



Ending Homelessness with Mainstream Housing Resources

Whitepaper 1 of 3 Abundance and Prioritization of Existing Resources

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AZCEH Introduction and Whitepaper Vision

The [Arizona Coalition to End Homelessness \(AZCEH\)](#) provides leadership in statewide efforts to end homelessness through advocacy, education and coordination with local communities and initiatives. AZCEH activities include its annual statewide conference; coordination of focused service initiatives such as [Arizona StandDown](#) for homeless veterans and [Project H3: Home, Health, Hope](#) for long term vulnerable homeless individuals and families; and providing education opportunities for service providers, policy makers and advocates working on behalf of men, women and children experiencing homelessness.

AZCEH coordinates collaborative whitepapers as one of many tools in our advocacy and education efforts. This series of whitepapers seek to inform policy makers, service professionals and advocates on strategies to end homelessness with existing mainstream housing resources. We hope that these papers will serve as impetus to change agents and community leaders to call for systems change through the adoption of the policies and practices suggested herein.

In Whitepaper 1, we unveil the abundance of Housing Choice Vouchers available in Arizona to serve individuals and families experiencing homelessness through a reprioritization of turnover vouchers. This paper also discusses some of the policies and practices used by public housing authorities to maintain and update their waiting lists and the disparate impact of such policies on persons experiencing homelessness. Finally, the first whitepaper emphasizes the importance of making sure mainstream government resources are the last resort for individuals and families in need in order for these finite resources to have maximum impact in our communities.

The second whitepaper explores the creation of local preferences for individuals and families experiencing homelessness in Housing Choice Voucher programs. This paper will demonstrate the alignment of such policies with federal, state and local guidelines. It will lay out the mechanics for public housing authorities to implement these preferences and will look at examples of such strategies here in Arizona and across the country.

Our third and final whitepaper in this series explores the importance of coupling client centered, wrap-around supportive services with the Housing Choice Voucher program for formerly homeless individuals and families. The Housing Choice Voucher program is a tremendous resource for ending homelessness in communities, but our public housing authority partners are not expected to solve this problem alone. The third whitepaper will focus on the role of “Navigators” in Project H3: Home, Health, Hope, and how this unique service delivery system integrates best practices from existing supportive services and natural support systems to improve outcomes using “housing first” and recovery principles.

Whitepaper 1: Abundance and Prioritization of Existing Resources

It seems intuitive that the end of homelessness begins with housing. Perhaps less intuitive is the way in which this has been done over the past 40 years. We have built shelter after shelter, time-limited transitional housing programs, scrupulous and oft-unscrupulous half-way houses and a variety of “get treatment first” models. For many, these systems can and do work; there are literally thousands of success stories. Yet, we continue to see the same faces on our streets, in our emergency shelters, in the deserts and forests of our rural communities, and at our outreach events and in our urban centers. Surprisingly, the issue of housing the most vulnerable people experiencing long-term homelessness is easily solved. We need only retool the use of existing resources.

This whitepaper is the first in a 3 part series focused on reprioritizing existing resources to bring us closer, if not all the way, to ending homelessness in Arizona. This first paper illuminates the housing abundance side of this equation and will be followed by one addressing some of the actual mechanics of reprioritizing housing and a final part on creating coupled, wrap-around services for the “formerly” homeless.

[Common Ground](#) has launched the [100,000 Homes Campaign](#) to find and house the most vulnerable and long-term homeless people across the Nation by 2013. [Project H3: Home, Health, Hope](#), launched by [AZCEH](#) as a demonstration project, is the first local implementation of the 100,000 Homes Campaign in Arizona. Project H3 surveyed 262 street-living homeless people from April 20-22, 2010 from 4 a.m. until 6 a.m. each morning administering a simple survey tool called the Vulnerability Index developed by Common Ground. Based on research conducted by Dr. Jim O’Connell and [Boston’s Health Care for the Homeless](#), the Vulnerability Index assesses for 8 critical health factors that, when coupled with long-term homelessness, create high-risk of premature death if left without housing and services.

Consistent with National results, Project H3 found 43% of those surveyed to be medically vulnerable and they collectively averaged 7.8 years on the streets. It is the vulnerable and long-term homeless population this paper focuses on as a means to defining the target population rather than using “[chronic homelessness](#)” in general, a relatively broad term. It is the results of Project H3 used to estimate vulnerable and long-term homelessness across Arizona via analyzing [Street Count](#) data published annually by the [Department of Economic Security](#).

How to Generate Housing Capacity for the Most Vulnerable Homeless People

There are 19 Housing Authorities throughout Arizona that, together, control 21,363 housing vouchers. The chart below details voucher allocations by Housing Authority, the number of street-living homeless based on street counts, the number of vulnerable and long-term homeless people and the associated percentages of these populations against the vouchers in a community. One can quickly see that 78% of communities have more vouchers than street homeless and 95% of communities have a greater number of vouchers than vulnerable, long-term homeless people with the only exception being the Arizona Department of Housing which is relegated to serving every rural area in Arizona without a Housing Authority of its own. The bottom line is that most Arizona communities have the housing resources in its arsenal to end long-term homelessness experienced by vulnerable people.

Housing Authority	Number of Vouchers	Street Homeless	% of Vouchers	Mx Vulnerable	% of Vouchers
Chandler	480	5	1.0%	2	0.4%
Glendale	1051	18	1.7%	8	0.7%
Maricopa County	1479	325	22.0%	140	9.4%
Mesa	1536	152	9.9%	65	4.3%
Peoria	82	32	39.0%	14	16.8%
Phoenix	5730	2140	37.3%	920	16.1%
Scottsdale	735	108	14.7%	46	6.3%
Tempe	1082	138	12.8%	59	5.5%
Yuma City/County*	1523	201	13.2%	86	5.7%
Winslow	128	105	82.0%	45	35.3%
Tucson/Pima	4971	1141	23.0%	491	9.9%
South Tucson	132	232	175.8%	100	75.6%
Pinal/Eloy*	715	136	19.0%	58	8.2%
Nogales	192	10	5.2%	4	2.2%
Mohave County	284	590	207.7%	254	89.3%
Gila County	53	87	164.2%	37	70.6%
Flagstaff/Williams*	377	210	55.7%	90	24.0%
Cochise Co./Douglas*	686	111	16.2%	48	7.0%
AZ Dept. of Housing	124	614	495.2%	264	212.9%
Total	21360	6355	29.8%	2733	12.8%

* Homeless Street Counts in these areas have more than one housing authority yet complete just one street count and thus Housing Authority Vouchers are combined for comparison purposes

Reprioritizing just 12.8% of the overall vouchers in Arizona would end vulnerable and long-term homelessness with half of communities requiring 9.4% or less of their total vouchers. While seemingly small, one must remember that these vouchers are already supporting low-income families and individuals and thus are not readily available for reprioritization. However, it is generally common for Housing Authorities to turn over 10% of its vouchers annually and thus can be reasonably expected to become available. In accordance with the 2013 housing goal, the chart below clearly demonstrates that 74% of all Arizona communities can end homelessness for the most vulnerable by allocating just a percentage of their annual turnover each year. Excepting 5 communities, sufficient resources exist with half of all communities reprioritizing 32% or less of their annual turnover toward ending vulnerable homelessness. An egalitarian spread of 43% annual reprioritization per community is also shown that, in theory, could “make up” for the 5 communities without sufficient resources.

Housing Authority	Annual T/O	Mx Vuln.	2011	2012	2013	% Annual	43% Egalitarian
Chandler	48	2	1	1	0	1%	20
Glendale	105	8	3	3	2	3%	44
Maricopa County	148	140	47	47	46	32%	64
Mesa	154	65	22	22	21	14%	66
Peoria	8	14	5	5	4	57%	4
Phoenix	573	920	307	307	306	54%	246
Scottsdale	74	46	15	15	16	20%	31
Tempe	108	59	20	20	19	18%	45

Housing Authority	Annual T/O	Mx Vuln.	2011	2012	2013	% Annual	43% Egalitarian
Yuma City/County*	152	86	29	29	28	19%	64
Winslow	13	45	13	13	13	100%	6
Tucson/Pima	497	491	164	164	163	33%	213
South Tucson	13	100	13	13	13	100%	6
Pinal/Eloy*	72	58	19	19	20	27%	30
Nogales	19	4	1	1	2	7%	7
Mohave County	28	254	28	28	28	100%	12
Gila County	5	37	5	5	5	100%	2
Flagstaff/Williams*	38	90	30	30	30	80%	17
Cochise Co./Douglas*	69	48	16	16	16	23%	29
AZ Dept. of Housing	12	264	12	12	12	100%	5
Total	2136	2731	910	910	911	43%	911

Communities in red do not have sufficient housing resources to end vulnerable homelessness and require additional resources/strategies.

Why Vouchers Are Inaccessible to Homeless People Absent Specific Targeting

Arizona has a poverty rate of [14.7% representing approximately 969,579 individuals in 367,265 households](#), all of whom potentially qualify for a housing voucher resource. Arizona communities have vouchers for, at best, 5.8% of this population and at worst, just 2.2%. As one might imagine, with such a large baseline population of qualifying families and individuals, waiting lists for these precious and finite resources are significant. Considering only 2,136 vouchers will reasonably become available in a given year, Housing Authorities understandably must develop policies to manage their overwhelming waiting lists. Unfortunately, this is where it gets bad for people experiencing homelessness, particularly those who are vulnerable.

“Purging” policies are those developed in order to clean up a waiting list so a Housing Authority can ensure that those on the list still actually need the resource, live in its jurisdiction and wish to maintain their position on the list. Many waiting lists throughout Arizona have not been open for new applicants in years, leaving room only to clean up the list and slowly allocate vouchers to new families and individuals who still qualify years later when their name comes up. Many policies managing these lists entail periodically sending a letter to everyone on the list requesting their response and action to remain on the waiting list. If a household fails to respond, they are removed from the list. An example of such policies can be found on page 13, Item 3.2.5 in this provided [Administrative Plan](#).

People experiencing homelessness, and particularly those living on the streets, are at an inherent disadvantage in this system even though it’s difficult to argue against the fact that they need the resource the most. Further, vulnerable and long term homeless who may be struggling with addictions, mental illnesses, traumatic brain injury, the cycle of despair and any other number of elements, are at an even greater disadvantage as they are unable to build and manage the relationships necessary to obtain a mailing address, follow back and enlist consistent service provider assistance.

Making Mainstream, Government Resources the Last Resort

It can undoubtedly be argued that reprioritizing a portion of a community's mainstream, housing voucher resource "takes away" the resource from a low-income family. However, in terms of impact on our communities, the current system is a bit like "spitting in the ocean." We have vouchers to support 2.2%-5.8% of a population and each year get to make housing affordable for another 0.22 % - 0.58% of that population. Yet, those families and individuals on the waiting list have often been on the waiting list for years and, for the most part, never became homeless. While there are many factors that contribute to homelessness, such as substance use and mental health conditions, these factors mostly contribute to eroding the family and social network and when those natural resources are eliminated, homelessness occurs.

Families and individuals who can maintain status on a waiting list for years without becoming homeless tend to have intact family and social networks. This creates a system that ensures the *Most Resourced, of the Least Resourced, Get the Resource*. Without prioritization of finite resources, government becomes the source of first resort within a baseline population by taking people from the support of their family and social support networks, rather than the source of last resort taking in those who lack family and social supports. It also limits its community impact by throwing minimal resources into a large problem, consistently "overreaching and under-resourcing."

Reprioritizing less than 13% of Housing Vouchers can end Vulnerable and Long-Term Homelessness and just 30% ends street homelessness altogether ([6,355 in 2009 Point in Time Street Count](#)) having a 100% impact on a population most in need of housing; not to mention a [cost reduction](#) to the public through reduced jail time, hospital visits and detoxification programs, and; a reduction in panhandling and other sources of community distress.

For more information or to learn how to get involved, visit our website at www.azceh.org. Please join the mailing list to receive the next 2 installments of this Whitepaper series and all future alerts.

A note on References: For space purposes this document contains underlined hyperlinks to on-line resource information as opposed to traditional references. If you are reading a printed version, please visit www.azceh.org to obtain an electronic version to connect to on-line resources for additional information or fact-checking purposes.