



# How the Virginia Uses Collaboration and Coordination to End Homelessness Statewide

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The Commonwealth of Virginia has made significant progress in the work to prevent and end homelessness. We've reduced overall homelessness by 31% and family homelessness by 37.6% from 2010 to 2016. And in November 2015, we became the first state to effectively end Veteran homelessness. We credit that progress to leadership from successive Governors, strong state agency partnerships, and the dedication of local communities to working collaboratively to embrace the strongest practices.

## Laying the Groundwork

In 2010, then-Governor Bob McDonnell convened the Homeless Outcomes Advisory Committee that laid the groundwork for the statewide coordination that has been key to Virginia's success. This committee formulated the state's original plan, which included a goal of reducing overall homelessness 15% by 2014. Through the changes begun under that effort, the Commonwealth was able to exceed the 2014 goal, reducing overall homelessness by 16%.

The 2010 plan included five specific strategies that were aligned with *Opening Doors*. It also called for the creation of a coordinating body--the structure of which mirrored the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness--to oversee the implementation of the strategies. The Governor's Coordinating Council on Homelessness is currently co-chaired by the Secretary of Commerce and Trade and the Secretary of Health and Human Resources. Members include the Secretariat of Education and the Department of Veterans Services, among others. The Coordinating Council meets quarterly, and our standing committees meet monthly, bi-monthly, or as needed. Some of those committees include:

- **Performance and Impact:** focusing on performance measures and efforts to create a statewide HMIS, among other things
- **Solutions:** focusing on strengthening approaches like rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing, as well as our special populations work
- **Interagency Partnership to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness:** focusing on how we engage all our resources, including mainstream resources, to end homelessness among youth ages 14-24
- **Ending Veteran Homelessness:** focusing on continuing to support communities as we sustain our effective end of Veteran homelessness

Through the Coordinating Council, we have been able to align our work with federal goals and strategies and build strong collaboration across secretariats, state agencies, and local service providers. And ultimately, we changed the way in which communities responded to the needs of people experiencing homelessness.

### **Transforming our State System**

Because the 2010 goal of reducing homelessness by 15% did not come with additional funding, we had to focus on getting the most out of existing resources. Fortunately, the Freddie Mac Foundation learned about our work to transition our system and supported us with funding for a three-year project to reduce family homelessness using rapid re-housing approaches. Our strategy was to align our policy and funding to emphasize rapid re-housing interventions and to provide intensive training and technical assistance to providers across the state on how to deliver high-quality rapid re-housing services.

Under the first part of our strategy, Virginia prioritized rapid re-housing as the primary intervention for families experiencing homelessness. The Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development created financial incentives for communities to embrace rapid re-housing by shifting \$2.5 million in funding primarily from transitional housing. We also defined and rewarded high-performing providers. Then, we partnered with the National Alliance to End Homelessness and the Virginia Coalition to End Homelessness (now the Virginia Housing Alliance) to train local providers. We conducted more than 30 trainings to 172 providers across the state to introduce the concept of rapid re-housing and the strategies behind our plan. We also launched 7 learning collaboratives around the state so that providers could continue to learn from each other. And we held a 100-day challenge, which succeeded in housing 545 families in 100 days.

At the same time, we held system design clinics to begin looking at how to incorporate coordinated entry and assessment across the state to ensure all stakeholders were working together more effectively. We issued some small challenge grants to encourage communities and providers to test organizational and systems change. Ultimately, we redesigned how we award our state funding entirely—much like the federal Continuum of Care competition, each Virginia community applies for funding collectively and is held to community-wide performance measures. As a state, we have now fully transitioned to an emergency crisis response model at the community level to ensure homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring.

### **Driving Down our Numbers**

With the lessons from the ending family homelessness initiative, we then turned more purposefully to ending Veteran homelessness. We hosted the first Homeless Veteran Summit in 2014, which convened communities with the highest percentage of Veterans to create an in-depth, statewide action plan. In June of the same year, Governor McAuliffe provided significant leadership by becoming one of the first governors to sign on to the [Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness](#). In the fall of 2014, we kicked off the Homeless Veteran Boot Camp and the 100-day challenge to help communities develop local plans to end Veteran homelessness.

While continuing to emphasize rapid re-housing, we also established policies encouraging landlord engagement, created a housing search portal, aligned priorities across state agencies that focused on Veterans' needs, and implemented best practices. We also created a website to serve as a hub where the communities could share information and documents that streamlined and coordinated their efforts. In addition to using federal resources

effectively, the investment of additional financial resources, the targeting of resources, and other efforts were key to Virginia's success in effectively ending Veteran homelessness.

We have identified several effective strategies from this work. Some include:

1. Using a common assessment tool across outreach providers to identify and assess individuals experiencing homelessness;
2. Increasing coordination among providers to streamline the processes;
3. Leveraging additional community and public housing authority resources;
4. Following Housing First principles;
5. Sharing data among all community providers; and
6. Robust communication.

Our work continues to sustain our progress and to end homelessness for all Virginians. Through the Governor's Coordinating Council on Homelessness, we continue to build and deepen our partnerships and collaborations with the systems--like criminal justice, behavioral health, and healthcare--that will help us end homelessness once and for all.