

A. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

Clark County is situated in Southwest Washington, north of the state of Oregon, right across the bridge from Portland. It is a close-knit community of family-centric cities and civically engaged constituents. The residents of Clark County love where they live, want their community to feel like home and to be a place that gives them pride. Clark County is a community with a rich history of charitable initiatives and philanthropy, that has worked alongside local government on issues important to those who live there. Homelessness has become an increasingly prominent issue to residents and elected officials alike due to its proliferation in scale and complexity. The number of people experiencing homelessness has grown over the years since this complex issue presented itself in this community.

In 2019, data collected from the annual Point in Time (PIT) Count revealed a 21% increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness in Clark County from the previous year's count. Despite a 4% decrease in the overall numbers of people who are homeless according to the 2020 PIT count, the data also revealed that there were increasingly more people who were unsheltered (+6%). The data may need further examination that would help provide deeper insights, but it is certain that this reality is not for lack of effort on the part of a community with deep non-profit and human service roots. Clark County, like many communities across the U.S., is grappling with the challenges presented by this growing issue and the factors which perpetuate it—such as housing affordability, inadequate behavioral health and substance use disorder resources, poverty, racial disparities, and more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Clark County, the racial disparities are evidenced by the number of Black, Indigenous and Persons of Color (BIPOC) communities who are homeless as compared to their overall representation in the general population. Data from the annual PIT collected in 2020 revealed that 24% of all people experiencing homelessness in Clark County identify as BIPOC. Black people who account for less than 2% of the population of Clark county make up 7% of the homeless population, Pacific Islanders who account for less than 1% of the overall population account for 4% of people who are homeless.

Clark County is a collaborative community of thought leaders on the larger issues that impact people unhoused such as behavioral health, housing, law enforcement, etc. The County and City of Vancouver recently formed the Joint Executive Board currently comprised of elected officials with the intention to add persons with lived experience. The Board will work together to examine, and address systems gaps and recommend policy issues to their respective jurisdictions. This Board will work with key stakeholders that are at the forefront of strategizing on this issue which include providers, Clark County Government staff, the City of Vancouver staff, the Vancouver Housing Authority (VHA), community constituents and other partnering systems.

Community partners are mostly aligned in their understanding of homelessness as intersecting with other systems such behavioral health and criminal justice, and as a result, efforts are increasingly more strategic, collaborative, and multidimensional. Some highlights of past and ongoing efforts in the community include:

- In 2016, Council for the Homeless (CFTH), following an analysis of the state of housing affordability and availability in Clark County, and realizing the gaps, formed the Housing Initiative, LLC to focus on increasing the community's capacity to own and manage housing for homeless and mentally ill people who have the most significant challenges. The Housing

Initiative's new supportive housing projects partner with Sea Mar-Community Services North West (CSNW) as the service provider and VHA as a development consultant and rental assistance provider. This partnership identifies individuals who have a completed housing assessment (VI-SPDAT), are interested in being housed, and are eligible for Medicaid foundational community support housing case managers. Qualifying individuals are referred to CSNW for enrollment in the program. Once enrolled, they are eligible for access to 8 apartments at The Pacific (now open), 46 apartments at The Elwood (opening in February 2021), and 46 apartments at The Meridian (opening spring of 2022). The VHA has also committed to pair 200 tenant-based vouchers with the foundational community support housing case management program creating scattered-site supportive housing. Applicants gain access in the same method as described above for the Housing Initiative's supportive housing. At the end of 2020, this program has housed 76 households as it builds toward 200.

- In February of 2016, Vancouver Housing Authority (owner), in partnership with Share (Service Provider) opened Lincoln Place, a housing-first apartment building where clients have onsite access to behavioral and physical health services. Lincoln Place is permanent supportive housing so can live there indefinitely and receive on-going services. During their time residents are being actively supported toward improving their overall functioning. Clients are expected to pay 30% of their gross income towards rent; those who have no funds are not required to pay.
- On Nov. 8, 2016, Vancouver voters approved a \$42 million, seven-year Affordable Housing Fund for very low-income households within the city who earn 50 percent or less of the area median income. *(The link to the Affordable Housing Fund Webpage can be found here: <https://www.cityofvancouver.us/ced/page/affordable-housing-fund>).* Through 2023, the fund supported community partners in implementing projects and programs that:
 - Build and preserve long-term affordable housing in Vancouver
 - Provide temporary shelter to people experiencing homelessness
 - Provide rental assistance and services to help households avoid an eviction or access a rental unit
- In 2017, the City of Vancouver purchased a 25,000 square foot building, located on 2018 Grand Boulevard in Central Vancouver, for a price of \$4.3 million for the purpose of operating a homeless day center. The day center, called the Navigation Center, provided a space where people could be throughout the day, receive mail, get meals, complete housing assessments, do laundry, take showers, use bathrooms, and connect with service providers. Due to its location, the foot traffic, and the perception of increased criminality in the neighborhood, the program divided opinions as to its suitability. At the height of the program, more than 100 unique individuals visited daily. The City made the decision to close the day center toward the start of the pandemic because of the public health risk it would have posed, the lack of appropriate staff, and inability to ensure appropriate safety measures for guests. *(The link to the City of Vancouver Navigation Center webpage can be found here: <https://www.cityofvancouver.us/ced/page/vancouver-navigation-center>).*

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- In August 2018, with assistance from the City's Affordable Housing Fund, Vancouver Housing Authority and Columbia Non-Profit Housing opened Meriwether Place, a 30-unit affordable housing project for people experiencing homelessness with behavioral health challenges.
- On November 27, 2018, Clark County Council adopted the Homeless Action Plan (HAP) which had been developed by Council for the Homeless in collaboration with community members, people with lived homelessness experience, social service providers, and local elected officials. (*The Homeless Action Plan can be found here: <https://www.councilforthehomeless.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/FINAL-Clark-County-HAP-adopted-11-27-18.pdf>.*) Some of the recommendations of the HAP include:
 - Grow the capacity of the Homeless Crisis Response System across all intervention types
 - Leverage philanthropic giving
 - Increased focus on:
 - Mobile outreach and engagement
 - Strengthening prevention and diversion
 - Increasing housing options
 - Engaging the expertise of people with lived experience
 - Improve and increase ability to deliver culturally competent services
 - The HAP also recommended the creation of a homeless crisis response system Continuum of Care that would bring together representatives from the City of Vancouver and Clark County Leadership.
- In October 2020, the City of Vancouver and Clark County approved a memorandum of agreement between the two jurisdictions which established Clark County as the lead agency on regional homeless response and created a joint advisory policy group on homelessness to enable leaders from both organizations to collaborate on projects and initiatives that will address homelessness and its impacts within the county. (*The MOA and Charter can be found here: https://clark.wa.gov/sites/default/files/media/document/2020-10/102820_JointExecutiveGrouponHomelessnessMOACharter.pdf.*)
- Washington Department of Social and Health Services is actively working to meet the increased demand for mental health services by individuals in acute crises, and those awaiting competency evaluations and restoration services. In 2014, the Trueblood v. DSHS (Trueblood) lawsuit challenged unconstitutional delays in competency evaluation and restoration services for people detained in jails (<https://www.dshs.wa.gov/bha/trueblood-et-al-v-washington-state-dshs>, n.d.). As a result of the groundbreaking ruling which followed, the state was ordered to provide competency evaluations within 14 days and competency restoration services within seven days of court orders for persons who are deemed to not be competent to stand trial due to mental health competency concerns. Clark County was one of the first regions in Washington State to receive funding for competency and restoration services, and has since rolled out the following programs:
 - **Forensic Navigators**
 - Forensic Navigators are assigned clients who receive court orders for competency evaluations. Their support starts with visits and initial connections

to resources while clients are in jail. If clients are deemed competent, Forensic Navigator services end. For those who are determined not competent to stand trial and are ordered into outpatient competency restoration, Forensic Navigators continue until they provide warm handoffs to community resources. Forensic Navigators help guide, support, and advocate for their clients as they undergo competency evaluations, competency restoration treatment, and transitions to the community. Forensic Navigators serve as officers of the courts, interim case managers, and community liaisons who assist clients while they are involved with the criminal court system. They also offer coordinated transitions and warm handoffs to appropriate resources.

- **Foundational PATH and HARPS**

- F-PATH and F-HARPS teams within community behavioral health agencies include certified peer counselors who work with people experiencing homelessness to build relationships and help connect them with housing, transportation, and other care services. These certified peer counselors have lived experience with behavioral health recovery and are required to complete continuing education training as part of the Enhanced Peer Services Program. They build relationships with clients and help connect them with supports including housing, transportation, and health care services.
- As a response to the growing need for appropriate resources for those experiencing behavioral health crises in the community, a group, including representatives from the agencies listed above, convened to strategize options. The result of this process was the opening of a Crisis Triage & Stabilization Program located at 5197 NW Lower River Road, Bldg #1, Vancouver, WA 98660. Due to restrictions imposed by Governor Inslee as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the site is currently operating at limited capacity. During regular 24/7 program hours, the Crisis Triage & Stabilization Center will provide a safe and supportive alternative for diversion from hospital emergency departments or incarceration for individuals experiencing an acute behavioral health crisis. The triage component supports eight people for up to 23 hours, while the stabilization component has 16 beds for a length of stay of between five and seven days. Services include one on one and group sessions, substance use disorder and mental health assessments, medication education, and connections to community resources for increased support to promote continued stabilization.

B. SCOPE OF SERVICES

Homelessness in Clark County represents an ongoing public health issue, is co-morbid with chronic and persistent behavioral health disorders and is most disruptive when those experiencing homelessness are street-bound and experiencing crises related to their complex behavioral health challenges. Trends in homelessness remain stubbornly high, despite policy and programmatic initiatives to end homelessness. Those include a housing first approach, strategic partnerships, financial investments, commitment to diversion from incarceration and emergency medical systems, and ongoing community education. Homelessness in Clark County is caused by poverty, and positively correlates with chronic behavioral health challenges and criminal justice involvement. Preliminary insights reveal that to develop an

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effective strategy to address homelessness in Clark County it requires an understanding of its underpinnings, including:

1. Predisposing Factors (How do we stop folks from entering the pipeline)
 - a. Who is most likely to be homeless in Clark County and why?
2. Precipitating Factors (How do we prevent the traumas and conditions that lead to homelessness)
 - a. What are the circumstances which lead to people becoming homeless in Clark County?
3. Perpetuating Factors (How do we appropriately address what is happening now)
 - a. Why are people remaining homeless in Clark County?

The consultant(s) should conduct a comprehensive system evaluation that produces perspective and insights about:

1. System Strengths (What are we doing well)
 - a. What are the strengths of the systems orientation in the community?
 - b. Alignments with housing first throughout the service delivery network/are local homelessness and behavioral health organizations using a Housing First orientation in their programs and practices?
 - c. What programs are working well?
2. System Gaps (What are we not getting right)
 - a. Where are philosophies and approaches not aligned?
 - b. Gaps in data collection
 - c. What services are missing, under resourced, or underutilized?
 - d. What service providers are outside of the established homeless response system and what are opportunities to integrate their programs?
3. System Opportunities (How can we be better)
 - a. Identification of opportunities for new funding
 - b. Identification of opportunities to leverage and optimize current funding
 - c. Recommendations about consolidating funding, if allowable
 - d. Recommendations as to partnership opportunities
 - e. Recommendations as to potential best practices that should be implemented.
 - f. Recommendations for expanding the service provider network in Clark County.

The assessment should include a review of the local policies, and other complex systems perspectives, to provides insights into the dynamics underlying the current responses to homelessness. Gaining these insights requires the skill and experience necessary to engage with those affected, service providers, and other systems' stakeholders to broaden the consultant's perspective and inform their analysis. Furthermore, any assessment should be inclusive of diverse community voices including advocates, residents, those with lived experience, and other impacted stakeholders.

C. DELIVERABLES

The consultant shall provide professional consulting services for a comprehensive evaluation of the homelessness response system and its intersections with the criminal justice, physical health, and

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behavioral health system. This evaluation will include an analysis of findings, including gaps, areas for investments, and culminating in strategic recommendations.

1. A comprehensive assessment of Clark County's homelessness response system to include:
 - a. Landscape analysis of the current state of homelessness
 - b. Insights on system and program performance
2. Analysis and evaluation of the system to include:
 - a. Identification of gaps
 - b. Report on findings
 - c. Detailed recommendation on strategic improvements
 - d. Identify process and data collection improvements
3. Implementation and technical assistance recommendations:
 - a. Outline of the implementation support needs
 - b. Identify the technical assistance needs and how to recruit
 - c. Set benchmarks/measures for success
4. An evaluation of the applicability of housing first as an effective and applicable intervention in addressing homelessness for all people unhoused in Clark County.
 - a. An overall assessment of the model, including its successes and challenges
 - b. Is this model feasible for all people unhoused?
 - c. Is the intervention being effectively leveraged?
 - d. Are there any disadvantages of this intervention?
 - e. Recommendation for applicable alternatives

The Consultant will report to Clark County Community Services for deliverables and payment. The Consultant will provide updates during scheduled meetings and the final report to the joint Board working on the larger homeless issues in Clark County. The joint Board may choose to provide the report to community advisory boards, City and County Councils, and the broader public.