

## Executive Summary

Our 5-Year Action Plan is our community's path forward for measurable, accountable success in reducing homelessness. It is an evidence-based course of action for policymakers, a shared roadmap for advocates and service providers, a tool to hold our response system accountable, and a signal that progress is possible.

**Collective action is the path to solving complex problems, and this plan is the embodiment of our region's decision to dramatically reduce homelessness.** The seven goals outlined here are meant to show our communities that homelessness is, in fact, solvable—and that we can accomplish these goals together.

### **A Unified Approach**

Fragmentation of the homeless crisis response system has been one of King County's most persistent barriers to achieving meaningful progress in reducing homelessness. For this reason, the King County Regional Homelessness Authority ("KCRHA" or "the Authority") was designed and formed to unify and coordinate the funding, policies and programs of 39 cities and King County into a single, efficient, successful system.

Our mission is to significantly decrease homelessness throughout King County, using equity and social justice principles. Our theory of change: if we create a homelessness response system that centers people with lived experience of homelessness, then we will be able to respond to needs and eliminate inequities, in order to end homelessness for all.

This collaborative, equity-focused approach is a fundamentally new way of working. Making the change is no easy task. Creation of a new governing body with a mandate to redesign an existing system is a change in culture as much as a change in policy. In addition, the impacts of COVID-19 increased the challenges surrounding homelessness just as the KCRHA was getting started, and those impacts continue to be felt today. But the very existence of the Authority, and the broad support for its creation and mission, are themselves new and different from previous efforts.

With providers, advocates, and partners across the County, we've made significant progress to date—in just the past year, more than 4,500 people have moved from encampments or shelter into housing. We are implementing new state and federal programs for housing and encampment resolution, improving the Coordinated Entry process for accessing housing, and targeting resources using an emergency management framework. Despite these successes, the number of people experiencing homelessness—individuals, youth and young adults, and families with children, all disproportionately people of color—remains unacceptable. There is much work to do. We must continue to work together, scale our efforts, and move more people inside—into safe and stable temporary or permanent housing.

We cannot do this work alone. The Authority coordinates the crisis response system, working alongside our network of service providers in outreach, shelter, temporary housing and services. But it's important to remember that the pathways into and out of homelessness depend on engagement and commitment from systems outside of homelessness crisis response—including permanent housing, health care, child welfare, education and employment. Collaboration and sufficient resources across these intersecting systems is critical to reducing homelessness.

## **The Path Forward**

Accurate, reliable data must drive our response.

- First, we need an accurate accounting of the number of people experiencing homelessness in King County and what services and supports might be most helpful for them.
- Second, we need to understand the types and scale of temporary and permanent housing solutions necessary to meet the needs of people who are experiencing homelessness.
- Third, we need to resource and scale evidence-based policies, programs, and practices that will increase the capacity and effectiveness of the service system.

To do so, this plan includes seven goals, each supported by specific strategies, each with metrics to measure our progress and a 24-month action plan for achievement. Consistent with the Authority's Theory of Change, each part of this plan includes insight and feedback from people with lived experience of homelessness.

### **Goal 1: Dramatically Reduce Unsheltered Homelessness**

Our efforts use the evidence-based Housing First approach, prioritizing an individual's most impactful need first – the safety and stability of housing – and then connecting people to supportive services to address medical, mental health, substance use, employment, and education needs in an effort toward individual self-sufficiency and reintegration into community.

- The solution to homelessness is housing, so we must expand temporary and permanent housing to meet the need, using the data and methodology relied upon by the Washington State Department of Commerce.
- To address the suffering of people experiencing severe mental or behavioral health issues, we must improve and expand temporary housing and wrap-around support for people with high-acuity needs.
- To achieve the scale necessary to achieve “functional zero” countywide, we must expand the Partnership for Zero emergency management model, building infrastructure and capacity as we go.

Through data analysis both qualitative and quantitative, the Authority has identified solutions designed to meet the needs of real people and create lasting improvements in housing stability.

While the Authority's jurisdiction is limited to temporary housing and shelter, in order to dramatically reduce unsheltered homelessness our community must also act with urgency to build more permanent housing and to improve the behavioral health system.

**Goal 2: Restructure the service system to improve capacity, supports, and efficiency**

High-quality and longitudinally integrated services are an essential component of a system that can produce and sustain significant reductions in homelessness. Regardless of the kind of support necessary, it must be available on demand, person-centered, healing-based, and capable of facilitating connection to other systems.

- To optimize services and increase outreach capacity, we must reorganize and integrate the service environment
- To decrease inflow into homelessness, we will scale diversion interventions
- To improve individual outcomes, we will standardize and support person-centered, healing-based practices, including trauma-informed care, harm reduction, motivational interviewing, shared decision-making frameworks, and practices specific to people of color and other specific sub-populations
- To address the impacts of climate change and accelerating severe weather events, we will improve severe weather response system performance
- To support quality, effective services and operations, we will optimize all available funding.
- To stabilize the front-line workforce, we will value and compensate the work at a level sufficient to attract and retain skilled workers and keep people from having to access the services they are providing
- To ensure culturally responsive care, we will grow and diversify the portfolio of service providers, including expansion of BIPOC "By and For" equity programs

**Goal 3: Ensure the availability of accessible, accountable, and responsive services**

People experiencing homelessness consistently voiced the need to ensure that the system has more robust and reliable continuous quality improvement mechanisms that are fully rooted in both program outcomes and client experience. With the creation of the KCRHA there is, for the first time, a single agency that has the capacity to own all the information necessary to meet this need and own the accuracy and accessibility of essential information.

- To support accountability to people experiencing homelessness, we will refine and tailor the processes of the Ombuds Office
- To ensure that program participants can provide continuous feedback, we will develop a web- and mobile-based communication channel
- To ensure client access to and control of personal information, we will develop and support an integrated approach to data, similar to Electronic Health Records
- To rapidly identify and allocate resources, we will support transparent information on unit or other resource availability, including real-time availability of shelter beds

**Goal 4: Reduce the Impact of Racism on People Experiencing Homelessness**

The data is clear that people of color are dramatically overrepresented in the population experiencing homelessness, thus it remains essential to focus on directly addressing the source and perpetuation of structural racism within the system.

- To address the impacts of structural racism and the need for culturally relevant care, we will work to ensure racial equity in service provision
- To better understand how homelessness is experienced by Black and African Americans, Indigenous and Native Americans, and other racially marginalized communities, we will improve quantitative and qualitative data collection

**Goal 5: No Family with Children Sleeps Outside**

Families with children make up 17% of people experiencing homelessness in King County, and the number has been trending upward since mid-2021. Boosting the capacity of emergency housing availability, providing concerted improvements to care, and increasing coordination with other systems like schools and pediatric health services will help rapidly move families from shelters into permanent housing and prevent families from falling into homelessness.

- We will expand evidence-based program interventions that end family homelessness, including targeted cash interventions
- To improve early warning systems, prevention, and wrap-around services, we will support partnerships with healthcare and school systems
- To ensure families experiencing homelessness have rapid pathways to housing, we will improve coordination between homeless service providers and community supports

**Goal 6: Every Youth and Young Adult (YYA) Has a Home**

Youth homelessness is pervasive but often hidden because it may involve couch surfing or other forms of homelessness that are not as visible. It's essential to recognize that YYA have distinct needs that are substantially different from those of their adult counterparts. Many young people have been impacted by complex and often family-based trauma, thus trauma-informed service provision must be the bare minimum. Services for YYA should be oriented toward creating healing environments that will promote resiliency and assist young people in navigating their next steps successfully.

- To systematize cross-system alignment and strategy, we will develop a Youth and Young Adult coordinating body, supported by KCRHA
- With that coordinating body, we will expand housing and programmatic interventions specifically developed for Youth and Young Adults, informed by evidence-based practices, and tied to identified housing and service gaps

**Goal 7: The Region Acts as One to Address Homelessness**

Together, we are implementing a fundamentally different way of working—centering the expertise of people who have lived through homelessness and housing instability, using principles of equity and justice, unifying and coordinating actions across our region in order to achieve better outcomes.

- To consolidate and streamline funding for homelessness services, using a focused collective impact strategy, we will partner with all 39 cities in King County
- To facilitate pathways to temporary and permanent housing connections, we will continue to improve Coordinated Entry
- To respond to the unique characteristics of our communities, we will develop coordinated Sub-Regional Implementation Plans for each of our seven sub-regions

### **Our Shared Success**

King County is a diverse community in every sense, and the lived experience of someone in Auburn is very different from someone in Bellevue. Every community has varying demographics, needs, and assets when it comes to the homelessness crisis.

For the Authority to truly be successful in actualizing the promise embedded in its architecture, KCRHA must continue to unify the region so that our work truly represents the will and financial investment of all 39 cities and King County, effectively coordinated for maximum collective impact, focused on ending homelessness.

As we work together on achieving these goals, we are driving towards a hopeful, inclusive future where every person has a safe and stable place to live.

There is much to do. Let's get started.