

NEWS UPDATE: Innovations in Serving Unsheltered Veterans: The First Year of ALL INside

Shawn Liu: [00:00:00] Welcome to Ending Veteran Homelessness, your first hand look into our nation's efforts to ensure that every Veteran has a safe and stable place to call home. From the Department of Veterans Affairs, Homeless Programs Office, I'm your host, Shawn Liu.

If you're a Veteran who's homeless or at risk of homelessness, reach out.

Call the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans at 877-424-3838. Trained counselors are standing by to help 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. That number again is 877-424-3838.

Hey everyone, it's Shawn, and we've got a news update for you today.

Last year on May 18th, 2023, the U. S. Interagency Council on Homelessness launched ALL INside, a first of its kind initiative to address unsheltered homelessness across the country.

Now, when we say unsheltered homelessness, we mean [00:01:00] people sleeping literally on the streets, in the woods, in encampments, under bridges. Unsheltered homelessness is one of the most dangerous experiences a person can face, negatively impacting their whole health. Mind, body, and soul. This is really bad stuff.

ALL INside, as an initiative, identified six communities: Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, the Metro Phoenix area, Seattle, and the entire state of California, if an entire state could be considered a community. And for each of these communities, ALL INside embedded a dedicated federal official to accelerate locally driven strategies, deploy dedicated teams across the federal government to identify different regulatory relief and flexibility opportunities, navigate the different federal funding streams, and facilitate peer learning, launch some new efforts to address significant barriers to housing, healthcare, and other supports and convene philanthropic, private sector, and other communities to identify more opportunities for support and collaboration.

Since it's been a year, I got curious. What have we learned? Were there any [00:02:00] innovations that emerged from the work? And what's on the horizon?

As I say to myself, those are really great questions.

To give us an update on key lessons learned and the progress made to help unsheltered Americans, including Veterans, come inside, we've brought him back, Mr. Jeff Olivet, the Executive Director of the U. S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, or USICH.

Mr. Olivet has worked to prevent and end homelessness for more than 30 years as a street outreach worker, case manager, coalition builder, researcher, and trainer. He is the founder of jo consulting, co-founder of Racial Equity Partners, and from 2010 to 2018, he served as the CEO of C4 Innovations.

Throughout his career, Mr. Olivet has worked extensively in the areas of homelessness and housing, health and behavioral health, HIV, education, and organizational development. He's also deeply committed to social justice, racial equity, gender equality, and inclusion for all. Jeff, welcome back to the show.

Jeff Olivet: Shawn, it's great to be with you again.

Shawn Liu: Yeah, it's great to have you here. We actually had you [00:03:00] on a little bit a while ago to talk about ALL IN, the new updated Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness. In terms of naming conventions, this initiative that we brought you on to get an update for is ALL INside, which I just think, in terms of like, cutesy, naming is actually one of the better ones.

I have a little bit of a pet peeve against like cutesy naming conventions, but that one is actually pretty cool.

Jeff Olivet: Our team will appreciate that, Shawn.

Shawn Liu: Yeah, no, they did a good job on that one. They did a good job on that one.

Also one other kind of thread connecting.

A little bit a while ago, we also had Anthony Love at VA. He's our Director of Community Engagement who let us know about the launch of ALL INside on this podcast. We'll put links to both of those episodes in the description. And

we're gonna have Anthony on in a couple months to actually provide a perspective from the VA side about ALL INside, but I wanted to bring you on to get the high level, Year 1 update.

Now, I shared a little bit about what ALL INside is at the top, just from a [00:04:00] high level. It's also copy lifted straight from your website. But from your perspective, did I miss anything?

What is ALL INside? And why is it important for the work to end homelessness?

Jeff Olivet: Well, as you mentioned, Shawn, a year ago this month, we launched ALL INside as an initiative to really tackle the crisis of unsheltered homelessness. And what we're really trying to do is help communities cut red tape that makes it difficult for people to access housing, health care, and all of the other supports that help them move from the streets into homes.

This effort, as you mentioned, is part of our larger ALL IN Federal Strategic Plan, which is attempting to address all dimensions of homelessness: unsheltered, Veterans, youth, homelessness among older adults, families, people with disabilities. This particular effort is really focused on the crisis of unsheltered homelessness in all of the dimensions that you talked about earlier. The idea of embedding dedicated federal staff on the ground with communities is all about accelerating the progress that they're already making. It really [00:05:00] is individualized, tailored to the community's efforts, and all pointed in the direction of showing that it is possible to solve homelessness.

Shawn Liu: I really admired that idea of embedding a national, federal subject matter expert. I know in homelessness, in years past, when different communities have been part of different boot camps, that there was always a deep sense of value that having a national-level subject matter expert who knew all the ins and outs on different policy, who could basically do real time fact checking to make sure that as innovative ideas cropped up, that they weren't too quickly swat down because of a perception that it might violate a rule that wasn't actually there. But then also to make sure that any innovations that do get implemented, they do kind of fit through the rules.

And there was another component that was fantastic, which is the idea of are there opportunities for flexibilities to maybe waive certain regulations that are creating barriers and not creating more access, which is really, really helpful. So I'm super pumped about the [00:06:00] initiative launching and the way that it was structured.

Also at the top, I mentioned that there were six communities, but I heard through the grapevine that there's maybe a bit of an expansion, that you might have had an addition or two. Can you share a little bit about what the communities are participating are as of today, and a little bit of background in terms of how they were selected?

Jeff Olivet: Sure, we're now at seven communities, and that is all we're focusing on right now. We've brought on one new community since we began the initiative, and that new community is Denver, Colorado, and we were really excited to bring them on last fall. So we're now at seven jurisdictions: Chicago, Dallas, Denver, Los Angeles, Phoenix and Maricopa County, Seattle and King County, and then, as you mentioned at the top, the state of California, which has a variety of challenges across communities. We're working there with the governor's office and the state interagency council to see if we can tackle unsheltered homelessness statewide.

The way the communities were selected was that we really looked at places where unsheltered homelessness had been increasing rapidly, where there was a lot of [00:07:00] political will and a lot of kind of collaborative muscle already built that we could coordinate with, that we could come alongside. And we know in, each of these communities there are large numbers of people living outside exposed to the deadly risks of hunger, extreme weather, disease, violence. And while unsheltered homelessness is a crisis in many parts of the country, in urban and rural areas, in tribal areas we decided that focusing on these seven communities actually would have potential impact on more than half the unsheltered population in the United States.

So that was the calculus in selecting the communities.

Shawn Liu: That's a really good, the helping the math to math perspective. That if you could move the needle in these seven communities, you're actually going to make a big dent overall. And I would imagine that when we think about improvements that happen as a part of these type of innovations and initiatives, that there is this concept of scale and being able to scale improvements that I think is probably a little bit easier to accomplish if you're, say, doing an improvement with Los [00:08:00] Angeles, right? Or Denver, as opposed to if you start an improvement with a smaller community, and then figuring out how to make it work in, say, Seattle. That, by starting with these large, very complex communities, there's a possibly a better chance that the innovations will be easier to spread to potentially rural communities, potentially suburban areas as well.

So, it's been about a year. What have we learned? Are there things that have been emerging? Are there trends, insights, key lessons that we've figured out over this past year?

Jeff Olivet: Well, the work is far from over, we know that, and we know that a lot of communities face very strong headwinds around unsheltered homelessness. But we're also really starting to see progress. In Dallas, for example, homelessness overall has dropped 12% from 2023 to 2024, and over the last couple of years, unsheltered homelessness in Dallas has been slashed by 24%, so that's a very promising bright spot. We've also seen that the leadership of mayors really matters. And we've seen very strong leadership from Mayor Bass [00:09:00] in Los Angeles, from Mayor Johnston in Denver, where they and their teams are tackling homelessness daily in a very focused way with a great sense of urgency and bringing along the business community, the faith community, the nonprofits, the public sector, the private sector, philanthropy, and it's that kind of spearheading of these efforts at the local level that I think is really showing promise.

We also are being reminded of something that we already knew, and that is that homelessness is solvable, especially when we work together, federal, state, local, public, private, and treat homelessness like the public health crisis that it is.

Shawn Liu: Yeah, those are some really great points. So, if I kind of heard correctly, you talked about the value of leadership, especially with mayors coming on board and serving as that critical convener or matchmaker to bring in other partners who may not necessarily think of themselves as part of this mission. But then also the importance of treating homelessness like the public health emergency it is, as opposed to maybe a social problem of personal failings, and thus we have to, you know, kind of lean in on the [00:10:00] individual to lift themselves up by their bootstraps. That if we treat it as a public health approach and we mobilize all of our different stakeholders, that we're able to, move the needle a little bit more.

You mentioned in terms of impact that Dallas has already seen pretty significant reductions, and I know the major benchmark, the year over the year benchmark that we as the federal government rely on the annual Point-in-Time Count survey. The results probably won't be there for later this year.

The results of the 2024 Point-in-Time count. That took place earlier this year in January, probably won't see the results for a while.

However, communities are starting to, little by little, release their own local PIT counts, and we know that our partners at the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development later this year will tally all of those up and release the national results as part of their Annual Homeless Assessment Report.

But from your perspective, are there other communities where we're seeing impact.

We know that initiatives like this, they take a little bit of time to build momentum and build steam, but once the train leaves the station, it actually can go pretty [00:11:00] fast. Are there other areas that we're seeing positive impacts too?

Jeff Olivet: Absolutely. In Chicago, 59 people who were living in transit stations were safely moved into shelters while they wait for permanent housing. In Los Angeles and Dallas, our partners at HUD approve waivers that really make it much easier for people to move into housing faster by cutting the bureaucratic red tape. We also saw Dallas set aside 100 housing vouchers a year specifically for people experiencing homelessness and developing 40 new units of permanent supportive housing for people experiencing homelessness. So those efforts are still on the front edge. They're beginning to take root. They're beginning to show momentum and progress, but it's pretty exciting stuff.

And then another thing that I would mention is since you and I talked last, HUD and Health and Human Services launched the Housing and Services Partnership Accelerator in a number of states across the country, and that includes Arizona and California, which are both ALL INside sites. And the focus of that effort is to develop and expand [00:12:00] innovative, common sense programs, that help people who don't have a home and who have complex medical needs. So it's about using Medicaid dollars as flexibly as possible to help folks who are really in need.

Shawn Liu: So what I heard from you saying is that a lot of the positive impacts so far in this first year have been really foundational, like setting the stage for more ripple effects to happen later on down the stream. Waivers and set asides of resources so that they could be targeted and used in a timely manner. So that hopefully as time goes on, we'll actually see more reductions like Dallas has been reporting, more Veterans and people experiencing homelessness generally moving out of different unsheltered settings, different encampments, different settings locales where they may set up tents but actually coming into shelters and then getting on that path to permanent housing.

Jeff, this has been really fantastic. Before we let you go, can you read the tea leaves for us? What's next for ALL INside? You mentioned that your seven communities right now are the ones that you're focusing on, and we're still building more momentum with different [00:13:00] stakeholders, different innovations, different waivers, different ways to collaborate and use resources.

Are there things that we're thinking about for year two that our listeners should be aware of and maybe even get excited for?

Jeff Olivet: Yeah, when I think about what's next for ALL INside, I think about more waivers, more solutions, and fewer people living on the street. And while each ALL INside community has its own goals, across these communities, the federal government's working to build capacity of local governments and organizations to respond to homelessness. We're working to strengthen the alignment of local partners, goals, and strategies. Those groups I mentioned earlier when we're trying to get everyone to the table. That work is continuing. We're focused on expanding targeted funding to address unsheltered homelessness. And we've seen HUD do that over the last couple of years with unsheltered dollars.

We've seen the VA do that through very focused outreach and trying to increase HUD-VASH utilization, for example. So really expanding all of that work and bringing alongside that additional philanthropic fund funding. And then finally, we're [00:14:00] working to identifying additional flexibilities that we need to consider at the federal level while we're still encouraging communities to make the best use of what the, what they can already do with the funding and resources and flexibilities that they have.

So again, the work continues as this federal local partnership where we're trying to bring our strengths to the table and we're asking local communities to do the same.

Shawn Liu: Jeff Olivet is the Executive Director of the U. S. Interagency Council on Homelessness. Jeff, great to have you back. Thank you so much for the gift of your time.

Jeff Olivet: Shawn, it's been great to be with you. Keep up your good work.

Shawn Liu: If you want to know more about the services that VA provides to Veterans experiencing homelessness and housing instability, visit us online at www.va.gov/Homeless.

And if you're a Veteran who's homeless or at risk of homelessness, reach out. Call the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans at 877-424-3838. Trained counselors are standing by to help 24 hours a day, seven days a week. That number again is [00:15:00] 877-424-3838.

If you're enjoying the show, please leave us a review on Apple Podcasts. It would really help us out.

That's all for now. We hope that you found this time to be valuable and that you feel empowered in our collective work to ensure that every Veteran has a safe and stable place to call home.

Take care.