

Interagency Commission on Homelessness Annual Report 2020



Montgomery County, Maryland
Department of Health and Human Services
Services to End and Prevent Homelessness
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Overview

The Interagency Commission on Homelessness (ICH) was established by the Montgomery County Council in 2014 and began its work in 2015 to promote efforts to end and prevent homelessness in Montgomery County. The mission of the ICH is to

- promote a community-wide goal to end and prevent homelessness,
- develop and implement a strategic plan,
- educate the community about homelessness,
- promote partnerships to improve the County's ability to prevent and end homelessness,
- monitor programs that are components of the Continuum of Care,
- make recommendations to the County Executive and County Council to improve the Continuum of Care, and
- establish procedures for effective coordination of the Continuum of Care.

The ICH has also been designated as the Governing Board of the Continuum of Care (CoC).

The CoC is Montgomery County's local homeless program planning network. It is a public-private partnership that includes County and other government agencies, non-profit service providers, landlords and others who have a role in preventing and ending homelessness. The purpose of the CoC is to coordinate the implementation of a housing and service system within the Montgomery County CoC geographic area that meets the needs of individuals and families experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The Montgomery County CoC provides a full continuum of housing services to homeless persons including:

- outreach and engagement,
- emergency and transitional shelter,
- rapid re-housing,
- permanent supportive housing and
- prevention strategies.

Strategic Direction

In January 2020, the ICH launched the new [Strategic Plan to End Homelessness](#). This community-wide effort began in February 2019 and involved multiple stakeholders including elected officials, non-profit service providers, representatives from other systems of care, and government agencies. The Strategy and Planning Committee led the development of the plan and organized a series of work sessions to inform the community's strategies. Below are highlights from the plan.

Vision: *We envision a home for everyone in Montgomery County, where the experience of homelessness is rare, brief, and one-time only.*

Mission: *Through commitment and collaboration, we will create effective systems in our community to achieve our vision. We strive to be a leader in the work to end homelessness across our nation.*

Bold Goals

- End homelessness among Veterans by 2015. - **Achieved!**
- End homelessness among chronically homeless individuals by 2019. - **Achieved!**
- End homelessness among families with children by the end of 2020.
- End homelessness among youth (ages 16-24) by the end of 2021.
- End homelessness among seniors by the end of 2022.
- End homelessness among everyone in Montgomery County by the end of 2023.

Values

- Housing First and Person-Centered Approaches
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Collaboration Across the Continuum of Care
- Data and Results Based Decisions
- Continuous Change and Improvement

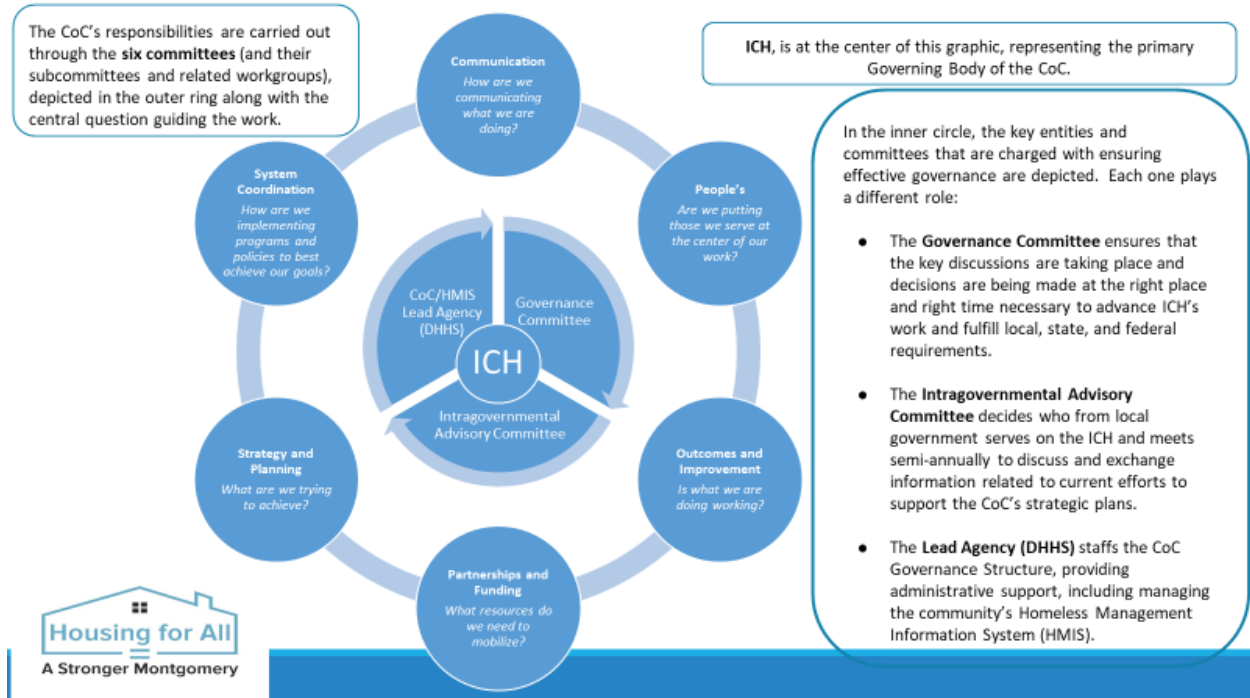
Strategies

- Reduce Racial Disparities Across the System
- Build and Support Strong and Adaptable Programs
- Build and Support Affordable Housing Solutions within the Homeless Continuum
- Coordinate Effectively Across Other Systems of Care
- Increase and Diversify Funding
- Educate and Advocate for Change

ICH Infrastructure

On July 29, 2020, a new [bill](#) was signed into law with important updates to the ICH statute. This new legislation made several modification and updates to the existing bill to better align with

the goals of the ICH. Most notably, the bill alters the composition of the ICH by removing a number of ex-officio members and adding more public representatives, including homeless service providers, healthcare providers, family services providers, and affordable housing providers. The bill also establishes a governance committee chaired by the ICH Chair and the Chief of Services to End and Prevent Homelessness as well as an intragovernmental advisory group consisting of various government departments whose work intersects with work of ending homelessness. See graphic below outlining the new structure. The ICH’s primary focus in 2021 will be filling vacancies on both the Commission and supporting committees.



Initiatives

The work over the past year has been focused on the three current initiatives that are part of the “*Housing for All*” campaign:

- “Zero:2016” – Veterans Homelessness
- “Inside (Not Outside)” – Chronic Homelessness
- “At Home Together” – Family Homelessness

The ***Housing for All = A Stronger Montgomery*** campaign encompasses the broader vision of making homelessness rare, brief, and one-time only for all. In 2017, Services to End and Prevent Homelessness (SEPH) began to restructure programs that implement this vision and are in alignment with the new federal mandates on Coordinated Entry Systems (CES) for both single

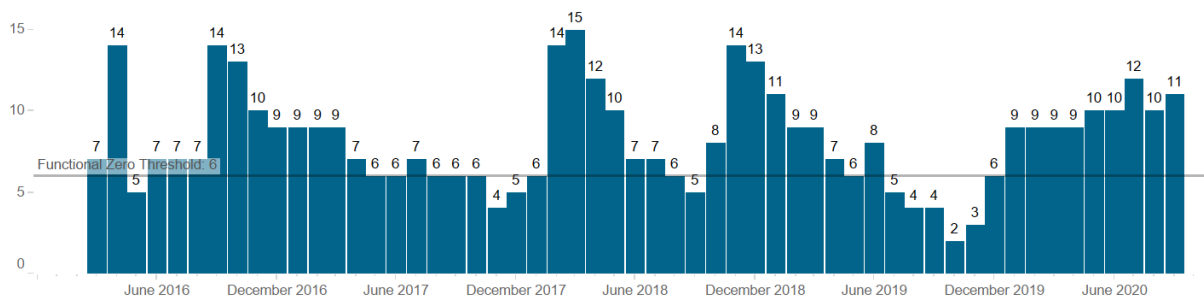
adults and families with minor children. The restructure builds on this vision and utilizes the guiding principles and shared values of our CoC including:

- A person-centered system of care which includes low-barrier access, standardized intake and assessment, housing prioritization, and evaluation;
- Commitment to a comprehensive crisis response system, including increased access to shelter, housing, and services;
- Concentrated effort to reduce the racial disparities in the homeless continuum, and
- Expansion of prevention, diversion, and permanent housing solutions that are based on need.

Zero: 2016

In December 2015, Montgomery County was one of the first four jurisdictions in the Country to effectively end Veteran homelessness. This success was confirmed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, and the Community Solutions **Built for Zero (BFZ)** campaign. We have housed 158 Veterans since the **Zero:2016** effort officially kicked off in June 2015. Approximately 15% or 23 Veterans housed through the initiative returned to homelessness but because of the CoC’s commitment to Housing First principles, 18 of these Veterans were rehoused. Slightly more than 3% of Veterans returned to homelessness and have yet to be rehoused.

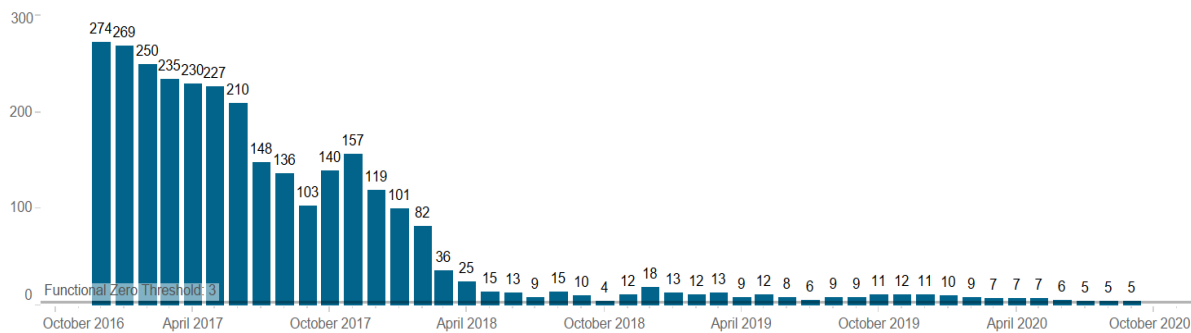
Actively Homeless Population Monthly count for Veteran subpopulation(s)



The **Inside (not Outside)** Initiative is Montgomery County’s campaign to end chronic homelessness.

In January 2016, Montgomery County CoC committed to the ambitious goal of ending long-term homelessness for people with disabilities. To date, 433 people have been housed through this initiative and 5 individuals remain to be housed. Although the CoC has not officially met the target for “functional zero,” Montgomery County has consistently had less than 12 unhoused people identified as chronic since July of 2018. See the run chart below.

Actively Homeless Population Monthly count for Chronic subpopulation(s)



In February 2019, the ICH decided to shift the prioritization of permanent supportive housing from chronic to other vulnerable populations. The ***Inside (not Outside)*** Initiative resulted in a significant number of people with long histories of homelessness placed in permanent housing but had unintended consequences. Most notably, highly vulnerable individuals who did not meet the federal definition of chronic homelessness due to an inability to verify of the length of time homeless were stuck waiting on the Coordinated Entry List while others with lower acuity were placed in high intensity permanent supportive housing. In an effort to more effectively allocate resources, the ICH and CoC amended the prioritization policy for permanent supportive housing. Based on the principle of progressive engagement, the Coordinated Entry Systems seeks to provide the lowest level of intervention needed to keep an individual from returning to homelessness.

Since June 2018, 194 vulnerable adults have been placed in permanent supportive housing reducing the number of households without children by 14% between the 2018 Homeless Point-in-Time Count and 2020 Count.

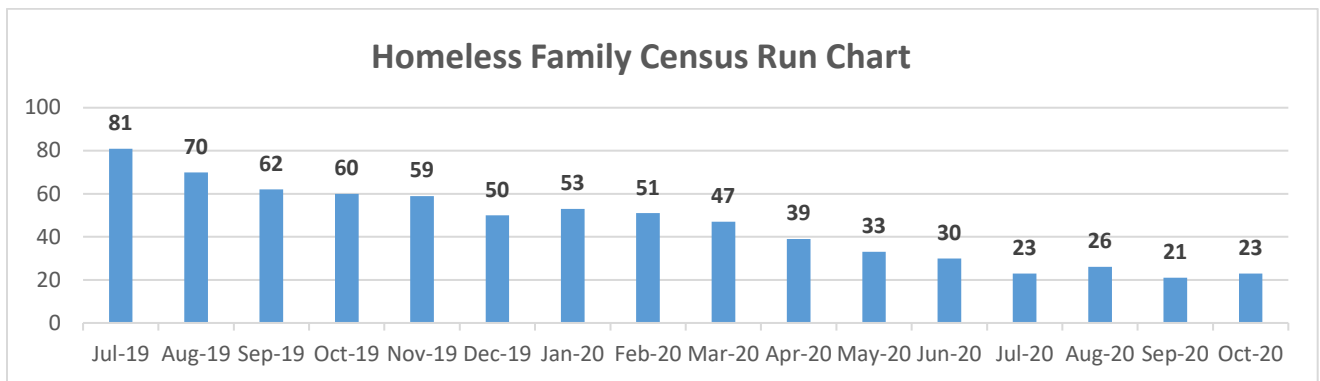


In July 2018, the ICH launched the ***@HomeTogether*** Initiative to end and prevent homelessness for families with children by the end of 2020.

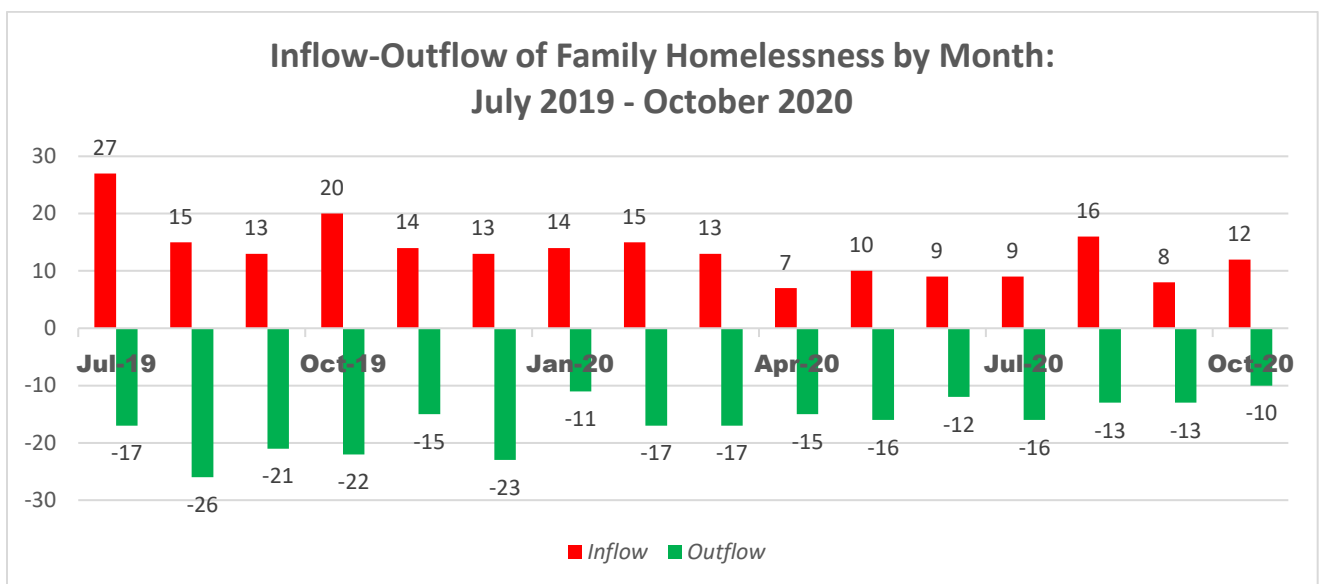
Unlike the previous initiatives addressing Veteran and chronic homelessness, success is not defined by a “functional zero” number but instead by making the experience rare, brief, and one-time only. Montgomery County will measure success through a number of indicators including inflow vs. outflow rates per month, the length of time a family experiences homelessness, number of families entering homelessness for the first time, percent of exits to permanent housing, and the rate of returns to homelessness for families with children.

In Fiscal Year 2020, Montgomery County served 281 households’ families including 483 children in the homeless system. The strategies of the ***@HomeTogether*** Initiative continue to focus heavily on preventing families from entering homelessness whenever possible, quickly connecting families whose homelessness cannot be prevented to permanent housing, and

connecting families with mainstream services like employment counseling, benefits, and behavioral health services to keep them housed. Since July 2018, the CoC has been able to prevent more than 70% of all families seeking emergency shelter from becoming homeless by partnering with households to resolve their housing emergency through conflict mediation, problem-solving, short-term case management, and financial assistance. Due to an influx in Rapid Rehousing resources, exits to permanent housing for families has increased from 49% in FY18 to 61% in FY20. Most notably, the number of families experiencing homelessness at any given time has decreased by 72% from 81 in July 2019 to 23 as of October 2020. See chart below.

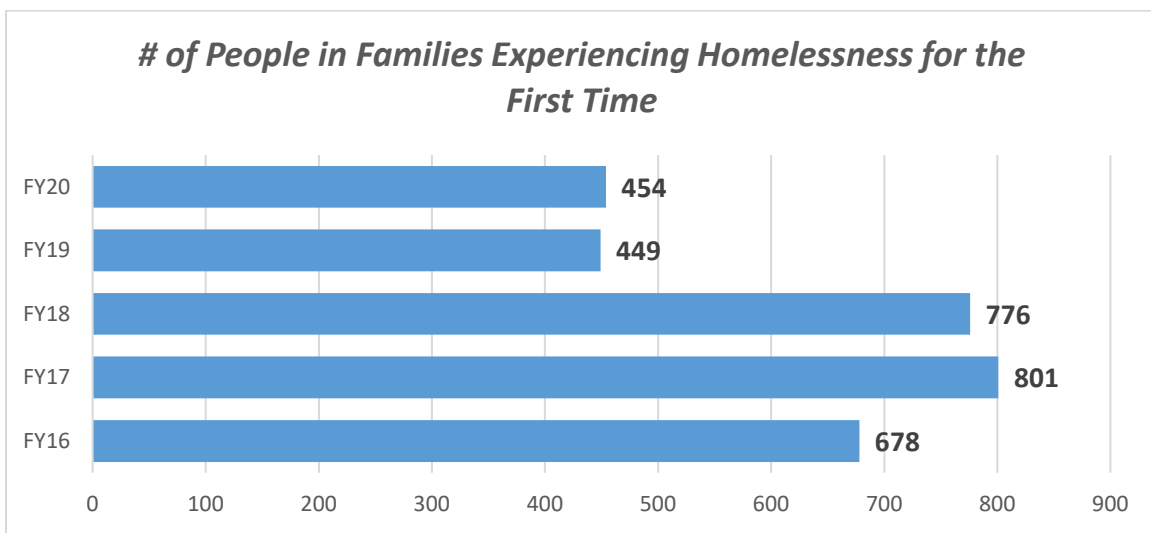


The success in reducing the number of families experiencing homelessness can likely be attributed to both preventing families from entering homelessness and the rate of which families exit to permanent housing. The chart below details the rate of inflow and outflow in the family homeless system. In FY20, the average monthly inflow into homelessness was 14 and was outpaced by the average number of families exiting per month of 18.

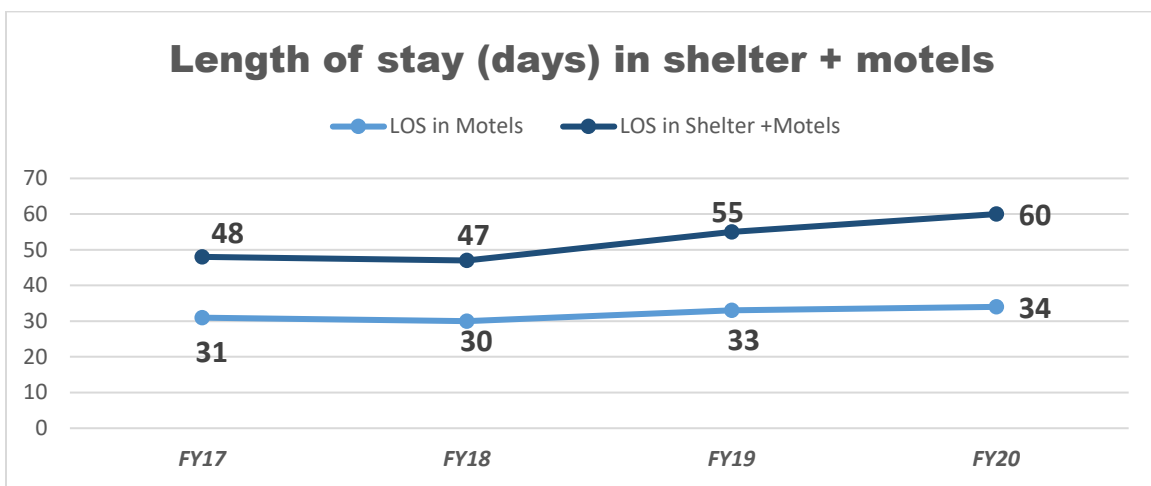


Despite improvements in many outcome areas including exits to permanent housing and reduction in overall number of families experiencing homelessness at any given time, there has been an increase in the length of time families experience homeless and rate of returns to homelessness. The number of families entering homelessness for the first time has only seen moderate improvement. The increase in the length of time may be attributed to the success of homeless diversion and only the most vulnerable families with more complex needs entering the system but more data is needed to support this theory.

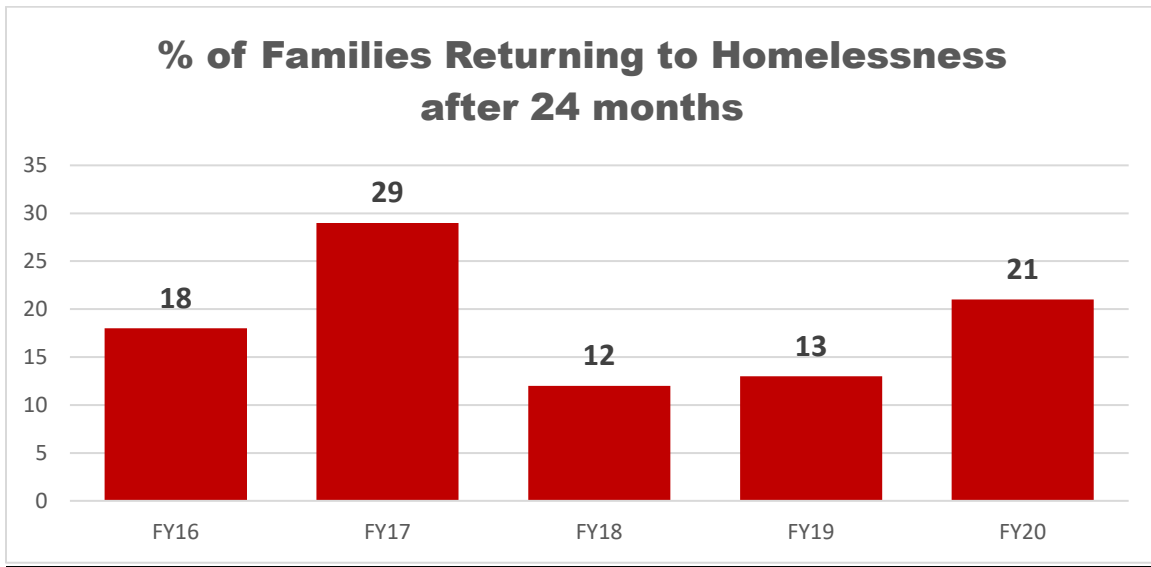
Making Homelessness for Families RARE



Making Homelessness for Families BRIEF



Making Homelessness for Families One-Time Only



CoC Response to COVID 19

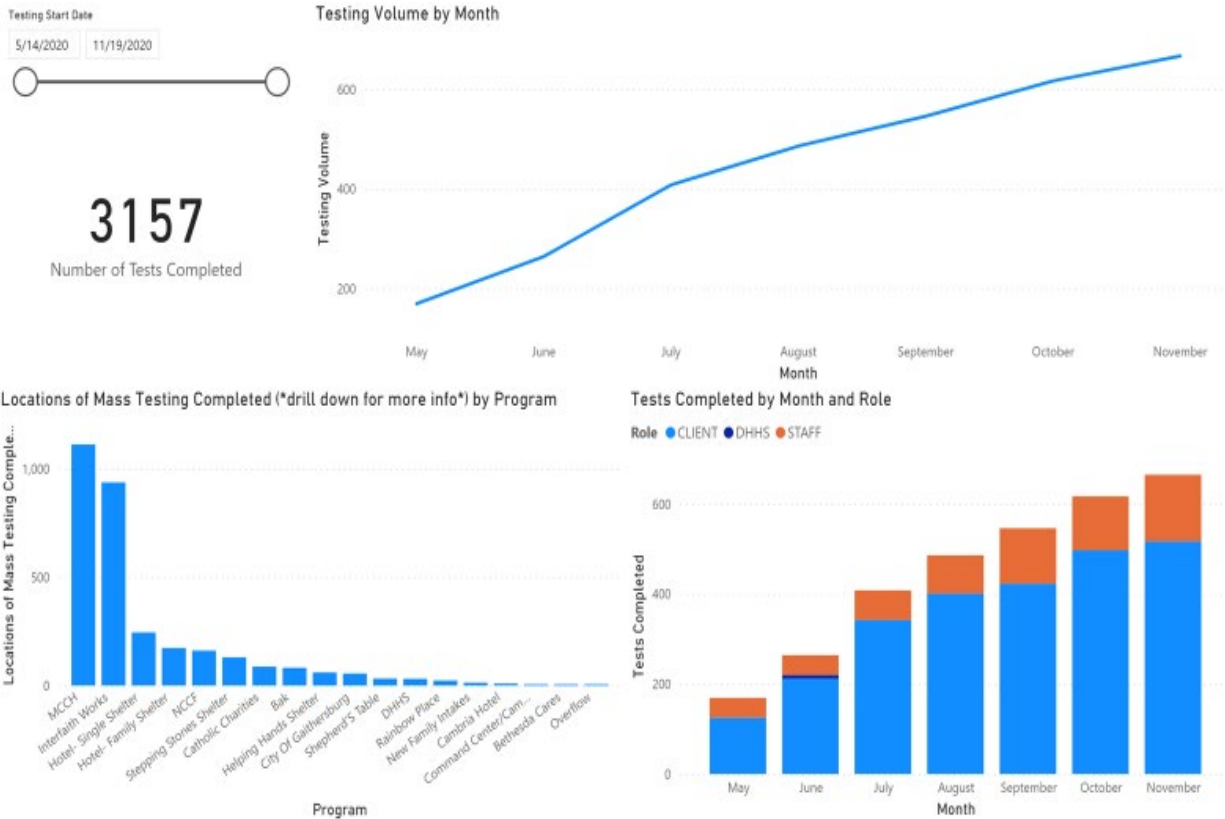
Protecting People in Shelters

In March 2020, Maryland Governor Larry Hogan declared a state of emergency in response to COVID-19. As of November 2020, more than 180,000 people have tested positive for COVID-19 in the state of Maryland with more than 31,000 positive cases within Montgomery County. COVID-19 is a novel respiratory virus that has resulted in millions of human infections, causing illness and death worldwide.

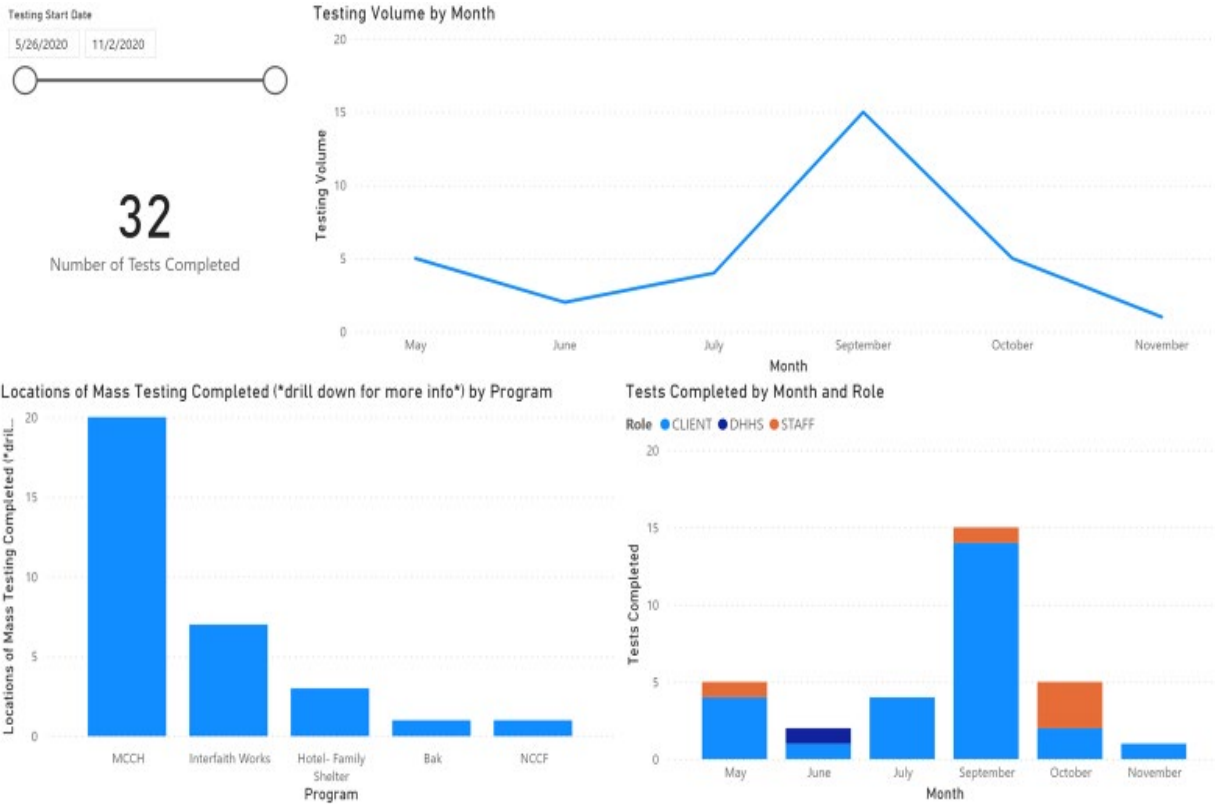
The Montgomery County CoC responded immediately to address the health and safety of people residing in our homeless emergency shelters by:

- Keeping seasonal overflow shelters open through the duration of the pandemic.
- Repurposing two closed recreational centers to serve as additional emergency shelter facilities. This move allowed us to meet the CDC social distancing recommendations.
- Placing individuals over age 62 and those with complex medical conditions in hotels with daily meal delivery, laundry services, and case management services.
- Secured 48 hotel rooms for isolation of individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19 or were exposed and advised to isolate.
- Regular screening for COVID-19 symptoms at the shelters and hotels and universal testing of all people in shelter and other congregate settings on a weekly and bi-monthly schedule.
- Remained open to new intakes and established quarantine locations within the shelters.

To date, the CoC in partnership with Public Health Services of the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services has conducted 3157 COVID-19 tests. The charts below delineate the testing volume by month, location, and status of person tested (staff vs. client). Note that the testing volume continues to increase in response to rising cases in the county and the country at large.



As of November 2020, the positivity rate with the homeless continuum remains relatively low at 1.3%. A total of 32 people have tested positive for COVID-19 through universal testing and another 26 individuals had tested positive prior to universal testing. This may include people in permanent housing programs or other congregate settings. A total of three people within the CoC have died of complications from COVID-19. The chart below delineates the number of positive cases by month, location, and status (staff or client).



Protecting People Sleeping Outside

Despite the increase in available shelter beds, a significant number of people chose to remain outdoors for a variety of reasons including fears about their safety in a congregate facility. At the beginning of the pandemic when many businesses, libraries and other public facilities were closed to the public, the CoC raised concerns about the lack of access to respite from the cold and an inability to secure food. The following steps were taken to mitigate these issues and protect individuals sleeping outside:

- Placed individuals at high risk for COVID complications in hotels with daily meal delivery, laundry, and case management services.
- Shepherd's Table transitioned to brunch and dinner to reduce the need to travel and extended hours to reduce the congregating of large groups
- Interfaith Works Empowerment Center is closed for new intakes. Shower trailers outside are available for anyone and funding provided for laundry in the community.
- Offered daily meal pick up in partnership with the City of Gaithersburg where there is no day program.
- Expanding medical services in partnership with outreach teams to screen individuals for COVID-19 symptoms and testing.

Preventing People from Becoming Homeless

Services to End and Prevent Homelessness has partnered with the Department of Housing and Community Affairs (DHCA) to develop a progressive engagement approach to eviction/homeless prevention. The first step in preventing eviction is offering housing counseling services and landlord mediation. Several nonprofit partners received funding through DHCA to conduct outreach and engagement to tenants with rent delinquency and facilitated repayment plan agreements. Despite our best efforts, some tenants will inevitably have court action taken against them for nonpayment of rent. For these tenants, legal assistance has been provided. Finally, for households most at risk of homelessness as a result of eviction, financial assistance is provided to tenants.

The pandemic has had a disproportionately impact on people of color with higher rates of COVID-19 infection and deaths as well as related job loss which exacerbates housing instability and risk of homelessness. Research from [Eviction Lab](#) at Princeton University shows that low-income women, especially poor women of color and families with children, have a high risk of eviction. In response to these inequities, DHHS used local data to create a [Homeless Prevention Index](#) to identify communities most at risk. The tool combines data on social determinants (rates of poverty, residents of color, and single parent households), COVID impact (positive cases and job loss), and housing stress (rates of low income renters, turnover, and overcrowding) to determine the census tracts within the county with the highest composite score. SEPH used this data to target outreach efforts to specific neighborhoods. For more information on the Homeless Prevention Index and CoC's efforts on eviction prevention, see [presentation](#) to HUD's Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs (SNAPS).

Protecting People Through Housing

The best way to keep people experiencing homelessness safe during a pandemic is to quickly connect them to permanent housing. Homelessness was a crisis before COVID-19 and the CoC continues to respond with a sense of urgency. Notably, the average housing placement rate increased by 45% between 2019 and 2020. The following actions has been taken to increase the number of people placed in housing and reduce the length of time homeless:

- Prioritized housing resources for those most at risk of COVID-19 complications
- Added Housing Location staff
- Dedicated the majority of new HUD Emergency Solutions Grant funding for Rapid Rehousing and employment services
- Provided first month's rent and security deposit for any household exiting homelessness
- Used CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Funds to rapidly exit more than 50 households by providing a short-term rental subsidy
- Developed a direct cash assistance program for adults exiting emergency shelter
- Suspended all terminations from CoC funded permanent housing programs

Supporting Our Partners

The effects of COVID-19 are widespread and have put a strain on homeless service providers in how they respond to the health and wellbeing of both the people they serve and their employees. The CoC took the following actions to better support our nonprofit partners:

- Provided cleaning supplies and PPE for shelter, outreach, and housing staff.
- Technical assistance from Health Care for the Homeless to implement CDC guidelines on emergency shelter protocols.
- Approved incentive/ hazard pay for shelter staff.
- Frequent communication with all partners to give updates, answer questions and collaboratively problem solve.
- Shared resources for private funding.

Community Outreach and Public Engagement

The ICH was involved in a variety of community outreach events to engage the public. Due to restrictions on public gatherings because of COVID-19, some planned events were postponed until 2021. Public engagement events in 2020 include the following:

- The eighth Nadim Khan Memorial Homeless Resource Day was held in November 2019. Homeless Resource Day is a one-day, one-stop opportunity for individuals and families experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness to access services, resources, and information. More than 300 volunteers and over 400 guests attended the event.
- Launched the new Strategic Plan to End Homelessness to the community in January 2020.
- Representatives of the ICH engaged a variety of stakeholder groups by providing education on issues surrounding homelessness. These groups include the Montgomery Cares Advisory Board, Commission on People with Disabilities, funding collaboratives, civic associations, Renter's Alliance, Food Security Task Force and Food Council, Nonprofit Montgomery, state Joint Committee on Ending Homelessness and many others.



Services to End and Prevent Homelessness Staff accessing Homeless Resource Day Guests for services

Data and Trends Regarding Homelessness in Montgomery County

Point-In-Time Count

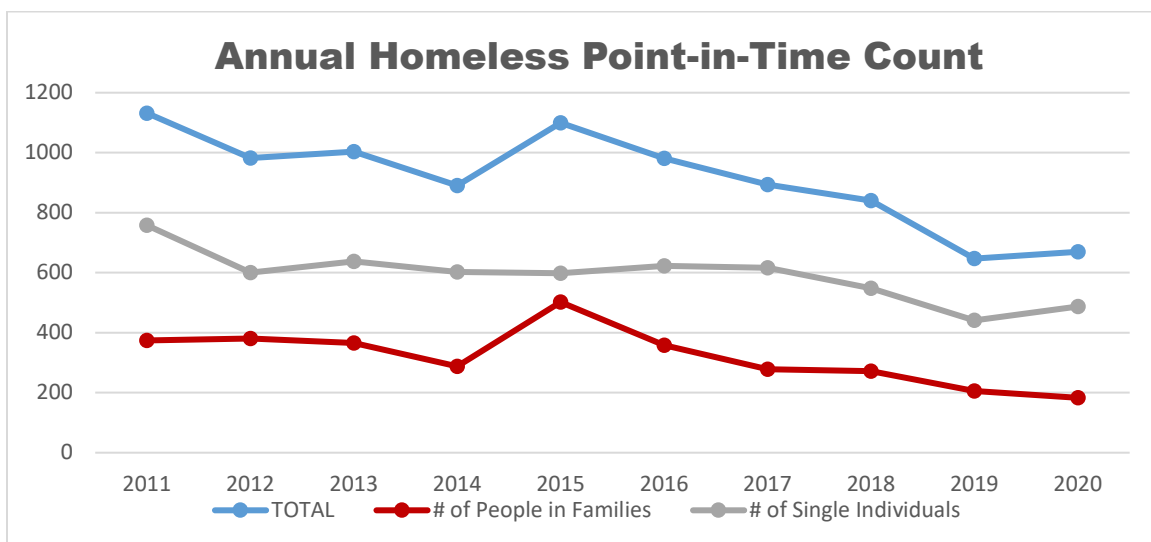
Montgomery County’s homeless point in time survey was conducted on January 22, 2020. A total of 670 homeless persons were counted that day, an increase of 4% from 2019 and a decrease of 20% from 2018 count. Although there was an increase this year, the declining trend in homelessness over the last two years can be attributed to a population specific approach that seeks to connect households who become homeless to the most appropriate housing intervention, targeting prevention resources to those most likely to become homeless and engaging in homeless diversion or rapid exit from shelter for those households newly entering the system.



Point in time volunteers engaging an individual experiencing homelessness during the 2020 PIT Count.

Households without children experienced a 10% increase in 2020 from 441 in 2019 to 487 in 2020. There was an increase of 37% in the number of unsheltered, 75 in 2019 compared to 103 in 2020. This is still a decrease of 23% from the 2018 enumeration. In addition to the annual enumeration Montgomery County plans to conduct quarterly “head counts” of unsheltered persons to identify, engage, and track those experiencing street homelessness. The number of unsheltered individuals is trending upwards specifically in the more urban centers in the county.

The chart below provides a comparison of the past 10 years.



The number of households with children headed by transition age youth (18-24 years old) decreased 36% from 11 in 2018 to 7 during the 2020 enumeration. In July 2018, the CoC began implementing homeless diversion for families with children. Trends over the last two years suggest that nearly 2/3 of all households seeking shelter can resolve their housing crisis without needed emergency shelter. If the trend continues, the CoC will attribute the decline in transition age youth headed households with children to this change in practice. The number of unaccompanied transition age youth increased in 2020 to 31 (55%) from 2019. This increase is likely due to increased outreach and engagement with providers serving youth including a network of peer outreach workers.

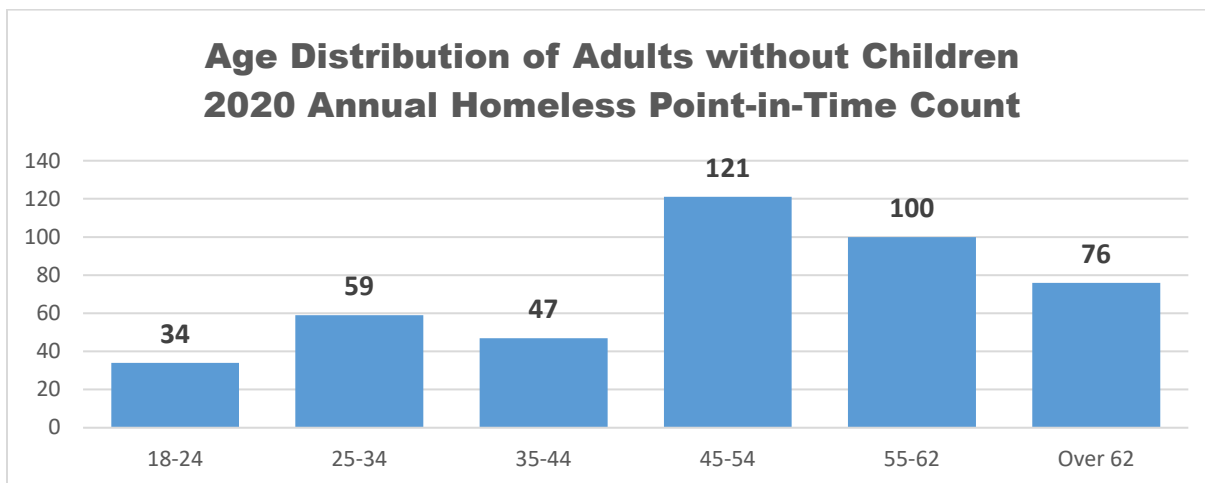
Income and Employment

Among all household types without children including those who are unsheltered, veterans, and transition age youth, 201 or 41% reported some type of monthly income. This is a decrease from 51% in 2019 and 50% in 2018. However, of those reporting monthly income 49% reported income from employment compared to 41% percent in 2019. The CoC has recognized the need to support homeless persons in obtaining eligible benefits. A total of 42% percent reported income from Social Security Retirement, Social Security or Veteran Disability, and/or Temporary Disability Assistance Program as their primary source of income. Montgomery County supports Housing First philosophy and though income is not required for permanent supportive housing or rapid rehousing, the CoC has made a concerted effort to connect homeless persons with vocational and employment supportive services. Additionally, emergency shelter staff are more focused on addressing the immediate barriers to housing such as income in their efforts to help individuals rapidly exit.

Among households with children including veterans and transition age youth, the number of adults reporting monthly income was 47 (26%) which decreased from 74% in 2019. In addition, 26 (55%) reported income from employment, which is an increase over the 2018 which was 39%. This likely can be attributed to the CoC's effort to increase housing interventions for families like rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing. Work force development has been identified as a gap in the CoC and must continue to be a priority for all household types. Employment specialist and vocational services are incorporated into Rapid Re-housing and permanent supportive housing contracts. The other primary source of income for households with families included Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Social Security Retirement, Social Security Disability / Survivor benefits which accounted for the income of 40% of this cohort.

Subpopulations

There continues to be an increasing number of older adults entering the homeless system. More than half (61%) of all adults without children are over 45 years old, 36% are over 55, and 17%, representing a 21% increase from 2019, are 62 years or older. Research states that people experiencing homelessness die an average of 30 years younger than the average person in the United States. This means that individuals with a history of homelessness age at an increased rate, so those 45 years old may have similar health issues as someone in their 70s.



Over the past three years, the number of persons fleeing domestic violence has decreased. This year there was a 54% decrease in the 2020 enumeration from 26 adults in 2019 to only 12 in 2020 and an 85% decrease from 83 in 2018. The percent of adults reporting a history of domestic violence decreased by 76% since 2018. The CoC cannot attribute the changes to any specific reasons. The CoC continues to prioritize the limited scattered site transitional housing for DV households with minor children and undocumented households.

The number of persons experiencing chronic homelessness decreased by 92% from the 2018 enumeration. This decrease directly correlates to the efforts of the Inside (not Outside) initiative to end chronic homelessness.

For more information on the PIT Count in Montgomery County and the Washington metro region, see the full [report](#).

Housing Inventory

Emergency Shelter

The Montgomery County Homeless Continuum of Care (CoC) and Services to End and Prevent (SEPH) have rapidly and strategically responded to COVID-19 to prevent the spread amongst our sheltered homeless population. In an effort to adhere to guidelines established by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), we quickly moved older and medically vulnerable individuals from shelter or the streets into rented hotel space. The winter overflow shelter, originally scheduled to close on March 31, 2020 reducing the shelter capacity by hundreds, remains open. Two additional shelter facilities have been stood up by making use of closed recreation centers to allow for social distancing and spacing of beds. These efforts have significantly paid off as evidenced by a less than 2% positivity rate in our single adult shelters. To continue to keep people safe from COVID-19, influenza, and other future viruses, we need to maintain social distancing in all congregate shelter facilities which requires significantly reducing the bed capacity at each facility.

With the addition of the temporary use the recreational centers and 6 Taft Court, the CoC have been able to maintain pre-COVID level shelter bed capacity. The City of Rockville has permitted the continued use of 6 Taft Court through April 2021. At this point, there is no stated exit date from the recreational centers, but the CoC is aware that this is not a permanent solution. At the advice of local public health officials, the CoC must maintain social distancing in all facilities, greatly reducing the bed capacity in the existing facilities of 2 Taft Court and Crabbs Branch. In total, the CoC shelter bed capacity has gone from 390 beds to 93 permanent beds.

To further complicate the matter, the CoC was facing a loss of bed capacity before the onset of the coronavirus. In May 2019, the location of the main men’s shelter at 600 East Gude Drive was compromised due to environmental issues. The facility was evacuated and is no longer a viable location for an emergency shelter. This facility previously had the capacity to serve up to 145 people.

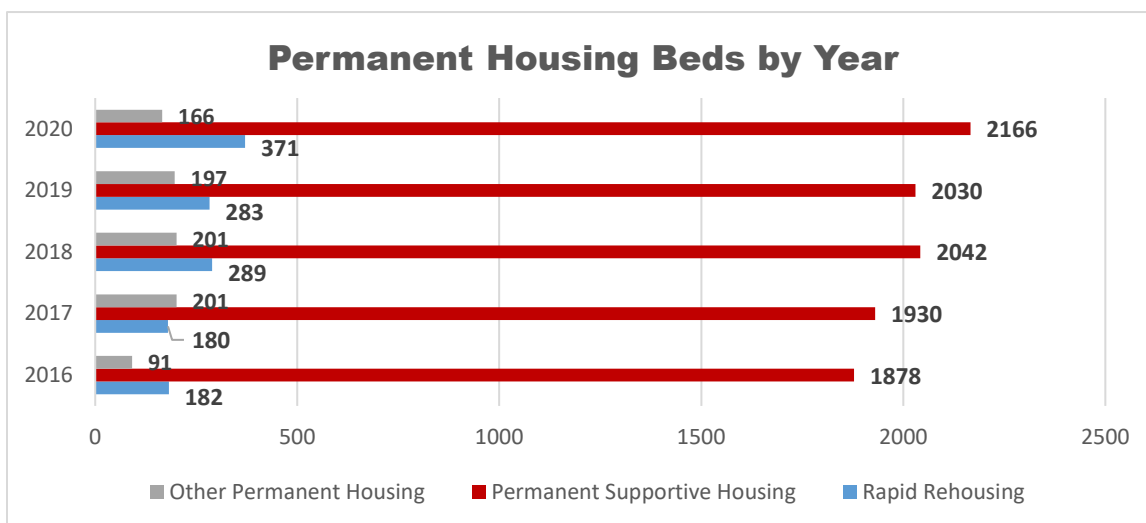
The chart below describes the deficit in shelter beds based on the need for proper bed spacing. The highlighted facilities show an unknown capacity. Rainbow Shelter cannot operate in its existing facility without approval from the site owner and the city of Rockville. We do not know the full extent to which hotels will remain necessary to serve highly individuals at high risk of COVID complications but we estimate the need to continue the use of rented hotel space for a percent of the population.

Facility	Male/ Female	Pre-COVID Capacity	COVID Capacity	Temporary	Known Post- COVID Capacity	GAP
Sprung/ Crabbs Branch	M	100	38	N	38	62
6 Taft Court	M	100	60	Y	0	100
2 Taft Court	F	70	28	N	28	42
Rainbow	F	28	12		12	16
Progress Place	M/F	80	30	N	30	50
Long Branch Rec Center	M	0	80	Y	0	0
Coffield Rec Center	W	0	50	Y	0	0
Hotels	M/F	0	100	Y	0	0
ALL Facilities		378	386		108	270

Permanent Housing

From 2016 to 2020, the number of permanent housing beds in Montgomery County has increased by 26% from 2151 to 2703 as reported in January 2020 HUD Housing Inventory Count. See chart below for more details. The most significant increase of 104% has been the number of rapid rehousing beds from 182 in 2016 to 371 in 2020. The number of permanent supportive housing beds has also increased by 15% since 2016. The CoC seeks to provide access to housing to all people experiencing homelessness. This requires creativity and an ability to leverage federal and state resources. Montgomery County continues to receive funding from the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development for rapid rehousing and hopes to increase the amount in future years. The CoC is also leveraging

Medicaid funding for supportive services and has added 20 new slots to the Maryland Department of Health Assistance in Community Integration Services pilot as part of the Housing Initiative Program, a Housing First permanent supportive housing program. Additionally, the Housing Opportunities Commission, the local public housing authority, was awarded 99 new non-elderly disabled vouchers resulting in 26 known homeless households being selected to receive a housing voucher.

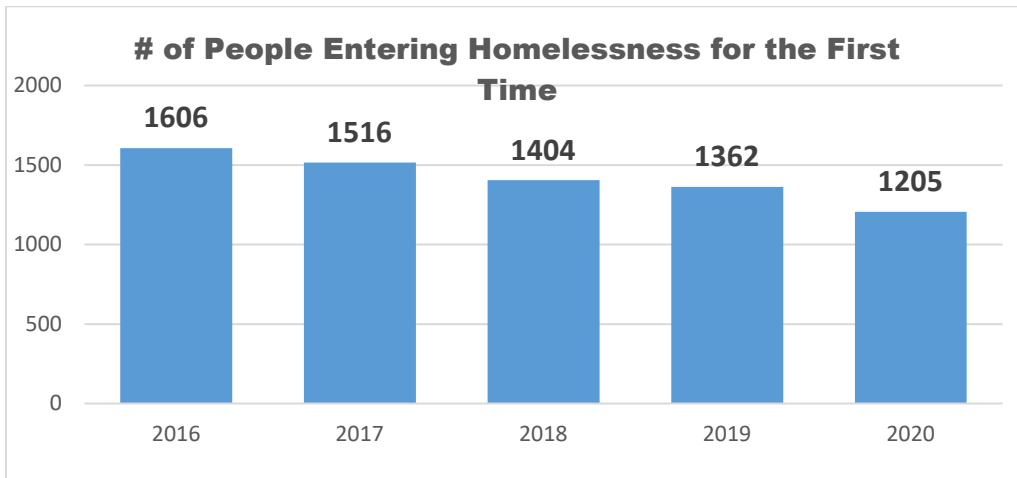


In response to COVID-19, the federal and local governments have invested significant resources toward homeless and housing services. Montgomery County is capitalizing on this opportunity by allocating the majority of the new HUD Emergency Solutions Grant- COVID to Rapid Rehousing, adding 300 units over the next two years. Local dollars in combination with CARES Act funding has been appropriated by the County Council to provide 14 new units of Permanent Supportive Housing. Finally, the Housing Opportunities Commission has applied for 99 new permanent housing vouchers and is working with the CoC to allocate at least a portion to households experiencing homelessness.

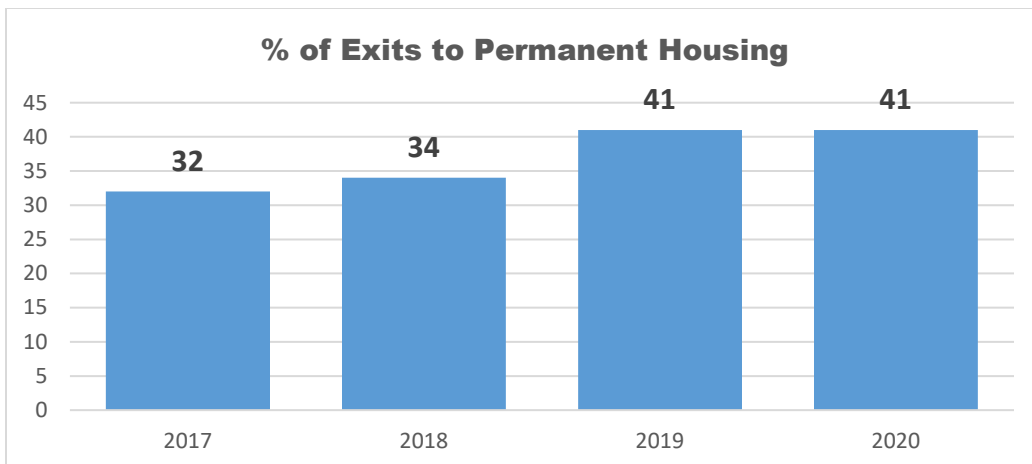
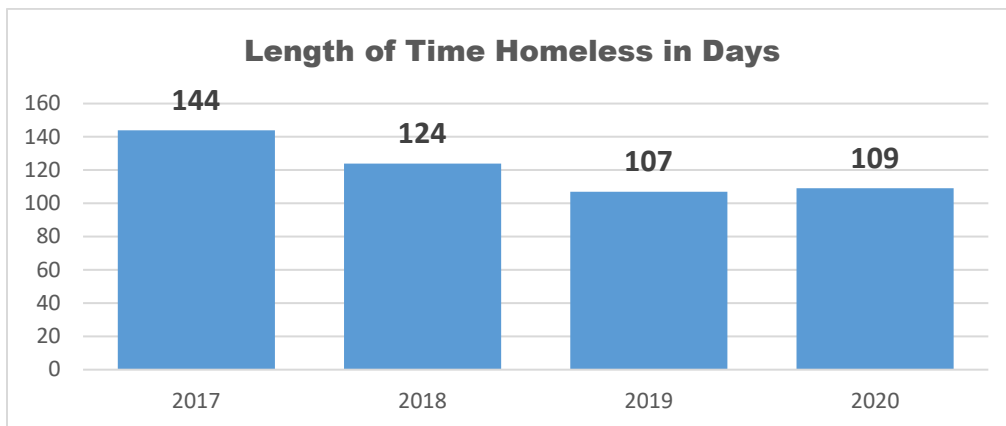
System Performance

Recognizing the limitations of the PIT Count, the CoC also measures success by monitoring overall system performance. All measures are put in the context of making homelessness a rare, brief, and one-time only experience. Data is collected and reported to HUD annually based on the federal fiscal year. Despite the impact of the pandemic, the CoC has largely maintained the gains made over the past few years and has improved in reducing the number of households experiencing homelessness for the first time.

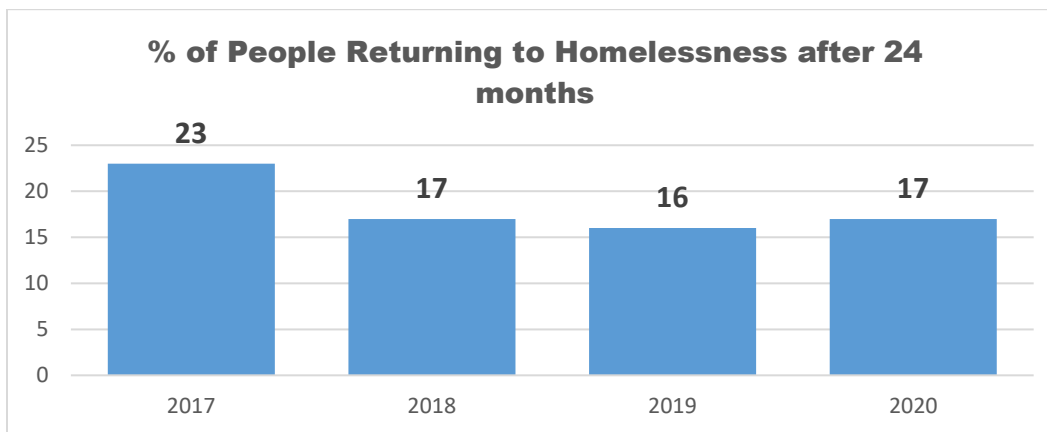
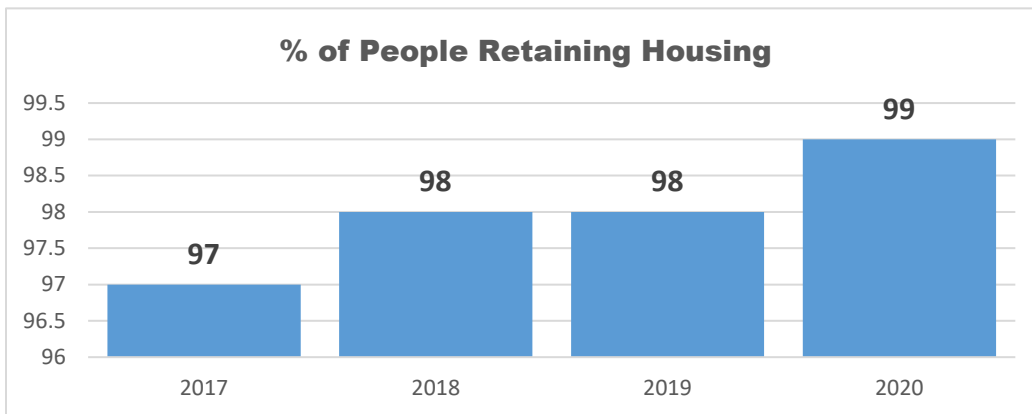
Making homelessness RARE



Making homelessness BRIEF



Making homelessness One-time only



Gaps in the Continuum of Care

The Montgomery County CoC has developed a diverse range of services to end and prevent homelessness in the County, yet gaps remain. Many of the gaps identified have either been a direct result of the pandemic or been exacerbated by COVID-19. These include:

- **Lack of emergency shelter for single adults:** As previously mentioned, the CoC has identified the need to increase the number of year-round emergency shelter beds from 140 to 350. In order to adhere to CDC guidelines on social distancing and bed spacing, the CoC needs additional facilities and operating costs to support an increase of 200 year-round shelter beds.
- **Insufficient care coordination with other systems of care:** The CoC serves many households with significant behavioral and physical health challenges in permanent housing programs. In order to ensure housing stability, individuals need to receive community-based health services including Assertive Community Treatment, crisis

services, and home health care. As a result of the pandemic, other systems of care have shifted to primarily telehealth services. Individuals in permanent housing do not have adequate technology or capacity to be successful with telehealth services only.

- **Dearth of affordable housing for extremely low-income homeless individuals and families** (i.e. households at or below 30% of the area medium income).
- **Lack of adequate permanent supportive housing programs** equipped to provide intensive support services to those who do not meet the definition of chronic homelessness (individuals with serious mental illness, chronic substance use, and/or co-occurring disorders). Based on current data, the CoC would need to increase the number of permanent supportive housing units by 50 to meet the need.
- **Lack of adequate Rapid Re-housing units and employment services for individuals and families.** Based on current data, the CoC would need to increase the number of Rapid Re-housing units by 200 to meet the need.
- **Lack of access to employment services and job opportunities for persons experiencing homelessness.**

Funding Recommendations

In support of the CoC's Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness, the ICH recommends the following:

- Increasing the supply by funding the development of deeply affordable housing to extremely low-income families (those below 30% of area median income) who do not have high service needs.
- Provide \$4 million in funding for the County Rental Assistance Program to allow an increase in the maximum rental subsidy amount that is equal to 25% of Fair Market Rent.
- Provide \$2.4 million in funding to increase Rapid Re-housing by 200 units to better serve households that are currently employed or employable.
- Increasing the capacity of the CoC to develop a robust CES that is aligned with HUD policy by funding additional street outreach workers and coordinated entry staff to conduct assessment and data analysis.
- Provide \$1.5 million in funding for 60 units of permanent supportive housing to meet the needs of vulnerable adults to sustain the success of the ***Inside (not Outside)*** Initiative on ending chronic homelessness.

Legislative or Regulatory Changes Requested

The ICH recommends stronger fair housing policy and legislation that protects individuals and families experiencing or at risk of homelessness against discrimination based on criminal history, bad credit and poor rental history. Montgomery County has made great strides in promoting equity in housing by protecting against discrimination based on source of income but people are still denied housing based on poor credit, criminal backgrounds, and poor rental history which are all exacerbated by structural racism. Unfortunately, the route to investigate these denials is too cumbersome for many individuals. By limiting a landlord or property manager's ability to automatically deny applicants, we can begin to address the significant disparities Black households experience in obtaining and sustaining permanent housing as evidenced by the high rates of Black people (60%) in the homeless continuum.

- Enact "ban the box" legislation
- Support "just cause" eviction legislation at the state level
- Advocate that HOC review eligibility criteria on criminal backgrounds and rental history
- Develop an independent pathway to investigate housing discrimination and illegal practices at housing complexes that is not client driven

To increase the availability of affordable housing, the ICH encourages the commitment of dedicated, set aside units or a local homeless preference in multifamily housing developments using federal, state, or local financing and public housing authorities.

The ICH supports the changes to the Rental Assistance Program recommended by the Department of Health and Human Services to better target limited resources and to more effectively serve people at risk of or experiencing homelessness, particularly seniors and people with disabilities.

Over the past year, the CoC has been successfully implementing a CES that ensures fair and equal access to housing and services that are prioritized based on need. To ensure continued commitment to CES by all housing and homeless providers including the local public housing authority, the ICH encourages the County Council and the County Executive to codify in law participation in coordinated entry.

Conclusion

The Montgomery County CoC's goal is to end homelessness for all individuals in our community by making homelessness a rare, brief, and one-time only experience. Although government resources have been strained over the past few years, the County has continued its commitment to end and prevent homelessness through strategic investment in critical resources. Such strategic investment produced a more effective system that ultimately succeeded in ending Veteran homelessness, effectively ending chronic homelessness, and

making significant progress on ending family homelessness in spite of the impact of COVID-19. To sustain these gains, improve overall system performance, and mitigate the likely rise in homelessness, additional targeted funding will likely be needed to produce similar results for youth and seniors. The ICH is confident that the CoC is operating efficiently and is equipped to serve the County's most vulnerable residents with continued support.