National Alliance to End Homelessness

The Critical Role of Housing-focused Emergency Shelter in Austin's Homeless Response System

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The Center for Capacity Building

RESEARCH AND EDUCATION • INFLUENCING FEDERAL POLICY • BUILDING LOCAL CAPACITY

National Alliance to End Homelessness

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National Alliance To End Homelessness

The National Alliance to End Homelessness is the leading national voice on the issue of homelessness. The Alliance analyzes policy and develops pragmatic, effective policy solutions. The Alliance works collaboratively with the public, private, and nonprofit sectors to build state and local capacity, leading to stronger projects and policies that help communities achieve their goal of ending homelessness.

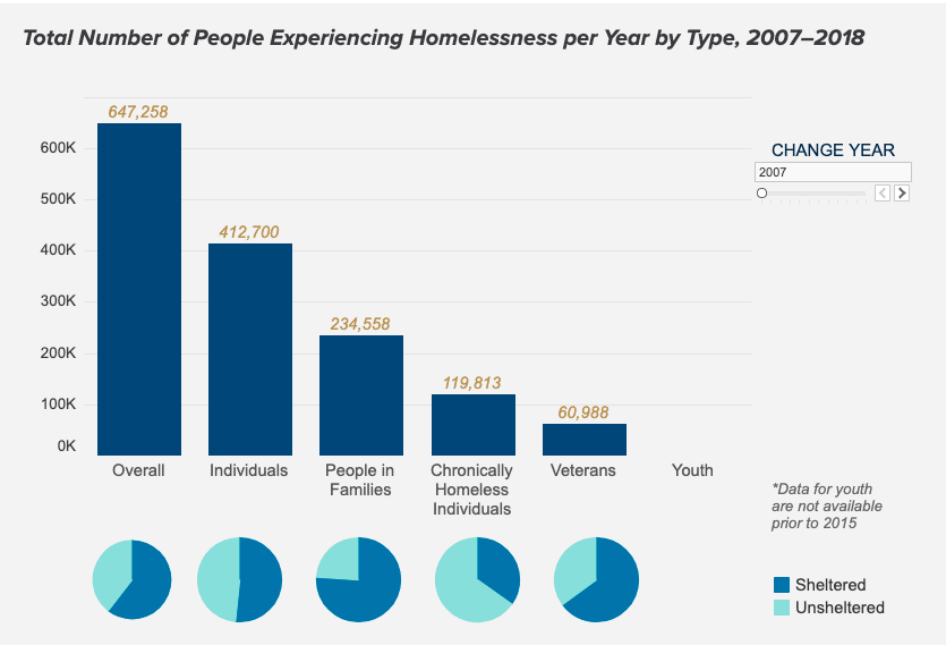
The National Alliance to End Homelessness identifies and evaluates hundreds of policy and project strategies and their impact on homelessness. The Alliance's Center for Capacity Building helps communities replicate and customize the best of those strategies. The Center focuses on strategies that are cost effective, data driven, and can be implemented at a scale that can significantly reduce homelessness.

Today's Key Questions

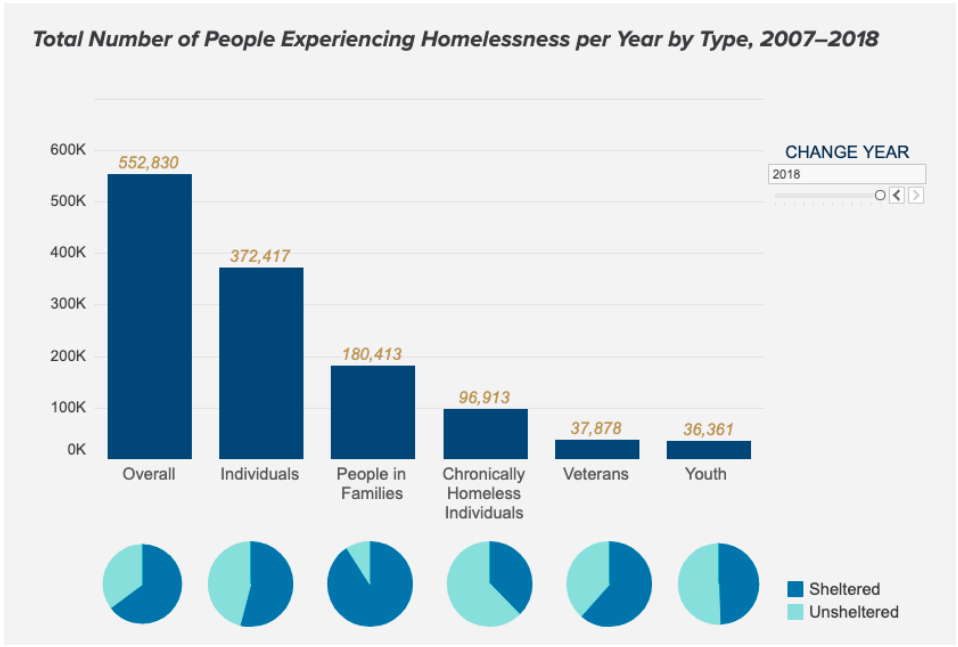
- What are national trends in homelessness?
- What are some common myths about homelessness?
- What is an effective homeless response system?
- What role do housing-focused emergency shelters play in a homeless response system?
- What is an effective shelter model?

National Trends

2007 Point in Time Count



2018 Point in Time Count

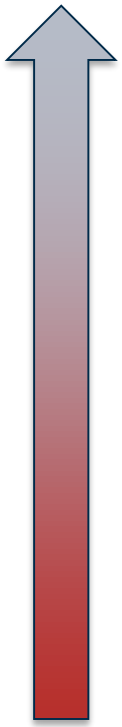


Source: NAEH State of Homelessness 2018

National Trends in Homelessness

- Since 2007, overall homelessness decreased 15 percent across every population
- The most dramatic decreases have been among:
  - veterans (38 % decrease)
  - people in families (23 % decrease)
  - individuals experiencing chronic homelessness (19 % decrease)
  - people living in unsheltered locations (24.6 % decrease)
- Since 2017, homelessness declined in 31 states

National Trends in Homelessness



- Between 2017 and 2018, homelessness increased slightly by 0.3 percent or 1,834 people
- Increases are being seen largely in the # of individual adults
- As the largest subgroup, homeless individuals make up 67 percent of the total population
  - One likely reason is the failure to invest in targeted rental assistance and services for individual adults
  - Solutions for individuals are critical to efforts to end homelessness

Why Decreases?

- Since 2006, federal and local funding has primarily moved towards funding permanent housing solutions and using outcomes-driven strategies
- The field has moved from managing homelessness to solving it
- Communities are investing in housing-focused solutions instead of temporary solutions

Why Increases?

- Rising housing costs
- Stagnating wages
- Higher rates of inflow into homelessness - more people becoming homeless
- Not enough “flow” in homeless systems to housing
- Not enough targeted investment in permanent housing resources for individuals who are unsheltered

MYTHS

About Homelessness

About Homelessness

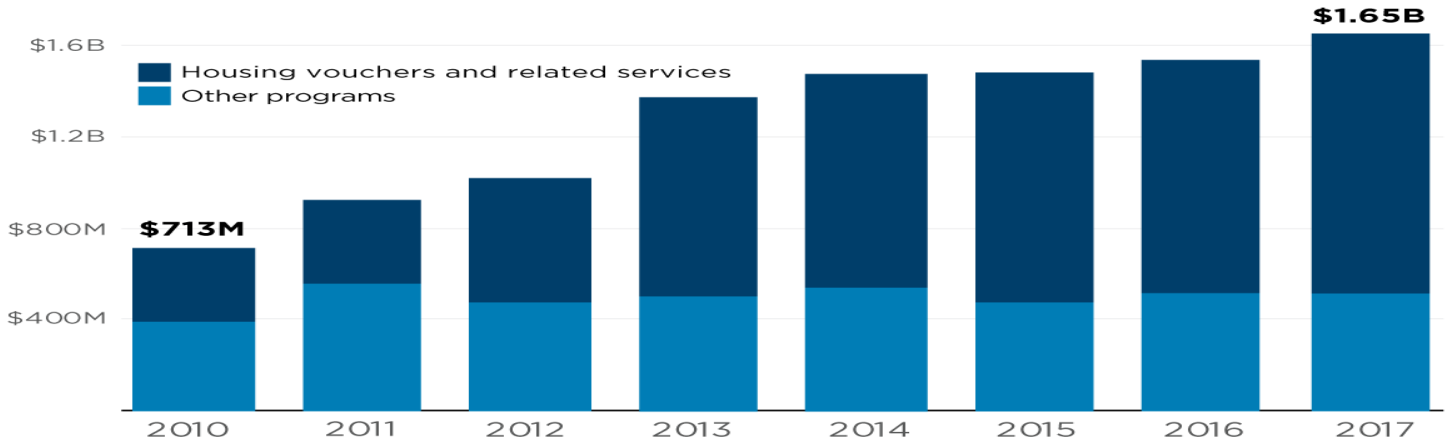
We don’t know how to solve homelessness

About Homelessness

The Solution to Homelessness is Housing

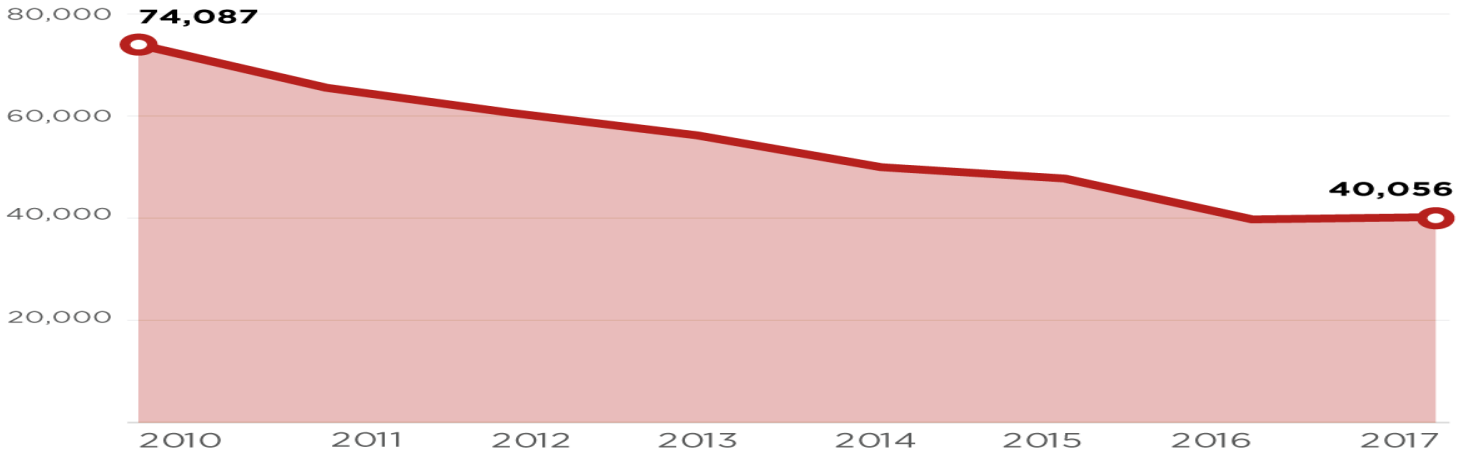
Dedicated Funding for Homeless Veterans has Increased Dramatically Since 2010

Annual federal homeless veterans program funding



In the Same Period, Veteran Homelessness Fell by 47%

Number of homeless veterans on a single night



Source: Congressional Research Service, U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

National Alliance to End Homelessness

About Homelessness

- The solution is adequate incomes or an adequate supply of affordable housing so that people don't become homeless in the first place
- Until then, we can help the vast majority of people move quickly back into housing with **short term and longer-term rent subsidies and connection to services in the community**

About Homelessness

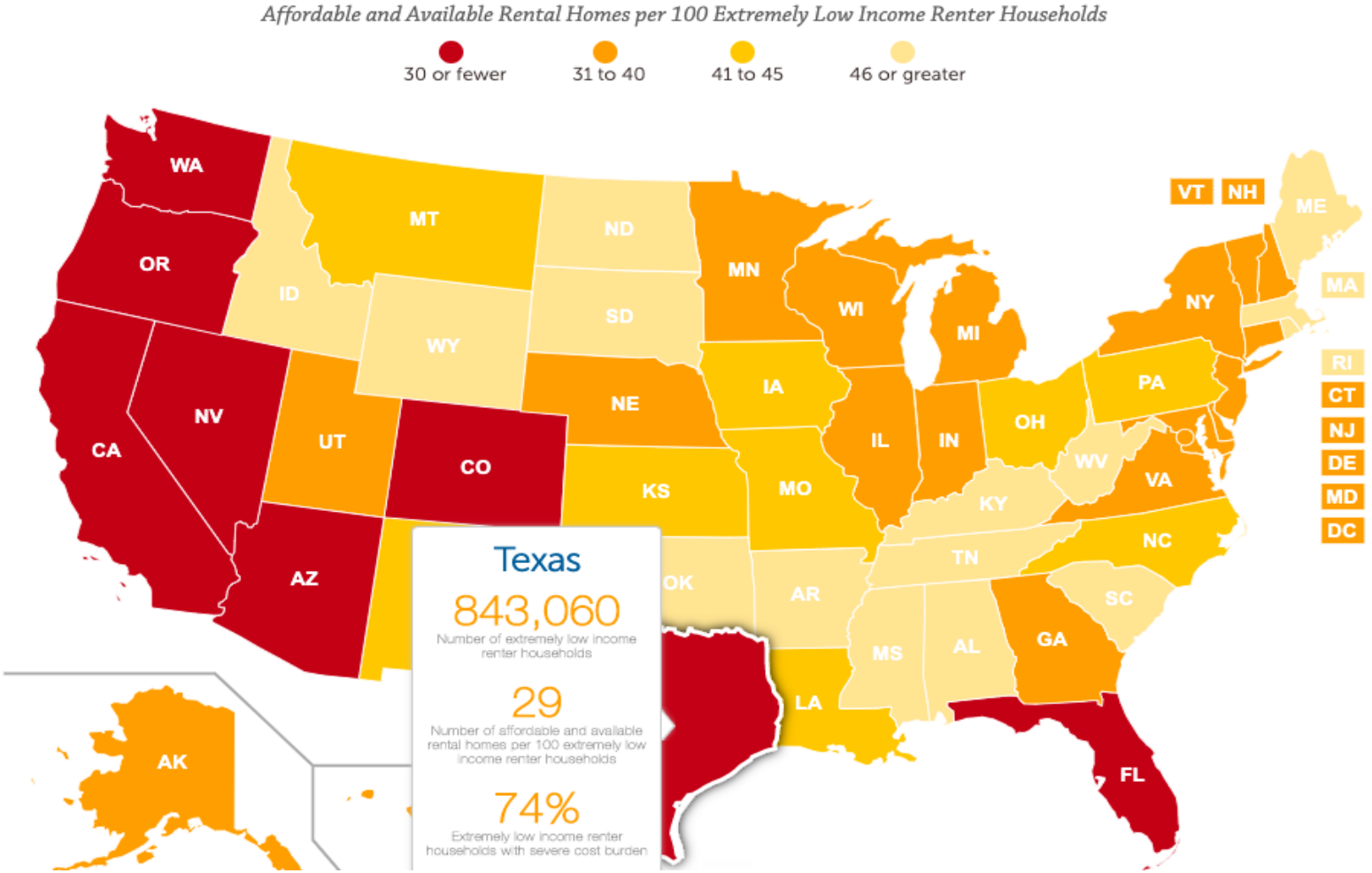
Homelessness is **caused** by people's characteristics – by mental illness, substance abuse, disabilities

About Homelessness

Homelessness is a Housing-driven, Economic Problem

- If there were a sufficient supply of affordable housing, there would not be widespread homelessness
- Today, we are 7.2 million affordable units short for extremely low-income renters

No State Has an Adequate Supply of Affordable Rental Housing for the Lowest Income Renters



Source: National Low-Income Housing Coalition

About Homelessness

- The twenty CoCs with the highest homeless counts represent 44 percent of the homeless population

About Homelessness

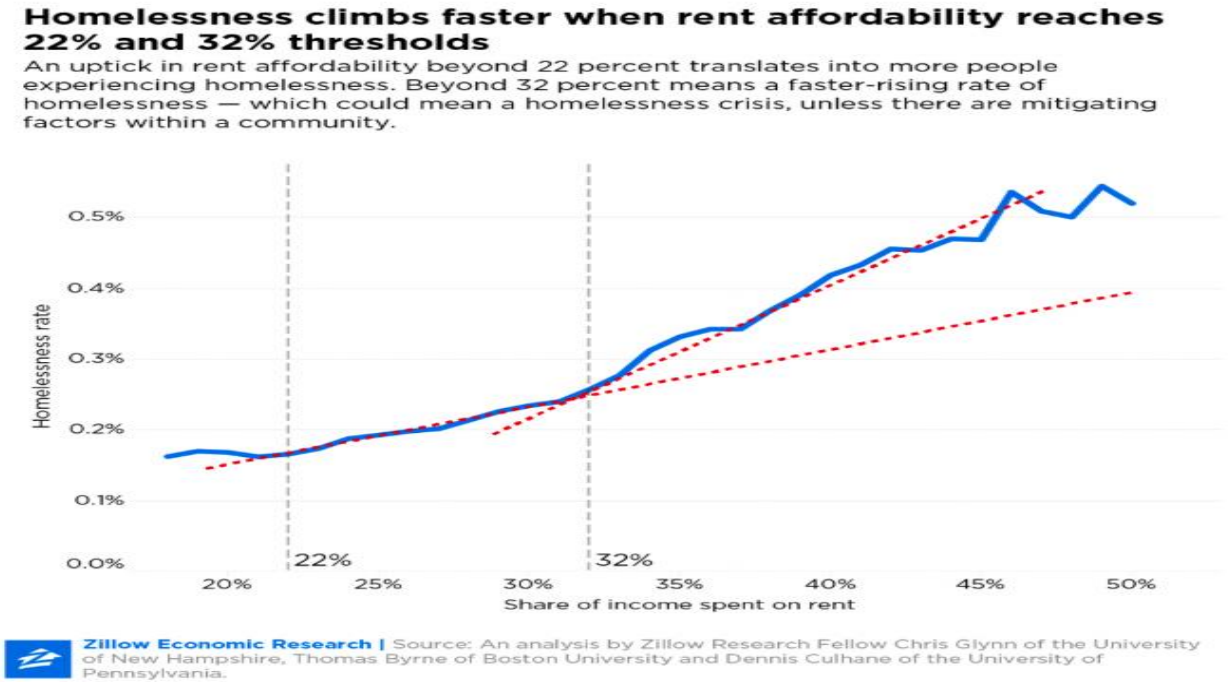
- The lack of affordable housing has a dual effect:
  1. pushes more people into the homelessness system
  2. makes it more difficult to help people exit into housing
- Because there is not enough affordable housing, many poor households are unstable in housing and are at risk of or become homeless

About Homelessness

- **Homelessness happens because incomes don't match housing costs**
- A toxic combination of slow wage growth + skyrocketing rents puts housing out of reach for many
- Zillow's research found that a 5% increase in rents in L.A. translates into about 2,000 more homeless people, among the highest correlations in the U.S.

About Homelessness

- **Homelessness happens because incomes don't match housing costs**

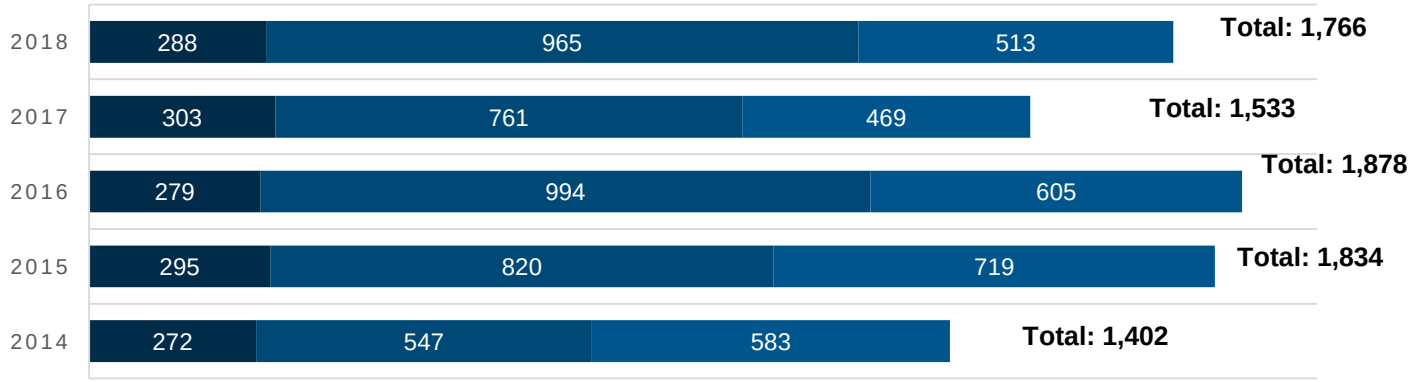


About Homelessness

- **The majority of people become homeless for economic reasons –** not because of their characteristics
- Many people living on the street and in shelters have income
- Housing is how we end homelessness

Number of People Housed in Austin

- 233 more people housed than 2018



About Homelessness

People living outside or in their cars refuse help because they want to be homeless

About Homelessness

People Remain Homeless Because There Aren't Available Housing and Service Options that Actually Meet Their Needs

About Homelessness

- We often ask people to go to shelters that are inadequate for their needs and are not offering a permanent solution that will end their homelessness
- We often ask people to fit our existing programs, rather than changing our programs to fit people's actual needs
- Emergency shelters ARE NOT HOUSING

If you were an individual adult or a couple or someone with a pet, where would you go in Austin? Would you be allowed in?

Would you want to stay there?

WHAT IS AN EFFECTIVE HOMELESS RESPONSE SYSTEM?

Effective Homeless Response System: Goal

House people as quickly as possible
and

divert people from imminent homelessness whenever possible

Effective Homeless Response System: Approach

Use a systemic approach

to align interventions and resources across programs in a coordinated way around this common goal

Effective Homeless Response System: Endgame

- People in a housing crisis have access to immediate help, including a safe place to go and diversion services
- People are not unsheltered
- People do not spend long periods of time homeless
- People exiting homelessness do not quickly cycle back into homelessness

Homelessness is rare, brief, and one-time

Effective Homeless Response System: Performance

- Reduce in-flow into homelessness
- Increase exits to permanent housing
- Decrease average length of homelessness
- Decrease returns to homelessness

Effective Homeless Response System: Increase System Flow

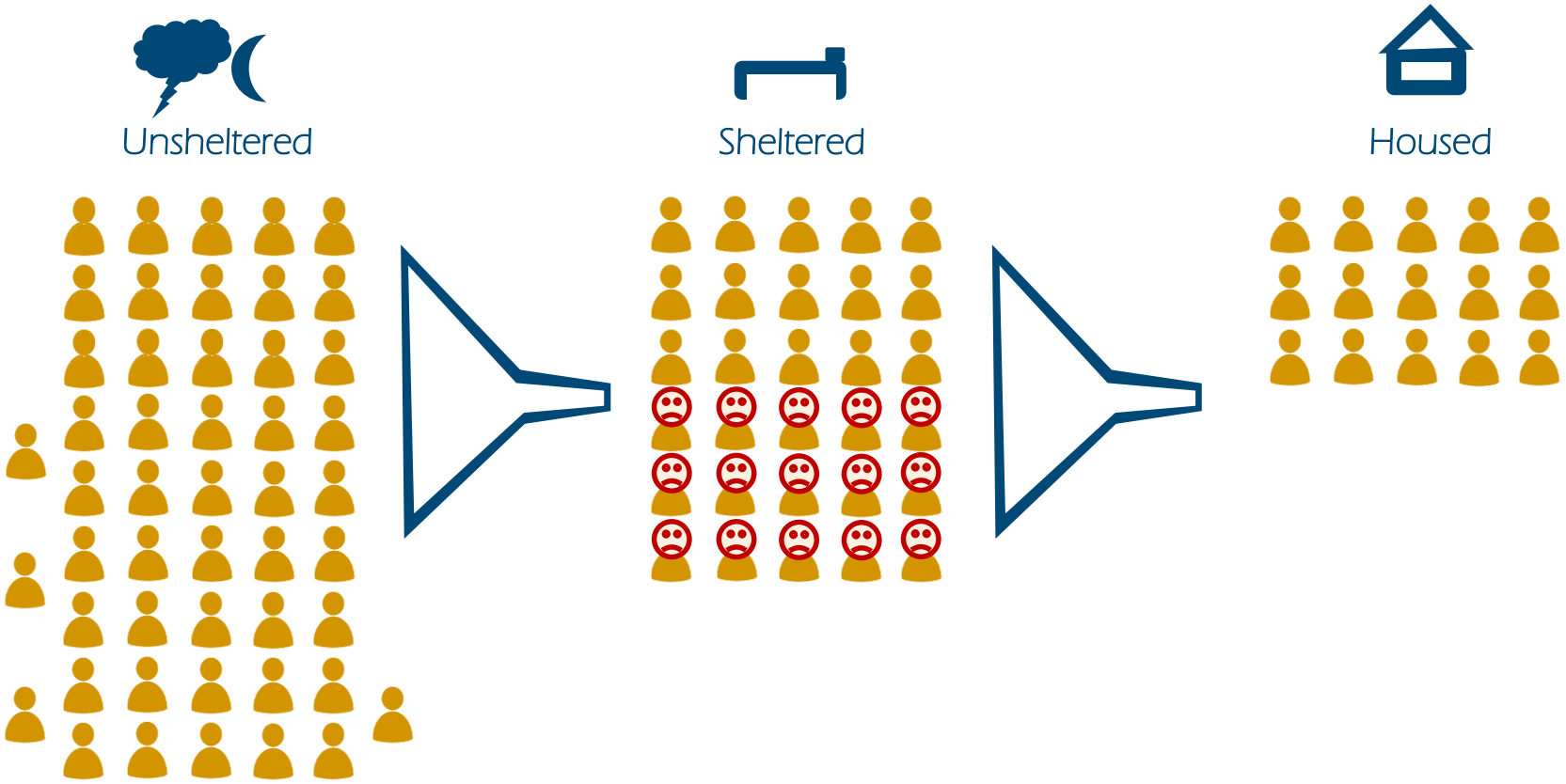
System Flow:

An efficient and coordinated process that moves people from homelessness to housing as quickly as possible

Poor System Flow

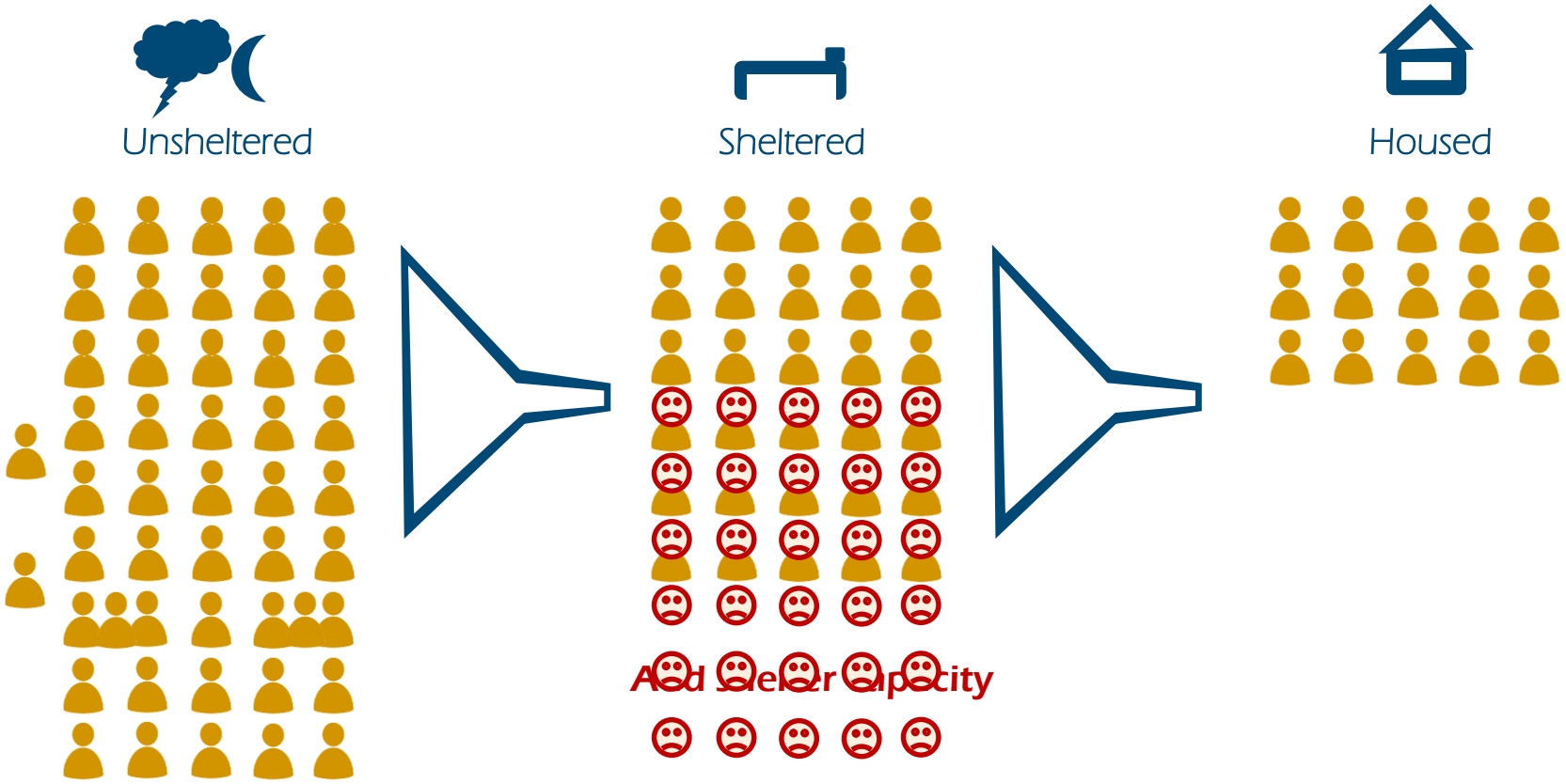
- Unchanging or increasing number of unsheltered people
- Waitlists for shelter
- Long lengths of stay in shelter (more than 30 days)
- High percentage of exits from shelters to homelessness
- Average length of homelessness is not decreasing
- In-flow into homelessness is steady or increasing
- Long waitlists for RRH and PSH (long CES wait list)
- Significant amount of people aren't getting any kind of assistance

A "Stuck" System



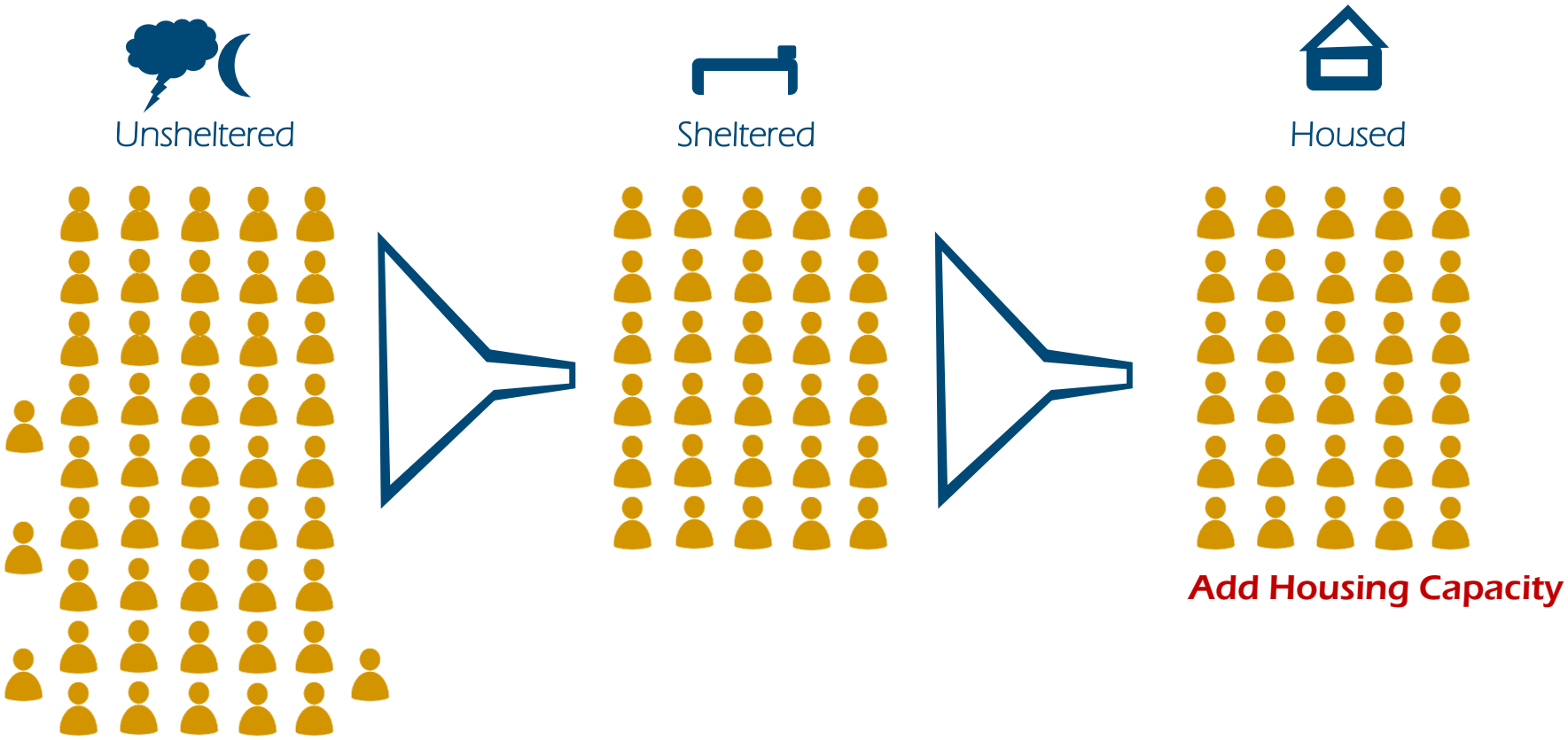
49 unsheltered + 30 sheltered = **79**

Adding More Shelter Capacity



34 unsheltered + 45 sheltered = **79**

Adding More Permanent Housing Capacity



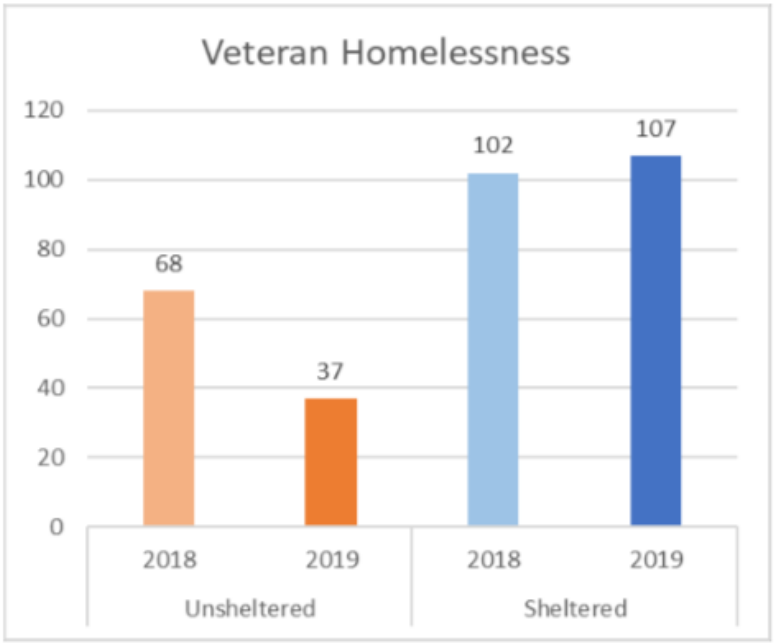
34 unsheltered + 30 sheltered = **64**

An Effective Homeless Response Means…

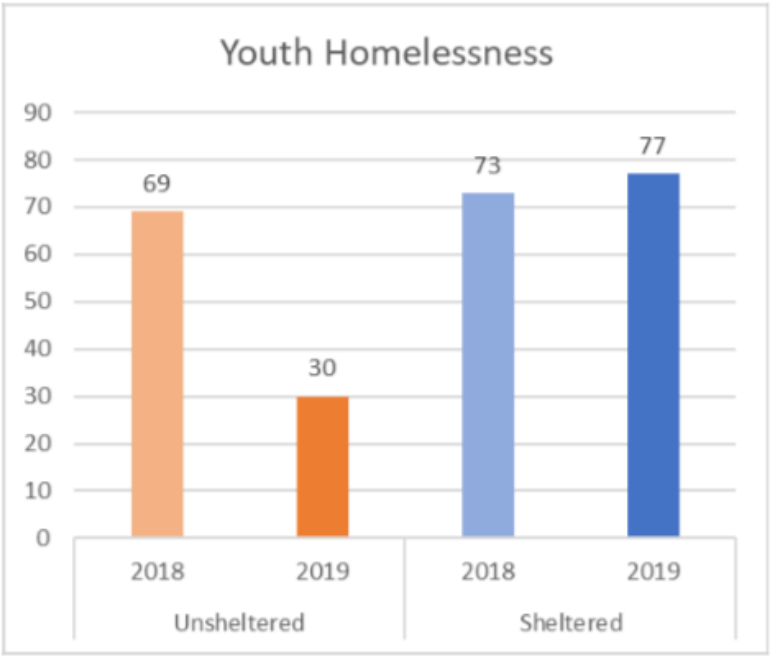
- Right-sizing your system
- Having rapid re-housing to scale that is aligned with best practices is the BEST way to get flow in your system
- Balancing temporary help with permanent housing solutions
- Treating each person's episode of homelessness as an URGENT CRISIS that needs a quick permanent housing resolution

Austin: System Success in Vets and Youth

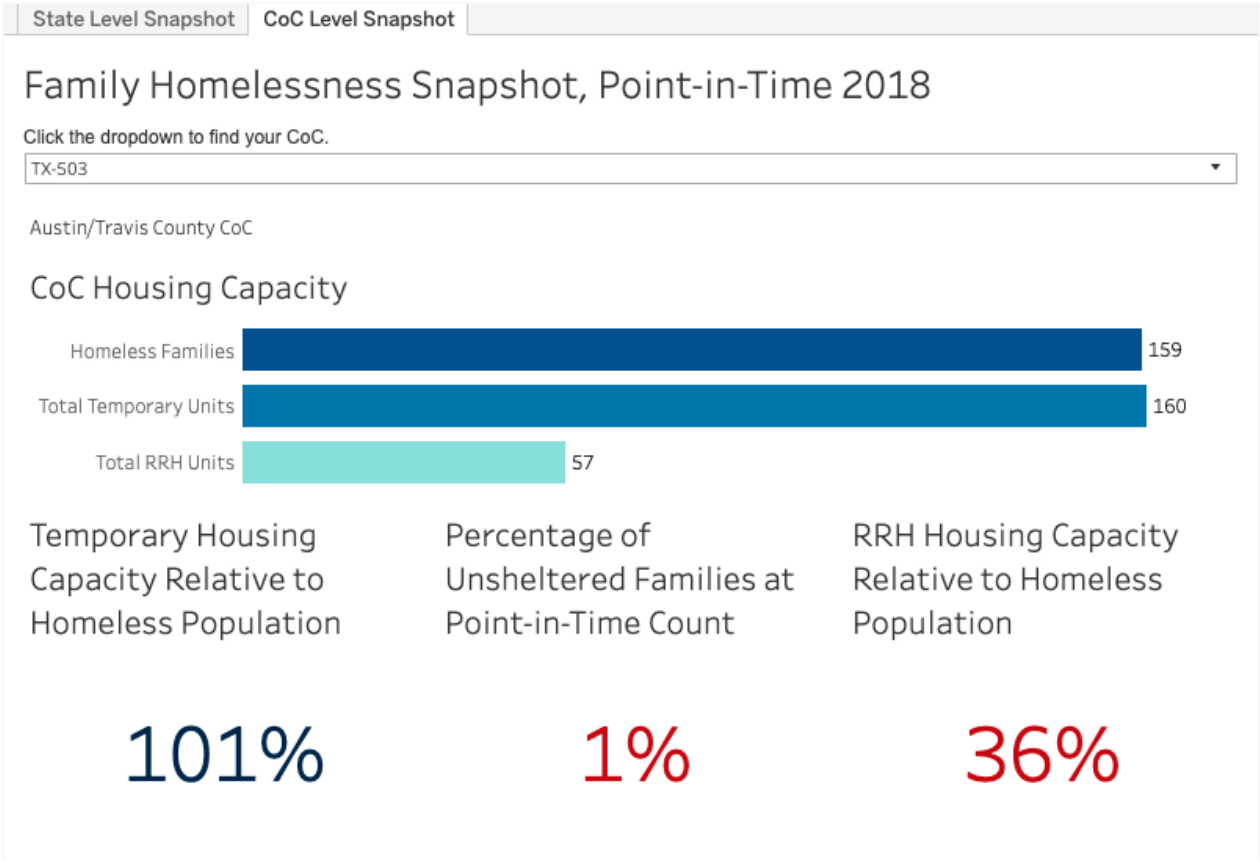
15% Reduction in Veteran Homelessness Since 2018



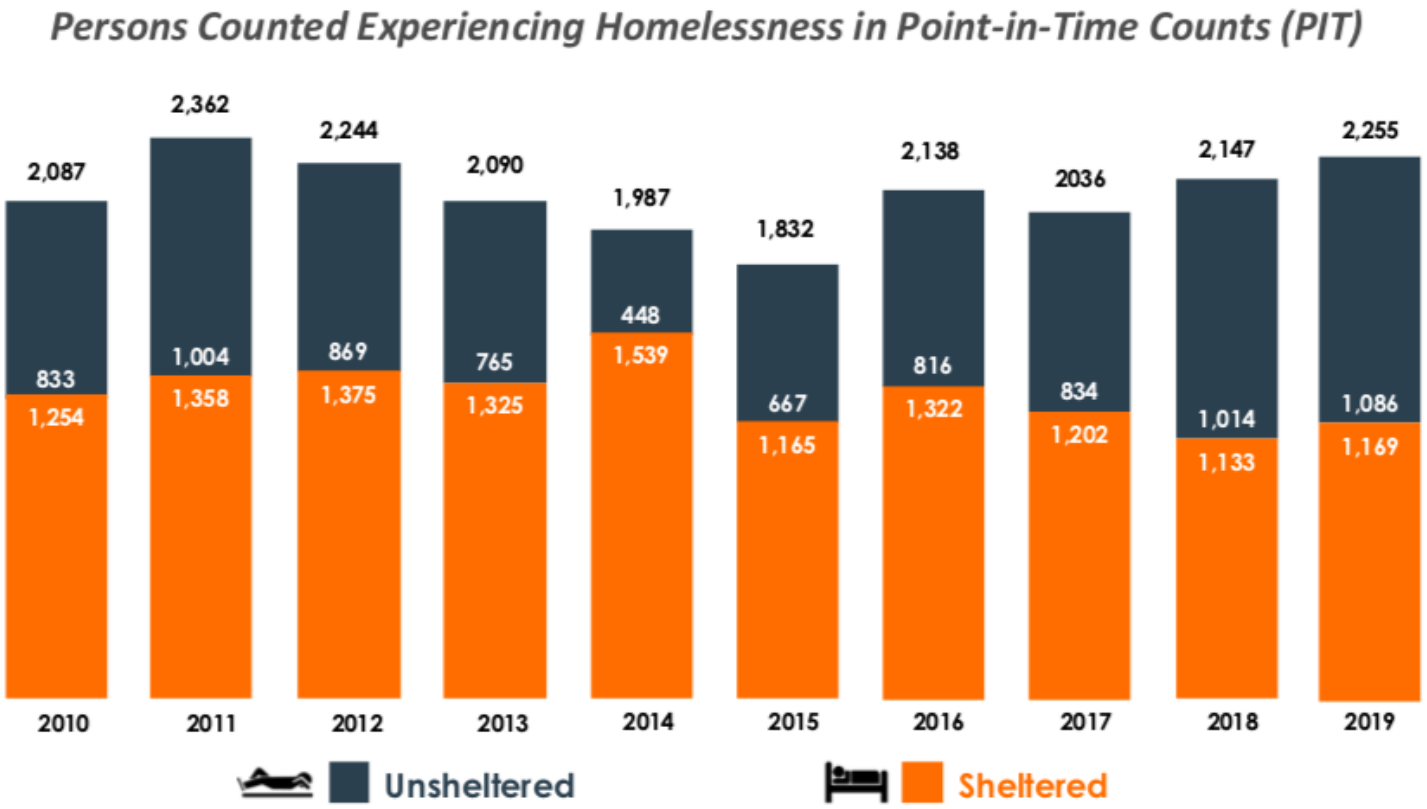
25%Reduction in Youth Homelessness Since 2018



Right-sizing Austin's Family Resources



Right-sizing Austin's Individuals' Resources



WHAT IS THE ROLE OF EMERGENCY SHELTERS IN AN EFFECTIVE HOMELESS RESPONSE SYSTEM?

EMERGENCY SHELTERS

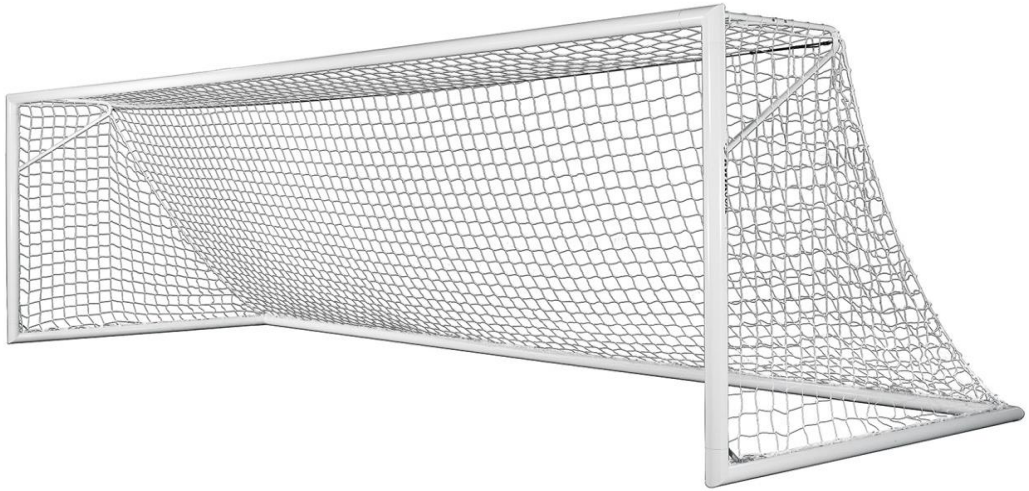
are critical to **ending homelessness.**

Why Are Shelters So Important?

- People in a housing crisis need a safe and decent place to go that is immediately available and accommodated their needs

- Shelters may be the only place people receive help to resolve their housing crisis

What is the Goal of Emergency Shelter?



Goal of Shelter: Traditional Model

- To provide temporary shelter and safety
  - Hostel-like environment (check-in and check out every day)
  - Meets basic needs
    - Shower/bathroom
    - Laundry
    - Mail
  - Self-directed resource/information and referral
  - Inadequate case management/housing support services

Goal of Shelter in an Effective System: Provide a Path to Housing

- To provide temporary shelter and safety
  - Hostel-like environment (check-in and check out every day)
  - Large, congregate-style
  - Meets basic needs
    - Shower/bathroom
    - Laundry
    - Mail
  - Self-directed resource/information and referral
  - Light services

OR

- To provide a path to housing
  - Resolve housing crises permanently
  - Facilitate self-resolution
  - Re-house people quickly
  - Reduce unsheltered homelessness
  - Connect people to housing search and other resources to help stabilize them once housed

Traditional Shelter Model

- Many people refuse to stay in shelters because they are not accommodating of their needs or have too many rules
  - No Partners
  - No Pets
  - Limited Hours of operation
  - Too many rules
  - Unsafe
  - Unclean
  - Crowded
- Emergency shelters must focus on getting people housed, not just offering a bed

These ‘high barriers’ get in the way of helping those with the most dire need.
SHELTER

New Housing-focused Shelter Model

- Shelter is NOT a destination
- Shelter is part of a process of getting people housed
- The shelter is equipped and resourced to help people get housed as soon as they come into shelter
- Everything in the shelter is focused on getting people housed with whatever resources they have

People have to be able to get ***in***…

People have to be able to get ***in***…

...and be able to get ***out*** (to housing).

Measure Outcomes

DECREASE Long-stays

INCREASE Exits to permanent housing

DECREASE Returns to shelter

INCREASE Shelter utilization

Shelters Must Have a Housing Exit Strategy

- **Don't** just build shelters without a housing exit strategy
- Effective emergency shelters:
  - Focus all services on housing people as quickly as possible
  - Low-barrier and accommodating of people's needs
  - Safe
  - Open 24/7 (do not kick people out during the day)
  - Example:
    - Navigation Centers = Low-barrier and housing-focused shelters
- Tiny homes, Tuff Sheds, and other temporary emergency housing must have a permanent housing exit strategy to be a real solution and not just a band-aid

How do you create better system flow?

Issue: Not enough shelter; Long lengths of stay in shelter; Average length of homelessness is not decreasing; High % of returns to homelessness

Solution: Housing-focused services in shelter

Solution: Increased permanent housing resources provided by the homeless and other mainstream systems to help people exit shelter

Additional Resources: NAEH Emergency Shelter Learning Series

- Webinars
- Infographics
- Tools
- Self-Assessments
- More!

https://endhomelessness.org/resource/emergency-shelter/

Questions

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