



A Three-Year Strategic Plan for Arlington County

Within Our Reach

Our Community's Commitment to Prevent and End Homelessness

This plan lays out our three-year strategies for continuing our work to reduce the number of persons who experience homelessness, and to be able to assist those who do become homeless to return to housing stability as quickly as possible.

March 2018

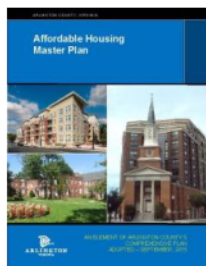
Background

Development and Adoption of Arlington's 10-Year Plan

In 2006, *A Passage Way Home – A 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness in Arlington County* was adopted by the Arlington County Board, providing a clear statement of the needs in Arlington, the vision for the future, guiding principles for the work, and four broad goals for achieving the vision. Over the following two years, hundreds of Arlingtonians – from local government, non-profit agencies, the business community, faith groups, and individual interested citizens – worked together to develop the detailed plan, a set of goals, strategies, and action steps to focus our community effort and guide the work. The resulting “Strategic Directions Report to Implement *A Passage Way Home*” was implemented in 2008, and our community effort to end and prevent homelessness within 10 years began.



Arlington's 10-Year Plan effort was part of a national movement to address homelessness. In 2000, the National Alliance to End Homelessness called upon the nation to begin a serious, focused effort to end and prevent homelessness in America. In 2002, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) took up this effort, calling upon local communities – cities and counties – to develop meaningful, structured plans to address homelessness, and in the following years the national movement to end and prevent homelessness grew.



Ending Homelessness Becomes Part of the County's Affordable Housing Master Plan

In 2015, the County Board adopted an *Affordable Housing Master Plan (AHMP)* that makes the prevention and ending of homelessness a

County objective and makes practices specified in the 10-Year Plan – including housing first, permanent supportive housing, homelessness prevention and safety net services – formal County policy. The AHMP, including Objective 2.3: Prevent and End Homelessness, is now an element in the County's Comprehensive Plan for coordinated planning and development across all departments. Specifically, the AHMP Objective 2.3 includes the following strategies:

- 2.3.1: Use the best practice approach of housing first, which places people experiencing homelessness into housing as rapidly as possible and provides wrap around services, to help them maintain their housing.

Mission Statement

Building on our past work, the mission remains:

Arlington will sustain an integrated, community-based support system which will help households at risk of homelessness keep their housing, and will assist any household that does become homeless in regaining stable housing within 30 days.

Guiding Principles

The principles that will continue to guide our work to prevent and end homelessness include:

- Commitment from all sectors of the community
- Use of best practice, evidence-based solutions in shaping programs and services
- Ensuring the availability of affordable, appropriate housing options
- Using culturally competent and consumer-centered services
- Committing sufficient financial resources to sustain our work

- 2.3.2: Provide permanent supportive housing (PSH) for persons with disabilities who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- 2.3.3: Prevent homelessness through safety net supports and social services to enable residents to maintain their housing.

Where We Are Today

We are now approaching the close of the 10 years since the Strategic Directions Report, and it is time to reflect on our progress and consider where we are going from here. We have succeeded in so many ways – from strengthening the system as a whole to changing lives one person or family at a time. Some of the successes over the past decade include:

- Each year on one day and night in January, Arlington nonprofit and government agencies undertake a “point in time” (PIT) count of the number of persons who are homeless in the county. The PIT data show a **56 percent reduction in the number of homeless persons in Arlington, from 527 in 2008 to 232 in January 2017.**
- To ensure consistent and prompt services, Arlington developed a **centralized intake system** that standardized assessment of households needing services, and in 2015 established a **unified single shelter process** through which shelter services use the same assessment tools and service planning procedures.
- We have implemented a **single, comprehensive hotline for persons seeking safety from domestic and sexual violence.**
- With the initiation of the **100 Homes Campaign** in 2011, more than 100 of the most vulnerable persons living on the streets were permanently housed. In 2016 Arlington achieved **“functional zero” for homelessness among military veterans** and we are on track to attain functional zero for chronically homeless persons. Arlington is one of only a handful of jurisdictions nationwide to achieve these goals.
- Since 2008, Arlington has added 215 permanent supportive housing spaces for formerly homeless persons with disabilities.
- In October 2015 Arlington opened a **new year-round Homeless Services Center** providing added year-round shelter space, hypothermia (winter shelter) space, medical respite beds, and coordinated drop-in services for persons living unsheltered.
- We have launched **internships and culinary training programs** for homeless persons, and established a **landlord partnership** initiative to help gain housing for individuals with significant housing barriers.

This range of projects, service enhancements, focused campaigns, and system changes has culminated in Arlington County’s successes in preventing homelessness for many households, and helping homeless persons successfully obtain permanent housing.



What is Functional Zero?

... AT ANY POINT IN TIME, THE NUMBER OF PERSONS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS (IN SHELTER, OR LIVING “ON THE STREETS”) WILL BE NO GREATER THAN THE AVERAGE MONTHLY HOUSING PLACEMENT RATE.

What Comes Next?

Arlington County, through its broad-based community effort, has made great strides in preventing and ending homelessness. And yet, work remains to be done. While homelessness has been greatly reduced, we are still working to achieve “functional zero.” That is, we are able to help people who do become homeless regain stable housing quickly, and at any point in time, the number of persons who are experiencing homelessness (in shelter, or living “on the streets”) will be no greater than the average monthly housing placement rate.

As our 10-Year Plan comes to an end, the goals and strategies outlined here are presented as our “next step.” This plan lays out our three-year strategies for continuing our work to reduce the number of persons who experience homelessness, and to be able to assist those who do become homeless to return to housing stability as quickly as possible. As the 10-Year Plan closes, fulfilling our original goal of eliminating homelessness in Arlington is *Within Our Reach*, provided we continue to work together as a community to support and assist our neighbors in need.

Strategic Planning Goals

Upon review of the strategic planning goals originally established in the 10-Year Plan, the **Arlington County Continuum of Care (CoC)** believes these strategic planning goals should remain unchanged. The established goals are still relevant today even with the successes we have had in preventing and ending homelessness. These planning goals include:

- **Affordable Housing:** We believe that safe, affordable housing is critical to ending and preventing homelessness. New housing development projects in Arlington County should continue to include affordable housing units – especially family-sized units and units suited for people with disabilities.
- **Comprehensive Supportive Services:** 10-Year Plan partners have done an excellent job in ending homelessness for many households. However, some of the homeless households today come with a complexity of issues that warrant new and creative supportive services that in some cases may follow them for extended periods to ensure housing stability.
- **Prevention:** Arlington County will continue to prevent new cases of homelessness and to assist other, previously homeless households in maintaining their housing.
- **Income Maximization:** New, promising practices exist that combine permanent housing with employment readiness and job placement. Arlington County will explore options that can increase earning potential and contribute to housing stability.

What is the Continuum of Care?

ARLINGTON COUNTY HAS A CORE NETWORK OF INTERCONNECTED PROGRAMS AND SERVICES (CALLED A CONTINUUM OF CARE, OR CoC) TO DEVELOP STRATEGIES AND ASSIST PEOPLE WHO ARE HOMELESS OR AT RISK OF BECOMING HOMELESS.

THE CoC INCLUDES COUNTY GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES, AND NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS. IT PROVIDES A FOUNDATION FOR THE BROADER COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP WORKING TOWARD THE SHARED GOALS OF PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS BEFORE IT OCCURS AND RETURNING HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES TO STABLE HOUSING AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE.

Current Areas of Particular Need

Homelessness has many faces, and affects different households in different ways. Despite the successes Arlington County has had with the 10-Year Plan, work remains to be done, especially in the following areas:

Disproportionate Number of African-American Persons in Need of Homeless Services

- In 2017, a total of 615 persons were provided emergency shelter in Arlington County; 397, or 65 percent of those persons, were of African-American descent. As a point of comparison, the 2015 American Community Survey estimated that 8.5 percent of Arlington's 223,945 residents were African-American. This is consistent with national trends and is cause for us to look at the root causes of housing instability, vulnerability for homelessness, and barriers for persons of color.
- ▶ The CoC will apply a racial equity lens and adopt informed approaches to strategically address this imbalance and the needs of this population. Through this approach the CoC will determine what best practices exist and what initiatives can be implemented. The CoC will create an action plan to meet the needs of African-Americans experiencing homelessness in the Arlington community. This effort will include tracking outcome measures by race across Continuum of Care programs.

Employment

- An increasing number of clients served by CoC programs have a limited path to employment – this can be due to a lack of citizenship, educational attainment, limited work experience and/or other barriers.
- ▶ The CoC will broaden the entry level skills and employment path for those being served. This will include identifying sectors beyond retail, food service/hospitality, and caretaking for skill-building, training and placement. The goal is for people to overcome homelessness and earn a livable wage that allows them to afford housing.
- ▶ The Continuum of Care will examine successful programs in other localities and determine the applicability for our Arlington residents.

Recidivism

- In 2015, the CoC benchmarked the number of persons who were homeless and entered permanent housing but returned to homelessness (e.g., emergency shelter or on the streets) within two years. In 2015, the percentage of persons returning to homelessness was 25 percent; this number decreased slightly to 22 percent in 2016.
- ▶ The goal of our Continuum is to determine the reasons for returns to homelessness and develop strategies to reduce recidivism.

Family Homelessness

- In 2017, the family shelters served 61 households, representing 168 total people. Of the total served, 58 percent, or 98 persons, were children. According to studies, homelessness can lead to developmental delays in toddlers and can impact the social, physical, and academic lives of school-aged children. It may also lead to repeating the cycle of homelessness as adults. The family shelters in Arlington report many families entering shelter who were also in Arlington shelters as children. The federal plan to end family homelessness has designated 2020 as the target year to end family homelessness.
- ▶ The Continuum of Care will develop a specific campaign to end family homelessness and develop specific supportive services to meet the complex needs of these families.

Youth Homelessness

- HUD looks at youth homelessness from two perspectives: (1) unaccompanied youth (below age 18) and (2) transitional age youth (TAY), ages 18 to 24. In Arlington, the 2016 point in time count identified 21 homeless youth, while the 2017 count yielded 27 persons – an increase of 28.5 percent. Simply put, anyone who is 24 years of age or younger and homeless is at-risk and extremely vulnerable:
 - Youth who had been homeless or who received housing assistance in the past were nearly twice as likely to become homeless as adults.
 - Youth who are parents are more than twice as likely to become homeless as youth who are not parents.
 - Up to 77 percent of sex-trafficked youth have reported previously running away from home.
 - LGBT homeless youth comprise 20 to 40 percent of the homeless youth population.
- ▶ The Continuum of Care will address the needs of transitional age youth households and make determinations about the types of shelter, housing, and services needed. Further, Arlington will establish a process for identifying the extent to which unaccompanied homeless youth and transitional age homeless youth are in our community, and how the Continuum of Care will work to meet their needs.

Aging Population

- In 2017, a total of 461 persons were served in emergency shelters. Of those, 29% were 55 years of age and older. Many of these persons have medical issues that require specialized housing placements and/or supportive services.
- ▶ The CoC will identify an “early warning system” that can identify, intervene, and track persons who are at risk of becoming homeless – with an emphasis on the elderly population living on fixed incomes.
- ▶ For those individuals who do become homeless, the CoC will examine expanded housing solutions for this aging population.

Immigrant Households

- Indicators in many jurisdictions reflect that immigrant households are fearful of contacting human service agencies, regardless of their actual immigration status. One key challenge in supporting this population is that many otherwise-qualified households cannot access relevant safety net programs, including many housing assistance programs, over issues of immigration status. These barriers create longer stays in emergency shelter or lead individuals and families to choose unsafe housing conditions, including living on the street.
- ▶ As an inclusive community, Arlington has a significant immigrant population; the Census Bureau estimated that 23 percent of all Arlingtonians were foreign-born as of July 1, 2016. The CoC intends to bring greater focus and collective problem-solving to address barriers to safety and housing faced by these members of our community. The CoC will conduct research into what communities similar to Arlington are doing to support immigrants who experience homelessness and housing instability. The CoC will also provide training and share information among homeless service providers to ensure these households remain informed of their options, with opportunities to move forward from homelessness. The CoC will seek community and private support to help immigrant households overcome barriers to their housing stability.

Domestic Violence

- Domestic violence is one of the leading causes of homelessness for families, and the leading cause of homelessness for women. Our strategic efforts to support households experiencing these forms of abuse are vital. Over the past three years, as national awareness of domestic violence has grown, Arlington's Sexual and Domestic Violence Hotline has seen a more than 50 percent increase in calls for help. Point in time count data and annual report data both show a steady increase in persons in family and single shelters having been impacted by violence. The trend is seen in other housing programs, as well.
- ▶ Looking forward, the CoC will provide solutions to homelessness that: are trauma-informed, support survivors' long-term safety, and reduce cycles of violence that too often destabilize housing and other basic needs for persons impacted.

Strategies for Fulfilling Our Planning Goals

The four strategic planning goals carried over from the 10-Year Plan, as well as a fifth related to evaluation, will guide the future work of the Arlington County CoC.

Over the last four years, the collection and evaluation of data has become increasingly important to the CoC. The data helps us identify needs and successes, aids us in shaping policy, and indicates where and how resources can be best used by the Continuum. Data will be critical in our efforts to provide focused assistance to the subpopulations noted above, in the Current Areas of Particular Need section.

Implementation plans will serve to actualize this strategic plan, and will be updated annually with action steps and reports on progress. See Table 1: Goals and Strategies.

Conclusion

The 10-Year Plan set an aspirational goal for the community. Then, as now, our community would not and will not accept that people are living outside and unsheltered in a place of such beauty and prosperity. Over the past decade, the community has responded with unprecedented partnerships and results. Innovative public/private collaborations were developed. State and local funding increased, and businesses, faith communities, nonprofits, local governments, and people experiencing homelessness came together like never before to address the crisis of homelessness.

A well-functioning system of providing housing and services to people who are experiencing homelessness or who are at-risk of becoming homelessness is essential. People who are homeless need homes and jobs. The CoC will begin efforts to better match people with the resources we have in our community and look for innovative, creative ways to bridge the gaps that still exist. As Arlington community partners, we will continue to work together to ensure we are delivering services that address the needs of the individuals and, importantly, do it in a cost-effective way. This enables our system to serve more people, while also ensuring people have the necessary supports as they regain and sustain housing stability.

**The goal to end and prevent homelessness
is within our reach.**

Table 1: Goals and Strategies

	Strategy 1	Strategy 2	Strategy 3	Strategy 4
Goal 1: Affordable Housing	Increase the supply and variety of housing affordable to homeless individuals and families.	Ensure adequate rental assistance for homeless individuals and families that pairs with a variety of housing types and approaches.	Facilitate access to affordable housing for homeless individuals and families.	
Goal 2: Comprehensive Supportive Services	Develop and/or refine approaches for households experiencing recidivism or lack of success in housing.	Implement and maintain evidence-based practices and approaches that include but are not limited to concepts from Bridges Out of Poverty, Critical Time Intervention, Trauma-Informed Care, Housing First, and Motivational Interviewing.	Engage additional expertise, networks, and community members to develop and implement effective outreach, emergency assistance, and housing first interventions to support specific needs and populations in Arlington County.	Develop a continuum of comprehensive supportive services for the housing approaches used, with an emphasis on graduate/aftercare resources to support households post-rapid re-housing and post-homelessness prevention.
Goal 3: Prevention	Building upon the initial successes of the Centralized Access System, enhance and advertise a 24/7 Housing Crisis Response Plan for the entire County.	Develop a robust prevention and homelessness response system that is flexible, creative, and utilizes best practices to broaden the Continuum’s reach to underserved populations.	Advocate at all levels for programs and policies that help people bridge out of poverty.	
Goal 4: Income Maximization	Define and develop an evidence-based curriculum that combines permanent housing with supportive employment services and training opportunities.	Create an Employer Advisory Group to identify the key workforce demands for employment in the Washington, D.C. area, as well as corresponding funding streams and opportunities.		
Goal 5: Evaluation	Develop a governance document for the Data and Evaluation Committee.	Present quarterly data report to the Executive Committee.	Develop a process for analyzing data across the entire CoC to identify service gaps and needs, strengthen program evaluation, and inform resource allocation.	