

Thank you, Madame Chairwoman. And thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

Right now, many American families are struggling to find safe, affordable housing. For some of these families, housing insecurity is a growing concern.

There are many challenges that can drive an individual or family to homelessness and make it harder to regain housing. The availability of affordable housing is part of the problem, but mental health challenges, physical disabilities and struggles with substance use can lead to homelessness and make it harder to escape when it occurs.

These problems cut across demographics. As a result, communities in every state right now, including my home state of Wyoming, are challenged to help those who are homeless or who lack stable housing.

Today's hearing on the Biden administration's strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness provides a good opportunity to talk about what's worked and where we can do better.

Housing First, a centerpiece of the administration's plan, is a policy that places individuals into supportive housing without any conditions. Individuals are offered supportive services but are not required to use them.

The term "housing first" raises an important question: "If housing comes first, what comes second?"

Individuals are placed into housing and then may choose whether to undertake the mental health treatment or substance abuse counseling they need to live healthy lives. But how many people caught in the cycle of addiction or the grips of a severe mental health crisis can recognize the help they need in the moment?

At some point, when Housing First fails—and it does fail for some people—there need to be other paths to help.

Shuttling vulnerable people between programs without needed treatment is not the path to housing independence. It perpetuates the problem.

I'm disheartened at the administration's continued focus on a version of housing first without the integrated wraparound services some individuals and families require to overcome homelessness.

As a result, we've drifted too far to "housing only." Funding does not allow local organizations the flexibility to act on what they've seen work in their local community.

I'd also like to see HUD and USICH spend more time on the unique needs of rural communities and tribes. These are important issues in Wyoming.

Homelessness and housing instability looks different in rural areas and reservations. Shelters are rare, and so many people turn to family and friends to get through a period of homelessness.

As a result, homelessness shows up as overcrowding rather than tents on the street. But given how HUD conducts its counts of the homeless, these individuals and families living with family and friends would not be counted.

We cannot fix problems when we are unsure of how big they are or where they are.

Homelessness is a challenging issue, one that requires our best ideas.

I look forward to hearing more from the witnesses about specific ideas to reduce red tape and help programs better serve vulnerable Americans.