

Alaskans Experiencing Homelessness

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Priority issues:

1. High level coordination of housing and homeless services to create policy alignment across state agencies and in partnership with agencies and advocates on the local level to end homelessness in Alaska:

Background:

Advancement of housing and homeless policy in the short-term will require additional coordination with the recognition that housing/homeless data, resources, planning processes, and expertise in the sector are scattered amongst a wide-range of state departments and partner agencies that are often in silos and don't communicate effectively. The Alaska Coalition on Housing and Homelessness proposes a high-level director position or a more empowered Governor's Council on the Homeless to ensure that these conversations take place.

Who: Governor's Administration

What: Create a State Housing Director Position or empower the Alaska Council on the Homeless

When: Immediate

2. Coordinated Funding Program for Housing & Services:

Develop strategic and coordinated funding for housing and services for the homeless. For example:

- Put together demonstration project that includes clear funding options;
- Encourage both housing and services funders (AHFC, DHSS, DCEED, AMHTA, Rasmuson Foundation) to list other housing or services program that can be matched on Requests for Proposals.

For Housing:

Who: AHFC, Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, Department of Health & Social Services, Rasmuson Foundation, Alaska Continuum of Care (Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness, Alaska Coalition on Housing and Homelessness)

What: Coordinate available housing funding (HUD 811 program, Special Needs Housing Grant (SNHG), National Housing Trust Fund, and more.)

When: Immediate

For Services:

Who: Department of Health & Social Services, Department of Corrections, Office of Children's Services, Alaska Public Assistance, and more.

What: Funds to follow service needs as attached to individual person that needs it. Prioritize right agency.

When: Immediate

* Coordination of these opportunities can be overseen by either a State Housing Director or the Governor's Council on the Homeless.

3. More involvement in the housing/homelessness services sector is needed on the local level and in the Alaska State legislature. Two pieces of legislation will help in this regard.

- **Legislation that adds a Housing & Homelessness Element to the Comprehensive Plan of Municipal Governments (AS 29.40.030).**

Background:

Currently, there is no such requirement. Subsequently, throughout the state, the housing/homeless language used and approach to addressing housing and homelessness issues vary greatly from community to community. This can lead to confusion, non-participation, or an inability to acquire resources for housing and homelessness issues. (This legislation will be more palatable to the Alaska Municipal League and local governments if packaged with efforts to provide the necessary housing and homelessness data – see recommendation #4.)

Who: Legislator with housing and homeless advocates support.

What: Add Housing and Homelessness Element to Comprehensive Plan

When: This Session

- **Creation of an Alaska State Legislature Committee on Housing/Homelessness.**

Background:

Legislatures across the country address housing and homelessness concerns in formal committees. The Coalition encourages creating a similar committee in the Alaska House or Senate or by adding this subject matter to the responsibilities of an existing committee.

Who: Alaska State Legislature

What: Start a Committee

When: This Session

4. Housing and Homeless Data

Because there are no requirements in local communities Comprehensive Planning process, access to reliable housing and homeless data is often the first barrier to making policy decisions on these issues. Communities need access to the full spectrum of housing and homeless data. (From homeless shelter beds to homeownership)

Access to reliable housing data: In general, there is not a true sense of housing availability or understanding of the housing need in the state. Pockets of housing data exist (State Census, Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, Department of Labor, Department of Commerce and Economic Development, Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, Rasmuson Foundation, and data that a handful of communities have contracted out to create one-time needs assessment or their own data sets.) The Coalition proposes assembling a workgroup to create a statewide housing data resource that provides up-dated community level housing data that covers the full spectrum of housing (emergency shelter to fair market housing) and provides clarity for communities, planners, policymakers, media, researchers, investors, and other stakeholders.

Two models:

a. **State of California Community Development Department – *Building Blocks for Effective Housing Elements*** (<http://www.hcd.ca.gov/housing-policy-development/housing-element/>)

b. **Vermont Housing Data Website - <http://www.housingdata.org/profile/>**

Who: Partnership between Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, Department of Labor, Department of Community & Economic Development, Rasmuson Foundation, and Alaska & Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness (*utilize existing workgroup's work*)

What: Create a Housing Data Website for local communities that is reliable

When: By October 2016

Homeless Data & Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).

As of June 1, 2015, the two Alaska Continua of Care – the Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness and the Alaska Coalition on Housing and Homelessness have contracted with the Institute for Community Alliances to improve homeless data collection and housing inventory data for those experiencing homelessness throughout the state. Improvements still need to be made:

a. Outreach and greater community participation in the Annual Point-In-Time Homeless Count.

b. More reliable Point-In-Time homeless count and housing inventory chart information broken down to community level.

c. Coordinated Entry – Both Continua of Care need to implement a coordinated entry system that involves homeless data and homeless management information systems data sharing and coordination of local housing resources to ensure persons experiencing homelessness are housed appropriately and in a timely manner.

Who: Government Agencies (Governor’s Council on the Homeless, Department of Health & Social Services, Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, etc.)

What: State agencies should require and use point-in-time and data in policymaking, funding decisions. State agencies should be involved in the development of a coordinated entry planning process.

When: Immediate

5. Access to Supplemental Security Income/Social Security Disability Insurance (SSI/SSDI):

A key component of ending or avoiding a period of homelessness is to ensure individual income and access to mainstream benefits that individuals at risk for homelessness are eligible. Alaska consistently rates last in the nation for Social Security Disability appeals (Alaska – 21 percent, National Average – 43 percent in 2015). Furthermore, despite efforts of Alaska Legal Services Corporation, the Disability Law Center, and Alaska Coalition on Housing & Homelessness to train providers across the state in the SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery (SOAR) process, a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration best practice to approve accuracy and processing time, Coalition members consistently report high rates of application denials by Alaska Disability Determination Services. The Coalition encourages the Administration to look into this matter and to work with our federal delegation to ensure Alaskans are receiving the benefits they deserve.

Who: Governor

What: Direct disability determination services to collaborate with State Homeless Coalitions and providers to improve Alaskans access to benefits for which they are eligible. Including:

- Access to necessary medical records and evaluations; and
- Execute a memorandum of understanding between Disability Determination Services and Social Security Administration in regards to how the SOAR process will operate and be successful in Alaska.

SOAR (SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery) links:

- National: <http://soarworks.prainc.com/>

When: Immediate

6. Medicaid Expansion: Support Optional Medicaid Benefits That Prevent Homelessness and Higher Cost Interventions

Who: Department of Health & Social Services – Medicaid Expansion

What:

- Support additional 1915(i) and other waiver options and tenancy support services resources with Medicaid Expansion.
- Eliminate the provision that you must be a Department of Behavioral Health grantee to bill Medicaid. (This hurts recipients of Alaska Housing Finance Corporation Special Needs Housing Grant funds and permanent supportive housing programs)

When: Ongoing

7. Making the Shift to Permanent Supportive Housing: Continuum of Care Housing Inventory

Current chart data and maps indicate that housing resources for the homeless in Alaskan communities is limited – and in many communities does not exist. In many balance of state communities the only resources are domestic violence shelters or seasonal emergency shelter beds. As a whole the statewide system is severely lacking in permanent supportive housing opportunities (scattered site and congregate setting).

Essentially the state is operating a limited shelter system for the homeless when best practice noted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), US Department of Housing and Urban Development, and US Interagency Council on the Homeless indicate that permanent supportive housing is the key to ending homelessness in communities.

Who: Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, Department of Health & Social Services, Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, Alaska Continuum of Care (Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness, Alaska Coalition on Housing and Homelessness)

What: Utilize the Technical Assistance Collaborative Permanent Supportive Housing Report: The Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority and Department of Behavioral Health have utilized the Technical Assistance Collaborative to analyze the state system to increase and maximize the supply of affordable housing and to create more Permanent Supportive Housing units.

When: Immediate