House COVID-19 Subcommittee on Housing & Homelessness

Lessons Learned & Recommendations for Homeless Service System Funding

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated known inequities across the country between people who have been able to shelter in-home, and those who do not have a safe shelter to turn to. At the same time, the number of people who face new housing insecurity due to the pandemic has increased significantly, with over 11,000 renters across the state months behind on rent. When Catholic Charities implemented its most recent privately funded rent relief program, the organization received 11,000 applications in five days. The nonprofit service providers focused on serving people experiencing and at risk of homelessness came together with government and private funders to more actively collaborate to meet the emergency. This groundwork and innovation that blossomed during the pandemic creates a landscape for opportunity for continued progress in the homeless service system toward a shared vision of ending homelessness in the state.

When designing the State's Rent Relief & Housing Assistance Program, the stakeholders that formed the House COVID-19 Subcommittee on Housing offered a series of recommendations that provided a roadmap for the design and implementation of rent relief programs statewide. This memo intends to do the same, building on what works, what lessons have been learned, and how the sector can move together to achieve the greatest impact in ending homelessness statewide. This is particularly important given the shortage of public funding projected over the next few years, and the opportunity surrounding a potential influx of federal funding for state and local governments in the government's next stimulus package.

Big Picture Lessons Learned

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, nonprofit service providers quickly developed plans to provide unsheltered community members safe shelter, access to basic needs, COVID testing, and connection to stable housing. In emergency response, the following lessons were learned that further informed the recommendations in this memo:

- Collective efforts between nonprofits have the greatest impact.
- Programs are more likely to succeed when funders co-design programs with nonprofit providers and people with lived experience in homelessness
- State, County, and private resources can create a continuum of service when it is effectively coordinated
- Nonprofit homeless service providers need additional capacity to implement new efficiencies and growing programs
- Advancing funds to contracted nonprofits for working capital is critical to success

Recommendations for Future Design and Implementation of Homelessness Programming

1. **Continue and expand cross-sector coordination of resources and relationship building:** State, County, and private resources should coordinate regularly to align resources for greatest impact and develop priorities for homelessness services in partnership with each other, service providers, and people with lived experience. This coordination can leverage existing platforms such as those established by the Governor's Coordinator on Homelessness, where funders, policy makers, and social service providers come together to share as transparently as possible the funding available and where additional funding would be best leveraged. These platforms can create spaces for greater relationship building between public officials, service providers, and private funders, and serve as a launching point for program design, iteration, and problem solving. This should also include building relationships between nonprofit providers and departments that impact homelessness services indirectly, such as the Department of Budget and Finance and County equivalents, in order to set clear expectations of contract billing requirements at the beginning of program implementation.

2. **Invest in nonprofit capacity by building shared competencies, advocating for living-wage salaries, and increasing workforce development opportunities for nonprofit staff:** Currently, organizations are on their own to train and support case managers, outreach, and administrative staff. This contributes to systemwide inconsistencies in service provision, high staff turnover, and decreased opportunities for long-term relationships between community members and staff. Supported by public and private funders, nonprofits should prioritize investing in and building supports and pathways for staff that includes inter-organizational networking. This will create standards of care across providers, increase collaboration, and deepen the impact of services. As an example, Partners in Care is developing with providers a training for homeless outreach staff that creates more consistencies across providers. This is especially critical in communities where there are multiple providers working on similar programs.

3. **Expand capacity of homeless service sector nonprofits to leverage existing financial resources outside the homeless service system:** Funding should support nonprofits in the sector to train staff on Medicaid billing and other earned-income sources as a sustaining revenue stream. In a funding scarce environment, many nonprofits are learning and teaching others individually. Statewide capacity building support for nonprofit staff would build the sustainability of nonprofits over time and increase relationship building across the sector. Investing in this as a portion of a contract or in collaboration with private funding sources, can leverage many additional dollars for the sector.

4. **Co-create and establish a shared understanding of short, mid, and long term outcomes for programs with nonprofits, people with lived experience, and public and private funders**: Various contracts measure an organization's success by the speed at which an

individual receives services and is housed. This is a necessary outcome to track, but does not fully capture the pathway to housing and relationships people must build along the way. Funders and providers should reassess outcomes together and determine through public and private resources, how to reach those outcomes. The Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion program provides an example of how providers, community groups, and government can set benchmarks of people's connection to community and social supports as key indicators for success and long term stability, which can inform programming and increase long term stability of individuals.

5. **Link affordable housing development with homeless service providers to create more opportunities for integrated affordable housing with supportive services:** Many people with experience in homelessness, will require additional services built-in to their housing to support them with workforce development, child care, and health care services. In order to meet this service need and build housing built for and around vulnerable populations, more opportunities should exist to support affordable housing developers in connecting with service providers to integrate services into affordable housing projects and foster the creation of more set-aside units for people exiting homelessness and special populations. Examples for replication include IHS's collaboration with Hui Aloha and Ka Poe Kakaako at Hale Mauliola, Ka Hale A Ke Ola's affordable housing projects on Maui, and HOPE Service's new Pahoa affordable housing project being developed in partnership with Hawaii Island Community Development Corporation, HPM, and the County of Hawaii.