

# **Austin/Travis County Street Outreach Standards**

## **Street Outreach**

The aim of coordinated street outreach is to engage individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness by meeting them where they are, including campsites, parks, bus stations, abandoned buildings, and other places not intended for habitation, as well as through partnerships with local organizations providing support services. Street outreach serves as a critical entry point for accessing emergency shelter, health care, and pathways to permanent housing.

Outreach workers build trust through consistent, compassionate, and non-judgmental engagement, while applying specialized skills to maintain safety, uphold ethical boundaries, and navigate challenging environments. Street outreach programs provide life-sustaining supplies, including food, water, hygiene kits, clothing, blankets, and over-the-counter medical supplies, along with information about available services and updates on changing policies. Street Outreach Providers provide person-centered engagement. Person-centered engagement involves actively listening, prioritizing each person's autonomy, while working with each participant to make decisions and plans that align with their goals and values. Person-centered engagement also requires outreach staff to see people they are working with through a strengths-based lens, meaning they recognize and uplift each person's unique talents, skills and assets and engage those aspects of the person as key resources that they can draw on in identifying solutions to problems and unmet needs.

By meeting immediate needs and building trust, effective outreach engages individuals who may not actively seek assistance or come to the attention of the homelessness response system, helping ensure access to essential resources and pathways toward long-term stability. Programs are integrated into local coordinated assessment systems, such as the APAT Prescreen Tool in Austin/Travis County, to help assess needs and prioritize housing placement, supporting individuals as they move toward permanent housing

***Note: The Austin / Travis County Continuum of Care provides these written standards as reference for providers operating Street Outreach programs. These written standards support but do not supersede the written standards, policies, and procedures maintained or stipulated by program funders unless otherwise stated by those funders. Funders of Street Outreach programs are welcome to stipulate that providers follow these Austin / Travis County Continuum of Care written standards for Street Outreach.***

# Population

All served by Street Outreach programs must qualify as homeless under paragraphs (1) and (4) of the “homeless” definition under 24 CFR § 576.2.

## Street Outreach Best Practices

In line with [guidance from USICH](#) and NAEH Street Outreach programs:

- Programs will locate, identify, and build relationships with unsheltered people experiencing homelessness and engage them for the purpose of providing immediate support, intervention, and connections with homeless assistance programs, mainstream social services, and permanent housing programs.

**All street outreach teams in Austin/Travis County should offer services at one of the following levels:**

### Level 1 Low-Level Services

These services may include the following:

- Relationship Building
- Immediate survival needs
- Referral to navigation services
- Environmental (cold weather/flood risk/fire prevention)
- Hygiene resources
- Mobile Coordinated Assessments
- Referral to shelter or shelter waitlist
- Referral to Diversion/Rapid Exit providers
- Other resources sharing

### Level 2 Mid-Level Services

These may include services offered at level 1, as well as the following:

- Motivational Interviewing
- Coordination of medical and mental health services
- Vital documents
- Housing-problem solving

- Peer-led Outreach
- Transportation to services/shelter
- Benefits referral: MAP, SNAP, SOAR
- Workforce development opportunities
- CPS and APS referrals

### **Level 3 Specialized Services**

These may include services offered in level 1 and 2 as well as the following:

- Individual and housing-focused case management
- Permanent Supporting Housing (PSH) enrollment packets (for clients referred to PSH)
- Opioid response and other substance use recovery resources
- Physical and mental health services including acute crisis response, assertive community treatment, and street medicine
- Services tailored to address the unique needs of youth, veterans, victims of partner violence or related crimes, persons with HIV/AIDS, etc.
- **Engage individuals in efforts to develop solutions to exit homelessness**
  - Street Outreach providers should always explore diversion when engaging with individuals. Street Outreach providers will offer or connect to diversion services connecting individuals experiencing homelessness to family/friends as a housing solution.
  - Street Outreach providers will offer individuals experiencing homelessness assistance with getting on shelter waitlists. This may include, but is not limited to:
    - Calling on behalf of the individual
    - Explaining available options
    - Advocating for the person's immediate needs
    - Providing necessary contact information and support through the process
  - Street Outreach providers will be knowledgeable about affordable housing opportunities and offer assistance or give information on affordable housing waitlist within Austin/Travis County

- Street Outreach providers will continue to offer support to all unsheltered individuals ensuring that they have access to resources, information, and guidance as they navigate their own path to stability
  - Outreach efforts should consistently be made, with a primary focus on assessing and safeguarding the safety of individuals and their possessions. Any observed or perceived safety threats must be thoroughly documented and shared with other Outreach providers via the coordination calls. Re-engagement following a safety concern may be pursued at the discretion of the Street Outreach provider once the threat has been addressed and resolved.
- **Address Basic Needs**
    - Street Outreach providers will aim to meet the immediate needs of persons experiencing homelessness by providing survival supplies like food, clothing, blankets and ensuring access to water, sanitation and hygiene services.
    - Street Outreach providers will provide clothing as it is available or connection to organizations that can provide clothing
- **Conduct Comprehensive, Coordinated, and Ongoing Housing-Focused Outreach**
    - Street Outreach providers will be encouraged to coordinate efforts via weekly outreach coordination calls
    - Street Outreach providers will partner with other outreach providers to expand services for specialized populations/needs
    - Street Outreach providers will connect clients back to system providers if identified in HMIS
    - Street Outreach providers will check the client's current assessment status
    - Street Outreach providers will get clients connected to Coordinated Assessment services and/or complete the Coordinated Assessment and updates
    - If no one is at an encampment when conducting outreach, Street Outreach workers should leave contact/org info at outreach location that includes name, email, and phone number
- **Refer to shelter and housing resources**
    - Street Outreach providers will assist clients with calls to be put on shelter waitlists or provide information for clients to contact shelters

- Street Outreach providers will inform clients of known housing opportunities and affordable housing waitlists as alternatives to waiting for referrals
- **Provide access to healthcare and address unique needs of people with chronic and acute Health conditions**
  - Street Outreach providers should develop strong relationships with community-based health care services to bring health care providers to encampments as they are available.
  - Street Outreach providers will connect to or help enroll individuals experiencing homelessness into Central Health medical access program (MAP) services so the individuals experiencing homelessness can adhere to medical needs.
  - Street Outreach providers will provide a warm handoff to medical services by assisting in the scheduling and making identified medical appointments needed
  - Street Outreach providers will provide transportation to medical appointments via company vehicle or bus pass.
- **Establish a cross-agency, multi-sector response for successful coordination of outreach**
  - Street outreach providers will work together to ensure a coordinated approach to engaging participants
  - Street Outreach providers will be transparent about areas they are serving and communicate those areas within coordination calls, also documenting those locations within HMIS
  - Street Outreach providers will send a rep to attend governance meetings to stay informed of and give input on changes within COC
  - Street Outreach providers will send a rep to attend outreach coordination calls hosted by the Homeless Strategy Office. A program manager or lead rep will be present for the call at least twice a month
- **Inclement Weather assistance**
  - Street Outreach providers will inform individuals experiencing homelessness of incoming inclement weather

- Street Outreach providers will provide information on warming/cooling centers available
  - Street Outreach provider will assist with transport to warming/cooling centers and cold weather shelter via vehicle, bus pass, or give information on transportation options
- **Document contacts and services provided in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)**

Street Outreach providers must enter/update service delivery data into HMIS following HMIS Data Standards to include but not limited to:

- Case notes
- Identifying information
- Demographic details
- Current Living Situation
- Client's housing plan and goals
- Identified strengths and perceived barriers
- Client contact information
- Document the location of individuals experiencing homelessness during each engagement in HMIS

Any other pertinent information that can help the outreach worker and client eliminate the need for the client to retell their stories to multiple provider staff or restart their housing plan with each new provider they engage. HMIS data records will also allow for continuity of care and services when a client encounters different outreach workers or homeless service providers that utilize HMIS.

**\*Victim service providers are prohibited from entering client-level data into HMIS and must instead enter data into a comparable database. Victim services providers that are recipients or subrecipients under the CoC Program are required to collect client-level data consistent with HMIS data collection requirements, BUT they must not directly enter data into an HMIS. To protect clients, victim services providers must enter required client-level data into a comparable database that complies with HMIS requirements.**

## Essential Elements

All staff on street outreach teams in Austin/Travis County should receive training in:

**If you are a volunteer, training in these areas is recommended:**

- First Aid & universal precautions
- Harm Reduction 101/Opioid Reversal
- De-escalation techniques
- Strength-based interventions
- Trauma Informed Care
- Be Familiar with Motivational Interviewing Techniques

**If you receive funding these trainings are recommended as well as those listed above:**

- Cultural competency
- Mental Health First Aid
- Substance use disorder management
- Housing Problem Solving
- Addressing domestic and sexual violence

Street Outreach Providers should continue to participate in ongoing professional development opportunities as they are available and as funding is available. SO providers will ensure efforts are made to complete these trainings, utilizing community partners as necessary.

## Further Guidance

[COVID-19-Homeless-System-Response-Housing-Focused-Outreach.pdf](#)  
([hudexchange.info](#))

[https://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/NAEH\\_Housing-Focused-Street-Outreach-Framework.pdf](https://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/NAEH_Housing-Focused-Street-Outreach-Framework.pdf)

[..19 Strategies for Communities to Address Encampments Humanely and Effectively\\_1.pdf](#)