



*STATE OF WASHINGTON*

# HOMELESS HOUSING STRATEGIC PLAN

January, 2018  
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Department of Commerce

# INTRODUCTION

In 2005, the Washington State Legislature passed the Homeless Housing and Assistance Act which outlined several bold policies to address homelessness. The Act also required the Department of Commerce (Commerce) to develop a strategic plan which was first submitted in 2006. This is the fourth update to the Washington State Homeless Housing Strategic Plan (Plan) which includes a statewide vision that directs our efforts and resources to ensure that people have a safe place to live. The Plan's guiding principles and goals support the state's homeless housing policies and funding so that Commerce, contracted local governments, service providers, and partnering agencies have clear expectations and benchmarks to guide this important work.

The Plan includes specific minimum system performance requirements<sup>1</sup> that were incorporated into state contracts with local governments and other housing providers beginning in July 2017. Local systems not able to perform to the contracted standards

will initially be provided intensive technical assistance as part of a corrective action plan. If a local homeless system is not able to achieve reasonable performance improvement toward the state performance requirements, contracted funding will be reduced and redirected to higher performing communities. In all cases, Commerce and partner state agencies will remain engaged with communities to set reasonable performance targets based on actual performance in similar high performing systems while accounting for local circumstances.

The state's homeless response system for single adults and families is prioritizing people living outdoors or in places not meant for human habitation and people fleeing from domestic violence as priority populations for assistance. Commerce firmly supports that anyone who is living in an emergency shelter or in temporary housing (including couch surfing) needs permanent housing, and we need to ensure people most at risk of dying from violence or exposure

Box 1.

## We Strengthen Communities

The Department of Commerce touches every aspect of community and economic development. We work with local governments, businesses and civic leaders to strengthen communities so all residents may thrive and prosper.



**Planning**



**Infrastructure**



**Community  
Facilities**



**Housing**



**Safety/  
Crime Victims**



**Business  
Assurance**

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A for system performance measures

# INTRODUCTION

to the outdoor elements receive assistance as rapidly as possible.

The joint work of the Commerce's Office of Family and Adult Homelessness (OFAH) and the Office of Homeless Youth (OHY) homelessness are both complimentary and evolving. The partnership is demonstrated through a collaborative work environment where the Offices share a common data system, analytical staff, and develop policies concurrently so that the impact is both coordinated and strategic. The Offices work together to strengthen the State and county responses to unaccompanied minors, youth, young adults, and families and adults experiencing homelessness. The current OHY Report and Plan are on the Commerce website.

Maintaining a high functioning and low barrier<sup>2</sup> crisis response to homelessness is possible and we must continue to learn from data, research, and experiential evidence to ensure resources are targeted toward effective and proven strategies. State government agencies alongside local governments, nonprofits, faith based networks, advocates, public housing agencies, business communities, and philanthropic organizations need to work collectively, and with urgency, to support the systems and programs with the best outcomes for people experiencing homelessness.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix B for low barrier requirements

## OUR VISION

No person left living outside.

## OUR MISSION

Support homeless crisis response systems that efficiently reduce the number of people living outside, and that when scaled appropriately can house all unsheltered people.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- ▶ All people deserve a safe place to live.
- ▶ Urgent and bold action is the appropriate response to people living outside.
- ▶ Interventions must be data driven and evidence based.

**For additional context for this Plan, see our [web page](#) which has links to the following articles:**

- [Why is homelessness increasing?](#)
- [Counts of homelessness: What the different data sources tell us](#)
- [Overview of the homeless housing system: Funding, Interventions, and Numbers served](#)

# SYSTEM WORK

The State of Washington promotes the mission, vision, and guiding principles by funding and supporting homeless crisis response systems.

Homeless crisis response systems respond to the immediacy and urgency of homelessness and make sure everyone has a safe and appropriate place to live. The system must also target and prioritize resources for people with the greatest needs so they are quickly “screened in” for housing assistance. The goal of a high functioning system is to reach the balance between need and capacity, often referred to as functional zero,

so that when a person becomes homeless there is an immediate system response that quickly moves that person back into housing.

A homeless crisis response system prioritizes providing people with housing first and then offers additional supports and voluntary services as needed. This evidenced based, national best practice approach yields higher housing retention rates, lower returns to homelessness, and significant reductions in the use of crisis service and institutions.

Box 2.

## Core elements of a high performing homeless crises response system capable of bringing everyone inside:

1. People living unsheltered are promptly identified and engaged.
2. Diversion strategies are used first to solve a housing crisis. Family and friends are engaged if the situation is safe and appropriate.
3. People are prioritized based on need, using a transparent and consistently applied coordinated entry process.
4. Access to housing and services is contingent on rules no more restrictive than typical leases.
5. Housing and service goals are client driven.
6. Clients are supported in developing housing stability plans that address client safety, barriers to permanent housing, and self-sufficiency.
7. Programs quickly move most clients into market rate housing, and stay available as requested to maintain housing stability.
8. Programs provide the minimum assistance needed to secure housing and only offer more when it is necessary to prevent a return to homelessness.
9. Programs should intervene with permanent supportive housing when clients have a disability that impacts their ability to live independently, and market-rate housing placements have proven ineffective in resolving their homelessness.
10. Programs share client data between systems as allowable to improve coordination of services.

# SYSTEM GOALS

There are six primary goals in Washington State's work supporting the statewide homeless crisis response systems. These goals include strategies, specific actions, timelines, and connect to performance measures.

- **Goal 1:** Effective and efficient coordinated access and assessment for services and housing.
- **Goal 2:** Effective and efficient crisis response system.
- **Goal 3:** Identification of policy changes and resources necessary to house all people living unsheltered.
- **Goal 4:** Quantifying what would reduce the number of new people becoming homeless.
- **Goal 5:** Transparent and meaningful accounting of state and local recording fee funds.
- **Goal 6:** Fair and equitable resource distribution.

## Goal 1: Effective and efficient coordinated access and assessment for services and housing.

### Strategy to Fulfill Goal:

#### 1.1 Improved implementation of coordinated entry, outreach & statewide by-name list.

<i>Actions in Support of Strategy</i>	<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Accountability</i>
1.1.1 Continue technical assistance to counties working to refine their coordinated entry systems and outreach strategies.	On-going	Biennial technical assistance and training plan.
1.1.2 Develop a project plan for an active statewide by-name list in the state's Homeless Management Information System.	2018	Active statewide by-name list.
1.1.3 Continue to evaluate and score coordinated entry systems, including adding additional performance measures of coordinated entry and accessibility.	2019	Evaluated biennially by interdisciplinary team.

# SYSTEM GOALS

<i>Actions in Support of Strategy</i>	<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Accountability</i>
1.1.4 Expand coordinated entry requirement for all homeless housing programs managed by recipients of, and sub recipients of, Commerce homeless funding.	Completed	Review during compliance monitoring.
1.1.3 Revise Consolidated Homeless Grants to include the new HUD coordinated entry requirements in 2018–2019 grants.	Completed	Updated Grant Guidelines.

## **Goal 2: Effective and efficient crisis response system.**

### *Strategy to Fulfill Goal:*

#### **2.1 Promote evidence-based housing interventions that efficiently move people experiencing homelessness into permanent destinations.**

<i>Actions in Support of Strategy</i>	<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Accountability</i>
2.1.1 Publish Homeless System Performance County Report Card with system performance measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost per successful exit to permanent housing</li> <li>• Exits to permanent housing destinations</li> <li>• Returns to homelessness</li> <li>• Length of time homeless</li> </ul>	Annually	Post to Commerce website.

# SYSTEM GOALS

<i>Actions in Support of Strategy</i>	<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Accountability</i>
<p>2.1.2 Publish Homeless System Performance Project Report with project level performance measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People served, exited</li> <li>• Exits to permanent housing destinations</li> <li>• Returns to homelessness</li> <li>• Length of stay</li> </ul>	Quarterly	Post to Commerce website.
<p>2.1.3 Provide training on Trauma Informed Services, Mental Health First Aid, Low Barrier Conversion, Harm Reduction, Fair Housing, Progressive Engagement, best practices in serving survivors of domestic violence and Coordinated Entry.</p>	On-going	Biennial technical assistance and training plan.
<p>2.1.4 Explore contracting the next biennial 2019 -2021 Consolidated Homeless Grant funds competitively based on performance.</p>	2018	Procure performance consultant.
<p>2.1.5 Explore promoting local prioritization of locally-controlled housing funding (recording fees and federal funds awarded to housing authorities) for priority populations in the 2019 homeless grants awarded from Commerce.</p>	2018	Develop policy memo for stakeholder feedback.
<p>2.1.6 Align homeless grant requirements with system performance measures and benchmarks plus require systems receiving Commerce funds to prioritize serving people who are unsheltered. See appendix A for more details.</p>	Completed	Consolidated Homeless Grant

# SYSTEM GOALS

<i>Actions in Support of Strategy</i>	<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Accountability</i>
<p>2.1.7 Require systems receiving Commerce funds to use a service model that includes the following evidenced based best practices:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Access to and continued housing assistance should not be contingent on unnecessary conditions.</li> <li>2. Initial and frequent re-assessment to solve housing crises with minimal services needed.</li> <li>3. Individualized services responsive to the needs of each household.</li> <li>4. Voluntary participation in supportive services.</li> <li>5. Rapid exits to permanent housing.</li> </ol>	Completed	Consolidated Homeless Grant
<p>2.1.8 Provide local homeless plan academy for county/local governments and introduce Local Plan Modeling Tool.</p>	Completed	Local Plan Modeling Tool

## **Goal 3: Identification of policy changes and resources necessary to house all people living unsheltered.**

### *Strategy to Fulfill Goal:*

#### **3.1 Improve county data reporting.**

<i>Actions in Support of Strategy</i>	<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Accountability</i>
<p>3.1.1 Contractually require data quality improvements in submission of Homeless Management Information System data and Annual Report submissions by Consolidated Homeless Grantees.</p>	<p>Thresholds introduced in 2018 and required contractually in 2019.</p>	<p>Improved data quality scores in <i>Homeless System Performance Report Card</i>.</p>



# SYSTEM GOALS

<i>Actions in Support of Strategy</i>	<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Accountability</i>
3.1.2 Contractually require best practices in administering the Point-in Time count by Consolidated Homeless Grantees.	Introduced in 2018 and required contractually in 2019.	Improved data quality scores in <i>Homeless System Performance Report Card</i> .
3.1.3 Expand participation in statewide by name list in the Homeless Management Information System in cooperation with the Department of Social and Health Services and other entities in contact with people experiencing homelessness	2018 - 2019	Improved data quality scores in <i>Homeless System Performance Report Card</i> .
<b>Strategy to Fulfill Goal:</b>		
<b>3.2 Develop unmet need estimate to house all people living unsheltered.</b>		
<i>Actions in Support of Strategy</i>	<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Accountability</i>
3.2.1 Propose law and policy changes to support cross agency data sharing capacity.	On-going	Interagency Council on Homelessness
3.2.2 Work with state agencies to determine the counts of people unsheltered whose housing is the direct responsibility of state agencies.	On-going	Interagency Council on Homelessness
3.2.3 Develop unmet count based on statewide by-name lists in the Homeless Management Information System.	On-going	Post to Commerce website.

# SYSTEM GOALS

<i>Actions in Support of Strategy</i>	<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Accountability</i>
3.2.4 Supplement point in time count with count derived from administrative data collected by the Department of Social and Health Services.	Twice annually	Post to Commerce website.
3.2.5 Estimate policy and resource changes in resources necessary to leave no person living outside, based on contracted system performance targets and updated enumerations of people living outside.	January 2018	Update state Homeless Housing Strategic Plan to include updated resource gap calculations.

## **Goal 4: Quantifying what would reduce the number of new people becoming homeless.**

### *Strategy to Fulfill Goal:*

#### **4.1 Facilitate identification of policy and resource changes that would reduce the number of new people becoming homeless.**

<i>Actions in Support of Strategy</i>	<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Accountability</i>
4.1.1 Engage local governments and service providers to solicit ideas on interventions and policy changes that would reduce the number of people becoming homeless.	2018	Commerce publishes literature review and model assumptions.
4.1.2 Review literature to quantify the impact of upstream interventions that could reduce the number of people at-risk of becoming homeless by increasing incomes, improving family stability, and reducing behavioral health problems.	2018	Commerce publishes literature review and model assumptions.

# SYSTEM GOALS

## Goal 5: Transparent accounting of state and local recording fee funds.

### Strategy to Fulfill Goal:

#### 5.1 Publish county report cards.

<i>Actions in Support of Strategy</i>	<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Accountability</i>
5.1.1 Compile data from the Homeless Management Information System, contract compliance, spending, and other data sources to develop county reports cards.	Annually	Post to Commerce website

### Strategy to Fulfill Goal:

#### 5.2 Publish spending and performance data for all projects funded by state and local recording fees.

<i>Actions in Support of Strategy</i>	<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Accountability</i>
5.2.1 Commerce drafts Annual Report and presents to the Interagency Council on Homelessness and the Statewide Advisory Council on Homelessness.	Annually	Post to Commerce website

### Strategy to Fulfill Goal:

#### 5.3 Ensure access to all homeless data

<i>Actions in Support of Strategy</i>	<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Accountability</i>
5.3.1 Require counties not able to export client data to the state Homeless Management Information System by December 2016 to use the state Homeless Management Information System for direct data entry. Provide technical assistance to all data integration counties.	In progress	All statewide data available to Commerce.

# SYSTEM GOALS

## Goal 6: Fair and equitable resource distribution.

### Strategy to Fulfill Goal:

#### 6.1 Staff development on system disparities.

<i>Actions in Support of Strategy</i>	<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Accountability</i>
6.1.1 Identify training plan for staff development.	2018	Staff complete training in 2018.

### Strategy to Fulfill Goal:

#### 6.2 Examine system disparities

<i>Actions in Support of Strategy</i>	<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Accountability</i>
6.2.1 Identify components and timeframe for completing the work.	2018	Staff produce draft findings and recommended strategies in 2019.

### Strategy to Fulfill Goal:

#### 6.3 Produce recommendations

<i>Actions in Support of Strategy</i>	<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Accountability</i>
6.3.1 Include remedies in the future State Homeless Housing Strategic Plan update.	2018	Updated Plan includes remedies.

# HOW THIS PLAN WAS DEVELOPED

The State Advisory Council on Homelessness, the Interagency Council on Homelessness, and other statewide homeless advisory groups provided recommendations and guidance for the Plan.

- [Washington Low Income Housing Alliance](#), Homeless Advisory Council
- [Washington State Community Action Partnership](#)

- Commerce Consolidated Homeless Grant and Emergency Solution Grant Lead Grantees
- [State Advisory Council on Homelessness](#) is a governor appointed council with representatives from city and county governments, a youth and a domestic violence advocate, private business, federal government, public housing and philanthropic representatives, formerly homeless people, and a member of the state Interagency Council on Homelessness.
- [Interagency Council on Homelessness](#) agencies include the Department of Social and Health Services, Employment Security Department, Department of Veteran Affairs, Health Care Authority, State Board of Community and Technical Colleges, Department of Health, Office of Financial Management, Department of Commerce, Department of Corrections, and the Governor's Office.



# APPENDIX A

## Improving Performance

In 2016, Commerce added a new system-wide performance measure to the Consolidated Homeless Grant contract that required counties to focus on housing unsheltered people. In 2017, Commerce also added new system-wide performance requirements in response to new requirements under RCW 43.185C.040<sup>3</sup> including:

1. Percent exits to permanent housing.
2. Length of time people remain homeless.
3. Returns to homelessness within two years of exit.

County Report Cards<sup>4</sup> posted on the Commerce website include progress on these performance measures and are reported twice annually at the state and county levels.

Commerce will continue to provide technical assistance and training to lower-performing counties and will continue to monitor and potentially sanction grantees that do not meet grant terms and conditions. The new performance measures are listed in Table 1.

Table 1.

Consolidated Homeless Grant Performance Measures in State Fiscal Years 2018 and 2019

<b>Intervention Type</b>	<b>Performance Measure/Domains</b>	<b>Acceptable Progress</b> <i>(Minimum Change from Baseline)</i>	<b>Performance Target</b>
Emergency Shelter	Increase Percent Exits to Permanent Housing	Increase by at least 5 percentage points	At Least 50%
	Reduce Median Length of Time Persons Remain Homeless (Length of Stay)	Decrease by at least 5 days	20 Days or Less
	Reduce Average Length of Time Persons Remain Homeless (Length of Stay)	Decrease by at least 5 days	20 Days or Less
	Reduce Percent Return to Homelessness in 2 Years	Decrease by at least 5 percentage points	Less than 10%

3 Washington State Legislature, RCW 43.185C.040, (2005, 2009, 2015, 2017), <http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?Cite=43.185C.040>

4 Washington State Department of Commerce, County Report Cards, <http://www.commerce.wa.gov/serving-communities/homelessness/county-report-cards/>

# APPENDIX A

Transitional Housing	Increase Percent Exits to Permanent Housing	Increase by at least 5 percentage points	At Least 80%
	Reduce Median Length of Time Persons Remain Homeless (Length of Stay)	Decrease by at least 10 days	90 Days or Less
	Reduce Average Length of Time Persons Remain Homeless (Length of Stay)	Decrease by at least 10 days	90 Days or Less
	Reduce Percent Return to Homelessness in 2 Years	Decrease by at least 5 percentage points	Less than 5%
Rapid Re-Housing	Increase Percent Exits to Permanent Housing	Increase by at least 5 percentage points	At Least 80%
	Reduce Percent Return to Homelessness in 2 Years	Decrease by at least 5 percentage points	Less than 5%
Targeted Prevention	Reduce Number of New Homeless	Reduce by any number	Reduce Number
	Increase Percent served with residence prior to project entry: institutional setting or temporarily staying with family or friends	Increase by at least 5 percentage points	At Least 80%
	Increase Percent served with past homelessness (previously served in HMIS)	Increase by at least 5 percentage points	At Least 80%
Permanent Supportive Housing	Increase Percent Exits to or Retention of Permanent Housing	Increase by at least 5 percentage points	At Least 95%

# APPENDIX B

## **Low Barrier Requirement**

By July 2018, each county must have at least one low barrier project serving adults experiencing homeless and at least one low barrier project serving households with children experiencing homelessness. (Project types that can meet this requirement include Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing, Rapid Re-Housing, and Permanent Housing. Projects that operate seasonally do not meet this requirement.) National experience where communities successfully ended veteran homelessness shows that a homeless crisis response system without lower barrier housing options is not capable of bringing everyone inside.<sup>5</sup> This low barrier requirement is intended to build the capability throughout Washington State to serve all the types of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, including people at highest risk of trauma, illness or death due to living outside.

Low barriers projects have flexible intake schedules and require minimal documentation. Additionally people experiencing homelessness are not screened out based on the following criteria:

- Having too little or no income.
- Having poor credit or financial history.
- Having poor or lack of rental history.
- Having involvement with the criminal justice system.
- Having active or a history of alcohol and/or substance use.
- Having a history of victimization.
- Lacking ID or proof of U.S. Residency Status.
- Other behaviors that are perceived as indicating a lack of "housing readiness."

Additionally, projects have realistic and clear expectations. Rules and policies are narrowly focused on maintaining a safe environment and avoiding exits to homelessness. Low barrier projects do not have work or volunteer requirements. Projects that require people to pay a share of rent allow reasonable flexibility in payment. People are not terminated from the project for the following reasons:

- Failure to participate in supportive services or treatment programs.
- Failure to make progress on a service plan.
- Alcohol and/or substance use in and of itself is not considered a reason for termination.

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5 [https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset\\_library/Vet\\_Criteria\\_Benchmarks\\_V3\\_February2017.pdf](https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Vet_Criteria_Benchmarks_V3_February2017.pdf)



STATE OF WASHINGTON

# HOMELESS HOUSING STRATEGIC PLAN

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January, 2018  
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