

Module 3.1 Origins

NATIONAL
HEALTH CARE
for the
HOMELESS
COUNCIL

In this section, you will learn about the origin and evolution of the federal HCH program, characteristics of care that developed from the original HCH demonstration projects, and governmental agencies that fund and provide oversight for the federal HCH program.

Origins

A D V A N C E S Newsletter of The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

RWJF Presents Federal Officials with Guide to Homeless Care

Foundation staff members presented U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) officials with a guide to health care for the homeless as the government began to implement the Stuart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (PL 100-77) in February.

The guide is based on the Health Care for the Homeless Program, a \$25 million national initiative jointly funded by the foundation and the Pew Charitable



Pete Bjorn

From the 1988 Newsletter of the RWJ Foundation



Health Care for the Homeless as an organized health care activity, focusing on the needs of an identifiable population, emerged from one of the most successful demonstration programs in the history of American philanthropy.

Homelessness Re-emerged



Migrant mother with children, circa 1936

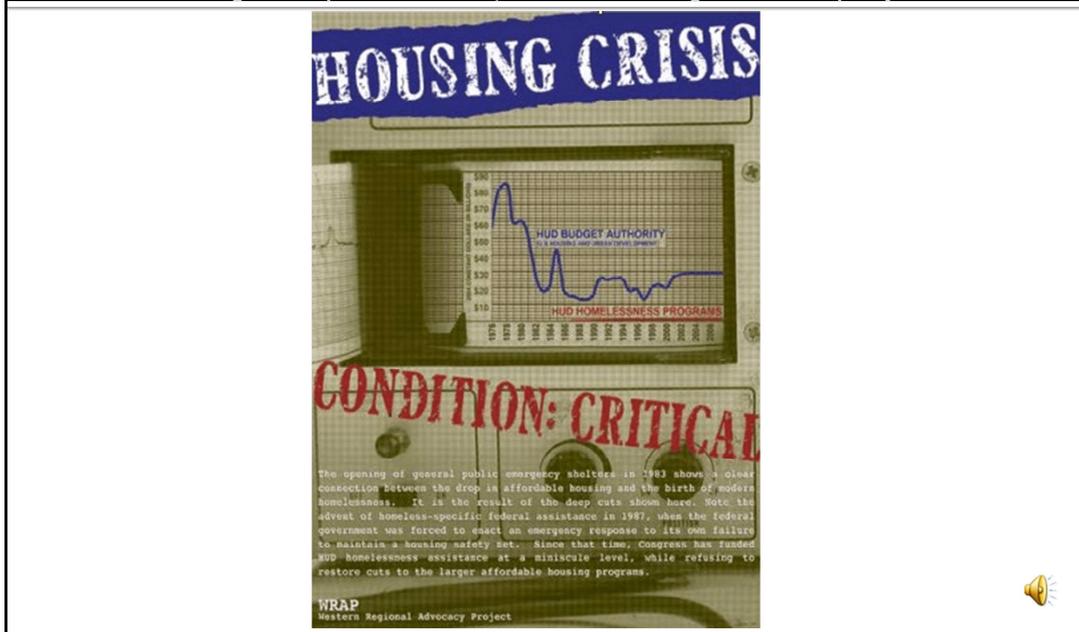
Important causes included
severe cuts in the federal housing budget

Photo by Mark Hines



In the early 1980's, a perfect storm of economic and political changes suddenly pushed Americans into homelessness in numbers unseen since the Great Depression. These changes included huge cuts to the budget of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development.

'Housing Crisis' by Claude Moller for the Western Regional Advocacy Project



The blue line on this chart shows the magnitude of the cuts to the HUD budget, which resulted in immediate, dramatic declines in affordable housing nationwide. In a tight housing market that never recovered for poor people, individuals and families with limited resources and severe personal problems including mental illnesses, addictions and other disabilities were squeezed out onto the streets.

Contributing Factors

- High unemployment (near 10%)
- Reduced mental hospital capacity (“deinstitutionalization”)
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among veterans of Vietnam war



Just as the housing cuts took hold, an economic recession brought unemployment to 10%. Years of mental health deinstitutionalization policies did not suddenly dump mentally ill people from the back wards of state hospitals onto the streets, but did result in decreased capacity of institutions that was not replaced by more appropriate community mental health resources. Mentally ill persons, many of them baby boomers who had just reached the age for onset of schizophrenia, basically had no where to turn. Likewise, many veterans who had been traumatized in Vietnam began to exhibit symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Hundreds of thousands of Americans were suddenly without homes.

The HCH Demonstration Program

Health issues were glaringly obvious among those now dwelling on the streets.



The wife of an executive of the nation's largest health care philanthropy asked her husband:

"What are you going to do about this?"

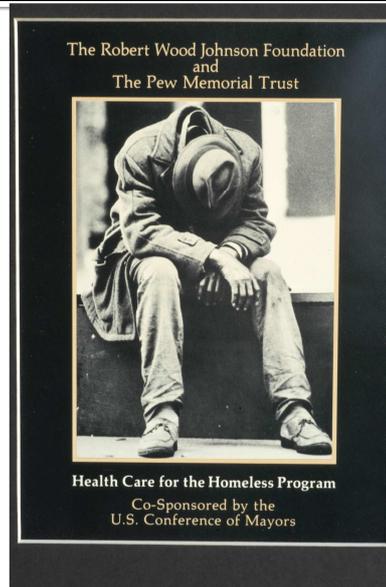


The health problems that contributed to this new wave of homelessness were obvious to some people. The wife of Drew Altman, then a Vice President of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, after having to step over a homeless person lying in a doorway, went home and asked her husband "What are you going to do about this?"

The HCH Demonstration Program

December 1983 - the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Pew Charitable Trust and the U.S. Conference of Mayors announce a grant competition for a major demonstration program

One application from each of the nation's 50 largest cities was accepted for review.



The result was an ambitious grant program that involved the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Pew Charitable Trust, and the US Conference of Mayors. To assure collaboration at the local level, only one application was accepted from each of the nation's 50 largest cities, with the mayor's endorsement required.

The purposes of the program were:

- To demonstrate new ways to deliver health and social services to homeless persons
- To demonstrate better ways to link homeless people with public benefits
- To encourage a broad cross section of groups in our big cities to work together in common cause
- To provide an opportunity for learning, leading to further action down the road
- And to improve the health of the homeless people it served

Drew Altman and Bruce Vladeck, Preface to Under the Safety Net: The Health and Social Welfare of the Homeless in the United States (New York: United Hospital Fund, 1990) ix.



The purposes of the Demonstration Program, as later recounted by Dr. Altman and Bruce Vladeck, were:

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To demonstrate better ways to link homeless people with public benefits

To encourage a broad cross section of groups in our big cities to . . . work together in common cause

To provide an opportunity for learning, leading to further action down the road

And to improve the health of the homeless people it served

The HCH Demonstration Program

Nineteen projects funded in 1984

Medical, nursing and social work services

Based on work of St. Vincent's Hospital in New York City



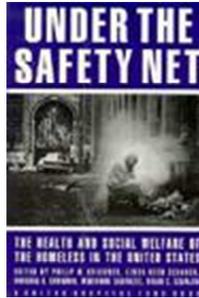
Philip Brickner, MD



Albuquerque
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New York
Newark
Philadelphia
Phoenix
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Seattle
Washington

Grants to projects in 19 cities were announced in 1984. Local projects varied in program design, but all provided primary care, nursing and social work services using a team approach. The interdisciplinary model of care was based on the experience of St. Vincent's Hospital in New York City, and a St. Vincent's team headed by Dr. Philip Brickner was retained by the Foundations to manage the program.

Results of the HCH Demonstration Program



Under the Safety Net: The Health And Social Welfare of the Homeless in the United States, Philip W, Brickner, et al. eds (New York: United Hospital Fund, 1990)



Address Unknown: The Homeless in America by James D. Wright (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1989)



Data collected by the Demonstration Program represented the first large national sample of homeless people. Program experiences and data were reported in publications including Dr. Brickner's *Under the Safety Net*, and *Address Unknown* by Dr. James Wright, the demonstration program's Principal Investigator. The demonstration firmly established the huge health disparities experienced by homeless people AND the ability of well-designed programs to reach and treat homeless persons.