



UPDATE TO THE FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE WESTERN PA CONTINUUM OF CARE

INTRODUCTION

On June 29, 2017, the Western PA Continuum of Care (CoC) adopted its first Five-Year Strategic Plan, outlining a set of ambitious goals to galvanize the CoC's work toward ending homelessness. Through the Five-Year Strategic Plan, the CoC also identified a series of strategies and action steps to act as a roadmap for making progress in achieving the goals that were established. Over the past two years the Western PA CoC has made significant progress, although much work remains. This update will provide an overview of the CoC's progress in achieving its goals, highlighting significant achievements, areas of opportunity and challenges ahead.

THE COC'S GOALS

The CoC's Five-Year Strategic Plan established bold goals that were aligned with the federal plan to end homelessness, *Opening Doors*. Like the *Opening Doors* plan, the Western PA CoC sought to measure its impact by reducing the number of people experiencing homelessness, including focusing on data related to several target subpopulations:

- 50% reduction in the number of people experiencing homelessness
- End chronic homelessness.

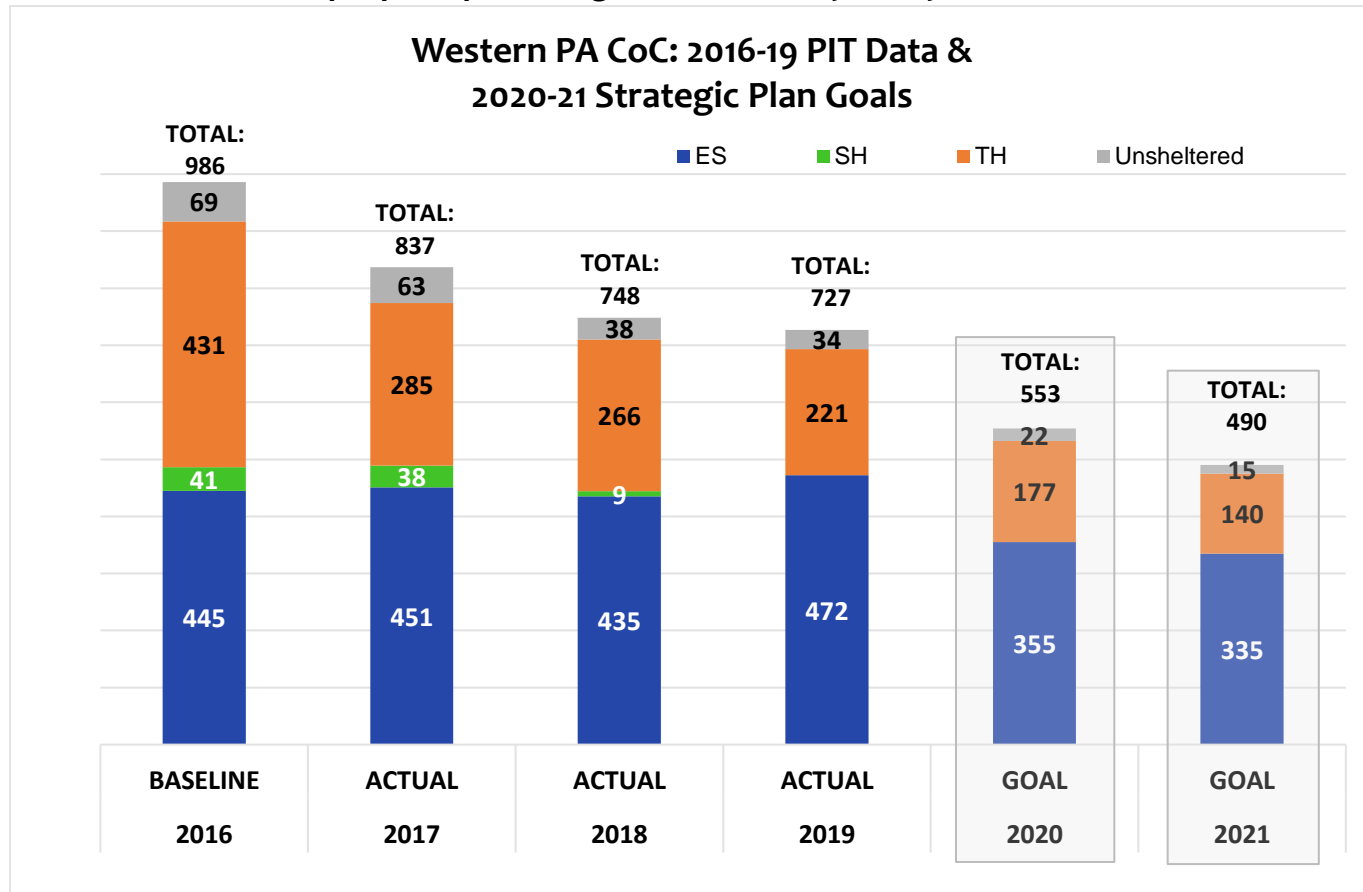
Outcome: achieve functional zero (functional zero is the state when your homelessness system has enough capacity and resources to prevent homelessness when possible and to permanently house those experiencing homelessness now and in the future)

- End Veterans homelessness
Outcome: achieve functional zero
- Reduce homelessness among families with children
Outcomes: reduce all homelessness among families with children by 50%; achieve functional zero for unsheltered families with children; reduce the number of families with children in transitional housing by at least 50%
- Reduce homelessness among unaccompanied youth
Outcome: reduce the number of unaccompanied youth (those under 25 years old) experiencing homelessness by 50%
- Set a path to end all forms of homelessness
Outcome: reduce the duration of homelessness to an average of 50 days or less

WHAT THE DATA SHOW

Data gathered by the CoC demonstrate where the community has made progress:

Goal: Reduce number of people experiencing homelessness by 50% by 2021

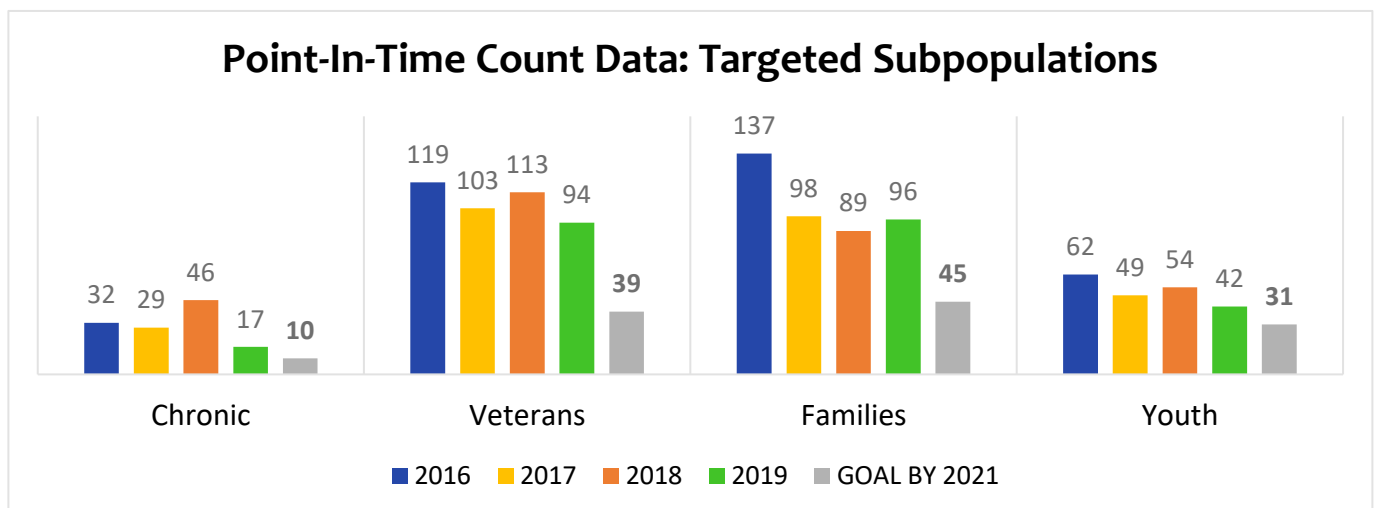


The CoC is making steady progress toward this goal with a **reduction in overall homelessness of 26% and unsheltered homelessness by 51%** since 2016. The CoC has seen a significant **49% reduction in the number of people experiencing sheltered homelessness residing in transitional housing**, primarily due to the reallocation of CoC-funded transitional housing projects. If the CoC is to make additional progress on this goal, however, significant reductions will be needed in the number of people residing in emergency shelters.

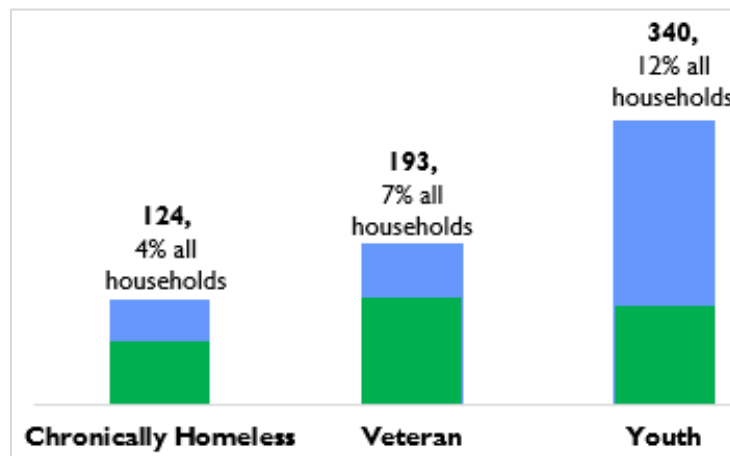
Goal: Reduce homelessness among targeted subpopulations

- End chronic homelessness; reduce chronic homelessness by 20%/year
- End veterans homelessness; reduce number of veterans experiencing homelessness by 20%/year
- Reduce homelessness among families experiencing homelessness by 20%/year
- Reduce homelessness among youth by 50%

The CoC has made steady progress in reducing homelessness among chronic, veterans, families with children and youth. While the number of Veterans experiencing homelessness has not been reduced at the rate the CoC projected, the CoC’s Veterans Committee has made impressive strides in working to address the needs of this subpopulation. As a result of their work, **the CoC submitted a claim to the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) asserting that the CoC has met the established benchmarks and criteria for ending Veterans homelessness**. This means the CoC has built a durable system able to identify and quickly house any Veteran experiencing homelessness within the CoC, effectively achieving functional zero for Veterans homelessness.



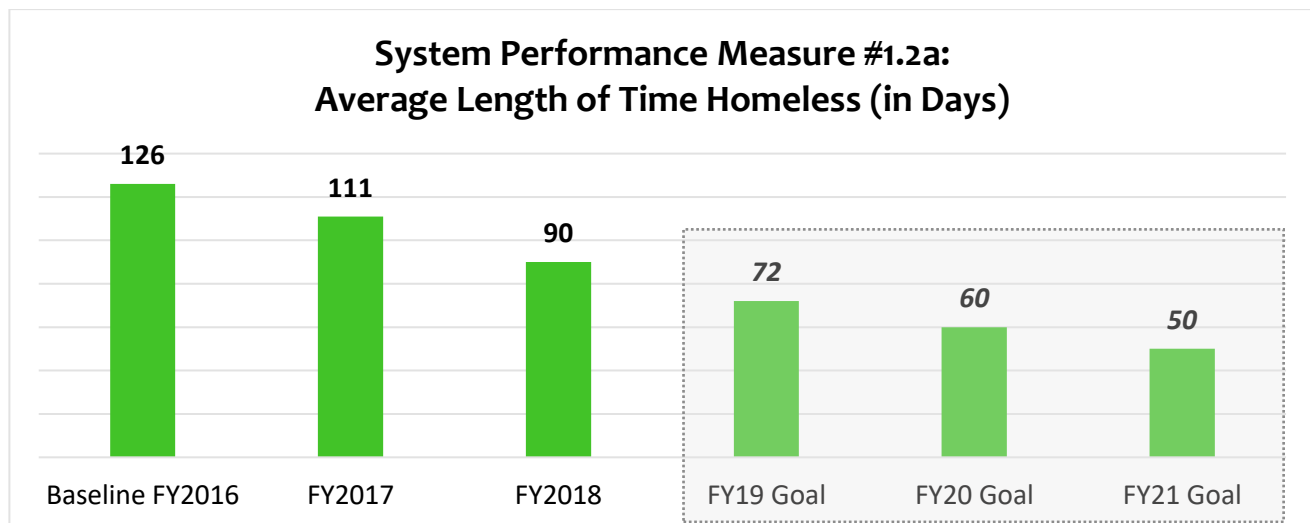
One Year of Data: Households Accessing Coordinated Entry, April 2018 to March 2019, by Subpopulation



The CoC continues to work on reducing homelessness for the other key subpopulations targeted in the Strategic Plan.

Goal: Reduce the duration of homelessness to a system average of 30 days (long term) and 50 days over the next five years.

The CoC has seen a decrease in the average length of time homeless from 126 days in FY2016 to 90 days in FY2018. While this is steady progress, the CoC still has work to do to continue to reduce the average length of time homeless. *It is important to note that this data may be skewed due to some emergency shelter and transitional housing providers who do not participate in HMIS.*



In addition, HUD has a number of ways of measuring the length of time homeless. When factoring in the data for those who enroll in permanent housing programs (PH), System Performance Measure data indicate that the CoC's length of time homeless has grown longer since 2016 from 144 days to 156 days in 2018. It will be very important for the CoC to continue to monitor this data closely, along with data on the CoC's Coordinated Entry System, to ensure that those experiencing homelessness in the CoC are served as quickly and effectively as possible.

A LOOK BACK

The Western PA CoC has made several significant achievements over the past two years, using the collective strength of the CoC's service providers, housing partners, local and state government agencies, funders, community supporters and other stakeholders to drive system's change.



Increasing leadership, collaboration and civic engagement to expand the CoC's reach

(Strategic Plan Strategy 1)

In the Strategic Plan, the Western PA CoC stated as an action step that it would seek to increase awareness of the CoC and its mission, goals, vision and strategies among the broader community. To further this strategy, the CoC set out to adopt a new name that would help this collaborative effort establish an identity within the community. In late 2017, the CoC launched a friendly competition to gather ideas for names and logos for the CoC. After several rounds of voting by the CoC members and Board, **a name for the CoC – One by One – was selected, along with the tagline, “Ending homelessness in Western PA.”** A logo was designed and the CoC has begun to develop plans for marketing, including selling merchandise branded with the One by One name and logo to help raise funds to support the CoC's work.

The CoC also listed an action step that it would seek out and enlist champions within the community to help spread the word about and broaden support for the CoC's efforts to end homelessness. To help further this strategy, the CoC has begun to plan a “Champions” event to acknowledge and raise awareness of those in the community who are doing work that serves those experiencing homelessness in extraordinary ways. The CoC firmly believes that efforts like this are important to engaging new

stakeholders and to building a sense of community among those working to prevent and end homelessness and will look for additional opportunities to do so.

Increase Affordable Housing Resources (Strategic Plan Strategy 2)

With the implementation of a fully operational coordinated entry system, it has become clear that the CoC simply does not have enough housing resources to meet the needs of the many households in the community that need housing. In addition to working to ensure that prevention and diversion are effectively used to help households identify housing options that may already exist (further detailed later in this document), the CoC has consistently worked to expand housing options wherever possible. The CoC has used available ESG & CoC program funding to **increase the supply of rapid rehousing (RRH) programs** in order to create more resources for non-chronic households needing assistance, with a significant increase in RRH units for youth experiencing homelessness. Additionally, the CoC prioritized Home4Good program funding to meet a variety of housing needs, including for a youth host homes program to better serve unaccompanied youth under 18 years old who cannot be served through CoC RRH and PSH programs.

The CoC also worked with HUD's Rural Technical Assistance initiative to hold **rural landlord engagement trainings** for CoC agencies. Through this training, the CoC is working to build capacity to identify existing housing options in communities throughout the CoC. **Additional trainings related to housing-focused case management** were also provided to increase skills of providers in engaging with clients on their responsibilities as tenants and improving communication with landlords. Due to the lack of rental housing in many of the CoC's rural communities, it is vital that the CoC's providers cultivate relationships with landlords to ensure that there continue to be viable housing options for clients as the CoC brings in new housing resources.

Increase Economic Security (Strategic Plan Strategy 3)

DISCUSS WITH THE GOVERNING BOARD

- i. effectively collaborate with workforce development system

1. Fayette County event – info? Outcome? Next steps?
- ii. connect clients to mainstream income supports – anything relayed to SOAR or anything else here?
- iii. address barriers to obtaining and maintaining employment – anything?
- iv. work with local employers to expand employment opportunities – anything?
- v. SPMs?



Expand and Align Resources (Strategic Plan Strategy 4)

Over the last several years, the CoC has worked to **align and prioritize various funding resources in pursuit of identifying resources to implement the goals within CoC’s strategic plan and to better meet the needs of the community**. In 2018, the CoC had the opportunity to apply for Home4Good funding, a new program from the Federal Home Loan Bank of Pittsburg and the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency. As a uniquely flexible source of funds, the CoC worked to prioritize all Home4Good funding toward activities to meet gaps in the system for which other funding sources, such as the CoC and ESG programs, cannot be used. The CoC was awarded a total of \$405,803 in Home4Good funding. These new resources helped to expand the capacity of Coordinated Entry Assessment Centers, increased the CoC staff person’s hours from part-time to full-time, created a youth host homes program, and provided unrestricted administrative funding to be used at the CoC Board’s discretion.

The CoC has become more proactive about distributing information about other funding sources available to further the goals of the CoC, as well as providing data and letters of support for applicants. This has included funding opportunities to address veterans homelessness, youth homelessness, affordable housing expansion, the housing needs of individuals with Opioid use disorder, and more.

To advance the goals of the strategic plan, specifically to reduce the number of unaccompanied youth, the CoC prioritized new CoC funding toward youth-dedicated RRH programs in 2017. This investment in responding to youth homelessness was expanded in 2018, when the CoC decided to prioritize a pilot youth host homes program for unaccompanied youth under 18 years old, as this population could not be served by the new youth RRH programs.

In 2018, the CoC sought to effectively **align CoC program funds to help build system capacity and meet ongoing infrastructure needs** related to operating the new Coordinated Entry System (CES). In addition to the Home4Good funding awarded to support the CES, the CoC applied for and received DV Bonus funding through the 2018 CoC NOFA to help support the CoC's CES DV-specific assessment centers.

The work with the DV system was part of a broader CoC effort to **improve coordination and resource alignment with other systems, including the DV system**. Coordination efforts to date include: the development of a DV Coordinated Entry Workgroup to support the assessment process and housing placement of Survivors; best practices for serving Survivors, a training designed for homeless assistance providers; training for the County Coordinators and volunteers conducting the annual Point-in-Time count on how to engaging Survivors during the PIT count; input and guidance around the development of the VAWA-required Emergency Transfer Plan, which will establish procedures regarding how to effectively serve a domestic violence survivor who needs to relocate to a different housing situation for safety reasons; CoC training on the eligibility of Survivors to be served by homeless assistance programs; and planning around how to safely incorporate the needs of Survivors into a CoC-wide diversion strategy. These efforts have helped bring about a closer working relationship with providers who serve victims of domestic violence so that the two systems can more effectively coordinate resources and serve clients appropriately.

Similarly, the **CoC's Youth Committee's interest in the host homes model brought together CoC stakeholders with those from the child welfare and education systems**. All three systems share the goal of better meeting the needs of youth experiencing homelessness and worked together to explore, develop and implement the pilot host homes project. In fact, the program will blend funds from Home4Good with local CYS offices to help support housing placements for youth in need. This kind of effective collaboration provides a base of support for ongoing efforts to bring these systems together to meet the needs of vulnerable youth in the CoC's communities. Further work is being done to improve data sharing between the CoC and education system around homeless youth and to potentially expand the host homes project if it is found to be successful in meeting the needs of unaccompanied youth.

The CoC's Veterans Committee has designed a Rapid Resolution Plan, which has been approved by the SSVF Program Office. Rapid Resolution is very similar to Diversion, a priority area of expansion for the CoC. **The Rapid Resolution system built by the Veterans Committee will provide a strong starting point for the CoC's system-wide diversion strategy** to be developed over the next year.



Retool and Strengthen the Homeless Assistance System (Strategic Plan Strategy 5)

The most significant system-wide change adopted by the CoC in the last two years has been the **implementation of the CoC's Coordinated Entry System (CES)**. This monumental effort brought CoC providers and stakeholders together to design, develop and implement a coordinated entry system that would meet the guidelines established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and better address the needs of those seeking homeless assistance in the community. CES has re-shaped how the CoC provides housing assistance, with the CoC now using a common tool to assess the vulnerability and need of households and prioritize resources accordingly.

Overseen by the CoC's Coordinated Entry Committee, the work around establishing the CES cannot be overstated. It has brought together providers to address the needs of those experiencing homelessness in new ways, while also revealing the depth of need in the communities encompassed by the CoC. Work to improve the CES continues as the CE Committee reviews data, along with CES policies to identify changes needed. The CE Committee and the Youth Committee are also working together to develop and implement a workflow that will allow for youth to be better served through the CES, including unaccompanied youth under 18.

In addition to the work being done on the CES, the CoC identified the need to make investments in both prevention and diversion activities in order to reduce the flow of households into the homeless system who may instead have other housing options. Given the scarcity of emergency shelter and housing resources, the **CoC invested in diversion training** from the Cleveland Mediation Center, with those providing Coordinated Entry assessment services prioritized for this training.

To further improve access to housing and services, the CoC has also **supported trainings around Housing First** to ensure that those most in need of housing are not turned away. Housing First trainings were

supplemented by trainings on related topics including trauma-informed care, motivational interviewing, housing-focused case management, and harm reduction, among others. Together, this suite of trainings was developed to ensure that program staff at provider agency are introduced to information and techniques vital to ensuring that they are able to work with those experiencing homelessness and seeking housing to obtain and retain housing.

The CoC is also working to improve coordination of prevention efforts by incorporating ESG-funded prevention into the CoC's Written Standards, which were approved in March 2019.



Increasing the Capacity for Data Collection and Analysis (Strategic Plan Strategy 6)

The CoC continues to work to improve its ability to collect data and analyze project, agency and system performance. One major area in need of improvement has been in HMIS participation. The CoC's HMIS Lead, DCED, has entered into a new contract with the CoC's HMIS vendor (Eccovia) which will allow for continued stability and potentially expand the number of available HMIS user licenses, a key to being able to engage non-participating agencies.

In addition, **the CoC has established a System Performance Committee** to oversee the ongoing implementation and refinement of the CoC's Monitoring Plan and to review system performance. The Committee is currently working to develop a process and structure that will help support agencies in improving project-level data quality and performance on key measures that are tied to the CoC's goals and to improving the CoC's System Performance Measures.

The CoC is also **using data more effectively to drive decision-making**, with HMIS, PIT, HIC and CES data being mined to better understand the housing needs and gaps within the CoC's communities. This information has and will continue to form the basis of the CoC's prioritization decisions in terms of new funding resources.

Additionally, the CoC has and will continue to use data to assess project-level performance and use this information to drive funding decisions for the annual CoC program competition. Based on the data provided for the annual CoC NOFA round, the CoC has prioritized new projects over poor performing

existing projects, a significant shift in the prioritization of resources that reflects the need for the CoC to think strategically and creatively when considering resource allocations.

As part of the increased coordination and collaboration with the Domestic Violence system, the CoC is working with PCADV to identify the data the CoC needs for the annual CoC NOFA and to effectively evaluate projects operated by DV providers, as their data cannot be entered into HMIS. **Data sharing will allow the CoC to measure and track** exits to permanent housing, returns to homelessness, and the unmet housing needs of households with a history of domestic violence.

Finally, the CoC's HMIS Lead is working with the PA Department of Education to **share data across the two systems** to ensure that the CoC is able to secure education resources to serve the children and youth experiencing homelessness in the CoC. The CoC's Youth Committee has also begun **planning around the implementation of a Youth Count** to gather data on the scale of youth homelessness in the CoC's communities, along with the housing and service needs of those youth.



Building a Sustainable System (Strategic Plan Strategy 7)

Along with the adoption of a new name for the CoC, there has been a **sustained effort to strengthen the CoC's leadership and decision-making infrastructure**. The CoC's Governing Board participated in a Board retreat in summer of 2018 and has also participated in a Leadership Training program through the Corporation for Supportive Housing during the first half of 2019. In addition, the Board's officers (the Executive Committee) have begun to meet monthly to address ongoing issues for the CoC.

In 2018 and early 2019, the CoC also embarked on revisions to the CoC Governance Charter to ensure that it is up-to-date and established the infrastructure needed for the CoC to achieve its goals. This has included: revisions to the CoC's membership structure; an open and transparent application process for soliciting new Board members; revisions to the CoC's Monitoring Plan to ensure it is actionable; and the creation of the Written Standards for Assistance. These policy and governance documents provide a foundation for the CoC's ongoing work and create the kind of sustainable system needed to implement the strategies identified in the Strategic Plan.

THE WORK AHEAD

The CoC has made significant strides over the last two years, along with measurable progress in achieving its goals. Still, much work remains and the CoC has recognized this by identifying several key priorities for the work moving ahead:

→ **Develop and implement a CoC-wide Diversion Strategy**

With the implementation of CES, it has become clear that there are more households needing housing assistance than can be served through existing resources. The CoC, therefore, is committed to developing a systemwide strategy to help divert households that may not need the level of assistance provided through TH, RRH or PSH resources. With the Diversion training conducted in 2018 as a basis, the CoC will seek to develop a strategy tailored to the community's needs that incorporates existing efforts, the VA's new Rapid Response program work and national best practices.

→ **Create a Move On strategy that includes ways expand affordable housing options in the CoC**

Understanding that the CoC's PSH resources should be used to serve those most in need of ongoing intensive case management, the CoC is interested in developing a strategy to help those who no longer need the services provided by PSH to move on safely and with reduced support. Key to this strategy is identifying affordable housing options for these households, as they may need ongoing housing subsidies.

→ **Participate in a Rapid Rehousing Learning Collaborative to more effectively and efficiently use RRH resources in the CoC**

RRH has expanded within the CoC and become more firmly established as a way to serve those needing housing assistance who do not need ongoing, high intensity case management. Given this, there is a need to better understand how this model is being implemented throughout the CoC and how it can be more effectively used to move households into permanent housing quickly while also meeting their needs. Therefore, the CoC is looking to embark on participation in a RRH Learning Collaborative process, led by the National Alliance to End Homelessness, to

help the CoC align its Written Standards and actual implementation of RRH in the community with national best practices.

→ **Refine and improve the CoC's Coordinated Entry System**

With over a year in existence, the CoC is now embarking on an effort to implement revisions to the CES to ensure that it is able to quickly and effectively move those experiencing homelessness in housing opportunities. The Coordinated Entry Committee will work over the next year to develop and implement revisions and to support the Assessment Center staff and providers as these changes are implemented. In addition, the Coordinated Entry Committee will continue its work with the Youth Committee and DV Workgroup to develop and implement policies to help make the CES better equipped to serve all populations.