Better Ways to Spend Our Money

**What Should Local Governments Do?**

*by Alex Visotzky January 24, 2023*

[National Alliance to End Homelessness](https://endhomelessness.org/blog/what-can-and-cant-local-government-do-to-address-homelessness/)

So what is a local government supposed to do if they can’t control the levers of housing and healthcare, two cornerstones of addressing homelessness? There are, in fact, a number of critical steps that a local government can take.

1. Utilize Federal and State Funding in Alignment with Existing Homeless Plans: Local governments are often the recipients of state and federal aid that can be used to address homelessness, among other eligible uses. Rather than reinvent the wheel, local governments should consult with their local Continuum of Care (CoC) and determine how to invest these funds in ways that are complementary to existing homelessness efforts.
2. Reconsider Land and Land Use: The most valuable resource that local government does have access to is land. Local governments may not be able to fully fund all aspects of developing affordable or supportive housing, but can make publicly-owned land available to affordable developers, solving the vexing question of how to site affordable housing and significantly lower development costs.
3. Similarly, local governments control land use and zoning regulations. As a result, City Councils, County Boards, and others can be major barriers to the delivery of needed housing, or they can facilitate its expedited delivery and ensure that developments targeting those with the greatest needs are prioritized.
4. Finally, local governments can also take an inventory of buildings that they own, and determine if any underutilized buildings may be good candidates to convert to affordable housing.
5. Remove Barriers to Faster Affordable Housing Production: While local governments may not always control the capital funding to produce affordable housing, these entities do control permitting processes and other approvals that can make a major difference in the scale and speed of affordable housing production. Local governments should consider how they can expedite affordable housing projects through the development pipeline, including by referring to some of the guidance provided through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH)’s House America Initiative.
6. Ensure Tenant Protections: Local governments, depending on the state, may also have significant jurisdiction over tenant protections, and can keep people in their homes. Local governments can enact strong eviction protections or rent control policies that slow the inflow of people into homelessness over the long-term. Actions such as the City of Los Angeles’ recent move to expand just cause eviction protections, for example, provide a strong template for the type of protections local governments should consider.
7. Deliver Basic Sanitation and Hygiene Services: While cities grapple with rising numbers of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, they can also ensure that street conditions are healthier for encampment residents and their neighbors alike. Ensuring equitable access to public restrooms, garbage pickup, and other hygiene infrastructure like wash stations is a critical step local governments can take to improve conditions for all of their residents.
8. Promote Coordination: Local government should partner with their local CoC to ensure coordination is happening between key municipal services and community-based homeless service providers who contract with the CoC. Furthermore, local governments should regularly be connecting with their CoC to weigh in on items like the governing policies of the Coordinated Entry System to address any conflicts or misconceptions arising.
9. Where local governments are playing a key role in partnering with service providers or the CoC to provide outreach to encampment residents, local governments should be versed in USICH’s Seven Principles for Addressing Encampments and ensure their outreach is aligned with these principles.
10. Advocate for Local Needs: Finally, local governments play an essential role in advocating to state and federal government for needed resources. Locals should not miss opportunities to weigh in with Members of Congress and state officials on the gaps in their homeless services systems. And local governments should also look for opportunities to partner with seasoned advocates: unconventional partnerships between advocates and local government can make for very powerful coalitions in Washington or the state capitol.