

The Thurston County Homeless Crisis Response Five Year Plan

In June 2018, the Thurston County Board of Health declared homelessness a public health crisis, pledging action to help alleviate the impact of the growing crisis. Simultaneous to this declaration, the Thurston County Homeless and Housing 5-Year Plan was formally adopted. In December of 2018, the Washington State Department of Commerce released a set of new guidelines, with the intent that local communities adjust their current Homeless Crisis Response plans accordingly. The Homeless Crisis Response Plan provides strategies for the following five primary goals provided by Commerce:

1. **Address** racial disparities among people experiencing homelessness
2. Quickly **identify** and **engage** all people experiencing homelessness through outreach and coordination between every system that encounters people experiencing homelessness:
3. **Prioritize** housing for people with the greatest need
4. **Operate** an effective and efficient homeless crisis response system that swiftly moves people into stable permanent housing.
5. **Project** the impact of the fully implemented local plan on the number of households housed and the number of households left unsheltered

Framework

A successful HCRP must be built on a shared understanding and principle that all people deserve dignity, respect and to feel safe—both the housed and unhoused alike. As such, the strategies and solutions built and developed in the HCRP add value to every individual in our county. Although access to housing is the logical and primary solution for all populations of people experiencing homelessness, there is not a 'one-size-fits-all' approach. Everyone who is unsheltered, or at risk of experiencing homelessness, has a unique set of needs that require a flexible system to respond. An effective HCRP requires that our system be **coordinated**, **consistent**, and **concise**, so that all cross-system collaboration is trauma-informed and streamlined.

A **coordinated** system is:

- an efficient system, removing response-related silos, and increasing positive exits into housing projects.
- has shared data as allowable between providers and participates in concert with the coordinated entry system.

A **consistent** system is trauma informed and clearly communicates to the providers, the community at large and the participants within the system:

- what is to be expected
- how the system works
- how to access various programs.

A **concise** system is a system that trims the processes in order to

- quickly and efficiently identify those who are experiencing homelessness
- swiftly move them into housing.

The 2019 HCRP was developed by the Thurston County Homeless Prevention and Affordable Housing Coordinator, together with several stakeholder groups. Some of the stakeholder groups included law enforcement agencies and city staff from four jurisdictions, county staff, and providers of housing and services for each sub population.

Work Plan

The HCRP's work plan addresses each of the goals identified by the Department of Commerce by linking specific strategies, tasks, outcomes and lead entities who will take the lead in implementation of the strategies to the HCRP.

Address Racial Disparity:

The HCRP acknowledges the need to responsibly address this goal and ensure that there are actionable steps that all stakeholders in the HCRS can participate in. Data, data analysis, training, and policy work are addressed at all levels.

Identify and Engage

Specific outreach strategies for all subpopulations of people experiencing homelessness are addressed within this section. There are also strategies to address system capacity, strategies to engage the mainstream service sectors and increase partnerships to ensure as many people as possible are referred into and served within the HCRS.

Prioritize Those with the Highest Needs

Strategies that analyze county-wide data in order to understand how the current prioritization process is working, and subsequently provide research into equitable prioritization practices are included in this goal. Youth and young adult (YYA) prioritization strategies are specifically addressed, as there are unique to this population.

Operate an Efficient and Effective Homeless Crisis Response System

Best practices, neighborhood and community outreach, capacity building, emergency response and affordable housing strategies and tasks are addressed in this section. The culmination of a successfully identifying, engaging and prioritizing households experiencing homelessness set this section's tasks up for success.

Project the Impact an Effective System

Successfully implementing our strategies in the first for goals will lead to more households being swiftly prioritized and placed in housing that is accessible, affordable and appropriate for them. By 2024, the Thurston County HCRS will see a significant decrease in unsheltered individuals, and an increase in permanent supportive, youth transitional, affordable and subsidized housing projects.

The success of the Thurston County Homeless Crisis Response Plan requires all stakeholders to be committed to the long-term goal of solving homelessness in our community. This overarching goal is lofty but not impossible when the HCRS is well supported and coordinated.