



Creating a New Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness

Participant Discussion Guide

About the Federal Strategic Plan

The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) is [required by statute](#) to develop, implement, and report to Congress annually on a Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness. The plan guides the work of USICH, drives our work with our member agencies, and provides a national vision and roadmap for the field.

The first plan, [Opening Doors](#), was developed in 2010 with extensive stakeholder input from federal agencies, national organizations, and state and local agencies and organizations. The plan set four goals: to end chronic homelessness in 5 years; to prevent and end veteran homelessness in 5 years; to prevent and end homelessness for families, youth, and children in 10 years; and to set a path to end all types of homelessness. To reach those goals, *Opening Doors* focused on 10 objectives and 52 strategies.

Opening Doors was amended twice—[first in 2012](#) to include the [Federal Framework to End Youth Homelessness](#) as well as additional strategies to improve educational outcomes for children and youth, and [again in 2015](#). That time, the plan was completely updated and amended to include an operational definition for ending homelessness, clarifications regarding the role of health and behavioral health systems in supporting services for permanent supportive housing, an updated discussion about the use of metrics and accountability, and improved guidance for retooling crisis response systems.

Opening Doors was succeeded in 2018 by *Home, Together*, which focused on operationalizing the definition to end homelessness to ensure that it's a rare, brief, and one-time experience. *Home, Together* also identified the following areas that needed additional attention: increasing affordable housing, strengthening prevention/diversion, creating solutions for unsheltered homelessness, tailoring strategies for rural communities, helping people find employment success, and learning from people with lived expertise. Like *Opening Doors*, *Home, Together* included goals to end homelessness among subpopulations and for all Americans, but without setting timeframes.

Home, Together was followed in October 2020 by *Expanding the Toolbox*. *Expanding the Toolbox* does not align with the current administration's priorities and was discontinued in February 2021.

Progress

In the decade after the launch of the first plan, the annual Point-in-Time count showed a steady national reduction in the number of people experiencing homelessness. Between 2010 and 2020, there was a:

- **9% reduction** in the total number of people experiencing homelessness, including a 3% drop in unsheltered homelessness;
- **50% reduction** in the number of veterans experiencing homelessness and in unsheltered homelessness among veterans; and

- **29% reduction** in the number of families with children experiencing homelessness, including a 67% drop in unsheltered homelessness among this population.

Also during this time, [more than 80 communities and 3 states](#) ended veteran or chronic homelessness—or both, according to the [federal criteria and benchmarks](#).

State of Homelessness

Much of the progress we've made has stalled in the last few years. Since 2016, homelessness has been on the rise, and some troubling trends have emerged. According to the [2020 Homeless Assessment Report to Congress](#), more than half a million people were experiencing homelessness—even before the pandemic. For the first time since this data collection began, more individuals experiencing homelessness were **unsheltered** than were sheltered, and the number of **unsheltered families with children** increased. Between 2019 and 2020 alone, **chronic homelessness** rose by 15%.

How to Maximize Your Input

Your input is essential to our progress. Before the listening session, please review this guide as well as the two previous federal strategic plans—[Opening Doors](#) and [Home, Together](#). As we gather input, we're placing an emphasis on:

- Sustaining or building on what's working and leading to positive outcomes;
- Reflecting on what we're learning from evolving practices;
- Addressing areas in need of greater attention, including racial disparities in the risk for and experience of homelessness; and
- Identifying opportunities to align strategies with federal, state, and local priorities.

Questions for You

During the listening session, you'll be asked the following questions:

- 1) What should the federal government's top priorities be as they relate to preventing and ending homelessness?
- 2) What are the biggest barriers to ending homelessness in the communities your agency/organization serves?
- 3) How can the federal government more effectively center racial equity in its prevention of or response to homelessness, and how can it best support equitable distribution of/access to resources and equitable outcomes at the local level?
- 4) What lessons have you learned during the COVID-19 pandemic about how the housing, health, and supportive services systems can best respond to people experiencing homelessness?
- 5) Both *Opening Doors* and *Home, Together* included a goal to end homelessness for all Americans, as well as goals to end homelessness among specific subpopulations. For the next plan:
 - Would it be helpful to set similar goals?
 - If so, should there be subpopulation-specific goals or just one goal to end all homelessness?
 - Should the goals include target dates?
- 6) Is there anything else you wish to add?

Thank you for sharing your time and expertise. **If you would like to provide additional feedback, please visit our online input portal at usich.gov/fsp by November 30, 2021.**