



## United States Interagency Council on Homelessness

*Preventing and Ending Homelessness in the United States*

### Opening Doors Implementation Update

#### Background

On June 22, 2010, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) unveiled the nation's first-ever comprehensive federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness. *Opening Doors: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness* serves as a roadmap for joint action by the 19 USICH member agencies. The Plan is focused on four key goals:

- Finish the job of ending chronic homelessness in five years;
- Prevent and end homelessness among Veterans in five years;
- Prevent and end homelessness for families, youth, and children in ten years; and
- Set a path to ending all types of homelessness.

This implementation update includes events and work related to progress made on *Opening Doors*. A comprehensive update on the Plan's objectives will be provided in July.

USICH has hosted or participated in a series of events and begun implementation related to the goals and strategies in *Opening Doors*:

- In September, HUD held HEARTH/HMIS conferences in Atlanta and Denver. The conference promoted best practices to reduce and end homelessness. Over 1,000 HMIS administrators, Continuum of Care leaders, and ESG and HPRP grantees from across the country engaged with USICH Executive Director Barbara Poppe and Deputy Director Anthony Love, as well as representatives from HHS, VA, and Labor about how the federal plan relates to efforts in local communities.
- Pursuant to the strategies outlined in *Opening Doors* that promote collaboration and alignment at all levels of government, USICH senior staff has presented the plan across the country, including at nearly two dozen national, statewide, and major metropolitan area conferences, and to Regional and State Interagency Councils on Homelessness, while also encouraging communities to align their work with the Plan. USICH played a supporting role in the new Los Angeles Business Leaders Task Force on Homelessness' plan, *Home for Good*. The goals in *Home for Good* of ending chronic homelessness and Veterans homelessness in five years are aligned with goals for these groups in *Opening Doors*.
- On December 1, 2010 with the Department of Justice's Access to Justice Initiative, USICH co-sponsored "**Searching for Balance: Civic Engagement in Communities Responding to Homelessness**"—we organized a day long discussion for 80 people representing 20 communities to discuss alternatives to criminalization of homelessness. Law enforcement, courts, city officials, federal partners and advocates were all in attendance.

- HUD, HHS, VA and USICH issued joint guidance and hosted a webinar on strategies to improve accuracy of local Point-in-Time Counts of people experiencing homelessness, particularly with regard to youth and Veterans, in advance of the January 2011 count.
- On January 26, 2011, USICH hosted a discussion per the HEARTH Act, in response to the GAO report called “**Homelessness: A Common Vocabulary Could Help Agencies Collaborate and Collect More Consistent Data.**” A report to the Council and to Congress will be issued as an outcome of the convening.
- In April, USICH co-hosted an historic convening in Los Angeles County with over 140 federal, state, and local leaders to determine the best ways to partner around better access to and utilization of federal funding, services, and resources to end chronic and Veteran homelessness in LA. Leaders from USICH, HUD, Health and Human Services, Labor, Veterans Affairs, and the Social Security Administration all participated.
- In May of 2011, USICH updated its website [www.usich.gov](http://www.usich.gov), dramatically improving access to information and increasing opportunities for dialogue with stakeholders across the country.

In addition, USICH has been working with its Council member agencies to make continued progress on the goals of *Opening Doors*:

### **Chronic homelessness**

- On December 16, 2010 USICH held the fourth and final Council meeting for 2010. In attendance were four Cabinet Secretaries including HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan, Labor Secretary Hilda Solis, Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki and Education Secretary Arne Duncan. Melody Barnes, Director of the White House Domestic Policy Council also joined. Labor Secretary Hilda Solis was elected Chair for 2011 with Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius as Vice-Chair. An action plan to finish the job of ending chronic homelessness was adopted.
- In October 2010, USICH organized a **Listening Session at the Center for Medicaid** in Baltimore with representatives from across HHS and other partner agencies with practitioners in the field to discuss effective integrated care models for people who have experienced chronic homelessness, and to discuss the challenges and lessons learned from organizations that operate these programs as they relate to Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act.
- USICH met with **Dr. Donald Berwick and his senior team at the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)**. USICH hopes to identify ways to encourage states to adopt Medicaid plans that will best assist people experiencing homelessness, as well as possible demonstration projects through health reform initiatives to learn more about how to ensure better health outcomes for people experiencing or most at risk of homelessness.
- USICH has been participating in regular planning meetings with HUD and HHS around *Opening Doors*’ Chronic Homelessness Signature Initiative. The initiative, which was included in the President’s FY2011 and FY2012 Budgets, would connect vouchers with health and social services provided through Medicaid and wraparound

services funded through SAMHSA. This initiative is intended to help 4,000 people experiencing chronic homelessness move off the streets and out of shelter.

### **Veterans' homelessness**

- On November 3, USICH held its third Council meeting of 2010. In order to tackle barriers for Veterans to access mainstream resources, the Council committed to develop and then disseminate key policy guidance about all federal programs, services and benefits available to Veterans and their families. The plan will help identify and remove barriers to mainstream program access for Veterans and their families at risk of or experiencing homelessness.
- In December 2010, VA and USICH organized a two day **National Forum on Veterans Homelessness** for four hundred people—federal staff, advocates, VISN directors and staff, and housing and service providers who work with Veterans. Three Cabinet Secretaries spoke at the Forum. Among other notable mentions, VA Secretary Shinseki directed each Veterans Health Administration (VHA) entity director to hold an organizational meeting before the end of February to develop local plans to end Veterans homelessness.
- VA and HUD have provided permanent housing to more than 20,000 Veterans and families through the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program with an additional 10,000 being housed in the next year.
- VA released a Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) for the new Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Program. The SSVF Program grants will fund nonprofit organizations and consumer cooperatives so they can provide supportive services, including rental assistance, that promote housing stability for very low-income veteran families currently residing in or transitioning into permanent housing. VA received the applications and is in the process of reviewing the applications. VA will be making announcements by July.
- A component of the VA's plan to end homelessness among Veterans in 5 years is promoting use of management systems to monitor outcomes for both individual Veterans and the programs that serve them. Accordingly, the VA announced on December 21 that it plans to fully participate in Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) over the next 12 months, and VA-funded homeless assistance providers were required to participate in their local HMIS before or by March 31, 2011.
- In early 2011, HUD, VA and DOL staff planned for and conducted a start-up conference for the Homeless Veterans Prevention Demonstration Program (VHPD). The VHPD is a pilot collaborative initiative to explore early interventions to help prevent Veteran homelessness, targeted to service members returning from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The communities selected for this demonstration are located near the following military installations: MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida; Camp Pendleton in San Diego, California; Fort Hood in Killeen, Texas; Fort Drum in Watertown, New York; and Joint Base Lewis-McChord near Tacoma, Washington.

## Family, youth, and children homelessness

- Building upon the goal to prevent and end family, youth, and children homelessness by 2020, USICH has engaged with the Department of Education's senior leadership. In early September, USICH met with Education Secretary Arne Duncan, Assistant Deputy Secretary Kevin Jennings, Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education Thelma Melendez de Santa Ana, and Special Assistant Kathryn Young to discuss their collaborative approach to the growing population of children experiencing homelessness. Recently, an intra-agency workgroup has been established to bring all of the Department's resources to the table.
- USICH has been participating in the development of Opening Doors' families and children signature initiative with HUD, HHS, and Education. The signature initiative, included in the President's FY 2011 and 2012 Budgets, calls for 6,000 supportive housing vouchers through a collaboration between the three agencies. While awaiting Congressional budget decisions, HUD, HHS, and Education are moving forward with planning. With targeted Housing Choice Vouchers through HUD, mainstream services like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) through HHS, and homeless student identification and service coordination by Education's homeless liaisons in school systems, this comprehensive initiative aims to create incentives that encourage interagency collaboration at both the federal and local levels to prevent and end homelessness for families.
- USICH along with HUD, HHS, Education, and Labor are exploring how the Youth Signature Initiative might be shaped. Executive Director Poppe hosted youth focus groups in New York City and Columbus, Ohio, as well as visiting model programs in California, New York, and Ohio. USICH is participating in an inter-agency work group on youth in transition.