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WA State Department of Commerce Homeless System Priorities & Best Practices

October 6, 2016

Proposed Objectives

- Understand Commerce's ***role in granting funds for homeless housing assistance***
- Understand Commerce's ***homeless grant priorities***
- Understand the key components and best practices of a ***homeless crisis response system***

Imagine a day when…

There are no *chronically* homeless people in your community. Or perhaps only a handful, and the few remaining are regularly engaged, and there is housing available for them whenever they decide they are ready for it.

There are no unsheltered families. Your community has enough emergency shelter beds to assist people who cannot be diverted from the system.

Through your targeted and strategic prevention assistance, you've been able to dramatically reduce the number of people experiencing first time homelessness.

Commerce's role in granting funds for homeless housing assistance

Federal Legislation

- HEARTH ACT

State Legislation

- Homeless Housing and Assistance Act
- State Advisory Council on Homelessness
- Interagency Council on Homelessness

Commerce's role in granting funds for homeless housing assistance

Federal

HEARTH ACT

Programs → Systems

Activities → Outcomes

Transitioning → Rapidly ReHousing

Commerce's role in granting funds for homeless housing assistance

Federal

- HEARTH ACT Performance Measures
  - Reduce the # of people who become homeless
  - Reduce the length of time homeless
  - Reduce returns to homelessness
  - Reduce overall homeless

Commerce's role in granting funds for homeless housing assistance

State

- Homeless Housing and Assistance Act

The legislature finds that the fiscal and societal costs of homelessness are high for both the public and private sectors, and that ending homelessness should be a goal for state and local government.

Commerce's role in granting funds for homeless housing assistance

Homeless Housing and Assistance Act

1. Collect and evaluate homeless data
2. Implement best practices
3. Systematic measurement of progress
4. The ultimate goal of *ending* homelessness

Commerce's role in granting funds for homeless housing assistance

Setting policy through the homeless assistance grants

- Consolidated Homeless Grant
- Emergency Solutions Grant

New Office of Homeless Youth

Understand Commerce's homeless grant system priorities

- Prior to 2005
  - Primary local control w/ outputs
- 2006 – 2012
  - Balancing local control w/ focus on performance
- 2012 – 2016
  - State and federal priorities directing performance

Understand Commerce's homeless grant system priorities

Working to create an effective and efficient ***homeless crisis response system*** through

- Coordinated Entry
- Prioritize unsheltered and most vulnerable
- Reducing barriers to assistance
- Functional Zero

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Homeless Crisis Response System

Core tenants of an effective crisis response

- People know where to go for help and can easily access assistance.
- Assistance is client-centric, not program or agency centric.
- People spend the least amount of time being in crisis as possible; the focus is on quickly stabilizing people.
- Assistance is “just enough” to help the client achieve/maintain stability.

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What’s our goal?

People who are experiencing homelessness receive the right intervention and services quickly so that homeless episodes are rare, brief and one time.

Basic Elements

1. Outreach and engagement
2. Coordinated Entry
3. Diversion
4. Emergency shelter
5. Rapid re-housing /progressive engagement
6. Transitional housing
7. Permanent supportive housing

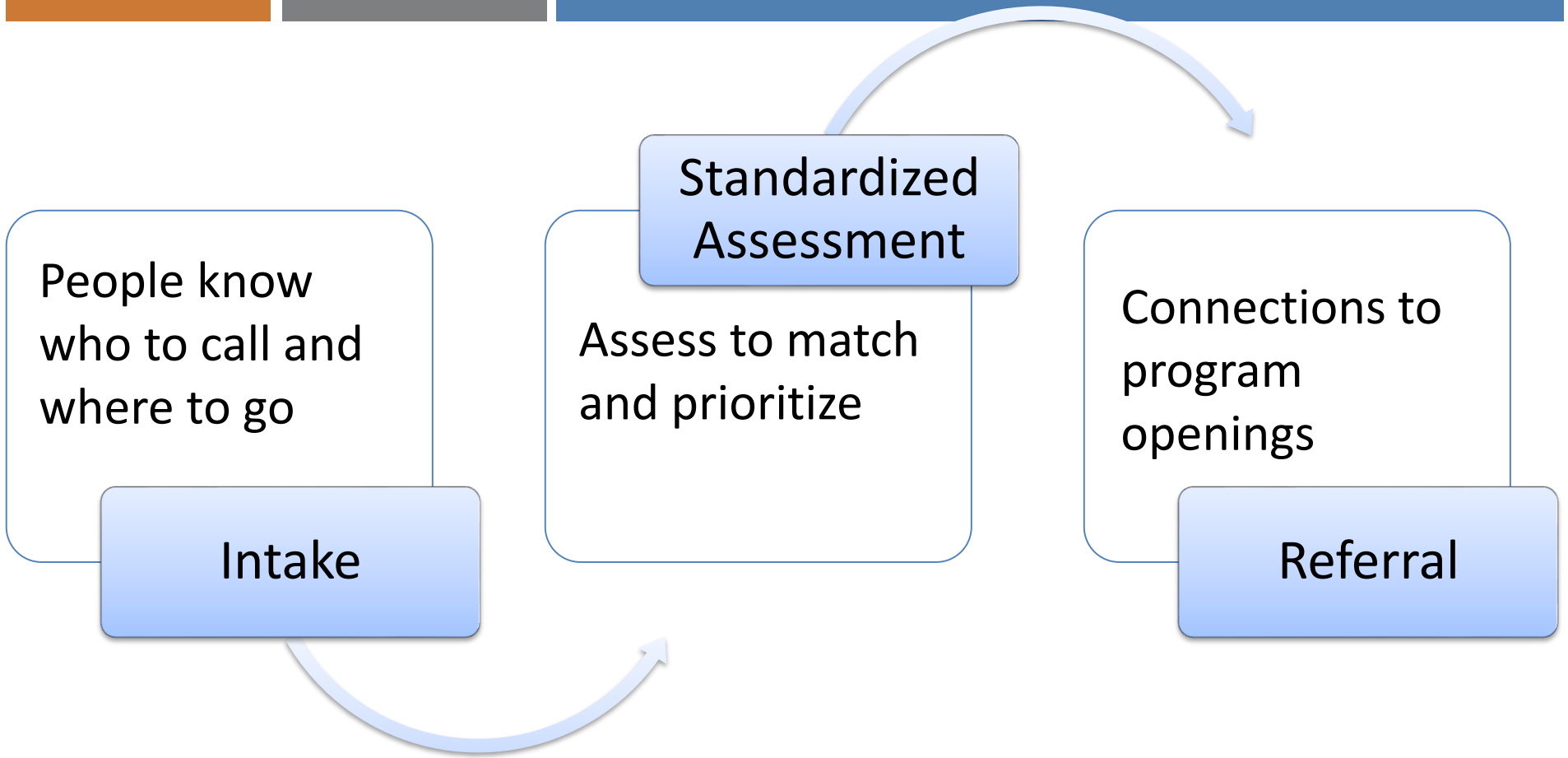
Outreach and engagement

Outreach and crisis response teams are coordinated, trained, and have the ability to engage and quickly connect people experiencing homelessness to the local coordinated entry process.

Outreach and engagement best practice

Coordinated mobile street outreach teams work with local law enforcement, businesses, public health and behavioral health systems.

Coordinated Entry



Coordinated Entry System Design

Centralized: One location

Decentralized: Multiple sites

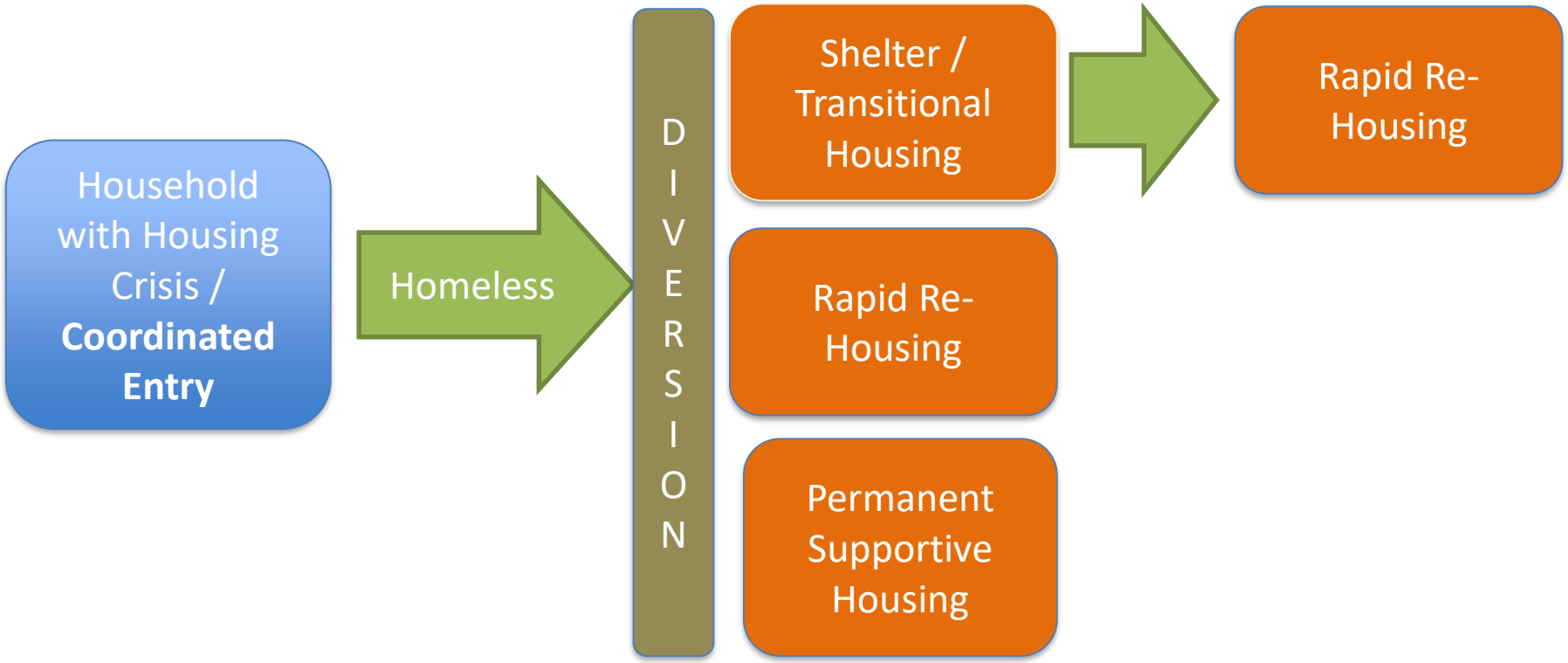
- Geographic
- Population (families, singles)
- Subpopulation (youth, DV)

Virtual / Phone- based: One phone number households can call for intake, assessment and referral.

Why Coordinated Entry?

- Easier for people seeking help: one place to go
- Fair treatment – not dependent on who you know
- Case managers don’t have to manage intakes and waitlists – they can focus on housing
- Collect data on system needs and gaps
- Implement system-wide prioritization

Homeless Housing System Flow



Diversion

- Helps people experiencing homelessness before more costly interventions
- Focus on person's resources and support systems
- Can be creative and flexible—the goal is to restore housing stability as quickly as possible

Diversion best practice

Diversion case managers work with a sense of urgency and believe that the person can (and wants) to quickly resolve their crisis.

Intervention—Emergency Shelter

- **Temporary** housing intervention
- Goal of less than 20 days
- May be a dedicated facility, unit(s), or local hotel/motel
- Voluntary supportive services

Emergency shelter best practice

Exit planning begins when people enter the shelter – there is no getting comfortable and stays are less than 30 days.

Intervention—Rapid Rehousing

- **Permanent** housing intervention
- Addresses the needs of most HHs
- Typically short- to medium-term assistance
- Housing stability case management
- Voluntary supportive services

Best Practice: Progressive Engagement

A strategy of starting with a small amount of assistance and then adding more assistance as needed.

Intervention—Transitional Housing

- **Temporary** housing intervention
- Requires tenants to leave unit after program participation
- Frequently provides longer duration of services

Transitional Housing Best Practice

Supportive services must be voluntary and build on the strengths and resources of each person, respecting their autonomy.

Intervention—Permanent Supportive Housing

- **Permanent** housing intervention
- Requires a household member who has a disabling condition
- Set aside for chronically homeless
- Non-time-limited tenancy
- Voluntary supportive services

Housing First Best Practice

Housing First is a homeless assistance approach that prioritizes providing people experiencing homelessness with permanent **housing** as quickly as possible – and then providing voluntary supportive services as needed.

Housing First Best Practice

Access to programs is not contingent on sobriety, minimum income requirements, lack of a criminal record, completion of treatment, participation in services, or other unnecessary conditions.

Housing First Best Practice

Programs or projects do everything possible not to reject an individual or family on the basis of poor credit or financial history, poor or lack of rental history, minor criminal convictions, or behaviors that are interpreted as indicating a lack of “housing readiness.”

Housing First Best Practice

Participation in services or compliance with service plans are not conditions of tenancy, but are reviewed with tenants and regularly offered as a resource to tenants.

Housing First Best Practice

Substance use in and of itself, without other lease violations, is not considered a reason for eviction.

Housing First Best Practice

Staff in positions across the entire housing and services system are trained in and actively employ evidence-based practices for client/tenant engagement, such as motivational interviewing, client-centered counseling, critical time interventions, and trauma-informed care.

Nothing about us without us

Bring the perspective of lived experience to the forefront

Include people with lived experience in decision making

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