

ENDING COMMUNITY HOMELESSNESS COALITION

ANNUAL

REPORT

2023



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The Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO) is the backbone of our community's Homelessness Response System. As the lead agency for the Austin/Travis County Continuum of Care, we lead and align a coalition responsible for planning and implementing community-wide strategies to end homelessness. We work alongside people with firsthand experience of homelessness and nonprofit, government, and philanthropic partners to build a future in which everyone in our community has housing of their choice that provides a foundation for optimal health, success, and stability. Learn more: austinecho.org

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



ECHO STARTED AND FINISHED 2023 LIVING INTO OUR GUIDING STATEMENTS.

Our mission and vision call for us to continue to demand change in our community. To help Austinites feel connected to everyone's struggle for quality affordable housing and just wages.

Our values mandate us to work alongside people experiencing these injustices, encouraging their leadership and supporting their solutions. Our values require us to measure the impact of our community's efforts and to transparently communicate the outcomes of the investments made to the public and most importantly to the people meant to be served by those investments so that progress can be made and lessons can be learned.

Courage is required. Courage to admit we don't have all the answers and that all of our efforts don't lead perfectly to the outcomes we hope to achieve. Courage to be clear that the policies and budgets over decades past make the solutions complex and require sustained commitments.

For ECHO and Austin/Travis County, 2023 was a year of great promise and living into our values. **Grit and courage will be the themes of 2024 for our policy makers and community at large if we desire to be an Austin for all.**



WHAT GUIDES US

In 2022, ECHO worked with dozens of community partners and the firm Racial Equity Partners to create a new long-term Strategic Plan for the organization. As part of the process, we created a new Vision, Mission, Acknowledgement, and set of Values that better reflect the roles and responsibilities ECHO holds in our community's Homelessness Response System.

VISION

Everyone in our community has housing of their choice that provides a foundation for optimal health, success, and stability.

MISSION

We lead and align a coalition to administer an effective Homelessness Response System, centered in racial equity, informed by the needs and expertise of people experiencing homelessness, and accountable to systemically marginalized communities.



STRATEGIC PLAN

The planning process took place over several months and incorporated input from people who've gotten services from our Homelessness Response System, service providers, policymakers, community leaders, advocates, and additional stakeholders. Our ultimate goal to ensure everyone in our community has a safe, stable place to live has not changed; however, this

new Strategic Plan reflects ECHO's adaptability as needs and priorities within the community shift. In order to execute on priorities we identified with our community, ECHO undertook an extensive reorganization throughout 2023. This realignment of staff responsibilities allows us to better provide the kinds of support, expertise, and leadership our community expects and deserves.

In November 2023, ECHO presented our Strategic Plan to community stakeholders who took part in the process. Explore ECHO's four detailed strategic priorities on the [About ECHO](#) page of our website.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

- Historic, structural, and systematic racism in our community has resulted in people of color, especially Black people, being more likely to become homeless in our community and ECHO is therefore committed to centering racial equity in its work with providers, community partners, and community members.

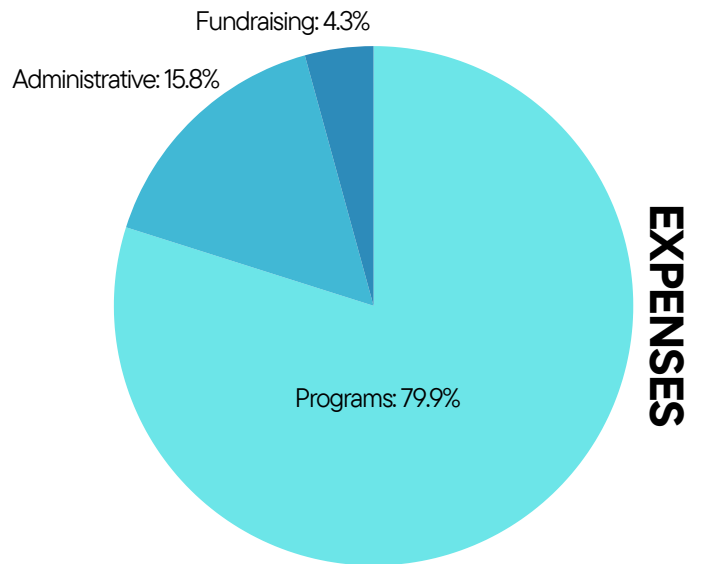
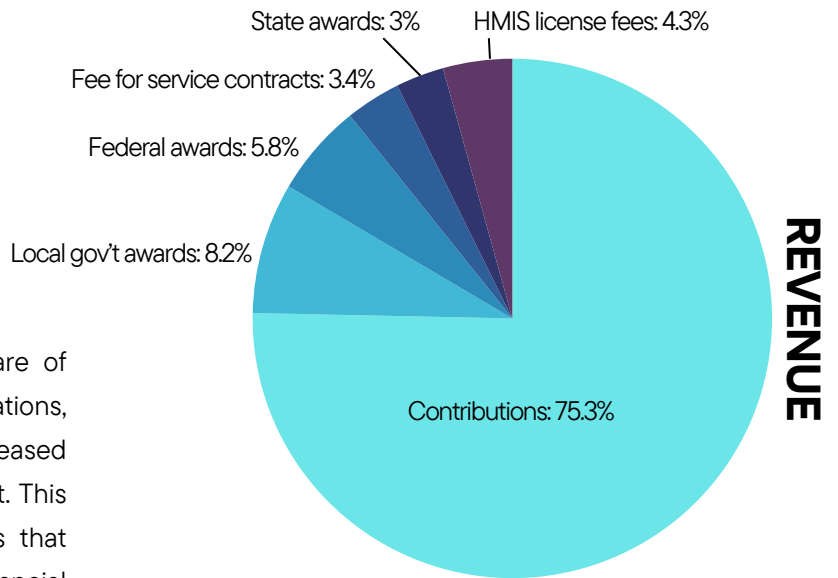
VALUES

- **Leadership** – Advocate alongside the people we serve.
- **Passion** – Serve our community with drive and commitment.
- **Racial Equity** – Promote policies, programs, and performance monitoring to seek to reduce racial disparities in homelessness.
- **Diversity and Collaboration** – Seek diverse voices and unique perspectives to best serve our community.
- **Continuous Improvement**
 - **Lived Expertise** – Affirm that people are experts in their own circumstances and couple their expertise with data to inform our system.
 - **Data Informed Decisions** – Promote and value evidence and data to impact solutions.
 - **Innovation** – Foster and lead innovation in HRS.
- **Courage** – Have hard conversations, take personal and organizational accountability, and take risks and make changes when needed.

FINANCE

based on 2022 audited financial statements
(2023 yet to be audited)

in 2022 (our most recent audit), our share of revenue from contributions (from foundations, corporations, and individual donors) increased from the year before by roughly 10 percent. This is partly the result of large grant awards that included funds to provide direct financial support to partner organizations. This initiative to pass funds through to grassroots organizations is a result of feedback we heard during our strategic planning process and aligns with [Strategic Priority 1.4 \(PDF\)](#). Expenses remained largely the same, with a minor increase in the share of administrative costs and a corresponding decline in fundraising costs. Also of note, in 2023 ECHO eliminated license fees to access our community’s Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), thanks to an increase in our community’s HMIS award through the federal CoC grant program ([see page 17](#)).



Revenue

\$7.4M



Expenses

\$5.2M

MAJOR DONORS

over \$5,000

THANK YOU!

These generous gifts enable a wide range of activities and initiatives that **allow ECHO to provide the expertise, leadership, and support** necessary to execute the priorities in our Strategic Plan.

In addition to larger gifts, ECHO received **267 donations from 135 individual donors** in 2023! **We appreciate your continued commitment to our shared cause!**


ST. DAVID'S FOUNDATION


INDEED


GLIMMER AUSTIN


MFI FOUNDATION


SAMSUNG


ORACLE


PRESIDIUM

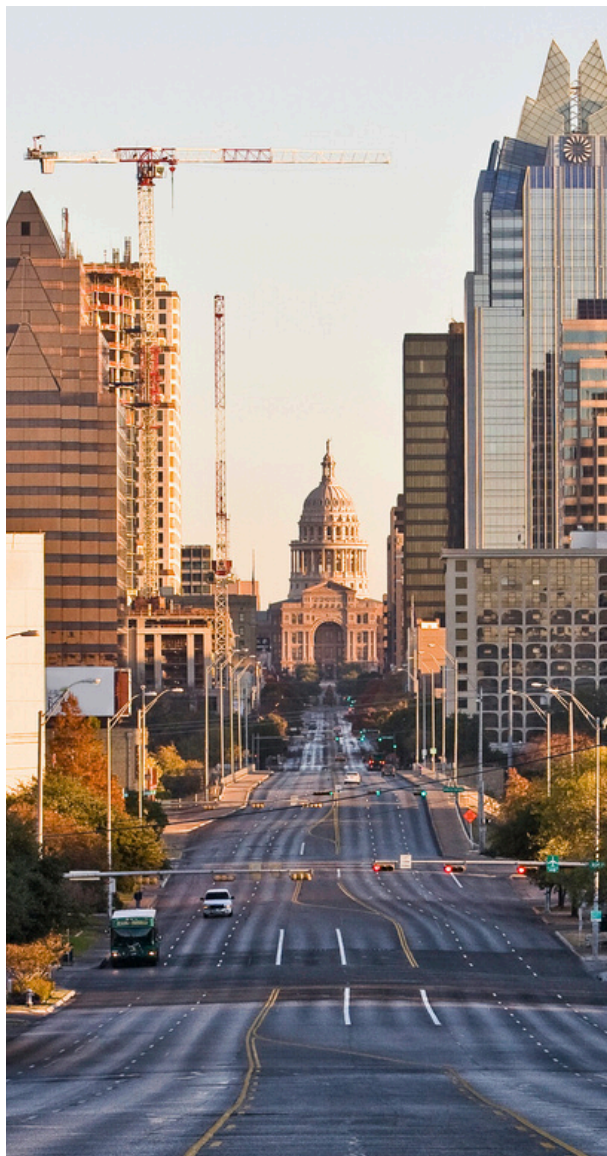

WELLSKY FOUNDATION


MISSION CAPITAL


NATIONAL
INSTRUMENTS


MICHAEL GAGARIN &
DONNA CARTER

CoC AWARDS



CONTINUUM OF CARE NOFO

ECHO coordinated the annual Austin/Travis County Continuum of Care's (CoC) Collaborative Application. Our community increased its award by nearly \$900,000 in 2023 and funded five new projects. [Read more about what was funded.](#)

\$11.9M

Awarded across CoC

16

Projects funded

SPECIAL NOFO

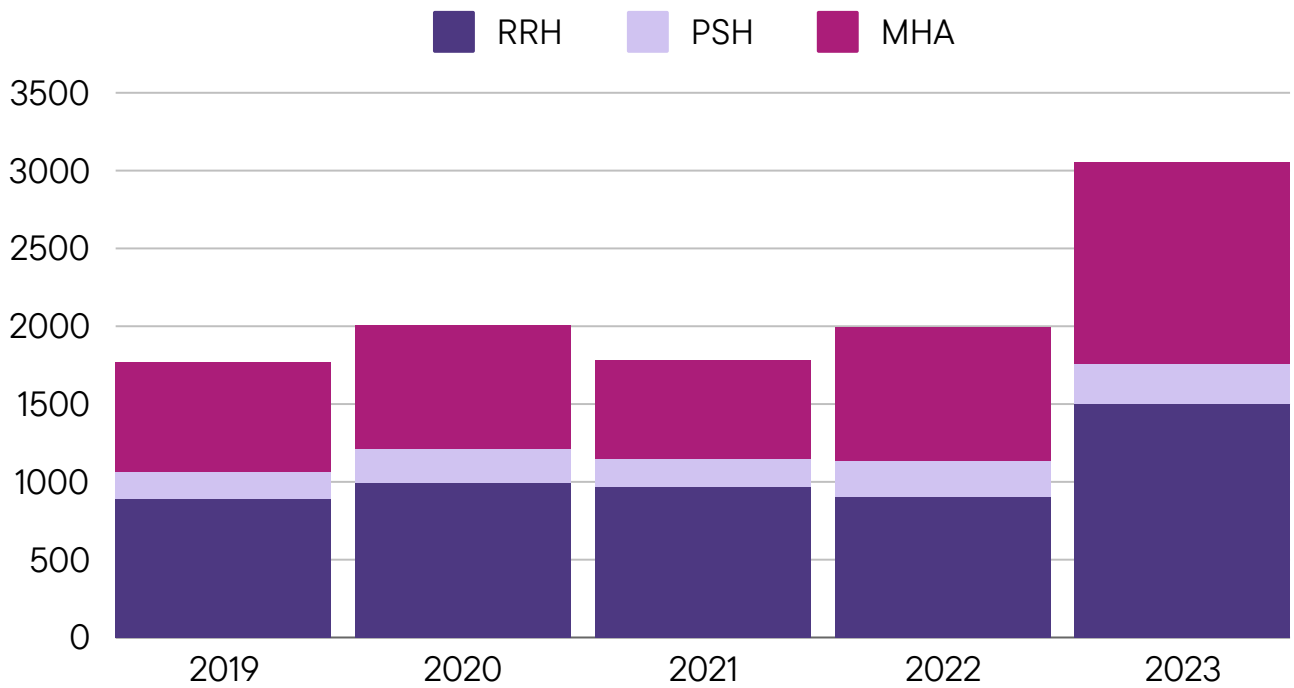
The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) awarded two organizations in our CoC through a first-of-its-kind Special Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) to address unsheltered and rural homelessness. [Learn more.](#)

\$7.7M

Awarded

2

Projects funded



HOUSING PARTNER SUCCESSES

Housing providers helped **3,058 new people** find places to live in 2023. Interventions include Rapid Re-Housing (**RRH**), a short-term program; Permanent Supportive Housing (**PSH**), a long-term program for people who need permanent support; and Minimal Housing Assistance (**MHA**), an umbrella term for many kinds of “light touch” interventions that help people find housing but don’t provide long-term support.

53%
Increase from 2022

73%
Increase from 2019

GROWTH IN HOUSING

* The largest growth has been in programs that provide Minimal Housing Assistance (MHA), like Diversion, which generally provides one-time assistance to meet a financial need that can end someone’s homelessness quickly.

* Adding to the growth our community has already seen, housing providers are planning site-based housing projects through the end of 2027 that will add nearly 1,200 PSH units to our Homelessness Response System (HRS).

CORE HRS FUNCTIONS



ECHO STAFF PLAY VITAL ROLES IN LEADING, COORDINATING, AND ADMINISTERING OUR COMMUNITY'S SYSTEM TO RECONNECT PEOPLE TO PLACES TO LIVE.

ECHO's core functions as the CoC Lead Agency keep our HRS operating and growing to meet a growing need. Among these are managing the community's Coordinated Entry System (CES) and Coordinated Assessment (CA), coordinating the biannual Point in Time (PIT) Count, administering the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), and conducting research and analyzing data on behalf of our HRS.



800

Volunteers for PIT Count



59

New projects in HMIS



67

Data requests



366

New HMIS users



20

New CA Assessors



\$90K

Paid to people with lived experience engaged in governance

CORE HRS FUNCTIONS



Staff coordinated our community's first in-person Point in Time (PIT) Count since the start of the pandemic. **Around 800 volunteers helped prepare and spread out across Austin and Travis County in the middle of the night to interview people living outside and provide some light provisions** to help people through the cold, rainy January night. The PIT Count provides a valuable opportunity to meet and hear from folks experiencing homelessness in our community.

Staff **trained 366 people to use our community's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)**. As the HMIS Lead Agency for Austin/Travis County, ECHO manages this database that housing providers use to enroll people in their programs. More HMIS users, facilitated in part by the elimination of license fees ([see page 17](#)), grows our HRS' capacity to help people access services.



CORE HRS FUNCTIONS



Staff **trained 20 new people at partner agencies to help people do their Coordinated Assessment (CA)**. This continued growth of community access points to our community's centralized housing survey allows more people to get connected to the services they need to improve their lives and work toward a permanent end to their homelessness.

The HMIS Team **integrated 59 new projects into our community-wide database**, including housing programs, street outreach, shelters, and any other kind of short-term or long-term intervention that people utilize in our Homelessness Response System. **Each project is run by a partner agency and requires set up and continuous quality assurance by ECHO staff** to meet our community's needs and the needs of people we serve.



ECHO's Research & Evaluation Team **responded to 67 data requests from system partners, community members, media outlets and others** interested in who our Homelessness Response System is serving, how well different kinds of housing interventions are working for people, and many other metrics.



GOVERNANCE



Our CoC Board, Leadership Council, convenes five committees that stand up workgroups to accomplish specific tasks. Through this CoC Governance structure, **our HRS benefited from the expertise of more than 30 people with lived experience of homelessness in 2023.** Governance participants with lived experience are compensated at a rate equivalent to \$40/hour. **In total, participants earned \$90,480 for their contributions.**

ROADMAP

Leadership Council in 2023 refined its approach to developing a Roadmap of priorities for the Committees it organizes. Collaborating with ECHO staff, the governing body collected feedback from governance participants - including people with lived experience of homelessness, service providers, local government representatives, community advocates, and additional HRS stakeholders - and defined specific priorities for Committees. These priorities are all designed to improve the way our HRS serves people experiencing homelessness and create a more equitable, sustainable system.

Keep up with Roadmap progress on the [Leadership Council page](#) on our website.



* Leadership Council logo (right) designed by ECHO Communications and Public Policy Manager Lyric Wardlow



AYC members Kayla Yerby and Jacquez Tibbs print and cut AYC stickers at the ECHO office.

INTEGRATING LIVED EXPERIENCE

ECHO took meaningful strides in 2023 to further integrate voices of people with lived experience of homelessness into our organization and HRS. In particular, ECHO grew and strengthened relationships with two groups: the **Austin Youth Collective (AYC)** and the **Austin Homelessness Advisory Council (AHAC)**. This growth would not be possible without support from **Glimmer Austin, Indeed, and the St. David's Foundation** to fund direct payments and other supports to people we engage who've experienced homelessness.

When we talk about lived experience, we mean people who've received services from our Homelessness Response System (HRS) -- **our most important stakeholders and the people our HRS must ultimately be accountable to. These experiences cannot be learned in a classroom**, yet they teach the most important lessons about what works for people and what doesn't. That's why it's so important to us at ECHO to create a platform for people to use their firsthand experience of moving through our HRS to improve services and how they're delivered. **We centered this approach in our organization's Values, and we're committed to continually improving and expanding how we're integrating voices of people who use our HRS.**

INTEGRATING LIVED EXPERIENCE

AYC

- * Members advocated to ECHO leadership to increase their budget to be more supportive of their work. As a result, AYC increased its budget by 61% for 2024. In addition to compensation, the budget includes line items for things like transportation, meals for meetings, technology, professional development and an emergency fund for unexpected financial needs.
- * The Collective coordinated and hosted a community resource fair that brought together service providers and gave people access to care, clothing, and supplies to make being unhoused in the Texas summer a little more bearable.
- * AYC began working with a professional photographer to film a documentary series about homelessness among youth and young adults and the hidden labor that unhoused people engage in daily to survive. The Collective partnered with a University of Texas at Austin researcher to incorporate an academic study component as well.
- * Members attended the Texas Network of Youth Services (TNOYS) conference in Houston, connecting with other young people doing similar work and learning how to make a greater impact in our HRS.



The Austin Youth Collective (AYC)

is our community's Youth Action Board (YAB), originally created with the goal of informing and advancing work associated with the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) grant awarded in 2018. AYC, comprised for most of 2023 of five members ages 18-24 with lived experience of homelessness, has since expanded its mission to consult on a broad range of HRS policies, initiatives, and funding opportunities, as well as plan and execute projects around the Collective's advocacy and community engagement priorities. ECHO coordinates and provides funding for AYC.

- * Members contributed more than 300 hours of expert consulting to our HRS directly through CoC governance committee and workgroup meetings. This total does not include time spent on work associated with governance groups outside of meetings.



INTEGRATING LIVED EXPERIENCE

The Austin Homelessness Advisory Council (AHAC) is a group of people with lived experience convened by the City of Austin to consult on programs and initiatives throughout the HRS. The Downtown Austin Community Court (DACC) hosts biweekly meetings for the group, and agendas are regularly filled with feedback and engagement opportunities from the City's Homeless Strategy Office, ECHO, and many partners within the HRS. ECHO has made it a priority to engage and build partnership more strategically with AHAC, creating opportunities for members to engage in the community outside of their regular meetings through conferences, site visits, and regular access to the ECHO office and staff.

AHAC

- * Seven members, sponsored by ECHO, joined staff in Washington, D.C., for the National Coalition for the Homeless' Lived Experience Leadership Conference in September. AYC members also attended the conference.



- * AHAC, which meets biweekly, began hosting one meeting per quarter at the ECHO office. The first was a joint meeting and holiday party with AYC in December.

Volunteers for the 2023 Point in Time (PIT) Count speak with someone experiencing homelessness.



COMMUNITY FUNDING



* ECHO established the [Austin Street Outreach Collaborative \(ASOC\)](#) in 2022 with a two-year grant from the St. David's Foundation. Funds allowed three agencies - We Can Now, Sunrise Homeless Navigation Center, and Urban Alchemy - to hire 12 outreach staff and distribute \$500,000 in direct assistance through diversion programs. ASOC agencies have completed more than 1,800 CAs to connect people to HRS housing programs.

AUSTIN STREET OUTREACH COLLABORATIVE

People diverted in 2023:

626

Average need:

\$650

* Through a partnership with the WoodNext Foundation, ECHO awarded 14 grassroots organizations microgrants of at least \$25,000 starting in 2023. Funds are dedicated to diversion/rapid exit, generally one-time costs to help someone get back into housing quickly. Eight awarded organizations weren't connected to our HRS before. Learn more about the awards [on our blog](#), and [watch a video](#) introducing three of the awardees.



WOODNEXT FOUNDATION

Agencies awarded:

14

People diverted in first year:

130

COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

* ECHO piloted eliminating fees previously charged to organizations for licenses to use the HMIS database. The successful pilot was funded by Indeed, and ECHO worked with Leadership Council to increase the community's HMIS award to sustain funding long-term. Eliminating license fees has allowed more grassroots organizations to join HMIS, allowing our HRS to reach people we haven't reached before.



New HMIS agencies in 2023:

17

People served by new agencies*:

151

ELIMINATING HMIS LICENSE FEES

**Not including CAs*

* Staff secured 45,000 free Capital Metro bus passes through a partnership with the Transit Empowerment Fund (TEF) to distribute to more than 30 community partners. The paper passes are now being replaced by [free two-year plastic passes](#) available to anyone with a current entry in our Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).

A group of ECHO staff banded and boxed nearly all the passes based on individual organizations' needs.



Passes awarded:

45K

New HMIS passes good for:

2 yrs

CAPMETRO BUS PASSES

REPORTS & RESEARCH

* All reports and archives are available on the [Reports & Research page](#) on our website

PIT COUNT

The Point in Time (PIT) Count is a one-night survey of people living unsheltered in our community. HUD requires the CoC Lead Agency to conduct an unsheltered PIT Count every other year. ECHO coordinated around 800 volunteers throughout the planning and execution of the 2023 PIT Count, including more than 700 participating the night of the Count.



Survey data from the PIT Count helps inform our HRS and target interventions where they're most needed. HUD also collects this information from communities across the country and compiles it into the Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR), which is presented to Congress each year to inform policy and funding discussions.

NEEDS & GAPS

An annual requirement of the CoC Lead Agency, this report provides an overview of who used our HRS in the previous calendar year, the programs that exist to serve people, how our system is performing, and where service gaps exist. Starting in 2024, this report is combined with the racial disparities report and other information into a comprehensive annual State of the HRS report.

RACIAL DISPARITIES

This report examines the ways homelessness impacts people of different races and ethnicities and how our HRS responds to the needs of a diverse population. The report highlights the fact that Black people are disproportionately represented in our HRS due to structural racism in a range of systems, including ours.

ART OF THE HEART

"The Art of the Heart is to Hear with the Ear" is a qualitative research project that uncovered reasons Black unhoused people do and do not engage with homeless services in the Austin/Travis County Homelessness Response System. The research revealed the significance of lived expertise and compassion in service delivery as it relates to trust of homeless service providers in the system.

INPUT TO UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS PANEL

ECHO's Research & Evaluation Team submitted input to the United Nations International Independent Expert Mechanism to Advance Racial Justice and Equality in the Context of Law Enforcement. This research shows how Black people experiencing homelessness are particularly vulnerable to police discrimination and abuse.

ADVANCING SYSTEMS

PSH HEALTH CARE COLLABORATIVE

The Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) Health Care Collaborative (HCC) [kicked off its planning process](#) in December. This innovative new partnership, launched with seed funding from Oracle and additional partners, will deliver whole-person care directly to people in their PSH units.



16

Members of steering committee

1,200+

PSH units in pipeline through 2027



The PSH HCC steering committee consisted of people with lived experience of homelessness, direct service providers, health care system partners, housing providers, local elected leaders, and ECHO. Over the course of the next several months, the team mapped out an actionable plan and secured organizational and financial commitments to begin standing up teams of nurses, primary care physicians, psychiatrists, counselors, peers, pharmacists, case managers, and additional personnel needed at individual sites to meet people's needs. The first PSH sites will be staffed starting in Fall 2024.

ADVANCING SYSTEMS

SOAR

The SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) program is a way for unhoused people to apply for federal benefits they're eligible for. ECHO serves as our community's [SOAR local lead](#), recruiting, training, and supporting SOAR case workers at various organizations in our community. ECHO's work to grow and support SOAR was recently [highlighted](#) by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in a guide to integrating the program into a CoC.

32

New SOAR assessors

151

Benefits applications filed

MENTAL HEALTH DIVERSION CENTER

ECHO staff served on Travis County's Forensic Mental Health Committee that recommended, as one of [five priorities \(PDF\)](#), developing a [diversion center](#) to keep people out of jail and provide appropriate mental and behavioral health care. Travis County Commissioners voted unanimously in March 2023 to create the center.

3-yr

Pilot program (Integral Care)

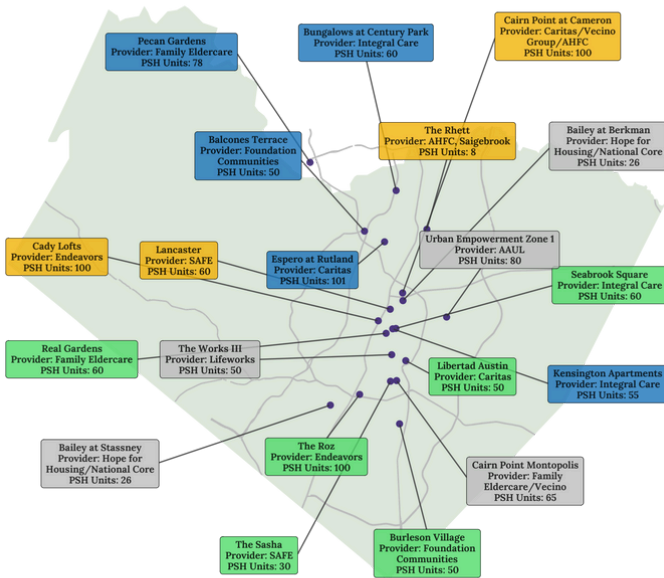
31

Beds available in pilot phase



ECHO staff participated in a panel on public safety and homelessness in North Austin.

SYSTEM PROGRESS



Learn more about the PSH Pipeline in the [2024 State of the HRS Report](#)

PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING (PSH) PIPELINE

- * Austin/Travis County housing providers are developing site-based PSH projects that will add more than 1,200 units of long-term housing to our system by the end of 2027.
- * The first developments in this PSH pipeline drew closer to opening their doors in 2023, while more secured funding, broke ground, and continued the long process of creating new housing for people who need it.
- * Developers are expected to bring online 293 new units of site-based PSH in 2024.

AT HOME INITIATIVE

The At Home Initiative is an innovative partnership that will provide housing and support services for 200–250 people experiencing chronic homelessness who are medically vulnerable and frequently end up in places like emergency rooms or jails.

IN 2023:

- * ECHO launched a partnership with the University of Texas at Austin’s Ray Marshall Center to evaluate the initiative’s effectiveness.
- * Caritas of Austin’s development Espero Rutland was the first PSH project awarded as part of the initiative to expand the pilot program and began moving in At Home participants in 2024.
- * Partners continued planning future phases of the initiative, with additional funding to be released through a Request for Proposals process.

LOOKING AHEAD

WHAT'S NEXT

Our community has made tremendous progress toward building a Homelessness Response System that works for everyone. With this progress, ECHO has grown and evolved to meet changing needs within our Continuum of Care. In 2024 and beyond, ECHO will continue to step into the roles the community helped develop in our strategic planning process, advancing efforts to integrate people who've received services from our system into our work, center racial equity as a driving force for change, and collaborate communitywide to find lasting solutions.



STAY IN TOUCH



Social Media/



Newsletter

<https://bit.ly/getECHOnews>

Website/

www.austinecho.org

Address/

210 Barton Springs Rd., Ste 400
Austin, TX 78704