

BEST PRACTICES IN HOUSING PROBLEM SOLVING/DIVERSION

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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 meeting, training or forum.

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.

BEST PRACTICES IN HOUSING PROBLEM SOLVING/DIVERSION: Objectives

Define	Define “Housing Problem Solving” and “diversion” as a system intervention including guiding principles
Clarify	Clarify difference between homelessness prevention and diversion
Gain	Gain an understanding of the key fundamentals of effective homelessness diversion
Identify	Identify steps to get started
Clarify	Clarify important measures of successful diversion

Welcome/Introductions

- Name
- Pronouns/Other Identities
- Organization/Role
- Why do you do this work?



Housekeeping



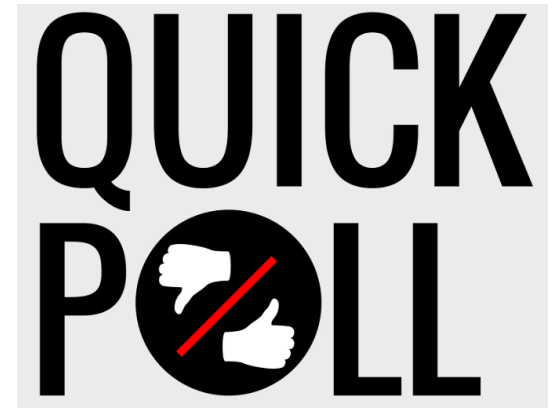
Who Is In The Building: Introductions

- Provider Staff (Prevention, ES, TH, RRH, PSH)
- CoC
- Coordinated Entry Staff
- Local/State/Federal Government
- Funders
- Community Leaders
- HMIS Staff
- Other



Poll

Are you currently practicing housing problem solving?





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

Activity: Your Thoughts on Housing Problem Solving/Diversion



In the chat, answer the following question:



What is one question and/or concern you have about Housing Problem Solving/diversion?

EFFECTIVE, EFFICIENT, EQUITABLE SYSTEM



Effective, Efficient, and Equitable Homeless Response Homeless Response System: Goal

House people as quickly as possible
and

divert people from imminent
homelessness whenever possible



Effective, Efficient, and Equitable Homeless Response System: Endgame

Homelessness is rare, brief, and one-time



People in a housing crisis have access to immediate help, including a safe place to go



People are not unsheltered



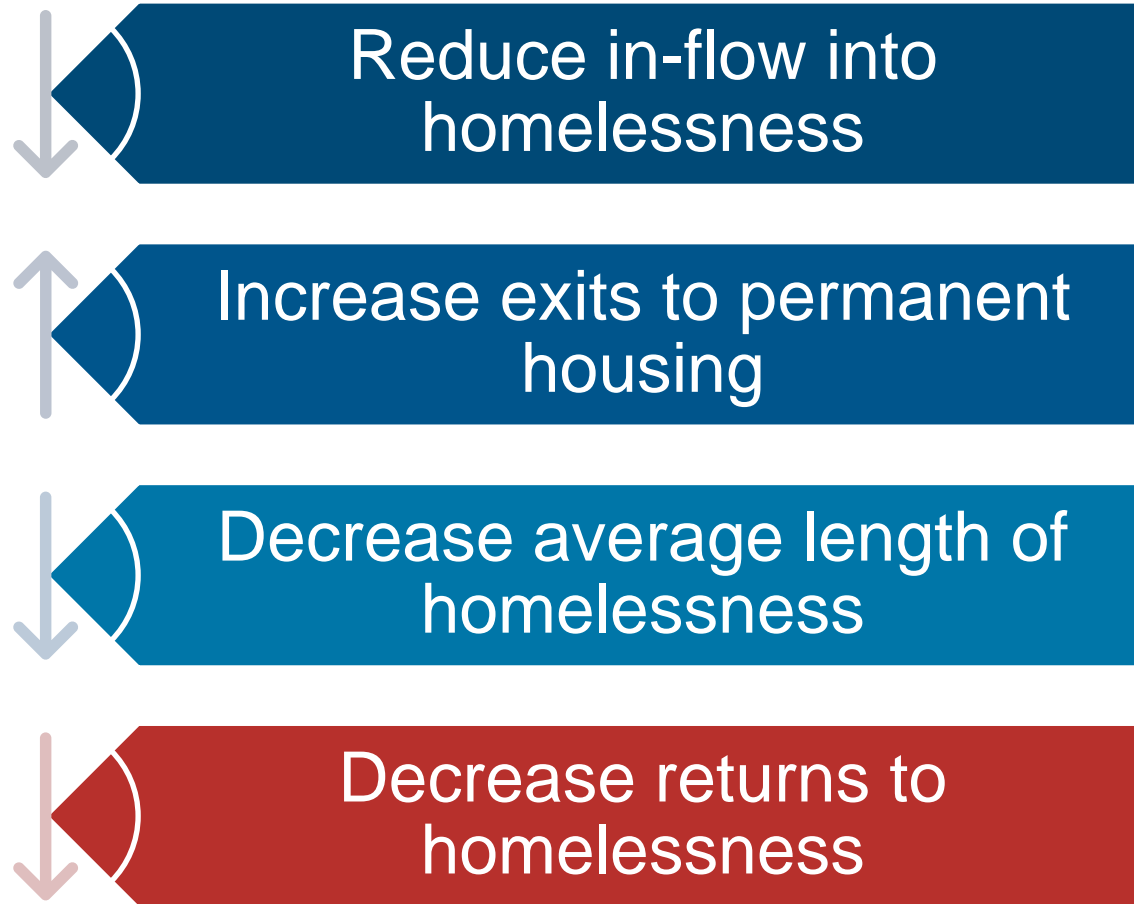
People do not spend long periods of time homeless



People exiting homelessness do not quickly cycle back into homelessness



Effective, Efficient, and Equitable Homeless Response System: Performance



Effective, Efficient, and Equitable Homeless Response System: What is a System?

Inter-dependent parts

Doing different things

Working together

With a defined set of resources and practices

To achieve a common goal



Effective, Efficient, and Equitable Homeless Response System: Increase System Flow

System Flow:

An efficient and coordinated process that moves people from homelessness to housing as quickly as possible



Consider How Current Resources Are Being Utilized and Working Together...

If you make investments without considering how it impacts the system and how it is coordinated...



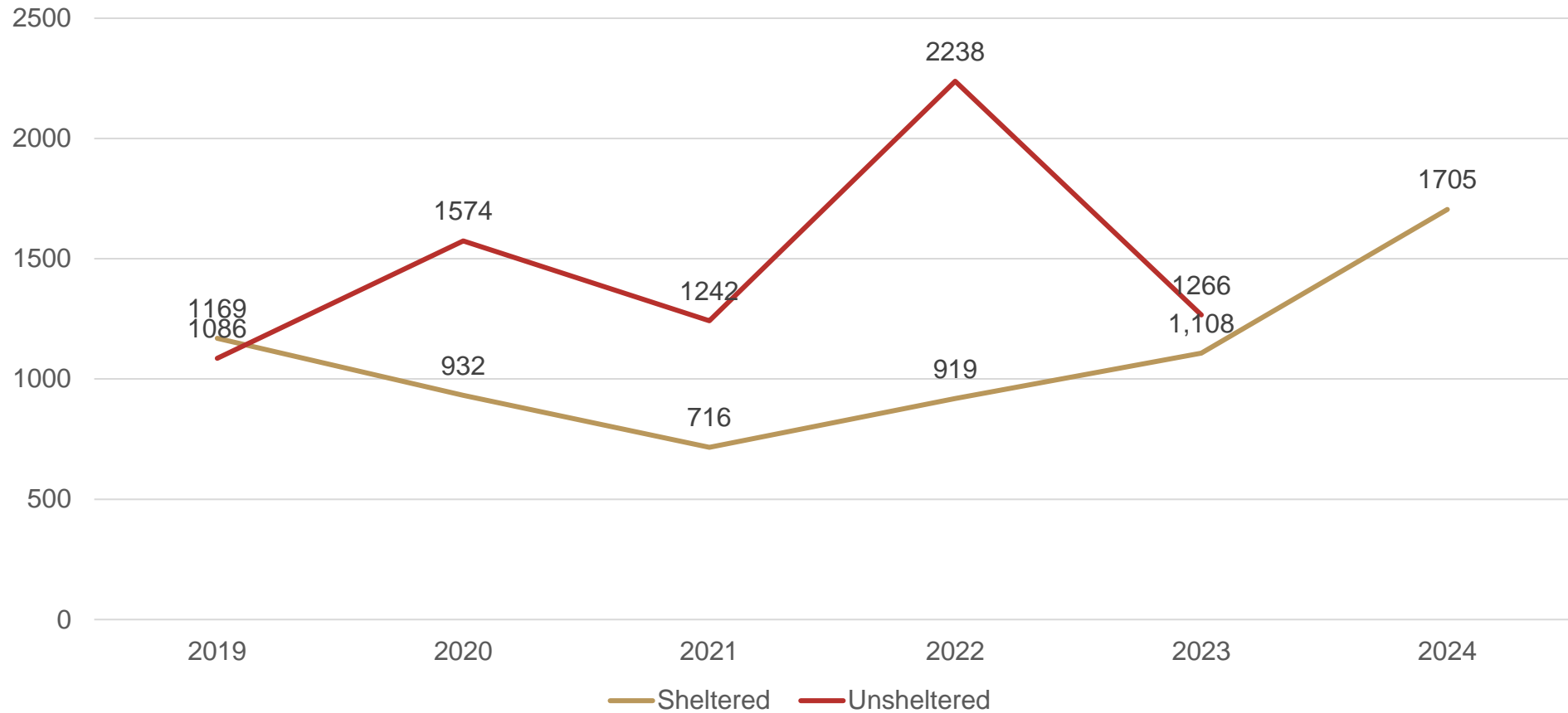
If the interventions working together...



Poor System Flow

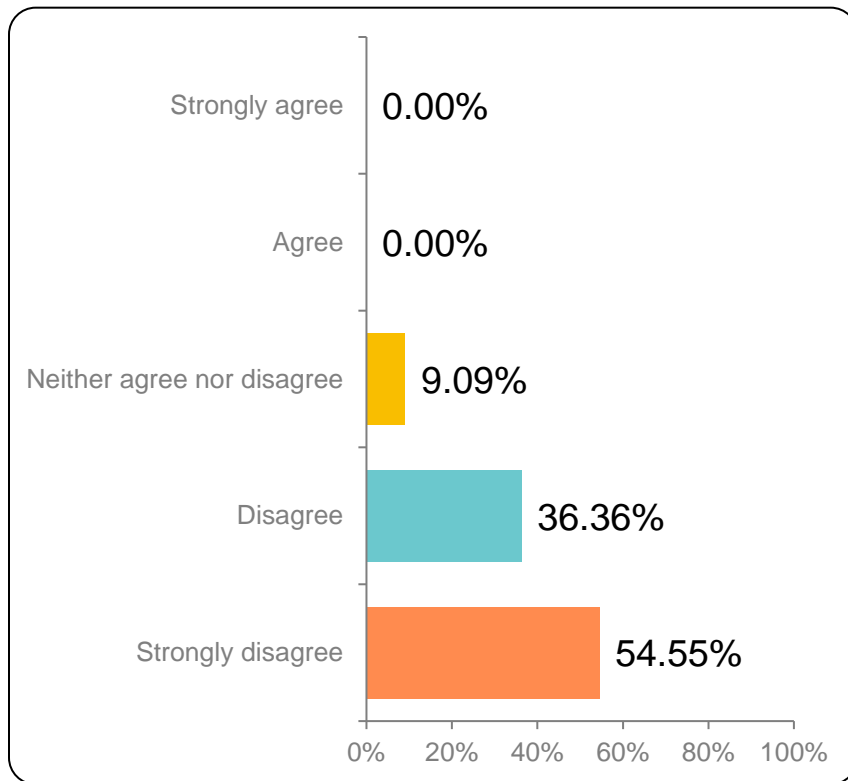
- Unchanging or increasing number of unsheltered people
- Waitlists for shelter
- Long lengths of stay in shelter (more than 30 days)
- High percentage of exits from shelters to homelessness
- Average length of homelessness is not decreasing
- In-flow into homelessness is steady or increasing
- Long waitlists for RRH and PSH (long CES wait list)
- Significant amount of people aren't getting any assistance
- Programs are not connected to coordinated entry with many "side doors"

The Austin Numbers

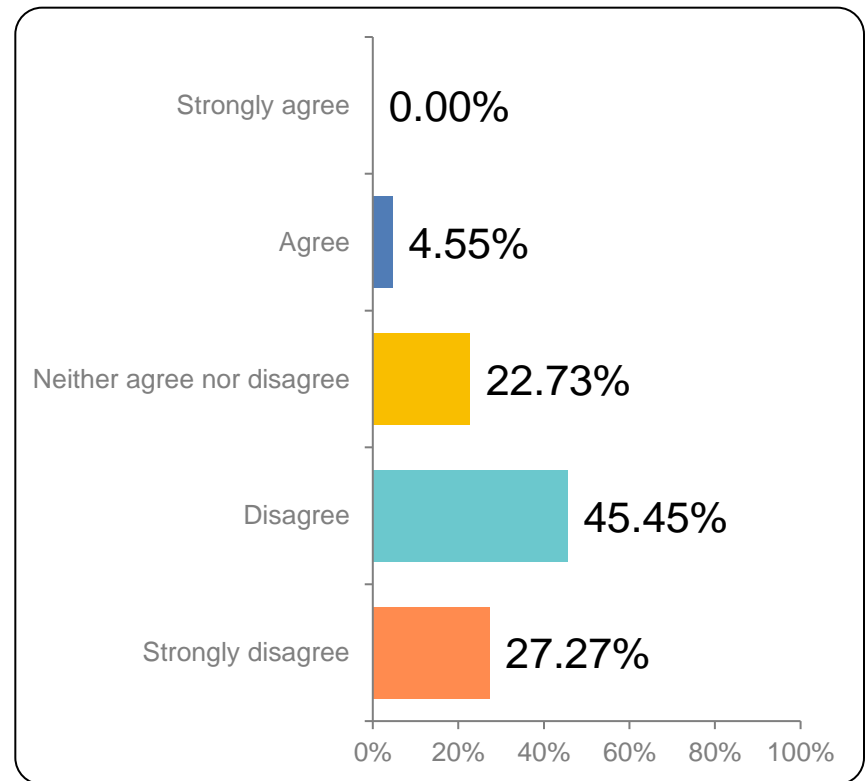


The community has sufficient rapid re-housing resources in place that assist people experiencing homelessness to be rehoused quickly should they become homeless

Leadership

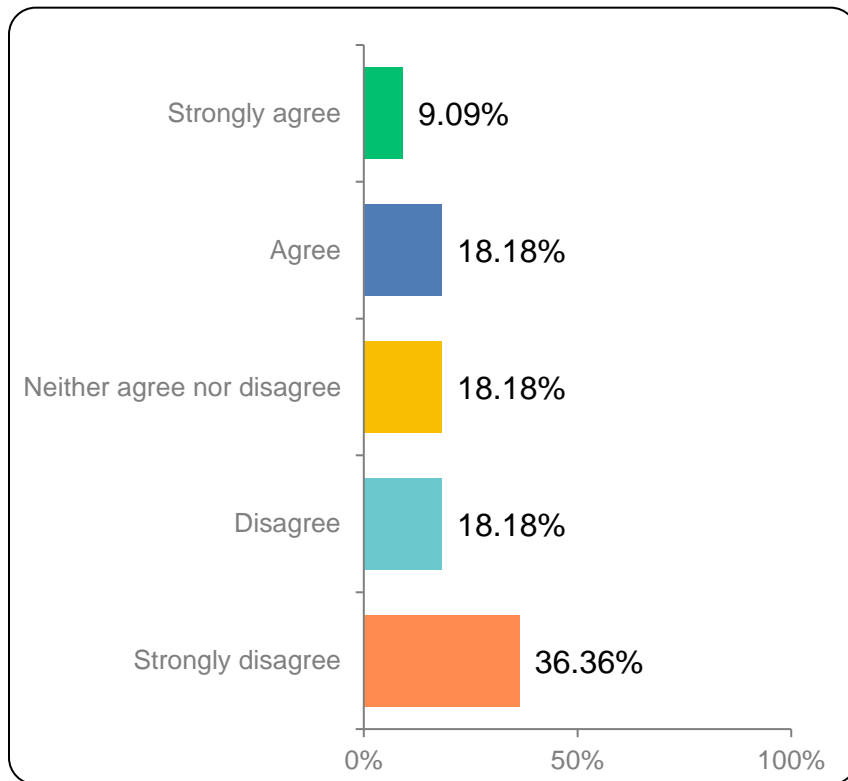


Providers

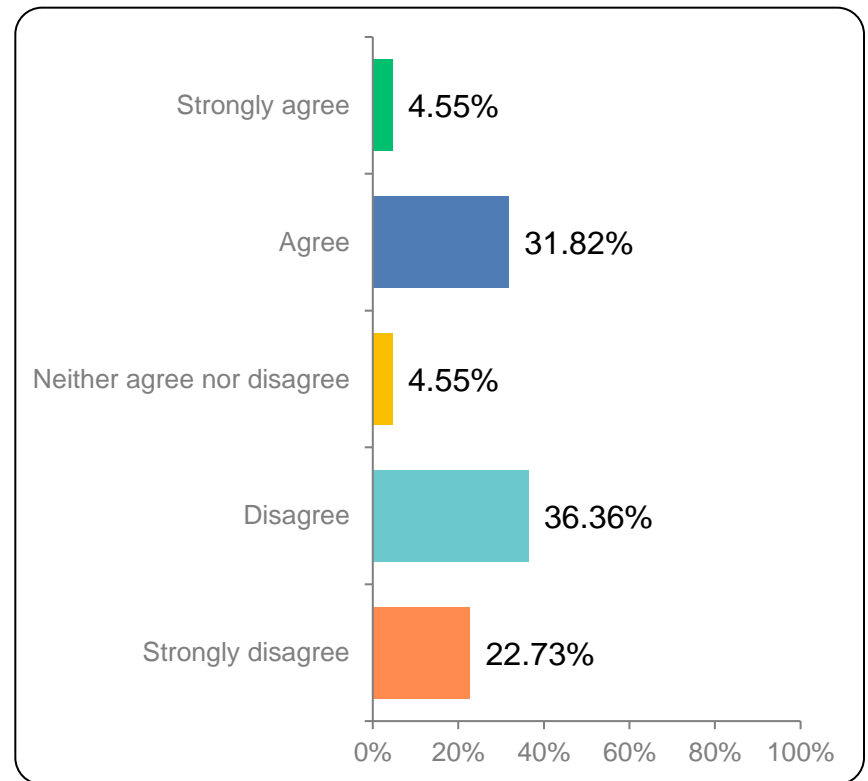


Intensive supports, like permanent supportive housing, are available to people experiencing homelessness with the highest needs.

Leadership



Providers



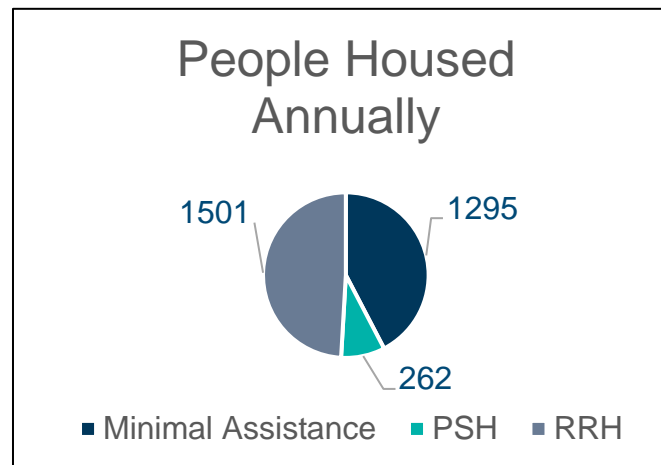
Reality of the numbers

2023

- PIT:
 - 2374 people experiencing homeless
 - 3,175 people experiencing for the first time

2024

- CES numbers:
 - 795 on average new and reassessed HH monthly
 - 98 on average RRH (49) and PSH (49) HH Monthly

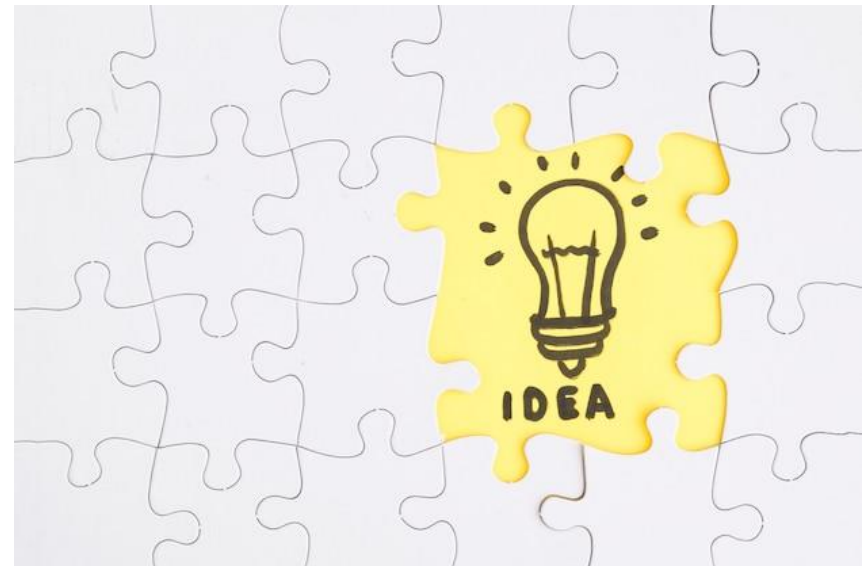


HOUSING PROBLEM SOLVING

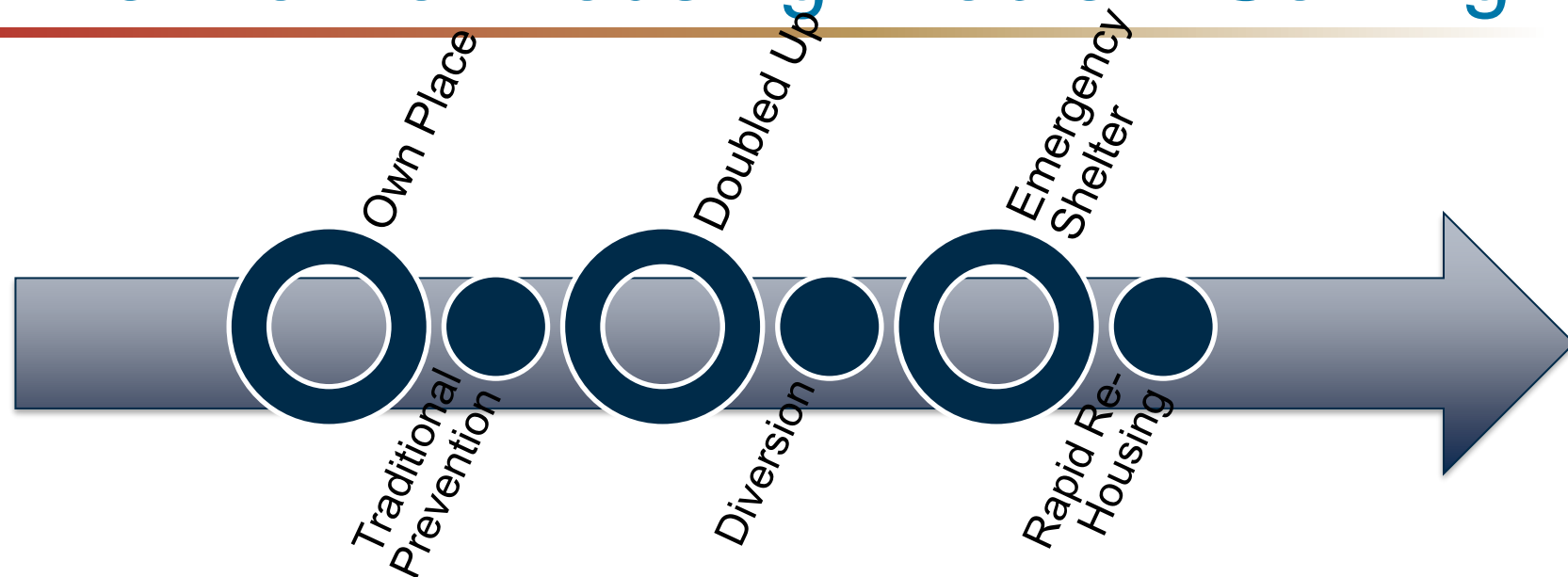


Housing Problem-Solving

A **strength-based**, **person-centered**, **flexible** intervention **focused on identifying solutions** in **conversation with people** to support them in resolving their own housing crisis as quickly as possible by **any means available** to them.



The Flow of Housing Problem Solving



Diversion is targeted prevention at the “Front Door” of Shelter/System

- Traditional Prevention is general eviction prevention that provides one time assistance to tenants at risk of losing their units
- Diversion typically occurs once housing is lost, and other resources have been exhausted, and the person is presenting at shelter.

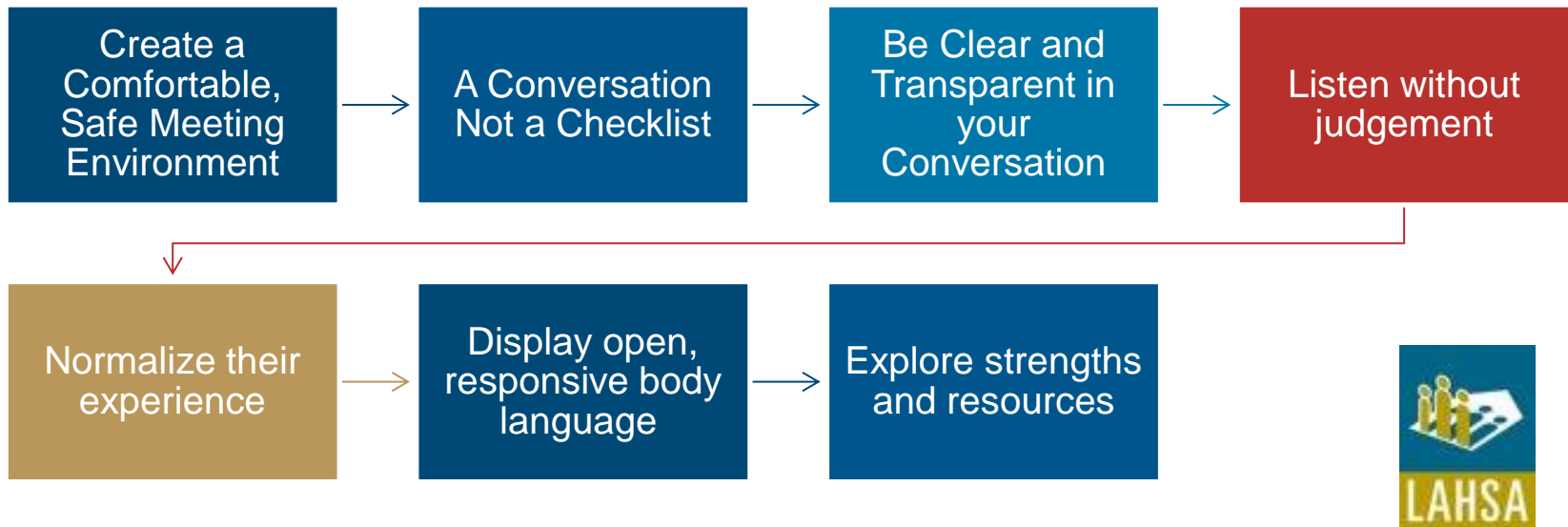
Credit: Katharine Gale Consulting

When Should Shelters Use Diversion Strategies?

Consumer's Housing Situation	Intervention Used	Services Provided in All Interventions
At Risk of Losing Housing (precariously housed)	HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION	<p>Services (Strengths-Based Case Management)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative Problem-Solving Conversation • Conflict Resolution • Housing Search/Placement • Landlord/Tenant Mediation • Connection to Mainstream Resources • Tenant Legal Services • Credit Repair <p>Financial Assistance*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rental Application Fee • Rental Subsidy/Arrears • Security/Utility Deposits • Utility Arrears • Moving Costs • Transportation Costs • Other Financial Assistance
Seeking Shelter (at “front door” of system and seeking place to stay)	DIVERSION	
Literally Homeless (in emergency shelter or on the street/place not meant for human habitation/ shelter)	HOUSING FOCUSED, RAPID EXIT SERVICES	

Problem-Solving Conversation

The Basics:



Ramping Up Housing Problem Solving The Housing Reality



Majority of sheltered and unsheltered folks will not get a subsidy

Majority of people with the same economic and health challenges as our clients are NOT homeless

We need to move people beyond shelter into housing quickly to free beds up for people who are newly homeless

Client centered is not just about the client in front of us but also the next person in our community facing homelessness

PSH “must” be used for the people with the highest acuity

People CAN find housing options without vouchers

Securing housing takes commitment and creative thinking

When People Experience Crisis



Fight

Affirm & redirect anger → removing barriers



Flee

Slow down & help identify strengths



Freeze

Show care & affirm, build confidence



Fawn

Emphasize options & encourage autonomy

What all Housing Problem Solving has in common

Locates **POWER** and **responsibility** for resolution with the person in housing crisis

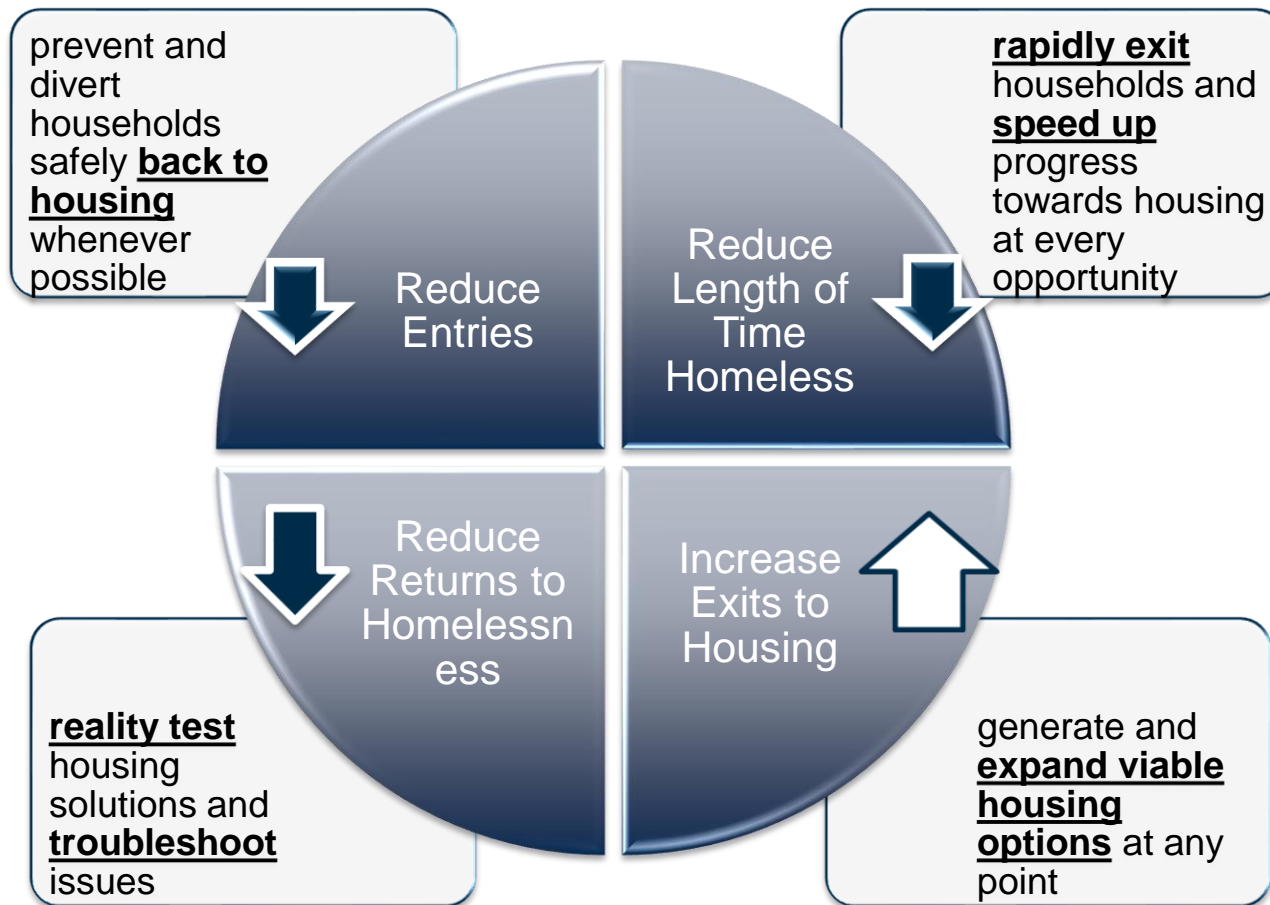
Communicates **confidence** in the person's abilities to resolve their housing crisis

Supports the person's **creativity and autonomy** in identifying solutions and removing barriers to housing

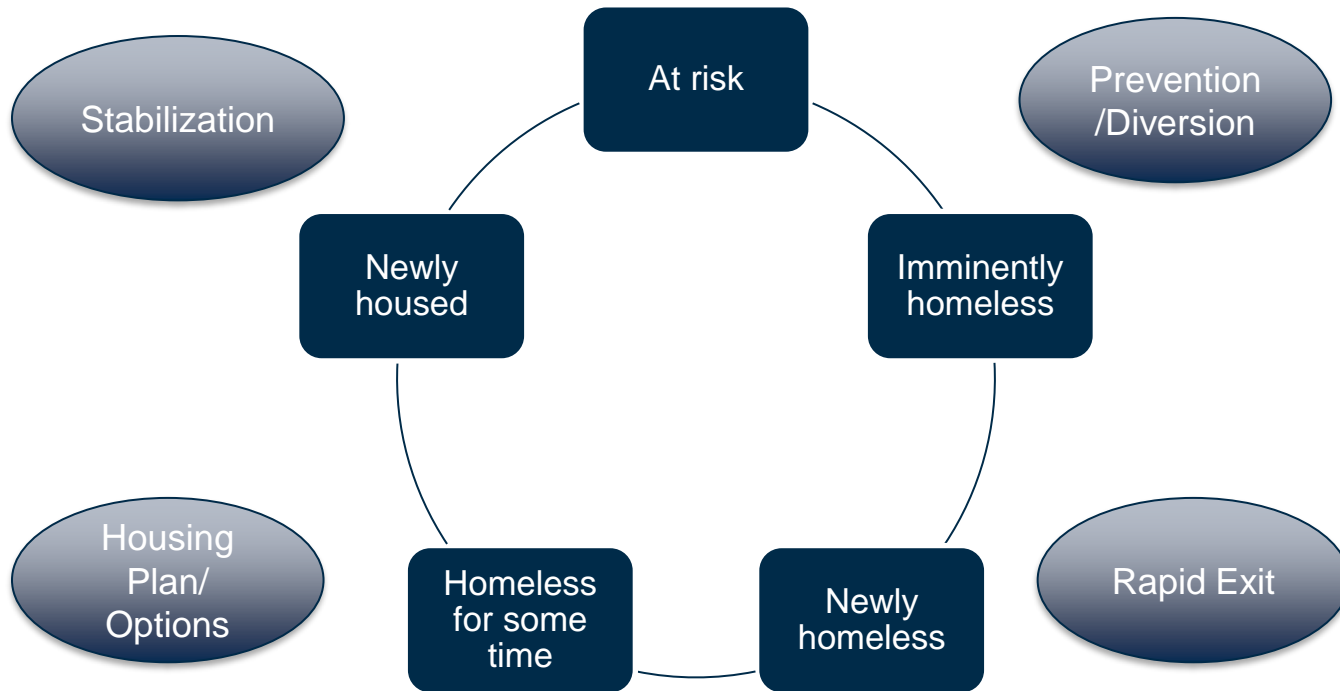
Grows shared **understanding** of what they need to resolve the housing crisis

Is grounded in the understanding of (continued) **homelessness as a trauma**

System Orientation: Using Housing Problem Solving to End Homelessness



Stages of Housing Crisis



Activity

- Are we currently practicing Housing Problem Solving well in Austin, TX now?
- Who provides Housing Problem Solving?
- Where are opportunities to increase the effectiveness of Housing Problem Solving?



BREAK



Questions

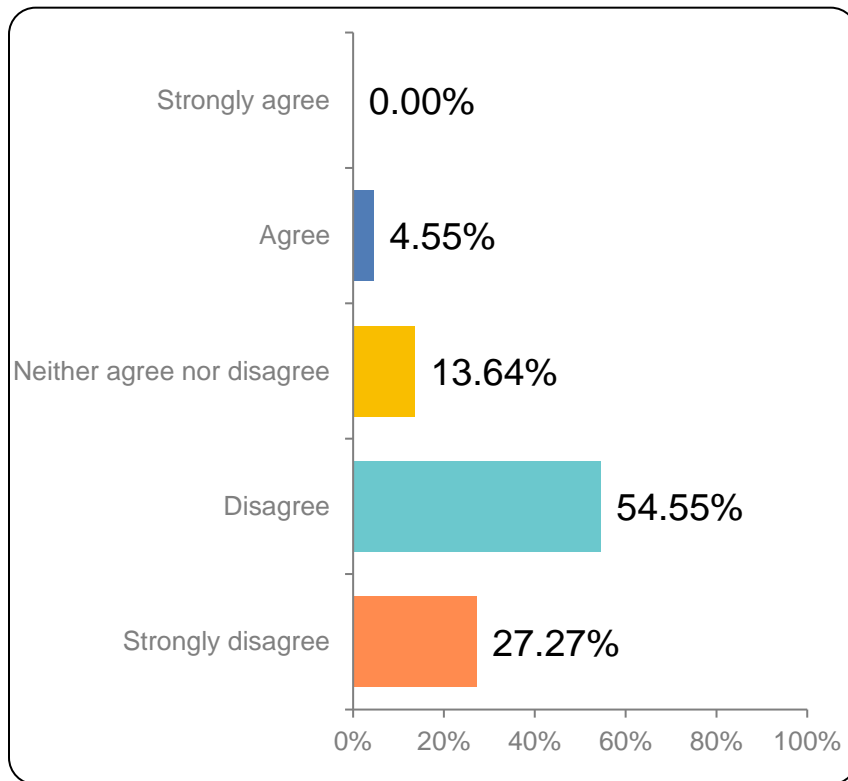


DIVERSION: WHAT, WHEN, HOW, & WHO

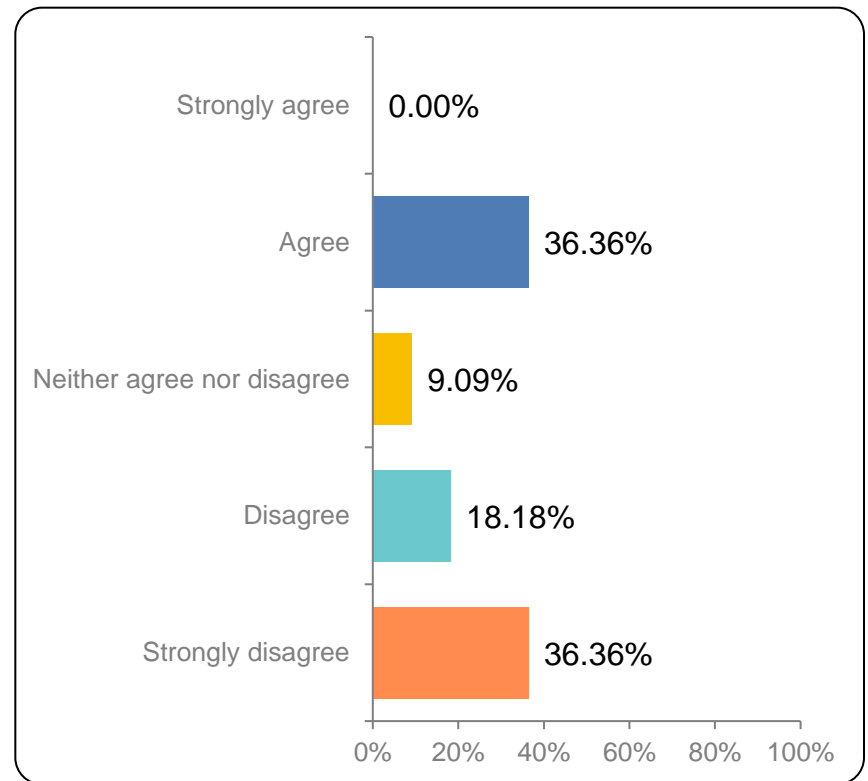


In our community, people who are experiencing a housing crisis are quickly identified and assisted.

Provider



Leadership



How Does Diversion Work?



Diversion is an intensive service intervention. Through an interactive problem-solving conversation with the person or household, staff seek to:

- understand what caused a person's housing crisis;
- explore what immediate solutions to the crisis may be possible; and
- help them pursue a solution(s).

How Does Diversion Work?

Diversion seeks to immediately get the person or household into a safe housing alternative, which may be short- or longer-term. Some of these options may include:

- a negotiated return to their previous housing;
- short-term, non-shelter accommodation;
- apartments or homes, (including shared housing);
- returns to family.



How Does Diversion Work?

Services offered:

- Creative Problem-Solving Conversation focused on immediate housing options
- Connections to Family and Natural Supports
- Strengths-Based Case Management
- Conflict Resolution/Mediation
- Housing Search/Placement
- Landlord/Tenant Mediation
- Connection to Mainstream Resources
- Tenant Legal Services
- Credit Repair
- ***Financial Assistance when necessary**



When Should The System Use Diversion Strategies?

- At access points or “front doors” to the homeless system
 - Coordinated entry system access points
 - Emergency shelter
 - Other places people are seeking homeless services assistance



When Should Shelters Use Diversion Strategies?

- When person is seeking shelter but before shelter intake

Who Can Be Diverted From Emergency Shelter?

Try diversion with **everyone!**

- *Try* having a problem-solving conversation with **everyone** seeking shelter to determine whether it is viable, desirable, safe, and appropriate to divert them.

Who Can **Not** be Diverted From Emergency Shelter?

Individuals or families that do not have any safe or viable alternatives aside from staying in shelter



When Diversion Is Not Appropriate, Use Housing-focused Problem Solving in Shelter

When a household is not diverted from shelter, the same diversion strategies - **effective problem solving conversations, that are client-centered, and focus on creative solutions – should continue in the shelter** in order to quickly resolve a household's homelessness.

When Diversion Is Not Appropriate, Use Housing-focused Problem Solving in Shelter

These continued strategies provide much needed **housing focused, rapid exit services** for all households assessed for housing and support services and **are critical for those who will not receive** interventions such as rapid re-housing or permanent support housing.

Activity: Diversion Case Studies

Household Profile

- Jackie and James present at shelter seeking beds for the night.
- They are currently staying at a motel which they have been paying for. They do not have enough money to pay for hotel room that night and don't know where to go.
- One of them will receive a paycheck but not for five days. They're out of ideas.

Diversion or Prevention



Activity: Diversion Case Studies

Household Profile

- Jean and her two children called the homeless helpline in search of shelter.
- Jean is living paycheck to paycheck and is dependent on her car to get her to her job 20 miles away. Her car recently broke down. She is also in arrears for her childcare since she was late a couple of times due to the car breaking down.
- Jean doesn't have enough to pay for the car repair, childcare fees, and her upcoming rent.

Diversion or Prevention



Activity: Diversion Case Studies

Household Profile

- Jane located to a new city with her one year old to be closer to Jacob, the child's father. They planned to stay in shelter until they can find their own place.
- They have a car and a strong support system in another city located further south in the state.

Diversion or Prevention



DIVERSION: WHY

Why Employ a System-wide Diversion Strategy or Shelter Diversion Intervention?



Diversion: Why?

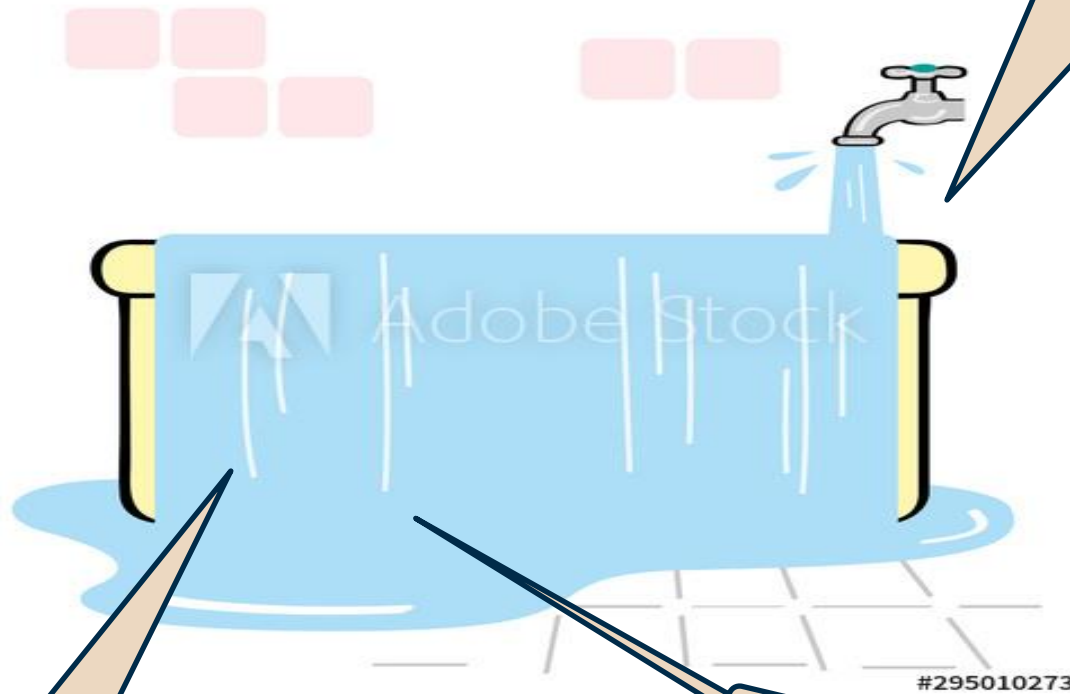
Many people face a housing crisis, but few become homeless, even when it looks like they will...

So...

How do we target intensive homelessness interventions and resources to those with higher needs who no alternatives to a shelter stay or unsheltered homelessness?



The Tub is Overflowing



Focusing only on adding shelter beds but not inflow and outflow means your tub overflows!

Waitlists are like mops pushing the water around but not making progress



Shelter Waitlist

Unsheltered

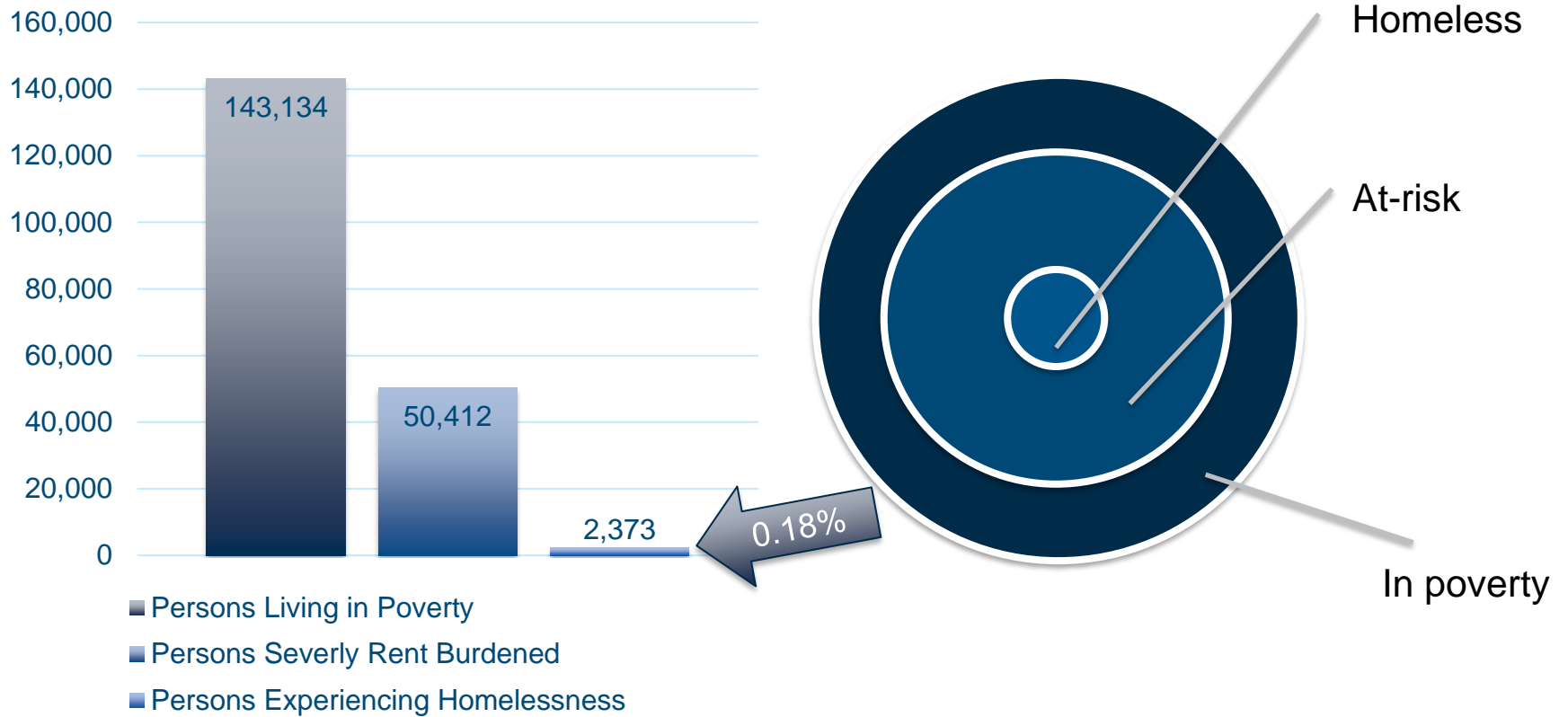
Diversion: Why?

- Shelter can be traumatic, unhealthy, and unsafe.
- Some data show that people who enter shelter experience longer periods of homelessness than those who are diverted from it.
- No matter how well-run shelter is, clients prefer to be in housing, and housing is more likely to improve their well-being.



Diversion: Why?

Travis County

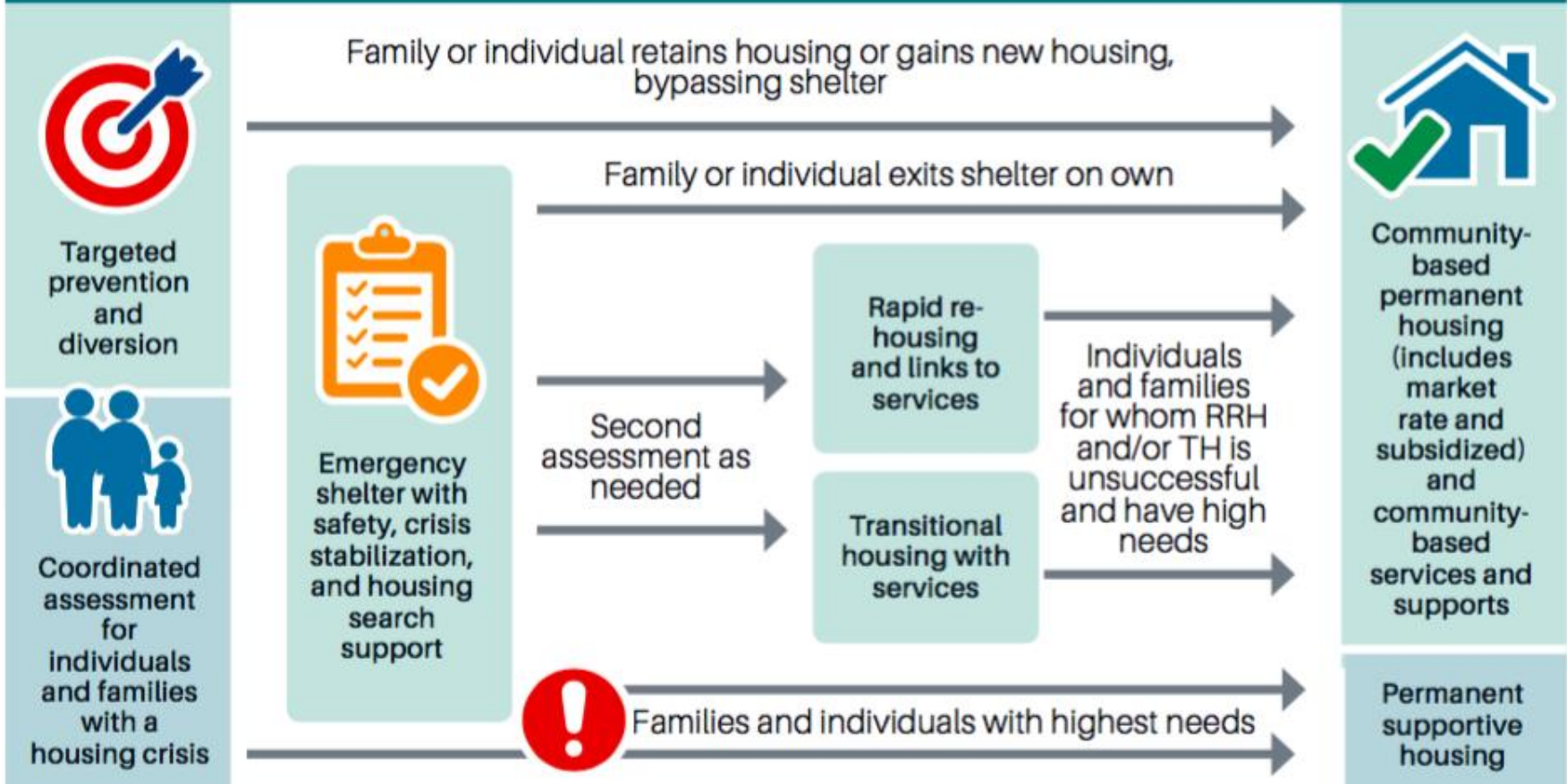


Diversion: Why?



- Being unsheltered has high risk of negative health outcomes and involvement with the criminal justice system
- Diversion is a much more effective intervention from the perspective of homeless services systems and ending homelessness.
- Diversion stems the inflow and reduces demands for shelter beds
- Diversion is less costly, on average, than a shelter stay.
- Diversion avoids the emergency-related costs of unsheltered homelessness including ambulance use, sanitation, and interaction with law enforcement.

Homeless Response System



Questions



DIVERSION PRACTICE

Guiding Principles of Diversion



Finally...

Diversion Is/Isn't

- Diversion is **NOT** a separate “program” but rather part of the entire system
- Diversion is **problem solving and solution focused**
- Diversion should always be **safe and appropriate** for the client

Diversion Requires

- Coordinated entry process and shelter front door
- **Resourceful staff trained** in:
 - Mediation, conflict resolution
 - Strength based assessment
 - Problem solving
 - Respect for client choice and
 - Recognition of safety
- **Linkages** to mainstream services and natural supports
- **Flexible** funds

Summary

- **Goal of the Homeless Response system is to house** people as quickly as possible and **divert** people from imminent homelessness whenever possible
- It is important that there is system flow to prevent a system from getting stuck
- Effective diversion impact first time homelessness, and decreases inflow into the homeless system
- Communities practicing diversion need to ensure that the guiding principles are imbedded in the practice.
-

Role of Diversion

What role does it play in improving system outcomes?

- Reduces first time entries into homelessness
- Improves system flow
- Conserves and targets homeless resources for those who need it the most– shelter beds used only when there is no alternative and cuts down on shelter waitlists
- Could decrease LOS experiencing



Anything We Missed?



Q&A

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SYSTEM-WIDE HOUSING PROBLEM STRATEGY

Where To Begin Within the Homeless Response System

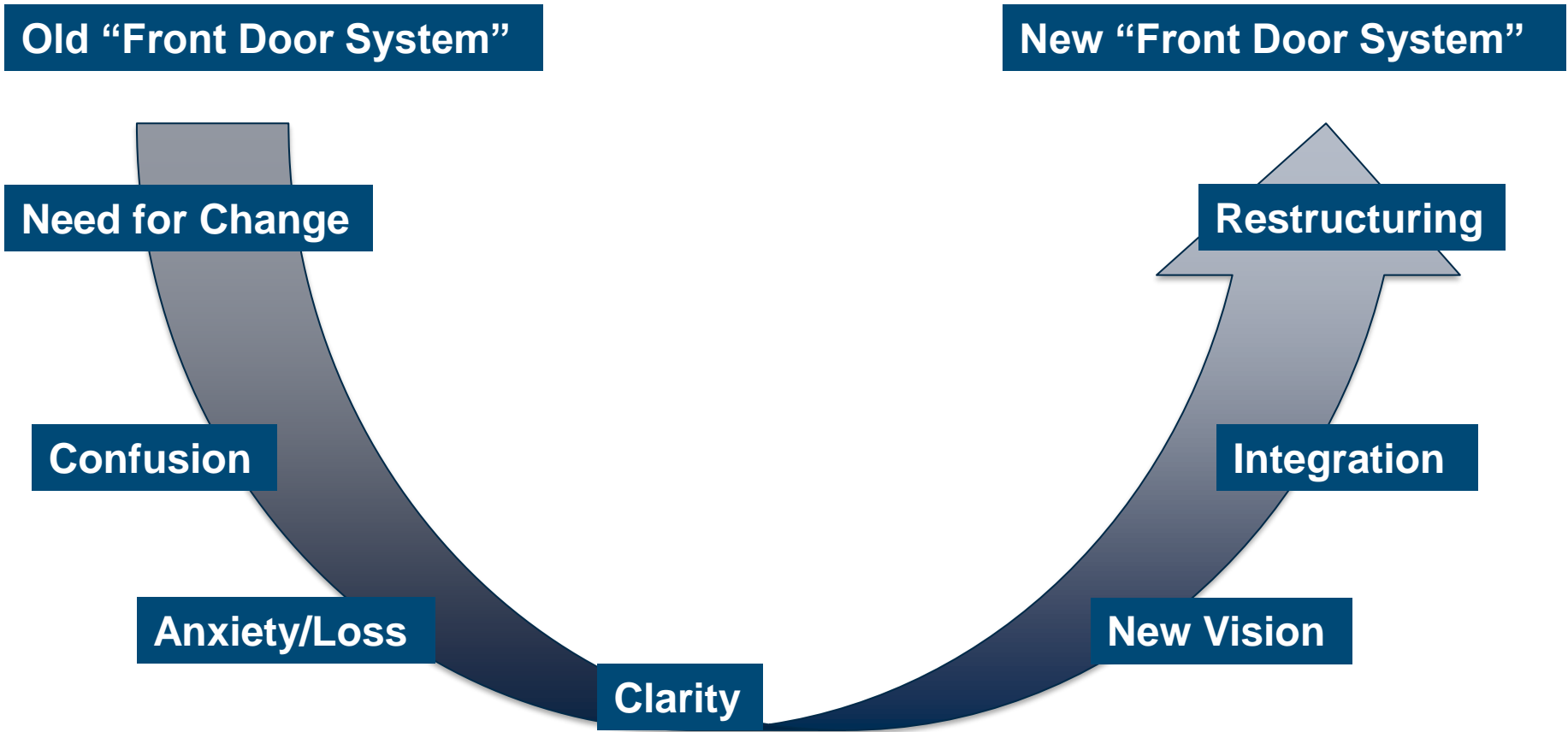


The Role of Coordinated Entry in the System

Coordinated Entry and Shelter

- Many communities have not yet integrated shelter entry/prioritization together with coordinated entry and diversion strategies
- Shelters are therefore **critical** in implementing diversion strategies as it serves as the “front door” of the homeless response system
- Shelters have an incredible opportunity to engage households and assist in solving their immediate housing crisis **before they become homeless**
- Shelters **are not** denying service when employing diversion strategies. Instead, they are providing a chance to avoid trauma of homelessness and find safe, appropriate alternative
- In employing diversion strategies, shelters ensure resources dedicated to those who will need them most

Coordinated Entry and Shelter



Coordinated Entry and Shelter

Shift From	Shift Towards
Are you willing to enter shelter?	Is the place you were staying safe? What can we do to help you remain there? What can we do to help you find a safe place other than shelter?
What programs are you eligible for? Who has a bed?	What would resolve your current housing crisis?
Beginning with eligibility determinations	Begin with brainstorming and structured problem-solving conversations about household's situation and resources
Beginning with screening and assessment tools and shelter waitlists	Support crisis resolution to avoid shelter entry through problem solving conversation

DIVERSION STRATEGIES

Data Collection and Analysis



Diversion: Desired System Outcomes

- Why do you collect data?
- What happens with the data you collect?
- What does it tell you?
- Does the data you collect tell you what you need to know to improve performance?
- How often do you look at it?
- Do you use it to make design, policy and staffing decisions?

Successful Outcomes

**Permanently Back with
Friends or Family**

**Return to Own
Residence**

**Temporarily Diverted
While Seeking New
Housing**

**Permanent Relocation
To Safe Place Out of
Town**

Desired Outcomes and Shared Measures

- Decrease number of first time homeless
- Decrease number of people entering shelter
- Decrease number of people on shelter waiting list
- Percentage of people diverted from homeless response system

Evaluating Performance

MUST HAVES

1. Decrease in the number of first time homeless
2. Decrease number of people entering shelter
3. Decrease number of people on shelter waiting list
4. Percentage of persons diverted from the homeless response system

HIGHLY ENCOURAGED

- Decrease in Prior Residence to shelter categories
- Type of diversion service provided
- Destination or resolution
- Changes in need and barriers to sheltered population
- Percentage of people who were diverted that return to shelter/system (TBD: timeframe to track)

DIVERSION

Guiding Principles of Diversion

