Allegheny County Homeless Advisory Board

CoC Bi-Monthly Meeting
November 28, 2023; 10:00AM to 12:00PM
Microsoft Teams Virtual Meeting *and*
1 Smithfield St, Pittsburgh, 15222 (HSB, Lower Level)

Purpose: The Homeless Advisory Board (HAB) is a public/private partnership formed to assist and recommend to Allegheny County, the City of Pittsburgh, the City of McKeesport and the Municipality of Penn Hills on public policy, programs, activities, data and all other efforts that will eliminate homelessness and improve the wellbeing of persons and families who are homeless.

HAB Members[1]

Nicole Anderson	Shawlane Heffernan	Gale Schwartz (P)
Breanna Benjamin	Matthew Grayson (P)	Katie Stohlberg (P)
Damian Butler-Buccilli (P)	Brian Knight (P)	Pam Turner (P)
Kwabena Danso-Ayesu (P)	Dave Lettrich (P)	LaVerne Wagner (P)
Chase Archer Evans (P)	Amy Plant	Michael Yonas (P)
Melissa Ferraro	Raymond Prushnok (P)	
Andy Halfhill (P)	Susie Puskar (P)	

In addition to the below notes, the [meeting recording can be accessed here](#).

Minutes

- **Welcome—Gale Schwartz**
  Gale Schwartz, HAB Chair, welcomed meeting participants. The September meetings minutes were approved by the HAB, with all members in attendance voting in favor of approving.

- **Allegheny County Health Department—Stacie Brown**
  The Communication and Education Committee has been working to support linkages between the CoC and other systems and stakeholders throughout the community. In May, the CoC was joined by Pittsburgh Regional Transit. This month, the CoC welcomed Stacie Brown, Overdose Engagement Lead with the Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD).

  Ms. Brown provided meeting participants with information about ACHD's harm reduction approaches to support better outcomes for people who use drugs. Ms. Brown highlighted the regular distribution of Narcan and testing strips. She noted that testing strips have been distributed to individuals, but that the State is in the process of sending a large quantity, so plans are underway to make strips available to organizations. Regarding Narcan, ACHD makes it available for pick-up or through community drop-off, including through community pop-up events. Ms. Brown also highlighted the upcoming use of Naloxone vending machines. Locations for the machines have been identified in McKeesport, McKees Rocks, Brookline and the Southside. Two (2) additional locations are still being looked for in the North Side, Downtown, and/or Homewood.

  Finally, Ms. Brown discussed the availability of overdose prevention training, which she recommended for anyone and everyone and noted they have provided to a wide range of partnerships, from doctors to library staff to bank staff. Because overdoses can and do happen

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[1] (P) indicates HAB members who were present for the meeting.

everywhere, and 1 in 5 overdoses happen within voice distance of someone, everyone can benefite from the knowledge gained through the training. The training includes an overview of policies and circumstances that have gotten us to this point, what is currently going on in our community, what an overdose is, and how to respond to an overdose. Additionally, the training debunks myths and provides information on resources, harm reduction and stigma.

Ms. Brown encourages people to get information at https://www.harmreductionallegheny.org/ She can also be contacted for information, linkages to resources, and/or information on trainings at stacie.brown@alleghenycounty.us

- **HAB Meetings and Membership—Hilary Scherer**
  Hilary Scherer provided a brief review of the roles and responsabilities of the CoC and HAB. This review can be found in the meeting slides in Appendix A. The HAB and CoC attendees were then asked for input on support effective HAB membership and CoC meetings. Meeting participants shared the following input:
    o Processes to integrate the expertise of front-line workers into system understanding and planning.
    o More in-person participation to support effective discussions, which can be difficult in hybrid settings. Including consideration of meeting locations moving as an opportunity to see other settings across the CoC.
    o Enhanced orientation for HAB members; for example: stronger linkages between HAB members for peer sharing, summary reviews of recent happenings, and a cheat sheet of key terms and language.
    o Continued movement on effectively and meaningfully engaging people with lived expertise. Consortium of Recognizing Experience (CORE), was established but experienced many barriers to consistently engaging people without causing frustration. One recommendation was to incorporate lived experience into the HOCC, but others expressed a desire for the ability to reach a broader scope of lived experience. The HAB has explored models from other CoCs and highlighted the need to have a dedicated forum with regular support to make the group accessible.
    o A recommendation for the HAB to meet more frequently was raised, citing the need to more regularly discuss needs and actionable responses to those needs. The meetings could be shortened, but occur more regularly to ensure members are up to date and relevant. Other members cautioned the need for clear meeting purposes and action items to make monthly meetings useful, and highlighted Committee meetings and working sessions, as well as time commitments for members.
    o More opportunities to communicate the work of the Committees

  HAB and CoC members were reminded that the annual nomination period for HAB membership was open, with nominations requested to be submitted by Friday, January 5, 2024.

- **CoC Governance Charter—Gale Schwartz**
  Ms. Schwartze reminded HAB and CoC members that the CoC was also in the annual review period for the Allegheny County CoC Governance Charter. The meeting was open to initial comment on revisions to the Charter and the following input was shared:
    o Update the Code of Conduct to clarify expectations and processes around those expectations.
    o Include the role of the CoC and HAB in the strategic planning process.
    o Establish a grievance process.

At this time, Chase Archer Evans raised a recommendation to change the HAB Chair of the HOCC (Dave Lettrich), citing that the conduct of the Chair was not conducive to supporting the Committee's work and the participation of Committee members. Later in the meeting, Mr. Evans further spoke to the involvement of Mr. Lettrich in the processes to close the encampment at First Street, and cited that encampment policies were not followed in relation to who was notified of the closure. Ms. Schwartz reflected that the HAB has historically looked to each Committee for direction on their leadership. In addition to wanting input from the full HOCC regarding their Chair, Brian Knight requested more information from the Committee on the situation before the HAB consider if action is appropriate. The HAB Executive Committee will coordinate with HOCC members for additional information and discussion.

- **CoC Shelter Update—Andy Halfhill**
  Andy Halfhill presented information regarding the CoC's shelters for single adults. The slides presented are in Appendix A, and include a review of shelter capacity and approaches for providing shelter through the winter. Meeting participants raised questions and concerns regarding the shift to operating a severe weather shelter this winter, rather than opening a winter shelter. Participants cited recognition of the overall capacity of single shelter spaces being higher, but reflected that the need has risen and further capacity throughout the winter season was necessary.

  Regarding the severe weather shelter, there was a call to establish and communicate clear thresholds for when the shelter would be activated. ***The motion to put forward a letter to the County and City to establish and communicate the conditions in which the severe weather shelter would be opened, and a recommendation to set the threshold at 32 degrees Fahrenheit and in consideration of co-occurring weather conditions was passed***. One HAB member abstained from the vote (Andy Halfhill), no present HAB members voted against the motion, and all other present HAB members voted in favor.

- **Public Comments/Announcements**
  - National Coalition for the Homeless Conference Reflections—Chase Archer Evans
    Mr. Evans highlighted learnings from the National Coalition for the Homeless Conference for consideration in Allegheny County:
    - Develop and implement a process for shelter terminations, inclusive of a panel that includes peers before services can be terminated
    - Implement surveys of service participants, including surveys at the start of service, during services, at after services have ended

  - Homeless Persons' Memorial Day is held annually in remembrance of the lives of unhoused people who have died and honoring each person. The day is marked on the first day of winter, as the longest night of year, which is December 21, 2023. Service will begin at 7pm on the corner of Grant Street and Fort Pitt Blvd.

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Next CoC Meeting
January 30, 2024 from 10:00am to 12:00pm
1 Smithfield St, Pittsburgh, 15222 (HSB, Lower Level) and
Microsoft Teams

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Appendix A
Meeting Slides

CoC/HAB Bi-Monthly Meeting November 28, 2023

Please mute your lines when you are not speaking

Meeting will be recorded

We ask that members of the media identify themselves for transparency and so we can follow up appropriately with any additional information that may be needed

Agenda

Allegheny County Health Department

HAB Membership Roles and Meetings

CoC Governance Charter

CoC Shelter System Overview

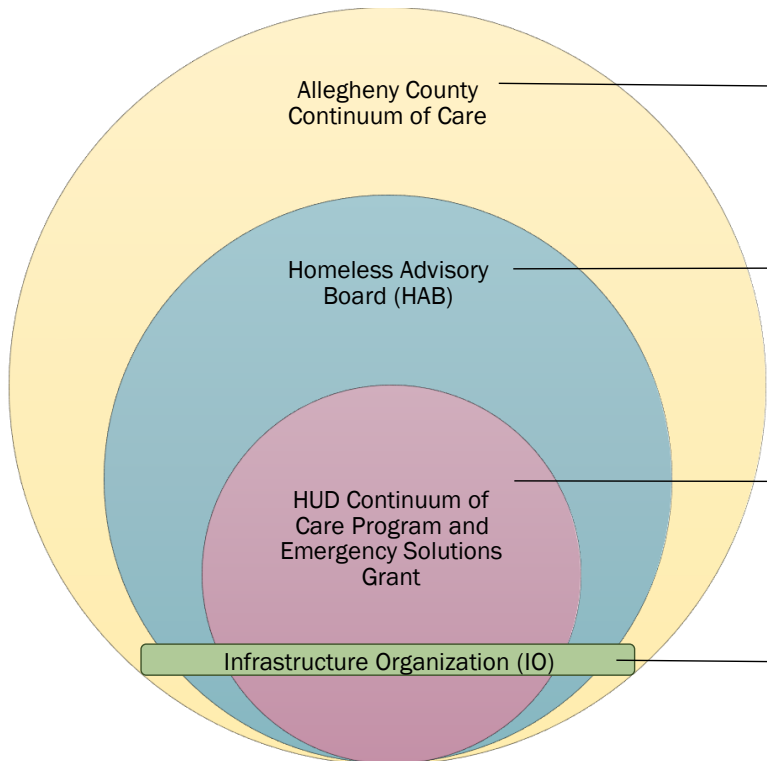**Public Comment/Announcements**

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Welcome
September Meeting Minutes

Allegheny County Health Department

Stacie Brown

Homeless Advisory Board

- Working board of the CoC, responsible for planning, coordinating and operating a system in Allegheny County to meet the needs of individuals and families experiencing homelessness

- 21 members across stakeholder groups

- Committees are designated by the HAB to advise on the progression of CoC priorities

Allegheny County Continuum of Care

Homeless Advisory Board (HAB)

HUD Continuum of Care Program and Emergency Solutions Grant

Infrastructure Organization (IO)

Allegheny County Continuum of Care
- County's community-based homeless assistance program planning network
- While the CoC's work will focus, at a minimum, on those services funded through HUD's Continuum of Care and ESG programs, its work is intended to be generally inclusive of all housing and services for people experiencing homelessness or at risk of becoming homeless, regardless of the funding source associated with the services

Homeless Advisory Board
- Working board that acts on the behalf of the Allegheny County CoC—fulfilling the responsibilities of (1) operating the CoC, (2) designating an HMIS for the CoC, and (3) planning for the CoC.

HUD CoC and ESG Programs
- CoC Program: HUD funding stream supporting permanent supportive housing for disabled persons, rapid re-housing, supportive services, and the HMIS
- ESG Program: HUD funding stream, granted by formula to city, county, and state governments, providing resources for renovation and operation of emergency shelters and related services, homelessness prevention, and re-housing activities

Infrastructure Organization
- The HAB has delegated to the IO (DHS) the day-to-day and operational responsibilities that fulfill the core duties of the CoC

HAB Responsibilities in Practice

Attend bi-monthly CoC meetings

Serve on at least one HAB Committee

Review materials

Engage in Discussions and Votes

Represent the HAB and CoC

HAB Directions

Past System Visioning

- Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness
- Housing First
- Prioritizing services to the most vulnerable
- Data-informed decision making
- Coordinated Entry

HUD CoC Program

- CoC Program Project Rankings
  - Performance Outcome Tool and Ranking Approach
  - Final Ranking
- Reallocating CoC Program funds

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Committees

CoC Analysis and Planning Committee
Provide ongoing analysis to support the planning of the CoC, at both the provider and system level

Homeless Outreach Coordinating Committee
Address the complex issues and challenges faced by people who are unsheltered

Communication and Education Committee
Develop and distribute messaging regarding the needs and experiences of people experiencing homelessness and the homelessness system, and facilitate avenues for community engagement

Provider Committee
Capture the experiences and perspectives of providers in order to inform CoC planning and processes

Executive Committee
Drive the strategic direction of the HAB and the Allegheny County CoC, based upon data, best practices/evidence-based practices and establishe priorities.
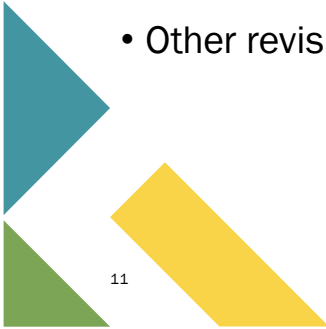
Comprised of HAB Chair, ViceChair, Secretary, Committee HAB Chairs, and IO Representative.

Establish additional Ad Hoc Committees when necessary to carry out special initiatives.

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What is needed to support effective HAB members and productive meeting?

CoC Governance Charter

- Media Guidance
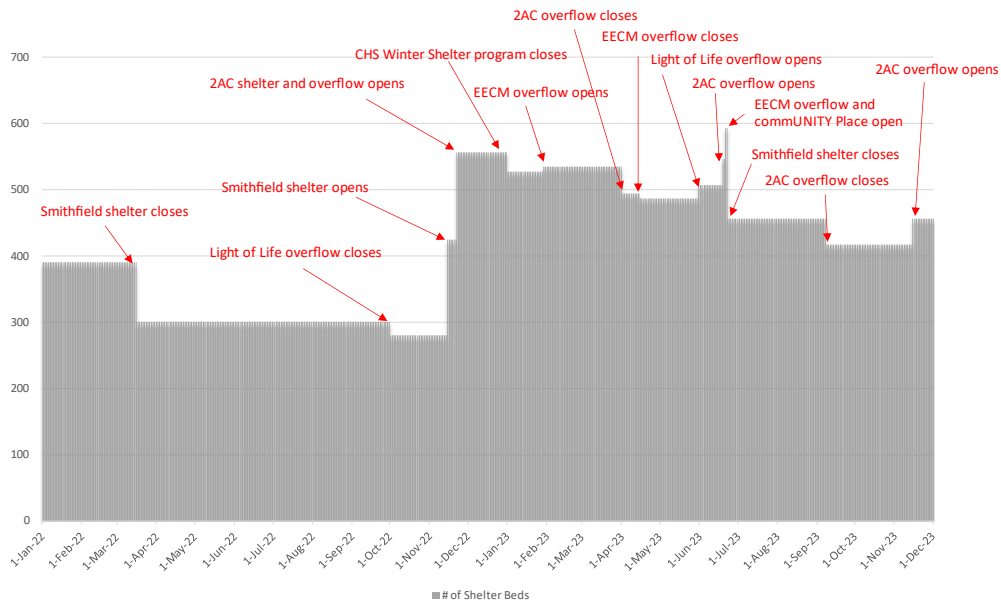 - Add clarifications and general guidance

- Code of Conduct

- Other revisions?

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CoC Single Shelter Update
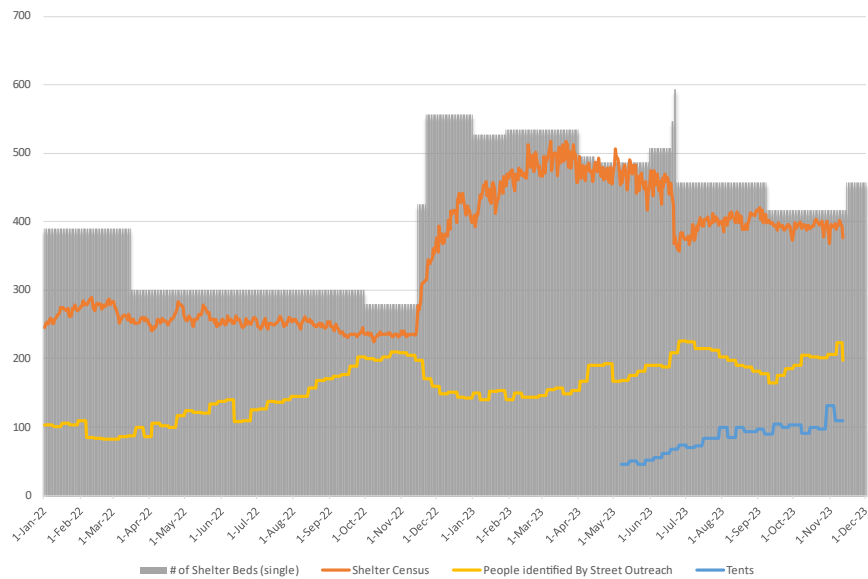
Homeless Advisory Board Meeting

November 28, 2023

Changes in Single Shelter Capacity 2022-2023

Single Emergency Shelter Capacity

Single Shelter Capacity as of 11/28/23	
Shelter program	# of beds
ACTION McKeesport Shelter	25
Bethlehem Haven	28
CHS Scattered Site	50
CHS Wood Street Commons	32
EECM shelter (year-round)	21
EECM overflow shelter	20
FamilyLinks DOCS	26
Pleasant Valley/Goodwill	25
Light of Life (year-round)	34
Light of Life overflow	20
Second Avenue Commons	92
Second Avenue Commons- overflow	40
Team PSBG McKeesport Low Barrier Shelter	17
Unity Recovery commUNITY Place	27
TOTAL BEDS (year-round)	**377**
TOTAL BEDS (overflow)	**80**
TOTAL BEDS (year-round + overflow)	**457**

Monitoring of System Needs and Capacity for Singles

Legend: # of Shelter Beds (single) — Shelter Census — People identified By Street Outreach — Tents

Plan for Winter

Prefer all year-long shelters with 24/7 access, but we aren't there yet

Not re-opening winter shelter downtown (shelter at Smithfield UCC)

Since 2021, have increased the number of yearround shelter beds for individuals by 65%, from 232 to 377 (current)

- Second Avenue Commons (Pittsburgh Mercy)
- commUnity Place (Unity Recovery)
- DOCS (Familylinks)
- McKeesport Downtown Housing Low-Barrier Shelter (ACTION Housing/Team PSBG)

Have periodically added overflow beds to the system

- Second Avenue Commons (40 beds)
- Light of Life (20 beds)
- East End Cooperative Ministries (20 beds)

These 80 overflow beds will be available this winter, and we are working on adding some additional overflow

Emergency Overflow

Severe weather & system at capacity

We've invested a lot in shelter – some learnings to-date

Insights Informing DHS Planning

- People, community, businesses all tend to want the same thing– housing for those experiencing homelessness
- Shelter costs and permanent housing costs are similar, so we need to consider a balance of investments in shelter and housing options
- Our permanent housing system (i.e. RRH, PSH) can only serve 10-15% of the population using shelter. While our prioritization approach is working, this system only works for a fraction of the need (though we are adding PSH capacity).
- We'll never have enough shelter space if we don't work on increased supports for the other 85-90% of the population (shelter lengths of stay have been increasing, and there is reduced turnover of beds)
- Few people transition quickly from shelter to subsidized housing, and housing affordability has changed (public benefits not enough to cover cost of modest priced units)
- Shared housing opportunities may be more needed than in the past

New Shelter Strategies

DHS is developing new strategies to help improve flow through the shelter system:
- Balancing investments in shelter and non-shelter housing options

- Second Avenue Commons Housing Solutions pilot

- Discussions with shelter providers on establishing more defined pathways out of shelter and possible strategies:
  - Create a CoC-wide, housing-focused shelter culture
  - Implement a standardized, housing-focused shelter protocol for shelter-level triage and housing pathway determination:
    - Earlier determination of RRH/PSH referral eligibility
    - Structured, motivational interview to identify viable pathways out of shelter

- Develop and implement new incentive initiatives and supports that help transition shelter guests to housing faster, and with greater chance of preventing returns to homelessness
  - Payment of security deposits, first month's rent, utility deposits, basic furnishings, landlord incentives, utility arrearages, etc. (for individuals and for family/friends where applicable)
  - Improved resource navigation for public subsidized housing and external to DHS population-specific housing programs
  - Contracted employment and income services in shelter
  - New supports for roommate matching, completing applications, acquiring personal documents, connecting to behavioral health supports, apartment searches and visits

Public Comment/ Announcements

Next Meeting
Tuesday, January 30, 2024
10:00am-12:00pm