

**Interagency Council on Homelessness
Performance Oversight Hearing
Responses to Questions from the Committee on Housing & Neighborhood Revitalization**

1. How does the Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH) solicit feedback from the public?

Beginning in 2014 - when the ICH was first staffed - the ICH has made it a practice to solicit feedback from a variety of stakeholders in a variety of ways:

Standing Committees and Work Groups: Meetings of the standing committees and work groups are open to the public and can be attended by any interested stakeholder. To facilitate participation, the ICH calendar (available online at <https://ich.dc.gov/events>) includes a listing of these meetings, a description of the purpose, and instructions on how to join the listserv (maintained by co-chairs).

This is significant because the ICH staff use the standing committees and associated work groups to support implementation of the Homeward DC and Solid Foundations DC plans. Each committee is responsible for a different set of issue areas/strategies. Committees are comprised of public and private sector partners, from agency heads to front line staff. Advocates and system consumers attend as well. This positions committees well to assist with identifying and diagnosing problems and brainstorming solutions. They also serve as a vehicle for transparency of the work being done inside of agencies, communication with stakeholders, and oversight of government partners to ensure work is moving forward and, given the ever-changing landscape, that the community is in agreement on the most pressing priorities and the best path forward.

Although co-chairs are responsible for planning meetings in advance, every meeting opens with an opportunity for participants to raise additional agenda items. In addition, committee infrastructure is formally reviewed at the end of the calendar year to determine what changes, if any, need to be made to the ICH structure in the year ahead.

Special Engagement Events: In addition to the standing committees and work groups, feedback on specific issues is obtained through special engagement events, including stakeholder focus groups and shelter town hall meetings. Four examples are listed below:

1. **Strategic Planning.** As was the case with Homeward DC, stakeholder input was critical to the development of the Solid Foundations DC plan in FY17. In addition to the feedback received through the youth subcommittee, the ICH hosted a number of special meetings, including meetings with providers to flesh out program models, review utilization and outcome data, and estimate the percentage of youth needing different types of services. Additionally, ICH members hosted focus groups with youth to solicit feedback on their experiences within the homeless services system and their recommendations on ways we could improve services.
2. **Winter Plan Debrief.** Each spring, the Emergency Response and Shelter Operations (ERSO) committee hosts a "hypothermia season debrief" to review the prior year's

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operations and identify any challenges that occurred that must be addressed during planning for the upcoming season.

3. **HSRA Modernization.** As we worked on the development of the Homeward DC plan, stakeholders indicated that it would be necessary to update our local legislative infrastructure, the Homeless Services Reform Act (HSRA), if we were to fully achieve the vision articulated by the plan. The Executive Committee identified legislative reform as a priority for FY17 and established a public process for receiving, compiling, reviewing, and categorizing stakeholder input. Between May 2016 and May 2017, over 20 meetings were conducted to solicit feedback on different parts of the law.
4. **Consumer Engagement.** ICH Standing Committee and Work Group meetings are actively used to inform policies, procedures, and protocols. One example is the pre-Council meeting, a forum used to obtain feedback from consumers, which occurs prior to the quarterly full Council meeting. Discussion topics in FY17 included, for example, impact of MLK closure and HMIS Visibility.

Consumer Engagement Work Group: In January 2018, members of the ICH Executive Committee suggested the formation of a Consumer Engagement Work Group. ICH staff are working with Executive Committee members, particularly constituents with lived experience, to establish a framework for the work group (including purpose, roles and responsibilities, process for establishing agenda, meeting date/time, and expectations for follow up/reporting). The March 2018 Pre-Council meeting will be used to present the draft framework and obtain feedback from consumers, with the goal of launching the Consumer Engagement Work Group in April 2018.

2. What role does the ICH play in providing support for, analysis of, or presentation of the District's annual Point-in-Time Count?

Each year, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires jurisdictions receiving federal funding for homeless services to conduct a count of persons experiencing homelessness in their community on a single night within the last ten days of January. Each count is planned, coordinated, and carried out by the community's "Collaborative Applicant" – the entity responsible for preparing the community's application for HUD Continuum of Care (CoC) funding and ensuring the jurisdiction meets all CoC program requirements. The District's Collaborative Applicant is The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness (TCP).

Each jurisdiction is also required to have a CoC governing board to oversee strategic planning, coordination of services, policy development, and performance management for community's homeless services system. The ICH fulfills this function for the District. Accordingly, the ICH staff work closely with TCP staff on all issues related to federal requirements and federal funding. With regard to the PIT specifically, the ICH provides support in the following ways:

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- **Planning support.** The ICH provides planning support to TCP to ensure that we are using the best process and tools possible to get the data needed, not only for federal reporting purposes, but to support our local planning needs. The ICH also provides a forum for a debrief following the count to capture any lessons learned or changes required for the following year.
- **Information Dissemination/Volunteer Recruitment.** After the date for the count has been identified, the ICH committees and work groups help advertise the PIT and recruit volunteers.
- **Analysis and Presentation of the Point-in-Tie (PIT).** Once the data has been compiled, cleaned, and analyzed, the TCP team works with ICH and DHS staff to contextualize the results within the context of Homeward DC implementation. PIT results are published in April or May in coordination with the other members of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Government. Findings are then reviewed in detail at the May ICH Executive Committee and June ICH Full Council meetings.

3. How does ICH, and the District Continuum of Care generally, address or plan to address the unique circumstances of returning citizens facing homelessness upon their release from an institution?

The homeless services system is a safety net for residents experiencing a housing crisis. Given the District's right to shelter law, any resident experiencing a housing crisis has access to shelter. (Although DC's right to shelter – as a matter of law – is limited to hypothermia season, the continuum typically always has available capacity in non-hypothermic months.)

Accordingly, any returning citizen that has no access to housing typically has immediate access to shelter. That said, a referral to emergency shelter is not an adequate housing plan for returning citizens – shelter can be a critical short-term safety net but it is not a housing plan. Accordingly, ICH staff are engaged with the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council and the Mayor's Office of Returning Citizen Affairs to discuss transferrable lessons learned from Homeward DC – specifically, the importance of having a system approach, being able to quantify need, and implementation of a coordinated assessment system in order to better target limited resources.

4. How does ICH, and the District Continuum of Care generally, address or plan to address the needs of homeless senior citizens, such as more frequent medical care or mobility assistance?

The work of the ICH is to ensure that the District has a system in place for immediate and effective crisis response, focused on establishing (re)connection to permanent housing and the appropriate mainstream services and supports.

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Key improvements and expansions in the homeless services' crisis response system have significant impact on all medically vulnerable individuals, including senior citizens experiencing homelessness. Some examples are listed here:

- **Expansion of Street Outreach Services.** As a result of a \$9 million grant from the US Department of Health and Human Services, we have dramatically expanded our street outreach capacity. This expansion ensures we have a system in place for reaching our most vulnerable neighbors choosing to remain unsheltered.
- **Improvements in our Low Barrier Shelter System.** We are currently working to segment shelter beds so that we can increase the number of beds that offer specialized services (to support people in different situations, such as seniors, medically frail, and employment/pre-employment). Concurrently, we are also working to expand case management services so that we have the capacity to offer specialized services. This will greatly improve connections to mainstream benefits and services, appropriately leveraging the District's existing medical infrastructure to address the needs of medically vulnerable residents.
- **Prioritization of Chronically Homeless Seniors for Permanent Housing Assistance.** Our Coordinated Assessment and Housing Placement (CAHP) System is designed to help us understand the vulnerability level and service needs of clients experiencing homelessness so that we may prioritize access to our most intensive intervention – Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) – to those with the most severe needs. As we have worked to expand and improve our CAHP system, we learned that we had a number of seniors (and “near-seniors”) with long histories of homelessness and disabling conditions that were scoring for rapid re-housing because they did not have the same intensive service needs as those with long-term behavioral health conditions. Understanding that rapid re-housing would likely not work for seniors with little/no income growth potential, the CAHP leadership team decided to prioritize this population for access to Targeted Affordable Housing (TAH) - an intervention that has a permanent subsidy, like PSH, but much lighter service supports. This population will likely continue to be a priority for TAH resources moving forward.

5. Does the ICH partner with the Department of Parks and Recreation with respect to the agency's Roving Leaders Program, whose mission is to “prevent, neutralize, and control hostile behavior in youth and youth groups through the development of positive relationships between teens/youth and outreach workers”? If so, please elaborate.

Through the implementation of Solid Foundations DC, we are working to identify potential new partners to help us engage homeless and at-risk youth. We know that addressing homelessness among youth is about more than just stabilizing the immediate crisis and providing a quick connection to permanent housing; it is also about helping youth to develop healthy relationships with trusted adults and permanent connections. The Roving Leaders Program is a good example of a potential new opportunity as we ramp up implementation, as is our

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partnership with the ACE, PASS and STEP programs. As described in the response to Question #1, the ICH operates a very open process and welcomes any and all new partners interested in working with us on Homeward DC and Solid Foundations DC implementation.

6. Please describe whether and how membership in the ICH facilitates the effectiveness of the partnership between the D.C. Housing Authority and the Department of Human Services with respect to administering housing subsidies for Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) and Targeted Affordable Housing (TAH).

DHS and DCHA have seats on a number of committees working on implementation of different parts of the Homeward DC plan, including the Strategic Planning, Housing Solutions, and Executive committees. These committees each have a multitude of responsibilities that require a close partnership between ICH, DHS, and DCHA. One important example is administration of our coordinated entry systems for both singles and families. Within the Singles Coordinated Assessment and Housing Placement (CAHP) Leadership Work Group, for example, decisions are made about how to best prioritize and target permanent housing resources dedicated to the homeless services system (including PSH and TAH). Given the number of different steps and different staff involved in helping a client exit homelessness to permanent housing, the work group regularly reviews data to examine how long it takes clients to move through the housing process and where we are experiencing bottlenecks or challenges in order to identify necessary changes to policy or business process. For example:

- In response to requests from the community and partners, DCHA revised its business process to allow for pre-inspection of units, when and as appropriate (December 2016).
- To provide greater transparency around inspections, the DHS STEP Tool – the IT system used to manage the voucher lease-up process and coordination between partners – was updated to establish an automated daily update of inspection results (January 2017).
- To promote efficiencies and address feedback regarding the amount of time it takes to review and approve LRSP applications, DCHA co-located staff in-house at DHS (November 2017). Since DCHA staff moved in-house, the process time has reduced significantly; applications can now be approved within two weeks.