

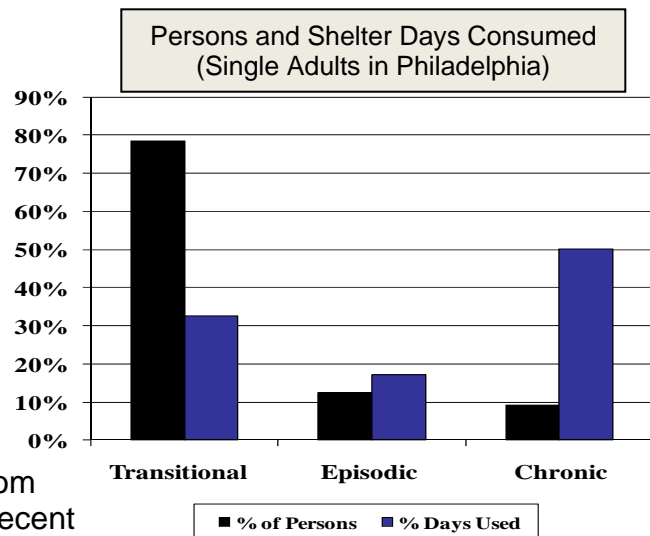
Central Oregon 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness - Planning Update

(May 31, 2010)

Background:

Recognizing both the high social and economic cost of homelessness, more than 350 cities and counties across the United States (including 11 others in Oregon) have coalesced to create local plans to address this serious problem. With support from the US Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), these communities are creating business-like, results-oriented "10 Year Plans to End Homelessness" that incorporate a Housing First approach, cost benefit analysis, best practices, service innovations, and a focus on prevention.

The term "homeless" is not a one-size-fits-all label, and new research is showing that different types of homelessness (e.g. episodic, transitional and long-term chronic) have very different societal impacts in terms of the cost of providing shelter, medical care and law enforcement services. Because they have no regular place to stay, people who are homeless use a variety of public systems in an inefficient and costly way (e.g. visit to the emergency room rather than getting a regular checkup). Recent research shows that the chronic homeless - who comprise only a small portion of the total homeless population - consume a significantly larger portion of community resources like health care, shelter, etc., and there may be more cost-effective solutions to this problem. Preventing a homeless episode or ensuring a speedy transition into stable permanent housing (i.e. the "housing first" approach which doesn't necessarily wait for additional support services) can often result in a significant cost savings to the community as well as for the individual.



May 8, 2009 marked the official start of the development of the Central Oregon 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness. According to Co-Chair, Deschutes County Commissioner Tammy Baney, "The 10 Year Plan provides a valuable framework for local leaders to develop a comprehensive and strategic approach to address the critical issue of homelessness. This is particularly timely given the economic downturn, which is throwing hundreds of people into homelessness, but also because we have more information than ever before on both the causes and solutions." The Central Oregon 10 Year Plan has an anticipated completion date of Fall 2010.

Why a Regional Approach?

The Central Oregon 10 Year Plan encompasses Crook, Deschutes and Jefferson County, the cities within those jurisdictions, and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs. There are many reasons why the effort is being tackled using a regional approach:

- There is a lot of movement and spill over effects between the communities - one early observation was, “we need to move beyond simply providing a bus ticket to Bend” as a way for many of the outlying communities to address homelessness
- There are many examples where the region has worked well on homelessness efforts:
 - ⇒ Homeless Leadership Coalition - expanded from Deschutes County to tri-county
 - ⇒ Project (Homeless) Connect - tri-county effort with 3 years experience
 - ⇒ One Night Shelter Count - tri-county effort with 3 years of data
 - ⇒ McKinney-Vento - federal grant to assist homeless outreach in our schools
- There are many local non-profits who already operate at a regional level to provide homeless services and housing assistance (e.g. NeighborImpact, Housing Works, Partnership to End Poverty)
- Because of the wide range of communities in Central Oregon, state officials are looking to see if we can successfully create a template that can be replicated in other parts of the state

There will be a single "10-Year Plan" for the entire region, but it will recognize that the communities may have very different resources and/or political issues. Homelessness looks quite different in rural communities like Culver and La Pine than it does in more urban settings such as Bend and Redmond. Homelessness may also look different depending upon the culture (e.g. certain populations are more likely to double or triple up than be on the streets). Great strides are being taken to ensure that this effort does not become either Bend and/or Deschutes County centric and that we take advantage of the resources of the faith community. The 10-Year Plan is viewed as a “living document” that will evolve and change with conditions and participant commitment in Central Oregon. Our goal is to create synergy from different communities working together on the issue so all communities will want to participate and learn from one another.

Who is Involved in Developing the 10 Year Plan?

Three separate committees have been formed to get the 10 Year Plan document completed and ultimately endorsed by local jurisdictions:

Steering Committee - comprised primarily of local elected officials. The Steering Committee is headed up by Deschutes County Commissioner Tammy Baney.

Working Group - comprised of key staff and community members who will collect data and community input, research other successful models from around the country, and DRAFT the formal 10 Year Plan. The Working Group is headed up by former Bend Mayor, Bruce Abernethy, and includes representatives from federal, state and local government, non-profits, service providers, law enforcement, the medical community, schools and the homeless population (see Working Group members on back sheet)

Technical Support Committee - comprised of key people who can give additional support and assistance, but might not be able to attend regular meetings. Examples include Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS) Deputy Director, Rick Crager, HUD Regional Manager Paul Carlson and many other state and local representatives who will be called upon to provide valuable information and feedback.

What does Homelessness Look Like in our Communities?

Central Oregon is facing many challenges as a result of the recent economic downturn. These challenges include higher unemployment rate, increased foreclosures, additional demands on social services at a time of decreased financial support for non-profits. Unfortunately, the types of jobs that are often available to the homeless or those in transition - landscaping and construction positions - are not doing well in this economy which is making it that much more difficult for them to earn a living.

The One Night Shelter Count is conducted across the state, gathering a “snapshot” of information during a 24 hour period. Volunteers talk to people in homeless shelters, food kitchens, camps and at various locations such as food stamp offices to identify people who are considered homeless (including those who are living doubled up or in unsafe conditions). Central Oregon data shows the following growth over the past 3 years:

| Total Homeless in the Tri-County Region | Adult Male | Adult Female | Children (<17) | Total Individuals | Total Households |
|---|------------|--------------|----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Date of Count - January 28, 2010 | 741 | 663 | 989 | 2,402 | 1,179 |
| Date of Count - January 29, 2009 | 733 | 628 | 876 | 2,237 | 1,154 |
| Date of Count - January 31, 2008 | 514 | 473 | 749 | 1,736 | 875 |

According to a 2009 report released by the National Alliance to End Homeless, Central Oregon ranks sixth in the nation in overall homelessness and third among rural communities.

Project (Homeless) Connect is a special one-day service event for those who are homeless to help connect them with community resources like housing, health care, food and clothing. On Sept. 19, 2009, 662 volunteers from 181 agencies, organizations and churches helped provide services and information to 2,257 guests from throughout the region!

New Resources and New Thinking Needed:

To tackle this problem will require a combination of both increased resources and changes in how we currently function as a system. Some changes will be relatively easy to implement while other may be quite expensive or are beyond our direct control. Fortunately, we have 10 years to do this - it won't all happen in 2010. General changes will include the following:

1. \$\$\$ - some elements of the Plan will require new sources of funding
2. Policy Changes - to increase flexibility
3. System Improvements - to increase efficiencies
4. Perception Shifts - we need to change stereotypes around the homeless

When dealing with the homeless and emergency housing sites, there are 4 key criteria that guide the Plan. For those making use of the services, there must be:

- Safety and security
- Accountability
- Access to resources - housing can't be located out in the middle of nowhere
- Recognition that this is only a bridge - the goal is to increase self-sufficiency

Potential Components of the Central Oregon 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness:

The following elements are strategies that have been discussed by the Working Group, and it is likely they will be included in the Central Oregon 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness DRAFT plan that will be shared with the community for input. We recognize that some of these may be relatively simple to implement while others may take years, involve a significant cultural shift and/or require a huge financial commitment. Some of the strategies may fit into multiple Goal categories.

Goal 1 Homelessness Prevention

Prevent and divert people from becoming homeless by working with them directly to obtain and/or keep their housing. The primary strategy is to provide additional resources (or reduce expenses) so people can continue to pay for their housing (this applies to both rental or mortgage). Current efforts need to be continued and/or expanded and new programs developed.

- Rental assistance (also utility assistance)
- Foreclosure prevention assistance (provide funds, counseling, etc.)
- Security deposit assistance (perhaps as a small grant or revolving loan fund)
- Remove barriers to housing (e.g. offer programs like Ready to Rent or others that help the homeless repair criminal or credit history)
- Guide of community resources (must be a comprehensive and accessible way of providing current information on government, nonprofit, and church resources)
- Landlord mediation and assistance program
- Centralized Emergency Assistance Center (develop a “One stop” location to get help so people who may not have reliable forms of transportation don't have to drive all over town)

Goal 2 Increase the Supply of Affordable Housing

Expand, develop, and coordinate the supply of affordable housing/supportive services to prevent and end homelessness, and shorten stays in emergency shelter. This goal is all about adding “physical capacity” to the system. It focuses on building additional housing units and/or making existing units accessible to the formerly homeless. As such, it looks at issues of construction, financing, zoning, rental subsidies and public-private partnerships. This goal will require the greatest amount of direct financial support which will come from federal, state and local government as well as the development of new sources of funding.

- Rental assistance (also utility assistance)
- Development of small, inexpensive, flexible prototype housing units (there will be tradeoffs as far as flexibility of small units vs economies of scale of larger projects)
- Address liability/insurance issues that inhibit the development of shelters or transitional housing
- Promote and support Cooperative Housing models such as SROs (Single Residence Occupancy), Oxford House (shared housing in market rate rentals) et al
- Build Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) units using the Housing First model which emphasizes putting people into housing as the first step rather than making housing a condition of the individual accessing certain social services

Goal 3 Appropriate Support Services

Build the capacity of homeless persons for self-support through strategies that identify their risk of homelessness, document their specific needs, and help them access housing with appropriate supportive services. This includes not only developing new services/resources but also making sure that everybody knows about them.

- Substance abuse treatment services (this is critical, but may be difficult since it is so heavily reliant upon public funding)
- Transportation services (this will involve support of intra as well as inter-community transit options)
- Access to job training and employment
- Homeless Courts – resolve issues in a single day event
- Securing id for the homeless

Goal 4 System Improvements

Identify and implement system improvements for coordination at the program funding and delivery levels leading to measurable results. This goal is all about improved communication and coordination among agencies and organizations. A related strategy is to improve discharge procedures so people are not discharged from jail, hospitals, or the foster care system directly into homelessness.

- Model ordinances for all Central Oregon communities (work to ensure that homeless shelters and transitional housing can be located in all communities)
- Improving discharge from public facilities (foster care system, corrections, ER)
- Develop a coordinated intake system

Goal 5 Education and Outreach

Implement education and public awareness campaigns to remove societal stigma about homelessness and to build community support and coordinated responses

- Project Connect (continue this highly successful event)
- Develop a coordinated community education/resource information system
- Information sheet (and training) on community resources for law enforcement
- Ongoing advocacy in all communities (to ensure accountability of commitments)
- Establish “Leadership Committee” of business and community leaders
- Develop a mentor program for the homeless
- Develop a Report Card or similar mechanism to show progress

Goal 6 Better Data

Improve data collection technology and methodology to better account for homeless program outcomes

- One Night Shelter Count
- Continuum of Care
- McKinney-Vento regional effort with schools
- Track first responder and emergency room care statistics
- Academia - ask a local college to do a cost-benefit analysis of Housing First model

Next steps:

Based on experiences of other communities, developing a 10 Year Plan typically takes 12 - 18 months. Our goal is to have the Central Oregon 10 Year Plan complete and ready for community review and implementation by Fall 2010.

Right now, we want/need to hear back from the community. Are we on the right track? Do these preliminary strategies make sense? What are we missing? Who in the community needs to be involved? Can your organization/agency/business help out in any of these strategies?

Want to learn more? Help out? Provide input or feedback? Please contact any of the Working Group members below or:

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10 year Plan Working Group Members

| Name | Organization |
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| Marty Betsch | St Charles |
| Gary Buss | Living Hope Church |
| Chris Clouart | Bethlehem Inn |
| Brenda Comini | Crook County Commission on Children & Families |
| Scott Cooper | Partnership to End Poverty |
| Marcella Edmonds | St Vincent de Paul (Prineville) |
| Sarah Elliot | Deschutes County Mental Health/HLC |
| Lt. Mike Espinoza | Deschutes County Sheriff's Office |
| Karen Friend | Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council (COIC) |
| Jefferson Greene | Warm Springs |
| Deborah Henderson-Norton | BLM (Prineville District) |
| Dennis Kostelecky | Crook County School District |
| Erik Kropp | Deschutes County |
| Kenny LaPoint | HousingWorks |
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| Jim Long | City of Bend |
| Ron Parsons | Dept. of Human Services (DHS) |
| Cindy Pasko | Partnership to End Poverty |
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| Deb Price | OR Housing & Community Services |
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| Julie Tapia | Grandma's House |