



# **MONTGOMERY COUNTY INTERAGENCY COMMISSION ON HOMELESSNESS ANNUAL REPORT 2016**

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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 and implement 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 Continuum of Care.

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 the US Interagency Council on 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 annually develops a one-year action plan to guide its work. This year's top priority is ending chronic homelessness by December 31, 2017. The following action items are intended to help us achieve this goal:

- Conduct a comprehensive analysis of the homeless system to identify gaps and use data to inform programming and funding.
- Develop a robust street outreach strategy to provide targeted, housing-focused case management to individuals experiencing street homelessness and disengaged from all other services.
- Develop a robust By-Name- List to get a better understanding of the scale of chronic homelessness in Montgomery County.
- Implement a coordinated housing entry system for all populations, including youth and families, that prioritizes those households with the greatest need.

- Create a communication plan for educating the public and engaging all stakeholders.
- Implement a Move-Up strategy in Montgomery County to create a true continuum of care that allows ebb and flow as a household’s housing support needs change. The Move-up effort will enable stable tenants who are currently in a permanent supportive housing (PSH) program but no longer need regular social services to transition to non-PSH subsidized housing with limited after care.
- Partner with community housing agencies like the Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC) and the Department of Housing and Community Affairs to increase the availability of low income housing and rental subsidies.
- Implement a medical respite program for homeless individuals recently discharged from the hospital with complex medical needs.
- Create and implement a Landlord – Tenant Engagement Initiative to increase the number of landlords willing to accept previously homeless households.
- Maximize the utilization of Medicaid funding for housing support services including the implementation of the 1115 Medicaid Waiver for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness or returning to homelessness from long-term institutionalization.

The Interagency Commission on Homelessness engaged in a variety of activities in FY16 in support of the CoC strategic plan. These include:

- Ending Veteran homelessness by achieving “functional zero” in December 2015.
- Implemented a Coordinated Entry process for the CoC providers serving single adults that ensures those individuals with the greatest needs are housed first.
- Instituted CoC-wide performance measures to evaluate the system on housing retention, length of time homeless, and many more.
- Provided clarification on the definition of “disability” and implemented uniform documentation standards.
- Received a limited local preference from HOC for Veterans experiencing homelessness.
- Applied through the State of Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene for a 1115 Medicaid Waiver that would make housing support services reimbursable through Medicaid for those individuals experiencing chronic homelessness and/or returning to homelessness after long-term institutionalization.
- Received a planning grant to develop a proposal to implement a supportive housing “Pay for Success” model by developing a permanent supportive housing program for justice-involved persons.

## **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 2015 - Montgomery County in partnership with the City of Gaithersburg held its fourth annual “Homeless Resource Day” to reach out to residents experiencing homelessness and connect them with needed community resources and services. More than 400 people attended this highly successful event and could receive

health screenings, registration for mainstream benefits, legal assistance, employment, haircuts and more.

- The Outreach and Education Committee has performed “education” around issues of homelessness and the needs of these vulnerable residents at five different events this year to 180 total persons including service providers, housing agencies, government entities, civic associations, and religious organizations.
- ICH Community-Wide meetings - The ICH Community-Wide meetings are designed to engage the community and update the public on the activities of the CoC. This year’s ICH Community-wide meeting was held in October 2016.

## 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, 2016. A total of 981 homeless persons were counted, 64% of whom were individuals and 36% were persons in families. This represents a 11% decrease over the 2015 count. This overall decrease in homelessness can be attributed to the 31% reduction in the number of homeless households with children which is likely due to increased diversion efforts to prevent entry to homelessness, use of an intensive teaming model for households in motel more than 30 days, an increase in rapid re-housing units, and the opening of the public housing authority waitlist.

Because of the CoC’s efforts to prioritize housing for veterans and persons experiencing chronic homelessness, both groups saw a decrease over the past year. There was an overall decrease of 8% percent in the number of persons experiencing chronic homelessness and a 29% decrease in the number of veterans experiencing homelessness between 2015 and 2016.

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

<b>MONTGOMERY COUNTY’S HOMELESS COUNT BY CATEGORY</b>					
<b>Category</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>Percent Change 2014 to 2016</b>	<b>Percent Change 2015 to 2016</b>
<b>Total Number Counted</b>	981	1100	891	10%	-11%
<b>Total Individuals</b>	623	598	603	3%	4%
<b>Total Number of Families</b>	109	159	91	20%	-31%
<b>Total Persons in Families</b>	358	502	288	24%	-29%

<b>Total Adults in Families</b>	128	184	101	27%	-30%
<b>Total Children in Families</b>	230	318	187	23%	-28%

Among individuals experiencing homelessness, 62% percent reported chronic substance abuse, serious mental health issues, or co-occurring disorders and 49% reported a chronic health condition and/or physical disability.

### **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:

<b>MONTGOMERY COUNTY'S Year-Round and Winter Inventory of Beds</b>				
	<b>Beds for Households w/o Children</b>	<b>Beds/Units for Households w/children</b>	<b>Total Year-Round Beds</b>	<b>Total Winter Beds</b>
<b>Hypothermia/Overflow/Other (Additional winter Capacity)</b>	243	111/34	0	354
<b>Emergency Shelter Beds</b>	135	135/41	270	0
<b>Transitional / Safe Haven Beds</b>	178	171/50	349	0
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>556</b>	<b>417/125</b>	<b>619</b>	<b>354</b>

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 to exit homelessness. In 2016, the number of permanent housing beds increased 6% from 1,950 in 2015 to 2,071 in 2016.

### **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)
- Lack of adequate effective permanent supportive housing programs equipped to provide intensive support services to those with the greatest need (individuals with serious mental illness, chronic substance use, and/or co-occurring disorders)
- Lack of adequate Rapid Re-housing units and employment services for individuals and families

## **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 affordable housing to extremely low-income families (those below 30% of area median income) who do not have high service needs.
- Increasing the community's capacity to provide intensive street outreach and case management to individuals disengaged from other types of services.

## **Legislative or Regulatory Changes Requested**

Now ICH, does not recommend any legislative or regulatory changes needed to implement the Continuum of Care Strategic Plan. However, we are currently evaluating the Housing Initiative Program to see if regulatory changes might be needed to make the program more responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable.

## **Conclusion**

The Montgomery County Continuum of Care (CoC) goal is to end homelessness for all individuals in our community by making homelessness a rare, brief, and nonrecurring event. Although government resources have been strained over the past few years, the County has continued its commitment to prevent and end homelessness through strategic investment in critical resources. Such strategic investment produced a more effective system that ultimately succeeded in ending Veteran homelessness. While additional targeted funding will likely be needed to produce similar results for chronically homeless individuals and families, the ICH is confident the CoC is operating efficiently and is equipped to serve the County's most vulnerable residents with your continued support.