

# Family Connection

Building Systems to End Family Homelessness



Ending homelessness for families and children is a priority for the nation and for every community. By providing the right amount of assistance to help families obtain or regain permanent housing as quickly as possible and ensuring access to services to remain stably housed, achieving an end to family homelessness is possible.

## Defining an End to Family Homelessness

Given the current economic realities in most communities, situations in which families experience a crisis and lose their home will likely occur. Recognizing this reality, USICH and Federal partners adopted a vision of an *end to family homelessness* to mean that **no family will be without shelter** and **homelessness will be a rare and brief occurrence**. To achieve an end to family homelessness, we encourage communities to join us to strengthen our local crisis response systems together.

*Working together with our partners at the state, local, and federal level to strengthen the local crisis response systems, we will:*

- *Ensure that no family is living unsheltered,*
- *Shorten episodes of family homelessness by providing resources that enable families to safely reenter permanent housing as quickly as possible,*
- *Link families to the benefits, supports, and community-based services they need to achieve and maintain housing stability, and*
- *Identify and implement effective prevention methods to help families avoid homelessness.*

## Key Areas of Action

USICH and Federal partners, through a review of research, engagement with communities, and an interagency working group process, identified four key strategy areas for federal, state, and local action to end family homelessness:

- 1) Develop a centralized or [coordinated entry system](#) with the capacity to assess needs and connect families to [targeted prevention assistance](#) where possible and [temporary shelter](#) as needed;
- 2) Ensure interventions and assistance are tailored to the needs of families:
  - a) Provide [rapid re-housing](#) assistance to the majority of families experiencing homelessness,
  - b) Increase access to [affordable housing](#), and help communities target resources, and
  - c) Direct more [service-intensive housing interventions](#) to the highest need households;

## The Plan

*Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness* sets the goal to end family homelessness by 2020.

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## What We Know

Families experiencing homelessness are very similar to other low-income families. They face many obstacles such as low education level, domestic violence, and mental health issues.

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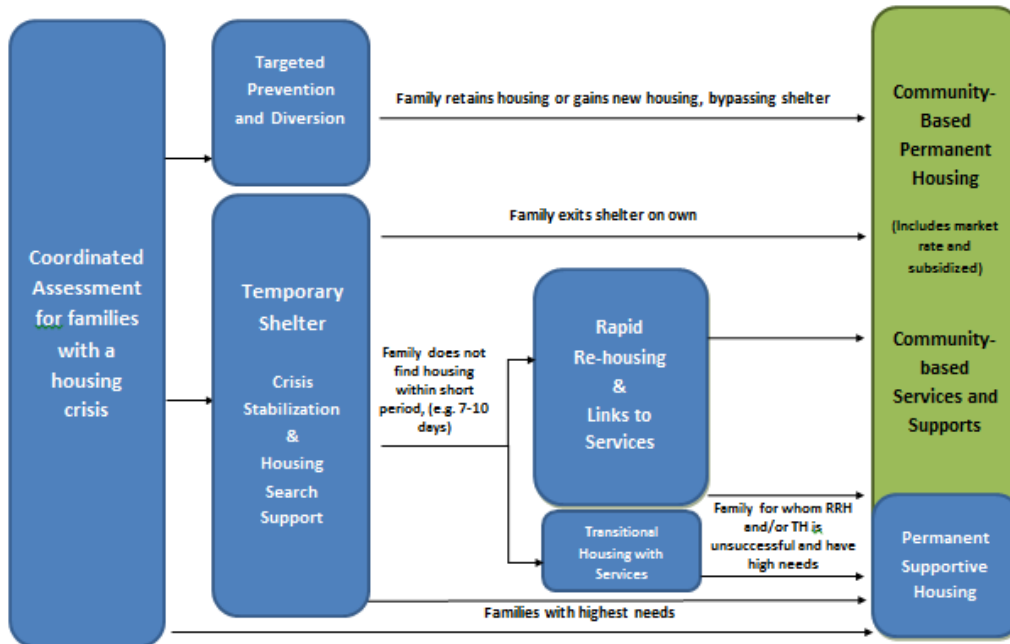
## Our Progress

Despite tremendous challenges associated with the recession, 2013 HUD data on family homelessness indicates a decrease at a point in time. Still, the data on family homelessness points to the need for additional efforts, and increased resources to meet our shared goal.

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- 3) Help families connect to the mainstream resources (benefits, employment, and community-based services) needed to sustain housing and achieve stability. Improve linkages to [local mainstream systems](#) to help families gain access to these resources more quickly;
- 4) Develop and build upon [evidence-based practices](#) for serving families experiencing and at-risk of experiencing homelessness.

USICH and Federal partners are aligned around this approach and committed to supporting communities and stakeholders through the use of interagency messaging, policies, and technical assistance.



**Figure 1:**  
**Diagram of Crisis Response System for Families**

This diagram illustrates how an effective crisis response system can assess the needs of families experiencing a housing crisis, prevent homelessness, and connect families to the housing and services they need to exit homelessness quickly and safely when it occurs.

## Coordinated Entry System

*Ensure safety and well-being while solving families' housing crises.*

Families experiencing homelessness have varying levels of strengths and service needs. An effective response prevents homelessness or addresses the immediate crisis of homelessness, then connects housing families to the most appropriate level and type of assistance based on their strengths and needs. Effective crisis response systems have coordinated access or entry points through which families can seek help, have their strengths and needs assessed, and be connected to appropriate housing and supports. The assessment provides the ability for families to be given access to the best options to address their needs, rather than being evaluated for single programs.

### Prevention and Diversion

As a result of the assessment process, families can be assisted to maintain or obtain permanent housing while avoiding a shelter stay. Prevention and diversion assistance may include a combination of financial assistance, mediation, housing location, or other supports. When the intervention is aimed at helping families stay in their current housing, safety should be a primary consideration.

## Parts of an Effective System:

[Prevention & Diversion](#)

[Temporary Shelter](#)

[Safety for Survivors of Domestic Violence](#)

## Temporary shelter

Temporary shelter with stabilization services provides immediate safety for a family and addresses immediate crisis needs, including specialized domestic violence shelters and services. Stabilization services may include access to school or early childhood care and learning, benefits, and health services including substance use and mental health services. Housing placement is the primary objective for temporary shelter.

## Safety for Survivors of Domestic Violence

In order for coordinated entry systems to function, providers may need to change their admissions policies by removing barriers to entry that may be embedded in eligibility criteria, as well as accept referrals from the coordinated access point(s). As many families experiencing homelessness are significantly impacted by domestic violence and other trauma, effective entry systems have the training and capacity to engage in a trauma-informed way and identify survivors of domestic violence. Successful systems also offer safety planning, advocacy, and access to specialized services that address the safety concerns of individuals, and their children, fleeing domestic violence. Effective systems are able to assess the needs of children and youth and make effective linkages for appropriate services.

## Tailored Interventions and Assistance

*Utilize a range of resources and program models to better serve families.*

### Rapid Re-housing

Rapid re-housing helps individuals and families quickly exit homelessness to permanent housing. Rapid re-housing assistance is offered without preconditions (such as employment, income, absence of criminal record, or sobriety), and the resources and services provided are typically tailored to the unique needs of the household. The core components of a rapid re-housing program include housing identification services, financial assistance for rent and move-in, and accompanying case management and supportive services. While a rapid re-housing program has all three core components available, it is not required that a household utilize them all.

### Permanent Supportive Housing

Permanent supportive housing is long term affordable housing with ongoing services for families with disabilities and high levels of need, such as those who have experienced homelessness repeatedly or are frequent users of other systems of care. To be successful, supportive housing that uses a Housing First approach needs to be available at a scale sufficient to serve the households that require this approach.

### Affordable Housing

Many households can resolve their homelessness without needing either rapid re-housing or permanent supportive housing. Partnerships between homeless service providers, public housing agencies, and other affordable housing providers help expedite quick access to housing.

### Transitional Housing

Transitional housing programs provide temporary residence combined with intensive services—usually for up to 24 months—for people experiencing

## Tailored Interventions:

[Rapid Re-housing](#)

[Permanent Supportive Housing](#)

[Affordable Housing](#)

[Transitional Housing](#)

homelessness. Transitional housing may currently represent a significant portion of the inventory in many communities. While transitional housing programs may meet the needs of a sub-population of families, it is important to evaluate programs based on the effectiveness and efficiency of achieving permanent housing outcomes relative to other housing interventions.

### Connection to Mainstream Resources

*Expand services by leveraging local community assets.*

Beyond housing, a range of community-based benefits and supportive services can help parents and children move out of crisis, achieve stability, and improve income, education, and well-being. Given limited resources for homeless specific assistance programs, it is essential that communities develop strategies to improve access to and coordination with mainstream benefits and services. Local mainstream or community service programs can provide comprehensive, wrap-around services for families and children, as needed. More effective coordination between homelessness services, prevention efforts, and mainstream programs is essential. Such a system-level transformation takes a great deal of community-level partnership and engagement.

### Evidenced-Based Practices

*Ensure parents and children receive high quality care.*

There is a wealth of evidence and data on practices that improve the efficiency and effectiveness of interventions which support families to achieve and maintain a permanent housing outcome. Communities can apply these practices to their programs and funding decisions. For example, there is an opportunity for communities to adopt [housing first principles](#), ensure the use of [trauma-informed services](#) in every intervention, apply [critical time intervention](#), and connect families with [early childhood home visiting and early childhood education](#) programs. Enhancing services for families through the implementation of evidence-based practices can lead to a range of improved outcomes for parents and their children, all while making scarce resources go further.

### Together We Can End Family Homelessness

An end to family homelessness requires partnership across all levels of government and sectors as well as across a range of disciplines. Reaching an end to family homelessness is challenging, but dramatic improvements are achievable through providing the right amount of assistance to families, connecting families to permanent housing, strengthening local crisis response systems, and using resources and evidence-based practices strategically. An increase in resources to grow the supply of affordable housing is a critical component to this effort.

USICH, in partnership with Federal agencies, will publish additional resources as more is learned from the field and Federal partners about effective strategies for building systems to end family homelessness. Visit our website at [www.usich.gov](http://www.usich.gov) for available guidance and resources.

### Key Mainstream Resources:

[TANF](#)

[Health care](#)

[Child welfare](#)

[Education](#)

[Child Care](#)

[Employment training services](#)

### Evidence-Based Practices

[Housing First](#)

[Trauma-informed services](#)

[Critical time intervention](#)

[Engagement with early childhood home visiting & education programs](#)