Whatcom County Local Homelessness Plan Update

Whatcom County Health Department

October 8, 2019
Whatcom County Council – Public Works and Health Committee

Background

History of Planning

Current system began organizing in 2005
- Last major update was in 2012

Guiding principals and values remain the same
- The solution to homelessness is permanent, stable housing
- Prioritize services for the most vulnerable
- Use evidence-based best practices while innovating new solutions tailored to local conditions; verify with data
- Housing restores dignity, saves lives, and strengthens community

Plan Overview

Requirements of Plan from Dept. Commerce

1. Identify and engage people experiencing homelessness
2. Prioritize people with the greatest needs
3. Operate a crisis response system that moves people to stable housing
4. Project the number of households served and number left unsheltered
5. Address racial disparities among people experiencing homelessness

Identified Needs

Leading Causes of Homelessness

1. Shortage of Affordable Housing
   - Eviction, Job Loss, Unemployment
2. Health Care and Social Service Needs
   - Mental Illness, Substance Abuse, Medical, Dev. Disabilities
3. Domestic Violence & Family Conflict
4. Re-Entry from Jails, Prisons, and other Institutes

What We Do Now

4 Foundational Pillars

- Case Management

- Inter-Agency Collaboration

- Quality Oversight and Assurance
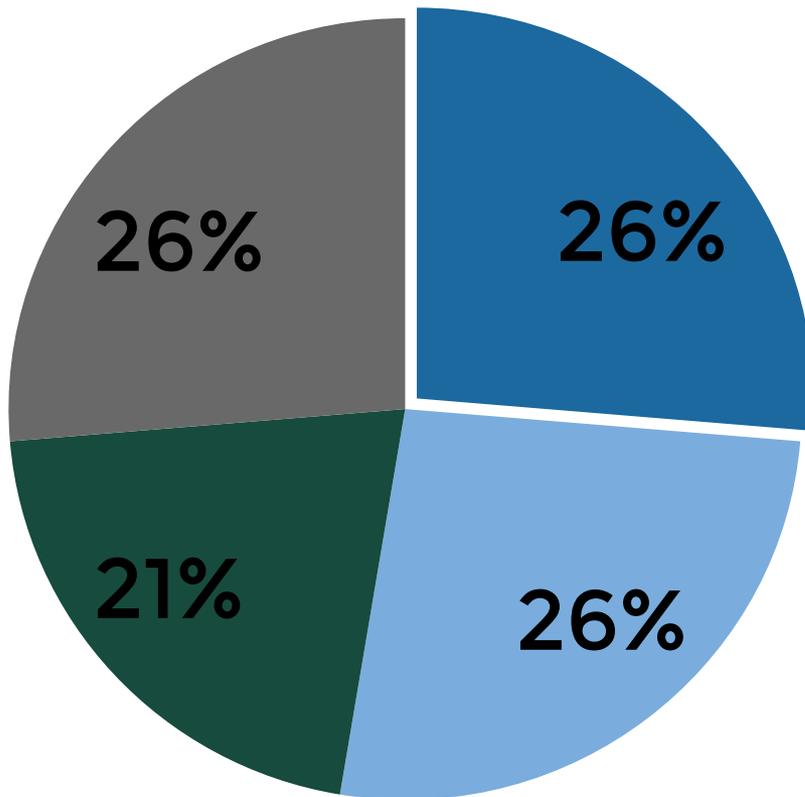
- Whatcom Homeless Service Center

What We Do Now

7 Local Strategies

- Coordinated Entry / Centralized Intakes

- Rapid Re-Housing

- Permanent Supportive Housing

- Increase Supply of Affordable Housing

- Prevention and Diversion

- Interim Housing

- Improve Economic Security

System Resources

Whatcom County HEALTH Department
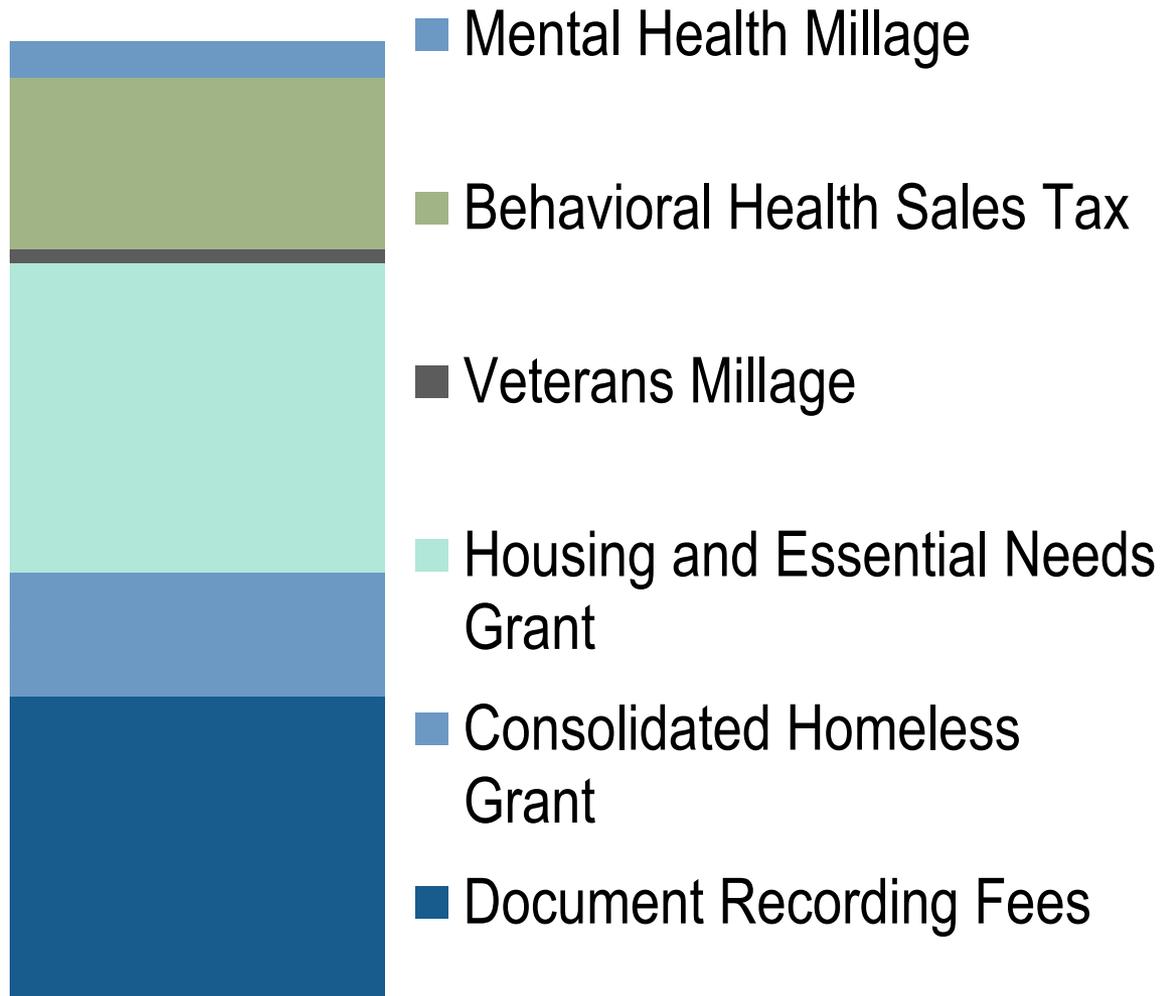
Annual Funding – $19 million

- 26% Whatcom County Health Dept (local & state funding)
- 26% City of Bellingham (local & federal funding)
- 21% Housing Authority and other Federal Funding
- 26% Private Contributions

System Resources

Whatcom County
HEALTH
Department

2019 Funding Composition for WCHD's Housing Program

$5,053,546 Total

- Mental Health Millage
- Behavioral Health Sales Tax
- Veterans Millage
- Housing and Essential Needs Grant
- Consolidated Homeless Grant
- Document Recording Fees

System Resources

Subsidized Housing – In System

Type	Beds for Adults or Solo Youths	Beds for Families	Total
Emergency Shelter	49	49	98
Transitional Housing	31	41	72
Rapid ReHousing	125	404	529
Permanent Rent Support	12	201	213
Permanent Supportive Housing	331	34	365
Total	**548**	**729**	**1,277**

System Resources

Recent Improvements or Additions

- Count of homeless individuals decreased 14% from 2018
- Increased number of units and added service capacity
- Improved relationships with landlords
- Development of diversion program at Homeless Svc Cntr
- Launch of coordinated care program (GRACE)
- Improved data collection and data use
- Stronger collaboration of service providers and community

Plan to End Homelessness

System Improvements Underway

Expand access to affordable housing

- Landlord Liaison, Roommate Café, Housing Lab, Supported Employment

Increase support for chronically homeless population

- Use Medicaid funding (Foundational Community Supports) to increase capacity of Permanent Supportive Housing

Improve referral process

- Better info from assessments, better coordination with partners

New Actions In Plan

Quickly Identify and Engage . . .

Provide more extensive training for frontline staff

- Behavioral health, trauma-informed care, motivational interviewing, etc.

Reduce unsheltered homelessness

- Add capacity and supports to emergency shelters
- Expand "outreach" at Ground Floor day center for Youth

New Actions In Plan

Prioritize Housing for Most Vulnerable

Update assessment tool to more accurately identify needs

New, collaborative effort to improve "fit" of housing placements and reduce repetition of system failures

New Actions In Plan

Continue to Operate an Effective and Efficient System to Quickly Move People into Permanent Housing

Invest in Landlord Liaison and Roommate Café programs

- Reduce time spent looking for homes
- Reduce returns to homelessness
- Share housing to support affordability

Refine Housing Pool Maintenance

- Spend less time searching for households
- Reduce false hope and the tendency to wait

Equity Analysis

Homelessness is not distributed evenly

- Much greater likelihood for Native Americans to be homeless

- Non-white households are twice as likely to be homeless

- LGBTQ identification overrepresented among homeless youths

- Only 7% of single parent homeless families led by male head of household
    - Nationally, 20% of single parent households have male parent

Equity Actions

Reduce Disparities in Homelessness

- Provide training for partner agency staff on equity and cultural competency

- Require contractual partners of the Health Department to submit plan on how they intend to work toward reducing disparities in at least one of the identified groups

- Reach out to leadership of groups that experience disparities in rates of homelessness

Forecast

Funding Required to Keep Up with Need

	Population Growth (annual %)	Rent Growth (annual %)	Predicted change in number of unsheltered HHs in 2024	Annual Funding to Offset Growth (includes inflation)
Scenario 1	0	0	**-24**	$111,629
Scenario 2	0	3	**-5**	$198,314
Scenario 3	1.5	3	**+29**	$318,183
Scenario 4	1.5	5	**+67**	$493,327
Scenario 5	1.5	8	**+129**	$758,772

Summary

- **Requirements from Commerce Met**

- **Local Strategies Remain in Place**
  - Strengthened with New Programs
  - Increased Emphasis on Equity

- **Expand Programs as Funding Allows**

Next Steps

- **Plan due to Commerce on 12/2**
- **Must be approved by Council**
  - Final draft to council: Nov. 19
  - Last day to make changes: Oct. 30

Next Steps

Questions?

Comments?

Requests?