



Western PA Continuum of Care

Five-Year Strategic Plan to Reduce and End Homelessness, 2017 - 2021

INTRODUCTION

Throughout 20 counties in northwestern and southwestern PA, collectively known as the Western Pennsylvania Continuum of Care (CoC), 986 people were identified as experiencing homelessness on a single night in January 2016. This, of course, reflects just a portion of those who experience homelessness or housing instability over the course of the year in the region.

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 some communities.

Feeling a sense of urgency and a commitment **to end homelessness in our region**, the Western 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.

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 or identify viable housing options in order to prevent episodes of homelessness and to divert households from entering the homeless system whenever possible.

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, through partnerships, will be sustainable, with enough resources to provide housing and services to those experiencing homelessness according to their individual needs
- ❖ Our system is attuned to the causes of rural homelessness and able to adapt to changing circumstances
- ❖ Our system uses data to guide decision-making and enhance effectiveness across all 20 counties

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

→ **Person-Centered**

While we cannot prevent/divert 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**

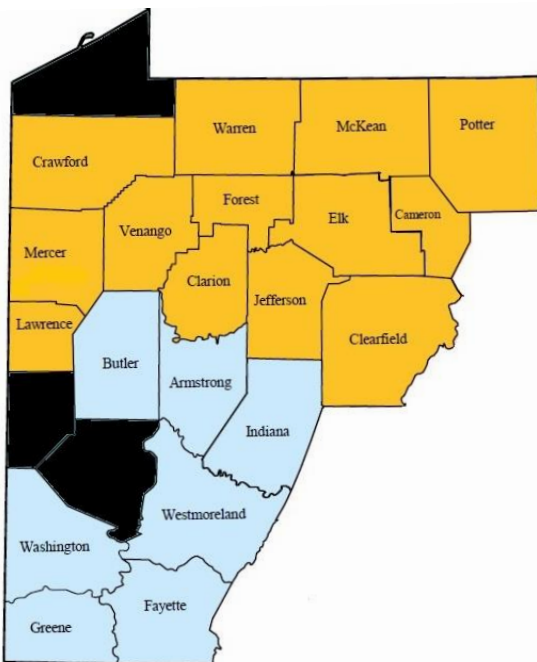
We will work to immediately house those who experience homelessness, with the understanding that permanent housing is the foundation upon which individuals and households can regain stability in their lives and achieve success.

→ **Sustainability**

Our aim 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 WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA BALANCE OF STATE CONTINUUM OF CARE

The Western PA CoC, a structure which is required by HUD to receive homeless assistance resources, is charged with addressing the needs of individuals and families experiencing homelessness in the region. The CoC's mission, as stated in the Governance Charter, is to end homelessness through a coordinated community-based process of identifying needs and building an open and integrated system of housing and services that addresses those needs.



The activities to fulfill this mission are guided by its Governing Board and activities are undertaken by the Board and Committees. In addition, two Regional Homeless Advisory Boards (RHABs) meet regularly to advance local, regional and CoC-wide efforts.

The Western PA CoC includes 20 counties, which are home to 1,716,565 Pennsylvanians.

These counties cover 15,230 sq/miles and include 720 municipalities with 122 school districts.

The geographic area is largely rural, with 74% of all municipalities having less than 2,500 residents. However, 149 municipalities are considered to be "urban." Collectively, these counties have over 15,000 farms with over 2 million acres of farmland.

In addition, these twenty counties are also home to:

- The nation's oldest golf course (Clarion County)
- The Christmas Tree capital of the world (Indiana County)
- Punxsatawney Phil, the famous groundhog (Jefferson County)
- Fallingwater, Frank Lloyd Wright's most famously designed home (Fayette County)
- Zippo lighters (McKean County)
- The first oil well and the birthplace of the modern oil industry (Crawford County)
- The largest amount of largest bituminous coal reserves in the state (Greene County)
- 21 colleges and universities

OUR GOALS & OUTCOMES

The primary goal of this strategic plan is a 50% reduction in the number of people experiencing homelessness in the Western 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: Reduce all homelessness among families with children by 50% (households).
- Outcome: Achieve/maintain functional zero for unsheltered families with children.
- Outcome: 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 experiencing homelessness by 50%.
- Youth include those under 25 years of age, including single (unaccompanied) individuals and parents aged under 25. This goal is specific to unaccompanied youth.

→ **Set a path to end all forms of homelessness: families with children, youth, couples, singles, people with disabilities including addiction, and those fleeing domestic violence**

- Outcome: Reduce the duration of homelessness to an average of 50 days or less over the next five years, with a long-range goal is to reduce this average to 30 days or less.

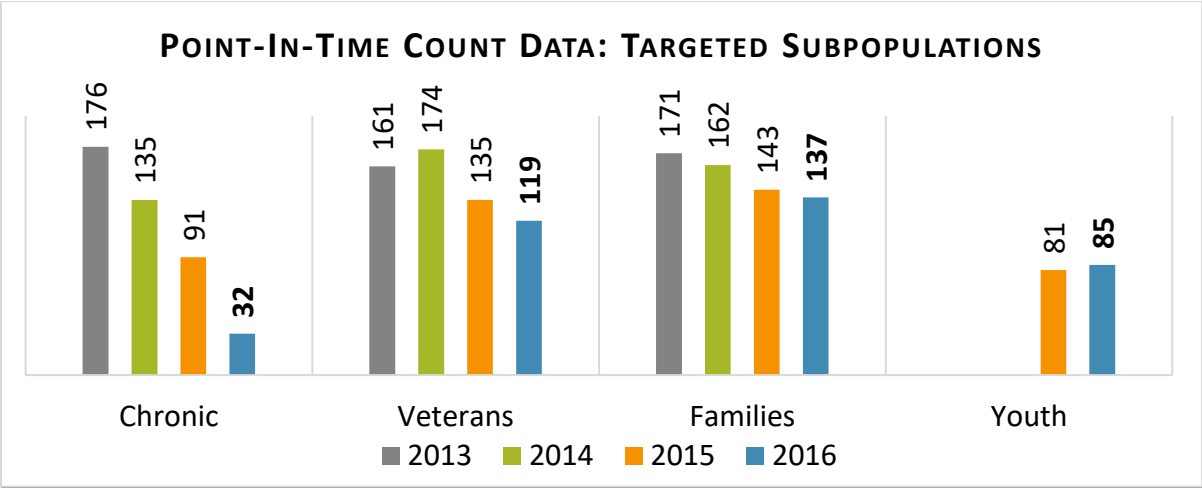
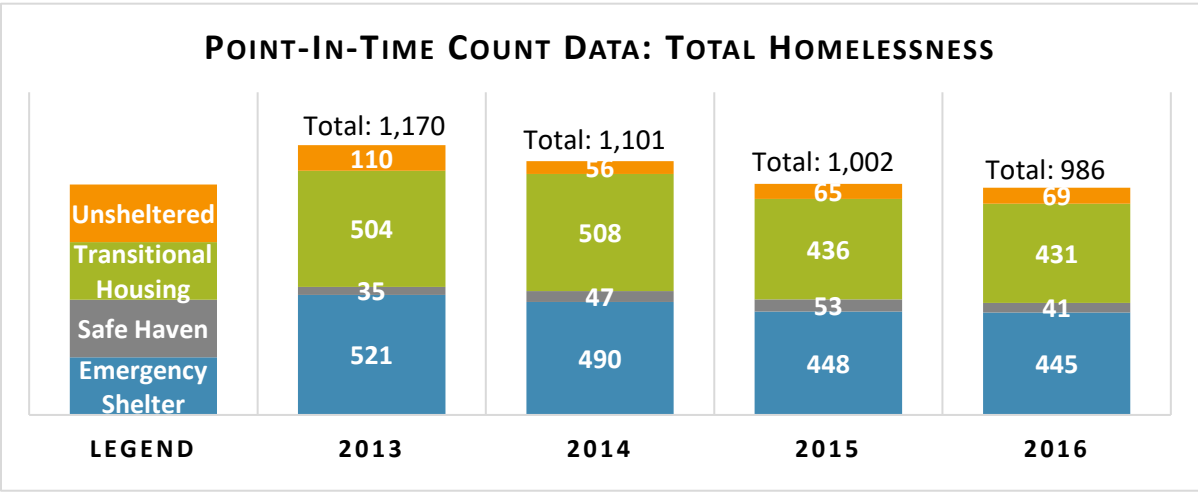
Progress on achieving the outcomes described under these goals will be measured using data from the Point-In-Time Count, with the exception of the length of time homeless which will be pulled from PA-HMIS, the CoC's Homeless Management Information System. The Point-In-Time (PIT) Count is an annual census 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 20-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.

WESTERN PA CoC HOMELESSNESS DATA

As described in the introduction, 986 people were identified as experiencing homelessness during the annual Point-In-Time Count in January 2016. This number included 69 people who were sleeping outdoors; 32 households who are experiencing chronic homelessness; 119 veterans; and 137 families.



Number of Children experiencing homelessness, as identified by the Pennsylvania Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness = 2,417 throughout the Western PA CoC

County	# children homeless	County	# children homeless
Armstrong	58	Indiana	128
Butler	215	Jefferson	94
Cameron	0	Lawrence	147
Clarion	87	McKean	158
Clearfield	171	Mercer	134
Crawford	110	Potter	11
Elk	0	Venango	128
Fayette	268	Warren	81
Forest	43	Washington	186
Greene	31	Westmoreland	367

WESTERN PA CoC DETAILED POINT-IN-TIME COUNT DATA					
	2013	2014	2015	2016	Change 2013 to 2016
Total Number of Homeless	1,170	1,101	1,002	986	-16%
Total Number Sheltered	1,060	1,045	937	917	-13%
Emergency Shelter	521	490	448	445	-15%
Transitional Housing	504	508	436	431	-14%
Safe Haven	35	47	53	41	17%
Total Number Unsheltered	110	56	65	69	-37%
Veterans	161	174	135	119	-26%
Chronic	176	135	91	32	-82%
Individuals	154	133	89	21	-86%
People in families	22	2	2	11	-50%
Families	171	162	143	137	-20%
Sheltered	162	160	140	136	-16%
Unsheltered	9	2	3	1	-89%
Youth	n/a	n/a	81	85	5%
Unaccompanied Youth	n/a	n/a	61	62	2%
Parenting Youth	n/a	n/a	20	23	15%

This number only tells a portion of the story, as it is based on a single day count (known as the point-in-time count) and is not reflective of the number of people experiencing homelessness throughout the year. Additionally, the homeless definition used for the point-in-time count does not represent any individual or family who lacks permanent housing in their name, but instead, is limited to individuals and families who are in emergency or domestic violence shelter, in a safe haven program, in transitional housing, or identified in an unsheltered location (e.g. car, tent, abandoned building). Countless more individuals who lack housing may have been in a local hospital or emergency room, jail or prison, in a treatment facility, or living with friends/family.

Data gathered from other sources can help expand the understanding of homelessness in the CoC's region. For example, the Pennsylvania Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness (ECYEH) program provides reports on the number of children experiencing homelessness as identified by local school districts using a broader definition of homelessness. ECYEH data shows that over 2,400 children were identified as homeless in school districts throughout the Western PA CoC region during the 2015-2016 school year.

While the CoC will currently use PIT data as the basis for assessing progress on achieving the goals identified in this plan, one of the CoC's strategies is to enhance data collection and analysis to better understand the full picture of homelessness in the region.

OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

As part of the strategic planning process, the Western PA CoC Governing Board participated in a strategic planning retreat. During this session, many opportunities and challenges that will impact the CoC's ability to succeed were discussed.

→ *Opportunities*

- There is an understanding of the role housing plays in furthering a household's ability to achieve economic security and stability.
- A significant amount of data has become available that demonstrates the importance of housing in educational success and as a social determinate of health. This creates enormous opportunities to partner with educational and/or health care related organizations which are often key community anchor institutions.
- There is increasing awareness of the intersections between housing/homelessness and child welfare, criminal justice and other systems.
- The CoC has access to better technology and data collection/analysis, leading to improved understanding regarding the scope of homelessness throughout the CoC and the CoC's ability to assess needs and provide appropriate resources. In addition, data can be used to better understand how individuals/families experiencing homelessness interact with other system. This cross-systems data can be used to develop a data-driven case for investing in ending homelessness.

→ *Challenges*

- Considering the rural nature of the CoC, transportation creates significant barriers to employment, service delivery, and more. Public transportation is not available throughout most of the region.
- Inadequate employment opportunities. In addition to transportation being a barrier to employment, there is a real lack of opportunity for a job that pays a living wage. In addition, new industries that have been created in the last decade have not increased opportunities for local residents (e.g., through the natural gas industry).
- There is a real lack of affordable housing. In many cases, local landlords have targeted units towards students, gas drillers or other populations that can afford rents at levels above Fair Market Rent making it difficult for households to attain affordable housing.
- Most housing programs seem geared toward meeting the needs of urban centers rather than rural areas. Furthermore, the scoring of competitive funding opportunities commonly prioritizes factors that are less prevalent in rural communities. As a result, rural communities have struggled to access funds and resources to address local housing needs.
- State resources have been reduced, resulting in a depletion of local funding for supportive services. In addition, many existing resources have shifted to respond to the opiate drug epidemic, which has significantly impacted many local communities throughout the CoC.

OUR STRATEGIES AND ACTION STEPS

After assessing both the opportunities and challenges described above, the Western PA CoC identified a number of strategies that will need to be further developed and implemented in order to achieve the goals detailed in this plan. These strategies are described below and are centered around the following themes:

- Increasing leadership, collaboration and civic engagement to expand the CoC's reach.
- Increasing affordable housing resources.
- Increasing economic security.
- Expanding and aligning resources.
- Retooling the homeless assistance network, preventing and diverting homelessness whenever possible.
- Enhancing data collection.

1. INCREASE LEADERSHIP, COLLABORATION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT TO EXPAND THE COC'S REACH

The National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) has identified critical success factors that have helped communities make progress toward ending homelessness. From *Critical Success Factors in High Performing Rural Continuums of Care*¹, these include:

- An identified "Glue Person" that maintains both a high-level understanding and detailed perspective of the Continuum and its activities
- A "Champion" for ending homelessness that has the trust and respect of community members, as well as the skills to build relationships both inside and outside of the homeless system
- A high level of stakeholder involvement and leadership in the Continuum of Care planning process
- Implementation strategies that reinforce inclusion, coordination, and collaboration across homeless system agencies and programs, both public and private
- A willingness to think "outside of the box" to achieve key goals within the homelessness assistance system.

While the work of the CoC is far reaching, many individuals and organizations beyond those that receive CoC, Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) or other funding to provide homeless assistance understand that they can participate in the CoC process. Expanding the number of engaged stakeholders has the potential to bring additional leaders to the forefront and increase collaboration with other systems and the public.

A. Increase awareness of the CoC, its mission, goals, vision and strategies

¹ http://www.endhomelessness.org/page/-/files/2681_file_Critical_Success_Factors_in_High_Performing_rural_CoCs.pdf

In order to better engage the public, the CoC must create a public-facing structure. This will include succinctly articulated statements about its mission, vision and goals. In addition, the CoC will need to ensure that its ongoing communications are coordinated and clear to a broader audience.

The roll-out of the strategic plan presents an opportunity to elevate the work of the CoC and highlight how it connects to other issues. This can be accomplished through the development of materials that identify how issues central to other systems are related to the mission of the CoC.

Input during the strategic planning process also pointed to a need to build awareness of the CoC among a younger generation. This may be accomplished through youth-targeted events, the development of a youth council and exposure through service clubs.

Newsletters and/or other mechanism should be considered to provide continuous communication with stakeholders. This should include the CoC's website and perhaps the use of social media.

Action Steps:

- Engage in a process to better understand what stakeholders currently know about the CoC and its work.
- Survey CoC-funded agencies and stakeholders to better understand the types of communication products needed to build knowledge of and support for their work in their communities.
- Consider options for creating a public-facing structure for the CoC's ongoing engagement effort. Look at how other communities have approached this engagement and assess the structure that would best fit the CoC. This may include naming the CoC and/or its strategic plan as a way of better communicating its mission and goals. Communities that have branded themselves in this way include: Houston, TX (The Way Home); Pikes Peak, CO (Our Path Home); King County, WA (All Home); Lancaster, PA (Heading Home); and State of Connecticut (Opening Doors Connecticut).
- Develop an implementation plan for creating a functional public-facing structure.

B. Enlist/engage champions

In highlighting the need to identify champions, NAEH's *Critical Success Factors in High Performing Rural Continuums of Care* states:

"The Champion is one person, usually per rural locale in the Continuum, who people trust and listen to, such as a faith-based or community leader. This person believes the work and proposed solutions of the Continuum and works in conjunction with the "glue person" and other Continuum leaders to move the work forward. One way the champion moves the work forward is by influencing cultural shifts in provider staff and consumers that would otherwise serve as barriers to the system's progress. This is often achieved by communicating system goals and activities to the broader community in a culturally sensitive, accessible way."²

² http://www.endhomelessness.org/page/-/files/2681_file_Critical_Success_Factors_in_High_Performing_rural_CoCs.pdf

Government officials, leaders from faith-based communities, foundations or other community funders will be critical partners and potential champions for expanding resources as the CoC pursues the stated goals.

Identifying champions who are able to assist in expanding affordable housing opportunities will be critical to the CoC's ongoing success. Housing champions in local government, local HUD offices and state agencies can help facilitate housing creation and expansion in a number of ways. They 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.

To identify where additional champions are needed, the CoC should assess existing geographic and sector representation and gaps. In geographies where leaders are needed and/or within particular systems, Local Housing Options Teams (LHOTs)/ county housing and homeless coalitions may be helpful to identify potential champions.

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.

2. INCREASE AFFORDABLE HOUSING RESOURCES

Average monthly rent is as low as \$568 in Cameron County and as high as \$873 in Butler County. 23% of renters throughout the CoC pay 50%+ of income towards rent, with Cameron County having the lowest severely rent burdened residents (11%) and Indiana County reporting the highest percentage (33%).³

The Western 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.

³ Center for Rural Pennsylvania's County Profiles - <http://www.rural.palegislature.us/2017CountyProfile.xlsx>

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)
- Determine the level of interest in shared housing and other non-traditional housing models
- 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 use existing resources to house a portion of those who meet the current definition of chronic homelessness.

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*.⁴ 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.

⁴ <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Opening-Doors-Through-Multifamily-Housing-Toolkit-for-Implementing-a-Homeless-Preference.pdf>

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 among PHAs and other housing providers regarding housing high-need households.
- Engage PHFA in systems-level strategy and planning to create new housing opportunities in communities.

C. Engage affordable housing developers

Affordable housing policies favor development in more urban areas. In rural areas it can be difficult to find sites that have access to transportation and/or are located in areas near community resources such as grocery stores, shopping, medical care, and faith-based institutions. Furthermore, many potential sites are difficult to access and have no existing infrastructure, which can extend the development time and increase costs. To overcome these issues, the CoC should proactively engage with developers to expand affordable housing options.

Action Steps:

- Refer potential development sites to developers
- Develop a Return on Investment approach for developers and property owners
- Partner with developers to provide services for Permanent Supportive Housing units included in developments
- Provide letters of support and other types of assistance

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.
- Identify strategies for bringing rental units up to code, which may include incentives and/or financial assistance. One best practice discussed was in Greene County where they provide grants to landlords to bring properties up to code in exchange for having access to those units to house individuals participating in one of the county's housing programs.

- Create resources for landlords to incentivize working with clients with poor rental history, such as fund for damages, security deposits, first/last month's rent.
- Provide landlords with a connection to case manager and/or other designated contact that they can call if a problem arises.
- 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.
- 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.

E. *Preserve affordable housing options*

The number of affordable housing opportunities is limited throughout each of the Western PA CoC's 20 counties. According to PHFA's Rental Housing Inventory, they have provided funding for the development of 14,300 units, over half of which are designated units for households aged 55+ or 62+.

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.

3. INCREASE ECONOMIC SECURITY

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.

As stated in *Opening Doors*, the Federal Strategic Plan to End Homelessness, "unemployment, under-employment and low wage employment are frequent causes of homelessness."⁵ The poverty rate throughout the CoC is 13.5%, ranging from 24% in Forest County to 9% in Elk County. (The State average of 13.1%.)⁶

⁵ Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness; <https://www.usich.gov/opening-doors>

⁶ Center for Rural Pennsylvania's County Profiles - <http://www.rural.palegislature.us/2017CountyProfile.xlsx>

This lack of economic security leads to a significant number of households needing assistance with food security. For example, 24% of Fayette County residents receive food stamps and 69% of their students qualify for free lunch.⁷

While minimum wage is currently \$7.25/hour, families would need to earn an hourly wage of \$13.97 (working 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year) in order to afford the Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom rental unit, without paying more than 30% of their income.⁸ This rental housing wage ranges from \$13.10 in Armstrong, Cameron, Clarion, Elk, Jefferson, Potter, Venango and Warren counties to \$15.81 in Butler, Fayette, Washington and Westmoreland counties.⁹

Strategies aimed at increasing the economic security of households will be an important factor in supporting families in maintaining permanent housing given the region's housing wages.

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 (WIOA) 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 train and fund peer support programs to support employment.
- 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.

⁷ Center for Rural Pennsylvania's County Profiles - <http://www.rural.palegislature.us/2017CountyProfile.xlsx>

⁸ National Low Income Housing Coalition, Out of Reach 2017; http://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/oor/OOR_2017.pdf

⁹ Ibid,

- 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 and/or compensated work therapy 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.

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.

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. In addition to the above referenced partnerships, the following opportunities should be aggressively pursued 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 ensure goals and outcomes are aligned and 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. RETOOL AND STRENGTHEN THE HOMELESS ASSISTANCE SYSTEM

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 Western 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.

For individuals and families whose homelessness cannot be prevented, the homeless service system may be difficult to navigate for both households in need. Streamlining this system and improving coordination are key elements 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.

With all of the changes to the homeless assistance system that have been and will continue to be implemented, one key aspect of this plan will be to ensure homeless assistance providers have appropriate tools to assist those in their community in exiting homelessness. This will require the development and implementation of a communications strategy that allows the CoC to share information with providers. Additionally, providers need the opportunity to discuss challenges, needs, successes, resources, and more with each other.

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 Coordinated Entry intake sites, emergency shelters, and other sites, as appropriate.
- Identify funding opportunities to support the creation and/or expansion of diversion programs in the CoC region.

D. 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 (CE) system. As part of the CE system, 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 Committee will continue to lead the implementation of the CE system. The Governing Board will be updated regularly regarding the progress of the CE system implementation and provide input as needed.

Action Steps:

- Continue CoC efforts to implement CE through the CoC's Coordinated Entry Committee.
- Once implemented, CE Committee will oversee ongoing assessment to understand inflow into the system and levels of need.
- CE Committee will coordinate ongoing outreach to community partners and stakeholders as Coordinated Entry system matures.
- CE Committee will engage new partners in participating in Coordinated Entry in order to expand the available resources.
- The CoC will ensure that no less than one full-time staff person is hired to oversee the implementation, operation, effectiveness and compliance of coordinated entry.

E. *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 intake sites 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 populations 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 households experiencing homelessness living in unsheltered situations.

F. *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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experiencing chronic homelessness or youth experiencing homelessness, 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 intake sites 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/low-barrier models.

G. 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 Steps:

- 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.

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, the HMIS Lead Agency will need to ensure provider data entry 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 in promoting 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.
- Work with the HMIS Lead Agency to implement a 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, and health care - can help identify vulnerable households, increase understanding around the flow into and out of homelessness, and lead to enhanced coordination 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. BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE SYSTEM: A STRUCTURE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Homeless assistance providers have worked collaboratively within their organizations, their county/ies, their RHAB and the entire CoC to end homelessness for countless households over the last twenty years. These efforts have been successful, as demonstrated by the low rate of homelessness throughout the 20 county region. (The rate of homelessness is 5.7 people experiencing homelessness per 10,000 people in the Western PA CoC, as compared to the national average rate of homelessness is 17.7 people.¹⁰)

However, to further reduce homelessness, new strategies as outlined in this plan are required. The successful implementation of this plan will require the CoC to expand the infrastructure to support current and new system-wide efforts as well as local and regional activities. The Western 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. 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 stakeholder 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

¹⁰ Western PA CoC rate of homelessness calculated using data from the Center for Rural Pennsylvania's County Profiles - <http://www.rural.palegislature.us/2017CountyProfile.xlsx>. National rate of homelessness reported in the State of Homelessness in America 2016; <http://www.endhomelessness.org/library/entry/SOH2016>.

- RHABs
- Committees and subcommittees
- Local Housing Options Teams (LHOTs)/ county housing and homeless coalitions
- Collaborative Applicant
- HMIS Lead Agency
- Consultants
- CoC staff person

B. Re-design the Western PA CoC operations and structure where needed

In order to ensure the CoC has the ability to inform and engage a broader range of stakeholders, the business of those meetings should focus on the goals of the CoC and not the rules imposed by any particular funding source. The CoC can keep stakeholders up to date by increasing other forms of communication (e.g. newsletters, website, social media). In addition, the CoC should evaluate whether semi-annual meetings are sufficient or if these meetings should take place quarterly.

In addition, the CoC's Governing Board will take the lead in examining and potentially redesigning the CoC's Board, committee and subcommittee structures 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:

- The Governing Board should determine if semi-annual meetings of the full CoC are sufficient. As the number and diversity of CoC stakeholders increases over time, this determination should be revisited no less than annually.
- The Board should examine its own structure and composition to determine if there are additional groups that should be represented and if there are key stakeholders that should be engaged in the Board in order to further pursue these goals. Additionally, the Governing Board may find it helpful to increase the existing meeting schedule from quarterly to every other month.
- To ensure the voices of youth are represented throughout the CoC, the Board will want to consider creating a dedicated seat for a youth with lived experience. This youth may be a representative of a Youth Advisory Board.
- Regional Homeless Advisory Board (RHABs): As the CoC moves away from discussion of CoC funding during full CoC meetings, the RHAB meetings will be an important vehicle for providers to engage in conversation about funding and other more technical issues. Existing relationships and strengths should be evaluated and built upon, even as RHAB activities are re-envisioned. The Northwest and Southwest RHABs should convene providers (CoC, ESG and beyond as appropriate) no less than six times per year. These meetings will provide an

opportunity to discuss best practices, identify barriers to success, share resources, and more; these activities will be vital to the implementation of this strategic plan and the CoC's monitoring plan. As such, it may be appropriate to have representatives participate in RHAB meetings and in specific committees in order to ensure an appropriate communication loop exists.

→ Standing committees –

- Evaluate status of existing standing committees and determine whether/how to align them with the strategic plan
 - Membership: – Assess whether this committee can assist in identifying local champions.
 - Policy
 - Strategic Planning Committee: While a System Performance Committee was recommended to implement the CoC's monitoring plan, track the progress of the CoC's performance measures and the outcomes of this strategic plan, assess whether these activities can be assigned to the Strategic Planning Committee.
 - HMIS: The creation of a Data Committee was recommended for the implementation of the CoC's monitoring plan. Assess whether the activities assigned to the HMIS committee can be expanded to serve in this capacity. Also, assess whether membership would need to be altered to serve in this role.
 - Resource Development Committee: Examine whether this committee can be charged with implementing activities aimed at expanding permanent housing and the continuum of housing options.
- The CoC's Coordinated Entry Committee and Youth Committee have specific roles identified within this plan. These committees should be evaluated to ensure the appropriate stakeholders are at the table. In addition, these committees need to integrate the relevant goals of the strategic plan into their workplans. This may include, for example, the establishment of a subcommittee of the Coordinated Entry Committee charged with expanding prevention and diversion efforts.
 - To ensure that youth who are currently or previously homeless have the opportunity to provide input and inform the CoC's governance and operation, the CoC should establish a Youth Advisory Board.
- The CoC's Veteran Committee is not included in the CoC's Governance Charter as a standing committee. Until the time that the CoC achieves functional zero and the committee no longer believes they need to operate, it is recommended that they transition from an ad hoc committee to a standing committee.

→ 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.

→ Ad hoc committees: Review ad hoc committees/subcommittees and determine whether/how to align them with strategic plan.

- In order to ensure a non-conflicted fair and transparent funding process, the CoC established a Funding Committee in 2016. The roles of this committee should be reconsidered to determine if there is a need for ongoing/year-round function, and is

so, the committee should be included in the Governance Charter. Furthermore, the ranking-related roles currently assigned to subcommittees of the RHAB should be re-evaluated to ensure that CoC funding decisions are made in a fair and non-conflicted manner.

- Regional/local committees: Assess activities of regional and local groups (e.g. Local Housing Options Teams (LHOTs)/ county housing and homeless coalitions) and determine how increase coordination. While these local groups are not under the control of the CoC, they are included in the CoC's organizational chart. As such, the CoC may want to provide regular updates to these groups as an effort to further expand the reach of CoC and enhance coordination to achieve common goals.
 - In addition, these local groups may play an important role in the ongoing implementation and improvement of Coordinated Entry. For example, providers may find it convenient to come together before or after meetings of these groups to discuss the needs of households on the prioritized waiting list.
- Determine the best structure for pursuing the CoC's goals around identified subpopulations: veterans, chronically homeless, families, youth, survivors of domestic violence and elderly. Individual committees for each subpopulation may or may not be necessary.

C. Monitor progress in achieving goals

It is recommended that a System Performance Committee is established to monitor progress of the goals established. As noted above, this role may also be fulfilled by revising the role of the Strategic Planning Committee.

Action Steps:

- 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 corrections or celebrations

D. Develop communications structure to allow for improved information sharing and coordination

Creating a solid internal and external communications structure will be essential to implementation of the plan and to building ongoing support in the communities that comprise the Western PA CoC. Building upon existing structures and platforms and strategically expanding communications tools will be essential as the CoC moves forward.

Action Steps:

- Expand the use of email communications:
 - Build out distribution lists
 - Facilitate CoC, Board, RHAB, 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 education
- Develop surveys to address various needs:
 - Gathering information
 - Event registration
 - Soliciting feedback
- Continue to enhance the usability of the CoC’s website to provide usable information to CoC members and stakeholders:
 - Provide information about the CoC to the public
 - Post events to calendar
 - Post CoC documents/notices
 - Post CoC resources

GOALS/TIMELINES/RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

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

- Baseline number: 986
- Goal: 493
 - Reduce number of people in emergency shelters at a point-in-time by 25% from 445 (2016 baseline) to 335 by 2021. This will require a reduction of 5.5% annually.
 - Reduce the number of people in safe haven programs from 41 (2016 baseline) to zero by 2018.
 - Reduce number of people in transitional housing programs at a point-in-time by 67% from 431 (2016 baseline) to 141 by 2021. This will require a reduction of 20% annually.
 - Reduce number of people counted as unsheltered at a point-in-time by 76% from 69 (2016 baseline) to 16 by 2021. This will require a reduction of 25% annually.
- Summary of goal, by year:

	BASELINE 2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	GOAL By end of 2021 and reflected in 2022 PIT
Emergency Shelter	445	421	397	376	355	335
Safe Haven	41	41	16	0	0	0
Transitional Housing	431	345	276	221	177	141
Unsheltered	69	52	39	29	22	16
TOTAL	986	858	728	625	553	493

- Responsible party: System Performance Committee

GOAL 2: End chronic homelessness

- Baseline number: 32 (21 single individuals + 11 family households)
- Goal: Functional Zero

- Reduce number of people experiencing chronic homelessness by 20%/year.
- Responsible party: TBD. There are 859 Permanent Supportive Housing beds throughout the Western PA CoC, excluding the VASH funded beds designated for veterans. Because of the CoC's regional projects, beds can be made available in each of the CoC's 20 counties. It is recommended that an ad-hoc workgroup be established to identify all barriers related to matching chronic household to an appropriate resource. Once these action steps are determined, the CoC will need to determine the appropriate entity for implementation.

GOAL 3: End veterans homelessness

- Baseline number: 119
- 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: 137 households
- Goal: 68 households
 - Reduce number of families experiencing homelessness by 20%/year.
 - Zero unsheltered families by 2019 PIT count.
- Responsible party:
 - TBD. It is recommended that the CoC establish an ad-hoc group to review the US Interagency Council on Homelessness criteria and benchmarks for ending family homelessness and recommend an appropriate structure for implementation. (CoC is not following USICH timelines.)
 - In addition, the System Performance Committee will be charged with monitoring the effectiveness of rapid rehousing, which will be the CoC's primary tool available to address homelessness among families with children.

GOAL 5: Reduce homelessness among unaccompanied youth by 50%

- Baseline number: 62
- Goal: 31 youth
 - Reduce number of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness by 32%/year.
- Responsible party: Youth Committee. The Youth Committee will be the entity to review the US Interagency Council on Homelessness criteria and benchmarks for ending youth homelessness. (CoC is not following USICH timelines.) This Committee is also tasked with developing a workplan to achieve the CoC's goal and pursue the USICH criteria and benchmarks.

GOAL 6: Reduce the duration of homelessness to a system average of 30 days (long term) and 50 days over the next five years

- Baseline number: Average number of days homeless for persons in emergency shelter, safe haven and transitional housing programs: 126 days
 - Baseline average in emergency shelter: 59 days
 - Baseline average in safe haven: 173 days
 - Baseline average in transitional housing: 214 days
- Five-year goal: 50 days
 - Reduce the length of time people are in emergency shelters by 13% per year to an average of 29 days.
 - The safe haven programs will be closed.
 - Reduce the length of time people are in transitional housing by 16% per year to an average of 89 days.
- Summary of goal, by year:

	ES	SH	TH	ES+TH
Annual Percentage Reduction	13%	100%	16%	17%
Baseline Year - Average Days	59	173	214	126
Year 1 Goal - Average Days (2017)	51	173	180	105
Year 2 Goal - Average Days (2018)	45	173	151	87
Year 3 Goal - Average Days (2019)	39		127	72
Year 4 Goal - Average Days (2020)	34		107	60
Year 5 Goal - Average Days (2021)	29		89	50

- 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, and other methods of communication such as email, 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. Ideally, a champion in each county should be identified as well as a champion to address key issues with other systems and/or funders.
- Establish a “name” for the CoC. This name may be connected to the actual name of the CoC or the implementation of the strategic plan or the implementation of the Coordinated Entry System.

- Formalize the relationship between Local Housing Options Teams (LHOTs)/ county housing and homeless coalitions
- 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.
- Engage and coordinated with the Department of Human Services (DHS) around better discharge planning to ensure individuals are not becoming homeless upon discharge from foster care, mental health and/or treatment facilities and other types of institutions.
- 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. Where CoC Representatives are not engaged, the Collaborative Applicant and/or CoC Consultant should keep the Governing Board up to date and ensure a sufficient communication loop exists.