



Health Care for the Homeless

Advocacy Agenda 2011-2015

Health Care for the Homeless provides health-related services, education and advocacy to reduce the incidence and burdens of homelessness in Maryland.

Central to this mission is a commitment to advocacy with and on behalf of people without homes and those at risk of homelessness. "HCH advocacy" is rooted in direct service experience, shaped by the perspectives and involvement of staff, board, and clients, and targeted on local, state, and national levels. In its advocacy work, HCH acknowledges the importance of emergency safety net services but commits the bulk of its efforts to addressing the underlying causes of poverty and challenging public policies which uphold the status quo. HCH therefore works to ensure access to comprehensive health care, affordable housing, living wages, and adequate disability assistance. HCH forms partnerships with organizations locally and nationally to advance this agenda.

Between 2011 and 2015, HCH will commit its time, energy and resources toward the following agenda:

- ❑ **Health Care:** HCH will work on local, state, and national levels toward systems of universal health care including enhanced addiction treatment and mental health services.
 - **Universal Health Care:** HCH will work in Maryland and nationally to further public consideration of proposals for systems of universal health care.
 - **Medicaid Expansion:** HCH will work to ensure the full and effective expansion of Medicaid coverage to low-income people as a result of federal health reform law, to include advocating for an early expansion for those Marylanders with the lowest incomes.
 - **Addiction and Mental Health:** HCH will work to improve and integrate the public addiction and mental health systems within the context of Medicaid expansion and will advance harm reduction practices and strategies to increase access to services for vulnerable populations.
 - **HCH Appropriations:** HCH will work to ensure continued federal funding of the Health Care for the Homeless Program and continued public and private support of the organization.

- ❑ **Affordable Housing:** HCH will work collaboratively at the local, state and national levels to create and implement a comprehensive affordable housing plan that reverses the decline of housing available to persons with low incomes and includes strategies to rapidly re-house persons experiencing homelessness. On the local level, this includes implementing the City's 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness, which includes a commitment to expand permanent supportive housing as well as create other housing availability for very low income households. On the state level, this would include advocating for legislative initiatives that decrease barriers for housing eligibility and increase availability of housing, and at the national level, this includes advocating for Congress to finance the National Affordable Housing Trust Fund and to implement the strategies contained in the Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness.

- ❑ **Incomes and Disability Assistance:** HCH will work with others on the local and state level to enhance wages and increase financial support available to people with disabilities (including through

the implementation of the SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery Initiative). Nationally, HCH will work to address the inadequacy and inaccessibility of federal benefit programs and to advance the National Living Wage campaign.

- ❑ **Access to Resources:** HCH will work to ensure the availability of comprehensive emergency and supportive resources and to minimize barriers to needed services.
 - **Availability:** HCH will continue its local and state-level work to improve emergency shelter and supportive services with particular emphasis on services for women, including women with children; families; people with disabilities, including limited mobility, addiction, and mental illness; and for individuals released from public institutions (jails, prisons, hospitals, etc.).
 - **Barrier Reduction:** HCH will work locally and nationally to reduce barriers to services. This work ranges from technical or administrative barriers (e.g., applications and eligibility criteria.) to systemic barriers (e.g., the navigation of public bureaucracies and inadequate transportation systems) to public policy barriers that restrict access to necessary benefits or services (e.g., regulations that prevent successful reentry and reintegration) to physical barriers (e.g., to buildings).

- ❑ **Civil Rights:** HCH will oppose policies that criminalize so-called “nuisance crimes” created by the experience of homelessness and practices (of agencies or individuals) that use intimidation or force to remove homeless individuals from public spaces. HCH will work to ensure that the civil rights of people experiencing homelessness are respected. In particular, HCH will promote the exercise of constitutional rights (e.g., to vote, assemble, speak) of people without housing.

- ❑ **Collaboration:** HCH will continue to work collaboratively with local, state and national partners who work to address issues of poverty and homelessness. Often, these include the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, the Homeless Persons Representation Project, the Maryland Alliance for the Poor, SHARP, Welfare Advocates, the Leadership Advisory Group to the Baltimore City 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness, the SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery (SOAR) Implementation Team, the Maryland Citizens’ Health Initiative, Health Care-Now of Maryland, the Congressional Universal Health Care Task Force, the National Health Care for the Homeless Council, the National Coalition for the Homeless, the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, the National Low Income Housing Coalition, the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the National Institute of Child and Human Development, as well as others who hold similar interests in improving systems of care for individuals experiencing homelessness.

Public Education: HCH will continue to educate individuals and organizations about the causes of and solutions to homelessness. HCH will work locally and nationally to increase the capacity for advocacy in direct service organizations and will educate homeless service providers on the advocacy priorities of HCH and the National Health Care for the Homeless Council.