

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-20-602](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The mission of USICH is to coordinate the federal response to homelessness and create partnerships with the private sector and state and local governments to reduce and end homelessness. The joint explanatory statement related to the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2019 includes a provision for GAO to review the management and governance structure of USICH, including the Council's ability to oversee the Executive Director and USICH operations.

This report (1) describes the structure and practices for USICH operations and (2) evaluates the extent to which roles and responsibilities for the governance of USICH have been defined and documented. GAO focused primarily on the 2017–2020 time frame and analyzed agency documentation (such as Council meeting transcripts, and USICH's strategic plan and performance reports) and interviewed Council members, current and former Executive Directors, and staff from member agencies.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that the Council further clarify and document its roles and responsibilities for matters requiring the Council's approval, the role of the Council Chair, and actions within the Executive Director's delegated authority. The Council concurred with the recommendation.

View [GAO-20-602](#). For more information, contact Alicia Puente Cackley, 202-512-8678, cackleya@gao.gov

August 2020

INTERAGENCY COUNCIL ON HOMELESSNESS

Governance Responsibilities Need Further Clarification

What GAO Found

The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) consists of representatives from 19 federal agencies—including a Chair and Vice-Chair—on its governing Council and a full-time staff led by an Executive Director. The Executive Director has led most day-to-day operations, including hiring and managing staff, preparing budget requests, working with private-sector groups, drafting strategic plans, developing performance goals, and drafting agendas for the Council's quarterly meetings. Council members have quarterly meetings to discuss and consider homelessness issues and review the efforts of the Executive Director and USICH staff. Actions taken at Council meetings held from December 2017 through March 2020 included electing the Chair and Vice-Chair, appointing the Executive Director, and approving the USICH strategic plan and activities of interagency working groups. USICH staff also informed the Council of their performance results during the quarterly meetings.

Some roles and responsibilities for the governance of USICH, such as the types of matters that require Council approval, are not fully defined or documented. Recent Council Chairs told GAO they generally did not have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and generally based them on their predecessors' activities. For example, the 2019 Chair stated he saw his responsibilities as preparing and chairing quarterly Council meetings and acting as the Council's external spokesperson, but there were no written procedures detailing these responsibilities. The 2019 Chair also stated that he had no involvement in overseeing the USICH budget or operations, staff, and interagency working groups. *Standards of Internal Control for the Federal Government* state that for an entity's objectives to be achieved the responsibilities and delegations of authority should be clearly established. At its quarterly meeting held in March 2020, the Council approved a charter that addresses voting mechanics, performance evaluations for the Executive Director, and the authority of the Executive Director to oversee personnel. But the charter does not fully clarify the Council's responsibilities in other areas, such as the responsibilities of the Council Chair, types of matters that would require approval by Council vote, and actions that are within the Executive Director's delegated authority. Additional clarity and documentation in these areas may assist the Council in securing a fuller understanding of its oversight role and responsibilities.