

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

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*2023 IMPACT AND LEARNING REPORT*

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**THE FUTURE  
WE CAN BUILD,  
TOGETHER**



## We're working toward a future where homelessness is rare and brief.

Where communities of all kinds — big and small, urban and rural, red and blue — are able to achieve breakthrough results.

When someone loses a home, they're quickly connected to the help they need to get back on their feet. They're not lost in a complicated system. Instead, the organizations are working as a unified community housing system and know people experiencing homelessness by name and understand what they need to get back into a home. They get help quickly because they're treated as a neighbor throughout the process. Everyone in the community is on the same page, working as a team.

The people experiencing homelessness don't have to deal with the impossible web of bureaucracy to get back into housing and get the help they need to stay there — which could include health care, job training, or drug treatment. And the system delivers excellent outcomes for everyone, no matter what race or ethnicity they are.

As a result of a more efficient and effective system, the focus shifts to ensure most people don't ever experience homelessness in the first place — leading to a world where homelessness is truly rare and brief.

This future isn't just possible —  
Built for Zero communities in the U.S.  
are making it a reality.

14

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

71 communities achieved quality by-name data

3 state partners engaged

40%

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

171,681 people housed in Built for Zero communities

How did they produce these results? Communities are choosing to align across organizations and sectors to share information and resources in order to reach a shared aim.

- **Communities define success** by whether they're reducing homelessness and have the infrastructure, data, and partnerships to ensure homelessness is rare and brief.
- **Solving homelessness is the responsibility of the whole community** — it's not just the job of a single sector or organization. Like a command center during a crisis, everyone who holds a key piece of the solution works together to solve it.
- **Leaders take accountability for solving homelessness.** 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.** These areas — which historically have slowed progress— now work in service of solving homelessness. Communities use all available resources to quickly close housing gaps.



## Homelessness is solvable.

The MacArthur Foundation awarded Community Solutions \$100 million in 2021 to reach a tipping point in the U.S. in five years, where the conditions are primed for any community to make homelessness rare, brief, and nonrecurring.

This year, communities reached milestones that bring us closer to our goal of solving homelessness:

- In a year where overall numbers were on the rise, **over 40% of Built for Zero communities — including a number of major cities** — reduced homelessness for veterans or people who have experienced chronic homelessness.
- **Communities continued to make progress toward Zero for All** — an exciting first where homelessness is rare and brief for everyone. We will likely see this achievement in 2024.
- **A substantial number of communities have real-time, quality data on every person experiencing homelessness**, including their history and their needs — a critical step in reducing homelessness.
- Across the country, **community teams are more coordinated, collaborative, and confident** in their ability to make homelessness rare and brief.

These achievements are profoundly inspiring. They're also only the beginning.

How fast we act and how much we learn will determine how much we can achieve. In that spirit, this impact report explores the key insights that have emerged in the past year of the MacArthur Foundation's five-year challenge.

Homelessness doesn't have to be a heartbreaking but inevitable reality. Built for Zero communities are demonstrating that homelessness is solvable.

**OUR PATH  
TOWARD  
A TIPPING POINT**

*Community Solutions aims to create a tipping point in the United States where communities have the infrastructure, information, tools, and support needed to make homelessness rare and brief.*

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, in our present situation, 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.

But imagine if we changed the rules, adding more chairs instead of taking them away, 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 is able to 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. 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.**

No single organization — or sector — can solve homelessness. Community Solutions acts as a "field catalyst" that supports communities and creates the broader conditions needed to propel the field up and over a tipping point. This includes bringing together partners like the ones listed on the next page to drive policy and practice changes at the local, regional, state, and federal levels. It also requires partnering across sectors — public and private, health systems, corrections, child welfare, housing, etc. — to support the broader movement.

## Partners in the movement to solve homelessness

### INTERNATIONAL

- Backbone organizations for national movements to solve homelessness

### NATIONAL

- Charitable foundations and philanthropy
- Data and technology companies
- Health system and public health partners
- Field catalysts
- Federal partners (executive and legislative branches)
- Housing and homelessness organizations
- Philanthropic foundations

### REGIONAL / STATE

- Entities coordinating regional homeless response
- Governors' offices
- Health care systems
- State and regional human service and public health agencies
- State housing agencies
- State legislatures
- State-level coalitions

### LOCAL

- Continuums of Care
- City/county agencies
- Faith-based organizations
- Health systems
- Housing authorities
- Housing providers
- Local government
- Business and civic leaders
- Landlords and property managers
- Nonprofit service providers
- VA Medical Centers

## Landscape

As of January 2023, more than 650,000 people were estimated to be experiencing homelessness during the nation's once-a-year point-in-time count — a 12% increase over the previous year's estimate and the highest number reported since 2007. This increase continues a rising pre-pandemic trend in people living in temporary shelters (60% of those reported) and in people experiencing unsheltered homelessness (40% of those reported). The beginning of 2023 also marked the end of COVID-19 relief funding and policy protections that prevented homelessness for millions of individuals and families during the pandemic.

This significant increase in homelessness is related to a complex interplay of economic, political, and social factors. This complexity is why homelessness persists. Poverty, inequality, disabilities, poor health, racial inequity, low wages, high housing costs, and inadequate housing options all contribute to homelessness. Increasingly, the working poor and aging Americans are falling into homelessness.

While the news about homelessness is grim, the many communities making clear progress in reducing homelessness provide evidence and hope that solutions are within our grasp.

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.



**Denver, Colorado**  
reduced homelessness among  
veterans by 21% in 2023



**Hennepin County, Minnesota**  
reduced chronic homelessness  
by 30%



**Rockford, Illinois, and  
Gulf Coast, Mississippi,**  
have made homelessness  
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for more than one  
population





**HELPING  
COMMUNITIES  
SOLVE HOMELESSNESS**



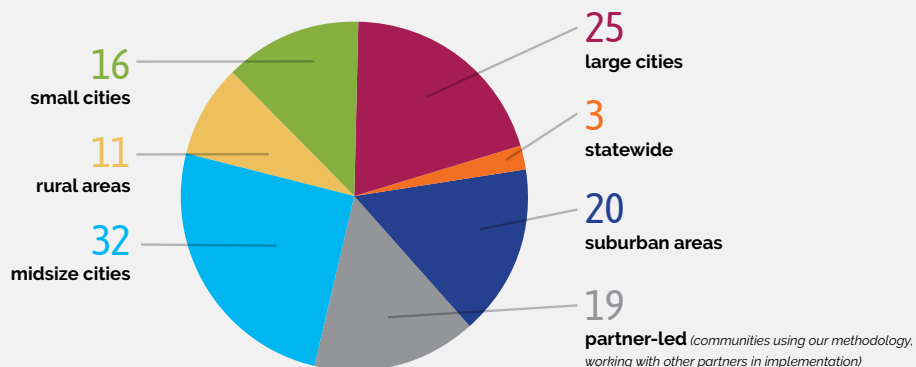
## OUR AIM

**Our goal is to prove that homelessness is solvable and drive the changes necessary to create a tipping point across the country.**

By 2026, at least 75 communities will have made significant progress toward solving homelessness. Five of these communities will have made homelessness rare and brief for everyone.

## 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.



## Our Approach

To propel the movement to solve homelessness up and over a tipping point, we work with communities to solve the most persistent challenges that stand in the way:

- **preventing homelessness** from happening in the first place
- **building and sustaining homeless response systems** that continuously resolve homelessness
- **creating local housing systems** that steadily deliver homes to meet communities' needs
- **building the public expectations and political will** needed to accelerate and sustain progress

### What does this look like in practice?

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

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

**Functional zero:** A technical term akin to “net zero” measures whether a community has reached a place where instances of homelessness are rare, brief, and nonrecurring, and outcomes are equitable.

**Populations:** Communities track various demographics, including veterans, youth, families, single adults, and people experiencing chronic (long-lasting or recurring) homelessness. There are different resources and housing needs for each group, so it helps to understand progress within each group.

With these pieces in place and well coordinated, communities are better positioned to connect those in housing crises to the help needed to get back on their feet. A well-functioning housing system not only connects people quickly with a safe place to live but also prevents people from experiencing homelessness in the first place.

For example, in Fairfax, Virginia, anyone who called with a housing emergency was contacted by a team with one clear goal: to divert them from losing their home. In the first quarter of 2023 alone, the Fairfax team, comprised of many nonprofit and government agencies, diverted 74% of callers from homelessness.

Finally, making sure reductions in homelessness are sustained requires an environment designed to do that. This means building the public’s expectation that homelessness be solved, and the political will to enact effective policies, mobilize needed resources, and increase access to housing.

## Progress

**Since 2015, 14 communities in Built for Zero have achieved “functional zero” for one or more populations.** Fourteen more Built for Zero communities expect to reach this milestone in the next 12 months.

**In 2023, 27 communities made a measurable reduction in homelessness for one or more populations.** Their system improvements and allocation of resources directly resulted in fewer people experiencing homelessness month over month.

**More communities are compiling quality data on exactly who is experiencing homelessness and what support they need to exit it.** This year, several communities reached the milestone of having quality, by-name data for all individuals experiencing homelessness, whether on the streets or in temporary shelters. This allows organizations to understand the actual scope of homelessness and whether all their efforts are adding up to fewer people experiencing homelessness month over month. Accurate, real-time information also allows organizations to collaborate around a shared awareness of what’s happening, see where progress is stuck, and recognize high-impact areas for focus to reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness. >>

### *Washoe County, Nevada — home to Reno — was one of the first communities to reach quality data for all single adults.*

“You can’t solve a problem that you can’t see. And you need that data piece also to see that our investments and our program changes are getting us where we want to go,” explained Catrina Peters, Homeless Services Coordinator with Washoe County Housing and Homeless Services. “We don’t want to waste precious resources. We want to see dollars and effort going to programs that are going to solve homelessness.”

At their peak, Washoe County had real-time records of almost 2,500 people experiencing homelessness in their community. In 2023, Washoe County made huge strides, reducing that number by 28%, with 1,800 people on their by-name list in October.

**Communities are making progress through other backbone, intermediary organizations supported by Community Solutions.** The movement to solve homelessness is greater than any single organization. Community Solutions partners with backbone organizations guiding national movements to make homelessness rare and brief in five countries outside the United States.

We provide design and strategy support to the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness and the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness on national campaigns modeled on Built for Zero. Four communities in Canada have achieved functional zero for a population, including three for veterans and one for chronic homelessness. Community Solutions also provides similar advisory and initiative design support to early-stage efforts in the United Kingdom, France, and Denmark.

## KEY TAKEAWAY

### Communities are making progress in:

- expanding outreach to identify and serve more unsheltered individuals
- expanding housing options for people currently experiencing homelessness
- implementing prevention and diversion programs to help people avoid homelessness in the first place



## Challenges and Learnings

### The Who and How of Collaboration

To solve homelessness, organizations across a community must work together. This involves creating a structure for decision-making and new ways of working that unify efforts into a resilient housing and homeless response system.

Agencies (and even programs within the same agency) are often siloed, leading to fragmented and duplicative services for those in housing crises.

Beyond the challenge of unifying fragmented efforts, organizations are limited by capacity constraints (staffing, funding, technical expertise). 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.

By building close relationships and collective identity, organizations build the trust and true collaboration necessary for creating and sustaining a resilient housing system. 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."

A great example of this results-focused collaboration is Washington, D.C.'s Veterans NOW! Workgroup. The workgroup is a coalition of government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and community members with lived experience who convene regularly around the shared goal of ending veteran homelessness and identifying and overcoming the silos that hinder progress. Through their efforts, Washington, D.C., has reduced veteran homelessness by nearly 50% since 2015. >>

However, broader cross-sector collaboration is needed to capture all of a community's available resources and capabilities to drive reductions in homelessness. This includes business leaders, landlords, law enforcement, health care systems, philanthropies, universities, and the range of actors who constitute a community's civic infrastructure.



### Cross-sector collaboration

- Almost two-thirds of Built for Zero communities interviewed for our impact report reported engaging at least one broader cross-sector partner — with health care organizations and landlords being the focus.
- Less than a quarter of communities named partnerships with other adjacent sectors, such as law enforcement or the legal system.
- Even fewer collaborated with the private sector, such as businesses and funders.

Making homelessness rare and brief will require a broader network of partners than homeless service providers alone. Community Solutions will launch an effort in 2024 to help communities build these critical relationships.

### Communities are working to ensure collaboration is the norm.

To lock in new ways of working, communities are formalizing collaboration at the system level. Take this example from Metro Denver.

The Metro Denver Homeless Initiative (MDHI) is responsible for solving homelessness across seven counties, 40 municipalities, and a population of 3.2 million. To better tailor solutions to local contexts, they've divided their approach into nine subregions.

To assure coordination at every level, MDHI convenes key partners, builds buy-in, monitors the quality and consistency of data, provides technical assistance across the nine subregions, and coordinates funding. Partners include government agencies, service providers, health care entities, legal groups, foundations, and civic organizations.

MDHI supports the subregional teams and facilitates regional coordination efforts. Each subregion also has its own structure, generally consisting of:

- **an executive team** of elected officials that meets monthly
- **a homeless coordination team** of nonprofit and agency leaders focused on eliminating barriers and improving communication
- **case conferencing teams** that discuss individuals experiencing homelessness to determine needed support.

This tiered governance infrastructure facilitates regional strategic planning while allowing for locality-specific responses. And this approach is working: Metro Denver has reduced veteran homelessness by 30% over the past four years.

The role of the lead organization, such as MDHI, is critical in system-level change. The lead organization provides the backbone — the infrastructure, support, and leadership required to steer the collaboration and hold members accountable to shared goals. »

**Leadership matters — both at the system and individual level.**

System leaders driving local collaborative efforts are most effective when they:

- Are situated within an organization positioned to have influence across the community.
- Have decision-making influence or political capital to advance system-wide results.
- Have the ability to engage many stakeholders.
- Are engaged in learning networks such as Built for Zero to support system-level impact.

**KEY TAKEAWAY*****Leadership: empowerment and authority***

Built for Zero studies the key attributes of effective system leaders and ways to develop more leaders with these qualities and skills. Ongoing professional development and empowerment is critical to advancing solutions and creating alignment. The two examples below highlight the importance of the system leader's role.

In one Built for Zero community, the system leader sits within a direct-service nonprofit — to reduce power plays or political challenges that might arise if the role was located within the lead organization. Yet the leader has challenges enforcing agreements among peer agencies, gaining consistent participation in key activities, and holding partners accountable to community-wide goals. Multiple levels of bureaucracy stand between them and elected officials and municipal agency leaders and the ability to work nimbly to advance progress.

In another, Bergen County, New Jersey — a community that has reached functional zero for veteran and chronic homelessness — the system leader is an employee of the county, chairs the board of the lead homeless services organization, and sits on major committees controlling resources. She explains: “the more tentacles you have into these systems, the more you can inform them. It’s the connective tissue of getting other systems to work a little differently.”

**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.

**KEY TAKEAWAY**

*Creating a strong and resilient housing and homeless response system is the aim of Built for Zero communities, but many are concerned with sustainability and how to ensure their system improvements endure.*

*Institutionalizing collaborative ways of working will require new policies, providing for needed coordination capacity and governance models that enable effective system operations.*

# **SOLVING KEY DATA AND COLLABORATION CHALLENGES**



By 2026, key data, governance, and accountability challenges will have been solved, creating the conditions for any community to end homelessness.

Across the country, communities will have comprehensive, real-time, person-specific data that enables them to accelerate housing placements, make targeted system improvements, and drive reductions in overall homelessness.

## Progress

By-name data allows communities to measure homelessness in real time to make data-driven decisions, prioritize resources, and connect their neighbors to a home.

A commitment to data is more than a commitment to numbers. It is about being accountable to all people experiencing homelessness and their community.

**As of the end of 2023, 71 communities had achieved quality by-name data standards for at least one population.**

This means communities know every person experiencing homelessness - whether living on the street or in a shelter - by name and are putting them on a path to a home.

This comprehensive picture of homelessness provides communities with a radically new understanding of homelessness. They can see the dynamics of homelessness over time and whether their efforts are actually reducing homelessness. They can identify disparities

in outcomes and test new approaches to close these disparities. They can understand trends and bottlenecks in the housing process and spot opportunities to speed up the process of reconnecting people with a home. They can pinpoint where to intervene to have the greatest impact and where new investments will have the most beneficial effect in reducing overall homelessness.

**And it's working. 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 homeless 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. Communities actively collecting feedback from those they serve reported improvement in the ease of navigating housing assistance and other supportive resources.

High-quality, shared data makes these outcomes possible, allowing communities to detect and resolve barriers to moving individuals toward homes. Resources and priorities can be continuously assessed and adjusted to accelerate housing placements, prevent new inflow into homelessness, correct racial and other disparities, and seize opportunities for system-level improvement. >>

### KEY TAKEAWAY

*High-quality, shared data makes these outcomes possible, allowing communities to detect and resolve barriers to moving individuals toward homes.*



Community Solutions' Built for Zero team works closely with communities to build the team and structure they'll need to reduce homelessness. This includes forming a governance structure for the team, coaching to develop technical capabilities, and helping to align practices between key organizations and government agencies to achieve quality data on homelessness. We help to establish a "data culture" and the appropriate data-sharing agreements across all partner organizations to enable collective accountability for reducing homelessness. Quality data also supports more effective outreach, case conferencing, and resource sharing, leading to improved services to each individual and reducing homelessness overall.

The transformation of case conferencing illustrates the power of a data-driven, collective approach. These meetings bring multiple homeless service providers together to address the specific barriers to housing facing each individual on the community's by-name list. Working from the by-name list they have created, attendees review the steps needed to assist specific individuals out of homelessness — and which organization is accountable for completing that action. Staff participating in this process report that it is not only more effective to work in this coordinated way across organizations, but also "key in humanizing the work and making it feel more urgent."

Communities are using feedback from people experiencing homelessness to inform system changes. Who can better identify when and why a community's efforts to reduce homelessness are failing than individuals experiencing homelessness? Built for Zero communities now routinely engage people experiencing homelessness in the work of improving their system. Surveys and focus groups of those in the process of overcoming homelessness provide local teams with critical feedback for system improvement.

In places like Gulf Coast, Mississippi, a youth advisory board informs and guides their work to solve youth homelessness. Several communities have created dedicated roles for those with lived experience of homelessness to inform their services and ways to achieve racially equitable outcomes. These insights are leading to more streamlined processes and

reduced administrative burden for individuals experiencing homelessness and for frontline staff (such as minimizing duplicated efforts or having to provide the same information to multiple agencies), along with improved results and experiences that are more respectful and positive for all involved.

Communities are now using quality data to deploy their resources and investments more strategically. Standardized assessment tools — including data on the length of time someone has been homeless, disabilities, income sources, and frequency of contact with various service-providing organizations — allow communities to identify "highest-need" cases. This in turn, makes it possible to respond quickly to real-time changes in individual circumstances, such as deteriorating health. An increasing number of communities also integrate personal demographics into their assessments to help mitigate the risk of unequal access to resources. These standardized approaches help communities eliminate guesswork and make more informed and timely decisions on how to focus the efforts of their team and set priorities for the use of resources.

A particularly valuable tool for system coordination and decision making is data visualization. Community Solutions collaborates with the Tableau Foundation to provide customized visualization tools and training for community teams, which enables them to track and display the real-time inflow and outflow dynamics of homelessness and to mine their data for patterns, emerging issues, and opportunities for system improvements. Communities use these visualization tools to pinpoint where and why individuals are "trapped" in the system while others successfully move forward to stable housing.

**Visualization tools also help community teams educate policymakers, elected officials, and, in some cases, the general public, by allowing data to be presented in easy-to-understand formats, even for those without expertise in the subject.**

## Challenges and Learning

**Data sharing is a challenge.** A maze of different data systems are used by the various organizations that interact with people experiencing homelessness. Each nonprofit, local government, health care institution, state agency, and law enforcement body has its own data system and way of identifying the same individual. Aggregating and safely sharing data across the organizations that must work together to reduce homelessness presents a significant challenge. Some organizations are reluctant to share data due to uncertainties around liability and confidentiality or because of limited capacity or the fees charged by software vendors to run reports or enable links between different systems. There are also different and occasionally conflicting rules around data usage among organizations, including between federal agencies such as HUD and Medicaid. Furthermore, smaller organizations may not have the staffing or technical know-how to collect and store reliable data.

The answer is action by federal and state agencies to modernize and align the data standards and policies affecting homelessness, and to support the technical and human infrastructure communities need to coordinate their efforts, optimize their resources, and assure equitable outcomes. This is a top policy focus for Community Solutions.



### KEY TAKEAWAY

*Communities need affordable, effective technology options that make the work of reducing homelessness easier, not harder.*

**Legacy technology creates a challenge.** All communities are required to use HUD-mandated software called the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Three vendors control most of the market. The HMIS measures compliance with HUD-funded programs but is not designed to enable system management or effectiveness. It does not provide interoperability with other systems, such as health care, or provide the reports communities need to track the population-level dynamics of inflow and outflow that tell a community whether their efforts are succeeding. Accessing this critical information requires elaborate workarounds that place a significant burden on community teams with limited staffing.

Communities need affordable, effective technology options that make the work of reducing homelessness easier, not harder.

**Ongoing data improvements will require more staff and more training.** Adding system coordination staff is ostensibly within a community's control, but securing funding for these roles has been challenging. Government and philanthropy typically fund direct services staff, not the system coordination roles that make communities' overall housing and homeless response systems operate effectively. Community Solutions is educating funders on the critical nature of these positions, and developing workforce support and training opportunities for those in these roles, informed by the requests and aspirations of Built for Zero community teams.

To assist with the recruitment, training, and retention of key system leadership staff, we are curating existing professional training offerings in data analytics, quality improvement, and other system-coordination capabilities and creating new system leader career pathways and professional development supports. A number of valuable resources have been developed in other sectors,

In 2023, Community Solutions made staffing and training investments in 35 communities, supporting 37 new system-level positions.



# **SUPPORTING RACIALLY EQUITABLE HOMELESS RESPONSE SYSTEMS**



## OUR AIM

By 2026, communities across the country will have proven it is possible to make progress on and achieve key indicators of a racially equitable homeless response system.

## Our Approach

**Solving homelessness requires, by definition and design, eliminating racial inequality in outcomes.**

We aim to make homelessness rare and brief for everyone. Built for Zero's framework for reducing homelessness all the way to functional zero embeds a commitment to achieving racially equitable outcomes at each stage of the process of being reconnected to a stable home.



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. The framework looks at qualitative and quantitative measures around:

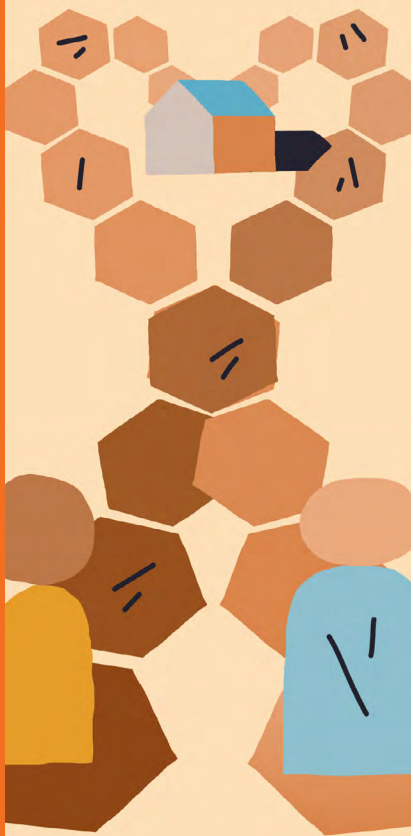
1. **Decision-making power.** People of color must have real influence over the system's design.
2. **Lived experience.** People with firsthand experience of homelessness, who have accessed homeless services themselves, must be part of the process.
3. **Quality data.** Communities must have data on race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic conditions to meet quality data standards.
4. **System outcomes.** Communities must proactively address and effectively reduce disparities in outcomes overall and at key stages of the housing process.

## Progress

ORS Impact found that in 2023, roughly 75% of the Built for Zero communities surveyed have begun to take specific action to reduce racial disparities in system outcomes.

**Communities are actively analyzing disaggregated data to identify disparities — an essential first step.** Many communities focus on analyzing housing placements, access to services, and whether the demographics of people being served are reflective of the overall population of people experiencing homelessness. Quality data is crucial to this analysis, and Built for Zero coaches support this process.

As one community leader commented, "All of our data is broken out by race and ethnicity, but also equitable housing outcomes. So, everything — any housing outcomes that we're checking, programs, in the shelter, our own Homeless to Housing — everything is broken out to make sure that nothing is skewing in the wrong direction." >>



Specific actions taken by communities based on their data include incorporating racial equity-related requirements as part of funding awards, testing assessment tools for bias, developing culturally-informed strategies for serving target populations, and prioritizing funding for groups that have been historically underserved.

**Beyond using their data to understand and correct disparities, Built for Zero communities are focused on resolving racial inequities as a way to drive action and steer their internal decision-making processes.**

ORS Impact found that approximately one-third of communities interviewed have taken the step of creating a committee or workgroup specifically to address racial equity and inclusion. One-fourth are exploring strategies to diversify their own staff, leadership, and/or governing bodies. And about 20% have engaged outside experts, such as consultants or researchers, for guidance in their efforts.

To that end, Community Solutions has worked hand-in-hand with communities to better align local and regional efforts with Built for Zero's framework for achieving a racially equitable system: We're guiding them 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.

## Challenges and Learnings

**Communities remain uncertain about best practices.** While analyzing their data to surface racial disparities and explicitly prioritizing corrective action are the starting points, many communities remain hesitant to go beyond studying the problem. Communities often lack three things that would spur more rapid progress: skills, time, and confidence.

Community teams desire more training on what constitutes best practices — for those specifically leading their racial equity work and for organizational leaders — so that implementation is not stymied by miscommunication, uncertainty, or conflicting priorities.

And while communities have assigned staff to the issue, it is typically on top of many other responsibilities. Dedicated capacity is needed, such as time written into job descriptions to monitor and correct-course on disparities.

**Communities are actively seeking the expertise and guidance of people with lived experience of homelessness, but not always effectively.** From identifying gaps in services to highlighting opportunities to improve outreach, the voices of people with lived experience can be invaluable. However, simply making room for them at the table isn't always enough to ensure their participation has weight and influence.

Community Solutions has prioritized the meaningful involvement of people of color with lived experience with homelessness on community teams, both by increasing their representation and by ensuring their influence. However, some communities remain hesitant to shake up existing norms and structures.



# **CREATING ACCOUNTABILITY FOR SOLVING HOMELESSNESS**



## OUR AIM

By 2026, targeted states and cities will have a formal role in resolving and preventing homelessness, and federal grants and contracts will define success as reducing the number of people experiencing homelessness. Importantly, others will hold political leaders accountable for reducing homelessness, too.

The media and public narrative will reinforce the message that homelessness is solvable and a systems problem. A critical mass of communities of all types — and in particular, large cities — will be measurably reducing homelessness, and this proof that homelessness is solvable will be well documented and widely shared. Through targeted communications, an expanded network of influencers and active citizens will hold leaders accountable for progress.

## Our Approach

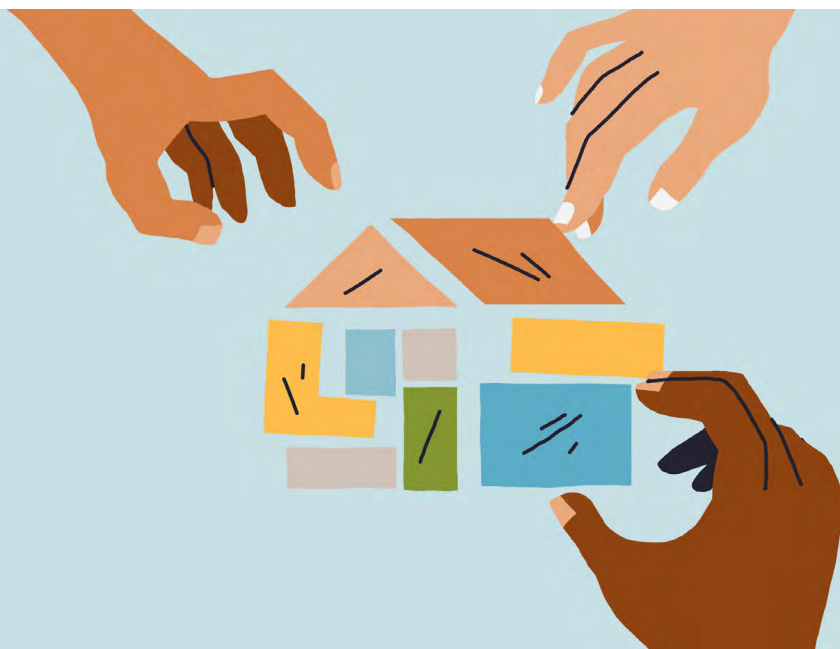
### **We are changing expectations at the federal, state, regional, and municipal levels.**

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. Community Solutions is working with targeted communities to test new ways of aligning key civic actors at every level to broaden commitment and accountability for reducing homelessness.

### **Achieving and sustaining a new normal where homelessness is rare and brief requires a broad understanding of the solutions and accountability for implementing them.**

As our work has progressed, we are finding that people want to believe homelessness is solvable, but have little faith in their civic and government leaders.

In addition, large cities not only have the largest number of people experiencing homelessness but also have an outsized impact on the national discourse on the issue. In 2024, we will work with a group of large cities to shift local messaging, educate targeted groups, and enlist a broader network of partners in building the expectation that homelessness is solvable.



## Progress

The myth that homelessness is an intractable problem has prolonged the suffering of people experiencing homelessness and perpetuated the status quo for far too long. We need a new story that raises our collective expectations of what can and must be done.

Community Solutions has begun to implement local campaigns in targeted large cities to establish a new level of public and media accountability for a measurable and equitable end to homelessness. We will measure success by tracking positive shifts in the public discourse around homelessness in these communities, as well as by spreading and amplifying the local stories of progress nationally.

The news media frequently reports on homelessness as an ever-worsening crisis. Over the past two years, we have focused on sharing stories of progress and bright spots in Built for Zero communities and beyond. A larger percentage of news stories now focus on solutions and progress than ever before. In the past two years, stories focused on solutions to homelessness went from 10% to now 21% of stories in the news media.

In addition, stories of solutions and progress on social media have increased from 16% to nearly 40%.

### KEY TAKEAWAY

*Communities are keenly aware of the need to influence public perceptions of homelessness but typically lack the capacity to do so effectively.*

## Challenges and Learning

### **Communities could benefit from more intentional messaging and media support.**

A third of communities interviewed by ORS Impact cited public misperceptions as a major barrier to pursuing proactive, human-centered solutions. Homelessness is too often seen as an individual moral failure rather than a failure of housing and other social systems. These beliefs make it harder for communities to advance solutions that work for each individual and the community as a whole.

Communities are keenly aware of the need to influence public perceptions of homelessness but typically lack the capacity or expertise to do so effectively.

Some communities leverage coalitions and relationships with local media to fill in communications gaps. In one large city, one organization's contact with a journalist led to telling a more accurate and hopeful story to the press and public.

**Communities are beginning to leverage data to shape public narratives.** In 2023, Community Solutions hosted a peer-learning session highlighting San Diego's work to bring data to life in communicating their progress. We provided simple templates for other communities based on San Diego's model.

More communities are using data to tell the story of how they are reducing homelessness and what it takes to solve complex issues, and not relying on the traditional practice of sharing sympathetic personal stories alone. Some communities are equipping media outlets with individual stories, backed by data, that show how homelessness impacts different groups, illustrating the role of the community team and quality data in achieving reductions.



In 2023, Community Solutions interviewed leaders in 10 large cities to understand their local barriers to progress in reducing homelessness:

- **Talking about the work:** Limited capacity or freedom to share the story of their progress in a compelling way.
- **Getting the message right:** The need for localized messages and communications strategies that fit their specific audiences.
- **Getting aligned:** Misaligned messages across organizations and stakeholders that confuse the issue. "We're not all singing from the same song sheet."
- **Engaging stakeholders:** The need for third-party validators and prominently placed local champions who can accelerate progress through their influence and help to tell a solutions-focused story.

In 2024, we aim to equip communities with more of the messaging and organizing support they need and help them grow their internal communications capabilities.

Community Solutions is engaging narrative change experts, conducting polling, and testing messages in order to:

- Overcome sector and political misalignments that slow progress.
- Build community awareness of the solvability of homelessness and local progress.
- Engage a wider network of civic actors who will champion system-level solutions.

**Equipping communities with tools for engaging with policymakers will strengthen advocacy for sustainable 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 are expanding our policy efforts, including developing model state policies and legislation, and developing organizing and communications tools to engage policy makers and those who influence them in championing sustainable solutions.

## KEY TAKEAWAY

*Reducing homelessness requires a sense of urgency, flexible resources, and a sustained focus.*



**Reducing homelessness requires a sense of urgency, flexible resources, and a sustained focus.** Community teams make extraordinary progress despite rules that inhibit collaboration, resources with rigid eligibility criteria, restrictive zoning, and other barriers to creating the housing they need. Dedicated funding for the core staff and data infrastructure needed to support a coordinated system is difficult to come by. Local, state, and federal policy reform is needed to enable:

- Funding for the backbone team that coordinates the community team, including the data infrastructure required.
- Adjustments to program eligibility criteria, allowable uses, and program requirements to provide more flexibility in how existing funding sources can be used to reduce the time it takes to be connected with a stable home.
- An increased supply of housing and expanded housing options to meet local needs.
- Humane housing- and services-centered encampment resolution policies that reduce the number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness without cruel, harmful criminalization.
- Policy mandates that enable assistance to be coordinated among health care, criminal justice, and homelessness services.



**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. Government funding involves a myriad of eligibility rules as to who can benefit from a given program and significant documentation requirements to prove one's poverty or status. Philanthropic funding — including social impact investments to scale established and cost-saving practices — is often narrowly targeted at certain populations and programs rather than achieving population-level reductions in homelessness. 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 a dynamic, shifting problem like housing instability and homelessness.



# **CLOSING THE HOUSING SUPPLY GAP**



## OUR AIM

By 2026, communities will have tools and practices in place to close housing supply gaps that perpetuate homelessness.

## Approach

**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.**

This social impact investment model demonstrates how existing apartment buildings can become key elements of a community's strategy for preventing and reducing homelessness. Using social impact capital to acquire properties with dozens or hundreds of apartments, the fund makes homes available to people experiencing homelessness as there is a natural turnover of apartments while maintaining badly needed workforce housing.

Compared to housing built through federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credits, which can take years to complete, 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.

**This unique model brings housing directly to local homelessness response teams.** Using their by-name lists, community partners can quickly link people experiencing homelessness with apartments and any assistance needed. Community Solutions supports the local team in coordinating the work of multiple agencies to ensure a rapid move-in and successful tenancy.

Ultimately, as apartments turnover, each building will contain a 50/50 mix of homes for individuals exiting homelessness and affordable, workforce 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 Property Management Plus model is filling this void. It is a framework for redefining the role of the landlord/property manager as part of the community's civic infrastructure, and equipping them to assist tenants who may be struggling and to accept as tenants individuals transitioning from homelessness. We have introduced PM+ in fund properties >>

## Milestones

- **1,335 affordable homes** acquired and connected to local homeless response systems, through a combination of social impact investing and fundraising.
- **12 properties** that preserve workforce housing and reduce homelessness.
- **Six markets** impacted by this new approach to creating an integrated housing system that prevents and ends homelessness.

in nine markets, working with third-party property managers to make tenant success a core element of their job. Simultaneously, we are working with local CoCs to educate their housing placement and case management staff on how to support landlords when tenants are violating their leases.

In 2024, we will make PM+ training available beyond fund properties to independent landlords and property managers in targeted communities in order to fundamentally change the relationship between landlords and vulnerable tenants.

In 2022, Phillip Morris, a military veteran, moved into Centra Villa Apartments in Atlanta. After exiting the military, he faced challenges transitioning back to civilian life, which led to him experiencing homelessness.

Mr. Morris shared his story as part of a [video series on Centra Villa](#).

*“I’m in a good position now to remain structured, balanced and pursue other things. So it’s good, real good.”*



## Progress

In 2023, we acquired the following properties:

- The Park at Ferentino, 216 homes, Charlotte, North Carolina
- Villager Apartments, 40 homes, Jacksonville, Florida
- The Loop at Lamar, 138 homes, Metro Denver, Colorado
- The Avalon Apartments, 117 homes, Phoenix, Arizona

Previous acquisitions include:

- The Mayflower, 65 homes, Baltimore, Maryland
- Caroline Village, 93 homes, Jacksonville, Florida
- Avon North, 63 homes, Metro Denver, Colorado
- Avon South, 36 homes, Metro Denver, Colorado
- Park 16, 60 homes, Metro Denver, Colorado
- French Courtyard, 42 homes, Jacksonville, Florida
- Glastonbury Woods, 144 homes, Nashville, Tennessee
- Centra Villa, 132 homes, Atlanta, Georgia
- Santa Fe Suites, 123 homes, Santa Fe, New Mexico
- The Abrigo Apartments, 66 homes, Metro Denver, Colorado

**We continued to roll out our enhanced property management model.**

We are implementing Property Management Plus in all Community Solutions housing to:

1. Ensure that prospective tenants are being matched to any support services they may require by forging strong relationships between the on-site manager, the Continuum of Care, VA, and other case management agencies.
2. Create a network of trusted community resources to benefit tenants.
3. Promote health and well-being with partnerships with healthcare providers, including local VA Medical Centers.
4. Provide a safe and positive environment that aligns the needs of tenants and landlords.
5. Maintain the physical environment to a high standard.

**In 2023, we developed and implemented strategies for converting shelters to permanent housing.** In Washington, D.C., and Detroit, we are working with local operators to implement replicable processes for repurposing shelters and transitional housing facilities into permanent homes.

In particular, as the number of veterans experiencing homelessness decreases in many communities, facilities built as dorm-style shelters can be given a new life as permanent homes and efficiently add to the supply of homes available to veterans and others who are experiencing homelessness. We are prototyping model approaches for reusing these properties in Detroit and Washington, D.C., and figuring out the regulatory, design, financial, and operating issues involved to prepare open-source guidance for communities able to seize these opportunities to create homes.

## Challenges and Learnings

**Balancing short-term emergency shelter needs with investments in sustainable solutions to homelessness is a challenge.** Nationally, the number of people experiencing homelessness for the first time was estimated to have risen 30% from 2020 to 2022. A wave of evictions following the pandemic moratorium and rising housing costs contributed to this alarming trend.

Major cities face deficits of tens of thousands of homes, a stark reality reflected in unsheltered homelessness, which increased by more than 10% between 2022-2023.

Even in communities with higher vacancy rates, people experiencing homelessness struggle to find homes:

- Many landlords don't accept rental subsidies and automatically screen out housing seekers with poor credit, criminal histories, or evictions.
- Federal rental vouchers are not available for all who need help paying the rent, and don't match up with rising costs.
- The production of new housing is slow and costly. Strict zoning, building, and occupancy regulations stand in the way of developing deeply affordable housing. >>

### KEY TAKEAWAY

*While shelters provide temporary refuge, the shortage of housing puts a ceiling on solving homelessness.*

In spite of these challenges, communities are matching record numbers of people experiencing homelessness with homes — but struggling with the increasing numbers of individuals newly entering homelessness.

Shelters are intended as just a first step toward housing rather than an end solution. Communities have increased beds, expanded hours, and utilized COVID-relief funds to increase capacity. Some have leased hotels, paid for motel stays, or experimented with alternatives like tiny home villages.

While shelters provide temporary refuge, the shortage of housing puts a ceiling on solving homelessness.

The crisis is such that bipartisan, pro-housing legislation has been introduced in many states, which has spurred innovations in building construction, housing finance, and living arrangements. Community Solutions is connecting these opportunities with Built for Zero communities.

**Efforts to expand access to affordable housing are primarily through the use of existing housing stock.** Communities are influencing private landlords through outreach and education efforts, financial incentives, and by mitigating landlords' concerns about renting to people with experience of homelessness and with government rental subsidies.

In Nashville, the public-private Low Barrier Housing Collective offers landlords incentives like generous sign-on and lease-up bonuses, guaranteed funds that provide additional coverage for any damages to apartments, as well as lost rent reimbursement. These funds also pay for support services for tenants who need assistance to meet their responsibilities. In Oregon, Multnomah County offered landlords 12-month rent guarantees, payments to hold vacant units, a landlord hotline, and extra damage coverage. More than 200 people were housed as a result.

**Efforts to add new units through development and renovation are small-scale and infrequent.** A few communities are undertaking efforts that modestly increase their affordable housing supply by acquiring existing properties and converting them into new affordable units.

**Development of new housing at a significant scale is limited.** To meet substantial demand, most communities require new housing at all levels of affordability.

Communities need supportive local and state policies that remove barriers to development, such as highly restrictive zoning, building code, and occupancy rules. It will also necessitate mobilizing public and private investment and prioritizing new housing resources for people currently or at risk of experiencing homelessness.

## Low-barrier shelters

Low-barrier shelters are an important short-term option for people experiencing homelessness. They provide safe accommodation without prerequisites like sobriety or background checks that have historically deterred people from seeking help. Services may include assistance with finding long-term housing, health care, counseling, job training, and storage for belongings.

## KEY TAKEAWAY

*Communities need supportive local and state policies that remove barriers to development, and prioritize new housing resources for people experiencing homelessness.*

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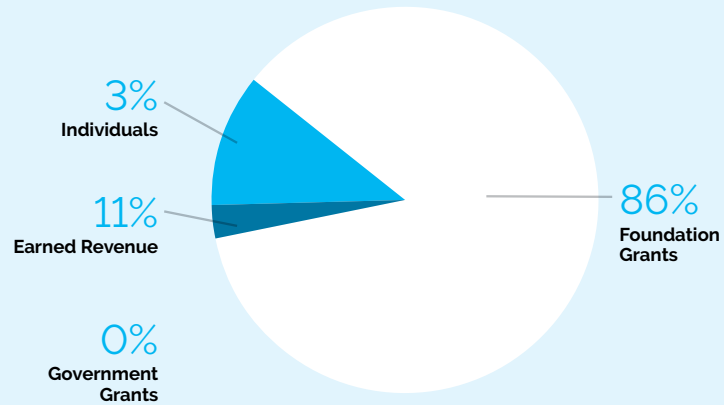
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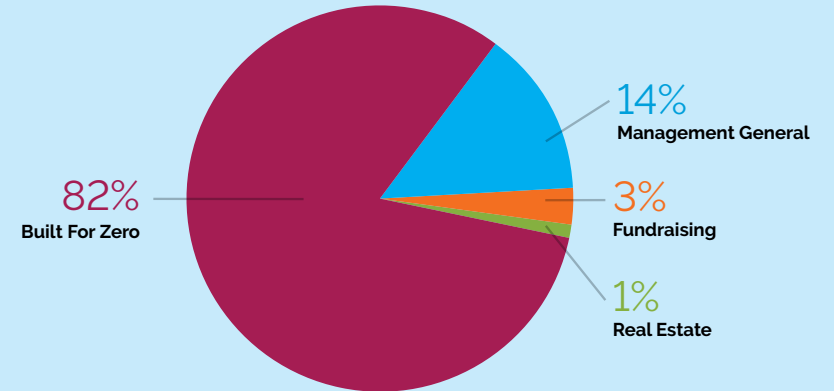
# 2023 Financials

UNAUDITED

Revenue  
\$24,403,227



Expenses  
\$21,267,989



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

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