

Explainer



Questions and Answers on Homelessness Policy and Research

What is a Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness?

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The problem of homelessness, many say, is unsolvable. Communities across the country have struggled with getting homeless people off the street by building shelters, transitional housing, and soup kitchens. Although these strategies help address the immediate needs of our nation's homeless people by providing food and temporary shelter, they have not been successful in decreasing homelessness, leaving communities frustrated and hopeless.

History of the Ten Year Plan

In 2000, the National Alliance to End Homelessness released *A Plan, Not a Dream: How to End Homelessness in Ten Years*. Drawing on research and innovative programs from around the country, the plan outlined key strategies in addressing the issue locally, which cumulatively can address the issue nationally. The plan outlined four key elements of a plan to end homelessness¹:

- **Plan for outcomes.** Every jurisdiction should collect data that allows it to identify the most effective strategy for each sub-group of the homeless population and jurisdictions should bring those responsible for mainstream as well as homeless targeted resources to the planning table.
- **Close the front door.** Communities should prevent homelessness by making mainstream poverty programs more accountable for outcomes of their clients.
- **Open the back door.** Communities should develop, and subsidize when needed, an adequate supply of affordable housing.
- **Build the infrastructure.** Ending homelessness can be a first step in addressing the systemic problems that lead to crisis poverty, including a shortage of affordable housing, incomes that do not pay for basic needs, and a lack of appropriate services for those that need them.

¹ National Alliance to End Homelessness. 2000. *A Plan, Not a Dream: How to End Homelessness in Ten Years*. Washington, DC: National Alliance to End Homelessness.

Since the release of this blueprint, the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Bush Administration endorsed the idea of planning to end chronic homelessness in ten years, the US Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) challenged 100 cities to create plans to end homelessness. The momentum built across the country—to date, over 300 communities have undertaken efforts to end homelessness and over 180 communities have completed plans to end homelessness. These plans echo key strategies outlined in the Alliance's plan and represent a critical, collective effort to end homelessness nationwide. The Homelessness Research Institute at the National Alliance to End Homelessness recently completed a study evaluating the completed plans.²

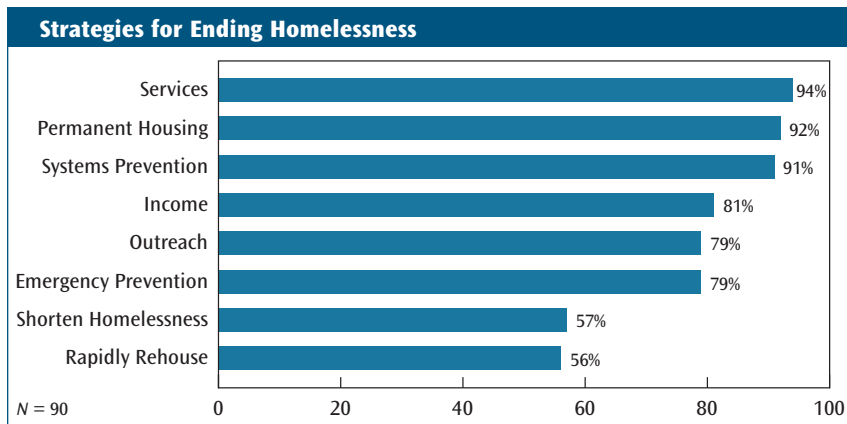
Plan Types

A majority (66 percent) of the community plans to end homelessness target all homeless people and 34 percent focus on chronically homeless people. Many plans lay out strategies for specific subgroups of homeless people, including families, youth, veterans, and the elderly. Forty-one percent of plans outline strategies to end family homelessness, 49 percent outline efforts to end youth homelessness, and 31 percent of plans address the housing needs of former prisoners in order to prevent them from becoming homeless. Planning efforts to end homelessness have taken root across the country—geographically distributed, but concentrated in population centers. A wide range of stakeholders were involved in the community planning process, with the strongest representation from the non-profit sector and the weakest representation from the private sector. Although some plans (28 percent) involve currently or formerly homeless people, their participation in the development of plans is lower than that of other stakeholders.

Primary Strategies Outlined in the Plans

Communities outlined a wide range of strategies in the plans:

² Cunningham et al. 2006. *A New Vision: What is in Community Plans to End Homelessness?*. Washington, DC: National Alliance to End Homelessness.



- **Creating Data Systems.** Almost all of the plans (91 percent) outline strategies to create Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS).
- **Homelessness Prevention.** An overwhelming majority of the plans (79 percent) address emergency prevention (e.g., one-time rental or utility assistance, help negotiating an eviction with a landlord, etc.), and 91 percent of the plans outline systems prevention activities, such as discharge planning from correctional facilities, foster care systems, or mental health facilities.
- **Outreach.** Outreach efforts to engage people living on the streets are outlined in 79 percent of the plans.
- **Shortening Time of Homelessness.** Shortening the time that people spend homeless by providing permanent housing to homeless people is included in 67 percent of the plans; 57 percent call for rapid re-housing. In total, the plans call for creating approximately 196,000 units (or subsidies), of which 80,000 units are permanent supportive housing.
- **Links to Services.** Once individuals or families are in housing, 81 percent of the plans outline strategies to link them with mainstream services so they can earn enough money to pay rent and avoid homelessness.

Implementation and Funding Sources

The plans are a step in the right direction—a forward movement in the effort to end homelessness—but in

order for a community to see real declines in the number of homeless people, it must implement its plan. The Alliance developed an implementation strength score based on whether a plan identified performance measures, set a timeline and identified specific funding sources and bodies responsible for the implementation of each strategy. Most of the strength scores were low to medium with a majority falling between 0 and 2 (the highest

being 4). The scores show that although plans are outlining the right strategies, they are not always setting clear numeric indicators, establishing timelines, implementing bodies, and identifying funding sources for each strategy.

Implications for Future Plans

There is much more to be done, but despite these challenges, for the first time in two decades, communities have a plan and homelessness is a problem with a clear solution.

The problem of what to do about homelessness is no longer viewed as an unanswerable question. Although community plans to end homelessness represent a collective effort, community plans need a stronger focus on families, shortening homelessness, and rapid re-housing strategies, and implementation.

Additionally, while efforts to end homelessness require participation from local communities, the federal government has a bigger role to take on in the form of increasing access to affordable housing and coordinating mainstream services, such as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and mental health services. The federal government should also increase funding to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance programs, Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers, Community Development Block Grants, HOME, and Low-Income Housing Tax Credit.

The National Alliance to End Homelessness' **Explainer Series** answers common and frequent questions about homelessness policy and research. This series draws on the best expertise, data, and research available. For more information about homelessness, please visit www.endhomelessness.org.