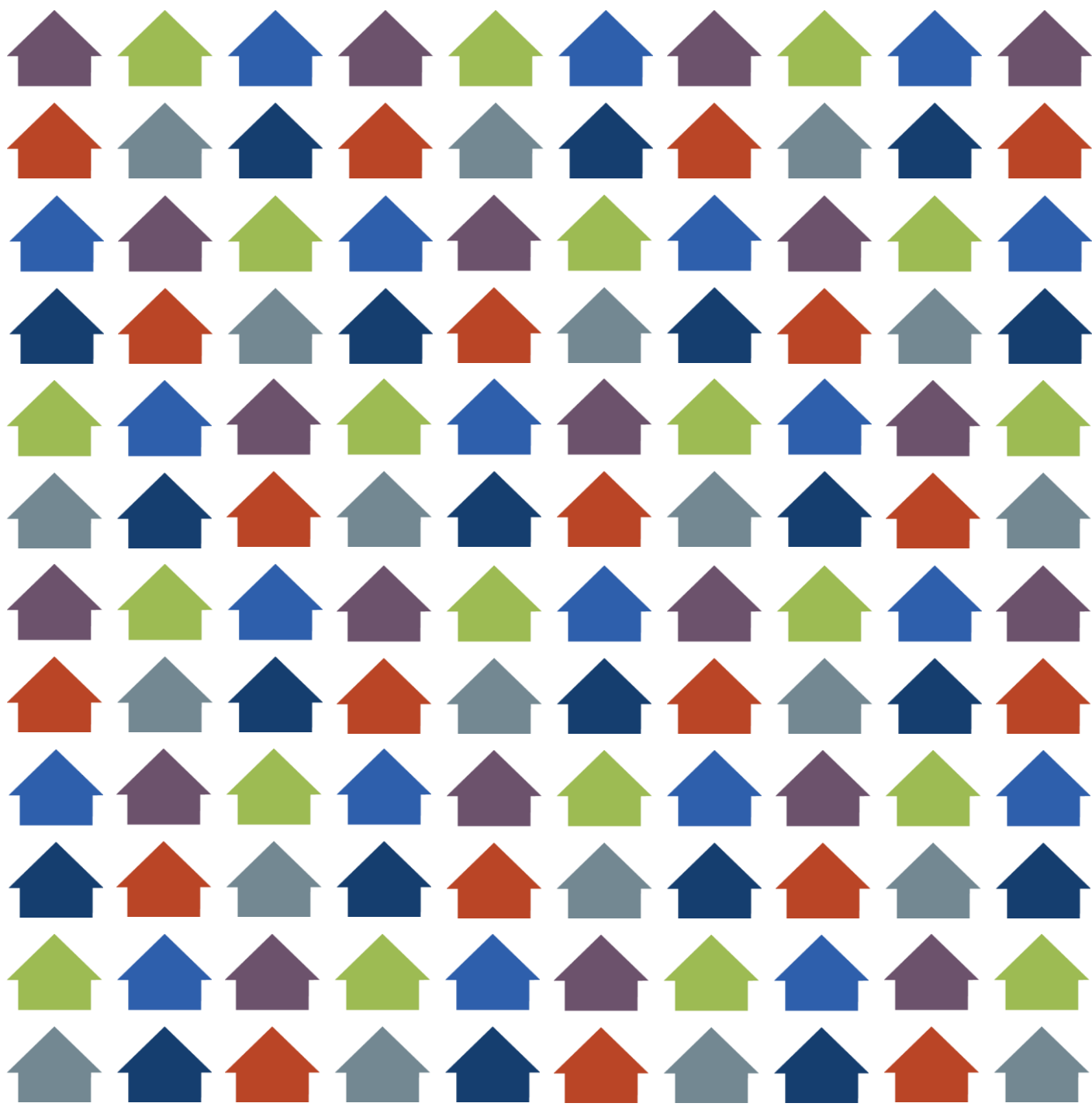




**Real Talk, Real Change:
How Lived Experience
Can Help Transform
the Homeless Response**

September 2025

Strategies For Change

thn.org



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Introductions

- Mary Stahlke, Director of Engagement for the TX BoS CoC
- Jen Beardsley, Local Homeless Coalition (LHC) Coordinator
- Members of the TX BoS CoC's Lived Experience Committee

Session Outline

- Introduction to the Texas Balance of State CoC
- Erasing Stigma by Storytelling
- Promoting Peer Support
- Providing Trauma-Informed Care
- Serving on TX BoS CoC Committees

Texas Homeless Network (THN)

- Mission Statement: *We lead Texas communities to make homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring.*
- Organizational Activities:
 - Advocacy
 - Annual conference
 - Training
 - TX BoS CoC Collaborative Applicant
 - TX BoS CoC HMIS Lead Agency
 - TX BoS CoC Coordinated Entry Lead Agency



What is a CoC?

A CoC, as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in the CoC Program Interim Rule at 24 CFR Part 578.3, is the group organized to carry out the responsibilities required under the CoC Program for a defined geographic area.

A community-based planning network for homelessness assistance.

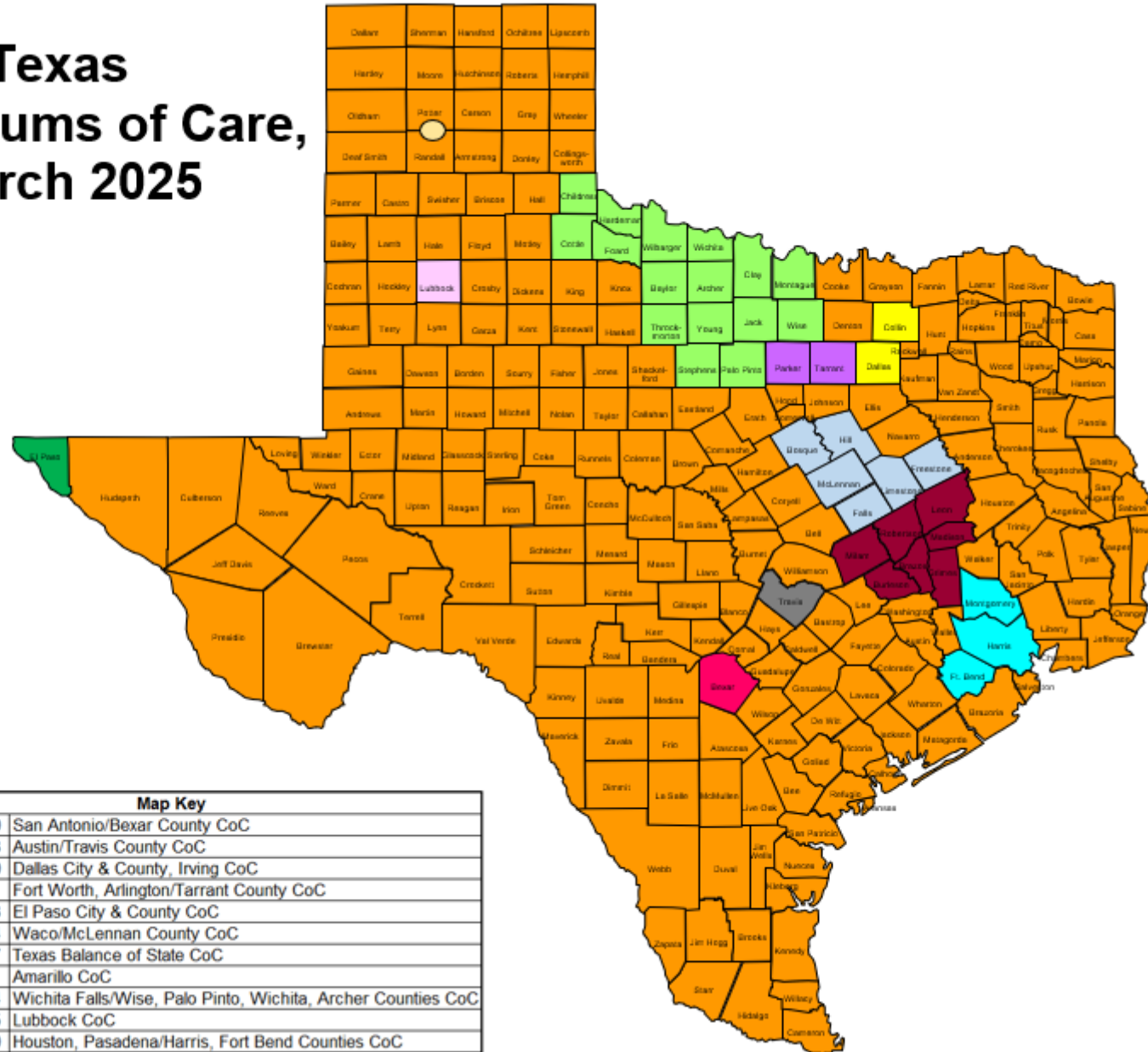
The geographic area covered by the community-based planning network.

A program operated by the U.S. Dept. of Housing & Urban Development (HUD)

Texas

Continuums of Care,

March 2025



Map Key		
	TX-500	San Antonio/Bexar County CoC
	TX-503	Austin/Travis County CoC
	TX-600	Dallas City & County, Irving CoC
	TX-601	Fort Worth, Arlington/Tarrant County CoC
	TX-603	El Paso City & County CoC
	TX-604	Waco/McLennan County CoC
	TX-607	Texas Balance of State CoC
	TX-611	Amarillo CoC
	TX-624	Wichita Falls/Wise, Palo Pinto, Wichita, Archer Counties CoC
	TX-625	Lubbock CoC
	TX-700	Houston, Pasadena/Harris, Fort Bend Counties CoC
	TX-701	Bryan, College Station/Brazos Valley CoC

Texas Balance of State CoC



Mission Statement

The TX BoS CoC develops system-level responses and coordinates local community strategies that prevent and end homelessness and increase housing stability.

LEC Purpose

The Lived Experience Committee (LEC) will provide Texas Homeless Network staff and the TX BoS CoC Board with valuable input on homeless services within the CoC.

Members will provide feedback on proposed policy and funding decisions based on their personal experience interacting with homeless services within the CoC.

Value of Storytelling

Value of Storytelling

- “Stories help construct and communicate messages and beliefs. They convey values that can reinforce beliefs or help see things with a new perspective. Taking the time to listen to individuals’ stories helps look beyond generalizations or stereotypes and see the real person. This human understanding and connection can help challenge assumptions, create bridges with people, and build community based on shared humanity.”

From the NCAB Storytelling Manual at <https://nhchc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/nhchc-storytelling-guide-may-2017-2.pdf>

Value of Storytelling (cont.)

- “Storytelling is a way to use personal experiences to talk about homelessness in a broader way. When experiences are shared, it helps to put thing in perspective for others.”
- “It is important for people to understand that it can happen to anyone.”
- “Telling your story makes these experiences concrete and personal, humanizing both the storyteller and the broader issue.”

From the NCAB Storytelling Manual at <https://nhchc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/nhchc-storytelling-guide-may-2017-2.pdf>

Value of Storytelling (cont.)

- “Yet storytelling is not just about expanding the perspectives of others, building empathy and understanding, or influencing people and communities. Storytelling is also transforming for the storyteller. It gives people the time and space to deconstruct their experiences to consider their cause, impact, and meaning. Storytelling gives you the power to claim your experience and decide how you want to be perceived or viewed by others. “
- “While everyone's experience of homelessness is unique, they are linked by the social and economic issues that lead to homelessness, and you want the audience to see that larger picture.”

From the NCAB Storytelling Manual at <https://nhchc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/nhchc-storytelling-guide-may-2017-2.pdf>

Erasing Stigma

Erasing Stigma

- Myth 1: Most people experiencing homelessness choose to be homeless
- Truth: There is a direct relationship between the reduced availability of low-cost housing, and the increased number of unhoused individuals and families. Research finds that most people who become homeless have nowhere to live after being evicted, losing their jobs, or fleeing an abusive partner. In a study conducted over three decades, very rarely was it found that anyone experiencing homelessness had “chosen” the homeless lifestyle. (McGee, M. P., & Gonzalez, J. J. (2021). *Cities and Homelessness*. McFarland & Company, Incorporated Publishers.)

From Caritas of Austin: <https://caritasofaustin.org/blog/dont-be-fooled-6-truths-that-debunk-myths-about-homelessness>

Erasing Stigma

- Myth 2: People experiencing homelessness just need a job
- Truth: Homelessness is a result of multiple factors, including lack of affordable healthcare, mental illness, physical disability, and lack of affordable housing. While the loss of job opportunities and benefits plays a role, the factors impacting people experiencing homelessness go beyond simply needing employment. While employment helps people to stay housed, it also does not guarantee housing. As many as 40% to 60% of unhoused people have a job, but housing is unaffordable. (McGee, M. P., & Gonzalez, J. J. (2021). Cities and Homelessness. McFarland & Company, Incorporated Publishers.)

From Caritas of Austin: <https://caritasofaustin.org/blog/dont-be-fooled-6-truths-that-debunk-myths-about-homelessness>

Erasing Stigma

- Myth 3: Ending homelessness is impossible
- Truth: Permanent supportive housing is highly effective in ending homelessness. With ongoing support services, it is possible to reduce high rates of homelessness, specifically among vulnerable groups. Once in housing, people who have experienced homelessness can maintain themselves in permanent housing over long periods of time. Throughout the country, rates of homelessness have decreased with the implementation of supportive housing programs. (McGee, M. P., & Gonzalez, J. J. (2021). Cities and Homelessness. McFarland & Company, Incorporated Publishers.)

From Caritas of Austin: <https://caritasofaustin.org/blog/dont-be-fooled-6-truths-that-debunk-myths-about-homelessness>

Promoting Peer Support

Promoting Peer Support

- “Peer support workers have lived experience of mental illnesses, substance use, or co-occurring conditions and are formally trained and employed to help others who are experiencing similar situations...Peer workers have received formal training and, in many cases, state certification to practice peer support.”

From “Expanding Peer Support Roles in Homeless Services Delivery: A Toolkit for Service Providers” at https://hhrctraining.org/system/files/paragraphs/download-file/file/2023-08/HHRC_Peer_Support_Toolkit-508.pdf

Promoting Peer Support

- “Studies on homelessness and substance use found positive outcomes for peer-led interventions, including reduced substance use-related harm and increased housing stability. Significantly, benefits extend to peers as they may grow and advance within their own recovery journey while providing services. This may also lead to new roles with increasing responsibility and intensity, providing options for potential new career paths.”

From “Expanding Peer Support Roles in Homeless Services Delivery: A Toolkit for Service Providers” at https://hhrctraining.org/system/files/paragraphs/download-file/file/2023-08/HHRC_Peer_Support_Toolkit-508.pdf

Promoting Peer Support

- Poll Questions



Providing Trauma-Informed Care (TIC)

Providing Trauma-Informed Care (TIC)

- “To end homelessness, we must continuously assess our systems to ensure that we remain faithful to trauma-informed approaches that center individuals’ and families’ choices in how they engage in housing and services, the kinds of programs they participate in, and the services they access. And we must make sure that our leaders and staff have access to the comprehensive training and support they need to design and deploy systems and programs that are aligned with these principles.”

From USICH: <https://www.usich.gov/news-events/news/trauma-informed-care-building-our-commitment-strengths-based-approaches-ending>

Principles of TIC

- **Safety** . People experiencing homelessness and program staff feel physically and psychologically safe. Physical settings and interpersonal interactions should promote a sense of safety for every child, young person, family, Veteran, person living with a disability, or individual adult experiencing homelessness.
- **Trustworthiness and Transparency** . Homelessness service systems and programs should operate and make decisions in ways that are transparent to everyone, building and maintaining trust with people experiencing homelessness, staff, and other stakeholders.

Principles of TIC (cont.)

- **Peer Support** . Peers are integral to establishing and maintaining safety and hope, building trust, enhancing collaboration, and using their lived expertise to help others with housing stability and other goals, like recovery and healing.
- **Collaboration and Mutuality**. Value is placed on relationship, partnership, and leveling power differences between staff and consumers to promote shared power and decision-making across the program. There is recognition that everyone has a role to play in advancing trauma-informed approaches.

Principles of TIC

5. Empowerment, Voice, and Choice. The homelessness service system and organizations within it foster a belief in people's resilience and the ability of individuals and communities to heal from trauma. People's strengths and experiences are recognized, honored, and built upon. Consumers are supported in shared decision-making, choice, and goal-setting to determine their own housing and service needs.

Serving on CoC Committees

- CoC Policy for every committee to have at least one person with lived experience on it
 - Lived Experience Committee
 - Coordinated Entry Steering Committee
 - Data Committee
 - Community Investment Committee
 - CoC Modernization Workgroup
 - Coordinated Entry Assessment and Prioritization (CEAP) Workgroup
 - CoC Board

Serving on CoC Committees

- Learn more

<https://www.thn.org/tx-bos-coc-committees/>



How were you able
to take your pain
and make it your power?

Q&A



THANK YOU!



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Contact Information

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