

LOW BARRIER HOMELESS SHELTER TASK FORCE

Membership Roster

Rick Alvis, Wheeler Mission
Jeff Bennett, City of Indianapolis (co-chairperson)
Christine Blessinger, Indiana Department of Corrections
Tim Brown, Crossroads Public Affairs
Kory Carey, Family and Social Services Administration
Chelsea Haring-Cozzi, Coalition for Homelessness Intervention and Prevention
Karen Holly, Marion County Public Health Department
Rep. Cindy Ledbetter
Tom McGowan, Kite Realty Group (co-chairperson)
Rep. Justin Moed
Sen. Jack Sandlin
J. Jacob Sipe, Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority
Sen. Fady Qaddoura

Staff

Michael McQuillen, Legislative Director
Dave Stewart, General Counsel
Van Sui, Legislative Liaison

FINAL REPORT
Low Barrier Homeless Shelter Task Force

I. LEGISLATIVE DIRECTIVE

The Low Barrier Homeless Shelter Task Force was established by IC 5-20-10. The Task Force has the following duties:

1. Determine the cost to build and operate a low barrier homeless shelter in a consolidated city, as well as potential funding sources. The low barrier homeless shelter must provide both short-term and long-term housing options.
2. Study ways in which the state and a consolidated city can access additional federal funding for community-based programs for the homeless.

The Task Force is required to submit a report to the governor and the legislative council not later than December 31, 2022. The report to the legislative council must be in an electronic format under IC 5-14-6.

II. SUMMARY OF WORK PROGRAM

The Task Force met seven times throughout the year: February 28, 2022; June 15, 2022; August 29, 2022; September 29, 2022; October 26, 2022; November 30, 2022; and December xx, 2022.

The February 28 meeting was held entirely virtually, all other meetings took place in Indiana Government Center South, Room 12, Cardinal Hall, Indianapolis, Indiana.

February 28, 2022: The Task Force discussed the need to provide short- and long-term housing solutions and building and sustaining a low barrier shelter. The Task Force heard presentations on the Indianapolis Community Plan to End Homelessness; the Central Indiana Community Foundation's Housing to Recovery Fund; Horizon House permanent supportive housing project; and the Indianapolis Office of Public Health and Safety's study: *The Need for & Feasibility of Low-barrier Options in Sheltering People Who are Experiencing Homelessness*.

June 15, 2022: The Task Force heard presentations from Sherry Seiwert, President of Downtown Indy, on a Low Barrier Shelter Feasibility Study conducted by IFF and the Corporation for Supportive Housing; Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority (IHCDA) regarding the 2022 Permanent Supportive Housing Institute; the Coalition for Homelessness Intervention and Prevention on the Indianapolis Point-in-Time Count; and Wheeler Mission.

August 29, 2022: The Task Force heard a presentation from Lauren Rodriguez, director of the Indianapolis Office of Public Health and Safety, regarding the Assessment and Intervention Center at the Community Justice Campus. The Task Force discussed the

concept of a Housing Hub/navigation center that combines supportive services under one roof, along with low barrier/emergency shelter beds and permanent supportive housing units. The Task Force further discussed Horizon House's interest in expanding its days and hours of operation to serve as the Housing Hub.

September 29, 2022: The Task Force discussed a potential phased approach implementing a Housing Hub concept in Indianapolis, beginning in Q1 2023. The Task Force heard testimony from Matt Rayburn, Deputy Executive Director of IHCDA, regarding the supply of permanent supportive housing. The Task Force discussed piloting a master leasing strategy to bring a supply of housing online in the short term to address chronic, unsheltered homelessness. The Task Force also discussed the need for supportive services funding, and a talent pipeline for service providers.

October 26, 2022: The Task Force heard a presentation from Jennifer Layton, President and CEO of LTHC Homeless Services, a Lafayette nonprofit organization that operates an "engagement center," combining emergency shelter beds, a day center, onsite supportive services, and permanent supportive housing in a campus setting. The Task Force also heard a brief presentation from Christine Blessinger, Deputy Commissioner of Re-Entry and Youth Services for the Indiana Department of Corrections (DOC), regarding instances of people exiting from statewide justice system involvement into instances of homelessness in Marion County. The Task Force began discussing the initial outline of its final report.

November 30, 2022: The Task Force reviewed the draft report and recommendations.

December xx, 2022:

The Task Force meeting minutes and exhibits can be viewed by visiting the following link: <https://www.in.gov/ihcda/program-partners/low-barrier-homeless-shelter-task-force/>

Archived videos of the Task Force's August, September, October, November, and December meetings can be viewed by visiting the following link: <https://www.in.gov/ihcda/program-partners/low-barrier-homeless-shelter-task-force/>

III. COMMITTEE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Guiding Principles

1. Fill gaps in the local system without duplicating efforts, by focusing attention on those who are not accessing vacancy within the local emergency shelter system.
2. Focus resources on individuals and couples experiencing chronic homelessness. An individual experiencing homelessness must meet the following HUD criteria to be considered chronically homeless:
 - Has experienced at least one disabling condition
 - Has experienced homelessness for at least one consecutive year OR has experienced homelessness at least four times in the past three years, adding up to a cumulative time of one year or more
 - Is experiencing unsheltered homelessness or is residing in an emergency shelter/safe haven
3. Define low-barrier. The National Alliance to End Homelessness defines a low-barrier emergency shelter as a shelter that “ensure(s) immediate and easy access...by lowering barriers to entry and staying open 24/7, eliminate(s) sobriety and income requirements and other policies that make it difficult to enter shelter, stay in shelter, or access housing and income opportunities.” Further, a low-barrier emergency shelter should “align shelter eligibility criteria, policies, and practices with a Housing First approach, provide diversion services to find safe and appropriate housing alternatives to entering shelter, focus services in shelter on assisting people to access permanent housing options as quickly as possible, and measure data on percentage of exits to housing, average length of stay in shelter, and returns to homelessness to evaluate the effectiveness of and improve outcomes.”
4. Ensure that any emergency shelter stay leads to permanent housing with supportive services.

Short-Term (Immediate) Actions

5. State funding to address housing needs of the Indiana Department of Corrections – Support direct funding for DOC for housing navigation, rental assistance, and supportive services to prevent people exiting from the justice system from being released into situations of homelessness in Marion County or anywhere in the state.
6. State funding for fund master leasing program – Support funding through IHEDA for a 300-unit master leasing strategy (150 Indianapolis/150 balance of state) focused immediate placement of unsheltered, chronically homeless individuals and couples.
7. Low-barrier emergency shelter pilot project – In Indianapolis, using local funds, activate available vacant space as low-barrier emergency shelter pilot project.

Commented [BJ1]: Data from DOC is forthcoming.

8. State funding for emergency shelter/navigation center operations – Support funding through the Family and Social Services Administration, Division of Mental Health and Addiction (FSSA/DMHA) to expand shelter/navigation center operations grant program. Incentivize exit strategies that lead to permanent housing.
9. Support established partners rather than the creation of new nonprofit organizations – In Indianapolis, using locally sourced funds, implement Horizon House’s strategic plan, which includes the phased-approach establishment of a Housing Hub/navigation center.
10. Secure participation of state agencies in Housing Hub/navigation center concepts across the state.
11. Inventory vacancies within existing permanent supportive housing developments – Make immediate referrals and placements from Indianapolis and balance of state Coordinated Entry systems.
12. Implement “Moving On” initiative(s) – In partnership with local housing agencies, IHCD, and the City of Indianapolis provide Housing Choice Vouchers to tenants using permanent supportive housing assistance who may only need rental assistance, opening up permanent supportive housing opportunities for those who need them most.
13. Fully deploy all Emergency Housing Vouchers from the CARES Act and/or American Rescue Plan Act, prioritizing people experiencing homelessness.
14. State funding for tenancy support services – Implement recommendation from the IHCD Medicaid crosswalk report by funding tenancy support services not covered under current Medicaid authorities and for persons who are Medicaid eligible but not enrolled at the start of services. Funding would be provided through FSSA/DMHA and would support outreach and engagement services; housing and benefits navigation; landlord engagement, training, and support; and onsite services for housing stability. In Indianapolis, funding could provide supportive services for up to 500 new clients for three years.
15. State funding for talent pipeline – Directly support the work of Community Health Network, Eskenazi, EmployIndy, and Ascend to expand the Behavioral Health Academy, which would include behavioral health specialists in Marion County to build the workforce for the homeless service sector (i.e. case managers).

Commented [BJ2]: Working with Chelsea & Tim on this.

Long-Term Actions

16. Integrate low-barrier shelter access within new construction – Based on development and operating models in Lafayette and Bloomington, and the recommendation of the Downtown Indy/IFF/CSH study (“Smaller decentralized shelters integrated into the community is a preferred alternative to larger centralized shelters”), incorporate

emergency shelter beds within permanent supportive housing developments when appropriate.

17. Acquire real estate – Using local funds, build a pipeline for future housing/shelter development in Indianapolis through strategic acquisition of real estate.
18. Promote Indiana Supportive Housing Institute – Encourage development partnerships to participate in the IHEDA program for the development of permanent supportive housing.
19. Secure additional state bond volume for affordable housing – Change state policy to shift additional bond volume to create more capacity for affordable housing financing via 4% tax credit program.
20. State housing tax credit – Create new state tax credit specifically for construction of permanent supportive housing through the 9% tax credit program.
21. Medicaid waiver – Implement recommendation from the IHEDA/CSH Medicaid crosswalk report to create a supportive housing benefit using the 1915(i) Medicaid State Plan Amendment and fund required match through the state budget.
22. Talent pipeline – Partner with state universities and Ivy Tech to recruit, train, hire, and retain pipeline of social workers and other service providers. Implement recommendation from Indiana Behavioral Health Commission final report to fund long-term student loan/tuition reimbursement program for behavioral health professionals, including coordination with and help navigating existing programs.

Commented [BJ3]: Other tax credit programs too?