



A Path to Equity:

Organizations Leading Transformative Efforts to Address Racial Inequities in Homelessness

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Highlighting the collaborative efforts of Los Angeles County and community organizations to address racial disparities in homelessness, with a focus on Black residents, through systemic reforms and equity-driven strategies.



County of Los Angeles
**Anti-Racism,
Diversity,
& Inclusion**

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A Path to Equity: Organizations Leading Transformative Efforts to Address Racial Inequities in Homelessness

In Los Angeles County, homelessness is tied to longstanding racial inequities that disproportionately affect Black people experiencing homelessness. Black residents make up 9% of Los Angeles's population, yet they account for 31% of those experiencing homelessness.

In March of 2021, the Anti-Racism Diversity and Inclusion (ARDI) initiative established the Black People Experiencing Homelessness (BPEH) Implementation Steering Committee to develop a detailed action plan with metrics and target outcomes to operationalize the recommendations developed by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) Black People Experiencing Homelessness Ad-Hoc Committee in 2018.

With over 60 recommendations in the report, the BPEH Implementation Steering Committee and ARDI have identified 20 priority recommendations to implement within 1-3 years, recognizing them critical to driving urgent and meaningful outcomes for community members unhoused or without stable housing.

The need for prioritization stems from the historical and systemic challenges outlined in the report. Centuries of systemic oppression and structural racism have led to entrenched disparities disproportionately affecting Black people experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles. These inequities cannot be dismantled overnight but require a sustained, multi-

level approach involving local, state, and national systemic changes.

Given this context, the Steering Committee and ARDI, with the Board's approval, have committed to addressing the 20 recommendations deemed 'High Priority' as a foundational step toward reducing racial disparities in homelessness. This strategic focus allows for immediate and concentrated action while laying the groundwork for comprehensive reform. Once these high-priority recommendations are implemented, the Steering Committee and ARDI will proceed with the subsequent phases, addressing 'Medium Priority' and 'Low Priority' recommendations to sustain progress and achieve the broader goals of the 2018 report.

Although progress is being made, the work being done throughout Los Angeles must include the urgency of the state of emergency on homelessness proclaimed by the LA County Board of Supervisors.

At the forefront of addressing these racial inequities are community members with lived experience, service providers, community advisors, leaders of faith-based organizations, Los Angeles County and the City of Los Angeles staff, and subject matter experts. On the ground are organizations that have been dedicated to doing this work and deeply committed to eliminating homelessness in Los Angeles County and the disparities of Black people experiencing homelessness, such as the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) and Homeless Outreach Program Integrated Care System (HOPICS).

Guided by community leaders like LAHSA's Deputy Chief Equity Officer Saba Mwine-Chang and HOPICS Executive Director Veronica Lewis, these organizations collaborate within Los Angeles County



to provide compassionate, community-centered care that takes a targeted universalism approach to addressing Black people experiencing homelessness, including individuals, families, LGBTQ+ members, and the elderly. As a joint powers authority of the City and County of Los Angeles, LAHSA has advanced homelessness response strategies under Dr. Va Lecia Adam Kellum's leadership through systemic reforms such as enhancing data infrastructure and adopting data-driven approaches to reduce disparities. Meanwhile, HOPICS, led by Executive Director Veronica Lewis, has implemented equitable hiring practices and improved foster care and child welfare systems to address structural inequities.

The County's Commitment to Racial Equity and Homelessness Reduction

LA County's Anti-Racism, Diversity, and Inclusion (ARDI) Initiative is pivotal to coordinating efforts across community partners and County departments and securing funding allocations from partners to catalyze and accelerate the implementation of the recommendations from the 2018 LAHSA Ad Hoc Committee's report. Organizations such as LAHSA and HOPICS are critical to ensuring we can create systemic change and eliminate homelessness.

The recent report, *The Road May Be Long, But the Journey is Just*, developed by ARDI and the BPEH Implementation Steering Committee, provides an update on the implementation roadmap and lessons learned. The BPEH Implementation Steering Committee, established by the ARDI Initiative, is a collaborative group of government agencies, community organizations, subject matter experts,

and individuals with lived experience. The committee guides the development and implementation of a 10-year action plan to address systemic inequities contributing to Black homelessness in Los Angeles County, ensuring coordinated, culturally relevant, and equity-driven solutions.

The BPEH Implementation Steering Committee is composed of committee members from St. Joseph Center, LA Voice / McCarty Memorial Christian Church, Southern California Health and Rehabilitation Program (SCHARP), Los Angeles County - Homeless Initiative, Sanctuary of Hope, Homeless Outreach Program Integrated Care System (HOPICS), Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), Florence Aliese Advancement Network, community advocates, Los Angeles County leaders, and ARDI.

LAHSA: Building Racial Equity into Systems

At LAHSA, Saba Mwine-Chang's role is central to embedding racial equity within Los Angeles' homelessness services. As appointed the inaugural Deputy Chief Equity Officer, Mwine-Chang oversees a comprehensive plan to address inequities across data/research, policy, and practice throughout LA County's homelessness response system. As the designated Continuum of Care with the task of providing housing and emergency services, LAHSA works to ensure equitable access to these critical resources. LAHSA fulfilled recommendation #1 of the Ad Hoc Report on Black People Experiencing Homelessness to develop and launch a racial equity initiative at LAHSA to further its commitment to advance racial equity within its workforce and within the homeless crisis response system with the inaugural role of a Deputy Chief Equity

Officer. Mwine-Chang’s team catalyzes emerging policy, research, and practice equity implementation projects such as culturally specific and responsive training, equitable funding policy development, and, in partnership with ARDI and others, equity metrics and goals for Measure A funding.

Internally, LAHSA staff have utilized recommendations across the Ad Hoc Report on BPEH, AIAN County Directive #4: Strategy to improve services for American Indian/Alaskan Natives who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness and emerging work of the Taskforce on Latinx Homelessness to devise action plans and key performance indicators and realize various recommendations’ aims. LAHSA cross-departmental matrix teams have organized this work across the following subject areas: Research & Data, Education & Training, System Refinement, Advocacy & Community Engagement, and Resource Availability. In complement to this and other LAHSA project work, Mwine-Chang helps to foster an understanding of how belonging, cultural and racial trauma-informed care, somatic healing, creative play, and culturally specific approaches can inform collective and individual healing and wellness.

The Coordinated Entry System (CES) in Los Angeles has undergone a significant update with the development of the Los Angeles Housing Assessment Tool (LA HAT). LA HAT is a newly developed version of the VI-SPDAT, a CES triage tool which helps providers generate a vulnerability score to be utilized for prioritization of supportive housing placements. LA HAT is the culmination of a multi-year, community-engaged research effort to redesign the previous triage tool, based on recommendations from the Ad Hoc Report on BPEH. The redesign process included a

community lead rewording of the triage tool questions to reflect considerations of race equity, trauma-informed practice, and real world experiences. Relatedly, the number of questions were reduced to 19 in LA HAT versus the prior 35 question version.

To address the practice of how the tool is implemented and to resource and partner with service providers, LAHSA with the expertise of A.C.T.I.O.N to Healing, LLC, has developed and finalized the LA HAT training. Over the course of 2025, LAHSA will train providers on how to administer the newly designed tool; as providers are trained, they will begin use of LA HAT. Some objectives of the training are: to build rapport with community members prior to conducting the assessment; to understand non-verbal cues and cultural considerations that impact connection with community members; to accurately enter assessment data into the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS); to understand the implementation of the assessment score in prioritization processes and procedures; to practice rapport building skills through a trauma-informed care and a culturally humble approach; and to practice introducing and administering the new tool to community members experiencing homelessness. The LA HAT training and accompanying workbook is grounded in identifying the manifestations of racial bias, inequities in homelessness and provides practice-based approaches in cultural humility, trauma informed and culturally sensitive behaviors. LAHSA also finalized a post-training survey to capture providers’ learning experience. As providers complete the LA HAT training and begin to use the new tool into 2025, LAHSA, in partnership with Arc4Justice, will begin tool evaluation so as to continue to understand how it is being received by all who experience it (both clients and assessors), with a

targeted analysis on the experiences of people of color being assessed. A second focus of the evaluation is the analysis of scores to determine whether or not this new assessment tool is more equitable in the scoring of people of color and other disproportionately represented people.

In summary, the LA HAT represents a community-driven evolution of the CES triage process. Developed through multi-year collaboration, it seeks to address the limitations of the previous tool while building toward more equitable and effective resource distribution.

LAHSA's additional partnerships with

community-based organizations like Bold Black LA and ARDI are essential to its success, amplifying outreach and enhancing cultural connectedness. Mwine-Chang emphasizes, "Our partnerships are essential to movement building and fostering the collectivism and community building that equity work requires." LAHSA's collaborations with local nonprofits as well as faith-based organizations in South LA strengthen its ability to serve smaller communities, offering technical support and resources for smaller nonprofits as they join the County's mission to reduce homelessness.



HOPICS: A Community-Centered Approach to Homelessness

For 36 years, HOPICS has provided support for Service Planning Area 6 (SPA 6), which serves the communities of Athens, Compton, Crenshaw, Florence, Hyde Park, Lynwood, Paramount, and Watts residents experiencing homelessness. Led by Veronica Lewis, a longtime resident of South LA, HOPICS offers comprehensive services that address not only homelessness but also the contributing issues of substance use disorder, mental health, and reentry challenges. The organization's diverse workforce, comprising many individuals who have experienced homelessness, addiction, or incarceration, embodies HOPICS's philosophy: "We are the community we serve."

Lewis's approach fosters career development and pathways to long-term stability. "Our approach is about creating equity, not just equality," she explains. HOPICS's integrated care model includes mental health services, substance use assistance, medical care, and basic needs support, empowering individuals to achieve long-term stability. The organization's multi-faceted Harm Reduction work— including the distribution of Narcan, for example, has saved over 400 lives from overdoses, underscoring its commitment to meeting people where they are and restorative justice. HOPICS also focuses on its employees' overall wellness by creating opportunities for access to resources, financial support, and mentorship to address inequities faced by many in their workforce who are a part of marginalized communities.

HOPICS's tailored housing programs, informed by county data, address critical gaps in service retention. Lewis says, "Data showed us that Black individuals are more

likely to fall out of housing programs, so we're piloting programs that address these retention gaps." By collaborating with ARDI and the Black People Experiencing Homelessness Implementation Steering Committee, HOPICS has helped shape a countywide response to homelessness that centers on Black voices and experiences.

The Collective Impact of Community Organizations on Reducing Homelessness

The partnership between LA County, LAHSA, and HOPICS demonstrates the power of community-based organizations to address homelessness. County support has enabled these groups to broaden their outreach, enhance cultural competency, and create targeted programs addressing homelessness's root causes. By prioritizing racial equity, they're setting a national example, underscoring that resolving homelessness requires resources and a commitment to justice and empathy.

Although progress has been made, it is not moving fast enough, particularly in implementing sustained solutions for Black residents. "Equity is not a one-time goal—it's an ongoing commitment," Lewis emphasizes. The BPEH Implementation Steering Committee members continue to advocate for long-term funding, highlighting the importance of transforming policy into lasting change.

Systemic change to eliminate homelessness for all residents, especially Black people experiencing homelessness, requires government and philanthropic resources and support for the initiative to ensure vigilance and improvements at a swifter pace.

A Path Forward for LA County

Collaboration across community programs, advocates, and government is critical to creating systemic change and eliminating homelessness. Through unified efforts, a future where homelessness solutions are both compassionate and equitable is possible. For Mwine-Chang, Lewis, and County leaders, reducing homelessness among Black residents transcends policy—it's a dedication to addressing systemic inequities. Their collaborative, equity-driven approach reinforces that while the journey is long and ongoing, they're paving the way for a future where every

resident has a clear path to a safe and lasting home.

We must hold ourselves accountable for eliminating homelessness in Los Angeles County and the disparities of Black people experiencing homelessness, especially individuals, families, the LGBTQ, and the elderly community.

Together, we can foster a system that not only meets the needs of our Black residents experiencing obstacles and challenges but also lays the groundwork for a Los Angeles where we can thrive, no matter our station in life, with the interventions in place to help.

Acknowledgments

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LAHSA

