



**Interagency Council on Homelessness
2019 Performance Oversight Hearing
Responses to Questions from the Committee on Housing & Neighborhood Revitalization**

- 1. Generally explain the value that is added by having an interagency council that regularly meets to discuss implementation of the homeless continuum of care across agencies, rather than having agencies simply collaborate behind-the-scenes.**

Complex problems like homelessness are not solved by one agency alone, nor are they solved by the government alone. Nonprofit service providers, advocates, persons with lived experience, and private sector partners all have different insights to share and different contributions to make. Accordingly, it's important to have all partners at a common table. The Homeward DC and Solid Foundations DC plans lay out a common vision for our community and helps different partners understand their specific roles. That said, we operate in a dynamic landscape where circumstances are constantly evolving. The regular ICH meetings not only ensure all partners are receiving consistent information about progress made, lessons learned, and challenges uncovered, but the meetings also serve as a way of ensuring transparency and holding one another accountable.

- 2. How does the Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH) solicit input from the public and ensure that this feedback is integrated into decision making?**

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 are open to the public and can be attended by any member of the public. Likewise, each standing committee uses work groups to tackle specific projects or tasks, and those work groups are open to all ICH stakeholders interested in helping advance the work. To facilitate participation, the ICH calendar (available online at <https://ich.dc.gov/events>) includes a listing of committee meetings, a description of the purpose of each committee, and instructions on how to join the listserv for each committee (maintained by co-chairs).

Participation in the standing committees is significant because the ICH staff use the 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 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 and communication with stakeholders.

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 and governance protocols 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. Two examples are listed below:

- *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 committee, 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. Similarly, in late FY18, the ICH began a process to update the Homeward DC plan and has since hosted special meetings among stakeholders to review performance data and lessons learned and begin updating the models that serve as the foundation for the plan.
- *Winter Plan Debrief.* Each spring, the Emergency Response and Shelter Operations (ERSO) committee hosts multiple “hypothermia season debriefs” to review the prior year winter plan operations and identify any challenges that must be addressed during planning for the upcoming season. In 2018, the Consumer Engagement Work Group hosted two town hall sessions at adult emergency shelter locations to gain input and feedback from current shelter residents regarding the Winter Plan.

Consumer Engagement:

- *Consumer Engagement Work Group:* In January 2018, members of the ICH Executive Committee suggested the formation of a Consumer Engagement Work Group (CEWG). The CEWG launched in the summer of 2018 and consists of eight current or recent ICH appointees with current or prior lived experience. The CEWG provides consumer-driven feedback to inform the implementation of the Homeward DC plan. Each CEWG member is assigned to attend meetings of two of the regular Standing Committees to help identify issues where broader consumer feedback is needed. The CEWG meets monthly to discuss these issues (where quick turnaround is needed), but they also help plan and execute broader engagement events (e.g., focus groups, surveys, and shelter townhall meetings).
- *Through the Eyes of Youth (Youth Action Board):* One of the more than 40 strategies identified in Solid Foundations DC is to “ensure youth voice/representation on the ICH and youth-serving agency boards.” In January 2018, ICH Youth Committee identified this strategy as one of its priorities for the year. *Through the Eyes of Youth* launched in the spring of 2018 and consists of 5 youth with current or prior lived experience. *Through the Eyes of Youth* ensures ongoing youth leadership in the planning and implementation of Solid Foundations DC, the District's strategic plan to prevent and end youth homelessness. The direct involvement of youth and young adults is central to strengthening the systems, programs, and policies that impact youth and young adults experiencing homelessness and housing instability.

3. List and briefly describe the presentations given by experts from outside the D.C. government who were invited to speak to the ICH general body during FY18 and FY19 to date.

On September 11, 2018, the ICH Full Council invited Dr. Matthew Morton to present on national trends and best practices in the youth homelessness field. Dr. Morton is a Research Fellow at Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago with expertise in youth development, youth homelessness, evaluation of complex interventions, and evidence-based practice. He presented the results of the *Voices of Youth Count*, a national research and policy initiative focused on building evidence to support action on ending youth homelessness.

4. What role does the ICH play in providing support for, analysis of, and 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 10 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 the 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:

- **Planning support.** The ICH provides planning support to TCP to ensure that we are using the best process and tools possible to obtain the data needed, not only for federal reporting purposes, but to support our local planning needs. The ICH also provides a forum to 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, TCP staff work 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 Governments. Findings are then reviewed in detail at the May ICH Executive Committee and June ICH Full Council meetings.

5. How does the District continuum of care 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 Department of Corrections, the Mayor's Office of Returning Citizen Affairs, and the Office of Victims Services and Justice Grants to discuss transferrable lessons learned from Homeward DC – specifically, the importance of having a systems approach, using data to quantify need, and implementation of a coordinated assessment system in order to better target limited resources.

6. Please describe how the ICH facilitates the partnership between the D.C. Housing Authority and the Department of Human Services with respect to administering housing subsidies for Permanent Supportive Housing and Targeted Affordable Housing.

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.

7. Does the ICH have sufficient meeting space? Is there difficulty finding space for either general body meetings or committee meetings?

Yes, the ICH has sufficient meeting space. The ICH staff works closely with Department of General Services (DGS) to reserve meeting space for Committee and Work Group meetings. The ICH sought feedback from stakeholders on the preferred meeting location. The community agreed that One

Judiciary Square (441 4th Street NW) is the preferred location for ICH meetings. As a result of this feedback, we will continue to work with DGS staff to reserve space at One Judiciary Square.

8. What precipitated the recent decision to dismiss staff at the Ward 7 family shelter?

Through the Department of Human Services' routine monitoring activities, DHS discovered that certain background documentation for Life Deeds staff working on-site at The Horizon may be incomplete or inaccurate. Out of an abundance of caution, DHS brought in DHS staff to support Life Deeds staff on-site until the issues are resolved.

DHS is the more appropriate entity to answer questions about this situation and is available to provide updates as desired.

9. How is the staff for the Ward family shelters recruited and selected?

The Department of Human Services issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) during the summer of 2018. Providers are selected through a competitive process in accordance with OCP procurement and contracting standards. The selected providers were then responsible for recruitment and selection of staff in accordance with DHS contract requirements.

DHS is the more appropriate entity to answer questions about DHS procurement, contracting, and monitoring processes and is available to provide additional information as needed.

