The severe economic impact of COVID-19 has created a tremendous need for housing assistance for low-income people. Federal, state, and local governments have responded with resources available for homelessness prevention. This document is designed to help communities create homelessness prevention programs that are **effective and efficient** in the current moment. It describes concepts that are used in homelessness prevention and public health contexts, and it describes factors that communities should consider as they develop homelessness prevention programs. However, it is not a comprehensive guide to homelessness prevention, nor is it designed to provide guidance on federal policy.

Prevention programs reduce homelessness when they are both effective and efficient. Effective interventions help people who are at risk to find and maintain stable housing and avoid homelessness. Efficient interventions provide assistance to the people who are most likely to experience homelessness if they do not receive assistance and minimize the extent to which resources are provided to those who are unlikely to experience homelessness.[1]

This document explains commonly used categories of homelessness prevention to guide decisions that promote being effective and efficient. These categories include:

- Primary prevention strategies that attempt to mitigate the direct factors that lead to homelessness.
- Secondary prevention strategies that help people find safe alternatives when they are seeking shelter or are likely to have to stay in an unsheltered location.
- Tertiary strategies that provide stabilization assistance to people who have already experienced homelessness to mitigate the impact of their homelessness and prevent another occurrence.

For each type of prevention, the following chart provides more description and factors communities should address if they are designing those kinds of prevention. In practice, these categories are fluid, and prevention programs often cross over between different categories.

Type of Prevention	Description	Considerations
Primary Prevention: Universal Strategies	**Goal** Universal strategies broadly reduce the risk of housing instability and homelessness; examples include public housing, Housing Choice Vouchers, SSI, TANF, Head Start, unemployment benefits, Medicaid, legal aid, tenant rights policies, and affordable housing production. **Target Population** All households near or below the poverty line. **Activities** - Increase the income and assets of low-income households. - Provide housing assistance to low-income households. - Increase the availability of affordable housing. - Reduce physical or behavioral health problems that contribute to homelessness.	The target population for universal strategies is very large and to be effective, universal strategies should affect all or most of the target population. It is difficult to measure the impact of universal strategies on homelessness. Universal strategies have benefits for households beyond just preventing homelessness. Universal strategies serve a large number of people for every episode of homelessness they prevent. To be effective at reducing homelessness, universal strategies are almost always large programs with a high overall cost that serve a large number of households.

[1]http://www.evidenceonhomelessness.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Homelessness_Prevention_Literature_Synthesis.pdf

	• Increase family stability. • Provide legal protections to people facing discrimination. • Ensure that households are benefiting from programs and policies by enrolling eligible households. • Ensure that universal prevention programs and policies are effectively implemented.	
Primary Prevention: Selected Group Strategies	**Goal** Selected prevention strategies aim to keep marginalized populations housed. The goal is to target housing assistance to households who face significant structural barriers that make the loss of housing more likely. **Target Population** Groups or populations that have a particularly high risk of homelessness, for example: • Households living in neighborhoods where a high percentage of residents lived before experiencing homelessness; • Individuals with criminal justice histories; • Households that moved frequently in the past year; • Households with children younger than two years old; and • Households involved with child protective services. **Activities** • Use local and national data to identify households at higher risk of homelessness. • Target resources to neighborhoods and communities with significant overrepresentation in your homeless system. • Provide housing and income assistance to high-risk households.	Use local data to determine which groups are most likely to experience homelessness; this will lead to greater effectiveness. If your community does not have localized data regarding risk of homelessness, selected group strategies are less likely to have an impact on homelessness. Selected group strategies can promote racial equity by enabling a community to target populations that are disproportionately more likely to experience homelessness. As with universal strategies, being able to serve all or most people in the target population is very important. If a program cannot serve a high proportion of people in the selected group, it will result in wasted resources in the program and more importantly, wasted time and frustration for program participants. ESG-CV and CDBG-CV funds may be a good resource for selected group strategies if there are enough resources available to serve most or all of the target population. Other useful sources of funding include Housing Choice Vouchers and TANF.
Primary Prevention: Indicated Group Strategies	**Goal** Indicated prevention strategies aim to keep people housed who are likely to have to stay in an emergency shelter or unsheltered location because of individual circumstances, or because they have experienced a crisis event (e.g. DV, health problem, lost housing) that is likely to lead to homelessness. **Target Population** Households with low incomes (typically below 30% or 50% of Area Median Income) who are experiencing a particular crisis that puts them at risk of an emergency shelter stay or needing to reside in an unsheltered location. For example: • Households who have eviction proceedings initiated;	It is important to identify both risk and protective factors to be efficient with indicated group strategies. For example, households that have family connections or who are able to live with friends or family are less likely to experience shelter stays or have to reside in unsheltered locations. On the other hand, those with family conflict or a lack of any family connections are more likely to become homeless. These strategies typically require the use of an assessment tool to determine who is most likely to experience homelessness. Working with other systems is very important for successful indicated group strategies. Many people who are at the highest risk of homelessness do not seek help, or they are

	• Households who make a housing hotline call for assistance; • Households who are losing their homes or have an eviction threat and recently lost employment in a sector impacted substantially by COVID-19 shutdowns; • Individuals who exit institutions like detention, jails, prisons, or hospitals; or • Individuals who age out of foster care. **Activities** • Identify factors that lead to homelessness that will be used to target assistance. Use risk and protective factors to indicate a high likelihood of sheltered and unsheltered homelessness. • Develop an assessment tool to determine who will be served by the program and what kind of assistance they will be eligible to receive. • Ensure that the program is designed to provide the assistance or services that will be needed to prevent homelessness for people at high risk (one-time assistance may be helpful, but many households will need more).	ineffective at seeking help. Often key partners (e.g. health clinics, schools, police, religious leaders) will be the first ones to know whether someone is at risk. Working with other systems is also important because you want to avoid encouraging other systems to reduce their level of care due to the existence of a prevention program. For example, a prison or hospital may fail to do adequate discharge planning and simply refer clients to your prevention program. ESG-CV funds can be a helpful resource for indicated group strategies. Other useful resources include CDBG-CV, SSVF and TANF.
Secondary Prevention	**Goal** Secondary prevention strategies are commonly referred to as diversion strategies. They aim to provide a safe alternative for people who are seeking shelter or are moving to an unsheltered location. Often, secondary prevention programs will identify short-term solutions, such as staying with a family member or delaying an eviction for a couple weeks while working with a participant on a more permanent solution. **Target Population** • Households that are already seeking shelter or facing unsheltered situations. • Households fleeing domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking. **Activities** • Create procedures at coordinated entry access points AND emergency shelters to implement a problem-solving approach. • Train staff on mediation techniques. • Identify flexible funding sources.	Because secondary prevention targets people with the highest risk of homelessness, it is more efficient at reducing the number of people who need shelter or who will stay in unsheltered locations. Secondary prevention programs typically have lower success rates because they serve people who are much closer to experiencing homelessness. Secondary prevention should be closely synchronized with coordinated entry systems and emergency shelters. Secondary prevention requires trained staff with good problem-solving skills. Secondary prevention can reduce homelessness regardless of whether they reach all or most of the people who would be eligible. By preventing stays in shelters with shared sleeping areas, secondary prevention plays a key role in reducing COVID-19 exposure and spread. ESG-CV is a good resource for secondary prevention. Other resources include the Emergency Food and Shelter Program, TANF, and SSVF.
Tertiary Prevention	**Goal** Tertiary prevention strategies aim to stabilize housing for people who have experienced	Tertiary prevention strategies should be built into homeless assistance programs whenever possible.

homelessness to both mitigate the impact of homelessness and prevent future episodes. **Target Population** • Households who have experienced homelessness. **Activities** • Work with landlords to identify when a household is at risk of losing their housing. • Work with households to increase income and reduce risk factors such as household conflict that could lead to a reoccurrence of homelessness.	Tertiary prevention can also be combined with indicated prevention strategies. Because people who experience homelessness have a greater risk of experiencing it again, tertiary prevention is usually an efficient approach.

Framework adapted from The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness' Homelessness Prevention: The Public Health Model

Key Points:

- When developing a homelessness prevention policy, you will need to understand the number of households you will be targeting and make sure you have the resources needed to serve most or all people in that target group. One common problem with homelessness prevention programs is that they have only enough resources to serve a small share of their target population. This leads to frustration among applicants who waste time applying for assistance that they are unlikely to receive. It also increases the cost because the program has to process applications for people who will ultimately never receive assistance.

- ESG-CV and other homelessness assistance program funding sources are best suited for prevention strategies where there is a high likelihood that the households being served will experience homelessness, especially secondary prevention. They are poorly suited for universal strategies because they typically do not provide enough resources to reach a large share of low-income people.

- The most common pathways into homelessness are exits from an institutional setting or from a doubled-up arrangement. People who have experienced homelessness in the past are more likely to experience it in the future. Other major risk factors include foster care involvement and criminal justice involvement.[2] Use this information about common pathways to inform how you might create targeted strategies.

- Households seeking shelter are the most likely to experience homelessness, while households who are facing eviction in the next 30 days are unlikely to experience sheltered or unsheltered homelessness. HUD's recent study on Market Predictors of Homelessness indicates that overcrowding has the highest anticipated effect on homelessness, followed by unemployment, and then evictions.

- It will be important to communicate to stakeholders which population is being targeted by prevention programs and what kinds of assistance are provided. Clear and transparent information will greatly improve a prevention program's effectiveness and efficiency.

- Although many homelessness prevention programs have little impact on homelessness, they can have other major benefits for recipients. Preventing an eviction has great benefit for a household, even if the household would not have experienced homelessness.

- Measuring the success of a homelessness prevention program is extremely challenging since both effectiveness and efficiency are part of the measure. Often, projects that claim high success rates (e.g. 95 percent of people served did not become homeless) are more likely targeting households that have a much lower likelihood of sheltered or unsheltered homelessness in the first place. In other words, these strategies are highly effective but inefficient. Programs that show lower rates of success may actually indicate better targeting and be highly efficient. The trick in prevention planning is to find the balance of doing enough targeting to be efficient but not to do so exclusively, or in a way that cannot respond to significant increases in households outside the target population criteria that are seeking shelter or assistance because they become unsheltered.

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[2] http://www.evidenceonhomelessness.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Homelessness_Prevention_Literature_Synthesis.pdf

- This document provides Five Things to Consider when aligning resources in targeted prevention strategies.

To read more about homelessness prevention, explore these resources:

- Homelessness Prevention from the Evidence Based Center on Homelessness
- A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention from the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness
- Predicting and Preventing Homelessness in Los Angeles from The California Policy Lab and The Poverty Lab
- Homelessness Prevention, Diversion, and Rapid Exit from USICH, HUD and VA
- A Prevention-Centered Approach to Homelessness Assistance: A Paradigm Shift?