Rural Homelessness Resources

TEXAS HOMELESS NETWORK

In 2024, 126,288 individuals experienced homelessness in a Rural CoC and nearly half were unsheltered. In recent years we continued to see an increase in rural homelessness. Due to the hidden nature of rural homelessness and the unique needs of these communities the Texas Homeless Network engaged in research about the needs and opportunities to assist with program development. In this document you can find toolkits and academic research articles about promising practices and evidence-based solutions to effectively address rural homelessness.

Strengthening Systems for Ending Rural Homelessness: Promising Practices and Considerations

In this resource you can find considerations for developing systems to end homelessness based on consultations with 15 rural regions across the country.

These considerations include:

- Creatively engaging non-targeted systems and programs, faith-based organization, and information partners
- Designing leadership and governance structure to increase capacity
- Developing outreach and engagement practices that reach people experiencing homelessness in rural communities
- Implementing coordinated entry processes that promote access for people across large geographies
- Thinking outside the box to expand the availability of crisis beds and permanent housing opportunities

The resource provided goes more in depth about all these considerations.

Challenges and Opportunities for Addressing Rural Youth Homelessness

A qualitative study aimed to better under the experiences of homeless youth in rural communities, and ways to respond to these challenges and strengthen service delivery models

Key findings include:

- Rural regions tend to undercount youth in need of support due to invisibility of rural homelessness, lack of awareness, stigma, and distrust of public systems
- Rural youth are more likely to seek informal support networks and 2x as likely to seek shelter with others
- Rural communities need to increase their ability to collect data about marginalized communities to measure outcomes and monitor service delivery effectively

This resource provides a variety of recommendations for effectively addressing youth homelessness in rural settings

Results of Support Systems for Rural Homeless Youth: Demonstation Projects 2008-2015

This resource provides examples of projects implemented in rural communities to help youth experiencing homelessness

Six categories of services and support discussed include:

- Community engagement and public outreach
- Dedicated spaces for at-risk youth
- Education
- Employment support
- Survival support skills
- Case management

Police Responses to People Experiencing Homelessness

In communities with limited resource, partnerships between homeless service providers and law enforcement can help improve outcomes. This resource provides implications for outreach.

Key considerations include:

- Using cop cars to transport individuals to service providers
- Using law enforcement to help with referral process for youth experiencing homelessness
- Trust between individuals experiencing homelessness and law enforcement can increase service utilization
- The need for increased law enforcement knowledge about the homeless services in their communities to offer individuals

Planning, Implementing, and Assessing Law Enforcement Responses to Homelessness

This toolkit provides examples of logic models and how to develop one to integrate law enforcement into community outreach programs

Provides five steps for building a logic model:

- Articulate shared goals, assumptions, and a theory of change
- Determine the resource needed to make the law enforcement response happen
- specify what the law enforcement response will do
- Develop implementation measures to track progress
- Identify the outcomes you want to see

Project MUSE - Experiencing Housing Instability in Rural North America: A Scoping Review

This scoping review includes 45 peer-reviewed articles to better understand the intersection of housing instability, care, and services in rural North America. The article provides implications for health care and service providers based on identified practices that may improve the outcomes for people experiencing homelessness

Key Findings:

- Nearly one in five people experiencing homelessness are living in rural areas
- Transportation was a frequent barrier to accessing care, especially for older adults
- Research showed a significant need for outreach in rural areas to increase engagement
- The use of telehealth services and making it more accessible for older adults and veterans

Motels as rural homeless shelters: A qualitative study across five Ontario communities - ScienceDirect

During the pandemic, rural communities in Ontario, Canada used motels as shelters due to limited infrastructure. This research study explores the experiences of participants living in rural motels, if motels are a viable option, and strategies for future success.

Although this research was conducted in Canada, the findings have implications for project development in the United States.

Key findings:

- Participants reported feeling happier, healthier, and reported seeing a decrease in substance use
- Motel staff can be used to connect individuals to additional resources

Common Themes Found Across All Resources

Across all the resources provided, common themes about promising practices and evidence-based solutions to address rural homelessness emerged. These themes have implications for program development and service delivery for rural communities across the United States.

Promising practices include:

- Working with non-traditional community partners and building trust
- Expanding outreach in schools
- Integrated care
- Using community members to identify individuals experiencing homelessness
- Have resources be accessible in diverse locations such as gas stations, churches, schools, motels, etc.
- The use of telehealth services for vulnerable populations, along with providing training
- Training law enforcement to better understand the needs of people experiencing homelessness and integrating law enforcement into outreach programs

The Texas Homeless Network hopes these resources are helpful for service delivery to address rural homelessness in communities across Texas. Although the resources above provide a variety of evidence-based strategies we would like to acknowledge that there is still a need for increased research about effective programs in rural communities. With additional research we can continue to make homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring.