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Prior to her appointment in July 2012, Pam served as President and CEO of the Council of Community Services in Roanoke, VA, which is a private nonprofit human service planning agency, where she worked for over 26 years. Pam has a BA degree in Sociology from Emory & Henry College and a MSW from Virginia Commonwealth University.

Introduction

The Commonwealth of Virginia has made significant progress in the work to prevent and end homelessness. In November 2015, the state announced that it had ended Veteran homelessness, a claim that was confirmed by Federal agencies. This brief summarizes how Virginia achieved the Veteran goal, shares lessons learned, and explores how those lessons can be applied to work with other populations, including families experiencing homelessness. It also identifies opportunities for additional Federal action.

Virginia's Efforts to Reduce Homelessness in the Commonwealth

In 2010, then-Governor Bob McDonnell laid the groundwork for the statewide coordination that has been key to Virginia's success in functionally ending Veteran homelessness, when he convened the Homeless Outcomes Advisory Committee. This committee formulated the state's original plan, which included a goal of reducing overall homelessness by 15 percent by 2014. The plan included five specific strategies to attain the goal, one of which focused on implementing rapid re-housing approaches. The plan also called for the creation of a coordinating council to oversee the implementation of the strategies. As a result, the Governor's Coordinating Council on Homelessness was formed and is currently co-chaired by the Secretary of Commerce and Trade and the Secretary of Health and Human Resources.

By 2014, the Commonwealth of Virginia reduced overall homelessness by 16 percent, exceeding the original goal. Pivotal to Virginia's success was the strategic move to change the way in which communities respond to the needs of people experiencing homelessness. The first step in this system transformation process was made by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, through shifting funds from transitional housing to rapid re-housing. The Freddie Mac Foundation learned of the Commonwealth's efforts to transform the homeless assistance system and funded a three-year project to reduce family homelessness by utilizing rapid re-housing approaches. This effort included a two-pronged approach: 1) funding and policy were realigned to emphasize rapid re-housing interventions, and 2) providers were assisted to be able to deliver high-quality rapid re-housing services.

Under the first prong, rapid re-housing was prioritized as Virginia's primary intervention for families experiencing homelessness, financial incentives were created for communities to shift to rapid re-housing, and high-performing providers were defined and rewarded. Serving as the lead agency providing technical assistance, the National Alliance to End Homelessness partnered with the Commonwealth to increase the capacity of service providers to move from transitional housing to rapid re-housing approaches. Also in partnership with the Alliance, the state spent three years preparing providers to deliver high-quality rapid re-housing. Developing robust communication among state government, local communities, and homeless service providers was a key feature of this preparation, which included monthly conference calls between state leaders and the Alliance, regular communication between the Department of Housing and Community Development, the Virginia Coalition to End Homelessness, and Continua of Care groups across the state. Finally, outcomes achieved through financial investments were tracked and analyzed to improve future outcomes.

There was also a complementary and concerted effort to incorporate coordinated entry and assessment into the system to ensure all stakeholders were working together more effectively. Finally, the state transitioned to an emergency crisis response model at the community level to ensure homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring. As a result of the project, the Commonwealth reduced family homelessness by 24.6 percent between the years of 2010 and 2015.

How Virginia Functionally Ended Veteran Homelessness

The Commonwealth continued its strong collaboration with local communities by hosting its first Homeless Veteran Summit in 2014, which gathered communities with the highest percentage of Veterans to create an in-depth, statewide action plan. In June of the same year, Governor McAuliffe provided significant leadership on the issue by becoming one of the first governors to sign on to the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness. In the fall of 2014, the Homeless Veteran Boot Camp and the first 100 Day Challenge were kicked off to help communities develop local plans to end Veteran homelessness. In addition to continuing the emphasis on rapid re-housing, these meetings also established policies encouraging landlord engagement, the creation of a housing search portal, aligning priorities across state agencies that focused on veterans' needs and implementing best practices. A [website](#) was also created to serve as a hub where the communities could share information and documents that streamlined and coordinated their efforts. In addition to implementing Federal resources effectively, the investment of additional financial resources, the targeting of resources, and other efforts were key to Virginia's efforts to end Veteran homelessness. Those resources included:

- **General Assembly Support**
 - \$1 million in Rapid Re-Housing (\$500,000 for Veterans)
 - 3 additional Veteran Housing Resource Specialists within the Department of Veterans Services Virginia Veteran and Family Support program (Hampton Roads, Roanoke, Northern Virginia)
- **Utility Assistance**
 - Dominion Virginia Power Energy Pledges (\$2.5 million)
 - Appalachian Power Company Veteran Energy Assistance Pilot (\$100,000)
- **Community Level**
 - Additional Housing Choice Vouchers: Several public housing authorities provided additional vouchers to “move up” Veterans in HUD-VASH who were no longer accessing services but still needed a housing subsidy.
 - Move in-kits, furniture, deposits, etc.
 - Increased landlord engagement
- **AmeriCorps**
 - Virginia Coalition To End Homelessness (VCEH)
 - Leveraged AmeriCorps VISTAs to provide capacity support on the state and CoC level.
 - Leveraged AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corp (NCCC) to provide additional boots on the ground in communities to ramp up housing efforts.

- Virginia Department of Veterans Services
 - The Virginia Veteran Corps, through Virginia Veteran and Family Support, provided assistance to local CoCs with housing navigation, which included assisting with getting Veterans document ready for housing and looking for available housing units.

Lessons Learned

From its work to end Veteran homelessness, as well as its efforts to reduce family homelessness, partners in Virginia have identified the following strategies as being critical to their success:

1. Using a common assessment tool across outreach providers to identify and assess individuals experiencing homelessness;
2. Increasing coordination among providers to streamline the processes;
3. Leveraging additional community and public housing authority resources;
4. Following Housing First principles; and
5. Sharing data among all community providers.

Applying Similar Strategies to Address Homelessness among Other Populations

Now that Virginia has achieved the goal of effectively ending homelessness for Veterans, and the state has made significant progress in reducing family homelessness, the work to sustain that progress and to end homelessness for all Virginians continues. The Governor's Coordinating Council on Homelessness (GCCH) is currently focused on setting metrics for ending youth, family, and chronic homelessness. Many lessons have been learned through the accomplishments to date, and State leaders believe that to continue this progress additional resources will be needed, including funding for rapid re-housing and permanent supportive housing. One of the biggest challenges the state faces is the absence of a statewide homeless management information system, so the GCCH is working to secure funds for the development of such a system. While access to housing remains the first step in reducing and ending homelessness, there is a need to also focus on the resources needed to stabilize and sustain housing long term. Connections to mainstream resources are critical to the success of existing efforts, and actions to engage mainstream systems have centered on income supports, health care, and employment services.

Performance Measures

Achieving each *Opening Doors* goal requires a focus on data-driven results and the ability to track the policies and procedures that have proven to be successful. To that end, GCCH has adopted the Virginia Statewide Performance Measures, which will be used at the community level to track system performance and outcomes, including:

1. Length of time persons remain homeless;
2. Extent to which persons who exit homelessness to permanent housing destinations return to homelessness;
3. Number of persons experiencing homelessness;

4. Employment and income growth for persons being served through CoC program-funded projects;
5. Number of persons who become homeless for the first time; and
6. Successful placement from street outreach and successful placement in or retention of permanent housing.

These measures are aligned with the measures developed for HUD's Continuum of Care program. In January 2016, the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) will begin tracking community performance measures. DHCD has tracked programmatic outcomes in the past, however, it is now focused on tracking community-level outcomes.

Opportunities for Increased Federal Partnership

It will be critical to continue to align the work of GCCH with the work of USICH and the Council's member agencies. Federal agencies can greatly assist Virginia and other states across the country to achieve goals of ending homelessness by implementing efforts to accomplish the following:

- Increase affordable housing opportunities;
- Encourage coordination between the homelessness service system and mainstream programs in applications for funding;
- Continue to identify ways to encourage the reallocation or conversion of funds away from less effective programs;
- Continue to provide greater encouragement or incentives to workforce systems to align their employment services with homelessness services, such as rapid re-housing; and
- Continue to provide guidance to encourage Grant and Per Diem programs to participate in and receive referrals to and from coordinated entry systems, to reduce barriers to entry, and to facilitate quicker permanent housing exits.