

# 2019 Federal Policy Priorities

## For the HCH Community

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*Homelessness is the result of deliberate policy decisions and every person has the right to housing and health care. To end homelessness and demonstrate a commitment to human rights, the Council works with Congress and the Administration to advocate for policies that achieve social, economic, and racial justice through the priorities outlined below. These priorities represent the foundation of our work at the federal level, while we also advocate with our broader community to affect change at the state and local level.*

### **Strengthen Current Health Programs & Establish a Universal Care Plan**

While the Affordable Care Act improved access to care for many, it still left millions uninsured and perpetuated a fragmented system of complex payment structures, high costs for consumers, and huge profits for insurance and pharmaceutical companies. Guaranteeing comprehensive, affordable health care through a single payer, 'Medicare for All,' national health plan would lower costs, improve outcomes, and drastically improve the lives of millions. Until this universal solution is achieved, we will work to expand and strengthen Medicaid so all low income people have access to comprehensive, affordable health coverage.

### **Reform the Behavioral Health System**

The behavioral health system must ensure accessible, equitable, and effective treatment for all people, especially those experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Behavioral health problems – such as substance use disorders and mental health conditions – are a primary cause of homelessness. Left untreated, these conditions present serious barriers to employment, education, and housing, and perpetuate a costly cycle of incarceration, poverty, poor health, and continued homelessness. Behavioral health system reform must be rooted in harm reduction approaches, reduce barriers to care, link services to housing and employment, and eliminate stigma.

### **Guarantee Affordable Housing**

This country currently suffers from an affordable housing crisis. Nationally, a renter working full-time and earning the federal minimum wage cannot afford a one-bedroom apartment, and no state has an adequate supply of rental housing for low-income renters. Each year millions are evicted from their homes, putting them at risk of homelessness. Until this crisis is addressed, homelessness will persist. Action must be taken to increase affordable housing and provide protections against unjust foreclosures and evictions.

### **Reform the Criminal Justice System**

The U.S. has the highest rate of incarceration in the world, particularly among people of color. Those who are homeless are routinely criminalized for living their private life in public spaces, as are people struggling with mental health and substance use. Reforms of the criminal justice system must eliminate mandatory minimum sentencing, provide alternatives to incarceration for those with a mental illness and/or a substance use disorder, streamline continuity of care for incarcerated individuals, reduce recidivism by improving re-entry practices, ensure access to health care services, and eliminate laws that criminalize homelessness.

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