

GAO@100 Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-21-540](#), a report to the Chairwoman, Committee on Financial Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Youth homelessness is a widespread problem, with one recent study estimating that one in 10 young adults experience some form of homelessness over the course of a year—such as living on the streets or in a shelter or temporarily staying with others. GAO was asked to study youth homelessness. This report examines, among other things, HUD's and HHS's coordination to address youth homelessness and challenges communities face in serving youth through HUD and HHS programs.

GAO analyzed federal agency documents related to homelessness efforts; conducted structured interviews with a nongeneralizable sample of 24 local homelessness providers, selected to reflect communities of different sizes and with different types of programs for youth; and interviewed other local program staff, youth homelessness researchers and advocates, and federal officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO makes 10 recommendations to improve services for youth experiencing homelessness, including that HUD work with HHS to provide additional information or examples to local communities in the following areas: serving young adults through coordinated entry processes, coordinating to serve unaccompanied minors, and coordinating their programs. HUD generally agreed with four recommendations. HUD neither agreed nor disagreed with two recommendations, but described intended plans to help address these areas. HHS agreed with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-21-540](#). For more information, contact Alicia Puente Cackley at (202) 512-8678 or cackleya@gao.gov

September 2021

YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

HUD and HHS Could Enhance Coordination to Better Support Communities

What GAO Found

The Departments of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Health and Human Services (HHS) have taken steps to coordinate their programs that serve youth experiencing homelessness. These programs include HUD's Continuum of Care program, which funds housing and homelessness services for people of all ages in nearly all communities across the country, and HHS's Runaway and Homeless Youth program, which funds emergency shelters, transitional housing, and supportive services for youth in a few hundred communities. For example, HHS was involved in the development of HUD's Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program, which provides grants to several dozen communities to address youth homelessness. In addition, the agencies integrated data collection for the Runaway and Homeless Youth program into local data systems operated under the Continuum of Care program to help program providers better coordinate client services at the local level.

GAO's review of documents and interviews with local program providers, agency officials, researchers, and advocates identified several challenges in serving youth experiencing homelessness, including both young adults and minors (those under 18). For example:

- Under the Continuum of Care program, communities must establish a process, known as coordinated entry, for prioritizing who receives limited housing resources. Many providers of homelessness services reported that their community's process tends to prioritize young adults lower than older adults. This is partly because these processes, following HUD guidance, give higher priority to those who have been homeless longer and who have documented disabilities. HUD has provided some information to communities on serving youth through coordinated entry, but this information largely has not addressed how to ensure that young adults are not consistently prioritized below other groups for housing.
- Most providers GAO interviewed reported that minors experiencing homelessness unaccompanied (without a parent or caregiver) do not participate in the coordinated entry process, with several noting there are limited housing options that can serve minors. Some providers and other stakeholders discussed challenges coordinating between the homelessness and child welfare systems to serve this group. However, HUD and HHS have provided limited information about or examples of how providers could coordinate to better serve unaccompanied minors.
- Although HUD and HHS have taken some steps to coordinate the Continuum of Care and Runaway and Homeless Youth programs, providers of these programs reported challenges in coordination and communication, including a lack of understanding of one another's programs and a need for more strategic planning on services for youth.

HUD and HHS have acknowledged a need for additional information related to serving youth. Additional support from HUD and HHS in the areas identified above could help to improve coordination and the delivery of services to both young adults and minors at the local level.