

Case Studies: Homelessness Responses of American Municipalities

Administration has identified four American municipalities that have developed or are working towards an integrated homelessness response linked to either a reduction in overall homelessness and/or improved outcomes for specific target populations. While the COVID-19 pandemic challenged progress being made in many communities, in some cases significant and holistic pandemic interventions demonstrated the impact of increased investments and deeper integration across health, social, and housing services. In the United States, an integrated homelessness and healthcare system is a part of the Continuum of Care and often referred to as a “Health Care for the Homeless Program.” The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development identifies priority cities for focused federal efforts and is aiming to “advance policies that recognize housing’s role as essential to health.”¹

Houston

Houston has a population of 2.3 million people with about 3,200 people experiencing homelessness; approximately 1,500 of those people are unsheltered.² Ten years ago Houston had the sixth largest homeless population in America and was designated as a priority city by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development in 2012.³ Houston has made headlines recently for housing 25,000 people over 10 years through their Housing First program⁴ and removing themselves from the top 10 homelessness populations in America. Their evaluations show 90 per cent of those housed are still permanently housed.⁵ The City of Houston’s lead system planner in responding to homelessness is the Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County. In January 2022 the City of Houston and their partners announced \$100 million in funding to house 7,000 people experiencing homelessness.⁶ The Coalition’s Community COVID Housing Program, supported by federal COVID funding, has housed or diverted almost 13,000 people as of February 2023. The first phase from 2020-2022 cost \$65 million and housed about 7,000 people.⁷ They accomplished this by consolidating the region’s efforts into a single Continuum of Care and referring to their local data when making policy and operational decisions.⁸ The entire Continuum of Care in Houston offers a range of wrap around services from healthcare to outreach and case management.⁹

¹ [FY 2022-2026 HUD Strategic Plan](#)

² [2022 Homeless Count and Survey Analysis, Coalition for the Homeless Fact Sheet](#)

³ [Inside Houston’s approach to addressing homelessness](#), Smart Cities Dive, December 13, 2022

⁴ [How Houston Moved 25,000 People From the Streets Into Homes of Their Own](#), New York Times, Updated February 13, 2023

⁵ [How Are We Doing? Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County webpage](#)

⁶ [Press release: City of Houston and Harris County Announce Unprecedented Investment to House the Homeless, Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County webpage, January 26, 2022](#)

⁷ [Community COVID Housing Program, Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County webpage](#)

⁸ [Inside Houston’s approach to addressing homelessness](#)

⁹ [Why coordinated care is key to Houston’s housing-first approach to homelessness](#)

The Houston Health Department is responsible for community engagement, education, and equity focused programs for seniors, families and youth. They are also responsible for the “Community Re-Entry Network Program” which delivers services for formerly incarcerated persons.¹⁰ Houston also has a Healthcare for the Homeless program where anyone can receive care regardless of income. In 2022, 76 per cent of people who used the Healthcare for the Homeless program had no health insurance.¹¹

Denver

Denver has a population of 711, 463 with a 2022 homelessness count of 4,788 individuals. 1,308 of those individuals are unsheltered.¹² The City of Denver uses a Department for Housing Stability to lead the planning and implementation¹³ of their Five Year Strategic Plan, which identifies that since 2014, experiences of homelessness have slowly increased and while available housing resources are well utilized, they must be scaled up to address the need.¹⁴ The City’s two main partners in homelessness responses are the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless¹⁵ and the Metro Denver Homelessness Initiative. The Metro Denver Homeless Initiative’s most recent “state of homelessness” report for 2022/23 focuses on taking a racial equity and lived experience lens.¹⁶

The City of Denver is mandated to build and maintain an affordable housing supply, fund and operate prevention programs, and coordinate their encampment response. By fall 2021, the City of Denver had spent \$15.89 million to build 270 units of supportive housing.¹⁷ The Department for Housing Stability also manages and shares local data through a public dashboard.¹⁸ Their projected housing and homelessness budget for 2023 is \$249.5 million coming from local taxes, federal grants and time-limited COVID-19 funding. Denver is implementing innovative financing solutions, including the Social Impact Partnerships to Pay for Results Act (SIPRA) program to use social impact bond financing as well as the establishment of the Homelessness Resolution Fund (a 0.25 per cent sales tax increase) which is expected to generate about \$40 million annually. Community engagement on how to use the fund demonstrated the public wanted to see a balanced approach to investment in long term housing solutions and immediate crisis responses like shelter.

In 2016, the City of Denver initiated a partnership with the Denver Police Department, the Urban Institute and The Evaluation Centre at the University of

¹⁰ [Community Re-Entry Network Program](#) webpage

¹¹ [Health Care for the Homeless](#) webpage

¹² [2022 Point-in-Time Count, Metro Denver Homeless Initiative, Public Tableau](#)

¹³ [2023 Department of Housing Stability Action Plan](#)

¹⁴ [Department of Housing Stability Five Year Strategic Plan](#)

¹⁵ [Colorado Coalition for the Homeless](#)

¹⁶ [State of Homelessness, Homelessness in Metro Denver through a Lens of Racial Equity and Lived Experience](#)

¹⁷ [How Denver Tackled Homelessness While Saving Money](#), The Pew Charitable Trusts, September 2021

¹⁸ [Five-Year Strategic Planning Efforts, Department of Housing Stability, City of Denver webpage](#)

Colorado Denver. The Denver Police identified a sample group of 762 people that had been arrested eight times in three years, and three of those times they had to have no fixed address. Half of these individuals were supported with population specific programming, as opposed to the regular continuum of care. At year three, the evaluation found that 77 per cent of the people placed in supportive housing were still housed.¹⁹ Interactions with police and nights spent in jail significantly decreased for those in supportive housing. The cost to house one person in supportive housing ranged from \$12,078 to \$15,484 in the study, but it was found that about half the money was offset by lower city spending on other emergency, health and enforcement services.²⁰

The Denver Department of Public Health and Environment is responsible for a variety of community health and well-being initiatives for the city and county.²¹ In June 2022, the City and its partners launched the Denver Housing to Health (H2H) program, which delivers permanent supportive housing to about 125 people experiencing chronic homelessness and suffering from frequent mental and behavioral health crises requiring emergency care. Project goals include housing stability, a reduction in the number of days spent in jail, and reduction in emergency federal healthcare expenditures. It is essentially a social impact bond financing based on health savings created by supportive housing using “performance based contracts” also known as “pay for performance” contracts.

Seattle²² (King County)

Seattle has a population of 737,015 (the region, King County, has a population of over two million), with 8,166 counted as homeless in 2020. 3,738 of those individuals are unsheltered. Over 40,000 people experienced homelessness at least once in King County in 2020. Seattle's total Homelessness Response investment for 2023 is \$153.7 million, which includes \$96.9 million allocated to the King County Regional Homelessness Authority (KCRHA) for 2023.²³ These investments have resulted in the ability of outreach workers to refer 100 per cent of their clients to 24/7 shelter spaces with integrated supports. The City of Seattle holds the Housing Authority accountable through their public dashboard, with a specific feature displaying “System Performance”. As of December 31, 2022 this data shows 58 per cent of homeless households were permanently housed and 6 per cent returned to homelessness²⁴.

In 2015 the City of Seattle declared a State of Emergency for Homelessness and have since focused their efforts on better understanding the root causes of the

¹⁹ [Breaking the Homelessness-jail Cycle with Housing First: Results from the Denver Supportive Housing Social Impact Bond Initiative](#), Urban Institute, July 15, 2021

²⁰ [How Denver Tackled Homelessness While Saving Money](#), The Pew Charitable Trusts, September 2021

²¹ [Denver Public Health and Environment webpage](#)

²² [Seattle has struggled to care for sick and homeless people since the 1800s; now programs are trying something different](#)

²³ [One Seattle Homelessness Action Plan](#)

²⁴ [System Performance, Data Overview, King County Regional Health Authority](#)

growing unsheltered population and have called upon all City departments to prioritize their budgets and responses according to their local data trends. They have identified three root causes and contributing factors of homelessness: housing affordability, inequity, and health challenges. The City has transferred the management of most partner contracts to an independent body called the King County Regional Homelessness Authority. They are the system planner, or Continuum of Care for King County primarily funded by and accountable to, the City of Seattle.

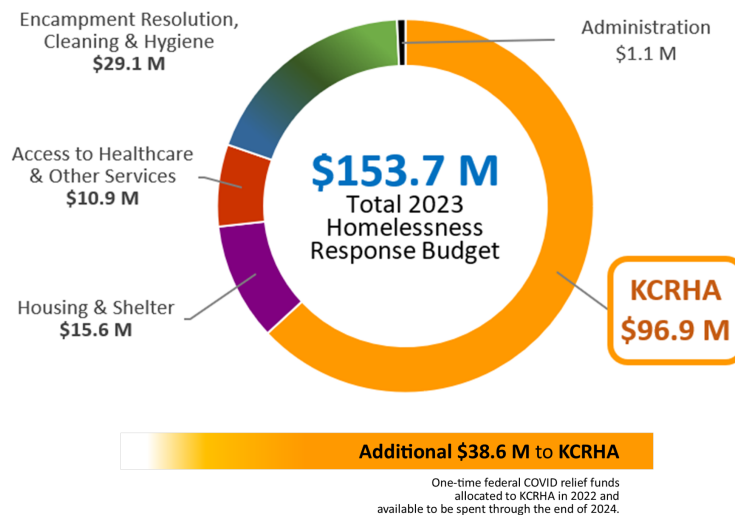


Image 1. City of Seattle Total 2023 Homelessness Response Budget²⁵

Public Health Seattle and King County (PHSKC) provides healthcare for people experiencing homelessness through their Healthcare for the Homeless Network. PHSKC serves as a connector and internal coordinator to other King County departments, including their Department of Community and Human Services, which leads King County's housing initiatives.

One way that municipal policies have leveraged the impact of healthcare and homelessness integration is through the passing of a sales tax in 2020, called "Health Through Housing." As of March 2023, King County has 14 hotels and apartment buildings in the Health Through Housing portfolio, dedicated to emergency and permanent supportive housing with 24/7 support.²⁶

Los Angeles

Los Angeles has a population of 3.9 million people with about 42,000 people experiencing homelessness with nearly 28,500 people experiencing unsheltered

²⁵ [One Seattle Homelessness Action Plan](#)

²⁶ [Health Through Housing](#)

homelessness.²⁷ The City of Los Angeles experienced a 32 per cent increase in overall homelessness between 2018 and 2020; however, in 2022, the curve began to flatten, demonstrating a 1.7 per cent increase from 2020. Policy makers are attributing this progress to the housing and economic programs that were implemented during the pandemic.²⁸ Specifically, significant federal and state funding was provided to increase the number of non-congregate shelter housing options (i.e. housing with supports through hotel programs), providing rental assistance for individuals facing homelessness, supporting the development of new affordable units, and stabilizing housing with supports.²⁹ As a result, LA City's sheltered population grew by 8.7 per cent (13,522 people) and saw a 1.4 per cent drop in the number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.³⁰

In 2022 Los Angeles elected a new mayor who quickly declared a state of emergency on homelessness.³¹ Mayor Bass used an Executive Directive to initiate the Inside Safe program, which is focused solely on housing people from encampments.³² Shortly after that, Los Angeles City Council unanimously supported the use of \$50 million for the "Homelessness Emergency Account".³³ The program identifies five goals: reducing mortality from homelessness, increasing access to mental health and substance use supports, housing stability, eliminating encampments, and enhancing safety and hygiene for everyone. The Mayor of Los Angeles has appointed a Chief of Housing and Homeless Solutions to coordinate and execute the program, which will result in a report on the city-wide plan to respond to encampments. The Los Angeles Homelessness Services Authority is the primary coordinator of the City's homelessness response and administers funding from all orders of government to over 100 service providers.³⁴

There are some strong examples of integrated homelessness and housing responses led by funded partners in LA's homelessness system of care. The non-profit Homeless Health Care Los Angeles (HHCLA)³⁵ provides "needle exchange, overdose reversal kits with naloxone, linkages to housing, hygiene services, medical and behavioral health services." Their housing team does assessments, case management, and connects people to the supportive housing system. The County of Los Angeles Public Health Department runs public health clinics where they offer

²⁷ [2022 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count, Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, Countywide Geography Survey](#)

²⁸ [LAHSA Releases 2022 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count Results](#), Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, September 9, 2022

²⁹ [California's Project Roomkey, Homelessness and COVID-19 Innovation Snapshot](#), California Health Care Foundation, July 2020

³⁰ [LAHSA Releases 2022 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count Results](#), Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, September 9, 2022

³¹ [LA County declares state of emergency on homelessness](#), County of Los Angeles Homelessness Initiative, January 11, 2023

³² [Mayor Bass Signs Executive Directive Launching Inside Safe Changing the City's Encampment Approach, City of Los Angeles webpage](#)

³³ [Los Angeles Office of the City Clerk](#), City Council Meetings Calendar, Archived Meetings, Journal, January 18, 2023

³⁴ [Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, What We Do](#)

³⁵ [Homeless Health Care Los Angeles webpage](#), December 21, 2022

fentanyl testing strips and other harm reduction supplies,³⁶ while the Department of Health Services offers a range of programs and supports, including a Housing for Health program which provides permanent supportive housing to people with complex health needs.

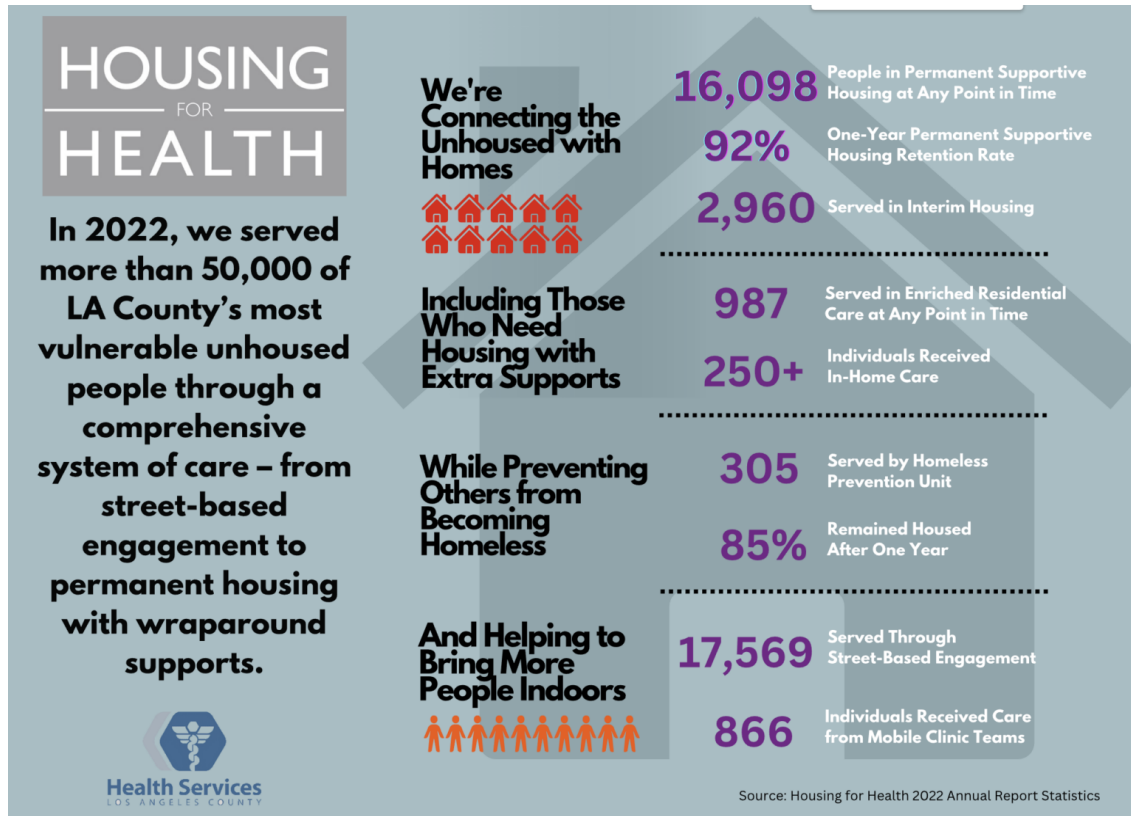


Image 4. Recent accomplishments of the Housing for Health program³⁷

³⁶ [County of Los Angeles Public Health](#) webpage

³⁷ [Who We Are, Housing for Health](#), Department of Health Services, Los Angeles County webpage