



NATIONAL COALITION for HOMELESS VETERANS

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Policy Statement: United States Interagency Council on Homelessness

WASHINGTON, May 30, 2018— The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) is an independent establishment within the executive branch of the federal government. They were originally created by Congress in the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 to coordinate the federal response to homelessness and to create a national partnership between every level of government and the private sector aimed at ending homelessness. Since their creation the body has grown to include nineteen member agencies from the federal government, and have become a leader in the movement to end veteran homelessness.

In 2010, USICH published *Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness* which set goals for ending homelessness in America, and was the first time the nation had ever produced a comprehensive strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness. This process was based on an earlier ten-year goal to end chronic homelessness conceived of and set by the George W. Bush administration. It incorporated as its first goal the end of veteran homelessness, and laid out best practices and policy priorities to achieve it.

Why is the USICH critical?

The small professional staff of policy experts and analysts at USICH is directed by a Council comprised of Cabinet Secretaries and agency heads, and their work cuts across these agencies and departments. USICH is the body which brings together different agencies with different missions, but which all have potential impacts in the attempt to end homelessness; USICH is able to convene them and set policy priorities and shared objectives to actualize the plan to end homelessness. Furthermore, from their unique cross-cutting position, USICH is able to identify and prevent duplication of services that would otherwise waste effort and resources. Finally, USICH is focused on cost-effective solutions to ending homelessness which drives them to identify and support policies that best economize tax-payer money while still achieving superior results in our efforts to end homelessness among veterans and for everyone.

USICH has led the way on systems change and dissemination of best practices that have contributed to the great successes we have seen as a country in our effort to end veteran homelessness. Since 2010 the amount of veterans homeless on any given night has decreased by 47%, and the number of those veterans who are living out-of-doors or in places not meant for human habitation has decreased by 56%. This historic reduction has been due in large part to the best practices and combined leadership mentioned above. A perfect example of this sort of cross-departmental cooperation has been the enormously successful HUD-VASH program, which has permanently housed more than 111,000 formerly homeless veterans since its inception. USICH has been instrumental in maintaining this successful partnership, and growing it to include creative uses of other federal programing like Medicaid.

Mission: The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans will end homelessness among veterans by shaping public policy, promoting collaboration, and building the capacity of service providers.

What should Congress do?

NCHV recommends that Congress permanently authorize and fund the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. A long term or permanent authorization must be made to ensure we will continue to have a leader to work across departments, identify and disseminate innovative best practices, and champion the issue of a perpetual end to homelessness in America. S. 743, “A bill to strengthen the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness,” sponsored by Sens. Reed (D-RI) and Collins (R-ME) would do just that. NCHV recommends that this bill be passed quickly.

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