

**RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS FOR**

# Local Government Leaders

Mayors, county executives, councilmembers, and elected officials are crucial in leading local efforts to address homelessness.

As noted by the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, leadership from mayors has made it possible for 78 communities across 35 states to effectively end homelessness among Veterans and four communities in four states to end chronic homelessness.

## ADDRESSING UNSHELTERED HOMELESSNESS

There are four required components to successfully address unsheltered homelessness.

 <p><b>Reducing Inflow</b></p>	 <p><b>Crisis Response</b></p>	 <p><b>Housing Stabilization</b></p>	 <p><b>Public Space Management</b></p>
<p>RESPONSIBILITY: <b>Public Systems</b></p>	<p>RESPONSIBILITY: <b>Homeless Assistance System</b></p>		<p>RESPONSIBILITY: <b>City &amp; County Government</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Justice</li> <li>&gt; Anti-Poverty</li> <li>&gt; Prevention</li> <li>&gt; Health, including behavioral health</li> <li>&gt; Child Welfare System</li> <li>&gt; Affordable Housing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Continuum of Care</li> <li>&gt; Outreach</li> <li>&gt; Emergency shelter &amp; temporary housing</li> <li>&gt; Housing providers</li> <li>&gt; First responders</li> <li>&gt; Health, including behavioral health providers</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Mayor/city manager</li> <li>&gt; Code enforcement</li> <li>&gt; Public health</li> <li>&gt; Law enforcement</li> <li>&gt; Parks</li> <li>&gt; Outreach</li> <li>&gt; Libraries</li> <li>&gt; Businesses and business organizations</li> <li>&gt; Faith-based organizations</li> </ul>
<p>Use data to identify how people are becoming homeless and target prevention strategies and policies to these areas.</p>	<p>Investment in housing stabilization capacity will make crisis response more effective and efficient.</p>		<p>To reduce expenditures, increase efforts to reduce inflow and expand homeless assistance system.</p>

# TO DO

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## Foster collaboration across sectors with a full range of partners

- > People with lived experience of homelessness
- > Local government, health, housing and human services
- > Homeless assistance system providers and advocates
- > Health care and behavioral health systems
- > Justice system including corrections, law enforcement, and courts
- > Fire and emergency medical response teams
- > Housing developers and property owners/managers
- > Business owners and business organizations
- > Philanthropy and civic organizations

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## 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. Integrate data across local government with data available through HMIS (Homeless Management Information System). One way to reduce unsheltered homelessness is to identify ways in which people are flowing into homelessness and test solutions to reduce inflow. Hold systems that discharge into homelessness (e.g., healthcare, justice, child welfare, etc.) accountable for identifying housing solutions rather than reliance on the homeless assistance system.

3

## Provide training on engaging with those living unsheltered

- > Homelessness 101—create awareness of the need for compassion for the situations of those living unsheltered, reasons for homelessness, and local homeless assistance system
- > Housing First
- > Problem solving
- > Government protocols and practices:
  - > How to connect to the homeless assistance system and partner with homelessness outreach teams
  - > How to mitigate public health and safety issues

4

## Establish government-wide policy based on proven best practices

Laws and regulations that prohibit camping, sitting/lying, panhandling, or other life-sustaining behaviors are punitive and ineffective. These should be repealed or adjusted to require an offer of an adequate alternative before enforcement. Policies should be informed by:

- > Housing First
- > Trauma-informed care
- > Culturally appropriate practices
- > Non-punitive approaches

A “whack a mole” approach is ineffective and harmful to the people who are being “moved along.”

- > Work with all stakeholders to develop protocols and timelines that establish sufficient notice and time to consult with encampment dwellers
- > Ensure protection and safe, accessible storage of personal belongings and documents
- > Provide connection to alternative housing (shelter, permanent housing, and other living arrangements).

A useful checklist for this process can be found at USICH.

**5**

**Increase affordable housing and homeless assistance system capacity**

A greater supply of rental housing affordable to low wage workers and households on fixed incomes is essential to preventing and ending homelessness. Identify and remove regulatory barriers that impede or delay development of affordable housing. Increase capacity of the homeless assistance system to provide longer-term solutions with a higher return-on-investment than short-term public space management, which serves to merely hide the unfortunate reality of unsheltered homelessness.

- > Increase crisis and housing capacity
- > Invest in a low-barrier shelter and expand housing options
- > Focus prevention on the households most likely to experience homelessness, including diversion, which promotes creative housing options to homelessness and admission to shelter
- > Ensure street outreach is coordinated across all providers, including law enforcement

**6**

**Make public spaces healthier for everyone**

Undertake proactive responses, which are critical when there are high numbers of people who are unsheltered. Make public spaces (like parks, sidewalks, trails) more usable and healthier for all.

- > Safe and accessible storage for personal belongings both during the day and ongoing
- > Regular trash pick-up
- > Access to drinking water
- > Public restrooms and showers or other hygiene and sanitary options
- > Safe needle disposal and needle exchange

Hiring those with lived experience of homelessness as part of this work is a triple win for the community. Peer support is effective. Providing employment with compensation commensurate with similar roles in the community can support exits from homelessness.

**7**

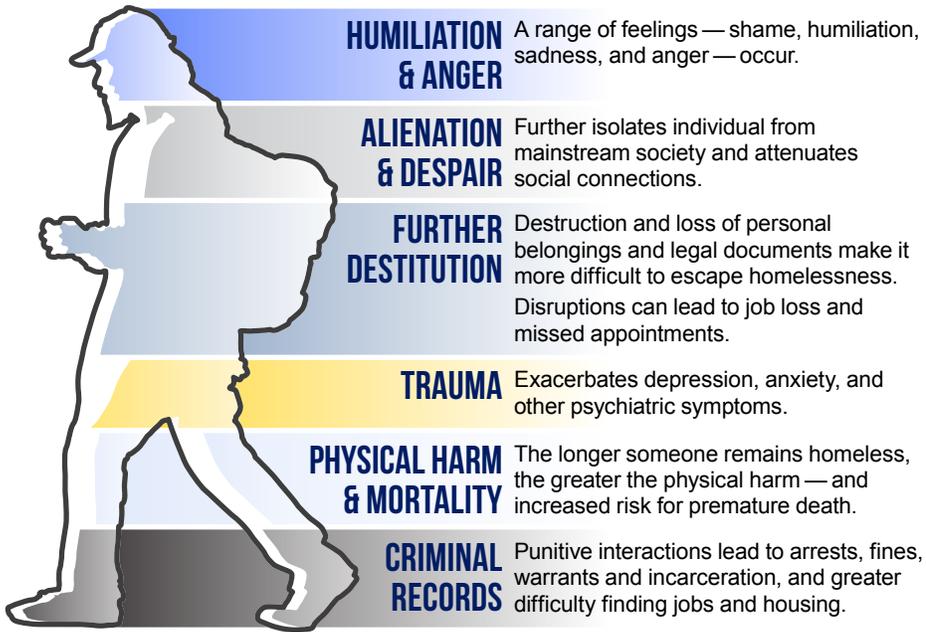
**Communicate about what is working**

When there are highly visible populations of unhoused people, compassion fatigue by housed residents can cycle downward to create an overall lack of belief that homelessness is solvable.

- > Tell stories that reduce stigma and show that people can be helped to end their homelessness
- > Communicate progress
- > Build understanding about the causes of and strategies to reduce homelessness

## 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.



## GREATER PORTLAND, OR:

### JOINT CITY-COUNTY GOVERNANCE MODEL

Greater Portland’s response to unsheltered homelessness is part of their larger initiative to end homelessness called “A Home for Everyone.” The initiative is jointly led by the City of Portland, City of Gresham, Home Forward (the public housing agency), and Multnomah County. Portland has a history of working collaboratively across sectors and creating housing-focused solutions to address homelessness. The new plan involves an even stronger collaboration and renewed focus on reducing disparities in housing access for people of color. With a strong emphasis on prevention to reduce inflow and increase the number of people who go into permanent housing each year, the plan identifies two subgroups for particular focus: people with chronic homelessness and people with disabilities.

To improve policy implementation, A Home for Everyone called for the merger of City of Portland and Multnomah County homeless program administration into a new Joint Office of Homeless Services (Joint Office), hosted at Multnomah County. The Joint Office is facilitating strategic conversations between the city and the county, as well as with federal and state government agencies. They oversee the community’s federal and state homeless program funding and contract out all the homeless services funding for the City of Portland and Multnomah County.

## DON'T DO

These approaches do not reduce unsheltered homelessness. Instead, they take attention of public safety providers away from their primary responsibilities, are expensive to implement, and can spur costly litigation.



Don't over-invest in public space management and minimize focus on health and safety concerns



Don't enact or enforce statutes or regulations that result in arrests for people engaging in meeting their basic needs



Don't over-rely on coercive and punitive approaches



Don't enact or enforce citations, or “move along” orders in response to complaints about people who are unsheltered



Don't create a hotline for public reporting about homeless campsites — if you already have one, convert it to a method for deploying services (outreach, public health, and sanitation services)



Don't require people to accept emergency shelter or face arrest

## TALKING POINTS

- > Housing First approaches are proven practices.
- > Arrest is not a solution to homelessness.
- > Creating more permanent housing options is essential.
- > Stopping inflow from major systems that contribute to homelessness is imperative.
- > Housing-focused emergency shelter is one tool to reduced unsheltered homelessness but is not sufficient on its own.
- > Managing public space to be safe, sanitary, and accessible to all residents is challenging. Partnership, collaboration, and coordination are required for success.

## 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 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.

### Inclusive Public Space Management

Inclusive public space management includes regulating uses, managing conflicts between uses, and coordinating interventions in the uses of public spaces to be inclusive of all, including people who are unsheltered and have no other feasible options.

## RESOURCES

- > **FEANTSA (European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless)**. Peer Support: A Tool for Recovery in Homelessness Services. [https://www.feantsa.org/download/peer\\_support\\_policy\\_paper2951723577548485776.pdf](https://www.feantsa.org/download/peer_support_policy_paper2951723577548485776.pdf)
- > **National Alliance to End Homelessness**. <https://endhomelessness.org>
- > **National League of Cities**. <https://www.nlc.org/resource/addressing-mental-health-substance-use-and-homelessness>
- > **U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness**. <https://www.usich.gov>  
More information addressing encampments: Planning Checklist Ending Homelessness for People Living in Encampments: Advancing the Dialogue [https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset\\_library/Planning\\_Checklist\\_Ending\\_Homelessness\\_for\\_People\\_Living\\_in\\_Encampments\\_Aug2015.pdf](https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Planning_Checklist_Ending_Homelessness_for_People_Living_in_Encampments_Aug2015.pdf)  
More information on mayors' joint efforts to solve homelessness <https://www.usich.gov/mayors/>

## 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.