

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Portland has the fourth highest per capita rate of homelessness in the United States. Our homelessness crisis affects all of us, at work and at home, in the downtown core and throughout the 95 neighborhoods of our city. Listening in to conversations at any of Portland's ubiquitous bistros, the topic of homelessness arises continuously. Everyone has a story. Indeed, though Portland faces any number of issues, homelessness crowds out the other issues to the point where it often feels like it is the only issue we face as a community.

- At the time of the most recent Point-in-Time count (2/17/18), there were 4,177 unhoused individuals in Portland, of whom nearly 2,000 were unsheltered. It is widely acknowledged that this is a significant undercount.
- In 2017, police arrested 10,229 homeless people, 52% of all arrests.
- The Joint Office of Homeless Services will spend more than \$71 million in FY 2019.

Finding No. 1: Portland's homelessness crisis is the predictable result of fifty years of policy on housing, economics and crime, and of decisions on how and where we treat our mentally ill. It is not the fault of local government. The crisis of homelessness is our community's crisis and not the crisis of the Mayor's Office or the Joint Office of Homeless Services.

Recommendation No. 1: Government agencies addressing the complex issue of homelessness in our community should embrace input gracefully and with an open mind.

Finding No. 2: The City and the County, through the Joint Office of Homeless Services, largely follow best practice in their efforts to address homelessness in our community. They focus on prevention, shelter-bed creation, and development of permanent supportive housing.

Recommendation No. 2: The City and County, through the Joint Office, should continue their programmatic focus on homelessness prevention through housing retention, additional shelter resources and growing the stock of permanent supportive housing, the most cost-effective solution to housing the chronically homeless. The City of Portland should instruct the Parks Department to *immediately* open park bathrooms 24/7/365.

Finding No. 3: Much of the public's criticism of government efforts to address the crisis arises within a vacuum of information. The current communications strategy leaves the public uninformed, creating conditions that are ripe for rumors and finger-pointing.

Recommendation No. 3: A more robust data- and outcomes-rich communications strategy is needed to keep us informed, to encourage engagement and to track progress.

Finding No. 4: The Joint Office has recently seen significant improvements to outcomes reporting. Comparative outcomes data reflecting program and system efficacy is essential to ensuring progress and maintaining public confidence.

Recommendation No. 4: Maintain and enhance existing efforts to capture, analyze and report data. Contract with the recently formed Portland State University Homelessness Research & Action Center to assess current outcomes measures and "own" an ongoing, transparent data set for use in establishing cost-effectiveness. Quarterly progress reports should be published widely.

Finding No. 5: This is our community's crisis and not simply a crisis to be shouldered by government. Through our support for two separate bond initiatives and through the Joint Office of Homeless Services, we, the citizens of our community, have committed to spending as much as \$2 billion or even more over the next ten years to provide long-term solutions to our broader housing shortage for low- and no-income individuals. More could be done by

businesses, faith entities, foundations and individuals to address our crisis in the near-term as our government implements long-term strategies to address the crisis.

Recommendation No. 5: Businesses, foundations, faith congregations and individuals interested in improving the quality of life for all Portlanders should invest in addressing conditions on the street today while long-term solutions are developed and implemented.

Finding No. 6: Organized villages of the homeless have proven to be a cost-effective interim solution to the crisis of homelessness in our community with numerous benefits including, but not limited to, reduced crime.

Recommendation No. 6: Encourage the expansion of the houseless village concept as a largely private sector and faith community endeavor. Fees should be waived, permits should be fast-tracked, and public utilities should be provided. For its part, government should engage the neighborhoods, including businesses, churches and not-for-profit organizations, to make land and funding available for the houseless.

Finding No. 7: Expenditures on behavioral health – mental health and substance abuse – remain miserly. This has resulted in a system, however well-intentioned, with nowhere near the resources to address current demand and woefully inadequate to meet the need for services to individuals living in the projected 2,000 new permanent supportive housing units currently in the public pipeline. Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) has been shown, repeatedly, to be the most cost-effective solution for the chronically homeless. Other states, including Washington, Arizona and Hawaii, have pursued Medicaid waivers to allow Medicaid to support PSH.

Recommendation No. 7: Housing is healthcare. The Oregon Health Authority (OHA), through CCO 2.0, must make significant investments into behavioral health. OHA should pursue a Medicaid waiver to support PSH.

Our community will not resolve the homelessness crisis overnight. But we can resolve this crisis: through careful investments and a realignment of resources; through best practice; with transparency and humility; and above all through a willingness to recognize the humanity of the other.

