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HUD RELEASES REPORT ON REDUCING CHRONIC STREET HOMELESSNESS

Philadelphia among seven cities providing a lesson in how to help most vulnerable

WASHINGTON – Seven cities across the country, including Philadelphia, are working to end long-term or chronic street homelessness, providing the rest of the nation with new approaches to best house and serve their most vulnerable citizens. That's the conclusion of a report released yesterday by Housing and Urban Development Acting Secretary Alphonso Jackson who said Philadelphia and six other cities are helping to meet President Bush's goal of ending chronic homelessness in ten years.

HUD's study, *Strategies for Reducing Chronic Street Homelessness*, focused on homeless assistance programs in Philadelphia, Birmingham, Alabama; Boston; Columbus, Ohio; Los Angeles; San Diego; and, Seattle. In each city, HUD found local leaders and homeless assistance providers are fundamentally changing their traditional approaches toward serving those living on their streets.

“This study is a valuable tool for any community who is serious about ending the cycle of homelessness for those living with mental illness, addiction or a disability,” said Jackson. “The programs in these seven communities are teaching us lessons in how to change the way we think about helping those among us who have only the streets to call their home.”

Prepared by the research firms, Walter R. McDonald & Associates of Sacramento, California and the Urban Institute, the report found most chronically homeless individuals never graduate beyond the emergency shelter environment and that traditional strategies generally do not fully succeed in moving every type of homeless persons out of homelessness. By contrast, the programs in these seven cities have either developed entirely new strategies or successfully modified existing methods for meeting the complex needs of persons whose skills are often oriented toward survival on the streets, not living in housing.

Many of the cities are developing mechanisms for improving services to their homeless population by creating database technology and information sharing that allows staff members of one agency to know what services a client might be receiving from another agency. In addition, there is a more concerted effort to coordinate among multiple providers to more effectively deliver both housing and services to those who need it most.

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Philadelphia operates extensive programs and services run by experienced providers that have developed over many years with the help of HUD and local funding. HUD's study found the City has a number of key elements in place to create a "paradigm shift" in the City's approach to street homelessness. The Sidewalk Behavior Ordinance introduced in 1998 was the trigger event that led to Philadelphia increasing its commitment to ending chronic street homelessness. Although the ordinance passed, it has been significantly modified (proscribing but not criminalizing certain sidewalk behavior) and was accompanied by new funding to provide alternatives to street homelessness. HUD concluded this trigger event galvanized Philadelphia's leaders to set the clear goal of reducing chronic street homelessness.

In 1988, Mayor Wilson Goode created a "homeless czar" to direct the Office of Services for the Homeless and Adults, an office that succeeding mayors maintained and expanded. Political will, strong homeless advocacy, and the combined resources of the City and County of Philadelphia have helped the planning and implementation of an extensive array of homeless services designed to encourage people to move from the streets into housing. The length of time the key players have been involved in this effort and the quality of their relationships have enabled Philadelphia to take advantage of situations and turn potentially hostile confrontations into opportunities for progress.

A major focus of Philadelphia's homeless assistance efforts has been people experiencing long-term or chronic homelessness. As a result, the City has managed to encourage people to move into housing through extensive outreach and to provide transitional and permanent supportive housing. In addition, the City offers low-demand residences and affordable housing units that may be occupied by formerly homeless persons. Some of the practices of potential interest to other jurisdictions include:

- A City-wide plan to address street homelessness;
 - Major investments by mainstream agencies to supplement homeless-specific resources;
 - An Outreach Coordination Center to provide a "one stop shop" for homeless issues and inter-agency coordination; and,
- Extensive data collection and analysis that is used to shape policy and practice.

How to pay for these innovative approaches is a challenge but HUD's report points to a common theme among the seven cities studied:

"The experience of these seven communities indicates very strongly that reducing chronic street homelessness requires significant investment of mainstream public agencies and *local* dollars. The goal cannot be met if the homeless assistance network providers are the only players, and Federal funding streams the only resource."

This year, HUD is awarding Philadelphia total of \$19,692,524.00 in homeless assistance – part of a record \$1.27 billion to thousands of local homeless assistance projects around the country. This unprecedented commitment helps support emergency shelter, transitional housing, vital services and a permanent home for homeless individuals and families. In addition, President Bush is fashioning a

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more coordinated federal response to homelessness in America through the Interagency Council on Homelessness and its 20 member agencies. To learn more about the federal strategy to help the homeless and to end chronic homelessness, visit www.hud.gov/initiatives/homeless.cfm.

HUD is the nation's housing agency committed to increasing homeownership, particularly among minorities; creating affordable housing opportunities for low-income Americans; and supporting the homeless, elderly, people with disabilities and people living with AIDS. The Department also promotes economic and community development as well as enforces the nation's fair housing laws. More information about HUD and its programs is available on the Internet at www.hud.gov and espanol.hud.gov.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: For a copy of *Strategies for Reducing Chronic Street Homelessness*, visit <http://www.huduser.org/publications/povsoc/chronichomelessness.html>.