

The cover page features a central title 'City of Tacoma Homelessness Strategy' in a large, teal, sans-serif font. Below the title is the subtitle '2022-2028' in a smaller, dark teal font. The page is decorated with stylized illustrations of houses, trees, and clouds in shades of teal, green, and blue. The illustrations are positioned around the title and extend towards the left and right margins.

City of Tacoma

Homelessness Strategy

2022-2028

Executive Summary

The City of Tacoma declared homelessness a public health emergency in 2017. Since then, homelessness has continued to rise and remains one of the top priorities for residents and leaders throughout the city and county as a whole. By one measure, between 2017 and 2022, homelessness in Pierce County increased by 40% from 1321 people who are experiencing homelessness in 2017 to 1851 people who are experiencing homelessness in 2022.¹ The rise of homelessness is also a national and statewide issue. Nationally the rise of homelessness increased 5.5% from 2017-2020.² In Washington State, the number of people who experienced homeless rose to 9% in that same time frame. This rise in homelessness in Pierce County, experienced acutely in the City of Tacoma, is occurring largely as a result of population growth and low supply in the housing market. Between 2010 and 2019, this area experienced a 15% increase in population and a 4.5% decrease in rental vacancies in the Tacoma-Lakewood Housing Market Analysis.^{3,4} This dynamic has created rapidly rising housing costs in the City and the County, while incomes have not kept the same pace. Pierce County's rent rose about 40% between 2010 and 2019.⁵ This is compared to the median income in Pierce County which increased only 25%.⁶ Though this is a national and statewide trend, we do need to think strategically with a regional and local approach, which is this plan is aligned with the objectives of the Pierce County Comprehensive Plan to End Homelessness to increase shelter capacity and services across the system to relieve the heavily weighted shelter capacity in the city, and shift our efforts to a central solution resulting in increased affordable housing, and aligning this plan to the implementation of the City's Affordable Housing Action Strategy and sustainable housing options.

The housing market is not the only contributing factor, residents of Pierce County who are Black are more disproportionately experiencing homeless than people who are white. Research links the racial disparities that are evident in the homeless population to centuries of structural racism that have excluded people of color from equal access to housing, community and social supports, criminal justice system, disparities in behavioral and mental health, and opportunities for economic mobility.⁷ This reality is recognized by the City and is laid out in Tacoma City Council Resolution 40622, where "the City acknowledges that the challenges of dismantling more than 400 years of systemic racism to ensure measurable improvements in the equitable health and wellbeing of all members of the community is an adaptive leadership challenge that will require a radical reimagining of institutions and an innovative and collaborative response".

Homelessness remains a central issue across Tacoma as the conditions that contribute to homelessness have continued to worsen due to the housing affordability crisis and the two pandemics of this time period, COVID-19, and racism. This reality coupled with the racial inequities within the homelessness system, requires us to transform our homeless response system through the lens of anti-racism. Statewide we have seen a huge increase in both chronic homelessness and unsheltered homeless in the last 5 years that requires us to implement a homeless strategy that uses targeted universalism, which means

1 Pierce County Homeless Point-In-Time Count, 2017-2022.

2 <https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/homelessness-statistics/state-of-homelessness-2021/>

3 <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/piercecountywashington,US#>

4 <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/pdf/Tacoma-LakewoodWA-CHMA-19.pdf>

5 https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/fmr/fmrs/FY2022_code/select_Geography.odn

6 <https://esd.wa.gov/labormarketinfo/median-hourly-wages>

7 Olivet, J., Dones, M., Richards, M., Wilkey, C., Yampolskaya, S., Beit-Arie, M. and Joseph, I. Center 4 Innovations. (2018). Supporting Partnerships for Anti-Racist Communities (SPARC). Phase One Study Findings.

pursuing goals designed to help everyone paired with specific approaches based on different group needs.⁸ The strategies developed to achieve those goals are targeted, based upon how different groups are situated within structures, culture, and across geographies to obtain the universal goal.⁹ Targeted universalism can be easily explained using a sheltering example: a universal goal is having a shelter for everyone experiencing homelessness, but in order to achieve that we must ensure that those with the most barriers such as behavioral health issues, disabilities, partners, and/or pets have access to shelter that feels welcoming and dignified.

This strategy is driving us to reach “Functional Zero.” For people who are experiencing homelessness or may enter homelessness, do so, in a short episode and are able to access shelter, services, and a pathway towards stable permanent housing. The following information in this strategy supports this direction.

Vision

Our vision is to sustain an equitable, dignified, and culturally responsive homeless and housing response system that quickly and effectively addresses everyone’s homeless crisis while supporting the needs of residents and local businesses.

Mission

We collaborate with citywide initiatives and strategies, and regional partners and stakeholders to support long term permanent housing and provide supportive services to people experiencing homelessness in Tacoma. We provide real solutions to creating a thriving community by immediately responding to the of individuals in encampments, the surrounding neighborhoods, and local businesses and by providing immediate access to emergency shelter, health, and wellness services and permanent, safe, and stable housing to everyone experiencing homelessness in this city.

Values for Addressing Homelessness

Anti-Racism

In all that we do, we must ensure that Black, Indigenous, and People of Color feel welcomed and are able to access services that are antiracist and trauma informed. A key step in this is ensuring that representation across internal staff, community of providers, and advisory boards reflect demographics and lived experiences of the populations they serve.

According to the National League of Cities’ 2021 State of the Cities report, COVID-19 has exacerbated existing inequalities in communities across 600 cities in the nationwide, especially for BIPOC. Survey results showed that 41 percent of municipalities saw a decrease in their total general fund revenues & approximately 50 percent of urban city leaders witnessed declining economic outcomes for BIPOC.¹⁰

In 2017, the City of Tacoma, in partnership with Pierce County, invested resources to Supporting Partnerships for Anti-Racist Communities (SPARC) initiative conducted by Center for Social Innovation (C4). This research reported Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) are disproportionally represented in the homeless population both nationally and locally. Their research highlighted that pathways into homelessness for BIPOC are often characterized by network impoverishment and family destabilization. This means there is no flexible money anywhere in their social network, and as a result, there is less capacity in community-level safety nets and significant increased psychosocial stressors associated with poverty, substance use and mental health conditions, child welfare involvement, criminal justice system involvement, and trauma. They also found that barriers to exiting homelessness for people of color are almost entirely systemic and can be broadly classed as economic mobility, eviction history, felony status, and/or credit score complications.

In order to successfully address racial disparities, we must become anti-racist, and this will require city staff, leadership all be equally skilled in anti-racist practice, have the ability to disaggregate data by race, and create a culture of data-based decision making. We will work together to build the internal and external capacity needed to ensure anti-racist problem solving, policy creation and programming advised by people with lived expertise.

8 <https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/homelessness-statistics/state-of-homelessness-dashboards/?State=Washington>

9 <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/targeteduniversalism>

10 https://www.nlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/NLC_2021_StateOfTheCities_Report.pdf

Data-Driven Decision Making

Data-driven decision-making means that programming and services are data driven and data informed. To accomplish this, the City of Tacoma must standardize tech savvy data creation and integration. Doing this may require additional technological resources including a database and equipment needed to effectively disaggregate data by race, as well as implementing the regular use of dashboards to report and evaluate internal programming and external programming against baseline data in collaboration with Pierce County. It will also require programmatic changes, including ensuring that all contracts require regular racial demographic data collection and reporting metrics by grantees, and that this racial data is disaggregated in the homelessness system and compared to local population and census data.¹¹

Data fluency is an important component of being able to deduce intelligence and insight from data and information. To do this, new ways of doing business may need to be considered including investing in databasing resources, equitable evaluation and data-based decision-making training for all leadership and program staff, investing in “Built for Zero” resources and training for management and directors, and developing processes that allow for lived experts to inform qualitative and quantitative data collection, analysis, evaluation, and storytelling.

Data literacy is also necessary to inform strategic decision making and drive action, including ensuring management job descriptions require the operationalization of data disaggregation and racial equity assessments in policies, programming and decision making. The City of Tacoma should continue to develop processes that ensure data collection, production, consumption, and management of evaluation is centered in advancing progress towards equity and use disaggregated data, dashboard evaluation and lived expert voice to develop targeted interventions.

Partnership & Collaboration

Addressing homelessness is something that we can only do together as a community. The City of Tacoma recognizes that the only path to addressing the issues outlined in this strategy are through deep partnership and collaboration, especially with the organizations who are closest to the priority populations that we aim to serve. One of the more important relationships we have identified are people who have lived experiences. We are in agreement with the Pierce County’s Comprehensive Plan to End of Homelessness stance that in order to expand a successful program moving forward we must include people with lived experiences in the decision-making and implementation processes. It is important to mention that the vision, mission, values, and goals were developed with input from the community, including individuals with lived experience, and that this information has been shared to ensure consistency with what we heard from people who have lived experience. We will continue to meet regularly with each of our partners to again invite feedback from those stakeholders and to ensure alignment.

We participate in several regional collaborations including the Continuum of Care (CoC), and the Tacoma Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness. The CoC is a regional or local planning body that coordinates housing and services funding for homeless persons. The Tacoma Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness is a loose network of individuals, non-profits, government agencies, and community businesses working together to serve people experiencing homelessness. Their goal is to establish quick and safe housing, help people retain housing, and address many of the factors that drive homelessness. We also collaborate with citywide initiatives and strategies such as the Affordable Housing Action Strategy, and regional partners and stakeholders to support long term permanent housing and provide supportive services to people experiencing homelessness in Tacoma. The City of Tacoma also is part of the Comprehensive Plan to End Homelessness Advisory Board and Anchor Community Initiative.

In addition to some of the regional and internal partnerships, we also focused our efforts to capacity-building partnership strategy and development objectives and actions for those efforts. W

Goals and Objectives

Under each goal you will see a description of the goal, the objectives needed to meet that goal, the actions we have taken and have planned as well as how it is aligned with our partnering agencies and citywide initiatives.

11 Olivet, J., Dones, M., Richards, M., Wilkey, C., Yampolskaya, S., Beit-Arie, M. and Joseph, I. Center 4 Innovations. (2018). Supporting Partnerships for Anti-Racist Communities (SPARC). Phase One Study Findings.

GOAL 1: ENSURE AFFORDABLE HOUSING IS AVAILABLE AND ACCESSIBLE TO TACOMA RESIDENTS.

The rise in homelessness in the City of Tacoma, as with almost all major cities, is directly tied to the rise in the cost of housing. People become homeless when they can no longer afford to stay in their housing because the costs exceed their ability to pay. In Tacoma, we have seen housing prices increase at a rate far higher than local wages have, causing an increasing number of residents spending an unsustainable portion of their monthly income on housing. For many people, this increasing gap between housing costs and wages forces them to make difficult decisions that sometimes end in couch-surfing, sleeping in their car, or sleeping in a tent. Pierce County's Point-In-Time count has reported in the last five years an increased number of 530 people experience homelessness because of the gap of rising costs and stagnate wages. Though the City has been able to mitigate some of the impacts by increasing shelter capacity, we still need to create more affordable housing options so people can exit homelessness and the shelter system into more sustainable and permanent housing options.

Preventing people from becoming homeless by ensuring there is enough affordable housing is the single most effective strategy for addressing homelessness in our community. The Affordable Housing Action Strategy (AHAS) is the guide by which we will continue to work as an organization to address housing affordability in Tacoma by implementing the twenty-four actions outlined in the strategy.

Specifically, preventing homelessness requires implementing strategies from the AHAS that reach the deepest levels of affordability. Strategies that address housing for people at 30 percent and below of Area Median Income (AMI), including people with no income and targeting people who have been chronically homeless, is an important prevention strategy for addressing homelessness in Tacoma. The Pierce County Comprehensive Plan also realizes that there is not enough affordable housing currently at 30 percent AMI to ensure that people who are experiencing homelessness right now can exit into permanent housing. We agree that this is one of the more important factors to address if we are going to reach "Functional Zero."

OBJECTIVE 1.1:

Create more housing for more people

OBJECTIVE 1.2:

Preserve exiting affordable housing

OBJECTIVE 1.3:

Help people stay in their homes and communities

OBJECTIVE 1.4:

Reduce barriers for people who often experience them



ACTIONS

Previous

Leveraged publicly and partner-owned land for affordable housing. An example would be the 35th and Pacific property and its transition into mixed housing, including affordable housing (AHAS 1.4)

Increased prevention services and funding for people who are on the verge of homelessness (Pierce County Comprehensive Plan 3.1)

Integrated culturally competent and trauma informed practices into new and existing programs (AHAS 2.5)

Streamline processes for households applying for and using rental assistance (AHAS 4.1)

Immediate (<1 year)

Create flexibility in contracting so providers can address various barriers

Short-Term (1-2 years)

Establish Workforce Development and Financial Empowerment program across the support system (Pierce County Comprehensive Plan 4.6 & 3.4)

Create a range of resources for households experiencing a housing crisis (AHAS 4.2)

Long-Term (3-5 years)

Continue to streamline processes for households applying for and using rental assistance across access points (AHAS 4:1)

Continue to expand a portion of new or expanded sources of local funding to provide support services in new development (AHAS 4.4)

Measurement Objectives

- Number of youth and young adults requesting access to permanent housing; and % who accessed on demand disaggregated by race (Black, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska Native and People of Color) and sexual orientation (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer)
- Number of persons existing homeless and housed for longer than six months, one year, and two years.



GOAL 2: EVERYONE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS IN TACOMA, OR IMPACTED BY HOMELESSNESS, CAN ACCESS SERVICES AND SUPPORT.

The City of Tacoma’s primary mechanism for response for individuals residing in encampments is the Homeless Engagement Alternative Liaison (HEAL) Team which is a collaboration between Neighborhood and Community Services and the Tacoma Police Department. This team provides supports and offers services to encampment residents such as: addressing basic needs, assisting with storage of belongings, rides to shelter or treatment facilities, mental health supports, and a variety of other supportive services to address unique needs. Additional homeless service providers assist HEAL with support of clients who accept services, shelter, and mental health and substance use disorder supports. In addition, they also provide support to the surrounding community and businesses by providing them suggestions on how to interact with individuals experiencing homelessness and equipping them with connection to resources.

Despite these efforts Tacoma has continued to experience a significant increase in unsheltered homelessness since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Similar to many other cities across the nation, we are working reactively in terms of how we respond to those experiencing unsheltered homelessness in encampments and with a goal to be strategic and proactive in our response going forward.

This will require becoming data driven, centering lived expertise, and creating stable and ample funding that allows for the creation of an effective encampment response system that reduces barriers into shelter, provides on-demand treatment and provides a direct pathway to permanent housing.

OBJECTIVE 2.1:

Provide access to hygiene, outreach, and seasonal weather shelter for unhoused residents of Tacoma.

OBJECTIVE 2.2:

Streamline access to services through improved tracking and coordination to support unhoused residents in Tacoma.

OBJECTIVE 2.3:

Deploy targeted strategies to reduce barriers and increase access for priority populations to shelter, treatment and permanent housing.

OBJECTIVE 2.4:

Collaborate with community and businesses to mitigate the impacts of homelessness.

ACTIONS

Previous

Hired additional program development specialists for the homeless outreach team to address unauthorized encampment locations throughout the city

Created a variety of shelter models that meet needs across the spectrum and eliminate known barriers into shelter access such as past bans at other shelters, drug free sites, weekly Urinary Analysis, prohibiting pets, and photo identification requirements

Immediate (<1 year)

Coordinate outreach workers, service providers and hospital social workers to collaborate on appropriate exit planning before people exit facilities into homelessness

Coordinate a regular schedule with outreach workers and services providers to maintain consistent presence at encampments and people who are unsheltered

Develop processes that ensure trauma informed and multi-culturally valid qualitative and quantitative data collection, analysis, evaluation, and storytelling from those with lived expertise

Develop a direct pathway for BIPOC community members who are ready to transition out of encampments, shelter, or the streets into subsidized living that practices harm reduction models and provides mental health and substance use support

Create visual dashboards that allow us to track people experiencing homelessness in real time and the fluidity of services they receive including outreach efforts and shelter/housing options (Pierce County Comprehensive Plan 5.8)

Short-Term (1-2 years)

Gather information for each individual situation of unsheltered homelessness and create a “By-Name List” that is continually updated in service of reaching and maintaining functional zero (Pierce County Comprehensive Plan 5.1)

Continue to work with local government jurisdictions, local tribes, and community partners to collaborate on solutions for supportive housing units in Tacoma/Pierce County (Pierce County Comprehensive Plan Vision and Values)

Create and implement outreach processes and capacity that allows for on-demand behavioral health, mental health, and substance use treatment to be made available when a person says they are ready

Directly fund expansion of detox centers and initiatives that allows for immediate access to treatment facilities

Implement protocol to strengthen the referral process to shelter (emergency and temporary) transitional housing, and housing interventions such as Rapid Re-housing and Permanent Supportive Housing. (Pierce County Comprehensive Plan 2.3)

Long-Term (3-5 years)

Implement the operationalization of racial equity assessments for problems, policies, programs, and decision making utilizing real-time data to address disparities and support anti-racist transformation

Support existing providers to expand permanent supportive housing programs in Tacoma/Pierce County (Pierce County Comprehensive Plan Goal 5)

Create new permanent supportive housing stock for those exiting encampments and shelters (Pierce County Comprehensive Plan Goal 6)

Create new permanent supportive housing stock for those exiting encampments and shelters with dedicated units for target groups, specifically the BIPOC population

Measurement Objectives

- Number of people who are unsheltered at any given time
- Number of people who were provided outreach by each day, week, and month
- Number of pounds of debris collected from encampments response
- Number of interactions needed for someone to accept services or shelter

GOAL 3: THE SHELTER SYSTEM IN TACOMA OFFERS TACOMA RESIDENTS A SAFE AND DIGNIFIED EXPERIENCE THAT IS EASY TO ACCESS.

The City of Tacoma has partnered with several providers and developed several different models throughout the City to address those unhoused and living in large encampments. These shelter sites have provided emergency sheltering for individuals, couples, and families experiencing unsheltered homelessness. The sites provide basic and enhanced supports, such as hygiene stations, meals, laundry, and case management with a focus on trauma-informed care and person-centered practice with priority housing stability supportive services.

The actions detailed below represent a desire by the City to diversify our shelter options and increase our provider pool which will directly support a more collaborative and shared approach to addressing unsheltered homelessness. This shift will also allow the City of Tacoma to slowly move encampment investments out of solely funding sheltering and towards reducing barriers into shelter, providing on-demand treatment, and providing direct pathways into housing.

In addition, we will continue to create an effective youth and young adult homeless crisis response system. Intentional attention will be given to those who identify as BIPOC and/or LGBTQ+. Youth and young adults experience stacked disparities that are only deepened by intersectionality. They are the one population that consistently experiences disparities at every measurement point across our continuum of services. Ideally, youth and young adults should have the same opportunity to access a variety of shelter and housing options that meet their needs, similar to our goals for an effective encampment response.

OBJECTIVE 3.1:

Ensure adequate shelter capacity through diversity of shelter models.

OBJECTIVE 3.2:

Support Faith-based and non-profit organizations shelter capacity and ability to provide access to everyone.

OBJECTIVE 3.3:

Reduce barriers to shelter for all individuals experiencing homelessness including Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC); Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual/Allies, and more (LGBTQIA+); Youth and Young Adults, and those that are differently abled.



ACTIONS

Previous

Contracted with new providers and build new shelter models that will help priority populations and reduce barriers to access shelters

Modified existing temporary shelter regulations to allow for more Faith-based and Non-profit organizations provide homeless sheltering

Supported Faith-based and Non-profit organizations with the permitting process and funding for homeless shelters

Published weekly reporting on bed utilization, capacity, and availability. (Pierce County Comprehensive Plan 2.6)

Immediate (<1 year)

Coordinate shelter providers to create accessible intake services in partnership with HEAL Team (Pierce County Comprehensive Plan 4.2)

Prioritize behavioral health services with accessing shelter by including it in all contracts (Pierce County Comprehensive Plan 5.4)

Increase shelter staff workforce by prioritizing funding for training academy

Develop a direct pathway for BIPOC community members who are ready to transition out of encampments, shelter, or the streets into subsidized living that practices harm reduction models and provides mental health and substance use support

Additionally published daily and monthly reporting on bed utilization, capacity, and availability. (Pierce County Comprehensive Plan 2.6)

Short-Term (1-2 years)

Expand permanent shelter capacity with existing providers

Continue to engage with targeted populations to identify needs and find alternative solutions and providers

Standardize training with providers in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Long-Term (3-5 years)

Implement the operationalization of racial equity assessments for problems, policies, programs, and decision making utilizing real-time data to address disparities and support anti-racist transformation

Measurement Objectives

- Number of youth and young adults requesting access to shelter; and percentage who accessed on demand disaggregated by race (Black, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska Native and People of Color) and sexual orientation (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer)
- Number of additional shelters beds made available
- Number of persons requesting access to emergency shelter; and % who accessed on demand disaggregated by race (Black, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska Native, People of Color)
- Average night stay at each shelter location

GOAL 4: TACOMA’S HOMELESS SERVICE SYSTEM PROVIDES INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES WITH ACCESS TO A CONTINUUM OF TAILORED SUPPORTS TO PREVENT AND END HOMELESSNESS.

Mental health continues to be one of the more challenging aspects of homelessness. The mental health connection to homeless is complex and requires us to look at one or more other contributing factors to understand the larger picture. Challenges with mental health can be a precursor to homelessness or it could be a result of being unsheltered for a period of time. It can be exaggerated by not having adequate resources, treatments, and services, and can be paired with substance abuse, lack of family or social support, or it can be tied to a traumatic experience. We know it also is more often prevalent in the BIPOC community because the system and social needs are often less responsive to those individuals. In any effective strategy, we must address the systems around mental health and substance abuse in order to have impactful outcomes.

Mental health is important to physical health and people’s ability to live a full and productive life. A coordinated and comprehensive system that promotes mental well-being, prevents mental illness and substance misuse, and provides access to high-quality and culturally appropriate treatment can improve lives and strengthen our community especially during stressful times. Substance use disorders are most effectively treated with multidisciplinary and evidence-based practices that include pharmacotherapies with behavioral health treatments, especially when addressing opioid and alcohol use. The process starts with detoxification and medically managed withdrawal of effects, as detoxification from long-term alcohol use can be fatal and should occur under medical supervision if possible. Increasing access to inpatient treatment is a necessity and will be achieved by increasing mobile access, community supports and prioritizing access to inpatient treatment.

Prevention services is a strong strategic approach that decreases the need for shelter use significantly. Prevention allows people to stay in their own residence/communities and reduce the cost of operations and capital that come with setting up and maintaining a shelter. Diversion services also reduces the amount of time the individual needs shelter services and puts them in a more empowering situation for stability. This connects to the Pierce County’s Comprehensive Plan, “this short-term problem-solving technique, [helps] them to leverage their natural resources [and] people can find no-cost or low-cost housing solutions at a critical moment. Once the issues are identified, their own solution can sometimes be paired with short-term rental assistance, a one-time bill payment, or help finding a job or addressing health and safety needs, providing support to help them maintain their current housing.” When an individual does need shelter, the goal is to continue to have them use for the least amount of time and get them into more stable housing as soon as possible. The important factor for creating short-term use and need is to diversify the shelter and services—both in types and who provides these shelters and services. Diversifying both would work to fit the need of the individuals and barriers they are experiencing

OBJECTIVE 4.1:

Ensure access to services that feel welcoming and dignified and reflect the City’s commitment to ensuring evidence-based models that are antiracist and trauma informed.

OBJECTIVE 4.2:

Ensure the system of supports includes welcoming and culturally appropriate mental and behavioral health services, including substance-use supports.

OBJECTIVE 4.3:

Ensure the system of supports includes transportation, education, financial, employment, and recreational services that empower individuals to thrive.



ACTIONS

Previous

Collaborated and aligned with Pierce County on Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder (MHSUD) tax system and interventions.

Built in training and technical assistance to build capacity and increase number of funded providers and NCS Department staff.

Established rental assistance program that supports residents facing economic hardships that was modified to expand support during the COVID-19 pandemic and set thresholds to serve BIPOC populations. (AHAS 4.1)

Support Therapeutic Mental Health Court programs that addresses residents who entered the therapeutic mental health court and have become homeless while incarcerated.

Increase number of providers with food access program that aim to support low-income individuals and families.

Support a Housing Navigator program that is aimed to support residents living in places not meant for human habitation with housing navigation, and housing search and placement. (AHAS 4.1)

Immediate (<1 year)

Prioritize funding for agencies that provide tailored interventions that reduce racial disparities. (Pierce County Comprehensive Plan Goal 2)

Prioritize programming that provides direct trauma-informed care treatment and interventions that have positive behavioral health and substance use disorder outcomes.

Collect data and disaggregated racial demographics and collaborate with systems and databases that collect medical and behavioral health information and identify gaps, while adhering to Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). (Pierce County Comprehensive Plan 4.5)

Continue researching direct intervention for best-practices and direct MHSUD interventions that meet best-practice standards.

Coordinate and centralize locations for outreach service providers prior to and during removal actions while increasing public perception of services and reducing barriers for shelter and service for unsheltered individuals.

Increase temporary financial assistance in contracting so providers can offer flexible funds to assist persons getting into permanent housing or remaining housed, such as paying for first month's rent, getting an identification, etc.

Enhance Housing Navigation programs in partnership with Office of Equity and Human Rights Department that builds collaborative relationships with landlords that works with housing programs and housing vouchers to result in providing permanent housing for persons that are unstably housed, or homeless.

Short-Term (1-2 years)

Target funding to agencies that address racial disparities and disproportionalities in behavioral health, mental health, and substance use disorder treatment models.

Increase funding to providers to navigate treatment facilities and services for substance use disorder—including emergency rooms and in-patient treatment supports.¹²¹

Increase access to mental health services including mobile access, teletherapy, telehealth psychiatric services, and medication refill without a physical appointment.¹³² (Pierce County Comprehensive Plan 5.4)

Support legal service programs that are aimed to support residents with legal needs (AHAS 3.2)

Long-Term (3-5 years)

Create more capacity for in-patient treatment for mental health and substance use disorder that are dignified and culturally responsive.

12 https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/samhsa_strategic_plan_fy19-fy23_final-508.pdf

13 https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/samhsa_strategic_plan_fy19-fy23_final-508.pdf

Measurement Objectives

- Number of youth and young adults requesting access to shelter; and percentage who accessed on demand disaggregated by race (Black, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska Native and People of Color) and sexual orientation (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer)
- Number of additional shelters beds made available
- Number of persons requesting access to emergency shelter; and % who accessed on demand disaggregated by race (Black, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska Native, People of Color)
- Average night stay at each shelter location

GOAL 5: TACOMA’S HOMELESS SERVICE SYSTEM PROVIDES INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES WITH ACCESS TO PERMANENT, STABLE HOUSING IN ORDER TO END THE CYCLE OF HOMELESSNESS.

Equity is accomplished when everyone has access to opportunities necessary to satisfy their essential needs, advance their well-being and achieve their full potential. Providing more permanent, safe, and stable housing to everyone experiencing homelessness

This goal aligns with Tacoma City Council’s Transforming Tacoma Priorities for Belief and Trust, Housing, Safety, and Health. Closing the current gap in disproportionate housing rates by race is also aligned with the Affordable Housing Action Strategy (AHAS), particularly actions 1.11 (Explore innovative low-cost housing solutions to serve persons experiencing homelessness) and 3.2 (Create a range of resources for households experiencing housing crisis).

The City Council have taken additional steps to support the work of addressing the affordable housing and homelessness priority: The priority based budget shows that \$74 million are dedicated to addressing housing and homelessness in the City’s baseline budget. The City Council took final action on Home in Tacoma Project - Phase 1 on December 7, 2021, through adoption of Amended Ordinance 28793. The Council as adopted Resolution NO. 40871 affirming the City of Tacoma’s support of the use of data-informed tools to prevent displacement of local residents and strongly encourages the City’s partners to use these tools to ensure more residents are able to stay in Tacoma with a focus on households from “low” and “very low” opportunity areas of the City, as well as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color households

The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) report, Exploring Homelessness among People Living in Encampments and Associated Costs, evaluated the state of four cities which includes Tacoma. It states, “Ultimately, the response to encampments must go beyond the shelter system and provide opportunities for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness to be placed in permanent housing. This objective is challenging because not one of the four cities has sufficient resources to meet the needs of its homeless population for permanent housing.”

OBJECTIVE 5.1:
Increase the number of permanent and stable housing opportunities for people experiencing homelessness.

OBJECTIVE 5.2:
Ensure adequate supportive services for permanent and stable housing opportunities.

OBJECTIVE 5.3:
Streamline access and reduce disproportionalities to permanent and stable housing placement with targeted strategies that address barriers experienced by priority populations*.

ACTIONS

Previous

Acquisition of Aspen Court with plans to utilize the property as permanent supportive housing following its use as shelter.

Short-Term (1-2 years)

Expand permanent shelter capacity with existing providers Target funding for rapid rehousing programs that are designed to help individuals and families that do not need intensive and ongoing support to quickly finding permanent housing through a tailored package of rental assistance supported with case management. (Pierce County Comprehensive Plan 6.2)

Support existing service and shelters providers transition into providing housing and housing services to maintain continuum of care.

Target funding and contracting to increase services to enhance life skills and maintain adequate housing.

Long-Term (3-5 years)

Divert funding from emergency shelter spending for Permanent Supportive Housing services to support new units

Target funding for transitional housing programs to address the transition from homelessness to permanent housing.

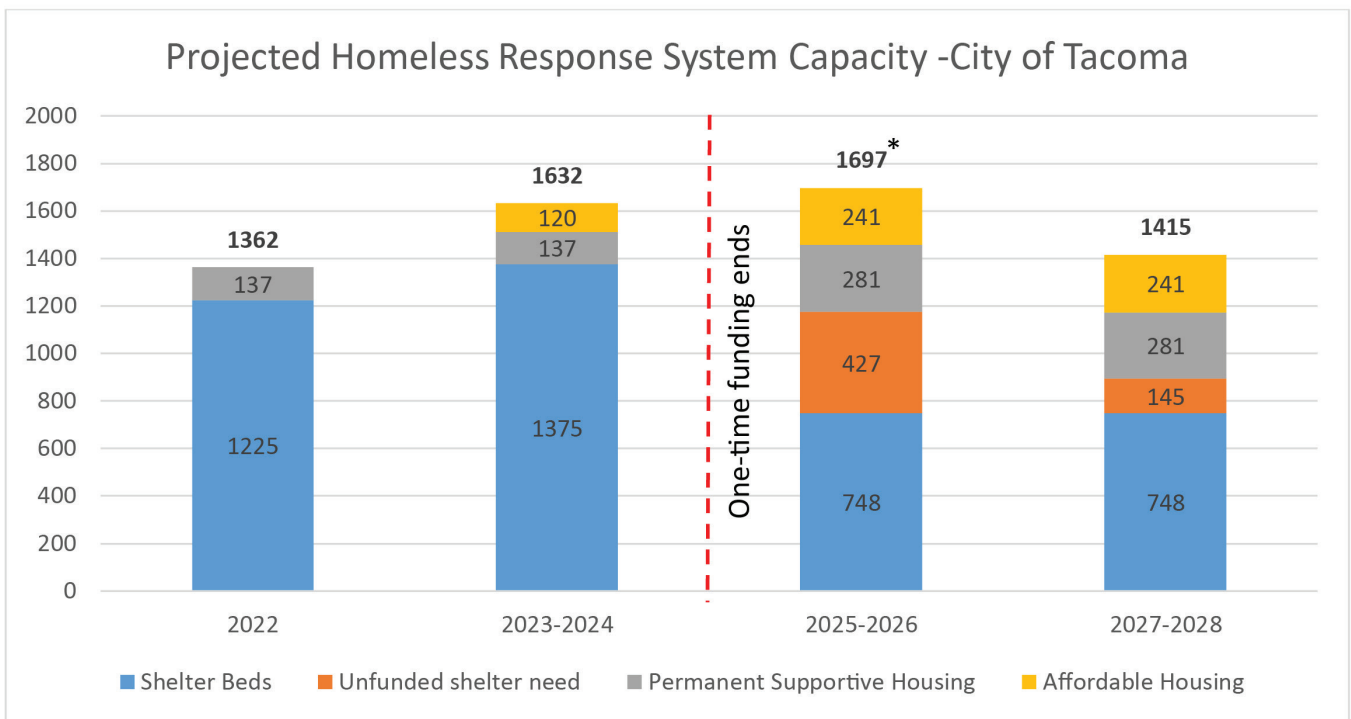
Target funding that expands and diversifies housing models to help address needs and barriers for people who are homeless.



Funding Considerations

The City of Tacoma’s current approach has been to invest the majority of its resources dedicated to homelessness in shelter and outreach. The City’s proposed 2023-2024 biennial budget dedicates \$34 Million to homeless services. Nearly \$16 Million of that is in one-time resources, including a \$3.5 Million contribution to the stand-up of expanded permanent shelter. This dedication of one-time resources will also allow an expansion of our temporary and emergency shelter system to address the number of individuals currently visible in encampments throughout our community. In keeping with the City’s commitment to outreach, the proposed budget package also looks to support an ongoing increase in outreach staff with the HEAL team.

The graphic below details the City’s current level of available shelter space as well as what is planned to come online in the coming years for both shelter, permanent supportive housing and affordable housing units supported by City investment (assumed at a 75% occupancy rate for individuals at or below 30% of area median income). Assuming the City needs to support shelter and housing capacity for approximately 1400, this chart demonstrates achieving that capacity by 2027-2028.



*Reflects peak capacity as the City transitions out of temporary and emergency shelter to more sustainable housing. Overall capacity at the end of 2026 will reflect the capacity demonstrated in 2027-2028.

The City envisions transitioning from our current investment in shelter beds to deeper support of permanent and supportive housing as well as the intervention and stabilization services described in the strategy above. Even with this shift in funding, the City will need to explore revenue options to support services that are currently supported with one-time funds through 2024. Although the current projected funding gap is approximately \$6.25 Million a year starting in 2025, staff will continue to monitor the inflow and outflow of the homeless system and discuss possible options to address this gap throughout the 2023-2024 biennium.

As we partner with City-wide initiatives, we look to replace the cost of those shelters beds and use that funding to prioritize permanent supportive housing (PSH), prevention services, diversion services, and rapid rehousing programs. While the standup of PSH and affordable housing units is more expensive and take longer than the standup of emergency and temporary shelter, the operational costs when the units are in place are about half of what it costs to operate emergency and temporary units. Sustaining funding at the needed level, however, will allow the City to enhance funding to other services and programs to support people who are experiencing homelessness or housing instability.

Appendices

SUMMARY OF MEASUREMENTS

The most important question we need to be asking is how do we know if our actions and strategy is working? Pierce County's Comprehensive Plan to End Homelessness and the City of Tacoma agree that "[t]he single most important metric to assess the plan's effectiveness is whether the number of people experiencing homelessness is shrinking."¹⁴

Data is an important tool for us to continue to develop in tracking our progress towards Functional Zero. Currently the city uses several ways to understand the scope of need and how we are meeting expectations. We also continue to partner with Pierce County and align ourselves with the Comprehensive Plan in creating systems that will help inform us regarding how many people are experiencing homelessness, and how can we adjust our services to meet the needs of people who are homeless and who might be becoming homeless.

POINT-IN-TIME COUNT

The Point-in-Time (PIT) count continues to clarify an overall year to year trend of people who are experiencing homelessness. The PIT count will continue to help inform us if we are reaching Functional Zero until we can rely on the By-name list source. The challenge with PIT count is that is counted different from year to year depending on volume of volunteers, the weather, and volunteer's abilities/approach. Overall, the count is done during one of the coldest days of the year, but the system's response changes dramatically throughout each season.

HOMELESS MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM

The Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) is currently accessible to our shelter providers and allows us to monitor outcomes for people who enter that system and outcomes from provider's programs. This tracking is entered by all shelter providers and needs less active management while still giving a window into the number of individuals experiencing homelessness. One of the challenges in the HMIS is that it requires estimate of duration of homelessness after last contact.

BY NAME LIST

A universal by name list has been proposed by the Pierce County Comprehensive Plan to End Homelessness and has been discussed with jurisdictions to align in practice on how to accurately count people who are experiencing homelessness. The City's own strategy supports the development of such a list. This list would include all people who are experiencing homelessness in Pierce County who stay at a shelter, work with an outreach provider, or any point in our response system. The challenge of the by-name list is that it must be utilized by every provider, in every homeless response system and it must be consistently updated for real time data. If it is updated consistently, then we can use that data to inform decision and adapted services and responses as need to any growing concerns that may arise. Currently two priority populations are tracked by a by-name list: youth and young adults, and veterans. As this list is managed and tracked, if the list grows then

14 <https://www.piercecountywa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/109977/Comprehensive-Plan-to-End-Homelessness-with-Appendices-and-Shelter-Action-Plan>



providers and the system come together and discuss needed changes. If the list shrinks, then the systems can prioritize needs for people who are still left on the list and determine if we should prioritize positive outcomes or change services to meet the needs.

Current Shelter Models in the City of Tacoma:

MITIGATION SITES

Mitigation sites allow us to address immediate health and safety concerns with basic hygiene services and other service connection. The city funds all operations including staff support, security, case management, maintenance, and utilities. The City of Tacoma expects to have two mitigation sites in operation by the end of 2022. The average cost of each bed that we fund for operations are about \$62 a bed night cost.

MICRO-SHELTER SITES

Longer-term sites such as the Stability Site and TEMS locations are another part of the emergency shelter response system, but place more emphasis on addressing barriers to housing, and moving individuals towards more sustainable solutions such as permanent housing. The city funds all operations including staff support, security, case management, maintenance, and utilities. The City of Tacoma expects to have 4 micro-shelter sites in operation by the end of 2022. The average cost of each bed that we fund for operations are about \$61 a bed night cost.

TEMPORARY SHELTERS

Temporary shelters also provide a vital component of our homelessness response system. Generally, in partnership with local Faith-based organizations, these shelters are primarily located in existing buildings already permitted for occupancy. There may be some additional costs associated with some improvements needed for individuals to stay overnight, but these costs are generally far below those capital costs of emergency shelter sites that involve site development and new construction. The City of Tacoma currently has 3 temporary shelters in operations. The average cost of each bed that we fund for operations are about \$56 a bed night cost.

PERMANENT SHELTERS

Permanent shelters are primarily congregate in nature but provide efficiencies in the number of beds/units they are able to offer in relation to size of a property, and the number of staff needed to maintain safe and successful operations. The city partners with organization and already existing structures and operations with funded staff support along with private and philanthropy dollars. The City of Tacoma currently supports 648 permanent shelter beds in operations. The average cost to the City is about \$10 a bed night.

HOTEL CONVERSION SHELTERS

Hotel conversion shelters provide emergency shelter beds in a non-congregate setting, Hotels/motels can be purchased/leased by local jurisdictions to provide shelter beds in the short-term, and can later be converted to permanent supportive housing units. The City of Tacoma currently has 1 Hotel Conversion in operations. The average cost to the City contribution are about \$48 a bed night cost.

Glossary of Terms:

People Experiencing Homelessness – The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development defines people experiencing homelessness as “an individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; as well an individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations, an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.”

By-Name list– A by-name list is a real time, up-to-date list of all people experiencing homelessness in your community that can be filtered by categories and shared across appropriate agencies. This list is generated with data from outreach, HMIS, federal partners, and any other community shelter and providers working within the homeless subpopulation.

Outreach – The initial and most critical step in connecting or reconnecting an individual experiencing homelessness to needed health, mental health, recovery, social and housing services that involves the process of engagement, assessing needs, defining service goals, or agreeing on a plan for delivering those services.

Encampment Cleanup – The removal of debris and waste created by people living outdoors on public or private property and the reclamation of the site.

Functional Zero – A state where any person starting a new homeless episode has immediate access to shelter and a permanent housing intervention. This acknowledges that homelessness will never fully disappear from a community. Instead, it aspires to making it rare, brief and, when it happens to someone, they do not experience it again.

Mitigation – Alleviating and/or reducing the health and safety impacts on people living in encampments and those who live or work in surrounding areas.

HEAL Team – Homelessness Engagement Alternative Liaison Team, which is a cross function team of Tacoma Police Officers, EMS personnel, mental health providers and outreach staff who work with people experiencing homelessness to connect them with services while also enforcing laws.

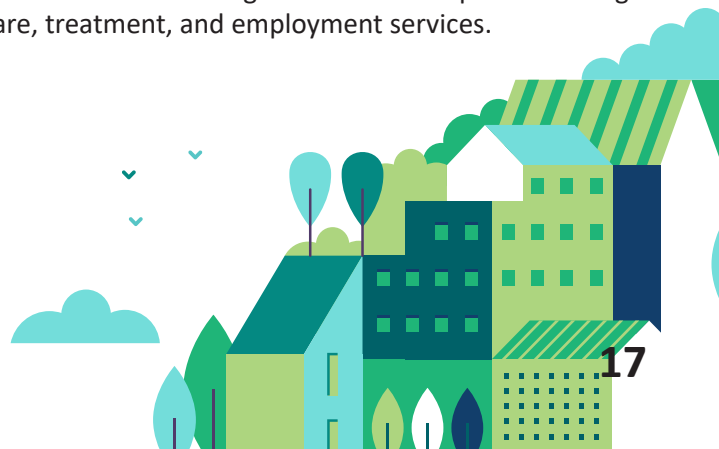
Prevention – Homelessness prevention refers to the policies, practices, and interventions that reduce the likelihood that someone will experience homelessness.

Diversion – Diversion strategies and practices assist people to resolve their immediate housing crisis by accessing alternatives to entering emergency shelter or the experience of unsheltered living.

Emergency Shelter – The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development defines emergency shelter as “any facility, the primary purpose of which is to provide temporary or transitional shelter for the homeless in general or for specific populations of the homeless.”

Rapid Rehousing – Rapid Rehousing is an intervention that is designed to quickly get individuals and families into permanent housing by providing short-term rental assistance and services.

Permanent Supportive Housing – A housing intervention that combines affordable housing assistance with voluntary support services to address the needs of chronically homeless people. The services are designed to build independent living and tenancy skills and connect people with community-based health care, treatment, and employment services.



Engagement & Community Feedback

Feedback on the development of this strategy was primarily collected through virtual engagement sessions facilitated by Neighborhood and Community Services across departments within the City of Tacoma, people with lived experience, and with community partners.

Recently we have presented the strategy with the Tacoma Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness, Lived Experienced Coalition Peirce County Chapter, and Human Service Commission for feedback about the strategy.

This strategy is a living document and we will be continuing to engage, request feedback, and determine alignment with our strategy to the overall work in the city and Pierce County. We intend to seek regular feedback from our community partners including but not limited to:

- **BIPOC:** The Black Collective, Centro Latino, Asia Pacific Cultural Center, Tacoma Urban League, Tacoma Ministerial Alliance, and the Puyallup Tribe
- LGBTQ+, REACH and Rainbow Center.
- **Lived Experts:** Youth and Young Adult Advisory board and the Lived Experience Coalition.
- **City Departments and groups:** Tacoma Police, Tacoma Fire, Community and Economic Development, Office of Equity and Human Rights, Environmental Services, Public Works, Tacoma Public Utilities, Planning, Legal, AHAS Technical Advisory Group, and the Library.
- **Community Providers:** Associated Ministries, Catholic Community Services, VADIS, Comprehensive Life Resources, Tacoma Rescue Mission, PC Coalition, Continuum of Care, Pierce County, Office of Homeless Youth, A Way Home WA, Russel Family Foundation, Building Changes, Anchor Community Initiative, Brotherhood RISE, Forward Operating Base Hope, Dave Purchasing Project, Life Enrichment Group, Metropolitan Development Council, Valeo Vocations, Shiloh Baptist, and Bethlehem Baptist and Alzheimer Church.
- **Neighborhood and Local Businesses:** Cross District Association and Neighborhood Business Districts, Neighborhood Council Groups.



