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EMERGENCY AND TEMPORARY SHELTER

People in a housing crisis will always need a safe and decent place to go immediately. Emergency and temporary shelters provide the immediate need of shelter and a safe place to sleep for people experiencing homelessness, as well as instantly connecting them with housing and support services.

Low-barrier shelters provide a safe, warm place of shelter to all people who may not have any other place to go. They do not require sobriety, attendance at religious services, minimum income requirements or lack of a criminal history. Family members and partners can stay together, and even pets are allowed inside. Providing a low-barrier emergency shelter plays an important role within an effective, housing-focused response to homelessness. Low-barrier shelters serve as a platform to link people experiencing homelessness to housing through identification and assessment. Once the immediate need of shelter is met, people can be navigated toward permanent housing.

Emergency shelters also provide an important access point for hard-to-serve populations, such as those with diagnoses of serious mental illness and substance dependence. Emergency shelters secure better outcomes if they operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week where people can store belongings, access employment services and healthcare, and quickly move on to permanent housing.

As of 2019, 1,000 emergency shelter beds exist in OKC through various organizations and programs. Despite this, 557 individuals were found unsheltered in OKC during the 2020 PIT count, one of the highest unsheltered counts seen in recent years. Many OKC emergency sheltered beds are considered high-barrier or designed for special populations such as survivors of domestic violence or youth experiencing homelessness.

City Care plans to open OKC's first low-barrier night shelter in early 2021 offering approximately 200 beds for men and women experiencing homelessness in the city, as well as some family suites. Planning participants agreed that while this begins the process of adding more low-barrier emergency shelter beds in the city, more may be necessary to adequately meet the need. The yet unknown economic impact of COVID-19 may further exacerbate the need to expand low-barrier emergency shelter capacity in OKC. While not explicitly recommended in the proposed strategies over the next five years, City Care and key stakeholders should continue to evaluate the need to expand low-barrier emergency shelter bed capacity in the city.

The CoC can enhance emergency and temporary shelter in OKC by implementing the following actions:

4.A

Inclement Weather Shelter

4.B

Expand Coordinated Entry Access in Shelters

4.A) INCLEMENT WEATHER SHELTER

After 16 people experiencing homelessness in OKC died due to exposure during the winter of 2017, homeless service providers and key stakeholders determined that emergency shelter bed capacity needed to expand during cold weather events. All the shelter directors, the City of Oklahoma City Homeless Services and other volunteer groups established the winter contingency plan in 2018. When the temperature outside is expected to drop below 32 degrees, OKC emergency shelters open extra beds to encourage people not to sleep outside or in a car. The shelters include Salvation Army, City Rescue Mission, Jesus House, Grace Rescue and SISU Youth.

The five shelters together offer about 161 overflow beds for the winter contingency plan. This capacity can be further expanded if the shelters see the overflow capacity beds filling up. Grace Rescue Mission can open its gym for an additional 75 cots and the Homeless Alliance can open its day shelter for 70 spaces.

Outcomes are currently positive for the emergency shelter winter contingency plan in OKC. The winter of 2018 saw no deaths among people experiencing homelessness due to the cold weather and the contingency plan is largely credited for this outcome.

Strategy Description

Planning participants discussed expanding the winter contingency strategy to other times of year during inclement weather. Inclement weather can mean the existence of rain or other abnormal climatic conditions such as hail, high wind, severe dust storm, extreme high temperature or any combination thereof.

Recommended Actions

1. Formalize the winter contingency plan with written policies and procedures and develop expanded inclement weather protocols to indicate what other weather conditions throughout the year trigger opening of overflow beds.
2. Explore developing a process with eligibility requirements that will allow some non-shelter sites to be pre-approved to operate as temporary emergency shelter locations in inclement weather situations.
3. Initiate the inclement weather contingency plan for emergency shelters and track outcomes.

Implementation Group

- OKC Shelter Executives Group
 - Salvation Army
 - City Rescue Mission
 - City Care
 - Jesus House
 - Grace Rescue Mission
- Homeless Alliance
 - Coordinated Outreach Team
 - CoC Lead Agency (Oklahoma City Homeless Services)



Possible Performance Measures

1. Utilization of services

4.B) EXPAND COORDINATED ENTRY ACCESS IN SHELTERS

Emergency and temporary shelters provide an opportunity to instantly connect people experiencing homelessness with housing and support services. Emergency shelters provide an important access point for hard-to-serve populations, such as domestic violence survivors, transitional age youth and those with diagnoses of serious health issues, mental illness and substance dependence.

Strategy Description

Planning participants discussed expanding access to the coordinated entry system in shelters to better connect people experiencing homelessness and specific hard-to-serve populations with housing and support services. This will require Coordinated Entry Advocates or Housing Navigators in each shelter facility who can work with clients to conduct housing assessments, collect required documents and connect them with housing. Once a client is housed, the advocate would then pass the client off to a housing case manager.

For some shelters with greater capacity, staff may be trained to fulfill this role. Additionally, a single organization should apply for a Coordinated Entry project through the Continuum of Care competition. This would allow several advocates to be employed that could visit shelter sites several days a week to perform these tasks if a shelter is not able to address them themselves.

Recommended Actions

1. Expand Coordinated Entry Policies, Procedures and Trainings to incorporate protocols for conducting the Coordinated Entry process in shelters.
2. Determine which shelter facilities have ability to begin the process immediately with current staff and provide training.
3. During Continuum of Care grant competition, emphasize need for applications requesting bonus funding for the Shelter Coordinated Entry program. Submit highest ranked application to the Department of Housing and Urban Development for funding.
4. Hire rotating Coordinated Entry program staff and determine weekly schedule for visitations to shelters to conduct assessments and collect documentation.
5. Hold annual trainings for all Coordinated Entry staff.

Implementation Group

- Salvation Army
- City Rescue Mission
- City Care
- Homeless Alliance
- CoC Lead Agency (Oklahoma City Homeless Services)



Possible Performance Measures

1. Amount of time assistance was provided for
2. Number/percent of individuals or families housed
3. Length of time the person or family stays housed
4. Number/percent of individuals connected to supportive services
5. Number of SSI or SSDI applications and number/percent of SSI or SSDI applications approved
6. Number/percent of individuals who secure health insurance
7. Number/percent of individuals who secure Medicaid or Medicare