



Executive Summary  
Ten-Year Plan  
To End Homelessness in  
Palm Beach County, Florida



## **HOW WE WILL END HOMELESSNESS**

Homelessness does not discriminate. It does not occur only to a unique group, class or type of individual or family. It is rarely that a single factor can be attributed to an individual's condition of homelessness, and is most often the result of a complex set of circumstances, a tragic consequence for those who are unable to resolve a wide range of life challenges. Homelessness is, unfortunately, a growing element of our local and national landscape.

While there are many presumed causes of homelessness, a lack of affordable health care, domestic violence, mental illness and addiction disorders among them, two leading factors are most often cited: a lack of affordable housing and an increase in poverty, both of which are prevalent in the Palm Beach County community. The continued disproportionate rise in living costs in comparison with the stagnancy of wages is culminating in the inability of a growing number of individuals to achieve and maintain housing stability.

Palm Beach County has a long tradition of motivated community members who have taken individual and collective action to remedy social injustices as they relate to homelessness. Community stakeholders are in agreement that the system of targeted homeless services in the County is generally strong, and that many effective and innovative programs are already in place. Despite the considerable efforts to stave this growing social epidemic, progress has been slow because the existing homeless response system is somewhat fragmented and built on a system of managing, rather than ending homelessness, and because resources are insufficient to address the issue's root causes.

Ending a complex problem such as homelessness is a daunting task, one that requires time and patience from all involved. It requires a willingness to examine the assumptions under which we have approached this issue in the past, an openness to honestly and critically assess our past and current initiatives and ultimately, to changing current systems of care, redirecting existing resources, and securing additional funding. Most importantly, it requires *commitment* from ALL members of the Palm Beach County community – government officials, philanthropists, faith and civic groups, social service agencies, small and large business owners, housing and service providers, and concerned citizens.

To affirm the need for, and to further the realization of a unified endeavor, as well as to demonstrate its own commitment to, and leadership in ending homelessness, the Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners established the Palm Beach County Homeless Advisory Board in May of 2007. The Board was chartered with, among other responsibilities, the task of preparing and overseeing the implementation of this *Ten-year Plan to End Homelessness in Palm Beach County*. The combined efforts of the members of the Board and a multitude of service provider representatives led to the adoption of this comprehensive and aggressive Plan in July of 2008.

In order to be successful, the individuals and entities behind this Plan's implementation will focus on: formulating systems to accurately measure the extent of the problem; systematically evaluating the levels of success of existing programs; identifying models successful in other communities that can be replicated in our own community;

advocating on behalf of homeless individuals and families in order to influence public perception, bring about policy change and the availability of sufficient funding, and ensuring that service providers have the resources to offer the levels of services that are necessary to have a true and lasting impact on the rate of homelessness in Palm Beach County.

This Plan outlines a strategy to design, fund and develop permanent housing solutions for our homeless population. Until our housing solutions come to fruition, however, it is important that our current systems enhance how individuals and families are connected to services and temporary supportive housing options, which are critical to both attaining and maintaining long-term independence. This Plan creates an integrated, countywide response to ending homelessness that encourages and supports collaboration, offers long-term solutions and is fiscally responsible. It is presented as a living document, one that will evolve as additional needs are recognized, as solutions are identified and as progress is made.

## **THE SEVEN GOALS**

The objective of the *Ten-year Plan to End Homelessness in Palm Beach County* is to create a local homeless response system that will completely eliminate homelessness in ten years. The Plan is presented in the form of seven goals, outlined in detail in Chapter Four of this document, and presented in a priority order not related to a proposed date of initiation, but according to the areas of greatest need, and the intensity in which their implementation will impact the problem. In order to meet these goals, a comprehensive set of action steps have been developed which address current gaps in services, particularly as they relate to a number of underserved populations whose specific needs are not currently being met by those services available in our community.

### ***GOAL 1: Develop a Universal System for Intake/Assessment and Enhance Client Information Management System***

A centralized, standard procedure (with 24-hour access) would improve upon the current system of accessing, tracking, and serving our County's homeless population.

#### **Proposed Outcome:**

By 2018, Palm Beach County's homeless response system will have created a County-wide process for the intake, assessment and management of homeless clients. Additionally, regional homeless resource centers will have been created throughout the County, providing supportive services that include: a universal intake process, interim beds when needed, 24 hour access, engagement centers, as well as medical and psychiatric assessments.

### ***GOAL 2: Provide Interim Housing Services for Homeless Individuals/Families***

When immediate permanent housing is not available, a need for interim housing options is essential. An increase in the number of interim housing beds is needed for individuals and families and could include the utilization of hotels and/or motels, particularly for

homeless families. Additionally, interim housing should include comprehensive case management and supportive services.

**Proposed Outcome:**

By 2018 Palm Beach County's homeless response system will have enhanced and increased the current number of interim housing options for homeless individuals and families. This system will include services for underserved homeless populations. The system will use hotel/motel vouchers to temporarily house homeless families. In addition, interim housing options will provide clients with individual case management and supportive services. Respite beds for individuals discharged from medical or psychiatric facilities will have been created.

***GOAL 3: Coordinate Partnerships and Resources for Homeless Services***

An effective Continuum of Care relies on the seamless coordination of community partnerships and resources. A collaboration and coordination of homeless services is needed in order to effectively address the issues of individual/family homelessness. The Plan must utilize and streamline existing resources when appropriate and seek additional resources when necessary. Additionally, the Plan ensures cost effectiveness and efficiency of the homeless response system.

**Proposed Outcome:**

By 2018, Palm Beach County's homeless response system will have effectively established a strong, collaborative approach to ending individual/family homelessness. This approach will coordinate the planning, funding, and delivery of housing and homeless services in Palm Beach County. These services will specifically target individuals and families who are either currently homeless or those who face the threat of becoming homeless. Additionally, these efforts will have increased both the success and cost-effectiveness of the homeless response system assuring long-term housing stability for the clients.

***GOAL 4: Improve Access to Homeless Services with Outreach and Education***

The current homeless outreach efforts in our County can be enhanced by coordinating additional support from other jurisdictions and resources. With increased support, these efforts can be expanded to include evening and weekend hours. Additionally, increasing public awareness on homeless issues can educate the community and improve access to the homeless response system for homeless individuals and families.

**Proposed Outcome:**

By 2018 Palm Beach County's current homeless outreach system will have been enhanced by the support of additional resources, including the coordination of local jurisdictions, faith-based organizations and other interested parties. Additionally, marketing and educational efforts will have been implemented to increase awareness of the issues surrounding homelessness and accessing homeless services.

***GOAL 5: Prevent Individuals and Families from Becoming Homeless***

Strategic investment in prevention initiatives can effectively prevent homelessness for groups of people at risk of losing their housing. Preventative measures should offer permanent solutions, with a special emphasis on increasing clients' income, creating more affordable/accessible housing options and improving clients' access to mainstream resources.

**Proposed Outcome:**

By 2018, Palm Beach County's homeless response system will have created, nurtured, and fully implemented an intervention system focused on preventing individual/family homelessness. This improved system will have created new education, training and employment opportunities along with supportive services needed to maintain employment.

***GOAL 6: Secure a Stable Stock of Affordable/Accessible Housing***

Homeless individuals and families often present with an array of challenges and needs, for which various housing strategies and accommodations are necessary. Offering permanent housing options along with supportive services through the Housing First methodology is the ideal model for ending homelessness. It is imperative to identify, secure and/or develop a dependable stock of affordable, accessible and safe housing options that can serve our homeless population. These various strategies should include transitional, permanent supportive, rental and homeownership options.

**Proposed Outcome:**

By 2018, our communities will have developed 4,000 units of affordable/accessible housing located throughout the County. The Plan will have assured that these units remain affordable and accessible on a long-term basis, and that they continue to support individuals and families who have been homeless. These units will not have been lost to market conversion or owners opting-out. In addition, our communities will have implemented effective policies, procedures, incentives, and dedicated resources to keep subsidized units available to extremely-low income homeless and formerly-homeless households. Finally, by "opening the back door" – a phrase often used when referring to the ability to move homeless individuals out of the shelter system by placing them in permanent housing – through the development of new permanent housing stock, the homeless response system will have achieved maximum use of its interim and transitional housing units.

***GOAL 7: Provide System Oversight and Evaluation of the Ten-year Plan***

The integrity and success of this Plan is dependent upon the consistent oversight and evaluation of each of its components, which include: Plan implementation, oversight of operations, management of funds and evaluation of all partners. The effort will include conducting research and collecting data that will routinely drive policy development. Best practice strategies will be researched and, where appropriate for Palm Beach County, replicated to improve existing models. Evaluation systems will be developed to accurately measure success. Providers must be accountable to meet certain standards and achieve success with their clients. Also, a key component of oversight and evaluation is the engagement of clients – those who are homeless and/or formerly homeless. Finally, service providers must receive appropriate training and resources to succeed.

**Proposed Outcome:**

By 2018, a system will have been created that provides regular oversight and ongoing evaluation of the Plan. Reliable research and data will have been collected to measure the progress and success of the Plan and reports will have been generated and distributed analyzing its effectiveness. Additionally, leadership duties will have been established for implementation and oversight of the Plan.

We begin this work at a time when homeless counts have been steadily rising, when federal and state governments are cutting housing and social supports, when the healthcare system is in crisis, when living-wage jobs are scarce, when our community is experiencing unprecedented home foreclosure rates, and when our nation is at war. Nonetheless, there is substantial work that can and must be done *today*.