

Virginia's Local Ten Year Plans to End Homelessness

The ten year plan to end homelessness is a community-based planning effort that many of Virginia's local jurisdictions have undertaken. The final plan outlines the local context of homelessness and prescribes a concrete set of strategies designed to overcome the challenges for ending homelessness. The ultimate goal is to incrementally move towards reducing rates of homelessness until homelessness no longer exists.

Certainly, ending homelessness is an ambitious goal—one that many believe is impossible. Yet an effective ten year plan is based on the idea that homelessness is solvable.

Background

In the year 2000, the National Alliance to End Homelessness developed the ten year plan to end homelessness and formulated the idea of creating local ten year plans. Since then, communities across the country have created hundreds of local, regional, and state ten year plans. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) began encouraging the development of local plans to end chronic homelessness although the majority, 66 percent, of local ten year plans and all of Virginia's plans focus on homelessness among all populations.

Key Characteristics

Most of Virginia's ten year plans are in the early stages of implementation, therefore it is too early to know definitively how effective local ten year plans will be. However, early successes attributable to existing ten year plans point to key characteristics of an effective plan. These early successes include realigning current resources and strategies to focus on a shared goal, improving coordination among service providers, engaging new partners who bring additional resources to the table, and attracting new public and private funding. Here are several examples of key characteristics that communities point to as the reasons for these early successes:

Strategic Vision

"Apathy can be overcome by enthusiasm, and enthusiasm can only be aroused by two things: first, an ideal, which takes the imagination by storm, and second, a definite intelligible plan for carrying that ideal into practice." - Arnold Toynbee

First and foremost, a ten year plan must proclaim the goal of ending homelessness. This directly counteracts the misconception that there are no solutions to this problem, which will increase community and political support for investments in the solutions.

Local ten year plans have been developed by:

- Alexandria
- Arlington County
- Charlottesville
- Chesapeake
- Fairfax County and City of Falls Church
- Norfolk
- Portsmouth
- Richmond (City of Richmond and the Counties of Chesterfield, Hanover, and Henrico)
- Roanoke (Cities of Covington, Roanoke, and Salem and Counties of Alleghany, Botetourt, Craig and Roanoke)
- Virginia Beach
- Virginia Peninsula (Cities of Hampton, Newport News, Poquoson, Gloucester, and Williamsburg and the counties of York, James City and Isle of Wight)

Local ten year plans are in development in:

- Loudoun County
- Prince William County

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- Richmond’s ten year plan recommends targeting existing housing resources to those at the greatest risk of homelessness and housing instability, as well as partnering with the public housing authority to better access current resources.
- In Roanoke, local funding requests must be aligned with the principles of the ten year plan. Therefore the programs and services provided in Roanoke are better coordinated and more effectively fill gaps in available assistance.
- Charlottesville formalized the Homeless Services Council as part of its ten year plan to improve coordination among service providers.



Photo courtesy of Carpenter's Shelter

- As part of the planning phase for its Ten Year Plan, Chesapeake held a series of focus group meetings with various service providers, local leaders from city government and the faith community, and people experiencing homelessness. During the discussions, participants looked outside of Chesapeake’s own experience for new, innovative strategies. The plan concludes: “Up until the last few years, most cities found the task of trying to end homelessness overwhelming. Research and the ability to learn from the experience of other cities and non-profits that have successfully implemented programs shows us that making a commitment to ending homelessness pays off and makes our cities better places to live.”

Strategically Using Data

The primary cause of homelessness does not change based on locality or an urban, suburban or rural context. However, local data and research can pinpoint specific barriers to housing stability (such as a lack of available mental health treatment, high percentage of clients with former foster care involvement, and need for and lack of public transportation), and define strategies that will overcome these specific challenges.

- Homeward, the regional planning and coordinating organization for homeless services in the Greater Richmond region makes innovative use of data. In addition to a comprehensive look at homeless individuals and families, Homeward publishes “snapshots” to understand sub-populations of people experiencing homelessness. By analyzing and widely disseminating data, Homeward improves the understanding of homelessness.
- Arlington County’s Ten Year Plan breaks down cost information on emergency shelter, child welfare services, mental health care, addiction treatment, emergency room care, acute care hospitals, and unemployment compensation and welfare to understand the costs of homelessness. According to this data, “homeless families in Arlington, many of them made up of mothers with small children, use up to \$100,000 of service dollars per family, per year.” The Plan then argues that by streamlining services and directing funds to initiatives to end homelessness, many of these costs can be avoided.
- Virginia Beach’s Ten Year Plan breaks down cost information on emergency shelter, mental health care, addiction treatment, and emergency room care to understand the cost of homelessness. The Plan then argues that homelessness creates cost to the public and private sectors that is both ineffective and expensive.

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