Role of Emergency Shelters in Ending Homelessness

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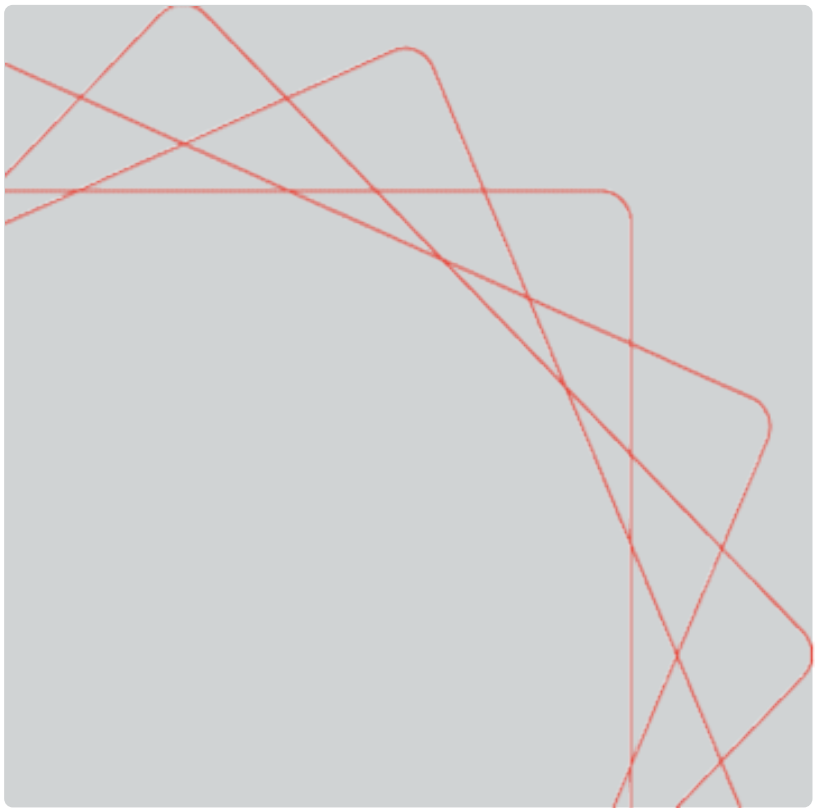


What Does it Mean to "End Homelessness"?

Operational Definition of an End to Homelessness – US Interagency Council on Homelessness

An end to homelessness **does not mean that no one will ever experience a housing crisis again**. Changing economic realities, the unpredictability of life and unsafe or unwelcoming family environments may create situations where individuals, families, or youth could experience or be at-risk of homelessness.

An end to homelessness means that every community will have a **systematic response in place** that ensures homelessness is prevented whenever possible or is otherwise a rare, brief, and non-recurring experience.

Specifically, every community will have the capacity to:

- **Quickly identify** and **engage** people at-risk of and experiencing homelessness.
- Intervene to **prevent** the loss of housing and **divert** people from entering the homelessness services system.
- Provide immediate **access to shelter and crisis services**, without barriers to entry, while permanent stable housing and appropriate supports are being secured.
- When homelessness does occur, **quickly connect people to housing** assistance and services—tailored to their unique needs and strengths—to help them achieve and maintain stable housing.

How does a Homeless Crisis Response System "End Homelessness"?

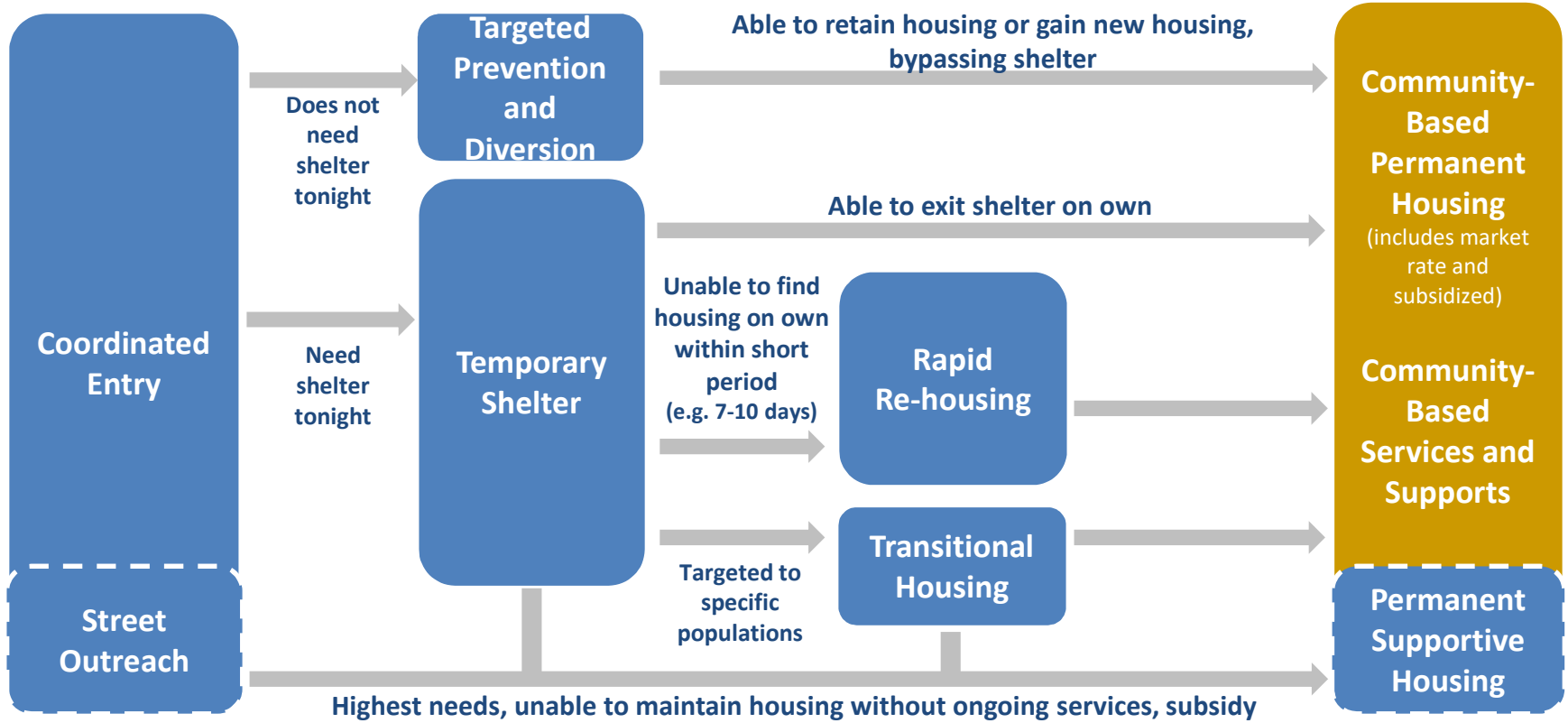
- INTERNAL: Organize assistance across providers to assure homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring for people in the community – *optimize* system functions & performance

> ***Optimization***: an act, process, or methodology of making something (as a design, system, or decision) as fully perfect, functional, or effective as possible.
>
> -Merriam-Webster Dictionary

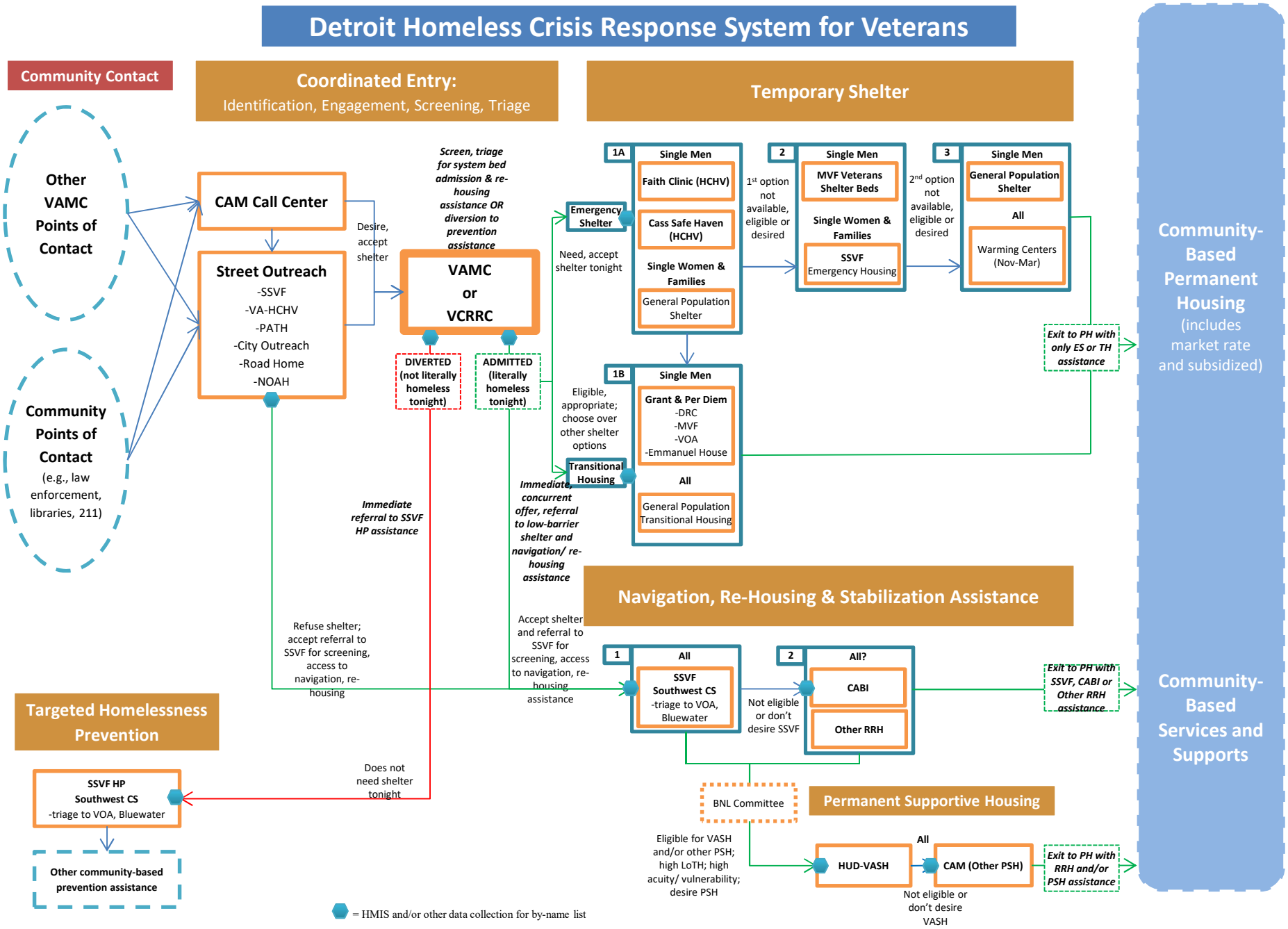
- EXTERNAL: Advocate for community response and resources to prevent homelessness

Homeless Crisis Response System
4 Basic Functions

HOMELESS CRISIS RESPONSE *SYSTEM*
General Components & Client Flow



Detroit Homeless Crisis Response System for Veterans



What is “Housing First”?

Housing First approaches quickly connect people experiencing a housing crisis with permanent housing and the supports needed to maintain housing – *without* preconditions (e.g., income, sobriety, engagement in treatment, service participation).

Core Principles of Housing First

1. Immediate access to permanent housing with no housing readiness requirements
2. Programs that help people access permanent housing are also easy to access, 'consumer-ready', and aim to place people who are homeless in permanent housing as quickly as possible
3. Consumer choice and self-determination, including housing choice and client centered goals
4. Recovery orientation
5. Individualized, progressive, and client-driven supports
6. Social and community integration…

…Not a one size fits all approach

What matters…

Adopting a Housing First approach helps better ensure systems, and programs that serve different functions within systems, are…

- **Person-centered**: address what people need *and* want relative to their housing crisis
- **Mission-driven**: Able to establish practices, processes, and performance measures that support efficient and effective resolution of housing crises
  - Focus on practices/programs that best address and resolve housing crises and move away from unsupported practices
- **Collaborative**: operate collaboratively and interdependently to ensure housing needs of each person are met and system performs as intended for the community and community members

Housing First Practices

Housing First approaches can be employed at both a system and program level, across all forms of homeless assistance…

- ✓ *Homelessness Prevention*
- ✓ *Street Outreach*
- ✓ *Emergency Shelter*
- ✓ *Rapid Re-Housing*
- ✓ *Transitional Housing*
- ✓ *Permanent Supportive Housing*

System Practices

- Integrated, readily accessible and navigable crisis response assistance (outreach, shelter, etc) and permanent housing assistance
- System for screening, matching people to the right housing and services – both needed *and* desired
  - Organize and manage processes to facilitate streamlined access to assistance from front to back door
  - Assure progressive, strengths-based approach to resolve housing crises and strengthen housing resiliency
  - Data-driven approaches used to identify and prioritize access to higher cost/intensive assistance for people with higher acuity, vulnerability and utilization of crisis response services

System Practices, con't

- Collaborative planning and resource allocation to ensure sufficient array of housing options and assistance
- Relationships with wide range of private/public housing partners
  - Advocate for barrier-free access to benefits, community-based services
- Advocate for adoption of housing stability screening, support among other public systems to prevent literal homelessness and promote stability
- Set system and program standards and performance measures; set targets; evaluate project and system performance; incent performance and high quality services; continuously improve

Program Practices (General)

- Integration with system coordinated entry and re-housing processes
- Avoid screening out due to unnecessary conditions (e.g., income, substance use, treatment compliance, service participation, poor credit, criminal record, or behaviors that indicate a lack of "housing readiness.") or baseless predictions
  - Eligibility and targeting based on best fit relative to need, strengths, consumer choice, safety
- Provide or facilitate access to permanent housing assistance as part of core assistance offered – housing plans, housing ID and placement, housing-centered case management
- Staff understand core principles, roles, and how to assist people to apply for and obtain permanent housing

Program Practices (General), con't

- Supportive services are consumer driven, emphasize engagement, empowerment, problem-solving over therapeutic goals.
- Services and housing assistance not conditioned on service participation or compliance.
- Alcohol or drug use in and of itself (without other lease violations) is not considered a reason for eviction.
- Employ evidence-based interventions to support housing stability and wellness improvements (e.g., motivational interviewing, harm reduction, etc.).
- Able to readily connect people to income, benefits, and wide array of community supports
- Use individualized, progressive approach to assistance.

Housing First Practices: Examples *Emergency Shelter*

- **Rapid screening and diversion** (when possible) to other safe/appropriate housing options. **Immediate connection to homelessness prevention if diverted**
- Operate as part of **community system** that ensures access to safe, appropriate shelter
- Staff and clients understand **goal of shelter is two fold – *safe shelter & re-housing***
- *All* clients helped with **housing plan soon after entry** and have **access to re-housing assistance** (ES staff or partner is expert at)
- More **intensive assistance** available and offered to clients with greater vulnerabilities and/or higher utilization
- Participants expected to **actively work on re-housing** and engage in assistance to overcome immediate *housing* barriers; **other services are voluntary**
- **Exits to homelessness avoided, even when program rules are violated**

Common Challenges

- Organizational culture, mission, and system/community orientation
  - Shift to homeless crisis response system orientation
  - Perceived as unethical, not helping whole person/family, households will fail if not “housing ready”
- Staff readiness, training, roles
- Changing program practices (it’s a lot of work!)
- Developing and maintaining service & housing partners
- Lack of capacity, resources for system functions (e.g., data collection/analysis, case conferencing, CQI)
- Funding – may have contrary or broader objectives; may incent outputs (utilization, number served) over housing outcomes
- Emergency Shelters & Street Outreach
  - Fostering dual-mission: crisis response (safe shelter or access to) AND rapid crisis resolution (re-housing)
  - Lowering barriers, while keeping everyone safe

Helpful Resources

- **Organizational Change: Adopting a Housing First Approach**

  National Alliance to End Homelessness

  www.endhomelessness.org/library/entry/organizational-change-adopting-a-housing-first-approach

- **Housing First Checklist** (system and general program)

  U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness

  http://usich.gov/usich_resources/fact_sheets/the_housing_first_checklist_a_practical_tool_for_assessing_housing_first_in

- **Housing First Practices Review Tool** (for each program type)

  Abt Associates: Contact Tom Albanese (tom_albanese@abtassoc.com)

- **Housing First in Canada**

  Stephen Gaetz, Fiona Scott & Tanya Gulliver (Eds.) (2013): **Housing First in Canada: Supporting Communities to End Homelessness**. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

  http://www.homelesshub.ca/housingfirstcanada