

Interagency Commission on Homelessness Annual Report | 2019



Department of Health and Human Services
Services to End and Prevent Homelessness
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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 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 ICH has also been designated as the Governing Board of the Continuum of Care (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 housing services to homeless persons including:

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

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

In October 2014, the ICH approved a [Ten-Year Strategic 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 U.S. 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.

Since the adoption of the current Ten-Year Strategic Plan, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness has developed a new Federal plan titled [Home, Together](#). In turn, the ICH embarked on updating and revising the Montgomery County's strategic plan to end homelessness. This community-wide effort began in February 2019 and involved multiple stakeholders including elected officials, non-profit service providers, representatives from other systems of care, and government agencies. The Strategy and Planning Committee led the development of the plan and organized a series of work sessions to inform the community's strategies. The [final plan](#) will be launched in January 2020. See highlights below.

***Vision:** We envision a home for everyone in Montgomery County, where the experience of homelessness is rare, brief, and one-time only.*

***Mission:** Through commitment and collaboration, we will create effective systems in our community to achieve our vision. We strive to be a leader in the work to end homelessness across our nation.*

Bold Goals

- End homelessness among Veterans by 2015. - **Achieved!**
- End homelessness among chronically homeless individuals by 2019. - **Achieved!**
- End homelessness among families with children by the end of 2020.
- End homelessness among youth (ages 16-24) by the end of 2021.
- End homelessness among seniors by the end of 2022.
- End homelessness among everyone in Montgomery County by the end of 2023.

Values

- Housing First and Person-Centered Approaches
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Collaboration Across the Continuum of Care
- Data and Results Based Decisions
- Continuous Change and Improvement

Strategies

- Reduce Racial Disparities Across the System
- Build and Support Strong and Adaptable Programs
- Build and Support Affordable Housing Solutions within the Homeless Continuum
- Coordinate Effectively Across Other Systems of Care
- Increase and Diversify Funding
- Educate and Advocate for Change

ICH INFRASTRUCTURE

This year, the ICH evaluated its current membership, committee structure, and governance. As a result, the CoC approved a revised [Governance Charter](#) and recommended legislative changes to the existing ICH statute. The intent is to improve effectiveness and efficiency as well as increase participation from other systems of care. See highlights of the revised committee structure below.

Committee	Key Roles and Responsibilities
STRATEGY AND PLANNING Long-term vision and strategy	Develop and oversee the strategic plan to end homelessness, including monitoring progress toward goals, conducting an annual gaps analysis and reviewing external policies that may affect local efforts.
COMMUNICATION Public education and messaging	Educate the public on issues related to homelessness and the community’s response, including managing the CoC’s website and communications strategy for initiatives and campaigns.
PEOPLE’S COMMITTEE Ensuring people- centered efforts	Facilitate the leadership and authentic collaboration with individuals with lived experience in all aspects of the community’s efforts to end homelessness, including advising other committees and recruiting individuals with lived experience to participate.
OUTCOMES AND IMPROVEMENT Harnessing data for improvement	Establish performance targets and monitors and evaluate program level performance, including supporting improvement efforts through identifying training on best practices. Oversee the implementation of HMIS (through the HMIS subcommittee).
PARTNERSHIPS AND FUNDING Mobilizing Resources	Forge partnerships and assist funders to establish priorities that further the CoC’s strategic plan, including overseeing the annual application for federal homelessness funding (through the Allocations Subcommittee).
SYSTEM COORDINATION Cross sector program and policy implementation	Coordinate the implementation of a housing and services system across sectors, including recommending improvements for policies and overseeing the CES (through the Coordinate Entry System Subcommittee).

INITIATIVES

The *Housing for All = A Stronger Montgomery* campaign encompasses the broader vision of making homelessness rare, brief, and one-time only for all. In 2017, Services to End and Prevent Homelessness (SEPH) began to restructure programs to align with this vision and encompass the new federal mandates on Coordinated Entry Systems (CES) for both single adults

and families with minor children. The restructure utilizes the guiding principles and shared values of our CoC as identified in the Strategic Plan to End Homelessness.

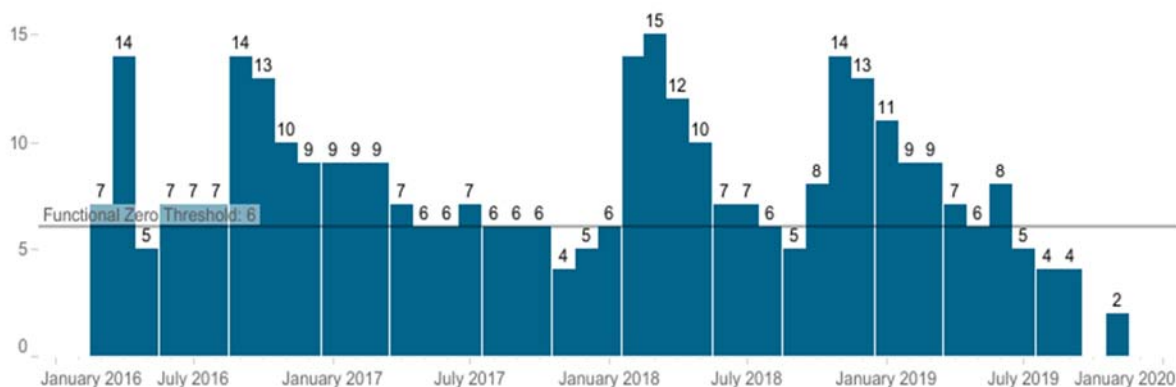
ICH’s work over the past year has been focused on three initiatives as part of the “*Housing for All*” campaign. These include the Zero:2016, Inside (Not Outside), and At Home Together campaigns, detailed below.

Zero: 2016

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

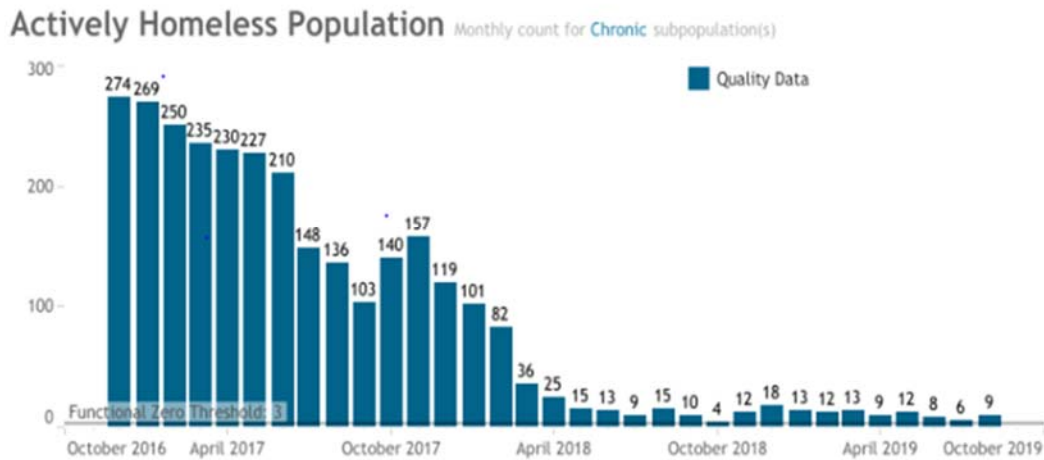
This success was confirmed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, and the Community Solutions *Built for Zero (BFZ)* campaign. We have housed more than 156 Veterans since the *Zero:2016* effort officially kicked off in June 2015 and only 5 % of them have returned to homelessness. The chart below shows the number of Veterans experiencing homelessness for each month since January 2016. Our goal is to have no more than six Veterans experiencing homelessness at any give time.

Actively Homeless Population Monthly count for Veteran subpopulation(s)



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

In January 2016, Montgomery County CoC committed to the ambitious goal of ending long-term homelessness for people with disabilities. To date, 424 people have been housed through this initiative and 11 individuals remain to be housed. Although the CoC has not officially met the target for “functional zero,” Montgomery County has consistently had less than 12 unhoused people identified as chronic since May of 2018. See the run chart below.



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

Unlike the previous initiatives addressing Veteran and chronic homelessness, success is not defined by a “functional zero” number but instead by making the experience rare, brief, and one-time only. Montgomery County will measure success by reducing the number of families experiencing homelessness for the first time, shortening the length of time a family experiences homelessness, and decreasing the rate of returns to homelessness for families with children. The chart on page 7 describe our performance over the last four years.

In Fiscal Year 2019, Montgomery County served 275 households’ families in the homeless system. This includes more than 500 children. The strategies of the **@HomeTogether** Initiative include new and enhanced programs to better engage families early before they become homeless, and better targeted resources to provide rental assistance to families who are at risk of losing their housing. For families who enter the emergency family shelter, there will be more integration between agencies to quickly connect to mainstream resources, employment, and affordable childcare. We believe ending homelessness is possible by providing the right amount of assistance to help families obtain or regain permanent housing quickly and ensuring access to services to help them remain stably housed.

Over the last year, the County has made some early improvements in serving families experiencing homelessness. From 2018 to 2019, there was a 27% decrease in the number of households served and a 42% reduction in the number of people in families experiencing homelessness for the first time. This can be directly attributed to the County’s work on homeless prevention. In turn, the heavy emphasis on prevention, has contributed to an increase in the length of stay for shelters. The families we are serving in shelter have significantly more complex challenges than we have seen in the past as those households with less barriers are provided with early interventions and support eliminating the need for emergency shelter.

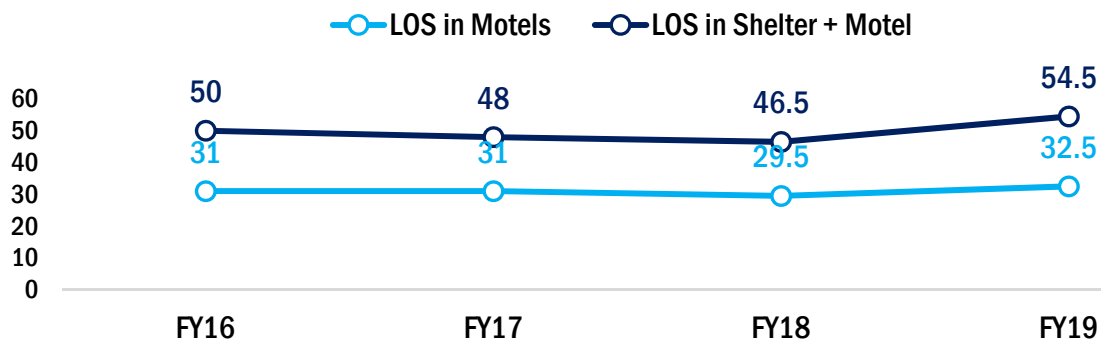
Making Homelessness for Families RARE

Number of people in households experiencing homelessness for the first time



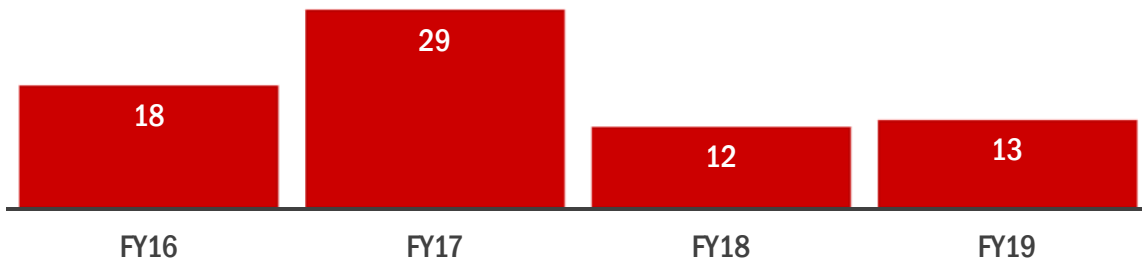
Making Homelessness for Families BRIEF

Length of stay (days) in motels and in shelter + motels



Making Homelessness for Families One-Time Only

Returns to homelessness within 24 months: Households



COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

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

- The third annual Community Memorial Event honoring individuals who were part of the homeless community who died during 2018. More than 100 family, friends, policy makers, service providers and members of the faith community attended the event which provided education on the connection between health and housing.
- Montgomery County in partnership with the City of Gaithersburg held its eighth “Homeless Resource Day” to reach out to residents experiencing homelessness and connect them with needed community resources and services. More than 380 households attended this highly successful event and received health screenings, registration for mainstream benefits, legal assistance, employment, haircuts and more. Over 330 volunteers make the event possible.
- Developed a communications strategy and launched the *@HomeTogether* Initiative to end family homelessness in Montgomery County.
- Representatives of the ICH engaged a variety of stakeholder groups by providing education on issues surrounding homelessness. These groups include the Montgomery Cares Advisory Board, Commission on People with Disabilities, funding collaboratives, civic associations and many others.

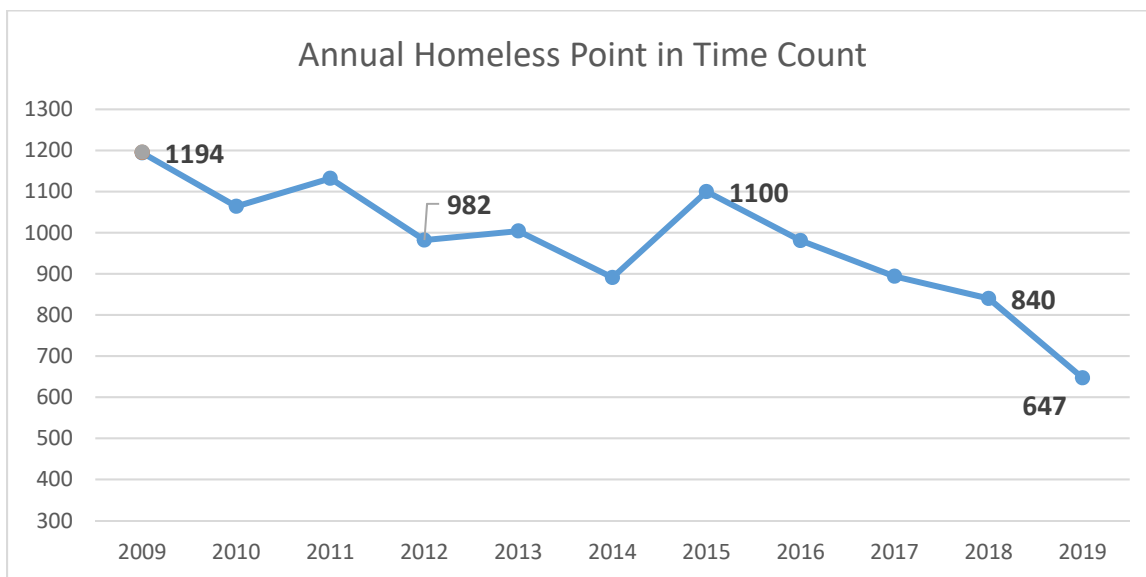
DATA AND TRENDS REGARDING HOMELESSNESS IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY

Point-In-Time Count

Montgomery County’s Homeless Point-in-time (PIT) Count was conducted on January 23, 2019. A total of 647 homeless persons were counted that day, a decline of 23% from 2018 and 28% from 2017 count. Montgomery County attributes the decrease in the number of persons experiencing homelessness to a multipronged approach to ensuring that all residents experiencing a housing crisis and entering the homeless services system are supported and housed as quickly as possible. Since January of 2016, more than 400 people experiencing homelessness have been placed in permanent housing through the Inside (not Outside) Initiative, resulting in a 93% decrease in chronic homelessness. In addition to the concentrated effort to end long-term homelessness, the CoC instituted a shelter diversion program for families, leading to a reduction in the number of households entering the homeless continuum. Staff offer support in problem solving and conflict resolution that allows families to resolve their housing crisis quickly. A similar approach is used at the single adult emergency shelters resulting in shorter length of stay. In addition, the CoC has increased the number of Rapid Rehousing units and made the program more flexible to meet the varying needs of all households.

Households without children experienced an 22% decrease in 2019 from 568 in 2018 to 441 in 2019. There was a decrease of 44% in the number of unsheltered populations, 75 in 2019 compared to 133 in 2018. In addition to the annual PIT Count Montgomery County plans to conduct quarterly counts of unsheltered persons to identify, engage, and track those experiencing street homelessness.

The chart below provides a comparison of the past 10 years.



Montgomery County's Homeless Count by Category					
Category	2017	2018	2019	Percent Change 2017 to 2019	Percent Change 2018 to 2019
Total Number Counted	894	840	647	-28%	-23%
Total Individuals	616	568	441	-28%	-22%
Total Number of Families	84	86	61	-27%	-29%
Total Persons in Families	278	278	206	-26%	-26%
Total Adults in Families	106	93	76	-28%	-18%
Total Children in Families	172	185	130	-24%	-30%

The number of households with children headed by transition age youth (18-24 years old) decreased 82% from 11 in 2018 to 2 during the 2019 count. This is an 85% decrease from the 2017 count. However, it is unclear why the number of transition age parenting youth households has decreased so drastically. In calendar year 2018, 57 youth-headed households were served in the continuum which is similar to previous years. In July 2018, the CoC began implementing homeless diversion for families with children. Preliminary numbers suggest that nearly 2/3 of all households seeking shelter can resolve their housing crisis without needed emergency shelter. If the trend continues, the CoC will attribute the decline in transition age youth-headed households with children to this change in practice. The number of unaccompanied transition age youth decreased in 2019 to 20 (31%) from 2018.

For more information on the PIT Count in Montgomery County and the Washington metro region, see the full [report](#).

HOUSING INVENTORY

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. During the hypothermia season from November 1 to March 31, additional overflow shelter is provided through a non-profit organization. During the 2019 enumeration, a total of 47 households with minor children were residing in emergency, overflow, or DV shelter which is a significant decrease (32%) from 2018.

Emergency shelter capacity for adults without children remains 140 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. During hypothermia season, capacity expands to 383 beds. On the day of the 2019 enumeration, there were 298 emergency shelter and overflow beds occupied; a decrease of 4% from 2018 and 15% from 2017. Over the last few years, the need for emergency seasonal beds have not exceeded the CoC capacity.

Over the last few years, the CoC has reallocated funding from safe havens and transitional housing to permanent housing programs. This partially accounts for the decrease in the number of people served on the night of the PIT count. On the night of the PIT count, the bed capacity for transitional shelter and Safe Haven was 88. On the day of the enumeration, there were only 46 beds occupied. The continued decrease during the past two years' enumerations highlights the need to explore alternative uses for transitional housing facilities. The summary below represents the literal homeless capacity.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY'S YEAR-ROUND AND WINTER INVENTORY OF BEDS				
	Beds for Households without Children	Beds/Units for Households with children	Total Year-Round Beds	Total Winter Beds
Hypothermia/Overflow/Other (Additional Winter Capacity)	244	70/18	0	346
Emergency Shelter Beds	140	143/41	283	0
Transitional / Safe Haven Beds	88	46/8	134	0
TOTALS	472	285/80	417	346

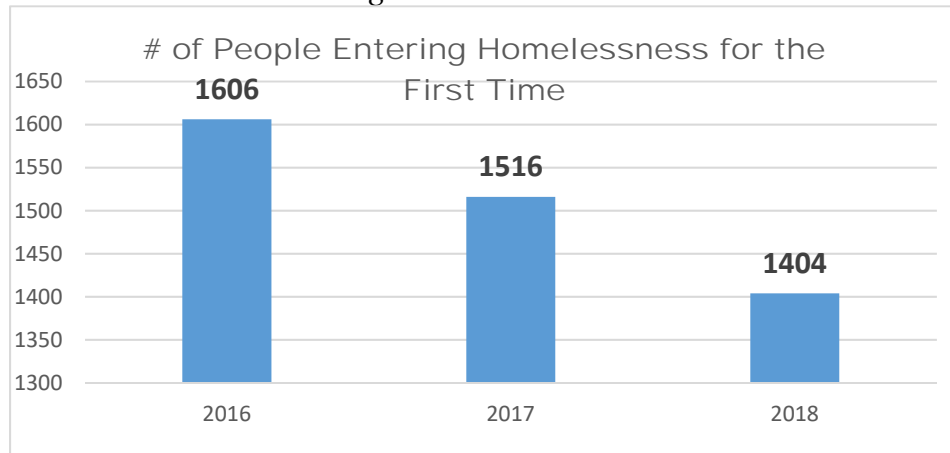
In addition, the CoC continues to expand permanent housing options including Rapid Re-housing and Permanent Supportive Housing for persons in need of supportive housing options to exit homelessness. From 2017 to 2019, the number of units of permanent housing in Montgomery County has increased by 223 (16%) from 1,138 to 1,361.

SYSTEM PERFORMANCE

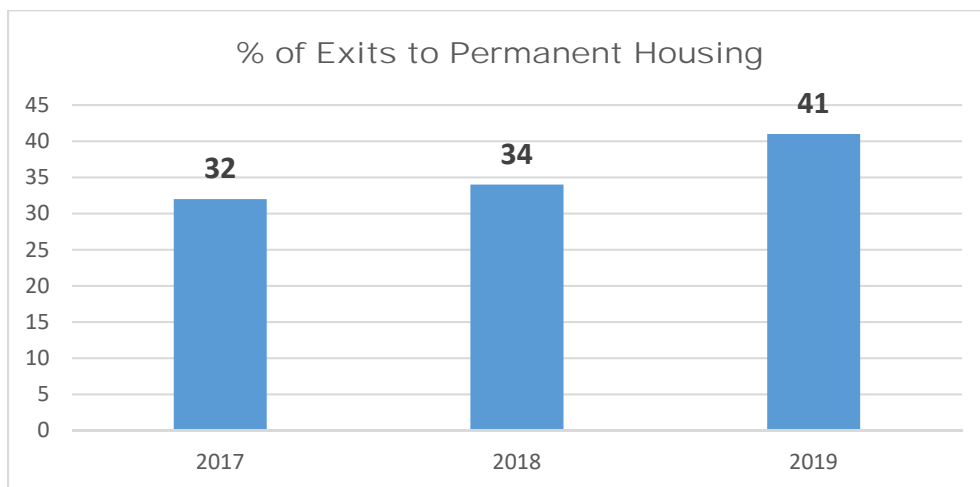
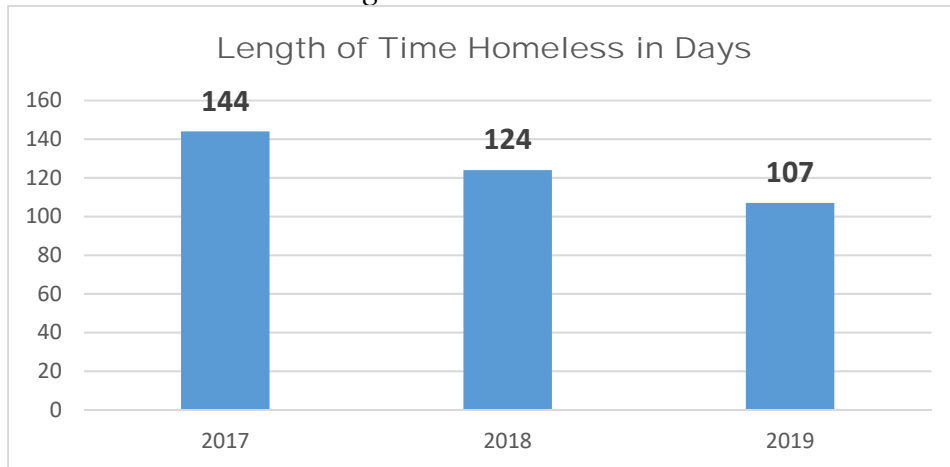
Recognizing the limitations of the PIT Count, the CoC also measures success by monitoring overall system performance. All measures are put in the context of making homelessness rare, brief and one-time only. Data is collected and reported to HUD annually based on the federal

fiscal year. The charts below demonstrate the performance of the entire system unlike the charts on page 7 which represents only families served by the Continuum.

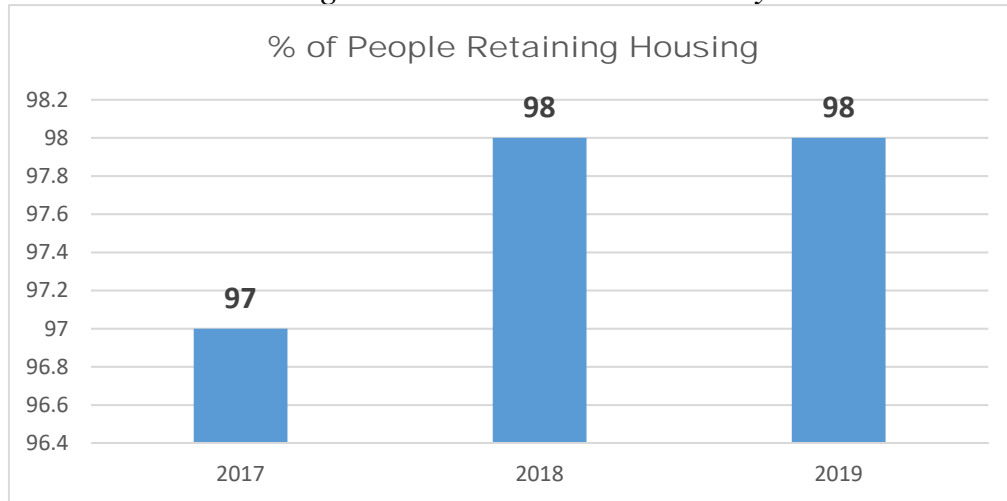
Making homelessness RARE



Making homelessness BRIEF



Making homelessness One-time only



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:

- Dearth of 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 permanent supportive housing programs equipped to provide intensive support services to those who do not meet the definition of chronic homelessness (individuals with serious mental illness, chronic substance use, and/or co-occurring disorders). Based on current data, the CoC would need to increase the number of permanent supportive housing units by 100 to meet the need.

- Lack of adequate Rapid Re-housing units and employment services for individuals and families. Based on current data, the CoC would need to increase the number of Rapid Re-housing units by 350 to meet the need.
- Lack of access to employment services and job opportunities for persons experiencing homelessness.

FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS

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

- Increasing the supply of affordable housing to extremely low-income families (those below 30% of area median income) who do not have high service needs.
- Provide \$4 million in funding for the County Rental Assistance Program to allow an increase in the maximum rental subsidy amount that is equal to 25% of Fair Market Rent.
- Provide \$4.2 million in funding to increase Rapid Re-housing by 350 units to better serve households that are currently employed or employable.
- Increasing the capacity of the CoC to develop a robust CES that is aligned with HUD policy by funding additional street outreach workers and coordinated entry staff to conduct assessment and data analysis.
- Provide \$2.5 million in funding for 100 units of permanent supportive housing to meet the needs of vulnerable adults to sustain the success of the *Inside (not Outside)* Initiative on ending chronic homelessness.

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. Montgomery County has made great strides in promoting equity in housing by protecting against discrimination based on source of income. By limiting a landlord or property manager’s ability to automatically deny applicants with a criminal history, we can begin to address the significant disparities Black households experience in obtaining and sustaining permanent housing as evidenced by the high rates of Black people (64%) in the homeless continuum.

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.

The ICH supports the changes to the Rental Assistance Program recommended by the Department of Health and Human Services to better target limited resources and to more effectively serve people at risk of or experiencing homelessness, particularly seniors and people with disabilities.

Over the past year, the CoC has been successfully implementing a CES that ensures fair and equal access to housing and services that are prioritized based on need. To ensure continued

commitment to CES by all housing and homeless providers, the ICH encourages the County Council and the County Executive to codify in law participation in coordinated entry.

CONCLUSION

The Montgomery County CoC's goal is to end homelessness for all individuals in our community by making homelessness a rare, brief, and one-time only for everyone. Although government resources have been strained over the past few years, the County has continued 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 effectively ending chronic homelessness. While additional targeted funding will likely be needed to produce similar results for families with children, youth, and seniors, the ICH is confident that the CoC is operating efficiently and is equipped to serve the County's most vulnerable residents with continued support.