

Vermont Interagency Council on Homelessness



**2007 Report to
Governor James H. Douglas**

**Chaired by
Cathleen M. Voyer
Director of Housing and Transportation,
Agency of Human Services**

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HISTORY:

Since the inception of the newly formed Vermont Interagency Council on Homelessness (VICH) in February 2007, the state of Vermont has experienced an increased need within our communities. The causes of homelessness are not the stereotypical chronic alcoholic and street person suffering from mental illness anymore; they include our families and children, and the working poor. Studies show that 35-50 percent of our homeless population is families and children. Children are our fastest growing population.

The causes of homelessness are many and complex. The rising cost of fuel, property taxes, and housing often prevent the lowest income Vermonters from experiencing a safe and stable housing environment. In 2000, the number of low-income households in Vermont with housing cost burdens greater than 30% of their income was 52,324 – 22% of the total households in the state. By 2005, this number grew to 63,026 low-income Vermont households, or 25% of all Vermont households, representing a 20% increase in five years. Preliminary analysis shows that more than half (51%) of all Vermont renter households were estimated to be paying 30% or more of their income for housing in 2006; up from 40% in 2001. Along with other complications, in 2005, Vermont had a shortage of 21,000 affordable rental units. It is projected that by the year 2010, the state will require 12,300 additional units of affordable, owner-occupied housing. Waiting list for housing subsidies such as Section 8 vouchers and Shelter Plus Care are stretched beyond capacity with numerous individuals and families left on waiting lists. The Section 8 voucher waiting lists are closed throughout the state, therefore creating pressures on our lowest income population. With the rising cost of housing and the waiting list closed, the likelihood of people transitioning up and off the Section 8 voucher is challenging, if possible at all, due to the lack of affordable housing.

Over the last year, the Vermont State Housing Authority data indicates that more than 54% of the Section 8 vouchers were awarded to individuals or families who had become homeless as a result of domestic violence. The Vermont 2007 Point in Time Survey (PIT) compiled and collected by the Agency of Human Services, VT State Housing Authority and the VCEH represents a statewide unduplicated count of homelessness on a given night in January. The data shows that approximately 800 individuals are staying in emergency shelters, motels, and streets; 90 of whom are children. This data does not include those staying in domestic violence shelters or those floating from place to place because they don't have a permanent, affordable place to stay.

OVERVIEW:

In February 2007 you renewed your commitment to the Vermont Interagency Council on Homelessness and added high level officials within your Administration, additional Housing funders and federal agencies to our membership. The mission you outlined is clear:

- ✓ Serve as the single statewide homeless planning and policy development resource for the State of Vermont;
- ✓ Review and revise the existing ten year plan to end homelessness and to submit a revised plan to you by the end of 2007;
- ✓ Monitor and oversee implementation of the plan to ensure accountability and results;
- ✓ Recommend resource, policy and regulatory changes necessary to accomplish the goals of the plan; and
- ✓ Recommend changes annually thereafter.

To fulfill the VICH mission you outlined, the VICH continues to meet on a quarterly basis with Standing Committees meeting monthly, or more frequently as needed. Each Standing Committee includes individuals appointed by you to serve on the VICH or a designee from their respective leadership teams. In addition to the members above, we have included a number of other stakeholders such as community providers, advocates and consumers, to assist with developing strategic and creative approaches to address homelessness in Vermont.

While the goal of each of the standing committees may be slightly different, the overall structure is the same. Each standing committee has a team leader. At quarterly meetings of the full council, the standing committees report progress toward accomplishing the goals which are outlined below.

STANDING COMMITTEES:

The VICH Standing Committees meets regularly researching, compiling and making recommendations to the overarching VICH. One of the VICH's first accomplishments was developing a direction for accomplishing our tasks. During our first year of meeting, the Standing Committees spent the majority of time compiling data, setting direction and developing priorities to present to the full Council. Recorded below is an outline of each Standing Committee and the direction given from the full VICH.

✓ *Housing and/with Supportive Services Standing Committee*

As one of the primary issues for homelessness, this is one of the most important goals—to obtain and sustain housing with coordinated services available to the occupying families and individuals—supportive housing. The committee's tasks are to:

Analyze and catalogue existing best practices; e.g. GA Pilot projects, Pathways to Housing, Housing First, and previous work done with housing workgroups;

Analyze and recommend creative approaches for utilizing existing service support funding streams to meet need;

Analyze and recommend solutions to barriers of obtaining housing within existing units;

Recommend creative solutions to maximizing and creating new units specifically for those hardest to house;

Review existing housing stock and recommend specific demand in permanent, transitional, and Single Room Occupancies (SROs) for targeting housing funds; and

Develop an MOU between Housing funders and AHS.

This committee is led by Sarah Carpenter from VHFA with members from housing, supportive services, and consumers represented. The committee focused primarily on inventorying all supportive housing in the state as well as developing a structure that would increase the supply of permanent supportive housing units in Vermont by dedicating housing and supportive services' resources to the most vulnerable Vermonters. Ten percent of all bond and allocated tax credit financed units would be targeted to people who are homeless, or people earning Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) in permanent supportive housing. Supportive services would be provided through local service agencies and funded by federal and state resources.

Dedicating ten percent of future housing produced through tax credits will systemically change the way the state creates supportive housing, so that it will be integrated into most future developments seamlessly. At the same time, dedicating ten percent of future housing tax credits is not intended to solve homelessness on its own. It is directed at one specific population, those already homeless or at risk because of their extremely low incomes on SSI/SSDI, and using only one housing model; permanent supportive housing. To reach your goal to end homelessness in ten years, the committee is pursuing a menu of options of housing linked with supportive services. This menu, once completely vetted, will offer several concrete models of how housing with services integrated in different settings for diverse populations, based on their individual needs. Some evidence-based, best practice models the Housing and Supportive Services Committee is considering include (but not limited to):

- Housing First (a low-barrier housing model that provides housing first; participation in supportive services may follow later);
- Coordinated Resident Service Coordination (a low-level of services that ensures service coordination and not the provision of services directly);
- Copying the Housing Contingency Fund from the Department of Mental Health for other populations other than CRT-eligible individuals who might currently “fall through the cracks” (includes funding for services, as well as a housing subsidy that bridges until federal Section 8 assistance is received);
- A landlord guarantee program (acts as an incentive for landlords to take high-risk applicants who would not otherwise be eligible for housing); and
- Additional housing funding (both in terms of construction funds as well as operating subsidies to cover the low amounts individuals may be able to pay for rent).

✓ *Data Collection and Analysis Standing Committee*

The committee’s tasks are to:

Analyze the existing data; i.e. PIT survey, The AHS program data, national data, regional data, and any existing data that may be useful;

Identify need for data by working closely with the Data Quality Management Council within the VCEH structure;

Identify critical data necessary to document the impact of the ten year plan;

Identify how to develop or enhance the data collection system; and

Develop, distribute and analyze a provider survey for housing and supportive services to inform the VICH.

This committee was led by Cathleen Gent from the AHS Central Office Planning Division for our first year. Leadership is in transition with Theo Kennedy from taking on the responsibilities of leading the committee. Theo is the Director of Planning, Policy, and Regulations for the AHS Department for Families and Children. The committee is focusing on the data presently collected while working closely with existing infrastructure such as the Data Quality Management Council through the Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness (VCEH). Over the past year and throughout the next year they will be identifying and analyzing existing data to document impact of the VICH ten year plan. The Committee agreed to continue gathering data for the development of the ten year plan. They will focus on vulnerable populations, concentrate on how to best present the data available, and work closely with the AHS Housing Taskforce to develop consistent data across agency programs which directly relate to the homeless and at risk of homeless population.

✓ Prevention

The committee's tasks are to:

Identify causes of homelessness;

Describe resources and services key to prevention, e.g., identify funding streams which could be used for prevention;

Identify gaps in services and resources; and

Recommend a "prevention of homelessness services system" to VICH.

The standing committee is led by Scott Johnson, Deputy Commissioner of Field Services, AHS Central Office. Through an examination of existing data and with input from experts in Vermont's housing and homelessness issues, the committee developed four areas of focus for alleviating homelessness in Vermont: affordability; preservation of existing housing; community relations and local jurisdiction; health care coverage.

Some of the strategies detailed within these focus areas include:

- Filling the gap between housing costs and income through subsidies, cutting housing costs, and increasing wages. It will be critical to secure support and funding at the federal level to solve Vermont's housing issues.
- Reforming the General Assistance program within the Agency of Human Services.
- Local coalitions, led by AHS Field Directors, bringing together all community housing partners to focus on: supportive housing for individual clients and families in need; preventing evictions by building relationships with landlords; and collaborative planning for housing development projects to meet the community's needs.

- Support outreach to assist in obtaining health care coverage for all Vermonters.

✓ **Ten Year Plan Revision and Public Relations Document**

The committee's tasks are to:

Define the structure of the ten year plan;

Short term; one to five years

Long term; five to ten years

Examine the existing ten year plan;

Make recommendations for substantive change;

Make recommendations for design change;

Identify time-lines for each task; and

Prepare a plan for Public Relations on the issue of ending homelessness.

This committee is led by Cathy Voyer, Chair and Housing and Transportation Director for the Agency of Human Services. The overall goal is to create a document which will inform and guide the work of the Council and that also clearly defines our goals, our expected outcomes and the tactical actions we believe are necessary to implement to ensure success. The committee is compiling recommendations brought forth by the standing committees, incorporating them into a comprehensive plan for your review.

2007 STATUS REPORT:

Each of the VICH Standing Committees is working diligently on recommendations for the VICH. Based on the work of these committees, the VICH is recommending that we focus on four primary areas during 2008.

- ✓ **Dedicate 10 percent of New Tax Credit Units built to supportive housing for the homeless and SSI recipients;**
- ✓ **Develop and Implement Supportive Housing Initiatives for homeless consumers and those at risk for homelessness;**
- ✓ **Measure our success through the collection of consistent data at a program and statewide level; and**
- ✓ **Develop a comprehensive ten year plan to end homelessness based on recommendations of the VICH Standing Committees.**

These four focus areas are discussed in greater detail below:

- ✓ **Dedicate 10 percent of New Tax Credit Units built to supportive housing for the homeless and SSI recipients**

The dedication of units that are newly built within the state for supportive housing is a significant step forward in addressing homelessness. This plan has been developed with an understanding by the housing providers and the Agency of Human Services that they will work closely together through a statewide housing memorandum of understanding that will outline the commitment to dedicate housing units and the state's commitment to provide a variety of wraparound social services.

- ✓ **Develop and Implement Supportive Housing Initiatives for homeless consumers and those at risk for homelessness**

The Agency of Human Services (AHS) is working closely with community providers, housing suppliers, and consumers to implement an initiative that will address preventing the loss of housing, alleviating homelessness, and delivering services to consumers holistically. This will be developed during the first few months of 2008 and implemented statewide by the end of 2008. Services and case management will be delivered through a lead agency with more efficiency based on better coordination and maximization of resources.

✓ **Measure our success through the collection of consistent data at a program and state-wide level**

To demonstrate success in preventing homelessness, alleviating homelessness, and the effect of providing wraparound services while housed or homeless, we must collect consistent, quality data. The Data Standing Committee will work closely with other Standing Committees as well as the AHS Housing Taskforce to identify what data needs to be collected and how that data will be collected. The Agency of Human Services is compiling financial and human resources data within our communities for serving individuals and families who are at risk or are homeless. This is a critical piece in demonstrating our success on a long-term basis. We will begin with the Statewide Point in Time Count each January. This is the only statewide data we have to rely on at this time.

✓ **Develop a comprehensive ten year plan to end homelessness based on recommendations of the VICH Standing Committees**

The ten year plan standing committee is working on a comprehensive ten year plan primarily focusing on the three standing committees' direction. Each standing committee is developing priorities, strategies, and outcomes for this standing committee to build a comprehensive plan that includes direction and measurable outcomes for ending homelessness. The Data Standing Committee met and determined we were going to start from scratch and utilize the existing ten year plan for guidance.

CLOSING:

Homelessness is a complex issue and there is no single solution. The goal is to begin implementing tangible action steps over the next year as we develop a comprehensive ten year plan to address the multifaceted causes of homelessness.

APPENDIX

**VERMONT INTERAGENCY COUNCIL ON HOMELESS
COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

AHS Housing & Transportation, Director (Chair)	Cathy Voyer
Department of Housing and Community Affairs, Commissioner	Molly Dugan, designee
Department for Children and Families, Commissioner	Steve Dale
Department of Corrections, Commissioner	Dave Peebles, designee
Department of Health, Commissioner	Chris Finley, designee
Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living, Commissioner	Joan Senecal
Field Services of AHS	Scott Johnson
Office of Vermont Health Access, Director	Ann Rugg, designee
Department of Labor, Commissioner	Tom Douse, designee
Department of Education, Commissioner	Wendy Ross, designee
Vermont Housing Finance Agency, Executive Director	Sarah Carpenter
Vermont State Housing Authority, Executive Director	Richard Williams
Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, Executive Director	Gus Seelig
US Department of Veterans Affairs	Jesse Vazzano
US Social Security Administration	John Rynne
Vermont Balance of State Continuum of Care	Melinda Bussino
Chittenden County Continuum of Care	Rita Markley

STANDING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Housing and/with Supportive Services

Sarah Carpenter, VHFA-Team Lead

Ed Cafferty, DCF/ESD

Tom Douse, DOL

Paul Dragon, VDH

Molly Dugan, DHCA

Carrie Hathaway, OVHA

Chris Hart, BHA

Karen Lawson, DOC

Rita Markley, Chittenden CCoC

Kim McCarty, VCIL

Richard Moffi, DAIL

Tony Morgan, DCF/OEO

Joe Patrissi, DCF/ESD

Gus Seelig, VHCB

Brian Smith, DMH

Cathy Voyer, AHS CO

Richard Williams, VHFA

Dave Yacovone, FS, Morrisville

Data Collection and Analysis

Theo Kennedy, AHS DCF Planning, Policy and Regulations-Team Lead

Cathleen Gent, AHS Planning Division

Linda Ryan, Bal. of State CoC

Ed Cafferty, DCF/ESD

Steve Coble, DHCA

Maura Collins, VHFA

Tony Morgan, DCF/OEO

John Pandiani, VDH/DMH

John Perry, DOC on consultation

Ames Robb, AHS/FSD

Brian Smith, Data Quality Management Council
Consumer

Prevention

Scott Johnson, AHS/FSD-Team Lead

Charlie Biss, DMH

Michael Hartman, DMH

Trudy Lyon-Hart, Disability Determination Services (DDS)

Erhard Mahnke, VAHC

Paul Mascitti, Good Samaritan

Kim McCarty, VCIL

Susan Onderwyzer, DOC on consultation

Joe Patrissi, DCF/ESD

John Rynne, SSA

Susanna Weller, VDH/PH

Jesse Vazzano, VA

Cathy Voyer, AHS CO

10 Year Plan-Revision and Public Relations Document

Cathy Voyer, Chair VICH, Team Lead

Melinda Bussino, Bal. of State CoC

Steve Dale, DCF

Molly Dugan, DHCA

Rita Markley, CCCoC

Wendy Ross, DOE

John Rynne, SSA

Jesse Vazzano, VA

Richard Williams, VHFA