



Kittitas County 5-Year Homelessness Plan

2026-2030



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Executive Summary

The Kittitas County 2025–2030 Homeless Housing Plan provides a coordinated roadmap for addressing homelessness and housing instability over the next five years. Grounded in local data, community input, and best practices, the plan outlines shared goals and strategies to ensure that all residents of Kittitas County have access to housing that meets their needs, and the individualized support required to maintain stability.

Homelessness is a complex challenge. It affects individuals, families, and entire communities. Addressing it requires clear priorities, collaboration, and a sustained commitment to measurable progress. This plan sets that direction.

Key goals

- Promote an equitable, transparent, and accountable homeless response system.
- Strengthen the homeless service provider workforce.
- Prevent episodes of homelessness whenever possible.
- Prioritize assistance based on the greatest barriers to housing stability and risk of harm.
- Seek to house everyone in a stable setting that meets their needs.

Key priorities

- Expand the supply of affordable and supportive housing.
- Strengthen partnerships across sectors.
- Improve access to behavioral health services.
- Enhance prevention, diversion, and outreach efforts.
- Build community awareness and foster public support.

These priorities align with and reinforce the goals of the Kittitas County Comprehensive Plan, particularly the commitment to affordable housing, inclusive growth, and coordinated health and human services.

Current context

Housing costs in Kittitas County continue to rise faster than income, placing severe strain on low-income households. The Housing for All Planning Tool (HAPT) projects a need for approximately 1,351 new housing units over the next five years, with the greatest demand among extremely low- and very low-income households.

In 2024, the Point-in-Time (PIT) Count identified 91 people experiencing homelessness in Kittitas County. By 2025, that number dropped to 26, largely due to increased housing placements and limited outreach during the count period. These shifts demonstrate how homelessness is shaped by both local conditions and the way data is collected, underscoring the importance of coordinated and responsive strategies.

Recent federal changes have also created uncertainty in homelessness policy and funding. For Kittitas County, this makes flexibility, strong local planning, and regional collaboration essential to securing resources while ensuring strategies remain centered on the needs of our community.

Moving forward

Implementation of this plan will be guided by the Homeless and Affordable Housing Committee, with broad engagement from public, private, and nonprofit partners. Progress will be measured through data-driven outcomes, community feedback, and regular evaluation.

Homelessness remains one of the most pressing challenges facing Kittitas County, but by working together, sustaining strong partnerships, and maintaining a shared focus on dignity, housing stability, and community well-being, meaningful progress is both possible and within reach.

Glossary of Terms

By-Name List: A real-time, person-specific record of individuals experiencing homelessness in a community. Each entry includes key details such as housing status, service needs, and contact information. These lists help service providers coordinate care, prioritize resources, and track progress toward housing outcomes.

Coordinated Entry (CE): a standardized process that helps communities assess, prioritize, and connect people experiencing homelessness to appropriate housing and services. It simplifies access, reduces duplication, and ensures those with the greatest need are served first.

Diversions: A strategy that helps people avoid entering the homeless system by resolving their housing crisis quickly, often through conflict mediation, reconnection with family, or one-time financial support. It reduces shelter demand, shortens time spent unhoused, and ensures crisis resources go to those with no alternatives.

Emergency Housing Assistance Short-term housing with minimal barriers, designed to provide immediate shelter for people experiencing homelessness while they seek permanent housing.

Functional Zero is the point when the number of people experiencing homelessness at any time is no greater than the community's proven capacity to quickly house them with appropriate, long-term support.

Homelessness: The lack of a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. It includes people who:

- Sleep in places not meant for habitation (cars, parks, abandoned buildings)
- Stay in emergency shelters or transitional housing.
- Flee domestic violence or unsafe conditions without stable housing.
- Youth or young adults who rely on temporary arrangements like "couch-surfing" without a permanent home.

Homeless Management Information System (HMIS): A shared database used by service providers to track client data and service use. HMIS enables coordination among providers, accurate reporting, and data-driven funding and planning. High utilization improves system performance and accountability.

Housing instability is the condition of being at risk of losing safe and adequate housing. It includes people who:

- Face eviction, foreclosure, or loss of housing
- Struggle to pay rent, utilities, or other basic housing costs.
- Move frequently or rely on short-term, unstable housing.
- Live in overcrowded or unsafe conditions that threaten long-term stability.

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) Long-term affordable housing with optional support services for people with chronic homelessness or high housing barriers.

Point-in-Time (PIT) Count is a survey conducted on a single day each January that records the number of people experiencing homelessness, both sheltered and unsheltered. It is used to track trends, guide planning, and meet federal reporting requirements.

Unsheltered Homelessness: Includes people who sleep in places not meant for habitation (cars, parks, abandoned buildings). This is known to lead to increased risk of illness, violence, and long-term instability.

About the 5 Year Plan

The Kittitas County 2025–2030 Homeless Housing Plan provides a strategic roadmap for preventing and reducing homelessness across the county. Developed with input from residents, service providers, and people with lived experience, the plan outlines shared goals, key priorities, and coordinated actions to improve housing stability for all.

This plan is more than a legal requirement. It's a shared commitment to ensure that people facing homelessness are met with timely, effective, and compassionate support. Required by RCW 43.185C, the plan secures Kittitas County's eligibility for state homelessness funding while guiding how local document recording fees and other public resources are allocated.

The plan applies countywide, including cities, towns, and unincorporated areas, and promotes a unified response through partnerships with public agencies, nonprofit providers, healthcare systems, and community groups.

Homelessness affects individuals, families, and entire communities. By aligning this plan with the housing, health, and service priorities outlined in the Comprehensive Plans for Kittitas County, Ellensburg, Cle Elum, Roslyn and South Cle Elum, we ensure a coordinated approach that reflects local goals. A reference table highlighting this alignment is included in the Appendix.

Previous Plan and Achievements

Kittitas County adopted its most recent 5-Year Homeless Housing Plan in 2019. That plan outlined five key objectives aligned with state and federal priorities: identify and engage people experiencing homelessness, prioritize those with the greatest needs, ensure swift access to permanent housing, project system impact, and address racial disparities in service delivery.

Over the past five years, progress has been made across all five areas. Highlights include:

- **Functional zero for veteran homelessness** - Kittitas County became the first in Washington to reach this milestone.
- **Emergency shelter expansion** - A seven-day-per-week winter shelter system was established, providing consistent access to safe overnight space during the coldest months.
- **Rapid rehousing and permanent housing** - Over 45 new units were developed between 2020–2024, including youth-specific housing and permanent options supported by local, state, and federal funds.
- **Coordinated outreach and data tracking** - Mobile outreach, by-name lists, and improved system coordination has increased responsiveness and system alignment.

Annual reports from 2021 to 2024 reflect growing alignment across service providers, increased use of Coordinated Entry, and measurable housing outcomes, including exit rates to permanent housing exceeding 80% in some years, including 2024.

While gaps remain, especially in affordable housing stock, behavioral health support, and rural access, this work laid a foundation for the next five-year cycle. This plan builds on the progress of the last five years while recognizing where continued focus and innovation are needed.

Local & State Context and Background

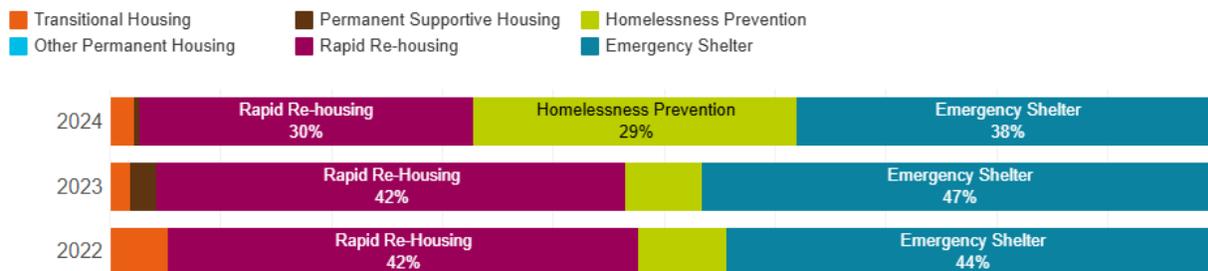
This five-year plan builds on and reinforces the goals set forth in the Comprehensive Plans of Kittitas County and its cities. Across all jurisdictions with current comprehensive plans, Ellensburg, Cle Elum, Roslyn, South Cle Elum and Kittitas County itself, there is strong alignment around several key priorities: expanding access to affordable housing, reducing homelessness through prevention and intervention, supporting vulnerable populations, and fostering coordinated service delivery. These shared goals provide a consistent planning foundation. Each of the five strategic goals outlined in this plan is explicitly tied to comprehensive plan policies, ensuring alignment not just in language, but in long-term community intent.

Kittitas County’s Current Homelessness Landscape

In 2024, the Point-in-Time (PIT) Count identified 91 individuals experiencing homelessness in Kittitas County. Approximately 65 were sheltered and 26 were unsheltered. The 2025 PIT Count found 26 individuals experiencing homelessness, 11 of which were unsheltered. While the decrease is notable, year-over-year PIT counts should be interpreted with caution, especially in rural communities where visibility and access vary. A number of factors can affect the accuracy of the count, including number of volunteers conducting the count, camping ordinance enforcement, and weather. Ongoing tracking through By-Name Lists and coordinated outreach remains essential for understanding the true scope of local need.

HMIS enrollments support the downward trend observed in Kittitas County's PIT counts, which dropped from 91 individuals in January 2024 to 26 in January 2025. While overall HMIS enrollments decreased slightly from 432 in FY2023 to 403 in FY2024, the share of individuals accessing prevention services grew notably. This shift suggests local strategies are not only reaching people earlier but effectively preventing homelessness before it occurs. While the data for SFY2025 was not finalized at the time of this report, these trends point to a positive impact of targeted investments in early intervention and housing-focused support. The chart below shows the breakdown of entries by project type.

Kittitas County HMIS Entries by Project Type



Source: Washington State Department of Commerce

The challenges contributing to homelessness in Kittitas County mirror those seen statewide but take on a distinct form in this rural context. Housing costs have risen sharply over the last several years. Between 2017 and 2023, the median gross rent in the county increased by nearly 50%, while household incomes remained below the state average. As of 2023, nearly one in five renters were spending more than 50% of their income on housing, making

them severely cost-burdened. This mismatch between wages and housing costs remains one of the central drivers of local housing instability.

At the same time, the supply of housing, especially for very low-income households, has not kept pace with demand. The Washington State Department of Commerce estimates that Kittitas County will need more than 2,000 additional housing units by 2044 to meet projected demand. With rental vacancy rates extremely low, those seeking housing often face long waitlists or no available options.

Behavioral health and substance use also play a significant role. Local focus groups and service providers consistently point to untreated mental health conditions and substance use as common factors leading to homelessness. In a rural county like Kittitas, access to outpatient care, detox, and supportive housing services is limited, making recovery and housing stabilization harder to achieve.

Other barriers further compound these challenges. Community members and service providers alike cited transportation, lack of documentation, and stigma as key obstacles preventing people from accessing the help they need. Focus group participants specifically noted that stigma and judgment often discourage individuals from seeking assistance.

Even with these challenges, Kittitas County has developed a responsive network of crisis response and housing services. These include emergency shelters, case-managed transitional housing, and rapid rehousing programs. Services delivered by local organizations are coordinated through a centralized Coordinated Entry system that prioritizes immediate access to services.

According to the Washington State Department of Commerce’s Annual Expenditure Report, over \$3.3 million was invested in Kittitas County in State Fiscal Year 2024 to support housing and homelessness programs. These funds supported a broad range of services, including prevention, shelter operations, outreach, and rental assistance. The scale of this investment illustrates both the need for and the impact of sustained funding to support local efforts. For more details, reference [Survey of Fund Sources](#) in the appendices.

Projected Need: Looking Ahead to 2045

As part of its long-range planning, Washington State requires each county to estimate the number of permanent supportive housing and emergency housing units needed to meet future demand. The Housing for All Planning Tool (HAPT), developed by the Department of Commerce, translates homelessness trends, population projections, and local conditions into actionable housing targets.

For Kittitas County, the HAPT estimates that by 2045, at least 509 units of permanent supportive housing and 119 units of emergency housing will be needed. These projections provide a data-informed basis for setting capital investment goals, shaping program development, and guiding policy decisions. Including them here ensures that local strategies remain grounded in projected need and support coordinated regional and state-level planning.

***Kittitas County: Cumulative % Change
(2017-2023)***



State and Federal Trends

Homelessness continues to rise across Washington State. The official 2024 Point-in-Time (PIT) Count identified 31,554 people experiencing homelessness, an increase of 12.5% from the 2023 total of 28,036. Chronic homelessness surged by 56% year-over-year and now accounts for nearly half of the state's unhoused population. Washington ranks third nationally in total homelessness, behind only California and New York.

In 2025, the statewide count identified 22,173 people experiencing homelessness. However, this total excludes King County's unsheltered population, which was not counted that year. In previous years, King County accounted for approximately half of the state's unsheltered homelessness, meaning the 2025 data significantly underrepresents the actual number of individuals experiencing homelessness statewide.

Washington State PIT Count Results

Changes in Homelessness Over Time (excludes King County unsheltered count)



Source: Washington State Department of Commerce

This trend reflects growing pressure on emergency shelters, transitional housing, and street outreach system, particularly in rural areas and smaller counties where housing and service capacity are limited.

The Washington State Homeless Housing Strategic Plan for 2024–2029 outlines five strategic priorities for addressing these trends. These include promoting equity and accountability, strengthening the provider workforce, focusing on prevention, prioritizing those facing the highest barriers, and ensuring access to housing that meets people's individual needs. The Kittitas County plan mirrors these state-level objectives in its goals and implementation strategies.

Kittitas County's 2025–2030 Homeless Housing Plan aligns closely with these priorities, applying them through a rural lens and in coordination with local comprehensive plans.

National Trends and Policy Shifts

At the national level, homelessness has also increased significantly. The 2024 PIT Count found 771,480 people experiencing homelessness across the U.S., a record high and a 18% increase over the prior year. More significant than the numbers, though, are the shifts in federal policy.

In 2025, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), which previously coordinated efforts across HUD, HHS, the VA, and other agencies, was dissolved. Without a single coordinating body, each federal agency is now

independently setting its priorities, creating a more fragmented and unpredictable landscape for funding and policy guidance.

For Kittitas County, this shift presents new challenges. The lack of a unified federal strategy means local efforts must be even more flexible and nimble. Aligning closely with state-level strategies may help preserve access to resources, but the evolving national landscape underscores the importance of regional coordination and local readiness.

Community Engagement

Washington State’s Local Plan Guidance requires that counties involve a broad range of stakeholders in developing homeless housing plans, including people with lived experience of homelessness, local governments, service providers, and the public. But more than a requirement, community engagement is essential to building a plan that is practical, responsive, and community owned.

We approached engagement with a clear belief: those closest to the problem are closest to the solution. Homelessness touches every part of our county, and addressing it requires perspectives from across the spectrum, those with lived experience, frontline workers, community partners, and everyday residents. Their insights shaped not only the priorities of this plan, but the way we talk about homelessness, the way we serve, and the values we hold.

Between September and November 2024, more than 280 individuals participated in shaping the Kittitas County 2025–2030 Homeless Housing Plan:

- 240 residents completed a community survey, distributed both online and in person through trusted community channels.
- Over 30 people joined facilitated focus groups, including individuals with lived experience, nonprofit providers, government representatives, healthcare workers, educators, and community members.
- Stakeholders engaged through targeted meetings with housing providers, city officials, and regional partners.

What We Heard

Survey responses reflected shared concerns across demographic lines and geographies:

- Broad support for expanding affordable housing, emergency shelter, and behavioral health services.
- Frustration with stigma, service gaps, and confusing systems that prevent people from getting help.
- A divide in public opinion around personal responsibility versus systemic causes of homelessness.
- A clear call for collaborative solutions and better public education to shift understanding and engagement.

“It’s not that people are unwilling to engage—it’s that they’re tired of being treated badly or getting stuck in a system that doesn’t work.”

—Service provider participant.

People want help and want to get sober, but it’s hard to stay sober on the streets.”

—Participant with lived experience.

From the focus groups, five cross-cutting themes emerged:

- The system is too hard to access: participants described long waits, strict rules, and complex requirements that don’t match people’s real lives.

- People want help: and many are actively trying to stabilize their lives but need access to safe housing and meaningful support.
- Peer support is powerful: participants emphasized the role of trusted guides with lived experience in helping others navigate the system.
- Rural community challenges: transportation, isolation, and limited provider options create unique barriers in smaller communities.
- The tone of our community matters: how people are spoken to, treated, and portrayed can either encourage engagement or push people away.

Participants consistently emphasized the need for peer advocates, simplified processes, and a shift in how the community talks about and treats people experiencing homelessness. These ideas helped shape the plan's focus on low-barrier access, dignity-centered services, and targeted investment in critical supports.

Participants who identified as low-income or as having lived experience of homelessness were offered compensation for their time and expertise at a rate of \$25 per hour, paid directly. This practice aligns with guidance from the Washington State Office of Equity on participant engagement and compensation.

Vision, Mission, and Guiding Principles

The following Vision, Mission, and Guiding Principles provide a shared framework to guide Kittitas County's collective efforts to prevent and address homelessness. These elements reflect community values and priorities, shaped through public engagement and collaboration across sectors.

Vision

Everyone in Kittitas County has access to housing that is safe, affordable, and appropriate, combined with the individualized services needed to foster long-term stability, dignity, and community belonging.

Mission

To build and sustain a comprehensive, coordinated system that prevents and addresses homelessness by meeting immediate needs and supporting long-term stability for all people at risk of or experiencing homelessness in Kittitas County.

Guiding Principles

- Client-Centered Care: Services should recognize the humanity of every person and be delivered in a person-centered, individualized, and trauma-informed manner, supporting both immediate needs and long-term outcomes.
- Equity and Inclusion: All individuals across Kittitas County should be able to access housing and services without unnecessary barriers, through fair, open, and consistent systems.
- Collaboration: Strong partnerships and cross-sector coordination are essential to achieving shared goals, maximizing impact, and ensuring efficient use of resources.
- Data-Informed Decisions: Planning, funding, and programs should be guided by objective data, measurable outcomes, and accountability to ensure resources are used effectively and continuously improved.
- Transparency and Accountability: Processes and decision-making should be transparent, grounded in clear communication, and accountable both to the people served and to the broader Kittitas County community.

Goals and Strategies

Refer to [Implementation Plan](#) section that includes timelines for completion.

Goal 1: Promote an equitable, accountable, and transparent homeless crisis response system.

A community-wide effort to address homelessness requires a clear, coordinated, and transparent system. Kittitas County has multiple providers and services working to support individuals experiencing homelessness, but public understanding and awareness about how these resources fit together can be improved. Increasing transparency and accountability within the homeless crisis response system builds public trust and ensures resources are used effectively.

To achieve this, the community will focus on clear communication, regular reporting, and ongoing engagement. This includes:

- Holding regular community meetings and forums to provide updates, gather input, and build awareness.
- Producing clear and accessible annual progress reports.
- Developing a communications and educational toolkit, including a visual system map, messaging, and key resources, that municipalities, service providers, and local organizations can use to share accurate, consistent information about homelessness, the local response system, and available services.
- Strengthening the use of the Coordinated Entry system, ensuring consistent and fair access to housing and services, minimizing duplication, and maximizing efficiency.

The goal is to increase transparency so that everyone, residents, service providers, elected officials, and people experiencing homelessness clearly understand how the system works, where to access help, and how public resources are being used. This is an ongoing effort that will evolve as the system matures, and the community needs change.

Goal 2: Strengthen the homeless service provider workforce.

A strong and sustainable homeless response system depends on the capacity, resilience, and well-being of the people working within it. Retaining skilled staff and fostering a culture of shared learning and support are essential to improving service quality and building a more consistent, collaborative homeless response system across Kittitas County.

Funding capacity building and staff development remains a critical gap across the non-profit and social services sector. Addressing this need is important to building a sustainable workforce and ensuring high-quality services for people experiencing homelessness in our community.

To achieve this, the community will focus on creating professional development opportunities for service providers and volunteers, including:

- Providing training and cross-agency learning opportunities to strengthen staff skills in trauma-informed care, client-centered approaches, boundaries, wellness and resilience, and consistent service delivery practices.
- Exploring the creation of a dedicated funding source, through public, private, or philanthropic sources, to support workforce development, capacity building, and training needs across the homeless response system.

- Engaging volunteers, interns, and community members to support providers by creating structured opportunities, pathways for involvement, and training to strengthen long-term workforce capacity.

This goal focuses on strengthening the professional workforce engaged in the local homelessness response system. Shared learning also contributes to broader collaboration and communication across the system, reinforcing efforts outlined in Goal 1.

Goal 3: Prevent episodes of homelessness whenever possible.

Preventing homelessness is both humane and financially responsible. Studies^{1,2} show it is less costly to prevent a housing crisis through diversion and/or eviction prevention, than to assist individuals and families after they become homeless. In addition to the financial benefit, keeping individuals and families stably housed avoids the trauma of homelessness and reduces the demand on emergency services and housing programs. Kittitas County already supports prevention through diversion, and eviction prevention efforts, but coordination and communication can be strengthened.

Kittitas County’s approach to achieving this goal focuses on improving coordination and early intervention through community partnerships. Prevention must be seen as a shared responsibility across the system, including non-profit providers, public agencies, private organizations, and landlords. Partnerships with the private sector, particularly property owners and managers, are an important part of this effort, and creating opportunities to engage landlords as active participants in prevention is a priority.

The county will pursue this goal through the following strategies:

- Improve coordination of existing prevention resources across the community, with an emphasis on aligning diversion funds, strengthening data coordination, and supporting shared evaluation of outcomes.
- Strengthen partnerships with private organizations and landlords to increase early identification of households at risk of homelessness and promote collaborative prevention efforts.
- Expand and support diversion practices that resolve housing crises without system entry, including consistent referral pathways and cross-sector collaboration.
- Increase public awareness of available prevention resources and promote early help-seeking by individuals and families at risk of homelessness.

Goal 4: Prioritize assistance based on the greatest barriers to housing stability and the greatest risk of harm.

Individuals with the greatest barriers to housing stability and the highest risk of harm often face the most complex challenges, chronic health conditions, severe behavioral health needs, generational poverty, or histories of trauma. Many are also the least well served by traditional systems and may not consistently engage with available services. Ensuring that the community prioritizes assistance for these individuals requires clear definitions, strong partnerships, and shared understanding across sectors.

Kittitas County recognizes that refining prioritization practices and defining “high risk” will require further community discussion and collaboration. This work must balance equity, safety, and system capacity, while responding flexibly

¹ National League of Cities: [Eviction Prevention as a Tool for Cities](#)

² Urban Institute: [Cost Effectiveness of Eviction Prevention Programs](#)

to the changing needs of the population. It will also require shared guidance on how partners, including service providers, law enforcement, healthcare providers, schools, and businesses can effectively support and refer individuals with high needs.

The communication toolkit being developed under Goal 1 and the training and learning opportunities outlined in Goal 2 will help build a more consistent community approach to responding to high-risk individuals. These tools will include practical guidance for frontline staff, community members, and local organizations on how to engage with individuals safely and appropriately.

The community will pursue this goal through the following strategies:

- Strengthen collaboration between non-profit, public, faith-based, and private organizations to improve identification of high-need individuals to support consistent triage and prioritization of high-need individuals.
- Expand and support street outreach and proactive engagement with individuals at greatest risk of harm, with particular attention to those not connected to traditional service pathways.
- Support approaches that seek to reduce harm and promote engagement, even when individuals are not ready to fully engage.

Goal 5: Seek to house everyone in a stable setting that meets their needs.

Housing is the foundation for stability, well-being, and community connection. Yet stable housing does not look the same for every person. For some, it may mean a one-bedroom apartment; for others, shared housing, sober living, staying with family or friends, or other flexible arrangements may be preferred or most appropriate. Kittitas County's goal is to end homelessness, not to prescribe one standard pathway, but to ensure that individuals and families can access housing that supports their stability and meets their needs.

Recognizing the constraints of the local housing market and the varied needs of higher-barrier individuals, the community will pursue creative, person-centered approaches. This includes advancing policies that enable more flexible housing options, supporting individuals who choose non-traditional forms of stability, and mitigating the public and financial impacts when individuals decline traditional housing offers.

This focus on flexible, affordable housing options supports key objectives found in the Comprehensive Plans of Kittitas County, Cle Elum, Ellensburg, Roslyn and South Cle Elum, all of which call for expanded housing opportunities across income levels and for populations with special needs. As the Town of South Cle Elum outlines in its comprehensive plan, thoughtful growth and community design can preserve small-town character while increasing housing availability for all.

The county will pursue this goal through the following strategies:

- Increase the supply and availability of permanent housing options, including both traditional and non-traditional models, to reflect the diverse needs of individuals and families.
- Expand access to rental assistance programs and supportive services that help individuals secure and maintain stable housing.
- Advance policy coordination and advocacy to promote flexible housing solutions, reduce barriers to development, and support innovative housing approaches that meet local needs.

****No capital projects are included in the development of this plan.***

Addressing Challenges

Community engagement through surveys, focus groups, and direct feedback identified persistent challenges that must be addressed to build a more responsive and effective homeless response system in Kittitas County. These challenges align with what national best practices highlight and reflect the lived experiences of those navigating local systems. Addressing them directly will help advance this plan’s vision: that all residents have access to stable housing and the individualized support they need to thrive. This work is anchored in our guiding principles of client-centered care, access for all, collaboration, and accountability.

Reducing Reluctance to Participate

Stigma, trauma, and mistrust of systems are well-established barriers to participation among people experiencing homelessness. Community input reinforced this reality, with many individuals citing fear of judgment, concerns about system involvement, or prior negative experiences as reasons for not seeking help. National best practices consistently emphasize that building trust and offering low-barrier, trauma-informed engagement are foundational to increasing participation (USICH, HUD).

“People don’t reach out because they’ve been burned too many times. They don’t trust the system anymore.”
— Focus group participant.

In alignment with these principles, Kittitas County is already expanding outreach efforts and improving frontline training to build trust and engagement (Goals 2 and 4). The forthcoming communications and educational toolkit (Goal 1) will further equip providers and community partners to present services clearly and respectfully. These efforts will help ensure that individuals feel safe and welcome when seeking assistance, supporting the plan’s commitment to client-centered care and equitable access.

Improving Service Access

Complex intake processes, inconsistent communication, and fragmented navigation pathways create unnecessary barriers to accessing services—a challenge highlighted by both local stakeholders and national best practices (HUD Coordinated Entry guidance, Housing First models). Individuals in crisis benefit from simple, clear, and coordinated pathways to services, yet community feedback indicated that many still encounter confusion and delays.

Improving service access directly supports the plan’s goals of transparency, accountability, and collaboration (Goal 1) and aligns with national calls for streamlined Coordinated Entry systems and low-barrier service models. It also reflects priorities found in local Comprehensive Plans, which emphasize equity, community health, and inclusive service delivery. Kittitas County will continue to strengthen Coordinated Entry and cross-system coordination (Goals 1 and 3), while also simplifying intake and referral processes and promoting consistent communication across partners. These efforts will help ensure that people receive timely and appropriate support, further advancing the plan’s vision of access for all.

“By the time you get an answer, you’ve already given up.”
— Community survey response.

Expanding Behavioral Health Services

Behavioral health needs, including mental health and substance use, are both a cause and consequence of homelessness. Community input consistently emphasized that addressing these needs in isolation from housing is ineffective. National research strongly supports integrated models that combine housing with behavioral health services³, as these approaches lead to better outcomes and housing stability⁴.

"You can't heal when you're still in survival mode. You need both, housing and mental health) to make it work."

— Participant with lived experience.

Expanding behavioral health integration aligns directly with the plan's emphasis on client-centered care, holistic support, and individualized services (Goals 2, 4, and 5). Kittitas County is building on existing partnerships with behavioral health providers and will continue to promote integration through training, cross-sector collaboration, and policy advocacy. These efforts will help ensure that individuals with complex needs receive the coordinated support necessary to achieve and maintain stable housing.

³ [SAMHSA Permanent Supportive Housing Evidence-Based Practices \(EBP\) Kit](#)

⁴ [NASEM Permanent Supportive Housing: Evaluating the Evidence for Improving Health Outcomes Among People Experiencing Chronic Homelessness \(2018\)](#)

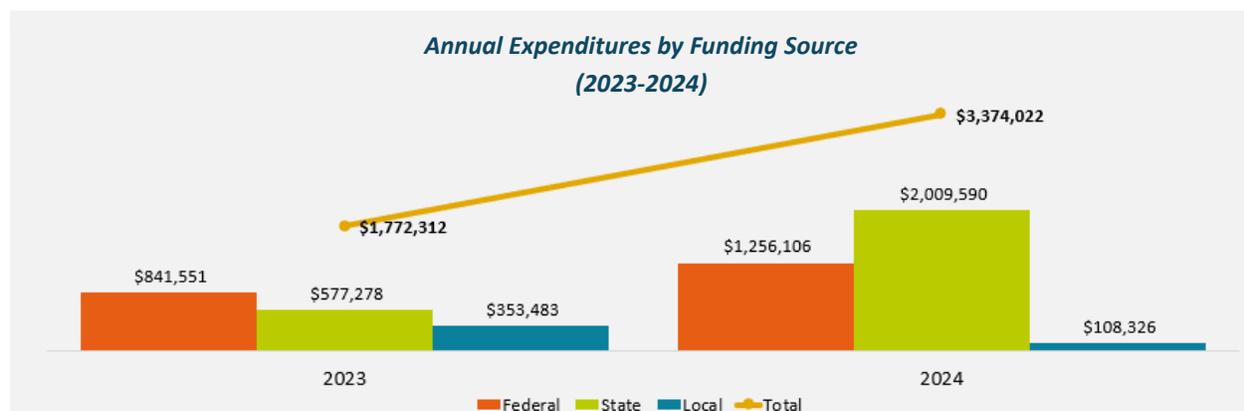
Current Resources and Future Needs

Our community has made considerable progress and built a strong network of services, yet the need continues to outpace available resources. Achieving the vision outlined in this plan, where every person in Kittitas County has access to stable housing and individualized support, will require a continued commitment to aligning resources with community needs. Community feedback, national best practices, and analysis of current data and projected needs all point to a clear conclusion: Kittitas County’s homeless response system must both expand and evolve to meet increasing demand and address persistent gaps in housing and services.

This section provides an overview of current investments and a forward-looking assessment of the resources that will be needed over the next five years to support the plan’s goals.

Current Resources

Kittitas County’s homeless response system is currently funded through a mix of federal, state, local, and private resources, as detailed *Appendix G: Survey of Fund Sources*. These resources support a network of community-based organizations that provide critical housing and support services.



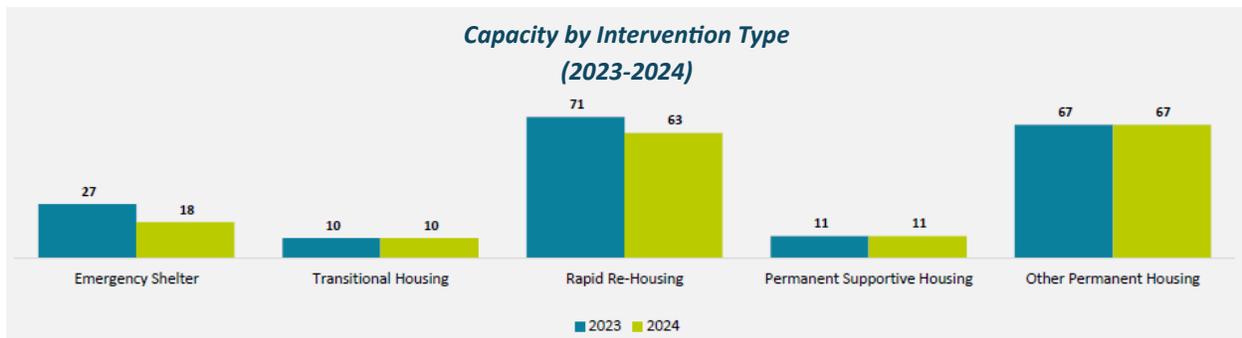
Federal funds:

- *HUD Continuum of Care Grant*: funds permanent supportive housing and rapid rehousing.
- *HUD Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project (YHDP) Grants*: supports a range of youth housing and service interventions.

These investments support a range of services currently provided by organizations such as HopeSource, Comprehensive Healthcare, Habitat for Humanity, Catholic Charities, and other community-based agencies. The system delivers emergency shelter, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing, rapid rehousing, prevention services, street outreach, and supportive services.

Current service capacity

Based on the most recent Estimated Service Levels calculated by Washington State Department of Commerce, Kittitas County currently funds 31 emergency shelter beds, 11 permanent supportive housing beds, and prevention and rehousing services for approximately 183 households annually. While outreach and supportive services are also funded, overall enrollment capacity remains limited.



Projected Resource Needs

The gap between current housing capacity and projected need is significant, particularly for low-income households and those with the highest barriers to housing stability. Meeting the needs identified through community engagement and the HAPT tool will require scaling both housing and service capacity. The HAPT tool (Attachment C), which projects housing needs through 2045, estimates that Kittitas County will require approximately 5,405 additional housing units across all income levels. For the purposes of this five-year plan, this translates to roughly 1,351 new units, with the greatest needs concentrated among extremely and very low-income households and individuals requiring supportive housing.

- The county would need 88 additional emergency shelter beds available to meet the 2030 estimated need.
- In addition to the 11 PSH units available, to meet the 2030 need, 133 additional units are needed.
- 473 units for Extremely Low-Income households (0-30% AMI⁵)
- 258 units for Very Low-Income households (30-50% AMI)
- 94 units for Low-Income households (50-80% AMI)

Projected Housing Needs for Kittitas County (20-Year Projection, 5-Year Planning Focus)

	Permanent Housing Needs by Income Level (% of Area Median Income)							Emergency Housing Needs (Temporary)	
	Total	0-30%		>30-50%	>50-80%	>80-100%	>100-120%		>120%
Countywide Estimated Housing Supply (2020)	19,975	841	1	2,799	6,330	2,814	2,519	4,671	119
Countywide Total Housing Needs (2045)	25,380	2,734	577	3,832	6,709	3,106	2,800	5,622	119
Countywide Additional Units Needed (2020-2045)	5,405	1,893	576	1,033	379	292	281	951	0

The largest share of projected housing need falls among extremely low- and very low-income households, those earning below 50% AMI, who face the greatest barriers to finding affordable housing in the private market.

Given current service levels and development pipelines, Kittitas County will need to substantially increase the supply of affordable and supportive housing, including flexible housing options as described in Goal 5, and ensure that new housing options are paired with appropriate services and supports.

Services

In addition to housing capacity, the county must also expand and strengthen supportive services to ensure that individuals can achieve and maintain housing stability. Community feedback, national best practices, and current capacity data all point to the need for scaling supportive services alongside housing.

The key areas that this plan will focus on include:

⁵ AMI (Area Median Income): The midpoint income for households in a specific geographic area. Housing programs often use income thresholds based on AMI (such as 30% AMI) to determine eligibility for affordable and supportive housing.

- **Behavioral health services:** Addressing this gap is essential to ensuring housing stability for higher-barrier populations, as emphasized in both community feedback and the Housing First model.
- **Prevention and diversion:** Expanded capacity is needed to reduce new entries into homelessness, consistent with Goal 3.
- **Street outreach:** Current capacity is limited and must be strengthened to engage unsheltered individuals more effectively.
- **Workforce development:** Sustaining and growing the system’s workforce is a key priority under Goal 2.

Addressing these gaps will require sustained investment, cross-sector collaboration, and ongoing leadership commitment to ensure that the county’s homeless response system evolves to meet community needs.

Implementation Plan

Achieving the goals outlined in this plan will require sustained, coordinated action across multiple sectors and partners over the next five years. This Implementation Plan provides a roadmap for translating the plan’s vision into practical progress, sequencing near-term actions, building toward medium- and long-term outcomes, and establishing a foundation for ongoing evaluation and improvement.

Throughout this process, the Homeless and Affordable Housing Committee, in partnership with county and community stakeholders, will guide implementation, monitor progress, and ensure alignment with evolving community needs and opportunities.

Goal 1: Equitable, Accountable, Transparent System

Action	Lead	Key Partners	Timeline	Performance Measures (KPIs)	Data Source
Hold community meetings/forums	HAHC	Cities, providers	Launch 2026: Ongoing	Cross-agency workgroup participation; actions completed from minutes	Rosters, minutes, partner reports
Publish annual progress report	HopeSource / County	Providers	Annually, Q2	Report on time; BOCC and HAHC briefing delivered	Report Submission; Committee Agendas
Deploy comms/education toolkit (system map, messages, resources)	County Comms	Providers	2027	Orgs using toolkit; correct referrals up; public understanding up	Distribution list, Web Analytics, CE referral data, community survey
Strengthen Coordinated Entry (use + consistency)	HopeSource	Providers	Launch 2026: Ongoing	% enrollments via CE; referral turnaround; diversion rate	CE reports, HMIS

Goal 2: Strengthen the Provider Workforce

Action	Lead	Key Partners	Timeline	Performance Measures (KPIs)	Data Source
Cross-agency training & learning collaboratives	County	Providers	Launch 2027; ongoing	# of Staff trained; competency gained; number of sessions	Sign-ins, evals, manager checks
Establish workforce development fund	County + Community	Providers	Design 2027; launch 2028	Dollars available; grants awarded; Increased retention rate	Fund reports; provider HR departments
Engage volunteers & interns (structured roles + training)	Providers	CWU, faith groups, community	Launch 2026; ongoing	Volunteers/interns onboarded; training completion; volunteer hours; supervisor satisfaction	Volunteer logs; training records; pulse surveys

Goal 3: Prevent Homelessness Whenever Possible

Action	Lead	Key Partners	Timeline	Performance Measures (KPIs)	Data Source
Align barrier-removal funds + shared outcomes	County	Providers, Courts	Framework Y1; operate Y2–Y5	Households stabilized; time to assistance; cost/HH	Program reports; CE/HMIS
Scale diversion at the “front door” with CE	HopeSource	All access points	Launch in 2026: Ongoing	Diversion attempts; diversion success rate; 6-mo re-entries	CE diversion fields
Public awareness for services	County Comms	Providers	Launch in 2026: Ongoing	Calls to access points; “Get Help” web visits; earlier contact pre-eviction	web analytics; Number of CE Applications

Goal 4: Prioritize Highest Barriers / Highest Risk

Action	Lead	Key Partners	Timeline	Performance Measures (KPIs)	Data Source
Shared high-risk triage protocol & referral paths	County Comms + BH Providers	Providers	Protocol 2027; adopt 2028	CE (time from application to contact); successful warm handoffs	CE Data
Expand targeted street outreach	County	Providers	Staff 2026; expand 2027-2030	Outreach Contacts: Decrease in crisis calls	Outreach Data; 911/EMS summaries
Harm-reduction engagement supports	Public Health	Providers	Launch in 2026: Ongoing	Retention in services, linkage to BH care	Program records; BH referrals

Goal 5: House Everyone in Settings That Meet Their Needs

Action	Lead	Key Partners	Timeline	Performance Measures (KPIs)	Data Source
Advance pipeline of affordable/supportive housing	County + Developers	Cities, funders	Launch in 2026: Ongoing	Units funded/started/completed; PSH set asides	Project trackers; award notices
Expand rental assistance & tenancy supports	Providers	Providers, Community, landlords	Scale Y1–Y5	Exits to Permanent Housing, Average Time until Housed	HMIS.
Policy/code for flexible housing (ADUs, shared, congregate, sober living)	Cities + County	BOCC, Planning Commissions	Work plan Y1; adopt Y2–Y4	Policies adopted; number of units; permit time ↓	Ordinance logs; permit data

The success of this plan will depend not only on coordinated action but on a shared commitment to learning, collaboration, and sustained progress. The following section offers concluding reflections on this shared path forward.

Conclusion

This plan represents both a roadmap and a shared commitment to addressing homelessness in Kittitas County over the next five years. It builds on past progress, reflects local strengths, and acknowledges the significant work still ahead.

Homelessness is a complex, community-wide challenge, and solutions require the collective efforts of government, nonprofit organizations, service providers, the private sector, and the public. The guiding principles of this plan: client-centered care, access for all, collaboration, data-informed decision-making, transparency, and accountability, are intended to keep people and partnerships at the center of this work.

No single agency or system can meet this challenge alone. Achieving the vision of a community where everyone has access to stable housing and the individualized support they need will require sustained leadership, continuous learning, and adaptability as conditions evolve.

This plan is not static. The Homeless and Affordable Housing Committee, in partnership with the county and key stakeholders, will guide its implementation and regularly assess progress. Community voices, especially those with lived experience, will remain essential to refining priorities and ensuring the system continues to meet real-world needs.

By investing in strong partnerships, scaling proven interventions, and fostering an inclusive, accountable system, Kittitas County can continue to make meaningful strides toward making homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring.

Appendices:

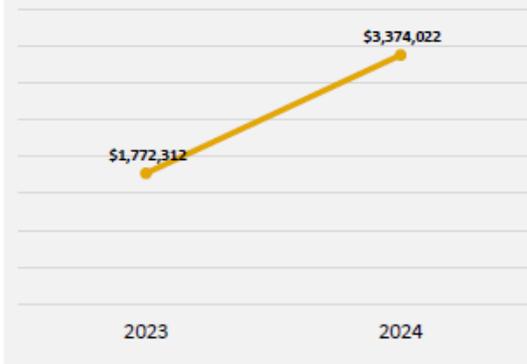
- A. Estimates of Service Levels
- B. Key Stakeholder Participation
- C. Goals and Strategies
- D. Survey Funding sources (current and available)
- E. Alignment with County and Cities Comprehensive Plans
- F. Notice of Plan Development
- G. Notice of Public Hearing
- H. Focus group Report

Estimates of Service Levels

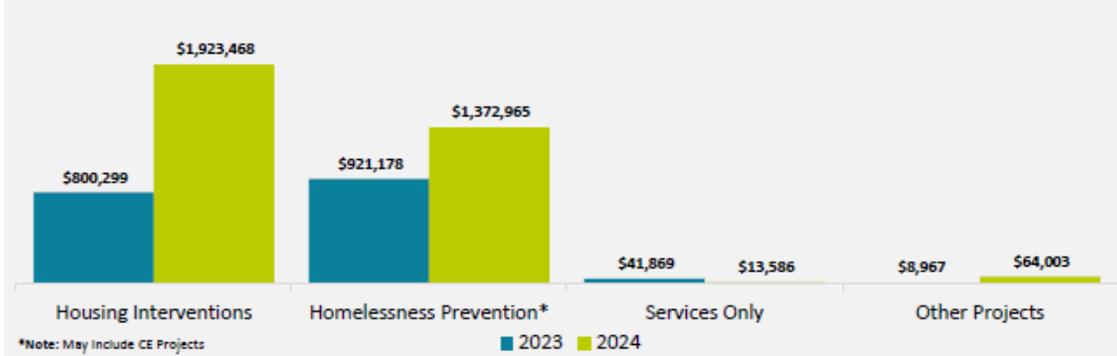
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Expenditures

Total Expenditures (2023-2024)

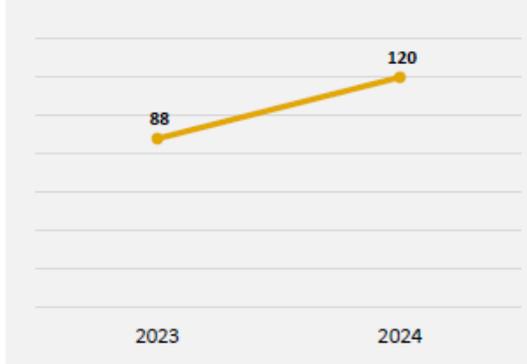


Expenditures by Project (2023-2024)

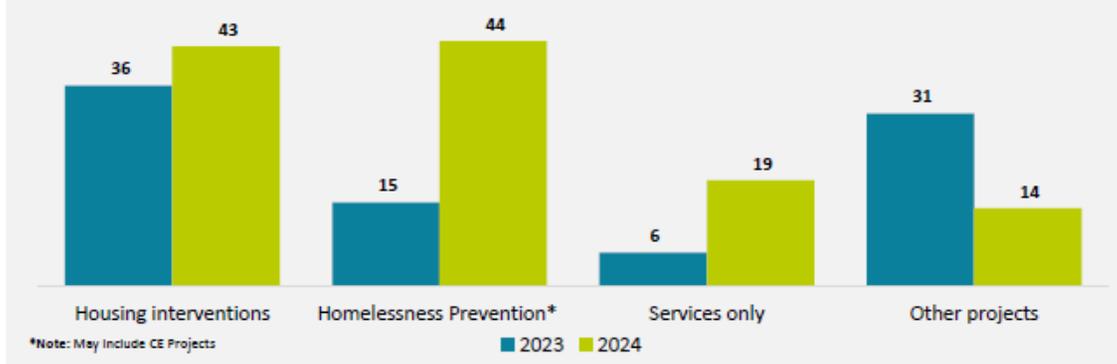


Enrollments

Total Enrollments (2023-2024)

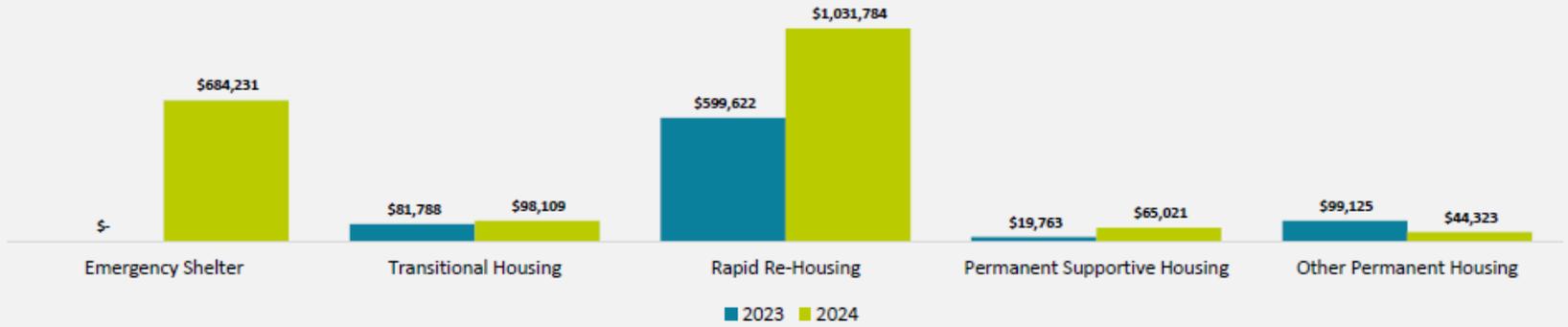


Enrollments by Project (2023-2024)

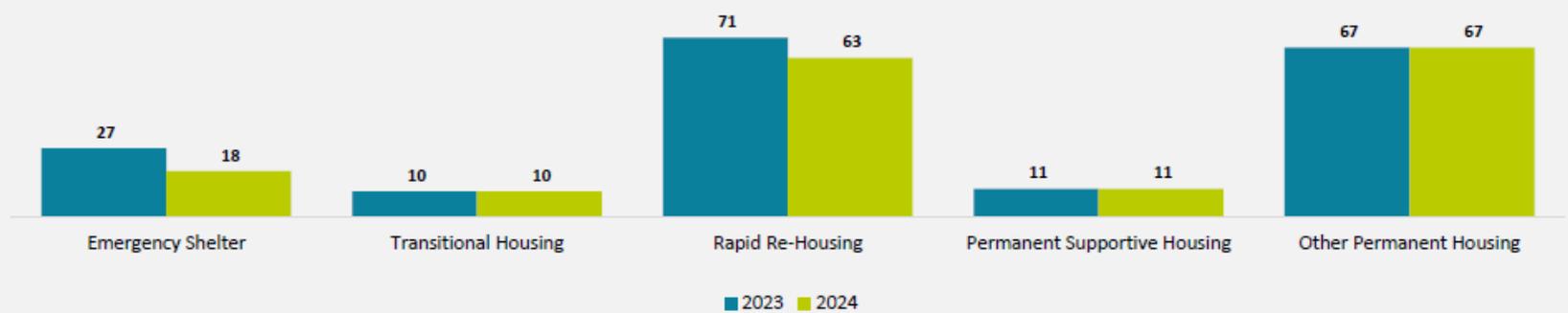


Housing Interventions

Expenditures on Housing Interventions Only (2023-2024)

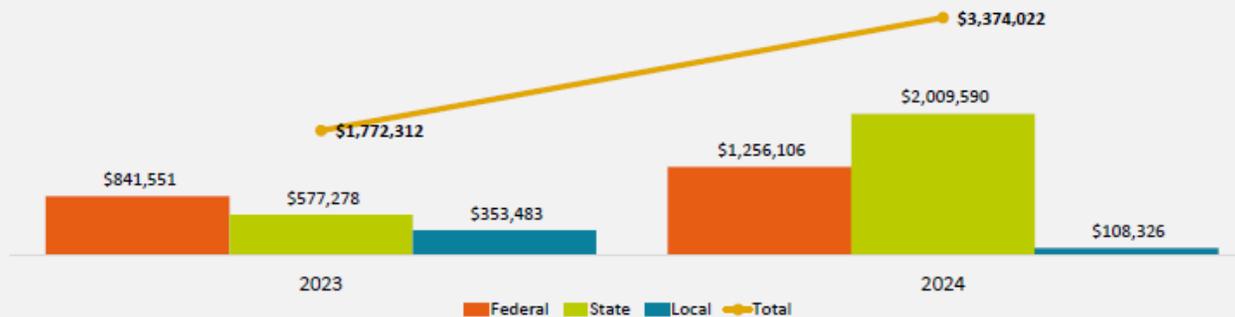


Beds By Housing Interventions Only (2023-2024)



Funding Breakdown

Annual Expenditures By Funding Source (2023-2024)



Key Stakeholder Participation

Category	Engagement	Organization/City
Representatives from the two largest Cities	Participation in survey, focus group sessions, participated in the Homeless Ad Hoc meeting and member of Homeless and Affordable Housing Committee for Kittitas County	City of Ellensburg and Cle Elum
Individuals with lived experience of homelessness	Participation in survey, focus group sessions, and member of Homeless and Affordable Housing Committee for Kittitas County	N/A
A representative of a Behavioral Health Administrative Service Organization OR a Managed Care Organization	Participation in survey and focus group session and Homeless Ad Hoc meeting.	Comprehensive Healthcare and Kittitas County Health Network
A representative from a By and for organization within the local government's jurisdiction	Participation in survey and focus group session.	Peers Rising (formerly KCRCO)
Emergency shelter operators	Member of the HHTF Participation in survey and focus group session and Homeless Ad Hoc meeting.	HopeSource
Domestic violence/sexual assault shelter and housing providers	Participation in community survey and invited to focus group session but did not participate.	Aspen Victim Advocacy Services
	Member of the HHTF Participation in survey and focus group session and Homeless Ad Hoc meeting.	HopeSource
Homeless outreach providers	Member of the HHTF Participation in survey and focus group session and Homeless Ad Hoc meeting.	HopeSource
Rental subsidy administrators	Member of the HHTF Participation in survey and focus group session and Homeless Ad Hoc meeting.	HopeSource
Permanent Supportive Housing providers and operators	Member of the HHTF Participation in survey and focus group session and Homeless Ad Hoc meeting.	HopeSource
Coordinated entry staff	Member of the HHTF Participation in survey and focus group session and Homeless Ad Hoc meeting.	HopeSource

Homeless Housing Taskforce Members

Category	Name	Organization
A representative of the county	Emily Brown	Kittitas County Lower District Court
A representative of the largest city located within the county.	Lily Frey	City of Ellensburg
At least one homeless or formerly homeless person	Bradly Esparza	
A representative of a private nonprofit organization with experience in law-income housing (if feasible)	Brittany Bouchouari	HopeSource

Goals and Strategies

Goal	Strategies	Success Measures	Timeline	Data Source
Promote an equitable, accountable, and transparent homeless crisis response system	Hold regular community meetings and forums	Engagement in community workgroups and collaborative efforts	Ongoing	Meeting rosters, community partner reports
	Produce clear and accessible annual progress reports	Distribution and active use of communications toolkit	Annual	Toolkit distribution logs, partner feedback
	Develop a communications and educational toolkit	Improved public understanding (community surveys)	Year 1, updated annually	Community survey data
Strengthen the homeless service provider workforce	Strengthen use of Coordinated Entry system	Increased use of Coordinated Entry as primary access point	Ongoing	Coordinated Entry data (CE reports)
	Provide training and cross-agency learning opportunities	Participation in workforce-focused training opportunities and learning collaboratives	Semiannual	Training attendance records, feedback forms
	Explore creation of a dedicated funding source for workforce development	Improved staff retention	Annual	Provider surveys
		Feedback on training effectiveness and value	After each training cycle	Training evaluations
Prevent episodes of homelessness whenever possible	Improve coordination of existing prevention resources	Reductions in new entries into homelessness	Ongoing	PIT Count, Coordinated Entry data
	Strengthen partnerships with landlords and private organizations	Lower eviction rates	Ongoing	County court eviction records
	Expand and support diversion practices	Increased rates of successful diversion	Ongoing	Coordinated Entry, program reporting

	Increase public awareness of prevention resources	Community awareness levels (survey)	Annual	Community survey data
Prioritize assistance based on the greatest barriers to housing stability and the greatest risk of harm	Strengthen collaboration to improve identification and triage of high-need individuals	Improvements in housing stability and service engagement	Ongoing	Coordinated Entry, HMIS, provider data
	Expand and support street outreach and proactive engagement	Reductions in recidivism	Ongoing	HMIS, County Report Card
	Support harm reduction and engagement approaches	Increased cross-sector coordination in responding to high-need individuals	Ongoing	Partner feedback, outreach data
Seek to house everyone in a stable setting that meets their needs	Increase supply and availability of permanent housing options	Reductions in number of unhoused individuals	Ongoing	PIT Count
	Expand access to rental assistance and supportive services	Increased exits to permanent housing	Ongoing	Coordinated Entry, HMIS, County Report Card
	Advance policy coordination and advocacy for flexible housing solutions	Completion of all affordable housing projects currently funded and in progress	5-year period	County housing reports, project tracking

Survey of Fund Sources

Fund Source	Source	Status	Allowable Uses	Amount received SFY24	Actual/ projected received SFY25
Mental Health Sales and Use Tax (RCW 82.14.460)	Local	Receiving / collecting	Mental health and drug treatment	\$1,872,178.56	\$449,838.36
Housing and Related Services Sales and Use Tax (RCW 82.14.530)	Local	Receiving / collecting	Acquisition, construction of AH or behavioral health housing, O&M for AH or supportive housing	\$809,339	\$734,406 (budgeted)
Affordable and Supportive Housing Sales and Use Tax (RCW 82.14.540)	Local	Receiving / collecting	Acquisition, rehab, construction of AH, O&M for AH or supportive housing	\$227,500	\$204,750 (estimate)
Local Housing Levies (RCW 84.52.105)	Local	Not eligible / Not collecting	Affordable Housing for very-low income households, affordable homeownership, owner-occupied home repair, foreclosure prevention	N/A	N/A
Document Recording Surcharge, Local Portion (RCW 36.22.250)	Local	Receiving/collecting	Acquisition/rehab/construction; operations & maintenance of AH; shelter operations	TBC	TBC
Local Document Recording Fees Support	DOC-State	Receiving / collecting	"For maintaining programs and investments" under local homeless housing plans and affordable housing under RCW 36.22.250.	\$67,644	TBC
Consolidated Homeless	State	Receiving / collecting	Homeless housing and assistance	\$2,497,586.00	\$1,998,068.80

Grant/System Demonstration Grant (including Housing and Essential Needs)					
HUD Emergency Solutions Grant	Federal	Not eligible / Not collecting	Rapid re-housing, emergency shelter, and homelessness prevention	N/A	N/A
HUD Community Development Block Grant	Federal		Acquisition, preservation of existing housing, rehab, weatherization, home buyer assistance. NO NEW Const.	\$77,202.02	\$75,657.97
HUD Continuum of Care Grant	Federal	Receiving / collecting	Permanent supportive housing, rapid rehousing, transitional housing, supportive services, acquisition/rehab	\$58,997.00	\$65,837.00
HUD Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project Grants	Federal	Receiving / collecting	Rapid rehousing, permanent housing, transitional housing, and host homes for youth	\$314,538.83	\$429,014.67
HOME	Federal	Receiving / collecting	New construction, acquisition, preservation, rehab, home buyer assistance	N/A	\$829,857.00
Connecting Housing to Infrastructure (CHIP)	State	Receiving / collecting	Utility improvements for affordable housing, reduce per unit connection fees	N/A	\$1,985,650.00

Alignment with Comprehensive Plans

5-Year Plan Goal	Relevant Sections in Local Comprehensive Plans
Goal 1: Promote an equitable, accountable, and transparent homeless response system	Kittitas County Plan: Housing Goal H-3 (coordinate housing with other services) Roslyn Plan: Chapter 7 (Civic Engagement)
Goal 2: Strengthen the homeless service provider workforce	Kittitas County Plan: Housing Goal H-3 (partner with service providers) Cle Elum Plan: Housing Goal 4 (collaborate with partners to provide services) Ellensburg Plan: Goal H-3, Policy H-3A (collaborate with other jurisdictions and organizations to meet special housing needs that address a broad spectrum of solutions)
Goal 3: Prevent episodes of homelessness whenever possible	Kittitas County Plan: Housing Goal H-2, Policy H-2.3 (encourage prevention strategies) Cle Elum Plan: Housing Goal 3, Policy 3.2 (support programs to prevent homelessness) Ellensburg Comp Plan: Goal H-2 (allow, encourage and accommodate housing types to meet housing needs of all economic segments of the community)
Goal 4: Prioritize assistance based on greatest barriers to housing stability and greatest risk of harm	Kittitas County Plan: Housing Goal H-1, Policy H-1.4 (meet needs of special populations) Cle Elum Plan: Housing Goal 4, Policy 4.3 (address needs of vulnerable populations) Ellensburg Plan: Goal H-2, Policy H-2D (create and preserve ADA accessible and affordable housing opportunities locally and regionally), Goal H-3 (encourage a variety of housing opportunities for older adults and people with disabilities)
Goal 5: Seek to house everyone in a stable setting that meets their needs	Kittitas County Plan: Housing Goal H-1 & H-2 (expand housing options and affordability) Cle Elum Plan: Housing Goals 3 & 4; Ellensburg Comp Plan: Goal H-2 (allow, encourage and accommodate housing types to meet housing needs of all economic segments of the community) Policy 2E (identify potential properties to allow for emergency housing, emergency shelters and PSH) Roslyn Plan: Housing Chapter Goals 1 & 2 (promote housing diversity and affordability)

Links to Comprehensive Plans:

[Kittitas County Comprehensive Plan](#)

[Cle Elum Comprehensive Plan](#)

[Ellensburg Comprehensive Plan](#)

[Roslyn Comprehensive Plan](#)

[South Cle Elum Comprehensive Plan](#)

Notice of Plan Development

A Notice of Plan Development was posted to the County website on November 6, 2024. Kittitas County Does not maintain a social media presence.

The notice can be found here: [Notice of 5 year Plan Development.pdf](#)

Notice of Plan Development for the 2025-2030 Local Homeless Housing Plan for Kittitas County

Kittitas County in collaboration with HopeSource is initiating the development of the 2025-2030 Local Homeless Housing Plan aimed at addressing homelessness in our community. This five-year plan will include goals, strategies, activities, performance measures, and timelines to eliminate homelessness within Kittitas County. The 2025-2030 Local Homeless Housing Plan is expected to be adopted by the Kittitas County Board of Commissioners in June of 2025.

Please direct your comments to Brittany Bouchouari with HopeSource: bbouchouari@hopesource.us

Notice of Public Hearing

[TBD]

Focus Group Report

Homeless Housing 5-Year Plan Focus Groups

November 2024



(509) 607-1375

robinhread@gmail.com

Executive Summary

The Homeless Housing 5-Year Planning Committee organized five focus groups facilitated by an external facilitator, Robin Read. The purpose of the focus groups was to gain the perspective of the community about homelessness and related issues, and to inform the development of community priorities that can be addressed in the 5-Year Plan.

The focus groups ranged from four to eight participants each and were made up of community members, people with lived experience with homelessness, law enforcement and local government, service providers, and students, faculty, and staff from Central Washington University. Participation in the focus group questions and activities was robust, and all attendees actively participated throughout the duration of the sessions.

Focus Group Questions

The focus groups explored the following questions:

Is the homelessness problem in Kittitas County better, worse, or the same than 5 years ago?

Why? Overall, across the focus groups participants tended to feel that the problem has either stayed the same or gotten worse. Some participants weren't sure due to lack of knowledge about the problem, or limited time in the community. Many felt that the problem is more visible than it used to be and there are more services available which is why it may seem like it has gotten worse. People generally felt that more needs to be done to address the issue. Participants cited increased costs, poverty, housing costs, and unemployment or low wages as the primary reasons for increases.

In a community survey, behavioral health services (mental health and substance use disorder) and job training and employment services were listed as priorities for individuals experiencing homelessness. Does this resonate with you? Are these priorities? Why or why not? Participants tended to agree that these are priorities, but lots of people expressed concern that housing and basic needs aren't considered priorities first. It was expressed that basic needs like housing, food, and clothing have to be addressed before individuals can address behavioral health and/or employment. Substance use disorder was a common theme among the groups as something that is a common problem for many people who experience homelessness.

Unwillingness to participate and limited availability are listed as the top barriers to accessing services. How can we address these barriers? While some participants agreed that these are barriers, many listed other barriers that they felt are more prominent, such as complicated processes and stigma and judgment. Many participants took issue with the fact that many of the survey respondents selected "unwillingness to participate" because there are many factors that go into someone not participating in services (i.e., stigma, poor treatment, lack of documentation needed, barriers to accessing services, etc.) Common ideas for addressing barriers were reducing judgment of people accessing services, having personal advocates or peer advocates who can help people walk through the system, and increasing accessibility of mental health services.

What are your barriers to accessing services? What was successful/what worked well? (for people with lived experience) Barriers listed by people with lived experience included addiction, experiencing negative judgment, having a criminal history, not having

dependents or a disability, lack of tenant history, being homeless but housed, having pets, filling out multiple intakes, and not having an address. Things that worked well included funding to help with finding employment and support with clothing and hygiene, seeking mental health services, having good attitude and being non-judgmental, having people advocate for you, and support with addiction and sober housing.

With limited resources in Kittitas County, what would you prioritize to address homelessness? Shelter services and transitional housing were the most prominent of priorities, along with meeting basic needs through services, increasing affordable housing, addressing behavioral health, and communication with the public. Addressing barriers and addressing stigma were other areas that were discussed.

Previous priorities have included increasing affordable housing, increasing shelter and other support services, preventing homelessness, improving the homeless response system, and expanding community engagement, awareness, and education. Are these still priorities or have they shifted? Generally, participants agreed that these priorities are still relevant and that more work needs to continue to be done in these areas. Other priorities discussed included addressing behavioral health, expanding awareness about services available, implementing rapid rehousing programs, and reducing stigma through community education.

What should be the key messages to the community about homelessness and people experiencing homelessness? How can we effectively share this information? Most key messages shared had to do with reducing stigma about people experiencing homelessness. A common key message that arose is that people experiencing homelessness are human beings and are our neighbors. Many people in the community don't realize how close they could be to experiencing homelessness. Additionally, getting information out about the resources available, the causes of homelessness, and the impacts of homelessness on the community were discussed. Primary ways of getting information to the community were social media and an online presence, an education campaign, and community presentations.

Key Takeaways

- The perception is that the homelessness problem has stayed the same or worsened in the past few years, possibly due to increased visibility as well as economic factors.
- Housing and basic needs must be addressed prior to addressing employment and behavioral health needs.
- However, behavioral health issues are common among people experiencing homelessness and should be a priority.
- It's not so much an unwillingness to participate as it is an inability to participate in services due to multiple barriers.
- Stigma towards people experiencing homelessness by both the community and service providers is a major concern.
- Navigating the system is complicated and a lot of work; having personal advocates to help would be beneficial.
- The community needs more emergency housing, shelter services, and transitional housing options.
- The lack of affordable housing is a major concern.

Background

As part of the Homeless Housing 5-Year planning process, the planning committee conducted a community survey that was filled out by anybody in the community. After reviewing the results of the survey, the committee wished to gather more qualitative information about homelessness in Kittitas County. As a result, the committee decided to hire an independent facilitator to run five focus groups to gather opinions, thoughts, and ideas about homelessness in Kittitas County. The perspectives gained will help inform priorities for the 5-Year Plan.

Methods

The five focus groups were held between November 5th and November 8th, 2024 in the HopeSource training room and on the Central Washington University campus.

- **People with Lived Experience with Homelessness:** 5 participants
- **Service Providers:** 5 participants (Ellensburg Public Library, Kittitas County Public Health Department, HopeSource, Kittitas County Recovery Community Organization, APOYO)
- **Law Enforcement/Local Government:** 4 participants (Kittitas County Sheriff's Office, Kittitas Police Department, Ellensburg Police Department, City of Ellensburg)
- **Community Members:** 6 participants
- **Central Washington University:** 8 participants (students, faculty, and staff)

Participants were given a list of the focus group questions as well as an information sheet/consent form prior to the meetings. The first few minutes was spent doing brief introductions including an icebreaker question, going over the focus group format and participation guidelines, and collecting consent forms (Appendix A).

The questions and prompts that were asked of the focus groups were mostly in an open discussion format or a round robin format. The facilitator frequently called upon participants to ensure equitable participation. Some questions involved some individual brainstorming and then sharing top ideas with the group.

Each focus group was recorded and the recordings sent to a transcriptionist for transcribing. The transcriptionist transcribes for content and meaning and leaves out language fillers and unrelated conversations. (Quotes provided may not be word for word.)

The facilitator then reviewed the transcriptions, identified themes where appropriate, and used them to provide the results in this report.

Results

Question 1: Is the homelessness problem in Kittitas County better, worse, or the same than 5 years ago? Why?

People with Lived Experience: Participant responses were mixed. A couple of people felt it has stayed the same based on the fact that people are generally getting services and moving along through the system. One person sees a positive change but feels like more needs to be done. There was discussion of the barriers that people experience in accessing services as well as the impact of substance use disorder.

- “It seems like people in the shelter have been processed and moved along. For us personally, they have moved along fairly fast.”
- “I do see a better change, but I do feel like it needs to be improved more....I do feel there needs to be some more services or thought put into temporary housing.”
- “A lot of times, addicts don’t get sober because they’re on the streets....They may want help and want to get sober but it’s hard to stay sober on the streets.”

Service Providers: Most participants felt the problem is worse, with one saying they don’t know. Their opinions were primarily based on community observations and the visibility of people experiencing homelessness. There was some discussion about the cost of living, cost of housing, and diverse economic backgrounds being contributing factors. There were also several comments about a more recent dip in services in the past few months potentially attributable to people not being eligible for services.

- “When I’ve driven around town in the last two years, it’s more visible. You can see more people.”
- “I do think it’s worse because there’s some community fatigue, less tolerance, and maybe exhaustion in terms of helping and finding solutions.”
- “I see more individuals who are transient, and who identify as living in their cars, compared to previous years.”

Law Enforcement/Local Government: Generally, participants felt the problem is worse based on the number of law enforcement calls seen. One participant said that based on the data and usage of the cold weather shelter, the problem has stayed the same. There was discussion about what the definition is of “the homelessness problem”—is it the number of people affected, or the impacts experienced by the community? One participant felt the problem is worse based on the community impacts.

- “Overall, I haven’t seen a steep rise, but that’s only from the perspective of those that are using the shelter.”
- “My only observation...is listening to KITTCOM, the number of calls they have regarding homelessness or transient individuals.”
- “What exactly is the ‘homelessness problem’?...Is it the impacts as they’re experienced by the community and that we hear about in law enforcement, or is it the fact that there are people who struggle with not having a home?”
- “It doesn’t seem like a steep incline over the last five years. It’s not a whole lot, but it definitely feels like you see more.”

Community Members: Participants felt that the problem is the same, with some saying it is a little bit worse. Their opinions were primarily based on observations of people camping and people continuing to use services. There was discussion about it being a more visible problem and the loss of jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic and increased costs being contributing factors.

- “I hear about people camped along the river in different places...It’s possible there are more of them.”
- “It may be becoming more visible; there may be fewer people couch surfing and more camping by the river.”
- “People lost jobs in the pandemic five years ago. Huge increases in food and utility prices have forced people into homelessness. And losing their jobs, obviously.”

Central Washington University: All participants felt the homelessness problem has gotten worse, but also recognized that it is more visible as well. There was discussion about police involvement in getting people who are homeless out of the community and the overall increase in poverty.

- “Maybe they are more visible, or maybe they’re not being kicked out as fast.”
- “...it’s a matter of the police actively keeping this problem away from public eye in a way that is dehumanizing.”
- “There was a time when you wouldn’t see much of it, but now for whatever reason there are individuals asking for assistance at Fred Meyer, corners, streets, and stuff.”
- “Poverty in general is increasing, not just homelessness—everything is getting more expensive, wages aren’t going up, process, inflation. It’s harder for people to survive.”
- “Everything is expensive. People are actually close to homelessness even if they have stable employment and housing.”

Question 2: In a community survey, behavioral health services and job training and employment services were listed as priorities for individuals experiencing homelessness. Does this resonate with you? Are these priorities? Why or why not?

People with Lived Experience: Generally, participants agreed that these are common priorities. Some mentioned currently being in treatment for either substance use disorder or mental health needs and the positive impact it has had on their situations. There was discussion about the need to give people a chance regardless of their behavioral health issues and reduce stigma. There was concern about not being able to access services if they are actively using.

- “With the income I’m receiving now and the mental health we’re receiving, our scenario has improved significantly. Those were the two big focuses: mental health and job training.”
- “...as long as addicts have a chance.... A lot of addicts are scared to ask for help to find housing....If people could just let go of what we think we know about addicts to giving them a chance if they ask for help.”
- “I don’t know if we would have been carried through the system if the restrictions had been higher. We probably would have gone back to the care and started camping again.”

Service Providers: Participants felt that yes, these are priorities, but housing and basic needs must be addressed first. One participant indicated from personal experience that employment

was a priority over housing for them, but most voiced that housing first, then employment. There was discussion about the importance of behavioral health services and that these services are requested often. One participant also commented that the population they serve (LatinX community) doesn't typically take advantage of behavioral health services.

- “We do have a lot of requests for the mental health part of behavioral health, so I would agree that those two are definitely at the top of the list.”
- “Most of the people who cross my path benefit and report that they need behavioral health and mental health resources.”
- “I know of one person who cannot work without housing, so when they lost their housing, they lost their job at which they were thriving.”
- “I'm a firm believer that your housing often stabilizes the person inside it.”

Law Enforcement/Local Government: Participants agreed that these are important but discussed the need for housing and basic needs to be addressed first in order to be successful. There was discussion on how many people who experience homelessness have behavioral health issues and that this has to be addressed before they can engage in job training.

- “I don't think you can offer people employment services if they don't have a place where they can get dressed appropriately, shower, get a meal, get a good eight hours rest. Without these things, those employment services will not be successful.”
- “There has to be the basic things addressed for someone to be successful. They need a place to live, a place to eat, to feel safe and (if necessary) behavioral health services. Once those core things are addressed, an individual is set up for success in my opinion.”
- “You have to have the behavioral health services, but you also need to have the housing to be successful.”

Community Members: Generally, participants felt that yes, these are priorities, but housing should be the first priority: affordable low barrier housing and keeping people in housing. There were concerns about keeping people in housing if they have unmet behavioral health needs.

- “I think these are priorities, but I think the biggest priority is affordable housing and low barrier housing.”
- “You can't just put someone in an AA meeting who's homeless.”
- “Housing first is my approach, what I'd prefer to see. How do you prioritize behavioral health services when you don't know where you will sleep at night?”

Central Washington University: Most participants felt that while these are important, affordable housing and basic needs must be met first, especially before job training and employment services. People need a safe place to be housed, have access to food, and have access to medical and mental health services before they can be ready for job training. Participants also mentioned the need for supportive employment services such as laundry, clothing, haircuts, washrooms, etc. There was also some discussion about stigma and the need to have programs that are nonjudgmental and discrete.

- “You've got to meet their material, health, and psychological needs first. And then you start thinking about things like job training. There's a hierarchy of needs.”
- “I would say the #1 priority is a place where you can be safe and fed, where you can take care of your body in any way that is needed.”
- “I think a massive priority should be affordable housing.”

Question 3: Unwillingness to participate and limited availability are listed as the top barriers to accessing services. How can we address these barriers? (*People with lived experience were asked: What are your barriers to accessing services? What was successful/what worked well?*)

People with Lived Experience: When asked what are their barriers to accessing services, people with lived experience with homelessness listed the following:

- Addiction/substance use disorder
- People who are judgmental
- Having a criminal history
- Lack of funding for homes
- Not having dependents
- Not having a disability
- Lack of tenant history
- Being homeless but housed
- Having pets
- Having to do multiple intakes/paperwork and telling same story over and over
- Weekly goals that hard to manage/achieve (monthly goals might be more manageable)
- Lack of organizational skills
- Changes in case managers
- DSHS wait times
- Not having an address

When asked what has been successful or worked well for them, they discussed the funding for helping people find employment, including support with clothing and hygiene; encouragement to seek mental health services; having a good attitude towards people experiencing homelessness, being nonjudgemental, and giving people the time of day; advocacy on behalf of clients; and support with addiction and sober housing.

- “...there are people who don’t have dependents, people trying to get their kids back, adults who don’t have a disability (they’re just a single individual on the street trying to make their way.) They feel hopeless because they don’t have anything to help them get their foot in the door.”
- “For me personally, the biggest issue would be lack of tenant history.”
- “...but intake after intake after intake after intake after intake—it gets really exhausting to tell the story 5,000 times especially when you are trying to move past it.”
- “I believe the funding for helping folks for getting back on their feet and employed has been a very big help as they also help provide clothing for interviews for jobs....”
- “When there’s not an attitude about it, that helps a lot. I go through weird stuff in my life. I go through things most people don’t go through, that’s just how my life has been....so to have someone work side-by-side with me and give me the time of day...that makes me want to keep going and not give up.”

Service Providers: Unwillingness to participate resonated with some participants who have experience with people not showing up for help. However, they recognize that there are a lot of barriers to accessing help and it’s important to be there when people are ready. One participant suggested it is about an “inability to participate.” Other barriers cited included substance abuse, not being able to get a job, readiness for change, stigma and judgment, traumatic pasts, and lack

of basic life skills. Ideas for addressing barriers included not thinking less of people who are not ready for help, developing peer leaders or mentors who can provide assistance in accessing services without judgment, trust building, and meeting people where they are at.

- “To address the barriers, you can offer to be there when they want to change.”
- “Trust-building has to be implemented because either these people have been through tough situations and have trauma, or they have tried to go through the system and there’s limited availability....Some people need to be taught basic life skills because they don’t understand or have experience with them.”
- “I think if we can incorporate that peer work more in what we do, that would be beneficial. We need to meet where they are, with non-judgment, approaching them as individuals who are where they are.”
- “Meet people where they’re at in the trauma they brought with them.”

Law Enforcement/Local Government: Participants discussed a variety of ways to address these barriers. One participant suggested using the behavioral health court as a model for getting people to access services. Another participant expressed that sometimes it takes several tries for someone to be willing to access services. The multiple steps people have to go through to access services is a barrier as well and there was a suggestion to have people available to walk people through the process with them.

- “Maybe it’s that fifth time they say they will do it.”
- “I think the limited availability of services is a big obstacle.”

Community Members: Participant ideas for addressing barriers included people having an ongoing support system (a personal advocate to help them access services), increased availability and accessibility of mental health services for people who are unhoused, levels of support similar to what people with developmental disabilities receive, letting people know what resources are available, and education about how the system works.

- “I feel like the challenge is being able to support them as they go along. You get them a house, and they can’t manage that on their own without support. So an ongoing support system for people who have these challenges would be good.”
- “I see less around mental health and mental illness. That’s a big barrier....it’s traditional in that you come into their office. Not everyone who is unhoused is available to do that or they don’t sit well in a waiting room. So there is not a variety of approaches to make that available to folks who are unhoused.”
- “I strongly support the idea of some of these people having a personal advocate.”
- “I don’t think they know what’s available.”

Central Washington University: Some participants felt that there is an unwillingness to provide services more than an unwillingness to participate. Other barriers brought up included lack of transportation, judgement and stigma, and lack of trust. Ideas to address barriers included letting people know what is and isn’t needed to access services (i.e., identification, social security number), ensuring services are discrete and welcoming, having someone to help guide people through processes, and asking people what *their* priorities are and what *their* barriers are.

- “Not having a vehicle is a major, major issue...counting on the bus to come around the area wasn’t enough...”
- “They want to blame the victim. It’s easier. It gets them off the hook.”

- “Having these programs be discrete and having them have a more welcoming environment. Pride happens at every level. You may be in a situation where you need assistance and help, but it’s hard to ask for help. It’s a big step, asking for help.”
- “There’s an unwillingness to help rather than unwillingness to take help.”

Question 4: With limited resources in Kittitas County, what would you prioritize to address homelessness?

For this question, most groups were asked to spend a couple of minutes brainstorming individually. Then, they were asked to pick their top two ideas, write them on a large sticky note, and put them up on the wall. The facilitator helped to identify commonalities among the ideas to create themes.

People with Lived Experience: The top priorities listed for people with lived experience fell into four themes: Addressing barriers, addressing stigma, temporary housing assistance, and housing availability.

ADDRESS BARRIERS

- Addressing mental health and substance use disorder as a barrier
- Disability/addiction services
- A place for someone who is homeless to clean up for a job interview
- Addressing lack of tenant history and lack of an address
- Help getting people insurance so they can seek behavioral health services
- Patience in weekly goals for improvement

ADDRESS STIGMA

- Forgiving someone’s past
- Being open minded and giving people a chance regardless of circumstances
- Prioritizing trauma informed training

TEMPORARY HOUSING ASSISTANCE

- More assistance for people who are doubled up (to prevent homelessness)
- Emergency temporary housing

HOUSING AVAILABILITY

- Have more units available
 - Fundraising for building ownership to increase available housing
 - More housing availability
- “My top one is addressing substance abuse and behavioral health stuff...from my own personal experience and what not.”
 - “From my personal experience, forgiveness for someone’s past.”
 - “I guess more of a system for people who are in doubled up scenarios....A little bit of preventive maintenance for the homeless, when on that teetering spot, could go a long way.”

Service Providers: Three themes emerged with a couple of outliers: Communication, Behavioral Health Services, and Shelter and Transitional Housing. Outliers included job training and livable wages, and mentors during and after school age for parents and kids. There was discussion around

wraparound services for people in transitional housing, teaching people things they didn't learn growing up, trust and connection with others, and prevention.

COMMUNICATION

- Improved info sharing about resources already
- Education of general population

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES

- Increased access and availability to substance use disorder/alcohol use disorder treatment and detox within the county
- Behavioral health services
- 24 hour direct link to SUD/behavioral health services through hot line or peer/care navigation

SHELTER AND TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

- Transitional housing with wrap around services and structure program to receive services (housing)
- Short-term year-round shelter—converting to long term housing (with access to shower, laundry, storage)
- Create year round safe, clean, dry, warm space with laundry and showering capabilities for all (no trespassing people)
- “Transitional housing could be more rehabilitative and wraparound. It’s not just ‘Here’s your housing,’ but also ‘Here are the steps and things you need to meet.’”
- “Increasing access to more local, more in the moment treatment...would be huge. I think it’s a huge barrier for people.”
- “We talk about trust. All someone needs is one friend, one person to connect with, and they could be a healthy human being for the rest of their life.”
- “...we can look at prevention as a community and as individuals. What can we do to foster love, warmth, communication, and access to all the good things?”

Law Enforcement/Local Government: The common themes among participants included Shelter and Transitional Housing, and an increase in Available Housing. Outliers included increased availability of behavioral health services, and organizational liaisons with other organizations such as FISH. There was also discussion about high rent being a primary cause of homelessness, location of the sleep center, and increasing affordable housing stock.

SHELTER AND TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

- Year-round shelter
- Property for temporary structures
- A continuum of shelter to transitional housing with onsite services
- More temporary/transitional housing

AVAILABLE HOUSING

- Affordable construction/regulations
- Existing structures to utilize/modify for housing
- “I don’t want to use the term ‘tent city,’ but something to get people out of the elements.”
- “The biggest driver of homelessness statewide is rents. Behavioral health issues are tied in, but rents are so high...”

- “The overall perception of homelessness in our community skews from very understanding to I want ‘em out of here. Somehow, we need to bring those together.”

Community Members: Common themes for this question included Access to Services, Shelters, and Housing. Other discussions included public education about homelessness, rental assistance for those at risk of homelessness, and increased utility assistance.

ACCESS TO SERVICES

- Behavioral health, mental health services. Robust, creative, accessible mental health services
- Mental and medical assistance
- Reliable transportation, flexible employment opportunities, flexible work training programs
- Expand shelter services to include access to other needs identified by those with that lived experience.
- Make sure homeless are signed up for all available services such as food stamps, Medicaid, Medicare, affordable housing sign up application, etc.
- Food and shelter—address immediate needs.

SHELTER

- Tiny house communities provide shelter (low barrier), look for successful models from elsewhere (i.e., Bend, Toppenish/Wapato, Wenatchee)
- Short term help, sleep center, rental assistance, food, and clothing
- Sleep center/shelter, low barrier, year-round shelter.

HOUSING

- Make the process for getting into housing less intimidating and bureaucratic
- HOUSING, homeless people need homes, more available housing.
- “The solution to homelessness is simple, but it’s not easy. ‘Home’ is in the word; homeless people need homes. All other things don’t help if they’re sleeping on the street every night.”
- “I think it’s important to educate the problem to reduce the fear of homeless people.”
- “Many of the same people are a paycheck away from being right there.”

Central Washington University: Participants had several common themes for this question: Shelter, Housing, Basic Needs, and Communication. Sponsorship/mentorship programs was an outlier. There was additional discussion about mentors to help sponsor a person and the community response to the proposed location of the sleep center.

SHELTER

- Adapt empty spaces for shelter (hotels, campus spaces...)
- Designated shelter/safe camp area for immediate place to stay.
- Safe place 2 sleep
- Warm/cold shelters

HOUSING

- Affordable housing
- Financial incentive for community to build permanent housing.
- More housing: temporary, transitional, affordable
- Multiple locations of free/affordable housing

BASIC NEEDS

- Consistent housing and direct transportation to services for cohorts of individuals guided by basic needs coordinators/navigators.
- Clothing, laundry services
- Shower, grooming
- Showers and laundry (food and clothing banks already exist)
- Laundry service and shower area that are free drop-in services.
- Basic needs
- Meeting basic needs

COMMUNICATION

- Intentional outreach—assessment, referrals, delivery of services, transitional support
- Educating the public on demographics, abilities, capacity
- Community gatherings/meetings
- Focus on preventing homelessness by preventing social stigma.

Question 5: Previous priorities have included increasing affordable housing, increasing shelter and other support services, preventing homelessness, improving the homeless response system, and expanding community engagement, awareness, and education. Are these still priorities or have they shifted?

People with Lived Experience: Generally, participants didn't disagree that these are priorities, but they would like to see more progress in them. It was mentioned that there's been limited increase in affordable housing (Spurling Court) and there are still wait lists everywhere. They also expressed that addressing barriers, especially stigma, needs to be a priority. There was also some discussion about price gouging leading to high rents and there being more housing out there than people are aware of.

- “There are a lot of things missing from the priorities. I do think it really heavily needs to be worked on. I do see some improvement, but believe there needs to be more action put in.”
- “My personal opinion is that the only increase in affordable housing (which is a really big one) in the last five years has been Spurling Court.”
- “I think there's a lot more housing available here than anyone is leading to believe.... a lot of it is being price gouged to keep people in poverty out of it.”

Service Providers: Participants discussed trespassing people being a concern and that maybe community fatigue with the issue has something to do with it. People who are trespassed from the cold weather shelter often end up getting into jail. Participants suggested coming up with an alternative to jail. Also discussed was having more information about services available and addressing people who have pets.

- “Several people who have crossed my path have been trespassed here, there, and everywhere. I fully understand why that may have happened, but something has made this person react or act the way they do. There still has to be a place for someone.”

- “I feel like that sometimes ending up in jail is a positive. It’s not a goal, it’s something to avoid, but maybe we need to create an in-between place. Something similar, without all the expensive resources that jail has.”
- “It feels trivial, but I think the pet piece needs to be in there. We can find a way to accommodate the only friend that some of these people have.”

Law Enforcement/Local Government: Participants felt that yes, these are still priorities. There has been some progress on additional housing (Sterling Court), but these priorities need to be addressed simultaneously in order to have an impact. Participants felt that behavioral health services should be included in the priorities. There were also comments about expanding community awareness and questions about what the state of availability of resources is.

- “I feel like we have the same priorities. I think we have made headway on additional housing. I don’t know if I’d call it affordable housing.”
- “We need to increase affordable housing more and be more adept at doing it in a responsive way. The other support services alongside shelter have to include the behavioral health issues that will enable people to stay in the shelter.
- “In reviewing these, I think they’re on the right track. But it’s almost like they need to progress at the same time. You can’t have an increased homeless response without resources available or structures to address that response.”

Community Members: Participants felt that yes, these are still broad priorities, but also need to prioritize rapid rehousing programs, expanding options for HUD housing, and legislative advocacy. There was additional discussion about the community land trust and high rents. There was concern expressed that the rapid rehousing program has not been able to be funded the past couple of years. There was a perception that there are more HUD options than people know about. There was also concern about properties being “flipped” and thus experiencing an increase in costs.

- “[The rapid rehousing program] would help more of our homeless, and not just low income, which we haven’t done for two years right? It sounds like we need to get something back in place.”
- “Maybe some lobbyists? If the community could recognize what legislation would help with that, it could help with housing, bring some model in that would help them all, not just the homeless but the other people who are struggling too.”

Central Washington University: Most of the discussion revolved around the importance of the community education piece. Engaging the community in the homelessness issue and educating people about what it’s like to experience poverty and homelessness is important. It was expressed that we need to humanize people who are experiencing homelessness. There was also discussion about the need to address addiction, mental health, and trauma.

- “The community engagement and awareness in education is important. The community obviously doesn’t understand the realities of what these people are experiencing.... We can’t really move forward with initiative if there’s no community support.”
- “However, fundamentally it’s an issue of humanization.... We need to start seeing these people as people.”
- “...this is a neighborly community. When you integrate the neighbors into this kind of collective action for homelessness, the community outreach, that’s how you solve this issue. You can get the fundamental structure of the town to change.”

- “So really educate people. Go out and talk to people, ask them their story. Let’s start framing this as human lives and human stories.”

Question 6: What should be the key messages to the community about homelessness and people experiencing homelessness? How can we effectively share this information?

People with Lived Experience: Key messages brainstormed were the following:

- People are closer to homelessness than they realize.
- Not all homeless people look the same, stop marginalizing.
- Everyone has different reasons for being homeless.
- Stop judgment, it’s not a moral failing.
- Be more accepting lead with the heart
- Understanding where someone is coming from.
- Give more grace—people make mistakes.

The best way to get messages out would be social media, flyers, signs on corners, billboards, and getting out in the community to share success stories.

- “We need to stop marginalizing people who are dealing with homelessness into a cookie-cutter image.... Everyone is different and they have different reasons for why they’re homeless whether abuse, addiction, mental health, disabilities, anything.”
- “There’s something to be said for connecting with them on a deeper level...understanding where they’re coming from and why they’re there.”
- “It doesn’t matter what you did in your past. What matters is what you’re doing now to change that.”

Service Providers: Key messages discussed were:

- They are human and there’s not a simple way out of homelessness.
- These are our neighbors.
- Many people are just a step away from homelessness.
- Education about the societal and economic causes of homelessness

Best ways to get out messaging that were discussed included getting people engaged in volunteering as a way to learn more about people who are experiencing homelessness, online communication, virtual community meetings, and forums with people with lived experience. It was also discussed the importance of having a moderator for discussions, identifying what different people have in common in terms of opinions, and having information available in Spanish.

- “They’re human people. Babies, toddlers, children, sons, and daughters. There’s not a simple way out.”
- “...how do we...get them engaged, proactive, and helping? How do we get them interested in volunteering...and get them into the conversations that are happening?”
- “Changing a person’s personal belief and ethics is a wasted time sometimes. If you can bump up the people already on board, you have more people working to change the other people over time.”

- “...these are our neighbors...the majority are our community members...they are from here.”
- “Asking people what they feel about homelessness won’t help. Instead ask what some possible answers are for bettering these individuals in the community.”

Law Enforcement/Local Government: Participants discussed the following key messages.

- What services are and aren’t available.
- The majority of people who are homeless in Kittitas County are from the county; only a small percentage are from out of the area.
- The shelter has to go somewhere.
- Not addressing the issue won’t make it go away.
- It is more costly to deal with people who are unhoused (law enforcement)
- Communicate the success of the behavioral health court.
- Debunk negative stereotypes, it’s often situational instead of due to the individual.

Methods for distribution of messages discussed were social media through ad campaigns, repetition, and persuasive messaging; community group presentations (i.e., Rotary, churches, etc.) and presenting the homeless plan to the community via the county commissioners and city council.

- “I think there’s a perception that they’re being bussed in here or they see there’s a cold weather shelter, so they come here. Of the numbers, that’s a very small percentage— people coming just for the services in the county.”
- “...I think most people in the county want to have that emergency housing, like a sleep center, they just don’t want it next to them. How do you make them understand, it has to go somewhere? Not everyone will be happy.”
- “There’s a perception that if we don’t have anything available, the problem will go away.”

Community Members: Key messages discussed were:

- It’s not going to go away even if you don’t support.
- Not necessarily their fault (mental health, unable to work)
- Many people are 1 paycheck away.
- People experiencing homelessness are our neighbors, they are not scary.

Methods for distributing messages included professional presentation of messages through a public affairs person, presenting at committees, encouraging volunteerism and involvement with community service, and sharing personal experiences.

- “They’re not nearly as scary as the media would have us think. They are just people trying to get by. In my experience, the vast majority are people who are kind and generally good neighbors.”
- “On an individual level, it’s about calling out disinformation and correcting...and being bold in doing so.”

Central Washington University: Key messages shared were:

- These are human beings who have been through some trauma and being homeless exacerbates that trauma.
- Education about who the homeless are in this community and what their actual needs are, versus perceived needs.
- It could happen to you, it could happen to anyone.

- Helping people who are homeless doesn't have to be scary, you can set boundaries for yourself.
- You can't expect someone to be able to focus on a job if they are homeless.
- Not every person has an addiction issue and if they do, we should help, not villainize

Ways to share this information discussed included:

- Provide opportunities for people to speak anonymously to share their stories and opinions.
- Social media (brought up several times as being how most people get their information)
- Educational campaigns
- Posters up around town
- Community event about homelessness
- Word of mouth and socially influential people spreading messages (city council, business owners, church leaders)
- Presenting at clubs like Rotary and Elks
 - "I would stress that...these are humans who have been through some trauma, and being homeless exacerbates that trauma. It's perpetuating the trauma, not helping the trauma."
 - "Often people do want to help, but they're not sure where they can set boundaries...so they just don't help...they can help in ways that work for them."
 - "...we can humanize who people are who are experiencing homelessness, how it can happen to everyone."
 - "It can happen to you. You're not immune. You could lose a job and then can't make your mortgage or rent payment. It can happen to you. It's not a specific problem for specific people."

Appendix A

Homeless Housing Plan Focus Groups 2024

We are asking you to participate in a focus group to share your thoughts and opinions about homelessness in Kittitas County. A focus group is gathering a group of people together to discuss a topic. It is an opportunity to delve deeper into community issues and gather qualitative data through group discussion and interaction.

WHO: We will be asking several people from different sectors of the community about their thoughts and opinions on homelessness in Kittitas County. These sectors include law enforcement, local government, service providers, Central Washington University, community members, and people with lived experience.

WHAT: In a focus group, you can answer any questions you want and choose not to answer others if you like. You can stop participating at any time. There are no right or wrong answers. The conversations at the focus group will be recorded and analyzed for common themes. The analysis will be put together into a report, but the information included will not be connected to individual names.

WHERE: HopeSource Annex Training Room

WHEN: The focus group will last 1 hour. Here is the schedule:

Law Enforcement/Local Government: Thursday, November 7th, 11am Central

Washington University: Friday, November 8th, 11:30am Service Providers:

Tuesday, November 5th, 11am

Community Members: Thursday, November 7th, 2pm People with

Lived Experience: Tuesday, November 5th, 2pm

WHY: The objectives of these focus groups are:

1. To gain the perspective of the community about homelessness and related issues
2. To inform the development of community priorities for homelessness

HOW: The facilitator will ask all group participants to agree to the following:

- Please respect each other’s privacy and do not share what is discussed outside of the focus group.
- Please avoid side conversations during the focus group discussion
- There are no right or wrong answers, please respect all opinions.
- Share your own thoughts
- Be succinct in your comments—we have limited time together!

Have questions? Please contact Robin Read, Focus Group Facilitator, at robinhread@gmail.com or 509-607-1375.

I understand the information above, and I agree to participate.

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Question 1: Is the homelessness problem in Kittitas County better, worse, or the same than 5 years ago? Why?

Question 2: In a community survey, behavioral health services and job training and employment services were listed as priorities for individuals experiencing homelessness. Does this resonate with you? Are these priorities? Why or why not?

Question 3: Unwillingness to participate and limited availability are listed as the top barriers to accessing services. How can we address these barriers? (For people with lived experience: What are your barriers to accessing services? What was successful/what worked well?)

Question 4: With limited resources in Kittitas County, what would you prioritize to address homelessness?

Question 5: Previous priorities have included increasing affordable housing, increasing shelter and other support services, preventing homelessness, improving the homeless response system, and expanding community engagement, awareness, and education. Are these still priorities or have they shifted?

Question 6: What should be the key messages to the community about homelessness and people experiencing homelessness? How can we effectively share this information?