VISION STATEMENT

A Connecticut where all young people have safe, stable places to live and opportunities to reach their full potential. Where:

- Community partners in child welfare, juvenile and criminal justice, workforce and educational systems, among others, work closely to ensure youth falling into homelessness is a rare occurrence;

- There is a coordinated response system within each region of Connecticut that provides low-barrier, individualized, and quick access to housing assistance and services needed for youth to obtain stability through self-determined goals, thereby ensuring a youth's episode of homelessness is brief; and

- Youth are connected to services within the community, kin and/or other natural supports, and employment as well as provided with the necessary tools, such as living and relationship skills, to maintain stability and well-being, ensuring homelessness is non-recurring and providing youth with an opportunity to achieve their goals and thrive.

Once Connecticut achieves this vision, we will continue to update and improve the homeless prevention and response system in collaboration with our youth partners based on feedback from youth participants and providers, data, and emerging best practices to meet the evolving needs of youth.

ENDING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN CONNECTICUT DEFINITION

The goal of the partners in the Reaching Home Campaign is to ensure that homelessness among unaccompanied youth[1] is rare, brief, and non-recurring. Accordingly, we seek to ensure that our homeless response system can meet the following conditions by the end of 2020. At the same time, we will continue to refine our efforts to assess the scope of youth living in Connecticut who are experiencing homelessness and housing instability. Our goal is to provide housing interventions for youth who are literally homeless (Category 1), imminently homeless (Category 2) and fleeing domestic violence (Category 4)[2] and provide appropriate services and supports to those under all federal definitions[3]. Throughout our work we will partner with youth to ensure that the services and programs are informed by the needs of youth experiencing homelessness. These criteria and benchmarks reflect the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness' criteria and benchmarks.

CRITERIA

---

[1] Youth is defined as age 24 and younger.

[2] Youth served through the domestic violence system are exempted from the calculation of performance against these benchmarks, unless they have been referred with their consent to the homeless response system for assistance. Connecticut's homeless response system works closely in coordination with Connecticut's domestic violence response system to meet the needs of clients seeking services in either system.

[3] Parenting youth experiencing homelessness are addressed in the Families benchmark.

1.**THE COMMUNITY IDENTIFIES ALL UNACCOMPANIED YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS.**

- The community identifies all youth who are experiencing homelessness under all federal definitions

- The community conducts outreach and in-reach on a regular basis, including at least weekly outreach to known locations or other areas where youth who are unsheltered may be located, and at least weekly in-reach to drop-in centers, shelters, and other homelessness assistance programs.

- The community's efforts are tailored to the unique needs of particularly vulnerable youth (including pregnant & parenting youth and their families, LGBTQ youth, minors under age 18, youth involved with juvenile justice and foster care systems, and victims of human trafficking & sexual exploitation).

- Key partners (e.g., child welfare agencies, schools, youth providers, Runaway and Homeless Youth providers, family services programs, juvenile justice agencies, early childhood, primary care and behavioral health providers, hospitals, free clinics, community health centers, and other community human services and homelessness service providers) are involved in identifying youth experiencing homelessness in the community.

- The community maintains an active list of youth experiencing homelessness which is updated on at least a biweekly basis and reviewed to make prioritization decisions.

- The community has a single data system (i.e., HMIS, active list) that identifies and tracks all unaccompanied youth known to be experiencing homelessness and complies with confidentiality requirements.

2. **THE COMMUNITY USES MEDIATION AND DIVERSION STRATEGIES WHENEVER POSSIBLE AND PROVIDES IMMEDIATE ACCESS TO LOW-BARRIER[4] CRISIS HOUSING OPTIONS TO ANY YOUTH WHO NEEDS AND WANTS IT.**

- The community provides youth experiencing homelessness with supports and services without having to enter crisis housing options, whenever possible.

- The community uses strategies to connect and/or reunify youth with family members or other natural supports (as defined by each young person) to help them stay or return home, when appropriate.

---

[4]Access to a range of temporary housing options in the community is not contingent on school attendance, mental health, sobriety, minimum income requirements, absence of a criminal record, or other unnecessary conditions, and includes options appropriate for particularly vulnerable youth.

- At the same time, the community has capacity to immediately provide access to developmentally appropriate crisis housing options to the target population.

- The community's youth crisis response system utilizes a positive youth development framework and a trauma-informed approach to service delivery.

3. THE COMMUNITY USES COORDINATED ACCESS PROCESSES TO LINK ALL YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS TO HOUSING AND SERVICES THAT ARE TAILORED TO THEIR NEEDS.

- The community has implemented coordinated entry processes that:
  - Operate in close coordination with mainstream systems and include the full array of youth-serving systems and programs;
  - Use assessment tools that are adapted for youth and appropriate for their circumstances; and
  - Streamline access and referrals to a range of tailored housing and services solutions aligned with individual needs and strengths, and driven by youth choice.

4. THE COMMUNITY ACTS WITH URGENCY TO SWIFTLY ASSIST YOUTH TO MOVE INTO PERMANENT OR NON-TIME LIMITED HOUSING OPTIONS WITH APPROPRIATE SERVICES AND SUPPORTS.

- Using Housing First and low-barrier approaches that ensure youth safety (as defined by each youth), the community efficiently connects youth experiencing homelessness to permanent or non-time-limited housing and services aligned, whenever possible, with youth choice.

- Solutions include appropriate strategies for addressing the safety concerns and service needs of youth in unsafe situations, such as those fleeing child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual violence, or trafficking, or those with other significant risk factors or vulnerabilities.

- The community swiftly connects youth living in time-limited safe and stable housing options, such as transitional living programs, to a permanent or non-time-limited housing opportunity when that youth expresses a desire to do so.

- The community is tracking and evaluating outcomes (stable housing, permanent connections, education and employment, and well-being) for youth in time-limited safe and stable housing options as well as permanent or non-time-limited housing options.

5. **THE COMMUNITY HAS RESOURCES, PLANS AND SYSTEM CAPACITY IN PLACE TO CONTINUE TO PREVENT AND QUICKLY END FUTURE EXPERIENCES OF HOMELESSNESS AMONG YOUTH.**

- The community has projected the number of youth who may need crisis housing options and services, and dedicated sufficient resources to ensure those needs are met and that future experiences of homelessness among youth are rare, brief, and nonrecurring.

- The community has comprehensive plans and partnerships in place, as well as the system capacity, to continue to:

    o Whenever possible, prevent or divert youth including identified subpopulations from experiencing homelessness through substantial partnerships and coordination with key partners listed above in #1;

    o Connect youth experiencing homelessness to appropriate and choice-driven housing and services options; and

    o Prevent returns to homelessness by promoting long-term housing stability.

- The community is working with partners, including those named in the bullet above, to capture better information on youth who are experiencing homelessness as defined under all federal definitions.

<u>BENCHMARKS</u>

Once we have achieved these conditions, our system will meet the following benchmarks as measures of our success in ending youth homelessness.

Benchmark
A. There are few youth experiencing homelessness at any given time.
1. The community's list of youth experiencing homelessness includes all unaccompanied youth under 25 that meet any federal definition of homelessness, including youth identified by local education agencies and runaway and homeless youth programs.
2. No unaccompanied youth are experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

3. No unaccompanied youth seeking emergency shelter are turned away unless they can be successfully diverted to another safe living environment of their choosing.

4. All youth identified as experiencing homelessness, including those who are doubled up (based on the federal definition), are offered connections to appropriate services on an ongoing basis to support sustainable exits from homelessness.

5. The monthly average of youth entering sheltered homelessness is less than the number in shelter. The shelter inflow ratio must be less than or equal to two after dividing the number of youth experiencing homelessness by the monthly average number of youth entering shelter.

6. The community's list of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness is not increasing over time. Specifically,

- **For unaccompanied youth ages 18-24**: exits to Permanent Housing (PH) from sheltered or unsheltered homelessness each month >= newly identified as experiencing sheltered homelessness
- **For unaccompanied youth under 18:** exits to PH or Time Limited Safe and Stable Housing from sheltered or unsheltered homelessness each month >= new identified as experiencing sheltered homelessness

B. **Youth experiencing homelessness are swiftly connected to safe and stable housing opportunities and to permanent housing options.**

1. Unaccompanied youth identified as experiencing unsheltered or sheltered homelessness (including emergency shelter or basic center programs) exit to permanent or non-time-limited safe and stable housing within a community-wide average of 45 days, and no longer than 90 days from the point of identification.

2. It is expected that an initial offer of assistance to access permanent or non-time-limited safe and stable housing shall be made immediately upon assessment of the need for such assistance. There shall be periodic recurring offers of assistance to the youth, and youth shall receive assistance to access permanent or non-time-limited safe and stable housing as soon as they express a desire for it.

3. In the case of those youth who have chosen to first enter a time-limited safe and stable housing program (including transitional housing or transitional living programs) or to access another residential placement, this calculation begins when the youth requests assistance in attaining permanent housing to exit the program or accepts an offer as described in (a) above. [5]

C. Prevent youth from returning to homelessness

1. 90% of youth who exit the system positively do not return within the following two years

---

[5] Data will be tracked and monitored on transitional housing for minors to better understand whether the population should be included in this measure.