# Target Practice:
## Lessons for Poverty Reduction

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CLASP
CENTER FOR LAW AND SOCIAL POLICY

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CLASP develops and advocates for policies at the federal, state and local levels that improve the lives of low income people. We focus on policies that strengthen families and create pathways to education and work. Through careful research and analysis and effective advocacy, we develop and promote new ideas, mobilize others, and directly assist governments and advocates to put in place successful strategies that deliver results that matter to people across America.

CLASP has played a key role in the re-emergence of poverty and opportunity in recent public discourse. In 2006 CLASP published *Targeting Poverty: Aim at a Bull's Eye* which telescoped the potential for a new political climate toward those struggling to make ends meet. In addition to tracking developments around the nation, CLASP provides technical assistance related to raising the political profile of poverty and opportunity. Look for CLASP audio conferences and issue briefs on a range of related.topics.

## About the Authors

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# Target Practice:
# Lessons for Poverty Reduction

Poverty reduction targets have begun to gain political traction in the last few years. Targets – a numerical goal and a timeline for achieving that goal – are somewhat novel in tackling poverty. While eight states have established a poverty reduction target, three became law just in 2008.[1] States are still learning from each other. In contrast, targets are much more commonplace in other policy arenas, such as the environment and homelessness.

Perhaps the most prominent application of targets is aimed at reducing the greenhouse gas emissions which contribute to global climate change. Such efforts involve not only government action, but corporate engagement as well. While less well known, targets are also an active tool in homelessness policy, as both the federal government and more than 350 communities have adopted targets to end chronic or overall homelessness in 10 years.

*Target Practice* highlights the experience with targets in these two arenas. While each faces unique substantive challenges in finding the right mix of policy and politics to achieve goals, there are potential lessons that can be applied to poverty targets as they have developed to date, which are identified in the final section of this report.

The aim of *Target Practice* is simple – to build awareness among those who work on poverty reduction that policy targets are being utilized in other arenas and that their adoption by local, state, and the federal government offers important insights useful for poverty reduction initiatives. Targets establish a shared vision that asserts that the problem deserves attention and talent to solve it, setting the stage for policy choices and program implementation. We hope to share more insights as the nation gains more practice with policy targets.

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# Global Warming Targets – Reducing Greenhouse Gases

With the scientific community in almost unanimous consensus that human activity is contributing to global climate change through the emission of greenhouse gases, many of the world's developed countries and several states and cities within the United States have set targets to limit and reduce those greenhouse gases.

In 1997, the international community met in Kyoto, Japan, to develop a protocol for reducing greenhouse gases. Most of the world's industrialized countries agreed to a target: by 2012 gas emissions would be reduced below 1990 levels by an average of 5 percent per country.[2] However, the target only applied to developed countries, excluding major greenhouse gas emitters like China and India. And though the United States signed the Kyoto Protocol, neither the Clinton nor Bush administrations sent it to Congress for ratification, and the Senate later passed a resolution against ratification, arguing that developing countries should be included. In 2005 the Kyoto Protocol became law for the more than 140 countries that ratified it, but not the United States. The U.S. still lacks a national target for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

In the absence of a federal target, and driven by the scientific consensus that global warming is threatening the environmental and economic health of communities, state and local governments – led by both Republicans and Democrats – have taken the lead in setting their own targets. Some governments are establishing cap-and-trade systems, where they set an overall cap on the amount of emissions that can be released. They then can auction off emissions allowances to individual emitters, who can trade those allowances with one another, as some will be able to reduce emissions more easily than others.[3] In the 1990s, the United States used this type of cap-and-trade system to effectively combat acid rain, and power plants actually reduced sulfur dioxide emissions 22 percent below the mandated levels.[4]

In addition to cap-and-trade, states and cities are pursuing their targets through a range of other strategies. These include adopting renewable energy standards[5]; encouraging more energy efficiency in buildings and homes; investing in public transportation infrastructure; incentivizing or requiring more fuel-efficient vehicles; creating more green space; and preventing deforestation. Public campaigns have developed around these strategies to press governments to take action, including initiatives such as the "We Can Solve It" campaign, a drive to make 100 percent of our energy from renewable sources within 10 years.[6] Many of these strategies not only demand government action, but inevitably require business behaviors to change as well.

Targets have been established at the state, regional, and local levels:

**State Targets** - In 2003, Maine became the first state to adopt a greenhouse gas reduction target: by 2010, emissions are to drop to 1990 levels. Since 2003, at least 16 other states have adopted statewide targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The most prominent is California, where Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed the Global Warming Solutions Act in 2006,[7] setting a target for reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2020. This essentially means a 25 percent reduction at the current emissions rate. The act makes California the first state to adopt a cap-and-trade program that includes enforceable penalties on emitters. The state has taken a number of major steps to reach its target, including passing a more recent, unprecedented law which comprehensively links regional development planning, affordable housing, and public transit development.[8]

> *"California has achieved the right balance, the goals they have established are reasonable enough to meet, and ambitious enough to spur innovation. This is a big deal and a beautiful example of leadership and bi-partisanship at work."*
>
> Eileen Clausen, President of the Pew Center for Global Climate Change

**Regional Targets** – Some states, including several with their own targets, are joining together to adopt regional targets and create uniform regional environmental regulations. In addition to the obvious value of neighboring states sharing the same goals to reduce emissions, regional collaborations serve to reduce work duplication that would otherwise occur between states.[9] The Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, a consortium of 10 Northeastern and Mid-Atlantic states, joined together to form a regional wide cap-and-trade system. They expect to establish a cap on carbon emissions by 2009, and by 2018 will reduce emissions by 10 percent.[10] The consortium created a nonprofit tasked with providing a range of technical and support services to help member states meet their regional target.

Another regional target has been set by the Western Climate Initiative, a group of seven states and four Canadian provinces. It has a target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the west to 15 percent below 2005 levels by 2020.[11] The Western Climate Initiative provides extensive support to help these states meet their regional target, and recently released comprehensive recommendations for the design of a regional cap-and-trade system.

**City Targets** – Local governments also have refused to wait for a national emissions target. On February 16, 2005, the same day that the Kyoto Protocol became law for 141 nations but not the United States, Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels launched the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement. Under this agreement, 141 mayors adopted a target for reducing gas emissions in their own cities to at least Kyoto levels, or to 7 percent below 1990 levels by 2012. Since that time, more than 900 mayors – from small towns to the

nation's biggest cities, representing Democrats and Republicans, from every state and the District of Columbia – have signed on to the agreement. These cities have embraced a range of strategies designed to help them reach their targets, thanks in part to the Climate Protection Center, started by the U.S. Conference of Mayors in 2007 to promote best practices and equip the cities with the tools needed to achieve their emission reduction targets. Though it is too soon for most greenhouse gas targets to show emission reductions, in 2007 Seattle announced that it had cut greenhouse gas emissions by 8 percent between 1990 and 2005.[12]

*"Signing this agreement is an important step in the greening of Cincinnati. We are sending a message that these issues are real and that we must pay attention to them. It is time to take proactive steps."*

Mark Mallory, Mayor of Cincinnati

In addition to adopting emissions reduction targets, the cities that signed on to the Climate Protection Agreement also committed to lobbying the federal government to adopt a national emissions reduction target. While the cities are pursuing local strategies that move them closer to their target, they are clear about the need for the federal government to embrace a national target. As Mayor Nickels said: "Change is in the air and the time to act is now. In Seattle, where our electric utility is carbon neutral, we are showing that you can power a city without toasting a planet. Now we need our leaders in Washington to step up to the aggressive but achievable goal of cutting emissions 80 percent nationwide by 2050."[13]

There are signs that the federal government may be hearing the message about the need for its engagement. In July 2008, leaders of the world's richest nations pledged a target of cutting greenhouse gas emissions in half by 2050, marking the first time the Bush White House supported a target for the reduction of greenhouse gases.[14] Further, legislation which would establish a cap-and-trade system and set a target for reducing greenhouse gas emissions has been introduced in Congress, and additional proposals are anticipated in the next Congress.[15]

# Homelessness Targets – Ten Year Plans

Over the last decade, the idea of setting targets has caught steam in the homelessness arena as well. Many local governments and the federal government have committed to ending *chronic* homelessness in 10 years. In contrast to environmental targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the *chronic* homelessness target was first initiated by the federal government and then spread to the states and cities.

In 2000, the National Alliance to End Homelessness (the Alliance), a nonprofit advocacy organization, released *A Plan, Not a Dream: How to End Homelessness In Ten Years*,[16] which identified action steps to end homelessness. The report emphasized a 10 year time frame for accomplishing the goal. The Alliance identified four broad strategies to reach its target – acquire and utilize better data on homelessness; close the "front door" into homelessness by investing more in prevention efforts; open the "back door" out of homelessness by creating more affordable housing; and build the infrastructure to ensure that mainstream systems were working to end homelessness and help lift people out of poverty.

This plan, coupled with compelling research, led the Bush Administration to declare its own target around homelessness, though one with a much more limited population. A number of studies[17] had focused on *chronic* homelessness, meaning long-term or repeated homelessness accompanied by some type of debilitating condition, such as a substance use disorder or mental illness. Research found that this group, estimated at a quarter of the homeless population overall, utilize a disproportionate amount of homelessness resources, as well as public resources through interventions such as frequent emergency room visits, hospital stays, and arrests. The findings suggested that chronic homelessness not only was solvable, but also could be ended through "permanent supportive housing" in which housing is linked with intensive support services. Finally, the research found that placing chronically homeless people in permanent supportive housing could be cost-effective. When chronically homeless people are housed, there are fewer public interventions, like emergency room visits and jail time.

Driven by this research, the Bush Administration adopted the goal to end *chronic* homelessness in 10 years.[18] U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Secretary Mel Martinez announced the Administration's support of such a plan in 2001.[19] Several months later, the Bush Administration explicitly stated its chronic homelessness target in the Fiscal Year 2003 budget proposal: "The Administration has made ending chronic homelessness in the next decade a top objective."[20]

> *"The Administration has made ending chronic homelessness in the next decade a top objective."*
> Administration's Fiscal Year 2003 Budget

Support for ending chronic homelessness continued to grow. The bi-partisan Millennial Housing Commission set up by Congress to study the importance of housing, particularly affordable housing, also endorsed the target. The Commission asserted that it "strongly endorses a program to end chronic homelessness within ten years through the provision of additional supportive housing."[21] The 2002 report called for 150,000 units of permanent supportive housing.

By the end of 2002, the national target to end chronic homelessness in 10 years was well established, and the Administration begin to take steps to move toward its goal. These steps fell into two main categories: first, increased funding for homelessness through the Department of Housing and Urban Development's McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, the primary federal homelessness program; and second, federal promotion of local 10 year plans to end chronic homelessness.

## *Increasing Federal Funding for Homelessness*

The primary federal homelessness program is the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, or the McKinney program. Under this program, a number of different groups in a geographic area – homelessness service providers, local government officials, and other interested parties – submit a joint application to HUD for funding for homeless-related projects in the geographic area. These funds can support emergency shelter, transitional housing, permanent housing, and supportive services.

During the Bush Administration, mainstream, affordable housing programs have not fared well, but homelessness funding has consistently increased. So while the Bush Administration proposed and secured either cuts or nominal funding for the Section 8 program, public housing, Community Development Block Grants, and other low-income housing programs, it has proposed and secured increases for the McKinney program.[22] In its budget requests, the Administration cited the chronic homelessness target as a reason for the proposed increases in funding for McKinney.[23]

In addition to increasing overall funding for McKinney, the Administration and Congress have directed a greater percentage of McKinney funds to serve chronically homeless people. In the late 1990s, Congress began instituting a set aside to ensure that at least 30 percent of funding in the McKinney program was directed toward permanent supportive housing, usually used to serve chronically homeless people.

However, despite these funding increases, housing advocates and analysts agree that the McKinney funding levels are still far short of what is needed to create the 150,000 units of permanent supportive housing essential to put an end to chronic homelessness.

Further, some argue that the cuts to the much larger, mainstream affordable housing programs undermine the ability of communities to respond to homelessness. This is because these mainstream programs often are vital funding sources for permanent supportive housing – the McKinney funds have never done the whole job. McKinney mostly funds operating costs while other programs are used to construct the housing (e.g. the Low Income Housing Tax Credit) and to subsidize rents. As the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities noted, "Even if McKinney funding were to grow at *twice* the recent rate of growth, the resulting resources would not even offset the impact of the cuts that have already been made as well as the deep cuts in funding for mainstream federal low-income housing assistance programs that the Administration is likely to propose."

## *Local Plans Expand On Federal Promotion to End Chronic Homelessness*

The Administration has also pursued its target to end chronic homelessness by building on an idea from the Alliance's *A Plan, Not a Dream: How to End Homelessness in Ten Years*, which encouraged local communities to create their own plans to end overall homelessness in 10 years.[24] In part to foster local plans, the Bush Administration reactivated the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (the Interagency Council), with the stated mission to coordinate the federal response to homelessness. It has reached out to communities encouraging them to develop their own local 10 year plans to end chronic homelessness.

One of the first major acts of the Interagency Council came in 2003, when its Executive Director Philip Mangano challenged 100 cities at the annual meeting of the U.S. Conference of Mayors to adopt plans to end chronic homelessness. The U.S. Conference of Mayors endorsed a resolution in favor of meeting the challenge, and later that year the U.S. League of Cities and the National Association of Counties also endorsed resolutions in favor of plans to end chronic homelessness in 10 years.[25]

Since that time, more than 350 communities across the United States have either completed or are in the process of developing a 10 year plan to end homelessness overall or chronic homelessness in particular.[26] These plans are usually created by a diverse set of stakeholders – service providers, housing developers, business leaders, local government officials, and other interested parties.

Whereas the Interagency Council promotes the development of *chronic* homelessness targets, most communities followed the example of the Alliance and adopted plans to end homelessness *overall*. As the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities notes, "The chronically homeless make up only a small proportion of the homeless population in

most communities, and well-designed community plans to end homelessness are based on a rigorous assessment of local needs."[27] The National Alliance to End Homelessness reports that the majority – 66 percent – of local plans are focused on ending homelessness *overall* in 10 years while an exclusive focus on *chronic* homelessness is limited to 34 percent.[28]

The Interagency Council has been a partner in many of these plans by publicly encouraging community leaders to create a plan and through offering support to individual communities through its regional coordinators. In addition to the Interagency Council's role, HUD modified McKinney funding criteria in FY 2004 so that communities with 10 year plans to end chronic homelessness receive higher scores in the competitive grant process – a strong incentive for more places to create local homelessness targets either aimed at ending chronic homelessness specifically or chronic homelessness as part of ending all homelessness.[29] A number of advocates believe this incentive has the effect of leading some communities to create 10 year plans to end chronic or overall homelessness that are in name only. They argue that the plans are created to improve the chances of receiving federal funds, yet have resulted in relatively little action to actually make progress on the target, including no increased local funding.[30]

For some communities, however, the chronic homelessness target has contributed to an outcome few thought possible several years ago – reducing the number of chronically homeless people and even the number of homeless people overall. Many communities with 10 year plans have developed new and innovative approaches, fine-tuned strategies, and directed more public and private local resources toward accomplishing their target. Some communities, like Portland, Oregon; Hennepin County, Minnesota; and Denver, Colorado; have seen significant reductions in chronic and overall homelessness.[31]

And there are signs that the federal government may be making progress toward its target to reduce chronic homelessness nationwide. In July 2008, the Bush Administration announced that between 2005 and 2007 chronic homelessness declined almost 30 percent from about 176,000 down to 124,000. Further, homelessness overall declined in this period, from over 750,000 on a single night to just more than 665,000.[32]

# Lessons For Poverty Reduction

A policy target sets a numerical goal and a timeline for achieving it. Eight states have set a target for reducing poverty, and several more have other poverty initiatives (see *Seizing the Moment*).[33] While these states are pointing the way, the target practice with greenhouse gas emissions and homelessness can also offer some lessons that should inform poverty targets and what they can and cannot accomplish. There are, of course, many differences between these policy issues, but what follows is a top 10 list of potential lessons for poverty reduction targets:

1.  **A target transforms the debate.** Some view a target as too simple for complex problems. But the simplicity of a target can be one of its strengths. A target establishes a shared, easily understood vision that says a particular problem deserves to be – and can be – tackled. Poverty is sometimes viewed as a condition that "will always be with us." Similarly, until the late 1990s and early 2000s, chronic homelessness, by definition, was assumed to be intractable. However, 10 year plans and the success of individual cities' related efforts to end chronic homelessness have fundamentally changed many policymakers' perception. And targets can tackle problems far greater in scope than chronic homelessness. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions requires a comprehensive approach that touches many different arenas, including a change of behavior by utility companies and powerful corporate enterprises. Likewise, the complexity inherent in poverty in the United States can be guided by a target that sets a numerical goal and timeline.

    > *"Change is in the air and the time to act is now. In Seattle, where our electric utility is carbon neutral, we are showing that you can power a city without toasting a planet. Now we need our leaders in Washington to step up to the aggressive but achievable goal of cutting emissions 80 percent nationwide by 2050."*
    > Greg Nickels, Mayor of Seattle

2.  **A target is more realizable if solutions are identified.** It is hard to take aim at a target without clear focus. In other words, the political feasibility for establishing a target and being able to realize it increases when there are ways to achieve it. Ten year plans to end chronic homelessness gained steam in part due to research which suggested that permanent supportive housing could effectively house a chronically homeless person, and that it was actually cost effective. The regional greenhouse gas reduction targets, as well as some state and city targets, establish the overall framework, or solution, for reducing greenhouse gases – a cap-and-trade system. Many of the solutions for cutting poverty already exist. A recent report by the Center for American Progress, "From Poverty to Prosperity," identifies a range of existing strategies for cutting poverty, and demonstrates how implementation of four could alone lead to a 26 percent reduction in poverty over 10 years.[34]

3. **A target is a useful tool that must be wielded into action.** A target simply sets the goal. Reaching the target requires political commitment and action. Around the nation, numerous communities that have set out to end chronic homelessness in 10 years have reduced its incidence and the target has catalyzed progress. However, in some communities that have adopted targets, it appears the plans were developed to gain a higher HUD funding score, but few or no local actionable steps have followed. In some of those communities, advocates have wielded the policy tool – the target – to promote attention to inaction. In the poverty arena, the target has been used to galvanize advocacy in the face of political challenges. For example, in Connecticut, where a child poverty reduction target has been set, advocates were able to gain legislative approval for a state earned income tax which would reduce poverty. However, the governor chose to veto the bill. In the face of this challenge, advocates promoted a different, and successful, new law designed to help meet the target. The bill provides localities with matching funds (through the Food Stamp Employment and Training program) for poverty reduction strategies.[35]

4. **A target is enhanced when all levels of government participate.** States have begun to take the lead in setting poverty targets, much as states and cities have done in greenhouse gas reduction targets, as at least 16 states and 900 cities have adopted such a target. Some states have furthered their commitment by joining with neighboring states and adopting regional greenhouse gas targets. But these states and cities recognize the importance of a national target and are encouraging the federal government to get on board. Similarly, though the chronic homelessness target was initiated by the federal government and then spread to the cities, those communities are now pushing the federal government to increase funding in order to create more permanent supportive housing and meet the objectives put forth in local 10 year plans to end chronic homelessness or homelessness overall. A poverty target supported by the federal government enhances state capacity to get the job done. A national goal to cut poverty in half over the next 10 years was approved in a U.S. House of Representatives Sense of Congress resolution in January, 2008.[36] And Barack Obama, the 44th President of the United States, pledged to cut poverty in half during his presidential campaign, noting it "is a goal that I will set as President of the United States of America."[37] While localities and states can lead the way, their efforts can be enhanced with a federal partnership.

*Cities are on the frontlines of climate change with mayors leading the way. But we can't do it alone. We need the federal government to be a real partner with us."*

Douglas Palmer, Mayor of Trenton, New Jersey, and President of the U.S. Conference of Mayors

5. **A target can break down silos and engage the private sector.** An important result of 10 year plans to end chronic or overall homelessness is that they

have helped to break down service assistance silos. At the community level, creating 10 year plans and successfully implementing them requires coordinating the delivery of services between different agencies – mental health authorities, TANF agencies, public housing authorities, the corrections system, and others. Crossing silos has been an outgrowth of poverty targets as well. Officials involved in the poverty targets in both the United Kingdom and Connecticut have noted that these targets have catalyzed different agencies to work together toward a shared goal.[38] In addition to cutting across government silos, targets can help engage the private sector as well. Private sector leaders have helped champion 10 year plans to end chronic homelessness in certain communities, and businesses, like utility companies, are the ones who must reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

6. **A target is more achievable with a dedicated technical assistance entity.** Government or nonprofit technical assistance entities can assist all levels of government in achieving a target. The Interagency Council is tasked with helping the federal government meet its chronic homelessness target, and has been a driver in encouraging local communities to adopt their own 10 year plans to end chronic homelessness. The Mayors Climate Protection Center assists local governments by promoting innovative best practices on greenhouse gas reductions – ranging from green roofs on government buildings to carbon sequestration programs – to help cities meet their targets. Technical assistance entities play a role at the regional level as well, as the states collaborating on regional initiatives have formed entities that design a cap-and-trade system and provide other technical support. A similar governmental or nonprofit technical assistance entity could help all levels of government establish and make progress toward a poverty target.

7. **A target can leverage action beyond the original vision.** Greenhouse gas reduction targets have led to a broadened focus, most dramatically illustrated by California's new law which links public transit, affordable housing, and regional development with reducing the gas emissions causing global warming. And while the federal government adopted a 10 year target specifically geared toward chronic homelessness, the majority of communities with 10 year plans have focused on overall homelessness. Further, while there has been more federal funding directed to permanent supportive housing for chronically homeless people, a number of communities have seen reductions in family homelessness as well. In the poverty arena, Illinois has a law to cut extreme poverty in half by 2015, and proponents contend that the tight focus will show success and provide the framework for addressing poverty overall.[39]

8. **A target should track progress and be transparent.** State and local governments and regional initiatives with greenhouse gas targets have mechanisms in place to track the gas emissions. On the homelessness front, individual communities

are required by HUD to conduct a homelessness count every other year, and most do it annually, allowing them to track progress toward meeting their 10 year plan to end chronic or overall homelessness. Further, when the federal government adopted its target, the Bush Administration and the Millennial Housing Commission calculated that to solve the problem it would take 150,000 units of permanent supportive housing over 10 years, and it called for the creation of these units to be tracked. Transparency in reporting progress is critical to building legitimacy. Some homeless advocates dispute the federal government's recent reported decline in chronic and overall homelessness, illustrating the importance of transparency and consistent reporting. Where poverty targets have been established, they generally call for periodic reporting on progress to an oversight entity.

> *"There's a lot of attention, a lot of concern, and a lot of effort to make sure…we don't miss [the milestones]. No one wants to be responsible for not meeting the milestones."*
>
> Mike Bull, Minnesota Office of Energy Security

9. **A target can generate attention to a resources gap.** Since calling for 150,000 units of permanent supportive housing to meet the target to end chronic homelessness in 10 years, the Bush Administration has proposed and secured increases for the primary federal homelessness program, the McKinney program. This increase has allowed communities to create more units of permanent supportive housing for chronically homeless people and make progress on their 10 year plans. But these modest increases – coupled with the cuts and nominal funding in mainstream affordable housing programs – have not been sufficient to get the country on track to create enough permanent supportive housing units to end chronic homelessness in 10 years. National advocacy groups as well as local advocates can use the target as a means of lobbying for more federal resources dedicated to serving chronically homeless people. When resources are tight, a poverty target can be a tool for activists inside and outside government to draw attention to the gap in resources needed to tackle poverty. In the UK, where three kinds of child poverty targets are tracked, reports showed that absolute but not relative poverty had been reduced on schedule. This led officials to call for "redoubling" efforts.[40]

10. **A target works best with metrics that measure shared thresholds and policy impacts.** Sometimes metrics are mired in politics. For example, while there is general agreement over who is chronically homeless,[41] how to define overall homelessness is quite controversial. Some homelessness advocates contend that the current federal threshold for homelessness is set too low – while it counts those in shelters and on the streets, it fails to adequately capture many who are living doubled-up with family or friends. So, in those communities that seek to end overall homelessness there may be different views of who needs to be counted in order to claim success. Similarly, in the poverty arena, most agree that the official federal poverty measure fails to adequately capture many who face significant struggles to

make ends meet. In some states, even where the target is tied to reducing the number who live below 100 percent of poverty, progress reports include information on those who live at higher thresholds such as 150 percent or 200 percent of poverty. A shared view of the appropriate threshold translates into a shared view of success in meeting the target. A related issue is whether the metric captures the impact of the policies designed to meet the target. For chronic homelessness, the principle policy intervention is more permanent supportive housing. For poverty, the current measure is antiquated. It does not count taxes or near-cash benefits as income so it fails to capture tax liabilities or the impact of a range of policies such as the Earned Income Tax Credit and housing subsidies; it also fails to adequately capture family expenditures such as child care. Further, the current measure does not provide for regional variations regarding the income level at which someone is considered poor; regional variations would reflect the substantial difference in housing costs across the nation. The response to these flaws in the official poverty measure range from the establishment of a better one (e.g. New York City)[42] to the inclusion of additional, available metrics (e.g. school drop out).[43] Bills pending in Congress would modernize the poverty measure. It is not clear how fast the legislation will move. Yet, while it is best when metrics are perfect, imperfection should not cause inaction.[44]

The experience with targets in these two arenas offers these lessons – and many more – for those working to reduce poverty. Targets are used to take on problems as seemingly intractable as homelessness, and as large and complex as global warming. A poverty target – at the federal, state or local level – can be an important tool in shaping a shared vision and leading to policies and programs that can make progress toward achieving the goal. With a new Administration, a new Congress, and new leadership throughout the country, the time is right to commit to reducing poverty. A target can be the tool that catalyzes action. Take aim.
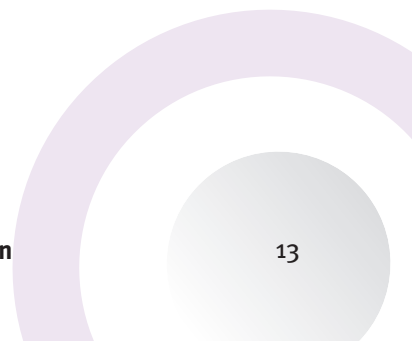
## *Endnotes*

1. Illinois, Louisiana, and Maine established targets in 2008; Connecticut, Delaware, Minnesota Vermont, Washington also have poverty reduction targets. State timeframes vary as does the population – some focus on child poverty, others on extreme poverty or all overall poverty. For more information on state efforts to reduce poverty, see the CLASP report *Seizing the Moment*. http://www.clasp.org/publications/clasp_report_0418.pdf

2. Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. 1998. http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/kpeng.pdf

3. Under a typical cap-and-trade system, the cap on allowable emissions will reduce over time, as emitters find ways to become more efficient. Further, the revenue the governmental entity gains from auctioning off emissions can be used to invest in other strategies to combat climate change and promote economic development. For more information, visit the Center for American Progress at http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2008/01/capandtrade101.html

4. "The Cap and Trade Success Story." Environmental Defense Fund. 2008. http://www.edf.org/page.cfm?tagID=1085

5. At least 26 states and the District of Columbia have adopted targets for renewable energy. Most of the targets stipulate that a certain percentage of electricity generated by a power plant must come from re-newable sources by a given date. For more information, visit the Pew Center on Global Climate Change at http://www.pewclimate.org/what_s_being_done/in_the_states/rps.cfm

6. "We Can Solve It" Campaign. 2008. http://www.wecansolveit.org/

7. "California Global Warming Solutions Act." Pew Center on Global Climate Change. 2008. http://www.pewclimate.org/what_s_being_done/in_the_states/ab32

8. California SB 375 http://info.sen.ca.gov/pub/07-08/bill/sen/sb_0351-0400/sb_375_cfa_20080818_153416_asm_comm.html

9. "Regional Initiatives." Pew Center on Global Climate Change. 2008. http://www.pewclimate.org/what_s_being_done/in_the_states/regional_initiatives.cfm

10. For more information on the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, visit http://www.rggi.org/home

11. For more information on the Western Climate Initiative, visit http://www.westernclimateinitiative.org/

12. Cornwall, Warren. "Seattle Reports Milestone in Cutting Emissions." *The Seattle Times*. 30 October 2007. http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/localnews/2003982610_kyoto30m.html

13. "Mayor Launches Major Drive for Immediate Federal Climate Action." City of Seattle. 25 January 2007. http://www.seattle.gov/news/detail.asp?ID=6963&Dept=40

14. While some environmental advocates have praised the G8 countries adopting the emissions reduction targets, they have also pointed out that it is unclear whether the 50 percent reduction applies current greenhouse gas levels or 1990 levels. Further, some advocates and scientists have expressed concern that the agreement only sets a long-term target and fails to set interim targets for the reduction of green-house gases over the next decade. For more information, see, "Richest Nations Pledge to Halve Greenhouse Gas." *New York Times*. http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/09/science/earth/09climate.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=G8%20greenhouse%20gas%20emissions&st=cse

15. For more information, visit the Pew Center on Global Climate Change at http://www.pewclimate.org/federal

16. *A Plan, Not a Dream: How to End Homelessness in Ten Years*. National Alliance to End Homelessness. 1 June 2000. http://www.endhomelessness.org/content/article/detail/585

17. Since the late 1990s, chronic homelessness has been well researched. University of Pennsylvania Professor Dennis Culhane is the most prominent chronic homelessness researcher. One of his most oft-cited studies is *Public Service Reductions Associated with Placement of Homeless Persons with Severe Mental Illness in Supportive Housing*, coauthored with Stephen Metraux and Trevor Hadley. http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1067&context=spp_papers

18. At a speech to the National Alliance to End Homelessness annual conference in 2002, HUD Secretary Mel Martinez said, "[T]he costs associated with placing a homeless person in supportive housing are essentially the same as maintaining and managing that person in a state of homelessness…The research makes it clear that our best hope for ending homelessness of every sort depends on addressing chronic homelessness. We are setting policy based on that research." http://www.hud.gov/news/speeches/endhomelessness.cfm

19. "Secretary Martinez's Remarks to the National Alliance to End Homelessness." Department of Housing and Urban Development. 20 July 2001. http://www.hud.gov/news/speeches/homelessness.cfm

20. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Bush Administration's Fiscal Year 2003 Budget Proposal. http://www.gpoaccess.gov/usbudget/fy03/pdf/bud16.pdf - (pg. 9 in PDF, pg. 179 of budget)

21. *Meeting Our Nation's Housing Challenges: Report of the Bipartisan Millennial Housing Commission* Appointed by the Congress of the United States. 30 May 2002. http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/mhc/MHCReport.pdf

22. As Douglas Rice and Barbara Sard of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities note in *Cuts in Federal Housing Assistance are Undermining Community Plans to End Homelessness*, "One bright spot in the HUD budget has been the McKinney Homeless Assistance Grant Program, whose funding grew by nearly $70 million (or 5.3 percent) in real terms between fiscal years 2002 and 2006." Since FY 2006, McKinney has continued to grow from $1.3 billion in FY 2006 to over $1.6 billion proposed for FY 2009. http://www.cbpp.org/2-1-07hous.pdf

23. In addition to increasing overall funding for McKinney, the Administration and Congress have directed a greater percentage of McKinney funds to serve chronically homeless people. In the late 1990s, Congress established a set aside through the appropriations process to ensure that at least 30 percent of funding in the McKinney program was directed toward permanent supportive housing, usually used to serve chronically homeless people. Congress has continued this set aside every year since it was first instituted.

24. *A New Vision: What is in Community Plans to End Homelessness*. National Alliance to End Homelessness. November 2006. http://www.endhomelessness.org/content/article/detail/1397

25. The U.S. Conference of Mayors endorsement of 10 year plans to end chronic homelessness can be found on page 41of its approved resolutions in June 2003. http://www.usmayors.org/71stAnnualMeeting/resolutions2003.pdf

26. "City and County Ten Year Plan Update" United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. 2008. http://www.usich.gov/slocal/10-year-plan-communities.pdf

27. See 22

28. *A New Vision: What is in Community Plans to End Homelessness*. National Alliance to End Homelessness. November 2006. http://www.endhomelessness.org/content/article/detail/1397

29. See 22

30 The National Policy and Advocacy Council on Homelessness Comment on U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Strategic Plan. March 2006. http://www.npach.org/npach_hud_comments2006-11.pdf

31  For more information on these communities and others, and how they achieved these reductions, visit the Web site of the National Alliance to End Homelessness (www.endhomelessness.org) and explore the *Community Snapshot* series.

32  Some counter that the lower numbers are more attributable to varying methodologies in counting homeless people than to actual decreases in chronic or overall homelessness. http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1827876,00.html

33  *Seizing the Moment: State Governments and the New Commitment to Reduce Poverty in America*. Center for Law and Social Policy. April 2008. http://www.clasp.org/publications/clasp_report_0418.pdf

34  *From Poverty to Prosperity: A National Strategy to Cut Poverty in Half*. Center for American Progress. April 2007. http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2007/04/pdf/poverty_report.pdf

35  SB 344, An Act Concerning Family Prosperity and the Recommendations of the Child Poverty and Prevention Council

36  H.Con. Res 198

37  Barack Obama, speech in Grand Rapids, Michigan. 14 May 2008. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/14/AR2008051403533_pf.html

38  Connecticut's Commitment to End Child Poverty: An Interview with Pat Wilson-Coker, former commissioner of Connecticut's Department of Social Services. 6 February 2007. http://www.clasp.org/AudioArchive.htm

39  "Half in Ten Event." Center for American Progress. 28 July 2008. Video. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eVC_RozjSKo

40  *The Experience of the U.K. Child Poverty Target*. Center for American Progress. November 2008 http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2008/11/pdf/uk_child_poverty.pdf

41  A chronically homeless person is defined by HUD as an unaccompanied adult with a disability (substance use disorder, serious mental illness, developmental disability, or chronic physical illness or disability) who has been homeless continuously for a year or more, or three times in the past four years. There is agreement among policymakers and advocates that families with a head of household who meets this definition should also be defined as chronically homeless, and included in the 30 percent set aside. Recent efforts to reauthorize the McKinney Act would make this change to define these families as chronically homeless.

42  Testimony of Mark Levitan. *Testimony on Measuring American Poverty. The Need for Federal Action to Improve the Nation's Poverty Measure: Lessons From New York*. House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support. 17 July 2008. http://www.nyc.gov/html/ceo/downloads/pdf/Levitan_Testimony_071708.pdf

43  Poverty impact statements have been proposed as a means for understanding how different legislative proposals might influence poverty rates.  This concept would not substitute for an improved official poverty measure but its implementation has the potential to enhance decisions on how to meet targets. To date, the concept of a poverty impact statement has been included in a federal bill, The Poverty Impact Trigger Act of 2007 and a California bill, AB 690, which, in the context of a child poverty target, would require state budgets to include a projection of their poverty impact.   In addition, poverty impacts have been or are already being modeled. The Center for American Progress report "From Poverty to Prosperity" modeled a set of policies and predicted their impact on poverty; the state of Connecticut has contract with the Urban Institute to model the impact of a range of alternative policies and a report is due by the end of 2009.

44  The Measuring American Poverty Act of Act of 2008 in the House (HR 6941) and the Senate (S. 3636).
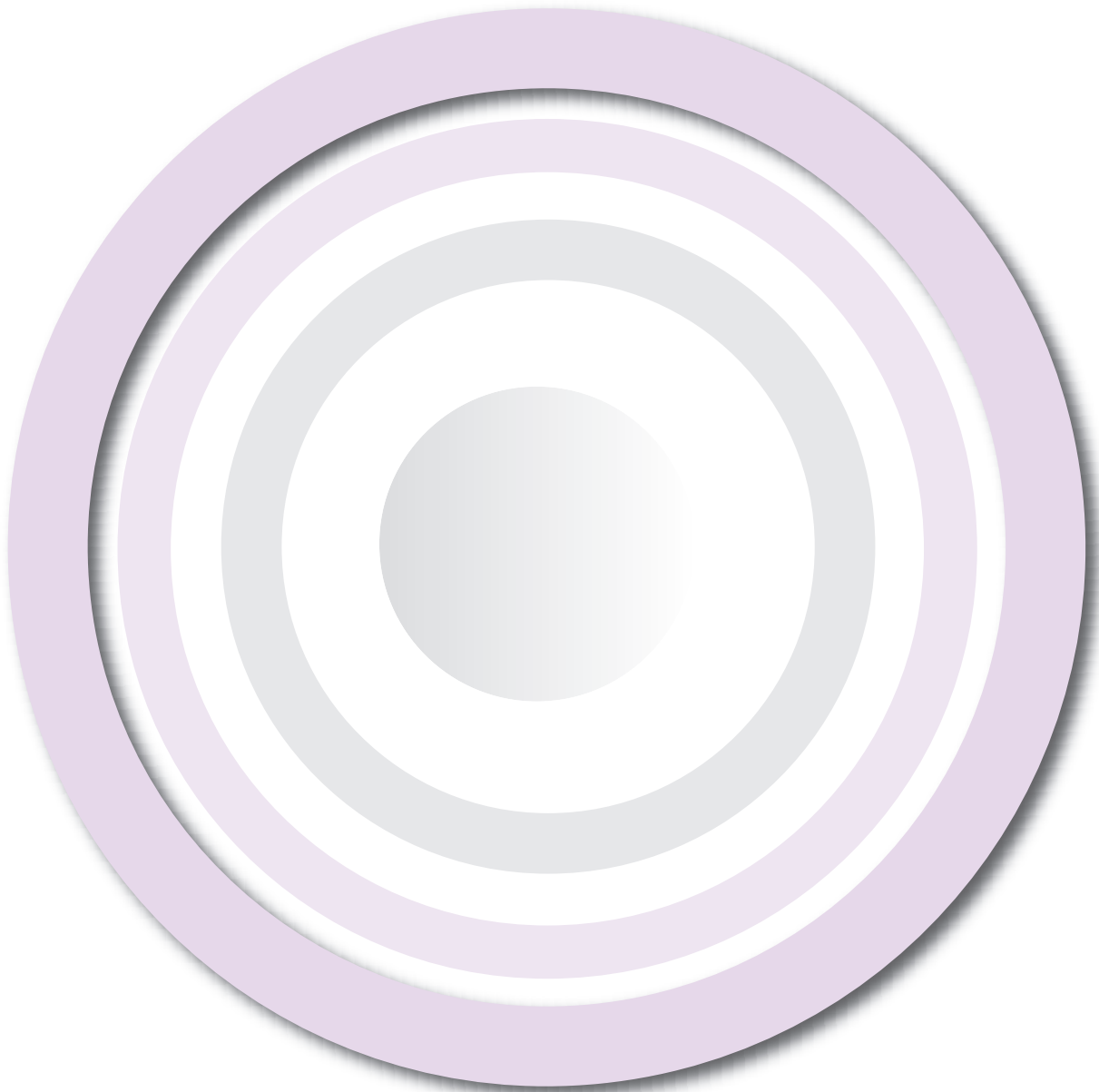
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