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June 28, 2022

Evaluating LAHSA’s Housing Navigation Program

LAHSA launched the Regional System Implementation (RSI) meeting process in November 2021 to provide a forum for communicating system changes and goals, to share trends in data that provide insight into system bottlenecks and to help generate ground-up solutions. Through these meetings, the following goals were established from the feedback received from providers engaged in this process: Expand problem solving to decrease inflow and facilitate quick exits to safe and stable housing.

1. Drive throughput from Interim Housing to Permanent Housing.
2. Simplify pathways to permanent housing by implanting progressive engagement and CES Transfer Policy.
3. Lease up all Emergency Housing Vouchers through the rapid improvement and streamlining of unit.
4. Center equity in resource allocation and prioritization.
5. Decrease direct service position vacancy rate.

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The intersection between Goals 2 and 4 were then selected for discussion at the January 2022 RSI meeting. A combined total of 642 people participated in the virtual meetings from across all 8 Service Planning Areas (SPAs). SPA 7 and 8 each had 29 and 71 participants respectively. LAHSA staff presented data identifying the significant service gap that exists for participants currently in Interim Housing and their inability to access permanent housing resources and programs. Feedback from providers gave further insight into this service gap as they expressed concerns with capacity for interim housing staff to be able to provide more intensive case management services other than “light touch” case management services. While service providers overall were receptive to refocusing housing navigation and time limited subsidy resources on unconnected participants in interim housing, they also raised concern about the creation of a limited path to permanent housing understanding that some of the most vulnerable people experiencing homelessness may not choose to enter interim housing. Accordingly, LAHSA created the Street to Home Pathway Workgroup to explore a direct street to permanent housing pathway for these participants. The group continues to meet and has not released any initial findings or recommendations to date.

On March 15, 2022, LAHSA staff held a virtual Housing Navigation Change Planning Meeting with service providers. At this meeting, LAHSA staff shared the proposed changes to the Housing Navigation program that are scheduled to take place as of July 1, 2022. The changes were reported as follows:

- REFERRALS: All referrals for Housing Navigation will come from Interim Housing programs;
- CONTRACTING: Contracts will move from a contracted to serve to a slot-based

model (HN programs will serve a set number of participants at any point in the contract versus a set number for the year);

- **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:** HN will include all pre-lease up activities leading to Permanent Housing (includes coordinating connection to TLS program, housing identification and search, landlord engagement, unit viewing and partnering with TLS programs during lease signing);
- **FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE:** allowance for provision of transportation and rental application assistance
- **CASELOAD RATIOS:** would change from 1:25 to 1:20

These changes were overall received well by the service providers present, with one exception – the referral process. The proposed change to channel all referrals to Housing Navigation through Interim Housing was the one recommendation where some service providers expressed some reservations. Service providers expressed concern about this proposed change in the referral process not aligning with LAHSA’s commitment to a “no wrong door” approach when accessing the Coordinated Entry System (CES). While undoubtedly through-put in Interim Housing should remain a focus of future system changes, finding the balance between focusing limited resources on people experiencing homelessness in interim housing may limit housing pathways for people experiencing homelessness who are unsheltered. Limiting access to housing navigation to only those who are in Interim Housing, further marginalizes our unsheltered population creating a “wrong door” for accessing vital case management services and time limited subsidies offered through the housing navigation program. While this program change is designed to increase interim housing bed turnover by increasing placements from interim housing

to permanent housing, it does not fully take into consideration the vast difference in interim housing availability that exists in some SPAs where very limited interim housing beds exist. According to the 2020 LAHSA Point In Time Count, in Supervisorial District 4, there were a total of 4,711 persons experiencing homelessness of which only 17% (800 persons) were sheltered. The housing navigation piece of our homelessness system currently receives \$9.3 million through Measure H serving a proportion of people experiencing homelessness, it will require further evaluation to understand if focusing the program to people in interim housing improves outcomes and does not negatively impact people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

LAHSA in partnership with providers and jurisdictions must evaluate this decision and ensure that a commitment to their “no wrong door” approach remains open for both our sheltered and unsheltered populations. As housing navigation slots are allocated, ensuring that referrals can be generated through pathways in addition to interim housing will help to ensure equitable access across the system. To achieve this, housing navigation slots should be accessible through interim housing, access centers and directly from street-based outreach. These pathways must be considered for future implementation as part of the HN systems changes. In addition, the Los Angeles County Homelessness Initiative in partnership with LAHSA needs to learn from this process as it moves to implement the May 17, 2022 Board Motion on updating the Homelessness Initiative Framework and strategy update particularly the impact of budget alignment to direct services through providers.

I, THEREFORE MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Director of CEO-HI to work with the Interim Executive Directors of LAHSA on reporting back in writing in

90 days and 180 days from the start of the new program changes on July 1, 2022. The report needs to include the following:

- Analysis of the update to Housing Navigation Scope of Required Services at LAHSA and its impact in housing people experiencing homelessness.
- Testimonials from every Executive Director of each SPA lead homeless agency in the County of Los Angeles providing their experience in the transition of the program and their agency and their respective SPA partner agency outcomes in increasing through put from interim housing to permanent housing as well as placement of unsheltered people.
- Analysis of the resources dedicated to Housing Navigation, and other similar programs like the Department of Health Services Integrated Case Management Services program, and whether additional resources and recommendations are needed to navigate a greater proportion of people experiencing homelessness to permanent housing.
- Lessons learned for process of updating programs, aligning budgets, communicating with service providers and recommendations for process with the implementation of Homelessness Initiative framework and strategy reassessment.
- The feasibility of incorporating Interim Housing operated by local jurisdictions into the Coordinated Entry System as it relates to the new Housing Navigation Policy by LAHSA.

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