



DRAFT Responses to Findings and Recommendations
2021-22 Grand Jury Report:

“How is Orange County Addressing Homelessness?”

SUMMARY RESPONSE STATEMENT:

On June 23, 2022, the Grand Jury released a report entitled “How is Orange County Addressing Homelessness?” This report directed responses to findings and recommendations to the Orange County Board of Supervisors. The responses are below:

FINDINGS AND RESPONSES:

F1. South Orange County SPA cities lack low-threshold emergency shelters resulting in more homeless encampments and individuals living on the streets.

Response: **Agrees with the finding.** While the South Service Planning Area (SPA) does have a few emergency shelters such as the Friendship Shelter that operates the City of Laguna Beach’s Alternative Sleeping Location (ASL) Emergency Shelter, the 2022 Point In Time Count did identify a total of 422 individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness within the South SPA. And while this is an overall decrease of 116 individuals or a 21.56 percent decrease from the 538 individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness identified during the 2019 Point In Time Count, there is still a need for additional low-threshold emergency shelters.

F2. Too many of the homeless who are severely and persistently mentally ill and those with addiction issues end up incarcerated instead of more appropriate placements.

Response: **Disagrees partially with the finding.** The 2022 Point In Time Count did indicate that the number of homeless individuals in the county who self-identified as having a mental health disorder or substance use disorder has increased. However, mental health diagnoses run the entire gamut of being “mild to moderate” through “severely and persistently mentally ill” (SPMI); therefore, it would be difficult to make a definitive statement that all SPMI homeless individuals end up incarcerated versus appropriate placements. Following the 2019 Point in Time Count, the County launched the OC Cares initiative focused on reducing recidivism in the Corrections System through diversion, data-driven decision making and rehabilitative best

practices. Additionally, in January 2021, the County's first payer-agnostic behavioral health campus, Be Well, opened its doors in Orange, California.

- F3. The County of Orange and cities within Orange County have been inconsistent in collaboration for support of shelters and services, which has resulted in missed opportunities to end homelessness.**

Response: Disagrees wholly with the finding. The collaboration between the County of Orange (County), Orange County Continuum of Care and cities in Orange County has resulted in the creation of several shelters and services that better address unsheltered homelessness.

- F4. There are insufficient number of rental units available to those exiting Emergency Shelters, resulting in the majority returning to homelessness when leaving the shelters.**

Response: Agrees partially with the finding. The County has oversight of the Coordinated Entry System which streamlines access and referrals to permanent housing opportunities. Often individuals and families experiencing homelessness who are working towards a permanent housing option may experience delays and barriers in securing rental units. This is due to several reasons including the lack of affordable units in desired areas, especially the one-bedroom units, extremely low fixed income or no income, criminal backgrounds, credit scores, employment history, rental history/evictions, screenings performed by landlords and property management, etc. Because of the barriers to housing faced by people experiencing homelessness, the County has invested in programs with equipped staff to assist in finding and securing units successfully. These efforts have resulted in housing-focused emergency shelters, increased housing navigation and unit identification programming, and enhanced supportive services to assist people in securing permanent housing.

Within County-operated and funded contracts, the County does not establish a limited length of stay within the emergency shelter program as the County understands every household's housing process and timeline may be varied. Additionally, the County recognizes that returning people to unsheltered homelessness would further disengage the homeless population from accessing available supportive services and discourage progress from securing permanent housing.

- F5. The Office of Care Coordination, in collaboration with the Continuum of Care Board, provides an effective community-based system of setting priorities to address homelessness, learning best practices, awarding and monitoring contracts, and overseeing a comprehensive system of care. However, the challenge of housing all our homeless requires much more.**

Response: Agrees with the finding.

- F6. Transitional Aged Youth who age out of the Foster Care system are a vulnerable population that often become homeless and need assistance in finding housing. There are insufficient resources to adequately serve these young people.**

Response: **Agrees with the finding.** The Orange County Social Service Agency (SSA) has several specialized programs and services that assist transitional aged youth that are aging out of the Foster Care system.

In addition, SSA works with the Orange County Continuum of Care, the Santa Ana Housing Authority, the Orange County Housing Authority and the Office of Care Coordination to coordinate access to available housing resources and programs to assist Transitional Aged Youth in finding housing. This has resulted in increased collaboration and awareness of the housing needs experienced by transitional aged youth experiencing homelessness.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONSES:

- R1. By July 1, 2023, the CoC and County of Orange should leverage funding to persuade South Orange County cities to open a regional, low-threshold emergency shelter for the homeless, in addition to the Laguna Beach Friendship Shelter. (F1)**

Response: **The recommendation requires further analysis.** The Orange County Continuum of Care and County of Orange (County) strive for the community-wide commitment of ending homelessness through regional coordination and collaboration, as well as adopting a coordinated approach to funding opportunities. On April 27, 2022, the County of Orange with the support of the Orange County Continuum of Care Board issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) to seek proposals from qualified organizations to provide Emergency Shelter Operations and Services across three Service Planning Areas (SPAs) in Orange County and for different segments of the homeless population including individuals, families, transitional aged youth and survivors of domestic violence. The primary goal of the Emergency Shelters Operations and Services program is to ensure accessible, streamlined entry to emergency shelter and providing robust supportive services that assist participants in obtaining permanent housing. The goal is to award contracts to the Emergency Shelter Operations and Service programs.

- R2. By July 1, 2023, South OC SPA cities should collaborate in siting and funding a low-threshold emergency shelter for the homeless, in addition to the Friendship Shelter in Laguna Beach. (F2)**

Response: **The recommendation requires further analysis.** Further analysis is required for recommendation R2 as outlined by the Orange County Grand Jury. The siting of a low-threshold emergency shelter for people experiencing homelessness in the South Service Planning Area (SPA) of Orange County requires collaboration amongst both the cities and the County of Orange (County). The County will always be a willing partner in establishing low-threshold shelters in the South SPA with the South County cities.

- R3. The CoC should fund programs in fiscal year 2022-23 for people with severe and persistent mental illness and addiction issues to receive supervised care and treatment. (F2)**

Response: **The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable.** The County of Orange's (County) Office of Care Coordination on behalf of the Orange County Continuum of Care recognizes the need for a higher level of care for people experiencing homelessness with severe and persistent mental illness and addiction issues. It is important to recognize that the Orange County Continuum of Care's role is to coordinate with the appropriate components of the System of Care, including behavioral health and healthcare, to address homelessness and not replicate or overlap programs that provide supervised care and treatment for people with severe and persistent mental illness and addiction issues. As such, the Office of Care Coordination's ongoing coordination and collaboration with the Orange County Health Care Agency's Mental Health and Recovery Services is key in meeting the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness who have severe and persistent mental illness and addition issues.

- R4. By July 1, 2024, the County of Orange and cities should collaborate to open facilities that can house people with severe and persistent mental illness and addiction issues in a secure setting. (F2)**

Response: **The recommendation has been implemented.** The 2022 Housing Inventory Count identified 2,793 units of permanent supportive housing. Permanent supportive housing is long-term affordable housing paired with supportive services for people experiencing homelessness who have disabling conditions such as severe and persistent mental illness and addition issues. Permanent supportive housing is prioritized for individuals experiencing the longest lengths of homelessness in Orange County and with high service needs as a result of the disabling conditions they experience.

Since the Orange County Board of Supervisor's adoption of the Orange County Housing Funding Strategy in 2018 and through the Orange County Housing Finance Trust, a total of 1,273 permanent supportive housing units have been completed, are in progress of funding, or under construction. The Housing Funding Strategy has established a target for the development of 2,700 new supportive housing by 2025. The development of new permanent supportive housing and affordable housing is an existing and ongoing collaborative effort between the County of Orange, the cities and the Orange County Housing Finance Trust.

- R5. By July 1, 2023, the County of Orange, cities and CoC should collaborate to encourage the development of housing affordable to individuals exiting the emergency shelters in Orange County. (F3, F4, F5)**

Response: **The recommendation has been implemented.** The County of Orange (County), cities and the Orange County Continuum of Care have been working together to encourage the development of affordable housing and permanent supportive housing that supports the needs of people experiencing homelessness and accessing the system of care. This includes the development of housing opportunities that support participants exiting from emergency shelters into permanent housing.

In 2019, the Orange County Housing Finance Trust (OCHFT) was established and is a collaboration between the County of Orange and the cities for the purpose of funding affordable housing and permanent supportive housing to assisting the homeless population and households of extremely low, very low, and low income within Orange County. Twenty-four (24) cities are now members in the Trust along with the County. The OCHFT has issued three Notice of Funding Availabilities (NOFAs) and provided funding commitments for seventeen (17) projects to date.

To date, over 2,600 units of affordable and supportive housing are complete, under construction or in progress of funding throughout Orange County with the support and collaboration between the County of Orange and Cities.

The Orange County Continuum of Care and the four public housing authorities – Orange County, Santa Ana, Garden Grove and Anaheim - have worked together to support the Emergency Housing Voucher program. The Emergency Housing Voucher program will provide a total of 1,041 special purpose vouchers for people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness as identified by the service providers in the Orange County Continuum of Care.

The County continues to allocate additional resources to subsidize housing opportunities for households that previously experienced homelessness and/or households experiencing homelessness. Since the adoption of the Housing Funding Strategy, the Orange County Board of Supervisors have authorized utilization of a combined 310 project-based Housing Choice, Mainstream and Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing vouchers from the Orange County Housing Authority for permanent supportive housing developments throughout the Orange County. In addition, since 2018, the Orange County Board of Supervisors has approved an allocation of over \$135.5 million in Mental Health Services Act funding for supportive housing development that is administered at both the state and local level. The County has also partnered with developers to apply jointly for other available funding sources such as No Place Like Home, Housing for a Healthy California and Housing Accelerator funds.

The County, in partnership with cities, worked with developers in identifying prospective sites that may be eligible for State of California's Homekey Program funding. To date, there has been over \$50 million in funding awarded to the County of Orange and to developer co-applicants for five motel conversions that will provide 252 units of permanent supportive housing.

The County will continue to work with all cities and the Orange County Continuum of Care in various capacities to collaborate and encourage the development of affordable housing and permanent supportive housing as part of the system of care.

R6. By December 1, 2022, the County of Orange, cities and CoC should collaborate to increase the number of housing opportunities for Transitional Aged Youth. (F6)

Response: **The recommendation has been implemented.** Since June 2020, County's Office of Care Coordination has worked to improve the homeless service delivery for transitional aged youth experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. The County provides oversight over the Coordinated Entry System and has worked to implement a separate process for transitional aged youth to be prioritized for available housing resources in Orange County. This has resulted in the implementation of a Transitional Aged Youth Registry, composed of youth participants experiencing homelessness in Orange County regardless of their household composition. Transitional aged youth service providers are invited to attend a collaborative case conferencing meeting to discuss individual cases, available housing resources, and dynamic prioritization through the Coordinated Entry System to ensure that the most vulnerable participants are receiving the most appropriate housing referrals.

In addition to this, the Office of Care Coordination began tracking outcomes in the form of transitional aged youth-focused dashboard to understand the housing needs and analyze trends. The Office of Care Coordination and the Orange County Continuum of Care have utilized this information to inform the implementation of housing resources and the solicitation of new housing resources specifically designed to meet the needs of the transitional aged youth experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness in Orange County.

The Office of Care Coordination most recently submitted an application for the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program, a funding opportunity from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) designed to reduce the number of transitional aged youths experiencing homelessness through a coordinated community approach.

Lastly, the State of California's Homeless, Housing Assistance and Prevention Program, which provides funding to the County, CoC, and cities of Anaheim and Santa, require recipient jurisdictions to allocate a minimum percentage of the funding to create housing opportunities and resources for transitional aged youth. This focused funding resource has proven helpful in the planning and design of a homeless service system that meets the needs of transitional aged youth.