

**ALLEGHENY COUNTY STRATEGIC PLAN TO PREVENT AND END HOMELESSNESS:  
DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY<sup>1</sup>  
HOUSING INNOVATIONS <sup>2</sup>**

**SIGNATURE INITIATIVES TO PREVENT AND END HOMELESSNESS**

**INITIATIVE 1: Prevent people from becoming homeless through greater integration among systems of care that serve those at high risk of homelessness, improved targeting and expansion of the types of prevention services available.**

***Strategies:***

*Homeless System*

- Ensure that prevention resources are strategically targeted to people most at risk of literal homelessness. Analyze primary causes of homelessness among individuals and families entering emergency shelter, identify and use the factors most closely related to people becoming literally homeless.
- Reassess current prevention policy of assessing future income potential for those in danger of being evicted to adopting a risk assessment model
- Incorporate diversion screening at the shelters for first-time presenters

*Educational System*

- Pilot an initiative aimed at identifying high need students/households at greatest risk for literal homelessness and prioritize them through Coordinated Entry (the Link) for prevention services including case management, service assessment and limited rental assistance.

*Public Housing*

- Work with the housing authorities to explore the extent to which housing choice voucher holders experience eviction and identify those tenants or rental situations that place tenants at highest risk. Examine the potential benefits of limited financial assistance, mediation or legal representation to resolve eviction.

*Discharge from Other Systems into Homelessness*

*Healthcare*

- Continue to enroll people experiencing homelessness in Medicaid or other health coverage as applicable
- Through the Health and Housing Initiative, target those experiencing homelessness who are also high users of healthcare

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<sup>1</sup> This document summarizes key strategy points from the Strategic Plan, however the full Plan should be reviewed and referenced for details and complete explanations.

<sup>2</sup> Housing Innovations, a national consulting firm specializing in issues around homelessness, was hired by a Sub-Committee of the Allegheny County Homeless Advisory Board in April 2016 to develop a community planning process to prevent and end homelessness in Allegheny County.

Allegheny County Jail Collaborative

- Explore re-entry housing alternatives that allow persons being discharged to have safe housing (not a homeless shelter)

Child Welfare System

- Develop written policy and procedures for coordination between Allegheny Link and the Child Welfare System e.g. for those who have aged out of foster care and/or those with recent involvement or who may be eligible for child protective services

**Proposed Action Items for Implementation:**

- *Reassess prevention strategies – Allegheny County Department of Human Services*
- *Identify school districts and funding to pilot school based prevention demonstration – Allegheny Intermediate Unit*
- *Continue efforts to integrate housing and health care – H2 Implementation Committee*
- *Establish efforts with housing authorities to identify and address causes of eviction of housing choice voucher holders – HACP, ACHA, MHA, HAB*

**INITIATIVE 2: Ensure that when people do become homeless, they can access safe and secure shelter and that stays in shelter are brief and lead to stable housing**

**Strategies:**

- Establish year-round low-barrier shelters for individuals that will provide a safe environment focused on assisting those experiencing housing insecurity to secure housing in the community.
- Target case management to those who are unable to self-resolve their homelessness, i.e. those who have been in shelter for at least seven nights, and households who have cycled through homelessness on multiple occasions or exhibit other indications of inability to self-resolve their homelessness
- Provide individuals and families with assistance in addressing barriers to housing including identification, disability documentation and applications for benefits, developing a plan for exiting from the shelter, and identifying additional resources to implement the plan
- Assess remaining shelters, once the year-round low barrier shelters are introduced, and adjust accordingly

**Proposed Action Items for Implementation:**

- *Establish year-round low-barrier shelters*
  - *Strategy for siting shelters – HAB*
  - *Funding strategy - City and County executive leadership with DHS and HAB support*
  - *Implementation and Oversight Plan – DHS to develop contracting and services plan*

### **INITIATIVE 3: Rapidly exit people from homelessness and support them in maintaining housing stability**

#### **Strategies:**

- Provide centralized navigation and housing location support to expedite access to permanent housing
  - Navigation support includes:
    - Working with shelter and other providers to assist households in becoming “document ready” for housing;
    - Providing individuals and families with information regarding housing options
    - Developing working relationships with owners of rental housing to expand the supply of housing available to program participants
      - Consider establishing a risk mitigation fund for landlords to restore units that have been damaged by tenants coming from the homeless system
      - Extend navigation support to assist households in the homeless system who have housing choice vouchers, initially targeting those with the homeless set-aside vouchers
  - Housing search includes:
    - Providing transportation to look at potential units;
    - Assisting families to negotiate with landlords to obtain housing that is affordable under relevant payment standards;
    - Being familiar with HUD Housing Quality Standards and doing a preliminary assessment of whether the unit will meet standards
    - Identifying housing that will allow students to remain within the school system they were enrolled in prior to becoming homeless, if that is the family’s preference
- Facilitate entry into Rapid Rehousing programs
  - Provide navigation support to all households entering Rapid Rehousing.
- Ensure the most service intensive resources (permanent supportive housing) are serving those with highest vulnerability and greatest need. Support provider organizations in implementing evidence-based practices (Housing First, Harm Reduction, Critical Time Intervention) and accessing sufficient resources and training to implement them
- Provide housing stabilization and eviction prevention services post-housing to assist in accessing needed resources and meet lease obligations
- Expand resources for housing stabilization support (financial resources related to health such as Medicaid, Medicare, or individual coverage and nutritional supports such as SNAP or food banks; adult protective services, corrections, health/behavioral health, child welfare)

#### **Proposed Action Items for Implementation:**

*Expand navigation support and housing location services to expedite access to permanent housing*

- *Decide structure for navigation services in Allegheny County, implement contracting and oversight – Allegheny County Department of Human Services*

- *Broker agreement with public housing authorities and DHS to extend navigation services to public housing authority units – starting with set-aside units – HAB in conjunction with DHS, HACP, ACHA, MHA*

#### **INITIATIVE 4: Increase the supply and access to affordable housing for people who have experienced homelessness**

##### **Strategies:**

- Establish additional set-asides/preference for people exiting homelessness in affordable housing developments
- Enhance coordination/cooperation with the public housing authorities on set-aside housing choice vouchers to assist families in moving on from homeless assistance
- Develop a flexible housing assistance fund to address low-cost barriers such as lack of funds for basic household furnishings, access to security and utility deposits and application fees and/or small loans for landlords to meet housing quality standards

##### **Proposed Action Items for Implementation:**

*Work to establish set asides/preferences for people exiting homelessness in affordable housing developments*

- *Establish policy on municipal, county and state level that affordable housing developments provide a set aside of units for formerly homeless households – HAB to work with agencies and elected officials to implement policy*
- *Create flexible emergency fund to address barriers to housing placement – Funder community*
- *Explore expanded collaboration with area public housing authorities and the Continuum of Care – HAB, HACP, ACHA, MHA*

#### **INITIATIVE 5: Strengthen integration across and among human services systems to prevent and end homelessness among vulnerable populations**

##### **Strategies:**

- Use the Department of Human Services data warehouse to identify the highest cost users of multiple systems. Prioritize eligible households for permanent supportive housing through the Allegheny Link.
  - Continue development of the predictive analytic tool by Allegheny Link
  - Ensure other service systems (health and behavioral health, criminal justice, child welfare, veterans, education) are well informed about coordinated entry and making appropriate referrals
- Continue to support the Jail Collaborative efforts to link persons in custody to post-discharge supports including housing, SSI/SSDI, Medicaid and employment/training
- To address the needs of people with significant health and behavioral health care needs:
  - Expand the medical respite pilot programs and recruit additional healthcare providers to replicate the model
  - Continue to expand use of Medicaid funding to support housing stabilization supports and assess capacity to increase the number of organizations that can bill Medicaid or facilitate access to existing organizations that have the capacity.

- support housing stability post-discharge from mental health and drug and alcohol treatment programs by connecting with community-based follow-up services funded/supported by these systems.
- To maintain connections to educational services and prevent multi-generational cycles of homelessness
  - Ensure homeless liaisons in the educational system and school liaisons in the homeless system understand the process to access services in each other's system
  - Explore processes to streamline access to special education and other needed services for homeless children
  - Collaborate in implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act to address the needs of homeless children as efficiently as possible
  - Establish a plan to ensure data reliability and participation by all 43 school districts in the data warehouse to assist in identifying students most at risk of homelessness and target prevention resources accordingly
- Continue to coordinate homeless services with the Department of Veterans Affairs
  - Maintain coordinated list of homeless veterans needing assistance from the CoC and the VA
  - Work with currently funded VA providers of transitional housing through the Grant and Per Diem program to restructure their programs to more closely meet current need

***Proposed Action Items for Implementation:***

*Use the DHS data warehouse to identify the highest cost users of multiple systems and prioritize eligible households for permanent supportive housing through Allegheny Link*

- *Continue the development of the predictive analytic tool to be used by Allegheny Link to identify those at highest risk for homelessness – DHS*
- *Continue to expand use of Medicaid to cover supportive services and non-housing needs of eligible homeless people Allegheny County Health and Housing Planning Committee*
- *Restructure VA transitional programs for homeless adults to focus on rapidly placing Veterans into housing – Pittsburgh Veterans Administration*
- *Expand engagement of educational authorities in collecting and sharing data and identify methods to prevent students' families from becoming homeless – Allegheny Intermediate Unit*

## FIVE YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

### *Strategy for Implementing Signature Initiatives*

#### ***Governance Structure***

Preventing and ending homelessness requires broad, cross-sector coordination among a diverse group of private and public organizations. To ensure success in preventing and ending homelessness in Allegheny County, there will need to be an effective governance body that uses data to design the crisis response system, right-sizes the interventions and ensures that funding decisions are aligned with the plan. Cross sector commitment to a common agenda must be supported by a centralized infrastructure and dedicated staff. The Homeless Advisory Board is committed to ensuring that there is an effective governance structure that engages the highest level of leadership in the county and city to commit to the goals and implementation of the plan.

To ensure this engagement, the HAB will:

- Seek adoption of the plan by the Mayor, County Executive, City Council and County Council;
- Convene twice annual briefings with senior elected officials to provide progress updates on successes and challenges in implementing the plan and to seek input from and support of city and county officials.

To ensure cross-sector commitment to the common agenda laid out in the plan, the HAB will:

- Assess the need for additional membership on the HAB to ensure representation from the most critical stakeholder organizations needed for implementation;
- Add representatives as determined necessary; and
- Add HAB subcommittees and work groups as needed, including a Funders Subcommittee, to support implementation of the plan.

#### ***Tracking Progress and continuously improving outcomes:***

The HAB will:

- Add additional measures of performance to the Allegheny County Score Card such as:
  - Point in Time and annual counts of total homeless, chronic homelessness and homelessness among veterans, youth and families;
  - Length of time homeless;
  - Re-entries to the homeless services;
  - Costs per permanent housing exit by program type;
  - Investments by program type; and
  - Location at system entry by program type
- Adopt performance targets at the community and program levels including all projects with dedicated beds for homeless people not only those that are funded by the HUD Continuum of Care and Emergency Solutions grants
- Use baseline data to establish performance targets and raise the bar as performance improves
- Regularly and transparently evaluate actual performance against targets (through quarterly performance reports)

- Support the provision of training and supports to help program managers use data to identify opportunities to strengthen performance using a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) approach.
- The following recommendations will support continuous improvement of services
  - Adopting programmatic and operational standards for shelters;
  - Adopting Housing First standards;
  - Adopting Recovery Housing standards that are aligned with Housing First approach for people in the early stages of recovery who choose to live in an environment that prioritizes abstinence;
  - Providing training and TA to providers on shelter, Housing First and Recovery Housing standards;
  - Including an assessment of standards implementation as part of protocols for monitoring projects. Use a corrective action process to support projects in meeting standards;
  - Incorporating consumer satisfaction data and consumer input into the overall CQI strategy;
  - Systematizing training efforts and establish and implement an annual training plan

#### ***Backbone Support Plan***

The HAB will conduct an assessment of the backbone support DHS is providing the HAB using recommended critical backbone support functions and criteria to assess strengths and limitations and identify any gaps that may occur. It will establish a plan to fill the gaps.

#### ***Communication Plan***

Establishing mechanisms, such as monthly meetings of high level decision makers, for continuous communication provides a platform to develop trust, address concerns and pursue solutions in a collaborative way. The HAB will establish a communications plan.