Houston’s approach to Homelessness

Lance Gilliam
Board Chair, Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County
The struggle to solve homelessness is getting harder nearly everywhere. Yet recent years have still seen many more victories than defeats. And the biggest victory is in greater Houston, which over the last decade has cut homelessness by more than half.

Houston’s story holds lessons for Los Angeles. The chief one is that solving homelessness is less about economics than about strategic clarity and execution.

Evidence that homelessness is not an inescapable fact of modern post-industrial life is not hard to find. From the time systematic counting began in 2007 to the last official count in 2020, the homeless population fell nationwide by 30.3%.

The decline has been especially significant among homeless families with children, which is particularly good news.

If that good news seems too removed from the particular woes of West Coast mega-cities, note that while homelessness in Los Angeles County was doubling over the last decade, it was significantly dropping in Long Beach — in the same crazed Southern California housing market and same unequal local economy. It’s also fallen in Pasadena and Glendale, the two other cities that handle homelessness separately from the rest of the county.

L.A. and Houston are the second- and fourth-largest cities in the country, two vast, highly diverse Sun Belt sprawls. Houston has slightly higher poverty levels, while L.A.’s unemployment rate fell close to Houston’s leading into the pandemic.

One significant difference:

Second Opinion ::
BIG IDEAS ON GLOBAL CHALLENGES

The homelessness quandary

Houston has cut homelessness over the last decade by more than half. The big takeaway for L.A.: Strategic clarity and execution lead to success.
Coordinate the community response to homelessness

Non-Profit Organization

Lead agency for the TX-700 Continuum of Care

100+ partners working together to end homelessness

Permanent housing is the solution

AKA: TX-700 Continuum of Care
The local homeless response system

Coalition for the Homeless

The Way Home

The Way Home
Houston leads the nation in housing & reducing homelessness.

**Figure 4**

Note: Counts prior to 2017 include Harris and Fort Bend counties only. Counts 2017 and after also include Montgomery County. 2021 Count employed different methodology due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
The Way Home

Coordinated Access*
Real-time, web-based system

Triage | Assess | Assign | Accountability

30% short-term intervention (Rapid Rehousing)
28% medium-term intervention (Transition in Place)
30% long-term intervention (Permanent Supportive Housing)

* 12% of the homeless population will solve their homelessness on their own
The Way Home

Steering Committee

Officers:
Chair - Barbie Brashear, Harris County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council
Vice Chair - Barbie Robinson, Harris County Public Health
Secretary - Dr. Martin Negron, Harris County Community Services Department

Fixed Position Representatives:
Sara Rogers, City of Pasadena Community Development
Carol Borrego - Fort Bend County Community Development
Horace Allison, Harris County Housing Authority
Mark Thiele, Houston Housing Authority
Marc Eichenbaum - Houston Housing & Community Development
Rebecca Ansley, Montgomery County Community Development

At-Large Representatives:
Jennifer Herring, Harris County Sheriff’s Office
Tracey Burdine, Harris Health System
Alan Watkins, Houston Housing Collaborative
Dr. Roberta Scott, Houston Independent School District
Dr. Evanthe Collins, The Harris Center
Dr. Theresa Tran, UT Health

Provider Representatives:
Preston Witt, Harmony House
Becky Landes, The Beacon

Consumer Representatives:
Gregory Dread, Lived Experience
Nakia Sims, Lived Experience
Housing First

permanent housing + supportive services = life stability
Community COVID Housing Program
On July 1, 2020, Houston, Harris County, Coalition announced $65M plan to house 5,000 people by October 2022

Housing is healthcare
Proposed Strategy

- Bridge to Permanent Supportive Housing
- 12-Month Rapid Re-housing
- Diversion
- Auxiliary/ Social Distancing Emergency Shelter
- Mental Health Case Management
- Enhanced Street Outreach
- PSH Housing Preservation
The Way Home System Performance
CCHP Funding People Housed Tracker (as of 2/21/22)

Phase 1 goal: 5,000 housed met ✅
Community COVID Housing Program

Photos courtesy of The Salvation Army of Greater Houston
The CCHP allowed for the roll-out of an Encampment Decommissioning program that has demonstrated proven results in placing individuals living on the streets into housing.

- Official Encampment Response Strategy available.
- Currently being used by HUD as a national best practice.
- Houston Chronicle cover story featured our efforts.
## Encampment Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encampments Decommissioned</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individuals Engaged</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individuals Housed or On Path to Being House</td>
<td>245</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individuals Self-Resolved</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individuals Refused</td>
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</table>
Encampment at Allen Parkway and 45 North

Before

After
CCHP Phase 2

Advancing our System with ARPA
Houston and Harris County announce increased investment in efforts to reduce homelessness by $100 million.

“In Houston, we either go big or we go home. And today, we are going big so…Houstonians can go home!” – Houston Mayor, Sylvester Turner
ARPA Funding for PSH and RRH Expansion to End Chronic and Unsheltered Homelessness by 2024

$20M+ State of Texas

$40M+ Harris County

$40M+ City of Houston

= House another 7,000 through 2024
What has made the difference?

- Focus on providing permanent housing with supportive services
- Steering Committee for the homeless response system led by public funders and adjacent systems
  - Appoints the lead agency (the Coalition for the Homeless)
  - Sets the system’s long-term strategy
- Most vulnerable individuals prioritized for housing (Coordinated Access)
- Nonprofit service providers streamlined services so as not to overlap
The lead agency must

1. Have a macro viewpoint
2. Have flexibility, independence and energy to overcome bureaucratic hurdles
3. Obtain appropriate public and private financial support to sustain itself and the system
Three key strengths

- SCALE OF EFFORT
- EXCELLENT ORGANIZATION
- PRAGMATISM