Enlisting Mainstream Resources and Programs to End Homelessness

Federal programs targeted to homelessness are vital, but not sufficient, to achieve the goal of ending homelessness for all Americans. As described in *Opening Doors,* we must also enlist the larger set of federal, state, and local programs that serve low-income Americans.

These "mainstream" resources, like TANF, Medicaid, and Housing Choice vouchers, provide housing, health care, income supports, and other forms of assistance. Many are significantly larger in scale than targeted homelessness programs and offer forms of assistance that targeted programs cannot. Some can help finance essential housing and services interventions, like supportive housing and rapid re-housing, that serve as the backbone of efforts to prevent and end homelessness.

Since state and local leaders often determine whether and to what extent these programs and resources support efforts to end homelessness, it is critical for the homelessness service system to build partnerships with the agencies that administer them. Your conversations should reinforce the importance of housing stability in achieving their broader mandates of economic success, health, or educational achievement. To help you with those conversations, federal agencies have clarified some of the ways that mainstream programs can serve and/or prioritize people experiencing homelessness, help finance and support housing and services interventions, or provide other assistance.

This document details some of the key federal mainstream programs and systems, and the ways that they can support efforts to prevent and end homelessness, along with guidance and tools that can assist you in enlisting these programs. This list is not exhaustive, and it will be updated as more guidance and resources are released.

Mainstream Housing

Housing Choice Vouchers and Public Housing

Housing Choice vouchers and public housing administered by public housing agencies (PHAs) are two of the largest sources of federal housing assistance for low-income households, and PHAs can play many different roles within community efforts to end homelessness. For example, they can provide affordable housing to people exiting homelessness, including supportive housing that is linked with dedicated case management and supportive services. You should work with your PHAs to adopt policies and practices that can prioritize people experiencing homelessness for housing assistance, decrease barriers to entry, link housing assistance to services to expand supportive housing, and other strategies.

Guidance:

- [Guidance on housing individuals and families experiencing homelessness through the Public Housing and Housing Choice Voucher Programs](#) (HUD, 2013)
- [CoC and PHA Collaboration: Strategies for CoCs to Start the Partnership Conversation](#) (HUD, 2015)
- [Guidance for Public Housing Agencies (PHAs) and Owners of Federally-Assisted Housing on Excluding the Use of Arrest Records in Housing Decisions](#) (HUD, 2015)
- [PHA Guidebook to Ending Homelessness](#) (USICH, 2013)

Multifamily Housing

There is also a large inventory of affordable housing supported through HUD's Multifamily Housing programs. The Section 8 PBRA program, for instance, provides rental assistance in 1.5 million apartments in privately owned developments. Multifamily housing developments can be an important resource for providing the housing options needed to end homelessness. You should work with multifamily housing owners in your community to adopt preferences to prioritize admission to families or individuals experiencing homelessness, partner with social services providers to ensure that families or individuals are connected with supports, and other strategies.

Guidance:

- [Implementation and Approval of Owner-Adopted Admissions Preferences for Individuals/Families](#) (HUD, 2013)
- [Opening Doors Through Multifamily Housing: Toolkit for Implementing a Homeless Preference](#) (HUD, 2015)

HOME Investment Partnerships Program

HUD's HOME program provides formula grants to states and localities that communities can use — often in partnership with local nonprofit groups — to fund a wide range of activities, including building, buying, or rehabilitating affordable housing, or providing direct rental assistance to low-income people. You should be partnering with local developers to create a pipeline of affordable and supportive housing units.

Guidance:

- [HOME and CDBG: Working Together to Create Affordable Housing - Training Manual and Slides](#) (HUD, 2012)
- [Supportive Housing Opportunities Planner](#) (USICH, 2016)

Health Care

Medicaid

Medicaid is one of the most important means of providing health insurance coverage for low-income populations, including people experiencing homelessness. Through the Affordable Care Act, states can now extend Medicaid eligibility and coverage to low-income childless adults, including those experiencing homelessness. Moreover, youth transitioning from foster care and unaccompanied youth are now eligible to receive Medicaid until the age of 26. In addition to covering required services like primary care, medical services, and behavioral health treatment under their Medicaid plans, states can also choose to cover and reimburse for the costs of services that support housing stability, such as case management and services coordination. You should be aware of and get

involved in community efforts to partner with your State Medicaid Office to improve care coordination for beneficiaries with complex needs and high costs, including individuals experiencing chronic homelessness and youth that are transitioning from foster care.

>   **Guidance:**
>   - [Coverage of Housing-Related Activities for Individuals with Disabilities](#) (CMS, 2015)
>   - [Primer on Using Medicaid for People Experiencing Chronic Homelessness and Tenants in Permanent Supportive Housing](#) (HHS, 2014)
>   - [Medicaid and Permanent Supportive Housing for Chronically Homeless Individuals: Emerging Practices from the Field](#) (HHS, 2014)
>   - [Medicaid and Permanent Supportive Housing: A Quick Guide for Health Centers](#) (USICH/NHCHC, 2015)
>   - [A Quick Guide to Improving Medicaid Coverage for Supportive Housing Services](#) (USICH/CSH, 2015)
>   - [Health Coverage for Homeless and At-Risk Youth](#) (HHS, 2016)

Income Supports

Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Benefits

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) are important benefits for many people with disabilities experiencing homelessness, providing income, access to health care coverage through Medicaid and Medicare, and help with workforce reconnection through work incentives and services. Crisis response systems should work with local SSA field offices to ensure that best practices are being used when processing claims of people experiencing homelessness so that they are able to quickly enroll in SSA programs that can provide income for housing.

>   **Guidance:**
>   - [Key Strategies for Connecting People Experiencing Homelessness to SSI/SSDI](#) (SSA et al., 2015)

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

Many families experiencing homelessness are also recipients of TANF and benefit from the supports that TANF provides to help low-income families transition to employment. Work with your TANF agencies to explore ways to specifically support the needs of families experiencing homelessness, such as providing short-term housing assistance or adjusting benefit levels to account for variation in housing costs.

>   **Guidance:**
>   - [Use of TANF Funds to Serve Homeless Families and Families at Risk of Experiencing Homelessness](#) (ACF, 2013)

Education/Employment

Head Start

Families experiencing homelessness are most often headed by a single woman in her late 20s, with approximately two children, one or both younger than six years old. The effects of housing instability and homelessness on those young children can last a lifetime. Recognizing their greater risk for developmental delays and chronic health

problems, children experiencing homelessness were made categorically eligible for Head Start in its 2007 reauthorization. Your community should work with local Head Start programs to effectively identify and prioritize access to services for families with children experiencing homelessness.

Guidance:
- [Expanding Early Care and Education for Homeless Children](#) (ACF)
- [Building Partnerships to Address Family Homelessness](#) (ACF)

Public Schools

Research has demonstrated that students experiencing homelessness have higher rates of absenteeism, are more likely to change schools, repeat grades, and require special education services, all of which may contribute to poor academic performance. Schools play a critical role within local systems for identifying and assisting families, children, and youth experiencing homelessness, as part of their broad mandate to meet the academic and social-emotional needs of all students and to ensure their college and career readiness. Your crisis response system should work closely with state and local education agencies and McKinney-Vento school liaisons to understand all of your community-level data on homelessness in order to tailor housing and services to meet the needs of students and their families. You should also work together to understand the new provisions to strengthen education programs for students experiencing homelessness within the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015.

Guidance:
- [Guidelines for States Related to Requirements Under the McKinney-Vento Act, as Amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)](#) (ED, 2016)
- [Housing and Education Collaborations to Serve Homeless Children, Youth, and Families](#) (ED, 2013)
- [Housing and Education Cross-Systems Collaboration](#) (HUD, 2016)
- [Data-Sharing Toolkit for Communities](#) (ED, 2016)

Workforce Systems

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 — the first legislative reform of the public workforce system since 1998 — provides new opportunities to help individuals experiencing homelessness access employment, education, training, and support services. Your community should work with state and local WIOA planning committees to help eliminate programmatic barriers, identify best practices, and increase coordination of employment strategies with housing and other interventions.

Guidance:
- [Partnerships for Opening Doors Final Report](#) (USICH, 2015)
- [Practice Guides for Employment and Training](#) (USICH, 2015)
- [WIOA Fact Sheet: The Big Picture](#) (DOL, 2016)
- [CoC Collaboration with Workforce Boards Under WIOA](#) (HUD, 2016)
- [State Planning Resources](#) (DOL)

Human Services

Child Welfare

Existing research highlights the prevalence of homelessness among families and children involved with the child welfare system and supports efforts to strengthen service coordination between the systems that families interact with. Through the Family Unification Program, as well as grant-funded demonstration projects, public child welfare agencies and public housing agencies are collaborating to build the evidence base for supporting families with high service needs, including a lack of housing, to prevent the need for foster care or to assist with reunification. They are also developing strategies to provide more housing and supportive services to young people aging out of the system. You should engage your local child welfare agency on ways these emerging efforts fit into your coordinated community response to homelessness and opportunities for increased partnership.

Guidance:
- [Information Memorandum: Serving Youth Who Run Away From Foster Care](#) (HHS, 2014)
- [Family Unification Program and Family Self Sufficiency Demonstration](#) (HUD, 2016)

Other Human Services

You should also engage with other human services programs and resources in your community, including Community Services Block Grants, Community Development Block Grants, and Social Services Block Grants, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), to explore how they can support your efforts to end homelessness. You might also want to review [Federal Resources that Can Fund Rapid Re-housing](#).

Working Together to End Homelessness

People need a stable home to improve their health, education, and economic self-sufficiency. That's why addressing homelessness is integral to the broader missions and mandates of programs and systems serving all low-income Americans. By bringing state and local agencies administering mainstream programs and resources into our comprehensive systems for preventing and ending homelessness, we can and will end homelessness in this country.