

Capitol Hill Day 2017: Federal Policy Priorities to End Homelessness

The affordable housing crisis has grown worse since the end of the recession, despite decreases in unemployment. Rents for modest apartments continue to rise, and incomes at the bottom of the labor market have not kept up. Federal programs that have historically helped fill gaps, particularly at HUD, are still feeling the effects of recent cuts and caps. As a result, the rapid flow of people into homelessness remains a challenge even for communities that have done an excellent job of organizing a system to quickly resolve housing crises.

Congress needs to step up and enact bipartisan solutions to give communities across the country the resources they need to end homelessness. The following are high-priority issues on which we can make significant progress during Capitol Hill Day at the 2017 National Conference on Ending Homelessness. Please note that this is not a complete list of the policy initiatives that the Alliance supports.

1. Provide at least \$2.6 billion for HUD's McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants program in FY 2018.

\$2.6 billion would allow communities to house 40,000 more homeless people than this year, a life-saving response that is enough to keep up with the increasing number of people made homeless by rising rents. HUD's homeless assistance programs solve the problem of homelessness, which now victimizes over half a million vulnerable Americans each night. These effective, evidence-based programs fund solutions including emergency shelter, rapid re-housing, and permanent supportive housing to ensure that homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring. Since counts of people experiencing homelessness began in 2007, homelessness has decreased 15 percent. This funding level would allow us to make important additional progress toward ending homelessness, including for people with disabling conditions, families, youth, and veterans.

2. Protect Medicaid funding that provides essential resources for communities combating chronic homelessness and is a lifeline for millions of the nation's most vulnerable citizens.

Access to Medicaid has been a driving force behind the reductions in chronic homelessness that are occurring in communities across the country. Legislation now under consideration in Congress includes nearly \$800 billion in cuts to Medicaid, which would cause an estimated 15 million fewer people to be able to receive Medicaid ten years from now. These cuts would be devastating to local communities and to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Congress should reject any proposal that cuts or caps Medicaid, phases out the Medicaid expansion in the Affordable Care Act (ACA), or reduces coverage or services.

3. Fund "mainstream" affordable housing programs at the levels necessary to preserve and begin to increase capacity.

Appropriators should carefully determine the funding necessary to maintain capacity in Tenant-Based Rental Assistance, Project-Based Rental Assistance, and Public Housing Operating and Capital, and fund these accounts accordingly. In addition, Congress should increase funding for non-defense discretionary spending in order to build the capacity of Tenant-Based Rental Assistance by 34,000 households in FY 2018. Over the next ten years, Congress should ensure sufficient investment to assist all Americans with the lowest incomes to afford decent housing. This is essential to ending homelessness.

4. Senators should co-sponsor S. 743 to eliminate the sunset date of the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH). Congress should fund USICH at its current \$3.6 million level in FY 2018, and include appropriations language to extend the fall 2018 sunset date if S.743 has not passed.

USICH's work to coordinate the federal government's work on homelessness across the various agencies has improved the outcomes of Congressional investments in ending homelessness and helped localities and states make progress. It is important to protect this work.