Indicators of a Racially Equitable Homeless Response System

Background

As with any system, a homeless response system that is not explicitly designed to identify and respond to racial inequity will potentially sustain and even deepen it. Communities working to end homelessness expressed interest in addressing racial disparities in their homeless response systems, but there was no widely used or validated measurement framework for achieving a racially equitable homeless response system.

Purpose

With input from our external partners, community leaders, and people with lived experience of homelessness, Built for Zero has developed a framework to support communities to measure and design a racially equitable homeless response system. The framework seeks to equip communities with indicators, and accompanying measures, to signal progress toward four critical areas of a racially equitable homeless response system.

We recognize that this framework is limited in scope, and should be treated as such.

• These measures and indicators **do not alone** define a racially equitable system, and we encourage communities to determine whether there are additional indicators and measures to incorporate into its work.
• This framework intentionally focuses on improvements in the homeless response system and does not include upstream systems that contribute to the overall disproportionality of people of color — particularly Black and Native Americans — experiencing homelessness.
• With learning comes improvement. As communities begin measuring and designing toward racially equitable systems, it is likely these indicators will change.

DEFINITION OF A RACIALLY EQUITABLE HOMELESS RESPONSE SYSTEM

INDICATORS

SYSTEM DECISION-MAKING POWER

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) at all levels of the homeless response system have decision-making power to influence the design of the system.

LIVED EXPERIENCE

BIPOC receiving services from the homeless response system have experiences that preserve their dignity and have their needs met in a timely manner.

QUALITY DATA

All people experiencing homelessness have access to the system and are known by name in real-time. Communities accurately collect data around race and ethnicity.

SYSTEM OUTCOMES

Communities close all racial/ethnic disproportionality in housing placements, returns to homelessness, and the average length of time from identification to housing by improving outcomes for BIPOC who experience homelessness.

MEASURES

SYSTEM DECISION-MAKING POWER

Communities have created and implemented formal design & decision-making roles for BIPOC including but not limited to: people currently experiencing homelessness, people with previous experience of homelessness, and front line staff.

These formal roles and their selection criteria are designed with and approved by stakeholders representing the target group.

LIVED EXPERIENCE

Using data collection procedures and aims developed in partnership with a stakeholder group of individuals experiencing homelessness, BIPOC receiving services from the homeless response system report interactions that preserve their dignity and that meet their needs in a timely manner.

All data collection procedures include provisions prohibiting retaliation against or delay or declination of service delivery to anyone reporting an unsatisfactory experience. These provisions must be approved by the stakeholder group.

QUALITY DATA

Communities score 100% on the By-Name List (BNL) Scorecard with new racial equity content that aims to ensure data is collected appropriately, of high quality, and complete.

- Staff working with, sharing and communicating race and equity data are demonstrating best practices to mitigate racial bias in data.
- The data collection process around race and ethnicity fields respects self-identification of clients, and best practices to acknowledge the sensitivity around these data points are demonstrated by frontline staff charged with collecting this data.
- Race and ethnicity data is collected for at least 90% of the individuals on the BNL with high degree of confidence in accuracy.

Communities can visualize and share data disaggregated by race/ethnicity from their quality BNLs.

SYSTEM OUTCOMES

Racial/ethnic disproportionality in housing placement outcomes, returns to homelessness, and the average length of time from identification to housing is analyzed with an intersectional lens (considering gender identity, age, and sexual orientation) and documented.

Eliminate disproportionality across racial/ethnic groups by improving outcomes:
- Housing placements
- Returns to homelessness
- Length of time homeless

Assumptions/Methodology

- **Defining "disproportionality."** We define "disproportionality" in relation to the homeless population in a community's Continuum of Care geography.
- **Quality data.** We are assuming a community must achieve data quality in their By Name List before and as part of working towards zero racial disproportionality.
- **Returns to homelessness.** Returns to homelessness may include both individuals who were permanently housed and subsequently lost their housing, and individuals who were previously designated as "inactive" on their community By Name List.
- **Excluding inflow.** This framework intentionally focuses on improvements in the homeless response system and does not include upstream systems that contribute to the overall disproportionality of people of color — particularly Black and Native Americans — experiencing homelessness. Thus, we are intentionally not including inflow in the scope of measuring zero disproportionality. Since inflow is not included, a community's actively homeless number is also not included in this definition because an actively homeless number is simply a tally of inflow vs. outflow month over month.

Key Terms

- **BIPOC:** Black, Indigenous and People of Color
- **Equity/Equitable:** Racial equity the absence of overt racial discrimination and the presence of deliberate policies and practices that provide everyone with the support they need to improve the quality of their lives. To pursue equity, policies and frameworks for society must address the underlying and systemic differences of opportunity and access to social resources.
- **Homeless Response System:** The system - including the process components and resources - that is accountable to identifying people experiencing homelessness, providing services that respond to their immediate human needs, and ultimately connects people with permanent housing, ensuring this experience is brief, rare and nonrecurring. An effective homeless response system achieves these things through:
  - Outreach
  - Coordinated Entry
  - Diversion and Prevention
  - Low-Barrier Emergency and Interim Housing
  - Permanent Housing
- **By-name list/Quality by-name list (BNL/QBNL):** A list or database of documenting the movement of homeless individuals through a community's coordinated system to end homelessness, kept up in as close to real-time as possible. A quality by-name list is one that meets the minimum thresholds for data quality outlined in the BNL scorecard.
- **BNL scorecard:** A tool that measures a community BNL comprehensiveness and quality in terms of elements such as outreach coverage, homeless provider participation, and data completeness/accuracy.
- **Outflow:** Individuals who exited homelessness or went inactive (missing) during a certain period of time.
- **Housing placement:** Individuals experiencing homelessness who are permanently housed during a certain period of time.
- **Inflow:** Individuals who were either newly identified as homeless or returned to homelessness during a certain period of time.
- **Returns to homelessness:** The number of individuals who were previously permanently housed and have become unhoused or have otherwise returned to homelessness.
- **Length of time homeless:** The average length of time from when a homeless individual is first identified to when they move into permanent housing.
- **Actively homeless number:** The number of individuals actively experiencing homelessness during a certain period of time.