

## Meeting the Grand Challenge to End Homelessness

### Policy Recommendations

- Support the Housing ACCESS Act (S.2932) to mitigate barriers that stall the creation of supportive housing programs.
- Expand access to affordable housing through vouchers and housing development.
- Increase worker wages as well as professional and organizational development opportunities for the homeless services sector.

### Introduction

Ending homelessness will require robust and comprehensive solutions that attend to individual, community, and policy needs. Effective policy solutions require significant federal investment and champions in influential positions. We propose three policy recommendations to be prioritized by members of Congress. The recommendations comprise efforts to expand access to supportive and affordable housing, as well as opportunities to strengthen the homeless services delivery system through targeted workforce and organizational investment.

### Policy Recommendations

#### **1. Support the Housing ACCESS Act (S.2932) to mitigate barriers that stall the creation of supportive housing programs.**

Supportive housing is an evidence-based best practice that has been shown to end chronic homelessness and reduce costly and avoidable healthcare service use by high-need, chronic homeless populations.<sup>1</sup> Yet, complex regulations and a lack of alignment between housing and healthcare resources hinder implementation of supportive housing and efficient use of federal resources, ultimately making it more difficult and more expensive to end chronic homelessness.

The Housing Alignment and Coordination of Critical and Effective Supportive Health Services (Housing ACCESS) Act will address these barriers by doing the following:

- Requiring the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), in consultation with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Treasury, to issue joint guidance to state Medicaid agencies, public housing agencies, homeless service Continuums of Care, and housing finance agencies on how to connect

Medicaid beneficiaries to housing-related services in an integrated and simplified manner. By aligning housing and healthcare eligibility criteria, determination processes, and outcome measures under this joint guidance, the Act will simplify implementation of supportive housing services.

- Requiring HHS to conduct a national study to determine appropriate rates for housing-related services and supports. This will allow providers to pay living wages, reduce staff turnover, and ensure a maximum case manager-to-client ratio of 1:15 in alignment with the evidence base for strong supportive housing outcomes.

## **2. Expand access to affordable housing through vouchers and housing development.**

Ending homelessness will take increased access to affordable housing for all low-income Americans. Government-funded rental vouchers, such as Housing Choice Vouchers, are effective at reducing poverty and homelessness, yet only one out of four eligible households actually receive housing vouchers due to government underfunding.<sup>2</sup> Further, housing markets across the United States are unaffordable at record levels driven by overall housing shortages.<sup>3</sup> Addressing these challenges will require a change in the status quo. Current actions that Congress can take to begin to address the growing issue include the following:

- Pass the bipartisan Family Stability and Opportunity Vouchers Act (S.1257, H.R.3776) that would provide an additional 250,000 housing vouchers for families with young children.
- Increase investments in any future reconciliation legislation for housing vouchers, public housing, and the national Housing Trust Fund.

## **3. Increase worker wages as well as professional and organizational development opportunities for the homeless services sector.**

A well-trained and compensated homeless services workforce is critical for ending homelessness. Staff shortages and turnover are ongoing concerns, and research has shed light on the exceptionally low wages paid to people working on the front lines of the homeless services sector.<sup>4</sup> Working in the sector comes with many potential job stressors that can be compounded by organizational factors, including low wages, inadequate benefits, and a lack of organizational support and professional development.<sup>5, 6, 7, 8, 9</sup>

Critically, research suggests that inadequate pay, supports, and professional development can contribute to higher rates of burnout and turnover intentions.<sup>10, 11</sup> With this in mind, we recommend two policy priorities for supporting the homeless services workforce:

- Increase funding under HUD’s Continuum of Care (CoC) Program and Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) Program to align salaries with cost-of-living standards. The National Alliance to End Homelessness estimates that a \$97 million increase for the CoC Program and a \$141 million increase for the ESG Program is necessary to accomplish this goal.<sup>12</sup>
- Allocate funding for organizational and workforce development through the CoC Program or supplemental funding. Organizational development could include efforts to improve organization culture, climate, and cohesion to promote staff retention. Professional development could include staff training related to evidence-based practice models, reimbursement for relevant formal education, and efforts to improve the quality of supervision provided by program and agency leadership.

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## About the Grand Challenges for Social Work

The Grand Challenges for Social Work was launched by the American Academy of Social Work & Social Welfare in 2016 to harness the ingenuity, expertise, dedication, and creativity of individuals and organizations within the field of social work and beyond to champion “social progress powered by science.” Additional information on the Grand Challenges may be found at [GrandChallengesforSocialWork.org](https://GrandChallengesforSocialWork.org).

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Charania (2021).

<sup>2</sup> Wheaton et al. (2023).

<sup>3</sup> Joint Center for Housing Studies (2023).

<sup>4</sup> Culhane & An (2022).

<sup>5</sup> Goodwin et al. (2022).

<sup>6</sup> Olivet et al. (2010).

<sup>7</sup> Kerman et al. (2022).

<sup>8</sup> Lemieux-Cumberlege et al. (2023).

<sup>9</sup> Aykanian & Mammah (2023).

<sup>10</sup> Joint Office of Homeless Services (2023).

<sup>11</sup> Voronov et al. (2023).

<sup>12</sup> DuBois (2023).

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