



**Statement of Executive Director Jeff Olivet  
United States Interagency Council on Homelessness**

**Before the United States House of Representatives  
Committee on Veterans Affairs  
Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity**

***Exploring the Use of Data-Driven Methods and Community Collaboration to  
Reduce Veteran Homelessness.***

**June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2024**

Good afternoon, Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Levin, and distinguished subcommittee members. I am Jeff Olivet, Executive Director of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH). It is an honor to appear before you today. I am here to discuss the nation's homelessness crisis and the administration's current and planned work to prevent and end it.

As the sole federal agency dedicated to eradicating homelessness, USICH holds a unique position. Our agency leverages the collective strength of 19 other federal agencies to orchestrate the federal response to homelessness. Our member agencies oversee more than 30 programs aimed at homelessness and numerous others that help individuals grappling with poverty and housing instability. Our team of Senior Regional Advisors, strategically positioned across the country, collaborate directly with mayors, governors, and service providers in various regions, ensuring the efficient, effective, and compassionate use of resources. All In, the Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness, which guides USICH's work, includes several strategies to related to veterans experiencing homelessness:

- Increasing and improving coordination between DoD, VA and other partner agencies to identify opportunities to strengthen appropriate housing connections with follow-up services for transitioning service members (TSMs).
- Providing information and outreach to military communities and legal service providers about federal foreclosure and eviction protections for service members and veterans.
- Broadening community outreach and marketing of VA's resources to promote health, volunteerism, and national service, wellness, education, employment, economic mobility, and legal assistance.
- Strengthening and building partnerships across federal, state, and private entities to expand housing stock availability as identified in the VA Homeless Programs Office Strategic Plan for 2021-2025.
- Promoting the use of tools and providing guidance on how to screen for housing instability for TSMs.

The story of USICH is a testament to the power of bipartisan collaboration. In 1987, large majorities in Congress, transcending political lines, passed the Stewart B. McKinney Act, later renamed the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. This law, signed by President Reagan, recognized the complexity of coordinating federal efforts to address homelessness. It was a clear message that homelessness is a cross-system problem that requires cross-system solutions. No single agency, system, sector, or jurisdiction alone can end homelessness. The McKinney-Vento Act, a product of this bipartisan understanding, requires USICH to develop and annually update a national strategic plan, providing a shared vision of the work required to end homelessness and the strategies necessary to accomplish that vision. Today, I would like to provide a picture of homelessness in America and discuss the challenges we still face.

Homelessness is a life-and-death public health crisis. Thousands of people die every year due to the dangerous conditions of living without a home. People who experience homelessness die 20 years earlier than people who are housed.<sup>i</sup> According to the [latest annual Point-in-Time Count<sup>ii</sup>](#), more than 650,000 people in the United States experienced homelessness on a single night in January 2023. But this is only a snapshot. According to the 2021 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report Part 2, over the course of a year, at least [twice that number<sup>iii</sup>](#), more than 1.2 million people experienced sheltered homelessness at some point during the year<sup>iv</sup>. When we consider households that are “doubled up”—where multiple families or generations are living together out of necessity—homelessness and housing

instability surge even higher. Recent data from The Department of Housing and Urban Development's most recent Point in Time Count found more than 650,000 people were experiencing homelessness on a single night in January 2023, a 12% increase from 2022.<sup>v</sup>

People of color are disproportionately affected by homelessness. For example, while Black Americans comprise 13% of the overall population, they account for 37% of the homeless population. American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Asian Americans are even more disproportionately represented. Latinos, who are undercounted in our national estimates, are overrepresented compared to their share of the general population.<sup>vi</sup>

Homelessness touches both the young and the old. Children—who made up 17 percent (111,620 children) of the homeless population in the 2023 Point-in-Time Count -- are [more likely](#) to experience severe health conditions, abuse, and violence if they have experienced homelessness, according to a 2022 analysis published in the Journal of Community Health<sup>vii</sup>. Furthermore, according to data from the Department of Education<sup>viii</sup>, more than 1 million students experienced homelessness during the School Year 2021-2022. This represents 2.4% of all students enrolled in public schools. At the other end of the spectrum, older adults are the fastest-growing number of homeless Americans. According to one study, people aged 50 or older are the fastest-growing group of people experiencing homelessness in America, and their numbers are estimated to triple by 2030.<sup>ix</sup>

When considering how people lose their homes, no two stories are the same. Among the root causes of homelessness is the lack of affordable housing and incomes that do not keep pace with the cost of housing. A job has never guaranteed a home—and that is even more true today. Some measures have shown that half of the people living in shelters or on the streets are employed. However, according to the most recent “Out of Reach” report from the National Low Income Housing Coalition, there is no county in America in which a full-time minimum-wage worker can afford even a modest two-bedroom apartment.<sup>x</sup> Meanwhile, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, rents have risen far faster than wages across the United States, with growth in median rents outpacing growth in median renter income in nearly every state since 2001.<sup>xi</sup> Evictions can come fast, while government assistance is often too slow. Decades of growing economic inequality have left more than half of Americans living paycheck to paycheck and one unexpected car repair or medical bill away from homelessness.

Even when people can afford a home, one is not always available. In 1970, the United States had a surplus of 300,000 affordable homes. Today, according to various estimates, we have a shortage of approximately 2 million units nationwide. For lowest-income renters, this gap is even more significant.<sup>xii</sup> Some measures have indicated that, for every 100 extremely low-income renters, there are only 37 affordable homes. Where do we expect the other 63 to live? Furthermore, people using housing vouchers struggle to find landlords who will rent to them.<sup>xiii</sup> Some landlords don't want to go through the bureaucratic hurdles to accept vouchers, including inspections, paperwork, and making needed repairs.

Preventing homelessness from happening in the first place is also critical because every day, roughly 2,500 people, or around 900,000 people each year, exit homelessness—yet roughly the same number fall into homelessness. To end homelessness, it is vital that we not just house people experiencing homelessness now but that we also find ways to ensure people do not become homeless in the first place.

We also know that homelessness and health are inextricably linked. While mental health, substance use, domestic violence, and other risk factors influence who is most likely to become homeless, lack of affordable housing and wages that do not keep pace with housing costs remain the root causes that have driven homelessness in the United States over the past few decades. The current state of homelessness is heartbreaking. This is not the way it should be.

More specifically, I'd like to discuss veterans. Even just one veteran experiencing homelessness is a tragedy. It is unacceptable that anyone who has served this country in uniform leaves military service only to experience the trauma of homelessness. According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD's) 2023 Annual Report to Congress (AHAR), 35,574 veterans were experiencing homelessness on a given night. That is 22 of every 10,000 veterans in the United States.<sup>xiv</sup> More troubling, the number of veterans experiencing homelessness increased by seven percent (2,445 more veterans) between 2022 and 2023.<sup>xv</sup> The increase included a 14 percent rise in unsheltered veterans (1,943 more veterans) and a three percent increase in veterans experiencing sheltered homelessness (502 more veterans). Despite increases in experiences of veteran homelessness between 2022 and 2023, the number of veterans experiencing homelessness is 52 percent lower than it was in 2010, the year that the federal government first set a goal to end homelessness, including among veterans.<sup>xvi</sup>

This tremendous success—sustained over 15 years—has spanned Democratic and Republican administrations, received bipartisan Congressional support, and demonstrated that it is possible to solve homelessness. The 52% reduction in veteran homelessness is the proof point. When we provide stable housing with strong wrap-around supports, that is the recipe for ending homelessness. The challenge ahead for all of us is to finish the work of ending Veteran homelessness and to apply these lessons to other groups—families, youth, single adult non-veterans, and older Americans.

Ending veteran homelessness means that homelessness among veterans is prevented whenever possible and is otherwise a rare, brief, and one-time experience. In the work to end Veteran homelessness, one community I would like to highlight is the City of Dallas, Texas, which recently joined 83 other states and communities across the United States in formally declaring an effective end to Veteran homelessness through the achievement of the USICH Criteria and Benchmarks.<sup>xvii</sup> The City of Dallas joined the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) North Texas and community stalwarts Housing Forward and the All-Neighbors Coalition in formally declaring the effective end of homelessness for North Texas Veterans at Dallas City Hall on May 22nd. This was due to collaborative efforts and the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program. In addition to the HUD-VASH program, the VA awards grants through the Grant and Per Diem program to eligible entities to provide transitional housing with wraparound supportive services to assist veterans with moving into permanent housing. This multifaceted approach ensures that the VA can meet the diverse needs of our veteran population and provide them with the necessary resources to rebuild their lives.<sup>xviii</sup>

Finally, the Biden-Harris Administration has taken sweeping new steps that are beginning to yield results. Through the implementation of the White House's Housing Supply Action Plan, more units have been under construction than ever before. In 2023, HUD announced that it helped more than 424,000 households connect to homeless support services, exit homelessness, or avoid homelessness altogether. In January, the VA announced that it had housed more than 46,000 homeless veterans, surpassing its goal for 2023.

The President's 2025 Budget<sup>xix</sup> includes a plan to invest over \$258 billion to build 2 million housing units, support millions of first-time homebuyers, guarantee housing vouchers for hundreds of thousands of extremely low-income veterans and youth aging out of foster care, and advance efforts to end homelessness. The Budget includes \$20 billion in mandatory funding for competitive grants to incentivize State and local jurisdictions and Tribes to expand housing supply. The grants will fund multifamily developments, including commercial-to-residential conversions and projects near transit and other community amenities; support planning and implementation grants to help jurisdictions identify and remove barriers to building more housing; launch or expand innovative housing models that increase the stock of permanently affordable rental and for-sale housing, including community land trusts, mixed-income public development, and accessory dwelling units; and construct and rehabilitate starter homes.<sup>xx</sup>

The 2025 Budget also provides \$4.1 billion for Homeless Assistance Grants to continue supporting approximately 1.2 million people experiencing homelessness each year and to expand assistance to approximately 25,000 additional households, specifically survivors of domestic violence and homeless youth. These new resources build on Administration efforts that have expanded assistance to roughly 140,000 additional households experiencing homelessness since the President took office. The Budget further reflects the Administration's commitment to making progress toward ending homelessness by providing \$8 billion in mandatory funding for the acquisition, construction, or operation of housing to expand housing options for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, as well as \$3 billion in mandatory funding for grants to provide counseling and emergency rental assistance to older adult renters at-risk of homelessness.

Finally, it's important that I mention USICH's All Inside initiative, launched in May of 2023, USICH along with our 19 federal member agencies are partnering with state and local governments for up to two years to strengthen and accelerate local efforts to help people move off the streets and into homes where they can recover from the trauma of homelessness and rebuild their lives. ALL Inside focuses on reducing unsheltered homelessness in seven communities: Chicago, Dallas, Denver, Los Angeles, Phoenix Metro, Seattle, and California. Veterans are part of the work in California, including developing a white paper on veterans and older adults.

Thank you for inviting me to be here with you today. I look forward to your questions.

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<sup>i</sup> The Mortality of the US Homeless Population

<https://bfi.uchicago.edu/insight/research-summary/the-mortality-of-the-us-homeless-population/>

<sup>ii</sup> HUD Releases January 2023 Point-in-Time Count Report

[https://www.hud.gov/press/press\\_releases\\_media\\_advisories/hud\\_no\\_23\\_278](https://www.hud.gov/press/press_releases_media_advisories/hud_no_23_278)

<sup>iii</sup> The 2020 Annual Homeless Assessment Report

<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2020-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>

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- <sup>v</sup> HUD Releases January 2023 Point-in-Time Count Report  
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- <sup>vi</sup> Homelessness and Racial Disparities  
<https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/what-causes-homelessness/inequality/>
- <sup>vii</sup> Risk Behaviors and Experiences Among Youth Experiencing Homelessness—Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 23 U.S. States and 11 Local School Districts, 2019  
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- <sup>ix</sup> The Emerging Crisis of Aged Homelessness  
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- <sup>xi</sup> Rents Grow Faster Than Wages Across the US – and NYC Feels the Brunt. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Rents Have Risen More Than Incomes in Nearly Every State Since 2001:  
<https://www.cbpp.org/blog/rents-have-risen-more-than-incomes-in-nearly-every-state-since-2001>
- <sup>xii</sup> ESTIMATING THE NATIONAL HOUSING SHORTFALL  
<https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/blog/estimating-national-housing-shortfall>
- <sup>xiv</sup> The 2023 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress  
<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2023-ahar-part-1.Pdf>
- <sup>xv</sup> The 2023 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress  
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<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2023-ahar-part-1.Pdf>
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<https://www.usich.gov/guidance-reports-data/federal-guidance-resources/criteria-and-benchmarks-achieving-goal-ending>
- <sup>xviii</sup> VA and community partners declare end to North Texas Veteran homelessness  
<https://www.va.gov/north-texas-health-care/stories/va-and-community-partners-declare-end-to-north-texas-veteranhomelessness/#:~:text=The%20City%20of%20Dallas%20joined%20VA%20North%20Texas,Veterans%20at%20Dallas%20City%20Hall%20on%20May%2022nd>

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<sup>xix</sup> FACT SHEET: The President’s Budget Cuts Housing Costs, Boosts Supply, and Expands Access to Affordable Housing

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/03/11/fact-sheet-the-presidents-budget-cuts-housing-costs-boosts-supply-and-expands-access-to-affordable-housing/#:~:text=The%20Budget%20proposes%20a%20one,operate%2C%20maintain%2C%20and%20make%20capital>

<sup>xx</sup> FACT SHEET: Biden-Harris Administration Announces New Actions to Boost Housing Supply and Lower Housing Costs

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/02/29/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-announces-new-actions-to-boost-housing-supply-and-lower-housing-costs/>