



IGH Virtual Vanguard Cities Summit Recap: November 3 & 4, 2021

The 2021 IGH Virtual Vanguard Cities Summit was convened to facilitate the sharing of stories of progress made by the Vanguard Cities over the past year. The first day of the summit featured opening remarks from IGH Chair Baroness Casey of Blackstock and UN Habitat's Shipra Narang Suri followed by short presentations from each of the Vanguard Cities. Day two of the summit featured a presentation by researchers Suzanne Fitzpatrick and Volker Busch-Geertsema who discussed the findings of their evaluation of the first Vanguard Cities cohort. Day two of the summit concluded with a panel discussion on community plans and systems change to end homelessness.

Summit Day 1: Plenary

Opening Remarks

Baroness Casey of Blackstock's introductory remarks celebrated the progress that has been achieved over the past few years on the issue of global homelessness with the Vanguard Cities being a key part. Baroness Casey shared her deep thanks to all of the Vanguard Cities for their work during a difficult year.

She continued by drawing attention to the importance of sustaining momentum related to an international approach to the problem. She specifically noted the milestones of establishing a working definition of homelessness at the UN level and beginning a formal partnership with UN Habitat. Baroness Casey closed by highlighting forthcoming efforts to conduct a global measurement of homelessness by 2025.

UN Habitat's Shipra Narang Suri argued that homelessness is an issue of human rights and a complex problem that exists due to the failure of multiple systems and several intersecting issues including mental health, domestic violence, discrimination, and failures of housing policy. Suri noted the importance of a multisectoral response to the problem and lauded the Vanguard Cities for taking on this challenge. Suri echoed Baroness Casey's observation regarding how critical measurement is to the task of effectively addressing homelessness and argued that data-focused initiatives can help spur progress in this area.

Vanguard City Updates

Tshwane, South Africa – Tshwane established the Tshwane Homelessness Task Team in 2020. Twenty-seven shelters were opened that served 2,000 people and provided psycho-social and health support and a methadone program. Two Housing First pilot projects were started with a 36-bed capacity and 18 frail-care beds for serving older homeless persons. A city-wide street

homelessness street count was piloted in 2021 and is scheduled to be fully implemented in 2022.

Santiago, Chile - The Ministry of Social Development and Family in Chile started the Barrios Calle Cero program in order to end rough sleeping in Santiago. This Housing First program works to address homelessness at the neighborhood level by engaging local partners, and using street outreach, integrative services, and offers of housing to target and reduce homelessness.

Montevideo, Uruguay - Montevideo has worked to improve services and data over the last year. They continue to expand their Housing First program. The Ministry of Social Development has worked to improve job training including homeless people attending courses taught by the University of Labor of Uruguay (UTU) in masonry, carpentry and blacksmithing. They have also established two transitional admission centers for women with children and adolescents who are homeless.

Bengaluru, India - Twenty-six shelter visits were conducted between November 2020 and October 2021 to monitor shelter operations and provide technical support in the form of facilitated community meetings, training of shelter staff and NGO leaders. Rescue vans were used to assist 229 people experiencing homelessness. Steps were also taken to improve program monitoring, standardize care, and connect people to social security benefits.

Greater Manchester, United Kingdom - Greater Manchester continued to improve their emergency response to homelessness, identify gaps in statutory prevention, healthcare and social security provision. Manchester began a Housing First pilot program during the pandemic and despite challenging circumstances still succeeded at housing over 100 people. They mentioned the importance of learning by doing and how that was critical to discovering which interventions work to end the homelessness of people with complex needs experiencing complex homelessness.

Little Rock, Arkansas, U.S. - Little Rock mentioned being relatively unprepared to deal with the challenges of addressing their homelessness problem on account of having little in the way of homelessness infrastructure. They reported lobbying the new Mayor in the city to cultivate political will to address the problem and acknowledged the influence of IGH in encouraging them to adopt specific goals and establish a coordinated entry system. They announced that they have recently they joined the Built for Zero program with the homelessness organization Community Solutions.

Adelaide, South Australia - Adelaide's approach to reaching functional zero has centered on four main components: Housing First, person-centered and strengths-based focus, evidence-based systems change, and place-based collective impact collaboration. South Australia has recently launched a new, five-year strategic plan which organized the homelessness sector in various alliances and developed a new service model involving several different organizations and incorporated the Adelaide Zero Project into the service model.

Sydney & New South Wales, Australia - The End Street Sleeping team focused on extending the by-name list and reworking it so it could be used by outreach workers in hopes that this new platform will be more effective for matching people with appropriate housing. They also reported incorporating more people with lived experience into their program development as well as expanding their reach throughout the state.

Brussels, Belgium - The 400 Toits campaign held a connections week in 2020 where 240 volunteers connected with 438 people sleeping rough and conducted 167 interviews, which allowed them to collect valuable data and better understand their homeless population. They have also established a modular home project for housing people experiencing homelessness. The 400 Toits campaign has recently ended and the organization Infirmiers de Rue will be continuing work in this area.

Summit Day 2

Key Findings on the Vanguard City Evaluation

On the second day of the summit, homelessness researchers Suzanne Fitzpatrick and Volker Busch-Geertsema presented their findings from an evaluation of the Vanguard Cities. The aims of this project were to monitor the progress of the Vanguard Cities in IGH's A Place to Call Home initiative in meeting the goals they set related to ending or reducing street homelessness in their communities by the end of 2020. The project also sought to identify what works in the way of ending street homelessness; what components of success can be transferred to other contexts; and what lessons can be learned from the cities' experiences navigating the COVID-19 pandemic.

The methods of the project entailed developing standardized research instruments developed to maximize comparability across highly varied cities, tailored as necessary for context. Local research teams conducted two waves of field work, informant interviews and focus groups with frontline workers. Transcripts, quantitative data, and local research reports were subsequently analyzed by the researchers.

Progress

The Vanguard Cities had varying degrees of success in meeting their targets, with the available evidence suggesting that half of the cities achieved reductions in homelessness. Sydney and Glasgow fully met their targets. Greater Manchester and Montevideo did not quite achieve their goals but did achieve substantial progress. Edmonton and Adelaide appeared to have increases in their homeless populations, while homelessness in Chicago appeared to stay stable or increase slightly. A lack of available data in Tshwane and Santiago meant the researchers could not evaluate whether these cities had met their targets, but there were indications of progress.

Effective Approaches

Supportive systems, structures, and policies were critical to success in the cities. This included the presence of a lead agency, whether from the state or NGO sector, to coordinate efforts and

pursue targets. Coordinated entry systems; individual-level case management, especially for those with complex needs; and specialized interventions for particular subgroups (e.g., indigenous people) were also essential to progress.

Also crucial to cities' success were effective policy practices and implementation, especially as it related to housing. Examples included:

- Assertive street outreach services alongside substantive assistance in moving off the street and into housing
- Access to housing or emergency accommodation in instances where immediate rehousing was not available
- Practical financial and emotional support with sustaining housing such as Housing First wraparound service support for those with complex needs
- Access to mental health, substance misuse and specialist support without high conditionality barriers

Ineffective Approaches

The reliance on large-scale and poor quality communal shelters were generally ineffective, as they tended to be experienced as unsafe, had no preventative function, and generally did not lead to permanent housing. Such spaces can also be especially dangerous for vulnerable groups.

Heavy reliance on faith groups for service provision were also often ineffective in many cases, as they tended to focus on immediate physiological needs and perceived spiritual needs rather than system inadequacies. Such groups sometimes imposed high conditionality thresholds as well. Further, extreme religiosity could be experienced by some people experiencing homelessness as off-putting, possibly leading them to not engage with these services.

Aggressive involvement by police and city authorities, especially if unaccompanied by offers of support and accommodation were generally unhelpful. However, there was variability across contexts, and in some areas, police were considered helpful in connecting people to services and a constructive part of the homelessness response.

A final significant weakness was a lack of preventative services. The researchers mentioned that in most cities there is little emphasis on halting the inflow into homelessness, even from highly predictable pathways like prisons, hospital/care settings.

Broader Context for Success

The researchers identified some common features of successful homelessness responses among the Vanguard Cities. Resources were critical to success, and a lack of resources posed challenges for Global North and Global South cities alike. Political will was also an important factor, as high-profile commitments tended to encourage accountability and drive subsequent success. Finally, favorable housing market conditions and initiatives aimed at increasing the supply of affordable housing were also central to success.

Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic had varying effects on the cities. In several areas, the pandemic presented an opportunity to marshal significant resources towards effectively ending and preventing homelessness in the short-term through the use of hotel rooms, eviction moratoria, and enhanced social benefits. Glasgow used the opportunity to end the use of communal shelters altogether. Despite the progress achieved early in the pandemic, there were concerns regarding whether this progress could be sustained long-term.

IGH Contributions

Fitzpatrick and Busch-Geertsema identified several ways that cities benefited from their relationships with IGH. Benefits included more local visibility and momentum aimed at reducing street homelessness as opposed to merely managing the problem. Additional benefits experienced by the cities were enhanced capacity-building due to coaching and leadership assistance, improved data collection capacity, and the ability to leverage additional resources locally. Cities also benefited from the exchange of ideas and collective learning from interaction with other Vanguard Cities.

Community Plans and Systems Change to End Homelessness

Day two of the summit concluded with a panel discussion on community plans and systems change to end homelessness. The discussion was moderated by IGH Senior Advisor Nonie Brennan and featured antwan wallace, CEO at National Innovation Service (Baltimore, US), Aravind Unni, Urban Poverty Thematic Lead at Indo-Global Social Service Society (New Delhi, India), and Neil Munslow MBE, Service Manager of Active Inclusion at Newcastle City Council (Newcastle, England). The wide ranging discussion touched on issues such as the inclusion of people with lived experience of homelessness in systems change, the importance of equitable urban planning and housing policies, as well as theoretical aspects of how to approach systems change.