

THE WILLIAM D. RUCKELSHAUS CENTER

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Pathways to Housing Security in Washington State

FACILITATED DISCUSSION 6: Shifting Views of Homelessness and Housing Instability

August 23, 2023

9:00 AM-1:00 PM (online)

The Washington State Legislature has tasked the Ruckelshaus Center to facilitate discussions to inform principles, options, and recommendations for a long-term statewide strategy for housing security. This is part of a project described in Section 6 of [House Bill 1277](#) and on the [project page](#).

In August 2023, the Center is bringing together a broad range of participants in guided discussions about options that have emerged from previous interviews and small group discussions. The purpose of these workshops is to react to and refine **options for how state policies, resources, and other supports can best contribute to sustained progress toward housing security**. Each workshop is focused on a theme, while holding the whole picture of housing security in mind. For a list of themes and to register for other workshops, go to [this link](#).¹

After these discussions, a draft of guiding principles and recommendations will be developed. Feedback will then be gathered through virtual and in-person workshops in September.

A final report is due on December 1, 2023.

UNDERLYING PREMISE FOR VIEWS OF HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING INSTABILITY

Housing security is advanced when there is availability and affordability of housing for low- and middle-income individuals and households, housing is stabilized when it becomes precarious, homelessness is prevented when possible, and experiences of homelessness are mitigated as quickly as possible.

The ways in which a challenge like housing insecurity is viewed and understood deeply affects the possibilities for how it can be addressed.

People in a range of roles and with varied forms of relevant experience and knowledge have highlighted an array of current views or narratives they describe as being counterproductive to the goal of sustained progress toward housing security. Participants expressed that it will be necessary to proactively shift those views in order to make meaningful progress.

These were not necessarily the views of participants, rather they are views participants perceive as persistent among some in the state.

Examples of Views Described as Counterproductive that Need to Be Shifted

1. "Homelessness is primarily people living on the streets or in the woods."
2. "People are homeless or don't have stable housing because they made bad choices or aren't working hard enough"
3. "People are homeless because they have a mental illness or are on drugs"

¹ <https://ruckelshauscenter.wsu.edu/projects/current-projects/pathways-to-housing-security/2023-housing-security-workshops/>

4. “Evictions cause homelessness”
5. “Living on the streets or in the woods is a crime”
6. “We have to protect the safety of our neighborhoods and houses”
7. “We need to do something about homelessness, but we don’t want those solutions to be here”
8. “We have no choice but to use exclusionary policies and practices that focus on who is not eligible or deserving of help”
9. “We need restrictions on who is allowed to be involved in implementing the response”
10. “Rental property owners/managers are villains and tenants are victims”; “Tenants cause problems and property owners/managers are victims”
11. “We have to decide whether it’s more important to invest in providing homelessness services or in increasing affordable housing”
12. “We have to be able to quantify successes and see a return on investment in financial terms
13. “Everyone has to coalesce around one message”

DISCUSSION PROMPTS ABOUT VIEWS OF HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING INSTABILITY

- *What surprised you or was new to you in the examples of counterproductive narratives?*
- *What narratives are desired?*
- *What are you already doing to amplify those desired narratives?*
- *What are you observing that amplifies desired narratives or reinforces counterproductive narratives?*
- *In what ways might your actions inadvertently be reinforcing counterproductive narratives?*
- *What would help you do more to shift views of homelessness and housing instability?*
- *What actions could the state take to help shift how homelessness and housing instability are viewed?*

EMERGING OPTIONS RELATED TO VIEWS OF HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING INSTABILITY

Prior workshops in August facilitated discussions in response to emerging options in other thematic areas such as *Meeting Needs Along the Housing Continuum*, *Responding Holistically to People’s Needs*, *Connecting Housing Security and Economic Security*, and *Defining Success and Managing Performance*.

Some of those emerging options, repeated below, propose actions that could also contribute to changing how homelessness and housing instability are viewed.

Discussion Prompts

- *How would these options shift views of homelessness and housing instability?*
- *How could you reinforce that shift in your work?*
- *What other actions could the state take to shift views of homelessness and housing instability?*

Emerging Options

Option 6-1 (Multiple Successes): Recognize multiple, co-existing ways of understanding success.

Option 6-2 (Holistic Eligibility): Reconfigure eligibility criteria using a cross-sector, multifactorial, periodic assessment designed to help people access the supports they need over time to synergistically stabilize their housing, health, behavioral health, and socioeconomic circumstances.

Option 6-3 (Variety of Options): Expand the quality, variety, and volume of supported options for temporary shelter and longer-term housing, and better match people to their types and level of need and to their preferences.

Option 6-4 (Diversity in Implementation): Increase the diversity of and cooperation among the organizations and entities who implement the response to housing insecurity.

Option 6-5 (Experiential Expertise): Amplify the insights and expertise of communities and individuals affected by homelessness and housing instability by supporting them to participate in making decisions about, implementing, and assessing the performance of the response to housing insecurity.

Option 6-6 (Core Competencies): Establish universal core competencies in culturally responsive, anti-racism, and trauma-informed principles for providers, administrators, and leaders across sectors, and regularly provide the training needed to put those competencies into practice.

Option 6-7 (Close Cooperation): Support closer cooperation at all levels of the response among agencies, programs, and services that provide interdependent forms of assistance.

Option 6-8 (Total Investment and Benefit): Analyze and communicate the comprehensive investments that advance housing security, the benefits they yield, and for whom.