



RESEARCH REPORT

How Would Terminating USICH Affect Efforts to End Homelessness?

Findings from Interviews with Federal Agencies, National Advocacy
Organizations, and State and Local Stakeholders

*Sarah Gillespie
Lily Posey*

*Mary Cunningham
Josh Leopold*

*Brandi Gilbert
Harry Hatry*

Shiva Kooragayala

October 2016



ABOUT THE URBAN INSTITUTE

The nonprofit Urban Institute is dedicated to elevating the debate on social and economic policy. For nearly five decades, Urban scholars have conducted research and offered evidence-based solutions that improve lives and strengthen communities across a rapidly urbanizing world. Their objective research helps expand opportunities for all, reduce hardship among the most vulnerable, and strengthen the effectiveness of the public sector.

Contents

Acknowledgments	iv
Executive Summary	v
How Would Terminating USICH Affect Efforts to End Homelessness?	1
About This Assessment	1
Why Is Ending Homelessness So Challenging?	2
What Is USICH?	5
How Are Efforts to End Homelessness Progressing?	11
How Does USICH Facilitate National and Local Progress?	15
What Are the Potential Effects of USICH's Planned Termination?	29
How Could USICH Improve or Strengthen Its Role?	34
Conclusion	36
Appendix A. Interview Respondents	37
Appendix B. Interview Guide	40
Notes	43
References	44
About the Authors	45
Statement of Independence	47

Acknowledgments

This report was funded by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, the Melville Charitable Trust, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, and the Butler Family Fund. We are grateful to them and to all our funders, who make it possible for Urban to advance its mission.

The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders. Funders do not determine research findings or the insights and recommendations of Urban experts. Further information on the Urban Institute's funding principles is available at www.urban.org/support.

The authors thank all who gave their time to participate in an interview, site visit, or other piece of this assessment; the lessons in this report would not be possible without their ongoing efforts to end and prevent homelessness. We would also like to thank Marge Turner for her technical review of this report, and the excellent editing work of David Hinson and Fiona Blackshaw.

Executive Summary

To understand the US Interagency Council on Homelessness's (USICH's) role in the nation's efforts to end homelessness and potential effects of the agency's impending termination in 2017, we interviewed more than 50 federal, national, state, and local stakeholders across the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Overwhelmingly, stakeholders considered USICH an important part of a highly effective performance-driven partnership and argued that terminating USICH could slow down efforts to end homelessness.

Since 1987, USICH has coordinated the federal response to homelessness and created partnerships with the private sector and local governments to prevent and end homelessness. Progress toward ending homelessness has been mixed since the 2010 release of *Opening Doors*, the federal strategic plan to end homelessness. While significant progress has been made for particular populations, such as ending veteran homelessness, progress for other populations—such as families and youth—has been slower, and in some communities, homelessness has been on the rise. To understand USICH's role in the progress to date, our methods for this assessment captured the perspectives of those who work directly with USICH to end and prevent homelessness and who would be most affected by USICH's termination.

Interviewees at the federal and local levels perceived USICH as uniquely positioned to help achieve the nation's ambitious goals to end homelessness.

Stakeholders discussed five key components of USICH's role in facilitating national and local progress:

- USICH coordinates an interagency, multisector response.
 - » For example, cabinet-level leadership regularly attended USICH council meetings, USICH convened national nonprofits and advocates on a regular basis, and business leaders have credited the formation of local homelessness task forces to strong USICH messaging on the need for a cross-sector response to homelessness.
- USICH navigates silos that block coordination, thereby reducing fragmentation.
 - » For example, USICH brought the US Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs together to plan “warm handoffs” of transitioning military service members—strengthening housing stability throughout their transition—and has provided guidance on overlapping data systems from the US Departments of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban

Development to help community partners produce a shared list of veterans who most need housing assistance.

- USICH identifies and expands evidence-based and cost-effective solutions.
 - » For example, stakeholders argued that communities have modeled local action to reflect federal priorities and perceived USICH as bringing credibility to difficult decisions to shift policy and funding priorities to align with best practice, such as focusing on housing-first models.
- USICH drives the work of a federal strategic plan, holding agencies accountable to shared goals.
 - » For example, local stakeholders credited USICH with unprecedented access to federal staff, resulting in a unique level of clarity and alignment in the work to end homelessness.
- USICH marshals cross-sector, mainstream resources for maximum effectiveness.
 - » For example, stakeholders credited USICH in helping maximize federal resources by clarifying the role of federal resources (e.g., Supplemental Security Income, Social Security Disability Insurance, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, housing vouchers, and Medicaid) to best serve people experiencing homelessness.

Interviewees argued that while there has been progress, especially for veteran homelessness, the work will be even harder to end homelessness for families and youth, and the same results cannot be expected at the same pace without USICH.

While stakeholders believed the work to end homelessness would continue without USICH, they argued that terminating USICH would slow efforts to end homelessness and weaken the collective movement.

Federal stakeholders identified the following potential effects:

- Diminished quality and consistency of agency collaboration
- Decreased urgency and focus of agency staff
- Duplication and suboptimal use of federal resources
- Signal that ending homelessness is not a federal priority

State and local stakeholders identified the following potential effects:

- Increased burden on local communities to seek best practices
- Decreased support in navigating relationships with local and federal stakeholders
- Reduced focus on a central vision that drives the national plan to end homelessness
- Weakened momentum for challenging work ahead

Stakeholders also identified recommendations for addressing challenges and strengthening USICH’s role, if USICH’s work continues.

Federal and national advocacy stakeholders had the following recommendations:

- Increase USICH’s staff capacity
- Clarify USICH’s role at the local level
- Engage additional stakeholders at both levels

State and local stakeholders had the following recommendations:

- Increase USICH’s staff capacity
- Strengthen USICH’s mandate to coordinate federal agencies’ efforts to end homelessness
- Establish opportunities for USICH to receive more feedback on its work

While many of the themes and recommendations we heard in interviews with federal, national, state, and local stakeholders were similar, the examples in this report illustrate the different roles and levers for influence USICH has at each level.

How Would Terminating USICH Affect Efforts to End Homelessness?

About This Assessment

This assessment describes the US Interagency Council on Homelessness's (USICH's) role and the potential effects of its termination perceived by the federal, national advocacy, state, and local stakeholders we interviewed who work with USICH on efforts to end homelessness. Because homelessness is a complex problem, organizations working to end and prevent homelessness take a collaborative approach. Many stakeholders we spoke to saw efforts to end homelessness as a collective impact model in which various actors contribute to shared goals and results. In such a framework, it is difficult or impossible to link one actor to a specific result. Many actors contribute to progress and success, and there is no clear counterfactual or comparison to know what might have happened without any one actor. Our assessment methods captured the perspectives of people who would be most affected by USICH's termination: people who work directly with USICH on efforts to end homelessness. We asked interviewees about USICH's strengths and weaknesses, what they perceive as USICH's influence within the collaborative approach to end homelessness, and what might be the effects on their work if USICH sunsets in 2017 (see appendix B for the interview guide).

Our findings are based on interviews, literature review, and secondary data collection conducted from April to July 2016. The research team interviewed more than 50 federal, national, state, and local stakeholders across the public, private, and nonprofit sectors, identified by USICH, who are working to end homelessness and have engaged directly with the agency (appendix A). To capture the federal perspective, we interviewed lead staff from the council's member agencies, including the US Departments of Defense (DOD), Education, Health and Human Services (HHS), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Interior, Justice, Labor, and Veterans Affairs (VA), as well as the Social Security Administration. In addition, we interviewed key staff from the Government Accountability Office and the White House's Domestic Policy Council. We interviewed lead staff at five key national advocacy organizations and nonprofits as well as three former USICH executive directors.

To capture the local perspective, we conducted two site visits to Los Angeles and Houston. These sites were selected from USICH's priority communities. USICH provided contact information of key

stakeholders in these communities, including respondents from the local Continuums of Care (a HUD-funded homeless services collaborative), the city or county, the business community, and nonprofits. We supplemented the site visits with telephone interviews to other local respondents who engaged directly with USICH in five communities, including those communities' Continuums of Care.

Our findings represent only the views of the people we interviewed.

Why Is Ending Homelessness So Challenging?

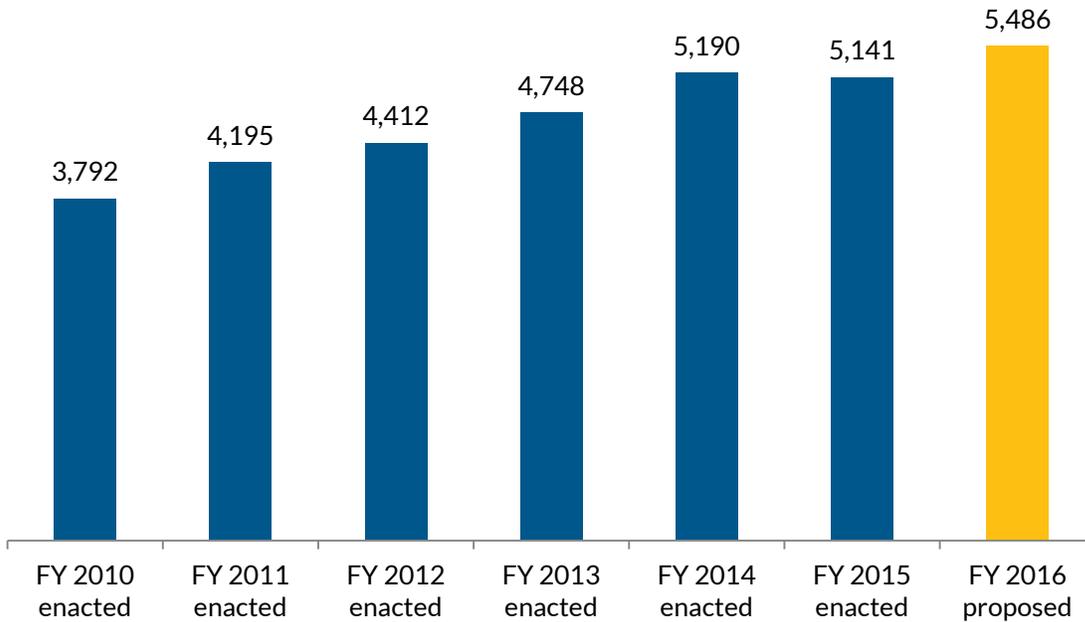
Homelessness is a complex, multisector problem that cannot be solved by any single agency or system. Several federal agencies have programs and funding streams dedicated to ending and preventing homelessness. Bureaucratic barriers often prevent streamlining these targeted programs and funding streams. Additionally, federal silos often produce weakened accountability for action and results, as each agency lacks the full budget and authority to address multisystem challenges at the root of homelessness.

The combined federal budget authority for targeted homeless assistance programs has grown from \$3.8 billion in 2010 to over \$5 billion in 2015, and is proposed at almost \$5.5 billion for 2016 (figure 1). A report by the US Government Accountability Office (GAO 2012a) identifies 26 programs in 2010 targeted to people experiencing or at risk for homelessness across eight federal agencies, including the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Justice, Labor, and Veterans Affairs; the Federal Emergency Management Agency within the Department of Homeland Security; and the General Services Administration. Most of these programs fall under HHS, HUD, and the VA (table 1).

FIGURE 1

Targeted Homeless Assistance Programs

Federal budget authority in millions of dollars



Source: USICH 2015.

Note: FY 2013 enacted budget reflects postsequester funding levels.

These targeted programs operate alongside 62 mainstream programs identified by the GAO (2012a) that are available to low-income people and people experiencing homelessness for additional services and supports. These mainstream programs include Medicaid, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and public housing programs and are administered by the Departments of Agriculture, Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Justice, Labor, and Veterans Affairs; the General Services Administration; and the Social Security Administration.

Table 1 (USICH 2016) portrays the scope and scale of the federal response to homelessness and its fragmentation across agencies and programs. Fragmentation requires intentional coordination to minimize inefficiencies from overlap or duplication (GAO 2012a). Because almost half of federal funding for targeted homeless assistance programs is allocated for grants to states, communities, and nonprofits, the need for federal coordination and collaboration is reflected in the challenges experienced by organizations attempting to end homelessness in their communities.

TABLE 1

Discretionary Federal Budget Authority for Targeted Homelessness Programs

Department	Program	Budget Authority (in Millions of Dollars)		
		FY 2015 enacted	FY 2016 enacted	FY 2017 proposed
Education	Education for Homeless Children and Youth program	65	70	85
Health and Human Services	ACF: Head Start program	358	365	371
	ACF: Runaway and Homeless Youth; Service Connections for Youth	114	119	126
	HRSA: Health Care for the Homeless program	410	440	440
	SAMHSA: Homeless Prevention and Housing programs	33	33	33
	SAMHSA: Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness	65	65	65
	SAMHSA: Treatment Systems for Homelessness	41	41	36
	FEMA: Emergency Food and Shelter program	120	120	100
Homeland Security	FEMA: Emergency Food and Shelter program	120	120	100
Housing and Urban Development	Homeless Assistance–Continuum of Care and Emergency Solutions Grant programs	2,135	2,250	2,664
	New HUD-VASH Vouchers	75	60	--
	New Vouchers Targeted to Homeless Families with Children	--	--	88
Justice	Justice Bureau of Justice Assistance: Pay for Success Supportive Housing Demonstration	5	5	10
	Transitional Housing Assistance Grants to Victims of Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, Dating Violence or Stalking program	26	30	30
Labor	Homeless Veterans' Reintegration program	38	38	50
USICH	<i>Opening Doors</i> –Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness	3.6	3.6	3.6
USDA	The Emergency Food Assistance Program	376	372	388
Veterans Affairs	Compensated Work Therapy program	61	62	57
	Domiciliary Care for Homeless Veterans program	183	194	180
	Health Care for Homeless Veterans program	158	155	161
	Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem program	250	206	248
	HUD-VA Supportive Housing program	374	TBD	TBD
	Justice Outreach, Homelessness Prevention Initiative	38	37	40
	Supportive Services for Veteran Families	300	300	300

Source: USICH 2016.

Notes: ACF = Administration for Children and Families; FEMA = Federal Emergency Management Agency; HRSA = Health Resources and Services Administration; HUD = Housing and Urban Development; SAMHSA = Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration; USDA = US Department of Agriculture; USICH = US Interagency Council on Homelessness; VA = Veterans Affairs; VASH = Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing.

Federal agencies and agencies using federal funds locally contended that fragmented homelessness programs reflects the complex nature of homelessness, in which “the needs of people experiencing homelessness varied greatly, as did the nature of the assistance they required” (GAO 2012a). Additionally, the network of programs created greater access to services, a higher likelihood that all

populations were served, and a bridge between homeless services and mainstream programs that would help people experiencing homelessness transition to independence. However, if funding is not appropriately coordinated, local communities also saw fragmented homeless assistance as a burden. Federal fragmentation increases administrative costs for providers using federal funds to provide homelessness assistance in their communities because of various applications for funding, different eligibility criteria, and separate reporting responsibilities, which can make it more difficult to identify and access services for different clients (GAO 2012a).

Both practice and research, such as Burt and Spellman's (2007) synthesis of research on changing community systems into configurations that promote ending homelessness, have contended that ending and preventing complex problems like homelessness requires services integration and systems change through interagency coordination and collaboration. To maximize the federal investment in ending homelessness, federal programs and agencies that administer them must coordinate effectively.

What Is USICH?

Since 1987, the US Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) has promoted services integration and systems change to end homelessness. Its mission, amended by the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act, is to coordinate the federal response to homelessness and create partnerships with the private sector and every level of government to reduce and end homelessness. Under its current congressional authorization, USICH is scheduled to automatically sunset on October 1, 2017.

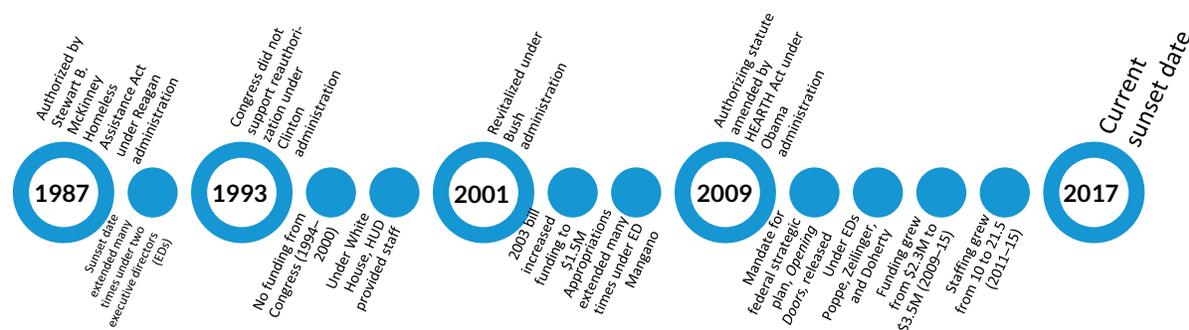
Legislative Authority

USICH was created under the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act in 1987 (renamed the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act in 2000) and was "charged with coordinating the federal response to homelessness and creating a national partnership at every level of government and with the private sector to reduce and end homelessness."¹ The agency absorbed the functions of the HHS's Federal Task Force on Homelessness and took on federal homeless program review, governmental and private program review, information distribution, and provision of professional and technical assistance.

After 1987, appropriations for USICH were reauthorized approximately every three years. However, Congress did not support reauthorization from 1994 to 2000 during the Clinton administration, and the council was a working group within the Domestic Policy Council with administrative support provided by HUD. Under the Bush administration in 2001, the council was revitalized as an independent agency through the VA, HUD, and the Independent Agencies Appropriations Act, and continued to report to the Domestic Policy Council.

Congress and the Obama administration reauthorized USICH through the HEARTH Act in 2009, which gave USICH its current mission to "coordinate the federal response to homelessness and to create a national partnership at every level of government and with the private sector to reduce and end homelessness in the nation while maximizing the effectiveness of the federal government in contributing to the end of homelessness" (USICH, n.d.). Without congressional action, the agency is scheduled to sunset on October 1, 2017. Figure 2 outlines some of USICH's key legislative and structural developments.

FIGURE 2
Key USICH Legislative and Structural Developments since 1987



In the HEARTH Act, USICH was tasked with creating a strategic plan to end homelessness, which manifested in *Opening Doors*, the nation's first comprehensive plan to prevent and end homelessness across all populations (box 1).

Structure and Budget

In 2016, USICH's budget calls for 20.5 General Schedule (except the executive director) full-time equivalents with an appropriation of \$3.5 million dollars. USICH staff includes an executive director,

chief of staff, deputy director (who leads a policy team), and a field-based national initiatives team with staff in Boston, Detroit, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Seattle. Other positions include finance, administration, and communications, as well as program analysts and assistants.

USICH convenes a council that includes the heads of 19 member agencies. The council elects a chair and vice chair each year from its members; the current chair is HHS secretary Sylvia Mathews Burwell, and the vice chair is Department of Education secretary John King Jr. Furthermore, the council appoints USICH's executive director, currently Matthew Doherty. Member agencies include the following:

- Corporation for National and Community Service
- General Services Administration
- Office of Management and Budget
- Social Security Administration
- US Department of Agriculture
- US Department of Commerce
- US Department of Defense
- US Department of Education
- US Department of Energy
- US Department of Health and Human Services
- US Department of Homeland Security
- US Department of Housing and Urban Development
- US Department of the Interior
- US Department of Justice
- US Department of Labor
- US Department of Transportation
- US Department of Veterans Affairs
- US Postal Service
- White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

The council meets quarterly to review progress on the goals and strategies in *Opening Doors*. Recent council meetings have included discussions on veterans and families or racial disparities and criminalization of homelessness. Between council meetings, USICH engages with federal staff and convenes several interagency working groups, including groups focused on the population goals in *Opening Doors*. Locally, USICH focuses on 25 high-priority communities based on point-in-time estimates of people experiencing homelessness and other data indicating need.

BOX 1

Opening Doors: A Federal Strategic Plan

Responding to its charge under the HEARTH ACT, USICH released *Opening Doors*, the country's first comprehensive federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness in 2010. *Opening Doors* was developed through extensive collaboration and input from federal agencies and experts and significant external stakeholder involvement, including advocates, consumers, and local and state government officials. The plan's vision is that "no one should experience homelessness—no one should be without a safe, stable place to call home." As amended in 2015, *Opening Doors* establishes four population goals:

1. Prevent and end homelessness among veterans in 2015
2. End chronic homelessness in 2017
3. Prevent and end homelessness for families, youth, and children in 2020
4. Set a path to end all types of homelessness

In addition, *Opening Doors* identifies 10 objectives and 66 strategies to meet these goals. Objectives and strategies are organized by five thematic areas: (1) increase leadership, collaboration, and civic engagement; (2) increase access to stable and affordable housing; (3) increase economic security; (4) improve health and stability; and (5) retool the homeless crisis response system. Annual updates on the plan are submitted to Congress pursuant to its current authorizing legislation.

Communication Tools

USICH uses several communications tools to conduct its work. It uses the tools listed below to disseminate information and best practices to federal, state, and local decision makers. The USICH website houses *Opening Doors* and its updates, USICH and federal partners publish resources on the site, and webinars are hosted by both USICH staff and experts in the field on topics relevant to the strategic plan and USICH's federal partners.

- **Website.** USICH maintains a website that helps the agency communicate best practices, "tools for action," relevant news, research, and other resources.
- **Resources.** USICH has published or copublished over 140 documents, including fact sheets, tools, formal guidance, and practice and policy briefs.
- **Social media platforms.** USICH uses several social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, and Vimeo, to deliver its messaging. USICH's Twitter feed has over 8,000 followers, and its Facebook page features over 5,000 likes.

- **Newsletter.** USICH publishes a biweekly newsletter that reaches approximately 15,000 people.
- **Webinars.** Regular USICH webinars are attended by an average of 750 attendees.

Previous GAO Assessments of Interagency Coordination and USICH’s Performance

Because of mandates to maximize performance across the federal government, most recently updated in the Government Performance and Results Modernization Act of 2010 with a focus on managing crosscutting issues, the GAO often reports on the state of interagency coordination in the federal government. Federal agencies have used different mechanisms to coordinate interagency activities, such as the president appointing an interagency coordinator, federal agencies co-locating, or establishing interagency task forces (GAO 2012b). Mechanisms for interagency collaboration have also been used for policy development, program implementation, oversight and monitoring, information sharing and communication, and building organizational capacity (GAO 2012b). Although these mechanisms and examples of federal interagency coordination vary widely in scope and scale, they share features that fall into the following categories:

- Outcomes and accountability
- Bridging organizational cultures
- Leadership
- Clarity of roles and responsibilities
- Participants
- Resources
- Written guidance and agreements

Each of these features raises important issues related to interagency coordination, and the GAO identified effective collaboration practices within these features. In a 2014 report, the GAO reported on four federal interagency groups, including USICH, to identify examples of these features and collaboration practices. The GAO chose the four interagency groups because they had previously documented their success addressing one or more of the key considerations for interagency efforts. The GAO found examples of the ways USICH exhibited some of the practices to enhance and sustain collaboration among federal agencies (table 2). Many of these practices and examples align with the themes highlighted by stakeholders during our independent assessment.

TABLE 2

USICH Practices to Enhance and Sustain Collaboration

Key features of interagency collaboration	Collaboration practices	Examples from USICH identified by GAO
Outcomes and accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Define and articulate a common outcome. ■ Develop mechanisms to monitor, evaluate, and report results. ■ Reinforce agency accountability for collaborative efforts through agency plans and reports. ■ Reinforce individual accountability for collaborative efforts through performance management systems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ VA and HUD, in collaboration with other federal agencies, shared a joint commitment to preventing and ending veteran homelessness in 2015. ■ USICH conducted extensive outreach to participants and stakeholders before developing shared interagency outcomes and a national strategic plan in 2010. ■ HUD and VA have a shared goal related to the percentage of chronically homeless veterans served by HUD-VASH.
Bridging organizational cultures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Establish compatible policies, procedures, and other means to operate across agency boundaries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ USICH developed a common vocabulary for discussing homelessness and related terms.
Leadership		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ At least three cabinet secretaries attend each USICH meeting. ■ Leadership rotates among cabinet secretaries annually.
Funding, technology, and staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Identify and address needs by leveraging resources. ■ Establish compatible policies, procedures, and other means to operate across agency boundaries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ USICH facilitates a broad understanding of the policy and program tools that each member agency brings to the table. ■ HHS and the VA have made their homelessness programs' data systems compatible with HUD's as part of their work USICH.

Source: GAO 2014.

Notes: GAO = Government Accountability Office; HHS = Health and Human Services; HUD = Housing and Urban Development; USICH = US Interagency Council on Homelessness; VA = Veterans Affairs; VASH = Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing.

In a report on fragmentation and overlap among targeted federal homelessness programs, the GAO assessed *Opening Doors* against its six characteristics of effective national strategies (GAO 2012a). *Opening Doors* fully or partially addressed the six characteristics of an effective national strategy, with particular strengths in the participatory process for developing the plan and the data used to define the nature and scope of homelessness as a national problem. The GAO also found areas where *Opening Doors* could strengthen its alignment with the characteristics of an effective national strategy, by identifying activities and corresponding performance metrics that the council and member agencies could use to measure their progress in implementing the plan, discussing the resources needed to

achieve the plan’s objectives and strategies, and discussing the cost-effectiveness of specific federal programs. USICH noted it was focusing on these activities in the implementation of *Opening Doors*, but the GAO recommended these efforts be transparent to ensure accountability and inform federal efforts to end homelessness. Some of the examples and areas for improvement the GAO identified in *Opening Doors* were echoed in our interviews.

How Are Efforts to End Homelessness Progressing?

Establishing a Consistent Count of Homelessness

To evaluate USICH’s effectiveness, it is important to know if homelessness has decreased since USICH was established. National data on homelessness have only been available for nine years through a homeless point-in-time (PIT) count and Homeless Management Information Systems. USICH did not lead the establishment of these data sources but has increased their adoption. Creating a federal plan to end homelessness has helped spur the adoption of the PIT count and Homeless Management Information Systems across federal agencies and increased the urgency to address critical gaps in understanding homelessness. Since releasing *Opening Doors*, USICH has improved data collection on veterans and youth.

The PIT count is the primary data source for measuring the progress of *Opening Doors*. Every HUD-funded Continuum of Care is required by HUD to complete a PIT count each year (or every other year for unsheltered counts) to identify people living in emergency shelter, transitional housing, or in places not meant for human habitation (e.g., on the street, in cars or abandoned buildings). PIT counts have limitations. They likely produce underestimates because of the challenge counting “hidden homelessness,” such as youth who stay on friends’ couches or families who live in motel rooms. The PIT count is a HUD initiative, and HUD provides communities with resources, guidance, and technical assistance to improve local counts. HUD collects and analyzes the data and publishes the results in its annual homeless assessment report to Congress. HUD also encourages communities to use additional data sources, such as the Housing Inventory Count, American Housing Survey, and Homeless Management Information Systems data to understand the full picture of homelessness. USICH has encouraged other federal agencies to adopt the PIT count and other federal data sources to create a common platform for understanding the extent and nature of homelessness.

Before *Opening Doors*, veteran status was an optional data element in the PIT count. Volunteers were not required to ask each person if he or she was a veteran, and the data were often missing. The VA relied on program data to measure the extent of veteran homelessness but missed veterans who were not using VA programs. With *Opening Doors*, the VA adopted the PIT count as its main measure of progress toward ending veteran homelessness. This has allowed a count of homeless veterans that includes those in VA programs, in community homeless programs, and on the street. Through the Solving Veterans Homelessness as One interagency framework, USICH has worked with HUD and the VA to help local VA staff and grantees work with Continuums of Care to improve PIT count accuracy.

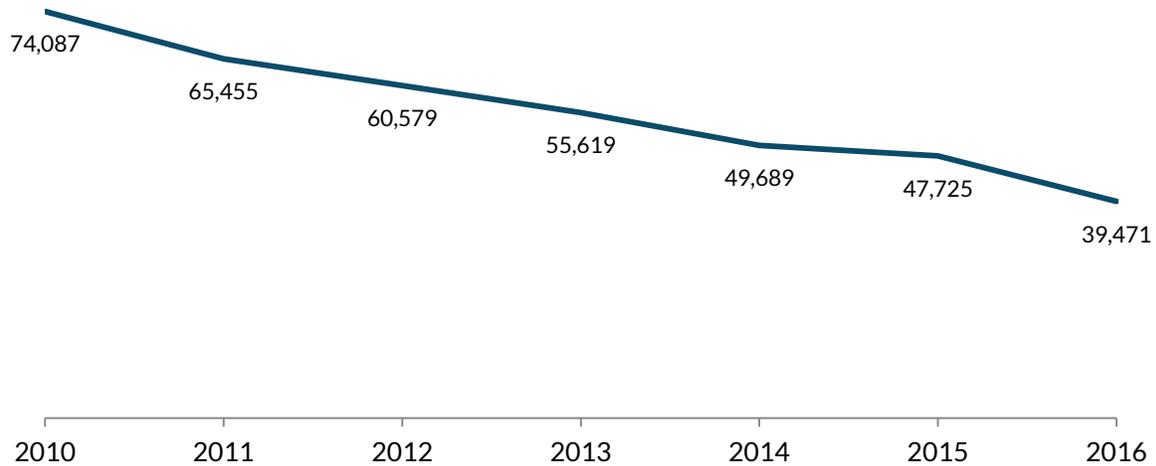
Although *Opening Doors* set a goal to end youth homelessness by 2020, no one has a reliable national estimate of the number of youth experiencing homelessness or this population's characteristics. While communities are now required to report on homeless youth as part of their PIT count, this method is widely thought to underreport the extent of youth homelessness (Pergamit et al. 2013). USICH created an action plan for producing a reliable national estimate of youth homelessness through improved PIT counts, including the interagency Youth Count! initiative and a national household survey (USICH 2013). Through Voices of Youth Count, a public-private partnership, work is under way to develop a national estimate of homeless youth in 2017.²

Trends in Homelessness: 2010–16

Opening Doors set a goal to end chronic and veteran homelessness in 2015; the chronic homelessness goal was later pushed back to 2017. Veteran homelessness did not fully end in 2015, and it is unlikely that USICH and its federal and private-sector partners will end chronic homelessness in 2017. However, veteran homelessness has decreased 47 percent since 2010, from more than 74,000 veterans to fewer than 40,000 veterans (figure 3). By August 2016, Virginia and Connecticut and 29 communities were certified by HUD, the VA, and USICH as having met the federal criteria for ending veteran homelessness.³ Additionally, from 2010 to 2015, the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness declined 22 percent, from more than 106,000 to around 83,000 (figure 4).

FIGURE 3

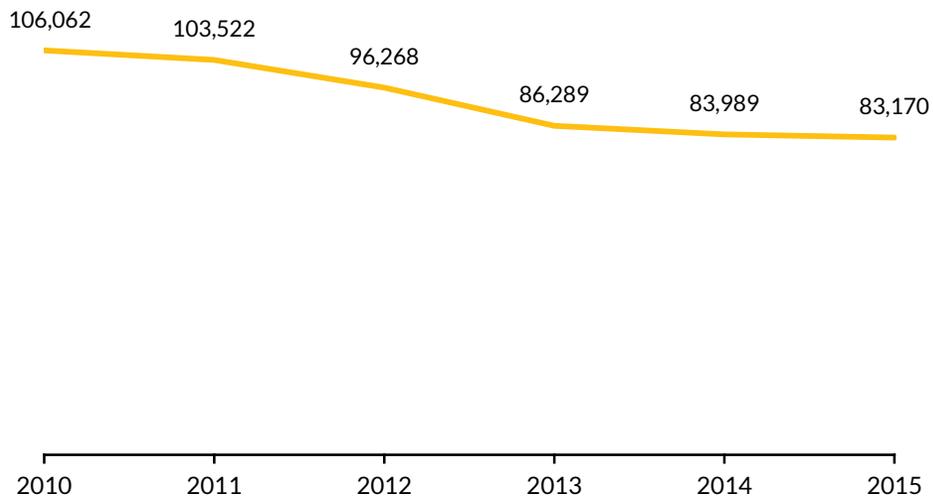
Veterans Experiencing Homelessness on a Single Night, 2010–16



Sources: Henry et al. (2015) and “2016 PIT Estimate of Veteran Homelessness in the US,” US Department of Housing and Urban Development, accessed September 16, 2016, <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/5114/2016-pit-estimate-of-veteran-homelessness-in-the-us/>.

FIGURE 4

People Experiencing Chronic Homelessness, 2010–15

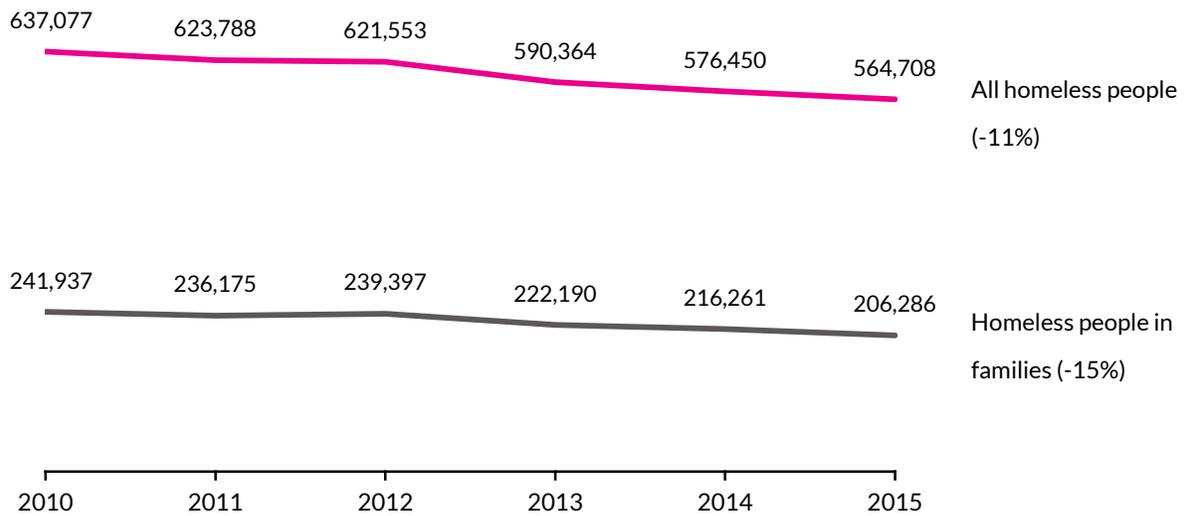


Source: Henry et al. (2015).

Opening Doors set a goal to end family and youth homelessness by 2020 and set a path to end homelessness for all people. From 2010 to 2015, the number of people in families experiencing homelessness declined 15 percent, and the number of people experiencing homelessness has declined 11 percent (figure 5).

FIGURE 5

Point-in-Time Estimates of People Experiencing Homelessness, 2010–15



Source: Henry et al. (2015).

It is difficult to isolate USICH’s influence on the homeless PIT counts. In our interviews, some respondents saw USICH as a driving force behind the reductions in homelessness but also cited the many other important partners who have helped drive the work forward. The next section of this report details USICH’s role and its effect on efforts to end homelessness, according to the stakeholders we interviewed. As one stakeholder noted when explaining the effect of USICH’s potential termination, “we have made extraordinary progress ending homelessness under the USICH and *Opening Doors* model...that you would take a critical factor out of that equation and expect that progress to continue, I think is a really, really poor assumption.”

“We have made extraordinary progress ending homelessness under the USICH and Opening Doors model...that you would take a critical factor out of that equation and expect that progress to continue, I think is a really, really poor assumption.”

How Does USICH Facilitate National and Local Progress?

Tasked with coordinating the federal response to homelessness, USICH is perceived as uniquely positioned to help federal, state, and local actors achieve the nation’s ambitious goals. Stakeholders across all sectors and levels of government identified USICH as part of a highly effective performance-driven partnership to end homelessness. USICH brought together partners who had never worked together because of forces that kept work in silos. Many stakeholders pointed to USICH as a model of interagency collaboration, with a focus on evidence and results that led to key successes. Stakeholders commonly discussed five components of USICH’s role (table 3):

- Coordinate an interagency, multisector response to a complex problem
- Navigate the silos that block coordination, thereby reducing fragmentation
- Identify and expand evidence-based and cost-effective solutions
- Drive the work of a federal strategic plan, holding multiple agencies accountable to shared goals
- Marshal cross-sector resources for maximum effectiveness

While many of the themes were consistent across federal, national, state, and local stakeholders, the examples illustrate the different activities and levers for influence USICH has at each level.

TABLE 3

Components of USICH’s Role and Common Themes and Examples Identified by Stakeholders

Components of USICH’s role	Themes and examples
Coordinate an interagency, multisector response to a complex problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Cabinet-level leadership routinely attended USICH’s quarterly council meetings. ■ USICH regularly convened national advocates for coordination and input. ■ Strong USICH messaging on the cross-sector response to homelessness led to the formation of local homelessness task forces.
Navigate the silos that block coordination, thereby reducing fragmentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ USICH brought the DOD and the VA together to plan for “warm handoffs” of transitioning military service members, strengthening housing stability. ■ USICH supported optimization of the HUD-VASH program at the federal and local levels through a focus on data and on-the-ground lessons. ■ Based on USICH guidance, communities worked to overlap HUD and VA data systems to help community partners produce a shared list of veterans who most need housing assistance.
Identify and expand evidence-based and cost-effective solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ USICH guided federal agencies and communities in applying research to practice to improve programs and systems by promoting housing-first models as a best practice and navigating difficult conversations to transform homeless services into crisis response systems. ■ USICH was a leading thought partner in shifting policy priorities to fund what works for ending homelessness, resulting in reduced funding for less effective and more expensive strategies, such as transitional housing, and increased funding for evidence-based permanent housing strategies. ■ USICH facilitated a feedback loop to federal agencies to understand how policies are implemented on the ground, creating best practices and highlighting necessary federal changes.
Drive the work of a federal strategic plan, holding multiple agencies accountable to shared goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ In 2010, USICH released <i>Opening Doors</i>, the nation’s first comprehensive federal strategy to prevent and end homelessness. Federal agencies and hundreds of communities have adopted this plan, galvanizing coordinated action to end homelessness on specific timelines. ■ Many stakeholders viewed the urgency and focus that came to homelessness issues after <i>Opening Doors</i>, especially the focus on regularly measuring progress, as the crucial factor in progress made since 2010. ■ Communities credited USICH with unprecedented access to federal staff, resulting in unique clarity and alignment in the work to end homelessness. ■ USICH led the creation of federal criteria and benchmarks for effectively ending veteran and chronic homelessness. As of August 2016, two states (Virginia and Connecticut) and 29 communities were certified by HUD, VA, and USICH as having met the federal criteria for ending veteran homelessness. Stakeholders believe these milestones shifted the conversation from managing homelessness to ending it, and built momentum community by community.
Marshal cross-sector resources for maximum effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Federal stakeholders credited USICH with helping maximize federal resources by clarifying the role of federal programs, including Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Insurance, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, housing vouchers, and Medicaid, to best serve people experiencing homelessness. ■ Local stakeholders cited USICH’s tools and resources, such as the Supportive Housing Opportunities Planner Tool and the benchmarks and criteria for ending homelessness, as important in generating cross-sector investment in local homeless response systems.

Notes: DOD = Department of Defense; HUD = Housing and Urban Development; USICH = US Interagency Council on Homelessness; VA = Veterans Affairs; VASH = Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing.

Coordinate an Interagency, Multisector Response to a Complex Problem

Those we interviewed explained that USICH worked directly with federal staff from cabinet secretaries to program managers. Coordinated federal leadership sent a strong message to communities to prioritize multisector collaboration. USICH also brought nonprofits, business leaders, and philanthropy to the table as full partners. Federal and local partners across all sectors said they saw themselves as part of the solution because of USICH.

Cabinet-level leadership routinely attended USICH's quarterly council meetings. USICH's council structure brought together cabinet-level leadership quarterly to review progress toward goals and make high-level decisions to advance federal coordination and collaboration on efforts to end homelessness. One federal staff said, "It's unprecedented that six cabinet-level leaders show up to a meeting on homelessness, and USICH is the structure that makes that happen." Cabinet leaders contributed to council conversations and have rotated as annual council chairs and vice chairs. This active participation was perceived by several stakeholders as a significant motivator for federal staff. Another federal staff said, "The secretary is busy, but she is also spending time on ending homelessness. Our staff knows that, and we push harder and get more accomplished."

"It's unprecedented that six cabinet-level leaders show up to a meeting on homelessness, and USICH is the structure that makes that happen."

USICH regularly convened national advocates for coordination and input. National stakeholders from nonprofit organizations argued that the way USICH regularly convened advocates and solicited input is a rare but welcome federal practice. One stakeholder said, "USICH saw [nonprofit organizations] as full partners, and I don't know that's been particularly the norm in large bureaucracy, to recognize nonprofits as a partner." Stakeholders also thought that including advocates has fostered a team of cross-sector partners and led to more effective working relationships. Another stakeholder said USICH has "been able to do this cross-sector inclusion of advocates. No other body is able to bring together all of the advocates into one space, to set priorities, and get into the weeds of how we can work together. By bringing advocates together and operationalizing it through the federal strategic plan, they have been really helpful."

Strong USICH messaging on the cross-sector response to homelessness led to the formation of local homelessness task forces. In both communities we visited, the business community assisted local plans to end homelessness through leadership and leveraged funding. Stakeholders credited USICH with planting seeds of leadership that have grown into organized task forces that plan and track local progress and advocate with public leaders (box 2). One stakeholder never thought that business was the appropriate actor for ending homelessness, but she heard a former USICH executive director speak on how to end homelessness, and he made a compelling argument about how silos maintain homelessness, spurring her to action locally. Another stakeholder said, “Our collaborative was...fostered by our understanding of the importance of leveraging private-sector funding; that communication and idea came from USICH.”

BOX 2

Engaging the Business Community

In Los Angeles, progress on homelessness has been challenging. Homelessness has been on the rise since 2010, including large increases in chronic homelessness and people in families. However, veteran homelessness decreased 36 percent from 2010 to 2015, with another decrease of 32 percent from 2015 to 2016. While many in the city have played a role in these efforts to end homelessness, stakeholders credited USICH with planting critical seeds of leadership, particularly within the business community. USICH staff across two federal administrations spurred the private sector to see their part in the solution and spent time with key business leaders in the city, providing a link to best practices and peer contacts in other communities and preventing the need to reinvent the wheel. Business leaders in Hollywood brought neighborhood stakeholders together for the first time to create Hollywood 4WRD, launch a plan to end homelessness, embrace housing-first models, and track progress. Additionally, the Business Leader’s Task Force on Homelessness created the Home for Good action plan to end chronic and veteran homelessness in Los Angeles County by 2016. In consultation with USICH, the task force conducted research and elicited community input, ultimately embracing housing-first models and committing to an ambitious timeline. The task force continues to advocate for evidence-based practices in allocating public resources.

Navigate the Silos That Block Coordination, Thereby Reducing Fragmentation

The federal government invests approximately \$5 billion in targeted homeless assistance programs each year (USICH 2015). The stakeholders we interviewed argued that USICH provided an

infrastructure that brought federal agencies together to ensure those dollars fulfilled their purpose without unnecessary duplication or gaps. Stakeholders believed USICH understood the statutory requirements of different programs and the goals and priorities of different agencies, translating across agencies to find common ground and commitment to common goals.

Many of the examples stakeholders discussed concerned efforts to end and prevent veteran homelessness, bringing together the DOD, HUD, and the VA. Stakeholders outside the federal government thought these agencies “spoke different languages” and “saw the world differently,” but with USICH’s help, the agencies “learned to dance together.” Federal stakeholders also acknowledged a shift, arguing that USICH appreciated the silos and statutory requirements of each agency, and had the mandate and capacity to help agencies work across those lines.

USICH brought the DOD and VA together to plan for “warm handoffs” of transitioning military service members, strengthening housing stability. The DOD and VA were already working on transition issues, but USICH elevated the priority when it joined the conversation. USICH pressed the interagency team to “take preventive measures rather than just responding” by establishing a process and mandate for a warm handoff. The transition assistance program was redesigned to mandate a warm handoff from the DOD to the VA anytime eligible service members separating from active duty indicate they have not established a post-separation housing plan, one of the questions on a form for transitioning service members. This handoff will allow the VA to plan appropriate services as veterans return to their civilian community.

USICH supported optimization of the HUD-VASH program at the federal and local levels through a focus on data and on-the-ground lessons. Housing and Urban Development Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) is a housing voucher program for veterans, jointly administered by HUD and the VA. Federal agency staff explained that USICH was a critical support in facilitating “the use of our data in better and new ways to make sure that not just the program was doing well but that our policies were driving toward our goals.” USICH helped broker what stakeholders saw as difficult conversations about data housed in two agencies and for which alignment was needed for managing a shared program. “Trying to coordinate on just the data was a big step, and probably the most important step we took, and I don’t know that we could have done that without USICH,” said one federal staff.

“Trying to coordinate on just the data was a big step and probably the most important step we took, and I don’t know that we could have done that without USICH.”

USICH regional coordinators helped share best practices for HUD-VASH. As one local stakeholder explained, the community had underutilized the HUD-VASH program and was frustrated with the strong silos that were seemingly preventing local partners from finding a solution. “We were banging our heads against the wall,” said the local stakeholder. “Then [our regional coordinator] suggested something that had been done in [another community], and the best thing came out of this discussion was to do a one-day housing search event and invite the veterans on your list and bring [all partners] into the room and get vouchers issued there and then. A week later, we hosted one of those, and it was a tremendous break through for our partnership together. We issued 15 VASH vouchers that day, and we made such tremendous progress just with that one tool....It’s those kinds of insights that got us past our own experience and our own walls so that we had some hope of breaking new ground.”

Based on USICH guidance, communities worked to overlap HUD and VA data systems to help community partners produce a shared list of veterans who most need housing assistance. A large barrier communities face in ending veteran homelessness is the incompatibility of the databases used by HUD and the VA. Local stakeholders discussed the challenges of creating by-name lists of veterans, a best practice that identifies and prioritizes veterans by need and supports a coordinated entry system for homelessness assistance. One stakeholder explained that USICH lifted these data barriers to federal partners and “were able to really champion that and trumpet it in a way that we can’t as one community, in a sea of communities across the country.” With this support, stakeholders in one community we visited redesigned the intake process, aligning the two systems’ data for quality checks and reducing the burden of paperwork on people receiving services.

Identify and Expand Evidence-Based and Cost-Effective Solutions

Many stakeholders we spoke with perceived USICH’s staff members as experts on strategies to end homelessness. USICH focused on the big picture, while other agencies focused on program administration. USICH didn’t have a specific program budget to defend; it was driven by evidence and could be a neutral broker in difficult policy negotiations, ensuring government funded what works.

USICH guided federal agencies and communities in applying research to practice to improve programs and systems by promoting housing-first models as a best practice and navigating difficult conversations to transform homeless services into crisis response systems. Federal and local stakeholders spoke about USICH's role in highlighting evidence that supported a shift from a "housing-ready" approach to a "housing-first" model (Tsemberis, Gulcur, and Nakae 2004) that would ensure homeless assistance programs were ending homelessness, not just managing it. Stakeholders identified other actors who supported this shift and provided important resources, but saw USICH's role as unique because it brought a perspective that was not tied to any specific homeless assistance program and represented the overall federal government's direction.

Federal stakeholders described the orientation to housing-first models as a "huge policy shift." One stakeholder explained that while federal staff were focused on operating good programs, USICH and cabinet-level leaders were driving the policy shifts: "I don't think we would have been able to do that on our own without USICH to make sure...agencies as policymakers were oriented toward housing-first."

Local stakeholders felt the shift as well. One stakeholder said, "I've been doing this work for over 14 years, and when I first came into this work, there was no shared vision around housing-first, and now [USICH staff] are helping communities understand that it is a best practice approach." Those we spoke with explained how USICH staff, particularly regional coordinators, facilitated conversations about housing-first among local partners. One stakeholder explained, "We talk a lot locally among our board members and community about housing-first...but it's always so helpful if an outside person with a national platform comes to our community and further discusses this with our board and our business leaders and our provider community." A stakeholder from a different community echoed this role: "[USICH staff] are willing to be strategically deployed. Here's another example. This other [partner] had a very clear housing ready mindset....[Our regional coordinator] met with them and as the person with the 'ear of the feds,' he is able to say tough things that we can't say as we are relationship building."

"Housing-first, that was a huge policy shift, and I don't think we would have been able to do that on our own without USICH."

USICH was a leading thought partner in shifting policy priorities to fund what works for ending homelessness, resulting in reduced funding for less effective and more expensive strategies, such as transitional housing, and increased funding for evidence-based permanent housing strategies. Growing evidence, including HUD’s Family Options Study (Gubits et al. 2015), has suggested that housing strategies such as supportive housing and rapid rehousing are more cost effective and achieve the same or better outcomes than other strategies such as transitional housing. *Opening Doors* encourages communities to assess and retool transitional housing programs, reducing barriers to entry, reallocating resources, and reserving transitional housing for specific populations that may benefit from the model. Stakeholders at the federal and local levels discussed the difficulty of this shift and the importance of USICH’s role.

One federal stakeholder explained that USICH brought together agencies to “come up with a coordinated response to our strategy for transitional housing. [USICH] also pulled together advocacy groups and stakeholders to think through how we were going to do transitional housing; that kind of coordination is invaluable. As we look at transitional housing, the resistance to change decreases with a coordinated response.” A stakeholder from another agency had a similar perspective: “[USICH] got us aligned in messaging. They didn’t eliminate transitional housing; they helped frame transitional housing as service intensive for people who need service-intense rehabilitation....They are able to speak from a federal government’s viewpoint rather than [one agency] speaking from their individual perspective.” Another stakeholder explained how USICH facilitated discussions among agencies about populations transitional housing may benefit, bringing in additional experts to discuss aligning appropriate transitional housing strategies and resources within the broader policy shift.

In line with these shifts, the Fiscal Year 2015 HUD Continuum of Care program competition reduced funding for transitional housing by \$155 million, increased funding for permanent supportive housing by \$165 million, and doubled funding for rapid rehousing.⁴ One national advocate explained, “USICH has been a leading thought partner in making sure the data drives the decision rather than the intuition...a lot of funding moved from transitional housing and caused lots of consternation at the [Continuum of Care] level, but it’s the right thing to do. We are not going to step back from this, and USICH led the conversation in that direction.”

Other federal stakeholders said USICH helped translate lessons on transitional housing to other agencies. One stakeholder explained that HUD’s experience retooling transitional housing strategies has informed their agency’s examination of programs that might contradict best practices. One federal staff argued, “Having a structure of accountability around really hard questions—when you have to make a decision to stop funding something you’ve been doing for a really long time to do something that

would have a better cost to outcome—that is where you really need policy evidence and a strong partnership and continued reinforcement to create the political will to do that.”

USICH facilitated a feedback loop to federal agencies to understand how policies are implemented on the ground, creating best practices and highlighting necessary federal changes. Federal and local stakeholders said USICH facilitated a federal-local feedback loop on what was and wasn’t working to end homelessness. One federal stakeholder explained that USICH is “good at finding both the positive things and barriers that are happening at the local level. They are able to bring those challenges and accomplishments to the national level and communicate what stakeholders are seeing at the local level. There are things that I may not ever know that are happening..., but their regional coordinators are able to get that information for us.”

Local stakeholders echoed this message, emphasizing how USICH translated federal priorities for local and state stakeholders, and carried the message of local successes and challenges back to federal partners (box 3). Several local stakeholders described USICH’s role in this feedback loop:

- “As we started to change the system, [our regional coordinator] lent credibility and continued to bring the federal message to the table. It was so valuable. It wasn’t just a political sound bite—it had the support of the entire federal government.”
- “We’ve often asked [our regional coordinator] to help facilitate conversations with our state government entities to help move along some of those conversations from just conversations to action and implementation....They help us bring partners to the table that we aren’t able to bring on our own.”
- “I could say, ‘We’re struggling with this; this is a barrier,’ and [USICH] would come back and say, ‘That’s a misperception; that’s not actually a barrier,’ and would then go get [the federal agency] to provide [technical assistance] to people on the ground.”
- “They have helped us communicate correctly with our federal partners. Their communication of our successes and challenges has been extremely effective.”

BOX 3

Leveraging Federal Leadership

Houston has seen large decreases in homelessness across the board since 2010, and declared an effective end to veteran homelessness in 2015. Stakeholders agreed that many forces aligned to create the city's momentum for such a milestone, including leadership from the mayor, the business community, the Continuum of Care, the public housing authority, and local philanthropy. Stakeholders also agreed that those local leaders rallied around *Opening Doors*. USICH staff met with leaders across the city, lending credibility to the idea that Houston could end veteran homelessness with the right strategies and investments. The city aligned its homeless system to federal recommendations, citing USICH as its closest federal partner, with staff frequently on the ground to be “barrier busters” and help navigate federal programs and regulations. Stakeholders said USICH staff would often go in first for difficult conversations, bringing the federal government's voice to partners who resisted the shift to housing-first or data integration efforts. USICH also took Houston's voice to the federal government, inviting partners to present on their work to the council. Hearing that Houston wanted to better understand the role of income and employment strategies, Department of Labor staff followed up directly by connecting with the local workforce investment board, spurring new partnerships and strategies in the work to end homelessness.

Drive the Work of a Federal Strategic Plan, Holding Multiple Agencies Accountable to Shared Goals

Stakeholders explained that USICH has focused on the system and policy changes needed to end homelessness outlined in *Opening Doors* while other agencies have focused on administering effective targeted and mainstream federal programs. Our interviewees perceived USICH as an expert resource to federal agencies and communities and as a vehicle for holding federal actors accountable to results. Without infrastructure to drive interagency work and measure progress, agencies often communicated without action driving measurable results.

In 2010, USICH released Opening Doors, the nation's first comprehensive federal strategy to prevent and end homelessness. Federal agencies and hundreds of communities have adopted this plan, galvanizing coordinated action to end homelessness on specific timelines. USICH created *Opening Doors* with unprecedented input from thousands of practitioners, researchers, public officials, and people who have experienced homelessness. When asked whether USICH affected efforts to end homelessness, interviewees often mentioned *Opening Doors* first. One federal stakeholder argued, “The fundamental

building block is *Opening Doors*. That is the thing that everyone bought into. Without that building block, the rest [of the progress on homelessness] wouldn't have happened the way it did.”

Federal stakeholders explained how agencies adopted the goals and strategies established in *Opening Doors*. Agency staff were experts in administering programs but leaned on USICH to help negotiate how to better align federal programs with the strategic plan. For example, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Cooperative Agreements to Benefit Homeless Individuals program required a statewide plan to end homelessness that aligned with *Opening Doors*. “It was a small policy insertion that had implications beyond the [program's] grants...that actually advanced the federal plan across the country,” according to one stakeholder. Without USICH, agencies are more likely to implement programs without thinking strategically about leveraging federal resources to achieve national goals to end homelessness. Local stakeholders' applications for HUD's homeless assistance funding are measured against the strategies in *Opening Doors*, further encouraging alignment.

Other stakeholders argued that the common understanding of the goals and timelines in *Opening Doors* indicate its success. Local stakeholders spoke about attaching similar timelines to their local goals to align with the federal plan. One national advocate noted, “It's not the usual way of doing business, ending things with a date...[USICH] pushed hard on that...everybody knows what the goals are.” Stakeholders see periodic updates to *Opening Doors* as paramount to continued progress, communicating new progress and priorities.

“The fundamental building block is Opening Doors. That is the thing that everyone bought into. Without that building block, the rest [of the progress on homelessness] wouldn't have happened the way it did.”

Many stakeholders viewed the urgency and focus that came to homelessness issues after Opening Doors, especially the focus on regularly measuring progress, as the crucial factor in progress made since 2010. One federal stakeholder said, “We've been working on this for 20 years but never with urgency or focus as we have had with the federal strategic plan.” Much of this urgency and focus comes from the regular measurement of progress toward goals. These data keep the attention of agency leadership who must regularly report on and interpret progress. Stakeholders explained that USICH also tracks

activities across agencies and how those efforts contribute to the overall trends. These submetrics are presented regularly at council meetings and highlight areas where leadership should push for more progress.

Before data were available this way, USICH helped agencies understand what data were collected and how to use data to track progress. Agencies working on veteran homelessness piloted that work, which is now being adapted by agencies that hold the data to track progress on youth homelessness.

Federal stakeholders argued that collecting and tracking data helped the council push past bumps in the road. Instead of losing momentum when progress stalled, agencies pushed for more data to understand the challenges and noted USICH was in a unique position to make that happen. National advocates also saw the effects of regularly measuring progress. One stakeholder explained, “I think they’ve kept the federal agencies on task in a way they hadn’t been before. Many of our conversations with federal agencies around homelessness or supportive housing are conversations that couldn’t have been had years ago without USICH’s focus on the plan and results.”

Communities credited USICH with unprecedented access to federal staff, resulting in unique clarity and alignment in the work to end homelessness. USICH connected local actors to federal staff for guidance and assistance. Many local stakeholders said the status quo in their work consists of murky, often contradictory messages from federal agencies and long delays in responses to questions. One local stakeholder argued, “It seems like through USICH we get better contact...with USICH we have a better connection with DC, and USICH would connect us with other agency folks.” Increased contact has led to greater clarity and alignment, which allows local actors to be clear about what success looks like and hold partners accountable.

USICH led the creation of federal criteria and benchmarks for effectively ending veteran and chronic homelessness. As of August 2016, two states (Virginia and Connecticut) and 29 communities were certified by HUD, VA, and USICH as having met the federal criteria for ending veteran homelessness. Stakeholders believe these milestones shifted the conversation from managing homelessness to ending it, and built momentum community by community. While the federal criteria and benchmarks for effectively ending veteran and chronic homelessness was one of the most complicated USICH contributions discussed by interviewees, overall they were perceived as a key step forward. One national advocate explained, “The national benchmarks have been useful in defining and measuring what we mean by ending homelessness. That was a critical change, because it gave communities a way to quantify how their systems were operating. They aren’t perfect, but they capture a lot of the critical work.”

One local stakeholder argued that it would have been easier to succumb to political pressure and compromise on a less ambitious goal, but the federal benchmarks gave local actors the credibility to define the systems and resources they needed to effectively end veteran homelessness. Another local stakeholder explained that when he goes to conferences to talk about homelessness, it seems like everyone is speaking the same language because of the federal benchmarks. For communities who have achieved the goal and for those who have not, the benchmarks and criteria have created important momentum for local efforts to end homelessness. Local stakeholders explained the following:

- “The certification around ending chronic veteran homelessness and being able to tell people here locally that the federal government said we did it was really important and was wind beneath our sails.”
- “We are making a lot of progress on reaching our goal to end veteran homelessness in the community. One of the things [USICH] gave us was their tool on the federal benchmarks to determine whether or not you’ve met the criteria to declare whether your community has ended veteran homelessness....We decided on a monthly basis to have calls with [USICH] to discuss progress and to use that tool in measuring that progress.”

Marshal Cross-Sector Resources for Maximum Effectiveness

Interviewees argued that USICH convened agencies from a position of independence and authority. Agencies negotiated with USICH at the table because USICH held a systems-level vision, not an agency’s agenda. USICH could connect many federal resources, providing clarity and guidance to make local investments most effective.

Federal stakeholders credited USICH with helping maximize federal resources by clarifying the role of federal programs, including Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Insurance, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, housing vouchers, and Medicaid, to best serve people experiencing homelessness. Given the complexity of homelessness, stakeholders we talked to emphasized the importance of using all possible resources to end and prevent it. Most of these resources are outside the targeted homelessness programs and represent the larger network of mainstream programs and benefits available to low-income and vulnerable people. These fragmented mainstream resources are spread across many federal agencies with their own mandates and definitions. This fragmentation is experienced at the local level as well. One local funder said, “We tend to right-size our approach to the resources and solutions in our own silo, rather than looking at the bigger picture to effectively allocate

all of our resources.” Another national organization echoed this perspective, explaining, “it’s very hard to do systems change when you don’t have someone looking at the whole system....That’s where USICH has been important.”

With appreciation for the origin of these silos, and an in-depth understanding of agencies’ funding streams and programs, stakeholders said USICH could broker guidelines for using targeted and mainstream federal resources to serve people experiencing homelessness. For example, USICH facilitated the joint release of guidance from the Social Security Administration, the VA, and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to connect people experiencing homelessness to Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Insurance benefits. Federal stakeholders explained that while targeting homeless people may not be in each agency’s mission, coordination and collaboration is efficient because they provide more access to benefits and improve each agency’s core work.

Local stakeholders also discussed the importance of mainstream coordination. One stakeholder said, “What we see locally is that mainstream systems provide more services to homeless people than the homeless system. These systems have federal counterparts—I think federal agencies have a significant role to play....In that context, USICH is an ally for us within the federal government, and they have a perspective that starts with homelessness, so they are important in terms of navigating [resources] from other agencies.”

“It’s very hard to do systems change when you don’t have someone looking at the whole system....That’s where USICH has been important.”

Local stakeholders credited USICH’s tools and resources, such as the Supportive Housing Opportunities Planner Tool and the benchmarks and criteria for ending homelessness, as important in generating cross-sector investment in local homeless response systems. Stakeholders discussed USICH’s role in generating local and private investment for efforts to end homelessness. For example, one local stakeholder discussed the Supportive Housing Opportunities Planner Tool that allows Continuums of Care to identify and decrease the permanent housing gap in their community. Stakeholders can share that message and number with community leaders and private partners to reinforce the need for affordable housing.

The benchmarks and criteria for ending homelessness increased investment needed for a community to effectively end homelessness and maintain that system. The benchmarks provided federally driven accountability for continued investment in community systems that can be difficult to sustain locally.

Similarly, USICH provided guidance on landlord engagement. One stakeholder explained, “We are struggling with needing to find more apartments, and [partners] are not taking the comprehensive approach that we need. And I just said, ‘Did you see that USICH did a report on landlord engagement...?’ and I said, ‘Well, that’s the model we should be following.’” Other local stakeholders echoed the value of having USICH make the federal case for landlord and private-sector engagement, helping break down barriers that can be difficult to navigate locally.

What Are the Potential Effects of USICH’s Planned Termination?

Despite a great deal of traction in addressing homelessness at the local and federal levels, respondents noted that the road to ending homelessness nationwide is long, particularly for youth and families, and ultimately we must address the lack of affordable housing that is a root cause of homelessness. Stakeholders were certain that work to end homelessness would continue without USICH, citing the buy-in the work has at all levels. However, to continue achieving robust results, stakeholders overwhelmingly believe USICH should continue as a key partner, maintaining critical federal infrastructure for the work.

Stakeholders argued USICH’s termination would slow efforts to end homelessness at federal and local levels. In this section, we outline the potential effects discussed by interviewees (table 4).

TABLE 4

Potential Effects of Termination Identified by Stakeholders

Federal and national advocacy stakeholders	State and local stakeholders
Diminished quality and consistency of agency collaboration	Increased burden on local communities to seek best practices
Decreased urgency and focus of agency staff	Decreased support for navigating relationships with local and federal stakeholders
Duplication and suboptimal use of federal resources	Minimized focus on the national plan to end homelessness
Signal that ending homelessness is not a federal priority	Weakened momentum for challenging work ahead

Effects at the Federal and National Level

Diminished quality and consistency of agency collaboration. Federal stakeholders thought the value of agency collaboration would diminish, negatively affecting progress toward shared goals. One federal stakeholder explained that USICH made sense of the different homelessness efforts across agencies: “USICH is the connective tissue across complex local and federal efforts. If we want to end homelessness, getting rid of USICH would create an atmosphere of unnecessary chaos.” Because USICH connects staff between agencies and maintains institutional knowledge of homelessness efforts, stakeholders said the absence of USICH would be difficult, especially after a change in administration, under new agency leadership.

Similarly, federal stakeholders were clear that while they would continue to collaborate with other agencies, they do not have the time or staff to continue the planning and following up that goes into USICH working group and council meetings. One stakeholder argued, “If USICH disappeared, we or any other administration would find a way to encourage interagency collaboration, but the quality and consistency of that collaboration, and the rigor and strategic value of the planning...would be weaker.” Furthermore, federal agencies would find collaboration harder without an independent, trusted broker such as USICH. Several stakeholders argued that interagency meetings called by one agency do not solicit nearly the same participation or commitment because they are not perceived as part of a shared agenda.

“If USICH disappeared, we or any other administration would find a way to encourage interagency collaboration, but the quality and consistency of that collaboration, and the rigor and strategic value of the planning...would be weaker.”

Decreased urgency and focus of agency staff. Federal agencies have competing priorities. When prioritizing efforts to end homelessness, stakeholders argued that USICH’s “top-down effect has great prioritization power within agencies.” USICH is the only federal entity with a singular and clear focus on preventing and ending homelessness. For agencies that don’t focus on homelessness, the commitment to homelessness efforts depends on the administration’s priorities and agency leadership. Stakeholders argued that without the USICH structure that engages this leadership, staff priorities would wane. One

stakeholder said, “Although [staff] are committed, they are so busy that they would not have the drive or focus towards goals that USICH fuels.” Another explained, “Homelessness is not a key priority for [our agency]. What I appreciate is that they (USICH) make sure that we give this issue the correct attention.”

Duplication and suboptimal use of federal resources. When stakeholders identified potential costs of USICH’s termination, they commonly discussed duplication and suboptimal use of resources and efforts. One federal stakeholder identified it as the “opportunity cost of not knowing what everyone else is doing,” and further explained, “Everybody is well intentioned, but we operate inside our own boxes and think that we have to deliver the solution ourselves.” Agencies know they can manage good programs but fear that lack of coordination could lead to duplication of services, resulting in suboptimal use of federal funds.

Signal that ending homelessness is not a federal priority. Stakeholders viewed USICH’s leadership in developing the federal strategy to prevent and end homelessness as a signal of the federal government’s interest, dedication, and commitment. Allowing USICH to sunset, in one respondent’s words, is a “horrible signal to send to people, the people who work every day on ending homelessness.” Many respondents believe that USICH as a signal of federal interest has been essential to recent progress, particularly in reducing veterans homelessness.

Effects at the State and Local Level

Increased burden on local communities to seek best practices. States and communities look to USICH as a source of best practices. Without USICH’s resources, local stakeholders argued they will need to cultivate these capacities internally, seek consultant support, or lack much of this important information. However, spending limited resources to cultivate similar expertise and technical assistance would be challenging for agencies that are already overstretched and under resourced in their current efforts to end homelessness. One local stakeholder explained, “I can’t emphasize enough this is very important for us little small guys out in the community. We need access to organizations that have more resources than us to provide us with the tools that are essential for us to be effective in putting in place evidence-based practices and successful solutions in our community, because we don’t have the wherewithal to do that ourselves. We depend on their resources to help us implement that.”

Other respondents stressed the importance of having USICH for feedback and support: “We do biweekly calls and calls in between those times if we have a question about a particular thing. Just not having a person to turn to with national perspective hurts.”

Decreased support for navigating relationships with local and federal stakeholders. Interviewees argued that USICH supports and facilitates relationships among stakeholders, with local and state government, and with federal field staff and staff in Washington, DC. One stakeholder discussed how USICH helped them connect with state government partners that they would not have been able to engage otherwise: “They help us bring partners to the table that we aren’t able to bring on our own even through a lot of outreach. Their name brings enough weight to bring that partner to the table in a more meaningful way than if we asked them.” Beyond the initial connection to partners, stakeholders believed they would see fewer outcomes from these connections without USICH to follow up and maintain accountability. A local stakeholder spoke about trying to work with state government and realizing how much more fragmented the work was at the state level than work at the national level with USICH: “We spend so much time on the phone, in meetings—it is really a nightmare to think about crossing issues like that at the state level. We haven’t had to spend so many resources at the federal level because USICH does this work for us.”

Minimized focus on the national plan to end homelessness. Local stakeholders stressed that terminating USICH would weaken the sense of shared vision. One stakeholder said that “without central vision or strategy, it would be hard to have as big of an impact. You can serve people but not impact the system.” Others conveyed the importance of future updates to *Opening Doors* in documenting progress toward ending homelessness: “Reports like *Opening Doors*, the federal strategy to end homelessness, wouldn’t happen or would have to be done by other agencies. Not having an update to *Opening Doors* as the work evolves would be challenging. These updates are very helpful for us to be informed and do the work we do.”

Weakened momentum for challenging work ahead. Local stakeholders also worried about the risk of weakened momentum and not seeing the bigger picture. Despite the progress on homelessness so far, stakeholders emphasized ending homelessness is likely to get more difficult as priorities shift to address the other population goals set in *Opening Doors*. One stakeholder argued, “We do have momentum in the veterans space...but in other areas and demographics, you are really at a critical inflection point....This is the most critical time for USICH to continue working.” Stakeholders working in communities that have achieved major milestones also see a challenging road ahead. One stakeholder explained, “As we are successful, the need for [USICH] is even more important as we move upstream on preventing homelessness....I don’t see how we can move upstream without USICH.”

“We do have momentum in the veterans space...but in other areas and demographics, you are really at a critical inflection point....This is the most critical time for USICH to continue working.”

Other Collaboration Strategies

Stakeholders could imagine alternatives to USICH for continuing collaborative efforts but expressed doubt that any other entity could take on USICH’s role. One stakeholder explained, “There are other strategies, all of them would be better than nothing, and none of them would be as effective.”

Interviewees posed single agencies, such as HUD or the VA, as potential alternative agencies for taking on USICH’s role. However, in addition to staffing and budget concerns for the host agency, stakeholders discussed the likely challenges when an agency must balance its own priorities with those of the interagency efforts and develop the trust among agencies that USICH has developed as an independent body. One stakeholder familiar with USICH while it was staffed by HUD during the Clinton administration explained, “Within a single department, it can play a role in information sharing, but it’s very hard for one agency to push an agenda that other agencies will pick up and support.” Another stakeholder familiar with interagency collaboration sees USICH as better positioned than other models in structure, staff, and funding. Stakeholders who suggested philanthropy or a national advocacy organization leading a homelessness collaborative thought the lack of federal standing would weaken its capacity and authority. Stakeholders also argued that any of these alternatives would have to rebuild the infrastructure currently maintained by USICH.

Overall, rather than identifying other strategies for continuing the work of USICH, stakeholders argued for the continuation of USICH and for additional staffing and funding for USICH to bolster its work supporting federal and local actors.

“There are other strategies. All of them would be better than nothing, and none of them would be as effective.”

How Could USICH Improve or Strengthen Its Role?

This section describes recommendations from stakeholders for addressing challenges and strengthening USICH’s role, should USICH’s work continue (table 5). While recommendations from federal, national advocacy, state, and local stakeholders share similar themes, there are also some differences which illustrate the various goals and barriers perceived at each level.

TABLE 5

Recommendations from Stakeholders

Federal and national advocacy stakeholders	State and local stakeholders
Increase USICH’s staff capacity	Increase USICH’s staff capacity
Clarify USICH’s role at the local level	Strengthen USICH’s mandate to coordinate federal agencies’ efforts to end homelessness
Engage additional stakeholders at both levels	Establish opportunities for USICH to receive more feedback on its work

Federal and National Stakeholder Recommendations

Increase USICH’s staff capacity. Federal stakeholders discussed perceived “ebbs and flows” in USICH’s capacity, particularly as work has expanded or staffing levels have contracted. One stakeholder said, “They are a pretty small shop. They don’t need to be huge, but I think they need to have the capacity to be a bit bigger and expand and contract as needs shift...When they are low on staff...it’s hard for us and it impacts our work.” Other respondents talked about expanding USICH’s staff to focus on specific areas of expertise, such as homelessness in Indian country. While current staff have made significant progress, federal stakeholders see a role for even more USICH staff dedicated to specific issues.

Clarify USICH’s role at the local level. Given USICH’s capacity, some federal and national advocacy stakeholders thought USICH’s work could focus on federal coordination, leaving local coordination and engagement to other actors. Some stakeholders said they were not aware of USICH’s local-level work. One explained, “I never realized they had such broad reach, and I’m not sure how you do that with a small federal agency that is under resourced. Going forward, there could be more clarification on their role locally.”

Engage additional stakeholders at both levels. Some stakeholders said there is an opportunity for USICH to engage additional actors in the work to end homelessness. For example, under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, every state appoints a state coordinator for homeless education, and

each local educational agency designates a liaison for homeless education. Some of these actors helped create *Opening Doors* and stakeholders argued they could help ensure continued collaboration given the right connections to Continuums of Care and other local agencies. Similarly, there is an opportunity to further inform and engage field staff for federal agencies in the local work to end homelessness.

State and Local Stakeholder Recommendations

Increase USICH's staff capacity. Local stakeholders also expressed an opportunity for increased USICH staffing and capacity to engage with communities. Stakeholders recognized the large number of communities served by five regional coordinators and noted follow-up can be slow when USICH staff have competing priorities. Stakeholders wanted resources or directories they could pull from directly instead of waiting to communicate with USICH staff. One stakeholder felt that engagement with USICH had slowed so much that USICH seemed “invisible” and lacking in some important local conversations. Another stakeholder recommended that USICH increase its capacity to spend more time engaging with direct service organizations because “that bridge from the policy world to working with people is important.” A couple stakeholders thought USICH's capacity limits its work locally to a “one-size-fits-all” approach rather than a custom approach in each community. One stakeholder said there is “no formula for coordinating work on that level. It needs to be more community based.” Another said USICH can't “assume a one-size-fits-all approach to ending homelessness, especially for cities dealing with unique issues.” Stakeholders saw value in USICH's current role but saw the need to increase its capacity to continue working locally and achieving the best results.

Strengthen USICH's mandate to coordinate federal agencies' efforts. While some federal stakeholders thought USICH's strength comes from its neutral position (i.e., “they don't have authority to tell us what to do”), several local stakeholders believed USICH should have a more explicit mandate and greater authority to require federal action. One stakeholder explained, “There's a need for the federal agencies to do what USICH needs them to do.” Another state-level stakeholder, who experienced USICH's convening power but questioned whether convenings turned into action, said, “I think that the challenge that they face is how much authority do they have to do that?”

Establish opportunities for USICH to receive more feedback on its work. Other challenges and recommendations discussed by local stakeholders presented the opportunity for USICH to seek more feedback on how to improve implementation of federal policies. Several stakeholders mentioned the “consternation” surrounding funding shifts for HUD's homeless assistance grants. Some stakeholders thought USICH could have dealt more with the perceived service gaps left in communities and

identified other federal funding streams. Additionally, stakeholders explained that while the federal criteria and benchmarks for ending veteran homelessness have been a big step forward, there are opportunities to continue improving the certification process, especially for large, dynamic systems that may need a “more sophisticated definition of particular milestones.” Finally, as communities make progress, some stakeholders want USICH to provide more support on “moving upstream” to work on preventing homelessness and providing more guidance on the role of income and employment. Stakeholders explained this is not necessarily a shortcoming in USICH’s work, but they want it to be an additional focus area going forward.

Conclusion

This report summarizes the findings from our qualitative assessment of USICH to better understand its role and the potential effects of its impending termination in 2017 for stakeholders who work closely with USICH on efforts to end homelessness. Stakeholders consider USICH an important part of a highly effective interagency collaboration. Federal, national advocacy, state, and local stakeholders perceive USICH as uniquely positioned to help achieve the nation’s ambitious goals to end homelessness. While stakeholders believe the work to end homelessness would continue without USICH, they argued that terminating USICH would slow efforts and weaken the collective movement. Interviewees argued that while there has been progress, especially for veterans, ending homelessness for populations such as families and youth will be harder, and the same results cannot be expected at the same pace without USICH.

Appendix A. Interview Respondents

TABLE A.1

Interview Respondents

Level	Agency	Name	Title
Federal	US Department of Defense	Susan Kelly	Director, Transition to Veteran's Programs Office
Federal	US Department of Education	John McLaughlin	Education Program Specialist, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
Federal	US Department of Health and Human Services	Jennifer Cannistra	Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation
Federal	US Department of Health and Human Services	Richard Frank	Assistant Secretary of Planning and Evaluation
Federal	US Department of Health and Human Services	Mark Greenberg	Acting Assistant Secretary, Administration for Children and Families
Federal	US Department of Housing and Urban Development	Jennifer Ho	Senior Adviser for Housing and Services
Federal	US Department of Housing and Urban Development	Ann Oliva	Deputy Assistant Secretary for Special Needs
Federal	US Department of the Interior	Clint Hastings	Adviser to the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs
Federal	US Department of the Interior	Lawrence Roberts	Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs
Federal	US Department of Justice	Brent Cohen	Senior Adviser to the Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs
Federal	US Department of Labor	Teresa Gerton	Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy, Veterans' Employment, and Training Service
Federal	US Department of Labor	Ben Seigel	Former Senior Policy Adviser
Federal	US Department of Veterans Affairs	Lisa Pape	Executive Director, Veterans Health Administration Homeless Programs
Federal	US Government Accountability Office	Alicia Puente Cackley	Director, Financial Markets and Community Investment
Federal	US Government Accountability Office	Paul Schmidt	Assistant Director, Financial Markets and Community Investment
Federal	US Government Accountability Office	Peter Beck	Senior Analyst
Federal	US Government Accountability Office	Sarah Veale	Assistant Director, Strategic Management
Federal	US Social Security Administration	Susan Wilschke	Deputy Associate Commissioner for Research, Demonstration, and Employment Support
Federal	White House, Domestic Policy Council	Luke Tate	Special Assistant to the President for Economic Mobility
National Advocates and Funders	Community Solutions	Rosanne Haggerty	President

Level	Agency	Name	Title
National Advocates and Funders	Community Solutions	Linda Kaufman	Manager, National Movements
National Advocates and Funders	Corporation for Supportive Housing	Deborah De Santis	President and CEO
National Advocates and Funders	Corporation for Supportive Housing	Andrew McMahon	Managing Director of Government Affairs and Innovation
National Advocates and Funders	Funders Together to End Homelessness	Amanda Andere	CEO
National Advocates and Funders	National Alliance to End Homelessness	Nan Roman	President and CEO
National Advocates and Funders	National Alliance to End Homelessness	Steve Berg	Vice President for Programs and Policies
National Advocates and Funders	National Coalition for Homeless Veterans	Baylee Crone	Executive Director
Past USICH Executive Directors	DC Department of Human Services	Laura Zeilinger	Director
Past USICH Executive Directors	Kresge Foundation	Fred Karnas	Senior Fellow
Past USICH Executive Directors	Poppe and Associates	Barbara Poppe	Founder and Principal
State and Local	Continuum of Care – Home for Everyone	Marc Jolin	Director
State and Local	Governor's Office, State of Colorado	Jamie Van Leeuwen	Special Adviser on Homelessness to Governor Hickenlooper
State and Local	Homeless Action Network of Detroit	Tasha Gray	Executive Director
State and Local	Homeless Initiatives, Governor's Office, State of Colorado	Zac Schaffner	Homeless Initiative Project Coordinator
State and Local	Homeless Initiatives, Governor's Office, State of Colorado	Jennifer Lopez	Director of Homeless Initiatives
State and Local	Initiative to End Street, Chronic, and Veteran Homelessness, City of Boston Department of Neighborhood Development	Laila Bernstein	Assistant Director
State and Local	Massachusetts Interagency Council on Homelessness	Linn Torto	Executive Director
State and Local	Metro Denver Homeless Initiative	Gary Sanford	Executive Director
State and Local	Miami-Dade County Homeless Trust	Victoria Mallette	Executive Director
State and Local	Miami Homes for All	Barbara Ibarra	Executive Director

Level	Agency	Name	Title
State and Local	Michigan State Housing Development Authority	Kelly Rose	Director of Rental Assistance and Homeless Solutions
State and Local	Multnomah County	Deborah Kafoury	County Chairwoman of Multnomah County Commission
Los Angeles	Business Leader's Taskforce on Homelessness	Jerold Neuman	Cochair
Los Angeles	Hollywood Property Owners Alliance	Kerry Morrison	Executive Director
Los Angeles	Housing Works	Rudy Salinas	Program Director
Los Angeles	Inner City Law Center	Greg Spiegel	Director of Strategic Initiatives
Los Angeles	Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce	Gary Toebben	President and CEO
Los Angeles	Los Angeles County	Phil Ansell	Director, Homeless Initiative
Los Angeles	Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority	Peter Lynn	Executive Director
Los Angeles	The Center at Blessed Sacrament	Nathan Sheets	Director of Operations and Programs
Los Angeles	United Way of Greater Los Angeles	Christine Margiotta	Vice President of Community Impact
Houston	City of Houston	Mandy Chapman Semple	Special Assistant to the Mayor on Homeless Initiatives
Houston	Coalition for the Homeless	Eva Thibaudeau	Director of Programs
Houston	Houston Housing Authority	Tory Gunsolley	President and CEO
Houston	Houston Housing Authority	Mark Thiele	Vice President, Housing Choice Voucher Program
Houston	The Simmons Foundation	Kelli King-Jackson	Senior Program Officer

Appendix B. Interview Guide

In this interview, we want to cover three main areas: some background on your role and your agency's work with UISCH, your perspective on the role and influence of USICH in efforts to end homelessness, and your perspective on the potential effects of USICH sunseting in 2017.

First, we have a few background questions.

Background on Work with USICH

1. Could you confirm your name and title for our notes?
2. How long have you been working for this agency?
3. And how long have you been in your current position?
4. Could you describe how you see your organization's role within the community's efforts to end homelessness?

Probe: How much of your time is spent on efforts to end homelessness? Is it a primary focus for you, a piece of what you do?

Probe: How would you describe the biggest priorities for the community's current work to end homelessness?

Probe: Has your organization's role or the community's priorities for ending homelessness changed over the last few years?

5. Do you work directly with USICH?

Probe: If so, in what ways, and how often do you work with USICH?

Probe: Do others in your agency work with USICH? How is the relationship structured?

Probe: Do you work with a USICH regional coordinator? How? What is that relationship like?

Probe: Do you use USICH's online resources, like webinars, newsletters, or guidance they publish online? What's most helpful, and what's not been helpful?

Next, we'll move to your perspective on the role and influence of USICH in supporting the effort to end homelessness in the community.

Role and Influence of USICH in Effort to End Homelessness

6. Do you think USICH has had an influence **on your organization's** work? If so, in what ways? What are some examples?

Probe: Has your work changed because of your partnership with USICH? Are there any examples?

Probe: Has USICH had an influence on the broader community's work to end homelessness?

Probe: What have been the most effective aspects of USICH's work?

Probe: What challenges have they helped solve? What were they able to do that others couldn't?

Probe: What are the main outcomes you think have resulted from USICH's involvement? What have been some of the big successes?

7. Are there any particular data points that you think speak to the role USICH has played in your community's efforts to end homelessness?

Probe: Performance measures or other indicators?

8. Are there examples of ways USICH has **not** been effective or helpful in their role? What challenges were they not able to help with and why?

9. Are there opportunities to strengthen USICH's role in supporting your community's efforts to end homelessness?

Probe: Through technical assistance? Through staff? Through online or other resources?

10. Are there any particular challenges or barriers to USICH's work to support your community's efforts to end homelessness?

Probe: Does USICH have gaps in capacity or expertise?

Probe: Do they have a harder time bringing certain partners to the table?

Finally, we'll move to your perspective on the potential effects of USICH's termination. We also have a few questions about strategies going forward and potential costs to other stakeholders.

Potential effects of USICH termination

11. Are there potential effects of USICH's termination **on your organization's** work to end homelessness?

Probe: If USICH sunsets, would anything change about your mission or work?

12. Are there potential effects on the broader community and the work to end homelessness?

Probe: Where would the effects be greatest? For government? For service providers? For people experiencing homelessness?

13. Which parts of USICH's role, if any, do you think are most important to support your community's work to end homelessness?

14. Can you imagine other potential strategies for continuing USICH's work in supporting local communities? Who would be involved in these strategies?

15. Are there any potential costs of USICH sunsetting in 2017?

Probe: For your programs or organization? For your community? For people experiencing homelessness?

16. Is there anything we've missed or haven't asked about? Is there anything else you'd like to share with us?

Wrap-Up

That concludes our interview for today—we really appreciate your time. Our next steps will be to wrap up our interviews and summarize our key findings in a research report that should be available late this summer or early fall. We will share our research report with you when it's available. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. Thank you!

Notes

1. "About USICH," USICH, accessed September 15, 2016, <https://www.usich.gov/about-usich>.
2. "Evidence and Action," Voices of Youth Count, accessed September 15, 2016, <http://www.voicesofyouthcount.org/evidence-and-action>.
3. "Mayor's Challenge," US Department of Housing and Urban Development, accessed August 26, 2016, http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/comm_planning/veteran_information/mayors_challenge/.
4. Norm Suchar, "SNAPS In Focus: FY 2015 CoC Program Competition Recap," news release, May 16, 2016, <https://www.hudexchange.info/news/snaps-in-focus-fy-2015-coc-program-competition-recap/>.

References

- Burt, Martha R., and Brooke E. Spellman. 2007. *Changing Homeless and Mainstream Service Systems: Essential Approaches to Ending Homelessness*. Washington, DC: US Department of Housing and Urban Development. <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/homeless/p2.html>.
- GAO (US Government Accountability Office). 2012a. *Homelessness: Fragmentation and Overlap in Programs Highlight the Need to Identify, Assess, and Reduce Inefficiencies*. GAO-12-491. Washington, DC: GAO. <http://www.gao.gov/assets/600/590782.pdf>.
- . 2012b. *Managing for Results: Key Considerations for Implementing Interagency Collaborative Mechanisms*. GAO-12-1022. Washington, DC: GAO. <http://www.gao.gov/assets/650/648934.pdf>.
- . 2014. *Managing for Results: Implementation Approaches Used to Enhance Collaboration in Interagency Groups*. GAO-14-220. Washington, DC: GAO. <http://www.gao.gov/assets/670/660952.pdf>.
- Gubits, Daniel, Marybeth Shinn, Stephen Bell, Michelle Wood, Samuel Dastrup, Claudia D. Solari, Scott R. Brown, et al. 2015. *Family Options Study: Short Term Impacts of Housing and Services Interventions for Homeless Families*. Washington, DC: US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research. https://www.huduser.gov/portal/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/FamilyOptionsStudy_final.pdf.
- Henry, Meghan, Azim Shivji, Tanya de Sousa, and Rebecca Cohen. 2015. *The 2015 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress, Part 1: Point in Time Estimates of Homelessness*. Washington, DC: US Department of Housing and Urban Development. <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2015-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>.
- Pergamit, Michael, Mary Cunningham, Martha Burt, Pamela Lee, Brent Howell, and Kassie Bertumen. 2013. "Counting Homeless Youth: Promising Practices from the Youth Count! Initiative." Washington, DC: Urban Institute. <http://urbn.is/2cdteu6>.
- Tsemberis, Sam, Leyla Gulcur, and Maria Nakae. 2004. "Housing First, Consumer Choice, and Harm Reduction for Homeless Individuals with a Dual Diagnosis." *American Journal of Public Health* 94 (4): 651–56. <http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/pdf/10.2105/AJPH.94.4.651>.
- USICH (US Interagency Council on Homelessness). n.d. "United States Interagency Council on Homelessness Historical Overview." Washington, DC: USICH. https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/USICH_History_final.pdf.
- . 2013. "Framework to End Youth Homelessness: A Resource Text for Dialogue and Action." Washington, DC: USICH. https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/USICH_Youth_Framework_FINAL_02_13_131.pdf.
- . 2015. "The President's 2016 Budget: Fact Sheet on Homelessness Assistance." Washington, DC: USICH. https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/2016_Budget_Fact_Sheet_on_Homelessness_Assistance.pdf.
- . 2016. "The President's 2017 Budget Fact Sheet: Investing in the End of Homelessness." Washington, DC: USICH. <https://www.usich.gov/tools-for-action/presidents-2017-budget-fact-sheet>

About the Authors

Sarah Gillespie is a research associate in the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center at the Urban Institute. Her research focuses on housing and homelessness, place-based initiatives, and performance measurement. She is project director for a five-site national evaluation of supportive housing for families involved in the child welfare system, and an evaluation of a supportive housing social impact bond for frequent users of the criminal justice system in Denver.

Mary Cunningham is a senior fellow in the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center. Her research focuses on homelessness, housing instability, and concentrated poverty. Cunningham leads studies examining the impact of housing vouchers on child welfare involvement, the impact of supportive housing on high-need families in the child welfare system, and outcomes from a homeless prevention program for at-risk veterans.

Brandi Gilbert is a research associate in the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center, where her research focuses on disaster resilience. She is also deputy director of Rockefeller Foundation's Resilience Academies and Capacity Building Initiative evaluation, a qualitative study to assess technical assistance efforts for the US Department of Housing and Urban Development's National Disaster Resilience Competition.

Shiva Kooragayala is a research associate in the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center. His research interests include community and economic development, education policy, and the spatial dimensions of inequality and opportunity.

Lily Posey is a research assistant in the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center, where her research includes a national evaluation of a supportive housing demonstration for families involved in the child welfare system.

Josh Leopold is a research associate in the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center, where his work focuses on homelessness and affordable housing policy, including an analysis of the housing affordability gap for extremely low income renters, an affordable housing needs assessment for the District of Columbia, and an evaluation of the 100,000 Homes Campaign. Before joining Urban, he was a management and program analyst at USICH.

Harry Hatry is a distinguished fellow in the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center, where he has been a leader in developing performance management/measurement and evaluation procedures for public agencies since the 1970s. He has worked with a wide range of local, state, and federal agencies—internationally and nationally—to develop outcome measurement procedures for such services as public safety, health, transportation, education, parks and recreation, social services, environmental protection, and economic development.

STATEMENT OF INDEPENDENCE

The Urban Institute strives to meet the highest standards of integrity and quality in its research and analyses and in the evidence-based policy recommendations offered by its researchers and experts. We believe that operating consistent with the values of independence, rigor, and transparency is essential to maintaining those standards. As an organization, the Urban Institute does not take positions on issues, but it does empower and support its experts in sharing their own evidence-based views and policy recommendations that have been shaped by scholarship. Funders do not determine our research findings or the insights and recommendations of our experts. Urban scholars and experts are expected to be objective and follow the evidence wherever it may lead.



2100 M Street NW
Washington, DC 20037

www.urban.org