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## **Editorial: Finding a home**

### **Battling widespread homelessness requires a broad and varied approach**

As a new "housing first" approach to helping people beat homelessness becomes increasingly popular, social workers and advocates disagree as to whether the philosophy is effective.

The newer approach places people into homes first and then addresses substance abuse, job searches and other issues. The older, more familiar approach - commonly called the "continuum of care" - offers people space in a shelter and access to drug-abuse treatment, job training and other services to address the problems that contributed to their homelessness in the first place. Then they look for permanent homes.

A story by the Las Vegas Sun's Ed Koch last week showed how either approach can work well, based on the experiences of people who had beat homelessness. But those who deliver social services have differing opinions as to which one works. And some say neither program works consistently.

The executive director of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness told the Sun that President Bush favors housing-first programs and has requested increasing to \$4.15 billion the amount to be spent on fighting homelessness in 2007.

The administration's Housing and Urban Development Department also has built 30,000 low-cost housing units to help provide affordable homes.

But a New York City-based expert on homeless issues says it would take \$15 billion and 350,000 affordable homes to make a dent in the problem. As one Las Vegas-area advocate pointed out, the 10,000 to 12,000 people living on Southern Nevada's streets would fill a third of the low-cost homes the Bush administration has built nationally. It is not enough.

While the housing-first approach worked well for Clark County in 2004 - 48 of the 50 people who participated still have jobs and pay rent - only 30 of the 50 who participated last year still are living independently. What made the difference, experts said, is that those enrolled in 2005 had fewer job skills.

Clearly, there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach to eradicating homelessness, and some people may not benefit from either of the two most popular approaches.

Successfully confronting this issue will take more of a financial commitment from all levels of government, along with all of the creativity and compassion that, as a society, we can muster.