

## **WA-500 CoC Plan for Serving Individuals and Families Experiencing Homelessness with Severe Service Needs**

The strategy for addressing unsheltered homelessness for individuals and families with severe service needs in King County rests on the principle that the goal of the Seattle/King County Continuum of Care (CoC) for all people experiencing homelessness is permanent housing. We use a Housing First approach to meet the needs of all people experiencing homelessness in King County, recognizing that housing with appropriate supports is the only durable solution to homelessness. With a high cost, low vacancy housing market, King County lacks sufficient deeply affordable housing alternatives to rehouse extremely low income households who experience housing instability and homelessness rapidly, or sufficient emergency shelter alternatives to immediately intervene with a bed or unit for all who request it. One consequence is that King County holds one of the largest concentrations of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in the United States. The regional strategy to address the needs of unsheltered people in the continuum is to deploy a suite of field-based and site-specific service interventions that meet people where they are and provide connectivity to the full range of housing and service resources available to the continuum.

The CoC strategy is further anchored in ensuring those living unsheltered have a voice and say in how we work to reduce unsheltered homelessness. Centering our strategy in the real experiences and desires expressed by those we are aiming to support is paramount to our success. Without truly getting to know each individual who is unsheltered, the CoC will fall short in actually meeting the needs and wants in our community. We strive to center the voices and expertise of those who are unsheltered in our work and strategies to increase access and options for housing solutions.

### **P-1. Leveraging Housing Resources**

The two largest Public Housing Authorities in WA-500 are King County Housing Authority (KCHA) and Seattle Housing Authority (SHA). Both KCHA and SHA are Moving to Work Housing Authorities. Each PHA has a Homeless Preference for both Public Housing and Housing Choice Vouchers and has for some years. Our CoC closely partners with both PHAs to ensure vouchers are prioritized for households experiencing homelessness and works to increase the dedicated number year after year. Both KCHA and SHA are actively involved in the CoC participating in workgroups, planning, and strategy. PHAs effectively partnered with the CoC Lead in an extremely successful Emergency Housing Voucher (EHV) program, including leasing in other PHA owned housing. This close partnership led to an above national average lease up rate for the EHV program.

KCHA and SHA programs address the varied and diverse needs of CoC's most vulnerable homeless populations – those experiencing chronic mental illness; exiting the criminal justice system; homeless young adults and former foster youth; homeless students and their families; veterans experiencing homelessness; and people fleeing domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and/or sex trafficking. Many of these households need supportive services to stabilize

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their housing that traditional housing subsidy programs lack. The PHAs partner with the CoC to ensure a wide array of housing options are available - from HCVs, subsidizing new permanent supportive housing units, and prioritizing public housing properties for those with severe service needs.

PHAs are actively part of Coordinate Entry (CE) and By-Name-List (BNL) efforts and there is a process for allocating Mainstream and VASH vouchers to the development of permanent supportive housing (PSH) units, and vouchers are also contributed to the CoC Move On program, which King County Department of Community and Human Services continues to run in partnership with KCHA. CoC-funded PSH providers are prioritized for vouchers to develop new buildings for individuals and families with severe services needs. Data sharing agreements are in place with both PHAs allowing for households experiencing homelessness that receive HCV or Public Housing to be documented in HMIS. Both PHAs adopted portability policies and prioritized homeless households in their recent Mainstream NOFA applications. KCHA used HMIS data matching and CE case conferencing to identify households on the HCV waitlist and enrolled in a CoC program for voucher prioritization.

Further, our CoC actively partners with the King County Affordable Housing Committee, which includes County and multiple city elected and non-elected officials, that was created to increase affordable housing supply dedicated to those experiencing homelessness through regional collaboration; affordable unit production especially near transit; and expansion of housing diversity. We have collaborated on the development of an affordable housing policy checklist, which is posted on our regional dashboard and lists every municipality with zoning and land-use policy compliance for transparency and accountability, including incentives, inclusionary zoning, and multifamily tax exemptions.

To reduce regulatory barriers, the regional dashboard also lists every municipality and regulatory barrier removal for transparency, including elimination of parking requirements, planned action environmental impact statement, and permitting prioritization towards marginalized groups not currently represented in systems to serve those experiencing homelessness. The King County Regional Homelessness Authority (KCRHA), the CoC Lead, submitted public comment on Bellevue, WA Ordinance 6672, which is a Land Use Code Amendment (LUCA) to establish regulations for permanent supportive housing, transitional housing, emergency housing, and emergency shelter, asking the city to not put any new barriers to building and/or siting aforementioned building types within the city. The public comment was completed in collaboration with multiple eastside King County human services and housing agencies.

### **P-1c. Landlord Recruitment.**

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Our CoC employs a centralized housing location process focused on finding units throughout King County as well as more proactive landlord recruitment and engagement through a partnership with Housing Connector, whose mission is to partner “with property owners and managers to lower barriers to housing and increase our region’s affordable housing capacity.” This partnership supports all CoC-funded Rapid Rehousing programs and also works with private landlords to offer affordable units directly to households experiencing unsheltered homelessness. To support this work, the CoC also works to diligently shift the narrative on homelessness and to reduce stigma about those experiencing unsheltered homelessness - particularly with landlords and property managers.

Through KCRHA’s recent pilot - Partnership for Zero - we have expanded funding to Housing Connector for centralized housing search and bolstering landlord relationships with risk mitigation funds as well as piloting funding local landlord incentives to support housing retention. Housing Connector will also be equipped to provide Rapid Rehousing subsidies to up to 30 households with ongoing case management support coming from the KCRHA System Advocate team.

The Housing Command Center, an arm of PfZ, actively recruits new landlords and units for unsheltered neighbors. To bring new units in, staff call landlords inquiring about units, provide PfZ information including details about incentive packages. Available units are then instantly made available in a daily rapid case conferencing to match those in encampments scheduled for clearing to units. SAs accompany households to unit viewings and assist with completing the application process. Thus far 600+ people have been engaged and 300+ new units identified.

### **P-3. Current Strategy to Identify, Shelter, and House Individuals and Families Experiencing Unsheltered Homelessness.**

By definition, unsheltered people are distributed in community locations away from the specific services concentrated in shelter and other emergency site-based interventions. King County CoC’s strategy is to provide a variety of field-based and site-based resources to meet people where they are. The current strategy deploys interventions that resource those who are unsheltered through: specialized and generalized outreach, regional access points, day centers, hygiene centers, housing navigation services, and a no-wrong-door approach to coordinated entry for access to housing resources and other referrals. Shelter bed availability is communicated to outreach staff to facilitate direct referrals with transportation. In addition, through a connected set of initiatives using catalytic funding from philanthropic sources, Partnership for Zero, led by the KCRHA, is piloting a Peer Navigator (now called System Advocate) workforce that will be supporting street-to-home wrap around peer supports, an at-scale By-Name-List to appropriately connect and coordinate services, and scaled up Emergency Housing resources.

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Outreach is not a one and done process. Through the King County Homelessness Authority's (KCRHA) Peer Navigation Workforce, we have hired System Advocates(SAs) who all have lived experience of homelessness. The SAs are both navigators to help locate housing who also provide ongoing support to people for up to a year once housed to ensure we offer robust, wraparound services in our regional approach. This consistent relationship building and knowing what supports our unhoused community needs throughout their individual journey reduces returns to homelessness and leads to ongoing, sustainable housing.

### **P-3.a Current Street Outreach Strategy.**

The role of outreach is to connect with unsheltered households to ensure that valuable relationships develop in order to fully understand their unique needs and wants as well as connecting them with other available resources. Outreach staff provide communication about public safety, public access, ADA compliance and other municipal requirements for unsheltered people and dwelling places. During severe weather conditions, outreach staff provide harm reduction supplies and basic necessities such as food and water, and information about severe weather shelters, cooling and warming centers, clean air centers and other facilities.

There are currently 9 contracted outreach providers that also coordinate with KCRHA. Outreach staff across King County are deployed with a focus on specific regional needs and specialist capabilities. The continuum funds general outreach in regional deployment to address encampment dwellers and unsheltered populations, with specific funding for outreach to address the unique needs of vehicular residents. Additionally, we focus on service providers with specific specializations to address the needs of historically marginalized or highly vulnerable populations, including cultural fluency for American Indian/Alaskan Native (AIAN) populations and Black/African-American unsheltered people, as well as behavioral health specialist outreach for people with severe and persistent mental illness and substance disorders, youth and young adult specialists, and family specialists.

To ensure all people experiencing unsheltered homelessness are identified and engaged, outreach staff are deployed through daily field outreach. Outreach staff across the continuum coordinate schedules, participate in weekly case conferencing with a developing By-Name-List to connect households to temporary shelter or housing. The CoC also coordinates with community and faith-based organizations that provide ongoing engagement and basic care. Such organizations include, Operation Nightwatch, Union Gospel Mission, St. Vincent de Paul RV Outreach and Facing Homelessness.

Outreach staff are tasked to engage in outreach site visits and engagements daily with a focus on specific regional needs and specialist capabilities - general outreach via regular deployment to address encampments and unsheltered households, the unique needs of vehicular households, and the needs of historically marginalized or highly vulnerable populations. Due to the urgent

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nature of outreach services, teams determine their outings based on the barriers of the site, assessing high acuity needs, and the availability of outreach teams within our region. KCRHA contracted-outreach providers serve unsheltered households throughout the week, with diverse hours to ensure the needs of unsheltered individuals are met and supported at any given time. The varying engagements of outreach outings are not conducive to typical 9-5 hours, with some teams going during post-5pm. For example, KCRHA's Systems Advocates engage in 8-hour shifts from 5am - 1pm and a swing shift from 12pm - 8pm. Each team has their own outreach engagement strategy and schedule amongst their teams.

KCRHA, the CoC lead entity, does not support displacement based approaches to unsheltered homelessness. KCRHA also recognizes that some encampments present public health and safety challenges, some impair public access or jeopardize infrastructure, impinge on protected nature or wildlife reserves, and require address. Clusters of people living unsheltered in communities across the City of Seattle and King County are a local political flashpoint and a leading driver of constituent complaints to elected municipal leaders countywide. The high volume of negative interest raises concern that continuously unaddressed constituent complaints will cause erosion of public will to invest in housing focused evidence based practices. Municipal enforcement of ordinances that prohibit tents and other dwelling structures in various public places, and parking regulations that require parked vehicles to relocate after 72 hours, have resumed after a Covid pandemic related hiatus.

According to Seattle's Mayor's Office initiative, One Seattle Homelessness Action Plan, the data highlights that since July of 2022, 814 tents and 426 RVs have been scheduled for removal from city-parcels. KCRHA has outreach contracted providers who support unsheltered households staying in targeted encampments. **Since March 2022, to** The focus on Housing First versus displacement allows for more thoughtful safety planning, housing referrals, and supportive actions to ensure that the well-being of unsheltered folks takes precedence while awaiting housing solutions tailored to each household's needs.

In lieu of resources being scarce, shelter referrals are offered intermittently due to capacity, outreach workers are tasked to engage in building resiliency with unsheltered households until appropriate resources are offered. Housing resources vary and are difficult to manage, as the resources change and funding dollars shift elsewhere. The means of building out this resiliency is an intangible quality that outreach workers and their teams have difficulty upholding and replicating, which makes this work both invaluable and difficult to maintain. Nonetheless, outreachers continue to show up with needed survival materials, i.e. hygiene supplies, food, car parts for vehicles, harm reduction supplies, medical care supplies, and other items as means for survival.

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In order to effectively connect unsheltered households to permanent housing rather than displace, the CoC has enacted a number of strategies to increase scale and focus resources on permanent housing solutions. Outreach staff throughout the continuum are trained on Housing First practices to work to effectively connect unsheltered households directly to housing. Emergency Housing Voucher referrals were targeted to unsheltered families to ensure rapid match to permanent housing. Our community made a total of 1,707 referrals to EHV's for households meeting the HUD homelessness definition of categories 1 and 4. The CoC also expanded funding for Rapid Rehousing through the CARES Act (\$6.2M) and local revenue (total \$8.5M) with increased flexibility for longer stayers and increased funding for local landlord engagement provider Housing Connector to recruit new rental stock.

Not only were efforts increased to connect unsheltered households to permanent housing, but the CoC also increased focus on improving retention rates for permanent housing. Such actions include: a) Increased investment in prevention case management for households with previous homeless history; b) added conflict mediation, dispute resolution/family reunification services and training to our suite of retention supports; c) new cross sector partnerships with mainstream employment/education services to increase/maintain employment; d) expanded move-on strategy in permanent supportive housing; e) leveraged Medicaid housing supports for on-site nursing through levies; f) expanded use of Coordinated Entry mobility transfer policy to help relocate a household when all other efforts were exhausted; i) increased quarterly review of exits and program terminations to intervene on program-level to identify patterns and provide technical assistance to decrease the likelihood that a household will be exited for behavioral reasons; j) systemwide increase to eviction prevention assistance to cover arrears or missed payments to due economic constraints related to continued impacts of COVID and the end of the local eviction moratorium.

### **P-3.b. Current Strategy to Provide Immediate Access to Low-Barrier Shelter and Temporary Housing for Individuals and Families Experiencing Unsheltered Homelessness and P-3.c Current Strategy to Provide Immediate Access to Low Barrier Permanent Housing for Individuals and Families Experiencing Unsheltered Homelessness.**

In July 2022, 26% of the homeless population in WA-500 were unsheltered. Given the high percent of unsheltered households experiencing homelessness, our CoC is working to increase immediate access options such as low-barrier shelter and bridge housing provided the rental market conditions in King County that are a barrier in and of themselves. We are shifting our strategies to treat the emergency of homelessness as an emergency.

### **Partnership for Zero (PfZ)**

In an effort to provide immediate access to Low Barrier, Housing First, Permanent Housing for individuals and families experiencing unsheltered homelessness, PfZ was implemented. PfZ is a united effort to focus and coordinate resources in targeted geographic areas in order to

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dramatically reduce unsheltered homelessness. It's based on an emergency management framework that prioritizes system integration and coordinated resource deployment. This strategy is led by the KCRHA and supported by We Are In, a coalition of business, philanthropy, advocates, service providers, and housed and unhoused King County residents who are uniting resources to create the infrastructure — including workforce, data capacity, high-acuity services, and supports for housing and shelter providers — necessary to end homelessness across King County. Starting with the premise that housing is a basic human need and every human deserves a safe place, the goal of PfZ is to focus and coordinate resources in a targeted geographic area in order to put people experiencing unsheltered homelessness on a path to permanent housing. Once this is accomplished, the CoC in conjunction with KCRHA will maintain the infrastructure necessary to rapidly assist new individuals experiencing homelessness in target areas. PfZ will provide the region with a model that can be quickly and effectively scaled, with additional resources, to other communities across King County. This strategy builds infrastructure and adds capacity to the system in order to deliver comprehensive services and housing or shelter rooted in a Housing First model for those experiencing unsheltered homelessness in target areas, helping to revitalize our communities and providing all residents an opportunity to thrive.

### **System Advocates**

A Systems Advocate is a peer agent and resource connector who identifies gaps in support and the changes necessary to improve the systems that impact individuals and families living unsheltered in King County. System Advocates engage in long-term relationships with people experiencing homelessness, using learnings from their own lived expertise, along with empathy, dignity and support for full self-determination in order to house and improve the health and wellbeing of those we serve, particularly Black/Brown, Indigenous, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, LGTBQIA, and neighbors who have historically not had a voice.

Our current system is fragmented and daunting for an individual to navigate alone. Our neighbors are endlessly referred to other resources on their paths out of homelessness. The approaches and activities in the Systems Advocate program are rooted in peer navigation, which is a proven best practice. Systems Advocates have lived experience of homelessness and understand how the various social service systems work and how to access resources. That lived experience is an asset in building trust, and in acting as a coach, ally, and advocate throughout the whole process of navigating multiple social service systems and providers.

### **Emergency Housing Vouchers**

Another strategy the CoC has implemented to ensure immediate access to permanent housing, has been leveraging the use of Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHVs). In compliance with HUD, these vouchers have been distributed in partnership with COC. The Authority has taken a whole system approach to architecting the deployment of EHVs. In this approach we have identified two primary goals: 1) Generate throughput in the system to increase availability of resources for

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those who are currently living unsheltered, and; 2) Focus explicitly on those communities most likely to experience homelessness.

In order to meet these goals the CoC and KCRHA has worked with the PHAs to develop four pathways which give households access to vouchers. The first pathway will be for individuals currently living in permanent supportive housing (PSH) who no longer need intensive supportive services. These individuals will be offered a path out of permanent supportive housing through emergency housing vouchers, freeing up more units for households in need of a higher level of services. The second pathway will be through enhanced emergency shelter. Contracted service providers who currently operate enhanced emergency shelter will identify people who could successfully transition into housing with some service support. The third pathway is through coordinated entry's priority pool. CEA will continue to use the prioritization framework developed during the beginning of the pandemic to focus on housing those at highest risk, specifically those who are either medically vulnerable or are members of communities that have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. The fourth, and final pathway, will be for agencies who work with survivors of intimate partner violence who will, again, identify households who would be successful in the EHV program.

### **Other Strategies for Immediate Access to Low-Barrier Shelter and Housing**

Safe parking programs provide a continuum of resources for people living in vehicles. There is currently a single publicly funded program for vehicle residents. There is an additional RV safe lot program under award through a locally funded procurement process in startup, and an RV storage facility in planning. In addition to publicly funded programs, regional safe parking programs utilize faith-based organization parking resources for overnight use and are otherwise unstaffed. Vehicular residents constitute the largest single group of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, and the Continuum is building capacity for safe parking and vehicle dwellers.

Regional Access Points (RAPs) provide a durable location for connection with people experiencing homelessness within each subregion of the County. RAPs are staffed during business hours with trained providers who can connect people experiencing unsheltered homelessness to the continuum of resources available, and to assess needs for coordinated entry. RAPs provide a meeting place for housing navigation and other appointments, HMIS entry, and connection to other mainstream resources and benefits. RAPs provide bathrooms and seating areas, but are not generally equipped as hygiene centers. There are 5 RAPs located throughout King County, with at least one per subregion.

Day centers serve as additional access, resting and meeting points to connect people to system resources. In King County, day centers primarily align with historically marginalized communities, primarily AIAN and youth and young adults experiencing homelessness and



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housing instability. Some community-based day centers are not publicly funded and have historically served as community access points, or have provided connection to recovery-based services. Some emergency shelter locations also operate day centers to serve a broader community of unhoused residents than the shelter itself. Day centers offer meeting places, restrooms, and trained staff with HMIS access.

### **P-4. Updating the CoC's Strategy to Identify, Shelter, and House Individuals Experiencing Unsheltered Homelessness with Data and Performance.**

#### **Street Outreach**

Our community's data strategy around street outreach is built for service coordination, housing and shelter placement, analytics and evaluation of performance in addition to being the basis of the communities "By Name List" development. We are in process of improving data collection methods and service coordination with Outreach Providers using our HMIS Software system's Outreach Module, which allows for GIS mapping of encampments and individuals/households, tracking encampment characteristics, assigning teams to outreach areas and adding alerts. All street outreach workers will have access to this software and be trained by the end of 2022. This data will also be coordinated with the City of Seattle's outreach data, to further coordinate efforts with existing departments such as parks, law enforcement and sanitation.

In addition, KCRHA is developing other systems in HMIS for service coordination and analytics and program evaluation. The street outreach workers will be able to complete intake assessments for anyone unsheltered seeking services, and be placed on a queue for case management services as well as for Coordinated Entry HMIS housing prioritization. Additional assessments are being implemented, which includes housing needs, and an acuity form. Future development includes integrating Foundational Community Supports data and case management functions into HMIS by the end of the year. All these developments will provide important information to the system on the needs and preferences of the unsheltered households in regards to housing.

Outside of HMIS, systems are being developed for private rental market inspections and relationship building with partner landlords to move people quickly from unhoused to housed. Tracking this information will be critical to coordinate amongst service providers the resources available to address the issue. This information will be combined with the needs and preferences of the clients to form a housing match.

Lastly, all this data is being used to form a community wide BNL, to collect and utilize real time data on each person experiencing homelessness, this will enable system planners and case workers to be using one uniform list for service delivery, resource allocation, advocacy and funding priorities. This is a nation wide best practice approach to get to functional zero on unsheltered homelessneses. To accomplish this end, KCRHA has partnered with Microsoft to build a data platform to securely hold and store data from other data sources such as medical

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providers, behavioral health providers, etc. Initial data architecture scheduled to be completed by the end of 2022. Future planning involves app development and analytics of data and information.

### **Low-Barrier Shelter, Temporary Accommodations and Permanent Housing**

In 2023, KCRHA will begin development of improved inventory in HMIS. This improvement will enable all housing units (shelter, transitional housing, permanent housing) to track information unit by unit, and pair each unit with an individual or household. This will allow for more acute tracking of how the units are being utilized, by whom, and will show where there are gaps for improvement in resource allocation. This will also allow for more real time matching, which will improve the length of time someone is waiting for a unit and, in addition, give information about projects that are coming on line so the system can respond to that growth.

By analyzing Coordinated Entry data on referrals and denials, the CoC tracks projects with higher barriers to housing entry, particularly those coming from unsheltered situations. Data from HMIS is reviewed on a quarterly basis - including referrals, denials, living situation at program entry - to better understand how permanent housing programs are supporting those who have been unsheltered to rapidly access housing. Documentation requirements are also reviewed through annual monitoring and ongoing CE and Ombuds Office reports. This allows KCRHA Program staff to work with providers to remove unnecessary burdens and reduce the time it takes to house people.

Through the Partnership for Zero initiative, our CoC is developing a process to rapidly match unhoused neighbors to available housing units by collecting their housing preferences in a newly created Housing Needs Form (HNF). The HNF data will be used to identify which newly opened units meet our unhoused neighbor's needs for same day housing offers. Through the development of a pool of private landlords who have agreed to our incentive package the System Advocate Team is able to offer units the day they become available, arrange unit viewings, and complete application forms the same day.

Relying on a cross-system analysis of the CoC's housing inventory, a sub-regional landscape analysis, improved Point-in-Time count methods, and development of a robust By-Name-List, the CoC is working to get a more comprehensive picture of the housing types and models that are more needed in our community to effectively and impactfully end homelessness for unsheltered individuals and families. The ongoing work to build relationships and develop a detailed landscape of services, allows the CoC to identify what housing investments must expand to rapidly, and permanently, house people and ensure necessary supports are in place to sustain housing.

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Through the Special NOFO, we are seeking to transform a current Transitional Housing program to become a Joint Component TH-RRH and to add two Permanent Supportive Housing projects to our housing inventory in order to increase successful connections to permanent housing for unsheltered individuals and families. The Nike Manor transitional housing will pair temporary shelter with rapid rehousing to provide ongoing support to families while they reenter housing and further stabilize. This will not only allow families to continue engaging with those they've established trust with, but will also aim to increase access to transitional housing for more families experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Both PSH projects aim to serve chronically homeless single adults with severe service needs, with a focus on unsheltered individuals.

### **P-5. Identify and Prioritize Households Experiencing or with Histories of Unsheltered Homelessness.**

Through the Partnership for Zero initiative, our CoC is deploying system advocates via street outreach to targeted regions in the CoC with the highest concentration of unsheltered homelessness. New projects funded through the Special NOFO will be directly connected to the Housing Command Center and Coordinated Entry, which meets daily to review the By-Name-List and match unsheltered households to available housing in real time. As the new projects come online, those units will be brought into the daily case conferencing process to ensure direct access.

Throughout the continuum, both program eligibility and coordinated entry processes have been significantly improved to reduce unnecessary barriers for those experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Through system advocates, a process to secure documentation has been established to safely keep track of vital documents such as ID copies, social security cards, and other personal identifying information needed for Public Housing Authorities. Our strategy is to ensure that resources are provided through an equity lens. We believe all people should have access to stable housing while also providing immediate survival resources to keep our unsheltered community safe and secure while awaiting permanent housing. We believe in centering people with lived experiences and to meet their stated needs to eliminate the inequities.

Program eligibility is based on the lowest barriers as dictated by funding. For permanent supportive housing, homelessness and income are the two core eligibility criteria with disability included for units dedicated to those experiencing chronic homelessness. KCRHA as the CoC Lead works closely with providers to review and lower documentation and eligibility requirements to ensure fidelity to a true Housing First program. The only eligibility criteria for the Joint Component Transitional Housing-Rapid Rehousing program seeking funding in this Special NOFO is literal homelessness. All programs will be required to ensure they incorporate a Harm Reduction and Low Barrier Model to ensure our unsheltered neighbors have access to programs that will give them an opportunity to address their needs in a safe environment.

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The intake process for Coordinated Entry substantially shifted to no longer require the lengthy, often re-traumatizing VI-SPDAT for eligibility on the Priority Pool. Rather, our universal intake has been reduced to general information and prioritization is based on administrative data, COVID prioritization recommendations from the CDC and Seattle-King County Public Health. Our system is also working to incorporate behavioral health data and gender identity into the prioritization schema. People are no longer required to respond to the invasive and biased VI-SPDAT to access Coordinated Entry, rather the burden to gather prioritization information has shifted to Coordinated Entry staff and HMIS data already in the system.

The shift to system advocates (SAs) as the golden thread for those experiencing homelessness ensures that true relationships are the focus of outreach. These relationships build trust and allow for those who are unsheltered to be authentic about their needs and wants for sustainable housing. System advocates not only develop authentic relationships, but also provide assistance to navigate what can be a convoluted system. Their personal experiences of homelessness equips the SAs to walk through the system with others and provide insight into effectively navigating into housing as well as healthcare, benefits such as food assistance, TANF, SSI, etc.

### **P-6. Involving Individuals with Lived Experience of Homelessness in Decision Making Meaningful Outreach.**

Now, and moving forward, people with lived experience of homelessness are an integral partner in the design, implementation, and evaluation of all the CoC projects. This starts with our CoC Board, which includes over 50% of members who have experienced homelessness, as key partners and decision makers in the CoC. The CoC has also designed ways of doing system navigation to focus first and foremost on relationship building and engaging meaningfully and directly with people who are unsheltered versus prescribing needs first and then building a relationship with people.

Through shifting our work from a deficiency model, we work to uplift and empower people to believe and know they have autonomy within system and policy change. This is seen in efforts to empower our CoC Board to focus on well-being and ensuring their needs are met to fully participate. We work to further adopt self-advocacy and empowerment of lived experience as guiding principles for how our CoC should and will work.

KCRHA as an organization lives and breathes our Theory of Change: If we create a homeless response system that centers people with lived experience, then we will be able to focus on responding to needs and eliminating inequities, in order to end homelessness for all. To embody this culture and belief, 60% of KCRHA staff come to the table with lived experience.

A multitude of CoC providers also live by the principle that those with lived experience are the experts in our collective work. Throughout the provider community, those with lived experience

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lead, offer direct service, and sit on boards. Within the KCRHA RFP process, we look for and evaluate shared power through dedicated board seats and leadership staff with lived experience.

Further steps we take include proactive recruitment and standing weekly meetings with the Lived Experience Coalition (LEC); web-posting of open positions including a statement on our intention to hire those with lived experience; community engagement sessions; base building spaces; and in 2022 we completed the Understanding Unsheltered Homelessness Project as a part of the Point in Time Count - much of the findings from this study will be incorporated into our ongoing work. Any significant policy or program decision is first reviewed and vetted with the Lived Experience Coalition to ensure an explicit lens of lived experience is included. This process is also supported and developed using our Equity-Based Decision Making Framework which includes careful consideration of both who is currently involved and who we need to outreach to bring into the planning and decision-making process.

Members of the LEC and local provider staff with lived experience are recruited to be raters for all KCRHA RFP processes - this includes providing robust training about procurement, rating applications, rating matrices and their development, and an orientation which includes a section on implicit bias. During the Understanding Unsheltered Homelessness Project, members of the LEC also acted as interviewers - they were provided training on how to conduct interviews and paid for their time to participate in the month-long study.

### **P-7. Supporting Underserved Communities and Supporting Equitable Community Development.**

KCRHA supports community engagement through ongoing workgroups in varying population experiences, to support the dimensional needs and experiences of unsheltered communities. In support of the need to hear, uplift, and advocate for underrepresented communities, KCRHA is committed to workgroup engagements and recommendations presented by these spaces to guide our work in greater systems-change.

#### **Focus on BIPOC**

In all our work, KCRHA is guided by our mission to significantly decrease the incidence of homelessness throughout King County, using equity and social justice principles. King County's Regional Action Framework (RAF) on Homelessness states, "People of color, especially Black and American Indian/Alaska Native communities, are disproportionately impacted by homelessness and housing instability in King County. RAF implementation must be grounded in the principles of racial equity to address and ameliorate this reality." Findings within this framework identify that pervasive racism and other forms of violence towards BIPOC communities and unsheltered households impact access to services and housing. "Although Black people comprise 13% of the general population in the United States and 26% of those living in poverty, they account for more than 40% of the homeless population, suggesting that

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poverty rates alone do not explain the over-representation.”<sup>1</sup> These narratives and data are startling - ushering the urgency for KCRHA to approach systems change with compassion, mindfulness of our system’s harm, and informed approaches to end homelessness.

### **Vehicle Residency Workgroup**

KCRHA has established a workgroup to support the needs and uplift the voices of those with lived experiences in vehicles, which ranges from cars, trucks, trailers, and RVs as a means of shelter and security. Through conversation, strategy, and offering recommendations to KCRHA leadership, the workgroup offered items to support a plan for standing-up programming to support vehicle residency as an unsheltered population. This is a critical moment for vehicle residents to establish service provisions fitted to their lived experience. The vehicle residency workgroup has created a 4-program proposed objective, which will guide KCRHA in program implementation and servicing: 1) Safe Parking Lot - a temporary lot for VR folks to park and reside while doing the work to transition to permanent housing solutions; 2) Permanent Parking Lot - a parking lot for VR folks who want to permanently reside in their vehicle, with no plans for permanent housing solutions. in traditional settings, i.e. apartment units, staying with family, permanent supportive housing placement, etc., 3) Nesting - defined as a cohort of <5 vehicles who create community guidelines with each other and the surrounding neighbors for accountability, safety, and furthering relationships. This model is an alternate method for safe parking but would need collaboration and coordination with the region’s municipalities; 4) Safe Storage Parking - a parking lot for storage purposes only, while their owners are sheltered and engaging in housing navigation services for permanent housing solutions.

With these proposed objectives, KCRHA will be able to support unsheltered communities through service provision fitted to the vehicle resident experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

### **People with High Acuity Behavioral Health Needs Workgroup**

KCRHA has been working with and establishing progress for people with high acuity to ensure their needs are seen, uplifted, and met. Through consistent conversation, lived experience centered, and program providers who support this work ,KCRHA has met with this group on a regulate basis in support of identifying needs and uplifting work to be done within this experience. As a part of KCRHA’s 5-year plan to address immediate and long-term goals, this workgroup will offer their recommendations as part of the proposed objectives KCRHA is planning to implement.

### **LGBTQ+ Workgroup**

KCRHA has engaged LGBTQIA+ community members and leadership to uplift needs and create strategies that support vulnerable communities, one being LGBTQIA+ folks experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Through consistent conversation, lived experience centered, and

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<sup>1</sup>Supporting Partnerships for Anti-Racist Communities Phase One Findings, Center for Social Innovation, March 2018

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program providers who support this work. As a part of KCRHA's 5-year plan to address immediate and long-term goals, this workgroup will offer their recommendations as part of the proposed objectives KCRHA is planning to implement.

### **Emphasis on American Indian/Alaskan Natives**

American Indian/Alaska Natives are disproportionately misrepresented in homelessness services data within King County. Due to historical ethnocide, relocation acts, reservation systems, boarding school(s), and the historical erasure of American Indian/Alaska Native peoples of the land; There was a lack of representation of culturally responsible referrals being made to AI/AN households within Coordinated Entry methodology due to improper use of the Vi-SPIDAT tool being counter-productive in representing accurate vulnerability for AI/AN within the homeless management system.

Native leadership from the front lines of Native-led organizations met with CEA and provided insight on barriers to adequately serve AI/AN when case conferencing had a low percentage of AI/AN due to improper assessment use, misrepresentation of race, and low scores that would prevent the AI/AN households into making it to the case conferencing spaces for single adults, families, and YYA. During the fall of 2018, Native Providers in partnership with Coordinated Entry for All, created the American Indian/Alaska Native space to match service connection referrals for the indigenous community with homelessness project types being offered by providers such as Chief Seattle Club, Seattle Indian Health Board, Mother Nation, United Indians of All Tribes, and Seattle Indian Center. It was not just about housing, it was about identity.

Having the accessibility of the AI/AN Case Conferencing space gave opportunity for the native providers to pull AI/AN specific population and cross community case conferences weekly to provide housing to end indigenous homelessness. During this iteration of American Indian/Alaska case conferences, it was decided to not only advocate for tribal designation in HMIS but to create a By Name List in replace of the VI-SPDAT to gather information that was representative of what native providers were offering to help the AI/AN community in more ways than just offering housing. A system that reformed the homelessness system to better serve indigenous people in a culturally respectful way.

“That’s the main importance of tribal designations, to be seen. To be seen on our own land, for who we are.”-Nawishtunmi Nightgun