



## Regional Policy Framework: Funding Priorities

### Introduction

The HereTogether Coalition is pursuing a dedicated source of funding for homeless services and housing stability. The purpose of this document is to guide the creation, distribution, accountability, and oversight of supportive service funds we intend to be approved by voters at a future election.

We are guided by the belief that a safe, affordable home is the cornerstone on which all other success is built, and the stable foundation all members of our community need to thrive. We value a community where all of our neighbors have a safe, affordable place to call home, and recognize that the housing affordability and homelessness crisis in the Portland Metro region impacts all of us. This crisis requires collective and individual action from every person, business, elected official, and resident that calls the region home. We believe we can come together to fund solutions that match the scale and scope of the issue.

We recognize that communities of color have been directly impacted by a long list of systemic inequities and discriminatory policies that have caused higher rates of housing instability and homelessness among people of color. Communities of color are disproportionately represented in the housing affordability and homelessness crisis, thus our efforts emphasize the need to focus on equity.

We have come together as a coalition of business leaders, elected officials, service providers, advocates, faith communities, culturally-specific providers, and people with lived experience of homelessness and housing insecurity understanding that it will take all of us to meaningfully address the Portland Metro region's housing affordability and homeless crisis.

We understand that our housing affordability and homelessness crisis is an issue of scale because, as we know, our services do not yet match the scope of the crisis. We understand that thousands of our neighbors experiencing homelessness and extreme poverty want to improve their situations, but for lack of resources, in many cases, all they can do is get on long waiting lists. We want to ensure that supportive services are available when they can be most effective — not weeks or months in the future, but right away.

We believe we can maximize our region's historic, billion-dollar investment in sticks and bricks affordable housing construction and development by securing highly flexible funding to invest in proven, outcome-driven, client-centered solutions like case management, job training, addiction and recovery services, mental health support, rent assistance (both long- and short-term), homelessness prevention services, housing placement, and other tools people need to be successful.

While we anticipate the funds will be initially prioritized for those experiencing chronic homelessness, as well as those most at risk of losing their homes and entering chronic or long-term homelessness, we have kept our strategies broad with the hope that they can remain client-centered with a focus on equity. As our regional partners address and stabilize these populations with various housing options, we anticipate the funds will be reprioritized to support other populations affected by our housing affordability crisis from becoming homeless. In doing so, we believe those who have experienced chronic or sporadic homelessness, as well as our region's lowest-income residents who might be at risk of homelessness, will have the greatest opportunity to thrive in our community over the lifetime of the investment.

## **Our Unique Opportunity: Why we must act now**

The Portland Metro region is facing a severe housing affordability and homelessness crisis, which endangers the health and safety of thousands of our unhoused neighbors. Homelessness is a deeply traumatic and dehumanizing experience that no person should have to endure, regardless of their circumstances. Many of our neighbors are one missed paycheck or one unexpected medical expense away from homelessness. Seniors, children, people of color, people who identify as LGBTQ+, women, persons with disabilities, youth exiting foster care, people with criminal records, victims of domestic violence, unaccompanied homeless youth, and people living with certain chronic health conditions are disproportionately represented in our homeless population and most at risk of chronic homelessness.

We know that homelessness and the need to house our neighbors is a top priority for residents of all three counties in the Portland Metropolitan area. Between 2016 and 2018 voters in the region overwhelmingly approved two affordable housing bonds worth nearly \$1 billion, which will add more than 5,300 permanently affordable homes to our region. We now have a unique opportunity to capitalize on those victories and our community's priorities to enact measurable improvement on the lives of low-income residents in our region, and livability for everyone, while ensuring that for every one person this funding moves off the street, two more will not end up in similar predicaments.

We are seeking funds that will take these bond investments in affordable housing to the next level. The Portland Metro region already has a strong network of community members, nonprofit agencies, government bureaus, and faith communities working together to find creative solutions that support our neighbors experiencing homelessness and extreme poverty. We are aiming to increase funding for their service-based work at a scale that matches the need evident on our streets and in our community, is client-focused, and helps people who have experienced homelessness successfully transition to housing and remain in their homes. We recognize that funding supportive services will not be enough, and that in order for programs to reach the populations they are designed to serve, we must fund experienced, trained, frontline outreach programs to actively intervene and actively connect people to services. We recognize that the crisis is immediate, but scaling up will take time and therefore immediate needs in terms of prevention and safety from the streets, including providing safe shelter and public health options, will need to be immediately available.

Caseworkers, nonprofit providers, government agencies, and faith communities help thousands of our neighbors experiencing homelessness get into housing every year, while helping thousands more remain stably housed. We have done this in spite of the federal government dramatically cutting funding for affordable housing and homelessness services. Research demonstrates that the longer someone is experiencing homelessness the harder it is for them to regain stability.

## Our Approach

We propose alleviating people's homelessness in our community by:

- I. **Providing client-centered wraparound, highly flexible services, and creating genuine economic opportunity** for people who are currently experiencing homelessness and those populations most at risk of becoming homeless. These may include investing in a robust workforce of case managers who can help them navigate the existing systems and understand the services available to them, supporting with mental health and recovery services, providing rent assistance, helping those who are currently on the streets with street outreach programs that will transition people off the streets, job training, social security and benefits navigation and more.
- II. **Constantly striving to work together and improve our systems** by aligning our work, cultivating public, private, faith community, and nonprofit partnerships, and funding proven and innovative programs and services.
- III. **Transparency, Outcomes And Oversight:** We recognize that in order to earn and maintain community support, success will be based on critically recognized metrics that measure the results of the service provided and evidence that the communities disproportionately impacted are benefiting. We must establish a robust governance and oversight structure that is representative of diverse stakeholders, ensures that new revenue raised to fund these critical programs efficiently makes it to frontline service providers, is appropriately leveraged with existing service dollars, and is not used to replace existing funding. An official oversight entity must be legally empowered to track all revenue, evaluate program implementation, and take appropriate action to ensure outcomes match intentions. The regional oversight committee will have the power to approve or deny local implementation plans that do not meet this criteria. A new tax dedicated to these services will require periodic voter approval to be renewed.

*\*Please see our attached strategy document for more information.*

## Our Desired Outcomes

We expect to reduce unsheltered and sheltered homeless populations by maximizing the potential of our region's new investments in affordable housing, to help those who are currently on the streets, and to help vulnerable residents succeed in remaining in their homes. To do this we will:

- Secure the stable, ongoing revenue necessary to reduce homelessness across our region, and prevent people from becoming homeless. The revenue mechanism should match the scale of the problem and should be flexible enough to meet the needs of individual people, and the changing realities of homelessness and poverty in our region so we can respond to needs for years to come.
- As our transitional housing and affordable housing stock expands, neighbors experiencing chronic homelessness are successfully, permanently housed because they received the help they needed. This will be tracked using annual research including the HUD Point in Time Count.
- Use additional funds secured to fully realize the value of existing capital construction dollars, and existing service investments across the community. We need region-wide systems to assess, inventory and integrate existing efforts while investing in proven solutions that combat chronic homelessness. We believe regional collaboration and innovation between local governments, culturally responsive and client-centered service providers, the faith community, nonprofits, and community-based organizations is a key way to measure our success and make an impact.
- Ensure that we are lowering the number of individuals experiencing long-term and new homelessness to prevent a net-negative effect. We must minimize the chance that people become homeless and minimize the amount of time they spend doubled up, couch surfing or on the streets if they do.
- Services should be client-centered, culturally-responsive, with demonstrated commitment to prioritizing equity with a focus on leading with race in service provision and outcomes.
- Grow and strengthen availability of services that promote education and access to justice for those most at risk of losing their homes.
- Once the funds are successfully secured, community-based oversight will oversee implementation of the principles outlined in this document.

## Our Guiding Principles

- **Focus on equity and lead with race.** People in communities disproportionately impacted by homelessness must have a leadership role in shaping programs and services. In addition, we must improve outcomes through targeted investments and by expanding culturally specific and responsive services in all counties. When we directly address the barriers people of color face, we also remove barriers from other disadvantaged groups and create solutions that work for everyone. Leading with race begins the reversal of a long list of systems and policies that have caused disproportionate rates of housing instability and homelessness among people of color, including exclusionary zoning laws, overcharging for housing, disproportionate rates of evictions, fewer opportunities for home-ownership, gentrification, and persistent, significant disparities in economic opportunity.
- In order to **prioritize equitable outcomes**, we expect a robust racial equity lens, will be employed that outlines expected results, data collection and analysis, community engagement,

targeted strategies and approaches, implementation and accountability. County level oversight and planning boards shall adopt a racial equity plan to guide their work.

- We know that the only way to truly end homelessness is to make sure people are housed. Thus, funds raised from this measure will **prioritize getting people permanently housed**.
- Homelessness is a multi-dimensional problem which necessitates active, sustained **region-wide collaboration** among counties, cities, other public agencies, nonprofit, business and community partners.
- We will be **transparent** in our motives, work collectively to solve issues, and share our successes.
- Understanding that people who are homeless are experts in their own experience, we will **center their perspectives** and experiences whenever possible.
- We will be **provider-informed** in developing and adopting strategies for reducing homelessness using client-centered approaches and culturally responsive support.
- **Efficient and measurable outcomes.** We will require defined outcomes based on broadly recognized public metrics that measure the number of people currently experiencing homelessness in the region. This transparency and accountability is vital to maintain the long term support of voters and the community.
- We will **stay accountable to long-term impact** by requiring and supporting innovative and evidence-based programs and services with concurrent data analysis to evaluate progress toward stated goals, prioritizing equity, aligning systems and processes that ensure public accountability, and ensuring ongoing communication and feedback from individuals served to maximize the effectiveness of service delivery.



## STRATEGY

**Provide client-centered wraparound, highly flexible services, and genuine economic opportunity**

### **A. Expand case management and outreach services by:**

1. Prioritizing permanent supportive housing services.
2. Expanding professionally trained, culturally appropriate street outreach programs to actively connect people who are chronically homeless with services and housing.
3. Expanding access to culturally responsive and appropriate service providers in all counties.
4. Increasing flexible funding streams to help people transition out of homelessness.
5. Address the immediate crisis at hand by helping those who are currently on the streets with outreach and basic survival support designed to help them move into housing and support services.
6. Use best practices, including assertive engagement, along with emerging research to place client need and experience at the center of solutions.

### **B. Expand clinical services by:**

1. Improving access to behavioral health: mental health services and interventions, and addiction services to support people in crisis and people in recovery.
2. Expanding access to services and interventions for people with physical impairments and disabilities.

### **C. Increase access to income opportunities including:**

1. Financial literacy, employment, job training and retention, education, peer support services and workplace supports.
2. Assisting individuals to access veterans benefits, Social Security, disability income, and other benefits.

### **D. Homeless prevention to include:**

1. Rent assistance, displacement, eviction prevention services, education and legal services among other programs, for those most at risk of becoming homeless to prevent a net-negative effect, ensuring people can remain successfully housed.
2. Prevention services tailored to rural households.

**E Expand access to housing placements that are affordable and culturally appropriate to our community's most vulnerable, including:**

1. Maximize federal, state, and local housing programs and subsidies that meet the needs of individuals where they are.
2. Shelters, bridge/transitional housing placements, including for people exiting institutions, foster care, etc. so unsheltered homeless individuals are provided the option to sleep indoors.
3. Long-term housing subsidies for the elderly, those disproportionately at-risk of long-term homelessness, youth and people with disabilities.

**Constantly strive to work together and improve our systems**

**F. Improve systems coordination, state, and regional alignment by:**

1. Incentivizing regional coordination efforts, including data collection, and use metrics that measure the size of the region's sheltered and unsheltered homeless population.
2. Maximizing resources by leveraging existing local, state and federal service dollars and other investments and coordinate with other services (Medicaid, hospitals, jails, child welfare, aging services, etc.).
3. Encouraging innovation and collaboration with nonprofit, business, faith communities, government agencies, etc.

**Transparency, outcomes and oversight**

**G. Be transparent, outcome-driven and allow for strong community oversight of the funds, program implementation and evaluation of outcomes.**

1. Align systems and processes to ensure public accountability through data analysis and program evaluation and ongoing communication and feedback from individuals served to maximize the effectiveness of service delivery.
2. Use incentives, including matching or challenge grants and funding and other strategies, to ensure that existing community investments are increased and not reduced.
3. Employ a racial equity lens to prioritize equitable outcomes for communities that are overrepresented in our homeless population, are most-at-risk of chronic homelessness, and/or have been historically marginalized.