Homelessness
Research Institute

A RESEARCH AGENDA *for* ENDING HOMELESSNESS

June 2014

INCREASINGLY, THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT INVESTS IN COST-EFFECTIVE AND OUT-COME-ORIENTED PROGRAMS.

TO DATE, HOMELESSNESS ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS HAVE BEEN ABLE TO MAKE THE CASE THAT THE FEDERAL FUNDING THEY RECEIVE IS EFFECTIVELY AND EFFICIENTLY SERVING THE MOST VULNERABLE PEOPLE. MOVING FORWARD, THE FIELD WILL HAVE TO CONTINUE TO PROVE THAT INTERVENTIONS ARE ENDING HOMELESSNESS FOR TARGET POPULATIONS IN A COST-EFFECTIVE WAY. TO DO SO, RIGOROUS EVALUATION OF PROGRAM MODELS AND OUTCOMES IS REQUIRED.

Research on Homelessness

Research on homelessness has come a long way. In the early to mid-1990s, research primarily focused on counting and describing the character-istics of the population. Eventually research moved on to examining administrative data to develop typologies and examine sub-populations as well as evaluate the effectiveness of different program models and interventions. More recently, random assignment and longitudinal studies have been developed to answer much more specific questions related to program design and implementation.

Homeless Assistance

The homelessness assistance system has evolved alongside the efforts on research. What started as programs providing food and shelter in the 1980s and 1990s has transformed to a community-wide focus on coordinated targeting of households to particular interventions, prioritization of permanent housing resources to those households and individuals most in need, and system-wide outcome measurement and performance improvement.

Goal of the Research Agenda

The purpose of the Research Agenda for Ending Homelessness is to better inform funders, both private and public, about research questions that will help make policy and practice more effective. The Agenda was developed under the guidance of the Alliance's Research Council, a group of leading academic and policy researchers. The Agenda is not an exhaustive list of research questions, rather a list of prioritized questions: those that are the most pressing given the evolving nature of homelessness as a social issue and those that will answer specific policy or practice concerns.

- **The Scope and Demographics of Homelessness**
  The ability to clearly describe the scope and characteristics of the homeless population and various subpopulations is essential to designing interventions as well as securing resources to scale. As homelessness is an evolving issue, research questions in this section will primarily focus on determining details of specific subpopulations, especially those that are newly emerging or growing.

- **The Efficacy of Interventions**
  The varying effectiveness of interventions to end homelessness for households and individuals will help determine resource allocation and proper targeting. It is also essential to inform public and private funders of which programs provide the greatest return on investment. Research questions in this section will primarily focus in evaluation and comparison of currently utilized program models and designs.

- **System Planning and Infrastructure**
  As communities across the country embark on system-level planning required by current federal policy, questions as to the most effective methods for creating and imple-menting this infrastructure will surely arise. Research questions in this section will work to answer those questions for communities.

THE SCOPE AND DEMOGRAPHICS OF HOMELESSNESS

	RESEARCH QUESTION	RESEARCH DESIGN ELEMENTS	PRACTICE/POLICY IMPACTS
FAMILIES	What are the characteristics of unsheltered families?	Survey attached to point in time counts nationwide	Informs shelter and program policies by identifying those families opting out or being excluded from services.
	In what ways do young homeless parents differ from older homeless parents?	Survey attached to point in time counts nationwide, longitudinal panel study supplemented with administrative data	Informs scope and type of interventions and resources
	What are the demographic characteristics and service needs of chronically homeless families?	Survey attached to point in time counts nationwide	Informs the types of interventions that should be available to chronically homeless families.
INDIVIDUALS	What is the rate of entry into chronic homelessness? Who becomes chronically homeless?	Longitudinal panel study supplemented by administrative data	Informs the scale of interventions and resources.
	What are the characteristics, including length of homelessness, of the single, non-chronically homeless population? Why did they become homeless? What is their housing and income status when they exit the homeless assistance system?	Longitudinal panel study in varying geographic regions and population densities, supplemented by administrative dataSurvey of veterans using SSVF program	Informs scope and type of interventions and resources
	What are the characteristics and service needs of the elderly who are homeless? What is their housing and income status when they exit the homeless assistance system?	Longitudinal panel study	Informs scope and type of interventions and resources
YOUTH	What are the scope and characteristics, including length of homelessness, of homeless youth? Why did they become homeless? What is the impact of poverty in a youth's family of origin?	Youth point in time counts, participation of school districts in HMIS. Survey attached to point in time counts.	Informs the scale and type of interventions and resources targeted toward youth.
	What is their housing and income status when they exit the homelessness assistance system? What housing resources are available for homeless youth when they exit the homeless assistance system?	Nationwide, longitudinal panel study supplemented with administrative data	Informs type of interventions and resources that should be available to homeless youth.

THE EFFICACY OF INTERVENTIONS

	RESEARCH QUESTION	RESEARCH DESIGN ELEMENTS	PRACTICE/POLICY IMPACTS
PREVENTION	Is homelessness prevention a cost-effective intervention for communities? Is there a targeting mechanism that can limit resource waste?	Experimental or quasi-experimental design with a cost-effectiveness analysis	Informs targeting and resource allocation and prioritization.
FAMILY INTERVENTION	What is the long-term and short-term impacts of family intervention on youth experiencing homelessness?	Experimental or quasi-experimental design	Informs program design and resource prioritization.
	What are the comparative effectiveness of different models of family intervention for youth?	Experimental or quasi-experimental design	Informs program design and resource prioritization.
RAPID RE-HOUSING (RRH)	What is the effectiveness of rapid re-housing (RRH) in helping recipients achieve housing stability? What types of housing do recipients of RRH obtain and how affordable is it? How long do households remain stable? What are the other positive outcomes for families and individuals?	Multisite evaluation research supplemented by administrative data, cost analysis.	Informs targeting and resource allocation.
	Is RRH a cost-effective intervention for communities? How long would households remain homeless in the absence of a rapid re-housing intervention? Is there a targeting mechanism that can limit resource waste?	Experimental or quasi-experimental design with a cost-effectiveness analysis	Informs targeting and resource allocation and prioritization.
	How are RRH programs designed? What is the structure, length, and size of the RRH subsidy? How much financial assistance is enough and for how long?	Qualitative survey study.	Informs targeting and resource allocation.
TRANSITIONAL HOUSING	What are the characteristics and lengths of stay for persons living in transitional housing? What are the living arrangements after exiting transitional housing? How effective is transitional housing in helping its recipients achieve housing stability?	Experimental or quasi-experimental design, longitudinal tracking survey with cost analysis.	Informs targeting and resource allocation.
	What is the efficacy of transitional living programs and other housing interventions for youth? Are there particular subpopulations of youth that benefit from one program design more than another?	Experimental or quasi-experimental design supplemented by cost data.	Informs program design and resource prioritization.
PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING (PSH)	Who needs permanent supportive housing (PSH) - housing and intensive services? Who needs affordable housing without the services attached to permanent supportive housing?	Experimental or quasi-experimental design.	Informs targeting and resource allocation.
	What are the characteristics of individuals and families who exit PSH? How long do they stay in PSH before exiting? Where do they exit to?	Longitudinal tracking survey	Informs targeting and has cost and turnover implications.
	What is the difference in outcomes, costs, and turnover in project-based PSH programs versus scattered site PSH programs? How does consumer choice impact housing stability?	Experimental or quasi-experimental design	Informs targeting and resource allocation and prioritization.

SYSTEM PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE

	RESEARCH QUESTION	RESEARCH DESIGN ELEMENTS	PRACTICE/POLICY IMPACTS
COORDINATED ENTRY & ASSESSMENT	How do various coordinated entry systems compare in effectiveness? Do certain system components work more effectively in particular geographic and population density conditions?	Qualitative review and examination of outcomes	Informs coordinated entry design for communities across the country.
	How do the various assessment tools being implemented in communities impact the targeting of interventions and resources? What is the precision and applicability of the vulnerability index and/or SPDAT?	Qualitative review and examination of outcomes; psychometric testing.	Informs the implementation of targeting and assessment tools across the country.
COMMUNITY IMPACT	What is the impact of a progressive engagement model on households? Does it save a community or program resources?	Experimental or quasi-experimental design	Informs program design and resource allocation.
	What is the impact of RRH on communities? Does it reduce homelessness? Does it incentivize entry to the homeless assistance system?	Qualitative review and examination of outcomes; analysis of admission trends from HMIS	Informs system planning, resource allocation, and targeting.
MAINSTREAM SYSTEMS	What is the impact of extending foster care to age 21? What is the efficacy of different short- to medium-term housing assistance models for those aging out? What are the implications for homeless youth?	Natural experimental design	Informs program design and resource prioritization.

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Homelessness Research Institute

The Homelessness Research Institute (HRI), the research and education arm of the National Alliance to End Homelessness, works to end homelessness by building and disseminating knowledge. The goals of HRI are to build the intellectual capital around solutions to homelessness; to advance data and research to ensure that policymakers, practitioners, and the caring public have the best information about trends in homelessness and emerging solutions; and to engage the media to promote the proliferation of solid data and information on homelessness.

National Alliance to END HOMELESSNESS

The National Alliance to End Homelessness (Alliance) is a leading national voice on the issue of homelessness. To accomplish its mission of ending homelessness, the Alliance uses da ta and research to identify the nature of, and solutions to, the problem. It analyzes policy to determine how best to advance these solutions. And, it helps build the capacity of communities to implement strategies that help them end homelessness.

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Improving Policy - Building Capacity - Educating Opinion Leaders