

Peer Housing Location Assistance Group (PHLAG)

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ABSTRACT

Finding and maintaining permanent housing is a daunting problem for homeless Veterans. The Veterans Affairs Central Office funded a two-year, six site pilot of PHLAG, an intervention developed from a successful model at the Boston VA which empowers veterans through a peer-assisted housing group. In PHLAG, a peer support technician and a social worker co-lead a weekly group which, along with between-group individual contacts, helps veterans take responsibility and initiative in overcoming obstacles to obtaining independent, permanent housing. PHLAG emphasizes veterans helping each other through information sharing, problem solving and mutual support.

The VISN 5 Mental Illness Research Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC) monitored the implementation of PHLAG and conducted the evaluation of the PHLAG pilot. This poster describes PHLAG, the evaluation, and the final results based on 769 participants.

INTRODUCTION & PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

In 2006, the VA Central Office (VACO) created and funded a pilot of the Peer Housing Location Assistance Group (PHLAG) program. Developed from a successful program created by Carol Klein, LICSW at the Boston VA Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV), PHLAG empowers veterans through a peer-assisted permanent housing group and individual assistance.

PHLAG was implemented in six VA sites nationally: Dallas TX, Hudson Valley NY, Los Angeles CA, Martinsburg WV, Queens NY, and Walla Walla WA. At three sites, PHLAG is based in the VA Domiciliary Care for Homeless Veterans (DCHV) residential program; in the other three it is part of the Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) outpatient programs. Dallas, Los Angeles, and Queens are urban; Hudson Valley, Martinsburg, and Walla Walla are rural.

PHLAG is a recovery oriented program for veterans interested in pursuing permanent and independent housing. A Social Worker (SW) and a Peer Support Technician (PST) work as a team to encourage and enable each veteran to take responsibility and initiative in overcoming barriers to reach their goal. They do this through PHLAG's core components (see Table 1).

Table 1. PHLAG Core Components

- Open to Veterans who are homeless or at risk for homelessness
- Weekly "housing assistance" group co-led by SW and PST
- Co-leaders and Veterans become partners in the practical and emotional challenges of securing housing
- Groups are augmented by individualized assistance focusing on helping the Veteran help himself

Both group and individual contacts include dissemination of practical information, discussion of challenges, problem-solving (e.g. credit problems, legal barriers), encouragement and social support

Both encourage mutual practical help and support among Veterans

Use of mental health and/or substance abuse care is encouraged

PHLAG also offers phone / internet access for housing tasks, assistance with moving-in arrangements, furniture, etc.

Follow up visits, continued involvement of staff and peers

DATA ANALYSIS

Figures presented here include 2 years of data collection, but analyses are not yet complete. This poster presents descriptive data on the sample, participation, main outcomes, fidelity results, Veteran's satisfaction results and 6 month follow-up data assessing housing sustainability. There is no comparison group.

EVALUATION DESCRIPTION

Outcomes Evaluation: Does PHLAG work?

Primary Outcome:

Did the Veteran obtain permanent & independent housing at discharge from PHLAG?

Is it sustained at 6 months?

Permanent = not time limited

Independent = no professionally-delivered treatment required as a condition of residence

Secondary Outcome: Is the Veteran "better housed" after PHLAG?

Data Sources:

- Intake (Pre) and Discharge (Post) data forms completed by PHLAG staff and Veteran
- Follow-up: Data form completed by PHLAG staff and veteran 6 months post successful discharge
- Weekly group attendance and individual PHLAG contacts
- Veteran satisfaction form completed after discharge

Fidelity Evaluation

We also conducted a fidelity evaluation to assess to what degree PHLAG is being implemented according to the model at each site. This included documenting problems and solution strategies and local implementation variations that were unavoidable or desirable.

Data Sources:

- Site Self Evaluations: Monthly Fidelity Report from each co leader
- Phone Calls: During biweekly all-site phone calls we noted fidelity problems, strategies, and solutions
- Site Visits: We collected fidelity and implementation data via observations, ratings, conversations with all parties, and documents at each site twice during the data collection period

FINAL SAMPLE

Age: 23 – 86 years, 81% between 40-60 years
Gender: 94% Men

Race / Ethnicity	Homelessness Past 3 Years
African American 58%	None (at risk): 5%
Caucasian 32%	Less than 6 mo: 24%
Latino 7%	Between 6 – 12 mo 16%
Native American 1%	Between 1 – 2 years 36%
Asian 1%	All of past 3 years 19%
Other 2%	Unknown 1%

Monthly Income	Military Service Era
No income 7%	Pre-Vietnam (1950-64) 3%
\$1 - \$99 1%	Vietnam Era (1964-75) 41%
\$100 - \$499 5%	Post-Vietnam (1975-90) 45%
\$500 - \$999 53%	Persian Gulf (1990-present) 11%
More than \$1000 35%	

RESULTS

Total Enrollment:	769
Still enrolled as of 5/15/09:	116
Dropped Out of PHLAG:	158
Discharged:	495

Change in Living Status from Intake to Discharge, among those known:

(n = 490)	n	%
Improved	395	81
Same	77	16
Worse	18	4

Of those Improved, what Change?

(n = 395)	n	%
Temp to Perm & Indep	70	18
Dom to Perm & Indep	151	38
None to Perm & Indep	23	6
Dom to Temporary	146	37
None to Temporary	5	1

Time between Intake and Discharge

Average: 129 days
Range: 13 - 703 days

Housing Status at Discharge

(n=646)	n	%
Perm & Indep Housing	239	37
Temporary/ Not Indep	200	31
(51 of this 200 = HUD-VASH vouchers)		
Other (mostly drop out)	207	32

6 Month Follow-Up: Among those who obtained perm & indep housing, is the veteran's living situation the same as when s/he graduated PHLAG?

(n=145)	n	%
No, better housing	15	10
Yes	97	67
No, lost housing	27	19
Unknown	6	4

SATISFACTION

How would you rate the quality of services received in PHLAG?

(n= 203)	n	%
Excellent	113	56
Very Good	63	31
Good	24	12
Fair	2	1
Poor	1	0.5

Would you recommend PHLAG at this facility to another veteran or friend?

(n= 202)	n	%
Definitely	176	87
Probably so	25	12
Probably not	0	0
Definitely not	1	0.5

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

Although initial implementation was challenging, overall fidelity was excellent at all sites. There is no control group, but comparison to NEPEC statistics for VA homelessness programs (HCHV and Dom) without PHLAG are useful.

In 2008 NEPEC reports, 37% of Dom Veterans and 35% of HCHV veterans were discharged to "their own" apartment, room, or house. These figures include substantial proportions of diverse supervised living arrangements. In contrast, 37% of PHLAG veterans obtained their own permanent and independent housing – a more stringent criterion.

Therefore, while the final details of our analyses are pending, PHLAG meets its goal of helping veterans overcome barriers to securing their own permanent and independent housing. Not only does this afford them more autonomy, it also opens beds in VA and other programs (e.g., GPD) for veterans in need, resulting in better use of VA resources.

Our data and observations suggest that PHLAG achieves this success through several unique characteristics:

1. The PHLAG model brings **dedicated, focused attention, staff time, and resources** to homelessness that were not present in most of the field test sites beforehand.
2. PHLAG has a **holistic focus**, helping the veteran address whatever obstacles s/he faces regarding housing (credit history, evictions, fear of having a fixed address, anger mgmt, etc)
3. PHLAG uses a **three-way synergy** of veteran group members, PST, and Social Worker, each contributing unique and valuable skills, knowledge, and perspective to the endeavor. It fosters personal responsibility and peer support with the added benefit of several types of professional expertise.
4. PHLAG **changes expectations**. It is not for everyone; it sends a message that veterans who are ready to rise to the challenge can solve housing obstacles and do not have to settle for cycles of transitional or marginal housing.

QUOTES FROM VETERANS AND STAFF

"It gives me hope to hear from other vets, how they solved problems and to see their success" (PHLAG participant)

"Sometimes I just sit in my new apartment and think about how amazing it is that I am here. I was homeless since 1991." (PHLAG participant)

"This is not a gimme class, you have to work. If you think it is you should just leave now...PHLAG did not "give" her [a graduate] the apartment "- she got it! (Peer Support Tech)

"They [PHLAG members] really like the hands on sessions. Like one week we focused on budgeting, ... how much it takes to maintain an apartment vs their income, how to cut costs, etc. We share progress a lot, [and] encourage them to keep their ears open since networking is the best way to find housing" (Social Worker)