

# An Action Plan to End Veterans and Chronic Homelessness in Boston: 2015-2018

## Plan Summary

### I. Introduction

#### Data

- On average there are 1,720 homeless individuals in shelter on a single night (2014).
- There are 10,883 unduplicated homeless individuals in Boston shelters during the course of a year (2014).
- Boston's number of homeless individuals has decreased by 14.7% since 2007.
- Latest annual Point in Time (PIT) count indicates that 139 individuals slept on the street, one of the lowest rates of unsheltered homelessness in the country.
- 66% of all homeless individuals in shelter stay less than 30 days.
- There are 600 chronically homeless individuals in Boston's shelters and on the streets. After 6 years of steady decline, the number of chronically homeless individuals increased in 2014 and 2015.
- On any given night, approximately 40% - 50% individuals in Boston shelters are not from Boston.
- Annually, close to 1,000 individuals are discharged from systems of care to emergency shelter. These systems of care include psychiatric facilities, substance abuse treatment, hospitals and correctional facilities. Individuals discharged from these systems tend to have multiple barriers and stay in shelter the longest.
- The average length of stay in shelter has increased from 112 days in 2013 to 168 in January 2014.

#### Long Island Progress/Recovery Programs

- The new Southamptton shelter opened 100 beds in January 2015, 150 more in April 2015 and is now able to accommodate over 400 guests per night. This new shelter serves men only.
- The Boston Public Health Commission has undertaken renovations of the Woods Mullen shelter and converted it to an all-women's shelter. This shelter is now able to serve approximately 200 women each night.
- In April, 2015 Boston Public Health Commission reopened Wyman Re-entry and the Transitions programs in Mattapan, replacing 75 recovery beds.
- Boston Public Health Commission's other recovery programs, Project SOAR and Safe Harbor, are open and staffed with 40 beds on the second floor of the Southamptton shelter.

### II. Goals

#### End Veteran Homelessness by 2015

- No veteran is forced to sleep on the streets
- When a veteran becomes homeless it is rare and brief
- All currently homeless veterans will be housed or on a pathway to stable housing by the end of 2015

#### End Chronic Homelessness by 2018

- House the most vulnerable, chronically homeless individuals living in shelter and on the street in Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)
- Prevent new individuals from becoming chronically homeless through rapid rehousing

Ending homelessness among veterans and chronically homeless individuals will require complete transformation of the homeless response system and thus will impact outcomes for the entire individual homeless population.

### III. Strategy

The primary strategy is to redesign Boston's homeless response system **from** a collection of effective yet fragmented programs **to** one single integrated system founded on Housing First principles.

The system redesign components are:

- *Front Door Triage* is the immediate response to homeless individuals upon entry into the homeless system. The triage design will be modeled on an emergency room triage system and will provide a differential response based on vulnerability and individual need. Front Door Triage will develop specific responses to unaccompanied youth and young adults, individuals with untreated substance use disorders, individuals discharged from other systems of care, and individuals sleeping outside.
- *Coordinated Access* is a centralized data system that matches homeless individuals to housing vacancies based on need. The system will centralize vacancies to permanent supportive housing units.
- *Rapid Rehousing* moves homeless individuals to housing as quickly as possible by providing the amount, type and duration of assistance needed to stabilize the household.
- *Permanent Supportive Housing* combines subsidized rental housing with individual support services. It is an intensive intervention reserved for individuals with complex barriers who need a high level of support in order to achieve stability in housing.

### IV. Recommendations

Design and Implement a triage system at the front door of the homeless response system by 2016

- Develop specialized services at the front door including substance abuse specialists, resources for youth, disability specialists among others
- Facilitate real time access to prioritized emergency slots in detox programs, residential treatment, youth programs, domestic violence shelters and other systems of care that will better serve some individuals who find themselves at the front door
- Explore alternative to shelter to reconnect people with formal and informal support systems

Develop a Coordinated Access System by 2016

- Match homeless individuals to the right housing and support services based on their specific needs
- Centralize vacancies and ensure the most vulnerable individuals are first in line for PSH units

Increase Rapid Rehousing Outcomes by 2016

- Increase Rapid Rehousing resources and create a system that prevents homeless individuals from falling into chronic homelessness

Increase Access to Permanent Supportive Housing for the Most Vulnerable Homeless Individuals by 2016

- Access 750 PSH units by strictly targeting vacancies and develop 200 units of low barrier housing paired with support services
- Develop strategies that enable people who no longer need intensive support services but still need affordable housing to move on from PSH
- Review and revise policies that create barriers for the most vulnerable individuals to access housing

City of Boston Mayors Challenge Status Update  
August 31, 2015

Mayor Marty Walsh launched Mayors Challenge in July, 2014

- **Number housed: 449** homeless veterans have been housed since the Mayors Challenge. Therefore, approximately one veteran is housed every day.

**Total Housed since Mayor's Challenge - July 2014**

VASH Voucher	174	39%	Other Subsidy Breakdown:	
Other Subsidy	148	33%	Other (includes SSVF, Section 8 CSH, etc.)	66
Market Rate Unit	74	16%	CoC Subsidy	43
Family and Friends	44	10%	MRVP	2
Owned by Client	6	1%	Sec 8 Mod Rehab	5
Transitional Housing	2	0%	Subsidy - no details	8
Nursing Home	1	0%	Section 8 PBV	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>449</b>		Public Housing	5
			Pine Street Gap	1
			Section 8 Tenant Based	4
			<b>Total</b>	<b>148</b>

**Chronic Vets Data - 100 days**

As of 09-17-2015

total vets	86	
<b>Inactive</b>	<b>#</b>	
Deceased	2	2%
Housed	23	27%
Inactive/disappeared	8	10%
Not a vet	17	20%
<b>Total inactive</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>59%</b>
		<b>w/ housing program ID'd</b>
<b>Active</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>36</b>

- **Status of Homeless veterans at the time of the Mayors Challenge announcement:** At the time of the launch there were 414 homeless veterans in Boston and a less than a year later of those, only 80 were still homeless and 57 of those were in transitional housing
- **Reduction in Point in Time Count:** The recent Point in Time count showed a 15% decrease in the number of homeless vets from 450 to 383. The pit count for homeless vets has never been below 400 since we began to count homeless veterans
- **Length of stay:**
  - For those who have entered shelter for the first time since the Mayor's Challenge began, average length of stay is 44 days
  - Currently, 70% of homeless veterans who enter the system leave shelter within 6 months and of those 45% leave in less than 2 months. A year ago 50% left shelter in less than 6 months.
- **Chronically Homeless Veterans:** The community has developed a list of 84 chronically homeless veterans and it is our goal to house all or most of the Ch vets before the end of the year. 19 have been housed and another 17 are on a path to receive a VASH housing voucher.

DHCD is poised to provide 20 MRVP's to house the non-VA eligible veterans and NECHV was able to secure \$200,000 for support services that was included in the recently passed state budget.

- **Definition of Ending Veterans Homelessness:** With other Community leaders we have developed a definition of functional zero which for Boston is No veteran is forced to sleep on the streets, When a veteran becomes homeless it is rare and brief and all currently homeless veterans will be housed or on a pathway to stable housing by the end of 2015.
- **Unprecedented Collaboration:** All City of Boston agencies that work with homeless veterans are working towards the Mayors Challenge. These include the VA, DVS, CoB Office of Veterans Services, New England Center for Homeless Veterans, Pine Street Inn, BPHC Pilgrim Church, MHSA

Best example of this is the collaboration is the work of group that meets weekly to track progress and identify housing options for the 84 CH vets.

- **Leveraging New Partners:** Brighton Marine Health Center is scheduling information sessions for real estate brokers to assist with finding rental units for homeless veterans looking for housing. In addition the Brighton Marine Board has voted to begin an endowment fund with a \$200,000 contribution to pay brokers fees.
- **Challenges:** Our biggest challenge is that our HMIS data tells us that depending on the month between 100 - or 200 new veterans enter the system and of those about ½ have been in system before. It might have been a month ago, 3 months ago or maybe even years but we know we need to work on housing stabilization or in figuring out where folks are going and why they are coming back