

## **NAN ROMAN**

Nan Roman, President and CEO of the National Alliance to End Homelessness, is a leading national voice on the issue of homelessness. The Alliance is a national nonprofit, nonpartisan organization whose sole mission is to prevent and end homelessness. Under Ms. Roman's direction, the Alliance seeks to achieve its mission through policy, research and capacity building. It works with over 10,000 partner organizations, agencies and corporations across the nation.

Ms. Roman is an active and influential participant in the national debate on solutions to homelessness, with a special focus on housing. In the nation's capital, she works closely with leaders in Congress and the Administration and with national partner organizations on a variety of issues affecting homeless people. These include affordable housing, income assistance, education, employment, job placement, veterans, and service delivery. Ms. Roman is frequently interviewed by national and local press and is a guest speaker at events across the country.

In 2000 Ms. Roman launched a nationwide initiative to develop plans to end homelessness in. Today, every major city is implementing a plan to end homelessness, and the number of homeless people in the nation is declining. Ms. Roman continues to assist cities to implement these plans. Under her leadership, the Alliance has developed a Homelessness Research Institute to develop knowledge on solutions, and a Center for Capacity Building to help communities implement successful strategies. She is the author of numerous articles on homelessness, as well as training manuals and handbooks and has designed and conducted research on the connection between foster care and homelessness, and on best practices of homeless assistance. Under her leadership the Alliance has held dozens of national conferences and training institutes on homelessness and its solutions.

Ms. Roman is on the boards of numerous organizations including the National AIDS Housing Coalition and the National Housing Conference. She is a Fellow of the National Academy for Public Administration, and a member of the Bipartisan Policy Council Housing Commission, the District of Columbia Interagency Council on Homelessness, and the Building America CDE Advisory Council. She is the recipient of numerous awards and has been an advisor to presidential transition teams of the past four administrations. She was an official delegate of the United States to Habitat II, the United National Conference on Cities and is a founder of the International Alliance to End Homelessness.

Ms. Roman was born in Bloomington, Indiana. She graduated Phi Beta Kappa from the University of Illinois, from which she also received her Master of Arts degree. Prior to coming to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, she worked on issues of poverty and housing at other national and local nonprofit organizations. Her combination of local hands-on and national program and policy experience has given her a unique perspective on the issues of poverty

## ENDING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS National Alliance to End Homelessness (Alliance)

The National Alliance to End Homelessness applauds the commitment of Chairman Sibelius and the members of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) to end youth homelessness by 2020. For far too long the plight of unaccompanied children and young adults has gone unaddressed. *Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness* brought much needed attention to this particularly vulnerable population. The *USICH Proposed Framework for Ending Youth Homelessness* is an important next step in laying out what the Federal government will do to achieve this goal.

The Alliance concurs with the major focus areas in the *Framework*: sizing the population; identifying the key segments of the population; identifying solutions for each segment; and going to scale with the solutions for each segment. We also support the outcomes of housing, connection, wellbeing, and education/employment.

Earlier this year the Alliance made a preliminary effort, using existing data, to estimate the size and segments of the population and examined this information for implications to policy and practice. Using data from the *National Incidence Studies of Missing Abducted, Runaway and Thrownaway Children* and HUD's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), and applying homelessness typologies developed by Dr. Paul Toro (for youth under 18) and Dr. Dennis Culhane (for people over 18), the Alliance found the following for **youth 12-24**.

- 1.9 million youth (12-24) are homeless every year.
  - 1.3 million of them return home within a week.
- 530,000 of the 1.9 million are homeless longer than a week.
  - Of these, 450,000 remain connected to home and/or school.
  - 80,000 of them have more serious problems and are less connected.
    - Half of those less connected have disabilities and/or more serious problems.
- 60,000 are young parents with children of their own.

Applying Dr. Toro's typology to the 380,000 **youth under 18 who are homeless longer than a week** the following emerged.

- 327,000 are "temporarily disconnected," still maintaining links to families and school and experiencing the least amount of homelessness over time.
- 29,000 youth are "unstably connected" to family and school, moving in and out of homelessness repeatedly, but not having prominent mental health or substance abuse problems.
- 24,000 youth are "chronically disconnected" from school or family, have mental health and substance abuse issues, and experience long stretches of homelessness.

As the *Framework* points out, there is little research to compare what works best for each of these segments of the homeless youth population. But these preliminary findings do give rise to certain implications.

Clearly, a large number (1.9 million) of young people become homeless every year, but most (1.3 million) return home to their families. RHYA data also indicate this. Implications are: (1) the **crisis response system** for youth who leave home should be expanded, particularly for those under 18; and (2) as they are going to return “home,” the focus of assistance should be family reunification through **family intervention services and flexible resources to address problems such as the family’s loss of housing**.

Over 500,000 youth will not return home so quickly. Nevertheless most of these youth retain some connection to home and/or school. Again, **crisis accommodation** must be available to scale, and **family intervention** is an implied focus.

For the smaller number of youth (80,000) who have more challenges to returning home, the homelessness system should provide **longer term housing and support**. Learnings from the adult homelessness system indicate that it is critical to target intensive and high cost interventions such as transitional housing and permanent supportive housing to high need youth. They further indicate that focusing on the highest need population can free the crisis system to deal more productively with lower need individuals and more quickly bring down the number of homeless youth; thus helping to meet the Federal goal.

Based upon the above as well as the *USICH Framework*, the Alliance offers the following thoughts for the future.

**Improving Data.** The Alliance concurs that better data is essential to size and address the problem to scale. Further, the experiences of both HUD and VA clearly indicate that setting numerical goals for ending homelessness, and driving performance toward these goals, works. Without solid data there is no baseline and progress cannot be measured. For all of these reasons, the need for better data is critical. The Alliance recommends:

- Merging RHYMIS and HMIS in 2012 and beginning to create the tools by which the increasing volume of youth data can be analyzed.
- Requiring youth providers and local Continuums of Care to include youth in the HUD mandated point in time counts in 2013. Any inclusion of youth will be an improvement.

**Serving High Need Youth.** Approximately 40,000 youth have higher levels of physical and mental health problems and rates of substance use, as well as longer or more frequent episodes of homelessness. These youth may spend long periods on the streets because they cannot or do not access programs that lack either the ability or the inclination to address their need for treatment. While on the street, they face a host of challenges, including violence, drugs, and the risk of sexual exploitation. HHS and HUD should **incentivize youth-targeted programs to serve the most vulnerable youth** by providing bonus points in the competitive granting process to programs that target “street youth” with a diagnosed/diagnosable mental health, substance abuse, physical and/or developmental disorder; and that clearly define the outcomes they will achieve. **Evaluation** of these efforts, and **practice collaboratives** to share best practices are also recommended in order to advance successful approaches.

**Mainstream Resources.** Reunification with family remains the most practical and promising solution for a vast majority of homeless youth, particularly those under 18. Additionally, the reason that families break apart is often poverty and eviction rather than conflict. The homelessness system is not sized to address these needs. As *Opening Doors* points out, **mainstream programs** such as child welfare, TANF, juvenile justice, and housing must assume much of this responsibility. The education system has a

critical role both in identifying risk and improving outcomes. Ending youth homelessness will require a clear plan for how mainstream programs will assume responsibility for these vulnerable youth. HHS should encourage state child welfare agencies to include these minors as a targeted population in state plans, with goals for reducing homelessness. HHS could also provide guidance as to how child welfare agencies can work collaboratively with RHYA programs to better serve homeless youth. The Administration could set goals for other mainstream programs including affordable housing, TANF, juvenile and criminal justice, and mental health and substance abuse treatment to strengthen families and both prevent youth from becoming homeless and facilitate youth returning to their families.

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Once again, thank you to Chairman Sebelius and the members of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, as well as the HHS Administration on Children, Youth and Families, for the commitment to end youth homelessness. The Alliance looks forward to being a partner with the Administration on these efforts.