

Homelessness in Austin/Travis County: Current Needs and Gaps Report



DRAFT

Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO)

September 1, 2017



About ECHO

The Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO) is a non-profit that plans, develops, prioritizes and implements systemic, community-wide strategies to end homelessness in Austin and Travis County, Texas. Together with its community partners, ECHO uses strategic, data-driven decision-making and innovative, bold thinking to transform the system to end homelessness. ECHO engages over 100 stakeholders every month through taskforces and working groups.

ECHO is recognized by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as the Continuum of Care (CoC) lead agency, the local leader in coordinating the system of housing and services for persons experiencing homelessness. ECHO is also designated as the lead agency for the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), a system-wide database that tracks the needs of households experiencing homelessness, services received across the community and their outcomes.

Recommended Citation

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following contributors who generously provided data, information and time toward the completion of this document:

- Persons with lived experiences of homelessness,
- Services providers,
- Elected officials,
- Business leaders
- City of Austin and Travis County staff, and
- The many other public- and private-sector stakeholders who participated in the public input process, including input sessions, meetings and interviews.

About this Report

ECHO created this report on data, trends, and actions to address the needs of persons experiencing homelessness to inform ongoing efforts to prevent and end homelessness in our community.

This visual report describes (1) the characteristics of the homeless population in Austin and Travis County, (2) their current needs, (3) our current community public investments to address homelessness, and (4) gaps in services.

We hope this information is helpful in efforts to improve programs, plan community investments, and shape local policies. We encourage others to borrow and cite this material.

Data Sources

The primary data and information sources for this document include the following:

- Focus groups and interviews with 20 persons with lived experiences of homelessness.
- Surveys of over 5,836 households experiencing homelessness conducted since October 2014 per Coordinated Assessment Surveys assessing their needs.
- Historical data on the number of persons experiencing homelessness on a given day since 2007 per the annual Point in Time Count.
- Data on the number of shelter beds provided by different agencies as reported to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development as a part of the Housing Inventory Count.
- Population data from the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey.
- Literature review of research and effective practices from other communities around the country.
- Consultation with national industry experts.
- Analysis of existing local homeless programs including investments and system performance measures.

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Data Trends

The Many Factors Contributing to Homelessness

Homelessness is often caused by the breakdown and failure of many inter-related systems and safety nets.

Economic/ Environmental Factors

- Stagnant Wages
- Limited job skills
- Limited affordable housing
- Increased cost of living (e.g. medical, transportation, rents)
- Displacement after natural disasters

Lack of Family or Support Networks

- Mental health issues
- Family conflict
- Lack of support networks
- Domestic violence or abuse
- Substance use
- Rejection of youth by parent or guardian due to sexual orientation, gender identity or pregnancy

Inadequate Supportive Services

- Insufficient mental health services and basic healthcare
- Exit from foster care with no housing or income support
- Difficulty navigating resources and services
- Lack of formal education and support to help youth stay in school

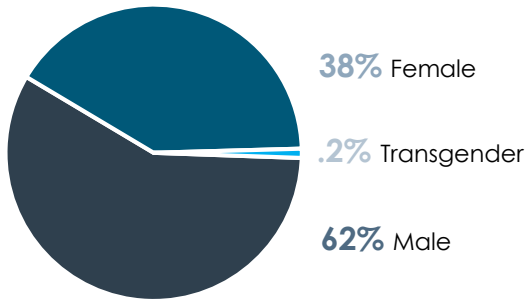
Criminal Justice Involvement

- Limited access to jobs and housing after incarceration
- Systemic racial discrimination for African Americans who are incarcerated at higher rates and receive longer sentences than persons of other races
- Criminalization of substance use disorders
- Accumulation of court costs (with no address, courts bills are not received, leading to increased fees)

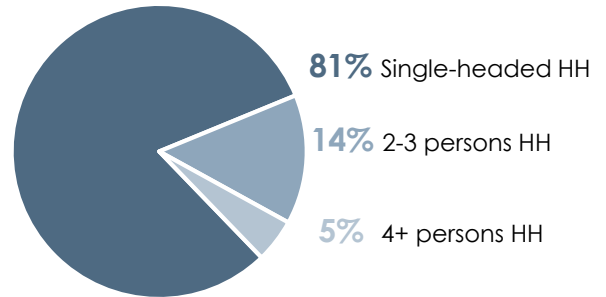
• Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO). October 2016. Focus Groups with Persons with Lived Experiences of homelessness and service providers.

Persons Experiencing Homelessness Represent a Diverse Population

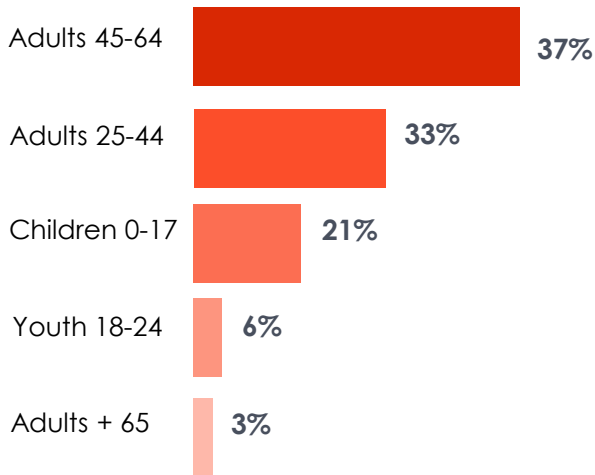
Gender



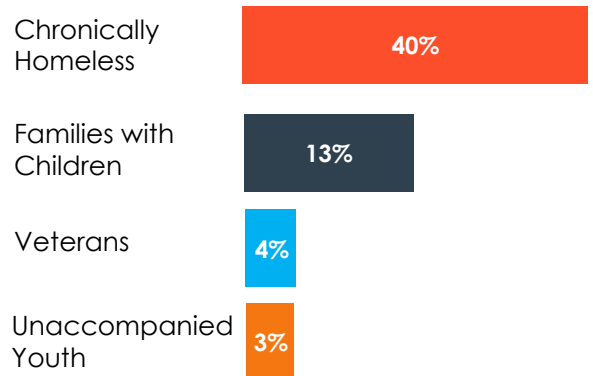
Household (HH) Size



Age



Subpopulations



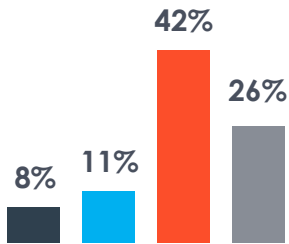
- Categories not mutually exclusive.
- Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO). Summary Report of Coordinated Assessment Surveys of 5,836 Households." Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), 5 Dec. 2016.

African Americans Face Large Disparities Across Systems

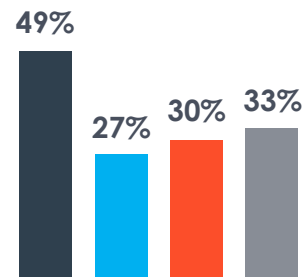
African Americans are incarcerated and experience poverty at significantly higher rates compared to their makeup in the general Travis County population and are disproportionately represented in the homeless population. They also receive longer sentences in jail for the same offenses with comparable criminal histories than their white counterparts.

County Population
 Below Poverty Level
 Homeless Population
 Jail

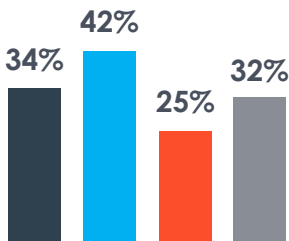
Black/African American



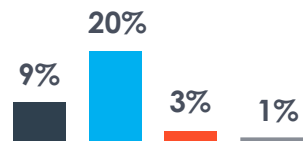
Non-Hispanic White



Hispanic or Latino



Other



- Ayres, Brittain, et al. "Travis County Snapshot from the American Community Survey." Travis County Health & Human Services, Dec. 2016, www.traviscountytx.gov/health-human-services/research-planning/snapshot. Accessed Feb. 2017.
- US Census Bureau. "Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months." 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, S1701.
- Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO). Summary Report of Coordinated Assessment Surveys of 5,836 Households. 5 Dec. 2016. Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), Austin.
- Vera Institute of Justice. "Incarceration Trends: Disparate Impacts: Race." *Vera Institute of Justice*. N.p., 15 Dec. 2015. Web. 23 Feb. 2017.
- Harris, Chris. (2017). Travis County Jail in 2015: Data Points to racism and longer confinement of African Americans. Retrieved from Grassroots Leadership website: <https://grassrootsleadership.org/sites/default/files/reports/racist-jailing-report.pdf>

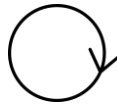
Persons Experiencing Homelessness Face Many Challenges

Persons experiencing homelessness often have many inter-related health, social and economic challenges that make it difficult to end homelessness on their own.



67%

Can't access employment/do not have earned income



62%

Report having no planned activities that bring them happiness or fulfillment



61%

Access healthcare through an emergency room or do not access any healthcare



56%

Have experienced trauma or abuse in their life



44%

Report currently experiencing mental health issues



42%

Of the homeless population are African American, despite the fact that African Americans only make up 8% of Travis County's population



36%

Report having legal stuff going on that may result in them being locked up or having to pay fines



29%

Report having experienced domestic violence in their lifetime



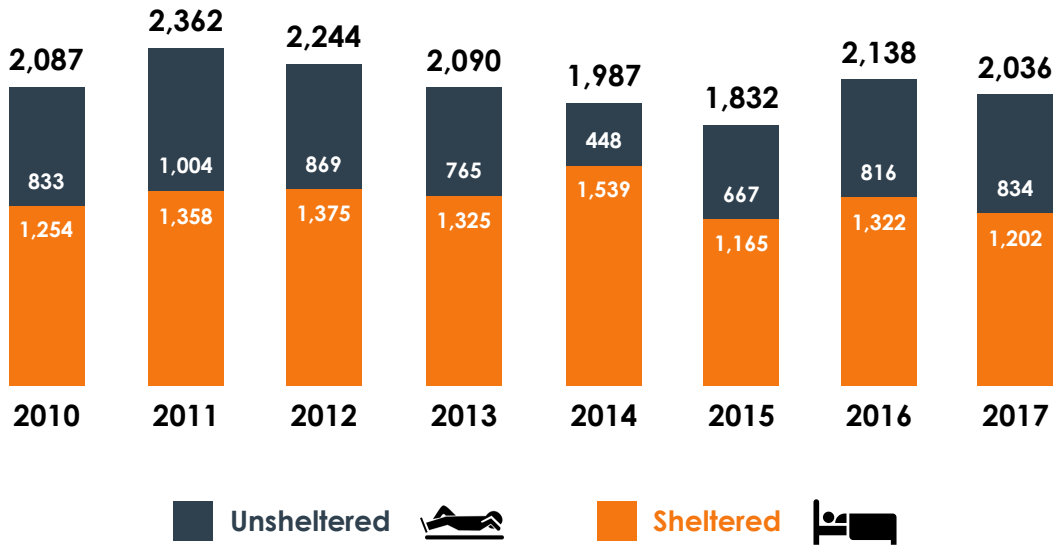
17%

Report consuming drugs and/or alcohol almost everyday or everyday for the past month

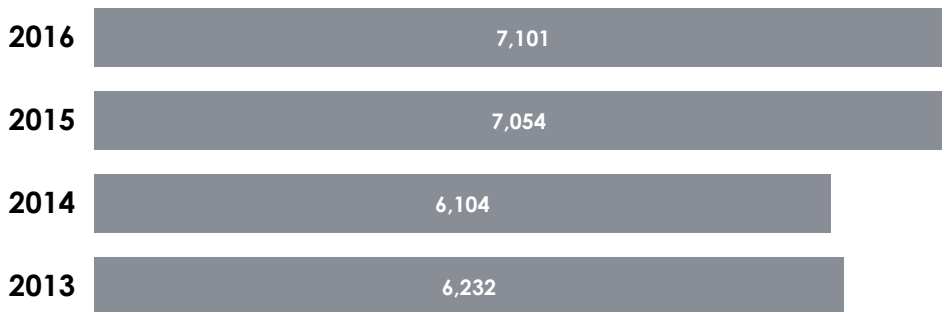
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- Categories not mutually exclusive.
 - Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO). "Summary Report of Coordinated Assessment Surveys of 5,836 Households." Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), 5 Dec. 2016.

Literally Homeless Population in Austin/Travis County

Persons counted experiencing homelessness in a given day



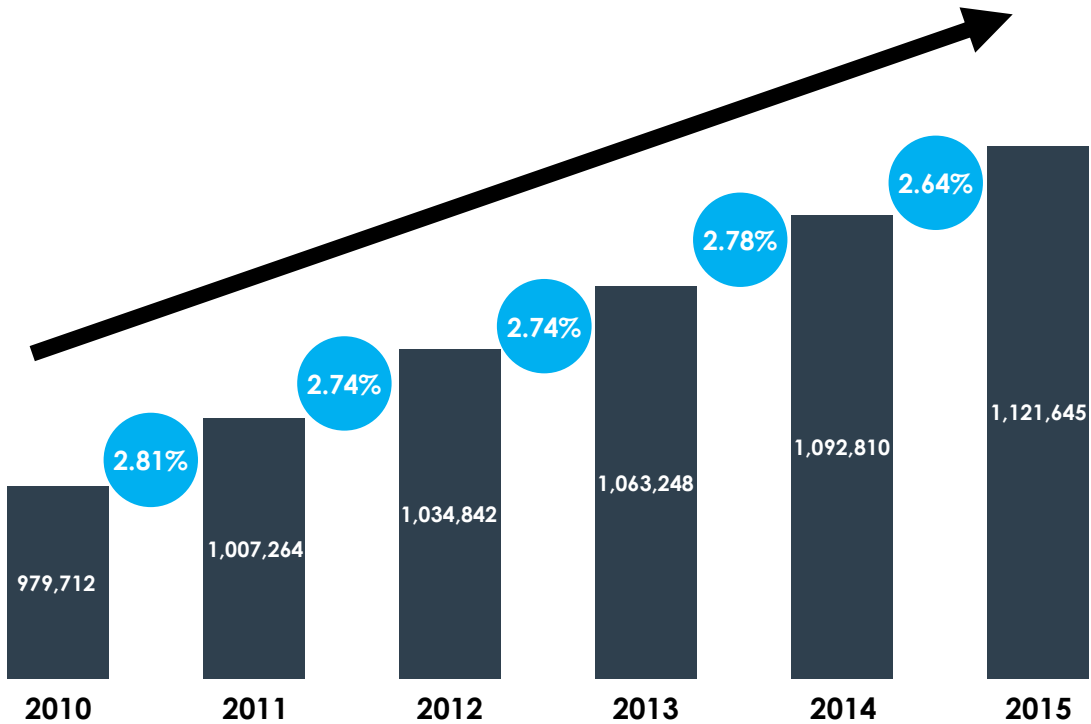
Persons known to have experienced homelessness in a given year



- The "sheltered homeless" in a given day includes those in transitional housing per PIT guidelines.
- The number of "newly homeless" or persons who become homeless for the first time is based on the System Performance Measure # 5, a measure from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.
- Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO). "Point in Time Count." Jan. 2010 - 2017.
- Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO). "Newly Homeless System Users." Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), 2017.

Regional Factors Affecting the Homeless Population

Growth in Travis County has averaged 2.74% over the past 5 years, with an average growth of 28K people/year, creating more competition for the limited supply of affordable rental housing units.



Regional Growth and Affordability Crisis

Austin and Travis County are experiencing rapid population growth, leading to rising housing costs and an unprecedented demand for rental units, including Austin's limited affordable housing. This creates more housing competition for those experiencing homelessness who may already have housing barriers, such as a criminal record, a history of substance use, un- or under-employment, poor credit history, and low or no income.

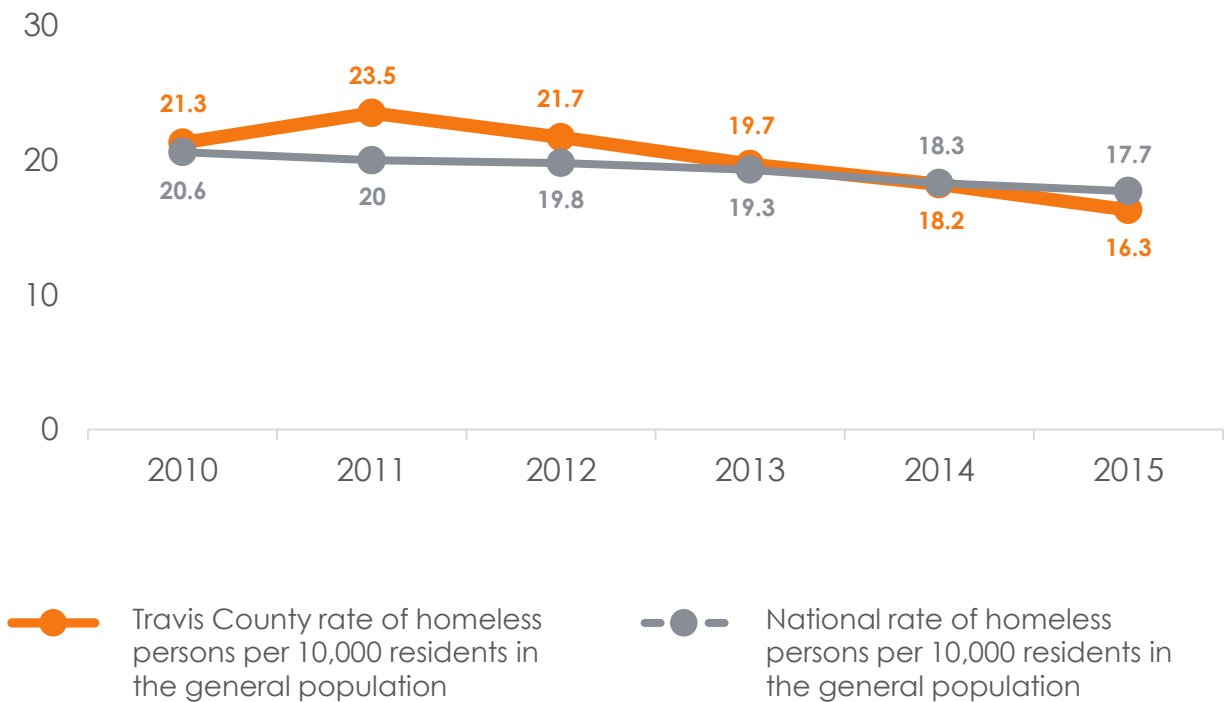
Stagnant Job Wages for Low Income Workers

Despite Austin's rising housing costs, wages for low-income workers remain stagnant, making it more likely that low-income households with the weakest safety nets who are already struggling to balance life's demands will fall into homelessness. For many, all it takes is an unforeseen financial crisis—a medical emergency or a car accident—coupled with a weak social support system, to push them over the edge from housing into homelessness.

• U.S. Census Bureau. "Demographic and Housing Estimates." 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, DP05.

The Rate of Homelessness Has Been Decreasing

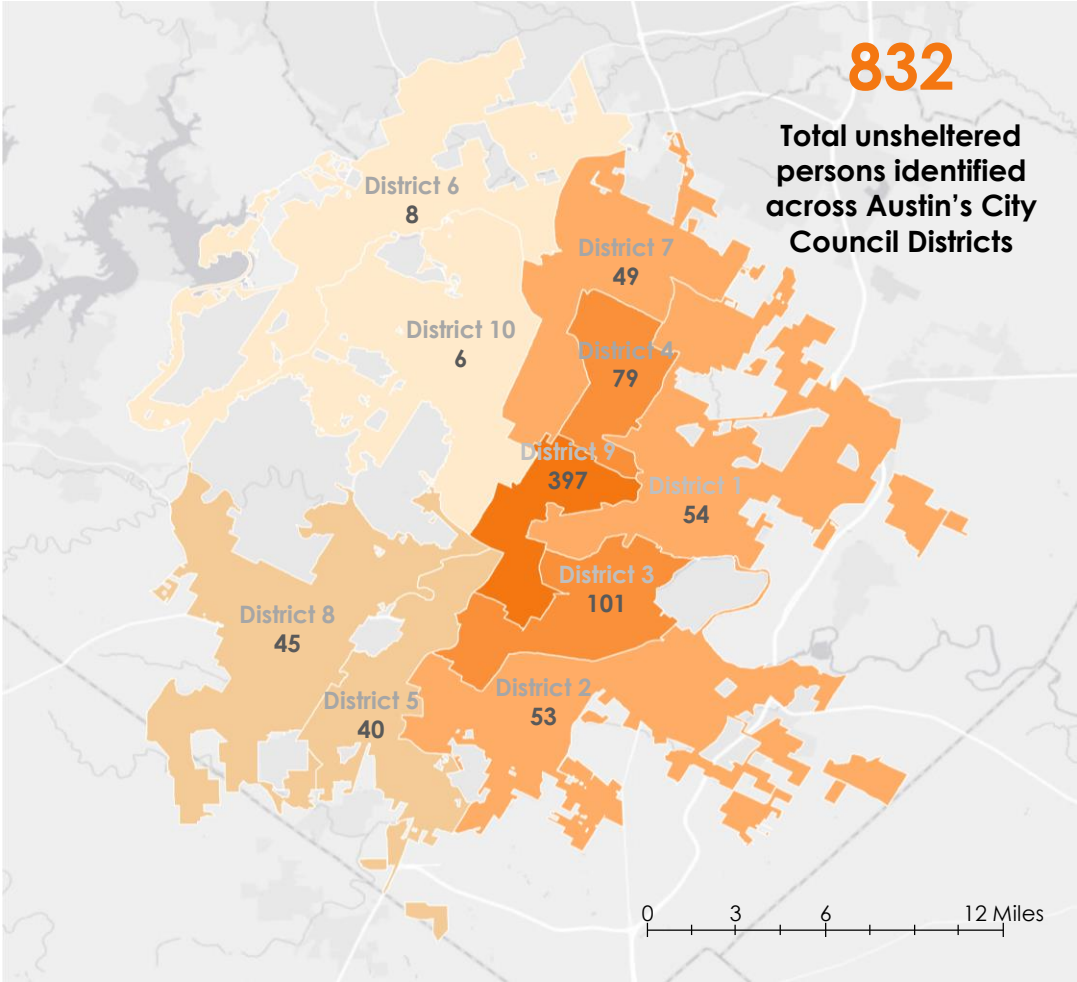
Even though the homeless population has remained relatively constant in absolute numbers, when controlling for population growth, over the past five years, one sees reduction in the rate of homelessness in Travis County



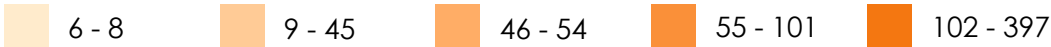
- Homeless Persons: HUD Continuum of Care Point-in-Time Homeless Population Count
- Population: Census Bureau-American Community Survey, DP05 5-year data-Population
- TX Pop: Census Bureau-American Community Survey, B01003 5-year estimates.
- National Alliance to End Homelessness. State of Homelessness in America. p. 11.
- HUD Exchange. "Homeless Populations and Subpopulations Reports."

Unsheltered Homelessness by City Council District

On January 28, 2017, we counted 832 unsheltered individuals sleeping in places not meant for human habitation, such as cars, in the streets, or parks.



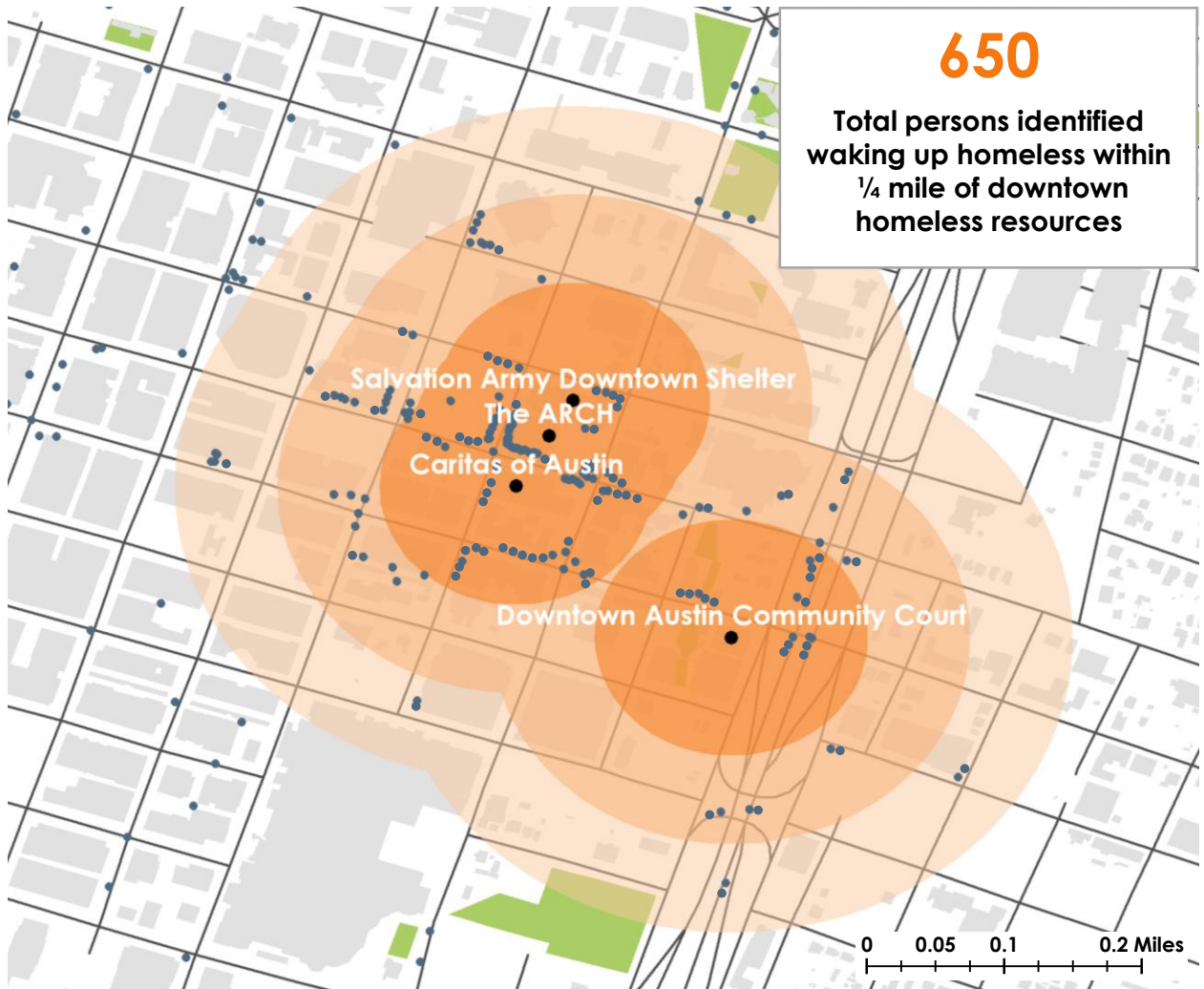
Total Unsheltered Persons



- Volunteers found 832 unsheltered persons across Austin City Council Districts, which means 826 fall within Travis County's Precincts. The City of Austin extends into Williamson County where PIT Count volunteers found 8 people. Volunteers found 2 outside the city limits of Austin, one inside Manor and one in unincorporated areas, both of which were in Travis County precinct 1.
- Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO). "Point in Time Count (Preliminary Data)." Jan. 2017.

Homelessness is Most Visibly Concentrated Downtown

On January 28, 2017, 650 persons woke up homeless within ¼ mile of downtown homeless resources: 472 stayed in shelters & 178 stayed in the streets



- Homeless Services Center
- Unsheltered persons, sleeping in places not meant for human habitation
- 1 Block Radius (110 unsheltered persons)
- 2 Block Radius (162 unsheltered persons)
- ¼ Mile Radius (178 unsheltered persons)

• Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO). "Point in Time Count." Jan. 2017.

Places where People Experiencing Homelessness Are Sleeping or Resting

Over the course of time people experience homelessness, the majority are unsheltered, sleeping in places not meant for human habitation, such as cars, in the streets, or parks.



28% Shelter

Places NOT meant for Human Habitation

Unsheltered
72%



28% Street, sidewalk, or doorway



16% Car, van, or RV



16% Beach, riverbed, or park



10% Other (e.g. bridges, abandoned buildings)



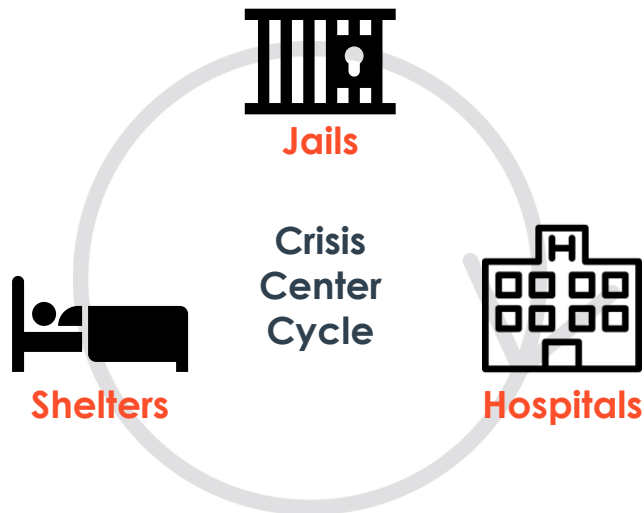
2% Bus or subway

100%

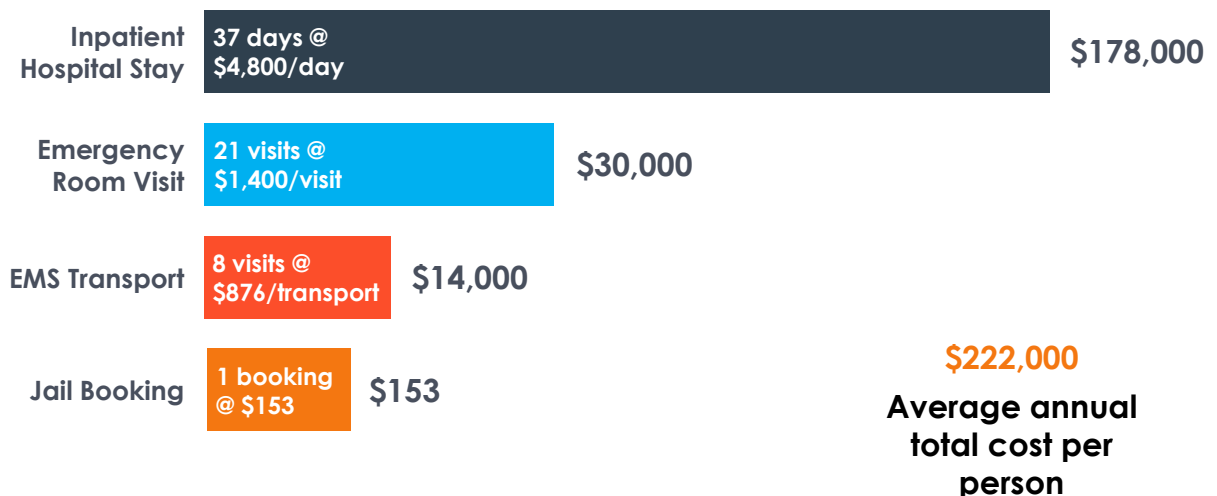
- The percentages for the people staying in "shelter" does not include those staying in transitional housing.
- Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO). "Summary Report of Coordinated Assessment Surveys of 5,836 Households." Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), 5 Dec. 2016.

The Costly Cycle of Homelessness for Many

A subset of the homeless population experiences complex health and social issues, frequently cycling between shelters, hospitals, and jails, and disproportionately impacting public spending.



Average Annual Costs for Top 250 High-Cost Homeless Users of Public Crisis Services in Travis County

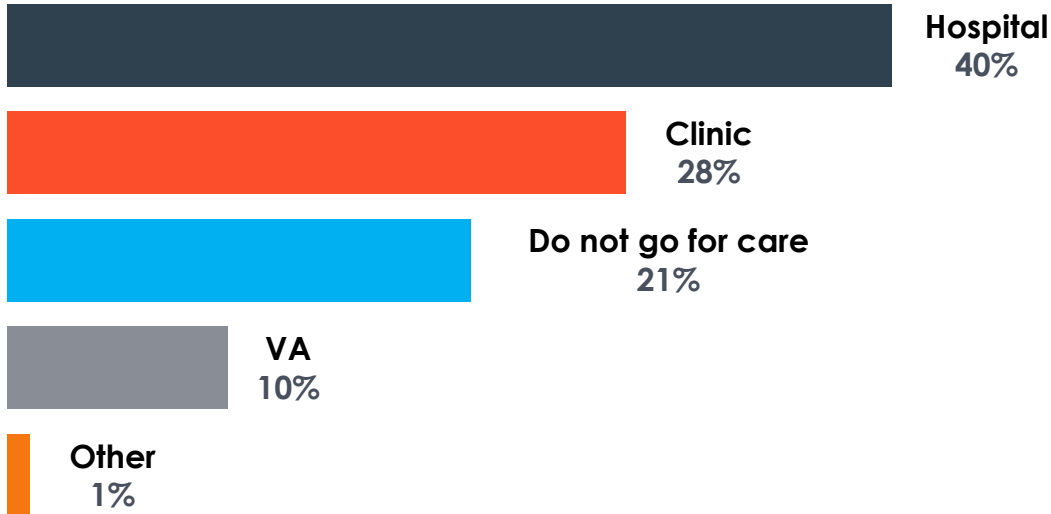


• Corporation for Supportive Housing. *Social Innovation Fund Pay for Success Feasibility Report: ECHO Austin Travis County*. Rep. N.p., Apr. 2016. Web. Mar. 2017.

Persons Experiencing Homelessness Healthcare Access

A large majority of persons experiencing homelessness use hospitals or do not go for care at all when they are not feeling well

Places the Homeless Report Going to When they're not Feeling Well



How the Homeless Use Healthcare Services



64%

Report having been to the **emergency room** in the past 6 months



40%

Report having been taken to the hospital in an **ambulance** in the past 6 months



34%

Report having been **hospitalized** in the past 6 months

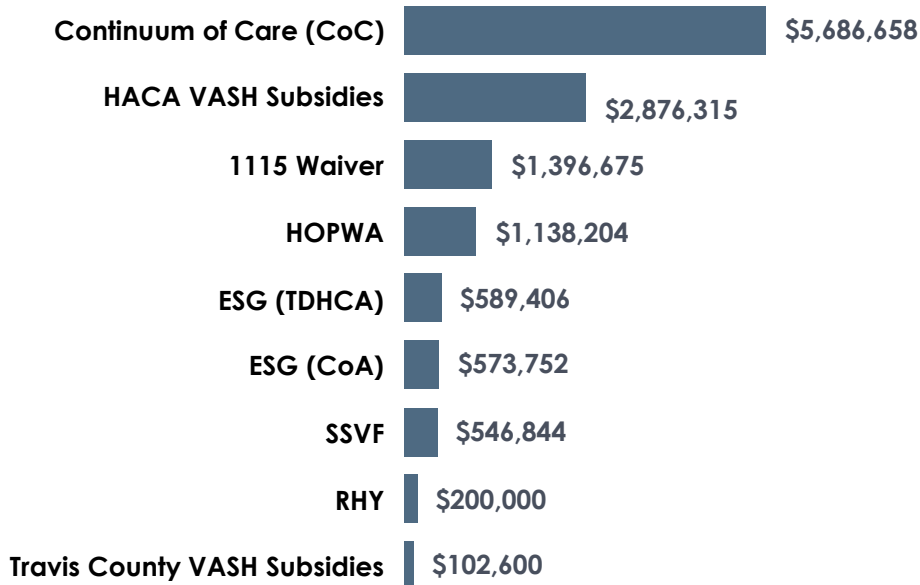
- Categories not mutually exclusive.
- Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO). Coordinated Assessment Surveys of 5,836 Households. 5 Dec. 2016. Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), Austin.

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Current Assets & Gaps

Current Yearly Federal, State, and Local Homelessness Funds

\$14,371,201 Federal



\$2,812,173 State



\$12,972,367 Local

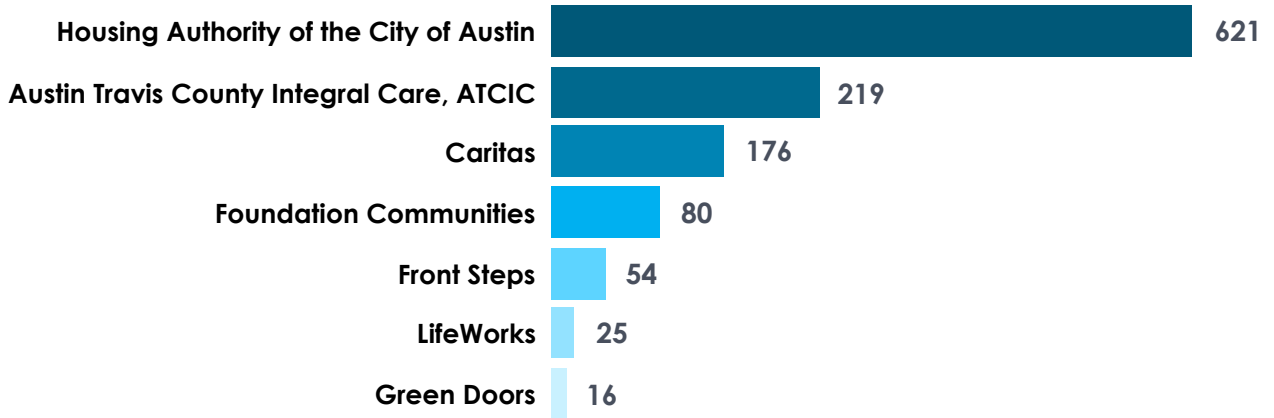


\$30,155,741
Total Yearly Funds

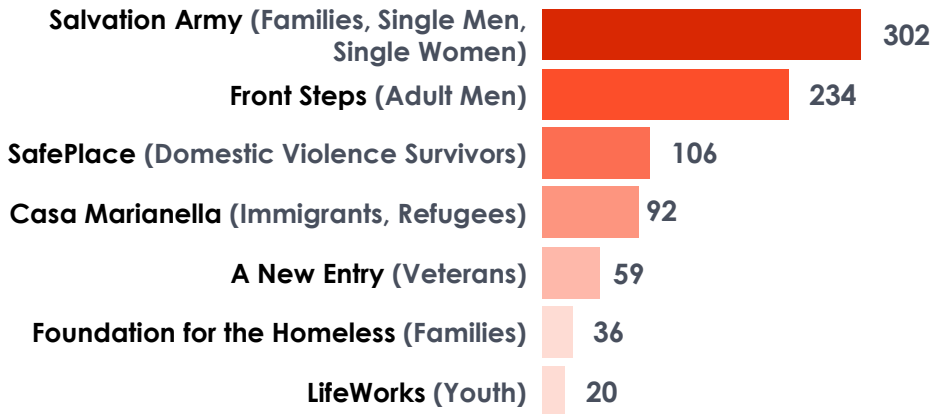
- HUD Exchange. FY 2016 Continuum of Care Competition Homeless Assistance Award Report."
- City of Austin. Budget Analysis.
- TDHCA. 2016 Emergency Solutions Grants ("ESG") Awards.
- Veterans Affairs. FY 2016 Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Awards List.
- Family & Youth Services Bureau. "2016 Basic Center Program Grant Awards."
- Travis County Health and Human Services & Veterans Service Research & Planning Division. Housing Continuum FY 2016 Community Impact Report.

2017 Community Assets for Persons Experiencing Homelessness

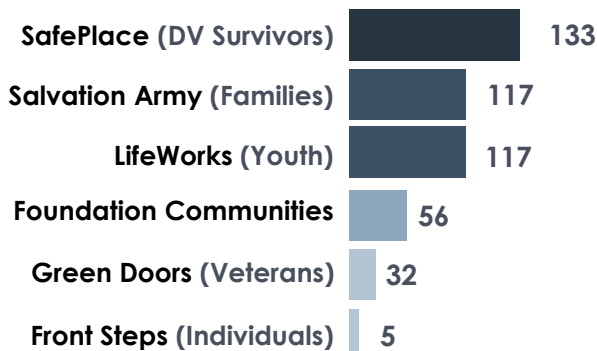
1,191 Permanent Supportive Housing Beds



849 Emergency Shelter Beds



460 Transitional Housing Beds



12 Recuperative Care beds

0 Hospice beds

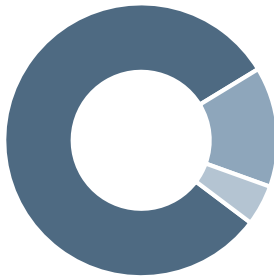
• Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO). 2017 Housing Inventory Count (HIC).

2,600 Households are currently Experiencing Homelessness

Our community keeps a by-name list of people who are assessed as experiencing homelessness and are in need of housing and other support services. Our current list identifies 2,600 households (HHs) in need of support.

Affordable and Low Barrier Housing Units Needed

Since the majority of the persons who experience homelessness are single-person households, the greatest housing need is for studios or one bedroom units.



2,106 Studios or 1 Bedroom (BR) Units needed for single-headed HHs who make up 81% of the homeless population

364 1-2 BR Units for 2-3 persons HH needed

130 3+ BR Units for 4+ persons HH

Types of Services Needed According to Vulnerability Level

The types of services required by persons experiencing homelessness varies according to their vulnerability.



70% Households need Rapid Re-Housing services, including housing location, limited rental assistance, + some supportive services

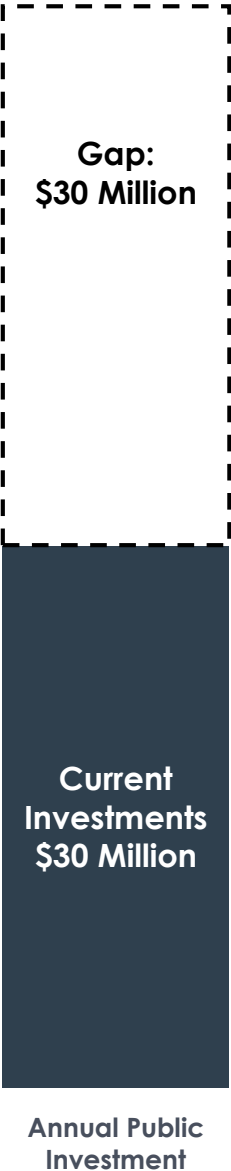
30% Households need Permanent Supportive Housing services, including housing location, ongoing rental subsidies, + supportive services

>1% Households need Minimal Housing Assistance and minimal support

- Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO). Estimated Needs based on current Coordinated Assessment By-Name list with persons active within the last year. August 2017.

Estimated Gap in Yearly Investments to End Homelessness in Austin/Travis County

Despite our current investments, we project a gap of \$30 million on average of additional yearly investments needed to create a response system at an appropriate scale for current and projected needs over time. Refer to Austin's Action Plan on Ending Homelessness for more details on the investments gap.



• Current investments include local, state and federal investments.

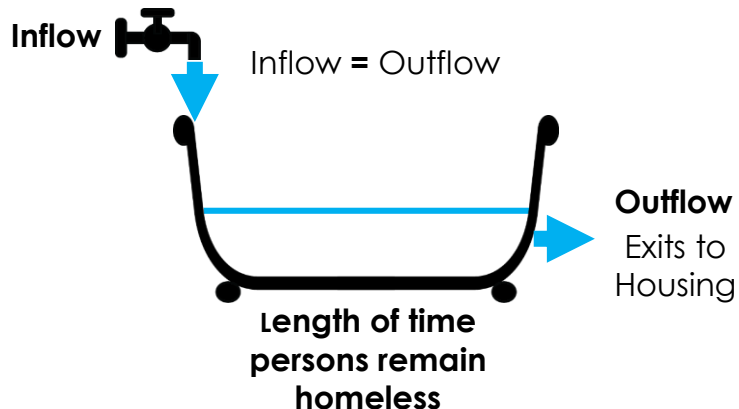
Ending Homelessness: Reaching Functional Zero

Ending homelessness does not mean individuals and families will never again experience homelessness. Instead, it means that we as a community will have a systematic response that can address immediate needs, quickly connect people to housing and provide services to ensure long-term stability.

Current System



Desired System



Target

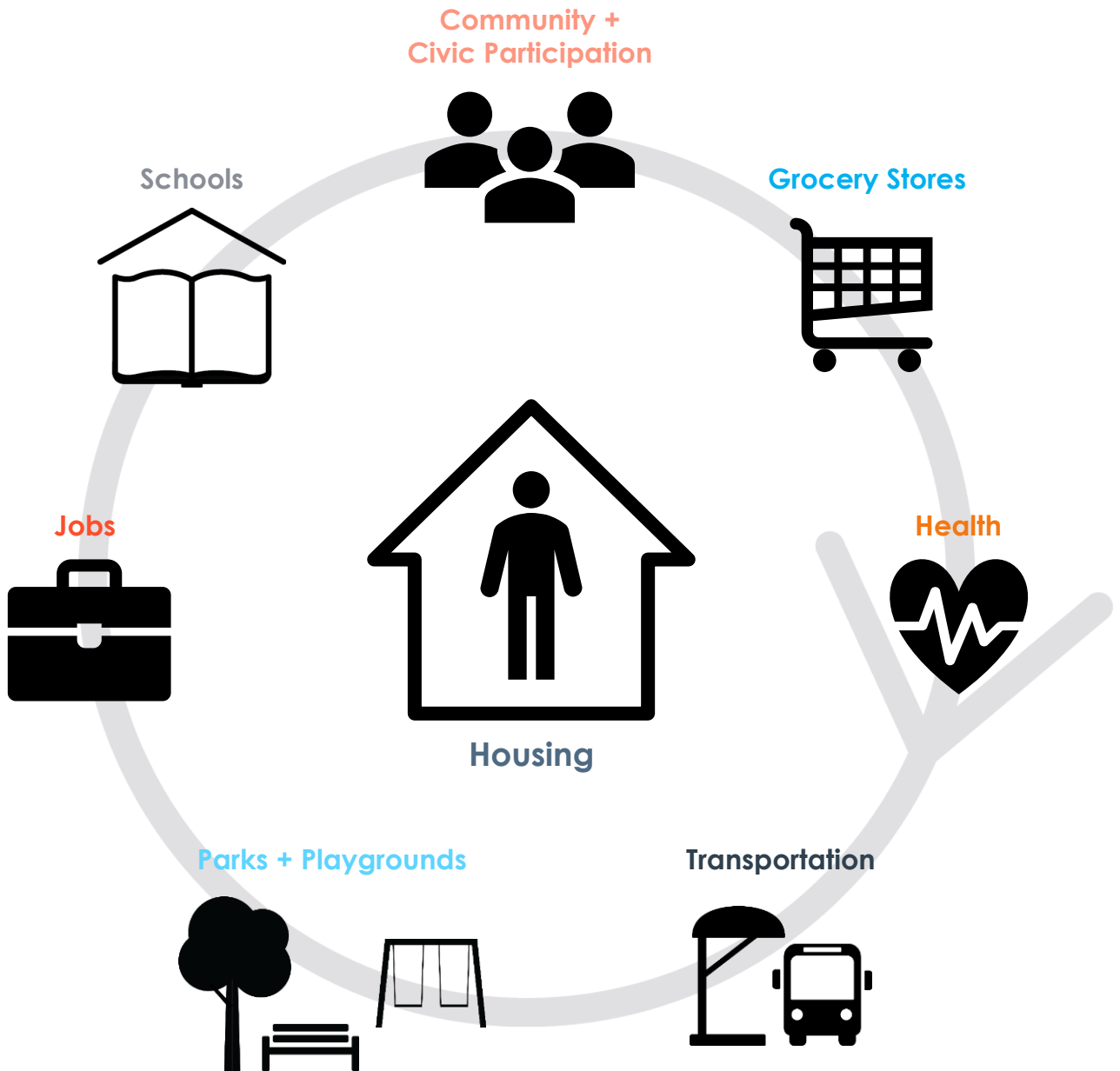
- Reduce inflow of newly homeless through targeted prevention
- Reduce inflow of persons returning to Homelessness
- Reduced length of time each person remains homeless
- Increased exits to housing so outflows equals inflow

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Vision + Strategies

Our Vision for Everyone

Our vision is that persons who experience homelessness quickly move into stable and permanent housing, are connected to positive communities, and also have access to all the services and opportunities they need to live fulfilling lives.



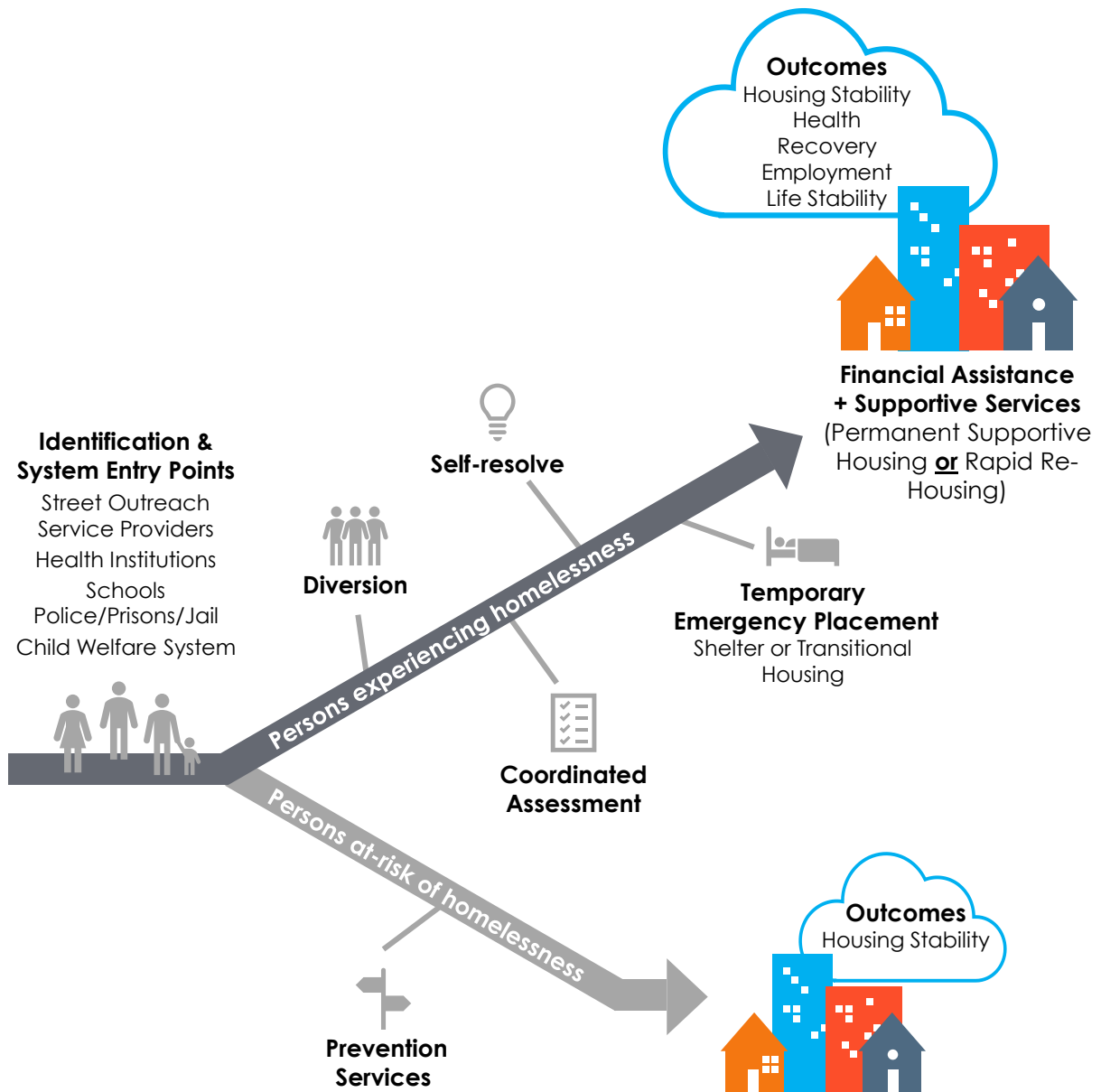
System Components to Ending Homelessness in Austin/Travis County

Ending homelessness does not mean individuals and families will never again experience homelessness. Instead, it means that we as a community will have a systematic response that can address immediate needs, quickly connect people to housing and provide services to ensure long-term stability. Our community has developed five elements that *together* will work to end homelessness through a system's approach. These system elements are described on Austin's Action Plan to End Homelessness.



Our System to Prevent + End Homelessness

Our ultimate goals are to prevent homelessness whenever possible and quickly help people get back into housing, minimizing the length of their homelessness. This flow chart provides a broad overview of different paths to permanent housing.



- Refer to the Glossary section of the document for explanations of different terms.

Addressing Homelessness Downtown

Austin's homelessness population is most visibly concentrated downtown: on a given night 650 persons wake homeless downtown, 472 persons sleep at the ARCH and the Salvation Army while 178 persons sleep in the surrounding streets.

Reasons for Downtown Concentration



Not enough housing and service resources to assist the 7,000+ persons who experience homelessness every year



Many homeless services are clustered downtown



There is activity in the area day and night

Problems of Downtown Concentration



Cheap street drugs like K2 readily available to homeless population without enough access to treatment



Downtown hotels and businesses are exposed to trespassing, panhandling, and alcohol and drug use, impacting customers



Homelessness is criminalized in the forms of trespassing and possession of substances, creating more housing barriers

Strategies that *Together* will Reduce Homelessness Downtown + Beyond

STRATEGIES



Outreach. Expand outreach resources to connect to all unsheltered persons with available resources.



Shelters + Navigation Services. Increase temporary shelter beds & housing navigation services throughout the city, alleviating the pressure at the ARCH and other downtown service providers



Addressing Disparities. Address housing barriers such as criminal histories.



Housing + Services. Increase rental assistance and support services (e.g. case management, employment + substance use treatment).



Effective System. Ensure all strategies connect persons to housing, ending their homelessness. Align stakeholders' vision, streamline coordination and collaboration and track community progress.

RESULTS

- Increased persons connected to permanent housing, jobs, appropriate healthcare and other support services
- Increased public health and safety for all

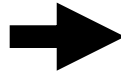
Addressing Housing Barriers

Persons experiencing homelessness often face one or more of the housing barriers described below, making it difficult to end homelessness on their own. Our system helps them overcome those barriers to find housing through the following strategies.

Criminal Background Discrimination



If a person has recent misdemeanor charges, he/she may be ineligible for rent



We negotiate more tolerant criminal screening policies at properties

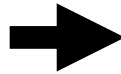


If a person has any felony charges, he/she may be ineligible for rent

Income Source Discrimination



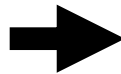
If a person has low or no income, he/she may be ineligible for rent, even if a benefit program covers income



We offer a risk mitigation fund to landlords to provide them with financial security



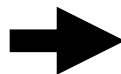
Some landlords may not accept housing choice vouchers



We streamline the process for landlords who are open to accepting vouchers, and educate others who are unfamiliar with the voucher program



If a person has any outstanding rental or utility debt, bankruptcy, he/she may be ineligible for rent



We offer financial assistance to settle the debts

Lack of Documentation



If a person lacks proper documentation (birth certificates, state IDs, social security cards), he/she cannot apply for housing or find employment



We work tirelessly to help the people we serve acquire those documents

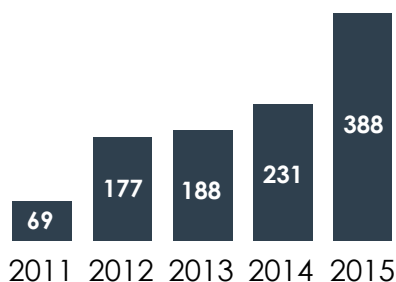
- Barriers identified per interviews with housing placement staff working to find housing for persons experiencing homelessness.

Success: Ending Veteran Homelessness + Housing More Youth

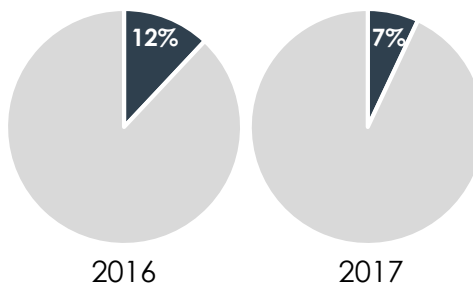
Focusing on subpopulations in Austin/Travis County led to a dramatic reduction in the numbers of veterans and youth experiencing homelessness.

Veteran Successes, 2015 - 2017

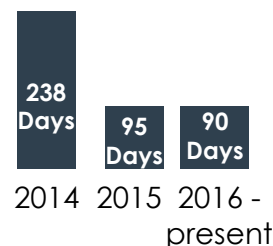
Veteran Housing Rate Improved



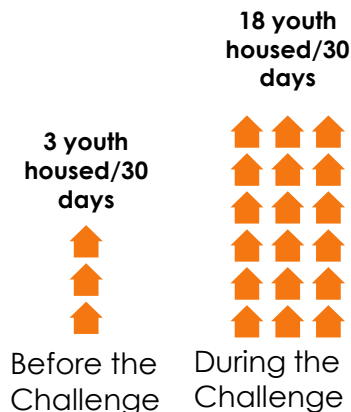
Veterans Experiencing Homelessness in a Given Day Decreased



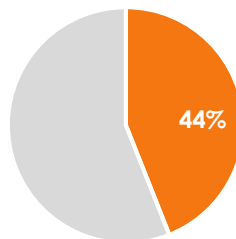
Days to Housing for Veterans Decreased



Youth Successes, 2016 - 2017



During the 100 Day Challenge, Austin housed 62 youth, surpassing its goal of 50



44% of youth who moved into housing during 100 Day Challenge had a history of foster care. Studies show youth with a history of foster care are disproportionately represented in homelessness

\$5.2 M

Awarded to Austin in Jan. 2017 to become a demonstration site to end youth homelessness

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Questions or Comments?

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