

3.03 Addressing Unsheltered Homelessness Among Older Adults



Dr. LaTanya Wright, she/hers

Vice President of Outreach & Partnerships, Hearth

Meghan Pluimer, she/hers

Managing Attorney, Homeless Action Center

Kai Gault, she/they

Outreach Supervisor, Homeless Action Center

Older Adults are the fastest growing segment of the homeless population. In this session, panelists will share efforts like outreach to encampments, support to obtain safety net benefits, and housing location services to help mitigate homelessness among older adults.



Our Beginning

- In 1991, seven women formed The Committee to End Elder Homelessness. They came together to answer the question, "**how can you be healthy if you don't have a home?**".
- They believed that the hungry should be fed; the homeless should be housed; the sick should be cared for; and that our elders should be cherished, nurtured, and able to live out their lives with independence and grace.
- They realized that elders were a growing percentage of the homeless population and that no one was expressly addressing the issue. Hearth is an expert on the challenges and solutions of ending elder homelessness.



Hearth's Programming



Service-Enriched Housing

7 sites, 228 units of affordable permanent housing in Greater Boston with an on-site interdisciplinary team of licensed staff

Homeless Services

Serves 300+ older adults each year through housing search, case management, and stabilization services

Tenancy Preservation

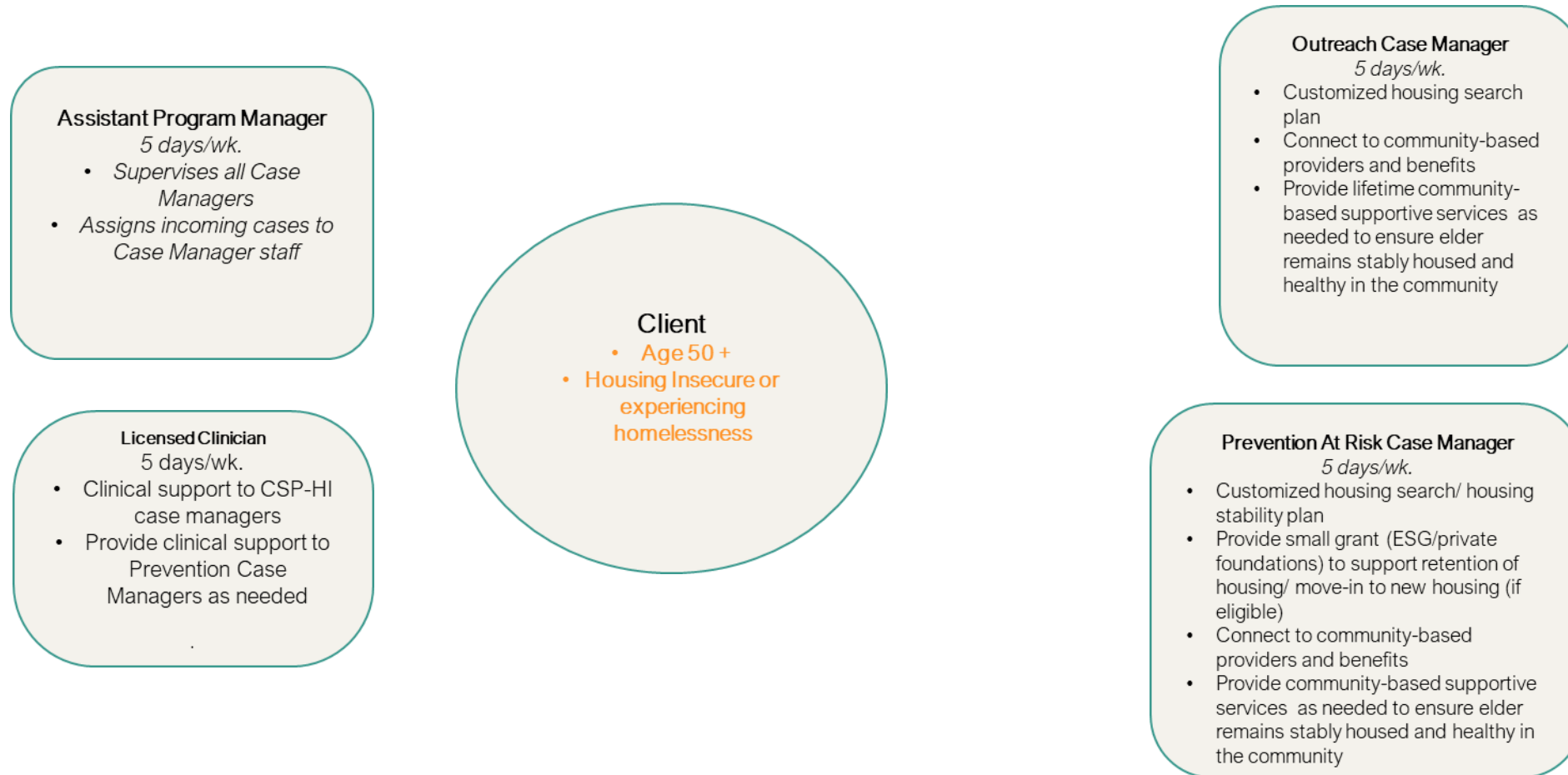
Serves 120+ older adults each year through emergency assistance grants and tenancy preservation

Advocacy

Furtherers national and local dialogue to promote effective solutions to end elder homelessness

Bringing People Home.

Outreach Service Model: Homeless Services and Homelessness Prevention



CSP-CHI (formerly CSPECH): Community Support Program For Chronically Homeless Individuals, a Medicaid funded program

ESG: Emergency Solutions Grant (The Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) program utilizes federal funds to support communities in providing street outreach, emergency shelter, rental assistance, and related services.)

Bringing People Home.

How Our Programs Are Funded

- **RENTAL SUBSIDIES**

Rental subsidies through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (**HUD**), Mobile Vouchers, Project Based Section 8, Moderate Rehabilitation also known as “Mod Rehab” (a rental subsidy program that provides rental assistance for low-income families to live in renovated properties), Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (**LIHTC**)

- **CLINICAL SERVICES FOR THOSE WITH SEVERE MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES**

Massachusetts Department of Mental Health (**DMH**) funds community clinical support services through a program called Adult Community Clinical Services (**ACCS**) for 45 of Hearth’s residents. Hearth has a subcontract with Vinfen to provide these services at six of our seven properties. Hearth is currently funded at a daily rate.

- **ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT**

For our seven properties we rely on various grants that support our mission and the individuals that we work with.

How Our Programs Are Funded 'Cont.

PERSONAL CARE SERVICES TO SUPPORT INDEPENDENT LIVING

- Across six of our seven properties, Hearth receives funding for personal care homemaking services for a percentage of our residents through contracts, we have with several Senior Care Options (SCO) programs and The Program of All Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE).

Current daily reimbursement rate for personal care services are through:

- Senior Whole Health (SWH)
- Commonwealth Care Alliance (CCA)/ CCA One Care
- Tufts Health Plan
- Boston Medical Center HealthNet
- Program for All Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE)

How Our Programs Are Funded 'Cont.

CASE MANAGEMENT FOR FORMERLY HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS THROUGH HEARTH OUTREACH

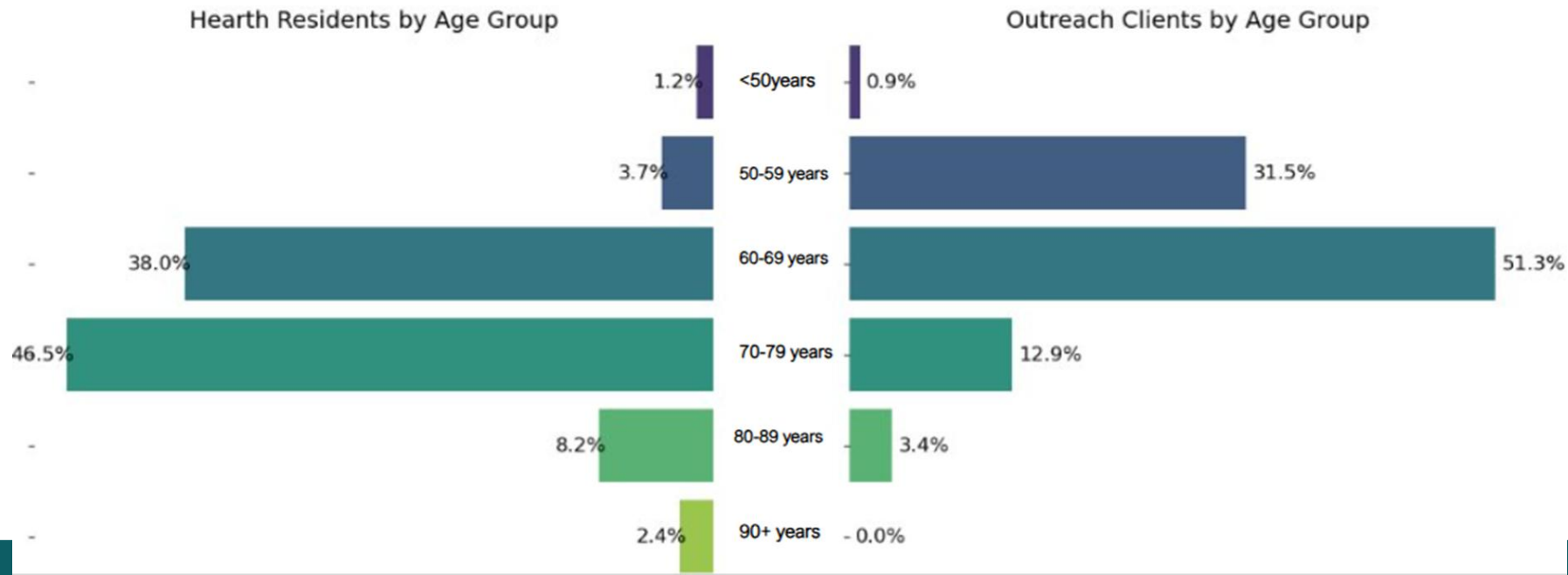
- MassHealth funds our Outreach Program with funds from Community Support Program for Chronically Homeless Individuals (CSP-CHI, formerly CSPECH) . The current CSP-CHI daily rate is \$27.42. Eliot Community Human Services charges an 11.5% fee for administrative support. As of 12/31/2024, Hearth is reimbursed for 82 clients living in the community and fall into several different services areas of housed (stabilization) or housing search.
- In November of 2023, the City of Boston awarded Hearth's Outreach Department with a \$217,372.60 per year for three years grant to provide housing and stabilizations services to 36 unsheltered individuals with vouchers from the City. In addition, funding for two case manager positions and half of the salary of a social work clinician position was awarded.

TENANCY STABILIZATION FUNDING TO PREVENT TENANTS FROM BECOMING HOMELESS

- Department of Neighborhood Development (DND), Department of Housing Stability (OHS) funds our Outreach Prevention CM through a federal grant annually. The most recent grant of \$154,828 supports 2 FTE of prevention case management in addition to other personnel costs associated with the program. As of June 30, 2024, we do not have a grant through the City of Boston that funds the Prevention case managers.
- In October 2024, Liberty Mutual awarded Hearth \$75,000 to be utilized over one year to support homeless prevention financial assistance, benefiting both community clients and Hearth Housing residents through Outreach programs.

Who We Serve

- In 2024, 62.9% of outreach participants identified as Black, African American, or African, followed by 23.3% as White, with smaller percentages representing multiracial, Hispanic/Latina/e/o, and Asian populations, highlighting the program's diversity.
- In 2024, 50% of residents identified in our Hearth Housing are Black, African American, or African, 31.7% as White, and 11.7% as Hispanic/Latina/e/o, with smaller percentages representing mixed race, Asian, Indigenous, or undisclosed groups.



OUTREACH DIRECT CLIENT SERVICES 2024

- Assisted 25 clients with clothing resources (provided clothing or referred to clothing organizations).
- Supported 42 clients with access to food resources (Hearth Food Pantry, gift cards, referrals to Food Banks, Meals on Wheels).
- Connected 30 clients to essential home goods (beds, toiletries, bedding, furniture bank referrals).
- Supported 43 clients with housing-related expenses (moving assistance, utility bills, back rent, security deposits).
- Connected 35 clients to transportation resources (MBTA passes, The Ride, Charlie Card, PT1, cab vouchers).

Scope Of The Problem

- The [2024 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report: Part 1: Point-in-Time Estimates](#) report found more than 770,000 people were experiencing homelessness on a single night in January 2024, an 18% increase from 2023.
- According to the [2024 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report \(AHAR\)](#) from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), over 100,000 individuals aged 55 or older were experiencing homelessness, with nearly 50% of this group being unsheltered.
- According to the [2024 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report to Congress](#), homelessness in Massachusetts rose by 53.4% (compared to 18% nationwide), nearly three times the national rate.
- In 2024, 64.9% were either homeless or chronically homeless before entering Hearth Housing, while 22.6% were at risk of homelessness before getting housed by Hearth.

Older Adults' Unique Challenges

- Healthcare Needs
- Financial Vulnerability
- Age-related Barriers
- Social Isolation

Operational Challenges

- **The ability to locate or generate a steady source of funding** to help individuals cover housing costs not included in vouchers (e.g., vital documents, first month's rent, security deposits, moving costs), to secure safe and affordable housing, reduce emergency service utilization.
- **The amount of prevention efforts** is infrequent due to the loss of various sources of fundings that would help individuals at risk of losing their homes.
- **Low rate** of pay when it comes to reimbursements is a challenge, and increased needs requires higher levels of training and resources.
- **Finding programs** that help with "closing the gaps" so individuals experiencing homelessness can prioritize their housing and health needs.
- **HUD's application process** is incredibly cumbersome.
- **Resources are limited** which creates extremely long waiting lists.
- **Availability of housing** is a challenge due to finding options that are safe, affordable and has services that follow a "Housing First" model. *Bringing People Home.*

Approaches to Improving Housing Stability and Access to Services

- **Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)** provides stable housing paired with medical care, mental health services, and case management, addressing both housing and health challenges.
 - The residential housing at Hearth has captured a care plan that works with meeting the needs of the residents and it has shown over the years to improve the quality. It is important to have a team that consists of the following individuals: Nurse, Clinical Social Worker, and Behavioral Health Clinician.
- **Wrap-around services** offer comprehensive elder care across multiple domains, enhancing accessibility and support.
 - The clients that are housed in the community are followed by the outreach case managers. The case managers assist with connecting the individuals with care in the community and various supports that will help to avoid isolation. The case managers assists everyone with keeping needed appointments for healthcare and assisting with housing recertification.

Bringing People Home.

Approaches to Improving Housing Stability and Access to Services Cont'd

- **The Housing First model** removes barriers by offering immediate housing without preconditions, improving stability and access to additional services.
 - As the case managers assist individuals with housing options there is a strong focus on these services. The case managers offer wrap around services, and we are able to give huge support when it comes to finding housing units that support "Housing First". The Outreach Team has a clinician that supports the case managers as they work with each individual.
- **Community-based peer support programs** connect older adults with resources and companionship, reducing isolation and the risk of homelessness.
 - Hearth is able to network with various agencies to help support the older adults in finding the right support. The agency also works with various volunteer programs that provided an abundance of services to the residents

Hearth's Outcomes + Impact 2024

- Since its founding in 1991, Hearth has housed 3052+ homeless and housing-insecure older adults through our permanent supported housing programs and outreach programs
- 81.78% of our housed older adults maintained their housing 12 months+
- 300+ older adults received housing search and stabilization services.
- 99.1% of outreach clients are aged 50 and older.
- 100% of outreach clients receive case management throughout the year and readily access stabilization and housing search services.
- 97.% are connected to a health insurance provider.



Homeless Action Center

Bringing People Home.

Who, Where, and What

Who

- Attorneys and Advocates

Where

- Alameda County: Offices in Berkeley and West Oakland

What

- **Public Benefits Advocacy**
 - SSI/SSDI
 - Local benefits: cash aid, food stamps, Medi-Cal, etc.
- **Help Accessing Medical Care**
- **Outreach**
 - Help accessing HAC services in person at encampments
 - Distribute basic hygiene supplies
 - Accompany individuals or households to appointments related to accessing public benefits
 - Help obtain vital documents (IDs, birth certificates)
 - Help apply for housing (get on waitlists)
- **Housing Navigation**
- ***Almost Home* transitional housing**
- **Front Desk Drop-in Hours/Helpline**

Bringing People Home.

How Our Programs are Funded

- HUD SNOFO Sub-recipient
 - 120 benefits clients and 30 housing navigation clients
- Alameda County Social Services
- Alameda County BHCS
 - Includes Santa Rita Jail Project, Public Defender
- State Bar of CA: EAF and IOLTA
- Other smaller contracts, e.g. City of Berkeley, City of Oakland

Our Work with Unhoused Older Adults: Benefits Advocacy

- Target of 120 unhoused older adults in Alameda County for full benefits advocacy
 - Assess if clients meet HUD definition of homelessness
 - Social Security Disability Insurance and/or Supplemental Security Income depending on age (SSDI and SSI)
 - Local benefits, county cash aid, SNAP (food stamps), Medicaid
 - Connect with housing
 - Assist with post-entitlement issues, e.g. overpayments, Continuing Disability Reviews, cessation and reinstatements

Bringing People Home.

Our Work with Unhoused Older Adults: Outreach

- Target of 30 unhoused older adults in Alameda County for housing navigation
 - Assess whether clients meet HUD's definition of homelessness
 - Assist with applying for Social Security Disability Insurance and/or Supplemental Security Income depending on age (SSDI and SSI)
 - Assist with local benefits, county cash aid, SNAP (food stamps), Medicaid
 - Connect with housing

Challenges to Serving Our Clients

- Staying in touch; making and keeping appointments
- Negative past experiences make people not want to engage (treated poorly, not taken seriously, paternalistic)
- Long waits for everything: medical appointments, housing matches, disability determinations
- Numerous issues to cover during short appointment blocks
- Harmful information in medical records (e.g. focus on substance use or accusations of malingering without considering underlying causes; short boilerplate notes)
- Encampment sweeps: displacement, property loss, trauma
- Serving a disabled population: e.g. clients with severe mental illness have difficulty engaging

Challenges to Serving Our Clients (continued)

- Reluctance or refusal by providers to assist with disability paperwork or other verifications
- Lack of stability (income, housing, ongoing trauma) make it difficult to maintain care, treatment, and contact which exacerbate health conditions; very difficult to stabilize or improve when in constant state of crisis
- Systemic/structural racism in these systems
- Negative assumptions/stereotypes of people experiencing homelessness or seeking benefits or housing
- Lack of community understanding around the conditions and causes of homelessness

Best Practices: Our Advocacy Approach

- Client-centered:
 - Maintain client autonomy, carry out client's expressed interests (versus perceived view of "best interests")
 - Involve clients in case management strategy
 - Let clients define what success looks like
- Low-Barrier:
 - Appointments not necessary
 - Sobriety not required
 - Meet people where they need us to: go to where they are staying, meet at café or medical facility, give rides or provide Lyft
 - Give multiple chances; realistic assessment of options if denied services

Best Practices: Our Advocacy Approach

- Harm Reduction:
 - Assist clients in addressing and improving health and well-being without asking them to change behaviors not ready/able to change
 - Motivational interviews: present options and involve client in strategy
 - Identify challenges: e.g. staying in touch, treatment engagement
 - Nonjudgmental approach
 - Celebrate all victories no matter how small
- Trauma-informed/trauma-responsive:
 - Recognize client population often traumatized, may not behave like others who have not experienced trauma
 - Look past surface of behavior, do not make assumptions about why

Specific Positive Outcomes of Unhoused Older Adults' Project

- Can take clients on the spot as opposed to waiting until an advocate has room in their caseload
- Can take clients who do not fit under any other contracts
- Working directly with outreach makes us able to reach more clients
- Working with outreach has enhanced knowledge of housing system for benefits advocates, team is all now trained in HMIS
- Generally easier to win cases for clients over 55, so winning more cases at initial
- Providing services to some of the most vulnerable community members

Thank You!

Dr. LaTanya N. Wright,
Vice President of Outreach and Partnerships
Hearth, Inc.
1640 Washington Street
Boston, MA 02118
(617) 369-1559 (Direct Line & Fax)
lwright@hearth-home.org
www.hearth-home.org

Meghan Pluimer
Managing Attorney
Homeless Action Center
2601 San Pablo Ave.
Oakland, CA 94612
(510) 698-1599
mpluimer@homelessactioncenter.org
www.homelessactioncenter.org

Kai Gault
Outreach Supervisor
Homeless Action Center
2601 San Pablo Ave.
Oakland, CA 94612
kgault@homelessactioncenter.org

Bringing People Home.