

THE PROBLEM:

FEDERAL DEFINITIONS OF HOMELESSNESS ARE NOT ALIGNED

Communities need to be able to use the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Homeless Assistance Grants flexibly, effectively, and appropriately to meet the needs of children, youth, and families.

Youth and Young Adults Experiencing Homelessness Have Distinct Needs that Require Communities to Respond Flexibly

Unaccompanied homeless youth and young adults (YYA) stay wherever they can, frequently move between living situations. They often hide their situation due to fear of child welfare or law enforcement involvement.

HUD Homeless Assistance Grants Must Be Retooled to Allow Communities to More Flexibly and Effectively Use Available Federal Funding to Meet the Unique Needs of Children, Youth, and Families

- Communities must be allowed to use available resources to serve homeless children, youth and families in a way that is responsive to their unique community needs; there is no one size fits all approach.
- Homelessness Assistance eligibility criteria have been interpreted to effectively exclude some of the most vulnerable YYA from the housing programs and services they need.
- Directly or indirectly, HUD Homeless Assistance must provide support for the services that are critical to long-term success for YYA experiencing homelessness, including child care, education, employment assistance, job training, and case management.

“The young people we serve who are temporarily staying with others are in inherently unstable situations. They lack certainty over how long they can remain in that setting. Their arrangements are subject to change with little-to-no notice. The people they’re staying with are often unwilling to provide written notice for fear of risking their lease or public benefits.”

- NN4Y Youth Service Provider Member

THE SOLUTION: THE HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH ACT

The Homeless Children and Youth Act (HCYA) H.R. 5221 restores local decision-making and improves communities’ ability to meet the unique developmental needs of YYA experiencing all forms of homelessness, which is the best long-term strategy to reduce all forms of homelessness. Specifically, HCYA:

- Allows communities to serve some of the most vulnerable YYA by aligning HUD Homeless Assistance eligibility criteria with other federal programs, including the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act and Violence Against Women Act programs.
- Provides flexibility to local communities to use available resources to meet the needs they identify by ensuring that housing and services are tailored to each homeless population’s unique needs, including YYA and homeless families.
- Increases visibility and awareness of YYA experiencing homelessness through data transparency and more accurate counts, thus helping communities leverage and attract more public/private resources to address homelessness.
- Together, our nation has a responsibility to help all persons experiencing homelessness. If enacted, HCYA would take us closer to upholding this promise for our children, youth, and families in need.

We will not effectively address homelessness in America **until we align definitions of homelessness across all federal programs and include all forms of homelessness.**

One in 10 young adults ages 18-25 experienced homelessness over a 12-month period.



That's approximately 3.5 million young adults

One in 30 youth ages 13-17 experienced homelessness over a 12-month period.



That's approximately 700,000 youth

Even before COVID-19, youth and family homelessness were at record levels: public schools identified over 1.5 million children and youth experiencing homelessness. Racial disparities continue to run rampant. According to research conducted in 2019, compared to their white peers in high school, Black students are 2.67 times more likely to experience homelessness, and Hispanic students are 1.68 times more likely to experience homelessness.

Homelessness can have a tremendous impact on children and youth – their education, health, sense of safety, and overall development. More than ever, these children, families, and youth need our attention to receive the help they need to survive and thrive.

ALIGNING DEFINITIONS WILL REDUCE CHRONIC ADULT HOMELESSNESS

Adults experiencing homelessness are likely to have been homeless for long periods of time and had their first homelessness experience at a young age - younger than 25.

Current definitions of homelessness reflect the ways adults – and not youth – experience homelessness. American youth experiencing homelessness is a shifting population of young people who use temporary situations to get by when they cannot stay in a home of their own. Research has found that homelessness among young people is a fluid experience – they may be sleeping in a car one night, at a shelter the next, and on an acquaintance's floor the following week.

The definition of homelessness used by federal agencies dictates who can be served through their funded programs. Who is “counted” as homeless impacts a community’s homeless population’s perceived size and influences how agencies — public and private — target programs and services. **The same young person may be considered “homeless” and eligible to access services under one definition and set of programs, but not another.**

Breaking generational cycles of homelessness starts with refocusing our attention and resources on youth. The HCYA restores local decision-making and improves communities’ ability to meet the unique developmental needs of YYA experiencing all forms of homelessness, which is the best long-term strategy to reduce all forms of homelessness.



To cosponsor the Homeless Children and Youth Act:

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