



August 17, 2018

SNAPS In Focus: Ending Homelessness in Rural America

The Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs (SNAPS) is coordinating with the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) and other federal partners to bring rural communities to the forefront as we launch our rural strategy – *All Routes Home: Ending Homelessness in Rural America*. Here is a summary of some of the housing challenges facing rural areas:

- **Over one-third** of rural rental units are at least 55 years old.
- **3.6%** of homes lack complete plumbing (double the national average).
- Substandard living conditions, such as poor insulation, often lead to **financial strain** from **high utility costs**.
- **1.3 million renters** in suburban and non-metro rural areas are experiencing worst case housing needs (roughly 15% of the total), per HUD's latest [Worst Case Housing Needs Report](#).

In the past, HUD has often used Balance of State and Statewide Continuums of Care (CoCs) as a proxy definition for rural communities. A quick look at the 2017 Point-in-Time (PIT) count shows that nearly 14% of people experiencing homelessness are in these CoCs. However, we recognize that there are many other rural areas not represented by Balance of State and Statewide CoCs. HUD is working with its partners on a more expansive definition for rural CoCs. We hope that by working together we can offer more to rural America.

2017 Point-In-Time Count



Balance of State & Statewide CoCs

14%



Our partners in rural communities know that solutions to homelessness must be flexible, unique, and innovative. Rural communities face distinct challenges such as large geographies; limited resources, including transportation and jobs; and a higher than average poverty rate. We know that the best ideas and solutions to rural homelessness will come from rural communities. To reflect this, *All Routes Home* will create opportunities for shared learning and inspiration.

As part of the initiative, SNAPS is working on expanding eligible activities under the CoC and Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) Programs; incentivizing and supporting CoC mergers; and reexamining the CoC application to ensure that the competitive factors give all communities – including rural communities – the same opportunity for funding. The intended outcome of these changes is to address rural needs and encourage innovative solutions to end rural homelessness.

SNAPS will provide technical assistance (TA) to enhance the capacity of rural communities to plan and implement solutions to end rural homelessness. We have identified six core components that TA should address:

1. Enhancing and refining governance
2. Improving data collection and utilization
3. Creating a housing continuum so that there are different housing options, including shelter, for those experiencing homelessness within rural communities
4. Creating peer learning opportunities and coaching, as we know that communities must drive the design and implementation of interventions
5. Reviewing current tools and products with a rural lens
6. Developing new products highlighting strategies and best practice interventions that are succeeding in rural communities

We are partnering with local, state, and federal stakeholders to inform and refine *All Routes Home*. One such partnership is our work with USICH, which hosted a convening of rural and Balance of State CoCs in September 2017. We heard from many rural communities about ways they are creating innovative solutions to address rural homelessness. These include the use of technology in outreach programs; coordinated entry systems for large regions; and engaging with non-traditional partners, such as the faith-based community, to help make homelessness rare, brief, and one time in rural communities. If we work together creatively and flexibly, homelessness in rural America can end.

To make resources easier to access, HUD launched a new [Rural Homelessness](#) page that includes resources from HUD and other federal partners. We want to highlight two great new resources.

1. [Strengthening Systems for Ending Rural Homelessness: Promising Practices and Considerations](#), a document recently released in June 2018 by USICH on promising practices to address homelessness in rural areas.

All Routes Home will build the capacity of rural communities to address the needs of persons experiencing homelessness through:

1) Changes to the CoC Program

2) Technical assistance

3) An intense focus on collaboration



2. [Balance of State Continuum of Care Toolkit](#), a document describing common issues and solutions identified by Balance of State CoCs. It includes HUD guidance, national partner recommendations, peer community examples, and other tools and resources.

We look forward to partnering with you, and hearing from communities about what is working and what isn't so we can adjust our policies and funding opportunities. We will communicate ideas, strategies, and progress as we go, so that together we can end homelessness in rural America.

Thank you for all the hard work that you do to end homelessness in your community every day.

Norm Suchar & William Snow
Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs