

INITIAL SUMMARY OF SHELTER FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR LANE COUNTY

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1. Background

In March of 2018, Lane County secured the services of the Technical Assistance Collaborative (TAC) to conduct a public shelter feasibility study. As part of the study, TAC was to assess the current homeless service system within Lane County including resource capacity and gaps within various system components such as Coordinated Entry, Diversion, Outreach, Day Shelter, Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing, Rapid-Rehousing, and Permanent Supportive Housing. Since that time, TAC has conducted a comprehensive review of Lane County's homeless service system through multiple activities that have included:

- Onsite and offsite meetings with staff from Lane County and the City of Eugene
- Onsite and phone interviews with provider agency staff including emergency shelter providers, housing providers, advocates, consumers, and other community stakeholders
- Analysis of HMIS reports, Coordinated Entry data, System Performance Measures, Point-in-Time Counts and the Housing Inventory Chart

A list of all agencies and providers interviewed as part of this study is included in Appendix A.

2. Summary & Overview

The following information provided in this summary outlines TAC's initial observations and preliminary recommendations regarding shelter feasibility. While emergency shelter plays a crucial role in addressing a person's immediate housing crisis needs, it is important to note that shelter alone cannot be a community's singular strategy to ending homelessness. Shelter is one of a number of interventions needed and a community is most successful at reducing or ending homelessness when all housing and service interventions are working as a coordinated system. For this reason, many of the observations and recommendations outlined here relate to system-wide capacity across all system components.

This initial summary focuses on single adults who are homeless as this is the most significant challenge facing the County. The final report will address other homeless populations including youth, victims of domestic violence and families.

3. Lane County Homeless Single Adults

The 2018 Point-In-Time (PIT) Count identified a total of 1,641 persons experiencing homelessness within Lane County. 1,365 of these persons were single adults representing 83% of the overall homeless population. 1,009 of these single adults were in unsheltered locations (e.g. on the streets, living in vehicles, etc.) accounting for 89% of the unsheltered population. Compared to national data, Lane County has a much higher incidence of homelessness amongst single adults. Nationally, 67% of the overall homeless population is single adults and 33% are people in families¹. A closer look at this population indicates that many are chronically homeless, have a serious mental illness, a substance use disorder and/or are veterans.

¹ 2017 AHAR

The unsheltered population in Lane County is very visible and comparisons indicate it is significantly higher than many other similar communities:

- Out of 399 Continuums of Care (CoC) across the country, Lane County ranks 42nd CoC with highest unsheltered people.
- Of “Smaller, City, County and Regional CoCs” across the country, Lane County ranks 6th in chronically homeless number of single individual adults.
- In Lane County, .27% of population are unsheltered, as compared to Portland with .20% and Seattle with .25%.

Compared to the State of Oregon, City of Portland, City of Salem and Multnomah County, Lane County has a higher rate of poverty, a larger population of elders as well as those under 65 who have a disability and a higher unemployment rate.

While the number of homeless veterans – sheltered and unsheltered – has generally trended downwards over the last ten years, the number of unsheltered chronically homeless single adults with disabling conditions has generally increased.

4. Lane County Homeless Service System for Single Adults

TAC’s analysis included a review of all system components to determine overall capacity and gaps in housing and services to address homelessness with particular focus on single adults. The major components of Lane County’s homeless service system include Coordinated Entry, Emergency Shelter, Day Shelter, Outreach, Transitional Housing, Rapid-Rehousing, and Permanent Supportive Housing. TAC has developed a system map of Lane County’s Homeless Service System and the system flow throughout the system which is included as Appendix B. Further below in this summary, a number of challenges and recommendations are provided based on an assessment of the different components for single adults.

5. Challenges

TAC’s interviews and data analysis indicate that the persistence of the County’s single adult homeless population is due to external factors – some of which the County may be able to impact and others it cannot – as well as factors the County and/or the Continuum of Care can impact.

Demographic variables are among those factors the County can effect in only limited ways. As stated previously, Lane County has a higher percentage of citizens over 65 years of age, a higher poverty rate, a lower employment rate and a higher percentage of citizens between 18 and 65 who have disabilities than Salem, Portland, Multnomah County or the State of Oregon as a whole. It is not surprising then that there would be a relatively greater need for affordable housing and permanent supportive housing.

At the same time, however, the County’s affordable housing stock is limited. Like many communities across the Country, pressure on the rental market has been increasing, resulting

in low vacancy rates; the Lane County rate is 2.9%. There is limited new production in the County; the U.S. Census indicates that there were only 842 building permits in 2017. Interviews indicated there is limited incentive, e.g. funding, as well as capacity for new development in the County.

In addition to these factors, analysis of the homeless data provided by the County indicates that there is substantial, on-going in-flow into the homeless system.

The factors that the County can most readily impact relate to the Continuum of Care (CoC). Research by HUD and other entities has identified “best” and “promising” practices that are most effective in helping to end homelessness. For example, a housing first approach, policies and practices have been shown to be very effective in helping a variety of homeless subpopulations including single adults to move from the streets and shelter to housing. Housing first is an approach to quickly and successfully connect individuals and families experiencing homelessness to permanent housing without preconditions and barriers to entry, such as sobriety, treatment or service participation requirements. To the extent CoC programs are not implementing best/promising practices such as Housing First, they are less effective in affecting homelessness.

One of the CoC challenges is around the current emergency shelter system. Eugene Mission is the largest emergency shelter in Lane County serving multiple populations. Eugene Mission is well known to the community, providing year-round emergency shelter with facilities, access to meals, and some clinical and housing-related case management services. As the County’s primary permanent emergency shelter for single adults, the Eugene Mission plays a critical role in the crisis response system. The Mission, however, is not a low barrier, housing first oriented program. Eugene Mission has a sobriety requirement that limits the ability for many unsheltered people to be eligible for admission into the overnight setting. The case management services at Eugene Mission are focused more heavily on clinical support, and not as strongly on exiting the shelter and navigation to permanent housing. TAC’s interview with Eugene Mission staff indicated that it has these policies for a variety of reasons including staff capacity and building configuration. Since neither the County, City or Continuum of Care (CoC) fund or have a contract with the Mission, however, they have limited capacity to impact program policies.

6. Preliminary Recommendations

While increasing emergency shelter beds will help to respond to the immediate crisis of unsheltered single adults in the community, without expansion of other system components as well as policy alignment, training and implementation of best practices across the CoC, the County will be unable to make a significant impact on single adult homelessness. These preliminary recommended strategies include:

- Expand programs and Increase Utilization
 - *Add shelter beds*
 - *Expand Outreach*
 - *Expand Diversion*
 - *Add Permanent Supportive Housing & increase existing utilization*
 - *Expand move-on practices for existing Permanent Housing Units*
 - *Ensure Tenancy supports are available*
- Policy changes aligned with best practices and across CoC programs
 - *Coordinated Entry*
- Training to ensure implementation of best practices
 - *Housing First*
 - *Rapid Rehousing*
 - *Tenancy supports*

Expand Shelter and Increase Utilization

TAC recommends the County expand permanent housing first oriented shelter beds. Specifically, TAC's modeling suggests a range of between 50 and 75 shelter beds for single adults would be impactful. Most importantly, however, any new shelter(s) should implement a housing first orientation including

- Immediate and easy access
- Housing-focused services
- Rapid exits to permanent and permanent supportive housing
- Measure outcomes to improve performance

TAC also recommends the County work with Eugene Mission to identify ways to increase utilization. TAC also recommends the County consider placing City and/or County funded staff on-site for navigation and/or case management services. If the Mission is willing to target long-term shelter stayers for rapid rehousing, this could greatly reduce system-wide length of stay for emergency shelter.

Program Expansion - Outreach

TAC recommends expanding street outreach. Currently, the number of FTEs engaged in street outreach is inadequate relative to the number of homeless, unsheltered single adults. The

recently awarded SAMHSA funds will increase outreach to chronically homeless single adults with SPMI but are unlikely to address the need.

TAC also recommends expanding/redesigning street outreach to become a coordinated system-wide approach, connected to coordinated entry. Connecting to coordinated entry will help to place households more quickly, moving them out of homelessness and increasing overall utilization of CoC programs.

Program Outreach – Diversion

Diversion can assist in addressing inflow. Currently, however, County diversion programs are targeted only to families and youth. TAC recommends that diversion be implemented system-wide and at levels needed to prevent at-risk single adults from entering the homeless system.

To implement effective diversion programs, the County will want to hire and train staff dedicated to diverting single adults at the front door through active diversion tactics. The County may also want to consider providing limited financial assistance when needed to divert single individual adults from homelessness.

Program Expansion – Permanent Supportive Housing and Rapid Rehousing for Single Adults

Currently, there are 407 PSH units in Lane County targeted towards homeless single adults. Recognizing the key role that PSH plays in ending homelessness, the Lane County Poverty and Homelessness Board has set a goal of creating an additional 600 PSH units by 2021. In the past few months, County has received funds for 60 Housing First PSH units and 33 targeted Mainstream Vouchers².

While these awards bring the Board closer to its goal, TAC recommends that the County continue to apply for and/or support developers in applying for these funds as appropriate. HUD will be issuing another significant Mainstream Voucher program NOFA in the near future. As described above, one of the significant subpopulations of unsheltered homeless single adults is veterans. The County has a significant pool of VASH resources specifically targeted to this population. TAC recommends a focus on identifying any barriers to efficient implementation, including project-basing some of the vouchers, and once these are resolved, consider expanding the program.

One strategy that many communities are using to decrease homelessness is to increase “flow” and availability of PSH by creating “move-on” units. These are specific units or program/property preferences that allow PSH tenants to move onto other affordable housing options such as the Housing Choice Voucher program, public housing and HUD-assisted housing. TAC estimates that the County can add up to 200 move-on units by using 2-5% of existing affordable housing options that will increase turnover in PSH and reduce bottlenecks in the system.

² Some of these will divert from homelessness.

TAC also recommends a number of PSH program policy and practice modifications including:

- Ensure PSH & RRH is targeted to the most vulnerable single individual adults by making all referrals to PSH and RRH through Coordinated Entry
- Ensure the crisis response system - especially case managers - understands how to leverage reasonable accommodations
- Consider increasing the PHA payment standard
- Establish system-wide landlord engagement strategies to increase access to units and quicker housing search

Program Expansion – Tenancy Supports

Many formerly or at risk adults who are homeless or at risk of homelessness need tenancy support to obtain and retain housing. Review of the County’s data on returns to homelessness from PSH and PSH turnover suggests that tenancy supports may not be as available or effective as needed; in 2017, 21% of the exits to permanent housing returned to homelessness. TAC recommends the County ensure providers are able to effectively provide and bill for tenancy supports. This may require capacity development on service delivery and billing, training and supports on delivery of best practices.

Policy Change – Coordinated Entry

Lane County is commended for having a coordinated entry system in place for its crisis response system. As described above, however, the coordinated entry system would be most effective with the following recommended policy changes.

- Ensure referrals for all CoC units are made through the CWL.
- Increase provider capacity to conduct assessments in the field, through walk-ins, and via phone.
- Establish a designated coordinated entry outreach team to conduct assessments.
- Increase navigation to ensure those highest on list are “document ready” and can be located quickly.
- Consider eliminating separation of buckets between PSH & RRH.
- Revise how assessments are updated to decrease number of “expired” assessments.
- Establish a timeframe for how and when assessments occur.

Training

To enhance its effectiveness, the Lane County crisis response system needs to be seamless; programs and agencies need to work together effectively. Coordinated entry provides the core

of this partnership but there are other evidence-based best policies and practices are necessary across each program type.

Stakeholders, for example, have a strong awareness of housing first principles but it is not evident that housing first practices are being implemented throughout the system. Staff interviews indicate that the system is challenged in its implementation of the RRH model. TAC recommends the County consider moving to RRH delivery by a single provider or provide more intensive training for all providers. Interviews indicate that training to better serve individuals with co-occurring serious mental illness and substance use disorders is needed.

If the system overall enhances implementation of these policies and practices, Lane County will see improvements even without increases in services.

Recommendation to Focus on Unsheltered Single Adults

Lane County, Portland/Multnomah County, and State of Oregon have “stand out” unsheltered numbers. Lane County and the City of Eugene cannot resolve this persistent unsheltered issue alone. Neither the City nor the County have sufficient resources at this time; additional state and/or federal support such as enhanced shelter funding and additional allocation of PSH funding is needed.

That said, the County should not wait for outside funding. The state will want to see Lane County and the City of Eugene making the types of systems recommendations above in addition to requests for additional funds. In addition, the County and City should consider examining new types of local revenue and funding based on successful examples of other communities. The County should consider working with Portland/Multnomah County as well as OHCS to secure state funds specifically to resolve these unsheltered challenges.

Similar to the hundred day challenges and surges done across the country, the County should consider a one-year strategy focused on ending single adult homelessness, especially unsheltered homelessness. Implementing a surge-type intervention might include a surge targeting seniors linked to PSH preference in HUD 202 properties and elderly public housing as well as a surge targeting vets linked to VASH.

Appendix A

To Date, TAC has interviewed staff from the following homeless provider agencies and programs:

- St. Vincent de Paul Society of Lane County
 - Service Center Staff
 - Supportive Services for Veteran Families staff
 - Family Shelter Staff
 - Executive Director
- Eugene Mission
 - Executive Director
 - Shelter Staff
- Homes for Good Housing Agency
- Nightingale Health Sanctuary
- ShelterCare
- Catholic Community Services of Lane County
- PHB subcommittee Lived Experience Advisory Group for Unhoused Engagement (LEAGUE) member meeting
- Focus group discussions
 - Poverty and Homelessness Board
 - Community advocates, community members
- Eugene Police Department
- City of Eugene Parks and Recreation staff
- Looking Glass
- White Bird/CAHOOTS
- Community Court
- CORT
- Lane County Staff for;
 - Coordinated Entry
 - Frequent User System Engagement (FUSE)
 - Community Service Worker