



Preventing Homelessness

THE VISION

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

THE PROBLEM

It isn't enough to move people out of homelessness; we must keep people from falling into homelessness. The threat of homelessness most often occurs when a household has insufficient resources to cover housing costs. Unemployment, a health crisis, or the breakup of a family are the most common causes. The households most vulnerable to homelessness are those with no income or those earning significantly less than the federal poverty level. Households living in high cost housing markets are particularly at risk of homelessness as the cost of housing is significantly more than a working class job pays. Rural areas have a rate of unsheltered persons in families almost double that of urban areas. Persons living on a fixed income, particularly adults disabled by mental illness, are especially vulnerable to homelessness.

THE PLAN

Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness acknowledges that prevention is critical to ending homelessness and recognizes that every episode of homelessness that can be averted spares men, women, and children the trauma of homelessness itself. To concentrate on strategies that have proven successful, prevention strategies focus on five key areas:

1. Increased Leadership, Collaboration, and Civic Engagement

Opening Doors is a call to action for the federal government and for the nation. Public comment called for federal agencies to “break down the silos” and organize federal resources together with local and state resources. Enhanced collaboration will lead to a better understanding at all levels in both the public and private sectors of the causes and consequences of homelessness and the interventions that are most effective in preventing homelessness.

2. Increased Access to Stable and Affordable Housing

To prevent homelessness, the most vulnerable population—including families with children with the lowest incomes, unaccompanied youth, people with disabling conditions, and frail elders—must have access to affordable housing and support services that address health and employment needs.

3. Increased Economic Security

The best protection against homelessness is a meaningful and sustainable job that pays enough to afford a safe, decent place to live. Helping those most at risk for homelessness to access existing work support programs as well health care and income support services to which they are entitled are key prevention strategies.

4. Improved Health and Stability

Housing integrated with health care has been shown to be an effective and cost-saving intervention for homeless and unstably housed persons with serious health problems. Partnerships between housing providers and health and behavioral health care providers can advance the goal of preventing homelessness. Programs focusing on youth aging out of foster care and juvenile justice as well as adults who have frequent contact with hospitals and criminal justice are also critical to success.

5. Transformed Homeless Crisis Response System

Communities must evolve their homeless service systems to include proven solutions focused on prevention for all vulnerable populations. As a result, people will be better able to get connected to help before losing their homes.

We know targeted comprehensive solutions are far more effective and cost-efficient than temporary fixes. Funding prevention strategies today will save the economic and social costs that we as a country will pay if we fail to take action.