



## **Eastern Pennsylvania Continuum of Care: Five-Year Strategic Plan to Reduce and End Homelessness, 2017 - 2021**

**Adopted by Eastern PA CoC Board 6/19/17**

- **Last updated 6/30/17**

## INTRODUCTION

On a single night in January 2016, nearly 2,600 people experienced homelessness throughout the Eastern Pennsylvania Balance of State Continuum of Care (CoC), which encompasses 33 counties in eastern and central Pennsylvania. The Eastern PA BoS CoC is charged with addressing the needs of those individuals and families, along with others experiencing homelessness in the region on an ongoing basis.

For years, the agencies and organizations that comprise the CoC have worked to provide housing and services to those experiencing homelessness. Through these agencies and organizations, thousands of individuals and families are provided with shelter and assistance to find new homes and regain stability in those homes. Still, homelessness remains a pressing issue for too many in our region and, in recent years, has increased in many communities.

Feeling a sense of urgency and a commitment **to end homelessness in our region**, the Eastern PA CoC is launching a five-year strategic plan. This plan embraces bold goals and describes various concrete strategies for achieving these goals, which include reducing and ending homelessness among various subpopulations.

Ending homelessness does not guarantee that individuals and families will never again experience homelessness in our region. Unfortunately, some people will still temporarily lose their homes and need assistance. Therefore, through the strategies identified in this plan, our CoC will set out to create a sustainable system to ensure that homelessness is prevented whenever possible and, when it does occur, is rare, brief and non-recurring.

## Our Vision

- ❖ Homelessness will be rare, brief and nonrecurring in our community
- ❖ Our system will meet people where they are and support them in obtaining and retaining housing
- ❖ Our system will be sustainable, with enough resources to provide housing and services to those experiencing homelessness according to their individual needs
- ❖ Our system will work with mainstream systems to maximize resources for those we serve

## Guiding principles

- ❖ Ending homelessness is possible
- ❖ Homelessness should not define those who experience it
- ❖ Housing is essential to ending homelessness
- ❖ “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts”
  - We must work together as a cohesive system in order to reach our goal
  - We must engage with the wider community
  - We must be strategic in how we use our resources

Key elements of such a system:

→ **Prevention & Diversion**

We will work with mainstream systems and with households in danger of becoming homeless to find ways to retain housing where possible in order to prevent episodes of homelessness.

→ **Client-Centered**

While we cannot prevent every household from entering homelessness, we can create a system that provides a continuum of housing and service options that are appropriately prioritized and matched to those who need them most. To do that, we will focus on understanding the needs of and resources available to key groups who experience homelessness, because we know that a one-size-fits-all approach will not work.

→ **Housing First**

We will work to immediately house those who experience homelessness, with the understanding that permanent housing is the foundation upon which individuals and households can regain stability in their lives and achieve success.

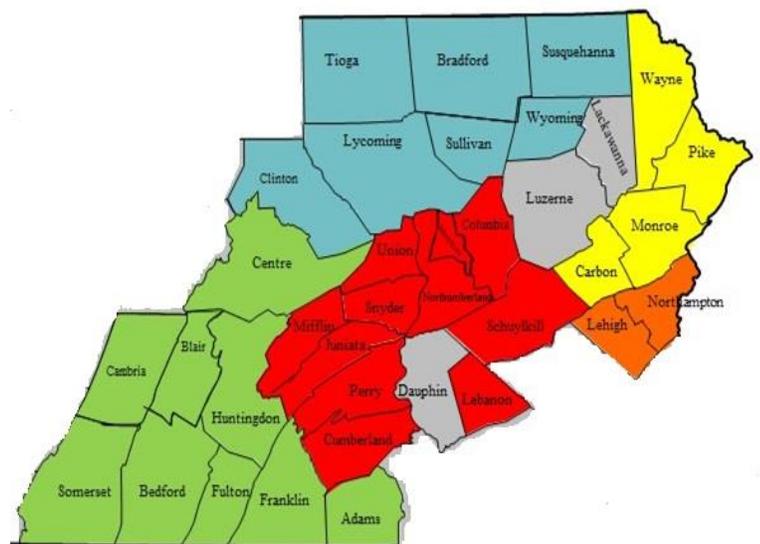
→ **Sustainability**

Our goal is to create a sustainable, durable system of housing and service options that engages a wide range of stakeholders from across the community. Building a broad-based coalition will strengthen the impact of these efforts by supporting households in reconnecting to the social fabric of their community. A collaborative approach will also help mitigate challenges that may arise by allowing the system to tap into the knowledge and experience of its stakeholders and identify new opportunities.

## ABOUT THE EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA BALANCE OF STATE CONTINUUM OF CARE

The Eastern PA BoS Continuum of Care’s geography includes 33 counties. Collectively these counties cover nearly 21,000 square miles and includes:

- eleven cities including the City of Allentown, PA’s third largest City;
- 672 townships;
- 337 boroughs, including Centralia Borough the state’s least populated borough (10 residents) and St. Clairsville Borough which has the smallest land area of any borough in the state (0.03 mi<sup>2</sup>).



The CoC includes the Crayola Factory (Easton), America's Oldest Brewery (Yuengling), the world's oldest wooden rollercoaster (Altoona), the home of Little League Baseball's World Series (Williamsport), the Pocono Mountains and the tallest waterfall in the state (Raymondskill Falls in Milford).

The mission of the CoC is to end homelessness throughout its 33-county geographic region. Representatives of organizations in these counties have come together to establish the CoC in order to advance efforts to end homelessness in the region.

The activities of the Eastern PA CoC are guided by its Governing Board and activities are undertaken by Committees, along with five Regional Homeless Advisory Boards. These various groups meet regularly to advance local, regional and CoC-wide efforts.

## **OUR GOALS & OUTCOMES**

The primary goal of this strategic plan is a 50% reduction in the number of people experiencing homelessness in the Eastern PA CoC by 2021. Due to the differing needs of the population and the resources available to assist them, the CoC has identified additional goals, largely organized around key subpopulations: those experiencing chronic homelessness, Veterans, families with children, and unaccompanied youth. These subpopulations are also identified by the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) in the federal *Opening Doors* plan to end homelessness.

Goals specific to these subpopulations include, by 2021:

### → **End chronic homelessness**

- Outcome: Achieve/maintain functional zero.
- Functional zero: 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. USICH has provided criteria and benchmarks to help communities assess whether their system has reached functional zero.
- Chronic homelessness: long-term homelessness (12+ continuous or episodic months) among those with a disability. A detailed definition of chronic homelessness for use in determining eligibility for housing and services has been developed by the [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development](#).

### → **End Veterans homelessness**

- Outcome: Achieve/maintain functional zero

### → **Reduce homelessness among families with children**

- Outcome: Achieve/maintain functional zero for unsheltered families with children
- Outcome: Achieve/maintain functional zero for all families with children fleeing domestic violence

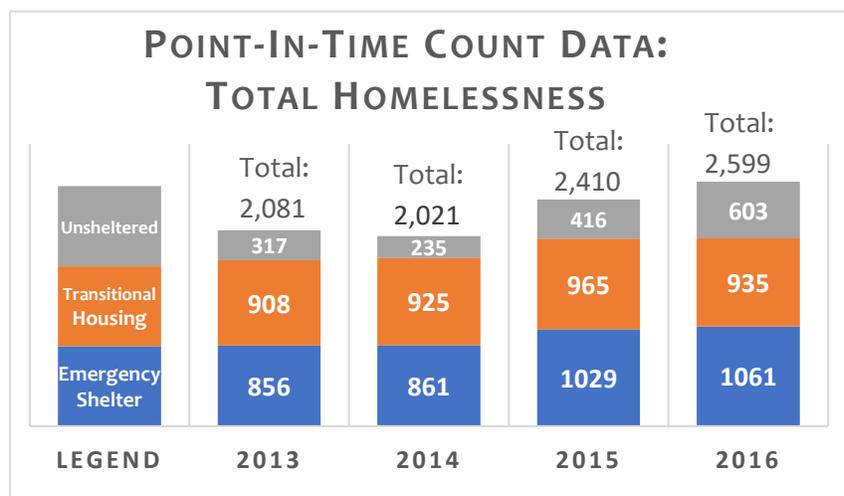
- Outcome: Reduce all homelessness among families with children by 50% (households)
- **Reduce homelessness among unaccompanied youth**
  - Outcome: Reduce the number of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness by 75%
  - Youth: those under 25 years of age, including single individuals and parenting youth.
- **Set a path to end all forms of homelessness (achieve functional zero)**
- **Reduce the duration of homelessness to an average of 47 days or less**
  - The CoC’s long range goal is to reduce this average to 30 days or less

## HOMELESSNESS DATA

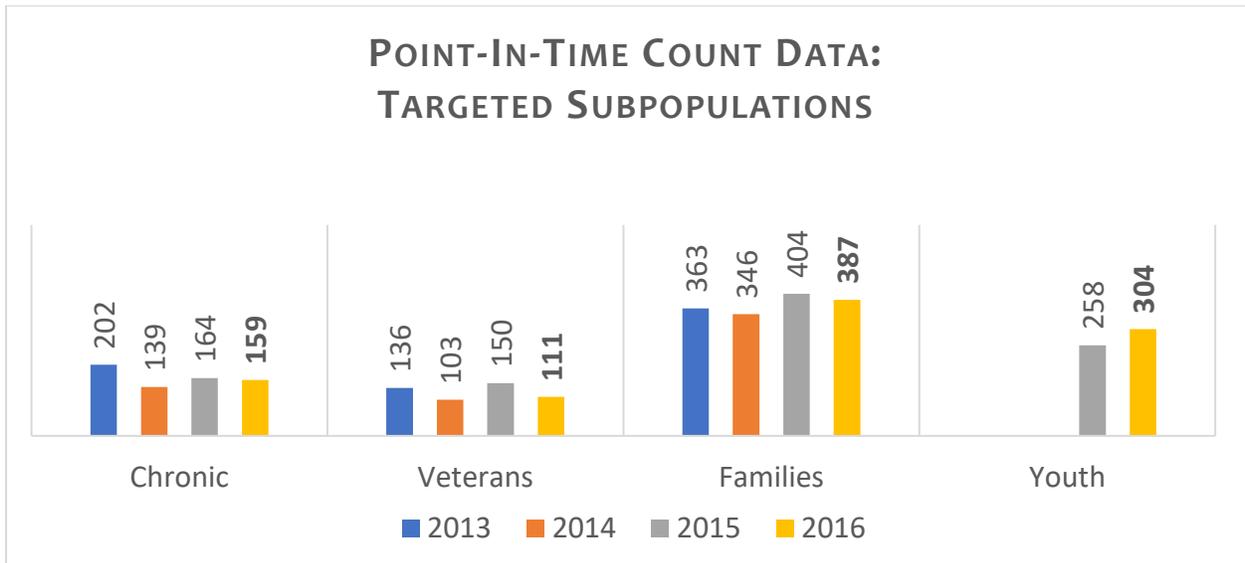
Progress on achieving the outcomes described under these goals will be measured using data from the Point-In-Time Count. The Point-In-Time (PIT) Count is an annual census of those experiencing homelessness undertaken across every CoC on a single night in January. The PIT Count is best understood as a “snapshot” in time – it provides a picture of what homelessness in the CoC looks like at one particular moment in time, including who experiences homelessness in the community and where they are located.

Because this snapshot of homeless data is conducted annually, it offers the CoC a way to assess trends from year to year. For example, PIT data can be used to see whether overall homelessness is increasing or decreasing and whether certain types of homelessness, such as homelessness among Veterans or chronic homelessness, may be rising or declining. It can also help us to see geographic variations across the 33-county region, including which areas have large numbers of households experiencing homelessness who are living in unsheltered conditions or which areas have an increased concentration of families experiencing homelessness. Using this information, the CoC can develop targeted strategies to address the particular needs of communities within the region.

In addition to data from the PIT Count, the CoC will use additional data from a database known as the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Specified HUD-funded programs are required to enter data into HMIS, making the database a helpful tool for understanding who is being served by those programs throughout the year.



## Eastern PA CoC Point-In-Time Count Data



## DETAILED POINT-IN-TIME COUNT DATA

Eastern PA CoC	2013	2014	2015	2016	Change 2013 to 2016
<b>Total Number of Homeless</b>	2,081	2,021	2,410	2,599	25%
<b>Total Number Sheltered</b>	1,764	1,786	1,994	1,996	13%
Emergency Shelter	856	861	1,029	1,061	24%
Transitional Housing	908	925	965	935	3%
<b>Total Number Unsheltered</b>	317	235	416	603	90%
<b>Veterans</b>	136	103	150	111	-18%
<b>Chronic</b>	202	139	164	159	-21%
Individuals	179	132	147	143	-20%
People in families	23	7	17	16	-30%
<b>Families</b>	363	346	404	387	7%
Sheltered	343	337	386	350	2%
Unsheltered	20	9	18	37	85%
<b>Youth</b>	n/a	n/a	258	304	18%
Unaccompanied Youth	n/a	n/a	165	209	27%
Parenting Youth	n/a	n/a	93	95	2%

## OUR STRATEGIES & ACTION STEPS

In order to achieve the goals detailed earlier in this plan, the Eastern PA CoC has identified a number of strategies that will need to be further developed and implemented. These strategies are designed to address a range of needs and include:

- Investing in prevention and diversion strategies;
- Streamlining and coordinating access to housing and services;
- Expanding the continuum of housing options;
- Expanding and aligning resources;
- Increasing the economic security of households;
- Increasing the capacity for data collection and analysis; and
- Engaging in advocacy to increase support and sustainability.

The strategies described build on current strengths and also recognize areas where the CoC will need to grow beyond its existing capacity.

### 1. PREVENT AND DIVERT HOMELESSNESS

The homeless system is currently designed to serve those who present themselves to a homeless service provider by offering emergency shelters, motels or other temporary housing options. However, resources are stretched thin and there are often many individuals and families that are not able to obtain emergency housing. The Eastern PA CoC has identified prevention and diversion as key strategies that can help the CoC reduce the number of individuals and families that needlessly enter the homeless system.

The goal of homeless prevention is to assist an individual or family from entering the homeless system. Examples of homeless prevention include: providing resources to keep a household in their current home; providing assistance to a household to move into a new unit because their current housing is unaffordable or because they are facing eviction; discharge planning from an institution (e.g. prison) to a non-homeless destination; among other approaches. Diversion, on the other hand, typically occurs when a household has lost their housing and is entering the homeless system. In this case, alternative temporary arrangements are sought during which more permanent arrangements are made. This may include a brief stay with friends or family until a housing unit can be identified or a first paycheck is received. Prevention and diversion can occur at multiple levels.

#### A. Evaluate and improve discharge planning where needed

Individuals are often highly vulnerable upon leaving institutional settings, such as hospitals, mental/behavioral health settings, jails/prisons and foster care. Too often these systems lack the tools and resources to develop effective discharge plans for those experiencing housing

instability. As a result, many individuals experience homelessness upon discharge from institutional settings, contributing toward a negative and costly cycle.

At a systems level, prevention can be achieved through an effective discharge planning process that reinforces the need for stable housing options for those leaving institutional settings. Effective discharge planning helps transition those who leave institutional settings to living on their own, and will sometimes include support services or housing assistance. Multiple systems must be engaged in this strategy, including hospitals and emergency departments, mental and behavioral health systems, the criminal justice system, the child welfare system and homeless service providers.

Action Steps:

- Evaluate current discharge planning from these systems to help stem the flow of individuals leaving institutional settings and entering homelessness because they lack stable housing options.
- Research and provide information to other systems/organizations on effective discharge planning policies/procedures for individuals and households at risk of entering homelessness upon discharge, as well as information on available housing resources.
- Engage with statewide efforts to improve discharge planning policies across systems, emphasizing the need for permanent housing placement for those exiting institutions.

**B. Increase coordination of homeless prevention resources**

While there are challenges to identifying those households that will benefit most from homeless prevention programs, they remain a crucial resource to help individuals and families preserve their current housing situation. At the systems-level, it will be increasingly important for the CoC to understand the available resources, how they can most effectively be used and for whom and to coordinate efforts so that resources are aligned with need.

Action Steps:

- Assess the use of existing funding available for prevention and identify gaps.
- Coordinate funding (including ESG, HAP, PHARE) across the CoC so that resources are used effectively. For example, the CoC may decide to channel prevention resources to geographic areas where emergency shelter access is limited, either due to wait lists or lack of shelter facilities.
- Investigate the use of tools, such as the Prevention VI-SPDAT, to help the CoC more effectively assess households requesting assistance.
- Ensure coordination of prevention activities with Coordinated Entry to increase the effectiveness of the system.

### C. Implement diversion programs

Communities across the nation have developed various diversion strategies aimed at providing limited assistance to households in cases where that assistance may help them return to housing without entering the homeless system. An effective diversion program helps both households and the homeless system: it supports households in identifying and obtaining housing options outside of the shelter system which helps reserve emergency housing resources for those most in need.

#### Action Steps:

- Develop and provide education and training opportunities related to diversion programs and strategies.
- Enlist the assistance of diversion specialists and engage partners with diversion expertise in order to effectively implement diversion strategies using staff operating 211, Coordinated Entry access sites, emergency shelters, and others as appropriate.
- Identify funding opportunities to support the creation and/or expansion of diversion programs in the CoC region.

## 2. STREAMLINE AND COORDINATE ACCESS TO HOUSING & SERVICES

The homeless service system has often been described as a maze that is difficult to navigate for both households in need and those providing services and housing. Streamlining this system and improving coordination are key element to ensuring that households are served effectively and resources are used efficiently. In addition, removing barriers to accessing services and housing allows the CoC to identify the most vulnerable households and prioritize them for the housing interventions and services they need.

### A. Continue implementation of the CoC's Coordinated Entry System

A core component of the CoC's ongoing efforts to utilize resources more effectively and reduce unnecessary entries into the homeless system is the implementation of a Coordinated Entry System (CES). As part of the CES, household needs will be assessed and matched with the housing intervention that best addresses their needs. This will allow the CoC to better understand who is entering the homeless system, along with their level of need, and to deploy resources more efficiently across the system.

The CoC's Coordinated Entry System Committee will continue to lead the implementation of the CES. The Governing Board will be updated regularly regarding the progress of the CES implementation and provide input as needed.

#### Action Steps:

- Continue CoC efforts to implement coordinated entry through the CoC's Coordinated Entry System Committee.

- Once implemented, CES Committee will oversee ongoing assessment to understand inflow into the system and levels of need.
- CES Committee will coordinate ongoing outreach to community partners and stakeholders as Coordinated Entry system matures.
- CES Committee will engage new partners in participating in Coordinated Entry in order to expand the available resources.

## **B. Ensure coordination of street outreach within the CoC**

A key aspect of an effective Coordinated Entry system is effectively identifying and prioritizing housing and services for those experiencing homelessness who exhibit the highest vulnerability and level of need. Oftentimes, however, those with the highest vulnerability and/or level of need, such as those experiencing chronic homelessness or youth, avoid or are unable to navigate the homeless services system. Therefore, effective street outreach programs are essential to ensuring that vulnerable and high need households who do not present at traditional Coordinated Entry access points are identified, assessed and appropriately prioritized for housing and services.

### Action Steps:

- Work with DHS/OMHSAS to align goals/activities of PATH and the CoC's street outreach programs.
- Ensure street outreach programs participate in the CoC's Coordinated Entry System.
- Work with street outreach programs to ensure full participation and utilization of the CoC's HMIS.
- Work with communities with unsheltered homeless to identify opportunities for establishing year-round street outreach teams.
- Encourage utilization of ESG outreach funding in areas of the CoC with the largest numbers of homeless who are living in unsheltered situations.

## **C. Expand Housing First and low barrier access to homeless assistance**

While the CoC has a policy requiring all CoC-funded projects to operate using a housing first approach, these projects account for only a portion of homeless assistance provided. Further, our system does not currently operate as a low barrier system, as many programs require sobriety, residency and participation in programs. These requirements create barriers to entry among those with the most significant needs.

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do not present at traditional Coordinated Entry access points are identified, assessed and appropriately prioritized for housing and services.

Action Steps:

- Encourage a housing first/ low barrier approach for all homeless assistance providers throughout the CoC.
- Provide targeted training and assistance to emergency shelters in order to support this transition.
- Educate funders of homeless assistance projects about the benefits of housing first.

### 3. EXPAND THE CONTINUUM OF HOUSING OPTIONS

The Eastern PA CoC views the expansion of affordable housing opportunities as a key strategy in ending homelessness in the region. An adequate supply of affordable housing is necessary to quickly re-house those who are experiencing homelessness. Without an inventory of rental housing available at an affordable level, households will languish in emergency housing options, such as shelters or motel rooms, which are not well-suited for long-term stays. Ensuring that the CoC continues to support the development of affordable housing options throughout the region is essential to reducing homelessness and the length of time households experience homelessness.

Increasing housing options can happen through a variety of mechanisms that, at their core, involve engagement with housing-sector stakeholders.

#### A. Assess housing supply/needs

In order to use housing resources effectively, communities will need to assess the housing needs of the subpopulations identified in this plan, including singles, families with children, youth and elderly. This assessment should be used to direct housing expansion activities.

Action Steps:

- Use data to identify needs within the CoC, each RHAB, and each county.
- Use data to assess current subpopulations in the community.
- Use data to assess current housing resources.
- Identify gaps and prioritize community needs.
- Analyze sufficient data to project the type of resources needed (e.g. shallow subsidy vs. Permanent Supportive Housing)
- Identify housing resources to assist individuals and families in Permanent Supportive Housing programs who are stability housed and no longer require intensive services to move on to other housing opportunities. Through the turnover of these units, the CoC will be able to reduce the number of people identified as chronically homeless.

- Identify opportunities to increase housing options through shared housing and other non-traditional housing models.

## **B. Advocate for homeless preferences**

HUD allows for public housing authorities (PHAs) to implement homeless preferences in order to increase access to public housing and housing vouchers for those experiencing homelessness. However, doing so requires an amendment to the PHAs Admissions and Continued Occupancy Policy (ACOPs), which can be a process that PHAs are reluctant to pursue. Engaging with PHAs on how to implement a homeless preference is often essential to moving the strategy forward and can result in an increase in much needed subsidized units available to those experiencing homelessness.

In addition, HUD-funded multi-family housing providers may also opt to implement homeless preferences. To guide these efforts, HUD has recently created the *Opening Doors Through Multifamily Housing Toolkit for Implementing a Homeless Preference*. To further expand the availability of affordable housing resources, the CoC must explore these types of opportunities with HUD-funded multi-family housing providers and those funded through other sources. This strategy should also be used to approach USDA-funded multi-family housing providers and others.

The CoC will seek to work with the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA) in order to determine how to obtain and maximize available affordable housing resources. This may include partnerships with existing multi-family housing providers and developers.

### Action Steps:

- Provide/create guidance on how public housing authorities and multi-family housing providers can amend their administrative policies to implement a homeless preference.
- Meet with local PHAs and multi-family housing providers to discuss the benefits of implementing a homeless preference and encourage implementation of such a preference.
- Engage public housing advocacy groups, such as NAHRO and PAHRA.
- Provide support services to the households that use the preference once they are housed to mitigate concerns regarding housing high-need households among PHAs and other housing providers.
- Engage PHFA in systems-level strategy and planning to create new housing opportunities in communities.

### C. Identify/develop housing champions

Having housing champions in local government, local HUD offices and state agencies can help facilitate housing creation and expansion in a number of ways. Champions may help identify funding opportunities otherwise unknown to agencies and/or provide critical backing to projects that need political, community or financial support. These champions may also provide expertise on issues that are relevant to serving those who experience homelessness or connect homeless service providers to other agencies that can provide services or assistance to their clients.

In addition to government officials, champions from faith-based communities, foundations or other community funders are also critical to expanding resources for pursuing the stated goals.

#### Action Steps:

- Present strategic plan to local stakeholders. Follow up with those who express further interest.
- Arrange for site tour of facilities or meetings with those who have successfully obtained permanent housing.
- Use community needs assessment to highlight local needs. Connect with stakeholders that have a shared interest (i.e., Veterans, youth, families, housing as a social determinant of health, etc).
- Invite stakeholders to participate in CoC or local activities.
- Cultivate and support the efforts of housing champions on an ongoing basis.

### D. Engage with landlords

Landlord engagement is key to expanding access to units within the community, which allows for households to quickly exit homelessness. Landlords may be reluctant to serve households exiting homelessness for various reasons, such as history of evictions or nonpayment, poor credit, damages to previous units, incarceration, etc. Service providers must work to identify the concerns landlords raise and develop strategies to address those issues.

#### Action Steps:

- Provide landlords with information and supports so that they are comfortable renting housing units to clients with barriers.
- Provide landlords with information on resources to help them meet program requirements regarding unit quality and safety issues.
- Develop a mechanism, or promote use of PHFA housing search, for obtaining information from landlords on available units and rental application requirements.
- Expand Prepared Renters Program (PREP) training to work with clients to gather/obtain records and documents needed to apply for rental units. If needed

create an additional module regarding documentation needed to verify homeless status.

- Consider creating a housing locator position for the community that can actively engage with landlords, identify potential units, and help landlords make connections to service providers if problems with tenants arise.

### **E. Preserve affordable housing options**

All too often, economic pressures result in affordable housing units converting to market-rate housing, with thousands of existing affordable units lost this way each year nationally. Preserving existing affordable housing is an important element in maintaining the overall supply of affordable housing in the community, particularly where existing clients are being served in such housing. The homeless system has a role to play in helping to identify solutions to preserve affordable housing options when they are threatened.

#### Action Steps:

- Assist in identifying funds and/or supporting funding opportunities for the rehabilitation of properties that require reinvestment.
- Work with housing developers to ensure that existing affordable units are not converted to market-rate units.
- Consider partnering with housing developers seeking funding for rehabilitation/refinancing to set aside units for those exiting homelessness and provide services.

### **F. Support inclusionary housing and zoning policies**

To expand affordable housing options, the CoC will support efforts to enact inclusionary zoning policies and/or policies that promote set asides of affordable units for those experiencing homelessness in new housing development. While such policies can be challenging at the local level, opportunities may arise for agencies to provide support for these measures.

#### Action Steps:

- Identify opportunities to support local efforts to increase the stock of affordable housing through inclusionary zoning, density bonuses, or similar mechanisms.
- Identify opportunities to partner with housing developers to set aside units for those exiting homelessness in newly constructed housing developments.

## **4. EXPAND AND ALIGN RESOURCES**

The strategic use of resources will be essential to the CoC's ability to meet the goals described in this plan. Expanding the pool of available resources and aligning existing and new resources are

efforts that the CoC will need to pursue in order to make progress. More than ever, the CoC will need to aggressively pursue opportunities to bring new resources to the table and work with stakeholders in related systems and sectors.

#### **A. Assess funding opportunities that can help the CoC to advance the Strategic Plan**

Resources may come from a wide range of sources, including government agencies and private sector and philanthropic organizations operating at the federal, state, regional and local levels.

##### Action Steps:

- Establish an advisory group and/or steering committee to further align how ESG & CoC funding can be coordinated to support the implementation of this plan
  - Develop Written Standards for providing assistance that would direct the use of ESG & CoC resources
- Identify opportunities to provide support to individuals and families who have been exited from homeless assistance programs.
- Research and pursue funding opportunities that will help the CoC better serve those experiencing homelessness.
  - Federal government
    - Dept. of Health and Human Services: Runaway and Homeless Youth, SAMHSA, PATH, TANF, Medicaid
    - Dept. of Housing and Urban Development: CoC, ESG, CDBG, HOME
    - Dept. of Veterans Affairs
    - Dept. of Labor
    - USDA
    - Dept. of Justice
  - State government
    - PA Housing Finance Agency: PHARE, LIHTC, HOME
    - PA Commission on Crime and Delinquency
    - PA Dept. Community and Economic Development: ESG, NAP, HOME
    - PA Dept. Human Services: HAP, Medicaid, Human Service Block Grant, PATH
  - Local government
    - Housing Trust Funds
    - Local departments covering mental health, child welfare, criminal justice
  - Philanthropy
    - Local trusts and foundations
    - Hospital foundations
    - Bank foundations

## **B. Engage with other systems to align resources**

CoC agencies will look for opportunities to work more closely with related sectors and systems – such as employment, education, health care, child welfare, criminal justice, and others – where resources can be pooled or coordinated to serve clients more effectively. CoC resources will need to be aligned to ensure that the CoC has the continuum of housing and services necessary to meet the needs of the various subpopulations identified.

In addition, several statewide initiatives that support the goals of this plan are currently being implemented. These include the implementation of the Department of Human Services' five-year housing strategy, *Supporting Pennsylvanians Through Housing* and the Governor's Homelessness, Housing and Health Care Workgroup, which was created upon the completion of the HR550 Task Force report, *Homelessness in Pennsylvania: Causes, Impacts, and Solutions*. The CoC's needs and priorities must be represented during these discussions in order to align efforts and maximize potential benefits.

### Action Steps:

- Engage with agencies/systems to ensure that programs and grants are aligned with CoC strategies. In particular, the CoC should engage with other state agencies funding homeless assistance to direct resources to meeting the CoC's goals.
- Identify opportunities to work with other systems to coordinate resources more effectively and ensure alignment on best practices to end homelessness. Work to better understand the needs, strengths and capacity of other systems and effectively communicate those of the homeless system.
- Host events and training opportunities, such as webinars, to improve cross-system collaboration.
- Use committees or subcommittees to advance specific cross-system engagement and collaboration strategies related to key subpopulations (Veterans, youth, etc.).

## **5. INCREASE THE ECONOMIC SECURITY OF HOUSEHOLDS**

Most households experiencing homelessness struggle with a lack of financial resources. Therefore, it is essential that the CoC work with these individuals and families to implement strategies aimed at maximizing their income so that they can afford housing and other necessities.

### **A. Effectively collaborate with the workforce development system**

For most households, increasing economic security will be a matter of improving their job prospects, through increased education, training and/or access to new employment opportunities.

As the CoC invests in resources to expand permanent housing using a Rapid Re-housing model, connections to employment will be a key component of successful short-term

assistance and ensuring that households have the resources to maintain housing in the future. Rapid Re-housing specifically prioritizes connections to mainstream resources, but additional support for those experiencing homelessness may be necessary to assist them in navigating the workforce development system.

The reauthorized Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act provides additional opportunities for expanding support to individuals who need a higher level of assistance to obtain employment. The CoC should assess needs among its providers and expand collaboration with the PA Department of Labor & Industry, as well as the local Workforce Development Boards in order to increase employment opportunities.

#### Action Steps:

- In order to expand workforce supports for individuals with significant barriers to employment, determine how to participate in state and local planning efforts that direct the use of WIOA funding.
- Build relationships with Workforce Development Boards throughout the CoC.
- Assess opportunities for coordination between workforce development programs and homeless service providers to better serve households experiencing homelessness. For example, identify ways to address barriers to accessing training and employment programs.
- Provide trainings to homeless service provider organizations on the services offered by Workforce Development Boards, CareerLink, and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and vice versa. This will help both systems better understand how to effectively serve households by matching their needs with appropriate services.
- Create a guide to workforce development/employment services and resources.
- Consider special events to share information about workforce related programs.
- Explore expanding/creating supported employment programs.

#### **B. Connect clients to mainstream income supports**

For individuals with disabilities, income may more realistically be achieved by applying for and receiving SSI/SSDI. Homeless service providers may play a key role in assisting these households in accessing SOAR-trained specialists who can provide the support needed to file a successful application for social security assistance.

In addition, connections to TANF, SNAP and other mainstream services are key resources for increasing economic security.

#### Action Steps:

- Determine the most effective options for the expansion of SOAR. This may be through CoC-funded organizations and/or a through another community partner.

- Provide educational document describing how existing SOAR providers have covered staff time and/or integrated this into specific job descriptions.
- Identify/provide case management services to assist clients in accessing other mainstream income supports (TANF, SNAP, unemployment, etc.).

### **C. Address barriers to obtaining and maintaining employment**

Households who are currently or who have formerly experienced homelessness often face logistical barriers to accessing and maintaining employment. Transportation can be a significant factor that limits the ability of those able to work to get to their job consistently and on-time. Limited accessible and affordable child-care options can also hinder households with children in successfully maintaining employment or training/educational opportunities.

#### Action Steps:

- Work with county and local officials to identify transportation options/resources available to low-income households.
- Identify and explore the feasibility of innovative transportation models.
- Identify opportunities to work with larger employers to address transportation barriers.
- Assess successful strategies within re-entry and veteran serving employment programs, as they are largely regarded as very successful.
- Assess child-care resources available to low-income households and work with households to identify viable child-care options.
- Provide education around the recent expansion of priority assistance available for children experiencing homelessness.
- Assess best practices from across the nation in addressing barriers such as transportation and child-care for applicability to the CoC.

### **D. Work with local employers to expand employment opportunities**

Local communities may have employment opportunities available to those exiting homelessness or who are participants in permanent housing programs. Agencies may be able to identify these opportunities and connect participants to them or work with workforce development programs to do so.

#### Action Steps:

- Engage with local government, community organizations, and employers to assess employment opportunities that exist for individuals currently/formerly experiencing homelessness.

## **6. INCREASE CAPACITY FOR DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS**

Having access to high quality data that can be used by the CoC to assess progress and make

decisions regarding when, how and where to deploy resources will be critical to the CoC's success in achieving its goals. The CoC will need to continue to develop its HMIS data system so that it becomes a more effective tool for tracking households experiencing homelessness, assessing their needs, prioritizing resources and evaluating outcomes.

#### **A. Increase provider participation in HMIS**

In order to effectively evaluate the CoC's progress in reaching its goals, it is vital that the CoC increase the percentage of providers participating in HMIS and the quality of the data in the system. The CoC will need to develop strategies to encourage participation from providers that have heretofore chosen not to participate, including increased engagement with faith-based and community organizations. Further, HMIS Lead Agency will need to ensure provider data is timely and accurate.

##### Action Steps:

- Develop talking points and other tools to provide facts about HMIS, with the goal of encouraging HMIS participation and addressing barriers to participation.
- Partner with faith-based organizations who are using HMIS in order to assist their assistance to promote the benefits of HMIS to faith-based programs not using HMIS.
- Evaluate technology-based options that could be used to mitigate concerns about HMIS participation.
- HMIS Lead Agency to implement data quality plan throughout the CoC and provide training, as needed, to address ongoing and widespread data quality issues.

#### **B. Leverage data collection efforts related to Coordinated Entry**

With the implementation of Coordinated Entry throughout the CoC, more information will be collected in HMIS on households being served. This information provides an opportunity to more thoroughly determine the flow of people through the system, identify gaps, and needs and assess the effectiveness of programs and strategies.

##### Action Steps:

- Provide ongoing training on data elements and data entry requirements that impact the implementation and ongoing evaluation of CE.
- Monitor CE participation and data entry by program/agency to identify areas for improvement.
- Incorporate Coordinated Entry monitoring strategy into the CoC Monitoring Plan in order to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the system. Consider development of dashboards or other ways to share data outcomes.

#### **C. Identify data sharing opportunities**

In order to effectively coordinate with other systems, the CoC should consider where opportunities exist to share data while maintaining client confidentiality. Sharing data with

other systems, such as education, criminal justice, health care, can help identify vulnerable households, increase understanding around the flow into and out of homelessness, and lead to enhanced coordinated and improvements in care for those households engaged in multiple systems.

Action Steps:

- Research data sharing projects in other geographies and identify best practices.
- Engage with other systems where the client base is likely to overlap with homelessness system.
- Evaluate opportunities to share data, including small and large data sharing projects, considering risks to clients and potential benefits.

## 7. ENGAGE IN ADVOCACY TO INCREASE SUPPORT AND SUSTAINABILITY

Advocacy for programs that assist in preventing and ending homelessness will be essential in the current constricted funding environment. In order to achieve the goals identified in this plan, the CoC will need to communicate its vision for ending homelessness and the value that this effort brings to the wider community.

### A. Enhance internal communications

The CoC must communicate effectively with its core stakeholders in order to advance the goals described in this plan. An enhanced communications strategy will serve many purposes, including to: share information, promote effective strategies, enable decision-making, enhance transparency, improve engagement, and more. All of these purposes strengthen the CoC and develop stakeholders with the knowledge necessary to advocate for increased resources.

Action Steps:

- Enhance the CoC website and utilize it as a platform to share information produced by the CoC.
- Develop email newsletter to be distributed to stakeholders to share information related to CoC activities.
- Continue to use CoC meetings to share information about important CoC topics.
- Consider/evaluate additional tools to enhance internal communications.

### B. Expand external communications efforts

The CoC must also expand its efforts to communicate with external stakeholders in order to raise the profile of the CoC and its work. Using a combination of data and individual stories, the CoC can make a clear case for why funding is vital to improving the lives of the most vulnerable members of the community.

### Action Steps:

- Develop clear and concise talking points for issues related to homelessness in which external stakeholders and legislators may have an interest.
- Create fact sheets and other tools to help CoC stakeholders share positive information about the CoC's work to end homelessness.
- Work with statewide organizations, such as the Housing Alliance of PA, to identify state and federal advocacy opportunities.
- Look for opportunities at the local level to promote the CoC's work, such as events, public hearings, etc.
- Provide talking points and/or tools to those who will be advocating for resources that support the CoC's goals.
- Develop relationships with local media outlets, providing information related to homelessness and housing.
- Identify story ideas, such as the PIT Count, to help raise awareness of homelessness.
- Write op-eds and/or letters to the editor to address homelessness-related issues in the community.
- Explore using social media to expand knowledge of and engagement in efforts to end homelessness in the community.

## **8. BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE SYSTEM: A STRUCTURE FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

Building infrastructure is essential to the sustainability of the CoC's efforts to end homelessness. Implementation of the strategies and action steps described in this plan requires an infrastructure that can support system-wide efforts as well as local and regional activities. The Eastern PA CoC's existing infrastructure will provide a significant base of support as implementation moves forward. This includes a strong and committed Governing Board, committees and subcommittees, and the Regional Homeless Advisory Boards (RHABs).

To move ahead, the CoC will assess the work of these existing groups and align them with the strategic plan, revamping committee structures where needed to advance the CoC's activities. This work will entail clearly defining roles and responsibilities among CoC leadership to increase transparency and accountability. The CoC's infrastructure must also include mechanisms for supporting stakeholders by providing training and community building opportunities. In addition, the CoC must monitor progress in achieving its goals.

Underlying all of these will be an effective communications structure that will facilitate coordination and collaboration throughout the CoC.

Action Steps for development of CoC infrastructure:

## A. Re-design the Eastern PA CoC Committee/Subcommittee structure where needed

The CoC's Governing Board will take the lead in redesigning the CoC's committee and subcommittee structure and to monitoring activities of the committees and subcommittees to ensure that they are focused on their tasks and are driving the strategies outlined in the strategic plan. The Governing Board will be assisted by the CoC consultants in taking on this evaluation and in revising the CoC Charter to reflect any changes identified.

In revising the committee/subcommittee structure, the CoC should seek to prevent duplication of efforts as many issues are interrelated. The purpose of this activity is to ensure the CoC can effectively implement this plan, be responsive to opportunities, and maximize all resources including the participation of Board and Committee members. As such, this organizational structure should be evaluated each year with changes made as necessary to respond to the progress and set-backs of the CoC.

### Action Steps:

- Standing committees - Evaluate status of existing standing committees and determine whether/how to align them with strategic plan
  - Governance and Policy
  - Membership
  - Coordinated Entry
- Ad hoc committees - Review ad hoc committees/subcommittees and determine whether/how to align them with strategic plan
  - Transitional Housing
  - Veterans
- Regional/local committees - Assess activities of regional and local groups and determine how to align them with strategic plan
  - Subcommittees of the RHABs
  - County-level housing/homeless coalitions
- Determine the best structure for pursuing the CoC's goals around subpopulations – veterans, chronically homeless, families, youth and survivors of domestic violence. Individual committees to address specific concerns of each population may or may not be necessary.
- Specific Committee recommendations include:
  - Revise the purpose and function of the existing Data Management, Collection, and Outcomes Committee to support the implementation of the project-level portion of the CoC Monitoring Plan. Establish a subcommittee specifically focused on increasing HMIS participation.
  - Revise the purpose and function of the existing Funding Committee to help expand and align resources. While this Committee should continue to oversee the CoC's funding process, the development of the ranking criteria should be

accomplished through a subcommittee under the direction of the Funding Committee.

- Establish a System Performance Committee specifically charged with overseeing the system's level outcomes per the CoC's Monitoring Plan, as well as overseeing the implementation of the CoC's strategic plan.
  - Create a subcommittee of the Coordinated Entry Committee charged with expanding prevention and diversion efforts.
  - Establish a committee charged with expanding permanent housing and the continuum of housing options.
- Additional action steps to be considered through these or other new committees include:
- Expansion of partnership with hospitals and health care organizations.
  - Expansion of partnership with the faith-based community, including local congregations and missions providing shelter.
  - Enhancing opportunities for economic security.
  - Expanding coordination of advocacy efforts throughout the CoC.

## **B. Assess roles and define responsibilities**

In order to ensure that the CoC's Strategic Plan is effectively implemented, the CoC Governing Board will work with the following groups to ensure that roles and responsibilities are clearly identified and that each participant's time is maximized.

### Action Step:

- Clearly identify roles and responsibilities for each of the following stakeholders in regards to implementation of the CoC's Strategic Plan:
- Governing Board
  - Committees and subcommittees
  - RHABs
  - Collaborative Applicant
  - HMIS Lead Agency
  - Consultants
  - CoC staff person

## **C. Develop mechanisms to support providers and agencies**

The CoC's service provider agencies and other community organizations will require support to improve performance and share best practices. The CoC will assess the needs of these groups and identify effective mechanisms for helping agencies and organizations to optimize their programs and participate fully in the CoC's efforts to end homelessness.

#### Action Step:

- RHAB chairs, along with the CoC staff person, will identify needs of service providers and community organizations participating in the local RHABs. These issues will be brought to the Governing Board to develop recommendations for addressing ongoing knowledge- and skill-building needs. This may include:
  - Technical assistance
  - Learning collaboratives
  - Trainings
  - Community building opportunities
- Share best practices: Within the CoC, agencies are often developing new strategies for increasing housing opportunities for clients, implementing best practices to meet service needs and expanding community support for their programs. Information about effective strategies should be shared in order to facilitate replication.
  - Identify ways the CoC can facilitate the sharing of best practices, including through learning collaboratives, webinars, CoC meetings, email distributions, etc.
  - Circulate surveys to gauge interest in various information sharing methods.
  - Develop fact sheets and/or other ways to document, distribute, and share information about best/promising practices.
  - Use CoC communications platforms to disseminate information across CoC stakeholders.

#### **D. Monitor progress in achieving goals**

It is recommended that a System Performance Committee is established to monitor progress of the goals established. This Committee should provide no less than quarterly updates to the Governing Board and provide recommendations to address barriers impacting the CoC's success. Specifically, monitoring of goals will include:

- Implementation of the CoC Monitoring Plan and CoC Strategic Plan
- Evaluate options for monitoring progress: data dashboards, fact sheets, etc.
- Create opportunities for regular check-in with Board and other groups on system-wide performance to allow for course corrections or celebrations

#### **E. Develop communications structure to allow for improved information sharing and coordination**

- Email communications
  - Build out distribution lists
  - CoC, Board, committee communications
  - Communicate with grantees for CoC NOFA related issues
  - Create CoC newsletter to share updates and information
  - Develop capacity for additional uses, such as advocacy

- Surveys
  - Use for various purposes: gather information, register for events, solicit feedback
- Website
  - Provide information about the CoC to the public
  - Post events to calendar
  - Post CoC documents/notices
  - Post CoC resources
- Wiggio
  - Continue to use for internal stakeholder communications
  - Re- evaluate use if lack of technical support for platform poses challenge to continued use

## GOALS/TIMELINES/RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

### **GOAL 1: Reduce number of people experiencing homelessness by 50%**

- Baseline number: 2,599
- Goal: 1,300
  - Reduce number of people in emergency shelters at a point-in-time by 20% from 1,061 (2016 baseline) to 850 by 2021. This will require a reduction of 5% annually.
  - Reduce number of people in transitional housing programs at a point-in-time by 63% from 935 (2016 baseline) to 350 by 2021. This will require a reduction of 18% annually.
  - Reduce number of people counted as unsheltered at a point-in-time by 83% from 603 (2016 baseline) to 100 by 2021. This will require a reduction of 30% annually.
- Summary of goal, by year:

	BASELINE						GOAL
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2021
Emergency Shelter	1061	1,008	958	919	882	847	850
Transitional Housing	935	767	629	516	423	347	350
Unsheltered	603	422	295	207	145	101	100
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2599</b>	<b>2,197</b>	<b>1,882</b>	<b>1,642</b>	<b>1,450</b>	<b>1,295</b>	<b>1300</b>

- Responsible party: System Performance Committee

### **GOAL 2: End chronic homelessness**

- Baseline number: 159
- Goal: Functional Zero
  - Reduce number of people experiencing chronic homelessness by 20%/year.
- Responsible party: TBD

### **GOAL 3: End veterans homelessness**

- Baseline number: 111
- Goal: Functional Zero
  - Reduce number of veterans experiencing homelessness by 20%/year.
- Responsible party: Veterans Committee

### **GOAL 4: Reduce homelessness among families with children by 50%**

- Baseline number: 387 households
- Goal: 193 households
  - Reduce number of families experiencing homelessness by 20%/year.
  - Zero unsheltered families by 2019 PIT count.
  - Ensure that all families fleeing domestic violence have resources to return to the community.
  - Establish structure for pursuing the US Interagency Council on Homelessness criteria and benchmarks for ending family homelessness. (CoC is not following USICH timelines.)
- Responsible party: TBD

### **GOAL 5: Reduce homelessness among unaccompanied youth by 75%**

- Baseline number: 209
- Goal: 52 youth
  - Reduce number of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness by 32/year.
  - Establish structure for pursuing the US Interagency Council on Homelessness criteria and benchmarks for ending youth homelessness. (CoC is not following USICH timelines.)
- Responsible party: TBD

### **GOAL 6: Reduce the duration of homelessness to a system average of 30 days (long term) and 47 days over the next five years**

- Baseline number: Average number of days homeless for persons in emergency shelter and transitional housing programs: 125 days
  - Baseline average in emergency shelter: 67 days
  - Baseline average in transitional housing: 258 days
- Goal: 47 days
  - Reduce the length of time people are in emergency shelters by 15% per year to an average of 30 days.
  - Reduce the length of time people are in transitional housing by 19% per year to an average of 90 days.
- Summary of goal, by year:

	<b>ES</b>	<b>TH</b>	<b>ES+TH</b>
<b>Annual Percentage Reduction</b>	15%	19%	18%
<b>Baseline Year - Average Days</b>	67	258	125
<b>Year 1 Goal - Average Days</b>	57	209	103
<b>Year 2 Goal - Average Days</b>	49	169	84
<b>Year 3 Goal - Average Days</b>	41	137	69
<b>Year 4 Goal - Average Days</b>	35	111	57
<b>Year 5 Goal - Average Days</b>	30	90	46

→ Responsible party: System Performance Committee

## PRIORITY ACTION STEPS FOR YEAR 1

- Redesign Committee/subcommittee structure for implementation of the CoC Strategic Plan and recruit volunteers for committees.
- Establish an effective communications structure, which will incorporate the CoC's website, Wiggio or other method of email communication and newsletters or other system of providing regular updates. Social media may also be considered.
- ID and cultivate local champions. At a minimum, each RHAB should have one local champion that can effectively engage and mobilize people to participate in the CoC and/or other efforts that directly impact the CoC's goals.
- Continue implementation and strengthening of the CoC's Coordinated Entry System.
- Provide education on homeless prevention and diversion and work with the Coordinated Entry Committee, or a subcommittee to develop a strategy for implementation and expansion of these practices.
- Increase data collection and quality of data.
- Establish specific goals for expansion of permanent housing resources and begin implementation. This may include preferences from Public Housing Authorities or other multi-family housing providers, housing development, or other approaches.
- Increase coordination of ESG & CoC funding.
- Expand street outreach efforts.
- Focus on discharge planning to ensure individuals exiting criminal justice, treatment/rehab, foster care and other systems are not being exited to homelessness.
- Continue providing training to homeless assistance providers and incorporate ongoing opportunities for learning.
- In order to increase resources, determine what existing statewide/regional groups are working on homelessness, affordable housing, service delivery, employment and other related issues. CoC Representatives should be incorporated into these efforts to maximize potential benefit to the CoC.