

**CITY OF SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA**  
**COUNCIL POLICY**

**CURRENT**

SUBJECT:                   **COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON HOMELESSNESS**  
POLICY NO.:               **000-51**  
EFFECTIVE DATE:          May 8, 2018

**BACKGROUND:**

Homelessness is a pervasive issue that has affected the City of San Diego (City) for many years. It is an acute social problem that causes severe impacts to those experiencing homelessness, including death. In addition, homelessness is expensive for the City to manage and negatively impacts residents, neighborhoods, and businesses.

Homelessness is visible in every community within the City: the scope of the homeless crisis across the City and region is significant. According to the most recent data, San Diego County's homeless population is among the highest in the nation. Of that population, most of the individuals reside in the City of San Diego. More strikingly, most of that population live unsheltered, either on the streets, in cars, in canyons, or in makeshift encampments and structures.

Although homelessness may be perceived as an insurmountable challenge, communities across the country have demonstrated that, through strong leadership and collaboration, adoption of best practices such as Housing First,<sup>1</sup> alignment of funding, and using data-driven decision making, it is very much a solvable social problem.

**PURPOSE:**

It is the intent of the San Diego City Council (Council) to clarify and strengthen its role in addressing homelessness. This Policy provides high-level guidelines for the City's response to ending homelessness.

---

<sup>1</sup>Capitalized terms not defined in this Policy refer to definitions put forth by United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), and locally by the Regional Task Force on the Homelessness (RTFH), specifically the RTFH Community Standards and Community Plan to End Homelessness, as each of those definitions and documents may be amended.

For example, the USICH describes the “Housing First” approach to homelessness as one that prioritizes quick access to housing with supportive services and minimizes barriers or pre-conditions related to housing readiness, sobriety, or engagement in treatment. See United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, *Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness* (2015), [https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset\\_library/USICH\\_OpeningDoors\\_Amendment2015\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/USICH_OpeningDoors_Amendment2015_FINAL.pdf).

**CITY OF SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA**  
**COUNCIL POLICY**

**CURRENT**

It is the Council's intent that all proposals brought forward to address homelessness within the City will meet this Policy. The Council also recognizes that some flexibility in the application of this Policy is required to allow the City to adapt to address acute needs and evolving best practices.

The Council intends to coordinate, collaborate, and align efforts with City partners, including the Office of the Mayor and the San Diego Housing Commission (SDHC). As part of this Policy, the Council recommends that all City entities and partners, including the Council, Office of the Mayor, and the SDHC, align their policies with and adopt requirements and recommendations by HUD regarding homeless assistance system operations outlined in the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act (HEARTH Act);<sup>2</sup> adopt strategies and goals outlined by the USICH in *Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness*; include Housing First as a best practice approach; and seek guidance from the RTFH San Diego, including creating a region-wide Homeless Crisis Response System.

In addition, the Council commits to actively coordinates and partner with City and County of San Diego (County) stakeholders, non-profit homeless services providers, businesses, the philanthropic sector, the faith-based community, advocates, and individuals experiencing homelessness.

**POLICY:**

The Council understands that the most effective way to end an individual's homelessness is through the rapid provision of a permanent stable home with appropriate ongoing support.

The Council shall focus on creating pathways to permanent housing and developing permanent housing solutions, and that efforts to address homelessness use a person-centered and Housing First approach.

The Council understands homelessness is significantly impacted by the housing market; specifically, housing affordability coupled with low vacancy rates.

The Council shall focus on improving and building an effective Homelessness Crisis Response System while simultaneously working to address housing affordability and housing supply issues within the City and surrounding region.

---

<sup>2</sup>See Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act of 2009, S. 896, 111th Cong. §§ 1001-1505 (2009), [https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/S896\\_HEARTHAct.pdf](https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/S896_HEARTHAct.pdf).

**CITY OF SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA**  
**COUNCIL POLICY**

**CURRENT**

The Council recognizes that homelessness is not a crime, but responsible behavior is expected. Individuals and families experiencing homelessness possess rights and responsibilities and deserve the respect and protection afforded to every member of the community.

The Council, as a partner in the region-wide effort will seek guidance from the RTFH San Diego Community Plan to End Homelessness and RTFH Community Standards when implementing each of the strategies outlined in this Policy.

The Council shall review this document on a regular basis to reflect the latest standards, best practices, and public policy decisions with regard to addressing homelessness.

To these ends, the Council will seek to partner with the Office of the Mayor, SDHC, and other entities, and will support the core strategies of a system to effectively end homelessness, as stated in the policies detailed below.

**A. Unified Leadership, Effective Government, and Aligned Funding**

1. Actively participate in the RTFH Governance Board and partner with the County, other cities, and business and philanthropic entities to ensure a unified voice in the ongoing creation, implementation, and evaluation of a regional strategy to address homelessness, including those elements outlined in the RTFH San Diego Community Plan to End Homelessness.
  
2. Provide that funding originating from the City for activities addressing homelessness utilizes best practices, such as Housing First and other elements of this Policy.
  
3. Strongly support homeless and housing programs that have demonstrable outcomes in successfully placing households into permanent housing quickly, maintaining stable housing for individuals and families, limiting returns to homelessness, and cost-effectiveness.
  
4. Provide a platform for non-profit partners, the faith-based community, advocates, and those experiencing homelessness to make their voices heard in the development and implementation of City homelessness policies and funding decisions.

**CITY OF SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA**  
**COUNCIL POLICY**

**CURRENT**

5. Explore opportunities to develop collaborative relationships with non-profit and faith-based partners, including those that do not receive public funding.

**CITY OF SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA**  
**COUNCIL POLICY**

**CURRENT**

6. Support right-sizing of the homeless services system, meaning effectively matching the amount and type of housing and homeless services resources to population needs.
  
7. Encourage siting facilities and programs in a manner that provides an equitable distribution of housing options and co-located support service facilities throughout the City where the need exists. As part of the site selection process, the needs of the neighborhood should be taken into account, which could include working with neighbors, businesses, community organizations, private partners, and service providers, as well as consideration of actions that could mitigate impacts on the community associated with the facilities or programs.

**B. System Access/Entry: Outreach, Coordinated Entry, and Diversion**

1. Support region-wide development, implementation, enactment of policies and procedures, and evaluation of a Coordinated Entry System (CES) aligned with HUD guidance and requirements regarding the core components of CES: Access, Assessment, Prioritization, and Referral.
  
2. Support RTFH CES policies and procedures.
  
3. Promote outreach that targets the most vulnerable unsheltered individuals with the highest service needs, moves individuals toward permanent housing, and builds relationships, trust, and rapport.
  
4. Support prevention and diversion interventions that keep individuals from becoming homeless and divert households from entering the homeless system by utilizing housing problem-solving strategies.
  
5. Arrange for, through the help of regional partners, adequate access to basic services for those living unsheltered, including access to clean restrooms, showers, trash disposal, laundry, and storage facilities.

**CITY OF SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA**  
**COUNCIL POLICY**

**CURRENT**

6. Provide that all programs that provide basic services, including day centers, storage facilities, restrooms, showers, safe zones, and meal providers, act as entry points for CES, or at minimum make referrals to a program that acts as an entry point.
  
7. Support coordination with outdoor meal programs and volunteer groups seeking to provide meals to those living unsheltered so that such meal programs operate in a safe, sanitary, and effective manner.

**CITY OF SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA**  
**COUNCIL POLICY**

**CURRENT**

8. Provide that all City departments interacting with those experiencing unsheltered homelessness understand best practices and are knowledgeable on availability of homeless services in the community.
  
9. Strike a balance between respecting the rights of individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness while responding to community needs for safe streets, healthy neighborhoods, and responsible behavior.

**C. Emergency Responses: Shelter, Transitional Housing, and Interim Housing**

1. Require temporary housing programs, including Emergency Shelter, Interim Housing, Bridge Housing, and Transitional Housing, to use a Housing First approach characterized by having low-barrier criteria for entry and ongoing programming, focusing on rapid housing placement, participation in CES as defined by the RTFH, and ensuring all households have an individualized housing plan.
  
2. Encourage, engage, and work with non-City funded temporary housing programs operating within the City to adopt approved RTFH Community Standards and participate in regional CES.
  
3. Support low-cost options for the expansion of temporary shelter beds, including the use of unused public buildings, temporary low-cost structures, partnerships with the faith-based community, or repurposing transitional housing to Interim or Bridge Housing, with the primary goal being to provide pathways to permanent housing.

**D. System Exits: Housing Interventions**

1. All Rapid Re-Housing (RRH) and Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) should only accept referrals from CES and should require that referrals adhere to prioritization standards set by RTFH to ensure that those who are the most vulnerable and with the greatest need receive permanent housing resources first.
  
2. All RRH programs should be flexible and should operate at a variety of intensities, including short-term, lighter touch models and higher intensity, longer duration

**CITY OF SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA**  
**COUNCIL POLICY**

**CURRENT**

models, and should employ best practice strategies, such as Critical Time Intervention. RRH programs should use progressive engagement strategies that provide only as much assistance as needed as households progress in the program, with a focus on housing sustainability.

**CITY OF SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA**  
**COUNCIL POLICY**

**CURRENT**

3. All PSH programs should use best practices, including Harm Reduction regarding substance use and mental illness, and should provide individualized flexible support based on household need. Although PSH is indefinite in nature, efforts should be made to progress households to a level of independence where they no longer need the intense programming of PSH.
4. New RRH and PSH programs should be created through the use of traditional funding, blended funding with public and private partners, as well as newly identified funding sources.
5. Engagement and outreach should be undertaken to connect community landlords to those households experiencing homelessness in existing rental housing stock.
6. Existing affordable housing operated by the City or its partners should be used for households experiencing homelessness and prioritize, target, or set aside units for such households.
7. The supply of permanent affordable housing units should be increased and expedited development processes should be pursued.

**E. System Infrastructure: Data, Evaluation, Training, Capacity Building**

1. Use data to drive all decision making on funding, changes in programs, and new efforts.
2. Regularly review system and program performance to ensure high quality of service and ensure that progress is made toward performance targets.
3. Utilize a set of common region-wide approved performance benchmarks to measure City interventions and programs.

**CITY OF SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA**  
**COUNCIL POLICY**

**CURRENT**

4. Require all homeless programs to use the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and abide by all approved RTFH HMIS policies and procedures, including privacy and confidentiality.
5. Participate in RTFH regional committees related to data and evaluation.
6. Provide data capacity building opportunities and activities to City entities and contracted homeless services providers. Capacity building activities may include, but are not limited to, concepts such as learning to understand and analyze homeless data, interpretation of data into action steps, and effectively moving data into action.

**CITY OF SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA**  
**COUNCIL POLICY**

**CURRENT**

7. Allow service providers not currently connected to HMIS to access the program by providing training and resources to the extent feasible.

**HISTORY:**

“Comprehensive Homeless Policy”

Adopted by Resolution R-285953 – 06/12/1995

“Comprehensive Policy on Homelessness”

Amended and renamed by Resolution R-311717 – 05/08/2018