

Opening Doors

**FEDERAL STRATEGIC PLAN TO
PREVENT AND END HOMELESSNESS**

AMENDMENT 2012





UNITED STATES INTERAGENCY COUNCIL ON HOMELESSNESS

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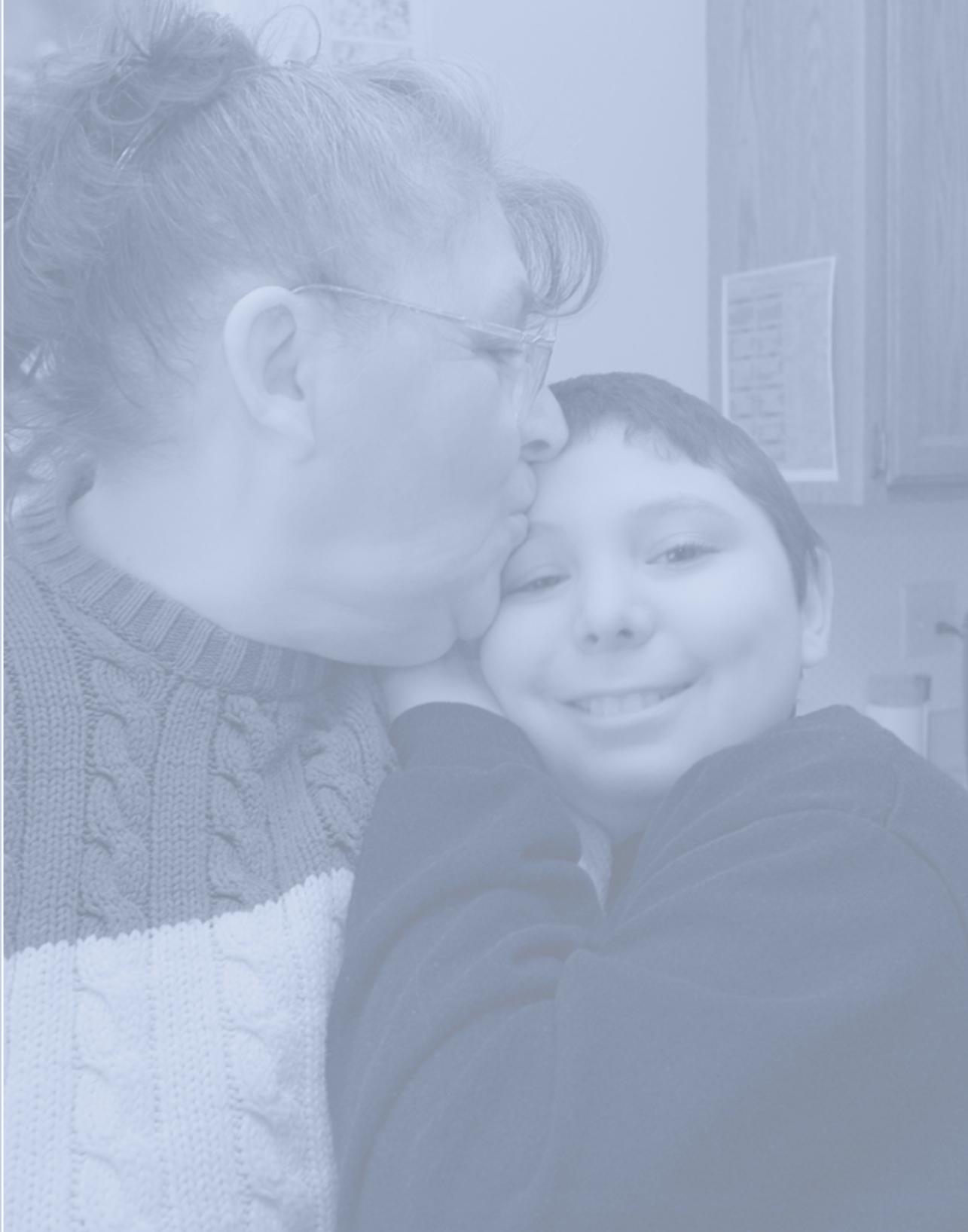
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COVER

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“I’m heartbroken that any child in America is homeless.... Part of the change in attitudes that I want to see here in Washington and all across the country is a belief that it is not acceptable for children and families to be without a roof over their heads in a country as wealthy as ours.”

PRESIDENT OBAMA

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Preface from the Chair

As the Chair of the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), I am pleased to present this amendment to *Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness*. Even during these tough economic times, we are making progress in the fight to prevent and end homelessness. For example, during the last two years we have continued to witness a decline in homelessness among Veterans. However, more work needs to be done across the board to provide support and stability for our most vulnerable populations—including children and youth.



The release of *Opening Doors* marked the first time that the Federal Government set a specific goal to address the prevention and end of homelessness. The Plan includes 52 strategies under the umbrella of 10 objectives, and is focused on four key goals (ending chronic and Veteran homelessness by 2015, ending homelessness for families, children, and youth by 2020, and setting a path to ending all types of homelessness). I reiterate President Obama's assertion that it is simply unacceptable for individuals, children, families and our nation's Veterans to be faced with homelessness in this country.

We knew when we adopted the goal to prevent and end homelessness for families, youth, and children by 2020 that there was much more to learn, even as we acted urgently to respond to the needs of vulnerable children and youth as families struggle with the effects of the recession. We knew that we needed to do more work at the federal level to act collaboratively and strategically to end homelessness for children and youth.

With this amendment, we are specifically addressing what is needed to improve the educational outcomes of children experiencing homelessness and adding specific steps that must be taken to prevent and end homelessness for unaccompanied youth. Continued cross-agency collaboration will be more important than ever: ending homelessness for youth and children requires collaborative leadership; capacity building for all stakeholders and service providers; a close focus on housing, employment, health and well-being; and the re-tooling of homeless crisis response systems. The Administration remains committed to the goals in *Opening Doors*, and we are confident that the objectives included in the Plan are the right ones to accomplish these bold goals.

This amendment to *Opening Doors* is the next iteration of our best thinking, informed by our federal, state, and local partners, and the many people whom we have engaged across America. We invite your continued feedback and suggestions. We also encourage you to look at the community where you live and the communities you serve for opportunities to collaborate and identify ways to implement the strategies set forth in this amendment.

Ending family and youth homelessness in America will require the concerted efforts of all of us. Every parent, youth, and child experiencing homelessness across the country is counting on us all to persevere.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Sebelius

Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and USICH Chair

Introduction

On June 22, 2010, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) and its 19 member agencies launched *Opening Doors*, the first comprehensive federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness. For the past two years, *Opening Doors* has served as a roadmap for joint action by the Federal Government and its state and local partners in the public and private sectors.

Opening Doors (“the Plan”) established bold and measurable goals for preventing and ending homelessness. Collaboration is at the heart of the Plan, among federal agencies and with state, local, and tribal government. The Plan is based on proven, cost-effective strategies. As the President wrote in the preface to the original Plan, “preventing and ending homelessness is not just a federal issue or responsibility. It also will require the skill and talents of people outside of Washington.... These state and local stakeholders must be active partners with the Federal Government, and their work will inform and guide our efforts at the national level.”

The Plan has been extraordinarily well received around the country. There is much consensus that if we all work together to faithfully and urgently implement the objectives, we can and will prevent and end homelessness in America.

Background on the Council

USICH’s mission is to “coordinate the federal response to homelessness and to create a national partnership at every level of government and with the private sector to reduce and end homelessness in the nation while maximizing the effectiveness of the Federal Government in contributing to the end of homelessness.”

Table 1. USICH Member Agencies

Member Agency	Principal	Member Agency	Principal
Department of Agriculture	Secretary Tom Vilsack	Department of Labor	Secretary Hilda L. Solis
Department of Commerce	Secretary Rebecca Blank (acting)	Department of Transportation	Secretary Ray. H. LaHood
Department of Defense	Secretary Leon Panetta	Department of Veterans Affairs	Secretary Eric K. Shinseki
Department of Education	Secretary Arne Duncan	Corporation for National and Community Service	Chief Executive Officer Wendy Spencer
Department of Energy	Secretary Steven Chu	General Services Administration	Administrator Daniel Tangherlini (acting)
Department of Health and Human Services	Secretary Kathleen Sebelius	Office of Management and Budget	Director Jeffrey Zients (acting)
Department of Homeland Security	Secretary Janet Napolitano	Social Security Administration	Commissioner Michael J. Astrue
Department of Housing and Urban Development	Secretary Shaun Donovan	U.S. Postal Service	Postmaster General Patrick R. Donahoe
Department of Interior	Secretary Ken Salazar	White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships	Executive Director Joshua DuBois
Department of Justice	Attorney General Eric Holder		

Members of the Council include the heads of 19 federal agencies (see Table 1). In 2012, Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kathleen Sebelius became the Council’s Chair, with Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary Eric Shinseki serving as Vice Chair. USICH Executive Director Barbara Poppe has served in that capacity since November 2009.

Overview of the Plan

The Plan is based on the vision that no one should experience homelessness—no one should be without a safe, stable place to call home. It is a five-year plan, covering fiscal years 2010-2014. The Plan has four goals:

- ▶ Finishing the job of ending chronic homelessness by 2015;
- ▶ Preventing and ending homelessness among Veterans by 2015;
- ▶ Preventing and ending homelessness for families, youth, and children by 2020; and
- ▶ Setting a path to ending all types of homelessness.

The Plan has 52 strategies under 10 objectives that cover five themes:

INCREASE LEADERSHIP, COLLABORATION, AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Objective 1: Provide and promote collaborative leadership at all levels of government and across all sectors to inspire and energize Americans to commit to preventing and ending homelessness

Objective 2: Strengthen the capacity of public and private organizations by increasing knowledge about collaboration, homelessness, and successful interventions to prevent and end homelessness

INCREASE ACCESS TO STABLE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Objective 3: Provide affordable housing to people experiencing or most at risk of homelessness

Objective 4: Provide permanent supportive housing to prevent and end chronic homelessness

INCREASE ECONOMIC SECURITY

Objective 5: Increase meaningful and sustainable employment for people experiencing or most at risk of homelessness

Objective 6: Improve access to mainstream programs and services to reduce people’s financial vulnerability to homelessness

IMPROVE HEALTH AND STABILITY

Objective 7: Integrate primary and behavioral health care services with homeless assistance programs and housing to reduce people’s vulnerability to and the impacts of homelessness

Objective 8: Advance health and housing stability for youth aging out of systems such as foster care and juvenile justice

Objective 9: Advance health and housing stability for people experiencing homelessness who have frequent contact with hospitals and criminal justice

RETOOL THE HOMELESS CRISIS RESPONSE SYSTEM

Objective 10: Transform homeless services to crisis response systems that prevent homelessness and rapidly return people who experience homelessness to stable housing

Amendment to the Plan

Since the initial release of *Opening Doors*, USICH has received feedback that there are areas of the Plan that would benefit from greater development in implementation, especially those related to youth and education. This feedback came from national advocates, service providers across the country, and through an online forum visited by over 1,700 people.

USICH developed this amendment to *Opening Doors* to further develop certain areas in the original Plan. The amendment builds upon existing work, providing further clarity and direction on what needs to be done specifically for youth and children experiencing homelessness. It discusses the steps that should be taken to prevent and end homelessness for unaccompanied youth and to improve educational outcomes for all children and youth experiencing homelessness.

This amendment was developed through interagency planning among USICH's federal partners. Progress toward the four goals in *Opening Doors* is dependent on continued commitment and strategic action at all levels of government, in coordination with the private sector. This amendment should be taken in context with the full Plan as ending homelessness for youth and children requires collaborative leadership; capacity building; focus on housing, employment, health and well-being; and the re-tooling of the homeless crisis response systems that are presented in *Opening Doors*.

Overview and Amended Language

This document is divided into two sections. The first section, Improving Educational Outcomes for Children and Youth, discusses improving educational outcomes for children and youth experiencing homelessness. The language in the Plan's Objective 5 is amended to include access to education. Related strategies are added to address improved educational outcomes, seamless transitions through educational programs, collaboration, and communication with providers. **The amended language in each area is indicated in boldface text.**

Objective 5: **Improve access to education** and increase meaningful and sustainable employment for people experiencing or most at risk of homelessness

Improve access to education and educational outcomes of children and young adults experiencing homelessness through the following:

- Improve identification of children and support for them to enroll in school. Provide seamless transitions from early childhood education through elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education.
- Review existing federal, state, and local program policies, procedures, and regulations to identify mechanisms that could increase both access to and retention in high-quality programs. These mechanisms should help ensure early childhood-to-adulthood educational access: quality child care and early-childhood education through elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education.
- Educate homeless assistance providers about the laws, and the programs and practices under those laws, designed to increase access to early care and education, such as those carried out under Head Start, the McKinney-Vento Act's education subtitle, and the independent student provisions of the Higher Education Act.

To support the strengthened focus on education for children and youth experiencing homelessness, Objective 2 is amended to include strategies to address increasing knowledge and awareness of successful collaborations and

interventions, and increasing access to and retention of children and youth in educational, developmental, and housing support programs:

- Objective 2:** Strengthen the capacity of public and private organizations by increasing knowledge about collaboration, homelessness, and successful interventions to prevent and end homelessness
- **Access to and retention in early childhood education programs, elementary and secondary education, and post-secondary education.**
 - **Awareness of child and youth development and strategies to support healthy child and youth development within housing programs.**

The second section of the document, Meeting the Unique Needs of Unaccompanied Youth, addresses the unique needs of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness, with the goal of quickly returning this population to a stable housing situation. Objective 8 is expanded to describe steps that should be taken to allocate resources to assist unaccompanied youth while considering the level of intervention appropriate to the circumstances. A preliminary, research-informed intervention model is set forth to guide continuing research and practice.

- Objective 8:** Advance health and housing stability for **unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness and youth aging out of systems such as foster care and juvenile justice**
- **Obtain more comprehensive information on the scope of youth homelessness** by improving counting methods; better coordinating and disseminating the information collected by different programs and systems; and conducting new research to expand and improve our understanding of the problem.
 - Build an evidence base of the most effective interventions for the different subsets of youth experiencing homelessness. Refine the preliminary intervention model (discussed below), and conduct additional research on effective interventions.
 - Improve access to emergency assistance, housing, and supports for historically underserved groups of youth. Such groups include youth who have been involved in the juvenile justice and/or child welfare systems; sexually exploited youth; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) and gender non-conforming youth; pregnant or parenting youth; and youth with mental health needs.



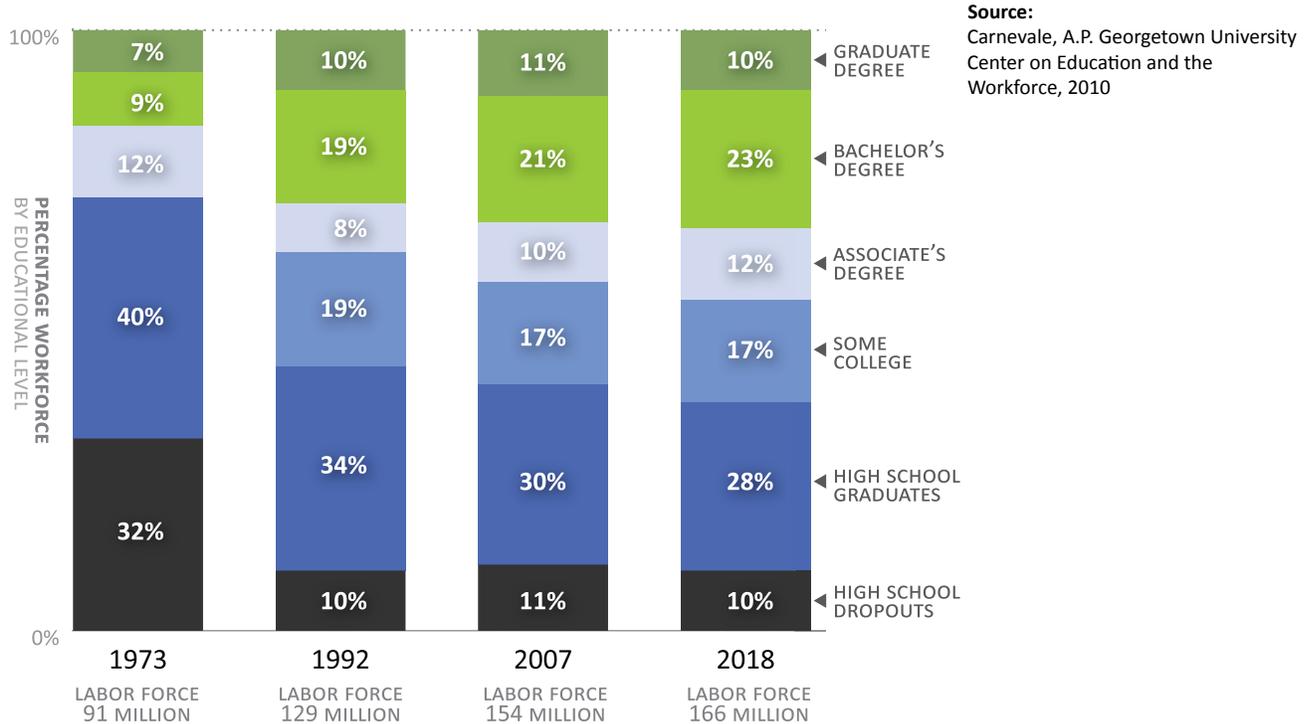
Used with permission of the Youth Empowerment Program of Columbus, Ohio. Photographer: Patrick Turner

Improving Educational Outcomes for Children and Youth

Quality education from early childhood to adulthood is essential to reducing vulnerability to homelessness. *Opening Doors* outlines objectives to increase meaningful and sustainable employment and to improve access to mainstream programs and services. In this amendment, the Plan’s fifth objective is updated to include access to education for children and youth experiencing homelessness. Related strategies are added to address improved educational outcomes, seamless transitions through educational programs, collaboration, and improved communication with providers. The Plan’s second objective is amended to address increasing the knowledge and awareness of all stakeholders and service providers about successful collaborations and interventions as well as increasing access to and retention of children and youth in educational, developmental, and housing support programs.

Strong evidence supports the inclusion of early care and education in these updated objectives. In order to be self-supporting and avoid homelessness, people need employment. Employment is dependent on education. According to Georgetown University Center on the Workforce, by 2018 only 10 percent of jobs created will be open to high school dropouts. Twenty-eight percent of jobs will be open to those with a high school degree.¹ The rest will require some college education. The next generation—our children and youth—must have early care and education if they are to avoid homelessness as adults.

Figure 1. Comparison: Workforce Distribution by Education Level



Challenges begin early and without intervention can continue throughout the lives of children and youth experiencing homelessness. Young children too often do not get the kind of quality early-childhood education that promotes school readiness.² Their parents commonly struggle to find any reliable child care; child care that incorporates programs to meet early educational needs may not be affordable or may not be a primary consideration. Children and youth suffer disruptions in education, often changing schools frequently due to residential instability.³ These disruptions can negatively affect cognitive development, meaning that children who fall behind their

peers may forever struggle to catch up.⁴ For older unaccompanied youth, school is often their only stability. Because unaccompanied youth are solely responsible for their own means of support, their best opportunity to earn a living wage depends on their ability to stay in school, get a high school degree, and—whenever possible—enter and complete postsecondary education.

Child care, early learning, elementary and secondary education, and post-secondary education can help reduce vulnerability to homelessness as adults. Concentrating the efforts of service providers, communities, and stakeholders on the availability and benefits of these programs and targeted supports will help today’s children and youth experiencing homelessness break the cycle.

Support for effecting these strategies and increasing access will come from Objective 2 of *Opening Doors*. The amended language describes strengthening the capacity of public and private organizations to deliver assistance and intervention by increasing emphasis on collaboration and the sharing of best practices and by broadly communicating information about homelessness and successful interventions to prevent and end it.

To realize improvements, it is important to encourage public-private partnerships between nonprofits, government, health care organizations, local businesses, and schools that seek to integrate diverse yet important supports and resources for children and youth. Efforts to support and educate young people must be consistent among the wide array of stakeholders—from afterschool and summer programs and youth development organizations to parents themselves—and should be recognized as part of a seamless pipeline of providers who educate and develop the whole student.

Meeting the Unique Needs of Unaccompanied Youth

The needs of unaccompanied youth who become homeless are distinct from those of adults or families experiencing homelessness. Young people are still emotionally, socially, and physically developing. They often have little or no work experience when they become homeless. A unique set of strategies is required to end homelessness for this population. An overarching and sustained commitment to achieving core outcomes for youth experiencing homelessness—stable housing, permanent connections, education/employment, and social-emotional well-being—will be critical to realizing the goal of ending youth homelessness.

- ▶ Although even brief periods of homelessness put youth at risk, most unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness return home or are able to find a stable place to stay in a relatively short amount of time (i.e., within one week, often within 24 hours) with little or no assistance.⁵ The service needs of youth experiencing homelessness vary. Some youth might benefit more from strengths-based programs aimed at enhancing their skills and abilities. Others require specific mental health or substance abuse treatments. Some need immediate housing arrangements, like subsidized apartment living or an emergency shelter bed. Those under 18 face particular legal challenges (e.g., the inability to sign a lease).
- ▶ A subset of newly homeless youth faces significant challenges when trying to regain stability. These challenges make them more susceptible to chronic homelessness, that is, being homeless repeatedly or for long periods of time.⁶ More intensive interventions can help youth experiencing chronic homelessness who typically experience mental health or substance use disorders and who need a complex array of intensive services and stable housing in order to live successfully on their own.⁷

Trauma-informed care

is an approach to engaging people with histories of trauma that recognizes the presence of trauma symptoms and acknowledges the role that trauma has played in their lives.

*National Center for
Trauma-Informed Care*

Because unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness have significant exposure to trauma, it is essential that interventions are trauma-informed in all aspects of how they approach and support young people to facilitate healing.

For many youth, engagement of their families and schools can be a critical factor in avoiding chronic homelessness. Where possible, intervention approaches should include a youth's family, friends, and significant others.

One of the key challenges to meeting the unique needs of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness is that a comprehensive, coherent system of care does not currently exist. Youth homelessness services are undersized and fragmented. Too many unaccompanied youth fall between the cracks because they cannot get the types of support they need when they most need them.

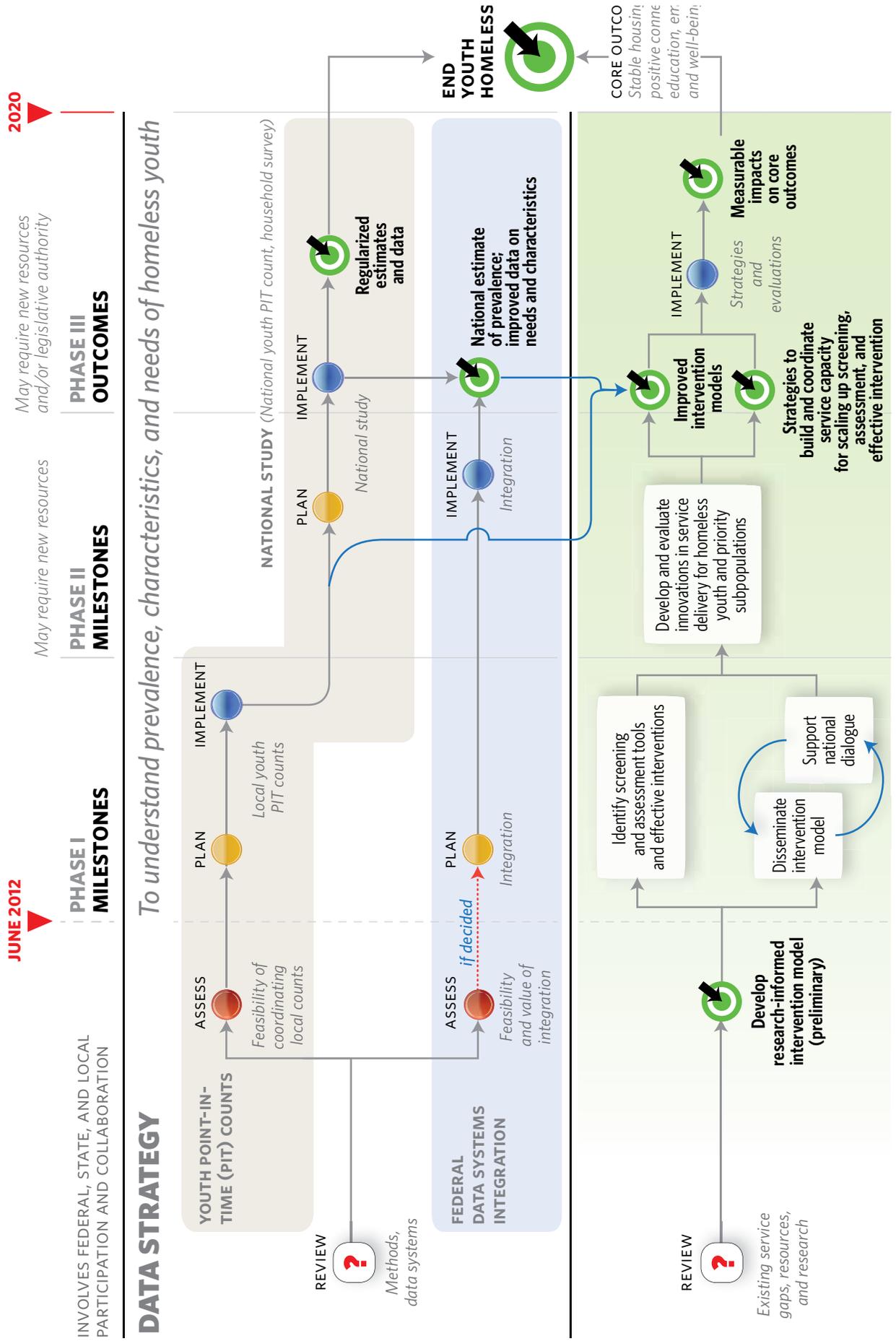
Youth-serving agencies range from large agencies with multiple funding sources to very small agencies solely dependent on private contributions. At the local level, a network of public and nonprofit agencies secure and manage resources from a variety of funding streams—foundations, city and county governments, state and federal funds. At the federal level, various agencies—including HUD, HHS, and the Departments of Education, Justice, and Labor—fund aspects of the services that local communities and programs use. The blending of these funds with local, state, and private funds to support programs occurs at the local level. More strategic coordination of these investments at multiple levels can result in more comprehensive data and more effective and efficient service delivery. A range of stakeholder groups, including youth experiencing homelessness, should have a voice and a role in these efforts.

Opening Doors describes the causes of youth homelessness and possible strategies to prevent and end it. The Plan calls for developmentally-appropriate services and shelter. Housing interventions are to be matched with needs and available to all youth experiencing homelessness. Embedded in the Plan's 10 objectives are strategies that call for better data and research. Two priorities are obtaining improved data on the prevalence, needs, and characteristics of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness and using rigorous evaluation to fill gaps in the evidence base of appropriate and effective interventions for unique groups of youth. Objective 8 speaks to the needs of particularly vulnerable subpopulations of homeless youth including youth aging out of foster care and juvenile justice, LGBTQ youth, and pregnant/parenting youth. To prevent and end youth homelessness, it is critical that communities and government follow and build on the roadmap set forth in *Opening Doors*. Building on this work, the Federal Government can more specifically map out what needs to be done and at what scale. Figure 2 illustrates how early efforts to support improved data and capacity for facilitating service delivery can inform strategic actions to end youth homelessness.



Reprinted with permission from the National Center on Family Homelessness. Photographer: Ren Haoyuan

Figure 2. USICH Framework Logic Model for Ending Youth Homelessness



Although not every variable has been identified, meaningful and measurable improvements can still be made in core outcomes for youth by using available research while improving data and building knowledge. The ultimate goal is a clearer understanding of the scale and nature of intervention required to prevent and end youth homelessness by 2020 and more information on the costs and benefits of intervening.

A Preliminary Research-Informed Intervention Model for Unaccompanied Youth Experiencing Homelessness

This amendment to *Opening Doors* broadens Objective 8 to describe specific next steps that communities and the nation can take to allocate resources in a manner that is sensitive to the level of intervention needed to quickly return an unaccompanied youth to a stable housing situation. There is currently no definitive way to predict which youth will need intensive services to avoid chronic or recurring homelessness. This preliminary intervention model is proposed based on risk and protective factors that can help communities manage limited resources in a more strategic and effective way. Data collected will also be used to build an evidence base of the most effective interventions for different subsets of homeless youth. The model can be applied at multiple levels to inform research and service strategies to achieve the long-term goal of ensuring that no youth experiences homelessness in America. In other words, the model can inform strategies about system and organizational service array; it can also provide useful information along with a youth's goals and circumstances to develop individual service and support plans.

Existing Strategies Under Objective 8 of *Opening Doors*

- Improve discharge planning
 - Review federal program policies, procedures, and regulations
 - Promote targeted outreach strategies
-

The model was developed with two complementary intentions: 1) to use the best available scientific evidence from research involving youth experiencing homelessness to guide the content of the model; and, 2) to incorporate a risk- and protective-factors perspective into understanding the diversity of youth experiencing homelessness. A risk- and protective-factors orientation prompts individual assessment and targeted, outcome-driven service strategies. It emphasizes modifiable risk and protective factors that interventions can target in order to improve outcomes. Still, it is a preliminary intervention model. The lack of high-quality empirical research on youth experiencing homelessness leaves many gaps and questions. Future research and data collection efforts will help improve this intervention model over time to better reflect the needs and characteristics of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness.

Risk factors are conditions or variables associated with a lower likelihood of positive outcomes and a higher likelihood of negative or socially undesirable outcomes.

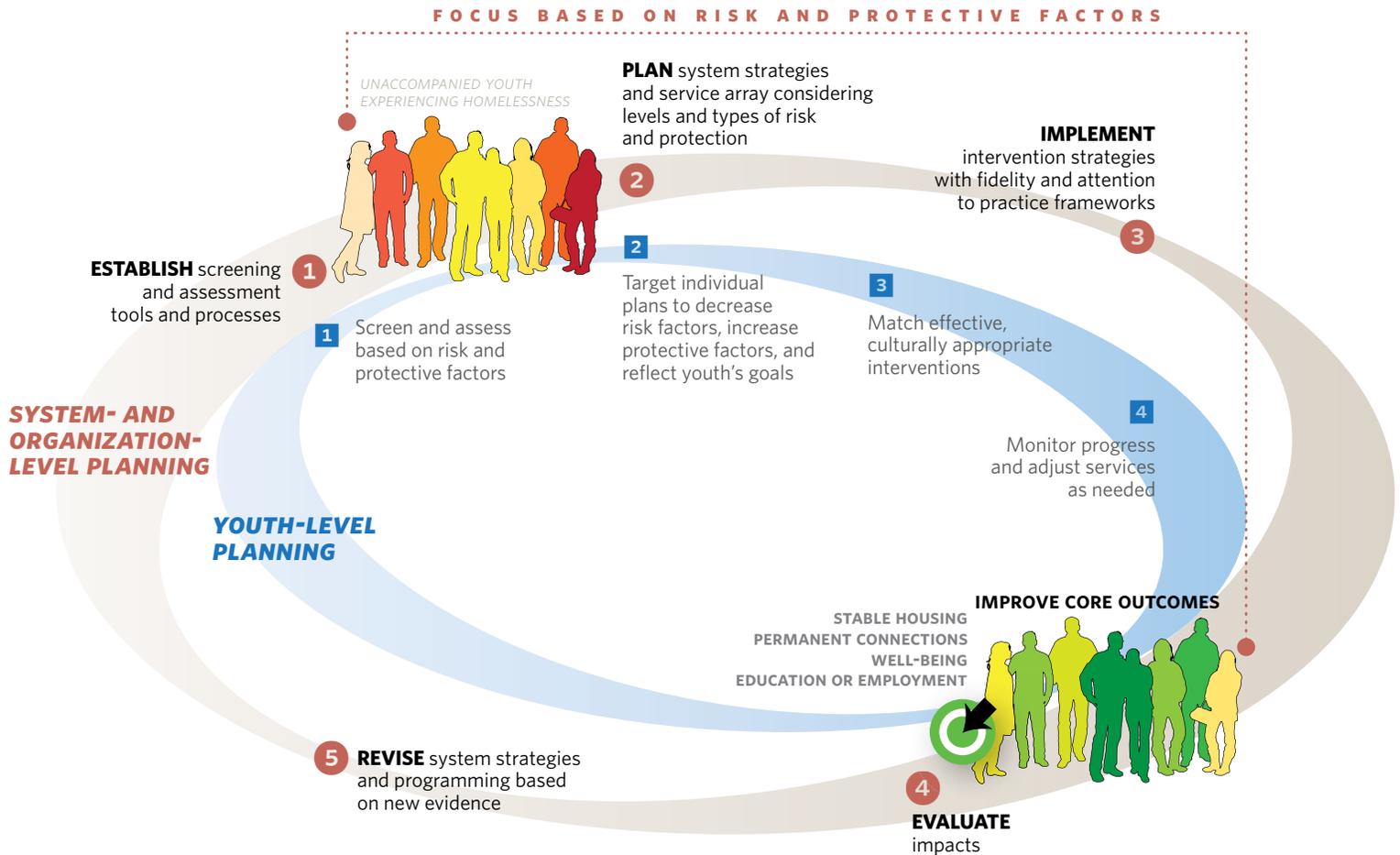
Presently, the empirical connections between risk and protective factors in the literature are largely more correlative or predictive than causal. This means that research can show relationships between a factor and outcome, but it cannot always confirm a cause-and-effect relationship. For now, these connections provide a scientific basis for focusing on risk and protective factors as a plausibly effective strategy for changing key outcomes.

Protective factors have the reverse effect: they enhance the likelihood of positive outcomes and lessen the likelihood of negative consequences from exposure to risk.

Notably, the risk and protective factors that have emerged from the research demonstrate the critical need for multiple service types, including those focused on housing, education, mental health, physical health, and other youth and family services. As such, the model reinforces the importance of coordination among various institutions at the federal, state, and local levels to end youth homelessness successfully. In addition to risk and protective factors, the model takes into account length of time experiencing homelessness, intervention strategies, outcomes, and pathways.

Jessor, Turbin, and Costa, 1998

Figure 3: Unaccompanied Youth Intervention Model



<p>1 SYSTEM- AND ORGANIZATION-LEVEL CONSIDERATIONS</p> <p>LIKELIHOOD OF RISK</p> <p><i>Time Experiencing Homelessness and Disconnection</i></p> <p>less time more time</p> <p>LOWER RISK HIGHER PROTECTION HIGHER RISK LOWER PROTECTION</p>	<p>2 TARGETING PLANS TO FACTORS</p> <p>RISK FACTORS <i>Problematic symptoms, behaviors, associations</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trauma • Emotional distress • Sexual risk behavior • Family problems • Criminal or delinquent behavior • Substance abuse 	<p>3 IMPLEMENT INTERVENTION STRATEGIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing • Treatment • School and community programs • Family supports <p>PRACTICE FRAMEWORKS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive youth development • Trauma-informed
<p>RISK AND PROTECTION GROUPS</p> <p>RISKY <i>High risk factors, low protective factors</i></p> <p>AT-RISK <i>High risk factors, some protective factors</i></p> <p>LOWER RISK <i>Low-to-medium risk factors, high protective factors</i></p>	<p>PROTECTIVE FACTORS <i>Positive skills, attitudes, behaviors, associations</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family cohesion and support • School engagement or employment • Survival skills • Positive connections • Positive future expectations • Decision-making skills • Self-esteem and self-efficacy • Health 	

Conclusion

USICH and its federal partners have taken important steps to identify clear action items that will enable us to move closer to the goals of ending child and youth homelessness. At all ages, children need access to education and training. Educational stability and smooth transitions from one level to the next can help break the cycle of homelessness, giving today's children and youth the tools they need to earn better incomes as adults. This requires communities across the country to work collaboratively to improve access to existing services, including supports to help children and youth stay in school.

To end youth homelessness by 2020, there needs to be better information about the scope of youth homelessness, and better evidence of effective interventions. This includes targeted homelessness assistance (runaway and homeless youth providers, HUD Continuum of Care providers, and homeless education liaisons within public schools); other targeted programs, including the child welfare and juvenile justice systems; and mainstream systems, including elementary, secondary and post-secondary education, vocational education, workforce programs, health care, and income supports.

The original Plan and these amendments are guided by USICH's commitment to: (1) better anticipation of the challenges that youth have when they are at risk of homelessness, when they become newly homeless, or when they are chronically homeless; (2) improvements in the data and rethinking of the structure across federal program areas and across services delivered by providers; and (3) maximization of existing capacity by scaling back practices that are not achieving desired results while concurrently scaling up evidence-based interventions.

Investing in America's most vulnerable children and youth is an investment in the future of America—one that USICH is committed to continuing to pursue to the fullest extent possible.

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