



U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness

Equity Action Plan

Executive Summary

The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) leads and coordinates the federal response to prevent and end homelessness. We drive action among our 19 federal member agencies and foster the efficient use of resources in support of best practices at every level of government and the private sector.

Across these departments, USICH creates the Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness and helps communities implement this plan. USICH ensures guidance, funding, and expertise systematically flow between the highest levels of the federal government to local leaders. In addition, USICH leads interagency working groups to design and implement federal strategies and provides expert guidance that empowers communities to end homelessness.

Guided by the values of **racial equity**, **Housing First**, **decriminalization**, and **inclusion**, USICH believes that housing should be a right—not a privilege.

USICH believes we will never end homelessness until everyone has an equal opportunity to live in a safe and affordable home. Research shows that racial equity has benefits for society. Still, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) have been systemically excluded and denied equitable access to not only housing but the systems that help people stay housed: health care, education, transportation, and employment.

USICH also believes people who have experienced homelessness play a critical role in ending homelessness and must be meaningfully included in decision-making, planning, and implementing policies and programs. Many of the most effective and most equitable innovations, such as Housing First, were born from listening to people who have been in the shoes of the people they help.

In the spirit of implementing and demonstrating our support for the Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government (13985), USICH intends to center its work on racial equity and evidence-based practices through our federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness, engagement with tribal sovereign nations, and strengthening of internal operations. In summary, the concrete outcomes of this work would include:

- Establishing racial equity as a core part of **developing the new federal strategic plan** with corresponding goals and priorities within the plan that incorporate racial equity.
- **Engaging with tribal sovereign nations** by developing an advisory group, holding facilitated convenings, and reestablishing our interagency working group on Native American homelessness.
- **Strengthening internal operations** will start with assessing the current climate of equity to identify areas where USICH can model the operational behavior we encourage communities and partners to exemplify in advancing racial equity. Further exploring opportunities to develop a Civil Rights Office will enable the agency to improve advanced civil rights and racial equity.

Summary of Early Accomplishments

In 2021, USICH has sought to move quickly by convening our new chair, vice-chair, and councilmembers to publish an updated vision and core values for USICH, which speak directly to racial equity and allows the public and local, state, and federal partners to know our priorities.

Federal Strategic Plan

Under the Biden-Harris administration, efforts have been underway to develop a new strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness. Since September 2021, USICH has coordinated the most comprehensive public input process in our history. USICH spent hundreds of hours collecting feedback from the public, receiving more than 1,500 comments online, and engaging in nearly 100 listening sessions.¹ Participants spoke directly to USICH on homelessness issues and included a wide range of perspectives nationwide: people who experience or have experienced homelessness; leaders in racial equity, criminal justice, LGBTQ advocates, youth, people with disabilities; and more. This Strategic Plan will represent the consensus of our 19 council members and enable a whole of government approach to prevent and end homelessness rooted in equity.

Innovative Stakeholder Engagement

In 2010, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) created the National Stakeholders Group. Membership consists of non-federal homelessness, health, and housing organizations that meet quarterly with USICH and Council Member agencies to discuss pertinent issues that impact homelessness. In October 2021, USICH held its first National Stakeholders Group meeting since December 2019. Under the Biden-Harris Administration, USICH opened this body to national organizations with a historical racial justice focus for the first time. USICH's engagement with national organizations that focus on racial justice allows the agency to broaden and deepen our understanding of systemic challenges, barriers, and opportunities to address. USICH was also able to hear directly from the leaders of these national organizations about what they would hope to see incorporated into the federal strategic plan.

Notable Changes in Policies or Operations

Per the Executive Order on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce (14035), USICH has discontinued the practice of relying on prior salary history to set pay for prospective applicants to set compensation. As part of USICH's recruitment practices, we have advertised vacant positions in newspapers, media outlets, or journals that specifically serve underserved communities. USICH also required racial equity training as part of the new employee's onboarding orientation process, which allows employees to develop a foundational historical understanding of racial equity.

USICH understands that racial equity work matters. Our ability to successfully fulfill our agency mission and statutory requirements directly connect to our ability to center equity in all parts of our work.

¹ "WHAT WE'RE HEARING FROM YOU ABOUT THE FEDERAL STRATEGIC PLAN TO PREVENT AND END HOMELESSNESS", USICH. Link: <https://www.usich.gov/news/what-were-hearing-from-you-about-the-federal-strategic-plan-to-prevent-and-end-homelessness>

Equity Action Plan

Focus Area #1: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness

A. Challenge

Barrier Being Addressed: USICH is seeking to address overrepresentation of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) in the homelessness data.

Population Impacted by Barrier: The population of focus for this work is people experiencing homelessness, including those that identify as a person of color.

Evidence Indicating This Barrier Meaningfully Impacts Full and Equal Participation: Racial inequities are evident and glaring for those experiencing homelessness. According to HUD's 2020 AHAR Part 1, Black and indigenous people (including Native Americans and Pacific Islanders) remained overrepresented among the homeless population compared to the United States population². People identifying as Black or African American accounted for 39% of all people experiencing homelessness and 53 % of people experiencing homelessness as members of families with children but are 12 % of the total population. In contrast, 48 % of all people experiencing homelessness were white compared with 74 % of the U.S. population. People identifying as Hispanic or Latino (who can be of any race) are about 23 % of the homeless population, but only 16 % of the population overall. The federal strategic plan is the policy document that sets priorities and ambitious goals for the federal government to address and end homelessness. As such, embedding racial equity as a core tenant of the work of USICH through the federal strategic plan is critical. Developing the federal strategic plan through the lens of racial equity will intentionally focus the agency and our council member partners on ways we can work toward rectifying the existing racial disparities experienced by BIPOC communities that experience homelessness.

B. Action and Intended Impact on Barrier

The Action: USICH will develop a federal strategic plan that centers racial equity and commits to taking bold and innovative equity-centered actions to drive change. Following plan adoption, USICH will further engage Council member agencies, national partners, communities, and people with lived experience to implement strategies to address the racial disparities among homelessness populations.

The federal strategic plan serves as a roadmap for joint action by the 19 USICH member agencies along with local and state partners in the public and private sectors. The federal strategic directs the work of USICH, informs the work of the USICH Council, and influences the strategic plan of states and communities that look to USICH as the federal leader in addressing and ending homelessness. USICH has a unique opportunity to transform how we prevent and end homelessness by developing and implementing strategies centered in racial equity.

² Henry, Meaghan, et. al. "The 2020 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress" U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Link: <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2020-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>

C. Tracking Progress

Near- to Mid-Term Indicators:

- Outcome-Focused: By centering equity throughout the new federal strategic plan, actions taken by USICH, and partner agencies will result in more equitable outcomes. USICH will identify specific metrics in the Federal Strategic Plan to measure once the plan is published.
- Output-Focused: USICH will develop equity-centered goals, priorities, and strategies in the federal strategic plan.

Long-Term Indicators:

- USICH will publish a [key findings analysis](#) on the Point in Time Count data that highlights demographic data broken down by racial groups and type of homelessness experienced within 1-3 months after the Point in Time Count data is published.
- USICH will work with communities to collect and report on relevant qualitative data and other indicators for individuals experiencing homelessness by race, ethnicity, and geography, supplementing the quantitative data within the AHAR- Point in Time count.

D. Accountability

Internal Mechanism: USICH will hold itself accountable for implementing this action by having the Office of the Executive Director bear the responsibility of overseeing this work.

Communicating Progress: USICH will hold itself and its federal partners accountable for implementing the equity-centered strategies in the plan by reporting out on actions and progress through newsletters and other mechanisms.

Focus Area #2: Tribal Consultations

A. Challenge

Barrier Being Addressed: USICH seeks to address the issue of reducing and ending homelessness among all populations, including indigenous communities. USICH's ability to engage in tribal consultations is limited, yet there is a need to address homelessness among indigenous communities in partnership with tribal sovereign nations. USICH recognizes the critical importance of flexible funding opportunities for tribes to have the resources needed to address homelessness among tribal members.

Population Impacted by Barrier: The population of focus for this work is people experiencing homelessness that identify as indigenous.

Evidence Indicating This Barrier Meaningfully Impacts Full and Equal Participation: According to HUD's 2020 AHAR Part 1, indigenous people (including Native Americans and Pacific Islanders) remained overrepresented among the homeless population compared to the United States' overall population.³ Together, American Indian, Alaska Native, Pacific Islander, and Native Hawaiian people account for one percent of the U.S. population but represent five percent of the homeless population and seven percent of the unsheltered population. As an executive branch agency, USICH has a

³ Henry, Meaghan, et. al. "The 2020 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress" U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Link: <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2020-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>

responsibility and is committed to working with tribal governments in developing this unique relationship, respecting tribal sovereignty and self-determination.

B. Action and Intended Impact on Barrier

The Action: USICH will engage in tribal consultation that consists of four phases: Identification, Notification, Tribal Input, and Follow-Up.

Given the administration's issuance of the *Memorandum on Tribal Consultation and Strengthening Nation-to-Nation Relationships*, there is a new window of opportunity to address the disparate effect of homelessness on indigenous people. Although USICH has not engaged in official tribal consultations, USICH has engaged with several tribal sovereign nations through convenings and outreach.

USICH's sole mission is focused on preventing and ending homelessness in the United States. If USICH can take actionable steps to engage in tribal consultations, then there can be an opportunity to meaningfully contribute to the reduction in the racial inequities endured by indigenous families and individuals experiencing homelessness.

C. Tracking Progress

Near- to Mid-Term Indicators:

- Outcome-Focused: USICH will reestablish the Interagency Working Group on American Indians and Alaskan Natives.
- USICH will track the type and number of engagements staff members convene or participate in through outreach to our communities to enable USICH to identify gaps in communities/populations served.
- Output-Focused: USICH will build a strategy to coordinate Tribal homelessness policy and programs within the Federal government. This will entail focused efforts in communication, aligning resources, engagement at the regional level, and collaboration with Council member agencies. The Interagency Working Group on American Indians and Alaskan Natives will be the lead on this endeavor.

Long-Term Indicators:

- Regular listening sessions in communities with stakeholders to provide insight into homelessness policies. In conjunction with our Councilmember federal partners, hosting listening sessions and ensuring participants in listening sessions will be kept abreast on how the feedback received is utilized, when possible.
- Work with federal partners to develop a Native American & homelessness national convening in partnership with Tribal nations on housing instability.
- Develop an advisory group with tribal sovereign nations- building on the knowledge base of our federal partners that will also [be engaging in similar efforts](#).

D. Accountability

Internal Mechanism: USICH will hold itself accountable for implementing this action by setting priorities for these endeavors within our agency-wide internal action plan. USICH will hold itself accountable for implementing this action by incorporating tribal sovereign nation engagement into the federal strategic plan.

Communicating Progress: USICH will hold itself accountable for implementing this action by communicating our progress during our Council meeting, National Stakeholders Group, and our Performance and Accountability Report. USICH will have the Leadership Team report progress to the Chief of Staff.

Focus Area #3: USICH’s Internal Operations Process

A. Challenge

Barrier Being Addressed: USICH seeks to address the issue of reducing and removing barriers to equitable and equal opportunity in the workforce through our internal operations. Advancing racial equity as a federal agency with a mission to address and end homelessness requires embedding racial equity as part of the internal operations decision-making process, policies, and procedures.

Population Impacted by Barrier: This work focuses on agency employees, including those in the BIPOC community or traditionally underrepresented in the federal government workforce. In addition, focusing on internal operations will allow USICH to model expectations for partner agencies and communities.

Evidence Indicating This Barrier Meaningfully Impacts Full and Equal Participation: Racial inequities are evident throughout the federal government. According to the Partnership for Public Service, as of March 2021, people of color represent 47% of all full-time, entry-level employees but only 33% of senior-level positions.⁴ According to Office of Presidential Management FedScope data, Black and other employees of color make up 53% of clerical positions, but only 32% of the professional workforce.⁵ Addressing barriers and access to opportunities within the agency, especially for members of historically underrepresented and underserved racial or ethnic groups, requires addressing built-in barriers and biases that impede USICH success and development.

B. Action and Intended Impact on Barrier

The Action: USICH will need first to identify a baseline to gain awareness of the employees’ current viewpoints on the state of racial equity within the organization. This can be done through a researched-based anonymous survey tool that will assess USICH employees’ views on barriers to equitable and equal opportunities within the organization and racial equity generously. Next, USICH will develop a plan to engage employees on the survey’s findings and incorporate feedback from staff. USICH will also review internal policies and procedures and continuously reevaluate hiring practices and expectations. Additionally, USICH will evaluate the need for a Civil Rights Office.

USICH will develop a statement of work and engage in a process to hire a consultant to help with this agency assessment when funding permits. Currently, USICH provides mandatory racial equity trainings for employees, and have participated in several sessions led by the [Racial Equity Institute](#) to understand the historical context of racial equity in the United States. USICH has an internal Racial Equity Action Team, which meets bi-weekly to discuss and strategize work inclusive of: [equity publications](#), agency partnerships, USICH [guidance](#), and the National Working Group on Racial Equity.

⁴ “A revealing look at racial diversity in the federal government”. Partnership for Public Service, Link: <https://ourpublicservice.org/blog/a-revealing-look-at-racial-diversity-in-the-federal-government/>.

⁵ “Federal Workforce Data”. United States Office of Personnel Management, Link: <https://www.fedscope.opm.gov/> .; “A revealing look at racial diversity in the federal government”. Partnership for Public Service, Link: <https://ourpublicservice.org/blog/a-revealing-look-at-racial-diversity-in-the-federal-government/>.

In 2019, USICH staff members created an affinity group entitled the Learning Circle on Race, Housing, and Homelessness. The purpose of this group was to foster shared learning on the issue of race in relation to housing and homelessness. USICH will facilitate ongoing dialogues with this affinity group to develop a shared understanding, language, and skills in addressing racial equity in the homelessness sector.

C. Tracking Progress

Near- to Mid-Term Indicators:

- Outcome-Focused: USICH will anonymously assess perspectives of our 18 staff employees concerning the current status of racial equity within the organization in order to gain perspective on how and whether USICH fosters a diverse and equitable workplace.
- Output-Focused: USICH will collect qualitative feedback from communities and partners on the usefulness of and gaps in USICH guidance and technical assistance. This will help USICH have a baseline of information on the types of resources and engagements we can provide.

Long-Term Indicators:

- Increase workforce engagement in the number of employees that participate in professional development opportunities on racial equity and cultural competency.
- Develop budget line items that includes racial equity as a standard practice.

D. Accountability

Internal Mechanism: USICH will hold itself accountable for implementing this action by holding space during internal Racial Equity Action Team meetings to discuss progress towards accomplishing this focus area. USICH will have the Leadership Team report progress to the Office of the Executive Director.

Communicating Progress: USICH will hold itself accountable for implementing this action by submitting and publishing our annual progress reports.