

# Homeless Assistance: Ten-Year Plans to End Homelessness

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**See also:** *McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Programs, Continuum of Care Planning, Federal Surplus Property to Address Homelessness, Interagency Council on Homelessness*

The homeless population was once assumed to be largely urban, suffering from mental illness, and unable to live independently. The solution was to manage homelessness through the creation of emergency shelters, transitional housing, and other homeless services. These assumptions have disappeared. Over the last few decades, numerous studies have dispelled the myths that have surrounded homelessness. Now, communities of all sizes across the country are completing plans to end homelessness, declaring that it is no longer suitable for any community to yield to what we have come to learn is a surmountable problem. Since 2003, hundreds of communities have completed and begun implementing ten-year plans to end homelessness.

## HISTORY

In 2000, the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) released *A Plan, Not a Dream: How to End Homelessness in Ten Years*. Drawing upon years of research and promising approaches from around the country, the blueprint provided the key strategies needed to address the issue of homelessness in ten years. In 2001, HUD, together with the Administration of President George W. Bush, created an initiative to end chronic homelessness. As part of the initiative, the reactivated U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) challenged cities to create plans to end chronic homelessness.

In 2010, USICH released *Opening Doors: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness*. *Opening Doors* is the first-ever comprehensive federal commitment to end homelessness. The plan is especially notable because when the federal government challenged communities to create plans to end homelessness in 2003, there was little in the way of federal assistance for these plans. *Opening Doors* aims to support local plan implementation and promote effective strategies across the country with a concrete timeframe and clear, measurable national goals.

The four national goals set in *Opening Doors* are: ending chronic homelessness in five years; ending veteran homelessness in five years; ending family, youth, and child homelessness in ten years; and, setting the nation on a course to end all homelessness in ten years. The plan is built around five themes:

- Increase leadership, collaboration, and civic engagement;
- Increase access to stable and affordable housing;
- Increase economic security;
- Improve health and stability; and,
- Retool the homeless crisis response system.

## COMPONENTS OF LOCAL PLANS

Local plans to end homelessness have been completed in all regions of the country in all types of communities, rural, urban, and suburban. While some of the elements in the plans differ, common plan components include a summary of baseline data, strategies for ending homelessness among people currently experiencing homelessness, prevention efforts to reach people at risk of homelessness, increasing the supply of affordable housing, and community outreach plans.

NAEH published a summary of 234 plans to end homelessness in 2009. It found that most plans start from the same place: understanding the local homeless population. More than 80% of communities with completed ten-year plans collected baseline data on homelessness prior to engaging in planning efforts. These data allow communities to better understand which community members become homeless, how they become homeless, and which programs will work best to solve each community's specific problems.

The strategies outlined in the plans vary widely depending on the unique needs of the communities. One common component is the need for permanent housing. Approximately 89% of the plans include permanent housing as a strategy to end homelessness, and 77% identify the need for permanent supportive housing in particular. In total, the plans call for the creation of more than 375,000 units of affordable, permanent supportive housing for homeless people. Efforts to shorten the length of time people spend homeless through Housing First or rapid re-housing initiatives are included in 94% of the plans.

The initial challenge was to create plans to end chronic or long-term homelessness; of the completed plans to end homelessness, 70% identify strategies to end chronic homelessness (including those that target it specifically). However, 74% of communities extended their plans to include all homelessness. Many plans outline additional strategies to address the unique needs of various subpopulations such as veterans, youth, families, victims of domestic violence, and seniors. For example, 50% lay out strategies to end homelessness among youth, 49% provide strategies to end family homelessness, and 32% address the housing needs of former prisoners re-entering the community.

Prevention is an integral part of ending homelessness in every community. By identifying and serving those most at risk of becoming homeless, communities can cap the endless stream of people entering into homelessness. Emergency prevention strategies, such as eviction prevention through rent, utility, or mortgage assistance, case management, and landlord intervention are included in 83% of plans. Systems-level prevention, such as discharge planning from correctional facilities, mental health facilities, youth aging out of foster care, and residential treatment programs, are included in 83% of plans.

Outreach plays an important role in ending homelessness by engaging persons on the street and helping them both get into housing and access needed services. Over 62% of plans focus on increasing outreach efforts to people living on the streets and provide them with basic services such as food, medical care, and housing. Many already have outreach activities in place, such as assertive community treatment (ACT) teams and safe havens. The provision of, or links to, mainstream services are included in 78% of plans. Increasing income through job training services, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) outreach, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) outreach, or Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) outreach was included in over three-quarters of the plans.

## **TIPS FOR LOCAL SUCCESS**

To be successful, the planning process should be participatory and involve multiple sectors of the community. Receiving input from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors allows for greater community buy-in and a smoother transition from planning to implementation. The completed plans incorporate a wide range of stakeholders in the process, from formerly homeless persons to the local chamber of commerce. Approximately 40% involved public sector stakeholders, 36% involved the nonprofit community, and 25% of plans had private sector representation.

It has been over a decade since NAEH released *A Plan, Not a Dream* and USICH challenged communities to end chronic homelessness. In that time the country has dramatically improved the way communities respond to homelessness. As a result, the number of people experiencing homelessness across the country has declined, particularly the number of veterans and people experiencing chronic homelessness. However, there is much more to be done.

Consistently measuring progress, defining parties responsible for each action step, identifying funding sources, and creating timelines can help communities stay on track. Further, plans should be living documents that can be modified and updated in response to a community's changing needs.

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

National Alliance to End Homelessness, 202-838-1526, [www.endhomelessness.org](http://www.endhomelessness.org)