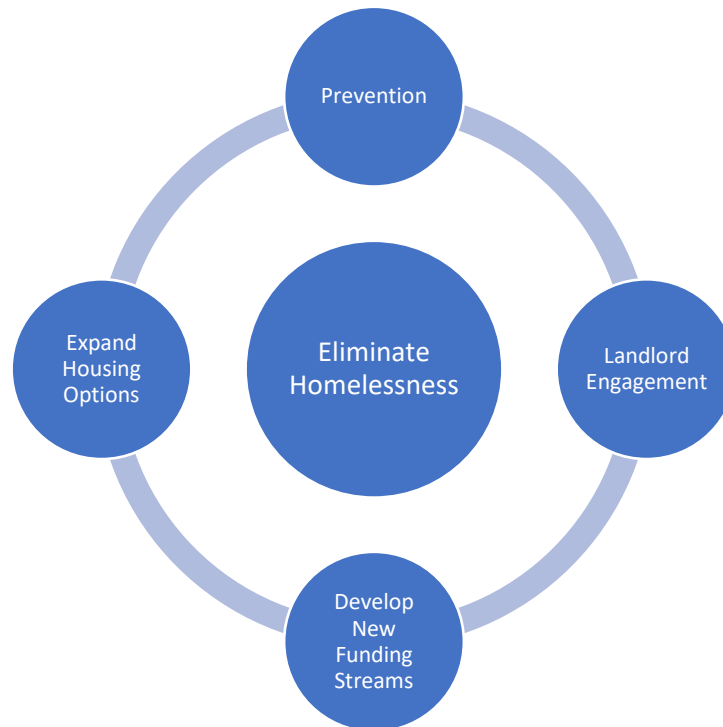


Allentown Homeless Commission

Draft Strategic Plan – 2021



City of Allentown
Commission on Homelessness
March, 2021

Draft Strategy – 2021

Strategy #1 – Prevent Homelessness through Rental Assistance

Most people experiencing homelessness do so because of a short-term crisis, such as a medical emergency, a lost job or a family separation. Helping families weather this short-term crisis is the most cost effective way to reduce homelessness, while also having the best outcomes for families and children.

1. **Expand Rental Assistance and Housing Vouchers** - Work with existing Providers to help pay past due rent & utilities for people experiencing short-term housing crisis to help families and individuals remain in their current housing.
 - a. In 2021, coordinate with Lehigh County to best utilize the \$11.5M in new federal funding for rental assistance.
2. **Provide Flexible Assistance Funds** – Federal rental assistance funds often have restrictions that limit the number of families and individuals who can be helped. The Commission sees the need to expand the availability of flexible assistance funds to help families in need of short-term housing or utility support who may not qualify for other grant programs.
 - a. Included in this effort would be additional support for the **Allentown School District's Rooster Relief Fund** which is administered by staff and volunteers in the Allentown School District and provides flexible rental assistance to needy families in the City.

Strategy #2 – Landlord Engagement Initiative

Homeless renters face many barriers to obtaining housing, including bad credit, stigma and unaffordable or inadequate housing stock. The vision of the Landlord Engagement Plan is to develop relationships with willing landlords who would be willing to work with individuals and organizations to safely house individuals who are homeless or facing imminent homelessness.

1. **Housing Navigators** - This promising strategy utilizes Housing Navigators to recruit landlords who will rent to individuals and families that have experienced homelessness. Landlords are offered incentives, such as the payment of first and last month's rent and security deposits, or a certain dollar amount each month.
2. **Landlord-Tenant Mediation services** are offered, and a Risk Mitigation Fund is established to cover repairs or other issues that might arise.
3. **Data Base of Available Units** - This strategy calls for the building of a data base of available units that could be accessed by homeless services providers to assist individuals and families in a housing search. A software program like that offered by Padmission would enable providers to centralize landlord relationships, expand housing opportunities, track performance and reduce housing search times.

Strategy #3 – Expand Housing Options

One of the root causes of homelessness is the lack of affordable housing in Allentown. Expanding affordable housing can take several forms, based on the circumstances of the person facing or experiencing homelessness. Included in our strategy are efforts to expand the following housing options:

1. **The Rapid Rehousing** program is a primary solution for ending homelessness that has been demonstrated to be effective in getting people experiencing homelessness into permanent housing and keeping them there. **Rapid Rehousing** provides **short-term rental assistance and supportive services** designed to help people obtain housing quickly and address the issues that caused them to become homeless.
 - a. **Low-Barrier of Entry** – Rapid Rehousing takes a Housing-First approach, which assumes that people need stable housing before they can confront other challenges they may be facing. As such, housing is offered without preconditions, such as employment, income, absence of criminal record or sobriety and the services are tailored for the needs of the person.
 - b. **Better Outcomes** - Research demonstrates that those who receive Rapid Rehousing assistance are **homeless for shorter periods of time** than those assisted with shelter or transitional housing.
 - c. **Less Expensive** - Rapid Rehousing is also less expensive than shelters or transitional housing and has better outcomes for children in school.
2. **Permanent Supportive Housing** is an intervention that combines affordable housing assistance with voluntary support services to address the needs of chronically homeless adults who typically suffer from long-term disabilities. The services are designed to build independent living skills and connect people with community-based health care, treatment and employment services.
 - a. **Research shows** that investments in Permanent Supportive Housing have helped decrease the number of chronically homeless individuals by 20% nationally since 2007.
 - b. **Research has shown** that Permanent Supportive Housing **improves health outcomes and lowers public costs** associated with crisis services in shelters, hospitals, jails and prisons.
3. **Transitional Housing through a Tiny Home Village** – Many communities have developed a Tiny Home Village to provide transitional housing for people experiencing homelessness. These Tiny Home Villages provide affordable housing coupled with support services to address issues of employment, mental health, physical health and drug & alcohol issues. Successful Tiny Home Villages involve their residents in the daily management and security of the site, and build a sense of community among members.
4. **Additional Housing Options should be provided for various sub-groups of people experiencing homelessness, including:**
 - a. **Housing for Single Mothers with Children** – create housing opportunities for single mothers with children who are experiencing homelessness. National studies tell us that 46% of people living in emergency shelters are families, and our City currently faces a shortage of housing appropriate for homeless families.
 - b. **Support for Youth in the Foster Care System** - Research has shown that 40% of youth who transition out of the foster care system at the age of 18 experience homelessness within one year. Strategies that help youth and young adults learn essential life skills

and build permanent relationships are essential in helping youth in foster care successfully transition to adulthood.

- c. **LGBTQ Youth** – Up to 40% of youth who are homeless identify as LGBTQ. Housing and support services that specifically target LGBTQ youth is a proven strategy to help these young people transition into stable permanent housing.
- d. **Housing for people leaving hospitals or prison without an address** – There are individuals who are eligible to be released from a hospital or a prison who are not released because they do not have a permanent address. Providing housing for this group of people would not only help them move out of these institutions, but would also save taxpayers significant funds.

Strategy #4 – Develop Sustainable New Funding Streams

None of these initiatives will be able to be expanded without identifying new sources of funding that are sustainable year after year. Included in this are the following:

- 1. **Public Funding Options:** Work with City, County and State officials to explore opportunities to develop a new funding stream to provide affordable housing and support services for people experiencing homelessness.
- 2. **Public/Private Funding Opportunities:** Work with local philanthropists to discuss opportunities to utilize federal tax credit programs to leverage private dollars to fund programs and services to end homelessness in Allentown.

Strategy #5 – Improve Community-wide Coordination using Data and Evidence-based Solutions

- 1. **Work with the Regional Homeless Advisory Board (RHAB) and additional stakeholders to improve Coordination** – coordinate efforts with the RHAB and engage additional stakeholders to ensure buy-in on the strategy and implementation. Representatives should be recruited from the following stakeholders:
 - a. Government entities, including: Lehigh County Department of Human Services, including Departments of Mental Health and Drug & Alcohol; Lehigh County Corrections Department; Allentown Housing Authority; Veteran Affairs
 - b. Local Providers and Hospitals
 - c. Local Housing Developers & Contractors
 - d. Local Funders – Private and Public
 - e. People who have experienced homelessness
- 2. **Built for Zero** – Consider adopting the Built for Zero campaign to develop a by-name list of those currently experiencing homelessness and hold bi-weekly meetings with Providers to move these people into either Emergency Shelters, Transitional Housing, Rapid Rehousing, or Permanent Supportive Housing.