

## **Housing is First Priority for Homeless Vets**

VISN 1 MIRECC researchers have shown that an initial mental hospital stay yields little added benefit for homeless vets with mental illness who are placed into permanent housing. The homeless with severe mental illness have many needs including psychiatric symptom reduction, occupational rehabilitation and housing. The standard approach has been first to provide temporary supported housing or hospitalization and then to provide placement into independent and permanent housing in the community. The current study is the first to provide a systematic comparison of the standard approach and a new model that provides direct placement into permanent independent housing without a prior mental hospital stay. Outcomes from 675 clients using the VA Supported Housing Program showed no differences in either duration of program participation or in three of four other outcomes among clients who received prior residential treatment as compared to those placed directly into permanent housing. The single cross group difference was a better employment outcome for the group receiving prior residential treatment. The program factor most strongly associated with treatment retention was receipt of a housing rent subsidy. This study suggests the value of placing a high priority on basic housing needs for homeless veterans with mental illness. Specialized inpatient psychiatric care might best be reserved for those who fail to stabilize when provided with housing alone. The MIRECC research group included Alvin Mares, Wesley Kaspro and Robert Rosenheck.