

Executive Summary

In June 2010, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) issued the first comprehensive plan to prevent and end homelessness. This plan, Opening Doors, provides a road map for joint action by 19 federal agencies and local and state partners to align housing, health, education and human services to prevent Americans from experiencing homelessness.

Central to this comprehensive effort is a greater emphasis on helping people secure and retain safe, stable housing. From years of practice and research, we know that housing is an essential platform for human and community development.

Following the release of Opening Doors, conversations ensued about the possibility of creating a similar framework for Connecticut. Opening Doors – CT formally was launched in March 2011 with the first of a series of six “listening session” – facilitated conversations among practitioners and policymakers in the fields of homeless services, health care, criminal justice, family and youth programs, community engagement, employment, and housing. A summary of the feedback given during the listening sessions can be found in Appendix A. Through these sessions and an on-line survey instrument, over 250 stakeholders from across the state provided practical advice on potential Connecticut-based strategies for preventing and ending homelessness. Also examined was extensive public comment provided the federal Opening Doors process from a 2010 stakeholders meeting held in the Northeast.

Context for the Opening Doors – CT Framework

Opening Doors - CT embraces the vision, core values, and goals laid out in the federal Opening Doors plan. We also use the same starting year as the Opening Doors plan, which is 2010, and adopt its initial five- year planning timeframe of 2010-2014.

Vision

No one should experience homelessness – no one should be without a safe, stable place to call home.

Core values

- Homelessness is unacceptable. It is solvable and preventable.
- There are no “homeless people,” but rather people who have lost their homes who deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.
- Homelessness is expensive. Invest in solutions.

Goals

- Finish the job of ending chronic homelessness in 5 years
- Prevent and end homelessness among Veterans in 5 years
- Prevent and end homelessness among families, youth and children in 10 years
- Set a path to ending all types of homelessness.

Opening Doors - CT is guided by a set of key principles:

- Stable housing is the foundation.

- What happens at the ground level matters.
- Collaboration is fundamental to our success.
- Our strategies and solutions must be driven in a way that puts the person or family facing homelessness at the center.
- Strategies must be implementable, user-friendly, cost-effective, and scalable.

What do we know about homelessness in Connecticut?

On any given day, there are approximately 3,800 men, women and children staying in Connecticut emergency shelters and transitional housing programs. This is not a finite population. Over three times as many people (13,400) have at least one episode of homelessness during the year than those who are homeless at any given point in time. With the exception of a core of households who are homeless for long periods of time, there is a tremendous fluidity of people moving into and out of homelessness – some for the first time, some repeatedly over time.

Homelessness is a situation that people find themselves in; it is not a characteristic of the people experiencing it. Effectively addressing homelessness means facilitating the transitions of people out of this situation, preventing their return to it, and preventing people from becoming homeless in the first place. Connecticut and national data help us better understand who is most impacted by homelessness and who is most likely to fall within its grasp.

Opening Doors – CT attempts to capture in one document the homeless and at-risk populations in a series of charts based upon data collected through the Point in Time annual count of people who are homeless and through the CT Homeless Management Information System. There follows a discussion of the costs of homelessness such as the utilization of more expensive state services and the reasons why people find themselves homeless in the first instance. This analysis then leads to a description of the housing assistance necessary over a five-year period in order to respond to the challenges we face.

What needs to happen?

The framework of *Opening Doors-CT* is divided along the same lines as the federal plan:

- Increase access to stable and affordable housing
- Retool the homeless crisis response system
- Increase economic security
- Improve health and housing stability
- Increase leadership, collaboration, and civic engagement

Within each of the principles, above, the framework establishes objectives and offers ideas, concepts and collaborations that should be considered and acted upon.

The Framework calls for increasing leadership, collaboration and civic engagement through an expanded and recommitted Reaching Home initiative. Reaching Home currently is the campaign to end long-term homelessness by creating 10,000 units of supportive housing over a ten-year period. To date, the campaign has led to the creation of over 4,500 such units. By using an expanded framework of the Reaching Home initiative to incorporate the work of the Opening Doors – CT framework, Connecticut is well positioned to make the plan to end homelessness a reality.

Opening Doors - Connecticut

Summary of Strategy Ideas

INCREASE ACCESS TO STABLE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Strengthen our housing delivery system; create supportive and affordable housing at a scale sufficient to meet the need

Expand and target rent subsidies.

Stimulate the development of supportive housing and of mixed income communities that include units affordable to households with extremely low incomes.

Embed strategies to end homelessness within cohesive State and municipal housing policies that set clear outcome targets.

Aggressively leverage and compete for Federal rent subsidies, housing development dollars, and service funding linked to housing.

RETOOL THE HOMELESS CRISIS RESPONSE SYSTEM

Recalibrate our response to housing loss

Within an overall policy framework support community or regional-level development of a coordinated system of response centered on homelessness prevention, housing assistance, and housing stabilization.

Target housing assistance to those most likely to enter or remain in shelter or in unsheltered settings.

Strengthen the capacity of Connecticut's HMIS system to meet the expanded data-matching, reporting and research needs identified in the Opening Doors-CT process.

Align state and local activities.

INCREASE ECONOMIC SECURITY

Foster housing retention through income growth and employment

Link workforce system resources (skill & job development) with the housing assistance system to create effective pathways to employment for vulnerable populations.

Align public and private sectors to ensure effective systems coordination with shared goals.

Expand income growth for persons with disabilities.

IMPROVE HEALTH AND HOUSING STABILITY

Reduce medical vulnerability and frequent use of health care systems

Align state and local strategies to support the goals of improved access to health care and effective use of appropriate types of health services.

Maximize the use of existing and new health sector resources to address both the housing and service needs of extremely vulnerable populations.

Implement housing-based approaches to align with the health reform goals of prevention, greater access, better quality and lower cost.

Expand use of HMIS to support new targeting approaches and to collect and disseminate quality data about use of healthcare systems.

Support the housing stability of vulnerable families, children and youth

Assess the feasibility of deploying a "systems navigator" function that will align and coordinate services at the individual family level across sectors and at different levels of service delivery.

Incentivize the creation of service-supported affordable housing for families.

Develop targeted outreach strategies to identify youth and young adults without permanent housing and connect them to the housing and support they need; develop partnerships with school systems in this effort.

Expand the range of housing options for youth and young adults facing housing loss.

Break the cycle of homelessness and re-incarceration

Target housing resources and other supports to prevent and end homelessness among people leaving incarceration.

Align housing resources and other supports to prevent and end homelessness among people leaving incarceration.

INCREASE LEADERSHIP, COLLABORATION, AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Lead, manage and monitor the change process

Reaching Home 2.0 would become the leadership structure for planning and oversight of Opening Doors - CT that builds upon existing partnerships between the public, private, and nonprofit sectors.

Develop operational plans at the state and local level with specific actions linked to resources and responsible parties.

Create opportunities to ensure that the voices of people who have experienced homelessness and people working on the front lines of service delivery are heard.

Develop outcome measures at both the system level and at the program level.

As the State looks at its overall use of data and use of technology, consider the creation of a human services data warehouse to provide a platform for integrating key data across HMIS and human services.