BEST PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
STREET OUTREACH

Presented To : Alachua County Board of County Commissioners

Table of Contents ↘

National Alliance to
END HOMELESSNESS

BACKGROUND

The National Alliance to End Homelessness (the Alliance) was contracted by Alachua County Government Board of County Commissioners, to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the efficiency of street outreach in the North Central Florida Continuum of Care (CoC)/FL-508. The Alliance spent two days in FL-508 from July 31-August 1 to spend time with local street outreach teams, nonprofit leadership, and other stakeholders, conducted an analysis of available quantitative and qualitative data, administered stakeholder surveys, interviewed key informants, and reviewed relevant policies and procedures.

KEY FINDINGS

Based on available information during our site visit and analysis, key findings indicate the single CoC-funded street outreach provider operates a high functioning, best practice program that provides high quality services, connects people who are homeless outdoors to permanent housing, and operates efficiently but not does not provide coverage for the entire CoC; funding and staffing for current street outreach are inadequate to serve the number of people who are homeless outdoors within the entire CoC geography; access to street outreach for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in the primarily rural communities of Bradford, Gilchrist, Levy, and Putnam Counties is inadequate, data for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in the four primarily rural counties is unreliable or completely absent from Point-in-Time (PIT) counts; Coordinated Entry System (CES) access points do not exist outside of Gainesville city limits and providers in the underserved rural counties do not know how to access or advise anyone how to access CES for assessment, prioritization, or referrals; rural homelessness data is not reflected in HMIS and excludes meaningful data on housing status; nearly half of service providers interviewed described disengaging or experiencing exclusion from CoC activities in which they had interest; and, providers identified the transition to a new Lead Agency as a key opportunity for restoring relationships, re-establishing trust, and increasing engagement in the CoC across the region.
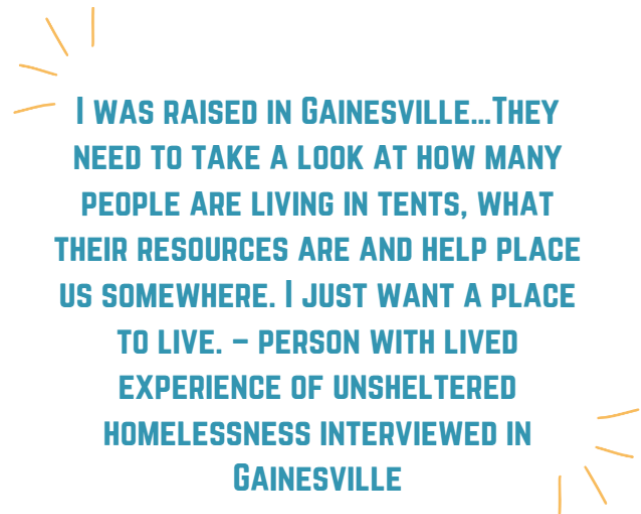
RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the literature review and key findings from our analysis, the Alliance recommends the North Central Florida CoC develop an effective, efficient, and equitable housing-focused street outreach strategy by 1) quantifying unsheltered homelessness in the CoC; 2) establishing a subcommittee or workgroup within the CoC focused on unsheltered homelessness; 3) establishing and tracking performance metrics for street outreach; 4) facilitating providers' coordination of services for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness; 5) supporting and scaling current street outreach programming; 6) expanding CES access to include rural counties, updating prioritization for housing programs; 7) scaling housing programs and solutions alongside crisis interventions; and 8) establishing centralized landlord engagement strategies. Parallel to developing a strategy, the Alliance recommends implementing CoC best practices to 1) establish trusting relationships and forge systemwide strategies collectively; 2) actively cultivate CoC membership within rural counties; 3) improve engagement of people with lived experience in CoC structures; 4) engage in continuous strategic communication with stakeholders; 5) disaggregate data and address existing disparities; 6) adopt Housing Problem-Solving philosophy and approach across all programs; and 7) prioritize funding effective, evidence-based programs.

Both the key findings and recommendations summarized above are explained in greater detail below.

APPROACH TO ANALYSIS

The Alliance analyzed current street outreach programming, effectiveness, and outcomes by: 1) analyzing aggregate and program-level Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), Point-in-Time Count (PIT), and other relevant data collected by street outreach programs, 2) examining current street outreach program's policies and procedures (where they exist), 3) administering a comprehensive stakeholder survey about community needs, priorities, and current street outreach programming, 4) conducting key informant interviews with 30 stakeholders including current street outreach providers and people currently experiencing unsheltered homelessness, and 5) leading two focus groups with service providers engaging people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in Gainesville and Palatka respectively. Although requested, disaggregated data was not provided for inclusion in the overall analysis.

> I WAS RAISED IN GAINESVILLE...THEY NEED TO TAKE A LOOK AT HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE LIVING IN TENTS, WHAT THEIR RESOURCES ARE AND HELP PLACE US SOMEWHERE. I JUST WANT A PLACE TO LIVE. – PERSON WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE OF UNSHELTERED HOMELESSNESS INTERVIEWED IN GAINESVILLE

LITERATURE REVIEW OF EVIDENCE AND RESEARCH

Evidence-based research supports the effectiveness of street outreach programming in increasing the likelihood of obtaining permanent housing among people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, as well as increasing many dimensions of health and service engagement. Although limited, much of the research has explored the qualities of effective homelessness street outreach practice with the majority of studies focusing on what is effective in efforts to engage specific subpopulations primarily people with mental health symptoms, people who use substances, and veterans. Core components of Street Outreach practice that is effective in reducing homelessness can be categorized by:

- Data informed decision-making at the program- and system-level.
- Strategic collaboration and partnerships between street outreach and other service providers.
- Person-centered engagement of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness that prioritize trust, respect and autonomy.
- Promotion of community health and safety through use of harm reduction practices.
- Housing-focus of street outreach programming.

While the limited research on street outreach does not explicitly include some demographics of people who experience unsheltered homelessness, these core components are consistent across all subpopulations studied. The populations studied include those whose service needs generally exceed those of the general population of people who experience unsheltered homelessness and are not to be generalized among those whose service needs are not as great.

KEY FINDINGS

Our findings are divided into three sections – <u>effectiveness of current street outreach programming</u>, <u>absence of reliable data on rural homelessness</u>, and <u>need for building relationships across the CoC</u> - and detail the results of our analysis. Overall, we found the street outreach services in operation to be high quality but insufficient in scale and geographical reach to meet the needs of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness across the CoC; information about unsheltered homelessness in the rural parts of the CoC necessary for scaling and implementing street outreach there to be unavailable; and a significant need to build and strengthen relationships between the CoC and services providers, especially in the predominantly rural counties within the CoC.

EFFECTIVENESS OF CURRENT STREET OUTREACH PROGRAMMING

The single CoC-funded street outreach provider operates a high functioning, best practice program that provides high quality services, connects people who are homeless outdoors to housing, and operates efficiently but does not provide coverage for the entire CoC.

Current providers have a high level of commitment to the core components of effective housing-focused street outreach. Evidence-based best practices – Housing First, Harm Reduction, person-centered service delivery – are being operationalized as demonstrated by the performance outcomes noted below coupled with a strong knowledge of local resources, strong relationships with local providers and support for the CoC goal of ending homelessness. 85 percent of survey respondents experiencing unsheltered homelessness engaged with street outreach report satisfaction with the services they receive, with 56 percent of those receiving services reporting those services are focused on getting into housing as quickly as possible. 39 percent of people served by this street outreach program exit the streets of Alachua County into permanent housing and 14 percent to emergency shelter. For comparison, three similarly situated communities for which the Alliance has street outreach performance data show permanent housing exit rates of 5 percent, 11 percent and 28 percent respectively. Street outreach tends to serve higher needs and harder to house populations compared to emergency shelter programs without access to time-limited rental subsidies such as rapid re-housing which could further expedite permanent housing placements.

Funding and staffing for current street outreach are inadequate to serve the number of people within the entire current geography.

According to the 2024 PIT Count, FL-508 serves 444 people experiencing unsheltered homelessness on any given night. While there are several partners who provide support for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, there is only one provider who provides housing-focused street outreach with a primary service area within the City of Gainesville limits. With only 4.5 full-time equivalents (FTEs) to provide effective services, the CoC does not currently have enough staff to meet the needs of everyone who is homeless outdoors. An ideal staff to participant ratio for street outreach programs is 1:12 for the best possible outcomes. Street outreach staff have a range of responsibilities which include administering

assessments, developing housing plans, addressing barriers to housing, providing logistical support for obtaining ID documents, linking participants with community-based services, and moving participants into shelter or housing. Participants with complex medical or service needs may require more staff time.

Access to street outreach for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in the primarily rural communities of Bradford, Gilchrist, Levy, and Putnam Counties is inadequate.

Of the key informant interviews and survey respondents, both those who serve rural areas of the CoC and who experienced homelessness in a county other than Alachua expressed a high level of agreement that homelessness services – street outreach, emergency shelter, and housing programs – are inaccessible in most of the rural areas of the CoC. Provider surveys reveal that despite all respondents reporting significant contact with people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, respondents serving rural areas are much less likely to work with any street outreach provider in the course of their work. 44 percent of respondents serving Putnam, 33 percent serving Bradford, and 25 percent serving either Gilchrist or Levy Counties report that they work closely with Street Outreach as opposed to 81 percent of respondents serving Gainesville and 71 percent serving Alachua County. Considering that many of the respondents who serve rural areas of the CoC also serve Gainesville, even these numbers likely overestimate the reach of current street outreach services into the rural parts of the CoC.

100 percent of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness outside of Gainesville report that they do not receive services that are designed to end their homelessness. This compares to responses in Gainesville and Alachua County, where Street Outreach services regularly operate, in which 50 percent of respondents receive services that are designed to end their homelessness.

ABSENCE OF RELIABLE DATA ON RURAL HOMELESSNESS

Data for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in the four primarily rural counties is unreliable or completely absent from Point-in-Time (PIT) counts.

Providers interviewed by the Alliance who participated in the recent design and implementation of PIT counts reported multiple concerns about methodology. A consensus emerged concerning a lack of engagement of rural partners in PIT activities to such an extent that the general reaction expressed across all stakeholders is that the scale of rural homelessness within the CoC is currently unknown. All ten stakeholders interviewed who provide services in one or more of the rural parts of the CoC shared concerns about the reliability and accuracy of PIT reported numbers. These same stakeholders along with several of their colleagues in Gainesville and Alachua County, indicated that current PIT methodology does not work for the rural makeup of those communities.

Coordinated Entry System access points do not exist outside of Gainesville and providers in the underserved rural counties do not know how to access or advise anyone to access the system for assessment, prioritization, or referrals.

Currently there are no coordinated entry access points outside of Alachua County that participate in the assessment and referral process. One identified site in Putnum County stated that they do not have the necessary training to enter anyone into the coordinated entry system, were unaware of how entries into the system functioned, and did not understand prioritization and referrals to housing programs. The entry points listed on the CoC's website for each rural county direct people to agencies who either do not

participate in the coordinated entry system or only serve specific subpopulations (e.g., people fleeing Domestic Violence, Veterans). The lack of access to coordinated entry coupled with the absence of street outreach leaves people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in the rural parts of the CoC with no meaningful way to access help to resolve their homelessness. 75 percent of survey respondents experiencing homelessness in the rural parts of the CoC report not knowing where they could get help when they first became homeless and espouse a strong belief that their community does not have the services needed to help someone find and keep stable housing.

Rural homelessness data is not reflected in HMIS and excludes meaningful data on housing status.

None of the providers in the rural counties who report that they regularly encounter people experiencing unsheltered homelessness track client data in HMIS or use any other methods of tracking their clients' housing status. Many providers were unfamiliar with HUDs definitions of homelessness or tracked data according to other agency's definitions, making even the limited available data difficult to use to quantify unsheltered homelessness. Only one provider in any of the rural counties reported using HMIS and only in a very limited capacity to track a small number of households receiving prevention and rapid re-housing assistance funded by Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG).

NEED FOR RELATIONSHIP BUILDING ACROSS THE COC

Nearly half of service providers interviewed described disengaging or experiencing exclusion from CoC activities in which they had an interest.

> IN ORDER TO MAKE IT WORTHWHILE FOR RURAL SERVICE PROVIDERS TO ENGAGE, THE COC HAS TO TAKE THEIR CONCERNS AND NEEDS SERIOUSLY. – RURAL SERVICE PROVIDER INTERVIEWED

Providers cited a range of reasons for not participating in aspects of the CoC, but a notable theme across key informant interviews and survey responses was 1) a perceived lack of transparency in both CoC operations and homelessness data leading to an erosion of trust in the CoC, 2) a sense of being dismissed, unheard, uninvited, or disregarded in CoC decisions and priorities, 3) and a feeling that participation would be futile or not worth the effort. These sentiments were most prevalent among providers serving rural parts of the CoC and least pronounced among providers situated directly within county or city governments in Alachua and Gainesville.

Providers identified the transition to a new Lead Agency as a key opportunity for restoring relationships, re-establishing trust, and increasing engagement in the CoC across the region.

Excitement for the future of the CoC with the introduction of a new Lead Agency was as prevalent in key informant interviews as concerns about the past. Providers demonstrated a high level of regard for one another, and almost all providers interviewed expressed a willingness to engage with the CoC and a desire to find solutions for homelessness in their communities.

Based on literature review and key findings above, the Alliance details 15 recommendations, divided into two sections: develop an effective, efficient, and equitable housing-focused street outreach strategy and implement CoC best practices.

SECTION 1: DEVELOP AN EFFECTIVE, EFFICIENT, AND EQUITABLE HOUSING-FOCUSED STREET OUTREACH STRATEGY

The Alliance recommends developing a CoC-wide strategy to address unsheltered homelessness including Street Outreach as one key component of a broader approach. Once a strategy is established it is the CoC's responsibility to clearly and continuously message it throughout the provider and general community across all five counties, measure and evaluate it for success using system and program level data and adjust it to meet emerging needs as they are identified. This section outlines steps to develop this strategy:

1. Quantify Unsheltered Homelessness in the CoC

The Alliance recommends the CoC design a PIT count methodology in collaboration with both people experiencing unsheltered homelessness and providers across the full geography of the CoC. This methodology should be proactively communicated with all stakeholders throughout the PIT process, including during the deduplication process, and by maintaining transparent written methodology to ensure consistency. To ensure accurate and comprehensive data collection, rural counties will require additional support from the CoC by receiving training and support to prepare for PIT count activities, messaging the importance of the PIT count, defining who is included in the PIT count, data collection practices and standards, and any technology to be used during the count.

Rural counties should receive final PIT data relevant to their specific jurisdictions (county and town/city), assistance in understanding that data in context, and support with advocacy with their local municipal leadership to enact strategies and provide resources that are effective for reducing and ending unsheltered homelessness. It is imperative that PIT data, as a whole and for each jurisdiction, be disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, age, and other subpopulation-specific information to understand racial or other disparities in homelessness, as well as the impacts of the system-level and programmatic strategies.

2. Establish a subcommittee or workgroup within the CoC focused on unsheltered homelessness

The Alliance recommends establishing a subcommittee or workgroup on unsheltered homelessness to provide leadership and guidance within the CoC on addressing unsheltered homelessness. Representation from across the CoC's full geography, people with recent lived expertise of unsheltered homelessness, and service providers who regularly work with people experiencing unsheltered homelessness should be included in the makeup. Ideally this group reflects the demographic diversity of people experiencing homelessness within the CoC. This group should be empowered to inform decision-making for the CoC about issues related to unsheltered homelessness.

3. Establish and Track Performance Metrics for Street Outreach

The Alliance recommends establishing performance metrics and tracking outcomes for street outreach. Performance metrics should reflect street outreach's impact on the CoC's overall system performance and regularly evaluate existing Street Outreach program performance, identify program and system level needs to positively impact performance, adjust policies, practices, and resource allocation to improve outcomes, and prioritize high functioning programs for funding opportunities. Recommended metrics for program evaluation include:

    a.   rates of exits to permanent housing
    b.   rates of exits to shelter
    c.   returns to homelessness after exiting a program to permanent housing
    d.   with attention to any racial, gender, or other disparities in these rates.

Recommended metrics for understanding the efficacy of the CoC's overall strategy to address unsheltered homelessness includes:

    a.   reductions in overall numbers of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, disaggregated by different geographical regions respective of street outreach programs' service area(s)
    b.   reductions in entries into homelessness, with attention to the impact of where Coordinated Entry access points are and are not accessible
    c.   reductions in numbers of people on waitlists for shelter beds
    d.   proportionality of referrals to housing programs (both PSH & RRH) from unsheltered locations and sheltered locations
    e.   and reductions in returns to homelessness by people exited from unsheltered locations into permanent housing.

To fully understand how the CoC's strategy is functioning systemwide, data needs to be reviewed regularly, and disaggregated by race, ethnicity, age, gender, family status, veteran status and any other demographic information so that disparities can be identified and addressed.

4. Facilitate coordination of services for unsheltered homelessness

The Alliance recommends facilitating coordination among current service providers serving people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Current ad-hoc coordination between a few participating providers enhances the reach and quality of services of current Street Outreach programming and reduces duplication of services across providers. However, more formal coordination has the potential to further reduce inefficiencies, increase collaboration among providers, and more strategically leverage the current resources available to address unsheltered homelessness. To the extent possible, include all providers who regularly engage with people experiencing unsheltered homelessness and focus coordination efforts on supporting providers' efforts to house people via case conferencing, mutual accountability and skill sharing, and divvying up of engagement and service delivery activities.

5. Support and scale current Street Outreach programming

The Alliance recommends current street outreach programming be scaled and supported with enough resources. Current program resources are inadequate to serve the numbers of people within the current program's limited service-area let alone the full geography of the CoC. To serve the CoC's unsheltered

population of 444 with the current 4.5 FTE capacity of the street outreach program, caseloads would be roughly 100 people. Considering ideal case management ratios of 1:12, even taking into account that not every person experiencing unsheltered homelessness may be on a caseload at any given time since identification and rapport building may need to happen before being included on a formal caseload, at least eight times the current staffing capacity would be needed to begin to meet current needs for these services.

The Alliance recommends increasing staffing to address the concentration of unsheltered homelessness in the City of Gainesville, in addition to increasing funding and staffing to scale the Street Outreach coverage area to the rural parts of the CoC. Housing this program within the Alachua County government would present a significant barrier to any future scaling of this program to serve the four underserved rural counties within the CoC and is therefore inadvisable.

6. Expand Coordinated Entry System (CES) access to include rural counties, update prioritization for housing programs.

The Alliance recommends working with service providers and municipalities across the rural parts of the CoC to establish access methods and sites that work for their communities. To do this successfully the CoC will need to educate service providers across the whole CoC geography and especially in the four rural counties about what CES is and why it is important. To serve the full geographic region of the CoC and to sustain regional participation, data collection from the CES must be done in such a way that providers within all five counties and the different municipalities within them can readily access data about rates of housing crisis and homelessness within their jurisdictions alongside data for the entire CoC. Target available housing program assistance to the highest acuity households via CES prioritization by removing strict VI-SPDAT score limits for qualifying for RRH and reorienting RRH prioritization practices to include high acuity households for whom PSH is unavailable.

7. Scale housing programs and solutions alongside crisis interventions

The Alliance recommends pairing efforts to scale Street Outreach and Coordinated Entry access into underserved areas of the CoC with ample investments in permanent housing pathways that match the needs of people experiencing homelessness within the CoC because combining these elements will prove most effective, efficient, and equitable. Long waitlists for RRH and PSH housing placements within the CoC indicate that there are not enough resources to meet the current needs. Additionally, the rural parts of the CoC have few housing programs in operation and residents of those counties are largely ineligible for the housing programs currently funded by the CoC because funded programs focus exclusively on subpopulations (veterans, people fleeing DV) or include geographic limitations on program eligibility.

8. Establish centralized landlord engagement strategies and activities

The Alliance recommends establishing a CoC-wide landlord engagement strategy to enhance current efforts and allow them to scale more effectively. To exit homelessness, people need access to housing, which often requires willingness from landlords in both public and private housing systems to lease to people with significant tenancy screening barriers. Current practices in Street Outreach and across the CoC involve elements of effective landlord engagement but are siloed and inefficient, which takes scarce resources such as staff time away from other core services. An effective CoC-wide landlord engagement strategy would likely require:

- Staff knowledgeable about the local rental real estate market and skilled in partnership building with business interests, especially landlords.
- <u>Ongoing relationship building strategies</u> such as direct outreach and engagement, attending real estate association events, hosting landlord recruitment events, landlord information sessions/trainings, landlord appreciation ceremonies, etc.
- Funds for incentives for landlords (risk mitigation, enhanced security deposit, signing bonus, lease-renewal bonus, etc.) to engage with clients from the homelessness services system who would otherwise experience prohibitive tenancy screening barriers (low income, credit, criminal history, etc.), or who vacate a lease or damage a unit.

SECTION 2: IMPLEMENT COC BEST PRACTICES

The Alliance recommends cultivating an inclusive CoC that is representative of the community and those who experience homelessness in the region. Ensuring diverse representation and active participation of stakeholders in all levels of the CoC from across the full geography as well as from all sectors and demographics impacted by homelessness in the region is key to the CoC's ability to address homelessness effectively.

1. Establish trusting relationships and forge systemwide strategies collectively

The Alliance recommends using the transition to a new Lead Agency to rebuild trust in the CoC as an inclusive body that is responsive and accountable to all the communities within its geographical region and capable of making positive change towards ending homelessness across the region. Prioritize transparency during the transition process, including sharing information and soliciting ongoing feedback from stakeholders about their needs and concerns. Going forward, proactively include providers, people with lived expertise, and community stakeholders in developing CoC strategies, policies and practices collectively. HUD recently released <u>Building Consensus and Trust</u> a workbook with both conceptual and practical tools for local leaders and governing bodies to do collaborative work across of this nature involving diverse stakeholders.

2. Actively cultivate CoC membership within rural counties

The Alliance recommends prioritizing participation of stakeholders from the four rural counties by conducting affirmative marketing and outreach to ensure, 1) they can join the CoC as members, 2) they can participate in subcommittees and workgroups, and 3) their perspectives and needs are included on the CoC Leadership Council.

### 3. Improve engagement of people with lived expertise in CoC structures

The Alliance recommends incorporating people with a range of lived experience of homelessness at all levels within the CoC from leadership to general body, to committees or work groups, and staff at participating agencies. It is the responsibility of the CoC to ensure access to meaningful participation for people with recent lived experience across all demographic groups who experience homelessness within the CoC including people of all races, ethnicities, ages, family statuses, disability statuses, etc.

4. Engage in continuous strategic communication with stakeholders

The Alliance recommends establishing a comprehensive communication strategy inclusive of engagement with service providers, municipal governments, and broader community stakeholders across all five counties. To support efficacy and cohesion in the region's work to address homelessness the CoC's ongoing and proactive communication is necessary in the following areas: sharing general information about homelessness and evidence-based interventions effective at ending homelessness, information about CoC operations and regional strategy for ending homelessness, funding opportunities, local trends in homelessness via system data and program evaluation processes, and best practices in providing homelessness services.

5. Disaggregate data and address existing disparities

Challenges that arose in attempts to disaggregate data by race and ethnicity at the program level prevented analysis of how equitable current Street Outreach programming's outcomes are. The ability to access and analyze data disaggregated by race is extremely important because of significant racial disparities in who experiences homelessness. In this CoC these disparities persist across subpopulations including families with children, youth, and veterans. Notably people identifying as Latino/a/e are deeply underrepresented in the CoC's data which may indicate a need to explore how culturally responsive services are and whether there are issues resulting in a lack of access to the system for this community.

American Indian **3x**

White **.7x**

Black/ African American **2.5x**

Latino **.5x**
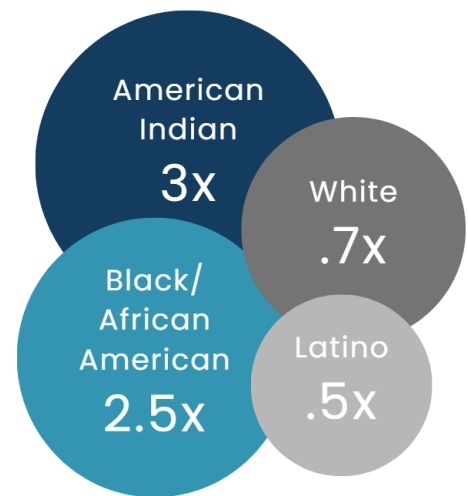
While system outcomes data provided show that African Americans and Native Americans are served in disproportionately higher numbers in crisis housing (Emergency Shelter and Transitional Housing), it also shows that people identifying as African American exit homelessness to housed locations at disproportionately low rates as do people categorized as "all other races" (which includes Asian and Pacific Islanders, and people of multiple races) who are also underserved in crisis housing programs. In contrast people identifying as White exit homelessness to housing at disproportionate high rates even though they are underrepresented in crisis housing services.

The Alliance recommends strengthening data analysis to learn more about how the local homelessness response system is functioning, disaggregating quantitative data and pairing it with insights from qualitative data.

- **Data disaggregation** will show if people have different experiences due to their race, ethnicity, age, length of time homeless, gender identity, and other characteristics and life experiences. Because of historic racism and inequities in housing and homelessness, it is especially important to disaggregate data by race and ethnicity. Unless directly linked to Coordinated Entry prioritization factors, no characteristic should be a determining factor in system outcomes. HUD's Data & Equity: Use the Data You Have provides more guidance on this topic.

- **Qualitative data** provides context to numerical trends and adds nuance that can't be captured in a data point. It resonates with people powerfully and is a natural extension of quantitative efforts. There are many ways to incorporate qualitative data, ranging from easy to implement to more

resource- and time-intensive. One way to do this is for case managers to conduct exit interviews and document closing case notes, which can be used to understand how the program worked and can be improved. HUD's Qualitative Data 101 Guide provides more information and examples.

The Alliance further recommends establishing regular reporting practices; embedding data review into existing infrastructure, like standing CoC committees, CoC communication channels, and public engagements; and thinking about what data should be shared, to whom, and at what intervals. It is often helpful for the HMIS Lead Agency to take a driving role because they are knowledgeable about reporting requirements and tools available to support analysis, can run reports across programs, and should have staff time to devote to this activity. Street outreach workers should also participate in data and policy review to share insights based on their experience. People with lived expertise should be partners in this work as well. HUD's toolkit on People with Lived Experience and Expertise of Homelessness and Data Decision-Making includes helpful background and template materials like onboarding slide decks.

6. Adopt Housing Problem-Solving philosophy and approach across all programs

The Alliance recommends addressing inflow into homelessness by adopting a housing problem-solving (prevention, shelter diversion, and rapid exit) approach across all programs is vital to using scarce homelessness system resources judiciously and thus ensuring the quality of Street Outreach services available. Integrating housing problem-solving at all coordinated entry sites, in street outreach, and at emergency shelter will help reduce entries into homelessness. At minimum train Coordinated Entry operators, Street Outreach staff, and Emergency Shelter operators on Housing Problem-Solving, what it is, why it's important at the system and individual levels, and how to do it effectively.

Whenever possible, incentivize participation by providers in adjacent systems—especially hospitals, mental and behavioral health providers, law enforcement, and carceral systems—and housing programs in these training opportunities. Notably over 90% of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness responding to our survey reported encounters with one or more of those adjacent systems immediately before or during their homelessness.

7. Prioritize funding effective, evidence-based programs

The Alliance recommends maximizing utilization of federal funding and prioritizing scarce homelessness funding resources to interventions that are low barrier, effective at housing people, and serve populations who have the greatest vulnerability and acuity within the CoC. Current funding allocations, and application and selection processes do not appear consistent with considerations of systemic needs including rural coverage, services for populations not served by available programming, cost effectiveness of programming, or the impact of programming on system performance. Use system data to identify populations not currently being served by funded programs and design and target funding processes to encourage scaling programs or bringing in new partners who serve populations not served by current programs. On initial analysis populations who are both overrepresented and categorically underserved via program eligibility (especially in permanent housing programs) include adults with no children who are not currently fleeing DV, people in rural areas, and men. This in conjunction with racial disparities in who experiences homelessness disproportionately impacts Black/African American men who are categorically overrepresented in at least two of those underserved groups.

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