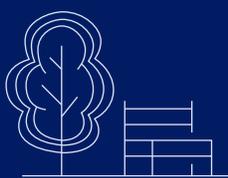RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS UNSHELTERED HOMELESSNESS FOR

Homeless Assistance System, Continuum of Care, and Service Providers

Homeless assistance providers and system leaders are on the frontlines of local efforts to address homelessness. They play many roles from the provision of services and housing to advocacy for sufficient resources. They also should be advancing and using best practices that offer solutions to homelessness and are non-punitive.

ADDRESSING UNSHELTERED HOMELESSNESS

There are four required components to successfully address unsheltered homelessness.

Reducing Inflow	Crisis Response	Housing Stabilization	Public Space Management
RESPONSIBILITY: **Public Systems**	RESPONSIBILITY: **Homeless Assistance System**		RESPONSIBILITY: **City & County Government**
> Justice > Anti-Poverty > Prevention > Health, including behavioral health > Child Welfare System > Affordable Housing	> Continuum of Care > Outreach > Emergency shelter & temporary housing > Housing providers > First responders > Health, including behavioral health providers		> Mayor/city manager > Code enforcement > Public health > Law enforcement > Parks > Outreach > Libraries > Businesses and business organizations > Faith-based organizations
Use data to identify how people are becoming homeless and target prevention strategies and policies to these areas.	Investment in housing stabilization capacity will make crisis response more effective and efficient.		To reduce expenditures, increase efforts to reduce inflow and expand homeless assistance system.

THE SOLUTION IS SIMPLE, BUT NOT EASY

The existence of unsheltered homelessness reflects insufficient resources and/or ineffective practices. To remedy this requires temporary housing to get people out of unsheltered conditions, permanent housing to get people out of homelessness, and effective and coordinated outreach. In all cases, these services should engage the person as they meet their needs.

WHY A HOUSING FIRST APPROACH?

Instead of requiring people to stabilize before receiving housing, a Housing First approach helps people achieve stability in housing as a precursor to other improvements in their lives. Withholding or ending the means to maintain basic subsistence, such as housing, based on prerequisite compliance with services or sobriety requirements hurts people and limits the effectiveness of other services.

TO DO Effective strategies that take the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness into account:

1 Foster collaboration across sectors with a full range of partners

In all jurisdictions that effectively address unsheltered homelessness, agencies providing homeless services work together, coordinate services, and share resources. Collaborating increases services efficiency and effectiveness, turning an aggregation of services into a functioning system. Facilitate effective collaborations by:

> Assessing the areas and degree in which collaboration is occurring

> Identifying ways to build upon and enhance existing partnerships

> Moving collectively toward a shared goal

> Advocating jointly against punitive approaches and for solutions that reduce unsheltered homelessness

Addressing the common goal of ending unsheltered homelessness may also be a focal point for forming partnerships across systems. The homeless assistance system must partner with multiple systems to address unsheltered homelessness comprehensively:

> Business organizations

> Community members and advocates

> Justice systems including corrections, law enforcement, and courts

> Health and behavioral health care

> Housing providers

> Parks and libraries

> Public housing authorities

> Public transit

> Services providers

Partner with justice systems and law enforcement services.

> Provide training and education on appropriate ways of interacting with people experiencing homelessness

> Help police develop protocols for first calling service providers to respond to calls regarding persons who are living unsheltered

> Help develop protocols and mechanisms for addressing homeless encampments that include adequate notice and provide for Housing First or low-barrier temporary shelter solutions rather than displacement

2 — Use data to inform policy and practices

Data-informed decision making is critical to developing and implementing effective strategies to reduce unsheltered homelessness. Data analysis is important to identifying approaches to reduce racial disparities. Integrating data across local government with data available through HMIS (Homeless Management Information System), and other data sources including, Point-in-Time (PIT) counts, "by-name" lists, and Coordinated Entry Systems.

> Partner with researchers who can link homelessness data with data from other networks, such as justice and healthcare systems, and apply sophisticated analyses to expand insights and assess the effectiveness of approaches.

> Aggregate data and present it in dashboards to guide system actions.

> Use data to educate partners and elected officials about constructive ways of ending homelessness and the harm that punitive approaches cause both to individuals and to the community as a whole.

3 — Provide training on engaging with those living unsheltered

> Housing First
> Problem solving
> Motivational interviewing
> Trauma-informed care
> Culturally appropriate practices
> Non-punitive methods
> Low-barrier approaches

4 — Have sufficient housing available using a Housing First approach

Unsheltered homelessness will not decrease without a supply of permanent housing. Engaging in a Housing First approach enables lasting exits directly from unsheltered homelessness to permanent housing. Work with housing providers to develop a pipeline of accessible and affordable permanent housing.

When the supply of permanent housing is insufficient, temporary housing with a low-barrier approach can get people out of unsheltered situations and give them stability until a subsequent placement to permanent housing. *See Special Topic: Low-barrier approaches*.

5 — Promote non-punitive, low-barrier practices within the homeless assistance system

All homeless programs should ensure that the environment, activities, and policies are non-punitive and do not further traumatize homeless individuals. Admission and discharge policies should be consistent with a low-barrier approach and limit evictions from programs and housing. Specific low-barrier practices include:

> Promoting Housing First, harm reduction, and trauma-informed program models

> Encouraging programs to provide easy and immediate access for participants 24 hours a day, seven days a week: any time of the day and *without having* people leave every morning at a certain time, stay outside until evening, and line up for their beds

> Discourage temporary and permanent bans from programs except for in cases when actions threaten the safety of other residents or staff

> Not supporting programs that require religious participation as a condition of stay

Low-barrier approaches reduce unsheltered homelessness by removing barriers for shelter stays and program participation. *See Special Topic: Low-barrier approaches*.

6 Reduce chronic homelessness

Meaningful reductions in unsheltered homelessness cannot be attained without reductions in chronic homelessness. Many individuals who experience chronic homelessness are also unsheltered. A substantial level of chronic homelessness within a local homeless population indicates insufficient movement out of homelessness and into housing. Homeless assistance systems can:

> Develop a plan to address chronic homelessness specifically
> Dedicate local resources toward fulfilling this plan
> Require programs to use Housing First and low-barrier approaches
> Prioritize individuals who are designated as chronically homeless for housing and services in their Continuum of Care programs and processes, such as Coordinated Entry
> Focus efforts to prevent people with disabilities from aging into chronic homelessness by quickly connecting them to permanent housing and services

7 Maintain strong outreach services

Having sufficient coverage, resources, and skilled workers for outreach is essential to reducing unsheltered homelessness. Outreach workers who make initial contacts with someone who is unsheltered should be able to offer immediate solutions and alternatives that could have an immediate impact, such as regular drinking water delivery and clean use items, while doing document collection and rehousing plan development. However, for individuals who have been living unsheltered for a long time, outreach workers may need to build a trusting and supportive relationship first before linking the individual to housing and other services. People with lived experience of being homeless add a valuable dimension to outreach services—appropriate compensation, training, and support are essential to ensure effectiveness. *See Special Topic: Outreach*.

NEW ORLEANS LA

OUTREACH & HOUSING:

Originating in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans outreach services providers pioneered approaches for linking people living in unsheltered situations directly to housing. Outreach workers played vital roles in clearing two large encampments through a coordinated "evacuation" that strategically moved at least 320 people from encampments to temporary housing in motels and then to permanent housing. They emptied the camps without any evictions.

As the supply of permanent housing has diminished, a low-barrier shelter has opened with 100 beds of temporary housing. This shelter (shown below) is both responsive to resident's accommodation needs and has the means to provide services that facilitate their moving on to permanent housing.

Outreach workers have continued their work under more normalized conditions as the homeless population has steadily declined from its 2007 peak. Central to these efforts has been their approach of initiating the housing placement process while engaging persons living in unsheltered situations and an otherwise "laser focus on housing."
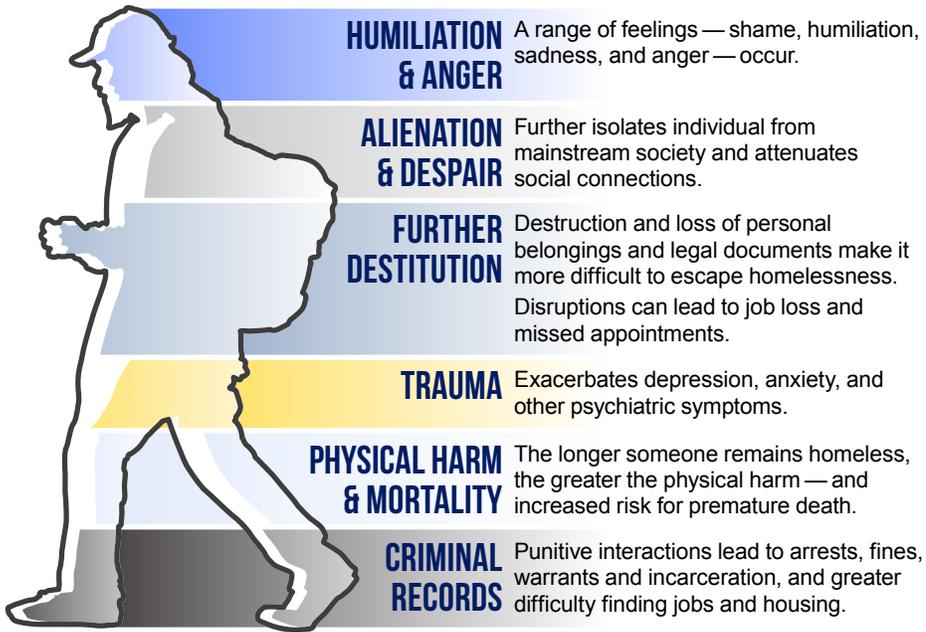
See Special Topic: Low-barrier approaches and Special Topic: Outreach

Entrance to the City of New Orleans Shelter and Engagement Center, referred to locally as "the low-barrier shelter."

Consequences of Punitive Approaches

Displacement through move-along orders or arrest and citations for activities like sleeping, camping and "acts of living" laws are fundamentally unfair when individuals have no other reasonable alternatives, and prolong homelessness and increase the need for services from various public systems.

HUMILIATION & ANGER
A range of feelings — shame, humiliation, sadness, and anger — occur.

ALIENATION & DESPAIR
Further isolates individual from mainstream society and attenuates social connections.

FURTHER DESTITUTION
Destruction and loss of personal belongings and legal documents make it more difficult to escape homelessness. Disruptions can lead to job loss and missed appointments.

TRAUMA
Exacerbates depression, anxiety, and other psychiatric symptoms.

PHYSICAL HARM & MORTALITY
The longer someone remains homeless, the greater the physical harm — and increased risk for premature death.

CRIMINAL RECORDS
Punitive interactions lead to arrests, fines, warrants and incarceration, and greater difficulty finding jobs and housing.

DON'T DO

These practices do not work at reducing unsheltered homelessness:

- 🚫 **Doing nothing —** in order to reduce unsheltered homelessness, there must be flow out of homelessness and into permanent housing

- 🚫 **Using punitive practices within homeless programs, e.g., banning people from shelter who are using alcohol or other substances**

- 🚫 **Prioritizing orderly public spaces over the needs of those who are living unsheltered**

- 🚫 **Abetting punitive approaches in the community**

- 🚫 **Conducting outreach that does not make a connection to housing**

- 🚫 **Overinvesting in crisis responses, diverting resources from creation of additional permanent housing**

ROCKFORD IL, SOUTHWEST MN, SYRACUSE NY & WICHITA KS

ADDRESSING CHRONIC AND VETERAN HOMELESSNESS:

Rockford and Southwest MN have ended chronic homelessness, and Wichita and Syracuse have reduced chronic homelessness substantially to near zero. All four areas have low levels of unsheltered homelessness. These four localities are contextually very different, but each managed their reductions through implementing best practices that have been recognized by HUD and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness. Key to their success includes developing permanent supportive housing, comprehensive outreach services, and creative access to other affordable housing and use of shared case conferencing with by-name lists. Rockford, Syracuse, and Southwest Minnesota also ended veteran homelessness before ending chronic homelessness. All four communities adopted Housing First practices and have ensured that programs are low-barrier.

TALKING POINTS

> Creating more permanent housing options is essential for reducing homeless populations.

> Reducing homelessness requires partnerships, collaborations, and coordination among services and systems.

> Effective homeless services create environments conducive to meeting people where they are at and linking them with the means to exit homelessness.

> Housing First and harm reduction are proven practices for reducing unsheltered homelessness.

> Reducing unsheltered homelessness means stopping inflow from major systems that contribute to homelessness.

> Punitive practices are incompatible with effective homeless services.

KEY TERMS

Housing First

Housing First is an approach to ending homelessness that centers on providing people experiencing homelessness with housing as quickly as possible – and then providing services as needed. The basic underlying principle of Housing First approaches is that people are better able to move forward with their lives if they are first housed. This means eliminating or reducing the use of treatment preconditions, behavioral contingencies, and other barriers or requirements before housing or as a condition for continued tenancy in housing.

Low-barrier approaches

Involves minimizing the requirements placed on people who wish to utilize services, shelter, or housing. The objective with this approach is to have services "meet people where they are," as long as this does not negatively affect other residents or staff. A low-barrier approach is consistent with a harm reduction philosophy.

Harm reduction

Harm reduction focuses on reducing risks and negative impacts associated with substance abuse and other addictive behaviors. Interventions and policies focus on individual and community needs, including reducing injuries, preventing and treating overdoses, and minimizing the spread of diseases. Recipients of these services may be encouraged, but not required, to reduce their consumption of harmful substances. Practices may include needle exchanges and other equipment distribution programs and safe injection and utilization sites.

RESOURCES

> **Center for Evidence-based Solutions to Homelessness.** http://www.evidenceonhomelessness.com/evidence-base/ and http://www.evidenceonhomelessness.com/systems-strengthening-partnership/

> **National Alliance to End Homelessness.** https://endhomelessness.org/resources/?fwp_content_filter=toolkits-and-training-materials and https://endhomelessness.org/resource/the-system-series/

> **Seattle University School of Law Homeless Rights Advocacy Project.** See policy briefs at https://law.seattleu.edu/centers-and-institutes/korematsu-center/initiatives/homeless-rights-advocacy-project and Shut Out: How Barriers Often Prevent Meaningful Access to Emergency Shelter at https://digitalcommons.law.seattleu.edu/hrap/6/

> **U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.** https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Housing-First-Permanent-Supportive-Housing-Brief.pdf

> **U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness.** https://www.usich.gov/tools-for-action/

SOLUTIONS BASED ON EVIDENCE

Arnold Ventures (AV) is a philanthropic organization with the mission to invest in evidence-based solutions that maximize opportunities and minimize injustice. AV supported a study to identify practices and policies that promote alternatives to using punitive and enforcement-based measures as the primary responses to unsheltered homelessness. Project investigators conducted a three-day visit in spring–summer 2019 to each of nine sites for an in-person review of community-specific initiatives. The sites represent the major regions of the U.S. and include cities of different sizes as well as rural, suburban, and tribal areas and provide an array of different socioeconomic contexts and present different local housing market configurations.

Arnold Ventures