



Policy Brief

May 2024

Invest in long-term housing to expand Austin's national leadership in person-centered solutions to homelessness

Austin and Travis County leaders have made historic investments in housing and homeless services in recent years. The returns are evident: **Housing providers in our Homelessness Response System (HRS) connected more than 3,000 people to places to live in 2023, a 53% jump from the year before.** Yet recent investments, while critical, have not been enough to make up for years of underfunding and historically high housing costs. **Providers here have excelled despite these and other challenges, delivering best-in-the-nation supports to help people stay housed long-term.** At the same time, the number of folks ending up homeless for the first time is rising, and there are already thousands of people waiting to hear from a housing provider.

In an increasingly politicized and polarizing conversation, it's easy to lose sight of a day-to-day reality in our community: **People wake up outside, spend the day working to improve their situation, and go to sleep outside again.** The longer someone repeats this cycle, the more trauma they endure and the worse their physical and mental health become. The lack of space for people to live means the rate of chronic homelessness in our community is staggering, more than double that in Houston and Dallas. Meanwhile, our Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) capacity - units for people with the highest needs - is among the lowest compared to peer cities.

Each person needs different supports to end their homelessness. **Foundational to every person's journey out of homelessness, however, is the same foundation we all need to live healthy, fulfilling lives: access to safe, stable housing of our choice.** Building a rehousing system that delivers that foundation starts with **investing in lasting housing solutions, growing capacity in long-term housing programs, scaling up and targeting prevention efforts, and providing homeless service nonprofits the tools they need to hire people quickly and keep them on staff for the long run.**



Caritas of Austin's Espero Rutland development added 171 housing units to our HRS when it opened to residents earlier this year. These are the first of an expected 1,000+ site-based Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) units to come online in the next few years. (Photo: Caritas of Austin)

In this Brief:

- Our capacity to provide people places to sleep **grew 85% from 2015-2023**
- **Increases in housing capacity have not kept pace with increases in need**
- Austin and Travis County are **national leaders in helping people achieve and maintain stability**
- **Nearly 90% of people** who move through our system into housing on their own **remain stably housed two years later**



Policy Brief

May 2024

New investments significantly increase our ability to shelter and house people, but it's simply not enough to keep up

- **Between 2015 and 2023, the number of beds in the system to shelter or house people, temporarily or permanently, increased 85% - 22% in the last two years alone. We expect more than 1,000 new site-based housing units to be available to house people by the end of 2025.**

Our system has historically had few site-based units, meaning most of the time, providers have to compete against every other renter in a volatile private housing market to find people places to live. **A PSH unit like this is life-changing for people like Felicia who can get one.**

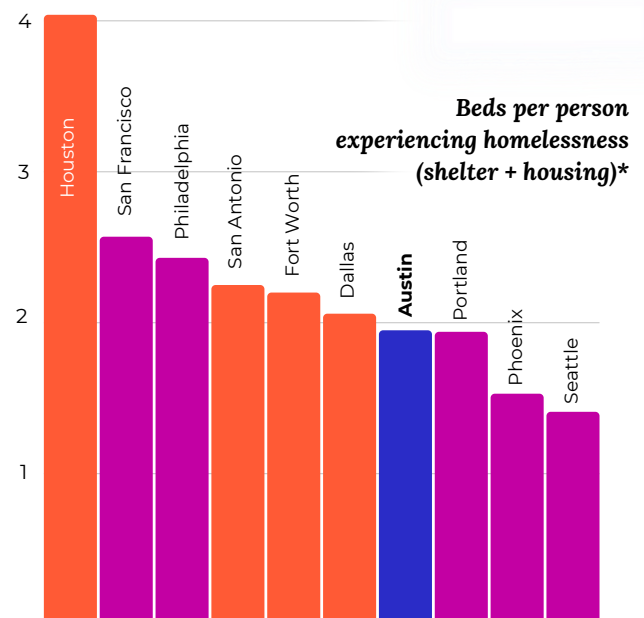
“—
“That’s the thing about having housing... **I can set and accomplish goals.** Experiencing homelessness feels like purgatory; you’re just stuck, but **now I’m moving forward.**”

Felicia Perkins
Supportive Housing Resident

caritasofaustin.org/blog

- Yet Austin’s capacity to shelter and house people remains the lowest among big Texas cities and among peer cities across the country. Meanwhile, **providers in our HRS served 50% more people in 2023 than in 2019**, both because more folks need help and because we’re getting much better at finding people who need help.

*Note: These are not available beds, but total beds in the system. Because people fall into homelessness throughout the year and because shelter and permanent housing beds do not turn over very regularly, the beds per person experiencing homelessness measure is bound to be above 1 and needs to be considerably higher to account for inflow and turnover.





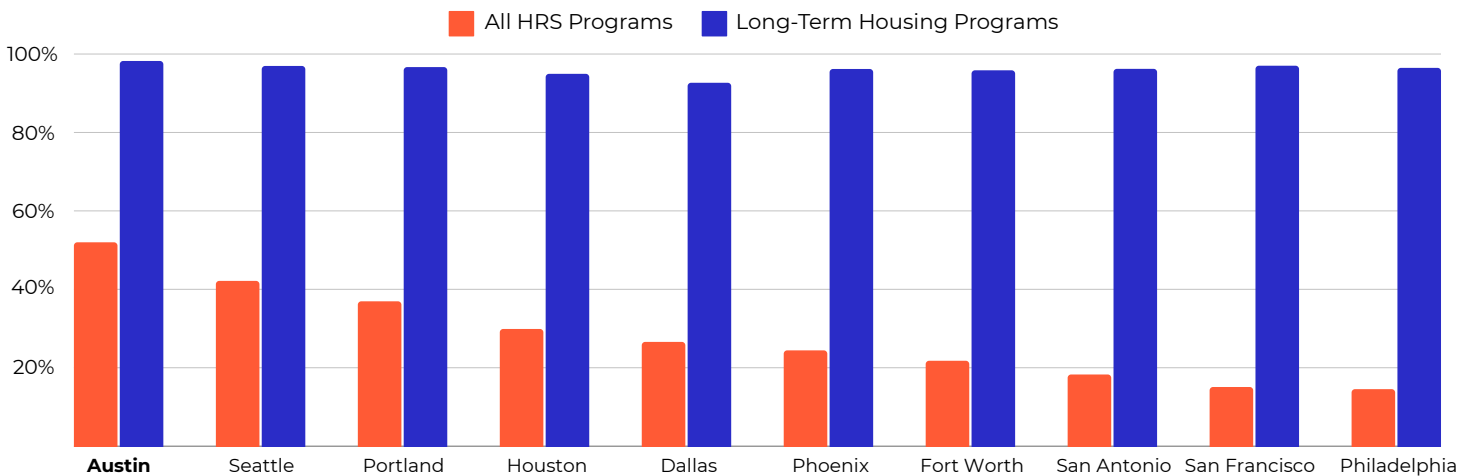
Policy Brief

May 2024

Providers in Austin are the best in the nation in helping people get the services they need to stay housed long-term

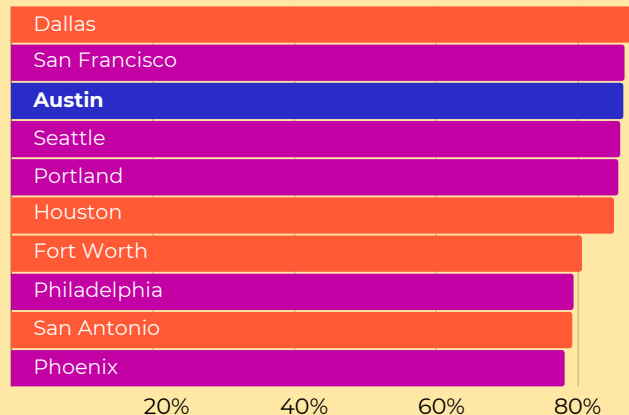
- More than half of people who use our HRS (52%) move to a stable place on their own. **Almost everyone** (98.2%) who uses a long-term permanent housing program either stays housed in the program or moves into different housing on their own. **Both of these are the highest rates among peer cities.**

Exits to housing/remain in program



- Providers in Austin are very good at helping folks prepare for long-term success in housing. More than **4 out of 5 people** (86.4%) who use any part of our HRS and move into a place to live on their own are **still stably housed two years later.**

Stably housed two years later





Policy Brief

May 2024



Recommendations

- **Invest in the solutions we know work to end people's homelessness long-term.**



The evidence is clear: Pairing safe, stable places to live with individualized care provides people the support they want and need to stay housed long-term. Shelter and other crisis response interventions are critical components of our HRS, not replacements for the lasting housing solutions people need to truly end their homelessness.

- **Grow the capacity of long-term housing programs to serve more people.**



Austin and Travis County providers are national leaders in delivering care that helps people stay in their homes long-term. The lack of housing in our community creates a significant bottleneck in our system that delays or altogether prevents people from accessing life-saving supports.

- **Identify reasons people become homeless in the first place and collaborate to fix those cracks.**



Homeless service providers do a good job of connecting people currently experiencing homelessness to housing. But because the system is strapped for capacity, the wider community needs to better understand and fund prevention efforts (eviction protections, rent and utility assistance, and more affordable housing) to relieve pressure off of our HRS.

- **Support nonprofit homeless service providers to hire and retain staff more effectively to grow their impact.**



People working in our HRS are some of the most dedicated, hardest-working advocates in our community. They are also some of the most under-valued. Nonprofits need more tools to be able to offer people competitive salaries and benefits, along with supportive, equitable, and inclusive work environments to attract and retain staff.

Want more data? ECHO's Research & Evaluation Team updates our HRS Dashboard with regular estimates of need and system flow metrics.

 austinecho.org/dashboard

Chris Davis
 Director of Communications &
 Public Policy
chrisdavis@austinecho.org
 804-370-3294

@atxecho
   
 @atx_echo
