

# 1.09 Does Secret Domestic Violence Housing Lead to Unsheltered Homelessness?



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Domestic violence (DV) is a leading cause of homelessness. Conventional response approaches that move DV survivors 'underground' to protect their safety also cut survivors' access to mainstream social services, eventually forcing the choice between unsheltered homelessness or returning to a violent home. But, what if support for survivors happened in plain sight? Program leaders will spark discussion on the practicality of removing secrecy to prevent homeless DV survivors, from top to bottom.



# The dilemma...

- Domestic Violence (DV) is a leading cause of homelessness for women and families in the United States
- Conversely, housing instability and a lack of affordable housing options increase risks for women experiencing DV
- The conventional DV response moves survivors 'underground' to protect their safety, often currently cutting survivors' access to needed mainstream social services
- Without access to long-term services, survivors are often forced to choose between unsheltered homelessness or returning themselves and their children to a violent housing situation



## ...but, what if support for survivors happened in plain sight?

Could removing the confidential nature of DV services help to prevent homelessness?

**Some researchers and DV shelter operators say 'yes'!**

- A 2020 report concluded that “there is no longer a clear connection between a secret and inaccessible shelter location and the safety of survivor-residents.”
- That stated, there are safety concerns for survivors (and those assisting them) to consider when unveiling the location of DV services broadly.

# What's in store for this NAEH Innovation Session

## AGENDA

1. Cyclical Cause and Effect: Overlap between DV and Homelessness: Stats and Figures
2. Landscape View: Federal initiatives to coordinate DV and homeless response efforts
3. Different Approaches to Consider: Urban to Rural
  - DC
  - Utah
  - Nashville
4. Let's Talk About It: Break out Sessions
5. Key ideas to take with you

## Panel members will...

- examine the conventional practice of keeping DV shelter locations secret,
- explore safe alternative approaches, and
- explain how confidentiality plays a role in their community's work to align domestic violence & homeless prevention efforts

## Learning Objectives

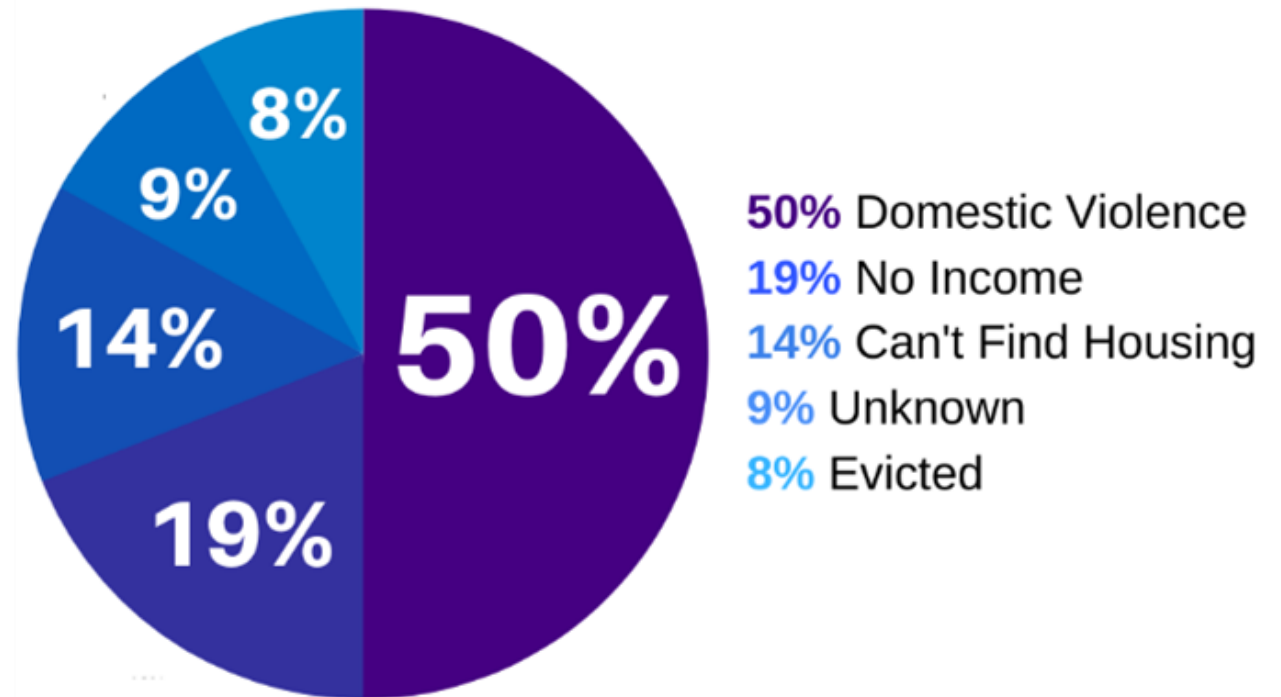
1. To understand the landscape of domestic violence housing models in different contexts.
2. To evaluate the benefits and challenges of making domestic violence housing locations more public.
3. To explore practical tactics to bridge the gaps between domestic violence and mainstream housing continuums to prevent unsheltered homelessness.

# Cyclical Cause and Effect of DV and Homelessness

- Domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness for women and families.
- Housing instability and lack of affordable housing increase risks for women experiencing DV.
- Survivors often seek refuge in homeless service programs.
- 50% of homeless women and children in the U.S. are fleeing domestic violence.

## Domestic Violence and Homelessness

50% of all homeless women have reported domestic violence as being the immediate cause of their homelessness.



Source: ACLU Foundation - Women's Rights Project

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# Federal initiatives to coordinate DV and homeless response efforts

- **Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs (IWGYP)** promotes collaboration to improve outcomes for at-risk youth, including those affected by domestic violence and homelessness
- **Violence Against Women Act (VAWA):** Reauthorized in 2022, funds organizations working with survivors of gender-based violence; Includes provisions for safe housing and the economic stability needs of survivors
- **Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA):** Primary federal funding stream dedicated to supporting emergency shelters and related assistance for victims of domestic violence and their children.
- **All In: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness:** Includes strategies to prevent family homelessness by reducing housing instability among survivors of domestic violence. It promotes child welfare funding and services, encourages zoning law updates, and increases the supply of permanent supportive housing for families with complex service needs.
- **Coordinated Entry Systems:** Ensure that individuals and families with the highest vulnerability receive priority in housing placement. These systems often include specific provisions for domestic violence survivors
- **HUD's Office on Violence Against Women:** Focuses on gender-based violence to address the safe housing and economic stability needs of survivors. This office works to enforce VAWA's housing protections and coordinate with other federal agencies to provide comprehensive support

# Federal initiatives to coordinate DV and homeless response efforts



**Confidential  
Voter  
Registration**



**Protective  
Orders**



**Digital  
Security  
Measures**



**Address  
Confidentiality  
Programs**



**Legal and Policy  
Advocacy**



**Collaboration with  
Law Enforcement  
& Legal Systems**



**Safety  
Planning**

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# Pros and Cons of Making a DV Shelter Public



## PROS

- Transparency & Accountability
- Community Support & Engagement
- Increased Awareness & Accessibility

## CONS

- Security & Operational Challenges
- Safety Risks for Survivors & Privacy Concerns
- Deterrence for Seeking Help



# Are Shelters Every Really Confidential? *An Example in Indiana*

“Campbell approached her [domestic violence] shelter’s neighbors before their ribbon-cutting ceremony to fill them in on the shelter’s plans to go public.

“Almost all of the neighbors knew what we were already. You can’t really keep it confidential,” she says.”

## There are various ways word gets out:

- Some survivors return to their abusers and disclose the location
- Survivors’ children and family members find out about the shelter
- Taxi drivers and rideshare drivers drop off survivors
- Abusers follow survivors after a custody exchange
- Neighbors observe activities and figure out that a location might be a shelter
- Search engines routinely disclose shelter locations”\*

**“Some survivors still feel a greater sense of protection when the shelter is confidential.”**

## Different Approaches to Consider: *Washington, DC*

### Coordinated Critical Intervention Model

1. Creating access points with first responders
2. Assessing survivor for risk of re-assault or homicide
3. Providing a multidisciplinary interventions (17 partners in the LAP)

**12,000**  
individuals are connected

**1,600 - 2,000**  
assessed as high risk

**300 - 400**  
housed yearly

# Different Approaches to Consider: *Washington, DC*

## Crisis Housing

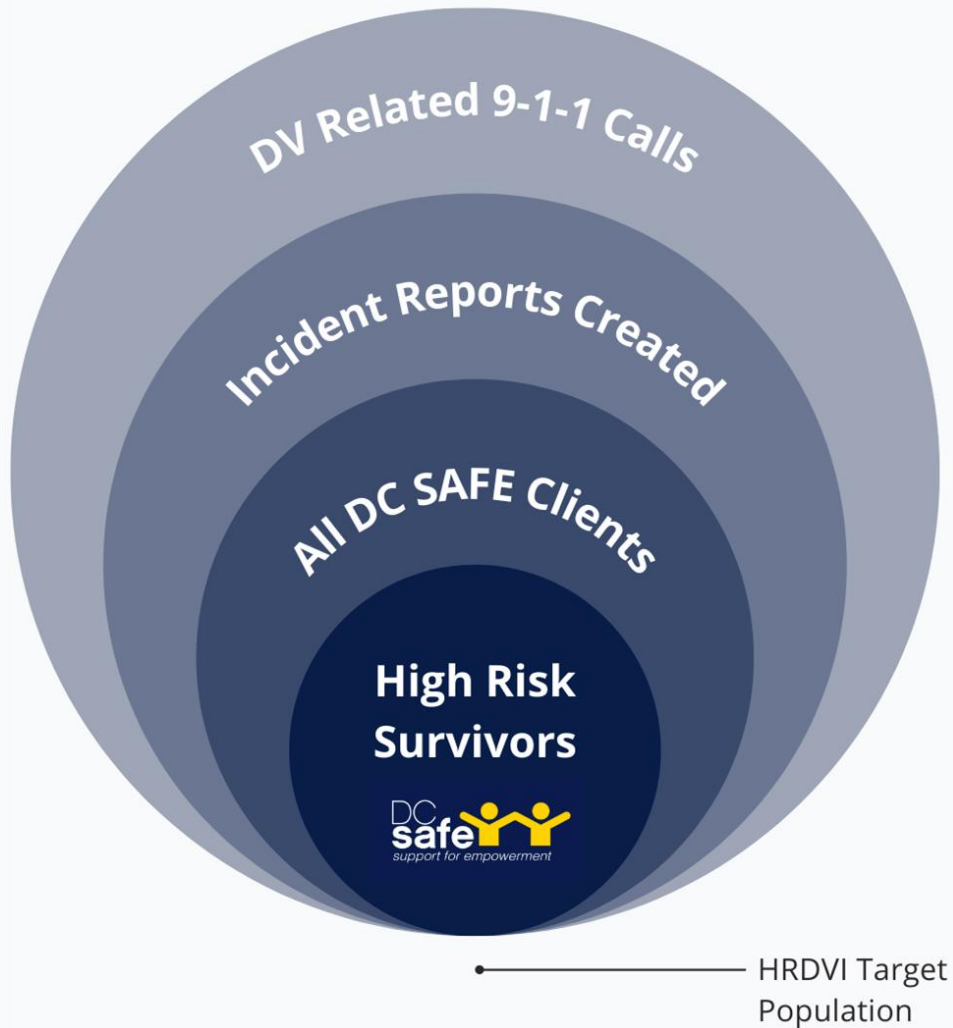
- Low barrier entry point accessible within an hour of a call
- Housing is intended to be prevention of homelessness
- Main goal of housing is to decrease harm and create a safe next step
  - Preservation
  - Reconnection
  - Expedited / Enhanced Services
  - Emergency Financial Assistance

## The Community Must:

- Have federal and local agencies willing to create policy specific to DV
- Have strong local laws on DV, confidentiality, training and criminal code
- Ensure the lead agency is NOT a government entity
- See housing as a preventative measure not as the solution to DV



## Different Approaches to Consider: *Washington, DC*





# Different Approaches to Consider: *Park City, UT*

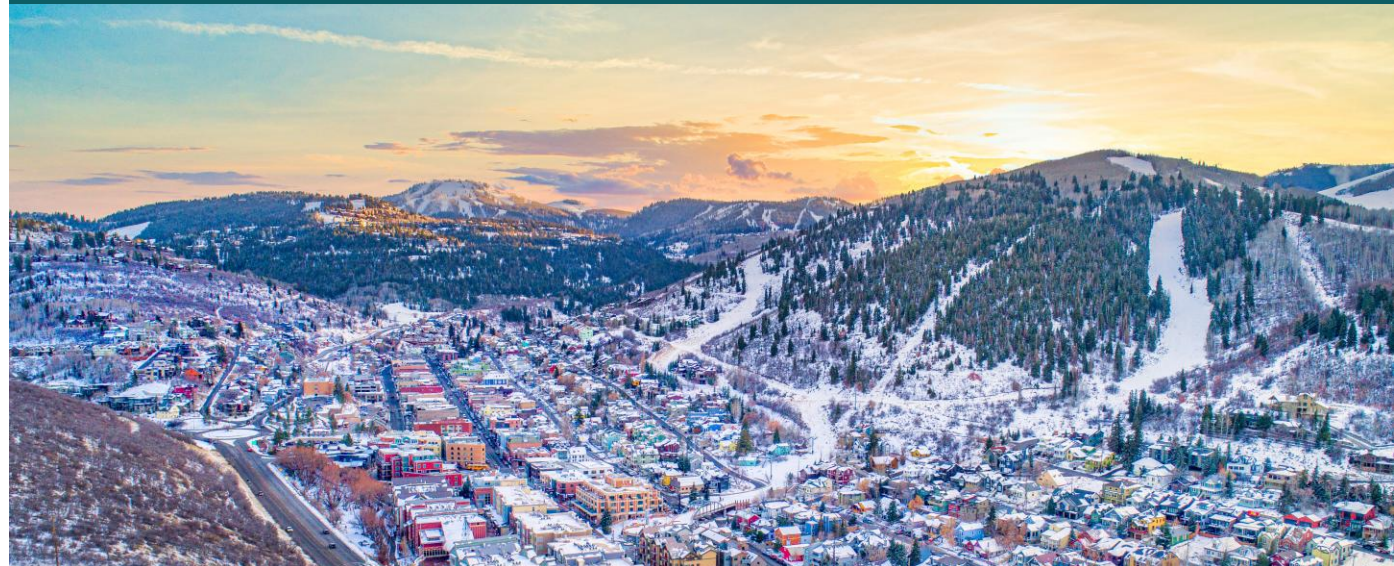
## BACKGROUND:

The Landscape of Park City Before Peace House Campus Community

- Summit County, Park City is a mountain resort town known for its tourism, but lacks abundant services for those experiencing homelessness. There is no homeless resource center or shelter and we serve two counties that include rural and frontier areas.
- Before the opening of the Peace House Community Campus in 2019, we had a small undisclosed emergency shelter capacity of 15 beds and outreach office - resources were limited and scattered.
- Victims often had to travel outside the area to seek safe and affordable housing options, making it harder to access

## Challenges Before a Publicly Disclosed Campus

- Fear of seeking help due to stigma and secrecy.
- Limited awareness and accessibility to resources.
- Difficulty coordinating emergency shelter, housing and other support services.



# Different Approaches to Consider: *Park City, UT*



## Benefits of a Publicly Disclosed Location

- **Easier Access:** Victims can find support without secrecy or barriers including unsheltered or unhoused populations.
- **Community Awareness:** Increased local engagement and prevention efforts.
- **Collaborative Services:** Partnerships with law enforcement, healthcare, and advocacy groups has increased strengthening the communities response to issues affecting both victims and those experiencing homelessness.
- **A Continuum of Housing:** Provides a dedicated space for crisis intervention and healing including shelter, transitional housing and permanent housing navigation.

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# Different Approaches to Consider: *Nashville, TN*

## LANDSCAPE:

- Nashville-Davidson County Metro Area, which encompasses 14 surrounding counties and has a population of nearly 1.9 million. Nashville proper has a population of 683,622.
- Tennessee is consistently ranked in the top 10 most dangerous states for women
- Metro Nashville Police Department reporting 25,584 cases of domestic violence (including 12 homicides) in 2024
- Every single day in the state of TN, 401 domestic violence hotline calls are answered, with 87 requests for services going unmet, 87% of which are for housing (National Network to End Domestic Violence, 2023).
- Unsheltered Homelessness and IPV

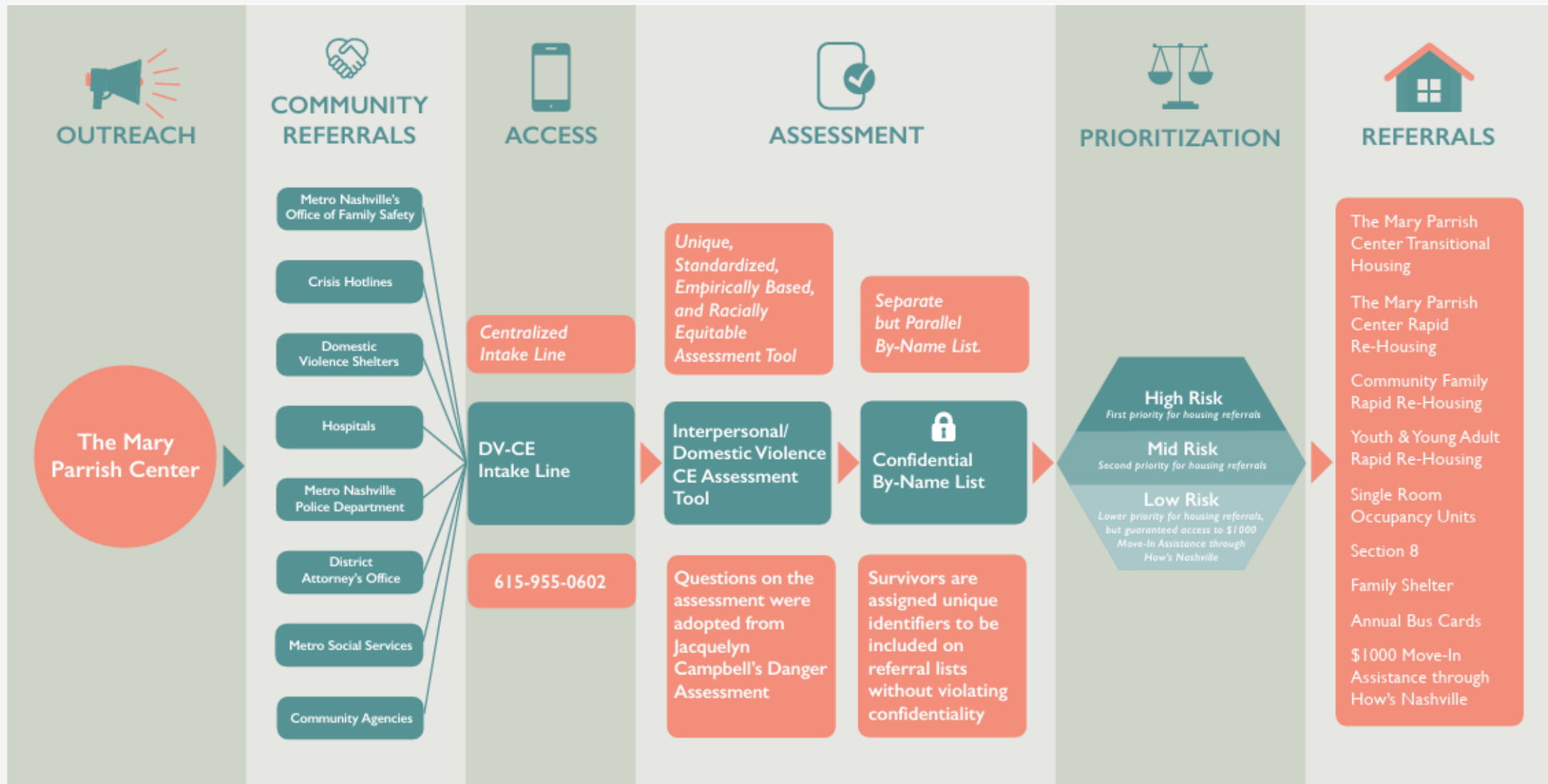
## Housing and Other Resources

- DV Bonus Funds
- Partnerships between Government and Nonprofit Organizations
  - Metro Nashville's Office of Family Safety
  - Metro Nashville's Office of Homeless Services

## Domestic Violence Coordinated Entry (DV-CE)

- *See the following slide*





Survivor-Focused, Confidential, Trauma-Informed.



# Let's Talk About It: *Break Out Sessions*

## Group 1

DV Coordinated Entry Models

## Group 2

Public Facing DV Shelters

## Group 3

Using Risk Assessments to Triage Care

## Discussion Prompts

1. Who / which entities must be at the table for this to work?
2. What is the best way to introduce this concept to government officials? Survivors? Homeless outreach providers? Others?
3. Why would this initiative most likely will / will not work in certain states/ cities/ jurisdictions?

## Key ideas to take with you...

- Knowing about a DV shelter and having access to it can prevent unsheltered homelessness—especially for women and children
- Making the location of domestic violence shelters public is a complex issue with significant implications for the safety and well-being of survivors... but it can be done!
- To safely remove confidentiality for domestic violence shelters while ensuring the safety and privacy of survivors, several strategies and best practices can be implemented
- Each DV shelter director needs to make its own decision on whether or not to go public based on lived experience and the needs of their local community

