

HOMELESS ASSISTANCE: MCKINNEY - VENTO HOMELESS ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

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Administering Agency: HUD's Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs within the Office of Community Planning and Development (CPD)

Year Started: 1987

Number of Persons/Households Served: Total year-round capacity to provide beds for approximately 400,000 people experiencing homelessness, plus over 500,000 formerly homeless people now in permanent housing

Population Targeted: People experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Funding: Approximately \$4.4 billion in fiscal year (FY) 2026

See Also: For additional information, refer to the *Continuum of Care Planning* and *Federal Surplus Property to Address Homelessness* sections of this guide.

The McKinney-Vento homeless assistance programs are a set of federal programs created by the "McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act." This article refers to two programs administered by HUD: Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) and the Continuum of Care (CoC) Program. In 2009, Congress passed the "Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act," which significantly improves HUD's McKinney-Vento homeless assistance programs.

History and Purpose

Congress enacted the "Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act" in 1987 in response to the homelessness crisis that emerged in the 1980s. In 2000, the act was renamed as the "McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act." For many years the programs did not undergo

any comprehensive overhaul despite improved understanding of homelessness, its causes, and its solutions. In May 2009, Congress passed the "HEARTH Act," which was intended to consolidate separate homelessness programs at HUD and make homeless assistance more performance based. Since then, HUD has issued a series of regulations.

Program Summary

HUD's McKinney-Vento programs provide outreach, shelter, transitional housing, supportive services, short- and medium-term rent subsidies, and permanent housing for people experiencing homelessness and in some cases for people at risk of homelessness. Funding is distributed by formula to jurisdictions for the ESG Program and competitively for the Continuum of Care (CoC) Program.

ESG PROGRAM

The Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) Program is a formula grant to states and to larger cities and counties to fund rapid re-housing, homelessness prevention programs, and emergency shelters for people experiencing homelessness. People are eligible for prevention or re-housing assistance if they are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Being at risk of homelessness means an individual or family has a total income below 30% of area median income and they are losing their housing, doubled up, living in motels, or living in other precarious housing situations. In recent years, Congress has specified the total amount for ESG in the appropriations act.

COC PROGRAM

A unique feature of HUD's CoC program is the application process. Applicants in a community, including local governments, nonprofit providers, advocates, people experiencing homelessness, and

other stakeholders organize into a CoC and submit a joint application to HUD for their project requests. The entire application is scored, and specific projects are funded in order of priority. The “HEARTH Act” combines the three legacy programs into a single CoC program that includes the same eligible activities as the previous programs.

The entity that submits the application for funding is known as the Collaborative Applicant.

Changes made by the “HEARTH Act” and implementing regulations to the competitive CoC program include the following:

- The selection criteria include performance measures for reducing the duration of homelessness, reducing the number of people who become homeless, and reducing the number of people who re-experience homelessness after they exit the program.
- Incentives include creating new rapid re-housing projects for families and individuals experiencing homelessness and new permanent supportive housing for those experiencing chronic homelessness.
- The match is simplified to 25% for all activities. Leasing projects will continue to have no match requirement.
- A new rural program created to provide rural areas with more flexibility and increase funding to rural areas (this program has not yet been funded by appropriations).
- More funding is available for administrative costs. For CoC projects, up to 10% is allowed and 3% is allowed for the Collaborative Applicant.

In addition to HUD’s homeless assistance grants, several other programs are authorized by the “McKinney-Vento Act”:

- The Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program, administered by the U.S. Department of Education, provides grants to schools to aid in the identification of children experiencing homelessness and provide services to help them succeed in school. EHCY also requires schools to make accommodations to improve the stability of homeless children’s education.
- Title V Surplus Properties, which require federal surplus property, are offered to nonprofit organizations

for the purpose of assisting people experiencing homelessness.

- The Interagency Council on Homelessness, an independent agency within the federal executive branch, coordinates the federal response to homelessness and is charged with creating a federal plan to end homelessness.

Funding

The McKinney-Vento homeless assistance programs received \$1.901 billion for both FY11 and FY12, \$1.933 billion (after sequestration) for FY13, \$2.105 billion for FY14, \$2.135 billion for FY15, \$2.25 billion for FY 16, \$2.383 billion for FY17, \$2.513 billion for FY18, \$2.636 billion for FY19, \$2.777 billion for FY 20, \$3.0 billion for FY21, \$3.213 billion for FY22, \$3.633 billion for FY23, \$4.051 billion for FY24 and for FY25, and \$4.417 billion for FY26.

Forecast for 2026

HUD has announced substantial changes in the Continuum of Care program, beginning FY25, abandoning much of the focus on permanent housing and cost-effectiveness. These changes have been challenged in litigation and in bipartisan measures in Congress and currently appear unlikely to be implemented in the FY25 funding that will be distributed to communities over the course of 2026. There may be additional attempts to make these changes related to FY26 funding.

Tips for Local Success

The best way to maximize the impact of McKinney-Vento funding in a community is to participate in the local CoC process and to work to use resources for the most effective programs.

What to Say to Legislators

Advocates should ask their members of Congress to support increases in HUD’s homeless assistance programs to allow more progress toward reducing the number of people experiencing homelessness.

Specifically, advocates should communicate the following points:

- HUD’s McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants are successful and have helped drive reductions in homelessness across the country. These grants support critical housing and service supports to thousands of the most vulnerable, hard-working Americans. Without these grants and the support of Congress to date, much of our country’s progress on homelessness would not have been possible.
- Continued federal funding is critical to community efforts to end homelessness, and the FY26 funding amount is simply not enough to keep up with the rising need around the country driven by increasing rents and legislation that has undermined the Medicaid program, the largest source of federal funding for mental health and substance use treatment.
- Congress should help their communities’ efforts to end homelessness by supporting an increase in funding for FY27 to reach at least \$5 billion for HUD’s McKinney-Vento programs.

For More Information

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Corporation for Supportive Housing, 212-986-2966,
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