



Criteria and Benchmarks for Achieving the Goal of Ending Family Homelessness

In January 2017, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) and our member agencies—including the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Housing and Urban Development—released [criteria and benchmarks](#) to help guide communities as they bring together many different programs and systems to build a [coordinated community response](#) to ending homelessness among families with children. They reflect the understanding that housing, health care, and family service providers—among many others—must work together to meet the unique needs of diverse families.

These criteria and benchmarks have been updated to reflect input from external stakeholders on the original release and to ensure clearer communication of the expectations and intentions behind some of the elements. The updates primarily focus on:

- Refining indicators 1 through 4 under Benchmark A to streamline and more clearly articulate expectations around the identification of families experiencing homelessness, access to emergency shelter, and connections to services for families identified as experiencing homelessness who are doubled up.
- Adding indicators 5 and 6 under Benchmark A, which reflect considerations highlighted in the initial version of the criteria and benchmarks released in January 2017. We will be working with a select number of communities to pilot the benchmarks over the coming months. As part of that piloting, for example, we will be asking communities to provide input on whether indicators 5 and 6 require additional refinement to ensure appropriate inclusion of families fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence.
- Refining the indicator under Benchmark B to more clearly articulate the expectation around exits from homelessness to permanent housing destinations, including for families who choose to enter time-limited safe and stable housing.
- Piloting a separate measure that reflects the percentage of families who report that they perceive higher levels of safety and/or lower risk of violence when exiting to a permanent housing destination. We will be seeking community recommendations on whether and how best to capture this kind of data and expectations for tracking and reporting it, including the option to include this measure as part of a new benchmark.

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. They are not used by HUD or other agencies to evaluate or score communities for specific grant-funded programs.

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 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.

We hope that these clarifications are helpful in increasing understanding of the criteria and benchmarks. We have been learning a great deal as we have worked with communities to understand their concerns and recommendations. We expect to continue to learn and think further, to provide future clarifications as questions arise, and to review and evaluate the effectiveness of these criteria and benchmarks over time. Revised guidance will be posted to the [Family Criteria and Benchmarks page](#) on the USICH website, as needed.

Criteria

USICH and its member agencies 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, lack of a 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 that meet any federal definition of homelessness; for example, families identified by local education agencies, early childhood programs, and domestic violence service providers. **(REVISED)**
2. No families with children under 18 are experiencing unsheltered homelessness.
NOTE: If there are any such families, the community will be expected to provide a clear explanation and documentation of the circumstances. **(REVISED)**
3. No families seeking emergency shelter in the community are turned away unless they can be successfully diverted to another safe living environment of their choosing. **(REVISED)**
4. All families identified as experiencing homelessness, including those who are doubled up, are offered connections to appropriate services. **(REVISED)**
5. The number of families currently experiencing sheltered homelessness (including emergency shelter and transitional housing) demonstrates the community's capacity to address emerging needs through permanent housing placements. Specifically, the number of families experiencing sheltered homelessness is: a) Less than or equal to twice the monthly average number of families newly identified as experiencing homelessness AND b) Less than or equal to twice the monthly average number of families exiting homelessness to permanent housing. **(NEW)**
6. The community's census of families experiencing homelessness is not increasing. Specifically, the average number of families exiting to permanent housing destinations from sheltered or unsheltered homelessness each month is greater than or equal to the average number of families newly identified as experiencing sheltered or unsheltered homelessness each month. **(NEW)**

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

1. Families with children identified as experiencing unsheltered or sheltered homelessness exit homelessness to safe, stable permanent housing within an average of 45 days and no longer than 120 days from the point of identification. **(REVISED)**
 - a. It is expected that families begin to receive assistance to access safe, stable permanent housing as soon as they express a desire to do so, with an initial offer of such assistance to occur within no longer than 30 days from the point of identification. There shall be periodic recurring offers of assistance to the family.
 - b. In the case of those families who have chosen time-limited safe and stable housing, this calculation should use the date the family requests or accepts an offer of assistance in attaining permanent housing.
 - c. It is expected that families who choose to enter longer-term transitional housing programs are primarily: seeking to address issues related to substance use; survivors of domestic violence or other forms of severe trauma; and/or headed by a pregnant or parenting youth under the age of 25.