



The State of Our Homelessness Crisis

An Overview of Lane County Homelessness & Recommendations from the Eugene Business Community



Prepared by:
Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce

September 2021



Introduction

Over the past year, it has become increasingly clear that public safety and homeless-related issues are top priorities for the business community. Business leaders are frustrated by illegal activities accompanying many illegal camps across the city. There is also despair that we don't have safe places in our community for people who have fallen on hard times.

The Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce has tracked the efforts to manage our homeless crisis and engaged in conversations to identify resources over the past few years; however, there has been no collective effort for the private business community to formally engage in this issue at a community-wide level.

As the concerns and requests for help from businesses escalated, the Eugene Chamber board of directors, composed of local business owners and community leaders, agreed that bringing the private sector to the table to accelerate our community toward permanent solutions to homelessness needed to be a top priority for the chamber.

As a result, we set out to better understand the complexity of the crisis in order to identify existing barriers so we could recommend improvements. We do not claim to be experts, but we have spoken to the experts and their insights are included throughout this report.

Over the past six months, the Eugene Chamber interviewed over 150 stakeholders in the community, including executives from nearly every nonprofit delivering homeless services, city and county staff, business and community leaders, unhoused individuals and residents. In addition, we spoke with many experts from communities across the country who made significant progress towards ending homelessness.

As a comprehensive summary of our research, this report is intended to document the current state of the homeless crisis in our community. It highlights a collection of successful endeavors worthy of recognition, along with recommendations for additional actions.

The solutions -- plural intended -- cannot be reduced to a simple "golden ticket." Nevertheless, we believe there is a light at the end of this tunnel, and we hope to inspire community partners to unite to end to homelessness in our community.



Executive Summary

The State of our Homeless Crisis



Homelessness is not new to our community. There are numerous factors that have led us to our current crisis, on a national, state and local scale. We have structural, cultural and political realities that uniquely impact the crisis in our community. We have long lacked adequate low-barrier shelter spaces. We have also lacked the political will and, consequently, the community justice resources to adequately address the criminal behavior taking place in our community.

Lane County's human-centered approach is one of our greatest strengths. Eugene and Springfield house dozens of service agencies that have been recognized nationwide as leaders in their areas of focus. Yet, critical analysis urges us to recognize that this crisis has continued to worsen in our community despite millions of dollars of investment and countless hours of service. Even with the aid of well-intentioned efforts, our community must reevaluate our definition of success and explore further opportunities to drive change.

To shift from our current state of *managing* our homeless crisis to truly making homelessness *rare, brief and non-recurring*, we must move away from a government-driven and funded model to a collective impact approach that brings more stakeholders to the table to pursue solutions.

By focusing on obtaining accurate data, increasing our shelter and housing capacity, improving coordination between service providers and targeting investments, we can break down silos, reduce overlap, and expand capacity for critical wrap-around services. None of this can be accomplished if we don't take the steps to build community trust and move from a culture of tolerance to one of wellness and accountability.

Implementing these recommendations will be difficult, but we have reasons to be hopeful. There appears to be more willingness than ever before to approach these challenges differently. By working together we can make our community better, safer and more humane. Together we can end homelessness for good.

Recommendations

There is broad agreement among partners that a fundamentally different way to approach this issue is needed. It is essential that community stakeholders from all sectors align to more efficiently utilize our limited resources. Until efforts are better united, we cannot achieve success.

The following recommendations, in no particular order, aim to establish homelessness as rare, brief and non-recurring.

1

Quality Data

Our current methods and systems for collecting data are inadequate and make it difficult to fully understand the scope of the problem. We need to establish a quality, actionable baseline of data so we can accurately identify solutions.

2

Shared Goals + Collective Impact

Convene leaders from across sectors to agree on shared goals and align around strategic actions to end homelessness. We can't rely on government and nonprofits to solve this crisis, it will take all of us.

3

Service Provider Capacity

Restrictive funding sources make it difficult to pay good wages and retain staff. We need to strengthen administrative and programmatic capacity for nonprofit service providers, with reimagined funding strategies.

4

Emergency Shelter + Permanent Housing

We must prioritize increasing emergency shelter capacity and relentlessly pursue strategies that will make housing more affordable in Lane County if we are going to make progress on ending homelessness.

5

Outreach + Case Management

Better coordinated outreach and case management is needed to reduce overlap, use our limited funds more efficiently and make the system easier to navigate for our unhoused population.

6

Wrap-around Services

We need effective 'wrap-around' services like mental health and substance abuse support, workforce skills training and employment connections that will help our unhoused achieve sustained wellness.

7

Enforcement + Accountability

It's time to shift our community culture from one of tolerance to one of wellness and accountability. We need to send the message that Eugene is no place for those, housed or unhoused, who want to break the law.

8

Rebuild Community Trust

Improving communication, transparency and accountability among all stakeholders, is critically necessary to rebuild community trust and instill a sense of hope for the future.



Next Steps

Many of the recommendations in this report will take partners from across sectors to fully implement. Some of these items can be led by the Eugene Chamber and business community and others will need champions in local government or with our service providers. Now comes the hard work of bringing disparate voices together and agreeing to act.

As for the Eugene Chamber, we are ready to come to the table and plan to prioritize and take the lead on the following actions.

1

Launch a focused task force of business and community leaders to bring private sector support to the task of ending homelessness. This group will help ensure the implementation of these recommendations and increase the accountability and transparency of our community's efforts towards these goals.

Execute by: October 2021

2

Continue to build out strategic implementation tactics for each of the recommendations included in this report while continuing to explore models of success from across the country that could work for Eugene.

Execute by: November 2021

3

Convene a strategic group of community stakeholders from business, government, nonprofit, philanthropy, faith community and those with lived experience to determine a collective-impact approach to turning the tide on this issue in our community.

Execute by: November 2021

4

Perform cost study/economic impact analysis to better understand the cost of this issue on our community and find areas to more efficiently use our resources.

Execute by: December 2021

Call to Action

If you are interested in joining the business leaders task force, providing funds to help implement strategies to end homelessness, or offering specific technical expertise to help improve our system, please contact Brittany Quick-Warner at the Eugene Chamber to get plugged into these activities at brittanyw@eugenechamber.com.



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Prepared by the Eugene Chamber of Commerce

Thank you.

We sincerely appreciate the nonprofit, City of Eugene, and Lane County staff who spent time sharing their expertise, challenges and data to help inform this report. We also appreciate the business leaders, neighbors, and faith community partners who assisted with this research and shared their own experiences. Lastly, we are incredibly grateful for the currently or formerly unhoused individuals who imparted wisdom and first-hand experience that no amount of research could replace.

Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce
September 2021

Learn more at www.eugenechamber.com

1. https://nlchp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Homeless_Stats_Fact_Sheet.pdf
2. <https://www.oregon.gov/ohcs/about-us/Documents/RHNA/02-21-2021-ECONW-OHCS.pdf>
3. <https://community.solutions/our-solutions/built-for-zero/>
4. https://p1cdn4static.civiclive.com/UserFiles/Servers/Server_3585797/File/HSD/FINAL%202019%20PIT%20COUNT%20report%20ver%201.0.pdf
5. https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/lchsd/viz/HomelessnessinLaneCountyOregon_16195399452050/IntroductiontoLaneCountysHomelessnessData
6. <https://www.eugene-or.gov/3337/Community-Court>
7. <https://www.sheltercare.org/2017/08/community-partnerships-are-central-to-fuse-success/>
8. https://lanecounty.org/government/county_departments/health_and_human_services/human_services_division/public_shelter_feasibility_study
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