

Proposed Strategy for Ending Homelessness in New Mexico

June 2005

Introduction

Recognizing that a Policy Academy Task Force made up of representatives of state agencies and nonprofit advocates developed a 10 year plan to end homelessness in New Mexico in June of 2004 and that the Lieutenant Governor's Strategy Group on Homelessness has been investigating strategies, this document seeks to summarize the key components of the recommendations of those two groups.

Why End Homelessness

Several studies have now shown that in addition to the immeasurable suffering of homeless individuals and families, homelessness costs as much money as the solutions. The costs come in the form of unpaid emergency room visits, police and ambulance time, extended stays in psychiatric hospitals, and other drains on the health care, educational and employment systems, let alone the emotional toll on families and relationships. Ending homelessness is not only the humane thing to do, it is the cost effective thing to do as well.

Next Steps for the State of New Mexico

1. New Mexico needs an Inter-Agency Council on the Homeless including representatives from the Human Services Department, the Mortgage Finance Authority, the Health Department, the Children Youth and Families Department, the Corrections Department, the Public Education Department, and representatives from the homeless nonprofit sector. The primary purposes of this Council would be to work toward a system of care among the programs these agencies administer that would prevent and end homelessness for those served and in need of services.
2. Since supportive housing is recognized as the most effective way to help people end their own homelessness, the newly created Affordable Housing Trust Fund should make the creation of supportive housing one of its highest priorities. Additionally, MFA can make prioritize investing a proportionate amount of its most flexible resources to supportive housing developments that target ending homelessness.
3. Since employment at a "living wage" is key to ending and preventing homelessness for those who are able to work, the state should pursue innovative economic development initiatives that will bring "living wage" jobs to those parts of the state that are experiencing the highest levels of unemployment.
4. Since *housing first* is recognized as the most effective model for helping the disabled homeless, nonprofit agencies – as well as private and public funders – should begin to incorporate housing first methods into their permanent housing for the disabled homeless, and new projects should be built around this model.
5. Recognizing that federal public housing programs are critical for ending homelessness, the state administration and the nonprofit advocates should support efforts fighting for increased funding for low-income housing at the federal level.
6. Since grassroots organizing and public policy advocacy work for affordable housing are essential to creating and sustaining momentum to end homelessness, the New Mexico Coalition to End Homelessness, the Human Needs Coordinating Council, and the New Mexico Chapter of NAHRO should create a unified advocacy effort for affordable housing.
7. The Albuquerque Mental Health Housing Coalition with the support of the New Mexico Coalition the End Homelessness should set up a statewide supportive housing development arm. This effort should be supported financially by the Enterprise Foundation, the Daniels Fund, the McCune Foundation, the Mortgage Finance Authority and the Department of Health, among others.
8. The State of New Mexico should increase funding for homeless services by 33% per year for the next three years bringing the total funding from \$1 million to \$2 million. The new funding should be directed to projects which use the housing first and other "best practices" models, to encourage efficacious models throughout the state.