How the Federal Government Is Working to End Homelessness

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Veteran homelessness has fallen 47 percent since 2010. Though no one agency or organization can take full credit for this progress, many stakeholders we interviewed said that the US Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) played a critical role in helping communities achieve these reductions.

But USICH, an independent agency tasked with coordinating the federal government’s strategy for ending homelessness, is scheduled to sunset in 2017 without congressional reauthorization. We interviewed over 50 national and local stakeholders—people who actively work to end and prevent homelessness—to better understand USICH’s efforts and who would be most affected if the agency sunsets.

Here are five things that national and local leaders credited to USICH:

1. **USICH brought everyone to the table.** USICH brought together nonprofits, advocates, and business leaders—in some cases, actors who had not collaborated before—as full partners and made ending homelessness a federal priority.

2. **USICH coordinated an interagency response to a complex problem.** Through close coordination, agencies can quickly connect veterans who are homeless to the best supports in their community, no matter which agency’s door the veterans might walk through first.

3. **USICH pushed leaders to follow the evidence on what works and what doesn’t.** Evidence shows that someone who is homeless does not need to be sober or “ready” to be stable in housing. USICH was integral in promoting the housing-first model, which many described as a critical policy shift.

4. **USICH defined what it means to end homelessness, giving communities a clear goal.** This helped communities advocate for resources needed to meet that goal instead of succumbing to a less ambitious goal in the face of competing priorities.

5. **USICH enlisted billions in mainstream federal funding** from programs such as Medicaid and Social Security Disability Insurance by reducing barriers to benefits for people experiencing homelessness.
Despite this progress, the work to end and prevent homelessness is far from over. Stakeholders we spoke with believe that allowing USICH to sunset could have the following effects:

- Federal agencies may no longer prioritize ending and preventing homelessness.
- The quality and consistency of agency collaboration would decline, and lack of coordination could lead to duplication and wastefulness of federal resources.
- Local communities would have a harder time seeking out best practices. Local stakeholders said they rely on USICH for tools and evidence-based solutions.
- The sense of a shared vision would weaken, as would the momentum to tackle the difficult work ahead.

The next goal—ending and preventing homelessness for families, youth, and children—will be particularly challenging to achieve. Though communities have made a dent in veteran homelessness, stakeholders said that the same progress cannot be expected at the same pace 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.”

—FEDERAL STAKEHOLDER

**VETERANS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS ON A SINGLE NIGHT, 2010–16**

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

—FEDERAL STAKEHOLDER