

CASE STUDIES: Homelessness Prevention

Addressing Older Adult Homelessness Through a Community-Wide Prevention and Response Initiative

Western Piedmont Area Agency on Aging

Hickory, NC

www.wpcog.org/area-agency-on-aging

USAging highlights successful programs and partnerships to provide inspiration for AAAs and other community-based organizations to advance their work in homelessness prevention. Find more case studies at www.usaging.org/research.

With older adult homelessness on the rise, the Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) in North Carolina launched a homelessness prevention and response initiative in partnership with its Area Agency on Aging (Western Piedmont AAA), municipalities, towns and a wide array of community partners.

To determine the best approach, WPCOG conducted listening sessions with members of the public, municipal and town officials, homelessness agencies, police departments and other stakeholders. The WPCOG Community Development Department ultimately adopted a model from Sarasota, FL, that focused on housing navigation and local coordination. Because WPCOG also administers the public housing authority, community and economic development departments, regional planning and code enforcement, service integration can be more seamless for the consumer.

WPCOG recruited a team of diverse individuals to the homelessness prevention and response team to serve as the boots on the ground. The team has one homelessness manager and four housing navigators equipped to provide intensive case management. Team member experience and expertise includes hands-on knowledge with mental health, substance misuse, public health and lived experience with homelessness.

The expanded knowledge of the homelessness team across various sectors allows for connection and referral to the programs and services that seek to help people find, keep and maintain their housing. The team works closely with the local Continuum of Care (CoC), a group of organizations and entities with a common goal to eliminate homelessness. This partnership enables team members to enter individuals' profiles into the homeless management information system (HMIS) and refer them to homelessness services and programs for which they might qualify.

Western Piedmont AAA supports the homelessness prevention and response initiative through its services and programs. WPCOG uses American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for a community health worker who goes out into streets, shelters and other community venues to identify people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The AAA then connects the client to the services and supports they need to become stably housed. Other AAA efforts include the following:

- **Options counselors** ask questions related to housing stability during intake. If an individual is at risk of or experiencing homelessness, a referral is made to the homelessness prevention and response team to begin the process of service coordination and housing stabilization support.
- **Housing-related financial assistance** is available to cover things like heating fuel or repairs to well pumps, rental security deposits, utility connection deposits, furniture and other wraparound services and supports that help older adults live stably in the community housing of their choice.
- **Service providers** offer supportive services that help individuals engage with their community through community programs, obtain health insurance, file for disability assistance, locate and obtain food resources, access mental health professionals, and connect to other community resources.

Funding for the Initiative

The WPCOG homelessness prevention and response initiative currently has federal funding through the City of Lenoir with HOME Investment Partnership American Rescue Plan Program (HOME-ARP) funds that will support the program through 2030. (HOME-ARP provides funding to HOME participating jurisdictions to create programs to reduce homelessness and increase housing stability as established through the \$5 billion total allocation in the American Rescue Plan.) Even though the initiative officially launches in January 2024, considerations are already underway for long-term sustainability of the program through careful evaluation of the services that are most effective. WPCOG also plans on using the data it gathers to inform the advocacy efforts of municipalities and towns to push for permanent funding of this program.

Advice for AAAs

- **Convene community partners:** Become the catalyst for community organization partnership and collaboration across various agencies that can work together to help with homelessness prevention.
- **Get a seat at the table:** If your community already has a collaborative partnership, make sure your agency, and other agencies that support and serve older adults and people with disabilities, have a seat at the table and a voice in the conversation.
- **Hold listening sessions:** Actively listen to voices in the community as they identify the most pressing needs. Then use the combined expertise of your partners to determine the most effective solutions.
- **Diversify your advisory and planning bodies:** Bring together entities that can support your efforts to provide homelessness prevention services including, but not limited to, CoCs, public housing authorities and other housing and homelessness service providers.

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