

Colorado Community and Interagency
Council on Homelessness

Recommendations
to
Governor Ritter

Acting to End Homelessness

Housing
Access to Support Services
Employment
Benefits Acquisition
Education
Information Collection, Management and Evaluation

October, 2008

Colorado Community and Interagency Council on Homelessness

Dear Council Members:

We have completed the first year of our work on the *Colorado Community and Interagency Council on Homelessness*. As detailed in this report, it has been a productive year. Thank you all for the time and effort you have devoted thus far.

The Council met six times since Governor Ritter appointed us as his advisory body, charging us to recommend policies and programs that we believe will assist in preventing and, to the extent possible, ending homelessness in Colorado.

First, we educated ourselves. Then, based on what we learned and the knowledge we brought with us into the Council, we agreed to a *Year One Action Plan*: to create a short list of actionable recommendations for consideration by the Governor and the Legislature. We concluded that the focus had to be on **recommendations of what the State can do** to end homelessness. We set about creating our short list by assembling working groups with opinion leaders outside of the Council. We captured the working groups' initial recommendations in one document; Council members refined these in May. Subsequently, we took an online survey that facilitated prioritization of our focus areas, strategic goals and specific recommendations. In August we made final revisions. Five **focus areas** with fourteen **strategic goals** and forty-eight **ultimate recommendations** emerged. The focus areas and strategic goals are:

Housing

- Increase housing production funds
- Improve targeting of housing resources
- Improve housing access for people with special needs

Employment and Benefits Acquisition

- Expand access to benefits
- Improve access to benefits following discharge from state systems
- Implement cross-agency training
- Foster cross-agency and federal collaboration

Information Collection, Management and Evaluation

- Information access
- Data collection and management

Education

- Increase and target education funds for homeless children
- Foster cross-agency and private sector collaboration
- Evaluate educational progress of homeless youth and provide cross-agency training

Access to Support Services

- Target and expand resources for mental health and substance abuse services
- Target and expand resources for families
- Improve methods to transition youth to adult systems

The following pages detail all forty-eight recommendations; leading with the top twelve that emerged as the Council's first year priorities and the top recommendations in each focus area. We are proud to deliver it to you now and to have readied it for presentation to Colorado's decision-makers.

Thank you again for your work to date and for your willingness to continue that work as we search for the most realistic and effective ways in which the State of Colorado can intersect with the struggles of homeless Coloradans or those who are at risk of becoming homeless.

Sincerely,

Christine Murphy and John Parvensky

Colorado Community and Interagency Council on Homelessness

COUNCIL MEMBERS APPOINTED MAY 23, 2007

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TOP RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Increase state general funding (Division of Housing) from \$2.1 million in 2008 to \$4.5 million for the development of affordable housing with targeting to populations at 30% of area median income (AMI) and particular emphasis on those developments that provide supportive housing for homeless and special needs populations – this includes homeless families, veterans and persons with disabilities.
2. Increase state general funding for public and private agencies to provide integrated substance abuse and mental health services to homeless populations.
3. Establish a state housing trust fund to expand the capacity to produce and preserve affordable housing units throughout the state for those in greatest need. Target 75% of funds to persons at 30% or below of area median income (AMI).
4. Expand the Benefits Acquisition and Retention Team (BART) model in locations outside Denver. For example, an implementation method may be to allocate \$5,000 to \$10,000 to Supportive Housing and Homeless Programs and the Department of Corrections to co-host national Supplemental Security Income (SSI)/Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) Outreach, Access and Recovery (SOAR) trainers and community training for selected SOAR venues. Additional models to be explored.
5. Ensure that the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Qualified Allocation Plan, administered by the Colorado Housing and Finance Authority, prioritizes projects serving the lowest income households for the longest periods of time, particularly those providing supportive housing for homeless and special needs populations. This includes homeless families, veterans and persons with disabilities.
6. Fund development of Housing First programs to serve chronically homeless individuals with mental health and/or substance use disorders.
7. Advance policy: *“Mental Health Institutes will not discharge clients to shelters or similar temporary settings that will result in homelessness.”*
8. Secure ongoing, stable funding and work proactively with vendor to implement upgrades to existing software that result in an efficient and effective Homeless Management Information System.
9. Establish more supportive housing programs for persons re-entering the community from behavioral health settings, especially those who are suffering from mental illness.
10. Strengthen and expand pre-release Benefits Acquisition Programs to assist individuals leaving the State Institutes, the Department of Youth Corrections, state prisons and jails in order to increase their chance of successful community integration.
11. Integrate within the Statewide Internet Portal an electronic resource directory that allows for “one-stop” customer access to all government information and services for persons who are homeless or at-risk of being homeless.
12. Appropriate funding for one full-time employee to staff the unfunded statutorily required Office of Homeless Youth Services within the Colorado Department of Human Services. The duties of this Office are to identify and remove obstacles to service provision; improve service quality; reduce expenditures caused by overlapping services; and identify funding resources for serving homeless youth.

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TOP RECOMMENDATIONS BY FOCUS AREA

HOUSING

- Increase state general funding (Division of Housing) from \$2.1 million in 2008 to \$4.5 million for the development of affordable housing with targeting to populations at 30% of area median income (AMI) and particular emphasis on those developments that provide supportive housing for homeless and special needs populations – this includes homeless families, veterans and persons with disabilities.
- Establish a state housing trust fund to expand the capacity to produce and preserve affordable housing units throughout the state for those in greatest need. Target 75% of funds to persons at 30% or below of area median income (AMI).
- Ensure that the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Qualified Allocation Plan, administered by the Colorado Housing and Finance Authority, prioritizes projects serving the lowest income households for the longest periods of time, particularly those providing supportive housing for homeless and special needs populations. This includes homeless families, veterans and persons with disabilities.
- Fund development of Housing First programs to serve chronically homeless individuals with mental health and/or substance use disorders.

EMPLOYMENT AND BENEFITS ACQUISITION

- Expand the Benefits Acquisition and Retention Team (BART) model in locations outside Denver. For example, an implementation method may be to allocate \$5,000 to \$10,000 to Supportive Housing and Homeless Programs and the Department of Corrections to co-host national Supplemental Security Income (SSI)/Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) Outreach, Access and Recovery (SOAR) trainers and community training for selected SOAR venues. Additional models to be explored.
- Strengthen and expand pre-release Benefits Acquisition Programs to assist individuals leaving the State Institutes, the Department of Youth Corrections, state prisons and jails in order to increase their chance of successful community integration.

EDUCATION

- Provide technical assistance from the Colorado Department of Education to school districts to prioritize kindergarteners experiencing homelessness in the Governor's full-day kindergarten initiative.
- Increase resources to address the needs of unaccompanied homeless youth, including access to education, discharge planning from state systems and transition services to adulthood, by supporting the action steps outlined in Colorado's Homeless Youth Action Plan.

ACCESS TO SUPPORT SERVICES

- Increase state general funding for public and private agencies to provide integrated substance abuse and mental health services to homeless populations.

- Appropriate funding for one full-time employee to staff the unfunded statutorily required Office of Homeless Youth Services within the Colorado Department of Human Services. The duties of this Office are to identify and remove obstacles to service provision; improve service quality; reduce expenditures caused by overlapping services; and identify funding resources for serving homeless youth.
- Implement Rapid Re-Entry Pilot Programs throughout the state to help homeless families rapidly exit the shelter system into permanent supportive housing.

INFORMATION COLLECTION, MANAGEMENT AND EVALUATION

- Secure adequate funding to meet the challenges of the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Fix the problems associated with Colorado's current HMIS so that it is legitimate to require participation.
- Integrate within the Statewide Internet Portal an electronic resource directory that allows for "one-stop" customer access to all government information and services for persons who are homeless or at-risk of being homeless.

Colorado Community and Interagency Council on Homelessness

COMPENDIUM OF ALL 2008 RECOMMENDATIONS

HOUSING

1. Increase Housing Production Funds

- 1.1. Establish a state housing trust fund to expand the capacity to produce and preserve affordable housing units throughout the state for those in greatest need.¹ Target 75% of funds to persons at 30% or below of area median income (AMI).²
- 1.2. Increase state general funding (Division of Housing) from \$2.1 million in 2008 to \$4.5 million³ for the development of affordable housing with targeting to populations at 30% of the area median income (AMI) and particular emphasis on those developments that provide supportive housing for homeless and special needs populations – this includes homeless families, veterans and persons with disabilities.

Improve Targeting of Housing Resources

- 1.3. Target state-controlled housing funds and financing mechanisms to populations at 30% AMI (i.e., HOME Investment Partnership Program, Community Development Block Grants, Housing Development Grants, Private Activity Bonds).⁴
- 1.4. Ensure that the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) Qualified Allocation Plan, administered by the Colorado Housing and Finance Authority, prioritizes projects serving the lowest income households for the longest periods of time, particularly those providing supportive housing for homeless and special needs populations. This includes homeless families, veterans and persons with disabilities.⁵
- 1.5. Require Colorado's State Public Housing Authorities (Division of Housing (DOLA) and Supportive Housing and Homeless Programs (DHS)) to set aside a greater percentage of their Housing Choice Vouchers for the development of project-based rental assistance targeted for persons who are homeless.⁶
 - 1.5.1. Advocate to Colorado's local Public Housing Authorities to set aside a greater percentage of their Housing Choice Vouchers for the development of project-based rental assistance targeted for persons who are homeless.

Improve Housing Access for People with Special Needs

- 1.6. Establish more supportive housing programs for persons re-entering the community from behavioral health settings, especially those who are suffering from mental illness.⁷
- 1.7. Fund development of Housing First programs to serve chronically homeless individuals with mental health and/or substance use disorders.⁸
- 1.8. Advance policy: *"Mental Health Institutes will not discharge clients to shelters or similar temporary settings that will result in homelessness."*⁹
- 1.9. Establish more supportive housing programs for youth re-entering the community from foster care and child welfare settings.
- 1.10. Establish more supportive housing programs for youth re-entering the community from correctional settings.
- 1.11. Establish more supportive housing programs for adults re-entering the community from correctional settings.

- 1.11.1. Identify and evaluate the re-entry programs within state corrections systems and county/municipal jails that help inmates secure housing resources prior to their release, in order to prevent homelessness.
- 1.11.2. Create and fund state-owned and operated community corrections programs for ex-offenders at-risk of becoming homeless, including funding for '3/4 way' houses.¹⁰
- 1.11.3. Encourage government agencies to meet with community and faith-based programs to create new transitional housing programs based on 'best practice' models, including supportive services as appropriate. Fund one full-time employee to do this.
- 1.11.4. Establish programs for inmates who participate in pre-release drug treatment programs to become eligible for housing linked to post-release drug treatment programs for a limited amount of time. California and Maryland have model programs already in place.¹¹

EMPLOYMENT AND BENEFITS ACQUISITION

2. Expand Access to Benefits

- 2.1. Expand the Benefits Acquisition and Retention Team (BART) model in locations outside Denver.¹² For example, an implementation method may be to allocate \$5,000 to \$10,000 to Supportive Housing and Homeless Programs and the Department of Corrections to co-host national Supplemental Security Income (SSI)/Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) Outreach, Access and Recovery (SOAR) trainers and community training for selected SOAR venues. Additional models to be explored.¹³
- 2.2. Explore acquisition of a second mobile van for the Division of Motor Vehicles, and employment of necessary Department of Revenue personnel, for use in processing ID applications for inmates in metro area jails and for other special needs populations at other locations.¹⁴
- 2.3. Enhance the ability of the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment to secure benefits for homeless workforce service clients (possibly as many as 6,000 annually), or contract out responsibility to an experienced case management community provider.¹⁵

Improve Access to Benefits Following Discharge from State Systems

- 2.4. Establish pre-release Benefit Acquisition Programs to assist individuals leaving the State Institutes and Department of Youth Corrections in order to increase their chance of successful community reintegration. For example, Institute discharge planners could identify those in need of benefits, especially healthcare, upon admission to begin the application process to secure resources for housing and supportive services upon discharge.¹⁶ Measure and report outcomes.
- 2.5. Strengthen and expand pre-release Benefits Acquisition Programs to assist individuals leaving the State Institutes, the Department of Youth Corrections, state prisons and jails in order to increase their chance of successful community integration.
- 2.6. Appoint a member or members of the Colorado Department of Employment and Labor and the Division of Developmental Disabilities to the full Council for assistance with recommendations related to employment.

Foster Cross-Agency and Private Sector Collaboration

- 2.7. Further strengthen the working relationships among staff at Colorado's Department of Corrections, Department of Health Care Policy and Financing, Colorado Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and the U.S. Social Security Administration.
- 2.8. Increase access for homeless adults to workforce programs that already exist.

EDUCATION

3. Increase and Target Education Funds for Homeless Children

- 3.1. Provide a McKinney-Vento Education 1:1 state match with federal funding levels to increase the educational supports and effective enforcement of the education rights of children and youth experiencing homelessness in Colorado public schools.¹⁷
- 3.2. Better target Colorado Department of Education funds to homeless students.

Foster Cross-Agency and Private Sector Collaboration

- 3.3. Provide technical assistance from the Colorado Department of Education to school districts to prioritize kindergarteners experiencing homelessness in the Governor's full-day kindergarten initiative.¹⁸
- 3.4. Foster collaboration between housing providers and school districts to maximize residential stability and minimize school mobility for children and youth experiencing homelessness by the Colorado Department of Education's creation of sample Memorandums of Understanding.¹⁹
- 3.5. Foster collaboration between the Colorado Department of Education and Department of Human Services' IDEA-Part C (Early Intervention) Program to increase outreach and services for families experiencing homelessness.
- 3.6. Research and fund best practice models with Colorado school districts and public/nonprofit agencies to address educational needs of homeless youth, with a particular emphasis on unaccompanied youth who are homeless.

Evaluate Educational Progress of Homeless Youth and Provide Cross-Agency Training

- 3.7. Increase resources to address the needs of unaccompanied homeless youth, including access to education, discharge planning from state systems and transition/services to adulthood, by supporting the action steps outlined in Colorado's Homeless Youth Action Plan.
- 3.8. Provide cross-agency training on the educational rights of homeless children and youth and available agency resources.

ACCESS TO SUPPORT SERVICES

4. Target and Expand Resources for Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services

- 4.1. Increase state general funding for public and private community agencies to provide integrated substance abuse and mental health services to homeless populations.
- 4.2. Appropriate funding for one full-time employee to staff the unfunded statutorily required Office of Homeless Youth Services within the Colorado Department of Human Services. The duties of this Office are to identify and remove obstacles to service provision; improve service quality; reduce expenditures caused by overlapping services; and identify funding resources for serving homeless youth.²⁰

Target and Expand Resources for Families

- 4.3. Establish service integration between the homeless shelter and the child welfare systems, so as to create more efficient and effective responses, with the aim of obviating the need for further involvement in either system, particularly when the outcome would be the splitting up of families.²¹
- 4.4. Identify service gaps in assisting homeless families with getting access to Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid and Food Stamps.

- 4.5. Expand “prevention-based” emergency programs for families using TANF funds (foreclosure prevention, eviction prevention, etc.).²²
- 4.6. Implement Rapid Re-Entry Pilot Programs throughout the state to help homeless families rapidly exit the shelter system into permanent supportive housing.²³
- 4.7. Create pilot program(s) that target access to services for all stages of life. For example, review community-based models that focus on aging issues and homeless populations.²⁴

Improve Methods to Transition Youth to Adult Systems

- 4.8. Develop a method to transition youth from the systems providing behavioral health services for children to systems providing adult behavioral health services.²⁵
 - 4.8.1. Provide training to County Caseworkers, Case Managers, Discharge Planners, and others to obtain vital documents for youth prior to releasing youth from systems of care (such as Division of Youth Corrections).²⁶

INFORMATION COLLECTION, MANAGEMENT AND EVALUATION

5. Information Access

- 5.1. Integrate within the Statewide Internet Portal an electronic resource directory that allows for “one-stop” customer access to all government information and services for persons who are homeless or at-risk of being homeless.²⁷
- 5.2. Charge the Colorado Department of Human Services with coordinating satellite access to the Colorado Benefits Management System (CBMS) for non-profit homeless service providers to improve access to benefits and streamline application processes for persons who are homeless.

Data Collection and Management

- 5.3. Adopt baseline data collection standards throughout state agencies to include fields for the collection of homeless status.
- 5.4. Establish an electronic record system for Behavioral Health Services clients.²⁸
- 5.5. Secure ongoing, stable funding and work proactively with vendor to implement upgrades to existing software that result in an efficient and effective Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).²⁹
- 5.6. Conduct assessment of all user-friendly options to replace the current HMIS software vendor, including a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis with probable financing options.
- 5.7. Require participation in the HMIS for all agencies/organizations that receive state or federal pass-through funding to provide housing and/or services to persons who are homeless.

REFERENCES

¹ According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, "there is not one single Congressional district that has enough rental housing that is affordable and available to extremely low-income families, those making 30% or below of area median income." President Bush signed the Housing and Economic Recovery Act into law in July 2008. One of the pieces included in the bill is the creation of a National Housing Trust Fund that will produce, rehabilitate, and preserve 1,500,000 units of housing over the next 10 years. Under this new law, at least 75% of the Trust Fund dollars shall be used for housing that is affordable for extremely low-income households, that is, those with incomes that do not exceed 30% of the median income for the area. NLICH states that there are nearly 600 city, county and state housing trust funds in 43 states. About \$1.6 billion is spent for affordable housing through these trust funds every year. They estimate that for every \$1 committed to a housing project by a housing trust fund, another \$5 to \$10 is leveraged in other public and private resources. According to the recent point-in-time survey, unemployment and inability to pay housing costs are the leading causes of homelessness in the Denver Metropolitan area. On any given night there are over 15,000 homeless people in Colorado; most are families with children (Colorado Housing Investment Fund Coalition). The Colorado Housing Investment Fund Coalition is proposing a ballot initiative for 2008 that would create a dedicated revenue source for the production and preservation of affordable housing in our state. However, this initiative, if passed, would only require 50% of the funds be directed to persons living at 50% or below of area median income. According to the Colorado Housing Trust Fund Impacts Study, putting \$26.5 million each year into a housing fund will stimulate substantial economic growth. Annual investments in the fund are projected to create 3,400 new housing opportunities and 3,200 new jobs. In addition, formerly rent-burdened families would have on average an extra \$2,460 to spend on goods and services and the resulting economic activity would produce over \$26 million in tax revenues.

² The National Housing Trust Fund, an element of the newly passed Housing and Economic Recovery Act signed into law by President Bush on July 31st, 2008, uses this targeting formula. The National Low Income Housing Coalition summarizes that, "At least 75% of the funds for rental housing must benefit extremely low income households and all funds must benefit very low income households."

³ Funding for the Division of Housing's Housing Development Grant Program has roller-coasted from a high of \$4,570,000 in 2002 to nothing in 2003. In 2006, it was partially restored to \$1,115,000 and was bumped up to \$1,238,000 in 2007. In 2008, the Joint Budget Committee added \$1 million bringing the current total to \$2.1 million.

⁴ Colorado allocates funds received from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and distributes them by formula under the state Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Emergency Shelter Grant (ESG), HOME Investment Partnership, and Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA) programs. The Department of Local Affairs (DOLA), the Division of Housing (DOH), the Division of Local Government (DLG) and the Governor's Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OED) administer these funds on behalf of partner jurisdictions and local organizations.

⁵ Historically, the Colorado LIHTC allocation plan included priorities for the allocation of this scarce housing development resource for projects serving the lowest incomes for the longest period of time. The effect of this clearly-stated process was to encourage housing developers to create housing targeted to those with the greatest need – generally, those below 30 percent of the area median income. Without an allocation of tax credits, these vital projects would be impossible to produce or sustain. In recent years, CHFA has moved away from this priority-driven allocation approach to a more subjective process which does not clearly prioritize projects serving the lowest incomes. Rather, allocations are now made based on other factors, such as market conditions, readiness to proceed, site suitability, experience of the developer, financial feasibility and viability, and total development cost per unit. This has created uncertainty for developers attempting to create housing for homeless and extremely low-income families and individuals, making an already complicated task more difficult and risky.

⁶ There are two different types of vouchers subsidized by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the regular Housing Choice Voucher and Project-Based Vouchers. Housing Choice Vouchers allow individuals and families to rent units of their choice in communities of their choice by allowing the subsidy to follow the person. The Project-Based Voucher program attaches the housing assistance subsidy to the unit rather than to the individual. In tight rental markets, when rents are going up and vacancies are going down, it becomes more difficult to use a Housing Choice Voucher. Landlords begin to stop accepting vouchers and begin renting units only to market rate tenants.

Given Colorado's increasingly tight rental market, a specific set-aside of units, as happens with the Project-Based Voucher Program, will be more useful for vulnerable populations. Additionally, the Project-Based Voucher Program allows programs to link housing to services, which has proven very successful. Project basing can also be beneficial in helping mission-driven housing developers finance projects. The Project-Based Voucher Program does not create a hardship for housing authorities, but rather ensures that permanently assisted housing will not be subject to the increases and changes experienced within market rate units. Example: Supportive Housing and Homeless Programs (SHHP) has partnered with the Alternatives to Incarceration for Individuals with Mental Health Needs (AIIM) Program to provide housing assistance to mental health consumers being discharged from jail. SHHP works in partnership with the Larimer County Community Corrections Department, and the Larimer Center for Mental Health to administer this program. Key factors in the success of the AIIM Program include a multi-disciplinary, co-located team that provides integrated treatment and supervision; access to Project-Based Housing assistance; and swift and sure consequences for non-compliance with program requirements. The emphasis on continuity of treatment and collaborative support from key community leaders has helped to make this project exceptionally successful.

⁷ The National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD) Position Statement reads, "The NASMHPD recognizes that housing and housing supports are essential factors in the stability and recovery of people with mental illness, and therefore issues this position statement to affirm our commitment to: the development and sustainability of decent, safe, and affordable housing; the availability of flexible and individualized quality housing services and supports; housing policies that do not tie the status of mental health treatment to the acquisition or protection of housing; a more active and determined effort by the federal government to protect and bolster current federal housing policies and programs; and state mental health authorities providing leadership in the housing arena, especially in housing development."

⁸ For example, the Denver Housing First Collaborative is one of eleven programs funded nationally through the Ending Chronic Homeless Initiative Program, a collaborative grant from the Health Resource Service Administration, Housing and Urban Development, Substance Abuse Mental Health Service Administration, and the Department of Veterans Affairs. The goal of the national initiative is to provide permanent housing that makes supportive services available to persons experiencing chronic homelessness in order to transition them out of homelessness and connect them with mainstream services. The multi-agency approach brings together expertise in the areas of primary health care, mental health care, substance treatment services, veterans' issues, benefits acquisition, and housing. It also brings together representatives from both the homeless and mainstream service systems, including health care, mental health, substance treatment, veterans' services, and housing.

⁹ The state mental health institutes have a policy that disallows the discharge of patients from the institutes to shelters. In the infrequent situations where this action may be a planned discharge option, the policy requires that the Director of the Office of Behavioral Health Services conduct an administrative review of the case to examine the appropriateness of the action and to consider alternative options if indicated by the review. In the event that a discharge to the community results in a homeless shelter placement due to unforeseen circumstances, the policy requires the Institute Director shall immediately notify the Manager of the Office of Behavioral Health and Housing of the circumstances following the homeless shelter placement and efforts underway to facilitate continuity of care.

¹⁰ The '3/4 way house' idea is similar to a half-way house but just offers fewer services. There are many names for this type of transitional housing. The key is that you use one house or one hotel to house a number of otherwise homeless people at a cost much lower than they could rent if they lived alone. Services provided could be as minimal or extensive as you want. Programs could focus on the needs of certain special populations, such as mentally ill persons, substance abusers or sex offenders. They could also be more general and simply offer employment resource referrals.

¹¹ "California and Maryland are examples of states that are focusing on the objective of providing housing as part of substance abuse treatment or employment programs. In California, inmates who participate in pre-release drug treatment programs are eligible for up to six months of housing linked to post-release drug treatment. Of the approximately 160,000 inmates statewide, 7,500 are in drug treatment programs. Participants must first complete a residential treatment program and later can become eligible for housing in privately run "sober living" residences while they participate in outpatient drug treatment. In Maryland, ex-offenders in Baltimore can enroll in job training and get help finding a job through the Re-Entry Partnership Initiative. The programs provides two months of housing, which participants pay for with the stipend they receive while they're in job training. The goal is for ex-offenders to save

money so that they can eventually live on their own. The program, a joint venture of the State Division of Correction and the Enterprise Foundation, began in 1999 and serves about 130 people per year. With the federal reentry funds, the program plans to expand its services to 325." (Quoted text taken from the Vera Institute of Justice, "Preventing Homelessness Among People Leaving Prison." December 2003)

¹² The Benefits Acquisition and Retention Team (BART) team has been in place for about four years. It is built upon a simple agreement between the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless (CCH) and the Social Security Administration (SSA). SSA provides ongoing program and disability training for BART case managers and medical staff, and flags BART cases for special handling. CCH provides case management to assist homeless individuals throughout the claims process and develops the medical record needed by the State of Colorado Disability Determinations Services (DDS) to make social security disability income (SSDI) and supplemental security income (SSI) decisions. Monthly BART meetings have been hosted by CCH since project inception to continually reinforce and improve the relationships and the processes. SSA regional and field office managers participate, as does the Colorado DDS and SSA's Office of Disability, Adjudication and Review (SSA's appeals organization). In addition CCH's medical and psychiatric staff leadership and consumer advisors participate in the monthly sessions. BART results have probably surprised even its most optimistic architects. To date, BART has assisted more than 1200 homeless men and women with the SSDI/SSI application process. More than 80% have been awarded benefits, and 80% of those are now housed. Through 2007, only one individual was denied benefits for failure to pursue his application. Few individuals have had to go through SSA's lengthy Administrative Law Judge review process because of the upfront quality and completeness of the medical record developed by CCH. However, for those applicants where an appeal was necessary, almost all applications were approved.

¹³ SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery (SOAR) is a training grant that has been awarded to more than half the States. It is administered by the United States Department of Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Colorado received a training grant in 2006, but for a variety of reasons, has not yet successfully leveraged the opportunity. The SOAR model is a "train the trainer" process. Its success is predicated upon State commitments and leadership and upon community partnerships with homeless service providers. Not unlike Benefits Acquisition and Retention Team (BART), SOAR places great importance on case management, and partnering with the Social Security Administration (SSA) to achieve success. SOAR training is provided for trainers centrally, and followed up with an audited first training within the state for local providers. Training materials are extensive and focus not only upon the traditional social security disability insurance (SSDI)/supplemental security income (SSI) application process and disability requirements, but also places significant emphasis on the unique challenges (and proven success strategies) of providing case management for the difficult to serve homeless population who have mental illness, substance abuse issues, or co-occurring disorders. SOAR provides States with the flexibility to develop a strategy and model most suited to its challenges and alignment of state, local and non-profit service providers. Examples: In Montana, the designated SOAR trainers are the lead consultant for the Governor's Homeless Council, the Director of the Montana Disability Determinations Services, and the state director for the PATH mental health services programs. Montana took a community based approach in traveling through the state and providing SOAR training to community providers. SSA participated in all training sessions. Providers and SSA used the opportunity to establish local relations and protocols for providing claims services to homeless individuals. The model is ideal for large rural areas and communities with limited case management resources because it allows SSA and communities to establish working agreements tailored to their needs and resources. In Utah, the SOAR grant was applied for, and received, under the auspices of the Governor's Homeless Council. Utah has a statewide network of staff employed by the Utah Department of Workforce Services (DWS). The staff, comprised of case managers, brings specialized experience in preparing people for employment. Not incidental is the number of individuals they serve who may be disabled or homeless that may not yet be ready for DWS mainstream services. With an infusion of just two full-time-equivalents and SOAR training for case managers state-wide, Utah has leveraged a statewide network of state employees to assist homeless men and women with navigating the SSDI/SSI application process. DWS also partners with SSA, DDS and community homeless providers to complete the network. Bi-monthly training summits keep skills fresh and focus on process improvement.

¹⁴ The Metropolitan Area County Commissioners (MACC) have endorsed the mobile van concept, with a focus on its use with seriously mentally ill inmates. They see facilitating inmates' efforts to obtain state ID's in order to access benefits as an anti-recidivism measure, as well as a significant cost savings. MACC identifies money as the major barrier. One possibility to explore is a local-state partnership. According to the MACC: "During the past year the MACC created the Mentally Ill Inmates Task Force to identify ways to reduce length of stay and recidivism of seriously mentally

ill inmates in county jails. The task force collected some startling data over a twenty-seven month period illustrating the problem. For example, the average length of stay for seriously mentally ill inmates is five and a half times longer than the general inmate population (119 vs. 21 days) and the cost of care for these inmates exceeds thirty-five million dollars annually for 5,500 inmates. Aside from on-going behavioral problems in jail, a major obstacle to inmates obtaining treatment and services upon release is the lack of secure and verifiable identification. A recent survey of seriously mentally ill inmates in the seven MACC counties found that 37% did not have ID's or access to ID's. Extrapolated out over a year (37% of 5,500) 2,035 inmates need ID's."

¹⁵ Consider a model similar to the Utah Department of Workforce Services SSDI/SSI benefit acquisition program. The Social Security Administration (SSA) and Colorado Disability Determination Service (DDS) have offered to provide technical training and to develop claims intake protocols.

¹⁶In some circumstances, client discharge from institutes is delayed for a period of time due to an absence of appropriate care options or housing with supportive services. Some clients of the institutes are homeless upon admission, or have tenuous living circumstances that will result in the loss of housing during a hospitalization. Identifying clients upon admission and facilitating applications for Social Security Disability, Medicaid, Food Stamps, and other benefits will provide clients with an opportunity to have benefits in place or have a shorter waiting period for approval, and will reduce the reliance upon more costly care options.

¹⁷ Correlations exist between subgrantee districts and students served. In the 2005-06 school year, public school districts receiving supplemental federal assistance identified and served 10,599 of the 12,683 reported students experiencing homelessness in Colorado (this represents 17 districts out of 178, accounting for 84% of the statewide total). State level monitoring through the Department of Education shows districts receiving supplemental funding are more effective in finding and serving homeless students in public schools.

¹⁸ The following language was added to the School Finance Act during the 2008 Colorado legislative session: "School districts are encouraged to prioritize children experiencing homelessness for enrollment in a full-day kindergarten program." This recommendation is an anticipated follow-up step following the approved legislation.

¹⁹ Housing agency and school district collaborations to serve homeless and highly mobile students is considered a best practice in homeless education at the national level. "Housing plays a central role in the lives of families; it is the largest single cost for most families, and its location determines a parent's access to employment and a child's access to education. Lack of affordable housing is a principal cause of homelessness. A housing agency and school district that collaborate to offer affordable housing choices along with family services may reduce the frequency of family moves. This, in turn, allows children the opportunity to enjoy school stability—possibly for the first time in their lives. Increasingly, housing authorities and school districts are partnering to serve homeless and highly mobile children and families to accomplish these worthwhile goals." Mesa County Colorado has been highlighted as a successful model for replication. (Quoted text taken from the National Center for Homeless Education, "BEST PRACTICES IN HOMELESS EDUCATION: Housing Agency and School District Collaborations to Serve Homeless and Highly Mobile Students." Spring 2006)

²⁰ The Colorado Homeless Youth Services Act (HB02-1159) established the Office of Youth Homeless Services (OHYS) in response to the overwhelming and diverse needs of homeless youth in Colorado. The intent of the legislation was to create a vehicle through which services to homeless youth ages 15-21 statewide could be improved by coordinating current services and facilitating interagency collaboration to: (1) identify and remove obstacles to service provision; (2) improve the service quality; (3) reduce needless expenditures caused by overlapping services; and (4) identify funding resources available to entities serving homeless youth. Initially OHYS was housed within the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. HB 04-1107 authorized the transfer of the OHYS to the Department of Human Services' Supportive Housing and Homeless Programs (SHHP) because SHHP has complementary programs, proven expertise in working with homeless youth, and could then resource the position with Section 8 funding from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). But a HUD regulatory change in 2004 disallows the use of Section 8 funds for homeless program activities. SHHP is currently using HUD reserves that accumulated prior to 2004 to fund this position. These reserves are likely to be depleted by July 2010 or earlier. OHYS established an Advisory Committee on Homeless Youth comprised of 60 members representing the Departments of Corrections, Education, Health Care Policy and Financing, Human Services, Public Safety, Public Health and Environment, the Judicial

Department, private nonprofit organizations serving homeless youth, appropriate federal departments, and other key stakeholders in the community. The Committee implemented a five-year strategic action plan to achieve the priority goals of (1) preventing youth homelessness; (2) providing safe and appropriate housing; (3) providing supportive services to maximize self-sufficiency or reunification with families; (4) planning to establish best practices and policies based upon accurate data and outcomes; and (5) providing outreach to link vulnerable youth with appropriate housing and services.

²¹ According to a study published by the University of Pennsylvania, “the findings suggest not only that homelessness among families has wide effects on family structure, but also that considerable public costs are associated with these effects across public services systems. Furthermore, measures to prevent homelessness, as well as related housing interventions, may result in a range of benefits, such as reductions in the demand for child welfare services. Evaluations of housing programs should take into account such potential collateral effects both in the child welfare system and possibly in other social welfare systems when assessing the effectiveness of housing for homeless families.”

²² A few states have implemented programs that target families and persons that are at-risk of becoming homeless due to foreclosure or eviction. For example, the Illinois Department of Human Services implemented the “Homeless Prevention Program.” This program “provides rental/mortgage assistance, security deposit assistance, utility assistance, approved case management, and approved supportive services to individuals and families who are in imminent danger of eviction, foreclosure or homelessness, or who are currently homeless. Supportive services must directly relate to the prevention of homelessness. These services are provided in an effort to stabilize families in their existing homes, shorten the amount of time that individuals and families stay in shelters, and assist individuals and families with securing affordable housing. The households must document to the provider a temporary economic crisis beyond household control.” Colorado should research similar programs in other states and implement programs that aim to prevent homelessness for families and persons utilizing TANF benefits.

²³ Hennepin County’s homeless assistance system serves as a national model for helping families rapidly exit the shelter system for permanent housing. In 1992, facing a sharp increase in the number of families seeking shelter, the county faced a difficult choice: turn families away from shelter or invest more resources in helping families exit the system more rapidly. They chose the latter. County administrators partnered with the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency to develop a program built around rapidly re-housing families. As a part of this program, local nonprofit agencies, under contract with the county, help families find housing in the private market and then continue to provide follow-up services to promote housing stability. Because the county lacks an adequate number of federal housing subsidies, most families must quickly assume the full cost of rent, although, the county provides some financial resources (e.g., security deposit assistance, first month’s rent, etc.) which can be used flexibly by the agencies to help families access housing. The results of the county’s efforts are striking. From 2000 to 2004, the number of families experiencing homelessness declined by 43 percent and the county has made significant progress in reducing the length of time families remain in shelters before they re-access housing.

²⁴ The North Carolina Governor’s Advisory Council on Aging put together a housing forum in 2003 to clarify and discuss issues and trends concerning affordable housing for older adults. According to NC Governor Perdue, “Thirty one percent of adults over the age of sixty own their own homes. While much progress has been made concerning older adults, many needs must still be met: Of adults over the age of sixty-five, 53% of renters spend more than 30% of their income on housing and, the largest increase in the homeless population is of people age fifty-five or older.” Consider developing programs that focus on safe and affordable housing for the elderly, especially those with low-incomes. Encourage partnerships with organizations to create innovative efforts to provide funding and offer affordable housing options to as many elderly people as possible.

²⁵ When children with mental health and substance abuse issues reach the age of 18, lack of insurance coverage and other issues result in a suspension or termination of services. Youth “transition specialist” positions in school systems, treatment programs, and Child Welfare should be developed to provide a continuum of services for the behavioral health needs of youth.

²⁶ One of the primary barriers for youth in obtaining benefits and securing employment is the absence of vital documents required to apply for assistance or jobs; this often results in youth homelessness. In partnership with the Department of Motor Vehicles, Social Security Administration, and Department of Public Health and Environment, a coordinated process to obtain photo identification, a Social Security card, and a birth certificate should be developed.

Training caseworkers and discharge planners in the established process to obtain these documents prior to release from systems of care is essential.

²⁷ Consider collaborating with Colorado's 211 system to incorporate both public and private homeless service information.

²⁸ When clients are discharged from the State mental health institutes, they are assigned to a case-manager at a community mental health center. In some cases, clients admitted to the institutes are first clients of the centers. The transitioning of clients is complex, and requires coordination between institute staff and community mental health center staff that is dependent on the transfer of hard copy records. The immediate accessibility to comprehensive information concerning the treatment needs, client status, treatment plan, and similar information is needed by the receiving entity to implement a plan that will result in continuity of services. Gaps or duplication in plans may leave clients without follow-up on applications for benefits or housing.

²⁹ The Homeless Management Information System is a collaborative web-based system which serves as the primary client data-collection and management tool for the entire State to coordinate client services and collect uniform data. HMIS gives policymakers an accurate count of those receiving services and helps determine which services and combination of services work best to alleviate homelessness and to assess gaps in service. HUD mandates HMIS; without this program, Colorado would not qualify for considerable McKinney-Vento (Federal Homeless Assistance Grant) funding to be shared by various state agencies. All communities that receive McKinney-Vento funds are required to implement a Homeless Management Information System.

