



U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness Historical Overview

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 voted to change 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).

Overview of the McKinney Act and its Amendments

The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act was originally introduced as the “Urgent Relief for the Homeless Act” in January 1987 by Representative Thomas Foley (who later became Speaker of the House) and 111 cosponsors. It aimed to provide “urgently needed assistance to protect and improve the lives and safety of the homeless, with special emphasis on families and children.” The legislation was re-named in honor of Representative Stewart McKinney, who died from pneumonia he contracted sleeping outside the Capitol while joining advocates, providers, consumers, and other officials to advocate for the bill.

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 and the Council

USICH’s Council 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:

Original McKinney Act members:

- Department of Agriculture
- Department of Commerce
- Department of Defense
- Department of Education
- Department of Energy
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Department of the Interior
- Department of Labor
- Low Income Opportunity Board (now defunct)
- Department of Transportation
- Department of 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

Members added administratively in 1991 and later by statute:

- Social Security Administration
- Department of Justice
- Office of Management and Budget

Members added administratively in 2002 and in 2009 by statute:

- White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (also called the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships or the White House Faith and Opportunity Initiative)
- USA Freedom Corps (Inactive)

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

Term	Chair	Vice-Chair
1987-1988	Samuel Pierce (HUD)	Otis Brown (HHS)
1989-1992	Jack Kemp (HUD)	Louis Sullivan (HHS)
1993-1994*	Henry Cisneros (HUD)	Donna Shalala (HHS)/ Jesse Brown (VA)
1995-2000*	Andrew Cuomo (HUD)	
2001-2002	Mel Martinez (HUD)	Tommy Thompson (HHS)

2004-2005	Tommy Thompson (HHS)	Anthony Principi (VA)
2005	Anthony Principi (VA)	Elaine Chao (DOL)
2005-2007	R. James Nicholson (VA)	
2007-2008	Alphonso Jackson (HUD)	
2008	Michael Leavitt (HHS) James B. Peake (VA)	
2009	Eric Shinseki (VA, pro tem)	
2010	Shaun Donovan (HUD)	Hilda Solis (DOL)
2011	Hilda Solis (DOL)	Kathleen Sebelius (HHS)
2012	Kathleen Sebelius (HHS)	Eric Shinseki (VA)
2013	Eric Shinseki (VA)	Shaun Donovan (HUD)
2014	Shaun Donovan (HUD)	Thomas Perez (DOL)
2015	Thomas Perez (DOL)	Sylvia Mathews Burwell (HHS)
2016	Sylvia Mathews Burwell (HHS)	John King (ED)
2017		
2018	Neal Rackleff (HUD)	Jason Botel (ED)
2019	Frank Brogan (ED)	
2020	John Pallasch (DOL)	Arne Owens (HHS)

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 in the field provided by HUD, per the McKinney-Vento Act, which requires HUD to provide administrative support to USICH. In 2005, USICH moved to its own office space, while regional coordinators continued to be funded by HUD. In 2009, through the HEARTH Act, USICH was authorized to incorporate the five regional coordinator positions into its own administrative structure.

USICH is currently authorized for a staff of 20.5 full time equivalents.

USICH Executive Directors

1987-1988	Cassandra Moore
1988	James Stimpson (Acting Director)
1989-1992	Patricia Carlile
1993-1995	Marsha Martin (DPC Working Group)
1995-2001	Fred Karnas (DPC Working Group)
2002-2009	Philip Mangano
2009	Peter Dougherty (Acting Director)
2009-2014	Barbara Poppe
2014-2015	Laura Zeilinger
2015-2019	Matthew Doherty
2019-	Robert Marbut

Major Accomplishments

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 chair 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 10 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.

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 - 2017)

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 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.

Through *Opening Doors*, the Council defined what it means to end homelessness for the first time in this country. Through a set of written criteria and benchmarks, USICH created a clear roadmap for communities to end homelessness, for Veterans, for families, for youth, and for people with disabilities. And they described the resources and partnerships that would be needed for government and communities to get their arms around this complex problem.

Through the urgency generated by *Opening Doors*, overall homelessness in the United States, as measured by the Point-in-Time count, was reduced by 14%. Family homelessness was reduced 23%, chronic homelessness was reduced 27%, and Veteran homelessness was reduced by 47%. What's more, through First Lady Michelle Obama's initiative, called the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness, communities actually ended Veteran homelessness, proving that an end to homelessness is possible.

Trump Administration (2017 -)

In July 2018, a revision to the federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness, called *Home, Together*, was released, after a year-long consultative process with federal, state, and local stakeholders, including people with lived experience of homelessness. *Home, Together* covers Fiscal Years 2018 –2022, and builds upon strategies and actions taken across multiple administrations.

Home, Together has one fundamental goal, a goal shared across federal, state, and local partners: to end homelessness in America. The plan also sets important population-specific goals as well:

- To end homelessness among Veterans
- To end chronic homelessness among people with disabilities
- To end homelessness among families with children
- To end homelessness among unaccompanied youth
- To end homelessness among all other individuals

By the end of 2019, 78 communities and 3 states had used the roadmap in *Home, Together* and the criteria and benchmarks to end Veteran homelessness entirely, building enduring community-wide collaborations that make sure Veterans get the help they need in times of crisis. Four communities had also ended chronic homelessness among people with disabilities. Many more communities are working toward achieving those goals.