

Fact Sheet

Questions and Answers on Homelessness Policy and Research

What is a Continuum of Care?

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A Continuum of Care (CoC) is a regional or local planning body that coordinates housing and services funding for homeless families and individuals. In 2007, 461 CoCs submitted application for federal homeless assistance funds in all 50 states, plus DC, Puerto Rico, and Guam. CoCs represent communities of all kinds, including major cities, suburbs and rural areas.

In 1995, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) began to require communities to submit a single application for McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants in order to streamline the funding application process, encourage coordination of housing and service providers on a local level, and promote the development of Continuums of Care (CoCs). By requiring communities to submit a single application, HUD hoped to encourage a more structural and strategic approach to both housing and providing services to homeless people.¹ A CoC would provide this more strategic system by providing homeless people with housing and services appropriate to their range of needs.²

According to HUD, a CoC is "a community plan to organize and deliver housing and services to meet the specific needs of people who are homeless as they move to stable housing and maximize self-sufficiency. It includes action steps to end homelessness and prevent a return to homelessness."³ HUD identifies four necessary parts of a continuum:

- Outreach, intake, and assessment in order to identify service and housing needs and provide a link to the appropriate level of both;
- Emergency shelter to provide an immediate and safe alternative to sleeping on the streets, especially for homeless families with children;
- Transitional housing with supportive services to allow for the development of skills that will be needed once permanently housed; and
- Permanent and permanent supportive housing to provide individuals and families with an affordable place to live with services if needed.⁴

CoCs are tasked to can track and manage the homeless community in their area. One of most important activities entrusted to CoCs is the biannual count of the homeless population and an annual enumeration of emergency systems, transitional housing units, and beds that make up the homeless assistance systems. These counts provide an overview of the state of homelessness in a CoC, and offer the information necessary to redirect services, funding, and resources as necessary.

¹ Burt et al. 2002. Evaluation of Continuums of Care for Homeless People. Washington, DC: US Department of Housing and Urban Development.

² Ibid.

³ US Department of Housing and Urban Development's *Trainer Guide to Continuum of Care Planning and Implementation?*

⁴ Ibid.

The CoC also manages these services, offering both prevention strategies and homeless assistance programs to assist those at-risk of or experiencing homelessness.

The National Alliance to End Homelessness' Fact Sheets answer common and frequently asked questions about homelessness policy and research. This series draws on the best expertise, data, and research available. For more information about homelessness, please visit www.endhomelessness.org

