

## States Engaging Human Need with Community Partners: Progress in Ending Chronic Homelessness in Utah

Recently, Utah Governor Jon Huntsman received the Governor's Award from the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness for the state's progress against chronic homelessness. In 2008 there was a 15% drop in chronic homeless numbers between January's point in time count, and our three-year base line. This is a stunning number, but it is only the beginning: communities throughout Utah have already begun investing in permanent housing for the homeless. By the end of 2008, 525 of the state's 1,800 chronically homeless will occupy new apartments, with various levels of wrap-around support services. As a result of restructuring, collaboration, changes in policy, and redirection of existing funds, more organizations and individuals are involved and thoroughly engaged, making a significant difference both to the cause and to the people involved.

The state strategy involves four main issues:

- **Affordable Housing** -- Creating additional, affordable housing for the chronically homeless (a combination of existing and rehabilitated units and new construction)
- **Discharge Planning** -- Preventing homelessness by helping people succeed upon being discharged from publicly-funded institutions of care, such as shelters, jails, prisons, hospitals, mental health institutions and foster care
- **Supportive Services** -- Streamlining and targeting the delivery of mainstream resources and supports, including case management, mental health and substance abuse treatment, job training and safety net programs
- **Data Management** -- Creating a statewide database to take better stock of Utah's homeless, chart outcomes of the 10-year plan, and drive success

Utah's efforts to end chronic homelessness and reduce overall homelessness are unique in a number of ways:

1. As homelessness is a statewide problem, Utah is implementing a statewide effort. Utah has a State Homeless Coordinating Committee and twelve local Homeless Coordinating Councils which are located across the state. The Lt. Governor of Utah chairs the state committee and a local elected official chairs each of the councils, signifying Utah's commitment to having elected officials actively involved in both the initiative and the solution.
2. These committee and councils participated in needs and assets assessments and considered best practices. Pilot programs were initiated even as ten-year plans were being developed, and everyone on the council actively works to implement the pilot by employing resources, directing activities, meeting deadlines, solving problems, and evaluating the results.
3. Pilot projects were used to see what would work in Utah (from best practices and successful model programs elsewhere). Intelligent adaptations were considered which could be made for local conditions and which would help local committees move from discussion to action. Their success led to new and expanded projects.
4. Collaboration is occurring at all levels. Leaders from government, faith-based organizations, community groups, law enforcement, private business, and advocacy groups have been

serving on committees and councils from the beginning. Before outside resources are sought, this diverse group considers the resources they have together which can be reallocated or used differently. The attitude is one of cooperation rather than competition. All groups share in the vision and can claim leveraging.

5. The restructuring is centrally led, but locally developed. Utah's plan is not a menu of top-down mandates. There is a shared vision, a statewide strategy, and there are twelve locally developed action plans tailored to each region's unique demographics and social needs. Many councils have already launched locally grown pilot projects which are already paying dividends. As a result, faith-based and community organizations which actively engage with agencies and individuals are critical to accomplishing the strategic goals statewide and on the local level.

For example, to conceptualize and build the first new supportive housing complex, many partners were involved including:

- community organizations including Crusade Against Homelessness and the Eccles Foundation,
- faith-based organizations such as Volunteers of America and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints Foundation,
- government agencies including the Olene Walker Housing Loan Fund, Continuum of Care,
- law enforcement offices, and the Homeless Task Force, quasi-governmental entities such as Salt Lake Housing Authority,
- private sector banks and businesses including Intermountain Health Care.

For the final post-construction cleaning, furnishing, and set up of the apartments, volunteers were recruited from a variety of local churches, scout troops, and government offices, including the Governor's office. To run the case management and other supportive services, government agencies partnered with faith-based and community organizations.

6. The committee and councils were aware early into the process that there would be policy and social barriers and committed to overcome them. As a result, MOU's were signed, tears were acknowledged and addressed, reasonable risks were taken, new activities were tried, best practices were implemented, problems were solved, and barrier orientation gave way to solution orientation.
7. Progress has been made by working smarter, working collaboratively, and by reallocating existing resources.

**Additional Resources and Information about the Utah Solution visit:**

**[Utah State Homeless Coordinating Committee](#)**

**[Pamela Atkinson Homeless Trust Fund](#)**

**[Utah Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives](#)**

**[Utah Division of Housing and Community Development](#)**