

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE MAYOR'S DEPARTMENT OF HOMELESSNESS: INSIGHTS FROM COMMUNITY-BASED NONPROFITS SERVING HOMELESS POPULATIONS

Council of Community Housing Organizations (CCHO)
Homeless Emergency Service Providers Association (HESPA)
Homeless Employment Collaborative (HEC)
San Francisco HIV-AIDS Provider Network (HAPN)
San Francisco Human Services Network (HSN)
Supportive Housing Providers Network (SHPN)

Executive Summary

The Mayor's announcement to create a new homelessness services department is a tremendous opportunity to expand services that are doing well, create change in those areas that are impeding progress, and forge fresh inroads in pursuit of our shared goal of ending homelessness. Providers and advocacy organizations comprising the networks listed above have compiled and aligned on the following recommendations to the Mayor for careful consideration throughout the planning phase of the new Department. These recommendations include our collective perspective on the new Department's structure, priorities and approaches. We have a vision for a robust and coordinated homelessness services system that creates stronger pathways off the streets and into sustainable housing that supports meaningful outcomes for those facing the indignity of homelessness in San Francisco.

I. Introduction: The Mayor's Department of Homelessness

On December 3, 2015, San Francisco Mayor Edwin Lee announced the creation of a new Department with a mandate to solve homelessness. This Department would consolidate the Homeless Outreach Team, Human Services Agency (HSA) Housing and Homeless Programs (shelter, drop-in and homeless housing), Department of Public Health (DPH) Direct Access to Housing and the Office of the Conservator into a single department. The Mayor called for a bold vision and scaled-up cooperation between city departments, community-based organizations, advocates and national experts.

The member organizations of the Council of Community Housing Organizations (CCHO), Homeless Emergency Service Providers Association (HESPA), Homeless Employment Collaborative (HEC), San Francisco HIV-AIDS Provider Network (HAPN), San Francisco Human Services Network (HSN), and Supportive Housing Providers Network (SHPN) represent the front lines of the City's struggle to address homelessness. As providers of services, and as homeless advocacy organizations, we see first-hand the barriers that homeless people face, and the gaps in the current system of care. We run successful, innovative programs that work miracles with insufficient resources. The reality is that we simply don't have enough shelter beds, treatment, or housing capacity to ensure everyone has a safe and decent place to call home.

We present this policy briefing to share our expertise and insights with City policymakers as we work together to shape the new department. This new vision presents unprecedented

opportunities to expand services that are doing well, create change in those areas that are impeding progress, and forge fresh inroads in pursuit of our shared goal of ending homelessness.

II. Department Structural Recommendations

- **Community Input:** The City should proactively seek the input of homeless people, service providers, and City officials for recommendations to shape the new Department, choose its leader, and guide policy decisions.
- **Community Oversight:** The new Department should have a commission to ensure transparency and community input. The expertise of the Local Homeless Coordinating Board should be considered for this role.
- **Staffing:** The City should hire the most energetic visionaries to staff the new Department, including hiring people from the community. Fresh blood will allow the city to move away from entrenched policymaking and open the door to institutional change.
- **Department Priorities:** The new Department should focus squarely and exclusively on homelessness, and the following three tasks:
 1. Coordinate the alignment of key local, federal and state entities;
 2. Eradicate and change policies that create barriers to ending homelessness; and
 3. Improve outcomes for homeless people.
- **Department Parameter:** The City should include only those divisions and programs that exclusively house and serve homeless people rather than programs that serve the entire community, relate to lifelong health struggles, or are not specific to homelessness (i.e. DPH's clinical supervision, behavioral health program, and MediCal billing). The Office of the Conservator should reside within DPH to streamline buying beds. However, the new Department must coordinate with DPH, HSA, and MOHCD to align access to services that homeless people need, such as eviction prevention and behavioral health.
- **Cross Departmental Coordination:** The Department should create the political will to bring the City's full weight to ensure success through weekly meetings with high-level city staff from DPH, HSA, MOHCD, and the Mayor's Chief of Staff.

III. Diverse, Population-Based Approaches

- **Cultural Competency:** The Department should embrace that there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to ending homelessness because different populations have vastly different needs, with certain subpopulations being over-represented: people of color, people with disabilities, those who identify as LGBTQ, and those with HIV and Hepatitis C, for example.
- **Ending Family Homelessness:** The City should commit to doubling the number of units in the pipeline for homeless families, coupled with immediate emergency shelter and rapid re-housing, taking advantage of vacant public housing, and expanding local subsidies.
- **Ending Homelessness for Single Adults:** The Department should reverse its scaling back

of new housing for single adults and apply creative housing solutions for this population, including rapid re-housing, permanent supportive housing, and access to public and non-profit housing units that become vacant.

- **Ending Homelessness for People with Disabilities and Seniors:** The Department should create service-enhanced housing for the growing population of homeless people who are aging, becoming sicker, and more disabled, with rents that align with the size of disability checks.
- **Ending Youth and Transitional Aged Youth (TAY) Homelessness:** The City should renew and redouble its promise to create 400 new units of housing for TAY, advocate for a TAY set-aside as part of the State's \$2 billion Housing Bond, and compete as a youth homelessness demonstration site under the Homeless Assistance Grants through the Continuum of Care.

IV. Focus on Solutions

- **Success is Dependent on Investment:** The Department should estimate the costs, determine sites, and work with policymakers to develop a sustainable revenue source to support the Mayor's laudable goal of housing 8,000 more homeless people in the next five years. Efforts should include increasing the number of homeless units in the affordable housing pipeline, speeding up construction, subsidizing turnover units in nonprofit housing, and increasing supportive housing to address those with special needs.
- **End Criminalization:** The Department should change its protocol and send an outreach worker and offer housing instead of policing homelessness through ticketing, property confiscation and arrests that destabilize homeless people and create additional barriers to exits off the streets.
- **Prevention:** The Department should prioritize eviction prevention through means such as legal intervention and bridge rent, building on current efforts to capture those at risk, in both public and private housing.
- **Mental Health and Substance Abuse:** The Department should coordinate closely with DPH to identify barriers to treatment and move toward treatment on demand.
- **Education and Employment:** The new Department should support and enhance already successful programs; expand education, paid training, and transitional employment opportunities; provide additional funds for tools and other supports people need to seek and secure employment; and compel employers to hire through community organizations that provide placement services.
- **Addressing Street Based Issues:** The Department should support the dignity of those forced to remain on the streets through sufficient access to restrooms, showers, health care, safe sharps containers for dirty needles, garbage bags, brooms, and safe parking places for people living in vehicles.

V. Build on Navigation Center Success to Improve the Shelter System

- **Accommodation for Entry Barriers:** The Department should adopt a policy around pets, partners, and possessions that helps shelters, whenever possible, to accommodate these needs.
- **Shelter Size:** The Department should promote smaller shelter environments with low staff-to-resident ratios for a sense of quiet, safe communal living where both residents and staff can focus on housing readiness without the distraction or heightened potential for violence that frequently plagues larger shelters.
- **Breaking down Exit Barriers:** The Department should build shelter capacity to prevent long-term use of this emergency resource through: a greater supportive housing supply, warm case management hand-offs to supportive housing, and financial resources to ensure that each person has the furniture and household equipment necessary to manage their new apartment. The Department should also provide shelters with access to on-site City workers (GA and CalWorks, CalFresh, MediCal, Homeward Bound, and the HOT Medical team) who have the power, contacts and resources to remove barriers. Other help should include application assistance, on-site services, DMV, medical care, and connections with higher levels of care when needed.

VI. Housing Access

- **Create Pathways:** The Department should increase the diversity of the housing spectrum to create a tenant-centric approach focused on the tenant's needs and outcomes. When a tenant is ready to move out of service-enriched housing, this option must be available through Section 8, public housing, and other rental subsidy supports (including homeless units set aside by the Local Operating Subsidy Program in affordable housing) that may be less expensive and more appropriate for some. By creating pathways out of supportive housing for those who will be successful elsewhere, the intervention is more available to those who need it most.
- **Hold Rent at 30% of Income in Supportive Housing:** The Department should adhere to the Federal standard that no more than 30% of a tenant's rent in supportive housing goes toward rent.
- **Prioritize Non-profit Owned Supportive Housing:** The Department should support non-profit owned housing, including acquisition, rehabilitation, and new construction.
- **Increased Supply of Supportive Housing:** The Department should find creative ways to expedite the development of new supportive housing units to increase the city's supply.

VII. Smart and Consistent Contracting and Meaningful Outcomes

- **Avoid Disruption:** The Department should ensure a seamless transition throughout its initial year, so CBOs experience no contract delays or late payments that would result in disrupted service delivery.

- **Meaningful Outcomes:** The Department should work with community providers to re-craft contract outcomes to ensure high standards that measure meaningful progress toward shared goals.
- **A Multi-year Approach:** The Department should recognize that outcomes are not always achieved in twelve months. Multi-year measurements and contracts with matched multi-year costs would support greater success, saving the City and contracted nonprofits critical time while helping to better manage the cost of doing business.
- **Contract Modifications:** The Department should create an efficient system to easily modify and revise contract budgets to ensure that City dollars are spent where they are most needed.

VIII. CBO Capacity

- **Adequate Staffing:** The Department should support and fund lower staff-to-tenant ratios to improve outcomes for shelter and supportive housing residents.
- **Capacity Building:** The Department should invest in the effectiveness of providers through training to ensure that tenants receive the highest quality of care.

IX. Select Policy Changes to Improve Access and Outcomes

- **Sanction Policy:** The Department should ensure that no one in a program where rent is paid by the city (primarily Care Not Cash) loses their housing because of non-payment of rent.
- **Shelter Access:** The Department should ensure that access to shelter is seamless:
 1. Families signing up for the shelter wait list should not be required to transfer their benefits to San Francisco.
 2. Single adults should not be held to the one-night bed process, wherein people are turned away while beds sit empty, and homeless people must go from place to place at multiple times daily, waiting in line for a bed.
- **Equitable Access:** The new Department should ensure equitable (geographic, ethnic, disability status and racial) access for homeless people to housing and other services.

X. Conclusion

These recommendations represent the collective insight and experience of dozens of agencies working on the frontlines to end homelessness in San Francisco. We have come together around a shared vision for a better system that can serve as a model in the nation for collaboration, resource alignment, and results. Thank you for taking our recommendations under careful consideration.