



CALIFORNIA HOMELESS COORDINATING AND FINANCING COUNCIL

Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency
Gavin Newsom, Governor | Lourdes M. Castro Ramírez, Secretary

Meeting Summary
September 15, 2020
3:00PM – 5:00PM
Teleconference

I. Call to Order and Roll Call

Lourdes M. Castro Ramírez, Council Chair and Secretary of Business, Consumer Services, and Housing Agency called the meeting to order at 3:05PM.

Council Members Present:

- Lourdes M. Castro Ramírez, Council Chair and Secretary of the Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency;
- Emilio Ramirez, Council Vice Chair and Director of Housing, City of Oxnard;
- Amy Anderson, Chief Housing Officer, Office of Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti;
- Russell Atterberry, Undersecretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs;
- Alexis Barries, Family Partner, Placement Service and Crisis Stabilization Response Team, Santa Clara;
- Gina Buccieri-Harrington, Assistant Director of Grants Management, Victim Services Program in the Governor's Office of Emergency Services;
- Corrin Buchanan, Assistant Director of the Housing, Homelessness and Civil Rights Branch in the Department of Social Services;
- Donald Cavier, Chief Deputy Director of the California Housing Finance Agency;
- Jacey Cooper, Chief Deputy Director of Health Care Programs in the Department of Health Care Services;
- Gail Gilman, Chief Strategy Officer, All Home California;
- Jody Ketcheside, Deputy Regional Director of Turning Point of Central California;
- Jennifer Loving, Chief Executive Officer, Destination: Home;
- Gary McCoy, Congressional Aide, Office of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi;
- Toks Omishakin, Director of California Department of Transportation;
- Joe Uchishiba, Police Officer, City of Fairfield; and
- Gustavo Velasquez, Director of California Department of Housing and Community Development

Opening Remarks

Secretary Castro Ramírez provided a brief background on the Council's mission and updates since the last meeting. Stephanie Welch has left her role at the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) and the Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council (HCFC) is working with CDCR to identify a new council member.

Across state agencies and departments, and at the local level, California has continued to be proactive in providing shelter for people experiencing homelessness. HCFC put out a [letter to council members](#) explaining some of the actions taken since the June 11 Council meeting.

New Federal resources have been brought to bear to help respond to the impact of COVID-19 among people experiencing homelessness, along with new and existing state dollars. To help local governments and service providers better navigate this funding, HCFC released the [*Guide to Strategic Uses of Key State and Federal Funds to Reduce Homelessness During the COVID-19 Pandemic*](#).

HCFC has also been focused on communication and technical assistance around how to respond to ongoing heat events and public safety power shut-offs, and released a [memo](#) which covers these topics. Additionally, HCFC has identified [resources](#) to assist youth experiencing homelessness with distance learning opportunities.

Secretary Castro Ramírez recognized that the COVID-19 pandemic has had disproportionate economic and public health impacts on people of color—notably Black, Latino, and Indigenous communities. HCFC is mindful of the importance of good data to understand how resources are being allocated and used, but also to help address racial and economic inequities in homelessness systems. As the Council moves to discuss its Strategic Action Plan process, it is important to look at racial equity and inclusion.

HCFC is also working on a [Homeless Data Integration System](#). Every continuum of care in the state has completed a data use agreement agreeing to participate in the system. This will help to better understand how homeless services and dollars are being used across the state. The goal is to launch the HDIS by early 2021.

Today's meeting is intended as a step back from regular quarterly meetings and is focused on development of a Strategic Action Plan. There are many different stakeholders in this process, and it is important to hear directly from Council Members to help guide priorities and ensure that work is impactful. California has over 151,000 individuals experiencing homelessness, which is 12% of the nation's total. The Secretary quoted Governor Newsom in explaining: "This crisis was not created overnight, and it will not be solved overnight, or even in one year. But as a state, we must do everything that we can to ensure that no Californian is homeless."

II. Adoption of the June 11, 2020 Council meeting minutes

The Council approved the [meeting minutes](#) from the June 11, 2020 Council Meeting. Council Member Gary McCoy abstained from voting; all other members present voted to approve.

III. Overview of HCFC action planning process

Deputy Secretary for Homelessness Ali Sutton provided an update before introducing this topic. HCFC has a new Executive Officer, Julie Lo, starting in October. She has experience both consulting with local communities and personally with homelessness.

For its first 18 months, HCFC was focused on ensuring state programs complied with Housing First laws by July 1, 2019. Additional staffing has been added since then, and with the added capacity this is the time to give this Council more structure, focus, and accountability, and to strengthen coordination between partners. This will allow a more collective approach and better understanding around how strategies and funding are implemented at the State.

Lessons have been learned from COVID-19 response which can be translated into a longer-term homelessness response strategy and included in an Action Plan. Matthew Doherty, former Executive Director at the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness is consulting with HCFC. He has worked on similar planning in the past at the national level, including assisting with the National Alliance to End Homelessness [Framework for an Equitable COVID-19 Homelessness Response](#).

Action Planning work is being done in coordination with, and with support from the Governor's Office. The first step is talking with Council Members, which is being done through individual surveying conversations. These will be followed by broader stakeholder conversations, including people with lived expertise. At the Council's meeting on October 26, HCFC intends to present an initial draft plan with focus areas, priorities, and objectives. At the December 18 meeting, HCFC will include recommendations for State actions on those priorities and objectives. In March 2021, HCFC intends approve and adopt an Action Plan.

Matthew Doherty, Consultant provided an [overview](#) of the action planning process and the framework being used as a starting point. The framework is designed to provide guidance around homelessness, COVID-19, and strategic uses of funding in response to these crises. It also looks at building and strengthening systems for the future.

There are several key principles to the framework:

1. Advance racial justice and equity
2. Address the highest needs first
3. Grow Partnerships
4. Get people into housing
5. Act quickly

The framework is also organized into five action areas:

1. Unsheltered People

Providing opportunities for safety and hygiene resources as an immediate response, connecting people to safe shelter during the pandemic, and reducing unsheltered homelessness.

2. Shelter

Transforming and re-imagining approach to sheltering, establishing non-congregate shelter and moving away from large congregate shelter settings.

3. Housing

Connecting people to permanent housing as the best solution to homelessness and best opportunity during the pandemic. Expanding housing resources, creating more flow out of shelter and out of homelessness, and focusing on equitable outcomes.

4. Diversion and Prevention

Reducing new entries into homelessness, trying to effectively reach those most at risk. Focusing on people who have recently exited homelessness but may not be fully stable, people from historically marginalized communities, people with the lowest incomes, and people whose support networks have fewer resources.

5. Strengthening Systems for the Future

Moving toward stronger systems that are better prepared for future crises, do a better job of addressing racial justice and equity, that have stronger partnerships including with public health systems, and are more focused on housing and employment outcomes to support people's long-term success.

Secretary Castro Ramírez asked for more information around when to choose a non-congregate versus a congregate shelter model, and why there should be more focus on non-congregate settings.

- Shelter for families experiencing homelessness will often have dedicated rooms or units, but that is not seen as much for individuals. Congregate settings can pose health risks through exposure, but also people often do not want to enter those settings and feel them to be unproductive or unsafe. This can cause further challenges around trying to end people's homelessness directly from the street. Communities are trying to identify alternate models of shelter that will reach people who have not typically come into shelter. Evidence is being found that people's experiences and health are improving through these models.

Council Member Joe Uchishiba asked what "decompressed congregate shelter settings" are.

- This is about finding ways thin out or "decompress" congregate shelters, to ensure the setting is as safe as possible based on CDC guidance around social distancing.

Council Member Amy Anderson asked to what extent the Council should be thinking about defining an Action Plan through a COVID lens, and whether non-congregate shelter is preferred because the outcomes are better or because of concern about COVID.

- COVID is an important, though unpredictable context. But the goal is to move beyond that context and think about building better, more efficient systems into the future, to be more able to better reach people and more effectively help them.

Council Member Gail Gilman commented that COVID has shown the State can act with innovation and urgency. The Bay Area's nine counties were able to bring close to 5,000 individuals or families off the street during the COVID period of trying to decompress shelters. Rethinking of systems and structures is also necessary, because there are still 151,000 homeless individuals in California. This is an opportunity to think big and be innovative.

Council Member Gustavo Velasquez commented on three areas he and the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) would like the Council to consider in development of an Action Plan.

- Strategic collaboration

HCD partners with a variety of stakeholders and organizations from the homeless response sector. HCD is in a role of regulating local land use and housing policies, affirmatively furthering fair housing, and promoting accessibility and non-discrimination strategies around supportive housing. Every Council Member should consider how their own partnerships and collaborations can be used in development of the plan.

- Data and transparency

The ways in which information is collected and reporting, for example by HCD through funding programs. The Council has been moving toward using local HMIS data to inform housing policy, and data collection and democratizing should be important to development of the plan.

- Equity

HCD works to combat housing discrimination at the state level, including implementing state and Federal statutes to identify impediments to fair housing, and addressing community disparities through programs and policies. Accessibility and non-discrimination strategies are being used in [Homekey](#) and should be part of future programs the State sponsors or supports.

Secretary Castro Ramírez thanked the Council for their comments and encouraged continued conversation in terms what can be done within each Council Member's department or organization to strengthen the homelessness system.

IV. HCFC Action Plan discussion

Deputy Secretary Sutton thanked the Council Members for thoughtfulness and feedback in surveying conversations around this topic. Matthew will go over themes from these conversations before facilitating discussion for most of the rest of the meeting. Council Members are encouraged to speak up if there are key action areas or themes they feel should be included, but they should not feel that today is the only chance for feedback.

Matthew explained some of the priorities that Council Members have brought up in surveying conversations. Overarching themes not already in the framework were strengthening partnerships, using the flexibility and urgency from COVID-19 response in moving forward, and seeing the State step into a stronger leadership role to provide guidance, training tools, and resources. The value of being ambitious in planning and setting bold goals also came through in many conversations, as well as goals that focus on racial equity, rehousing people, and reducing unsheltered homelessness.

On unsheltered homelessness, a key theme was balancing sheltering and housing as strategies, as there is need to do work in both areas for the maximum impact. A need to innovate, test, and demonstrate what the most effective strategies and interventions are came through, and ideas were generated about how State-funded services and programs can be improved, including a strong focus on access to healthcare.

On shelter, there was recognition of work in response to COVID-19 and a desire to find ways to build upon that. A need to expand shelter capacity not as endpoints, but as safe steps on pathways out of homelessness was brought up, as well as the opportunity to reimagine what shelter looks like, including exploring recuperative care options, and interim housing through Homekey.

On housing, the focus was on housing production and affordability, and recognizing that there need to be a range of options and models of permanent housing opportunities. There were comments around reaching the lowest income households, around people who are exiting homelessness, and aligning housing with the needs of the populations most in need, as well as comments on strengthening regional approaches and the need to be able to access services across jurisdictional boundaries.

On diversion and prevention, a need was expressed for better data and for the State to be thoughtful in strategies about diversion. Homelessness prevention and eviction prevention may be necessary, but resources need to be used thoughtfully. There was also a focus on strengthening partnerships, including with health, education, corrections, foster care, and other systems. Other topics included re-entry planning and services as well as strategies to prevent youth homelessness.

On strengthening systems for the future, a strong focus was given to racial equity and to building consistent approaches to addressing equity across State-funded programs, as well as to training and capacity building at the community level. Housing First is still seen as a need in this area as well.

Deputy Secretary Sutton listed additional items of importance from Council Member conversations: documenting homelessness status or housing instability among non-homelessness-funded State programs to identify those who might become homeless, or who are homeless but not accessing the homelessness system; coordination between agencies, local, and tribal partners; fostering regional strategies and collaboration, which will be assisted by HDIS; and State-Federal partnerships and really understanding what HCFC can advocate for from the Federal government.

Matthew continued by emphasizing that the exit from homelessness is not the only goal people have from themselves—that there is a focus on how on how to support a person’s other goals and their long-term success. There is a role for the State to play in setting expectations for how resources are used and a lot of interest at the local level for more technical assistance.

Council Member Corrin Buchanan echoed Council Member Gilman’s call to have a big vision. Through [Project Roomkey](#), the State has stood up 16,000 new shelter beds in a matter of months that have served at least 22,000 individuals, which is an increase of 50% in terms of the state number of shelter beds. Lessons from this are that obstacles can be overcome, and this must be done collaboratively. Communities are also thinking about what resources already exist and are asking the State what flexibilities can be offered, so this barrier-busting mentality should be kept in moving forward.

Council Member Gilman asked to include under the “housing” section the wider, statewide use of the Flexible Housing Subsidy Pool. There has been success in Los Angeles County and in San Francisco showing how flexible subsidies can be used to help augment rent in the private market. Under the “service systems” section, if Proposition 16 passes there may be new options for addressing racial inequities and disparities, and HCFC should make sure recommendations can pivot if it does. Finally, a gaps analysis may be useful to determine who struggled during COVID response and where the state stands from a capacity perspective. Capacity is not just about dollars, it’s about the service provider community network and ecosystem, and the ability to rapidly process and stand up new programs.

Council Member Anderson emphasized a need to help support the service provider community to expand capacity. It is also important to consider the general public as stakeholders in developing a plan, as they can sometimes be a barrier to solutions. The Council should also advocate for the Federal Government to step up and help address these needs.

Council Member Toks Omishakin commented on priorities and concerns at the Department of Transportation (CalTrans), and the need to find solutions for people who are unsheltered. Cases of encampments that are too close to roadways and individuals running into roadways can be dangerous both for those individuals and for the public. In multiple cases explosions have occurred at encampments near bridges, which can damage infrastructure as well.

Council Member Jacey Cooper commented that there is an opportunity to do a data-driven plan to decide where to make short- and long-term investments and echoed earlier support for a gaps analysis. The Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) can play a role in this. Diversion and prevention should also be a priority, as it can often be pushed to the lower part of a plan.

Council Member Russell Atterberry commented that the State has an opportunity for a great communications plan. This would show the results of the Council's actions and the impact the State has had on homelessness, during the pandemic and otherwise.

Council Member Buchanan added that there is a desire and a need from local counties for rental subsidies to help get people out of hotels and into housing.

Council Member Jennifer Loving commented on an urgent need to keep people from entering homelessness as back rent comes due. 60% of people who Destination: Home have helped recently have lost every dollar they had.

- AB 3088 passed and was signed into law, which provides protections for individuals through January 31, 2021. BCSH has been working with stakeholders to get information to individuals and families. A challenge in developing this Action Plan is a need to stay focused on urgent matters while laying the groundwork for longer-term solutions. If something is identified that can be immediately done, the Council should do that.

Council Member Loving added that the Council hasn't really used its authority and suggested a group letter or request for emergency funding.

- The Governor has been vocal about the importance of rental assistance and the need for additional Federal support at the state and local level. HCFC will follow up on this topic and will consider drafting a letter to the state's congressional or Senate delegation.

Public Comment:

- Sharon Rapport, Corporation for Supportive Housing: Supports the Council Member comments around a needs and gaps analysis on a statewide level and around considering rental assistance. Recommends that affordable housing for people who are experiencing homelessness but don't need supportive housing is included in the "housing" section of the plan.

V. Future Meeting Agendas

Deputy Secretary Sutton provided information on next steps and future meetings. Council Member conversations about the Action Plan will be completed soon and will be followed by broader stakeholder conversations before the October meeting. There will be reading materials provided which Council Members are strongly encouraged to look through prior to that meeting.

Secretary Castro Ramírez commented that the Council should think big, not be afraid to take risks and innovate on the issue of homelessness, and continue to embrace a collaborative approach. There should be a focus on rehousing efforts, on thinking creatively about necessary flexibility, and on really understanding the issue, possibly through a gaps analysis. There is also a need for the State to understand and support the provider community. It is important to note and lift up the work that is happening by many partners and for Council Members to think through what their own department or organization can do. Continued commitment to racial justice and equity is also needed.

Council Member Gilman asked for future meetings to include briefings on legislation that would influence the Council or its work, noting that there were multiple bills this last legislative cycle that would have affected the Council.

Council Member Uchishiba explained that in his profession as a police officer, there are often times when responding to calls for people experiencing homelessness that someone in a mental health crisis may not receive the help they need. It is important that the police do a better job of responding to mental health and homelessness.

- It is important for the Council to work to understand some of the issues impacting individuals experiencing homelessness to make better and more informed decisions in the area of mental health and mental illness. HCFC can look into identifying a presenter to provide more information and data on this.

Council Chair Castro Ramírez suggested bringing in a speaker for a future meeting to present on racial disparities among people experiencing homelessness. Those with thoughts or suggestions on this should contact HCFC.

VI. Public comments on items not on the agenda

No public comments were made on this item.

Secretary Castro Ramírez thanked everyone for joining and gave special thanks to Deputy Secretary Sutton and consultant Matthew Doherty. The Council's next meeting is coming up on October 26.

VII. Meeting is adjourned at 5:06PM.