

Austin Area Human Services Association
Put People First
2008 CAN Statement

The Austin Area Human Services Association (AAHSA) is comprised of more than 65 nonprofit health and human service organizations unified by the common value that people come first. We are the voice for the rapidly growing populations in our community who are unable to access a standard of living that supports their health, safety and security, and general welfare."

Our region is witnessing dramatically growing gaps between the affluent, the disadvantaged and the middle class. The numbers speak for themselves:

- One in six of us do not have health insurance.
- 21% of Travis County children lived at or below the Federal Poverty line in 2005.
- Basic needs stat
- One in five Central Texans suffers from a debilitating mental health condition.
- Homeless stat

We bring you three messages today. First, our community's human services infrastructure is straining under the weight of trying to help rapidly increasing numbers of families overcome or alleviate the devastating effects of poverty. We are fortunate to have numerous nonprofits in this community that are recognized for their effectiveness, innovation and ability to leverage millions upon millions of state, federal and private dollars. However, please hear us when we tell you very clearly that our current resources are not meeting the community's need, and in fact we are falling behind.

Second, an infrastructure capable of promoting the potential of our community's most vulnerable will only be possible though the infusion of significantly more resources than this community has historically invested. It is difficult to describe the shared innovation and collaboration of Austin's non-profit community. However, we have to question whether the amount of time and money spent planning how to stretch the same amount of money in different directions year after year is the most effective use of our time. A net pulled in too many directions will pull apart from wear and tear just as easily as it would have from repeated, consistent use.

Third, we ask you to put people first by recognizing that human services are a vital link in our community's safety net and should be ranked as a critical priority on par with public safety and transportation. The leadership of the Austin Area Human Services Association is committed this budget cycle to work in partnership with the City, County, the Healthcare District, MHMR and other CAN partners to conduct a comprehensive planning process that both quantifies the needs of the community and identifies funding strategies to build the human services infrastructure that can provide the opportunities and supports for our most vulnerable community members to reach their potential. This body, the Community Action Network, has the creativity, resources and leadership to make it happen. We ask for your partnership in the comprehensive planning required to make sure that it does.