

# Health Care for the Homeless Mobilizer

The National Health Care for the Homeless Council

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## National Homeless and Low-Income Voter Registration Week September 21-27

*Everyone Has the Right to Vote!*

The right to vote is fundamental in the United States. Participation in our democracy enables the ordinary American to influence important social change and policy in their local communities and at the national level. Despite substantial progress toward equal voting rights for all Americans, many voters – and particularly people experiencing homelessness – remain disenfranchised. More than 3.5 million people experience homelessness each year, approximately 63 to 75 percent of whom are of voting age.<sup>1</sup> The National Council encourages *Mobilizer* readers to promote the voting rights of people experiencing homelessness by organizing voter registration drives during National Homeless and Low-Income Voter Registration Week.

### Barriers to Voter Registration

According to the National Coalition for the Homeless, only one of every three people experiencing homelessness is currently registered to vote. Of registered homeless voters, approximately 55 percent go to the polls, a sign that many people experiencing homelessness are indeed exercising their voting rights. However, as is well known to *Mobilizer* readers, many face significant obstacles to registering and voting because they lack a stable residence or proper identification. The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty reports that 39 states have mailing address requirements that ask individuals to identify an address where they can receive mail, and all states require some kind of identifying information or document in order to register and/or to vote.

### In-decision 2008

The next Election Day in the United States is Tuesday, November 4, 2008 — an election that political analysts expect to draw a significant number of new voters. Most political party candidates have not been officially chosen, but their presumptive

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<sup>1</sup> National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty. *Voter Registration and Voting: Ensuring the Voting Rights of Homeless Persons*. July, 2008.

nominees are senior Arizona Senator John McCain for the Republican Party, junior Illinois Senator Barack Obama for the Democratic Party, former Georgia Congressman Bob Barr for the Libertarian Party, Cynthia McKinney for the Green Party, and perennial candidate Ralph Nader, running this time as an independent. The Presidential Election coincides with Senate elections in 33 states, House of Representatives elections in all states, and gubernatorial elections in eleven states, as well as various state referendums and local elections.

The elected candidate from any party has the opportunity to make history by ending contemporary homelessness. To ensure that homelessness is part of the electoral debate and national agenda, the National Council, along with our partner homeless advocacy organizations, is supporting “The Five Fundamentals to End and Prevent Homelessness” campaign, which challenges candidates for all levels of public office to make ending homelessness a top priority. The “Five Fundamentals” address principal policy changes necessary to create a society in which homelessness is rare and brief.

### **“The Five Fundamentals” Campaign**

- I. Reauthorize McKinney-Vento homeless assistance programs.
- II. Dramatically increase the supply of affordable housing.
- III. Provide health care, education, and social services to all who need them.
- IV. Ensure and personal incomes are sufficient to pay for the necessities of life.
- V. End and prevent discrimination against homeless persons.

Through “The Five Fundamentals” Campaign, the National Council and its partner organizations challenge candidates to pledge publicly an end to homelessness. Mass homelessness has existed in our nation for nearly three decades. Through The Five Fundamentals, we challenge ourselves and all sectors of society—especially our government—to take action to eradicate this national injustice.

### **ACTION:**

- **Organize your own Election Center at your clinic during the week of September 21-27.** This effort has been endorsed by the National Consumer Advisory Board, and we strongly encourage local Consumer Advisory Boards to assume a leadership role in organizing voter registration drives. Voter registration drives are an excellent way to engage HCH clients in advocacy and educate them about issues related to homelessness. Find an updated version of the National Council’s voter registration guide, *Enfranchising Homeless Clients: a Resource Guide to Voter Registration for Health Care for the Homeless Projects* (2008), at [www.nhchc.org](http://www.nhchc.org).
- **Call upon candidates to endorse the Five Fundamentals to Prevent and End Homelessness campaign.** Access The Five Fundamentals to Prevent and End Homelessness toolkit at

[http://www.nlchp.org/content/pubs/FIVE\\_FUNDAMENTALS\\_CAMPAIGN\\_TOOLKIT\\_Joint\\_Effort2.pdf](http://www.nlchp.org/content/pubs/FIVE_FUNDAMENTALS_CAMPAIGN_TOOLKIT_Joint_Effort2.pdf)

- **To learn more about voting requirements and procedures**, read the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty voting rights report, *Voter Registration and Voting: Ensuring the Voting Rights of Homeless Persons*, available at [http://www.nlchp.org/content/pubs/2008\\_Voting\\_Report\\_final2.pdf](http://www.nlchp.org/content/pubs/2008_Voting_Report_final2.pdf)
- **For more information** contact the Council's Health Policy Organizer, Adrienne Breidenstine, at [abreidenstine@hchmd.org](mailto:abreidenstine@hchmd.org) or 443-703-1337.

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\$15 per year by fax, free by e-mail.

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