

Strategic Plan to End Homelessness

Approved 2013, Updated October 2016

Ohio Balance of State Continuum of Care



Homelessness in the Ohio BoSCoC

When most people imagine what homelessness looks like, they often picture a single man living on the streets of an urban center. In reality though, homelessness occurs in even some of the most rural communities in our state. And those experiencing homelessness in the Ohio BoSCoC are almost as likely to be families with children as they are single individuals.

During the annual one-day count of homelessness in the Ohio BoSCoC in January 2013 (called the Point-in-Time or PIT Count) 3,830 people were identified as homeless. This includes 1,807 people in families (including 1,105 children) and 2,023 people without children. Of these, 17% were identified as unsheltered homeless, meaning they were living on the streets, in cars, or other places not meant for human habitation.

The 2013 PIT Count results show a 12% decrease in total homelessness across the Ohio BoSCoC from the previous year¹. Moreover, the BoSCoC reported a 29% decrease in unsheltered homelessness, as well as a 43% decrease in chronic homelessness. Overall, 2013 homelessness was at its lowest, across the board, since the Ohio BoSCoC began formally reporting PIT data in 2008. Although it would be premature to say that homelessness in the Ohio BoSCoC is officially on a downward path, 2013 data could be an indication that we are making progress and that our homeless programs are operating more effectively and efficiently with each passing year. But progress notwithstanding, the Ohio BoSCoC still has much work to do if we are going to end homelessness in our 80 counties.

The Ohio BoSCoC Strategic Plan to End Homelessness

The Ohio BoSCoC Strategic Plan to End Homelessness seeks to set a path to ending all homelessness in the Ohio BoSCoC in 20 years. The identification of Strategic Plan principles, goals, and associated strategies will help guide our work as we progress towards our ultimate goal of ending homelessness across all 80 counties of the Ohio BoSCoC.

Ending Homelessness in the Ohio BoSCoC

Ending homelessness does not mean that no one will ever have a housing crisis or need to spend a night in an emergency shelter. Ending homelessness means that when it does occur, homelessness is rare, short-term, and does not recur.

Strategic Plan Vision: To end homelessness in the Ohio Balance of State Continuum of Care in 20 years.

Measure Progress

To measure progress in meeting our goal of ending homelessness in the Ohio BoSCoC in 20 years, we will use data collected through annual Point-in-Time (PIT) Counts. PIT Counts are one-day, unduplicated counts of sheltered (in emergency shelters and transitional housing programs) and unsheltered homeless persons.

Although PIT count data is problematic, we believe it provides the best indication of how well our CoC is doing as a whole in preventing, reducing, and ultimately ending homelessness for our community members. In particular, data on the number people sleeping on the streets or other places not intended for human habitation (also called unsheltered homeless) may provide the greatest indication of progress in meeting our strategic plan vision. PIT Counts of unsheltered homeless should provide a picture of those persons who are absolutely in need of homeless program beds/units, but who have been unable to access those resources. As their numbers decrease, this should serve as an indication that those in need of homeless services are being served by appropriate programs and that those who can be served by other systems/providers have been appropriately connected and referred away from the homeless system.

Achieving the Vision

The Ohio BoSCoC will reduce total homelessness by 40% in 10 years, and will reduce total homelessness by 80% in 20 years. By achieving these measurable goals, we will have effectively ended

¹ This decrease reflects the adjusted 2013 PIT count numbers which account for the temporary closure of a large CoC-wide TH program.

homelessness in the Ohio BoSCoC. Using 2012 PIT data as the baseline, reducing BoSCoC homelessness by 40% in 10 years means that by 2023, there will be no more than 3,000 total homeless persons counted during the annual PIT Count. Reducing homelessness by 80% in 20 years means that by 2033, no more than 1,000 total will be counted.

Additionally, the Ohio BoSCoC will reduce unsheltered homelessness by 40% in 10 years and 80% in 20 years. Again, using 2012 PIT data as the baseline, this means that by 2023 no more than 562 people will be sleeping on the streets and other places not meant for human habitation. By 2033, no more than 187 people will be unsheltered during the PIT Count.

Ohio BoSCoC Strategic Plan Principles

The Ohio BoSCoC has identified the following principles to guide the identification of strategic plan goals and related strategies, as well as implementation:

- Homelessness is a complex, multi-faceted issue requiring the collaboration of partners across multiple service systems
- Those experiencing homelessness should have access to the appropriate assistance and supportive services to meet their needs in every area of the state
- Those experiencing homelessness should be treated with dignity and their self-determination should be respected
- To move from managing homelessness to ending homelessness, homeless systems must address individuals entering the system with the earliest and swiftest possible interventions
- High-quality data collection, management, and evaluation are integral to the development of effective policies and programs

Ohio BoSCoC Strategic Plan Goals

To help the Ohio BoSCoC achieve its vision of ending homelessness in 20 years, the following goals have been identified:

- Prevent homelessness whenever possible
- When homelessness does occur, end it quickly
- Homeless programs operate effectively and efficiently
- Homeless systems operate effectively and efficiently

In the following section, several strategies have been identified for each of the Strategic Plan Goals. These strategies include actionable items that will move the Ohio BoSCoC forward in meeting each of the Strategic Plan goals and ultimately end homelessness in the Ohio BoSCoC.

Prevent Homelessness Whenever Possible

Preventing homelessness is a critical piece to any plan to reduce or end homelessness. Not only does effective homelessness prevention keep people from entering the homeless system in the first place, but it is often significantly more cost effective than providing assistance to someone who has already become homeless. Thus, CoCs have greater resources to devote to those who may have more barriers or need higher amounts of assistance. Additionally, by keeping people out of the homeless system, we are keeping them connected to their communities and support networks and minimizing the impact of housing crises on children.

Strategies

- Improve targeting of homelessness prevention resources
- Increase the use of quality diversion strategies and begin to measure their impact and effectiveness

When Homelessness Does Occur, End it Quickly

In some cases, homelessness simply cannot be prevented. When this happens, homeless services providers and systems should work to end homelessness as quickly as possible by moving the individual or family into permanent housing. This should be done in a way that moves families or individuals into permanent housing right away, providing services once in housing. Not only is this rapid re-housing approach more cost effective than keeping people in shelter or transitional housing programs, but it also

helps people return to stability more quickly (Note: the Ohio BoSCoC recognizes that transitional housing programs may be beneficial for certain target populations including homeless youth, persons in recovery, and victims of domestic violence).

Strategies

- Increase the use and availability of rapid re-housing resources
- Shorten the length of time persons remain homeless in emergency shelters and transitional housing programs
- Increase access to and receipt of mainstream resources and cash and non-cash benefits for those experiencing homelessness

Homeless Programs Operate Effectively and Efficiently

Effective and efficient homeless programs maximize resources and successfully and quickly end homelessness for families and individuals. These programs also maintain good HMIS data quality and are able to evidence their success through this data.

Strategies

- Regularly monitor programs on their effectiveness and efficiency in preventing and ending homelessness and make measurable improvement when indicated
- Increase targeting of Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) resources to those experiencing homelessness with the greatest barriers and longest terms of homelessness

Homeless Systems Operate Effectively and Efficiently

Effective and efficient homeless systems plan and operate in a coordinated fashion that maximizes current resources, identifies gaps and needs, and develops responsive and effective systems and processes. These systems include quality homeless programs that prevent or end homelessness for persons experiencing it in a way that is effective and efficient as well.

Strategies

- Develop, implement, and monitor coordinated intake and assessment processes within each of the BoSCoC Homeless Planning Regions
- Regularly monitor systems on their effectiveness and efficiency in preventing and ending homelessness and make measurable improvement when indicated
- Monitor level of need and gaps in services, and work to make system-level program adjustments as warranted
- Continue to advocate for increased development of affordable housing and educate providers about how they can develop resources within their local communities

Implementing the Strategic Plan

The Ohio BoSCoC Board is ultimately responsible for implementing the strategies and meeting the goals laid out in this Strategic Plan. The CoC Boards works with the BoSCoC's Collaborative Applicant, the Ohio Development Services Agency (ODSA), and COHHIO's CoC Coordinator to identify and carry out necessary tasks and workplans to implement the Strategic Plan strategies.

Beginning in 2014, ODSA and COHHIO will provide annual written reports to the Ohio BoSCoC on the progress of Strategic Plan implementation, as well as progress in achievement of the four goals laid out in this plan. These annual reports will also allow the Ohio BoSCoC to update stakeholders on changes in the environment, such as new opportunities or challenges, as well as new research and information about best practices.

Ohio BoSCoC Strategic Plan Supplement

Added and Approved

Background

After adoption of the Ohio BoSCoC Strategic Plan to End Homelessness in 2013, and in alignment with *Opening Doors*, the Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness, the Ohio BoSCoC Board agreed in 2014 to prioritize efforts to end Veteran and chronic homelessness in the CoC. The CoC Board prioritized this work in part, because they believed that the lessons learned through the process to achieve an end to Veteran and chronic homelessness could be applied to the CoC's efforts to also end youth and family homelessness and, ultimately, to set a path to end all homelessness.

In 2015, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) released much more specific guidance about what it means to end Veteran and chronic homelessness in CoCs across the country, and how to demonstrate that a functional end has been achieved. These guidance documents include *Achieving the Goal of Ending Veteran Homelessness: Federal Criteria and Benchmarks*², and *Criteria and Benchmark for Achieving the Goal of Ending Chronic Homelessness*³ - Criteria and benchmarks work together to provide a complete picture of a community's response to homelessness. The criteria focus on describing essential elements and accomplishments of the community response, and the benchmarks serve as indicators of whether and how effectively the system is working towards the goal(s).

Upon release of the federal criteria and benchmarks, the Ohio BoSCoC refined planning efforts and work related to achieving the goals of ending Veteran and chronic homelessness so that they aligned with the criteria. In turn, this set the stage for the adoption of more specific and focused strategies related to ending youth homelessness in the Ohio BoSCoC. These updated strategies are outlined below for the following homeless populations: Veterans, chronically homeless, and youth.

Ohio BoSCoC Strategic Plan Goals - Supplement

End Veteran Homelessness

The Ohio BoSCoC seeks to functionally end Veteran homelessness by 2017.

Functionally ending Veteran homelessness means that the Ohio BoSCoC has achieved the federal criteria and benchmarks that demonstrate a functional end to Veteran homelessness, and that USICH has provided formal support of the Ohio BoSCoC claim.

The following strategies for ending Veteran homelessness align with federal criteria and benchmarks for achieving the goal of ending Veteran homelessness, as well as with the *Ohio BoSCoC Policies and Procedures for a Comprehensive System Response to Veteran Homelessness*.

Strategies

- Convene a Homeless Veterans workgroup to guide the system response to Veteran homelessness
- Identify all literally homeless Veterans in the Ohio BoSCoC
- Provide immediate shelter to all unsheltered homeless Veterans who want it
- Provide immediate access to permanent housing to all homeless Veterans who desire it
- Prevent homelessness and returns to homelessness for Veterans
- Prioritize for non-VA homeless resources those Veterans who are not VA eligible
- VA and non-VA funded providers coordinate with VA staff to provide services/housing assistance to homeless Veterans

² <https://www.usich.gov/tools-for-action/criteria-for-ending-veteran-homelessness>

³ <https://www.usich.gov/tools-for-action/criteria-and-benchmark-for-ending-chronic-homelessness/>

- Comply with the *Ohio BoSCoC Policies and Procedures for a Comprehensive System Response to Veteran Homelessness*

End Chronic Homelessness

The Ohio BoSCoC will functionally end chronic homelessness by 2018.

Functionally ending chronic homelessness means that the Ohio BoSCoC has achieved the federal criteria and benchmarks that demonstrate a functional end to chronic homelessness, and that USICH has provided formal support of the Ohio BoSCoC claim.

The following strategies for ending chronic homelessness align with federal criteria and benchmarks for achieving the goal of ending chronic homelessness.

Strategies

- Convene a Chronic Homelessness workgroup to guide the system efforts to end chronic homelessness
- Identify all individuals experiencing chronic homelessness or at risk for chronic homelessness
- Provide immediate shelter to all unsheltered chronically homeless persons who want it
- Implement community-wide Housing First orientation that includes consideration of preferences of individuals being served
- Provide immediate access to permanent housing, with appropriate level of supportive services, to all chronically homeless persons who desire it
- Prevent chronic homelessness and returns to homelessness whenever possible

End Youth Homelessness

The Ohio BoSCoC will functionally end youth homelessness by 2020.

The Ohio BoSCoC will define ‘functional end to youth homelessness’ as more guidance from USICH and the federal partners becomes available.

For our strategic plan purposes, homeless youth are defined as unaccompanied youth under age 18 or unaccompanied young adults ages 18 to 24, including parenting youth.

As of October 2016, USICH has not released federal criteria and benchmarks to guide the development and evaluation of system responses to end youth homelessness. However, in 2015 USICH released *Preventing and Ending Youth Homelessness: A Coordinated Community Response*⁴, a document that provides a preliminary vision for what effective coordinated responses will look like. The following strategies for ending youth homelessness align with the key elements to a coordinated community response identified by USICH.

Strategies

- Convene a Youth Homelessness workgroup to guide the system efforts to end youth homelessness
- Identify and engage youth at risk for or experiencing homelessness and connect with them in trauma-informed, and culturally and developmentally appropriate ways
- Provide immediate, safe shelter to all unsheltered homeless youth who want it
- Develop coordinated entry systems to identify youth for appropriate types of assistance and prioritize resources for the most vulnerable youth
- Create individualized services and housing options tailored to the needs of youth – both through the development of youth dedicated programs and through the improvement of existing homeless programs
- Prevent youth from becoming homeless by identifying and working with families who at risk of fracturing, and by coordinated with other systems of care to ensure youth exiting those systems do not become homeless at exit

⁴ <https://www.usich.gov/tools-for-action/coordinated-community-response-to-youth-homelessness>