

What Doors Does *Opening Doors* Open?

A WRAP Summary

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

The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) just released *Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan To Prevent And End Homelessness*.



USICH

The USICH is made up of 19 federal agencies, including the Department of Agriculture, Department of Defense, Department of Education, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Housing and Urban Development, Department of Justice, Department of Veteran Affairs, and the U.S. Postal Service. Its FY2010 budget is \$2.68 million.

The Plan

USICH Chair and HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan presents the plan as “the nation’s first ever comprehensive Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness.” He says the plan “outlines an interagency collaboration that aligns mainstream housing, health, education, and human services to prevent Americans from experiencing homelessness in the future.” The plan’s proposed strategies “call upon the federal government to work in partnership with the private sector, philanthropy, state and local governments to employ cost effective and comprehensive solutions to end homelessness.”

Data and Facts

Data in the plan comes from HUD’s Annual Homeless Assessment Report of 2009 (which draws its data from the national point-in-time count and Homeless Management Information Systems), the Department of Education and the Department of Veteran Affairs.

- Close 2 million Americans experience homelessness each year.

- On a single night in 2009, 643,067 people were homeless; 63% were sheltered, 37% were unsheltered; 63 % were individuals, 37% were families.
- 1,558,917 people used emergency shelters or transitional housing programs.
- African Americans accounted for 39% of the total sheltered homeless population; African Americans represent only 12.4 of the total U.S. population.
- Public schools reported over 956,000 homeless students, a 20% increase from 2007-08.
- Over half of people experiencing homelessness were in California, Florida, Nevada, Texas, Georgia, and Washington.
- One out of every six people in HUD's point-in-time count lived in Greater Los Angeles/Orange County area, New York City, Las Vegas or New Orleans.
- On a single night, 238,110 people in families were counted as homeless.
- Among mothers with children experiencing homelessness, more than 80% had previously experienced domestic violence.
- 983,835 people accessing shelters and transitional housing programs were individual adults; 43% of sheltered adults without families had a disabling condition and 13% were Veterans.
- There were 110,917 adults experiencing chronic homelessness; 60% were unsheltered.
- A study of hospital costs associated with homelessness reported that 52% of individuals who are homeless were admitted for mental health or substance abuse treatment, compared to 23% of non-homeless low-income patients, and the length of hospital stay for homeless patients was 36% longer per admission than for non-homeless patients.
- In 2009, the VA estimated 107,000 homeless Veterans on any given night.
- About 50% of homeless Veterans have serious mental illness and 70% have substance abuse problems.

Goals

The plan sets four goals: 1) *Finish the job of ending chronic homelessness in five years*; 2) *Prevent and end homelessness among Veterans in five years*; 3) *Prevent and end homelessness for families, youth, and children in ten years*; and 4) *Set a path to ending all types of homelessness*.

The plan states that “it is important to set goals, *even if aspirational*, for true progress to be made.”

Signature Initiatives

The plan has four signature initiatives that focus on the following target populations: veterans, families with children, chronic homelessness, and youth. These initiatives relate to the plan’s four goals.

Objectives

The plan has ten objectives: 1) promote collaborative leadership; 2) strengthen capacity and knowledge; 3) provide affordable housing; 4) provide permanent supportive housing; 5) increase economic security; 6) reduce financial vulnerability; 7) integrate health care with housing; 8) advance health and housing stability for youth; 9) advance health and housing stability for adults; and 10) transform crisis response systems.

Under Objective 9 (Advance health and housing stability for people experiencing homelessness who have frequent contact with hospitals and criminal justice), the plan states: “Criminalizing acts of survival is not a solution to homelessness and results in unnecessary public costs for police, courts, and jails. Development of alternative approaches should meet both the public’s need for access to public streets, parks, and recreation areas and the ability of people experiencing homelessness to meet basic needs.”

Strategies

To **promote collaborative leadership**, the plan will: educate the public; engage leaders (State, local, tribal); update and implement local plans; involve citizens and private sector; test the model of interagency collaboration; reward collaborating communities; recognize savings across partners; engage congressional committees.

To **strengthen capacity and knowledge**, the plan will: compile research; coordinate federal technical assistance; make information available on special populations; acknowledge the needs of rural and tribal communities; inventory federal emergency response programs; increase use of HMIS (Homeless Management Information System); create a common data standard and uniform performance measures if feasible.

To **provide affordable housing**, the plan will: support rental housing subsidies; expand supply of affordable rental homes; improve access to assistance; increase service-enriched housing.

To **provide permanent supportive housing**, the plan will: improve access to and use of supportive housing; protocols and incentives to free up units; expand supply of supportive housing; assess options for supportive housing service funding.

To **increase economic security**, the plan will: provide job development opportunities with a focus on homelessness; improve access to work supports and help people enter the workforce, coordinate/integrate employment programs; increase work for Veterans.

To **reduce financial vulnerability**, the plan will: employ practices that will enable people to have an income and supportive services to maintain that income; enhance public information and call center for Veterans; create pathways to financial independence.

To **integrate health care with housing**, the plan will: co-locate housing and health care; build upon successful service delivery models; evaluate effectiveness of medical home model; establish medical respite programs; increase availability of behavioral health services; improve access to child and family services.

To **advance health and housing stability for youth**, the plan will: improve discharge planning; improve access for youth; promote targeted outreach strategies.

To **advance health and housing stability for adults**, the plan will: improve discharge planning; promote targeted outreach strategies; increase number of jail diversion courts; define approaches to reduce criminalization.

To **transform crisis response systems**, the plan will: promote best practices in crisis response; use mainstream resources for housing stability; implementation strategies for HEARTH Act; ensure continuity through HPRP services; ensure prevention in place-based strategies.

Measures

Progress will be measured by:

- Annual changes in the number of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness
- Annual changes in the number of Veterans experiencing homelessness
- Annual changes in the number of families with children experiencing homelessness
- Increase in the number of permanent supportive housing units
- Increase employment and participation in mainstream assistance programs among those existing homeless assistance programs

USICH will monitor participation in four major federal assistance programs: Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Insurance, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

Implementation

The FY2011 Budget includes an 11.5% increase for targeted homeless programs, including increases for Veterans and for HUD homeless assistance programs.

“Activities undertaken by the Administration and activities proposed in the Administration’s FY2011 Budget are included in the Plan. Some strategies will be quickly executed while others may require more

significant policy work, thus necessitating more time before implementation begins and results are realized.”

Crosscutting Initiatives

The administration is relying on activities and legislation to help prevent, reduce and end homelessness. These include:

- The Affordable Care Act
- The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009
- The Edward Kennedy Serve American Act

There are other activities and plans to expand services under existing programs such as Medicaid, the Compassionate Allowances Initiative, Housing Choice Voucher, and Project-Based Rental Assistance.

Next Steps

USICH is gathering “baseline data around key measures,” working with “member agencies to prioritize which strategies demand action first,” and translating “this strategic plan into implementation plans.”

USICH will:

- Publish an annual report card on progress towards Plan goals and targets.
- Report to Congress activities and accomplishments across all USICH agencies.
- Evaluate Signature Initiatives targeting Veterans, families with children, youth, and chronic homelessness.