

Housing Insecurity & Emergency Resources Assessment Guide

March 2024

This document provides guidance and access to a template that can be used for conducting an environmental scan of currently available community prevention resources, completing community interviews to gain a fuller understanding of how people access those resources, as well as considerations for aligning and developing partnerships to support a Coordinated Prevention approach.

Examples of different community partners that might participate in a community's Coordinated Prevention system or approach are provided, along with potential opportunities for and considerations for partnering and improving coordination, targeting, and expedited access to prevention assistance for households with more severe and urgent needs. Resources and potential partners to examine include: 1) current diversion and targeted homelessness assistance providers, and 2) community providers that administer prevention-related resources, and other potential "access points" where people can be readily screened and offered direct assistance or connection to assistance, including key cross-sector partners (e.g., healthcare, education, criminal justice, child welfare).

The resource assessment should be informed by community members through community interviews, which can be conducted as part of the needs assessment process (HSLC Foundational Priority 2). These interviews should focus on how people learn about and access prevention assistance, what the experience and steps are like for them, and what could be improved.

This assessment should be guided by inflow analysis and community data pointing to areas where there is greater housing insecurity and literal homelessness occurring and where more robust and immediately accessible housing problem-solving and prevention resources are needed. Communities may choose to be selective when first compiling partner information, including focusing only on certain areas with higher need.

Audience: Community Core Prevention Team

HSLC Foundational Priority:

- **3. Examine Current Housing Insecurity & Emergency Responses (months 2-4)**

Topics:

- [Environmental Scan](#)
- [Coordinated Homelessness Prevention Partner Types](#)

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- [Community Interviews](#)

Related Tools/Guidance:

- [HSLC Environmental Scan & Partner Development Workbook](#)

Community Examples:

- Columbus: [Partner Environmental Scan & Planning Workbook](#)
- Hartford: [Hartford Inflow Qualitative Interview Intake Form & Questionnaire](#)

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ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

Objective: Inventory and assess current prevention resources and potential partners within a defined geographic area (e.g., Continuum of Care geographic area; areas with higher housing insecurity, based on heat map analysis conducted as part of Foundational Priority 2 Needs Assessment). Information should be used to understand current prevention-related resources based on **Coordinated Homelessness Prevention Partner Types** described below and within the linked **Environmental Scan** tool. Stakeholders should consider to what extent prevention resources and **Core Elements of Coordinated Prevention** are already in place and what opportunities exist to further improve access, coordination, and targeting.

Data to Examine:

- Current homeless response system “coordinated entry system” or similar system “access point” provider(s), location(s), capacity, and current referral relationships partnerships with community partners;
- All existing homelessness “diversion” and “targeted homelessness prevention” programs including their specific funding sources and requirements;
- Emergency rental assistance providers (all funding sources);
- Major community service providers commonly turned to by people with financial, food, or other material assistance needs (e.g., Community Action Agency, The Salvation Army, other local non-profits);
- Other service providers who offer a range of social supports for lower income households (e.g., food pantries, drop-in centers, child care centers)
- Partners who operate public facilities in lower income, higher housing insecurity areas (e.g., library branches, recreation centers, school personnel/homeless school liaisons);
- Cross-sector partners that serve housing insecure populations and conduct or may be willing to conduct coordinated approaches to screening, assisting, and linking people who are housing insecure to available community resources, including those with more urgent or complex needs;
- Other faith-based organizations, trusted community organizations, and business partners (e.g., barber shops, laundromats, Veteran Service Organizations) potentially willing to share information with and connect people in need - i.e., serve as an “Access Point.”

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Questions to Consider:

- Are programs currently funded to provide targeted homelessness prevention part of a coordinated prevention approach (e.g., as part of the homeless response system coordinated entry/front-door diversion)?
 - If not, what if any barriers exist for the provider(s) to participate in a coordinated access to diversion/prevention process for people seeking emergency shelter or engaging with street outreach for the first time?
- In areas with higher housing insecurity:
 - Are there current/potential partners physically located in or otherwise readily accessible to people living those areas?
 - Which entity(ies) might be interested and motivated to participate in initial testing and development of coordinated prevention approaches (screening/triage, housing problem-solving, and resource navigation)?
 - Are any entities 'obvious' choices as a potential key partner in those areas – i.e., could possibly serve as a 'hub' or lead housing resource center/provider in the area for other 'access point' partners?
 - How do people currently learn about and access these providers?
 - Are these potential access point partners who might screen and offer assistance with prioritized access to targeted homelessness prevention?
- Are there entities that should be invited to have representation on the Core PreventionTeam?
- For entities providing prevention-related assistance of any kind:
 - Would they be open to using standardized screening questions to identify and provide immediate Housing Problem-Solving and other prioritized assistance to avoid imminent literal homelessness (i.e., offering households screened as high risk "prioritized access" to the next available appointment)?
- Do any partners currently have staff who are trained in Housing Problem-Solving?
- How interested and willing are providers in having staff trained in Housing Problem-Solving and participating in Coordinated Prevention approaches?
- What other information is needed to understand the universe of potential partners and partnership opportunities?
- What other community coalitions, networks, etc., exist, if any, where entities convene to discuss and coordinate emergency rental assistance? What opportunities exist to leverage and collaborate with existing efforts?

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COORDINATED HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION: PARTNER TYPES

Coordinated Homelessness Prevention			
PARTNER TYPES	<i>Diversion & Targeted Homelessness Prevention</i> SERVICE PROVIDERS	<i>Other Prevention-Related</i> SERVICE PROVIDERS	ACCESS POINTS
Description	Programs funded and designed to provide diversion and/or targeted homelessness prevention for households at-risk of literal homelessness within a specific timeframe (e.g., tonight, within 14 days, within 30 days) "but for" targeted prevention assistance.	Social service agencies and other entities that intentionally or incidentally provide any form of prevention-related assistance (financial, food, material, other service supports) for at-risk households.	Any type of entity encountering households who may be at-risk of housing instability or homelessness that is willing and able to conduct light screening and resource connections. Entities generally do not provide prevention-related services and/or are not able to engage in the system as a Tier B as prevention service provider.
Current Practices	<p>Diversion assistance typically focuses on safe alternatives for those seeking shelter or who are newly homeless, while targeted homelessness prevention programs screen-in and prioritize higher risk households as part of standard eligibility and intake procedures.</p> <p>Targeted homelessness prevention typically offers more in-depth assessment and housing problem-solving, financial assistance, and often can provide more intensive and extended housing relocation (if needed) and stabilization supports.</p> <p>Diversion and targeted homelessness prevention services are often not as fully integrated or coordinated within communities as they could be to ensure seamless, expedited, person-centered assistance that can offer more intensive support when diversion assistance alone is insufficient.</p>	<p>Community resources that may help stabilize housing and prevent housing loss are diverse and varied and typically include existing emergency rental assistance, mediation services, legal services, and utility assistance programs. Such resources are typically not targeted to higher risk households, with exception of eligibility criteria that may limit assistance households meeting minimum income and/or other basic criteria.</p> <p>Assistance is often "first come, first served" and typically has only a limited and indirect effect on the number of people needing emergency shelter each night. Community providers typically do not prioritize assistance or screen for more urgent and severe forms of housing insecurity risk.</p>	<p>Various types of partners across the community that encounter people who are housing insecure and formally or informally offer information, referral, and sometimes a warm connection (e.g., support to make a phone call and appointment) with a community service provider.</p> <p>Many cross-sector partners that refer to community prevention resources screen clients/patients/guests for critical needs (e.g., healthcare screening for "social determinants of health"), but lack a formal, expedited process for connecting people who have the most urgent or severe needs.</p>

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<p>Coordinated Prevention Opportunities</p>	<p>Integrate diversion and targeted homelessness prevention for seamless transition to additional assistance for households with greater needs, ongoing risk.</p> <p>Establish screening and triage protocols that assure all at-risk Veterans are immediately connected to VA-funded Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program, which offers targeted homelessness prevention assistance for at-risk Veterans.</p> <p>Train/certify staff on intensive Housing Problem-Solving and require routine training refreshers and recertification for all Diversion/Prevention direct service staff.</p>	<p>Use standardized brief screening tool to identify higher risk households.</p> <p>Train/certify staff on intensive Housing Problem-Solving to reduce unnecessary referrals to the homeless response system front-door.</p> <p>Establish formal processes to facilitate expedited referral and access to prevention-related services, when needed, to prevent literal homelessness for higher risk households.</p>	<p>Use standardized brief screening tool to identify higher risk households.</p> <p>Train/certify staff on basic Housing Problem-Solving to reduce unnecessary referrals to the homeless response system front-door.</p> <p>Establish formal processes to facilitate expedited referral and access to prevention-related services, when needed, to prevent literal homelessness for higher risk households.</p>
<p>Examples</p>	<p>Examples: Diversion and prevention assistance funded by HUD Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) program or VA SSVF program</p>	<p>Examples: Community Action Agency; Legal Aid Society; FEMA Emergency Food & Shelter Program (EFSP) provider; Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) provider</p>	<p>Examples: Primary care/urgent care clinic; Local library branch; homeless school liaison; eviction court staff/program; property management company; recreation center staff; food pantry</p>

COMMUNITY INTERVIEWS

Objective: Understand and document common user *experiences with accessing prevention assistance resources*, along with experiences and insights from prevention staff.

Data to Examine:

- Qualitative information from interviews and/or focus groups with people using prevention assistance regarding their experiences and insights.
- Qualitative information from interviews and/or focus groups with frontline staff regarding their experiences and insights.

Questions to consider:

- What do people know about prevention assistance and how to access it?
- What do people experience when they're trying to access prevention assistance, including accessing prevention assistance during a housing crisis?
- What do people experience after they've resolved their housing crisis with regard to the service supports, resources, and prevention safeguards available to avoid a return to homelessness?
- What do frontline staff experience when they're trying to provide prevention assistance, with regard to needed support, resources, and training?
- Are there opportunities to improve access, timeliness, or the effectiveness of prevention - i.e., increase targeted homelessness prevention so it's most readily accessible to those most in need?