Ending Homelessness in Austin/Travis County

Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO)

2016 Annual Report

5/17/2016

WHO IS ECHO?

The Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO) is a non-profit that plans, develops, prioritizes and implements systemic, community-wide strategies to end homelessness in Austin and Travis County, Texas. Created in 2011, ECHO collaborates with policymakers and stakeholders to implement best practices to end homelessness in our region.

ECHO is led by:

1. A volunteer *Board of Directors*,
2. A *Membership Council* representing stakeholder organizations and individuals working to end homelessness,
3. *Workgroups* and *taskforces* working to improve our community-wide response to ending homelessness, and
4. Eighteen full-time *staff*.

ECHO is designated as planning body elected locally and recognized by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as the local leader in coordinating housing and services funding for persons experiencing homelessness. Each year, as a Continuum of Care, ECHO coordinates with other partners applying for and receiving funding from HUD's COC program. Our 2016 community allocation is $5.5M.

ECHO is also designated as the lead agency for the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), a system-wide database that tracks the needs of households experiencing homelessness, services received across the CoC, and their outcomes. As the lead HMIS agency, ECHO manages this database and analyzes and tracks local trends.

What ECHO does...

- Analyzes
- Prioritizes
- Problem-solves
- Catalyzes change
- Innovates
- Tracks progress
- Strategizes
- Convenes
- Facilitates
- Educates
- Engages
- Collaborates
- Leads
- Retools our response system
- Collectively ends homelessness

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Chair - **Corky Hilliard**
Vice-Chair - **Rick Cofer**
Rick Mendoza - Treasurer
Ed McHorse - Secretary
Mark Littlefield - Advocacy
Ann Denton – Membership Council Liaison

BOARD MEMBERS

Dr. Donald Christian
Stephanie Hayden
Alan Isaacson
Marshall Jones
Tim League
Perry Lorenz
Judy Maggio
Laura Morrison
Betty Staehr
Dr. Calvin Streeter

MEMBERSHIP COUNCIL

Chair - **Stephanie Hayden** - City of Austin, HHS
Vice-Chair - **Mandy De Mayo** - Housing Works
Lauren Avioli - City of Austin - NHCD
Darilynn Cardona-Beiler - ATCIC
Sandy Coe Simmons - Central Health
Michael Cooper – Heritage Title
Sandra Chavez - AIDS Services of Austin
Jennifer Denton – City of Austin
Lori Frasco - Caritas of Austin
Lisa Garcia - HACA
Mitchell Gibbs - Front Steps
Vella Karman - City of Austin, HHS
Monica Keller - VA Medical Center
Susan McDowell - LifeWorks
Christy Moffett - Travis County
Paul Mowry - RCAH
Kimberly Pierce – Travis Co. Justice Planning
Blythe Plunkett - Project Transitions
Jo Kathryn Quinn - Caritas of Austin
Terri Sabella – Community Care
Julia Spann – SAFE Alliance
Irit Umani - Trinity Center
Hosie Washington - SAFE Alliance
Michelle Wilkinson - Easter Seals

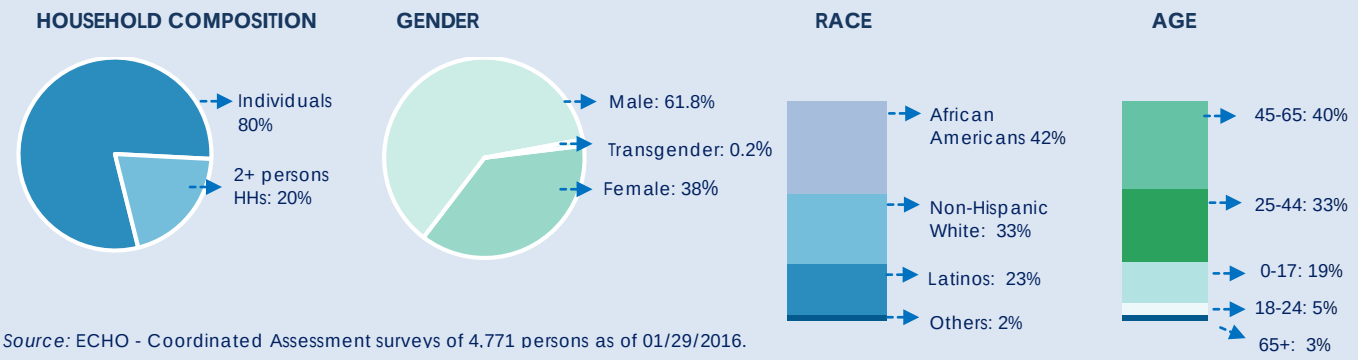
ECHO STAFF

Executive Director - **Ann Howard**
Talia Boyd – CA Specialist
Becky Casey – Administrative Assistant
Casey Cork – CA Service Coordinator
Michael Curry – HMIS Support Specialist
Richard Dodson – HMIS Administrator
Alesandra Dominguez – CA Program Manager
Tina Griego – HMIS Trainer
Allison Mabbs - CA Specialist
Katy Manganella – HMIS Director
Lauren Marsiglia - AmeriCorps VISTA
Mariana Salazar – Research & Eval. Director
Niki Paul – Director of Operations
Preston Petty – CA Program Director
Kaleigh Phelan - CA Specialist
Katie Rose - Housing Navigator
Jordan Schmid - CA Specialist
Bree Williams - Community Housing Liaison
Kristin Zakoor - CA Data & Reporting

WHO EXPERIENCES HOMELESSNESS IN AUSTIN & TRAVIS COUNTY?

Persons living on the streets are often the most visible face of homelessness in our community. Others are less visible living in camps, cars or abandoned buildings. This unsheltered group make up 70% of all the homeless population while the rest stay in shelters. Locally, the largest subpopulations experiencing homelessness are individuals (80%), males (60%), African Americans (42%) and 45-65 year olds (40%) (Figure 1). Other impacted groups include families with children, survivors of domestic violence, Veterans & unaccompanied youth.

FIGURE 1: DEMOGRAPHICS OVERVIEW



Source: ECHO - Coordinated Assessment surveys of 4,771 persons as of 01/29/2016.

Our homeless population experiences high rates of mental and physical health complications exacerbated by living on the streets and in shelters. Approximately 45% report having a current mental health problem, while over 38% report receiving treatment for substance use addictions in the past but returning to drinking or using drugs.

HOMELESSNESS ON THE RISE, WHY?

Local data shows our homeless population is on the rise. Other cities across the U.S. – ranging from Dallas, to Seattle, to NYC - have also seen a spike. Our last Point-in-Time (PIT) count, the national standard for collecting census data on local homeless populations, counted 2,138 persons experiencing homelessness on January 22, 2016, a 17% increase from the previous year (Figure 2). Similarly, the number of persons who experienced homelessness and sought homeless services increased almost 14%, from 6,104 people in 2014 to 7,054 people in 2015 (Figure 3). Why is homelessness on the rise despite increased efforts to house the homeless? We believe the following factors contribute to this increase.

FIGURE 2: POINT-IN-TIME COUNT

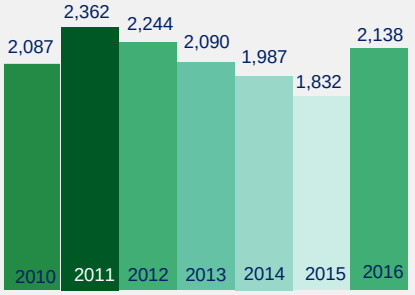
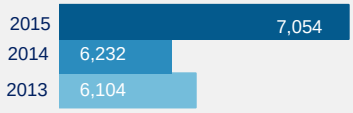


FIGURE 3: ANNUAL COUNT



Regional Growth & Affordability Crisis. Austin is experiencing rapid population growth leading to rising housing costs and an unprecedented demand for rental units, including Austin's limited affordable housing. This creates more housing competition for those experiencing homelessness who may already have additional barriers such as criminal records, a history of substance use, poor employment, poor credit history, and low or no income.

Despite Austin's rising housing costs, wages for low-income workers remain stagnant, making it more likely that low-income households with the weakest safety nets who are already struggling to balance life's demands will fall into homelessness. For many, all it takes is an unforeseen financial crisis – be it a medical emergency or a car accident - *coupled with* a weak social support system, to push them over the edge from housing into homelessness.

Improved Outreach Efforts. As a community, we have improved our street outreach and engagement efforts allowing us to count and work with people that we might have otherwise overlooked previously. It is always our goal to find people experiencing homelessness and connect them to helpful resources.

OUR STRATEGIES & ACCOMPLISHMENTS: MAKING SYSTEMIC CHANGES

ECHO continues to coordinate across organizations and programs to work toward the shared goal of ending homelessness in Austin and Travis County. The following initiatives underscore some of our main system-wide strategies and accomplishments with our partner agencies.

Coordinated Assessment Process

In the past, people experiencing homelessness had to navigate an uncoordinated set of services and programs to obtain assistance. ECHO continues to lead system reform to break many program silos by building inter-agency collaboration.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- **17** agencies & **36** programs use coordinated assessment
- **5,400** persons assessed to date
- **874** people housed – referred through the Coordinated Assessment system

Beginning October 2014, Caritas, Front Steps, Salvation Army and ATCIC spearheaded the implementation of *Coordinated Assessment – a* coordinated community-wide intake process that 1) assesses a households' needs using a common tool to determine which housing interventions are most appropriate, 2) prioritizes people for assistance based on the severity of their needs, and 3) screens households for program eligibility to make appropriate program referrals (Figure 4).

This process has transformed how organizations in our community work by: 1) helping people move through our community system faster; 2) prioritizing assistance based on vulnerability and severity of service need; 3) providing consistent and accurate information on what kind of housing assistance clients need; and 4) documenting the community shortfall where there is a gap between what is needed and what is available. At the community level, Coordinated Assessment now allows programs to collectively work together to end homelessness by focusing on their areas of strengths.

Understanding & Using Community-Wide Data

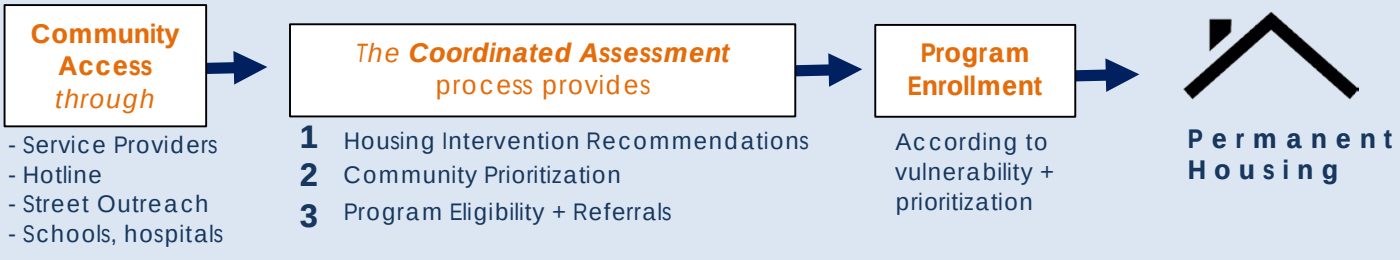
Another major accomplishment is a shift in how we use data locally. We are increasingly using our data to better understand the scale and scope of homelessness, to measure and improve program performance, to improve our community response system, and to inform resource allocation. We can make sense of a wealth of local data thanks to the commitment of local programs who upload information into the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) every day.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- From 117 HMIS licenses in 2011 to **246** licenses in 2016, a 110% increase.
- From 45 HMIS reporting licenses in 2014 to **61** reporting licenses in 2016, a 36% increase.
- **Data sharing relationships** successfully established with United Health Care & *Pay for Success* partners among others
- **Analysis and publications** of community reports including a monthly Community Dashboard and the 2016 Gap Analysis

Information from over 5,000 *Coordinated Assessments* of persons experiencing homelessness, along with the power that comes from harnessing such information within our HMIS database, creates a powerful framework to inform our community-wide needs and progress as well as provide client-level information directly to programs and case managers to better house clients.

FIGURE 4: COORDINATED ASSESSMENT & HMIS- A POWERFUL DATA FRAMEWORK FOR HOUSING STABILITY



Pay for Success

ECHO, the City, the County and Central Health led by Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH), a national expert in supportive housing, have been actively engaged in establishing the feasibility of a Pay for Success (PFS) transaction, which is focused on scaling permanent supportive housing (PSH) for frequent users of health care, criminal justice systems and homeless shelters. In March 2016, CHS determined that not only is a PFS transaction feasible but that the Austin/Travis County community has a unique opportunity to be a national leader in PFS. ECHO will move this work forward in the months ahead.

The goals of our PFS initiative are to end homelessness for 250-300 persons experiencing homelessness, improve their well-being while reducing public costs, scale up high quality PSH services, attract new and private resources to drive social goals, allow government to test the efficacy of an intervention and only pay for services if outcomes are achieved, and use evidence-based practices to drive performance management.

TABLE 1: PRELIMINARY PFS PROJECT TERMS

Geography + Project Term + Potential End Payors	Intervention	Target Population	Outcome Metrics
Austin/Travis County ~6 years (2016-2021) Travis County City of Austin Central Health	Permanent Supportive Housing with comprehensive supportive services delivered through an intensive case management program	250 – 300 persons experiencing homelessness whose cumulative criminal justice, healthcare, shelter, and emergency medical services costs place them in a cohort of roughly the top 500 most expensive homeless users	▪ Improved housing stability ▪ Improved health outcomes & reduction in emergency room usage and inpatient costs ▪ Reduced jail system usage & police interaction

FIGURE 5: ESTIMATED COST BENEFIT ANALYSIS OF PSH IN TRAVIS COUNTY PER PERSON/PER YEAR

Source: Social Innovation Fund Pay for Success Feasibility Report: ECHO Austin/Travis County, April 2016.

Housing and Healthcare: ECHO and United Healthcare's Partnership

ECHO recognizes that health and housing go hand in hand and that healthcare is vital to maintaining health—and housing. In Texas, managed care organizations contract with the state to provide healthcare to special populations. United Healthcare has clients in the Star Plus program who they cannot locate but are responsible for their healthcare and related costs. United and ECHO are working together to connect shared clients back to United Healthcare services. The pilot is starting small but has great promise to help stabilize client health and housing.

The two organizations matched data sets to locate United members who had lost contact with United but were found in HMIS. ECHO conducts outreach to find the clients, explain the healthcare available and make a warm referral back to United. United makes a payment to ECHO for this service that is applied to housing costs.

ENDING VETERAN HOMELESSNESS: REINVENTING OUR SERVICE SYSTEM

Since January 2015, ECHO and its partners have worked closely and industriously with Mayor Steve Adler and State Senator Kirk Watson to end Veteran homelessness. As part of the national Mayor's Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness, ECHO partnered with the mayor, businesses, the real estate community, & social service agencies.

Since then, our community has seen remarkable results: 497 Veterans were housed between January 2015 and March 2016 and at a faster rate over time. While in 2012 it took on average 238 days to house a Veteran, it now takes less than 90 days in 2016. Our capacity to house Veterans also increased more than 5 times: 69 Veterans were housed in 2011 compared to 388 Veterans in 2015. By forging new public-private partnerships, we collectively built a new way of doing business--streamlining processes and serving Veterans more effectively.

- *Support from Local Leadership*

  Mayor Steve Adler's support brought credibility, connections, and motivation to this initiative. He helped set a common goal - identifying 200 housing units for Veterans - that different stakeholders embraced and rallied around. He also spearheaded the *Housing Our Heroes Fund*, a privately funded risk mitigation pool used to incentivize and bring new property partners to the table. Ultimately, his leadership helped build momentum to create a sustainable system that makes homelessness among Veterans rare, brief, and non-recurring.

- *Strategic Collaboration*

  As all stakeholders came together, we reconfigured resources and assets, unified processes across agencies, and simplified the steps to process a Veteran's application for housing. We created a series of one-stop shop events for homeless Veterans so their requirements for receiving support were completed in one day. We held street outreach events to identify Veterans who had not engaged with our system. We met with relevant decision makers every week, building trust, allowing for transparency in the process, and generating the pressure and sense of urgency necessary to fulfill our common goals.

- *Data-Driven Planning + Dedicated Resources*

  At weekly meetings, we continue to review a by-name list of Veterans and their progress to goals using real-time data. Programs share their success stories and work together to resolve problems using new solutions. These cross-learning meetings help us create a more collaborative community system. We use all available resources like Supportive Services for Veteran Families (*SSVF), the Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing, and the local Housing Our Heroes Funds* to house Veterans as quickly as possible.

- *New Housing Strategies*

  Our community worked with landlords and property managers of both individual housing units and larger apartment complexes to execute lower screening criteria for Veterans supported by the collaborative. In other instances, we provided financial incentives to landlords to mitigate any perceived tenant risks. We created a homeless preference process with the Housing Authority of City of Austin in which Austinites experiencing homelessness, including homeless Veterans, are given priority as new units or vouchers become available. We also developed positions around the community where staff are fully dedicated to finding housing and processing paperwork for housing, streamlining a job that had previously been executed by case managers.

PARTICIPATING STAKEHOLDERS

Housing & Support Services Partners:

AIDS Services of Austin
Americorp VISTA
American Legion
A New Entry
Austin/Travis County Integral Care
Caritas of Austin
Central Texas VA Medical Center
City of Austin
Downtown Austin Community Court
Foundation Communities
Front Steps
Goodwill of Central Texas
Green Doors
HACA
LifeWorks
Salvation Army
Texas Veterans Commission
TexVet
Travis County
Trinity Center

Other Community Contributors:

Austin Furniture Bank
Capital Metro
DLA Piper, LLP
Freedom Office Supplies
Gridmates
HEB
Intel
Shalom Austin Jewish Community
Texas Center Point
University of Texas-Cadets

Private-Sector Housing Partners:

512 Realty
Austin Apartment Association
Austin Board of Realtors
Avesta Capella and Solano
Roscoe Properties
Texas Apartment Association
Presidium

CURRENT NEEDS AND FUTURE SOLUTIONS

As of March 2016, at least 2,800 households (3,700 people) were literally homeless in the Austin region and in need of 2,800 affordable and low-barrier housing units (Figure 6). This is easily an undercount, considering not everyone who is literally homeless engages with the homeless services system. The urgent need for housing is also coupled with many interconnected needs including living wage jobs and appropriate access to health care. In Table 2, we reference what we see as the most pressing challenges and solutions to make significant progress in making homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring.

FIGURE 6: AUSTIN/TRAVIS COUNTY NEEDS OVERVIEW

Source: Coordinated Assessment surveys (VI-SPDATs) of 5,066 persons per 03/03/16.

TABLE 2: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Challenges	*Solutions*
✓ Access to affordable and *low barrier housing* remains the single greatest challenge to ending homelessness.	✓ *Flexible Funding for Landlord Outreach* Flexible funding to work directly with landlords and provide the right incentives and risk mitigation resources to house the homeless population. ✓ *Public and Private Low Barrier Housing* Traditional affordable housing programs alone do not work a lot of the times for persons experiencing homelessness—what many clients need is low barrier housing - where households are not screened out based on their criminal history, use of substances or source of income for rent. We need access to both public affordable low-barrier housing units ranging from Public Housing Authorities, Tax Credit properties to other HUD-funded multifamily properties, as well as private low-barrier housing units from landlords and larger apartment complexes.
✓ Current community funds are not enough to address the scope of homelessness.	✓ *Larger Investments to scale up what works* Considerable larger public and private investments are needed to significantly reduce homelessness in Austin. Options of new sources of funding include creating a dedicated funding stream for local homeless services or adopting new funding models that leverage private and public funds. A surge in funding can support programs that work in our community such as Rapid Re-Housing, Permanent Supportive Housing, Diversion, Progressive Engagement, Housing First housing, employment and re-integration services. ✓ *Supporting Strategic Initiatives* Supporting the community at large as it works strategically to end chronic homelessness by 2017 and family and youth homelessness by Dec. 2020.

WORDS FROM VETERANS RECENTLY HOUSED

"*I'm happy right now, I have a big weight lifted off my shoulders.*"

"*Now I can say I can make dinner, take a bath. Those simple things mean a lot. And they gave me that back.*"

"*I was like man this is awesome. I couldn't' believe the water was running, simple stuff like that.*"

"*I am so happy right now. It made my life, my kids life, a whole lot better.*"

HOW YOU CAN HELP

LEARN & SPEAK UP

Learn the facts about solutions and talk to your friends, family and co-workers about homelessness – get others involved!

RENT OR HIRE

Persons experiencing homelessness often face rental and employment barriers. If you are a landlord or an employer you can help by modifying your screening criteria to give someone a second chance.

SHARE YOUR TIME

Research non-profit agencies or contact United Way to learn about volunteer opportunities in Austin.

CONNECT WITH COMPASSION

Support people in need with compassion and join our community in making human-to-human connections with our neighbors experiencing homelessness.

CONNECT WITH US

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