



MONTGOMERY COUNTY INTERAGENCY COMMISSION ON HOMELESSNESS ANNUAL REPORT 2015

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Overview

The Interagency Commission on Homelessness (ICH) was established by Montgomery County Council in 2014 and began its work in 2015 to promote efforts to prevent and end homelessness in Montgomery County. The mission of the ICH is to promote a community-wide goal to end homelessness, develop a strategic plan, educate the community about homelessness, promote partnerships to improve the County's ability to prevent and reduce homelessness, monitor programs that are components of the Continuum of Care and make recommendations to the County Executive and County Council to improve the Continuum of Care. The Interagency Commission on Homelessness has also been designated as the Governing Board of the CoC.

The Continuum of Care (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 homeless individuals and families. The Montgomery CoC provides a full continuum of housing services to homeless persons including outreach and engagement, emergency and transitional shelter, safe havens, rapid re-housing, permanent supportive housing and prevention strategies.

Strategic Direction

In October, 2014 the ICH approved a Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness after an extensive, community-wide planning process. The resulting plan is aligned with the Federal plan to end homelessness, *Opening Doors*, which was developed by U.S Interagency Council to End Homelessness. The Plan's overarching goals are as follows:

- Prevent and end homelessness among Veterans by the end of 2015.
- Finish the job of ending chronic homelessness by the end of 2017.
- Prevent and end homelessness for families, youth, and children by 2020.
- Set a path to ending all types of homelessness.

To further the goals of the strategic plan, the ICH has developed a one year action plan to guide its work, which is reviewed and updated annually. Priorities include increasing housing options; improving access to education and training; increasing employment; educating the community; increasing knowledge about best practices; and increasing collaboration and partnerships.

The Interagency Commission on Homelessness engaged in a variety of activities in FY15 in support of the CoC strategic plan. These include:

- Adopted Continuum of Care Governance Charter designating the Interagency Commission on Homelessness as the CoC Governing Board.

- Approved Continuum of Care Ten Year Strategic Plan and developed a Year One Action Plan.
- Joined the Zero: 2016 Initiative, a follow-on to the 100,000 Homes Campaign designed to help the communities to end Veterans homelessness by December 2015 and chronic homelessness by 2017. CoC housing providers have agreed to prioritize vacancies in their existing programs for Veterans and those experiencing chronic homelessness.
- Implemented consistent definition of Veteran to enable all CoC providers to more quickly identify Veterans and link them to housing.
- Adopted written standards for its coordinated assessment system to standardize referrals to housing programs and assure that homeless individuals and families most in need are prioritized for housing.
- Created Resource Development Committee to explore way to increase housing options that are affordable to low income persons and identify alternate funding sources.

Community Outreach and Public Engagement

The Interagency Commission was involved in a variety of community outreach events to engage the public. These include:

- Homeless Resource Day 2014 - Montgomery County in partnership with the City of Gaithersburg held its fourth annual “Homeless Resource Day” as a way reach to out to residents experiencing homelessness and connect them with needed community resources and supports. More than 460 people attended this highly successful event and were able to receive health screenings, registration for mainstream benefits, legal assistance, employment, haircuts and more.
- Homeless Resource Guide – The ICH developed a resource guide that includes concise, comprehensive information about help available to persons experiencing homelessness in Montgomery County.
- ICH Community-Wide meetings - The ICH one Community-Wide meetings designed to engage the community and update the public on the activities of the CoC. The first ICH Community-wide meeting was held in February 2015.

Data and Trends regarding Homelessness in Montgomery County

Point-In-Time Count

Montgomery County’s homeless point in time survey was conducted on January 28, 2015. A total of 1,100 homeless persons were counted, 54% of whom were individuals and 46% were persons in families. This represents a 24% increase over the 2014 count. Most of this increase is a due to a rise in the number of homeless families, which increased 36% from 117 households in 2014 to 159 households in 2015.

As result of the CoC’s efforts to prioritize housing for veterans and persons experiencing chronic homelessness, both group saw a decrease over the past year. There was an overall decrease of 11% percent in the number of persons experiencing chronic homelessness and a 31% decrease in the number of veterans experiencing homelessness between 2014 and 2015.

The table below provides a comparison of the past 3 years.

| MONTGOMERY COUNTY’S HOMELESS COUNT BY CATEGORY | | | | | |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|--|--|
| Category | 2015 | 2014 | 2013 | Percent Change 2013 to 2015 | Percent Change 2014 to 2015 |
| Total Number Counted | 1100 | 891 | 1004 | 10% | 23.5% |
| Total Individuals | 598 | 603 | 638 | -6% | -1% |
| Total Number of Families | 159 | 91 | 117 | 36% | 75% |
| Total Persons in Families | 502 | 288 | 366 | 37% | 74% |
| Total Adults in Families | 184 | 101 | 137 | 34% | 82% |
| Total Children in Families | 318 | 187 | 229 | 39% | 70% |

Among individuals experiencing homelessness, 67% percent reported chronic substance abuse, serious mental health issues, or co-occurring disorders while 48% reported a chronic health condition and/or physical disability. Twenty-six percent met the criteria for chronic homelessness defined as a person who has a disabling condition and who has been homeless for at least 12 months or had four episodes of homelessness in three years. Looking at family households, 11% of adults in families reported chronic substance abuse, serious mental illness, or co-occurring disorders while 9% reported a chronic health condition and/or physical disability. Twenty percent of households with children reported that domestic violence contributed to their homelessness. Two percent of families met the criteria for chronic homelessness.

Housing Inventory

Montgomery County CoC continues to provide a range of temporary and permanent housing options to address the needs of persons experiencing homelessness and help them rapidly exit homelessness. The crisis response system includes emergency shelter, overflow shelter and transitional housing options as outlined below:

| MONTGOMERY COUNTY'S Year-Round and Winter Inventory of Beds | | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| | Beds for Households w/o Children | Beds\Units for Households w/children | Total Year-Round Beds | Total Winter Beds |
| Hypothermia/Overflow/Other (Additional winter Capacity) | 260 | 221/73 | 0 | 481 |
| Emergency Shelter Beds | 150 | 132/41 | 282 | 0 |
| Transitional / Safe Haven Beds | 172 | 164/51 | 336 | 0 |
| TOTALS | 582 | 417/165 | 618 | 481 |

In addition, the CoC continues to expand permanent housing options including Rapid Rehousing and Permanent Supportive Housing for persons in need of supportive housing options in order to exit homelessness. In 2015, the number of permanent housing beds increased 11% from 1,771 in 2014 to 1,960 in 2015.

Gaps in the Continuum of Care

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

- Lack of sufficient affordable housing for extremely low income homeless individuals and families (i.e. households at or below 30% of the area medium income)
- Landlords willing to rent to homeless individuals and families with criminal histories and poor credit.

Funding Recommendations

The Interagency Commission on Homelessness is recommending the following in support of the CoC's Ten Year Plan:

- Increase permanent supportive housing for persons experiencing chronic homelessness. Additional resources are needed for the CoC to be able to meet the goal of ending chronic homelessness by 2017.
- Increasing supply of housing affordable to extremely low-income families (those below 30% of area median income) who do not have high service needs.

Legislative or Regulatory changes Requested

At this time ICH does not recommend any legislative or regulatory changes needed to implement the Continuum of Care Strategic Plan.

Conclusion

The Montgomery County Continuum of Care (CoC) goal is to end homelessness for all individuals in our community. Although government resources have been strained over the past few years, the County has continued its commitment to prevent and end homelessness. The strategy to achieve this vision is of making homelessness a rare, brief, and nonrecurring event for all residents in Montgomery County.