Revising and Strengthening the Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness
Participation Guide

Background

The current federal strategic plan, Opening Doors, was issued in 2010 and built upon strategies and actions taken across multiple administrations. The plan was developed with extensive stakeholder input from across federal agencies, national organizations, and state and local agencies and organizations. Through the urgent action mobilized by the plan, we've seen steady national reductions of people experiencing homelessness within the annual Point-in-Time counts performed in communities across the country between 2010 and 2016, including:

- 14% reduction in overall homelessness nationwide
- 47% reduction in Veteran homelessness, including a 56% drop in unsheltered homelessness among Veterans
- 27% reduction in chronic homelessness
- 23% reduction in family homelessness, including a 65% drop in unsheltered homelessness among family households

The federal strategic plan has been amended twice. The 2012 amendment included the Federal Framework to End Youth Homelessness, as well as additional strategies to improve the educational outcomes for children and youth. In 2015, the plan was completely updated and amended to include an operational definition for an end to homelessness, clarifications regarding the role of health and behavioral health systems in supporting services for permanent supportive housing, an updated discussion of the use of metrics and accountability, and improved guidance for retooling crisis response systems.

Provide Your Input

Your input is essential to our continued progress. As we begin the process of gathering stakeholder input to revise and strengthen the federal strategic plan, we are placing an emphasis on:

- Sustaining or building on what is working and leading to positive outcomes
- Reflecting on what we are learning from evolving practices
- Addressing areas in need of greater attention, including racial inequities and other disparities in the risk for and experience of homelessness
- Identifying opportunities to align strategies with emerging federal, state, and local priorities

To help you consider your feedback and input, the information on the following pages summarizes the Vision, Goals, Themes, Objectives, and Strategies of the current federal strategic plan. Input on how the plan's elements and structure may be revised is also welcome.

OPENING DOORS: FEDERAL STRATEGIC PLAN TO PREVENT AND END HOMELESSNESS	
VISION	No one should experience homelessness. No one should be without a safe, stable place to call home.
GOALS	1. Finish the job of ending chronic homelessness by 2017 2. Prevent and end homelessness among Veterans by 2015 3. Prevent and end homelessness for families, youth, and children by 2020 4. Set a path to ending all types of homelessness
OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF AND END TO HOMELESSNESS	An end to homelessness does not mean that no one will ever experience a housing crisis again. Changing economic realities, the unpredictability of life, and unsafe or unwelcoming family environments may create situations where individuals, families, or youth could experience, re-experience, or be at risk of homelessness. An end to homelessness means that every community will have a systematic response in place that ensures homelessness is prevented whenever possible or is otherwise a rare, brief, and non-recurring experience. Specifically, every community will have the capacity to: • Quickly identify and engage people at risk of and experiencing homelessness. • Intervene to prevent the loss of housing and divert people from entering the homelessness services system. • When homelessness does occur, provide immediate access to shelter and crisis services, without barriers to entry, while permanent stable housing and appropriate supports are being secured, and quickly connect people to housing assistance and services—tailored to their unique needs and strengths—to help them achieve and maintain stable housing.

THEME: INCREASE LEADERSHIP, COLLABORATION, AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT	
OBJECTIVE	**STRATEGIES**
ONE *Provide and promote collaborative leadership at all levels of government and across all sectors to inspire and energize Americans to commit to preventing and ending homelessness*	a. **Educate the public** on the scope, causes, and costs of homelessness, the Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness, and the reasons for taking action. b. **Engage state, local, and tribal leaders in a renewed commitment** to prevent and end homelessness in their communities. c. **Get states and localities to update and implement plans to end homelessness** to reflect local conditions and the comprehensiveness of this Federal Plan, as well as to develop mechanisms for effective implementation. d. **Involve citizens—including people with firsthand experience with homelessness—and the private sector**—businesses, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, foundations, and volunteers—in efforts to prevent and end homelessness. e. **Strengthen, learn more about, and institutionalize interagency collaboration.** f. **Seek opportunities to reward communities that are collaborating** to make significant progress preventing and ending homelessness. g. **Review budget processes to determine avenues for recognizing savings across partners** resulting from interventions to prevent and end homelessness, such as where investments in housing result in health care savings. h. **Seek opportunities for engaging Congressional committees collaboratively** on issues related to preventing and ending homelessness.
TWO *Strengthen the capacity of public and private organizations by increasing knowledge about collaboration, homelessness, and successful interventions to prevent and end homelessness*	a. **Collaborate on and compile research** to better understand best practices, the cost-effectiveness of various intervention, metrics to measure outcomes, and the gaps in research. Identify and fill gaps in the body of knowledge. b. **Coordinate federal technical assistance resources** related to preventing and ending homelessness and provide information to states, tribes, and local communities on how to access the support they need. c. **Make information more readily available on best practices** and strategies to finance them at scale. d. **Make information more readily available on working effectively with special populations,** and the overlap between and among groups. e. **Increase knowledge about and attend to the unique needs of rural and tribal communities** to respond to homelessness. Develop effective strategies and programs that use best and culturally competent practices tailored to addressing the unique way that homelessness manifests itself on American Indian lands, in rural/frontier areas, and urban centers. f. **Support communities' ability to conduct annual PIT counts that accurately count people experiencing both sheltered and unsheltered homelessness, including youth.** HUD will provide guidance and tools on PIT count methodology. g. **Continue to increase use of the Homeless Management Information System** by local communities and encourage its use by additional programs targeted at homelessness. Develop standards that permit data inter-operability between data systems while protecting the confidentiality of all individuals. h. **Increase community capacity to analyze HMIS and match HMIS data with other administrative data** to determine the use of other public services like health care and corrections.

| | i. **Create common data standards on homelessness and integrate Federal data systems on homelessness where possible.** A common data standard will facilitate data exchanges and comparisons between both targeted programs and mainstream systems in order to improve identification of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. |
| | j. **Promote data-driven client engagement and housing placement efforts in which communities set specific short-term goals** to connect people experiencing homelessness to housing and services appropriate to their needs and where data on engagements and housing placements is used to track performance against those goals. |

THEME: INCREASE ACCESS TO STABLE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING	
OBJECTIVE	**STRATEGIES**
THREE *Provide affordable housing to people experiencing or most at risk of homelessness*	a. **Support rental housing subsidies through federal, state, local, and private resources** to individuals and families experiencing or most at risk of homelessness. The rent subsidies should be structured so that households pay no more than 30 percent of their income for housing. b. **Expand the supply of affordable rental homes where they are most needed through federal, state, and local efforts.** To provide affordable housing to people experiencing or most at risk of homelessness, rental subsidies should better target households earning significantly less than 30 percent of the Area Median Income so that residents pay no more than 30 percent of their income for housing. The supply will need to include units that are accessible to persons with disabilities. c. **Improve access to federally-funded housing assistance by eliminating administrative barriers and encouraging prioritization** of people experiencing or most at risk of homelessness. d. **Encourage collaboration between public housing agencies, multifamily housing owners, and homeless services to increase mainstream housing opportunities for people experiencing homelessness.** Promote guidance on how public housing agencies and multifamily housing owners can adopt admissions preferences and coordinate with homeless services organizations to make referrals, assist with applications and lease-up, and provide supportive services. e. **Increase service-enriched housing** by co-locating or connecting services with affordable housing.
FOUR *Provide permanent supportive housing to prevent and end chronic homelessness*	a. **Improve access to and use of supportive housing by encouraging prioritization and targeting** for people who need this level of support to prevent or exit homelessness. b. **Create protocols and consider incentives to help people who have achieved stability in supportive housing**—who no longer need and desire to live there—to move into affordable housing to free units for others who need it. c. **Bring the supply of permanent supportive housing to scale,** in partnership with state and local governments and the private sector. d. **Increase use of mainstream resources to cover and finance services** in permanent supportive housing.

THEME: INCREASE ECONOMIC SECURITY	
OBJECTIVE	**STRATEGIES**
FIVE *Improve access to education and increase meaningful and sustainable employment for people experiencing or most at risk of homelessness*	a. **Improve access to education and educational outcomes of children and young adults experiencing homelessness** through the following: • **Improve identification of children and support for them to enroll in school.** Eliminate barriers to enrollment and provide seamless transitions from early childhood education through elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education. • **Review existing Federal, state, and local program policies, procedures, and regulations to identify mechanisms that could increase both access to and retention in high-quality programs**. These mechanisms should help remove barriers and ensure early childhood-to-adulthood educational access, quality child care, and early-childhood education through elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education. • **Educate homeless assistance providers about the laws, and the programs and practices under those laws, designed to increase access to early care and education**, such as those carried out under Head Start, the McKinney-Vento Act's education subtitle, and the independent student provisions of the Higher Education Act. b. **Coordinate employment services with housing and homelessness assistance** to ensure that job development and training strategies focus attention on people who are experiencing or most at risk of homelessness and support their long-term housing stability. c. **Review Federal program policies, procedures, and regulations to identify educational, administrative, or regulatory mechanisms** that could be used to improve access to work support. Identify ways the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and TANF programs can help people who are experiencing or most at risk of homelessness, including people with multiple barriers to employment. d. **Develop and disseminate best practices on helping people with histories of homelessness and barriers to employment enter the workforce,** including strategies that take into consideration transportation, child care, child support, domestic violence, criminal justice history, disabling conditions, limited work experience, and age appropriateness. e. **Improve system-wide coordination and integration of employment programs with homeless assistance programs**, survivor assistance programs, and housing and permanent supportive housing programs. f. **Increase opportunities for work and support recovery for Veterans with barriers to employment**, especially Veterans returning from active duty, Veterans with disabilities, and Veterans in permanent supportive housing.
SIX *Improve access to mainstream programs*	a. **Document, disseminate, and promote the use of best practices in expedited access to income and work supports for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.** This includes improved outreach to homeless assistance providers and collaborations across government and with community nonprofits, online consolidated application processing, and electronic submission and dissemination to promote joint guidance on connecting people experiencing homelessness to SSI/SSDI.

and services to reduce people's financial vulnerability to homelessness	**b.** **Review Federal program policies, procedures, and regulations to identify administrative or regulatory mechanisms** that could be used to remove barriers and improve access to income supports.
	c. **Enhance public information, targeted communications, and a national toll-free homeless call center to ensure that all Veterans and their families know they can obtain homelessness prevention assistance** from VA or other places in their community.
	d. **Create clear pathways to greater financial independence.** Collaborate to review program eligibility and termination criteria across the range of programs which people experiencing or at risk of homelessness may access. Identify changes that should be made to help and encourage people experiencing homelessness connect to jobs, earning and retaining income while maintaining access to health coverage, housing assistance, child care, etc. until a household is earning enough through employment to be financially stable.
	e. **Continue to support the enrollment of eligible individuals into Medicaid** and ensure they are linked to appropriate health care providers.

THEME: IMPROVE HEALTH AND STABILITY	
OBJECTIVE	**STRATEGIES**
SEVEN *Integrate primary and behavioral health care services with homeless assistance programs and housing to reduce people's vulnerability to and the impacts of homelessness*	**a.** **Encourage partnerships between housing providers and health and behavioral health care providers such as health centers to co-locate, coordinate, or integrate health, behavioral health, safety, and wellness services with housing** and create better resources for providers to connect patients to housing resources.
	b. **Build upon successful and test new care and service delivery models** to provide services in the homes of people who have experienced homelessness, including Medicaid-funded Assertive Community Treatment Teams and Home and Community Based Services for those with behavioral health needs. HHS will continue to provide innovation grants that test new models.
	c. **Apply lessons from evaluations of the Medicaid Health Home option** to inform efforts to integrate health care and social services for people with chronic conditions experiencing homelessness.
	d. **Seek opportunities to increase the availability of medical respite programs** in communities to allow hospitals to discharge people experiencing homelessness with complex health needs to medical respite programs that can help stabilize their medical conditions and assist them to access or return to safe and stable housing.
	e. **Ensure that people experiencing homelessness have access to expanded behavioral health services** under the Affordable Care Act, including substance use disorder treatment services.
	f. **Promote the adoption and integration of evidence-based Medicaid behavioral health services for children and youth**, including intensive care coordination, peer services, intensive in-home services, mobile crisis and stabilization services, and other home and community-based services.
	g. **Expand access to evidence-based maternal, infant, and early childhood home visiting services for families and pregnant women**, and promote integration of these services with housing.
	h. **Increase awareness of child and youth development and strategies to support healthy child and youth development** within housing programs.

	i. **Leverage opportunities in child welfare reform to expand evidence-based preventive services**, and promote their coordination with homeless services and housing.
EIGHT *Advance health and housing stability for unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness and youth aging out of systems such as foster care and juvenile justice*	**a.** **Improve discharge planning from foster care and juvenile justice to connect youth to education** (including plans to complete secondary education, if necessary, as well as to access higher education), housing, health and behavioral health supports, income supports, and health coverage prior to discharge. **b.** **Review Federal program policies, procedures, and regulations to identify administrative or regulatory mechanisms** that could be used to remove barriers and improve access to stable health care, housing, and housing supports for youth. **c.** **Promote targeted outreach strategies to identify youth experiencing homelessness** who are most likely to end up in an emergency room, hospital, jail, or prison, and connect them to the housing and support they need. **d.** **Obtain more comprehensive information on the scope of youth homelessness** by improving counting methods; better coordinating and disseminating the information collected by different programs and systems; and conducting new research to expand and improve our understanding of the problem. **e.** **Build an evidence base of and bring to scale the most effective interventions for the different subsets of youth experiencing homelessness.** Refine the preliminary intervention model, conduct additional research on effective interventions, and strengthen the capacity of youth-serving organizations to implement the most effective interventions. **f.** **Improve access to emergency assistance, housing, and supports for historically underserved groups of youth.** Such groups include youth who have been involved in the juvenile justice and/or child welfare systems; sexually exploited youth; LGBTQ and other gender- non-conforming youth; pregnant or parenting youth; and youth with mental health needs.
NINE *Advance health and housing stability for people experiencing homelessness who have frequent contact with hospitals and criminal justice*	**a.** **Ensure that discharge planning and re-entry from hospitals, VA medical centers, psychiatric facilities, jails, and prisons are connecting people to housing**, health and behavioral health support, income and work supports, and health coverage prior to discharge. **b.** **Promote targeted outreach strategies to identify people experiencing homelessness** who are most likely to end up in an emergency room, hospital, jail, or prison, and connect them to the housing and support they need. **c.** **Encourage the adoption of housing strategies as part of state and community efforts to improve re-entry from prison and jail.** Support DOJ's Second Chance Act grants to incorporate housing strategies. **d.** **Encourage states to link housing assistance with care management approaches for people experiencing homelessness identified as Medicaid high utilizers.** States pursuing initiatives focused on high need, high cost Medicaid beneficiaries can identify homeless sub-populations through data matching with HMIS, as well as link care management services with housing. **e.** **Increase the number of problem solving courts at the state and local levels that are linked to housing and support** including courts specifically for Veterans, those experiencing homelessness, or people with mental health issues or substance use disorders. **f.** **Reduce criminalization of homelessness by defining constructive approaches to unsheltered homelessness** and considering incentives to urge cities to adopt these practices.

THEME: RETOOL THE HOMELESS CRISIS RESPONSE SYSTEM	
OBJECTIVE	**STRATEGIES**
TEN *Transform homeless services to crisis response systems that prevent homelessness and rapidly return people who experience homelessness to stable housing*	a. **Assist communities to transform homeless services to crisis response systems through guidance and best practices**, including adoption of community-wide Housing First approaches, homelessness prevention and diversion, collaborative approaches to outreach, McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act performance measurements, and system-wide planning for programs and services. b. **Encourage the coordination of homeless services funded by different Federal, state, and local sources and for different populations**, including through the integration and sharing of HMIS and other data systems as well as through collaborative planning and services coordination. c. **Provide guidance and tools regarding emergency shelter standards and operations**, including the simplification and reduction of entry requirements, alignment with fair and equal access guidelines, assessing child development issues, avoiding the involuntary separation of families, and Housing First. d. **Encourage communities to assess and retool transitional housing programs.** Communities should reduce barriers to entry and also consider conversion or reallocation of resources to cost-effective alternatives like permanent supportive housing, rapid re-housing, crisis or interim housing, or transition-in-place models. They should reserve the use of long-term transitional housing for people with acute service needs that are likely to resolve within two years, or who face the most severe challenges to finding housing. e. **Ensure that homeless services are coordinated with the EHCY program** and that collaboration with local educational agencies and schools occurs to identify and respond to the housing, developmental, educational, and service needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness, reducing their unnecessary school mobility whenever possible. f. **Provide guidance and technical assistance on implementation of coordinated entry systems**, including assessment, triage, centralized or coordinated housing referral systems, youth-specific assessments, and coordination with mainstream programs and services. g. **Encourage connection to Federal mainstream resources that could support the crisis response system**, such as TANF, Community Services Block Grants (CSBG), Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Medicaid, and other programs. h. **Provide guidance and technical assistance to assist communities to implement rapid re-housing**, drawing upon knowledge gained from HPRP and SSVF implementation and studies of effectiveness.