

Samuel Choi

Professor Herrera

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Policy Analysis Brief (Homelessness and Housing)

1. Goal Statement:

As you may or may not have known, the population of homeless individuals have risen over numerous decades and have continued to grow at an alarming rate. There is a need for attention to alleviate this homelessness epidemic. However, due to the severely limited resources and housing availabilities due to the insurmountable pricing on affordable houses, this proves to be extremely difficult for homeless individuals to live a comfortable life style. Not only are fellow human beings at risk of endangerment living on the ruthless streets of the city, but they are targets of mass discrimination due to being considered lower class individuals. These obstacles and stigmas affect the lives of homeless individuals in a negative perspective who are already struggling to survive already. I propose focusing a vast majority of the government's funding into establishing affordable housing for the homeless. These housing plans will include stable

foundations, complete with basic housing utilities that will serve to be useful for the homeless. I

believe that by initiating this plan, we are one step closer to resolving the homeless epidemic that

has been occurring for centuries.

2. Scope of the problem:

Homelessness is defined as “fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.” In America, homelessness has been a national crisis that has been on the rise since the 1600-1700s. and has progressively worsened over time, with approximately more than 500,000 homeless individuals crowding the streets across the USA and approximately 150 million across the entire world lacking a proper shelter. Bearing this information in mind, it is imperative to realize just how impactful homelessness really is on our society mentally, physically, and financially.

Homelessness can be the main catalyst of an individual’s myriad of mental and social problems such as psychiatric distress, increased vulnerability, difficulty obtaining employment, and more.

The result of being homeless can significantly impact the mental state of a person as they are consistently on the verge of death every day as are vulnerable to the harsh weather and

dangerous characters roaming the streets. Homelessness can also significantly impact the environment as well. Since homeless individuals are left to fend for themselves, they have to scavenge for whatever resources they can collect. This is problematic as it leads to the excessive discarding of human wastes, biohazardous materials, used syringes, and potential fires from disposed lit cigarettes. The overwhelming crisis of homelessness impacts the financial state of the world as well. To help maintain the costs of providing temporary shelter and food to the growing number of homeless individuals, the government must continue to exhaust its remaining funds to assist them and this affects the taxpayers as well since we are the ones responsible for the costs. Not to mention the fact that the economy loses working manpower to help the economy function smoothly. According to www.endhomeless.org the amount of homeless individuals are staggeringly high. a single night recorded in 2022 included at least 582,462 people who experienced homelessness in the U.S. Between October 1, 2016 and September 30, 2017, an estimated amount of 950,497 people used emergency shelters or transitional housing programs for assistance. The Department of Housing and Urban Development, Department of

Health and Human Services, and the Department of Veterans Affairs consider a person to be homeless if they are sleeping outside, in a place not meant for human habitation such as a car or abandoned building, or in an emergency shelter or transitional housing program. Other federal agencies have different definitions for homelessness.

3. Past Policy:

One of the past policies regarding the issue of homelessness is the Affordable Housing policy. This policy was established due to the sheer amount of people going into debt due to the staggering prices of housing, which in turn results in more homeless individuals struggling to survive. Research shows that 11 million households spend more than one-half of their income on housing alone. Another study stated that 38.1 million households have spent more than one-third of their income on rent alone. Families in both categories are in jeopardy of being homeless. The government has established a program called “Housing Choice Vouchers” specifically designed to help low-income families with affordable housing. The people who are in this program are as follows. 75% of people are extremely low-income and must rely on this program to help them

avoid being homeless. 36% of people in the HCV program have a head of the household with a disability of some kind. 25% of people within the program are the elderly. The HCV is considered to be the largest rental assistance program with a record of assisting over 2.2 million households. Unfortunately, their resources are limited as they lack the funding and resources and select few households are qualified to receive the benefits while the others must wait.

4. Current Policy:

One of the current policies in regards to combating homelessness in the U.S. is the federal funding for homelessness programs. Homelessness is unpredictable and can occur to potentially anyone. Therefore, it is imperative that proper precautionary measures be taken to prevent people from experiencing homelessness. One of the programs called “McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants” is widely funded by the federal government and can potentially end the homelessness crisis. The following is an excerpt from www.endhomelessness.org “Consider the results: Since 2007, homelessness has decreased by 15 percent. Meanwhile, communities and even states across the country have announced that they have ended veteran and chronic

homelessness. That progress is only possible through bipartisan Congressional investments in this program. Each year, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) awards Homeless Assistance Grants to communities that administer housing and services at the local level. Specifically, the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) program and the Continuum of Care (CoC) program fund the cornerstones of each community's homeless system. The ESG grant funds street outreach, homelessness prevention and diversion, emergency shelter, and rapid re-housing. The CoC program funds permanent supportive housing, rapid re-housing, transitional housing, coordinated entry, and pilots like the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program. Because HUD prioritizes evidence-based programs and practices as part of the grants program, homeless assistance systems across the country have improved their ability to quickly respond to housing crises, get people back into housing, and connect them with community-based services.”

5. Proposed Solutions:

When taking solutions to combat homelessness into account, we must dive straight into the

root of the problem: lack of affordable housing. This is the main factor driving the rate of homelessness across the U.S. To accurately address homelessness, communities must take a coordinated approach. From individual programs to shifting into a community wide level response that is supported by data gathered about the needs of the homeless individuals and how they could allocate their resources, services and programs to the best of the communities' abilities. One of the key elements of a coordinated systems approach is "coordinated entry". This is an important process designed to quickly assess, identify, refer and connect people who are in desperate need of housing and other inquiries and cannot deny their requests. This method will allow for more homeless assistance systems such as helping people to move through the queue for waiting for available housing. Another method is by preventing homelessness in the first place by providing programs that will financially assist low-income families in jeopardy of losing their homes. Another method utilized is improving the accuracy of the data collected based on what assistance consumers need. Another method that needs to be taken into consideration is planning long term. Establishing a plan helps communities set goals and

conceptualize what they should prioritize. A plan can include goals, a process and timeline for meeting those goals, and mechanisms for evaluating progress. Planning also brings providers, government officials, Continuum of Care leads and funders together to address topics such as how to identify needs of the population, decide on the structure of coordinated assessment, integrate prevention and shelter diversion resources, map out existing assessment and intake processes and sketch out preliminary needs assessment and screening tools.

6. Involvement of local communities:

A division known as the “Alliance Center for Capacity Building” is designed to gather multiple communities of individuals who dedicate their time, energy and resources into assisting cities, counties, states, and several non-profit organizations to end the homelessness epidemic across the U.S. It helps achieve their goal by implementing evidence based best practices and working closely with people on the verge of homelessness and by providing the utmost assistance. The Alliance center excels by working collaboratively with several public, private and nonprofit sector partners and focus on key areas of system and programs such as diversion, outreach,

coordinated assessment and entry, emergency shelter and services, self-resolution, rapid re-housing, permanent supportive housing, and housing subsidy. It covers the full spectrum of homeless subpopulations including children and youth, families, veterans, individual adults, chronically homeless people, and people with disabilities. It is always attentive to the special needs of LGBTQ people and racial and ethnic minorities, and the particular strategies needed to address their distinct experiences of homelessness. The Center offers both remote, virtual, and on-site technical assistance and training. Training and technical assistance is provided based on The Center's availability and capacity as well as the community's specific technical assistance needs. The following explains the system designs that the Alliance Center utilizes to ensure the quality of their communities are top notch. "System Design Training and Technical Assistance –

The Alliance works with CoCs to make changes in their homeless response system including implementing best practice policies and procedures, and right sizing their system to ensure that homelessness is rare, brief, and one time. the Alliance collects and analyzes a comprehensive set of data elements that describe a community's homeless population, the system's ability to move

people to permanent housing quickly, and the system's cost-efficiency. The Alliance will qualitatively analyze a system by surveying community leaders, providers including executive directors and front-line staff, and people experiencing homelessness. Our qualitative analysis also involves reviewing planning and operation documents, and evaluation reports. Through training and consultation, the Alliance guides the community in creating action plans to achieve identified priorities and, following a training and/or technical assistance, support implementation efforts. System Design training and technical assistance is offered on-site and/or virtually.

Homeless Response System Assessment and Recommendations. The Alliance works with CoCs to provide analysis and recommendations to the CoC Collaborative Applicant, CoC Governance Board and community stakeholders on implementation of best practices in crisis response systems, including reviewing core system components such as CoC Governance, Coordinated Entry, Outreach, Homelessness Prevention, Diversion, Emergency Shelter, Rapid Re-Housing, Permanent Supportive Housing and others, analyze data including System Performance Measures and key housing outcomes by program type, and develop recommendations on

strategies, including the role of CoC governance and its critical role in coordinating this system, to address identified challenges to ensure homelessness is rare, brief, and one time.” Another training program in which local communities are involved in is the “Rapid Re-Housing Workshop”. This is a training program in which addresses the three core components of rapid re-housing. housing identification, financial assistance and case management and services—and instruct on practical strategies for implementation. This training is offered on-site and/or virtually. Another training program is the “Rapid Re-Housing Learning Collaborative”. This program specializes in providing an opportunity for homeless services organizations to make changes in the way they operate, while being supported by their peers and rapid re-housing experts. The goal of the Rapid Re-Housing Learning Collaborative is to increase the number of households being rapidly re-housed and shorten the amount of time households remain homeless. Learning Collaboratives last a year or more, involve three to five in-person meetings, and in-depth technical assistance for participating organizations. The Learning Collaborative is delivered through a combination of on-site and virtual training and technical assistance. Another

program is called “Rapid Re-housing System Design Technical Assistance”. This provides remote technical assistance to help implement rapid re-housing aligned with recommended practice in a standardized way across a community. The local communities of the Alliance Center also provide emergency shelters which play a critical role in the crisis response system. These training programs are held on site or virtually to help emphasize that emergency shelters play a critical role in reducing the length of time households experience homelessness, as well as how many return to housing. This training focuses on how emergency shelters can align with a Housing First approach, as well as focus on helping clients exit back to housing more quickly. Participants will understand that five key elements of emergency shelter: Housing First approach; Diversion; Immediate and low-barrier access to shelter; Housing-focused services, rapid exits services; and Measuring outcomes to improve performance. Another program is called the “Emergency Shelter Learning Collaborative”. This is an opportunity for homeless services organizations to make changes in the way they operate, while being supported by their peers and emergency shelter/homeless crisis response experts. The goal of the Learning

Collaborative is to support the implementation of a Housing First approach to shelter services, increase the number of households being permanently housed, and shorten the amount of time households remain homeless. Learning Collaboratives last a year or more, involve three to five in-person meetings, and in-depth technical assistance for participating organizations. The Learning Collaborative is delivered through a combination of on-site and virtual training and technical assistance. The “Diversion and problem solving strategies training” is the Alliance’s Diversion and Problem-Solving Strategies Training provides participants a deeper understanding of the critical role that effective problem-solving and diversion strategies have on reducing homelessness across the crisis response system and an in-depth understanding of the core components of problem-solving, the guiding principles of diversion strategies and the fundamentals of effective diversion practice including an intentional focus on the problem-solving conversation. This program also involves system leaders, providers, coordinated entry staff, HMIS staff, and key community stakeholders to improve the understanding of an effective system, and the role of effective diversion practice. The training focuses on the effective

implementation of problem-solving as an intervention across the homeless response system. The training begins with an overview of the effective homeless response system, then focuses on the core components of an effective problem-solving approach and defines problem-solving, diversion, and rapid exit and how these interventions are distinguished from prevention. Last, the training focuses on various diversion and problem-solving strategies, including data collection and analysis; integration with coordinated entry; and effective practices. This training is offered on-site and/or virtually.

7. Involvement of Faith Communities:

It has been recorded that multiple faith-based organizations serve as the main foundation of emergency shelter systems within the U.S. They are responsible for providing a minimum of 30% of emergency beds for families and single adults who are at risk of becoming homeless. They are also responsible for providing various services for people in crisis and results in reducing the amount of individuals experiencing homelessness. In a world where our mentality is to pass off the work onto others believing that they will help the people in need, faith based

organizations take up the opportunities to provide the utmost care for desperate people. Faith based organizations also provide national awareness of the severity of the homelessness crisis that is plaguing our world. This is imperative as there are people who genuinely do not believe or are in denial of people experiencing homelessness and are ignorant to this fact. These organizations also possess a strong volunteer base and advocacy base. They can utilize their following to partner with larger organizations to ensure that their power is increased and spread all of their resources and connections nationwide to combat the homelessness crisis.

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