



Interagency Council on the Homeless

October 1995

INTERIM REPORT

IMPLEMENTATION OF PRIORITY: HOME! THE FEDERAL PLAN TO BREAK THE CYCLE OF HOMELESSNESS

BACKGROUND

The Clinton Administration's policy on homelessness was articulated in a May 1994 report entitled *Priority: Home! The Federal Plan to Break the Cycle of Homelessness*. *Priority: Home!* was prepared by the Interagency Council on the Homeless, a working group of the White House Domestic Policy Council. The Interagency Council is comprised of the heads of 18 Federal agencies with programs and other resources that can be used to assist the homeless. There was unprecedented consultation with representatives of State and local governments, service providers, public interest and advocacy organizations, and other concerned individuals in writing the report.

Priority: Home! includes a thorough analysis of the nature and causes of homelessness and a comprehensive overview of Federal and local assistance and relief efforts. It acknowledges the importance of two broad and sometimes overlapping classes of problems--"crisis poverty" and chronic disabilities--which can interact and result in large-scale homelessness.

Priority: Home! proposes the development of a seamless system of housing and services called the "continuum of care," a concept which encompasses early assessment, transitional housing and services, and permanent housing to promote long-term independence and self-sufficiency, as well as short-term emergency needs.

Other key recommendations include doubling the HUD McKinney homeless assistance budget, improving the mental and physical health systems, increasing Federal housing subsidies for homeless families, fighting illegal discrimination, and exploring the use of tax incentives to assist low-income households with housing costs.

To prevent future homelessness, *Priority: Home!* cites the need to increase education, job training, and employment opportunities while increasing accessibility to social services and affordable housing for homeless people.

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

Priority: Home! recommends a number of initiatives and agency actions to assist those who are currently homeless or at risk of homelessness through long-term "structural" changes and cross-cutting agency actions. Shortly after the publication of *Priority: Home!*, the Interagency Council established work groups to recommend specific action steps for implementing the various recommendations. The work groups were formed around the following topical areas: (1) making prevention equal to remediation in policy planning; (2) integrating the services system for homeless persons with mainstream programs so that it no longer operates as a parallel system; (3) expanding and enhancing access to long-term, affordable housing; (4) improving the delivery of mental health and substance abuse services for those who need them; (5) increasing access to health care and nutrition services; (6) addressing special needs in rural areas; and (6) improving interagency coordination.

The work groups were directed to take necessary steps to implement the recommendations in *Priority: Home!* The adequacy of current Federal efforts in these areas was assessed, and additional steps that Federal agencies could take to improve, build upon, or otherwise enhance this strategy were identified.

SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE

While some of these actions require legislative changes, others can be acted upon administratively. There have been numerous changes in Federal policies and programs since the May 1994 publication of *Priority: Home!*, and the Administration and Congress are currently reviewing proposals for major revisions to key support programs such as welfare and Medicaid in connection with the F.Y. 1996 budget. However, there has been major progress in implementing the principles and recommendations in *Priority: Home!* Highlights include the following accomplishments:

Increased Funding

- o The Administration was successful in doubling the HUD budget for targeted homelessness assistance programs under the McKinney Act from \$571 million in FY 1993 to \$1.12 billion in FY 1995.
- o The Administration has strengthened the support network for homeless veterans by doubling the VA budget for homeless veterans from \$32 million in FY 1992 to \$76 million in FY 1995.
- o The Administration reaffirmed its commitment to improved outreach by approving \$6.4 million in FY 1995 for the

continuation of 35 SSI Outreach Demonstration grants. These grants either target homeless people or populations which include homeless people.

Program Improvements

- o DoD and HUD have worked with Congress to enact the Base Closure Community Redevelopment and Homeless Assistance Act of 1994 to improve the process for making surplus property on closed military bases available for homeless assistance while allowing local reuse committees to balance homeless assistance needs with other economic and community development needs.
- o HUD developed a legislative proposal to consolidate all five of its McKinney homeless assistance programs into a single Homeless Assistance Grant Program to enhance local flexibility in designing effective programs and filling local gaps in the continuum of care. The proposal initially submitted to Congress in 1994 is still pending.
- o HUD awarded \$900 million in homeless assistance funds to 818 projects in 228 communities in 1995 through a consolidated and streamlined competition designed to foster community planning. These projects are key components in specific communities' continuum of care strategies to break the cycle of homelessness.
- o HHS has proposed consolidating its mental health, substance abuse and primary health care programs to provide greater local flexibility, encourage more comprehensive approaches and improve program administration. Grant recipients will be encouraged to address the needs of homeless persons in their plans.
- o USDA is evaluating the results of \$2.8 million in small demonstration grants to 26 community organizations in 10 States to test innovative ways of providing outreach and enrollment assistance to homeless persons and other hard-to-reach groups in connection with the Food Stamp Program.
- o HHS has proposed consolidating three programs for runaway and homeless youth into a single, comprehensive program for this population.
- o Many of the Administration's proposals for the reauthorization of the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program were adopted in the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (IASA), including a new requirement that homeless children and youth must have access to the education and other services they need to meet the same challenging academic standards to which all students are

held. The IASA also makes all homeless children and youth eligible for Title I, the largest Federal compensatory education program serving disadvantaged children.

- o VA has awarded more than \$11.5 million to 63 projects in 25 States and the District of Columbia to expand the VA continuum of care to homeless veterans through partnerships with nonprofits and public entities under the Homeless Grant and Per Diem Program.
- o To ensure that the housing needs of persons with HIV/AIDS are met, HUD established a new Office of HIV/AIDS Housing. The office administers the Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS program, assists persons with AIDS in accessing other HUD programs for which they may be eligible and provides technical assistance to service providers. A working group consisting of housing providers and persons living with HIV/AIDS meets regularly to provide first-hand perspectives on ways to improve the programs and operations of HUD in this area.
- o The Social Security Administration (SSA) received the distinguished Hammer Award for developing the plan to redesign the disability claims process. SSA is committed to implementing a new disability determination process that will deliver significantly improved service to the public, including homeless people.

Improved Data

- o Under the auspices of the Interagency Council on the Homeless, 12 Federal agencies are co-sponsoring a National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients to provide current information on the providers of homeless assistance and the characteristics of homeless persons who use services. The Census Bureau is conducting the survey on behalf of the sponsoring agencies between October 1995 and February 1996.
- o The Census Bureau is testing methods to ensure that homeless persons are included in the national decennial census in 2000.
- o HUD and HHS are collaborating with the University of Pennsylvania and the Fannie Mae Foundation to develop and test a uniform community-level homeless data system to guide local policy and program planning.
- o HHS is restructuring its national Head Start information system to include information on homeless children.
- o HUD developed and is implementing a computer mapping

software program as a tool to assist localities in comprehensive, consolidated community planning and development. Computer mapping enables localities to use technology to outline areas of need by Census tract block groups down to the street level. It also pinpoints existing and planned projects, including continuums of care for homeless families and individuals.

- o VA conducted a one-day hospital census of its patients to determine homeless veterans' access to VA medical care services.

Provision of Technical Information and Other Assistance

- o USDA's Office of Rural Economic and Community Development sponsored three regional interactive workshops and a national conference to obtain information on the special nature of homelessness in rural areas and recommendations on ways to combat it. FEMA, VA, other Federal agencies and local homeless coalitions provided support by hosting special workshops at these meetings. USDA will publish a conference report by December 1, 1995 that includes regional highlights and strategies for addressing rural homelessness.
- o Through its CHALENG (Community Homelessness Assessment, Local Education and Networking Groups) for Veterans initiative, VA has undertaken a nationwide assessment of the needs of homeless veterans through a series of VA-hosted mini-summits on homelessness at each of its 171 medical centers. All of the relevant agencies in each medical center catchment area are brought together at these meetings to energize community-wide efforts to improve assistance to homeless veterans and develop new strategies to address identified needs.
- o HUD is offering in 40 cities a nationwide series of technical assistance workshops to help service providers develop an effective continuum of care in their community to help homeless persons gain self-sufficiency to the extent possible.
- o HHS sponsored a national conference, "A Call to Action", to mobilize the mental health and substance abuse communities to become involved in community homeless assistance planning efforts.
- o The Department of Labor (DOL) required grantees under the Job Training for the Homeless Program to "partner" with and provide technical assistance to at least one Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) administrative entity. This partnership would implement strategies likely to prove effective in increasing the number of homeless persons

served by JTPA and enhancing the services that this mainstream program offers them.

- o As part of a major technical assistance effort focused on "mainstreaming" services to homeless people through the JTPA system, DOL conducted workshops at national and regional conferences of key employment and training organizations, including the National Association of Private Industry Councils, the National Association of Workforce Development Professionals and the Western Job Training Partnership Institute. These workshops have included instructions for grantees in the use of Internet to improve their access to information and the provision of services to the homeless. As a result of these technical assistance efforts, more than half of the Job Training for the Homeless Demonstration Program grantees have secured State or local funding resources to provided employment and training and other supportive services to homeless individuals.
- o HHS has offered a series of workshops for Health Care for the Homeless providers and developed a self-assessment tool and other technical assistance materials to help providers to continue to be viable in a managed care environment, and thereby continue to be able to provide health care services to homeless persons.
- o VA has continued its support of Stand Downs and Homeless Veterans Programs to provide homeless veterans with clothing, food and linkages to programs and benefits. VA supported over 40 Stand Downs and Benefit Fairs in FY 1994, assisting over 16,000 homeless veterans. Since 1993 VA has distributed more than \$16 million worth of excess clothing and personal supplies to homeless veterans.
- o HHS sponsored a training institute to advance models of working with homeless persons with mental illnesses and substance abuse disorders. Participating communities, which had to send at least one representative from the mental health and substance abuse service systems, developed strategies for implementing programs in their communities.

Miscellaneous Actions

- o The White House formed an interagency task force on veterans, including VA, HUD and other key agencies, to improve the coordination of Federal programs for veterans. In response to the special needs of homeless veterans, a Task Force on Homeless Veterans, chaired by VA, has been established under the Interagency Council on the Homeless.
- o FEMA is working to encourage the 2,500 local boards and 11,000 agencies under the Emergency Food and Shelter

National Board Program to incorporate prevention activities into their local plans.

- o The Corporation for National and Community Service has created a partnership with HUD to match some of HUD's funds for the Supportive Housing program with human resources available through AmeriCorps and VISTA volunteers to assist local, community-based organizations. VA's AmeriCorps project, "Collaboration for Homeless Veterans" focuses on improving the lives of homeless veterans through a collaboration of community-based providers, VA medical centers and regional benefit offices.
- o The Department of Justice filed an amicus brief on behalf of overturning a Santa Ana, California, ordinance that clearly targeted the homeless community by prohibiting sleeping in public with a blanket.
- o Transfers of Federal surplus real and personal property have continued under the authority of Title V of the McKinney Act. For example, GSA has transferred 45 sites valued at more than \$84.4 million to homeless providers under this program.
- o HHS is leading an interagency group including representatives of HUD, VA, Justice and other agencies to develop an effective discharge planning process for persons with mental illnesses or substance abuse disorders.
- o Because it administers key benefits that assist homeless people, the Social Security Administration was made a full member of the Interagency Council on the Homeless.
- o SSA and VA continue to operate a joint pilot project that provides benefits and services to homeless mentally ill veterans at 11 sites. SSA staff coordinate outreach and benefits certification with VA staff to locate and assist homeless veterans in obtaining SSA benefits.



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