



Criteria and Benchmarks for Achieving the Goal of Ending Youth Homelessness

In January 2017, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness and our member agencies—including the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Housing and Urban Development— released criteria and benchmarks to help guide communities as they bring together many different programs and systems to build a [coordinated community response to ending youth homelessness](#). They reflect the understanding that the varied and unique needs of youth experiencing homelessness require a range of interventions and solutions to help them achieve the outcomes most critical to their success: stable housing, permanent connections, education and employment, and overall well-being.

These criteria and benchmarks have been updated to reflect input from external stakeholders on the original release and to ensure clearer communication of the expectations and intentions behind some of the elements. The updates primarily focus on:

- Refining indicators 1 through 4 under Benchmark A to streamline and more clearly articulate expectations around the identification of youth experiencing homelessness, access to emergency shelter, and connections to services for youth identified as experiencing homelessness who are doubled up.
- Adding indicators 5 and 6 under Benchmark A, which reflect considerations highlighted in the initial version of the criteria and benchmarks released in January 2017.
- Refining the indicator under Benchmark B to more clearly articulate the expectation around exits from homelessness to permanent or non-time-limited safe and stable housing destinations, including for youth who choose to enter time-limited safe and stable housing (including transitional housing or transitional living programs).

We will be working with a select number of communities to pilot the criteria and benchmarks over the coming months. As part of that piloting, for example, we will be asking communities to provide input on whether any of the indicators under Benchmarks A and B require additional refinement to adequately reflect community achievement of the goal of ending youth homelessness.

Purpose of the Criteria and Benchmarks

Criteria and benchmarks work together to provide a complete picture and an ongoing assessment of a community's response to homelessness. While the criteria focus on describing essential elements and accomplishments of the community's response, benchmarks serve as important indicators of whether and how effectively that system is working on an ongoing basis. Together, these criteria and benchmarks are intended to help communities drive down the number of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness to as close to zero as possible, while building long-term, lasting solutions that can effectively and efficiently respond to future needs.

Communities that have assessed their response to youth homelessness and concluded that they have met the criteria and benchmarks will have the opportunity to validate and confirm their achievement through a federal review process. During that process, we will consider a community's data and information holistically. For

example, it may be possible for data to indicate that a community has achieved the benchmarks, while other information may indicate that the expectations of the criteria haven't been met. Or the benchmarks may indicate that a community's response is working efficiently, but it has not been in place long enough to have fully achieved the goal. [These tools can help you](#) as you work to achieve the goal and document and validate your community's claim.

We hope that these clarifications are helpful in increasing understanding of the criteria and benchmarks. We have been learning a great deal as we have worked with communities to understand and respond to concerns and recommendations. We expect to continue to learn and think further, to provide future clarifications as questions arise, and to review and evaluate the effectiveness of these criteria and benchmarks over time. Revised guidance will be posted to the [Youth Criteria and Benchmarks](#) page on the USICH website, as needed.

Criteria

USICH and the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Housing and Urban Development have developed the following set of community-level criteria for achieving an end to youth homelessness. These criteria, and the accompanying benchmarks, apply to all youth and young adults under the age of 25 who are unaccompanied by a parent, legal guardian, or caretaker and who meet any [federal definition](#) of homelessness.

1. The community identifies all unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness.

The community uses coordinated outreach, in-reach, multiple data sources, and other methods to identify and enumerate all unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness, spanning the community's entire geographical area. Specifically, while recognizing that youth experiencing homelessness may move among a variety of settings:

- a. The community literally identifies every unaccompanied youth who is unsheltered, in shelter, or in transitional housing settings or other residential programs for youth experiencing homelessness; and,
- b. The community coordinates a comprehensive set of strategies, spanning schools, the child welfare system, including child protective services, the justice system, drop-in centers, hotlines and 2-1-1, and other youth-serving agencies and programs to identify unaccompanied youth who are doubled up or couch-surfing and considered homeless under any federal definition.

The community's efforts are tailored to the unique needs of particularly vulnerable youth.

2. The community uses prevention and diversion strategies whenever possible, and otherwise provides immediate access to low-barrier crisis housing and services to any youth who needs and wants it.

The community helps youth avoid the need for emergency shelter whenever possible by connecting and/or reunifying them with members of their family or other natural supports (as defined by each young person), providing support to the youth's identified family to help them stay at or return home, or through other prevention or diversion strategies. Youth and young adults who are unsheltered, fleeing an unsafe situation, or experiencing a housing crisis, can immediately access developmentally appropriate safety services, emergency shelters, host homes, or other temporary housing settings, as well as other forms of emergency assistance. Access to shelter or other temporary housing in the community includes an adequate supply and range of options that are not contingent on school attendance, sobriety, minimum income requirements, absence of a criminal record, or other unnecessary conditions, including options appropriate for particularly vulnerable youth.

3. The community uses coordinated entry processes to effectively link all youth experiencing homelessness to housing and services solutions that are tailored to their needs.

The community implements coordinated entry processes that include the full array of youth-serving systems and programs and uses assessment tools that are adapted for youth and appropriate for their circumstances. The provision of tailored housing and services solutions is driven by youth choice and includes a range of options, including: service-only interventions, such as family reunification; housing options with varying levels of services, such as transitional living programs, host homes, rapid re-housing, and supportive housing; and, other affordable, safe, and stable living situations. Youth have the right to refuse housing and/or services. Coordinated entry processes, housing options, and services are trauma informed, age and developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, provide fair and equitable access, reflect a positive youth development framework, and support the capacity of youth to achieve four core outcomes: stable housing, permanent connections, education and employment, and well-being.

4. The community acts with urgency to swiftly assist youth to move in to permanent or non-time-limited housing options with appropriate services and supports.

Using Housing First and low-barrier approaches that ensure youth safety (as defined by each youth), the community efficiently connects youth experiencing homelessness to permanent or non-time-limited housing and services opportunities to prevent future entries into homelessness. Time-limited housing and services programs also support youth to achieve safe and appropriate exits upon discharge. Youth may choose to first enter time-limited safe and stable housing options, such as transitional living programs, before securing a permanent or non-time-limited housing opportunity. This includes youth in unsafe situations, such as those fleeing domestic violence, dating violence, sexual violence, or trafficking, or those with other significant risk factors or vulnerabilities. It is the expectation that these programs, like all programs, demonstrate strong outcomes related to exits to permanent housing.

5. The community has resources, plans, and system capacity in place to continue to prevent and quickly end future experiences of homelessness among youth.

The community dedicates sufficient resources to continue to prevent and end youth homelessness scaled to projected needs, and acts with urgency to end youth homelessness. The community has comprehensive plans and partnerships in place and system capacity to continue to: 1) whenever possible, prevent or divert youth from experiencing homelessness through substantial partnership with schools (including post-secondary educational institutions), the child welfare and justice systems, employment, physical, and mental health systems, and other youth-serving programs; 2) connect youth experiencing homelessness to appropriate and choice-driven crisis housing and services options; 3) connect pregnant and parenting youth to Head Start and child care centers; and 4) swiftly move youth into permanent or non-time-limited housing options with the appropriate services and supports.

Benchmarks

Communities should use a variety of information and data to assess whether they have achieved an end to youth homelessness, including the data necessary to calculate the following benchmarks, which, like the criteria, will continue to be refined over time. [These tools and guidance can help with that assessment.](#) Taken together, that information and data indicate how well a community's coordinated response is working to ensure that homelessness among unaccompanied youth is rare, brief, and non-recurring. Communities will have the

opportunity to document any circumstances in their local context that should be considered during the review process.

These benchmarks provide important indicators of whether and how effectively a community's response to youth homelessness is working, but this is not the only data or information we will review as part of the federal confirmation process. Meeting the benchmarks does not guarantee that a community will be confirmed as achieving the goal of ending youth homelessness if other supplemental data or information related to the criteria above indicates that the goal has not yet been met.

Benchmark A. There are few youth experiencing homelessness at any given time.

1. The community's census of youth experiencing homelessness includes all unaccompanied youth under 25 that meet any federal definition of homelessness, including youth identified by local education agencies and runaway and homeless youth programs. **(REVISED)**
2. No unaccompanied youth are experiencing unsheltered homelessness. **(REVISED)**
3. No unaccompanied youth seeking emergency shelter are turned away unless they can be successfully diverted to another safe living environment of their choosing. **(REVISED)**
4. All youth identified as experiencing homelessness, including those who are doubled up (based on the federal definition), are offered connections to appropriate services on an ongoing basis to support sustainable exits from homelessness. **(REVISED)**
5. The number of unaccompanied youth currently experiencing sheltered homelessness (including emergency shelter, basic center program, and time-limited or temporary housing) demonstrates the community's capacity to address emerging needs through exits to permanent or non-time-limited safe and stable housing destinations, including reunification with family. Specifically, the number of unaccompanied youth experiencing sheltered homelessness is:
 - a. **Less than or equal to** twice the monthly average number of unaccompanied youth newly identified as experiencing sheltered homelessness, AND
 - b. **Less than or equal to** twice the monthly average number of unaccompanied youth exiting sheltered homelessness to permanent or non-time-limited safe and stable housing destinations. **(NEW)**
6. The community's census of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness is not increasing over time. Specifically,
 - **For unaccompanied youth ages 18-24:** the average number exiting to permanent or non-time-limited safe and stable housing from sheltered or unsheltered homelessness each month is greater than or equal to the average number newly identified as experiencing sheltered homelessness (including emergency shelter and time-limited safe and stable housing), AND
 - **For unaccompanied youth under 18:** the average number exiting to safe and stable housing (including transitional housing or transitional living programs) from sheltered or unsheltered homelessness each month is greater than or equal to the average number newly identified as experiencing sheltered homelessness (including emergency shelter). **(NEW)**

Benchmark B. Youth experiencing homelessness are swiftly connected to safe and stable housing opportunities and to permanent housing options.

1. Unaccompanied youth identified as experiencing unsheltered or sheltered homelessness (including emergency shelter or basic center programs) exit to permanent or non-time-limited safe and stable housing within a community-wide average of 30 days, and no longer than 90 days from the point of identification.
 - a. It is expected that an initial offer of assistance to access permanent or non-time-limited safe and stable housing shall be made immediately upon assessment of the need for such assistance. There shall be periodic recurring offers of assistance to the youth, and youth shall receive assistance to access permanent or non-time-limited safe and stable housing as soon as they express a desire for it.
 - b. In the case of those youth who have chosen to first enter a time-limited safe and stable housing program (including transitional housing or transitional living programs) or to access another residential placement, this calculation begins when the youth requests assistance in attaining permanent housing to exit the program or accepts an offer as described in (a) above. **(NEW)**