Emerging Findings from Ending Street Homelessness in Vanguard Cities, Overarching Evaluation Project

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This meeting was convened to discuss the emerging, preliminary findings regarding the current cohort of cities participating in IGH's Vanguard Cities project, exploring what has worked in the way of addressing homelessness and what obstacles have stymied progress.

Overview of Research and Evaluation Project
The evaluation research was conducted by Suzanne Fitzpatrick, a professor of housing and social policy at Heriot-Watt University, and Volker Busch-Geertsema, coordinator for the European Observatory on Homelessness. The core aims of the evaluation were to determine the extent of progress made by cities towards meeting their goals of reducing or ending street homelessness in their respective communities in the specified time frame; what the core components of their success have been; what value IGH has added to this endeavor; and how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the effort.

The research was carried out primarily through research teams soliciting feedback from the cities through standardized research instruments which allowed for comparison among the cities. This was the first round of research, with the second round slated to take place in early 2021. Given that the Vanguard Cities project is ongoing and does not conclude until the end of 2020, priority was given to qualitative data. However, there are indications from preliminary quantatative data that a number of cities (Sydney, Manchester, Chicago, Glasgow, and Adelaide) are making progress in the right direction.

"What Works" in the Vanguard Cities
Regarding what has worked for Vanguard Cities, Fitzpatrick highlighted the importance of raising ambition and shifting the discussion on homelessness from one of management to one of reducing or solving homelessness, noting that IGH has been critical in this area. A number of themes emerged related to effective service provision and approaches to addressing homelessness, such as the importance of coordinated entry and by-name list infrastructure; assertive street outreach in order to bring people in off the streets to be housed and receive

treatment; and the need for providing safe, dignified accommodation to those being brought off the street.

Barriers and Challenges

A number of the cities faced common barriers to success as well. In most of the cities, little emphasis is placed on halting inflow of people into homelessness, even where this outcome is predictable, such as in cases where people are being released from prison or mental health institutions. A lack of affordable housing is a common problem among the cities, and related to this point, there is an overreliance on large, dormitory-style shelters, which are not ideal due to security and privacy concerns, as well as public health concerns highlighted by COVID-19. Lack of connection between mental health services and other systems were also mentioned as a significant challenge.

Fitzpatrick pointed out that direct comparisons between the cities are complicated due to their diversity. The disparity of resources between the cities means that resource-poor cities are less well-positioned to tackle the issue of homelessness. Government/state buy-in is another key area of variability. While some cities operate in contexts where there is a lead/coordinating agency on homelessness, this is not the case everywhere. Political commitment to the issue of homeless on the part of relevant officials such as mayor or governors was also recognized as a key component to a city's success or failure. Where state capacity is diminished, non-governmental actors such as NGOs or religious groups can help, but it is essential that they are involved in a constructive manner and not merely to further their own agenda.

The Role of IGH

Positive contributions IGH was seen as making to the cities' goals relate to reframing the issue of homelessness as an urgent social problem in need of addressing and increasing its visibility. The Vanguard Cities project helped to catalyze cooperation between local actors and provide outside accountability related to homelessness reduction goals. Some cities saw the collaborative nature of the project as helping to facilitate exposure between cities and introduced some of them to innovative approaches and best practices in addressing homelessness. Cities also mentioned areas for improvement for IGH, mostly related to considerations of resource availability and the capacity of IGH to assist them. Cities expressed a desire for clearer goal criteria, progress measurement, and theories of how to achieve change. Resource scarcity was an issue for a number of cities, as a dearth of resources limits how effective homelessness reduction efforts can be expected to be.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 global pandemic was highlighted as well, as it shifted the focus for many cities. In cities with sympathetic governments, the state took a proactive approach to housing the homeless, with some using hotels and accommodations that were safer and more dignified than congregate shelters. In some cities, the urgency of the pandemic catalyzed an unprecedented level of collaborative action on homelessness. Primary concerns on this front going forward relate to how to best sustain the improvements that have been achieved, how to move forward, and how to deal with the fallout from the economic conditions the pandemic has created.

Next Steps

Next steps for the Vanguard Cities evaluation will involve further analysis of the data collected through the first phase of the project. A quantitative evaluation is expected to be available by the end of 2020 or early 2021. On the qualitative front, the second phase of research will begin early 2021, with the final findings projected to be published in summer 2021.