



# A Research Agenda for Ending Homelessness

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## RESEARCH ON HOMELESSNESS

Research on homelessness has produced a series of robust findings, filling in knowledge gaps and identifying solutions that help policymakers and practitioners move forward with cost-effective approaches to ending homelessness. In a handful of pioneering communities, these approaches are resulting in reductions in homelessness. As the movement to end homelessness grows, policymakers and practitioners will continue to test innovative solutions on the ground. The sustained support of knowledge building is critical to ensuring that the movement reaches its goal—ending homelessness nationwide.

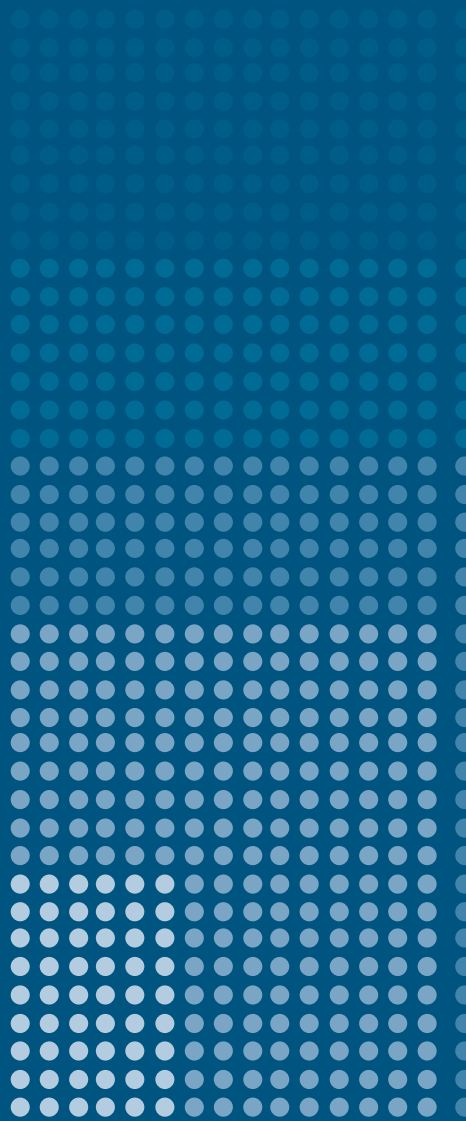
## GOAL OF THE RESEARCH AGENDA

The purpose of creating a Research Agenda for Ending Homelessness is to better inform government agencies, philanthropic organizations, and other funders about research questions that will help move policy and practice forward. The agenda aims to prioritize key questions by guiding funders and their research collaborators during the identification, conceptualization, and development of new research. In 2007, following the National Homelessness Research Symposium, a group of leading academics, policy researchers, and policy experts met to develop the agenda. The agenda does not represent an exhaustive list of unanswered questions on homelessness. Instead, it focuses on priority research questions immediately relevant to policy and program development.



## RESEARCH DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

To optimize the value of research findings, research designs should include rigorous data collection strategies that will lead to conclusive findings.

- Future research projects should shift the emphasis from descriptive studies to intervention evaluations. These studies should include, where appropriate, quasi-experimental and experimental designs and evaluation strategies that include cost analysis. While the design and data collection are more expensive for these studies, the return on conclusive findings is worth the investment.
  - To better understand how program components are implemented, where appropriate, evaluations should include a process study component. Process studies should be designed to identify key ingredients or aspects of the programs that appear to relate most strongly to outcomes.
  - With the goal of drawing nationwide policy implications, research studies should evaluate multi-site models that represent geographic diversity. Where appropriate, the research design should include rural areas.
  - Research projects should focus on *housing stability* as the primary outcome and should include other outcomes such as employment, increases in income, improvement in health status, mental health, and overall well-being. In addition, where appropriate, studies that look at program effects should collect data that capture changes in children's well-being.
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Research Questions	Research Design Elements	Policy Impact
What mix of housing assistance and services prevents and ends homelessness for various subgroups of homeless families? Are housing and service interventions effective in promoting family preservation or reunification?	Experimental or quasi-experimental design with process study and cost analysis	Will help identify cost-effective interventions to prevent and end family homelessness. Will help inform family reunification policies at the local level.
What characteristics distinguish those poor, at-risk families who become homeless, particularly those who have repeated or long episodes of homelessness, from those who do not? How can these characteristics help identify risk factors for homelessness?	Longitudinal survey supplemented by administrative data and cost analysis	Will help inform the design of prevention programs.
What are the risk factors for chronic homelessness?	Longitudinal survey matched with administrative data; design should include comparisons	Will help inform the design of prevention programs.
What programs and policies are effective in preventing chronic homelessness?	Program evaluation, including cost analysis, of initiatives that preserve tenancy or prevent people who are leaving systems from becoming homeless	Will help identify policies and programs that prevent chronic homelessness before it occurs.
What types of assessment tools help practitioners target various housing/service strategies (e.g., short-term rent assistance/transitional case management, congregate transitional housing stays, transition in place models, etc.) to match the needs of families?	Exploration and review assessment tools/mechanisms that communities are relying on to target enriched services	Will identify promising assessment tools that communities can adopt and test.
What promising models are addressing homelessness in rural areas?	Qualitative review and examination of outcomes	Will help inform the development of flexible housing and program models that are effective in rural areas.
Typology of homeless youth by either characteristics or use of systems	Epidemiological study of youth	Will help inform the development of housing and service models for homeless youth.
What housing and service models are effective in preventing and ending youth homelessness, particularly those exiting (aging out, reunifying with their family, leaving on their own) the foster care system?	Qualitative review to identify promising models that would inform an experimental or quasi-experimental design demonstration program, including a cost analysis component	
To what extent are "in reach" discharge planning models for prisoner reentry effective in preventing homelessness? What level of housing and services should be attached to discharge planning? What is the effect of housing stability on recidivism back to prison?	Experimental or quasi-experimental design demonstration program	Will help identify effective discharge planning strategies, which can serve as possible national models.
Does providing financial and other support to families of returning prisoners help reduce housing instability among those returning? What are the effects on the family?	Experimental or quasi-experimental design with longitudinal follow-up and cost analysis based on possibly lower rates of recidivism	Will examine the importance of housing in successful prisoner reentry.
To what extent are rapid exit/re-housing programs effective and for whom?  Are participants in rapid exit/re-housing programs becoming homeless again and when? What is the impact of a single point of entry compared to systems with multiple points?	Cross-sectional comparison and longitudinal tracking survey with cost analysis	Evaluates a promising model more rigorously to inform whether or not it should be brought to scale.
To what extent are harm reduction models effective in increasing housing stability? What are the long-term effects on treatment, healthcare utilization, and health status?	Cross-sectional comparison and longitudinal tracking survey with cost analysis	Rigorously evaluates a promising model and will inform whether or not the model should be brought to scale.



## Homelessness Research Institute

The Homelessness Research Institute, the research and education arm of the National Alliance to End Homelessness, works to end homelessness by building and disseminating knowledge that informs policy change. The goals of the Homelessness Research Institute are to build the intellectual capital around solutions to homelessness; to advance data and research so that policymakers, practitioners, and the caring public have the best information about trends in homelessness and emerging solutions; and to engage the media to ensure intelligent reporting on the issue.



The National Alliance to End Homelessness is a nonpartisan, mission-driven organization committed to preventing and ending homelessness in the United States. The Alliance works collaboratively with the public, private, and nonprofit sectors to improve practice, cultivate innovation, provide data and research, and build capacity, leading to stronger programs and policies that help communities achieve their goal of ending homelessness.