

OKANOGAN COUNTY COMMISSIONERS'

RESOLUTION 82-2019

WHEREAS, The Housing Coalition of Okanogan County and the Homeless Housing Task Force consists of community members, elected officials, and/or homeless or formally homeless persons and social service agency staff who developed the County's initial 10-year plan which was subsequently approved by the county; and

WHEREAS, pursuant, in part, to RCW 43.185C.050, each local Housing Task Force shall prepare and recommend to its local government legislative authority a five-year homeless housing plan for its jurisdictional area and the local government may amend the proposed plan and shall adopt a plan by December 1, 2019; and

WHEREAS, in cooperation with the Homeless Housing Task Force and the Housing Coalition for Okanogan County, the plan amendment was created in alignment with the Washington State Plan to End Homelessness; and

WHEREAS, the Homeless Housing Plan considered results from the Homeless Point in Time count data, Homeless Management Information System data, results from Survey of Providers, Survey of Homeless Individuals, and review of National Evidence Based Practices such as Transitional Housing, Housing First, Permanent Supportive Housing, Overnight Winter Homeless Shelters and Therapeutic Supportive Housing; and

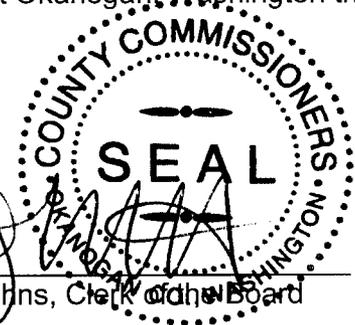
WHEREAS, the plan includes data analysis, needs assessment details from Okanogan County Community Action Council (OCCAC), coordination and identification of community-wide collaborative approaches, and Action Plan and intends to address homelessness by promoting a continuum of housing and support services that augment individual and family stability, resiliency, and economic independence; and

WHEREAS, the current priority includes a strategic plan with five goals: Make homelessness rare (prevention strategies), Make homelessness brief (crisis response strategies), Make homelessness one-time (ensure long-term housing stability strategies), Continuously improve the homeless coordination system (increase capacity and efficiency strategies) and finally Expand community engagement (leadership, planning, and communication strategies), and;

WHEREAS, the proposed Homeless Housing Plan is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Housing Coalition of Okanogan County, Housing Task Force, and Washington State Plan to end Homelessness;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the attached Okanogan County Homeless Housing Plan 2019 is hereby adopted by Okanogan County as required by R.C.W. 43.185C.050.

DATED at Okanogan, Washington this 2 day of July 2019.

ATTEST

Laleña Johns, Clerk of the Board

**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
OKANOGAN, WASHINGTON**



Jim DeTro, Chairman

Chris Branch, Member



Andy Hover, Member

OKANOGAN COUNTY HOMELESS HOUSING PLAN 2019

Okanogan County
Homeless Housing Plan 2019

Prepared by Okanogan County Community Action Council in cooperation with the Homeless Housing Task Force meetings and the Housing Coalition for Okanogan County. Plan Template provided by Kitsap County.

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Acknowledgements

Thanks to the many people and organizations that provided input and supported the effort to Update the Okanogan County Homeless Housing Plan, including citizens, mayors, city council members, social service providers, and people experiencing homelessness. **Special acknowledgement to Kitsap County Housing Department for their generous allowance of the plan template and sharing of thoughts on rural homelessness which have been invaluable to this effort.**

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OKANOGAN COUNTY HOMELESS HOUSING PLAN 2019

I. Executive Summary

The Okanogan County Homeless Housing Plan contains data and information collected primarily in 2017 as noted. This version is a draft submitted for Commissioner approval.

History

The Washington State Legislature approved House Bill 2060 in 2002, creating a Low-Income Housing Program. It provides a source of grant funding for low income housing capital projects and operations and maintenance, but it does not fund services.

Evidence-based practices from around the United States consistently have demonstrated that successful transition from homelessness to self-sufficiency requires accompanying supportive services (debt counseling, job training, etc.) Historically there had been no statewide, integrated approach to homelessness. House Bill 2163, passed in 2005, attempted to remedy this situation by:

Creating a State Interagency Council on Homelessness, whose mission is to align State policies and practices across many State agencies and departments towards a single goal: reducing homelessness.

Requiring the Washington State Department of Commerce (formerly Community, Trade, and Economic Development) to:

- Oversee the implementation of the provisions of ESHB 2163;
- Create a statewide strategic plan to house homeless persons;
- Assist local governments in developing 10-year Homeless Housing Plans, with the goal to reduce homelessness by 50% by 2015; and

Coordinate a Federally required annual census of homeless persons commonly known as the Point in Time Count. This count is performed in January every year across the nation.

Creating a funding source for programs that directly address the goals identified in these 10-year Homeless Housing Plans.

The Housing Coalition for Okanogan County was formed in 2006 to share knowledge of housing resources and to work in collaboration rather than competition to provide maximum impact in ending homelessness and to avoid duplication of services. The Coalition and meetings of the Homeless Housing Task force (community members, elected officials, and homeless or formerly homeless persons in addition to social service agency staff) developed the initial 10-year plan to end homelessness which was subsequently approved by the County Commissioners

Purpose of the Plan

The overall goal of the Plan aligns with the Washington State Plan to End Homelessness in that its objective is to work together as a community to make homelessness a rare, brief, and one-time occurrence through an efficient and effective homeless response system.

The Homeless Housing Plan Update Committee began meeting again in late 2016 and in 2017 analyzed the needs of homeless people in Okanogan County by reviewing the Homeless Point In Time count data, Homeless Management Information System data, results from a survey of providers, a survey of homeless

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individuals, meetings with elected officials and reviewed national evidence-based practices such as transitional housing, Housing First, Permanent Supportive Housing, Overnight Winter Homeless Shelters, and Therapeutic Supportive Housing.

To achieve making homelessness rare, brief, and one-time, the Plan includes data analysis, needs assessment details from OCCAC, coordination and identification of community-wide collaborative approaches. The included Action Plan is intended to address homelessness by promoting a continuum of housing and support services that augment individual and family stability, resiliency, and economic independence.

This Plan is intended to complement the Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness, the work of the Economic Alliance in general Affordable Housing availability, and faith based local plans that address winter sheltering of the homeless.

Scope of the Plan

This plan addresses issues of homelessness throughout Okanogan County, including:

- Information about progress made over the last ten years,
- Current demographics of homelessness in Okanogan County,
- Resources available and current needs and gaps, and
- An action plan that outlines the goals, strategies, and action steps that will be used over the next five years to address homelessness.

Barriers

Despite significant improvements in the provision of housing and services to people experiencing homelessness, and a vastly improved capacity over the last 10 years, the planning process revealed specific barriers and gaps within our community's capacity to assist all people experiencing homelessness. These barriers and gaps are the underlying causes of our inability to meet the needs of all homeless residents at this time. They include:

- Insufficient funding
- Increased demand
- Limited capacity – both in housing stock and providers' limited ability to expand and enhance services

Gaps in Homeless Housing and Services

The following needs and gaps in housing resources have been identified:

- Emergency shelter for men with children, couples, households with pets, and large families
- Housing Solutions for homeless unaccompanied youth within current limited resources
- Housing and services for homeless individuals entering the community from jails, correctional facilities, foster care, hospitals, and mental institutions, and who are chronically unsheltered.
- Lack of overnight shelter in the South County (Brewster/Pateros).
- Housing First/Harm Reduction housing (for chronically unsheltered and other high-needs populations)
- Additional units of Permanent Supportive Housing
- Coordination of case management both between homeless providers and among other systems of care
- Planning and collaboration among different sectors that serve people experiencing homelessness
- Citizen engagement in outreach and communication
- Integration of planning efforts between social service providers, faith-based groups, and the public

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Goals

The Homeless Housing Plan includes a strategic plan, comprised of five goals with supporting strategies and action steps. Indicators of success are included for each goal.

1. **Make homelessness rare** (prevention strategies).
2. **Make homelessness brief** (crisis response strategies).
3. **Make homelessness one-time** (ensure long-term housing stability strategies).
4. **Continuously improve the homeless coordination system** (increase capacity and efficiency strategies).
5. **Expand community engagement** (leadership, planning, and communication strategies).

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II. Introduction: Homelessness among our Neighbors

Because the Point in Time count is conducted in January at the coldest time of the year, the ability to conduct an accurate count is hindered. While the count may vary between 50 and 60 individuals, we know that DSHS counts an average of 400-500 families who are identified as homeless. The Superintendent of Public Instruction identified 295 students in the county who were homeless. The Housing Authority currently has a Section 8 waiting list of over 200 families. Geographic territory to be searched for our homeless residents who may be living in a car or building unfit for habitation in the cold of winter is a huge obstacle to obtaining accurate point in time counts of homelessness.

In Okanogan County, homelessness is not as visible as it may be on the streets of Seattle, but it affects hundreds of people directly, every day, right here in our rural community. These are our friends, neighbors, co-workers, and community members.

Homelessness happens to people of all ages, genders, education levels, races, income levels, and household types. It happens to good people in our community who work hard to be self-sufficient but live on the brink of economic instability. Health issues, poor credit, job loss, family break-up, domestic violence, mental illness or substance use disorders can also push people into homelessness. Whatever the underlying reason for their homelessness, they are in crisis. Visible or hidden, everyone deserves a safe and decent place to live.

Causes of Homelessness

Homelessness was a relatively rare phenomenon until the 1980s, when many economic and social changes converged to cause its dramatic rise. These changes included:

Lack of growth in real earnings for those with low incomes,
Growing scarcity of appropriate affordable housing,
Demolition of old buildings that provided inexpensive Single Room Occupancy (SRO) opportunities, and
Closing of institutions (i.e. beds at Western State Hospital) that had long served the mentally ill.
The number of homeless families and individuals continued to rise during the 1990's. Factors included:

On-going deinstitutionalization of persons with mental illness without the development of adequate community-based housing and appropriate support services, Foreign out-sourcing of manufacturing jobs that paid a living wage, Rise of a service economy with low paying jobs, and Flat and/or reduced spending on social programs at all levels.

From OCCAC Case files:

SOMEONE ELSE NEEDS IT MORE

A couple ages 41 & 53 had lost their housing and were living outside in a tent at the city park. With constant employment search efforts, they were both able to get employment at a local packing shed. Though employed now, they still found themselves homeless and living in a tent. They found an affordable 1-bedroom apartment that included all utilities yet had no resources to help them move in. They received no benefits from the state with the mind set of "someone else out there needs it more than us" and their limited income was going to food, toiletries, cooking supplies, etc. With our help, we were able to get them out of living in uninhabitable conditions and assisted them with first month's rent and deposit of \$614.00. Additionally, we also provided one on one family budgeting and employment coaching/retention support. They are now residing in their own affordable apartment and continue to be employed. **Family has maintained employment and are stably housed**

Total investment - \$614.00
direct service & \$400 staff
time/ongoing counseling.

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The impact of welfare reform in the 90's pushed thousands of families into the position of choosing between paying rent and feeding their children.

More recently, the Great Recession of 2009-2012 created the highest unemployment rates in decades, resulting in fewer workers employed, a decline in earned income, fluctuating rents, an increase in home foreclosures, and a reduction in state and federal funding for need-based assistance programs. These factors pushed many low-income households, and even some middle-income families, into crisis, including homelessness.

Because our rural economy was already challenged by high rates of generational poverty, the downturns in urban employers and economic growth made less of an impact on the clients we serve. The wildfires of 2014 & 2015 however, pushed the affordable housing market to the breaking point with rents skyrocketing to as much as \$1000 a month within weeks of the fires. Buildings lost that had housed tenants such as the 19-unit complex lost in Pateros due to the Carlton Complex fire wiped out the housing for support staffing at motels, restaurants, schools, and more. Families camped out for weeks and were left without alternative housing solutions as winter approached. Even as families began to recover, the visibility of homeless increased in a community where the only homeless person had been "that guy by the Walmart entrance".

Today, many of our community's low-income persons are at-risk of becoming homeless – often a single paycheck away from losing their housing. Many of these individuals lack education and job skills to be prepared to compete for living-wage jobs, have an insufficient personal safety net to successfully weather temporary or chronic adversity, and may use poor judgment and choices related to personal relationships and engagement in risky behaviors. Ultimately, they lose hope for a future that envisions economic self-sufficiency and social resiliency.

While economic problems and evictions are often the final event leading to homelessness, persons with serious behavioral health issues are particularly vulnerable. They are often unable to maintain a job (or if they do, it is at very low pay), have difficulty managing medicines appropriately and rely on multiple services to sustain self-sufficiency. Others at-risk are members of dysfunctional families who are often victims of domestic violence, runaway or abandoned youth or youth who have aged out of foster care, large families, or veterans who have been negatively impacted by the traumas of war. The combination of rising housing costs, limited income and a severe shortage of affordable housing are other major factors leading to homelessness. Today Homelessness is visible and a topic on the minds of many community residents who feel that there must be a quick fix.

Ultimately, homelessness is a result of other societal factors that create financial instability and inability to afford housing: lack of affordable housing, inter-generational poverty, expensive health care costs, lack of living-wage jobs, lack of education and training, severe mental illness, and

Pay it Forward

The family of three had lost everything. A good job was gone with lay-offs, unemployment ended, and the family home was foreclosed. A tent in the park was all that was left.

A quick stay in the local motel was provided for stability and soon Dad had a job while Mom had enrolled in college. With regular case management assistance, credit was repaired, and a small apartment was found. Mom finished college finding not one but two jobs with her new degree. Dad found better paying full time work.

During all their struggles, they eagerly learned every strategy we offered to move out of the current situation.

Within just a few months this "never give up" family was back on their feet with more reason to hope than ever before.

This story does not end there. Our case manager encountered them in the grocery store. Their cart was loaded up with groceries and necessities for a family that had lost everything in a fire.

Dad said: "we will never forget the assistance that was given to us when we needed it and we are grateful to be able to pay it forward to others"

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substance use disorders. Addressing homelessness is, necessarily, working backwards attempting to fix the condition (homelessness) and then providing individualized social supports to address the underlying social issues facing each individual household.

Social Impact of Homelessness: The Cost of Doing Nothing

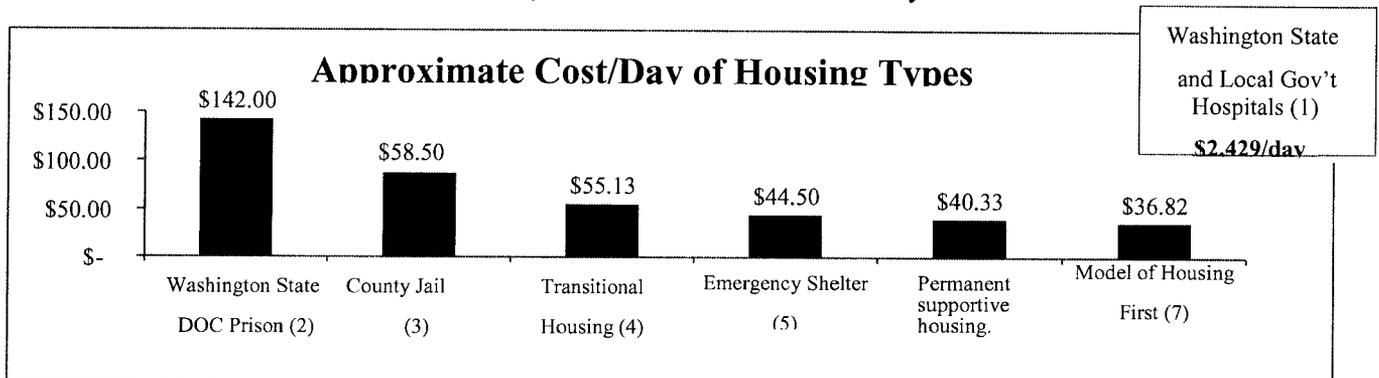
Homelessness not only has huge impacts on the individuals experiencing it, it is also expensive for our community. Homelessness almost always escalates an already unstable family situation. Youth and adults with mental illness or drug and alcohol problems get worse when they do not have stable housing to get the behavioral and/or medical attention they need.

Homelessness costs our community in other ways, as well. Each year, tax dollars are spent caring for homeless people through our emergency services – including 911, emergency rooms and clinics, law enforcement, fire and rescue units, jails, detoxification programs, public health system, the judiciary system and more.

Homelessness has a particularly troubling impact on children. Homeless children often are impacted by adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) resulting in impediments to growth and development and overall weak performance in school. Numerous studies have found that housing instability and homelessness lower academic performance, increase the chances of repeating a grade, and reduce high school completion rates. Homelessness also puts children at greater risk of serious physical health problems. In our county, homeless youth often commit crimes that are connected to their housing instability: misdemeanor theft, trespassing, etc. and are subsequently entered into the court system. Once youth have a criminal record, their opportunities for stable employment and long-term housing decline. Further, homeless youth are often exposed to high risk environments in which drug use and violence are persistently present. As such, homeless youth are at increased risk again for incarceration. These factors contribute to perpetuating the cycle of homelessness. Homeless adults have a hard time gaining employment and holding a job. Evictions and foreclosures hurt landlords, banks, and neighborhoods. Law enforcement spends countless hours responding to complaints about vagrants, illegal camping, squatting or use of and illegal overnight parking.

Cost studies around the nation, however, have proven that many of these individuals and households can succeed in transitioning back to stable housing, and often self-sufficiency, if they access appropriate supportive services.

Once housed, their use of emergency services declines sharply as family or individual's stability improves. The result: a decrease in expenses for society, and a more livable community for all of us.



(1)2010 Kaiser State Health Facts (2) State of Wash DOC website (3) Rate charged Douglas County (4)(5)(6) https://www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/povsoc/cost_homelessness.html does not include volunteer shelters and (7) <http://jama.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=183666>. April 1, 2009 Health Care and Public Service Use and Costs

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Implementing the Okanogan Homeless Housing Plan will require significant community investment. It will require significant leadership from all sectors where homelessness lingers – in schools, law enforcement, social service providers, and affordable housing as well as with for profit developers of affordable housing and landlords. It will not cost our community as much as continuing to try to manage homelessness through expensive shelter systems that rely on motel rentals most of the year and in public services in the years to come.

History of the Plan

This plan is part of a national movement to end homelessness and is the continuation of work that began in 2006 with the Homelessness Advisory Committee and the Okanogan Housing Coalition. Washington State passed legislation in 2005 (ESSHB 2163) mandating that each county focus on reducing homelessness. Each county is required to (1) develop a Homeless Housing Plan with the goal of reducing homelessness by 50% by 2015, (2) collect funds to pay for its implementation through a document recording surcharge at the county Auditor level, (3) collect data about homeless persons and the services they receive to evaluate progress, and (4) coordinate efforts among homeless service providers. While we have met our goal of reducing homelessness by 50%, from the data collected in 2005 we know that data is not everything. The measure of the data relies on the Point in Time Count which is a flawed system when it is applied to rural Okanogan County.

The original 2005 legislative mandate was to “reduce homelessness by 50% by 2015.” With a much clearer understanding of the underlying causes of homelessness, The Housing Coalition recommends the goal embraced by many counties and nationwide, that is to *make homelessness rare, brief, and a one-time event*. Until the underlying social issues that lead people to become homeless are addressed, the Coalition’s role is to prevent homelessness whenever possible and help people quickly regain stable housing and overcome their barriers to sustaining that housing.

Over subsequent years the Coalition has updated the Homeless Plan as it approached the 2015 deadline. With minimal realistic resources, we projected what was needed most and what could be realistically achieved. The objective of this update is to re-focus on gaps in what is currently being provided and offer specific goals and strategies to fill them. Another objective is to incorporate strategic thinking about what is needed over the next five years to continue the progress in effectively addressing homelessness in Okanogan County. Input for the plan was gathered from a broad range of sources:

- A. Point in Time Count data,
- B. Homeless Management Information System data,
- C. Housing Coalition for Okanogan County members,
- D. Community stakeholder workshops, and
- E. Case management data from individuals experiencing homelessness.

The Plan Update effort also looked at plans and evidence-based practices from around the country.

This Plan includes three substantive sections:

1. **A Progress Report**, which briefly discusses progress made in addressing homelessness over the last 10 years, and outlines the current homeless response system and resources available;
2. **The State of Homelessness**, which provides a review of data and statistics regarding homelessness in Okanogan County in 2015; and
3. **The Action Plan**, including the current needs and gaps that impede progress and goals, strategies, and action steps that our community should undertake to address homelessness over the next five years.

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Although these sections overlap, each can “stand alone,” presenting relevant information on a single aspect of homelessness in Okanogan County. Collectively, these sections complete the picture of what will be required to make homelessness rare, brief, and one-time.

Purpose of the Plan

The Homeless Housing Plan Update Committee identified three main purposes of the plan, in addition to fulfilling the legislative mandate:

Blueprint for Implementation: A clear and concise agreement about the community’s plan to reduce homelessness.

Tool for Advocacy: An informational focal point to inspire local advocacy and leadership to embrace homelessness as a priority for action.

Reference for Funders: An articulation of the community’s priorities for funding, ensuring that these priorities meet the Federal, State, and local requirements that the funded programs are in alignment with the homelessness plan.

The plan lays out broad goals and strategies to guide government, non-profit agencies, and other partners to achieve the desired outcomes necessary to reduce homelessness and create community impact. Whereas past plans shied away from full scale plans due to the experience of rural communities always being under funded due to smaller “unit impact” (number of people served per dollar), this plan calls out what is needed with the recognition that if we don’t make the ask, the community, the government, and philanthropic funders will not be able to identify the need.

Future Plan Updates

The Department of Commerce has set new agendas and now requires a new plan be delivered to them prior to December of 2019. The Homeless Housing Task force in partnership with the Housing Coalition will be working on this project in partnership with the County.

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III. A Decade of Inequality and Evolution

The past decade has been challenging for many Okanogan County citizens, as the value of their wages has diminished, the number of households living in poverty has risen, and the lack of affordable housing has affected many households, resulting in housing instability and homelessness. In response, Okanogan County Community Action Council is providing an on line coordinated entry system and testing the system with the Housing Authority of Okanogan County in the hope that other service providers will join in. Service providers have agreed to improve upon the current referral system and review the results of the initial testing of the Coordinated Entry system to track the growing demand and improve access to resources for the homeless. We are still challenged to provide more beds and units in the face of now diminishing state and federal resources. These barriers and gaps impede progress toward the goal of making homelessness rare, brief, and one-time.

An Affordability Crisis

While the “westside” economy has remained robust for some, Okanogan County’s economy has been impaired by the lack of affordable “worker” housing. Worker housing includes housing for sale or rent to individuals ranging from farm workers to highly skilled and paid professionals. In 2017 Okanogan County Community Action and the Economic Alliance partnered in a series of meetings to discuss solutions for this problem. Committees are currently assessing everything from alternative housing to Employer owned housing for professional staff.

Declining Value of Wages

Nationally, statewide, and locally, the value of wages has not kept pace with inflation and the cost of goods and housing. In 2015 in Washington, a minimum wage worker earned an hourly wage of \$9.47. For Okanogan County, the living wage (the amount that an individual must earn to support their family) is \$9.53 for a household of one, or \$14.78 per adult for a household with two working adults and two children.¹ Minimum wage is simply not enough for any sized household to live without risk of a housing crisis. In addition, Washington State low- income residents pay the highest proportion of taxes than in any other state.

Rising Poverty Rates

By every measure, more of our neighbors continue to experience unacceptable levels of poverty²

- 19.7% of residents are living below the Federal poverty level.
- 16.5% of youth are living below the Federal poverty level.
- 27 of every 100 available rentals are affordable to those living at 30% of the AMI and at 30-50% of AMI ³
- 1537 senior citizens (unduplicated) utilized the Food Bank system in 2017.

¹ <http://www.commerce.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/AHAB-needs-study-Okanogan.pdf>

² Based on most recent US Census

³ <http://www.commerce.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/AHAB-needs-study-Okanogan.pdf>

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Affordable Housing Crisis

Many factors contribute to homelessness, but in most situations the underlying cause is the gap between income and the cost of available housing. Housing is considered “affordable” when it costs no more than 30% of household income. Okanogan housing costs are well beyond the affordability of low-income households, particularly single-adult households or households with children, where an adult must provide childcare.

Affordable rent for a single person earning minimum wage is \$492.

In Okanogan County, even with new state increases in 2018, many families work less than 20 hours per week thus reducing their ability to rent at “fair market rate” and increasing their competition for the few subsidized units or Housing vouchers available.

Fair Market rent for 1-bedroom unit is \$590 and a 3-bedroom unit is \$917. Competition for units at Fair Market rent is very high even with minimal affordability.

While recent studies such as the Affordable Housing Advisory Board (AHAB) needs study, which is an addendum to this plan, indicates vacancy rates of 3%, a low-income renter will testify that the rate is closer to 0%. Evidence of this is the number of Section 8 housing vouchers lost due to scarcity of available units that qualify at the Fair Market standard.

Other Causes of Homelessness

Homelessness is a result of the breakdown of other social factors as well. Economic security, employment, education, and the health care system intersect with our county’s high rate of generational poverty, mental illness, and the new poverty created by the Great Recession that began in 2008.

While the direct impact on our economy was not as drastic as urban areas, the county did see its share of foreclosures and increases in unemployment. An increase in the cost of living further reduced the ability of many families to cope with the cost of housing – pushing many into homelessness. Since this time there have been openings and closings of businesses seen as high wage employers such as the Colville Tribal Enterprise Mill and the Crown Jewel Mine.

The wildfires of 2014 & 2015 further exacerbated the crisis when hundreds of housing units were lost to fire. Some of the homes have been rebuilt but recovery for many has meant leaving the county or a view of recovery that includes loss of a business and/or settling for having a camper instead of a home. Many low-income rental and owner-occupied homes have degraded as their owners have aged in place. OCCAC has worked to complete repair and rehabilitation on these homes as well as weatherization to preserve the existing housing stock for the current tenants, owners and the next generation.

Tipping Points

With so many of our neighbors living on the edge of housing instability, small crises are often the tipping point leading to homelessness. These crises are often related to loss of employment or financial hardship (50% report this as a major factor in their homelessness), physical health issues (17%), mental health issues (17%), substance abuse disorders (33%), domestic violence, or family break-ups (17%).⁴ In addition,

⁴ HMIS Point in Time Count 2018

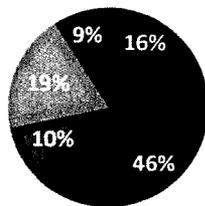
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emerging research shows the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) on the physical and behavioral health of adults, increasing the likelihood of homelessness.

Poverty Rate compared	County/State/Federal ⁵	All individuals			Children (<18 years old)		
		1999	2006-10	2011-15	1999	2006-10	2011-15
U.S.		9.2%	13.8%	15.5%	13.6%	23.7%	27.8%
State		10.6%	12.1%	13.3%	15.0%	19.0%	21.2%
Okanogan		21.3%	19.5%	21.2%	29.0%	37.6%	41.7%

INCOME SOURCE

- No Income
- Benefit
- Other
- SSI, Social Security, Pension
- Employment



The 2015 Self Sufficiency Standard for Washington State authored by the University of Washington indicated that for a one adult and One pre-school child family, the needed income for support of basic expenses ranged between \$27,945 and \$31,535. As children grow and the family grows, costs expand for adequate housing. Some costs shift between reduced daycare costs and increased food costs. According to this same study the cost to attain self-sufficiency has risen in Okanogan County for a family of two adults, one school age and one preschool age child between 23-39%.

Progress and Innovation

When individuals or families are in danger of becoming homeless, or have already lost their housing, the goal is to get them into housing and provide services that best meet their needs as quickly as possible. This “homeless coordinated entry system” involves many organizations, a diverse set of programmatic tools, and multiple funding sources. Ten years after the originating legislation, Okanogan County has made progress in

⁵ Employment Security Data Tables 2017

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many areas, adding additional units of subsidized housing and temporary housing beds, as well as adding supportive services and programs.

Following is a sample of major innovations and accomplishments.

Efficiency of the Response System

Since 2005, tremendous progress has been made to improve the efficiency of the housing and services delivery system. The Point in Time Count has been conducted in coordination with Day of Services, **Project Homeless Connect**. In 2017 additional service days were held in the county in Grand Coulee and Twisp to inform the work of the Housing Coalition.

HUD and WA Department of Commerce required implementation of the **Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)**, which requires certain data to be collected about all clients receiving homeless housing and services that are funded through federal, state, and local homeless grants. This information is used to produce high-level reports to evaluate the outcomes of homeless housing and service providers. Okanogan County is still working on implementation of HMIS among all required homeless service providers with the hope that all providers will embrace this system even though they may not utilize Commerce funding. The system has now been adapted and changed to a new provider, with a greater flexibility and ease of use for agencies. Comparing results for 2015 and 2016 we see an improvement in performance with exits into permanent housing moving from 30.8 to 39% and returns to homelessness moving from 6% to 4% in 2016. The bad news is the number of people entering the system has increased from 568 in 2015 to 774 in 2016. During this same period, the Point in Time count reflected 42 people in 2015 and 50 in 2016.

Prevention

The most cost-effective way to decrease homelessness is to intervene before individuals and families lose their housing. Often, a household on the brink of homelessness can avert the crisis with a small amount of financial support and the necessary supportive services to regain financial stability. Contrast this minimal cost for prevention with the immense cost to the family, social service agencies, and the community when individuals or families become homeless. By focusing on prevention and diversion, we can effectively reduce homelessness. Prevention also reduces ACES for children in vulnerable families.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act passed by Congress in 2009 provided significant investment in eviction prevention and rapid rehousing programs; this program and its successors aid in the form of short-term **rental and mortgage assistance**. Assistance with **utilities costs** is provided through a Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and partnerships with local utilities and heating suppliers. Other programs provide funding for minor home repairs for extremely low-income households to rectify health and safety issues that might result in homelessness. **Weatherization programs** help low-income households to reduce utilities costs through small grants to improve energy efficiency.

Transportation

The adoption of Transit taxes has provided affordable alternatives to transportation on a more comprehensive series of routes. This has reduced the expenses of many families whose only alternative was less than reliable – but inexpensive cars, expensive car repairs, gas, and insurance in order to get to work or school. Vouchers for **free bus transportation** to low-income and vulnerable populations for specific emergency uses, such as getting to job interviews, food banks, or case management appointments are provided on a case by case basis by OCCAC and other social service providers.

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Increased Subsidized Housing Units

Each type of housing in the subsidized housing continuum plays a key role in moving people from homelessness to self-sufficiency.

Okanogan Behavioral Health Care has the only specifically **Transitional housing** development to support Therapeutic recovery for persons in recovery from mental and substance abuse issues. This facility provides the time needed for a homeless individual to get stabilized away from the situation which may have contributed to their challenge after a period in a treatment program.

Permanent supportive housing is also provided by OBHC at The Shove House as needed for individuals who are unable to achieve and sustain economic self-sufficiency and need a longer period to achieve stability. Permanent supportive Housing for the general homeless population is supported by the housing coalition as an identified continuing need throughout the county.

Affordability is a necessary option for many low-income people in our community, whether they've experienced homelessness or not. OCCAC provides **Rapid response, Housing First** vouchers to families who have become homeless and also provide prevention of homelessness through case management, landlord negotiation and financial assistance that requires participation in financial literacy and regular progress in self-directed housing stability plans. Rapid rehousing has proven successful for households with few barriers to self-reliance. Room One also provides financial assistance to families who are struggling to stay in their homes and supportive services across their period of instability.

The Housing Authority of Okanogan County (HAOC) provides some emergency housing via the Tenant Based Rental Assistance program(TBRA), and they are a primary resource for subsidized Section 8 vouchers with the county. The Housing Authority of Okanogan Count currently has 165 families supported with these vouchers and 133 families on a waiting list.

OCCAC and Room One also provide immediate shelter for homeless families via **motel vouchers** that are time limited and dependent on client follow through.

The Support Center is the lead agency for Crime Victims and Victims of Domestic Violence. As a part of the Domestic Violence prevention and case work, they provide **Domestic Violence Protection Shelter**.

OCCAC **has provided homelessness supportive** services to Veterans and families for the last three years, averaging over 75 families stabilized in housing each year with the SSVF program. This service is assisted by the availability of an increasing number of **VASH vouchers** (like Section 8 but only for veterans) serviced by the Housing Authority of Okanogan County.

OCCAC has also completed a feasibility study for the State department of Veterans Affairs to provide training in construction to returning Veterans while they build **tiny homes** intended to replace existing housing not fit for habitation for aging Vietnam era Veterans. A tiny home has been built in Kent by consultants to use for demonstration purposes.

The OCCAC CEO also participated in a study submitted to the Governor and legislature to clarify the difference between tiny homes and tiny shelters such as the units being built by the faith based Community for the Okanogan winter shelter.

Winter Emergency shelter provided by the Oroville Winter Emergency Camp utilizes the Migrant worker

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camp in the off season and is managed by the Housing Authority of Oroville. From mid-November to mid-April the camp provides immediate, affordable relief from homelessness and the opportunity for the homeless to meet with service providers who assess the needs of each individual. This camp does not limit the number of days a person can stay. A winter homeless shelter is also under development in Okanogan sponsored by the local faith-based community. This facility will provide safe sleeping quarters for single individuals on an overnight only basis in the winter. Individuals arrive at 7pm and depart at 7am. Stays are limited to 4 days.

House Bill 2060 provided funding to purchase land for the Pine Meadows Senior Housing Complex sponsored by OCCAC and managed by HAOC provides long term affordable housing for low income seniors with units designated for senior veterans.

Investments in new units of affordable housing have are in the planning stages for the Housing Authority of Okanogan County with approved funding from the Housing Trust Fund for the Meadow Point development (now awaiting Tax Credit funding) and by the Methow Valley Housing Trust. Each new unit built relieves pressure on the demand for housing county wide.

Okanogan Behavioral Health Care and The Housing Authority of Okanogan County have been able to utilize Recording Fee funds to leverage grant funding in the building of additional housing facilities. These dollars carry a local fund character, making them eligible for match of both state and federal projects.

Housing provided by For-Profit Landlords is far and away the largest resource for affordable housing in the county and constitutes the majority of housing first vouchers utilized by OCCAC for clients in crisis.

Increased Supportive Services

Housing alone is usually not enough to enable people to make this transition from homelessness to stable housing. Supportive case management services provide assistance and skill-building to overcome the crises and dire circumstances that cause homelessness. Progress has been made in providing supportive services in a variety of areas, such as **legal services, job counseling, training and placement, “ready to rent” counseling, financial literacy classes, and behavioral health services.** However, expanded access to all these services is needed to meet the demand.

Specific Populations

Certain homeless populations require specific services or housing situations to be able to acquire and sustain housing. Several programs exist to serve particular populations, such as veterans, severely mentally ill, those with chemical use disorders, and survivors of domestic violence.

Homeless youth, countywide, (especially under the age of 18) however have been largely underserved due to the requirements surrounding licensing, required 24-hour staffing, lack of appropriate facilities, inconsistent data collection across school districts, exceptionally high rates of youth incarceration, and a severe need for emergency and long-term housing alternatives and problems related to drugs that interfere with successful transition into housing stability. In August of 2017 and again in December meetings were facilitated by Room One with Housing Coalition staff and staff at DSHS, schools, and the Juvenile detention facility to inquire more deeply into the needs of homeless youth. The housing Coalition continues to investigate possibilities and will be working with the state Office of Youth Homelessness in the coming year to provide recommendations to the commissioners as an addendum to this plan.

Housing and services are still needed for several homeless sub-populations to achieve stable housing. Because

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of their special needs, these populations have little hope of regaining housing without programs specifically geared to their needs. Chronically homeless individuals (particularly men) and individuals re-entering the community from correctional facilities, jails, mental institutions, foster care, and hospitals remain extremely under-served, as there are not always housing options available or adequate to address the unique needs of these populations. We need to further develop innovative, evidence-based programs to move these sub-populations out of homelessness. One potential is the development of Boarding House Facilities.

Current Resources

Leadership

The political and community commitment to address the issue of homelessness is essential. Over the last few years, leadership in this effort has enabled Okanogan County to make progress in addressing homelessness through HMIS implementation, improved referral processes, and increased communication between the Housing Coalition for Okanogan County, other social service providers, and the general public. The leadership has been by Okanogan elected officials, and the individual agencies in the Housing Coalition for Okanogan County.

Providers

The Okanogan Continuum of Care which is also the Housing Coalition for Okanogan County is a very active organized network of homeless housing and service providers that creates a continuum of housing and services for homeless households. Together these organizations comprise the homeless response system.

Housing Units

32 sites provide subsidized 651 housing units in the county. 439 of these units are scheduled to move into for profit status in 2017. The Housing Authority of Okanogan County has been working diligently to prevent the loss of these much-needed units and recently succeeded in securing continuation of affordability at Brewster Gardens.

Existing Funding Sources

There are some sources specifically “targeted” towards the homeless; these funds are restricted to services and projects which directly benefit homeless individuals and families and others with special needs. Other funding sources, while not “targeted” towards people experiencing homeless, must be used to benefit low-income individuals and families in need, and as such, are used to indirectly address homelessness. Current resources include:

McKinney-Vento (HEARTH ACT), Emergency Shelter Grant, VA resources -SSVF& VASH, Consolidated Homeless Grant Program, Housing and Essential Needs (HEN), Transitional Operating and Maintenance, and Homeless Housing Grant Program. Programs that are utilized to repair otherwise uninhabitable properties include the CDBG Repair and Rehab and a variety of Weatherization programs from the Department of Commerce and Bonneville Power. The PUD offers assistance in deposits for move in costs when clients take a financial literacy course from OCCAC.

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IV. Okanogan Homelessness

Demographics

Understanding the scope of homelessness in Okanogan County is an important step in developing key strategies to address it. Homelessness is an extremely complex social challenge and requires significant community investments to create an impact. There is a constant flow of people becoming homeless while others move out of homelessness into housing. Many may only experience one episode of homelessness, while others (often termed “chronically homeless”) may experience multiple episodes over several years or remain homeless for many years. Fortunately, we have better data and statistics on the homeless population than ever before to guide our efforts.

Before discussing statistics and data, it is important to recognize that it is very difficult to arrive at a definitive number of homeless households or accurate statistics about our homeless population. The following variables impede our ability to accurately identify the number of individuals and families that are homeless and the complex barriers they face while attempting to overcome homelessness:

- A. The face and composition of homelessness is changing all the time. Each day new households are forced into homelessness and each day homeless households are re-housed and re-gain self-sufficiency.
- B. Due to the ongoing stigmatization of being homeless, many individuals and households either do not self-identify as homeless and do not seek services, or do not admit to being homeless. Our data collection efforts require voluntary participation, so households that do not seek services or volunteer to be counted in our homeless census are not included in statistics. This is the hidden face of homelessness.
- C. Data about homelessness gathered from different sources does not always provide a consistent picture, since it may define homelessness differently or collect data differently.

Data about homelessness is collected in two primary ways, through the efforts of the social service and housing providers who work with people experiencing homelessness:

Point in Time Count

Point in Time Count (PIT) is required by the Department of Commerce and HUD in order to receive homeless grant funds. The information from the count is compiled and submitted to WA State and is used locally for evaluation and planning purposes. The PIT surveys sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing homelessness on the fourth Thursday in January during a specific 24-hour period in all WA counties. Okanogan County has conducted an annual Point in Time Count of the homeless since 2005. The PIT provides limited information about the full scope of homelessness, because external factors affect the results: weather, volunteers, and the social stigma of homelessness. When you compare the number of people who enter and exit homelessness in a year with the number of people counted, and the number of people self-declaring as homeless, it is clear that this is not a system designed for very rural areas.

Homeless Management Information System and Housing Coalition for Okanogan County

The second tool that is used to collect information about homelessness the county is the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). This is a federally-mandated and state-managed database of information that is required to be collected by homeless housing and service providers about every client who

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receives homeless assistance provided by federal or state funding. After providing numerous trainings we are still working to engage all providers. Faith based organizations are not required to participate and none participate at this time.

Required HMIS data includes demographic information such as gender, age, prior living situation, length of time homeless, education level, ethnicity, and family composition. (Clients must provide signed consent to have identifying information entered into the system.) When a client enters a particular housing or homeless services program, information about their participation in the program is also recorded in HMIS.

HMIS information is used at the state level to develop state-wide statistics and models. At the local level it provides accurate information about clients who access services. Its limitation is that clients, who are not using services, either by choice or because needed services are not available, are not included. Thus, it provides limited information about under-served populations or gaps in service.

As the coordinated entry program becomes fully utilized by all housing providers we anticipate better data than currently exists. At this time, the information and comparisons achieved in regular meetings of the Housing coalition is our most up to date information on trends in homelessness.

RARE: How many people experience homelessness?

The Point in Time Count provides information about homeless households who choose to participate in a survey on one specific day, regardless of whether they are seeking or receiving services and includes individuals who are sheltered and unsheltered, by federal definition. The Homeless Management Information System and the Housing Solutions Center provide information only about clients who seek and access services. We are allowed to collect this data over 4 weeks as long as we can confirm homelessness on the date of the count.

Comparison of PIT 2012-2016

POINT IN TIME COUNT					
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Sheltered	53	17	30	23	32
Unsheltered	37	15	20	20	18
Total	90	32	50	43	50

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BRIEF

2016 Performance measures	Okanogan	State High Performance Target	State Average
People entered into any housing type	774		853
Median Length of Stay in Emergency Shelter and Transitional Housing (Days)	12	20 days	71
Permanent Housing Exits	39%	80%+	52%
Returns to Homelessness	4%	10% or less	10%
Unsheltered Entries	26%		35%
Vacancy rates	4%		4%

HMIS provides the data for the second chart on Performance measures and provides data that confirms the theory of stabilization once Permanent Housing is obtained with 4% of the clients returning to Homelessness compared to the state average of 10%. Shorter stays in temporary housing are considered to be better for building long-term stability. In addition, when people regain permanent housing faster, more people are able to be served with the limited temporary housing resources. HUD sets the goal of less than 20 days in emergency shelter.

This data does not include people who are unsheltered and are NOT seeking services – often these individuals experiencing “chronic homelessness” are unsheltered for extended periods of time (1+ years) or repeatedly over the course of many years.

ONE TIME

Of the 774-people housed in 2016, 31 returned to homelessness. Unfortunately, not all members of the Housing Coalition enter their data into the HMIS system which creates more reliance on the data entered by The Support Center and OCCAC. Anecdotal experience however, affirms the ability of homelessness prevention paired with regular case management to permanently stabilize vulnerable families and provide the carrot on the stick for financial literacy classes, budgeting one on one as well as employment improvement.

OTHER SOURCES OF DATA ON HOMELESSNESS

Use of the Food Pantry system in Okanogan County allows OCCAC to track vulnerability, however, DSHS has data for individuals applying for SNAP who self-identify as homeless. Per Chris Scott at DSHS Omak office, the average number of persons is between 400 & 500 per month. Coalition members such as our SSVF staff have regular interactions with homeless individuals who are part of the many homeless camps throughout the county. These camps tend to consolidate into make shift trailers in winter and “bloom” in the spring when the weather is more conducive to camping. Anecdotal information is of little use in applications for funding however, it does confirm our understanding that there are many individuals who are chronically

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homeless and the hardest to serve. These individuals are a priority for the Department of Commerce within our contracts and we make every effort to change lives with housing when they are ready to accept help.

V. Action Plan

Needs, Gaps and Strategies

We will work together as a community to make homelessness a rare, brief, and one-time occurrence through an efficient and effective homeless coordination by the Housing Coalition of Okanogan County.

Goal 1: Make Homelessness Rare

One of the most cost-effective ways to decrease homelessness is to prevent homelessness before it occurs.

Current Needs and Gaps

Increased Demand: The numbers of homeless households and requests for homeless service have grown. National research indicates that many households seeking help may only need case management to discover their own resiliency in solving the financial problem independently, where the most vulnerable should be prioritized for assistance.

People Re-entering the Community from Systems of Care: Systems such as jails, hospitals, behavioral health, and foster care are often discharged into homelessness due to lack of housing options.

Affordable Housing Shortage: Affordable housing shortages have been clearly detailed above. The affordable housing survey from the State indicates there are 27 units for every 100 units of need for individuals at 0-30% of AMI and the same numbers for individuals at 30-50% of AMI.

Proposed Strategies

Preventing homelessness through targeted prevention can avert eviction or foreclosure for those *most likely* to become homeless. Diversion programs make smaller investments of funds for non-housing items that prevent housing instability or homelessness. Prevention programs have improved efficacy if connections to existing supports (such as job training and placement, basic life skills, financial literacy, and education) are included, so that households can address the underlying reasons for their housing. **Pro-actively planning for housing and services for individuals re-entering the community** from jails, correctional facilities, foster care, hospitals, mental health programs, and homeless shelters and programs will prevent homelessness among people in these situations. In addition, respite beds are needed for people with complex medical and/or behavioral health needs who do not have stable housing and who need related supportive services either temporarily or long-term. This strategy will require funding and development of new partners such as extended care and assisted living facilities who have care experience, in order to be feasible.

Additional units of affordable housing for households at very low- and low- income levels are required to prevent the large number of rent-burdened households being forced into homelessness. Alternative housing models may also provide some solutions – in other counties Single Room Occupancy units, boarding houses, shared housing and cottage houses have proved to be a viable way for more low-income households to remain intact. Expanding landlord partnerships is also key to increasing access to market-rate units for formerly homeless households. To support development of more affordable housing, new dedicated funding is required.

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Goal 2: Make homelessness brief

For all households who experience homelessness, getting into emergency housing as quickly as possible is the goal. After they are stabilized, transitioning to permanent housing as quickly as possible ends their homelessness.

Current Needs and Gaps

Accessibility: While the coordinated entry system is successfully doing intake, assessments, and referrals, the accessibility of shelter beds remains a challenge for some households.

Overnight Shelter: Unfortunately, Okanogan County does not have a year-round overnight shelter that could serve as temporary respite for these households until a longer-term solution could be arranged, rather than returning to unstable living conditions or situations unsuitable for human habitation. A year-round overnight shelter could also potentially address the need for respite care for homeless people being discharged from hospitals, but who still need some semi-skilled or limited assistance.

Immediate Housing (Shelter Beds) for Specific Types of Households: There is no housing currently available for couples, households with pets, single parents with teenagers of the opposite sex, and people with criminal histories (especially sex offenders). In addition, there are insufficient units available for single men with children, single men, and large families, resulting in more days spent on the waitlist. Appendix A provides detail on availability of different housing types.

Permanent Housing Availability: Many people seeking referrals from the Housing Coalition are not able to be referred because although they may have housing instability and are at imminent risk of losing their housing they are not technically homeless. These households are often under income to be able to afford the minimum rent to provide long-term sustainability required for some programs (many have \$0 income), or they are over income to qualify for other programs (sometimes with fixed incomes), despite being extremely low-income.

Rapid Rehousing programs (permanent market-rate housing, with short shallow subsidies and case management) have proved to be successful for many low-barrier households; however, funds are not available to help all households who could benefit from this type of program. Some households need slightly longer subsidies to be successful. For households with more complex barriers, permanent supportive housing is the answer. However, as with all subsidized housing, there is a severe shortage of this type of housing.

Housing and Resources for Chronically Unsheltered Individuals: Currently individuals with the most severe, persistent, or complex barriers to housing stability are the most under-served. Because they are often not seeking housing, it is difficult to estimate how many are living in places not meant for human habitation, such as camping illegally, living in cars, or in abandoned buildings. They tend to be difficult to place in existing shelter beds and, if they are unwilling or unable to comply with programmatic rules are unsuccessful in existing permanent supportive housing programs. A growing body of research supports a “harm reduction” housing model for these individuals to become stable re-housed.

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Proposed Strategies

For households experiencing homelessness, **easy access and appropriate connections to crisis response housing would** make unsheltered homelessness brief. **Immediate shelter** beds that meet the needs of all different household types and situations are needed. Connections with tailored services should be integrated throughout the shelter network.

The goal is to **place all households into permanent housing as quickly as possible**; for households with low barriers to self-sufficiency, short graduated subsidies with short term support services is appropriate; for households with complex and/or multiple barriers, permanent supportive housing is necessary and should be targeted for development.

Individuals experiencing **unsheltered and/or chronic homelessness** are extremely under-served and should be prioritized for housing and services. New programs that provide outreach, crisis response, and housing that is appropriate and attractive for these individuals are needed. In particular, Housing First, or “come as you are” housing, using the harm reduction model, has been demonstrated to save money and lives in numerous other communities. In addition, criminalization of homelessness should be prevented – a growing trend throughout the country, despite evidence that it is expensive and ineffective.

Goal 3: Make homelessness one-time

To ensure long-term housing stability, households must be quickly connected with resources to help them address any barriers to housing stability. Appropriate and affordable housing must be available.

Current Needs and Gaps

Supportive Services: Expanding connections with supportive services is needed, including consistently incorporating these resources into housing stability plans. In addition, an increased focus on personal safety net and skill-building is needed to help households retain housing stability and grow their resiliency.

Underserved Populations: Homeless housing and services are lacking for individuals re-entering the community from systems of care (jails, prison, foster care, etc.), for chronically homeless individuals and households with multiple and/or complex barriers to housing. In addition, elderly and aging homeless individuals and households have been identified as a growing sub-population that will need specific types of housing and services to meet their needs. This population may also require different definitions of successful outcomes. The Housing Coalition recognizes the need to develop additional resources for unaccompanied Homeless Youth as well.

Affordable Housing Policies: Market rate affordable housing is woefully insufficient and developers do not seem inclined to create additional units. Few jurisdictions currently have land use policies that incentivize creation of affordable housing and permanent supportive housing units. Many communities have found success with adopting policies that allow a wider range of types of non-traditional housing to be built.

Proposed Solutions

Once households are stabilized in appropriate permanent housing, they can address the issues or barriers to self-sufficiency that caused the housing crisis. Rapid **connection with individually tailored services and resources**, including employment supports and education are essential. In addition, developing resiliency through personal skill-building provides long-term benefits, including prevention of further episodes of homelessness.

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Policies that support the creation of appropriate and affordable housing, whether market-rate affordable housing, subsidized housing, or permanent supportive housing, are likely to spur development. This contributes to long-term housing stability and reduces the likelihood of future homelessness for at-risk households. Among the proposed ideas are Accessory Dwelling Units and tiny homes included in zoning.

Goal 4: Continuously improve the homeless response system

Although Okanogan County has a robust homeless referral and response system, it must continuously innovate to respond to changing needs and incorporate emerging successful strategies.

Current Needs and Gaps

Use of Performance Measurement: Although many individual organizations are using performance indicators, including outputs and outcomes, currently there is not widespread use of countywide measures to help identify whether collective progress is being made to accomplish community impact.

Coordination Within and Beyond the Coordinated Entry and referral Systems: Case management in Okanogan is defined and delivered in varying ways depending on the agency. In addition, although there is a history of and agreements between OCCAC and other agencies to provide case management, it is not formally coordinated among all agencies for clients who are receiving services from multiple agencies. This creates duplication of services, inefficiency, and gaps in addressing client barriers. Okanogan is the most rural community in Washington state. It is appropriate and effective for individuals to receive services as close to home as possible and requires providers to have exceptional communication across vast distances.

In addition, clients with high barriers are often shared across sectors, such as law enforcement, behavioral health, and emergency responders.

Insufficient Funding: While Okanogan County agencies do have limited funding, sources targeted to reducing homelessness, the demand for services continues to grow. Several key funding sources either have been reduced or have stagnated over the past three to five years. Funding has not kept pace with demand and is expected to be even more limited over the coming years. In addition, more expensive operating costs mean that funding does not stretch as far as it once did. Accessing, and advocating for, additional funding resources will be critical to implementing the strategies outlined in the Action Plan.

Because of this limited funding, existing funding must be invested as effectively as possible. Over the last 10 years, significant research has demonstrated the most effective homeless housing and programs, yet many of these programs are not well suited to a service area the size of this county. Multiple offices to provide immediate service are outside the bounds of grant funding at this time. More effective partnerships and systems will need to recognize this barrier and work to reduce it.

Limited Capacity: Capacity issues exist on two levels in our community. The underlying issue is that the existing emergency, supportive and permanent affordable housing available is not adequate to meet the demand.

Homeless services, such as emergency shelters, are being strained and usually run at capacity during a limited winter period.

Since there are not sufficient homeless housing units or beds available to meet the demand, homeless individuals and families are forced to find shelter in temporary or unsuitable conditions. Waiting lists for permanent subsidized housing, such as Housing Choice Vouchers, are often years long.

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On a second level, some agencies' abilities to manage the expansion of an existing program or develop a new program are limited. This may be due to a need for more specific expertise and experience within agencies. Agencies can also be reluctant to expand or create new programs without assurance that they have funding for the ongoing operation and maintenance of these programs. Agencies may also need assistance developing their agency capacity through emerging evidence-based practices.

Proposed Strategies

At a time when demand is increasing, and resources are decreasing, doing more with less is imperative, but more resources are needed as well. Increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the homeless housing system through maximizing system coordination, provider capacity, and overall system capacity is critical.

Using performance measures and data to drive decision-making and improving coordination among different systems of care and among service providers will improve efficiency.

We must ensure the strategic investment of public funds through incorporating evidence-based practices in new and existing programs to shift the response system. Additional funding is needed to keep up with the demand for homeless housing and services. An evolving economic environment and population require ensuring the "right-sizing" of our homeless response system, by continuing to monitor the number and demand for different housing units and developing new units of housing to be as flexible as possible. The proposed Action Plan is ambitious and includes many new action steps; a new process for setting funding priorities needs to be developed and implemented to target funding to priority needs.

Provider capacity and outcomes can be improved through providing training on evidence-base practices and performance measurement and implementing shelter care standards. The Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) system being utilized in greater depth by OCCAC is available to all members of the Housing Coalition as a model for increased accountability.

GOAL 5: Expand community engagement

Community understanding and support for addressing homelessness is essential for generating the leadership and resources to be successful.

Current Needs and Gaps

Leadership: Although leadership for homeless issues is strong within the homeless response system, it needs to be expanded to incorporate a broader representation from other sectors and systems of care that interact with the issues of affordable housing and homelessness.

Citizens: One of the most frequent themes at the Stakeholders meetings for this Plan was the need for having coordinated and consistent communication about the issue of homelessness with the broader community so that compassion for those experiencing homelessness can be increased, leading to greater community support and involvement. Expanded efforts to advocate within local, state and federal venues must be on-going.

Planning Integration: Housing stability is increasingly being identified as an important component of the success of other sectors, such as health care and behavioral health. Coordinating and integrating strategies is just beginning to be recognized as essential to success for clients in all these systems of care. The timing of the update to this Plan is intended to allow for increased coordination between planning efforts. As Coalition members begin to work with Health Care Coordination, we anticipate increased efficiency and the opportunity to increase prevention of homelessness before a crisis occurs.

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Proposed Strategies

Leadership on the issue of homelessness by our elected officials and representatives from across the different sectors that touch individuals experiencing homelessness is required to make the policy changes that are needed. **Raising awareness and engaging our community** is essential to creating the community and political involvement to expand solutions. Advocacy at the state and federal level increases the likelihood of the needed funding streams to implement this plan in Okanogan County.

In addition, ensuring that **planning for homelessness and affordable housing are integrated** with other planning efforts such as the worker housing effort by the Economic Alliance and the Housing Trust models forming with other services delivery will provide a more cohesive and comprehensive response.

By focusing efforts on these strategies and specific action steps that support them, we can make homelessness rare, brief, and one-time.

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Action Plan Detail: Goals, Strategies, and Action Steps

GOAL 1	Make homelessness rare	
Indicators of Success		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Fewer people experience homelessness for the first time ★ Fewer people discharged from institutions to homelessness ★ Fewer low-income people are cost-burdened by their housing (spending more than 50% of income on housing) 	Measures	Action steps
<p>⊕ <i>Strategy 1.1</i></p> <p><i>Prevent people from losing their homes</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Targeted prevention: Ensure that homelessness prevention programs (short-term rent assistance for eviction prevention) are targeted to those people who are most at risk of becoming homeless B. County-wide assessment tool: Develop and implement a county-wide vulnerability assessment/self-sufficiency evaluation tool to ensure that the most vulnerable are prioritized for prevention assistance C. Shelter diversion: Support programs that divert people from shelter through flexible funding for non-housing related items to prevent homelessness, such as car repair, childcare, etc. and pursue opportunities for further improvement D. Connection to existing supports: Continually improve access and connections to existing social supports and benefits E. Fixed-income subsidies: Increase availability of subsidies for people with a fixed-income (elderly, disabled, etc.) 	<p>A. Targeted prevention: Homelessness prevention activities will be supported by virtue of county recording fees. Funded implementation of strategies will be reviewed by and agreed to between Homeless Task Force, Housing Coalition members and local government after:</p> <p>B. County-wide assessment tool: Assessment through Coordinated Entry is being evaluated by two Coalition members and final priorities will be developed by OCCAC in consultation with Coalition providers</p> <p>C.D. Shelter diversion & Connection to existing supports: Coalition members will support their organizations in shelter diversion and strengthening connections to existing supports.</p> <p>E. Fixed-income subsidies: OCCAC will use long term case management and resource directories to assist in identifying and increasing access to subsidies</p>
<p>⊕ <i>Strategy 1.2</i></p> <p><i>Prevent people from being discharged into homelessness</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Coordinated discharge programs: Develop and implement additional housing and programs to ensure stable housing destinations for people being discharged from jail, hospitals, foster care, and inpatient 	<p>A. Coordinated discharge programs: Coordination with all housing and programs is ongoing but funding is not available to develop additional resources at points of discharge. This will be a long term</p>

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	<p>or 24/7 behavioral health programs</p> <p>B. Respite beds: Explore opportunities to develop respite housing beds (for short-term stays for people with complex medical and/or behavioral health needs)</p>	<p>goal.</p> <p>B. Respite beds: As with A above, the Coalition will advocate for and seek to explore partnerships with Hospitals and Assisted Living/Adult Care homes as time and funding become available.</p>
<p>⊛ <i>Strategy 1.3</i></p> <p><i>Increase availability of affordable housing</i></p>	<p>A. Affordable Housing Task Force: participate in the existing task forces to specifically identify and implement strategies to increase the availability and number of units of housing affordable to households earning 30% - 80% of area median income in Okanogan County.</p> <p>B. 30% - 50% AMI housing: Increase units of housing that are affordable for households earning less than 50% of area median income</p> <p>C. Workforce housing: Increase units of workforce housing for households earning 50% - 80% of area median income</p> <p>D. Partner with landlords: Support programs that incentivize and reduce risk for private land lords to rent to low-income and formerly homeless households; provide case management resources and emergency response resources for resolution of tenant issues</p> <p>E. New funding: Develop new, local, dedicated funding streams to support development and subsidization of affordable housing units</p>	<p>A. Affordable Housing Task Force: By June 1st, 2019 the Coalition will explore and recommend a plan to support and improve if necessary existing affordable housing planning activities.</p> <p>B. 30% - 50% AMI housing: The Coalition will support housing development activities led by the Housing Authority of Okanogan County, the Oroville Housing Authority and any housing development agencies/companies and will encourage future development to serve the target AMI. The Coalition will support partners in their endeavor to develop revenues for building affordable housing such as taxes, bonds, and housing levy.</p> <p>C. Workforce housing: The Coalition will work with housing providers such as the Methow Housing Trust and agencies such as the Economic Alliance to assist them in their effort to expand access to affordable housing for this targeted AMI.</p> <p>D. Partner with landlords: The coalition will continue to support current housing providers in their activities with landlords</p> <p>E. New Funding: The Coalition will support partners in their endeavor to develop revenues for building affordable housing such as grants, taxes, bonds, and housing levy.</p>

GOAL 2	<i>Make homelessness brief</i>	
Indicators of Success		

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ People experience fewer days of homelessness before being sheltered ★ People experience fewer days of homelessness in shelters ★ Fewer people are experiencing unsheltered homelessness 	Measures	Action Steps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊕ Strategy 2.1 <p><i>Provide immediate shelter for all who want it</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Overnight shelter: Support current overnight shelters in reducing barriers to use by homeless individuals B. Resident shelter beds for underserved populations: Identify funding and strategies to explore opportunities and plans for underserved populations. (youth, veterans, seniors etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Overnight shelter: All Coalition members will advise, collaborate as possible, and share best practices with current shelter operators, including tiny shelters, Oroville winter emergency camp, Shove House, and Support Center B. Resident shelter beds for underserved populations: Current Youth Homelessness Coalition will explore best practices and opportunities to develop beds for youth. All Coalition members will share information on funding and development opportunities as appropriate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊕ Strategy 2.3 <p><i>Move households as quickly as possible to appropriate permanent housing</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Rapid Rehousing: Provide Rapid Rehousing programs for households with short-term barriers to housing stability B. Extended Rapid Rehousing: Provide “extended” Rapid Rehousing subsidies & case management for households who need additional time to regain self-sufficiency C. Permanent Supportive Housing: Increase units of permanent supportive housing with sustained operating funds for individuals with long-term and/or complex barriers to stable housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. B. Rapid Rehousing & Extended Rapid Rehousing: As funding allows, Coalition members will engage in Rapid Rehousing and Extended Rapid Rehousing practices C. Permanent Supportive Housing Coalition Members will support affordable housing projects that align with the goals of the plan. This support extends to for-profit developers that reduce pressure on the low income rental market as well as low income housing developers.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊕ Strategy 2.3 <p><i>Prioritize ending homelessness as soon as possible for people who are unsheltered and/or chronically homeless</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Master List: Identify unsheltered homeless through a Master List Project (outreach census/survey) B. De-criminalize homelessness: Ensure that homelessness is not criminalized and that life-sustaining activities (sleeping, eating) are allowed in public places and interim survival mechanisms that create pathways to housing are supported C. Housing First Units: Create sufficient “Come as you are 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. U Master List: utilize Coordinated Entry program to generate Master List of unsheltered homeless individuals. By December 2019 OCCAC will actively work to engage all Coalition members and other critical partners in Coordinated Entry. B. De-criminalize homelessness: OCCAC will share recent case verdicts regarding decriminalization of homelessness with Coalition members so they

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	<p>housing” units (Housing First/Harm Reduction/Unconditional Housing/Low- barrier Housing) with long term operating supports to house all individuals who need it</p>	<p>can effectively support outdoor living options housing options</p> <p>C. Housing First Units: Coalition members will engage in efforts to create Rapid Rehousing that addresses needs and where people are in their lives, removing the concept of barriers to housing in qualifications</p>
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GOAL 3	Make homelessness one-time	
Indicators of Success	Measures	Action Steps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ More people exit homelessness to stable housing ★ More people exit homelessness with increased income and/or benefits ★ Fewer people return to homelessness after being stably housed ★ More units of housing are available for low- income households 	<p>A. Policies supporting affordable housing and Permanent Supportive Housing: Increase units of affordable housing and permanent supportive housing (see strategies & actions under 1.3 and 2.3 above) through inclusionary zoning and support to developers of affordable housing</p>	<p>A. Policies supporting affordable housing and Permanent Supportive Housing: Members of the Coalition will be encouraged to be active participants in state wide agencies who are working on policies that support affordable housing and homeless issues, including the WA Low Income Housing Alliance, WA State Department of Commerce, WA Associate of Housing Authorities, Affordable Rural Housing Council, & WACAP.. Members will actively inform prospective housing developers and stakeholders of affordable housing needs and barriers to developing affordable housing. Members will create opportunities to advocate to policy makers around Okanogan Housing needs, including an annual meeting with legislators (some of which will be organized by OCCAC).</p>
<p>⊗ Strategy 3.1 <i>Expand connections to & supply of appropriate tailored resources</i></p>	<p>Continuously improve the homeless response system</p>	

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<p>GOAL 4</p>		
<p>Indicators of Success</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Countywide performance indicators are being used ★ Coordinated care programs are in place ★ Evidence-based practices are being used ★ Shelter care standards have been developed and adopted 	<p>Measures</p>	<p>Action Steps</p>
<p>★ Strategy 4.1</p> <p><i>Use performance measures and data to drive decision-making</i></p>	<p>A. Data-driven evaluation: Develop data systems that identify and expand effective programs</p> <p>B. Countywide performance measurement: Develop and use county-wide performance indicators and metrics to track progress within appropriate data systems.</p>	<p>A. Data-driven evaluation: Members of Coalition will enroll in and utilize Coordinated Entry Software to establish baseline data and utilize the data to inform program development.</p> <p>B. Countywide performance measurement: Coalition members will agree to goals and indicators established by OCCAC once Coordinated Entry tracking has developed data for a full 12 months with all members participating. Coalition members will participate in HMIS tracking of homeless services as soon as possible and as appropriate.</p>

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<p>★ Strategy 4.2 <i>Improve coordination among different systems of care and service providers</i></p>	<p>A. Improve coordination across sectors: Improve coordination and communication with other mainstream care systems, including emergency responders</p> <p>B. Coordinated case management: Utilize coordinated care teams, bringing together case managers and other system providers from different organizations for multiple-barrier clients, as appropriate</p>	<p>A. Improve coordination across sectors: With participation from the Coalition, OCCAC will assist in organizing an annual meeting among housing providers, health care providers, school districts and emergency responders to further develop a pipeline for assisting homeless individuals with housing.</p> <p>B. Coordinated case management: Coalition members will expand the use of the Coordinated Entry system and continue to utilize care teams as appropriate.</p>
<p>★ Strategy 4.3 <i>Ensure strategic investments of public funds</i></p>	<p>A. Use evidence-based strategies: Prioritize local funding to evidence-based practices and tools known to be most effective</p> <p>B. Develop new annual priorities-setting process: Develop and implement process to set annual funding priorities</p> <p>C. Project needed units: Use one of the available predictive tools to project the number of emergency and supportive housing units needed to meet the current gap.</p> <p>D. Additional funding: Advocate for, create, and attract additional dedicated funding for homeless housing and services</p>	<p>A. Use evidence-based strategies: Coalition members will utilize a matrix to assess the use of evidence-based strategies among those organization who apply for local funding and allocate funds accordingly.</p> <p>B Develop new annual priorities-setting process: The Coalition will meet in August of each year to set priorities.</p> <p>C. Project needed units: The Coalition will research and agree to utilize county-wide housing needs assessment and any new tools available from HUD.</p> <p>D. Additional funding: Coalition members will jointly advocate to bring additional revenue to homeless efforts in the county, including a sales tax surcharge</p>
<p>GOAL 5</p>	<p>Expand community engagement</p>	

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Indicators of Success		
	Measures	Action Steps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Leadership group is convened and actively engaged ★ Communication plan is developed and implemented ★ Homelessness and affordable housing are included in on-going planning efforts in other sectors ★ Homelessness and affordable housing are coordinated with Medical providers, ACH, and BHO 		
<p>★ <i>Strategy 5.1</i></p> <p><i>Provide accountable community leadership</i></p>	<p>A. Growing leadership and participation: Engage and strengthen a county-wide homelessness stakeholder group that could include participation at the executive level from a broad range of sectors including (but not limited to): elected officials, policy-makers, homeless service providers, behavioral health providers, medical providers, law enforcement, business-owners, emergency responders, planning, transit, education, youth providers, churches/faith-based organizations, and others. The purpose of the group would be to support the work to end homelessness, improve cross-sector coordination, and devise and implement cross-sector strategies.</p> <p>B. Advocacy: Advocate at the local, state, and federal level for homeless and affordable housing issues</p>	<p>A. Growing leadership and participation: With leadership from OCCAC, Coalition members will ask representatives to serve on a county-wide stakeholder group to support homelessness coordination. This group will be contacted by OCCAC annually to learn about homelessness resources and funding opportunities. The Coalition will explore opportunities to elevate group to a sustainable leadership council.</p> <p>B. Advocacy: The Coalition will inform cities located in Okanogan County of funding sources available to address the need for affordable housing and assist entities in selling propositions for affordable housing to voters. All members of the Coalition agree to participate in advocacy efforts and to engage their boards in these efforts as appropriate.</p>
<p><i>e community leaders and citizens to take action</i></p>	<p>A. Communication Plan: Utilize communication and outreach tools to share information about homelessness resources and funding opportunities.</p> <p>B. Data sharing: Move towards distributing periodic easily accessible data about homelessness and affordable housing to stakeholders, elected officials, and the public</p> <p>C. Volunteer opportunities: Promote opportunities for personal connection and “humanizing” the</p>	<p>A. Communication Plan: All members of the Coalition will assist with communication and outreach.</p> <p>B. Data sharing: All Coalition members will participate in HMIS and CE, Coalition members will explore ways to share data once data is more robustly collected.</p> <p>C. Volunteer opportunities: OCCAC will continue annual Day of Service as an opportunity for volunteer engagement.</p>

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<p>★ Strategy 5.3</p> <p><i>Integrate planning for homelessness and affordable housing with other planning efforts</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">issue of homelessness through volunteer projects</p> <p>A. Coordinate with other plans: Support and coordinate with other strategies to end homelessness and increase affordable housing as they are identified by the Department of Commerce or developed across the community.</p> <p>B. Cross-sector planning: Participate in planning efforts for housing, land use, economic development, behavioral health, education, and transportation throughout Okanogan County</p> <p>C. Integrate with health system innovations: Coordinate and integrate housing and homelessness strategies and action steps with innovative health systems</p> <p>D. Support other homelessness initiatives: Support other initiatives and plans to address homelessness in sub-populations (e.g. veteran homelessness, chronic homelessness, youth homelessness)</p>	<p>A. Coordinate with other plans: The Coalition will adapt the current plan to meet the requirements of the Department of Commerce and stay connected to local housing movement.</p> <p>B. Cross-sector planning: Coalition members will actively connect with the cross-sector agencies and report back to the Coalition as appropriate</p> <p>C. Integrate with health system innovations: Housing Authority will share this plan with the North Central Accountable Community of Health, the local Coalition for Healthcare Improvement group</p> <p>D. Support other homelessness initiatives: Current members of the Coalition will engage with additional housing/homeless initiatives. Updates initiatives will be reported back to the Coalition and the County Commissioners on a quarterly basis.</p>
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VI. Defining and Documenting Success

For many years success in homeless programs was defined by how many people received housing services. Over time, the idea of what constitutes success has shifted to focus on outcomes for the individuals served. It is not enough to say that services were received, but instead we must determine the efficacy of those services in reducing homelessness. This can be a difficult process, since long-term follow-up of people who received housing or services is difficult and impractical.

Challenges

In addition, determining success in the realm of reducing overall homelessness is an elusive proposition. Several factors contribute to the challenge:

Dynamic Population The homeless population is not static: there is a constant influx of people who are becoming homeless at any given time, while at the same time previously homeless people are being housed. While hundreds of homeless people may have been housed over a period of time, more have become homeless over the same period. Therefore, the overall number of homeless may have stayed the same or increased.

Prevention Efforts Many of our efforts are geared at preventing homelessness and evaluating the long-term effectiveness of these programs is difficult to measure.

Inaccurate Data & Counts There are numerous homeless people who either do not consider themselves to be homeless because they are “staying with friends” or “living in their car” or who do not want to be counted due to a variety of personal issues. Our community experiences these people and their homelessness, but they are not

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included in our voluntary homeless counts.

Challenges notwithstanding, it is crucial that we develop ways to assess whether the time, effort, and financial commitments to the issue of homelessness are effective.

Tools

In addition to data from community partners, two primary tools will be used to assist with evaluating success:

Annual Point in Time Count

Each January the Okanogan Continuum of Care (which is also the Housing Coalition) is mandated to carry out a countywide count of homeless people, both sheltered (currently receiving subsidized emergency or transitional housing) and un-sheltered (living on the streets, in cars, with friends, or identified as incarcerated transients). Participation by people experiencing homelessness is voluntary. Data collected from this effort provides the state with basic statistics about Okanogan County progress in reducing homelessness, and provides the Housing Coalition for Okanogan County agencies with information about the housing and services gaps.

Homeless Management Information System

This state- and federally-mandated database project collects detailed data about users of homeless housing and services. The collected data is used by the state to analyze the resources necessary to move individuals from homelessness to self-sufficiency. On a local level, it facilitates coordination among agencies and delivery of services to homeless individuals. It also allows excellent quality demographic and programmatic information to be collected about homeless households who are receiving services.

Performance Indicators

For each of the Plan's five goals, specific indicators of success are listed. Some are data-based, whereas others are performance-based. These performance indicators are also drawn from measures developed by the Washington State Department of Commerce, HUD, and referenced in the HEARTH Act.

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Performance Indicators for the Okanogan Homeless Housing Plan				
	Name	Measure	Metric	Source
GOAL 1: Make homelessness rare.				
1.1	Prevention	Fewer people experience homelessness for the first time	# of new people who have become homeless	HMIS
1.2	Institutional Discharges	Fewer people discharged from institutions to homelessness	# of people discharged from institutions	Hospitals, Jail, Foster Care, etc.
1.3	Cost-burdened	Fewer people are cost-burdened by their housing	# of cost-burdened households	WA Commerce, OKPHD, Census
GOAL 2: Make homelessness brief.				
2.1	Term of Homelessness	People experience fewer days of homelessness before being sheltered	Average # of days before getting into emergency shelter	Community Waiting List
2.2	Term in Shelter	People experience fewer days of homelessness in shelters	Average # of days spent in shelter	HMIS
2.3	Unsheltered Homelessness	Fewer people are experiencing unsheltered homelessness	# of people unsheltered, sheltered, or in temporary housing	Point in Time Count
GOAL 3: Make homelessness one-time.				
3.1	Exit Destination	More people exit homelessness into stable housing	# of people exiting from each type of program to each type of destination	HMIS
3.2	Income at Exit	More people exit homelessness with increased income and/or benefits	# of people exiting programs with increased income	HMIS
3.3	Housing Stability	Fewer people return to homelessness after being stably housed	# returns to homelessness within 2 years of stable exit	HMIS
3.4	Affordable Housing Units	More units of housing are available for low-income households	# of subsidized housing units	WA Commerce
GOAL 4: Continuously improve the homeless response system.				
4.1	Countywide Indicators	Countywide performance indicators are being used	Countywide indicators report is being produced	HCFOC members
4.2	Coordinated Care	Coordinated care programs are in place	# of clients served in coordinated care programs	HCFOC members
4.3	Evidence-based Practices	Evidence-based practices are being used in delivering services	# of KC contracts that include evidence-based practices	HCFOC members
4.4	Shelter Care Standards	Shelter care standards have been developed and adopted	# of shelters that have adopted care standards	HCFOC members
GOAL 5: Expand community engagement.				
5.1	Leadership Group	Leadership group is convened and actively engaged	Leadership group is selected and is meeting	HCFOC members
5.2	Communication Plan	Communication plan is developed and implemented	Communication plan is being used	HCFOC members
5.3	Coordinated Planning	Homelessness and affordable housing are included in on-going planning efforts in other sectors	Housing and homelessness representatives participate in planning efforts	HCFOC members OK County BOC

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VII. Conclusion

Ending Homelessness Requires Commitment

Making homelessness rare, brief, and one-time must be one of our community's top priorities. It will require us to meld specific strategies to decrease homelessness and to implement broader policy changes to achieve an overall increase in affordable housing.

Our county's Homeless Housing Plan is an expression of a collective commitment to actively seek long-term and sustainable solutions to the issue rather than to simply manage episodes of homelessness as they occur.

We will need to examine our past assumptions about this issue and honestly and critically assess our present activities and initiatives. We need to do business differently – changing systems, redirecting existing resources, and securing additional funding commitments.

We must rely on all community stakeholders to drive policy changes that will result in reducing the number of people experiencing homelessness in Okanogan County:

- A. County Commissioners, Mayors, City Council Members
- B. Tribes
- C. Federal, State and County Agencies / Department Heads
- D. Business & civic leaders
- E. Public / Homeless Population
- F. Housing Developers & Service Providers
- G. Non-profit organizations
- H. Foundations
- I. Faith-based organizations

Moving Forward to Reduce Homelessness

It is evident that a new approach is needed since people continue to become homeless; those who are chronically homeless continue to lapse into homelessness using precious resources without successfully regaining housing; and too many people are turned away from assistance because of lack of capacity. This Plan proposes strategies to correct the flaws. This will require community investment. It builds on the successful programs we already have in place, expanding capacity to meet the level of need, and implementing policies and agreements to weave them together into one comprehensive and effective countywide system of care.

The Future of Homelessness

Many social and governmental factors beyond the control of community members contribute to the epidemic of homelessness: low minimum wage, declining job market, lack of affordable housing, and high housing and rental prices. Huge efforts will be needed to meet the needs of people who become homeless.

However, with a clear plan to reduce homelessness, the community's investment of resources, and an unwavering commitment to our community members in crisis, we can be successful in making homelessness rare, brief, and one-time.

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VIII. **Appendix**

Affordable Housing Advisory Board needs study – Okanogan

MIT Living Wage Calculator - Okanogan

Costs Associated with First Time Homelessness – HUD

Youth Homelessness in Okanogan – Housing Coalition

Self Sufficiency Standard for Washington state 2014 Revised 2015