

Memorandum of Understanding: Action Plan

Regarding Interagency Coordination and Collaboration for Setting a Path to End Homelessness among American Indians and Alaska Natives

On November 5, 2015, the Departments of the Interior, Agriculture, Labor, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Education, and Veterans Affairs, and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness entered into a Memorandum of Understanding Regarding Interagency Coordination and Collaboration for Setting a Path to End Homelessness among American Indians and Alaska Natives (MOU). The MOU directs the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness Interagency Working Group on American Indian and Alaska Native Homelessness (“Working Group”) to develop an Action Plan for implementation of the MOU. This Action Plan is a dynamic set of strategies to fulfill the MOU and build a foundation for long-term work.

The Working Group will consult with tribal communities, urban native communities, and experts in the field to ensure that the ongoing implementation of the Action Plan is informed by local expertise, experience, and need. Specifically, the Working Group aims to honor the federal government’s trust obligation to tribes, and to develop technical assistance, guidance, and other resources that are responsive to the feedback received through consultation.

Strategy Areas and Actions

The Working Group has identified a set of actions that together will set a path to end homelessness on and off tribal lands. These actions are organized around four strategic areas:

1. Improve access to housing and services through administrative action, where possible, and provide guidance and technical assistance to: a) increase the knowledge and capacity of tribal communities and homelessness services and housing providers to improve access to housing and services; and b) increase the availability of housing options for American Indian and Alaska Natives experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness both on and off tribal lands;
2. Improve data collection on homelessness and at-risk of homelessness among American Indian and Alaska Natives both on and off tribal lands to better enumerate the size and scope of the problem;
3. Ensure that federal strategies and actions to set a path to end American Indian and Alaska Native homelessness are informed by consultation and engagement with tribal leaders, urban Native communities, and experts in the field; and
4. Elevate awareness of the crisis of homelessness and housing instability among American Indian and Alaska Natives, both on and off tribal lands, through coordinated federal messaging and communications.

Strategy Area 1: Improve Access through Administrative Action, Guidance, and Technical Assistance

Issue: Tribal communities and homelessness assistance and housing providers typically lack enough affordable housing needed to address American Indian and Alaska Natives experiencing homelessness both on and off tribal lands. A coordinated, concerted effort is essential to build the capacity of tribal communities and homelessness assistance providers and increase the supply of affordable housing stock.

Actions: Improve access to housing and services through administrative action where possible, and provide guidance and technical assistance to: 1) increase the knowledge and capacity of tribal communities and homelessness assistance and housing providers to improve access to housing and services; and 2) increase the availability of housing options for American Indian and Alaska Natives experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness both on and off tribal lands. Guidance and technical assistance will also promote improvements in culturally responsive service provision, strengthen the capacity of health care and human services systems in tribal communities, and clarify the roles and intended uses of existing resources.

- a. Identify and analyze regulatory and statutory barriers to tribes' ability to access federal programs and resources that support the provision of services and housing, including barriers to funding for new construction, and work to eliminate such barriers;
- b. Identify opportunities to update regulations to include tribal communities as part of consultation processes required of state, local government, and non-profit recipients of Federal funding;
- c. Use opportunities created by guidance and funding solicitations to encourage states, local agencies, non-profits to work with tribal communities;
- d. Build upon existing place based technical assistance for tribal communities – particularly those focused on increasing access to existing housing and services and strengthening coordination between tribal communities, homelessness assistance providers, and other appropriate service systems in their communities;
- e. Through consultation with experts in the field, adapt existing resources and training materials to improve cultural responsiveness among mainstream and targeted programs providing services to American Indian and Alaska Natives experiencing homelessness off tribal lands;
- f. Identify “lessons learned” regarding challenges and solutions to increasing housing availability on or near reservations and other Indian areas;
- g. Strengthen the capacity of the healthcare and human services systems to provide tenancy support services for American Indian and Alaska Natives, including youth experiencing homelessness on and off tribal lands. For example, this could include improving coordination to increase access to health care services like case management and referrals;
- h. Develop and disseminate a comprehensive inventory of available Federal resources that can be used to serve American Indian and Alaska Natives experiencing and at risk of experiencing homelessness; and
- i. Develop and disseminate an inventory of available Federal funding for housing development and rehabilitation on or near reservations and other Indian areas.

Strategy Area 2: Improve Data Collection

Issue: There is a crisis of homelessness and housing instability in tribal communities. These areas experience severe overcrowding and substandard housing. At the same time, there exists little data and information to clearly document the scale of the problem. Moreover, even less is known about unsheltered homelessness on or near reservations and other Indian areas except for anecdotal reports, or about American Indian and Alaska Native homelessness in many urban areas. This lack of comprehensive

data regarding the scope of homelessness and at-risk of homelessness both on and off tribal lands makes it difficult to accurately estimate the resources needed to address the crisis.

Action: In partnership with tribal communities, improve data collection on homelessness among American Indian and Alaska Natives both on and off tribal lands to better enumerate the size and scope of the crisis. Existing resources will be disseminated and promoted and new opportunities will be explored in order to advance implementation of best practices and approaches to collecting data. Additionally, federal partners will strengthen local capacity for data collection through technical assistance.

- a. Explore opportunities to strengthen the capacity for data collection on or near reservations and other Indian areas and disseminate lessons learned to other tribal communities and Continuums of Care;
- b. Disseminate existing resources that promote best practices and techniques for data collection on or near reservations and other Indian areas; and
- c. Improve the capacity of homelessness assistance providers to collect data on American Indian and Alaska Natives experiencing homelessness off tribal lands.

Strategy Area 3: Engage with Tribal Leaders, Urban Native Communities, and Experts in the Field

Issue: Most tribal communities confront issues that include geographic isolation and weak local economies. It is imperative for tribal communities to have the ability to identify local issues and provide input into the design and implementation of the most appropriate solutions, and for urban Native communities to be actively engaged in creating solutions to urban homelessness.

Action: Ensure that federal strategies and actions to set a path to end American Indian and Alaska Native homelessness are informed by consultation and engagement with tribal leaders, urban Native communities, and experts in the field.

- a. Consult with tribal leaders and communities, urban Native communities, and experts on an ongoing basis to ensure that Federal activities are informed by local expertise and experience; and
- b. Increase presence at and engagement through national conferences focused on American Indian and Alaska Native issues and participate in site visits to tribal communities to learn and share knowledge.

Strategy Area 4: Elevate Awareness of the Crisis of Homelessness

Issue: Federal leadership, in consultation with tribal leaders and engagement with urban Native communities, can help to increase awareness of the crisis of homelessness on and off tribal lands and highlight the significant barriers that make it difficult for American Indian and Alaska Natives to access housing and services. Implementation of this strategy will articulate the Federal commitment for setting a path to end American Indian and Alaska Native homelessness.

Action: Elevate awareness of the crisis of homelessness and housing instability among American Indian and Alaska Natives, both on and off tribal lands, through coordinated Federal messaging and communications. Additionally, messaging will be used to highlight innovation in practice and to describe significant barriers and challenges that require additional attention and action.

a. Develop and disseminate resources that highlight both the crisis of homelessness and housing instability among American Indian and Alaska Natives and promising solutions. This will take the form of webinars, toolkits, or other forms of communications.