

THE PENNSYLVANIA AGENDA FOR ENDING HOMELESSNESS: A FIVE YEAR PLAN

Background

In the early to mid 1990's the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania initiated an aggressive campaign to combat homelessness. In addition to state dollars, many of Pennsylvania's larger communities received substantial federal dollars for homeless housing and services. However, due to limited capacity, many of the state's rural areas were unable to tap into these federal resources.

In response, in 1997, Pennsylvania initiated the Regional Homeless Assistance Process (RHAP) to cover the 51 rural counties that comprised the "balance of the state." The process began with the formation of the PA Homeless Steering Committee, with representation from the Department of Community and Economic Development, the Department of Public Welfare, the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency, and the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

The Steering Committee then formed four separate Regional "Continuums of Care" to cover the participating counties: Northeast, Southwest, Northwest, and Central-Harrisburg. Each region established a Regional Homeless Advisory Board (RHAB) with representatives of 10-15 local entities involved in housing and homeless services. In the year 2000, the chairpersons of all four RHABs became Steering Committee members and, during 2001, 2002 and 2003, representatives of the PA Rural Development Council, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, the PA Department of Health Division of HIV/AIDS, the Department of Labor and Industry, and the Office of Children, Youth and Families, were added to the Steering Committee to round out representation among all relevant state agencies. During that time, three more counties joined the Regional Homeless Assistance Process, bringing the number of participating counties to 54.

Finally, in 2004 an Entitlement Committee was established to bring the 13 Participating Jurisdictions (PJs) into the state process. This Committee meets regularly to discuss issues of common interest, and the chairperson serves on the Steering Committee, ensuring representation from all 17 of Pennsylvania's Continuums of Care—from urban and suburban as well as rural communities.

Today the PA Homeless Steering Committee:

- Serves as a forum for information sharing;
- Assesses and formulates state policy;
- Reviews and develops procedures for the RHAP Continuum of Care application process;
- Facilitates the collection of data on homelessness; and
- Directs and provides technical assistance to the Regional Homeless Advisory Boards and individual project applicants.

Following are the Vision, Strategies, Goals, Objectives and Action Steps for implementing Pennsylvania's Five Year Agenda to End Homelessness:

Vision

The following vision statement was reviewed and approved by the PA Interagency Council on Homelessness in June 2004 and guides the Agenda for Ending Homelessness in Pennsylvania.

Vision Statement:

Pennsylvania envisions a state where there are no homeless individuals or families. Each person will have the supports needed to live as independently as possible in permanent housing of his or her choice. The mainstream services will be adequate, well-coordinated, consumer driven, and recovery-oriented. All housing and services will be offered with dignity and respect free of discrimination, and will provide hope.

Strategies

The Agenda for Ending Homelessness in Pennsylvania is based on three state-driven strategies to prevent and end homelessness throughout Pennsylvania. These strategies serve as the backbone for the implementation of the Plan's Action Steps, which will occur at both the state and local levels.

To improve coordination between state agencies and promote targeting of resources consistent with the state vision

A central part of the Agenda is to assess the effectiveness of the current state and local housing and human service delivery systems and to ensure that they support the above vision. By breaking down the "silos" through which resources are currently being funneled, Pennsylvania will be better able to ensure that resources are targeted to where they are most needed and most effective. In addition to key state agencies and offices, it is recognized that the support of county commissioners and other local officials is critical to the success of this effort. Therefore, financial and other incentives will be necessary to create a targeted approach to preventing and addressing homelessness.

To foster and support local efforts to end homelessness

Given the size and diversity of the Commonwealth, the health of the local network of homeless housing and service providers is a critical factor in successfully implementing the Agenda. Since every region of the state is different, the Agenda must be designed to support local participation and accommodate regional differences, while meeting state goals and objectives. Training and technical assistance are needed in order to build local capacity, especially in areas of the state where resources are limited.

To promote recovery-oriented housing and services for homeless individuals with serious mental illness, substance abuse and/or co-occurring disorders

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and its Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services has embraced the recovery model for the provision of housing and services to individuals served through the Mental Health System, including homeless individuals and families. The goals and objectives in this report for preventing and ending chronic and episodic homelessness reflect the state's commitment to the recovery model for all people with serious mental illness.

Five Year Goals, Objectives and Action Steps

Based on the Commonwealth's desire to meet its goal of ending chronic homelessness as well as its recognition of the importance of addressing homelessness among Pennsylvania's families and children, this Agenda addresses all homeless populations and subpopulations. It recognizes the importance of not only ending homelessness as quickly as possible but also of preventing homelessness. This is expressed in the following four goals outlined below:

Goal 1: Homelessness Prevention

Goal 2: Rapid Re-housing

Goal 3: Supports for Obtaining and Maintaining Permanent Housing

Goal 4: Creating New Permanent Housing Opportunities

Goal 1: Homelessness Prevention

Goal Statement: To prevent PA families and individuals from becoming homeless or returning to homelessness

Desired Outcomes:

- Reducing the number of first time homeless
- Reducing the number of homeless episodes
- Reducing the number of households who are doubled up

Objective 1: Develop discharge planning protocols which include comprehensive housing plans for youth aging out of foster care and individuals discharged from community and state hospitals and adult correctional facilities.

Action Step 1: Develop discharge planning protocols including comprehensive housing plans for the above populations.

Responsible: Department of Public Welfare

Action Step 2: Increase the number of counties implementing SOAR across Pennsylvania.

Responsible: Department of Community and Economic Development

Objective 2: Ensure the provision of on-going case management including housing counseling, for individuals and families once housing is obtained.

Action Step 1: Implement on-going statewide training to county staff regarding information on resources for the homeless, homelessness prevention, and affordable housing resources.

Responsible: Department of Community and Economic Development

Action Step 2: Identify a lead organization for maximizing housing opportunities across consumer groups in their area.

Responsible: Department of Community and Economic Development

Action Step 3: Include HUD-funded housing counselors as part of the county housing team and utilize their programs as resources to consumers.

Responsible: Department of Community and Economic Development

Action Step 4: Develop and pilot a universal homelessness risk assessment tool for use in relevant county programs.

Responsible: PA Homeless Steering Committee

Objective 3: Identify and improve existing programs across the state designed to prepare people for self-sufficiency.

Action Step 1: Survey counties to assess what programs exist.

Responsible: Department of Public Welfare

Action Step 2: Post program information and contact information.

Responsible: Department of Community and Economic Development

Action Step 3: Highlight best practices statewide

Responsible: PA Homeless Steering Committee

Objective 4: Prevent homelessness among compulsive gamblers in PA

Action Step 1: Review research that links compulsive gambling with homelessness in Pennsylvania

Responsible: Department of Public Welfare

Action Step 2: Develop strategies for identifying and treating compulsive gamblers

Responsible: Department of Public Welfare

Objective 3: Establish the Housing and Homeless Liaison position in every County Assistance Office in order to facilitate linkages that will eliminate barriers to accessing mainstream resources that are necessary to stabilize income and other benefits.

Action Step 1: Meet with appropriate DPW personnel to learn about the history of the Homeless Liaison positions, why they were phased out and to determine the feasibility of establishing the Housing and Homeless Liaison positions

Responsible: Department of Public Welfare

Action Step 2: Discuss findings with the Steering Committee and determine next steps

Responsible: Department of Public Welfare

Action Step 3: Appoint at least one Homeless Liaison position in each CoC jurisdiction over the next 12 months with the goal of having one (1) in each county over the next five (5) years

Responsible: Department of Public Welfare

Objective 4: Advocate for funding of the PA Housing Trust Fund and for a set-aside of funds for the homeless

Action Step 1: Provide written information on the PA Housing Trust Fund to all CoCs

Responsible: Pennsylvania Housing Alliance

Action Step 2: Encourage representation of all CoCs on the Housing Alliance Legislative Committee and their participation in educating legislators about the need for a Housing Trust Fund in order to ensure a consistent funding stream to supplement federal resources for homeless housing and services

Responsible: Pennsylvania Housing Alliance

Goal 2: Rapid Re-housing

Goal Statement: To ensure that homeless families and individuals are re-housed as quickly as possible after becoming homeless

Desired Outcomes:

- Reducing the length of time households are homeless
- Increasing the percentage of households moving from emergency and transitional to permanent housing

Objective 1: Assess current HAP, HPRP, PATH, and other state homeless program policies, regulations and procedures in order to identify and eliminate barriers to local flexibility

Action Step 1: Conduct survey of local CoCs and their provider agencies to identify barriers

Task 1: Discuss purpose of the survey at Steering Committee Meeting

Task 2: Draft survey

Task 3: Have survey reviewed by Steering Committee

Task 4: Send out survey

Task 5: Compile and analyze results

Task 6: Report results to the Steering Committee

Timeline 6 months

Responsible Party: Diana T Myers & Associates, Inc.
(Consultants to DCED)

Action Step 2: Develop at least three strategies to overcome the barriers

Task 1: Review survey results and identify specific strategies to overcome barriers identified

Timeline 6 months

Responsible Party: PA Homeless Steering Committee Co-Chairs

Action Step 3: Implement strategies as a pilot in one Continuum of Care

Timeline 6 months
Responsible Party One local CoC as identified by the Steering Committee

Action Step 4: Implement strategies in at least five (5) additional Continuums of Care

Timeline 18 months
Responsible Party: Local Continuums of Care as identified by the Steering Committee.

Objective 2: Identify best practices for Rapid Re-housing, including intake and assessment tools, and conduct four(4) regional training sessions in 2010

Action Step 1: Conduct search of best practices among at least the following: National Alliance to End Homelessness, NPACH, HUDHRE.org, SAMHSA, Corporation for Supportive Housing

Task 1: Conduct web and telephone research of best practices

Task 2: Write report summarizing results of research

Timeline 6 months
Responsible Party: Diana T Myers & Associates
(Consultants to DCED)

Action Step 2: Identify training dates, locations and other logistics in four regions of the Commonwealth

Timeline 6 months
Responsible Party: Department of Community and Economic Development

Action Step 3: Conduct and evaluate 4 training sessions

Timeline 18 months
Responsible Party: Department of Community and Economic Development

Objective 3: Establish a Housing and Homeless Liaison position in every County Assistance Office in order to facilitate linkages that will eliminate barriers to accessing mainstream resources that are necessary to stabilize income and other benefits.

Action Step 1: Meet with appropriate DPW personnel to learn about the history of the Homeless Liaison positions, why they were phased out and to determine the feasibility of establishing the Housing and Homeless Liaison positions

Task 1: Identify appropriate DPW personnel

Task 2: Set up meeting to discuss the history and discuss the feasibility of re-establishing Homeless Liaison positions at DPW

Timeline 6 months

Responsible Party: Statewide Housing Director, PA
Department of Public Welfare

Action Step 2: Discuss findings with the Steering Committee and determine next steps

Task 1: Meet with Steering Committee and determine a specific course of action

Timeline 6 months

Responsible Party: Statewide Housing Director, Department
of Public Welfare

Action Step 3: Appoint at least one Homeless Liaison position in each CoC jurisdiction over the next 18 months with the goal of having one (1) in each county over the next five (5 years)

Timeline 18 months

Responsible Party: Department of Public Welfare

Objective 4: Advocate for funding of the PA Housing Trust Fund and for a set-aside of funds for the homeless

Action Step 1: Provide written information on the PA Housing Trust Fund to all CoCs

Task 1: Obtain written information on the proposed PA Housing Trust Fund Bill and disseminate to all 17 CoCs

Timeline 6 months

Responsible Party: Pennsylvania Housing Alliance

Action Step 2: Encourage representation of CoCs on the Housing Alliance Legislative Committee and their participation in educating legislators about the need for a Housing Trust Fund in order to ensure a consistent funding stream to supplement federal resources for homeless housing and services

Timeline 18 months

Responsible Party: Pennsylvania Housing Alliance

Goal 3: Supports for Obtaining and Maintaining Permanent Housing

Goal Statement: To expand the access to and availability of resources to support homeless families and individuals in obtaining and maintaining the affordable housing of their choice.

Desired Outcomes:

- Increasing the number of homeless households who obtain employment
- Reducing the length of time households are homeless
- Reducing the number of homeless episodes
- Increasing the number of households that move from transitional housing to permanent housing
- Increasing the percentage of households remaining in permanent housing for more than 6 months

Objective 1: To identify or create funding sources for support services to assist all subpopulations of homeless (including singles, families, youth, people with disabilities, chronically homeless, victims of domestic violence, and veterans) and near homeless households in developing the skills and resources to obtain and maintain housing.

Action Step 1: Review existing funding sources and make recommendations to better utilize these resources for homeless households and to coordinate program implementation with HUD priorities under the HEARTH Act.

Task 1: Develop a template for reporting information about each source. The template will include such elements as eligibility criteria, application process, how funds are currently used, how funds are accessed at the local level.

Timeline 2 months

Responsible Party: DCED Consultants

Task 2: Review and analyze DPW Programs: HAP, TANF, HSDF, OMHSAS Resources (Base funding, CHIPP, Reinvestment), CAO Resources (Employment and Training, ESA, Childcare, Homeless Liaison), and others as appropriate.

Timeline 6 months

Responsible Party: DPW Statewide Housing Director

Task 3: Review and analyze DCED Programs: ESG, HPRP, CDBG, CSBG, HOME, NAP, HRA and others as appropriate.

Timeline 6 months

Responsible Party: DCED Director for Community Development

Task 4: Review and analyze programs available under other federal and state agencies including: Veterans Administration, Education, Children and Youth, Criminal Justice, USDA Rural

Development, Labor and Industry, Transportation, Aging, Office of Long Term Living, and others to be identified.

Timeline 12 months

Responsible Party: TBD

Task 5: Develop a plan to reallocate resources to better support homeless households.

Timeline 12 months

Responsible Party: TBD

Action Step 2: Develop a strategy to facilitate both providers' and homeless individuals' ability to access services and resources in their community.

Task 1: For each resource identified in Action Step 1, Tasks 2 and 3, identify which agency in each county is responsible for implementation of the programs funded under each.

Timeline: 12 months

Responsible Party: County representative on the RHAB

Task 2: Establish an online resource which provides information on each resource including eligibility requirements and how to access that resource at the local level.

Timeline: 18 months

Responsible Party: TBD

Action Step 3: Develop a strategy to improve homeless service providers' access to non-governmental resources.

Task 1: Develop and distribute a survey instrument to determine what non-government resources homeless service providers currently use and for what purposes.

Timeline 6 months

Responsible Party: DCED Consultants

Task 2: Analyze the survey results and prepare a report on the resources identified

Timeline: 12 months

Responsible Party: DCED Consultants

Objective 2: To increase employment opportunities for people who are homeless.

Action Step 1: Meet with the PA Dept. of Labor and Industry to identify the best approach to access Workforce Investment Board (WIB) resources for (1) homeless prevention and (2) those who are homeless.

Task 1: Meet with Labor and Industry

Timeline: 6 months

Responsible Party: Steering Committee Co-Chairs

Action Step 2: Identify a representative of L&I to participate on the Steering Committee .

Task: 1: Invite the representative to participate on the Steering Committee to provide information on L&I resources and help make these resources more responsive to the needs of near homeless and homeless individuals.

Timeline: 6 months

Responsible Party: Steering Committee Co-Chairs

Task 2: The L&I representative make a presentation to the Steering Committee on current services and resources for homeless prevention or for increasing employment opportunities for individuals who are homeless

Timeline: 6 months

Responsible Party: Steering Committee Co-Chairs

Action Step 3: Identify barriers to near homeless and homeless individuals utilizing the resources available through CareerLink and other L&I resources.

Task 1: Determine what data is available on utilization of CareerLink by homeless individuals.

Timeline: 9 months

Responsible Party: Labor and Industry SC representative

Task 2: Review and analyze data on utilization of CareerLink by homeless individuals.

Timeline: 12 months

Responsible Party: Labor and Industry SC representative

Task 3: Develop a strategy to increase utilization of these resources by near homeless and homeless individuals.

Timeline: 18 months

Responsible Party: TBD

Action Step 4: Continue to provide training to case managers on issues relating to employment and eligibility for SSI to reduce the perceived disincentive for people with disabilities to find employment

Task 1: Determine and distribute the training schedule already established by the Association for Habilitation and Employment of Developmentally Disabled (AHEDD), Goodwill Industries of Central PA, and Disability Rights Network of PA (DRN).

Timeline: 6 months

Responsible Party: Members of the Goal 3 Subcommittee

Task 2: Request that additional training meetings be scheduled in underserved areas of the state so that each provider has access to at least one training event per year.

Timeline: 6 months

Responsible Party: Steering Committee Co-Chairs

Action Step 5: Obtain and disseminate information on other employment programs including: WISE, Ticket to Work, MAWD and others to be determined.

Task 1: Research these resources and obtain/prepare a fact sheet for distribution

Timeline: 12 months

Responsible Party: TBD

Task 2: Disseminate the information to homeless service providers

Timeline: 12 months

Responsible Party: RHAB Chairs

Task 3: Schedule an informational event to assure all agencies have access to the information

Timeline: 12 months

Responsible Party: RHAB Chairs

Action Step 6: Develop a plan to conduct regional job fairs for near homeless and homeless individuals in collaboration with the Workforce Investment Boards, Community Action Agencies, and RHABs.

Timeline: 12 months

Responsible Party: RHAB Chairs

Objective 4: To improve coordination between the CoC planning process and the Homeless Children’s Initiative to assure that the educational and other service needs of homeless children are addressed.

Action Step 1: Work with the PA Department of Education (PDE) to coordinate resources.

Task 1: Compare the list of emergency shelters used by PDE with the CoCs’ eHICs to make sure both PDE and the CoCs have a full list.

Timeline: 6 months

Responsible Party: DCED Consultants

Task 2: Review the homeless data collection process of PDE and the CoCs’ HMIS systems to develop an accurate count of the number of homeless children in PA

Timeline: 6 months

Responsible Party: DPW Statewide Housing Director

Action Step 2: Meet with the PA Homeless Children’s Initiative Advisory Committee to better coordinate PDE services with other homeless planning initiatives.

Task 1: Present the PA CoC application and planning process to the Advisory Committee

Timeline: 6 months

Responsible Party: DPW Statewide Housing Director

Task 2: Provide updates to the Steering Committee on the activities of the Advisory Committee

Timeline: 6 months

Responsible Party: DPW Statewide Housing Director

Action Step 3: Disseminate information to the Steering Committee, CoC’s, HAP County Contacts and providers on how the Homeless Children’s Initiative is carried out in PA.

Task 1: Working with the CoCs, distribute the PDE “Blue Books” (guides to the Homeless Children’s Initiative) and list of Homeless Liaisons to providers

Timeline: 6 months

Responsible Party: DPW Statewide Housing Director

Task 2: Put information about the Homeless Children’s Initiative on DPW’s Housing Resource Website

Timeline: 6 months

Responsible Party: DPW Statewide Housing Director

Action Step 4: Disseminate information to PDE, the Homeless Children's Initiative Advisory Board, and Homeless Liaisons about the availability of Transitional Housing and Permanent Supportive Housing in their communities as well as contact information for the HAP County Contacts and HPRP resources.

Task 1: Compile a list of all Transitional Housing and Permanent Supportive Housing in each county, including location and contact information.

Timeline: 12 months

Responsible Party: DCED's Consultant

Task 2: Compile a list of HAP County Contacts and HPRP coordinators, including program descriptions and contact information.

Timeline: 12 months

Responsible Party: DPW Statewide Housing Director

Task 3: Work with the Regional Homeless Children's Initiative Regional Coordinators to distribute the information to the Homeless Liaisons.

Timeline: 12 months

Responsible Party: DPW Statewide Housing Director

Task 4: Put information about Transitional Housing, Permanent Supportive Housing, HAP contacts and resources, and HPRP contacts and resources on DPW's Housing Resource Website

Timeline: 12 months

Responsible Party: DPW Statewide Housing Director

Objective 5: To identify services that meet the needs of the increasing number of older homeless and previously homeless adults, both those who have recently become homeless due to the economic downturn and those who have aged in place in permanent supportive housing programs.

Action Step 1: Using data in the HMIS, analyze the number of homeless and formerly homeless individuals who are over 62 in emergency shelters, transitional and permanent supportive housing

Timeline: 12 months

Responsible Party: PA Department of Community and Economic Development

Action Step 2: Provide this data to the PA Dept. of Aging and county Area Agencies on Aging to determine appropriate service responses.

Timeline: 12 months

Responsible Party: PA Department of Aging

Action Step 3: Identify at least one new service intervention targeted to this population.

Timeline: 18 months

Responsible: PA Department of Aging

Objective 6: To identify resources and improve coordination between domestic violence providers and relevant state agencies.

Action Step 1: Identify all housing resources for victims of domestic violence and include these in the web-based resource guide being developed by DPW.

Timeline: 6 months

Responsible: DPW Statewide Housing Director

Action Step 2: Analyze trends in the number of victims of domestic violence utilizing homeless shelters and transitional housing services using data available from the Point in Time Surveys, the PA Coalition Against Domestic Violence (PCADV), and the PA Commission on Crime and Delinquency.

Timeline: 18 months

Responsible: PA Homeless Steering Committee

Action Step 3: Convene a meeting of stakeholders, including state agencies, CoC representatives, and provider agencies, with the goal of identifying gaps in housing and service delivery for victims of domestic violence and developing strategies to address the identified gaps

Timeline: 18 months

Responsible: DPW Statewide Housing Director

Goal 4: Creating New Permanent Housing Opportunities

Goal Statement: To work with public and private entities to increase the number of affordable permanent housing units for homeless households, formerly homeless households and households at risk of homelessness through the creation of new units and use of existing units.

Desired Outcomes:

- Increasing the number of people moving from streets, shelter and transitional housing to permanent housing
- Increasing the number of public and private agencies providing housing to homeless and formerly homeless households

Objective 1: Increase sources of funding to create new programs or change priorities of existing programs which produce affordable housing or rental subsidies.

Action Step1: Subsidize additional units for targeted homeless populations through the following actions:

- leveraging all resources
- being creative (i.e. use tax incentives)
- changing priorities for existing resources or targeting homeless
- developing data on cost savings

Responsible: Department of Public Welfare with assistance from DCED and PHFA

Objective 2: Enhance efforts to access affordable housing units in the private market by establishing partnerships with private sector landlords

Action Step 1: Create a housing locator service that engages private landlords and inventories housing stock

Responsible: Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency

Action Step 2: Establish County Housing and Homeless Liaison positions in each county

Responsible: Department of Public Welfare

Objective 3: Increase Public Housing Authority (PHA) efforts to prevent and end homelessness by securing support of PHAs (and other housing providers) to implement Special Needs Plans committing existing units to homeless and formerly homeless households

Action Step 1: Engage support of HUD

Responsible: Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency with assistance from DCED and DPW

Action Step 2: Develop and distribute sample written contracts/agreements between PHA's and service providers that

guarantees that supportive services will be available to assist when a tenant faces a crisis or other problem

Responsible: Department of Public Welfare

Action Step 3: Conduct outreach and training to private landlords which informs of Fair Housing Act and Service Delivery System

Responsible: Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency with assistance from DCED and DPW

Action Step 4: Encourage LHOTs (Local Housing Options Teams) and other local housing coalitions to address housing needs of people with all disabilities

Responsible: Department of Public Welfare with assistance from DCED and PHFA