



*Working to increase affordable housing
and eliminate homelessness in our great state.*

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January 26, 2015

Alaska Housing Finance Corporation
C/o Carrie Collins, Planner
PO Box 101020
Anchorage, Alaska 9910-1020

Dear Carrie Collins:

The Alaska Coalition on Housing and Homelessness would like to express its appreciation to the Governor's Council on the Homelessness for soliciting comments on the Alaska 10-Year Plan to End Long-Term Homelessness.

Last month, the Alaska Coalition on Housing and Homelessness prepared draft comments for its members. The Coalition accepted members' feedback from January 14-20th, 2015 and additional comments were included in the final draft.

Please feel free to contact me with and thoughts or questions on these comments. The Coalition looks forward to working with the Governor's Council on the Homeless on the 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness and ultimately on our shared goals of increasing affordable housing and eliminating homelessness in our great state.

Thanks,

Scott Ciambor, Chair
Alaska Coalition on Housing and Homelessness

Comments on the Alaska 10-Year Plan to End Long-Term Homelessness

The Alaska Coalition on Housing and Homelessness would like the Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness to be a document that is user-friendly and easily accessible to the general public. The Plan should be able to accomplish a number of different goals, including;

- **Purpose of the Plan:** Clearly noting the purpose of the Plan, providing summary information on key strategies and important initiatives, including data that shows progress or areas of concern, and including explanations of industry language that might be unfamiliar (permanent supportive housing, AKHMIS, etc.); This can be accomplished in an introduction that is similar to other state plans like Michigan¹ and Minnesota².
- **Educational Tool:** Serve as an educational tool about how the housing and homeless sector operates in Alaska, including information on the organizational structure of the Council and its statewide partners³, the function of the Continuum of Care (CoC) programs, and the funding streams available for housing and homelessness programs that line up with the strategies listed in the Plan.
- **Highlighting Effective Strategies:** Promoting strategies that have proven to be effective in Alaska – either through cost savings, number of persons housed, or a decrease in certain homeless subpopulations in communities. Activities such as:
 - Housing First Permanent Supportive Housing
 - SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR)
 - Prevention and Outreach Activities (100,000 Homes Campaign, Point In Time Homeless Count, Youth Count, Rapid Re-Housing)
 - VASH Vouchers
 - Effective community collaborations
 - Potential Medicaid Expansion resources for the homeless
- **Recognizing Community & Agency Successes:** The Plan should recognize the work of agencies and communities that have been successful in establishing best practices or effectively addressing homelessness around the state. The Plan provides an opportunity to celebrate the great work of the people and agencies in our sector.

¹ Michigan's 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness,
<http://www.thecampaigntoendhomelessness.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=sjb2hoqLRZQ%3d&tabid=67>

² Heading Home: Minnesota's Plan To Prevent and End Homelessness
http://www.headinghomeminnesota.org/sites/default/files/MICH%20full%20plan_0.pdf

³ Michigan Campaign to End Homelessness, 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness, pg. 3-6,
<http://www.thecampaigntoendhomelessness.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=sjb2hoqLRZQ%3d&tabid=67>

Lead Agency/Responsibility

The original 10-Year Plan to End Long-Term Homelessness included categories for strategy, action steps, and outcomes. It did not indicate the agencies or partners responsible for making sure these goals were met. The Coalition suggests adding this component to the revision so that roles are clear.

Also, a 10-year timeframe is too long of a period before updating the Plan-- strategies shift, economic factors change, and innovations are created. The Coalition suggests including a 2 Year At-A-Glance type of summary to focus efforts in a shorter timeframe, similar to the one in the Minnesota Heading Home Plan⁴.

Commitment to Data-Driven Policy-Making

The importance of accessible, reliable housing and homelessness data that is available at the community level -- and for comparison with communities around the state -- cannot be stressed highly enough.

- **Alaska Homeless Management Information System (AKHMIS)**
 - Incorporating the elements of the AKHMIS Advisory Group work plan and making it a statewide priority to enhance the system, including; expanding use of AKHMIS, establishing clear communication and training schedules, breaking out Point in Time Count and other data to the community level, and making this information as reliable as possible.
- **Housing Data**
 - **The full spectrum of housing data** – from emergency shelters to permanent supportive housing to fair-market housing—is scattered among a wide-range of sources. This creates issues for stakeholders that often have difficulty putting this information together; for communities spend money contracting with consultants for needs assessments; and for state legislators when comparable data from community to community isn’t available.
 - **Data in rural communities:** For many smaller communities, access to housing/homelessness data is the initial barrier to beginning the community dialogue on these issues. The Coalition suggests the development of strategies such as the creation of a housing data website or changing Alaska Statute Title 29, Chapter 40 through the legislative process to include the addition of a Housing Element to each community’s Comprehensive Plan.
 - **Provide intensive mentorship to smaller communities attempting to collect data on housing, homelessness, and homeless prevention.**
 - **Making the Fiscal Argument:** Using data in the Plan to assist stakeholders make the case in their communities that housing is healthcare, supportive housing is cost effective for the chronic homeless with high emergency service utilization, that the lack of housing is an economic development issue, or whatever arguments are necessary to access housing and homeless program resources.

⁴Heading Home: Minnesota’s Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness
http://www.headinghomeminnesota.org/sites/default/files/MICH%20full%20plan_0.pdf

- **Acquisition of Resources:** It is well understood that there aren't enough funding resources to develop the housing necessary to end homelessness in Alaska. To expand those resources (local government, philanthropic/private foundations, State Housing Trust Fund, etc.) reliable housing/homelessness data is necessary to make the case.

Subpopulations (youth, chronic homeless, domestic violence, veterans, prison re-entry)

Housing and Homelessness programs are often based on subpopulations that utilize a mix of mainstream and specific funding streams targeting the subpopulation. These subpopulations, as focus areas, are often eligible for additional state and federal resources. The Plan should give consideration to identifying the programs, resources, and networks in these subpopulation areas in the state as they line up with Opening Doors, the US Interagency Council on the Homeless plan to end homelessness.⁵

Expanding availability of State & Federal Housing programs to Rural Alaska

Work with the Federal Delegation, US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, Regional Housing Authorities and others to determine how rental voucher programs such as Veteran Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH), AHFC Housing Choice Vouchers, Tenant-Based Rental Assistance, and prisoner re-entry programs can be made available in rural communities.

Education

When the plan update is complete, the Coalition encourages a substantial rollout for stakeholders and communities around the State.

⁵ United State Interagency Council on Homelessness, Opening Doors, http://usich.gov/opening_doors/.