

SUMMARY:

Compiling all our deliberations so far on improving our homelessness crisis response system

The following summary is intended to serve as a starting point, but only a starting point, for identifying common ground from both the service provider forums (held online using the Common Ground for Action platform) and the consumer forums (recorded by facilitators) held in April and May. A full report with more detail on both sets of forums is also available.

INITIAL SUMMARY OF COMMON GROUND

Across both provider and consumer forums, a distinct blend of strategies emerged as the common ground for action: generally, forum participants broadly supported most of Option 2 (Shelter Services), augmented with some actions from Options 1 (Prevention) and 4 (Employment).

- **Option 2 (Shelter Services)** received strong support across all provider forums. The actions related to dynamic case plans that clearly identify objectives and who is responsible are shared with clients, service team members and shelter staff received unanimous high support, and all the other actions in this option (with the exception of the incentive system for clients) were also broadly and deeply supported. Overall, as participants put it, “I think this is an ideal situation. The issue is getting all of the community agencies on board. The benefit of multi-agency case management would intentionally address all needs coordinated by each agency representative. Instead of blind referrals and breaks in communication.”
- **Option 1 (Prevention):** The actions “Implement an eviction prevention program targeting HUD-subsidized housing residents,” and “Work collaboratively with institutions like jails, hospitals, nursing homes, foster care, and local housing code enforcement departments to prevent clients from being discharged into homelessness” were widely and deeply supported. The other two actions, which involved training community volunteers and working with churches, non-profits, and other civic groups had some support, but participants were more concerned about the tradeoffs.
- **Option 4 (Employment):** Expanding paid job and soft skills training as well as developing a pool of employers who commit to hire homeless/formerly homeless individuals both had extremely high support. The other actions had milder support, and participants had concerns about difficulty of implementing in-shelter.
- **Option 3 (Assistance After Shelter)**, which focused on immediate rental assistance for all those who did not qualify for Permanent Supportive Housing, was largely rejected as too risky.

Meanwhile, the in-person consumer forums were very similar: Deepest support for Option 2 (improving shelter services), with particular focus on the quality of case management. Consumers did tend to support the ideas behind Options 1 and 4 a bit more than providers, although they did not necessarily grapple with the tradeoffs for particular actions. Consumers were also strongly positive about Option 4 (Employment), saying that this was the key to long-term stability in housing, and identified needing more and varying support to be able to secure and maintain employment, particularly highlighting transportation as needing to be stable as they faced other circumstances changing. A few important additional notes from consumer forums:

- Knowledgeable, motivated case managers are the key. Clients spoke of the quality of their case manager as determinative of their experience in shelter.
- Transportation is a huge issue. Consumers spoke of transportation as being extremely difficult to coordinate, making it much more difficult to keep appointments or do them efficiently, and making it very difficult to secure or maintain a job.
- Medical care—several consumers mentioned that other people in shelter were dealing with medical conditions that needed treatment, and that not having any of those services available in-shelter meant that they required transportation.
- Relationship with staff, expressions of empathy, respect, and personal responsibility are key.
- An incentive system for compliance would be welcomed by clients (at least those who participated in these forums). Consumers wanted good behavior and initiative to be recognized, and spoke of the demotivation that occurred when good and bad behavior received identical treatment.

OPTION ONE: Emphasis on Prevention

A	Community-based Social Supports: Using a peer model, utilize volunteers to provide community-based case management aimed at preventing individuals from entering the shelter system.
B	Coordinated Landlord Recruitment: Implement a coordinated recruitment strategy to engage churches, civic organizations, and non-profit agencies to identify landlords who are willing to offer free/reduced rent and other supportive services.
C	Eviction Prevention Program: Implement an eviction prevention program targeting HUD-subsidized housing residents.
D	Collaborate with Institutions on Discharge Planning: Work collaboratively with institutions like jails, hospitals, nursing homes, foster care, and local housing code enforcement departments to prevent clients from being discharged into homelessness.

OPTION TWO: Emphasis on Shelter Services

E	Incentivize Client Behavior: Devise an incentive-based service model for shelter residents to reinforce and/or discourage behaviors while in shelter. (i.e., clients receive "points" as a reward for attending appointments or securing housing-once they get a certain number of points they can cash them in for extra benefits, e.g. housing kit, additional toiletries, clothing items)
F	Dynamic Case Plans: Implement dynamic case plans that clearly identify objectives and who is responsible. Case managers will share the agreed-upon case plan goals and projected timelines with clients, service team members, and shelter staff.
G	Specialized Services Teams: Utilize collaborative teams of multi-agency case managers to provide specialized, client-focused services that address issues of employment, mental health, housing, and addiction in shelter.
H	Earlier Triage & Linkage to Housing Focused Services: Administer triage assessment within 48 hours of shelter entry to quickly identify housing needs and immediate barriers. Clients determined to need Rapid Rehousing (RRH), a short-medium term rental assistance and services housing intervention, will meet with a case manager within 48 hours of the triage assessment. Clients needing other housing interventions will receive a comprehensive assessment within 5 to 7 days.
I	Enhance Case Management: Create more positions for case managers who work with specialized populations (i.e., veterans, youth, families, etc.), and increase work hours to accommodate clients during early mornings, evenings, and weekends.

OPTION THREE: Emphasis on Assistance After Shelter

J	Voluntary After Care Services: Offer clients the option to receive follow-up case management services, employment assistance, and mental health services after they are placed in housing.
K	Limit Shelter Stays: Enact a 90-day limit on shelter stays within a 12-month time period. Clients will not be allowed to return to shelter within 12 months after they exit into permanent housing or another program.
L	Universal Housing Assistance: Provide ALL clients who have been in shelter for 7 days or longer housing search support, rental assistance for 3 months, bus passes for employment, and necessary household supplies, if they are not assessed for Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH).

OPTION FOUR: Emphasis on Employment

M	Dedicated Employers: Develop a pool of employers who commit to hire homeless/formerly homeless individuals and work with case managers to ensure that employees are retained This may also include day labor or temporary work opportunities.
N	Assistance for Skills Program Participation: Provide rental subsidies and transportation assistance for clients who are participating in a skills or apprenticeship program.
O	Remove Barriers to Employment: Implement an intentional advocacy effort to broaden job training eligibility requirements, increase job training opportunities, and reduce hiring/employment barriers (i.e., drug testing, criminal background checks, etc.).
P	Expand Paid Job Training Opportunities: Expand paid job and soft skills training for clients to help them acquire and maintain employment.
Q	Other: Provide rental assistance to clients who are most at-risk. Consider pooling resources and partnering with agencies with the same mission. ** ONLY DISCUSSED in 3 of 6 forums