

AUGUST 4, 2020

HOME TOGETHER
ENDING HOMELESSNESS IN ALAMEDA COUNTY



INTRODUCTION

More than 8,000 people experience homelessness in Alameda County each night, with 79% of this population experiencing unsheltered homelessness on the street, in tents or vehicles. This is double the number of individuals who experienced homelessness in Alameda County in 2015; and 2019 data show that for each person exiting homelessness in our County, three more become homeless. Skyrocketing rents over the last decade in the County have contributed to homelessness, as more than 80% of those who are currently experiencing homelessness in Alameda County lived here before losing their home.¹ As we move through the recession and job loss triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, we anticipate that even more Alameda County residents will be at risk for homelessness.

The Alameda County Homelessness Action Plan, adopted by the Board of Supervisors in November 2018, invests more than \$340 million over three years toward ending homelessness in Alameda County. The County and local cities budgeted a total of nearly \$177.4 million in FY 19/20 through a combination of local, state and federal funds (\$130.2M County + \$47.2M cities). Additionally, the Board approved the launch of the Health Care Services Agency (HCSA) Office of Homeless Care and Coordination in December 2019 to implement expanded services and supports and to lead the development of a strategic framework to address homelessness.

Although significant, existing resources are not sufficient to address the need among our unhoused residents, and existing systems to address homelessness are not adequately resourced or coordinated to address the scale of the problem. Alameda County is in need of more housing and services, more shelter and more coordinated efforts to keep families and individuals from becoming homeless. It will take sustained additional investment in housing resources to bend the curve of homelessness.

The Home Together Plan lays the foundation for the County's next steps and future investments in addressing homelessness, and is the combined result of two interconnected, months-long planning processes: the Home Together Policy Committee and System Modeling. The plan offers an evidence-based and data-informed strategic framework specifically tailored for Alameda County that:

- leverages existing infrastructure,
- identifies pathways for ending homelessness for adults and families,
- is centered on a robust systems analysis with a racial equity lens,
- recommends a regional approach nested within a countywide strategy, and
- reflects input from a broad set of experts and stakeholders.

¹ Applied Survey Research. Alameda County Homeless County & Survey Comprehensive Report 2019. Available at https://everyonehome.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/2019_HIRDReport_Alameda_FinalDraft_8.15.19.pdf

PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Policy Committee

The Board of Supervisors directed the Alameda County Health Care Services Agency to convene a policy committee to develop recommendations for addressing homelessness in Alameda County through new investments. The Home Together Policy Committee included the Continuum of Care (CoC, represented by EveryOne Home), County agencies, regional organizations, and housing and service providers from across the County; and met nine times between November 2019 and April 2020 to review available data and develop its recommendations. The Committee's recommendations were presented to all 14 cities, and hundreds of residents and stakeholders who participated in public meetings with Alameda County Supervisors and homeless service providers.

The Policy Committee established the following guiding principles:

- Prioritize housing and interventions that end homelessness
- Promote racial equity, informed by lived experience
- Encourage regional/countywide approaches
- Use data and evaluation to guide allocations, and ensure accountability and efficacy
- Build on existing infrastructure and planning efforts

The Policy Committee endorsed the following strategies for ending homelessness:

- **Increase housing outcomes** by offering housing placement assistance, gap funding for affordable housing rents, permanent supportive housing operations and services, ongoing housing support and connected services that help people such as seniors and people with disabilities on fixed incomes to stabilize and retain their housing.
- **Invest in targeted prevention** including necessary mental health resources, substance use treatment, and rental assistance for our lowest income and highest vulnerability residents to keep people from losing their housing.
- **Expand shelter and street-based assistance**, including access to mobile health services for homeless families and other populations experiencing homelessness.
- **Build capacity among service providers** to deliver high-quality, responsive services including care coordination, navigation services and housing location for people seeking shelter and housing; additional beds and services in shelters and navigation centers, and increased street-based and mobile services for people in encampments and living in vehicles - including hygiene, sanitation and health checks.
- **Support a streamlined system** with shared goals and measures, and that enhances data capacity and ensures coordination and accountability.
- **Improve vocational options** by supporting the development and expansion of job training programs, employment services and upward mobility programs through community colleges and community-based organizations to provide opportunities for people with lived experience of homelessness.

The Policy Committee recommended establishing a Planning and Accountability Committee to advise the County on new investments in homelessness. This body would advise the Health Care Services Agency on new resources and track the impact of investments made over time. The group would be comprised of members representing a diversity of experience and expertise and include people with lived experience of homelessness, subject matter experts, non-profit service providers, health care partners, the Continuum of Care, affordable housing developers, and city and County agencies.

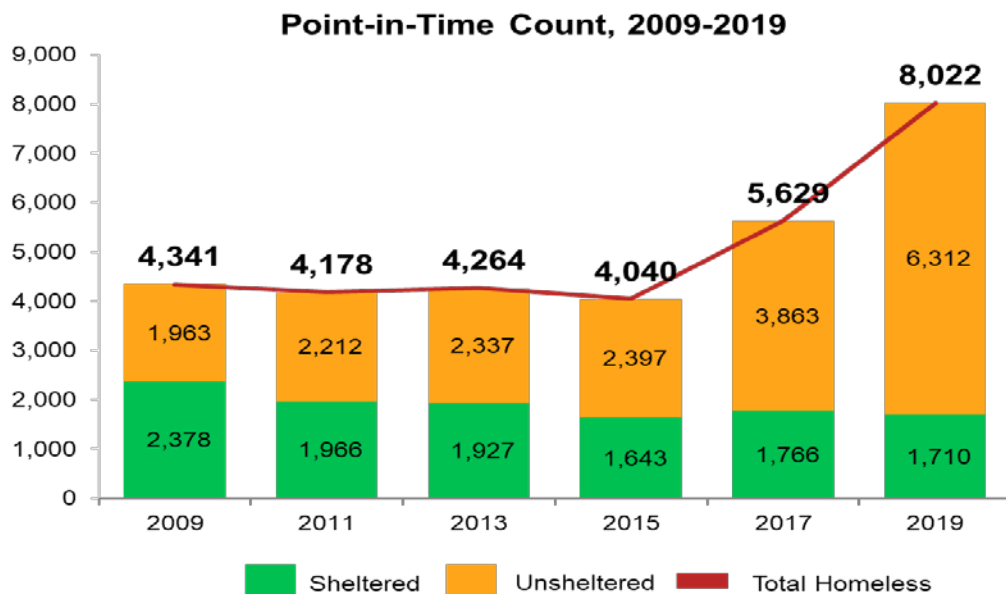
System Modeling

Between October 2019 and May 2020, the County, cities and CoC participated in a detailed system-wide resource analysis, known as System Modeling, with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The purpose of System Modeling is three-fold: to develop a shared vision of the optimal system to address the crisis and housing needs of people experiencing homelessness, to model the crisis and housing inventory and performance needed to address homelessness, and to create a transition plan to right-size the system. Recognizing the role of structural racism in perpetuating racial and ethnic disparities among homeless populations, Alameda County added an equity analysis to System Modeling.

Countywide Needs Analysis

Homelessness in Alameda County has increased dramatically and disproportionately in recent years. The numbers of people experiencing homelessness doubled from 2015 to 2019, as measured by the biannual Point-in-Time (PIT) count. These increases closely matched the increases in rental costs, and disproportionately affected Black and Native households. Black households were 4.6 times as likely to become homeless and Native households were 6.3 times as likely to become homeless as white households.

Figure 1: Homelessness in Alameda County



While the PIT count shows more than 8,000 people experiencing homelessness in Alameda County on one night, the annual number of people flowing through the system is nearly twice that number. Data from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) show that 15,786 unduplicated individuals and 13,135 households rely on homeless safety net services (excluding permanent supportive housing) in the course of one year. Households experiencing homelessness were distributed across the 14 cities and unincorporated areas of Alameda County in the following five regions in the 2019 PIT count:

Figure 2: Geographic Distribution of Homelessness in Alameda County

Geographical Regions in Alameda County	Estimated People Experiencing Homelessness Annually	Estimated Households Experiencing Homelessness Annually	Households with Only Adults	Households with Minor Children	Households with Only Children
Mid-County (Hayward, San Leandro, Unincorporated)	2,920	2,430	2,221	182	27
North County (Berkeley, Albany, Emeryville)	2,605	2,167	1,981	163	24
Oakland	8,004	6,659	6,087	499	73
Tri-City (Fremont, Newark, Union City)	1,579	1,313	1,201	99	14
Tri-Valley (Dublin, Pleasanton, Livermore)	679	565	516	42	6
Total	15,786	13,135	12,005	985	144

Although the PIT count has some limitations related to counting households with minor children and people in rural areas, it is the strongest data source currently available for understanding the geographic distribution of homelessness in Alameda County. The Home Together Plan recommends using the 2021 PIT count, which will incorporate improved count methodology, for planning and allocating new resources across the five regions.

Racial Equity & Factors Contributing to Homelessness

Homelessness disproportionately impacts people of color. Data show racial disparities in both inflow/ first time homelessness as well as returns to homelessness, with African Americans and Native Americans experiencing homelessness at a rate four times higher than Alameda County’s general population. Findings from the Racial Equity Impact Analysis highlight the role of structural racism in multiplying the barriers to housing stability throughout an individual’s life and contributing to economic inequality. The analysis also affirms that challenges of applying for housing are intensified for homeless people of color, emphasizing the critical need for ongoing systems evaluation through a race equity lens and adding and improving programs to reduce racial disparities.

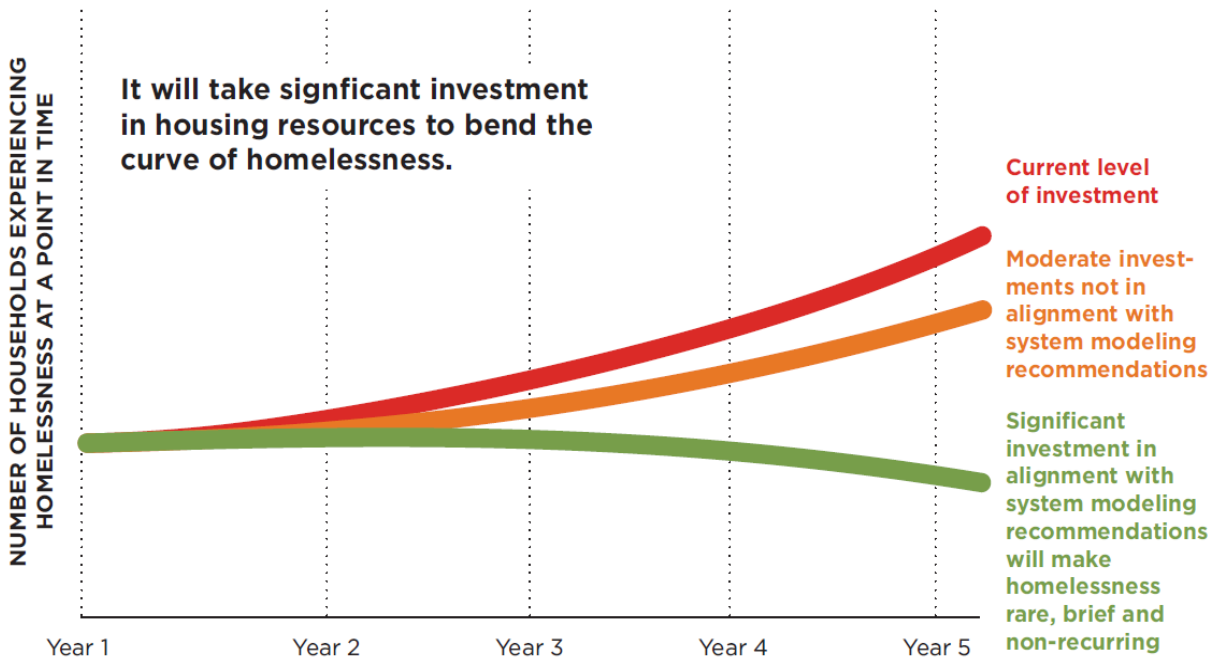
The cause of an individual’s ability to obtain or retain housing is often affected by multiple factors. Data from the 2019 Alameda County Point in Time Count analyzing the primary event or condition that led to current homelessness among those surveyed showed that 31% cited economic factors such as job loss (13%), eviction or foreclosure (9%), and rent increase (9%). Nearly one quarter (22%) cited behavioral health, such as mental health (12%) and substance use (10%). For seniors, living on a fixed income often limits ability to keep up with rising rental costs.

Optimizing the System

System Modeling shows that with increased investment and strategic coordination of resources, we can move toward a system that matches individuals and families with the timely and specific interventions needed to end their homelessness.

The model predicts that our current level of investment would see homelessness double in Alameda County in five years. If we increase investment moderately but not in alignment with recommended scale for various interventions, we can still expect an increase in homelessness in five years. **With significant additional investment—a total of \$820 million in new spending over five years—and alignment with System Modeling recommendations, we would expect to see decreased homelessness in three years, and in five years have the capacity to serve people in real-time as they become homeless.**

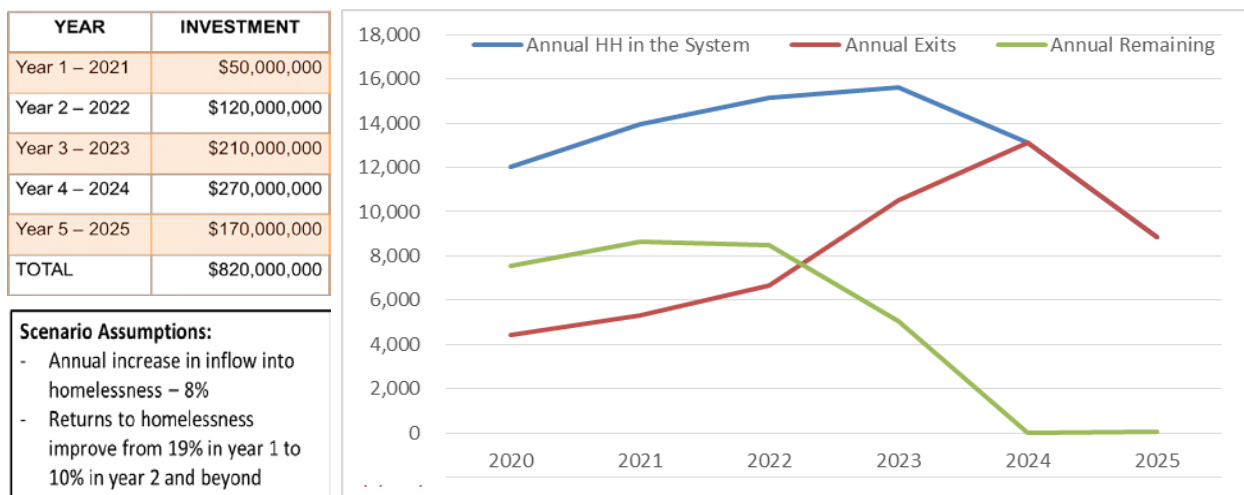
Figure 3: System Modeling Projections



For System Modeling, baseline investment was determined from a countywide inventory of existing funding for and availability of shelter, housing, subsidies, and other homelessness resources. For each type of resource, estimates were established for the number of households served and the remaining service need. Annual costs were assigned to the service gaps to estimate the needed additional investment.

Figure 4, details the impact of a significant increase in funding over the course of five years. The blue line shows the annual number of people touching the homelessness system over five years. The green line shows how new investments, as outlined in the table to the left, would reduce the annual number of people in the system. In Year One, with \$50M of additional investment beyond existing funding, annual exits to housing increase (red line), and the number of people remaining homeless (green line) begins to decrease. With sustained additional investment each year, the number of people exiting the system outpaces the number remaining homeless by Year Three. By Year Five, exits far outpace inflow and the system has the capacity to quickly and effectively address homelessness (green line flattens as homelessness becomes a brief experience rather than chronic).

Figure 4: Impact of Significant Investment Scenario



STRATEGIES FOR ENDING HOMELESSNESS IN ALAMEDA COUNTY

Create Pathways Out of Homelessness

To resolve homelessness for the 13,135 households estimated to experience homelessness each year, System Modeling indicates that multiple interventions should be deployed together. Combinations of programs—homeless prevention, crisis services, and housing—are pathways out of homelessness. Some of these interventions exist in our current system and can be better aligned and leveraged, while other interventions (shallow subsidies and dedicated permanent supportive housing for seniors) would need to be added to the system.

In exploring the most effective pathways out of homelessness, the following needs were identified by population. Using the racial equity analysis developed through focus groups with people who were homeless, plus system performance data and demographic data, the pathways below consider both, the kinds of programs and lengths of stay in a high-functioning system. Please note that many households need more than one type of service.

Figure 5: Pathways and Interventions Needed per Population Type

Pathway	% of Households Needing Pathway to End their Homelessness	
	Adults Only	Families with Children
Prevention/Problem Solving	20%	10%
Shelter	58%	90%
Shallow Subsidy	13%	40%
Rapid Rehousing	13%	13%
Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)/PSH+	26%	10%
Affordable Housing	28%	30%

The types of interventions that will work in Alameda County are described below. These solutions to homelessness build on and leverage existing infrastructure that includes housing, comprehensive countywide outreach, street-side treatment and encampment supports, and Coordinated Entry. The existing infrastructure will need ongoing support and expansion as required to complement a right-sized system.



Homeless Prevention/Rapid Resolution: short-term assistance such as flexible funds, or ongoing support such as a shallow subsidy. These resources can be accessed more than once in a lifetime.



Emergency Shelter: temporary lodging to provide for the safety and immediate needs of individuals and families experiencing literal homelessness. The average length of stay in emergency housing in the system model is 3 months. Before COVID-19, it was estimated Emergency Shelters would serve 58% of households with only adults and 90% of households with minor children. Many shelters have reduced capacity or closed, being replaced by non-congregate settings like hotels.



Transitional Housing: time limited housing with services to stabilize participants and prepare them for exit to permanent housing. The average length of stay in Transitional Housing is 18 months. Transitional Housing in the Alameda County models is primarily reserved for young adults aged 18-24.



Shallow Subsidy: ongoing rent assistance with no or limited services. Shallow subsidies may be configured as a flat rate or a percentage of the Fair Market Rent (FMR). Shallow subsidies can be renewed for as long as the household continues to meet income requirements.



Rapid Re-Housing: support with move in costs and a short-term subsidy to help households stabilize in housing before assuming the full rent themselves. The average length of stay in Rapid Re-Housing is 12 months.



Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH): deeply affordable permanent housing for individuals and families with a long history of homelessness and a disability. Participants in PSH have a lease and tenant rights. Households are eligible for PSH for as long as they meet income requirements.



Permanent Supportive Housing Plus: deeply subsidized permanent housing with intensive services designed for seniors to support aging in place.



Dedicated Affordable Housing: housing affordable to extremely low-income households experiencing homelessness. Rents are affordable at 30%-50% of a household's income. Dedicated affordable units are accessed through the homeless system ensuring that vacant units are filled by another homeless household. Does not require a disability or high service needs.

These solutions to homelessness will reduce inequities and serve a broad range of Alameda County residents at risk of and currently experiencing homelessness, including:

- Families and individuals with jobs who have housing but need help to keep it
- People living on the street (in tents, in vehicles and in shelters) who need assistance getting back into housing,
- Veterans,
- Seniors,
- People with disabilities, and
- Those most at risk of becoming homeless.

Focus on Equity

Homelessness for Black, Indigenous and other people of color is the result of structural racism, with origins in manifest destiny, slavery, redlining, mass incarceration, and displacement. Because the impacts of racism reverberate across generations, temporary and one-time supports may not be effective to end homelessness for many. To specifically address racial disparities, System Modeling recommends decreasing short-term Rapid Re-Housing, and increasing long-term interventions like ongoing Shallow Subsidies that bridge the gap between earned income and the cost of housing and Dedicated Affordable Housing for extremely low income households with low service needs.

Coordinate Regionally

Homelessness is a countywide problem with an unequal distribution across our 14 cities and unincorporated areas. Resources and new investments should be deployed across five regions to reflect need and proportion of unhoused residents across the County: North (Berkeley, Emeryville, Albany), Oakland (Oakland and Piedmont), Mid (Alameda, Hayward, San Leandro, Unincorporated Area), South (Fremont, Newark, Union City), and East (Dublin, Pleasanton, Livermore).

As new funding becomes available, the 2021 PIT count would be used to determine regional allocations, and the County, local cities, and the Continuum of Care would collaboratively plan and review programming and projects in each region. Cities could also apply to an Innovation and Acceleration Fund for special investments in capacity-building or acceleration of new projects. The regional approach fosters alignment with methods previously used to administer State funds, including Homeless Emergency Assistance Program (HEAP), California Emergency Solutions in Housing (CESH), and Housing and Homelessness Assistance Program (HHAP). Layered with System Modeling, regional coordination prioritizes localized interventions within the context of a countywide system.

Build Capacity and Vocational Options

Increased investments in homelessness services must be coupled with support for the service providers, many of whom face challenges with workforce recruitment and retention. By supporting the development and expansion of job training programs, employment services and upward mobility programs through community colleges and community-based organizations, we can provide opportunities for people with lived experience of homelessness and strengthen the service provider workforce.