

## SECTION 2: RECOMMENDATIONS

As presented in the Executive Summary, Shelter Partnership's Los Angeles Homeless Older Adults Strategic Plan is motivated by both a moral imperative to identify and meet the rising needs of an historically neglected population, but also to challenge our public systems of care to adopt strategies to better serve this population. With adoption of these strategies must come major financial commitments from all levels of governments as well as from the private sector.

Many in our community recognize that the problem of homelessness in Los Angeles is enormous, and seemingly, intractable. However, with this Strategic Plan – inclusive of its findings and recommendations – Shelter Partnership is presenting not only the problem, but also a potential solution to this enigmatic piece of the homelessness puzzle.

There are between 3,000 and 4,000 homeless aged 62 and above in Los Angeles County. With this plan, Shelter Partnership is offering a statement of principle and solutions: the problem of older adult homelessness in Los Angeles should and can be solved. Over the next several years, Shelter Partnership also commits to taking a major convening and catalytic role in solving older adult homelessness.

To solve older adult homelessness, we must build a consensus that older adult homelessness in Los Angeles can be solved. We must educate all stakeholders including elected officials, Commissioners, department heads, non-profit direct service providers, foundations and the general public about the mutual benefit of pursuing affordable housing for homeless older adults for both client outcomes and public savings to build a consensus that older adult homelessness in Los Angeles can be ended.

This section presents Shelter Partnership's recommendations for ending older adult homelessness in Los Angeles County. While the Advisory Committee was very helpful in advising us on the needs of the population, Shelter Partnership takes full responsibility for the following recommendations based on our research and convening work.

The recommendations address the following areas: *Permanent Supportive Housing*, *Access to Existing Housing*, and *Outreach to Shelters and Streets*. For each focus area, we first present summaries of related key findings (which are articulated more fully and contained elsewhere in this report), followed by the core recommendations themselves.

While we do not have recommendations associated with Prevention, it does not reflect the importance that we assign to such efforts. Rather, we do not have feel that we have a sufficient foundation to make such recommendations at this time that truly address this need beyond broad policies that could be applied to any subpopulation. However, we do note that the City of Santa Monica has been at the forefront in the region in trying to prevent older adult homelessness and their experience will inform future efforts that need to be undertaken.

## **A. Invest in Permanent Supportive Housing**

### **Findings**

- At least one-third and perhaps as many as one-half or more of homeless older adults are chronically homeless, which means they either have multiple episodes of homelessness or have been homeless one or more years and have at least one disability.
- A consensus exists among all stakeholders including developers, senior housing providers, social services agencies, government officials, and most importantly homeless older adults themselves, that permanent supportive housing is the housing model of choice to best serve chronically homeless older adults.
- While non-profit developers who focus in supportive housing for homeless older adults have seen success in other cities, including Boston, New York, San Diego, and San Francisco, no such development entity exists in Los Angeles.
- Existing special needs housing developers serving homeless populations have been clear that they would need additional incentives to target homeless older adults, from capital costs through services.
- Special needs housing developers who would serve homeless older adults would first need firm linkages with social service agencies that could guarantee the physical, mental, and emotional support these residents would need to thrive in their housing environment because of the special challenges of the population that include disabilities in 62% of the population, including acknowledged mental illness in 20% of that population and physical disabilities incidence rate of 89 percent in the disabled population.
- The design of permanent supportive housing for homeless older adults needs to maximize the availability of on-site services, incorporate building design techniques to assure accessibility, and a healthy balance between tenant independence and a sense of community, as described in Section 9 of this Plan.
- Sixty-nine percent of homeless older adults reported that they have income from Supplemental Social Security (SSI), Social Security, or Social Security Disability Insurance, which can be used to pay rent in permanent housing. Of all older adults with an income, their mean monthly income was \$773 and their median monthly income was \$800.
- Twenty-eight percent of homeless older adults are veterans, which is twice as high as the incidence in the general homeless population in Los Angeles County.
- HR 2930, approved by the U. S. House of Representatives in December 2007 to reauthorize the Section 202 Program, and now awaiting action by the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, presents an opportunity to revise the Section 202 funding criteria to allow targeting of units for homeless older adults.

## **Recommendations**

Recommendation A.1. Establish a housing development corporation to focus on the development of permanent, supportive housing for fragile homeless older adults such as has been successfully accomplished by Hearth in Boston, the West Side Federation for Senior and Supportive Housing (WSFSSH) in New York City, and Senior Community Centers in San Diego.

Recommendation 2: This set of recommendations addresses the need for inclusion of housing for older homeless adults in programs for special needs and senior populations:

- a. Develop a standardized definition for homeless older adults that can be used operationally within State, county, and municipally funded housing finance programs. Similarly, develop with stakeholders a consensus of basic supportive services and design standards that should be included as minimum requirements for affordable housing developments that target them.
- b. Advocate that policymakers within City and County of Los Angeles, respectively, establish a funding principle that all affordable senior housing developments that receive a capital funding commitment through their respective jurisdictions set-aside 10% of available units to homeless older adults.
- c. Expand the range of target populations that are eligible for supportive housing units through the Permanent Supportive Housing Program (PSHP) to include homeless older adults. Establish a reservation within the Permanent Supportive Housing Program that sets aside 10% of available funding per round for developments targeting homeless older adults.
- d. Expand the target populations eligible for City of Industry funding to include homeless older adults.

Recommendation A.3. Develop supportive housing units for older homeless veterans on Veterans Administration property throughout the County.

Recommendation A.4. Elected officials should support HR 2930 to revise the Section 202 funding criteria to allow space for services and funding for case management for special needs tenants, and permit Section 202 owners to establish a preference in tenant selection for the homeless elderly, if the owners provide supportive services to meet the needs of homeless older adults.

## **B. Greater Access to Existing Housing**

### **Findings**

- Many homeless older adults become homeless for the first time late in life. For many who first become homeless as older adults, housing affordability is the primary barrier to permanent housing; they have a much lower level of service needs than do chronically homeless older adults.
- Homeless older adults face barriers to accessing subsidized housing appropriate to their needs because of application, screening and wait list practices that we have shown through partnerships with social services agencies and understanding housing providers can be successfully overcome.
- The Assisted Living Waiver Pilot Project (ALWPP) has proven effective in allowing low-income older adults to live independently with appropriate services in Residential Care Facilities for the Elderly (RCFEs). Although implementation has been slower in public housing, the model should work there, too.
- Other programs, like the Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE), an optional benefit under both Medicare and Medicaid that focuses entirely on older adults who are frail enough to meet State's standards for nursing home care, also allow individuals who are at least 55 years old to live safely in a community setting with a comprehensive medical and social service delivery system using an interdisciplinary team approach in an adult day health center that is supplemented by in-home and referral services in accordance with participants' needs.

### **Recommendations**

Recommendation B.1. Actively develop linkages between homeless service providers with administrators of affordable senior housing, such as HUD Section 202s and Section 8 senior buildings, to overcome application, screening, and wait list barriers including background checks, lack of addresses and birth certificates, and move-in costs. Encourage the service providers to provide ongoing support to assure long-term tenancies.

Recommendation B.2. . Target 250 tenant-based Section 8 subsidies annually through the various housing authorities (HACLA, HACoLA, and other local cities housing authorities) for at least the next four years for homeless older adults. Identify and fund service providers to assist with housing search and leasing functions.

Recommendation B.3. Expand and utilize the state Assisted Living Waiver Pilot Project (ALWPP) to serve homeless older adults in public housing for seniors.

## **C. Create & Mobilize Interdisciplinary Outreach Teams Targeted to Shelters and Streets**

### **Findings**

- At New Image Shelter, 24% of homeless older adults aged 62 and up reported receiving no income, as did 27% of those aged 62-64.
- Among older adults reporting disabilities, 17% of those with physical disabilities, 13% of those with mental disabilities and 6 percent of those with both disabilities received no income.
- Chronically homeless people frequently suffer from untreated dental problems, eye problems, hypertension, cirrhosis, HIV infection, diabetes, skin diseases, osteoarthritis, frostbite, and immersion foot. At least one-half of our older adult interviewees suffered from dental problems (60%), eye problems (50%), hypertension (50%), and arthritis (50%).
- The Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health's in the Full Service Partnership (FSP), Field Capable Clinical Services (FCCS), and GENESIS programs demonstrate the efficacy of mobile outreach teams.
- The literature and experiences from other cities experiences that we reviewed very clearly demonstrates that outreach workers must gradually build trust with homeless older adults to before they become receptive to services and transitional and permanent supportive housing.
- Experts studying morbidity among the homeless include being aged over 60 as an indicator of vulnerability.

### **Recommendation**

Recommendation C.1. Initiate a pilot program targeting homeless older adults aged 62 or older in year-round shelters, using County Homeless Prevention Initiative funds. Establish mobile resource teams of gerontologists and other specialists to help seek out and assist homeless older adults. Create interdisciplinary teams that can build trust including a geriatrician, psychiatric specialist, medical staff, dental staff, income specialist, and housing specialist.