From out of sight to the limelight:
chronic homelessness, Housing First, and how a marginal human rights idea became economic policy under the Bush administration

Shannon M. Campbell

PS 571: Public Policy Theory
Dr. Jennifer Sykes

March 18, 2013

ABSTRACT

In 2003, the Bush administration designated a ten-year plan to end chronic homelessness as one of its top policy objectives. Its main method for doing so would be collaborating with cities nationwide to implement Housing First, a little-known model that supported creating "no-strings-attached" housing for homeless individuals with mental health issues, substance abuse issues, and other long-term problems that had led to the failure of more traditional interventions. Housing "first" meant that such individuals would be housed *before* any interventions took place, and that, while services would be made available at all times, no requirement to utilize those services would be made of them. The conservative administration's decision to adopt such a progressive policy, completely inverting the unspoken norms of "earning" and "deserving" assistance long inherent to the welfare state, took many by surprise. Upon utilizing the multiple streams framework to examine this decision, however, I found that this decision was in fact quite rational, and that the concurrent streams of problems, policies, and politics leading up to this moment, united by ideology under the direction of a few key actors, came together in a logical way to produce this moment of change.

Introduction

In 2003, in a move that would surprise many on both sides of the political aisle, the Bush administration included a ten-year plan to end chronic homelessness as one of its top policy priorities. Funds were allocated (an overall increase of 35% for homelessness-targeting programs), the dormant Interagency Council on Homelessness was revived, and an emissary was dispatched to sign up all the major cities in the nation to create their own ten-year plans modeled after the President's. This action would not only elevate "chronic homelessness" to buzzword status in the homeless services world, but would also elevate a little-known program from New York, known as *Housing First*, from local experiment to national model.

To give a brief background: the term *chronic homelessness* is meant to describe a small subpopulation of homeless individuals with a long-term history of serial homelessness. Those designated as chronically homeless often have a history of mental illness, substance abuse, or both; traditional interventions often fail in terms of ultimately securing housing. *Housing First* was developed in 1992 by a New York psychologist as a response to the needs of the mentally ill homeless population, and soon thereafter expanded to substance addicts and others with long-term problems as well. Traditional residential approaches in the homeless services sector, often denoted as "treatment-first" or "linear" models, usually follow a set sequence of events that includes sobriety, counseling, educational and vocational training, and other life improvement endeavors. When a certain standard of recovery is achieved, the person is then either aided in obtaining or released to independently pursue permanent housing. During such programs, residents are usually required to be sober and to follow certain rules, at risk of losing shelter, food, and other offered benefits should they fail. In comparison, Housing First was founded under the belief that shelter is a basic human right, and that individuals should not be forced to adopt certain behaviors in order to be housed. Homeless residents in these programs are not forced to pursue treatment or counseling of any kind—although these and other services are made available. Rather, the idea is that the program gives them both a safe place to live and the ability to make their own decisions on their own timing—taking a harm-reduction approach while restoring some level of autonomous decision-making, granting power to the "consumers" of services over the providers. While some service providers were uncomfortable with these ideas, founder Sam Tsemberis believed that stable housing provided its own foundation for recovery, while also promoting individual human rights. In an interview, he stated that policies "requiring people with mental illness to cure their clinical condition before they could house them…there's something quite discriminatory about that. There is no other population for whom this is required" (Fitzpatrick 2004:1). (As mentioned, this was later extended to cover others with long-term issues as well, under the same rationale.) If these people could handle the stress of the streets, he argued, they could handle managing an apartment and making decisions about how and when to change their lives.

This concept is a radical break from the traditional model—from the norms of welfare in general, in fact. Separating shelter and food from these service requirements is a bold move. While some more radical providers believed that the mandatory treatment model was a barrier to getting life-saving services to people, Housing First-style options were very marginal until recently, and most looked upon such interventions with suspicion. First, the traditional model rests upon the assumption that individuals need to be made "housing ready" first, or else they risk ending up right back where they started. Secondly, there has long been a history of designating recipients of assistance as either "deserving" or "undeserving" when it comes to delegating benefits.[1] In late 19th-century America, lodging houses for the poor administered a "work test" to weed out anyone lacking the "moral fiber" to put in an honest day's labor, and only offered food and shelter to those who could pass this test. The work completed was only mildly economically productive; the purpose was far more philosophical—men had to demonstrate their worthiness of assistance. This was not only an economic issue, but a moral issue (Willse 2010:159). This idea has persisted throughout the development of welfare and social services in America in various covert (and not so covert) ways, and housing is no different. "Though competing discourses have always existed…a Progressive-era moral argument that attributes housing deprivation to some personal shortcoming has persisted across generations…The idea of 'working on yourself' as a necessary part of securing and maintaining housing was routinized and codified in technologies of case management" (Willse 2010:165). Thus, the

---

[1] Social construction theory could provide valuable contributions to the study of this policy in the future.

rise of our current traditional interventions, in the form of treatment-first programs.[2] Homelessness is a "symptom of personal pathologies" that must be cured first before housing can be considered (Willse 2010:165). Housing First was completely contradictory to that understanding.

The norms and language of earning or deserving assistance have been firmly entrenched tin conservative politics for decades. So why did a conservative administration decide to adopt such a progressive policy? This "Cinderella story" of policy implementation essentially subverted the decades-old "rules" of welfare by agreeing to fund programs that targeted the "undeserving"—the homeless, the addicts, the mentally ill—with no requirements placed on those targets whatsoever. To discover the answer to this question, we turn to multiple streams framework. Upon analyzing the different elements of the process, we discovered a distinct convergence of conditions and events that created an ideal policy window, ready for a few motivated actors to utilize to create substantial change. Through the redefining of homelessness and the elevation of chronic homelessness from little-known, tenuously-defined condition to national problem, the preparedness of the designer of the original Housing First program to spread his knowledge, a changing relationship between research and policy, the rise of a new administration with its own economic priorities and agenda, and the readiness of a few key actors to manipulate and combine these events, Housing First would be spread around the country as *the* answer to addressing homelessness in communities nationwide, and over 100 cities would sign on to the president's plan to eradicate chronic homelessness within 10 years using this method (in 2011, the number was up to 234). In this paper, we will first describe our chosen framework and its key elements, and then move on to describing the events leading up to the Bush administration's decision via each of the three streams. We will then discuss the actors involved and how they converged these streams into an ideal policy window and achieved their surprising success. Through this, we will demonstrate that, while the adoption of this policy is certainly surprising at first, upon closer examination there was a definite logic at work in the events leading up to that decision.

The framework

In this paper, we will use the multiple streams framework to help us understand how a conservative administration, after decades of, at best, lackluster efforts to aid the homeless, decided to prioritize the eradication of chronic homelessness and adopted the somewhat-liberal concept of Housing First as its primary model over more traditional interventions.

The multiple streams framework revolves around timing and conditions. Three streams exist relevant to the policy-making process: problems, policies, and politics. In the hands of skilled policy entrepreneurs, these streams occasionally converge in what is termed a policy window—a window of opportunity where great change is able to occur in a short amount of time. This framework sees the collective choice behind change as not just an aggregate of individual thought, but also of context, conditions, and processes. The policy process exists in a state of ambiguity—there are always many different ways to consider the same phenomena—and what understandings of these phenomena are developed will determine the course of policy. It is not increases in information that aid policy-makers in solving problems, but the reframing of the issues in conjunction with timing and context—something we will return to momentarily.

First, let us describe the three streams of the model. The *problem stream* consists of current conditions, made apparent through general indicators, such as the raw number of homeless on the streets, or focusing events, such as the well-publicized death of a homeless child on a winter night; an event that grabs sufficient public attention. These are conditions that the populace—policymakers and citizens—may want addressed, but are not necessarily considered *problems* yet. Problems are formed interpretatively—through rhetoric, categorization, comparison to other places, or changing public opinion, to name a few. The *policy stream* consists of "floating" ideas—ideas developed in policy networks by various specialists from think tanks, congressional staffers, program managers, and so on. They are continually competing for acceptance within these communities, and only a few are ever given serious consideration. They are often developed with ideological purposes in mind, simply awaiting the right moment in time to make their

---

[2] In this paper, I do not intend to evaluate the merits or demerits of the treatment-first approach—rather, I only seek to place it within a wider philosophical context to illustrate the radical nature of what was being proposed with Housing First. In actuality, I would argue for a diversity of approaches to ending homelessness, including both models.

debut—be that changing conditions, a certain focusing event, or a new administration (as shall be discussed next). They are plans seeking a rationale for their implementation. Finally, the *politics stream* consists of the national "mood," electoral change, and special interest pressures. A new administration or ruling party can create policy opportunities that did not previously exist; changes in ideologies in the electorate can open elected officials' minds to considering new options.

Central to navigating these streams is the policy entrepreneur. According to Zahariadis, the most important task of the entrepreneur is to "clarify or create meaning" for policymakers; individuals involved in policy are divided between "those who manipulate and those who get manipulated" (Sabatier 69-70). In this model, politicians are blank canvasses waiting to receive these interpretations. Why this exalted view of the entrepreneur's abilities? Unlike in the business world, where profit is king, Zahariadis argues, policymakers do not always know their own preferences. Competing concerns confuse the idea of the best course of action—thus, the state of ambiguity we mentioned early. Rational choice-style self-interest does not apply here. Thus, policy-makers need more than information—they need to be told how to *think* of that information, and the problems to which it relates. When opportunity appears, entrepreneurs combine the streams to successfully enact new policy, skillfully weaving together political change, prepared policy solutions, and newly-formed problems to create the perfect policy window. The addition of extra financial resources from outside groups, the manipulation of language and emotion, and favorable ideological conditions all promote success, but this coupling of the streams is the crux of the theory. The political attention span is short, a "function of opportunity, bias, formal position…and the number of issues competing for policy maker attention" (Sabatier 75), and must be skillfully manipulated at the proper time. Thus, the centrality of timing over self-interest, rationality, information, or other traditionally-considered elements is paramount to this framework. In short, the ability to see how political conditions, ideologies, and a focusing event can converge to create major changes, as well as how the opportunism of select entrepreneurs may get more done in a short amount of time than our beleaguered democratic process, can be quite illuminating, and is thus the framework we will use to examine the appearance of Housing First as a national plan to end the newly-publicized problem of chronic homelessness.

Application

The homeless are not often given much weight when considering policy. Just as many of us step over their outstretched legs as we walk through downtown, ignoring cups of change thrust out in wordless appeal, the policy process has often overlooked this group as one of the lowest in our society—no economic or social capital to offer, no voice to be heard. The McKinney Act (later McKinney-Vento Act) of 1987 was the first major piece of legislation dealing with assistance for the homeless for nearly 50 years, and no major piece of legislation had occurred since. The Interagency Council on Homelessness formed in the bill, coordinating the actions of 15 different federal agencies, had gone into hibernation during the Clinton era; when it came to homelessness, the nation was silent. So how did a plan to end homelessness end up featuring so prominently in the Bush administration's first budget proposal in office—especially considering its central focus on the chronically homeless, most often comprised of the mentally ill and substance abusers? By examining the actors involved, the ideological climate, the goals of a new administration, and the recognition of a "new" problem on the streets of America, we can begin to piece together how this came about and make an argument for why things occurred as they did.

As described earlier, the multiple streams framework divides the policy process into three streams, with skilled policy entrepreneurs making sense of and combining these streams to enable change at the right moments. By singling out the elements of Housing First's rise to prominence, we can see how an MS-style logic was at work here, creating an opportunity to radically change homelessness policy in America. While describing three simultaneous streams of development has its challenges, we will seek to identify and categorize the elements of the respective processes and events into each stream, as well as point out where overlap and mini-convergences of the streams occur, as we build up to the policy window.

The problem stream

First, we must consider the conditions of the time, and how those conditions, via contact with the policy stream and the work of a few enterprising individuals, became a nationally recognized problem. As dis-

cussed earlier, problems do not occur on their own. Problems are formed interpretively via a variety of methods. It was not the sheer number of homeless people in America that prompted Housing First, nor a tragic story. It was the defining of a new form of homelessness, known as *chronic homelessness*, and its elevation from little-noticed social issue to defined economic problem that prompted a national response.

First of all, the subpopulations comprising chronic homelessness have always existed. What was new was their defining as a separate and distinct group in need of special intervention, the sudden popularity of the relatively new term among political agents, service providers, the media, and everyday citizens, its transformation into a tragic crisis affecting our most vulnerable citizens, and its new status as something worthy of the President's personal attention. Referring to our framework, these changes can be attributed to rhetoric and categorization. As mentioned, the creation of the "chronically homeless" as a defined sub-population in need of specific attention is fairly recent. The term itself, while possibly used sparingly in years previous to this, only came to concretely describe a specific group in the late '90s, a few years be-fore the events we are analyzing. The origination of the term's popularity can be traced to academia. Culhane and Kuhn, in a 1998 work examining service utilization patterns, divided homeless individuals frequenting shelters into three groups: the first of which they termed the "chronically homeless," a group typified by serial episodes of homelessness that would last for years at a time (Culhane and Kuhn 1998:41); very similar to how HUD would later characterize the group. They identified this subgroup as representing a "disproportionate consumption of system resources," and characterized primarily by age, mental disorders, and substance abuse. They noted that this group required more assistance than those in their other classifications, and recommended transitional or permanent housing to "reduce their risk for continued utilization of emergency shelter (and the associated costs)" (Culhane and Kuhn 1998:38, 40), thus making the first call for and justification of a new approach. This study had far-reaching implications. With this, a new category of homelessness was created, and a seemingly costly one at that. The widely-publicized numbers stated that, while chronically homeless individuals comprised 10% of the population, they consumed 50% of the resources made available to the homeless—numbers that would eventually be trotted out by politicians, homeless advocates, service providers, researchers, and many others for years to come. This introduced an economic angle formerly unseen—an angle that would ultimately help tie together the three streams at the moment of change, as shall be discussed at greater length later on.

Willse argues that the invention of the term chronic homelessness was, in fact, economically motivated. In an unintentional tribute to the multiple streams framework, he states that "national crises are not natural occurrences; the recognition of something *as* a national problem requiring federal intervention is a contin-gent and contested process" (Willse 2010:160). Culhane and Kuhn's seminal research, by so labeling this group and describing it as a costly drain on the social services industry, translated a little-recognized so-cial issue into a major economic problem, which would ultimately contribute to the unexpected "problem-ization" of chronic homelessness at the national level. Thus, "while at a discursive level chronic home-lessness evokes addiction and hence individual behavior and personal attributes, in practice it functions as a statistical model for assessing the economic costs of a subpopulation" (Willse 2010:171).

How successful was this problem transformation? Culhane and Kuhn's 1998 paper preceded HUD's first inclusion of the chronically homeless as a target population by only three years; two years later, it was enshrined in Bush's first national budget. In a brief period, chronic homelessness was transformed from a vague term that originated in academia into a political buzzword that started floating around nonprofits, service providers, and the public as well. Chronic homelessness soon came to reflect homelessness it-self, and ultimately portrayed a group of people as both vulnerable citizens and as a collective leech on our social services, inspiring both compassion and an urgent need to quickly determine an economical solution. In one of HUD's major reports on the subject, they argued that the chronically homeless were the hardest population to serve, and that "communities have come to recognize that addressing chronic homelessness is the *cornerstone* of an effective plan to end homelessness [emphasis mine]" (Williams 2007:1). The "privileging" (for lack of a better term) of one subpopulation over all others and the conflation of chronic homelessness with homelessness as a whole would lead to a major shift in both national dis-course and policy approaches, and an acceptance of chronic homelessness as a real and separate con-dition that required priority treatment. A HUD press release from late 2002 repeatedly described this group as "most vulnerable," creating justification for a prioritized federal response. All attention would shift to chronic homelessness as the problem of the hour in social services. That year, $969 million would be

allocated for continuum of care programs including outreach, assessment, and transitional/permanent housing; only $150 million would be allocated for emergency shelter programs and "traditional" interventions like job training, substance abuse treatment, or homelessness prevention. The justification for these disparate allocations was grounded in that 10%/50% argument (10% of the population consuming 50% of the resources): "By shifting the federal emphasis toward meeting the needs of the most vulnerable homeless persons, more resources become available for those who experience homelessness as a temporary condition" (Sullivan 2002b). These numbers fueled the crisis—we had to find a new solution for this group that displayed both incredible vulnerability and an incredible drain on limited resources.

Thus, in a very short period chronic homelessness was not only defined as a new term, but elevated to national priority as an urgent problem to be addressed. One can make the argument that the image of the chronically homeless person effectively became the new image of homelessness in the public eye, further cementing it as *the* problem to treat in the homeless services sector—despite experts' arguments that the numbers on service utilization presented by Culhane were overblown and service providers' fears that other populations, such as homeless families, would be neglected as the chronically homeless were privileged by new programs and funding. The story of chronic homelessness exemplifies what Deborah Stone describes in *Policy Paradox*—the creation of problems via language and political maneuvering, and the inherent power in the process of naming when it comes to defining meaning and framing issues. This process excluded many key communities, and not everyone found its results positive. The National Coalition for the Homeless argued that Culhane and Kuhn's findings were overstated as far as resource consumption was concerned, as a study that only examined single adults in urban areas, and that, with no reallocation plan in place, ending chronic homelessness would not, in fact, "free up" services for others. Rather, all it was accomplishing was the redirection of resources to one small population, leaving the rest out in the cold (literally), and "unethically pit[ting] needy populations against each other for service dollars" (NCH 2002b). The actions of the Bush administration—and subsequently the Interagency Council on Homelessness and the agencies under its oversight—were redefining homelessness by using "chronic homelessness" and "homelessness" interchangeably in its discussions. This redefining was also conveniently neglecting a necessary examination of the structural causes underlying homelessness by failing to recognize the diversity of the homeless population, exemplified by the lack of political discussions over poverty, affordable housing, or other related issues. Chronic homelessness thus made a "convenient" problem in this way, as a group characterized by a multitude of "pathologies"—it was easy to attribute their condition to these, rather than any underlying or structural social issues. What this redefining did accomplish was the creation of a tangible group that could be treated at an individual level—one narrow group, one narrow policy. The image of chronic homelessness fit what many people already pictured for the homeless—older, alone, mentally unwell, using alcohol or drugs—and thus was able to skirt uncomfortable questions about the unexpectedly homeless (such as families with working parents), creating a hierarchy of needs congruent with what politicians and administrators wanted to believe the homeless looked like (NCH 2002a). Thus, the darker side of the rise of chronic homelessness. In some ways, it drew attention to the plight of an oft-neglected group and ultimately offered a more socially just option for interventions; in another way, it conveniently hid from view the diversity of thousands of homeless men, women, and children whose experiences may have challenged the status quo.

In short, despite the aforementioned contentions, the terminology caught on and spread quickly. Various coalitions, interest groups, and service providers began using the term in their own publications and websites (and do to this day). HUD and other federal agencies began publishing reports and research. And a little-known program called Housing First started getting some national exposure.

The policy stream

Next, we turn to the policy atmosphere. In the MS framework, the policy stream consists of floating ideas developed (often ideologically) by experts in policy networks, awaiting the right moment and rationale for their appearance. And at the time that chronic homelessness was quickly becoming the face of homelessness and known as a serious problem, just such a policy existed. Housing First had been implemented in a few places previous to this—most notably New York, where founder and psychologist Sam Tsemberis had created the model via his successful Pathways to Housing program. It was, in fact, ideologically motivated, under a firm belief in a human right to housing and the inherent moral wrongness of requiring

individuals to prove themselves worthy to access services. It certainly possessed potential to spread under the right conditions, but was controversial in its subversion of the old welfare model that privileged the "deserving" first and the granting of consumer-style choice to the mentally ill and substance abusers. It was a hard sell not only to politicians, but also to many in the treatment and service provider community, a policy network in its own right, who were used to the norms of the traditional model. The right conditions to enable its spread, it would turn out, would be the rise of "chronic homelessness" as a major problem (the definition of the "new" population describing most of Tsemberis' residents), a new administration with a particular ideological bent (the political stream) and, also within the policy stream, a changing trend in research-policy relations. The rise of evidence-based policy—essentially, using the numbers to justify social action—would also play an important role in this policy's ultimate adoption.

The relationship between academic research and policy creation has gone through many changes over the years. Stanhope and Dunn examined the case of Housing First's policy emergence through the changing dynamics of this relationship, arguing that the rise of evidence-based policy helped spur Housing First's adoption. While the use of the social sciences to help solve social problems is not new, *how* those sciences have been used has looked different during different eras. Evidence-based policy is based on the idea of "what matters is what works," rather than ideology, per se—a more technical, "real world" solutions approach, rather than a normative one. Objective data was the key to solving our social ills—data doesn't lie. However, the authors argue that this process is not as objective as it purports to be. "[Evidence-based policy] is particularly problematic, charge its critics, because not only does it oversimplify a complex, value-laden process, but the values underpinning positive EBPol are covert and therefore become givens rather than being subject to debate" (Stanhope and Dunn 2011:277). The reliance on "objective" data fails to recognize both the other legitimate concerns of public policy (such as equity or human rights) and that the idea that data is king is an ideological one in and of itself, grounded in its own ideology of the importance of outcomes over process and standardization over ambiguity.

What did this mean for Housing First? What Stanhope and Dunn are describing is a process where numbers override value-based concerns, and ends determine means. It removes a discussion of moral values or individual life experiences and replaces it with data. However, as mentioned, covert values still exist—the kind of values that determine why numbers should supersede other concerns. And it is these covert values that helped move Housing First from a marginal solution to a major program under the Bush administration—the same covert values that would also latch on to Culhane and Kuhn's numbers as justification for the elevation of the chronically homeless as a target population in this new policy. "The genius of Culhane and his colleagues' research is that they were able to mobilize neo-liberal discourse of cost and efficiency to advocate successfully what humanist or ethical discourses have failed to do—that people in need of shelter should be housed as quickly as possible. In recasting housing insecurity in terms of financial cost, their research provides an economic justification for permanent, long-term housing…the invention of chronic homelessness retrofits a social problem as an economic problem" (Willse 2010:171). Thus, returning to the problem stream, the creation of this over-consuming subpopulation helped translate social issues into economic crises, enabling a discussion based on numbers over, say, the sociological study of the root causes of poverty. By turning homelessness into a numbers game, it fit right into this new policy paradigm that was taking root. These covert values also aligned with the ideology of the new administration in power. This ideological perspective thus unites all three streams.

Sam Tsemberis recognized this trend—he had been running Pathways to Housing (his Housing First program) for years and seeing success in individuals' life stories and outcomes, but saw "the writing on the wall," as it were, recognizing the need for hard outcomes. He thus commissioned and ran his own housing study to prove the cost-effectiveness and sustainability of his approach—and therefore justify its existence. His results were encouraging—after a five-year period, he found that 88% of Housing First participants were still stably housed, as opposed to only 47% of those from linear programs.[3] Housing stability

---

[3] Later, after the model was adopted in numerous cities, many additional studies appeared to continually reaffirm these findings—the bulk of which focused on cost-savings and long-term housing stability, estimating the savings generated in hospitals, prisons, and other "alternatives" for this population. To give an idea of the kind of economic impact this model can wield, Larimer's 2009 Seattle study found a $4 *million* decrease in city costs in a single year. It is also

itself is an indicator of cost-savings—individuals ceasing to utilize "alternative" (and costly) services. His program was thus not only normatively of value, but also effective where it "really" counted—the numbers.

Research had earlier narrowed down the problem to chronic homelessness; the way in which that and subsequent research was conducted and presented to officials determined the final policy outcome. While Stanhope and Dunn warn readers of the limitations of empirical research to determine social policy, particularly in light of rejecting normative concerns, the decision-makers of the time were eager to see the numbers. (Though numbers alone are not enough—something we will discuss at further length in the entrepreneur section.) It is notable that few studies exist regarding the mental health and substance abuse outcomes of this model, and that what studies do exist have been left largely out of the ongoing conversation about the value of this program. Granted, fewer studies existed at the time of the Bush administration's decision in *any* area, due to the low utilization of the Housing First model at the time, but in the years since, those important subjects have only comprised a very small subset of the literature, and have remained largely hidden from most public discussions, indicating the priorities in assessing the model.[45]

While evidence should inform us about the potential of various means and ends, in the model of evidence-based policy, the ends have already been decided and are subsequently embedded in the evidence long before democratic debate occurs, argue Stanhope and Dunn. With this in mind, economic concerns, such as those valued by the Bush administration, were already determining the hoped-for ends—a cheaper alternative to a population rumored to far exceed their "allotted" share of available services. Evidence to support a new policy was easily sought and found, and thanks to Sam Tsemberis' pioneering work—albeit created from a more humanist perspective—an intervention already existed that could achieve the desired aims. (The tension between activists' motivations and political maneuvering appears all over the social services world—the need to justify in numbers what the men and women involved personally in the work believe to be moral or justice issues. The considerations that go into navigating this tension are far beyond the scope of this paper, but are certainly worth mentioning, as this narrative is essentially about a socially just policy "sneaking in" under purely economic rationales.)

The political stream

Having discussed the problem and policy streams, with numerous allusions to the political, we finally arrive at the third stream. With Bush's ascent to office in 2001, a new party and new administration took power—often an opportunity for change in and of itself. This would present itself as a prime opportunity for the policy entrepreneurs in the game—but more on that later.

Referring back to the idea of covert values that become givens when analyzing an issue, the Bush administration demonstrated a heavy commitment to cost-savings, business-savvy solutions, and upholding the value of consumer choice—generally free market, capitalistic concerns. The problemization of chronic homelessness, along with the creation of cheaper interventions documented by economic research, was highly appealing in this environment. The value of housing the less privileged itself was not as readily apparent, as a California Institute for Mental Health report pointed out. Whereas 37,500 housing units for the chronically homeless were created between 2002 and 2006 under the Bush administration, other housing policies resulted in the loss of 150,000 housing vouchers for low-income families, and the number of rentals available for disabled people declined by 25% during that same period (Chandler 2008:9). Narratives

---

of note that her study is one of the few that also studied substance abuse outcomes (with positive results); few studies overall focus on the life outcomes and experiences of individuals within the program.

[4] My separate literature review on Housing First's impact on substance abuse outcomes indicates the truth of these statements. There are few studies in existence, and what has been done has often been as a sidenote to other outcomes, such as cost-effectiveness. This is an area sorely lacking in research, but vital to truly assessing the model's impact not just for cities, but also for the individuals it purports to help.

[5] In a 2007 HUD report, the agency would essentially espouse a "whatever it takes" approach, as long as the outcomes were sufficiently successful. This even included the willingness to overlook illegal activity (in the form of drug abuse) in government-owned housing, despite recognition of the "sticky" situation this presented—a federal agency knowingly allowing trespasses against federal law. It reflects an ends-oriented approach where gaps in the means will be overlooked as necessary. This is included not to debate whether or not HF programs should crack down on substance abuse within their units, but to demonstrate the extent that the focus on outcomes overrode all other concerns.

like these help underscore the political motivations at work—in this case, monetary motivations. While we cannot know the internal motivations of those who decided the policy (a limitation in any framework), the general evidence indicates that, even if/where more socially just concerns may have been present, it was economics that provided the chief rationale for change.

Phillip Mangano, whom HUD secretary Mel Martinez chose to head the Interagency Council on Homelessness at the time this was coming about, summed up some of these economic principles in a 2006 interview. Discussing the significant policy changes occurring, he stated that it was "economically irresponsible" to keep shuffling people through the system repeatedly. Confronted with cities' reluctance to try a new policy, in light of past failed plans, Mangano believed "that's why this set of plans [should be] a business plan. The creation is around a management agenda that anticipates outcomes and results" (*American City* 2006). The hope placed in a business-like approach, and its subsequent selling on such terms to cities nationwide, aligned the existing research and evidence-based policy approach with the ideology of the ruling administration and many city managers. Speaking of city managers, there was also a national mood element at work, in terms of the city leaders who would later be encouraged to adopt the Bush administration's new agenda. City managers have often been concerned about the image of their towns, the economic vitality of their business districts, and the perceived safety of their citizens. The new image of the homeless, in the form of the chronically homeless, mentally ill, substance abusing indigent, whether they could "help" themselves or not, played to city management's worst fears. The visibility of these individuals made communities uncomfortable—they were there for all to see, unlike those in emergency shelters or doubling up with family. Visibility is often one of the main determinants of the priority of a problem—and under that rationale, a middle-aged man with a substance problem on a street corner is of higher concern to a city council than a mother with three small children in a shelter.[6] Likewise, as already described, the cost rationale of one small population eating away at such a large portion of available resources, once disseminated to cities as fact, was also sufficient motivation for many cash-strapped cities to switch their focus to this population.

We can thus understand how the political environment was predisposed to be receptive to such change. But how did these issues even come to the administration's attention in the first place? Without this, the ICH would never have been revived and there would have been no plan to take to city leaders. No national marches on Washington had taken place; no 24-hour news cycle had devoted itself to a national crisis. Much of this discussion was happening in academic literature or among service provision networks. To answer this, we turn to the final element of the framework: the policy entrepreneur.

Tying it all together: the policy entrepreneur

"There is nothing a politician likes so little as to be well informed" (Stanhope and Dunn 2010:281). This paraphrase of Keynes reflects the MS framework's conception of politicians as "blank slates," waiting to be told not just information about a situation, but *how* to think of that information and the problems to which it relates. We see how the defining of chronic homelessness and the evidence-based policy trend enabled a certain viewpoint to be communicated to officials about what, precisely, the problem at stake was, and, via Tsemberis' original model and his forward thinking in creating an economic justification for it, just how it should be addressed. And it is here that we address one of the chief roles of the policy entrepreneur—to clarify and create meaning for those at the top.

In 2001, Mel Martinez, the new HUD secretary, had an epiphany. Driving to work in his limousine one day, he noticed, as if for the first time, the number of homeless people out in the winter cold. "Somebody ought to do something for them," he later told a reporter, echoing his thinking at the time. "And it dawned on me at that moment it was me" (Greve 2008). Thus began the effort that would turn Housing First from a little-known idea to a national model, endorsed by the president himself. It was Martinez who first brought these issues to the administration's attention, persuading them to include a pledge to end chronic homelessness within 10 years in Bush's first fiscal year budget, as well as funding raises for programs that targeted the homeless. The precise details of how Martinez convinced the administration are unclear.

---

[6] By setting up these kinds of dichotomies, I do not intend to elevate any one group over another. My intention is to point out the kinds of rationales that go into deciding who will receive policy interventions and who will not.

One of the limitations of any framework is the inability to see what happens behind closed doors and within individual minds. However, keeping the MS framework in mind and what we do know from interviews, press releases, and other studies, we can see by the results that he managed to elevate this "new" problem of chronic homelessness above competing policy concerns, gain the President's attention and commitment, and lay the groundwork for substantial policy action along specific philosophical and economic rationales—certainly qualifying as a successful coupling of the streams to open a policy window.

But this was only the first phase of policy implementation; he needed a leader to take charge for the future and determine how this would happen nationwide. He tapped Phillip Mangano, a homelessness advocate from Massachusetts, to take on that role. Mangano was appointed the head of the Interagency Council on Homelessness—the umbrella agency that had lain dormant for years that had once coordinated the activities of 15 different federal agencies in targeting assistance to the homeless. Mangano had a long history of success with gathering support for helping the homeless, and understood well that tension between moral and economic motivations. Despite the earlier interview we mentioned, where he emphasized the economic rationales of this approach, he also had a firm grasp of the moral issues at stake as well—as mentioned, he had spent the last 12 years as an advocate for the homeless. In an interview, Mangano shared his strategy of gathering support across party lines during his earlier advocacy days. "[With Democrats], if you went in with a couple of good stories on a snowy winter day, you could get some money; [but with Republicans] stories didn't cut it. [They] would ask 'What are the numbers on that?'" (Greve 2008). Recalling the "blank slate" of MS, Mangano stood ready to let politicians know what they needed to think, couched in the terms with which they were already comfortable. He may have been providing numbers, but he was also providing an ideology—whether that was one of human rights or of cutting costs. This ability was something he would carry with him into his new position.

Tsemberis' evidence-justified program was thus just what Mangano needed—a fit with the new administration's public objectives and private values that he could sell as *the* policy intervention to achieve their aims, but also fit his own ideological concerns. Upon meeting with Tsemberis at Pathways to Housing, he was immediately convinced by their cost-effectiveness and emphasis on consumer choice—a cherished conservative value. Developments in the ongoing policy/research relationship thus prompted a "meeting of the minds," where Tsemberis was able to provide the necessary data-based justification for a program he founded on more human values, and Mangano was able to take something of "tangible" value back to the administration, and ultimately to mayors and governors nationwide. Thus, Mangano combined the numbers with the kind of success stories Tsemberis had seen to prove his point that "housing the chronically homeless was both frugal governance and a moral good" (Greve 2008); a narrative that could appeal to all sides. Referring back to the policy stream, Mangano recognized the power of evidence-based policy, apart from his own personal convictions, and was willing to use that in the service of something he believed in, "openly stating that compassionate outcomes must be both congruent with and stated in terms of market needs," courting governing officials' and the public's approval (Stanhope and Dunn 2010:280). Taking Martinez's moral epiphany at face value, he was also operating under a similar dichotomy of both values and numbers—using data-based rationales in his personal crusade. Ultimately, they both recognized the arena in which they were operating and what arguments would speak loudest, and this guided how they combined problems, policies, and politics to achieve their ends.

Mangano was subsequently tasked with taking these ideas and gathering support nationwide. Martinez had wanted Mangano to reverse the ICH's decline and use it as a platform to travel the country and convince cities nationwide to create their own ten-year plans targeting chronic homelessness, with Housing First as the centerpiece. Mangano was ready to comply. Working with the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the National League of Cities, and the National Association of Counties, he set out to convince 100 of America's biggest cities to create their own plans. He received 127 in the first year. ICH's focused on resource consumption and chronic homelessness' impact on communities' visible safety and attractiveness—issues of importance to local leaders nationwide, as discussed in the political stream. The plans were sold under the idea of solid business principles—that with the right practices, cities could manage this problem and take control of it (Willse 2010:170). Creating the plans also enabled unique local alliances to develop between politicians, businessmen, clergy, service providers, advocates, and citizens—each with their own different motivations—who would carry on the efforts after Mangano and his funding moved on.

In different ways, the efforts of Culhane, Tsemberis, Martinez, and Mangano all played a key role in elevating Housing First above competing policy interests, managing to draw a national spotlight onto a group traditionally hidden from view and translating this into the new face of homelessness. The efforts of Martinez and Mangano in particular drove this process, and it was their role in realizing how the reinvention of homelessness, new interventions in existence, the rediscovered importance of economic rationales to politicians via evidence-based policy, and a new administration all created unprecedented opportunity for serious social change—at least for one population. Thus, a motivated man who wanted to create change for those he saw on the sidewalk created one of the most significant ideological departures from the welfare system's philosophy in decades and elevated an entirely new kind of intervention model (and philosophy) to national prominence. Via the epiphany of Martinez and the passion and strategy of Mangano, the entire world of homeless services provision would change. They thus managed to successfully and skillfully weave together political change, existing policy solutions, a newly-defined and recognized problem, and an underlying uniting ideology into a perfect window of opportunity.

Limitations and conclusions

No framework is perfect, and, due to the complex nature of human behavior, no framework can completely explain any human-driven process. Through identifying the elements that led to the ideal policy window in which chronic homelessness was elevated to national policy objective, with Housing First as official solution, we are able to see how the ideas of multiple streams of events, ideologies, policies, and politics can converge in unexpected ways to create ideal moments for change. We thus believe that the multiple streams framework best helps us understand just how this surprising policy came about. This framework enabled us to look beyond the initial surprise at the seeming mismatch of ideology between policy and administration to the actors behind the scenes and the very real events and conditions that made this policy's adoption not only possible, but logical. However, there are areas within the process that are difficult to describe. The chief of these, as mentioned earlier, is the inability to know the minds and intents of the actors involved, as well as the content of closed-door interactions (to what extent did Martinez and Mangano accept the rationales which they publicly espoused? just how did Martinez manage to persuade the President and his team?). However, what we have tried to do, based on what public evidence does exist, is make a sound argument for why things happened as they did, regardless of any secret intent, while yet acknowledging that there are areas that may not fit entirely neatly into the framework or that are beyond our knowledge, hidden behind closed doors or in individual minds, and any study of the policy process should keep these limitations in mind when examining human behavior. As a recommendation for future study, we would suggest social construction to supplement the understanding we have obtained via this model, recognizing the prevalence of different constructions of deserving and undeserving, privileged and not-privileged, inherent to this conversation.

In conclusion, we have attempted to make an argument for how and why, in the midst of a complete collision of values, one coherent policy arose that somehow managed to address the values of both sides and overcome enough suspicion to receive public endorsement from federal agencies, the U.S. Council of Mayors, and even many local service providers. The MS framework states that the policy process exists in a state of ambiguity—that there are always different ways to consider the same phenomena and realities. What we have presented here are the constructed understandings of certain phenomena that led to a specific policy outcome; had these phenomena been understood differently, or had different actors been at work, the outcome may have been quite different. The privileging of the chronically homeless as *the* most vulnerable and most important group to treat reflects the policy entrepreneur's struggle to elevate their issue above all other competing interests. In this case, the journey of chronic homelessness in the academic, advocacy, and ultimately political communities aided Martinez and Mangano's ends quite nicely. The development of chronic homelessness as its own population deserving its own unique approach, the rise of evidence-based policy, the already-existing and (also thanks to Sam Tsemberis) already justified-by-numbers Housing First program, the presence of a new administration with a certain economic bent, and city governments nationwide wanting to "clean up" their streets all contributed to a favorable confluence of conditions and events. This ultimately opened the perfect policy window under the guidance of Mel Martinez and Phillip Mangano to create substantial change, completely inverting the normal continuum of care for homeless individuals nationwide and managing to transform a marginal human rights idea into an economic policy under a conservative administration.

Sources

Author unknown. "Feds push efforts to house the homeless." *American City & County*, August 1, 2006. Retrieved February 26, 2013 (http://americancityandcounty.com/mag/government_feds_push_efforts).

Chandler, Daniel. May 2008. "Supported Housing: Review of Evidence." Report for the California Institute of Mental Health. Retrieved March 17, 2013 (http://www.cimh.org/Portals/0/Documents/Adult/EPB-IDDT/CiMH-IDDT-Supported-Housing.pdf).

Culhane, Dennis P., and Randall Kuhn. Winter 1998. "Patterns and Determinants of Public Shelter Utilization among Homeless Adults in New York City and Philadelphia." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 17(1): 23-43.

Editorial (author unknown). "Ending Chronic Homelessness." *New York Times*, Mar. 13, 2002. Retrieved February 25, 2013 (http://www.nytimes.com/2002/03/13/opinion/ending-chronic-homelessness.html).

Fitzpatrick, Colleen. October 25, 2004. "'Housing First' becoming the standard model for homeless populations." *Mental Health Weekly (special report: Innovations in Behavioral Health)*: 1-3.

Greve, Frank. "Bush administration has housed many homeless." *McClatchy Newspapers*, October 26, 2008. Retrieved February 18, 2013 (http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2008/10/26/54475/bush-administration-has-housed.html).

National Coalition for the Homeless. 2002. "Poverty Versus Pathology: What's 'Chronic' About Homelessness.'" Retrieved February 26, 2013 (http://nationalhomeless.org/publications/chronic/full.html).

National Coalition for the Homeless. 2002. "Questions and Answers about the 'Chronic Homelessness Initiative.'" Retrieved February 26, 2013 (http://nationalhomeless.org/publications/chronic/chronicqanda.html).

Stanhope, Victoria, and Kerry Dunn. May 2011. "The curious case of Housing First: The limits of evidence based policy." *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 34: 275-282.

Sullivan, Brian. January 10, 2002. "Martinez Names Mangano Director of Interagency Homeless Council." Press release, U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development. Retrieved March 8, 2013 (http://archives.hud.gov/news/2002/pr02-005.cfm).

Sullivan, Brian. December 17, 2002. "Bush Administration Awards Record $1.1 Billion to Provide Housing and Services to Homeless Individuals and Families." Press release, U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development. Retrieved March 8, 2013 (http://archives.hud.gov/news/2002/pr02-151.cfm).

Williams, Darlene F. July 2007. "The Applicability of Housing First Models to Homeless Persons with Serious Mental Illness." Special report, Office of Policy Development and Research. Retrieved February 17, 2013 (http://www.huduser.org/portal/publications/hsgfirst.pdf).

Willse, Craig. May 2010. "Neoliberal biopolitics and the invention of chronic homelessness." *Economy and Society* 39(2): 155-184.