

# ALLEGHENY COUNTY STRATEGIC PLAN TO PREVENT AND END HOMELESSNESS



July 2017

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## Executive Summary

This plan outlines a strategy to make homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania by 2022. The plan builds upon the significant progress that has already been made, identifies gaps remaining and prioritizes strategies to develop a system that efficiently uses resources to prevent people from becoming homeless and rapidly and permanently house those in housing crises.

In 2005, in response to the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness's call for ten-year plans to end chronic homelessness across the nation, Allegheny County Chief Elected Official Dan Onorato committed the County to implementing a ten-year plan to address the array of homeless issues occurring within the county.

Since that time, tremendous progress has been made under the direction of the Allegheny County Department of Human Services: growth in the number of people experiencing homelessness has been reversed, and significantly fewer families and single households in the county are now experiencing homelessness. Considerable success has also been achieved in reducing the number of key population groups in homelessness including Veterans and chronically homeless.

This plan has adopted a series of guiding principles to govern both this plan and efforts to address homelessness: the use of a collective approach, providing quality, accessible services to those in need, prioritizing rapid exits from homelessness using approaches including Housing First, providing the right services to end homelessness, and prioritizing assistance toward those with the greatest need.

Efforts to end homelessness in Allegheny County have achieved considerable results: homelessness among families has been cut by almost one-third since 2014 and by one-quarter among single adults. Among Veterans, homelessness has been reduced by over fifty-two percent during the same period. The number of people who were living without shelter in the county has been reduced by over fifty percent since 2014 as has the population living in Transitional Housing. Even greater success has been achieved in ending chronic homelessness. Chronic homelessness has decreased from by over two-thirds since the 197 persons counted in 2014. This winter (2017) saw an increase in the number of persons living in homeless shelters but this was likely a result of an increase in services – a low barrier shelter has been open for the entire winter season for the first time.

Addressing homelessness requires the right mix of resources to meet the needs of the various groups of people who become homeless. Substantial efforts have been made to shift the inventory of homeless assistance resources toward those interventions that have been shown to



be more effective including permanent supportive housing and rapid rehousing. From 2014 to 2017 the inventory of transitional housing was cut by about half from 1023 beds to 531. At the same time, an additional 283 beds of permanent supportive housing – all of which will be prioritized for chronically homeless – have been added to the inventory. In the same period, the number of Rapid Rehousing beds increased by 245. These changes in resources should yield significant results in ending homelessness.

Other major accomplishments in moving toward solving homelessness include: the implementation of a system of coordinated entry in conjunction with the existing Allegheny Link; establishment of a requirement that all housing assistance providers serving homeless people follow the Housing First model; and the prioritization of all permanent supportive housing resources to serve the chronically homeless until chronic homelessness has been solved in the community.

Preventing people from becoming homeless and sustaining those returning to housing requires affordable housing resources; Allegheny County and the City of Pittsburgh are facing great challenges in housing affordability. The Mayor of the City of Pittsburgh commissioned an Affordable Housing Task Force that found an affordability gap of nearly 15,000 housing units for extremely low-income families (those earning 30 percent of the area median income (AMI) or less).

### **Strategic Initiatives Proposed to Prevent and End Homelessness**

Addressing the needs of people who become homeless and preventing homelessness from occurring requires open communication between homeless serving organizations, the general public and community based organizations. Initiatives to address the needs of homeless people need to be informed by those with lived experience. People frequently become homeless when other systems of care fail to adequately coordinate their services with community resources – especially at times of transition from institutional to community based systems of care. In order to sustain housing, people need income from employment, access to transportation to be able to work (often in non-regular working hours shifts), have access to health and behavioral health services, and safe and affordable care for minor children.

Much has been accomplished in Allegheny County and the impacts of homelessness have been lessened but individuals and families continue to live with the crisis of homelessness. This plan proposes a series of strategic initiatives intended to more effectively employ existing resources. The experience of homeless assistance programs has been that strategic investment of resources and documentation of meaningful outcomes have been the keys to maintaining and enhancing public support. These initiatives seek to build on that history.



The proposed strategic initiatives represent a targeted effort to increase access to services, expanded housing availability, improved linkages with the educational system, and expanded communication to those in need and to the public on progress in plan implementation.

The Year 1 Workplan for the HAB includes:

***Provide access to year-round low barrier emergency shelter.***

- The experience of operating the Severe Weather Emergency Shelter every night from November 15, 2016 to March 15, 2017 regardless of the weather has led to a decision to operate a low-barrier shelter that will be open 24 hours a day, seven days a week for the entire year. Through an RFP, DHS plans to contract with an agency to help it plan and implement a year-round low barrier shelter.
- In implementing the low barrier shelter the planning process needs to consider:
  - What is the appropriate size for a low barrier shelter serving single adults?
  - How to appropriately provide shelter services to special populations including youth, families, LGBTQ people?
  - How can current shelter resources adapt to the low barrier model? Will the current inventory need to be reconfigured?

Key elements of a low barrier shelter include:

- Adequate provisions to ensure the health and safety of all residents. People who constitute a danger to themselves or others will not be admitted. Whenever possible they will be referred to emergency resources that can address their needs.
- Shelter will not be denied solely for alcohol or substance use but, as above, entry can be denied if the person presents a danger to self or others.
- Provide or coordinate with a provider of case management services to assist shelter residents in accessing necessary services, to obtain and maintain permanent housing.
- Coordination with the CoC system of coordinated entry. Shelter residents will be referred to coordinated entry for discharge from shelter.

***Establish a centralized rental housing locator (navigator)***

There are three interrelated efforts underway to increase the supply of apartments affordable for those experiencing homelessness. The Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania and its Rental Housing Working Group are trying to enlist more landlords willing to rent to homeless Veterans and other homeless individuals, Section 8 voucher holders having trouble locating housing, and other hard to place individuals. ACTION-Housing, under a grant from the United Way, provides



limited housing locator services to people with disabilities. DHS is increasing the utilization of Rapid Rehousing which requires that assisted households receive assistance through tenant based rental assistance. These households are seeking the same housing (meeting HUD's quality standards and affordable within HUD's fair market rents) as low income families receiving Housing Choice Vouchers or Veterans receiving HUD-VASH vouchers. A DHS priority is to help Rapid Rehousing providers lease up quickly. A hybrid of these approaches may be the best solution to identify these limited housing resources.

Questions to consider:

- What are the best practices? Will providers be willing to 'share' landlord relationships they have cultivated over the years to establish a centralized resource?
- Can PHAs adopt maintenance/management practices that will allow property owners to prepare vacated units for new tenants more efficiently and effectively to increase the utilization of homeless set-aside vouchers?

### *Increased supply and access to affordable housing*

The Mayor of the City of Pittsburgh supports the recommendations of the Affordable Housing Task Force and has issued executive orders to the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh and various city departments to prepare implementation plans. If a Housing Trust Fund (the Housing Opportunity Fund) is created, the HAB should support policy recommendations whereby new units should include units affordable to the lowest income groups, including those exiting homelessness. Expanded funding for purchase and rehab of existing naturally occurring affordable housing could be coupled with the 250 units for Section 8 homeless set aside vouchers.

The Local Housing Options Team (LHOT) should be charged with developing strategies to target resources to the most vulnerable populations by agencies that have affordable housing resources (e.g. Pennsylvania Housing and Finance Agency, Urban Redevelopment Authority, Allegheny County Economic Development Department, and the housing authorities) for HAB advocacy consideration.

Questions to consider:

- Should specified percentages of units be set aside in all affordable housing development to serve the needs of those ending homelessness?



- How to ensure that households placed in these units will be able to access services and support needed to sustain housing?

***Ensure that outreach resources are sufficient to cover the entirety of Allegheny County – especially areas with significant homeless populations***

Effective outreach is the key to engaging people who are homeless and offering an entry into services and housing assistance. Town hall meetings conducted as part of this planning process revealed that in certain areas in the county, such as the Monongahela Valley, participants were not well informed regarding homeless services and how to access them.

Questions to consider:

- There are limited resources for funding outreach. One of the few federal resources is the Emergency Solutions Grant program – which is also a key source of federal funding for shelter and rapid rehousing. What is the appropriate source for additional support for outreach?
- How to ensure that people engaged through outreach will be able to access the housing and services they need and prefer to end their homelessness.

***Develop a communications plan that includes broader dissemination of information on the homeless services system, how to access assistance, and informing the public on progress in implementing this plan.***

Town hall meetings and other public outreach regarding this plan revealed a lack of public awareness of local efforts to prevent and end homelessness and a prevalent feeling among the public that they do not know how to properly respond when they encounter people who are homeless. There is an opportunity for the Communications Committee at the HAB to make greater efforts at public information sharing.

Questions to consider:

- What are the best and most cost-effective strategies for informing the public?
- How often should the HAB report to the community on progress in plan implementation?



**Build on existing partnerships (such as the one with the Buhl Foundation) and/or develop new ones between the City and County governments, Pittsburgh Public Schools, the Allegheny Intermediate Unit and the Port Authority to pilot new programs to help with school responsibilities under Every Student Succeeds Act. The initial focus should be on transportation coordination.**

The key to preventing homelessness from becoming a multi-generational problem is to ensure that children in families suffering from housing instability do not experience interruptions to their education. In many instances, this will involve transportation assistance so that students can continue to be educated at their schools of origin. This service while critical to continuity of education is extremely costly to local school districts – frequently costing hundreds of dollars per week per student. Greater support for transportation coordination can help to improve educational outcomes while addressing the cost burden faced by individual districts.

Questions to consider:

- What is the most effective strategy to coordinate the transportation needs of students who are homeless?
- What are other possible sources of support for this?

In addition to the strategic initiatives described above and detailed in Section IV of this Plan, Housing Innovations has provided a series of Best Practice Recommendations to accompany the Plan. Those recommendations include best practices related to coordinated entry, client engagement, accessible emergency shelter, housing-focused case management, transitional housing, diversion and prevention services, coordination with the educational system, implementation of evidence-based practices, performance-based contracting, and system right-sizing.

**Plan Development.**

This plan was prepared by Housing Innovations, LLC on behalf of the Allegheny County, Pennsylvania Homeless Advisory Board (HAB). The development of the plan was guided by the HAB's Ad-Hoc Planning Committee, and the plan was informed by a series of in-person meetings, focus groups, and program site visits with people with lived experience of homelessness, and with government and non-profit partners who are contributing in various capacities to efforts to



end homelessness. The plan was also informed by remote interviews with additional key stakeholders, analysis of homeless population, program inventory, and investment data and a review of documents produced through related planning efforts, including the DHS Housing and Homeless Services Plan, the Allegheny County Homeless Alliance's Ten-Year Plan, the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services Five-Year Housing Strategy, the City of Pittsburgh's Affordable Housing Task Force's Housing Needs Assessment, Findings, and Recommendations, and Advisory Committee on Homelessness in Pennsylvania's Report, and the Pittsburgh Healthcare and Housing Systems Integration Initiative's Implementation Priorities.

Housing Innovations compiled recommendations and presented Draft Allegheny County Plans to Prevent and End Homelessness in January and March 2017. Review of the draft plan was extensive. The review included consideration by the Homeless Advisory Board (HAB) and an estimated 100 members of 11 Committees (three HAB committees and eight affiliated with preventing or ending homelessness); city of Pittsburgh staff from the Mayor's Office, the Bureau of Police and Departments of Public Works and Planning; 133 participants at three Town Hall meetings who broke into small groups after receiving an overview of the planning process and the current homeless service system; demographic information on homelessness and affordable housing; and summary information on the Draft Plan; and 38 people who responded to the on-line survey.

Outreach was conducted by Allegheny County Department of Human Services who sent requests for comments to providers, members of the Homeless Advisory Board and the HAB and Affiliate Committees and hosted the on-line survey; the Mayor's Office who posted notices of the public meeting on its website and through social media; and hosts of the three town hall meetings. Participants of previous planning meetings with Housing Innovations were invited by our Project Coordinator to comment on an on-line survey posted on the Continuum of Care webpage of the Department of Human Services. The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette did an article on the plan, which was picked up by KDKA, the CBS affiliate TV station and WESA, the largest public radio station.

For internal planning purposes, everyone was asked to rank the Strategic Initiatives, and to identify what was missing from the Draft Plan. The rankings were inconclusive as most participants indicated that priority should be given to addressing the needs of those currently experiencing homelessness while simultaneously enhancing prevention efforts.

There was general agreement with components of the plan and the recommended strategies. Participants in the three town hall meetings identified a need to improve communication with the public, including community-based organizations, about the homeless system and to incorporate the voices of those with lived experiences in planning specific projects. Each group



and the survey respondents made detailed suggestions about ways to improve the Draft Plan. These suggestions were forwarded to the consultants, and will be shared with the Homeless Advisory Board for dissemination to the working committees.

**Plan Implementation.** The Homeless Advisory Board (HAB) will oversee implementation of this plan. It will seek adoption of the plan by the Mayor and the County Executive. Regular briefings will be provided on plan implementation. As necessary, the HAB will add membership and establish working groups to ensure that critical stakeholders are represented and support is provided for implementation.

Key metrics that will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of this plan are:

- The numbers of homeless people in the community including key subpopulations such as families, Veterans, chronically homeless, and young people.
- The length of time people remain homeless.
- People who receive homeless assistance but return to homelessness within a short period of time.
- Cost-effectiveness of services including costs for placement in permanent housing.
- Continuing need for services provided.

The Allegheny County Department of Human Services currently provides backbone support to the HAB and it is recommended that it continue to do so for the implementation of this Plan. This includes providing a vision and strategy to implement and update the Plan, setting up a measurement plan to monitor outcomes, identifying needed resources, and developing a continuous communication strategy.



## I. Plan Goals and Guiding Principles

This plan outlines a strategy to make homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania by 2022. It is understood that individuals and families will experience crises that in some instances will cause them to lose their homes. This plan will ‘end homelessness’ by assuring that there are adequate resources to prevent people from becoming homeless and a robust and coordinated response system to assist those who lose housing in rapidly returning to housing. The plan shares the vision of *Opening Doors, the Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness* and seeks to achieve the following goals:

- An end to Veteran homelessness
- An end to chronic homelessness
- An end to youth homelessness
- An end family homelessness
- Setting a path to end all homelessness

The plan builds upon the significant progress that has already been made, identifies gaps remaining and prioritizes strategies to develop a system that efficiently uses resources to rapidly and permanently house people experiencing housing crises. The plan finds opportunities to fund solutions to homelessness, despite a challenging fiscal environment, through greater collaboration and more efficient and effective use of resources. To ensure a concrete path forward, the plan establishes an implementation plan including priorities, tasks, timelines, assignment of responsibilities and accountability measures.

To guide the development of the plan, the Allegheny County Homeless Advisory Board<sup>1</sup> adopted guiding principles. These principles are informed by and aligned with the **Allegheny County Department of Human Services’ Vision Statement<sup>2</sup>** and **Guiding Principles<sup>3</sup>**:

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<sup>1</sup> The Homeless Advisory Board is a public/private partnership formed to assist Allegheny County, the City of Pittsburgh, the City of McKeesport and the Municipality of Penn Hills in reviewing public policy, programs, activities, data and all other efforts that will eliminate homelessness and improve the well-being of homeless persons and families.

<sup>2</sup> To create an accessible, culturally competent, integrated and comprehensive human services system that ensures individually tailored, seamless and holistic services to Allegheny County residents, in particular, the county’s vulnerable populations.

<sup>3</sup> All services will be: High quality—reflecting best practices in case management, counseling, and treatment; Readily accessible—in natural, least-restrictive settings, often community-based; Strengths-based—focusing on the capabilities of individuals and families, not their deficits; Culturally competent—demonstrating respect for individuals, their goals, and preferences; Individually tailored and empowering—by building confidence and shared decision-making as routes to independence rather than dependency; Holistic—serving the comprehensive needs of families as well as individuals through tangible aid and a full continuum of services—Information Exchange, Prevention, Early Intervention, Case Management, Crisis Intervention and After Care).



## Guiding Principles:

### 1) Use a collective approach

- Understand that homelessness is a complex, interconnected social issue and that preventing and ending homelessness will require long-term commitments by multiple sectors to a joint approach to solving the problem through agreed upon actions.
- Work collectively to establish a common agenda, shared measurement system, community outcomes, mutually reinforcing activities, and ongoing communication, and ensure that those efforts are staffed by a backbone organization.

### 2) Ensure service accessibility & quality

- Ensure that people experiencing homelessness or housing instability know where to get help and to access housing and services as rapidly as possible through a process that is culturally competent, age appropriate, consistent, and inviting.
- Promote empathy, respect and courtesy, paired with clear and reasonable expectations throughout the system for participants, staff, and other partners.
- Prioritize use of evidence-based and promising housing models and services practices that have been demonstrated to be effective at preventing and ending homelessness.
- Integrate homeless services within a comprehensive housing and human services system that provides individually tailored, seamless and holistic services, particularly for vulnerable populations.
- Ensure that staff providing services is trained, supported and competent in assessing and meeting diverse needs.
- Ensure that participant safety is prioritized throughout all components of the system.

### 3) Prioritize rapid exit, Housing First & housing stabilization

- Ensure that people experiencing homelessness or housing instability gain access as efficiently as possible to safe accommodations, permanent housing and stabilization services to prevent homelessness whenever possible.
- Provide diversion services, including mediation to avoid shelter entry whenever possible.
- Facilitate rapid exits from homelessness using the Housing First model and ensure that homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurring.
- Collaborate with mainstream affordable housing systems to ensure prioritization or preferences for homeless households and support continued development of housing affordable to very low-income people.
- Ensure connection to employment and mainstream sources of support to sustain long-term housing stability.

### 4) Align services to peoples' needs

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- Ensure a response system that is driven by the voices and perspectives of people who have experienced homelessness and housing instability and by an analysis of available data about peoples' needs.
  - Make available housing and service models that serve a diverse range of needs and preferences and focus on the capabilities of individuals and families, not their deficits.
  - Invest in interventions that build confidence and share decision-making as routes to develop independence rather than dependency.
  - Provide access to the type of intervention most appropriate to peoples' immediate and long-term housing needs and preferences.
- 5) **Prioritize services for people with the greatest needs**
- Ensure that people who have been homeless the longest and/or are the most vulnerable have priority access to the project model to which they have been referred.
  - Ensure that housing and service program eligibility and discharge criteria are transparent, widely understood, consistent with the Housing First approach, and do not result in people with the most intensive service needs being screened out.
  - Coordinate across systems of care to prioritize serving those making extensive use of crisis and emergency services.
- 6) **Build a system that works efficiently, effectively, and collaboratively**
- Continue to establish and refine prioritization standards to determine how scarce resources can be best allocated.
  - Invest in housing models that end and prevent homelessness in a cost-effective manner.
  - Ensure clarity, transparency, consistency and accountability for participants, referral sources, receiving programs, and other partners.
  - Promote collaboration, communication, and sharing of knowledge.
  - Collect data in a manner that does not place undue burdens on staff or clients, supports data quality, limits data collection to that which is necessary and relevant, and respects clients' privacy and confidentiality.
- 7) **Invest in continuously strengthening the system**
- Leverage and expand existing data and infrastructure whenever possible for system evaluation, monitoring, and client care coordination.
  - Continue to make enhancements to the system in response to emerging findings and needs.
  - Continuously invest in opportunities to build provider capacity and enable more efficient and effective services.

## II. Homelessness in Allegheny County

In 2005, in response to the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness's call for ten-year plans to end chronic homelessness across the nation, Allegheny County Chief Elected Official Dan Onorato committed the County to implementing a ten-year plan to address the array of homeless



issues occurring within the county. At that time, despite the effort of an extensive system offering a wide array of housing and service options, homelessness in the County was increasing, and the increase was driven by growth in the number of families with children experiencing homelessness.<sup>4</sup>

Since that time under the direction of the Allegheny County of Human Services, tremendous progress has been made, growth in the number of people experiencing homelessness has been reversed, and significantly fewer families and single households in Allegheny County are now experiencing homelessness. Considerable success has been achieved in reducing the number of key population groups in homelessness including Veterans and chronically homeless.

### EXTENT OF HOMELESSNESS IN ALLEGHENY COUNTY

Each year Allegheny County conducts a count of people experiencing homelessness on a single night in late January, and the most recent count, conducted in January 2017, indicates that a total of 1,145 people, including 389 people in families with children and 756 people in households without children, are experiencing homelessness. **Based on the 2017 outcomes, there has been a 27.2 percent overall decline in homelessness, a 32.7 percent decline among families with children, and a 24.0 percent decline among people in households without children since 2014.**

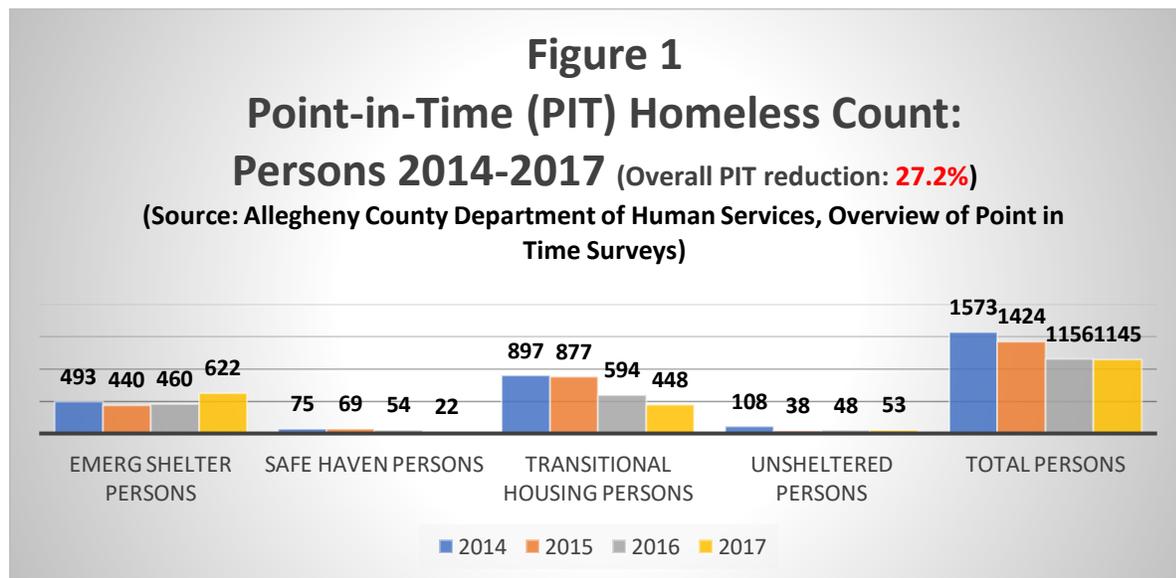


Figure 1 demonstrates a 25.5 percent decline in the number of people staying in programs meant to shelter homeless people (i.e., emergency shelter, Transitional Housing, and Safe Haven programs) and a 50.9 percent decline among people who were without adequate shelter, for example those living on the streets, or in a park, campground, or bus terminal since 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Ending Homelessness Now: Creating New Partnerships for Change (2005)



In addition to the overall reductions in homelessness, Allegheny County has reduced homelessness among key subpopulations. Research conducted in the 1990's revealed that despite representing only 10 percent of the overall population in shelters, people experiencing prolonged periods of homelessness were consuming half of the total shelter days used.<sup>5</sup> This finding led to a call through the *Opening Doors* federal strategic plan to end chronic homelessness and an increased focus nationally and in Allegheny County on targeting resources, particularly the most intensive and costly resources, to serving people who are chronically homeless. As a result, Allegheny County has achieved an 18 percent reduction in chronic homelessness since 2015 (see Figure 2).

In 2009, the White House and United States Department of Veterans Affairs announced an ambitious goal to end homelessness among Veterans. Allegheny County responded to this bold call to action and formed the Rapid Results Homeless Veterans' Boot Camp. By tracking every homeless Veteran and coordinating efforts across public and private agencies, Allegheny County has achieved a 52.7 percent reduction in homelessness among Veterans since 2015 (see Figure 2) and is on the verge of declaring a functional end to Veterans' homelessness.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, through its *Opening Doors* plan the federal government also set out to end homelessness among young people under the age of 25 by 2020. Allegheny County has achieved a 30 percent reduction in homelessness among this vulnerable population since 2015 (see Figure 2).

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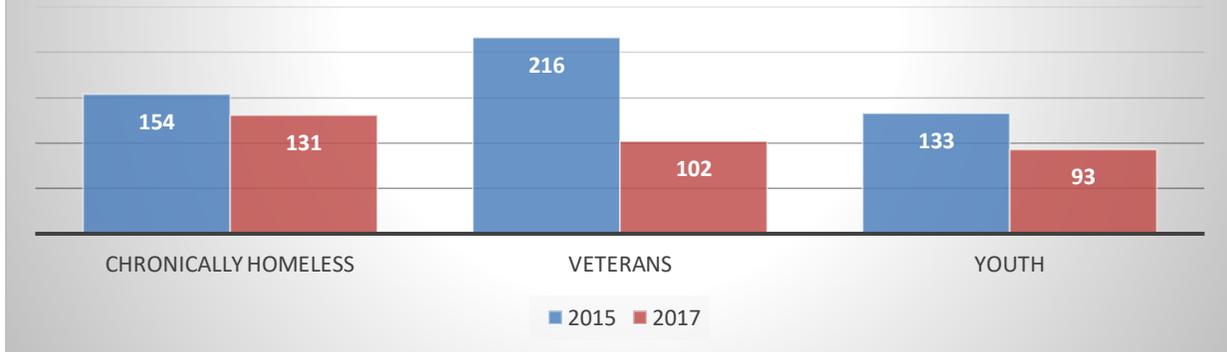
<sup>5</sup> Kuhn, R., & Dennis, C. P. (1998). Applying cluster analysis to test a typology of homelessness by pattern of shelter utilization: results from the analysis of administrative data. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 26(2), 207-302.

<sup>6</sup> The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness uses a concept called "functional zero" to determine when a community has ended homelessness among Veterans. A community achieves functional zero when at any point in time, the number of Veterans experiencing sheltered and unsheltered homelessness is no greater than the current monthly housing placement rate for Veterans experiencing homelessness. A community achieves functional zero when their inventory of housing interventions is sufficient to house the Veterans experiencing homelessness.



## Figure 2 (PIT) Homeless Count: Chronically Homeless, Veterans and Youths 2015 - 2017

(Source: Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Annual PIT)



Nationally, there were 306,000 people over age 50 living on the streets in 2014, the most recent data available.<sup>7</sup> This represents a 20 percent jump since 2007. Older adults now make up 31 percent of the nation's homeless population. Research demonstrates that the age group with the highest relative risks for homelessness shifted from 40 to 42 in 2000 to 49 to 51 in 2010.<sup>8</sup> This cohort is now in their mid-to-late-fifties. In Allegheny County, the most recent data indicate that 37 percent of single individuals experiencing homelessness are over the age of 50.<sup>9</sup>

With a life expectancy among homeless people of just sixty-four, this group is approaching premature old age. In fact, literally homeless older adults have three to four times the mortality rate of the general population due to unmet health needs,<sup>10</sup> and their health status is often like that of people who are 10 to 20 years older. This group can be expected to incur significant health care costs, including for nursing home care.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR).

<sup>8</sup> Dennis P. Culhane, Stephen Metraux, Thomas Byrne, Magdi Steno, Jay Bainbridge, and National Center on Homelessness among Veterans. "The Age Structure of Contemporary Homelessness: Evidence and Implications for Public Policy *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* 13.1 (2013): 1-17.

<sup>9</sup> 2015 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR)

<sup>10</sup> O'Connell, J(2005). Premature mortality in homeless populations: a review of the literature. Available at <http://www.nhchc.org/PrematureMortalityFinal.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Corporation for Supportive Housing (2011). Ending homelessness among older adults and elders through permanent supportive housing: revised policy paper prepared for the national leadership initiative to end elder homelessness.



## **SOLUTIONS AND STRATEGIES IN PLACE TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS**

To address the needs of households experiencing homelessness throughout the county, there are 125 programs providing emergency shelter and temporary and permanent affordable housing with social service supports. Collectively, these programs have capacity to serve 1,526 single adults and 740 households with families with children at any given point in time.<sup>12</sup>

The total investment of city, state, federal, and private funds in these programs is approximately \$39.5 million. Federal funds through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Continuum of Care (CoC) program comprise the largest source of funds at about 46 percent of the total investment, with the State Human Services Block Grant providing the second largest pool of funds at about 25 percent of the total investment. Other significant funding for homeless assistance comes from the Department of Veterans Affairs which provides approximately \$5.5 million, the Emergency Solutions Grants which provide the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County about \$2 million; Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA) which provides about \$720,000; State of Pennsylvania funded Penn Free Housing which provides a similar amount as the HOPWA program; emergency food support from FEMA which provides about \$300,000; and the Homeless and Runaway Youth Program from the Department of Health and Human Services which also provides about \$300,000 in assistance.

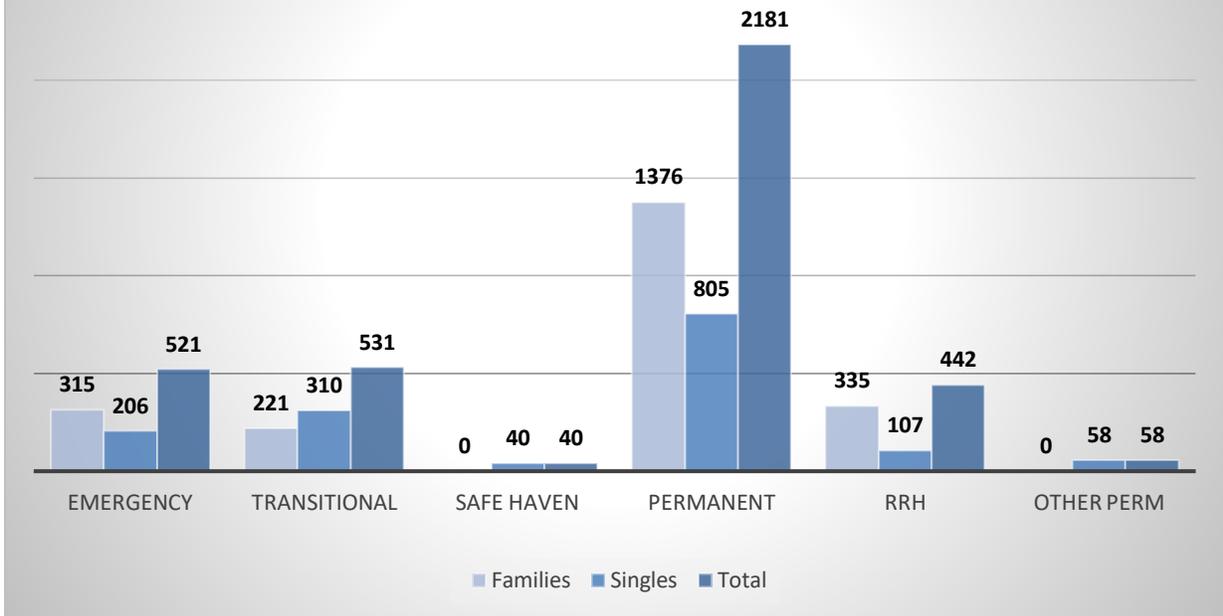
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<sup>12</sup> Allegheny County Continuum of Care 2017 Housing Inventory Chart



### Figure 3 Housing Inventory Count (HIC):

(Source: Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Overview of HDX Housing Inventory Count)



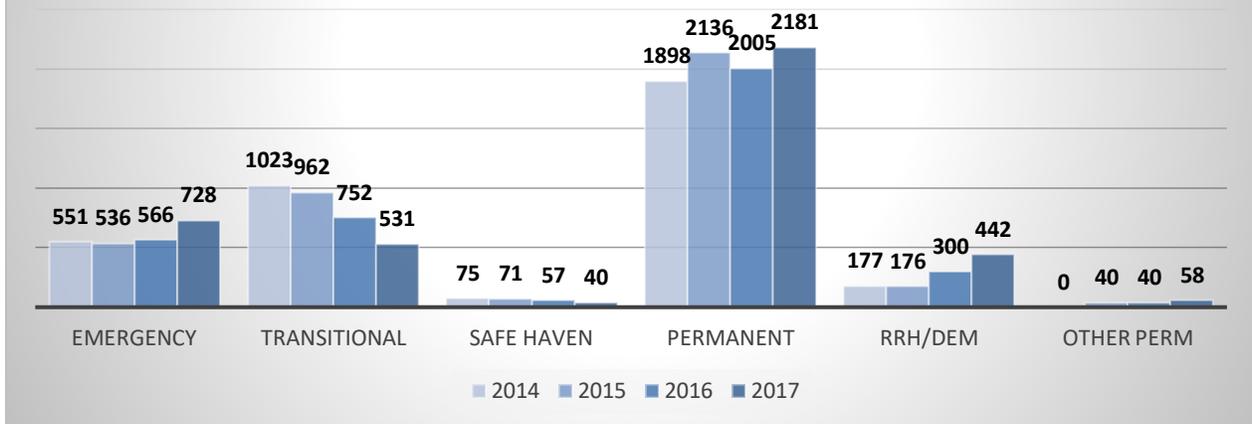
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<sup>13</sup> Permanent housing includes permanent supportive housing providing long term support and assistance to disabled homeless individuals and families and rapid rehousing providing time limited housing assistance and support services to homeless individuals and families.



## Figure 4 Housing Inventory Count (HIC) Total Beds 2014-2017:

(Source: Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Overview of HDX Housing Inventory Count)



Allegheny County has worked to ensure that funds are used effectively to prevent and end homelessness. This includes steps to ensure that resources are allocated to the most effective and cost-efficient strategies and that programs that are not effective or efficient at preventing and ending homelessness are transformed or reallocated. This also includes ensuring that people who have been homeless the longest and are the most vulnerable get priority access to help. As part of these efforts, the county has implemented Coordinated Entry through the Allegheny Link<sup>14</sup>. Coordinated entry to homeless services through Allegheny Link includes assessing the needs of homeless people, matching people to the intervention that best suits their needs, and ensures those with the greatest needs receive priority access to housing. Allegheny County has also adopted a policy that requires projects receiving CoC funds to use the Housing First<sup>15</sup> model, which helps to ensure that people most in need of housing supports are not being screened out due to restrictive admission criteria, such as treatment compliance, sobriety, absence of criminal background, and/or a positive rental history.

<sup>14</sup> Allegheny Link facilitates access to services and supports for: county residents with disabilities, residents over 60, people experiencing homelessness, and pregnant moms and caregivers of children up to six.

<sup>15</sup> *Housing First* is an evidence-based practice that provides permanent housing first and then provides services, as needed and requested. It approaches housing as an essential first step toward rather than a reward for recovery from an addiction or treatment compliance. It has been demonstrated to lead to significant improvements for individuals who are chronically homeless, including higher retention in housing and improved physical and mental health and reduced substance use.



In addition to these important changes, Allegheny County has also made significant shifts in how resources are spent to ensure increased investment in the most cost-effective models. There is a growing body of evidence indicating that Transitional Housing is costlier and does not achieve better outcomes than other types of interventions. One study showed that, compared to Rapid Re-housing,<sup>16</sup> Transitional Housing participants spent more time homeless and showed less improvement on measures of adult well-being despite costs that were on average nearly five times higher.<sup>17</sup> In the past several years the Allegheny County Continuum of Care has reallocated all HUD CoC Transitional Housing funds to other program models. These changes are reflected in Figure 4 that shows changes in the homeless assistance inventory from 2014 to 2017.

In addition, the county has continued to expand its supply of permanent housing, including Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) for chronically homeless people and Rapid Re-Housing (RRH). This has been accomplished by prioritizing 100% of existing CoC funded PSH beds to people experiencing chronic homelessness and by investing in new PSH and RRH development. Like Housing First, PSH is recognized by the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) as an Evidence-Based practice,<sup>18</sup> and, as indicated above, there is a growing body of evidence indicating that RRH is less costly than and at least equally effective to transitional models.

The county has also taken important steps to ensure access to emergency shelter. Accessible emergency shelter is an essential element of an effective response to homelessness. Providing safe shelter significantly reduces the risks faced by people experiencing homelessness who would otherwise be on the streets. Allegheny County recently shifted from expanding shelter capacity only during cold weather emergencies to providing seasonal shelter for the entire winter. This approach reduces repeated discharges from and readmissions to shelter, which can disrupt case management activities that are critical to helping clients to secure permanent housing. Additional strategies to ensure that resources are invested in the most efficient and cost-effective way are addressed in Section IV of this report.

There are significant resources to prevent and end homelessness among Veterans in Allegheny County, many of these operating under the jurisdiction of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The HUD-VASH program provides permanent supportive housing using Housing Choice Vouchers

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<sup>16</sup>Rapid re-housing is an intervention that helps individuals and families to quickly exit homelessness and return to permanent housing by providing assistance with housing search, short or medium term rental assistance, and/or case management support.

<sup>17</sup> HUD Family Options Study: Short-Term Impacts of Housing and Services Interventions for Homeless Families, July 2015

<sup>18</sup> <http://nrepp.samhsa.gov/AdvancedSearch.aspx>



administered by the Pittsburgh and Allegheny County Housing Authorities. Consistent with concerns about locating affordable housing in the community, Veterans with vouchers take an average of 103 days to locate housing – above the national average of 89. Despite challenges in locating housing, nearly 96 percent of the 422 HUD-VASH vouchers are leased and housing formerly homeless Veterans. There are two funded Supportive Services for Veteran Families programs that provide rapid rehousing and support to Veterans moving to permanent housing. There are five VA funded Grant and Per Diem Transitional Housing programs. The VA is restructuring these programs increasing the emphasis on rapid placement in permanent housing. In FY 2016, a total of 164 Veterans left these transitional programs after an average stay of 230 days and an average cost of services of \$9,150.

Despite continued efforts to expand the inventory of housing interventions dedicated to serving people experiencing homelessness and to achieve efficiencies in those programs, the existing designated inventory is not sufficient to prevent and end homelessness. In addition, given the fiscal environment at the federal and state levels, significant new funding is unlikely. Consequently, an effective plan will necessarily include strategies to leverage mainstream affordable housing resources<sup>19</sup> and ensure that existing resources are used as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Though the cost of living in Pittsburgh (as of 2015) has remained lower than many other cities of similar size, significant local job growth and a reputation of being a “livable city” have created strain on the affordable housing market. Recognizing that, the Mayor and City Council formed the Affordable Housing Task Force to evaluate existing programs and initiatives to produce and preserve affordable units and to make recommendations to ensure a “vibrant mix of housing opportunities for people of all income levels.”<sup>20</sup>

The Task Force commissioned a Housing Needs Assessment to compile findings regarding the existing affordable housing landscape within the city. The assessment demonstrated an affordability gap of 14,896 units for households earning up to 30 percent of Median Income and that only 34 units of available affordable housing are available for every 100 extremely low-income households. The assessment also found that, though new units are being constructed, they are often out of reach for low-income renters, with average rent of \$2,163 per month for a two-bedroom apartment in a newly constructed development. These challenges are being exacerbated by expirations of affordability periods in existing developments. In fact, 1,729 units have already or will have their affordability period expire between 2016 and 2020. The assessment also found that households in some neighborhoods are particularly vulnerable in that

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<sup>19</sup> Throughout this report the term “mainstream resources” is used to refer to housing and human service programs that are not designated to serve homeless people and are rather intended to serve a broader range of low-income households.

<sup>20</sup> Pittsburgh Affordable Housing Task Force mission



they face economic instability, constraints on their housing choices, and a high degree of housing market volatility.<sup>21</sup> Left unaddressed, these housing market dynamics will significantly impede efforts to prevent and end homelessness.

To address these issues, the Task Force has issued a range of recommendations, including establishing a Housing Trust Fund at \$10 million annually and targeting 50 percent of funds to households at or below 30 percent of area median income, increasing utilization of the federal four percent Low Income Housing Tax Credit program, and increasing mixed income development through inclusionary housing and targeting those rental units to households at or below 50 percent of area median income. These are all important recommendations however; the plan does not target units specifically to households experiencing or exiting from homelessness.

Setting aside affordable housing opportunities and other mainstream resources for households experiencing homelessness is a critical component of efforts to end homelessness, and the county has already made significant strides in this regard including commitments from both the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County Housing Authorities of Housing Choice Vouchers for homeless households.

Recognizing that their clients have a range of inter-related needs, including for example, housing, employment, income support, food, medical assistance, child protection, addiction services, and disability care and that higher levels of collaboration and integration among diverse human services provides clear fiscal benefits, increased efficiency, and greater service effectiveness, Allegheny County consolidated human services under the Department of Human Services (DHS) in 1997. Understanding that the vision of a truly integrated human services system will not be quickly realized, DHS continues to identify opportunities to move closer to that vision each year.

Recent examples include: creation of a new housing program that prevents young people exiting the child welfare system from becoming homeless; the ongoing build out of a cross system data warehouse that enables analysis of multiple system involvement and costs; creation of the 412 Youth Zone - a multi-service center where youth experiencing homelessness and those involved in the child welfare system can access medical, behavioral health, employment, housing, legal and other services in a single location; and use of Medicaid to fund services in Permanent Supportive Housing. In addition, DHS has been successful at leveraging resources from other public and private partners, including: securing 250 Housing Choice Vouchers set aside by the City and County Public Housing Authorities to help households with a history of homelessness to achieve long-term housing stability; receipt of an \$800,000 competitive federal award to help improve access to and retention in housing for people experiencing chronic homelessness; and establishment of a medical respite pilot at Allegheny Health Network to improve care

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<sup>21</sup> Pittsburgh Affordable Housing Task Force Housing Needs Assessment (May 2016)



coordination for people with acute medical needs, who would otherwise be returning to shelter or the streets, thereby reducing costs associated with hospital re-admission. Strategies to leverage additional mainstream housing and service resources are addressed in Section IV of this report.

In December 2015 the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) extended and expanded the protections and services for homeless youth that had been incorporated into the McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youths Program. New requirements focus on identifying homeless students, authorizing local liaisons to verify the eligibility of children, youths and families for HUD homeless assistance, ensure coordination with other providers of services, expanding school stability by expanding school of origin to include preschools and receiving schools, and providing transportation to the end of the school year, even if the student is permanently housed, and removing enrollment barriers among other provisions.

People experiencing homelessness sometimes have behavioral health disabilities, including serious mental illness and substance use disorders. Stable housing enables consistent delivery of behavioral healthcare and provides people the platform they need to pursue recovery from mental illness and substance use. Ensuring access to quality behavioral healthcare and ensuring people receiving inpatient and residential mental health and substance abuse treatment are not discharged to homelessness will be critical to Allegheny County's efforts to prevent and end homelessness.

### **III. Projected Impact of Strategic Plan on Ending Homelessness**

This plan was developed during a period of transition in the federal government. With a new administration at the helm, there is much that remains unknown. There is a likelihood of budget contraction at the federal level. These reductions may not be targeted at the designated homeless programs but as indicated throughout, homelessness can only be solved by braiding together homeless and mainstream resources. If other resources contract this will likely impact the ability of the community to meet the goals in this plan. In addition, at the time this plan was developed, the State of Pennsylvania was facing a projected \$2 billion deficit. Given the fiscal environment and political climate at the state and federal level, it is unlikely that significant new funding designated for preventing and ending homelessness will become available during the period covered by this plan through 2022. Existing resources as currently deployed have proven insufficient to prevent and end homelessness. Consequently, this plan lays out strategies to increase leveraging of existing mainstream affordable housing and human service resources and to ensure that resources designated to serving homeless people are invested in the most effective and cost-efficient manner possible.

This plan includes strategies to:



- Expand access to homelessness prevention services for people who are most likely to experience literal homelessness;
- Coordinate with other systems of care to prevent discharges into homelessness;
- Strengthen shelter, outreach, and housing navigation services so that people who do become homeless receive the supports they need to secure permanent housing quickly;
- Expand set-asides for people experiencing homelessness in mainstream affordable housing programs; and
- Expand use of Medicaid to fund housing stabilization supports. These strategies remain sound regardless of funding levels.

Collectively, the strategies included in this plan are anticipated to reduce the number of households already experiencing literal homelessness<sup>22</sup> and reduce the number of households that become homeless for the first time. For households that do become homeless, these strategies are anticipated to help them to move more quickly to permanent housing. These outcomes will result in savings that can be reinvested into cost effective solutions to homelessness.

However, homelessness is a complex, interconnected social issue and preventing and ending homelessness will require long-term commitments by multiple sectors, including affordable housing, health care, behavioral health care, child welfare, employment, income support, corrections, education, and Veterans services. Success will require a joint approach to solving the problem through agreed upon actions. A significant funding cut in any of these systems could impede the success of this effort. Macroeconomic factors such as a recession or crisis in the housing market could also disrupt efforts to prevent and end homelessness. Despite these uncertainties, this plan seeks to engage each sector to establish a common agenda, pursue mutually reinforcing activities, and commit to ongoing communication and continuous reassessment of the landscape in order to make adjustments to the plan as necessary in response to an ever-changing landscape.

Even with all the initiatives outlined in this plan, homelessness is likely to remain a challenge. This is tragic – especially for those affected by homelessness – because this problem can be fully addressed with an entirely reasonable investment. Advocacy must continue to direct resources toward sustaining the infrastructure of community – the families and youth. The Bipartisan Policy Center issued a recent report outlining how a limited investment of \$8.5 billion in new annual spending commitments would be sufficient to fully end homelessness for families and youth, produce 400,000 additional rental units, and add 500,000 targeted housing vouchers to

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<sup>22</sup> HUD only considers households living in emergency shelter, transitional housing, safe havens, or in places not meant for human habitation to be literally homeless. This definition excludes households who are doubled up.



communities of high need<sup>23</sup>. Although it is important to pursue the strategies outlined in this plan, there remains a critical need for advocacy to ensure that the resources truly needed are made available.

## IV. Strategic Initiatives to Prevent and End Homelessness

### PROVIDE ACCESS TO YEAR-ROUND LOW BARRIER EMERGENCY SHELTER.

- Establish year-round low-barrier shelters that will provide a safe environment focused on assisting those served to secure housing in the community. In addition to providing safe and low barrier shelter, the focus should be on rapidly returning shelter residents to permanent housing.
- Target case management and supportive services to those not able to resolve their homelessness crisis on their own. These services are currently provided but the level of resources may not be sufficient to assist in rapidly exiting shelter and serving all those who need support in ending their homelessness. Individuals and families in shelter should be provided with rapid access to assistance in addressing barriers to housing including: identification, disability documentation, and applications for benefits. Case management should be targeted toward those with most complex needs. Expanding the use of Rapid Rehousing and establishing housing navigation services (see below) will be critical in creating rapid exits from shelter. Services could be expanded by providing additional funding to shelters to support increased case management, by expanding the services currently offered centrally by DHS, or by funding one or several non-profits to provide the service system-wide. It is important that the community decide on one of these approaches.
  - Available HMIS data indicate that 33 percent of single adults and 16 percent of families spend one week or less in shelter and, of the remaining persons, 87 percent of single adults and 56 percent of families spend less than one month, suggesting that, consistent with national trends, a large portion of homeless people resolve their homelessness without assistance (referred to as ‘self-

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<sup>23</sup> Stegman, Michael and Dennis Shea, “Forging an Enduring Bipartisan Consensus on Affordable Rental Housing, Feb, 2017, Bipartisan Policy Center [http://bipartisanpolicy.org/library/forging-consensus-on-affordable-rental-housing/?\\_cldee=YXNjaHVtYWNoZXJAYmlwYXJ0aXNhbnBvbGljeS5vcmc%3d&recipientid=contact-8d94a80d745de61180ee6c3be5a82b30-e7582275dc404a6989ab39b15c5f43b8&utm\\_source=ClickDimensions&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Press%20Update%20%7C%20Housing%20Co%20mission&esid=182b155e-0cf9-e611-80ff-5065f38b31c1](http://bipartisanpolicy.org/library/forging-consensus-on-affordable-rental-housing/?_cldee=YXNjaHVtYWNoZXJAYmlwYXJ0aXNhbnBvbGljeS5vcmc%3d&recipientid=contact-8d94a80d745de61180ee6c3be5a82b30-e7582275dc404a6989ab39b15c5f43b8&utm_source=ClickDimensions&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Press%20Update%20%7C%20Housing%20Co%20mission&esid=182b155e-0cf9-e611-80ff-5065f38b31c1)



resolving’).<sup>24</sup> HMIS data should also be used to identify clients with a pattern of cycling in and out of homelessness; when these households are identified, target case management and housing options to them to prevent the re-occurrence of homelessness.

- Since housing and case management resources will always be limited, provide an opportunity for shelter residents to ‘self-resolve’ their homelessness by:
  - As part of the shelter intake process, seek to identify whether the household has a plan for exiting from the shelter. Identify the additional resources that would be needed to support this plan and seek to assist the household in obtaining this support.
- Case management services at shelters are limited. Seek to maximize the effectiveness of these services by targeting to those who are unable to self-resolve their homelessness. Rather than engaging people in case management as soon as they enter shelter, target case management to those who have been in shelter for at least seven nights since many assisted will have left the shelter by that time. The exception to this policy would be those households identified above that have cycled through homelessness on multiple occasions. Target those for immediate case management support. In all instances, shelter based case management should seek to engage with and case conference with any other service providers with which the person/family is involved.
- Based on the introduction of year-round low barrier shelter, assess remaining shelters and adjust accordingly. Anecdotal evidence from the introduction of daily winter shelter (in contrast to the cold weather emergency shelter) appears to indicate that the availability of these beds may be impacting the use of other shelter beds that are not low barrier. The creation of low barrier, year-round shelter may result in a reduction of need for some existing shelter beds. If so, any funds saved could be used to support the year-round low-barrier shelters.

(For more details and additional strategies related to ensuring engagement of and access to emergency shelter for all clients, including those living in places not meant for human habitation and related to ensuring that stays in emergency shelter are brief and lead to stable housing see the Client Engagement, Accessible Emergency Shelter, and Housing-focused Case Management sections of the accompanying Best Practice Recommendations.)

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<sup>24</sup>2015 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report - AHAR



<b>Implementation Strategy <i>PROVIDE ACCESS TO YEAR-ROUND LOW BARRIER EMERGENCY SHELTER.</i></b>		
<b>Action Step</b>	<b>Responsible Party</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
Develop and release a competitive RFP to identify an agency to assist in the development of a plan to implement a year-round low-barrier shelter	Allegheny County DHS	Summer 2017
Develop a strategy for accessible shelter including appropriate size for single adult shelters and appropriate facilities for families and special populations including LGBTQ people.	DHS and selected contractor	Fall 2017
Secure resources to provide shelter	DHS and HAB	Fall 2017 – Winter 2018

## **ESTABLISH A CENTRALIZED RENTAL HOUSING LOCATOR (NAVIGATOR)**

There are three interrelated efforts underway to increase the supply of apartments affordable for those experiencing homelessness. The Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania and its Rental Housing Working Group is trying to enlist more landlords willing to rent to homeless Veterans and other homeless individuals, Section 8 Voucher holders, and other hard to place individuals. ACTION-Housing, under a grant from the United Way, provides limited housing locator services to people with disabilities. A DHS priority is to help Rapid Rehousing providers lease up quickly.

Placing people into housing is challenging and resting the burden on homeless families and individuals to resolve can extend the time that they are homeless and result in under-used resources. Navigation services can be highly effective in addressing these issues.

- Expand navigation support and housing location services to expedite access to permanent housing. This support should be provided either on a central basis by an entity such as the Department of Human Services or through contract to one or more providers who will work on a city-wide or regional basis.

Navigation support includes:

- Working with shelter and other providers to assist clients in becoming ‘document ready’ for housing. This includes having proper identification for all family members, custody documentation for minor members of the household, and documentation of the households’ income.



- Developing working relations with owners of rental housing to expand the potential supply of housing available to program participants. This includes outreaching to property owners, identifying the barriers to their providing housing to formerly homeless consumers, and seeking to resolve those barriers.
  - As part of this process, consider establishing a risk mitigation fund that would assist owners in rapidly restoring units that have been damaged by tenants coming from the homeless system. These types of funds are effective tools in enlisting the participation of private owners – especially the owner/operators of smaller apartment buildings as the loss of revenue would be particularly harmful to them.<sup>25</sup>
- Assisting housing search including:
  - Providing transportation to assist in looking at potential units. Transportation is a major barrier to housing placement and significantly limits the ability of CoC consumers to secure housing. Providing transportation to support the housing search process can reduce the length of time it takes to secure housing and reduce the rate at which families are unable to secure housing.
  - Assisting families in negotiating with landlords to obtain housing that is affordable under relevant payment standards. In many instances property owners have been willing to make minor adjustments in rent or agreeing to include utilities in the rent in order to lease a unit more quickly. This is much easier for a skilled housing navigator to achieve than relying on the assisted family to negotiate with a property owner.
  - Being familiar with HUD Housing Quality Standards (HQS) and doing a preliminary assessment of whether the unit will meet standards (where required). As part of assisting the families to locate housing, the navigator should do an informal check of HQS to determine whether there are disqualifying factors. Inspecting units for HQS is time consuming and an expense for homeless service providers. Avoiding inspections that will result in negative outcomes will reduce unnecessary costs and speed up housing families.

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<sup>25</sup> The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness has excellent resources to assist in the development of such a fund. These are found here: <https://www.usich.gov/tools-for-action/engaging-landlords-risk-mitigation-funds-community-profiles>



- Identifying housing that will allow students in the family 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. The community has significantly increased the inventory of available rapid rehousing units. This increase will result in significant numbers of families and individuals searching for housing in the private market. This competition for resources could increase the time and complexity of securing housing and may leave some families unable to secure housing. Navigation support should be provided to all households entering rapid rehousing. Support should be provided either directly by DHS or via contract with a centralized or regional provider.

Landlord Partnership, Arlington County, VA: responds to landlord concerns within 2 business days. Provides case management including home visits to rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing. Facilitates communication to resolve conflicts. Accesses eviction prevention resources from County Prevention funding. Has a Risk Reduction Fund that covers up to \$3,000 in damages or lost rent.

- The expansion of Rapid Rehousing will put pressure on the supply of affordable housing as consumers with access to tenant based rental assistance seek units on the private market. Failure to rapidly get these units under lease could lead to under-expenditures of CoC funded Rapid Rehousing and potential risks to renewal of funding.

- Access to navigation support will be essential in assisting these households to promptly be able to lease up.

- Extend navigation support to assist people in the homeless system who have PHA issued Housing Choice Vouchersto locate and lease suitable housing. Initially target this support to move-on vouchers (the set aside vouchers provided by both the Pittsburgh and Allegheny County Housing Authorities). The Pittsburgh Housing Authority reported that the success rate of Housing Choice Voucher holders in securing and leasing a unit with their voucher is below 50 percent. The failure to find a unit and execute a lease during the voucher period has consequences on consumers (loss of the largest possible opportunity for affordable housing) and the PHA (no administrative fees are earned until the consumer can sign a lease for an approvable unit). Extending navigation support to the homeless set-aside units should help to ensure that these units are utilized and could provide a model for offering navigational support to Housing Choice Voucher recipients across the county. The time saved in issuing vouchers that do not



lead to housing placements and the administrative fees earned by placing tenants in housing might assist in covering the costs of providing navigation assistance.

- Ensure that the most service intensive resources (Permanent Supportive Housing) are serving those with highest vulnerability and greatest need. The use of coordinated entry and assessments which prioritize Permanent Supportive Housing to those with the highest needs is targeted to accomplishing this. A continuous quality improvement approach within coordinated entry will help to ensure that this resource continues to be appropriately targeted. With the targeting of all PSH to chronically homeless people, support provider organizations in implementing Evidence Based Practices (e.g., Housing First, Harm Reduction, Critical Time Intervention) and accessing sufficient resources and training to implement these practices.
- Provide housing stabilization and eviction prevention services post housing to assist in accessing needed resources and meeting lease obligations. Continue to link people exiting homelessness to mainstream service systems, monitor linkages to evaluate success and identify opportunities to improve access and utilization. Continue, as part of the annual review of providers, to track access to mainstream services programs and reward (through higher ranking and potential new funding) those providers who succeed in making these service connections.
- Expand resources for housing stabilization support including Medicaid and services from other systems of care, e.g., adult protective services, corrections, health/behavioral health services, child welfare etc.

(For more details and additional strategies related ensuring that stays in emergency shelter are brief and lead to stable housing see Housing-focused Case Management section of the accompanying Best Practice Recommendations.)



## Implementation Plan

<b>Establish a centralized rental housing locator (navigator)</b>		
<i>Expand navigation support and housing location services to expedite access to permanent housing.</i>		
<b>Action Step</b>	<b>Responsible Party</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
Decide structure for navigation services in Allegheny County, implement contracting and oversight	DHS	Fall 2017
Broker agreement with area PHAs and DHS to extend navigation services to PHA units – starting with set-aside units	HAB in conjunction with DHS, HACP, HA-AC	Fall 2017 - Winter 2018

## INCREASED SUPPLY AND ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING

There are two key approaches for increasing the supply of housing for homeless people:

- Increase access to the existing housing stock and
- Ensure access for homeless people in new affordable housing development.



A recent report from the Pennsylvania Housing Alliance indicated that the supply of rental units is concentrated in buildings with 1-4 units. Other communities have found that smaller scale property owners are more likely to rent to people leaving the homeless system than larger for profit housing providers. Many of these larger providers will rely on credit and background checks that will exclude formerly homeless people or those who have an eviction history from their units. Housing navigators and locators can focus on engaging owners of these smaller properties. Consider implementing policies to encourage the participation of these smaller owners.

There are opportunities to expand integration of affordable housing development within new affordable housing developments. Discussions indicate that there has been limited engagement between homeless services providers and community development corporations (CDCs). This lack of collaboration contributes to a lack of commitment to the twin goals of ending homelessness and maintaining and expanding the supply of affordable housing.

The recommendations here call for increased set-asides of housing in new affordable housing development. Implementing those recommendations will require greater engagement and collaboration among homeless service providers and the affordable housing sector.

- Establish additional set-asides/preferences for people exiting homelessness in affordable housing developments. In many instances people who receive PSH can stabilize and over

time no longer need the high level of services found in these projects. Accessing other affordable housing for these families will free up PSH beds for those who are still homeless.<sup>26</sup>

- Enhance coordination/cooperation with PHAs. Both the Pittsburgh and Allegheny County Housing Authorities have already agreed to set-aside housing choice vouchers to assist families in moving on from homeless assistance. This is a major commitment. Efforts should continue to engage the McKeesport Housing Authority to provide a similar level of support.

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<sup>26</sup> HUD has developed a set of resources to assist multifamily property owners and agents to establish 'preferences' for homeless people within their properties. These are found here: <https://www.hudexchange.info/news/hud-releases-resources-on-homeless-preferences-for-multifamily-property-owners-and-agents/>



- Address low-cost barriers to housing such as lack of funds for basic household furnishings, access to security and utility deposits, and application fees through the development of a flexible housing assistance fund. This fund would operate in coordination with the community’s diversion and prevention efforts, speeding up placing families in housing and reducing the amount of time spent homeless. A flexible fund such as this could be initially supported by the philanthropic community. If it demonstrates success in reducing the time spent homeless and related disruption to lives, it would be funded through prevention resources under ESG. It would be administered in conjunction with the housing navigation services.

Access to PHA assistance could be facilitated through a fund that would provide relatively small loans to landlords to cover improvements needed to meet housing quality standards (HQS). These loans could either be offered at a low interest rate or ‘forgiven’ if the owner continues to rent to homeless families for a specified period. The fund could be administered by the PHAs and in Pittsburgh, partially funded through the Moving to Work program.

- PHAs in other jurisdictions have developed close partnerships with their continuums of care. This includes:
  - In Ann Arbor, MI and Houston, TX, the PHA provides housing choice vouchers for permanent supportive housing while the CoC provides supportive services through a single or regional services provider with HUD CoC funded resources.
  - Other communities are using PHA vouchers similar to those set aside by the City and County Housing Authorities. This includes the Connecticut Department of Housing and the Houston Housing Authority.

The City of Pittsburgh’s Affordable Housing Task Force’s Recommendations to Mayor Peduto and the Pittsburgh City Council contain several key recommendations that are echoed in this plan. Those recommendations did not specifically target homeless people and it

Through the Department of Housing Preservation and Development, the City of New York sets aside 30 percent of all units in new low income projects for formerly homeless people.



is suggested that affordable housing developed through this initiative include set-asides for homeless people.

## IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

<b>Increase supply of and access to affordable housing for people who have experienced homelessness</b>		
<i>Work to establish set-asides/preferences for people exiting homelessness in affordable housing developments.</i>		
<b>Action Step</b>	<b>Responsible Party</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
Establish policy on municipal, county and state level that affordable housing developments provide a set aside of units for formerly homeless households	HAB to seek to work with agencies and elected officials to implement policy	Fall 2017
Create flexible emergency fund to address barriers to housing placement	Funder community	Winter 2018
Explore expanded collaboration with area PHAs and the continuum of care	HA-CP, AC-HA, HAP	Winter 2018



## **INCREASE AND EXPAND OUTREACH RESOURCES TO FULLY COVER ALL AREAS IN ALLEGHENY COUNTY WITH SIGNIFICANT POPULATIONS OF HOMELESS PEOPLE**

In many parts of Allegheny County, especially the Monongahela Valley, there is limited access to services, limited understanding of the homeless services system, and limited awareness among the public about services availability and results of efforts to prevent and end homelessness.

Outreach to people who are homeless can be very challenging. Limited access to shelter and the limited availability of low-barrier shelter discourage homeless people from seeking services. Engagement of homeless people can be challenging as it requires repeated and persistent engagement to secure trust and cooperation. In the absence of a sustained outreach effort, hard-to-engage homeless people will remain unsheltered and outside the system of care. Not only does this cause continuing harm to these individuals but it also reduces public confidence that the issue is being effectively addressed.

Outreach can be provided by multiple organizations and a key to effective outreach is coordination of services. Outreach teams funded through Emergency Solutions Grants and Continuum of Care funding should meet regularly to assure that their efforts are complementary and not duplicative. VA funded outreach through Health Care for Homeless Veterans should be coordinated with community based services. HMIS should be used to assist in coordinating outreach and quick referrals made to emergency housing and coordinated entry for people engaged through outreach.

Use the Department of Human Services data warehouse to identify the highest cost users of multiple systems and prioritize eligible households for permanent supportive housing. This is consistent with the earlier recommendations to match data between health care systems and criminal justice to identify repeat users who are homeless or at risk and prioritize those households for homeless assistance to limit re-admissions. Efforts are underway to develop a predictive analytics tool that would help Link operators identify the risks of becoming homeless and to target assistance to those at high risk. This effort may be critical in targeting prevention and diversion resources.

Connecticut Medicaid-HMIS match: a match was done of 1,340 adult Medicaid beneficiaries who were identified as homeless and accrued over and had accrued a minimum of \$20,000 in Medicaid services annually. This group of 1,340 persons was found to have accrued total of more than \$67 million in annual Medicaid costs.



Expand efforts to coordinate with the health care, behavioral health, criminal justice and foster care systems to prevent discharges into homelessness. Allegheny County DHS is in the process of developing a ‘warning signs’ of homelessness document that will be shared among case managers working in different human services system. This will assist in identifying individuals and families at risk and either offering services to prevent this or referring to Allegheny Link for support.

Public policy and attitudes toward public encampments of homeless people compounds the problem. While encampments can pose safety and sanitary threats, the lack of appropriate shelter provides limited alternatives to people experiencing housing crises. Accessible, low-barrier shelter combined with expanded outreach will assist in addressing the emergency needs of people who are experiencing homelessness.

Further outreach recommendations are included in the Best Practices Recommendations.

## IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

<b>Increase and expand outreach resources to Fully cover all areas in Allegheny County with significant populations of homeless people</b>		
<i>Work to expand outreach to cover entire county</i>		
<b>Action Step</b>	<b>Responsible Party</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
Identify resources to expand outreach	DHS in conjunction with the HAB	Fall 2017
Issue RFP to provide outreach in underserved areas of the county	DHS	Winter 2018
Evaluate effectiveness of the expanded outreach effort	HAB	Summer 2018

## **DEVELOP A COMMUNICATIONS PLAN THAT INCLUDES BROADER DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION ON THE HOMELESS SERVICES SYSTEM, HOW TO ACCESS ASSISTANCE, AND INFORMING THE PUBLIC ON PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING THIS PLAN.**



Outreach and Town Hall meetings conducted as part of this planning process revealed a lack of understanding of the homeless services system in Allegheny County, how and where to access services and limited public awareness of success of efforts to date to prevent and end homelessness. This lack of awareness can diminish public support and increase the challenges associated with accessing services.

This effort can build upon efforts currently underway to integrate data concerning people at risk. Data integration has been highly successful in Allegheny County and across the nation. Continue efforts to match data to identify high need households, risk factors, and priorities.

There are several existing initiatives to share information including:

- BigBurgh.com, a mobile optimized website that provides information on accessing services related to homelessness prevention and crisis assistance. It allows users to access information with services targeted toward youth, families, LGBTQ, and Veterans. This provides a readily accessible platform to many people at risk of or in housing emergency. This can be built upon to expand access to services among people in need.
- DHS has been compiling an electronic newsletter. It should be continued and linked to accessible social media sites to share information on successes and continuing challenges in addressing homelessness in the county.

Additionally, the HAB should explore strategies to remove the stigma associated with “homelessness”. There may be opportunities to partner with the VA in this. There is virtually universal acceptance that Veterans should not become homeless and many homeless Veterans have received support and now have noteworthy success stories. With proper consent and respect for confidentiality, successful personal histories can help to overcome the negative images and consequent lack of concern for people who are experiencing homelessness.

The HAB should develop a schedule for reporting back to the public on progress in implementing the plan. The communication plan should include opportunities for public input on plan implementation and for electronic distribution including social media.

Key to demonstrating progress in implementing the plan is timely and accurate data and DHS’s data warehouse provides a robust resource that can help to prioritize assistance through coordinated entry.



## IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Develop a communications plan that includes broader dissemination of information on the homeless services system, how to access assistance, and informing the public on progress in implementing this plan		
Action Step	Responsible Party	Timeline
Develop communications plan	HAB	Fall 2017
Conduct community information efforts so that people in housing crisis know where to turn and concerned community members know how to assist	DHS	Winter 2018

**BUILD ON EXISTING PARTNERSHIPS (SUCH AS THE ONE WITH THE BUHL FOUNDATION) AND/OR DEVELOP NEW ONES BETWEEN THE CITY AND COUNTY GOVERNMENTS, PITTSBURGH PUBLIC SCHOOLS, THE ALLEGHENY INTERMEDIATE UNIT AND THE PORT AUTHORITY TO PILOT NEW PROGRAMS TO HELP WITH SCHOOL RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT. THE INITIAL FOCUS SHOULD BE ON TRANSPORTATION COORDINATION.**

Maintaining the connection to educational services is critical in preventing multi-generational cycles of homelessness. To ensure that students remain engaged:

- Ensure homeless liaisons in the educational system understand the process to access homeless services and school liaisons in the homeless system understand the process to access services through the educational system.
- Seek to identify high need students/households at greatest risk for literal homelessness and prioritizing them through the Coordinated Entry System (CES) for prevention services. The goal is greater coordination between homelessness prevention resources through Allegheny Link and the activities of the school system homeless liaisons such that the liaisons can assist in coordinating resources to prevent families from becoming literally homeless. Prevention services to be provided include case management to assist the household in accessing resources, assessment to determine if other support is needed, and time limited rental assistance to allow the family to stabilize in housing. Support provided should extend beyond addressing payment arrearages and help to ensure that the family will remain in housing.



- Establish a plan to ensure data reliability and participation by all 43 school districts in the data warehouse. Use this data to assist in identifying those students most at risk of homelessness and target prevention resources accordingly.

(For additional detail see the Coordination with the Education System section of the accompanying Best Practice Recommendations)

### IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

<b>Build on existing partnerships (such as the one with the Buhl Foundation) and/or develop new ones between the City and County governments, Pittsburgh Public Schools, the Allegheny Intermediate Unit and the Port Authority to pilot new programs to help with school responsibilities under Every Student Succeeds Act.</b>		
<b>Action Step</b>	<b>Responsible Party</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
Develop linkages between philanthropic community, city/county government, local education authorities, and the AIU	HAB and philanthropic community	Fall 2017
Conduct pilot test of data linkages and transportation coordination	HAB AIU	Winter 2018

## V. Five-Year Implementation Plan

### Political and Economic Context

This plan was developed during a period of transition in the federal government. Though the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office anticipates that the U.S. economy will expand solidly in the near term, it also predicts that the federal budget deficit will increase, in relation to the size of the economy. The media has widely reported that the administration is seeking to cut \$10.5 trillion in federal spending over 10 years. Similarly, House Republicans have proposed: balancing the federal budget, valuing outcomes over inputs, devolving power back to the states, and prioritizing the national security responsibilities of the federal government.

At the State level, facing a projected \$2 billion deficit, Governor Tom Wolfe recently proposed a fiscal year 2017-2018 budget that includes over \$2 billion in cuts and savings and proposes to consolidate the State Departments of Aging, Drug and Alcohol Programs, Health and Human



Services into a single department. The proposal is intended to improve efficiency and service coordination and avoid cuts to services.

Though much remains unknown as the new federal administration takes the helm and details regarding the state’s proposal become available, given the fiscal and political climate at both the state and federal levels, it is unlikely that significant new funding designated for preventing and ending homelessness will become available over the next five years. In addition, existing programs, particularly those deemed wasteful, duplicative, or failing to achieve their purpose, may be at risk. Existing resources, as currently deployed, have already proven insufficient to prevent and end homelessness. Consequently, this plan for Allegheny County lays out strategies to increase leveraging of existing mainstream affordable housing and human service resources and to ensure that resources designated to serving homeless people are invested in the most effective and cost-efficient manner possible.

Homelessness is a complex, interconnected social issue and preventing and ending homelessness will require long-term commitments by multiple sectors, including affordable housing, health care, behavioral health care, child welfare, employment, income support, corrections, education, and Veterans services. A significant funding cut in any of these systems could impede the success of this effort. Macroeconomic factors such as a recession or crisis in the housing market could also disrupt efforts to prevent and end homelessness. Despite these uncertainties, this plan seeks to engage each sector to establish a common agenda, pursue mutually reinforcing activities, and commit to ongoing communication and continuous reassessment of the landscape in order to make adjustments to the plan as necessary in response to an ever changing landscape.

## **Strategy for Implementing Strategic Initiatives**

Implementation of the initiatives contained in this plan will require a commitment by multiple stakeholder organizations to take a defined set of actions within a particular time frame. The Homeless Advisory Board (HAB) has developed an implementation plan, detailing the necessary action steps, assigning responsibility for who will need to take those steps, and defining a timeline under which those actions will be taken.

## **GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE**

Like other types of large-scale social change, 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-size the interventions and ensure 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 (HAB) is committed to ensuring that there is an



effective governance structure that engages the highest levels of leadership in the county and city to commit to the goals and implementation of this plan.

To ensure this engagement, the HAB will:

- Seek adoption of the plan by the Mayor and County Executive.
- 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 Homeless Advisory Board will:

- Assess the need for additional membership on the HAB to ensure representation from the most critical stakeholder organizations that will be needed to act to implement the plan.
- Add representatives as determined necessary. Ensure that the HAB has a balanced membership that is empowered to make challenging funding decisions to improve system outcomes.
- Add HAB subcommittees and work groups as needed to support implementation of the plan. This will include a Funders Subcommittee that will pursue opportunities to align government and private funding to preferred program models and best practices as established in the plan, ensure that funders understand project performance on community-wide targets, and encourage funding shifts over time to projects and models that demonstrate strong performance.

## **TRACKING PROGRESS AND CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVING OUTCOMES**

Peter Goodman a participant in The Strive Partnership, a nationally recognized effort improving academic success in Greater Cincinnati, offers this advice: “Put concerned people in one room, agree upon statistically definable goals, and then coordinate action and spend the dollars to hit the targets.” Establishing clear indicators of systems performance, tracking those measures over time and making systems performance reporting transparent to all stakeholders will help to gauge progress towards preventing and ending homelessness and identify successes and challenges.

To accomplish this the Homeless Advisory Board will build upon the existing Allegheny County Score Card to track additional measures of systems performance, 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 homeless services
- Costs per permanent housing exit by program type
- Investments by program type
- Location at system entry by program type

The Homeless Advisory Board will also:

- Adopt performance targets at the community and program levels including for all projects with dedicated beds for homeless people not only those that are Continuum of Care or/and Emergency Solutions Grant funded.
- Use baseline data to establish performance targets and raise the bar as performance improves.
- Regularly and transparently evaluating actual performance against targets (i.e. by disseminating regular performance reports at least quarterly).
- Provide training and supports to help program managers to use data to identify opportunities to strengthen performance using a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) approach.

CQI starts with the belief that any service can be improved, regardless of how effective it may currently be and relies on data-driven decisions to inform ongoing, strategic efforts to make services better. A CQI approach uses outcome measures (e.g., the number of shelter residents who secure permanent housing each month) to evaluate service effectiveness and output measures (e.g., the number of shelter residents who submit a housing application each month) to determine whether processes are happening as they should to achieve desired outcomes. CQI uses a “fail forward” approach that acknowledges that challenges are inevitable and shares both struggles and successes openly to inform continuous efforts to improve.

The CQI cycle includes four stages:





**Plan:** Identify an opportunity to improve services and plan for change. Includes establishing measurable performance targets, designing systems to track accurate outcome data, and involving staff in brainstorming factors limiting current performance.

**Do:** Implement change on a small scale.

**Study:** Use data to analyze actual performance against performance targets and monitor results over time to determine whether the change made a difference.

**Act:** If the change was successful, implement it on a wider scale and continuously assess your results. If the change did not work, begin the cycle again. Continuously improve service quality by setting higher targets or selecting new outcomes to improve.

**These following recommendations will support continuous improvement of services provided to people experiencing homelessness.**

1. Adopting programmatic and operational standards for shelters.



2. **Adopting Housing First standards** establishing a clear understanding of what Housing First means and of expectations for each homeless program component and participants.
3. **Adopting Recovery Housing<sup>27</sup> standards** that are aligned with the Housing First approach for people in the early stages of recovery who choose to live in an environment that prioritizes abstinence.
4. **Providing training and TA to providers on shelter, Housing First and Recovery Housing standards.** Provide training led by professional trainers and peer-to-peer learning opportunities.
5. **Including an assessment of standards implementation as part of protocols for monitoring projects. Use a corrective action process to support projects in meeting standards.** For programs unable to remedy findings through a corrective action process, analyze barriers to implementation, including leadership orientation, staffing pattern, staff training, program budget, and coordination with community-based and mainstream services to determine a course of action to support implementation or reallocate funds.
6. **Incorporating consumer satisfaction data and consumer input into the overall CQI strategy.** This includes:
  - Requiring projects at least annually to survey consumers, review consumer survey results and act accordingly.
  - Requiring projects to report consumer survey data to the HAB.
  - Convening focus groups or other qualitative data strategies to interpret survey results, explore areas not examined through surveys, and ensure that consumer input is used to inform decisions regarding program evaluation and system right-sizing.
7. **Systematizing training efforts and establish and implement a training plan annually.** Establish an annual training plan that includes learning objectives for key staff cohorts (e.g., direct service staff, property management and operations staff, and supervisors) by program model (e.g., prevention/diversion, coordinated entry, emergency shelter, transitional housing, rapid re-housing, and permanent supportive housing). The plan should include training topics and target audience and training delivery frequency for each topic.

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/4852/recovery-housing-policy-brief/>



## BACKBONE SUPPORT PLAN

Similar to tackling any complex, interconnected social issue, preventing and ending homelessness will require long-term commitments by multiple sectors, and success will require a joint approach to solving the problem through agreed upon and mutually reinforcing actions. It will require diverse sectors to commit to ongoing communication and continuous reassessment of the landscape in order to make adjustments to the plan. One approach to achieving that is known as “Collective Impact.”<sup>28</sup>

Achieving cross-sector commitment to a common agenda and coordinating mutually reinforcing activities requires the support of dedicated staff. The Allegheny County Department of Homeless Services is currently providing backbone support to the Homeless Advisory Board (HAB). The HAB will conduct an assessment using the critical backbone support functions and criteria for effective backbone support listed below to assess strengths and limitations of existing backbone support and identify any gaps that may currently exist. Following that assessment they will establish a plan to fill those gaps and make any other necessary adjustments. Backbone support need not be provided by a single organization, and the assessment will identify which organization(s) and title(s) are best equipped to provide support in each of the critical areas.

Backbone support functions include:

- Guiding vision & strategy to implement and update the plan to prevent and end homelessness
- Aligning HAB and key stakeholder activities to the plan
- Establishing and using shared measurement practices that establishes the ways in which success will be measured and reported – this includes clear expectations and goals for system and program performance
- Building public will for, consensus around, and commitment to the common agenda and create a sense of urgency around the highest priority changes
- Advancing a policy agenda that is aligned with the plan
- Mobilizing and aligning public and private resources to support realizing the plan’s goals
- Designing and implementing a continuous communication strategy
- Establishing learning priorities and learning plans to create a continuous cycle of dialogue and reflection, and a culture that supports openness, trust, and risk-taking.

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<sup>28</sup> [www.Collectiveimpactforum.org](http://www.Collectiveimpactforum.org)



Criteria for effective backbone support include:

- Commitment to the vision
- Ability to clearly articulate a compelling call to action and a sense of urgency
- Ability to influence key stakeholders
- Orientation towards data-driven results
- Ability to provide focused but adaptive leadership
- Ability to sustain funding and resources
- High credibility in the community
- Ability to manage complex relationships involving multiple stakeholders, including high level decision-makers
- Ability to effectively plan and manage projects
- Orientation towards inclusive decision-making and careful listening to diverse groups
- Ability to be a neutral convener, who can think critically and make decisions based on objective analyses without conflicts of interest
- If multiple organizations or staff within an organization are providing backbone support, ability to effectively integrate efforts

## COMMUNICATION PLAN

Preventing and ending homelessness in Allegheny County will require a diverse group of stakeholders to change the ways they are currently working. The relational aspects of such efforts must not be undervalued. People will not necessarily adopt changes because it makes rational sense to do so. In fact, it is a common adage among people engaged in Collective Impact efforts that people adopt new practices because someone they trust helped to teach them how. Similarly, Steven Covey, a leading management consultant contends that “change happens at the speed of trust.”

Developing trust among a diverse group of stakeholders from non-profit and government agencies and private organizations across multiple human service sectors requires an ongoing commitment to build experience working with each other. Participants must see that their interests are treated fairly, decisions are made based on evidence, and plans are designed to leverage the best solutions to the problem and not to favor the interests of one organization over another. Establishing mechanisms for continuous communication helps provide a platform to develop trust, address concerns, and pursue solutions in a collaborative way. Most Collective Impact initiatives accomplish this by convening face-to-face meetings of high-level decision makers at least monthly.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Kania J, Kramer M. Collective Impact (2011). Stanford Social Innovation Review.



The optimal frequency and format of communication will change over time and should be re-evaluated in light of new information and changes in the environment. The Homeless Advisory Board will establish a communication plan that includes these elements:

- Regular face-to-face meetings of key decision makers critical to overall implementation and monitoring progress of the plan
- Regular face-to-face meetings of smaller work groups responsible for generating particular results in a specific sub-area of the plan
- Regular and transparent reporting that shows actual community-wide and program level performance compare to performance targets on common measures
- Semi-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
- Semi-annual community meetings to update all interested stakeholders, address any concerns, and share credit for successes with the people who contributed
- A reliable and predictable mechanism that stakeholders not participating in face-to-face meetings can use to have their concerns addressed in between semi-annual meetings
- An annual report that explains the effort, provides progress updates using objective data, identifies successes and challenges, shares credit, and looks ahead to future initiatives
- A web-site where interested members of the public and involved stakeholders can learn about the effort, access key documents, and discover opportunities to get involved
- A media strategy to help build public will for and a sense of urgency around the plan



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