



ALLEGHENY VALLEY VETERANS CENTER

Supportive Housing for Homeless Veterans

Guest Handbook

Updated 20 Oct 2023

INTRODUCTION

On behalf of Allegheny Valley Veterans Center (AVVC), we wish to welcome you to supportive housing homeless veterans. Please read this Guest Handbook so that you can familiarize yourself with what is expected of you and with what you can expect from the program. The policies and procedures are not intended to be all inclusive and are subject to change as the situation may warrant. Any specific point of program management not covered in this handbook is subject to interpretation by responsible staff designated as having program authority.

AVVC program is supportive housing for homeless veterans. The mission of the AVVC is to provide a full continuum of support to homeless, unstably housed, and low-income veterans to facilitate your return to the community as a productive, responsible citizen. While in the program, you will be expected to participate in the same sorts of activities as independent citizens, including paying your bills, shopping, cooking your meals, and cleaning your residence.

Please take advantage of what the program has to offer you. We hope that you are motivated and committed to changing your life. This handbook will serve as your guide to the rules, policies, and procedures of the program. Following these rules and guidelines will increase your chances of being successful in the program and will enhance your chances of returning to living in the community in a lifestyle that is both independent and productive.

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WELCOME

Congratulations on your acceptance into the Allegheny Valley Veterans Center. This is a stepping-stone toward self-sufficiency and independence. It is our hope that you make good use of your time with us and learn to make decisions and set goals that will improve the quality of your life. This handbook provides everything you need to know during your participation in our program. We look forward to helping you accomplish amazing things!

MISSION STATEMENT

OUR MISSION

Provide a full continuum of care to homeless, unstably housed, and low-income veterans and to facilitate your return to the community as a productive, responsible citizen.

NON-DISCRIMINATION STATEMENT

Admissions the provision of services and referrals of clients shall be made without regard to race, color, religious creed, disability, ancestry, national origin (including limited English proficiency) age, or sex.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Supported housing at the AVVC is more than just housing, it is a program that provides stable housing so veterans can focus on setting and achieving goals which lead to self-sufficiency. Honest communication with staff is key to staff being able to support all veterans as much as possible. Staff members do their best at supporting veterans while they work on their goals; however, staff members also hold veterans accountable for their actions.

- We are required to act if we have concerns that you may harm yourself or someone else. If needed, the Veterans Crisis Line or Warren County Crisis Line will be contacted to evaluate the need for hospital treatment.
- We want to make sure you are as healthy and safe as possible while in our program.

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

- Unless otherwise specified, **ALL** veterans are required to do the following:
 - Participate in searching for employment, volunteering, going to school, mental health/D&A treatment, and other activities related to achieving their goals.
 - Veterans will give staff their weekly work schedule, so staff knows where you are in the case that something happens and they need to contact you.
 - Veterans will provide staff with a copy of a current paystub for verification of income.
 - Meet with staff at least once a week for accountability.
 - Satisfactory performance in school and on the job is always expected.

SERVICE PLANNING

- When you first enter the program the process of identifying specific needs, preferences and goals begins.
- You will be involved in the development of a Service Plan based upon an assessment of your strengths, needs, preferences and resources.
- You are expected to follow your Service Plan and work on meeting the established goals.

VETERANS RIGHTS

- You have the right to be treated as an individual with dignity, compassion, and respect; with reasonable protection from harm; and with appropriate privacy.
- You have the right to expect confidentiality, unless disclosure is required or permitted by law, or you have consented to the release of such information.
- You have the right to directly participate in planning your rehabilitation services
- You have the right to receive unopened mail. If there is reason to believe the mail may contain contraband, you will need to open the mail in the presence of a AVVC staff member.

VETERANS EXPECTATIONS

- Veterans are expected to follow the program rules.
- Veterans will not be permitted a pass in the first 30 days. After 30 days a veterans must request a pass from the AVVC staff.
- Veterans are expected to be respectful of other veterans and AVVC staff.
- Veterans are expected to maintain the cleanliness of the common areas and bedrooms. Also, guests are expected to clean up after themselves.
- Veterans are expected to remain drug and alcohol free in the facility.
- Veterans are expected to participate in random drug screens if required.
- Veterans are expected to participate in house meetings when required.

PROGRAM FEES

AVVC retains possession of the rooms while you are in the program. This means that this is not the traditional "landlord-tenant" relationship. You are considered a guest of the AVVC, and you may be asked to leave for rule violations and/or safety concerns.

- You may be charged a monthly program fee of up to 30% of your income while you reside in the AVVC, not to exceed \$300 per month.
- The program fee monies are applied toward utilities, maintenance, and repairs to the AVVC.
- Veterans are encouraged to take advantage of Warren County's various food banks.

CURFEW

- Veterans are expected to sign in and sign out when they leave the premises for accountability.
- All veterans must be in the facility by curfew.
- Curfew is **10:00pm**. Exceptions must be cleared with staff.
- AVVC will perform random curfew checks.

PRIVILEGES

Veterans who are meeting the expectations can enjoy the following privileges. In addition to the below privileges, they will also be able to attend field trips and outings when the opportunities are available.

OVERNIGHTS

- Veterans are not permitted to have any overnights for the first 30 days in the program.
- After 30 days, veterans are eligible for two overnights per month. A request for an overnight must be made in advance to the staff for approval.
- Veterans should return by curfew the following day and should notify staff when they are back.
- In the event of an emergency, please notify staff immediately if an overnight is needed.

VISITOR(S)

- Visitors Rules:
 - o Visitors **MUST** sign in and out of the facility.
 - o Visitors are not permitted in any bedrooms; they are to stay in common areas only. Staff should be notified if any visitors will be in the facility for security and accountability purposes.
 - o Visitors under the age of 18 **MUST** be accompanied by a parent or guardian and supervised by them at all times.
 - o Veterans shall not leave visitors unattended.
 - o All visitors must abide by the same rules that the veteran abides by.
 - o All visitors are to be off premises by **9:00pm** curfew. **No exceptions**
 - o **NO** overnight visitors are permitted.
- **Visitors' curfew is as follows:** Curfew is at **9:00pm** on all days

DISCIPLINARY/PROBATION PROCEDURES

- In the event of a rule violation, the veteran will receive a verbal warning, after two violations the veteran will receive a written warning documenting the offense. After three violations the veteran may be terminated from the program.
- If a veteran is terminated from the program, they must leave the property immediately without incident and will not be permitted to be on property unless accompanied by staff. They will have 5 days to move their belongings. Arrangements will be made in advance with Case

Manager for **ONE** day to move their belongings. They will **NOT** be permitted to be back on property afterwards.

- Any veteran terminated from the program will not be allowed back on property to visit other veterans.
- **Veterans may be discharged from the program because of behavioral issues.**

IMMEDIATE TERMINATION

- Veterans maybe immediately terminated from the program for violating the following:
 - o **HAVING WEAPONS IN BUILDING AT ANY TIME. (NO EXCEPTIONS)**
 - o Physical altercations between guests.
 - o Any involvement in illegal activities. This includes but is not limited to stealing from other veterans or staff, possessing drugs/alcohol or drug paraphernalia in the facility, and drug/alcohol use in the facility.
 - o Violation of the No Smoking & Burning Policy.
 - o Repeated safety violations or concerns.
 - o Intentional destruction of property.
 - o Threatening or intimidating staff or other guests.
 - o Bringing a Megan's Law offender or wanted criminal onto property.
 - o Continual behavioral problems. Also, for being disrespectful to other veterans, AVVC staff and volunteers.
 - o Theft of AVVC property or another veterans' property.

ABANDONMENT

In the event any veteran is missing from the property without knowledge or permission of staff and is unable to be contacted, staff will contact the emergency contact. If the emergency contact is unable to locate the veteran and put him/her in contact with staff, staff will contact local hospitals and jail. If no contact is made in 5 days, the room will be abandoned. The lock code will be deleted, and the veteran will be discharged from the program. Veterans or emergency contacts will have three days from this point to arrange pickup of the missing veteran's belongings. Anything left after three days will be considered a donation to the AVVC.

TERMINATION APPEAL PROCESS

- Staff should be notified immediately when an appeal is being filed.
- If the situation is not resolved to the veteran's satisfaction, the veteran may appeal, in writing, to the Executive Directors within 72 hours of the receipt of a termination notice.
- The Executive Directors will schedule a meeting with the veteran within two working days. After the meeting the Executive Director will convey with the Board of Directors and will respond via letter to the veteran. A copy of the response will be added to the veteran's file. AVVC reserves the right to review all appeals with the Board of Directors.

KEEPING THE PROPERTY SAFE CLEAN

- Each veteran is responsible for their own conduct as well as their visitors.
This is to enable us to maintain a clean, safe, and secure living environment.
- Illegal substances, such as drugs and drug paraphernalia are not permitted on property at any time.
- Alcohol is also not permitted in the facility under any circumstances. (NO EXCEPTIONS)
- Guests are not permitted to be on property after consuming alcohol or drugs.
- Veterans will submit to random drug screens.
- All veterans are expected to participate in the maintenance of the property (cutting grass, shoveling snow, picking up litter, etc.).
- Veterans fleeing domestic violence will not invite the person they are fleeing from or have a protective order against onto property.
- In the event of locking yourself out, notify staff immediately. Once we get the security system installed Veterans will have to use an entry card or will have to select a four-digit number for the door code that they will not forget. Windows are not to be used as an entrance at any time.
- Veterans will maintain a healthy standard of household cleanliness, personal hygiene, and proper medical care. This includes addressing any mental health or drug and alcohol concerns.
- Laundry facilities are provided on premises. **ONLY** occupants are permitted to use these facilities and may not use them to wash items for people not in the program.
- Trash is to be removed from the building and placed in the dumpster provided.
- Report any maintenance problems and possible pest infestations to staff immediately.
- There will be weekly residence cleanliness inspections as well as residence searches as deemed necessary by staff. In the event of a failed room inspection, the veteran will have 24 hours to clean the room. If this is not done within 24 hours, an action plan will be put in place and the veteran will be issued a written warning. If not completed within 24 hours after the written warning the resident will be evicted from the facility.
- AVVC staff may enter the residence and any room at any time whether you are present or not.

PETS

- Pets are not permitted in or around the facility.

SERVICE DOGS

- Must be on a leash when in other areas other than the room.
- Must be housebroken and not disturbing of other residents.
- Must be current on Rabies and other vaccinations. Proof must be provided.
- Must be licensed/registered according to state and local laws
- Must be Spayed/Neutered
- Limited to 1 dog with the name of the dog provided to the AVVC Staff

- Must be trained service dog providing a specific service for the veteran.
- Must be feed, food and water in room only.
- Any droppings, feces, vomit, or excrement of any kind must be immediately picked up in a plastic bag and disposed of in dumpster.
- Must urinate away from the building, light posts, fence, etc.
- Must have some sort of Flea/Tick protection on

GETTING ALONG WITH STAFF AND OTHER GUESTS

- Veterans are always to treat staff and other guests with respect.
- Profanity and verbally abusive language should never be used when speaking with staff or guests.
- Veterans are to keep staff updated on any changes regarding employment, finances, etc.
- Veterans are expected to communicate honestly with staff.
- Noise should not be heard beyond one's room, this includes language and conversation, the noise level of music, TV, voices, and other activities.

VIOLENT BEHAVIOR

A veteran may be discharged from the program when staff has witnessed the person, or the veteran has admitted to being violent, or physically intrusive inside the facility, or has repeatedly targeted another individual. This includes:

- Hitting, kicking, slapping, pushing
- Throwing objects at someone
- Any unwanted physical contact
- Being verbally abusive repeatedly to the same person.

Staff will intervene in a conflict and encourage those involved to work things out. When a veteran has assaulted anyone at the facility or been physically intrusive, aggressive, and staff have seen it, or the veteran admitted it, the veteran will be discharged from the program and asked to leave the AVVC. Staff will be honest with the veteran about why they are being asked to leave. If possible, the staff will help the veteran with their plans and provide alternatives. The staff will remain non-judgmental.

MOVING IN

- After completing an intake packet, you will choose a key code for the front door and your room.
- While moving in, if any problems with the residence are found (appliances not working, lights not working, damage of any kind, etc.) please let staff know so repairs can be made.
- No additional persons can become occupants.
- Veteran's property will be searched upon intake to ensure contraband is not brought on AVVC.

Failure to abide by any of the following program requirements may result in the move in process being terminated and discharge from the AVVC Program.

FIRE SAFETY (NO SMOKING & BURNING POLICY)

AVVC is committed to providing a safe and healthful environment for its staff and guests. The AVVC strives to control involuntary exposures to the harmful substances produced by tobacco smoking and to minimize fire hazards.

- It is the of AVVC that smoking is only permitted in the designated smoking area.
- The policy covers all types of burnt and smoked products including cigarettes, tobacco, cigarette products, vaping as well as candle and incense burning.
- Cigarette butts must be disposed of in the appropriate containers and not on the ground.
- Smoking is only allowed in designated areas.
- Any littering of cigarette butts will result in a written warning.
- **NO** space heaters are permitted. If there is an emergency, we will provide you with space heaters.
- Make sure to clean lint traps in the clothes dryers before and after each use.

- Do not tamper with any fire equipment, including smoke detectors. If a smoke detector needs a new battery or keeps going off, please let staff know.
- When the building fire alarm sounds, all veterans and visitors are to exit the building immediately via the stairwells directly to the outside and should proceed to the designated area across the street from the AVVC for an accounting of all guests.

PROHIBITED ITEMS

Veterans and their guests are not permitted to bring firearms or other weapons, ammunition, intoxicants, narcotics, or preparations for self-medication onto the AVVC grounds. Alcohol based products such as mouthwash are prohibited in the facility. Gas emitting canisters, (i.e. tear gas, mace, pepper spray, etc.) are also prohibited. Any violation of this provision by a veteran will result in appropriate discharge measures. Any prohibited articles found in the possession of a veteran will be impounded and disposed of. In addition, the staff reserves the right to confiscate or require the removal of any material that is offensive to others and/or in general bad taste including books, magazines, tapes, posters, clothing, etc. which are pornographic, hateful, terroristic, personally, or religiously offensive, etc.

VEHICLES

If you enter the program already owning a vehicle, you may be asked to restrict its use. All vehicles must be properly licensed including: 1. Valid license registration, 2. Current inspection sticker, and 3. Proof of valid and current vehicle insurance. In addition, you must possess a valid state driver's license. You are not permitted to drive any vehicle without proof of a valid driver's license. Each resident is allowed 1 vehicle parked at the facility at any time and the vehicle must be in working condition. The parking lot is not a vehicle repair facility any repairs must be completed elsewhere away from the facility. Any additional vehicles must be stored off the grounds. You cannot "borrow

a car from another person unless previously approved by AVVC Executive Director. Violation of this rule will result in disciplinary action including possible discharge from the program.

NOTE: Prohibited items may not be kept in vehicles. If you own a bicycle, you may secure it in designated areas.

EXCHANGE OF GOODS/SERVICES

Transactions between veterans and transactions with staff are prohibited. Veterans may not sell or trade merchandise or services with other veterans or with staff. Anyone presenting themselves at the door of the AVVC attempting to solicit, sell, or borrow will be turned away.

BORROWING (LENDING MONEY)

AVVC veterans are not permitted to borrow money from, lend money to, sell goods or services to or barter (exchange items) with another AVVC veteran or staff member/volunteer. The possibility of irregular discharge may be imposed on all parties involved in such transactions.

GAMBLING

Gambling (defined as any activity/game of chance that presents the opportunity for financial gain) is not permitted in any form including raffles, card games, sports pools, lotteries, etc.

LAUNDRY

Veterans are responsible for completing their own laundry functions. Bed linens are to be laundered at a minimum rate of bi-weekly to coincide with Safety and Sanitation inspections. The laundry rooms are equipped with automatic washers and dryers that are free of charge. Use of washers and dryers is at individual veterans' risk. Veterans are expected to provide their own laundry detergent. Hours will remain flexible as long as they do not interfere with planned or scheduled activities. AVVC does not accept any responsibility for lost or damaged clothing. Shoes are not to be placed in the washers or dryers under any circumstances.

MEDICATION MANAGEMENT

- All prescribed medications are to be kept in your medication lock box and secured. Your bedroom must be secured at all times.
- You should never exchange medications with another person.
- If a veteran leaves medication lying around at the AVVC and you find it you should immediately turn it in to AVVC staff.
- Each veteran will submit to a monthly Health Inspection with AVVC staff to include a medication count.
- Veterans are expected to take all prescribed medications as ordered by their doctor.

ABSTAINER'S CONTRACT

- As a guest of the AVVC, you will be expected to abstain from possessing and/or utilizing alcohol, drugs, or other mind-altering substances.

- The use of non-prescribed drugs and abuse of prescribed drugs is also prohibited as a component of this abstinence requirement.
- Voluntary submission to a breathalyzer, blood alcohol, and urine screening upon staff request is required.

SUBSTANCE USE POLICY

AVVC does not accept veterans who are currently using illegal drugs. Any veteran suspected of using any illegal drugs or concealing syringes will be discharged from the program.

ADMISSION

- Veterans be questioned about current drug and alcohol use at admission.
- Veterans are asked to commit to remaining drug and alcohol free during their stay at the AVVC.
- All medications, syringes, and drug paraphernalia are to be turned in upon admission to the program.
- Prescribed medications will be stored in the veteran's lockbox and will be accounted for monthly.

ALCOHOL AND DRUG SCREENING

- When asked to provide a urine sample, you will have two (2) hours to comply with the request. Failure to do so will be considered a refusal and can result in an automatic discharge from the program.
- Evidence of drug or alcohol use can result in possible discharge from the program.
- A positive drug screen will require a repair plan to be developed and implemented with AVVC staff. Also, an increase in drug testing and passes will be revoked. The veteran will have an increase in NA/AA meetings. Possibly an in-patient drug and alcohol treatment center through the VA or in the community.

Staff will look for the following when determining if a person is under the influence of drugs or alcohol. These include:

- Difficulty walking
- Disoriented or confused
- Slurred Speech
- Dilated or constricted pupils
- Difficulty in gross motor movement
- Gurgling noise from mouth/throat
- Non-responsive to stimuli
- Lips appear blue in color
- Clammy skin

To ensure safety when an overdose or suspicion of impairment is evident, AVVC staff will notify local 9-1-1 so that medical attention and evaluation may be provided:

*Narcan is located on site and all staff will be trained on how to use it if necessary.

MEDICAL EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

- In the event of a life-threatening emergency such as an overdose, chest pains, loss of consciousness, shortness of breath, or a severely injured veteran:
- Call 9-1-1 from the AVVC phone and give the location of the residence and the nature of the emergency.
- Render assistance to the victim as appropriate.
- After the paramedics arrive and the situation is under control, contact AVVC staff to inform them about the situation.

In the event of a non-life-threatening medical emergency such as an illness or minor injury contact AVVC staff to inform them.

FIRE PLAN

The primary of the fire plan is to provide a course of action for guests and staff to follow in the event of a fire. If it becomes necessary to evacuate the facility due to a fire, the fire plan must be followed. Simulated fire drills will be held at the AVVC monthly. All guests present in the facility during a fire drill will be required to participate.

IF A FIRE STARTS IN THE AVVC, REMEMBER “R.A.C.E.”

Remove—yourself and others from danger.

Alert—the fire department by dialing 9-1-1.

Confine—the fire by closing all doors and windows

Extinguish—the fire, if possible, with a fire extinguisher

IN ORDER TO R.A.C.E. YOU WILL BE REQUIRED TO:

- Learn the location & fire extinguishers and how to use them.
- Learn the location of the exits in the facility.
- Become familiar with the emergency evacuation plans posted throughout the facility.
- Participate in monthly practice fire drill.

IN THE EVENT OF A FIRE:

- Guests and staff shall utilize R.A.C.E.
- Call 9-1-1
- Close all doors and windows but do not endanger yourself or others by remaining in the facility.
- All veterans and any guests will evacuate the building using the closest exit and assemble outside across the street from the AVVC for a head count.

- Notify Executive Director when head count is completed.
- When the “ALL CLEAR” is given by the fire department or Executive Director, veterans and any guests may re-enter the house.

FIRE EXTINGUISHERS

P.A.S.S. is the password for fighting a fire with a portable extinguisher:

Pull—the pin

Aim—low

Squeeze—the handle

Sweep—from side to side

INFECTION CONTROL POLICY

PURPOSE: To provide policies and procedures for veterans in AVVC Program.

POLICY: All guests in the AVVC will follow the Infection Control guidelines to prevent the transmission of infection.

PROCEDURES:

- Hand washing is the single most important means to prevent the spread of infection.
- Hand washing technique wet hands, soap and wash for 10-15 seconds, rinse and dry with a paper towel. Use paper towel to turn off spigot to prevent recontamination your hands.
- When to wash your hands: after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing, after using the bathroom, touching pets, before handling food, cleaning wounds, changing bandages, and eating.

CLEANING SUPPLIES:

AVVC veterans shall always maintain adequate cleaning supplies. This includes:

- Disinfectants
- Sponges
- Paper towels
- Mops
- Housekeeping gloves (replace if cracked or peeling).

CLEANING BATHROOMS AND COMMON AREAS:

- Clean and disinfect the toilet weekly or as necessary.
- Clean the showers after each use.
- Mop floor weekly and as needed with floor cleaner.
- Never share personal items such as: razors, toothbrushes, bathroom water cups, combs/brushes, and towel/washcloths.
- Each veteran is required to mark all personal food items and ensure proper disposal of all perishable food.

- All leftovers must be refrigerated in covered containers marked with the date. Failure to do so will result in food being discarded.
- Leftovers are to be discarded after 48 hours. Failure to do so will result in food being discarded
- Items with expiration dates must be used prior to the expire date. All expired items found in the refrigerator will be discarded.
- Refrigerators must be cleaned weekly to prevent mold.
- Stale or spoiled food must be thrown out immediately.
- Food must be thawed in the refrigerator or microwave, not on the counter.
- The refrigerators must be set at 40 degrees F and the freezers at 0 degrees F.
- Vegetables and fruits should be washed under running water before using to cook or eat.
- Separate cutting boards and utensils must be used for raw and cooked foods. Never use a cutting board another resident has used unless it has been washed first.
- Clean the can opener and cutting wheel after each use.
- Wash dishes and utensils in hot, soapy water after eating, or use the dishwasher, dry, and put away.
- Never pour used mop water down the kitchen sink, all used mop water is to be poured in the supply room sink.
- Never eat raw meat, fish, or eggs.
- Do not buy eggs at grocery store with cracked shells.
- Cook meat and poultry until juices run clear and there is no pink.
- Cook fish thoroughly.
- Cook eggs until yolks are not runny. Scrambled eggs should be firm and dry.

***Note: Veterans must remain in the kitchen or kitchenettes when using the stovetop and/or microwave.**

CONTAMINATED WASTE

- Never handle another person's body fluid (blood, saliva, semen, vomit, etc.) without wearing gloves. Treat everyone's blood and body fluids as if they are infectious.
- Place contaminated needles (diabetic patients on insulin) and razor blades in the locked puncture resistant, "sharps" containers, located in the bathrooms underneath the vanity sinks.

WHEN CLEANING UP BODY SUBSTANCES:

- Wear latex or utility gloves.
- Wipe substances with paper towels.
- Use a plastic bag to dispose of paper towels as you clean.
- Use more towels and/or mop to clean area with hot water and disinfectant.
- When finished cleaning, put latex gloves in plastic bag.
- Seal the bag and place in a second plastic bag. Dispose of it in outside trashcan.
- Disinfect utility gloves in disinfectant and water.

RESOURCES

- VA Crisis Line-1-800-273-8255
- Mental Health" Drug and Alcohol Treatment: (814) 726-2100 Ext 8333 or 8408
- Warren County Human Services: (814) 726-2100 Ext 8174
- United Way Human Services Information Hotline: 211
- Veterans Service Officer: (814) 331-0143
- Warren County VA: (814) 728-3478
- CareerLink: (814) 678-5057 or (814) 428-3219
- www.va.gov
- www.dmva.pa.gov
- <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/chat>