



USICH Report to Congress on How to Better Coordinate Federal Programs Serving Youth Experiencing Homelessness

April 2016

Executive Summary

Too many unaccompanied youth in this country experience homelessness. It is a complex issue that requires urgent action by both the public and private sectors if we are to achieve the goal of preventing and ending youth homelessness in 2020.

In 2012, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) and its member agencies developed an initial conceptual framework for preventing and ending youth homelessness and have been advancing progress on the first phase of that work.¹

To accelerate progress, Congress directed USICH, through the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act of 2015, to evaluate and report on how to better coordinate federal programs serving youth experiencing homelessness.

Through the Interagency Working Group to End Youth Homelessness,² USICH and its member agencies have engaged in a comprehensive strategic planning process. Last spring, the Working Group finalized the interagency vision of the core components of a coordinated community response to prevent and end youth homelessness and identified a set of initial strategies to implement that vision. Those recommendations were officially adopted by the full Council at its July 2015 meeting and make up the basis of this Report.

Since then, USICH released the first in a series of anticipated publications that will provide communities with the kinds of tools and resources needed to implement a coordinated response to preventing and ending youth homelessness. That document can be found in Appendix B.

In addition, the Working Group has made significant progress in identifying data sources and exploring modeling techniques to determine what resources are needed and what gaps need to be filled to achieve the goal of preventing and ending youth homelessness in 2020.

Over the next five years, USICH and its member agencies will continue to strengthen coordination and advance the implementation of the *Federal Framework to End Youth Homelessness*, improving data collection and research efforts while also strengthening the capacity of communities to respond to the needs of youth experiencing and at risk of homelessness.

We look to Congress to continue supporting the efforts of communities across the country as they work with urgency to end youth homelessness in 2020.

¹ https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/USICH_Youth_Framework_FINAL_02_13_131.pdf

² The Working Group is co-chaired by the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness and the Departments of Health and Human Services and Housing and Urban Development. Working group members include the Departments of Education, Labor, Justice, and the Social Security Administration.

Introduction

Homelessness is a complex and multi-faceted problem that cannot be solved by any single agency, level of government, sector, or system on its own. While ending homelessness must happen in every community individually, the interventions needed to achieve that goal require a range of targeted federal resources, guidance, and technical assistance, and must necessarily rely on resources from a diverse array of existing federal targeted and mainstream programs, along with state, local, private, and philanthropic investment.

Through the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act of 2009, Congress charged USICH³ with not only coordinating the federal response to homelessness, but also with creating a national partnership at every level of government and 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.

Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness serves as a roadmap for that effort. Launched in 2010, the Plan has been amended twice, once in 2012 to provide additional strategies related to educational outcomes for children and to ending youth homelessness, and again in 2015, to add strategies around data usage, Medicaid, and effective crisis response systems.

As amended, the Plan sets, and remains focused on, four goals:

- Prevent and end homelessness among Veterans in 2015;
- Finish the job of ending chronic homelessness in 2017;
- Prevent and end homelessness for families, youth, and children in 2020; and
- Set a path to ending all types of homelessness.

To achieve these goals, USICH works with its 19 member agencies to align resources and ensure that any duplication of effort is identified and converted to collaborative processes. USICH also works with national, state, and local community partners across the country to make sure federal resources and guidance and technical assistance are integrated effectively into communities.

Since the adoption of *Opening Doors*, systems-level planning among the agencies most engaged in efforts to address youth homelessness has improved dramatically. To accelerate progress, the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act of 2015 directed USICH to evaluate and report on how to better coordinate federal programs serving youth experiencing homelessness.

This report describes what is currently known about the scope and scale of youth homelessness, some of the primary existing programs that serve youth experiencing homelessness, and current and proposed actions to further strengthen interagency efforts to achieve the goal of ending youth homelessness in 2020.

Scope and Scale of Youth Homelessness

Each year, estimates show that tens of thousands of youth in the U.S. run away from home, are forced to leave their homes, or otherwise experience homelessness. Once homeless, youth face multiple challenges, including poor educational outcomes and lower rates of employment, increased risk of exploitation and victimization, and increased risk of behavioral health issues and traumatic stress. While

³ USICH was established in 1987 by the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (later renamed the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act).

progress has been made to improve national data, there is still no confident estimate of the scale and scope of youth homelessness. The data we have indicates:

- Approximately 45,000 children and youth without a parent or guardian (unaccompanied) under age 25 were living on the streets, in shelter, or in transitional housing on a given night in 2014, according to the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Point-in-Time (PIT) count. **The majority of youth captured in the HUD PIT count are over the age of 18.**
- More than 90,000 youth experiencing homelessness while not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian (unaccompanied) were enrolled in public school districts at some point over the course of the 2013-2014 school year, according to Department of Education data. They include, among others, youth who are sharing the housing of other persons, often in the form of "couch surfing," due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason. **The majority of youth captured in ED data are under the age of 18.**

Given the limited data, different collection methodologies, and different federal definitions of homelessness (see Appendix A) among existing data sets, USICH is working with federal partners to better coordinate how data sources are collected and statistics are produced to inform federal policy efforts. Coordination is particularly important to leverage data efficiencies and therefore yield the most accurate statistics describing this hard to reach population. USICH is also assisting communities as they apply these statistics in the development of local policy strategies.

Federal agencies are also continuing to encourage communities to apply the lessons learned through the 2012-2013 Youth Count! initiative, in which USICH member agencies worked with nine communities across the country to better count unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness and capture their characteristics.⁴ Some states, including Connecticut and Maine, have subsequently engaged in state-wide efforts, in collaboration with a diverse group of stakeholders, to broaden their reach and capture a more realistic picture of the housing instability and crisis experienced by young people across a spectrum of circumstances.

However, to scale the response appropriately, there is a need to develop more confident estimates of the prevalence of youth homelessness:

- A national prevalence study, as highlighted in the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Runaway and Homeless Youth Program's annual budget request, would provide a reliable baseline for the number of unaccompanied runaway and homeless youth.⁵
- Periodic estimates would allow monitoring of progress to reduce the prevalence of youth homelessness.
- Improved and coordinated data systems could result in better monitoring of service-usage patterns and youth-level outcomes in order to improve service delivery.

As federal, state, and local partners work to strengthen the nation's data capacity, USICH and its member agencies are also providing guidance and technical assistance to organizations on how to deliver services informed by existing research. Those services must be tailored to take into account:

⁴ <https://www.usich.gov/tools-for-action/youth-count>

⁵ In 2015, Chapin Hall, a research and policy center at the University Chicago, launched a multi-year research and policy effort designed to help contribute to the national understanding of youth homelessness, including the scope and scale of the issue and strategies for effective solutions.

- **The factors that contribute to youth homelessness specifically.** These primarily include: family problems (e.g., relating to domestic violence, severe conflict, and acceptance of sexual orientation); economic circumstances; racial disparities; child abuse; and mental health and substance use disorders, as well as involvement with public systems, such as criminal justice and child welfare. In one study, 19% of youth who were in foster care at age 17 reported at age 19 that they had been homeless at some point during the last two years.⁶
- **The unique needs of youth experiencing homelessness who are particularly vulnerable.** These include youth who have been trafficked for sex or labor, youth with special needs or disabilities, Native American youth, other youth of color, and youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ). For instance, family conflict and rejection around sexual orientation and gender identity may need to be addressed for many of the 20-40% of youth experiencing homelessness who identify as LGBTQ.⁷ Pregnant and parenting youth are another vulnerable group; approximately one in four youth served through HHS-funded transitional living programs fall into this category, according to FY 2014 data from the Runaway and Homeless Youth Management Information System.
- **Age and developmental considerations.** Age and development impacts how youth experience homelessness and their pathways into and out of homelessness. Strategies should focus on reunifying youth, particularly those under age 18, with family or other natural supports, when safe and appropriate. Around 70% of youth under age 18 who entered an HHS-funded emergency shelter left the shelter to go to a parent or guardian in FY 2014. In addition to family-focused efforts, ending homelessness for youth requires a broader set of interventions, ranging from short- to longer-term housing with varying levels of support and services, including trauma-informed interventions and education and employment services. Those services may be especially useful for youth over the age of 18, particularly if providers believe the young person is unable to safely reunite with family.

Federal Homeless Assistance Programs for Unaccompanied Youth

Ending youth homelessness requires a coordinated approach from a diverse set of federal programs that support community-level responses to the crises experienced by youth. The core of that response comes from the following programs, managed by the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Department of Education.⁸

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Programs:

- **Runaway and Homeless Youth Grant Programs:** The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) authorizes three RHYA grant programs that enable community-based organizations and shelters in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. territories to serve and protect runaway, homeless, missing, and sexually exploited youth.
 1. The **Basic Center Program (BCP)**, authorized under Part A of the RHYA, works to establish or strengthen community-based programs that meet the immediate needs of runaway and homeless youth and their families. The programs provide youth up to age 18 with emergency

⁶ Administration for Children and Families (2014). *National Youth in Transition Database Data Brief # 4*. Washington, DC. Retrieved from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/nytd-data-brief-4>

⁷ Ray (2006). An epidemic of homelessness. National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute. National Coalition for the Homeless. Retrieved from <http://graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/national/20070307HomelessYouth.pdf>.

⁸ In addition to the programs described, a range of federal programs help meet the child welfare, health, behavioral health, educational, employment, early childhood, and other needs of young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

shelter, food, clothing, counseling, case management, and referrals for health care. Most basic centers can provide 21 days of shelter for up to 20 youth, however there are exceptions for jurisdictions that have different standards for licensing. Basic centers seek to reunite young people with their families, whenever possible, or to locate appropriate alternative placements.

In FY 2014, federal funding for BCP supported 301 grantees with a total of \$48 million. BCP grant awards are for three years. State allocations for BCP funds are based on the state's population of youth younger than age 18 (according to the latest census data).

2. The **Transitional Living Program (TLP)**, authorized under Part B of the RHYA, supports projects that provide long-term residential services, typically up to 18 months, to youth ages 16-22 who are experiencing homelessness. The services offered are designed to help such young people make a successful transition to self-sufficient living.

The TLP provides youth with stable, safe living accommodations and services that help them develop the skills necessary to become independent. Living accommodations may include host-family homes, group homes, maternity group homes, or supervised apartments owned by the program or rented in the community.

In FY 2014, federal funding for TLP supported 202 grantees with a total of \$39.6 million. TLP grant awards are for five years.

3. The **Street Outreach Program (SOP)**, authorized under Part E of the RHYA, enables organizations around the country to help young people get off the streets. To that end, the program promotes efforts by its grantees to build relationships between street outreach workers and runaway, homeless, and street youth. Grantees also provide support services that aim to move youth into stable housing and prepare them for independence. The program's ultimate goal is to prevent the sexual abuse or exploitation of young people living on the streets or in unstable housing.

In FY 2014, federal funding supported 110 SOP grantees with a total of \$16 million. SOP grant awards are for three years.

- **Supporting Successful Transitions to Adulthood for Foster Youth:** Key provisions under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act provide supports and services to youth in foster care to assist their successful transition to adulthood. Under the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, state child welfare agencies have the authority to expend up to 30% of their allotted funds on housing for youth who have aged out of foster care. The Fostering Connections to Success Act of 2008 amended Title IV-E to permit states to extend eligibility for federal foster care maintenance payments for youth up to the age of 21, in order to provide supports for a longer period of time to ensure a smoother transition out of foster care. As of November 2015, 23 states have taken advantage of these federal funds and are providing foster care payments for youth between the ages of 18 and 21.
- **Children's Bureau Discretionary Grants:** In 2013, the Children's Bureau awarded multi-year discretionary grants to create and implement specialized programs to prevent homelessness for youth and young adults with child welfare involvement. After two years of planning, jurisdictions across the country are now in the implementation phase and are reporting positive results. These model interventions will be rigorously evaluated and then disseminated nationwide, as appropriate, in the coming years.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Programs:

- **Homelessness Assistance Programs:** HUD has two primary homelessness assistance programs that can offer services to youth experiencing homelessness, the **Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG)** Program and the **Continuum of Care (CoC)** Program.
 - The **ESG Program** is a formula-based program where funding is allocated to state and local government entities. The ESG program is designed to support local activities to engage homeless individuals and families living on the street, improve the number and quality of emergency shelters for homeless individuals and families, help operate these shelters, provide essential services to shelter residents, rapidly re-house homeless individuals and families, and prevent families/individuals from becoming homeless. In FY 2015, ESG funding totaled approximately \$270 million.
 - The **CoC Program** is a competitive program fostering community-wide commitments to the goal of ending homelessness by providing funding for nonprofit providers and state and local governments to quickly re-house homeless individuals and families while minimizing trauma and dislocation. The CoC Program is also designed to promote access to and affect utilization of mainstream programs by homeless individuals and families, while optimizing self-sufficiency among individuals and families experiencing homelessness. CoCs have discretion to prioritize funding for projects that meet local needs, within parameters set by HUD, in the national competition. In FY 2015, CoC funding totaled approximately \$1.89 billion.

The large majority of youth projects funded through the CoC Program serve unaccompanied youth ages 18-24, including youth that are parenting. In the FY 2014 CoC Program, HUD awarded \$79 million to more than 500 projects that primarily serve youth experiencing homelessness. The majority of this funding was for transitional housing programs. Many more projects serve at least some youth. HUD awarded funding to over 3,700 projects that plan to serve some youth, and HUD estimates that these projects will spend approximately \$200 million to serve youth aged 18-24.
- **Mainstream Affordable Housing Programs:** HUD also provides housing assistance to a significant number of 18-24 year olds, through its mainstream affordable housing programs. Currently, as reported to the Public and Indian Housing Information Center (PIC), nearly 60,000 of the households that HUD serves through its Housing Choice Voucher and Public Housing programs are headed by older youth, representing over \$700 million of funding annually. While these resources are not all targeted to older youth currently or formerly experiencing homelessness, they provide additional assistance to older youth with affordable housing needs, and can prevent them from experiencing homelessness.
- **Family Unification Program:** HUD has a targeted tenant-based rental assistance program, the Family Unification Program (FUP), for youth and families with current or prior involvement with the child welfare system. For youth, the program targets 18-21 year olds who exited the child welfare system after the age of 16 and are currently facing housing instability or homelessness.

U.S. Department of Education (ED) Programs:

- The **Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program** is authorized under Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. § 11431 et seq.). Formula grants are made to all states based on the proportion of funds allocated to each state under Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended. The outlying areas (American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and the United States Virgin Islands) and the Bureau of Indian Affairs also receive funds. The program supports an office for coordination of the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness in each state, which among other things gathers comprehensive information about the population, including the challenges they must overcome to attend and succeed in school. These grants also help State Educational Agencies (SEAs) ensure that children experiencing homelessness, including preschoolers and youth, have equal access to a free and appropriate public education. States must review and revise laws and practices that impede such equal access. States are required to have an approved plan for addressing problems associated with the enrollment, attendance, and success of children experiencing homelessness in school.

States must make competitive subgrants to Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) to facilitate the enrollment, attendance, and success in school of homeless children and youth. This includes addressing problems due to transportation needs, immunizations and residency requirements, lack of birth certificates and school records, and guardianship issues.

In FY 2015, federal funding for the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program totaled \$65.042 million. Approximately 1.5% of this appropriation is reserved to support a technical assistance contract for the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE), which has been operated by SERVE at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro since 1998.

Federal Framework to End Youth Homelessness

In 2012, the Council adopted the [Federal Framework to End Youth Homelessness](#), which lays the groundwork for coordination across the different disciplines that impact this population. The approach is based on research that shows that youth need to achieve four core outcomes to have the greatest chance of success:

- **Stable housing** includes a safe and reliable place to call home. Stable housing fulfills a critical and basic need for youth experiencing homelessness. It is essential to enabling functioning across a range of life activities. Lack of stable housing, on the other hand, exposes young people to a multitude of risks.
- **Permanent connections** include ongoing attachments to families, positive adults, communities, schools, health care services, and other positive social networks. Connections support young people's ability to access new ideas and opportunities that support their ability to thrive and provide a social safety net when young people are at risk of re-entering homelessness.
- **Education/employment** includes participation in and completion of educational and training activities, especially for younger youth, but also including higher education. This also includes starting and maintaining adequate and stable employment, particularly for older youth. Achievements in education and employment increase a youth's capacity to support himself or herself financially and prevents future homelessness.
- **Social-emotional well-being** refers to the social and emotional functioning of youth experiencing homelessness. It includes the development of key competencies, attitudes, and

behaviors that equip a young person experiencing homelessness to avoid unhealthy risks and to succeed across multiple domains of daily life, including school, work, relationships, and community.

To advance federal, state, and local responses to youth homelessness, and to support the capacity of communities and programs to achieve the core outcomes, the Framework focuses on two complementary strategies:

- 1) **Improving data on youth homelessness**, which will provide a clearer understanding of the prevalence, characteristics, and needs of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness; and
- 2) **Building capacity for service delivery**, focused on increasing the understanding of effective housing and services interventions, including prevention models shown to be most effective, and developing a preliminary intervention model (see Figure 1, below) which reinforces the need for contributions from and coordination among multiple services and systems to address risk and protective factors that impact the core outcomes and that communities can use to implement coordinated and comprehensive systems approaches to ending youth homelessness.

In adopting the Framework, the Council committed to a three-phased approach for implementation:

Phase 1: Activities that could begin immediately;

Phase 2: Activities that will require new resources; and,

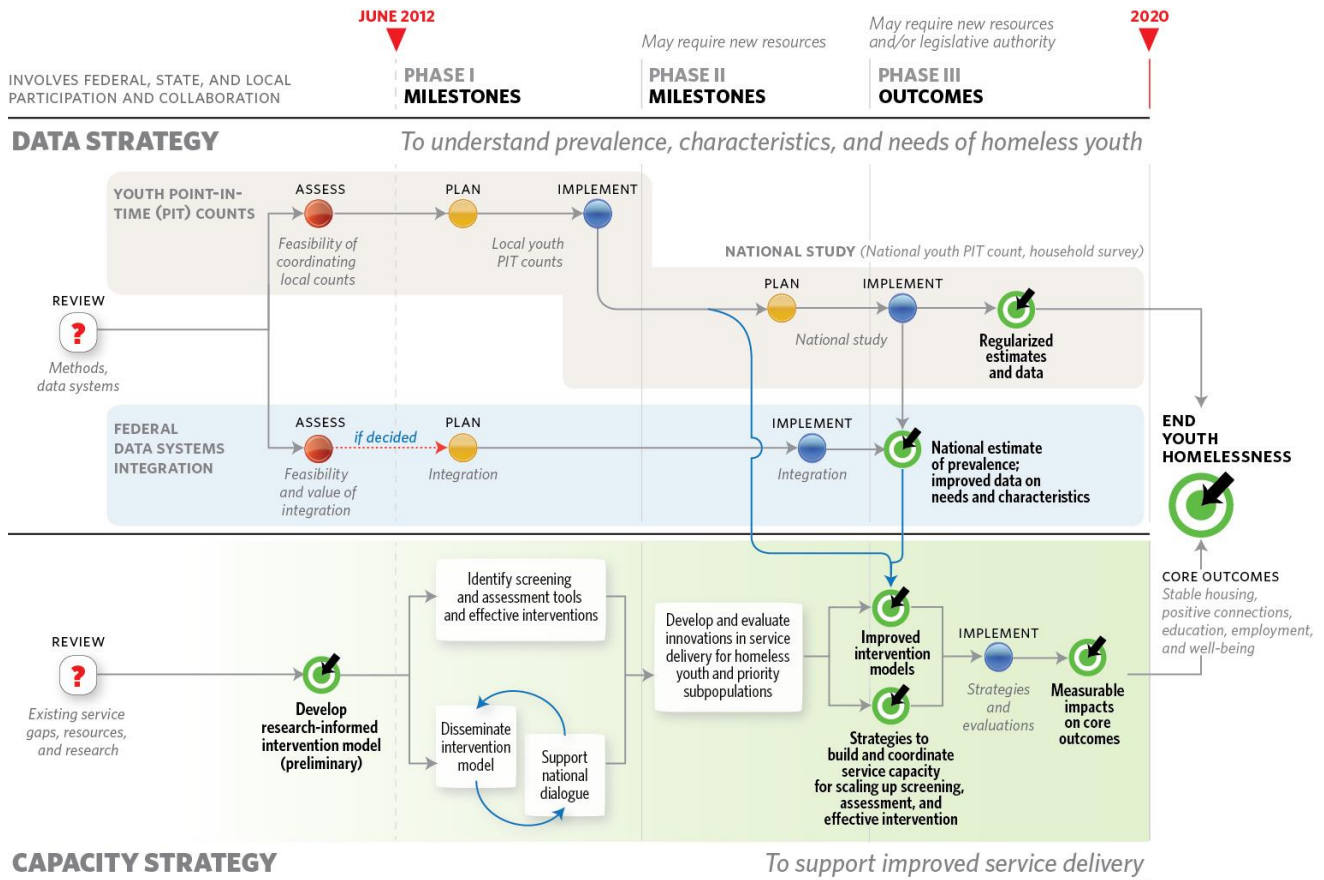
Phase 3: Longer-term activities that build on earlier efforts and may require new resources and/or legislative authority.

Under the guidance of the Interagency Working Group on Ending Youth Homelessness, led by USICH and co-chaired with HUD and HHS, Council agencies have either completed or made progress on many of the actions identified in Phase I. Examples include:

- Leveraging HUD's Point-in-Time count to improve strategies for counting youth by enhancing collaborations between CoCs, RHY providers, and LEAs, and developing youth-specific methods for counting youth (Youth Count!, mentioned above).
- Integrating the HHS Runaway and Homeless Youth Management Information System (RHYMIS) and the HUD Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), contributing to an increased understanding of how and where youth experiencing homelessness are accessing services.
- Disseminating the preliminary intervention model, initiating and guiding community planning efforts, and supporting pilot projects to expand evidence of effective interventions.

As these and other research activities continue, Council agencies are continuing to implement the Framework and strengthen capacity at the community level by developing and testing innovations in services and programs.

Figure 1 – Framework Logic Model for Ending Youth Homelessness



The Community Response Needed to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness

Implementation of the Federal Framework is moving into Phase 2, including efforts focused on improving the capacity of communities to respond to youth homelessness through a comprehensive, coordinated response (see Figure 2, below).

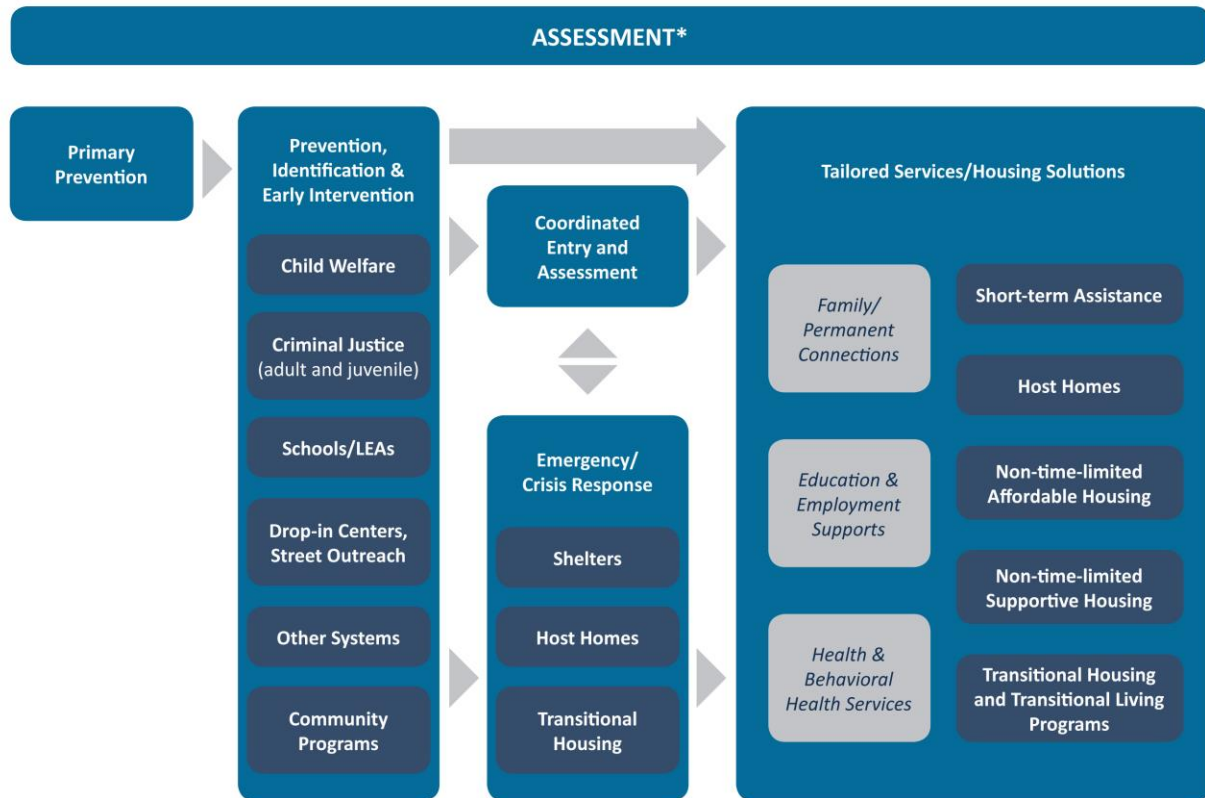
Unlike other systems with which youth interact, like child welfare or juvenile justice, efforts focused on serving youth experiencing homelessness are not provided through a single system of supports funded by a state or federal agency. In some communities, HHS’ RHY program and HUD’s CoC and ESG programs provide a foundation of support in the form of shelter, crisis services, and housing assistance for youth, but these efforts by themselves are insufficient in both scale and scope to meet the complex and diverse needs of youth. Connections to mainstream programs, such as health care and workforce supports, are often inconsistent.

In order to address the diverse needs of youth with a full range of age and developmentally appropriate programs and services, communities must have the capacity to:

- **Prevent youth** from becoming homeless by identifying and working with families who are at risk of fracturing.

- Effectively **identify and engage** youth at risk of, or actually experiencing homelessness, and connect them with trauma-informed, culturally appropriate, and developmentally and age-appropriate interventions and services.
- **Intervene early** when youth do become homeless and work toward family reunification, when safe and appropriate.
- Develop and utilize screening and assessment tools and **coordinated entry systems** to identify youth for appropriate types of housing and services assistance and to prioritize resources for the most vulnerable youth.
- Ensure access to **safe shelter and emergency services** when needed.
- Ensure that assessments respond to the unique needs and circumstances of youth and emphasize **strong connections to and supported exits from mainstream systems** when needed.
- Create **individualized services** and housing options tailored to the needs of each youth, and include measurable outcomes across key indicators of performance, including education and employment.

Figure 2 – Coordinated Community Response



**Throughout the provision of services, assessment will be ongoing.*

Under the leadership of the USICH Interagency Working Group on Ending Youth Homelessness, federal agencies have identified two strategic action areas to strengthen coordination at the federal level and better support communities as they implement this approach. The Working Group has identified an initial set of strategies and actions, while also anticipating the need for additional federal, state, and local resource investments to greatly accelerate progress.

Strategic Action Area #1 - Build the foundation for a coordinated and comprehensive community response. Planned activities are expected to focus on:

- ***Establishing and disseminating a national definition of an end to youth homelessness and the metrics to measure progress*** – The definition of an end to youth homelessness along with metrics for measuring whether this end has been achieved will be useful in guiding efforts at the federal, state, and local levels towards a shared vision. Federal partners will develop such a shared vision along with measures specific to achieving an end to youth homelessness.
- ***Conducting modeling projections to identify a preliminary projection of the full range of interventions needed to end youth homelessness to help set policy priorities*** – Using available data sources on the number and range of needs presented among youth, federal partners will determine the types and scale of interventions needed to achieve an end to youth homelessness.
- ***Improving the collection, sharing, and use of data from USICH member agencies and other sources on youth to determine and plan for resource needs*** – HUD and HHS started integrating HMIS/RHMHIS data in 2015 so that the data can be used in future years to better understand how youth enter homelessness, how they are served by HUD and HHS programs, and how they exit homelessness. This will help to identify gaps in services.
- ***Building an evidence base for successful strategies to prevent and end youth homelessness to further refine the proposed community response*** – Federal agencies will continue to identify and disseminate the latest information and resources to inform stakeholder investments in existing and new programs. Federal agencies will continue to promote innovation and, where appropriate, employ rigorous evaluation to build upon the existing evidence base on effective strategies and promising practices for meeting the services and housing needs of youth.

Strategic Action Area #2 - Build the capacity of local communities to implement the components of a coordinated and comprehensive community response. Those components include prevention, identification and early intervention, coordinated entry and assessment, emergency and crisis response, and tailored services and housing solutions. Planned activities are expected to focus on:

- ***Supporting the capacity of communities to quickly identify and engage at-risk children, youth, and families in targeted interventions to prevent homelessness by leveraging Basic Center Programs, drop-in centers, street outreach programs, transitional living programs, and public systems including child welfare, juvenile and adult criminal justice, state and local educational agencies, community programs, health and behavioral health, and other youth-serving systems*** – Federal agencies are collaborating to build the evidence base for prevention including lessons learned from pilot programs to prevent homelessness among LGBTQ youth. To improve outcomes for youth involved with systems such as child welfare and juvenile justice, agencies are engaged in efforts to build and sustain coordinated services to strengthen transitions out of these systems. HUD and its partners are also building on existing efforts to identify and engage at-risk youth and families currently residing in public housing to prevent homelessness. Local efforts to strengthen partnerships between schools and homeless assistance programs including the range of RHY programs will contribute to increased outreach and engagement of at-risk youth with connections to interventions to prevent homelessness.
- ***Supporting the capacity of communities to implement youth-focused screening and assessment tools at both the client and community levels and ensure that youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness have access to the most appropriate options that***

address their identified needs through specialized programs for homelessness assistance as well as mainstream programs – HHS and other agencies will provide guidance and technical assistance, and messaging that promotes the use of age and developmentally appropriate screening and assessment tools that address the individual needs and circumstances of youth. In addition, federal agencies are developing and disseminating guidance regarding the core components and implementation of coordinated entry systems for youth; coordinated entry provides an opportunity for communities to support access to the most appropriate interventions for youth.

- **Strengthening community capacity to provide low-barrier emergency and crisis services that mitigate risk factors and strengthen protective factors for youth, and work to connect youth to services and/or housing through the use of short- and long-term shelters, transitional housing, and host homes** – Federal agencies will continue to strengthen messaging and provide guidance and technical assistance to reduce barriers to program entry especially to emergency and crisis services.
- **Supporting innovation and experimentation at the local level to increase the scale, performance, and range of trauma-informed, culturally competent, and developmentally and age-appropriate services and housing options across the core outcomes: Family/Permanent Connections; Education and Employment Supports; Health and Behavioral Health Services; and Housing Opportunities (including short-term assistance [e.g. rapid re-housing], transitional living programs, host homes, non-time-limited affordable housing, and non-time-limited supportive housing)** – Federal agencies will identify the array of housing and services interventions that can be packaged or tailored to the unique needs and strengths of youth based on their current age and developmental needs and appropriate to their circumstances. Lessons learned from demonstration projects and examples of best practices will provide communities with increased understanding of the kinds of resources that are needed to support a comprehensive response to youth homelessness. This includes guidance and technical assistance, and messaging to encourage coordination across homelessness assistance programs and mainstream programs including education, employment, health, and behavioral health.

Potential Opportunities for New Investments

USICH and its member agencies have identified potential areas where new investments and/or statutory changes would help further efforts to prevent and end youth homelessness at the federal, state and local levels:

U.S. Department of Education

- **Strengthen Data Collection on Homeless Youth and the Analysis and Use of Local Data** – The U.S. Department of Education is proposing new data collection and outcome measures pertaining to youth experiencing homelessness for the 2016-17 school year, including an adjusted cohort graduation rate and chronic absenteeism measure for all public school districts and states. To date, the main academic outcome measure has been the number and percentages of homeless students who participate in state assessments and are proficient at grade level in reading, math, and science in grades three through eight and once in high school. Furthermore, since the 2012-13 school year, reporting of homeless student characteristics has been based on enrollment in all school districts rather than those served by the minority of school districts receiving McKinney-Vento subgrants. With appropriate privacy protections applied, these school district data can be analyzed for multiple school years and compared with HHS and HUD data on children and youth experiencing

homelessness served by their local grantees. Finally, from FY 2015, the Education for Homeless Children and Youth program office has been promoting the analysis of school district data for state departments of education to target their monitoring and technical assistance and create annual work plans to improve services and outcomes for youth experiencing homelessness.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

- **Invest in the Prevalence, Needs, and Characteristics of Homeless Youth Study** – In order to reach the goal of ending youth homelessness in 2020, it is necessary to obtain confident estimates of the number of unaccompanied homeless youth. Prevalence estimates on youth experiencing homelessness and the information that will be generated relating to youth needs and characteristics will show the overall scale of the issue of youth homelessness at given times; demonstrate the extent to which more or fewer youth are becoming homeless; provide clarity on the magnitude of the problem and facilitate action toward reducing rates and episodes of youth homelessness; and significantly improve understanding of the diversity of needs for this population to enable the implementation of more effective and efficient service strategies at the program level.
- **Expand the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program** – Research consistently identifies family conflict as one of the main reasons youth become homeless. At the same time, most youth – especially those under the age of 18 – will leave emergency shelters to go to their parents or caregiver. Therefore, one of the most important strategies agencies can pursue, when it is safe and feasible, is to support families and youth so they reunify as quickly as possible, or prevent youth from leaving home entirely. The Promoting Safe and Stable Families capped entitlement program is designed to enable each state and eligible Indian Tribe, tribal organization, and tribal consortium to operate a coordinated program of family preservation services, community-based family support services, time-limited reunification services, and adoption promotion and support services. Increases to this program are needed to increase capacity for tribes to administer child welfare services, support rural state grants, and increase research, evaluation, training, and technical assistance related to these initiatives.
- **Expand Prevention and Post-Permanency Services** – Similarly, providing states and tribes with a Federal Financial Participation (FFP) funding rate of 50% for front-end, child welfare services to families in crisis would reduce the need for foster care and, in turn, may decrease homelessness. Investments at the same rate for post-permanency services would help to provide stability after family reunification, adoption, kinship, or guardianship placements. These services would be designed to strengthen families and help keep youth safely in their homes and off the streets.
- **Extend Chafee Foster Care Independence Program to Age 23** – The Chafee Foster Care Independence Program provides states with resources for youth to make the transition from foster care to productive adulthood. The program currently provides services to children under 18 who are expected to “age out” of foster care, former foster youth (ages 18-21), and youth who exited foster care for kinship, guardianship, or adoption after age 16. Services include, but are not limited to, educational assistance, career exploration, career and technical education or vocational training, job placement, life skills training, home management, health services, substance abuse prevention, preventive health activities, and room and board. Extending the program to allow states to provide services to former foster youth to age 23 (as opposed to stopping the program at age 21) would help to ensure that youth are better equipped to transition to adulthood and less likely to experience homelessness.
- **Expand Transitional Living Program Services for Unique Populations** – The Transitional Living Program provides long-term, safe, stable, and nurturing environments for homeless youth through

grants to public and private organizations. More specifically, the grantees provide community-based, adult-supervised group homes and host homes for youth ages 16 to 22 who cannot safely live with their families. Studies suggest that LGBTQ youth represent a disproportionately large share of homeless youth when compared to the overall population. Thus, it is important to identify and test effective screening and assessment tools, interventions, and services tailored to LGBTQ youth.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

- **Expand the Family Unification Program** – The President’s FY 2016 budget requested \$20 million for approximately 2,500 new FUP vouchers. The FY 2016 Senate Appropriations Bill included the \$20 million investment in new FUP vouchers with language directing HUD to prioritize the award of these new vouchers to those Public Housing Authorities that will target them to youth.
- **Implement a Coordinated Community Response** – The FY 2016 Appropriations Act provides \$38 million to the HUD Homeless Assistance Grants program targeted for youth homelessness. This includes \$33 million for a youth homelessness demonstration and \$5 million for Technical Assistance. The demonstration project for youth homelessness would provide grants to up to 10 communities, of which four must be rural, to develop and test the impact of a coordinated and comprehensive community response to end youth homelessness. This pilot could include:
 - Expanding housing options for youth, consistent with Housing First principles, such as:
 - a. Rapid Re-housing: Rapidly moving youth into permanent housing; offering short- to medium-term financial assistance; and providing developmentally appropriate case management and services.
 - b. Non-Time-Limited Supportive Housing: Housing with indefinite leasing or rental assistance paired with services to help homeless youth with disabilities and high service needs achieve housing stability.
 - Further refining traditional housing models serving youth:
 - a. Transitional Housing: Housing with supportive services that can be provided for up to 24 months. HUD believes this may be an appropriate intervention for those youth who may choose more intensive support in recovering from addictions or mental health issues, in leaving domestic violence situations, or youth that are pregnant or parenting.
 - Further developing coordinated entry processes:
 - a. An effective coordinated entry process lowers the burden on youth accessing housing and services by standardizing the access, prioritization, and referral processes across an entire community. The development of such a process requires the involved planning of many stakeholders (including RHY providers, schools, child welfare, and juvenile justice) to ensure it meets the unique needs of vulnerable youth, and prioritizes housing and services to those youth with the greatest service needs and the longest time homeless.
- **Expand Quality Youth Projects across Continuums of Care (CoCs)** – CoCs have discretion to prioritize funding for projects that meet local needs, within parameters set by HUD, in the national competition. In FY 2015, the CoC national competition made youth a priority population for CoC funds, encouraging CoCs to engage with youth providers in the community planning process in order to expand the amount of youth-funded projects. The national competition also allows CoCs to reallocate funding towards new permanent housing projects for youth and to create new permanent housing projects as part of the Permanent Housing Bonus. Increased youth-targeted investments in the CoC program would allow communities much needed additional resources to expand the amount of youth-funded projects across the country.

Conclusion

Preventing and ending youth homelessness requires the active participation of state and local stakeholders working in partnership with federal agencies. Over the next five years, USICH and its member agencies will continue to coordinate closely and advance the implementation of the *Federal Framework to End Youth Homelessness*, improving data collection and research efforts, while also strengthening the capacity of communities to respond effectively and comprehensively to the needs of youth experiencing and at risk of homelessness.

Federal agencies will also coordinate to ensure that youth experience and expertise inform and guide efforts at all levels of government, non-profits, faith-based and community organizations, and the private and philanthropic sectors. USICH continues to incorporate feedback from key stakeholders, including youth, service providers, and advocates, in the development and implementation of strategies to accelerate progress at the federal level through a more coordinated and aligned approach across agencies to ending youth homelessness. Such feedback is critical to the work of federal agencies and is a necessary component of developing a comprehensive system to prevent and end youth homelessness.

Ending youth homelessness is possible. It will take federal, state, and local leaders working together to coordinate new and effective ways, identify opportunities to align and streamline efforts, maximize the use of existing resources, and strategically identify the need for new investments.

Appendix A – Definitions of Homelessness

Federal Definitions

Homelessness is defined in a number of different ways. Below are federal definitions and key terms that are used when talking about runaway and homeless youth.

The U.S. Department of Education (ED)

Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act defines *homeless children and youths* as follows:

The term "homeless children and youths"—

- A. means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence (within the meaning of section 11302(a)(1) of this title); and
- B. includes—
 - i. children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;
 - ii. children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings (within the meaning of section 11302(a)(2)(C) of this title);
 - iii. children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
 - iv. migratory children (as such term is defined in section 6399 of title 20) who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).

42 U.S.C. § 11434a(2)

Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act defines *unaccompanied youth* as follows:

The term “unaccompanied youth” includes a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.

42 U.S.C. § 11434a(6)

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

HUD defines homelessness for their program into four categories. The categories are:

Category 1: Literally Homeless

Individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, meaning:

- (i) Has a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not meant for human habitation;
- (ii) Is living in a publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state and local government programs); or
- (iii) Is exiting an institution where (s)he has resided for 90 days or less and who resided in an emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution

Category 2: Imminent Risk of Homelessness

Individual or family who will imminently lose their primary nighttime residence, provided that:

- (i) Residence will be lost within 14 days of the date of application for homeless assistance;
- (ii) No subsequent residence has been identified; and (iii) the individual or family lacks the resources or support networks needed to obtain other permanent housing

Category 3: Homeless under other federal statutes

Unaccompanied youth under 25 years of age, or families with children and youth, who do not otherwise qualify as homeless under this definition, but who:

- (i) Are defined as homeless under the other listed federal statutes;
- (ii) Have not had a lease, ownership interest, or occupancy agreement in permanent housing during the 60 days prior to the homeless assistance application;
- (iii) Have experienced persistent instability as measured by two moves or more during in the preceding 60 days; and
- (iv) Can be expected to continue in such status for an extended period of time due to special needs or barriers

Category 4: Fleeing/Attempting to Flee Domestic Violence

Any individual or family who:

- (i) Is fleeing or attempting to flee their housing or the place they are staying because of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions related to violence that has taken place in the house or has made them afraid to return to the house, including:
 - Trading sex for housing
 - Trafficking
 - Physical abuse
 - Violence (or perceived threat of violence) because of the youth’s sexual orientation;
- (ii) Has no other residence; and
- (iii) Lacks the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA)

RHYA (42 U.S.C. §5732a) defines HOMELESS YOUTH as individuals who are *“less than 21 years of age...for whom it is not possible to live in a safe environment with a relative and who have no other safe alternative living arrangement.”* This definition includes only those youth who are unaccompanied by families or caregivers. This definition is used in connection with the Basic Center Program and the Transitional Living Program.

For the **Basic Center Program**, the homeless youth is an individual who is less than 18 years of age, or is less than a higher maximum age if the state where the center is located has an applicable state or local law (including a regulation) that permits such higher maximum age in compliance with licensure requirements for child-and youth-serving facilities.

For the **Transitional Living Program**, the age is defined as 16-21 years of age, or 22 years of age if previously in care under certain circumstances.

In addition, the Basic Center program serves:

Runaway Youth —The term ‘runaway’, used with respect to a youth, means an individual who is less than 18 years of age and who absents himself or herself from home or a place of legal residence without the permission of a parent or legal guardian.

AND

Youth at Risk of Separation from the Family — The term ‘youth at risk of separation from the family’ means an individual (A) who is less than 18 years of age; and (B) (i) who has a history of running away from the family of such individual; (ii) whose parent, guardian, or custodian is not willing to provide for the basic needs of such individual; or (iii) who is at risk of entering the child welfare system or juvenile justice system as a result of the lack of services available to the family to meet such needs.

Finally, the **Street Outreach Program** (which attempts to outreach and refer youth to the above-mentioned transitional living and runaway youth programs) has this definition of youth who are the target of outreach:

Street Youth —The term ‘street youth’ means an individual who (A) is (i) a runaway youth; or (ii) indefinitely or intermittently a homeless youth; and (B) spends a significant amount of time on the street or in other areas that increase the risk to such youth for sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, prostitution, or drug abuse.

Appendix B

Preventing and Ending Youth Homelessness

A Coordinated Community Response



In *Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness*, we set a national goal to prevent and end youth homelessness in 2020. To get there, it will take all of us—government, non-profits, business, and philanthropy—to make sure every community has the capacity to achieve the goal.

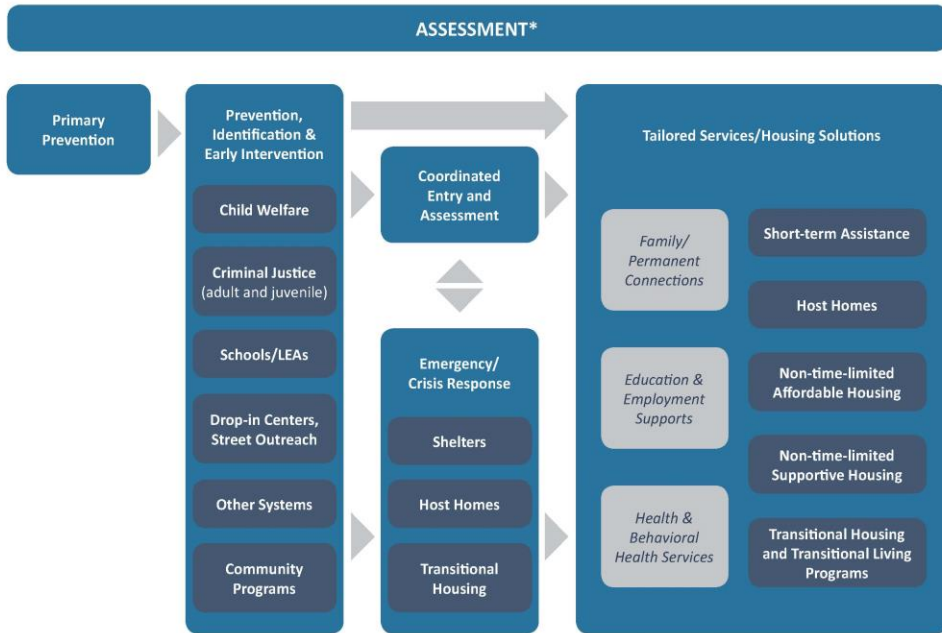
Our understanding of the scope and dynamics of youth homelessness is growing. While we continue to learn more every day, we must act now to build the comprehensive and coordinated response that young people need to end their homelessness forever.

This document provides a preliminary vision for such a response. It draws upon what we know works to end homelessness for other populations, along with strategies that support the unique needs of unaccompanied youth and young adults under 25.

We hope you'll use this document to advance discussions in your communities and build upon the work already underway. To receive additional tools and resources that will be developed to support the implementation of this response, [sign up for our newsletter](#).

Our Preliminary Vision for a Community Response

The Interagency Working Group on Ending Youth Homelessness has developed a shared vision for the community response that will be necessary to prevent and end youth homelessness, illustrated here and described in more detail below.



*Throughout the provision of services, assessment will be ongoing.

Interagency Working Group on Ending Youth Homelessness

Co-Chairs:
U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness

Department of Health and Human Services

Department of Housing and Urban Development

Members:
Department of Education
Department of Justice
Social Security Administration
Department of Labor

Our Progress

[The Federal Framework to End Youth Homelessness](#) calls on all of us to help youth achieve the outcomes most critical to their success: stable housing, permanent connections, education and employment, and well-being. At the federal level, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness and our member agencies have been focusing on two simultaneous strategies: improving data on youth homelessness, and building the capacity of communities to deliver effective services.

We've made some notable progress. On the data side, there has been improvement in how youth experiencing homelessness are identified as part of Point-in-Time counts, and the integration of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Management Information System (RHYMIS) and the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) is proceeding as planned. Meanwhile, federal, state, and local partners have helped to initiate and guide community planning efforts, and Council member agencies have supported pilot projects to expand evidence of what works. As these and other activities continue, we have moved into the next phase, focused on developing and testing innovations in services and programs.

Core Outcomes for Youth

- ▶ **Stable housing** includes a safe and reliable place to call home.
- ▶ **Permanent connections** include ongoing attachments to families, communities, schools, and other positive social networks.
- ▶ **Education/employment** includes high performance in and completion of educational and training activities, especially for younger youth, and starting and maintaining adequate and stable employment, particularly for older youth.
- ▶ **Social-emotional well-being** includes the development of key competencies, attitudes, and behaviors that equip a young person to succeed across multiple domains of daily life, including school, work, relationships, and community.

What We Know About Youth Homelessness

Despite our progress, we still don't have a confident estimate of the national scale and scope of youth homelessness. We don't have a system in place to determine rates of homelessness among the broader youth population, so current methodologies are based on counts of youth experiencing homelessness.

Here's what the counts tell us:

- ▶ Approximately 45,000 children and youth without a parent or guardian (unaccompanied) under age 25 were living on the streets, in shelter, or in transitional housing on a given night in 2014, according to the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Point-in-Time count. **The majority of youth captured in the HUD PIT count are over 18.**
- ▶ More than 90,000 youth without a parent or guardian (unaccompanied) enrolled in public school districts were identified as homeless at some point over the course of the 2013-2014 school year, according to Department of Education data. They include, among others, youth who are doubled-up or "couch surfing." **The majority of youth captured in the ED data are under 18.**

While we work to strengthen the nation's data capacity, we continue to use the information we do have to better understand the characteristics and experiences of youth under all federal definitions of homelessness. The research tells us that youth experience homelessness differently than adults in some important ways. To respond effectively, we must adapt strategies designed for adults to:

- ▶ **Pay attention to factors that contribute to youth homelessness specifically.** Those include family problems, economic circumstances, racial disparities, and mental health and substance use disorders, as well as involvement with public systems like criminal justice and child welfare. In one study, 19% of youth who were in foster care at 17 years old reported two years later that they had been homeless at some point during those two years.¹

- ▶ **Focus on the unique needs of youth experiencing homelessness who are particularly vulnerable.** That includes youth who have been trafficked, Native American youth, and youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ). For instance, family conflict and rejection around sexual orientation and gender identity may need to be addressed in the 20% to 40% of youth experiencing homelessness who identify as LGBTQ.² Other vulnerable groups include youth with special needs or disabilities and pregnant and parenting youth. Around 1 in 4 youth served through Family and Youth Services Bureau-funded transitional living programs are pregnant or parenting, according to FY 2014 RHYMIS data.
- ▶ **Understand how age and developmental issues impact how youth experience homelessness and their pathways in and out of homelessness.** Strategies should focus on reunifying youth, particularly those under age 18, with family or other natural supports when safe and appropriate. Around 70% of youth under age 18 who entered a Family and Youth Services Bureau-funded emergency shelter left the shelter to go to a parent or guardian in FY 2014. In addition to family-focused efforts, ending homelessness for youth requires a broader set of interventions, ranging from short- to longer-term housing, with varying levels of support and services, including education and employment. Those services may be especially useful for youth over the age of 18.

How Our Communities Must Respond

Unlike other systems youth interact with, like child welfare or juvenile justice, efforts to serve youth experiencing homelessness are not provided through a single, coordinated system of supports funded by a state or federal agency. Moreover, the varied and unique needs of youth experiencing homelessness require a range of interventions and solutions that no single funding stream can provide. Collaboration across federal, state, and local partners is needed to provide this full range of solutions.

To meet all the physical, developmental, and social needs of youth experiencing homelessness, we must design and implement a unified, collaborative response in every community (see Figure on Page 1). Building on local, state, and federal efforts to support healthy families, this response must:

- ▶ **Prevent youth** from becoming homeless by identifying and working with families who are at risk of fracturing.
- ▶ Effectively **identify and engage** youth at risk for, or actually experiencing, homelessness and connect them with trauma-informed, culturally appropriate, and developmentally and age-appropriate interventions.
- ▶ **Intervene early** when youth do become homeless and work toward family reunification, when safe and appropriate.
- ▶ Develop **coordinated entry systems** to identify youth for appropriate types of assistance and to prioritize resources for the most vulnerable youth.
- ▶ Ensure access to **safe shelter and emergency services** when needed.
- ▶ Ensure that assessments respond to the unique needs and circumstances of youth and emphasize **strong connections to and supported exits from mainstream systems** when needed.
- ▶ Create **individualized services** and housing options tailored to the needs of each youth, and include measurable outcomes across key indicators of performance, including education and employment.

¹Administration for Children and Families (2014). *National Youth in Transition Database Data Brief # 4*. Washington, DC. Retrieved from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/nytd-data-brief-4>

²Ray (2006). An epidemic of homelessness. National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute. National Coalition for the Homeless. Retrieved from <http://www.thetaskforce.org/lgbt-youth-an-epidemic-of-homelessness/>.

Federal Commitment to Action

To support communities in implementing this coordinated response, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness and our member agencies have committed to:

1. Work at the federal, state, and local levels to build the foundation for a coordinated and comprehensive community response. We will:

- Develop a shared understanding of what it means to end youth homelessness and establish the metrics to measure national progress.
- Project the full range of resources needed to end youth homelessness, identify resource gaps, and recommend new investments in order to help set budget and other policy priorities.
- Improve the collection, sharing, and use of data on youth experiencing homelessness to identify needs and plan for resource allocations.
- Build an evidence base for successful strategies to prevent and end youth homelessness that can be used to further refine the proposed community response.

2. Build the capacity of local communities to implement the components of a coordinated and comprehensive community response.

Prevention, Identification, and Early Intervention: We will advance strategies to support the capacity of communities to:

- Develop guidance and messaging targeted toward at-risk children, youth, and families to strengthen communities, increase protective factors, and reduce the prevalence of youth homelessness.
- Promote the use of evidence-based and promising practices in family interventions that can address and reduce family conflict and ensure youth remain connected to or reunify with their families, when safe and appropriate.
- Leverage drop-in centers, street outreach programs, and public systems, including child welfare, criminal justice, schools, community programs, and other youth-serving systems to quickly identify and engage at-risk children and intervene early to reduce the duration and impact of homelessness.

Coordinated Entry and Assessment: We will advance strategies to support the capacity of communities to implement screening and assessment tools at the client and community levels to ensure youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness have access to the most appropriate options to address their needs through specialized programs for homelessness assistance as well as mainstream programs.

Emergency and Crisis Response: We will advance strategies to strengthen community capacity to provide low-barrier emergency and crisis services that mitigate risk factors and strengthen protective factors for youth and work to connect youth to services and/or housing through the use of short- and long-term shelters, transitional housing, and host homes.

Tailored Services and Housing Solutions: We will advance strategies to support innovation and experimentation at the local level to increase the scale, performance, and range of trauma-informed, culturally and linguistically appropriate, and developmentally and age-appropriate services and housing options to positively impact the core outcomes.

Our Challenges Are Great, Our Determination is Greater

We recognize that achieving the goal of ending youth homelessness in 2020 is challenging. In order to reach the goal, the federal government, states, and communities must use all available resources effectively and efficiently, and new investments will be needed.

Through the implementation of *Opening Doors*, we as a nation have learned a lot about what works to end homelessness. The progress we've made demonstrates that ending homelessness for everyone is possible. When communities come together and mobilize around a goal, dramatic change can happen.

Join us – and the providers around the country who have been working for years to improve young people's lives – in being part of that change.