

Coordinated Entry and Prioritization: Making Progress on Homelessness Together

PIERCE COUNTY COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS
HOMELESS PROGRAMS

We are all working to make homelessness a rare, brief and one-time experience.

All of us who work to provide stable housing for community members in Pierce County know the incredible toll that homelessness takes on the overall well-being of youth, families, and individuals.

As we work together to improve outcomes for those experiencing homelessness, we'll know we're serving people to the best of our collective ability when:

- People receive the right resources at the right time.
- More families and individuals solve their own housing crises and stay out of the homeless system.
- The hardest to serve are helped by our system.
- People move to permanent housing and don't return to the system.

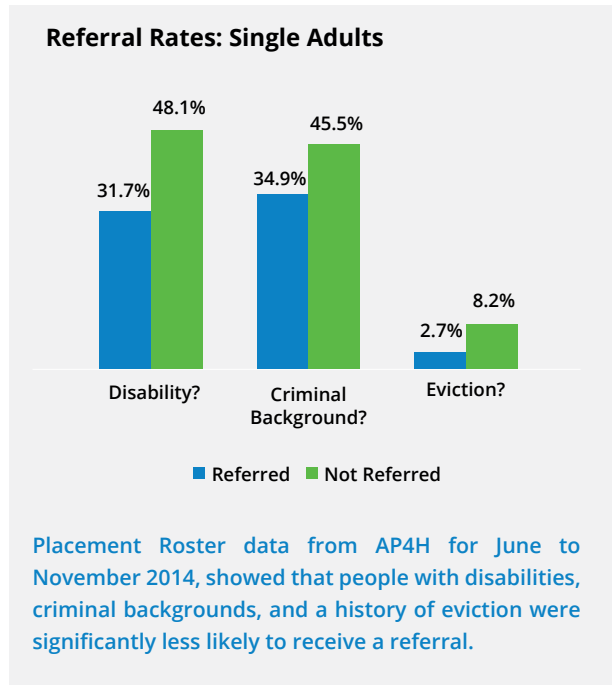


Pierce County
Community Connections

Organizations from across Pierce County are moving toward a system that is more coordinated, client-centered, and uses emerging best practices to increase our impact.

Past approaches to housing vulnerable people and families have not produced the results we would all like to see.

Those who are the most vulnerable frequently fall through the cracks. And people who enter the system all too often find it difficult to get out. Data from Access Point for Housing (AP4H) shows that many people are still not getting the help or housing they need. All these things must change. Emerging best practices from other communities like Columbus, Ohio, and Salt Lake City, Utah, show that shifting the way we serve people can help more individuals and families become stably housed and permanently off the streets. These best practices include establishing a coordinated entry system and a shared framework for assessing program fit and resource availability.



Coordinated entry: What is it and how will it work?

Coordinated entry will build on centralized intake. There will be more front doors to the county's homeless system and the same assessment tool will be used at each one of them. People experiencing homelessness will have better access to housing solutions and know that wherever they

go, they will be treated consistently. Organizations will be able to access and update a database with available beds and services throughout the county.

Prioritization: What is it and how will it work?

Prioritization means that we will begin to give precedence to those with the greatest vulnerability or barriers to housing:

- People most at risk if they remain homeless (e.g., medical issues, mental health issues, pregnancy, imminent risk of danger, etc.)
- People who have the greatest barriers to accessing housing (e.g., criminal record, eviction history, inability to work, chronically homeless)

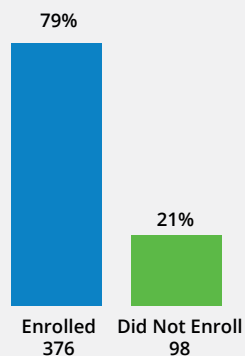
The prior approach to assessing and referring households to programs resulted in those with lower barriers to housing being served more often than those with higher barriers. This has meant that people with disabilities, criminal backgrounds, mental illness, addiction, or history of evictions—those who are extremely vulnerable—are less likely to receive a referral and help to access stable housing.

Prioritization involves everyone using the same assessment tool, which was informed by a working group comprised of representatives from across our system. This will ensure barriers to housing are determined objectively and people will be served equitably.

Those with more resources to access housing will be supported with a lighter touch. Data shows that many people are able to resolve their housing crisis with minimal help. Through coordinated entry individuals and families will start with a problem-solving conversation focused on helping them to successfully maintain or access housing, which can include re-establishing rental situations, moving into shared housing, or relocating to an area where they have a stronger support network. In 2015 Pierce County piloted this approach, which is designed to divert people experiencing homelessness from long waits for services or long stays in shelter.

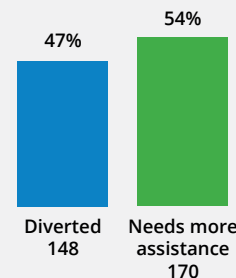
Pierce County Homeless Diversion Pilot (October 2014–September 2015)

Total Households That Had Problem Solving Conversation



When offered light-touch assistance to resolve their homelessness within 30 days, 4 out of 5 families accepted

Outcomes of Households Participating in Diversion Pilot



During the pilot, 47% of households were able to solve their housing crisis by either re-establishing a rental situation, moving into shared housing, or relocating to an area where they had a stronger support network.

We have the opportunity to improve how we all carry out our work and to serve community members to the best of our collective ability.

We all appreciate how difficult change can be. We are committed to working on this together to create a system that really works. In the end, we can all know that we're helping more people, especially those who often get overlooked. And, our own day-to-day experience of working in a complex system will improve. **We expect these shifts in approach to achieve the following over time:**

- **Reduce the length of time that housing slots are vacant**—clients, sheltered and unsheltered, will be referred right away.
- **Adopt a crisis resolution framework**—by engaging the strengths and resources of each person experiencing homelessness, more people will find they can resolve their housing crisis.
- **Ensure up-to-date assessment data**—client information will be current because clients will be coming from homelessness into shelter and/or permanent housing in just a few days.
- **Make permanent rehousing an accessible solution to all shelters**—shelters will serve as brief “way stations” between homelessness and a permanent housing referral.

What can you expect from Pierce County Community Connections?

We're committed to supporting providers as we implement these two new approaches. A few of the ways we intend to do this include:

- A Provider Academy that builds skills for servicing highly vulnerable, difficult-to-house people, and strengthens leadership and supports change management.
- Data sharing to reflect on successes, identify sticking points, and work together on creative solutions.
- A common set of objectives and metrics for grantees that aligns with this new direction.
- Regular communication to help you stay up-to-date with changes and progress.

For more information, please contact Jeff Rodgers, Homeless Programs Supervisor, at jrodger@co.pierce.wa.us or 253-798-6908.

By working together, we can have a lasting impact on the lives of people in our community.

