

Home Again

A 10-year plan to end homelessness in Portland and Multnomah County

6-month Report Card

Housing first works

In December 2004, the City of Portland and Multnomah County released a 10-year Plan to End Homelessness. The plan recommended a major change in the way that the homeless system—the government agencies, non-profits and institutions that serve homeless people—coordinates and delivers services. After 6 months, change is well underway: Homeless people are being moved into housing first and are receiving the services they need to stay housed.

The 10-year Plan is built on the following three principles:

1. Focus on the most chronically homeless populations;
2. Streamline access to existing services to prevent and reduce homelessness; and
3. Concentrate resources on programs that offer measurable results.

The Plan identified nine specific changes to the way in which we approach homelessness in Portland and Multnomah County. The most pressing task upon us—beyond helping folks escape homeless—is to engage the wider community. We need to enlist our city's communities of faith, businesses and neighborhood groups in this important endeavor.

Our progress to date

In many cases, we have made great progress on the nine specific steps outlined in December. We have made major change to the way the homeless system works, focusing all major partners in the system on housing first for homeless people.

We have already dramatically exceeded our goals in areas such as housing 350 chronically homeless people between January and June, a doubling of our one-year goal of housing 175 chronically homeless people.

For other steps, we are right on target. For example, in six months we have opened 107 units of permanent supportive housing, with another 175 units currently under development.

In other areas, we still have work to do. However, even where we are behind schedule, we still anticipate reaching our goal before the end of the year. In particular, even though there are 10 agencies whose data has been incorporated into the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), we plan to reach our goal of having the participation of 26 agencies by the end of 2005.

This 6-month report card provides a brief overview of our successes so far and areas for improvement, so we can reach the goal of ending homelessness as we know it.

Results for January – June 2005

Here are the results from the first six months of our work:

The Nine Actions to End Homelessness

1. Move people into housing first.

The 10-Year Plan called for 175 people to be moved into permanent housing by the end of 2005. As of the end of June, 350 chronically homeless people were placed in permanent housing (189 directly from the streets), including 23 “hard to reach” homeless youth. In addition, 124 homeless families with children were moved into permanent housing, 82 of who are considered “high resource users.”

Reducing social costs through housing first.

Since its beginning in 2004, Central City Concern’s Community Engagement Program (CEP) has permanently housed 162 chronically homeless people, 88 percent of whom remain housed today. The average length of homelessness for participants prior to their placement in housing was 9 years. Central City Concern reports other successes as a result of the program: participants in the program experienced a 73 percent reduction in the number of jail stays and arrests and a 42 percent reduction in hospitalizations.

2. Stop discharging people into homelessness.

The 10-year Plan placed an emphasis on building links between services provided by the homeless system and the discharge process used by institutions like jails and hospitals. The Discharge Planning Workgroup—comprised of front-line staff and managers from the institutions—has made good progress, creating a series of recommendations for ways to create consistency in the discharge process across these institutions.

Discharge Planning. *For more than two years, Joint Access to Benefits (JAB) has been successfully connecting qualified ex-offenders to Social Security benefits and Medicaid prior to their release. Previously, disabled ex-offenders would have to wait up to 2 years to receive benefits, which are stopped during incarceration. Many of these individuals were left to circulate through our homeless system while waiting for their benefits to be restored. Now four months prior to release, JAB staff complete the application by phone with social workers inside correctional facilities. In 2004, 90% of the 79 applications for benefits were approved, thereby insuring income for stable transition to permanent housing.*

During the next six months, our challenge will be to gain approval from top administrative staff at the institutions affected in order to implement this discharge planning process.

3. Improve outreach to homeless people.

The one-year goal for this action step was to develop a plan for a new resource center. The center will provide homeless people with quick and direct access to programs that move them directly into permanent housing. Program planning and preliminary designs for an access center has been accomplished.

In addition to creating a plan for an access center, the Outreach and Engagement Workgroup initiated and organized the most coordinated and comprehensive, countywide, street count ever conducted in Portland. The results were staggering: over 2,300 unduplicated people were counted, with nearly 55 percent reported as chronically homeless.

4. Emphasize permanent solutions.

This action step was designed to address the problem of people entering the homeless system who were not directly placed in permanent housing, but were instead shuffled from shelter to temporary housing before ending up back on the street. In FY 04-05 resources were re-directed to emphasize “housing first” strategies and we were successful at meeting our housing placement and retention goals for the year.

Skipping shelter for permanent housing. *In the past year, the primary shelter provider in Portland, Transition Projects Inc., hired a case manager to work with clients on their shelter wait list. In an 8 month time period, the case manager worked with 283 men and women – successfully placing 47 people (23 of whom were chronically homeless) directly into permanent housing, preventing homelessness for 14, and placing three in transitional housing.*

This fiscal year 05-06 the City of Portland’s budget includes an additional \$1 million to help get homeless people off the street, and another \$1 million for housing production (much of which will be directed at permanent supportive housing projects). Multnomah County has also allocated \$1 million dollars to support the Bridges to Housing Project for homeless families with a matching commitment from the City. We anticipate continued success on this action step through the remainder of 2005.

Unfortunately, more resources will be needed in order to reach our goal of placing 60 percent of homeless people in permanent housing by 2012. We will need to pursue an aggressive resource development campaign if we hope to sustain our current level of success throughout the life of this 10-year plan.

5. Increase supply of permanent supportive housing.

The 10-year Plan calls for 1,600 units of permanent supportive housing to be built in Portland by 2015—a major challenge. As of the end of June, however, we are on our way to meeting this challenge, having created 145 new permanent supportive housing units with another 175 currently under development.

6. Create innovative new partnerships to end homelessness.

One of the most impressive successes of the 10-year Plan's first six-month cannot be reduced to numbers. The unprecedented cooperation between City of Portland and

A public-private partnership for housing. *Bridges to Housing (B2H) is currently engaged in an effort to ramp up our community's capacity to place homeless families directly into permanent supportive housing. The B2H goal is to leverage new resources (\$20 million in private funds and \$50 million in public resources) to fund community-based organizations that provide permanent housing linked to services for families.*

Multnomah County has been key to meeting many of our goals.

For example, Multnomah County and the City of Portland pooled resources this year to develop an additional 43 units of permanent supportive housing.

The City and County along with community partners are also discussing holding a local "Project Connect" day in Portland. Originally

initiated in San Francisco, Project Connect brings together thousands of volunteers to provide direct assistance to homeless people. Project Connect has been successful in the Bay Area at both helping meet the immediate needs of homeless people but most importantly, in building the civic will among citizens, businesses and non-profit organizations to tackle homelessness.

7. Make the rent assistance system more effective.

The rent assistance system has been reformed in the past six months through a unique partnership of the City of Portland, Multnomah County and the Housing Authority of Portland (HAP). Instead of providing rent assistance through three separate efforts, these entities have merged rent assistance efforts under the single jurisdiction of HAP. This effort intends to save on administrative costs, while making the rent assistance program more efficient in program design and evaluation and more accessible for clients.

8. Increase economic opportunity for homeless people.

The City's Bureau of Housing and Community Development is coordinating its efforts to help the homeless with housing and economic opportunity (job readiness and job training). Previously, these two efforts were run with separate funding and administration; now, the bureau is providing seed funding for projects that mutually support the 10-year plan's efforts to end homelessness and those that address the issue of economic opportunity for homeless people.

Discussions with the staff at worksystems, Inc. (who administer workforce assistance programs funded through the federal Department of Labor) about cross-system coordination and providing "one-stops" for homeless clients continue. It is our hope that the result of these discussions will be the provision of workforce and housing services to homeless clients in one visit and at one location.

9. Implement new data collection technology throughout the homeless system.

The Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) is a web-based system that helps in data collection and research about the homeless population and allows multiple partners in the homeless system to coordinate data. Our goal for the first year of the 10-year Plan was to have the data from 26 homeless agencies in the system.

Currently, we already have 10 agencies on line; we expect another 27 will be using the system by the end of 2005.

HMIS is already allowing us to track the number of unduplicated homeless and chronically homeless persons served by participating agencies, and to see how many of them moved to permanent housing and how many of them are still in the system. Since January 1, 2005, 3,300 unduplicated persons have been served through the 10 participating agencies.

People are using HMIS.

*As of July 28th, 2005,
26,345 records were in
ServicePoint, the web-based
HMIS used in Portland.*

6-Month Report on 1st Year Goals and Results – the Numbers

Goal	Result
175 chronically homeless people will have homes	350 chronically homeless people moved into housing, 189 directly from the streets
160 new units of permanent supportive housing will be opened and 300 additional units will be under development	145 units of permanent supportive housing opened, with another 175 units currently under development
20 “hard to reach” homeless youth will be working toward housing stability	23 “hard to reach” homeless youth were housed
Waiting lists for shelters and turn away counts will be reduced by a minimum of five percent	(Waiting for year-end data before reporting on this goal)
Rent Assistance Program Reforms will be completed to produce a streamlined administration and increased outcomes for families and individuals	Rent Assistance Reforms 85 percent complete with selection of single administrative entity, agreed upon program design, and shared outcomes
250 homeless families with children will be permanently housed, 50 of whom will be high resources users	124 homeless families with children were permanent housed (82 households were high resource users)
Resources for permanent supportive housing will increase from 12 to 20percent of the overall homeless service system	(Data being collected for year-end analysis.)
An enhanced partnership to end homelessness will be formalized by public and private community partners	Progress occurring with partnership developed between the City and County to develop permanent housing for chronically homeless and homeless families
The new Homeless Management Information System will be fully operational in 26 homeless service agencies	Ten agencies are currently participating in HMIS