Central Sierra CoC

Strategic Plan to

PREVENT and END

homelessness

October 2019

CENTRAL SIERRA
Continuum
of CARE

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Executive Summary

This plan outlines a several year strategy to make homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring in the Central Sierra CoC, which encompasses four counties; Amador, Calaveras, Mariposa and Tuolumne. The direction and goals included in this plan build upon the significant progress the region has made toward ending homelessness while also recognizing new practices, emerging challenges, and opportunities to develop a system that uses all available resources to permanently house people experiencing a housing crises.

In response to the growing number of people experiencing homelessness within each of the counties, and their complex service needs, the communities have come together to form the Central Sierra Continuum of Care (CoC), and have mobilized around the issue of homelessness.[1] The CoC is a collective of a variety of organizations including educational, legal, business, and faith-based interests; homeless service providers; city, county, and state agencies; and private businesses as well as private individuals and consumer advocates. This strong collaboration represents one of the greatest tools within the Central Sierra CoC to combat homelessness. Through this CoC structure, member organizations were able to successfully seek $406,899 in 2018 and over $1.9 million cumulatively since 2013, from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to create housing and service programs for people experiencing homelessness.

Trends in homelessness in the Central Sierra CoC speak to the need for a comprehensive, coordinated community effort to address the issue. Since 2015, the number of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness has increased by 160%, while homelessness among veterans and unaccompanied youth has also increased by 38% and 46% respectively.[2] Despite the significant increase in several of the subpopulations experiencing homelessness in Central Sierra, the number of available permanent supportive housing beds has remained relatively the same between 2015 and 2018.[3] Conversely, there has been a significant increase in rapid re-housing resources in the CoC, with a 38% increase between 2015 and 2018.[4] It is also noteworthy that much of this increase in total number of people experiencing homelessness, can be attributed to the significant increase in the number of unsheltered individuals, which has seen a 150% increase since 2015 and the most recent point-in-time count conducted in January of 2019.

While much has been accomplished in Central Sierra, the experience of homelessness continues to effect many individuals and families, while others live one pay-check or unforeseeable circumstance away from falling into homelessness, i.e. at risk of homelessness. These realities propel county officials, nonprofit housing and service providers, faith-based organizations, and many other stake-holders to continually strive to find new solutions to homelessness.

This Plan proposes a series of steps to strategically utilize existing resources and position the Central Sierra CoC to access new resources. It intentionally builds upon the strengths of the community, namely the CoC and the capacity of its individual members, to leverage existing resources to address challenges such as the shortages of affordable housing and permanent supportive housing.

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1. A Continuum of Care (CoC) is a regional or local planning body that coordinates housing and services funding for homeless families and individuals.
2. https://www.centralsierracoc.org/pit-count
3. As defined by HUD, permanent supportive housing is decent, safe, affordable, community-based housing that provides participants with the rights of tenancy and links to voluntary and flexible supports and services for people with very low incomes and chronic, disabling health conditions.
4. https://www.hudexchange.info/grantees/ca-526/

Specific strategies are organized under four primary, overarching goals:

Strategic Plan Goals
GOAL 1: Strengthen Continuum of Care administrative capacity to increase resources for the crisis response system
GOAL 2: Move people who are experiencing homelessness into permanent housing as quickly as possible
GOAL 3: Help formerly homeless households retain their housing
GOAL 4: Prevent and divert new households from becoming homeless

The Amador Tuolumne Community Action Agency currently provides staffing to the CoC and it is recommended that the County continue to do so for the implementation of this plan. This role includes providing a vision and strategy to implement and update the plan as needed, identifying and seeking out resources, and providing the leadership to make mid-course adjustments. The Plan identifies some measurable outcomes to ensure constant and consistent attention to the action strategies and to help measure success. Success will be dependent on the willingness and commitment of key stakeholders to embrace innovation and a culture of change.

BACKGROUND

In January of 2019, California's Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) presented the opportunity for Continuums of Care (CoC) and Counties across the state to request technical assistance in three different areas of focus: capacity building, housing first, and housing stability. Eligible recipients of this technical assistance included those CoCs and Counties that were direct recipients or administrators of California's Emergency Solutions Grant Program (ESG) or No Place Like Home funding. Shortly after the assistance was made available, the Central Sierra CoC (CA-526) submitted a request for support in strengthening the capacity of the continuum.

Technical Assistance Collaborative (TAC) was retained by HCD to engage with all CoCs and Counties that submitted requests for capacity building technical assistance. TAC worked with HCD and Central Sierra CoC to develop a work plan, and the engagement began in February of 2019. The goal of the process was to help the CoC establish intentional and meaningful strategies to prevent and end homelessness across its four-county geography, culminating in a written strategic plan.

Prior to this engagement, much of the planning around homelessness and housing development in Central Sierra had taken place at the individual county level. While Amador, Calaveras, Mariposa and Tuolumne Counties are each unique in their capacity and needs; there is a commitment to collaborative, cross-county efforts to address homelessness within the structure of the CoC. Therefore, the planning process which produced this document focused on a more system-level, continuum-wide approach to the preventing and ending homelessness within the community. TAC conducted a thorough document review, including the most recently completed homelessness plans for each of the four counties. In addition to remote planning sessions and communication with CoC leadership, TAC facilitated an on-site strategic planning meeting during the CoC's full-membership meeting in May of 2019.

This collaborative effort produced the goals, strategies, and action steps outlined in this plan to prevent and end homelessness in Central Sierra CoC.

Homelessness in Central Sierra CoC; Amador, Calaveras, Mariposa, and Tuolumne Counties

The state of California is in the midst of an unprecedented homelessness and housing crisis. The number of individuals and families experiencing homelessness far exceeds any other state in the country. As of the January 2018 point in time count, the number of persons experiencing homelessness in California was 129,972.[5] This total is 41% higher than in New York, the state with the second-highest count, and 31% more than Florida, the state with the third-highest count. While the highest counts of homelessness exist in some of California's larger metropolitan areas, Central Sierra CoC is not untouched by this crisis.

The Central Sierra CoC spans a large geography comprised of thousands of square miles. Rural continuums of care are unique in the challenges they face, including significant transportation issues, lack of available housing and services, lack of employment opportunities, higher than usual poverty rates, lack of substance use treatment options (both in-patient and out-patient), and more. In addition to these challenges common to rural CoCs across the country, Central Sierra CoC is also faced with difficulties more unique to their specific geography and location. All four of the counties within the Central Sierra CoC are susceptible to wildfires, some areas having experienced the enormity of their devastation within the past few years. Parts of the Central Sierra CoC are also desirable vacation destinations frequented by tourists given their proximity to the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range and Yosemite National Park. This can lead to a lower stock and higher rental prices.

The total population across each of the four counties in the Central Sierra region varies significantly. This is outlined in Table 1, which shows the population totals according to 2018 census estimates.

It is imperative that local leadership consider all of the factors unique to rural areas when engaged in planning around preventing and ending homelessness in the Central Sierra CoC. Similarly, addressing the issue of homelessness also requires a closer look at the populations presenting for assistance in the community.

Demographics of People Experiencing Homelessness

Central Sierra CoC annually participates in the HUD-required point-in-time (PIT) census of sheltered and unsheltered individuals and families experiencing homelessness. The goal of the PIT is to provide CoCs with a one-night "snapshot" of homelessness so that the community can carry out meaningful planning and resource allocation, and can determine gaps and needs, annually. For the past few years the count has taken place in the last week of January.

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5.   https://www.usich.gov/homelessness-statistics/ca/

Keeping PIT in Perspective: Point-in-time count data can provide a longitudinal view of homelessness in Amador, Calaveras, Mariposa, and Tuolumne Counties. However, it is important to understand the limitations of the data. A small increase or decrease in a continuum such as Central Sierra may translate into a large percentage change; while important, such a change may not be statistically significant and should not trigger either concern or celebration. In addition, since the sheltered count is based on the number of individuals and families living in known shelters and transitional programs, any decrease in the number of these programs automatically leads to a decrease in the sheltered count — even if the actual number of persons who are homeless has not gone down.

The PIT includes counts of people experiencing both "sheltered" and "unsheltered" homelessness. For the sheltered count, Central Sierra CoC captures the number of persons who are in emergency shelter beds or transitional housing beds as per HUD's directive. For the unsheltered count, Central Sierra CoC assembles teams across each county to identify and survey individuals sleeping in places not meant for human habitation such as cars, abandoned buildings, garages or other structures without electricity or running water as well as on the street, in parks and other wooded areas, and elsewhere. PIT teams are comprised of trained volunteers. During the 2019 count, which took place on January 23rd, workers captured information during the entire week in order to determine where individuals had slept or were planning to sleep on that night.[6]

Table 1: 2019 Point-In-Time Count of People Experiencing Homelessness in Central Sierra CoC

Total People	**845**
Unsheltered	687
Emergency Shelter	110
Transitional Housing	48
Households with Children	51
Households without Children	545

Figure 1 demonstrates the total number of individuals and families experiencing homelessness, including those who are unsheltered, as captured in Central Sierra CoC's PIT counts over a ten-year period. This chart demonstrates a strikingly significant increase in the number of unsheltered households identified in the CoC during the 2019 PIT count. While this increase may be partially attributed to the frequency of unsheltered counts in past years or counting methodology, it is notable and worth consideration in any system level planning efforts.

It is also possible that the number of households experiencing unsheltered homelessness is actually higher than what is captured in the PIT count, as it is often very difficult to locate households that are sleeping outside and in places not meant for human habitation in rural CoCs. Individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness frequently establish encampments or temporary sleeping spaces in areas where they will not be identified by community members or law enforcement. Given the vast geography of the Central Sierra CoC, this could include very remote, wooded areas with limited access.

Persons who identify as White make up approximately 76% of the Central Sierra CoC's homeless population.

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6.   https://www.centralsierracoc.org/pit-count

Central Sierra CoC Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness

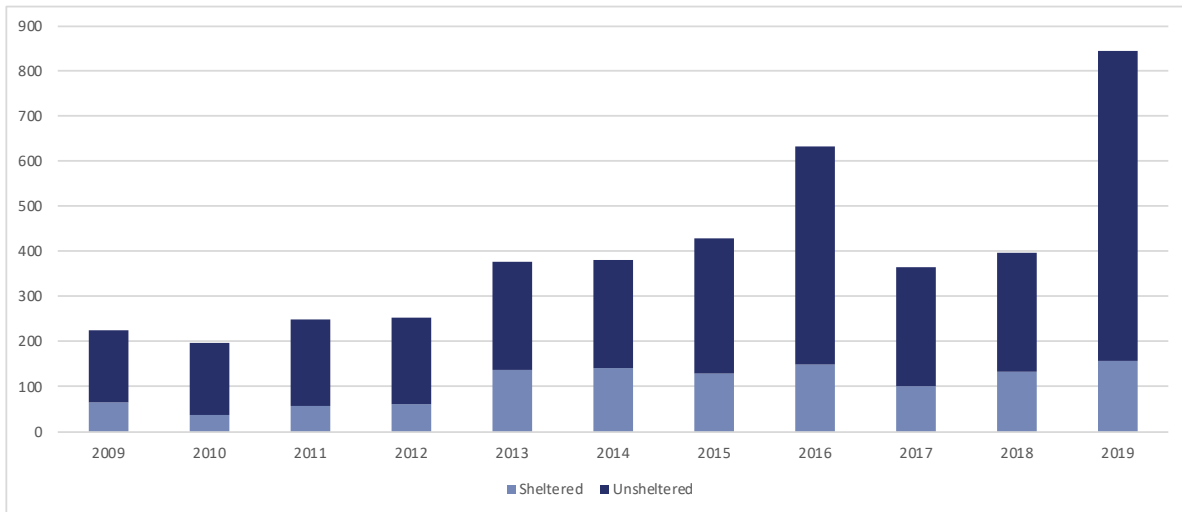## Figure 1: CA-526 Point in Time Count 2009-2019

Figure 2 demonstrates the trend in subpopulations experiencing homelessness in Central Sierra CoC over a 5-year period between 2015 and 2019.

Figure 2: CA-526 Point in Time Count by Subpopulation 2015-2019
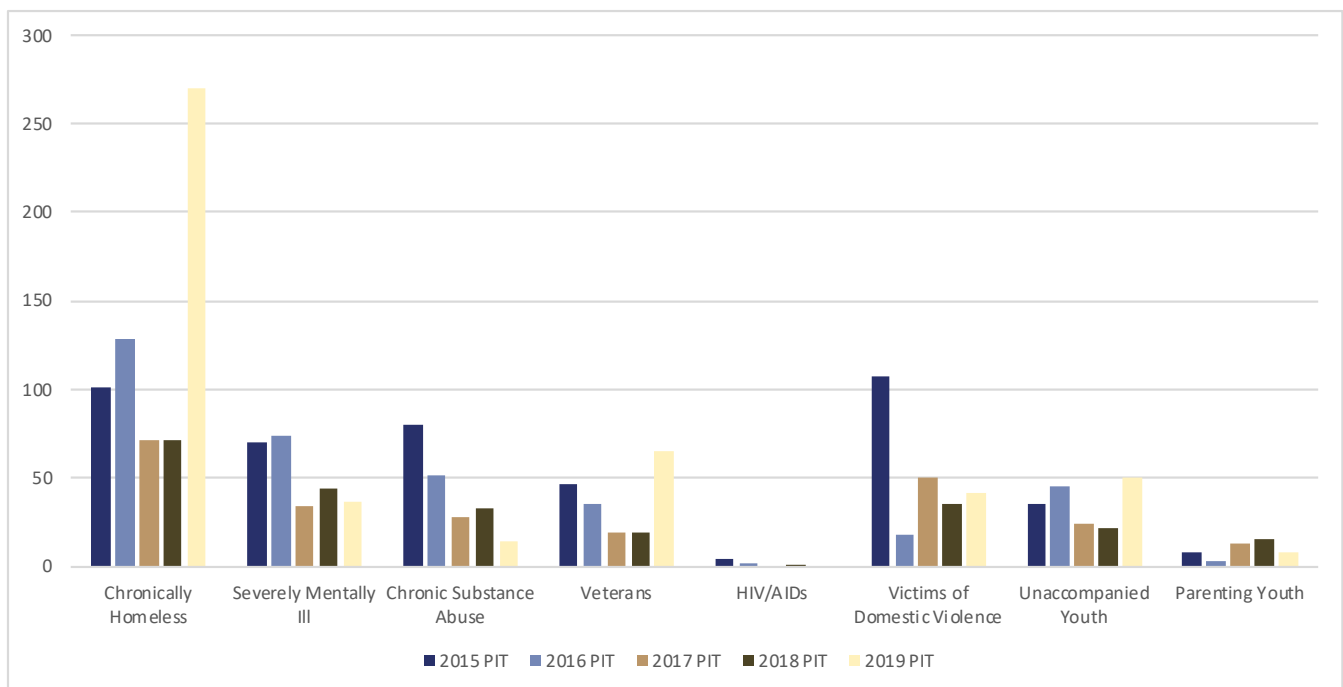

Figure 2 demonstrates a very significant increase in the chronically homeless population in the Central Sierra CoC in 2019. Similarly, this chart demonstrates recent increases in the total number of veterans and unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness in the community.

Figure 3 demonstrates the breakout of total persons experiencing homelessness in each county, per the 2019 Point in Time Count. The county with the highest number of individuals experiencing homelessness is Tuolumne at 385, with Amador and Calaveras at very similar totals of 214 and 186, and Mariposa trailing with the lowest count at 60. While this plan focuses on the CoC in its entirety, it is important to consider the difference in these county-level PIT counts when reviewing existing resources and planning for future resource allocation.

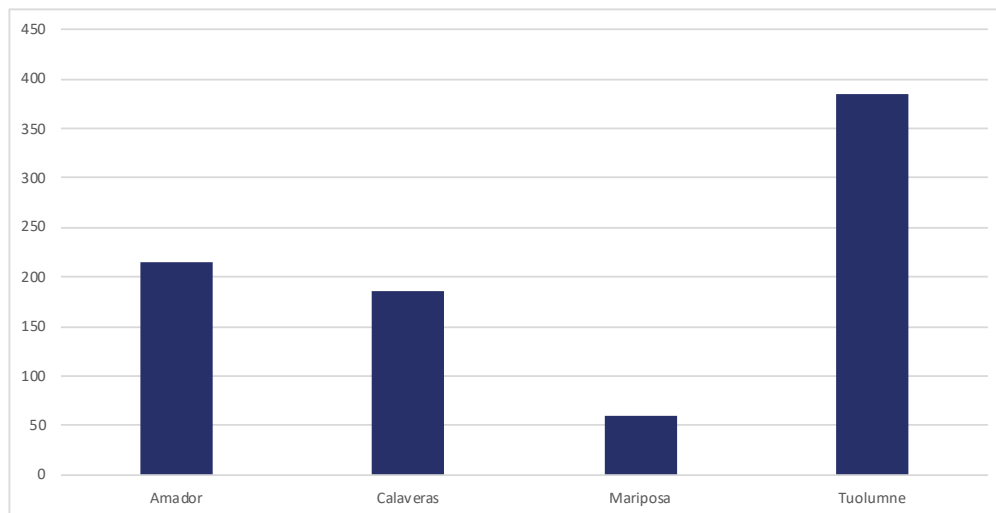## Figure 3: CA-526 Point in Time Count by County 2019

Table 2: Population Total by County (2018 Census Estimates)

Population Total by County (2018)	
County	**Total**
Amador	39,383
Calaveras	45,602
Mariposa	17,471
Tuolumne	54,539

Table 2 highlights the overall population totals by county according to 2018 census estimates for comparison, which indicate that homelessness is a significant challenge in each of the four counties proportionate to the population totals. Anecdotal information from providers throughout the region indicates that because of significant transportation challenges across the vast geography, there is not a lot of movement of individuals experiencing homelessness between the counties.

System Performance Measures

Since fiscal year Fiscal Year 2015, HUD has required CoCs to collect data on specific system performance measures (SPMs) and to report on these as part of their CoC funding applications. It is HUD's intention to award points to CoCs in the future based on progress made on these metrics. These system-level performance measures are therefore critical, and will likely continue to increase in importance. Consistent review and consideration of these metrics is also essential for community planning and evaluation of progress both at the system and project levels.

HUD System Performance Measures	
Measure 1	Length of Time Persons Remain Homeless
Measure 2	Returns to Homelessness
Measure 3	Number of Persons Experiencing Homelessness
Measure 4	Employment and Income Growth
Measure 5	Persons Experiencing Homelessness for First Time
Measure 6	Homelessness Prevention
Measure 7	Placement from Street Outreach

A comparison between the most recent SPM reports, submitted by Central Sierra CoC from FY17 to FY18 indicate both areas of success and areas that may require strengthening, as outlined below.

- From FY17 to FY18, Central Sierra saw a 38% increase in the number of average nights that persons experienced homelessness
- From FY17 to FY18, Central Sierra saw a 7% increase in the number of persons exiting to permanent housing destinations
- From FY17 to FY18, Central Sierra the percentage of households returning to homelessness after a period of 2 years remained constant at 9%
- From FY17 to FY18, Central Sierra saw a decrease of 15% in the number of persons experiencing homelessness for the first time

Existing Resources and Identified Gaps

The strategic planning process requires the identification of existing resources available to households experiencing or at-risk of homelessness, as well as any gaps in resources and those that may require strengthening or refining. The effort to prevent and end homelessness in Central Sierra CoC must also take into consideration the state and federal funding climates and evolving policy priorities. No community can address homelessness by relying solely on dedicated homeless resources, but must access and leverage other more mainstream housing and service resources as well.
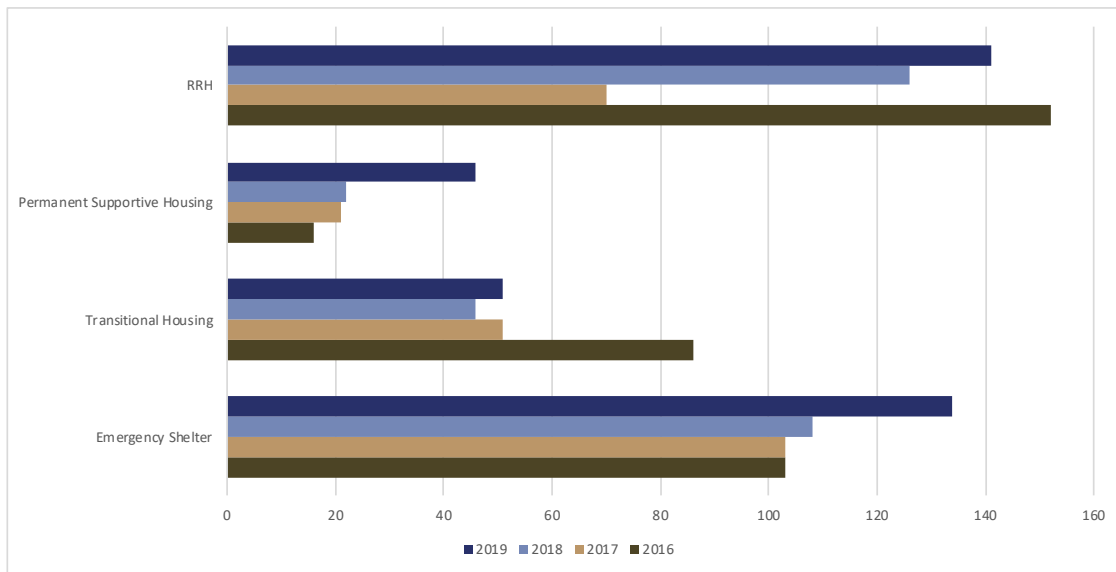
When considering existing resources, it is also important to note that there may be geographic disparity in their availability in such a large and rural CoC. For example, Table 3 indicates a total of 134 emergency shelter beds in the CoC, however, none of those brick and mortar emergency shelter beds for single adults experiencing homelessness are located in Calaveras County. This presents a challenge as there are ap-

Table 3: Housing Inventory Count 2019

Bed Type	Total
Emergency Shelter	134
Transitional Housing	51
Rapid Re-housing	141
Permanent Supportive Housing	46
Total Beds	**372**

proximately 186 individuals experiencing homelessness in Calaveras County. Similarly, there are extremely limited emergency shelter resources in Mariposa County. Trends in location and number of transitional housing beds also indicate that the inventory is not sufficient to meet the need in any region of the CoC.

The total number of permanent housing beds captured in Table 3 would only provide for approximately 22% of the total population currently experiencing homelessness and 27% of the unsheltered population in the Central Sierra CoC. Figure 4 provides a visual representation of the trends in available bed types in the Central Sierra CoC between 2016 and 2019.

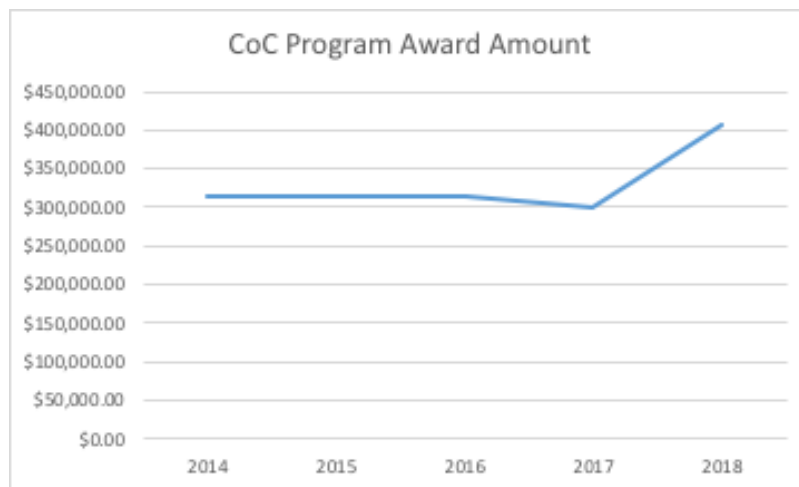## Figure 4: Housing Inventory Count 2016-2019

HUD Resources

Central Sierra CoC has successfully obtained competitive federal homeless assistance funds through the Continuum of Care Program. The award amount received in Fiscal Year 2018, as noted in Figure 5, is the highest award that the CoC has received in the past five years. The Continuum of Care Program funds permanent supportive housing, rapid re-housing, supportive services, homeless management information system (HMIS), operations, and planning within a CoC. Currently, the Central Sierra CoC receives CoC funding for the following project types:

- Permanent Supportive Housing
- Rapid Re-housing
- Joint Transitional Housing-Rapid Re-housing
- HMIS

Figure 5: CoC Program Award Amount FY2014-FY2018

California Resources

The State of California, through inter-state agency partnerships and collaboration, has created and funded programs to complement federal and local/philanthropic funding for county and CoC crisis response systems. Table 4 outlines some of the funding opportunities available to support CoCs in California. Central Sierra CoC currently receives funding through several of these opportunities.

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Table 4: California State-funded Resources

Program	Eligible uses	Eligible Applicants
Multifamily Housing Program-Supportive Housing (SHMHP)	Provides construction, rehabilitation, or acquisition of permanent supportive housing.	Nonprofits and/or for-profit developers and organizations.
California Emergency Solutions and Housing Program (CESH)	Provides housing relocation and stabilization services (including rental assistance), operating subsidies for permanent housing, flexible housing subsidy funds, operating support for emergency housing interventions, systems support for homelessness services and housing delivery systems, and can support homelessness planning.	Administrative Entities -- local governments, nonprofit organizations, or unified funding agencies -- designated by the Continuum of Care to administer CESH funds in their service area.
Housing for a Healthy California	Provides construction, rehabilitation, or acquisition of affordable housing; operating assistance (including long-term rental assistance and operating costs); administrative costs.	Counties and/or developers.
Emergency Solutions Grant Program (ESG)	Provides street outreach; emergency shelter; homelessness prevention; rapid re-housing; data collection; administrative costs.	Local government and private non-profit organizations.
No Place Like Home (NPLH)	Provides acquisition, design, construction, rehabilitation, or preservation of supportive housing.	Counties and counties in partnership with the development sponsor.
Permanent Local Housing Allocation (PLHA) (SB 2)	70 percent of the proceeds will be allocated to local governments (through both over-the-counter and competitive processes) for specified local projects or programs. Ten percent to assist the development of farmworker housing and five percent HCD to administer a program to incentivize the permitting of affordable housing. Fifteen percent will be allocated to CalHFA to assist mixed-income multifamily developments.	Local governments, eligibility of other entities TBD
Veterans Housing and Homelessness Prevention Program (VHHP)* ***Also a project with CalVet and CalHFA**	Provides acquisition and/or construction or rehabilitation of an Affordable Rental Housing Development or Transitional Housing, or the conversion of an existing structure into one of these housing types.	Counties and nonprofits.
Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities (AHSC)	Transportation stop required. Offers 3 types of grants, one specifically for rural projects.	Govt. agencies, localities, project sponsors.
Transformative Climate Communities (TCC)	Limited to projects, or planning for projects, that reduces GHG or VMT. Requires reporting of GHG/VMT progress. Offers two types of grants, including a planning option that could lead to future TCC grant approvals.	Businesses, organizations, stakeholders.
Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP)	Provides one-time funding to enable local governments to respond to homelessness through the following eligible activities; emergency housing vouchers, rapid rehousing, emergency shelter construction and use of armories to provide temporary shelters.	City, county or joint power must declare an emergency shelter crisis (waiver processes for smaller cities and counties that do not declare a shelter emergency). CoC must demonstrate collaboration with other city, county or nonprofit partners.

Identified Gaps and Challenges to Addressing Homelessness

The Central Sierra CoC faces significant challenges in its work to prevent and end homelessness across its four counties- some unique to rural communities, and others shared by CoC's across the country. These difficulties and resource gaps have been identified in an effort to inform the goals and strategies included in this plan. They have been outlined below in four categories.

Crisis Response; relating to the CoC's crisis response system and capacity for assisting households at-risk of and currently experiencing homelessness. It is imperative that people understand the risk of homelessness, and the relative fragility of many households' housing situations. Households at risk of homelessness are often one paycheck, utility bill, or medical bill away from an eviction. Those with untreated behavioral health needs may be forced to leave a housing unit due to related behaviors and risks. For those households that do enter the homeless crisis response system, the availability and access to safe shelter and outreach services are essential.

- Current Resource Gaps and Challenges:
- Lack of emergency shelter beds for people in crisis
- Need for increased homeless outreach services
- Need for additional facilities for people who are experiencing homelessness- e.g. showers, laundry facilities, warming/cooling centers
- Need for additional prevention and diversion services
- Urban competition for affordable housing

Housing; relating to the availability of both public and private housing resources. Each of the four counties that make up the Central Sierra CoC are experiencing a severe lack of safe, affordable housing for households at-risk of and experiencing homelessness, particularly those extremely and very low income households. The long term success in addressing homelessness throughout the CoC will involve both increasing the affordable housing stock throughout the CoC and obtaining additional rental subsidies for eligible households.

Current Resource Gaps and Challenges:

- Lack of available housing inventory
- Lack of housing affordable for people with low or ELI incomes
- Lack of PSH for people with physical and mental health disabilities
- Short-term rental assistance for households

Supportive Services; relating to the availability and access to services and other supports that aid households in their ability to maintain housing successfully. Supportive services are often the key to ensuring that households at-risk of homelessness are able to maintain their housing and avoid entry in to the crisis response system. Similarly, supportive services also serve as the primary mechanism for ensuring that formerly homeless households are able to successfully maintain housing.

Current Resource Gaps and Challenges:

- Need for improved and increased employment services

System-level; relating to challenges experienced at the systems or community level that likely expand beyond the homeless services system. These challenges may involve systems of care other than the homeless crisis response system, and are likely bigger than any one project or resource.

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Current Resource Gaps and Challenges:

- Need for increased participation in HMIS among community partners
- Need for increased and improved communication around resource access
- Stigma and discrimination hamper increased activities and services in some neighborhoods
- Lack of engagement with Tribal communities
- Need for more affordable public transportation options
- Lack of sufficient funding and staffing resources to support housing and services needs in the CoC

GOALS TO PREVENT AND END HOMELESSNESS IN CENTRAL SIERRA CoC

Homelessness can only be solved by accessing mainstream resources and a robust safety net. This Plan identifies strategies to leverage mainstream affordable housing and human service resources and to ensure that resources designated to serving people experiencing homelessness are targeted in the most effective and cost-efficient manner possible.

This Strategic Plan centers around four primary goals:

Strategic Plan Goals
GOAL 1: Strengthen Continuum of Care administrative capacity to increase resources for the crisis response system
GOAL 2: Move people who are experiencing homelessness into permanent housing as quickly as possible
GOAL 3: Help formerly homeless households retain their housing.
GOAL 4: Prevent and divert new households from becoming homeless

Collectively, the strategies included in this Plan will reduce both the number of households already experiencing literal homelessness and the number of households that become homeless for the first time.

GOAL 1: Strengthen Continuum of Care administrative capacity to increase resources for the crisis response system.

Strategy 1: Strengthen overall governance and structure of the CoC.

Action Steps:

A. Continue to work on the development of a CoC board with the capacity for leading CoC-wide efforts to address homelessness in Central Sierra
B. Establish and adhere to a detailed governance charter which clearly outlines the following:

- Roles and responsibilities for all levels of CoC membership (including the CoC board, general membership, committee structure, etc.)
- Decision-making structure (including specifics of decision-making around funding, project selection, etc.)

Strategy 2: Strengthen the CoC's administrative capacity.

Action Steps:
A. Continue to apply for a CoC Program Planning Grants through the 2020 CoC Program NOFA, and subsequent CoC Program NOFAs
B. Implement ongoing evaluation of how to leverage new and existing funding streams for maximizing the CoC's administrative capacity
C. Create plan to support counties with CoC staffing and HMIS/data collection and entry staffing

Strategy 3: Strengthen data collection and outcome measurements across the system.

Action Steps:
- Strengthen data quality control practices across CoC in HMIS policies and procedures.
- Utilize HUD's new Stella tool to engage CoC in conversation around the successes and challenges of project types across the CoC using data.
- Standardized definitions of data collection terms and expectations in HMIS policies and procedures.
- Standardize collective outcomes to SPM across all CoC and homeless crisis response system funded projects/grants

GOAL 2: Move people who are experiencing homelessness into permanent housing as quickly as possible.

Strategy 1: Pursue strategies such as reallocation and permanent supportive housing bonus funds to expand permanent supportive housing and rapid re-housing through CoC Program funds.

Action Steps:
A. Review Central Sierra FY19 CoC Program application for possible ways to increase points. The CoC Program application debrief provided by HUD does not give feedback on all the question in the CoC application. Rather, it provides some general comments and insight into questions HUD chose to comment on publicly. The CoC may benefit from an independent review of its 2019 application to gain a more thorough critique of areas that could have been improved upon and to identify possible changes for 2020.
B. Review the FY20 CoC Program NOFA for point maximization. When the FY20 NOFA is released, the CoC should review closely HUD's point structure, policy priorities, and other guidance.
C. Review existing CoC Program projects for performance to determine reallocation or restrictions of budget. Closely review data from the Annual Performance Reports and any monitoring visits. For those programs that are not performing well, the CoC should seek technical assistance to address performance issues or consider reallocating those resources to another program or program model. As part of this review, consider drawdowns from HUD for the previous year, and for those programs that consistently do not bill HUD for all CoC funds in the program budget, the CoC should consider reallocating at least a portion of the funds to a new program.

Strategy 2: Continue to apply for state California Emergency Solutions and Housing Program (CESH), Housing for a Healthy California, Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP) and No Place Like Home (NPLH), state funds.

Action Steps:
A. Utilize available state funding sources as leverage to develop larger housing complexes scattered through the CoC, with a combination of supportive housing and affordable housing.
B. Identify and apply for additional funding to support develop of new affordable housing units.
C. Explore funding opportunities for acquisition and rehabilitation of existing facilities that can be converted or restored into affordable housing.
D. Convene housing developers, consumers, service providers, local planning departments, and county staff to explore new ways to create and streamline affordable housing for targeted populations. Work with local jurisdictions to promote affordable and supportive housing developments.
E. Explore modifications to local regulations that could incentives develop of affordable housing or reduce existing barrier to new development

Strategy 3: Increase number of units in private housing available to persons transitioning from homelessness.

Action Steps:
A. Encourage HUD multifamily housing owners to create a homeless preference. Explore opportunities to encourage owners of HUD-assisted housing to adopt a homeless preference
B. Work with PHA and HUD multifamily housing owners to create a "move on" strategy for those currently in PSH or RRH. This strategy would provide private owners with tenants who have a demonstrated successful tenancy and would make PSH and RRH units available to those who are currently homeless.

Strategy 4: Create a property owner engagement initiative.

Action Steps:
A. Launch a CoC-wide campaign to engage property owners using national and local promising practices (e.g. highlighting the benefits of partnering with housing programs, underscoring the available supportive services, etc.)
B. Train staff on property owner engagement and retention. Ensure that both frontline and supervisory staff are trained on effective engagement and relationship building strategies for retention of partnerships with property owners.
C. Create a property owner mitigation fund. Draw on county resources or philanthropic entities to create a flexible fund that may be used to pay for costs other funders (i.e. HUD, CA DHCD) do not allow, such as property owner sign-on bonuses, damages, security deposits, and tenancy preservation. In other communities, the availability of such funds has encouraged owners to rent to people who are homeless (even though in actuality the funds are often left untapped).

Strategy 5: Maximize Housing First Opportunity. Housing First is a proven approach that should be implemented system-wide as well as at the project level. All four counties have adopted Housing First in principle but stakeholders have expressed concern that in practice Housing First is not being fully implemented.

Action Steps:

A. Train all levels of CoC membership, including both direct service providers and CoC board members, on Housing First program design and delivery.
B. Facilitate a Housing First Intensive Course. Consider providing a Housing First intensive course to address community opposition and misunderstanding regarding Housing First, its effectiveness, and other issues.
C. Create a learning community, or community of practice, for providers who want a venue to share the challenges and successes of implementing a Housing First approach with their peers.
D. Monitor programs for Housing First practices. Monitor all CoC-funded and state funded homeless programs for compliance with Housing First principles. Provide technical assistance and/or establish remedial action for programs that do not follow a housing first approach.

Strategy 6: Use data to lead planning and programming priorities.

Action Steps:

A. Ensure that HMIS is able to generate reports to help the CoC and counties monitor progress on systems performance measures, and other reports as requested to allow the CoC to make meaningful planning decisions. Reports should be available on the program level and systems level.
B. Create a mechanism to collect data on potential "previous homelessness" in the absence of a statewide HMIS data warehouse, and incorporate this information into SPM calculations.
C. Continue to work with other California CoCs to develop the data warehouse.
D. Target one or two SPMs to improve in the next year. Reducing first-time homelessness should be prioritized as one of the measures to target.
E. Pilot an expansion of data collection to Health and Human Services agencies and hospitals. Upon review of the pilot's effectiveness, consider further expansion to other medical settings as a means to collect data on high utilizers of emergency services.
F. Continue to encourage participation in HMIS for all homeless service providers- not just limited to those receiving CoC or ESG funding.

GOAL 3: Help formerly homeless households retain their housing.

Strategy 1: Ensure that resources and services are available to formerly homeless households in order to maintain their tenancies.

Action Steps:

A. Set CoC-wide standards for a certain number of home-visits after move-in that could identify risks for homelessness. Train provider staff on how to practice these standards.
B. Include additional homelessness risk factors in housing inspections. For CoC providers who conduct their own annual recertification of housing conditions, incorporate additional questions and observations that may indicate a risk to homelessness.
C. Pilot employment programs. Engage some larger employers to participate in an employment pilot program in which a number of jobs are set aside for formerly homeless individuals to access. Work with existing agencies to provide job coaching. Request small funding from organizations and partnerships that provide stipends for clothing, transportation, or other potential barriers.

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D. Partner with vocational rehabilitation services. Request that staff from the local and state employment agencies, including the Local Veteran's Employment Representative, be assigned to work with homeless programs and their clients, either on a regular basis or at scheduled on-site days.

GOAL 4: Prevent and divert new households from becoming homeless

Strategy 1: Develop a community-wide initiative to prevent homelessness.

Action Steps:

A. Facilitate a meeting of all providers that have prevention and/or diversion resources in order to develop a CoC-wide inventory. These resources may include flexible local funding, state funding, ESG-funding, SSVF, faith-based programs or Community Action Agencies.
B. As a CoC, utilize inventory of prevention/diversion resources to identify any gaps and to determine how resources may be used most effectively and efficiently.
C. Sponsor a community campaign on homelessness risk and prevention. Distribute information on the risk of homelessness, key indicators of possible risk factors, and available resources to schools, faith-based organizations, and county agencies frequented by the public. Work with County Community Health centers to incorporate "risk of homelessness" in their programs.
D. Develop a targeted initiative to prevent youth homelessness. Work with each county's school departments homelessness liaisons to train staff on risk factors to becoming homeless.

Strategy 2: Expand diversion capacity within CoC's coordinated entry system.

Action Steps:

A. Identify and utilize a diversion screening tool to assess households for alternatives to entering shelter and, as appropriate, suggest one-time assistance to prevent an episode of homelessness.
B. Expand use of county and federal ESG rapid re-housing funds to provide for one-time prevention activities.
C. Track information and review diversion data regularly (i.e. monthly) to provide Central Sierra CoC with a clearer understanding of who is becoming homeless and which efforts to divert those households are successful versus those that are unsuccessful. The goal is to understand homelessness risk and identify possible system-based solutions.
D. Provide training in diversion/mediation to all staff positioned at the front door of the homeless crisis response system in the CoC. Work to infuse these practices throughout the coordinated entry system and processes so that even those households waiting on prioritization/by-name lists are engaged in a continued exploration of alternatives to homelessness.
E. Create a peer support team program to assist individuals and families in accessing mainstream benefit coordination; i.e. transportation, employment coaching, employment connections, SOAR, etc.

Strategy 3: Collect and analyze information on households at risk of homelessness and those experiencing homelessness for the first time.

Action Steps:

A. Expand data collection through HMIS as well as other county agencies and information sources to report on high utilizers of crisis systems and households that may be at greater risk of homelessness.

B. Establish date sharing protocol between the four counties to understand who is accessing resources as they cross counties within the CoC.
C. Assess reliability of first-time homeless data. Review data protocols to determine their reliability. Consider additional ways to assess whether a household is "first-time homeless" or was homeless in another CoC prior to entering into the Central Sierra CoC. Train providers on the correct way to gather and report on this metric
D. Establish policies and practices for the collection and analysis of Street Outreach data. Assess data for possible insights around the recent increase in unsheltered homelessness in the Central Sierra CoC and develop a resource list geared to first responders based on data received.

Strategy 4: Increase access to mainstream service resources for households at risk of homelessness.

Action Steps:
A. Encourage all provider agency and county staff working with households experiencing homelessness/at risk of homelessness to participate in the "SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery (SOAR) On Line Course in order to increase SOAR access across all four counties.
B. Establish a formal linkage between county health and human services departments and behavioral health systems. Establishment of formal relationships will increase likelihood of access for households in need and potential for data sharing.
C. Establish practices for better assessment of employment needs. Include employment related questions on the diversion and CE assessment tools (VI-SPDAT) so referrals to employment-related services can be accessed immediately.
D. Establish strong partnerships between systems to allow for data crosschecking. Certain subpopulations captured in HMIS may also be eligible for MediCAL and other healthcare resources, etc.

Plan Implementation

The Central Sierra CoC leadership will be charged with developing a structure in which the strategies and action steps described in this plan may be carried out. Part of this process must include establishing responsible entities for each task, a realistic timeline for the completion of action steps, and measurable outcomes to hold the community accountable to the goals set forth in this Plan.

> **Responsible entity**- the person(s), committees, subcommittees, or partners tasked with leading the implementation of a particular action step.

> **Timeline**- the timeframe in which the action step is expected to reach completion. The CoC may determine whether the timeline should be specific (i.e. December 2020) or less so (i.e. short term, medium term, long term).

> **Measurable outcomes-** CoC decision-making around how each of the goals will be measured as implementation of this plan moves forward. For example, the community may choose to use an ongoing evaluation of the CoC's System Performance Measures to determine whether or not it is successful in decreasing the number of new households entering the homeless crisis response system.

CONCLUSION

As the Central Sierra CoC moves forward with implementation of this ambitious plan, continued cross-county commitment and engagement will be an essential component. Given the many challenges it currently faces, including a vastly rural geography and limited resources, the CoC will need to be both innovative and collaborative to prevent and end homelessness in the community.

This Strategic Plan is an aggressive multi-year effort to target resources to end homelessness. The CoC, will oversee implementation of this plan. These key metrics will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of this Plan:

- Increase in the number of affordable housing units dedicated to people who are homeless
- Decrease in homelessness in the community including in key subpopulations such as families, veterans, and people who are chronically homeless
- Decrease in the number of persons who become homeless for the first time
- Decrease in the average and median length of time persons remain homeless
- Decrease in the percentage of persons who return to homelessness
- Increase in the percentage of adults who gain or increase employment or non-employment cash income over time
- Increase in the percentage of persons who exit to or retain permanent housing

To be successful, the Plan will require broad community support for expanding data collection, sharing data, and using data as a planning tool. The target priorities and recommendations in this Plan are based on currently available data, but growing knowledge will allow for continuous review and refinement of strategies as circumstances change.