



## Housing Assistance Council

Building Rural Communities

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### **Affordable Rural Housing Issues and Recommendations: VULNERABLE POPULATIONS**

The most vulnerable people in the United States often suffer the worst housing conditions. These vulnerable populations in rural areas include residents of Appalachia, the U.S.-Mexico border colonias, the Mississippi Delta, and the southern Black Belt, Native Americans, farmworkers, minorities, people experiencing homelessness, elderly people, and people with disabilities. Their housing needs may be addressed through targeted federal housing programs, such as the Indian Housing Block Grant. Programs targeted to families with very low incomes are also important for special needs populations. Self-help housing, for example, a construction model in which families help build their own homes, works very well to help farm laborers to afford homeownership despite their low and uneven earnings.

The Housing Assistance Council encourages the Obama Administration and the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress to support these programs, both targeted and not, while recognizing that different populations have different needs. Specifically:

- △ **Protect and fully fund housing programs that serve vulnerable populations.**
- △ **Combine national oversight and accountability in these programs with enough local flexibility** to enable local administrators to apply the strategies best suited to specific populations.
- △ **Support programs and applicants based on effectiveness.** A number of “tried and true” models have proven their ability to improve housing conditions for special rural populations. Innovation should not be required in order to win points in a funding competition when existing programs are working well.
- △ **Support dedicated funding for the provision of training, technical assistance, and operating support** to community based organizations serving vulnerable populations.
- △ **Conduct outreach to special populations** in culturally, linguistically appropriate ways to let them know what assistance is available.
- △ **Recognize that improved housing is an integral part of reforms in areas that are often handled separately**, such as health care and immigration, and that housing providers must often provide or find supportive services for their clients. Establish communication and cooperation links at the national and local levels among agencies responsible for these interrelated programs.
- △ **Make vouchers available for tenants in assisted housing developments.** Many vulnerable people subsist on low, fixed incomes, and cannot afford even subsidized rents unless they receive additional aid.
- △ **Provide funding and support so that assisted housing providers can supply elderly and disabled residents with in-home care** as needed to avoid premature institutionalization.
- △ **Take “poverty tours”** like Robert F. Kennedy’s 1968 trip to Appalachian Kentucky to see and hear firsthand what life is like on reservations, in the colonias, in the Mississippi Delta and the southern “Black Belt,” and in other high-poverty rural areas. Include Cabinet officers and members of Congress.