

Background

The principles proposed below are intended to guide a plan to prevent and end homelessness in Allegheny County. These principles are informed by and aligned with the **Allegheny County Department of Human Services' Vision Statement¹** and **Guiding Principles²**:

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.

¹ *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.*

² *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: Allegheny County Plan to Prevent & End Homelessness (9/2/16)

- 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

- 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.