



# Criteria and Benchmarks for Achieving the Goal of Ending Family Homelessness

The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) and its member agencies have adopted a vision of what it means to end all homelessness, ensuring that it is a rare, brief, and non-recurring experience. This vision was included in the 2015 amendment to the federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness. This document provides specific criteria and benchmarks for ending homelessness among families with children, in order to help guide communities as they take action to achieve the goal through [a coordinated community response](#).

## Purpose of the Criteria and Benchmarks

Criteria and benchmarks work together to provide a complete picture and an ongoing assessment of a community's response to homelessness. While the criteria focus on describing essential elements and accomplishments of the community's response, benchmarks serve as important indicators of whether and how effectively that system is working on an ongoing basis. Together, these criteria and benchmarks are intended to help communities drive down the number of families with children experiencing homelessness to as close to zero as possible, while building long-term, lasting solutions that can effectively and efficiently respond to future needs.

Communities that have assessed their response to family homelessness and concluded that they have met the criteria and benchmarks will have the opportunity to validate and confirm their achievement through a federal review process. During that process, we will consider a community's data and information holistically. For example, it may be possible for data to indicate that a community has achieved all of the benchmarks, while other information may indicate that the expectations of the criteria haven't been met. Or the benchmarks may indicate that a community's response is working efficiently, but it has not been in place long enough to have fully achieved the goal. [These tools can help you](#) as you work to achieve the goal and document and validate your community's claim.

Under the benchmarks section, federal partners are continuing to solicit stakeholder input and assess available data to support recommendations for one or more of the proposed indicators. Revised guidance will be posted to the Family Criteria and Benchmarks webpage on the USICH website. These criteria and benchmarks represent our best thinking at this time. We will continue to review and evaluate their effectiveness as more communities approach and succeed in meeting the goal of ending family homelessness.

## Criteria

USICH and the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Housing and Urban Development have developed the following set of community-level criteria for achieving an end to homelessness among families with children. These criteria, and the accompanying benchmarks, apply to all families with children under the age of 18 experiencing homelessness and who meet any federal definition of homelessness.

**1. The community identifies all families experiencing homelessness.**

The community uses coordinated outreach, in-reach, multiple data sources, and other methods to identify and enumerate families experiencing homelessness, spanning the community’s entire geographical area.

Specifically, while recognizing that families experiencing homelessness may move among a variety of settings:

- a. The community literally identifies every family who is unsheltered, in shelter, or in transitional housing settings or other residential programs for families experiencing homelessness; and,
- b. The community coordinates a comprehensive set of strategies, across schools, the child welfare system, hotlines and 2-1-1, and other community-based programs, to identify families who are doubled up and identified as homeless under the Department of Education’s definition.

The community’s efforts are tailored to the unique needs of particularly vulnerable families, including those fleeing domestic violence.

**2. The community uses prevention and diversion strategies whenever possible, and otherwise provides immediate access to low-barrier shelter to any family experiencing homelessness who needs and wants it.**

The community helps families experiencing homelessness avoid the need to enter shelter whenever possible using prevention or diversion strategies. At the same time, the community has capacity to immediately provide a form of shelter (emergency shelter, bridge or transitional housing, or other temporary settings) to any family experiencing unsheltered homelessness or an otherwise unsafe situation, including fleeing domestic violence or trafficking, who needs such assistance. No family is turned away from shelter, and access is not contingent on sobriety, minimum income requirements, criminal history, or other unnecessary conditions. Family members — regardless of family structure — are not required to separate from one another in order to access shelter.

**3. The community uses coordinated entry processes to effectively link families experiencing homelessness to housing and services solutions that are tailored to the needs of all family members.**

The community has implemented coordinated entry processes that: 1) operate in close coordination with mainstream systems; 2) use assessment tools for families that take into consideration the unique needs and characteristics of all adult and child members of the household, including those fleeing domestic violence; and 3) streamline access and referrals to appropriate housing and supportive services aligned with families’ needs and strengths, and informed by household choice. The coordinated entry processes are tailored to align available housing and services resources based on the needs of each member — adult and child — of the household.

**4. The community assists families to move swiftly into permanent or non-time-limited housing options with appropriate services and supports.**

Using Housing First and low-barrier approaches, the community quickly connects families experiencing homelessness to safe, affordable, and sustainable permanent housing — complemented by ongoing services that are aligned, whenever possible, with their choice — to prevent future returns to homelessness. Solutions include appropriate strategies for addressing the safety concerns and service needs of families experiencing homelessness who are impacted by domestic violence. Some families — such as those fleeing domestic violence or those with a head of household in recovery — may choose to first enter time-limited safe and stable housing programs before securing a permanent or non-time-limited housing opportunity.

## **5. The community has resources, plans, and system capacity in place to continue to prevent and quickly end future experiences of homelessness among families.**

The community has projected the number of families who may need shelter and services, and has dedicated sufficient resources to ensure those needs are met and that future experiences of homelessness among families are rare and brief. The community has comprehensive plans in place, as well as the system capacity to: 1) provide appropriate services that will, whenever possible, prevent homelessness among families; 2) provide immediate access to low-barrier shelter; 3) connect families experiencing homelessness to appropriate services and permanent housing; and 4) promote long-term housing stability.

The community leverages connections to workforce systems and TANF agencies, as well as behavioral health, child care, and other relevant programs, to help families connect to the benefits, supports, and community-based services they need to achieve and maintain housing and financial stability. The community is able to provide non-housing crisis response options, including emergency financial assistance, safety services, transportation, legal services, and other necessary services and supports.

### **Benchmarks**

Communities should use a variety of information and data to assess whether they have achieved an end to family homelessness, including the data necessary to calculate the following benchmarks, which, like the criteria, will continue to be refined over time. [These tools and guidance can help](#) with that assessment. Taken together, that information and data indicate how well a community's coordinated response is working to ensure that homelessness among families with children is rare, brief, and non-recurring. Communities will also have the opportunity to document any special circumstances in their local context that should be considered during the review process.

These benchmarks provide important indicators of whether and how effectively a community's response to family homelessness is working, but they are not the only data or information we will review as part of the federal confirmation process. Meeting the benchmarks does not guarantee that a community will be confirmed as achieving the goal of ending homelessness among families with children if other supplemental data or information related to the criteria above indicates that the goal has not yet been met.

#### **A. There are few families experiencing homelessness at any given time.**

1. The community's census of families experiencing homelessness includes all families identified by local education agencies or other agencies that meet any federal definition of homelessness, including persons residing in domestic violence shelters or temporary housing for victims of domestic violence.
2. No families with children under 18 are experiencing unsheltered homelessness.
3. No families seeking emergency shelter are turned away unless they can be successfully diverted to another safe, temporary living environment of their choosing.
4. All families identified as experiencing homelessness, including those who are sheltered in emergency shelter or transitional housing or those who are doubled up, are offered connections to appropriate housing or services.

**NOTE:**

- Federal partners are considering an indicator that expresses the maximum number of families who may be identified as experiencing homelessness in a community at any point in time.
- Federal partners are also considering how to incorporate expectations regarding families who are doubled up and identified as experiencing homelessness within this benchmark.

**B. Families experiencing homelessness are swiftly connected to permanent or non-time-limited housing options.**

Federal partners are in the process of developing relevant indicators for this benchmark, focused on assuring rapid exits from homelessness to permanent housing, while also recognizing that some families, including families fleeing domestic violence or with a head of household in recovery, will choose to enter time-limited safe and stable housing programs prior to accessing a permanent housing opportunity. Based on input to-date from stakeholders and key partners, we are considering the following:

1. Families with children exit homelessness to permanent housing within an average of 45 days from the point of identification and no longer than 120 days. **(Proposed)**
  - a. Families who are offered permanent housing opportunities but decline and instead choose connections to time-limited safe and stable housing before exiting to permanent housing — including families fleeing domestic violence or with a head of household in recovery — are exempted from the calculation of performance against this benchmark.
  - b. It is expected that all families that have chosen to enter temporary housing begin to receive assistance to access permanent housing as soon as they express a desire to do so, with an initial offer of assistance to occur within 10 days of entry into safe and stable housing. There shall be periodic recurring offers of assistance to the family.

**NOTE:**

- Federal partners are considering whether alternatives to the use of averages in this benchmark should be developed.
- Federal partners are also considering how to incorporate expectations regarding exits from time-limited safe and stable housing within this benchmark, recognizing the needs and concerns of families fleeing domestic violence as well as families in recovery housing.