

# BENTON COUNTY

## COORDINATED HOMELESS RESPONSE OFFICE (CHRO)

HB 4123 COORDINATED HOMELESS RESPONSE PILOTS – NOVEMBER 2023 LEGISLATIVE REPORT

### INTRODUCTION

The [Benton County Coordinated Homeless Response Office \(CHRO\)](#) consists of two dedicated full-time county staff members within the county Health Department that comprise a program coordinator and project manager along with one part-time contracted grant writer and researcher. These positions support internal and external homeless response efforts through comprehensive coordination, facilitation, project management, capacity building, and community engagement. These positions were established prior to Benton County becoming an HB 4123 community and have been overseeing the County's implementation of HB 4123 requirements.

The Coordinated Homeless Response Office works closely with the City of Corvallis Community Development Department staff and Community Services Consortium leadership to coordinate efforts to implement HB 4123.

Prior to becoming a HB 4123 Pilot community, Benton County had a well-established Advisory Board: The Home, Opportunity, Planning, and Equity (HOPE) Advisory Board. At the time of this report the HOPE Advisory Board had the following structure:

- Chartering Jurisdictions – Benton County and the City of Corvallis are the initial Chartering Jurisdictions. The Chartering Jurisdictions establish the bylaws, establish governance structure, have direct policy and funding authority, define scope of the Advisory Board and Executive Committee, provide staff support to the Advisory Board, and establish lead agency roles.
- Advisory Board – The Advisory Board provides a wide array of community expertise and representation of groups working on homelessness, housing, and social determinants of health.
- Executive Committee – The Executive Committee is a subset of the Advisory Board whose responsibilities include appointing Advisory Board members, adopting action plans presented to it by the Advisory Board, reviewing and

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assisting the Advisory Board to align its work with the bylaws, and presenting reports to Chartering Jurisdictions.

Amendments to the HOPE Advisory Board bylaws are needed to integrate the membership and functional requirements of the Advisory Board pursuant to HB 4123 (see Lessons Learned section below). At the time of preparing this report, the CHRO is engaging Benton County Board of Commissioners to seek direction on amending HOPE Advisory Board bylaws and the process for adopting the HB 4123 Coordinated Homeless Response System Strategic Plan.

### **Geographic coverage**

Benton County's Coordinated Homeless Response System (System) covers the geographic boundaries of Benton County. This includes the Cities of Corvallis and Philomath, and all unincorporated communities within the county. The Cities of Adair Village and Monroe have been invited to formally partner with the System through formal membership via Benton County's Coordinated Homeless Response System Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). In lieu of formal partnership, the CHRO prioritizes engaging and including the Cities of Adair Village and Monroe in updates regarding opportunities that support implementation of the Coordinated Homeless Response System 5-Year Strategic Plan (5-Year Plan).

### **Date of formal recognition/adoption of MOU or IGA recognizing the coordinated effort:**

Benton County, the City of Corvallis, and Community Services Consortium entered into the MOU in September 2022. This agreement was later amended to include the City of Philomath in May 2023.

## STRATEGIC PLAN

As described above, prior to becoming a HB 4123 pilot community, Benton County and the City of Corvallis formed the HOPE Board in 2019. The HOPE Board was

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created to support Benton County's response to homelessness with improved transparency and inclusion for all sectors of the community, especially people experiencing homelessness. The HOPE Board includes leaders from our Hispanic community, Black community, LGBTQI2S+ community, as well as representatives from rural communities, city council, county Board of Commissioners, police, fire department, social service providers (Samaritan LCSW, housing first, transitional housing, shelter), InterCommunity Health Network Coordinated Care Organization (IHN-CCO) CEO, school district McKinney Vento representative, OSU recent graduates, business community representative, and data experts.

In the summer of 2021, Benton County and the City of Corvallis accepted 12 policy recommendations developed by the HOPE Board. Building on Benton County's 10-Year Plan (10-Year Plan) and an update to the 10-Year Plan in 2017, the HOPE Board policy recommendations focus the community's response to homelessness by prioritizing vulnerable populations, racial and ethnic justice, and community safety for all. The HOPE Board policy recommendations and the Update to the 10-Year Plan serve as the foundation and outline for the (5-Year Plan).

Built from the basis of this extensive, collaborative foundation, the purpose of the Strategic Plan is to provide a community roadmap, guide work and resource prioritization, provide clear metrics to encourage accountability and thoughtful stewardship, and articulate strategic priorities. These strategic priority areas comprise:

- I. Community and Organizational Systems and Policy Change: To provide a home for everyone, we must increase coordination and collaboration of service providers and strengthen efficiencies in our current system and better align our resources. This includes coordination of services, increased cooperation and knowledge sharing, and strengthening cross-sector relationships.
- II. Comprehensive Care Coordination: Coordination of care helps us prioritize our highest need populations and better help people. Our community will

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need training, funding, and development of shared definitions to build our provider capacity to support this population.

- III. Prevention: Providing early intervention as well as improving systems and structures can address problems that contribute to homelessness and housing instability in both rural and urban areas of Benton County.
- IV. Street Outreach and Rapid Response: Implementing best practices – like harm reduction, low barrier approaches, and trauma-informed response – helps navigate people out of homelessness and improve outcomes.
- V. Housing: Expanding housing and sheltering options along the entire housing continuum ensures everyone in the community has a place to live. Leveraging and increasing resources will improve housing affordability and accessibility.
- VI. Community Engagement, Inclusion, and Neighborhood Belonging: Engaging our communities in both processes and solutions creates ownership of our progress. Our Coordinated Office strives to facilitate community education and dialogue about the causes and community impact of homelessness. We value local wisdom and lived experiences by elevating the voices of service providers and people who have experienced homelessness.

The Strategic Plan also outlines the values that guide our work, the data that informs our decisions, and the structure and resources that will sustain our efforts.

### **Background on the Development of HOPE policy recommendations:**

In Summer 2020, the HOPE Board conducted a gap analysis of all available services in Benton County. The Board collected available data from homeless service and social service providers working to prevent homelessness to understand safety concerns, racial and ethnic inequalities, and vulnerable populations. Finally, the Board researched successful systems of housing and supportive services to transition people out of homelessness.

In Fall 2020, the Board prioritized four main topic areas based on this data-driven, systems-level approach with a focus on equity:

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1. Align and coordinate existing services with a focus on improving data collection and collaboration for individuals experiencing homelessness or in behavioral health crisis;
2. Establish a sheltering system for all populations that is accessible 24/7/365 days per year, as well as a Resource Center to support coordinated entry into publicly funded assistance programs;
3. Expand transitional options for housing with a focus on notice, communication, and engagement with neighborhoods and the larger community; and
4. Increase permanent supportive housing to provide stable housing for our chronically homeless community members.

### **Community Engagement prior to becoming a HB 4123 community:**

In November and December 2020, the HOPE Board engaged the community throughout Benton County to receive feedback on the four priority topics (above). Public engagement included:

- Online surveys;
- Multiple virtual meetings soliciting community feedback;
- Board attendance at various community meetings including different sectors and perspectives; and
- In-person client surveying conducted by nine service providers in Benton County serving individuals in need or experiencing homelessness.

In April 2021, the Board received community feedback on the final draft of policy recommendations via a community survey and a virtual public forum. Homeless service providers at four different locations supported in-person focus groups with clients experiencing homelessness to provide their perspective on the draft recommendations.

In Summer 2021, the Benton County Board of Commissioners and the City of Corvallis City Council accepted the HOPE Policy Recommendations. Staff from Benton County and the City of Corvallis formed a workgroup consisting of County

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Health Department, City and County Community Development, and Community Services Consortium (CSC) staff to provide direction to their relative governing boards on prioritization on the implementation of the HOPE Policy Recommendations.

### **Community Engagement Upon Becoming a HB 4123 Community:**

Staff from this original workgroup (described above) integrated HB 4123 planning and development into the HOPE Policy implementation work. Using the strategic priorities identified by the Update to the 10-Year Plan (2017) to organize the HOPE Policy Recommendations and requirements of HB 4123, staff developed an outline for Benton County's Coordinated Homeless Response System 5-Year Strategic Plan. Staff used this outline to conduct outreach to the governing bodies of the cities of Adair Village, Monroe, and Philomath to identify potential cross-jurisdictional alignment to inform the 5-Year Plan. Using this same strategy staff conducted outreach to regional and local stakeholders including, but not limited to:

- Affordable housing providers
- Behavioral health providers
- Educational agency liaisons for homeless children
- IHN-CCO
- Emergency shelter providers
- Homeless service providers
- OHCS
- Organizations serving and advocating for veterans
- Culturally responsive organizations

The HOPE Board serves as the main community engagement forum to provide feedback on the development of the 5-Year Plan. Coordinated Homeless Response Office staff will continue to leverage the HOPE Board's expertise and diverse

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experience to provide feedback for continuous improvement and implementation of the 5-Year Plan.

In addition to the extensive community engagement described above, multiple focus groups were hosted onsite at local providers, including:

- Corvallis Daytime Drop-in Center,
- Corvallis Housing First,
- Community Outreach Inc. (COI), and
- SafeCamp

The focus groups discussed the draft HOPE policy recommendations and incorporated direct feedback from people currently experiencing homelessness or in transitional housing following homelessness. A one-page survey was also distributed by nine service provider organizations to collect approximately 240 responses from people accessing support in urban and rural locations in Benton County.

For ongoing representation of individuals with current and lived experience of homelessness, CSC provides stipends for HOPE Board members to increase engagement and support participation for communities of color, for people who have experienced homelessness, and for our LGBTQI2S+ community. These stipends have helped to support HOPE Board membership that includes five people with lived experience with homelessness, people from our Black and Hispanic communities, and multiple representatives from our LGBTQI2S+ community.

At the time this report was prepared, Benton County's Coordinated Homeless Response System 5-Year Plan has not been completed. Including the considerations in the Lessons Learned section below, Benton County's community work in response to House Bill 5019 impacted the anticipated time to complete and adopt the Strategic Plan. Benton County's HB 5019 community work has greatly informed the HB 4123 implementation, demonstrating an effective use of the structure provided by HB 4123 and identified opportunity to improve elements of the current draft Strategic Plan and governing documents (e.g., MOUs and IGAs). Furthermore, Benton County

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is committed to developing and implementing sustainable solutions to homelessness and such commitment requires prioritization of thoughtful processes and gaining community-wide understanding and buy-in on such solutions.

### **Lessons Learned**

A large portion of the work to implement HB 4123 in Benton County has been the investigation of existing frameworks at the federal, state, and local level that influence and impact the local response to homelessness. This investigation is essential to prevent creation of redundant systems and the diversion of resources from existing successful programs.

In Benton County, the HB 4123 Coordinated Office is housed within county government. This structure is built on existing county investments for dedicated staffing to provide leadership and coordination in Benton County's response to homelessness. Understanding the appropriate role of county government in the local response to homelessness is essential in effectively deploying the resources of HB 4123. This understanding has been iterative as the Coordinated Office has worked collectively with the community to gain understanding of the complexity of the systems and structures that contribute to housing and homelessness solutions. For example, how does the work of the Coordinated Office participate with the Community Action Agency, Housing Authority, Coordinated Care Organization, Continuum of Care (CoC), City's affordable housing programs, and direct service providers to improve pathways for people at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness? Using Benton County's structure of HB 4123 for the planning and development of the HB 5019 Community Plan has provided insight on what this role is. Specifically, that this role must not only provide leadership and coordination of local services through policy development and community engagement, but it must also be equipped with funding resources to support the organizations and partners whose work is impacted by policies.

In addition, homelessness is not any one agency's sole responsibility. A Strategic Plan that can inform a community's local and regional work while aligning the multiple levels of resources and initiatives extends beyond the scope of county government



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influence and the work of the Coordinated Office. To capture the entire scope of work for an effective local Coordinated Homeless Response System, the work of multiple agencies must be included and aligned.

The purpose of Benton County's 5-Year Strategic Plan is to align the work of Benton County's Coordinated Office with the work of all other community partners in this sector. This alignment attempts to communicate the breadth of this topic, informing policy and investment decisions at multiple agency levels for collective impact.

Furthermore, because of the complexity of the systems and structures contributing to housing and homelessness solutions, it has been challenging to identify the roles and responsibilities of the Advisory Board as required by HB 4123. The formation of an advisory board that can effectively provide support to the Coordinated Office requires representation from the sectors that have authority over these systems and can make timely decisions to move the work of Coordinated Homeless Response System forward. Benton County is currently reevaluating the governance structure of the Coordinated Office as it supports the implementation of the 5-Year Strategic Plan. This has contributed to the delay of completing the Strategic Plan.

### REGIONAL COORDINATION

As described above, a Strategic Plan that can guide work that has meaningful impact on Benton County's homelessness must acknowledge the multiple agencies that participate in housing and homelessness services and work to align efforts.

Benton County's Coordinated Office leveraged existing local and regional meetings and community engagement forums to build community awareness of HB 4123 and inform the development the 5-Year Plan. In these meetings, initiatives of local and regional agencies were documented to map out where there was potential for collective impact across Benton County's and partnering service areas. These meetings included:

- City council meetings with all Benton County Cities

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- Rural Continuum of Care (ROCC) meetings
- Tri-county coordination with regional partners:
  - IHN-CCO – coordination on supporting capacity building in social service community organizations, coordinating provider engagement and feedback for 1115 waiver rental assistance benefit through IHN's Coalition for Housing Equity.
  - Oregon Cascades West Council of Governments (OCWCOG) – coordination on expanding OCWCOG capacity to engage in housing navigation and housing coordination with other community partners.
  - CSC – coordination on community engagement via the HOPE Board, working collaboratively to improve coordinated entry process, partnering on planning efforts for continuum of care options.
  - Linn Benton Lincoln Health Equity Alliance – direct engagement with their community meetings to shape and inform the HOPE recommendations that serve as a foundation for the Strategic Plan.
  - National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Linn-Benton Chapter – engaging the Housing Committee to inform NAACP planned efforts over the next five years in fair housing impact work. Direct engagement with their community meetings to shape and inform the HOPE recommendations that serve as a foundation for the strategic plan.
  - Casa Latinos Unidos (CLU) – coordination with their staff to inform CLU expansion efforts into housing and supportive services over the next five years and strategic alignment of those action items.
- Leveraging the HOPE Board meetings and stakeholder engagement process for tri-county coordination:
  - In August and September 2023, a portion of the HOPE Board meeting was used to learn about housing and homelessness initiatives in Linn

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and Lincoln Counties. This gave an opportunity to share lessons learned and identify opportunities for coordination through regional agencies such as CSC and Continuum of Care (CoC).

### **Coordination challenges**

The limited capacity of the community spread among a multitude of competing priorities has been the most significant challenge in coordination. Many service providers and partnering agencies are operating with minimal staff and resources. Taking time away from critical operations to participate in long-range planning can be challenging when communities are facing immediate needs and other obligations.

### **Coordination successes & opportunities**

As described in the Lessons Learned section above, much of the work of the Coordinated Office has been investigating and identifying the relationships between the key participants in housing and homelessness services and policy development. This process has helped identify opportunities for system improvement and avoided redundancy. For example, prior to becoming a HB 4123 community, Benton County and City of Corvallis staff began researching Coordinated Entry and its role in Benton County's response to homelessness. Staff invited agencies from other jurisdictions who had integrated Coordinated Entry into their communitywide response to homelessness to provide educational presentations to service providers within the Benton County service area. Staff then began learning about the role of Coordinated Entry in Benton County and potential to align referrals and prioritization processes, with the ultimate goal to improve outcomes for people experiencing homelessness. Benton County partnered with X4 Health to use their ROCKit model to engage Benton County in a strength-based problem-solving model leveraging the community's existing connections to inventory local gaps and assets for the development of a Coordinated Entry system that improves service provider and client participation. This process supported the development of a monthly case conferencing meeting with a wide representation of service providers supporting individuals at risk of or

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experiencing homelessness. Case conferencing supports streamlined coordination of resources and improved partnerships across the service area.

This research into Coordinated Entry also identified opportunities to coordinate with the ROCC and build better understanding of the roles and responsibilities of a CoC and how these interrelate with other agencies. This improved understanding identified specific challenges that came with the lack of local control required to develop a locally responsive Coordinated Entry system. This process helped initiate a discussion led by CSC to explore the formation of a Linn-Benton-Lincoln CoC.

As described in the Strategic Plan section and in the explanation of the Coordinated Office's regional coordination strategies (above), the process of identifying opportunities for collective impact has been a primary focus of the engagement and coordination with the homeless service provider network.

Using the overarching strategic priorities that organize Benton County's HB 4123 Strategic Plan, the Coordinated Office engaged the homeless service provider network and policy makers throughout Benton County to identify specific initiatives for each priority that would be undertaken over the next five years.

The organization of Benton County's HB 4123 Strategic Plan includes a five-year timeline for each initiative (Table Below) to identify outcomes and guide opportunities to coordinate efforts. This structure is intended to serve as a template and guide for iterative development of outcomes and timelines for each initiative. This template creates a framework for ongoing accountability and awareness, illustrating the interdependencies between projects (and the organizations) and the impacts one project has on other projects. This template will also serve as a foundational guide for the Coordinated Office's staff development of workplans by highlighting key milestones across the service area for strategic alignment and prioritization of work.

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As described in the Lessons Learned section above, homelessness is not any one agency’s sole responsibility. A Strategic Plan that can inform a community’s local and regional work while aligning the multiple levels of resources and initiatives extends beyond the scope of county government influence and the work of Benton County’s Coordinated Office. Defining shared outcomes for a wide range of efforts and investments with a similarly wide range of responsible parties has been the primary challenge in defining shared outcomes or metrics in Benton County’s HB 4123 Strategic Plan.

The Work: Actions – Projects – Progress	Partners	Timeline (includes dates and milestones/metrics)				
		FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY27
1. HB 5019 Community Plan	OHCS					
2. Data improvement: Improving systemwide implementation of Coordinated Entry to assess and prioritize our most vulnerable community members for housing.	<b>Leads:</b> CSC and ROCC  <b>Collaborating Agencies:</b> ROCC, Coordinated Office, homeless service providers, housing providers, funders	Initiation of community project ROCKit  ROCC evaluating CE assessment tool	Integrate equity into CE assessment tool and process.	Increase housing referrals taken from CE by %.		
3. Impact analysis of existing data: IHN Research Institute (IHR) with Samaritan, OSU, and CSC analysis of the needs of people experiencing homelessness.	<b>Leads:</b> IHRI, CSC, OSU	Data collection and analysis	Research Analysis Completed	Establish and implement annual data quality improvement measures.  Integrate data into tri-county housing policy development	Perform annual data improvement process.	Perform annual data improvement process.  ??Review housing policy outcomes using data comparison??

A significant success in the development of Benton County’s 5-Year Plan is the information gathered during the process to define shared outcomes. This information has helped inform the role that a county can effectively serve in a Coordinated Homeless Response System, specifically how the Coordinated Office can support Benton County’s response to homelessness.

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Initiatives such as Benton County's Coordinated Entry improvement process led to a communitywide understanding and ownership of the many components Benton County's homelessness services. These components involve all levels of the homeless response system; local, regional, state, and federal.

The creation of the HOPE Advisory Board centered Benton County's commitment to assuring that "*everyone* in Benton County has the opportunity to live in decent, safe, and affordable housing." The HOPE Policy Recommendations elevated the HOPE Advisory Board's values, specifically prioritizing efforts to:

- Prioritize vulnerable populations
- Promote community safety for all
- Promote racial and ethnic justice

Stipends are provided for HOPE Board members to increase engagement and support participation for communities of color, for people who have experienced homelessness, and the LGBTQI2S+ community. Specific strategic initiatives have been identified in the 5-Year plan to improve the accessibility of the educational and community engagement resources of the HOPE Advisory board.

In addition, Benton County's 5-Year Plan is organized based on the Update to the 10-Year Plan, HOPE Policy Recommendations, and the legislative requirements of HB 4123. By using these guiding documents as the foundation for the 5-Year Plan, Benton County's Coordinated Homeless Response prioritizes initiatives and investments that work to eliminate racial disparities and improve equitable access to resources for people experiencing homelessness. These strategies include efforts to improve coordination between culturally responsive community-based organizations and service providers and agencies who provide resources to people experiencing homelessness. This also includes the development of a Coordinated Entry system that includes appropriate training and an assessment tool that does not perpetuate racial disparities within Benton County's service area.

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The culturally responsive community-based organizations (CBO's) in Benton County have very limited capacity. Data provided by OHCS for HB 5019 showed an overrepresentation of Black and Native American communities in Benton County's homelessness population. More resources are needed to improve the cultural responsiveness of Benton County's homeless service network to reduce barriers for these communities to navigate in to permanent housing. This includes dedicated funding to support capacity building within culturally responsive community-based organizations to provide housing and homelessness services (e.g., housing navigation and case management).

Benton County's Coordinated Entry system improvement initiative led to the establishment of a monthly case conference with representation across Benton County's service area to help streamline prioritization and placement of people on the Coordinated Entry list. This has improved partnerships across the service area and improved coordination of housing referrals to reduce redundancies and the time that it takes to get a person into housing.

### TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Benton County partnered with X4 Health to participate in ROCKit to support a countywide Coordinated Entry system improvement process.

Benton County has received support from OHCS via ICF for the implementation of the HB 5019 Community Plan

Monthly HB 4123 update meetings hosted by LOC have supported information sharing among Pilot communities' along with presentations from TA providers.

All the sources listed above have been helpful in coordinating at the local and regional level.

Benton County has staffing and previous planning efforts that other HB 4123 communities do not. In Benton County technical assistance would be best deployed

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directly to service providers such as culturally responsive community-based organizations, to build capacity and capabilities.

Benton County like other Oregon communities has a significant housing shortage. Benton County's vacancy rate remains between 1%-2%. Meeting the goals of Benton County's HB 4213 5-Year Plan and the HB 5019 Community Plan requires access to housing immediately or the immediate future. Technical assistance to support innovative housing and partnership models such as master-leases and landlord recruitment and retention is essential to utilize the current available housing resources to meet our local goals and the goals of the state.

### DATA

Benton County coordinated with X4 Health to participate in ROCKit to support a Coordinated Entry improvement process. This process worked to improve homeless service provider use of Coordinated Entry. Improving service provider use of Coordinated Entry improves community data. Specifically, identifying the needs of those experiencing homelessness and barriers to appropriate housing. The level of vulnerability and the duration on the coordinated entry list helps identify community gaps in services informing prioritization of work and resources.

As a member of the ROCC, Benton County has limited authority/control to make changes to the methods and processes to collect homelessness data. For example, making changes to a Coordinated Entry assessment tool to improve engagement requires consensus across 26 counties. Responses to this challenge have been the creation of locally created data systems that create redundancies and complexity to local data. CSC's pursuit of forming a tri-county CoC (Linn, Benton and Lincoln), will reduce the barrier for improved data that is reflective of the community by enabling more local control over data collection methods and systems. This will help support the establishment of a shared prioritization and referral method for housing and



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services for most the vulnerable populations that is responsive to the service area for which the data is collected.

Additionally, Intercommunity Health Coordinated Care Organization (IHN-CCO) serving the Linn, Benton and Lincoln counties, has formed a Research Institute in partnership with Samaritan Health Service and Oregon State University to evaluate the health needs of people experiencing homelessness. This initiative will help inform the health impacts of homelessness and help inform development of shared outcomes.

The PIT count does not accurately reflect the area's true homeless population counts, and this number can be misleading when engaging the community to build awareness on the scope of Benton County's housing and homelessness needs. Furthermore, this can impact investments leading to inequitable allocation of resources across the state. Improving statewide understanding of the various sources of data and what this data communicates about housing and homelessness needs is an opportunity beyond the scope of Benton County's authority.

### IDENTIFYING, ACCESSING AND ALIGNING FUNDS

Benton County's HB 4123 5-Year Plan includes specific strategies to align funding sources. These strategies include:

- Grant research and writing for funding to support opportunities internally within Benton County government and externally with community partners.
- Cross-jurisdictional coordination and collaboration with regional partners to improve communication and awareness, leverage resources, and build service provider organizational capacity with sustainable funding.
- Assess Continuum of Care framework for formation of tri-county CoC.
- Coordination and leveraging of resources across Benton County departments.

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In addition to these strategies, the dedicated county staffing for the planning and implementation of HB 4123 demonstrates a commitment from Benton County to support a coordinated homeless response system.

The strategies above are the methods the Coordinated Office will use to identify multiple funding sources based on the prioritization of the strategies within the 5-Year Plan.

The coordination required by HB 5019 to inventory local investments and funding sources and average service costs was an important first step in developing a model to inform how best to align funding coordination in Benton County. The Coordinated Office will build off this model to inform HB 5019 Community Plan implementation and identify future funding opportunities.

In addition, the flexibility of HB 5019 funding has provided an opportunity to identify specific gaps in the service area to inform development of programs that can be supported by these funds.

The Coordinated Office team includes a Grant Writer/Researcher. This position is part-time on a contract basis. Overall, the Grant Writer facilitates identification and application for funding opportunities that support the HOPE Advisory Board recommendations. This scope of work includes:

- Research, vet, and share relevant funding opportunities including government and private grants for both the County and local homeless services providers. The Grant Writer provides relevant upcoming grant opportunities to service providers on a regular basis and serves as a resource to answer questions and provide information.
- Support County and providers in completing grant applications including collecting and reviewing data, writing or editing content for application documents, creating and coordinating required grant attachments, and coordinating partners for input and support.
- Develop methods for tracking grant information, applications, and awards, and retaining institutional knowledge.

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- Identify capacity building needs for County and providers in the context of increasing ability to successfully apply for grants that align with the HOPE recommendations.

Benton County has allocated HB 4123 funding for hiring new staff (i.e. Project Manager and Grant Research and Writer) for the Coordinated Office.

Two permanent-hire, full-time staff and one contracted researcher/grant writer directly support HB 4123 efforts. One staff member serves as the HOPE Advisory Board coordinator and is funded 40% by the City of Corvallis; another staff member serves as project manager. The County currently has committed HB 4123 staff funding through June 2027.

The current funding gaps in Benton County's homeless services include, but are not limited to:

- Capital funding for PSH.
- Operational funding for supportive services at PSH locations.
- Capital funding for site acquisition to provide adequate space and amenities for a resource center that provides rapid response to the essential needs of the communities' most vulnerable and provides resource navigation for those at risk of or experiencing homelessness.
- Operational funding for emergency shelter services.
- Organizational capacity funding for culturally responsive organizations serving vulnerable populations to support housing and homelessness services in partnership with existing housing voucher programs.
- Flexible funding for basic needs for people navigating out of homelessness into housing (e.g. rental deposits, application fees, furniture, transportation, storage and moving costs).

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The Benton County CHRO relies on the following for engagement and communications related to our work: utilization of HOPE Advisory Board for community engagement, targeted outreach and engagement to cities governing bodies, and monthly working meetings with Executive Directors of housing and emergency sheltering providers. We also use the following tools: quarterly newsletter, as needed news & updates email listserv, social media campaigns, news releases, media interviews, regular website updates, quick facts/info sheets, community progress reports, and presentations at public meetings.

Successes include expanded reach of social media campaigns when collaborating with partner agencies to tag each other, share, and like/comment each other's posts as well as 343 newsletter subscriptions. Our continuing challenges are reducing stigma through communications campaigns alone and needing more dedicated staff time for additional targeted community engagement aimed at destigmatization, education, etc.

Our future strategies include:

- Utilize HOPE Advisory Board to improve communitywide awareness, build relationships, highlight partner achievements, and increase understanding of homelessness and its systemic causes.
- Develop Coordinated Office Communications Plan that includes rural-specific outreach strategies.
- Community events with partners and vendors to improve access to resources and to engage underserved communities, particularly communities of color.

### ADDRESSING RACIAL DISPARITIES

Our strategies for addressing racial disparities include:

- Researching best practices for improving access to housing and sustaining housing for communities of color led by Linn-Benton NAACP.

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- Improving access to housing and resources for underserved populations and for communities of color by supporting organizational capacity building at culturally specific providers.
- Expanding awareness and outreach regarding tenant rights to reduce housing discrimination and prevent evictions and to improve access to resources for fair housing support.
- Develop Landlord Engagement strategies that align with state and local priorities to increase access to units for most marginalized populations.
- Community events with partners and vendors to improve access to resources and to engage underserved communities, particularly communities of color.

Through the HB 4123 and HB 5019 planning and engagement process intentional outreach was conducted with the following organizations to inform the Strategic Plan and the Community Plan.

- Faith Hope and Charity: A CBO that works to improve the lives of underprivileged families by providing referrals, food, and shelter.
- Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians: The Siletz Tribal Housing Department's overall mission is to ensure that low-income Siletz Tribal Members can obtain housing that meet their needs, is affordable, and provides a safe, healthy living environment.

As part of this work we have strengthened our partnership with Casa Latinos Unidos: A CBO committed to strengthening the Latinx communities in Linn and Benton Counties through programs that support people in meeting their basic needs, build resilience and capacity through education and leadership development, and celebrate cultures.

Capacity of the service provider network is the most significant challenge in strengthening additional partnerships. Building a stronger relationship between direct service providers and the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians is an opportunity identified to provide culturally responsive services within Benton County.

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### CONNECTIONS TO PERMANENT HOUSING

Our strategies for creating and strengthening connections to permanent housing include:

- Case Conferencing implementation to improve successful housing referrals from Coordinated Entry.
- Improving system-wide implementation of Coordinated Entry to assess and prioritize our most vulnerable community members for housing.
- Improving access to housing navigation and resources for underserved populations and for communities of color by supporting organizational capacity building at culturally specific providers.
- Expanding awareness and outreach regarding tenant rights to reduce housing discrimination and prevent evictions and to improve access to resources for fair housing support.
- Increase capacity for outreach and rapid engagement to connect Medicaid beneficiaries to supportive services and housing.
- Solicit projects and allocate housing and community development funding annually.
- Assess organizational capacity to add housing locations for longer-term housing options.

### APPENDICES

#### **A. Benton County Coordinated Homeless Response System MOU**

#### **B. HOPE Policy Recommendations**