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

July 2019

INTRODUCTION

On June 19, 2017, the Eastern PA Continuum of Care (CoC) adopted its first Five-Year Strategic Plan, outlining a set of ambitious goals to galvanize the CoC's work toward ending homelessness. Through the Five-Year Strategic Plan, the CoC also identified a series of strategies and action steps to act as a roadmap for making progress in achieving the goals that were established. Over the past two years the Eastern PA CoC has made significant progress, although much work remains. This update will provide an overview of the CoC's progress in achieving its goals, highlighting significant achievements, areas of opportunity and challenges ahead.

THE COC'S GOALS

The CoC's Five-Year Strategic Plan established bold goals that were aligned with the federal plan to end homelessness, *Opening Doors*. Like the *Opening Doors* plan, the Eastern PA CoC sought to measure its impact by focusing on data related to several target subpopulations:
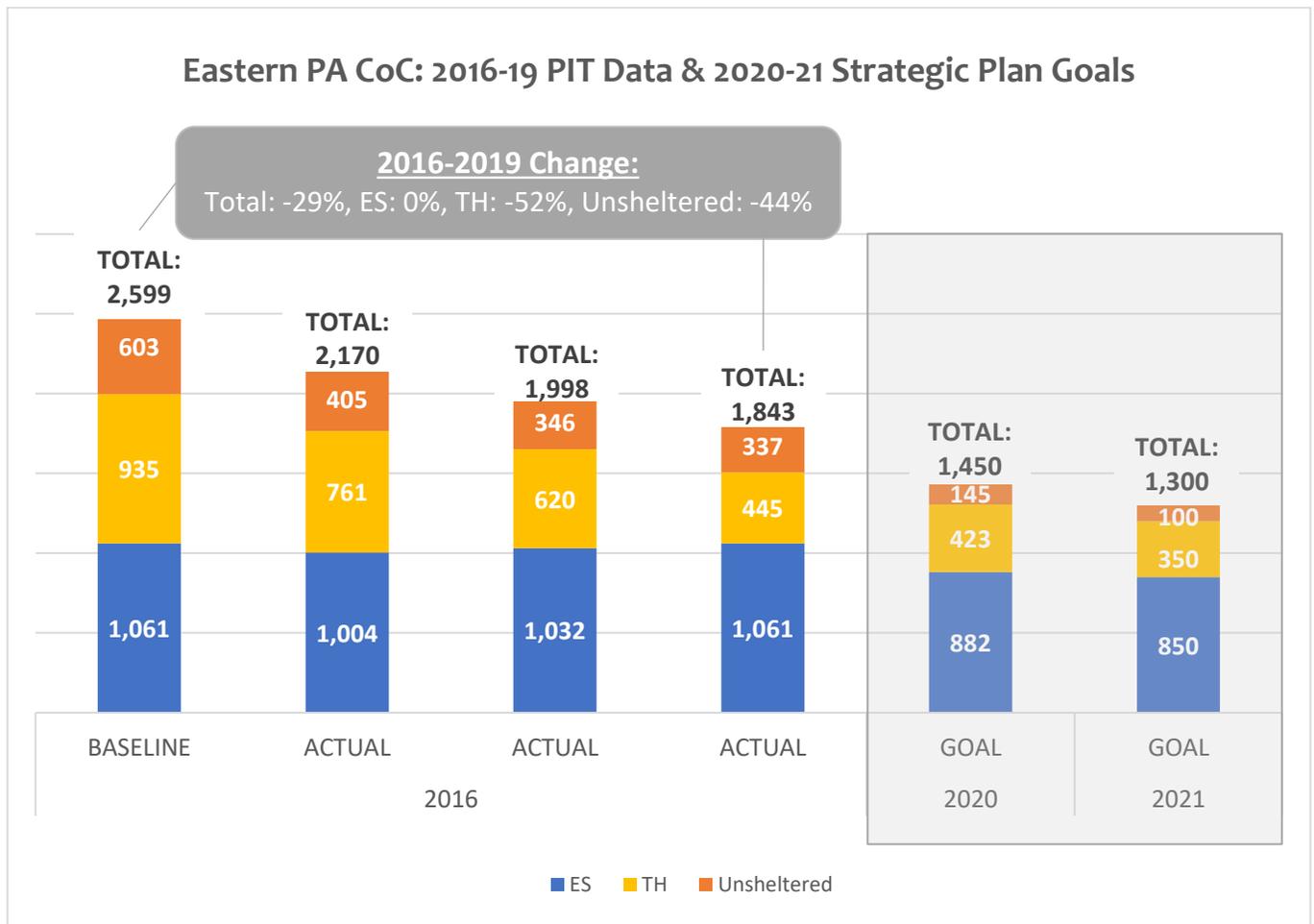
→ End chronic homelessness. Outcome: achieve functional zero. (Functional zero is the state when your homelessness system has enough capacity and resources to prevent homelessness when possible and to permanently house those experiencing homelessness now and in the future.)

→ End Veterans homelessness. Outcome: achieve functional zero.

→ Reduce homelessness among families with children. Outcomes: achieve functional zero for families with children who are unsheltered; achieve functional zero for families fleeing domestic violence; and reduce all homelessness among families with children by 50%.

→ Reduce homelessness among unaccompanied youth. Outcome: reduce the number of unaccompanied youth (those under 25 years old) experiencing homelessness by 75%.

→ Set a path to end all forms of homelessness.

→ Reduce the duration of homelessness to an average of 47 days or less.

WHAT THE DATA SHOW

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

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

The CoC is making steady progress toward this goal with a reduction in overall homelessness of 29% and unsheltered homelessness by 44% since 2016. The CoC has seen a significant 52% reduction in the number of people experiencing sheltered homelessness residing in transitional housing, primarily due to the reallocation of CoC-funded transitional housing projects. If the CoC is to make additional progress on this goal, however, significant reductions will be needed in the number of people residing in emergency shelters, which went down slightly in 2017 and 2018 before rising again in 2019.

Eastern PA CoC: 2016-19 PIT Data & 2020-21 Strategic Plan Goals

2016-2019 Change:
Total: -29%, ES: 0%, TH: -52%, Unsheltered: -44%

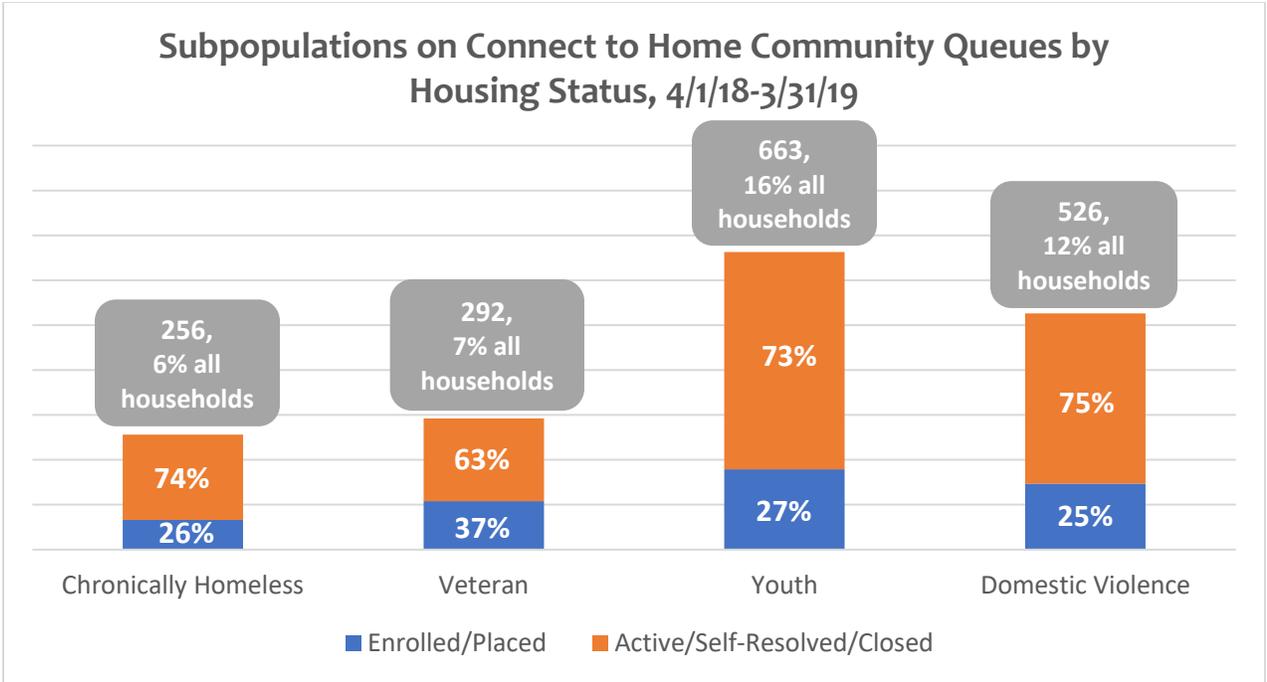|	BASELINE	ACTUAL	ACTUAL	ACTUAL	GOAL	GOAL
TOTAL	2,599	2,170	1,998	1,843	1,450	1,300
Unsheltered	603	405	346	337	145	100
TH	935	761	620	445	423	350
ES	1,061	1,004	1,032	1,061	882	850
Year	2016				2020	2021

■ ES   ■ TH   ■ Unsheltered

Goal: Reduce homelessness among targeted subpopulations

- End chronic homelessness; reduce chronic homelessness by 20%/year
- End veterans homelessness; reduce number of veterans experiencing homelessness by 20%/year
- Reduce homelessness among families experiencing homelessness by 20%/year
- Reduce homelessness among youth by 75%

While the CoC did not reduce homelessness among Veterans, families and youth at the levels needed to match the stated goals, steady progress has been made, with **reductions of 36% for Veterans, 35% for families and 38% for youth.** The CoC will need to focus strategies and resources on addressing chronic homelessness to meet the stated goals. While there was a sharp decrease in the number of households experiencing chronic homelessness from 2016 to 2018, a larger number of chronic households were counted in 2019 resulted in an **overall reduction in chronic homelessness of 11% over the four-year time period**, well short of the CoC's goal.

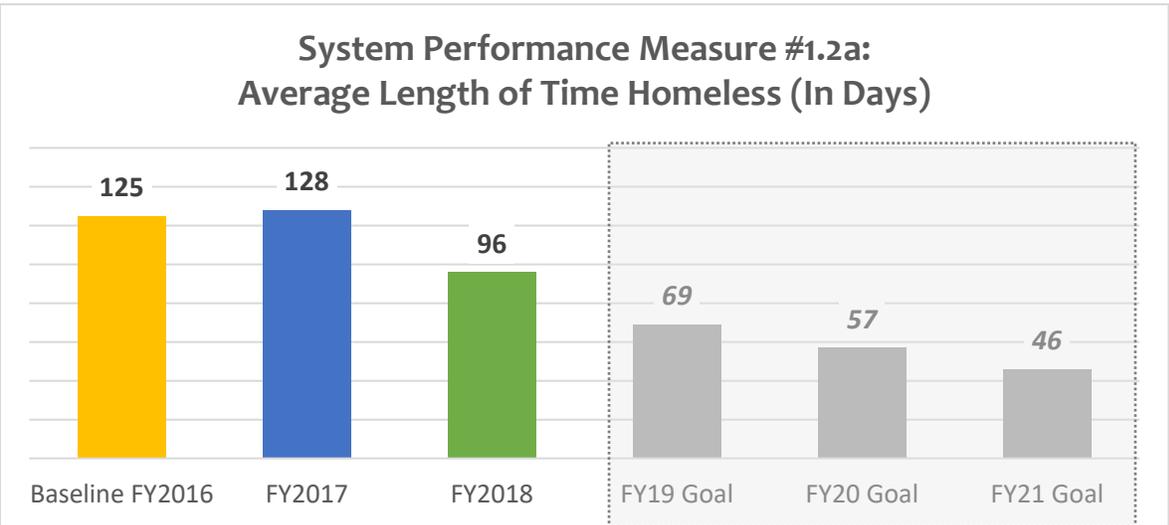Point-In-Time Count Data: Targeted Subpopulations
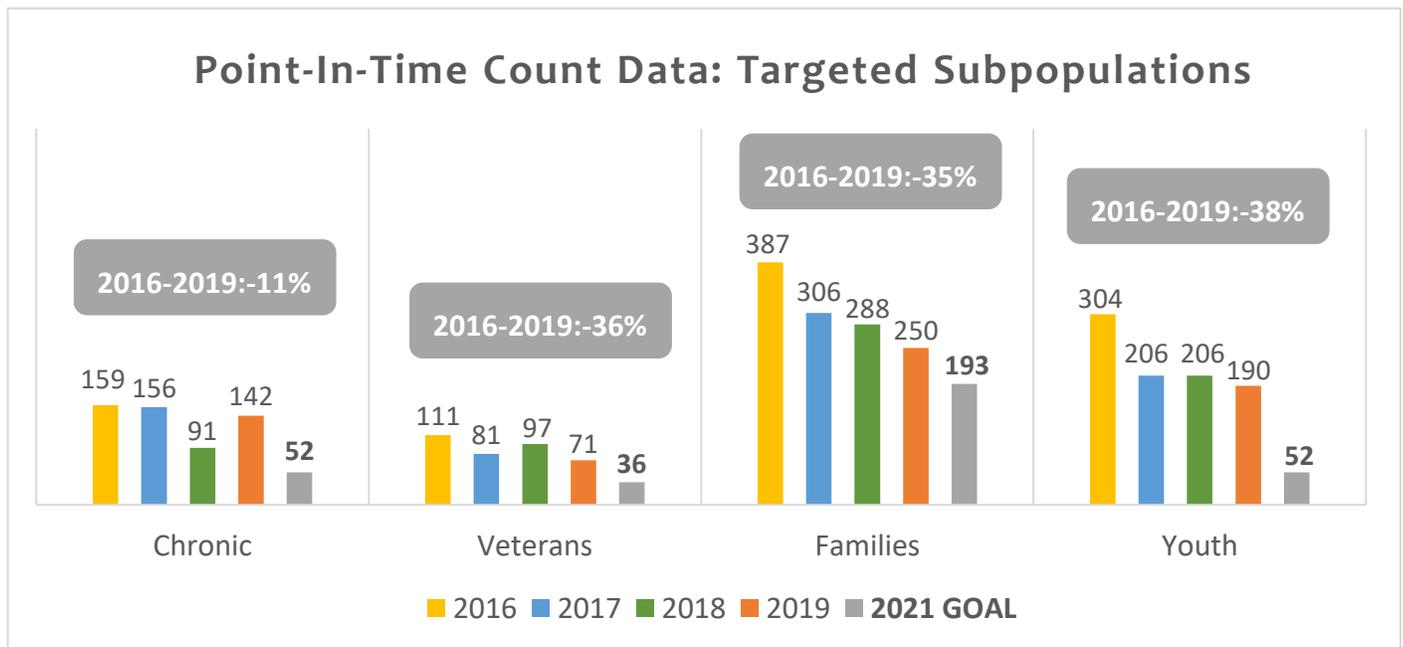
Other sources of data, such as that from the Connect to Home Coordinated Entry System, can help the CoC to better understand the flow of various subpopulation households into the CoC's homeless service system and how they are being served. This information will become increasingly important to the CoC's ability to achieve the goals laid out in the Strategic Plan.

Subpopulations on Connect to Home Community Queues by Housing Status, 4/1/18-3/31/19

	Chronically Homeless	Veteran	Youth	Domestic Violence
Total	256, 6% all households	292, 7% all households	663, 16% all households	526, 12% all households
Active/Self-Resolved/Closed	74%	63%	73%	75%
Enrolled/Placed	26%	37%	27%	25%

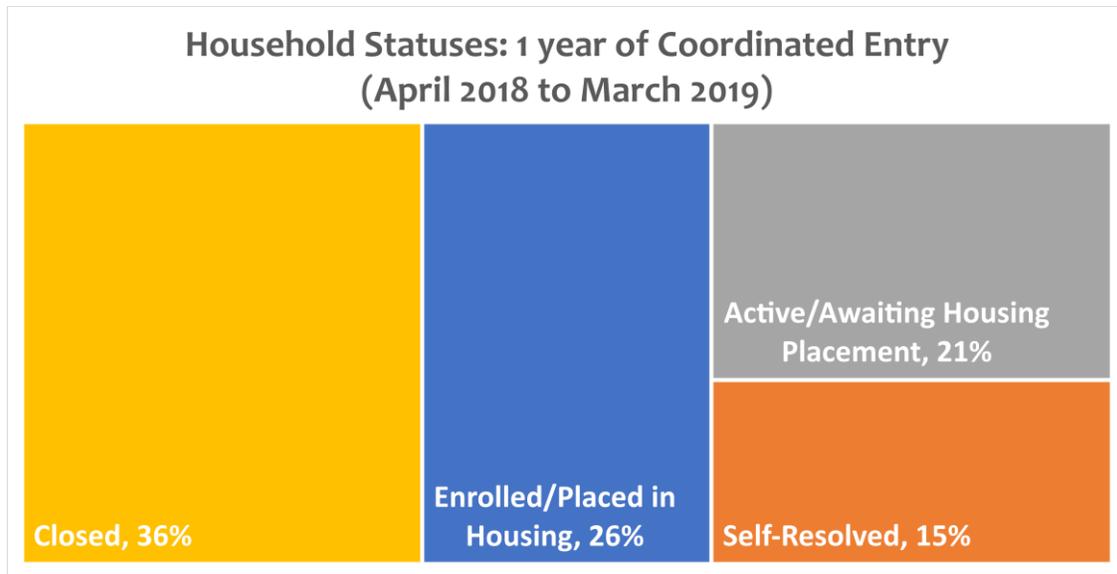■ Enrolled/Placed   ■ Active/Self-Resolved/Closed

Goal: Reduce the duration of homelessness to a system average of 30 days (long term) and 47 days over the next five years.

The CoC has seen a **decrease in the average length of time homeless from 125 days in FY2016 to 96 days in FY2018.** While this is steady progress, the CoC still has work to do to continue to reduce the average length of time homeless. *It is important to note that this data may be skewed due to some emergency shelter and transitional housing providers who do not participate in HMIS.*

System Performance Measure #1.2a: Average Length of Time Homeless (In Days)

Baseline FY2016	FY2017	FY2018	FY19 Goal	FY20 Goal	FY21 Goal
125	128	96	69	57	46

In addition, HUD has a number of ways of measuring the length of time homeless. When factoring in the data for those who enroll in permanent housing programs (PH), System Performance Measure (SPM) data indicate that the CoC's length of time homeless has grown longer since 2016 from 150 days to 184 days in 2018. It will be very important for the CoC to continue to monitor this SPM data closely to ensure that those experiencing homelessness in the CoC are served as quickly and effectively as possible.

Household Statuses: 1 year of Coordinated Entry (April 2018 to March 2019)

- Closed, 36%
- Enrolled/Placed in Housing, 26%
- Active/Awaiting Housing Placement, 21%
- Self-Resolved, 15%

Additionally, data from the CoC's Coordinated Entry System (CES) should also be reviewed to assess the rate of housing placements for those on the CES Prioritization List. This type of data can provide key insights into the needs of those experiencing homelessness in the community and potential gaps in the system. This will hep the CoC to better understand and address housing and serviced needed to further drive down the length of time homeless across the system.

A LOOK BACK

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

🏠 *Streamlining and Coordinating Access to Housing and Services* (Strategic Plan Strategy 2)

The most significant system-wide change adopted by the CoC in the last two years has been the **implementation of the CoC's coordinated entry system, known as Connect to Home.** This monumental effort brought CoC providers and stakeholders together to design, develop and implement a coordinated entry system that would meet the guidelines established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and better address the needs of those seeking homeless assistance in the community. Connect to Home is overseen by the CoC's Coordinated Entry Committee, whose membership consists of a diverse range of stakeholders including United Way 211, veteran service providers, housing and homeless service providers, CES regional managers, and providers serving survivors of domestic violence (DV). The system is designed with 18 access sites spread across the CoC's five Regional Homeless Advisory Boards (RHABs) and also provides access through the united Way 2-1-1 info line.

Connect to Home has re-shaped how the CoC provides housing assistance, with the CoC now using a common tool (the VI-SPDAT suite) to assess the vulnerability and needs of households and prioritize resources accordingly. Community providers now meet regularly to assess how to best assist those in need on the "Community Queue," the list of those seeking assistance. To further support this effort, the CoC prioritized funding resources for five regional managers to serve the CoC's ten referral zones and promote system flow and to develop marketing materials to increase knowledge of and engagement with Connect to Home by the community. Refinements to the Connect to Home system will continue over the next several years, with the CoC participating in a HUD-supported Community of Practice around coordinated entry and making adjustments to better serve those needing housing assistance.

To further improve access to housing and services, the CoC has also **supported trainings around Housing First** to ensure that those most in need of housing are not turned away. Housing First trainings were supplemented by trainings on related topics including trauma-informed care, motivational interviewing, housing-focused case management, and harm reduction, among others. Together, this suite of trainings was developed to ensure that program staff at provider agency are introduced to information and

techniques vital to ensuring that they are able to work with those experiencing homelessness and seeking housing to obtain and retain housing.

Additionally, coordination of street outreach with Connect to Home is also occurring in some parts of the CoC and should be expanded in order to improve access to those least likely to seek assistance. In some cases, Connect to Home Regional Managers are also able to use technology to conduct mobile intakes when the need is identified.

Investing in Prevention and Diversion Strategies (Strategic Plan Strategy 1)

The CoC identified the need to make investments in both prevention and diversion activities in order to reduce the flow of households into the homeless system who may instead have other housing options. Given the scarcity of emergency shelter and housing resources, the **CoC invested in diversion training** from the Cleveland Mediation Center, with those providing intake services for Connect to Home prioritized for this training. Additionally, the **CoC prioritized Home4Good funding for prevention and diversion programs** that could act as pilots and divert households needing limited help from more intensive homeless assistance programs. The grantees for these projects are required to coordinate with the CoC and the Connect to Home system and the projects are designed to increase system flow for households with minimal needs by providing light touch case management and financial assistance. Prioritization of resources for diversion is part of the **CoC's overall diversion strategy** which is being developed through the HUD Community of Practice coordinated entry technical assistance project.

The CoC is also working to **improve coordination of prevention efforts by incorporating ESG-funded prevention into the CoC's Written Standards**, which are currently under development by a CoC ad hoc committee. ESG prevention resources are also included in the CoC service matrix that was developed to help facilitate the flow of households approaching Connect to Home for assistance. This service matrix is continually updated and re-issued each month by Connect to Home to ensure the resources listed are available to the community.

🏠 *Expanding the Continuum of Housing Options (Strategic Plan Strategy 3)*

With the implementation of Connect to Home, it has become clear that the CoC simply does not have enough housing resources to meet the needs of the many households in the community that need it. In addition to working to ensure that prevention and diversion are effectively used to help households identify housing options that may already exist, the CoC has consistently worked to expand housing options wherever possible. The CoC has used available CoC program funding to **increase the supply of rapid rehousing (RRH) programs in the CoC** in order to create more resources for non-chronic households needing assistance, with a significant increase in RRH units for those fleeing domestic violence.

Additionally, the CoC prioritized Home4Good program funding to meet a variety of housing needs with a **particular focus on projects related to housing navigation and landlord engagement,** which was identified as a key area of work within the Strategic Plan. Agencies have also sought and obtained ESG funds to help support housing locator services to help improve access to housing resources in their communities. The CoC also worked with HUD's Rural Technical Assistance initiative to hold rural landlord engagement trainings for CoC agencies to continue to build this capacity within the CoC.

While there has been no CoC-wide strategy to engage with public housing authorities/agencies to expand homeless preferences, agencies throughout the CoC continue to work on this within their communities. The CoC has also seen efforts by local communities to increase awareness of housing needs in their local area. One example is the creation of a Local Housing Options Team (LHOT) in Pike County. In addition, the Connect to Home Regional Managers have become housing champions in their respective regions, working to raise awareness of the CES and to identify local resources to serve those seeking housing assistance. Three counties within the CoC have also been awarded funding to specifically respond to the housing needs of individuals with Opioid Use Disorder, this includes Blair, Lehigh and Mifflin counties.

🏠 *Expand and Align Resources* *(Strategic Plan Strategy 4)*

Over the last several years, the CoC has worked to align and prioritize various funding resources in pursuit of identifying resources to implement the goals within CoC's strategic plan and to better meet the needs of the community. In 2018, the CoC had the opportunity to apply for Home4Good funding, a new program from the Federal Home Loan Bank of Pittsburg and the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency. As a uniquely flexible source of funds, the CoC worked to prioritize all Home4Good funding toward activities to meet gaps in the system for which other funding sources, such as the CoC and ESG programs, cannot be used. The CoC was awarded a total of $514,188 in Home4Good funding for seven projects. These new resources helped to expand prevention and diversion funding, housing locator/navigation and landlord engagement and mobile street outreach targeted to youth, and also provided unrestricted administrative funding to be used at the CoC Board's discretion.

To advance the goals of the strategic plan and to specifically to reduce the number of homeless youth, the CoC prioritized new CoC funding toward creating a youth-dedicated TH-RRH program in 2017. Additionally, Wayne County staff participated in the HUD TA-funded Rural Youth Peer Network, which was supported by the CoC, and developed a youth TH project that used state PHARE funds to help pay for capital costs with in-kind services provided by the County. There are also a number of RHY-funded projects operating within the CoC which have helped the CoC to meet the needs of both unaccompanied and parenting youth experiencing homelessness and housing instability. In order to see a larger impact of these investments and to pursue the goals of the strategic plan, the CoC will need to consider a broader/ CoC-wide strategy to more effectively respond to youth homelessness.

In 2017, the CoC sought to effectively align CoC program funds to help build system capacity and meet ongoing infrastructure needs related to operating the Connect to Home. This funding, as noted earlier, supports the use of 2-1-1 and the Regional Manager positions that help manage system flow. In 2018, the CoC applied for and received DV Bonus funding through the CoC NOFA to help support and improve the CoC's CES DV intake process as well.

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

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

CoC providers were also engaged by the PA Department of Human Services to participate in a housing stakeholder work group that examined needs related to Medicaid waivers to support housing tenancy work being done for Medicaid-eligible clients.

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

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

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

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

Additionally, the CoC has and will continue to use data to assess project-level performance and use this information to drive funding decisions for the annual CoC program competition. Based on the data provided for the annual CoC NOFA round, the CoC has prioritized new projects over poor performing existing projects, a significant shift in the prioritization of resources that reflects the need for the CoC to think strategically and creatively when considering resource allocations.

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

Finally, the CoC's HMIS Lead is working with the PA Department of Education to share data across the two systems to ensure that the CoC is able to secure education resources to serve the children and youth experiencing homelessness in the CoC.

Engage in Advocacy to Increase Support and Sustainability (Strategic Plan Strategy 7)

The CoC has not made significant headway on this strategy on a CoC-wide basis but has engaged in increased information sharing and community building through the development of the Connect to

Home CES. In addition, the CoC members are active users of the Workplace by Facebook, which allows CoC members to post and share information on CoC-related topics, events and activities. Through this system, the CoC members are able to engage with another, increasing the cohesiveness of the CoC community.

🏠 Building a Sustainable System (Strategic Plan Strategy 8)

There has been a sustained effort to strengthen the CoC's leadership and decision-making infrastructure. The CoC's Governing Board participated in a Board retreat in summer of 2018 and has also participated in a Leadership Training program through the Corporation for Supportive Housing during the first half of 2019.

In November 2017, the CoC also embarked on revisions to the CoC Governance Charter to ensure that it is up-to-date and established the infrastructure needed for the CoC to achieve its goals. Additionally, the CoC has undertaken other steps to more clearly define the CoC's infrastructure, policies and procedures, including: discussions to revise the CoC's membership structure; revisions to the CoC's Monitoring Plan to ensure it is actionable; and the creation of an ad hoc committee to develop the CoC's Written Standards for Assistance. These policy and governance documents provide a foundation for the CoC's ongoing work and create the kind of sustainable system needed to implement the strategies identified in the Strategic Plan.

The CoC has also sought to provide various mechanisms to help support providers and agencies as the work of the CoC becomes more sophisticated. This includes participation in the HUD coordinated entry Community of Practice TA and in the CoC's interest in participating in a RRH Learning Collaborative. The CoC has also offered a number of training opportunities to provider agencies and CoC members to support their ongoing professional development on a wide array of topics, including: Housing First; housing -focused case management; harm reduction; working with individuals with opioid use disorders; adolescent brain development and de-escalation; positive youth development; cultural competency; commercial exploitation of youth; VAWA; HUD's Equal Access Rule; diversion; rural landlord engagement; and operating rapid rehousing programs. Other agencies within the CoC have also offered

trainings to assist homeless assistance programs operating in the CoC, such as: Prepared Renter Program (PREP) through the Self-Determination Housing Project; Pocono RHAB's HQS training; Central Valley RHAB's low-barrier shelter training from NAEH. Further trainings are provided on HMIS and Connect to Home on an ongoing basis to ensure that provider agencies are given the information needed to effectively utilize these systems. Materials related to many of these trainings are available on the CoC's website and/or Workplace and act as resources for CoC members on an ongoing basis.

Ongoing technical assistance is also available to CoC members through the staff at the Department of Community and Economic Development, which serves as the Collaborative Applicant, HMIS Lead and administers state ESG funds. Additional TA is provided through CoC consultants Diana T. Myers and Associates (general CoC TA) and Capacity for Change (Connect to Home TA). Community based TA and support is also provided through/by the RHABs and by the Connect to Home Regional Managers.

The CoC continue to work on monitoring progress through CoC meetings and with the new efforts by the Data and Outcomes Committee to implement the CoC's Monitoring Plan. Through these efforts, the CoC is building a more data-driven system in which its limited resources and efforts can be targeted and sustained over time.

THE WORK AHEAD

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

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

With the implementation of Connect to Home, it has become clear that there are more households needing housing assistance than can be served through existing resources. The CoC, therefore, is developing a systemwide strategy to help divert households that may not need the level of assistance provided through TH, RRH or PSH resources. With the Diversion training conducted in 2018 as a basis, along with the work being done through the HUD coordinated entry Community of Practice TA, the CoC

is actively developing a strategy tailored to the community's needs that incorporates existing efforts, the VA's new Rapid Response program work and national best practices.

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

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

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

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

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

With over a year in existence, the CoC continues to implement revisions to the Connect to Home CES to ensure that it is able to quickly and effectively move those experiencing homelessness in housing opportunities. The Coordinated Entry Committee will work over the next year to develop and implement revisions to support the CoC's diversion strategy. Coordinated Entry data must be reviewed, in combination with discussion with providers, in order to understand the barriers to housing placement,

as the length of time for housing placement has increased. In addition, the Coordinated Entry Committee will continue its work with the DV Workgroup to develop and implement policies to help make Connect to Home better equipped to serve all populations.

→ *Create a plan to address homelessness among specific populations*

While the CoC has made progress on its goals around ending/reducing homelessness among households who are chronically homeless, veterans, families and youth, these efforts will require system-wide planning in order to make continued progress. The CoC's Veterans Committee has a specific plan to continue to pursue a functional zero status and achieve the benchmarks and criteria set by the US Interagency Council on Homelessness. Similar efforts, engaging a diverse range of stakeholders, will be required to make ongoing, sustainable progress to reduce/end homelessness among chronic, family, and youth households.