



Housing Assistance Council

Building Rural Communities

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Affordable Rural Housing Issues and Recommendations: RURAL HOMELESSNESS

Although homelessness is widely viewed as an urban problem, rural individuals and families also experience both literal homelessness and extremely precarious housing situations. Literal homelessness, the condition of living on the street or in a shelter, is often episodic and less common in rural areas than in cities due to kinship networks and the lack of service providers and resources. Homeless people in rural areas typically experience precarious housing conditions, moving from one extremely substandard, overcrowded, and/or cost-burdened housing situation to another, often doubling or tripling up with friends or relatives.

The Housing Assistance Council encourages the Obama Administration and the 111th Congress to recognize the special situations of people who are homeless in rural places and to:

- △ **Enact the rural-friendly provisions** of the Community Partnership to End Homelessness Act (S. 1518) and the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act (H.R. 7221). In rural places, small community-based and faith-based organizations are often the only entities providing services for homeless individuals and families. To improve their ability to help their clients, these bills would make the following changes.
 - **Target resources to help people who are either literally homeless or in unstable housing situations;** the latter is particularly important in rural areas, where people without homes of their own often find temporary shelter with friends or relatives rather than living on streets.
 - **Expand the definition of “chronically homeless” to include families as well as individuals;** currently, funding decisions emphasize service to chronically homeless individuals, even though families and family members may also fit the “chronic” definition (having a disabling condition with four episodes of homelessness in three years or one year of being continuously homeless).
 - **Use a simplified funding application for rural community organizations,** which do not always have staff with fundraising experience.
 - **Allow community groups to use a portion of their funding for capacity building:** staff training, equipment purchases, and the like.