



# Core Elements of Effective Street Outreach to People Experiencing Homelessness

Coordinated street outreach that identifies and engages people living in unsheltered locations such as cars, parks, abandoned buildings, encampments, and on the streets, is a critical tool for ending homelessness. Effective street outreach reaches people who might not otherwise seek assistance or come to the attention of the homelessness service system and ensures that people’s basic needs are met as they are on a pathway toward housing stability.

Most street outreach in communities is currently funded through a patchwork of government programs and private resources, with varying mandates, requirements, and performance measures. Yet the goal of street outreach—helping people who are living unsheltered return to stable community living in safe and affordable housing—should remain consistent.

This document, which was developed collaboratively with our partners at Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH), is not intended to replace the mandates or metrics of individual programs. Rather, it is intended to identify **universal elements of effective street outreach** that cut across various funding streams, and which are broadly applicable to a variety of communities, geographic contexts, and sub-populations.

Communities can use this list to assess their street outreach efforts at both the program- and system-level, and to identify opportunities to build upon and strengthen their systemic approach to ending homelessness, particularly unsheltered homelessness.

It is important to acknowledge that while communities are strengthening housing-focused practices across their systems, the growing scarcity of decent housing at an attainable and sustainable cost creates additional pressure for outreach teams. Federal partners are committed to supporting communities to address the immediate crises they face, while also ensuring that individuals and families have meaningful access to safe, quality housing they can afford and sustain.

## Core Elements of Effective Street Outreach

### Street Outreach Efforts are Systematic, Coordinated, and Comprehensive.

- Street outreach is conducted on behalf of the community rather than one agency, requiring collaboration among multiple stakeholders. Knowledge of and engagement with all partners implementing street outreach efforts leads to more strategic use of resources and more comprehensive coverage and identification of all people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.
- Street outreach is coordinated among various providers engaged in ending homelessness and across different entities such as Federal, State, local government, and non-profits. These entities may utilize multiple funding sources to conduct street outreach.<sup>i</sup>

- Street outreach efforts are also coordinated with the broader network of programs, services, or staff who are likely to encounter individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness, but whose regular focus is broader than homelessness. This might include law enforcement and other first responders, hospitals, health and behavioral healthcare providers, child welfare agencies, homeless education liaisons, workforce systems, faith-based organizations, and other community-based providers.
- Street outreach efforts are connected to coordinated entry processes. People sleeping in unsheltered locations are assessed and prioritized for assistance in the same manner as any other person assessed through the coordinated entry process.
- All street outreach contacts and housing placements are documented in HMIS or another local data system, such as an active or by-name list. Outreach workers have access to data systems to be able to input data, look up previous contacts with the person experiencing homelessness, and access information on available resources.
- Where street outreach providers or coordinated-entry processes have established data-sharing agreements and protocols, outreach providers can access data that helps them more effectively engage in housing-focused outreach. Data on frequent use of shelter, emergency health services, and jails, when reviewed alongside HMIS or by-name list data, can lead to more comprehensive identification of high-need individuals.

#### **Street Outreach Efforts Are Housing Focused.**

- The goal of street outreach is to make connections to stable housing with tailored services and supports of their choice, such as health and behavioral health care, transportation, access to benefits, and more.
- Street outreach does not require individuals to enter emergency shelter or transitional housing as an ‘interim step’ or prerequisite to accessing stable housing. However, street outreach does make immediate connections to emergency shelter or temporary housing to provide safe options while individuals and families are on a pathway toward stability.
- To the extent possible, street outreach utilizes Housing First approaches that do not impose preconditions to make referrals to permanent housing, shelter, or other temporary housing, such as sobriety, minimum income requirements, absence of a criminal record, completion of treatment, participation in services, or other unnecessary conditions. Some housing options in the homelessness system may not be available due to specific eligibility criteria.

#### **Street Outreach Efforts Are Person-Centered, Trauma-Informed, and Culturally Responsive.**

- Street outreach utilizes a person-centered approach, focused on the individual’s strengths and resources, and never makes assumptions about what a person might need or want.
- Street outreach workers provide people experiencing homelessness with multiple opportunities to say ‘no’ and make repeated offers of assistance as necessary throughout the engagement process.
- Street outreach staff receive regular training in evidence-based practices, including trauma-informed care, and are proficient in utilizing such practices.

- Street outreach providers employ outreach staff with lived experience and offer commensurate compensation to all outreach staff.
- Street outreach workers provide warm handoffs to coordinated entry or to shelter, housing, and service providers (e.g. outreach staff may offer to physically accompany the individual to appointments to provide support).
- Street outreach efforts are respectful and responsive to the beliefs and practices, sexual orientations, disability statuses, age, gender identities, cultural preferences, and linguistic needs of all individuals.
- Street outreach efforts recognize that certain groups – particularly African-Americans, American Indians and Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders – are disproportionately represented among people experiencing homelessness. As part of the broader homelessness response system, street outreach efforts should be attentive to racial inequity and seek to play a role in facilitating housing and services connections. For example, this might include tracking and analyzing data on outreach engagements to ensure that housing opportunities are equitably reaching people of color and taking steps to diversify staff at all levels.
- Street outreach workers utilize problem-solving techniques to identify strengths and existing support networks, explore possible safe housing options outside the homelessness service system, such as reunification with family, and connect the individual to community supports and services.

#### **Street Efforts Emphasize Safety and Reduce Harm.**

- Street outreach providers have protocols in place to ensure the safety of all individuals seeking assistance. These protocols help ensure that people fleeing domestic violence, as well as dating violence, sexual assault, trafficking, or stalking, have safe and confidential access to the coordinated entry process and domestic violence services.
- Street outreach efforts utilize harm reduction principles, including non-judgmental, non-coercive provision of services and resources.
- Street outreach efforts accept that some individuals may not initially accept offers of emergency shelter or housing assistance. While maintaining a focus on creating connections to permanent housing, outreach workers establish rapport and reduce harm by providing critical, life-saving resources such as food, water, clothing, blankets, and other necessities.

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<sup>1</sup> Funding sources may include HUD's CoC and ESG programs, SAMHSA's Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH), Grants for the Benefit of Homeless Individuals (GBHI) and Treatment for Individuals Experiencing Homelessness (TIEH), HRSA's Healthcare for the Homeless (HCH), ACF's grantees of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act Street Outreach Program (SOP), and VA's outreach including Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) and Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV).