

Redesigning Maine's Homeless Response System

MaineHousing

Special Needs Housing: Combating Homelessness

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Building a more coordinated homeless response system through regional hubs

In 2022 MaineHousing and its partners attained a major goal in the redesign of the State's homeless response system when the agency signed contracts for nine new regional homeless system Hub Coordinators. These new Hub Coordinators are a key part of Maine's ongoing and collaborative effort to reach real-time, quality data on homelessness including a by-name list for each of the newly designated regional hubs, and to ultimately decrease homelessness across the state.

Jennifer Weatherbee, the Region 7 Hub coordinator, which covers the City of Bangor along with Maine's Penobscot and Piscataquis counties, came to the role with more than 20 years of experience as an outreach worker and case manager.

"A big take away for me in year one is how siloed we have been," Weatherbee wrote in a message reflecting on what she has learned in her first year in the role. "I think this job has shown me how we are all part of a larger system that works better when we understand the other roles and are able to work together more effectively."

To Weatherbee's point, ensuring the myriad of organizations that provide services and aid to those facing a housing crisis know how they fit into the bigger picture and how they can enhance their response and the quality of their service by collaboration with others in the region is instrumental to the success of the redesign.

Background

In June 2020, the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH), started a year-long process to help MaineHousing and the Statewide Homeless Council redesign Maine's homeless response system. This resulted in a final report that recommended the creation of nine regional Homeless Response Service Hubs, each staffed by a Hub Coordinator.

From June to December of 2021, MaineHousing and the Statewide Homeless Council partnered with Community Solutions' *Built for Zero* initiative to begin implementation of this statewide hub model, convening cross-agency teams in each Hub and setting a foundation for Hub Coordinators to establish command centers.

Unlike other staff whose primary role is supporting programmatic, compliance or organization-specific goals, Hub Coordinators are uniquely responsible for coordinating and tracking system-wide efforts to achieve reductions in homelessness across the entire Hub. The Hub Coordinator is dedicated to setting up and sustaining a "command center" approach that includes:

- Convening and facilitating a cross-agency collaborative team
- Working to achieve quality, real time Hub-level data
- Tracking Hub system performance metrics
- Managing a centralized prioritization and housing referral process (Coordinated Entry)
- Working with Hub team members to identify trends and resource gaps, and undertake system improvement projects

In many communities, success is often measured by program-level outcomes (we housed 30 people this month) versus population-level outcomes (homelessness decreased by 10% over the last six months). The command center strategy ensures that all activities and investments are driving measurable reductions in overall homelessness.

Indicators of success

Initial indicators that MaineHousing's redesign strategy is working and remains on track have also started to emerge.

Tara Hembree, MaineHousing's Statewide Homeless Response System Coordinator, who guides the work of the Hub Coordinators, said new and better communications between regional services providers, even those outside of the realm of homelessness response, are now aiding the cause.

"One short example of a positive outcome is that in the 2023 Point-In-Time count a local provider who typically focuses on food insecurity and substance use prevention decided to help with the unsheltered count," Hembree said. "They were so moved by the need for outreach in their community they are teaming up with the local Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) provider to assist in street outreach to connect more folks to the homeless response system in an area with minimal resources."

This is additionally an example of how the Hub coordinators, through communication, collaboration and outreach, are effective "force multipliers" because they are essentially growing response capacity and resources, and often finding it in pre-existing local programs or services that simple were previously "siloed" out of the response system.

Benefits outweigh costs

This is also one example of how the redesign effort is providing benefits that outweigh the costs of its implementation: coordinators have drawn to the table new or previously underutilized human, program and physical resources that may have otherwise been left out of the equation.

As the redesign reaches its goal of real-time, quality, by-name data, providers across the spectrum will be able to better judge program effectiveness, make more timely program adjustments and enhancements while improving overall quality assurance and control.

"With real-time data we can quickly see if a program is having the outcomes expected and if we are seeing the actively homeless numbers decrease," Hembree said. "Rather than waiting to examine a program at the end of the pilot, we can see indicators much sooner. Our next big steps will be to use what we can see in our data to make changes and test ideas that have measurable outcomes."

Hembree said we can explore and answer a range of important questions this way including, for example, things like:

- Did a landlord engagement effort show the expected increase in exits to permanent housing?
- Are homeless providers seeing a decrease in people discharged from hospitals into homelessness?
- Did a policy change reduce the time it takes to permanently house someone?

Answering these questions for one Hub will be adaptable and scalable to the others.

"We can work on solutions at a local level with willing partners and scale successful interventions to other Hubs across the State," Hembree said. "There are only good things to come with this model of local service Hubs responding to local needs. The learning from each other is invaluable and I cannot wait to see what we do over the next few years."

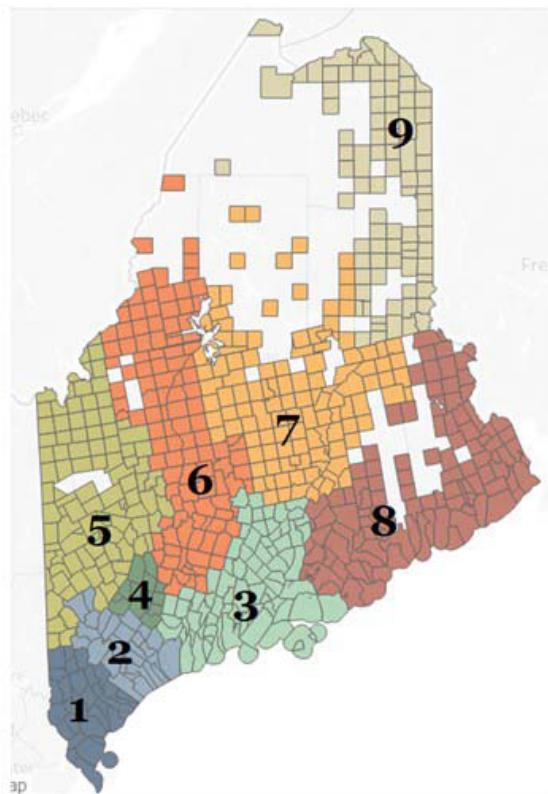
Replicable

Maine became only the second state in the nation, behind Colorado, to adopt a statewide Built-For-Zero strategy and methodology for combating homelessness. But as no two states are identical and the strategies and tactics that work well at reducing homelessness in one community may not always work the same in another, Maine modified its approach adopting a statewide model built on a coordinated network of nine regional hubs.

Nevertheless, the underlying strategy of improved collaboration and networking via a mission-control model of coordinated communications and response is easily replicable.

Appendix A Service Hubs Map

Maine Homeless Response System Service Hub Structure



Hub 1: York

Hub 2: Cumberland

Hub 3: Midcoast: Sagadahoc, Knox, Lincoln, Waldo and Towns of Brunswick and Harpswell

Hub 4: Androscoggin

Hub 5: Western: Oxford, Franklin and Towns of Livermore and Livermore Falls

Hub 6: Central: Somerset and Kennebec

Hub 7: Penquis: Penobscot and Piscataquis

Hub 8: Downeast: Washington and Hancock

Hub 9: Aroostook

Appendix B

News Article Links

New Strategy to reduce and end homelessness moves forward with HUD Contracts

<https://www.mainehousing.org/news/news-detail/2022/02/11/new-strategy-to-reduce-and-end-homelessness-moves-forward-with-hub-contracts>

Built for Zero movement targets homelessness in Maine

<https://spectrumlocalnews.com/me/maine/news/2022/05/06/built-for-zero-movement-targets-homelessness-in-maine>

“Built For Zero” A Nationwide Initiative to End Homelessness coming to The County

<https://www.wagmtv.com/2022/04/20/built-zero-nationwide-initiative-end-homelessness-coming-county/>

A Place To Call Home: Built For Zero / Homeless Hubs

[https://www.wagmtv.com/2022/10/05/place-call-home-builtzero-homeless-hubs/](https://www.wagmtv.com/2022/10/05/place-call-home-built-zero-homeless-hubs/)

Unlike Bangor, these cities across the country found solutions to rising homelessness

<https://www.bangordailynews.com/2022/09/26/news/bangor/nationwide-built-for-zero-homelessness-solutions-joam40zk0w/>

ME implements nationwide initiative to help curb homelessness

<https://www.newscentermaine.com/article/news/community/main-implements-nationwide-initiative-to-help-curb-homelessness-community/97-3983aa49-80e8-480c-a75d-54b3c31ebd32>

I-Team: Housing experts say Maine could be first to end homelessness statewide

<https://wgme.com/news/i-team/i-team-housing-experts-say-maine-could-be-first-to-end-homelessness-statewide>

Her work may be the answer for eliminating homelessness

<http://observer-me.com/2022/12/08/news/her-work-may-be-the-answer-for-eliminating-homelessness/>