



June 14, 2016

CoC Competition Focus: FY 2016 Policy Priority to End Youth Homelessness

In order to effectively end youth homelessness, we must improve and better understand the data we collect on youth homelessness, better understand the definitional and eligibility differences that exist between the various youth serving systems, design and implement an array of programs that work for youth with different experiences and needs, and coordinate with our partners to leverage the necessary resources and knowledge for the creation of an effective and coordinated community response.

This *Competition Focus* message provides information and resources to help Continuums of Care (CoCs) and stakeholders understand the FY 2016 policy priority of *ending youth homelessness*.

Understand and Use the Data

We have previously discussed in the [SNAPS In Focus message: Youth Homelessness](#) the critical need for better research and data to help us make more informed decisions about what works, for whom, how to implement it, and in what quantity, to end youth homelessness. We have always required communities to include youth in their point-in-time (PIT) counts, for example, but know that many communities struggle to locate youth who are experiencing homelessness on the night of the count. We began efforts to improve our [counting methodology](#) with lessons drawn from [Youth Count!](#) in 2013, and in the [2015 PIT Count](#), CoCs identified over 46,000 parenting and unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness. We suspect this undercounts the number of youth experiencing homelessness and are encouraging communities to engage with their local youth serving partners to design better tools and processes that will ensure all youth experiencing homelessness are counted in the 2017 PIT Count. HUD will be working closely with its federal partners to support communities in this effort in order to make the 2017 PIT count as accurate as possible. Local CoCs should also work closely with community partners to implement strategies (as suggested in Section 5.7 of the Point-in-Time Count Methodology Guide) to ensure that youth experiencing homelessness are accurately counted.

HUD also wants to make sure communities are using the data that they have. Many communities have data that was collected during the PIT count, or during alternate counts that are carried out locally to meet local needs, that include young people temporarily sharing housing with others and in other at risk situations. Additionally, most communities have data collected by the school district that can be used to complement data collected during the PIT count or other local surveys. While data from local counts or from the school district may not be reported to HUD as part of the PIT count, it can be useful information for communities to understand things like inflow and what resources should be advocated for in the community to serve young people in need.

To help all communities, especially those that have not traditionally collected data other than what HUD requires through the PIT count, better understand homelessness and housing instability among youth, we included data from the U.S. Department of Education (ED) in the [2014 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report \(AHAR\): Part II](#) (you



can find more detailed state-by-state homeless education data on the website of the [National Center for Homeless Education](#)). Incorporating ED data into the AHAR highlights the importance of partnering with ED and state and local education agencies to achieve our goal. We have also completed [the integration of the Runaway and Homeless Youth program's RHYMIS](#) into our Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) through a collaboration with our partners at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Reports derived from this combined dataset can provide rich information at the local, state, and federal levels for understanding how young people interact with the crisis response system and we should all begin to take advantage.

Understand Eligibility

Many youth are unnecessarily turned away from shelter or housing assistance due to misunderstandings by providers and young people concerning eligibility for assistance and corresponding recordkeeping requirements. To help address some of the common misunderstandings, we published [guidance on determining the homeless status of youth](#) and held a related [joint webinar](#) with the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) and HHS to explore definitional differences. Dispelling local myths and improving stakeholder understanding of eligibility and recordkeeping requirements will ensure that young people who qualify for housing and services are not inappropriately turned away or convinced to not present in the first place.

Identify and Implement Housing Models that Work

Understanding the causes of youth homelessness and the demographics of youth who experience homelessness can help us design systems and interventions that will help us make youth homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurrent. A recent [study on the Street Outreach Data Collection Program](#) published by HHS begins to explore these topics and the housing and service interventions desired by youth experiencing homelessness through the lens of the Street Outreach Program. While there is still much to be learned about the types of housing interventions that are most effective in ending youth homelessness, there are a few things we do know:

- All youth should have access to inclusive, nondiscriminatory shelter and housing, including those [youth who are transgender and gender nonconforming](#).
- Youth should have access to [low barrier housing](#) where their participation is not terminated for failure to participate in supportive services or follow age-inappropriate rules.
- [Rapid re-housing \(RRH\)](#) is a cost effective solution to ending homelessness for families and single adults and we believe that it can play an important role in ending youth homelessness as well. In order to help CoCs adapt RRH models to serve youth, HUD released [four case studies](#) highlighting successful implementations of RRH for youth.
- [Family engagement services](#) are a critical part of the youth crisis response system, should be a first option for youth under the age of 18, and should be a part of every intervention conversation with youth over 18.
- [Positive Youth Development](#) and [Trauma Informed Care](#) should be incorporated into all aspects of the youth crisis response system.

Leverage Resources and Expand the Knowledge Bases



Federal and private partners are working tirelessly to strategically leverage our combined resources in interventions, technical assistance (TA), and research to support communities in building local systemic responses that will end youth homelessness by 2020. The following resources are currently available as a result of these collaborations:

- The [Housing + Ed: Let's Get Ahead](#) toolkit designed for local housing and education stakeholders to explore collaboration across the two sectors. The toolkit includes case studies in innovative practices from two pioneering communities.
- A [joint webinar](#) with USICH and ED on strategies for integrating education and housing services.
- A [planning phase report and brief](#) emphasizing key lessons from the [LGBTQ Youth Homelessness Prevention Initiative](#) to help communities engaged in similar system-wide efforts.
- A USICH published [preliminary vision for a coordinated response to ending youth homelessness](#).

Over the next several months, these collaborations will also produce the following:

- Significant new TA resources;
- Research into and piloting of new intervention models;
- Policy briefs including Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) concerning coordinated entry processes for youth;
- Descriptions of efforts to collect better data at a national and local level, including the launch of [Voices of Youth Count](#) and new guidance concerning the annual PIT count; and
- A new youth homelessness demonstration that will be announced this summer.

We ask that CoCs, in partnership with a broad array of local youth stakeholders, share these resources among community partners and utilize them to begin the work of building a coordinated community response to end youth homelessness. We also encourage you to seek out additional resources located on our website and the websites of our partners. With your commitment and support, we will meet our goal of ending youth homelessness by 2020.

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Additional Resources Related to Ending Youth Homelessness

- [Fact Sheet: Eligibility for Health Care Coverage for Youth Experiencing or At Risk of Homelessness](#)
- [Screening and Assessment Tools for Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs](#)
- [HUD's newly designed Youth Homelessness landing page](#)
- [ED's newly designed student homelessness website](#)