

Beyond Chronic Homelessness: A Review of Statewide Plans

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a National Survey policy report from ICPH

Some states are revisiting their plans to end homelessness to respond to shifts in federal policy, incorporate lessons learned from the first half of implementation, and address recent demographic changes, including the rise in family homelessness. Others are creating plans for the first time. To aid their efforts, ICPH offers the following recommendations based on an overview of experiences reported by the 28 states with statewide plans:

Target population

States agree that a focus on chronic homelessness does not meet the needs of their homeless residents, which include growing numbers of homeless families. Instead, plans need to be tailored to address local demographics of homeless and at-risk families and individuals without overlooking any homeless person.

- **Maine:** As a rural state, Maine has a much higher rate of family homelessness (54.0%) than of chronic homelessness (7.6%). Hence, the state's homelessness plan has included both families and individuals since it was first released in 2005.

Plan goals

Plans that address more than one target population should include action steps that identify the unique needs of each sub-population, such as families with dependent children. Action steps or goals should be prioritized, realistic, and specific. They should include timelines, measurable outcomes, responsible parties, funding amounts and sources, and yearly benchmarks.

- **Washington:** Action steps in Washington State's *Homeless Families Plan* express common goals such as increasing access to public services, preventing homelessness, and effectively serving those who face multiple barriers to meet the unique needs of families.
- **Hawaii:** The *Plan to End Homelessness in Hawaii* specifically outlines the manager, expected outcomes, benchmarks, and deadlines for each action step under every goal in the plan.

Progress reports and updates

Conduct progress reports annually that detail advancements made during the previous year, including budget, programs created, survey data collected, and outcome and output measures compared to baseline. Identify steps that will be taken during the upcoming year to overcome stalled progress, respond to the changing needs of clients identified through survey analysis, and prioritize activities. Update plan documents in response to changes in homelessness demographics, policy environment, or funding streams.

- **Minnesota:** Minnesota's August 2010 progress report on housing opportunities funded through its business plan to end long-term homelessness includes: the total amount of funding for each housing program, disaggregated by funding source; the number of housing units created by each program; and the aforementioned data aggregated by region.
- **Georgia:** The Georgia Interagency Homeless Coordination Council's 2009 annual report demonstrates that the Georgia Re-entry Partnership Housing Program saved the state over \$17 million in incarceration costs for 749 eligible parolees in 2009, in addition to improving clients' health and stability.
- **Washington:** Washington State's 2008 annual report on its *Homeless Families Plan* identifies the amount of additional yearly funding needed to address unmet housing needs.
- **Vermont:** According to the Vermont Interagency Council on Homelessness' *2008 Report to Governor Douglas*, the legislature authorized the expenditure of \$250,000 for the creation of cold weather overflow beds to meet the demands of a rising shelter population.

Collaboration

Conduct regular meetings that include a wide range of traditional and non-traditional stakeholders to build broad-based support for and ownership of the plan. Stakeholders may include members of government agencies, businesses, faith-based organizations, advocacy groups, and service providers. Involving agencies that do not typically address homelessness can help better serve the unique needs of homeless subpopulations. Partnerships with local universities can yield more in-depth research and analysis.

- Maryland: The Maryland Governor's Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH) is composed of members from a wide variety of government agencies. The involvement of departments not traditionally associated with homelessness programming makes providers aware of a greater variety of services available to their clients. Nonprofit and community stakeholders participate in the ICH through a work group, communicating field experiences and bringing emerging needs to the attention of legislative champions.

Executive leadership

Governors have the political power to help further legislative priorities, funding applications, and the creation of local plans. They should signal homelessness as a policy priority by including it in their agendas, renewing executive orders establishing interagency councils, and requiring agency directors to actively participate in councils. Lower-level agency staff can be valuable members of work groups but should not represent agency directors at council meetings since progress stalls without decision-makers present. Agency directors can enact some change without gubernatorial support. For example, they can coordinate with each other to create consistent, no-wrong-door policies.

- Utah: The Lieutenant Governor, as the Chair of the Utah State Homeless Coordinating Committee, uses his political influence to stimulate the creation of local ten-year plans.

Funding

States can explore unique funding options in this time of economic strain. Creative taxes, challenge grants, linkages of grant application processes with plan goals, and maximization of mainstream resources can support activity that otherwise would not be funded.

- Alaska: The Alaska Housing Finance Corporation uses interest earned from the provision of low- and moderate-income housing loans and other investments to help fund the homelessness housing continuum.
- Nebraska: The Nebraska Homeless Shelter Assistance Trust Fund (HSATF) receives over \$800,000 annually through the state's Documentary Stamp Tax. The tax charges \$1.75 per \$1,000 of real estate sales and the HSATF receives \$0.25 for every \$1.75 of tax collected.
- Rhode Island: In 2005, the United Way of Rhode Island provided pilot funding for the Housing First Rhode Island Program. The state matched those funds with additional resources and the program is currently sustained through a grant from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.
- Utah: Local homelessness service providers in Utah receive State Homeless Trust Fund, Emergency Shelter Grant, and Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program dollars through contracts with the state tied to local ten-year plan goals.

Dedicated staff

Dedicate support personnel to the plan responsible for coordinating and scheduling council meetings, developing progress reports, identifying and procuring funding, and performing other administrative work. Such tasks are fundamental to plan implementation, but may overwhelm council members whose primary job functions lie outside the plan.

- Missouri: The Missouri council has dedicated personnel that manages capacity building and coordination of homelessness services for the Balance of State Continuum of Care. The staff travels to each of Missouri's ten regions quarterly to provide technical assistance and promote local and regional collaboration.

For the full report analyzing 49 interviews of key stakeholders from all 28 states with approved statewide plans to end homelessness, visit www.ICPHusa.org.

The *National Survey of Programs and Services for Homeless Families* is an online resource for service providers, advocates, researchers, and public policy makers working in the field of family homelessness. The Web site provides a state-by-state snapshot of the interconnections between governmental and nonprofit work to end family homelessness.
www.icprwb.org



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The Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness (ICPH) is an independent nonprofit research organization based in New York City. ICPH studies the impact of poverty on family and child well-being

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