



## Allegheny County Department of Human Services

Erin Dalton, Director



**Office of  
Community  
Services**

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### Administration

**Abigail Horn**  
DHS DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
OFFICE OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

County Community Services  
Advisory Council  
Homeless Alliance Advisory Board  
Local Housing Options Team (LHOT)

Pennsylvania oversight:  
Pa. Dept. of Labor and Industry  
Pa. Dept. of Human Services  
Pa. Dept. of Education  
Pa. Dept. of Community and Economic  
Development  
Pa. Dept. of Agriculture

Federal oversight:  
U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban  
Development

### Mission

Provides contracted services designed to meet the immediate needs of low-income and vulnerable individuals and families and, utilizing the strengths of individuals and families, empower them to become more self-sufficient.

## Background

The Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Office of Community Services is the County's public office responsible for providing Allegheny County residents with a coordinated, community-focused system of high quality and cost-effective services, programs and opportunities that support low-income and vulnerable individuals and families in their efforts to stabilize from crises and strengthen their self-sufficiency. The Office of Community Services (OCS) was established in 1997 and re-configured in 2018.

Office Overview	
Persons served† – CY 2021	56,390
OCS filled positions (a/o 01/2021)	21
Contract Providers (FY 2020–2021)	97
Total Budget (FY 2022–2023)	<b>\$288.5 million</b> <b>Housing: \$136.2 million</b> <i>Federal: 91.3%    County: 0.1%</i> <i>State: 6.1%        Other: 2.5%</i> <b>86.5% to providers</b> <b>ELRC: \$131 million</b> <i>Federal: 86.3%    County: 0%</i> <i>State: 13.7%      Other: 0%</i> <b>98.6% to providers</b> <b>HSDF: \$21.3 million</b> <i>Federal: 34.1%    County: 1.2%</i> <i>State: 59.4%      Other: 5.4%</i> <b>93.3% to providers</b>
<p>Contracted agencies account for 96% of the total OCS budget.</p> <p>†All clients receiving homeless services were served by at least one contracted provider.</p> <p>The Office of Community Services was reconfigured in 2018 to specialize in housing and homeless services and prevention services. Accurate statistics for persons served are not yet available beyond those who received homeless services.</p>	

## Mission

The Office of Community Services (OCS) is committed to providing human services that empower people, strengthen families, and work to build a healthy, connected community. Through more than 100 community-based agencies and direct services, OCS offers supports, rooted in solid data and best practices, that help prevent crises, stabilize households and create opportunities to thrive.

## Organization

The Office of Community Services is organized around three program areas:

- (1) Housing, Homeless and Coordinated Entry
- (2) Family and Community Supports
- (3) Community Outreach

Through a coordinated effort, these three areas provide a wide array of services around housing, family support, youth services, afterschool and summer youth programs, and other services vital to low- income persons. OCS also collaborates and coordinates services with other DHS program offices and community-based agencies.

## Program Areas

### 1. Housing, Homeless and Coordinated Entry

**The Homeless System** provide a safety net of resources to help those in critical need of shelter with the goal of a client's eventual independence and self-sufficiency. The homeless system offers a wide array of housing options and services for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, including: emergency shelter, permanent housing and supportive services; street outreach, engagement and case management; and prevention strategies. Over 30 agencies provide approximately 86 programs to meet the diverse needs of individuals and families in a housing crisis. Services are accessed through the county's coordinated entry system, the Allegheny Link.

- **Homeless Prevention** programs assist people at imminent risk of losing their apartment or home by assisting with past due rent, utility bills or mortgage payments.
- **Street Outreach** programs reach out to unsheltered individuals and families and offer them urgent mobile care and help with basic needs, while also connecting them to emergency shelter, housing and critical services.
- **Emergency Shelter** programs, located throughout the county, provide temporary refuge for those experiencing homelessness. The typical stay is 30 days or less.
- **Bridge Housing** programs offer shelter and supportive services to individuals and families for approximately three to 12 months, with the goal of returning clients to the most self-sufficient situation possible.
- **PennFree Bridge Housing** program provides rental assistance and support services to homeless individuals and families with drug, alcohol, or dual addiction or dependency issues.
- **Rapid Re-Housing** programs help people move from homelessness to permanent housing in the community through housing search assistance, rental assistance, and service coordination.
- **Supportive Housing** programs are available for homeless individuals with disabilities, for families with a family member with a disability, and individuals who would otherwise be living on the street (chronic street homeless). Residents may remain as long as necessary. Each program offers additional services to help participants become more independent.

**Homeless Services and Supports Coordinators** work alongside the existing family emergency shelter case managers to supplement their services and provide additional support where needed. They use a holistic approach to work with the families; focusing not only on the parents, but also the children. The Homeless Services and Supports Coordinators provide a consistent point of contact to help the families maintain connections to existing services and make connections to new ones. Using Conferencing and Teaming they engage all the familial, informal and formal supports as the family drives the process of goal-setting and action planning while in shelter and beyond.

**Homeless Services & Supports Coordinators for Youth (HSSCY)** provide a similar model of services for young adults under 25. HSSCY navigators deliver low-barrier, youth-centered case management to help sheltered and unsheltered youth secure and maintain safe, stable housing. Young adults who are couch-surfing or facing imminent homelessness can access housing stabilization services through the HOPE Project, a youth-specific prevention and diversion program, and Host Homes, which facilitates shared living arrangements with chosen natural supports.

**The Allegheny Link (Coordinated Entry System)** was established in 2005 to simplify and streamline access to long-term living services and supports. The Allegheny Link provides information referrals/assistance, person-centered counseling, eligibility screening for public and privately funded services and supports, assistance with completing applications for these services (when necessary) and general short-term service coordination in an effort to help individuals and families maintain their independence, dignity and quality of life. It standardizes access and assessment for housing insecure clients and coordinates referrals across all providers in the homeless

system. The Allegheny Link is also providing a coordinated referral service for home visiting programs for parents/caregivers of children age 0 to 6 in Allegheny County looking for support throughout their pregnancy and early stages of the child's development. The Allegheny Link can be accessed by phone or in person Monday through Friday 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. at 1-866-730-2368. In person assistance is provided through walk-in service at DHS and in the community via mobile outreach staff.

**Housing Navigation Unit** is a strategic initiative that DHS launched in 2018 designed to bring together landlords, service providers and the tenants that they serve. The Housing Navigators improve communication between service providers and landlords in the private rental market. This partnership builds trust, resolves problems, and fosters a mutually beneficial working relationship between all parties that improves service delivery. The Housing Navigators also expand resources and the pool of landlords willing to work with DHS housing programs to provide access to the private rental market more quickly and reduce homelessness. The Housing Navigators are DHS's experts in affordable housing and provide information, training and technical assistance to landlords, service providers, DHS staff and tenants.

## 2. Family and Community Supports

### Early Childhood:

**Hello Baby**, launched in September 2020, is a major new initiative that aims for every child in Allegheny County to thrive, and for their families to feel supported and connected as they adjust to life with a new baby. Hello Baby ensures all parents know about local programs and services available to them and provides more comprehensive services to families that need additional support. The program uses a tiered system of prevention services to support families with (1) universal options, such as a website [helloworldpgh.org](http://helloworldpgh.org) and the 2-1-1 warmline with a Family Navigator for families with children under age five, (2) the network of Family Centers throughout the county, and (3) priority wrap-around individualized assistance with Healthy Start for families with highest needs.

**Family Centers** are the places families with children 0 – 18 years visit or call when they want support to raise healthy kids. Families may want help in taking care of basic needs (like housing and food). Or they may need to find a trusted counselor for their depression or conflict at home; to learn more about how to prepare their children to enjoy and succeed in school; or to find health care, childcare, transportation, or employment. The 27 family centers across Allegheny County are valued community hubs that provide a fun atmosphere for adults and children where they feel respected and connected in a network of support with other families in their neighborhoods. Specifically, family centers offer the following types of activities for families with children 0 – 18 years:

- Parenting education and supports through home visits and groups
- Developmental screenings of infants and young children and referrals for Early Intervention
- Guidance in setting family and individual goals
- School-readiness activities and programs
- Providing opportunities for families to meet with one another in family-oriented activities
- Assistance in accessing preventive health care including pre-natal care, immunizations, primary care and WIC
- Fatherhood programming

For information on locations of Allegheny County Family Centers, please visit <https://familycenters.alleghenycounty.us/>

**Home Visiting** provides support for pregnant women and families with children up to six years of age through one-on-one meetings and support groups that address parenting and child development. Family Support Centers offer home visiting, as do many other programs across the county. To learn more, contact the Allegheny Link at 866-730-2368.

**Allegheny County Head Start**, a partnership with the Allegheny Intermediate Unit, is a free comprehensive

child development and education program that serves families with children three to five years of age who meet the required Federal Income Guidelines. Head Start is child-focused and has the overall goal of increasing school readiness. Allegheny County Head Start provides a range of individualized services including language development, math, science and social skills; early childhood development; physical and behavioral health; nutrition; and parent involvement.

**The Early Learning Resource Center (ELRC)** provides a single access point for families, early learning service providers, and communities to gain information and access services that support children and families with the goal of improving the quality, accessibility, and affordability of early learning services in Allegheny County. Specifically, the ELRC helps families access child care subsidies and provides information about early learning settings more broadly, such as Head Start and Pre K Counts options, and works with child care providers to strengthen quality practices. The ELRC is a partnership between the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, the Alliance for Infants and Toddlers, and Trying Together.

### **School-Age Children:**

**Out-of-school programs** provide community-based, safe place for children, youth and/or young adults after their school day ends. Some sites offer programming during the summer as well. They provide activities for students that typically include academic supports, recreation and enrichment. DHS funds several faith- and community-based afterschool and summer programs for children and youth throughout Allegheny County. For example, the Beverly Jewel Wall Lovelace Year-Round Program for Children is designed for children ages five through twelve years who live in or near most public housing communities in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County.

Please visit [www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/education/out-of-school.aspx](http://www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/education/out-of-school.aspx) for the locations of these programs.

**Mentoring and case management programs** provide individual and group support to older youth. Some programs offer opportunities for parental participation as well.

**Focus on Attendance Partnership Program** is a partnership between The Allegheny County Department of Human Services, The Allegheny Intermediate Unit, the Fifth Judicial District of Pennsylvania (specifically Juvenile Court, Magisterial District Court and Juvenile Probation) and local schools, grades Kindergarten through 12 addressing concerns around truancy and school attendance. Focus on Attendance can be used as a Community Based Attendance Improvement Program by school staff. It is also approved by the 5th Judicial District as an Adjudication Alternative Program for the Magisterial District Courts. Focus on Attendance facilitates positive communication between systems, provides technical assistance and offers coordination of services. Direct supports to children and families are provided by a variety of resources and services.

### **Transition-Age Youth:**

**Transition-age youth coordination** is an effort to work across DHS Offices to ensure that children and youth receiving human services have the support they need to make a successful transition to adulthood. Transition-age youth programs focus on young people ages 14-26. Markers of a successful transition include educational attainment, employment and economic security, housing stability, physical and mental health, healthy relationships, and positive social behavior. Cross-system and community stakeholders, led by young adults with system experience, align the Department's work to achieve successful, equitable outcomes for young adults.

**412 Youth Zone** is a one-stop center for young people ages 16-23 that are transitioning out of the foster care system or are experiencing unstable housing. The Zone is designed for youth to gain stability, build positive relationships, learn life skills, meet basic needs, foster creative expressions and be guided on the right path towards a brighter future. The 412 Youth Zone goal is to help youth become independent self-

sufficient adults. The 412 Youth Zone works with 80+ community partners to serve more than 1,000 youth annually in the areas of life skills, the arts, housing counseling, education, legal aid, food, child care and parenting support, medical and behavioral health, and workforce training. Clients are served both on-site at the downtown drop-in center and in the community through a team of Youth Coaches. For hours and contact information, visit <https://www.auberle.org/the-412-youth-zone>.

**Youth Support Partners (YSPs)** are young adult professionals who have personal experience in the human services system. They are hired, trained, coached, and supported to become peer advocates working with Transition Age Youth (TAY) involved with Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS). YSPs share their insights with youth currently in the system, advocate for them and mentor them. Their lived experience gives them credibility and lends to successful engagement of youth. Youth referred to the YSP Unit may be involved with child welfare, independent living, behavioral health, developmental supports, homeless services or juvenile probation. YSPs focus on 5 core areas with them: Youth Engagement, Team Planning, Healthy Choices, Life Skills and Social Connections. In addition to one-on-one peer support, the YSP Unit leads youth opportunities including: SITY (System Improvement Through Youth, advisory board for DHS), Opportunity Passport (financial literacy program), and We Rock (music production programming). If you would like to know more, call 412-442-8YSP or email [dhs-yspadmin@alleghenycounty.us](mailto:dhs-yspadmin@alleghenycounty.us).

### **Community Outreach**

**Community Outreach** strives to provide supports to individuals and families before situations in their lives reach a crisis level. A wide variety of prevention programs and services are funded with allocations to community-based organizations. Some are specifically offered to individuals and families whose total household income is at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.

**The Self-sufficiency Program** helps eligible individuals and families identify their strengths and needs, create a plan to reach their goals, and overcome any roadblocks to improved stability and economic security. The program includes service coordination, case management, job search assistance, career preparation and career training, transportation, assistance meeting basic needs, job skills education, and referrals. It is supported by the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) that is designed to fund a full range of services and activities that have a measurable impact on the causes and conditions of poverty in a community.

**Free Income Tax Return Preparation** is provided to eligible individuals and households in Allegheny County through a partnership with a community agency in the Mon Valley. Call United Way 211 to determine eligibility and schedule an appointment.

**Community Initiatives** address community-wide needs identified in the community needs assessment which is completed every three years. Recent initiatives include access to financial planning and budgeting, alternative transportation options to access the workforce, and the creation of a new health clinic co-located with a Family Center.

**Community Resource Specialists** address the need for systemic training and capacity building among OCS providers and community partners. Community Resource Specialists work with providers and other community groups to address capacity and system issues. The Community Resource Specialists help to identify assets in the community and to create mechanisms that increase consumer access to needed services. The partnerships they build create opportunities for people to own a stake in their community. Currently Specialists are focused on supporting the interplay of Schools and Human Services, Health and Housing, Employment and Housing, Budgeting and Financial Education, and community-based assets for the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative in Larimer.

### **Resource Support in Magisterial District Courts and Family Court**

A team of Resource Specialists provide coverage to the 46 Magisterial District Courtrooms and the Allegheny County Family Court. The work within the MDJ courtrooms focuses on identifying human service resources and coaching the Magisterial District Judges and other stakeholders regarding important human service needs they see day-to-day in the courtrooms. The focus is assisting in truancy hearings, in adult criminal

hearings and in landlord/tenant hearings. Also, in collaboration with the Office of Children, Youth and Families and Children's Court, the Resource Specialists are available to assist with Private Dependency Petitions where there is no alleged child abuse or neglect at the time of the filing. This creates an opportunity to connect parents and caregivers with resources and supports while avoiding deeper child welfare system involvement. In Family Court, the focus is on identifying appropriate resources and referrals for those involved in child custody cases, domestic violence cases involving children, and pre/post dependency cases where there is no formal Department of Human Services involvement.

**Battering Intervention Program (BIP)** is the most commonly accepted intervention for perpetrators of intimate partner violence in the United States and is structured as a set of curriculum-based, psycho-educational group classes. The main purpose of BIP is to hold offenders accountable and to reduce future harm. Participants learn to take responsibility for abusive behavior and explore the negative effects of violence. DHS partners with local non-profit agencies, the Allegheny County Fifth Judicial District of Pennsylvania, the District Attorney's Office, the Allegheny County Jail and intimate partner violence experts to create a coordinated system that holds batterers accountable and reduces risks to the survivor's safety.