

# On Our Way Home: Missoula Community Houselessness Strategy 2025-2028



# Executive Summary



## GOAL OF HOUSELESSNESS STRATEGY

The primary intended goal of our houselessness strategy is to make houselessness rare, brief, and non-recurring.



## OVERALL MEASURES OF PROGRESS

- Reduction of overall houselessness
- Reduction of chronic houselessness
- Reduction of unsheltered houselessness
- Housing stability for formerly houseless people



## RESPONSIBLE ACTORS

This is a community plan, developed and implemented by Missoula community members. A Coalition will lead the implementation process, but all of the **businesses, organizations, and individuals that are part of Missoula will impact the results of this strategy.**

## PRIMARY STRATEGIES

### STRATEGY A

Right-size the number of **beds** dedicated for people who are houseless and the **services that support housing retention** to meet the needs of the houseless population

### STRATEGY B

Secure **funding** for high-priority activities as detailed in the action items

### STRATEGY C

Support increase in capacity for provider organizations

## STATE OF HOUSELESSNESS IN MISSOULA

### On a single day in 2024:



**644** people experienced houselessness

**25%** were living unsheltered

**162** people experienced chronic houselessness

**1484** people experienced houselessness over the past year



Dear fellow Missoula residents,

As the *On Our Way Home* Leadership Group, we present this community strategy to respond to houselessness in Missoula over the next three years. We want to improve life in Missoula for all of its citizens by making houselessness rare, brief and non-recurring.

The experience of houselessness is deeply personal and unique to each person; we must work together to create solutions that are responsive to that reality. We acknowledge that there is a crisis of unaffordability of housing in Missoula, and while this strategy does not directly address that issue, we are encouraged by other efforts to address that very real contributing factor to houselessness in Missoula. With all of us working together towards these shared community goals, we can make an impact. Each organization, community, neighborhood, business, and individual in Missoula has a role to play in responding to houselessness here.

We would also like to honor the memory of and express gratitude to Toby Gobert, a member of our Leadership Group, who passed away during the Strategy drafting process.

Thank you for your attention to this strategy. We are excited to get started!

*On Our Way Home Leadership Group*



**Why do we say “houselessness”?** The term “houseless” is increasingly used instead of “homeless”. The term “homeless” carries a significant stigma, potentially stripping individuals of their connection to community and implying a lack of home even if they have social ties and a sense of belonging, while “houseless” simply denotes the lack of a physical house, considered a more neutral and respectful way to describe someone without stable housing. People experiencing houselessness include those who are living in a place not meant for human habitation, in emergency shelter or in transitional housing. People who are exiting an institution (e.g. hospital) after a short-term stay who were previously houseless and those that are fleeing from domestic violence, don’t have a place to go, and don’t have the resources to find a place to go are also considered houseless.

# Current State of Missoula Houselessness

ON A SINGLE DAY IN 2024:



**644** people experienced houselessness

**25%** were living unsheltered

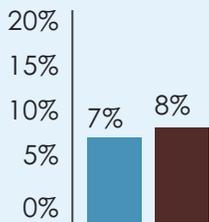
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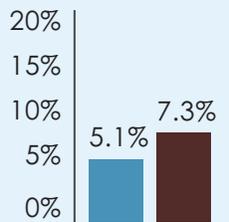
## RACE

■ % of Missoula County

■ % of Unhoused Neighbors



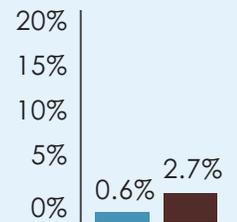
Multiple Races



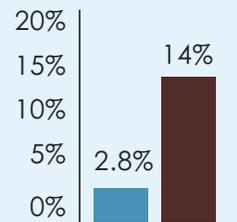
Hispanic/Latina/e/o



Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander



Black, African American, or African



American Indian, Alaska Native, or Indigenous American, or African

## CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO HOUSELESSNESS



High housing costs are a primary driver of houselessness:

- 44% of Missoulians were rent burdened (pay >30% of income on rent)
- In 2023, average rent for a 1-bedroom was \$171 more than the maximum Social Security benefit



In a survey of people with lived experience of houselessness, the top two causes of houselessness are:

- job loss
- mental/behavioral health

## POPULATION TYPE

476 single adults

93 families, including 47 w/ children

36 individuals under 25

74 veterans

## CURRENT EFFORTS



Emergency Shelter: 513 beds

Transitional Housing: 40 beds

Rapid Rehousing: 84 beds

Permanent Supportive Housing: 113 beds



75 people were permanently or temporarily housed between April 2024 and October 2024



43 partner agencies participate in Missoula's Coordinated Entry system to match unhoused neighbors to available resources

## MISSOULA'S SYSTEM OUTPERFORMS USA AVERAGES

- shorter length of time houseless (121 days vs. 158 days)
- fewer returns to houselessness within 2 years (6% vs. 16.5%)
- less chronic houselessness (21% vs. 31%)



The Housing Solutions Fund has stabilized housing for over 2,000 people over the past 3 years

## What the Experts Say



As part of surveys and focus groups that occurred during the development of this Strategy, people with lived experience of houselessness and providers of housing and services identified the biggest levers to reduce houselessness as:

✓ **Housing units and resources to access housing**, including rental assistance, application fees, deposits and housing search assistance

✓ **Resources for accessing employment or income**, which may include employment supports, volunteering opportunities, entrepreneurship, and job search support; and

✓ **Access to mental health and substance use services** for people who are at risk of or experiencing houselessness

“

[What I need most] is **money for housing, and help filling out housing applications.**

“

**I want help getting a job.** It goes a long way when someone has a job, even if it is volunteering.

“

**There is not a lot of free, accessible therapy.** I have struggled with that for the whole time I have been homeless.

“

[What I need is] understanding from my community – **this is a struggle and not what I dreamed about for my life.** People berating me is not helping.

– *An unhoused Missoulian*



Villagio, Affordable Housing, for households earning less than 60% AMI.

© Amplify Film Group

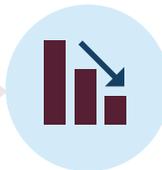
# Goal

The primary intended goal of our houselessness strategy is to make houselessness rare, brief, and non-recurring.



## OVERALL MEASURES OF PROGRESS

Reduction of overall houselessness



Reduction of unsheltered houselessness



Reduction of chronic houselessness



Housing stability for formerly houseless people



### What is the difference between Chronic Houselessness and Unsheltered Houselessness?

Chronic Houselessness refers to people who have experienced houselessness for at least a year — or repeatedly — while struggling with a disabling condition such as a serious mental illness, substance use disorder, or physical disability.

Unsheltered Houselessness refers to people who sleep outside or spend most nights in places not meant to be used as a regular sleeping place for human beings, such as makeshift shelters, abandoned buildings, or vehicles.

People may be experiencing both chronic and unsheltered houselessness, but some chronically houseless people live in shelters.



# Our Guiding Principles

In determining any next action, the strategy leaders will be driven by these guiding principles:

- 1 **Prioritize strategies that are measurably effective and efficient in reducing homelessness.**
- 2 **Provide resources that keep people safe.**
- 3 **Avoid unintentional harm to people experiencing homelessness.**
- 4 **Support providers and their staff to be effective through education, resources and staff retention support.**



[We need] a process for how the community responds to people in need. How can we use the resources better? **We should try to work in a way that makes the community feel like they can work with us, not just against us.**

– Missoula community member living outside



## Primary Strategies

To address the gaps identified through data analysis and community feedback—including a shortage of affordable housing, programs supporting employment and income access, and behavioral health services—Missoula needs more housing units, funding to support programs, and provider capacity. Therefore, the primary strategies are:

### STRATEGY A



**Right-size the number of beds** dedicated for people who are houseless and the **services that support housing retention** to meet the needs of the houseless population

### STRATEGY B



**Secure funding** for high-priority activities as detailed in the action items

### STRATEGY C



**Support increase in capacity** for provider organizations

# Community Leadership



To ensure that Missoula is driving towards the goals of this Houselessness Strategy, community leaders plan to create a Coalition to be the community-wide strategy leadership group.

The Coalition will include membership from decision-makers from all sectors with an impact on houselessness and be representative of the houseless population. This may involve a restructure of the At Risk Housing Coalition (ARHC) or development of a new collaborative body. The group will be referred to as “The Coalition” throughout this strategy document.



The Coalition members will include:

- People with Lived Experience
- Leaders from City, County, and Indigenous Nations
- Representatives of:
  - Business community
  - Healthcare
  - Funders
  - Faith communities
  - Neighborhoods, and
  - Non-profit providers



Blue Heron Place at Trinity Apartments, Permanent Supportive Housing, serving up to 30% AMI.

© Tiffany Photography

# Roles and Responsibilities



Roles	Responsibilities
<b>Coalition members</b>	Prioritize activities, direct fundraising efforts, pivot in response to ever-changing situations, evaluate and redirect progress, design community-wide efforts and build cross-system partnerships.
<b>People with lived experience of houselessness</b>	Give meaningful input into program and system design and evaluation. Participate in Coalition.
<b>Local government</b>	Support Coalition priorities through policymaking, funding, and information-sharing, and join Coalition.
<b>City staff</b>	Provide staffing support, including resources, data, and administrative support.
<b>Providers of houseless services &amp; housing resources</b>	Create and implement programs prioritized by Coalition with funding accessed because of Strategy efforts. Participate in Coalition.
<b>Housing developers, property managers &amp; landlords</b>	Led by Coalition priorities, take steps to expand housing supply for people who are houseless or at risk of houselessness.
<b>Healthcare and behavioral health</b>	Support Coalition priorities through commitment of resources and alignment of programming, and fill seat on Coalition.
<b>Faith communities and other community groups</b>	Be members of Coalition and partner with providers to meet the prioritized needs of people experiencing houselessness through fundraising, collaborative projects, and volunteering.
<b>Businesses</b>	Support Coalition priorities through commitment of expertise and resources and fill a seat on the Coalition. Volunteer to support providers.
<b>Missoula community members</b>	Support houseless programming through neighborhood participation on the Coalition, volunteering, donations, and information sharing.

## Baseline Need: Affordable Housing

While this strategy focuses on the needs of people experiencing houselessness, one of the primary underlying drivers of houselessness is the lack of affordable housing locally. The success of other efforts happening in this community related to the need for housing, including the citywide housing strategy **A Place to Call Home**, are key to the success of this effort.



# Strategy A



**Right-size the number of beds dedicated for people who are houseless and the services that support housing retention to meet the needs of the houseless population**

In April 2024, Missoula gaps included:

**81 shelter and transitional housing beds** (553 existing beds and a need for 634)

**634 permanent housing units** (113 existing units with a need for 747)

To monitor progress, the Coalition will track these gaps over time with a goal of impacting them by either reducing the number of people experiencing houselessness, increasing the number of bed or units available, or both.

## ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE STRATEGY

- 1** Continuous support for the **Housing Solutions Fund** to ensure that people are prevented and diverted from becoming houseless as much as possible.<sup>1</sup>
- 2** **Relocate and reimagine the current Johnson Street shelter** to one that responds to gaps identified by the community and people with lived expertise.
- 3** Increase and diversify **permanent housing opportunities** through new construction, rehabilitation, and master-leasing opportunities.
- 4** **Prioritize services** that support housing access and stability, including increasing rental assistance and building connections to increase access to behavioral health supports and resources.
- 5** Gather and analyze **data** to understand changes that occur in the community and the results of strategy implementation to inform community needs and priorities.

### **Diversion is a strategy**

for people seeking shelter to help them identify immediate alternate housing arrangements and, if necessary, connect them with services and financial assistance to help them return to permanent housing.

### **Most Interesting Solutions Based on Community Input**

at Missoula Town Hall:

- Noncongregate Shelter
- Housing-Focused Shelter
- Safe Parking
- Prevention/Diversion
- Mixed Space (Indoor + Outdoor) Shelter
- Permanent Supportive Housing

### **A “Move On” strategy**

focuses on shifting clients in Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) that no longer need or want the accompanying intensive supportive services, but continue to need rental assistance, to other housing voucher options, such as Housing Choice Vouchers.

<sup>1</sup> Note that the 2024 Gaps Analysis (pg 14) reported that 332 households were identified as houseless for the first time in the last year, or 29% of the total number of participating households, indicating that a more robust diversion and prevention system could meaningfully impact the total number of households experiencing houselessness.

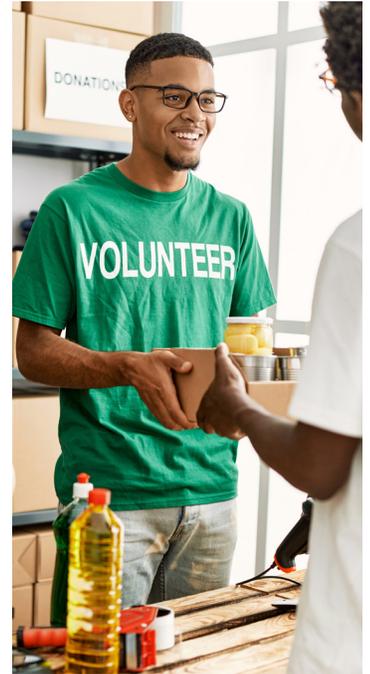
# Strategy B



Secure funding for high-priority activities as detailed in the action items

## ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE STRATEGY

- 1 The Coalition will meet annually to identify Missoula's **highest priority funding needs** in alignment with this strategy, which may include, for example, shelter, housing, services for unsheltered persons, frontline provider staff salaries, service to maintain permanent housing, the Housing Solutions Fund, input from people with lived expertise of houselessness, or resources for specific populations.
- 2 Hire support to **lead and drive community-wide fundraising** effort to bring new money to highest-priority funding needs.
- 3 Build community engagement and financial support through **information sharing and outcomes reporting**.
- 4 Ensure best use of existing funding by:
  - a. Funding programs that use **best-available strategies** that are measurably effective and efficient at ending houselessness, and
  - b. Developing **performance improvement and reallocation policies** to redirect funding from poorly-performing programs.
- 5 Where possible, **access resources for specific populations**, including chronically houseless, veterans, youth, families, and survivors of domestic violence, to reduce the burden on the system as a whole.



### EXAMPLE

In 2023, Missoula community committed to a **Built for Zero effort to reduce veteran houselessness to Functional Zero by November 11, 2026**, reducing veteran houselessness from 178 in 2023 (12% of total houseless population) to effectively zero. This reduction benefits the full houseless system of care by making resources available for non-veterans.

**Functional Zero** is achieved when a community's houseless system of care can prevent houselessness whenever possible and ensure that when houselessness does occur, it is rare, brief, and one-time.

# Strategy C



## Support increase in capacity for provider organizations

### ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE STRATEGY

- 1** Invest in training, support, and resources for frontline staff, managers, and organizational leaders in local houseless response agencies to **increase use of evidence-based, best-available or innovative practices** that are person-centered and effective.
- 2** **Direct a community-wide skilled volunteer recruitment and management effort** to support system-wide service gaps and needs (e.g., mentoring) and to support agency needs (e.g., grant writing).
- 3** **Partner with faith communities, businesses, and other community groups** to support providers to meet the needs of people experiencing houselessness in Missoula.
- 4** Support agency **recruitment and retention**, including raising funds to support an increase in pay and other resources that support houselessness staff (e.g., childcare supports, benefits available to all houselessness staff in community, professional development opportunities).

### Examples of Ways Volunteers Could Help

#### Helping People

- Companions
- Mentors
- Financial Literacy
- Coaches
- Housing Move In
- Cooking Classes
- Job search
- Housing Applications

#### Helping Organizations

- Grant writing
- Bookkeeping support
- Staff training
- Legal services
- Real estate services
- Cleaning
- Front desk



As service providers, we know that increasing capacity isn't just about adding beds or programs; **it's about expanding our ability to meet people where they are with dignity and hope.** With more resources, we can provide the comprehensive support needed to empower individuals and families to transition out of homelessness and into stability .

– Local provider of shelter and services

# Measures of Success



MEASURES	CHANGE EXPECTED
<b>Reduction of overall homelessness</b>	Reduction in the number of people who experience homelessness over a year-long period, measured with coordinated entry data.
<b>Reduction of chronic homelessness</b>	Reduction in the number of people who experience chronic homelessness over a year-long period, measured with coordinated entry data.
<b>Reduction of unsheltered homelessness</b>	Reduction in the number of people who experience homelessness over a year-long period, measured with annual Point in Time (PIT) Count data, until a more reliable data source is available.
<b>Housing stability for formerly homeless people</b>	Ninety-five percent (95%) housing retention or exit to other permanent housing outcomes for permanent housing projects for people who have experienced homelessness.

## STRATEGY A

<b>Adjust number of shelter beds and housing opportunities to narrow the gap between need and resource availability.</b>	Increase in number of beds or units dedicated for people experiencing homelessness and/or decrease in number of people experiencing homelessness in Missoula.
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## STRATEGY B

<b>Secure at least 3-5 new funding sources to support high-priority actions.</b>	Access three to five substantive new funding sources as a result of the actions 1 and 2 in Strategy B.
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## STRATEGY C

<b>Demonstrate that provider employee turnover rate is below 19% (the national average).</b>	Maintain turnover rate at homeless-focused provider agencies of below 19%.
<b>Provider employees engage in training opportunities at least quarterly.</b>	Homeless-focused provider agencies support their employees attending training at least quarterly.
<b>Improvement in care for people experiencing homelessness</b>	Qualitative feedback from people experiencing homelessness will demonstrate progress on this measure, potentially through gathering responses to additional survey questions during the annual Point in Time Count (PIT) Count of local homeless individuals.

# Thank You!

**Thank you** to everyone who contributed to the development of this strategy!

**Thank you** to the individuals experiencing houselessness that gave interviews or participated in focus groups to inform the strategy.

**Thank you** to the community members who attended and gave thoughtful feedback at Town Halls.

**Thank you** to City Houseless Programs staff who contributed time, resources, data, information, and funding, responding to every request of the community Leadership Group to ensure that this strategy aligns with other efforts in Missoula and will be fruitful.

**Thank you** to Homebase, and specifically Bridget and Alissa, who dove deep into this project with us and guided community members across Missoula to a strategy that will help us make meaningful change.

**Thank you** to each of the members of the Leadership Group who crafted this strategy. Each member shared their expertise related to their professional role and/or life experience, which made this final strategy more complete and informed. This strategy is only possible because of their leadership.

**Allie Harrison, Missoula Faith Leaders**

**Anne Hughes, Missoula County**

**Clint Whittle-Frazier, Franklin to the Fort Leadership Team**

**Eran Pehan, City of Missoula**

**Jed Dennison, Zillastate**

**Jill Bonny, Houseless Leaders Group**

**Kathryn Wiltfong, Providence/St. Patrick Hospital**

**Kathy Glover, Community Member**

**Keegan Flaherty, Strategic Alliance for Improved Behavioral Health**

**Michael McGee, Houselessness Experience Community Member**

**Renee Running Rabbit, All Nations Health Center**

**Robert Stokes, Community Member**

**Sam Oliver, Missoula Housing Authority**

**Samantha Hilliard, City of Missoula**

**Sydni Goodman, Community Member**

**Toby Gobert, Community Member**