

Since I did not receive an invitation to present on a specific topic for the upcoming state housing council meeting, I wanted to use this format to provide some information and insights that I hope will be useful to the individual members of the SHC and the group as a whole.

USICH believes that housing should be treated as a human right, and that housing is health care. We prioritize the use of data and evidence for effective policymaking and know that an evidence-informed approach to ending homelessness will require us to address the barriers and disparities that people of color and other marginalized groups too often face. Advancing the most effective policy solutions will require that people who have experienced homelessness firsthand should be in positions of power to shape federal, state, and local policy. We can prevent homelessness before it starts by scaling up housing and supports, —both of which are critical to ending homelessness.

In the seven months that I have worked with you all, I have taken note of a few trends in Maine that we’ve seen across the country.

* People experiencing homelessness have become “stuck” in your homeless services systems. Ways that other communities are addressing this is by employing housing stabilization staff, housing locators, and creating robust landlord engagement strategies.
* In Maine, as in many other places in the country, persons experiencing homelessness for the first time has skyrocketed and while the goal now is to exit those persons from homelessness (see first point), it may be beneficial to have conversations about how your systems can employ strategies that work to keep them out of the system in the first place. A few of those strategies are Diversion/Problem Solving conversations that avoid the episode of homelessness altogether and more upstream prevention interventions to decrease the need of your homeless services system to be the safety net when other systems fail (healthcare, foster care, justice system).
* Lastly, you all are doing well with employing collaborative strategies and could benefit from taking a step back to look at your system from a 30,000-foot level to see are their duplicative efforts, that everyone performing their roles, that there aren’t blind spots in service provision, and that there is a method of measuring your performance (that everyone understands).

My role as the Senior Regional Advisor serving your state is to act as a thought partner, a subject matter expert, and to provide or connect you to technical assistance. All of these duties are done at the request of you all, the providers, the funders, and the people with lived expertise. My role is not to dictate your actions as a state nor to drive your efforts. I am available to present All In: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness or any other USICH related item upon request. I am also personally dedicated to using my 26 years of experience on the non-profit, local, and state level in roles from outreach worker to Division Director to help you all end homelessness. Feel free to reach out if I can be of service or you would like my presence at specific events or meetings to serve in the role stated above.

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