BUILDING RACIAL AND GENDER EQUITY INTO COORDINATED ENTRY

Quiana Fisher (she/her), Claire Burrus (she/her),

Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO)

1. What our current data tells us

2. Building a new "table"

3. Increasing accessibility of the Coordinated Assessment

4. Reducing wait times for housing

5. Acknowledging our limitations

6. Next steps & ongoing conversation

Agenda

What Our Current Local Data Tells Us

- Black people in Austin/Travis County are **~6x as likely** as white people to experience homelessness

- Black and Hispanic/Latinx clients are more likely to report having been born and/or raised in the Austin area than white clients

- White clients are more likely than members of other racial/ethnic groups to be referred to Permanent Supportive Housing programs

What Our Current Local Data Tells Us

- Transgender people are **disproportionately represented** in the population experiencing homelessness

- Transgender and gender non-conforming people experiencing homelessness are more likely to report **experiencing violence** while living unhoused
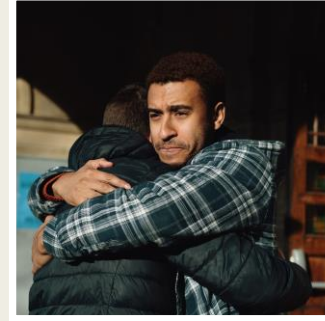
Building a New "Table"

- Austin/Travis County CoC governance restructure

  - CoC Board & Committee composition requirements

  - Compensation Policy

- Equity Committee

  - Purpose: "To eliminate racial disparities within the Homelessness Response System, to increase the safety and accessibility of the Homelessness Response System to LGBTQ clients, and to address intersections of marginalization or groups that would not be served equitably without explicit focus."

Building a New "Table"

Authentic engagement and **relationship-building**

with Black-led organizations in the community that are *already working* with the population experiencing homelessness

Acknowledging the harm of historical exclusion

Understanding the ongoing work these groups are doing

Reducing systematic barriers to participation in the CoC

Building a New "Table"

How do we continue authentic engagement and maintain relationships once people are brought to the new table?

- Compensation

- Changing roles

- Establishing an open and safe environment

- Taking it slow

Acknowledging the harm of historical exclusion

Understanding the ongoing work these groups are doing

Reducing systematic barriers to participation in the CoC

Building a New "Table"

- Challenges
- Lessons Learned
- Continuous Improvement Mindset

Building partnerships with community-based groups

Coordinated Entry is the "front door" to the system – our goal is to build new "front doors" where people are already at

- Capacity building work
  - Funding opportunities
  - Technical assistance
- **Example:** Austin Street Outreach Collaborative ("ASOC")

Investing in Qualitative Research

- 2022 research project: *"Toward Racial Equity in Street Outreach for People Experiencing Homelessness in Austin"*

  - Community-based participatory methods

  - Asset mapping

  - 1:1 interviews

Building a new Coordinated Assessment Tool Based in Local Data

- Historically, Austin used the VI-SPDAT as the CA tool

  - White clients consistently scored higher on the VI-SPDAT than Hispanic/Latinx and Black clients

- NEW Austin Prioritization Assessment Tool ("APAT" – previously "API")

  - Questions in 3 categories: (1) History of Homelessness,
    (2) Health Conditions Associated with Disparate Health Outcomes,
    (3) Barriers to Housing

  - Black and Hispanic/Latinx clients score higher than white clients, and transgender clients score higher than cisgender clients on the APAT

Building a new Coordinated Assessment Tool Based in Local Data

September 2019

December 2019

August 2021

October 2021

Developing and piloting

ECHO publishes the 2019 Racial Disparities Report, revealing the inequitability of the VI-SPDAT for Black and Hispanic/Latinx clients in Austin/Travis County

The Austin/Travis County Homelessness Response System establishes the Equity Task Group to build a replacement assessment tool

The Austin/Travis County CoC Board (Leadership Council) approves the APAT for implementation in the Coordinated Entry process

APAT officially goes into effect

Reducing Wait Times for Housing

Building a new Coordinated Assessment Tool Based in Local Data

- Process:
  1. Potential CA questions were piloted in the CA workflow, at the end of the assessment for every client
  2. Statistical analysis (chi-square tests) with a racial and gender equity lens was performed on pilot data on a rolling basis
  3. Results of the analysis were shared with the Equity Committee to inform decision making for the final tool proposal

Reducing Wait Times for Housing

Building a new Coordinated Assessment Tool Based in Local Data

- Guiding questions:
  - *What is the purpose of the Coordinated Assessment in our Homelessness Response System?*
  - *What factors affect a client's ability to self resolve?*
  - *What factors affect the risk of harm a client may experience as a result of delaying housing?*

APAT Questions that Support Racial Equity

Health Conditions Associated with Disparate Outcomes

- *Advanced age*
- *==Minor children==*
- *==Pregnancy/breastfeeding==*
- *Healthcare access*
- *HIV/AIDS program interest*
- *==High blood pressure==*
- *End stage disease*
- *Challenges in meeting daily needs*
- *Mental health*
- *Substance use*

History of Homelessness
- Frequent unsheltered homelessness
- Length of current homelessness
- Frequency of homelessness
- Harm or threat of harm

Barriers to Housing
- ==Education==
- ==Foster care history==
- ==Juvenile justice history==
- Criminal history barriers to housing
- ==Austin born/raised==
- ==Gentrified Austin ZIP raised or last permanently housed==
- ==Raised in multi-generational household==

APAT Questions that Support Gender Equity

Health Conditions Associated with Disparate Outcomes

- *Advanced age*
- *Minor children*
- *Pregnancy/breastfeeding*
- *Healthcare access*
- *HIV/AIDS program interest*
- *High blood pressure*
- *End stage disease*
- *Challenges in meeting daily needs*
- *Mental health*
- *Substance use*

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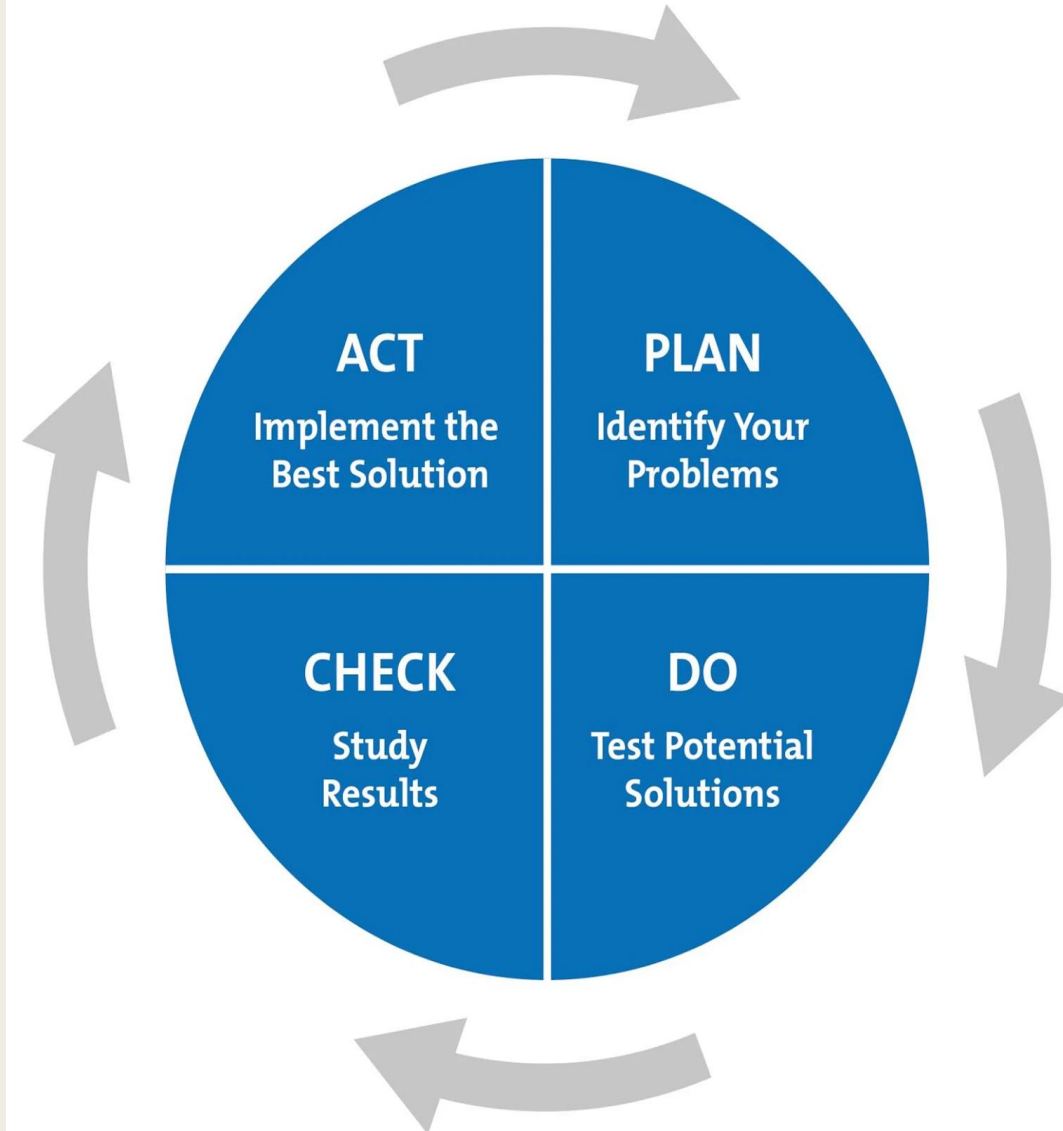- Frequency of homelessness
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Barriers to Housing
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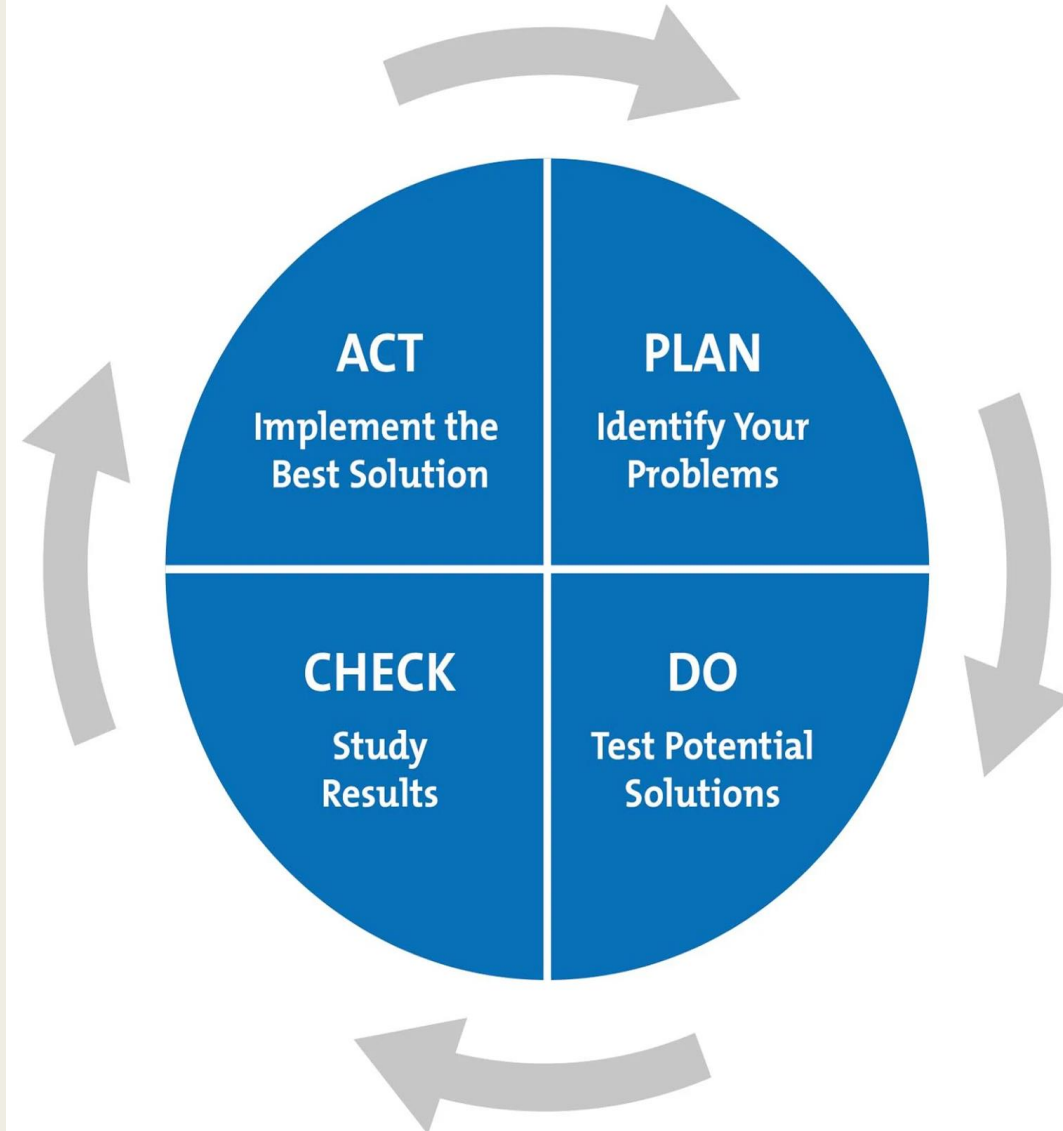# Reducing Wait Times for Housing

Continuous Improvement Cycle

- The APAT today is not the final version of the tool

- Improvements to the APAT are continuous and ongoing

- As the APAT was tailored to our community's needs, and our community is ever changing, the tool is as well

Reducing Wait Times for Housing
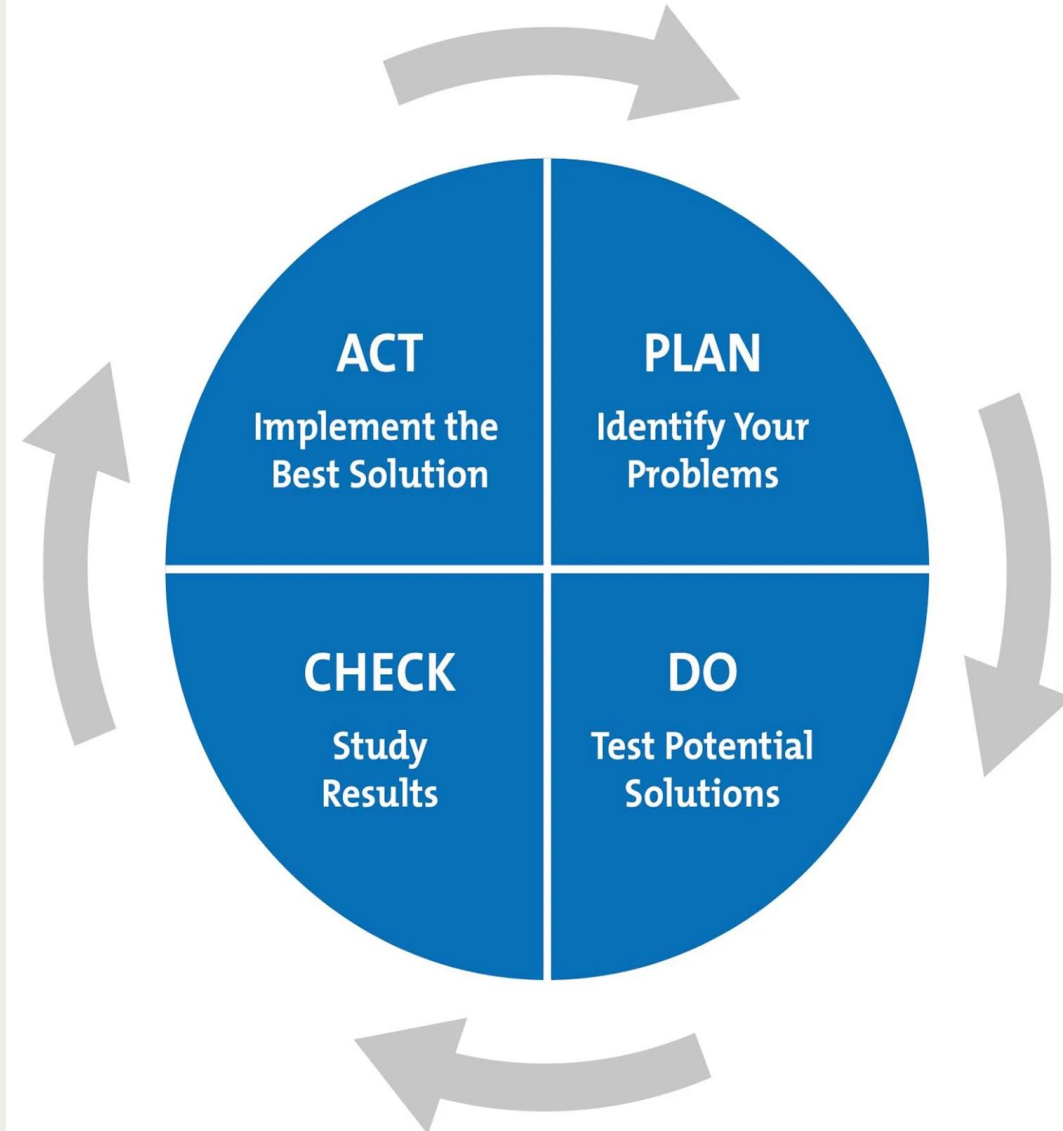
What we've done since October 2021

- Changed age threshold for "advanced age" point allocation on the tool to 50+
- Continued pilot for questions designed to prioritize transgender people experiencing homelessness

What we've done since October 2021

- Proposed new pilot questions that reflect the ever-changing landscape of Austin and the population experiencing homelessness in the community
  - *Criminalization of homelessness*
  - *Prevalence of camp sweeps*

Acknowledging Our Limitations

We still have very long wait times for housing

- This will not change until we have adequate housing program and affordable housing stock to move clients into

Assessor bias can still have an impact on client scoring

- Interpersonal bias

- Geographic accessibility

Acknowledging Our Limitations

The politics surrounding the Coordinated Entry System impact our ability to roll things out and the speed at which we can do so

Community buy-in

- Emergency shelter system

- Day centers and navigation centers

- Housing partners

- City of Austin

Next Steps & Ongoing Conversation

As our prioritization mechanism changes, how should service provision change accordingly? How do we become responsive to the client population entering our housing programs?

- Community investment
  - *Budgets*
  - *Staff Structures*
- Tough conversations in coalition spaces

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