

# THE ROLE OF OUTREACH IN AN EFFECTIVE HOMELESS RESPONSE

Communities who have successfully reduced unsheltered homelessness emphasize the importance of ensuring their homeless response system is effective, efficient, and equitable. Achieving this goal involves preventing homelessness before it happens – and swiftly providing housing if it does – through safe and appropriate interventions, all while preserving the dignity and resilience of those facing housing crises.

The role of street outreach is critical to this effort. Outreach is core to identifying and connecting the most vulnerable individuals who, for several reasons, are unable to access an existing system.

For outreach to effectively meet the needs of the broader system, it must align with overarching goals, including:

**System-Level Coordination:** Coordination among all outreach providers and programs is essential. This involves identifying individuals, avoiding service duplication, expanding geographical reach, and adopting a multidisciplinary approach when applicable. Outreach should balance immediate crisis response with long-term, housing-focused goals, emphasize the procurement of necessary housing documents, and employ housing-focused problem-solving strategies.

**Integration with Coordinated Entry Systems:** Outreach must seamlessly integrate with the Coordinated Entry System, facilitating quick access to open shelter beds and streamlining connections to housing resources. Information gathered by outreach workers should align with community prioritization and ensure a plan is developed for a successful referral.

**Exploration of Options and Resources:** Outreach teams must explore all available options and resources to rehouse individuals, including problem-solving (e.g., family reunification if safe and appropriate), assistance with subsidized housing applications, exploring shared housing opportunities, and leveraging transition resources.

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**Cultural Humility:** Services must be culturally responsive, and seek to understand both the cultures of people being served by outreach, and of the outreach workers and program designers representing the diversity of the communities served. Collaboration with culturally specific organizations is also key to ensure the voices of those served are uplifted. Prioritize warm handoffs over disseminating resource lists.

**Resource Equipping:** Outreach workers should be equipped with lifesaving harm reduction resources and tools to connect individuals with housing, including naloxone (also known as Narcan) and other necessary aids.

**Utilization of Data:** Outreach workers should leverage available technology, such as the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) or GIS mapping, to track outreach performance, services offered, and individual engagements.

**Effective Engagement:** Outreach workers should employ active listening, maintain consistency in engagement, and avoid overpromising resources and services. Providing tangible support, such as food, transportation, and hygiene kits, enhances the effectiveness of engagement efforts.

**Prioritization and Time Allocation:** Outreach time should be strategically allocated, focusing on engaging new individuals and dedicating most of the time to working with those on the caseload to secure housing. Outreach should be prioritized over in-reach. Whenever applicable, prioritization should be based on the highest needs within the homeless population.

By adopting these principles, communities can enhance the impact of outreach efforts and move closer to the vision of a world where homelessness is rare, and unsheltered conditions are eradicated.

WATCH THE WEBINAR “EFFECTIVE STREET OUTREACH:  
FROM UNSHELTERED TO HOUSED”

PART OF THE WEBINAR SERIES **“STRONGER TOGETHER:  
A ROADMAP TO AN EFFECTIVE HOMELESS SYSTEM”**