

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-105110](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The mission of USICH is to coordinate the federal response to homelessness and partner with the private sector and state and local governments to prevent and end homelessness. Under its governing statute, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, USICH must perform certain duties and functions, such as annually updating its national strategic plan to end homelessness, providing technical assistance to state and local governments and nonprofit organizations, and recommending improvements to programs that assist homeless individuals.

House Report No. 116-452 includes a provision for GAO to review USICH's policies and procedures to ensure compliance with certain statutory requirements.

This report addresses policies and procedures USICH used in fiscal years 2017–2021 to perform duties and functions under its governing statute and comply with certain appropriations requirements. GAO reviewed relevant statutes and agency documents (such as action plans, performance reports, and a charter) and interviewed senior USICH staff and agency representatives.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that USICH establish written policies and procedures for meeting its statutory requirements. USICH concurred with the recommendation.

View [GAO-22-105110](#). For more information, contact Alicia Puente Cackley at (202) 512-8678 or cackleya@gao.gov.

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INTERAGENCY COUNCIL ON HOMELESSNESS

Written Policies for Implementing Statutory Requirements Are Needed

What GAO Found

The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), which includes 19 federal agencies and its own full-time staff, coordinates the federal response to homelessness. In 2017–2021, activities USICH performed corresponded to duties and functions set forth in its governing statute. For example, as part of its duty to provide technical assistance to nonfederal entities, USICH provided written guidance and regional knowledge-sharing workshops. As part of its duty to recommend improvements in programs, USICH worked with the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development to increase voucher use for supportive housing (housing combined with other services, such as healthcare and job training and placement).

Homeless Encampment in Downtown Los Angeles, California



Source: Matt Gush/stock.adobe.com. | GAO-22-105110

However, USICH did not have documented policies that specified how it would meet the statutory requirements GAO reviewed and did not consistently perform some obligations, such as annually updating its strategic plan. To monitor how the agency meets some statutory requirements, USICH staff use a spreadsheet (action plan) that briefly describes planned or completed activities. But USICH did not always update the plan or specify the steps staff should take to meet requirements. The plan also did not address some requirements, such as a reporting requirement in an annual appropriations act.

Staff also could not clearly describe if or how USICH met certain requirements in prior years. For example, USICH consulted with the Office of Management and Budget and congressional appropriations staff on meeting certain reporting obligations, but could not describe related decisions (prior staff had not documented them). Federal internal control standards note the importance of documenting responsibilities through written policies. USICH staff told GAO they relied on informal processes used by their predecessors, but said written documentation would be beneficial, especially when facing staff turnover. By developing and documenting policies and procedures for meeting statutory requirements, USICH could help ensure it consistently performs statutory obligations and furthers its mission to prevent and end homelessness. Doing so also could help USICH communicate timely information to other stakeholders, including Congress and federal, state, and local partners.