WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

THE WILLIAM D. RUCKELSHAUS CENTER

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Pathways to Housing Security in Washington State

FACILITATED DISCUSSION 5: Defining Success and Managing Performance

August 22, 2023 12:30 PM-4:30PM (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, with a final report due on December 1, 2023.

UNDERLYING PREMISE FOR DEFINING SUCCESS AND MANAGING PERFORMANCE

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.

Housing security is complex and the needs are both urgent and long-term. To succeed, a statewide strategy will need to comprise multiple approaches and incorporate mechanisms to assess and adapt as circumstances change. Such a complex response needs a robust framework for gathering and managing information. Policymakers, service providers, and communities need to be able to use that information to sustain progress, adapt to changing patterns, and anticipate potential consequences of those adaptations.

EMERGING OPTIONS FOR DEFINING SUCCESS AND MANAGING PERFORMANCE

Option 5-1 (Multiple Successes): Recognize multiple, co-existing ways of understanding success.

> *Given the breadth of factors needed to create housing security in thriving communities, a wide range of goals and outcomes are needed to fully reflect progress. Advancing housing security will require the additive effects of successes across multiple domains and across the multiple perspectives of those involved and affected. A long-term strategy will be most effective if it helps the state align and track successes across these domains and perspectives.*
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> *For example, for the purpose of reducing the per capita rate of homelessness, a 50% decline can be viewed as a success. However, for those who continue to experience homelessness or housing instability, that overall decline means very little. For them and for the providers who engage with them, the extent*

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

to which varied and sometimes complex individual needs are being met is more meaningful. Each of these views of success might need different actions, investments, and timeframes. Rather than resolving a debate about which matters more, the strategic obligation is to discern what combination of investments will contribute to progress on both.

Similarly, given the scale and urgency of the need to mitigate homelessness, increasing the availability of any form of shelter can be seen as a success. However, the quality, accessibility, and acceptability of that shelter also matters, as well as the extent to which there is facilitated access to needed services and more permanent housing options. Success in reaching housing security will also vary depending on a person's specific circumstances. For some, 'self-sufficiency' is looked to as a marker of success. However, expecting self-sufficiency for everyone is unrealistic in the context of an economy in which wages do not keep up with housing costs. Further, for people living with complex behavioral, social, and health needs, high quality permanent supportive housing or residential care may be the benchmark of success.

For every aspect of housing insecurity, specific attention is needed to advancing equity as a parallel dimension of success; otherwise, the gap in getting to housing security will be greatest and longest for those who are most affected and who are historically and currently most marginalized. Defining success using numerical targets alone can result in approaches that default to reaching those who are relatively easy to serve. In parallel to overall targets, reaching those most on the margins can be seen as its own dimension of success, even if it requires a different type and level of investment. Similarly, goals such as building the capacity of more diverse providers can considered as complementary to meeting short-term targets.

Option 5-2 (Knowledge Management Framework): Develop a comprehensive framework for the role of knowledge and learning in the state's efforts to advance housing security, including performance monitoring, focused evaluation, a prioritized research agenda, and avenues for knowledge sharing.

The success of a complex response to housing security will rely on systematically creating or collecting information, and on using and sharing that knowledge to learn and to enhance performance. A comprehensive framework for managing knowledge in this way would articulate the following:

- *the purposes of gathering information;*
- *how information will be created or collected and used to achieve those purposes;*
- *the complementary roles of monitoring, evaluation, and research; and*
- *the intended users and audiences and how information will be disseminated to them.*

This framework should align across the breadth of state efforts related to housing security, contribute to sustainable management of the response, and adapt to emerging needs. By strategically combining different types of information-gathering, at different scales, and using different timeframes, such a framework can help the state track what matters most, including outcomes, context, processes and experiences, without being limited to what is most measurable as a performance metric.

This would not pre-empt existing monitoring systems and measures for different aspects of housing security. Rather, the purpose would be to use them together to capture and regularly update a picture of housing security as a whole. One desired aspect of this would be to link monitoring data and target setting more closely with financial data, allowing better estimation of what available resources can cover given current costs and capacity in the system.

A strategically coordinated, complementary portfolio of evaluation activities would serve to assess outcomes, context, and experiences that are not captured well by monitoring indicators. A complementary research portfolio could focus on questions that will enhance and advance the effectiveness, scale, quality, and acceptability of supported activities.

Part of a knowledge management framework is to develop systems and processes that institutionalize the most needed exchanges of knowledge. One desired aspect of this is avenues to share timely, secure

data across partner agencies and organizations as needed to effectively support housing goals at individual, community, and state levels while also providing assurances of privacy.

Option 5-3: (Diversity of Knowledge): Use knowledge of various types and from various sources to design, implement and monitor policies, programs, and services.

There is much existing research, evidence, and data about housing and homelessness, yet current practices for collecting and using knowledge have not fully yielded a meaningful and equitable reduction in housing insecurity. Success will be more likely through integrating a broader scope of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, disciplines, and forms of expertise, including the expertise of those most affected by housing insecurity and most directly involved in the response (see option 5-4). Using various forms of knowledge sets aside hierarchical standards based solely on the type of evidence and instead relies on a quality of evidence standard based on making the best possible match between the purpose or question and the type of information and methodology.

Option 5-4 (Experiential Expertise): Amplify the insights and expertise of communities and individuals affected by homelessness and housing instability by including them in making decisions about and assessing the performance of laws, policies, programs, and services related to housing security.

The pathway to housing security will be more robust and effective if there is space for the power and influence of people and communities disproportionately affected by housing insecurity and by inequality in decision-making. Individuals who experience homelessness and housing instability, like all people, are capable, adaptable, and knowledgeable. They are highly qualified to inform services and models of care and should have opportunities to contribute to every level of planning, implementing, and assessing the performance of the response to housing insecurity.

Option 5-5 (Connect Research and Practice): Create platforms for dialogue and cooperation among the research and evaluation communities and the policy and practice communities.

A comprehensive approach to research and evaluation would support several different kinds of desired connections. One is to foster exchange and collaborative relationships across the multiple disciplines that study aspects of housing. This could be done, for example, through platforms for convening and incentives for collaborative multidisciplinary work, especially with disciplines skilled in incorporating the experiential expertise of those who are most directly affected by housing insecurity and most directly involved in the response.

Another desired connection is to structured spaces to bring together those who conduct research and evaluation and those from the many policy arenas and fields of practice who have applied knowledge as well as insights into what aspects might benefit from structured research and evaluation. This will help those who study housing respond to pressing and practical questions, and also make it possible for the research community to proactively identify useful crosscutting or longer-term research questions that might otherwise be missed. Another tactic to achieve this is to collect and communicate research and evaluation questions, even in the absence of research funding; the research community may be able to be responsive using other resources available to them.

Option 5-6 (Total Investment and Benefit): Analyze and communicate the comprehensive investments that advance housing security, the benefits they yield, and for whom.[2]

The complexity of housing security as a goal necessitates that investments be assessed using a broad, cross-sector view of the resources being allocated and the benefits they yield. While this holistic view may be more than is feasible with a traditional 'return on investment' analysis, a descriptive mapping, with financial estimates where possible, could be established and updated periodically.

[2] This is the same as Option 2-10 discussed on August 10 under the theme of *Connecting Housing Security and Economic Security*.

A more comprehensive sense of the scope and scale of all resources that support housing security – and the explicit and implicit priorities that reflects – would include government spending, foregone government revenue from housing-related benefits such as mortgage tax credits, contributions from nongovernmental sources, and the value of temporary housing provided by friends and family to those who would otherwise be eligible for public homelessness services and housing assistance.

A similarly comprehensive picture of the benefits and to whom they accrue would not be limited to financial returns and would include benefits for direct recipients of assistance and services; those who receive funding or incentives to provide housing services, develop housing, or rent property they own; homeowners who receive tax credits; employers whose employees' low wages are supplemented with housing assistance or who benefit from workforce housing investments; public scholarship on housing; and other parts of the government that experience averted costs.

QUESTIONS TO SHAPE HOW PROGRESS ON HOUSING SECURITY IS TRACKED

A strategic approach to gathering the knowledge needed to assess the success and manage the performance of the response to housing insecurity will start by identifying the questions that need to be tracked over time. These questions can then be matched to appropriate quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches and data sources. The questions below reflect desired options for a long-term strategy that have emerged during this project's facilitated discussions.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS: For the questions below,

- ***What encourages you or concerns about this question?***
- ***How would you know whether progress is being made?***
- ***What other questions would you add?***

EMERGING QUESTIONS TO TRACK PROGRESS

1. To what extent is the state supporting housing and services that can be tailored to the circumstances, sociocultural context, and preferences of individuals, families, and households?
2. To what extent are laws, policies, and practices reducing disproportionate vulnerabilities to housing insecurity due to structural racism and other forms of systemic disadvantage? In what areas is the state's response exacerbating disproportionate vulnerabilities?
3. To what extent is the state's response to housing insecurity being implemented in accordance with trauma-informed, culturally sensitive, and antiracist practices?
4. To what extent is the state advancing compassion and mutual accountability? To what extent is the state guarding against shame and punishment?
5. To what extent is the expertise of providers and those with lived experience of homelessness and housing instability influencing decisions about laws, policies, programs, and services?
6. What is the distribution of types of providers, organizations, funders, and other actors who participate in implementing the response to housing insecurity?
7. How well is the state incentivizing and facilitating cooperation across jurisdictions and among agencies and services that provide interdependent forms of assistance?
8. To what extent is the state's response to housing insecurity mutually supporting the state's responses to other related challenges?
9. To what extent are the available financial and other resources adequate to advance housing security?