

## Continuum of Homeless Housing Strategies

In thinking about how to address the “housing needs of the homeless,” it is important to note that there are various housing strategies that fall along a continuum. Each of these strategies can function as a stand-alone program, or multiple strategies can be implemented in an integrated manner to address a range of housing needs. For example, a jurisdiction may seek to develop permanent supportive housing as well as transitional housing so that homeless persons have a place to live in the interim. Local needs and conditions; existing and potential tools, resources, and partnerships; and knowledge of Best Practices can help determine which strategies to use. Additionally, while there is a set of terms and descriptions that practitioners commonly use to describe the strategies, there is not a standardized set of definitions. Given the presence of multiple strategies and the lack of standardized language, it is not always immediately clear what is meant by “housing the homeless.” This Attachment 7 seeks to provide a conceptual framework through three “lenses” in order to facilitate a better understanding of the various homeless housing strategies and their interrelationships

Lenses 1 (Preventing Homelessness v. Housing the Homeless) and 2 (Emergency Assistance v. Development of/Access to Housing) discuss the options at the opposite ends of the continuum, while Lens 3 (Temporary Residential Structures v. Permanent Residential Structures) refers particularly to the part of the continuum that emphasizes housing structures. Note that these Lenses are intended to help categorize the strategies for easier understanding, but the categories are not meant to be rigid. There is fluidity along the continuum between the strategies.

- **Lens 1: Preventing Homelessness v. Housing the Homeless:**

Lens 1 distinguishes between preventing individuals or households from falling into homelessness versus providing housing for individuals who are already homeless. On one end of the continuum, certain individuals/households may face a high risk of homelessness due to the high cost of housing relative to income, job loss or decline in income, or other shock to their financial stability such as a spike in housing costs or unforeseen expense such as health care or car maintenance. These households make just enough to get by, but a change in their income or an unforeseen cost, even minor ones, can put their living situation in a precarious position.

On the other end of the continuum, persons who are already homeless need access to appropriate housing in order change their living condition. Therefore, housing the homeless would be the appropriate response.

“Rapid rehousing” may be considered a homeless prevention tool for those who may have lost their existing home but may be staying with friends or family or may have experienced homelessness for a brief period. Quickly rehousing these persons and minimizing the duration of their instability can allow them to get back on their feet more quickly. Rapid rehousing could be composed of any one or a combination of strategies, including emergency cash assistance, relocation services, and access to replacement housing.

- **Lens 2: Emergency Assistance v. Development of/Access to Housing:**

Building on Lens 1, households at risk of homelessness may be stabilized by emergency cash assistance in order to mitigate temporarily the loss of income or to pay for an unforeseen expense. However, if income loss or increased costs become long-term conditions (such as from loss of employment or long-term health conditions), temporary cash assistance may not be sufficient to prevent homelessness.

Conversely, homeless persons need a roof over their heads. This requires access to some type of structure. These may be structures that currently exist or that need to be built. These may also be nonresidential structures converted to residential uses (such as a warehouse or church) or purpose-built residential structures (such as a multi-unit residential building).

- **Lens 3: Temporary Residential Structures v. Permanent Residential Structures:**

Structures used to house the homeless may be either temporary or permanent in nature. For example, a strategy to house the homeless could include the conversion of a hotel/motel or a nonresidential structure such as a warehouse into a residential use for a limited duration. Upon the completion of the structure’s use as temporary or “interim” housing for the homeless, the structure could return to its original use or be redeveloped for another purpose. Another example of an interim housing strategy that has recently seen significant media attention and exploration by housing practitioners, though not yet widely implemented, is the use of “tiny homes,” “modular housing,” or even shipping containers that can be quickly brought to and built on a particular site. These structures are typically built for long-term durability. However, recent innovations and design concepts in new housing prototypes emphasize rapid response and scalability but that may have lower levels of durability. Developers, cities, and even design/architecture programs at universities are testing a variety of housing concepts. A potential constraint for interim housing is that certain product types may not meet building code requirements. The feasibility of these structures as interim housing would

require additional research by staff if directed by the City Council to conduct further exploration.

Note that certain structures that may be used as an interim housing strategy may also be used for permanent housing. For example, a converted hotel/motel or modular housing could remain as homeless housing and be part of a longer-term strategy. Shipping containers could also be used individually or stacked into a multi-unit configuration. For example, Potters Lane in Orange County, California, is using shipping containers to house homeless veterans. This is primarily a question of policy as opposed to a question of structural limitations.

However, a multi-unit apartment building is the structure that most readily comes to mind when permanent housing for the homeless is referenced. These are residential developments of various heights and densities but are often three to five stories tall. While this could be built using traditional stick-frame techniques (or steel if it exceeds certain heights), firms are also innovating on this area. For example, Kasita is an example of a firm that has developed some recent innovations in modular housing. While its product was originally designed as a micro unit with modern designs and finishes, each unit can be quickly built and stacked into a multi-unit development. CITYSPACES MicroPAD housing by Panoramic Interests is another example of stackable, modular housing that has been developed to house the homeless, as well as urban “naturally affordable” housing for the workforce.

Permanent housing for the homeless is typically developed according to the “housing first” model, where long-term housing is provided and is infused with resources such as case management, health care, and employment services. This is known as permanent supportive housing, and is typically geared toward individuals who experience long-term or recurring episodes of homelessness and have a disabling condition.

A key distinction between interim versus permanent supportive housing is that interim housing structures can usually be constructed or brought on-site much more quickly than permanent supportive housing, provided the availability of land and funding. As a result, interim housing can provide a temporary living situation for the homeless while permanent supportive housing, which takes longer to build, is being developed. This is one of the reasons that “interim” housing is also often called “transitional” housing: it is a stepping-stone that allows homeless persons to transition off the street and into permanent supportive housing. However, recent innovations in modular housing and construction, such as those discussed above, could potentially reduce the amount of time it would take to build permanent supportive housing.