



United States Interagency Council on Homelessness

Preventing and Ending Homelessness in the United States

United States Interagency Council on Homelessness Historical Overview

Background and Organization

The Interagency Council on the Homeless was authorized by Title II of the landmark Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act enacted on July 22, 1987 (PL 100-77). The McKinney Act established the Interagency Council on the Homeless as an “independent establishment” within the executive branch to review the effectiveness of federal activities and programs to assist people experiencing homelessness, promote better coordination among agency programs, and inform state and local governments and public and private sector organizations about the availability of federal homeless assistance. In 2002, Council members (see list of members on page 2) voted to approve changing the name of the agency to the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), a change that was enacted into law in 2004 (PL 108-199).

The Urgent Relief for the Homeless Act, introduced in January 1987 by Representative Thomas Foley (who later became Speaker of the House) along with 111 cosponsors aimed to provide “urgently needed assistance to protect and improve the lives and safety of the homeless, with special emphasis on families and children.” Representative Stewart McKinney died from pneumonia he contracted sleeping outside the Capitol while joining advocates, providers, consumers and other officials in to advocate for the bill. The legislation was re-named in his honor before being signed into law. The McKinney Act established or modified a number of programs within the authority of the Departments of Education (ED), Health and Human Services (HHS), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Labor (DOL), and Veterans Affairs (VA), along with the General Services Administration and Federal Emergency Management Agency, to specifically target assistance to people experiencing homelessness and provided for significant increases in funding. The functions of the HHS Federal Task Force on the Homeless that had been administratively established in 1983 were transferred to USICH, and USICH was directed to submit an annual report to the President and Congress. The McKinney Amendments of 1988 (PL 100-628) extended USICH’s original two-year authorization and added provisions strengthening USICH’s technical assistance responsibilities. In 2000, the McKinney Act was renamed the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act after the passing of Congressman Bruce Vento who had been a key supporter of the original legislation.

The most recent reauthorization of USICH occurred in 2009 with enactment of the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act. (PL 111-22).

As amended by the HEARTH Act, USICH's mission is to "coordinate the Federal response to homelessness and to create a national partnership at every level of government and with the private sector to reduce and end homelessness in the nation while maximizing the effectiveness of the federal government in contributing to the end of homelessness."

USICH Organization

USICH originally included the heads (or their representatives) of 16 Federal agencies; five additional agencies were subsequently added by Council vote or statutory amendments; two agencies are now inactive. The current members of the Council include the heads of the following 19 departments and agencies:

1987 (Original McKinney Act):	From 1991 administratively and later by statute:
Agriculture	Social Security Administration
Commerce	Department of Justice
Defense	Office of Management and Budget
Education	
Energy	From 2002 administratively and from 2009 by statute:
Health and Human Services	White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives
Housing and Urban Development	USA Freedom Corps (Inactive)
Interior	
Labor	
[Low Income Opportunity Board (now defunct)]	
Transportation	
Veterans Affairs	
Corporation for National and Community Service (formerly ACTION)	
Federal Emergency Management Agency (now under the Dept. of Homeland Security)	
General Services Administration	
Postmaster General	

For a period of USICH's history, the agency operated with a small staff in offices located in the HUD Headquarters building and with regional coordinators provided by HUD in the field, per the McKinney-Vento Act, which requires HUD to provide administrative support to USICH. In 2005, USICH moved to its present location at 409 Third Street SW, and its field operations continue to be supported by regional coordinators funded by HUD. USICH has traditionally received input from a Policy Group, comprised of senior-level representatives of its member agencies. Special ad hoc task forces and working groups are convened as necessary. To varying

degrees regional agency staff of the Council's member agencies have met as Federal Regional Interagency Councils to help carry out USICH's mission at the regional level.

As required by the McKinney-Vento Act, each state is asked to designate a contact person to receive information from USICH.

Reagan Administration (1987-1988)

USICH held its first meeting in September 1987. It spent much of its first year on organizational issues and published its first statutorily-mandated annual report in 1988. That report focused primarily on a review of research and field studies on homelessness, descriptions of government activities, and policy recommendations. USICH received criticism at the time from the advocacy community, General Accounting Office (now the Government Accountability Office), and members of Congress for giving insufficient attention to other parts of its mandate, including providing information and technical assistance on how to obtain the new federal McKinney Act funding that was targeted to programs serving people experiencing homelessness.

George H.W. Bush Administration (1989-1992)

Responding to the earlier criticism, the Bush administration re-energized USICH with full staffing and the establishment of numerous outreach vehicles such as *Program Alerts*, *the Council Communiqué*, regional workshops and interagency meetings. Initial discussions began on conducting a national survey of homeless providers and clients. Major projects included the *Federal Plan to Help End Homelessness* and a follow-up implementation report, and Operation Desert Share, which provided surplus food from the Gulf War to organizations serving people experiencing homelessness through the Second Harvest National Food Bank network.

In March 1992, USICH Chair and HUD Secretary Jack Kemp and USICH Vice Chair and HHS Secretary Louis Sullivan released "Outcasts on Main Street," a report outlining a national strategy to eradicate homelessness among people with severe mental illness. The report presented more than 50 steps federal agencies would take to substantially improve the system of care and housing options for individuals with mental illness experiencing homelessness.

Clinton Administration (1993-2000)

Congress did not support reauthorization of the Council in 1993. As a result, the Clinton administration decided to continue the work of USICH by establishing it as a working group of the White House Domestic Policy Council. USICH received no direct funding from Congress from 1994-2000. Instead, HUD provided staff and other administrative support for USICH operations. Pursuant to a Presidential Executive Order, the Council developed and published *Priority: Home! The Federal Plan to Break the Cycle of Homelessness*, which provided a framework for the Administration's homeless assistance strategy. A second major project during the Clinton administration involved oversight of the planning and administration of the National Survey of

Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients, an effort that was spearheaded by HUD and HHS but was jointly funded by nine of the Council's member agencies. The Census Bureau conducted the field research for this study; data analysis and summary reports were prepared under contract by the Urban Institute under the Council's supervision. Additional projects involved working with Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) to determine the best way to implement shelter standards to reduce the dangers of tuberculosis in the shelter system and convening working groups to build better connections between targeted homeless programs and mainstream programs and to improve services for homeless veterans.

George W. Bush Administration (2001-2008)

Revitalization of USICH as an independent agency began with enactment of the FY 2001 VA-HUD-Independent Agencies Appropriations bill which included legislative language reauthorizing the Council through October 1, 2005 and earmarking \$500,000 for the Council's administrative needs within the funding for HUD's Homeless Assistance Grants program. An additional \$500,000 for USICH was included in the FY 2002 VA-HUD-Independent Agencies Appropriations bill enacted November 2001 that also included congressional direction in the conference report that USICH should report to the Domestic Policy Council and that the chairmanship of the Council should rotate among the Secretaries of HUD, HHS, VA, and Labor. This legislative activity was followed by enactment of the Homeless Veterans Comprehensive Assistance Act in December 2001, which amended the McKinney-Vento Act to require that the full Council meet at least annually by the call of the chairperson or a majority of members.

At an organizing conference call of Council member agencies early in 2002, HUD Secretary Mel Martinez was elected chair. The first meeting of the revitalized USICH took place on July 18, 2002. USICH announced plans for an unprecedented collaborative effort between HUD, HHS, and the VA to make both permanent housing and supportive services funding available in a coordinated application package. This was an initial federal investment toward developing a comprehensive national strategy needed to achieve the goal included in the President's FY 2003 budget to end chronic homelessness in ten years.

By December 2002, USICH had begun working to put in place regional coordinators in each of the 10 federal regions through a partnership with HUD. The regional coordinators provided technical assistance to the states and communities in their regions to foster the establishment of State Interagency Councils on Homelessness and the creation of jurisdictionally-based 10-Year Plans to End Chronic Homelessness.

The FY 2003 VA-HUD-Independent Agencies Appropriations bill created a separate account for USICH under the Independent Agencies section of the bill and increased USICH's funding to \$1.5 million. The appropriations bill also provided \$10 million to HUD for a two-year housing demonstration for chronically homeless persons addicted to alcohol to be conducted in consultation with USICH.

In October 2003, USICH announced the selection of eleven community partnerships from more than 100 applications to participate in the \$55 million HUD-HHS-VA Collaborative Initiative to End Chronic Homelessness and the selection of five community partnerships for a HUD-DOL demonstration supporting two Administration goals - ending chronic homelessness and integrating persons with disabilities into the workforce.

From 2001 to 2005, a partnership of agencies including the Departments of HUD, HHS, Labor, VA, Agriculture, Justice, Education, the Social Security Administration and USICH (once it became operational) convened a series of nine Policy Academies for States focused on identifying and removing barriers to mainstream resources for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness and for families experiencing homelessness.

Obama Administration (2009 -)

USICH's authorizing statute was amended in May 2009 by the HEARTH Act (PL 111-22) to include several new responsibilities including preparation and submission of a federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness. The first meeting of USICH during the Obama administration took place on June 18, 2009. HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan was elected chairman and Labor Secretary Hilda Solis was elected vice chair. At the second meeting of the Council on October 19, in which members of the advocacy community also participated, the Council announced the appointment of Barbara Poppe as the new Executive Director.

On February 8, 2010, the full Council met despite the federal government's closure due to a severe snowstorm. The Council members agreed to center the Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness on the belief – the moral foundation – that “no one should experience homelessness – no one should be without a safe, stable place to call home.” The USICH members focused the planning process on aligning federal resources effectively and appropriately toward four key objectives: 1) finish the job of ending chronic homelessness; 2) prevent and end homelessness among Veterans; 3) prevent and end family, youth, and child homelessness; and 4) set a path to ending all types of homelessness. On May 19, 2010, the Obama administration held its second full Council meeting of 2010. Secretary Donovan called the historic meeting to discuss the final steps to complete the Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness and initial steps toward implementation.

On June 22, 2010, USICH and its member agencies released *Opening Doors*, the nation's first-ever comprehensive strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness among all populations. *Opening Doors* was 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.

USICH Leadership (including DPC Working Group, 1993-2000)

Term	Chairman	Vice-Chairman
1987-88	Samuel Pierce (HUD)	Otis Brown (HHS)
1989-92	Jack Kemp (HUD)	Louis Sullivan (HHS)
1993-94*	Henry Cisneros (HUD)	Donna Shalala (HHS)/ Jesse Brown (VA)
1995-2000*	Andrew Cuomo (HUD)	
2001-02	Mel Martinez (HUD)	Tommy Thompson (HHS)
2003-04	Tommy Thompson (HHS)	Anthony Principi (VA)
2004-05	Anthony Principi (VA)	Elaine Chao (DOL)
2005	R. James Nicholson (VA)	
2005-07	Alphonso Jackson (HUD)	
2007-08	Michael Leavitt (HHS)	
2008	James B. Peake (VA)	
2009	Eric Shinseki (VA, pro tem)	
2009-10	Shaun Donovan (HUD)	Hilda Solis (DOL)
2010-11	Hilda Solis (DOL)	Kathleen Sebelius (HHS)
2011-12	Kathleen Sebelius (HHS)	Eric Shinseki (VA)

*Domestic Policy Council Working Group

USICH Executive Directors

1987-88	Cassandra Moore
1988	James Stimpson (Acting Director)
1989-1992	Patricia Carlile
1993-95	Marsha Martin (DPC Working Group)
1995-2001	Fred Karnas (DPC Working Group)
2002-09	Philip Mangano
2009	Peter Dougherty (Acting Director)
Nov 2009-	Barbara Poppe

Full Council Meetings

The original McKinney Act required USICH to meet at the call of its chairperson or a majority of its members. This language was changed in 2001 to provide for “*at least*” an annual meeting. The Act was further revised in 2009 to require a full Council meeting “*not less often than four times each year.*” (Note: The Council was not subject to this statutory requirement for frequency of meetings during its status as a working group of the DPC from 1993 to 2001.)

1987	September 27, December 18	2000:	None (DPC)
1988	March 11, July 11, Nov 14	2001	None (DPC)

1989	April 3, July 11, October 18	2002	July 18; December 5
1990	January 24, May 2, Aug 8, Nov 7	2003	March 20, October 1
1991	May 29, September 25	2004	April 1, September 29
1992	January 15, September 30	2005	September 13
1993	May 19, December 16 (DPC)	2006	April 4, July 10
1994	August 9 (DPC)	2007	March 5
1995	May 24 (DPC)	2008	March 6, October 20
1996	March 13 (DPC)	2009:	June 18, October 19
1997	None (DPC)	2010:	February 8, May 19, October 19, December 16
1998	None (DPC)	2011:	March 30, July 12, September 13, December 13
1999	None (DPC)		

Annual Reports to the President and Congress

The McKinney-Vento Act requires USICH (as well as each USICH member agency) to prepare and transmit to Congress and the President an annual report. Each member agency's report describes its homelessness assistance programs, impediments to access, and efforts to increase access. USICH's report is to include an assessment of the nature and extent of the problems relating to homelessness and the needs of people experiencing homelessness, the activities of federal agencies as well as recommendations for legislative and administrative actions to address the problems and needs identified.

USICH published annual reports in 1987 (agency reports only), 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991/1992 (combined report), 2004, and 2009. Some of the reports for the years between 2002 and 2007 were submitted in draft form for agency and OMB review but were never released (USICH was not subject to this requirement from 1993-2001 during its status as a working group of the DPC).

Major Council Accomplishments

Annual Reports to President and Congress (1987, 1988, 1999, 1990, 1991-2, 2004, 2009)

Federal Plan to End Homelessness (1990-1992)

Priority: Home! The Federal Plan to Break the Cycle of Homelessness (1994)

Regional workshops (1988-1993)

National Survey of Homeless Providers and Clients (1995-1999)

Operation Desert Share (1991-1992)

Task Force on Severe Mental Illness and Homelessness (1992)

McKinney Act funding database (1991-94)

Chronic Homelessness Initiative, including the promotion of Ten Year Plans to end chronic homelessness (2002-2008)

Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness (2010)

Historical Publications and Information Resources

USICH *e-newsletter* (2003-present)

USICH Website (2002-present)

Characteristics and Dynamics of Homeless Families with Children (report by Dr. Debra Rog of Westat et al. presented by HHS Secretary Leavitt at March 2008 Council Meeting)

USICH Inventory of Federal Programs That May Assist Homeless Families with Children (2008)

Promising Strategies to End Youth Homelessness: A Report to Congress, Department of Health and Human Services (2007)

National Project Homeless Connect Toolkit 2.0 (2007)

Ensuring the Education Rights of Homeless Children: Final Report to Congress (2006)

Good . . . to Better . . . to Great : Innovations in 10-Year Plans (2005)

Step-by-Step Guide to Developing a State Interagency Council on Homelessness (2004)

Step-by-Step Guide to Developing 10-Year Plans (2003)

Use of Federally-Owned Real Property to Assist the Homeless: The Priority Under Title V of the McKinney Act (1991-1998)

Use of Personal Property for Providers of Assistance to the Homeless Under Title V of the McKinney Act (1991-1998)

Program Alert (1988-93)

Council Communiqué (1988-92)

Federal Programs to Help Homeless People (1990, 1991, 1992)

Outcasts on Main Street: A Report of the Federal Task Force on Homelessness and Severe Mental Illness (1992)

Reaching Out: A Guide For Service Providers (1992)

Initiatives for the Homeless: A Collection of Program Descriptions (1991)

Purchase or Lease of Federally-Acquired Foreclosed Properties by Homeless Service Providers (1991)

Working to End Homelessness: A Manual for States (1990)

I Have a Question: What Can I Do To Help the Homeless? (1990)