
INTERNATIONAL MAYORS COUNCIL ON HOMELESSNESS

2024 JOINT DECLARATION FROM THE INTERNATIONAL MAYORS COUNCIL ON HOMELESSNESS

We, the Mayors and Council Members of the International Mayors Council on Homelessness affirm our commitment to ending homelessness. We are united in the urgent need to take action to end homelessness locally, regionally, and globally.

Cities across the world are proving that ending homelessness is possible. There are diverse roles and responsibilities at local, regional, national, and international levels, and local city government play an important role in addressing this crisis including implementing evidenced-based systems and policies, engaging stakeholders across jurisdictions, and incentivizing housing development. Although cities across the world represent bright spots of action, homelessness is on the rise globally, and it is evident that we are not moving the needle.

Homelessness sits at the intersection of public health, lack of access to adequate housing and rising rates of unaffordability, gender violence, mental and physical illness, substance abuse, discrimination, privatization of public services, gaps in social protection systems, and lack of economic opportunity. Homelessness is one of the most visible forms of poverty in global cities, and it is experienced in some form in every city and country in the world. With increasing urbanization, the cost-of-living crisis, displacement and migration, climate change and armed conflict, homelessness is not just on the rise globally, but the demographics and needs of people experiencing homelessness are also shifting. Homelessness disproportionately impacts people of marginalized identities, and comprehensive, intersectional, and inclusive approaches are needed in response. People experiencing homelessness encounter social exclusion, stigmatization, and discrimination including racism, in accessing housing, finding jobs with a living wage, and face barriers to receiving social protection services and health services. They are more likely to experience significant health inequities, with an age of death more than thirty years below the average person.

We know that homelessness is solvable. Cities that are reducing homelessness are doing so through an evidenced-based mix of strategies including assertive street outreach, integrated social services, individualised case management, a focus on preventing homelessness, and expansion of housing options including temporary self-contained accommodation, Housing First, and affordable housing stock.

Effective solutions to homelessness require a shift away from criminalization, going beyond emergency responses, and developing interventions in partnership with people of lived experience. The majority of people making decisions about the homeless programs have not experienced homelessness themselves and this can lead to ineffective policies with hidden biases, especially towards marginalized groups. City leaders should not only acquire evidence-based knowledge

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beyond popular media, but also engage directly with the people who have experienced homelessness to gain a more balanced perspective and speak publicly to change the narrative.

Homelessness can be reduced and successfully addressed, when city government and civil society prioritise coordinated action and implement data-informed and housing-led strategies. We recognize the transformational power that mayors and city leaders have to end homelessness in cities across the world and we call for more global coordinated action on homelessness.

Ending homelessness leads to more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable cities. Homelessness connects to all of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals but is currently absent from the SDGs and its 169 indicators. We must act on homelessness so that we "leave no one behind". We recognize the importance of mayors in localizing the SDGs, welcome the momentum to address homelessness at all levels of society, and call for more cities across the world to commit to reducing homelessness.

We recall the recent Resolutions that have called for global action on homelessness:

- Whereas the Economic and Social Council Resolution 2020/7, encourages national and local governments to improve access to affordable housing through integrated housing policies and social protection measures, including social protection on both the demand and the supply sides, including by addressing legal and policy barriers to equal and non-discriminatory access to adequate housing and invites national and local governments, in collaboration with the private sector and local communities, to stimulate the supply of a variety of adequate housing options that are safe, affordable and accessible for members of different income groups of society, and to take positive measures to improve the living conditions of people experiencing homelessness, with a view to facilitating their full participation in society, and to prevent and eliminate homelessness; and invites national and local governments to increase allocations of financial and human resources, as appropriate, for the upgrading and, to the extent possible, prevention of slums and informal settlements;
- Whereas the United Nations General Assembly Resolutions 76/133, stresses that the responsibility for developing integrated, holistic, inclusive and effective policies and programmes affecting people experiencing homelessness, as well as coherent multisectoral efforts globally and evaluating this issue regularly as part of follow-up action lies foremost with Member States and local governments, in consultation, as appropriate, with individuals and families with a lived experience, civil society organizations, especially those currently serving the identified demographic, and other relevant stakeholders;
- Recalling resolution, United Nations Habitat Assembly resolution on Adequate Housing for All, which urges Member States to prioritize access to adequate housing, including addressing homelessness and slum transformation, as a central element of inclusive, resilient post-pandemic recovery and achievement of the New Urban Agenda and of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda.

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With this vision, we the Mayors of the International Mayors Council on Homelessness call for global action on the issue of homelessness under the following priorities.

1. Support action on homelessness at the local, national, and global level.

Commit to ending homelessness in our communities. Mayors and city leaders' commitment to ending homelessness makes a transformational impact in cities across the world. Prioritizing funding, coordinating stakeholders across sectors, establishing strategic direction and policy are all ways mayors can drive significant reductions.

Engage community-driven and region-driven approaches to homelessness policy. Policies and strategies are most effective when directly informed by civil society and local and regional stakeholders most impacted by homelessness. Local policies should include the expertise of people with lived experience and local perspectives should be integrated into national policies.

Share what works. We commit to exchanging knowledge, effective practices and innovative approaches on homelessness responses in cities, with the support of UN-Habitat, the Institute of Global Homelessness and other relevant stakeholders.

2. Address racism, marginalization and stigma impacting people experiencing homelessness.

Create programs that combat discrimination and racism. The disproportionate rates of homelessness for marginalized groups including Black, and Indigenous people are a result of unequal and racist economic and social systems. Cities must reduce inequalities and respond to racism and marginalization at every level and focus on expanding anti-racist approaches and diversity of staff, including people with lived experience and marginalized identities.

Ensure equal access to housing and services for people experiencing homelessness. Persons experiencing homelessness should be able to access housing and services with dignity and without discrimination for characteristics including race, gender, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability status. Persons experiencing homelessness should not face with penalization or criminalization of essential activities carried out in public spaces.

Combat stigma for our citizens who are experiencing homelessness. Alongside the personal and economic hardship, people experiencing homelessness face discrimination, exclusion, and sometimes violence as a result of their housing status. Communications, programs, knowledge mobilization, and training to decrease stigma and dispel false stereotypes should be incorporated into city legislation, with law enforcement, social and health care systems, and with citizens.

3. Define and enumerate homelessness and utilize analysis to create more effective, data-informed programs.

Ensure municipal policy includes a clear definition of homelessness. To address homelessness as a global phenomenon, it is important for communities and countries to use a clear, consistent, and inclusive definition of homelessness, that is shared across sectors of government. While manifestations of homelessness differ across countries and regions, homelessness includes people living on the streets, in other open spaces or in buildings not intended for human habitation, people living in temporary accommodation or shelters, and people living in severely inadequate and

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insecure accommodation including doubled up with family or acquaintances, extremely overcrowded situations, or under threat of violence.

Enumerate homelessness according to local definitions. Enumerating and analysing homelessness data regularly and consistently allows communities to understand the scale of the issue, drivers of homelessness, allocate funding, and design more targeted and effective programs that meet the diverse needs of people experiencing homelessness. Indicators should track locally that homelessness is prevented wherever possible, but where it cannot be prevented it should only ever be a rare, brief and nonrecurring experience.

4. Commit to multi-sectoral collaboration and multi-level governance.

Integrate homeless response strategies across multiple sectors and agencies. Homelessness is a complex topic with many intersections to other social and economic issues. Thus no one agency or actor can end homelessness alone. Many stakeholders must take part in creating and owning certain homeless response strategies including across government agencies, civil society, academia and education, healthcare, business, faith, community leaders, people who have experienced homelessness, and more.

Build meaningful participation with people with lived experience of homelessness to create more inclusive and effective programs so that people/clients can participate in decisions, and lived experience is highly valued. Plans and policies should centre voices of experts by experience at all levels including leadership roles, advisory, policy development, case management, and research.

Ensure the continuity of homeless response strategies across mayoral administration transitions. Creating shared political will through comprehensive strategies, long-term goals, and sharing comprehensive program briefings including up-to-date data and outcomes with incoming mayoral administrations ensures that foundations for progress remain strong.

5. Commit to broaden prevention strategies.

Identify and stop homeless inflow. Homelessness is a failure of multiple systems and thus there are often opportunities for interventions to prevent individuals and families from becoming homeless. Preventing homelessness before it occurs is less expensive, reduces the amount of instability and trauma that people experience, and supports positive health, education, and employment outcomes. Targeted approaches to prevention including supporting young people transitioning from foster care, migrants and asylum seekers, and people leaving state institutions including correctional facilities.

Develop and expand prevention strategies which address the structural factors associated with homelessness. This approach encompasses universal approaches, to minimise the risk of homelessness in policy areas where there is direct national, regional and local influence through inclusive housing and social policies, including eviction prevention programmes, affordable housing, and poverty reduction strategies.

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6. Expand access to housing initiatives, co-produced with local stakeholders.

Prioritize housing-led programs with supportive services as part of homelessness response strategies. Housing-led programs provide a safe, stable home for people who have experienced homelessness and facilitate the provision of wrap-around supportive services. Housing access should be as rapid as possible without preconditions. These programs and services should be integrated into communities and consider a person's holistic needs.

Broaden access to adequate, truly affordable housing. Ambitious housing policies to ensure an adequate and affordable housing supply for the entire population, irrespective of income, are needed globally including expanding housing stock and social housing that are accessible and affordable to individuals at risk of or experiencing homelessness. This also includes undertaking participatory upgrading programmes in slums and informal settlements with severely inadequate housing to improve habitability, security of tenure and access to essential services, and implementing clear limitations on evictions with due process for people affected.

Prioritise the development and implementation of robust land use planning strategies. A well-structured land use plan, which promotes pro-poor and gender-transformative land use and prioritising access for disadvantaged groups, serves as a fundamental tool for shaping urban development, enabling mixed land use to foster vibrant, diverse, and safe communities.

7. Connect homelessness with human rights and international agendas.

Integrate homelessness into human rights agendas and international campaigns including the Sustainable Development Goals to ensure no one, including people experiencing homelessness, is left behind, to realise the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its article 25 recognizing that everyone has a right to an adequate standard of living including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.