

COVID-19 Homeless System Response: Prevention to Promote Equity

Well-designed homelessness prevention that is centered around preventing homelessness or housing instability within the environmental and structural factors that result in the disproportionate rates of Black, Hispanic, and Native American households experiencing COVID-19¹ illness, housing instability, and homelessness will promote equity.

Embedding principles of equity throughout the design, implementation, and monitoring of targeted prevention activities offers a community an opportunity to move energy and resources to those most impacted by both deep poverty and high rates of COVID-19 cases and to provide equitable access to needed resources to achieve equitable outcomes.

Determining Households for Prevention

Use the [Framework for Homelessness Prevention](#) to guide your approach, set specific goals, scale resources, and assess the impact of your targeted prevention efforts to promote equity. Be clear about whether you are intending your targeting to focus on primary prevention, secondary prevention, tertiary prevention strategies, or some combination of these. When designing primary prevention strategies, be clear on whether you are designing selected or indicated group strategies. Along the way, conduct a Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) to continue refining your approach based on local data.

Being clear requires your community to have a deep understanding of who should be targeted. Here are some additional factors that reflect racial disparities and increase a household's risk of housing instability and homelessness:

1. Households living in neighborhoods or zip codes where large numbers of people last resided before seeking help with housing assistance.
HOW: Find these neighborhoods here: [Rental Housing Instability, Homelessness, and COVID-19 Map](#) or [Eviction Lab](#).
2. Households living in neighborhoods with the highest rates of illness from COVID-19.
HOW: Find these rates here: [COVID-19 Cases and Deaths by State](#).
3. Households with heightened risk of severe impacts from COVID-19 exposure.
HOW: Source local data to better understand **communities** with higher prevalence of [underlying conditions](#) that include—but are not limited to—obesity, diabetes, liver disease, chronic lung disease, or moderate to severe asthma, and are immunocompromised.
4. Households with children younger than two years old, or households who are involved with child protective services.
HOW: Find data about these households here: [Kids Count](#).
5. Households who previously received assistance from the homeless system.
HOW: Use Local HMIS and [Stella](#) data.

See this come together for [King County, WA](#).

Equitable Access and Culturally Responsive Prevention Strategies

Once you are clear on who you are targeting for prevention, get specific about enacting an equitable approach:

1. **Partner with Lived Experience and Expertise.** Partner with individuals and families most impacted by the local priorities to co-design prevention strategies. Valuing knowledge from past or present experience will inform and improve the design and implementation of the determined prevention strategies. Engagement must go beyond representation in the planning process and requires that individuals and families involved have decision-making power and access to resources needed to support their participation (childcare, transportation, time and

¹ <https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/2020/04/15/coronavirus-risk-90-patients-had-underlying-conditions/2962721001/>

location of planning activities, payment for time, access to information, etc.). Lean on existing advisory committees and recruit interested parties through connections with trusted community-based organizations, including those outside of traditional homeless system partners.

Examples and Resources:

- [SNAPS In Focus: Integrating Persons with Lived Experiences in our Efforts to Prevent and End Homelessness](#)
- [LEAB \(Lived Experience Advisory Board\)](#)
- [Baltimore City Lived Experience Advisory Committee](#)
- [Seven principles for leadership & inclusion of people with lived experience of homelessness](#)

- 2. Do Community Engagement and Outreach with Communities, Individuals, and Organizations Trained by People Experiencing Homelessness.** Partner with individuals and community organizations who are relevant to the households who are seeking help to implement prevention programs. This includes organizations like legal aid, immigrant services, school-based family resource agencies, culturally specific agencies, and faith-based organizations. Collaboration with these partners leans into the trust and confidence individuals and families most impacted may already have with these identified agencies and can inform and improve planning and implementation strategies. Collaboration must go beyond representation in the planning process; these partners understand deeply the experiences of their neighbors and communities and offer strategies that are often missed by the traditional homeless response system.

Examples and Resources:

- [Your Way Home: Diversion and Prevention](#)
- [Your Way Home: 10 Ways We've Advanced Equity in the Past Year](#)

- 3. Design Screening Tools to Get to the Population You Mean to Serve Equitably.** Screening for prevention assistance within the targeted population must not result in service decisions based on membership in a protected class (e.g., race, ethnicity, sex), BUT these decisions *can* be based on vulnerabilities. Designing appropriate screening strategies can include collaborations with school districts, healthcare systems/hospitals, housing courts, public social service agencies, or senior centers and can help you identify additional and specific vulnerabilities you could include.

Examples and Resources:

- [Youth-Homelessness Prevention Targeting Tool](#)

- 4. Fund Culturally Responsive Partners.** Fund partners with an established presence and connection to households in targeted, high-risk neighborhoods to participate as access points, develop marketing/communication strategy, and administer related prevention activities. This will result in increased access and improved outcomes AND the capacity to develop more culturally responsive prevention activities in the ethnic and cultural community context in which the household resides.

***This step will require designing the procurement process that decreases barriers to the competition and incentives strategies that align with equity-based performance.

Examples and Resources:

- [The Village of Hope Seattle](#)
- [Your Way Home Advisory Council](#)
- [Government Alliance on Race & Equity: Contracting for Equity](#)

Monitoring Outcomes Across Targeted Households

- 1. Make sure you are collecting the data you need.** The [HMIS Data Standards](#) outline what is required—if your needs go beyond that (example: zip codes for identifying households from specific neighborhoods), work with your [HMIS lead](#) to add that into your system.

2. **Know your system.** [Stella P](#) uses HMIS data for analyses of demographics and system performance, illuminating how people are served in your system and whether access, system use, and housing outcomes vary for different groups. Knowing these 'System Pathways,' or how people navigate your system, and how outcomes vary for different groups is important for resource allocation, performance target development, and system health and equity analyses.
3. **Identify meaningful measures that connect directly to the goals.** Example: exits to permanent destinations, reducing entries, returns to the homelessness response system.
4. **Consistently bring data forward** for accountability, information, and action at multiple tables and groups to solicit observations and feedback at different levels and backgrounds.
5. Measure by measure, group by group, **identify how data will indicate success** (e.g., fewer system entries from target households over time) and collaboratively draft action plans or policies in response to a measure trending in the opposite direction of success (e.g., if system entries increase over time, we as a system, will...).
6. **Monitor progress regularly**, and draft and implement action plans, adjusting as needed. Review the measures identified and how progress is being made—are you seeing fewer entries from the target households? If not, adjust strategies as needed (e.g., more targeted outreach and prevention to a specific zip code).

Additional Resources:

- [Racial Equity Impact Assessment \(REIA\)](#).
 - For an example, see [St. Pauls' Toolkit](#).
- [Market Predictors of Homelessness](#).
- [Linking Housing Challenges and Racial Disparities in COVID-19](#).
- [Communities of Color at Higher Risk for Health and Economic Challenges due to COVID-19](#).