



Department of Health and Human Services

INTERAGENCY COMMISSION ON HOMELESSNESS 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

ENDING
HOMELESSNESS ONE
PERSON AT A TIME



December 2023

www.montgomerycountymd.gov/homelessness

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Homeless Providers, Advocates and Community:

On behalf of the Montgomery County Interagency Commission on Homelessness (ICH), we are pleased to submit the attached report for 2023. The mission of the ICH is to promote a community-wide goal to end homelessness, develop and implement a strategic plan, educate the community about homelessness, and promote partnerships to improve the County's ability to prevent and reduce homelessness. As the Governing Board of the County's Homeless Continuum of Care (CoC), the ICH is also tasked with monitoring programs that are components of the CoC and make recommendations to the County Executive and County Council to improve the CoC—with the goal being to coordinate the implementation of an effective housing and service system within the Montgomery County CoC geographic area that meets the needs of homeless individuals and families.

In November 2022, the ICH voted to recommit to the goal of ending homelessness for all populations by the end of 2025. Montgomery County is working in partnership with [*Built for Zero \(BfZ\)*](#), an international movement of more than 100 communities working to end homelessness in a measurable and equitable way, to be one of the first communities to end homelessness for all populations. Ending homelessness does not mean that no one will ever experience homelessness, but that all efforts are made to prevent homelessness whenever possible, and when prevention isn't possible, people are rapidly connected to permanent housing that best meets their unique needs. BfZ defines ending homelessness for all by reaching "functional zero" for all subpopulations. Functional zero simply means that the number of households actively experiencing homelessness must be **less than or equal to the monthly rate at which households achieve stable housing**.

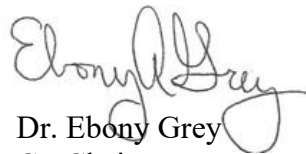
The CoC continues to face many challenges. Rents continue to rise at alarming rates and vacancy rates remain low creating a strained housing market. Our nonprofit partners struggle to recruit and retain staff causing delays in making housing referrals and longer lengths of time homeless. Inadequate care coordination with other systems of care and a lack of access to services makes it difficult to meet the complex needs of our most vulnerable households. To address these obstacles, we need the help of our elected officials to keep moving the needle. Together we will end homelessness by 2025.

Furthermore, as county residents, we are extremely proud of our county for its thoughtful and strategic approach to caring for its most vulnerable citizens. We thank you for your leadership, interest, and help, and we stand ready to continue to support your efforts.

Respectfully submitted,



Jeff Goldman
Chair



Dr. Ebony Grey
Co-Chair

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Susie Sinclair-Smith, Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless

Delegate Vaughn Stewart, Maryland State Delegation

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OVERVIEW

The Interagency Commission on Homelessness (ICH) was established by the Montgomery County Council in 2014 and began its work in 2015 to promote efforts to end and prevent homelessness in Montgomery County. The mission of the ICH is to:

- promote a community-wide goal to end and prevent homelessness,
- develop and implement a strategic plan,
- educate the community about homelessness,
- promote partnerships to improve the County's ability to prevent and end homelessness,
- monitor programs that are components of the Continuum of Care (CoC),
- make recommendations to the County Executive and County Council to improve the CoC, and
- establish procedures for effective coordination of the CoC.

The ICH has also been designated as the Governing Board of the CoC.

The CoC is Montgomery County's local homeless program planning network. It is a public-private partnership that includes County and other government agencies, non-profit service providers, landlords and others who have a role in preventing and ending homelessness. The purpose of the CoC is to coordinate the implementation of a housing and service system within the Montgomery County CoC geographic area that meets the needs of individuals and families experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The Montgomery County CoC provides a full continuum of services and housing interventions to people at risk of or experiencing homelessness including:

- prevention and diversion,
- outreach and engagement,
- emergency and transitional shelter,
- rapid re-housing,
- permanent supportive housing.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

On November 2, 2022, the ICH voted to recommit to the goal of ending homelessness for all populations by the end of 2025. Montgomery County is working in partnership with [Built for Zero \(BfZ\)](#), an international movement of more than 100 communities working to end homelessness in a measurable and equitable way, to be one of the first communities to end homelessness for all populations. Ending homelessness does not mean that no one will ever experience homelessness, but that all efforts are made to prevent homelessness whenever possible, and

when prevention isn't possible, people are rapidly connected to permanent housing that best meets their unique needs.



BfZ defines ending homelessness for all by reaching “functional zero” for all subpopulations. Functional zero simply means that the number of households actively experiencing homelessness must be **less than or equal to the monthly rate at which households achieve stable housing.**

Montgomery County remains committed to strengthening its partnership with Built for Zero (BFZ) and its community partners, all of whom are devoted to advancing the common goal of solving homelessness. The strides made and challenges confronted by our Continuum of Care (CoC) in the Zero for All (ZfA) campaign hinge on robust coordination with our community partners. Bethesda Cares, as the ZFA campaign coordinator in partnership with Montgomery County, convened numerous leaders involved in the homeless response system to participate in the 2023 Built for Zero Learning Session in Washington, DC.



The group collectively shared learning with national organizations, supported one another, identified gaps in services, reviewed current milestones, and actively reaffirmed the commitment to fostering a unified approach with a shared goal to achieve functional zero through the ZFA initiative. These partnerships are critical to building a future where homelessness is rare and brief for everyone in Montgomery County.

For a community to achieve functional zero across all populations, they must meet additional indicators to ensure that homelessness is *rare, brief, and one-time only* for all households.

Rare:

- The community has met and sustained functional zero measures for youth, families, and single adults (including veterans and chronically homelessness individuals).

Brief:

- Individuals spend 45 days or less on average on a community's active by-name list (real time list of all individuals experiencing homelessness).

One-time Only:

- No more than 5% of positive exits result in a return to the homelessness system within two years of exit from the homeless system (e.g., subsidy or services).

On December 14, 2022, the ICH, CoC, people with lived experience of homelessness, housing advocates, elected officials, and other systems of care convened to launch our efforts to achieve the benchmarks outlined by BfZ.

Using the framework and strategies of ICH's Strategic Plan to End Homelessness, the ICH will establish or assign existing committees and work groups to oversee the action plans developed for each subpopulation (youth, families, Veterans, vulnerable adults, and seniors). In alignment with the BfZ approach, the action plans will be mapped out in six-month increments with milestones to benchmark progress at each six-month mark. The full CoC will convene quarterly to review progress on achieving the milestones. The milestones to be met by June 2023 are as follows:

- **Veterans:** No more than seven Veterans experiencing homelessness (down from 10)
- **Youth:** A fully operational Coordinated Entry System specific for youth
- **Families:** An average length of time from identification to move-in of 45 days
- **Seniors:** Decrease the number of seniors entering homelessness by 50% (from six to three)
- **Vulnerable Adults:** An average length of time from assigned to house of 45 days.
- **Other Adult-Only Households:** House 350 individuals

In January 2020, the ICH launched the [3-Year Strategic Plan to End Homelessness](#). The plan consists of six primary strategies:

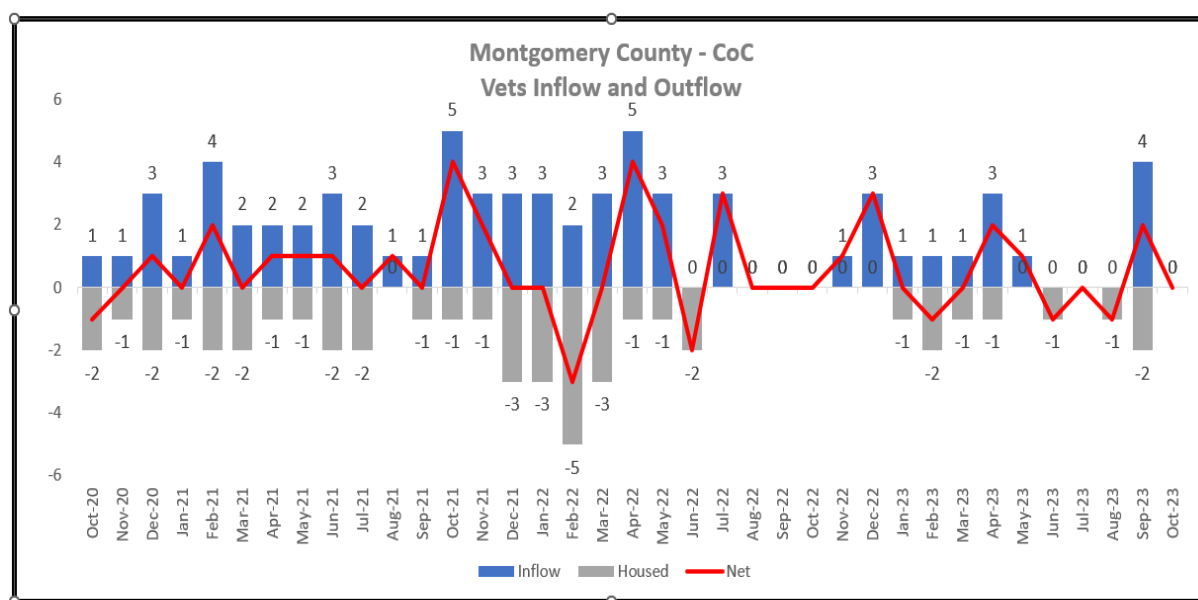
1. Reduce Racial Disparities Across the System,
2. Build and Support Strong and Adaptable Programs,
3. Build and Support Affordable Housing Solutions within the Homeless Continuum,
4. Coordinate Effectively Across Other Systems of Care,
5. Increase and Diversify Funding, and
6. Educate and Advocate for Change.

The ICH and its partners have achieved many of the objectives articulated in the plan which is scheduled to end in 2023. The Strategy and Planning Committee will use the next year to develop a new three-year plan. A lot has changed since January 2020, and while the strategies for the ICH are unlikely to change, the priorities and action items need to align with the current challenges facing the CoC.

Status Report on Previous Initiatives and Subpopulations

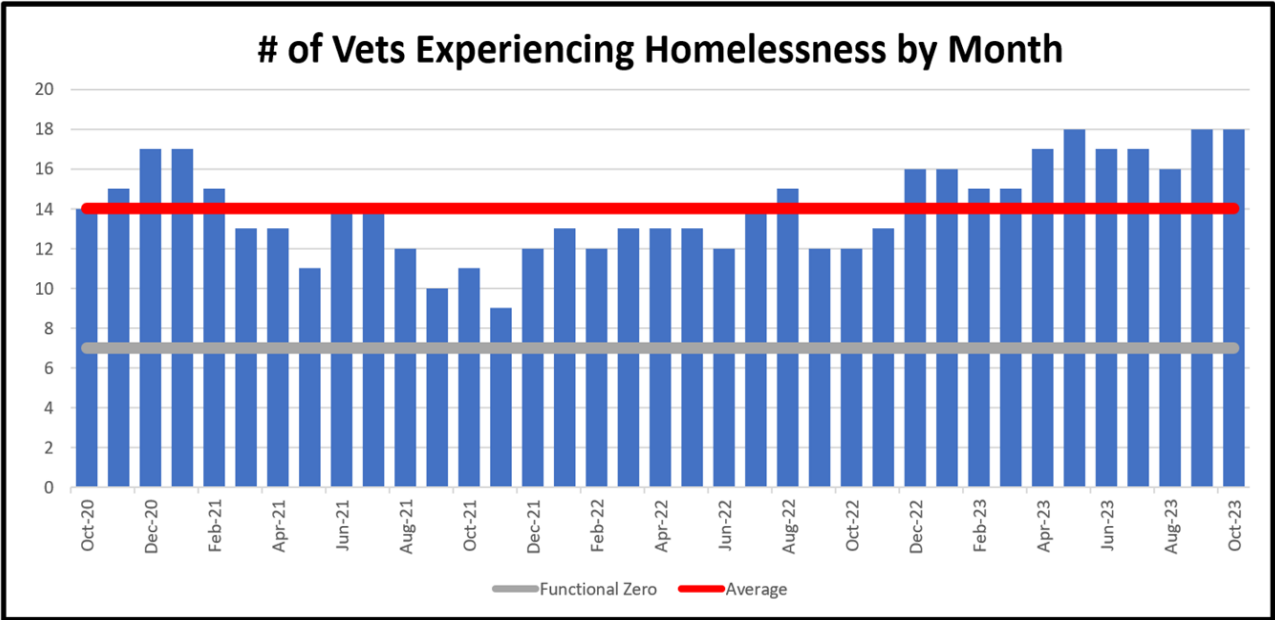
Veterans

In December 2015, Montgomery County was one of the first four jurisdictions in the Country to effectively end Veteran homelessness.



This success was confirmed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, and the Community Solutions **Built for Zero (BFZ)** campaign. At this time, “functional zero” was defined as having no more than seven Veterans experiencing homelessness at any given time. For the last three years, the average number of Veterans experiencing homelessness each month has increased to fourteen. For this reporting period, the number of unhoused Veterans has increased above the average. As of this day, December 1, 2023, the active number of Veterans is 17. The focus continues prioritizing Veterans for permanent housing placements and moving as quickly as possible to end their homelessness. Since January 2015, we have ended homelessness for 236 Veterans.

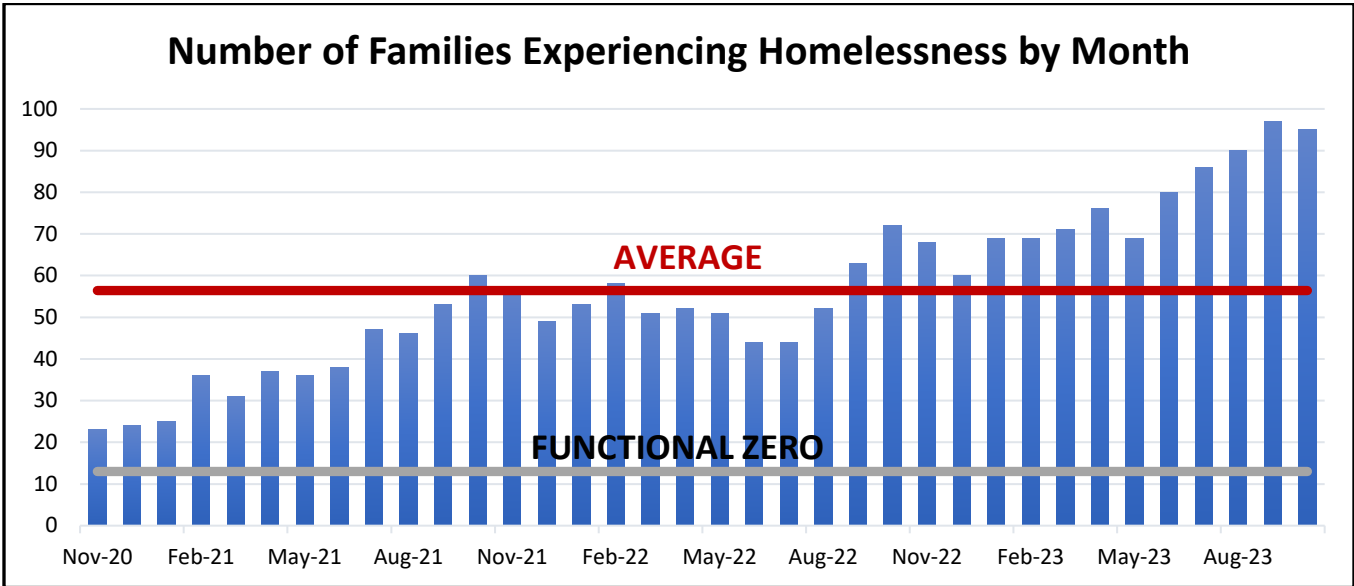
The charts below show the effectiveness of the CoC at serving Veterans. The first chart displays the number of Veterans entering and exiting homelessness each month. The goal is for the number of exits (outflow) to exceed the number of entries (inflow). The second chart shows the number of Veterans actively experiencing homelessness each month. The goal is for the active number to be equal to or less than functional zero.



Families

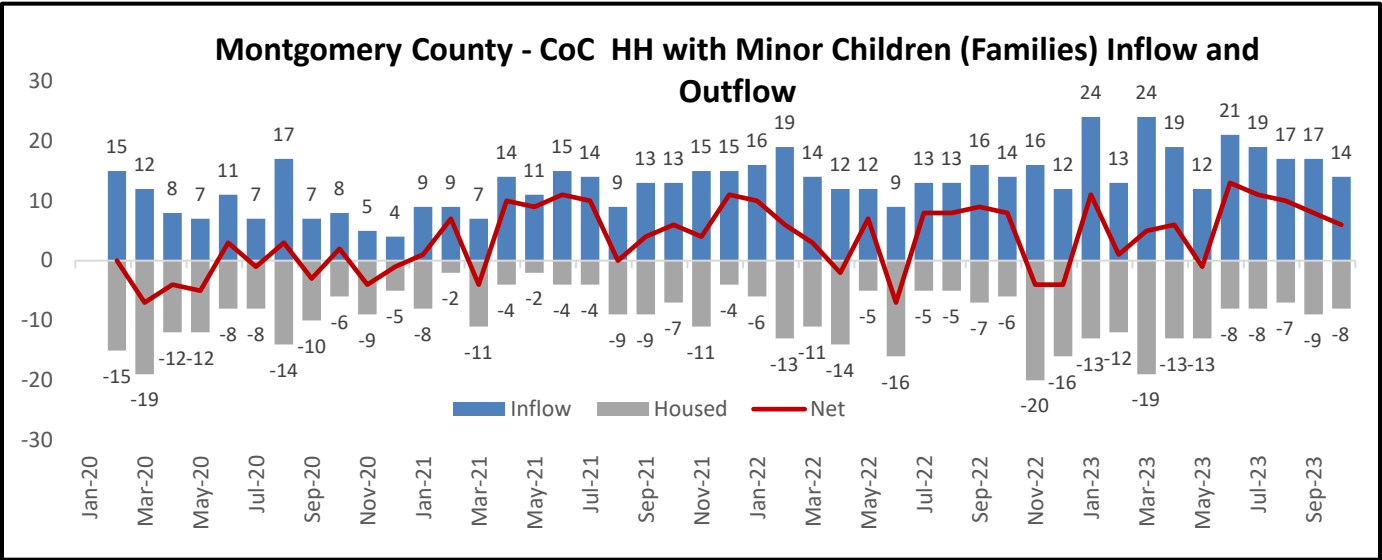
In July 2018, the ICH launched the **@HomeTogether** Initiative to end and prevent homelessness for families with children by the end of 2020.

As detailed in the monthly census chart below, the number of families experiencing homelessness has significantly increased since late 2022 and throughout 2023. The low census prior to this coincides with the beginning of the pandemic as well as state and federal eviction moratoriums. The number of families entering homelessness has increased in part due to rising rents, inflation, source of income discrimination and the influx of migrant groups entering the region and the ongoing shortage of affordable housing nationwide.



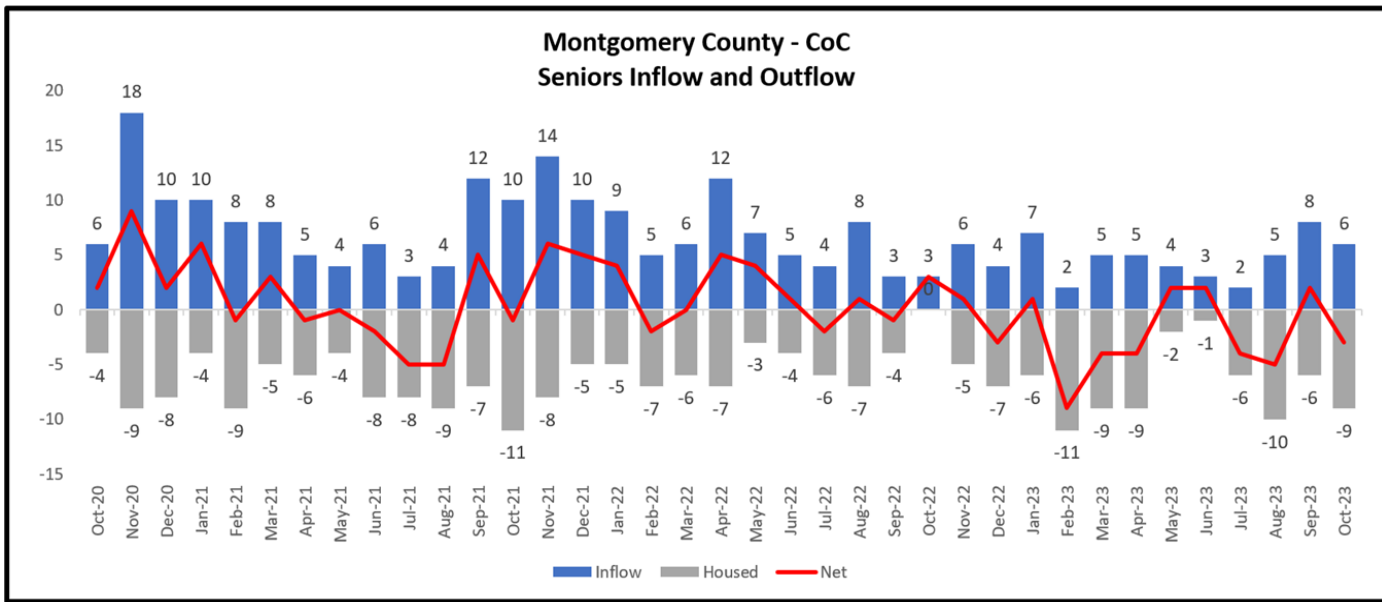
The monthly inflow and outflow chart below explains that inflow has increased and simultaneously the number of families housed each month has slowed down. Rising rents and inflation, the same factors that lead to housing

instability and homelessness, also make it harder for households to exit homelessness. In addition, there continue to be reports from housing locators and case managers, who are searching for housing for these households, that some landlords state they will not take housing vouchers. This type of housing discrimination, based on source of income, is illegal, but it is difficult to enforce legislation intended to prevent it. Landlords have not been found to put in writing that they do not accept housing vouchers. The struggle of finding housing is exacerbated for larger families with four or more minor children.



Seniors

The Montgomery County ICH was one the first communities to specifically set a goal to reach functional zero for seniors. Seniors or older adults are defined as those age 62 years or older. Between January 1, 2023, and December 1, 2023, 199 seniors were served in emergency services. The CoC is not yet tracking the number of seniors actively experiencing homelessness by month, but below is the monthly inflow and outflow chart. The CoC is very close to reaching functional zero for seniors as the number of entries and exits are close to equal. Housing programs, such as Lon's House, which opened during the summer of 2023, are specifically designed to provide around-the-clock, on-site supportive services, to help both vulnerable and older adults maintain housing and improve health outcomes.



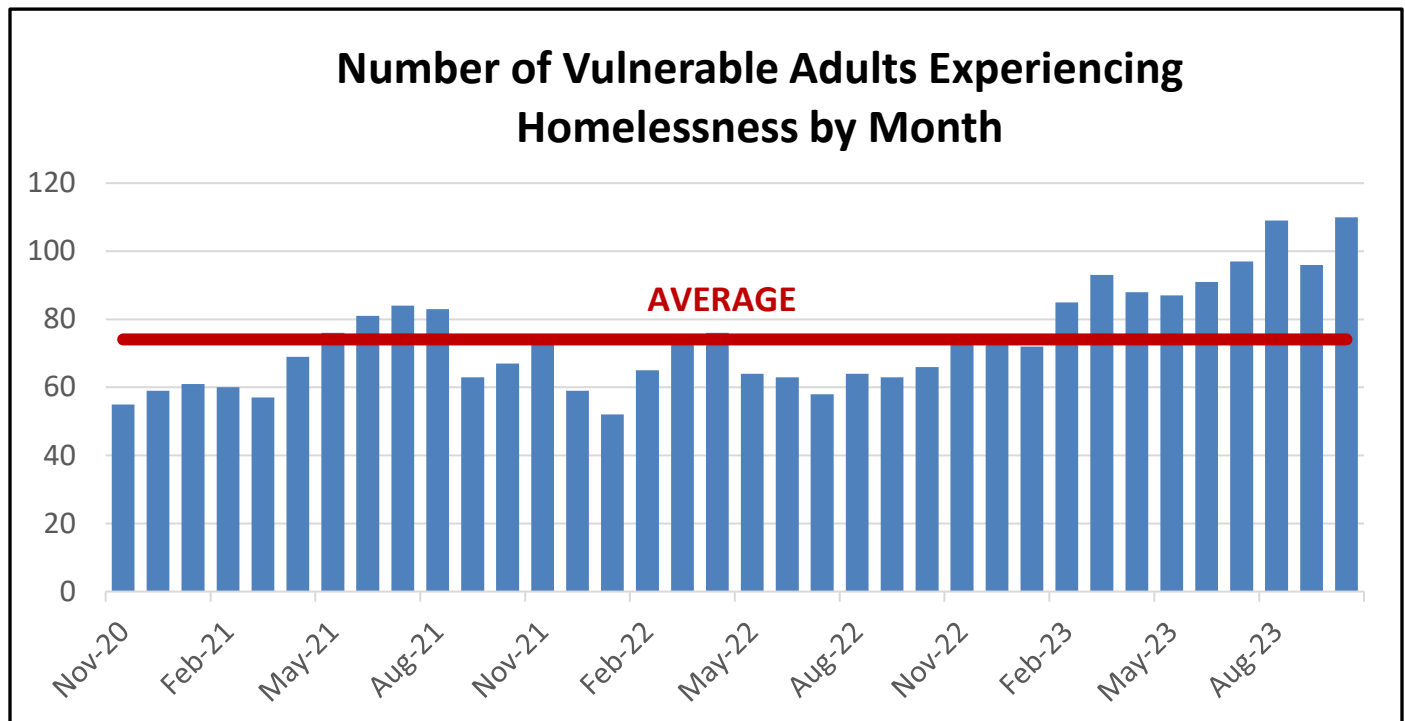
Vulnerable Adults

The ***Inside (not Outside)*** Initiative is Montgomery County's campaign to end chronic homelessness.

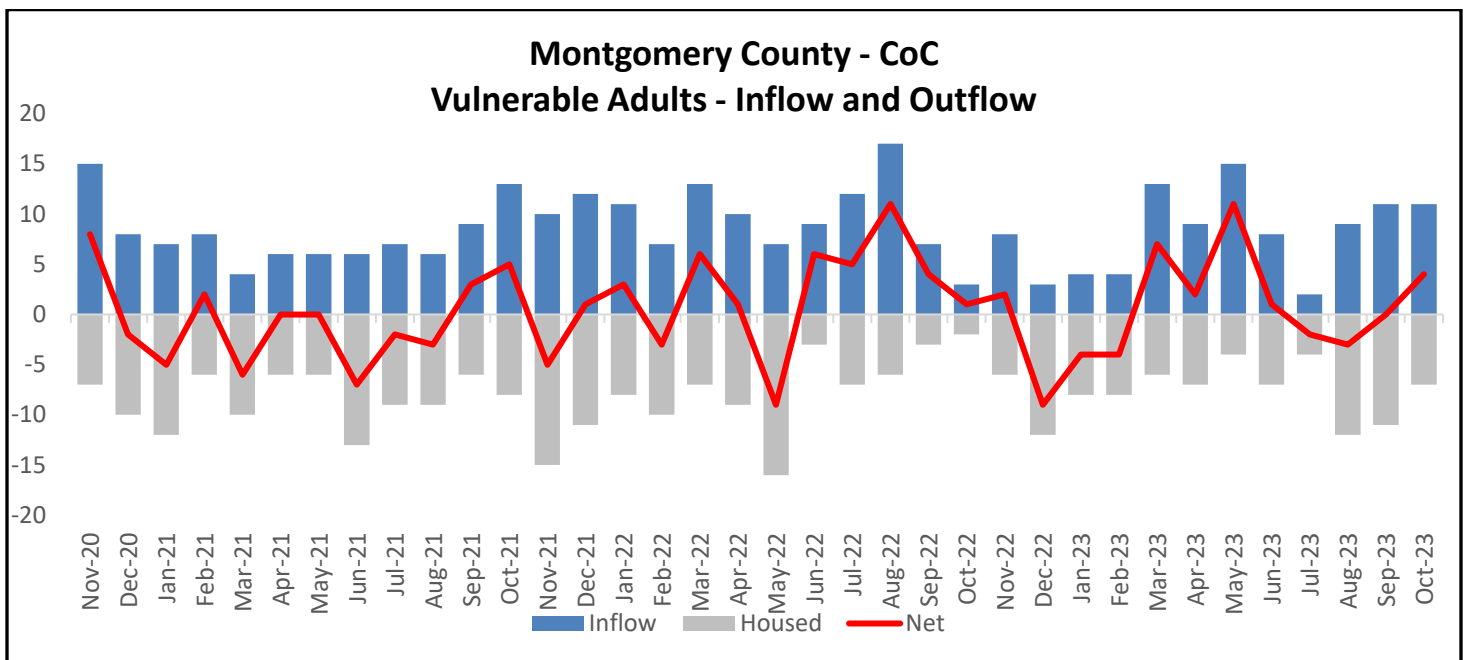
In January 2016, the Montgomery County CoC committed to the ambitious goal of ending long-term homelessness for people with disabilities. To date, more than 490 chronically homeless adults have been housed through this initiative.

In February 2019, the ICH decided to shift the prioritization of permanent supportive housing from chronic to other vulnerable populations. The ***Inside (not Outside)*** Initiative resulted in a significant number of people with long histories of homelessness placed in permanent housing but had unintended consequences. Most notably, highly vulnerable individuals who did not meet the federal definition of chronic homelessness due to an inability to verify the length of time homeless were stuck waiting on the Coordinated Entry List while others with lower acuity were placed in high intensity permanent supportive housing. To most effectively allocate resources, the Coordinated Entry System now prioritizes all vulnerable adults for permanent supportive housing.

The charts below detail the census of unhoused vulnerable adults by month and the number of placements in permanent supportive housing. Of note, in 2023, the monthly census of vulnerable adults increased above the average of 72. This is evidence of the toll the pandemic took on vulnerable populations and it is consistent with the increasing trend in homelessness regionally and nationally.



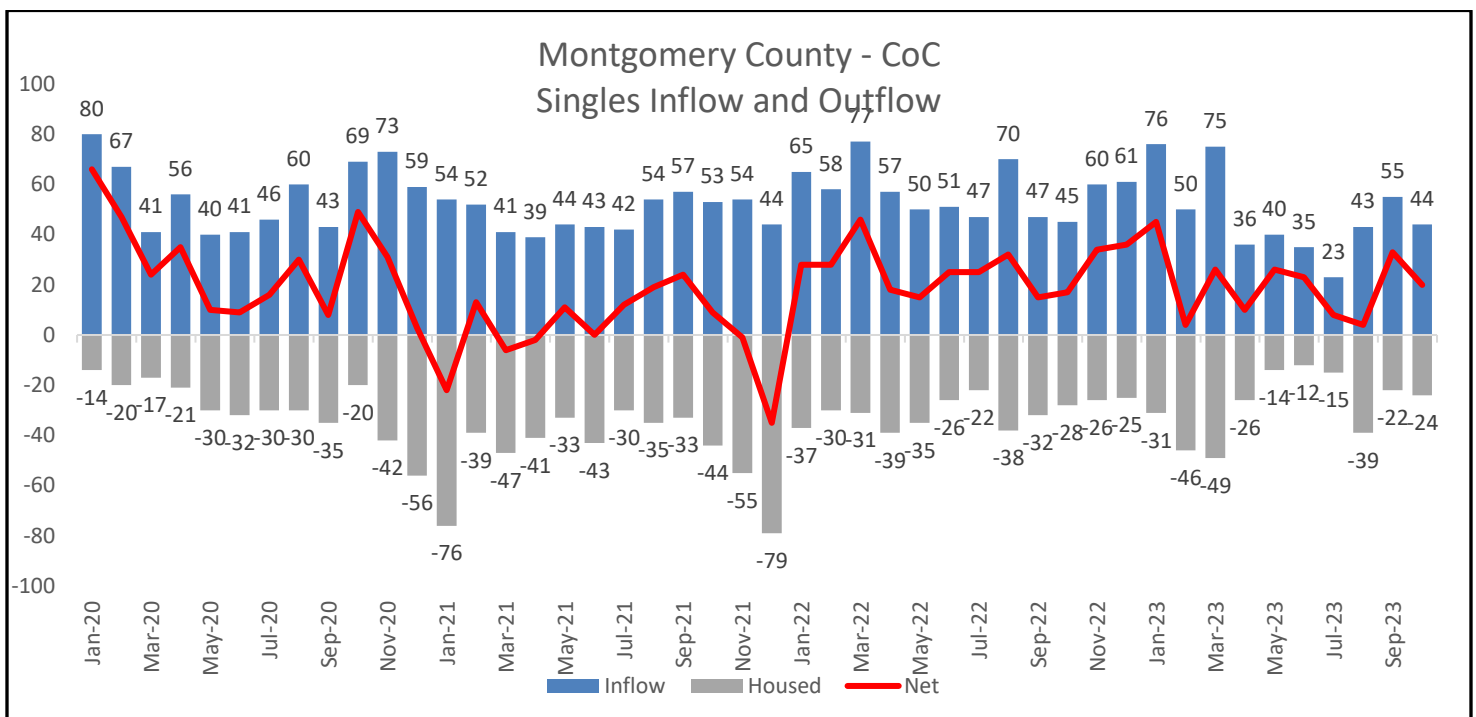
When reviewing the inflow and outflow of vulnerable adults, it is evident that the outflow did not keep pace with the inflow except in the summer months. Since the pandemic, vulnerable adults with behavioral health needs have struggled to access services. Many behavioral health clinics moved from in-person services to telehealth. This change made it extremely difficult for the homeless population to receive much-needed services. Although Montgomery County has three Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams, that provide services in the community wherever their clients go, all three have extensive waiting lists. The lack of adequate behavioral health services, coupled with the opioid epidemic, have contributed to the increase in vulnerable adults experiencing homelessness and have made it harder to engage the subpopulation to get them housed.



All Adult-Only Households (Singles or Individuals)

This population makes up the highest percentage of the overall number of people experiencing homelessness and often receiving the smallest allocation of resources. Montgomery County is fortunate to have multiple options for adult-only households including both permanent and time-limited housing subsidies or other financial benefits. A larger allocation of housing resources is needed to reach the functional zero number of 73 for this population.

The chart below highlights the improvements in the monthly inflow versus outflow for households without children. In the last year, on average 56 new individuals entered the homelessness continuum each month and 31 were placed in permanent housing. This is an average increase from 2022 of 7 more people per month entering the continuum and an average decrease of 10 fewer people exiting the continuum each month. As mentioned above, inflation and rising rents caused greater financial instability for the large percentage of housing cost burdened households and make it harder for households to exit homelessness.



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Eviction Prevention

Services to End and Prevent Homelessness (SEPH) partnered with the Department of Housing and Community Affairs (DHCA) to deploy a progressive engagement approach to eviction/homeless prevention. The first step in preventing eviction is offering housing counseling services and landlord mediation. Several nonprofit partners receive funding through DHCA to conduct outreach and engagement to tenants with rent delinquencies and facilitated repayment plan agreements. Despite our best efforts, some tenants will inevitably have court action taken against them for nonpayment of rent. For these tenants, legal assistance is provided. Finally, for households most at risk of homelessness, as a result of eviction, financial assistance is provided to tenants.

Throughout the pandemic, the ICH ensured that all eviction prevention efforts were based on equity principles by targeting outreach and housing counseling services to neighborhoods most at risk of homelessness and prioritized financial assistance to those households at imminent risk of eviction. With the goal of working more proactively with households struggling to pay rent, as of October 2023, SEPH changed the point at which households would be eligible for eviction prevention resources from when they receive an eviction judgement to when they receive a court summons for late rent. This change not only allows more time to stop the eviction, but it also prevents an eviction judgement from showing up on a household's credit report. More importantly it avoids the trauma of a housing crisis. Research has shown that low income, single parent households of color experience higher rates of eviction than their counterparts. Furthermore, households of color are significantly overrepresented in the homeless population. Therefore, eviction prevention is a critical response in addressing the racial disparities amongst those experiencing housing instability and homelessness.

To date, \$115.7 M has been distributed to 19,136 households to prevent eviction. The remaining federal rent relief funds will be expended by the end of FY24. Many households have returned for additional assistance as they continue to struggle to find work and pay rent. For some households, financial assistance is not enough to stave off the possibility of eviction long-term. For this reason, SEPH Housing Stabilization Services will need to pivot, once the federal rent relief funds are gone, to provide intensive, longer-term prevention case management that is aimed at financially stabilizing households, so they are better able to maintain their housing.

Homeless Street Outreach

Reducing unsheltered homelessness remains a top priority for the ICH. Street outreach teams have reported an increase in the number of people sleeping outside despite an expansion of street outreach capacity. Montgomery County is not alone, as the number of people unsheltered has increased across the nation, particularly on the West Coast. Montgomery County was the only jurisdiction in the State to be awarded the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) 2022 Continuum of Care Supplemental Grant to Address Unsheltered and Rural Homelessness (Special NOFO). The Special NOFO award will be used to implement coordinated approaches -- grounded in Housing First and public health principles -- to reduce the prevalence of unsheltered homelessness, and improve services, health outcomes, and housing stability among highly vulnerable unsheltered individuals and families. Montgomery County is partnering with health and housing agencies to leverage mainstream housing and healthcare resources.

Below are the two projects funded by HUD through the Special NOFO:

- The first is a partnership between Bethesda Cares, The Coordinating Center, Mary's Center, and the Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC) that will provide comprehensive street outreach and low barrier, Housing First permanent supportive housing specifically for unsheltered individuals. This unique model pulls from the strengths of each of the partner organizations with Bethesda Cares and The Coordinating Center using Critical Time Intervention to help people transition from the streets to homes. Mary's Center, a federally qualified health center, will provide somatic, behavioral health, and dental care through street outreach and for

households placed in PSH. HOC in partnership with SEPH applied for Stability Vouchers¹ through HUD. These vouchers will cover a significant portion of the housing costs of this new PSH project.

- The second project will provide the CoC with a Street Outreach Program Manager to coordinate services within the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services as well as police, fire and rescue, libraries, businesses, etc. to improve the outreach and engagement of individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

County Rental Assistance Program and Other Housing Subsidies

The County Rental Assistance Program (RAP) is a permanent shallow subsidy for households with at least one member with a disability or over 54 years old. Applicants must currently be experiencing homelessness or at imminent risk. Over the last few years, the ICH has advocated for an increase in funding for the program. Since 2020, the budget for RAP has doubled. In 2022, County Executive Marc Elrich approved an increase to the maximum benefit from \$400 to \$503 to better align with rising rent costs. RAP has been a useful tool for households graduating from rapid rehousing or other time-limited housing subsidies whose income remains too low to sustain housing on their own. It also remains an important subsidy for stabilizing low-income seniors in their housing.

The ICH Partnerships and Funding Committee has been working to improve the partnership between the CoC and the two local public housing authorities, HOC and Rockville Housing Enterprise. Over the last two years, SEPH collaborated with HOC to issue 118 Emergency Housing Vouchers². Emergency Housing Vouchers were released by HUD to communities in response to the pandemic. Most of the 118 vouchers went to households graduating from permanent supportive housing who no longer needed intensive supportive services but still needed a housing subsidy. The remaining vouchers were issued to households through the CoC Coordinated Entry System, a change from the previous HOC policy of pulling referrals from their waitlist. HUD also invited public housing authorities to apply for Stability Vouchers. Both HOC and Rockville Housing Enterprise applied and agreed to fill new vouchers with referrals from the Coordinated Entry System.

Rapid Rehousing and Short-term Housing and Resolution Program

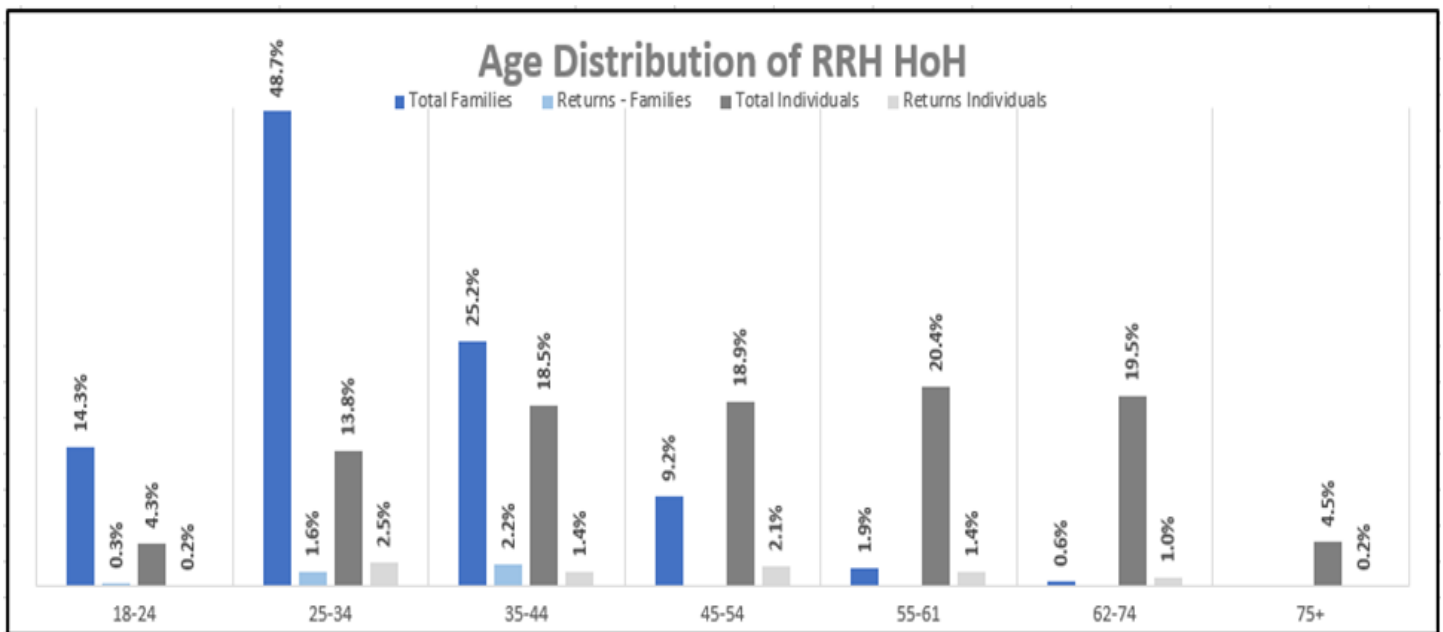
Expanding rapid rehousing (RRH) was identified as a goal in the ICH Strategic Plan to End Homelessness. The CoC received pandemic relief funding from the HUD Emergency Solutions Grant for this purpose. Building off the success of the COVID programs, an additional \$2.5M was included in the FY23 County budget. RRH provides a time-limited housing subsidy (typically 12 months) and intensive support services to help households exit homelessness to permanent housing. The CoC met its goal of expanding the number of RRH units by 350. Using the local common assessment tool, approximately 85% of families with children and half of all adult-only households could benefit from RRH. Not only does an investment in RRH lead to shorter lengths of time homeless for all households but also increases exits to permanent housing. Looking at the period between January 2020 and December 2022, less than 8% of households previously enrolled in RRH have returned to homelessness after exiting RRH. The charts below show who is being served through RRH and who is returning.

Rapid Rehousing Program Demographics (January 1, 2021 – December 1, 2023)	
Total Households Served: 765	Total Households Returning to Homelessness After 24 Months: 56

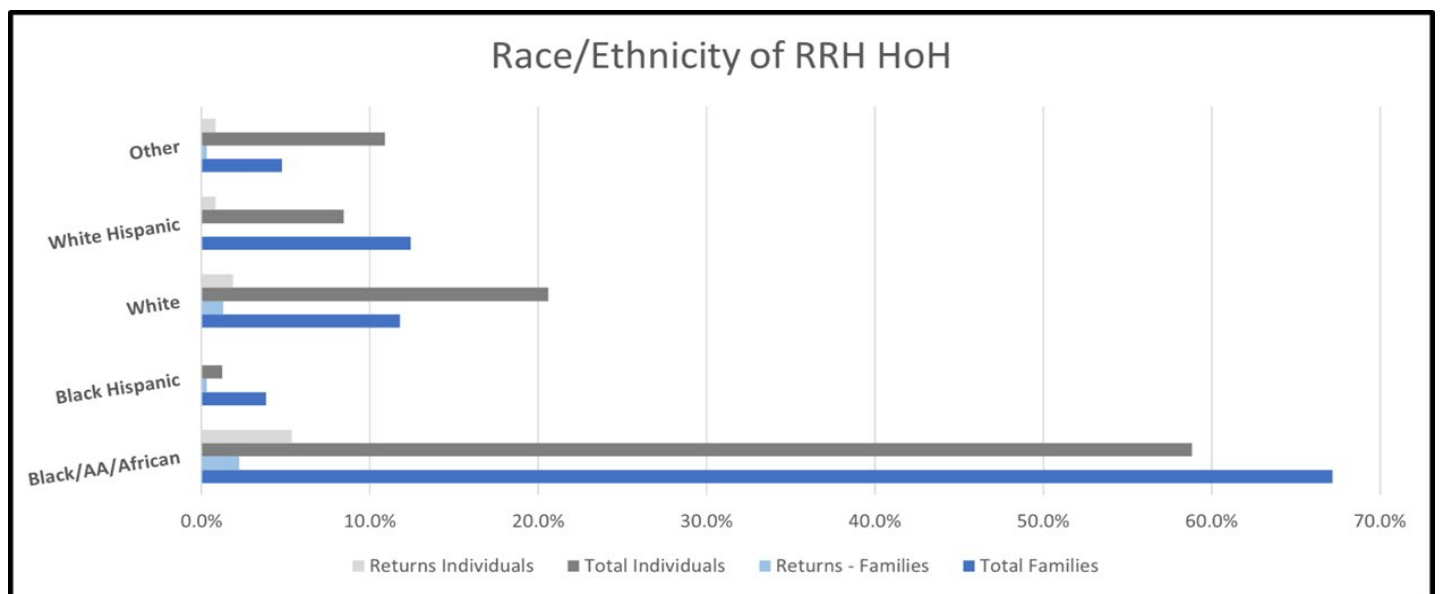
The chart below indicates that families where the head of household is between 35 and 44 years of age disproportionately return to homelessness whereas older families are less likely to return. For individuals, people 25-34 years old are more likely to return to homelessness.

¹ <https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/PIH/documents/2022-24pihnotice.pdf>

² <https://www.hud.gov/ehv>



When reviewing race/ethnicity of RRH participants, white non-Hispanic individuals and families return to homelessness at a disproportionately higher rate. White Hispanic and Black/African American families are less likely to return to homelessness. This data is unexpected given national research on how homelessness impacts people of color and warrants further exploration.

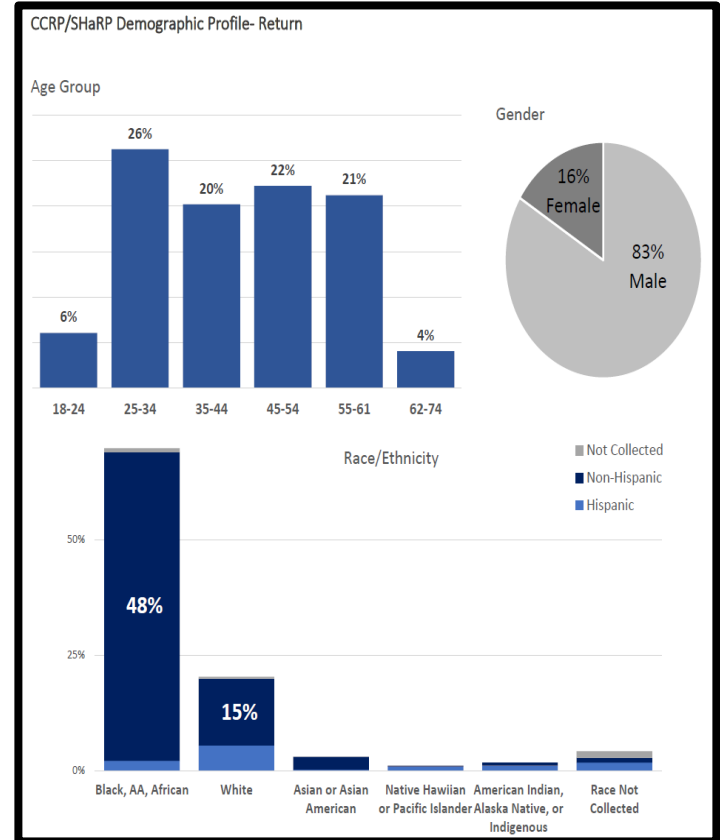
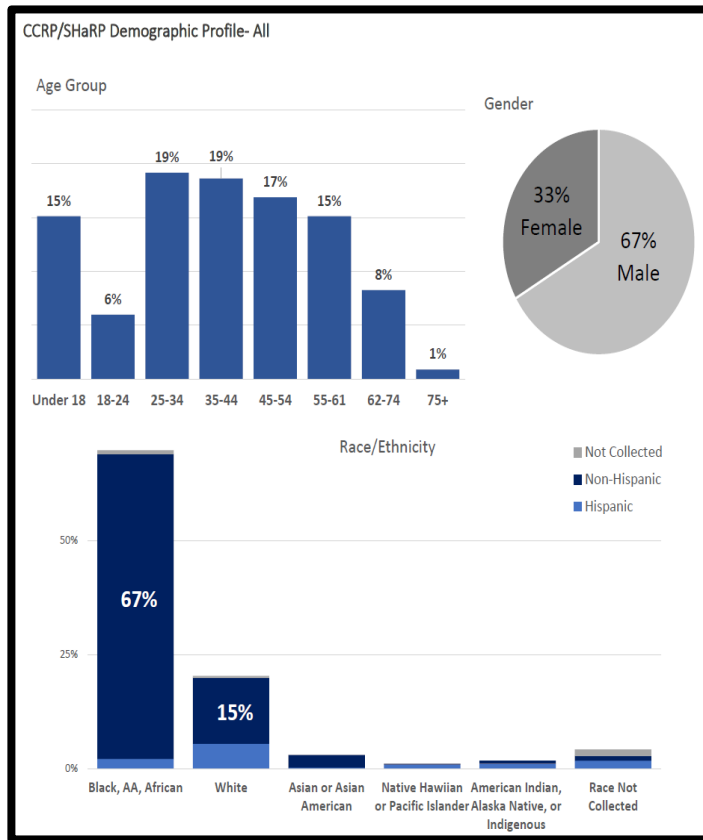


The flexibility of other federal pandemic relief funding created opportunities for the CoC to develop new programs to address the growing population of people experiencing homelessness for the first time with minimal need for on-going support services. The Short-Term Housing and Resolution Program or SHaRP originally provided a six-month deep housing subsidy for households exiting homelessness. All participants were required to have a minimum six-month lease.

Eligibility has been open to anyone in the CoC interested in participating with an income not exceeding 50% AMI. To date (through December 1, 2023) 452 households have been served through SHaRP. Of the 452 served, 22% have returned to homelessness since exiting with the program. A number of those households quickly exited back to permanent housing.

The first iteration of SHaRP did not include any supportive services once in housing. While 78% of SHaRP participants maintain their housing, the ICH is looking for ways to decrease the rate of returns. Beginning in calendar year 2023, the SHaRP housing subsidy was extended to 12 months and included voluntary housing stability services.

The charts below detail the demographics of who has been served through SHaRP and who returned to homelessness after receiving the benefit.

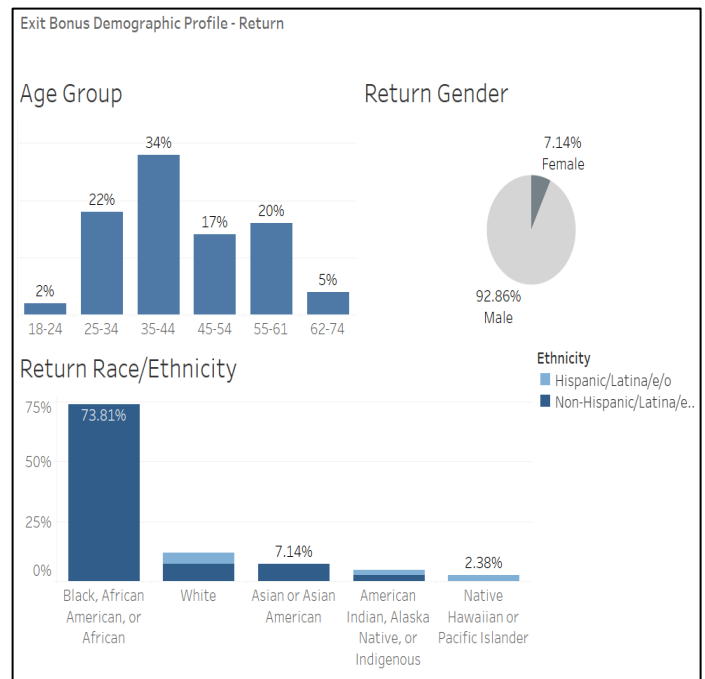
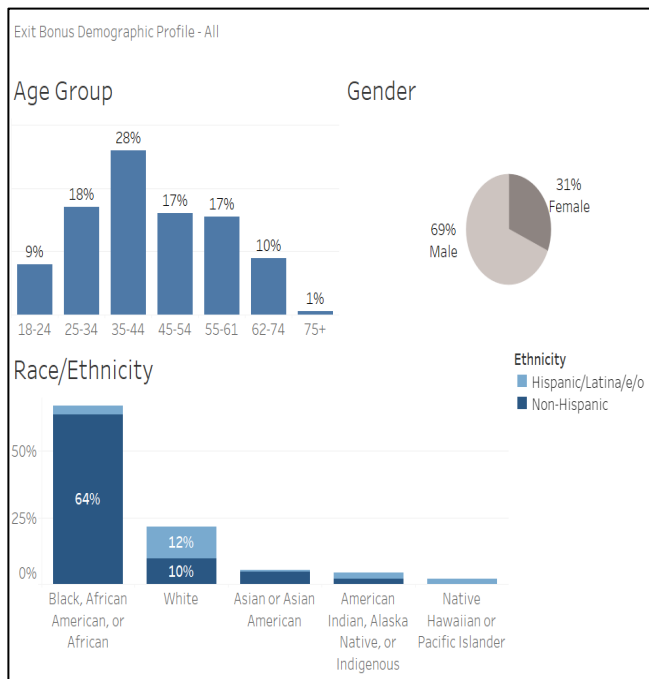


Direct Cash Assistance Programs:

Exit Bonus

The Exit Bonus Program offers \$5,000 as a one-time direct cash assistance payment to single adults and \$8,000 to households with minor children exiting emergency shelter. Participants must agree not to return to shelter for at least twelve months and complete a monthly survey. This program was originally designed for newly homeless individuals, less than six months, with no known substance use or mental health challenges. Eligibility guidelines have been updated to exclude the newly homeless criteria to open the program to those with low needs but have been in shelter longer than six months. The CoC follows each program participant for at least 12 months and conducts regular surveys to assess their housing stability, food security, income, and other quality of life indicators including general wellbeing, use of substances, and feelings about the future.

To date, 169 households have been served through the Exit Bonus program with a 24% return rate. The charts below display the demographics of program participants.



MoCo Boost – A Guaranteed Income Pilot

In December 2021, as a solution to assist families in permanently exiting poverty, the Montgomery County Council unanimously voted to approve a special appropriation to the FY22 Operating Budget for a Guaranteed Income Pilot Program³. Guaranteed Income (GI) is a type of cash transfer program that provides continuous unconditional cash transfers to individuals or households. The pilot program is a public-private partnership that will honor a household's resilience by placing trust in their ability to make their own decisions on what is best for their path forward. MoCo Boost is the first of its kind in the State of Maryland and is supported by the Montgomery County Council, Department of Health and Human Services, Meyer Foundation, Montgomery County Collaboration Council, and UpTogether.

MoCo BOOST is an initiative to provide \$800 a month to 300 Montgomery County households for 24 months. There are no restrictions on what participants can do with the money received through the pilot. One hundred of the 300 participants were selected from the homeless CoC. Recognizing that households served in Rapid Rehousing (RRH), Exit Bonus, and Rapid Resolution (ShARP) are more likely to return to homelessness compared to those households served in Permanent Supportive Housing, this became the pool of participants for selection. Of the 100 slots, 35 were families with children who either had a length of stay in rapid rehousing greater than 12 months or had exited RRH within the last 12 months without an ongoing housing subsidy. The remaining 65 slots were designated for individuals currently in a rapid rehousing program for more than one year or exited RRH, Exit Bonus, or SHARP within the last 12 months.

After a year of being in the program, those who received guaranteed income and were in RRH, demonstrated that the income could help them develop budgeting skills, be responsible for a larger portion of rent and utilities, pay back rent owed and even graduate from the program sooner than anticipated. If the program were to continue to be funded, graduation rates of RRH clients could be shortened, freeing up more slots for others who need them.

For more information about MoCo Boost, visit their website at <https://mocoboost.org/>.

³ https://www2.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcgportalapps/Press_Detail.aspx?Item_ID=39676

COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Public engagement events in 2023 include the following:



County Executive Marc Elrich joined staff and volunteers at the 2023 Homeless Resource Day.

The ICH was involved in a variety of community outreach events to engage the public. The **Nadim Khan Memorial Homeless Resource Day** occurred on October 19, 2023, at Bohrer Park in Gaithersburg. It was the first time the community was able to hold the event since the pandemic. The resource fair was a partnership with SEPH, the City of Gaithersburg and numerous community partners. There was a total of 284 service providers and 260 volunteers who came together to offer resources and services to 366 participants experiencing homelessness.

The fifth annual **Community Memorial Service** was held June 8, 2023. This event brings County officials, nonprofit leaders and people experiencing homelessness to honor and remember the lives lost in the homelessness continuum in the last year. This year the community recognized the passing of 69 formerly homeless individuals. Two people with recent lived experience of homelessness shared their stories of resilience.



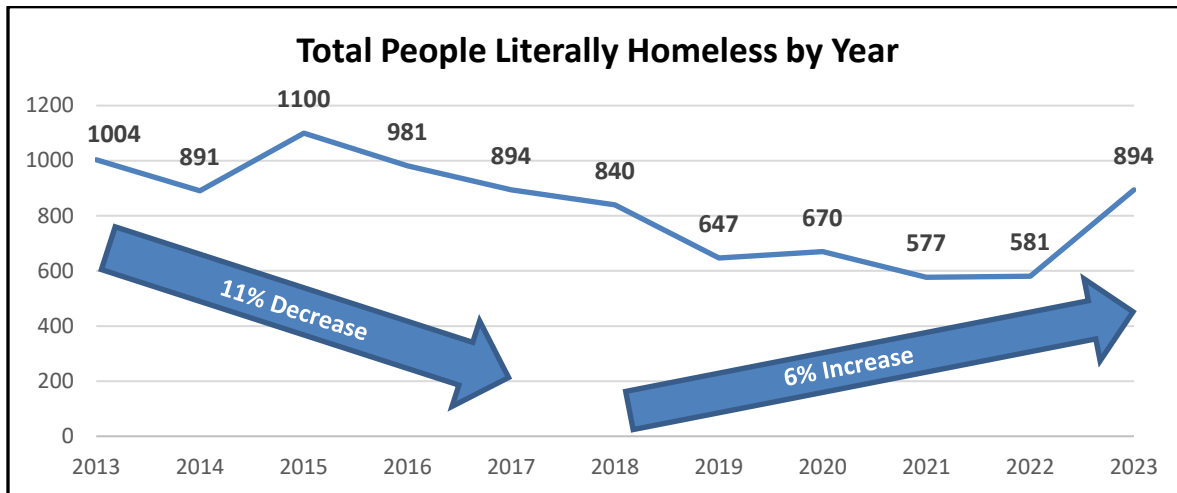
The Lead for Impact 2023 graduates.



List of names of the 69 individuals being memorialized.

SEPH sponsored a leadership development program called **Lead for Impact** for upcoming leaders in ending and preventing homelessness. This year's class developed leadership and advocacy ideas while being provided leadership coaching in a supportive group setting.

DATA AND TRENDS REGARDING HOMELESSNESS IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY



Point-in-Time Count

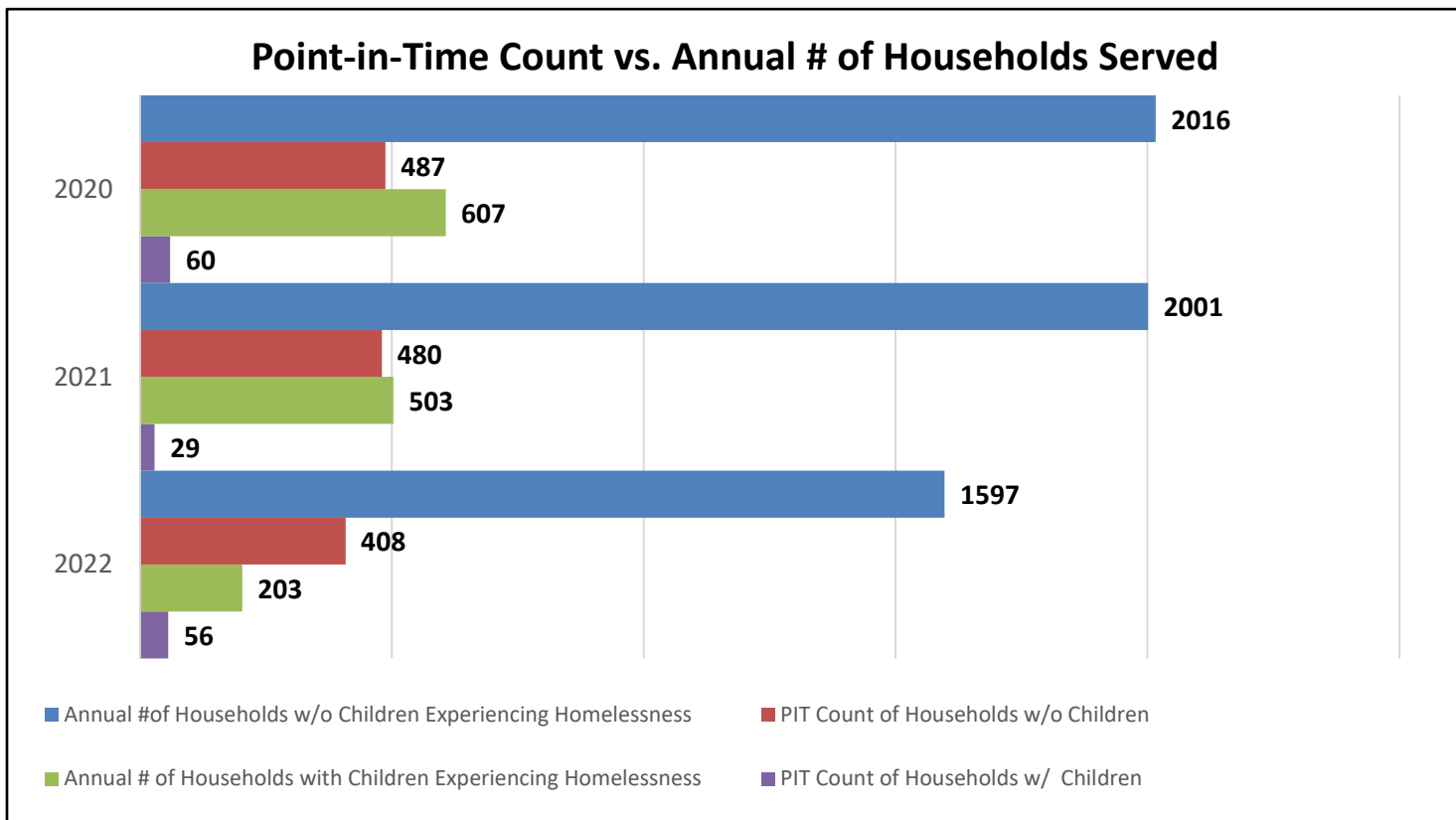


Point-in-Time Count volunteers.

Montgomery County's homeless **Point-in-Time (PIT)** survey was conducted on January 25, 2023. A total of 894 homeless persons were counted that day, an increase of 54% from 2022. This increase in homelessness was observed regionally and is part of the single largest increase in homelessness nationwide, since PIT counts began in 2007. The increase in Montgomery County is believed to be caused by rising rents and inflation, as well as the dwindling of Covid resources in 2022.

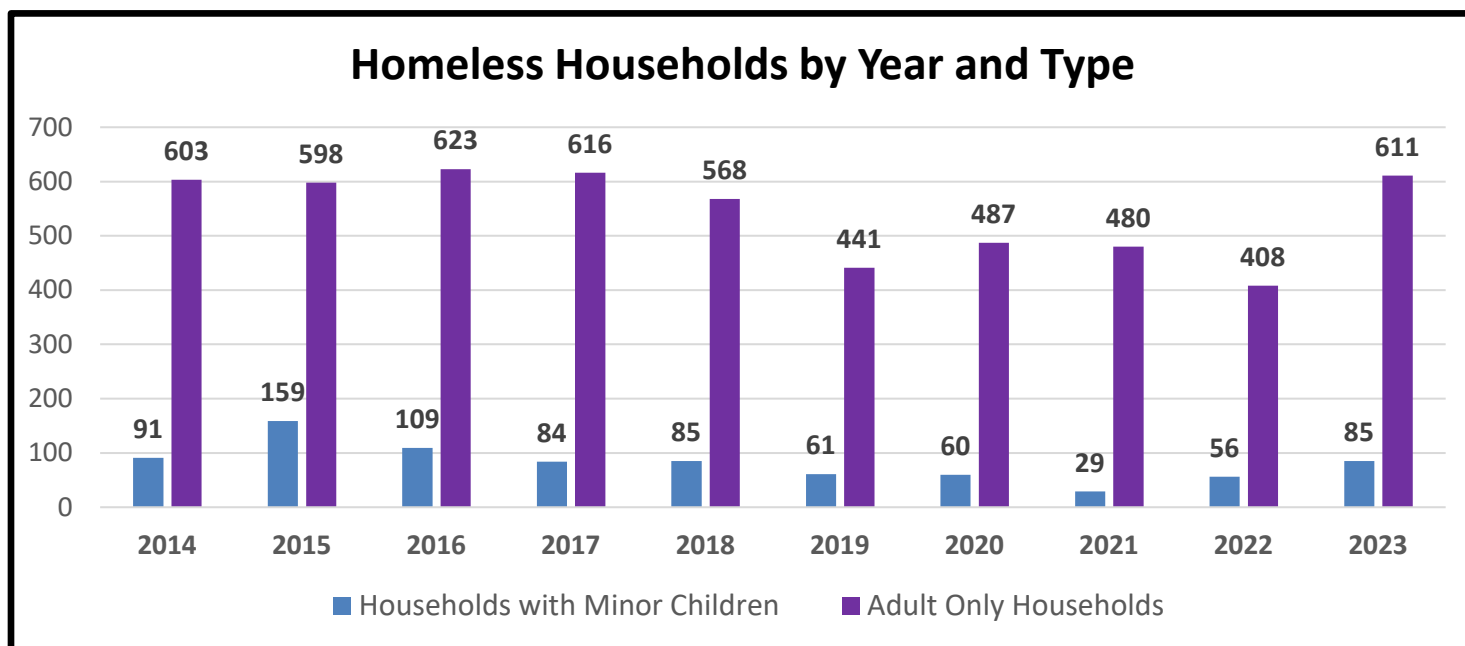
Despite the increase in homelessness, in the last ten years, overall homelessness has decreased by 11%. The most significant decreases have occurred in the last five years and can be attributed to a population specific approach that seeks to connect households who become homeless to the most appropriate housing intervention, targeting prevention resources to those most likely to become homeless and implementing homeless diversion or rapid exit from shelter for those households newly entering the system. The greatest one-year decrease occurred between 2018 and 2019 of 22%.

While the annual PIT survey highlights trends in homelessness, it does not tell the whole story. The snapshot provided by the PIT count has the potential to minimize the prevalence of homelessness in our communities. Another way to measure success in the goal of ending homelessness is to review the annual number of households served by the homeless continuum. The chart below shows the contrast between the PIT count and the number of households who experience homelessness each year. Of note, the number of families entering the homeless continuum has decreased by 60% from 2021 to 2022, and the number of individuals entering the continuum decreased by 20% during the same timeframe. This contrast with the PIT numbers can be explained by two dynamics. One is the decreased outflow from the system, which causes the overall number of households served to be lower than previous years when outflow was higher. The second dynamic is the inflow of individuals from neighboring jurisdictions during hypothermia season when there are more beds available in emergency shelters. In 2022, the Point-in-Time count was less than 26% of the number of households who experienced homelessness within the year.



Life Experiences and Vulnerabilities (Subpopulations)

The effects of the pandemic are illustrated by the high percent of households reporting vulnerabilities, specifically serious mental illness, and co-occurring disorder. Of all the individuals surveyed during this year's enumeration, 30% reported having a serious mental illness and 5% reported a co-occurring disorder. Throughout the pandemic, community behavioral providers primarily focused on telehealth with minimum face-to-face services and treatment. Many individuals with behavioral health challenges who are experiencing homelessness struggle to access treatment through traditional methods. Treatment is best provided when the services go to where the people are, including emergency shelter and the streets.



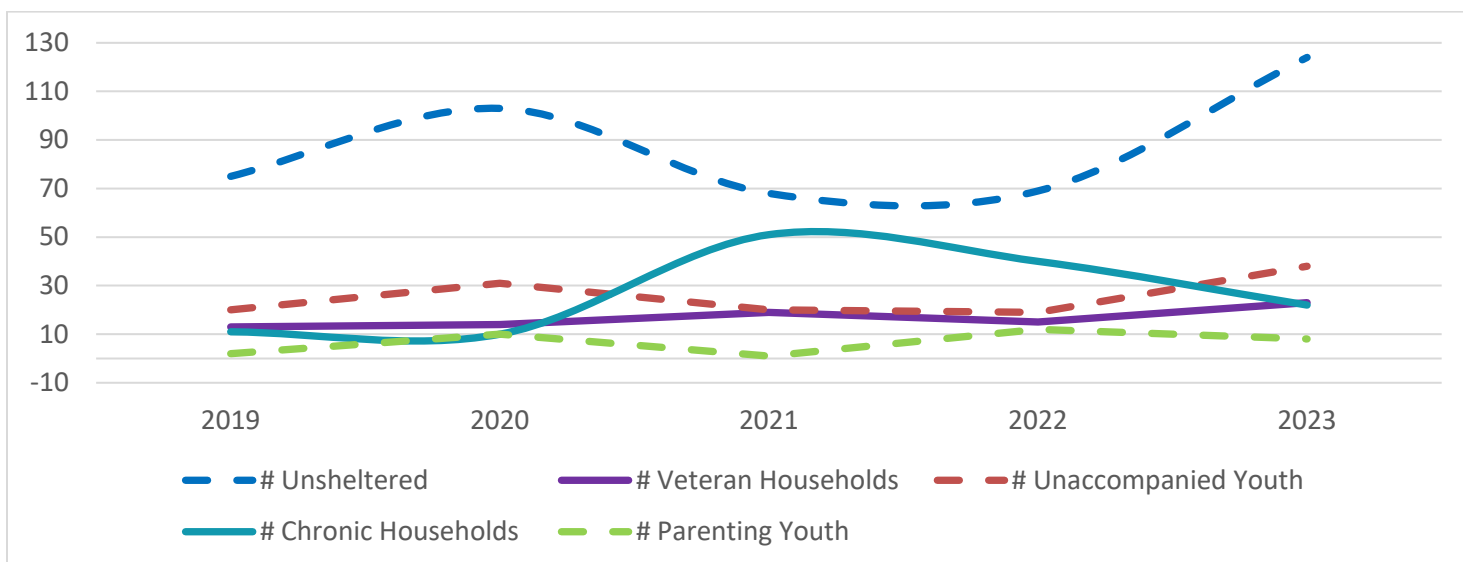
In addition, there was a prevalence of individuals reporting physical disability and chronic health conditions. The percentage of individuals reporting a physical disability, or a chronic health condition has been high for the last two years and there was only a slight decline in 2023. In 2022, 22% of individuals are reporting a physical disability compared to 21% in 2023. There is a similar trend for those reporting a chronic health condition at 13% in 2022 compared to 12% in 2023.

Households without Children		
Vulnerability/ Experience	# Self Reporting	% Of Total
Substance Use Disorder	63	10%
Serious Mental Illness	190	30%
Co-Occurring Disorder	31	5%
HIV/AIDS	3	0%
Domestic Violence History (any time in the past) - DVH	80	13%
Domestic Violence (this episode) -DVC	25	4%
Physical Disability	130	21%
Chronic Health Condition	78	12%
Limited English	30	5%
Foster Care (5)	16	3%
Formerly Institutionalized	22	4%

Episodes of domestic violence, which saw a dramatic increase in 2022, declined significantly in 2023. In 2022, 43% of adults in families reported a history of domestic violence and 34% report a current episode of domestic violence. In 2023, 9% of adults in families report a history of domestic violence and 9% report a current episode.

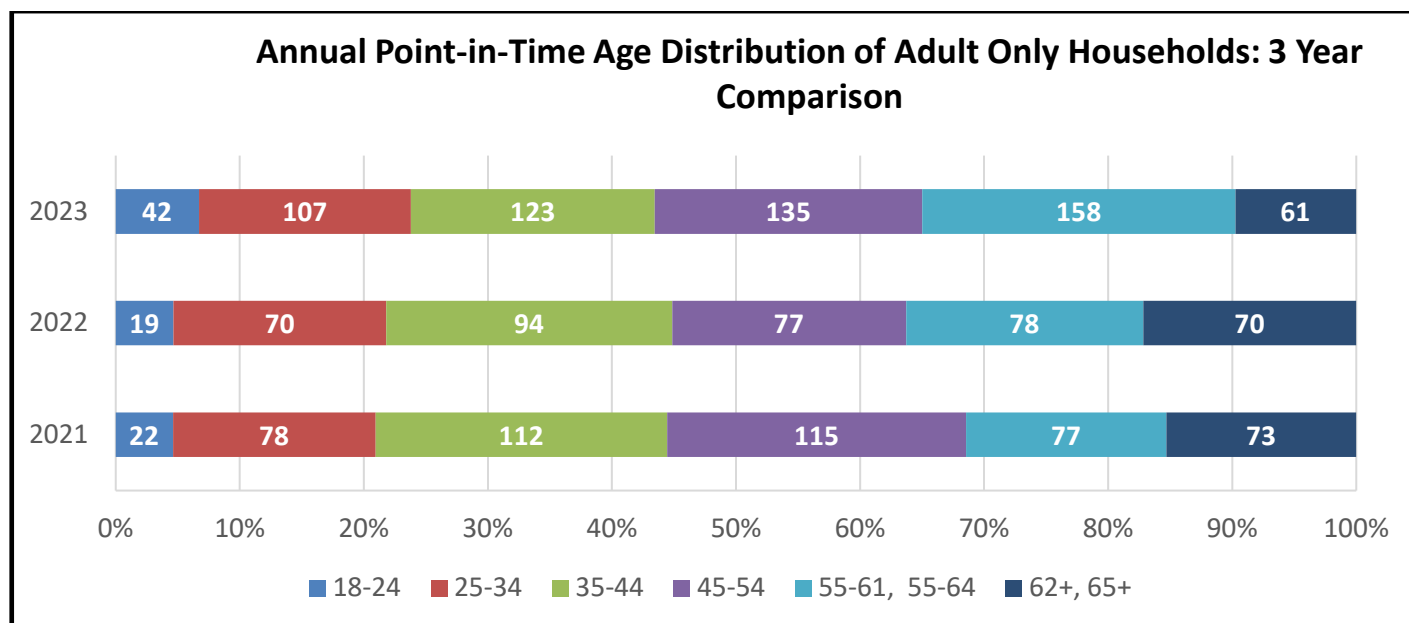
Adults in Households with Children		
Vulnerability/ Experience	# Self Reporting	% Of Total
Substance Use Disorder	0	0%
Serious Mental Illness	15	6%
Co-Occurring Disorder	0	0%
HIV/AIDS	0	0%
Domestic Violence History (any time in the past) - DVH	24	9%
Domestic Violence (this episode) -DVC	24	9%
Physical Disability	6	2%
Chronic Health Condition	4	1%
Limited English	7	3%
Foster Care (5)	2	1%
Formerly Institutionalized	0	0%

Montgomery County has made it a priority to focus on certain subpopulations (chronic, Veteran, and the unsheltered) who tend to have the most significant needs. While the number of chronic households trended downward between 2022 and 2023, the number of unsheltered and unaccompanied youth trended upward.



Age Distribution of Adult Only Households

There continues to be many older adults entering the homeless system. More than half (57%) of all adults without children are over 45 years old, 35% are over 55, and 10% are 62 years or older. The growing number of older adults in the homeless continuum is concerning. Research states that people experiencing homelessness die an average of 30 years younger than the average person in the United States. This means that individuals with a history of homelessness age at an increased rate, so those 45 years old may have similar health issues as someone in their 70s.



Year-Round and Winter Inventory of Beds

The CoC continues to provide emergency shelter to households with minor children through three year-round family shelters, one domestic violence (DV) shelter, and limited hotel subsidies used as overflow shelter. During hypothermia season, additional overflow shelter is provided for families via a non-profit organization. During this year's enumeration, a total of 79 households with minor children were residing in emergency, overflow shelter, or DV shelter and seven households in transitional housing.

Emergency shelter capacity for adults without children has increased to 362 for year-round capacity. This includes the DV shelter with five beds designated for this household type, three designated as medical beds, and two

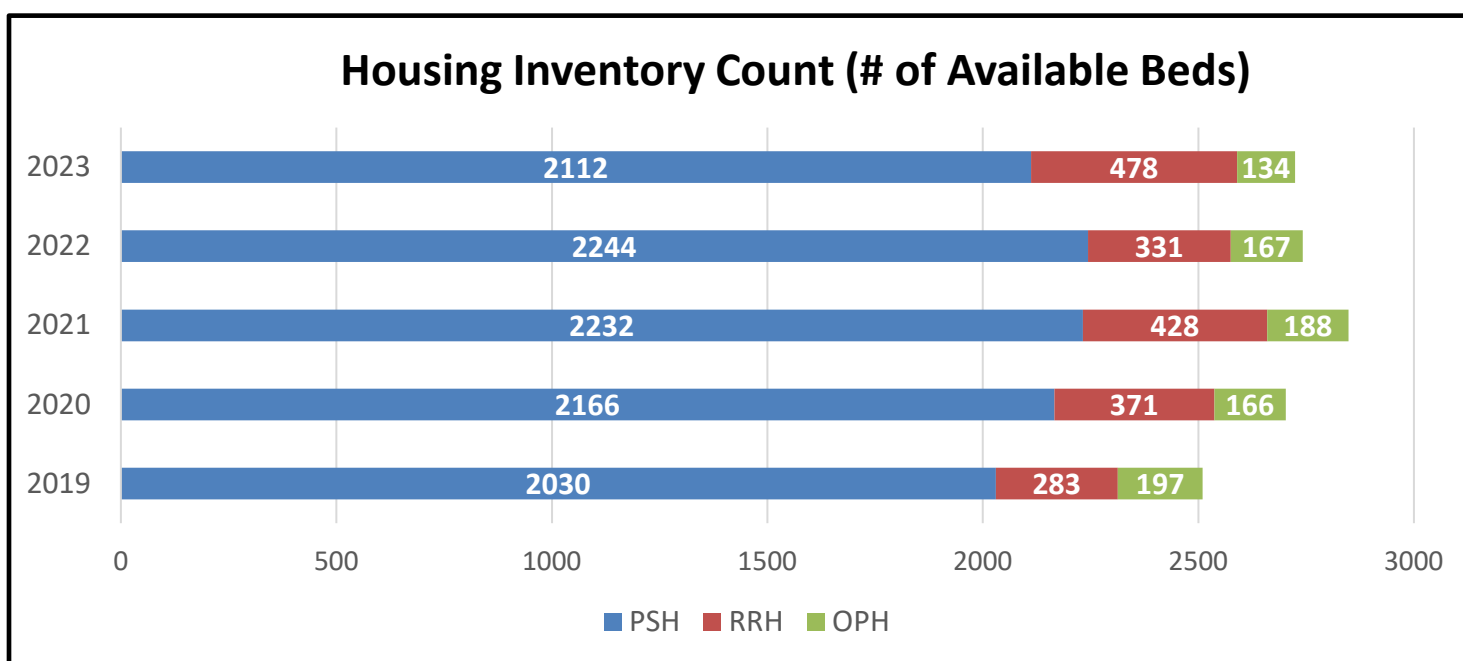
designated for older adults or people with disabilities. Due to the pandemic, the CoC has changed the shelter strategy to increase the number of year-round beds. Additionally, rented hotel space has been used to create non-congregate shelter beds for Covid isolation. On the day of the 2023 enumeration, there were 533 emergency shelters and overflow beds occupied by single adults: an increase of 19% from 2022.

Since the 2022 enumeration, Montgomery County increased the number of medical beds in shelters as well as 20 beds in the new Montgomery County Medical Respite Program. This is in direct response to the growing number of people with serious medical conditions and the increase in hospital discharges to shelter.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY'S YEAR-ROUND AND WINTER INVENTORY OF BEDS			
	Year-Round Beds for		
	Households w/o Children	Households w/children	Total Beds
COVID19 Social Distancing Expansion of shelters, Seasonal, and Overflow	171	151	322
Year-Round Emergency Shelter Bed	362	131	493
Transitional / Haven Beds	32	21	53
TOTALS	565	303	868

Permanent Housing Inventory Count

From 2018 to 2022, the number of units of permanent housing in Montgomery County increased by 8% from 2532 to 2724. Unfortunately, the number of permanent housing units decreased a small amount by less than 1% in 2023 from the 2022 enumeration. The drop in permanent housing is attributed to a decline in the number of people housed in Permanent Supportive Housing on the day of the enumeration. Though many households were able to graduate from Permanent Supportive Housing as a result of the Emergency Housing Vouchers received during the pandemic, filling the slots left in Permanent Supportive Housing has been slower than expected. The housing market has become tougher to navigate even with a housing voucher. With the end of pandemic eviction protections and rent stabilization efforts, landlords are responding by raising rents and increasing barriers to housing despite Montgomery County laws on source of income protection and “ban-the-box” on criminal histories. This puts additional strain on the housing locator network as vacancy rates are incredibly low.

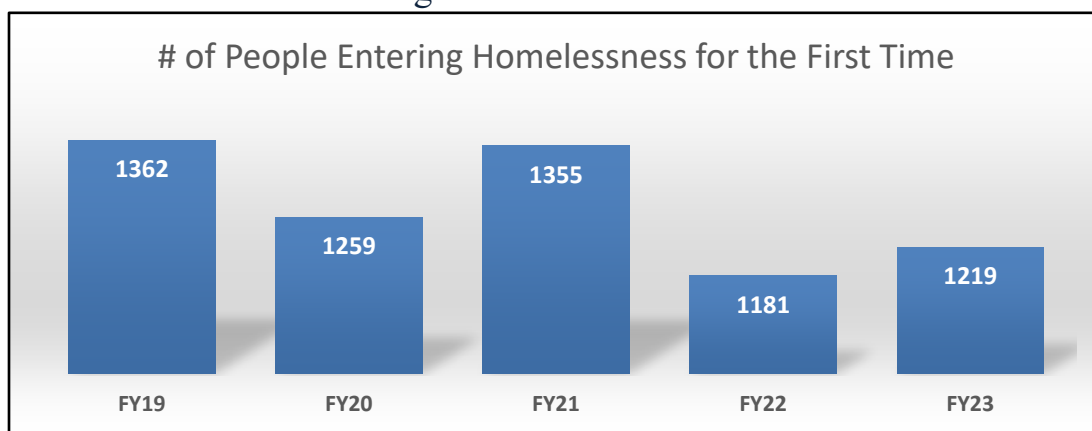


Nonetheless, the CoC remains optimistic about continuing to increase the number of permanent housing units. Montgomery County was awarded funding through the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for additional scattered-site permanent supportive housing. Since 2018, Montgomery County has participated in the state Department of Health Assistance in Community Integration Services (ACIS) pilot that uses the 1115 Medicaid Waiver to pay for supportive services. The CoC has requested in 2022 and received an increase of 100 ACIS slots for individuals with high needs. These slots are currently being filled.

SYSTEM PERFORMANCE

In alignment with the Built for Zero framework and HUD's requirements, the ICH also measures success by monitoring overall system performance. All measures are put in the context of making homelessness a rare, brief, and one-time only experience. Data is collected and reported to HUD annually based on the federal fiscal year. Despite the impact of the pandemic, the CoC has largely maintained the gains made over the past few years.

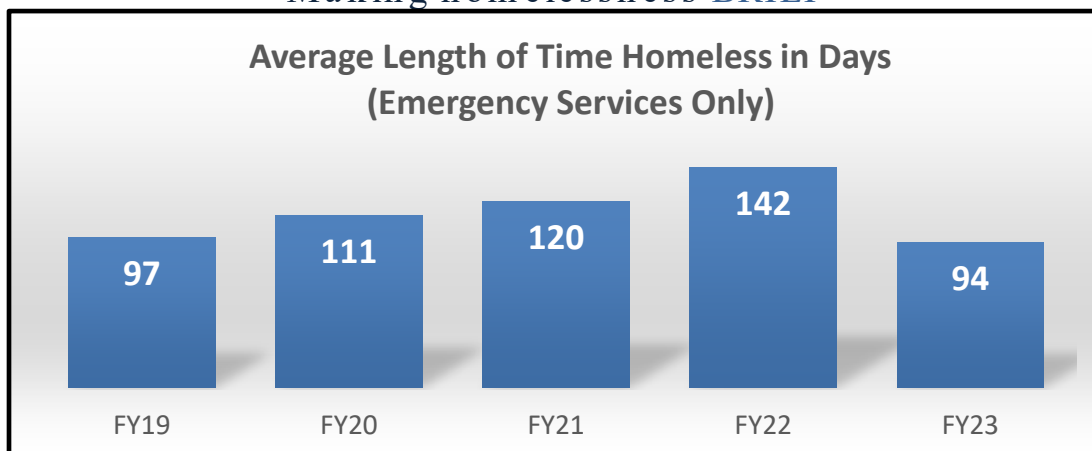
Making homelessness RARE



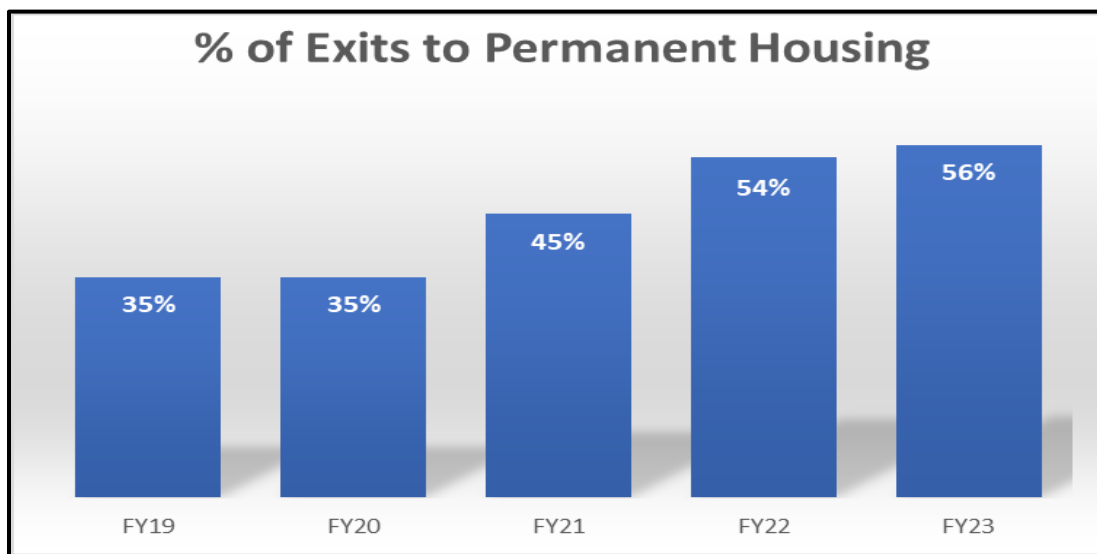
5-Year Trend: 10% Decrease

The Federal FY22 system performance data showed a decline in the number of people entering homelessness for the first time. This can be attributed to CoC's targeted outreach and prioritization of eviction prevention services to neighborhoods with the greatest community-level risk factors for homelessness as well as the implementation of a centralized shelter intake and homeless diversion program for adult-only households. Between FY19 and FY23, the number of people entering homelessness for the first time decreased by 10% despite the lifting of most of the pandemic related tenant protections.

Making homelessness BRIEF



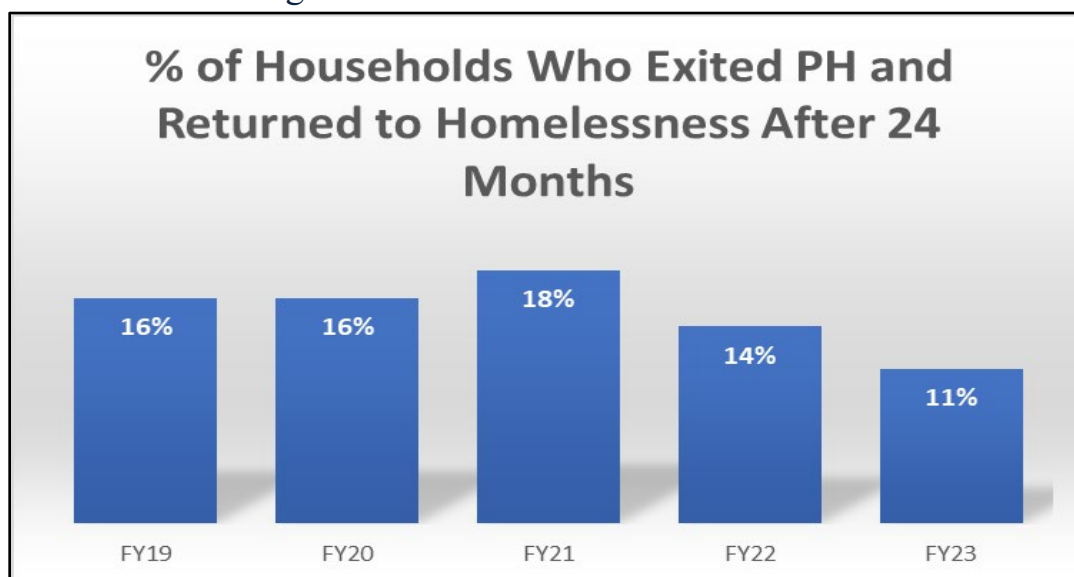
5-Year Trend: 3% Decrease



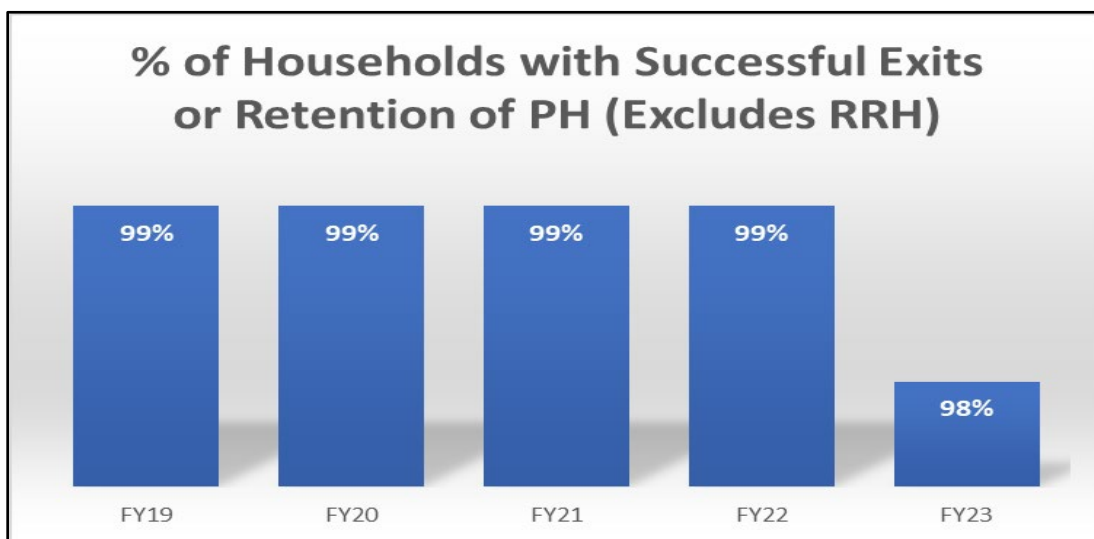
5-Year Trend: 60% Increase

With the ongoing availability of programs like Exit Bonus and SHaRP, households have more housing options available to them. This is evidenced by the increase in the percentage of households exiting to permanent housing. Between FY19 and FY23, the percentage of exits to permanent housing increased significantly by 60%. In addition, the length of time people in emergency shelter experience homelessness decreased by 48 days. In spite of these trends, there continues to be stigma associated with homelessness and fear that households from the CoC will not make good tenants. Other strategies are being developed including more efficient ways to secure identification documents to speed up the housing process to meet the Built for Zero goal of reaching an average length of time of 45 days or less.

Making homelessness ONE-TIME ONLY



5-Year Trend: 31% Decrease



The CoC continues to maintain a very high level of housing retention. The commitment to rehouse and transfer households to a program that is better equipped to serve them allows the CoC to avoid termination and eviction for most participants. Last year, the CoC saw an increase in the number of households returning to homelessness from a permanent destination, but this performance measure is now trending in the right direction with a 31% decrease from FY19 to FY23. SEPH was able to incorporate feedback from the program participants and CoC line staff to make adjustments to the new programming to reduce the likelihood for returns. The ICH is hopeful that the program adjustments, improved care coordination with other systems, and benefits of the Guaranteed Income Pilot will bring this measure closer to the Built for Zero goal of a 5% or less return rate.

GAPS IN THE CONTINUUM OF CARE

The Montgomery County CoC has developed a diverse range of services to end and prevent homelessness in the County, yet gaps remain. These include:

- **Insufficient prevention case management for increasing housing instability:** With the increased housing insecurity caused by rising rents and inflation, the SEPH Housing Stabilization team does not currently have adequate staff dedicated to providing intensive, longer term prevention case management.
- **Scarcity in landlords willing to work with households exiting homelessness:** Given the stigma and resistance among landlords to working with households with a history of homelessness, there is a continuous need for landlord recruitment and ways to incentivize landlords to house those exiting homelessness.
- **Insufficient care coordination with other systems of care:** The CoC serves many households with significant behavioral and physical health challenges in permanent housing programs. To ensure housing stability, individuals need to receive community-based health services including Assertive Community Treatment, crisis services, and home health care. As a result of the pandemic, other systems of care have shifted to providing telehealth services. Individuals in permanent housing do not have adequate technology or capacity to be successful with telehealth services.
- **Dearth of affordable housing and housing vouchers for extremely low-income homeless individuals and families** (i.e., households at or below 30% of the area medium income). The average rent in the County has increased by over 25% in the past two years, making access to housing even more limited.
- **Lack of access to affordable and market rate housing:** The ICH recognizes that households experiencing homelessness face many barriers to accessing housing. People experiencing homelessness are disproportionately people of color, particularly Black and African American. They are denied housing based on

poor credit, criminal backgrounds, and poor rental history, all exacerbated by structural racism. Unfortunately, the route to investigating these denials is too cumbersome for many individuals.

- **Lack of services to meet the needs of a growing aging population in permanent housing programs:** While permanent supportive housing and rapid rehousing provide wraparound support services, the ICH has seen a need for a higher level of medical care to allow people to age in place. Often older adults in permanent housing not only have somatic needs but also struggle with behavioral health challenges as well. Where in-home care exists, formerly homeless older adults are unable to access services due to the complexity of needs.

FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS

In support of the CoC's Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness, the ICH recommends the following:

- Provide \$10 million in funding for Eviction/Homeless Prevention to expand long-term housing stabilization case management and partially replace the loss of federal funding in FY25 to meet the needs of households since rents have increased significantly and evictions in the County are increasing.
- Create a dedicated role to increase landlord recruitment, engagement, retention, and support across various housing programs. This position would expand housing location and navigation efforts.
- Increase funding for mental health care provided on-site at emergency shelters and permanent housing supportive programs.
- Provide \$750,000 in funding to DHHS, Aging and Disability Services for therapeutic home care support in shelters and previously homeless clients in permanent supportive housing (PSH). This request will be a nontraditional approach to providing an equitable opportunity for this vulnerable population to age in place with support, decrease hospitalizations and overuse of emergency room visits, and avoid an increase in homelessness among our seniors and individuals with significant medical and psychiatric conditions.
- Provide \$5 million in additional funding for all scattered site Permanent Supportive Housing programs to account for the significant increases in rents and the increase in cost for community partners to provide supportive services.
- Increase the housing supply by funding the development of deeply affordable housing to extremely low-income families (those below 30% of area median income) who do not have high service needs.

LEGISLATIVE OR REGULATORY CHANGES REQUESTED

The ICH recommends stronger fair housing policy and legislation that protects individuals and families experiencing or at risk of homelessness against discrimination based on criminal history, bad credit and poor rental history. Montgomery County has made great strides in promoting equity in housing by protecting against discrimination based on source of income, but people are still denied housing based on poor credit, criminal backgrounds, and poor rental history which are all exacerbated by structural racism. Unfortunately, the route to investigate these denials is too cumbersome for many individuals. By limiting a landlord or property manager's ability to automatically deny applicants, we can begin to address the significant disparities Black and African American households experience in obtaining and sustaining permanent housing as evidenced by the high rates of Black people (nearly 60%) in the homeless continuum.

- Develop an independent pathway to investigate housing discrimination and illegal practices by landlords that is not client driven.
- Support “just cause” eviction legislation at the state level.
- Advocate that HOC review eligibility criteria on criminal backgrounds and rental history

To increase the availability of affordable housing, the ICH encourages the commitment of dedicated, set aside units or a local homeless preference in multifamily housing developments using federal, state, or local financing and public housing authorities.

CONCLUSION

The Montgomery County CoC’s goal is to end homelessness for all in our community by making homelessness a rare, brief, and one-time only experience. While resources were abundant during the pandemic, many have already expired or will soon be fully expended. The cost of housing continues to be unaffordable to so many households in our County, so housing instability and homelessness will continue to be an issue for years to come. The ICH urges the County to continue its commitment to end and prevent homelessness through strategic investment in critical resources. Such strategic investment produced a more effective system that ultimately succeeded in ending Veteran homelessness and reducing chronic homelessness by more than 90%, despite the impact of COVID-19. To sustain these gains, improve overall system performance, and mitigate the likely rise in homelessness, additional targeted funding will likely be needed to create an end to homelessness in Montgomery County.

There is reason to be optimistic that Montgomery County will reach functional zero for all populations. In December 2022, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness released the new [ALL IN: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness](#) and the Biden Administration has made ending homelessness a “top priority”. Unprecedented federal resources are being deployed to local communities and states including housing vouchers and funding for CoC services. This new plan, unlike all preceding plans, details the role the federal government plays in breaking down and rebuilding inequitable and ineffective systems that create and exacerbate the prevalence of homelessness. The road ahead is long and hard, but with collaboration and funding from local, state, and federal government, we can reach our goal of ending homelessness for all in Montgomery County by the end of 2025.



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