# Aligning Affordable Housing Efforts with Actions to End Homelessness

# Introduction

*Home, Together*, the federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness, emphasizes that housing affordability is essential for achieving the Plan's goals. However, housing that is affordable to people at a wide range of income levels is in short supply across the country. And significant racial inequities in access to housing still exist, creating disparate impacts. Because housing costs are rising more quickly than incomes in many markets, renter households at the lowest income levels face the greatest challenges with housing costs.

Now is the time to prioritize expanding the supply of and access to housing that is affordable to people who are at risk or are experiencing homelessness. If we fail to focus on rental housing affordability, our homelessness service systems will become increasingly bottlenecked by the scarcity of decent housing at an attainable and sustainable cost – and achieving our shared goal of ending homelessness will remain out of reach.

In many communities, however, conversations on housing affordability and those about homelessness are happening in different places among different groups of people. The following strategies and resources will support communities in aligning those conversations and will improve progress on preventing and ending homelessness.

## 1. Align Efforts: Develop and strengthen partnerships needed to align efforts.

There are many entities working in the affordable housing and homelessness arenas, but they do not always share the same goals, priorities, and timelines. For the most effective results, leaders and partners across sectors must work collaboratively to plan and implement policies and programs that increase the supply of and access to rental housing that is affordable to people across the full range of income levels. These partnerships can ensure that both shared and individual goals across agencies and jurisdictions are met.

> ### Strategies for Aligning Action
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> 1. **Align Efforts**: Develop and strengthen partnerships needed to align efforts.
> 2. **Set Goals**: Analyze local data, project needs, and set ambitious goals.
> 3. **Message Effectively**: Develop effective public messaging to mobilize awareness and support.
> 4. **Encourage Development**: Implement housing policies that temper rising costs and allow for affordable housing development.
> 5. **Engage Federal Programs**: Involve a broad range of federally funded housing programs.
> 6. **Target and Scale State and Local Funding**: Ensure that state and local financing and incentives support adequate development activity.
> 7. **Align Funding**: Synchronize financing by aligning capital, service, and operating funding.
> 8. **Link Health and Housing**: Align health and housing strategies and resources.
> 9. **Ensure Access**: Ensure access for people with histories of homelessness, low incomes, and other housing barriers.

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**Note About Recommended Resources:** Tools and resources are linked within the text throughout the document and also listed by strategy starting on page 8.

Key partners include:

- Public Housing Agencies
- Multifamily affordable and subsidized housing owners and operators
- Elected officials
- Local Health Departments and Human Services Departments
- State and local Housing Finance Agencies
- State and local Housing and Community Development Departments and organizations
- Homelessness service systems and Continuums of Care
- Private market housing owners and operators

- Organizations focused on population-specific housing, such as for domestic violence survivors, Veterans, persons with disabilities, or seniors
- Business and banking leaders
- For-profit and nonprofit affordable housing developers
- Other funders with reasons to invest in affordable housing, such as hospitals, community foundations, financial institutions, private and corporate philanthropy

By strengthening partnerships among these entities, and setting unified goals and targets, communities can increase the supply of affordable housing, preserve existing units, and ensure access for people exiting or at the greatest risk of homelessness, including those with extremely low incomes and other barriers to housing. One approach for leveraging the power of stakeholder collaboration is the collective impact model, which can be used effectively to address homelessness and housing costs. An example of a cross-sector collaboration aimed at addressing housing scarcity and costs, as well as homelessness, is the San Francisco Bay area's CASA Committee.



Strong relationships among affordable housing developers, housing owner/operators, and service providers are key for the planning, development, and operation of units that serve people exiting homelessness. For example, engaging service providers during the initial design of developments can help ensure that the living environment will serve the target population effectively, including any accessibility needs or dedicated space for any on-site services that might be offered. If a community does not have adequate capacity for such partnerships locally, targeted training and technical assistance efforts and/or recruiting other organizations that may be interested in working within the geographic area can help.

## 2. Set Goals: Analyze local data, project needs, and set ambitious goals.

To create ambitious goals for scaling rental housing that is affordable, a community must develop realistic projections, supported by data, of the number of affordable and supportive housing units needed. It is critical to project needs at varying affordability levels, not just the higher income affordability levels that are typically

easier to develop. The need is greatest for households at the lowest income levels, and research shows that not all units that are affordable to low-income households are available to them.

To support the community's data analysis, it is helpful to maintain an active inventory of all affordable housing rental units in your community, including new units in the development pipeline and existing units that may turn over. This inventory can be used to determine future investments needed for capital development, operating support, and services. It is also important to track when developments with affordability sunset dates are expected to convert to market-rate units, and to include housing affordability preservation strategies for those units.

Once the analysis of the community's housing needs is complete, it is important to set aggressive goals and to track progress. Those goals should help ensure that housing opportunities are distributed throughout the community, not only in certain areas or neighborhoods.

## 3. Message Effectively: Develop effective public messaging to mobilize awareness and support.

Effective messaging is necessary to generate and maintain public support, which is critical to the success of affordable housing efforts both for marshaling public resources and for overcoming objections to the zoning

and locating of new developments. Recent recommendations from the Frameworks Institute highlight the importance of approaching public outreach and messaging strategically around housing needs and solutions. Community partners must be aligned behind a strategic communications plan and shared messaging that makes the case for affordable housing and ending homelessness, clearly connecting community development efforts to the ability to address and end homelessness.
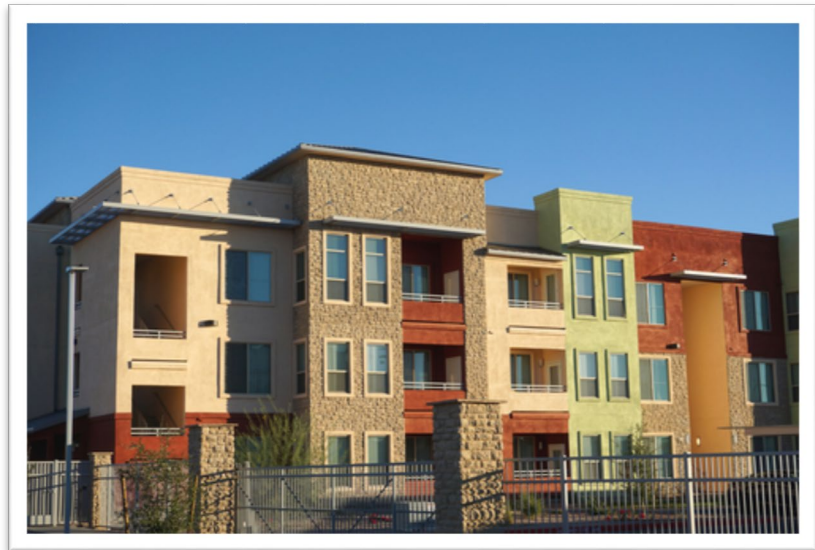


Messaging includes not only framing the issue well, in terms of equity and fairness, collective benefits, and regional interdependence, but also effectively communicating attainable goals and specific strategies. Beyond the initial messaging, progress should be consistently tracked and communicated, and "early wins" should be celebrated. The City of Los Angeles offers an example of effective tracking of their initiative to build 10,000 units of supportive housing to help end unsheltered homelessness.

## 4. Encourage Development: Implement housing policies that temper rising costs and allow for affordable housing development.

Financing and developing any housing, and especially affordable or supportive housing, is complex. The process involves multiple funding sources and timelines that must be aligned, and such alignment can be made even more difficult by local policies and processes that can hinder development.

A variety of requirements and regulations can impede a community's ability to respond quickly to the growing need for housing, including zoning restrictions, land use regulations, low density requirements, off-street-parking requirements, preservation or environmental impact regulations, and permitting processes, among other factors. Typically, such housing policies and processes are controlled at the local government level. Further, it is important to analyze if and why local community stakeholders may object to the development of housing that is accessible to lower income households. Analyzing where and how the development of affordable housing gets bottlenecked in a community, such as through approaches recommended by the National Community of Practice on Local Housing Policy, can help identify changes that can speed up development timelines without sacrificing safety and quality.

There are many policy alternatives to consider when designing a strong housing development strategy. Multifamily rental developments can be encouraged by reducing parking and setback requirements, as well as allowing for increased density. Affordable housing developments can be incentivized through inclusionary zoning, local fee waivers, expedited permitting, and local government surplus lands policies. Local policies that allow for and promote accessory dwelling units and community land trusts offer additional opportunities for housing affordability. Such housing policies can help expand the stock of rental housing that is affordable at a range of income levels, a necessary first step in creating inclusive communities and ending homelessness.

Reducing housing policy barriers alone will not necessarily result in an increase in the production of housing units that are, and remain, affordable to households with lower incomes. To encourage long-term affordability in the face of rising housing markets, it is also important to require permanent affordability within an adequate supply of units through funding and other incentives. Without affordability requirements tied to subsidies or land use, the cost of housing in the private market becomes a function of supply and demand within a housing submarket. As an example, local policies that provide for higher density (i.e., more units in a given space) may lead to the development of luxury apartments rather than affordable units. This addition of high-end apartments will not affect the availability of rental apartments that are affordable to those with low incomes. Therefore, the barrier-reduction approach must be complemented with incentives and/or requirements targeted directly to increasing the stock of housing that is affordable to lower income renter households, as well as ensuring ongoing affordability in the face of changing market conditions.

## 5. Engage Federal Programs: Involve a broad range of federally funded housing programs.

Existing federally funded housing programs can be engaged to increase supply and improve access, providing models for how other affordable housing programs can also be engaged in these efforts. Communities can expand access to housing for people exiting homelessness through partnerships with public housing agencies (PHAs), by strengthening CoC-PHA partnerships and using approaches described within the PHA Guidebook

to Ending Homelessness. Further, stakeholders should work closely with operators of HUD-financed multifamily housing, as well as USDA-supported multifamily housing.

There are many resources available to PHAs that are collaborating with community partners to help end homelessness. As described in the PHA Guidebook, PHAs can establish "preferences," providing for increased access to Housing Choice vouchers and public housing units by households experiencing homelessness. The same is true for HUD-financed multifamily housing units. When these units and subsidies are connected to adequate supportive services, they can also provide supportive housing opportunities for chronically homeless households and/or other vulnerable households. Communities can also prioritize households exiting homelessness for special needs programs, such as HUD's mainstream voucher program to assist nonelderly persons with disabilities, the Section 202 housing program for elderly households, the Family Unification Program vouchers, and Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA) assistance.

PHAs and multifamily housing owners can also project-base Housing Choice vouchers within existing or planned units, supporting the operation or development of units that are affordable for the lowest income households, and ensuring the long-term affordability of those units. PHAs may also designate Housing Choice vouchers or other affordable housing units in their portfolios for the implementation of a "move on" strategy, providing housing opportunities for tenants of supportive housing who no longer need intensive services, thereby freeing up slots for others who are prioritized for supportive housing.

## 6. Target and Scale State and Local Funding: Ensure that state and local financing and incentives support adequate development activity.

Creating an adequate supply of affordable and supportive housing opportunities to support communities in ending homelessness requires federal, state, and local investments. Those investments must be structured to allow for developments to have little or no debt, which will ensure that they can remain affordable over the long term and be accessible to households with extremely low incomes. Targeting an appropriate scale of
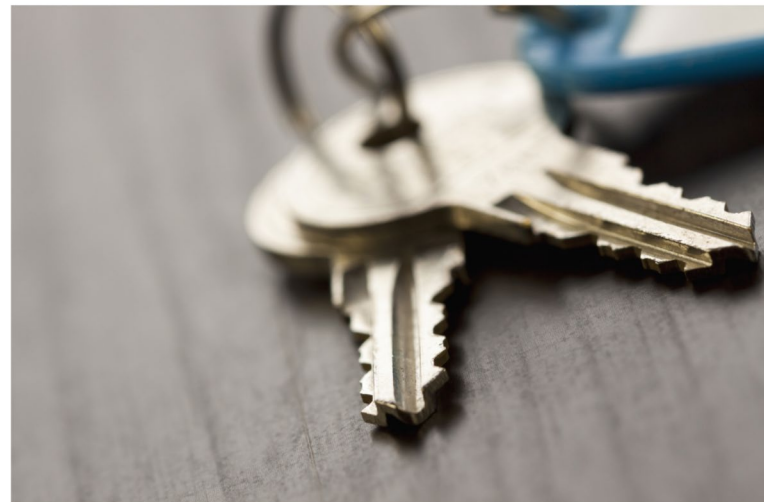


those resources to address the housing needs of the lowest income residents is necessary for the creation of units that are accessible to people exiting homelessness and help prevent homelessness among the most at-risk households.

Recently, voters have supported ballot initiatives that provided for increased funding for affordable housing at both the statewide and local level. States with new housing funding include Colorado, California, Washington, and Hawaii, and local jurisdictions such as Charlotte, Austin, and Portland also have new measures in place to fund affordable housing. While interest in housing affordability among voters and elected officials is increasing, such measures are not new. For example, the State of Florida's dedicated affordable housing trust fund, in place since 1992 and championed by a broad coalition of advocates, is used in part to build affordable rental units, as well as preserve existing units. In many cases, cities and counties have also

passed local sales taxes, bonds, or other dedicated revenue sources to increase housing affordability. Across America there are more than 800 such state and local housing trust funds.

A critical capital financing tool is the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) that is used to secure capital investments for many affordable and supportive housing developments. The processes, policies, and priorities for awarding such tax credits are laid out in the LIHTC Qualified Action Plans (QAP), which are developed by states' Housing Finance Agencies and/or Housing Departments, and for which public input is regularly sought. Many of these QAPs prioritize or incentivize permanent supportive housing and/or other housing for special needs populations, and can be effectively aligned with other resources to expand the supply of units available to people exiting homelessness. Also administered at the state level are monies from the National Housing Trust Fund, which helps create and preserve housing for the lowest income residents.

## 7. Align Funding: Synchronize financing by aligning capital, service, and operating funding.

Affordable housing developments rely on funding from a variety of public and private sources. For a development to open on schedule, the capital financing, operating support, and services funding must be effectively synchronized. Often housing developers bear the burden of aligning all of the funding resources, which have divergent applications schedules and timeframes, slowing down development processes.

Public and private funders of affordable housing can reduce that burden, and speed up development timeframes, by taking responsibility for aligning their requirements and application and award timeframes. Some communities have created "funders collaboratives" – like the Home for Good Funders Collaborative in Los Angeles, CA – to ensure public and private investments for capital, operations, and services are well aligned. Such alignment also allows for the creation of a shared pipeline of affordable and supportive housing developments necessary to achieve local goals and helps to identify any delays or potential gaps in funding.

## 8. Link Health and Housing: Align health and housing strategies and resources.

Evidence continues to show that housing and health are inextricably linked. To help people with the greatest needs achieve housing stability, affordable housing opportunities must be combined with a tailored package of consistent and effective supportive services, including health care services. Funding for those services can come from a variety of federal, state, and local sources, not only through targeted homelessness programs and resources, but also through partnerships with federal, state, and local programs and services, including hospitals, and health care and behavioral health care resources.

For example, Medicaid is one of the most important avenues to provide health insurance coverage for low-income populations, including people experiencing homelessness. Under their Medicaid plans, states can also choose to use Medicaid to cover the costs of services that support housing stability, such as case management and services coordination, and Medicaid can be a key resource for ending chronic homelessness and for tenants in supportive housing. Other health care resources, including targeted mental health and substance use resources, can also help support the services people need to succeed in housing. Close coordination in the development of housing and health care strategies at the state and local level can help ensure the most cost-effective use of resources, as well as ensure that both the health and housing outcomes for vulnerable populations are improved. Many innovative models in connecting health care and housing have been developed.

In some communities, such as the example in Portland, OR, health care organizations have invested directly in affordable and supportive housing, in recognition of the critical importance of housing to both health

outcomes and health care costs. Communities can also foster expanded partnerships between housing providers and health and behavioral health care providers, such as health centers, including co-location strategies and other efforts to improve coordination of resources and access to essential services.

## 9. Ensure Access: Ensure access for people with histories of homelessness, low incomes, and other housing barriers.

To follow through on public messaging that connects affordable housing efforts to the ability to end homelessness, it is essential that people experiencing or with histories of homelessness have genuine and meaningful access to existing and new affordable rental units. For there to be true access to housing for this population, there must be enough units that are both affordable and available to households at the lowest income levels and there must be concerted efforts to connect people experiencing homelessness to those units and to identify and remove barriers to such access.

Further, housing can be made more readily available to those with poor or no credit history, criminal records, and poor rental history through the implementation of Housing First practices and principles. Such access is often not realized even within communities' existing affordable housing. Increased access can be promoted through ongoing education of housing operators (e.g., training on fair housing laws and the rights of persons with disabilities), as well as through requirements attached to state and local funding (e.g., requiring a tenant selection plan that includes individualized consideration and limited "look back" periods for criminal histories and evictions).

Racial disparities in experiences of homelessness, as well as in access to decent housing, are stark, driven by a complex array of inequities within our systems and social dynamics—biases and prejudices, overt discrimination, systemic and institutional racism, and many other related and intersectional forces. Because of these historic and current racial inequities in housing and homelessness, all policies and resources must be intentionally vetted to ensure that access to stable housing is equitable across race and ethnicity. One example of the consideration of racial inequities is that done by the CASA Compact.

Creating a centralized database or resources hub of all available units, and streamlining eligibility for entry into these units, will help ensure that those who most need affordable housing can access it. Directly connecting mainstream resources, including deeply affordable units and Housing Choice vouchers, to your community's coordinated entry system can help simplify access, eliminate multiple waiting lists, and connect those best matched for units to the homes that will resolve their housing crisis quickly. At a minimum, efficiently tracking the supply of units, and turnover through which units become available, can help improve access and streamline lease-up timeframes.

Engaging owners and landlords consistently will result in improved access to available units, greater housing stability for tenants, and increased profitability for the owner/operator. Strong positive relationships between service providers and housing owners and operators are critical for ensuring that households with the greatest barriers have equitable access to housing units. Many communities have created landlord liaison programs to increase access to affordable and private market units. These programs typically centralize communication among tenants, landlords, and service providers. They assist with locating units, navigating the leasing process, and intervening to prevent an eviction if an issue arises. Some programs have access to risk mitigation funds to provide added insurance to an owner/manager who is willing to rent to someone who might otherwise be screened out.

## Recommended Resources

The following resources are linked to from within the text above:

**Introduction**

- [Out of Reach: The High Cost of Housing](#) (NLIHC)

1. **Align Efforts:** Develop and strengthen partnerships needed to align efforts.

   - [Overview of the Collective Impact Model](#) (Kania and Kramer, Stanford Social Innovation Review)

   - [Harnessing the Power of Collective Impact to End Homelessness](#) (Destination: Home)

   - Community example of aligned efforts: [CASA Compact: A 15-Year Emergency Policy Package to Confront the Housing Crisis in the San Francisco Bay Area](#) (CASA Committee)

2. **Set Goals:** Analyze local data, project needs, and set ambitious goals.

   - [SHOP Tool to Estimate the Need for Supportive Housing](#) (USICH)

   - [Overview of the Worst Case Housing Needs](#) (USICH)

   - [Mind the Gap](#) (Enterprise)

   - Example of online affordable housing inventory: [SocialServe](#) (socialserve.com)

   - [National Housing Preservation Database](#) (NHPD)

   - [Preserving Affordable Housing: What Works](#) (Treskon and McTarnaghan, Urban Institute)

3. **Message Effectively:** Develop effective public messaging to mobilize awareness and support.

   - [Communicating Effectively About Ending Homelessness](#) (USICH)

   - [Multiple resources focused on messaging about housing](#) (Frameworks Institute)

   - [Webinar: Making the Case for Affordable Housing and Ending Homelessness](#) (USICH)

   - Community example of communicating housing initiative progress: [Tracking HHH](#) (City of Los Angeles)

4. **Encourage Development:** Implement housing policies that temper rising costs and allow for affordable housing development.

   - Several "[Evidence Matters](#)" articles on local zoning and land use barriers to housing development (HUD PD&R)

   - [Overview and resources on Not in My Backyard (NIMBY)](#) (HUD)

   - [Multiple resources and tools on local solutions to housing affordability](#) (LocalHousingSolutions.org)

   - [Housing Development Toolkit](#) (The White House)

   - [Zoning Changes to Allow for Higher Residential Density](#) (LocalHousingSolutions.org)

   - [Questions to Consider Regarding Inclusionary Zoning Policy](#) (USICH)

   - [Overview and resources on Accessory Dwelling Units](#) (American Planning Association)

   - [Overview of Community Land Trusts](#) (Grounded Solutions Network)

- "Why Not In Our Community?": Removing Barriers to Affordable Housing (HUD PD&R)
- Why Voters Haven't Been Buying the Case for Building (Jacobus, Shelterforce)

5. **Engage Federal Programs:** Involve a broad range of federally funded housing programs.

- Advocates Guide: A Primer on Federal Affordable Housing and Community Development Programs (NLIHC)
- Public Housing Authorities and Continuums of Care: Establishing and Maintaining Powerful Teams (USICH)
- PHA Guidebook to Ending Homelessness (USICH)
- HUD Homelessness Assistance Resources for Multifamily Housing Owners and Managers landing page with numerous resources (HUD)
- USDA Multi-Family Housing Programs overview (USDA)
- Resources for CoC and PHA Collaboration to End Homelessness (HUD)
- Opening Doors Through Multifamily Housing: Toolkit for Implementing a Homeless Preference (HUD)
- HUD Mainstream Voucher landing page (HUD)
- HUD Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly Program landing page (HUD)
- HUD Family Unification Program landing page (HUD)
- HUD Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS landing page (HUD)
- Policy Basics: Project-Based Vouchers (CBPP)
- Webinar on Move-On Strategies for PHAs and CoCs (HUD)

6. **Target and Scale State and Local Funding:** Ensure that state and local financing and incentives support adequate development activity.

- Overview and Database of State and Local Housing Trust Funds (Housing Trust Fund Project)
- Example of state housing trust fund and advocacy: Sadowski Housing Trust Fund (Sadowski Coalition, Florida Housing Coalition)
- Fact Sheet on the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) (NLIHC)
- A Primer on Qualified Action Plans (QAPs) (ChangeLab Solutions)
- Contacts and Other Information about State Housing Finance Agencies (NCSHA)
- 2017 Low Income Housing Tax Credit Policies Promoting Supportive Housing & Recommendations for 2018 & 2019 (CSH)
- National Housing Trust Fund landing page with multiple resources (HUD)

7. **Align Funding:** Synchronize financing by aligning capital, service, and operating funding.

- Financing Affordable Rental Housing: Defining Success, including case studies (Wilson Center)
- Community example: Home for Good in Los Angeles

8.  **Link Health and Housing:** Align health and housing strategies and resources.

- [Housing is Health Care](#) (Werthheimer, USICH)

- [Services in a CoC Program: A Guide to Assessing Value and Finding Funding Alternatives (USICH)](#)

- [Integrate Health Care](#) (USICH)

- [Coverage of Housing-Related Activities and Services for Individuals with Disabilities](#) (HHS CMS)

- [A Primer on Using Medicaid for People Experiencing Chronic Homelessness and Tenants in Permanent Supportive Housing](#) (HHS ASPE)

- [A Quick Guide to Improving Medicaid Coverage for Supportive Housing Services](#) (CSH & USICH)

- [Innovative Models in Health and Housing](#), including community case studies (Bamberger et al.)

- [6 Portland Health Organizations Pledge $21.5million for 33 Low-Income Housing Projects](#) (Portland Business Journal)

- [Partnering with Hospitals to End Homelessness](#) (USICH)

9.  **Ensure Access:** Ensure access for people with histories of homelessness, low incomes, and other housing barriers.

- [Housing First Checklist](#) (USICH)

- [Fair Housing](#) landing page with numerous resources (HUD)

- [Application of Fair Housing Act to the Use of Criminal Records](#) (HUD)

- [How to Start Addressing Racial Disparities in Your Community](#) (USICH)

- Community example of racial equity perspective: [Racial Equity Analysis for the CASA Compact](#) (CASA Committee)

- [Enhancing Coordinated Entry through Partnership with Mainstream Resources and Programs](#) (USICH)

- [Coordinated Entry Policy Brief](#) (HUD)

- [Multiple Resources on Landlord Engagement](#) (USICH)

- [Engaging Landlords: Risk Mitigation Funds Community Profiles](#) (USICH)