



National Alliance to
END HOMELESSNESS

2008 Federal Policy Priorities

This year, the Alliance will continue to dedicate substantial advocacy resources to a broad range of homelessness, housing, and services issues. The following items are high priority issues where the Alliance believes we can make significant progress in 2008. This is not a complete list of all the policy initiatives that the Alliance supports.

Appropriations

1. Significantly increase funding for homeless and housing assistance programs within the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).
2. Increase funding for the Grants for the Benefit of Homeless Individuals program within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to \$50 million for services in permanent supportive housing; Increase funding for the Treatment for Homeless program to \$50 million for emergency, transitional and permanent housing services for all populations.
3. Increase funding for Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programs to \$175 million.
4. Increase funding for targeted homeless programs within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Department of Labor (DOL), the Department of Education (ED) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).
5. Increase funding for the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) to provide a range of services to low-income, homeless and at-risk households.

Authorizations

1. Enact a National Housing Trust Fund to build, rehabilitate and preserve 1.5 million units of housing for the lowest income families over the next 10 years and ensure adequate funding sources.
2. Pass legislation to reauthorize the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants program that will protect homeless families and homeless people with disabilities, expand prevention activities, and focus on permanent housing solutions to homelessness.
3. Enact the Services for Ending Long-Term Homelessness Act within legislation to reauthorize the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA); Include in final SAMHSA reauthorization legislation provisions to ensure that people with mental illness who are at risk of homelessness are adequately served and have their housing needs addressed.
4. Reauthorize the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act to increase housing and family reunification opportunities for unaccompanied, homeless youth.
5. Pass the Second Chance Act to reduce rates of recidivism and homelessness among ex-offenders reentering the community.
6. Enact Low Income Housing Tax Credit legislation that eliminates the penalty for using McKinney funding in a Tax Credit project and better targets extremely low income households.
7. Enact the Section Eight Voucher Reform Act (SEVRA) to streamline the Section 8 program and permanently address a formula problem that led to the loss of 150,000 vouchers over 3 years.

Appropriations

1. Significantly increase funding for homeless and housing assistance programs within the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Congress should:

- Increase McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants to \$2 billion and provide \$50 million for the rapid rehousing program for families,
- Fully fund all existing Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers and provide funding for 100,000 new vouchers this year which should include
 - An increase of \$75 million for approximately 8,000 – 10,000 new HUD-VA Supported Housing (HUD-VASH) vouchers, and
 - An increase of \$20 million for approximately 2,500 Family Unification Program (FUP) vouchers.
- Significantly increase funding for other HUD programs critical to preventing and ending homelessness, including the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), HOME, public housing, Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS (HOPWA), Housing for People with Disabilities (Section 811), and Housing for the Elderly (Section 202).

2. Increase funding for the Grants for the Benefit of Homeless Individuals program within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to \$50 million for services in permanent supportive housing; increase funding for the Treatment for Homeless program to \$50 million for permanent housing, transitional and emergency services for all populations.

One of the greatest challenges to creating permanent supportive housing – affordable housing linked to services - is funding the supportive services needed to help homeless people maintain their housing and progress toward recovery and self sufficiency. The Grants for the Benefit of Homeless Individuals (GBHI) program within the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in the Department of Health and Human Services funds mental health and substance abuse services. An increase of \$34 million would fund the services in approximately 6,800 units of permanent supportive housing.

The Treatment for Homeless or Treatment Systems for Homeless grants enables communities to expand and strengthen their treatment services for homeless and at-risk individuals with substance abuse disorders, mental illness, or co-occurring substance abuse disorders and mental illness. Treatment for Homeless is a program within SAMHSA's Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT).

3. Increase funding for Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programs to \$175 million.

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act was first enacted in 1974 and is the only federal law solely focused on unaccompanied, homeless youth. It provides federal funds to support a spectrum of services, including shelter programs (basic centers), transitional housing, street-based outreach, and the National Runaway Switchboard. The RHYA programs help to prevent victimization, encourage family reunification, and ensure basic safety of and housing opportunities for unaccompanied children and youth. An increase in RHY funds will decrease the number of homeless youth turned away from shelter and housing programs.

4. Increase funding for the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG).

The Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) funds anti-poverty efforts through 1,100 Community Action Agencies (CAAs) which are essential to preventing and ending homelessness in America. CAAs provide services directed to low income, homeless and at-risk households, including employment, education, housing, family counseling, transportation,

medical and dental, legal and family emergency programs. Supportive services are essential to assisting homeless and at-risk families and individuals end or prevent a homeless episode.

5. Increase funding for targeted homeless programs within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Department of Labor (DOL), the Department of Education (ED) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

There are a range of programs within several federal agencies that are targeted to assisting homeless individuals and families in a variety of ways. This list includes but is not limited to Projects to Assist in the Transition from Homelessness (PATH), Health Care for the Homeless, Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP), Homeless Veterans Grant and Per Diem Program, Education for Homeless Children and Youth, and the Emergency Food and Shelter Program.

Authorizations

1. Enact a National Housing Trust Fund to build, rehabilitate and preserve 1.5 million units of housing for the lowest income families over the next 10 years and ensure adequate funding sources.

The National Affordable Housing Trust Fund Act of 2007 would establish an ongoing, permanent, dedicated and sufficient source of revenue to build, rehabilitate and preserve 1.5 million units of housing for the lowest income families over the next 10 years. Funding would come from a variety of sources, with the opportunity to add more sources in the future. Funds could be used for construction, acquisition, rehabilitation, preservation, and up to 12 months of project-based rental assistance.

Funds would be highly targeted to serving the lowest income households. All funding would be used for people below 80 percent of area median income. At least 75 percent would serve people below 30 percent of area median income, and at least 30 percent would have to serve people whose income would qualify them for SSI.

2. Pass legislation to reauthorize the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants program that will protect homeless families and homeless people with disabilities, expand prevention activities, and focus on permanent housing solutions to homelessness.

Final legislation must:

- Consolidate the programs into a single program and simplify the match requirements,
- Provide permanent housing renewals out of the same account that funds Section 8,
- Increase priority on homeless families with children by providing funding for rapid rehousing programs, designating funding to permanent house families, and ensuring that families are included in incentives that serve people who experience long-term homelessness,
- Maintain a commitment to assisting people with disabilities by targeting thirty percent of funding for permanent housing for homeless people with disabilities and their children,
- Dedicate resources to prevent homelessness and help find better housing situations for people who are doubled up, living in hotels, or in other precarious housing situations and who are forced to move repeatedly,
- Expand the definition of homelessness to include those who “couch surf” – move from place to place because they can not find a stable living situation,

- Retain a targeted definition to ensure that homeless assistance continues to focus on its mission of meeting the emergency needs of people with no place to live, and
- Increase competitiveness of rural areas.

3. Enact the Services for Ending Long-Term Homelessness Act within legislation to reauthorize the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA); Include in final SAMHSA reauthorization legislation provisions to ensure that people with mental illness who are at risk of homelessness are adequately served and have their housing needs addressed.

Congress is in the process of reauthorizing the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), which distributes billions of dollars of funding for addressing mental health and substance abuse needs. In this process, Congress should pass the Services for Ending Long Term Homelessness Act, which would enable SAMHSA to fund services in permanent supportive housing. These services would include case management, mental health, substance abuse services and other services to help people stabilize in their housing and work toward recovery and self sufficiency. Congress should also retain in final legislation the “Grants for the Integrated Treatment of Serious Mental Illness and Co-Occurring Substance Use Disorders.” This program will ensure that people with mental illness who are at risk of homelessness receive adequate, coordinated services and have their housing needs addressed.

4. Reauthorize the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act to increase housing and family reunification opportunities for unaccompanied, homeless youth.

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act is the leading federal legislation focused on ending youth homelessness by funding emergency shelter tied to family reunification, street-based outreach, and transitional housing. The Act is scheduled for reauthorization in 2008 which offers an opportunity to strengthen the program. Congress should: authorize increased funding, increase the delivery of culturally competent services to special needs populations including youth of color, youth with disabilities, pregnant and parenting youth and gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning (GLBTQ) youth, extend the time youth may stay in shelter to thirty days to ensure a successful family reunification, call for research on youth housing outcomes, and enact an appeal system for programs denied funding.

5. Pass the Second Chance Act to reduce rates of recidivism and homelessness among ex-offenders reentering the community.

The Second Chance Act is bipartisan legislation that responds to the increasing number of people being released from incarceration each year, one in five of which will become homeless. The bill attempts to reduce rates of recidivism and homelessness among ex-offenders by providing money to states for programs that help people leaving prisons and jails successfully reintegrate into the community. Funds can be used for post-release housing, housing services, and supportive services including, job training, health care, mental health care and substance use treatment which help people remain housed. The bill also requires more sufficient pre-release planning procedures and creates a federal interagency task force to study and coordinate programs to more effectively connect people with support systems.

6. Enact improved Low Income Housing Tax Credit legislation.

Congress is working on legislation that would modify the Low Income Housing Tax Credit program. Although the program is very successful at producing housing for low-income people, it has a few drawbacks. Developers who try to combine some types of Homeless Assistance or other housing assistance with tax credit funding face a reduction in their eligible basis (the portion of the project eligible for tax credits), making it harder to develop supportive

housing. The tax credit generally works well for people at 40 to 60 percent of area median income, but less so for people below 30 percent.

Advocates and Members of Congress are working to address both issues. A solution to the problem of using homeless assistance resources with Tax Credit projects was included in the Community Partnership to End Homelessness Act, and is being included in House and Senate legislation. Several proposals to improve targeting to extremely low income households are being considered.

7. Enact the Section Eight Voucher Reform Act (SEVRA) to streamline the Section 8 program and to permanently address a formula problem that led to the loss of 150,000 vouchers over 3 years.

Since 2004, approximately 150,000 of the nearly two million Section 8 vouchers have been lost because of a flawed funding formula that prevents all the resources provided by Congress from being spent. Under this formula, some public housing authorities get more vouchers than they can use, while other PHAs do not have sufficient funding for their vouchers. The Section Eight Voucher Reform Act would improve the flawed funding formula, among many other provisions to simplify and streamline the program.