



# **Homeless Prevention & Re-housing: Effective and Efficient Use of New Federal Resources**

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## **Virginia Coalition to End Homelessness**

The Virginia Coalition to End Homelessness (VCEH) is a non-profit organization dedicated to preventing and ending homelessness in the Commonwealth of Virginia through community collaboration, capacity building, education and advocacy. VCEH advocacy and educational efforts have led to the creation of the vast majority of state funded programs for homeless prevention and assistance. VCEH promotes the understanding that there are solutions to homelessness and we can and must put in place a statewide system to prevent homelessness and rapidly re-house those who experience homelessness.

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*This brief provides information on best practices in homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing.*

## **Overview**

Congress included, as part of the \$787 billion economic recovery package in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Plan, \$1.5 billion for prevention and re-housing activities for a Homelessness Prevention Fund, later renamed the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP.) **For HPRP details, see VCEH's *Analysis of the HUD Notice for the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP): Requirements, Purpose and Eligible Uses* by visiting the website at [www.vceh.org](http://www.vceh.org)**

### ***Opportunity for Statewide Data that Demonstrates Effectiveness***

President Obama has stressed that all measures included in the economic stimulus package will be subject to transparency requirements and localities will have to demonstrate effective use of the funds. We therefore must ensure that the Homelessness Prevention Fund is effective at preventing homelessness and reducing the number of people who experience homelessness in Virginia. The only sure way to assess whether or not the program is effective is to prove it with housing stability outcomes that demonstrate the percentage of people who remain stably housed after prevention assistance has been delivered (e.g., a high percentage of clients remain stably housed six months later.) This new funding also presents an opportunity to collect statewide data on prevention and rehousing and strengthen our case in the short-term future for additional funding for prevention and re-housing.

### ***Targeting***

According to numerous national studies, the most common failing of local prevention strategies is that they target too broadly. "The people receiving the intervention are not uniformly at very high risk of homelessness, so relatively few would actually become homeless even without the intervention. Based on the goal of prevention, a prevention strategy is not efficient and "wastes" resources if it uses them to assist people who would not have become homeless without the service. Briefly stated, poor targeting leads to an inefficient strategy and inefficient strategies are rarely effective."<sup>1</sup>

In addition, a study comparing poor housed and homeless families found that the single factor "facing eviction" predicted homelessness only 20 percent of the time.<sup>2</sup> Additional indicators must be taken into account to ensure that prevention strategies target those most likely to experience homelessness. Two examples - one from Hennepin County, Minnesota, and one from Virginia

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<sup>1</sup> Burt, M., Pearson, C., Montgomery A.E.. May 2005. Strategies for Preventing Homelessness. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research.

<sup>2</sup> Shinn, M., Baumohl, J. 1998. Rethinking Prevention of Homelessness. Washington, DC: Practical Lessons: The 1998 National Symposium on Homelessness Research, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. August 1999.

Supportive Housing in Richmond - are included in this brief to assist communities with effective targeting.

### ***Coordinating, Leveraging and Maximizing Resources***

An effective prevention strategy leverages and connects to mainstream, private, and existing homeless assistance and housing resources and includes a plan for sustainability. Coordinating resources and programs stretches dollars further and maximizes impact.

Many Virginia communities have created local ten year plans to end homelessness<sup>3</sup> that have begun implementing or have already implemented community wide systems, coordination strategies and prevention and re-housing programs. Local plans for the use of the Homelessness Prevention Fund should be aligned with priorities and strategies included in local ten year plans to end homelessness.

## **Key Elements - Prevention & Re-housing**

Listed below are key elements of an effective prevention and re-housing program - one that stretches dollars the furthest and is most likely to prevent people from entering the homeless assistance system. Examples of each element are included.

### **Determining Eligibility / Assessing barriers to housing stability**

The effectiveness of any activity is only as good as the efficiency with which it is targeted to the families and individuals most likely to become or remain homeless without help.<sup>4</sup> Threat of eviction alone is an ineffectual predictor of homelessness.

Households will be expected to independently sustain housing - subsidized or unsubsidized - after receiving prevention assistance. Barriers must be accurately assessed to ensure that these funds can effectively prevent homelessness and ensure housing stability for the particular household.

Resource: Virginia Supportive Housing - Housing Barriers Assessment

Resource: Hennepin County, Minnesota

### **Interventions**

Prevention and rapid re-housing activities or interventions include short-term or medium-term rental assistance; housing relocation and stabilization services including housing search, mediation or outreach to property owners (including after a client has received an eviction notice), credit repair; security or utility deposits; utility payments; rental assistance for a final month at a location; moving cost assistance; case management; and other appropriate homelessness prevention activities.

If a client's housing barriers can not be met by the above interventions, triage can link the client to a resource or program that can (e.g., permanent supportive housing, other longer term interventions.)

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<sup>3</sup> Visit [www.vceh.org](http://www.vceh.org) for a list of and links to Virginia's completed local ten year plans to end homelessness.

<sup>4</sup> Burt et al

Resource: Finding Housing / Outreach to and Mediation with Landlords - Housing Broker Team, Norfolk

### **Tracking Housing Stability Outcomes**

The purpose of any prevention strategy is to ensure that the family or individual does not enter the homeless assistance system and remains stably housed over a period of time. The only way to accurately assess effectiveness is to track housing stability outcomes.

Resource: National Alliance to End Homelessness - *What Gets Measured Gets Done: A Toolkit on Performance Measurement for Ending Homelessness*

## **Incorporating Prevention and Re-housing Into Your Current Programs**

If you administer an emergency shelter or transitional housing program, you can incorporate elements of prevention and re-housing into your current programs, and are eligible to apply for these new funds. Several communities have established shelter diversion programs that make use of the current shelter framework. A shelter diversion program assesses the client's needs prior to entry into shelter, determines whether the client can be provided with prevention assistance instead of emergency shelter, provides the assistance, reduces the number of individuals and families entering shelter, and reserves shelter for those with long term barriers that are waiting for longer term supports.

Here are several examples.

\* Example - Shelter Diversion - Columbus, Ohio

\* Example - Rapid Re-housing in a Rural Community - Lancaster, Pennsylvania

## Additional Tools & Resources

1. Visit [www.vceh.org](http://www.vceh.org) to access the examples provided in this brief.
2. Visit HUD's Homelessness Resource Exchange for information on HPRP and best practice program information at [www.hudhre.info](http://www.hudhre.info)
3. For a list of Virginia's \*completed\* local ten year plans, visit [www.vceh.org](http://www.vceh.org)
4. Burt, M., Pearson, C., Montgomery A.E.. May 2005. Strategies for Preventing Homelessness. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research.
5. Culhane, D., Metraux, S. 2008. Rearranging the Deck Chairs or Reallocating the Lifeboats?: Homelessness Assistance and Its Alternatives. Chicago, IL: Journal of the American Planning Association, Vol 74, No. 1, Winter 2008.
6. For more information on the rapid re-housing program in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, visit the website of the National Alliance to End Homelessness and the archived audio conference "Strategies to End Rural Homelessness"  
  
<http://www.endhomelessness.org/content/article/detail/1954>
7. For more information on a program preventing eviction from public housing administered by Volunteers of America, Louisville, Kentucky, visit the website of the National Alliance to End Homelessness and the archived audio conference "Emergency Prevention Programs"  
  
<http://www.endhomelessness.org/content/article/detail/1988>
8. Friedman, D.H., Raymond, J., Puhala, K., Meschede, T., Tripp, J., Kala, M. June 2007. Understanding Boston - Preventing Homelessness and Promoting Housing Stability: A Comparative Analysis. Boston, Massachusetts: The Boston Foundation and The Center for Social Policy, McCormack Graduate School at University of Massachusetts - Boston.
9. Culhane, D., Metraux, S. 2008. Rearranging the Deck Chairs or Reallocating the Lifeboats?: Homelessness Assistance and Its Alternatives. Chicago, IL: Journal of the American Planning Association, Vol 74, No. 1, Winter 2008.