[Pasadena CoC Homelessness Action Plan]

Executive Summary

The Pasadena Continuum of Care (CoC) Homelessness Action Plan (HAP) provides recommendations to prevent and end homelessness by applying evidence-based strategies and best practices to effectively meet the needs of persons experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The CoC, led by the City of Pasadena, oversees the implementation of the recommendations and strategies outlined in this document. The intent of this plan is to describe the activities the CoC is pursuing to address and combat homelessness among the general populations and targeted sub-populations. This document will be regularly developed and refined to reflect the changing environment, community demands, and emerging opportunities within the Pasadena CoC's geographic area.

The action plan focuses on three primary goals for addressing homelessness among individuals, families, and youth in Pasadena:

1. Prevent homelessness through early, comprehensive assistance to persons most at risk.

2. Create new and maximize existing supportive housing opportunities that offer long-term support to high-needs individuals.

3. Facilitate the continued development of a coordinated homeless system of care to support long-term housing stability and provide timely, accurate data.

Goal 1 Homelessness Prevention	Goal 2 Increase Permanent Housing Resources	Goal 3 Coordinated System of Care
1. Provision of rental assistance, housing relocation and stabilization services 2. Implementation of shelter diversion programs/activities 3. Funding for legal services and representation 4. Ensure access to free and low-cost supportive services 5. Development of a homelessness prevention assessment tool 6. Development of a self-help toolkit	7. Implementation of a CoC-wide Housing First, low barrier approach 8. Increase the number of permanent supportive housing units 9. Augment Rapid Rehousing assistance 10. Provide landlord incentives 11. Promote housing search 12. Augment housing navigation	13. Expand street outreach and engagement 14. Ensure emergency shelter beds are low barrier 15. Support real time data collection 16. Engage key stakeholders in CoC planning activities 17. Encourage stakeholder participation in HMIS 18. Prevent the criminalization of activities associated with homelessness 19. Build long-term partnerships with healthcare institutions

[Goal #1: Homelessness Prevention]

Homelessness Prevention programs help to support those who are imminently at-risk of homelessness and ensure they do not become homeless. By targeting assistance to those who are most at-risk of homelessness, programs are able maximize the limited available resources for homelessness prevention.

Strategy #1: Provision of rental assistance

This approach focuses on providing temporary financial assistance to persons at imminent risk of becoming homeless to maintain their housing or find suitable alternative housing before becoming homeless. Such assistance includes short term (1-3 months) and medium term (4-24 months) rental assistance and utility payments. Homelessness prevention emphasizes early identification of high risk individuals and families and works to provide them with assistance to ensure they maintain their current housing whenever possible.

Strategy #2: Implementation of shelter diversion programs/activities

Diversion is a strategy that prevents homelessness for people seeking shelter by helping them identify immediate, alternate housing arrangements and, if necessary, connecting them with services and financial assistance to help them return to permanent housing. Diversion programs can reduce the number of families becoming homeless, the demand for shelter beds, and the size of program wait lists. Effective diversion programs focus on quick solutions that have priority to keep the household in current housing if it is safe. Diversion may also provide limited financial, utility, and/or rental assistance; short-term case management; conflict mediation; connection to mainstream services and/or benefits; and housing search. The Pasadena CoC is exploring the possibility of using state funding to support an intervention targeted at shelters or homeless system entry point that uses services to divert homeless populations away from shelter and into stable housing. Employing housing navigators focuses on helping participants utilize other housing options within their personal network rather than enter the shelter system. This could involve mediation with family and/or friends to locate an alternative to entering the homeless system.

Strategy #3: Funding for legal services and representation

Recently, the CoC has identified an unmet need for legal services. Particularly, eviction defense legal support is lacking in Pasadena for people being evicted. A 2018 report entitled "Unlocking Doors to Homelessness Prevention" indicates that an estimated 70% of U.S. households facing eviction receive no legal representation, however tenants with counsel are more likely to appear in court and are significantly less likely to be evicted than their unrepresented counterparts, irrespective of the merits of their case (Poppe, 2018). Legal strategies that help households retain their home can be used to disincentivize landlords from wrongfully evicting their tenants. The CoC is working to quantify the need for legal services across its geographic area and will collaborate with local organizations to estimate how many people could be assisted with different pots of funding. Legal services can either be limited or full scope, and will be paired with funding for arrears and moving costs to maximize program effectiveness.

Strategy #4: Ensure access to free and low-cost supportive services

The CoC works with a variety of mainstream programs that assist persons to apply for and receive mainstream benefits, and focuses on providing a wide range of free and low cost supportive services to those households less likely to become homeless but in need of such services and supplies to offset household expenses. These services include, but are not limited to the following:

- SSI/Social Security Disability Income (SSDI)
- Educational assistance
- Employment services
- Health care
- Household equipment and furniture
- Hygienic supplies
- Clothing
- Food
- Mental health care
- Public assistance
- School supplies; and
- Substance use counseling and treatment.

The CoC continues to collaborate with organizations to ensure that they are provided with regular trainings on the referral process for clients to access these resources.

Strategy #5: Development of a homelessness prevention assessment tool

In order to target resources accurately and intervene in the homeless trajectory early, service providers must have an understanding of how to identify individuals and households that are at risk of homelessness. Utilizing a previously developed screening instrument to identify imminent risk of homelessness among veterans accessing VA health care as a basis, the CoC is exploring the prospect of developing a risk assessment tool to identify the households most likely to become homeless. Organizations that serve very low-income households can screen for homelessness and/or risk of homelessness and then connect at risk and homeless recipients with crucial services, thereby reducing the negative consequences of homelessness for the individual and the community. Ideally, earlier intervention can reduce the flow into homelessness.

Strategy #6: Development of a self-help toolkit

Tenant information and education is critical in helping tenants quickly find adequate resources and become familiar with the assistance that is available, as well as their housing rights. The Pasadena CoC introduced the concept of developing a homelessness prevention self-help toolkit, particularly focusing on eviction and the rights of the tenant, to the Homelessness Prevention Subcommittee that meets monthly. The subcommittee was in support of creating this resource specific to services that address the unmet need within the geographic region. This toolkit will be modeled off of Pine Tree Legal Assistance's online materials, a civil legal assistance nonprofit in Maine. In the future, similar tools may be developed for financial management, public benefits, and health

[Goal #2: Increase Permanent Housing]

The City of Pasadena will use its resources to expand and promote the production of Permanent Supportive Housing. This will include collaborating with other jurisdictions and Public Housing Authorities to use rental subsidies creatively, collaboratively, and across jurisdictional boundaries when allowable.

Strategy #7: Implementation of a CoC-wide Housing First, low barrier approach

The Pasadena CoC Coordinated Entry System (CES) process operates with a low-barrier approach and Housing First model for all participating programs. The CES does not screen persons out for assistance due to barriers such as lack of income or sobriety for service or program enrollment and ensures that people are housed quickly without preconditions or service participation requirements. The CoC's decision to align the CES with a Housing First and low barrier approach helps homeless households obtain and maintain permanent housing, regardless of their service needs or challenges.

Research continues to prove that chronically homeless persons can achieve stability in permanent housing, regardless of their vulnerability, if provided with appropriate levels of low barrier supportive services. Through this approach, barriers are removed that have hindered homeless persons from obtaining housing such as too little income or no income; active or history of substance use; criminal record, with the exceptions for state or federal-mandated restrictions; and history of domestic violence (e.g., lack of a protective order, period of separation from abuser, or law enforcement involvement). Through this approach, barriers that have hindered homeless persons from obtaining housing are also removed, such as failure to participate in supportive services; failure to make progress on a service plan; loss of income or failure to increase income.

Strategy #8: Increase the number of permanent housing units

The CoC is pursuing innovative strategies to increase the number of available permanent housing units, such as the conversion of existing motel buildings. More permanent supportive housing is needed to offset recent increases in homelessness, particularly for persons experiencing chronic homelessness who have a disabling condition. Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) usually comes with no time limits, so people can receive services and stay housed as long as they need. Supportive services are designed to be flexible, voluntary, and based upon each individual's unique needs and are offered both on and off-site. Each person's rent is based upon their income, and Tenant-Based Rental Assistance (TBRA) programs are used to provide clients with rental subsidies so that households are able to afford their rent and related housing expenses. TBRA programs offer flexibility that make it especially useful for helping persons experiencing homelessness because assistance moves with the tenant, and the household may take the assistance and move to another rental property as their circumstances change. The CoC also has Project Based Rental Assistance (PBRA) tied to particular units that provides a source of long-term affordability.

Strategy #9: Augment Rapid Rehousing assistance

The CoC is dedicating federal ESG, state ESG, and Measure H local funding to augment Rapid Rehousing assistance, which assists individuals, families and youth with rapidly obtaining permanent housing and promotes stabilization through short term rental assistance and targeted support services. These households are not the highest vulnerability, but still require housing to stabilize long-term. More commonly, rapid rehousing clients have previously lived independently in permanent housing and are in need of temporary assistance to regain long-term housing stability. Rapid rehousing programs help persons experiencing homelessness who are living on the streets or in emergency shelters solve the practical and immediate challenges of obtaining permanent housing while reducing the amount of time they experience homelessness. Initial research indicates that rapid rehousing is more cost-effective than transitional housing and shows that people assisted by rapid re-housing experience higher rates of permanent housing placement and similar or lower rates of return to homelessness after the assistance ends compared to those assisted by transitional housing or who only receive emergency shelter.

Strategy #10: Provide Landlord Incentives

The CoC dedicates local Measure H and Housing Successor Agency funds for a Landlord Incentives program that provides financial incentives to encourage landlords to rent their available units to persons experiencing homelessness who have been issued subsidized vouchers. Monetary payments are provided to landlords for holding an available unit vacant while eligible homeless households are referred to them, and the owners are able to determine the suitability of the prospective tenant during the referral process. Financial assistance is also provided to landlords to mitigate damages by tenants during their occupancy in the subsidized units. Vacancy loss payments provide landlords the equivalent of one month's rent if the tenant vacates the unit without formal notice.

Strategy #11 Promote Housing Search

The CoC will use state issued Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP) funds to hire Housing Locators who will focus on cultivating a broad network of landlords and available units in Pasadena and surrounding areas to serve as a supportive housing resource for persons experiencing homelessness. Given Pasadena's competitive rental market, there is a need for specialized representatives skilled in the cultivation of relationships with housing providers, particularly private market landlords. Housing Locators will engage a wide range of community representatives in housing search activities in an effort to increase the lease up rate. Types of permanent housing will include the following:

- Scattered-site housing, which includes individual apartment units throughout the community; and
- Shared housing that provides a household with a private bedroom and shared living space that includes a bathroom, kitchen, dining area, and other living spaces.

Strategy #12: Augment Housing Navigation

The CoC will work with its collaborative partners to augment housing navigation by investing in full-time Housing Navigators that are solely dedicated to housing focused case management and supportive services that focus on finding and securing permanent housing for clients. This includes working with persons who are experiencing homelessness to develop a housing plan, address any barriers identified during the plan or during regular navigation activities, and assist the household with acquiring documentation and completing forms required for housing. Navigation will also include attending property management meetings, setting appointments and assisting with completing paperwork needed around housing applications. Navigation will also involve the securing of housing and assisting with the movement into housing.

[Goal #3: Coordinated System of Care]

The Pasadena CoC actively works to strengthen and build upon the existing systemic approach to homeless programming by focusing on aligning the needs of households that are experiencing homelessness with the best programs to address their needs. The continued coordination and collaboration between service providers work to create and support an integrated and sustainable response to homelessness.

Strategy #13: Expand street outreach and engagement

Investing in the expansion of street outreach within the CoC will support the ability of street outreach workers to effectively engage individuals and families experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Outreach workers play the critical role of executing the initial steps of effective engagement with homeless individuals, including:

- Building a personal connection and establishing trust
- Assessment of immediate needs and eligibility
- Minimize barriers to housing access
- Actively connect and provide referrals to shelter and housing

Outreach workers will be full-time and dedicated solely to outreach and engagement. Outreach includes building a personal connection with the individuals, assessing their immediate needs a with a basic field needs assessment, and working to identify barriers that the individual must address and overcome to improve health status, social support network and address their housing crisis. Engagement involves multiple contacts with individuals living on the street. Outreach and engagement also involves collaborating with outreach workers who may not be full-time and dedicated solely to outreach and engagement. Collaboration will also include cross training. Outreach and engagement also includes responding to community requests for street outreach intervention from local government including law enforcement, businesses, civic groups, service groups, and neighbors

Strategy #14: Ensure emergency shelter beds are low-barrier

In contrast to shelters and transitional housing programs that historically have "housing-ready models" where residents must address agree to engage in services (i.e. treatment and compliance for substance use) prior to obtaining permanent housing, emergency shelter implements a low barrier approach so that anyone experiencing homelessness can access shelter without preconditions or barriers to entry, such as such as sobriety or mandatory service participation. This approach has proven to be effective in engaging populations who are vulnerable and high risk, particularly for people experiencing chronic homelessness who have greater service needs. Shelter residents work with housing navigators who conduct Next Step and VI-SPDAT assessments to ensure persons have access to the Coordinated Entry system (CES), with the ultimate goal of moving clients into permanent housing as quickly as possible.

Strategy #15: Support Real-Time Data Collection

The foundation for combatting homelessness is actionable, real-time, person-specific data to ensure the right people get into housing at the right time. Investing and supporting real-time data will allow the CoC to understand who is becoming homeless and why, the inflow into homelessness and what prevention strategies can be implemented, trends in successful housing placements, and the effectiveness of programs as measured through recidivism outcomes. Quality data will enable the Pasadena CoC to strategically allocate funding that will best serve the unmet needs of the community and make policies decisions that will positively impact the homeless system of care.

Strategy #16: Engage key stakeholders in CoC planning activities

The CoC has strong partnerships with a diverse group of local and regional providers across sectors and geographic regions. The CoC hosts regular committee and public workshop meetings to obtain input on CoC policies, written standards, PIT count planning, and funding strategies. In order to strengthen and ensure the effective provision of resources within the community, stakeholder feedback is emphasized and regularly solicited. This collaboration ensures that decision makers are informed of activities and gaps in programming that are occurring on the ground in order to create systematic strategies that can be taken to best ensure that persons experiencing homelessness are quickly connected to housing and services that are most appropriate to their needs. Gathering regular feedback from collaborative partners is critical to making informed decisions that work towards effective solutions.

Strategy #17: Encourage stakeholder participation in HMIS

The CoC currently follows the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) guidance mandating that all programs funded through the CoC lead with federal, state, and local programs must participate in HMIS. HMIS provides an unduplicated intake of clients and yields comprehensive tally of persons experiencing homelessness and the services provided. Increased agency participation in HMIS improves the CoC's ability to measure client outcomes and program performance, improves coordination of services among agency programs and with other providers, informs the understanding of the scope of homelessness, and increases the ability of providers and policy makers to assess unmet needs and service gaps. All service providers that assist persons experiencing homelessness or are at imminent risk for homelessness are encouraged to be a part of the community's HMIS. The Pasadena CoC is part of an HMIS collaborative with the Los Angeles and Glendale CoCs that implements a coordinated and regional approach to serve the needs of homeless households.

Strategy #18: Prevent the criminalization of activities associated with homelessness

The CoC has the responsibility of preventing the criminalization of homelessness and finding alternative, constructive ways of addressing the needs of persons experiencing homelessness in Pasadena. Criminalizing acts of survival is not a solution to homelessness and result in creating additional barriers to ending homelessness as well as preventable public costs for police, courts, and jails. The City supports the provision of a comprehensive and collaborative system of care by convening with City Departments that interact with people experiencing homelessness, as well as Business Improvement Districts and local service providers, to implement cost effective solutions and ensure constructive alternatives to criminal justice system involvement. The City

also collaborates with the Pasadena Police Department's Homeless Outreach–Psychiatric Evaluation (HOPE) team to provide compassionate emergency response to people experiencing homelessness that have a mental health crisis.

Strategy #19: Build long-term partnerships with healthcare institutions

Addressing health-related needs of people who are experiencing or at-risk of homelessness has long been recognized as a key component of efforts to prevent and end homelessness. It has become increasingly clear that stable housing is fundamental to both maintaining good health and minimizing the costs of preventable interactions with public systems, such as emergency room utilization and hospital admissions. As Pasadena continues to focus on housing and subsequently stabilizing the health of people experiencing homelessness, long-term, comprehensive solutions are needed by both the homeless and healthcare sectors. The CoC hosts a bi-monthly healthcare committee that seeks to address access to care barriers and barriers to navigating the healthcare system in order to bridge the gap between siloed systems of operation. The committee will be exploring opportunities to build and sustain meaningful cross-sector partnerships and working to disseminate best practices and approaches to address the intersection of housing and health.