

Health Care for the Homeless Mobilizer

The National Health Care for the Homeless Council

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The 2005 HCH Policy Symposium *Bringing Human Rights Home*

The experience of homelessness is more than mere misfortune; it is a violation of human rights. We believe in the right to safe and affordable housing, yet up to 3.5 million Americans experience homelessness each year. We believe in the right to accessible, high quality health care, yet 45 million Americans (15.6% of the population) are uninsured. We believe in the right to a sufficient income and an adequate standard of living, yet 36 million Americans (12.5%) live in poverty. Over the past three decades, the nation's attempts to alleviate the burdens of homelessness have focused primarily on the most egregious manifestations of the problem and have failed to address the human rights infractions that are at its roots.

The National Health Care for the Homeless Council seeks to end homelessness, and the earnest pursuit of this goal requires that we go beyond incremental safety-net solutions to demand the recognition and protection of the right to health care, housing, and a livable income. The 2005 HCH Policy Symposium will educate and empower participants to work toward this goal. Symposium events will take place June 1-3 in Washington DC, in conjunction with (but organized separately from) the National HCH Conference.

Congressional Briefings

On Wednesday, June 1, 2005, Members and staff in the U.S. House and Senate are invited to two separate policy briefings conducted by the National Council. The briefings will cover issues of health care, housing, and income as they relate to the experience of homelessness. Participants will explore current Federal policies relevant to low-income individuals and families and propose recommendations for programs that would ensure every person's "right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of [one]self and [one's] family" (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25). The Senate briefing will take place at 1:00 p.m. in room 538 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building, and the House briefing will begin at 3:00 p.m. in room 1539 of the Longworth House Office Building. Each session will last approximately one hour, and will be open to anyone who wishes to attend.

The Susan L. Neibacher Address

At lunchtime on Thursday, June 2, Dr. David Himmelstein will deliver the inaugural Susan L. Neibacher Memorial Address, named in memory of the founding Executive Director of Care for the Homeless in New York City. Dr. Himmelstein practices and

teaches at Harvard Medical School and has published widely on the nation's health care crisis. A founder of Physicians for a National Health Program in 1986, Dr. Himmelstein has ardently supported single-payer national health insurance and the right to health care. As the Policy Symposium's keynote speaker, Dr. Himmelstein will offer his message of human rights and health care justice to the HCH community.

Friday in the Park

Following the Conference and Symposium workshops on Friday, June 3, we will *Rally for Human Rights* in Lafayette Park, immediately north of the White House. Come stand with us, peacefully and passionately proclaiming the need for Federal protection of the human rights to health care, housing, and livable incomes. These entitlements will only be recognized when the people to whom these rights belong – all of us – audibly and visibly demand them! Enjoy music, meet other concerned citizens, and demand justice. The rally will begin at 6:00 p.m.

ACTION:

- **Attend the National Health Care for the Homeless Conference and the HCH Policy Symposium.** For registration information, visit <http://www.bphc.hrsa.gov/hchirc>. We look forward to your participation in the wide range of workshops and events offered throughout this year's Policy Symposium.
- **Invite your Member of Congress to a Briefing**, even if you cannot attend. Call and introduce yourself and your involvement with homelessness. Ask if your Member's office has already received notice (a "Dear Colleague" letter) of the upcoming policy briefing from Senator Paul Sarbanes or Congressman Jeb Bradley (for the Senate or House briefing, respectively). Reiterate that the purpose of the briefing is to present research and offer policy recommendations that would reduce the incidence and burdens of homelessness in the United States. Provide the time and location of the relevant briefing, and emphasize the importance of your Member's attendance (or that of his or her staff) to you and to the people with whom you work. *If you, or your Member of Congress (or staff), have questions about the briefings, please contact David Johnson at 410-837-5533 (ext. 395) or e-mail djohnson@hchmd.org.*
- **Schedule a personal visit with your Congressional representatives while you are in Washington.** Though the Symposium falls during a Congressional recess, you will nonetheless have the opportunity to visit the offices of your Members of Congress during your stay in Washington. Find out who represents you at www.house.gov or www.senate.gov.
- **Read the 2005 Health Care for the Homeless Policy Statements**, soon to be posted at www.nhchc.org.

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