



TRI-COUNTY EQUITABLE HOUSING STRATEGY TO EXPAND SUPPORTIVE HOUSING FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCING CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS

PREPARED FOR CLACKAMAS, MULTNOMAH
& WASHINGTON COUNTIES BY CSH &
CONTEXT FOR ACTION
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Homelessness is a challenging and increasingly visible issue throughout the greater Portland region. It is traumatic for those who experience it, safety-net responses are costly and better solutions are possible through coordinated regional investment and action. This is especially true for people with complex health conditions and long-term experiences of homelessness.

Vikki was homeless for over four years. She was convinced that her medication for schizophrenia was poisoning her so she stopped taking it and started having severe hallucinations. While sleeping outside, she would wake up most days at 5:00 a.m. because she felt like the police would ask her to leave, or even worse, arrest her. During the daylight hours she says, “I walked aimlessly, 10-12 hours a day, yelling at walls and screaming at imaginary ‘enemies’.”

Through outreach and engagement, she was offered supportive housing and three weeks later moved in. With a home and supportive services, she learned and re-learned everything, including simple things like taking a shower. Since moving into supportive housing, she has stabilized, takes her medication regularly, receives other important health services and has a supportive community in her building and life. In her own words she sums it up like this, “I can’t even explain how incredible it is to live again after feeling like I was dying for so long.”

Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington Counties convened an extensive planning process with support from Metro to better understand the scale of regional need and to identify best strategies for effective responses. The resulting recommendations can significantly reduce chronic homelessness for people in the Tri-county region through realignment of siloed systems and expansion of supportive housing – deeply affordable housing coupled with supportive services to help people recover, achieve stability and thrive.

While the regional need is significant – at least 3,121 units of supportive housing, which could cost up to \$998 million over a decade – a scaled response sufficient to meet the need is highly achievable. For example, Multnomah County already has 517 new units of supportive housing on the ground or in the pipeline. Furthermore, systems are already paying for the costs of chronic homelessness. A person experiencing long-term homelessness costs public systems almost \$40,000 a year¹ while the average cost of supportive housing in the Metro area is less than \$22,500 annually.²

It is nearly twice as expensive for people to remain homeless as it is for them to be successfully housed.

Extensive local stakeholder engagement and best practices research identify the following priorities for early action:

- Create more deeply affordable housing dedicated as supportive housing
- Expand flexible resources to fund supportive services and rent subsidies that help people access and succeed in housing
- Build regional capacity to:
 - rapidly scale supportive housing programming
 - coordinate funding and investment strategies
 - measure outcomes and effectiveness
 - communicate strategies and results

This report identifies key opportunities to realize these priorities across the tri-county region through new ways of organizing and expanding the work across public, health, housing and related sectors.

¹ National Alliance to End Homelessness 2015 <https://endhomelessness.org/resource/ending-chronic-homelessness-saves-taxpayers-money/> & adjusting for inflation to 2018 dollars <http://www.in2013dollars.com/2015-dollars-in-2018?amount=35578>

² According to cost modeling for this report, see page 24.

Shared Challenge, Shared Approach

Complex health needs, trauma, mental illness, substance use disorders, and other disabilities, coupled with the lack of affordable housing for households with extremely low incomes all contribute to individuals and families becoming homeless and often prevent those households from being able to exit homelessness without significant supports. Institutional and structural racism is also a significant driver of chronic homelessness. While the social, emotional and financial burdens of chronic homelessness are most significantly felt by those directly experiencing homelessness, everyone in the region is affected.

Supportive housing, a proven intervention for chronic homelessness aligns deeply affordable housing with effective delivery of supportive services. Supportive housing embraces systemic realignment of regional housing, justice, healthcare and service delivery systems so that they work together. Done well, it stitches together partners and programs across a variety of boundaries, sectors and systems to create accessible pathways that end chronic homelessness reduce racial disparities and improve health outcomes

Over the long term, supportive housing helps transform societal systems of divestment that result in extreme poverty to socially just, inclusive communities where everyone, especially those with special needs, lives in dignity.

Regional Need, Regional Solutions

Siloed and limited county-by-county approaches to supportive housing are insufficient, and a regional approach increases the potential for impact. Our housing markets, transportation networks, employment and health systems all function on a regional basis. Working together will create a better understanding of the consequences of overburdened systems, develop efficiencies, address common challenges in a shared service delivery system and generate coordinated action to scale systems according to the need. Additionally, coming together as a region will open access to more state, federal and local resources.

Efforts and agreement towards alignment of homeless services systems are well underway. A supportive housing forum held in May 2019, other extensive metro wide community engagement and an involved Steering Committee significantly contributed to this report and its robust strategies to address resources, alignment and implementation. (See following graphic).

Leaders across the area agree moving from continuous crisis response to long-term solutions will reduce the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness. Creating supportive housing through smart resource strategies, greater alignment of housing and services, and effective implementation of necessary systems change is the right way to proceed. It will take time to accomplish, but the region must start now in order to address the human suffering, community pressures and growing costs of chronic homelessness.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REGIONAL SCALING OF SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

The goal of this plan is to reduce chronic homelessness for people with complex health conditions by scaling a blended housing-services system adequate to meet the regional need within ten years.

This graphic summarizes strategic, early-stage recommendations for initiating the system changes required to expand supportive housing in Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas Counties.

