

# BEST PRACTICES LOW BARRIER, HOUSING FOCUSED SHELTER

## SESSION FOUR: LOW BARRIER AND HOUSING FOCUSED EFFECTIVE SHELTER PRACTICE

September 24, 2024

**Kay Mosher McDivitt**

**Josh Johnson**

**diiv sternman**

Senior Technical Assistance Specialist,  
Center for Capacity Building

# What We Do

## Policy and Programs

- Carries out the vital work of educating policymakers and the field about key strategies and policies for ending and preventing homelessness.
- Keeps federal policymakers and legislators informed of the needs of people experiencing homelessness and the programs serving them.
- Leads advocacy efforts on a grassroots level.

## Capacity Building

- Supports efforts to end homelessness by offering training and technical assistance tailored to communities' unique needs.
- Helps design and implement crisis systems, improve systems' performance, and utilize data to end homelessness, particularly with an equity lens.
- Provides online courses, trainings, and webinars to inform the field of best practices to end homelessness.

## Homelessness Research Institute

- Analyzes data to identify homelessness trends on national, local, and Continuum of Care levels.
- Publishes research that ensures policymakers, practitioners, the media, and the public have the best information about trends and emerging solutions to the problem.
- Uses an equity lens to identify disparities in homelessness data.

**Lived Experience Innovation + Strategic Communications**

# National Alliance to End Homelessness Statements for Participation

The Alliance works to ensure that diverse voices are included as facilitators, attendees, and guests in our training forums. All voices are welcome.

The organization has a zero-tolerance policy for any form of discrimination or abusive behavior. The Alliance is committed to ensuring that all its events are safe and respectful for all participants.

Participants acknowledge that any form of discrimination, violence, or abusive behavior may result in removal from an office hour or forum depending on the situation.

If any discrimination is witnessed or experienced during the training, or if you feel unsafe, please notify any member of the Alliance staff.

The National Alliance to End Homelessness strives to create a diverse, inclusive, accepting, and safe space for everyone.

# Training Series Overview

## Week One

- Effective Homeless Response Systems
- Role of Emergency Shelter

## Week Two

- Housing First Approach in Shelter
- Role of Shelter in Diversion and Problem Solving

## Week Three

- Implementing Low Barrier Practice and the Role of “Rules”
- Housing Focused Shelter and Rapid Exits
- Creating a Housing Focused Environment

## Week Four

- Continued Creating a Housing Focused Environment
- Using Data and Outcomes to Measure Success
- Taking Action and Wrap Up

9/24/2024



# Virtual Session Logistics

---



Mute Button

Comment and  
Ask Questions in  
Chat

Slides will be  
provided at the  
end of the series

Participation  
encouraged  
cameras on!

# Breakout Rooms Who's Here?

- Name
- Pronouns
- Role
- Other identities
- Organization
- What was an aha moment you had from last Tuesday's training...

Aha!



**“Good, better, best. Never let  
it rest. Until your good is  
better and your better is best.”  
—Tim Duncan**

# REVIEW

Immediate and Low Barrier Access  
Housing Focused, Rapid Exit Services

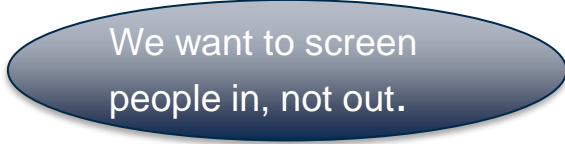




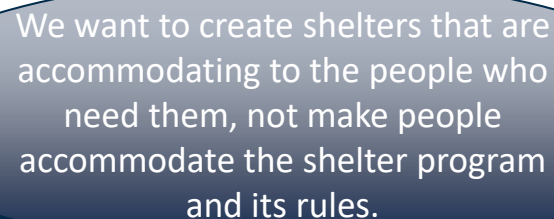
# Immediate and Low-barrier Access

## What Does Low Barrier Shelter Look

- Shelter is open 24/7
- People do not have to line up for a bed each night or leave early in the morning
- No drug and alcohol testing to get in **or to stay in**
- No criminal background checks to get in
- Not requiring income to get in
- Not requiring “housing-readiness” to get in
- Allowing people, pets, and possessions



We want to screen people in, not out.



We want to create shelters that are accommodating to the people who need them, not make people accommodate the shelter program and its rules.

## Retooling the Rules

**DO** promote safety.

**DO NOT** try to change or control people or their behaviors.

-Iain De Jong, OrgCode Consulting



**RULES**



**EXPECTATIONS**

# Housing-Focused Supports

## Housing Plan

- Start developing the plan at entry with an exit date for a housing solution
- Shifting from “What can I do to help you?” to “How can I support you to obtain housing quickly?”
- Identify barriers to tenancy that will be worked through in the housing plan
- Have “problem-solving” conversations to connect to natural supports and housing options
- Focus every in-person meeting on a quick move to permanent housing
- Review and discuss the housing plan weekly at a minimum

# Housing-Focused Supports

## Messaging

- **Shelter is not a destination; it is a step to get you housed**
  - Waiting in shelter for something better is NOT an option
  - We can't wait for a train that isn't coming
- **We are going to re-house you RAPIDLY**
  - Every day is a day to find a housing solution
  - Don't get too comfortable - save that for when you move home
- **You CAN be housed!**
  - You're better off without us
  - You will have supports in the community



# Homework



Report Out

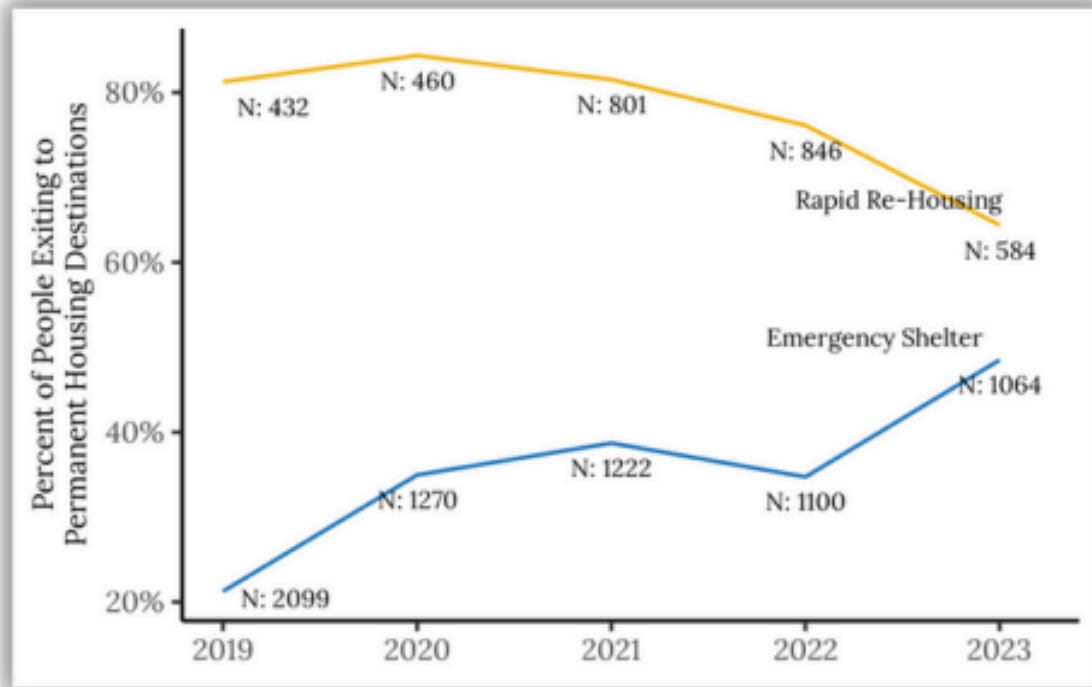
## Assignment

**In the next week, come in the front door of the shelter and then take time to walk around your entire facility and make detailed observations.**

1. What does the signage look like?
2. Is there easy access to materials on finding housing?
3. Is language person-centered, empowering, and does it create a sense of urgency?
4. What are some simple changes you can make to ramp up your housing focused messaging
5. Be ready to report out next week.

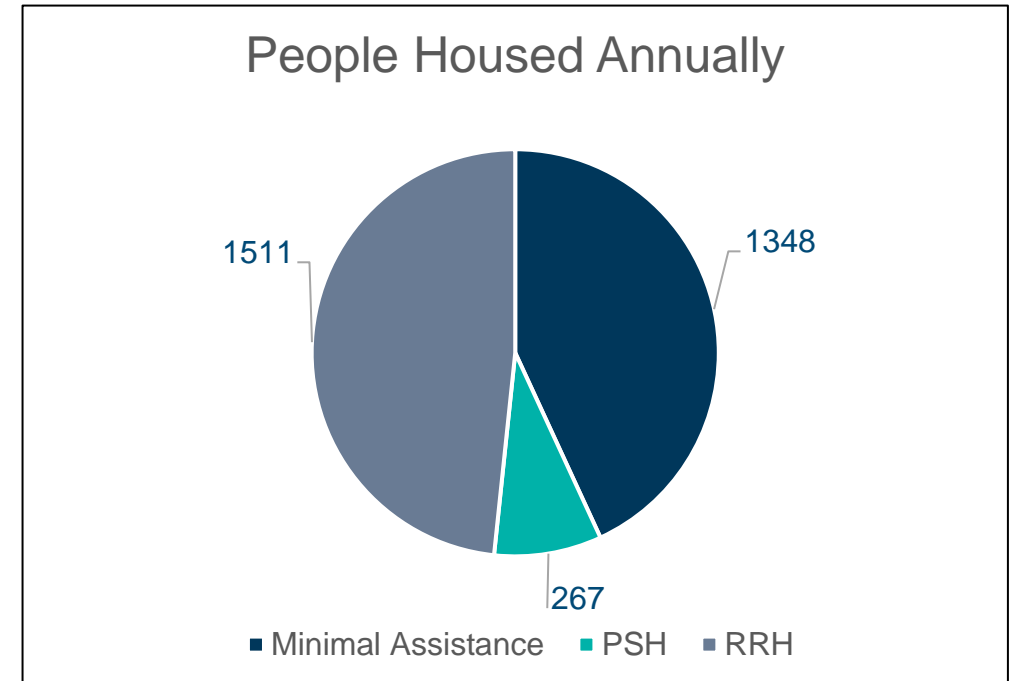
# Why Housing Focused Shelter?

Number of Exits from RRH and ES and Percent of Exits to PH



Source: August 2024 A Report on the State of the Homelessness Response System in Austin/Travis County

People Housed Annually



CES averages:  
 795 assessed/reassessed monthly  
 98 on referrals monthly

# IMPLEMENTING HOUSING-FOCUSED SUPPORTS FOR RAPID EXITS TO PERMANENT HOUSING

STAFFING  
HOUSING PLAN DEVELOPMENT  
**MESSAGING** 



# Housing-Focused Supports

## Messaging

### Shelter environment is housing-focused

- Reframe messaging throughout the shelter
- All signage reflects a housing message
- Shelter environment incentivizes engagement in self-resolution and quick moves to permanent living situations
- Create a sense of urgency
  - “You are the best captain of your housing plan.”
  - “You CAN Find Housing!”
  - “You can choose to say no to a housing option, but not continue to stay in shelter forever.”



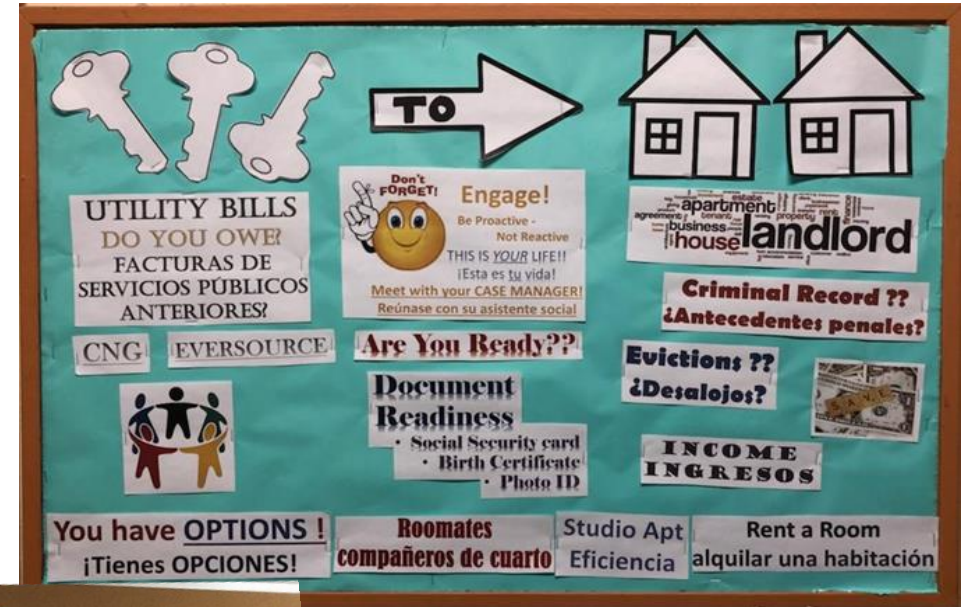
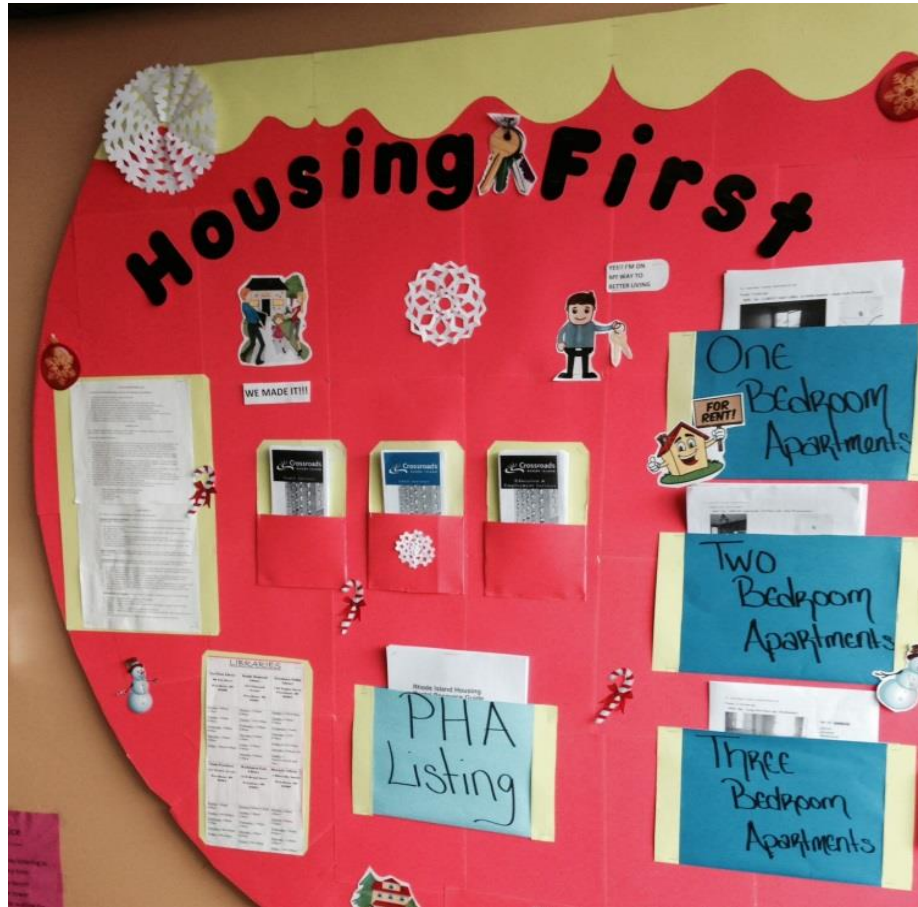
# Housing-Focused Supports Messaging Before



# Housing-Focused Supports

## Shifting the Messaging

# After...



# Breakout Activity

## Shifting Our Message Brainstorm Activity

- **Breakouts 1&2:** Messaging to create a sense of urgency to find housing
- **Breakouts 3&4:** Strategies to incentivize leaving shelter to move to permanent housing solutions
- **Breakouts 5:** Strategies to facilitate self-resolution
  
- Debrief
- Now, in chat identify one thing you heard that you can implement in your shelter within the next week!

**SHARED HOUSING – IT'S A GREAT  
HOUSING TOOL!**



# Let's Talk About Shared Housing

## Why Shared Housing



### Cost Savings

- Rent
- Utilities
- Household supplies

### Sharing in Household Responsibilities

- Cleaning
- Maintenance
- Yardwork



### Socialization & Shared Personal Responsibilities

- Emergencies!
- Babysitting/Childrearing (for families)
- Loneliness



Source: Northern Virginia Family Service

# Shared Housing



Wisdom from Meghann Cotter - Micah Ministries - Fredericksburg, VA

**LET'S TALK ABOUT:  
LANDLORD RECRUITMENT AND  
ENGAGEMENT**



## Finding Housing



“It takes a lot of advocacy for someone to get into the housing. Without a case manager, without an advocate, these people would still be out in the streets. And that’s just the reality of it.”

Case Manager- Denton, TX

Source: <http://www.dentonrc.com/newsrss/newsrss/2018/04/21/annual-point-time-count-shows-new-increase-homelessness-denton-county>

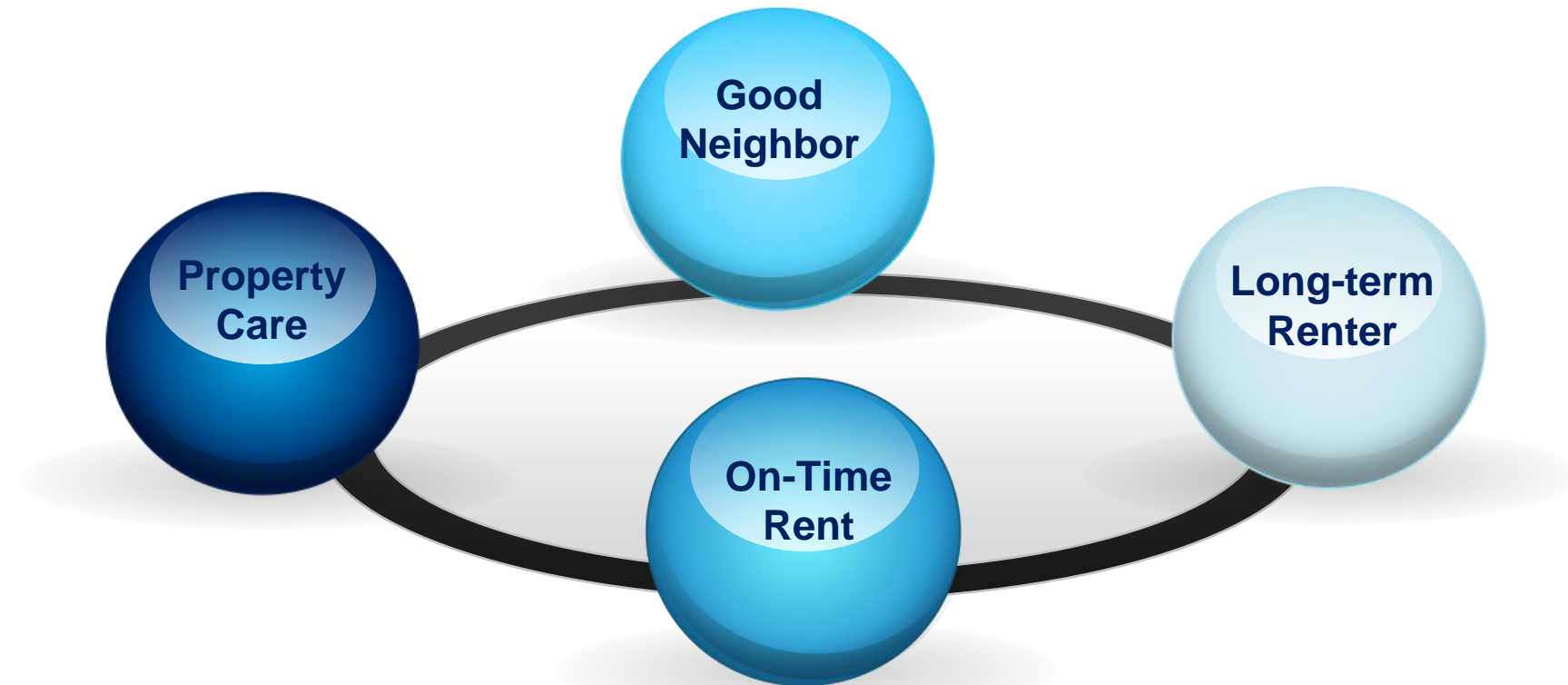


# Finding Housing Landlord Recruitment



# Finding Housing Landlord Engagement

## What Do Landlords Want?



# Finding Housing

## Landlord Engagement

Match the right tenant to the right landlord

Follow through on your promises

Return phone calls promptly

Listen!!!

Recognition

- “Thank You” notes
- Appreciation events - with FOOD!
- Write-ups in organizational materials

Convey positive impact on community



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY](#)

# Breakout Activity

## Creative Housing Solutions

---

- In five minutes, brainstorm any potential housing solutions that can help people exit shelter more quickly.
- Who has the best list!
  
- Debrief
- Now, in chat identify one thing you heard that you can try in your shelter in the next month.

**5 Minutes**



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)



# Key Elements of Emergency Shelters in an Effective Crisis Response System

- Housing First Approach
- Safe & Appropriate Diversion
- Immediate and Low-barrier Access
- Housing-focused, Rapid Exit Services
- **Data to Measure Performance**



# DATA

Why is it important?



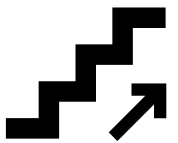
# Why data?



Tells a story



Informs decision-making



Helps to set, track, and monitor goals



Measures Impact

DATA



SORTED



ARRANGED



PRESENTED VISUALLY



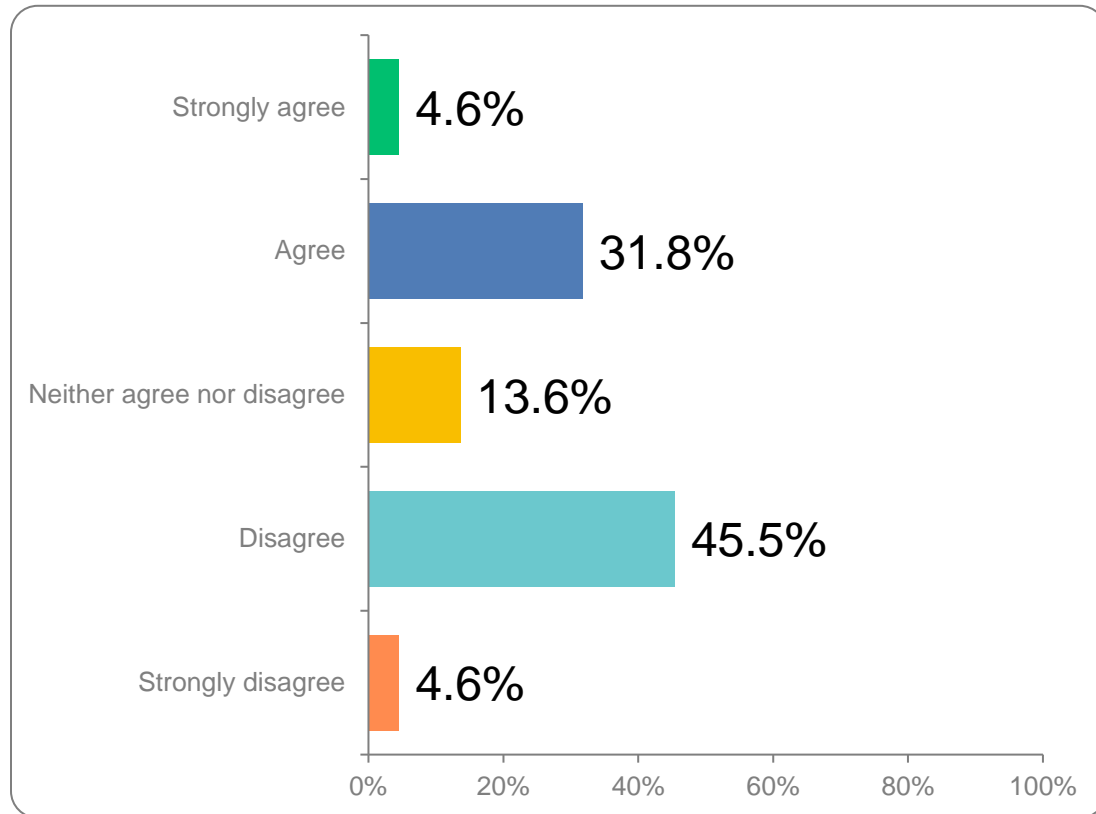
EXPLAINED WITH A STORY



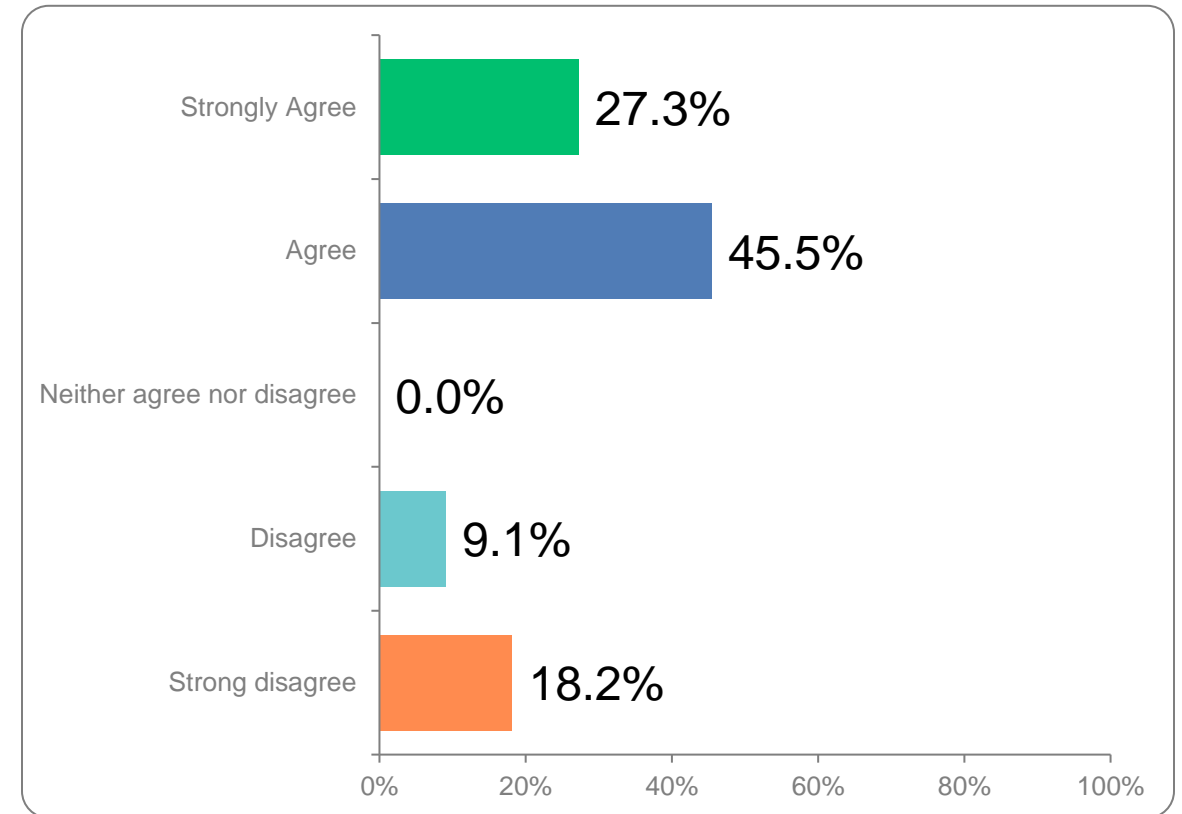


As a community, we routinely reflect on data from either our HMIS or other case management software to understand who we are serving and not serving well and make adjustments to our service delivery.

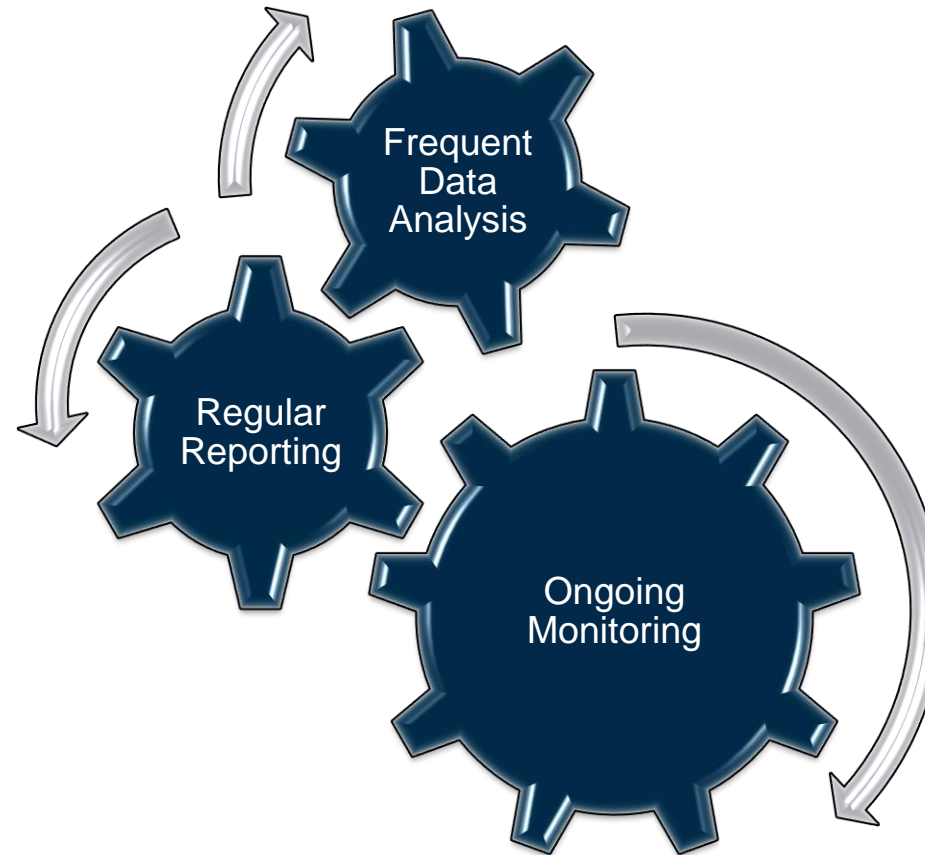
## Providers



## Leadership



# Report Performance Emergency Shelter Outcome Metrics

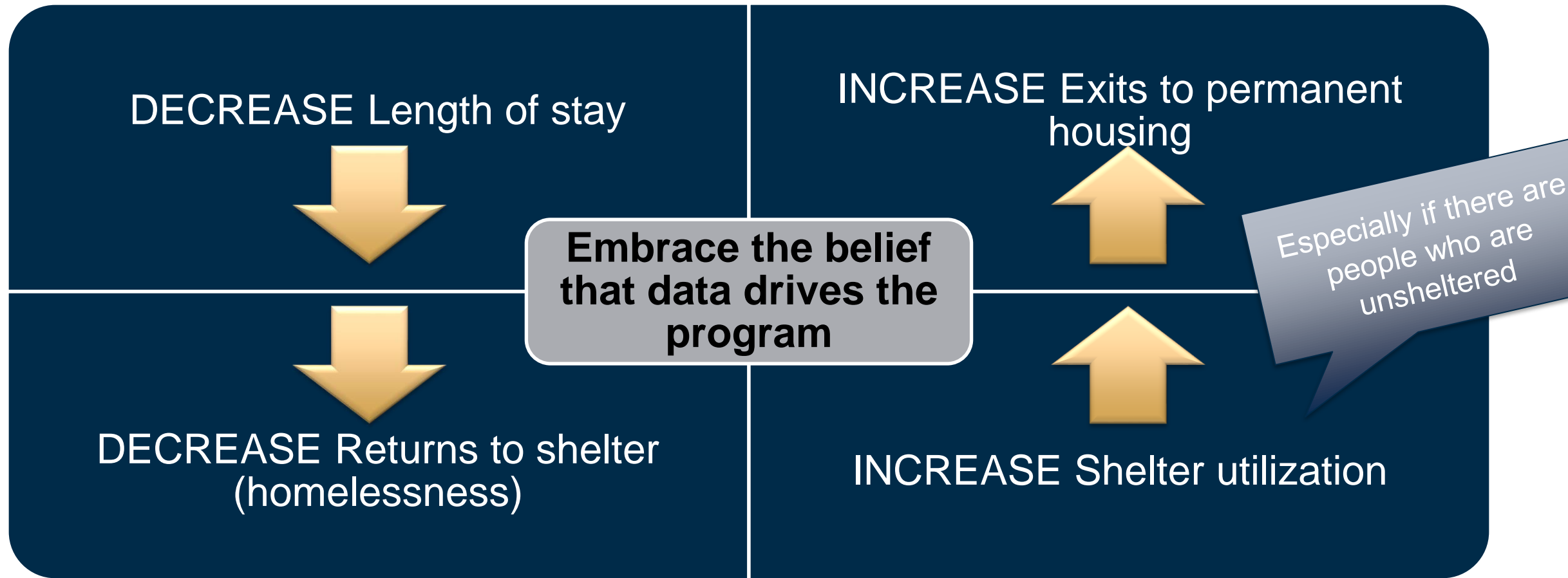


## Using Data to Improve Shelter



# MEASURE: Using Data to Improve Performance Outcomes

## Philosophical Shift



# EVALUATE Data to Measure Performance - Philosophical Shift

The only way to end people's homelessness is to help them obtain permanent housing

- These outcomes work together!



- Remember: rules designed to control people do not work!

A diagram illustrating a philosophical shift. It features a large grey rectangular box. On the left side of the box is a large dark blue plus sign. Inside the box, the text reads: "Increasing exits to permanent housing & speeding up those exits decreases lengths of time homeless!". To the right of this text is a vertical line, followed by the text: "Do not institute arbitrary length of stay limits in shelter to reduce shelter stays." Below the box is a dark blue horizontal bar.

# MEASURE and REPORT Performance Emergency Shelter Outcome Metrics

#	Measure	June 2024
1	Total number of beds a. Total beds for unaccompanied individuals b. Total beds for families	
2	Total unique households served	
3	Total households entering shelter	
4	Total households exiting	
5	Total households exiting to a permanent housing destination	
6	Average length of shelter stay in days for all households exiting the shelter to any destination	
7	Average length of shelter stay in days for all households exiting to a permanent housing destination	
8	Total household stayers (those households who entered in previous months and did not exit this month)	
9	Average length of shelter stay in days for all stayer households	

Measure and report monthly

Households not persons

Answer based on activities that occurred during reporting month

# DATA AND RACIAL EQUITY



# IMPROVE: Use Data to Be More Effective

## Operational Shifts

### Analyze data for racial disparities

Does your shelter population reflect the make-up of your general population/those living in poverty?

Does your staffing reflect those you serve?

Look at your shelter inflow and outflow – who is more likely to return to homelessness, and who leaves for housing ?

Is there disparity in length of stay?

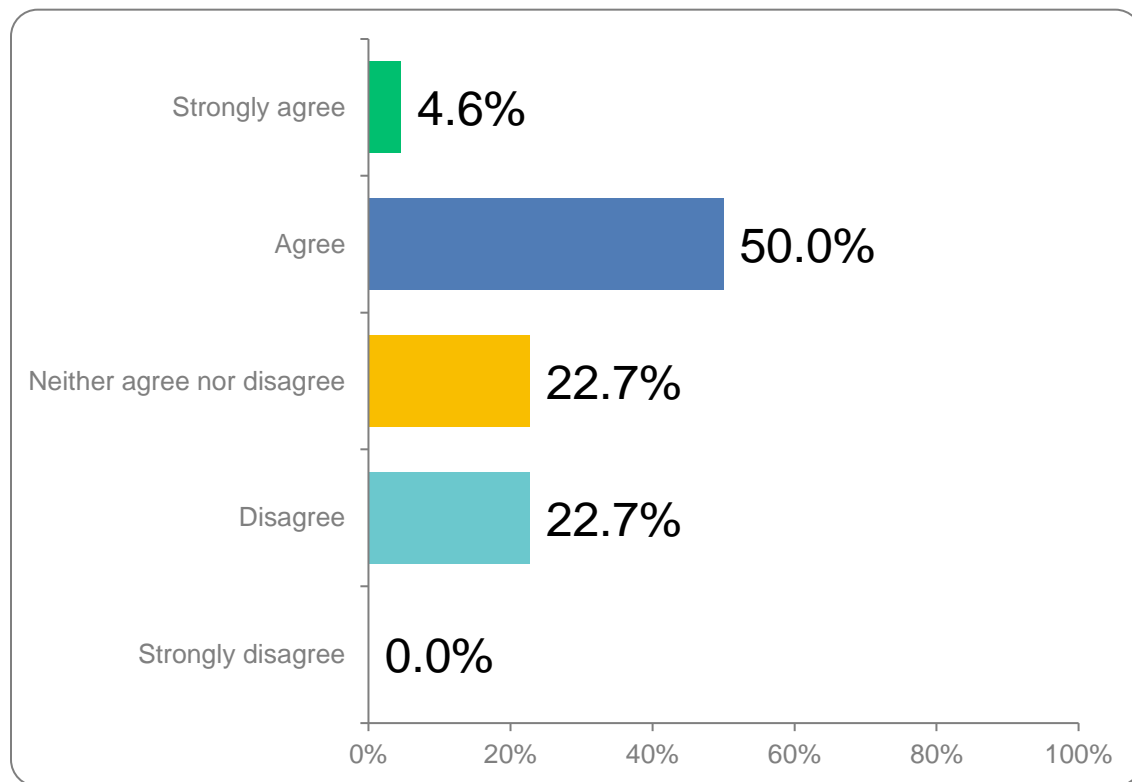
What about prioritization for interventions?

Are there racial differences in who is exited due to compliance issues?

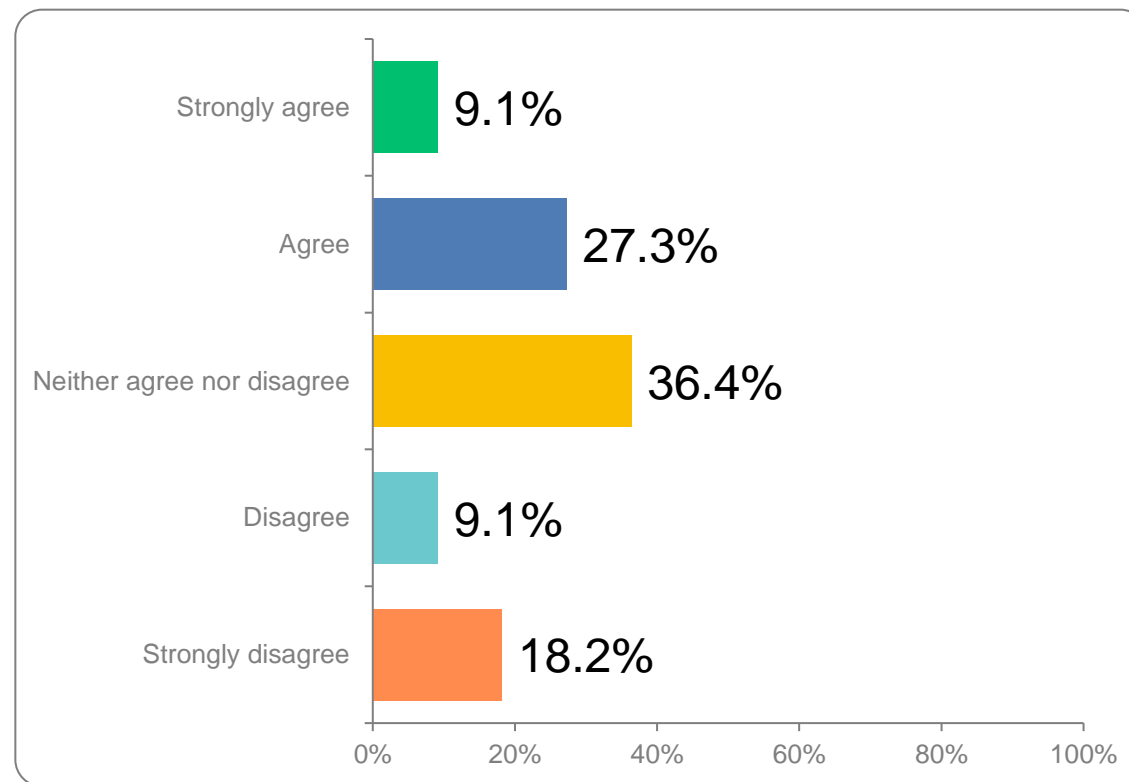


The CoC has identified where racial disparities exist within the homeless response system and is active in implementing solutions to address those disparities.

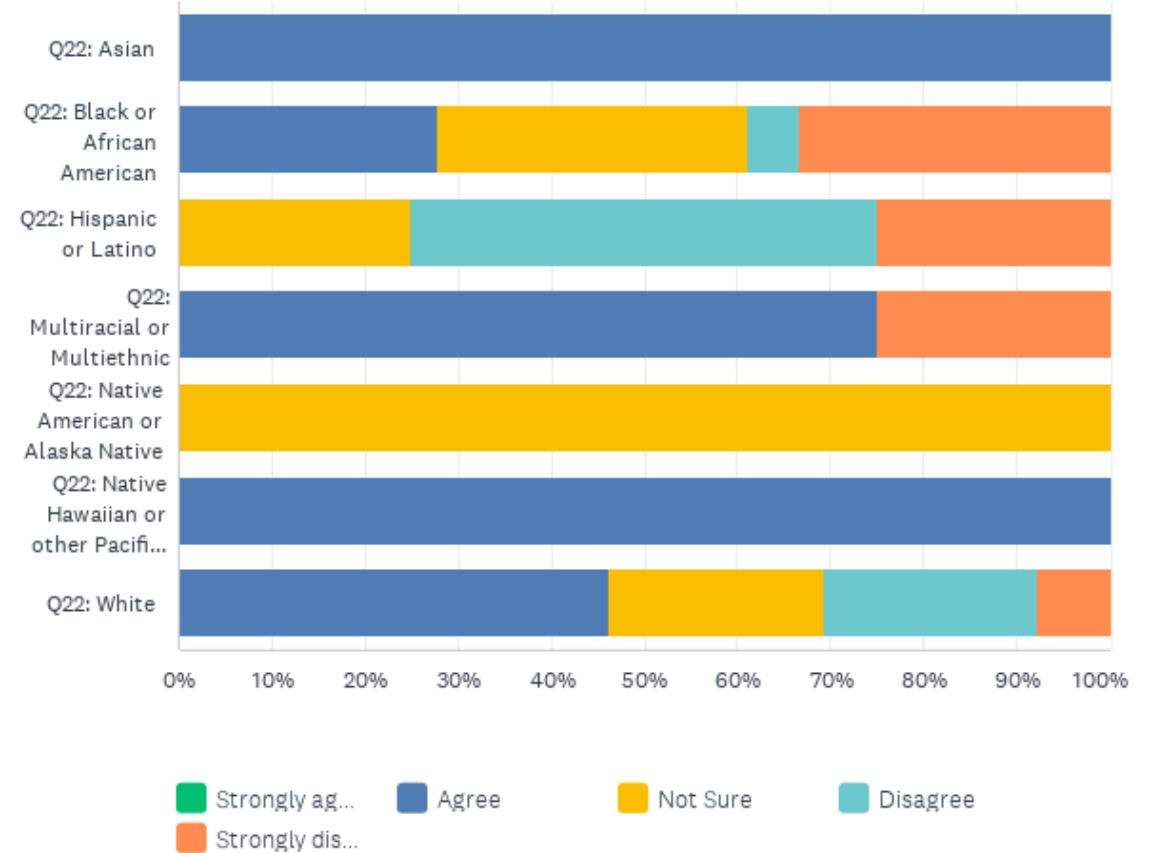
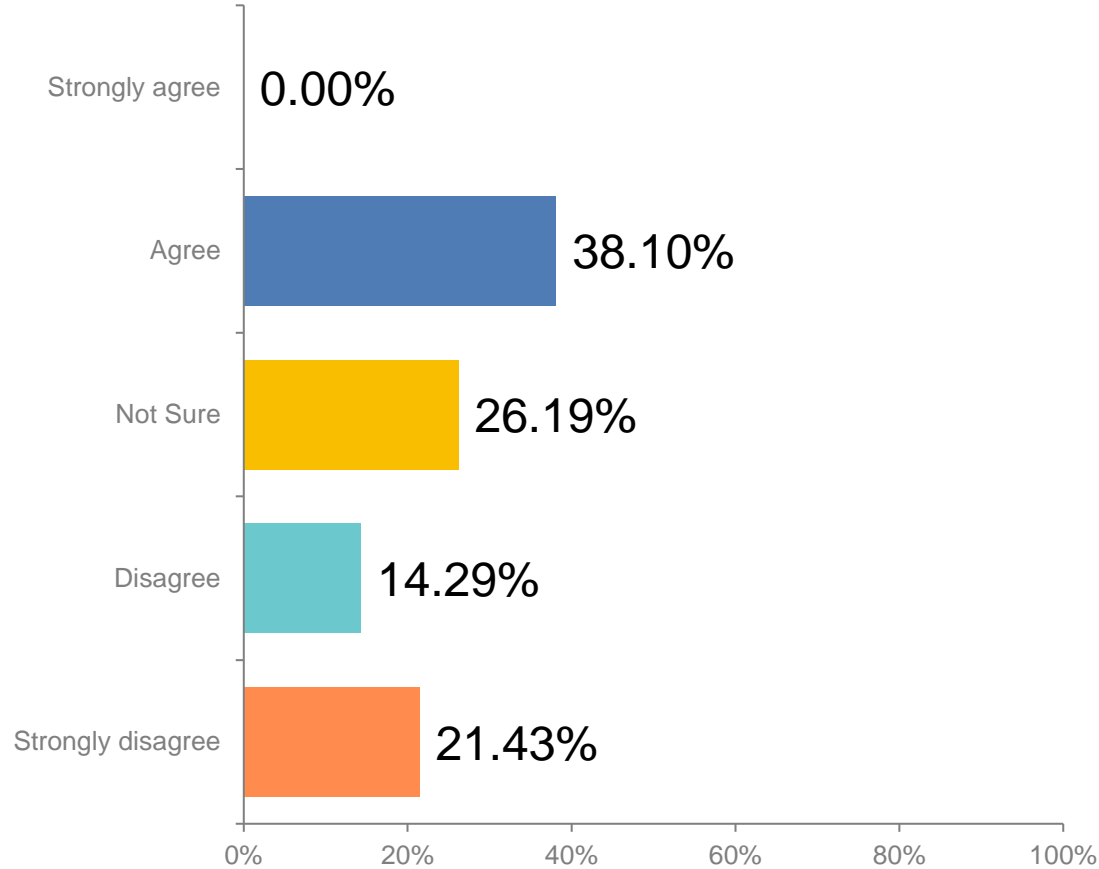
## Providers



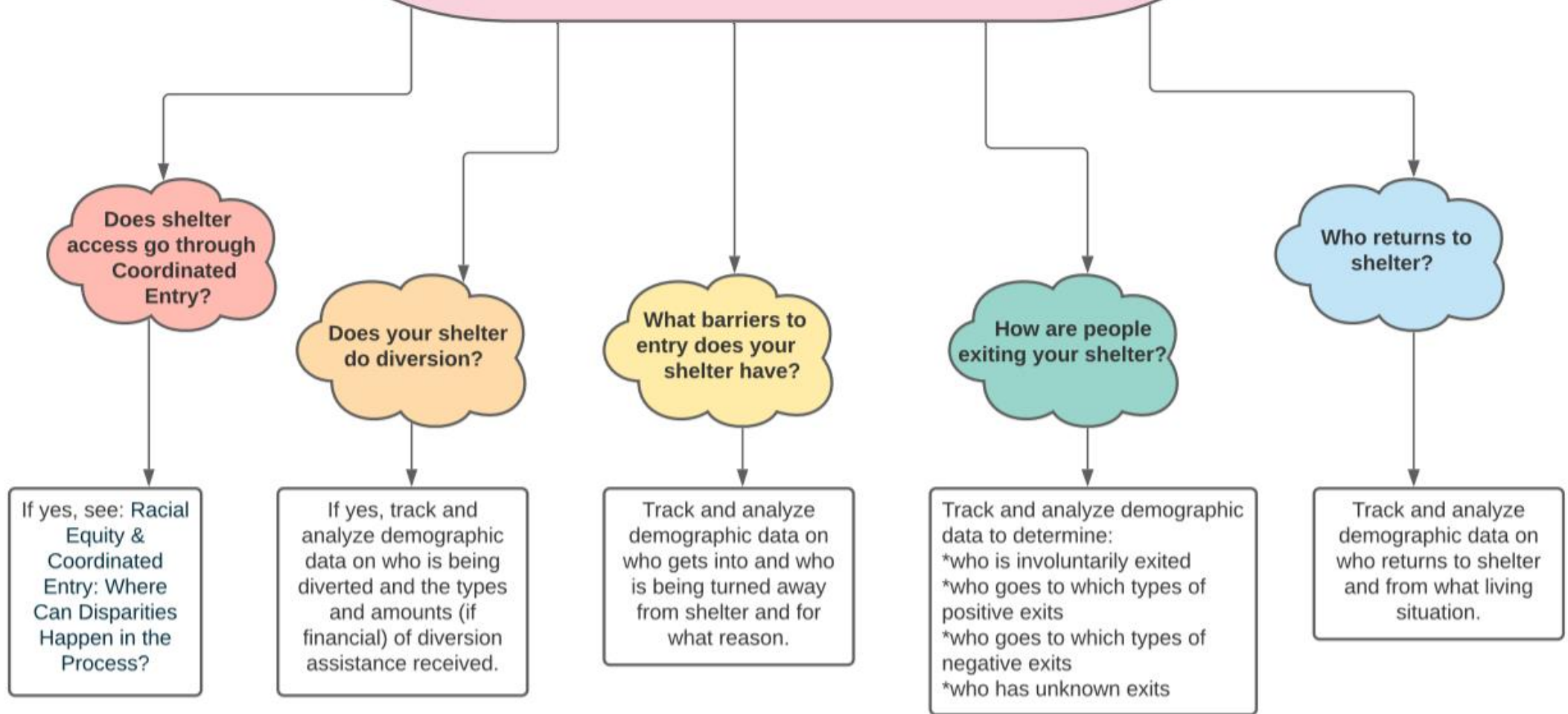
## Leadership



# My race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability did not influence the way I was treated by service providers in my community while being homeless. (Lived Experience)



# Racial Equity and Emergency Shelter: Access and Outcomes



# TAILORING YOUR DATA COLLECTION



# Output vs Outcome

An **output** should be:

- ▶ Focused on what the client and/or program will do to achieve the outcome.
- ▶ Quantified in terms of the frequency and intensity of the activity from the client's perspective.
- ▶ Specific to the activity described for the program.
- ▶ Feasible.
- ▶ Attainable.
- ▶ Understandable to someone outside of the program

An **outcome** should be:

- ▶ Focused on what the participant will gain from that program.
- ▶ Quantified in terms of the client-level impact with clear targets and methods.
- ▶ Specific and attributable to (a result of) that program.
- ▶ Meaningful.
- ▶ Attainable.
- ▶ Understandable to someone outside of the program

# Be a Cake Boss!



**Think of the outputs as the recipe and the outcomes as the cake.**

- How much of each ingredient do you need for the cake to taste good?
- How many case management meetings or service engagements did it take to achieve your goal with clients?

# IMPROVE: Use Data to Be More Effective

## Practice Shift

### Old “outcomes”

- Number of people served
- Bed nights provided
- Number of meals served
- Number of volunteer hours

### Negative Outcomes to Analyze:

- Disciplinary discharges (compliance)
- Exits to homelessness
- Unknown exits
- People with long lengths of stay

### **INSTEAD:** Measure impact:

- How many people exit to permanent housing?
- How long do people stay in shelter?
- Are positive outcomes equitable?

# IMPROVE: Use Data to Be More Effective

## Practice Shift

---

### Staff Performance:

- Create expected outcomes specific to each staff
- At a minimum, review each staff's outcomes monthly
- Use data to look at results for each staff;
  - Peer learning/mentoring
  - Race Equity Outcomes
  - Identify Training Needs



# SET GOALS :

## Where are we now, and where do we go?

### Who are the long stayers?

- Who is working with them?
- What is their housing plan?
- What housing options have been explored with them?
- Are they “waiting” because they think that if they stay long enough, they will get something?

### What can we learn from short stayers?

- Where do they exit to?
- Who was working with them?
- Could they have been diverted?

### What about the “unknown exits”?

- What do we know about those persons?
- Can we get better information? How?
- Who is working with those persons?

**Set goals within your  
organizations and as a  
system.**



# Tailoring Your Data Collection

Just because you don't have to report it doesn't mean you shouldn't collect it.

Better understand the impact of your shelter outcomes on the overall system to reduce homelessness!



# Using Data to Improve Performance

## Philosophy

- There is always room to improve



## Practice

- Measure outcomes, not outputs
  - Decrease length of stay in homelessness
  - Increase exits to permanent housing
  - Decrease returns to shelter

# Brainstorm Activity

Shelter A has an average length of stay of 200 days (just shy of 8 months). The shelter has set a goal to decrease their average length of stay to 120 days (about 4 months).

*List the outputs the shelter and system can engage in to accomplish this goal.*

**Instructions:**

- Put in the chat
- Come off mute

# USING QUALITATIVE DATA



# What Is Qualitative Data

Qualitative data is non-numerical data. This means that it represents the aspects of experiences that are often difficult to measure through tools and assessments or are open-ended in nature. The overall objective of qualitative research is to capture snapshots of people's lived experience:

Perspectives

Characteristics

Experiences &  
Interactions

Thoughts &  
Feelings

Habits of  
communities

Source: [Qualitative Data 101](#)

# Ways to Collect Qualitative Data

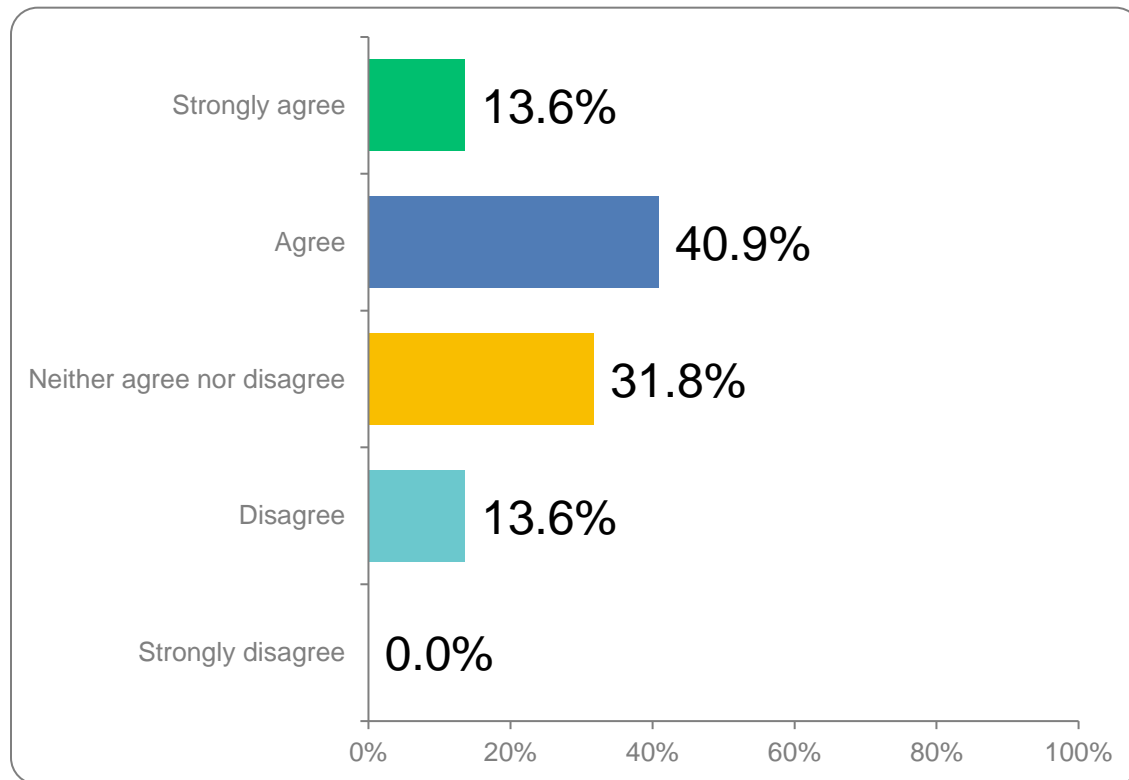


- People with lived expertise
  - 1 on 1 interviews
  - Focus groups
  - Surveys\*
- Observation\*
- Ethnographies\*
- Digital storytelling
- Case notes
- Case conferencing

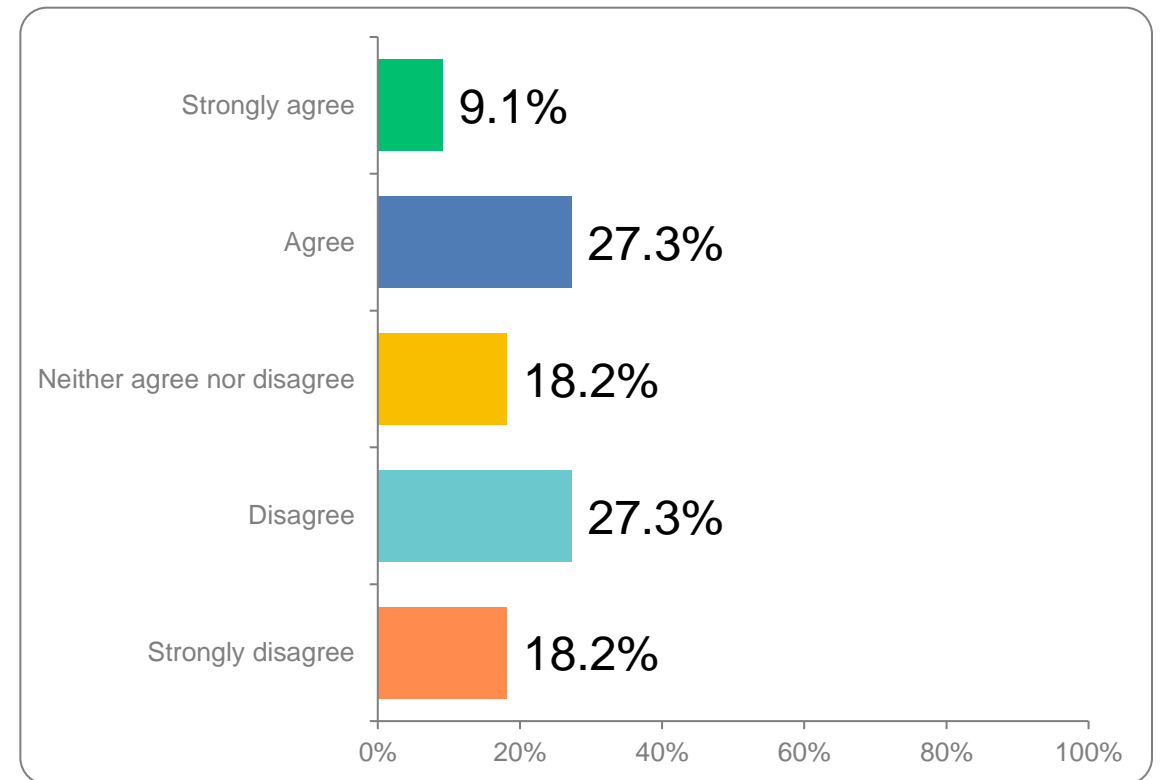


Our homeless response system has a process to solicit and integrate consumer feedback from people currently experiencing homelessness or who have recent lived experience of homeless into homeless system design and service delivery.

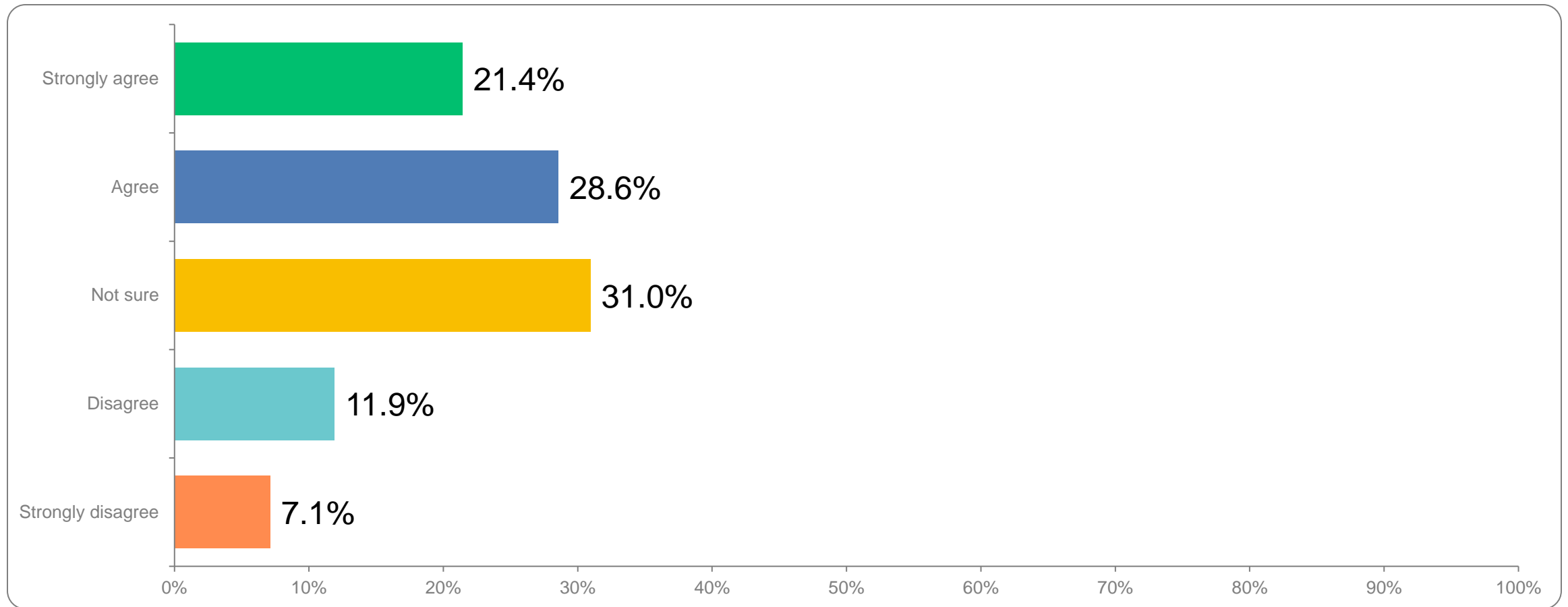
## Provider



## Leadership



# I feel like decisions made about the solutions to end homelessness in the community include the meaningful participation of people who are currently or recently homeless. (Lived Experience)

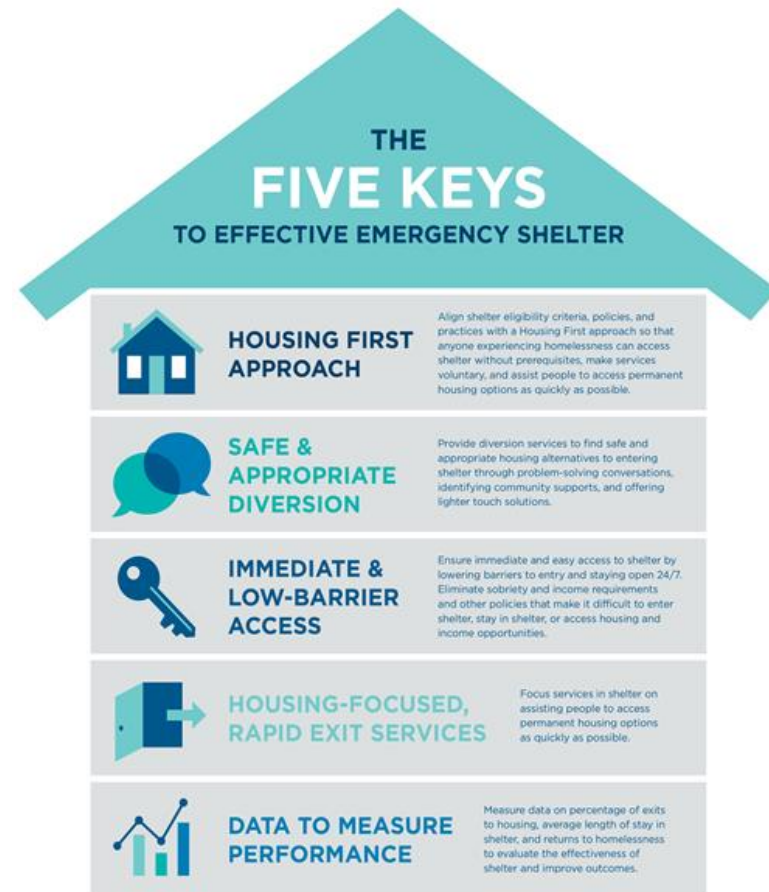


**WRAP UP!**



# Key Elements of Emergency Shelters in an Effective Crisis Response System

- **Housing First Approach**
- **Safe & Appropriate Diversion**
- **Immediate and Low-barrier Access**
- **Housing-focused, Rapid Exit Services**
- **Data to Measure Performance**





# PUTTING CHANGE INTO ACTION



# Group Activity: Action Planning

## Group Topics

- **Groups 1 and 2:** Implement a Housing First Approach
- **Groups 3 and 4:** Increase Rapid Exits to Permanent Housing

Each group will have 10 minutes to develop Actions Steps for their topic.

*2-3 immediate, short-term, and long-term actions your community can take*

# Group Debrief

Long-term Action Steps

Short-term Action Steps

Immediate Action Steps

## Group Topics

- Groups 1&2: Implement a Housing First Approach
- Group 3&4: Increase Rapid Exits to Permanent Housing



# In Chat

---

What is one thing you're going to do before the end of November as a result of this training?



# Q&A



# Your Trainers

**Josh Johnson**

[jjohnson@naeh.org](mailto:jjohnson@naeh.org)



**Kay Moshier McDivitt**

[kmoshiermcdivitt@naeh.org](mailto:kmoshiermcdivitt@naeh.org)



**diiv sternman**

[dsternman@naeh.org](mailto:dsternman@naeh.org)

