

PATHWAYS TO HOUSING SECURITY

**FINAL REPORT OF FACILITATED
DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

December 1, 2023

Prepared for: The Washington State Governor and the Washington State Legislature

THE WILLIAM D. RUCKELSHAUS CENTER

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

About the William D. Ruckelshaus Center

The William D. Ruckelshaus Center (the Center) is an impartial resource for collaborative problem solving in the State of Washington and the Pacific Northwest. The Center is dedicated to assisting public, private, nonprofit, tribal, and other community leaders in their efforts to build consensus and resolve conflicts around difficult public policy issues. The Center is a joint effort of the University of Washington (hosted by the Daniel J. Evans School of Public Policy and Governance) and Washington State University (hosted and administered by the Office of the Provost). For more information about the Center, please visit:

<https://ruckelshauscenter.wsu.edu/about/>

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Disclaimer

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Acknowledgements

In 2021, the Washington State Legislature directed the William D. Ruckelshaus Center to facilitate discussions to inform desired principles, options, and recommendations for a state strategy towards housing security. The project team is sincerely grateful for the hundreds of individuals with knowledge or experience of housing and/or homelessness related programs and policies who gave their talent, time, and energy over the past two and a half years.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recognizing many challenges related to homelessness and housing instability, in Section 6 of House Bill 1277 (HB 1277, see Appendix A for text of relevant section) the Washington State Legislature tasked the William D. Ruckelshaus Center (the Center, see Appendix B) with gathering information and facilitating discussions to inform a long-term state strategy to create pathways to housing security. The Center, in turn, partnered with Washington State University's Division of Governmental Studies and Services (DGSS).

Specifically, the purpose set forth by the Legislature was to:

- ◆ explore and identify trends affecting and policies guiding the housing and services provided to individuals and families who are, or at risk of, homelessness in Washington State; and
- ◆ facilitate meetings and discussions to develop options and recommendations for a long-term strategy and implementation steps to improve services and outcomes for persons at risk of or experiencing homelessness and to develop pathways to permanent housing solutions.

The Center and DGSS released reports on the status of those tasks in December 2021 and December 2022. This report, in companionship with the “Status of Fact-Finding, Year 3” report presents a cumulative narrative of those tasks, as well as work completed in 2023, and is also intended to meet the final reporting requirement described in HB 1277, Section 6. The project team will be available for follow-up conversations and project dissemination through June 2024.

Facilitated Discussions

The Center invited and facilitated conversations among hundreds of individuals with knowledge of and experience related to housing and homelessness across geographies, sectors, and roles (See Appendix C for list of project participants). Themes emerging from early discussions informed the development of emerging options, opportunities, and concerns. Further facilitated discussions helped articulate guiding principles and refine emerging options into recommendations, including ways to guide investment decisions and ways to assess whether those investments are contributing to the desired results.

Participants, over the course of this project, have reinforced, deepened, and expanded upon the elements put forth in HB 1277, Section 6. This project has not been an audit nor an evaluation of the numerous entities working to meet the needs of individuals and families experiencing

homelessness and/or housing instability. Nor has this work been an evaluation of the many strategies in place to guide that work. While participants reflected on the past and current context, their conversations focused on where to go next: on shaping a scaffold for decision-making and identifying priority action areas needed both acutely and over time, rather than on detailed tactical solutions.

More details on the Center’s approach to iterations of facilitated discussions, to participant outreach, and to coordinating with other existing efforts are described in “Approach to Facilitated Discussions: 2021-2023.”

Landscape of Housing Security

Housing needs are often defined in broad categories, such as emergency shelter, transitional housing, or subsidized housing. However, most participants described housing as a continuum, and effective programs or policies in any of the categories ultimately depend on others. For example, temporary housing serves its function well when longer-term housing and appropriate supports are available and accessible.

This report takes a holistic view of the landscape of housing security, first by providing an overview of the current trends of homelessness and housing instability, then the myriad of investments, entities, and actors engaged in the response to housing insecurity. This section also provides an overview of policy trends and court rulings shaping the housing security landscape. A deeper dive into factors affecting the rates and trends of sheltered and unsheltered homelessness is presented in the “Status of Fact-Finding – Year 3” report produced by DGSS. That analysis highlights county variations in key factors that affect the rates of homelessness over time, as well as an overview of service evaluations—which highlight the importance of aligning resources with the unique needs of people.

Foundational Themes for a Long-Term Strategy

As a precursor to identifying options and recommendations for a long-term strategy, HB 1277, Section 6 called for discussions to gather information about factors that contribute to homelessness and housing instability; statutory and regulatory issues; other concerns, barriers, and opportunities; and desired principles.¹

Participants provided a range and depth of perspectives on these issues. Foundational themes and components of a coherent, effective, and widely accepted long-term effort include:

¹ Sections (2)(c)(i) and (c)(ii) also called for fact-finding on these topics. That work was carried out by the project team from the Washington State University Extension’s Division of Governmental Studies and Services through literature review and analyses of publicly available data (reported separately in 2022 and 2023). Points of intersection in the topics, finding, and themes between that work and the Center’s facilitated discussions are noted throughout this report.

- ◆ **Understanding the causes of homelessness and housing instability**—as multiple, often co-occurring contributing factors, rather than seeking to identify a short list of “root causes.”
- ◆ **Recognizing the complexity of housing security**—that a wide range of services are relevant and needed, but are also implemented in various settings, by practitioners from many disciplines, funded through multiple governmental and nongovernmental sources, and operating under the management or regulatory oversight of a myriad of agencies with varying policies, incentives, and constraints.
- ◆ **Matching the response to the needs**—current programs and available resources do not match the scale of people experiencing homelessness and housing instability or their varied needs of the current moment.
- ◆ **Tending to the complex aspects of the response**—shifting the conversation from opposing choices can bring the conversation towards what would be a productive balance between and among seemingly conflicting ideas, such as flexibility and consistency.
- ◆ **State partnership with Tribal Governments**—and with Urban Indian Organizations to meet the specific housing needs of tribal citizens and communities is a foundational component of a state effort to advance housing security.

More discussion and detail can be found in “Foundational Themes and Components” in Section 4 of this report.

Conceptual Shifts for a Long-Term Strategy

Building on the foundational themes, participant discussions also illuminated three conceptual shifts to incorporate in a long-term effort. Mindsets shape the actions and initiatives developed to address homelessness and housing insecurity. Participants emphasized that the underlying mindsets, or ways of thinking, need to change in order to enhance success and make progress towards advancing pathways towards housing security.

- ◆ **Shift to a holistic understanding of multiple contributing factors to housing insecurity and homelessness**—to be comprehensive and useful, a strategy cannot seek to address some factors and exclude others. Instead, a strategy will need to grapple with multiple structural factors and individual vulnerabilities and how they interact with each other.
- ◆ **Shift to a shared aspirational future**—to break down silos and build more intentional connections across the entire housing security landscape.
- ◆ **Shift to relationships of support, alignment, and coordination**—to foster incentives, relationships, and adaptive learning to ensure stable individuals, communities, and systems.

Guiding Principles

Guiding principles help align decisions and actions to the goal of advancing housing security. They serve to guide ongoing decision-making about actions to advance housing security; serve across levels and sectors—for strategy, policy, program design, service provision, and for local, regional, and state; help navigate aspects of the response that can seem to be contradictory and reduce adversarial approaches to finding solutions; and create conditions that balance flexibility for different parts of the complex response to housing insecurity with consistency for the response as a whole. Taken together, guiding principles contribute to a comprehensive approach to advancing housing security.

- Guiding Principle A:** Foster productive narratives around housing security and homelessness.
- Guiding Principle B:** Mobilize a multi-sector response to advance housing security.
- Guiding Principle C:** Respond to the holistic and interdependent nature of housing security.
- Guiding Principle D:** Design the response to housing insecurity around what people and communities need to thrive.
- Guiding Principle E:** Undo the harm of structural racism and other forms of systemic disadvantage that produce housing inequity.
- Guiding Principle F:** Employ a sense of urgency about both meeting immediate needs and initiating steps for long-term progress.
- Guiding Principle G:** Amplify the influence of those most affected by homelessness and housing instability.
- Guiding Principle H:** Create conditions that reduce competition and facilitate cooperation.
- Guiding Principle I:** Address the inability of the housing market to meet housing needs.
- Guiding Principle J:** Sustain the response to housing insecurity through stability in infrastructure, relationships, and appropriately scaled resources.
- Guiding Principle K:** Prepare to adapt to changing circumstances, unanticipated disruptions, and new knowledge.

Recommendations and Opportunities for Sustained Progress Towards Housing Security

Section 6 of HB1277 called for facilitated discussions to inform options and recommendations for a long-term strategy, including clarity on roles and responsibilities, and considerations of the manner in which investments should be made.

The following recommendations were developed and informed by the knowledge and expertise of a myriad of individuals with knowledge or experience of programs and policies related to homelessness and housing instability, and by the project team's experience in supporting collaborative efforts. Recommendations and opportunities are organized in the following categories:

- ◆ opportunities for State partnership with Tribal Governments;
- ◆ set the strategy up for success;
- ◆ respond to the continuum of housing needs;
- ◆ respond holistically to people's needs;
- ◆ bolster systems and workforce capacity and stability; and
- ◆ foster accountability and manage performance, and adapt over time.

Collectively, these recommendations embody actions in a more holistic approach to housing security, where entities and actors consider the common set of guiding principles described in this report. The following recommendations provide guidance for the State—the Legislature, Office of the Governor, and agencies—to lead and encourage a more coordinated framework; and for entities and organizations across sectors and levels to adopt conceptual shifts and guiding principles, in the actions they take according to their roles.

Opportunities for State Partnership with Tribal Governments

The State of Washington and federally recognized tribes have government to government relationships and these relationships recognize and respect the sovereignty of the other. Within that context, this section presents themes emerging from participant conversations for how the State could better partner with tribal governments in a long-term effort to advance housing security.

Set the Strategy up for Success

Recommendation 1

Multiple Successes: Recognize multiple, co-existing ways of understanding success.

Recommendation 2

Clarity of Total Investment and Benefit: Capture and communicate the comprehensive investments that advance housing security, the benefits they yield, and for whom.

Recommendation 3

Experiential Expertise: Amplify the insights and expertise of those affected by homelessness and housing instability by supporting them to participate in making decisions about, implementing, and assessing the performance of laws, policies, programs, and services related to housing insecurity.

Respond to the Continuum of Housing Needs

Recommendation 4

Housing Options: Expand the supply, variety, location, and quality of supported options and pathways for shelter, temporary, and longer-term housing, to better match people to their types and level of need and to their preferences.

Recommendation 5

Supply of Affordable Housing: Adopt strategies that align homelessness services and housing assistance with increasing the supply of affordable housing for rental and ownership. Allocate more funds to be used for operations and maintenance to preserve the current stock of subsidized and affordable housing.

Recommendation 6

Equitable Access to Housing: As policies are implemented to increase the supply of affordable housing, ensure equitable access for those transitioning from homelessness and most at risk of housing instability.

Recommendation 7

Geographic Variability: Accommodate the ways in which housing challenges manifest differently in different places.

Key actions include:

Local Affordability: Allow local communities to determine what is considered affordable housing and fair market pricing based on their local economic conditions.

Local Affordable Housing Solutions: Support local rental property owners and local builders/developers with risk mitigation and tailored incentives to participate in sustaining a robust stock of high-quality local affordable housing.

Recommendation 8

Cooperation Across Jurisdictions: Incentivize greater cooperation across geographic and political jurisdictions.

Respond Holistically to People's Needs

Recommendation 9

Coordinated Pathway: Create a coordinated pathway system that cultivates operational connections among entities working on outreach, entry into the homelessness response system, placement in housing, and longer-term housing stability.

Key actions include:

Infrastructure for Coordination: Directly support the infrastructure and effort required for active coordination and sustained relationships among local implementing organizations.

State and Local Engagement: Increase engagement across state and local levels to clarify policies, practices, and criteria for coordinated systems.

Recommendation 10

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.

Key actions include:

Income Eligibility Gap: Supplement housing assistance eligibility beyond federal income limits to compensate for the locally disproportionate mismatch between household income and housing costs.

Income Eligibility Cliff: Extend housing assistance eligibility to replace binary thresholds with a sliding scale to help people gradually transition to housing stability as their socioeconomic stability also gradually improves.

Recommendation 11

Person-Centered Navigation: Evolve current case management and care navigation efforts into a cross-sector navigation system that responds to the specific needs of individuals and households and follows them longitudinally as those needs evolve.

Recommendation 12

Circumstances of Precarious Housing: Expand investments that stabilize individuals or households with circumstances of precarious housing.

Key actions include:

Bridging Support: Provide bridging grants or loans for unanticipated expenses that may supersede making rent or mortgage payments on time.

Eviction Mitigation: Shift from policies that merely prohibit eviction to add comprehensive prevention strategies that mitigate the reasons for and impacts of impending eviction for tenants, neighbors, and property owners/managers.

Bolster Systems and Workforce Capacity and Stability

Recommendation 13

Diversity in Implementation: Increase the diversity of and cooperation among organizations and entities in the public, nonprofit, and private sector with the potential to contribute to the response to housing insecurity.

Recommendation 14

Financial Stability of Implementers: Foster the financial stability of those implementing the response to housing insecurity by offering a range of funding models to variety of grantees and partners.

Recommendation 15

Working Conditions: Improve working conditions and supports for the frontline workers who directly provide homeless services and housing assistance.

Recommendation 16

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

Foster Accountability, Manage Performance, and Adapt Over Time

Recommendation 17

Alignment of Policymaking: Assess laws and policies in all areas of government for the potential to affect housing security and assess housing laws and policies for their potential to affect interrelated goals in other areas.

Key actions include:

Policy Coordination: Support closer coordination among those who set and implement policies for interdependent forms of assistance within and across levels of government.

Alignment with Poverty Reduction Strategies: Cooperate to implement strategies that mutually reduce poverty and housing insecurity.

Recommendation 18

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.

Key actions include:

Diversity of Knowledge: Draw on complementary sources of information to design, implement, and monitor policies, programs, and services.

Connect Research and Practice: Create opportunities for dialogue and cooperation among the research and evaluation communities and the policy and practice communities.

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SECTION 1: PROJECT OVERVIEW

Recognizing many challenges related to homelessness and housing instability, in Section 6 of House Bill 1277 (HB 1277, see Appendix A for text of relevant section) the Washington State Legislature called for a multi-year effort between 2021 and 2023 to gather information about homelessness and housing instability and facilitate discussions among individuals representing various roles, sectors, and geographies to explore what is needed for sustained progress towards housing security (See Appendix C for a list of participants). The Legislature tasked the William D. Ruckelshaus Center (the Center, see Appendix B for more information) to conduct this work. To accomplish this, the Center partnered with Washington State University’s Division of Governmental Studies and Services (DGSS).

Legislative tasks to be included in the scope of the project included:

- ◆ In (2)(a), examine “trends affecting, and policies guiding, the housing and services provided to individuals and families who are or at risk of homelessness[;]”
- ◆ In (2)(c)(i), facilitated discussions to identify participant “concerns, barriers, opportunities, and desired principles for a long-term strategy to improve outcomes and services for persons at risk or experiencing homelessness and develop pathways to permanent housing solutions[;]”
- ◆ In (2)(c)(ii), fact-finding and facilitated discussions among participants to “identify root causes of housing instability and homelessness within Washington State.” This task should include consideration of geographic and demographic variations, as well as “identify statutory and regulatory issues that impede efforts to address root causes[;]” and
- ◆ In (2)(d), facilitated discussions among participants for “the purposes of identifying options and recommendations to develop and implement a long-term strategy to improve the outcomes and service[s] for persons at risk or experiencing homelessness and develop pathways to permanent housing solutions, including the manner and amount in which the state funds homelessness housing and services and performance measures that must be achieved to receive state funding.”

DGSS faculty and staff have conducted work relating to the fact-finding tasks: taking a deep dive into the literature surrounding contributing factors of homelessness and housing instability and reviewing available data. These separate volumes on the “Status of Fact-Finding” are available

through the Center’s website.² Information and experiences shared by participants also contributed to the development of a common information base.

The Center and DGSS released reports on the status of tasks (2)(a), (c)(i), and (c)(ii) in December 2021 and December 2022. This report, in companionship with “Status of Fact-Finding, Year 3,” present a cumulative narrative of those tasks. The Center project team has prepared this “Final Report of Facilitated Discussions and Recommendations,” which synthesizes themes across facilitated discussions over the course of this project and provides a framework to catalyze a renewed and robust long-term trajectory towards housing security, to satisfy the third and final reporting requirement described in HB 1277, Section 6 (2)(d). The project team will be available for follow-up conversations and project dissemination through June 2024.

This project has not been an audit nor an evaluation of the numerous entities working to meet the needs of individuals and families experiencing homelessness and/or housing instability. Nor has this work been an evaluation of the many strategies in place to guide that work. While participants reflected on the historical work and investments, their conversations focused on where to go next: on shaping a scaffold for decision-making and identifying priority action areas needed both acutely and over time, rather than detailed tactical solutions.

Report Structure

The information provided in this report is presented in three primary sections. These sections are (1) **Approach to Facilitated Discussions: 2021-2023**, (2) **Landscape of Housing Security**, and (3) **Elements of a Long-Term Strategy**.

Approach to Facilitated Discussions: 2021-2023 provides an overview of the team’s iterative approach to facilitated discussions, criteria for participant outreach and engagement, and approach to analysis and synthesis of participant insights.

Landscape of Housing Security presents a summary of the patterns of homelessness and housing instability, of the investments and entities engaged in the response to housing insecurity, as well as policy trends and court rulings. A deeper dive into the research and data collection regarding patterns of homelessness and housing instability can be found in the reports on “Status of Fact-Finding” produced by WSU’s Division of Governmental Studies and Services.

Participants, during iterations of facilitated discussions, have reinforced, deepened, and expanded upon the elements put forth in the legislation. **Elements of a Long-Term Strategy** reports out the foundational themes and components of a long-term strategy. These themes serve as the groundwork for framing the conceptual shifts, for articulating guiding principles,

² Reports on fact-finding efforts are available through the project page:
<https://ruckelshauscenter.wsu.edu/projects/current-projects/pathways-to-housing-security/>

identifying recommendations, and capturing considerations and concerns about those recommendations and key actions. The guiding principles and recommendations provide a scaffold for decision-making across the sectors—government, philanthropic, service providers, others—including ways to guide investment decisions and ways to assess whether those investments are contributing to desired results.

This report also reflects the call to action emphasized by participants. A call for:

- ◆ a more transparent, holistic, coordinated, and multi-sectoral approach to advancing housing security;
- ◆ entities and organizations across sectors and geographic scales to adopt conceptual shifts and guiding principles in their actions according to their roles; and
- ◆ the State—the Legislature, Office of the Governor, agencies—to not only implement, but to lead and encourage a more coordinated framework.

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SECTION 2:

APPROACH TO FACILITATED DISCUSSIONS: 2021-2023

As the Center drew on its experience convening diverse groups to inform public policy, the project team utilized an iterative and adaptive engagement approach. That approach started with individual interviews and progressed towards increasingly broader convenings that engaged individuals with varied roles and sectors in conversations with one another.

At the start of each interview, focused discussion, or workshop, the project team informed participants that this report would present aggregated themes, with no statement attributed to any individual or entity. A list of all participants can be found in Appendix C, except for those who opted out of being identified.

Themes emerging from preliminary conversations informed the focus areas of workshops and emerging options for a state strategy. Conversations during those workshops, in turn, helped refine those options into finalized recommendations and identify additional consideration and key actions. The rest of this section provides deeper understanding into the 2021-2023 Center iterative approach, as well as criteria for participant outreach.

Interviews

A first cycle of interviews, reported in 2021,³ served to clarify legislative intent and priorities, shape the project approach, and provide an initial understanding of concerns and areas of opportunity, starting from the perspectives of those with statewide leadership roles in efforts to address homelessness and housing instability.

The next cycle of interviews, reported in 2022,⁴ included 44 individuals across various roles, sectors, levels of jurisdiction, and regions. These interviews served to provide an initial range of perspectives on emerging concerns, opportunities, guiding principles, key questions, and suggestions for how to design productive engagements on a larger scale. These interviews also

3 Sanders et al. (2021). Pathways to Housing Security: Phase 1 Report. Online: <https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2180/2021/12/Pathways-to-Housing-Security-Report-FINAL.pdf>

4 Shulman et al. (2022). Status of Stakeholder Discussions: Phase 2 Report. Online: https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2180/2022/12/Housing-Security_Stakeholder-Discussions_Year-2-Report_Revised-12.23.22.pdf

had the purpose of elucidating what kinds of further engagement, with whom, and around which issue areas would most usefully explore what is needed for sustained progress towards housing security in Washington State.

Focused Discussions

This first cycle of discussions in 2023 focused on conversations among participants with similar interests, practices, and backgrounds. The team also sought to engage with individuals who work in communities underrepresented in policy-making spaces and/or overrepresented in experiences of homelessness and housing instability.

Specifically, these conversations provided an opportunity for individuals with similar responsibilities or working in similar contexts to share their perspectives regarding challenges and barriers, and successes, opportunities, and potential roles in a statewide approach to improving housing security in Washington State. The project team convened these focused discussions for individuals with a role in or knowledge of:

- ◆ private sector housing;
- ◆ providing housing and related services rural counties in Washington State;
- ◆ involvement in research, evaluation, and monitoring; and
- ◆ providing housing and related services for individuals in transition to/from State-supported systems and services, such as individuals released from state facilities or immigrants.

The project team also convened conversations for individuals affiliated with Tribal Governments and Urban Indian Organizations that are responsible for planning and coordinating homelessness services and housing assistance. During those conversations, participants shared perspectives on the experiences of homelessness and housing insecurity and how the State could support their efforts within their respective reservations and tribal communities.

This cycle of focused discussions helped clarify concerns and elicit emerging options to focus on in further future facilitated discussions. Those workshop themes and the process for providing additional input on the emerging options is described in the following section.

Discussion agendas, including facilitation questions, can be found in Appendix C.

Workshops

A series of six virtual workshops in August 2023 brought the collaborative knowledge gained, and some of the same individuals who participated in interviews and focused discussions, into a facilitated process. That process more broadly engaged individuals from across sectors, locations, and perspectives and with expertise or a role in the policies or services/programs related to homelessness and housing insecurity. While expanding the diversity and scale of the

collaborative engagement, the project team also focused on refining potential options identified in prior discussions by eliciting feedback, assessing convergence, clarifying differences, and capturing concerns and considerations.

The overall design of the workshops—the six thematic areas and emerging options for actions the State could take to advance housing security—reflected the topics identified by participants in interviews and focus discussions held in 2021 and 2022. Those topics include areas of convergence and divergence, and opportunities for transformative actions. Thematic topics for workshops, included (see Appendix D for workshop materials, including agendas, emerging options, and facilitation questions):

- ◆ meeting needs along the housing continuum,
- ◆ responding holistically to people’s needs,
- ◆ connecting housing security and economic security,
- ◆ navigating flexibility and consistency,
- ◆ defining success and managing performance, and
- ◆ shifting views of homelessness and housing instability.

In September and early October 2023, the project team convened six additional workshops—two virtual and four in-person across the state (Puyallup, Spokane, Kennewick, and Everett) that included 87 participants. All of these workshops shared the same theme, which emerged during August workshops: a desired strategic framework of a statewide approach to advancing housing security that builds a networked system of supports and resources focused on helping communities—at all scales—thrive.

Outreach and Participation

As directed by Section 6 of HB 1277, the project team worked with representatives of the following:

- ◆ Tribal governments and Urban Indian Organizations,
- ◆ local governments,
- ◆ local providers of housing and services for homeless populations,
- ◆ advocates and stakeholders representing the interests of homeless populations,
- ◆ mental health and substance abuse professionals,
- ◆ representatives of the business community,
- ◆ legislators from both parties of the House and Senate, including appointees representing the two largest caucuses in the Washington State House and Washington State Senate, and
- ◆ executive branch representatives, including three gubernatorial appointments.

The project team also conducted outreach using the following criteria to identify additional participants:

- ◆ expressed interest in this project, and/or suggested by another individual,
- ◆ have expertise or a role in the policies or services/programs related to homelessness and housing insecurity,
- ◆ geographic distribution,
- ◆ involved in a multi-jurisdictional effort to coordinate and/or collaborate on policies related to housing and homelessness,
- ◆ communities that are least heard, often underrepresented in policy discussions related housing and homelessness policies, and
- ◆ overall number of interviews and workshops fit within project time and resource constraints.

The project team also worked with partners at the Washington State Department of Commerce, Washington State Department of Social and Health Services,⁵ and Washington State Association of Counties, which forwarded invitations to relevant email distribution lists, such as standing committees and recipients of grants related to affordable housing and services for homeless crisis response.

During conversations early in the project, many participants emphasized the importance of including individuals with personal experiences of homelessness and housing instability, but cautioned the project team about holding conversations in a way that is not stigmatizing or retraumatizing. Others also noted that people bring their professional expertise, as well as personal experiences, which could include prior experiences of homelessness and/or current housing instability, to these conversations.

The project team utilized several partnerships to include perspectives of individuals with lived experience of homelessness and/or housing insecurity. The first partnership involved close coordination with the Housing Unit at the Department of Commerce and Kone Consulting, who were conducting a series of focus groups convened among individuals currently living without a house. More details on these conversations are described in a following section, **“Incorporating Work Done by Others in Parallel.”** Learnings from those conversations have informed the development of this report. The project team also partnered with Ferndale Community Services to convene a series of conversations with some of their clients and advocates.

5 The Center partnered with tribal liaisons who distributed our letters to Tribal Leaders inviting participation in facilitated discussions and connected the team with opportunities to share information about the project and receive input at existing forums. Specifically, the team provided project updates at the following meetings: May 11, 2023, Indian Policy Advisory Committee – Economic Services Subcommittee and July 12, 2023, Indian Policy Advisory Committee. A member of the project team attended the 2023 Washington State Tribal Opioid/Fentanyl Summit: Strengthening Pathways to Healing, May 22-23, 2023, where participants had conversations about housing challenges and needs in tribal communities, especially for individuals with subsistence use disorders.

Participant Stipends

Following the Washington State Office of Equity Community Compensation Guidelines,⁶ the Center provided participant stipends to individuals who were not otherwise compensated for their time and are low-income and/or are sharing lived experience related to housing instability, homelessness, and/or program and service delivery for individuals who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. This policy is intended to reduce the financial barriers for individuals directly impacted to participate and contribute their expertise in conversations.

Collection, Synthesis, and Analysis of Insights

The project team gathered qualitative data and information through workshops, facilitated discussions, and individual interviews. At the conclusion of each interview or workshop, team members entered notes—without attribution to speaker—into a single spreadsheet to enable the analysis of all conversations. As the team planned each cycle of facilitated discussions, members reviewed and synthesized the insights from the input received to develop a first offer of emerging options for a state strategy for advancing housing security. Participants received meeting materials with context about the purpose of the project and overarching questions. Materials and discussion questions from facilitated discussions in 2023 can be found in Appendices D and E.

Through iterations of analysis and synthesis, both individually and collectively, the team discussed observations and themes regarding perceptions of housing instability and homelessness in Washington and what is needed for sustained progress towards greater housing security—in terms of guiding principles and options and recommendations for a long-term strategy. The information and recommendations, including guiding principles, presented in this report reflect the perspectives shared by participants during facilitated discussions, reviews of relevant background documents and reports of other work being conducted in parallel, and the team’s expertise in collaborative governance and organizational systems and structures.

Incorporating Work Done by Others in Parallel

Currently, thousands of entities and organizations across the state work on issues related to housing security at different scales, contributing in different ways. Recognizing that many people expressed concerns about duplication of effort, whenever possible, the project team has drawn on previous and current efforts as building blocks and complementary sources of insights.

The project team worked diligently to pay careful attention to other existing efforts and conversations working to coordinate delivery and implement housing assistance programs and develop strategies to meet the varied needs of individuals experiencing homelessness or

⁶ Washington State Office of Equity. (n.d.). Community Compensation Guidelines. Webpage. Washington State Office of the Governor. Accessed November 16, 2023. Online: <https://equity.wa.gov/people/community-compensation-guidelines>

housing instability. Listening to those conversations, reviewing other bodies of work, and asking questions at standing meetings allowed the project team to engage with a broader range of perspectives, to gain a deeper understanding of a specific area of focus, and also minimize the number of meetings asked of individuals. For example, the project team closely tracked the Affordable Housing Advisory Board’s update to their strategic plan and a study to “identify and develop effective interventions and responses to primary and secondary workplace trauma experienced by direct service staff who work in homeless shelters, homeless outreach, and permanent supportive housing.”⁷ Team members also facilitated conversations during standing meetings, such as the Steering Committee of the Governor’s Poverty Reduction Working Group and the Indian Policy Advisory Committee, which is affiliated with the Department of Social and Health Services.

During the course of this project, the Department of Commerce, with advice from the Statewide Advisory Council on Homelessness, began work to update its strategic plan for the homeless housing crisis response system. The Homelessness Assistance Unit, within the Department of Commerce, partnered with Kone Consulting to gather experience and perspectives of individuals experiencing homelessness and service providers. The project team coordinated closely with Department of Commerce staff to develop interview questions for service providers and focus group questions for conversations among individuals currently experiencing homelessness in six different communities. The project team included summaries from those conversations in the analysis and synthesis.

7 Chapter 223, Laws of 2021



SECTION 3: LANDSCAPE OF HOUSING SECURITY

Section 6 of HB 1277 called for an examination of the current patterns of homelessness and housing instability in order to identify the long-term pathways towards housing security.

Housing needs are often defined in broad categories, for example: emergency, supportive, transitional, affordable, and market-rate. Entities may make decisions and/or act in one or multiple categories of housing needs. However, most participants described housing as a continuum, and effective programs or policies in any of the categories ultimately depend on the rest of them. For example, temporary housing serves its function well when longer-term housing and appropriate supports are available and accessible.

This section takes a holistic view of the landscape housing security across Washington—first by providing an overview of the patterns of homelessness and housing instability, then the myriad of investments, entities, and actors engaged in the response to housing insecurity. This section then provides an overview of policy trends and court rulings.

Current Patterns of Homelessness and Housing Insecurity in Washington State

Participants described a myriad of ways that state and federal entities seek to gather information about the demographics and geographic patterns of individuals and families experiencing homelessness and/or housing insecurity. Such information can be useful, but many participants also described limitations in quantitative data.

The annual Point in Time (PIT) count is a nationwide accounting of sheltered and unsheltered people on a night in January. As reported in “Status of Fact-Finding” reports, patterns of sheltered and unsheltered homelessness have increased with overall upward trends reported in Washington’s annual PIT count.⁸ According to the 2023 PIT count, approximately 14,000 individuals meet the criteria for sheltered homelessness and approximately 6,000 individuals

⁸ Washington State Department of Commerce. (2023). Annual Point in Time Count. Webpage. Washington State Department of Commerce. Accessed November 16, 2023. Online: <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/serving-communities/homelessness/annual-point-time-count/>

are experiencing unsheltered homelessness. However, many participants have noted that this approach may not provide a complete picture of individuals living unhoused or unstably housed. For example, the PIT count relies on outreach workers to connect with individuals willing to participate in the count; approaches to data collection may vary by county and vary from year to year; and it does not include individuals who are unstably housed.

Twice a year the Department of Commerce releases a “Snapshot of Homelessness in Washington State,” which provides supplemental information on the number of individuals experiencing homeless and insights on the number of individuals who may be experiencing housing instability in Washington.⁹ This report utilizes information collected from state administrative data systems such as those collecting data on individuals receiving public assistance and diagnoses in Medicaid data that indicate homelessness. By flagging individuals and households with any indication of homelessness or housing instability—such as mailing address of “general”—or where housing instability or homelessness is part of program eligibility, the “Snapshot of Homelessness in Washington State” report provides an estimate of individuals experiencing homelessness or housing instability and who are receiving public assistance across counties and by race/ethnicity. Of the 2,795,538 individuals receiving public assistance in Washington, 196,117 individuals are reported as experiencing homelessness or unstable housing.¹⁰ Of the 1,465,161 households receiving public assistance, 157,642 households are reported as experiencing homelessness or unstable housing. The Snapshot report also provides information on the race/ethnicity of individuals and households experiencing homelessness or housing instability for each county.

In the “Status of Fact-Finding, Year 3” report, Washington State University’s Division of Governmental Studies and Services presents information on the rates and trends of individuals meeting the criteria for sheltered and unsheltered homelessness. That review includes trends in geography, demographics, and potential contributing factors, as called for in Section 6, HB 1277.

Collectively, these resources and bodies of work provide policymakers and program implementors insights on the number of individuals and households experiencing homelessness and/or housing instability. However, participants emphasized that people and households may be excluded from those data collection efforts for a myriad of reasons—those ineligible for public assistance, those who do not meet definitions of sheltered or unsheltered homeless, or those not included during the annual PIT count.

9 Washington State Department of Commerce. (2023). Snapshot of Homelessness Reports. Webpage Collection. Washington State Department of Commerce. Accessed November 16, 2023. Online: “Understanding the Snapshot Report” and all Snapshot reports released since 2016 are available at: <https://deptofcommerce.app.box.com/s/hnpkedlkifogzx8i892cu0k34nzsrbtp>

10 Washington State Department of Commerce. (2023). Snapshot of Homelessness Reports. Webpage Collection. Washington State Department of Commerce. Accessed November 16, 2023. Online: <https://deptofcommerce.app.box.com/s/hnpkedlkifogzx8i892cu0k34nzsrbtp/file/1192641696848>

Overview of the Investments and Entities Engaged in the Response to Homelessness and Housing Insecurity

Efforts across multiple sectors support individuals and families experiencing homelessness and housing instability in Washington State. Programs are implemented and services delivered by a diverse array of governmental, private, and nongovernmental entities. Individuals may also utilize support from friends and family as they navigate not only the housing landscape, but also other systems such as healthcare, education, economics, and justice. Policy has been and is developed by leaders and elected officials at all levels of government, which creates layers of structures that influence each other and also influence/inform possibilities at different scales—state, regional, organizational, individual.

During participant conversations, it became evident that the layers created by the current structure can also lead to confusion for individuals working to help increase housing security and for those experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness, especially in connection to the workforce's high turnover rates. Turnover leads to a loss of knowledge of, and relationships across, the layered landscape. Some participants focused on resource constraints—from organizational accessibility to individual eligibility. Organizations receive resources from a variety of entities, with a range of constraints as to how those resources can be spent and then need to be reported back to investors—which increase the administrative requirements for managing resources and the complexity in connecting individuals with the supports they need. The shifting policy landscape constrains—and evolves—the realms of possibility and ways of implementing programs.

A common context of the current investments and entities engaged in the response to experiences of homelessness and housing insecurity is critical for further clarifying the roles and investments needed to create long-term pathways towards housing security.

The following graphic provides an overview of current investments across the housing continuum and interconnectedness among entities. The following subsections provide more context for the myriad of roles and entities, as well as the shifting landscape of policy and legislative trends.

Exhibit 1. Investment Landscape

Federal Government

Federal housing and economic services, policies, and programs provide a broad context for the housing security landscape. The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness is “focused on preventing and ending homelessness” and consists of 19 federal agencies that help develop and implement the Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness.¹¹ These agencies

11 Current plan available at: United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. (2022). ALL IN: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness. United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. Online: https://www.usich.gov/All_In_The_Federal_Strategic_Plan_to_Prevent_and_End_Homelessness.pdf

oversee a diverse range of programs, including rental assistance, mortgage tax credits, and economic supports. Collectively those programs provide resources to tribal governments, states, and individuals. Some of those resources, in turn, may be passed to local governments, private entities, and nongovernmental service providers.

BOX A US Interagency Council on Homelessness agencies:	
◆ Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)	◆ Department of Interior (DOI)
◆ Department of Education (ED)	◆ Department of Justice (DOJ)
◆ Department of Labor (DOL)	◆ Department of Transportation (DOT)
◆ Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)	◆ AmeriCorps
◆ Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)	◆ General Services Administration (GSA)
◆ Department of Agriculture (USDA)	◆ Office Management and Budget (OMB)
◆ Department of Commerce	◆ Social Security Administration (SSA)
◆ Department of Defense (DOD)	◆ United States Postal Service (USPS)
◆ Department of Energy (DOE)	◆ White House Office on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships
◆ Department of Homeland Security (DHS)	

Tribal Governments and Urban Indian Organizations

Treaties and executive orders provide a legal foundation for the special, legal relationship that the 29 federally recognized tribes within Washington have with the U.S. government, and for the trust responsibilities held by the federal government to tribes. In the context of housing, the U.S. Government has an obligation to provide adequate housing to Native Americans. Tribal governments have recognized authority to develop and implement housing programs and services for eligible tribal citizens.

Tribal governments may receive a mix of resources from the federal government, from state government for affordable housing capital projects, and/or from the state via county governments to operate homelessness crisis response. However, access to those resources varies by tribe and their administrative capacity to seek and meet grant requirements. Individual access to programs depends on meeting eligibility requirements.

Urban Indian Organizations, such as the Chief Seattle Club and The Healing Lodge of the Seven Nations, provide services to Native Americans in urban areas and people of all racial groups in tribal communities.

Washington State Government

Nearly all state agencies implement programs and allocate resources in the response to housing instability and homelessness. Programs range from housing-specific to programs that provide economic supports such as energy, food, medical, and housing assistance. Individual access to those programs can vary by a variety of circumstances such as age, income, geography, and prior history related to evictions and/or convictions.

The Washington State Department of Commerce (Commerce) plays a key role, acting as a coordinator for state and federal housing related policies and distributing resources to counties, which in turn pass those resources to tribes and service providers. In some cases, Commerce contracts directly with housing and homeless service providers. Commerce also has roles related to housing security that range from capital funding for affordable housing stock to building housing infrastructure and growth management, which includes housing goals, to improving outcomes for individuals after a period of incarceration.¹²

In the course of this project, significant changes have occurred at the state level regarding roles and the levels of investment—some of which are still in the early stages of coming to fruition. For example:

- ◆ HB 1277 increased the document recording fee and catalyzed changes in data collected and reported on racial equity by the Department of Commerce;
- ◆ internal reorganization of the Department of Commerce;
- ◆ increased resources and investments in homelessness and housing related programs and initiatives;
- ◆ launch of the Rights of Way Initiative, which is a multi-state agency, local government and nonprofit effort to develop a grant program to “transition persons residing on state-owned rights of way to safer housing opportunities, with an emphasis on permanent housing solutions;”¹³ and
- ◆ launch of Apple Health and Homes, a “multi-agency effort that pairs healthcare services with housing resources for some of the state’s most vulnerable residents.”¹⁴

12 Washington State Department of Commerce. (2023). Washington Statewide Reentry Council. Webpage. Washington State Department of Commerce. Accessed November 16, 2023. Online: <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/about-us/boards-and-commissions/statewide-reentry-council/>

13 Washington State Department of Commerce. (2023). Rights-of-Way Safety Initiative. Webpage. Washington State Department of Commerce. Accessed November 16, 2023. Online: <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/program-index/rights-of-way-initiative/>

14 Washington State Department of Commerce (2023). Apple Health and Homes Initiative. Webpage. Washington State Department of Commerce. Accessed November 16, 2023. Online: <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/building-infrastructure/housing/ahah-psh/ahah-program/>

State and Regional Coordination

The State has also created a variety of councils and commissions, which include representatives of entities with a variety of roles and perspectives, to coordinate the work of promoting housing security and meeting the needs of all individuals. Work is coordinated and informed through entities such as the Washington State Advisory Council on Homelessness and Interagency Council on Homelessness. The Legislature created the Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH) to “create greater levels of interagency coordination and to coordinate state agency efforts with the state and local entities addressing homelessness.”¹⁵ The ICH also works closely with the State Advisory Council on Homelessness (SACH), who in turn coordinates with the Affordable Housing Advisory Board (AHAB).

Additional multi-jurisdictional councils or commissions that advise policies or oversee the coordination of statewide programs relating to housing security include:

- ◆ Governor’s Poverty Reduction Working Group;¹⁶
- ◆ Washington State Housing Finance Commission;¹⁷
- ◆ Balance of Washington State Continuum of Care Steering Committee;¹⁸
- ◆ Statewide Reentry Council;¹⁹ and
- ◆ Interagency Workgroup on Youth Homelessness.²⁰

15 Revised Code of Washington. 43.185C.170. (2006). Online: <https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=43.185C.170>

16 Jackson et al. (2020). Blueprint for a Just and Equitable Future: The 10-Year Plan to Dismantle Poverty in Washington State. Report. Dismantle Poverty in Washington. Online: <https://dismantlepovertyinwa.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Final10yearPlan.pdf>

17 Washington State Housing Finance Commission. (2022). Washington State Housing Finance Commission Homepage. Webpage. Online: <https://www.wshfc.org/>

18 Washington State Department of Commerce. (2023). Continuum of Care. Webpage. Washington State Department of Commerce. Accessed November 16, 2023. Online: <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/serving-communities/homelessness/continuum-of-care/>

19 Washington State Department of Commerce. (2023). Washington Statewide Reentry Council. Webpage. Washington State Department of Commerce. Accessed November 16, 2023. Online: <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/about-us/boards-and-commissions/statewide-reentry-council/>

20 Washington State Department of Commerce. (2023). Interagency Workgroup on Youth Homelessness. Online: <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/serving-communities/homelessness/office-of-youth-homelessness/office-of-homeless-youth-committees-and-work-group/#:~:text=Gov.,to%20youth%20homelessness%20in%20Washington.>

Additional groups have developed policy recommendations to better meet the housing needs of their communities. For example, the Washington State Council on Aging²¹ has developed legislative priorities to meet the housing needs of seniors, and the Sex Offender Policy Board,²² maintained by the Sentencing Guidelines Commission, has released several reports with recommendations on addressing barriers to housing faced by individuals with a duty to register or prior conviction of a sex offense.

In many regions, there are also a variety of partnership or coalition approaches to addressing homelessness and housing instability across jurisdictions. These are formed, for example, to build shared understanding of the community's housing challenges, collaborate on the development of affordable housing, jointly address homelessness, and share resources. Some regions spanning multiple jurisdictions have institutions dedicated to the purpose of coordinating and supporting a regional approach.²³ Some coordinate efforts across jurisdictions on specific challenges or address historic racism and inequities, such as the Black Homeownership Initiative.²⁴

Local Government

Local governments also play a large role in housing security—from investing to distributing resources to delivering services. Federal and state resources are distributed to counties, which in turn distribute these resources to tribes and local organizations. Local governments can directly fund affordable housing, through housing levies and funding contributions, and various other forms of housing assistance—and each county develops a homeless housing plan for its jurisdictional area.

There are a variety of other ways that counties and municipalities contribute to the response to homelessness and availability of affordable housing.²⁵ Local zoning, in the context of federal and state regulations, as well as fees and permit procedures, determine what housing can be built, using what land, and in what quantity.²⁶ Local governments also have a role in creating and supporting infrastructure that facilitates housing development and accessibility, such as

21 Washington State Council on Aging. (2023). 2023 Legislative Priorities. Washington State Department of Social and Health Services. Online: <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/sites/default/files/ALTA/stakeholders/documents/SCOA/2023%20WSCO%20Leg%20Priorities.pdf>

22 See General Recommendations for Sex Offender Management, Sex Offender in the Community: Housing and Community Education, available at: https://sgc.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/sopb/documents/general_recommendations.pdf. See also: Recommendations for SSOSA Reforms, available at: https://sgc.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/SOPB/documents/house_public_safety_committee_report.pdf

23 See, for example: Puget Sound Regional Council. (2023). Online: <https://www.psrc.org/our-work/housing>

24 Housing Development Consortium. (2023). Online: <https://www.housingconsortium.org/bipoc-homeownership/>

25 For examples of the options available to municipalities, see: Association of Washington Cities and Municipal Research and Services Center. (2022). Homelessness and housing toolkit for cities. AWC and MRSC. Online: https://wacities.org/docs/default-source/resources/h3manual.pdf?sfvrsn=b5d1594f_11

26 For more on the effects of various planning regulations on housing, see the Department of Commerce, Housing Memorandum: Issues Affecting Housing Availability and Affordability.

transportation. They are also instrumental in other structural factors that intersect with housing, such as local economic development.

These funding and planning decisions are guided by a variety of plans, some focusing on land-use and community growth, others on housing people experiencing homelessness. These plans must be consistent with local plan guidelines issued by the Department of Commerce, with annual reports on plan accomplishments.²⁷

Local Implementers, Private Funders, and Other Nongovernmental Entities

A wide range of organizations, both public and private, implement programs and deliver services to individuals and communities. A wide range of entities also build and maintain the community infrastructure that contribute to housing security. The table below provides examples of the many local implementors, identified by project participants, who already contribute to housing security in communities—or will be needed partners.

Food banks	Real estate	Property managers
Advocacy organizations	Libraries	Faith communities
College human/student services	School counselors	First responders: EMT, fire, law enforcement
Community corrections officers	Insurance providers	Urban Indian Organizations
Neighborhood groups	Downtown associations, business associations	Private builders & developers
Community centers	Community land trusts	Nonprofit builders & developers
Hospitals	In-patient treatment centers	Sober living environments, such as oxford homes
Local alternative dispute resolution centers	Peers/individuals with lived experience	Homeowners
Friends and family	Philanthropies	Regional initiatives and networks

Overview of Court Rulings and Policy Trends

The December 2022 “Report on Facilitated Discussions” provides a summary of court rulings and legislative trends to provide context and trends of the shifting legal and policy framework in which entities and actors across the housing landscape are making decisions and investments. The following sections provide an overview of court rulings and expand upon the previously reported legislative trends.

²⁷ Washington State Department of Commerce. (2023). County Plans and Annual Reports. Webpage. Washington State Department of Commerce. Accessed November 16, 2023. Online: <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/serving-communities/homelessness/local-government-5-year-plans/>

Court Rulings

Federal court rulings define the bounds of policies and court decisions at state and local levels.²⁸ Examples of significant court rulings include:

- ◆ *Papachristou v. City of Jacksonville* (1972) and *Kolendar v. Lawson* (1983) held that overbroad vagrancy laws and vague anti-loitering statutes are a violation of Due Process and serve as a foundation for current anti-nuisance ordinances.
- ◆ *Reed v. Town of Gilbert* (2015) limited local abilities to target panhandling. However, other federal decisions regarding access to public spaces are much narrower and do not prevent cities from enforcing anti-nuisance laws to target homelessness.
- ◆ *Martin v. City of Boise* (2019) found that jurisdictions cannot enforce camping or sleeping ordinances when enough shelter beds are not available.

Federal case law creates a framework for state and local policies that may reduce the visibility of homelessness in public spaces. However, such policies may increase individual interactions with law enforcement and/or be ineffective in addressing the structural and individual factors that contribute to homelessness.²⁹

The Washington State Supreme Court decision in *Seattle v. Long* (2020)³⁰ will have lasting, to be determined, ramifications for individuals living in their vehicles. A workgroup, as directed by the Legislature, and facilitated by DGSS, has developed recommendations³¹ to, among other things, determine how to identify vehicles used as residences, and how to determine when towing and storage fees are excessive.³²

The interface of state laws on eviction and courts also shapes housing stability for individuals and families. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, governments enacted eviction moratoria to reduce a surge of evictions. The Washington State Legislature created an eviction resolution pilot program, which provided tenants and landlords the opportunity to explore mutually agreeable approaches before seeking resolution by Superior Courts.³³

28 A more detailed overview of federal case law can be found on pages 7-8 of December 2022, Pathways to Housing Security, available at: https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2180/2022/12/Housing-Security_Stakeholder-Discussions_Year-2-Report_Revised-12.23.22.pdf

29 National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (2021)

30 *City of Seattle v. Long*, 463 P.3d 135 (Wash. Ct. App. 2020)

31 Washington State Legislature. Committee Documents: Senate Housing – 1/11/2023. Webpage. Accessed November 16, 2023. Online: <https://app.leg.wa.gov/committeeschedules/Home/Documents/30244>

32 Washington State Legislature. (2022). Supplemental Transportation Budget. Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5689, Section 109, lines 16-29. Online: <https://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2021-22/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/Senate/5689-5.SL.pdf?q=20231120155339>

33 Washington Courts. (2023). Eviction Resolution Pilot Program. Online: <https://www.courts.wa.gov/newsinfo/index.cfm?fa=newsinfo.EvictionResolutionProgram>

Policy Trends

Legislative action in Washington State reflects the increasing response to homelessness and affordable housing over the last two decades. During this time, the overall trend has been an increase in proposed legislation associated with the descriptive tag or categories of:

- ◆ “homeless persons;”
- ◆ “low-income persons;”
- ◆ an amended “housing and homes” tag; and
- ◆ housing related bills with the term “affordable” in the sentence summary.³⁴

A review of all categories illustrated a general increase in bills introduced. All categories also show that, with the increase in the number of bills introduced, these categories also increased in proportion of all bills introduced. These parallel trends support the claim that with the increasing number of bills, these topics are taking up more legislative focus in consideration and activity. For a more detailed analysis of trends in bills in these categories, see Appendix F.

Many of the housing-related bills considered in the 2023 Legislative Session reflect a broad range of topics. Several are related to funding, with historic increases in investment in the Housing Trust Fund, homes and housing, mental health, substance use disorders, specific at-risk populations, legal obligations, and investments into incentive programs for those with low-income. Topics of bills passed include tax incentives and breaks, rent issues, counsel and financial obligations for indigent defendants, home and housing assistance, support for students and foster youth, affordable housing zoning, housing supply, and utility use protection.

Bipartisan support through sponsorship and testimony has been illustrated for certain at-risk populations like students and foster youth, affordable housing, housing intervention programs, housing supply, and poverty support measures. General bipartisan support for many of the passed bills during the 2023 Legislative session suggests continued common ground and interest in finding legislative approaches to advancing housing security.

³⁴ Washington State Legislature. (2023). Bill Information. Webpage. Washington State Legislature. Accessed November 16, 2023. Online: <https://app.leg.wa.gov/billinfo/>

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SECTION 4:

ELEMENTS OF A LONG-TERM STRATEGY

In Section 6 of HB 1277, the Legislature outlined several components that should be included in a long-term strategy:

- ◆ address the root causes of homelessness and housing insecurity,
- ◆ clearly assign responsibilities,
- ◆ support localization both to address specific community needs and to recognize that each community must play a part in the solution,
- ◆ respect property owner rights,
- ◆ encourage private sector involvement in solutions and service, and
- ◆ develop pathways to permanent housing solutions and associated services.

During the iterations of interviews and facilitated discussions held by the Center between 2021 and 2023, participants reinforced, deepened, and expanded upon the elements put forth in the legislation. Based on participant inputs, the project team identified four core essential elements for a long-term, state strategy—foundational themes and components, conceptual shifts, guiding principles, and recommendations.

Foundational themes and components reflect topics that emerged and were regularly discussed as participants provided their perspectives about what is needed for a state strategy for housing security and provide important groundwork for the other three core essential elements. Conceptual shifts reflect desired drivers and mental shifts needed to ensure closer alignment between all aspects of a response aimed at improving housing security. The guiding principles provide a shared scaffolding for decision-making across sectors and jurisdictions, which will help guide a more aligned approach to housing security. Lastly, the recommendations emerged as actions that maintain consistency with the guiding principles and contribute to the larger conceptual shifts. Together these elements create a backbone for a long-term state effort for advancing housing security.

Foundational Themes and Components

Foundational themes and essential components of a long-term effort include:

- ◆ understanding the causes of homelessness and housing instability as multiple, often co-occurring contributing factors,
- ◆ a deepening recognition of the inherent complexity of housing security,
- ◆ a desire to better match the response to the needs,
- ◆ a need to grapple with seemingly conflicting aspects of the response, and
- ◆ state partnership with tribal governments.

As a precursor to identifying options and recommendations, HB 1277, Section 6, (2)(c)(i) and (c)(ii) called for discussions to gather information about factors that contribute to homelessness and housing instability; statutory and regulatory issues; other concerns, barriers, and opportunities; and desired principles.³⁵

Several overarching themes emerged during participant conversations about what is needed for a coherent, effective, and widely accepted strategy.

Foundational Theme: Understanding Homelessness and Housing Instability

Participant perspectives converged on the recognition that there is not a singular cause or ‘root cause’ to housing insecurity and homelessness, but rather that people experience co-contributing factors that integrate their individual vulnerabilities within a larger structural context of instability.

The effort to understand the causes of homelessness and housing instability and how to address them is an area of considerable ongoing discourse in research, policy, practice, in the media, and among the general public. Many contributing factors have been recognized, studied, and discussed extensively over time. Consistent with this, participants emphasized multiple contributing factors when talking about the “causes” of the current homelessness and housing crisis. While participants raised a multitude of important contributing factors, there was divergence about which are seen as the most substantial or most in need of attention.

Within this context, participants acknowledged the need for a response to housing insecurity and homelessness that addresses both local community and individual needs, and how they interact within the larger federal and state context.

³⁵ Sections (2)(c)(i) and (c)(ii) also called for fact-finding on these topics. That work was carried out by the project team from the Washington State University Extension’s Division of Governmental Studies and Services through literature review and analyses of publicly available data (reported separately in 2022 and 2023). Points of intersection in the topics, finding, and themes between that work and the Center’s facilitated discussions are noted throughout this section.

Availability and Accessibility of Affordable Housing

The availability and accessibility of affordable housing was top of mind for most participants. While there was widespread recognition that this is of major importance, especially in Washington State, people identified numerous factors as reasons for the lack of affordable housing, and there were diverging perspectives on which reasons are most critical. Participants highlighted issues such as policies, regulations, and costs related to development, construction, land use planning, and infrastructure; the commodification of housing; and the dynamics of the housing market for rentals and home ownership. Furthermore, many participants cautioned that increasing the supply of housing is not enough to fully address housing insecurity as other significant factors also contribute. For instance, people expressed that as housing supply increases new housing must fit the diverse needs of individuals experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness and that attention must also be paid to economic security and access to care and support.

Economic Insecurity

Participants also focused on economic insecurity as a contributing factor to experiences of housing insecurity and homelessness. At the level of community or regional patterns of wealth and income inequality, participants observed that incomes, especially for low-wage earners, do not keep pace with rising housing costs. At the level of an individual or family, persistent housing instability is seen as arising from perpetual financial insecurity. Sudden job loss, or other acute financial hardships (such as vehicle repairs or medical bills) are recognized as acute tipping points leading to homelessness. Many participants observed that numerous households regularly exist just on the edge of housing security, and any adverse economic event could tip them into housing instability or homelessness, a reality increasing as overall cost of living (including non-housing related expenses) continues to increase.

Access to Care and Support

Other participants emphasized that what warrants heavy attention are factors that help explain who is most vulnerable and how to best assist those who are currently experiencing or at the greatest risk of homelessness. The focus for these participants was the availability of and access to care and support, such as assistance with financial hardship, employment support, health and behavioral health care, and other supports that can buffer someone from events or circumstances that might destabilize housing and catalyze homelessness.

Many participants focused on specific groups for whom a lack of adequate access to care and support creates disproportionate vulnerability, such as youth; older adults; families with children; people who are pregnant; people living with disabilities; veterans; those living with chronic illness, mental illness, or substance use disorders; refugees and immigrants; those experiencing domestic violence, family instability, or conflict; those aging out of the foster care system; those reentering the community from the criminal justice system; and those with non-

traditional familial structures of support (i.e., individuals with family ties that are not defined by bloodlines or marriage).

Particularly salient in the discourse about homelessness is the extent to which behavioral health needs are met. For the subset of individuals who do have co-occurring conditions, access to care is recognized as highly interrelated with both behavioral health outcomes and housing outcomes.³⁶

Structural Racism and Other Forms of Systemic Disadvantage

Participants identified the legacy of structural racism and other discriminatory policies and systemic disadvantages as another contributing factor to current experiences of homelessness and housing insecurity. Participants emphasized how this perpetuates inequitable access to housing and contributes to other factors that affect housing security. Overall, participants highlighted how for historically and currently marginalized groups, structural racism and systematic disadvantage and discrimination based on race/ethnicity, sex, gender identities, sexual orientations, and ability can disproportionately amplify an individual's risk of homelessness and housing instability.

Narratives

Many participants noted the multiple worldviews and sometimes conflicting narratives about people who experience homelessness and housing instability. These narratives, which are most often negative, shape how policymakers understand and respond to homelessness and housing insecurity. In recognizing the multiple, co-occurring contributing factors to homelessness and housing instability, participants converged on the critical role of narratives that also recognize the humanity and dignity of people. Participants variously described the importance of narratives that recognize individuals experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness as part of the community—rather than others or using “us versus them” frameworks.

Foundational Theme: Recognizing the Complexity of Housing Security

The range of perspectives shared by participants painted a picture of the complex and interdependent pieces that make up the landscape of homelessness services and housing assistance in Washington State. The systems, services, and providers that contribute to housing assistance are situated in various, sometimes disparate contexts. Facilitated discussions made clear that a wide range of services are relevant and needed, but are also implemented in various settings, by practitioners from many disciplines, funded through multiple governmental and nongovernmental sources, and operating under the management or regulatory oversight of diverse agencies with varying policies, incentives, and constraints. As a result, achieving

36 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2021). Behavioral Health Services for People Who are Homeless. Advisory. Online: <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/pep20-06-04-003.pdf>

alignment of efforts is challenging, and actions addressing homelessness and housing instability are often siloed and fragmented.

Yet, the concept of housing security itself is arguably even more complex. Housing needs are often thought of in categories, for example: emergency shelter, supportive housing, transitional housing, affordable housing, and the real estate market. While different interviewees described distinct aspects of each category, it also became clear that housing security is a continuum, and that effective programs or policies in any of the categories ultimately depend on the rest of them. For instance, emergency shelters are temporary by design, but function only if there is a connection to affordable permanent housing options. Availability of affordable housing, in turn, is affected by the housing market, which shifts alongside patterns of growth and the economy.

Many participants highlighted challenges resulting from the dynamics of supply and demand in the housing market, which they frequently observed as separate from the spheres of influence of those who are involved in homelessness and housing instability. For instance, higher-income households may purchase homes as investment properties, short-term rentals, or as secondary homes, outcompeting individuals and families with fewer resources.

Further, it was clear from participant insights that a successful pathway to housing security depends not only on the state of the whole housing continuum, but also on services, supports, and policies that address other needs that housing security both depends on and contributes to, such as economic security, safety, health, and wellbeing. As participants identified these major forms of interdependence related to housing and homelessness, the theme often manifested as a concern about fragmentation or silos as a barrier. This included fragmentation across levels of government and jurisdictions, between the public and private sectors, and across domains of policies, programs, and services (e.g., health, social services, employment, funding, transportation, planning, and land use). Some further described fragmentation within these categories.

One area of fragmentation described by many participants is that programs and services are delivered at the local level and are dependent on context, yet many policies and funding mechanisms remain at the regional, state, and federal levels. Some shared that the understanding of success itself becomes fragmented, as what “counts” as success differs across levels of government as well as across service sectors. This can be problematic when what contributes to whether success is achieved varies for different populations and in different contexts or when funding is tied to various competing measures of success.

Even as the importance of focusing on housing was strongly emphasized, a few participants took a broad lens, noting challenges as a result of interdependencies with other major issues facing the State, such as the pandemic recovery, economic stability and growth, income and wealth inequality, and climate change. In some cases, intersections with other sectors, such as health and housing or poverty reduction and housing, were described as opportunities. Most participants did not view a long-term strategy as Washington State choosing whether to advance housing security or ensure economic security or promote health and behavioral health.

These were recognized as interrelated aspects to thriving as a state, and government entities were viewed as having a role in connecting efforts.

Taken together with the discussion insights about the need to grapple with multiple contributing factors, participant discussions made clear that a comprehensive and integrated understanding of homelessness and housing instability reveals the advantages of advancing housing security in ways that mutually reinforce other important and related goals. Tending to other important and related goals, with deliberate attention, can create opportunities to reinforce housing security goals.

Foundational Theme: Matching the Response to the Need

The Challenges of Scale – Need, Timeframes, Resources, and Capacity

Many participants expressed concern that the scale of homelessness seems insurmountable and/or intractable even with expanding investment, especially given that there have been mixed results in getting individuals stabilized in long-term housing solutions and that the flow of people falling into homelessness exceeds the flow of those successfully exiting it. Several people highlighted a related challenge that the scale and severity of homelessness calls for speed, but the approaches that are most effective and lasting require time and patience. A few went on to describe programs and resources to connect an individual with a lease, but having insufficient or a lack of resources, programs and services, and skill-building opportunities to facilitate that person's long-term ability to remain stably housed. Others focused on the timeframes needed to increase shelter beds or temporary shelter, in comparison to increasing the supply of affordable housing.

In parallel to concerns raised about the scale of homelessness, many participants shared concerns about the relatively small amount of public investment for affordable housing when compared to the vast need due to the growing lack of affordable housing across income levels. Some conversations focused on the need for rental subsidies and other programs and services far exceeding available resources. Others focused on how the availability of resources, or the associated timeframes may not match the person's needs.

Examples of difficulties in meeting the need for housing security at scale included not just cost and time, but also challenges in the areas of workforce (such as increasing burden on a limited housing assistance workforce that is under resourced and overburdened or insufficient workforce in the building industries) and shifting policies and regulations (such as eligibility requirements and funding timeframes).

Response that is Not Fit-For-Purpose

Many participants described how current housing policies, services, and available resources do not match the varied needs of people, at the scale needed by communities. Many observed mismatches in other aspects of addressing homelessness and housing security. One pattern

described frequently is that the persistent need for an immediate crisis response means that leaders and service providers are stuck in a reactive mode, with so much focus on solving the problems of today that there is little bandwidth available—whether financial, energetic, or motivational—to explore more lasting shifts for the future. Several people described how little capacity there is for reflection and learning beyond making short-term adjustments at the margins. Some interviewees shared their perspective that the system does not work for big and bold ideas. Others cited that the way things work now tends to reinforce boundaries between jurisdictions and entities, such as working in siloes or competing for resources. This can get in the way of working collaboratively even when that is needed and desired. At the level of providing housing and other services, many participants described the challenge of not having the available options and flexibility to match people’s specific circumstances, needs, and preferences.

Varied Needs of Individuals and Communities

Another discussion theme emerged around people’s varied needs of the current moment and a need for greater flexibility to meet those varied needs. A lack of flexibility was often discussed as the result of either funding requirements, but there were also concerns tied to organizational specialization. Regardless of the reasonings, however, there was strong convergence during all discussions to have more flexibility in the ways that organizations are able to provide assistance to individuals and to adapt to meet their changing needs over time.

This perspective was predominantly tied to the idea that since housing instability and homelessness are a result of multiple compounding individual vulnerabilities and systemic conditions each individual requires different forms of assistance that is tailored to their unique situation as well as a more localized approach. As some participants put it, once you see what is needed to help one person out of an episode of being unhoused, you have only found a way to help one person. Some called for approaches to be more client-driven—what does that person need—rather than reviewing what that person may be eligible to receive.

Participants also described the importance of an approach that matches community need and resources. Some focused on the relationship between community wealth and ability to secure matching funds that may be required by grants. Others talked about the types and density of housing that may be needed or better suited for a community. This included recognitions that rural communities often require different housing needs and resources than increasingly urban spaces.

Foundational Theme: Tending to the Apparent Conflicts of the Response

Insights shared by participants helped elucidate that many of the important components warranted in a strategy to respond to homelessness and housing insecurity have aspects that can seem to be in opposition with each other. Finding ways to navigate needs that seem to be in competition or incompatible is necessary for a coherent, effective, and widely accepted strategy.

Many of these paired aspects are not only in tension with each other, but are also connected to other aspects, such that choices affecting one area will have an impact on other areas. For instance, the balance between state control and local control is related to the balance between consistency and flexibility. In another example, where the understanding of the contributing factors lies between individual and structural factors affects how much agreement there is on the extent to which solutions, such as coordination, need to be individual or systemic. Additional examples of paired tensions described by participants includes:

- ◆ safety of those at risk of and experiencing homelessness—safety of the community,
- ◆ actions proven to work—trying new approaches, and
- ◆ reactive, crisis response to acute needs—proactive, long-term adaptation.

Illuminating and grappling with tensions in complex issues can create dynamic energy, supply diversity of thought, and bring focus to the areas with the most potential to produce meaningful change. In facilitating discussions about options for a long-term strategy, the project team treated the tensions identified as important spaces for opportunity. Shifting the discourse away from discrete and opposing choices (e.g., right or wrong; most or least important), the discussions were facilitated to explore them as coexisting considerations that provide a continuum of options and need sustained attention in decision-making. This allowed for conversations that were less about making the case for either one or the other and more about what would be a useful balance between and among them to better address homelessness and housing instability, a balance which may need to be adjusted over time.

During participant discussions the tensions and interplay between and among flexibility, consistency, and accountability emerged as opportunities for further strategizing and conversation.

Flexibility

When it comes to the need to balance aspects of housing security that can often seem in competition with one another, flexibility was a predominant theme throughout every discussion the Center had with participants. Some participants described more flexibility in terms of entities developing more culturally attuned approaches, how funds are spent, eligibility, what qualifies as success, and how local service providers and nonprofits are able to adapt to the needs of each individual. In what follows, the report lays out some key aspects presented during conversations around flexibility.

Participants often associated flexibility with the ability to tailor the ways in which resources and programs are connected to communities, while retaining fidelity to the intent or principles of a program. For example, communities have varied collaborative relationships among organizations and governmental entities; communities that have differing capacity in infrastructure, workforce, and housing needs; and varied overall cost of living and local housing markets. Local entities and organizations are well-positioned to understand the needs of their communities, but have varied access to resources, technical capacity, and workforce. Greater flexibility in

matching requirements, timelines, and meeting programmatic intent could facilitate access to new partnerships and resources in communities.

Another connected aspect of flexibility is the recognition that the circumstances contributing to an experience of homelessness is different for each individual due to the complex network of interacting individual vulnerabilities and systemic conditions. Participants converged around a call for greater flexibility to connect people with services and supports. For example, participants described the critical role of cash assistance, small grants or loans, and other flexible ways that enhance a person's ability to respond to destabilizing events such as car maintenance and medical bills.

Consistency

A primary concern brought up in discussions around increased flexibility was consistency. Participants recognized that as flexibility increases, consistency from community to community can decrease leading to different expectations and experiences across the state. A few described opportunities for state-based thresholds or principles for programs and workforce training that would facilitate consistency in the quality of programs, while also allowing for community-based innovation.

Accountability

Participants variously described accountability in terms of transparency, effective use of resources and capacity, reporting progress, and consequences. Some participants raised concerns around an increase in flexibility leading to a decrease in accountability—a greater variation in programs could create challenges in consistent reporting, monitoring of progress, and incorporating learnings from other communities. Many participants also converged on a perspective that accountability can still be achieved—in a system with more flexibility in meeting a person's needs—through collaboratively determined markers that are tailored to the increasingly localized context rather than a universalized accountability set at the federal or state level.

Balancing flexibility, consistency, and accountability will be an important element of addressing housing security within a long-term approach. As this balance is tended, in consideration with local context and guiding principles, it is important to continuously re-evaluate and discuss how best to engage both of the aspects in ways that ensure an overall movement towards housing security for everyone living in Washington State.

Foundational Component: State Partnership with Tribal Governments

As noted in the Overview of the Landscape of Housing Security, each Tribe has a legal relationship with federal and state governments. The Federal government has a trust obligation to provide housing. The Centennial and Millennial Accords provide a framework for recognizing the government-to-government relationship between each Tribe and the State and for working

“cooperatively on issues of mutual concern.”³⁷ Within that context, the project team focused questions on how the State could better partner with tribes.

In response, participants emphasized that each tribe has a unique system of governance and culture, varying access to resources, and differing relationships with governmental entities. Some participants described projects and inter-governmental partnerships that have been successful; some shared challenges regarding a lack of trust and cultural awareness and understanding. While the specific needs may vary, State partnership with Tribal governments and organizations to meet the specific housing needs of tribal citizens and communities is a foundational component of a state effort to advance housing security.

Understanding Unique Needs of Tribal Citizens and Communities around Housing

During conversations with individuals working within tribal governments, Urban Indian Organizations, or working in partnership with tribes, many of the same foundational themes emerged: the multiple, co-occurring contributing factors to housing instability and homelessness; recognition of the complexity of housing security; a desire to better match the response to the needs of tribal communities; and call to tend to the complex aspects of the response. However, attention to the unique needs of tribal citizens and communities around housing and homelessness is critical in a state effort for creating pathways to housing security.

Some participants described challenges in connecting and building relationships with individuals living unhoused. For example, individuals may live in small and/or difficult to find encampments and outreach workers may have to travel long distances across reservations.

Some participants described the prevalence of unsafe, unsanitary, and/or overcrowded housing conditions. Examples shared include substandard HUD housing, multiple families sharing a home, and the disproportionality of homes in tribal communities that are behind in maintenance and upkeep.

Many participants described the insufficient housing supply, as well as insufficient resources, needed to meet the needs of individuals and families within their respective reservations and communities. These needs include housing for elders, for individuals in recovery, as well as for individuals or families currently living in overcrowded and/or unsafe living conditions. Participants also noted that the current housing supply is increasingly becoming financially out of reach for individuals, especially within tribal communities near urban areas.

Participants described misperceptions that programs and services that are successful in non-reservation communities will replicate that success within reservation and tribal communities.

³⁷ Governor’s Office of Indian Affairs. (2023). Centennial Accord – 1989. Washington State. Online: <https://goia.wa.gov/relations/centennial-accord>

Conceptual Shifts for a Long-Term Strategy

Housing security is a cornerstone of a flourishing society and a functional economy because it intersects with so many other factors, such as economic security, health, and safety, which contribute to whether individuals, families, communities and the state as a whole can thrive. Furthermore, housing security is advanced when housing for low- and middle-income individuals and households is available and affordable, when circumstances of precarious housing are stabilized, when homelessness is prevented as much as possible, and when experiences of homelessness are mitigated as quickly as possible.

Building on the foundational themes that emerged throughout facilitated discussions, the project team also heard participants identify three primary conceptual shifts as important drivers to the state establishment of a long-term strategy for housing security. Mindsets shape the actions and initiatives developed to address homelessness and housing insecurity. Participants emphasized that the underlying mindsets, or ways of thinking, need to change in order to enhance success and make progress towards advancing pathways towards housing security. These shifts are:

- ◆ to a holistic and integrated understanding of the multiple contributing factors of housing insecurity and homelessness,
- ◆ to a shared aspirational future rather than separate responses, and
- ◆ to actions and policies along the continuum of housing and across other interrelated forms of assistance dedicated to building relationships of support and increasing alignment and coordination.

The following sections provide a description of those shifts, including additional considerations, challenges, and opportunities for decision-makers across jurisdictions to consider and integrate into a long-term strategy for the State.

Conceptual Shift: To a Holistic Understanding of Multiple Contributing Factors to Housing Insecurity and Homelessness

As discussed in previous sections, participant discussions highlighted a multitude of co-occurring factors that all contribute to housing instability and homelessness. These contributing factors are a mixture of both individual vulnerabilities and systemic conditions that compound upon one another to create a society that is far from flourishing. As the issue itself is a result of multiple causes, the State's response must actively and sustainably start from a point of recognizing the holistic complexity.

By moving from identifying singular "root causes," a shift occurs in which actions are no longer based on isolated cause identification. For example, although more housing is needed, putting all focus on building more housing is not enough in isolation. More housing will not help establish overall housing security and thriving communities if there is not also dedication towards aligning housing security with economic security, overcoming systemic related

disparities, and increasing access to healthcare for physical, mental, and behavioral health needs. As a reminder, here are the multiple co-occurring factors discussed as collectively needing to be addressed to increase housing stability in Washington State:

- ◆ availability and accessibility of affordable housing,
- ◆ economic insecurity,
- ◆ access to care and support, and
- ◆ structural racism and other forms of systemic disadvantage.

A Comprehensive and Integrated Understanding of Housing Instability and Homelessness

The patterns prevalent in participant insights across facilitated discussions closely parallel the ways in which many scholars increasingly use a holistic and integrative framework for interpreting the research, recognizing that “micro-level” individual circumstances are nested within “macro-level” structural conditions. Therefore, it is the interactions of these circumstances and conditions that produce homelessness and housing instability collectively.³⁸ For example, anyone who faces ongoing or sudden financial insecurity could be at risk of unstable housing, but where there are few affordable housing options the risk of facing homelessness is greater. When there is wide income inequality and limited housing stock, those who can afford to pay more for housing can outcompete families who have fewer financial resources, leaving those with the fewest resources with no housing options. A lack of services can exacerbate the risk of homelessness that could otherwise have been mitigated by providing resources and support in the face of adverse life events or co-occurring health or behavioral health conditions. Compounding and intergenerational effects of structural racism, discriminatory policies, and displacement result in inequitable risk of housing insecurity for those who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).

This integrated understanding of housing insecurity recognizes that the relative contribution of different factors will vary based on the local context and the specific individual circumstances. What is consistent across contexts is that a place experiences high rates of homelessness and a person experiences housing insecurity not because of any single cause but because a collection of intertwined structural factors amplify a combination of interrelated individual vulnerabilities. This produces a complex reality that includes many different patterns of need and different pathways into housing insecurity.

Challenges in Establishing an Integrated Understanding of Multiple Contributing Factors

Although scholars are increasingly interpreting the totality of research in this integrated way, participant discussions surfaced differences between what is needed for practical application and the ways these many factors tend to be studied. The implications of those differences

³⁸ Further discussion of interpreting the research literature through a framework of “micro-level” individual circumstances that are nested within “macro-level” structural conditions can be found in the status of fact-finding reports for this project.

are worth describing, to inform how that research is used in the practical development and implementation of a strategy.

One implication relates to the challenge of drawing conclusions across the diverse available research. Studies are often designed narrowly to address specific questions in a specific context. Much of the research has sought to disentangle the multiple factors that contribute to homelessness and assess their singular contribution. This constrains the usefulness of the findings because, as our discussions highlight, in practice the factors remain entangled, and a comprehensive strategy needs information about how they operate in combination. Further, isolated research findings about individual factors have the potential to reinforce narratives that blame housing insecurity and homelessness on personal traits, weaknesses, or failings, rather than recognizing that individual identities, circumstances, or co-occurring conditions are not “causes” of homelessness; but instead interact with structural factors to disproportionately amplify vulnerability.

Studies are also conducted in different timeframes, contexts, geographies, and populations. Different factors tend to be studied from different disciplinary perspectives, using different conceptual framings and different methodologies. For example, research about economic factors is done differently than research about behavioral health. Quantitative methodologies are well suited to some questions, while for other questions qualitative methodologies are essential. Some factors that matter in practice and in the lived experience of those most affected are not widely studied in the research. Socially constructed ideologies can shape the way researchers study homelessness. Decisions about what is included or excluded in research influence what conclusions can be drawn, and how generalizable and applicable conclusions will be across contexts.

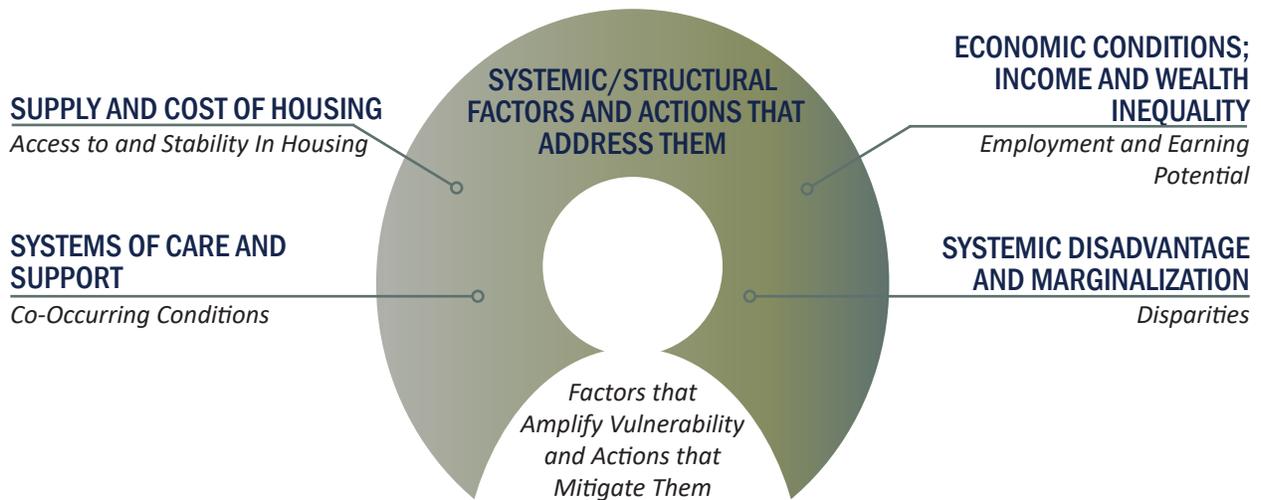
Moving from Understanding to Intervening

There are two dominant purposes of research that emerged in the Center’s discussions with participants around how entities use research to recognize the contributing factors of homelessness. One research purpose is explaining the per capita rate of homelessness in a given location, such as statewide or in a county or community. Another purpose of research is explaining how to identify and meet the needs of individuals and families who are currently experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The research questions asked and approaches taken depend on which purpose is being pursued. Further, the markers of a successful outcome are different depending on the purpose of the research. For example, when studying how to reduce rates of homelessness, a 25% decline would be a success. However, for those who continue to experience homelessness, that decline means very little, especially if these declines continue to overlook individuals and communities who have historically and are currently marginalized within society. For these individuals experiencing homelessness, studies that inform how to meet their varied and sometimes complex needs are more meaningful and measurements of success are more closely tied to helping them overcome barriers to establishing stable housing.

While both of these research purposes were emphasized in participant discussions, intervening to reduce the overall rate of homelessness in Washington State was described by most participants as critical for long term progress at the current scale.

At the same time, many participants cautioned that the available options to affect the supply, affordability, and accessibility of housing can be challenging to adopt and implement. Housing options often vary according to local context, will take time to have the desired effect, and, unless designed with attention to equity, may have the longest lag for those who are most affected and most vulnerable. Hence, the perspectives of participants, taken together, made clear that a comprehensive and useful strategy needs to consider how to both reduce the overall rate of homelessness and improve outcomes and the experiences of programs and services for people who continue to experience homelessness.

Exhibit 2. Structural Factors and Individual Vulnerabilities



During discussions about the second purpose, i.e., informing housing assistance programs and services, participants highlighted an important interplay between who is at greater risk of experiencing homelessness and the factors that contribute to whether that risk is made real. For a strategy to be cognizant of this interplay, the research on the individual and familial circumstances that amplify vulnerability and the research on the structural mechanisms that produce homelessness are most useful when understood in combination. This integration is useful because one helps identify who needs or might need assistance and the other yields options for how to intervene. For example, understanding racial disparities, is useful when integrated with an understanding of the structural racism that, if addressed, could reduce those disparities. Assessing how employment affects an individual’s ability to afford a home is useful when integrated with an understanding of income inequality and trends in the labor market. Understandings about the subset of individuals experiencing homelessness who are living with co-occurring mental illness, substance use disorder, or other chronic illnesses is most useful when integrated with an understanding of structural factors that can be addressed to improve the availability and accessibility of health and behavioral health services.

Understanding What Works to Reduce or Mitigate Homelessness and Housing Insecurity

With regard to the state of knowledge about how to intervene to address homelessness and housing instability, two main views emerged among participants. Some participants described a variation of “we still have more to learn.” Specific examples included needing more data about the causes of homelessness and housing instability in Washington in order to better understand how to address them and more data about what works. Other participants described the view that “we already know what we need to know about causes and solutions, we just don’t have the will to act on that knowledge.” One put it as, “we have the answers, we just don’t like them.” However, among those who expressed a sense of certainty about what actions are needed, the actions they were each certain about were often not the same as one another.

Some participants expressed a more intermediate position, with common ground about some areas where more information is needed. Participants expressed interest in building more knowledge about how best to apply available research and examples of successful approaches to diverse contexts and on a larger scale. Some raised concerns about the accuracy, accessibility, comprehensiveness, and utility of some of the current data being collected. Among those sharing this more intermediate perspective on the state of the knowledge base, some were comfortable with proceeding based on “best available” knowledge while others saw a need to wait for more clarity on what is most likely to work.

Across both the insights from participants and the available research about the ways to intervene, combined with the reality of the multiple factors that contribute to homelessness and housing instability, it becomes clear that effectiveness is not determined by which program or housing option is universally best. Rather, success relies on how well matched the available options are to the local context and how well matched the specific interventions provided are to the specific circumstances of the individual or family. A strategy that supports options for “best fit” pathways rather than seeking “single best” answers would align the robustness of the response to the complexity of the challenge.

Implications for a Comprehensive Strategy

Taken together, what emerges across various sources of information about the factors that contribute to housing insecurity is that to be comprehensive and useful, a strategy cannot seek to address some factors at the exclusion of others. Instead, a strategy will need to grapple with multiple factors and how they interact with each other. Attempting to identify and address an isolated shortlist of priority causes will mean that progress on those factors can be undermined by the lack of attention to others. While this adds to the complexity of designing a strategy, the interactions among factors also provide an opportunity for a strategy to support multiple areas of intervention that can amplify each other in advancing housing security.

Conceptual Shift: To a Shared Aspirational Future

In connection with recognizing the need to address multiple co-occurring and interrelated causes of homelessness and housing insecurity, participants made a strong call for building

more connection between the various related aspects of the entire housing security landscape to ensure a breakdown of siloing and isolated actions. The more networking and connection that can be built between the interrelated entities, actors, and organizations, such as affordable housing, poverty reduction, health services, first responders, state agencies, nonprofits, transportation, private sector, shelters, and others, the more a shared goal of overall housing security can be realized through collaboration.

It was not uncommon for many people who attended workshops to newly meet others working on similar issues in their community. Participants expressed desire for more dedicated opportunities for entities to come together on a regular basis and recognized such gatherings as a means of breaking down isolation and moving towards more coordinated efforts to meet the varied needs of individuals. Dedicated resources and capacity will be critical to facilitating meaningful opportunities for more communication and coordination.

Conceptual Shift: To Relationships of Support, Alignment, and Coordination

Across a wide range of roles, perspectives, and experiences, participants observed a common pattern in the current systems of responding to housing insecurity: that policies and practices often foster exclusion and isolation in ways that are counterproductive to the goal of advancing housing security. This pattern was described in many contexts, sometimes as an unintended consequence of something else, such as resource scarcity. For example:

- ◆ eligibility criteria that exclude individuals, such as based on their prior history or ability to meet follow up requirements, who otherwise have financial need,
- ◆ housing or shelter placements that separate people from their families and their support systems (individuals, pets, or collectives),
- ◆ competitive or restricted funding processes and policies that exclude actors who could contribute to the response, or that limit collaboration between government entities, the private sector, and community partners,
- ◆ timelines and duration of resources and support that do not match the needs of individuals to be served or organizations, and
- ◆ a real estate market that does not function to meet a diversity of housing needs.

While there was extensive convergence on concerns of exclusion and isolation, participants also converged on the desired alternative. Participants expressed an overall desire to move towards practices that aim at building relationships of support, coordination, and collaboration. They desire an approach that centers meeting the needs of people and communities, rather than what they may be eligible for.

This shift can be viewed as one that works to move away from siloing practices and policies to ones that foster rewards, agency, relationships, understanding, and collaboration among all those involved in the diverse aspects of housing security. This shift was presented as a necessity

to ensure stable and thriving individuals, communities, and systems—at all levels. Examples of needed changes include:

- ◆ increase investments to build relationships of support, such as mentors and navigators, for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness,
- ◆ distribute resources through a less competitive process,
- ◆ broaden definitions of family beyond legal marriage and blood relationships,
- ◆ incentivize and support cooperative relationships among providers from multiple jurisdictions, sectors, and levels,
- ◆ develop policies and make investments that enable a community to grow, diversify, and foster equitable access to housing,
- ◆ provide access to programs that offer guidance and support, rather than punishment, when a person’s path towards housing security is nonlinear, and
- ◆ support individuals experiencing homelessness or instability regain a sense of agency, autonomy, efficacy, responsibility, and belonging.

Guiding Principles for a Long-Term Strategy

Section 6 of HB 1277 calls for facilitated discussions to inform the development of guiding principles. The project team reported updates on progress in the two prior reports. The following guiding principles were informed by reviews of existing strategies and plans related to housing and homelessness in Washington and further developed and clarified through iterations of facilitated discussions in 2023.

Rationale For Guiding Principles

In developing a state, long-term strategy for something as complex as housing security, it will not be possible to identify every situation that exists or that may arise and then specify exactly what actions to take in response. It is also difficult to effectively specify or prescribe top-down solutions for an issue about which there can often be a wide range of views. Advancing housing security means navigating grey areas and working out how to stay within blurred boundaries.

To help with this, a strategy needs to create a scaffold for enough consistency in the response across the state and over time while also facilitating the flexibility, adaptation, and innovation that will be needed in different places, for different people, and as the context changes over time. A successful response will require conditions in which the strategic approach and the framework for accountability are less about compliance and more about the extent to which key underlying principles are met. In this context, a principle is a fundamental premise that serves as the foundation for decision-making. Although realistically some aspects of the response may need to be more prescriptive and compliance based than others, whenever possible how the principle is met is left largely to the expertise and ability of those who are implementing the response.

The following principles, summarized and described in more depth below, emerged from facilitated discussions among participants. The purpose of these guiding principles is to help align decisions and actions to the goal of advancing housing security in connection with the three primary conceptual shifts advocated for above in **Conceptual Shifts for a Long-Term Strategy**. They serve to:

- ◆ guide ongoing decision making about actions to advance housing security,
- ◆ serve across government entities and sectors—for strategy, policy, program design, service provision,
- ◆ help navigate aspects of the response that can seem to be contradictory and reduce adversarial approaches to finding solutions,
- ◆ create conditions that balance flexibility for different parts of the complex response to housing insecurity with consistency for the response as a whole, and
- ◆ taken together, contribute to a comprehensive approach to advancing housing security.

In keeping with a principles-based approach, the identified principles are not specific, prescriptive actions. The recommended current actions that emerged from the facilitated discussions are described later in this report. Rather, these principles are an enduring guide for choosing or designing a wide range of actions and for different types of actors to work together to serve a consistent purpose. Entities and actors working to advance housing security can use the guiding principles, both immediately and over time, as the context changes, progress is made, and the response to housing security evolves. Guiding principles are a tool for decision-makers and implementers, who can assess how to incorporate relevant principles in each decision or action they are considering.

Many of the principles reflect some of what is already occurring in parts of the response to housing insecurity. As such, they are not necessarily new; indeed, many participants described their way of working as consistent with some of the concepts represented here, and there are commonalities with the purpose statements and objectives of strategies and entities involved in the response to housing insecurity that were reviewed in gathering information for this project.

This report consolidates participant perspectives and principles articulated in existing plans in communities across Washington into one collection of guiding principles. If applied more consistently and comprehensively, these guiding principles would help make the response more intentional and more consistent across systems, sectors, levels of implementation, and jurisdictions.

BOX B

Summary of Guiding Principles to Advance Housing Security

- Guiding Principle A:** Foster productive narratives around housing security and homelessness.
- Guiding Principle B:** Mobilize a multi-sector response to advance housing security.
- Guiding Principle C:** Respond to the holistic and interdependent nature of housing security.
- Guiding Principle D:** Design the response to housing insecurity around what people and communities need to thrive.
- Guiding Principle E:** Undo the harm of structural racism and other forms of systemic disadvantage that produce housing inequity.
- Guiding Principle F:** Employ a sense of urgency about both meeting immediate needs and initiating steps for long-term progress.
- Guiding Principle G:** Amplify the influence of those most affected by homelessness and housing instability.
- Guiding Principle H:** Create conditions that reduce competition and facilitate cooperation.
- Guiding Principle I:** Address the inability of the housing market to meet housing needs.
- Guiding Principle J:** Sustain the response to housing insecurity through stability in infrastructure, relationships, and appropriately scaled resources.
- Guiding Principle K:** Prepare to adapt to changing circumstances, unanticipated disruptions, and new knowledge.

Guiding Principles are associated with letters for clarity, not to give weight or rank.

Guiding Principle A: Foster productive narratives around housing security and homelessness.

People in a range of roles and with varied forms of relevant experience and knowledge highlighted an array of current views or narratives that are counterproductive to the goal of sustained progress towards housing security. The ways in which a challenge like housing security is viewed and understood deeply affects the possibilities for action. Fostering productive narratives not only includes individuals with lived experience, but also gives thought and careful attention to how those painful personal experiences can inform policy and programmatic changes.

Guiding Principle B: Mobilize a multi-sector response to advance housing security.

Given the complexity and scale of housing challenges, there is a need to maximize opportunities and minimize competitive or exclusionary restrictions in order to encourage solutions through

a wide range of government, business, nonprofit, philanthropic, and community-based actors. This mobilization toward advancing housing security may come in the form of direct funding support to a diversity of implementers, incentives to take actions that advance housing security, or regulations to prevent actions that are counterproductive to housing security. The State's mobilizing role may also be less direct, providing a scaffolding for alignment and coordination and the technical assistance and capacity building needed to ensure quality.

In addition, the State legislative and executive branches have an important role to lead by example in a whole-of-government approach to advance housing security, one that aligns actions that directly or indirectly affect housing security. Advancing housing security will depend on actions beyond the systems dedicated specifically to affordable housing, housing assistance, and homelessness services. Success in housing both depends on and contributes to success in, for example, economic development, growth management, education, healthcare, behavioral health, public health, food security, criminal justice, climate security, and the environment. To support people living and working in Washington State, those responsible for each of these contributing components need to consider the context of the whole along with their functional part.

Guiding Principle C: Respond to the holistic and interdependent nature of housing security.

Multiple interacting factors contribute to housing challenges, from structural factors related to housing supply and economic conditions to factors related to accessing care and support services to systemic disadvantages that amplify risk for some individuals and families. A comprehensive, long-term strategy for housing security needs to respond within the reality of these multiple and compounding contributing factors. Just as there are multiple interacting factors that contribute to housing challenges, participants described the many interdependent needs that, if met, would work together to advance housing security. A strategy should help align the wide range of actors and actions that are relevant and dependent on each other.

Guiding Principle D: Design the response to housing insecurity around what people and communities need to thrive.

In many endeavors operating on a large scale, whether in governments or nongovernmental organizations, the default can become that policies, programs, and other functions are designed around the ways systems currently operate and are structured, rather than around what the system is for: people. Greater success in achieving housing security will come if systems can provide housing and services in ways that are flexible enough to be situationally appropriate and can be adjusted as needed when circumstances change. Circumstances vary from person to person. Services and assistance are most likely to have lasting effectiveness when they are guided by people's sociocultural context and individual preferences, support their realistic housing and life goals, and cultivate opportunities for self-sufficiency and self-determination.

Affirm humanity, compassion, hope, and the capacity to thrive.

A legacy of shame and punishment for people experiencing or at risk of housing instability and homelessness undermines the success of the State’s response to housing challenges. A strategy that intentionally replaces this legacy with humanity and mutual accountability will enhance the ability of policies, programs, and practices to make progress toward housing security at all levels, from individuals to the state as a whole.

Recognize how place matters.

Conditions are very different across the state. Each community has its own social, political, economic, cultural history, and current story. Housing strategies will have the greatest chance of success if they contribute to state goals in ways that are flexible enough to operate within the local dynamics and identity of each place.

Guiding Principle E: Undo the harm of structural racism and other forms of systemic disadvantage that produce inequity.

Undoing harm requires understanding the effects of past and current laws, policies, and programs that produce current inequities in housing security. It then requires assessing actions under consideration for the potential to exacerbate disproportionate vulnerabilities due to structural racism and other forms of systemic disadvantage. The design and implementation of trauma-informed actions to advance housing security can then incorporate ways to undo past harms and mitigate future inequities.

Guiding Principle F: Employ a sense of urgency about both meeting immediate needs and initiating steps for long-term progress.

Adopt both short- and long-term planning horizons and desired outcomes, with transparency about aspirations, priorities, limitations, and uncertainties. This also includes anticipating potential unintended long-term effects of actions that are taken to respond to immediate needs and planning for how to mitigate harmful long-term effects and amplify potential beneficial long-term effects of those immediate actions.

The goals of meeting the needs of individuals and addressing systemic contributing factors may or may not be best served by the same actions. Both need to be explicitly considered when prioritizing, designing, and allocating resources. In some cases, mitigating actions may be needed because focusing too narrowly on one level may hinder progress on another. For example, increasing the supply of affordable housing may not advance equitable housing security unless attention is paid to individual needs in accessing that housing.

Guiding Principle G: Amplify the influence of those most affected by homelessness and housing instability.

Incorporate the insights, expertise, and influence of communities and individuals affected by homelessness and housing instability and include them in making decisions about laws, policies, programs, and services related to housing security.

The pathway to housing security will be more robust and effective if there is intentional space for the power and influence of people and communities disproportionately affected by housing insecurity. Individuals who experience homelessness, like all people, are capable, adaptable, and knowledgeable. They are highly qualified to inform services and models of care to address their needs and should have opportunities to be involved in every level of advocacy, planning, and implementation.

Guiding Principle H: Create conditions that reduce competition and facilitate cooperation.

Progress toward housing security requires that the concept of a thriving community encompass the availability of the whole of housing needs, on the entire continuum from emergency shelter for those experiencing homelessness to affordability in the housing market. Similarly, a thriving community is one in which the provision of services facilitate stability. Coordination is needed not just upon entry into homelessness services, but also in moving along the housing continuum and in accessing the appropriate supportive services needed to stabilize and thrive.

Guiding Principle I: Address the inability of the housing market to meet housing needs.

The supply and cost of housing varies by market conditions; this has been complicated because homeownership in the United States has been commodified as an investment. The purchase and sale of real property has been fundamental to the accumulation and generational transmission of wealth. These often become divergent objectives—property ownership to increase wealth versus a housing stock that meets housing needs. As housing costs rise in response to supply and demand in the housing market, there are too few affordable dwellings in a community and more people than can be accommodated based on what is possible to afford. In the shortage that ensues, some people are left without somewhere to reside. Higher-income households outcompete lower-income households for the same housing inventory, which excludes those with the fewest resources from the housing market. Homelessness and housing insecurity increase when there are not enough affordable housing options and significant within-community income inequality.

In the housing market, there is a mismatch between the supply/cost and needs of individuals and families. In the labor market, there is a mismatch between wages/income and the costs of living, especially related to housing. Compensating for those mismatches can create more housing stability:

- ◆ stabilizing the rental market requires stability for both renters and property owners, and
- ◆ stabilizing the ownership market requires stability for both builders/developers and buyers.

Another area where the market is tied to the response to housing insecurity is the State revenue sources for housing assistance that are coupled to fluctuations in the real estate market. Being able to rely on sources in addition to document recording fees for homeless housing services will reduce the inverse relationship to the robustness of the real estate market and create greater alignment across all aspects of housing security.

Guiding Principle J: Sustain the response to housing insecurity through stability in infrastructure, relationships, and appropriately scaled resources.

A sustained effort will require meaningful and productive processes to support relationship building and coordination. Those processes require financial and other resources to achieve successful outcomes at the scale necessary to advance housing security statewide.

Guiding Principle K: Prepare to adapt to changing circumstances, unanticipated disruptions, and new knowledge.

From supporting individuals currently and at risk of experiencing homelessness to advancing society-wide housing security, this is long-term work at all levels. The work requires that policymakers, implementing organizations, service providers, nonprofits, and communities have the capability to adapt to changing patterns, an uncertain future, and a rapid pace of change—without undermining past progress.

Balance aspects that seem in contradiction with each other.

Part of the complexity of housing security is that many potentially useful options can sometimes seem to be in conflict, like flexibility and oversight, local control and statewide consistency, or reacting to acute needs and proactively preparing for a long-term response. New opportunities could arise if a strategy shifts from trying to decide between seemingly conflicting choices to discerning how to balance them—which is needed, to what extent, and when?

Recommendations and Actions for a Long-Term Strategy

Section 6 of HB 1277 called for facilitated discussions to inform options and recommendations for a long-term strategy, including clarity on roles and responsibilities, and considerations of the manner in which investments should be made.

Interviews and facilitated discussions in 2021 and 2022 informed the development of emerging options organized around seven thematic areas for workshops and participant discussions:

- ◆ meeting needs along the housing continuum,
- ◆ responding holistically to people’s needs,
- ◆ connecting housing security to economic security,
- ◆ navigating flexibility and consistency,

- ◆ defining success and managing performance,
- ◆ shifting views of homelessness and housing instability, and
- ◆ a desired strategic framework of the State’s approach to advancing housing security that builds a networked system of supports and resources focused on helping communities—at all scales—thrive.

Discussions among workshop participants in August to October 2023 helped further clarify and inform the following recommendations and key actions for supporting and advancing the conceptual shifts with actions, in accordance with the guiding principles.

Participants in facilitated discussions repeatedly described the core actions, policies, funding and decision-making structures that have been—and will be—vital to meeting the needs of individuals and families experiencing homelessness and/or housing instability. For an effective state strategy, participants also repeatedly called for a more holistic approach to housing security that does not only focus on increasing the housing supply or emphasizes exits of homelessness as connecting individuals to permanent housing. A more holistic approach recognizes the many, sometimes nonlinear, pathways towards housing security. Cornerstones of a holistic approach recognizes that housing security is advanced when housing for low- and middle-income individuals and households is available and affordable, when circumstances of precarious housing are stabilized, when homelessness is prevented as much as possible, and when experiences of homelessness are mitigated as quickly as possible.

The following recommendations were developed and informed by the knowledge and expertise of a myriad of individuals with knowledge or experience of programs and policies related to homelessness and housing instability and the project team’s experience in supporting collaborative efforts. Recommendations and opportunities are organized in the following categories:

- ◆ opportunities for state partnership with Tribal Governments,
- ◆ set the strategy up for success,
- ◆ respond to the continuum of housing needs,
- ◆ bolster systems and workforce capacity and stability, and
- ◆ foster accountability and manage performance and adapt over time.

Collectively, these recommendations embody actions in a more holistic approach to housing security, where entities and actors consider the common set of guiding principles described in this report. The following recommendations provide guidance for the State—the Legislature, Office of the Governor, and agencies—to lead and encourage a more coordinated framework; and for entities and organizations across sectors and levels to adopt conceptual shifts and guiding principles, in the actions they take according to their roles.

Opportunities for State Partnership with Tribal Governments

The State of Washington and federally recognized tribes have government to government relationships and these relationships recognize and respect the sovereignty of the other. The Centennial and Millennial Accords provide frameworks for consulting on matters of state and tribal interests. Within that context, this section reflects themes emerging from participant conversations around how the state could better partner with tribal governments in a long-term effort to advance housing security.

Funding

Participants emphasized the critical role of federal and state resources that are long-term, predictable, and stable. Some noted opportunities to address barriers to accessing resources associated with complex application and reporting processes that require staff capacity:

- ◆ State entities could reduce, or at least not increase, reporting and administrative requirements.
- ◆ Oversight relationships could focus on grantees alignment with programmatic intent or principles.

Participants also converged around calling for designated funding specifically for tribes, in a way that reduces competition.

Participants also described the critical role of resources with criteria and frameworks that align with sovereignty and are conducive to developing and implementing culturally attuned housing, programs, and services as a means of amplifying efforts. Specific areas of investment could include:

- ◆ supporting administrative infrastructure and operations and maintenance,
- ◆ rehabilitating and replacing current housing that is unsafe and/or unsanitary, and
- ◆ increasing housing supply.

Relationships

Participants described the importance of state staff and leadership in listening to and connecting with Tribal Leaders earlier in and throughout the process, especially regarding funding opportunities.

Decision-making

Participants emphasized the importance of policy frameworks and funding sources where tribal governments have the autonomy and flexibility to develop and implement programs that meet the needs of their respective citizens and community members.

Recommendations 1 – 3: Set the Strategy Up for Success

Given the breadth of factors needed to create housing security in thriving communities, strategies at various scales with 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. The state strategic framework needs to encompass successes that represent the whole of the landscape, expect each component to be more transparent about its focus, and make it possible for different aspects of the response to hold each other accountable for trying to contribute to, or at least not get in the way of, each other's forms of success. A narrow understanding of success can be counterproductive, undermining the interdependencies among different aspects of the response.

A long-term strategy will be most effective if it helps the state align and track multiple kinds of successes across scales, domains, and perspectives. Each of these types of successes might need different actions, investments, and timeframes. This does not mean that success goes undefined, it means that multiple operating definitions are working in concert with each other. Rather than resolving a debate about which matters more, the strategic obligation is to discern what combination of investments will contribute to progress on multiple fronts, together contributing to advancing housing security.

Recommendation 1

Multiple Successes: Recognize multiple, co-existing ways of understanding success.

The input from participants illuminated many areas in which it is possible, and important, for multiple ways of understanding success to co-exist. Those areas include:

- ◆ reducing the rates and experiences of homelessness,
- ◆ surviving and thriving,
- ◆ outcomes and pathways,
- ◆ different successes at different levels, and
- ◆ equity.

Reducing rates and experiences of homelessness

Participants discussed two forms of success in the response to homelessness that need to co-exist as related but sometimes differing goals. These were the importance of both seeking to reduce the overall rate of homelessness and addressing individual and household experiences of homelessness. For the purpose of reducing the per capita rate of homelessness in the long term, a 50% decline would be viewed as a success; this kind of metric tends to get a lot of emphasis. However, for those who continue to experience homelessness or housing instability, an overall decline that does not include them means very little. For them and for the providers who engage with them, the extent to which varied, and sometimes complex individual needs are being met—often over extended periods of time—is more meaningful.

Another associated aspect is different ways of understanding the meaning of successfully reducing homelessness. Reducing visible homelessness in encampments, rights of way, and other public spaces is reasonable to pursue as one outcome. Participants emphasized that it should not be understood as a success if it is achieved as displacement without regard for where people experiencing homelessness go, for how long, and what sustained support they receive. Similarly, achieving housing security goals are only successes if they focus as much on the safety of those experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity as they do on community safety needs. Participants further expressed a desire that reducing homelessness should extend to those who are sheltering in vehicles or being temporarily sheltered by family and friends—and to preventing those who are housing insecure from ever falling into homelessness in the first place.

Surviving and thriving

Similarly, given the scale and urgency of the need to mitigate homelessness, increasing the availability of and placement in any form of shelter can be seen as a success. Some participants who provide outreach or emergency shelter, the immediate form of success they described for those they support was survival—making it to the next day, providing a meal, being out of immediate harm.

Yet, they and others also desired the response as a whole to see success as thriving, not merely surviving. Thus, the quantity of placements is not enough to reflect success. The quality, accessibility, acceptability, and stability of housing placements also matters, as well as the extent to which there is facilitated access to needed services. As some participants variously said, “it’s not the first housing that comes along, but the right housing” for the person or family.

Outcomes and pathways

Another example of important co-existing forms of success are outcomes and the pathways to those outcomes. Participants described the importance of striving for and tracking key milestones and outcomes, such as permanent housing placements within a specified timeframe and expansion of housing supply and closing the gap in housing inequities. These outcomes help understand the extent to which the response is achieving its purpose.

In parallel, monitoring success along the pathway for each specific situation or circumstance is also critically important, with the realistic expectation that progress may not always be linear. Understanding what is happening along the pathway—as much for a person in need of housing support as for a particular community as for a state strategy—illuminates how and why the endpoint is or is not being achieved. For example, understanding why a person has not secured employment can inform what additional supports or interventions may be needed. Greater understanding of the pathways can also illuminate whether the hoped-for timeframes are realistic in practice. Seeing the pathway as a form of success also allows different programs and services to share in each other’s successes as individuals transition among providers.

Different successes at different levels

While the concept of both endpoints and pathways to those endpoints is consistent across levels, participants emphasized that the specific ways success looks vary by level of the response. The success of the system as a whole needs to be conceptualized differently than the success of a program or service provider. For example, program successes may mean that many people experiencing homelessness are being rehoused and connected to services. However, if just as many or more people continue to fall into homelessness, the success of the system as a whole is not being achieved.

Participants often described how an understanding of success needs to be not just whether someone is placed in housing and services, but how well-matched the housing placement and other interventions are to the person's circumstances, needs, and preferences and to the local community context. Some individuals may be looking to "self-sufficiency" 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.

Participants expressed a desire that rather than the funders developing measures of success, a collaborative and responsive approach to identifying what individualized success is and how to get there is more likely to produce robust and lasting results, including in different demographic, geographic, community, and cultural contexts.

Equity

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 numeric targets alone can result in approaches that default to reaching those who are relatively easy to serve. In parallel to overall targets, closing the gap in housing disparities and reaching those most on the margins is its own dimension of success, even if it requires a different type and level of investment. Similarly, goals such as building the capacity of new and more diverse implementing organizations and providers can be complementary to meeting short-term targets quickly by relying on experienced partners and grantees.

Some participants raised concerns that it can be complicated to measure multiple kinds of successes and it may result in a lack of focus or accountability or not setting ambitious enough goals. Other participants emphasized that while seeking a singular or simplified approach to understanding, measuring, and tracking 'success' has its appeal, such an approach will be insufficient, fail to represent the diversity of contributions needed in a response to housing insecurity, and ultimately be counterproductive to truly understanding how the response to

housing security is performing. As one participant put it, being narrow about what success looks like is “far riskier” than incorporating multiple understandings.

Systematically tracking more kinds of success is important to an effective strategy, participants also observed that not everything needs to be measured and tracked in every context nor at every level. The recommended approach to gathering and using the diversity of information needed to monitor and assess a comprehensive response to housing insecurity is discussed further in **Recommendation 18**.

Recommendation 2

Clarity of Total Investment and Benefit: Capture and communicate the comprehensive investments that advance housing security, the benefits they yield, and for whom.

The complexity of housing security as a goal necessitates that investments be assessed using a broad, cross-sectoral 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.

A more comprehensive sense of the scope and scale of all resources that support housing security could help clarify the value of investments across the housing continuum, rather than just focus on the investments in one part of the response to housing insecurity. This more detailed approach to understanding the investment landscape should include government spending, contributions from nongovernmental sources, and the value of temporary housing provided by friends and family, and also consider the relative public costs of permanent supportive housing compared to likely alternate outcomes such as incarceration or hospitalization, can also help clarify the value of the response to housing insecurity.

Recommendation 3

Experiential Expertise: Amplify the insights and expertise of those affected by homelessness and housing instability by supporting them to participate in making decisions about, implementing, and assessing the performance of laws, policies, programs, and services related to housing insecurity.

The pathways to housing security will be more robust and effective if there is intentional space for the power and influence of people and communities disproportionately affected by housing insecurity. 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 policies, programs, and services that make up the response to housing insecurity.

Some examples of opportunities to amplify insights:

- ◆ include individuals who are BIPOC, living with disabilities, elders, young people, and LGBTQIA and/or who have lived experience of homelessness and/or housing insecurity,
- ◆ increase access to compensation and reimbursement for individuals not otherwise paid to contribute to conversations on programs and policies, and
- ◆ include individuals with lived experience, who enter and collect data, and front-line workers in conversations around monitoring progress.

One widely desired aspect of this recommendation among participants is employing people in the housing response who have experienced homelessness or housing instability. Participants often described how that shared connection and empathy is important to effectively reach and engage people authentically and to build the trust needed to foster stability. Along with this, it is important to not only include people who have experienced homelessness or housing insecurity in the past, but to also include people currently experiencing it as they are the ones who are the closest to the realities of it in the immediate context.

In discussions around increasing the influence of individuals with lived experience (current or otherwise) associated with housing insecurity and homelessness, participants raised several considerations.

One consideration is that hiring people at relatively low wages may not provide sufficient income to afford their housing and may put their eligibility for services at risk. Another consideration is when citizenship or a history with the criminal justice system excludes people from employment. A process for facilitating exemptions to hiring restrictions on jobs in housing assistance would help to advance housing security by being able to consider an untapped pool of job candidates with valuable experiential and peer support expertise.

Recommendations 4 – 8: Respond to the Continuum of Housing Needs

Effective programs or policies anywhere on the housing continuum—from ensuring a supply of affordable housing to stabilizing precarious housing to mitigating homelessness—ultimately depend on the state of the rest of the continuum. For example, emergency shelters are temporary by design but can only serve that function if there is a connection to available permanent housing options. The availability of permanent housing options is affected by the affordability of housing, which is affected by the housing market, which shifts alongside patterns of growth and the economy.

The following set of recommendations address some of the structural housing needs, such the supply and access to available housing.

Recommendation 4

Housing Options: Expand the supply, variety, location, and quality of supported options and pathways for shelter, temporary, and longer-term housing, to better match people to their types and level of need and to their preferences.

A variety of facilities, structures, and types of requirements and supports are necessary to make it possible to stabilize people based on their circumstances, needs, and preferences—therefore facilitating their pathway to housing security.

The scale and urgency of the homelessness crisis necessitates difficult choices across equally important factors that can sometimes be in conflict, especially speed, and quality. Perspectives differed widely about what achieves sufficient quality—careful and transparent consideration is needed for choices that will inevitably be necessary but not adequate. Similarly difficult choices are also apparent in responding to the urgency of the affordable housing shortage.

Increased variety and flexibility in what housing options are supported by the State helps better balance helps expand the possibilities in navigating tradeoffs between quality and speed.

Examples of the desired variety of options and supports for temporary shelter include:

- ◆ 24/7 and continuous stay facilities in various configurations,
- ◆ day shelters and overnight shelters,
- ◆ safer encampments with more services, and
- ◆ coordinated placements for families and other socially linked people.

Participants also recognize that many people and families may lean on family and friends for temporary shelter. Providing support to mitigate the burden on friends and family as well as support infrastructure and policies to add and improve spaces and services for those who reside in recreational vehicles.

For longer-term housing placements, the desired variety includes:

- ◆ both low barrier and conditional models,
- ◆ both permanent supportive housing for those with complex needs and temporary transitional housing for those awaiting longer-term housing options,
- ◆ both individual and joint placements for those who are socially connected, and
- ◆ both renting and home ownership.

Other examples of options identified as needed include recovery housing; medical respite and recuperative care facilities; shared living alternatives, housing responsive to specific needs such as those who are pregnant or caring for infants, youth, older adults, people living with disabilities, or people affected by domestic violence; and residential care facilities for those whose complexity of need is more than can be met in permanent supportive housing.

Participants made clear that what is effective for one set of circumstances may be ineffective for another. For example, an effective housing response necessitates that well-implemented low barrier options be available as entry points for those who, in their current circumstances, would otherwise have no option. Yet a person currently in recovery may not do well in that environment. Similarly, a person with multiple complex needs may thrive in permanent supportive housing, while that level of support may be more than what is needed for some and less than what is needed for others.

What emerged from the discussions is that continuing the search for a universally “best” program model or type of housing can get in the way of investing in an effective strategy. A variety of facilities, structures, and types of requirements and supports are necessary to make it possible to stabilize people based on their circumstances, needs, and preferences—therefore facilitating their pathway to housing security.

A major consideration within discussions about the supply and variety of housing options is a desire to link people more effectively and more quickly to shelter and temporary housing and then into longer term housing options, or even directly into longer term housing. Supporting explicit and transparent cooperation between the acute response and progress on longer-term options will help ensure that acute solutions are not being developed in lieu of long-term ones and also that long term aspirations do not inadvertently get in the way of acute needs.

Recommendation 5

Supply of Affordable Housing: Adopt strategies that align homelessness services and housing assistance with increasing the supply of affordable housing for rental and ownership. Allocate more funds to be used for operations and maintenance to preserve the current stock of subsidized and affordable housing.

For recommendations related to affordable housing, the report of this work will cross-reference the Affordable Housing Advisory Board’s (AHAB) forthcoming updated plan and encourage alignment and coordination between the approach to affordable housing and other parts of the housing continuum. It is anticipated that the AHAB plan will include policy recommendations related to identified housing barriers, developed through an extensive information gathering and deliberative process. The issue areas covered include, for example, funding, land, local approvals, regulation, infrastructure, construction cost, expiring affordability, lack of affordable homeownership, financing options, and manufactured home community vulnerability.

Additional desired areas of emphasis that would complement the AHAB strategic plan include:

- ◆ allocate more funds to be used for operations and maintenance to preserve the current stock of subsidized and affordable housing,
- ◆ establish dedicated resources to rehabilitate and restore or replace housing that is unsafe or unsanitary,

- ◆ create pathways to homeownership, especially for BIPOC and individuals with disabilities,
- ◆ establish dedicated resources for tribes, distributed in a way that reduces competition, and
- ◆ increase supply of housing that is separate from the housing market, such as subsidized housing or community land trusts.

Participants generally described recent policy approaches and increases in the State’s investments to expand affordable housing as progress. However, there are persistent concerns that added housing units will not be consistent with housing needs assessments, that added housing units will not remain affordable in the realities of the current housing market in Washington State, and that there are not adequate mechanisms to incentivize or enforce affordable housing goals.

Recommendation 6

Equitable Access to Housing: As policies are implemented to increase the supply of affordable housing, ensure equitable access for those transitioning from homelessness and most at risk of housing instability.

Increasing the supply of affordable housing is a key component of housing security, and there is widespread convergence among participants that it is critical to mitigating homelessness—yet there is concern that it is not sufficient to fully meet the needs of all people experiencing housing instability. Increasing affordable housing supply needs to be paired with explicit strategies for equitable access to housing. Examples of desired approaches to facilitate access include:

- ◆ establish incentives for navigators or peer supports who can support a person’s pathway along the housing continuum,
- ◆ increase access to programs that cover up-front housing application and deposit expenses and/or repair credit history,
- ◆ address and mitigate disparities related to how credit scores are calculated,
- ◆ support programs that promote financial literacy and education,
- ◆ create pathways to homeownership through subsidizing, insuring or providing no or low interest loans, and supporting alternatives to traditional lending, and
- ◆ reduce barriers to access such as exclusions due to criminal history.

Strategies designed to facilitate access for those currently and historically most marginalized and least well served by current housing options due to racism, other systemic disadvantages, and exclusionary practices are likely to facilitate access universally for those in need of housing assistance. Conversely, designing mostly around the circumstances of the majority

can perpetuate current inequities and exclusion.³⁹ While many hold the perspective that some exclusionary policies are warranted for some circumstances, in practice these policies—without alternate strategies for those circumstances—are counterproductive to the goal of advancing housing security.

Recommendation 7

Geographic Variability: Accommodate the ways in which housing challenges manifest differently in different places.

Key actions include:

- ◆ **Local Affordability:** Allow local communities to determine what is considered affordable housing and fair market pricing based on their local economic conditions.
- ◆ **Local Affordable Housing Solutions:** Support local rental property owners and local builders/developers with risk mitigation and tailored incentives to participate in sustaining a robust stock of high-quality local affordable housing.

Localities with widely variable population sizes, densities, and housing markets all currently struggle with housing challenges. Supporting communities does not necessarily mean support that is proportionate to the number or percentage of the population experiencing homelessness or housing instability.

For example, some issues manifest differently in different places and therefore require different strategies that may be more or less costly. Creating and launching a new program may require different levels of resources than scaling up an ongoing program. Some comparable strategies cost more on a smaller scale or in different contexts. Some places experience overflow effects from rising housing costs and increasing rates of housing insecurity in other localities.

To be effective statewide, the housing response needs to transparently assess, track, and accommodate these variations and avoid moving housing challenges from place to place.

Recommendation 8

Cooperation Across Jurisdictions: Incentivize greater cooperation across geographic and political jurisdictions.

Participants widely recognized that a barrier to statewide progress is the potential for a local response to displace rather than resolve local housing challenges. That pattern could be interrupted by requiring or incentivizing cooperation across jurisdictions, which could take various forms from improved communication to coordination and to collaboration.

³⁹ This aligns with the most recent Federal strategic plan's adoption of a "targeted universalism" framework (<https://belonging.berkeley.edu/targeted-universalism>).

Recommendations 9 – 12: Respond Holistically to People’s Needs

A holistic view of homelessness and housing instability recognizes that multiple interacting factors contribute to produce both statewide patterns and individual experiences of housing insecurity.

A person’s ability to access and sustain housing necessitates support based on their specific circumstances. The following set of recommendations inform the ways a long-term strategy needs to connect actions and resources related to multiple factors beyond housing in mutually beneficial ways.

Recommendation 9

Coordinated Pathway: Create a coordinated pathway system that cultivates operational connections among entities working on outreach, entry into the homelessness response system, placement in housing, and longer-term housing stability.

Key actions include:

- ◆ **Infrastructure for Coordination:** Directly support the infrastructure and effort required for active coordination and sustained relationships among local implementing organizations.
- ◆ **State and Local Engagement:** Increase engagement across state and local levels to clarify policies, practices, and criteria for coordinated systems.

Advancing housing security requires not only housing options along the continuum but also support for people to successfully move along that continuum. Currently, people experience a great deal of difficulty getting from step to step across different providers and disparate systems. There is a recognition that it is not just entry into homelessness services that needs to be coordinated but the whole trajectory of housing stability that needs to be more effectively connected. Participants called for system improvements and pathways to reduce silos along the housing security continuum—**Recommendation 11** describes person-centered improvements.

Key Action: Infrastructure for Coordination

Given the lack of availability of housing and the challenging circumstances faced by some individuals, many participants described the common occurrence of a nonlinear trajectory from housing crisis towards housing security. Some participants went on to describe the pathways to housing security.

Desired features of such a pathway system include, for example:

- ◆ extend the allowable duration of transitional housing and supports, including augmenting time beyond federal limits,
- ◆ avoid duplicative eligibility determination and enrollment processes,

- ◆ provide access to peer support,
- ◆ increase flexibility around logistical barriers people face in getting assistance or employment,
- ◆ track referral completion between providers,
- ◆ fund facilitation of cooperation/coordination, and
- ◆ establish state investments in relationship building among local implementing organizations, including in neighboring jurisdictions when needed.

Key Action: State and Local Engagement

Dedicated regional “field officers” could work as liaisons across state and local levels to help with alignment across state agencies whose work relates to housing security. Their role should include a focus on engaging and exchanging information with local service providers and with people experiencing homelessness and housing instability.

Recommendation 10

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.

Key actions include:

- ◆ **Income Eligibility Gap:** Supplement housing assistance eligibility beyond federal income limits to compensate for the locally disproportionate mismatch between household income and housing costs.
- ◆ **Income Eligibility Cliff:** Extend housing assistance eligibility to replace binary thresholds with a sliding scale to help people gradually transition to housing stability as their socioeconomic stability also gradually improves.

Many participants described the gap between the income support or rental subsidy offered and actual rent or need. Many also described eligibility cliffs, where supports may completely expire after a specific amount of time or if income increases above a certain threshold. Participants also described the mental and emotional stress of both navigating the life circumstances contributing to housing insecurity and the eligibility criteria, deadlines, and follow-up required to access supports and housing.

Participants converged broadly on a system that works to match supports to people’s needs and timelines, while minimizing the administrative burden. Creating such an approach in Washington requires a process that examines existing services and eligibility criteria for public assistance across sectors, would need to consider multiple factors contributing to the need for assistance, and include a process for periodic assessment and adaptation.

Some participants described challenges associated with calculating the average median income (AMI). For example, a few high-income earners can distort the median for a community. Some participants described misalignments between incomes and AMI-based eligibility thresholds for services/supports that could still leave households rent burdened or not able to make progress towards greater financial stability.

Participants also described the looming weight of hard deadlines or thresholds for eligibility to qualify and receive benefits. Some participants saw opportunities to address the eligibility cliff by creating more of a ramp; however, the ramp would need to consider the complex system of potential benefits and the exit ramp should be more inclusive of the entirety of a person's situation than current thresholds.

Recommendation 11

Person-Centered Navigation: Evolve current case management and care navigation efforts into a cross-sector navigation system that responds to the specific needs of individuals and households and follows them longitudinally as those needs evolve.

Currently, people and providers experience a great deal of difficulty connecting across different services and disparate systems for health, behavioral health, social, economic, and other kinds of support. A more person-centered approach would strive to align the system to people's lived experiences rather than expecting people to organize their engagement according to the way the system is structured.

Desired features of coordination include assigning long-term culturally sensitive and trauma-informed navigators and expanding peer support programs. Other features of system coordination may require system changes, such as reducing administrative burdens on individuals in completing eligibility and enrollment paperwork and addressing logistical barriers people may face in applying for assistance.

A potential approach is to create a navigator role whose funding, infrastructure, and entry point are not tied to any one service, program, or government agency. The scope and relationships of such navigators could:

- ◆ facilitate understanding of and access to eligible services and referrals,
- ◆ integrate support for multiple needs over time,
- ◆ help coordinate teams of providers, and
- ◆ provide continuous follow-up that is inclusive of and tailored to what each client on their roster specifically needs.

Better navigation can only contribute to housing security if resources, services and supports are available in proportion to the need, which may change over time. The current availability and accessibility of appropriate care and support services are not adequate and would need to be expanded to match people's needs.

To design an optimized system, participants noted the opportunities to draw on both successes and challenges from existing navigation examples such as veteran service organizations; community support, the model used by Apple Health and Homes; and the dashboard and other program navigation related to the Economic Security for All Initiative.⁴⁰ Many participants also went on to raise cautions about implementing something new, particularly without robust input from the field, clear communication, and support for the costs and time of adopting.

Recommendation 12

Circumstances of Precarious Housing: Expand investments that stabilize individuals and households with circumstances of precarious housing.

Key actions include:

- ◆ **Bridging Support:** Provide bridging grants or loans for unanticipated expenses that may supersede making rent or mortgage payments on time.
- ◆ **Eviction Mitigation:** Shift from policies that merely prohibit eviction to add comprehensive prevention strategies that mitigate the reasons for and impacts of impending eviction for tenants, neighbors, and property owners/managers.

One desired approach to stabilize precarious housing is to support people in accessing available services and resources related to the specific ongoing factors that make it difficult for them to sustain stable housing in the context of their circumstances. Suggested examples of this include employment support; income assistance; childcare; education opportunities; life skills coaching; health insurance and access to health and behavioral health care; financial services; and legal representation.

Key Action: Bridging Support

Stabilizing housing for people could also include access to bridging grants or loans for unanticipated expenses that may supersede making rent or mortgage payments on time. Participants often described the disruption of unexpected expenses, such as auto repair or medical bills, and the critical role that a grant or loan for a period of months could play in facilitating re-stabilization.

Key Action: Eviction Mitigation

Stabilizing housing also includes mitigating eviction through comprehensive prevention strategies. Comprehensive strategies would include ways to mitigate the reasons for and impacts of impending eviction for tenants, neighbors, and property owners/managers.

40 Feek, C., Zeitlin, D., Probst, T. (2023). Economic Security for All. Legislative Report. Washington State Employment Security Department. Online: https://apps.leg.wa.gov/ReportsToTheLegislature/home/GetPDF?fileName=2023-05-EcSALegislativeReport_9012b38c-0f2f-4031-95cb-fdc149bd0c3c.pdf

Stabilizing current housing requires access, stability, and safety for renters and homeowners; safety for neighboring tenants or owners; and stability for landlords and lenders of subsidized and affordable housing. A desired strategy for housing security is to increase the availability of a first line response that does not treat these multiple needs as inherently in conflict.

This strategy could include for example, ensuring access to educational and support services that promote both responsible tenants and responsible landlords, relationship building between tenants and landlords, mediation services for tenants and landlords to explore workable solutions outside of court,⁴¹ subsidizing lost rent and damage costs that can occur during mediation or eviction proceedings, and providing bridge loans or grants that help prevent evictions due to lack of payment due to other unanticipated expenses.

This shift from an eviction prohibition does not preclude the ongoing need for formal eviction processes for landlords nor for legal protections for tenants, to be used in cases that cannot be resolved through prevention strategies or in which power imbalances are leveraged to exploit people who are vulnerable.

Recommendations 13 – 16: Bolster Systems and Workforce Capacity and Stability

Addressing concerns about the well-being of the workforce who implement the response to homelessness and housing instability is critical to achieving the goal of advancing housing security.

Recommendation 13

Diversity in Implementation: Increase the diversity of and cooperation among organizations and entities in the public, nonprofit, and private sector with the potential to contribute to the response to housing insecurity.

The scale of the need for affordable housing necessitates an all-hands-on-deck approach. Some participants described the need for more public-private partnerships, which may require examining current funding timelines and capital requirements and mitigating barriers to public-private partnerships.

Participants also emphasized the goal of increasing diversity and rebalancing historic disparities for the recipients of funding. Creating frameworks to incentivize multi-sector projects should incorporate additive rather than exclusionary strategies such as expanding funding opportunities, building technical capacity, and matching partners with complementary capacities.

41 The Office of Civil Legal Aid recently released a report, produced by researchers at the University of Washington, which provides baseline information on Washington State's Appointed Counsel Program, which was authorized by SB 5160: <https://ocla.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Final-Report-on-Implementation-of-Tenant-Appointment-Counsel-Program-10-2023.pdf>

Recommendation 14

Financial Stability of Implementers: Foster the financial stability of those implementing the response to housing insecurity by offering a range of funding models to a variety of grantees and partners.

Advancing housing security is a long-term effort, which will be more readily achieved through implementing organizations with financial stability. Desired approaches for funding models to support this breadth and depth include:

- ◆ leveraging the capital of private sector partners,
- ◆ offering up-front funding alternatives to reimbursement models for smaller organizations,
- ◆ increasing flexibility in covering operational costs,
- ◆ explicitly facilitating diversity in awarding funding,
- ◆ increasing funding periods, such as for three to five years, and adjusting the re-application period to allow for organizations to seek alternate funding or have a longer planning horizon if a program is closing, and
- ◆ building technical capacity for financial management.

Recommendation 15

Working Conditions: Improve working conditions and supports for the frontline workers who directly provide homeless services and housing assistance.

A recent report prepared for the Department of Commerce, “Supporting Homeless Service Provider Workers Experiencing Workplace Trauma in Washington State,”⁴² outlines strategies that can be used to support frontline workers and relieve workplace trauma. The report recommends improving compensation, training, and workplace conditions for workers at Homeless Service Provider (HSP) organizations. Additionally, the report recommends increasing communication between and reducing redundancies across HSP organizations.

Recommendation 16

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

Participants described the critical role service providers play in demonstrating cultural awareness or utilizing a trauma informed approach in building trust and relationships with

42 Reports to the Legislature. (2023). Online: https://app.leg.wa.gov/ReportsToTheLegislature/Home/GetPDF?fileName=CommerceReports_2023_HSD_HSP%20Workforce%20Trauma_Final_Occc9740-298e-447e-b942-8c218b3a2bf4.pdf

clients. A long-term strategy must articulate these practices and train providers, administrators, and leaders across sectors to develop and refine these core competencies.

Recommendations 17 – 18: Foster Accountability and Manage Performance, and Adapt Over Time

Housing security is complex, and the needs are both urgent and long-term. To make and sustain progress, a state strategy will need to comprise multiple aligned approaches, make the rationale behind choices transparent, incorporate accountability mechanisms to assess and adjust the performance of the current response, and avenues to discern whether and how to adapt over time as circumstances change.

Such a complex response needs a robust framework for gathering, managing, and using information. Policymakers, service providers, and communities need to be able to use that information to assess the performance of the current response and adjust as needed, adapt to changing patterns, anticipate potential consequences of those adjustments and adaptations, and sustain progress.

Recommendation 17

Alignment of Policymaking: Assess laws and policies in all areas of government for the potential to affect housing security and assess housing laws and policies for their potential to affect interrelated goals in other areas.

Key actions include:

- ◆ **Policy Coordination:** Support closer coordination among those who set and implement policies for interdependent forms of assistance within and across levels of government.
- ◆ **Alignment with Poverty Reduction Strategies:** Support cooperation among those implementing strategies that mutually reduce poverty and housing insecurity.

There are interdependencies between housing security and almost every other policy goal of the State, such as economic security, health, wellbeing, and safety. This means that policies in these areas do not operate in isolation from each other. Changes to many factors that are priorities in the State will be key to the success of a long-term strategy to advance housing security, even in areas that are not typically connected explicitly to policies for homelessness and housing instability. Similarly, many other policies—and the programs and services developed to implement them—are far more likely to succeed when there is greater housing security for individuals and in communities. Areas with interdependencies identified by participants include:

- ◆ land use and community planning,
- ◆ income and employment support, and other social services,
- ◆ health and behavioral health care,

- ◆ criminal justice,
- ◆ structural racism and other forms of historic and current systemic disadvantage,
- ◆ transportation and other infrastructure,
- ◆ environmental stewardship,
- ◆ climate change adaptation,
- ◆ tourism, and
- ◆ agriculture.

Because of the complex ways success in any one area depends on the others, a strategy for housing security will need to rely on cooperative assessments for policy alignment in other areas, and those who make housing policy need to be as willing to assess for alignment with the needs of other domains. For example, an effort to increase the diversity of housing types in communities could include close coordination and consideration of climate and environmental stewardship goals, as well as with the land-use planning framework. Increasing access to housing for individuals upon release from a period of incarceration, will require identifying, tracking, and mitigating potential unintended or counterproductive consequences between and among individuals with lived experience, service providers, and policy makers.

Key Action: Policy Coordination

For those entities more directly related to housing, the alignment needed is in the form of close coordination in the development and implementation of policies. At the level of state and local governments, closer coordination could help ensure mutually beneficial strategy, planning, policy, and funding allocations. It would also improve clarity and consistency about terminology, rules, regulations, implementation of new initiatives, and systems for performance management and accountability.

Key Action: Alignment with Poverty Reduction Strategies

For people to be stable in housing, their economic status needs to be stable—and for people to maintain economic stability they need to be housed. The housing security of a community is similarly connected to its economy. Actions related to housing security and actions related to wages, income, employment, workforce development, and other forms of economic security need to be mutually reinforcing or at least not inadvertently work at competing purposes.

The recent 10-Year Plan to Dismantle Poverty in Washington provides a roadmap for alignment with state strategies for improving economic security.⁴³ In addition, useful implementation

⁴³ Dismantle Poverty in Washington. (2023). Dismantle Poverty in Washington Homepage. Webpage. Online: <https://dismantlepovertyinwa.com/>

lessons may be gleaned from subsequent efforts implemented in response to the poverty reduction plan, such as the Economic Security for All poverty reduction model.⁴⁴

Recommendation 18

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.

Key actions include:

- ◆ **Diversity of Knowledge.** Draw on complementary sources of information to design, implement, and monitor policies, programs, and services.
- ◆ **Connect Research and Practice.** Create opportunities for dialogue and cooperation among the research and evaluation communities and the policy and practice communities.

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 monitor and enhance the performance of the response. 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. A comprehensive framework for managing knowledge in this way would clearly 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.

By strategically combining different types of information-gathering, at different scales and levels, and using different timeframes, such a framework can help the State track the multiple successes that matter, including outcomes, context, processes and experiences, without being limited to what is most measurable as a performance metric.

This does not pre-empt existing monitoring systems and measures for different aspects of housing security. Rather, the purpose would be to use existing data collection with additional strategic information together to capture and regularly update a picture of housing security as a whole. For routine performance monitoring, participants reinforced the value of tracking quantitative metrics, which help track whether outcomes are achieved. They also expressed the need for more systematic approaches to routinely collecting qualitative information, which provide critical insights into how and why the goals of the response are—or are not—

44 Workforce Professionals Center. (2023). Economic Security for All (ECSA). Webpage. Washington State. Online: <https://wpc.wa.gov/grants/EcSA-initiative-information>

being reached. In this way the state's performance monitoring approach can encompass both trends and statistical patterns as well as patterns in the experiences of those most affected by housing insecurity and most directly involved in implementing the response. Another desired development for monitoring data would be to link it more closely with financial data, allowing better estimation of what available resources can cover given current costs and capacity in the system.

A practical insight that emerged from the participant discussions is that there is a need for a manageable number of key quantifiable and comparable indicators of success to be collected, reported, and tracked statewide. At the same time, there was a widespread desire for more flexible and tailored performance monitoring to meet needs that vary by demographics, or geographic location, or type of program.

A state strategy would benefit from a purposeful determination of who needs to track what information, for what purpose, at what level of operations, and with what frequency. An efficient use of limited personnel, time, and financial resources could then meet those needs with a highest yield/least burden approach to collecting and reporting data. To balance efficiency with flexibility, a tiered approach could be employed. The state's universal reporting requirements can be streamlined to core monitoring needs, recognizing that some reporting requirements are not controlled by the State, while technical assistance could be provided to support the collection and use of routine quantitative and qualitative measures in a locality or within a program or for an individual's progress. These measures could be aligned as a menu of options that are centrally supported, which would facilitate some use not only for managing local and programmatic implementation, but also for trends or studies across jurisdictions or programs that choose to collect them.

To augment monitoring, what emerged from the discussions, is a need for a strategically coordinated, complementary portfolio of evaluation methods. This would serve to assess outcomes, context, and experiences that are not captured well by monitoring indicators, using quantitative and qualitative methodologies. There was particular interest among many participants in expanding the use of community-based and participatory evaluation approaches. A coordinated research portfolio can then complement monitoring and evaluation by focusing on questions that will enhance and advance the effectiveness, scale, quality, and acceptability of supported actions.

Finally, 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. Another is to develop ways to capture innovations at the local level and make it easier to adapt and spread them to other parts of the state.

Some participants expressed concerns about how challenging new information gathering efforts can be when those working in the response are already stretched thin. Being mindful of not

adding work without providing support was identified as critical to realizing the opportunities to improve the response by evolving the ways in which knowledge is gathered and used.

Key Action: Diversity of Knowledge

There is much existing knowledge about housing and homelessness. Yet, participants also often described the gaps and limitations in applying that knowledge. Gaps in knowledge may be attributed to lack of data collection over time or as some programs, regions, and populations may receive less attention by researchers. Of the knowledge and research available, there are limitations to the lessons that can be learned and applied in other contexts, for different individuals. Participants called for knowledge of various types and from various sources are used together to design, implement and monitor policies, programs, and services.

This will help build a strategy that takes advantage of a broad scope of methodologies, types of information, disciplines, fields, sectors, and forms of expertise, including the experiential expertise of those with lived experience of homelessness and housing instability, those most affected factors that contribute to housing insecurity, and those most directly involved in practice and policy aspects of the response.

There are a number of reasons that drawing on various forms of knowledge serves complex, unwieldy, multifaceted challenges well. One is that it allows for a more complete understanding that includes an overall view of trends and patterns about what contributes to housing challenges and what works to address them, how those relate to the specific environments and circumstances of people experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity, and the multiple lenses of those working on different aspects of the response. Another is that using complementary types of information and integrating different disciplinary approaches compensates for the assumptions, preconceptions, and gaps that inevitably accompany any one type of knowledge. This can bring to light different effective approaches than what might otherwise have been considered, and it can help anticipate unintended consequences for approaches that are under consideration. It can also make it more possible for learning to happen across different components of the response.

Integrating a diversity of knowledge can also help ensure that no one aspect of the response or sector or perspective can dominate how information influences decisions about strategy and implementation. Different parts of the response can learn from each other. Finally, it sets aside fixed hierarchical standards based on the type of evidence and instead seeks the best possible match between each relevant question and the type of information and methodology. This fit-for-purpose approach is increasingly recognized as a best practice for complex policy challenges that require alignment within and across multiple systems and sectors.

This does not mean a strategy will be able to follow the direction suggested based on every available type of knowledge. There will inevitably be differences depending on the perspective, the purpose, and the aspect or level of the response. Advancing housing security entails asking many questions that do not have a single “right” answer and making many decisions about

which absolute certainty is not possible. While some may worry that considering diverse information can be complicated and unwieldy, it is what makes it more possible to effectively address a complicated and unwieldy challenge. The value comes from developing a shared knowledge base that reflects the whole landscape of housing security, clarifying a sound rationale when tradeoffs need to be made, being transparent about and accountable for which types of knowledge inform which decisions, having better foresight about unintended consequences, and making it possible to tailor the response to different contexts.

Key Action: Connect Research and Practice

As described above, a complementary evaluation and research portfolio is an important part of a comprehensive knowledge management framework. Implementing this would provide an opportunity to bolster several different kinds of desired connections between the research and evaluation communities and the policy and practice communities. One is to foster exchange and collaborative relationships across the multiple disciplines that study aspects of housing. This could be done, for example, through 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 structure 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.

The shift to housing security as the overarching shared goal will bring with it some shifts in the knowledge needed to assess the success and manage the performance of the state's strategy. This shift will start by identifying the questions that need to be tracked over time. These questions can then be matched to appropriate information gathering approaches—whether monitoring, evaluation, or research; to the appropriate scale and context for tracking them, and to appropriate quantitative and qualitative methodologies and data sources.

The questions below are some examples of questions that emerged from facilitated discussions as important for tracking progress toward housing security:

- ◆ 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?

- ◆ 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?
- ◆ To what extent is the State’s response to housing insecurity being implemented in accordance with trauma-informed, culturally sensitive, and antiracist practices?
- ◆ To what extent is the State advancing compassion and mutual accountability? To what extent is the State guarding against shame and punishment?
- ◆ 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?
- ◆ What is the distribution of types of providers, organizations, funders, and other actors who participate in implementing the response to housing insecurity?
- ◆ How well is the State incentivizing and facilitating cooperation across jurisdictions and navigation across agencies and services that provide interdependent forms of assistance?
- ◆ To what extent is the State’s response to housing insecurity mutually supporting the state’s responses to other related challenges?
- ◆ To what extent are the available financial and other resources adequate to advance housing security?