



Menu

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Houston, we have a solution: How the city curbed homelessness

A photograph showing a homeless encampment under a bridge in Houston. Several tents are set up on the gravel ground, and a person is walking through the area. A bicycle is parked on the left. The bridge structure is made of concrete beams and pillars.

Juan A. Lotano/AP/File

A stylized graphic of a house. The roof is a solid orange shape with a white triangular cutout in the center. The base of the house is a solid dark purple shape, resembling a wide 'H' or a rectangular foundation.

Coalition for the Homeless

Mission:

- To provide leadership in the development, advocacy, and coordination of community strategies to prevent and end homelessness.

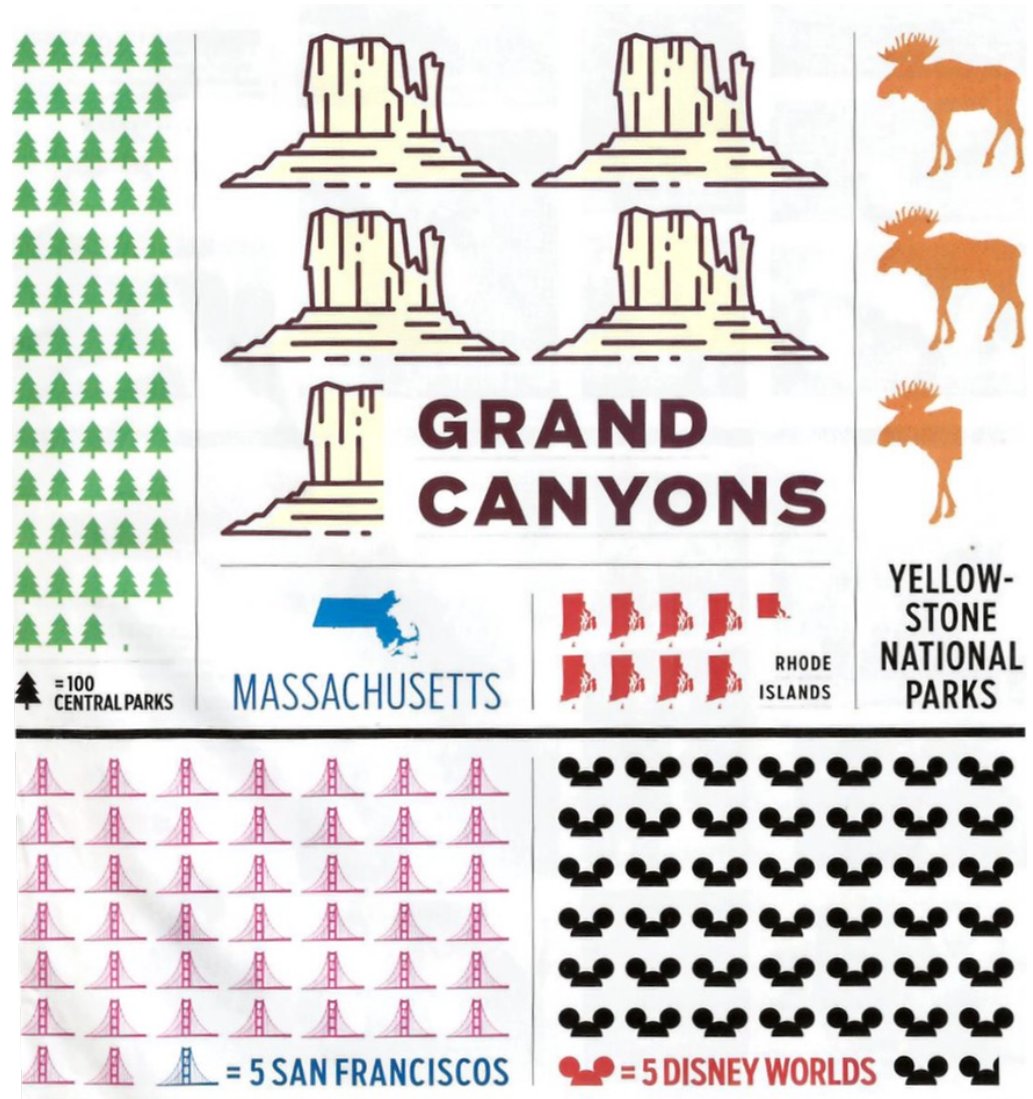
Role:

- Coordinate the community response to homelessness
- Lead agency for the TX-700 Continuum of Care (CoC)
- Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) lead
- Coordinated Access Lead

The Way Home

- The collaborative model to prevent and end homelessness in Harris, Fort Bend, and Montgomery Counties
- Comprised of 100+ stakeholder partners from all sectors of the community
- Since 2011:
 - 63% reduction in overall homelessness
 - 25,500+ people housed
 - 85% average long-term success rate in permanent housing

How big are we?



Geographic Area – 3,711 sq miles



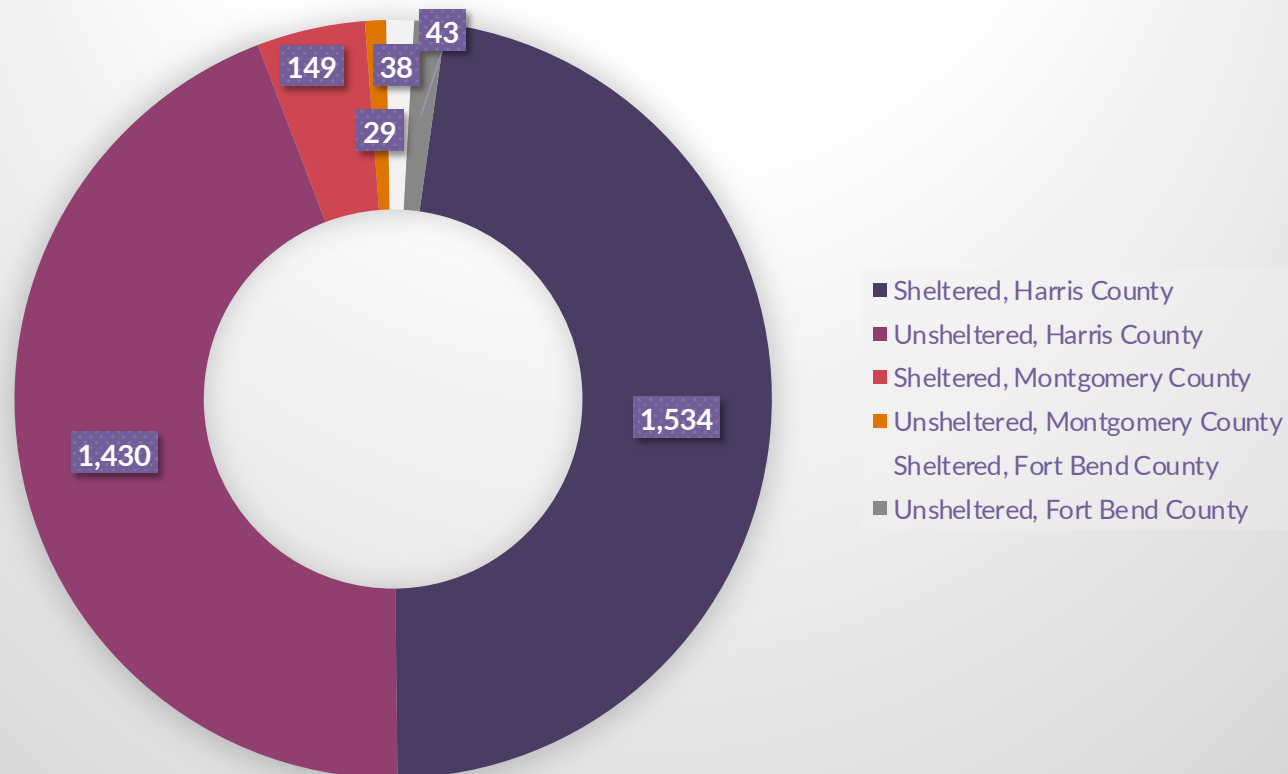
2022 Homeless Count Results

- 1,502 (47%) staying place not meant for human habitation
- 1,721 (53%) staying in emergency shelters, transitional housing, or safe haven that evening.



3,223
PERSONS

COUNTED IN HARRIS, FORT BEND,
AND MONTGOMERY COUNTIES



**Total Number
of those
Experiencing
Homelessness
by Interview
Location**

spotlight on...

HOUSTON MAYOR: WE HAVE EFFECTIVELY ENDED VETERAN HOMELESSNESS



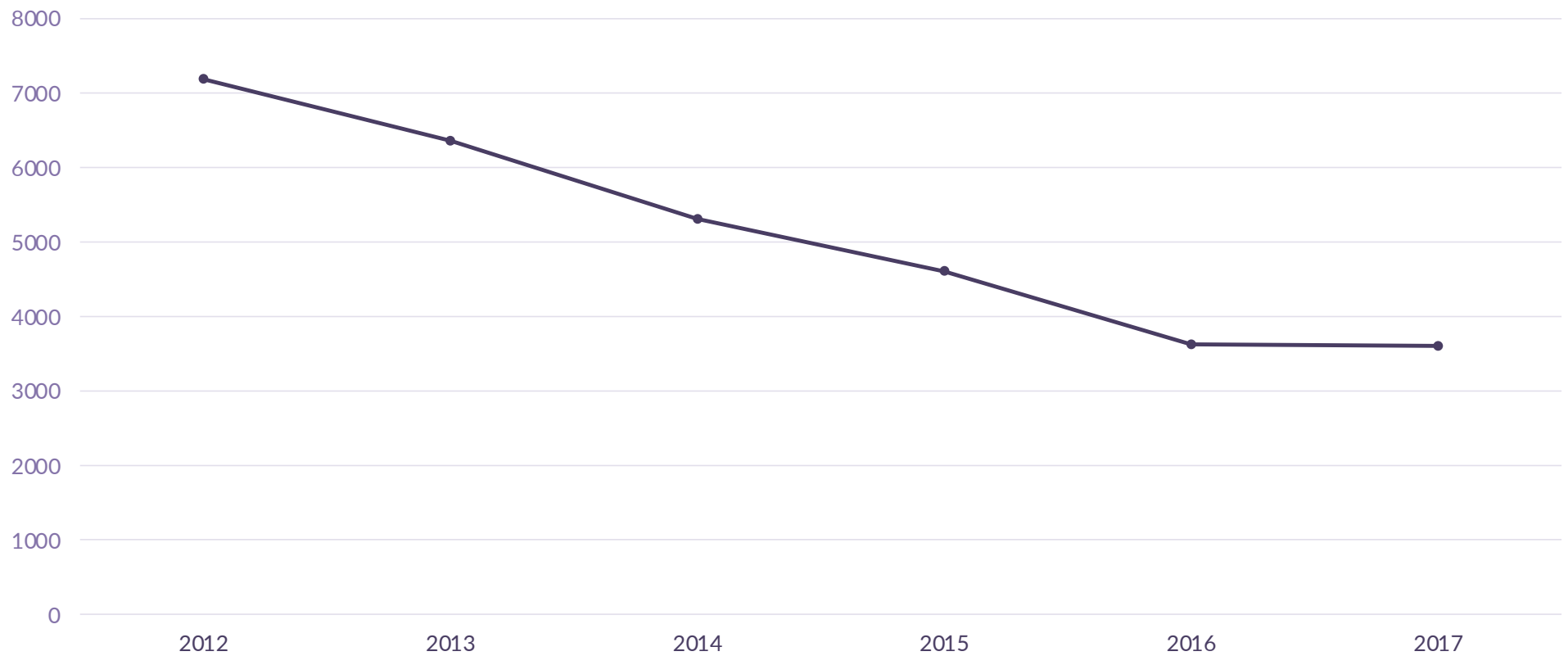
Congressman Al Green, Mayor Annise Parker, U.S. Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert F. McDonald, U.S. Housing and Urban Development Secretary Julián Castro, U.S. Department of Labor Secretary Thomas E. Perez, Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee, and U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness Executive Director Matthew Doherty. Photo courtesy of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development

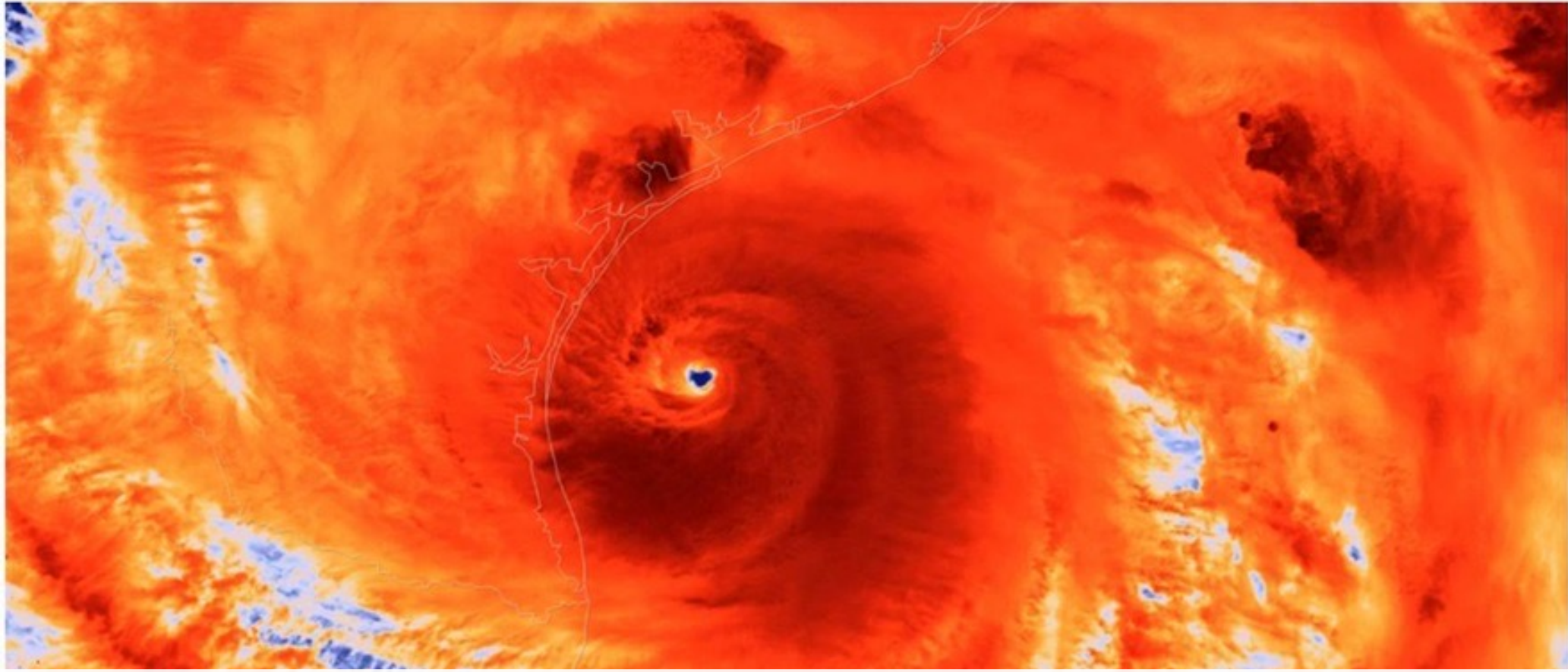
Houston Effectively Ends Veteran Homelessness

Becomes Largest City in the Nation to Create System to House any Homeless Veteran

June 2015

Homeless population cut in half during these years





Hurricane Harvey – August 2017

NOAA/NASA

Source: NOAA



Tidwell St
Before

Tidwell St
After



Source: Houston Chronicle



Source: Houston Chronicle

After Harvey Effects

More than 19 trillion gallons of rainwater fell on parts of Texas, causing widespread, catastrophic flooding

Nearly 80,000 homes had at least 18 inches of floodwater, 23,000 of those with more than 5 feet

The Houston area experienced the largest amount of rainwater ever recorded in the continental United States from a single storm (51.88 inches)

24 hospitals were evacuated, 61 communities lost drinking water, 23 ports were closed, 781 roads impassable

Nearly 780,000 Texans evacuated their homes, more than 42,000 housed temporarily in 692 shelters

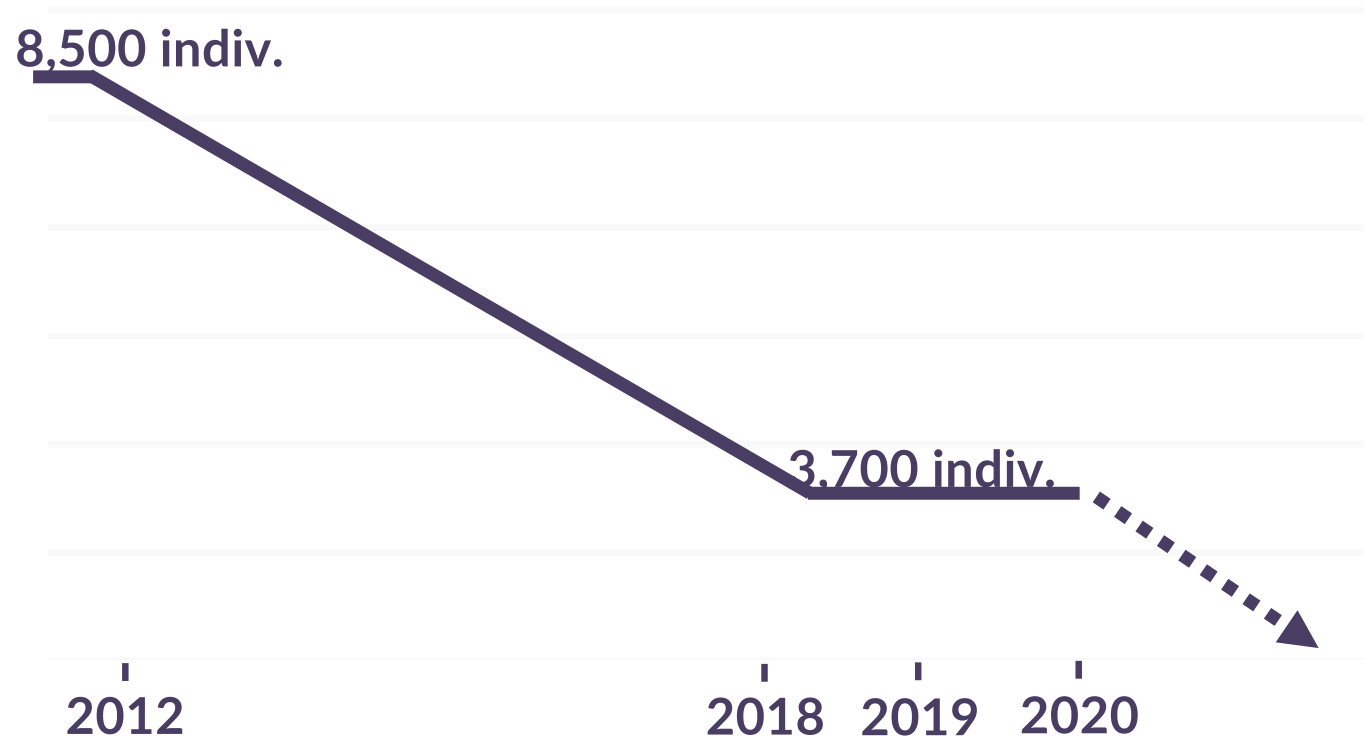
Local, state and federal first responders rescued 122,331 people and 5,234 pets

Houston Housing Authority estimated 1000 affordable housing units destroyed

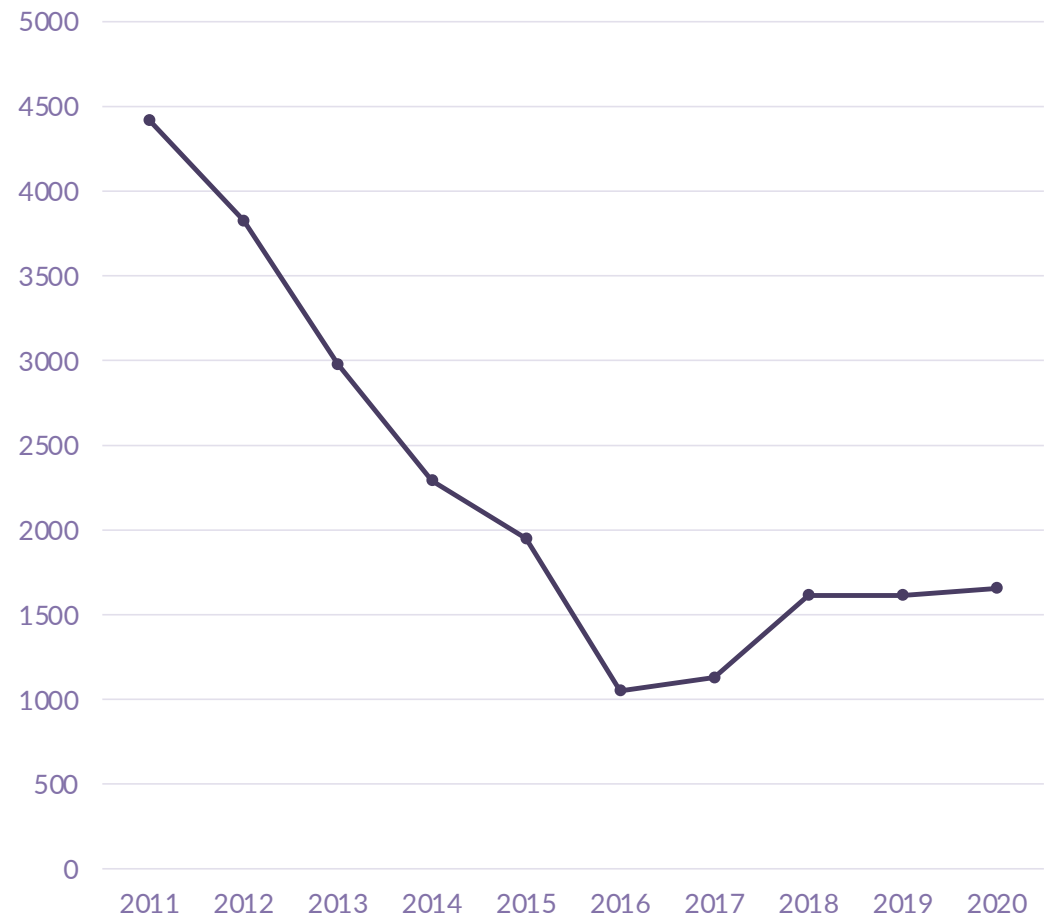
CoC Homeless Population

- Since 2012, more than 21,000+ individuals experiencing homelessness had been permanently housed.
- Nearly 90% remained housed two-years after placement.
- After reducing homelessness by 54%, we saw an 18% increase after Harvey.
- Much attention & resources were diverted to respond to the disaster.
- Our region's homeless population became stagnant, due to a lack of financial resources and tools.
- Continued support needed to "get over the hump"

8,500 indiv.



Increase in unsheltered homelessness



.....

The “rise” in street “issues”

54% homeless population

Visibility



A photograph showing an encampment under a concrete bridge. The ground is dirt and littered with various items including a tent, a wheelchair, a bicycle, a large white bucket, and a grey trash bin. A person is visible in the background near some more belongings. The bridge's concrete beams are visible overhead.

Let's close an encampment!

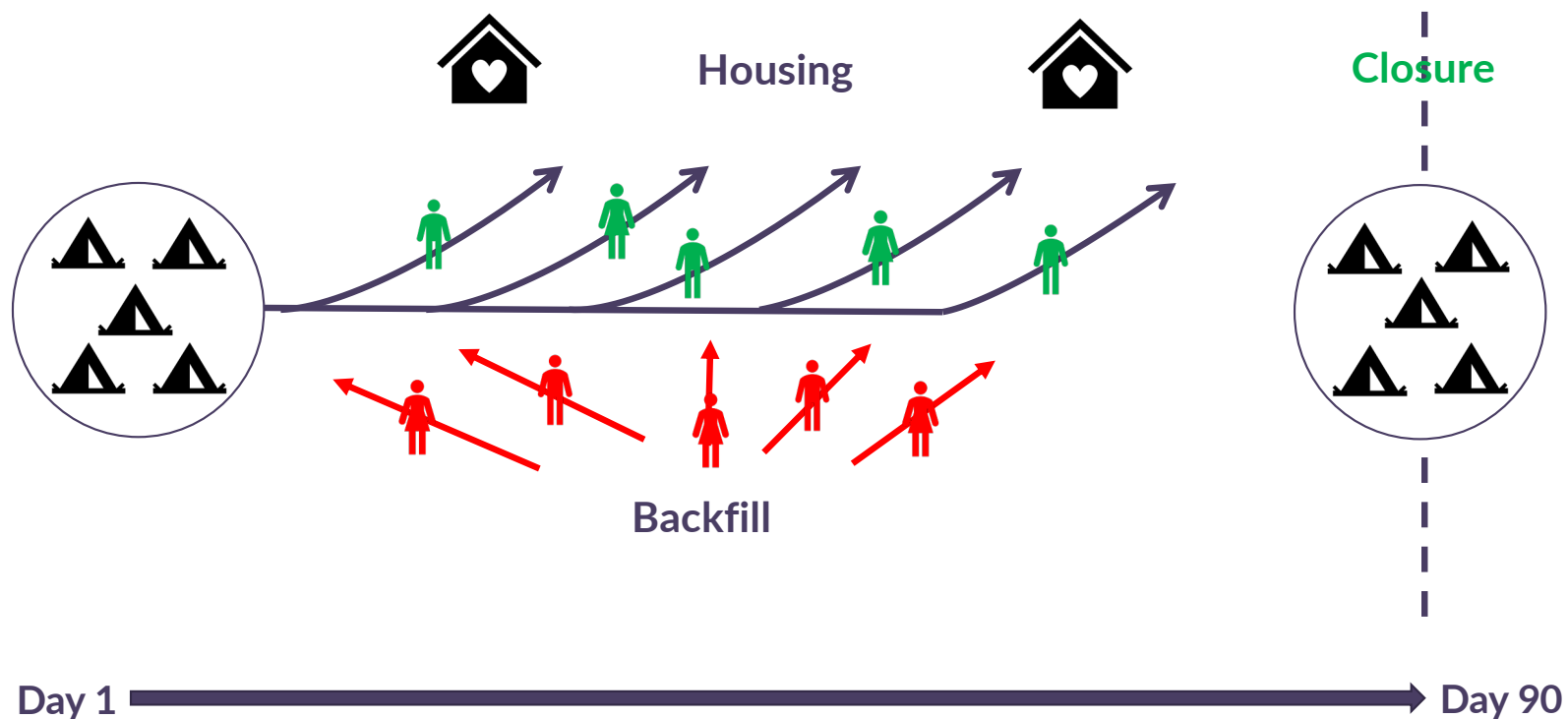
- Wheeler Encampment (Caroline & Alameda)
 - March 2018
 - 73 individuals
 - ✓ 73% housed
 - ✓ 5% refused
 - ✓ 22% left

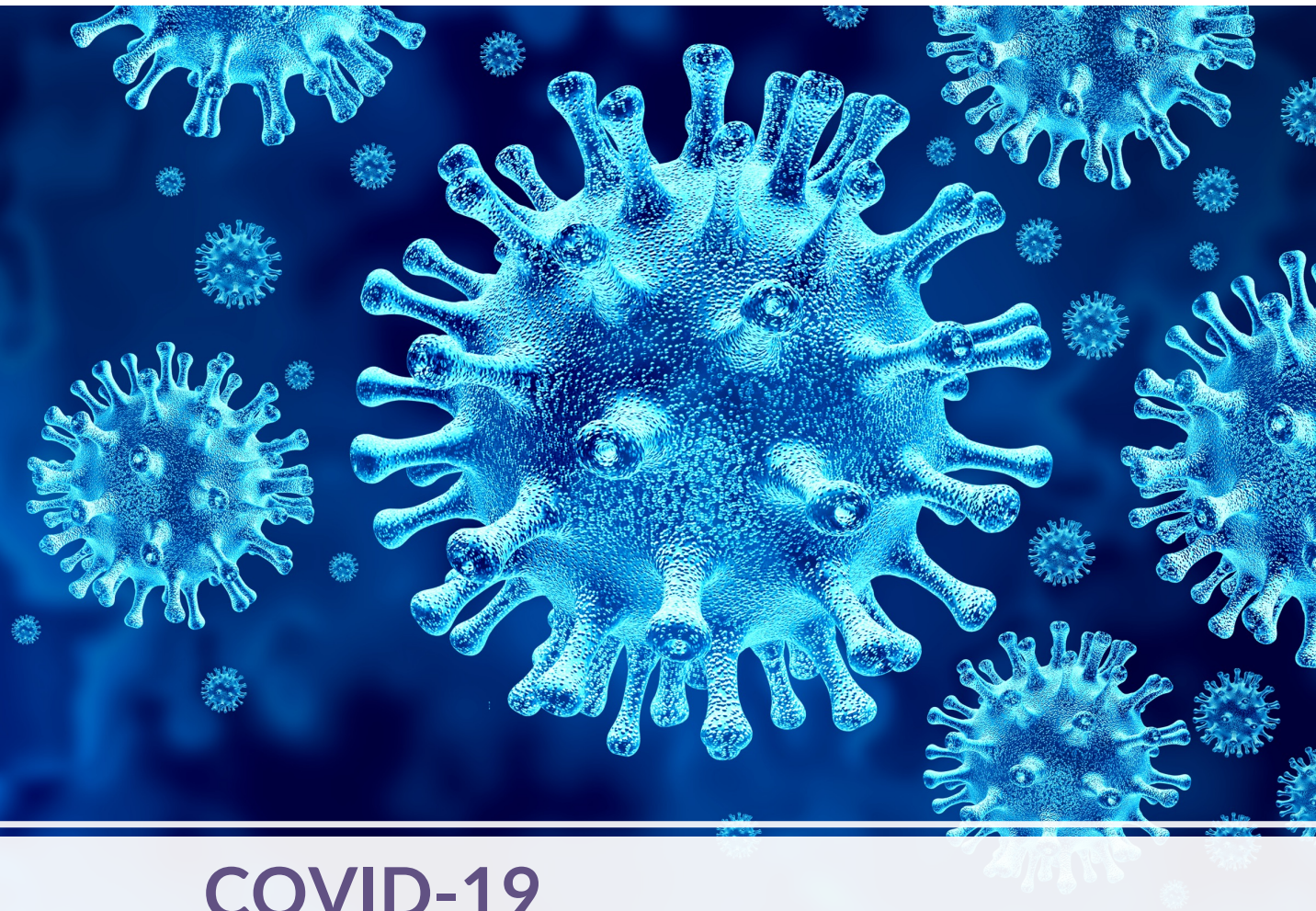
Housing Harvey's Homeless – H3

- September 2019
- Chartres Encampment (near Minute Maid)
- Several areas in downtown
- \$2,500,000
 - Qatar Harvey Fund via Mayor Turner's Complete Communities Improvement Fund
- \$500,000
 - Downtown Management District
- 286 individuals
 - 70% housed
 - 8% refused
 - 22% left




Initial Lessons Learned





COVID-19



Coronavirus Aid, Relief, & Economic Security Act (CARES)

- ❖ Individuals experiencing homelessness are more likely to contract the virus & more likely to require critical care if infected
- ❖ Can't socially distance if you're living on the streets
- ❖ City & County needed help in putting funds to best use
- ❖ Opportunity for large-scale impact
- ❖ Intended to be used as a public health tool to house the homeless



CCHP

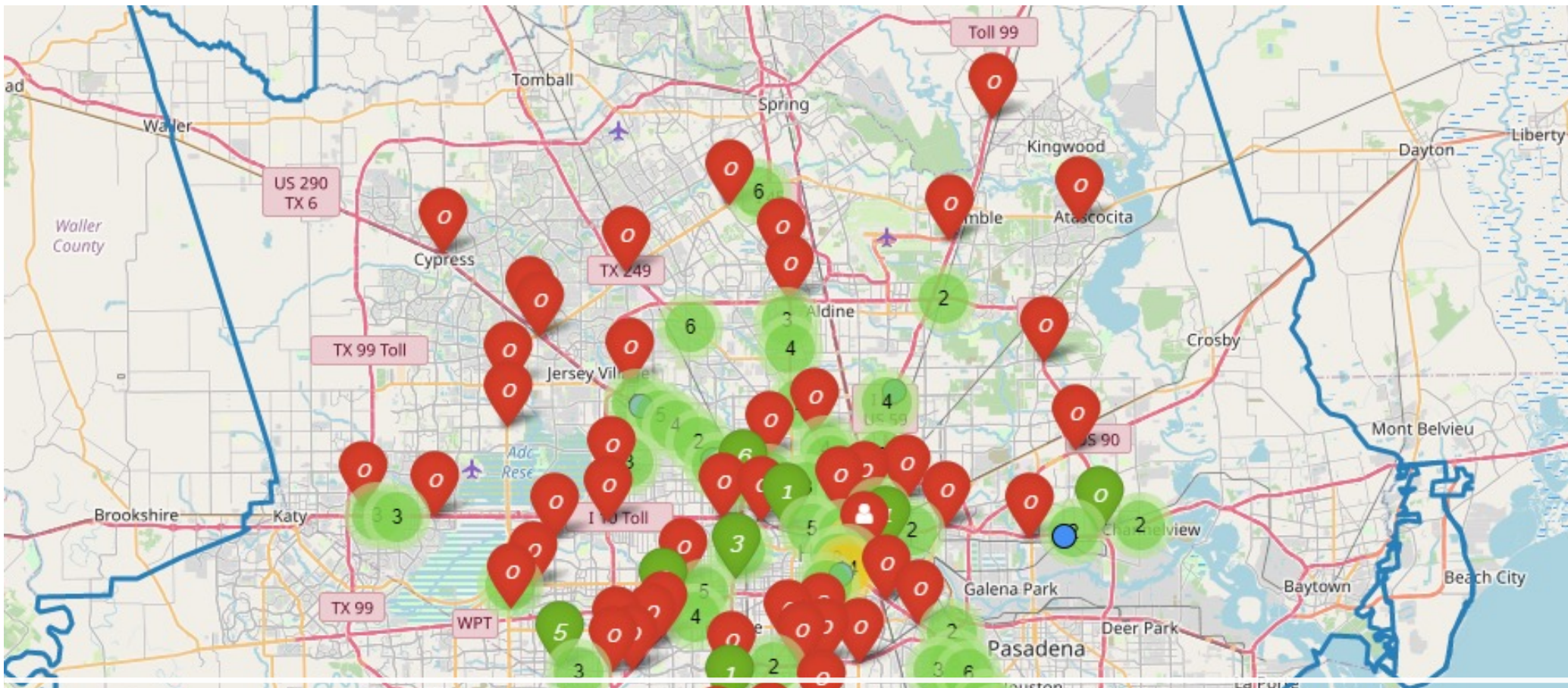
- On July 1, Harris County, Houston, & the Coalition announced \$65M plan to serve 5,000 people by October 2022

Housing is healthcare

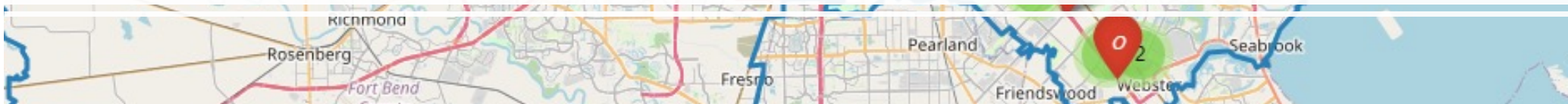


Encampment Response Strategy

- The CCHP allowed for the roll-out of an Encampment Decommissioning program that has demonstrated proven results in placing individuals living on the streets into housing.
- Official [Encampment Response Strategy](#) available.
- Currently being used by as a national best practice.
- Houston Chronicle [cover story](#) featured our efforts.



Coordinated Encampment Response



Why target encampments?



New resources



Living conditions



Visible & public opinions



Greater risk of COVID exposure

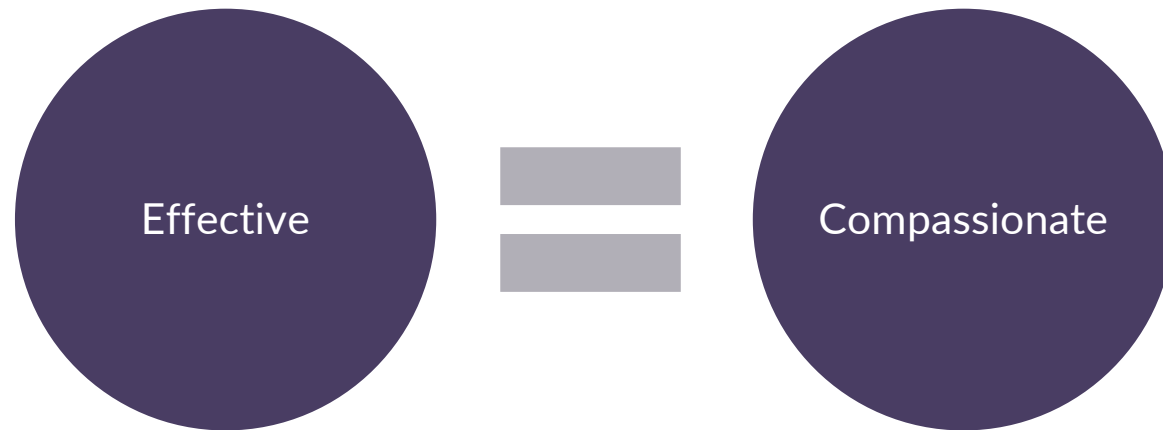


If we know the people residing in them, then we can better target them for services.

Guiding Principles

- Houston/Harris County does not endorse sanctioned encampments as a response to unsheltered homelessness. Forcibly relocating individuals to designated camps is not an effective strategy.
- All people can be housed, with the right housing model and service supports.
- To the greatest extent practicable, individual choices about where and how to live should be honored.
- Addressing encampments requires collaboration from multiple sectors and systems; no single entity can or should have exclusive responsibility.
- Non-punitive, engagement-focused approaches are more preferable than enforcement, clearance, and criminalization. Enforcement approaches should be strategically combined with housing offers to address broader community health and safety interests.
- Intensive and persistent outreach and engagement is the key to building trust among persons living in encampments.
- Persons in encampments do best with clear, low-barrier pathways to permanent housing.
- Permanent housing placements must be followed by support services to ensure individuals are successful in maintaining their housing.

What is the right
equation?



Our Approach

“Surge” Strategy Plan



Dedicated Outreach Teams



Dedicated Housing & Landlord Engagement Teams



Defining Encampments

Large Encampments

- Concentration of 10 or more people,
- Use of structures for sustained habitation (cardboard boxes, tents, non-permanent structures),
- Evidence of sustained presence - trash piles, cooking fires, shopping carts.

Small Encampments

- Concentration of 3 – 9 people in a definable location,
- Use of structures for sustained habitation (cardboard boxes, tents, non-permanent structures),
- Evidence of sustained presence, although degree/visibility may be less than large encampments.

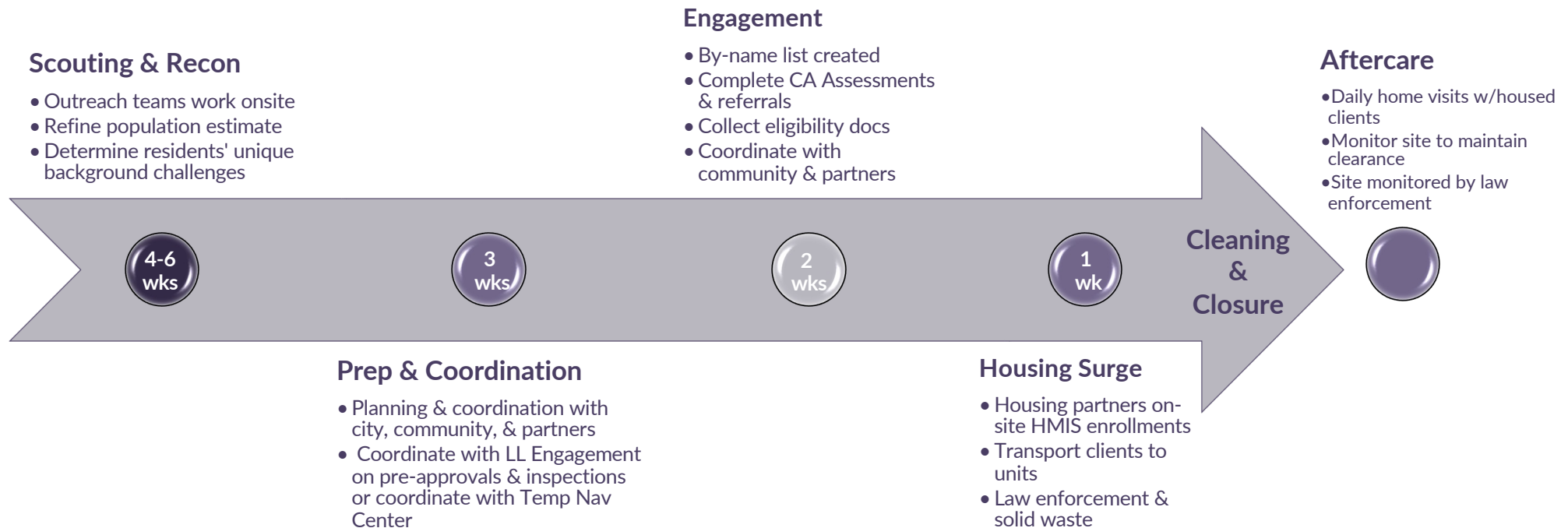
Hot Spots

- 1 - 3 people in a definable location,
- Evidence of bedding down but not sustained presence in the same location for sustained periods of time greater than one week.

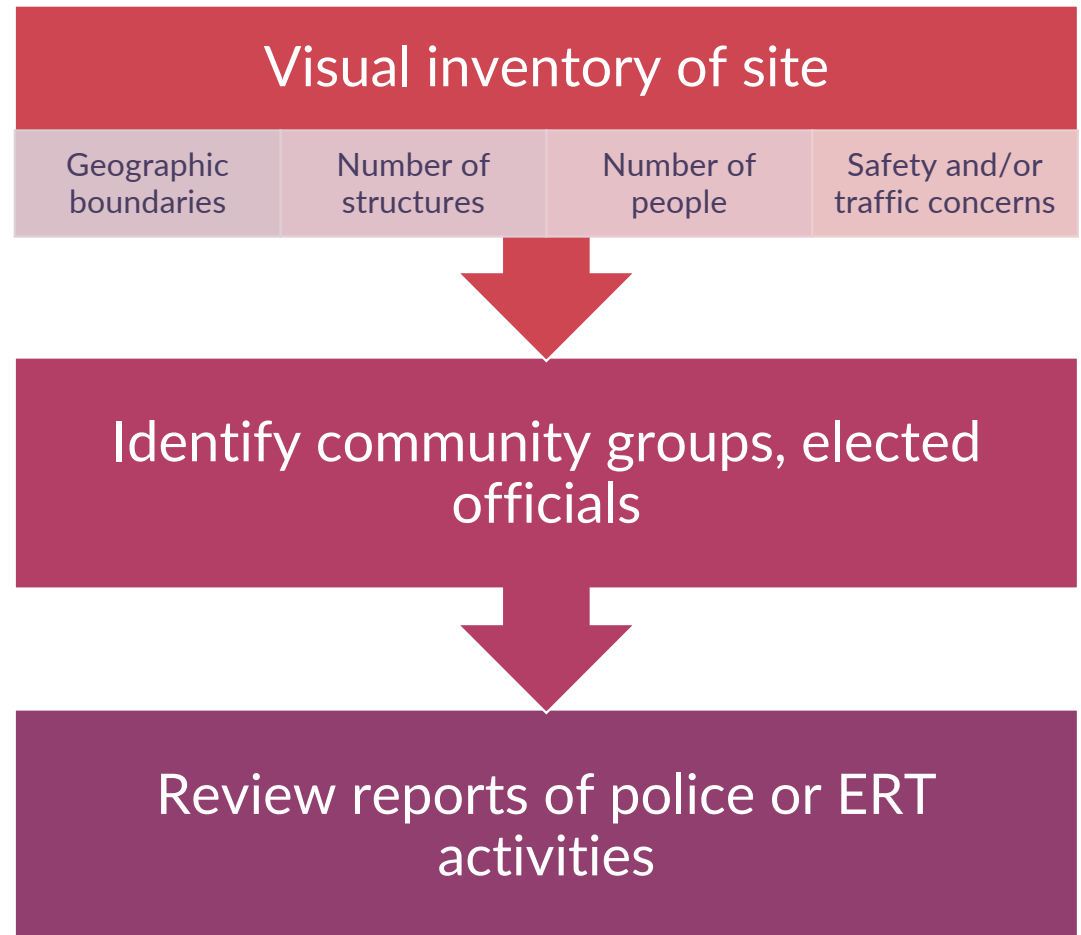
Selecting Encampments for Remediation



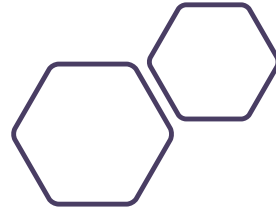
Decommissioning Timeline



**4-6 Weeks Prior:
Site Identification
&
Reconnaissance**



4 Weeks Prior – Site Assessment



- Document location characteristics
- Vulnerability of population
- Solid waste needs
- Confirm schedule for closing
- Brief community staff & elected officials
- Brief outreach teams & determine roles

3 Weeks Prior:

Engagement Begins

Outreach teams
start working
with clients

- Create by-name list
- Refine challenges or issues
- Identify housing intervention for each client
- Collect needed documents

First briefing
with partners

- Review roles & commitments

2 Weeks Prior: Encampment Response

Outreach continues intensive engagement

- Ensure CE assessments completed
- Confirm services & housing needs
- Identify missing documents & plans for securing them
- Medical appts set for disability verification

Ongoing planning with partners

Landlord Engagement Team presents availability & location



1 Week Prior: Confirmations

Outreach continues intensive engagement

- Confirm by-name list
- Confirm structures to be removed
- Confirm storage needs for clients

Second briefing with partners

- Confirm partner roles
- Confirm number of staff involved

Landlord Engagement Team

- Units available
- Location
- Pre-approvals initiated
- Process Landlord Engagement Fees

Confirm with clients that encampment will be decommissioned

- Closure notice posted



Housing Surge Week: All Hands-On Deck



Encampment Response PMs

- Coordinate all work & communication

Outreach teams

- Provide engagement & navigation support
- Support move-ins
- Identify belongings for trash or storage
- Identify temporary shelter for clients not able to move in

Landlord Engagement Team

- Point of contact with LLs
- Secure additional units if necessary
- Management changes, application issues, denials in real-time

Transportation

- Transport clients to move-ins

Case Managers

- HMIS enrollments, upload documents, unit applications.

Law Enforcement & Solid Waste

- Support engagement
- HOT IDs as necessary
- Remove belongings & trash

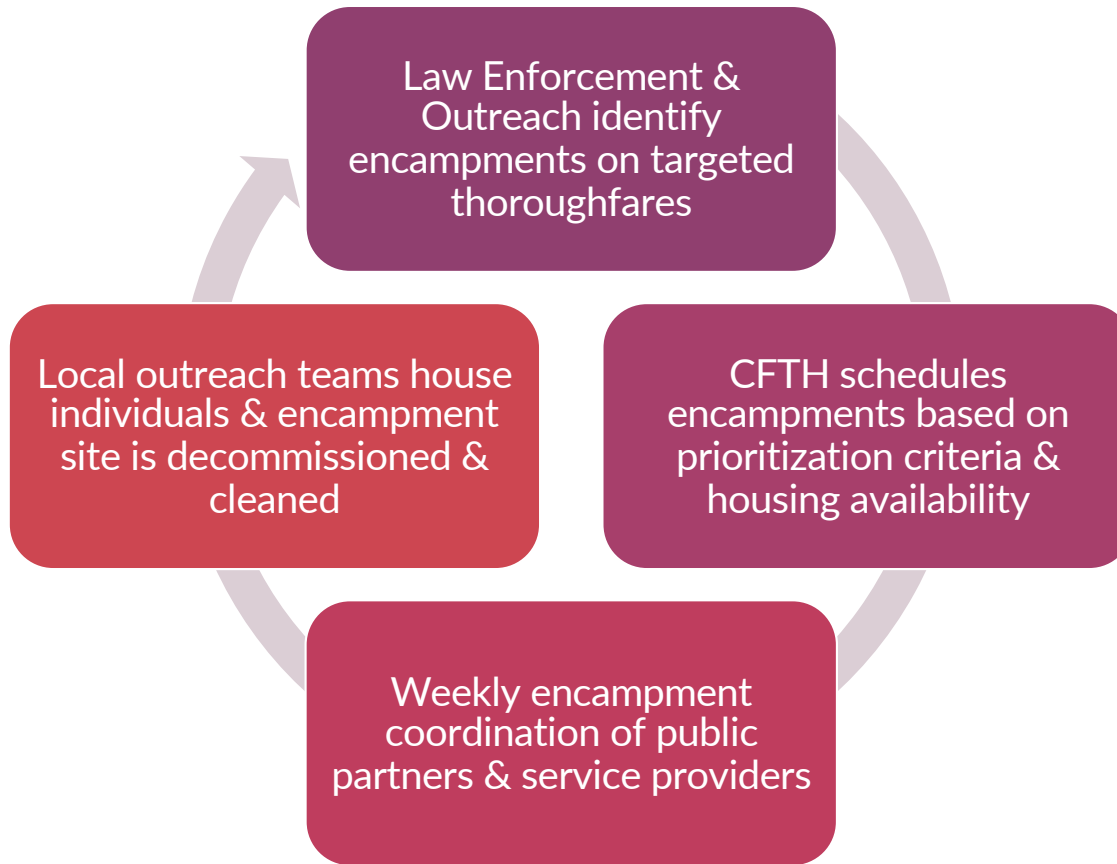
Aftercare

Daily site-visits with housed clients

Outreach continues engagement

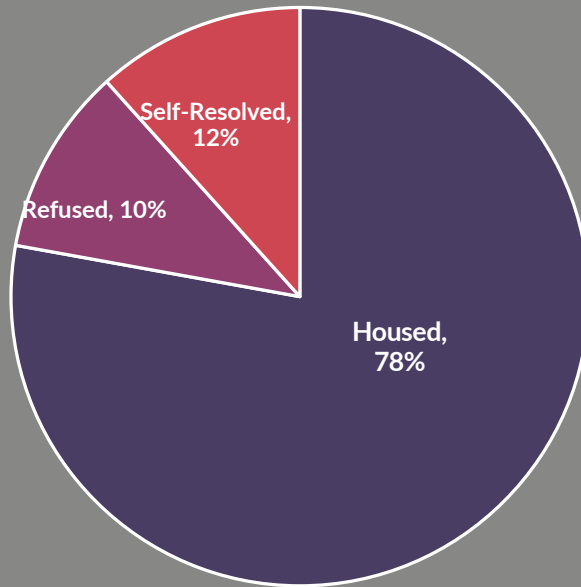
- Site monitored to maintain clearance
- Clients in temporary shelter moved in

Site monitored by law enforcement

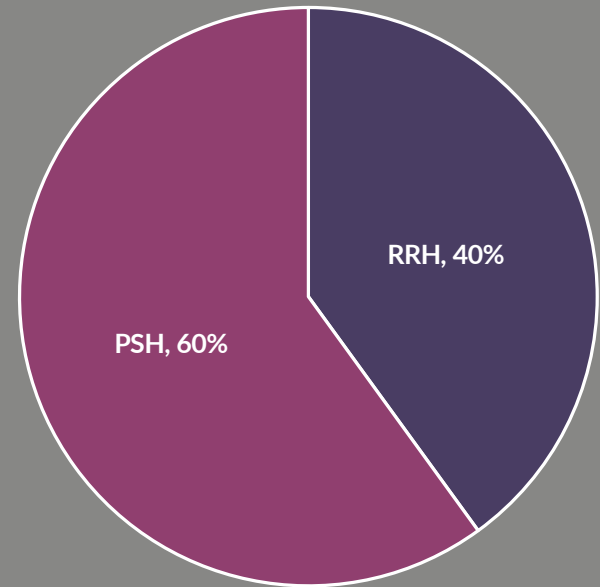


Rinse & Repeat

Individuals Engaged, n=343

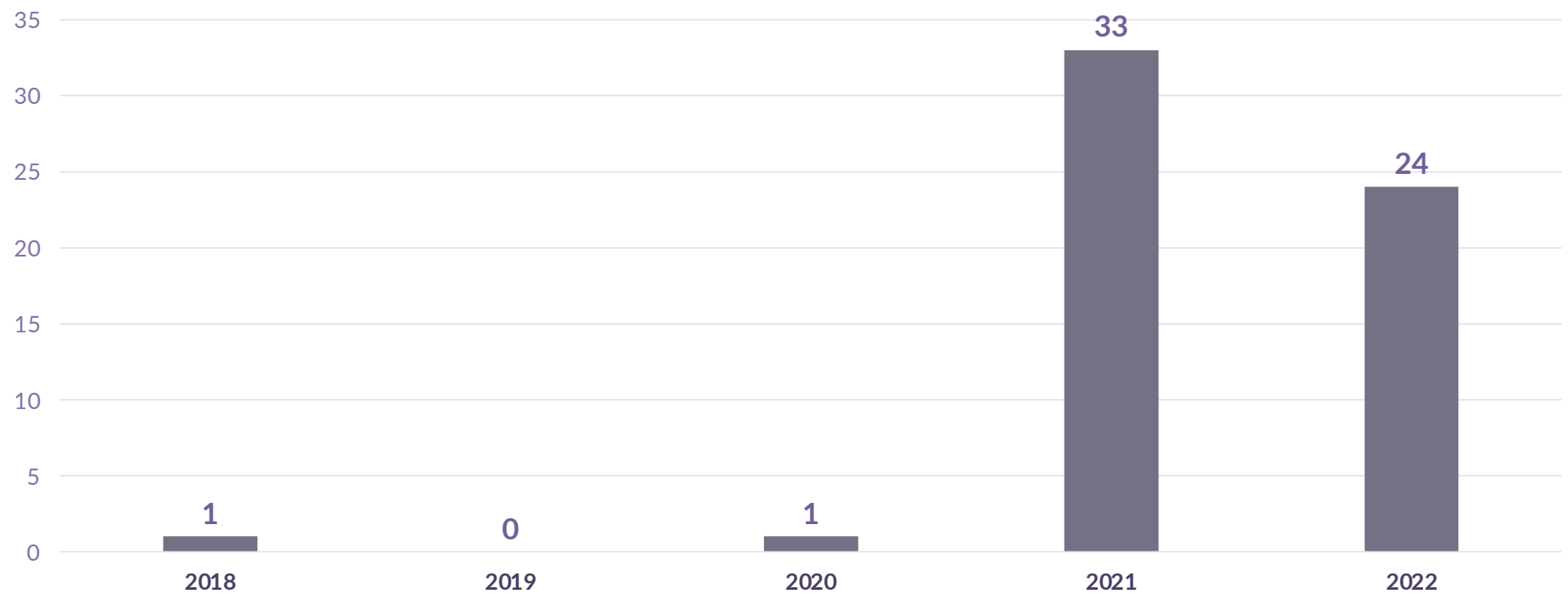


Permanent Housing



Encampments
Decommissioned - 57

Encampments Decommissioned through Housing

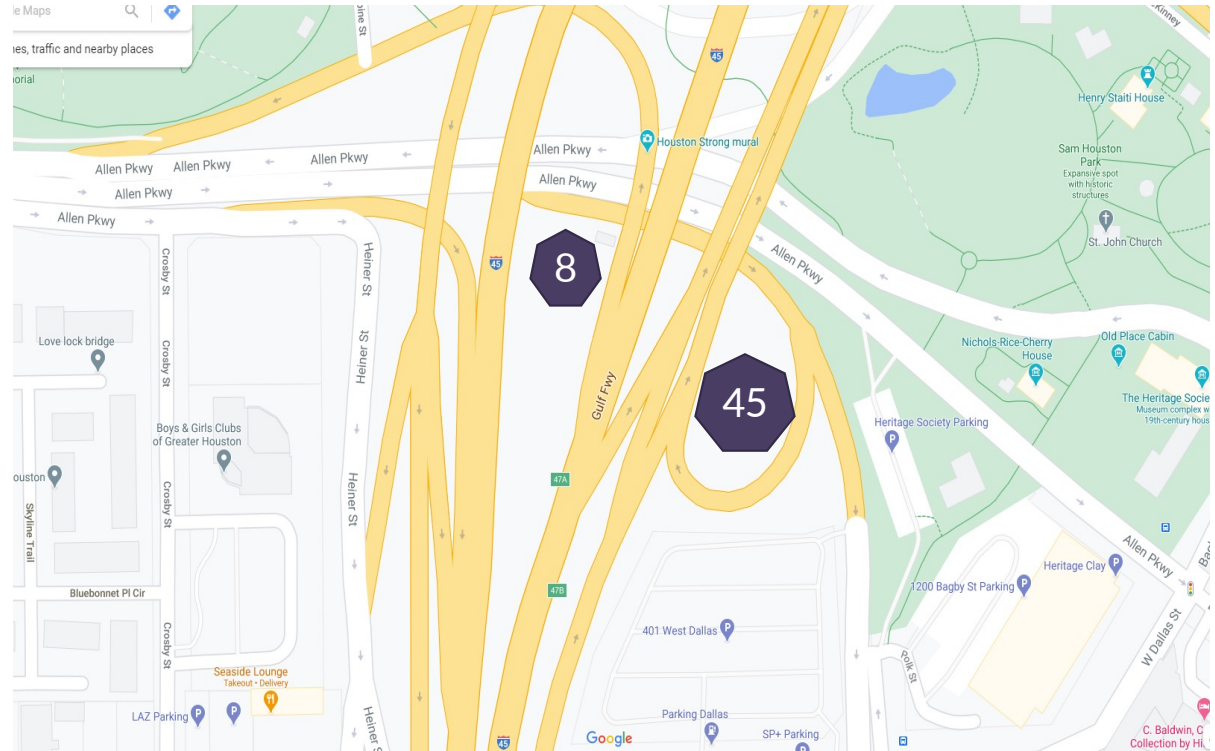




What Does
It Look Like?

Allen Parkway

- Two Sections
 - 53 Individuals
 - 27 PSH eligible clients
 - 26 RRH eligible clients



Before





After

Results

47 Individuals Housed



```
graph TD; A[47 Individuals Housed] --> B[3 Self-Resolved]; B --> C[3 Refused];
```

3 Self-Resolved

3 Refused



Spur @ Milam & Alabama

Before



After





There is no
“I” in
Team!!



Lessons Learned

No Two Encampments are the Same

Start small

Integrated Care Teams

Referral Timing

Restoring Community Support in Housing First

COVID Waivers

Supportive Services are not optional

Remaining Challenges

01

Housing Availability

- Between October 1, 2020 – July 12, 2022, we have placed 5,315 people in permanent housing
- 73% of these are single adults or couples using 1-bedroom units

02

Funding Sustainability

- Federal pandemic related funding provided a unique, once-in-a-generation opportunity of increased funding that enabled Houston to substantially increase PH & decommission encampment
- Local stakeholders must figure out a way to continue funding efforts to maintain momentum once pandemic funding is exhausted

About Landlord Engagement

The Landlord Engagement Team is strategically-focused on expanding affordable housing in our system.



How does the LL Team help the system?


Help to increase the
number of affordable
housing units

Decreases the
amount of time it
takes to house
someone

Troubleshoot issues
with property
managers and leasing
office staff

Educate service
providers on best
practices for working
with Landlords.

Provide education &
support to demystify
assumptions
surrounding the
homeless population





Building Relationships

Onboarding

Weekly Check-ins

Monthly Workgroup

In Person Visits

Throw Money At It!

- Landlord Incentive Fees (LIF)
 - Nonrefundable
 - \$1,600 at move in
- Double deposits
- Damage fees
- Electricity payments



Units for Encampments



Program
Capacity

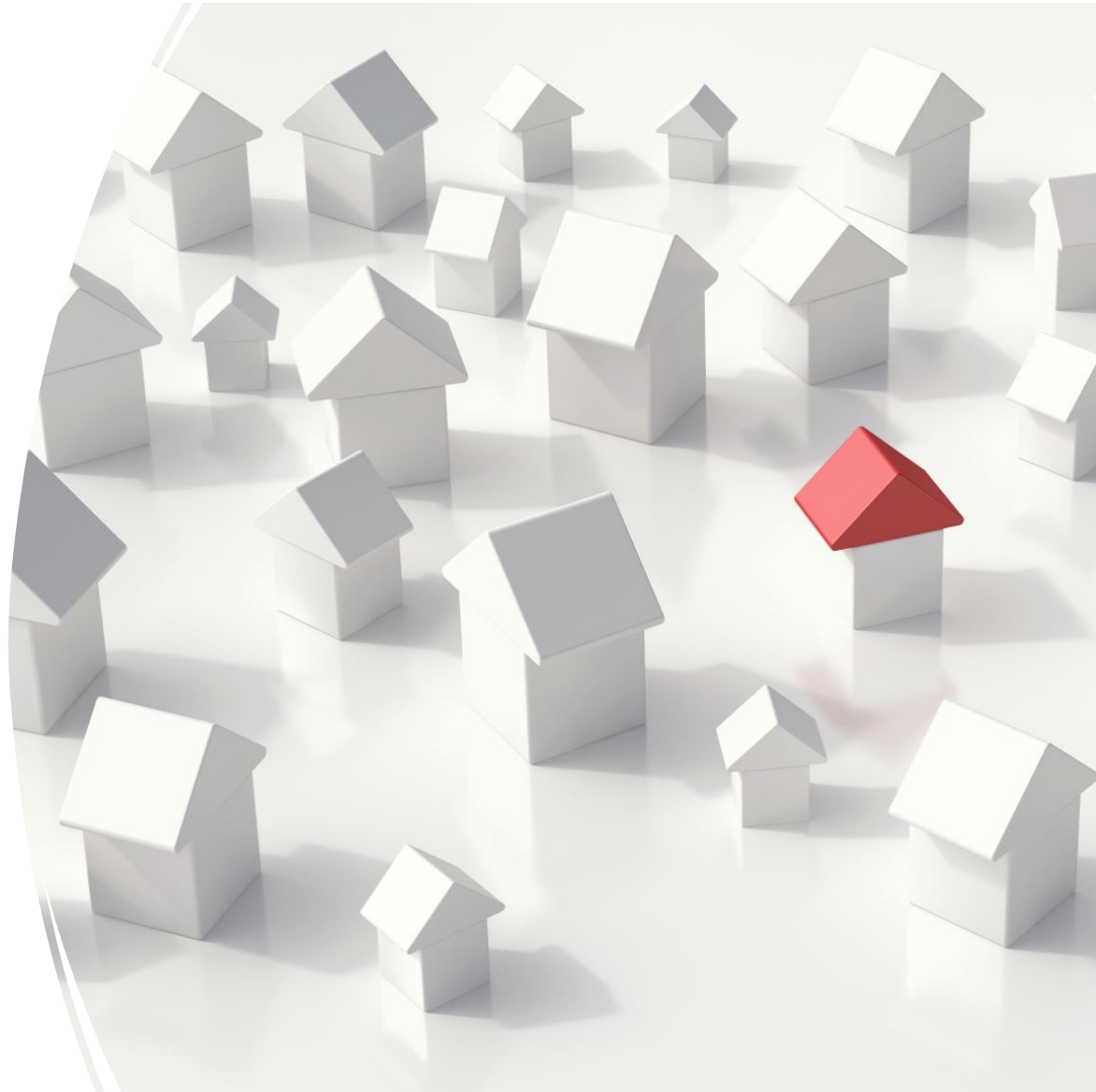
Triage Units

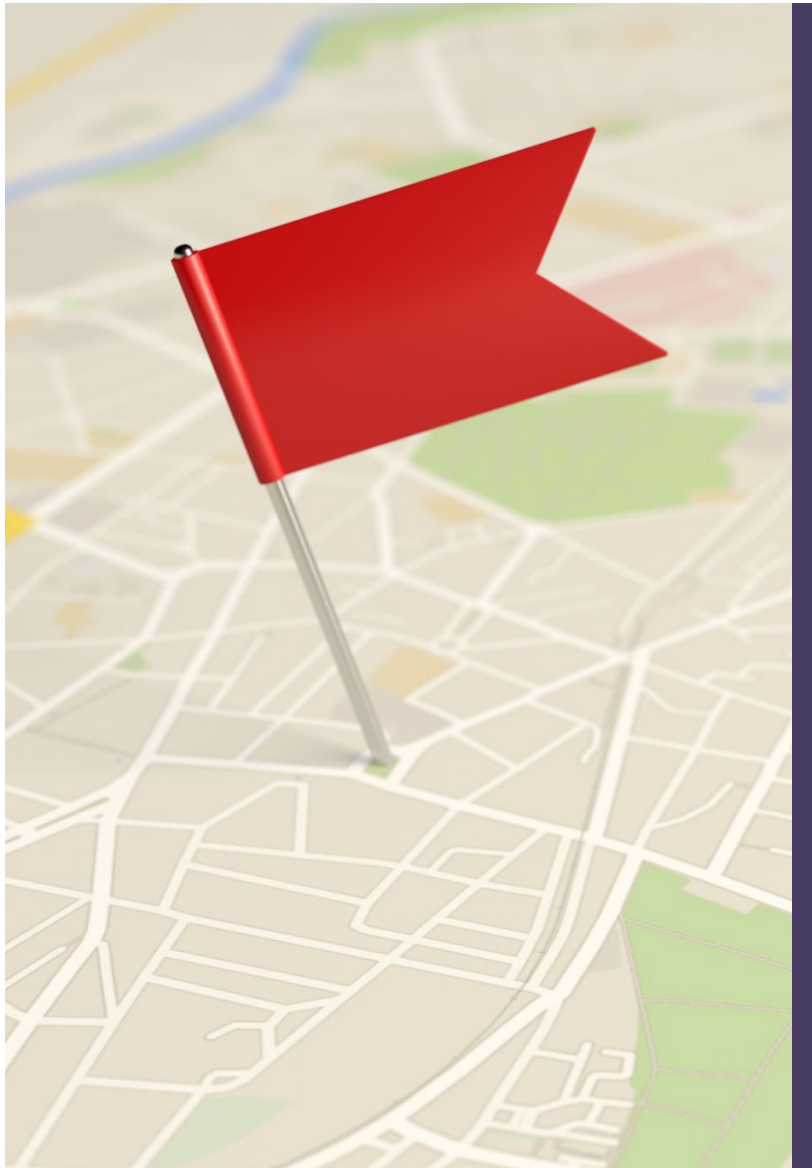


Rental
Assistance
Woes

Rules Changed

- Rental market shifted
- Financially not competitive
- Strict rental and background criteria





Navigation Center

- Funded by City of Houston
- Temporary location
- Not an emergency shelter

What's Next??



Shared
Housing

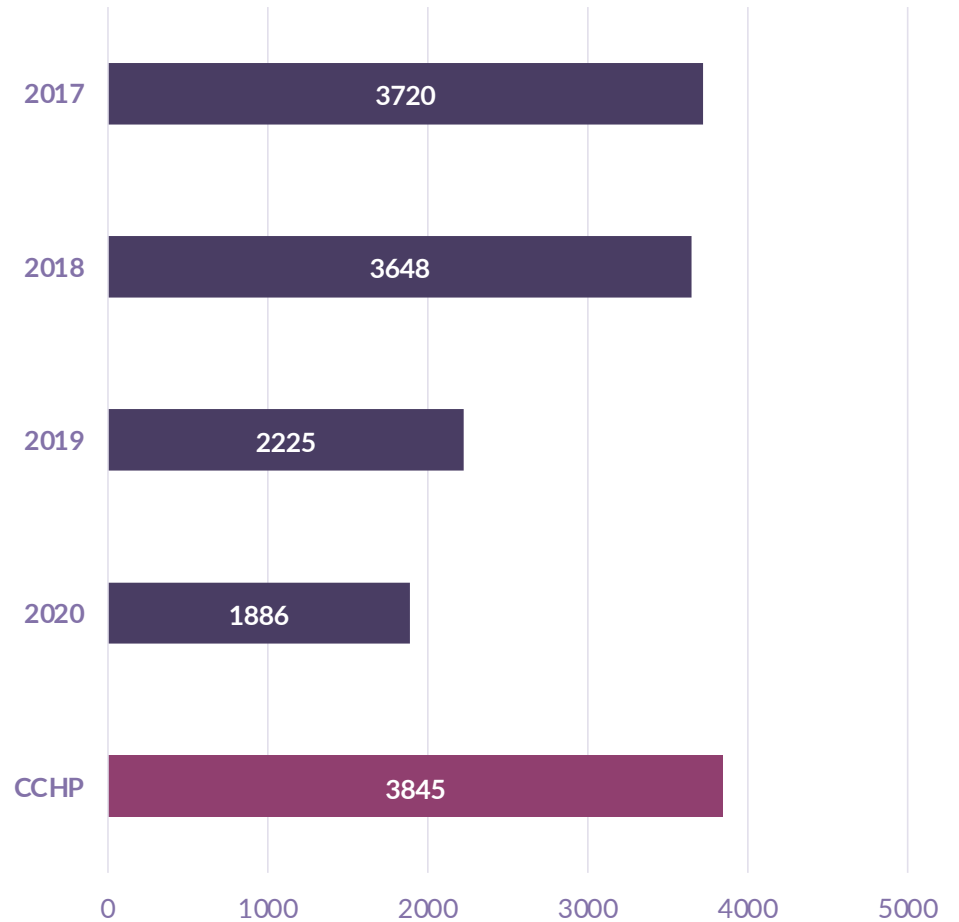
Leasing Units

Standardization
of Services

Evolution of
Incentives

CCHP Impact

We have housed as many people in one year of CCHP as almost the past two years combined, & more than the two years prior



Outcomes

PSH

- 80% of clients housed in PSH remain housed 6 months after exit.
- Result = 100% of PSH clients remain housed

RRH

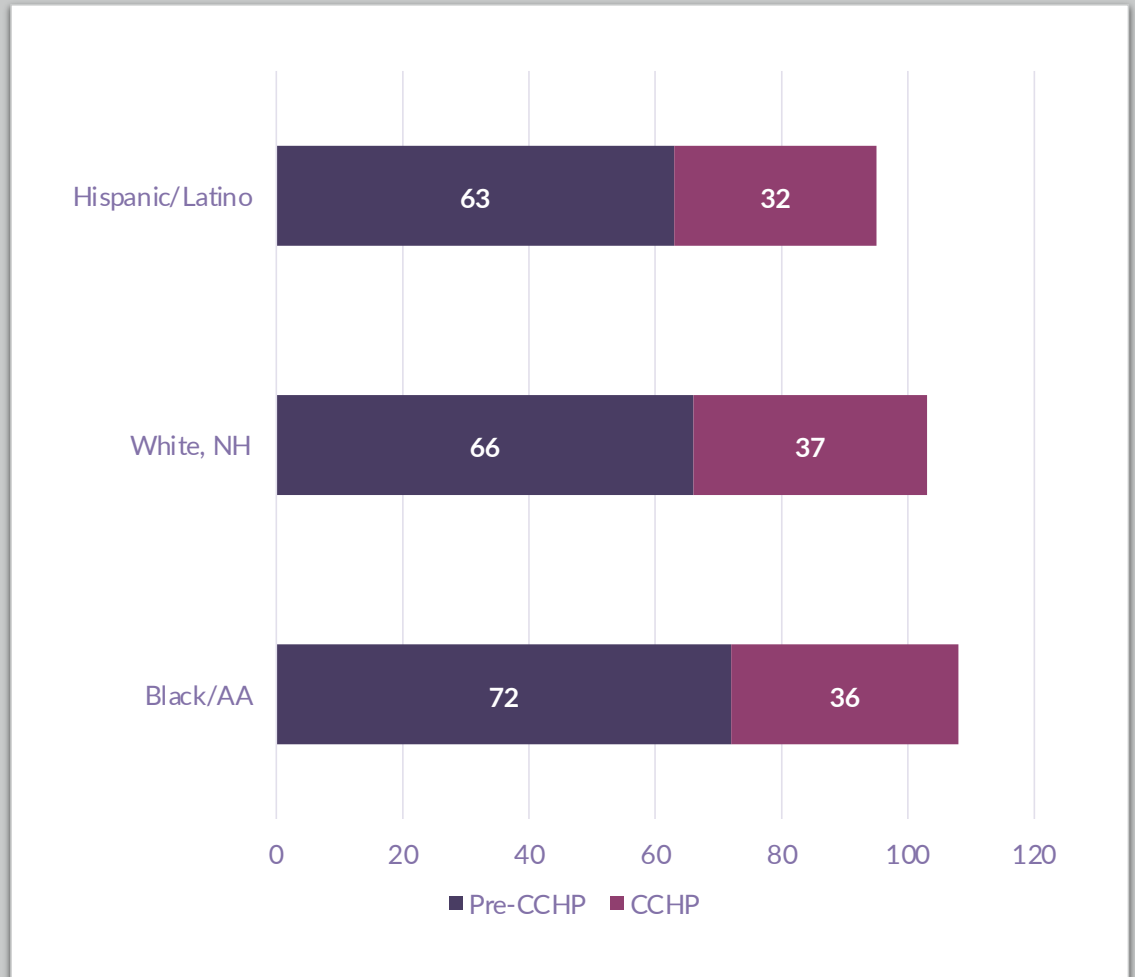
- 80% of clients housed in RRH remain housed 6 months after exit.
- Result = 98% of RRH clients remain housed

Diversion

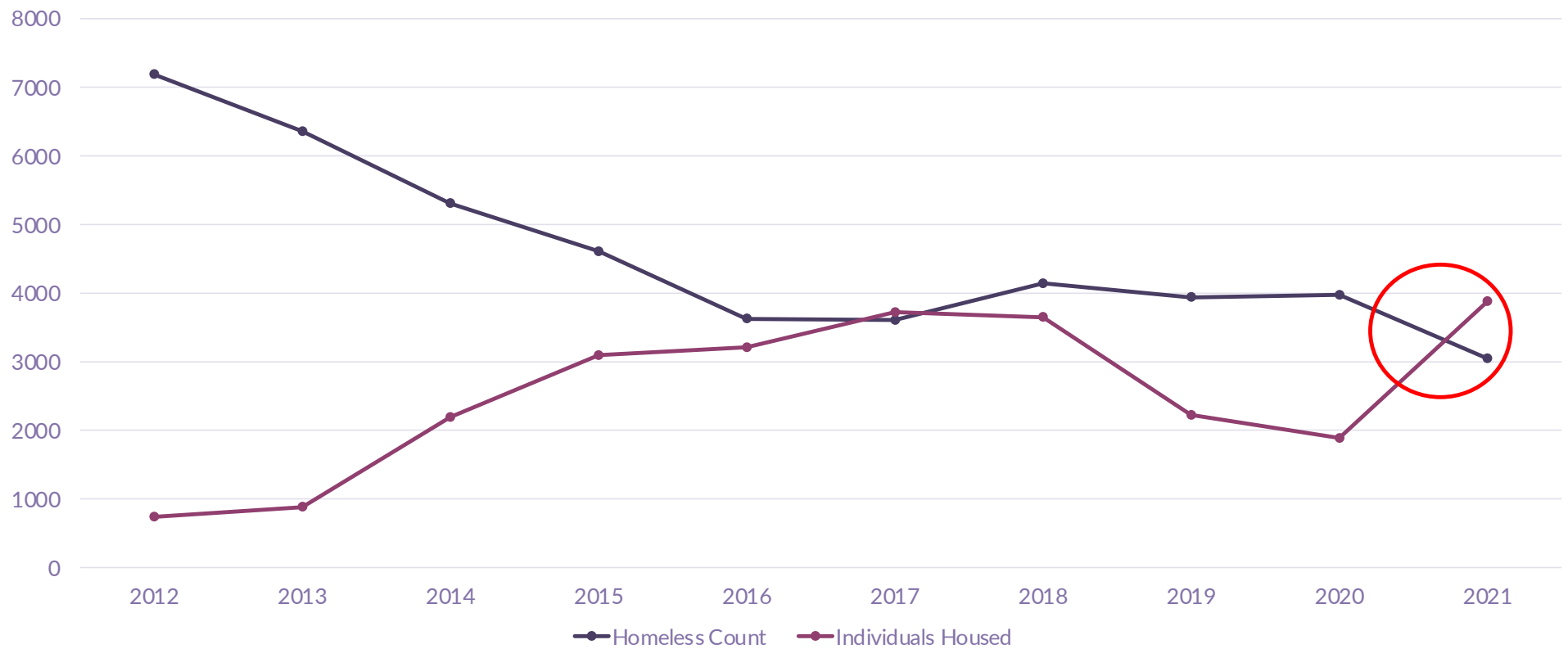
- 80% of diversion clients do not enter the homeless response system within 6 months of exit.
- Result = 84% of diversion clients did not enter the homeless response system.

Race/Ethnicity - Referral to Lease-Up

- Unit acquisition & holding fees could have some effect on equalizing time to housing across racial demographics



Houston leads the nation in housing & reducing homelessness





**25,500+ Housed
Since 2011**

- BBVA Stadium
- Capacity: 22,039

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