National Alliance to End Homelessness

Rethinking Transitional Housing: Applying Lessons Learned to Today's Homelessness Response

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ENDHOMELESSNESS.ORG

Governance • Coordination • System Flow • Housing Stability

WHAT WE DO



Policy and Programs	Capacity Building	Homeless Research Institute
• Carries out the vital work of educating policymakers and the field about key strategies and policies for ending and preventing homelessness. • Keeps federal policymakers and legislators informed of the needs of people experiencing homelessness and the programs serving them. • Leads advocacy efforts on a grassroots level.	• Supports efforts to end homelessness by offering training and technical assistance tailored to communities' unique needs. • Helps design and implement crisis systems, improve systems' performance, and utilize data to end homelessness, particularly with an equity lens. • Provides online courses, trainings, and webinars to inform the field of best practices to end homelessness.	• Analyzes data to identify homelessness trends on national, local, and Continuum of Care levels. • Publishes research that ensures policymakers, practitioners, the media, and the public have the best information about trends and emerging solutions to the problem. • Uses an equity lens to identify disparities in homelessness data.

Lived Experience Innovation + Strategic Communications

NATIONAL ALLIANCE TO END HOMELESSNESS STATEMENTS FOR PARTICIPATION

The Alliance works to ensure that diverse voices are included as facilitators, attendees, and guests in our office hours and forums. All voices are welcome.

The organization has a zero-tolerance policy for any form of discrimination or abusive behavior. The Alliance is committed to ensuring that all its events are safe and respectful for all participants.

Participants acknowledge that any form of discrimination, violence, or abusive behavior may result in removal from an office hour or forum depending on the situation.

If any discrimination is witnessed or experienced during the webinar, or if you feel unsafe, please notify any member of the Alliance staff.

The National Alliance to End Homelessness strives to create a diverse, inclusive, accepting, and safe space for everyone.

EFFECTIVE, EFFICIENT, AND EQUITABLE HOMELESS RESPONSE SYSTEM: GOAL

House people as quickly as possible
&
Divert people from imminent homelessness whenever possible



EFFECTIVE, EFFICIENT, AND EQUITABLE HOMELESS RESPONSE SYSTEM: ENDGAME

Homelessness is rare, brief, and one-time

- People in a housing crisis have access to immediate help, including a safe place to go
- People are not unsheltered
- People do not spend long periods of time homeless
- People exiting homelessness do not cycle quickly back into homelessness



EFFECTIVE, EFFICIENT, AND EQUITABLE HOMELESS RESPONSE SYSTEM: PRACTICE STANDARDS ALIGNED ACROSS ALL PROGRAMS

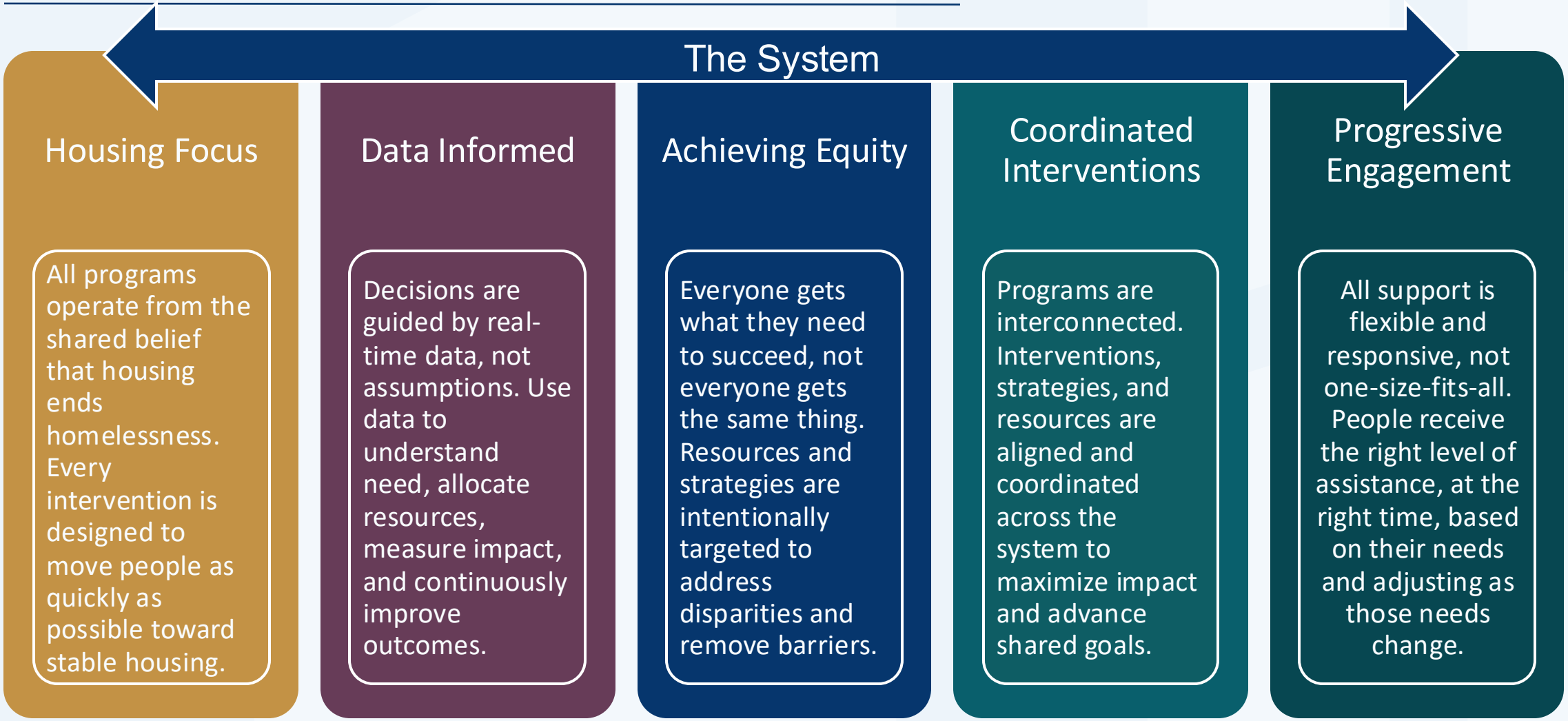
Prevent entries into homelessness whenever possible (upstream prevention, targeted prevention, diversion)

Rapidly identify and engage people experiencing unsheltered homelessness and connect them to crisis services and housing assistance

Quick, accessible, low-barrier pathways to shelter and other crisis services with short stays in shelter

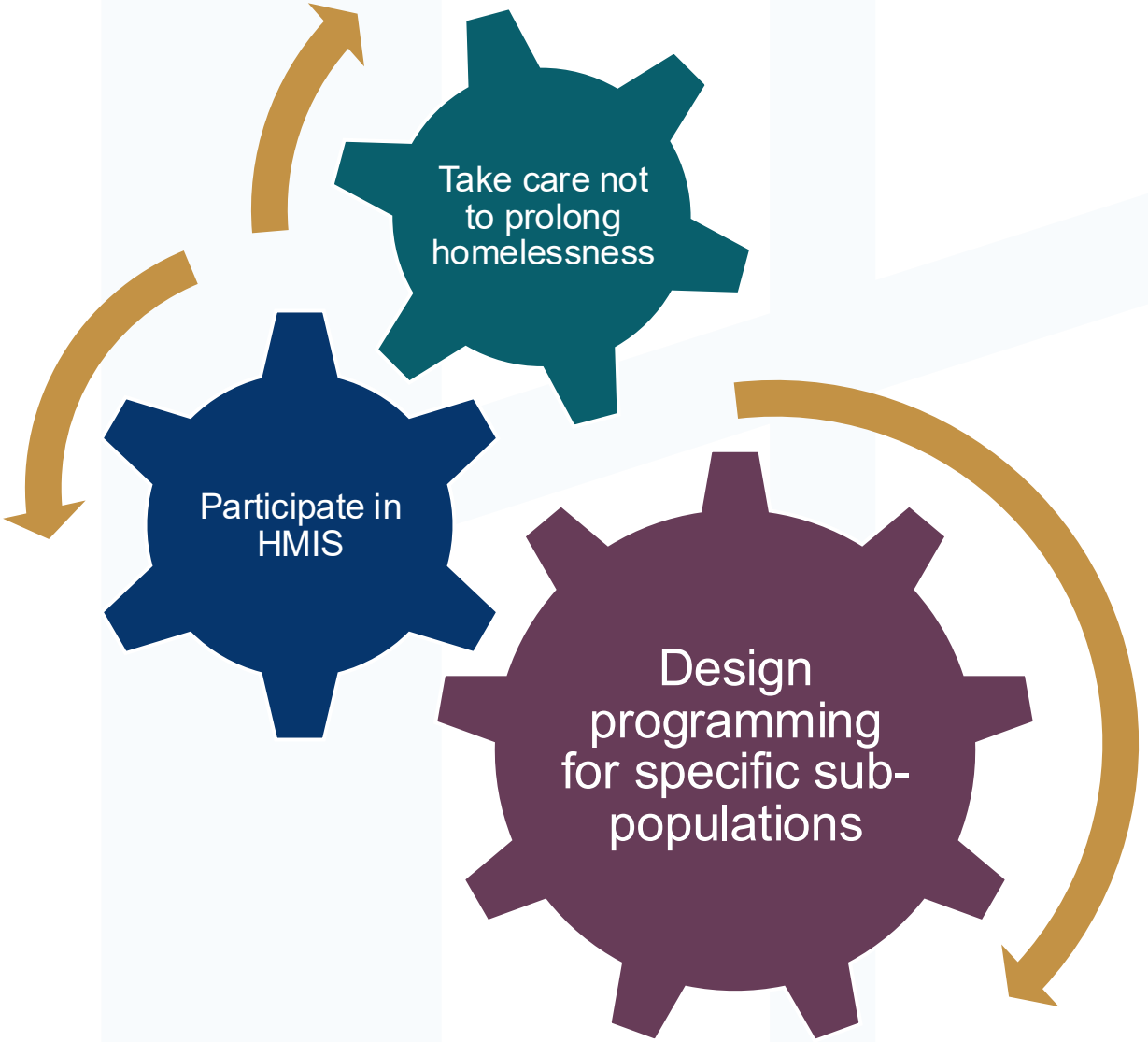
Rapid connection to permanent housing for all shelter and unsheltered people, with or without a housing program referral

EFFECTIVE, EFFICIENT, AND EQUITABLE HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE SYSTEM: SHARED SYSTEM PHILOSOPHY ACROSS ALL PROGRAMS



THE ROLE OF TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

- Integrated with the coordinated entry system (accepts referrals, provides real-time data)
- Diverting and rapidly exiting people who can safely maintain their housing or find other alternatives
- Prioritizing serving households with highest barriers to shelter and housing and those already literally homeless
- Providing immediate and low-barrier access via coordinated entry, with no programmatic barriers to retention
- Quickly connecting people to housing assistance and/or services tailored to their unique strengths and needs



Addressing Unsheltered Homelessness through the Joint Transitional Housing–Rapid Rehousing Program: Lessons learned for transitional housing

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JOINT COMPONENT TH-RRH PROGRAM MODEL

- Joint TH-RRH programs combine transitional housing and rapid rehousing into a single program
- Introduced in CoC Programs in FY2017
- Participants can use one or both components
- Designed as a flexible model that could be used to create tailored services for households experiencing homelessness



STUDY OVERVIEW & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Mixed-methods study to examine joint transitional housing-rapid rehousing programs as a strategy to address unsheltered homelessness
- Funded by the National Alliance to End Homelessness

- What are the key design, implementation, and service provision characteristics of joint component programs serving unsheltered adults in the United States?
- How are TH/RRH programs developed and implemented in communities?
- How do program staff and participants view these programs? How do they see this program as similar to or different from other available services?

ROLES & GOALS

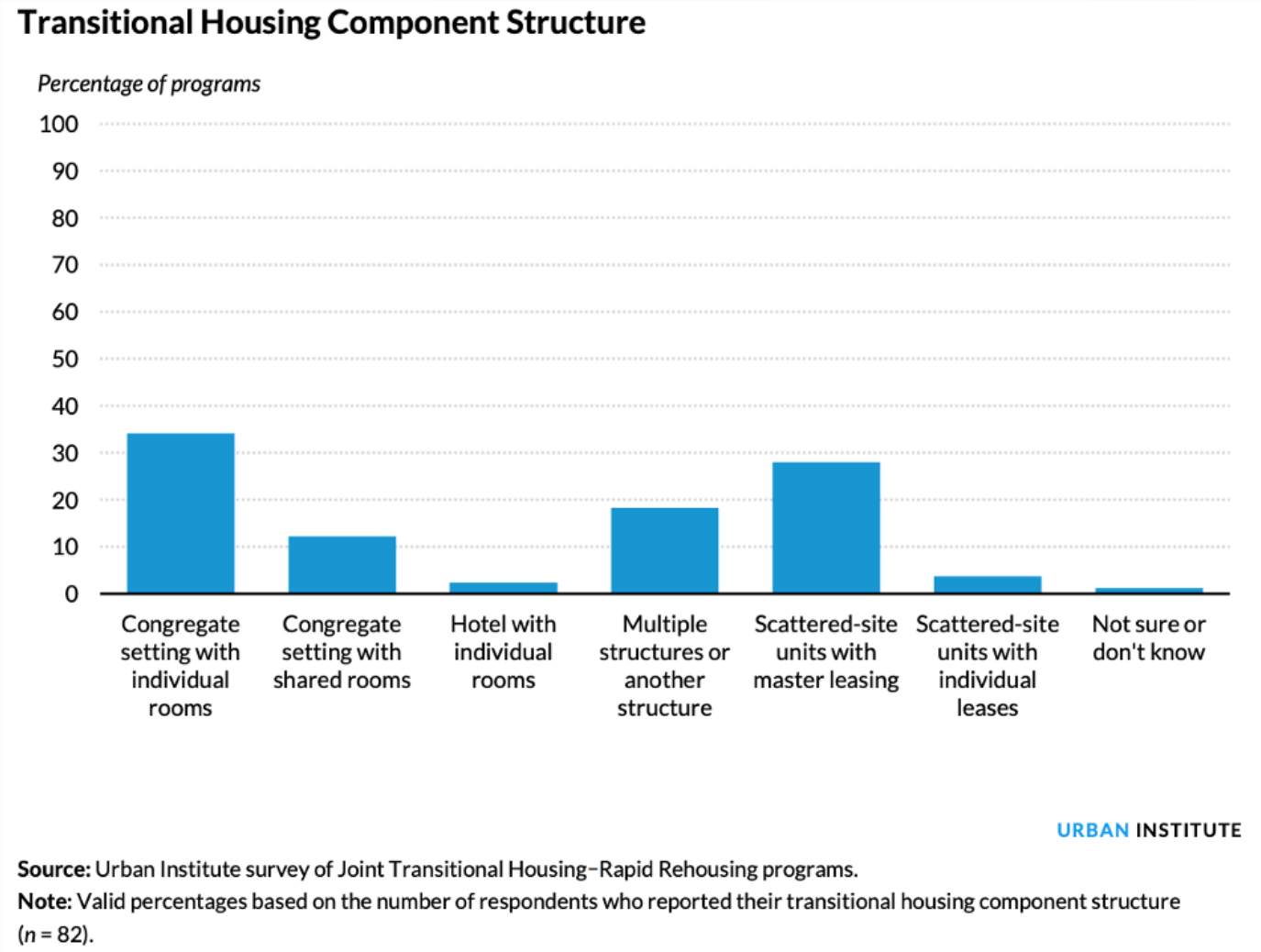
- Interview respondents described that the main goal of Joint TH/RRH programs is for clients to achieve housing and future stability
    - Designed programs with this in mind
- Transitional housing was described as an opportunity for clients to 'stabilize' and prepare to move into rapid rehousing.

"I have found that our low-barrier model has overall been very helpful, in the way that we have been able to get lots of clients housed, even if temporarily…we're getting them off the street and into housing, and I think that is always overall helpful."

—Case manager

DESIGNING TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

- Resource availability may drive some decisions around TH design
- Interview respondents described decisions based on availability and costs



PARTNERS, PETS, AND POSSESSIONS

- Partners, pets, and possessions can be barriers that may cause people experiencing homelessness to refuse or avoid traditional emergency shelter systems

- Aligned with the low-barrier design, transitional housing programs surveyed strived to accommodate partners, pets, and possessions.

LESSONS LEARNED

- The goal of the Joint TH/RRH program model is to promote future housing stability by providing short-term stabilization placements, time-limited rental assistance, and continued wraparound services.

- Strengths of the Joint TH/RRH program model include moving people out of unsheltered situations quickly and supporting quick transitions into permanent housing in the community

- Transitional housing components should aim to serve as a short-term resource, not a long-term placement

Where Does Transitional Housing Fit?

Where Does Transitional Housing Fit?

A purposeful bridge — not the destination



Homeless Crisis

Engagement, access, coordinated entry, and housing problem-solving

Transitional housing

Temporary stabilization + support while actively securing a housing exit

Permanent housing

A stable home, with ongoing supports when needed

Key point: People in TH are still considered homeless. Success is the move into permanent housing.

WHAT TRANSITIONAL HOUSING IS — AND IS NOT

START WITH A SHARED UNDERSTANDING

TH IS…

- Temporary housing with supportive services
- A pathway to permanent housing
- Housing with an occupancy agreement
- A component of the coordinated system

TH IS NOT…

- Permanent housing or an indefinite stay
- A test of “housing readiness”
- A program that requires earning graduation
- A stand-alone solution disconnected from exits

CoC-funded TH generally permits stays of up to 24 months but the goal is to exit sooner when permanent housing is secured.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED FROM THE PAST?

RETAIN THE LESSONS; AVOID REPEATING OLD PATTERNS

High barriers

Rules, requirements, or services that keep people from getting help.

One-size-fits-all design

Programs that require people to fit the model instead of adapting support to needs.

Long stays and high costs

Resource-intensive interventions without timely moves to permanent housing.

The design shift **From program compliance and length of stay - to choice, access, housing exits, and lasting stability.**

DESIGN TH TO ACCELERATE HOUSING EXITS

FOUR CORE PRACTICES FOR AN EFFECTIVE INTERVENTION

LOW-BARRIER

Remove unnecessary entry rules and reduce barriers to participation.

PERSON-CENTERED

Honor participant choice; offer responsive, voluntary supports.

HOUSING-FOCUSED

Begin housing planning on day one; navigate units and reduce barriers.

SYSTEM-ALIGNED

Use coordinated entry, shared priorities, and warm handoffs.

Design supports around the housing plan — not housing around the program.

THE QUESTIONS COMMUNITIES MUST ANSWER

TH IS A SYSTEM DESIGN DECISION

WHO?	Who benefits most, based on local data and lived experience?
HOW?	Which model, resources, and partnerships make exits possible?
TO WHERE?	What permanent housing pathways are available from day one?
HOW WELL?	Are exits faster, stays shorter, and returns reduced?

Measure success by permanent housing exits and sustained stability, not program completion.

RETHINKING TRANSITIONAL HOUSING: APPLYING LESSONS LEARNED TO TODAY'S HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE

Meet the Panel:

- Mar-quetta Boddie- Sr. TA Specialist National Alliance to End Homelessness
- Mary Gregg Simons– Senior Directing Analyst, Homebase
- Iain De Jong- President and CEO, OrgCode Consulting Inc.
- Tom Albanese– Principal and Founder, Element Consulting Group

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Do No Harm:** Design and operate transitional housing programs that prioritize safety, dignity, choice, and the well-being of participants.
- **Adapt to Community Needs:** Programs must be flexible and responsive to the evolving needs of people experiencing homelessness and the communities they serve.
- **Create Opportunities for Stability:** Transitional housing does not stabilize people; it provides an opportunity, resources, and support for individuals to work toward stability.
- **Measure Outcomes, Not Just Outputs:** Move beyond counting services provided and focus on meaningful outcomes, including permanent housing placements, housing retention, and participant well-being.
- **Compliance Does Not Equal Behavior Change:** We cannot rely on program rules, requirements, or compliance to change behavior. Instead, programs should build trusting relationships, support individual choice, and create opportunities for meaningful, sustainable change through person-centered and trauma-informed approaches.
- **Co-Create Services with Participants:** Center people with lived experience in program design and service planning, ensuring meaningful choice and self-determination.
- **Develop Robust Crisis Response Plans:** Establish clear, trauma-informed strategies to address crises, promote safety, and prevent unnecessary program exits.
- **Redefine Success**: Success should reflect the goals, experiences, and priorities of the people being served, not just program-defined benchmarks.
- **Take a Holistic Approach**: Design programs that recognize and respond to the interconnected housing, health, economic, and social needs of individuals.
- **Start Housing Conversations on Day One**: Make permanent housing the focus from the beginning, with housing planning, problem-solving, and navigation integrated throughout the program.
- **Embed Trauma-Informed Practices**: Recognize the impacts of trauma and create environments that promote trust, safety, empowerment, and healing.
- **Use the 5 Ps:** Prepared, Proximate, Present, Patient, and Professional

THANKS TO OUR PANELIST

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