

Responses to Findings and Recommendations 2024-25 Grand Jury Report:



“Homelessness: Is Orange County Moving in the Right Direction?”

SUMMARY RESPONSE STATEMENT

On June 27, 2025, the Grand Jury released a report titled, “Homelessness: Is Orange County Moving in the Right Direction?” This report includes findings and recommendations directed to the Orange County Board of Supervisors. Below are the responses.

FINDINGS AND RESPONSES

F1. Despite its efforts and substantial resources, Orange County’s current strategy for decreasing homelessness has been largely unsuccessful.

Response: *Disagrees wholly with the finding.*

While the 2024 Point In Time Count identified an increase in homelessness, the County of Orange (County) and its partners have ended homelessness for hundreds of persons who accessed emergency shelter, transitional housing, rapid rehousing permanent supportive housing and affordable housing, as well as other support services. From October 1, 2023, to September 30, 2024, 1,994 persons exited homelessness to a permanent housing resource. These outcomes demonstrate meaningful progress for individuals and families, even though overall numbers of people experiencing homelessness remain high due to the complexity of social-economic factors associated with homelessness.

The primary funding sources for this effort are state and federal, which are currently insufficient to fully address homelessness in Orange County. The County general fund receives the lowest share of property tax revenues statewide at five cents for every dollar collected, compared to the statewide average of 14 cents, challenging the County’s ability to address homelessness after mandatory program/service requirements are met. Despite this challenge, the County is committed to addressing homelessness as demonstrated by its OC Cares initiative and multi-disciplinary team efforts.

F2. Orange County’s contract with 2-1-1 Orange County provides for comprehensive information and 24/7 telephone referral service for households in need. However, its services are not well known by the population that could benefit from their assistance.

Response: *Disagrees partially with the finding.*

The County's contract is with Orange County United Way (OCUW), not 2-1-1 Orange County (211OC). Through this contract, the County provides funding for the 211OC Connection Center, which provides comprehensive information on health and human services, and support information to residents in need of shelter, housing, employment, childcare, food, physical and behavioral health services and a broad range of other human services.

According to the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024-25 Quarter 4 report as submitted by OCUW to the County, the 211OC Connection Center handled 92,291 requests for help and over 49,000 searches done through their online resources, demonstrating an awareness of 211OC services by those who need it. Additionally, referrals to 211OC and communication about 211OC availability and services are made each and every day by County employees and community-based organizations. The County, across many of its departments' webpages, provide information on how the community can contact 211OC for comprehensive information and referral services.

F3. Extensive waiting periods for people seeking Section 8 (Housing Choice) vouchers and lack of affordable housing in general are major contributing factors to the growing number of people experiencing homelessness and housing instability in Orange County.

Response: *Agrees with the finding*

The funding provided by the federal government for Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) is insufficient to meet the need in Orange County. A lack of affordable housing, a lack of federal funding for Section 8 vouchers, and the competition for low-cost units in the community are factors contributing to housing instability and/or homelessness in Orange County.

As detailed in the 2025 Federal Legislative Priorities, the County continues to advocate for adequate funding to support the full utilization of the County's HCV allocation.

F4. While Orange County directs a limited amount of resources to prevention, its programs to address homelessness are primarily reactionary, which over time is more costly than preventive interventions.

Response: *Disagrees wholly with the finding*

Since 2015, with the kickoff of the federal Stepping Up Initiative, the County has committed significant time and resources toward prevention efforts. While the Stepping Up Initiative initially focused on reducing the number of mentally ill individuals in custody, over the last 10 years it has evolved into the OC Cares initiative, which is focused on prevention and intervention for all individuals in the County's five Systems of Care, including those at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness. The OC Cares initiative is focused on addressing the root causes of homelessness and providing prevention and intervention services during childhood and beyond – not just at the brink of homelessness. The County is focused on and committed to building comprehensive and responsive Systems of Care that meet individual needs and supports in breaking the cycle of homelessness.

Additionally, the County has implemented homelessness prevention programs aimed at providing financial assistance and supportive services to households who are at risk of homelessness, with the goal of stabilizing them in their current housing and achieving long-term housing stability. These programs have been successful in accomplishing their goal and have been championed by members of the Board of Supervisors (Board).

F5. The Commission to Address Homelessness has not provided the Board of Supervisors with sufficient recommendations on homelessness prevention efforts, focusing instead on reactive strategies.

Response: *Disagrees partially with the finding.*

The Commission to Address Homelessness (Commission) provides recommendations on homelessness prevention and intervention strategies, both of which are important in addressing homelessness. The Commission's attention to helping those already experiencing homelessness has resulted in the gaining of knowledge from people with lived experience of homelessness, which the Commission has used in making informed recommendations for homeless services, including homelessness prevention, to the Board.

In October 2022, the Commission provided the Board with the Homeless Services System Pillars Report which details the best practices and guiding principles to better serve individuals and families at risk of homelessness and experiencing homelessness across four pillars – Prevention, Outreach and Support Services, Shelter and Housing. This report was instrumental in development of the Emergency Rental Assistance Program and the Homelessness Prevention and Stabilization Pilot Program that were approved by the Board in 2024. The Homelessness Prevention and Stabilization Pilot Program is actively serving households at risk of homelessness by providing financial assistance and case management supports. Both programs have been successful in preventing homelessness and followed the best practices and guiding principles as recommended by the Commission.

Additionally, the Office of Care Coordination conducted a study in 2025 titled "Falling through the Safety Net: Understanding Individuals' Journey and Contributing Factors to Homelessness." The results of these study have been presented to the Commission and the Commission will be working on utilizing the information and findings to develop recommendations to the Board on homelessness prevention efforts.

The Commission has demonstrated a focus on homelessness prevention and the County looks forward to any additional recommendations for the prevention of homelessness.

F6. Tenant-based vouchers are federally funded and administered by local Housing Authorities. They are a faster and more cost-effective way to house those experiencing homelessness. These vouchers are often unavailable and insufficiently funded, leaving many people experiencing homelessness, including those who have completed all the requirements for vouchers, without housing options.

Response: *Disagrees partially with the finding.*

The Tenant-Based HCV program is for low-income households and not specifically for households experiencing homelessness. Additionally, the Tenant-Based HCV program relies on the household's ability to identify a suitable low-cost housing unit so the voucher can be utilized. As mentioned in the response to Finding 3, there is both a lack of funding for HCVs and a high demand for a limited supply of low-cost housing in Orange County. A household with a Tenant-Based HCV would be more likely to find housing and/or faster at finding housing, if there were available units. The time it takes to secure a housing unit with a Tenant-Based HCV can vary depending on variables such as rental market conditions.

F7. Orange County’s elderly and disabled residents are an increasing segment of the homeless population. They rely heavily on tenant-based vouchers to maintain stable housing. This fixed income population will be disproportionately affected by any reduction in funding to these programs.

Response: *Disagrees partially with the finding.*

The Tenant-Based HCV program is a federal program aimed to serve low-income households in need of rental assistance. The application process for Tenant-Based HCV is consistent across all segments of the population, as households apply when the wait list is open and the same income eligibility criteria is met. While the majority of those participating in this Tenant-Based HCV program are elderly and/or people with disabilities, a reduction in funding to these programs does not only impact this population but every low-income household who receives or needs this assistance.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONSES

R1. Orange County should prioritize prevention of homelessness rather than primarily reactive measures. This could be done by earmarking sufficient discretionary funds toward this objective. This should be accomplished by June 30, 2026, and annually thereafter

Response: *The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable.*

The County is already committed to building comprehensive and responsive Systems of Care that provide prevention and intervention services and programs to address homelessness. Through the OC Cares initiative, the County has focused on addressing the root causes of homelessness and providing prevention and intervention services during childhood and beyond – not just at the brink of homelessness. Additionally, the County recognizes the value and importance of helping people who are currently experiencing homelessness on the streets, in our community, and in the emergency shelters and programs that are currently operating. The County’s approach to addressing homelessness cannot be limited to nor should it solely prioritize homelessness prevention. The County is committed to operating a robust System of Care and Homeless Service System to support people at risk of homelessness and experiencing homelessness, offering enhanced care coordination to better access available resources and services, secure permanent housing and achieve long-term housing stability.

R2. The Board of Supervisors should request that the Commission to Address Homelessness prepare a plan outlining current and future (next two years) prevention strategies. The Commission should submit this plan to the Board of Supervisors by December 31, 2025, and annually thereafter.

Response: *The recommendation has been implemented.*

The Commission has prepared and supported in the implementation of various homelessness prevention strategies that have been approved by the Board of Supervisors. In October 2022, the Commission provided the Board with the Homeless Services System Pillars Report which details the best practices and guiding principles to better service individuals and families at risk of homelessness and experiencing homelessness across four pillars – Prevention, Outreach and Support Services, Shelter and Housing. This report was instrumental in the development of the Emergency Rental Assistance Program and the Homelessness Prevention and Stabilization Pilot Program that was approved by the Board in 2024. The Homelessness Prevention and Stabilization Pilot Program is actively serving households at risk of homelessness by providing financial assistance and case management supports. Both programs have been successful in preventing homelessness and followed the best practices and guiding principles as recommended by the Commission.

Additionally, the Office of Care Coordination conducted a study in 2025 titled “Falling through the Safety Net: Understanding Individuals’ Journey and Contributing Factors to Homelessness.” The results of these study have been presented to the Commission and the Commission will be working on utilizing the information and findings to develop recommendations to the Board on homelessness prevention efforts.

R3. The Board of Supervisors should partner with non-profit service providers in each district that are focused on preventive measures to reduce homelessness. The programs could be similar to Supervisor Chaffee’s Emergency Rental Assistance Program, which partnered with the Friendly Center, a nonprofit in his district that emphasizes prevention. These partnerships should be implemented by June 30, 2026

Response: *The recommendation has been implemented.*

The Board approved the Homelessness Prevention and Stabilization Pilot Program on January 9, 2024. The goal of the Homelessness Prevention and Stabilization Pilot Program is to assist households at risk of experiencing homelessness achieve housing stability by providing financial assistance to pay rent in arrears, past due utility bills, and forward rent and/or bills based on financial need, and stabilization payments (for some eligible participants). The Homelessness Prevention and Stabilization Pilot mirrors the same programmatic components as Supervisor Chaffee's Emergency Rental Assistance Program by providing case management, and direct financial assistance to households. The HPSP Program launched on October 7, 2024, and is currently operating in partnership with five non-profit service providers to serve all eligible clients throughout Orange County.

R4. The County should develop a contingency plan to address potential reductions in funding for homeless prevention programs, especially for the elderly and disabled populations and those on a fixed income. This plan should identify alternate funding sources, prioritize critical services, and ensure continuity of care. This plan should be created by December 31, 2025.

Response: *The recommendation has been implemented.*

The County through the Homelessness Prevention Ad Hoc established by Chair Doug Chaffee and through its departments has identified all funding federal and state funding source that allow homelessness prevention as an eligible activity, its eligibility requirements for participants, and funding levels. The County is using this information to support the planning and operations of homelessness prevention programs.

R5. Orange County should launch a comprehensive awareness campaign to inform the public about the services offered by 2-1-1 OC. This should include social media outreach, partnerships with local media, and community events. This should be accomplished by November 30, 2025, and annually thereafter.

Response: *The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable.*

Consistent with other relationships with non-profit organizations, the County's role and responsibility does not extend to comprehensive awareness campaigns for promotional purposes of OCUW. OCUW is responsible for its approach to marketing, outreach and partnerships as it related to their organization and the services offered. The County will continue to provide information on how the community can contact 211OC for comprehensive information and referral services.