

HUD DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS IN THE HEARTH ACT

- The HEARTH Act amends the current HUD definition to include the following households:
 - People in motels not paid for by government or charities where they lack the resources to reside there for more than 14 days, provided they have no subsequent residence identified and lack the resources or support networks needed to obtain other permanent housing
 - People sharing the housing of others where there is “credible evidence” that the owner or renter of the housing will not allow the individual or family to stay for more than 14 days, provided they have no subsequent residence identified and lack the resources or support networks needed to obtain other permanent housing. Any oral statement from an individual or family seeking homeless assistance that is “found to be credible” will be considered credible evidence.
 - Any individual or family who is fleeing, or is attempting to flee, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous or life threatening conditions in the individual’s or family’s current housing situation, including where the health and safety of children are jeopardized, and who have no other residence and lack the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing.
 - Unaccompanied youth and families with children and youth who are homeless under other federal statutes (i.e. the education definition, the RHYA definition, etc.) who have: 1) experienced a long term period without living independently in permanent housing; and 2) have experienced persistent instability as measured by frequent moves over such period; and 3) can be expected to continue in such status for an extended period of time because of chronic disabilities, chronic physical health or mental health conditions, substance addiction, histories of domestic violence or childhood abuse, the presence of a child or youth with a disability, or multiple barriers to employment. Note: Communities may spend only 10% of their Continuum of Care funds on families and youth considered homeless under this category, and under any other federal statute, except that communities with low rates of homelessness may spend up to 100% of Continuum of Care funds on families and youth considered homeless under other federal statutes.
 - The Secretary of HUD is prohibited from requiring communities to include these “newly defined” categories described above in HUD homelessness counts. Only the old definition would be included in HUD counts.

The Definition of Homelessness used by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Excludes Many Homeless People, Especially Families, Children, and Youth on Their Own. This definition excludes people who are forced to live in certain homeless situations, including people staying with others ("doubled-up") or staying in motels because they have nowhere else to go. Families, children, and youth are disproportionately affected by this exclusion. The rationale behind this needed change is best explained by those who work on the front lines of homelessness and those who have lived it.



“We surveyed our local schools and identified 42 unduplicated homeless children and youth, several of whom were identified as unaccompanied. Our Continuum of Care, however, is refusing to include them in the grant because they are ‘**couch surfing**.’”

-Homeless Liaison in Binghamton, NY

“I served 322 students in the 2006 school year with the cooperation of all school districts. And yet local HUD and metropolitan housing says most of these students and families aren't homeless because they have a place to stay-- **doubled up** with friends and family.”

-Homeless Liaison in Cambridge, OH

“HUD needs to adopt the same definition as Education, especially for continuums and housing. There is very little 'emergency' housing downstate. In the 20 west-central counties I serve, 18 have virtually **no shelters**.”

-Homeless Liaison in Illinois

1.4 million

Children are Homeless in America

“I was in an abusive relationship for 16 years. I experienced all the common fears abused women and mothers suffer. One day my husband attacked my oldest son. It was then that I knew I had to act. But due to my children's ages, **we did not qualify** for a shelter.”

-Julianna, Homeless Mother in Arizona

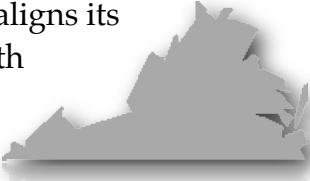
“A mom and her three kids who lost their home moved into a friend's house because the only local shelter, a mission, did not allow older boys. The four of them slept on the floor, sharing what was an already **overcrowded** home.

Why doesn't HUD call families like these 'homeless?'”

-Homeless Liaison in Las Cruces, NM

Virginia


Homeless Liaison in Roanoke



“Until HUD aligns its definition with McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY), it appears we will continue to report inaccurate numbers of those experiencing homelessness. With the rise in families and children being homeless and so many of them living doubled-up temporarily or in hotels, it seems almost impossible to provide adequate and necessary services for them, if in fact, HUD does not even recognize them as being homeless. It has been very frustrating not to be able to refer some homeless families to other community providers because those providers do not serve those in hotels and those who are doubled-up. I totally support the revision of this definition, so those who are working with this population can efficiently and sufficiently assist those who need it the most.”

Pennsylvania

Project R.U.T.H. Coordinator in Mercer County



“Mercer County has too few places to house its homeless population. There are three programs providing transitional housing, but each

Who is Homeless?

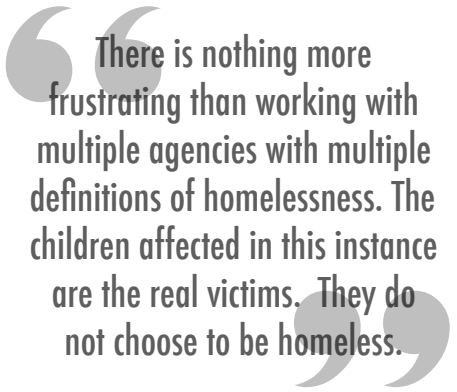
The HUD definition of homelessness should be expanded to include those who are sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reasons, as well as those living in motels due to lack of adequate alternative accommodations. This change would better serve families, children, and youth, and better align the HUD definition with other federal definitions of homelessness, such as the definition used by the U.S. Department of Education.

one has its own specific criteria for eligibility. Our local Salvation Army will house a family or individual in a local hotel for up to seven nights, when funding is available. We are limited in our housing and aware that we need an emergency shelter that is capable of providing a safe, drug-free place to stay.

Unfortunately, the subsidized housing complexes in our area are violent neighborhoods filled with drug activity. Our housing authority has neighborhoods that cannot be filled because of the increased gun shots and gang violence. When people have no homes to call their own they do ‘double up’ with friends and families. I understand this does not match the definition of what HUD calls homeless but it is occurring. My program has to abide by HUD’s guidelines, of course. I find homeless applicants coming from homes with domestic violence. Applicants have been evicted or are living in abandoned cars, campers, and buildings.

It is imperative that fund-

ing is given to programs to address issues of education, employment, drug free environments, etc. Homelessness will continue to exist until the issues such as these are decreased in our neighborhoods; however, in the meantime, they all need a place to call their own so they can focus on making their neighborhoods better places to live. It is about ending the intergenerational cycles of homelessness so that children grow up with stability and understand the importance of their own space, their own homes.”



There is nothing more frustrating than working with multiple agencies with multiple definitions of homelessness. The children affected in this instance are the real victims. They do not choose to be homeless.

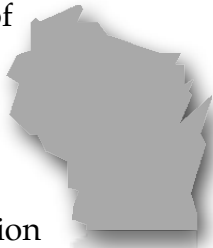
Wisconsin

Teacher in Madison

“A clear definition of homelessness that combines both the HUD definition and the McKinney-Vento EHCY definition would be a great asset as we try to serve our families as a community. There is nothing more frustrating than working with multiple agencies with multiple definitions of homelessness. The children affected in this instance are the real victims. They do not choose to be homeless.

Homelessness is often flung upon them and they cope as best as they can. They often take on roles other than the role of a child: caretaker of younger children, finance advisor, nurse, organizer, phone contact, peacemaker, etc. Finding ways to support these children can easily start with a common and useful definition, one that includes all forms of homelessness, including doubled-up persons and those in motels or tents.

“Our homeless children deserve to have the same opportunities for housing as all homeless people. Let’s even the playing field.”



New Mexico

Homeless liaison in Las Cruces

“For years, this family and its quadriplegic bed-ridden grandmother, lived in a one-room motel room. They could not get public housing because a handicap-accessible unit large enough for the family wasn’t available. Finally, in January 2006, they were able to move into their own apartment, a three bedroom unit provided by the local housing authority. They were in heaven!

In July 2006, the grandmother, who had suffered polio her whole life, and who had been struck by a car 8 years ago, transforming her from wheel-chair mobile to immobilized, died. Because of her death, the family had to move out of the apartment—back into homelessness. The mom and her kids moved into a friend’s house because the only local shelter, a mission, did not allow older boys. The four of them slept on the floor, sharing what was an already overcrowded home.”

Oregon

Homeless liaison, Springfield Public Schools

“In Lane county many of the families from Springfield chose to be doubled or tripled up instead of using shelters. Expanding the



“Originally, the Continuum of Care program was designed to allow communities greater flexibility in projects based on community needs. Amending the federal definition of homelessness takes us back to that time of more local control; after all, we are the experts on the needs of homeless persons in our community.”

Ken Martin, Executive Director, Texas Homeless Network

HUD definition of homelessness so that it is aligned more closely with the definition used by the U.S. Department of Education will include people who are living in doubled-up situations or in hotels and motels. This change will make many more children, youth, and families eligible for HUD homeless assistance, providing communities with the flexibility to serve the people who are homeless within their borders. Last year in Springfield we reported to the Oregon Department of Education that only 50 of 513 homeless students resided in a shelter. This is counting only our school-aged children and does not count younger children not yet in school. These families and their children are currently not considered homeless by HUD. Our homeless children deserve to have the same opportunities for housing as all homeless people. Let’s even the playing field.”

Arizona

Homeless liaison in Flagstaff

"Lou and her four children came to Flagstaff from the reservation in order to get away from domestic and substance abuse. She lived with relatives that were already living in over crowded conditions. She put her children in school and she went to the local housing authority to be put on a list that can take 2-3 years before a family receives public housing or Section 8. This family did not receive 'points' for being homeless because living with another family is not seen as



homeless according to the current HUD definition. Though not seen as homeless, the family endured living with ten other individuals in a 3 bedroom trailer. In an effort to create some sense of stability, Lou sent the two middle kids (grades 1 and 3) to live with other relatives on the reservation. With the two children that remained (Preschool and 7th grade), she was able to get a one bedroom apartment that she could afford. Lou cries when she talks about her two children that no longer live with her, but she felt she had no other option."

Texas

Service provider in Austin

"Unifying the HUD homeless definition with the Dept. of Education definition of homelessness will greatly reduce the amount of confusion that often arises between Continuum of Care funded programs and Department of Education funded programs. Many times, homeless persons miss out on badly needed services because of this confusion."



get back on their feet. Housing is too expensive for most families. Most towns around here don't have any kind of shelter or affordable housing for the homeless, so it forces people to come to the big city, for help.

We stayed at the shelter in Pensacola for a while, but had to move out because of its three week time limit. Housing in this area has been hard to find as long as I can remember. When we stayed in motels we knew a lot of families staying there because they had no place to live.

We've been homeless off and on for over 10 years. We became homeless most recently when Hurricane Ivan left our apartment filled with mold and our landlord wouldn't fix it. My daughter ended up in the hospital with respiratory problems, so we got help moving into a FEMA trailer. That was good, but after 18 months FEMA said we would have to leave. I complied with all the FEMA regulations and, after chasing down any possible lead, I was able to scrape together enough money to purchase this mobile home. It's our first 'real' home, but it's not without problems.

I know we're on the edge, and it won't take much to push us back to homelessness. The government should do a lot more to help families avoid this devastating experience. I've seen my kids suffer way too much. Having a decent, affordable place to live is all we want. Please help."



Florida

Single mother with three children in Pensacola

"Families seem to have it tougher in this area. The shelter doesn't have enough space to let families stay long enough to

Take Action Today

Write and fax your U.S. Representative and urge him or her to sign on to H.R. 840 as a co-sponsor. Please share this alert and ask community partners to write letters, too. Contact details for U.S. Representatives may be found at www.house.gov

In addition, please write or fax your U.S. Senator and urge him or her to work to amend S. 1518 to better meet the needs of homeless children, youth, and families by incorporating key elements of the HEARTH Act, especially definitions of homelessness, local flexibility, and coordination with public schools. Contact information for U.S. Senators may be found at www.senate.gov

Keep track of this issue at www.naehcy.org/update.html