



The Framework for an
Equitable COVID-19
Homelessness Response
#HousingEquity

Immediate and Flexible Crisis Options for Children and Families

Currently, too many families are left on waiting lists for shelter, or are turned away because their family configuration is not consistent with the family shelter programs that are available, such as programs that don't serve multi-generational families, that separate family members based on gender or age¹, or that don't allow families to self-define what family means. The consequences for families are severe – for their health, for their economic well-being, and for academic attainment for parents and children.

Now is the time to reimagine your community's crisis response system for families with children, using a racial justice and equity focus, including your approaches to sheltering families experiencing homelessness.

Led by Barbara Poppe with Tiffany Haynes, Alexis Kramer, and Sharon McDonald as primary contributors, the **Framework for an Equitable COVID-19 Homelessness Response project partners issued [Immediate and Flexible Crisis Options for Children and Families](#)**, to explore and support the expansion of crisis options, paired with strong housing exits, that can be replicated, adapted, and scaled up or down as needs and/or scale of resources change in each community, with the goal that **no child sleeps outside**. The research team sought out approaches that:

- Can **rapidly expand and contract based upon changes in demand**, with immediate 24/7 responses.
- Offer **dignity-based, safe, low-barrier, temporary shelter options** that were culturally responsive, non-discriminatory, welcoming to LGBTQ people, and accessible for people with disabilities and family members who may be undocumented.
- Amplify **racial justice and equity practices and deeply engage with families** in design, planning, implementation, and evaluation.
- Are **family-centered**, providing a priority for ease and convenience of families
- Use **trauma-informed design and practices**, and **accommodate a range of family definitions and configurations**.
- Practice **Housing First with harm reduction approaches** and serve as quick and effective bridges to long-term housing.
- Prioritize and **help unsheltered families and support exits** that reduce returns to homelessness.



Figure 1: Nine Spotlight Organizations

More than thirty programs and communities were contacted and ultimately **nine (9) Spotlight Organizations were selected and are featured in this report**. (Figure 1)


Through engagement with this wide range of organizations and programs, the **project team identified six (6) key practices that are essential for enhancing community responses to family homelessness and ensure that no child sleeps outside** by having sufficient capacity to accommodate all types of families and all families - and the report describes each of these practices in detail. (Figure 2)

¹ Equal Access is required by the [HUD Equal Access Rule](#).

The Framework for an Equitable COVID-19 Homelessness Response project is collaboratively guided by the following partners:
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities • National Alliance to End Homelessness
National Health Care for the Homeless Council • National Low Income Housing Coalition • Urban Institute
Barbara Poppe and associates • Matthew Doherty Consulting

The profiles of the Spotlight Organizations are intended to help guide systemic and organizational improvements focused on:

- Embedding flexible crisis options in Community-wide Systems
- Including flexible crisis options within Comprehensive Agency Responses
- Filling gaps in communities' responses to family homelessness through Collaborative Agency Responses
- Addressing the unique cultural needs of families in crisis with Culturally Informed Programs
- Serving survivors of domestic and interpersonal violence
- Strengthening approaches in rural settings

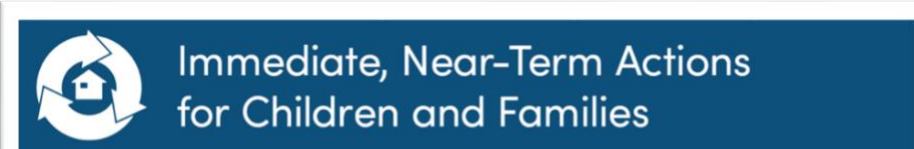


Key Practices to Enhance Community Responses to Family Homelessness

01. Ensure capacity to serve all families
02. Center equity and culture throughout every element of planning and programming
03. Utilize hotels/motels, vouchers, and master-lease units strategically and effectively
04. Implement homelessness diversion activities across the system
05. Connect sheltering strategies to rehousing assistance
06. Embed homelessness assistance within broader community systems of services and support

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Figure 2: Six Key Practices



Immediate, Near-Term Actions for Children and Families

- Build equity into policy and funding decisions and decision-making practices.
- Recognize and dismantle punitive system and program policies that impede and police Black families and other families of color.
- Increase flexible funding to meet the unique and self-defined needs of all families with children who experience homelessness.
- Ensure policy and funding supports Housing First approaches that are inclusive, holistic, and trauma-informed.
- Ensure all funding and policies are accountable for meeting each family's needs.

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Figure 3: Five Immediate, Near-Term Actions



Systemic Actions that Require Persistent Advocacy for Children and Families

- Stop criminalizing and policing the activities of black and brown people.
- Eradicate barriers to assistance for immigrant and undocumented family members.
- Increase the supply of deeply affordable rental housing, expand rental assistance access, and remove barriers to safe, stable housing.
- Support policies that raise families' incomes and promote economic stability.
- Expand capacity of community and public social service programs for families experiencing housing crises to avoid eviction, housing loss, and homelessness.

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Figure 4: Five Systemic Actions

Flexible crisis options only work when integrated within broader community responses to homelessness. The report provides **comprehensive system and program design recommendations** focused on:

- Racial equity;
- Consultation with families with lived expertise;
- Creating capacity within BIPOC/LGBTQ-led organizations; implementing low-barrier, trauma-informed, harm reduction, and Housing First best practices;
- Supporting families to quickly exit to stable housing;
- Embedding flexible crisis options within a coordinated or centralized approaches; and
- Other critical system and program design enhancements.

The report identifies **immediate actions that are achievable in the near term**, while others will require changes to policy and funding beyond the homelessness assistance system. (Figure 3)

Advancing these changes, and creating the range of crisis options that families urgently need, will not be easy. The report also identifies **systemic actions that will require, and that deserve, our persistent advocacy** in order to create durable progress for children and families. (Figure 4)

Please find the full [Immediate and Flexible Crisis Options for Children and Families](https://housingequityframework.org) report, and accompanying videos, at housingequityframework.org.