



County of Santa Cruz

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PRESS RELEASE

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PLAN TO END VETERAN HOMELESSNESS

On Veterans Day, a group of housing and veterans advocates announced an ambitious plan to end veteran homelessness in Santa Cruz County by the end of 2016.

A significant percentage of Santa Cruz County's homeless population is made up of veterans. Already, 175 are currently being housed using housing vouchers, coupled with case management and clinical services, provided through Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) vouchers.

But there is more work to be done. An additional 193 local veterans are still homeless, many of them living unsheltered on the streets. Through HUD-VASH vouchers and other means, ending veteran homelessness in Santa Cruz County by the end of next year is a realistic goal.

"Homelessness is an issue that significantly impacts the individuals experiencing it and the community as a whole. If we all work together to identify much-needed housing, we can make significant inroads in addressing the problem," Santa Cruz Mayor Don Lane said.

"These men and women made sacrifices to help defend our country. As we honor all veterans today, we should pay special attention to those still living out on the streets. They helped us when we needed it; it is now time to help them," Supervisor Zach Friend said.



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The means exist, but the will has to come from the community. As part of Wednesday's announcement, the group is also announcing the "**Be a Hero: Help a Hero**" initiative, which makes three specific requests of community members based on their own ability to help:

- 1) **House a Hero:** If you are a landlord, offer a home to a veteran. The vouchers are a stable, hassle-free, reliable source of income.
- 2) **Help a Hero:** Volunteer to help homeless veterans navigate the housing market, or assemble move-in kits.
- 3) **Support a Hero:** Purchase a "Welcome Home" move-in kit for veterans, or donate essential household items such as linens, clothing, utensils, appliances, toiletries, cleaning supplies and more. Gift cards are also welcome.

Through this effort, Santa Cruz County can join other communities across the country that have ended veteran homelessness. They include New Orleans, Houston, Mobile, Ala., Saratoga Springs, N.Y. and many more.

The HUD-VASH program removes many of the barriers to housing veterans. But one of the main barriers, particularly locally, is the availability of housing. Federal housing vouchers provide landlords with a stable, dedicated source of incomes, and First Lady Michelle Obama recently called on landlords to make housing available to veterans.

"You all have the power to open doors for Vets, and give them the stability they deserve, and help our country solve an issue that has been swept under the rug for far too long," Obama said in a video message released last week.