

For Immediate Release

Tip Sheet

Homelessness in 2022: Five Key Questions

December 27, 2021, Washington, D.C. – Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, homelessness took on a greater priority in communities across the nation. Driven by the economic impacts of the pandemic, the federal government stepped forward with emergency resources to help keep people who had housing in their homes, and to help those without housing secure a place to live. These interventions have had a critically important impact, but in the face of rising levels of homelessness since 2016 and an increasingly visible epidemic of unsheltered homelessness, they have not solved the problem of homelessness.

What will the coming year hold for efforts to end homelessness? As the nation hopes for a return to normalcy in 2022, the National Alliance to End Homelessness addresses five key questions that will ultimately impact whether homelessness can be reduced next year.

- 1. Will COVID-19 subside in the coming year?** The emergence of the Delta variant this year disrupted not only progress against the pandemic, but also hopes for a sustained economic recovery. As the Omicron and other potential new variants emerge, it will be essential that vaccination rates not only increase, but are equitably made available to the most at-risk communities. If not, the economic recovery will be further slowed, leaving more and more people at risk of homelessness.
- 2. Will the Build Back Better bill pass the Senate, and will it include the necessary investments in affordable housing?** The Biden Administration's signature economic relief proposal includes historic investments in affordable housing that are decades overdue. However, the status of negotiations is currently unclear. Should this legislation pass, it will immediately reduce the number of people at risk of, and experiencing, homelessness. If it does not pass, or if the housing provisions do not survive final negotiations, the nation will have fumbled a once-in-a-generation opportunity to turn the tide on homelessness. Moreover, without these needed investments in affordable housing, it is likely that many of the other provisions in the bill – including investments in health care, childcare, and education – will have far less impact.
- 3. Will Federal relief resources be equitably targeted to people experiencing homelessness?** It is essential that emerging federal relief resources are targeted to the people who need them most. Furthermore, the strategies to allocate them must be informed by a focus on racial

equity, so that historic racial disparities in homelessness can be reversed. These resources include rental assistance, Emergency Housing Vouchers, potential expansion of the Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) program, funds for acquisition and development of housing for people experiencing homelessness, and funding for supportive services. The success of these efforts will largely depend upon the partnerships between Continuums of Care and the various entities that distribute resources (such as state and local governments and Public Housing Authorities). If these parties can effectively work together towards a shared mission to equitably house people with the greatest needs, it will have a significant impact on local efforts to end homelessness.

4. **How will communities respond to unsheltered homelessness?** The increasing visibility of unsheltered homelessness has become a flashpoint in numerous communities over the past year. Local leaders must choose their strategies wisely in 2022. Will they prioritize long-term efforts to connect encampment residents with the shelter, services, and housing that will end their homelessness? Or will they rely on encampment sweeps, camping bans, and police interactions that are proven to be both ineffective as primary responses to homelessness and harmful to people experiencing it?
5. **What innovations will communities create?** One of the greatest success stories of this past year came from communities that acquired hotel and motel properties to rapidly expand their portfolios of non-congregate shelter and permanent housing. The ability of communities to creatively and strategically identify similarly scalable innovations will be critical to supplementing the impact of new federal relief resources and the tireless efforts of the homeless services sector.

About the National Alliance to End Homelessness

The National Alliance to End Homelessness is a nonprofit, non-partisan, organization committed to preventing and ending homelessness in the United States. As a leading voice on the issue of homelessness, the Alliance analyzes policy and develops pragmatic, cost-effective policy solutions; works collaboratively with the public, private, and nonprofit sectors to build state and local capacity; and provides data and research to policymakers and elected officials in order to inform policy debates and educate the public and opinion leaders nationwide.

CONTACT:

Tom Murphy
Director of Communications
202-942-8254
tmurphy@naeh.org

###