

# CREATING A TIPPING POINT FOR ENDING HOMELESSNESS IN THE UNITED STATES

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***EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: 2023 IMPACT AND LEARNING REPORT***

# Introduction

**We are working toward a future** where homelessness is rare and brief, where communities of all kinds — big and small, urban and rural, red and blue — can achieve breakthrough results. Homelessness is no longer seen as intractable, and ending it is no longer seen as exceptional. It's expected.

**This future is not an impossible dream.** It is exactly what the MacArthur Foundation had in mind in 2021, when it awarded Community Solutions \$100 million over five years to support Built for Zero, a movement of communities working to create a tipping point where homelessness is rare and brief.

**In some places, you can already see this future unfolding.** In total, 132 communities have adopted the collaborative, public health approach to homelessness represented by Built for Zero. They have formed community-wide teams around the shared aim of solving homelessness for good. They know each unhoused person by name, in real-time. Guided by this information, they target resources to drive measurable reductions toward reaching functional zero homelessness, adjusting their strategy as the dynamics of homelessness in their community move and change.

This report features insights from our evaluation partner ORS Impact, along with our own analysis of Year Two of our five-year journey with the MacArthur Foundation's 100&Change award.



# How we work

Think of our current housing system as a game of musical chairs. There are more people than affordable homes. Just as not everyone can get a chair when the music stops, not everyone can get a home. Those who struggle the most, because of a disability, low wages, or other challenges, are most likely to lose. Even those who work hard to improve their situation can lose their home due to things they can't control.

When someone loses their spot, organizations are waiting to give them socks or a sandwich but don't have the resources or tools to help them back into the circle of community.

But imagine if we changed the rules, adding more chairs instead of removing them, and helping people to find an open chair by removing obstacles in their way. We allow people to stay in the game, even when they are struggling, and create a situation where everyone can win.

Systems are designed by people — and they can be redesigned to better serve people.

**Through Built for Zero, we support 132 communities in changing minds and systems to ensure everyone has a home. We work directly with 105 communities and support others through our international work and partner-led programs.**

Community Solutions provides coaching, tools, and support to these communities while simultaneously working to change the broader conditions needed to help propel the field up and over a tipping point, a role that has been defined as a “field catalyst.”

**Across this broad cross-section of communities, we are demonstrating that places of varying geographies, sizes, and political leanings can create housing systems to quickly identify and house anyone experiencing homelessness.**

## How Built for Zero communities work

Building a resilient community housing system involves new ways of working. We've found this requires five foundational elements:

- A shared, community-wide definition of what solving homelessness looks like and the belief that it's possible
- A collaborative, community-wide team that is accountable and working together as a command center
- Comprehensive, real-time, by-name data on who is experiencing homelessness to continuously track progress and improve system performance
- A racial equity focus to overcome racial disparities
- Investments in the housing solutions that local data shows are needed

Built for Zero communities define success by whether they're reducing homelessness and have the infrastructure, data, and partnerships to ensure homelessness is rare and brief. They know how many people are experiencing homelessness each month and make this information public. They treat the issue with the urgency it requires and mobilize support to solve it. Progress is accelerated by smart public policies, governance structures, funding, and technology.

## What kind of communities are in Built for Zero?

The Built for Zero movement includes 132 communities in the U.S. More than 70 million people — about a fifth of the U.S. population — live in these communities.

25 large cities	3 statewide
32 midsize cities	20 suburban areas
16 small cities	19 partner-led (communities using our methodology, working with other partners in implementation)
11 rural areas	

# Accomplishments and challenges

We have provided a snapshot of key accomplishments, challenges, and learnings from Year Two of our five-year journey with support from the MacArthur Foundation.

**This past year, we have seen more evidence than ever that communities are making progress.** While homelessness is on the rise nationally, we saw bright spots in communities large and small. Take Denver, for instance, which reduced homelessness among veterans by 21% in 2023. In the past three years, Detroit has reduced veteran homelessness by nearly 50%. And in Hennepin County, Minnesota — home to Minneapolis — chronic homelessness is down by nearly a third. Meanwhile, smaller and mid-sized communities — like Rockford, Illinois, and the Gulf Coast region of Mississippi — have made homelessness rare and brief for more than one population. These communities have built the muscle to rehouse people who fall into homelessness within 30 days.

**Through close collaboration and collective identity, organizations are building the trust necessary for creating and sustaining a resilient housing system.**

Built for Zero communities unify fragmented programs into a resilient housing and homeless response system. Intentional partnerships allow communities to share resources, skills, and knowledge to make optimal use of their existing assets to reduce homelessness and identify where new resources could have the greatest impact. As the leader of one large city's team explained, "The most important things are relationships and building trust. That enables people to work in different ways and enables them to have conversations about what's working and what isn't. The transformation of relationships is what drives everything else."

## Built for Zero's progress

14

communities have solved homelessness for entire groups of people like veterans or people experiencing chronic homelessness

71

communities achieved quality by-name data

40%

of Built for Zero communities — including a number of major cities — reduced homelessness for veterans or people who have experienced chronic homelessness

3

state partners engaged

171,681

people housed in Built for Zero communities

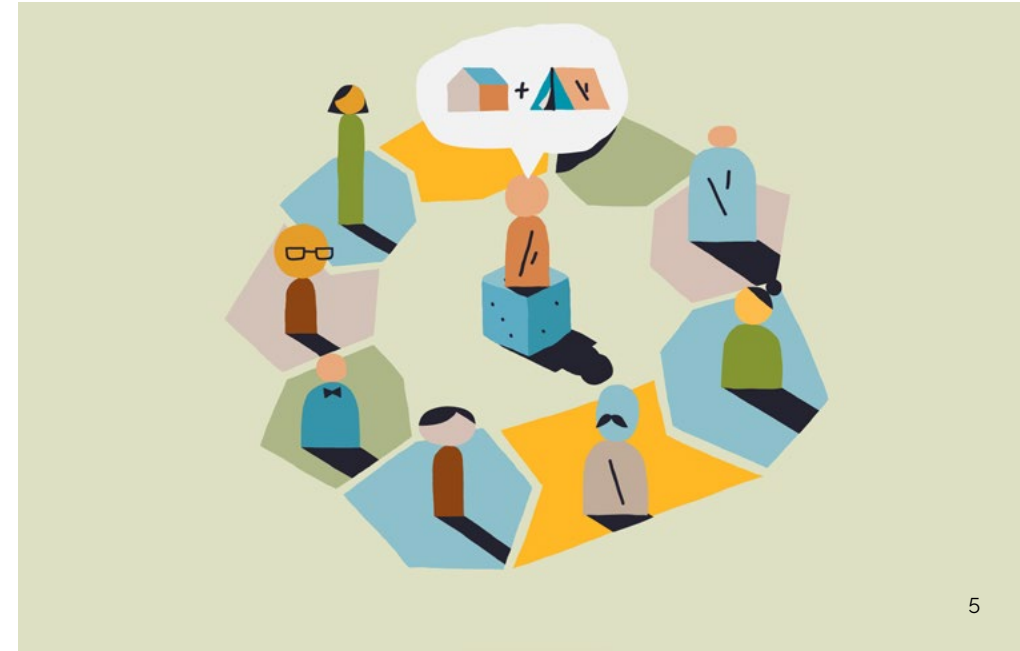
**Aligned frameworks, policies, and processes across the system lead to better integration.** Built for Zero's data-driven framework enables communities to build alignment and commitment among key organizations with established community-wide performance measures. Organizations can see individually and collectively how their contributions can lead to overall reductions in homelessness. Once these frameworks are in place, communities are working to ensure their system improvements endure by adding collaboration capacity, creating governance models, and implementing policies that enable effective system operations.

**As of the end of 2023, 71 communities had achieved quality by-name data standards for at least one population.** This means communities can see detailed profiles of every person in a community experiencing homelessness, including their name, background, health, and housing needs. This way, everyone experiencing homelessness, whether on the streets or in temporary shelters, is on a path to housing. On a larger scale, communities can see how numbers and their homeless population's demographics change over time. This big picture helps them understand trends, decide where to focus support or investments, test system improvements, and check if their efforts are actually reducing homelessness. With partners, we are exploring how to make quality data the standard, starting with improving technology and resources for staffing and training.

**Implementation of real-time, by-name data systems among communities has successfully improved real-world outcomes and reduced homelessness among target populations.** As a result of data system improvements, individuals are spending less time experiencing homelessness and gaining access to permanent homes more quickly. In fact, the time it takes to house individuals on a community's by-name list has been cut in half in several communities. Other communities have achieved a meaningful increase in access to supportive resources as a result of improved data. High-quality, shared data makes these outcomes possible, allowing communities to detect and resolve barriers to moving individuals toward homes.

**Achieving equitable systems is a necessary part of getting to zero homelessness.** Solving homelessness cannot be separated from eliminating the racial inequities within the homeless response system. Working with individuals with lived experience of homelessness, service providers, and leaders in racial equity, we co-created a framework to validate racial equity within the system. Community Solutions has worked hand-in-hand with communities to operationalize the framework, embed it in their work, track system-level indicators over time, and expand the participation and influence of people of color with lived experience with homelessness in decision-making.

**A wide range of investors — including individuals, health systems, philanthropies, and banks — have committed millions to acquire affordable homes to help communities solve veteran and chronic homelessness.** Using social impact capital, we have preserved 1,335 affordable homes via 12 properties in six markets. The fund makes homes available to people experiencing homelessness as there is a natural turnover of apartments while maintaining workforce housing. Compared to housing built through federal Low-Income Housing Tax Xredits, this social impact/acquisition model can deliver housing within months at less cost and greater flexibility than new construction. The fund is one example of the ways in which Community Solutions collaborates with community teams to test alternative strategies for expanding access to housing.



**Our Property Management Plus model (PM+) strengthens the role of property management in tenant success.**

Private landlords and property managers are essential parts of a community's housing system, but rarely have they been engaged as partners in the work of preventing and reducing homelessness. Our PM+ model works with third-party property managers to make tenant success a core element of their job. They connect tenants with support services, create a network of community resources, and promote health and well-being through healthcare providers, including local VA medical centers.

**We are changing expectations at the federal, state, regional, and municipal levels.**

Right now, communities that focus on reducing overall homelessness collect by-name data and implement a command-center model do so voluntarily. It's time that accountability for reducing homelessness becomes the norm. In 2024, we will work with targeted communities — primarily large cities — to shift local narratives, educate key civic actors at every level, and enlist a broader network of partners in building an understanding of solutions and accountability for implementing them.



**Communities could benefit from more intentional messaging and strategies for engaging with policymakers.**

Public misperceptions and political will are major barriers to pursuing proactive, human-centered solutions. The public and policymakers are often unaware of solutions to homelessness and the progress being made in implementing them, making them more prone to attempt quick fixes over comprehensive solutions. This is especially true where alarm over encampments and unsheltered homelessness dominate local concerns. In addition, turnover in elected officials can disrupt the ongoing commitment that system-level solutions require. In 2024, we aim to equip communities with more of the messaging, policy, and organizing support they need to champion sustainable solutions.

**Communities need additional support in advocating for state and local funding, as well as building relationships with philanthropy and private investors.** Government and philanthropic funding for addressing homelessness is fragmented and challenging to administer. Changing the funding environment to encourage outcome-based contracting and grantmaking would provide the accountability for results that funders require and the flexibility needed by community teams to operate the dynamic, adaptable housing system required by dynamic, shifting problems like housing instability and homelessness.

## A final word

The achievements of communities and partners from Year Two are profoundly inspiring. They are also only the beginning. Communities in Built for Zero are primed to continue proving it is possible to make homelessness rare and brief, everywhere.

This future is not an impossible dream. It is a moral imperative, a different set of choices, and a reality within our collective reach.

### Homelessness is solvable.

We are grateful for every partner that is playing a part in proving it.



# Thank you to our partners!

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**For a lasting end  
to homelessness  
that leaves  
no one behind**

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