

Detroit's Housing Justice Roadmap

October - March 2021



In 2020, the Detroit Continuum of Care (CoC), the Detroit Advisors Group, the Homeless Action Network of Detroit (HAND), the City of Detroit's Division of Homeless Services (HRD), and the local Veteran's Administration (VA) partnered to reimagine what it looks like to be ending homelessness in Detroit, focused on the pursuit of housing justice. They engaged with the National Innovation Service (NIS), through the financial support of the McGregor Fund, to support a community-driven process to define what housing justice means for Detroit and, from there, chart the path to a system rooted in justice. A path forward to transform Detroit's citywide response to homelessness is outlined here in the seven actions of Detroit's Housing Justice Roadmap.

The NIS Center for Housing Justice designs equitable public institutions in partnership with impacted communities to drive systems transformation. Learn more about the team [here](#).

This work was completed in partnership with:

Detroit Continuum of Care Executive Committee
HAND
City of Detroit Housing and Revitalization Department
Local Veteran's Administration

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Background

In 2020, the Detroit Continuum of Care (CoC), the Homeless Action Network of Detroit (HAND),¹ the City of Detroit's Division of Homeless Services (HRD), and the local Veteran's Administration (VA) partnered to reimagine what it looks like to be ending homelessness in Detroit, focused on the pursuit of housing justice.

Pursuing housing justice requires transformation: a new approach to housing instability and homelessness that is centered on racial equity, co-designed with people who have experienced homelessness, and built on a shared understanding of how Detroit's homeless response currently perpetuates inequality and exclusion. When reconciling a history of structural racism, marginalization, and harm is the question, housing justice is the answer. Structural racism is an underlying driver of homelessness in the United States. The high rates of poverty in Detroit, particularly among Black Detroiters, along with the city's ranking as the most segregated city in America, are products of intentional choices and decades of corporate decision-making controlling the lives and livelihoods of the city's residents, leaving many marginalized and cut off from opportunity.

There are inextricable linkages between housing, health, employment, and education, among other systems of care. Without recognizing these necessary linkages, housing justice will remain out of reach.

It is in recognition of these truths that the CoC Executive Committee, with the financial support of the McGregor Fund, engaged the [National Innovation Service \(NIS\)](#) to support a community-driven process to define what housing justice means for Detroit and, from there, chart the path to a system rooted in justice.

A path forward to transform Detroit's citywide response to homelessness is outlined here in the seven actions of Detroit's Housing Justice Roadmap.

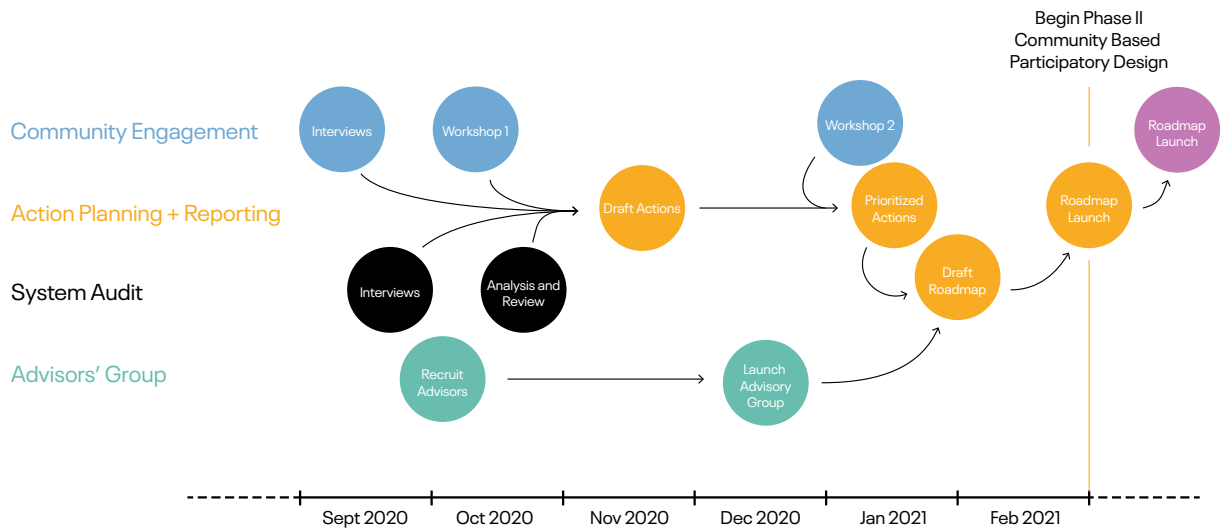
Process Overview

Detroit's Housing Justice Roadmap is a product of deep community engagement and policy analysis. The community engagement process included more than 30 interviews with community organizers and advocates outside of the traditional homelessness services sector and

homeless services administrators and providers. The process also included two community-wide workshops to engage the broader community working to address homelessness and a group of advisors comprised solely of Detroiters who have experienced homelessness. These advisors

¹ In this report, HRD refers specifically to the Housing and Revitalization Department, while references to "the City" refer to the community's government more broadly, inclusive of elected officials and administrative agencies and their staff.

Process Timeline



Timeline depicting this project's workstreams, milestones, and process from August 2020 through March 2021.

have been integral in guiding community engagement and refining the resulting analyses.

explored in interviews, focus groups, and workshops with the broader community.

Policy analysis was conducted through a systems lens, evaluating the policies and structures identified through community engagement to understand what drives and perpetuates the community's response to homelessness. This systems audit included an analysis of pertinent federal, state, and local policies, procedures, and data to understand what underpins the dynamics of housing instability and homelessness in Detroit that members of the community described. A more detailed description of the community engagement and systems audit are outlined below.

The 8-person Detroit Advisors Group has met on a regular basis since October 2020 to:

- Partner in the discovery process, action planning, and eventual co-design of the implementation of the Housing Justice Roadmap,
- Grow the coalition of co-designers alongside CoC and City partners, and
- Ensure that the priorities of those most impacted by homelessness and housing instability in Detroit are centered and represented throughout the process.

Community Engagement

The community engagement process began with:

- More than 30 interviews, focused on understanding stakeholders' vision for transformation, as well as roles within the current service arena, and observations on housing and homelessness barriers across Detroit, and
- Community-led analysis to synthesize and dissect the themes that were

The Discovery Workshop was held in October 2020 with more than 120 members of the community to:

- Offer a preliminary diagnostic readout of community engagement and systems audit findings to-date,
- Ensure alignment behind the main themes identified in those interviews, and to

- Coalesce around major themes:
 - Lacking systems-level connections across homeless services;
 - Inadequate accountability to people experiencing homelessness;
 - Lacking unified leadership and vision;
 - Limited power-sharing; and
 - Closed decision-making circuits.

The Roadmap Workshop was held in February of 2021 with more than 60 members of the community to share:

- A final synthesis of community engagement and system audit findings,
- Background on how those findings led to the seven actions, and to
- Gather feedback and input from community members on those actions and the community-driven path forward.

Systems Audit

The systems audit began with:

- Short-term targeted technical assistance to support HRD in prioritizing federal COVID-19 relief funding,
- Policy and data analysis to understand gaps in Detroit's homelessness response exacerbated by the pandemic, and
- Facilitating members of the CoC Executive Committee and HRD leadership in understanding the gaps in services that were identified and the funding needed.
- This process led to 18 interviews with funders and administrators, focused on understanding decision-making power dynamics, leadership and vision, and accountability across homeless services broadly.

Limitations

The COVID-19 pandemic precluded the NIS team from traveling to Detroit for this initiative.

This precluded the team from speaking with a wider array of frontline staff across programs and prevented the team from seeing the work of local homeless response programs in action. NIS attempted to address this limitation by engaging frontline staff in two community workshops, but deeper engagement with frontline staff will be necessary in future phases of this work.

Similarly, NIS methodology usually includes on-site workshops and meetings with larger groups of stakeholders working across the homeless response, but this was not possible due to pandemic restrictions. Provider agency leaders, middle management, and frontline workers were invited to and engaged in the community workshops. However, NIS recommends that the CoC and HRD engage more provider staff at every level in the review of the Roadmap and in deciding to move into the next phases of the work.

Lastly, given the amount of engagement and system audit necessary to understand homeless response programs in Detroit and the need to start with the foundational work of understanding how to build a system across the CoC and HRD, there was only minimal engagement of affordable housing and homeownership stakeholders. NIS did interview several programs and advocates and included a deep policy review of affordable housing and homeownership in order to address this limitation, but the CoC and HRD will need to broaden engagement with these stakeholders moving into co-design.

Phases of Transformation

NIS structured this engagement to position the Housing Justice Roadmap as the first of a three-phase process to begin transforming Detroit's response to homelessness and move towards a system rooted in justice.

NIS recommends that, upon receipt of the Roadmap and the conclusion of Phase I, the CoC and HRD jointly launch a community-based participatory design process to co-design the implementation of the actions outlined here in the Roadmap.

The co-design phase is a 12–18-month process to bring in a diverse set of stakeholders, including people with lived expertise, providers, administrative leaders, community organizers, and advocates and map the path forward. Co-designing offers the opportunity for the community to prioritize and sequence the actions outlined in the Roadmap and develop the implementation plan for the CoC and HRD.

The third phase of work is the longer-term process of implementing the Roadmap actions and strategies based on the process designed with community stakeholders in Phase II. During this phase the community stakeholders would remain engaged to hold the system accountable to enacting the process and strategies as they will be co-designed, and moving toward justice.

Centering Race and Identity

The National Innovation Service approaches systems transformation through the lenses of systems thinking and anti-racism. We center race and identity in our research methods and analysis, understanding that structural racism is at the foundation of America's public systems and social failures. We therefore privilege the voices of those who are most vulnerable to the issues at hand, amplify the insights and experiences of Black, Indigenous, and Brown people, and ensure that communities and individuals who are most proximate to the issues are leaders in developing the analysis as well as the solutions.

Equity-centered systems transformation requires that we grapple with the root causes of homelessness but design toward a future where those who have historically been marginalized are supported in thriving. Our work is done through anti-oppression and anti-racist frameworks.

History of Housing and Equity in Detroit

"Deep histories flow beneath present inequalities, silent as underground freshwater streams...Detroit is not the scene of natural disaster, but rather the scene of a crime—a crime committed by individuals, merchant-cabals, government officials, and empires foaming at the mouth for more."

- Tiya Miles, *The Dawn of Detroit: A Chronicle of Slavery and Freedom in the City of the Straits*

To envision housing justice, Detroiters must reckon with and honor the full history that has brought the city to its present-day victories and injustices.

The land known as Detroit was first Bkejwanong, a transitional village and hunting site for the Anishinaabe peoples, "a 'junction of the continent's major watersheds'...served as a hub of ancient indigenous travel and trade."¹

The groundbreaking work of Dr. Tiya Miles in *The Dawn of Detroit* outlines this history, revisiting and correcting the city's origin story. The history of injustice on this land, as Miles chronicles, dates back to wars inspired and backed by French colonizers, the expansion of the fur and animal trades, and the French enslavement of Indigenous people.

As the land traded hands from French to British colonizers and finally to the white, slaveholding founding generation of the United States, Miles writes that "greed, graft, and forced racialized labor" made up the cultural and industrial roots of Detroit.

The earliest phases of slavery in Detroit exploited the region's Indigenous peoples, but racial categories positioned even enslaved Indigenous people above the few Black slaves in Detroit. Black men's physical labor was used to fuel the fur trade while Black women were first exploited

1 Tiya Miles, *The Dawn of Detroit: A Chronicle of Slavery and Freedom in the City of the Straits* (New York: The New Press, 2019), xiv.

in Detroit for their sexual labor.² Today, sex work remains the only reliable work for many Black trans women in Detroit, illustrating the deep connections between the original social structures of the city and its present-day failures.

While the Revolutionary and Civil Wars slowly forced and led more Black people to Detroit, the Great Migration and the industrial demand of World War II offered Black Americans a promise of opportunity in Detroit. Its population boomed. Paired with that opportunity, however, were the foundations of structural racism, waiting to greet each new Black Detroiter.

Detroit's neighborhoods weren't segregated from the start, but white Detroiters confined Black Detroiters early in the Great Migration by first refusing to sell their homes to Black people and eventually through racially restrictive covenants and redlining.³ Later, racism exacerbated postwar economic pressures and housing shortages in the city, leaving Black Detroiters segregated to the Lower East Side with substandard, overcrowded housing options.

In 1948, the Supreme Court ruled that racially restrictive covenants were unenforceable by law, a case made in part by Detroit's own Orsel and Minnie McGhee. But government-backed redlining soon replaced restrictive covenants, effectively barring African Americans from homeownership and the accumulation of generational wealth. Through the middle of the 20th century, Black Detroiters only had access to substandard, crowded housing in segregated neighborhoods until Detroit's white population began to move to the suburbs in the 1950s, taking resources, opportunities, and the tax base with them in what became known as white flight.

Structural racism stifled Detroit. The ensuing decades brought industrial decline, employment discrimination, and exploitation that starved the city's residents of resources and services. Outsized property taxes were leveraged on the majority Black population to fill the local budget gap left by white flight. Those taxes then drove the city into decades of foreclosures, evictions, and home abandonment. The War on Drugs funneled much of those taxpayer dollars into law enforcement and the criminal justice system in the 1980s, resulting in high rates of over-policing and criminalization.⁴

The Great Recession and Detroit's 2013 bankruptcy filing exacerbated and perpetuated a century of housing injustice in the city.

Housing policies and market-driven local initiatives have failed generation after generation of Black Detroiters. To pursue its vision for housing justice, the community must assume a posture of proactively countering gentrification. Though local plans commit to "ensuring that those who have remained in Detroit benefit from its resurgence" and downtown Detroit is "revived," a myriad of local policies and public-private partnerships are failing to the needs of most Detroit residents.

Prior to the pandemic, homeowners were struggling with low home values, high-cost repairs, low rental income, and high property taxes. Rates of homeownership were sinking rapidly in Detroit and Michigan as a whole.⁵ Renters had few housing options that were safe, maintained, and affordable to low-income households. At least one percent of the population was experiencing homelessness at any given time, while literal countless others experienced housing instability and couch surfing or doubling up with other households.

2 Tiya Miles, *The Dawn of Detroit: A Chronicle of Slavery and Freedom in the City of the Straits* (New York: The New Press, 2019), 35.

3 Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2014), 17-31.

4 Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2014).

5 Christine MacDonald, "Black Homeownership Plunges in Michigan," July 10, 2018, <http://bit.ly/3qT66CM>.

As we see across the country and in Detroit specifically, the COVID-19 pandemic is worsening each of these dynamics and more, further compounding the impacts of decades of structural racism.

However, Dr. Miles reminds us of the brilliance and resilience of Detroiters at another point in history: “One of Detroit’s prominent slaveholders once called the city ‘ruined,’ and yet, from the vantage point of Detroit’s most vulnerable residents in his time—enslaved men and women—disarray meant the opportunity for reinvention.”

“Emancipatory action in our time, too, might be waterborne--ferried by the physical waters that embed social power, fed by the underground stream that is history. On the borderlands of bottom-line globalization, capitalistic expansion, and postindustrial flux, recognizing the historical links between land-seizers and body-snatchers, and exposing the tools and techniques of bondage as well as liberation, are incremental but purposeful ways to make room for visions that see the earth and all of its creatures free.”

- Dr. Tiya Miles

About NIS

The National Innovation Service (NIS) partners with governments across the country to engage in systems-level transformations. We do this by creating collaborative coalitions between communities, public sector partners, and other relevant stakeholders to redesign systems with those most impacted at the center of decision-making processes. Our work is to build new systems that produce equitable outcomes.

Our team draws on a variety of disciplines and experiences to deliver this work, privileging direct experience of the problems we address and merging practices from service design, policy analysis, systems thinking, community organizing, and change management.

We develop strategies and roadmaps for transformation and also remain committed partners throughout implementation. As we establish and test pathways forward with our partners, we are working to advance equity-based policy and legislation at the local, state, and national levels, as well as the development of new models, products and social services.

Vision

Members of the community created a vision for the future of Detroit's homelessness response rooted in justice that serves as the foundation of the Housing Justice Roadmap. Each of the four pillars of the vision and the path to achieving them are further defined below, each rooted in racial equity and justice.



Click the link to the left to listen to Kaitie Giza from HAND talk with Donna Price from the Detroit Advisory Group about uniting the community around a vision to end homelessness.

"Those who are closer to the problem should always be the one driving the solutions - they should have all the power. Not just gift cards or surveys but providing space and opportunity for people to be leaders."

- System leader and person with lived expertise

"We need more emphasis on housing in our shelters, people are in shelter being warehoused until housing resources are available, even though we don't have enough resources for anybody. 80% of those who qualify for RRH don't get in."

-System leader

Detroit's response to homelessness is led by people with lived experiences who reflect the community.

- The community should co-design and implement system transformation and have community power to hold the system accountable
- Leadership at the administrative and agency level need to reflect the community served by representing Black, Brown, trans and gender non-conforming (TGNC), lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer (LGBQ) Detroiters and have lived experience of homelessness.
- Providers must be supported in hiring people who have experienced homelessness so they can advise on and lead service provision across the city.

Members of the community experience homelessness rarely, and when they do, it's for a short time and only once.

- A system must address the high barriers to accessing crisis housing (shelters) for members of the TGNC community through safe and equitable access, and ensure that support is available to quickly move to long-term housing.
- A system must address barriers to quick, safe, access to long-term housing including issues with coordinated entry, prevention programs to keep people in their homes, and the lack of affordable housing stock in the community
- A system must coordinate resources, including economic supports, across the community and improve the quality of supportive services within homeless programs.

"For a long time, there was this idea that housing instability, affordability, eviction prevention were a separate thing from homelessness services. They are both inextricably linked."

- System leader

Housing security will be achieved by keeping people in their homes, developing affordable options, and helping to recover generational wealth.

- The city and county must invest in the revitalization and development of safe and affordable housing prioritized for people experiencing homelessness and housing instability.
- Detroit and Wayne County administrators must coordinate and prioritize homeownership supports for Black, Brown and LGBTQ communities to help build generational wealth.
- Detroit and Wayne County must address policy issues that have led to the historic loss of homes for the Black community in Detroit

"One of the things we constantly hear is how difficult it is to navigate services for homeless or displaced folks in Detroit."

Housing and services are rooted in dignity.

- A system must provide services that are safe and accessible for all and that respect, empower, and value all individuals, especially Black, Brown, and LGBTQ community members.
- Services should be designed with and provided by people who have experienced homelessness or housing instability.
- Providers must address organizational culture issues that lead to discrimination and lack of accountability to people being served.

Actions

The seven actions and strategies outlined below are designed to map the path to the vision above. These actions and strategies were developed in direct response to the themes that emerged from community engagement and the systems audit.

Each action includes background and an overview of the related themes. Each action also contains a set of strategies that lead toward the action in alignment with the broader vision. Tools, guidance, and examples of similar strategies in other communities are offered under each strategy. These examples are meant to serve as a reference for Detroit during the co-design phase and should not be taken as wholesale solutions, but instead as examples for consideration in developing implementation plans tailored to Detroiters' strengths and needs.

Action 01

Build a System

Build a system across the CoC and City (HRD) to coordinate and provide the homelessness and housing resources across Detroit and Wayne County necessary to achieve the community's vision, grounded in accountability, and led by people with lived experience of homelessness.



Click the link to the left to listen to Eleanor Bradford from the Detroit Advisors Group speak with Amy the CoC Board Chair on the importance of building a system that works together.

Background

A system can be defined as “an interconnected set of elements that is coherently organized in a way that achieves something.”¹ Donella Meadows, a pioneer of systems thinking, asserted that to achieve something, a system must consist of:

1. Elements: the individual parts of a system which tend to be more visible and easier to recognize
2. Interconnections: relationships that hold the elements of a system together or describe how elements work together to achieve the systems function/purpose
3. Purpose/Function: can be determined based on the system's behavior

The main finding of community engagement and the systems audit is that there is not currently a functioning homeless response system in Detroit.

There are clear and easily identifiable elements such as the CoC Board and membership; HAND, the collaborative applicant for the CoC;

Housing Revitalization and Development (HDR), the local agency administering federal funds such as Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) and the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG); the Coordinated Assessment Model (CAM); and the various providers of housing and services. However, there are not clearly defined relationships that hold these elements together and point them towards the end purpose of preventing and ending homelessness.

Any assortment of things, no matter how similar, without interconnection or shared function and purpose is not a system. This reality has resulted in continued struggles to prevent and end homelessness despite various system improvement efforts in Detroit's response to homelessness.

Throughout stakeholder interviews and the community workshop, community members identified the lack of a system in Detroit. Some of the most common themes included:²

- A lack of vision for preventing and ending homelessness and a lack of stated and

1 Meadows, Donella H., and Diana Wright. *Thinking in Systems: A Primer*. White River Junction, Vt: Chelsea Green Pub, 2011.

2 Themes are a result of the analysis from over 30 interviews and 2 community workshops with more than 150 community participants.

shared goals beyond those specific to veterans and families;

- Confusion around who is responsible for leading the homeless response between the CoC Board, HAND, and HRD;
- A lack of accountability to people being served by homeless services, including no clear way to hold individual providers, CAM, HRD, or the CoC accountable for inequitable service provision, discrimination, or low-quality service;
- A lack of accountability across the different elements working to serve people experiencing homelessness, including to and from providers, funders, and administrators (CoC and HRD);
- Disenfranchised stakeholders—including the people being served, provider agencies, and the community at large—due to a lack of structure for community engagement in setting and tracking priorities; and
- A disconnect between homeless services, poverty alleviation initiatives, homelessness prevention efforts, housing stability services, affordable housing needs and development, and homeownership supports.

Detroit’s critical and foundational step in system transformation is to design a homeless response system rooted in racial equity and justice that can hold interconnections between the CoC and HRD to facilitate a singular function: preventing and ending homelessness.

Strategies

01: CREATE A GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE THAT REACHES ACROSS HRD AND THE COC, CHARGED WITH:

1. Implementing the community’s vision for preventing and ending homelessness;
2. Leading a participatory community process to set the goals and strategies needed to enact the adopted community vision; and
3. Making joint decisions on public funding priorities for the homeless response and engaging with private funders to fill resource gaps and offer flexible solutions.

Detroit is in need of a governance structure across the CoC (board, general membership, and HAND) and HRD that can 1) enact the vision created by the community, 2) bring the community together to design system-level goals and strategies that can help to reach the community vision, and 3) make more strategic, joint decisions across the various homeless dedicated resources managed by the CoC and HRD.

The first steps in creating a governance structure should include:

- A formal commitment such as an MOU or letter of intent, between the CoC and the City of Detroit to co-lead a community design process grounded in the adopted vision described in the Vision Statement with the intent to engage other systems and community partners throughout the process
- Dedicated funds from the CoC and HRD for a minimum of 0.5 FTE staff to coordinate the participatory community design process
- Dedicated funds from the CoC, HRD, and private funders for equitable compensation for the engagement of people with lived experience of homelessness, including the established Detroit Advisors Group
- Establishing a design table that includes

a diverse set of stakeholders, including people with lived experience, service providers from every staff level, administrative leaders, and elected officials

- Equitable decision making across the design process that moves decision making power to those closest to the issue, particularly people who have experienced homelessness and unsafe housing instability, frontline workers, and Black, Brown, Indigenous, and LGBTQ members of the community.

Strategy in Action

The City of Seattle and King County government, alongside the Continuum of Care, recently went through a redesign process to bring together local government, the CoC, providers, and people with lived experiences under one governance entity. This effort resulted in the creation of the King County Regional Homelessness Authority. An [Interlocal Agreement](#) serves as a main governing document and outlines the way in which governmental entities (executive and legislative branches), providers, and people with lived experiences will work together alongside the CoC board to make joint decisions and strategies for the system moving forward.³

In Houston, the Mayor's Office led a special initiative to redesign the existing Continuum of Care to better align across the collaborative applicant, the CoC board, City and County government, providers, and people with lived experiences.⁴ This effort resulted in a new governing board, designed to ensure representation of critical government and non-governmental stakeholders, more strategic decision making, and a more engaged community.

02: SHIFT POWER TO CENTER THOSE WITH LIVED EXPERTISE AND THOSE AT THE FRONT LINES OF THE LOCAL HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE IN ALL CRITICAL DECISION-MAKING.

"Most people at the table are white cis people who don't have to think about any of this after work, it's a different type of work when you live in it."

- Detroit Advisor

People experiencing homelessness have little to no decision-making power with Detroit's Continuum of Care (CoC) or HRD structures. While there are two seats dedicated to people with lived experience on the CoC Board, the positions have been described as tokenizing and disenfranchised. A considerable amount of power is held within the CoC Executive Committee, which does not have a reserved position for a person with lived experience. HRD, which manages a substantial portfolio of homeless services contracts and funding, currently has no documented structures in place to include people with lived experience of homelessness or housing instability in decision-making processes.

Providers, particularly employees who are at the frontline of services and often have experienced housing instability or homelessness themselves, also have no clear way to help design solutions or set priorities. There are provider committees within the CoC to coordinate and strategize but there are unclear connections between these committees and the decision-making process of both the CoC board and HRD, exacerbating the disconnect between providers' expertise and administrators' priorities.

Building a more equitable system requires shifting power from a small set of funders and administrative leaders who are not representative of people experiencing homelessness in Detroit,⁵ towards those that have experienced

3 "Interlocal Agreement," Regional Homelessness Authority, All Home King County, Accessed March 10, 2021, <https://bit.ly/2P3APQv>.

4 Chapman Sample, Mandy, "Houston's New CoC Governance Structure", National Alliance to End Homelessness National Conference, Accessed March 7, 2021: https://b3cdn.net/naeh/4f892978c55b159075_1ym6ivk19.pdf

5 Nine out of every ten people accessing homeless services in Detroit identify as Black or African American; 58% of people

the system, are working within the system, and are more representative of the communities being served, particularly the Black and Queer community. During the design of the new governance structure, it will be critical to enact strategies that not only require representation but true decision-making authority.

Strategy in Action

The Suburban Minneapolis Area Continuum of Care—consisting of 5 counties surrounding Minneapolis-St. Paul—created a Director’s Council, a group of people with lived expertise from each of the counties represented to help redesign the coordinated entry system for the CoC.⁶ As the Council is established, they are also advising on CoC governance to help power and decision-making authority closer to people who have experience receiving services within the system. The Director’s Council approves all nominees running for CoC Board spots.

The King County Regional Homeless Authority built in a requirement for people with lived experience at every level of the governance, including the governing committee, implementation board, and advisory committee.⁷ The Lived Experience Coalition has representative positions on the governing committee and implementation board, which is more than any representative entity involved in governance.

03: CREATE AN OMBUDSMAN OFFICE WITHIN THE GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE TO ENSURE ACCOUNTABILITY TO THOSE ENGAGING WITH HOMELESS SERVICES

“It is easy to treat people like furniture and overlook them when there is no accountability and no one is calling this shit out.”

- Community advocate

There is currently no singular place for people navigating homeless services in Detroit to bring complaints, feedback, grievances, or ideas for improvement. This contributes greatly to the lack of accountability across service settings. An ombudsman’s⁸ office can serve as a central intake for welcoming and responding to people accessing homeless services, leading to greater accountability and a higher functioning system. In most models, the ombudsman’s office receives concerns and complaints from individuals navigating a system, then gathers more information with the individual, investigates the complaint, and resolves the complaint.

In Detroit, most feedback processes discourage individuals from filing grievances. In a service setting that honors individuals’ dignity and right to self-determination, feedback is both encouraged and responded to. The experience of people navigating homelessness response systems around the country have long been de-prioritized as a metric of success. A robust grievance system is key to changing that legacy.

accessing homeless services identified as male; two thirds of people receiving homeless services in Detroit are living alone without other members of their family; 1 in 4 people receiving services were children and 9% of people receiving services are between the ages of 18-24; most people receiving homeless services are between the ages of 41 and 64; and 50% of people accessing homeless services are living with a disabling condition (75% of those individuals have disabling conditions related to their mental health and 40% of those individuals have disabling conditions related to their physical health.

This demographic data is based on the Continuum of Care Gaps Analysis provided by OrgCode based on data from early 2020. This data, specifically demographic data on gender, is unreliable due to individuals’ safety and privacy concerns. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the <1% of people who identify as TGNC is an undercount due to these substantial concerns.

6 “Director’s Council,” Initiatives, Suburban Metro Area Continuum of Care, Accessed March 2, 2021, <http://bit.ly/3bUVOZM>.

7 “A visual on the newly adopted governance structure for the Authority,” Regional Homelessness Authority, All Home King County, Accessed March 10, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3lqz2B4>.

8 The National Innovation Service strives to use inclusive language. While “ombudsman” is seemingly gendered language, it is derived from a Swedish term. “Man” means “people” in Swedish, literally translating to “representative of the people.”

Strategy in Action

New York City's Department of Social Services formed an Office of Ombudsman for the Department of Homeless Services to directly respond to complaints from people experiencing homelessness, to offer mediation services across the system, and help navigate individuals through system issues directly impacting their homelessness.⁹

The King County Regional Homelessness Authority is required to create an ombudsman position that not only responds to complaints but actively gathers feedback from people navigating homeless services and from people working within the system.¹⁰ The office is required to report directly to the board to help ensure accountability.

04: STREAMLINE RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS SYSTEMS AND ALIGN THOSE PARTNERSHIPS TO THE PARTICIPATORY COMMUNITY PROCESS, GOALS, AND STRATEGIES NEEDED TO PURSUE THE ADOPTED COMMUNITY VISION

There are few clear pathways between homeless services and affordable housing and homeownership programs in Detroit, leaving residents experiencing homelessness or housing instability little to no direct and supported access to affordable housing units or homeownership opportunities. It will be critical for the CoC and HRD to engage affordable housing developers and operators, lenders, advocates, and public and private sector leaders to achieve the vision that was defined by the community: housing stability that is bolstered by affordable housing development that helps Detroiters recover generational wealth.

More detailed strategies on connecting with affordable housing and homeownership can be found in Action 2.

Detroit has struggled with making meaningful and sustainable connections to other social, health, educational and economic support systems as well. These partnerships are critical to the well-being and housing stability of many of the people experiencing homelessness in Detroit. There have been two recent partnerships to build from: one with the K-12 education system and one with Detroit at Work.

While developing a new governance structure, it is important to learn from current education and workforce partnerships and build in the ability for other systems to engage with the homeless response system. System partners must be at the table during the design phase in order to set mutually beneficial goals at the system level, rooted in data, and monitored across the two systems.

9 "Office of Ombudsman", Ombudsman, New York City Department of Homeless Services, Department of Social Services, Accessed March 5, 2021, <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/dhs/shelter/ombudsman/ombudsman.page>

10 "Interlocal Agreement" Regional Homelessness Authority, All Home King County, Accessed March 10, 2021, <https://bit.ly/2P3APQv>

Action 01: Build a System

System partnerships with the homeless response system often fail because partnering systems are not clear on their role, how the partnerships will benefit the work of their system, or the ways in which they can track progress. It will be critical to address these factors during the design phase and further strategies of system level partnerships are provided in Action 6.

Action 02

Focus Housing Priorities on Low-Income Detroiters

Leverage all federal, state, and local housing and growth investments to increase housing quality and affordability, and ensure quick access to safe, affordable housing for people experiencing homelessness in Detroit.



Click the link to the left to listen to ReGina Hentz from the Detroit Advisors Group speak on city accountability in housing priorities.

Background

Homelessness in Detroit is driven by the city's massive and increasing gap in safe, inhabitable affordable housing. The lack of safe affordable housing option leads to a reliance on the homeless response programs to access safe, affordable housing, contributes to longer stays in homeless response programs, and to higher returns to homeless response programs when safe, affordable units cannot be identified for individuals and families.

"The hardest part is when you get into a shelter and they tell you there's no funding for housing and now you have to figure out what you're going to do. How are you going to do this if you don't have income? Finding affordable housing and subsidized housing is the biggest challenge."

- Homeless services provider

Decades of harmful, racist housing policies and economic injustice have failed generation after generation of Black Detroiters, leaving far too many locked out of opportunities for stable housing and homeownership, increasing

poverty and resulting in a disproportionate rate of homelessness among Black and African Americans in the city.¹ At least one percent of the population experienced homelessness at any given time prior to the pandemic, while countless others experienced housing instability and couch surfing or doubling up with other households.

Low-income Detroit renters have few safe, adequately maintained, and affordable housing options while Black homeowners face the greatest home value disparities in the country, in addition to high rates of debt often due to outstanding property taxes.² Those homeowners are struggling with low home values, high-cost repairs, low rental income, and high property taxes. In the last 20 years alone, policies and market dynamics have severely limited Black Detroiters' access to capital, harmed their credit, and squelched hopes of economic mobility.

The community is long overdue in ensuring that it is livable for its people. To pursue its vision for

1 While Black Detroiters make up roughly 80% of the city's population, 90% of the people experiencing homelessness in Detroit are Black. This disparity is commonly referred to as "disproportionately represented."

2 Kirk Pinho, "Black Homeowners in Metro Detroit Face Greatest Home Value Disparity in Nation," Crain's Detroit Business, January 17, 2021, <https://bit.ly/30TmI2T>

housing justice, the community must increase access to affordable housing and proactively counter gentrification.

"People are getting pushed out of downtown. Several buildings were converted to market rate, because of gentrification. Affordable senior housing became market rate."

"A large, mostly white, affluent base of workers benefited from housing at rock-bottom prices. You got a lot of folks who moved into the city at a time when people are being displaced. No different from DC, San Francisco. There's so much vacant property, so much flight that's happened, people don't think about gentrification, it's happening at a different pace."

Though local plans currently commit to "reviving" downtown Detroit and "ensuring that those who have remained in Detroit benefit from its resurgence," a myriad of local policies and public-private partnerships are still failing to meet the needs of Black and low-income Detroit residents.

To effectively counter gentrification, the city and its partners must quickly reprioritize deeply affordable housing preservation and development to meet the needs of low-income Detroiters.

Through community engagement and in the systems audit, several themes emerged:

- Stable housing is out of reach for low-income Detroiters leading to a reliance on homeless response programs for housing and a cycling back into homeless response programs due to the lack of affordable option once they become re-housed;
- Housing quality is a major concern for renters and there is a perception that is has not prioritized by the city;
- Individuals and families living on a fixed income have few if any options for safe, inhabitable affordable housing;
- The repercussions of white flight and divestment from Detroit still shape the

city's housing market and economy today; and

- The absence of mass transit further limits Detroiters' access to affordable housing.

Strategies

01 ADOPT THE DETROIT MEDIAN INCOME CALCULATION COMMUNITY-WIDE

By using HUD's Area Median Income (AMI) calculation and prioritizing affordable housing based on 50-80% of that AMI even outside of federal jurisdiction, developers and planners are holding stable housing out of reach for most Detroiters. In 2020, there was a difference of \$18,874 between Detroit's local median income (\$31,283) and the federal AMI (\$55,000) for the Detroit-Livonia-Warren region.

For example, low-income housing, and many of Detroit's current affordable housing investments, are traditionally targeted at households with income at 51-80% of AMI. In Detroit, that would mean that households with incomes between \$28,050 and \$44,000 would be eligible for low-income housing. However, if eligibility was based on Detroit's median income rates, households with incomes between \$15,954 and \$25,026 would be prioritized for these housing opportunities.

In a city with such a high rate and history of poverty and exploitation, it is imperative that this issue is addressed. Adopting the local Detroit median income calculation³ community-wide for affordable housing prioritization wherever possible will help reach the majority of Detroiters that are currently priced out of stability due to the city's poverty levels.

Strategy in Action

The National Housing Trust Fund highlighted several communities' strategies for [developing and operating extremely low income housing](#). These strategies include public and private partners collaborating on cross-subsidization, capitalizing operating reserves, developing rent subsidies and operating assistance programs at the state level, supporting developers in reducing mortgage debt, and layering funding streams.

While the City already leverages many of these strategies, they have not been used to develop housing at the affordability levels needed in the city.

3 The Detroit City Council's Resolution Urging the City of Detroit to Utilize the Detroit Median Income as the Basis for Affordability in Detroit Housing Projects "urges that the City of Detroit began the utilization of the local area median income calculation in evaluating affordable housing projects used by housing programs, housing agencies, housing developers, housing financiers, community development financial institutions, corporate and philanthropic partners, shelter providers, elected officials, city departments, among many others unless HUD Area Median Income data is required by law."

"City Council Adopted a Detroit Median Income Resolution," CDAD Policy Update (Community Development Advocates of Detroit, n.d.), <https://buildingtheengine.com/bulletin/cdad-policy-update/>.

**02
DEVELOP A COMMUNITY-DRIVEN
COMPREHENSIVE AFFORDABILITY PLAN
THAT MEETS THE NEEDS OF DETROITERS
AT ALL INCOME LEVELS IN EVERY DETROIT
NEIGHBORHOOD.**

“We really need to focus on maintaining the integrity and the equity of our communities and really looking at having a safe place and a place for Detroiters to remain Detroiters so they don’t feel pushed out and they don’t have to fear that the family that’s moving in next door. ‘I won’t lose my house if I miss one tax payment’”

- Community organizer

A community-driven affordability plan should be co-created in partnership between:

- Neighborhood leaders
- Hyperlocal community development agencies
- Representatives of people with lived experience of homelessness, eviction, and foreclosure;
- Local government agencies; and
- Other existing coalitions dedicated to this goal.

This plan and its creators should have at their disposal all affordable housing development and preservation tools currently available. This is including, but not limited to: public-private partnerships, the Detroit Land Bank, the Affordable Housing Leverage Fund, Rehabbed & Ready, all applicable state and federal funding streams, as well as local tax abatements, tax-exempt bond financing, tax credits that are currently supporting mid-income affordable housing development and preservation in Detroit, though they are billed to be low-income housing.⁴

The plan should be informed by data from across the spectrum of Detroiters’ housing realities and income and should situate housing within the framework of social determinants of

health, interdependent with other determinants of health. Such a plan should also include funding and resources for capacity building for community development organizations to then lead the plan’s implementation in all of Detroit’s neighborhoods.

Strategy in Action

A [comprehensive housing affordability study](#) in King County, Washington mapped the housing needs of the community across income bands to demonstrate the strain the local housing market puts on extremely low-income residents. These research methods would be valuable to Detroiters in assessing needs, as well as in building a shared understanding of the role that both the public and private sectors have played in exacerbating the city’s housing affordability crisis.

4 This misnomer is due to the difference between Detroiters’ real income levels and the data used to define affordable housing regionally. See Action 2, Strategy 1 for more details.

**03
PRIORITIZE NEW FEDERAL COVID RELIEF AND
STIMULUS FUNDING FOR QUALITY, DEEPLY
AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND HOMELESS
SERVICES BASED ON COMMUNITY-LED
PRIORITIES.**

“Housing priorities - in city of Detroit it is around developing affordable housing but not deeply affordable so not helping people experiencing homelessness. Their real focus is “bringing Detroit back” and redeveloping in a way that isn’t inclusive of the homeless population. That’s a huge thing that we’re working against.”

- System leader

To address the immediate unmet housing needs of low-to-middle income Detroiters, the city, state, and county should prioritize those who are priced out of current local affordable housing development and preservation priorities when planning for new federal relief and stimulus funding.

People experiencing homelessness are generally not exiting the homeless response system with increases in income (through employment or entitlements) and so the housing stock currently under development in Detroit is not likely to increase the community’s ability to quickly and safely house people experiencing homelessness. There is also a lack of quality existing low income rentals across the city, contributing to the difficulties in being able to safely and quickly exit the homeless response programs.

As additional homelessness, rental assistance, and community development block grant resources become available from the federal government, Detroit must fill the current gap in resources for Detroiters who are experiencing homelessness and those making less than \$32,000 per year by targeting rental assistance resources and by utilizing the funding to address the housing quality issues across rental units in Detroit. The programs and services derived from those funding streams should be identified and/or designed by people with lived experience of

homelessness and housing instability in Detroit, focusing on addressing the hardships facing historically marginalized communities in the city.

Strategy in Action

The Framework for an Equitable COVID-19 Response includes [prioritization guidance](#) for emergency rental assistance, a [matrix of funding sources](#), and [guidance for meeting the needs of children and families](#), all of which can be used to help ensure that Detroit’s ongoing COVID-19 response and recovery centers the needs of Detroiters who have limited resources to address their challenges.

04 INCREASE ACCESS TO HOMEOWNERSHIP FOR DETROITERS AT LOWER INCOME LEVELS

In the short term, local leaders can support Detroiters in accessing home ownership while interest rates are low by pairing credit repair services with supports to navigate the variety of homeownership assistance programs and discounts available to them. Partners should leverage existing local and statewide down payment assistance programs with FHA home loans ([Detroit Home Mortgage](#), [MI Home Loan Flex](#), [MI Home Loan](#), and [Detroit Land Bank Discount Programs](#)) to facilitate homeownership. Credit repair services are a necessary component of any such initiative given the impact of tax foreclosures and debt on Detroiters over the last two decades.

Strategy in Action

[American Consumer Credit Counseling](#) offers credit counseling, debt management, credit repair services, classes for first-time homebuyers, and a myriad of other resources that are helpful to individuals and families navigating homeownership opportunities.

Action 03

Redesign the Crisis Response

Redesign Detroit's homelessness crisis response by abolishing the need for congregate shelters and offering alternative forms of crisis housing with strong navigation services and by focusing on improvements to coordinated entry that can assist people to more quickly to permanent housing options.



Click the link to the left to listen to Melvin Sylvester from the Detroit Advisors Group speak on the importance of long term housing supports connected to crisis options.

Background

In interviews and in conversation with community members who have navigated CAM and have experienced shelter programs in Detroit (and in some cases, now assist others in navigating those same services), experiences and insights were shared that illustrated a large gap between individuals' ability to move from congregate shelter into permanent housing.

In addition to the baseline ineffectiveness of congregate shelters in supporting people in accessing stable, permanent housing, the COVID-19 crisis has illustrated that many shelters are underfunded and lacking staff and supplies, making it harder to maintain safe and sanitary conditions.¹

Many congregate shelters have harmful and restrictive policies rooted in racism, homophobia, and transphobia that make them an unsafe, an option of last resort, or completely keep many Black, Brown, Indigenous, TGNC and LGBTQ people out of services.² Examples of harmful

and restrictive policies include those that restrict safe entry or retention of shelter due to drug or alcohol use, immigration status, and/or gender identity.

People who have navigated Detroit's homeless service programs repeatedly shared that both access to shelter and treatment within shelter were difficult and, at times, traumatizing. People experiencing homelessness and housing instability need access to crisis housing of their choice that offers privacy, dignity, and safety, and leads to long-term housing.

There are also gaps in the continuity of care between CAM, the coordinated entry system, and the shelter programs. People accessing shelter are often not fully aware of the CAM process, how to navigate through CAM while in shelter, or how remain connected to CAM if they leave shelter without permanent housing or choose not to enter a shelter program at all.

1 "The Framework for an Equitable Covid-19 Response," National Innovation Service, 2020, <https://www.nis.us/covid-19-response-top-priorities-and-actions-across-communities>

2 "The Framework for an Equitable Covid-19 Response: Priorities from Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer (LGBQ)/Trans* People," National Innovation Service, 2020, <http://bit.ly/2NuFeeF>

A strong coordinated entry system must ensure that staff in all crisis housing settings are fully trained in the coordinated entry process and that people utilizing crisis housing and experiencing unsheltered homelessness have navigation services that keep them informed and connected to the process and additional services.

The following common themes emerged related to the state of Detroit's response to housing crises:

- Lack of effective access and use of CAM (coordinated entry) including:
 - Lack of navigation assistance within the shelter system
 - Lack of understanding of the assessment and prioritization process to access housing and concerns of inequitable prioritization
 - Lack of navigation services across the crisis housing, experiences of unsheltered homelessness, and coordinated entry process
 - Lack of access for the Trans* community due to low Trans* cultural competency, distrust, and lack of connection to organizations that serve the Trans* community
- Lack of effective service connections and case management
- Lack of pipeline to permanent housing
- Service navigation is opaque with not much effective assistance
- Physical, emotional, and mental safety concerns relating to quality of services and treatment from staff, cleanliness, privacy

Strategies

01

UTILIZE COVID RELIEF AND STIMULUS FUNDING TO DESIGN A CRISIS RESPONSE THAT ABOLISHES THE NEED FOR LARGE CONGREGATE SHELTERS BY CREATING SAFE, SERVICE-ENRICHED CRISIS HOUSING OPTIONS

"One of the things we constantly hear is how difficult it is to navigate services for homeless or displaced folks in Detroit. That it's been difficult for folks to feel safe in shelter and how difficult it is to actually be able to hold down a job and still be in shelter."

- Community advocate

"Emergency shelter tends to be a tremendous barrier in navigating the system we need to have a willingness to be more flexible in how we're providing emergency shelter"

-Provider

The [Framework for an Equitable COVID-19 Homelessness Response](#) encourages communities to prioritize activities focused on the establishing non-congregate emergency shelter for purposes of social distancing, isolation, and quarantine and efforts to keep people safer within decompressed congregate shelter settings.

Communities are called upon to sustain and expand sheltering opportunities during the pandemic and to strive to transform their sheltering system to focus on non-congregate environments and other, safer models of sheltering people, in order to be better prepared for future public health crises and to create more welcoming and efficient systems.

Detroit should utilize the framework as a tool in the robust and ongoing community-led process necessary to properly utilize a portion of the subsequent rounds of federal and state relief and recovery funds to re-design the crisis response in Detroit. The community process should include HRD, the CoC, providers, and people with lived

experience to set funding priorities and clear goals around de-congregating shelters and creating alternate forms of crisis housing and assistance.

It will be essential to support the leadership capacity of people who have navigated Detroit's shelters in the process, to continually communicate with people currently utilizing shelters and others crisis assistance about what is working and not working within the crisis response, and to adapt to evidence-based practices. It will be important to create opportunities not just for feedback from people with lived experience, but opportunities for them to lead implementation toward their visions for a future with no congregate shelters.

Strategy in Action

At Y2Y in Boston, the nation's first youth-led youth homeless shelter, participants in the program collaborate with service providers, other youth experiencing homelessness, and student volunteers to create sustainable pathways out of homelessness and develop skills for long-term success. Young people informed and led every aspect of the program, from what services they offer to the design of the space.³

02 LAUNCH A COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PROCESS TO DESIGN IMPROVEMENTS TO CAM AND FURTHER RACIAL EQUITY.

"Number one is that I'm not getting housed fast enough, we hear that very frequently. They feel the process isn't working for them. Coupled with that, "I don't know where I am in the process or what my next step is"

- Provider

Communities across the country have raised concerns around coordinated entry's role in perpetuating racial disparities within the homeless response system. CoCs and other community stakeholders from many parts of the country have reported anecdotal evidence that CES assessments lead to a prioritization of white people for housing resources over Black, Brown, and Indigenous people.⁴ It is clear that the coordinated entry system is perpetuating racial inequities in the homelessness responses across the country and a further evaluation of CAM is needed to understand the ways in which it may be contributing to disparities in Detroit. Although the most documented example of this is in the use of the coordinated entry assessment tools,⁵ the entire process of CAM should be evaluated to identify places that are perpetuating racism or having other harmful effects on people attempting to access the system.⁶

The community-driven process should include:⁷

- A broad community stakeholder group, including those most impacted by CAM
- A set of clear goals and objectives around improving CAM for Black, Brown, Indigenous, and LGBTQ community members

3 "Y2Y Harvard Square," Young Adults Uniting To End Homelessness, Accessed February 2020, <https://www.y2ynetwork.org/y2y-harvard-square/>.

4 Wilkey et al., "Coordinated Entry Systems: Racial Equity Analysis of Assessment Data," C4 Innovations, October 2019, <https://bit.ly/2Qiqhxr>.

5 Wilkey et al., "Coordinated Entry Systems: Racial Equity Analysis of Assessment Data," C4 Innovations, October 2019, <https://bit.ly/2Qiqhxr>.

6 A racial disparities analysis of CAM was not conducted as part of this project, the assertions are based on national research and the community should focus on conducting a full analysis as part of the strategy to improve.

7 "Homeless System Response: Advancing Racial Equity through Assessments and Prioritization," Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, Accessed February 2020, <https://bit.ly/2ODiCJK>.

- An evaluation of all components of CAM (access, assessment, prioritization, and referral) for places for implicit or explicit racial bias is showing
- A pairing of CAM data with continuous actions for improvement

Strategy in Action

The [Advancing Racial Equity through Assessments and Prioritization](#) guide developed by Department of Housing and Urban Development Technical Assistant providers offers a comprehensive look at ways to organize community stakeholders around a planning and evaluation process to re-design coordinated entry systems to move toward racial equity. It offers suggestions on tools and data to use for the race-based evaluations of coordinated entry and ways to move towards action, including ways to look at prioritization factors that disproportionately effect marginalized communities as a means to ensure they have better access to the system.

Youth Collaboratory, in partnership with service providers, HUD, HHS, USICH and Melville Charitable Trust, created the [Coordinated Entry Learning Collaborative](#) (CELC) in response to the youth service field's need for guidance on how to design, implement, and maintain a coordinated community response to youth homelessness. Through the CELC, early innovators "case" challenges and find support from their peers. This includes sharing previous strategies that have failed, current or potential strategies, tangible policies and procedures, tools for implementation, and tools for system-level analysis.

03 FULLY FUND A PEER NAVIGATION PROGRAM FOR ALL POPULATIONS THAT SUPPORTS INDIVIDUALS FROM POINT OF ACCESS INTO PERMANENT HOUSING

Peer navigators are service providers who have personally navigated a housing program or system and are paid for their work supporting and connecting with individuals who are themselves navigating homeless services. Peer navigators can be an incredibly impactful form of support. The unique power of peer navigation programs is in part in the shared lived experience of homelessness and/or housing instability, but this can often translate to other shared experiences as well. Through these peer-to-peer relationships, trust can be built that helps to reduce barriers to housing, connect people to service providers and assist with referrals to programs and services—all with the end goal of creating a pathway out of homelessness.

While housing navigation assistance programs in Detroit do exist, there is a unique value in peer navigation programs. Peer navigators can leverage their experience and training to provide what is often much-needed relief from the burden of individuals having to navigate opaque systems on their own. Not only can peer housing navigators connect clients with services and provide problem solving support, but they can also provide social and emotional support to help an individual to live independently.

Strategy in Action

The Peer Wellness Program, a service component of Pathways to Housing, New York (PTH-NY), provides a wide range of peer-delivered services. These services include a peer-led recovery center and service delivery model that embeds peer specialists with clinical teams; a collaborative, strengths-based peer coaching model; and a peer-involved research component that supports peers interested in delivering presentations at local and national conferences. The project offers participants assistance with an array of services, such as housing retention, employment, pursuing their education, securing entitlements, making social connections, criminal

Action 03: Redesign the Crisis Response

justice issues, reuniting with children and families, living healthier lifestyles, becoming financially informed, and dealing with trauma. The Peer Warm Line, where peers are able to provide extra support via telephone in the evening and on weekends, has been ongoing since the beginning of the program.⁸

A Place 4 Me is an initiative that coordinates the planning and implementation of local efforts to improve outcomes for transition age youth. They found that many of their clients were leaving shelters without information about where they were going next. After digging deeper into the data, A Place 4 Me secured grant funds to hire two peer navigators to provide peer-to-peer outreach and resource support to these youths. The young people currently in those roles have experience with both foster care and homelessness, and their efforts to connect with other young people in similar circumstances have proved helpful.

8 "Peer Wellness Program and Pathways to Housing," SAMHSA, August 2019, <http://bit.ly/3cOKVwA>.

Action 04

Improve the Quality of Services

Continue to improve the quality of homelessness response services, based on the concerns and priorities of people experiencing homelessness.



Click the link to the left to listen to Eleanor Bradford from the Detroit Advisory Group on speak to the significance of quality housing services.

Background

People experience harmful, abusive treatment within homeless service settings every day, compounding the trauma of the experiences of housing instability and homelessness.

"If we ever needed to file a complaint. It would be this really big intimidating book that they would like position and be like, Oh, you got to do this and do all that, and nine times out of 10 at the time and myself included, I wasn't about to read all that and I was not about to go through all those processes, because just imagine how hard it was to get housing and fill it out and always follow up with on that, then you gotta give it to the person who you naturally probably complaining about anyway."

- TGNC Community Member in Detroit

Despite this and like many cities, previous local service improvement initiatives have been said to focus primarily on procedures and policy alignment and not on quality of experience of the person using the services. Providers and administrators also reported technical assistance fatigue from different efforts that have started and stopped over the years.

Frontline staff and people with lived experience of homelessness, as well as administrators and funders recognize the need to systematize and broaden person-centered, continuous quality improvement in all homeless service settings. The Homeless Action Network of Detroit and the

City's Housing and Revitalization Department have undertaken a systematic and pragmatic process to improve service provision in permanent supportive housing across the city as an attempt to improve the quality of experience for people in PSH.

Other common insights and themes that emerged from interviews and the community workshop include:

- Service agencies are given broad jurisdiction to manage homeless services with little operational oversight or accountability;
- Client to staff ratios are not managed;
- Case managers have very large caseloads;
- Funding cuts have significant impacts on frontline staff who are expected to provide an increasing number of services;
- System changes and improvement efforts have fallen on frontline workers such as case managers to improve outcomes; and
- There are limited connections between providers and staff across service points, disrupting relationships and continuity for people experiencing homelessness.

Strategies

01 IMPLEMENT CONTRACTUAL CLAUSES TO PRESCRIBE SERVICES WITHIN EACH SERVICE SETTING AND LIMIT THE SIZE OF CASE MANAGERS' CASELOADS

State and local public and private funders should implement contractual agreements that outline what case management services, connections to systems, and system navigation supports must be provided by contracted service providers across each service setting (outreach, diversion, coordinated entry, shelter, rapid re-housing, permanent supportive housing, and eviction prevention). These agreements should be structured based on the stated needs of people experiencing homelessness and developed in close consultation with members of the community who have accessed homeless services in Detroit.

Strategy in Action

The [Government Performance Lab at Harvard University](#) suite of [Active Contract Management](#) tools can help community members and administrators design processes and structures to improve service delivery through active funder-contractor collaboration. While technical assistance may be helpful in this transition, members of the community are also well-equipped with the expertise, if not the resources and leadership, to lead this process.

02 IDENTIFY GAPS AND DEVELOP SERVICES AND SUPPORTS FOR SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Detroit has a dearth of housing services tailored to the needs of survivors of domestic violence and those fleeing domestic violence. Leaders should create a process for survivors and advocates to define what service needs exist and co-design the necessary service models and programs alongside homeless service providers and administrators. Homeless service providers and administrators should also streamline their partnerships with domestic violence service providers nearby but outside the city to ensure that all Detroiters who have those needs in the short term can be easily and seamlessly connected to the services and supports they require.

Strategy in Action

The [Domestic Violence and Housing Technical Assistance Consortium](#) offers a wide-reaching set of tools and guidance for homeless service providers and domestic violence service providers to build and strengthen their connections in order to better serve survivors.

03 IMPROVE COORDINATION BETWEEN OUTREACH PROVIDERS, MDHHS, AND THE HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE SYSTEM.

"Large gap in care when someone gets into housing. As street outreach providers we lose touch with them, folks get moved in and don't have phones to let us know. Their needs don't seem as urgent once they're in housing, but it's one of the most important times to ensure people still have social support. Our patients struggle emotionally so much because people turn a blind eye, it's so degrading and so hard for people."

- outreach worker

Funders and providers should build and streamline relationships and connections between outreach providers and other homeless services and supports to offer person-centered care and to sustain and strengthen relationships between people experiencing homelessness and those providing services.

Strategy in Action

The U. S. Interagency Council on Homelessness published [lessons learned](#) from a panel of experts convened by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) as well as [guidance on the core elements of effective outreach](#).

04 UTILIZE PERFORMANCE-BASED CONTRACTING TO RESUME QUALITY IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS

Local partners should resume the work that began before the pandemic to improve service delivery within shelters and focus on ensuring that shelter services are:

1. Safe and affirming,
2. Connected to housing navigation services and the CAM process, and
3. More quickly connect people to supportive resources that can be utilized while in shelter and after exiting to housing.

Performance-based contracting for publicly funded shelters should include clear service quality standards and people with lived experiences of shelters should be included in designing the standards used in performance-based contracts. Efforts to improve service quality in permanent supportive housing can be leveraged to define quality standards and organize technical assistance to help shelter providers improve service quality.

Strategy in Action

Federal technical assistance is available through HUD to support communities in strengthening service delivery models. Given that service providers and administrators expressed "technical assistance fatigue," leaders should create space for these initiatives to be community-led and community-driven in order for them to be holistically developed and useful to all stakeholders involved. Technical assistance should be defined by the community and local experts, including and especially people who have experienced homelessness themselves, who should be positioned as leaders and subject matter experts in this work.

Action 05

Support and Protect Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Detroiters

Improve safety in and access to homeless services for transgender and gender non-conforming (TGNC) Detroiters.



Click the link to the left to listen to Racquelle Trammell and Julisa Abad from the Detroit Advisory Group speaks on why it is essential to center safe and affirming housing for Transgender community members.

Background

In interviews and ongoing advisory relationships with transgender and gender non-conforming (TGNC) community members, it was identified that housing and homelessness programs in Detroit have consistently failed TGNC people experiencing homelessness, particularly TGNC people of color. The programs often are designed around the needs of cisgender community members and do not reflect the needs of TGNC community members, which furthers the everyday realities and safety risks of being Trans in this country. Many shelters and housing programs have no policies in place that specify protections for TGNC clients, and it was specified by community members that there is a severe lack of services for TGNC people experiencing homelessness aside from HIV/AIDS support programs.

"My gender identity and expression made me not be taken serious in the shelter system. It gave me a distrust about myself and with those who run the programs."

- TGNC Community Member in Detroit

According to most recent national estimates,

8% of transgender people experienced homelessness in the last year, compared to 1% of cisgender straight adults.¹ Data further confirm that people of color (30.2% vs. 13.5%) and transgender (28.0% vs. 14.6%) people were much more common to have been homeless at some point in their lives than white and cisgender people.² As we seek to do better for the TGNC community in Detroit, it must be acknowledged that not only do the present strategies not work—they actively cause harm. This issue demands the greatest possible focus from systems leaders and community members in order to create both short- and long-term solutions.

Other common insights and themes that emerged from interviews and the community workshop include:

- Discrimination within homelessness response system
- Avoidance of services for fear of physical/mental safety
- Misgendering within housing services
- Physical and mental safety threats of

1 Wilson et al., "Homelessness Among LGBT Adults in the U.S.," UCLA School of Law, Williams Institute, May 2020, <http://bit.ly/3cZYkST>.

2 Frazer, Somjen and Howe, Erin, "LGBT Health and Human Service Needs in New York State," LGBT Community Center and NY State LGBT HHS Network, 2015, <https://bit.ly/3txrjnt>.

gender segregation within housing system

- Lack of services for TGNC people unless those services are tied to HIV/AIDS funding
- Lack of process for feedback within services and a fear of retaliation for feedback
- Lack of TGNC-specific housing case management and supports
- Lack of TGNC-specific supports around employment
- Need of both formal and informal support systems

Strategies

01 FUND PROGRAMS RUN BY AND FOR TRANSGENDER AND GENDER NON- CONFORMING PEOPLE AND/OR TGNC- SPECIFIC HOUSING SPACES AND SERVICES

In interviews and ongoing advisory relationships with TGNC community members, they identified the meaningful impact on both formal and informal peer support. Additionally, outcomes for TGNC people are far more positive when there is robust peer support in place.¹

Feedback from TGNC community members indicated that in order to fund TGNC-run programs, low barriers for funding need to be in place. Support for these organizations and their clients' needs to be streamlined and accessible. Often, when a system is operating in scarcity, services and programs for special populations are the first to be cut.

However, TGNC people experiencing homelessness need supports and protections specific to their transgender identity.² These services also need to provide support to the many intersecting identities that TGNC individuals may hold, such as living with disabilities.

Strategy in Action

The House of Tulip is a housing program in New Orleans run by and for TGNC community members. They are raising funds to buy and restore a multi-family property in an area of New Orleans that's accessible to health care and employment opportunities. It's a pilot permanent housing campus, and it will house up to 10 TGNC people at a time. Additionally, they're working to acquire a separate space that can serve as a community center where TGNC people can safely access social safety net navigation, community programming, a hot meal, a shower, or a safe place to just hang out or do schoolwork.³

GLITS, a Black transgender-led organization in New York City, creates holistic solutions to the health and housing crises faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals experiencing systemic discrimination at intersecting oppressions impacted by racism and criminalization, through a lens of harm reduction, human rights principles, social justice and community empowerment.

In the next year, GLITS will launch a new housing site with 12 apartments. Each unit will be filled by a member of the LGBTQIA+ community who is experiencing homelessness. This transitional housing will go far beyond the scope of a shelter to offer dignified long-term stability for residents who will engage with continuing education, training, counseling, and career development resources. Stipends are offered to residents as a means to engage with meeting their basic needs self-sufficiently.⁴

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- 1 Johnson, Austin H. and Rogers, Baker H, "We're the Normal Ones Here": Community Involvement, Peer Support, and Transgender Mental Health," Sociological Inquiry, Dec 2019, <https://bit.ly/3lrBGGy>.
 - 2 Mottet, Lisa and Ohle, John M, "Transitioning Our Shelters: A Guide to Making Homeless Shelters Safe for Transgender People," National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce Policy Institute, 2003, <https://bit.ly/3tsHu5m>.
 - 3 "Introducing House of Tulip," House of Tulip, accessed February 2020, <https://houseoftulip.org/>.
 - 4 "Gays and Lesbians living in a Transgender Society," G.L.I.T.S., Accessed February 2020. <https://www.glitsinc.org/>.

02 DEVELOP AN EFFECTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY PROCESS FOR EQUAL ACCESS VIOLATIONS

HUD's Equal Access Rule requires that HUD-funded housing services be provided without discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

Although it is stated in the CoC non-discrimination policy that all housing and services coordinated through the Continuum of Care must be available to all eligible persons regardless of actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, personal anecdotal accounts from interviews with TGNC community members suggests that not only is that not always enforced by the housing programs they have navigated, it is often actively and knowingly ignored.

It is recommended that a grievance process be created through the Ombudsman Office discussed in Action 1, Strategy 3, that includes meaningful accountability and thorough documentation. Accountability measures should include corrective action plans and the loss of future public funding if actions are not corrected. Clients also need assurance that their grievances will not lead to them losing their ability to access services—TGNC community members in our listening sessions cited fear of retaliation as a major reason for not coming forward with grievances and Equal Access violations.

Frontline staff have a particular role to play in building safety for TGNC clients. In conversations with TGNC community members, it was often stated that a lack of support system, particularly in regard to mental health, was crucial to their survival. It was also stated that while sometimes frontline staff were trained in LGBTQ competency, the training did not necessarily translate to increased safety or lack of traumatizing experiences for TGNC clients at the hands of people working in shelters and housing

programs. Cultural competency trainings must be thorough, intentional, and informed by the communities they are designed to protect.

"No shelter in Detroit will let you enter shelter of your gender identity if they knew you were Trans."

- TGNC Community Member in Detroit

Strategy in Action

HUD, in partnership with a group of TGNC advocates, developed and published guidance for communities on implementing the Equal access rule across shelters and supported housing programs. [Equal Access for Transgender People: Supporting Inclusive Housing and Shelters](#), offers guidance on the regulations, best practices in making housing affirming and inclusive, and sample policy and procedures.

03 CREATE AND SUPPORT OPPORTUNITIES FOR TGNC LEADERSHIP AT THE SYSTEM AND AGENCY LEVEL.

Individuals with the most compounded marginalized identities, such as transgender women of color, have particular insight not only into what it would take to create safety for their own communities, but for all communities.⁵ In order for TGNC-specific programs to thrive, they need sustained TGNC leadership and that leadership needs to be meaningfully supported. There is expertise that already exists within the TGNC community that is essential in establishing conditions for TGNC people to survive and thrive. TGNC individuals often have an increased capacity to lead based on the resiliency and problem-solving skills they have had to develop by the very nature of their experiences and identity.⁶

When TGNC people are given an opportunity to build their leadership capacity, they find opportunities to tell their own stories, and this can be a transformative force. These leaders become role models within communities and have the ability to impact the lives and experiences of their peers, both cisgender and gender expansive.

Strategy in Action

Catalyst Transgender Leadership Program is a year-long program for a selected cohort of 15-20 transgender Oregonians. Participants attend monthly retreats where they work to refine their leadership skills while building community with each other. Workshops are facilitated by transgender leaders who work with the cohort to create a safe, affirming, and connective space for all.

The mission of the Transgender Cultural District in San Francisco is to create an urban environment that fosters the rich history, culture, legacy, and empowerment of transgender people and its deep roots in the southeastern Tenderloin neighborhood. The transgender district aims to stabilize and economically empower the transgender community through ownership of homes, businesses, historic and cultural sites, and safe community spaces.

The Trans Leadership Initiative (TLI) of the Campaign for Southern Equality provides intensive support to new groups of trans leaders from across the South each year. The initiative offers leadership coaching, funding, and technical assistance to grow their leadership and help strengthen their vital work in local communities.⁷

5 T. Bowell, "Feminist Standpoint Theory," Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Accessed February 2020, <https://iep.utm.edu/fem-stan/>.

6 "Honoring the Resilience of the Transgender Community," Human Rights Campaign, October 2019, <https://www.hrc.org/news/honoring-the-resilience-of-the-transgender-community>.

7 "Trans Leadership Initiative." Campaign for Southern Equality. Accessed February 2020. <http://bit.ly/3cHMyMM>

Target Homelessness Prevention Resources

Refocus, coordinate, and target homelessness prevention funding to those most likely to become homeless and to those who have previously experienced homelessness.



Click the link to the left to listen to Tasha Grey from HAND discuss the importance of targeted prevention.

Background

Detroit is ranked with the second highest rate of poverty among large cities in the United States as a result of its history of housing crises, depopulation, and divestment. In 2020, 30.6% of Detroit residents were living below the poverty line.¹ The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated poverty and housing instability for Detroiters and increased demand for homelessness prevention services.

The work of Barbara Poppe and Dr. Dennis Culhane together offer a framework for evaluating Detroit's current homelessness prevention efforts: primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention efforts should be demonstrably effective and efficient.² Research

shows that, unless homelessness prevention services are community-wide and part of a larger structure of planning and organization that address proper targeting of support, they are unlikely to be efficient.³

Like many cities, Detroit's priorities for homelessness prevention funding are not efficient and cannot be shown to be effective for the task at hand.⁴ Primary prevention efforts are folded into broader local poverty alleviation efforts and are dispersed across different programs and agencies, making them difficult for people nearing or in crisis to access. Secondary intervention resources that are intended to solve the immediate crisis of lost housing, such

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- 1 "Cleveland overtakes Detroit as poorest big city in U.S., census finds." The Detroit News. September 2020. <http://bit.ly/30SHkrZ>
 - 2 Barbara Poppe, "Unlocking Doors to Homelessness Prevention" (Barbara Poppe and Associates, Health Spark Foundation, and Your Way Home Montgomery County, March 2018), <https://bit.ly/3cNguXx>.
 - 3 Martha R. Burt, Carol Pearson, and Ann Elizabeth Montgomery, "Community-Wide Strategies for Preventing Homelessness: Recent Evidence," The Journal of Primary Prevention 28, no. 3-4 (September 2007): pp. 213-228, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10935-007-0094-8>.
 - 4 Culhane's research validates previous research on this topic, asserting that "to be successful, homelessness prevention needs to be efficient as well as effective: efficient in that, like the proverbial ounce of prevention, prevention in the current policy context needs to realize overall cost benefits and reductions in demand for homeless services; and effective meaning that the measures work to provide a greater degree of housing stability to the point that literal homelessness is averted or reversed."

Dennis Culhane, "A Prevention-Centered Approach to Homelessness Assistance: A Paradigm Shift?" (University of Pennsylvania, May 2011), <https://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/Culhane.2011.pdf>.

as diversion, emergency cash assistance, and landlord mediation, are limited in Detroit and their efficacy has not been measured.

There is also a lack of meaningful connections between these secondary interventions and those who have recently left housing supported by homeless response programs in Detroit. This lack of connection leaves individuals at a higher risk of experiencing homelessness again after exiting a program and with little access to an intervention beyond going back through CAM and the homeless response once they have lost their housing for a second time.

Efficiency will require that households most likely to become imminently homeless without assistance are targeted for services and support, including those that have recently left housing supported by homeless response programs. Effectiveness requires that assistance is actually preventing and mitigating homelessness for the individuals and families at risk. The cyclical nature of severe housing instability and homelessness in Detroit indicates that prevention efforts are not effective.

Poppe's research found that programs designed to prevent homelessness only show net cost savings to communities only when those at imminent risk of homelessness are successfully housed and the cost of providing emergency shelter is significant,⁵ which is now the case across the United States given the necessity and cost of non-congregate shelter.

The following themes arose in conversations with administrators, service providers, and people who have experienced homelessness in Detroit:

- There are a series of "stops" individuals and families have to make to access the multiple services they need to prevent homelessness;
- Instances of homelessness are often intermittent and cyclical, intertwined

with periods of unstable housing arrangements;

- Housing quality and preservation is prioritized over affordability in mainstream local politics;
- Eviction prevention is prioritized for homelessness prevention funding locally; and
- Diversion is effective for families, but funding is insufficient and it little to no diversion is going to other populations

5 Barbara Poppe, "Unlocking Doors to Homelessness Prevention" (Barbara Poppe and Associates, Health Spark Foundation, and Your Way Home Montgomery County, March 2018), <https://bit.ly/3cNguXx>

Strategies

01 LAUNCH A PROCESS TO IDENTIFY WHO IS MOST LIKELY TO BECOME HOMELESS IN DETROIT TO THEN DEFINE SYSTEMS- AND SERVICE-LEVEL NEEDS.

"Not investing money in preventative services to keep people in their homes, it is creating more homelessness. Same things with not addressing foreclosure issues like high tax rates and water bills."

- System leader

Members of the community who have or are currently experiencing homelessness should be the key informants in a process to assess the community's prevention resources, identifying those that are most effective at ending or mitigating the effects of Detroiters' housing crises. While this work has been started in the past, it should be re-launched in the context of system transformation efforts.

This effort should be informed by quantitative and qualitative data about who becomes homeless in Detroit and how those experiences unfold at the individual, family, and community levels in order to increase the efficiency and targeting of those programs. Funding and resources for the identified programs and targeted demographics should be shifted from inefficient primary prevention efforts, as identified by the community.

Strategy in Action

The [Lived Experience Advisory Committee](#) of the Baltimore City Continuum of Care, which started as a working group and became a standing committee of the CoC, offers an excellent model for community-led policy advising and change.

The committee meets weekly and is responsible for advising the CoC and the Mayor's Office of Homeless Services. One of the committee's current goals is to reform the homeless service system by engaging and educating the Mayor's Office of Homeless Services and provider agencies to improve the delivery of services in shelters and other parts of the system. Members of the committee sit on almost every other CoC committee, the committee's co-chairs are members of the CoC Executive Committee, which also has six CoC Board positions dedicated to people who have experienced homelessness.

02 STREAMLINE PRIMARY PREVENTION RESOURCES THROUGH COORDINATED, CITY-WIDE SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

As outlined below in Action 6, Detroit’s homeless response system needs stronger connections to other systems, social services, and supports. The community’s poverty alleviation efforts are far-reaching but difficult to access given their decentralization. For people experiencing homelessness, this is particularly challenging and effectively cuts this segment of the population off from resources that are available to others in the community. Strategy 3 under Action 6 offers a framework for connecting people experiencing homelessness to these resources more effectively.

Strategy in Action

The [Everyone Home](#) program in Washington, DC is a 90-day program offering services for families at risk of experiencing homelessness based at the Virginia Williams Family Resource Center, which serves as the community’s front door for services for families experiencing homelessness in the city. The Everyone Home program offers flexible financial assistance, mediation, and connections to other supportive services including resources from and connections to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), child welfare, schools, health care, and employment services.¹

03 CREATE TERTIARY PREVENTION PROGRAMS BASED ON COMMUNITY-DEFINED NEEDS.

Tertiary prevention is “designed to mitigate the effects of housing instability once homelessness occurs and to create opportunities for stable housing.” Due to the cyclical nature of homelessness for many Detroiters, a tertiary prevention strategy and targeted resources will ensure that people who are experiencing homelessness in Detroit are able to access housing stability without having to come back through homeless response programs. This strategy should be focused on those who have recently exited Rapid Rehousing programs and are at risk of re-entering homeless response programs, those that are in Permanent Supportive Housing and could be safely moved to non-supported housing, and those on or who have recently left voucher assistance programs. This strategy should be closely aligned with efforts to improve service quality within the homeless service programs to ensure quality of intervention across prevention programs as well.

Strategy in Action

Local comprehensive tertiary prevention should include tenants’ rights policy improvement and enforcement,² comprehensive access to eviction prevention resources and emergency rental assistance, and streamlined, systematic connections to other local, state, and federal public assistance as needed. These additional resources should be coordinated across systems and access should be simplified and streamlined between these systems and homeless service access points. Needs should be defined by members of the community who have repeated experiences of homelessness.³

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- 1 Zeilinger, Laura Green, “Expert Brief.” DC Dept. of Human Services. December 2015. <https://bit.ly/3s1gERM>
 - 2 “Protect Tenants, Prevent Homelessness.” National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty. 2018. <https://nlchp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/ProtectTenants2018.pdf>
 - 3 Streamlined connections to the following resources should be considered: housing vouchers; behavioral health care; transportation assistance; senior services; veteran services; transportation assistance; Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI); TANF; Head Start and Early Head Start programs; Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs (SNAP) and other [federal food assistance programs](#), employment services and job training; Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits and services; and services for survivors of domestic violence.

04 SYSTEMATIZE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SYSTEMS TO ENSURE THAT INDIVIDUALS EXITING OR INTERACTING WITH THOSE SYSTEMS HAVE ACCESS TO THE HOUSING SUPPORTS THEY NEED

Public systems often disrupt people's lives and subsequently fail to support the needs they've created through that disruption. Young people aging out of the child welfare system and individuals exiting prison or jail often have no housing support during these pivotal transition points in their life. Systematizing cross-system connections for these individuals calls for housing status assessments that lead to warm handoffs between systems and strong case management as individuals' needs are identified. Data sharing and co-location are additional strategies to strengthen such connections. Regardless of the point of identification or handoff, individuals' rights to dignity and self-determination must be honored.

Strategy in Action

Audrey Premdas, a registered nurse in clinical information technology at Arrowhead Regional Medical Center in California, outlined the policies and tools that have helped her and her team improve discharge planning for patients at risk of homelessness upon discharge.⁴ Law enforcement, child welfare, criminal justice, and juvenile justice system administrators should adapt public health approaches to discharge planning that recognize housing as a social determinant of health and therefore a critical component of case management.

4 Premdas, Audrey. "How To Improve Discharge Procedures for Homeless Patients." Arrowhead Regional Medical Center. August 2019. <http://bit.ly/3vMnhK7>

Coordinate and Improve Access to Other Systems

Coordinate and improve access to all available resources and services by improving access and prioritization of supports from other city/county systems, particularly economic supports that can bolster housing stability.



Click the link to the left to listen to Melvin Sylvester from the Detroit Advisors Group speak on the importance of long term housing supports connected to crisis options.

Background

A well-functioning homeless response system should have clear and easily accessible connections to social service, health, education, and economic support systems across the community. These connections should be aligned behind joint system goals, monitored by system leaders across the partnering systems, and designed by individuals who have experienced the systems involved in the partnership.

The community engagement and system's audit found that Detroit currently has the beginning stages of some of these critical partnerships with the K-12 education system and economic support system through Detroit at Work. However, there are critical partnerships missing with the health/mental health system and other economic supports such as food benefits and TANF.

The most common themes around system collaboration included:

- A lack of meaningful connection to job and income support that leads to a lack of stability in housing both within programs like Rapid Rehousing and within housing obtained after leaving the

homeless response system

- A lack of access to quality mental health treatment that is offered by Black, Brown, Indigenous, and LGBTQ providers in the communities where people live
- A lack of connection to mainstream services through coordinated entry and/or the shelter system that could assist individuals in more quickly access supports that could reduce the time homeless
- A lack of connection to TGNC-specific health services leading to extreme mental and physical health risk for TGNC community members experiencing homelessness

Strategies

01 ENGAGE IN STRATEGIC CROSS-SYSTEM PLANNING WITH SYSTEM PARTNERS DURING THE CO-DESIGN PHASE

Strategic partnership with other systems requires a deep level of planning to ensure the work is rooted in data, mutual goals, best practices, and the expertise of those that work within the systems and have experienced the systems. As Detroit moves into the design phase of homeless response system transformation it will be critical to identify and engage system partners early; to review data across the partnering system, and to create mutually beneficial goals that can be monitored and tracked over time. These goals should align with the vision enacted by the CoC and HRD and as well as the partnering systems.

Strategy in Action

[One Roof](#) is a promising practice bringing together the child welfare system, homeless response system, and affordable housing behind the unifying goal of creating supportive housing for child welfare involved families. Their 8 Step Roadmap¹ to partnership offers a framework for partnering, goal setting, and implementing cross-system initiatives.

02 IMPROVE DIRECT ACCESS TO AND MORE SPECIALIZED SERVICES FROM DETROIT AT WORK FROM THE POINT OF ENTRY AND ACROSS ALL HOMELESS RESPONSE PROGRAMS

Economic supports, including employment and income support, were the most cited cross-system need in the community engagement process. The CoC and Detroit at Work have launched a new initiative to better connect people accessing CAM to Detroit at Work, this initiative can be leveraged and expanded to include best practices such as dedicated staff with cross-system experiences, co-location of services, and joint case conferencing, rooted in data sharing and shared decision-making across the system. The partnership should be accessible immediately upon entry to CAM and/or shelter and crisis housing options. It should also have direct lines to housing programs to ensure multiple engagement points throughout the system.

Strategy in Action

Starting as a pilot project funded by the Melville Trust, [Secure Jobs Connecticut 2.0](#) works across the CoC and the public workforce system to increase employment opportunities for people experiencing homelessness. The model includes job navigators, network building with employers and other services, flex funding for transportation, childcare and other services, and case conferencing across systems.²

The Connecticut initiative was modeled off of [Secure Jobs Initiative Massachusetts](#), funded by the Fireman Charitable Foundation. The model includes many of the same building blocks including individualized employment navigation, flexible funding, and strong case conferencing.³

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- 1 "One Roof Keeping Families Together 8-Step Road Map", Other Resources, One Roof, CSH, Accessed March 1, 2021 http://www.1roofamilies.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/OneRoofKFT_8-Steps-Roadmap.pdf
 - 2 Schnur, C., & Young, M. (2018). Systems work better together: Strengthening public workforce & homeless service systems collaboration. Chicago, IL: Heartland Alliance's National Initiatives on Poverty & Economic Opportunity, Accessed March 2, 2021, <http://bit.ly/2OEE3Kq>.
 - 3 "Secure Jobs Connecticut", Our Work, Secure Jobs Connecticut 2.0, Melville Charitable Trust, Accessed March, 7,

03 LEVERAGE WITH WAYNE METRO COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCY TO STRENGTHEN CONNECTIONS BETWEEN HOMELESS RESPONSE PROGRAMS AND SCHOOL-BASED RESOURCES

Schools have the most access to children and youth who may be experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity and it is critical to formalize the partnership between schools and homeless response programs. The current partnership through CAM to ensure students are connected to McKinney-Vento Homeless Liaisons is a critical and foundational step. Detroit should expand this partnership to include more direct access from schools into homeless response programs through CAM and better data sharing to understand the needs of children and youth and to plan for cross-system interventions.

Strategy in Action

This brief on [housing and education collaborations](#) from the National Center for Homeless Education offers valuable information on understanding the potential relationships between schools and CoCs. There are also community examples of ways to increase accurate data and to form school-based interventions.⁴

04 CONNECT MAINSTREAM RESOURCE ACCESS TO CAM AND THROUGHOUT HOMELESS RESPONSE PROGRAMS

As communities build out coordinated entry systems around the country, they are finding innovative ways to connect mainstream resources such as food benefits, SSI/SSDI, TANF, and WIC directly to the coordinated entry system. This allows for access to economic benefits that can directly impact an individual/family's ability to more quickly secure housing and move out of crisis. As CAM continues to build out its model it will be critical to bring mainstream benefits to the table to improve access.

Strategy in Action

This guide brief from the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness offers a range of consideration and steps that can be taken to improve access to mainstream benefits through coordinated entry.⁵ It also offers a jurisdictional example on family coordinated entry.

2021, <https://melvilletrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Secure-Jobs-Connecticut-ORIGINAL-COPY.pdf>

4 "Best Practices in Interagency Collaboration Brief Series Housing and Education Collaborations to Serve Homeless Children, Youth, and Families" Resources, Homeless Education Issues Briefs, National Center for Homeless Education, Accessed March 7, 2021, <https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/hud.pdf>

5 "Enhancing Coordinated Entry through Partnerships with Mainstream Resources and Programs", Asset Library, Coordinated Entry, United State Interagency Council on Homelessness, Accessed March 7, 2021, https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Coordinated_Entry_Brief.pdf

05 LEVERAGE THE AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE ACT

Expanded federal health care coverage has led to bolstered connections between housing and health with partnership ranging from the development of supportive housing to targeted navigation services that reduce both hospital stays and experiences of homelessness.

The current pandemic has spotlighted the need for stronger connections between health and housing in Detroit and around the country and has also sparked new partnerships that can be leveraged moving forward.

As Detroit and the State of Michigan explore more long-term connections between health and housing—such as Medicaid waivers to help with the development of supportive housing⁶ or expanding the homeless service providers that can bill directly to Medicaid,⁷ the community can explore more immediate action such as leveraging health care coverage to offer targeted health navigation services and flexible funding to some of the most medically vulnerable experiencing homelessness.

Strategy in Action

The [Innovative Models in Health and Housing](#) brief, prepared by Mercy Housing and the Low Income Investment Fund for the California Endowment and the Kresge Foundation

This whitepaper offers a variety of jurisdictional approaches from around the country that are connecting health and housing.⁸ The example from Minnesota offers an example of the success targeted health navigation and flexible funds can have at reducing homelessness and cost to health care systems for frequent utilizers.

6 “Summary of State Action: Medicaid & Housing Services”, Resources, CSH, Accessed March 7, 2021, <https://www.csh.org/resources/summary-of-state-action-medicaid-housing-services-2/>

7 “Administrative Models for Medicaid Funding Services”, Resources, CSH, Accessed March 7, 2021 <https://www.csh.org/resources/administrative-models-for-medicaid-funding-services/>

8 “Innovative Models In Health And Housing”, Publications, LIIF, Accessed March 7, 2021 https://www.liifund.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/LIIF_whitepaper_pages.pdf

Immediate Next Steps



Click the link to the left to listen to ReGina Hentz and Katie Giza speak on the importance of community involvement in building the design table as well as the components of a collaborative community process.

01

Adopt the community vision

The community vision outlined in the Vision Statement section of the Roadmap was developed through a deep level of community engagement and can serve as the foundational starting point for building a transformed system across the CoC and HRD. The vision statement can help to align the goals and strategies being implemented across Detroit and help to focus the work moving forward. The Continuum of Care and HRD should consider formally adopting the vision statement as the first step of building a system together that is led by the community and those most impacted by homelessness.

02

Convene the community co-design process

After adopting the vision for the system, the CoC and HRD, in direct partnership with the Detroit Advisors, should convene a community co-design process to engage the community in creating the governance and goals of the system being built across the CoC and HRD. The co-design process can also be the space to review the actions and strategies of the Roadmap and determine ways to take short- and long-term action by aligning the current work of the CoC and HRD and prioritizing any new workstreams needed.

Structural Considerations for the Co-Design Process

The CoC and HRD, in partnership with the Detroit Advisors, should consider the following when moving to a co-design process with the community:

- Stakeholder groups: It will be critical to include people with lived expertise, leadership and direct staff of homeless providers agencies, affordable housing and homeownership stakeholders, system partners (workforce, health/mental health, education, and legal systems), system planners, advocates, and community-based organizations
- Leadership body: Leaders with decision making power from the City (HRD), the Continuum of Care (including the board, member organizations, and HAND), and elected officials, with

strong representation of people with lived expertise must be included in a leadership body during the co-design process; this is critical to ensure that the work of the co-design process can be enacted and implemented

- Staffing: The co-design process should have a minimum of 0.5 FTE dedicated staff members to help convene, organize, and synthesize the work; it is critical that this staff person work across the CoC and HRD and in direct partnership with the Detroit Advisors. Dedicated staffing for ongoing support of the Detroit Advisors should be separate from this position and built into the ongoing work of the CoC beyond the design phase of this project.
- Funding: The CoC and HRD will need to determine what funding can be made available for staffing the co-design, for consulting service needs, and for compensating people with lived experience who are not otherwise being paid for their participation from their current employment
- Timing: Typical co-design processes take 12-18 months; the community will need to determine which actions in the Roadmap may take the full 12-18 months to design, such as designing a system across the CoC and HRD, and which may be able to design and begin implementing in a shorter period of time, such as increasing access and safety for the TGNC community