OVERVIEW

our time together

Our Time This Morning

- Summary findings from work with the Balance of State CoC Coordinator and MSHDA to identify and interview key contacts across each of its 59 counties

- Results of more than 50 hours interviewing Balance of State organizations to identify current processes, service strengths, existing gaps and external environment expectations in efforts to prevent and end homelessness

- Training opportunities identified throughout

- Opportunity for your feedback to further inform this process

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KEY FINDINGS

eight repeated themes

Opportunities for Enhancing Access and Communication

- Staff across each Balance of State location identified the processes for engaging a HARA and the resources that their community possessed
- Organizations knew each other well due to their small staff sizes
- HARA mobility/access can be challenging (50+ miles away sometimes)
- Concern with lack of well-publicized information on accessing resources for the audience of people experiencing a housing crisis
- For people experiencing first-time homelessness who may not show up at the "right door" to access resources, opportunities for enhanced communication included radio advertisements, newspaper ads, posters, signs and billboards

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Homelessness Prevention and Diversion

- The majority of those interviewed described diversion as part of their daily tasks in preventing and ending homelessness
- Staff also frequently identified wanting to know how to more effectively and consistently provide diversion strategies
- Multiple requests for additional and ongoing technical assistance
- Where diversion is happening, staff stated that it was not tracked consistently within the Statewide Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)

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Maximizing Limited Staff Resources

- Strong relationships among providers and community-wide expertise on the processes to end homelessness -- often by word of mouth
- HMIS still not fully utilized
- Heavy reliance on partnerships with faith-based providers and police
- Requests for more widely distributed emergency plans for instances when workers are unavailable (due to scheduled leave, holidays or other time off)
- Some communities have done commendable work already with integrating, marketing and advertising across systems

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Prioritization Enhancement Opportunities

- Most staff *could* readily describe their prioritization criteria of highest VI-SPDAT score and longest history of homelessness, including an emphasis on ending chronic homelessness

- Balance of State communities overwhelmingly *did not* describe real-time data and accountability, or easily understanding who the HARA is engaging, who is next, and where opportunities exist to collaborate with those next most likely to be housed

- While prioritization is based on vulnerability, it was very clear that subjectivity and strong advocacy continue to play a significant role in decision making

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Additional Transparency

- HARAs frequently described as having the lead on all things from assessment to decision making through a centralized process
- Almost every interviewee could identify opportunities to increase clarity and consistency of expectations
- Many staff struggled to understand who is getting prioritized and housed, with when and how that occurred
- VI-SPDATs continue to be completed at or near first contact, even for people newly experiencing literal homelessness
- "First come, first served" appears to still be happening quite frequently

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Ensuring Resources and Funding Reflect Needs

- Many locations identified allocation of funding not reflective of needs
- Surprisingly, multiple communities identified having sufficient housing resources to meet the needs of people seeking assistance, including their ability to make referrals to Housing Choice Vouchers and Section 8 subsidies
- Others identified insufficient housing resources or housing stock to end homelessness without requiring use of sub-optimal housing stock
- MSHDA's separation of homelessness programs and rental assistance programs can produce intra-department communication challenges
- Opportunities to improve landlord quality/Housing First practice

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Increasing Housing First Implementation

- Progress with how communities have grown to accept (and often champion) a Housing First approach in ending homelessness
- Ongoing efforts to build relationships and increase understanding on behalf of landlords
- Most staff described holding to a Housing First approach themselves
- Housing access and success may still be based too frequently on the "willingness" of program participants to "engage" and "do what they need to do," but the majority of staff used consistent Housing First language when providing feedback

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Expanding HMIS
Use and Access

- HMIS use was consistently described as being a tool primarily used by the HARA but not other service providers
- Even among HARA staff, representatives described keeping paper records and separate electronic databases in order to evaluate who they engaged, housed and supported
- Training opportunities on existing HMIS reports and ongoing assistance to increase use of HUD-required tools
- Ongoing reliance on HARAs to generate reports rather than possessing (or knowing of) the ability to run reports themselves
- Frustration at limited HMIS utilization and coverage

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TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

four upcoming options

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Taking Prioritization to the Next Level

- Let's get clearer on who is getting prioritized, when and how

- Beyond highest VI-SPDAT alone (and longest history of homelessness!)

- The ongoing process for HARA matching and how it works

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Using HMIS and Data to Drive Programming

- Monthly HMIS assistance often heavy on technical, not programmatic

- HMIS too often feels like where you put data in, not get data out

- Moving beyond technical/data quality to outcomes (people housed)

- Opportunities for assistance to refine existing HMIS reports

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Homelessness Prevention and Diversion

- Desire to learn from best practices on implementing diversion

- Lack of consistent (and consistently applied) diversion strategies

- Opportunity to increase Statewide HMIS reporting processes

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Progressive Engagement and Housing-Focused Case Management

- Opportunities to engage people not likely to seek our assistance or respond when we engage and learning from best practices

- Daily, structured, housing-focused conversations beyond meeting basic needs alone

- Moving from merely knowing our neighbours by name to knowing how we can effectively house them (and connected to the resources required to do so)

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Staff across the Balance of State consistently described being able to benefit from additional training on both homelessness prevention/ diversion and prioritization

What additional information about these topics would help you and your staff?

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