

February X, 2020

To President Trump and Secretary Carson:

We, the undersigned organizations dedicated to ending homelessness and housing poverty, write to express our serious concerns with the Trump administration's rejection of evidence-based approaches to ending homelessness. These evidence-based approaches include "Housing First" and ending the criminalization of homelessness.

Homelessness is one of our country's most urgent, tragic and solvable crises. We can't end homelessness, however, by ignoring the evidence about what works. Both Housing First and anti-criminalization efforts are supported by [decades of learning and research](#), which has led to broad, bipartisan agreement that the solution to homelessness starts with an affordable home, not with a ticket or jail. We urge the Trump administration to continue to build on the successes of past Republican and Democratic administrations by ensuring that any federal action on homelessness continue in this direction. We also urge the administration to help address the underlying cause of homelessness - the severe shortage of homes affordable and available to America's lowest income seniors, people of color, women, people with disabilities, families with children and other individuals – by expanding investments in proven solutions like housing vouchers, the national Housing Trust Fund, and public housing.

America's rental housing crisis – and the chronic underfunding of housing assistance and other investments – is the [primary cause of homelessness](#) in our nation. In fact, the recent growth in homelessness, particularly on the west coast, is due not to the failure of Housing First, but rather because the influx of newly homeless individuals outpaces those who are able to be rehoused.

The National Low Income Housing Coalition's [research](#) shows there are fewer than four homes for every 10 of these extremely low-income households; as a result, 71 percent of these households pay at least half of their income on rent, putting them at increased risk of evictions, and in worst cases, homelessness. Despite the clear need for affordable housing, however, only one in four eligible households receives any help because of chronic underfunding. Every community – urban, rural and suburban – is impacted. Other factors that contribute to homelessness include chronic health conditions, domestic violence, low wages, and systemic discrimination.

Housing First is a proven strategy – recognized as a best practice by [HUD](#), [U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness](#), [Department of Veterans Affairs](#), and [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#) – that recognizes that the solution to homelessness starts with an affordable and accessible home. Once stably housed, individuals previously experiencing homelessness can better address their other pressing needs. This approach is guided by the belief that people must have their basic needs met – like food and a place to live; this approach also better allows people to address other challenges, including securing employment or attending to health care needs.

There is a [large and growing evidence base](#) demonstrating that Housing First rapidly ends homelessness and positively impacts quality of life and community functioning. Individuals served through the Housing First model access housing faster and are more likely to remain stably housed, with the retention rate for permanent supportive housing up to 98 percent. Studies have shown that rapid re-housing helps people exit homelessness quickly—in one study, an average of two months—and remain housed. A variety of studies have shown that

between 75 percent and 91 percent of households remain housed a year after being rapidly re-housed.

Housing serves as a platform, especially for individuals who struggle with disabilities, [chronic health conditions or addictions](#). Individuals who participate in supportive services to address these and other housing barriers are more likely to participate in job training programs, attend school, discontinue substance use, have fewer instances of domestic violence, and spend fewer days hospitalized than those not participating. Without access to housing, it is far more difficult for supportive services to be successful.

Moreover, the Housing First model can be more cost-effective. When used as part of supportive housing programs, Housing First interventions have [reduced costs](#) for emergency services, including hospitals, jails, and emergency shelter for high-cost, frequent users of these systems. One study found an average cost savings on emergency services of \$31,545 per person housed in a Housing First program over the course of two years. We also know that housing people using rental assistance costs less than emergency shelters or transitional housing. One study showed that housing assistance could cost up to \$23,000 less per consumer per year than a shelter program.

An increased reliance on law enforcement to address homelessness runs counter to the broad bipartisan consensus on the need to reduce over-incarceration. Criminally punishing people experiencing homelessness for their survival activities when there is no adequate alternative [worsens homelessness](#). For individuals, fines, fees, and arrest records only put more barriers to getting and maintaining housing. For communities, criminalization costs more, and misdirects resources from constructive solutions.

It is critical that any federal effort to address homelessness is rooted in evidence and data. For that reason, we urge you to ensure that Housing First and efforts to reduce the criminalization of homelessness remain the foundation for any federal approach to ending homelessness.

Sincerely,

Community Solutions
Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities Housing Task Force
Council of Large Public Housing Agencies
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Alliance to End Homelessness
National Health Care for the Homeless Council
National Housing Law Project
National Low Income Housing Coalition
True Colors United