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SNAPS In Focus: Improving our Crisis Response System

Two years ago, we started seeing signs in our data that progress on ending chronic homelessness was slowing, and unsheltered homelessness was rising in many communities. In 2016, for the first time since 2010, we reported an increase nationally in unsheltered homelessness – largely driven by low vacancy rates and high costs for rental housing in major cities across the country. Along with these alarming signs, we are hearing from you – our community partners and experts – about struggles addressing encampments; increased opioid use, misuse, and overdoses; and increased demand for shelter.

Last year, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) hosted a convening to learn more about what is working and what gaps need to be filled with regard to emergency shelter across the country. While this was a good start, we have heard from you that we need more discussion and better tools to improve *crisis response systems* to more efficiently and effectively help people exit unsheltered homelessness and put them on quick paths to permanent and stable housing. Today's *In Focus* message kicks off a series of messages we will release about improving our crisis response systems. We plan to address the following topics:

- Implementing an effective **street outreach strategy** that is not only designed to engage people experiencing unsheltered homelessness – including those living in encampments – but to connect them directly to resources that can assist them to obtain permanent housing;
- **Right-sizing shelter and crisis housing** resources to meet the need, designed with low-barriers to entry and to connect people to permanent housing as quickly as possible;
- Working with **institutions and systems of care** like child welfare, hospitals, detox centers, and juvenile and criminal justice on in-reach strategies and discharge planning practices that prevent homelessness;
- Implementing **diversion** strategies to help people identify immediate alternate housing arrangements and **preventing homelessness** whenever possible; and
- Strategically targeting **rapid re-housing** and **permanent supportive housing** resources and using them in conjunction with innovations in these other areas to house people as quickly as possible.

Many partners will have to work together to accomplish these goals, including homeless service providers, mainstream programs, faith-based organizations, affordable housing developers and providers, public and private funders, local businesses, and political leadership. It will involve a robust Coordinated Entry process to ensure that every community's system is both responsive to the needs of people experiencing homelessness, can quickly connect people to permanent housing and needed services, and that resources are being used as efficiently as possible.



We at HUD and our federal partners are committed to working with communities to find real solutions and strategies to getting people off the street, even in challenging environments. We look forward to partnering with you, and we want to hear from communities about what is working and what isn't so we can adjust our policies and funding strategies as needed. We will communicate ideas, strategies, and progress as we go, so that together we can connect people experiencing homelessness to permanent housing as quickly as possible.

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