



SAMHSA's Expert Panel on the Prevention of Homelessness

What We Heard: *Guiding Principles*

- 1. Housing stability is the primary goal of homelessness prevention.** All housing work should be done with housing stability as the primary outcome in planning and monitoring programs.
- 2. Collaboration must be incentivized, funded, and facilitated to leverage all mainstream resources.** Collaborating across sectors is critical to creating a network of resources and has the greatest chance for success.
- 3. Mainstream systems are the primary locus for the prevention of homelessness and must be held accountable.** Mainstream services at all levels should be aligned with housing stability as a key outcome and assessed on agreed upon prevention indicators.
- 4. Initiatives and systems should be informed by what works.** Through the dissemination of research findings and a commitment to prevention research, we can use data thoughtfully and effectively.
- 5. Evaluations should be planned at the outset of significant initiatives and considered usual practice.** As programs are designed, the evaluation component and means of measuring success should be part of the strategy in order to tangibly show results to benefit the field.
- 6. People who have experienced homelessness or are at risk of homelessness should be involved in decisions about what they personally need.** This type of programming and planning is not only more respectful, it is more successful: incorporate strengths-based approaches and consumer choice in programs.
- 7. Prevention initiatives can be strengthened by removing the stigma around homelessness.** Messages that reinforce the concept that there are no homeless "people," but rather people who have lost their homes who deserve to be treated with dignity and respected should be shared widely.
- 8. The intensity of the intervention should match and not exceed the need.** Resources must be wisely managed so that each intervention is tailored to the level of the crisis, whether it is short-term rental subsidies or permanent supportive housing.
- 9. Strategically target people who are high risk of homelessness and offer alternative pathways to stability at vulnerable times.** We have identified groups that are already at a high risk of homelessness – once programs identify these factors in their population they can better target interventions.
- 10. Time interventions appropriately enough "upstream" before crises occur and reach out those most likely to become homeless.** Work on identifying "red flags" in an individual or family's housing or income stability and then work on finding alternative pathways to avoid homelessness.

In April 2011, leaders from USICH, SAMHSA, and ASPE (Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, HHS) led an expert panel and small group discussion on what is known about homelessness prevention, what can be learned from prevention science in behavioral health care that can be applied to homelessness prevention, and what principles and practices are effective and replicable.

Working together, panelists and audience members developed ten guiding principles to successful prevention of homelessness. The panel suggests that all levels of government, nonprofit, and private actors use these guiding principles in all aspects of their planning, monitoring, and implementation of their homelessness prevention activities.

Please note that the following information summarizes the contributions of the Expert Panel. It does not constitute Federal policy or the conclusions of any Federal agency relative to preventing homelessness.

What We Heard: *What We Need To Do*

Housing Subsidies

Panelists and researchers both highlighted that housing subsidies are still the most direct and effective tool in homelessness prevention, especially given the drop in wages and employment in recent years. Federal mechanisms at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) such as the Home Investments Partnerships program (HOME) and the Community

Development Block Grant Program (CDBG) are programs meant to increase the supply of affordable housing in communities. Federal assistance for families and individuals at risk of homelessness also comes in the form of public housing provision or Housing Choice Vouchers. Public Housing Agencies can work with tenants and social service providers in response to immediate housing problems that could result in homelessness in areas such as family or

tenant/landlord mediation, household budgeting, emergency rental assistance, job training and placement, and benefits advocacy that can mitigate a further housing crisis.

“Research has shown that a housing subsidy is the single most effective tool in preventing homelessness because it makes market-rate housing affordable.” – National Alliance to End Homelessness

Effective Strategies to Assist Persons with Multiple and Complex Needs

- ✓ **Supportive Service Interventions:** address specific risk factors before someone becomes homeless
- ✓ **Discharge Planning:** planning for release from situations such as hospitals and health care institutions, foster care, military service and prison that includes housing arrangements and community supports.
- ✓ **Housing First:** programs that “screen in” rather than “screen out” applicants if they have substance use or mental health disorders puts housing stability as the first goal, with recovery and support available as desired.
- ✓ **Permanent Supportive Housing:** provision of housing coupled with supportive services
- ✓ **Targeted Rental and Housing Subsidies:** provide support for specific sub-groups, such as veterans in the HUD-VASH program.

Collaboration among Mainstream Programs

Mainstream programs that have contact with people *before* they become homeless can play a major role in preventing homelessness. Strong collaborative efforts among agencies are essential for “upstream” interventions. States and local government agencies responsible for mainstream supports can intervene early before individuals or families lose their homes, and efforts to offer multiple forms of support in a single location have proven to be an effective way to assist people with many needs and limited mobility. Once these agencies recognize their shared aim in homelessness prevention, they can gain trust and understanding of one another’s capabilities through training and interaction. Joint planning and trainings for serving individuals and families at risk can be encouraged by policymakers at every level.

Targeting Funding to Those Most Likely to Become Homeless

Persons who experience homelessness are diverse and generalizations should be made with caution. However, there are some subgroups that do share common risk factors that are important in planning interventions to prevent homelessness. Because of this, programs and services are often differentiated by demographics including age, gender, family status, disability and veteran status to name a few. Local communities and providers can come together to implement screening tools for individuals and families that determine the level of crisis and what interventions in their community are most appropriate for their needs. Communities should continue to target resources and service strategies appropriate to the crisis and gather data and evaluate their success to share with the field.