

# MID-COLUMBIA HOUSELESS COLLABORATIVE

HB 4123 COORDINATED HOMELESS RESPONSE PILOTS – NOVEMBER 2023 LEGISLATIVE REPORT

## INTRODUCTION

Our House Bill 4123 pilot is led by Mid-Columbia Community Action Council (MCCAC) and our HB 4123 Advisory Board, which includes one member apiece from Wasco County, Hood River County, Sherman County, City of The Dalles, and City of Hood River. The MOU between MCCAC and these five local governments was executed in August, 2022.

In addition to serving as the lead organization coordinating HB 4123 efforts in our region, Mid-Columbia Community Action serves as the lead convener for the recently established Mid-Columbia Houseless Collaborative. The Collaborative is comprised of approximately 40 local governments, social service providers, health care entities, culturally specific and responsive organizations, and individuals with lived experience from Wasco, Sherman, and Hood River County on the Oregon side of the Mid-Columbia River Gorge and from Klickitat and Skamania Counties on the Washington side. The Houseless Collaborative's website can be found at [www.midcolumbiahouselesscollaborative.org](http://www.midcolumbiahouselesscollaborative.org) and a full list of Houseless Collaborative members can be found in the Collaborative's strategic plan that is posted on that site.

Since the Mid-Columbia Houseless Collaborative was founded shortly before the passage of HB 4123, and all of the member governments reflected in our region's HB 4123 MOU had already agreed to participate in the process of developing the Collaborative's regional strategic plan for addressing houselessness, our HB 4123 Advisory Board adopted the Collaborative's strategic plan and our Office of Housing Stabilization is using HB 4123 funds to carry out the work happening in Oregon to implement that plan. Washington Gorge Action Programs is leading and funding the work of the Collaborative in Washington's Klickitat and Skamania Counties.

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

MCCAC serves as the fiscal lead for our region's HB 4123 work and has developed an Office of Housing Stabilization to carry out our pilot's coordinated efforts. MCCAC already has representatives from 4 of our MOU's 5 participating local governments on our organizational board, so we invite the 5<sup>th</sup> participant to MCCAC board meetings regularly

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when we need to have a HB 4123 Advisory Board meeting. MCCAC and our 5 partner local governments in our HB 4123 pilot also convene for quarterly, full Mid-Columbia Houseless Collaborative meetings, and for smaller task force and workgroup meetings aligned with work areas within our five-year strategic plan. This structure makes sense for our region because of the nature of houseless services in a rural area where there is less staffing and capacity and streamlining existing efforts helps maximize limited capacity.

Even prior to the passage of HB 4123, MCCAC has served as the lead houseless services provider for Wasco, Sherman, and Hood River Counties. With the support of HB 4123, we shifted some staff structures and expanded capacity in order to focus more on regional coordination of houseless services efforts. Now, our coordinated Office of Housing Stabilization is led by a director who oversees three divisions: Shelter and Emergency Services, Housing Access and Retention, and Care Coordination and Administration. This design built on the existing structure at MCCAC, which was already providing shelter services and housing access/retention services to Wasco, Sherman, and Hood River County residents before the passage of HB 4123. The main shifts that have taken place since we created the Office of Housing Stabilization in 2022 included:

- 1) The creation of the Director position, which is now tasked with:
  - a. supporting the managers of our shelter and housing access/retention divisions with running their programs and improving coordination with local partners to ensure better outcomes for clients;
  - b. overseeing the office's care coordination and administration division, which includes one existing position and two new positions that have received HB 4123 funding due to their alignment with our region's HB 4123 strategic plan. Those positions are:
    - i. our Resource Development and Community Engagement Coordinator, who is tasked with raising funds to support the long-term sustainability of the services, goals, and strategies outlined in our region's HB 4123 plan;
    - ii. our Houselessness Data Management and Technical Assistance Specialist, who is tasked with helping MCCAC staff and Houseless Collaborative partner organizations to develop and implement quality

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- data entry, reporting, and analysis practices so we can ensure resources are being used wisely and in the most targeted way possible to ensure alignment with our equity and other values;
- iii. our Housing Intake and Referral Coordinator, who has implemented a new coordinated referral system for use by MCCAC and our partner agencies in the Mid-Columbia Houseless Collaborative, and who ensures better implementation of prioritization processes for limited houseless services resources, such as coordinated entry.
  - c. Facilitating HB 4123 Advisory Board meetings and Mid-Columbia Houseless Collaborative meetings, and coordinating implementation of the HB 4123/Houseless Collaborative strategic plan.

## STRATEGIC PLAN PROCESS

Our strategic plan was developed over the course of 9 months in 2022 with our HB 4123 MOU partners and our broader network of the 40 organizations and local governments within the Mid-Columbia Houseless Collaborative, so community engagement was infused in the entire process. A grant MCCAC received from Providence Health and Services supported us to hire a consulting team to help facilitate strategic planning sessions, during which HB 4123 Advisory Board members and other Collaborative members developed a mission, vision, and values, equity statement, and strategic plan for the Mid-Columbia Houseless Collaborative. Strategic planning participants also divided into four groups to develop the four distinct sections of our strategic plan, which are focused on shelter, services, housing, and advocacy. During the strategic planning process, a workgroup of people with current or previous lived experience with houselessness was also assembled with the support of MCCAC, our partner organizations, and strategic planning consulting team; that workgroup advised on the creation of the strategic plan before it was finalized through workgroup meetings and participation in larger Collaborative meetings. Our strategic plan was finalized by the Houseless Collaborative and adopted by our HB 4123 Advisory Board in October 2022, at which time we began a 4-month community “road show” to share the finalized plan with elected officials and community members across the Mid-Columbia region. A link to our strategic plan can be found [here](#).

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## STRATEGIC PLAN OUTCOMES

Our strategic plan sets shared outcomes by outlining strategic priorities, strategies, and actions in each of the four key work areas of Shelter, Services, Housing, and Advocacy. During the planning process, we did multiple rounds of review with planning participants to assess if the outcomes and goals we were setting were “SMART” goals so that we could ensure they were specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound.

In the area of Shelter, our central objective is to stabilize the region’s shelter system and improve coordination between shelters and service providers. We are working toward this objective by uniting agencies to better coordinate shelter placement and supportive services and by prioritizing stable shelter funding, rapid re-housing funding, and staff support.

In the area of Services, our primary objective is to ensure the region’s supportive services meet client needs in a culturally responsive manner. Our work toward this objective focuses on increasing accessibility of services with a focus on needs identified by clients, addressing gaps in services for houseless clients, and strengthening communication between service providers.

In the area of Housing, our main objective is to preserve and expand affordable, accessible housing across the Mid-Columbia region. We are working toward this objective by: increasing the supply of housing units that low-income households at or below 80% AMI can afford to rent; using preservation, acquisition, and rehabilitation to protect the region’s existing supply of affordable, accessible housing; prioritizing access to affordable, accessible housing units for communities of color and other traditionally underserved populations; and educating elected officials, community leaders, and the public about why our region needs more affordable and accessible housing.

In the area of Advocacy, our primary objective is to advocate, engage the community, and build support for the region’s efforts to address houselessness. Our work toward this objective focuses on: communicating to build awareness and support; using accurate data to inform people of the realities of houselessness and to address opposition; and advocating for funding and policies that support the Collaborative’s strategic investments.

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One of the biggest challenges we faced in setting shared outcomes included the decision of whether or not to list a specific number of affordable housing units that we wanted to help develop in our region within the next five years. Given the complex and often unpredictable process of securing the patchwork of funding needed to make projects like this a reality, and the reality of NIMBYism, Collaborative members had to have a lot of conversations to find the right number of units they were comfortable publishing as a goal of the HB 4123 Advisory Board and larger Houseless Collaborative. We also found it difficult to set shared outcomes related to other strategic priorities in the “housing” section of our plan because of the limited capacity of our housing authority and their development arm, and the reality of staffing challenges at other partner organizations focused on this priority in our rural area.

Despite these types of challenges, we found that there were more opportunities for successful setting of shared outcomes during our strategic planning process. For instance, the process provided a regular and structured opportunity for our lead houseless service providers in the region to communicate with culturally specific and responsive partners about what types of actions they thought would help move the needle on making houseless services and housing more accessible for the diverse communities in our region who experience houselessness at disproportionately high rates. The planning process also allowed shelter and services providers to envision structures that will eventually help make staff and clients’ lives easier through enhanced coordination, better training and technology, and smarter systems.

We are measuring success by convening regularly to continue our work together, and by making quarterly updates to a progress tracker that corresponds with each strategic priority, strategy, and action outlined in our strategic plan. We review that tracker with our full Collaborative each quarter and also plan to publish an annual report highlighting successes.

Our pilot’s approach to regional coordination of homeless services and planning was to establish the Office of Housing Stabilization based at MCCAC and build out a staff team there to help enhance coordination among houseless service providers and planning entities in the region. The largest coordination challenges we have faced since publishing our strategic plan include the reality that many of our partner agencies have limited

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staffing and capacity to engage in coordinated work, but a highlight of working in our region is that we have a strong foundation of good relationships with partners, which helps ensure the sustainability of our coordinated efforts despite those types of challenges.

Beyond the formal pilot in our region, which includes MCCAC and our five partner local governments in MCCAC's three-county service territory, our partners include the remainder of the 40 partner organizations and jurisdictions who participated in the creation of the Mid-Columbia Houseless Collaborative and its strategic plan. This network has been key to our ability to be successful because the houseless services realm represents a complex web not just of local governments and the region's lead houseless services providers, but also culturally specific and responsive providers, hospitals and federally qualified health centers, behavioral health providers, transportation agencies, state agencies, domestic violence organizations, shelters, local food banks, libraries, faith partners, people with lived experience, and more.

Our region has not yet felt a significant impact as a result of the Governor's Executive Orders and the 2023 legislative funding awards; unfortunately, the Governor's office used Point in Time Count data that put the Rural Oregon Continuum of Care at a disadvantage given changes in our continuum's membership during the five-year period for which her office pulled data to determine which communities would be targeted for resources. However, we are appreciative of the emergency order funding that all counties received to support continued eviction prevention efforts, and we have prevented nearly 50 households from becoming houseless with the support of that funding since we received that funding in the spring of 2023. We are also glad the legislature allocated \$26 million to the Rural Oregon Continuum of Care for houseless services to address the initial shortcomings of the Executive Orders; however, we have not yet received a final contract or been able to begin spending that funding as of mid-October 2023. This is a challenge we hope the legislature is aware of; even when there is an emergency designated, we are repeatedly told by Oregon Housing and Community Services that there are delays (oftentimes for months and months) to delivering funding on the ground because of the contracting process and other issues at the state level.

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Our pilot coordinates with our continuum of care because we have a MCCAC staff member who sits on the continuum's board. Our pilot was also the only project besides the continuum itself that received funding from HUD's recent Special NOFO to Address Rural and Unsheltered Homelessness, so we are coordinating closely with them on implementation of that grant over the next three years. Additionally, our Office of Housing Stabilization has coordinated meetings for the continuum's program staff to get to know other partner agencies in our region and learn more about how we are blending health care and housing funding to support and sustain our work.

Recruiting staff to scale up the work of our Office of Housing Stabilization has been an ongoing effort and we have made the decision to hire in-house staff rather than consultants in most cases. Occasionally we have used some HB 4123 funds to hire consultants, such as when we developed our strategic communications plan for our HB 4123/Houseless Collaborative priorities this year, but otherwise we have agreed that having dedicated, full-time staff who are in-house will allow for better local coordination, relationship-building, and execution of priorities in our rural community.

Our pilot is creating a more equitable, accessible, and responsive system for our residents experiencing houselessness in a few different ways.

Highlights include working quite successfully to expand and sustain shelter resources and strongly coordinated services in our region. We have had major success in this area already based on the progress we have made on two key action items in our HB 4123 strategic plan: 1) securing Project Turnkey resources for the region to enhance transitional housing/shelter offerings and improve shelter infrastructure, and 2) constructing the first ever navigation center and corresponding emergency shelter in our region. On October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023, less than a year after we secured Project Turnkey 2.0 funds from the Oregon Community Foundation and purchased the Oregon Motor Motel in The Dalles, we held a grand opening ceremony for our region's new, primary shelter there (now called "The Annex"), which can accommodate up to 100 people. This shelter will, for the first time in our region, offer shelter for all types of households, including families with children, in

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addition to including set-aside units for culturally specific and responsive partner organizations' clients and behavioral health providers' clients.

We are also in the midst of constructing our region's Navigation Center, "The Gloria," which is on track to open by mid-2024. That center will co-locate services from various agencies involved in our HB 4123 and Houseless Collaborative work so it can serve as a "one-stop-shop" for the emergency shelter, social services, and health care that houseless community members need to stabilize and get back into permanent housing as quickly as possible. The biggest challenge was fundraising to get both of these projects across the finish line, but we were grateful to have HB 4123 funds to support us to hire our Resource Development and Community Engagement Coordinator, who played a key role alongside MCCAC's Executive Director and Director of the Office of Housing Stabilization in securing the hundreds of thousands of dollars to make both projects a reality.

As we strengthen our physical infrastructure for shelter and coordinated services, we are also making headway on ensuring these services are accessible and equitable by implementing improved technology to ensure clients seeking services experience smooth hand-offs between various partner organizations in our region. Aligned with goals in our strategic plan we are in the final phase of implementing a shared referral system, and have decided to use the Unite Us/Connect Oregon platform to accomplish this goal. This will ensure that MCCAC and our partners in the region can make more seamless referrals for different types of services houseless clients need, and allow us to keep better track of whether or not those referrals have been accepted or advanced through the system.

As of October 2023, we are also making progress on key strategic plan action items such as providing trainings on trauma-informed and culturally responsive care to houseless service and other providers in the region to ensure clients have a better experience and a greater likelihood of having good outcomes. Additionally, in coordination with our lived experience workgroup, we've published a toolkit to help organizations working with our HB 4123 Advisory Board and Houseless Collaborative to implement stronger client feedback and data analysis practices so they can improve their programs and strengthen client outcomes.



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Importantly, we are looking at the systemic and structural barriers that affect culturally specific and responsive service providers' ability to serve our region's traditionally underserved, diverse populations as well. Through a series of conversations with these stakeholders, we recently accomplished our strategic plan goal of developing an annual strategy for resource development to support and expand culturally responsive and specific housing stabilization services; we are now beginning the process of supporting those partners to implement that strategy by doing things such as submitting collaborative grant applications to sustain funding for our Federally Qualified Health Center's mobile medical unit.

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

We did not receive technical assistance from OHCS to help develop our strategic plan, but we invited one of our partner organizations in the Mid-Columbia Houseless Collaborative, Nch'i Wana Housing, to take advantage of the TA resources being offered by OHCS to HB 4123 coalitions. Nch'i Wana is a culturally specific organization focused on housing stabilization for Native community members in the Mid-Columbia region, and they just secured their official 501(c)(3) status in the spring of 2023. They needed help with their own organizational strategic planning; given the equity values in our HB 4123 strategic plan, supporting them to get this type of technical assistance was aligned with our priorities.

The biggest area where we could use more technical assistance, or just additional capacity, is in the housing realm. Our local housing authority and their development/property management arm are participating in our efforts to implement our HB 4123/Houseless Collaborative strategic plan. However, their capacity is very limited and expertise in housing development and preservation in a rural area like ours is limited overall to a small handful of people who already have too many priorities on their plates.

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## DATA

Our pilot has begun working on improving our coordination of data collection and analysis in a few different ways. Within our equity statement, we have agreed to use data to drive decisions and focus resources so equity is not just a concept, but a practice.

We have partnered with the Providence Center for Outcomes, Research, and Evaluation (CORE) to ensure that tools our pilot is producing in alignment with our strategic plan goals, such as our Houseless Client Feedback Toolkit, have strong but user-friendly guidance about quality data practices as well.

Our pilot has also committed to collecting and sharing data and personal stories to educate people about houselessness and highlight the need for more housing, including by expanding the annual Point in Time Count through better involvement of providers who offer culturally specific and behavioral health services to underserved communities in our region. We coordinated extensively with partners to achieve this goal during our January 2023 PIT Count and published the informal (not yet verified by HUD) results of that count earlier this summer.

In late 2023 we published the annual report we committed to in our strategic plan by combining stories from people in our area who have been houseless with data on regional housing needs from the Corporation for Supportive Housing, Oregon Affordable Housing Inventory and other reports.

Perhaps most importantly, we have secured stable, long-term funding to make the temporary Houselessness Data Management and Technical Assistance Specialist position on our team (which was initially created in 2021 through temporary federal COVID relief funding) a permanent position. We have used some HB 4123 funding for this position, but have also included the position in our budget for some of the funds we're receiving from OHCS for the 23-25 biennium. We will continue working with our Resource Development and Community Engagement Coordinator to ensure longer-term sustainability of this position after 2025, regardless of the realities of the state houseless services budget landscape at that point.

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One of the biggest barriers to our pilot's data work is the antiquated nature of the Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS) software that we are required by to use since we receive public funds from the state and federal governments. Our understanding is that the state of Oregon and the Rural Oregon Continuum of Care are currently under contract with Wellsky to administer and provide agency access to the HMIS (where we are required to report houseless client data). As a local pilot and collaborative discussing how to improve not only data collection/analysis, but also case management, we have learned that this version of HMIS, while apparently more advanced than other offerings when it comes to reporting capabilities, falls very short when it comes to usability and case management capabilities as compared to other software platforms that administer HMIS.

From the conversations we have had with OHCS and the ROCC, it sounds like there are discussions about whether or not the state should continue its contract with Wellsky or change to another software company that administers HMIS, such as Bitfocus/Clarity Human Services within the next couple of years. We have learned from the state and our own pilot's initial research on this topic that Bitfocus/Clarity Human Services may be more user-friendly for caseworkers and include more referral and case management capabilities than Wellsky; we are inclined to think that shifting to an HMIS platform like this would ensure higher quality data is being put into the system in the first place, even if it would be an adjustment for local agency staff and the state to work with the different reporting capabilities of this type of platform. It could also ensure less duplication of efforts; currently, our region's houseless services agencies are not alone in the experience of needing to use several different software platforms to adhere to our public data reporting requirements, while simultaneously doing duplicative data entry into other, more user-friendly and capable software platforms that meet client and partner organizations' referral and case management needs. Within the next few years our pilot has committed, through goals in our strategic plan, to determining if there is a better shared case management system that can also help us ensure better data is going into the publicly mandated reports that can provide insight into who we are serving and whether or not we need to adjust our programs in order to align with our equity and access values (and strengthen our clients' outcomes). We acknowledge that this is a

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challenging prospect depending on if and how much the state coordinates with HB 4123 pilots as they determine whether or not to renew their contract with Wellsky though. We also acknowledge this is a complex process given the work that the state is doing through other agencies, such as OHA, to improve coordination of client care through new Community Information Exchange systems. We would urge the legislature to help make sure these efforts are coordinated and streamlined, and to make sure houseless services providers have a meaningful seat at the table as decisions are made at the statewide level about Community Information Exchange requirements that are meant to promote better coordination of resources focused on social determinants of health such as housing.

## IDENTIFYING, ACCESSING AND ALIGNING FUNDS

Our strategic plan outlines specific funding sources that we are currently or planning to pursue to support work in our four focus areas of Shelter, Services, Housing, and Advocacy, and we are actively working to coordinate and align multiple funding sources to achieve our goals. Our plan also identifies the need for 1) on-going collaboration with partner agencies and elected officials to apply and advocate for needed funds, 2) the hiring of MCCAC's Resource Development and Community Engagement Coordinator to lead fundraising efforts to support the Collaborative's priorities and 3) creation of a Collaborative-wide fundraising strategy to support and expand culturally responsive services that promote housing stabilization.

Funds explicitly outlined in our strategic plan that we have secured include:

- Project Turnkey funding through OCF and OHCS to support The Annex transitional housing and shelter facility which just opened in The Dalles.
- Approximately \$1 million through HUD's federally competitive Special NOFO to Address Rural and Unsheltered Homelessness to provide rapid rehousing financial assistance to houseless clients at The Annex over the next three years.
- A braided funding package to fully fund The Gloria Navigation Center Capital Project, including local and state governmental funds, land donated by a local individual, and a grant from The Ford Family Foundation. The Gloria Navigation Center is currently under construction and is expected to open in the first quarter of 2024.

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- A recently-finalized contract with PacificSource that allows us to bill for Medicaid reimbursement to support Traditional Health Workers in our region who can provide housing, behavioral health, and other navigation services to houseless clients.
- A recently-finalized grant agreement with our region’s primary behavioral health provider, Mid-Columbia Center for Living, to infuse more than \$3 million of behavioral health funds that were recently awarded to the region into housing-related behavioral health needs, including operations of our region’s two main shelters and the eventual development of permanent supportive housing.
- Private foundation funding to support projects prioritized in the strategic plan, including from The Roundhouse Foundation, The Ford Family Foundation, PacificSource Foundation, and multiple family foundations that wish to remain anonymous.
- Individual, business, and faith-based donations as a result of a coordinated effort to build a base of supporters.

Funds that we are currently pursuing or planning to pursue to support priorities from our strategic plan include:

- Additional private foundation funds including Oregon Community Foundation Community Grant funds to support our Federally Qualified Health Clinic’s mobile medical unit services to shelter and transitional housing locations and Meyer Memorial Trust funds to support Nch’l Wana Housing’s supports to Native community members living along the Columbia River.
- General Housing Account’s Capacity Building (GHAP-CB) funds to support increased capacity at Columbia Cascades Housing Corporation – increased capacity will help support access to additional potential funding supports for affordable housing development including construction excise taxes and urban renewal funds among multiple other potential funding sources.
- State and/or federal funds to support Permanent Support Housing Development following our Collaborative’s team participation in the 2023 Permanent Supportive Housing Institute offered by OHCS and the Corporation for Supportive Housing.

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As stated earlier in this report, our region’s houseless service providers have not yet felt a significant impact from the Governor’s Executive Orders and the 2023 legislative funding awards because of the disadvantaged scoring received by the Rural Oregon Continuum of Care. However, we are appreciative of the emergency order funding that all counties received to support continued eviction prevention efforts, and we are glad the legislature allocated \$26 million to the Rural Oregon Continuum of Care for houseless services to address the shortcomings of the data approach to the Executive Orders, although we have not yet received a final contract or been able to begin spending that funding as of mid-October 2023, which has unfortunately kept our region’s new rapid rehousing program enrollments “on pause” for the time being.

The HB 4123 Pilot fills significant gaps in the areas of funding, leadership, coordination, and organizational capacity. Although MCCAC had already taken on the role as lead agency addressing houselessness in the Mid-Columbia region prior to the passage of HB 4123, participation in the pilot has allowed us to reconfigure and scale up our staffing structure to better lead this regional coordination effort. HB 4123 funds are currently supporting the Director of Housing Stabilization, Resource Development and Community Engagement Coordinator, and Housing Intake and Referral Coordinator positions and various contracts and other costs associated with priorities outlined in our strategic plan.

We are working on multiple fronts to plan and make progress toward securing continued funding for the work of the Mid-Columbia Houseless Collaborative, including the following components:

- An initial resource development plan has been drafted with the goal of identifying – and securing – sustained funding to continue the coordinated response beyond the first 2 years of the pilot. This plan will be reviewed and updated annually.
- MCCAC’s Resource Development and Community Engagement Coordinator is focused on raising funds to support the long-term sustainability of the work of the Collaborative and works collaboratively both internally with the MCCAC leadership team as well as externally with partner members of the Collaborative.

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- We are building a base of supporters and recognize the value of fostering community-based donations from individuals, businesses, and faith communities as these diversify our funding streams and are flexible.
- Several of the Collaborative’s key projects have or are poised to receive operational funding from government, health and social service partners that will extend beyond the 2-year timeframe of the pilot, including a mental and behavioral health-focused outreach team that will be funded through braided funds from multiple agencies and local governments.
- MCCAC’s recently executed contract with PacificSource to bill Medicaid for Community Health Worker services will provide continued funding to support staffing for our shelter and housing programs for the foreseeable future and well beyond the 2-year pilot period.

Even with the Governor’s orders and the support of HB 4123, our pilot community has identified several funding gaps remaining for shelter or other homeless services for the 23-25 biennium. We have domestic violence providers and youth shelter providers who have budget gaps that we are working to help fill through a request we recently put in to OHCS. We have had several culturally specific and responsive service providers struggle to retain staff due to funding constraints or in one case lay off staff because of difficulties managing the administrative and budget requirements attached to all their different funding streams. Ultimately, we are still in a position where we need to prioritize our limited rapid rehousing and other financial assistance programs for the clients who need them most, which leaves many households that need assistance still struggling.

## COMMUNICATIONS

Community engagement and communication are priorities identified in our strategic plan. The Mid-Columbia Houseless Collaborative was founded, and continues to work, through active engagement of community partners including local government entities, social and health service agencies, culturally specific and culturally responsive organizations, and people with lived experience of poverty and homelessness.

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We recognize the importance of communication to build awareness and support. To move our work forward in this area we have worked with a contractor to develop a strategic communications plan with accompanying key messages which was adopted by the Collaborative in October 2023. Our communications plan articulates the goals of increasing awareness of coordinated services, reaching a wider audience, and shifting the perception of houseless people in the community. We are working to communicate proactively and effectively with volunteers and donors, elected leaders, community partners, and current and prospective clients through a variety of strategies including our website, quarterly e-newsletter, social media, regular email updates to community partners, press releases, and in-person and virtual meetings with key stakeholders.

A primary challenge we have faced in the area of engagement and communication is the limited capacity of partner organizations to lend staff time and expertise to this work. We recognize that building capacity of partner members of the Collaborative is needed in the mid to long term; in the short term, we have brought in capacity by contracting with a communications firm to support development of our communications plan and with another local contractor for translation of our materials into Spanish.

We understand the importance of sharing the stories of people who have experienced houselessness and are able to share some initial success in that area. We published an initial set of print version stories alongside our first Affordable Housing and Houselessness Report and are currently working with our Lived Experience Work Group to create a series of video stories that will highlight a diverse range of stories of houselessness from members of our community. We also plan for these video stories to dovetail with A Day in The Life event which we plan to hold mid-2024 and which is articulated in our strategic plan as an opportunity for community leaders, service providers, and law enforcement officers to be informed about the realities of houselessness, and to build awareness and support for our work in the region.

## ADDRESSING RACIAL DISPARITIES

Mid-Columbia Houseless Collaborative was founded with a focus on equity and justice. Before engaging in strategic planning, we took time to draft an equity statement, to own



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our history, and to commit to equity. We recognize that housing inequities are rooted in our country's history, and that when colonizers displaced the first people of these lands, a base of racial and other inequities was built for future generations. We are committed to working with partners in our region to engage fully in efforts to end poverty and houselessness, to finding and address root causes of inequity, to improving housing systems where personal identities predict inequitable outcomes, to using data to drive decisions and focus resources so that equity is not just a concept, but a practice, and to including the voices of people who are or have been houseless, with a focus on communities of Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color.

The Collaborative's vision, mission, and values each call out equity as well. Our vision is a region with equitable opportunities and support, where everyone who needs stable housing can find and afford it – especially communities who have faced disproportionate barriers to housing – so everyone can achieve the best quality of life possible. Our mission commits to expanding housing capacity and ensuring supportive services are provided in culturally affirming ways that uphold human dignity, and our values include diversity, equity, and lived experience.

Key culturally specific and culturally responsive partnerships of the Collaborative include with Nch'i Wana Housing, The Next Door Inc., Oregon Human Development Corporation, and One Community Health, our Federally Qualified Health Clinic. We approach these partnerships with respect, with an attitude of listening to learn, and with a goal of identifying and implementing creative and collaborative solutions to address the complex challenges of houselessness and to provide culturally responsive supportive services.

Some initial successes in the Collaborative's culturally specific and responsive partnerships are:

- Ensuring these organizations are involved as key partners in our priority projects, with dedicated office space for Nch'i Wana and Oregon Human Development Corporation at The Gloria Navigation Center, set aside rooms for clients of Nch'i Wana Housing and The Next Door at The Annex, and coordination of medical

# MID-COLUMBIA HOUSELESS COLLABORATIVE

HB 4123 COORDINATED HOMELESS RESPONSE PILOTS – NOVEMBER 2023 LEGISLATIVE REPORT

supportive services and access to Oregon Health Plan enrollment with One Community Health.

- Supporting outreach by Native people to Native people living at in lieu sites along the Columbia River – with our partners at Nch’i Wana and The Next Door, through their Neighbors Along the Big River (NABR) Program.
- Working with these partners to address technical assistance needs either by providing direct technical assistance (for example around HMIS) or by connecting these partners with TA resources through OHCS.
- Holding meetings with these partners to identify supports needed to maintain and expand culturally responsive services that promote housing stabilization.
- Identifying priority placement for Native community members in our planned Permanent Supportive Housing Development at The Gloria Center site.

Addressing racial disparities through partnering with our culturally specific and responsive partners will require on-going and sustained commitment and attention. This work requires us to examine ourselves and be open to transformational change.

## CONNECTIONS TO PERMANENT HOUSING

Our strategic plan includes goals for enhancing and sustaining funding for rapid rehousing and landlord incentives, and improving promotion of these resources in order to strengthen partnerships with area landlords. We have already made significant progress on these goals, including by placing 115 houseless people in permanent housing in Wasco, Sherman, and Hood River Counties in 2022, and by becoming the only rural region in Oregon to receive funding through HUD’s federally competitive Special NOFO to Address Rural and Unsheltered Homelessness. Through this grant, we received approximately \$1 million to provide rapid rehousing financial assistance to houseless clients at The Annex over the next three years. On October 31<sup>st</sup> we are also hosting a housing stabilization summit where we will promote our landlord incentives and rapid rehousing offerings to area landlords and service providers, another goal that is outlined in our strategic plan to ensure we continue building on these types of key community relationships that help houseless clients get into permanent housing.

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Our strategic plan also includes construction of more affordable housing units, and alignment of long-term rent assistance vouchers and other resources with new housing units as they are developed. Our plan commits us to ensuring that traditionally underserved communities have equitable access to being placed in these units and taking advantage of these resources as well. We are working closely with our housing authority, their development arm, culturally specific and responsive partners, and our main behavioral health provider in the region to accomplish these goals. We collaborated as a pilot to succeed in getting competitive state funding for the Rand Road project in Hood River County, which is one of the key affordable housing projects that we articulated in our strategic plan as a priority so we can add more units to our region’s affordable housing inventory. We also partnered with the Mid-Columbia Housing Authority and their affiliated Columbia Cascade Housing Corporation, and the Mid-Columbia Center for Living, to successfully compete for a spot in the 2023 Permanent Supportive Housing Institute offered by OHCS and the Corporation for Supportive Housing. By completing that institute this year, we are setting ourselves up for more access to permanent supportive housing development and rent assistance resources over the next several years which will support our goal of developing at least 40 units of Permanent Supportive Housing in the Dalles in the near future.

## CONCLUSION

We appreciate the legislature’s interest in our pilot’s experience thus far.

In terms of key successes and potentially replicable templates/models for the state, we would like to highlight our work to build a navigation center with so many co-located partner agencies on-site, and our work to secure and quickly rehabilitate a Project Turnkey site in a rural community. We hope the legislature will consider siting legislation for permanent supportive housing and other types of housing because of how challenging those projects can be. We know that without the shelter and Project Turnkey siting legislation the legislature passed shortly before we received our Project Turnkey 2.0 funding in the gorge, these projects likely would not have been possible in our community. We believe the legislature should use these types of lessons, and take into account the challenging landscape for affordable housing development, and pass similar

# MID-COLUMBIA HOUSELESS COLLABORATIVE

HB 4123 COORDINATED HOMELESS RESPONSE PILOTS – NOVEMBER 2023 LEGISLATIVE REPORT

siting legislation to pave the way for the construction of more desperately needed affordable and permanent supportive housing in our communities.

We also believe that our work with PacificSource’s programmatic payment model, which is allowing us and some of our partner organizations to begin billing some of our staff’s time to Medicaid once certified as Community Health Workers under OHA’s guidelines, is a potentially replicable model that should be explored in other areas around the state as we grapple with questions about funding sustainability for shelter operations and houseless services, and as we learn more and more about what a key social determinant of health housing can be. Our close partnership with our region’s designated behavioral health provider and the major grant agreement that we recent negotiated with them to help support our operations is another one that may be worth considering replicating in other rural areas around Oregon.

We urge the legislature to closely track and encourage adequate coordination around the continued work in the health care realm on implementing new Community Information Exchange technologies. We also hope the legislature does not lose track of the work OHCS is doing to implement data entry requirements for the Homelessness Management Information System—organizations on the ground ideally need a better, more user-friendly administrator for HMIS that ensures the data that is put into that system is higher quality, and for the sake of avoiding duplication of data entry and staff efforts given the current shortcomings of our HMIS system we outlined earlier in our report.

Finally, we hope the legislature works with pilots to consolidate homeless services programs and budgets as much as possible. Our administrative and financial burdens are a real barrier to getting Oregonians in urgent situations the care and coordination they need, and in many cases the amount of formula funding a rural community like ours gets from some of the state’s smaller homeless services grant programs are so small that we either opt not to accept the funds because of the different set of requirements and workload attached to them, or we accept them but can only use them to support a small handful of a few clients. Streamlining the state’s homeless services budgets and programs so that providers on the ground have more flexibility to identify needs and deploy

# MID-COLUMBIA HOUSELESS COLLABORATIVE

HB 4123 COORDINATED HOMELESS RESPONSE PILOTS – NOVEMBER 2023 LEGISLATIVE REPORT

resources in the most efficient way possible would make it easier for us to continue putting other systems in place, like CHW certifications and Medicaid billing, when we have limited administrative capacity. Most importantly it would allow us to deliver services more quickly and more effectively to clients who desperately need them to avoid or get out of houselessness.

## APPENDICES

- A. MCHC MOU**
- B. MCHC Strategic plan**
- C. Organizational Chart**
- D. Timeline for major project deliverables**
- E. Any other relevant info/data you'd like to share with the Legislature.**



**Mid-Columbia  
Community  
Action Council**

**Mid-Columbia Community Action Council**  
Serving Hood River, Wasco, and Sherman Counties  
312 E. 4th St, The Dalles, OR 97058  
606 State St, Suite 1B, Hood River, OR 97031  
Tel: (541) 298-5131  
[www.MCCAC.com](http://www.MCCAC.com)

## MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

This Memorandum of Understanding (**MOU**) has been created and entered into on July 31, 2022 between  
Mid-Columbia Community Action Council (**MCCAC**), 312 E Fourth St., The Dalles, OR 97058 and  
The City of The Dalles, The City of Hood River, Hood River County, Wasco County and Sherman County

### INTRODUCTION AND GOALS

1. MCCAC entered Agreement Number 107-2022-4123-05 (**Grant Agreement**) with the State of Oregon awarding MCCAC \$1,000,000 to establish a coordinated homeless response system consisting of the City of The Dalles, the City of Hood River, Hood River County, Wasco County, and Sherman County. The Grant Agreement was entered pursuant to the terms of House Bill 4123 from the 2022 Oregon Legislative Session (Oregon Laws 2022, chapter 70, section 3).
2. The Parties to this MOU wish to implement HB 4123 and establish a coordinated homeless response system consisting of the City of The Dalles, the City of Hood River, Hood River County, Wasco County and Sherman County (collectively, **System**). The System shall, at a minimum, consist of an Office of Housing Stabilization/Homeless Response Office (**Office**) and a Housing Stabilization Advisory Board (**Board**). The Parties specifically intend this MOU to establish a coordinated homeless response system satisfying all requirements set forth in the Grant Agreement, attached to and made part of this MOU as Exhibit "A".

### AGREEMENT

1. **Effective Date/Duration.** This MOU shall be effective when signed by all six of its Parties. Unless extended or earlier terminated in a writing signed by a majority of the Parties, this MOU automatically terminates on June 30, 2027.
2. **The Office of Housing Stabilization.** The Parties agree the Office shall be organized and perform the following functions:
  - a. The Office shall operate under the general policy guidance of the Board.
  - b. The Office shall be a division of MCCAC and consist of the Director of the Office of Housing Stabilization (**Director**), selected by the MCCAC Executive Director in consultation with the Board, and other staff members as outlined by the System's five-year strategic plan (**Strategic Plan**). The Director and other Office staff members shall be MCCAC employees.
  - c. The Office shall coordinate and develop partnerships with local and regional stakeholders as specified in House Bill 4123, including plans for coordination

with any local continuum of care receiving funding under 24 C.F.R. part 578.

- d. The Office shall also include the Mid-Columbia Houseless Collaborative (**MCHC**) as its Advisory Panel, comprising houselessness experts drawn from the community to include representatives with knowledge and experience in the areas of shelter, youth services, lived experience, affordable housing, houselessness, behavioral health, physical health, education, and philanthropy. The Advisory Panel supports development and implementation of the System's strategic plan.
- e. The Office shall be managed by the Director who, in coordination with the MCCAC Executive Director, will provide updates and reports to the Board. The Director shall be charged with the Office's general operation and shall work to coordinate with the Board, MCHC, and all Parties to this MOU to develop the Strategic Plan and otherwise ensure the System meets the project goals set forth in Exhibit "A".
- f. For the first two fiscal years, beginning July 1, 2022, the Office will be financed with pilot funding of \$1,000,000 awarded to MCCAC by the Grant Agreement. As outlined in the Grant Agreement, within one year of receiving the Grant Agreement funds, the System, through the Board or member government, shall adopt a five-year Strategic Plan that will identify and set goals for addressing funding to support ongoing operations of the System. The Office will hire a Development Coordinator to lead these fundraising efforts, in coordination with the Director, MCCAC, the Board, and member governments.

**3. Housing Stabilization Advisory Board.** The Parties agree the Board shall be organized and perform the following functions:

- a. The Board, consisting of one representative from the governing body of each Party to this MOU, shall be formed for the purposes of providing general guidance to the Office.
- b. Initial Board members shall have the opportunity to make important decisions at the inception of the System, including approval authority over the Strategic Plan developed by MCHC and providing policy direction to the Office.
  - i. The initial Board shall consist of the following appointed members:
    1. Gladys Rivera, City Councilor, City of Hood River
    2. Rich Mays, Mayor, City of The Dalles
    3. Arthur Babitz, County Commissioner, Hood River County
    4. Kathy Schwartz, County Commissioner, Wasco County
    5. Joan Bird, County Commissioner, Sherman County
  - ii. If one of the initial Board members listed above, or any subsequent Board member, resigns from the Board or is not re-elected to office, their member government agrees to work with the Director and MCCAC Executive Director to appoint

another member of their governing body to the Board in a timely fashion.

- c. By December 31, 2022, the Board shall review, approve, and adopt the Strategic Plan identifying and setting goals pursuant to HB 4123 and the Grant Agreement.
- d. Each Board member shall serve as a liaison between their respective governing body and the Office.

#### **4. Obligations of the Parties.**

- a. Commitment of Support. The Parties commit to their obligations under this MOU for a total of not less than five (5) fiscal years commencing on July 1, 2022. The Parties further agree to work together and use best efforts to seek out and obtain funding to further this objective, as outlined in the Grant Agreement and the System's Strategic Plan.
- b. The Parties agree to cooperate in good faith to ensure the goals of the System are achieved. The Parties shall work in good faith to amend this MOU as necessary to achieve the System's goals set forth in Exhibit "A".
- c. MCCAC shall serve as the fiscal agent responsible for funding the operations of the Office created under this MOU. MCCAC shall be responsible for all contracting, procurement, or other activities necessary to establish the Office. MCCAC shall retain fiscal and managerial oversight of the Office, the Director, and any other staff as outlined in the Strategic Plan and shall retain the authority to terminate the contractual and/or employment relationship with the Director and staff as necessary. In the event the Director's employment ends, MCCAC's Executive Director shall select a new Director with the Board's input. This MOU does not create any employment or contractual relationship between the Parties to this MOU or the Office, Director, or staff.

### **GENERAL PROVISIONS**


**1. Indemnification.** Each Party agrees, to the fullest extent permitted by law, to defend, indemnify, and hold harmless each other, their officers, directors, trustees, employees and agents, from and against any and all claims, liabilities, losses, and expenses (including reasonable attorneys' fees) directly, indirectly, wholly, or partially arising from or in connection with any act or omission of that Party, its employees, or agents in the performance of this MOU; provided, however, in no event shall a Party indemnify or hold harmless another Party for the other Party's sole negligence.

**2. Termination, Withdrawal, and Amendment.** This MOU may be terminated by a writing executed by a majority of the Parties. Any Party may withdraw from this MOU upon delivery of written notice to all other Parties. This MOU may be amended by a writing executed by all Parties.


**3. Disputes.** In the event a dispute arises under this MOU, the Parties shall make a good faith effort to resolve conflicts cooperatively. In the event the dispute cannot be resolved, the parties retain all remedies available to them by law.



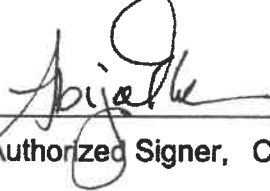
4. **Laws.** The Parties agree to abide by all local, Oregon, and federal laws and regulations in this MOU's performance. This MOU is subject to and shall be interpreted in accordance with Oregon law.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Executive Director, Mid -Columbia Community Action Council      Date

08/11/2022

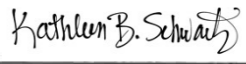
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Authorized Signer, City of The Dalles      Date

8/2/22

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Authorized Signer, City of The Hood River      Date

7/27/2022

DocuSigned by:  
  
Michael J. Oates      7/25/2022  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Michael J. Oates, Hood River County      Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Kathleen B. Schwartz, Board Chair Wasco County      Date

8.3.2022

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Authorized Signer, Sherman County      Date

8-3-2022

# Destination: Home

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A COORDINATED APPROACH TO HOUSING AND  
HOUSELESSNESS IN THE MID-COLUMBIA REGION

Five-Year  
Strategic Plan

2022-2027



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# Introduction

Across Oregon and Washington, communities are facing rising rates of housing insecurity and homelessness. For too many families, staying in housing has become increasingly difficult, if not impossible. Housing supply has lagged while demand has grown. Investors have begun buying up more and more single-family homes. Rents have sky-rocketed. As a result, the idea of being just one illness or car repair away from eviction has become all too familiar to our friends, families, and neighbors.

The issue of homelessness has also become more complex than it used to be. Increasing numbers of unhoused individuals are chronically homeless, meaning they have experienced homelessness for at least a year, or multiple times throughout their lives. Additionally, a growing portion of the homeless population has untreated mental illnesses or substance use disorders that make rehousing more difficult without intensive case management and other supports.

Like with any crisis, homelessness hits some communities harder than others. People of color, LGBTQ+ people, and other historically underserved communities are overrepresented in the homeless population. Families experiencing homelessness are typically headed by women, many of whom are young parents with children, and some of whom are fleeing domestic or sexual violence. People who have been incarcerated are more likely to experience homelessness and struggle to access housing stabilization resources than the general public due to their criminal records.

The Mid-Columbia region is unfortunately not immune from these trends. Preventing and ending homelessness in our area requires urgent, thoughtful work—and most importantly, partnership. Although this is a daunting task, our communities are up to the challenge. To date, there have been multiple, localized efforts to collaborate on work to prevent and end homelessness. However, this work has yet to be thoroughly coordinated across the five-county Mid-Columbia region, resulting in fragmentation across communities. That's why the Mid-Columbia Homeless Collaborative was founded.

In early 2022, Mid-Columbia Community Action Council (MCCAC) hired a consulting team, Sarah Kellems and Heidi Venture, to develop and convene a Collaborative of organizations and local governments from Hood River, Wasco, Sherman, Skamania, and Klickitat Counties working to address homelessness. With supportive leadership from Washington Gorge Action Programs (WAGAP) and generous funding from Providence, the consultants and MCCAC guided members of the Collaborative through a strategic planning process over the next nine months.

The plan included here represents the work members of the Mid-Columbia Houseless Collaborative will do over the next five years to develop a more strongly connected regional houselessness response system that provides the highest level of service to our most vulnerable community members. It explains how we will leverage and coordinate existing efforts throughout the region, and how we'll partner to enhance sorely needed services that will help our communities prevent and respond to houselessness more effectively.

This document also serves as the official work plan for MCCAC's Office of Housing Stabilization. This office was established in July, 2022 with funding from the Oregon Legislature following the passage of House Bill 4123, which allocated resources to a handful of communities across Oregon, including in Hood River, Wasco, and Sherman Counties, to strengthen their regional houselessness response systems.

As we begin the work of implementing this plan, we need support from the entire, five-county Mid-Columbia community. Growing houselessness is not simply an individual problem with individual solutions. This issue affects the families and children who are unhoused. It impacts our neighborhoods and divides our communities. And it costs our local and statewide economies significant resources that could be saved if we implemented more proactive interventions. At the end of the day, preventing and ending houselessness is our collective responsibility. It requires a unified, systems-level commitment from key community leaders, local governments, housing developers, tribal leaders, social service agencies, landlords, organizations that provide culturally responsive services to underserved populations, private sector partners, and people who have been or are houseless.

Members of the Mid-Columbia Houseless Collaborative have already demonstrated they are ready to make that commitment by writing this plan, and we look forward to the next phase of our efforts together to implement it. As we work to address one of the most complex challenges of our time, we invite you to join us so we can make the Mid-Columbia region the most vibrant community possible for everyone who calls this place home.

Onward,

Kelli Horvath  
Director of the Office of Housing Stabilization  
Mid-Columbia Community Action Council

September, 2022

# Words and Phrases to Know

**In an effort to make our strategic plan as accessible as possible to all audiences, Mid-Columbia Houseless Collaborative planning participants requested the inclusion of the following definitions:**

## **Affordable and Accessible Housing**

Affordable and accessible housing includes features that make it usable for people with disabilities or limited mobility and allows residents to spend no more than 30% of their income to live there. In this strategic plan, we also define “affordable” housing to mean housing that is reserved for households making 80% or less of the Area Median Income.

## **Area Median Income (AMI)**

The household income for the “middle” household in a geographic region. Half of the families in a region earn more than the AMI, and half earn less. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development calculates and defines the AMI for specific geographic areas across the country every year. Housing providers then use this number as a reference point when setting local income and affordability requirements for available housing units.

## **Acquisition and Rehabilitation/Rehab**

The process of gaining ownership and management rights over a real estate property and renovating existing units rather than developing new units. Acquisition and rehab are valuable tools used by proponents of affordable housing and preservation.

## **BIPOC**

An acronym that stands for “Black, Indigenous, and people of color.” This is a term used to describe communities of color, while centering the experience of Black and Indigenous people, who experience disproportionately high institutional barriers.

## **Chronically Houseless**

Experiencing houselessness for at least a year, or repeatedly over time, while struggling with a disabling condition like a serious mental illness, substance use disorder, or physical disability.

## **Construction Excise Taxes**

A charge placed on new construction (except for affordable and accessible housing projects) or additions to existing structures, the revenue from which can be used to fund incentives for building affordable housing and other housing-related programs.

## **Coordinated Entry**

A process developed to ensure that all people experiencing a housing crisis have fair and equal access to resources and are quickly assessed for, referred, and connected to housing and other assistance based on their vulnerabilities and strengths.

## **Culturally Responsive/Culturally Specific Services**

Being able to understand and consider the different cultural backgrounds of clients, and respecting clients' customs, experiences, perspectives, and language when assisting them to access resources.

## **Equity/Equitable**

While an equal approach means giving everyone the same resources, an equitable approach acknowledges that each person has different circumstances, needs, and institutional barriers they have faced. Equity means allocating resources and opportunities in a way that creates equal outcomes.

## **General Obligation Bonds**

Municipal bonds (debt obligations issued by government entities) that provide a way for state and local governments to raise money for public projects that may not yield revenue. General obligation bonds are backed by the state or local government's ability to use taxes to pay bondholders.

## **Houseless/Houselessness**

Lacking a place to live. Many housing and social service providers have begun using this term instead of "homeless," because many people who are or have been unhoused prefer it. This is because "home" is more than a building where a person lives; it represents community, social connections, memories, friends, family, or more. People who lack a physical house often still identify strongly with a place they call home.

## **Housing Stabilization**

The process of connecting to a wide range of individualized services—not just those that are directly related to housing—that help facilitate a person's ability to find and/or stay in housing.

## **Impact Fees**

Fees charged to property developers by local governments for the new infrastructure that must be built to accommodate new development.

## **Jail Diversion**

Community-based services that are designed to keep individuals, especially those with behavioral health issues, from becoming incarcerated by connecting them to other community-based resources like mental health support, substance abuse services,

employment services, and housing. Jail diversion aims to minimize the contact individuals have with law enforcement and help them avoid or reduce jail time.

### **LGBTQ+**

An abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, and more. These terms are used to describe a person's sexual orientation or gender identity.

### **Lived Experience (With Houselessness)**

Personal knowledge about houselessness that has been gained because of going through houselessness first-hand rather than through representations constructed by others.

### **Medical Respite**

Medical respite care is short-term residential care for people experiencing houselessness who are too ill or frail to recover from an illness or injury on the streets, but not ill enough to be in a hospital. Medical respite care helps people rest and recover in a safe environment while accessing medical care and other supportive services.

### **Point in Time Count**

Also known as the PIT Count, this is the annual count of sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing houselessness across the U.S. during the last ten days of January.

### **Preservation**

The process of retaining existing affordable housing, whether subsidized or market-rent, and protecting its affordability for current and future tenants.

### **Rapid Re-Housing**

A type of housing assistance that quickly helps people experiencing houselessness to get into housing with the help of application fees, security deposit funding, time-limited rent assistance, incentives to encourage landlords to place clients in their units, and case management services.

### **Reintegration After Incarceration**

The process a person goes through to re-enter society and become a productive member of the community after serving time in jail or prison.

### **Services/Supportive Services**

Aid that makes it easier for someone to get into and stay in housing long-term by enhancing their overall way of living. Examples include help directly related to housing—such as rent assistance—or other resources, such as reliable transportation, affordable childcare, food assistance, training in budgeting and money management, health care, job training, mental health services, or substance abuse treatment.



## **Supportive Housing**

The combination of ongoing affordable housing assistance, such as rent subsidies, with flexible and supportive services for people experiencing homelessness. The goal of supportive housing is to help people stay housed and live a more productive life in the community. There are multiple models of supportive housing: it could include the construction or renovation of new housing, setting aside units in privately-owned buildings, or leasing individual apartments throughout a specific geographic area where clients can receive services from supportive case managers.

## **System Development Charges**

Fees charged on new development, and in some cases on redevelopment. Revenue raised by these fees can help fund new infrastructure or upgrades to existing infrastructure.

## **Traditional Health Workers**

Frontline public health workers who work in health care clinic or community to assist individuals to achieve positive, health-related outcomes. Examples of traditional health workers include community health workers, personal health navigators, peer support specialists, and peer wellness specialists. Traditional health workers may have a particular specialty area or background, such as being a peer support specialist who uses their personal experience recovering from addiction to support a client struggling with a substance use disorder. Or they may promote health on a more holistic level by helping clients navigate multiple supportive services, including those that are not related to health care but contribute to overall well-being and stability.

## **Urban Renewal**

A set of plans and activities, often attached to public financing mechanisms, to upgrade neighborhoods that are in a state of disrepair or decay.

# Vision, Mission, and Values

## Vision

The Mid-Columbia Houseless Collaborative envisions a region with equitable opportunities and support, where everyone who needs stable housing can find and afford it—especially communities who have faced disproportionate barriers to housing—so everyone can achieve the best quality of life possible.

## Mission

Through collaboration and advocacy, we work to reduce houselessness in the Gorge by expanding housing capacity and ensuring supportive services are provided in culturally affirming ways that uphold human dignity.

## Values

Compassion and humanity are at the core of our work. As a collaborative, we recognize the hardships that houseless community members experience and the common humanity we all share, regardless of our housing status.

We value collaboration and partnership; working together helps us provide greater support to houseless and unstably housed community members.

Advocacy allows us to do more to support the vulnerable populations we serve when we champion strategic investments, projects, and policy changes.

We elevate diversity, equity, and lived experience. We cannot do this work without acknowledging the disproportionate barriers the housing crisis has created for communities of color and other traditionally marginalized populations. We cannot effectively advocate for solutions without lifting up the voices of those who are or have been houseless.

We value tenacity and perseverance. Houselessness is a complex issue that cannot be solved overnight; we acknowledge that this work requires visionary leadership and resilience.

# Equity Statement

## Owning our History

The Mid-Columbia Houseless Collaborative is aware that housing inequities are rooted in our country's history. When colonizers displaced the first people of these lands, a base of racial and other inequities was built for future generations who call this place home.

Our Collaborative recognizes not every person is born with the same opportunities to succeed, and because we care about people and our human rights, we must adjust our work to help solve these disparities. Further, we know each of us holds onto beliefs about people that are biased, flawed, and need to be challenged in a healthy and just way.

## Committing to Equity

We know our differences in race, ethnicity, national origin, ancestry, language, skin color, disability, family or marital status, gender identity, sexual orientation, language, physical or mental ability, traumas, politics, religion, socio-economic status, veteran status, and other identities make each of us unique and valuable members of our community.

We believe basic human rights include equitable access to safe and easy to afford housing, and other tools that help people get into and stay in housing: health care, education, living wage jobs, social services, and more. We also believe inclusion is key to helping all people in our community to feel valued and have a sense they belong.

As a Collaborative, we commit to equity by working with partners in our region to engage fully in efforts to end poverty and houselessness. To achieve equity in our housing work, we will:

- Find and address root cause(s) of inequity, in our work and our own lives
- Improve housing systems where personal identities predict inequitable outcomes
- Use data to drive decisions and focus resources so equity is not just a concept, but a practice
- Include the voices of people who are or have been houseless, with a focus on communities of Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC)

# Collaborative Planning Participants

- City of Bingen
- City of Goldendale
- City of Hood River and Hood River Homeless Stakeholders Coalition
- City of Stevenson
- City of The Dalles and The Dalles Unhoused Taskforce
- City of White Salmon
- Columbia Cascade Housing Corporation
- Columbia Gorge Education Service District
- Columbia Gorge Health Council/Bridges to Health Pathways Program
- Father's House
- GEM Immigrant Relief Fund
- Gorge Native American Collaborative
- Guided Path Shelter
- HAVEN from Domestic and Sexual Violence
- Helping Hands Against Violence
- Hood River County
- Hood River County Library District
- Hood River Shelter Services
- Klickitat County Homeless Housing Council
- Mid-Columbia Community Action Council
- Mid-Columbia Center for Living
- Mid-Columbia Housing Authority/Columbia Gorge Housing Authority
- Mid-Columbia Economic Development District
- Mid-Columbia Medical Center
- Nch' i Wana Housing
- One Community Health
- Oregon Human Development Corporation
- PacificSource/Columbia Gorge Coordinated Care Organization
- Providence Hood River Memorial Hospital
- Sherman County and Sherman County Sheriff's Office
- Skamania County Homeless Housing Council
- St. Paul's Episcopal Church (The Dalles)
- The Next Door, Inc.
- Wasco County and Wasco County Sheriff's Office
- Washington Gorge Action Programs
- White Salmon Valley Community Library
- White Salmon Valley School District
- Youth Empowerment Shelter

The Collaborative also includes volunteers and people who are or have been houseless.

# Strategic Plan



**Goal Area #1: Shelter**

**Goal Area #2: Services**

**Goal Area #3: Housing**

**Goal Area #4: Advocacy**

# Goal Area #1: Shelter

**Objective: Stabilize the region’s shelter system and improve coordination between shelters and service providers**

## Strategic Priorities

### **1: Unite agencies in the 5-county Mid-Columbia region to better coordinate shelter placement and supportive services**

**Strategy: Shelter and re-house people more quickly by creating a shared system for tracking shelter openings and aligning referral and intake processes**

Actions:

- ❑ Convene subcommittee of shelter staff and service providers to review existing coordinated entry procedures, develop a common intake process and improved tracking of shelter openings, and explore options for shared referral and case management platforms
- ❑ By late 2023, choose and begin implementing improved system to track shelter openings and coordinate intake and referrals
- ❑ By late 2025, choose and begin implementing improved system to enhance coordination of case management for houseless clients
- ❑ By mid- 2023, research shelter and houseless services hotlines in other rural areas and write report to outline resources that would be needed for our region to create one

### **2: Prioritize stable shelter funding, rapid re-housing funding, and staff support**

**Strategy: Stabilize shelter system and rapid re-housing program funding**

Actions:

- ❑ Partner with domestic violence survivor advocacy organizations, other shelter service providers, and local elected officials in the region to apply and advocate for shelter and rapid re-housing funding
- ❑ By late 2022, hire a staff member based in MCCAC’s Office of Housing Stabilization to lead fundraising efforts for the Collaborative’s shelter, rapid-re-housing, and other priorities; secure position funding for the duration of this plan
- ❑ Pursue Project Turnkey funds in Oregon in 2022 to increase the number of shelter and transitional housing units in the Mid-Columbia region; pursue similar funding opportunities in Washington at the local and state levels when possible

- ❑ Secure funding to complete construction of The Gloria Navigation Center in The Dalles and fund ongoing, on-site emergency shelter operations and service coordination

**Strategy: Enhance training and support for shelter staff and caseworkers**

Actions:

- ❑ Convene subcommittee and conduct survey to address supports needed for shelter staff and caseworkers
- ❑ Publish annual report on the region's shelter and housing casework staff compensation and benefits; include suggestions on how to improve staff support
- ❑ At least once a year, host trauma-informed convenings for shelter and casework staff to attend trainings and share best practices

# Goal Area #2: Services

**Objective: Ensure the region's supportive services meet client needs in a culturally responsive way**

## Strategic Priorities

### **1: Increase accessibility of services with a focus on needs identified by clients**

#### **Strategy: Provide culturally responsive and bilingual services**

Actions:

- Regularly work with The Next Door, Inc. and use online readability tools to screen regional housing assistance forms for accessible, plain language
- Hire local interpreters to translate housing assistance and other services enrollment documents into English and Spanish, and pair houseless clients with caseworkers who speak their native language whenever possible
- Support Collaborative partner organizations to use tools such as bilingual pay differentials to diversify shelter and casework staff
- At least once per year, provide trainings about culturally responsive care to help service providers better serve the region's diverse houseless population
- Coordinate to create annual, Collaborative-wide fundraising strategy to support and expand culturally responsive services that promote housing stabilization

#### **Strategy: Elevate the voices of people with lived experience and use client feedback to improve services**

Actions:

- By late 2022, establish a workgroup of people with lived experience with houselessness to advise on the Collaborative's work and share feedback on services
- By mid-2023, support lived experience workgroup to publish a conversation template that caseworkers and shelter staff can use to create more client-led housing stabilization plans
- By mid-2023, publish a toolkit to help Collaborative partner organizations collect feedback from houseless clients about improving services
- Coordinate with lived experience workgroup to organize annual opportunities for community leaders, service providers, and law enforcement officers to experience a day in the life of a houseless person



- ❑ Support Collaborative partner organizations to identify people with lived experience with houselessness to serve on hiring panels for shelter and casework staff
- ❑ Secure funding to provide stipends for lived experience workgroup members
- ❑ Encourage policymakers to provide opportunities for houseless individuals and frontline caseworkers to give policy input

## 2: Address gaps in services for houseless clients

### **Strategy: Improve access to existing services in the region that promote housing stabilization**

Actions:

- ❑ By mid-2023, create and distribute a bilingual (English and Spanish) flowchart or other user-friendly document to depict key services in the region and how to access them
- ❑ Update supportive services document at least annually and re-distribute to regional partner organizations for use by caseworkers and clients
- ❑ Coordinate at least two informational sessions about rapid re-housing program and long term rent assistance offerings in the region to area social service agencies, property management companies, and independent landlords per year
- ❑ Coordinate with transportation stakeholders and local jurisdictions to identify ways to enhance transportation options for houseless clients who need caseworkers to accompany them to enroll in services and implement solutions according to the needs and resources of each county represented within the Collaborative
- ❑ Find flexible resources to pay for gift cards and other incentives to help build trust and help houseless clients feel more comfortable accessing services

### **Strategy: Secure resources for services that need to be created or enhanced to improve support for the region's houseless community**

Actions:

- ❑ Regularly seek funding to sustain and improve services houseless people reliably connect to like shelter, street outreach services, emergency medical care, and law enforcement
- ❑ Advocate to remove barriers within systems and improve services houseless people struggle to connect to reliably, such as supportive housing, safe and appropriate medical respite care following a serious health event or discharge from the hospital, jail diversion and reintegration after incarceration, and wraparound case management

- ❑ Involve Collaborative members in regional plans focused on expanding behavioral health and substance use disorder support services, and other Houseless Collaborative priorities
- ❑ Support behavioral health providers to advocate for expansion of the region's behavioral health programs, including enhanced crisis response services that will be made available upon completion of the Columbia Gorge Resolution Center in The Dalles
- ❑ Support Providence Hood River to ensure strong coordination of services during and after their launch of the [Better Outcomes thru Bridges Program](#) in the Mid-Columbia region
- ❑ Pursue funding to increase the number of Traditional Health Workers—especially Peer Support Specialists—in our region who can provide housing, behavioral health, and other navigation services to houseless clients
- ❑ Develop plan and resources to provide more educational opportunities for houseless clients, such as renter education classes and know your rights trainings focused on interactions with law enforcement
- ❑ Invest in making resources such as those offered by the [PCC CLEAR Clinic](#) more accessible to houseless clients in our region to help them clear criminal and eviction records

### 3: Strengthen communication between service providers

**Strategy: Decrease barriers to services by enhancing coordination of client intake processes, referrals, and case management**

Actions:

- ❑ Include service providers in the subcommittee that assesses technology platforms before choosing and implementing a shared intake, referral, and case management system for houseless clients
- ❑ Support subcommittee to propose and test case conferencing models to improve coordination of care, especially for chronically houseless clients and those with significant behavioral health or substance abuse needs

# Goal Area #3: Housing

**Objective: Preserve and expand affordable, accessible housing**

## Strategic Priorities

### **1: Increase the supply of housing units that low-income households (80% Area Median Income or below) can afford to rent**

**Strategy: Advocate to increase funding, lower costs, and remove policy barriers to affordable and accessible housing development**

Actions:

- By mid-2023, convene subcommittee to conduct research on the best ways to enhance funding for and remove barriers to the construction and preservation of affordable housing in the region, especially in rural and unincorporated areas
- By late 2023, publish report about subcommittee's research and recommendations, including any about how to align the region's work with statewide work, such as the priorities of Governor Kotek's Housing Production Advisory Council
- Advocate with relevant local governments to waive system development charges and impact fees
- Advocate with relevant Oregon local governments to establish and use construction excise taxes
- Engage Collaborative members in urban renewal funding discussions and encourage use of urban renewal funds to build affordable, accessible housing
- Work with service providers and local elected officials to secure adequate supportive services and rent assistance to align with funding used to construct affordable housing

**Strategy: Take public actions to support Columbia Cascade Housing Corporation, tribal housing authorities, local governments, and other partners to build at least 262 affordable, accessible housing units in the region by 2027**

Actions:

- Support completion of the [Rand Road project](#) in Hood River (129 units total, 39 of which will be for households at or below 30% AMI and 90 of which will be for households at or below 60% AMI)
- Help complete the Westgate Market project in The Dalles (75 units total, all of which will be for households at or below 80% AMI and a portion of which will be reserved specifically for low-income veterans)

- ❑ Support completion of the White Salmon Assisted Living Facility project (52 units total with 13 at or below 50% AMI and the rest at or below 120% AMI with a potential for some below 80% AMI pending future funding)
- ❑ Support completion of the Wishram Project (45 units total, all of which will be for households at or below 50% AMI and 23 of which will be reserved for houseless applicants)
- ❑ Explore and foster private land donations for affordable, accessible housing development

## 2: Use preservation, acquisition, and rehabilitation to protect the region’s existing supply of affordable, accessible housing

### Strategy: Advocate for relevant funding, policies, and projects

#### Actions:

- ❑ Support completion of the Rhine Village acquisition and rehab project in White Salmon (36 units total, 35 units for households at or below 60% AMI)
- ❑ Support completion of the Columbia View acquisition and rehab project in Cascade Locks (12 units total, all of which will be for households at or below 60% AMI)
- ❑ By early 2024, work with the Columbia Cascade Housing Corporation to write regional report on affordable, accessible housing preservation opportunities; include advice about new acquisition and rehabilitation projects to pursue
- ❑ In coordination with local elected officials, governments, and agencies, apply for funding to support eligible projects
- ❑ Work with local governments to pass policies that promote affordable and accessible housing preservation, such as preserving mobile home parks and regulating/embracing short-term apartment rentals
- ❑ Find and work with local supportive governments and organizations to advocate for the Community Development Block Grant program and housing rehabilitation loan programs

## 3: Prioritize access to affordable, accessible housing units for communities of color and other traditionally underserved populations

### Strategy: Partner with organizations who serve culturally specific populations to ensure equitable access to affordable housing

#### Actions:

- ❑ By mid-2023, convene subcommittee to identify strategies to make access to affordable housing more equitable, such as preference policies for applicants referred by providers serving culturally specific populations

- ❑ Seek additional funding for tools to enhance the ability of organizations who provide culturally specific services to place client in vacant housing units, such as housing placement service fees
- ❑ Ensure robust marketing to traditionally underserved communities when units are made available, including through creation and use of a language access plan

#### **4: Educate elected officials, community leaders, and the public about why our region needs more affordable and accessible housing**

##### **Strategy: Collect and share data and personal stories to educate people about houselessness and highlight the need for more housing**

###### Actions:

- ❑ Support MCCAC and WAGAP to expand the annual Point in Time Count, including by involving providers who provide culturally specific services to underserved populations, and those who support clients with behavioral health needs
- ❑ Publish annual, local report with personal stories from people in our area who have been houseless and data on regional housing needs from the Corporation for Supportive Housing, Oregon Affordable Housing Inventory, recent regional studies on land and affordable housing inventory, and the National Low Income Housing Coalition’s “Out of Reach” or other reports
- ❑ Have meetings with local and state elected officials in our region to share the report, highlight its impact on our communities, and ask them to support the Collaborative’s housing goals; also engage regularly with elected officials in the region and at the statewide level to advocate for Houseless Collaborative priorities when relevant advocacy opportunities arise

# Goal Area #4: Advocacy

## Objective #4: Advocate, engage the community, and build support for the region's efforts to address houselessness

### Strategic Priorities

#### 1: Communicate to build awareness and support

##### **Strategy: Develop and implement a strategic communications plan**

Actions:

- By mid-2023, hire staff or contractor to support the Office of Housing Stabilization to write and begin implementing a strategic communications plan
- Regularly collect and publicly share real stories of people who have experienced houselessness or struggled to access services

#### 2: Use accurate data to inform people of the realities of houselessness and to address opposition to the Collaborative's priorities

##### **Strategy: Collect and share data about regional houselessness and housing**

Actions:

- Secure stable, long-term funding to pay at least one staff member to support the Collaborative's data collection and reporting needs
- Coordinate with local hospitals, law enforcement, employers, and organizations who provide culturally specific services to collect and share data about the impact of houselessness—and of houselessness prevention and response services—on the community
- Publish annual press release in English and Spanish to highlight regional houselessness statistics, emphasize success stories, dispel myths about affordable housing and houselessness, and share progress on the Collaborative's equity commitments

#### 3: Advocate for funding and policies that support the Collaborative's strategic investments

##### **Strategy: Participate in statewide, regional, and local task forces focused on houselessness**

Actions:

- Advocate to secure appointments on task forces for members of the Collaborative

- ❑ Provide opportunities at quarterly Collaborative meetings for task force members to report on their work and ensure institutional memory is not lost when their time on task forces end and new members are appointed
- ❑ Leverage policy tools and resources for the region

### **Strategy: Pursue public funding at the federal, state, and local level**

Actions:

- ❑ Work closely with local elected officials and governments to identify and secure additional government funding to support the Collaborative's long-term priorities
- ❑ Every year, coordinate a delegation of local leaders to meet with their representatives and advocate for funding at the state and federal level
- ❑ By mid-2023, develop and begin training an advocacy team made up of people who are or have experienced homelessness to publicly share their stories and lobby decision-makers
- ❑ Meet at least quarterly with state or federal agency staff to nurture relationships and strengthen applications for grants they administer

### **Strategy: Seek foundation and other private funding opportunities**

Actions:

- ❑ On an annual basis, create and update a region-wide grant pipeline and direct the Collaborative's fundraising staff to coordinate its implementation
- ❑ Include strategy for cultivating foundation relationships in grant pipeline and regularly engage Collaborative members in meetings with potential funders

### **Strategy: Build a committed base of donors to support the Collaborative's objectives**

Actions:

- ❑ Direct the Collaborative's fundraising staff to develop and begin implementing a major donor strategy by late 2023
- ❑ By mid-2023, launch a small donor fundraising program to enhance flexible resources for the Collaborative's work and build community support for the region's homelessness response and prevention efforts
- ❑ On an annual basis, host at least one Mid-Columbia Houseless Collaborative fundraising event in Oregon and one in Washington to raise money for the Collaborative's priorities, highlight the impact of our work, and publicly thank supporters

# Implementation

**The completion of this strategic plan represents the first step of the Mid-Columbia Houseless Collaborative’s work together over the next five years. The only way we can accomplish the goals we have outlined is by building on the momentum we have created.**

## **Next Steps:**

**We will continue to convene regularly to execute detailed work plans in each of our strategic goal areas, evaluate our progress, and make updates to the plan as new challenges and opportunities arise.**

## **In practice, this means:**

- ❑ Presenting our plan and providing updates as needed to local government bodies and relevant organizations in the Mid-Columbia region
- ❑ Appointing and convening subcommittees comprised of Collaborative planning participants to begin acting on specific goal areas and strategic priorities
- ❑ Coordinating with Mid-Columbia Community Action Council and Washington Gorge Action Programs to fully staff the Mid-Columbia Office of Housing Stabilization and develop detailed workplans to execute strategic plan initiatives
- ❑ Directing staff to coordinate work on specific goal areas with relevant partner organizations/governments on an individual or small group basis as needed
- ❑ Providing the full group of Collaborative planning participants, including the lived experience workgroup and House Bill 4123 Advisory Board members, with quarterly reports linked to the goals and strategies outlined in the strategic plan
- ❑ Conducting annual listening sessions to get feedback from community leaders and partners about headway made on the Collaborative’s strategic plan and equity commitments
- ❑ Reviewing the strategic plan annually with the full group of Collaborative planning participants to evaluate progress, update established metrics if needed, and revise the plan to ensure it continues to be responsive to the community’s needs



# Change Log

**Collaborative members are committed to ensuring this document is relevant to the needs of the community. On this basis, the Collaborative periodically makes updates to this strategic plan.**

## **Revisions have been made:**

- September 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022 (original adoption of strategic plan)
- April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2023

# Contact

The Mid-Columbia Houseless Collaborative website is updated regularly with reports, press releases, and involvement opportunities. Those interested in learning more about the Collaborative or our latest work can visit the website or contact Mid-Columbia Action Council's Office of Housing Stabilization.

## Website:

- ❑ [www.midcolumbiahouselesscollaborative.org](http://www.midcolumbiahouselesscollaborative.org)

## Contact:

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- ❑ Sarah Kellems, Resource Development and Community Engagement Coordinator, [skellems@mccac.com](mailto:skellems@mccac.com)