



Homelessness Prevention Framework

A Companion to the Home Together Community Plan



Alameda County Health

The Need for Prevention

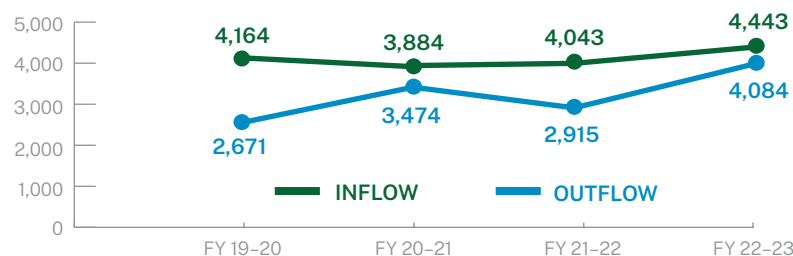


Preventing homelessness before it occurs is a critical strategy for reducing the number of unhoused residents and the associated racial disparities in Alameda County. Prevent Homelessness for our Residents is one of four core objectives in the Home Together Community Plan but until now there has not been a dedicated framework for how to pursue this critical objective.

Why focus on prevention now?

Alameda County is closer than ever to closing the gap between those who become newly homeless each year and those who end their homelessness. In FY22–23, 4,006 people became newly homeless¹ and 437 became homeless again after having been successfully rehoused (a total of 4,443 people.) During that same time, 4,084 people were assisted back into housing. This is the closest that the rehousing rate (outflow) has gotten to meeting new homelessness (inflow) in the last four years, a gap of only 359 people. (See *Figure 1*.)

Figure 1 | Homelessness Response System Inflow and Outflow



¹ Newly homeless is defined as not having enrolled in publicly funded homelessness services in at least the previous two years.

To turn the curve and steadily reduce homelessness, the inflow rate must dip deeply below the outflow rate and consistently remain there, as thousands of currently homeless households must also be rehoused before the trajectory is righted. Additionally, many people experience housing crises or housing loss without entering the homelessness response system and could benefit from prevention support through other avenues such as mainstream and upstream systems.

Alameda County's homelessness response system has expanded its capacity to serve and rehouse people experiencing homelessness since the launch of Home Together in FY21–22. The community has several effective programs currently working to prevent homelessness. However, the funding and scale is insufficient to meet the need, and the resources are not consistent or reliable. Inadequate resources and structural factors persist, such as systemic racism in the housing market, rising rents combined with insufficient wages, and displacement pressures exacerbated by persistent underproduction of affordable housing. These factors cause new homelessness (inflow) to occur at a rate that still outpaces the rates at which homelessness can be prevented and people currently experiencing homelessness can be rehoused.

To scale the prevention approach and begin to effectively meet the need is estimated to cost approximately \$50 million annually.² A significant investment combined with increased targeting and coordinated efforts across a wide array of systems can change the trajectory. This Framework provides the structure for this scaling and coordination to occur.

² This includes approximately \$10 million annually for reducing the rate people already rehoused fall back into homelessness, and \$44 million for targeted prevention to reduce new homelessness.

Targeting to those most at risk

Prevention is both humane and cost-effective when targeted to those most likely to lose housing. Many people within Alameda County are at risk of homelessness. More than 40,000 Alameda County households are extremely low-income and severely rent burdened.³ Housing for many of these households is tenuous and it takes little to put them at imminent risk of becoming homeless.

To reduce homelessness and decrease racial disparities requires reducing the rate at which people fall into, and return, to homelessness. Because at any given time a large number of people are at risk, the prevention response needs both to scale and to appropriately target resources to ensure it prevents homelessness for as many people as possible.

Resources for homelessness prevention, however, are extremely limited compared to the need, and coordinated efforts are required to expand and implement effective prevention strategies.



From the current approach to the future response

This Homelessness Prevention Framework was developed using evidence from national research, key informant interviews with local government and nonprofit leaders, and input from local stakeholders with lived and professional expertise who met as the Homelessness Prevention Strategy Team (HPST).⁴ The HPST met eight times over the course of 2023, studying best practices, reviewing suggested strategies, and providing feedback on existing and new approaches, including helping to develop critical screening tools that can be deployed within local government systems to identify households at high risk of losing housing and to provide preventative assistance.

Within Alameda County, there are several strong programs offering prevention-related services. These programs include the Keep People Housed network, which uses targeted outreach, geographic (zip code-based) prioritization, and risk screening to focus on people and communities who are closest to becoming homeless, as well as other specially targeted programs within some cities. In addition, there are a variety of programs embedded in mainstream systems that focus on households experiencing housing insecurity which provide prevention-related services. These programs include:

- Alameda County Housing Secure, which offers legal services and emergency rent assistance to households facing eviction.
- Alameda County's child welfare system's support for youth exiting foster care to transition to stable housing.
- The Probation Department's support for people exiting incarceration to access transitional and permanent housing.
- Alameda County Health, which operates and supports numerous programs aimed at increasing housing stability among the people they serve.

Not all of these programs are targeted to those most at risk of housing loss, however, and none are currently scaled to meet the existing need. In FY 22–23, eviction prevention and targeted homelessness prevention programs accounted for just \$5.2 million of the \$293.5 invested in the homelessness response system in Alameda County. One-time resources during the COVID response period temporarily increased the prevention resources available in Year 1 of the Plan (FY21-22), reaching many thousands of households, but there are currently no recurring federal or state resources that specifically fund the type of robust and targeted prevention services envisioned here and needed to make progress.⁵

³ Extremely low-income households earn less than 30% of the area median income (or less than \$39,950 for a family of three). Severely rent-burdened households pay more than 50% of their income for their housing.

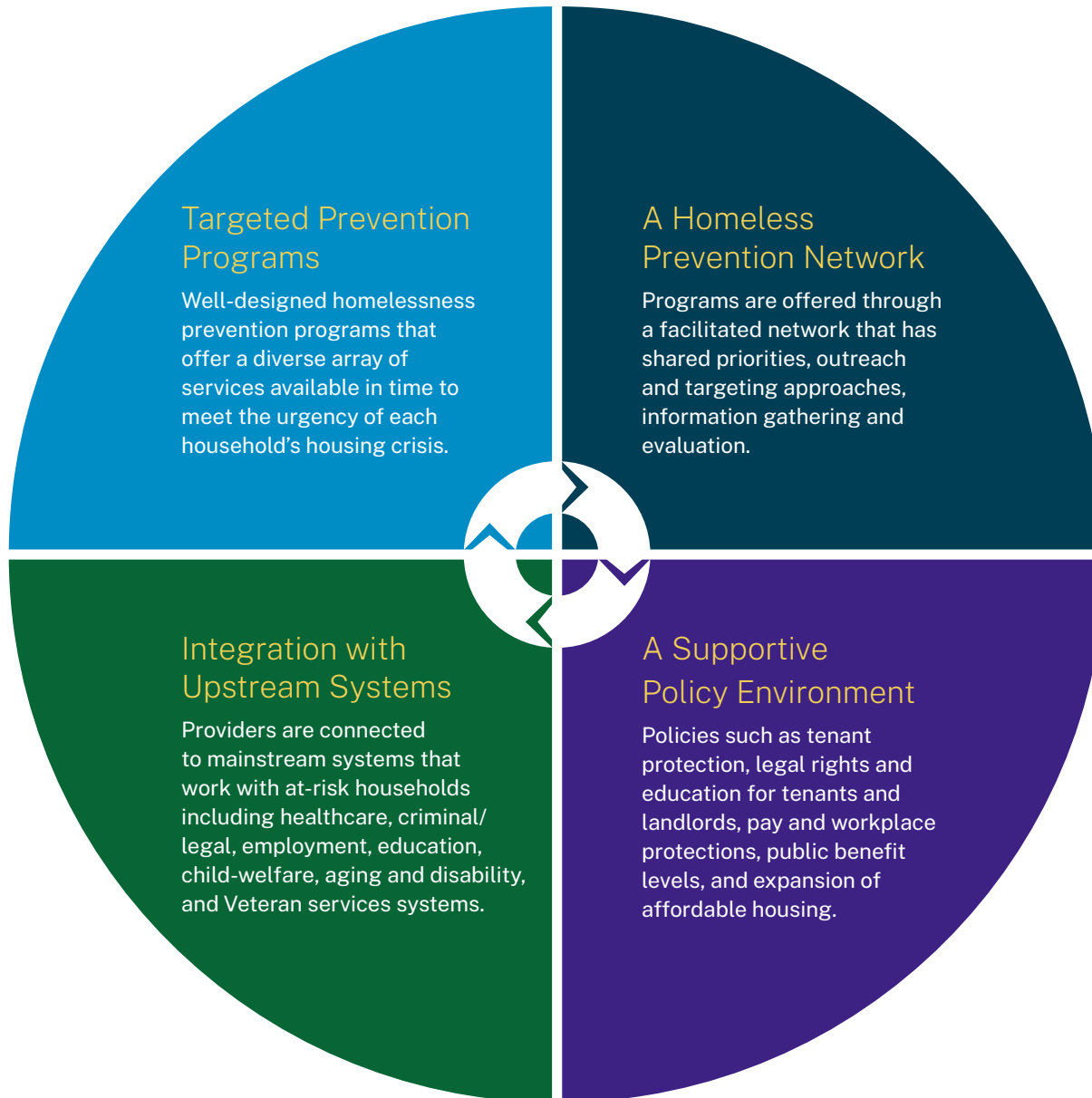
⁴ For a complete list of HPST members see *Appendix A*. For a more in-depth description of the methodology for this report, see *Appendix C*.

⁵ Home Together Year 2 Progress Update, available at <https://homelessness.acgov.org/reports.page?>

The creation of an effective, efficient, and equitable community-wide homelessness prevention response requires four interconnected components.

1. Targeted Prevention Programs
2. A Homeless Prevention Network
3. Integration with Upstream Systems
4. A Supportive Policy Environment

In addition, a robust and coordinated prevention approach requires well-defined and **accountable leadership and investment in administration and infrastructure** to implement, oversee, and evaluate the response. This is in addition to the **significant new investment needed directly in the prevention services themselves**.



Objectives, Strategies & Critical Action Steps



The recommendations developed for this Framework lay out specific strategies and action steps, which together create the four-part response pictured above. Several of these strategies were first presented in the Home Together 2026 plan and have been elaborated on for this Framework, while others are new.* *Appendix B* lays out all the recommendations and the detailed action steps needed to achieve them. These recommendations, summarized below, were discussed in detail with the HPST and other stakeholders who identified the work that needs to be done to realize the objectives.

* New strategies are marked with a **NEW** symbol.

OBJECTIVE 1

Address racial disparities in mainstream/upstream systems to prevent racially disproportionate inflow into homelessness.

Partner with school districts, social services agencies, child welfare, community health organizations and others to connect people to prevention and economic supports in a timely manner and through trusted sources.

Work with institutions in the criminal legal system to create housing planning and homelessness prevention resources.

Ensure that workforce services are accessible to and structured to support people whose housing is unstable.

Target resources to assist children and vulnerable transition-aged youth leaving their homes or foster care.

NEW

Highlighted Action Steps

- Convene public entities and develop joint plans.
- Implement screening questions in mainstream systems, including health care settings, and make warm hand-offs to prevention programs.
- Build prevention assessments into discharge planning.
- Align homelessness prevention services for the reentry population with current criminal legal system reform efforts.
- Deepen partnerships between workforce services, eviction prevention, homelessness prevention, and homelessness response systems.
- Build support and partnerships with existing and new employment social enterprises (ESEs).
- Build on the work of the child welfare/foster care system to support successful transitions to permanent housing for vulnerable youth at risk of homelessness.

OBJECTIVE 2

Focus resources for prevention on people most likely to lose their homes.

Work with government and private funders to increase targeted prevention for people most likely to become homeless.

Tailor outreach and prioritization to reach those at highest risk and coordinate these efforts in all areas of the county.

Implement and expand shallow subsidy availability for people on fixed or limited incomes with housing insecurity to relieve rent burden and reduce the risk of becoming homeless.

Highlighted Action Steps

- Invest in programs that use proven methods to reach and target households most likely to experience homelessness.
- Develop a homelessness prevention services network that coordinates efforts across Alameda County.
- Use data to identify and prioritize outreach to the highest need neighborhoods and geographic areas.
- Make prevention services easier to access using physical and virtual access points and streamline application processes.
- Use a shared information system, agreed-upon data standards and workflows.
- Advocate for the shallow subsidy model and for local, state, and federal funding to meet these needs.

OBJECTIVE 3

Rapidly resolve episodes of homelessness through Housing Problem Solving.

Add resources to flexible funding pools for Housing Problem Solving, a practice of helping people newly homeless or on the verge of homelessness to identify rapid solutions to their situation with light financial support.

Offer Housing Problem Solving training and funding throughout the system so that providers can quickly assist people when and where they seek help.

Provide Housing Problem Solving training and funding to mainstream systems and to organizations in the homelessness prevention network.

NEW

Highlighted Action Steps

- Evaluate Housing Problem Solving's impact and work with current and prospective providers to develop system improvements.
- Create an easily accessible pool of flexible funds that trained employees in mainstream systems and community-based organizations can use to problem-solve with households.
- Use a shared information platform, or information sharing protocol, to track Housing Problem Solving outcomes.

OBJECTIVE 4

Prevent racially disproportionate returns to homelessness.

Target time-limited rapid rehousing resources to serve households with an ability to increase income.

Partner with educational, vocational and employment services to ensure that people moving toward employment have strong support in obtaining and maintaining employment.

Establish a flexible funding pool for preventing homelessness, including a shallow subsidy option.

Review and evaluate methods for determining types of housing placements to ensure high rates of success and avoid unsustainable housing placements.

Provide additional support services, such as behavioral health care and case management, in existing sites and programs for people who have transitioned from homelessness to permanent housing.

Highlighted Action Steps

- Prioritize rapid rehousing to households engaged in workforce training and employment programs, or in the benefit acquisition process.
- Explore using rapid rehousing as a bridge to an expected shallow or deep long-term subsidy.
- Expand supported employment, including employment social enterprises (ESEs) to serve formerly homeless people with mental health and/or substance use disorder needs and other challenges.
- Allocate long-term shallow subsidies for formerly homeless people with limited fixed incomes.
- Target resources geographically to ensure significant resources reach BIPOC communities.
- Using a racial equity lens and available research, expand existing program standards to develop housing plans.
- Use data to evaluate equity impacts.

OBJECTIVE 5

Create a policy environment supporting homelessness prevention.

NEW

City and County legislators advocate collectively with state and federal leaders for needed policy changes and ongoing funding.

Increase the supply of deeply affordable housing.

Strengthen and enforce local tenant protections.

Increase enforcement of federal, state, and local anti-discrimination laws.

Reduce barriers to housing stability for people who have been convicted of crimes.

Highlighted Action Steps

- Develop a shared legislative platform for increases in ongoing funding and policy changes to reduce the risk of experiencing homelessness.
- Implement recommended enhancements to tenant protections.
- Extend code compliance and relocation programs.
- Evaluate guaranteeing legal representation to all tenants in eviction court, while expanding court-based homelessness prevention services.
- Support increased enforcement and strengthening of non-discrimination laws.
- Pursue strengthened “Ban the Box” and “Fair Chance” protections against use of past criminal history in housing.

The need for significant new investment

Achieving significant reductions in new homelessness through targeted prevention strategies requires significant new investment. As stated above, there are currently no large recurring sources from the federal or state government that can be dedicated to targeted prevention efforts. Local and ongoing resources are needed.

Estimating the additional investment needed is not easy. Not everyone who is at risk of losing their housing will become homeless if they do not receive prevention services, but who specifically among the population at risk will become homeless is very hard to predict. This means that the system must create strong targeting to find those most in need and then provide prevention services to many households to ensure that it prevents some from falling into homelessness. Not all prevention interventions will be successful, so each estimate includes both a targeting factor (an estimated number to be served to ensure a successful outcome) and a presumed number that won't be successful.

Finally, prevention can have a wide range of costs, depending on how quickly someone is assisted, how costly their rent or other expenses are, and how long they need assistance. Local eviction prevention providers estimate that they spend an average of between \$6,000 and \$8,000 per household served, including the cost of staffing. For these estimates, we have used \$7,000 per household as the cost of a targeted prevention intervention.

Approximately \$10 million is needed annually to reduce returns to homelessness

While not the majority of those entering homelessness, a portion of the annual inflow comes from people who have previously been homeless and were rehoused in the past two years.

Currently, the rate of returns to homelessness within two years is approximately 15% of all individuals rehoused.⁶ In FY22–23, 449 persons were recorded as returning to homelessness.

Home Together sets a target of reducing the rate of return to homelessness to 9% or lower. This means that the return rates must be lowered at the same time that the number of people who are being rehoused is expected to go up, leaving a larger group of people to target. Because it is impossible to know who of those rehoused will return to homelessness, services will need to be offered to a greater number of people who were rehoused.

Applying calculations that assume both a higher number of people needing to be served over time as the dedicated housing stock grows, and assuming a fairly high but not perfect success rate of 90% we estimate that it would currently take between \$4 million and \$6 million to bring the return rate below 9% over the next two years. When the system reaches full capacity it will take approximately \$10 million per year to achieve and maintain the reduction in returns. (See *Appendix D* for more detail on these calculations.)

Table 1 | Estimated annual cost of achieving a 9% rate of return to homelessness

	Targeted Reduction in # Returning	Multiplying factor to be served	Total Served	Estimated Success Rate	Cost Per Prevention	Total Cost
YEAR 1	181	3	597	90%	\$7,000	\$4,179,000
YEAR 2	255	3	841	90%	\$7,000	\$5,890,500
YEAR 3	415	3	1,369	90%	\$7,000	\$9,586,500

⁶ This analysis uses the return rate for adult-only households because families are already experiencing an 8% return rate, which is below the Home Together goal.

Approximately \$44 million is needed to reduce new entries to homelessness

A much larger number of people enter homelessness for the first time in any given year than return to homelessness. In FY22–23, 4,037 people newly experienced homelessness in Alameda County. To begin to turn the curve, the inflow number needs to drop at the same time the rehousing rate grows. However, even well-funded targeted homelessness prevention which includes extensive outreach cannot reach everyone who might become homeless. Reducing the inflow by approximately 25% each year would make a significant difference in the number of people becoming homeless over time and support the achievement of the Home Together goals to reduce inflow to below the placement rate and keep it low.

Because it is harder to predict among a very large group of low-income residents who will become homeless, targeted prevention to reduce new homelessness must both serve more people and assume a somewhat lower rate of success. For this calculation, we assume programs must serve five times the number of people to ensure at least one successful prevention outcome, and that not all incidences of homelessness will be prevented even with assistance. With these assumptions, a reduction of 1,070 people becoming homeless for the first time is estimated to require approximately \$44 million.⁷

Annual amounts after the first year are difficult to approximate because the rate of new homelessness is unknown. Home Together anticipated a growth rate of up to 20% per year for the first two years of the Plan. The actual growth rate in recorded new homelessness between FY20–21 and FY 22–23 was 4% and 11%. As the Framework is implemented and evaluation carried out, more refined estimates may be possible. If the rates of inflow to homelessness increase, the funding needed to achieve the same level of reduction will be greater. (See *Appendix D* for more details on these calculations.)

Table 2 | **Cost calculus to reduce new homelessness**

Target Reduction in Newly Homeless	Multiplying Factor to be Served	Estimated Success Rate	Total Served	Cost Per Prevention	Total Cost
1,070	5	85%	6,294	\$7,000	\$44,058,000

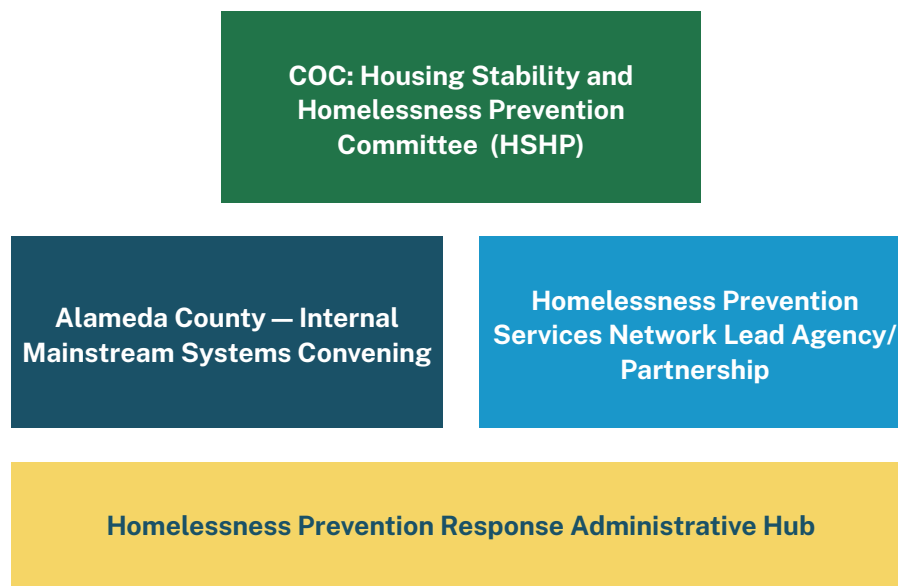
⁷ These assumptions are both very optimistic. The actual numbers needed to be served and the potential failure rate may both be much higher based on the published research, but this type of more targeted programming has not been evaluated.

Create expanded leadership and infrastructure

Finally, to be successful, the community-wide homelessness prevention response will require the support of an engaged leadership and administrative structure to conduct continued planning, provide ongoing oversight and accountability, and support implementation. The following recommendations and the chart below reflect a recommended administrative structure and approach to implement, evaluate and modify the Framework.

All components of this coordinated structure should reflect the guiding values of Home Together, including centering the expertise of people who have experienced housing instability and who represent communities disproportionately impacted by the systemic inequities that lead to homelessness.

Figure 2 | Prevention Framework Leadership and Administrative Structure



Fund and develop administrative capacity that ensures implementation, ongoing accountability to goals, and continuous quality improvement.

Designate the Continuum of Care's Housing Stability and Homelessness Prevention Committee (HSHP) as the public body responsible for ongoing public information and recommendations for implementing the homelessness prevention response.

Identify an agency or office within Alameda County to serve as the administrative hub for the homelessness prevention response (the Hub). Fund a team, initially with an estimated 3–4 FTE, to launch this effort, scaling the team as needed as further prevention resources are added.

Create or use an existing table or convening of Alameda County agencies, departments, and divisions that, with support from the Hub, can guide the implementation of the mainstream systems' roles.

Fund and support a Lead Agency or Partnership for a homelessness prevention services network of community-based homelessness prevention providers to implement the targeted approach, program priorities, and service delivery commitment of Home Together and this Framework.

Establish a shared data system, or a method for data sharing from existing data collection systems, operating across participating mainstream systems and the homelessness prevention network. Develop performance metrics for the work that focuses on outcomes such as retaining housing.

Simplify and streamline access to homelessness prevention financial assistance for providers and their participants by consolidating funding into fewer, more easily accessible, pools, providing maximum flexibility in the use of the funds.

Establish a learning collaborative through the Hub and Lead Agency/ Partnership to provide ongoing training, peer-to-peer learning, and information-sharing opportunities.

Conclusion



Creating a community-wide homelessness prevention response that is effective, efficient, and equitable is critical to achieve the goal of dramatically reducing homelessness and racial disparities in Alameda County.

This Homelessness Prevention Framework lays out a path toward such a response, developed with input from numerous community stakeholders, including people whose lived expertise helped shape the recommendations. Alameda County already benefits from several very good homelessness prevention programs that informed this Framework, and a growing body of academic research also shaped the strategies laid out above.

This Framework will be successful with the support of local leaders, from the mainstream systems that serve households on the verge of homelessness, and from the community-based organizations that are mission-driven to help keep people in their housing. It will be most successful with significant new resources dedicated to making real progress on homelessness prevention. Importantly, as the community stakeholders who contributed to this Framework emphasized, it will also require continued federal, state, and local policy change. **With the right approach, investments, and policy direction, this Framework will help reach the goal of functionally ending homelessness in Alameda County.**



