

# Vermont's Plan to End Homelessness

## July 1, 2013 Annual Report

Per Executive Order 03-12:

*"The Vermont Council on Homelessness will report to the Governor on July 1 of each calendar year regarding: (1) recommendations to the Administration regarding resource, policy, and regulatory changes necessary to accomplish the goals of the Plan, and (2) progress made under the Plan."*

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# I. Current strategies from the Vermont Plan

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As a key component in its plan to end homelessness, the Vermont Council on Homelessness identified the following three strategies and related action steps in the fall of 2012. These will remain high priority for the Council at least through the end of calendar year 2013. Other strategies were developed in 2012 and may be ranked for future adoption by the Council when members feel progress made on these items has been solidified.

## **1. Increase the number of units affordable to people who are extremely low-income, especially those who are homeless.**

- *Action items to address this strategy:*

- i. Develop the foundation of a housing production strategy which would include:
  1. Regular discussions between housing and supportive service agencies to discuss how best to implement this strategy, including determining for whom the housing would be created, where, and how to fund.
  2. Set goals for a multi-year housing strategy to increase housing for people who are homeless.
  3. Identify other necessary action items to address this strategy.

## **2. Align and coordinate existing homelessness prevention, housing retention and rapid re-housing activities under a clear and common objective, regardless of funding source with the goal of flexibly meeting the needs of the person instead of the program. This will include standard definitions, reporting and performance measurement.**

- *Action items to address this strategy:*

- i. Create standard program definitions for activities such as: case management; financial sustainability; housing support or retention specialist; length of service follow up after housing is secured; and “stable housing.”
- ii. Try to determine and encourage maximum caseloads so that the defined role of case management can be implemented effectively.
- iii. Consider implementing the following:
  1. Increasing state funded rental assistance;
  2. Expanding and enhancing financial capacity building services and asset building strategies;
  3. A supportive housing program for families with children.
- iv. Draft uniform reporting standards that measure outcomes for these programs.
- v. Report the drafted standards to community partners for discussion.

## **3. Expand the capacity of programs to provide voluntary supportive services once households move into permanent housing.**

- *Action items to address this strategy:*

- i. Work with local service providers to document barriers to providing services for one year.
- ii. Ask housing recipients about their needs after services end during a lease term.
- iii. Talk with housing providers about what their needs are after supportive services end during a lease term.
- iv. Quantify the resources needed to achieve this goal of providing services for at least a year once households move into permanent housing.
- v. Report on findings of the activities above to community partners.

## II. Recommendations to the Administration

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### A. Resource Recommendations

In general, the Vermont Council on Homelessness supports maintaining at least existing levels of funding for housing, homelessness, and homeless prevention efforts. State policy makers should always seek to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of existing programs. For example, the state should reduce reliance on hotels and motels and move towards affordable permanent housing which often requires ongoing rental assistance.

**To support implementation of the Vermont Plan to End Homelessness, and in recognition of the destabilizing contraction in federal housing subsidies and federal shelter operations funding, the Vermont Council on Homelessness recommends that the Administration support the following resource priorities in the state fiscal year 2015 budget:**

- 1. Increase funding for the **Vermont Rental Subsidy Program**, consider doubling this line item.*
- 2. Increase the state portion of the **Emergency Solutions Grant** (Homeless Shelters and Services line item) from \$792,000 to a range between \$1.3M and \$1.5M to offset the 25% reduction in the federal share.*
- 3. Fully support or increase the **Subsidy Plus Care** program in the Department of Mental Health so that people with mental illness have adequate supports to successfully remain housed in the community.*
- 4. Pursue options for new federal rental subsidy available through programs such as **HUD/VA VASH** vouchers to house homeless veterans, and the **HUD 811 PRA** program to house non-elderly persons with disabilities.*

### B. Policy and Regulatory Recommendations

*To support implementation of the Vermont Plan to End Homelessness, the Vermont Council on Homelessness recommends that the Administration adopt or pursue the following policy or regulatory recommendations:*

- 1. Support innovations between local services and housing providers, and encourage the use of local Memoranda of Understanding to establish partnerships, clarify roles, and create service-supported housing options for more formerly homeless families and individuals.*
- 2. Continue to support initiatives that provide longer-term transitional and supportive housing programming (up to 24 months) where it is proven effective at ending homelessness for higher-risk populations.*
- 3. The Council on Homelessness would like to affirm its belief that the Reach-Up program has an essential role in preventing family homelessness and as such would like the opportunity to offer input on proposed future changes to the program.*

### III. Progress since January 2013

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*Strategy 1. Increase the number of units affordable to people who are extremely low-income, especially those who are homeless.*

Develop the foundation of a housing production strategy which would include:

*A. Regular discussions between housing and supportive service agencies to discuss how best to implement this strategy, including determining for whom the housing would be created, where, and how to fund.*

The Chairs of the Vermont Council on Homelessness and Vermont Housing Council have worked together to solicit input from both bodies as well as other local experts in affordable housing. This has resulted in a number of draft sub-strategies to support the production and affordability agenda. While contracting federal resources for housing have made this challenging, conversations will continue at the state and local level.

*B. Set goals for a multi-year housing strategy to increase housing for people who are homeless.*

No production goals have been set at this time. In light of the impact of sequestration on federal programs that support the development or preservation of affordable housing, many developers of affordable housing are less than optimistic about this being a time for states to increase production. With the contraction in federal HUD section 8 funding, Vermont stands to lose the equivalent of 700 - 800 rental vouchers. This may necessitate looking to other sources, such as VASH, 811 PRA and state-funded subsidy programs to maintain the current number of deeply-affordable units in Vermont.

*C. Identify other necessary action items to address this strategy.*

The Council on Homelessness intends to continue working with the Housing Council to jointly pursue a production and affordability strategy. VCH members are now in the process of revising and ranking 10 production and affordability strategies and will likely develop in-state initiatives as well as lend support to more promising national efforts.

*Strategy 2. Align and coordinate existing homelessness prevention, housing retention and rapid re-housing activities under a clear and common objective, regardless of funding source with the goal of flexibly meeting the needs of the person instead of the program. This will include standard definitions, reporting and performance measurement.*

A. Create standard program definitions for activities such as: case management; financial sustainability; housing support or retention specialist; length of service follow up after housing is secured; and "stable housing."

The Agency of Human Services has developed standard expectations around "case management," "housing case management," and "housing retention," through the issuance

of an AHS Policy on Housing Stability. AHS has adopted standard HUD definitions of "homelessness" and "at-risk of homelessness," and worked with departments to use such definitions consistently except where a federal funding source precludes this.

B. Try to determine and encourage maximum caseloads so that the defined role of case management can be implemented effectively.

**Example: The new Family Supportive Housing Program (FSH), launching in July of 2013, specifies case load ranges of between 12-15 households per full-time service coordinator when working intensively with homeless and formerly-homeless families with multiple and complex needs. This program also establishes a minimum frequency of visits with a case manager, designates lead case managers, and defines duration of assistance at 24 months. Some, existing, programs still run high case loads where an increase in demand for services has not kept pace with state or federal resources.**

C. Consider implementing the following:

i. Increasing state funded rental assistance;

**This is a recommendation which received strong support from Council members in June 2013 voting. The Council recommends the Governor increase the specified subsidy programs in his state fiscal year 2015 budget recommend. This recommendation is fully encapsulated in Section II, above.**

ii. Expanding and enhancing financial capacity building services and asset building strategies;

**This is a key component of the new Family Supportive Housing program, launching in state fiscal year 2014. The financial empowerment curriculum builds on the success of similar pilots in the Champlain Valley and Windsor County. The FSH program will bring in staff from the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity's "Financial Futures" program to build local agency capacity at three demonstration sites. The program will use promising models, such as matched savings, and analyze results so that the curriculum can be expanded to other housing and shelter programs.**

iii. A supportive housing program for families with children.

**The Family Supportive Housing demonstration program launches this month (July 2013) in Brattleboro, Burlington and Rutland. The program will be administered by the Office of Economic Opportunity in the Department for Children and Families. Family Supportive Housing will link local service and housing partners to provide 24 months of intensive case management, service coordination and affordable housing for homeless families who have had multiple episodes of homelessness.**

iv. Draft uniform reporting standards that measure outcomes for these programs.

**AHS includes outcome measures in its housing inventory and has worked with departments to increase uniformity and alignment in each grant cycle. Examples include: In sfy '14, in the**

**Department for Children and Families (DCF), the new Community Housing Grants incorporate the same definitions and will align measures and reporting with the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG). SFY 2013 outcome measures will be compared and analyzed in the fall of 2013. At the local level, providers have also made progress working within their Continua of Care.**

v. Report the drafted standards to community partners for discussion.

**Draft standards will be developed and shared at the October or December meeting of the VCH.**

**Strategy 3. Expand the capacity of programs to provide voluntary supportive services once households move into permanent housing.**

*Action items to address this strategy:*

i. Work with local service providers to document barriers to providing services for one year.

ii. Ask housing recipients about their needs after services end during a lease term.

iii. Talk with housing providers about what their needs are after supportive services end during a lease term.

iv. Quantify the resources needed to achieve this goal of providing services for at least a year once households move into permanent housing.

v. Report on findings of the activities above to community partners.

**A sub-committee of the Vermont Council on Homelessness has met over the past four months and developed a draft survey to be distributed to providers and clients. The sub-committee will release the survey as well as reach out to the Vermont Housing Managers Association to see if this topic can be included at their annual fall conference. The survey will be available on line or in paper form. Results will be presented and reviewed at the October or December meeting of the Vermont Council on Homelessness.**

## IV. Indicators of progress

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On a single day in January of 2012, the state's network of homeless shelters and service providers counted over 2,800 people who were homeless or "precariously housed" (meaning temporarily staying with others but without a permanent home.) Based on that count, about 21% were in Emergency Shelter, 24% were living in Transitional Housing, 11% were staying in a state funded hotel or motel, and 9% were unsheltered. Unlike similar statistics from more urban states, Vermont's profile of homelessness looks somewhat different and almost half of those counted were families (as opposed to single individuals), which included 270 children.

Preliminary, de-duplicated data from a corresponding January 2013 Point In Time count showed approximately 2,100 Vermonters who were homeless or precariously housed. The Agency of Human Services Office of the Secretary has recently begun to analyze de-identified demographic data of persons who were homeless in the 2013 Point In Time Count, and intends to develop aggregate reports with and for the VCH to offer a more detailed report on statewide and local trends to support these data being used in a way that better informs policy.

Because Vermont's small sample sizes will undoubtedly mean annual fluctuations for indicators, the VCH will monitor long-term trends to watch for progress. Finally, measuring the rate or incidence of homelessness is a challenge in any region, and as such, data from the annual Point In Time count will be viewed alongside reports from other reliable sources such as the OEO Shelter Census report and Emergency Solutions Grant report.

The Council will present these additional data on the current rate, extent and picture of homelessness in the fall of 2013 once year-end data are available.