



OVERVIEW

Background

Our nation has made significant progress over the last decade reducing homelessness in specific communities and with specific populations. Communities across the United States—from rural Mankato, Minnesota, to urban San Francisco—have organized partnerships between local and state agencies and with the private and nonprofit sectors to implement plans to prevent, reduce, and end homelessness. These communities, in partnership with the federal government, have used a targeted pipeline of resources to combine housing and supportive services to deliver permanent supportive housing for people who have been homeless the longest and are the frailest. The results have been significant.

In many respects, this current period of economic hardship mirrors the early 1980s when widespread homelessness reappeared for the first time since the Great Depression. Communities will need all of the tools in our grasp to meet the needs of those experiencing homelessness, including families and far too many of our nation's Veterans. In particular, we are concerned that recent national data shows a significant rise in family homelessness from 2008 to 2009.

This is the right time to align our collective resources toward eradicating homelessness. There is a legislative mandate from the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act of 2009 and bi-partisan support to adopt a collaborative approach. Most importantly, we now know how to address this important issue on a large scale. Over the past five years, the public and private sectors have made remarkable progress in reducing chronic homelessness. By developing the "technology" of combining permanent housing and a pipeline of support services, there has been a reduction of chronically ill, long-term homeless individuals by one-third in the last five years.

Key Elements of the Plan

This Plan outlines an interagency collaboration that aligns mainstream housing, health, education, and human services to prevent Americans from experiencing homelessness. As the most far-reaching and ambitious plan to end homelessness in our history, this Plan will both strengthen existing partnerships—such as the combined effort of HUD and the Veterans Affairs to help homeless Veterans—and forge new partnerships between agencies like HUD, HHS, and the Department of Labor.

HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan, HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki, and Labor Secretary Hilda Solis declared the vision of the Plan to be centered on the belief that “no one should experience homelessness—no one should be without a safe, stable place to call home.” The Plan is focused on four key goals:

- Finish the job of ending chronic homelessness in five years;
- Prevent and end homelessness among Veterans in five years;
- Prevent and end homelessness for families, youth, and children in ten years; and
- Set a path to ending all types of homelessness.

This Plan is a roadmap for joint action by the 19 United States Interagency Council on Homelessness member agencies along with local and state partners in the public and private sectors. It will provide a reference framework for the allocation of resources and the alignment of programs to achieve our goal to prevent and end homelessness in America. We will take action in partnership with Congress, states, localities, philanthropy, and communities around the country.

From years of practice and research, we know what works to prevent and end homelessness. Evidence points to the role housing plays as an essential platform for human and community development. Stable housing is the foundation upon which people build their lives—absent a safe, decent, affordable place to live, it is next to impossible to achieve good health, positive educational outcomes, or reach one's economic potential. Indeed, for many persons living in poverty, the lack of stable housing leads to costly cycling through crisis-driven systems like foster care, emergency rooms, psychiatric hospitals, emergency domestic violence shelters, detox centers, and jails. By the same token, stable housing provides an ideal launching pad for the delivery of health care and other social services focused on improving life outcomes for individuals and families. More recently, researchers have focused on housing stability as an important ingredient for the success of children and youth in school. When children have a stable home, they are more likely to succeed socially, emotionally, and academically.

Capitalizing on this evidence, this Plan builds on the significant reforms of the last decade and the commitment by the Obama administration to directly address homelessness through inter-governmental collaboration. Successful implementation of this Plan will devote critical resources to advance stability and permanency for the more than 640,000 men, women, and children who are homeless on a single day in America. At the same time, its execution will produce approaches to homelessness that are cost-effective for local, state, and federal government. The Plan's content presents initial goals, themes, objectives, and strategies and was generated through the collaboration and consensus of the 19 USICH member agencies. Since the HEARTH Act requires USICH to update the Plan annually, the substance of this Plan represents the beginning of a process toward our goal of preventing and ending homelessness.

The Affordable Care Act, a landmark initiative of the Obama Administration, will further the Plan's goals by helping numerous families and individuals experiencing homelessness to get the health care they need. Medicaid will be expanded to nearly all individuals under the age of 65 with incomes up to 133 percent of the federal poverty level (currently about \$15,000 for a single individual). This significant expansion will allow more families and adults without dependent children to enroll in Medicaid in 2014. In addition, Health Reform will support demonstrations to improve the ability of psychiatric facilities to provide emergency services. It will also expand the availability of medical homes for individuals with chronic conditions, including severe and persistent mental illness. Expansion of community health centers is another major change that will serve many vulnerable populations, including those who are homeless or at risk of being homeless.

In this economic climate, principles of fiscal discipline must be applied to any work that we undertake. Thus, the federal government's ability to address these issues will be dictated, in part, by the state of the economy, and decisions about incremental funding will need to be made on an annual basis through the regular budgeting process. A fiscally prudent government response is imperative—local, state, and federal governments cannot afford to invest in anything but the most evidence-based, cost-effective strategies. The Plan is based on a body of high quality research that demonstrates how targeted comprehensive solutions are far more effective and cost-efficient than temporary fixes.

Focus and Structure

The Plan proposes a set of strategies that call upon the federal government to work in partnership with state and local governments, as well as the private sector to employ cost effective, comprehensive solutions to end homelessness. The Plan recognizes that the Federal government needs to be smarter and more targeted in its response and role, which also includes supporting the work that is being done on the ground. The Federal government’s partners at the local level have already made tremendous strides, with communities across the nation – including over 1,000 mayors and county executives across the country – having developed plans to end homelessness. The Plan highlights that by collaborating at all levels of government, the nation can harness public resources and build on the innovations that have been demonstrated at the local level and in cities nationwide to provide everyone—from the most capable to the most vulnerable—the opportunity to reach their full potential.

The Plan includes 10 objectives and 52 strategies. These objectives and strategies contribute to accomplishing all four goals of the Plan.

The first section details the development of this first-ever comprehensive federal plan to prevent and end homelessness. This section sets out the core values reflected in the Plan and the key principles that guided the process. It also describes the opportunities for public comment offered during the development of the Plan.

The second section of the Plan provides an overview of homelessness in America. Since homelessness takes many different forms by population or geographic area, we provide a synopsis of the issues facing these varying groups experiencing homelessness. The section also addresses the sources of data used throughout the Plan.

The third section represents the core of the Plan including the objectives and strategies to prevent and end homelessness. It provides the logic behind each objective, the departments and agencies involved, the key partners, and strategies to achieve the respective objectives.

The Plan concludes with a section that defines the steps USICH partners will take next, providing a framework for action. This includes the impact we aspire to have that will require active work from many partners at all levels of government and across the private sector. This section provides a brief summary about the context in which we move forward in terms of the economic, policy, and political challenges and opportunities. There is a discussion of the measures that will be used to track progress over time toward the Plan goals. Initiatives currently under way that help advance the Plan goals are summarized. Finally, the section lays out the documents USICH will produce to provide information and transparency to the public, Congress, and our partners going forward.

Next Steps

“Ending homelessness” requires improved systems and programs at all levels. This Plan calls for a fundamental shift in how the federal government and communities across the country respond to homelessness. To prevent and end homelessness, targeted programs must be fully integrated with mainstream programs that provide housing, health, education, and human services. The Plan calls on all relevant mainstream programs to prioritize housing stability for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. If someone does experience homelessness, well orchestrated systems should be in place to rapidly return people to housing. People experiencing homelessness should have affordable housing and the support they need to keep it.

Simultaneously, while homelessness has grown, our knowledge about what can be done to prevent and end homelessness has also increased. This first ever comprehensive Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness is a roadmap for what we must all do to change the landscape of homelessness in America.

By setting the goals of ending Veteran and chronic homelessness within five years, and family, youth and child homelessness in ten, *Opening Doors* sets targets to which the country should aspire. The Council believes it is important to set goals, even if aspirational, for true progress to be made. Working together, we can connect public and private resources—consistent with principles of fiscal discipline—to finish the effort started by mayors, governors, legislatures, nonprofits, faith-based and community organizations, and business leaders across our country to end homelessness. The Federal Strategic Plan provides a clear path to get there.

Opening Doors

Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness :: 2010

VISION *No one should experience homelessness—no one should be without a safe, stable place to call home.*

- GOALS**
- ▶ *Finish the job of ending chronic homelessness in 5 years*
 - ▶ *Prevent and end homelessness among Veterans in 5 years*
 - ▶ *Prevent and end homelessness for families, youth, and children in 10 years*
 - ▶ *Set a path to ending all types of homelessness*

THEME: INCREASE LEADERSHIP, COLLABORATION, AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

OBJECTIVE

STRATEGIES

ONE
Provide and promote collaborative leadership at all levels of government and across all sectors to inspire and energize Americans to commit to preventing and ending homelessness

- a. **Educate the public** on the scope, causes, and costs of homelessness, the Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness, and the reasons for taking action.
- b. **Engage state, local, and tribal leaders in a renewed commitment** to prevent and end homelessness in their communities.
- c. **Get states and localities to update and implement plans to end homelessness** to reflect local conditions and the comprehensiveness of this Federal Plan, as well as to develop mechanisms for effective implementation.
- d. **Involve citizens—including people with firsthand experience with homelessness—and the private sector**—businesses, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, foundations, and volunteers—in efforts to prevent and end homelessness.
- e. **Test, model, and learn more about interagency collaboration.**
- f. **Seek opportunities to reward communities that are collaborating** to make significant progress preventing and ending homelessness.
- g. **Review budget processes to determine avenues for recognizing savings across partners** resulting from interventions to prevent and end homelessness.
- h. **Seek opportunities for engaging Congressional committees collaboratively** on issues related to preventing and ending homelessness.

TWO
Strengthen the capacity of public and private organizations by increasing knowledge about collaboration, homelessness, and successful interventions to prevent and end homelessness

- a. **Collaborate on and compile research** to better understand best practices, the cost-effectiveness of various intervention, metrics to measure outcomes, and the gaps in research. Identify and fill gaps in the body of knowledge.
- b. **Coordinate federal technical assistance resources** related to preventing and ending homelessness and provide information to states, tribes, and local communities on how to access the support they need.
- c. **Make information more readily available on best practices** and strategies to finance them at scale.
- d. **Make information more readily available on working effectively with special populations**, and the overlap between and among groups.
- e. **Attend to the unique needs of rural and tribal communities** to respond to homelessness and develop effective strategies and programs that use best practices that contribute to housing stability and prevent and end homelessness on American Indian lands, in rural/frontier areas, and urban centers.
- f. **Develop and maintain an inventory of federal emergency response programs** to help communities identify what is being funded in their community with federal resources and which resources are available to them.
- g. **Continue to increase use of the Homeless Management Information System** by local communities and encourage its use by additional programs targeted at homelessness. Develop standards that permit data inter-operability between data systems while protecting the confidentiality of all individuals.
- h. **Create a common data standard and uniform performance measures if feasible**, especially related to housing stability, across all targeted and mainstream federal programs. This will facilitate data exchanges and comparisons between both targeted programs and mainstream systems in order to improve identification of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Encourage the dynamic use of state and local data warehouses.

THEME: INCREASE ACCESS TO STABLE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

OBJECTIVE

STRATEGIES

THREE
Provide affordable housing to people experiencing or most at risk of homelessness

- a. **Support rental housing subsidies through federal, state, local, and private resources** to individuals and families experiencing or most at risk of homelessness. The rent subsidies should be structured so that households pay no more than 30 percent of their income for housing.
- b. **Expand the supply of affordable rental homes where they are most needed through federal, state, and local efforts.** To provide affordable housing to people experiencing or most at risk of homelessness, rental subsidies should better target households earning significantly less than 30 percent of the Area Median Income so that residents pay no more than 30 percent of their income for housing. The supply will need to include units that are accessible to persons with mobility needs.
- c. **Improve access to federally-funded housing assistance by eliminating administrative barriers and encouraging prioritization** of people experiencing or most at risk of homelessness.
- d. **Increase service-enriched housing** by co-locating or connecting services with affordable housing.

INCREASE ACCESS TO STABLE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING (cont'd)

| OBJECTIVE | STRATEGIES |
|---|--|
| <p>FOUR Provide permanent supportive housing to prevent and end chronic homelessness</p> | <p>a. Improve access to and use of supportive housing by encouraging prioritization and targeting for people who need this level of support to prevent or escape homelessness.</p> <p>b. Create protocols and consider incentives to help people who have achieved stability in supportive housing—who no longer need and desire to live there—to move into affordable housing to free units for others who need it.</p> <p>c. Expand the supply of permanent supportive housing, in partnership with state and local governments and the private sector.</p> <p>d. Assess options for more coordinated, sustainable, dependable sources of supportive housing service funding. This should include consideration of incentives for local communities to develop supportive housing and how best to coordinate service funding with housing funding.</p> |

THEME: INCREASE ECONOMIC SECURITY

| OBJECTIVE | STRATEGIES |
|---|--|
| <p>FIVE Increase meaningful and sustainable employment for people experiencing or most at risk of homelessness</p> | <p>a. Collaborate with economic recovery and jobs programs to ensure that job development and training strategies focus attention on people who are experiencing or most at risk of homelessness.</p> <p>b. Review federal program policies, procedures, and regulations to identify educational, administrative, or regulatory mechanisms that could be used to improve access to work support.</p> <p>c. Develop and disseminate best practices on helping people with histories of homelessness and barriers to employment enter the workforce, including strategies that take into consideration transportation, child care, child support, domestic violence, criminal justice history, disabling conditions, and age appropriateness.</p> <p>d. Improve coordination and integration of employment programs with homelessness assistance programs, victim assistance programs, and housing and permanent supportive housing programs.</p> <p>e. Increase opportunities for work and support recovery for Veterans with barriers to employment, especially Veterans returning from active duty, Veterans with disabilities, and Veterans in permanent supportive housing.</p> |
| <p>SIX Improve access to mainstream programs and services to reduce people's financial vulnerability to homelessness</p> | <p>a. Document, disseminate, and promote the use of best practices in expedited access to income and work supports for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. This includes improved outreach to homeless assistance providers and collaborations across government and with community nonprofits, online consolidated application processing, and electronic submission. Consider lessons learned from the SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery Initiative (SOAR), and the Homeless Outreach and Projects and Evaluation Initiative (HOPE).</p> <p>b. Review federal program policies, procedures, and regulations to identify administrative or regulatory mechanisms that could be used to remove barriers and improve access to income supports.</p> <p>c. Enhance public information, targeted communications, and a national toll-free homeless call center to ensure that all Veterans and their families know they can obtain homelessness prevention assistance from the VA or other places in their community.</p> <p>d. Create clear pathways to greater financial independence. Collaborate to review program eligibility and termination criteria across the range of programs which people experiencing or at risk of homelessness may access. Identify changes that should be made to create incentives for work, earning and retaining income while maintaining access to health coverage, housing assistance, child care, etc. until a household is earning enough through employment to be financially stable.</p> <p>e. Prepare for Medicaid expansion to effectively enroll people who experience or are most at risk of experiencing homelessness. This should include systems to reach out to, engage, and enroll newly eligible people in health care insurance benefits.</p> |

THEME: IMPROVE HEALTH AND STABILITY

| OBJECTIVE | STRATEGIES |
|---|--|
| <p>SEVEN Integrate primary and behavioral health care services with homeless assistance programs and housing to reduce people's vulnerability to and the impacts of homelessness</p> | <p>a. Encourage partnerships between housing providers and health and behavioral health care providers to colocate or coordinate health, behavioral health, safety, and wellness services with housing and create better resources for providers to connect patients to housing resources.</p> <p>b. Build upon successful service delivery models to provide services in the homes of people who have experienced homelessness including using Medicaid-funded Assertive Community Treatment Teams for those with behavioral health needs.</p> <p>c. Seek opportunities to establish and evaluate the effectiveness of a "medical home" model to provide integrated care for medical and behavioral health, and to improve health and reduce health care costs in communities with the largest number of people experiencing homelessness.</p> <p>d. Seek opportunities to establish medical respite programs in communities with the largest number of people experiencing homelessness to allow hospitals to discharge people experiencing homelessness with complex health needs to medical respite programs that will help them transition to supportive housing.</p> <p>e. Increase availability of behavioral health services, including community mental health centers, to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.</p> <p>f. Improve access to child and family services that improve early child development, educational stability, youth development, and quality of life for families—including expectant families, children, and youth experiencing or most at risk of homelessness.</p> |

THEME: IMPROVE HEALTH AND STABILITY (cont'd)

| OBJECTIVE | STRATEGIES |
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| <p>EIGHT Advance health and housing stability for youth aging out of systems such as foster care and juvenile justice</p> | <p>a. Improve discharge planning from foster care and juvenile justice to connect youth to education, housing, health and behavioral health support, income supports, and health coverage prior to discharge.</p> <p>b. Review federal program policies, procedures, and regulations to identify administrative or regulatory mechanisms that could be used to remove barriers and improve access to stable health care, housing, and housing supports for youth.</p> <p>c. Promote targeted outreach strategies to identify youth experiencing homelessness who are most likely to end up in an emergency room, hospital, jail, or prison, and connect them to the housing and support they need.</p> |
| <p>NINE Advance health and housing stability for people experiencing homelessness who have frequent contact with hospitals and criminal justice</p> | <p>a. Improve discharge planning from hospitals, VA medical centers, psychiatric facilities, jails, and prisons to connect people to housing, health and behavioral health support, income and work supports, and health coverage prior to discharge.</p> <p>b. Promote targeted outreach strategies to identify people experiencing homelessness who are most likely to end up in an emergency room, hospital, jail, or prison, and connect them to the housing and support they need.</p> <p>c. Increase the number of jail diversion courts at the state and local levels that are linked to housing and support, including those specifically for Veterans, those experiencing homelessness, or people with mental health issues or drug abuse problems.</p> <p>d. Reduce criminalization of homelessness by defining constructive approaches to street homelessness and considering incentives to urge cities to adopt these practices.</p> |

THEME: RETOOL THE HOMELESS CRISIS RESPONSE SYSTEM

| OBJECTIVE | STRATEGIES |
|--|---|
| <p>TEN Transform homeless services to crisis response systems that prevent homelessness and rapidly return people who experience homelessness to stable housing</p> | <p>a. Develop and promote best practices for crisis response programs and increase their adoption by agencies receiving federal funds.</p> <p>b. Determine opportunities to utilize mainstream resources to provide housing stabilization assistance to clients who are homeless or at high risk of homelessness.</p> <p>c. Develop implementation strategies for the HEARTH Act—especially the new Emergency Solutions Grant—that sustain best practices learned from the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program and the Rapid Re-Housing Demonstration.</p> <p>d. Ensure continuity in the provision of homeless prevention and rapid re-housing services to families, youth, and individuals—including Veterans and their families—through HUD’s Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program.</p> <p>e. Ensure that homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing strategies are coordinated with Education for Homeless Children and Youth, and incorporated within federal place-based strategies to improve neighborhoods and schools, including Promise Neighborhoods and Choice Neighborhoods.</p> |

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