COLORADO

MAKING HOMELESSNESS HISTORY IN COLORADO

Updated 10/23/2020

INTRODUCTION

'Making Homelessness History In Colorado' provides a framework for efforts to address homelessness in Colorado today and a vision for the future. It introduces a series of guiding principles with key goals, cross-cutting approaches, and a list of proven solutions that communities across Colorado have successfully implemented that can be replicated elsewhere.

Our hope is that this document successfully weaves together many of the different conversations underway in Colorado while also building on the foundation of effective strategies and solutions at the local, state, and federal levels. It has been created with input from the Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA), the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS), the Colorado Department of Health Care Policy & Financing (HCPF), community stakeholders, and those with lived experience from throughout the state.

Whether it's due to getting sick, losing a job, or family conflict, homelessness can happen to anyone. We also know that due to historic and ongoing racism, not all racial and ethnic groups experience homelessness at the same rate. People of color, particularly Black and Native Americans, are disproportionately represented and impacted at virtually every phase of the experience. The homeless response system, which triages, supports, and re-houses people experiencing homelessness, must identify and respond to racial disparities.

The COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying economic fallout is hitting low- and extremely low-income individuals and families who were already severely cost-burdened especially hard. It is also estimated that persons experiencing homelessness infected with COVID-19 are twice as likely to be hospitalized, two to four times as likely to require critical care, and two to three times as likely to die from the illness as the general population.

This document serves as a playbook to address these challenges in order to meet the needs of those experiencing homelessness whether they're Veterans, families, youth, seniors, those fleeing domestic violence, individuals with complex physical and behavioral health needs, or those exiting incarceration. Across these populations and regardless of the precipitating event or circumstance, we know that homelessness ends in a home.

Collaboration is critical to the successful implementation of this playbook. If you have any feedback, positive or negative, please contact Kristin Toombs (*kristin.toombs@state.co.us*), Director of Homeless Initiatives within the Colorado Department of Local Affairs, Division of Housing. Thank you for your commitment to making homelessness history in Colorado.

THE VISION

Our vision is that everyone in Colorado has a safe, stable, and affordable place to live. Together we can create a future where homelessness is rare and brief when it occurs, and no one gets left behind.

THE ISSUE

- **Homelessness is a result of individual adverse circumstances colliding with inadequate systems.** Solving the complex problem of homelessness requires a system that can continuously tackle the problem at the individual, systemic, and structural levels.

- **Homelessness is a dynamic, ever-changing problem.** A homeless response system needs to know who is experiencing homelessness, what they need to exit homelessness, how that population is constantly changing, and what is working. Emergency events like fires, floods, storms, and public health crises should inform the design of the homelessness response system.

- **There is no one-size-fits-all solution to homelessness.** Every individual or family experiences homelessness differently. Ending homelessness requires the availability of diverse, proven solutions that meet a variety of needs as well as respond to and address a history of systemic racial inequities.

- **It takes an entire community working together to tackle a complex problem.** No single individual, agency or organization can solve homelessness alone. A strong homelessness response system is built on partnerships across agencies, organizations, and community leaders.

- **We need to act now.** The health and well-being of our neighbors are at stake.

THE URGENCY OF NOW

Homelessness is a big problem, but not one too big to be solved when an entire community comes together.

- **9,600+** Coloradans reported experiencing sheltered or unsheltered literal homelessness on a single night in January during the 2019 Federal Point-In-Time Count snapshot.

- **23,000+** students identified as experiencing homelessness, doubled up, or unstably housed by school-based McKinney-Vento liaisons during the 2018-2019 school year.

- **53,000+** individuals covered by Colorado's Medicaid system in 2019 were without stable housing.

The discrepancies between these data sources are part of what motivates us to encourage every community working to end homelessness in Colorado to collaboratively develop a multi-sector, real-time, by-name list of people experiencing homelessness in their communities and use that list to rapidly test and implement strategies to reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness.

THE PLAYBOOK

SHARED VISION

We can create a future where homelessness is rare and brief when it occurs, and no one gets left behind.

KEY GOALS

STOP HOMELESSNESS BEFORE IT STARTS.

IDENTIFY INDIVIDUALS AT RISK & ENSURE THEY ARE SAFE.

CONNECT PEOPLE WITH SUPPORTS THEY NEED TO QUICKLY EXIT HOMELESSNESS.

CREATE ACCESS TO LONG-TERM STRUCTURAL SOLUTIONS.

CROSS-CUTTING APPROACHES

LEADING WITH EQUITY

Tackling homelessness through anti-racist practices and community-driven solutions is critical to eliminating racial disparities and inequitable outcomes.

REAL-TIME, PERSON-SPECIFIC DATA

A real-time list of people experiencing homelessness by name can provide a shared understanding of who needs support, whether efforts are working, and how to best target resources.

HOUSING FOCUSED

Helping those experiencing homelessness find stable, secure, and affordable housing as soon as possible provides a foundation to effectively tackle other challenges and opportunities they face.

CROSS-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

Screening for social determinants of health across benefit programs, educational systems, healthcare providers, and reentry planning improves care navigation, reduces emergency system utilization, and increases stability.

PROVEN SOLUTIONS

PREVENTION & DIVERSION

Programs that identify people at high risk of homelessness and provide supports that can help them to avoid it can help reduce the number of people entering homelessness.

ANTI-POVERTY SUPPORTS

Programs that provide services, supports, and benefits help struggling households lead stable, productive, fulfilling, and dignified lives. Examples include access to physical and behavioral healthcare, childcare, employment, and nutritional services.

COORDINATED ENTRY SYSTEMS

Standardized and coordinated systems of care over a given geographic area can help ensure that homelessness services are provided equitably, efficiently, and effectively.

STREET OUTREACH

Street outreach programs can help to identify and help those who feel unsafe in, or are otherwise unable to come into traditional shelters.

LOW-BARRIER SHELTERS

Shelters without restrictive entry requirements help create spaces in which people can feel safe and connect with resources.

RAPID RE-HOUSING

Providing families and some individuals experiencing homelessness with steeply declining subsidies for market-rate rental housing can help resolve an immediate financial crisis.

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Supportive Housing combines affordable, community-based housing with access to voluntary wrap-around supportive services to help ensure safety and stability for extremely low-income households who face complex barriers and have long lengths of homelessness.

AFFORDABLE RENTAL HOUSING

Ensuring that a given geographic area has enough affordable rental housing to meet its population's needs can help prevent families & individuals from falling into homelessness.

HOMEOWNERSHIP SUPPORTS

Providing opportunities for low- and middle-income families to purchase homes protects them from rent increases and gentrification that can contribute to homelessness.

Additional information can be found at : The Colorado Community Health Alliance, The National Alliance to End Homelessness, & The Center for Evidence-Based Solutions to Homelessness.

THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS

PROVEN SOLUTIONS	LOCAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS
PREVENTION & DIVERSION	• The Homeless Prevention Activities Program (HPAP) uses State Income Tax Check-Off funding to provide emergency funding and case management assistance to eight organizations working across 25 counties. • Northern Colorado's Coordinated Entry System uses HPAP funds to esure that care managers can quickly engage with clients experiencing a tenancy crisis.
ANTI-POVERTY SUPPORTS	• Economic Security Programs are our first line of defense for individuals living in poverty to prevent homelessness. All Colorado counties provide a variety of supports, including basic cash assistance, employment supports, food, and medical assistance.
COORDINATED ENTRY SYSTEMS	• In 2019, OneHome in Metro Denver increased housing placements by 2-3x over the previous year for families and young adults. • Pitkin, Garfield, and Eagle counties are conducting case conferencing to more efficiently and equitably allocate Homeless Solutions Program - State Housing Vouchers.
LOW-BARRIER SHELTERS	• The City of Colorado Springs collaborated with Community Health Partners on a coordinated strategy to leverage Emergency Solutions Grants funding to encourage policy changes at their higher-barrier shelter, which resulted in fewer people forced to live unsheltered in its downtown area.
STREET OUTREACH	• The Denver Street Outreach Collaborative (DSOC) helps service providers engage with individuals who feel unsafe or are otherwise unable to access emergency shelters. This engagement is essential to building trust and securing permanent housing. When COVID-19 arrived DSOC staff helped connect medically vulnerable individuals with emergency non-congregate sheltering options.
RAPID RE-HOUSING	• The Colorado Rapid Re-Housing and Reentry (COR3) program administered through Volunteers of America receives referrals through local coordinated entry systems and the Colorado Department of Corrections. Together these referral sources help close gaps in the continuum, disrupt cycles of recidivism, and reduce the number of individuals exiting incarceration to homelessness. • Grand Junction's Next Step 2-Gen Program helps families with school-age children quickly exit homelessness in a collaboration between the Grand Junction Housing Authority, School District #51, Mesa County, and the Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA).
SUPPORTIVE HOUSING	• Journey Home is a 30-unit supportive housing development in Cañon City, CO, operated in partnership with Loaves & Fishes, Solvista Health, and Cardinal Capital funded by DOLA, the U.S. Department of Urban Affairs (HUD), and the Colorado Housing and Finance Authority (CHFA). The project provides affordable housing with access to supportive services to help individuals exiting chronic homelessness achieve long-term stability.
AFFORDABLE RENTAL HOUSING	• Arroyo Village is a 130-unit development created in partnership with Rocky Mountain Communities and the Delores Project that includes 95 units of workforce housing, 35 units of supportive housing, and an 11,000 sq ft emergency shelter. Funded with support from DOLA, HUD, CHFA, and the Denver Housing Authority (DHA), the project is located in Denver, CO, adjacent to a light rail line. • The Anvil Mountain Apartments is a 12-unit affordable housing development in Silverton, CO, created with support from DOLA, San Juan County, and the Town of Silverton. In response to the area's short construction season, the project was constructed with 10 factory-built sections delivered from Grand Junction, CO.
HOMEOWNERSHIP SUPPORTS	• The home rehabilitation and emergency repair program operated by Otero County in partnership with DOLA and Total Concept provides low- or no-interest loans to homeowners in Bent, Crowley, and Otero counties. In addition to helping homeowners afford costly home repairs and maintain their housing, the program helps to preserve the region's limited housing inventory.
REAL-TIME, PERSON-SPECIFIC DATA	• Fremont County and El Paso County have achieved "Quality Data" for all single adults experiencing homelessness, meaning that they are now able to substantially improve the systems that house and support individuals experiencing homelessness.
HOUSING FOCUSED	• Emergency shelters in Denver have become more housing focused by leveraging Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data to help connect and prioritize guests with housing opportunities on a nightly basis.

Housing and supports are foundational for the safety, health, and wellbeing of Coloradans. Housing is one of the best-researched social determinants of health, consistently found to improve health outcomes and decrease health care costs. We may not be able to prevent everyone from experiencing a housing crisis, but we can build a system to ensure that homelessness is rare and quickly resolved when it occurs.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- **We understand homelessness ends in a home.** We are addressing gaps in affordable housing and breaking down the barriers that stand in the way of affordable homeownership and rental opportunities.

- **We agree on a shared goal.** We aim to help more people and to drive that overall number of people experiencing homelessness down. Collaboration around this shared goal of ending homelessness — not just managing it — is necessary to make this a reality.

- **We work off a full picture of who needs support.** Data allows us to understand the scale of the problem and whether our activities and investments are reducing the number of people experiencing homelessness.

- **We invest in what works.** We ensure that the solutions we offer are those that are proven to work. Decades of evidence have proven that certain philosophies and interventions work — we are building a system that can deliver and target those solutions to those who need it.

- **We work toward a more equitable future.** Homelessness is inseparable from the social systems that create it. By applying a racial equity lens across all we do, we can identify, interrupt, and eliminate racial disparities at every stage of homelessness.

APPENDIX

Cross-Sector Partnership Bright Spot	*Tracking State & Federal Funding To Address Homelessness in CO*
Built for Zero Community Dashboards Tracking Housing Placements	*Ending Homelessness for Individuals with Justice System Involvement*