Interagency Commission on Homelessness

2021 ANNUAL REPORT

Housing for All
=
A Stronger Montgomery

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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 Plan

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 plan consists of six primary 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, and Educate and Advocate for Change. Below are updates on the implementation of the plan.

Strategy 1: Reduce Racial Disparities Across the System

The Racial Disparities Work Group of the ICH has done extensive work on addressing the inequities in the homeless continuum. This work has advanced beyond simply exploring how people of color

are represented in homelessness to better understand how race and ethnicity impact outcomes.
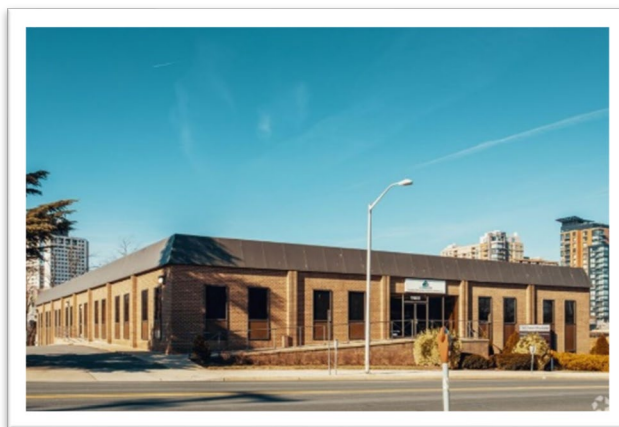
- The CoC has partnered with CSH to use their Racial Disparities and Disproportionality Index ("RDDI") to gain insight into the unique disparities in the Montgomery County homeless continuum. The RDDI compares the likelihood of one group experiencing an event to the likelihood of another group experiencing the same event. Their research tells us that Black African American households without children are 5.66 more likely to experience homelessness and Black households with children are 11.7 times more likely to experience homelessness. Once in the system, they are more likely to receive Rapid Rehousing than other groups. Additionally, White Hispanic/ Latino individuals are more likely to exit *to* permanent destinations, but also more likely to return to homelessness *from* permanent destinations. These findings led the group to act by partnering with a local nonprofit, Identity, serving the Latino community to conduct qualitative analysis through focus groups with this group who have experienced homelessness in the county. A full report of these efforts is expected to be released in 2022.

- In recent years, research on the Vulnerability Index- Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT) has shown bias in the tool. Montgomery County continues to use the VI-SPDAT in combination with a locally developed assessment tool called the Acuity Scale. The CoC has partnered with Evident Change to analyze the use of these tools and their specific indicators to determine if gender or racial bias exist. The analysis is expected to be completed in the next year.

Strategy 2: Build and Support Strong and Adaptable Programs

Much of the work over the last year has focused on Strategy 2. While some of the progress on the various priorities of this strategy are described in later sections of the report, below are some additional highlights.

Emergency Shelter for Single Individuals

The pandemic has forced us to take a different approach to sheltering people to maintain the health and safety of the residents. Under the guidance from Public Health officials, a decision was made to permanently expand year-round shelter capacity for single adults to 350 beds while maintaining proper distancing and bed spacing. The current shelter facilities were inadequate to meet this new requirement. Using local and federal COVID funding, the County has purchased a new building to act as the new men's emergency shelter. The Nebel Street Homeless Shelter pictured here is expected to open in early 2022 and will serve 200 men experiencing homelessness. See here for the most up to date progress report on the shelter project.

The opening of a new shelter created an opportunity to review the existing shelter contracts to ensure they are aligned with best practices. The People's Committee of the ICH did much of the heavy lifting reviewing all single adult emergency shelter contracts and making recommendations for revision. The People's Committee presented the recommendation to shelter providers and the group is working jointly to improve the shelter experience.

Centralized Intake and Homeless Diversion for Households without Children

Building on the success of the family homeless diversion program, the CoC implemented a similar approach for single adults this year. Using private funding from Community Solutions and Kaiser Permanente, Services to End and Prevent Homelessness (SEPH) hired two diversion specialists and created a flexible pool of funds to help people seeking emergency shelter resolve their housing emergency. SEPH also redeployed a social work position from eviction prevention to serve as the Lead Diversion Specialist. This team has responded to more than 500 households seeking shelter during office hours. Collectively the single and family diversion teams have provided more than $300,000 in diversion grants. Despite the 16% increase in the annual number of single adults served in the homeless continuum, the program has been a success. At the beginning of the pandemic, experts were estimating an increase in homelessness of 40-45%. While diversion efforts have demonstrated positive outcomes, the success is hampered by the lack of capacity to provide 24/7 diversion coverage. Many individuals are going directly to shelter to receive services as there is no centralized shelter intake process. The goal is to secure additional funding to fully implement the program.

Youth Homelessness

The ICH Youth Work Group has taken the following actions to advance the work of ending and preventing youth homelessness in Montgomery County.

- Connected with True Colors Fund to review their state index on youth homelessness including Maryland's rank and scorecard detailing our current laws and policies. Compared MD states policies, and those of neighboring jurisdictions identifying opportunities for growth as well as recommendations for Montgomery County specific policies.

- Developed the beginning stages of Montgomery County Youth Coordinated Entry System by gathering current housing service providers, County contract monitors, drop in programming support system, and Montgomery County Public Schools representatives to discuss current housing openings, client needs, and future planning.

- Worked with Montgomery County Collaboration Council on opening the MoCo Reconnect Youth Drop-In Center. Group has been instrumental in working to bring multiple partner groups to the table as Collaboration Council plans center programming revolving around the needs that are outlined by the Youth Action Board.

- Established the Youth Action Board to ensure the youth voice is centered and on display in several County events and projects including Homeless Memorial Day and MWCOG Racial Equity focus groups gauging the experience of folks with lived experience around the County.

- Finally, the group has worked with the ICH Communications Committee to work on strategies and the development of Campaign to End Youth Homelessness.

Increasing Employment Opportunities

The ICH formed an Employment Work Group focused on ensuring there is specific employment and technical training opportunities for people currently experiencing homelessness as well as those currently housed. Strategies of the group include the following:

- Messaging for employers to accommodate the gaps that exist on the resumes of people with lived experience.

- Intentional recruitment of employers in fields that are used to providing on the job training.

- Incorporate the voices and experiences of people with lived experience in relaying the

employment needs to employers and employments support services around the County.

- Survey CoC participants to identify their employment needs and employment service providers to determine what programming for people experiencing homelessness currently exists.

Strategy 3: Build and Support Affordable Housing

Services to End and Prevent Homelessness partnered with the Department of Housing and Community Affairs to create a Landlord Risk Mitigation Fund using private dollars from Community Solutions. This fund acts as insurance for landlords who choose to rent to households in the County's rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing programs. This program has led to an increase in the number of landlords participating in the CoC.

Strategy 4: Coordinate Effectively Across Other Systems of Care

Increasing Access to Medical Care

Services to End and Prevent Homeless (SEPH) secured funding from the state Department of Housing and Community Development to enhance shelter and outreach services. This funding was used to expand the existing contract with Kelly Collaborative to increase access to primary care for people experiencing homelessness. Over the last year, encounters with primary care increased by 55%.

For the last five years, SEPH has been working with Nexus Montgomery, a partnership among the six hospitals in Montgomery County and other stakeholders to create a Medical Respite Program. The Medical Respite Program of Montgomery County is designed to serve single adults whose medical needs cannot be addressed in congregate shelter but are not significant enough to warrant a hospital stay. Onsite medical care and housing support will be offered to 12 males and 8 females. The program will begin accepting referrals on January 3, 2022.

Increasing Access to Behavioral Health Services

SEPH also used state funding to increase access to behavioral health services including adding Peer Support to shelters and contracting with a local psychiatrist to provide medication management and therapy to people experiencing homelessness. With many traditional providers shifting to telehealth only, the CoC recognized the need to bring face to face behavioral health services to the streets and in emergency shelter.

The CoC, namely the Systems Coordination Committee, has spent the last year improving the partnership with the Behavioral Health and Crisis Services division of the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services with the goal of increasing access to care. This includes working with the Local Behavioral Health Authority to coordinate discharges of people experiencing homelessness from hospitals, residential rehab programs, and substance use treatment facilities; working in tandem with the new Mobile Crisis Outreach Teams to better serve the unhoused population when they are experiencing a psychiatric emergency; and coordinating advocacy efforts to improve the state involuntary commitment process and legislation.

Improving Regional Collaboration

Montgomery County is executing on the regional data sharing agreement with Prince George's County and the District of Columbia. The three coordinated entry teams of the three jurisdictions are meeting regularly to review each other's By-Name List of people experiencing homelessness to ensure there is no duplication of services and that no one falls through the cracks.

Initiatives

The work over the past year has been focused on the three current initiatives that are part of the *"Housing for All"* campaign:
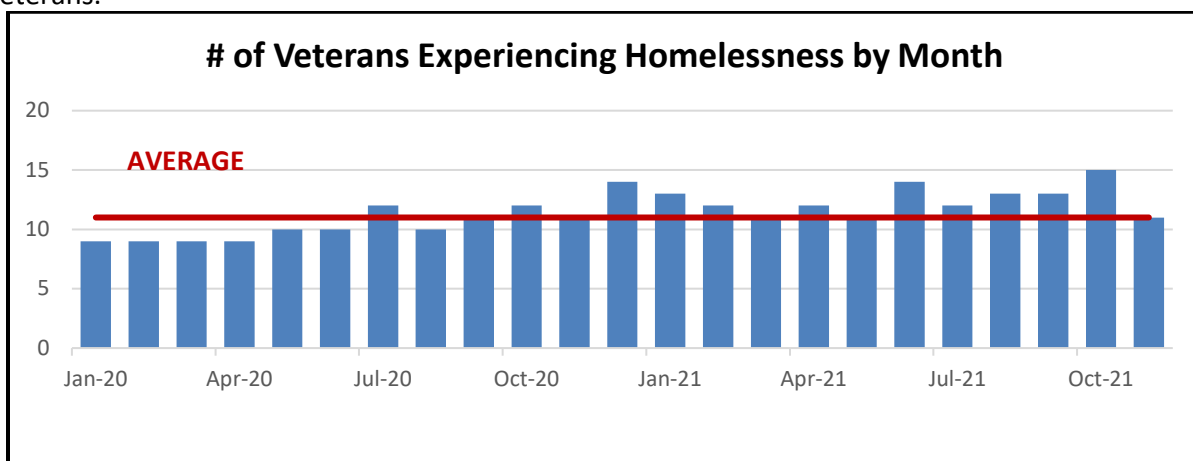
- "Zero:2016" – Veterans Homelessness
- "Inside (Not Outside)" – Chronic Homelessness
- "At Home Together" – Family Homelessness

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.

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. At this time, "functional zero" was defined as having no more than six Veterans experiencing homelessness at any given time. For the last two years, the average number of Veterans experiencing homelessness each month has increased to eleven. For more than half of the reporting period, the number of unhoused Veterans has remained below the average. The focus continues on prioritizing Veterans for permanent housing placements and moving as quickly as possible to end their homelessness. Since January 2015, we have ended homelessness for 219 Veterans.
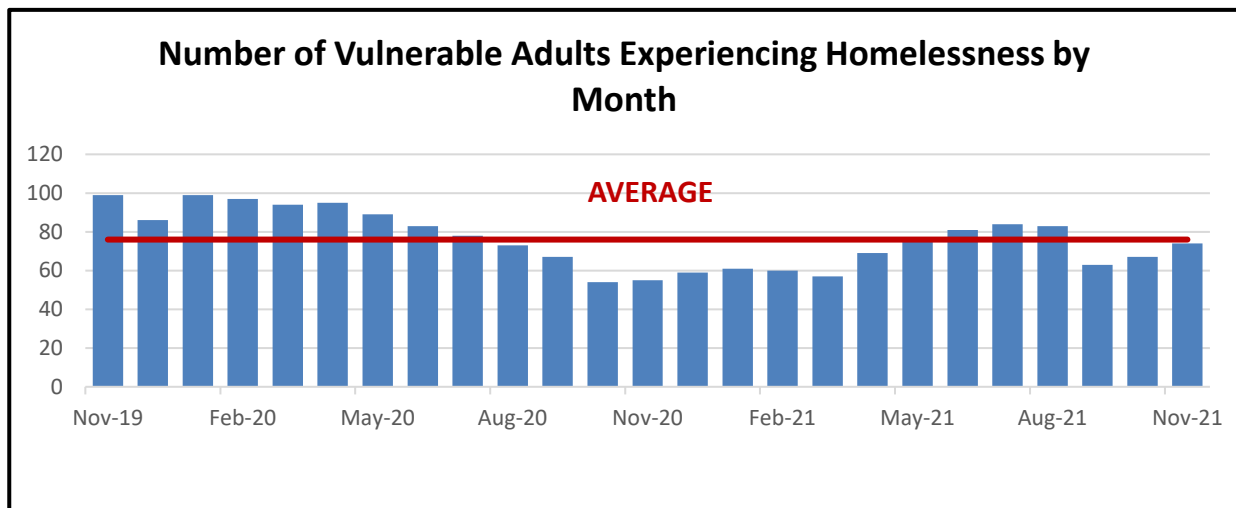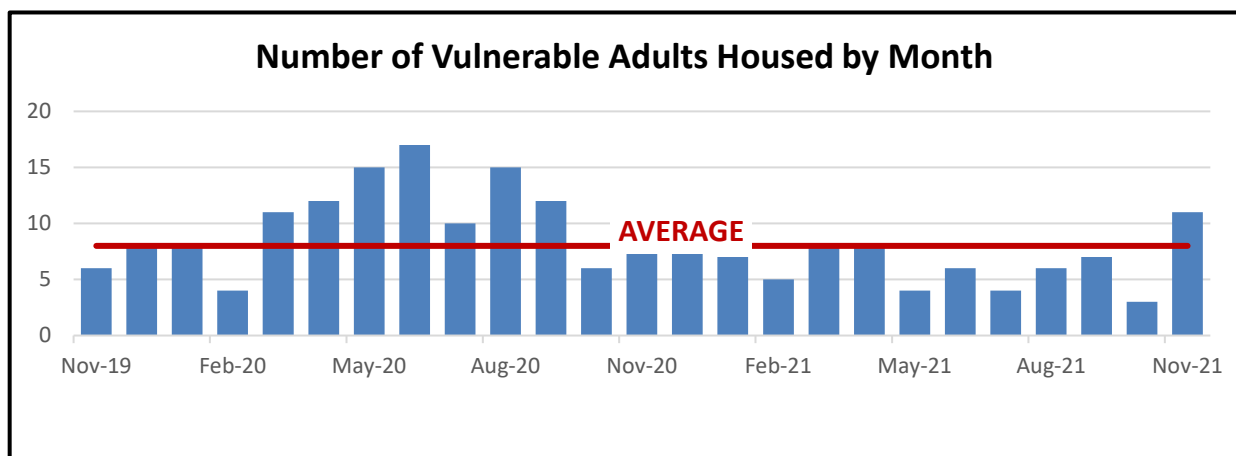

# of Veterans Experiencing Homelessness by Month

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, more than 430 people have been housed through this initiative.

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. To most effectively allocate resources, the Coordinated Entry System now prioritizes all vulnerable adults for permanent supportive housing. In the last two years, we have ended homelessness for 209 vulnerable adults.
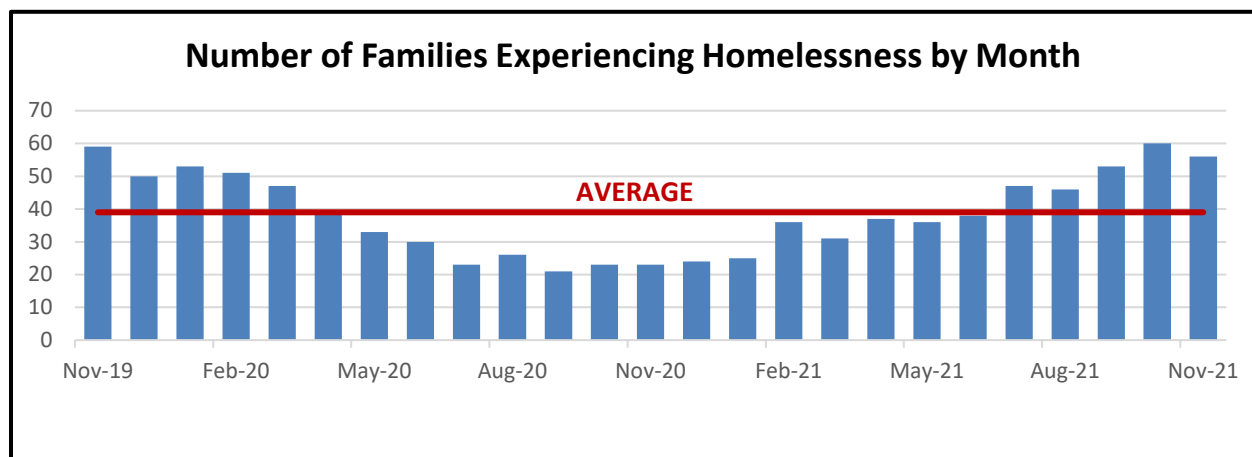
The charts below detail the census of unhoused vulnerable adults by month and the number of placements in permanent supportive housing. Of note, in 2020, the monthly census of vulnerable adults has been below the average of 76. This may be attributable to an increase in housing resources for both permanent supportive housing and rapid rehousing. By ensuring all people experiencing homelessness have housing options available to them, individuals are not lingering in shelter or on the street where their level of vulnerability is likely to increase the longer, they remain unhoused.
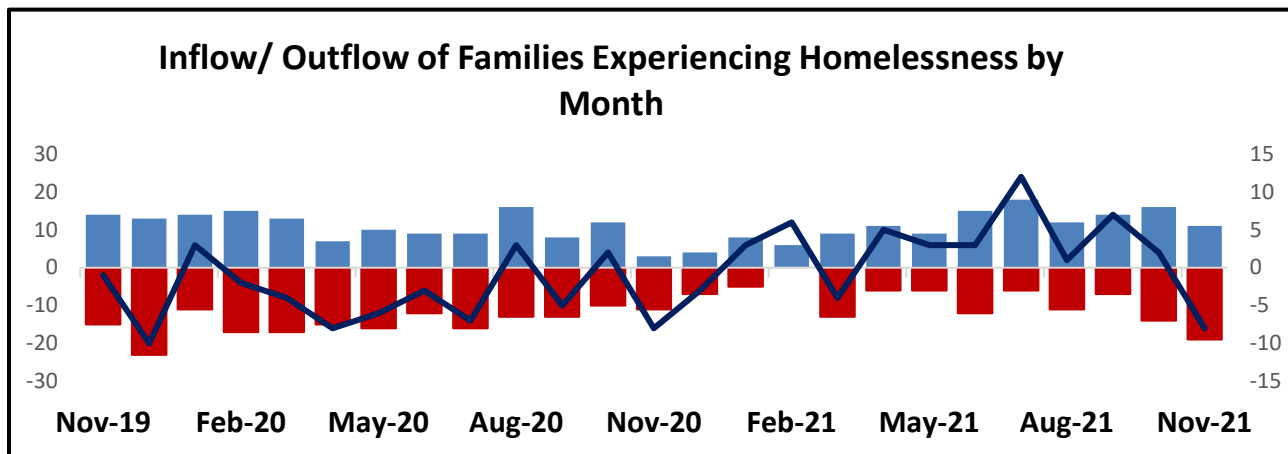
Number of Vulnerable Adults Housed by Month

Number of Vulnerable Adults Experiencing Homelessness by Month

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 several indicators including inflow vs. outflow rates per month, the length of time a family experiences homelessness, number of familiesentering homelessness for the first time, and the rate of returns to homelessness for families with children. The goal is to ensure that the average number of families entering homelessness each month is less than the average number of families exiting homelessness.

As detailed in the monthly census chart below, the number of families experiencing homelessness significantly decreased in early 2020. The low census coincides with the beginning of the pandemic as well as state and federal eviction moratoriums. In recent months, the number of families entering homelessness has begun to increase likely due to the end of eviction protections. Additionally, the staff of Services to End and Prevent Homelessness who normally are responsible for family shelter intake and homeless diversion were pulled to focus on implementing the large-scale federal rental assistance program. The COVID Rent Relief Program funded through the Department of Treasury required communities to spend at least 65% of their funding by September 30, 2021, or risk losing funding through reallocation. Montgomery County achieved the spending target, but this may have jeopardizing other homeless programs.

The following chart details the rate of inflow and outflow inthe family homeless system. Between November 2019 and November 2021, the average monthly inflow of families into homelessness was equal to the number of families exiting to permanent housing. Nonetheless the number of housing placements for families decreased in 2021 while the number of families entering increased. The slow pace of housing placements is not due to a lack of resources, as families are assigned a housing placement within 30 days or less but securing a unit has gotten difficult due to extremely low vacancy rates in the county.

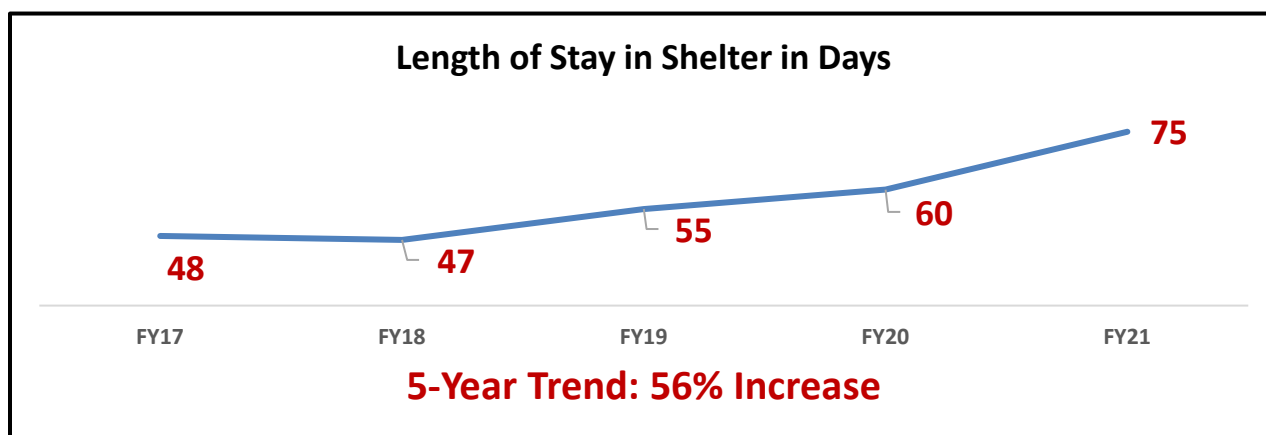## Inflow/ Outflow of Families Experiencing Homelessness by Month

Despite improvements over the last five years in reducing the number of families experiencing homelessness for the first time by 55% and decreasing the percent of families returning to homelessness by 17%, there has been an increase in the length of time families experience homeless, and rate of returns to homelessness are trending upwards. As speculated last year, the families we are unable to assist through shelter diversion or emergency eviction prevention tend to have a greater acuity of needs and housing barriers making it more challenging to secure a housing unit even when permanent supportive housing and rapid rehousing resources are available.

Making Homelessness for Families RARE

of People in Families Entering Homelessness for the First Time

FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21
801	776	449	454	359

5-Year Trend: 55% Decrease

Making Homelessness for Families BRIEF

Length of Stay in Shelter in Days

FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21
48	47	55	60	75

5-Year Trend: 56% Increase

% of Families Returning to Homelessness after 24 Months

29%	12%	13%	21%	24%
FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21

5-Year Trend: 17% Decrease

CoC Response to COVID-19

Protecting People Through Vaccination

While weekly testing efforts continue in all congregate facilities including emergency shelter, transitional housing, and single-site permanent supportive housing, the CoC has shifted the focus on vaccinations. In partnership with Montgomery County Public Health Services, Services to End and Prevent Homelessness (SEPH) has been offering vaccine clinics at the four largest shelters on a biweekly basis. To incentivize people to accept the vaccine, SEPH has conducted a vaccine lottery. All people vaccinated in emergency shelter are entered into a biweekly $100 raffle and all vaccinated people in the CoC including those unsheltered are entered in a monthly $500 raffle.

While these efforts have shown modest success, increasing the vaccination rate in emergency shelter from 10% to 30%, more work needs to be done. Beginning in early 2022, anyone in a congregate facility willing to get a first, second, or third dose will be given a cash incentive. Vaccination rates are the highest among older males.

Preventing People from Becoming Homeless

Like other jurisdictions across the country, Montgomery County Services to End and Prevent Homelessness (SEPH) received millions of dollars for emergency rental assistance from federal, state, and local resources. To date, Montgomery County has allocated more than $100 million to prevent evictions and homelessness through the COVID Rent Relief Program (CRRP). SEPH 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 repaymentplan agreements. Despite our best efforts, some tenants will inevitably have court action takenagainst them for nonpayment of rent. For these tenants, legal assistance has been provided. Finally, for households most at risk of homelessness because of eviction, financial assistanceis provided to tenants.

In the initial development of the COVID Rent Relief Program we knew that we would not have the resources to assist all rental households impacted by COVID. Montgomery County has over 110,000 renter households with more than half rent burdened prior to COVID. Many households are living
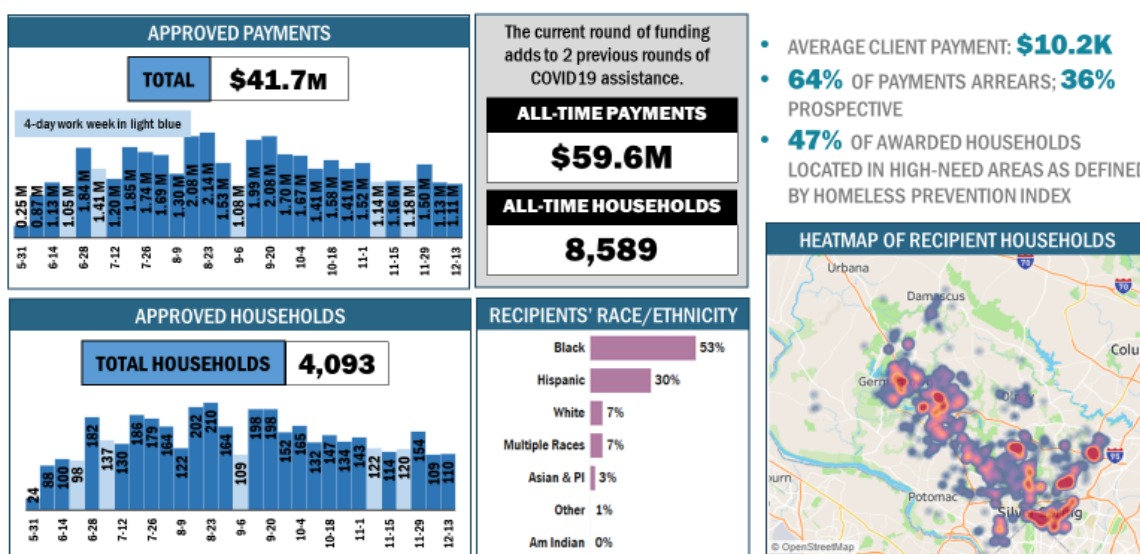
paycheck to paycheck and the economic disruption from COVID pushed many over the brink. It was critical that we developed a system to ensure we were prioritizing assistance to those without any safety net. History has demonstrated that not every housing crisis leads to homelessness. Many households can resolve their crisis on their own or with limited supports from family, friends, faith-based institutions, or other local support. However, for those that can't resolve their housing crisis, experiencing an episode of homelessness brings additional trauma to the household and has lasting impacts of health, education, and economic opportunities.

Therefore, we undertook developing a Homeless Prevention Index that would allow us use highly localized data to predict households most at risk of entering the homeless continuum. With this index we can target our outreach efforts and prioritize applications to those households identified as most at-risk. This has included hosting application events at properties within targeted census tracts, participating in vaccination events, community events such as nights out and holiday parties, partnering with our food distribution sites to distribute program information, and coordinating with schools within these areas to outreach to households.

Recognizing that people of color are disproportionately impacted by homelessness and evictions and that Montgomery County, MD is majority minority, we wanted to ensure that our program was accessible to all. We purchased an application platform that allowed for professional translation of the application into the top seven languages spoken in the County. We have also ensured that all program materials – document checklists, FAQs, etc. – are also available in all seven languages.
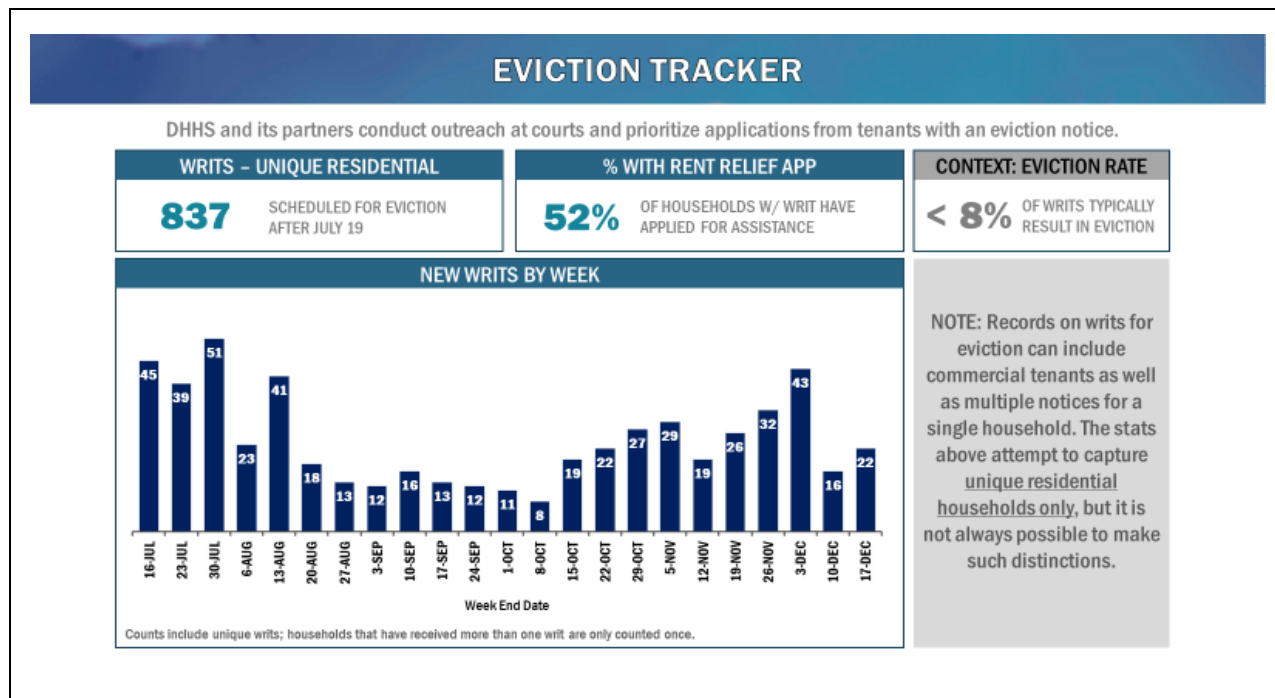
Additionally, while we chose to utilize an online only application, we have stood up a team that can assist anyone that calls in with completing the application over the phone. The call team has access to the County's language line which provides on-demand professional interpretation in over 100 languages. This team has responded to over 2500 inquiries and assisted over 1000 in completing the application. Finally, we have partnered with nonprofit organizations with a history of engagement to provide assistance to households that may feel uncomfortable initially working directly with us.

COVID RENT RELIEF STATISTICS AS OF DECEMBER 2021

Beginning in July 2021, we were able to implement a strengthened relationship with our sheriff department that has resulted in preventing many evictions. Historically, our housing stabilization case workers relied on tenants coming to us and asking for assistance when they were facing evictions. Landlords would share our information and the sheriff department included information on our programs in their "red & white" notice. The red and white is a voluntary notice that the sheriff posts on a door usually about two weeks before the eviction reminding tenants that their eviction has been scheduled and that there are assistance resources available. With the expiration of the State and CDC eviction moratoriums we knew we needed to be more intentional and proactive in our response to tenants with scheduled evictions. However, we were challenged by the fact that our district court system is still doing most of the work on paper. The sheriff's office was able to identify a staff person that on a weekly basis is able to transfer critical information (name and address) for each eviction that they have scheduled into a database for us. Our team then cross references that list against our application pool to identify any matches. Any application that is matched is assigned immediately or the case is flagged for the assigned case worker to expedite.

Additionally, program information is mailed out to each tenant without an application on file. The latter list is also shared with are nonprofit partners and they will attempt door-to-door outreach to engage those households and either help them apply or develop an alternative housing plan. This has enabled us to prevent many evictions and make sure to reach more residents than through traditional means.

For the most up to date information on the COVID Rent Relief Program, click here.

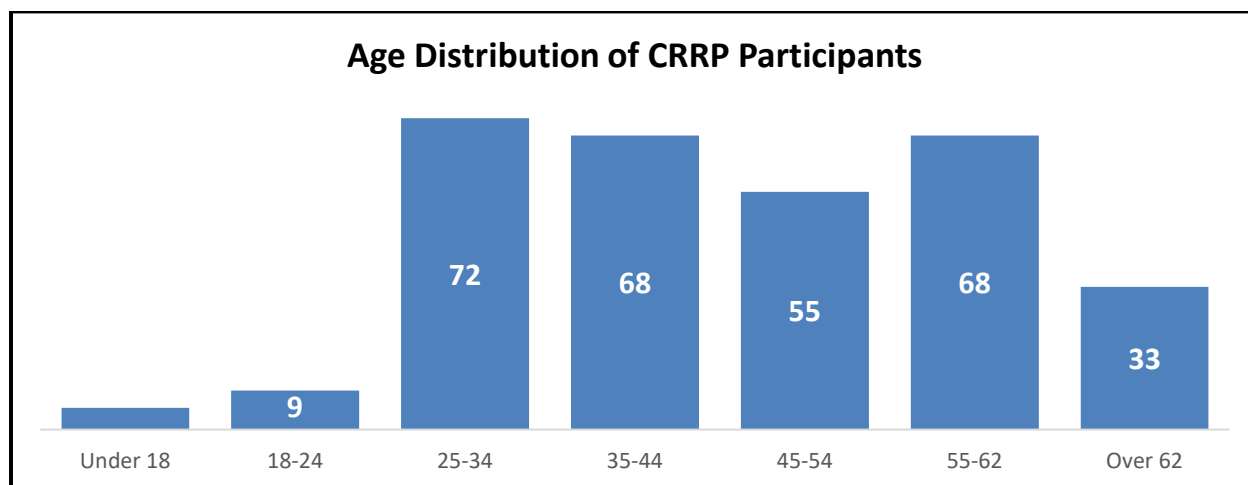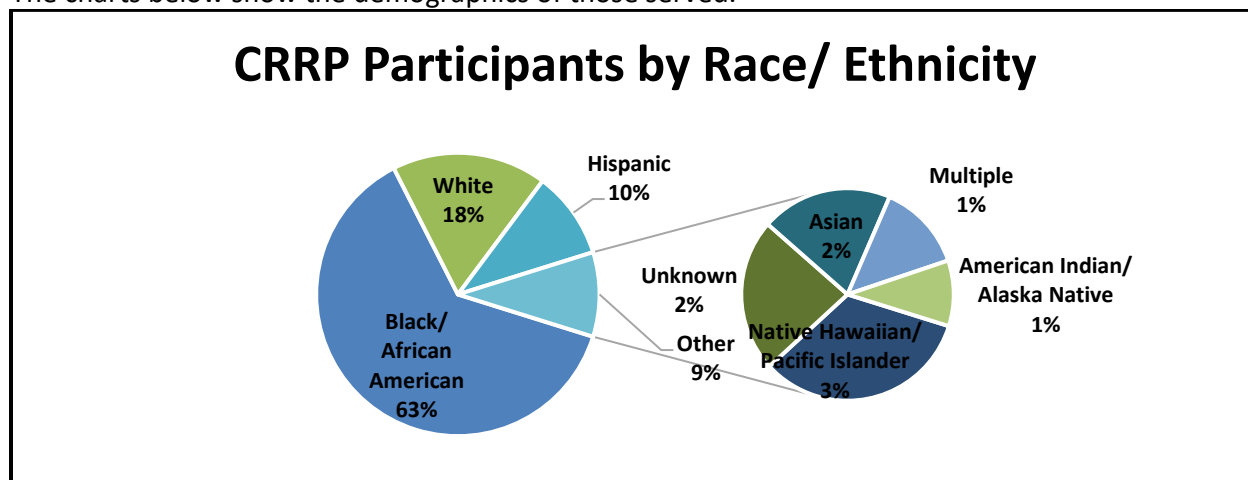**Protecting People Through Housing**

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. The pandemic has created a unique opportunity to implement new and innovative housing interventions. Montgomery County has leveraged federal

Coronavirus Relief Funds to develop two new housing programs described below. These programs have allowed the CoC to quickly exit people from homelessness, particularly for people of color.

Covid Rent Relief Program – Rapid Resolution

COVID Rent Relief Program provides financial assistance to households exiting homelessness. This includes first month's rent, security deposit, and an additional five-month rental credit. No case management or supportive services are provided. All participants must have a minimum six-month lease. Eligibility is open to anyone in the CoC interested in participating but income cannot exceed 50% AMI. To date 311 households have been served through Covid Rent Relief – Rapid Resolution. Of those, 14% have returned to homelessness.
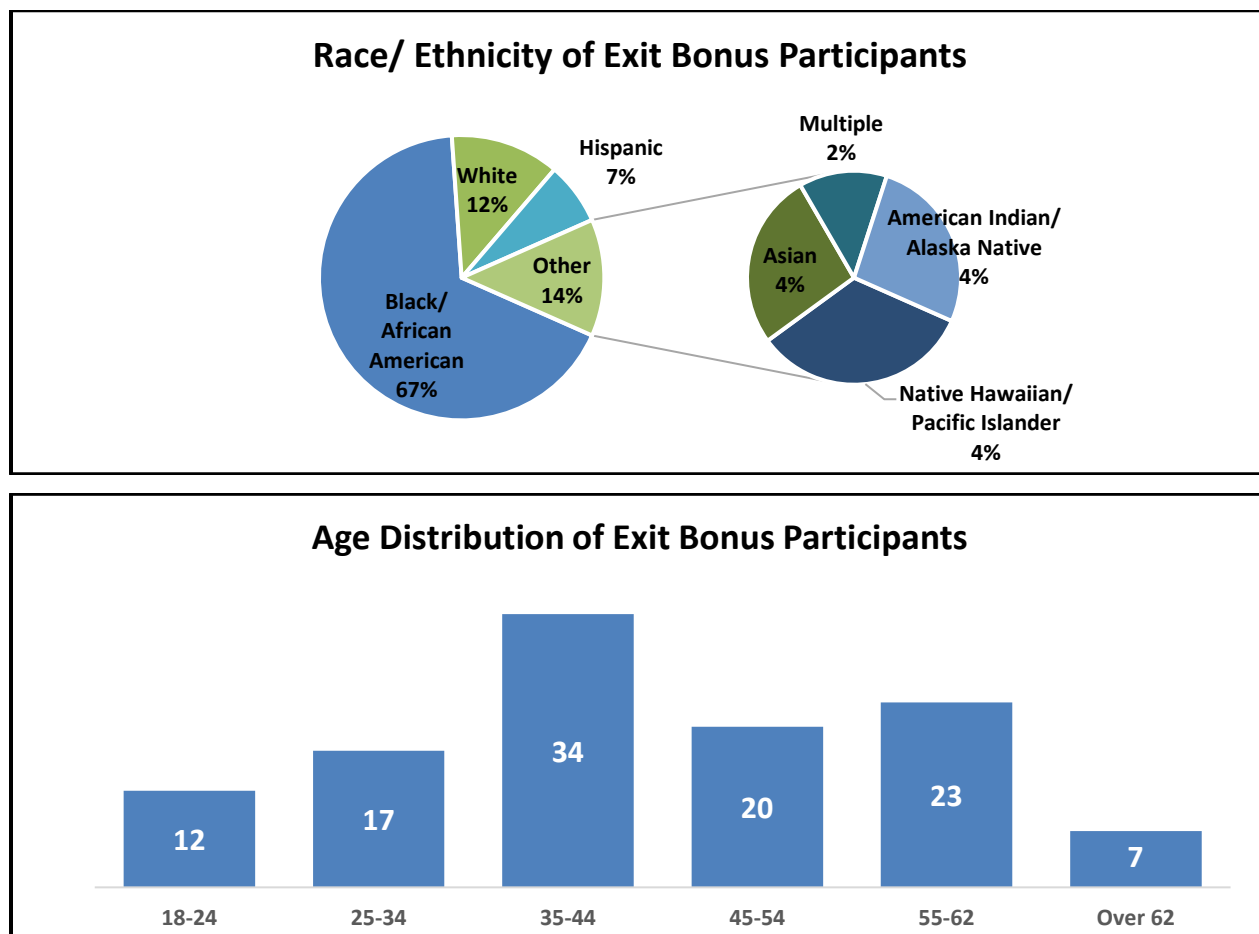
The charts below show the demographics of those served.

CRRP Participants by Race/ Ethnicity

White 18%
Hispanic 10%
Black/African American 63%
Unknown 2%
Other 9%
Asian 2%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander 3%
Multiple 1%
American Indian/Alaska Native 1%

Age Distribution of CRRP Participants

Under 18	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-62	Over 62
	9	72	68	55	68	33

Exit Bonus Program

Exit Bonus Program offers $5000 as a one-time direct cash assistance payment to households exiting emergency shelter. Participants must agree not to return to shelter for at least twelve months and complete a monthly survey. This program is designed for newly homeless individuals, less than 6 months, with no known substance or mental health challenges. The CoC intends to follow the program participants for twelve months and conduct regular surveys to assess their housing stability, food security, income, and other quality of life indicators including general

wellbeing, use of substances, and feelings about the future. To date, 113 people have been served through the Exit Bonus program and 24% have returned to homelessness.
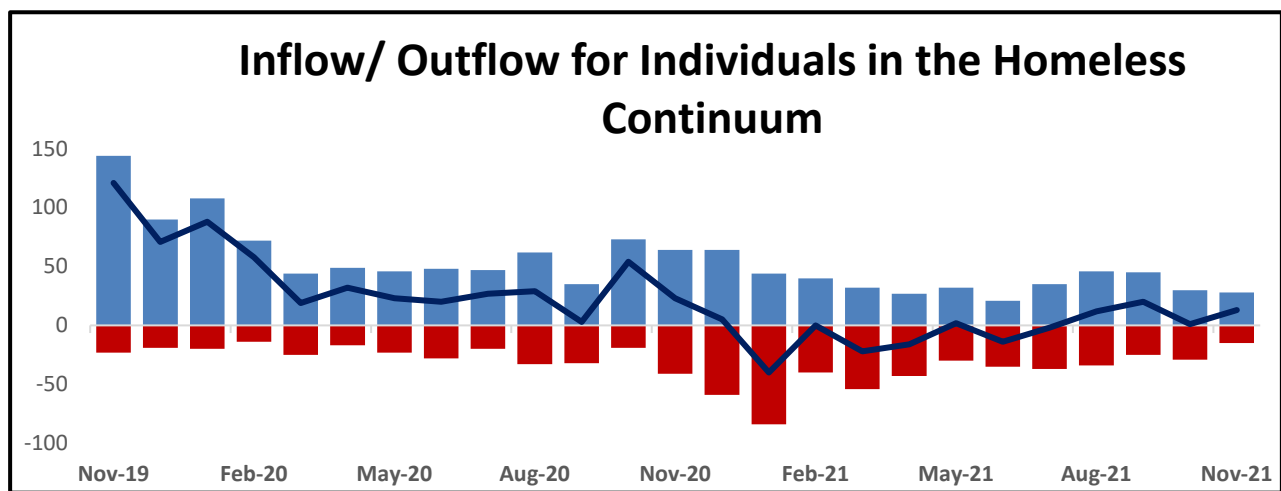
The charts below display the demographics of program participants.

Race/ Ethnicity of Exit Bonus Participants

Age Distribution of Exit Bonus Participants

While the rates of return for both the Exit Bonus and CRRP- Rapid Resolution programs are higher than we'd like to see, we remain optimistic about the potential of these alternatives to traditional housing programs. Currently SEPH is digging deeper into the data on those who have returned and conducting focus groups with participants to inform modifications to the program design.

In addition to the two new programs, pandemic funding allowed the CoC to scale up Rapid Rehousing for households without children and expand the Move-Up Initiative for households graduating from permanent supportive housing. The Housing Opportunities Commission was awarded 118 Emergency Housing Vouchers and partnered with the CoC to take referrals from the Coordinated Entry System. Of the 118 vouchers, 20 were used for people currently experiencing homelessness and the remainder were used for the Move-Up Initiative. This expansion of Move-Up frees up permanent supportive housing units for the most vulnerable. Despite a 16% increase in the annual number of single individuals served in the homelessness continuum from 1285 in FY19 to 1493 in FY21, the CoC placed 698 individuals in permanent housing since April 2020.

The chart below highlights the improvements in the monthly inflow versus outflow for households without children. In the last year, on average 39 new individuals enter the homelessness continuum each month and 40 are placed in permanent housing.

Inflow/ Outflow for Individuals in the Homeless Continuum

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 2022. Public engagement events in 2021 include the following:

- The third annual Community Memorial Service was held on July 21, 2021. This event brings County officials, nonprofit leaders and people experiencing homelessness to honor and remember the lives lost in the homelessness continuum in the last year. This year more than 200 guests attended the event.

- 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, Criminal Justice Coordinating Commission, Commission on Human Rights, 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.

The Reverend Anne E. Derse, Deacon
Minister for Community Engagement
St. John's Norwood Episcopal Church
making remarks and the innovation at the
2021 Community Memorial Service

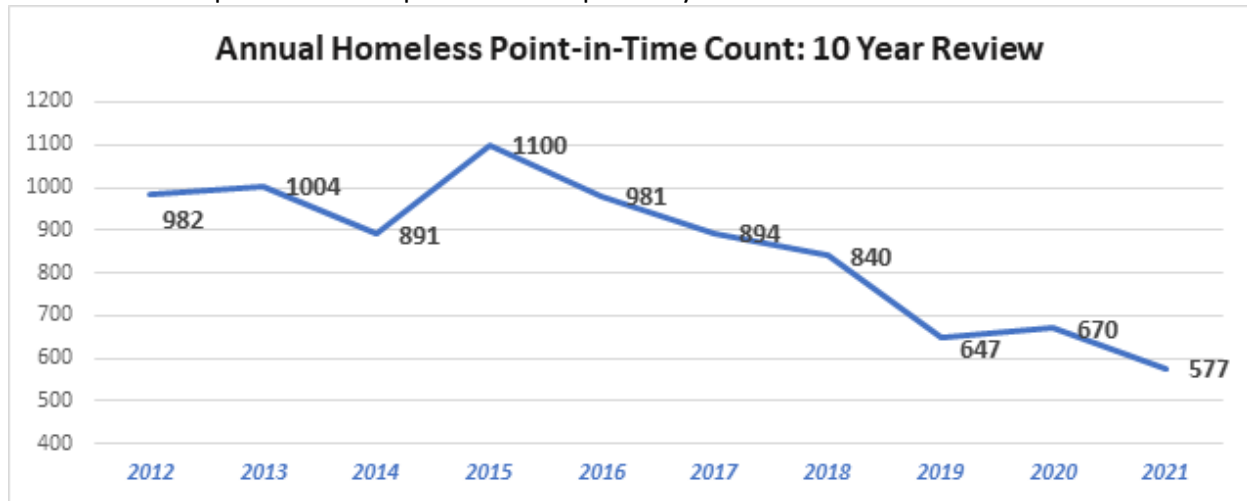## Data and Trends Regarding Homelessness in Montgomery County

Point-in-time Count

Montgomery County's homeless point in time survey was conducted on January 27, 2021. A total of 577 homeless persons were counted that day, a decrease of 14% from 2020 and a decrease of 41% from the 2012 count. The greatest one-year decrease occurred between 2018 and 2019 of 22%. The declining trend in homelessness over the last several 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.
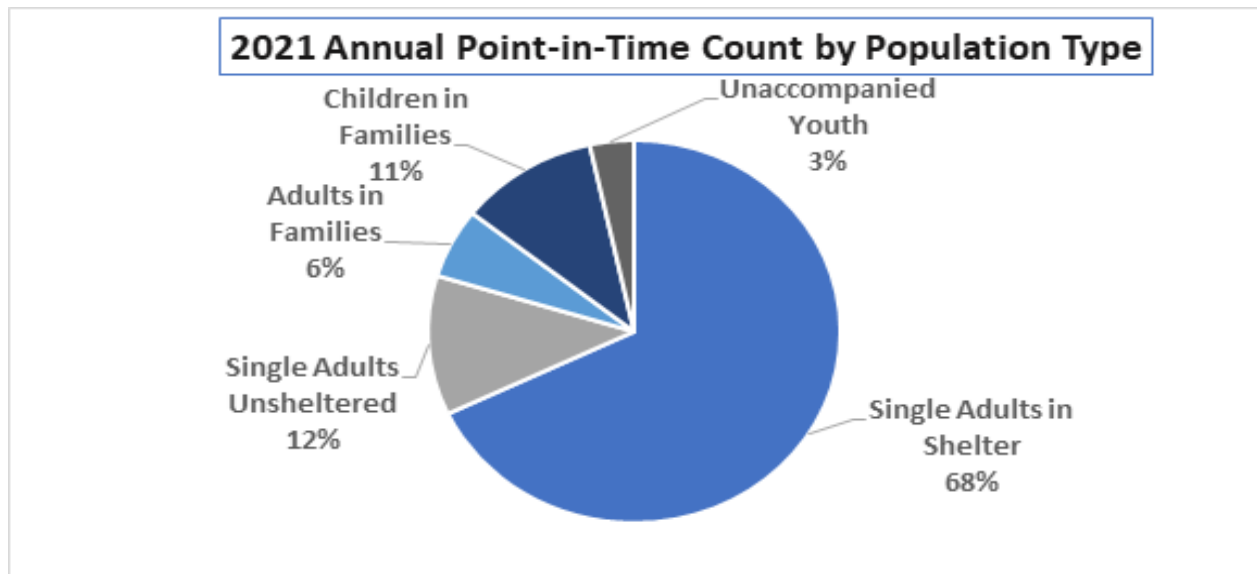
The chart below provides a comparison of the past 10 years.
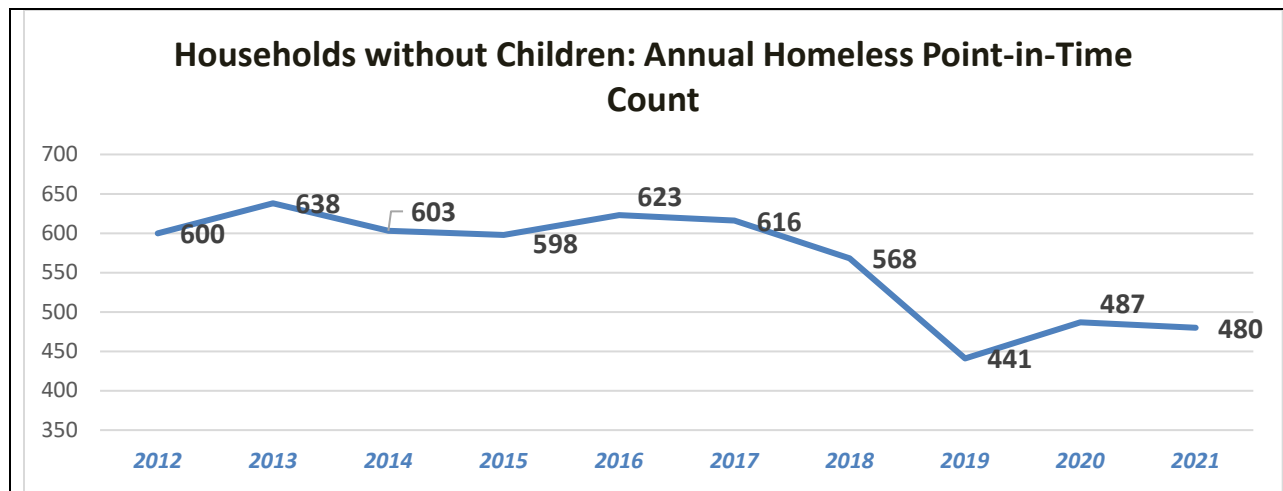

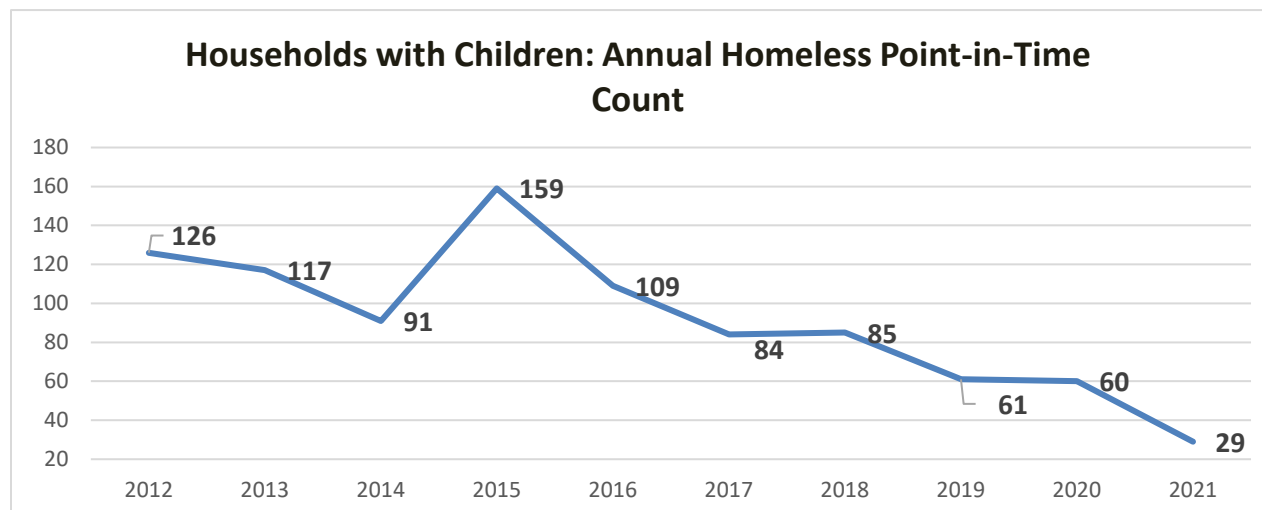The charts below describe the 2021 enumeration by population type.

Households without Children

Households without children experienced a 1% decrease in 2021 from 487 in 2020 to 480 in 2021. In the last five years, the number of individuals experiencing homelessness has declined by 22%. Although the 2021 enumeration only shows a modest decline in households without children, the CoC has increased the housing placement rate by nearly 50%. If not for the concerted effort to house people, the number of individuals experiencing homelessness would have increased significantly. There was a decrease of 34% in the number of unsheltered population, 103 in 2020 compared to 68 in 2021. The decrease in unsheltered homeless can be attributed to better access to emergency shelter and non-congregate hotel rooms. 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.

Households without Children: Annual Homeless Point-in-Time Count

Year	Count
2012	600
2013	638
2014	603
2015	598
2016	623
2017	616
2018	568
2019	441
2020	487
2021	480

Households with Children

The number of households with children decreased by 52% between 2020 and 2021. This is the largest one-year decline in the history of the Point-in-Time count. The CoC attributes the decrease directly to an influx of federal, state, and local resources for homeless prevention and rapid rehousing; enhanced tenant protections including moratoriums on evictions; and the robust shelter diversion program implemented in 2018.

Households with Children: Annual Homeless Point-in-Time Count

Year	Count
2012	126
2013	117
2014	91
2015	159
2016	109
2017	84
2018	85
2019	61
2020	60
2021	29

Monthly Income and Employment
Among all household types without children including those who are unsheltered, veterans, and transition age youth, 174 or 36% reported some type of monthly income. This is a decrease from 41% in 2020 and 51% in 2019. Of those reporting monthly income, 37% reported income from employment compared to 49% percent in 2020. The CoC has recognized the need to support homeless persons in obtaining eligible benefits. A total of 61% 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 a Housing First philosophy, and though income is not required to be for permanent supportive housing or rapid rehousing, the CoC has made a concerted effort to connect homeless persons with vocational and employment supportive services. This year, the CoC utilized federal Emergency Solutions Grant- CV to contract with a local workforce development agency to specific serve people experiencing homelessness. 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.
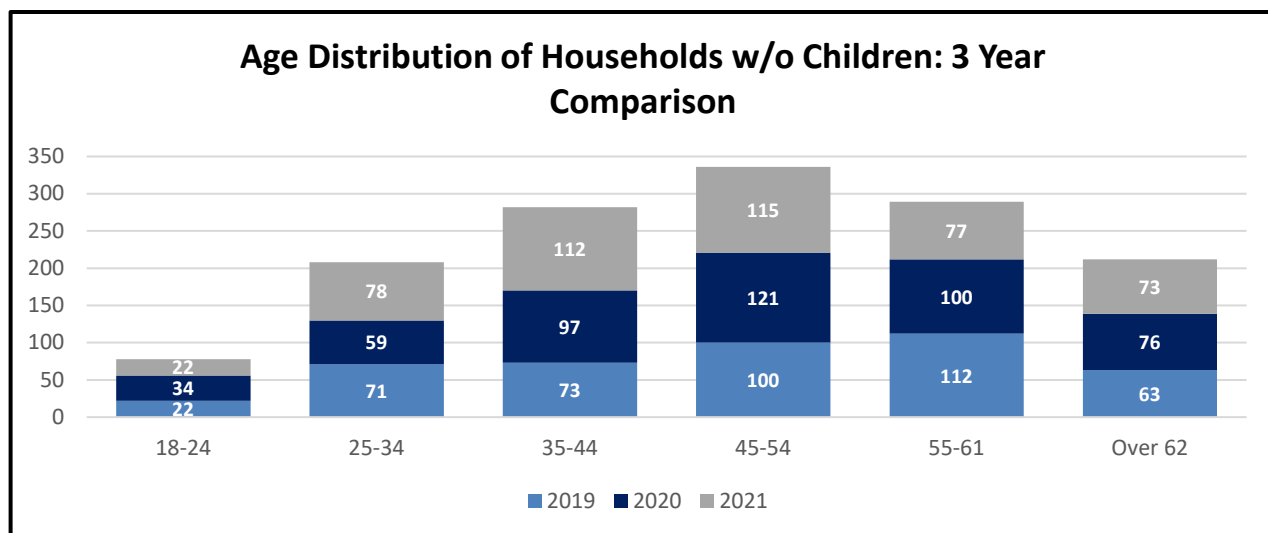
Among households with children including veterans and transition age youth, the number of adults reporting monthly income was 25 (74%) which increased from 26% in 2020. In addition, 10 (40%) reported income from employment, which is a decrease over the 2020 which was 55%. The decline in employment rates of families is likely attributed to high rates of unemployment due to the public health emergency. Work force development has been identified as a gap in the CoC, particularly for families, 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 Aide to Needy Families, Social Security Retirement, Social Security Disability / Survivor benefits which accounted for the income of 44% of this cohort.

Subpopulations
Montgomery County saw increases in every subpopulation with two exceptions, those living with HIV/AIDS and those reporting chronic substance use. The greatest increases were with chronically homeless adults and adults with limited English, 410% and 445% respectively. COVID-19 has led to decreased access to mainstream services including behavioral health and medical care. These barriers to support services likely attributed to the rise of people reporting significant challenges. Increases in people reporting a history of domestic violence and those with limited English proficiency may be explained by the CoC's efforts to provide more cultural appropriate services and break down barriers including language access.

Older Adults
There continues to be a large number of older adults entering the homeless system. More than half (56%) of all adults without children are over 45 years old, 31% are over 55, and 15% are 62 years or older. Although there was an 11% decrease between 2020 and 2021, the growing number of older adults in the homeless continuum is concerning. 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. Of note, 2021 brought an increase of 22% in the number of adult households experiencing homelessness in the age range of 25 to 44 years old. This is likely a result of severe job loss related to the pandemic.

Age Distribution of Households w/o Children: 3 Year Comparison

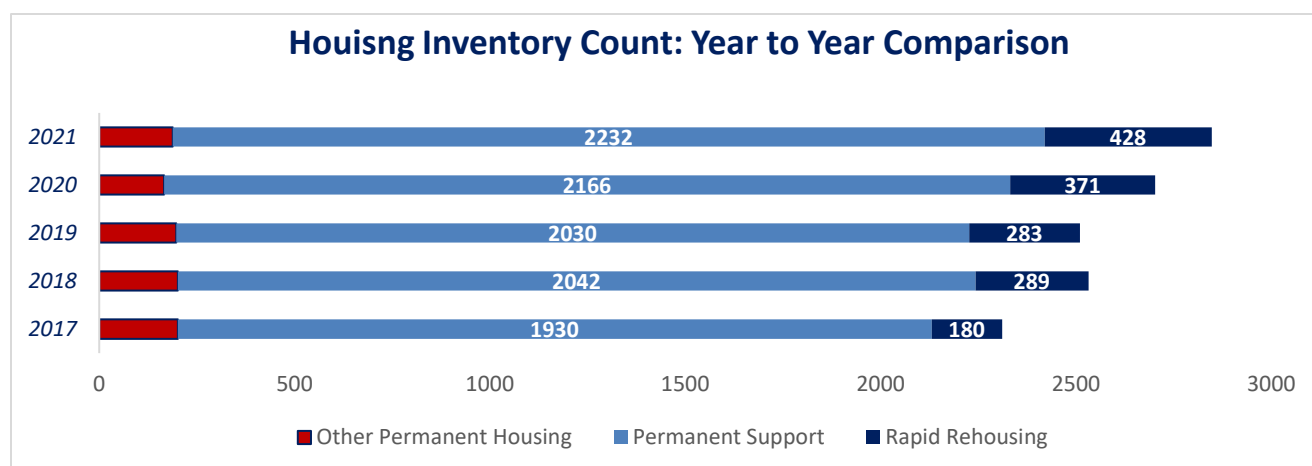Legend: ■ 2019 ■ 2020 ■ 2021

Survivors of domestic violence

Over the past two years, the number of persons reporting a history of domestic violence has decreased by 21%. This year there was a 134% increase in the 2021 enumeration from 35 in 2020 to 82 adults in 2021. The percent of adults fleeing domestic violence decreased by 8% between 2020 and 2021. 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.

For more information on the PIT Count in Montgomery County and the Washington metroregion, see the full report.

Housing Inventory

Permanent Housing

From 2017 to 2021, the number of units of permanent housing in Montgomery County increased by 23% from 2311 to 2848. Most significantly, the supply of rapid rehousing beds has increased 138% and a 16% increase in permanent supportive housing beds. The CoC adopted the goal of increasing rapid housing by 350 units as a result of the 2017 Gap Analysis. Due to the increase in funding from the Emergency Solutions Grant- CV, the CoC was able to increase the number of rapid rehousing units in 2020-21 by 300 units, although it should be noted this funding is temporary. The CoC also increased the number of permanent supportive housing units by 34 this year.

Houisng Inventory Count: Year to Year Comparison

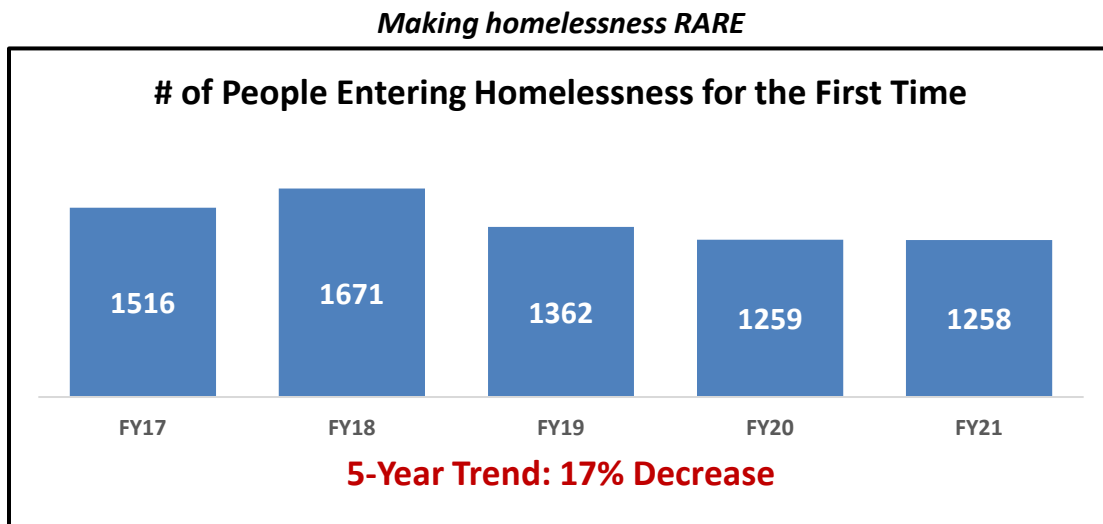Legend: ■ Other Permanent Housing ■ Permanent Support ■ Rapid Rehousing

Since 2018, Montgomery County has participated in the state Department of Health Assistance in Community Integration Services (ACIS) pilot that uses the 1115 Medicaid Waiver to pay for supportive services. This year, the CoC added 20 additional ACIS slots for individuals with significant behavioral health challenges. Another 14 units of intensive permanent supportive housing were added to the housing capacity. This program is designed to serve unsheltered individuals with a history of poor engagement with services by master leasing units.
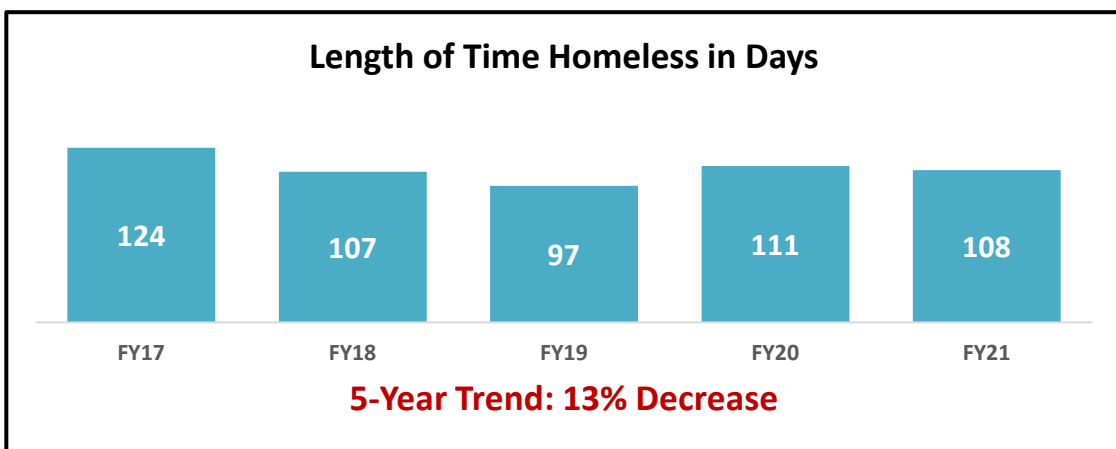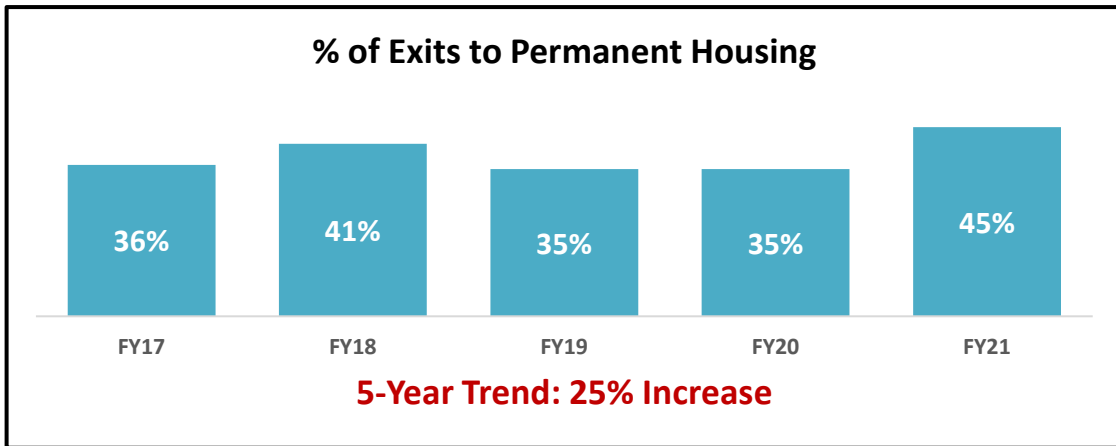
County officials remain committed to investing new local resources for permanent supportive housing, rapid rehousing, and shallow subsidies. As stated earlier, the CoC seeks to provide access to housing to all people experiencing homelessness. This requires creativity and an ability to leverage federal and state resources. As an example, the County Executive has recommended increased funding in the FY22 budget for the Rental Assistance Program (RAP). RAP provides a permanent shallow subsidy for older adults or people with disabilities exiting homelessness or at imminent risk of losing their home. This year the County Council approved changes to the program that increases the subsidy amount from $200 to $400 per month. RAP is currently used to sustain people who meet the RAP eligibility criteria when their rapid rehousing subsidy ends.

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 numberof households experiencing homelessness for the first time.

Making homelessness RARE

# of People Entering Homelessness for the First Time

FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21
1516	1671	1362	1259	1258

5-Year Trend: 17% Decrease

% of Exits to Permanent Housing

36%	41%	35%	35%	45%
FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21

5-Year Trend: 25% Increase

Length of Time Homeless in Days

124	107	97	111	108
FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21

5-Year Trend: 13% Decrease

Making homelessness One-time only

% of Returns to Homelessness After 24 Months

17%	16%	16%	16%	18%
FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21

% Retaining Permanent Housing (excluding RRH)

FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21
98%	98%	99%	99%	99%

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:

- **Insufficient care coordination with other systems of care:** The CoC serves many households with significant behavioral and physical health challenges in permanent housing programs. 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 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. This gap has been temporarily filled using Emergency Solutions Grant- CV funding but this ends in 2022.

- **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 housing 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 $3 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 MarketRent without reducing number of households served.

- Provide $2.4 million in funding to increase Rapid Re-housing by 200 units to better serve households that are currently employed or employable.

- Provide $700,000 in funding to fully implement a centralized shelter intake and homeless diversion program for households without children.

- Execute on the opportunity to use federal COVID funding purchase a hotel portfolio to re-imagine as extremely affordable micro-units. Many individuals experiencing homelessness have regular income but are unable to find housing that is affordable to them. By providing micro units at an extremely affordable rate these individuals will be able to self-resolve and end their experience with homelessness. The ICH envisions a facility with individual, furnished unit with private bathrooms and limited kitchen facilities. Community space can be programmed by partner nonprofits to bring community-based services to the residents. With the facilities already identified, minimal investment is needed to prepare for this new use.

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 rentalhistory 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.

- 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 developmentsusing federal, state, or local financing and public housing authorities.

The ICH fully supports efforts to reform the state involuntary commitment laws by clearly defining the meaning of "danger" in the legislation. Too often people with serious mental illness end up in the homeless continuum without adequate treatment or support. While we recognize housing as the best form of mental health treatment, some individuals lack the capacity to accept help due to their illness. To remove the barrier to hospital treatment, the danger standard in the law must make explicit that:

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1) The consequence of non-treatment the person is in danger of is reasonably expected to occur in the foreseeable future and need not be imminent.
2) A Danger of psychiatric deterioration is a form of "danger to self"; and
3) Any available personal, medical psychiatric history must be considered – not just the person's behavior in the present moment.

Additionally, the ICH supports changes to State statute that would categorize a government issued check as an acceptable form of payment to stop an eviction. Currently, the statute requires landlords to only accept cash, money order, or certified check. Without payment in one of those forms a landlord can still have the sheriff proceed with the eviction – even if funds are available and committed for the household. However, with the millions coming through government offices across the state, we need to ensure that these checks are valid and able to cancel an eviction.

Conclusion

The Montgomery County CoC's goal is to end homelessness for all in our communityby making homelessness a rare, brief, and one-time only experience. While resources have been abundant due to the pandemic, these will soon expire. Unfortunately, the need of people experiencing and at risk of homelessness will continue for years to come. The ICH urges the County to continue 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, reducing chronic homelessness by more than 90%, and reducing family homeless by 50% despite 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 create an end to all forms of homelessness.