SACRAMENTO CONTINUUM OF CARE GAPS ANALYSIS:
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
FEBRUARY 2021

The many partners responding to homelessness across Sacramento County serve well over 10,000 people every year. Many of those service interactions are very successful; more than 93.6% of people receiving permanent supportive housing maintain permanent housing going forward and more than 81% of people served by the system of care do not return to homelessness in the two years after they are served. However, despite these efforts, more than 5,000 people across the county experience homeless on a given night.

Within this context, Sacramento Steps Forward contracted Homebase to conduct a gaps analysis of Sacramento County's homeless system of care to identify areas that could make the system more efficient, effective, and equitable. This analysis is also intended to meet the requirement of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) which obligates every Continuum of Care (CoC) to "develop a plan that includes…conducting an annual gaps analysis of the homeless needs and services available within the geographic area" in order to find ways to stretch their limited resources further and improve fairness across the system.

PROCESS AND STRUCTURE

The gaps analysis process in Sacramento involved interviews with stakeholders, surveys of homeless housing and services programs, focus groups with people with lived experience of homelessness, analysis of Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data, as well as data collected from other funders and systems. The analysis also builds upon and incorporates significant systems mapping work already conducted by Homebase throughout 2019 and 2020.

The gaps analysis evaluates the system of programs and services responding to homelessness in Sacramento County, including street outreach, temporary shelter and housing programs, and permanent housing programs spread across the various systems and funders in the community.

Through this process, three opportunities for improvement were identified:

Improve Coordination and Align Priorities
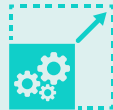
Increase System Capacity

Explore and Address Disparities in Program Outcomes

To address these three key gaps, the report is organized around seven recommendations, with each section including: the underlying analysis leading to the recommendation, prioritized suggestions for potential strategies that could improve the homeless system of care, and descriptions of current efforts underway to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness in Sacramento County. In this Executive Summary, the recommendations are categorized under the three broader gaps, however, in the gaps analysis report, the seven recommendations are organized in the order that a person experiencing homelessness would encounter the system of care – starting with prevention efforts before a person enters the system and continuing through outcomes of housing and services programs.

IDENTIFIED SYSTEM GAPS

📋 Improve Coordination and Align Priorities

Multiple sectors provide housing, shelter, and services to respond to and prevent homelessness in Sacramento County and a variety of local, state, federal, and private funding sources support these programs.

Partners responding to homelessness include:
- Sacramento's Continuum of Care
- Sacramento County departments including:
  - Department of Human Assistance
  - Department of Behavioral Health Services Mental Health Division
- Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency,
- Veterans Administration
- City of Sacramento
- Other cities in the county
- Non-profit agencies
- Numerous programs and services supporting low-income and vulnerable Sacramento County residents.

The funders, systems, agencies, and providers committed to serving people experiencing homelessness in Sacramento are both its greatest strength and a barrier to improving system efficiency, equity and effectiveness.

Through the gaps analysis process, Homebase identified that greater coordination and shared priorities across these partners would better serve the needs of people experiencing homelessness and maximize limited resources. This was most evident in two areas –access and systems planning – and led to the following recommendations:

Streamline Access to the Homeless System of Care

Adopt strategies that make the system of care easier to navigate and that connect people experiencing homelessness with housing and shelter services more efficiently.

There are 112 different shelter and housing programs serving people experiencing homelessness in Sacramento County, and 61 different access points for housing programs. This structure provides a variety of options for a diverse homeless population, however, access to programs is not consistent across access points. Most housing programs – 87% of permanent supportive housing and 62% of rapid re-housing programs – require a referral from a specific access point or set of access points. This means that the point a person enters the system dictates the housing resources that are available to them.

As a result, access is challenging for people experiencing homelessness to navigate. No access points provide access to all housing programs across the various funders and systems. Having multiple, well-publicized, coordinated options for accessing the breadth of Sacramento's diverse housing resources would improve access for people experiencing home-lessness, and does not require one prioritization schema or creation of one single waiting list for housing.

87% **Permanent Supportive Housing**

62% **Rapid Rehousing**

require a referral from a specific access point or set of access points

Insufficient coordination across the system also has an impact on what populations are able to access programs and services. For example, adults without children and transition age youth were more likely to access the homeless system through emergency shelter and street outreach than families with children. Because different access points unlock different housing resources, the populations have different access to housing.
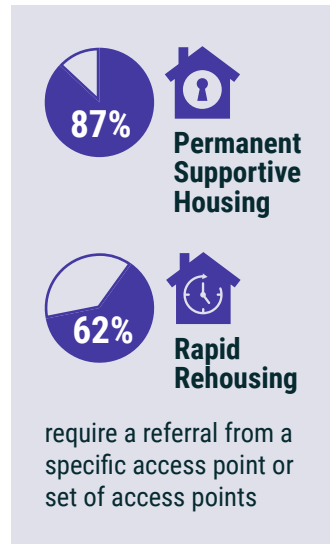
## Forge a Cohesive and Coordinated Homeless System of Care

Facilitate systems-level coordination and planning, transparency and account-ability by expanding data sharing and reporting.

Systems and funders providing homeless housing and services engage in limited coordination and data sharing, with no standardized data collection across systems. For the gaps analysis, the lack of standardized data prevented an accurate measurement of inflow into the homeless system of care, the capacity of the system overall, utilization of available resources, and outcomes of programs and services dedicated to people experiencing homelessness. Having access to system-wide information is critical for effective systems planning, allowing leaders to see what is working and what is not working across the system of care. Additional coordination, data sharing, and reporting would increase accountability and transparency and help the community understand where to prioritize resources.

◨ Increase System Capacity

Partners across Sacramento County dedicate a tremendous amount of resources for housing and services for people experiencing homelessness, including more than 6,000 beds that are dedicated to people experiencing homelessness. Despite this, more than 5,000 people are homelessness in Sacramento County on any given night. Even more urgent, more than two-thirds of them are living outside, a trend that has been increasing in recent years.

Partners dedicate

🛏

6,000+ Beds
to people experiencing homelessness

Despite this,
5,000 people are homeless in Sacramento County

2/3 are living outside
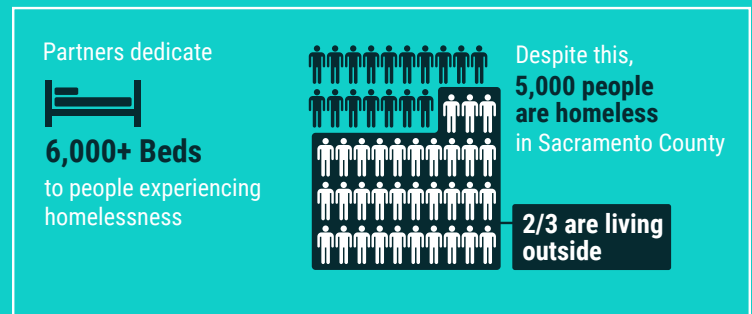
The level of need among the homeless population exceeds shelter and housing resources currently available. Shelter, rapid re-housing, and permanent supportive housing programs all have gaps between resource and need; affordable housing for very low-income people has limited availability.

Homebase made the following four recommendations to address these gaps:

⚠ Stop Homelessness Before It Begins

Expand, integrate, and improve the effectiveness of prevention and diversion efforts to reduce the burden on the system of care.

Research shows that one of the more cost-effective ways to decrease homelessness is to prevent or divert people from becoming homeless in the first place. Leveraging prevention and diversion programs allows the system to reserve limited beds in shelter and housing programs for those that need additional support to regain housing. Based on HMIS data in Sacramento, 92% of participants exiting prevention programs successfully exit to stable, permanent housing, a high success rate that suggests that expanding prevention programs could be an effective investment of resources. At the same time, Sacramento providers are offering prevention and diversion services using a wide variety of strategies and targeting, again with limited coordination or standard data collection, so impact and return on investment are unclear.

⚙ Optimize Existing Housing and Shelter Programs

Maximize existing housing and shelter resources by expanding what works and enhancing housing navigation and landlord engagement.

In addition to reducing inflow, a relatively low-cost approach to reducing gaps in system capacity – and serving more people – is to maximize the utilization and effectiveness of current housing programs. Limited access to affordable housing units in the community impacts housing program effectiveness. Over the last decade, the rental vacancy rate has continued to tick down, reaching 2.5% in 2019, creating an ever-larger impediment to accessing housing for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Some housing programs are having comparatively more success helping clients to access housing, and those strategies – including investing in housing navigation and landlord engagement – could be considered for wider implementation across the system. In addition, data reflects that shelter bed utilization varies among programs on a given night, indicating a need for reduced barriers to access to shelter.

Address the Gap in Housing and Supportive Services for People Experiencing Homelessness

Increase the capacity of permanent supportive housing, rapid re-housing, and emergency shelter programs to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness.

Sacramento's programs and systems are working diligently and successfully to respond to homelessness, however, even by reducing inflow and maximizing the use of existing housing resources, the gap in capacity will continue to exist if new housing and shelter programs are not created to meet the need. Homebase estimates that 44% of the current homeless population require long-term housing assistance and supportive services to end their homelessness and another 44% require short to medium-term housing assistance and supportive services to end their homelessness. Increasing the capacity of housing programs will take time—the nearly 4,000 people experiencing homelessness who are sleeping outside need access to shelter or crisis housing in the interim period.

44% require long-term housing assistance & supportive services

44% require short to medium-term housing assistance & supportive services
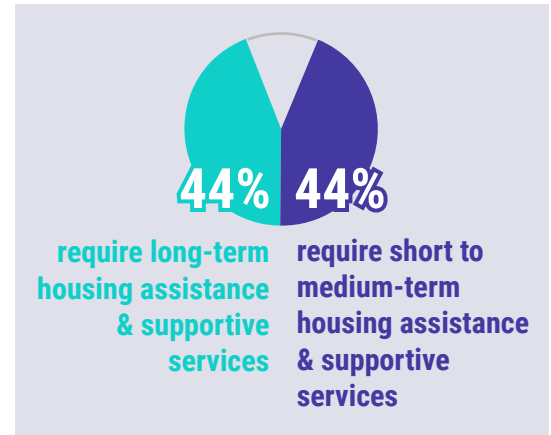
Create More Affordable Housing Units

Build or rehabilitate affordable housing units to alleviate the extreme housing shortage among low-income Sacramento residents and improve the effectiveness of homeless programs.

A lack of affordable housing units increases the risk of homelessness for low-income households while also making it challenging to re-house those that do become homeless. A key to increasing capacity across the system is to increase available affordable housing units, however only 5% of the Regional Housing Needs Allocation for Very Low Income households in Sacramento was built between 2013 and 2019.

Photo by Hector Amezcua.

⚖️ Explore and Address Disparities in Program Outcomes

While there is limited data available across the entire system of care, analysis of Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data showed disparities in outcomes across different types of households, age groups, and racial groups. Addressing access challenges and data sharing gaps would improve understanding about how effectively different programs serve specific homeless subpopulations over others. The system overall would better leverage its successes and could redirect resources to increase equity across the system.

Homebase made one recommendation related to this gap:

⚖️ Increase System Equity

Improve housing access and identify targeted interventions for underserved populations to address disparities in the homeless system of care.

In alignment with priorities established by the community, Sacramento's homeless system of care is identifying and serving people with disabling conditions and people experiencing chronic homelessness with its limited resources. However, Veterans, American Indian and Alaska Natives, and males are overrepresented in the homeless population overall and underrepresented in those being served by the homeless housing and services reflected in HMIS (but may be served by non-HMIS-participating programs, like the Veterans Administration). Transition age youth are also underrepresented among those receiving homeless housing and services in HMIS.

In addition, the time it takes people to get housed or access housing resources is inequitable across household types, with a median length of time between initial system access and housing program enrollment varying from 62 days for families with children to 141 days for adults without children. Participation in programs and connections with housing resources are also different across racial groups. For example, according to HMIS data, adults without children that identify as American Indian or Alaska Native and exit from street outreach are connected with housing programs at lower rates than other races (4.3% for American Indian or Alaska Native; 9.1% average across all racial groups).
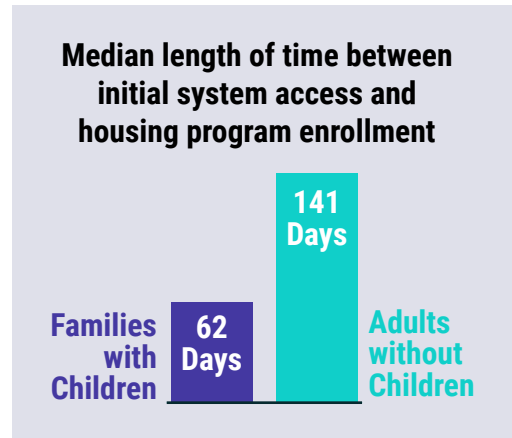
Median length of time between initial system access and housing program enrollment

Families with Children: **62 Days**
Adults without Children: **141 Days**

Inequitable housing outcomes and systematic disparities in bed dedication and resources also highlight missed opportunities for subpopulations. For example, in Sacramento, rapid re-housing is a successful program model for transition age youth and adults without children, but without additional dedicated resources, families are more likely to access the resource, given the availability of a significant state-funded rapid re-housing program dedicated to serving families.

Photo by Hector Amezcua.

NEXT STEPS

While partners across Sacramento are already implementing strategies that begin to address all seven recommendations, effective response to the gaps identified will require additional focus and action. In the gaps analysis report, Homebase suggests potential actions to implement the seven recommendations and categorizes them in three ways, based on the amount of effort required, the level of impact, and the scope of change required.

Among the suggestions, Homebase recommends three actions that would provide maximum impact:

- Dedicate blended funding for "one-stop-shop" drop-in access points that provide referrals to all housing programs regardless of who funds or administers the housing.

- Build out programs that leverage housing vouchers to connect prioritized and referred tenants with permanent supportive housing case management resources in a coordinated housing program.

- Convene system leaders and database administrators from HMIS, CalWIN, Shine, Avatar, and SHRA's internal databases to discuss opportunities to standardize data collection and reporting, reduce duplicative data entry across systems, and explore potential for future data sharing.

Creating a more coordinated and cohesive system of care that provides client-centered access and services will end and prevent homelessness for more Sacramento residents.

The Gaps Analysis report and executive summary was prepared by Homebase at the direction of Sacramento Steps Forward.

The full report is available at: https://sacramentostepsforward.org/coc-program-comp/policies/

Photo by Hector Amezcua.