JEFFERSON COUNTY HOMELESSNESS ACTION PLAN 2021-2023

Heading Home, A Committee of Jeffco Connections

HEADING HOME

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Executive Summary

Homelessness is a community-wide crisis requiring a community-wide solution. For this reason, the Heading Home group formed in 2006 to work toward ending homelessness in Jefferson County. As the crisis has grown over the years, Heading Home is now revising its plan to focus on the greatest needs of our unhoused neighbors. This Plan, driven by data and guiding principles outlined herein, will serve as a blueprint for the work of Heading Home over the next three years.

The vision of the Heading Home Collaborative is to implement a systemic response in Jefferson County that ensures homelessness is *rare* and prevented whenever possible and, when it cannot be prevented, it is a *brief*, and a one-time experience. Ensuring homelessness is a rare experience means that we build lasting systems, which include components that actively prevent housing crises that lead to homelessness. When homelessness cannot be prevented, the system is designed to ensure the experience is brief. This means at any given time we know who is experiencing homelessness in the community and ensure they are quickly engaged in a pathway to housing of their choice. Lastly, when homelessness does occur, the system is built to ensure it is a *one-time only* experience by connecting households with existing programs that support upward economic mobility through education, employment, and other essential services.

The Jeffco Homelessness Action Plan seeks to realize this vision by focusing on four primary objectives. A distinct workgroup will be structured around each objective.

As the Heading Home Committee moves towards a workgroup focused model, this document will serve as the roadmap and basis for accountability for each of the workgroups over the next three years. This document will be updated every three years in response to changing community needs and priorities.

Guiding Principles

Everyone has the right to live in safe, decent, affordable housing and to have access to services they need to survive and thrive. The following principles will guide the work of the Heading Home Committee:

Community-Level Approach

A community-wide problem necessitates a community-wide solution. The most effective and lasting solutions come when we bring our strengths as separate entities together to create collaborative solutions that put the best interests of those we serve first.

Housing First

Housing is ultimately the solution to homelessness. A successful and effective homelessness response system quickly connects families and individuals experiencing a housing crisis to permanent housing without preconditions or barriers and provides ongoing opportunities for engagement in services to support long-term stability.

Cultural Competence & Inclusivity

We develop and promote policies and interventions that respect the diverse cultures and beliefs of those we serve. We engage stakeholders from every sector, especially persons with lived experience of homelessness, in the development of solutions.

Self Determination

We treat all individuals and families experiencing homelessness with dignity and respect, promoting self-determination and personal choice about one's own life. We recognize that all persons are unique, and we must develop solutions driven by individual differences and needs rather than a one size fits all approach.

Data Driven Decisions

We promote robust systems for collecting, sharing, and integrating data among homeless service providers and other intersecting systems so that we can effectively measure the community's progress and adjust the approach as needed.

System Integration

We prevent and end homelessness by working collaboratively with other systems that impact our ability to end homelessness, including, but not limited to, health care, education, criminal justice, and the metro Denver Continuum of Care.

Racial Equity

We actively promote and implement antiracist policies and interventions that seek to resolve the racial and ethnic inequities experienced by persons of color who are disproportionately experiencing homelessness in Jefferson County.

Trauma Informed Care

We recognize the role and impact of high levels of trauma in the past and present condition of homelessness and seek to design interventions that provide safety and actively avoid re-traumatizing individuals.
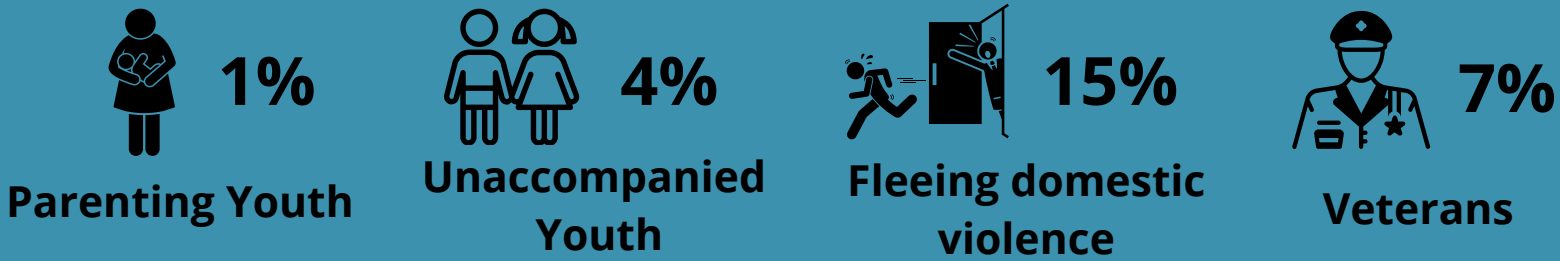
State of Homelessness in Jefferson County

The primary sources of data on homelessness in Jefferson County used to compile the data in this section are the 2019 Comprehensive Homeless Count ("Comprehensive Count") and the Point-in-Time Homeless Counts ("PIT Count"). These counts are both census events, which provide point-in-time snapshots of homelessness. Jefferson County is reliant on these census events due to current low utilization rates of the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) database throughout the county. While census and outreach events can hold value in providing snapshot data, a dynamic and shared database is the most reliable way to know real-time data on the full nature and extent of homelessness. All data included in these counts is self-reported.

Comprehensive Homeless Count Data (August 2019)

997 People experienced homelessness or lacked stable housing.

67% Of this group were literally homeless, which means they were living in a temporary shelter program or unsheltered.

77% Of those literally homeless were living outside or in another place not meant for human habitation.
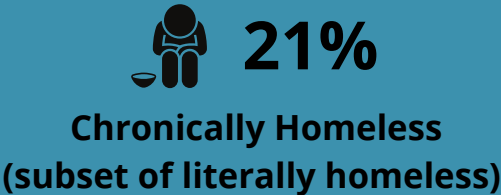
Subpopulations

Of those experiencing homelessness and lacking stable housing, the following notable subpopulations were identified.

1% Parenting Youth

4% Unaccompanied Youth

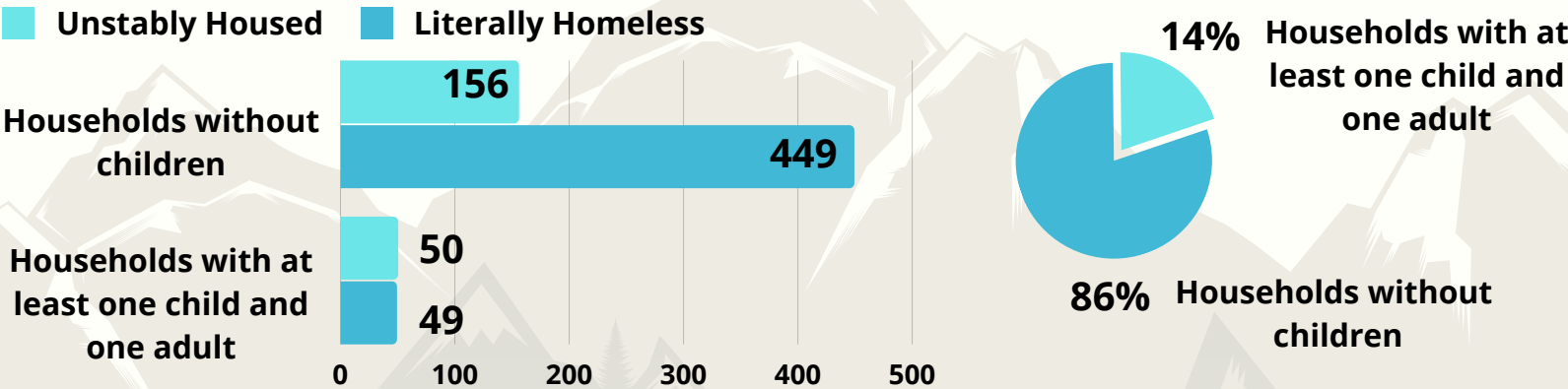**15%** Fleeing domestic violence

7% Veterans

Housing Status

Unstably housed refers to persons who were unable to sleep or stay in the same place for the next 14 days, could not pay for housing for the next 14 days, or had inconsistent housing for the last 60 days. Chronic homelessness is used to describe people who have experienced homelessness for at least a year, or repeatedly over several years, while struggling with a disabling condition such as a serious mental health disorder, substance use disorder, or physical disability

33%
Unstably Housed

67%
Literally Homeless

21%
Chronically Homeless
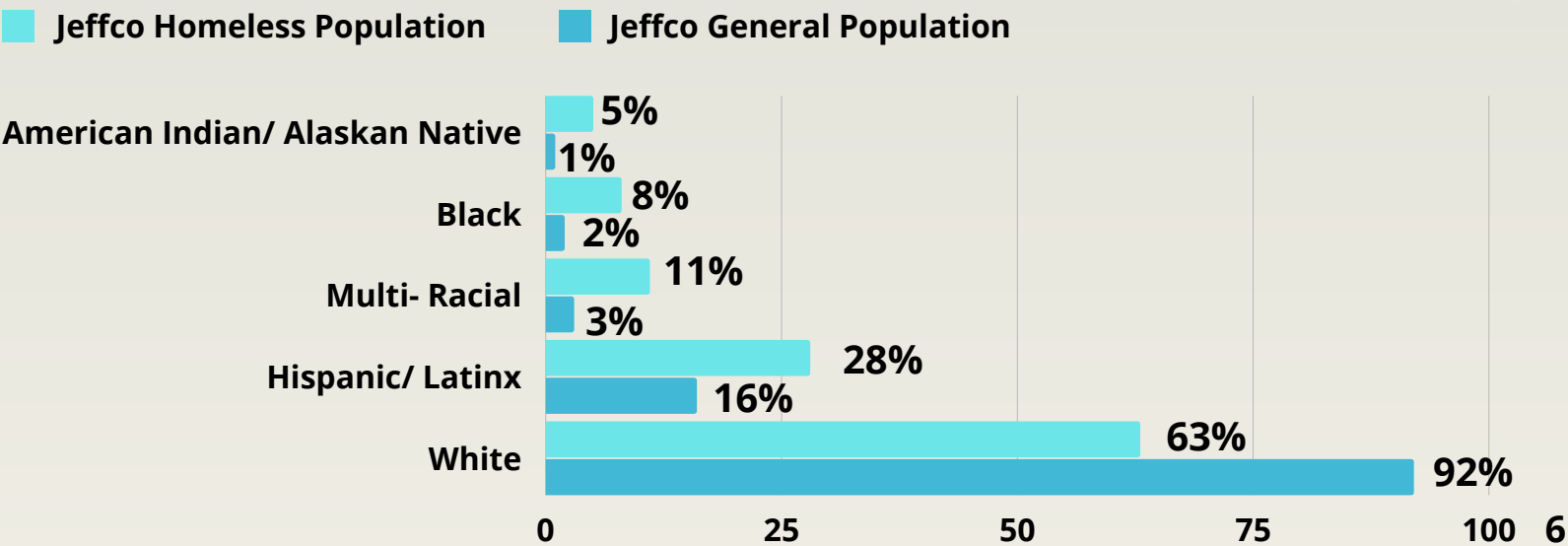**(subset of literally homeless)**

Household Type

Households without children are significantly more likely to experience homelessness, more likely to lack stable housing and have a higher proportion of persons literally homeless than households with children.

■ Unstably Housed   ■ Literally Homeless

Households without children
- 156
- 449

Households with at least one child and one adult
- 50
- 49

0   100   200   300   400   500

14% Households with at least one child and one adult

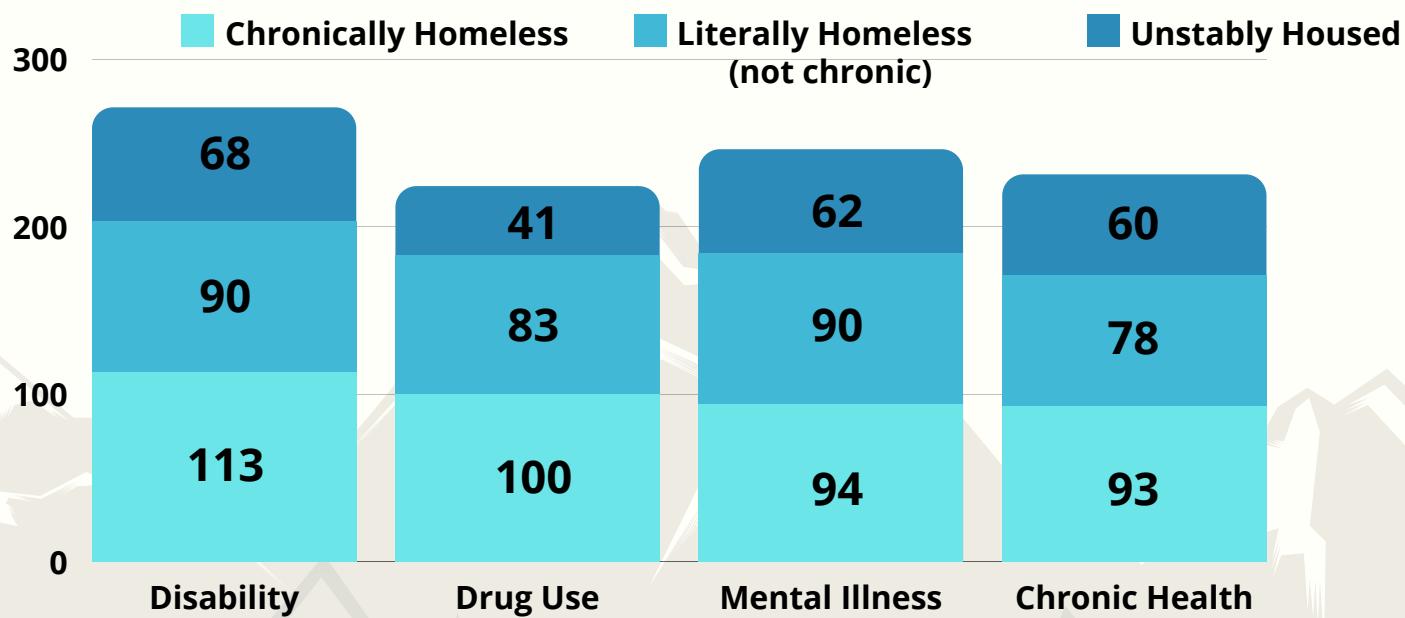**86%** Households without children

Race & Ethnicity

Homelessness disproportionately impacts persons of color in Jefferson County. Compared to the general population, persons experiencing homelessness were more likely to be persons of color.

■ Jeffco Homeless Population   ■ Jeffco General Population

American Indian/ Alaskan Native
- 5%
- 1%

Black
- 8%
- 2%

Multi- Racial
- 11%
- 3%

Hispanic/ Latinx
- 28%
- 16%

White
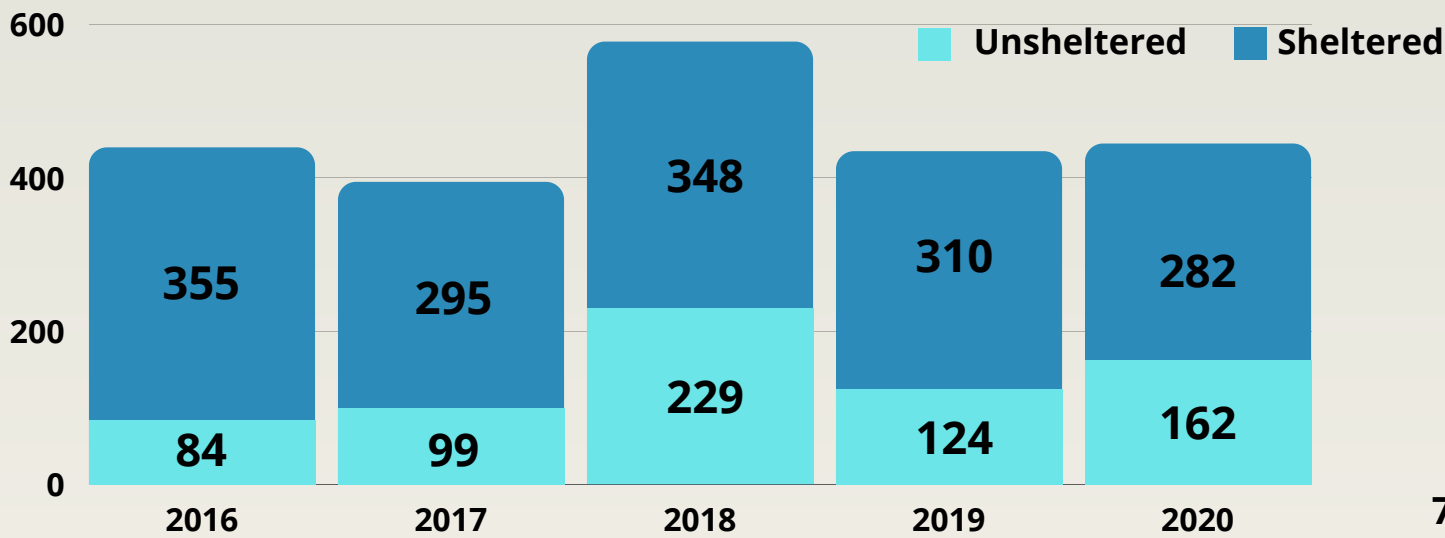- 63%
- 92%

0   25   50   75   100   6

Health Conditions & Disabilities

Approximately two out of every three persons (62%) over 18 report having at least one disabling condition. Persons experiencing chronic homelessness are disproportionately afflicted with physical and behavioral health issues and disabilities. A disabling condition in this context is one that is expected to be long-continuing or indefinite duration, substantially impedes the person's ability to live independently; and could be improved by the provision of more suitable housing conditions.

Legend: Chronically Homeless | Literally Homeless (not chronic) | Unstably Housed

	Disability	Drug Use	Mental Illness	Chronic Health
Unstably Housed	68	41	62	60
Literally Homeless (not chronic)	90	83	90	78
Chronically Homeless	113	100	94	93

Total Persons Literally Homeless – PIT Counts

Unlike the charts above, the following chart shows total persons counted in the PIT Counts over the past five years (2017-2020). The totals of the PIT counts are significantly lower than the totals reported in the Comprehensive Count data above because the PIT Count is a one-day event, while the Comprehensive Count was conducted over the course of a month.

Legend: Unsheltered | Sheltered

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Sheltered	355	295	348	310	282
Unsheltered	84	99	229	124	162

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Plan Objectives

The objectives of this Action Plan were identified using the results from the 2019 Comprehensive Count, 2020 PIT Count, a shelter gap and inventory analysis, 2020 Jefferson County Community Needs Assessment, the 2013 Heading Home Plan, and the 2015 Heading Home Collaborative Evaluation. Additionally, the authors reviewed similar plans from over 10 communities of various sizes and geographies. Key guiding framework documents also included the Jeffco Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP), the Jeffco Bright Futures Roadmap, Focus Strategies' Housing Crisis Resolution System Briefs, and the United States Interagency Council on the Homeless' Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness.

The Heading Home Governance Workgroup used this information to identify four primary objectives, which will focus and guide our efforts so that we can most effectively move Jefferson County towards its goals of ensuring homelessness is rare, brief, and one-time only.

Throughout Fall and Winter 2020, each workgroup completed a logic modeling exercise, which identified not only the vision for each objective, but also the concrete activities and expected outcomes for those activities. The activities describe what Heading Home will do to achieve the vision and the outcomes are the changes we expect to see because of the activities.

The first action step for each workgroup involves assessing available data to identify more specific gaps and subsequent activities. The results of this activity will allow the group to set clear, measurable benchmarks for progress and be held accountable to those metrics.

Rare   Brief   One-Time

1) **Optimize the Housing Crisis Resolution System**
2) **Increase Access to and Supply of Supportive Housing Units**
3) **Improve System-Wide Data Collection and Data Sharing**
4) **Increase Community Involvement in Support of Homelessness Solutions**

OPTIMIZE THE HOUSING CRISIS RESOLUTION SYSTEM

A housing crisis resolution system responds to the needs of all persons who are experiencing a housing crisis in Jefferson County. In such a system, the programs and resources that serve persons in a housing crisis function together with a common set of goals and performance measures. The system's resources directly align with those goals. Effective housing resolution systems function similarly to an effective emergency department of a hospital by:

- Serving all persons who present with urgent needs,
- Assessing and prioritizing the most urgent needs,
- Providing immediate crisis relief where needed,
- Triaging to appropriate long-term services, and
- Coordinating with multiple departments and programs towards common goal of stabilization

The following vision, activities and outcomes aim to create a system that prevents homelessness whenever possible, ensures enough resources exist for persons seeking to resolve their immediate crisis, and connects all persons in crisis with a pathway to stable housing. The outcomes will be made measurable after the gaps analysis is completed and progress will be tracked towards the benchmarks set.

VISION

All agencies that serve persons experiencing homelessness are equipped and able to stabilize a housing crisis and facilitate a pathway to housing.

- Maintains real-time data that illustrates unmet need for sheltering options. Able to respond nimbly to changes in need over time.
- Sufficient temporary sheltering programs exist that operate low barrier, housing-focused programming for persons experiencing homelessness with greatest unmet need.
- Programs that provide direct services primarily to persons experiencing homelessness actively connect persons with housing and diversion services.
- A coordinated street outreach team conducts outreach several times per week, consistently engaging unsheltered persons and connecting them with housing and health services.

ACTIVITIES

- Complete shelter and services survey and gaps analysis.
- Create recommendations for integrated sheltering model(s) that provide a resource for residents to recover from and exit homelessness as quickly as possible and meet their basic health and hygiene needs.
- Conduct community meetings with residents experiencing homelessness to identify key causes of homelessness, barriers to exiting homelessness.
- Support organizations who seek to improve their capacity to connect persons with housing resources with training and technical assistance.
- Create a dynamic, hotspot map of unsheltered encampments and day sheltering locations.
- Launch coordinated street outreach team that provides connection to health, housing resources and mainstream benefits.

OUTCOMES

- Reduction in persons experiencing homelessness
- Reduction in persons experiencing unsheltered homelessness
- Increase in low barrier sheltering option(s) that serve population(s) with greatest unmet needs
- Increase in persons who have access to Jeffco sheltering options
- Increase permanent housing placements for residents experiencing homelessness
- Increased service and benefit connections for unsheltered residents

INCREASE ACCESS TO AND SUPPLY OF SUPPORTIVE HOUSING UNITS

Permanent supportive housing is a proven solution to resolve homelessness for persons experiencing chronic homelessness. It pairs housing with case management and supportive services so persons can achieve stability and health in that housing. A cost-effective solution, supportive housing has been shown to lower public costs associated with the use of crisis services such as shelters, hospitals, jails, and prisons.

By taking a collaborative approach to increasing the supply of this type of housing, we can provide safe, decent, and affordable housing for those with the greatest service needs while reducing costs to public systems. The outcomes will be made measurable after the various supportive housing related assessments are completed. Progress will be tracked towards the benchmarks set.

VISION

The system has sufficient access to and supply of supportive housing

- Maintains real-time data that shows unmet need for supportive housing and can respond nimbly to changing need over time.
- Local rental subsidy programs prioritize Jeffco residents experiencing homelessness. A variety of housing subsidy programs exist to meet the full spectrum of need including short-term term programs such as rapid rehousing and also long-term tenant and project based rental subsidies.
- All persons in need of permanent supportive housing (PSH) have access to supportive housing units.
- All programs serving persons experiencing literal homelessness actively enter eligible persons into the metro-wide Continuum of Care coordinated entry system (One Home).
- A collaborative group of service providers and housing developers provide leadership locally on understanding the gaps in supportive housing and developing and implementing County-wide supportive housing strategy to address these gaps.

ACTIVITIES

- Conduct assessment to:
  - Determine subpopulations with greatest unmet need for supportive housing,
  - Determine utilization rates of existing voucher programs and assess for barriers to lease-up.
  - Summarize current and potential One Home participation by Jeffco service providers
  - Assess move-on strategies occurring with supportive housing providers.
- Create, advocate for and act on recommendations for development of supportive housing to address the greatest unmet need.
- Provide support to organizations developing supportive housing on aspects such as, but not limited to, community engagement, site identification, partner identification and service provision.
- Partner with local Public Housing Agencies (PHA) to advocate for increased housing preferences for residents experiencing homelessness.
- Increase Jeffco service providers who enroll persons in One Home.

OUTCOMES

- Reduction in persons experiencing chronic homelessness in Jeffco
- Reduction in homeless Veterans (Built for Zero initiative activities aligned with this workgroup)
- Reduction in persons experiencing unsheltered homelessness
- Increase in One Home enrollments and housing placements of Jeffco residents.
- Increase HMIS participation in Jeffco
- Increase positive exits from supportive housing
- Increase number of tenant and project based supportive housing units dedicated for homeless households.

INCREASE SYSTEM-WIDE DATA COLLECTION AND DATA SHARING

What gets measured gets done. Without having more objective data about the extent and characteristics of persons experiencing homelessness, it is difficult to design effective interventions and solutions. It is also difficult to understand the impact of the interventions we do create and to continue to invest in solutions that work. To reduce homelessness, we also need to know who is actively experiencing it at any given point in time.

This objective focuses on expanding our County-wide data collection system beyond an annual point-in-time so that we can know who is experiencing homelessness at any given point in time. More specific outcome measures will be established once an initial HMIS participation assessment is completed.

VISION

A homeless response system that has access to real-time, comprehensive, and reliable data

- Homeless service programs use HMIS as a client database, and where not possible, programs partner to share basic data elements for use in aggregate, county-wide reporting.
- Dedicated team monitors HMIS coverage, identifies opportunities and strategies for increased use.
- At any given point-in-time, Heading Home has access to data reports with reliable data on persons experiencing homelessness as well as the causes and conditions of homelessness locally.
- Dedicated team regularly analyzes system-wide data to identify system gaps and trends, evaluates program and system effectiveness, uses data to revise strategy and responds to data requests.
- County-wide, real-time data on homelessness is posted publicly in data dashboard format.
- Homeless service providers and the broader community understand and value the importance of a robust data collection and sharing system.

ACTIVITIES

- Coordinate data sharing process with Built for Zero Improvement team, specifically with active by-name list data, dashboard data and HMIS participation rates.
- Create and maintain list of agencies actively using HMIS and identify possible areas of increased HMIS coverage. Create recommendations on strategies to increase HMIS coverage.
- Assess County-wide data collection on homelessness outside of HMIS. Identify what data is being collected, by whom and in what systems. Create recommendations to explore data sharing opportunities.
- Pilot data integration project with one agency in at least two distinct systems (e.g., hospital, jail, court, school).
- Explore feasibility and strategies for creating data dashboards with MDHI. Develop strategies for creation and management of County-level data dashboard on homelessness.

OUTCOMES

- Increase in permanent housing placements of Jeffco residents through One Home.
- Increased number of Jeffco providers that use HMIS and One Home.
- Increased enrollments of Jeffco residents in HMIS.
- Increased understanding of barriers and opportunities to expand data integration with multiple public systems.
- Increased data integration with at least two public systems that do not use HMIS reporting and using data on homelessness, including quarterly reporting on progress on goals set, demographics analysis, current gaps, unmet need, and trends identified.

INCREASE COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN SUPPORT OF HOMELESSNESS SOLUTIONS

Community-wide solutions to homelessness require the coordination, participation and shared commitments of all corners of the community including local government, social service providers, faith partners, businesses, as well as community residents.

This objective seeks to bring more people with diverse experiences and expertise into Heading Home to participate in building the solutions necessary to reduce homelessness and the stigma surrounding it in Jefferson County.

VISION

A community that has productive conversations on the issue of homelessness, offers multiple opportunities for the public to learn and engage on the issue and includes people with lived experience in the development of solutions.

- A committed, active, and informed group unified in common purpose to end homelessness in Jefferson County works to increase public knowledge and compassion on this issue.
- Membership in quarterly meetings and workgroups represents the diverse demographics, life experiences and expertise of Jefferson County, including those with lived experience of homelessness.
- Community members have various means in which to obtain more accurate information on the issue of homelessness locally and have tangible opportunities to get involved in the solutions.

ACTIVITIES

- Research examples of effective community engagement strategies on homelessness and provide recommendations for activities for this workgroup.
- Engage elected officials and other leadership by educating on issues directly related to homelessness to enable them to better understand, promote and support effective solutions.
- Create education event series targeted for the public on the extent, causes and conditions of homelessness regionally and locally, effective interventions and opportunities for further involvement.
- Create opportunities for public to get involved in solutions to homelessness at various levels and capacities.
- Provide support and/or facilitation for public events that solicit feedback on various homelessness related initiatives.
- Assess semi-annually the Heading Home member list, attendance list and workgroup participant list to determine deficiencies in meeting diversity and inclusivity goals.
- Make recommendations and implement strategies to diversify membership and include the perspective of persons with lived experience of homelessness in Heading Home membership and workgroups.

OUTCOMES

- Increased public support of solutions
- Increase in number of persons of color, persons with lived experience of homelessness and persons from other underrepresented groups/sectors participating in the work of Heading Home.
- Increased knowledge and understanding of the problems and solutions needed to address homelessness.
- Increased solutions, programs, and interventions in place to effectively address homelessness in Jefferson County.

Action Plan in Motion...
Built For Zero

Community Solutions' Built for Zero initiative includes more than 70 communities across the country working to measurably and sustainably end chronic and Veteran homelessness. In late 2019, Kaiser Permanente Colorado, the state Division of Housing and the nonprofit Community Solutions announced the expansion in Colorado of the Built for Zero initiative. Metro Denver counties have ramped up a regional approach while a new cohort of five additional Colorado communities have signed up. Participating communities collaborate on building tailored plans to address homelessness in their specific community, adopt proven best practices, use data to improve homelessness plan performance, and share and deploy existing resources more efficiently based on an evidence-based process improvement framework.

Community Solutions also offers a useful definition of what it means to eliminate homelessness. It aims to reduce homelessness to "functional zero," meaning that the number of people experiencing homelessness is smaller than the number that are successfully placed in housing in the average month. Many communities have reached functional zero for certain populations, such as Veterans. This does not mean that no Veterans will ever again experience homelessness in those communities, but that the communities have the resources and procedures in place to ensure that it happens rarely and when it does occur, it is quickly resolved.

Jefferson County formed its own Built for Zero team in Fall of 2020 that works collaboratively with the metro regional efforts. The tasks of developing housing inventories, case conferencing, street outreach and increasing HMIS participation are now underway. This work will lay the foundation and further bolster the objectives and activities included in this Action Plan.

Impact

Making Homelessness Rare, Brief and Non-recurring in Jefferson County

This Plan outlines some specific actions and outcomes we feel confident will make an impact on our larger desired impact of creating a system in Jefferson County where homelessness is a rare, brief, and non-recurring experience. While homelessness may seem an intractable problem to many, we know it has not always been this way. Many policies in health, housing and criminal justice systems have caused or contributed to this epidemic over the last several decades and it will require the same level of determination and decisions from these systems, residents, and leadership to reverse this trajectory.

We acknowledge Heading Home has influence over only a small portion of these systems, but we commit to serving as a catalyst and leader in the Jefferson County community to further conversations on and development of solutions to homelessness locally. Using this plan as a roadmap, we hope to further realize Jefferson County's mission to promote the safety, health, and well-being of the entire Jefferson County community.