



COMMITTEE TO END
HOMELESSNESS
KING COUNTY



It All Starts at Home:

Providing Affordable Housing and Ending Homelessness in Washington 2007 Legislative Package

*Washington's Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness, approved in 2006, establishes a vision and action plan to move our State toward its goal of ending homelessness. The key elements to making this vision a reality are affordable housing, rent assistance and support services, State systems that no longer discharge people into homelessness, adequate health services for those who need it, and tracking performance to improve outcomes. **It All Starts at Home** calls for a sustained, multi-year effort to end homelessness. This 2007 Housing and Homelessness Legislative Package highlights vital first steps.*

Affordable Housing Production: *Increase the size of the Housing Trust Fund to \$363 million*

Affordable housing is the essential, stable base from which families and individuals grow and thrive. Education, jobs, and health care all depend on stable housing, and housing with supportive services helps build a bridge out of homelessness, or to help prevent it for those at risk. Washington has a very serious statewide affordable housing crisis. Due to rapidly increasing land prices, construction costs and population growth, at least 250,000 Washington households lack basic affordable housing. The Housing Trust Fund supports all types of affordable housing and leverages four times the funding from other public, private and philanthropic sources. Despite recent increases in funding, the Housing Trust Fund still has a substantial backlog of projects ready for development, and rising construction costs are placing increasing pressures on the fund. The Governor's excellent proposed 2007-09 Capital Budget provides \$140 million for the Trust Fund, which would keep up with the increased costs of land acquisition and construction, but even bolder steps are needed to make a successful effort to address this housing crisis.

Transitional Rent Assistance and Services for the Homeless and At-Risk: *Expand the THOR program's services to single adults, youth, and people at risk of homelessness, and provide a \$15 million increase for services*


The state's Transitional Housing, Operating and Rent (THOR) program and similar local programs demonstrate that short-term rental assistance in the form of vouchers and support services can provide a quick exit from homelessness or prevent homelessness altogether. An expansion of this proven, successful state program by increasing the number of families served, making it accessible to single adults and youth, allowing it to be used for people on the verge of homelessness, and providing additional resources to promote success of the existing program and these population expansions would go far to helping us end homelessness.


 **Discharge from State Systems into Stable Housing: *Fund housing and supportive services for individuals transitioning from correctional facilities into their communities and for youth aging out of foster care,***

A key element of the state's Ten-Year Plan is preventing people from being discharged from state care into homelessness with all the serious problems that creates – for them and for their communities. Stable housing with appropriate services stops that cycle. We must continue to help young people who “age out” of the foster care system to establish themselves as productive adults, through housing, treatment, education, and employment services. For inmates discharged from state correctional facilities, the lack of housing and support services is a recipe for recidivism.

 **Mental Health and Substance Abuse Treatment: *Ensure adequate funding for mental health services and substance abuse treatment***

People living with mental illness and chemical dependency frequently become homeless and cycle through jail and hospitals at great public expense. Treatment helps stop that cycle. Additional funding is needed for Medicaid and non-Medicaid mental health and substance abuse prevention and treatment programs to provide needed access to services for homeless people and other low-income Washingtonians at risk of homelessness. Sufficient funding will help these high-risk populations get the services they need and get on the road to recovery, particularly pilot projects providing mental health benefits for GA-U recipients (\$2.1m), and ensuring adequate funding for increases in the non-Medicaid population (those not eligible for Medicaid) needing services (\$13.7 million).

 **Local Ten-Year Plans to End Homelessness: *Provide \$20 million in additional funding to strengthen local “2163” homelessness initiatives.*** Across the state, local communities are leveraging Homeless Housing and Assistance Act (House Bill 2163) dollars to create innovative programs that often link services to housing, that are already showing success. The effort to end homelessness will be assisted by increases in the State Housing Trust Fund, which provides capital dollars, but an additional funding source is needed to provide services, short or long term subsidies, as well as address capital needs. The innovations required of the Ten Year Plans must have flexible funding that will allow their implementation.

 **Performance and Accountability: *Support effective performance measurement; provide funding to improve state and local planning; track and improve state client housing outcomes; promote and replicate best practices; establish the high cost to the state of homelessness; improve outcomes for hardest-to-serve clients.*** We support efforts and funding to improve planning, data collection and performance measurement and evaluation at all levels (state and local) to meet the 2015 goal of reducing homelessness by 50%. The state should also hold itself accountable for improving housing outcomes for its clients, consistent with many state program goals around self-sufficiency. We support legislation and approaches that will promote replication of best practices such as “housing with support services” across the state. Finally, we believe that the state and public need to understand the high cost of homelessness to the state, and that we need to promote information sharing among treatment providers to ensure the best possible outcomes for high-utilizers (long-time homeless), for both their individual benefit and as a cost-effective approach when success is achieved.