

## New Mexico Task Force to End Homelessness

### NEW MEXICO PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS

July-August, 2004

#### A. Introduction/Background

The goal of this Plan is to end homelessness in New Mexico within ten years. The Plan outlines strategies, action steps, desired outcomes, responsibilities, benchmarks, and timetables for accomplishing this ambitious and deceptively simple goal. The Plan is the result of a series of discussions that began in January of 2003 among representatives of New Mexico state government agencies, non-profit organizations (including homeless service providers), housing agencies, consumer representatives (including formerly homeless persons), and statewide and regional coalitions. The discussions have been lively and far-reaching; they have included assessments of New Mexico's strengths, weaknesses, needs, and opportunities with respect to ending chronic homelessness, as well as the setting of goals, priorities, and strategies.

New Mexico is one of the most rural and yet one of the most diverse states in the nation, with high percentages of Hispanic and Native American populations, many living in rural communities that pre-date the founding of the United States. New Mexico retains its rural, frontier character, with small urban areas separated by hundreds of miles, and with county population densities as low as 0.4 persons per square mile—posing major challenges for providers of health and social services and for developing statewide systems of care for addressing poverty, homelessness, and the entire constellation of related problems. The state is divided into distinct regions, encompassing the mountainous North with centuries-old traditional Hispanic villages and American Indian pueblos, the Albuquerque metropolitan area, the burgeoning southern region along the Mexican border, vast areas of the East and South dominated by agriculture and ranching, and the Navajo/Four Corners country in the West.

New Mexico is also one of the poorest states, with generally high unemployment, low per capita income, high levels of uninsured, and extremely limited stock of affordable housing. New Mexico has an estimated homeless population of **20,000** people, and the New Mexico Mortgage Finance Authority (the designated agency for managing HUD housing and supportive services funds) reports serving 10,500 unduplicated persons in 2002. New Mexico's homeless problem is exacerbated by the state's alcohol and substance abuse rates, which are some of the highest in the nation. (A more detailed description of New Mexico's socio-economic and demographic characteristics can be found in a previous report published in October 2003 by the NM Task Force on Homelessness as part of Senate Joint Memorial 52/House Joint Memorial 82, passed during the 46<sup>th</sup> session of the New Mexico State Legislature.)

New Mexico can point to a number of major areas of strength in the fight against homelessness. Chief among these is a strong and vital network of people and entities

with a shared commitment to ending homelessness. This network includes service providers, state agencies, private foundations, homeless advocates and advocacy organizations, faith communities, business representatives, and statewide and regional coalitions. The people involved in this network have built up high levels of trust and shared expectations, growing out of working together for years across systems and jurisdictional boundaries, and weathering the vagaries of changing political climates at the state and national levels. In a sparsely-populated state like New Mexico, the importance of these continuing collaborative relationships cannot be overstated. In a resource-poor state like this, homeless advocates and service providers are accustomed to accomplishing a great deal on virtually a fiscal shoestring.

## **B. The Planning Process**

This document is the result of an inclusive planning process. The statewide network of people engaged in fighting homelessness in New Mexico forms the nucleus of the group that is ultimately responsible for developing this State Plan to End Chronic Homelessness—the group now known as the Interagency Task Force to End Homelessness. The Task Force includes representation from the New Mexico Coalition to End Homelessness (NMCEH) and the Homeless Advocacy Coalition (HAC), which together coordinate the annual Continuum of Care process for utilizing HUD McKinney grant funds for homeless programs; the New Mexico Mortgage Finance Authority which manages a number of housing and homeless programs for the State; the New Mexico Departments of Health, Human Services, Children Youth and Families, Corrections, Labor, and Education; consumer representatives; and representatives of the state’s major non-profit homeless service providers.

The Interagency Task Force convened originally in January 2003 to participate in a Policy Academy under the combined auspices of three Federal cabinet departments (the Departments of Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, and Veterans Affairs) in January 2003. Since then, the Task Force has held facilitated planning retreats and has worked with the State Legislature to produce a Joint Senate/House Memorial addressing chronic homelessness and access to mainstream resources. A second draft of the Plan was produced and reviewed by members of the NMCEH.

A final working draft was developed and written by Ron Hale & Associates, Santa Fe, for wider circulation among various groups and stakeholders in New Mexico for further input and refinement. The expectation is that the Plan will be adopted, not only by the existent Interagency Task Force, but also by the Lieutenant Governor’s Homeless Strategy Group and the Governor’s Office, after review to assure alignment with other statewide initiatives. The Interagency Task Force will then be designated as an official advisory group on issues related to homelessness by Executive Order.

## C. Guiding Principles

A number of guiding principles or assumptions have emerged from the group throughout the planning process:

1. The risk factors related to homelessness are well known; they include lack of access to affordable housing, lack of access to affordable health care, poverty, unemployment and underemployment, chronic mental health and substance abuse, lack of community supports, and lack of coordination of essential services for people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
2. An effective approach to ending homelessness must include multifaceted strategies that link affordable housing, income enhancement measures, and services and resources.
3. We know what works: we need to build on what we've learned in recent years.
4. People can do very little beyond survival when they are homeless; they need to get into housing first, before they can address other needs and challenges.
5. We need to legitimize and institutionalize inter-agency collaboration if we are to succeed in delivering services where they are needed and in effecting long-lasting social change.
6. In order to reduce the numbers of homeless people, we must establish a system to prevent them from becoming homeless in the first place. It is much less expensive to keep someone housed than it is to get them into housing once they become homeless.
7. Not all solutions and strategies require money. Much can be accomplished by reorganizing existing resources more effectively.
8. Many strategies do require money. For these we need to have the collective political will and moral courage to commit the necessary financial and other resources to get the job done.

## D. Vision Statement

The following Vision Statement was adopted by the Interagency Task Force:

**We envision a New Mexico where the will and resources exist to empower communities to end homelessness. This will be accomplished by creating safe, decent, affordable housing with supportive services as needed; universal access to health care; and a living wage/income for all by 2010.**

## **E. Goals and Strategies**

The Plan is organized into three goals or Priority Areas, with major strategies included under each area: increasing affordable housing resources, improving incomes, and improving support system infrastructure and prevention services.

### **Priority One: Increase affordable housing resources:**

- Strategy 1.1: Create Statewide Affordable Housing Trust Fund
- Strategy 1.2: Develop new public/private funding for affordable housing development
- Strategy 1.3: Establish Statewide Housing Assistance and Eviction Prevention Fund
- Strategy 1.4: Establish Habitat for the Homeless
- Strategy 1.5: Implement construction trades affordable housing initiative
- Strategy 1.6: Establish state-funded housing for homeless voucher system
- Strategy 1.7: Model Best Practices by and for Public Housing Authorities
- Strategy 1.8: Identify & remove systemic barriers to permanent supportive housing models
- Strategy 1.9: Implement Affordable Housing Act
- Strategy 1.10: Create affordable housing set-asides

### **Priority Two: Improve incomes:**

- Strategy 2.1: Improve employment income
- Strategy 2.2: Improve Income from benefits

### **Priority Three: Improve support system infrastructure and preventive services:**

- Strategy 3.1: Establish formal Interagency Homeless Task Force
- Strategy 3.2: Centralize coordination and support of all New Mexico homeless and housing programs within MFA.
- Strategy 3.3: Develop additional coordinated community systems of care that link local solutions, prevent interruptions in benefits, and eliminate gaps in services.
- Strategy 3.4: Ensure State coverage of intensive case management for homeless services in NM Behavioral Health Purchasing Collaborative scope of services.
- Strategy 3.5: Advocate for improved access to health care for all New Mexico residents,
- Strategy 3.6: Advocate for Medicaid psychosocial coverage
- Strategy 3.7: Develop & implement a system of Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) to enable homeless people to save money for housing.
- Strategy 3.8: Improve access to mainstream resources for all homeless people.
- Strategy 3.9: Advocate for expansion of Federal Sec. 8 Program, with sufficient funding to support safe, appropriate housing for all eligible recipients

## F. The Plan Matrix

The matrix on the following pages lays out the entire Plan, incorporating:

- **Priority Areas:** three major goal areas identified by the planning group;
- **Strategies:** Major areas of activity within each Priority Area
- **Actions:** Smaller action steps or components that must be completed in order to carry out a Strategy;
- **Managers:** Persons and/or entities responsible for initiating and/or managing Actions;
- **Implementers:** Persons and/or entities responsible for implementing, carrying out, or following through on an Action;
- **Expected Outcomes:** Measurable or verifiable results of Actions or Strategies, expressed in terms of impacts on people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, or in terms of system changes that will in turn result in beneficial impacts within an anticipated time frame.
- **Benchmarks/Dates:** Intermediate steps leading to accomplishment of longer-term outcomes, expressed within an estimated time frame for completion.

Some of the strategies and actions are necessarily interdependent or potentially overlapping. It should also be noted that the Plan does not include references to New Mexico's current system of emergency shelter and services to homeless populations—a system that continues to fill a critical need and should be maintained at least at current levels of funding and support.

Finally, some strategies and actions in the Plan have to do with affecting national issues over which we in New Mexico have little control or influence. It could be argued that to include these (such as working to increase the Federal Section 8 low-income housing voucher program) is unrealistic. But to ignore Federal actions that have such an enormous impact on programs and services at the state and local level would be even more unrealistic and myopic.