

VETERANS FOR CHRIST, INC.  
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## VA helped house more than 26,000 at-risk vets since the start of 2023

[Veterans Affairs staffers have found housing](#) for more than 26,000 veterans at risk of homelessness through the first seven months of this year thanks to unprecedented outreach through community partners, department leaders announced Monday.

Combined with similar efforts last year, more than 67,000 veterans have received permanent housing since the start of 2022, part of an [administration-wide effort to cut down on homelessness across America](#).

Still, federal [researchers estimate as many as 33,000 veterans around the country lack safe, stable housing](#) on any given night. Department officials are hopeful given their advances over the last year, that figure will decrease when updated studies are released later this fall.

VA leaders released their progress report on [homelessness assistance](#) Monday as they simultaneously announced nearly \$1 billion in support grants for housing and assistance programs, money to be distributed to more than 700 community organizations.

### [Mobile medical units to be deployed across US to aid homeless vets](#)

Officials will send out 25 of the vehicles to help bring primary care, mental health services and other medical assistance to veterans across the country.

“We won’t rest until every veteran has the safe, stable home that they deserve, because none of our nation’s heroes should be homeless in this country they fought to defend,” [VA Secretary Denis McDonough](#) said in a statement. “These grants will allow VA, alongside our community partners, to help provide more housing and wraparound services to more homeless and at-risk veterans than ever before.”

The money is included in the department’s annual budget and includes both the [VA Supportive Services for Veteran Families](#) and [Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem](#) programs. Community groups have hailed those programs in the past as valuable to helping them provide direct support to individuals facing immediate short-term housing problems.

Jill Albanese, VA's director of clinical operations, said of the roughly 26,000 veterans helped with permanent housing so far this year, 97% are still in those new homes. The others are being aided in the search for alternative housing.

“All of our efforts are built around the evidence-based, housing-first approach which prioritizes getting veterans into housing and then assists them with the wraparound services that they need, including health care and other support,” she said.

VA has set a goal of placing at least 38,000 veterans without stable shelter into permanent housing by the end of the year. Officials said Monday's announcement shows they are ahead of that pace.

*Veterans seeking help with homelessness or related financial problems can call 877-424-3838 for help or [visit the department's web site](#).*

## Government shutdown could hinge on fight over ‘woke’ military policies



The Capitol dome in Washington, D.C., is shown on Nov. 4, 2022. (Colin Demarest/C4ISRNET)

A group of conservative lawmakers is vowing to oppose any federal budget extension and risk a [partial government shutdown](#) unless congressional leaders promise to end [all “woke” military policies](#) and agree to other political concessions.

The move heightens already growing fears that [troops and Defense Department civilians could see their paychecks stopped](#) and their job responsibilities paused at the start of October because of political infighting. [Government appropriations for the current fiscal year](#) run out on Sept. 30.

On Monday, members of the influential [House Freedom Caucus](#) released a statement outlining demands for upcoming negotiations on the federal budget. House Republican leaders will need to appease some or all of the caucus's 45 members to pass any budget deal, or get cooperation from Democrats on a spending plan.

Without a short-term extension of current spending levels or a long-term budget deal, numerous federal agencies — including the Department of Defense — would be [forced to stop paying employees and shutter most activities](#).

In the past, that has meant closures for military commissaries, cancellation of non-essential military travel and training, and shuttering of most family support programs. Troops would still be required to report for duty, but non-essential Defense Department civilian workers would be sent home until a new budget deal is completed.

Reaching a short-term budget deal was expected to be Congress' top priority when lawmakers return from their late-summer break in early September. But the process was already expected to be contentious, given strong disagreements between Republicans and Democrats in Congress on spending priorities. The Caucus demands further add to that challenge.

In a statement, caucus members said they will support a short-term budget extension only if it includes plans to “end the Left's cancerous woke policies in the Pentagon undermining our military's core warfighting mission.” Group members did not specify what policies or programs that would specifically entail.

The annual defense authorization bill debate in the House focused mainly on hot-button social issues.

As part of the annual defense authorization bill debate earlier this summer, House Republicans passed measures that would roll back diversity and inclusion training in military units, ban the teaching of “critical race theory” at service academies, and prohibit drag shows and other LGBTQ+ support events at military bases.

Those provisions were met with opposition from House Democrats. In the Senate, where Democratic lawmakers have a majority, leaders said they would not allow such provisions to move ahead.

The House Freedom Caucus is also demanding new border security legislation and restrictions on the Justice Department as part of any short-term budget extension. Members also said they will “oppose any blank check for Ukraine in any supplemental appropriations bill.”

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., has publicly promised not to allow any budget extension to go past early December, vowing to complete a full-year budget plan for fiscal 2024 before the end of the calendar year.

The last partial government shutdown began in December 2018 and lasted 35 days. But Defense Department personnel were largely exempt from the effects of that stalemate, because funding for military operations had been approved by Congress separate from other agencies.

The last time Defense Department civilians were furloughed for a significant stretch because of partial shutdown was in 2013. [During that 13-day impasse](#), troops missed one paycheck, but were awarded retroactive pay after a deal was reached.

## **Modernizing the disability claims process**

VA is currently undergoing modernization efforts and using technology to improve the disability claims process. When a Veteran files a claim for VA benefits, there are several administrative actions needed before a decision can be made, such as gathering medical records and military service records. VA is automating many of these administrative tasks, allowing claims processors to focus on more complex and analytical duties. These improvements result in reduced processing times and faster decisions on claims to Veterans and their families.

### **Automation and claims processing**

Automated Decision Support (ADS) helps automate administrative tasks related to claims processing. ADS helps claims processors make fast, accurate and consistent decisions for Veterans by reducing the amount of time spent on administrative tasks. ADS also provides a summary document of key information required for decision-making, making it easier for decision makers to review records.

Making a decision regarding VA disability claims can be complex, and ADS does not replace the need for claims processors to review and make decisions. Instead, ADS is a tool that assists claims processors with administrative tasks to help in the decision-making process.

### **How automation is being used today**

ADS is currently used for specific medical conditions as the technology is being developed. If a claim includes a condition that ADS can assist with, the claim will be reviewed using ADS. Relevant medical data from a variety of sources, including medical treatment records, military service treatment records, VA claim exams and electronic VA medical center health records will be compiled, and a summary document about the condition is uploaded into the Veteran's electronic claims folder. Technology is also used to scan handwritten documents and transcribe them into electronic records so they can be easily reviewed. Once all the information is gathered, it is sent to a claims processor for further review and action.

### **Looking ahead**

As with any new technology, testing is critical to make sure systems are functional and efficient. For this reason, VA initially designated one benefits office to serve as the prototype processing site. As ADS technology evolves, it will be rolled out to more benefits offices. Currently, there

are more than 40 disability conditions ADS can assist with, and this technology is being used by 16 benefits offices.

Modernizing the disability claims process is all about reducing decision wait times and getting decisions to Veterans and families in days, rather than months. Using technology to automate administrative areas of the claims process—while maintaining the human decision-making element—is just one of the ways VA is working to better serve Veterans and their families.

**“Be on your guard, stand firm in the faith, being men of courage, be strong.”  
1Cor 16:13**

Sincerely,

*William A. Harris, Jr.*

William A. Harris, Jr., USAF Retired  
President, Veterans for Christ, Inc.

[www.veteransforchristinc.org](http://www.veteransforchristinc.org)

## **Need to contact VA?**

[Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255](#) and press 1, [Chat](#), or Text 838255

[Homeless Veteran Resources: 1-877-424-3838](#) or [Chat](#)

[White House VA Hotline: 1-855-948-2311](#)

[1-800-MyVA411 \(800-698-2411\)](#) is never the wrong number