

**Specially Adapted Housing Protocol for COVID-19
Veteran Engagement – Moratorium on In-Home Visits**

1. Purpose. Effective immediately, and until further notice, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Loan Guaranty Service (LGY) is placing a moratorium on all in-person meetings by Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) agents, as required under VA M26-12, SAH Grant Processing Procedures, Loan Guaranty Operations for Regional Offices. This includes initial interviews, suitability/feasibility assessments, compliance inspections, final field reviews, and all other in-person Veteran and stakeholder meetings.

2. Background. LGY is committed to protecting our SAH employees and the Veterans who we serve, while continuing to execute our mission of delivering the SAH benefit. The potential risks associated with the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) provide unique challenges in the delivery of the SAH benefit as VA staff work closely one-on-one with Veterans in their homes. According to current guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), older adults and those with serious chronic medical conditions are at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19, and these individuals should limit events and meetings that require close contact. The majority of SAH eligible Veterans are already experiencing serious health challenges, to include compromised immune systems, serious injury, and/or terminal illness, and are at an increased risk of serious outcomes resulting from COVID-19 exposure. In addition, SAH Agents cover a wide geographic area which may require overnight travel or travel within population(s) at higher risk for serious complications from COVID-19.

3. Action. During this period, SAH Agents, Assistant Valuation Officers (AVOs), Valuation Officers (VO), and Loan Guaranty Officers (LGOs) will continue to process new SAH grant requests and active grant projects as normal, except for face-to-face engagements, using the following protocols:

a. Initial Interview and Feasibility Process: Effective immediately, and until further notice, all Initial Interviews will be performed virtually using the following steps:

(1) SAH Agents will schedule the Initial Interview and send out the pre-interview package. The pre-interview package will include a cover letter which will outline the documents included in the pre-interview package and encourage the Veteran to have a family member or other support in attendance for the virtual Initial Interview.

(2) Perform the Initial Interview with the Veteran: In an effort to establish rapport with the Veteran, the SAH Agent will utilize video and audio calling service (either via Facetime or via Microsoft Skype, using government furnished equipment (e.g., government issued iPhone or laptop). The SAH Agent will use the pre-interview package to walk the Veteran through the SAH grant process during the Virtual Interview.

(3) Next steps in the grant process will be dependent on the Veteran's condition and

motivation/urgency:

(i) If the Veteran is ready to proceed, the SAH Agent will move forward with processing the case. The Veteran will be advised by the Agent that upon conclusion of the moratorium, the Feasibility and Suitability review will be scheduled and completed.

(ii) If the Veteran is not ready to pursue the grant, the SAH Agent will complete regular follow-up calls, or follow manual procedures for inactivating cases.

b. Compliance Inspection and Final Field Review Process: Effective immediately, and until further notice, all Compliance Inspections and Final Field Reviews will be performed virtually using the following protocol:

- (1) Compliance Inspections and Final Field Reviews that must be performed by the SAH Agent will be performed remotely and approved solely on the photographic evidence of compliance provided by the builder, Compliance Inspector, and the Veteran.
- (2) It is imperative that SAH Agents maintain comprehensive notes in Special Adaptive Housing Special Housing Adaptation (SAHSHA) system to support decisions to approve phases and disbursement of funds.
- (3) No funds should be disbursed by a Regional Loan Center without enough evidence of compliance and supported by artifacts posted to the case record, including documented acceptance and a statement of satisfaction by the Veteran.
- (4) Panel Compliance Inspectors may continue to perform inspections as normal if allowed by the Veteran, with consideration given to any health and safety guidance given by local health authorities and the CDC.

c. Communicating with Builders and Contractors: Agents will provide guidance and support to the Veteran if any of the scenarios below occur. In each of these situations, the SAH Agent should work with the Veteran and builder to negotiate appropriate and mutually beneficial revisions to the scope of work, changes to the project schedule, and/or modification of the escrow disbursement agreement.

- (1) The builder is unable to continue working due to restrictions imposed by local authorities and/or health and safety guidance given by local health authorities and the CDC.
- (2) Either party is asymptomatic and has been instructed to stay home or practice social distancing, or has flu-like symptoms (such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath), or has been quarantined under direction of public health authorities.
- (3) The Veteran or the Builder does not want to proceed with the project due to concern of contracting COVID-19.

d. Contact Requirements: During this period of time, SAH Agents will continue to complete other contact requirements by phone, email, or letter to Veterans, Builders, Contractors, and other stakeholders for both active and inactive cases as outlined in Department of Veterans

Affairs (VA) M26-12, Specially Adapted Housing Grant Processing Procedures, Loan Guaranty Operations for Regional Offices.

4. Questions. If you have any questions regarding this circular, please contact Jason Latona by phone at (202) 461-9201, or email at jason.latona@va.gov.

5. Rescission: This Circular is rescinded April 1, 2021.

By Direction of the Under Secretary for Benefits

Jeffrey F. London
Director
Loan Guaranty Service

Distribution: CO: RPC 2022
SS (26A1) FLD: VBAFS, 1 each (Reproduce and distribute based on RPC 2022)