# Are Your Candidates Committed to Ending Homelessness?

## Ending homelessness requires a Housing First, data-driven approach - do your candidates agree?

Election season is around the corner, and we want to equip you with the questions you could be asking your candidates. Whether you vote in-person or drop your ballot in the mail, the most important part of the process is deciding who you want to represent you.

State and local lawmakers -- like mayors, city council members, county commissioners, state legislators, and governors -- play a leading role in how local governments address homelessness. Their actions are critical to prevent housing instability, ensure people experiencing homelessness receive services, and provide the proper funding and support to our local systems that respond to homelessness.

## Using a Housing First, data- driven approach is the only way to prevent and end homelessness.

Ending homelessness in America will take major changes at every level of government. And while there are many policies that can address housing and homelessness, there are two critical but often overlooked fundamental aspects of any system designed to end homelessness -- using a Housing First and data-driven approach.

Housing First is a proven homeless assistance approach that prioritizes providing permanent housing (including rental assistance vouchers, supportive housing, or other forms of affordable housing) to people experiencing homelessness, without preconditions or barriers to accessing housing that are dependent on sobriety, income, service interventions or case management. A data-driven approach results in a homeless service system that uses real-time information to inform resource allocation decisions. A data-driven approach requires explicit, quantifiable goals around ending and preventing homelessness and transparent data sharing so that the general public —along with city agencies and nonprofit organizations— can hold the community accountable.

Determining **how** a candidate might address homelessness is not always easy. Here are a few ideas on how to assess if your candidates may approach homelessness with the data-driven approach that is needed.

## Do your research.

As you review who your candidates are and decide whom to support, consider how each stands on policies that aim to measurably end homelessness, like collecting real-time data, making this data publicly available, and setting measurable goals for reducing or ending homelessness.

A basic internet search can help you find clues about your candidates' stance on key issues. Like topics such as health care, education, and the environment, candidates should develop and state clear policy solutions to housing and homelessness.

- Does the candidate have a policy platform dedicated to housing and homelessness?
- Do they acknowledge the importance of using a Housing First approach to prevent and end homelessness?
- Do they have a data-driven approach to policy challenges? For example, do they have a track record of utilizing information to make decisions that affect a number of people?
- Does their economic plan address housing shortages and barriers?
- Do they have a collaborative approach to policy challenges?

## The best time to educate a lawmaker is while they are a candidate.

### Questions for Local, State, and Federal Candidates

When running for office, candidates are actively in listening mode. They are talking to voters and sharing information about themselves and their approach to community and policy challenges.

Candidates reach out to their voters through phone calls, texts, and in person, by knocking on your front door or handing out fliers in a local farmers market or at a bus stop.. While you might want to decline these calls or not answer your door, these are excellent opportunities to educate your candidates through their volunteers about homelessness and ways to solve it!

Here are some examples of questions you can ask your candidates, if you get the chance.

- How knowledgeable are you about homelessness in our community or state?
- Are you committed to implementing a Housing First approach? What does Housing First mean to you?
- Do you support setting measurable goals for reducing and ending homelessness in our city or state? If so, what metrics will you commit to tracking and publicly sharing as part of your plan to prevent and end homelessness?
- What do you think the role of emergency, temporary shelter is in helping people at risk of or experiencing homelessness?
- Do you recognize homelessness as a public health crisis and are you committed to including the health sector in your work to end homelessness?
- Are you committed to including people with lived experience with homelessness in your leadership and decision-making around homelessness and housing policy?
- Access to affordable housing is a piece of the puzzle to end homelessness. How would you expand access to affordable housing in our community or state?

When elected, your advocacy can still continue.  Once seated, you can follow up to remind your elected representative  of your conversation and share how you can work together to end homelessness.