



ATHENS-CLARKE COUNTY
UNIFIED GOVERNMENT
**STRATEGIC PLAN
TO REDUCE
AND PREVENT
HOMELESSNESS**

August 2023

This plan would not have been possible without the collaboration of Athens-Clarke County Government and community stakeholders. We would like to thank the numerous individuals who contributed to the development of this plan. In addition to the individuals named below, we also thank the numerous people with lived experience of housing instability and homelessness, as well as the providers who serve them, who were interviewed confidentially for this plan.

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Executive Summary

This plan outlines ambitious strategies to prevent and reduce homelessness in Athens-Clarke County, Georgia. Stakeholders from across the community, including residents currently experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness, were invited to participate in the development of this plan (for a full description, see the section on the Strategic Planning Process). Informed by this community-driven process, this plan articulates common goals across local government, the nonprofit sector, and other community stakeholders.

Background

In March 2022, the Mayor and Commission for the Athens-Clarke County Unified Government (ACCGov) allocated approximately \$5 million of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to address homelessness and housing insecurity in the community. The Mayor and Commission also appointed the Athens Homeless Coalition as the ARPA Homelessness Advisory Committee for these funds and tasked them to work with ACCGov staff to develop this community-wide five-year strategic plan. To determine how to best invest these and future funds, ACCGov contracted with The Cloudburst Group (Cloudburst), a mission-driven consulting firm, to commission this strategic plan. Jointly, Cloudburst and ACCGov staff conducted data review, interviews, listening sessions, and surveys to analyze the current state of homelessness in Athens and to solicit broad feedback on potential solutions described in this plan.

Given the inherent connections between homelessness and affordable housing, ACCGov purposefully worked with HR&A Advisors to develop a separate Affordable Housing Investment Strategy (AHIS) over the same time period as this plan. There are several points of connection between both strategies, which are highlighted throughout each document. Copies of both plans are available via www.accgov.com/hcd.

Overview of the Strategic Plan

The first part of the plan provides background information on the context of homelessness in Athens-Clarke County, current funding, resources to address homelessness and housing insecurity, and the data collection process for this strategic plan. The rest of the document is organized into six overarching goals, each with specific strategies to further that goal. In order to make a maximum impact on the prevention and reduction of homelessness in the community, ACCGov will simultaneously focus on and allocate resources toward all goal areas. Where appropriate, case studies and additional data analysis are included within each section. The six goals are:

GOAL 1

Strengthen the capacity of the Continuum of Care through staffing of the Athens Homeless Coalition, engaging people with lived experience of homelessness, and investing in training and community-wide collaboration.

GOAL 2

Reduce the impact of unsheltered homelessness by investing in comprehensive street outreach, organizing housing surges, and other actions to increase the safety of people living unsheltered

GOAL 3

Improve emergency shelter and transitional housing programs by supporting low-barrier emergency housing, engaging clients in homelessness diversion case management, and coordinating access to shelters.

GOAL 4

Increase access to permanent housing through a support fund to end and prevent homelessness, landlord-focused initiatives (e.g., incentives), and supporting other affordable and supportive housing resources targeted to help people exit homelessness.

GOAL 5

Increase housing stability through employment, case management, mental health, and eviction mediation resources.

GOAL 6

Expand system-wide coordination with public outreach, case conferencing, and data sharing.

Within these goals are ten key strategies that form the basis of the proposed ARPA allocation plan contained in this document. In order to maximize the impact of any given strategy, it is important that ACCGov consider implementing as many of these simultaneously or as close to simultaneously as possible. The ten key strategies are:

Key Strategy #1: Staff the Athens Homeless Coalition. This will allow the Coalition to take on more leadership of the local homelessness response and support many of the strategies outlined in this plan.

Key Strategy #2: Increase participation from people with lived experience. By establishing consistent and well-defined ways to seek feedback from people with lived experience of homelessness and housing insecurity, ACCGov and service providers can support an equitable homelessness response and improve programs.

Key Strategy #3: Improve coordinated entry policy and implementation. A well-implemented coordinated entry (CE) system facilitates access to homeless services, assesses housing and service needs, prioritizes housing resources and services for those with the greatest need and vulnerability, and refers individuals to available resources. By strengthening CE, ACCGov and service providers can optimize the use of resources and move people into housing.

Key Strategy #4: Establish comprehensive street outreach. By consistently reaching out to people living unsheltered, providers can begin to establish the trust necessary to engage with people to enter shelter, housing, and other services.

Key Strategy #5: Organize housing surges for encampments. Leveraging emergency management collaboration models, the community can develop a comprehensive approach to resolving encampments that is both humane and effective.

Key Strategy #6: Increase low-barrier shelter units. Low-barrier shelter increases access to housing and services for vulnerable populations through new construction, acquisition/conversion of existing structures, or rehabilitation of existing shelter space.

Key Strategy #7: Implement diversion and rapid exit. By identifying people who may be able to resolve their homelessness quickly and providing flexible, short-term support, providers can free up more resources to invest in those who need more assistance.

Key Strategy #8: Create a support fund to end and prevent homelessness. By providing access to flexible funding, providers can help house and stabilize more people exiting homelessness.

Key Strategy #9: Engage in landlord-focused initiatives. Engage landlords through incentives, risk mitigation, and relationship building to increase access to private market rental units for people exiting homelessness.

Key Strategy #10: Establish partnerships for employment. Stable employment will help people maintain housing long-term.

In implementing any strategy outlined in this plan, it is important that ACCGov and service providers consider the specific needs of specialized populations at risk of or currently experiencing homelessness. Examples of such specialized populations may include but are not limited to: families with children, survivors of domestic violence/interpersonal personal violence, human trafficking, and sexual assault, individuals living with behavioral or physical health limitations, un-/under-documented immigrants, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, etc.

This plan does not include recommendations specific to the ACCGov-sanctioned encampment on Barber Street, given that the transition of those residents will likely have to begin before this plan is implemented (the contract with the agency managing that encampment expires in December 2023, unless renewed by Mayor & Commission). However, Cloudburst recommends that ACCGov collaborate with the agency managing the sanctioned encampment to follow the principles and guidelines described in the proposed key strategies to ensure a humane and effective transition for residents.

The Strategic Planning Process

This plan is the result of in-depth data analysis from all corners of the Athens-Clarke County community. Leaders from across ACCGov, the nonprofit community, businesses, homeless service providers, health care providers, victim advocates, educators, neighborhood leaders, and other community members agree that Athens-Clarke County needs to take comprehensive action to meet the needs of those currently experiencing and those at risk of experiencing homelessness and to address the challenge in a coordinated, effective way. To understand and articulate that vision within the planning process, ACCGov and Cloudburst conducted multi-faceted data collection between December 2022 and June 2023. Each activity is described in further detail below.

Administrative Data

ACCGov and Cloudburst analyzed the data collected as part of routine grant administration and program operations. A primary data source for this analysis was information from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)¹, a database required for many homelessness programs funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that includes the demographics of people served and the outcomes of those services. Data review also included many elements from the Point-In-Time (PIT) count, an annual census of people experiencing homelessness on a single night in January, and the Housing Inventory Count (HIC), which has information on the number of shelter, transitional housing, and some permanent housing beds. Other data sources included information on eviction prevention programs, calls to police for assistance, students experiencing homelessness, and other local programs. Where appropriate, all data sources are cited throughout this strategic plan.

Lived Experience Interviews

ACCGov and its partners value the experiences of people who have received homeless services in Athens-Clarke County. To ensure their perspectives were included in this strategic plan, in January 2023, ACCGov and consultants interviewed 20 individuals who were currently homeless, had recently experienced homelessness, or were at risk of homelessness in Athens-Clarke County. Questions were focused on causes of homelessness, sources of support, and experiences with local service providers. [Appendix A](#) includes detailed information on the demographics of participants and themes from these interviews.

Provider and Partner Interviews

Throughout April and May of 2023, consultants conducted interviews with homeless service providers, supportive services providers (e.g., medical services), and partners outside of homeless services that were nonetheless in contact with those experiencing housing instability, such as the public library. In total, 27 representatives from 20 different local organizations participated. Questions included recommendations for addressing unsheltered homelessness, perspectives on current shelter and transitional housing programs, ways to increase permanent housing access, and available supportive services. [Appendix B](#) includes more detailed information on the themes from these interviews.

¹ HMIS is a local information technology system used to collect client-level data and data about homeless services. Data collection in these systems are mandated by HUD and locally controlled. HMIS is considered the system of record for homeless services.

Business Survey

To understand the impact of homelessness on the business community and how local businesses can be part of the solution to end homelessness, ACCGov administered an online survey that was promoted throughout Athens-Clarke County via email blasts to local business owners and managers, the county website, and on social media. ACCGov also partnered with business leaders to encourage their networks to respond. The survey received 240 responses, which are detailed in [Appendix C](#).

Student Survey

To ensure the perspectives of students who are experiencing rental cost burden, housing instability, and homelessness were reflected in this strategic plan, ACCGov administered an online survey specifically for students 18 years and older. The survey was promoted throughout Athens-Clarke County via A-frame posters placed in College Square, flyers posted in local downtown businesses, posts on social media, and directly with student services representatives from local high schools, colleges, and universities. The student survey received 60 responses. The full results of this survey are included in [Appendix D](#).

Provider Survey

Through data analysis and community engagement, draft strategies for this strategic plan were presented to the ARPA Homelessness Advisory Committee in a public meeting in May 2023. The draft strategies and goals were included in a survey to allow for broad provider feedback during May and June 2023. This survey received 27 responses and informed the final version of this plan. [Appendix E](#) includes detailed information on the survey results.

Community Listening Sessions

Between December 2022 and February 2023, ACCGov and consultants held eight listening sessions with community members. Each session was targeted to a specific audience, though one session was dedicated to neighborhood associations and local leaders representing Athens-Clarke County residents. The sessions were designed to understand specific barriers and challenges the community is facing related to homelessness, as well as recommendations to address those challenges. [Appendix F](#) provides more detailed information on the themes discussed in these sessions.

The HOME Investment Partnerships American Rescue Plan Program Activities

The HOME Investment Partnerships American Rescue Plan Program (HOME-ARP) is a one-time federal program with a strong focus on serving people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness. To access these funds, HUD required that communities complete an allocation plan that included a community engagement component. Due to HUD deadlines, a portion of the engagement for the HOME-ARP allocation plan and this strategic plan overlapped. The HOME-ARP activities, which included community surveys, surveys from housing and homelessness stakeholders, listening sessions, and community meetings, helped inform this strategic plan. A full description of these activities can be found in the [HOME-ARP allocation plan](#). Additional information on HOME-ARP is also included in the [Funding Analysis section](#) of this plan.

Homelessness in Athens-Clarke County

Athens-Clarke County has a unified city-county government that receives direct federal funding for homeless services. Athens-Clarke County contains most homeless services available in the region, leading many local service providers to consider Athens a “service hub” for neighboring counties. The following sections provide an overview of the scope of homelessness and homeless programs in Athens-Clarke County using data from multiple sources. Data about persons experiencing homelessness in the county came from sources such as the 2022 and 2023 PIT counts, HMIS, the Athens-Clarke County School District, individual providers, and the Athens-Clarke County Police Department.

Scope of Homelessness

In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness in Athens-Clarke County (sheltered and unsheltered). HMIS data indicates that between 2021 and 2022, there was a 22 percent increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness, increasing from 3,295 people to 4,003 people. Similarly, data from the 2023 PIT count indicates there has been a 61 percent increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness within the last five years. Although Athens is a relatively small community, homelessness (sheltered and unsheltered) is increasing at a faster rate than what is seen statewide.

Table 1: Comparison in PIT Trends Across Georgia, 2018–2023

COMPARISON IN PIT TRENDS ACROSS THE STATE, 2018-2022				
Year	Total Number of People Experiencing Homelessness		Percent Change in Homeless Population from Previous Period	
	Athens-Clarke County	Rest of Georgia	Athens-Clarke County	Rest of Georgia
2018	212	9,287		
2019	237	10,206	12%	10%
2020	210	10,024	-11%	-2%
2022	283	10,406	35%	4%
2023	342	Not Available	21%	Not Available

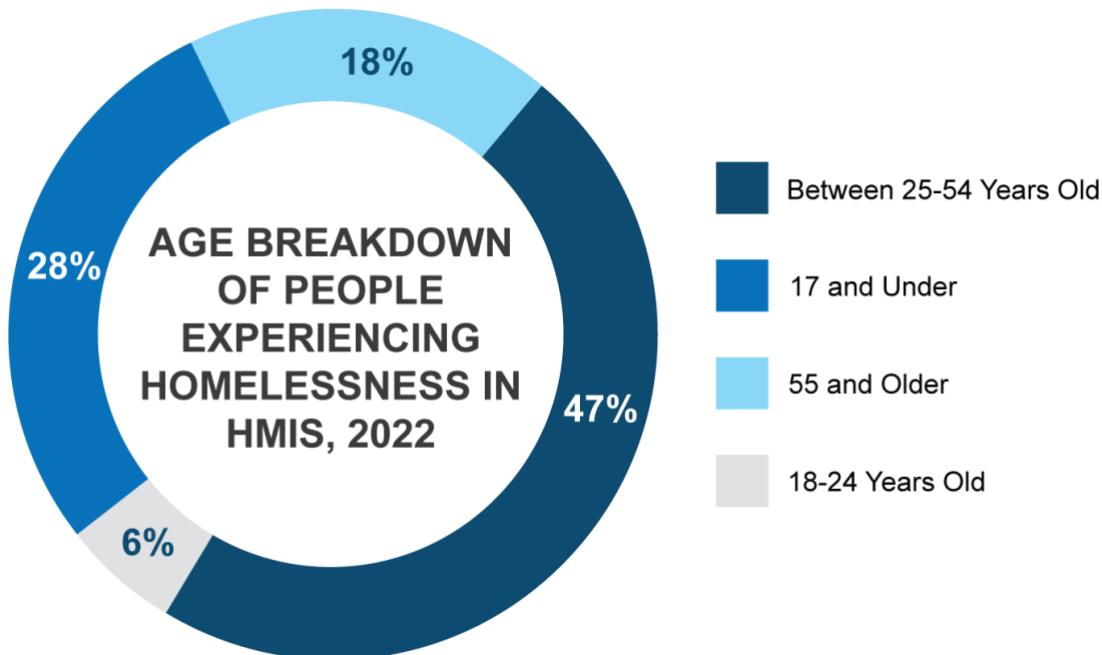
Source: PIT count

NOTE: A complete PIT count was not conducted in 2021 due to the impacts of COVID-19.

Demographics of People Experiencing Homelessness

According to HMIS data, in 2022, 2,625 households comprising 4,003 individuals experienced homelessness in Athens. While 80 percent of households consisted of adults only, 20 percent of households included children. Over one-third of people experiencing homelessness were identified as youth or minors, and nearly one-fifth were older (55+) adults. This points to an ongoing need in the community for family services, as well as accessible services for those who are aging.

Figure 1: Age Breakdown of People Experiencing Homelessness, 2022

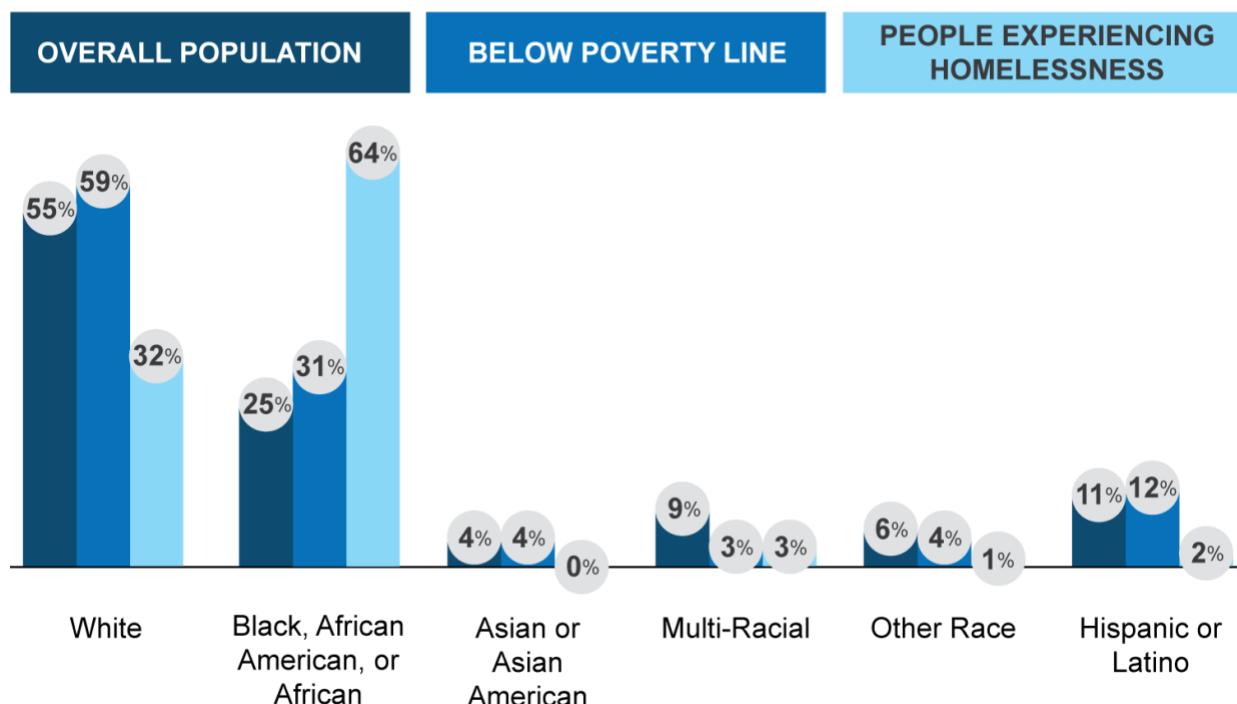


Source: 2022 HMIS data

People experiencing homelessness were more likely to be female (54 percent) than male (45 percent), with 1 percent of people identifying as trans, non-binary, or questioning their gender identity. Additionally, 43 percent of people reported having a disability and 14 percent of people were chronically homeless, meaning they had a disability and had experienced homelessness for at least 12 months or more on at least four separate occasions in the last three years. Significant racial disparities exist in who experiences homelessness. Specifically, Black or African American populations in Athens are more likely to experience homelessness and are more likely to live below the poverty line.

Figure 2: Racial and Ethnic Disparities, 2021

RACIAL AND ETHNIC DEMOGRAPHICS OF ATHENS-CLARKE COUNTY SUBPOPULATIONS



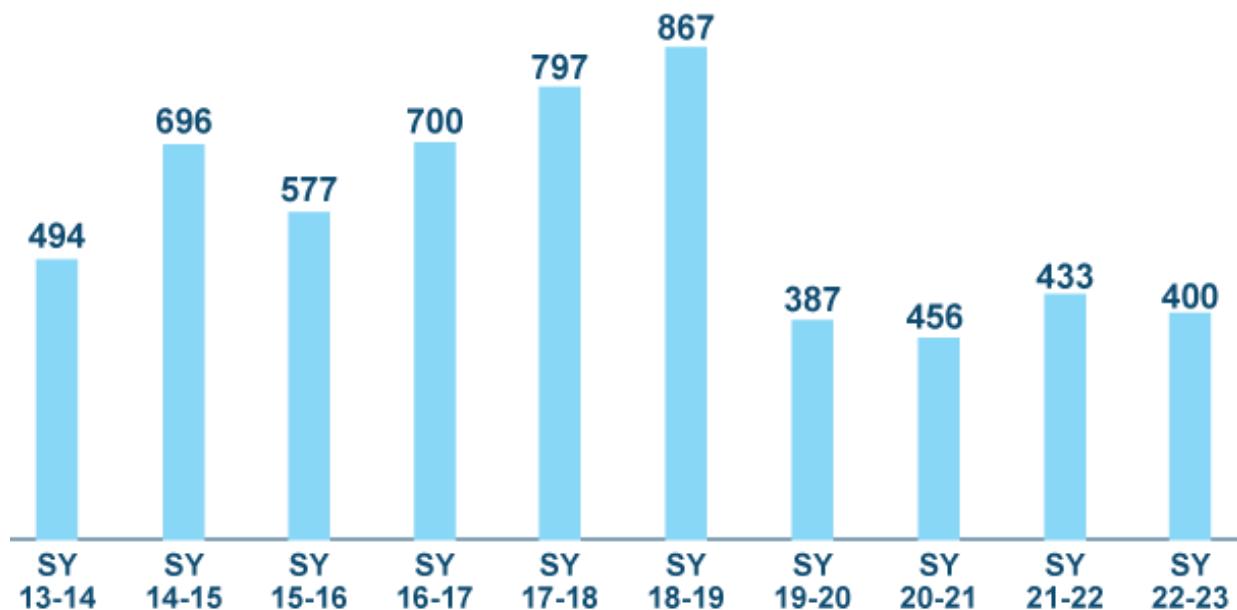
Source: 2021 HMIS data, 2021 American Community Survey (ACS) data

Student Homelessness

The U.S. Department of Education provides data on the number of enrolled pre-K through grade 12 students experiencing homelessness, as well as their living conditions and characteristics. Student homelessness has a broader definition than HUD's definition of homelessness for adults as it also includes those who are doubled up, couch surfing, or in other unstable housing situations.² Homelessness among K-12 students increased in Athens until the 2019–2020 school year, when the number of reported students experiencing homelessness dropped by more than half. During the 2019–2020 school year, there was a transition to online learning for many across the country due to the COVID-19 state of emergency beginning in March 2020. For students experiencing homelessness, the shift to online learning may have prevented some students from staying connected to their schools, which may account for the significant decreases shown in the data. The U.S. Department of Education has noted that many public schools changed their instructional schedules and modes, indicating that ways of tracking attendance, chronic absenteeism, and enrollment may have changed.

² Data taken from the [U.S. Department of Education](#).

Figure 3: Homelessness Among K-12 Students, 2013–2020



Source: U.S. Department of Education, Clarke County School District

There are also significant racial disparities in student homelessness. During the 2019–2020 school year, the first year in which racial and ethnic demographic information was collected, Black or African American students made up 79 percent of students experiencing homelessness, with 7 percent of students identifying as White, 5 percent as multi-racial, and 8 percent as Hispanic or Latino. The remaining one percent of students were from other racial groups. Since 2013, an average of one-fifth of students experiencing homelessness (21 percent) had one or more disabilities and 11 percent of students were unaccompanied youth, meaning no parents or guardians were in their household.

To understand the experiences of older high school and college students, ACCGov distributed a survey to students over the age of 18 in Athens-Clarke County. There were 60 total responses; 30 percent of respondents reported experiencing housing instability or homelessness and 17 percent experienced a housing crisis (e.g., eviction, inability to pay rent) in 2022 or 2023. Detailed results of the survey are available in [Appendix D](#).

Unsheltered Homelessness

The percentage of all people experiencing homelessness who are unsheltered (e.g., living outdoors) more than doubled in Athens between 2018 and 2023, increasing from 22 percent to 52 percent, according to the annual PIT count. The rate of unsheltered homelessness in Athens is slightly lower than that of the rest of the state, though this figure is skewed by high levels of unsheltered homelessness in Atlanta and the surrounding suburbs. Additionally, homelessness overall (both sheltered and unsheltered) is increasing faster in Athens than in other areas of Georgia. It is important to note that the PIT count likely does not capture the total number of individuals experiencing homelessness and should be considered a significant underrepresentation of unsheltered homelessness.³ For additional data on unsheltered homelessness, see [Goal Two: Reducing the Impact of Unsheltered Homelessness](#) in this plan.

Table 2: PIT Count Data, 2018–2023

Percentage of People Experiencing Homelessness Who Are Unsheltered		
Year	Athens-Clarke County	Rest of Georgia
2018	22%	38%
2019	23%	37%
2020	32%	41%
2022	26%	52%
2023	52%	N/A

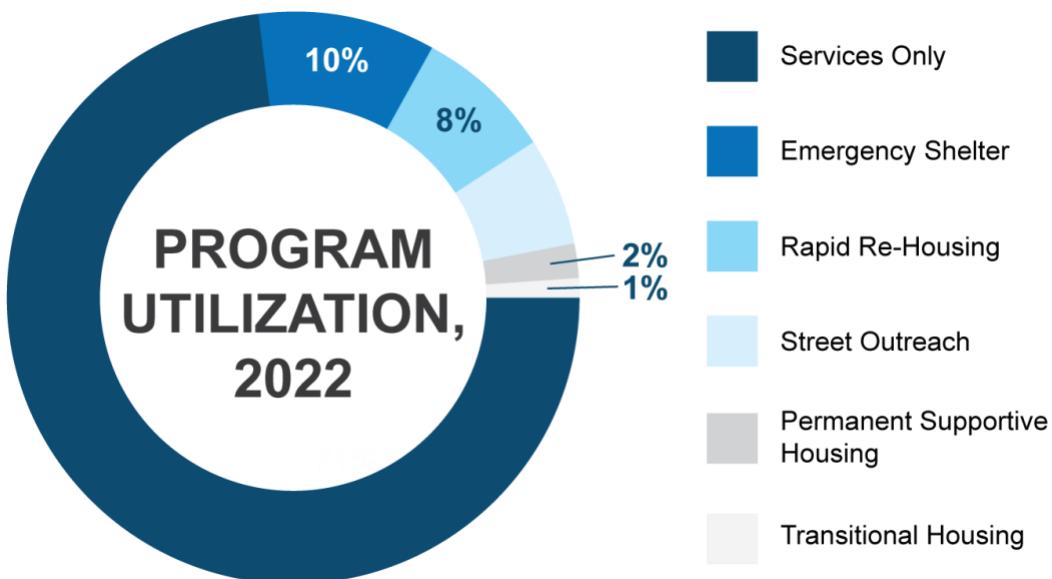
Source: PIT count

³ According to the [National League of Cities](#).

Homeless Services and Response

According to HMIS data, there were over 4,679 unique program enrollments⁴ in 2022, a 22 percent increase from the previous year. The most utilized program type was “services only,” which accounted for 74 percent of enrollments. These projects include outreach, supportive services (e.g., referrals to health providers), and service coordination, including access to workforce, education, and training programs. Figure 4 displays the breakdown of enrollments by project type. For additional data on emergency shelter and transitional housing, see [Goal Three: Improve Emergency Shelter and Transitional Housing Programs](#). [Goal Four: Increase Access to Permanent Housing](#) has additional analysis on rapid rehousing (RRH) and permanent supportive housing (PSH) programs.

Figure 4: Enrollments by Program Type, 2022

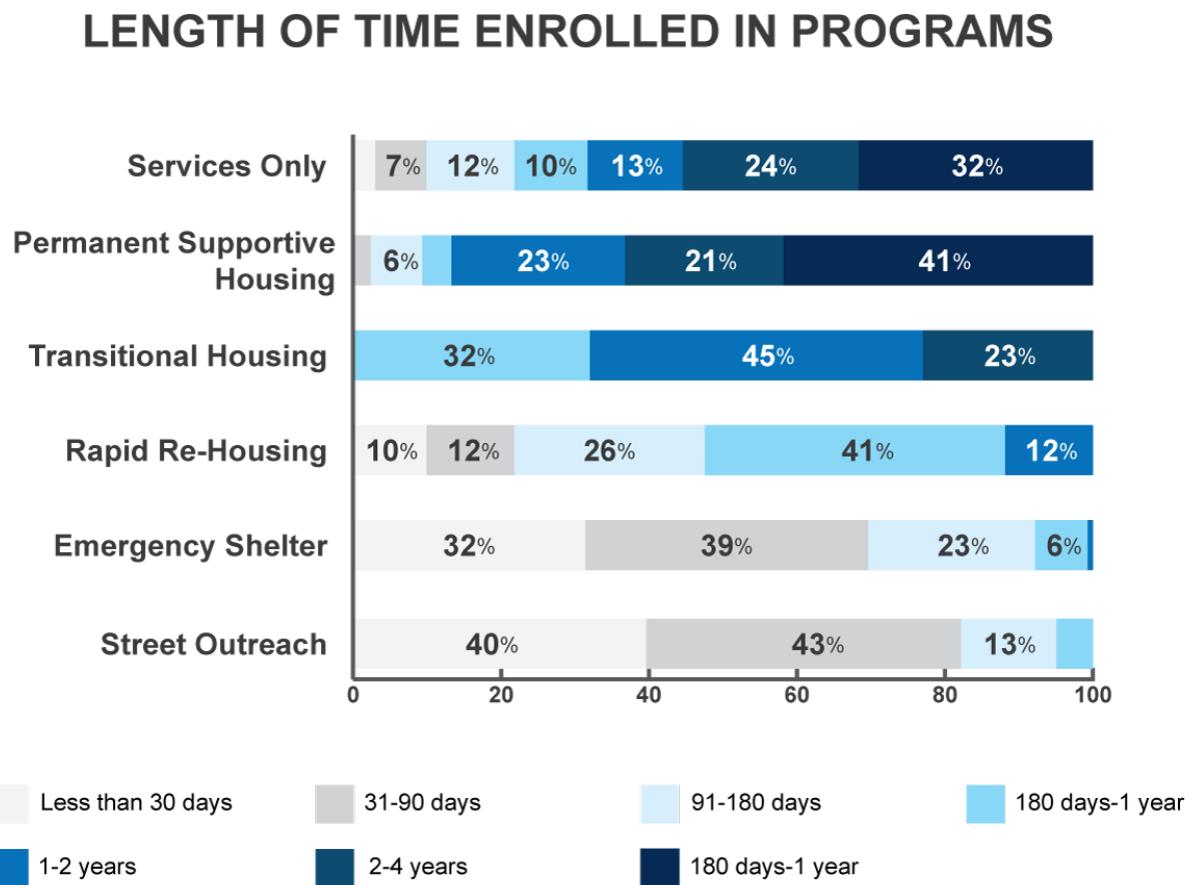


Source: 2022 HMIS

Most participants enrolled in emergency shelter and street outreach programs spent less than three months in the program. PSH, which is a non-time-limited housing solution for people with disabilities, has over 40 percent of enrollees staying in the program for more than four years. This suggests that there is some bed turnover for emergency shelter programs, but decreased bed and unit availability for PSH, as program participants tend to stay in these programs longer. With the increase of homelessness in Athens-Clarke County in recent years, it is expected that more people may be eligible for PSH, but fewer units will be available due to the low turnover rate. A potential factor that may be influencing longer lengths of stay in programs is the lack of availability in other non-PSH low-income and affordable rental housing (see the ACCGov 2023 AHIS at www.accgov.com/hcd for more information on this topic).

⁴ Program enrollments are a deduplicated count of client enrollment within each program type. For example, if a client was enrolled in two different emergency shelter programs during 2022, only the first enrollment would be counted. However, if a client was enrolled in emergency shelter and transitional housing during 2022, this would count as two enrollments.

Figure 5: Length of Program Enrollments, 2022

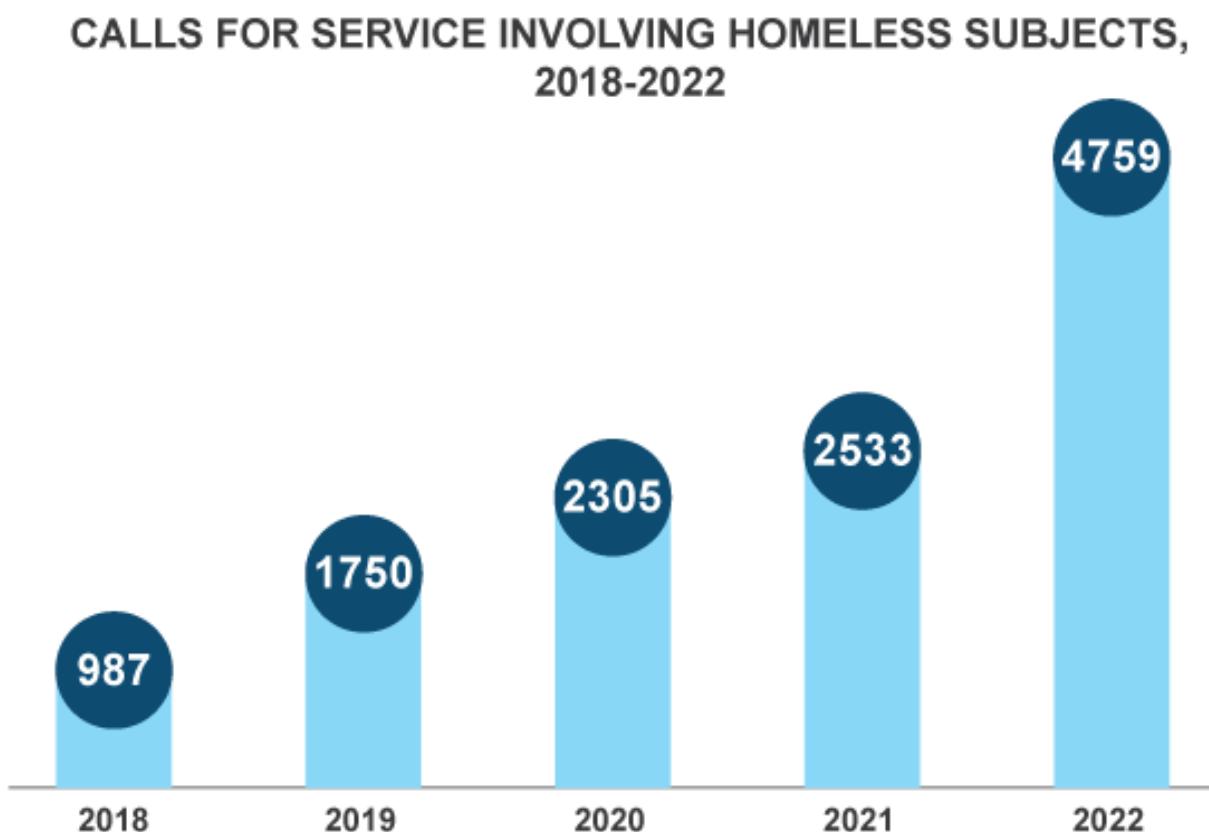


Source: 2022 HMIS data

Interactions with Law Enforcement

The Athens-Clarke County Police Department has tracked the number of calls for service involving homeless subjects since 2018. Since that time, police have responded to more than 12,334 calls for service and have encountered over 1,200 people experiencing homelessness, as shown in the figure below. It is important to note that the following figures represent calls for service, and not crimes committed. Homeless status was determined by the address (or lack of address) given by the subjects.

Figure 6: Calls for Service with Subjects Experiencing Homelessness, 2018–2022



Source: Athens-Clarke County Police Department

Note: There is missing data in early 2021 (January–April) due to data loss. The 2021 figures are an undercount.

Although the overall call volume to the police for incidents involving people experiencing homelessness has increased, the vast majority of these calls are not for violent crimes. In fact, many calls may simply be a consequence of the experience of homelessness itself. Analyzing the top thirty incident types involving people experiencing homelessness in 2023, out of the 1,057 incidents recorded, just over a quarter were trespassing-related and only 5 percent were violent crimes (e.g., battery, threats, stalking, assault).

Table 3: Rate of Top 30 Incident Types of Police Calls for Subjects Experiencing Homelessness, 2023

Incident Type	Rate
Trespassing-related	28%
Suspicious person/vehicle	13%
Welfare/house check or health-related	15%
Providing assistance	8%
Theft/shoplifting	6%
Violent crimes (battery, threats, stalking, assault)	5%
Other incident types	25%

Source: Athens-Clarke County Police Department

This data shows an increasing need in the community to respond to homelessness, including improving the lives of people experiencing housing loss and instability as well as reducing the impact of this experience on the Athens community. This plan outlines six goals intended to prevent future increases in the number of people experiencing homelessness and to support those who are currently experiencing homelessness with housing, services, and employment.

Funding Analysis

Resources to prevent and reduce homelessness in Athens-Clarke County include a network of federal, state, and local funds, each with their own eligible uses and requirements. These sources include both competitive and entitlement funds. ACCGov currently administers the listed below, individual nonprofit providers may have other funding available through private donors, grants, or philanthropic institutions. The Mayor and Commission may also allocate discretionary funding in the annual budget to homeless services or affordable housing. It is important to note that the funding outlined below represents funding directly intended for homelessness, affordable housing, and low-income households. It does not include costs associated with addressing homelessness that are outside of traditional service providers, such as funding used by the library, hospitals, schools, police, and other community services.

Roles of Key Partners in Funding Decisions

Different entities make decisions about homelessness funding in Athens. Each plays a key role in responding to the needs of people experiencing homelessness. Current roles and responsibilities include:

Mayor and Commission: Develop and execute policies regarding homelessness response. The Mayor and Commission also set the annual budget, which includes local funds dedicated to homelessness and housing, and approve funding recommendations stemming from requests for proposals (RFPs).

ACCGov staff, primarily in the ACCGov's Housing & Community Development Department: Act as administrative oversight for funding, including developing, issuing, and scoring RFPs. Staff distribute funds for local providers and contractors. Together, the department acts as the collaborative applicant to the Continuum of Care (CoC).

Athens Homeless Coalition: Governs the CoC to set and implement policy about continuum operations and funding. Acts as a coordinating entity among providers. The Coalition provides input to the consolidated planning process, which sets funding priorities.

ARPA Homelessness Advisory Committee: Composed of 16 members of the Athens Homeless Coalition, which was named by the Mayor and Commission as the initial advisory group for ARPA funds allocated toward homelessness. The Committee provides feedback on the use of ARPA homelessness funding and funding priorities, including this strategic plan.

Table 4: Housing and Homelessness Funding in Athens

Source	Amount ⁵	Current Use	Recommendation
Annual Funds			
Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)	CDBG: \$1,220,765 Reprogrammed CDBG funds: \$34,388 Reprogrammable CDBG funds: \$44,333 (FY 2024)	Public services: \$183,000 Neighborhood revitalization & economic development: \$294,000 Affordable housing: \$534,000 CDBG administration & planning: \$244,153	Consider ways to prioritize the use of CDBG public service dollars to support homeless services in the next Consolidated Plan cycle. Consider the use of CDBG funds designated for public facilities for homeless shelters and service facilities.
HOME	\$852,608 (FY 2024)	Affordable housing development: \$767,347 HOME administration & planning: \$85,261	Explore ways to support the development of affordable rental housing and build developer capacity to build and manage affordable rental housing through Community Housing Development Organization operating support.
Continuum of Care (CoC)	\$879,338 (FY 2022)	RRH projects: \$53,180 PSH projects: \$800,547 Planning grant: \$25,611	Improve system performance for a more competitive application.
Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG)	\$389,901 (FY 2020)	RRH: \$149,125 Shelter: \$77,164 Shelter services: \$33,200 Street outreach: \$30,412 Case management: \$25,000	Assist in capacity building to apply and compete for additional state funding.
ACCGov General Funds	\$350,000	Street outreach: \$130,000 (\$30,000 in FY 2023, with additional \$100,000 allocated in FY 2024) Athens Area Homeless Shelter: \$220,000	
One-Time Funds			

⁵ Next to some funding amounts, the corresponding fiscal year is provided. It should be noted that the federal fiscal year does not align with the local fiscal year.

Source	Amount ⁵	Current Use	Recommendation
HOME-ARP	\$2,506,309	Affordable rental housing development: \$1,300,000 Supportive services: \$625,000 Non-profit operating: \$125,315 Capacity building: \$125,315 HOME-ARP admin & planning: \$330,679	Use HOME-ARP supportive services funds to sustain homeless supportive services in 2026–2030. Use non-profit and operating and capacity building support dollars to build organizational capacity to develop affordable rental housing to support HOME-ARP qualifying populations.
ARPA	\$24,900,000	Strategic plan: \$133,116 Future homelessness initiatives: \$4,466,884 Eviction prevention: \$2,425,000 Sanctioned encampment: \$2,542,691 Support fund to end and prevent homelessness: \$300,000 Affordable housing: \$15,033,333	Allocate homelessness initiative funding according to priorities identified in this plan.
Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST)	\$500,000 (SPLOST 2011 Project 24) \$44.5M (SPLOST 2020 Project 2) \$5.325M (SPLOST 2020 Project 28)	Infrastructure improvements for affordable housing programs Affordable Housing Project – North Downtown Athens Mental Health Recovery Facility Project	Propose homelessness and housing projects before the next allocation cycle.

CDBG and HOME Resources

Athens-Clarke County receives annual entitlement allocations of CDBG and HOME funds. CDBG can be used for programs and services targeted to low- and moderate-income households that improve the living environment and expand economic opportunities. HOME is the largest federal block grant exclusively intended to provide affordable housing to low-income households. It can be used for building, acquiring, or rehabilitating affordable housing (to rent or own), as well as providing direct rental assistance.

Priorities for the use of these funds are guided through the development of a Five-Year Consolidated Plan. ACCGov's current Consolidated Plan utilizes these funds for a wide range of eligible activities with both CDBG and HOME funds. Ample evidence of significant needs for services, shelter, and housing should be considered in the prioritization of these funds in the future. These resources will be particularly important in 2026 and after, given that all ARPA funds must be expended by the end of 2026.

CoC Resources

The Continuum of Care (CoC) program is federally established and aims to promote community-wide collaborations to end homelessness through the use of mainstream resources and to encourage self-sufficiency. Communities establish local CoCs, currently administered by ACCGov in Athens-Clarke County. Agencies apply for these federal funds (available through HUD) collaboratively as a CoC. CoCs are governed by a board, which in Athens-Clarke County is composed of nonprofit homeless service providers; however, other community organizations and service providers, such as the library, are always welcome to participate in meetings.

ESG Resources

ESG is a federal entitlement program through which allocations are given based on formula funding to states, metropolitan cities, urban counties, and U.S. territories. It may be used to fund programs and services for people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness, including street outreach, emergency shelter, homelessness prevention, and rental assistance.

ACCGov does not directly receive ESG funding. Instead, local providers may apply for these funds through the state. Agencies in Athens-Clarke County are fighting for a small amount of annual ESG resources needed to serve people throughout the entire state. The State of Georgia's ESG office, the Department of Community Affairs (DCA), uses a scoring system to rate each application. Agencies within the CoC that are looking to increase their points in order to receive ESG funding should ensure that their program type is a priority each funding year, work to increase quality data entry into HMIS, participate in CoC meetings, and take advantage of trainings conducted by the CoC or the Department of Community Affairs. The Department of Community Affairs has two priorities through which the CoC can assist applicant agencies to potentially obtain more funding in the CoC's geographic area: 1) the CoC could work with agencies to lower barriers to programs and suggest that agencies apply for more RRH dollars in lieu of prevention dollars, and 2) if ESG-funded agencies are experiencing difficulty in spending all of their awarded dollars, the CoC could step in with suggestions on how to spend the dollars before the award term ends.

Goal #1: Strengthen CoC Capacity

Since 1994, HUD has required that local communities form coalitions called Continuum of Care (CoCs) to apply for funding through a collaborative application process. Since 2009, CoCs have been required to implement a HMIS for data collection. Since 2013, CoCs have been delegated additional responsibilities, including to:

- Plan and conduct the annual PIT count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons and HIC.
- Participate in local Consolidated Plans and consult with ESG recipients.
- Establish performance targets, monitor performance, evaluate outcomes, and take action against poor performers.
- Establish and operate a CE system.
- Establish written standards for providing assistance.

Effective coalitions are able to fulfill HUD requirements and bring together stakeholders across sectors—including schools, faith communities, local businesses, property owners, healthcare providers, and many others—to develop a homeless response system that not only stably houses persons with long histories of homelessness, but also prevents individuals and families from experiencing homelessness even once.

Each year, the Athens-Clarke County CoC is scored by HUD on its collaborative application and system performance alongside all CoCs in the nation. Based on this scoring, CoCs may lose programs, maintain the same level of funding, or successfully apply for bonus funding. Over the past five years, the Athens-Clarke County CoC's funding level has been consistent but, with increasing costs of housing and services, this has translated to a net loss of three units.⁶ In the 2022 Notice of Funding Opportunity competition, the Athens-Clarke County CoC scored slightly below the median. Areas for score improvement include coordination with community partners and system performance.

Recommended Actions to Strengthen CoC Capacity

The following strategies are intended to build the capacity of the local CoC to increase overall funding and coordination of homelessness programs in Athens-Clarke County.

Key Strategy #1: Staff the Coalition

The [Athens Homeless Coalition](#) was incorporated in 2018 as the Governing Board of the Athens-Clarke County CoC. The Coalition has expressed a desire to take on leadership of homeless response efforts in Athens-Clarke County with their own staff and with a long-term goal of serving as the collaborative applicant, which is the administrative entity for a CoC. Currently, ACCGov serves as the collaborative applicant for the CoC as well as the applicant for four of the six CoC-funded housing

⁶ This analysis includes all units in the CoC, including those that are managed by the State of Georgia. While there have been modest increases in the dollar amount of CoC awards, this is reflective of rent increases acknowledged by federal programs rather than actual increases in awards, hence the term “consistent” was used.

programs in Athens-Clarke County. This provides the Coalition access to support through ACCGov employees dedicated to housing and homelessness initiatives, but the Coalition does not currently have any of their own staff.

Similar-sized CoCs led by non-profit organizations vary in the number of staff dedicated to the administrative and oversight responsibilities required of a CoC lead agency, implementation of CE, and community leadership of the homeless response system. One such CoC in West Virginia, led by [Harmony House](#), contracts with a part-time consultant for tasks such as the annual collaborative application and submission of PIT/HIC data. Harmony House employs one individual who serves as the CE Specialist and one as the HMIS Administrator. Other community leadership tasks are undertaken by the Executive Director but are not funded with the CoC Planning Grant. The CoC has a robust Steering Committee and subcommittee structure that supports monitoring and evaluation, CE, HMIS, funding competition, training, advocacy, and the diversity, equity, and inclusion work of the CoC. Similarly, [the Homeless Coalition](#) of Jasper and Newton Counties in Missouri have selected the Economic Security Corporation of Southwest Missouri as their collaborative applicant and CE lead agency. They also operate with minimal dedicated staff and an active committee structure.

This ambitious Strategic Plan, however, will require full-time staffing. Athens Homeless Coalition staff will be tasked with establishing a successful lived experience committee and an effective CE system, implementing written standards, and strengthening relationships between the governing board and the collaborative applicant. Particularly in the first two years, the Coalition staff will need to focus on building trust and a shared vision for ending homelessness in Athens-Clarke County. This will require a leader with strong community organizing and cross-systems coordination skills, as well as the capacity to understand and apply HUD regulations to a complex environment. The Coalition will also require administrative staffing to develop the organizational infrastructure needed to effectively support staff and volunteers for years to come.

Additional resources:

[HUD, Building Effective Homeless Coalitions](#)

[University of Kansas, Community Toolbox: Coalition Building II: Maintaining a Coalition](#)

Key Strategy #2: Increase Participation from People with Lived Experience

HUD has long required that at least one CoC board member have lived experience of homelessness. Many communities are now moving beyond this requirement to engage in meaningful decision-sharing with groups of people who have lived experience. Emerging research⁷ has shown partnerships with people with lived experience have improved outcomes from homeless services, increased staff

⁷ Research from [Methods and Emerging Strategies to Engage People with Lived Experience](#).

knowledge, and provided professional development opportunities for people exiting homelessness.

To learn more about how to implement a lived experience committee in Athens-Clarke County, Cloudburst spoke with two Midwest communities that have had standing committees for nearly four years. To preserve the confidentiality of interviewees, these communities are referred to as Community One and Community Two. Their best practices for getting started are:

1. Be clear about the role of people with lived experience and their domain of decision-making.

The first step in getting started with a lived experience committee was determining what the role of the committee could be. In Community One, nearly everything related to CE was locally determined. This made CE an ideal domain to give to the lived experience committee, as their recommendations would not be subject to too many regulations. Having a clear role for people with lived experience and a scope for their committee was important to be able to ensure that recommendations could be implemented, helping to build trust and effective working relationships. In Community Two, the CoC charter was amended to define governance and policy topics that would be subject to review and approval by the lived experience committee.

2. Pay people for their time and provide resources to participate.

People with lived experience should be compensated for their time serving on committees. This may be a stipend or hourly rate. Community One paid people hourly using online gift cards. In Community Two, payment was organized by the collaborative applicant and issued via a W-9. In this community, private philanthropy had offered a source for payment, though the community had fundraised from a variety of sources to get started. The initial seed fund was only \$1,500 in Community One but was sufficient to gain momentum for other investments. This community found payment alone was sufficient for people to participate and did not provide refreshments or other services. However, the meetings were held primarily online, eliminating the need for transportation and childcare costs. For people with lived experience who did not have access to technology for online meetings, both communities applied for low-income cell phone programs on their behalf and secured donations of used laptops from local nonprofits.

3. Engage in meaningful power sharing.

Like in many CoCs, people with lived experience had served on the board prior to the effort for a dedicated committee in these communities. They found that voices could be drowned out and simply adding people with lived experience to existing committees continued “business as usual.” Having a dedicated committee was important for meaningful power sharing. In both communities, the committee is supported by a single staff member of the local homeless coalition who attends meetings as administrative support (e.g., notetaking) rather than as a facilitator. This supports the committee to act as a decision-making body that provides independent recommendations to the CoC board rather than allowing the committee to be overly influenced by nonprofit leaders.

The communities have tried different approaches for setting the lived experience committee agenda and meeting schedule. Currently, the committee in Community

One meets twice per month for one hour and focuses on a single topic during the agenda. This allows the committee to explore issues in depth, engage in learning and creative exploration, and discuss innovative approaches rather than needing to move through many topics at a surface level. Community Two has been successful with once-monthly meetings.

4. Take time for one-on-one conversations.

The lived experience committee members were recruited through the local nonprofit community by providing flyers and talking points to CoC members to share with clients. Clients could then contact the staff coordinator with the local coalition. That staff member would go out to meet people and have one-to-one conversations about the committee and provide an overview of the CoC structure and CE using visuals and plain language. The coordinator in Community One found that because of their lived experience, most people had a working knowledge of homeless services. These one-to-one conversations served to build interest and trust, laying the foundation for a positive working relationship. When needed, members can request one-to-one meetings to learn more about specific topics or answer questions they may have.

Both communities have seen improvements in CE outcomes since the start of the lived experience committee. If implemented in Athens-Clarke County, the specific performance measures to monitor will depend on the domain of the committee. To measure progress on implementing a lived experience committee, consider tracking:

- The number of people engaged for participation.
- The number of people expressing interest.
- The number of orientation conversations held with potential participants.

Additional resources:

[U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Methods and Emerging Strategies to Engage People with Lived Experience](#)

[HUD, Paying People with Lived Experience and Expertise](#)

[HUD, Guidance for Recruiting, Hiring, and Retaining People with Lived Experience and Expertise of Homelessness](#)

[HUD, Engaging Individuals with Lived Experience](#)

Key Strategy #3: Improve CE Policy and Implementation

HUD requires every CoC to maintain a CE process that: facilitates access to the homeless response system; assesses individuals' housing needs, preferences, and vulnerabilities; prioritizes housing resources and services for those with the greatest need and vulnerability; and refers individuals to available resources according to the policies established by the CoC. Within HUD's core requirements for CE, CoCs are encouraged to adopt strategies that meet the unique needs and resources of their communities. The Athens-Clarke County CoC's current CE process is unclear, as there is no publicly available information on how individuals can access CE, and CE policies and procedures have not been published on either the Coalition or the

collaborative applicant's websites. The Athens-Clarke County CoC should engage in an intentional planning process for developing CE policies and procedures and implementation strategies that meet HUD guidelines, service provider capacity, and, most importantly, the needs of individuals and families experiencing homelessness in Athens-Clarke County. This work can start with the support of HUD technical assistance or a contracted consultant and may result in dedicated staff at the Coalition providing training and administrative support to the Athens-Clarke County CE process.

One CE process Athens-Clarke County may consider is that of [Lane County, OR](#). Lane County uses a "No Wrong Door" approach in which numerous providers in the community—including homeless access centers, outreach teams, youth programs, senior programs, 211, and others—can complete front door assessments (FDAs) with individuals and families experiencing a housing crisis. FDAs are completed in HMIS or Cognito Forms (which are uploaded into HMIS). The local victim service provider completes FDAs in their comparable database and sends an anonymous profile, including their assessment score, to the CE staff. Households are prioritized for housing referrals based on their Vulnerability Index—Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool⁸ score and the length of time they have been experiencing homelessness. Some key strategies and approaches adopted in Lane County include:

1. Utilizing a by-name list and case conferencing.

Lane County maintains a dynamic by-name list of households at the top of the agenda to discuss at biweekly case conferencing meetings. As openings are reported to CE, they are brought to the case conference call where call participants will discuss what is going on with households on the list and determine which household is referred to each opening. Households are removed from the list if there has been no contact with the system for six months.

2. Referrals to PSH.

This community employs two community health workers who focus on engaging individuals from the by-name list and preparing them for a PSH housing referral. These dedicated staff will work with the individual to prepare all the documents they will need (e.g., verification of disability and homelessness) and to reduce barriers to housing.

3. Integration of diversion.

One staff person is focused on diversion for individuals identified in FDAs as lower priority and in need of minimal assistance (e.g., first month's rent and deposit) to end their housing crisis. This position supports eligible people to stabilize quickly, freeing up resources for those with more acute service needs. For more information on diversion, see [Goal Three: Improve Emergency Shelter and Transitional Housing Programs](#).

⁸ At the time of this plan's publication, Lane County is about two months away from having developed a localized assessment tool.

4. Connection to shelter.

Lane County-funded shelters are required to be connected to CE for receiving referrals. CE will refer unsheltered individuals to these shelters while they await a housing referral. This provides a safe space for people to stay while also maintaining engagement in diversion services or preparation for a PSH housing referral.

5. Use of HMIS.

Implementation of CE should be fully integrated with HMIS data collection. This is no different in Lane County, where CE is highly dependent on the use of HMIS by assessing agencies and housing providers. Although Lane County providers complain about using HMIS, they have ultimately found value in its ability to track down clients, coordinate services across provider agencies, and ensure equitable access to housing opportunities filled through CE. For outreach workers, they have added the ability to use Cognito Forms, which is more user-friendly on smartphones.

6. Robust staffing.

Lane County employs five full-time staff including a CE and outreach supervisor who oversees all CE work, an administrative analyst who makes referral connections, two staff who focus on PSH referrals, and one diversion staff member. Staff positions are funded through the County General Fund and state CE-specific funding. Lane County hopes to leverage Medicaid expansion billing for the work of the PSH staff.

7. “Don’t let perfect get in the way of progress.”

Lane County has prioritized flexibility and community engagement in the development of its CE system. CE staff believe it is better to have an agency involved with less than 100 percent compliance than for them to not be engaged at all. The relationship creates a platform to identify what in the system is not working and how to make it more effective for all involved. Lane County CE often works with allies to try initiatives or pilot projects before rolling them out system wide. As a result of this approach to forward movement, and despite the bumps, Lane County has had many grassroots and non-county-funded groups come to the table because of the tangible benefit to their clients.

Improved CE implementation should lead to increased exits to permanent housing and reduced length of time homeless, both of which are standard HUD performance measures. Additionally, Athens-Clarke County CoC may consider tracking:

- The total number of people assessed in CE.
- Distribution of CE assessment scores among different populations (e.g., racial equity, people with disabilities).

Additional resources:

[HUD, Coordinated Entry Core Elements](#)

[HUD, Coordinated Entry Community Samples Catalog](#)

[HUD, Outline for a Continuum of Care’s Coordinated Entry “Policies & Procedures” Document](#)

[Lane County, Coordinated Entry Written Standards](#)

In addition to these three key strategies for Goal #1, other actions that may support and strengthen the Athens CoC include:

Training for the CoC board, general members, and the collaborative applicant. The Athens-Clarke County CoC should receive training so that each individual and agency fully understands their roles and responsibilities. As regulations have shifted and staff have turned over in recent years, every active CoC member should receive training that will enable them to fully contribute.

Additional CoC training resources:

[HUD, CoC Program Toolkit](#)

[HUD, CoC 2.0 Training Materials](#)

[HUD, CoC and ESG Virtual Binders](#)

Implementing written standards for every program type. CoCs are required to create written standards, which are policies and procedures outlining how households will be assessed and served, as well as how programs will be evaluated. Written standards help ensure that every household served, regardless of the agency they are served by, has a consistent experience.

Sample written standards:

[Mississippi Balance of State](#)

[Wake County, North Carolina](#)

[Central Florida](#)

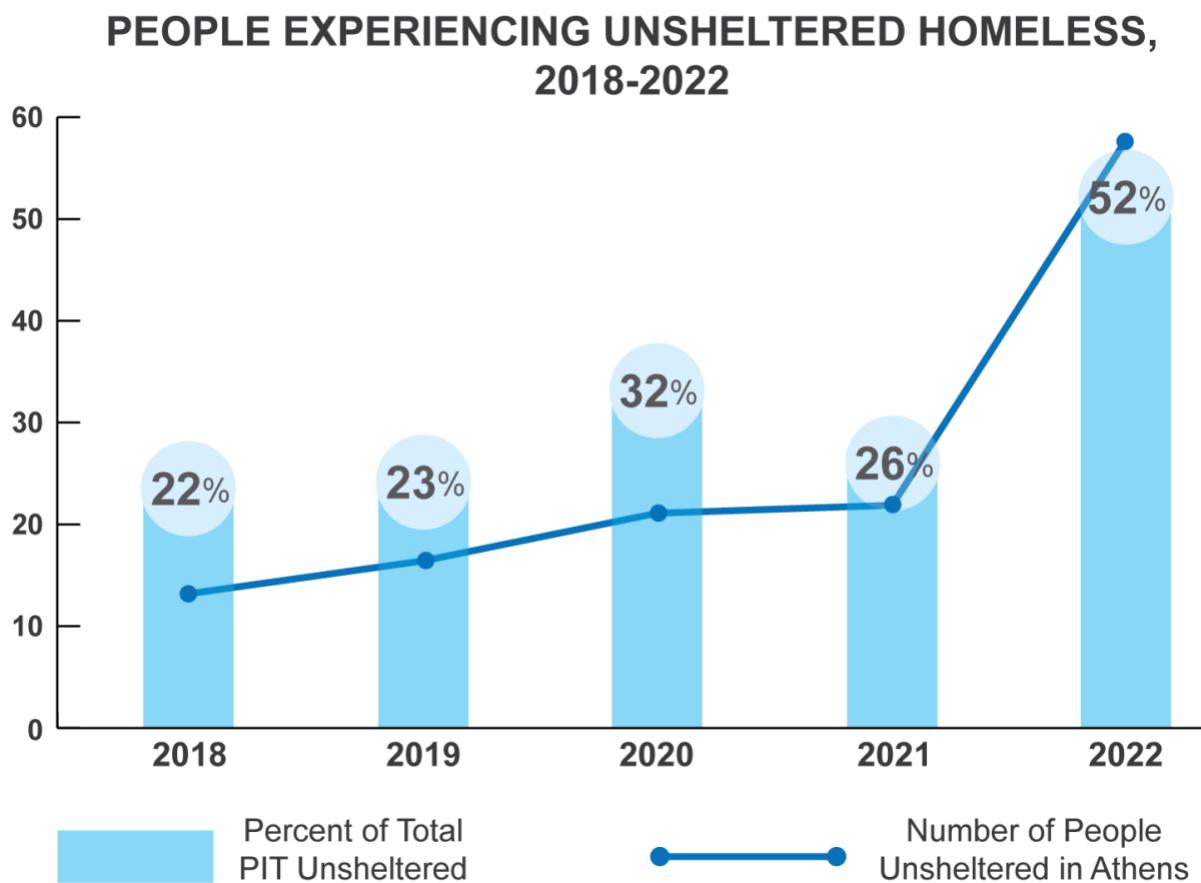
Strengthening CoC governance and collaboration with ACCGov. Every CoC should be led by a governing body and elected by the membership of the CoC that consists of a variety of stakeholders, including homeless and other service providers, persons with lived experience of homelessness, government and philanthropic funders, elected officials, faith and cultural communities, landlords and business owners, among others. One of the governing board's key duties is to select and oversee the work of the collaborative applicant. Highly effective CoCs have boards and collaborative applicants that operate on a shared vision for how their CoC will end homelessness. The governing board takes ownership of the direction of the homeless response system while the collaborative applicant takes on the day-to-day operations of HUD compliance and implementation of initiatives identified by the board. ACCGov currently participates as a non-voting member on the Coalition Board and works with homeless service providers to obtain input on funding strategies and to develop strategic plans such as this one. ACCGov and the Coalition should build on these efforts to further develop a shared vision and intentional decision-making procedures.

Supporting steps for an independent nonprofit community. During the feedback process for this plan, the Athens-Clarke County community stakeholders expressed a desire for CoC services to be led by the nonprofit community rather than ACCGov, which currently serves as the collaborative applicant for the CoC. Local nonprofit organizations should collaborate with ACCGov to understand the scope of collaborative applicant responsibilities and the resources required to undertake these activities. Together, the CoC should determine the necessary steps to build the capacity of providers to be able to start shifting responsibilities in a way that enables the nonprofit community to fully lead the CoC.

Goal #2: Reduce the Impact of Unsheltered Homelessness

Aside from a brief decrease during COVID-19 lockdowns, unsheltered homelessness—which includes people living outdoors or in places not meant for human habitation (e.g., abandoned buildings, cars)—has been increasing in many communities throughout the country.⁹ Athens-Clarke County has been no exception to this trend and increasing numbers of people in the community have been living unsheltered. Living unsheltered has been linked to poor mental and physical health outcomes.¹⁰ Unsheltered homelessness can also contribute to environmental health and safety concerns for other community members.

Figure 7. Unsheltered Homelessness in Athens, 2018–2023



Source: [PIT counts](#)

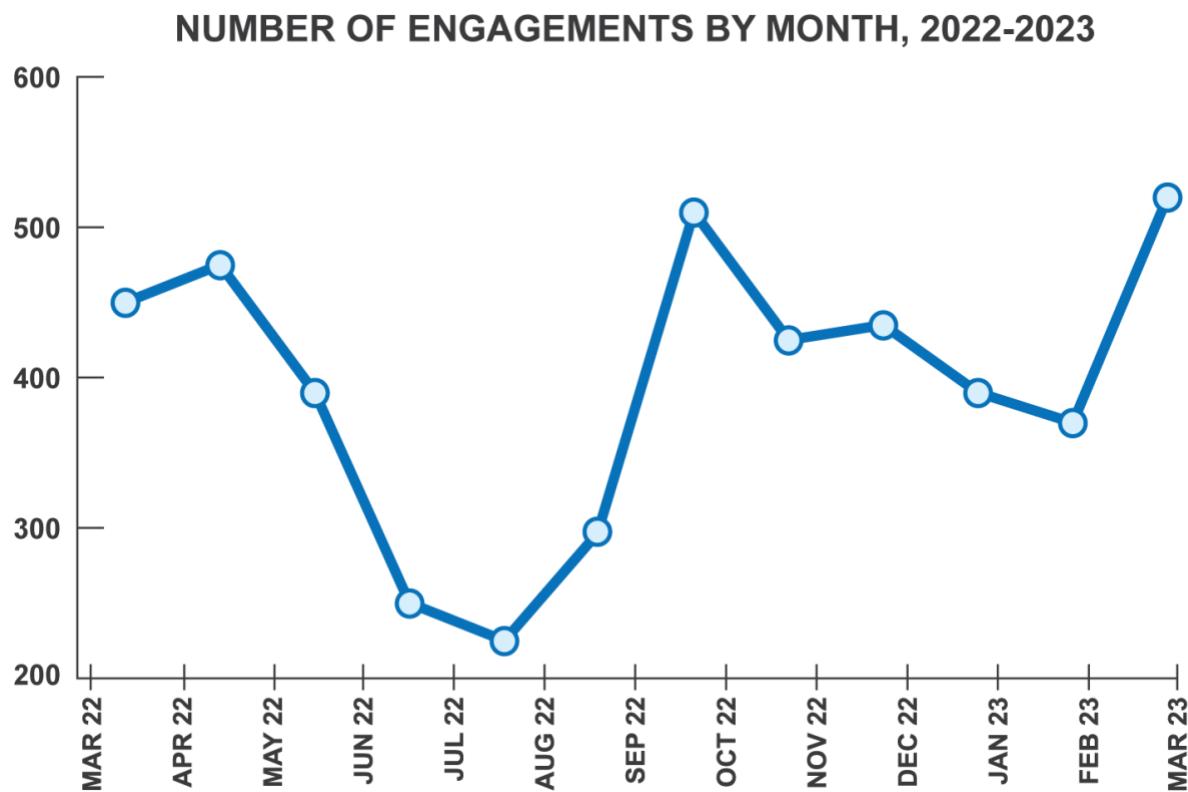
The Athens-Clarke County community is aware of the importance of addressing unsheltered homelessness. One way this is accomplished in the community is through street outreach. Street outreach services assist people experiencing homelessness to access programs and address their immediate needs. Often, these programs help to build trusting relationships with

⁹ According to data collected by the [Urban Institute](#).

¹⁰ From [Unsheltered Homelessness and Health: A Literature Review](#).

individuals experiencing homelessness, helping to create greater involvement in housing opportunities and services. Street outreach workers often engage in partnerships with law enforcement, health providers, and other community members, facilitating opportunities for coordination of care and addressing issues before more intensive interventions, such as arrest, are needed. The existing street outreach program in Athens-Clarke County maintains a high level of activity, helping individuals connect to housing resources and other important services. Despite current efforts, the need for additional street outreach in Athens-Clarke County remains high.

Figure 8. Street Outreach Engagements¹¹ by Month, 2022–2023



Source: Internal street outreach program data

In addition to street outreach, ACCGov established a temporary sanctioned encampment in 2022. The encampment is intended to provide low-barrier access to a legal place to sleep and connect people to needed services, such as mental health care. In 2022, this encampment served 156 individuals. Of those served, 51 percent were living with a disabling condition and 24 percent were chronically homeless. Residents come from diverse backgrounds, including those who have recently lost their housing, people exiting jail or prison, and those who are moving in from another unsanctioned encampment. As of August 2023, when this plan was written, the encampment is still in operation. Because the contract with the agency managing the encampment ends in December 2023 (unless renewed by Mayor and Commission), it is

¹¹ An engagement is defined as a street outreach worker having a verbal interaction with a client.

expected that by the time this strategic plan is implemented by ACCGov, the transition of those residents will already have begun.

Recommended Actions to Reduce the Impact of Unsheltered Homelessness

The following strategies are intended to reduce the impact of unsheltered homelessness on both those experiencing it and the community.

Key Strategy #4: Establish Comprehensive Street Outreach

Comprehensive street outreach strategies promote more efficient use of resources and intentional relationship-building with people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Street outreach professionals can help ensure newly unsheltered people are supported to move into safe housing options and highly vulnerable people are connected with appropriate housing and services. These workers can also serve as a point of contact to numerous systems (e.g., behavioral health, city officials) to address increasing rates of homelessness.

Drawing on information from three communities with highly coordinated street outreach programs,¹² the following are themes that emerged as central considerations for Athens-Clarke County to implement a comprehensive street outreach strategy:

1. Approach to outreach teams.

Coordinated systems must consider the structure of their outreach zones and teams. Approaches to structuring outreach zones include designating each neighborhood in the city as a zone, using geographical features (e.g., rivers) to mark boundaries, or using service centers frequented by people living unsheltered as epicenters and creating unique boundaries for each intake point. In addition to assigning outreach by geography, some cities also have specific teams for different populations. For example, some providers may be better equipped to engage youth through a specially trained team. Two people are generally dispatched on each team, especially if outreach is occurring at night or to serve larger encampments. In addition to behavioral health agencies, many cities incorporate peer specialists from homeless service agencies or social workers to provide outreach options to as broad a population as possible.

2. Leadership roles.

Coordination should be led by a central agency. In some cities, outreach is funded through contracts that require coordination among agencies. Although Athens-Clarke County currently has only one funded street outreach provider, other nonprofits and community groups are engaging in outreach on an informal basis. To the extent

¹² To protect the confidentiality of interviewees, the three communities are not identified. However, these communities represent cities in three different regions of the U.S. with diverse populations.

possible, these groups should be invited to coordination forums, in addition to any providers funded in the future.

The lead agency is commonly responsible for facilitating ongoing communication and collaboration, developing and assigning coverage zones, ensuring any requests for outreach have been addressed, operating any hotline and outreach dispatch functions, establishing policies and procedures for street outreach, and monitoring contracts. Training should be available to all participating agencies, including the lead agency.

As a result of fulfilling multiple functions, lead agencies generally have larger budgets than their outreach partners. In some places, this has led to tensions among partners that need to be mitigated through consistent, clear communication channels. Partners can convene through workgroups governing outreach functions, case meetings, and training opportunities. Uniforms or other outreach worker identification with the same branding and design for staff of all agencies also contributes to team cohesion.

3. Outreach engagement.

Moving people into services from outreach often requires multiple conversations to build trust. Teams with the strongest relationship with an individual will make repeated visits, even if that client has moved out of the team's assigned zone. With long waitlists for housing resources in many cities, coordinated outreach workers also assist with housing applications, CE calls, and treatment referrals. Often, the outreach worker can serve as an interim case manager until a long-term option can be identified.

4. Dispatch and prioritization.

Coordinated outreach teams are often asked to respond to requests that address encampments or the behavior of specific individuals. Outreach teams may be asked to respond to known encampments or areas where people living unsheltered congregate, or specific requests from city or county agencies and the community. Outreach workers often provide an assessment of what may be needed. For example, in cold weather emergencies, outreach workers may need additional assistance moving people into warming centers. If an encampment has been abandoned, the outreach workers will need to communicate to the appropriate entity what types of mitigation efforts are needed.

Some coordinated outreach systems also develop their own prioritization lists, including individuals known to the workers as well as people from whom they have received multiple requests to address issues. Clients on these prioritization lists are discussed at case conference meetings and are the target of additional case management services.

5. Data and outcomes.

Tracking outcomes from street outreach services can be challenging, and not all coordinated outreach efforts are logging data into HMIS. Outreach agencies generally track the number of individuals they are engaging, the number of contacts with each person they have had, and case management data such as applications and referrals. Since the CE system is often separate, many outreach agencies do not know what the exact housing status is once an individual is moved into shelter, nor do they

necessarily receive “credit” for housing that individual. Capacity building efforts should include resources for appropriate data entry training for outreach workers as well as access to any required technology to be able to more easily and accurately track outreach activities.

Outreach is funded through a variety of sources across communities. Often, multiple funding sources, including ESG and local funding, are blended to create comprehensive programs. The primary cost associated with outreach is staff salary and benefits. Outreach programs often provide basic necessities such as hygiene and harm-reduction items. These materials can often be obtained through in-kind donations.

HUD measures the performance of street outreach programs by the number of people who are successfully sheltered and placed into housing programs. ACCGov and providers may also measure the success of a comprehensive outreach program by:

- The number of people served each month.
- The number of people connected to services (e.g., mental or behavioral health).
- The number of people connected to CE.

Additional resources for street outreach:

[United States Interagency Council on Homelessness \(USICH\), Core Elements of Effective Street Outreach to People Experiencing Homelessness](#)

[HUD, Housing-Focused Outreach](#)

[USICH, The Role of Outreach and Engagement in Funding Homelessness: Lessons Learned from SAMHSA's Expert Panel](#)

Key Strategy #5: Organize Housing Surges for Encampments

Multiple communities have implemented a Housing Central Command (HCC) in recent years to quickly identify housing and place people experiencing homelessness into units. An HCC uses national disaster response approaches and personnel to rapidly implement changes within local homeless response systems. This is one model of a housing surge that has shown promising results in many communities, especially those with high rates of unsheltered homelessness. Most recently, [Bangor, Maine](#) utilized this structure to resolve two encampments within their jurisdiction. Activities include:

1. Establishing a team of teams.

An HCC is a team of teams that emphasizes quick, specific goal setting and accountability as well as an iterative process for determining workflows that are tailored to the local context. The HCC includes a leadership team that represents a housing agency, the community being served, and a representative with lived experience. In addition to this team of directors, the HCC contains multiple functional teams. Functional teams that make up an HCC may include a field team, data

management team, housing acquisition team, finance and administration team, and a communications team. HCCs require expert support, and while every implementation is unique, HUD has a team of experts available who have experience working within and across communities to successfully move unhoused persons into units to help guide this setup process. These HUD training and technical assistance providers facilitate the development of HCCs at the local level to ensure successful implementation and sustainability.

2. Communicating frequently.

HCCs meet frequently, often daily, to document and continually improve processes and to analyze the problems of individuals and families experiencing homelessness through an emergency response lens. During these meetings, the teams report on their progress, address challenges, identify potential opportunities, and set realistic goals for the day. The teams also meet separately on a regular, or ad hoc, basis depending on their needs.

In addition to constant internal communication, an HCC should also engage the community they serve from the onset. Early discussion with the community will provide an understanding of their perception and garner support for successful implementation. Communication also includes the identification of people experiencing homelessness, the establishment of a by-name list, and frequent outreach to those individuals.

3. Focusing on action.

Through the iterative process of developing, implementing, and refining workflows to progress toward, and achieve, these objectives, the HCC establishes priorities, delegates responsibilities to the various encampment response teams, and analyzes the effectiveness of the strategies it employs. The work of the HCC is squarely focused on the HCC objectives using an emergency response lens:

- a. Identify eligible households.
- b. Identify available housing units, including shelter, transitional housing and permanent homes.
- c. Move eligible households into available housing units.

Because this approach encourages quick daily action, mistakes are to be expected. Iterating, failing, and adapting are all necessary parts of the culture of a successful HCC. Long-term, successful HCC implementation will lower the number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness (as measured by the PIT count) and the total number of people experiencing homelessness, as well as increase the rate of exits to permanent housing. Other measures to track for implementation include:

- The number of housing units identified.
- The number of people experiencing homelessness engaged.
- The number of people living in encampments who are moved to shelter or transitional housing.
- The number of people living in encampments who are permanently housed.

While this plan does not include recommendations specific to the ACCGov-sanctioned encampment on Barber Street (given that the transition of those residents will likely have begun before this plan goes into effect), ACCGov should collaborate with the agency managing the sanctioned encampment to follow the principles and guidelines described above to help ensure a humane and effective transition for residents.

Additional resources on housing surges:

[Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, An Introduction to Housing Central Command](#)

[Community Solutions, Built for Zero](#)

[HUD, Housing Surges—Special Considerations for Targeting People Experiencing Unsheltered Homelessness](#)

In addition to these key strategies for Goal #2, other actions that may reduce the impact of unsheltered homelessness include:

Establishing an inclement weather policy. People living unsheltered are particularly vulnerable to extreme weather, including significant storms, heat waves, or cold temperatures. An inclement weather policy defines the kinds of weather events that warrant activating an emergency response for people experiencing homelessness. This policy often outlines the roles different service providers and key staff will fulfill during emergency weather situations, as well as physical spaces that can act as emergency response shelters. These policies help prevent serious injury or death for people who are unsheltered during extreme weather.

Examples of inclement weather policies:

[Lexington, Kentucky Emergency Winter Weather Plan](#)

[Washington County, Oregon Severe Weather Shelter Response Plan](#)

[Nashville, Tennessee Cold Weather Community Response Plan](#)

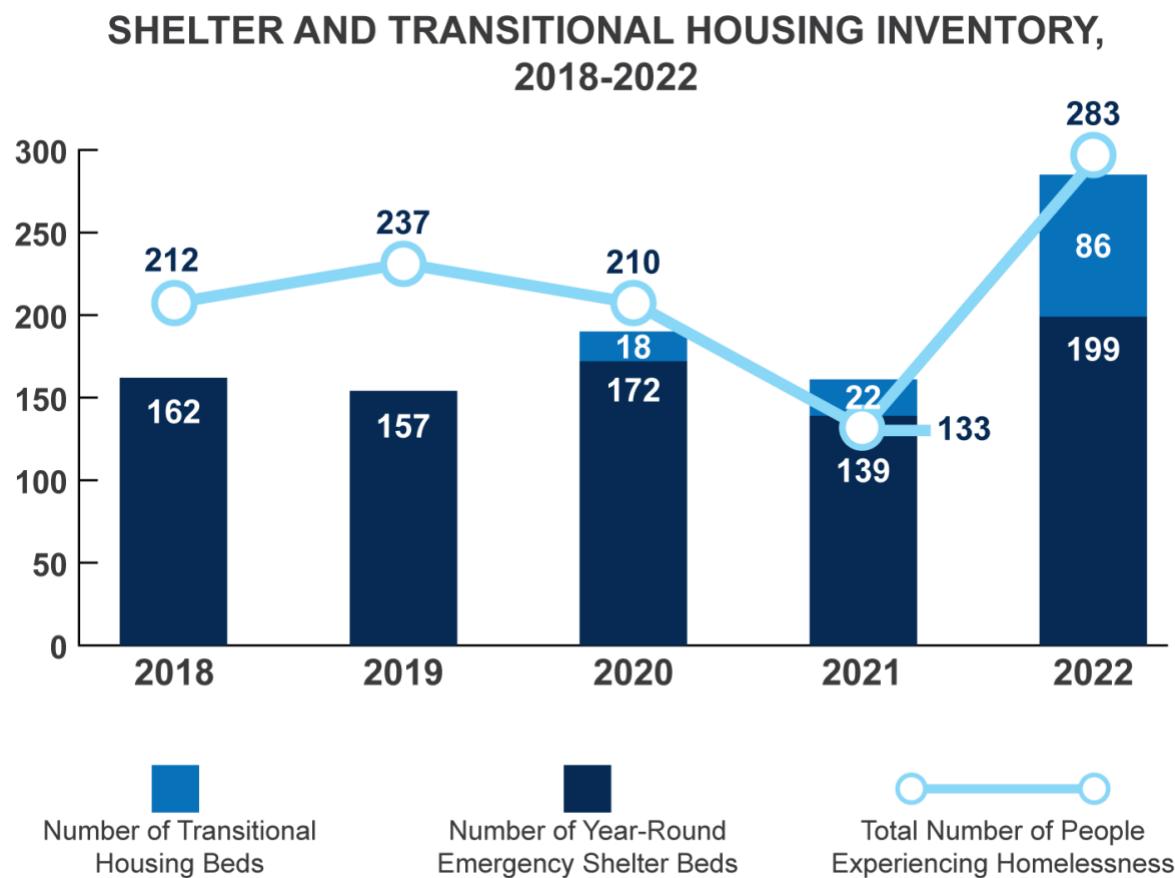
[National Healthcare for the Homeless Council Surviving Severe Weather Tools](#)

Creating personal property storage. People living unsheltered often do not have anywhere safe to leave their personal belongings. This can often lead to the loss of personal documents required for services and housing (e.g., birth certificates). Additionally, people experiencing homelessness may be prevented from entering buildings with a backpack or other personal property, creating situations where people must choose between leaving items unattended or seeking assistance. A safe personal property storage area for people experiencing homelessness may mitigate some of these challenges. This may include lockers or similar storage that is accessible to people experiencing homelessness.

Goal #3: Improve Emergency Shelter and Transitional Housing Programs

Access to emergency shelter and transitional housing is important for people experiencing homelessness so they may be in a safe environment, connect with services, and begin to stabilize their lives. Emergency shelter is a temporary solution, often primarily providing a place to sleep. Transitional housing can last for up to two years, providing a supportive environment intended to bridge the gap between the experience of homelessness and permanent housing. Though Athens-Clarke County has increased the total number of shelter and transitional housing beds available, it has not kept pace with the need in the community. During the feedback process to develop this plan, shelter providers often reported having to turn people away due to lack of space, and people experiencing homelessness reported similar difficulties securing shelter.

Figure 9. Shelter and Transitional Housing in Athens, 2018–2022



Sources: HUD HIC, PIT count

Note: The 2021 PIT count did not include unsheltered individuals due to COVID-19 restrictions, resulting in a lower overall count.

Many providers in Athens-Clarke County consider the community to be a “service hub,” meaning many people from outside of the area travel here to seek services. In the 2023 PIT count, only 13 percent of people living unsheltered¹³ had been in the Athens-Clarke County area for less than six months. Over half of the people experiencing unsheltered homelessness had been living in the county for more than six years. This indicates that, while at least some people are traveling to Athens-Clarke County while experiencing homelessness or becoming homeless shortly after arriving in the community, they are not the majority. One factor that supports this belief, however, is the lack of identified shelter and transitional housing in nearby communities.

Table 5: Housing Inventory in Neighboring Counties, 2021¹⁴

County	2021 Year-Round Shelter Beds	2021 Transitional Housing Beds
Barrow	0	25
Jackson	0	0
Madison	0	0
Oconee	0	0
Oglethorpe	0	0
Clarke	139	22

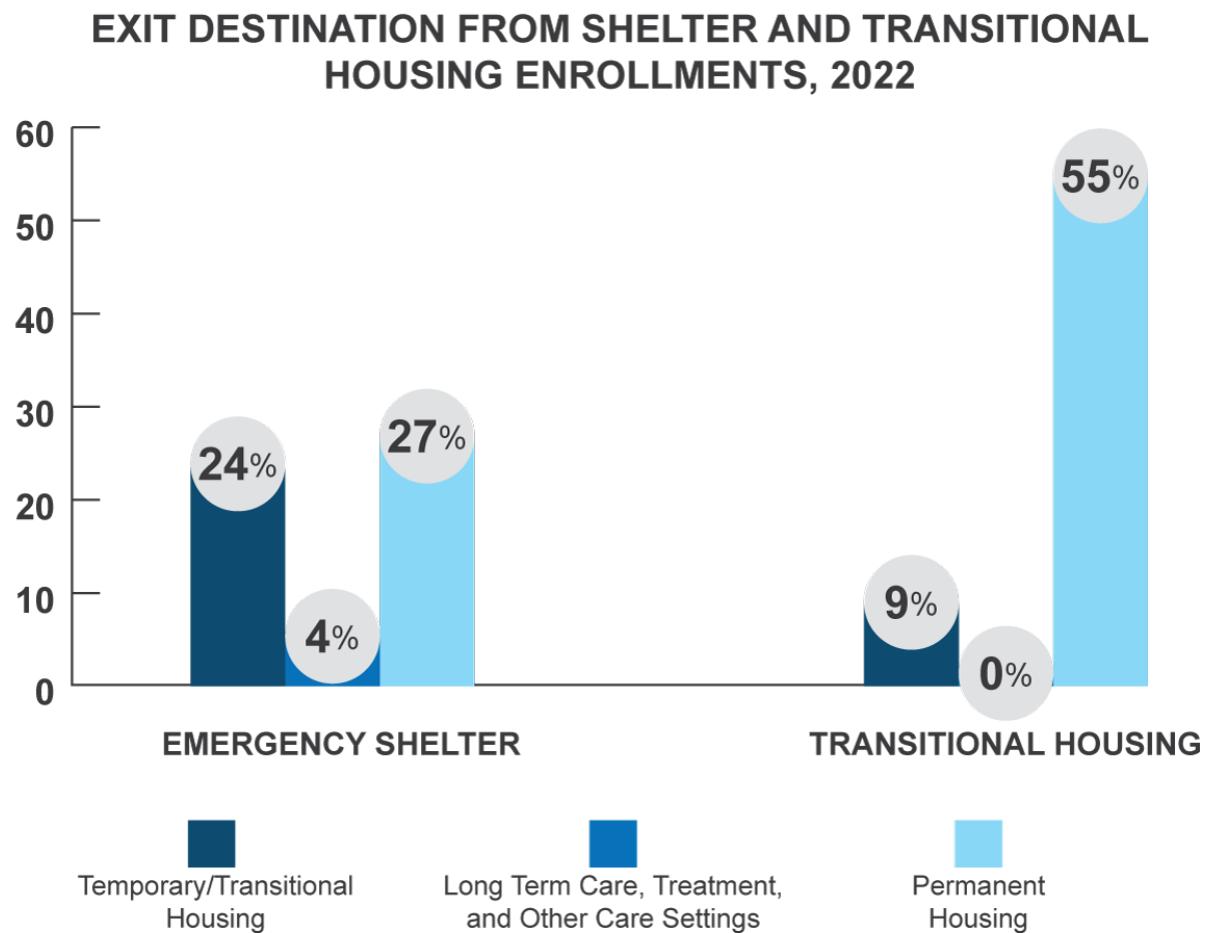
Source: HIC

Effective emergency shelter and transitional housing programs are focused on activities that move people into permanent housing. The rising cost of housing in Athens-Clarke County (further described in ACCGov’s 2023 AHIS, available at www.accgov.com/hcd) poses a challenge for people to exit homelessness, though local programs still work toward permanent housing solutions. In 2022, approximately half of the entries into shelter resulted in an exit to either temporary or permanent housing. Over half of the people in transitional housing exited to permanent housing.

¹³ This question was not asked of people living in shelter and transitional housing.

¹⁴ 2021 is the most recent year in which county-level data was available.

Figure 10: Exit Destination from Shelter and Transitional Housing Enrollments, 2022



Recommended Actions to Improve Emergency Shelter and Transitional Housing

The following strategies are intended to improve the effectiveness of emergency shelter and transitional housing programs, creating more access to these resources, improving service delivery, and increasing access to housing.

Key Strategy #6: Increase Number of Low-Barrier Shelter Units

ACCGov has allocated ARPA funds to operate a temporary sanctioned encampment made up of 55 tents, and the encampment has been operational since March 2022. In interviews, guests of the encampment expressed that they choose to stay there because shelters that currently exist were considered unsafe, inaccessible due to the need to check in at specific times of the day, or unavailable due to capacity.

constraints. The ongoing demand for such an encampment is indicative of the need for low-barrier shelter. Low barrier shelter: eliminates preconditions to entry such as income, sobriety, or lack of criminal background; allows individuals to stay in shelter with their partners (or other adult family members), pets, and possessions; and is open 24/7 without required check-in times. Over the past few years, many communities turned to non-congregate shelters as a way to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission and learned that giving households their own sleeping spaces and bathrooms further reduced barriers to entry. The following are principles that guide the implementation of low-barrier shelters:

1. Configure space to meet a variety of needs.

Sleeping spaces should be set up so they can be shared by couples, friends, or multi-generational adult families, as well as accessible to individuals/families with mobility, mental health, or other disability-related spatial needs.

2. Low barrier does not mean there are no rules.

Rules should be based on behavior while *in* the shelter. For example, many people cause no harm to themselves or others while under the influence of substances. Only those who do cause harm should experience consequences.

3. Termination should only be used as a last resort.

Guests should not be kicked out for non-participation in services, not completing chores, or being under the influence of drugs or alcohol. When rule violations occur, staff should engage in motivational interviewing to address incongruence with housing plans.

4. Shelters should have sufficient staffing to support individuals with higher needs to move into permanent housing.

Low-barrier shelters are—by definition—more accessible to individuals who have higher barriers to accessing permanent housing. As a result, shelters need to recruit, train, and retain staff who are “bought in” to the model and can engage in creative housing-focused problem-solving.

Athens-Clarke County may promote the implementation of low-barrier shelter through a combination of funding construction or acquisition and conversion of new shelter beds (e.g., the acquisition and conversion of a hotel or motel into shelter units), as well as supporting the operations and services of currently existing shelter beds if barriers to accessing shelter are severely reduced and/or eliminated (e.g., rehabilitating shelter units currently not in use due to physical conditions of space). Metrics to track for implementation and outcomes include:

- The number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.
- The number of people in shelter.
- The length of time in shelter before housing.
- The number of people banned from shelter.

Additional resources for low-barrier shelter:

[HUD, Emerging Practices to Enhance Safety at Congregate Shelters](#)

Key Strategy #7: Implement Diversion and Rapid Exit

Diversion and rapid exit are targeted motivational interviewing and case management efforts that result in reduced inflow into homelessness and thus ease the demand for limited shelter and housing resources. Diversion practices help people experiencing homelessness access alternatives to shelter or living unsheltered. Rapid exit refers to finding alternatives soon after entering homelessness. In practice, there is a great deal of overlap between these case management practices, and both are focused at the “front door” of homeless services.

One example of a [successful diversion and rapid exit effort](#) is in the Grand Traverse Area in Northwest Michigan, serving five rural counties and one small city. Administered by the Northwest Michigan Coalition to End Homelessness and implemented by the CE call center and two shelter providers, these practices have resulted in 23 percent of people calling for shelter being successfully diverted and 19 percent of people who do arrive in shelter exiting to housing within two weeks. The community experiences heavy tourism and has been able to accomplish this with limited housing resources through the following practices:

1. Leading calls for shelter with diversion questions.

Shelter providers in the community came together to review common causes of housing loss in the community and patterns in alternatives to shelter. Through this, they developed a [diversion call framework](#) that offers a structure to conversations when someone calls CE for shelter resources. All providers answering calls follow this framework, which successfully diverts nearly a quarter of the people who call in.

2. Targeting services when people arrive in shelter.

Diversion and rapid exit services are available to everyone in the shelter, but specialists target those who have no history of homelessness or who have not experienced homelessness in the past 18 months. Local data has shown that this group tends to have the highest success rates. Workers make contact with these individuals at least every other day for an individual’s first 14 to 30 days in shelter. The specialists use intensive motivational interviewing to identify safe alternatives to homelessness and to provide support to follow through on exploring those options.

3. Provide flexible funding sparingly.

While flexible diversion funds are available, the community has found they are not necessary for many people. Last year, of 53 people diverted, only nine needed flexible funding to do so, totaling less than \$8,500. The amount of flexible funding per person is decided on a case-by-case basis for what is necessary, which is sometimes as little as a bus ticket for family reunification and is at other times covering security deposits and other move-in costs.

Originally funded through local sources as a pilot, the [Northwest Michigan Coalition to End Homelessness](#) recently received a \$500,000 grant from the state to continue the diversion and rapid exit program. This covers three diversion workers, one at each shelter and one in the CE agency who acts as a floater, as well as the flexible support fund. The community reports that, even among those who do not successfully divert, the program helps to build trust and provide key information to shelter case managers or street outreach workers as they continue engagement with individuals.

HUD performance measures include tracking reductions in the number of people experiencing homelessness for the first time, which diversion may improve. The Grand Traverse area also uses the following performance measures for diversion and rapid exit:

- The percentage of all people seeking services who are diverted.
- The percentage of households who divert and do not return to homelessness in 30, 60, and 90 days.
- The average number of days in shelter following the diversion interaction.
- The average number of days engaged in diversion.

Additional resources for diversion and rapid exit:

[USICH, Prevention, Diversion, and Rapid Exit](#)

[HUD, Housing Problem-Solving: Prevention Strategies](#)

[USICH, Adopting Housing Problem-Solving Approaches with Prevention, Diversion, and Rapid Exit Strategies](#)

[Diversion First, Shelter Diversion 101 Training Slides](#)

In addition to these key strategies for Goal #3, other actions that may increase access to permanent housing include:

Coordinate access to shelter across providers. Many people experiencing homelessness in Athens-Clarke County report difficulty accessing emergency shelter due to the varying intake processes across shelters. Individuals may need to call several shelters each day at different times of the day and relay the same information about their situation repeatedly. Many communities have addressed these struggles by implementing coordinated access to shelter. In these communities, individuals are able to make one phone call or complete one intake visit to be matched to an available shelter bed that best meets their needs. Communities may choose to prioritize individuals or families who are literally homeless ahead of those at imminent risk of homelessness depending on shelter availability.

Coordinated access to shelter relies on having a robust CE system that allows for consistent information at different access points to homeless services and an effective data system (e.g., HMIS) to track bed inventory and openings with a high level of accuracy. Consultants providing guidance on this plan recommend pursuing [Key Strategy #3: Improve Coordinated Entry Policy and Implementation](#) as a key step toward coordinated shelter access.

Additional resources for coordinated access to shelter:

[Hennepin County Adult Shelter Connect](#)

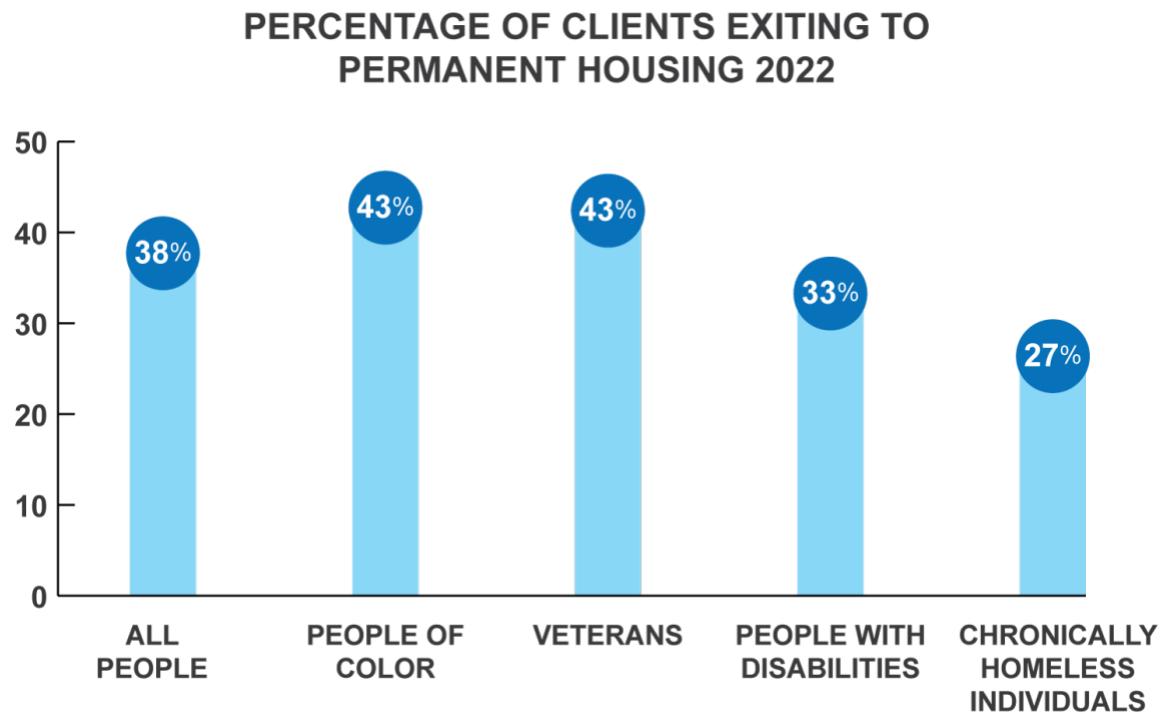
Homelessness Solutions in Alameda County
Milwaukee Continuum of Care Coordinated Entry

Goal #4: Increase Access to Permanent Housing

Homelessness is ended through access to permanent housing, and like many communities, Athens-Clarke County is facing a shortage of affordable housing. A full data analysis and action plan for the county to increase affordable housing for all community members is presented in the [AHIS](#). A specific analysis of needs for people experiencing homelessness and people at risk of homelessness is also available through the [Athens-Clarke County HOME-ARP Allocation Plan](#).

People trying to exit homelessness are also greatly impacted by the affordable housing shortage. As the rental market tightens, competition for units increases, further driving up prices, making it more difficult for people with poor credit, a history of eviction, or other barriers to housing to be accepted by landlords.¹⁵ When asked for feedback during the development of this plan, local providers reported that landlords are increasingly screening out their clients and have become less willing to accept vouchers and other forms of housing subsidies intended to help low-income households afford housing. The chart below shows exits to permanent housing from homeless services for different populations.¹⁶

Figure 11: Exits to Permanent Housing from Homeless Services, 2022



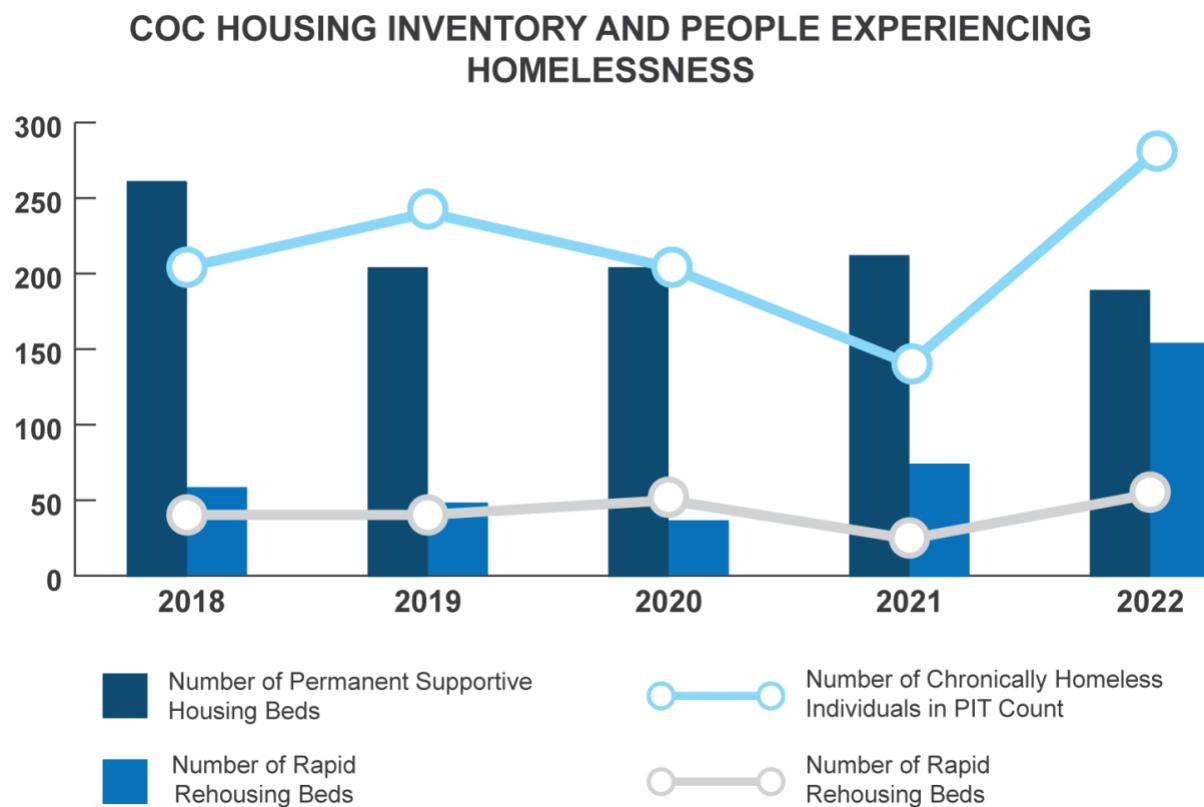
¹⁵ [HUD Policy Development and Research, Apartment Market Conditions, Housing Forward Virginia.](#)

¹⁶ This is based on the number of all people who exited the system and does not include those who exited because they were deceased or needed long-term care. This includes all exits to permanent housing, including permanent tenure with family and friends.

Source: HMIS data

Athens-Clarke County receives federal resources to help people exit homelessness. Through the CoC, two of the main resources available to Athens-Clarke County are PSH, which is intended for people with disabilities experiencing chronic homelessness, and RRH, which is a time-limited subsidy designed to support people to exit homelessness while they become self-sufficient. However, for both of these resources, the program capacity is exceeded by the number of potentially eligible people. PSH resources in Athens-Clarke County have decreased since 2018. There is very little turnover in these units, though counts of chronic homelessness (households likely eligible for these units) remain consistent in the PIT count. This shows that some households in need of supportive housing are continuing to experience homelessness due to a lack of appropriate housing. While RRH resources have increased, they have not kept pace with the total number of people experiencing homelessness.

Figure 12: Housing Inventory and PIT Counts, 2018–2022



Sources: HIC, PIT count

Note: The 2021 PIT count did not include unsheltered individuals due to COVID-19 restrictions, resulting in a lower overall count.

Recommended Actions to Increase Access to Permanent Housing

The following strategies are intended to increase access to permanent housing for people exiting homelessness. These strategies are intended to complement the community-wide strategies found in the AHIS.

Key Strategy #8: Create a Support Fund to End and Prevent Homelessness

The number of households experiencing homelessness in Athens-Clarke County exceeds the capacity of housing programs. However, for some households, all that is needed to exit homelessness is one-time housing-related financial assistance up to, and including, landlord incentives. Several communities have had great success in reducing homelessness by implementing flexible support funds to end and prevent homelessness that pair one-time financial assistance with ongoing supportive services. These funds can be funded incrementally using a mix of government and private funds, and as part of its FY24 budget, ACCGov has allocated \$300,000 of its ARPA dollars dedicated to this type of fund.¹⁷ Flexible support funds are typically administered by a single entity, such as a CoC, with supportive services provided by community partners.

One region that has successfully implemented a support fund to end and prevent homelessness is the 11-county CoC in southeast Tennessee led by the [Chattanooga Regional Homeless Coalition \(CRHC\)](#). Its fund was established in 2019 with an investment of \$400,000 from the City of Chattanooga, and since its inception, has received ongoing city, state, and philanthropic support to serve 354 households in exiting homelessness. The fund currently supports individuals and families experiencing literal homelessness in Hamilton County with a one-time payment for the first month's/last month's rent, rental or utility deposits, application fees, rental or utility arrears, identification fees, moving company fees, relocation assistance, renter's insurance, and/or move-in assistance. Eight partner organizations assist households in locating appropriate and affordable housing, determining the least amount of funding needed, seeking out other funding sources, and submitting the request to CRHC. CRHC verifies that all funder-required documentation is present and issues checks weekly for pick-up by the partner agency. Some lessons learned from CRHC include:

1. Keep eligibility and documentation requirements as minimal as possible.

CRHC's fund is intended to be low-barrier and based on RRH and progressive engagement principles. The only documentation requirements for the program are those required by the funding source, such as W-9s from recipients of federal funds. Because of these low-barrier principles, CRHC was able to open the program up to

¹⁷ In the future, if ACCGov general funds were used for this type of program, it would be restricted to households living at or below 30 percent of Area Median Income.

undocumented individuals and engage Latinx communities in the homeless response system for the first time.

2. Adopt program requirements in collaboration with community partners.

Each year, CRHC identifies eligible expenses and yearly assistance maximums in collaboration with partner agencies based on funding availability and community needs. This yearly process helps build relationships and ownership of the program by partner agencies. Partner agencies may make requests for other expenses throughout the program year, to be approved by the CRHC Executive Director. This flexibility allows the program to adapt to changing community needs and priorities.

3. Use HMIS for data collection and performance metrics.

CRHC has been able to strengthen its community's use of HMIS through the flexible support funds, including use by organizations that do not receive HUD funds and have not traditionally participated in the homeless response system. This enables the community to have a more complete picture of homelessness and housing insecurity, improving available data used for planning and decision-making.

HUD system performance measures include exits to permanent housing and returns to homelessness, which may improve as a result of flexible support fund participation. Other data points to track for progress include:

- The number of community partners.
- The number of households served.
- The support funds distributed.

Additional Resources for support funds to end and prevent homelessness:

[CRHC, Flexible Housing Fund Guidelines and Forms](#)

[HUD, Flexible Subsidy Pool Fundamentals: Essentials and How to Get Started](#)

[Maricopa Association of Governments, Flexible Housing Subsidy Pools/Funds](#)

Key Strategy #9: Engage in Landlord-Focused Initiatives

Landlord-focused initiatives include engagement, incentives, and risk mitigation.¹⁸ Proactive landlord engagement with targeted incentives can be a highly effective way to increase the housing supply for people exiting homelessness. [Open Doors Atlanta](#) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to implementing best practices for landlord-focused strategies. These include:

1. Develop connections in real estate

As part of the feedback process for this plan, providers noted that local landlords who own a small number of properties are more willing to engage with homeless services, but there are fewer of these property owners compared to larger management

¹⁸ Risk mitigation may also be part of a support fund to end and prevent homelessness.

companies. One approach Open Doors uses is to make relationships with key property managers and developers who have access to large numbers of units. This has included adding real estate professionals to the organization that understand how property management companies operate. Other CoCs have surveyed landlords and property managers about the incentives that would be most appealing to them to develop connections and offer mutually beneficial programs. The Athens Homeless Coalition recently undertook a similar effort, distributing a [survey to local landlords and property managers](#) that received 19 responses. Open Doors, similar to other CoCs with successful landlord programs, takes time to publicize positive relationships with landlords or property managers. This may be via a recognition event or newsletter.

2. Be collaborative

Open Doors has found that landlords are much more likely to engage when combining the efforts of multiple homeless service organizations than when working one-off with single providers. This also saves homeless service organizations time and money by sharing resources between multiple providers. In other communities, public housing authorities (PHAs) are able to bring together coalitions of providers and lead landlord engagement. Individual service providers may not have the resources to implement a robust landlord engagement effort, but coalitions can often pool resources to develop and implement successful programs.

3. Sustain relationships with landlords

Maintaining positive relationships with landlords will help ensure units remain available for people exiting homelessness. Successful landlord-focused efforts, including Open Doors, emphasize the importance of ensuring payments are made on time, landlord questions to providers are answered promptly, and tenants are supported when issues arise. This can often include risk mitigation when a tenant damages a unit through funding to repair units after moving out or offered as additional damage deposits prior to move-in.

Landlord-focused efforts are funded through flexible pools, and some federal resources may be eligible to offer landlord incentives. In many communities, staff are hired specifically for landlord engagement. This staff person can work through a coalition, local government, or PHA to offer support to multiple homeless service providers.

HUD system performance measures include exits to permanent housing, which may improve as a result of landlord engagement efforts. Other data points to track for progress include:

- The number of landlords engaged.
- The number of units committed.
- The risk mitigation funds distributed.

Additional resources for landlord-focused strategies:

[Florida Housing Coalition, Landlord Collaboration Guidebook](#)

[Employment and Social Development Canada, Landlord Engagement Toolkit](#)

[U.S. Department of the Treasury, Intentional Landlord Engagement](#)

[HUD, Leveraging ESG-CV Landlord Financial Incentives to Expedite Engagement](#)

In addition to these key strategies for Goal #4, other actions that may increase access to permanent housing include:

Develop site-based PSH. Throughout the strategic plan process, community members, service providers, and ACCGov staff have identified limitations with reliance on privately held rental housing to place people who have experienced chronic homelessness and have needs that require housing and services. PSH is a form of affordable housing that incorporates [Housing First](#) principles. Many communities are utilizing HOME-ARP funds to build their capacity to create and manage site-based PSH. Effective development and ongoing management of site-based PSH requires partnerships among affordable housing developers, funders, and service providers to bring together the resources necessary for these projects. Developing permanent housing is of high importance to local providers and there is a demonstrated need in the community. This strategy is a focus of the HOME-ARP allocation in Athens-Clarke County, available at www.accgov.com/hcd.

Additional resources on site-based PSH

[Homeless System Response: Long-Term Financing of Permanent Supportive Housing Projects](#)

[Primer on Homelessness and Supportive Housing](#)

[Atlanta HomeFirst PSH Initiative](#)

Establish comprehensive housing navigation. Feedback provided by people experiencing homelessness during the creation of this plan indicated that one of their primary challenges was navigating the local housing market. Housing navigation is a service that is intended to lower barriers to housing by assisting households with finding units, completing applications, coordinating with landlords for required information, and creating housing stability plans as people move into their units. Housing navigation may be embedded in case management or be a separate role within service provider organizations.

Additional resources on housing navigation:

[HUD, Housing Navigation](#)

[National Alliance to End Homelessness, Housing Navigation and Landlord Engagement](#)

[Veteran Affairs Housing Navigator Toolkit](#)

Enact a homeless preference for PHA resources. The Athens Housing Authority manages public housing units and some voucher programs. As a PHA, the Athens Housing Authority has the flexibility to establish policies and procedures regarding waitlists and tenant selection. One of these flexibilities is the establishment of preferences or criteria that move households up on the waitlist. HUD allows the experience of homelessness as a preference, moving people who are currently without housing up on waitlists to receive PHA resources. These preferences may be universal and apply to all resources, or they may be limited, setting aside a specific number of waitlist spots or resources (e.g., units, vouchers) for people experiencing homelessness. Preferences have been shown to be an effective tool for reducing homelessness in communities.¹⁹

Additional homeless preference resources:

[HUD, How PHAs Can Assist People Experiencing Homelessness](#)

¹⁹ [USICH](#).

[USICH, Establishing Wait List Preferences](#)
[Corporation for Supportive Housing, PHA Toolkit](#)

Create a Moving On program. After people have been living in supportive housing and have had the opportunity to stabilize their lives, sometimes they no longer need or want the intensive services provided in these units. Moving On programs and strategies help clients remain stable while transitioning to a different living environment. In some cases, clients may be able to support themselves entirely. In others, the client may wish to exit supportive housing and need to transition to a public housing unit or other affordable housing to remain stably housed. In all cases, Moving On programs should be voluntary and driven by client choice. These programs can help match clients to the resource they are best served by while creating vacancies in supportive housing for new tenants to exit homelessness.

Additional Moving On resources:

[HUD, Moving On resources](#)

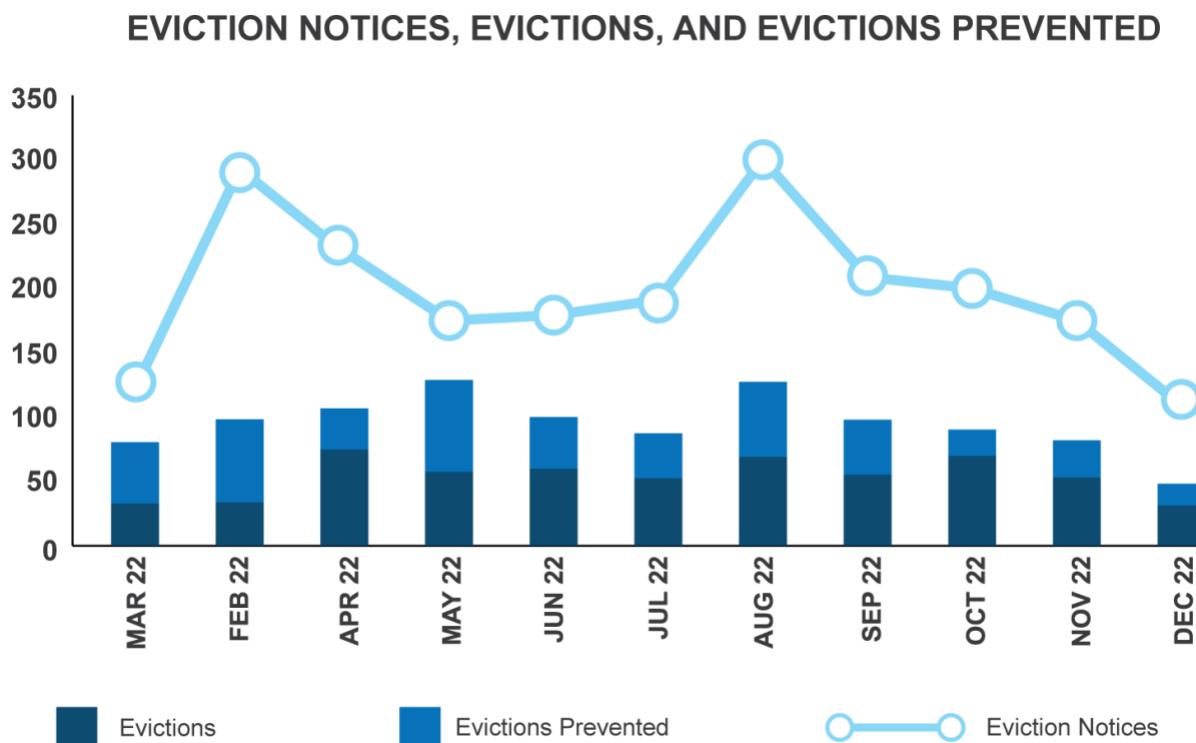
[HUD, Moving On webinar series](#)

Goal #5: Increase Housing Stability

Prevention programs that keep people in their housing are less expensive, not only for the household experiencing possible housing loss but also for public service systems.²⁰ Additionally, reducing the number of people entering homelessness reduces pressure on homeless service providers, allowing them to more effectively house and treat people and prevent people from experiencing the trauma of homelessness.

One form of preventing homelessness is primary prevention that stops people from ever having to experience homelessness. Though housing loss can happen for several reasons, eviction is a common pathway to experiencing homelessness. In Athens-Clarke County, approximately 200 evictions are filed every month, disproportionately impacting Black and Latinx tenants.²¹ Funded through ARPA, ACCGov administered an eviction prevention program during calendar year 2022 that prevented 425 evictions and distributed over \$830,000 in direct assistance. The chart below shows the number of eviction notices, evictions, and prevented evictions during this time. An additional \$900,000 in ARPA funds were allocated for a second eviction prevention program in 2023.

Figure 13: Eviction Notices, Evictions, and Prevented Evictions in Athens-Clarke County, 2022



Source: Athens Clarke-County Sheriff's Office, ACCGov ARPA Outcomes Tracker

²⁰ [National Low Income Housing Coalition](#)

²¹ According to [Athens Housing Advocacy; Eviction Prevention Program Outcomes Dashboard](#); and [Athens Community Mapping Lab](#).

As people exit homelessness and obtain housing, they may face further challenges to maintain that housing. For a variety of reasons, households may exit but then return to homelessness. Many forms of financial assistance for those exiting homelessness are temporary, leading to households needing to pay for market-rate rents with no subsidy assistance within a short period of time. In other cases, households may not have the appropriate support, such as mental health care, to be able to effectively manage a tenancy. The table below shows the proportion and number of households that exited homelessness and then became homeless again.

Table 6: Returns to Homelessness, 2018–2022

	Returns in Less Than Six Months	Returns in Six to 12 Months	Returns in 12 to 24 Months	Returns in Two Years
2018	4% (12 households)	2% (6)	5% (14)	10% (32)
2019	1% (4)	1% (4)	3% (9)	6% (17)
2020	4% (8)	1% (2)	8% (15)	13% (25)
2021	3% (17)	2% (11)	6% (32)	10% (60)
2022	4% (9)	<1% (1)	6% (13)	10% (23)

Source: HMIS System Performance Measures Report

Recommended Actions to Increase Housing Stability

The following strategies are intended to increase housing stability, reducing the number of newly homeless and households returning to homelessness.

Key Strategy #10: Establish Partnerships for Employment

Housing affordability is an issue in many communities across the country, and Athens-Clarke County is no exception. While actions need to be taken to increase the amount of affordable housing available in the community (see the [AHIS](#)), it is also important to support households to increase their income so they are able to pay for housing. This includes improving connections to well-paying jobs for people exiting homelessness.

Some people experiencing homelessness face barriers to employment. While people experiencing homelessness are not more likely to commit serious crimes than housed people,²² they are more likely to have been arrested for homelessness-related offenses, such as loitering or trespassing (see [Interactions with Law Enforcement](#) section of this document for local data). The resulting criminal record can be a barrier

²² [Washington Low Income Housing Alliance; Urban Institute; Criminality and Homeless Men.](#)

to finding quality employment. Additional barriers may include the need for training and behavioral support, access to clean clothing, and transportation.

[The Heartland Alliance](#) in Chicago is a leader in integrating CoCs with workforce programs, such as workforce boards. Based on its experience and [extensive research](#), it recommends the following to improve collaboration between CoCs and workforce programs, such as those in Athens-Clarke County:

1. Dedicate a staff person to the collaboration.

Public workforce providers and the CoC can share a dedicated point person. This person could be employed by either a CoC representative or a workforce provider. The role of this individual is to be knowledgeable about both systems and services available, thus facilitating knowledge sharing and helping people experiencing homelessness navigate employment. The staff person can also participate in shared governance, attending CoC board meetings and any workforce board meetings. The Heartland Alliance has found that, when CoCs share governance, it improves outcomes for people experiencing homelessness and benefits local businesses.²³

2. Engage in case conferencing.

Case conferencing helps build trust between partners. Formalizing partnerships with case conferencing, including defining the roles and responsibilities of each party, can help improve the service experience for job seekers experiencing homelessness. Resulting referrals and service plans could then incorporate goals related to both housing and employment. Case conferencing can highlight where there are service gaps in the community and where further partnership or investment is needed.

3. Co-locate services.

Some homeless service-employment partnerships share physical space for service delivery. For example, some American [Job Center](#) locations are also entry points for CE. Co-location of services helps improve collaboration and services, as it cuts down on the number of different locations an individual must travel to receive the care they need. For staff, it also facilitates information sharing and increases opportunities for shared learning.

HUD measures CoC performance with employment and income growth for people enrolled in CoC program-funded projects. To evaluate employment partnerships, the community may also measure:

- The proportion of people experiencing homelessness who are employed.
- The number of commitments from local employers to work with people experiencing homelessness.
- The length of tenure in employment for people experiencing homelessness.

The primary cost of employment partnerships is staff time. Staffing for these efforts may be an eligible cost under federal homeless service grants and awards.

²³ [Creating Economic Opportunities for Homeless Job Seekers.](#)

Additionally, employment agencies, such as the local workforce board or nonprofit career centers may have access to funding to provide staff for these efforts.

Additional resources for employment partnerships:

[Heartland Alliance, Systems Work Better Together: Strengthening Public Workforce & Homeless Service Systems Collaboration](#)

[Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration, Homeless Resources: Employment](#)

[HUD, Employment Strategies in Rapid Rehousing Programs](#)

In addition to facilitating employment partnerships, other actions that may increase housing stability include:

Expanding access to case management after people are housed. In some cases, intensive case management services end when people are permanently housed. Many clients expressed the desire to continue services that would support them in maintaining their housing. Tenancy support services can include goal setting to become self-sufficient, financial literacy and budgeting, assistance with school registration or other changes because of moving, classes to teach good neighbor behavior and life skills (e.g., cleaning), and support to become reintegrated into the community.

Additional tenancy support resources:

[Corporation for Supportive Housing, Tenancy Support Service Model](#)

[Tenancy Support in Three States' Medicaid Waivers](#)

[United Healthcare, Tenancy Support May Lead to Better Housing—and Health](#)

Provide access to non-emergency mental health services. Both providers and clients who shared feedback for this analysis agreed that there is access to emergency mental health services in Athens-Clarke County. However, some people noted that accessing ongoing, non-emergency services, including access to common medications to help improve mental health such as antidepressants, can be very difficult for people with low or no income. Some communities have found that providing tele-mental health services for people experiencing homelessness helps lower barriers to care and costs for providers.²⁴ Recently, ACCGov [allocated \\$4 million of ARPA funding](#) (separate from that included in this plan) to provide additional financing for the development of a Mental Health Recovery Facility (SPLOST 2020 Project 28) in the county. This facility will help address the mental and behavioral health needs of people experiencing homelessness and people with limited financial resources.

Additional mental healthcare resources:

[Counseling Today, Homelessness](#)

[American Psychological Association, Health and Homelessness](#)

Establish eviction mediation resources. As of May 2023, ACCGov has allocated a total of \$2.45M in ARPA funds to provide financial assistance to households facing, or at risk of facing, eviction through a program that is supported by findings in the [AHIS](#). In addition to financial

²⁴ [Telemental Health for Homeless Population.](#)

resources, however, some evictions may be able to be prevented through access to legal assistance or assistance mediating situations with landlords. Mediation can help landlords and tenants resolve disputes without the need to go in front of a judge. These programs are sometimes established through the courts, where an officer of the court contacts both parties within a short time after an eviction is filed. Other programs are established through low-cost legal aid networks or law schools. These programs have been shown to be effective in reducing eviction rates.²⁵

Additional eviction mediation resources:

[City Monitor, To Halt Evictions, U.S. Cities Turn to Mediation Programs](#)

[Eviction Innovation, Eviction Diversion Programs](#)

[Resolution Systems Institute, Eviction Mediation](#)

²⁵ [National Low Income Housing Coalition.](#)

Goal #6: Expand System-Wide Coordination

The National Alliance to End Homelessness states that communities should take a coordinated approach to planning and delivering housing and homeless services. This means moving from a collection of individual providers to a system of care. This should be inclusive of services that are likely to have contact with people experiencing homelessness, even if they are not traditional homeless providers, such as schools, hospitals, police officers, and other community services.

Recommended Actions to Expand System-Wide Coordination

The following strategies are intended to expand system-wide coordination, resulting in a service system that is more strategic and data-informed.

Provide public outreach and engagement opportunities. In the outreach sessions to develop this plan, many community leaders, service providers and business owners were not familiar with the work of the CoC. The CoC and member organizations should consider organizing information nights to inform the public about what local providers are doing to address homelessness and to share success stories. The information should include ways the community can support efforts to end homelessness, whether through donations, fundraising, or volunteering.

Incorporate partners outside of homeless services in system planning and case conferencing. Case conferencing with health providers, employment supports, and other services can help build holistic support for clients and reduce duplication in services and referrals. The Athens-Clarke County CoC should work to build comprehensive case conferencing for clients. These partners should also be invited to CoC meetings, helping to engage in system planning and to bring new ideas and resources to the table.

Increase data sharing opportunities. Data sharing can help service providers build a comprehensive view of what is happening with their clients. It can also identify high utilizers of multiple systems (e.g., shelter and the emergency room) to target for housing interventions, lowering costs for multiple services. Additionally, shared data can help improve system planning efforts. While building new technology systems can be costly and challenging, communities have found success with low-tech solutions. This includes providing exports to partners via HMIS, granting HMIS access to healthcare providers, and incorporating exports from other systems into local HMIS databases (e.g., exports from Veterans Affairs housing programs).

Additional data sharing resources:

[HUD, Leveraging Integrated Data to Support and Enhance COVID-19 Responses](#)

[Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy, Data Sharing in Action](#)

[Corporation for Supportive Housing, Data Sharing to End Homelessness—Challenges and Solutions](#)

Create opportunities for alignment around shared goals. Some communities create coordinated investment plans to fund goals, aligning multiple resources to fund a mutually agreed-upon housing strategy. These coordinated investments start with a goal that the community wants to accomplish together, then the community looks at how to combine multiple

funding streams to accomplish that goal. ACCGov and providers could collaborate to develop these shared goals, targeting resulting RFPs to obtain funding based on stated objectives and partnerships.

Additional coordinated investment resources:

[HUD, Rehousing and Coordinated Investment Planning Tool](#)

[HUD, Coordinated Investment Planning Case Studies](#)

[USICH, Aligning Affordable Housing Efforts with Actions to End Homelessness](#)

ARPA Allocation Plan

In order to maximize the impact of any given strategy contained in this plan, it is important that ACCGov consider implementing as many of these simultaneously or as close to simultaneously as possible. As such, based on the goals and key strategies identified in this strategic plan, ACCGov staff proposed the below allocation for local ARPA funds dedicated to homelessness. This allocation plan provides resources to support capacity building, services, and shelter to help prevent and reduce homelessness in Athens-Clarke County. This plan was developed through multiple workshops with ACCGov staff facilitated by Cloudburst to identify key priorities²⁶. These priorities were selected because they complement the focus on creating and increasing access to permanent, affordable housing. Funding amounts were estimated based on the anticipated number of people served, programmatic needs, and overhead costs. As part of the county's FY24 budget process, the ACCGov Mayor & Commission allocated \$300,000 of ARPA funding toward an "affordable housing flex fund" intended to function similarly to the proposed Support Fund to End and Prevent Homelessness (Key Strategy #8); as such, ACCGov staff does not recommend allocating additional ARPA funding toward this strategy.

ARPA funds must be obligated by December 31, 2024 and expended by December 31, 2026. The below allocations are intended to support the designated strategies through that date.

Table 7: Proposed ARPA Allocation

Strategy	Description	Funding Amount	Anticipated Components of Funding
<u>Key Strategy #1: Staff the Coalition</u>	Providing dedicated staffing for the Athens Homeless Coalition.	Year 1: \$200,000 Year 2: \$200,000 Total: \$400,000	Salary, benefits, and workstation costs (e.g., technology, space)

²⁶ Although a support fund to end and prevent homelessness was identified as a key priority in this plan, it is not included in this allocation because \$300,000 in ARPA funding has already been earmarked by the Mayor and Commission for this purpose, as part of the county's FY24 budget adoption process.

Strategy	Description	Funding Amount	Anticipated Components of Funding
<u>Key Strategy #2: Increase participation from persons with Lived Experience Engagement</u>	Dedicated committee and resources for engaging people with lived experience of homelessness.	Year 1: \$20,000 Year 2: \$10,000 Total: \$30,000	Stipends and support staff time
<u>Key Strategy #3: Improve Coordinated Entry Policy and Implementation</u>	Streamlining CE access and implementation.	Year 1: \$150,000 Year 2: \$150,000 Total: \$350,000	Salary, benefits, consulting support, training, and software upgrades
<u>Key Strategy #4: Establish Comprehensive Street Outreach</u>	Creating and implementing a comprehensive outreach plan.	Year 1: \$100,000 Year 2: \$100,000 Total: \$200,000 ²⁷	Salary, benefits, training, software upgrades, and program materials (e.g., toiletries for people experiencing homelessness)
<u>Key Strategy #5: Organize Housing Surges for Encampments</u>	Standing up a multidisciplinary team to decommission sanctioned and unsanctioned encampments through housing and shelter access.	Total: \$150,000	Salary, benefits, and move-in assistance for people experiencing homelessness
<u>Key Strategy #6: Increase Low-Barrier Shelter Units</u>	Funds for the creation, expansion, or rehabilitation of low-barrier emergency shelter.	Total: \$2,200,000	Acquisition, rehabilitation, modifying existing space, staffing, and other shelter operations costs (e.g., acquisition & modification of a hotel, etc.)

²⁷ As part of the FY24 Annual Operating & Capital Budget, the Mayor and Commission allocated a total of \$130,000 funds (\$100,000 increase from FY23) for an existing street outreach managed by a single local agency. These \$200,000 are additional ARPA funds intended to expand the program for new providers and support cross-agency collaboration.

Strategy	Description	Funding Amount	Anticipated Components of Funding
<u>Key Strategy #7: Implement Diversion and Rapid Exit</u>	Funds to support intensive case management techniques.	Year 1: \$100,000 Year 2: \$100,000 Total: \$200,000	Salary, benefits, and training
<u>Key Strategy #9: Engage in Landlord-Focused Initiatives</u>	Funds to increase engagement and unit commitment from landlords and property managers.	Year 1: \$160,000 Year 2: \$80,000 Total: \$240,000	Salary, benefits, incentives, and risk funds paid directly to landlords
<u>Key Strategy #10: Establish Partnerships for Employment</u>	Engagement with local employers and business owners to provide employment opportunities for people experiencing homelessness.	Year 1: \$120,000 Year 2: \$75,000 Total: \$195,000	Salary, benefits, training, and incentives paid directly to employers
All other strategies	Open funds to support other actions and priorities identified in this plan.	Total: \$500,000	Costs will vary depending on the strategy.

Tracking Progress

This plan outlines an ambitious set of strategies to reduce homelessness in Athens-Clarke County. Implementing this plan will require strong partnerships between ACCGov, service providers, other public services (e.g., hospitals), and the community at large. In order to communicate clearly about progress made on this plan, ACCGov and the ARPA Homelessness Advisory Committee should collaborate on a system of tracking, reviewing, and reporting the outcomes of this plan. This is important to:

1. Have transparent accountability regarding the status of the plan.
2. Understand the impact of these strategies and make implementation corrections if necessary.
3. Identify areas of investment for the community to match to potentially available resources.

Tracking and reporting should include both implementation and outcomes. Each is described further in the sections below.

Implementation Tracking

A public dashboard should show the status of each strategy in this plan. One approach to tracking implementation is a red/yellow/green dashboard to show the progress toward implementing specific goals. Each strategy could be broken down into action steps, with each step given a color for current status: green for work being started and on track, yellow for still on track but experiencing barriers, and red for not on track and possibly needing course correction. An example of a red/yellow/green dashboard is below.

Table 8. Sample Implementation Dashboard

Strategy: Establish a Lived Experience Committee				
Action Step	Action Needed	Target Completion Date	Status	Notes
Recruit members for the committee	Distribute flyers to agencies to inform clients of opportunities	2/15/2024		Flyer has been approved by committee and is being printed.

Outcome Tracking

Except for [Key Strategy #1: Staff the Coalition](#), each of the key strategies includes suggested metrics for tracking key actions and short-term changes as well as related performance measures (as defined by HUD) that should improve in the long term because of implementation. The table below summarizes these metrics and measures for each strategy.

Table 9. Key Strategy Metrics and Measures

Strategy	Suggested Metrics	Related Performance Measures
<u>Key Strategy 2: Increase Participation from People with Lived Experience</u>	<p>Number of people engaged for participation.</p> <p>Number of people expressing interest.</p> <p>Number of orientation conversations held with potential participants.</p>	<p><u>CE system performance</u>.</p> <p>Other locally identified domains for the committee.</p>
<u>Key Strategy #3: Improve Coordinated Entry Policy and Implementation</u>	<p>Number of people assessed in CE.</p> <p>Distribution of CE assessment scores among different populations (e.g., race equity, people with disabilities).</p>	<p><u>CE system performance</u>.</p> <p>Exits to permanent housing.</p> <p>Length of time homeless.</p>
<u>Key Strategy 4: Establish Comprehensive Street Outreach</u>	<p>Number of people served each month.</p> <p>Number of people connected to services (e.g., mental or behavioral health).</p>	<p>Successful street outreach program exits.</p>
<u>Key Strategy #5: Organize Housing Surges for Encampments</u>	<p>Number of people connected to CE.</p> <p>Number of housing units identified.</p> <p>Number of people experiencing homelessness engaged.</p>	<p>Number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.</p> <p>Total number of people experiencing homelessness.</p> <p>Exits to permanent housing.</p>
<u>Key Strategy #6: Increase Low Barrier Shelter Units</u>	<p>Number of people living in encampments who are moved to shelter or transitional housing.</p> <p>Number of people in shelter.</p> <p>Length of time in shelter before housing.</p>	<p>Number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.</p>
<u>Key Strategy #7: Implement Diversion and Rapid Exit</u>	<p>Number of people banned from shelter.</p> <p>Percentage of all people seeking services who are diverted.</p> <p>Percentage of households who divert and do not return to homelessness in 30, 60, and 90 days.</p>	<p>Number of people experiencing homelessness for the first time.</p>
<u>Key Strategy #8: Create a Support Fund to End and</u>	<p>Average number of days in shelter following the diversion interaction.</p> <p>Average number of days engaged in diversion.</p> <p>Number of community partners.</p>	<p>Exits to permanent housing.</p>

Strategy	Suggested Metrics	Related Performance Measures
<u>Prevent Homelessness</u>	Number of households served. Support funds distributed.	Returns to homelessness.
<u>Key Strategy #9: Engage in Landlord Focused Initiatives</u>	Number of landlords engaged. Number of units committed. Risk mitigation funds distributed.	Exits to permanent housing.
<u>Key Strategy #10: Establish Partnerships for Employment</u>	The proportion of people experiencing homelessness who are employed. The number of commitments from local employers to work with people experiencing homelessness. Length of tenure in employment for people experiencing homelessness.	Income and employment growth.

The outcome measures of the implemented strategies should also be tracked, with ACCGov and the ARPA Homelessness Advisory Committee reviewing a dashboard and discussing these at least quarterly. The following measures should be tracked for the overall impact of the plan's implementation. These are broadly consistent with HUD's [System Performance Measures](#) for CoCs:

- Length of time persons remain homeless, measured from the date of first program entry to the date of permanent housing.
 - Capture both average and median time.
- Returns to homelessness, defined as an individual or household exiting to permanent housing and later losing housing and seeking homelessness services.
 - Capture within six months, six to 12 months, 13 to 23 months, and two years.
- Total number of people experiencing homelessness.
 - Measured by enrollments in HMIS and the PIT count.
- Employment and income growth for people experiencing homelessness, which would include both paid employment and enrollment in benefit programs (e.g., disability income).
- Number of people who experience homelessness for the first time.
 - Based on self-reported data within HMIS.
- Successful placements from programs, with an emphasis on exits to permanent housing.

Appendices

Appendix A: Client Interview Summary

Between January 18 and January 20, 2023, ACCGov staff and consultants conducted interviews with 20 people who were experiencing homelessness or housing instability, including those recently housed from a homeless situation. ACCGov made strong efforts to recruit diverse participants, representing people of different demographics, family compositions, backgrounds, and needs (e.g., disabling conditions), including those who had been both sheltered and unsheltered. Participants were compensated with a \$20 gift card for their time. The following were common themes across the interviews as they relate to strategic plan goals.

Experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Approximately half of the interviewees were currently unsheltered, though more had experienced unsheltered homelessness. This experience was marked by avoiding detection from police, others who might report them, and even other people experiencing homelessness. Interviewees noted that being found could lead to citation, victimization, or the need to move to a new area. Interviewees staying in vehicles looked for safe places to park overnight, while those living unsheltered generally camped outdoors. Camping posed numerous challenges and safety risks, but when individuals were unable to access shelter, it was their only option. Interviewees reported positive experiences with outreach workers and the day service center, though noted there was not enough outreach to cover everyone or their full spectrum of needs. The sanctioned encampment was viewed by many as a positive alternative to living outdoors in other unsanctioned encampments.

Access to shelter and transitional housing. Many interviewees had difficulty finding shelter or emergency housing options (e.g., motels paid for by an agency). They frequently reported having to call numerous places numerous times to find an opening in a program and doing this navigation work without the assistance of any case manager. Some people waited months for a shelter bed to become available, often living unsheltered or in places not meant for human habitation in the meantime. Interviewees agreed there should be more emergency housing in Athens-Clarke County, shelters should be available all day, and shelters should not have strict entry and exit times to accommodate work schedules.

Not all shelter was considered ideal or acceptable. Some interviewees did not stay in the larger congregate shelters because those facilities were viewed as unsafe, and some people who did attend these types of facilities were harmed while in them. Interviewees also felt access to shelter should be more coordinated. Calling to try to obtain one of the spots for the night was prohibitive for those with limited phone plans (i.e., their phone had run out of minutes), and the call-in and entry times sometimes conflicted with people's work or school schedules.

Access to permanent housing. Affordable housing was most often the top need expressed by interviewees, and all of the interviewees stated that there was a shortage of affordable housing in the Athens area. Interviewees had difficulty navigating this tight housing market, which they were often doing without the support of case managers. Three interviewees currently had housing vouchers and were looking for housing, and an additional two interviewees had housing move-in dates for specific units. These individuals remarked that it was very difficult to find acceptable housing within their voucher or subsidy amount, that many landlords did not accept financial assistance, and that locating housing often meant leaving Athens-Clarke County. While leaving was an option for some people, those without transportation or with children attending Athens-Clarke County schools were more reluctant to explore options in other counties.

Additionally, some interviewees noted that high application fees were a barrier. If applicants were not admitted to the housing unit, these fees were not reimbursed. Two interviewees experienced situations where they were allowed to submit an application, paid a fee, and were then informed that they did not meet the criteria for the unit, a situation that could have been avoided by the landlord clearly stating the required credit score and income for the unit.

Housing stability. Interviewees often stated they wanted to participate in services to obtain or maintain housing and spoke highly of the services they were able to access. Many interviewees were accessing medical care, both emergency and primary care, and were satisfied with the services they received from local hospitals. Only one interviewee reported difficulties accessing Medicaid or indigent medical services. The most frequently requested supportive service was ongoing mental health services. Crisis services could be accessed through various programs, but there were few options for those who did not have acute conditions. Individuals unable to connect to ongoing mental health services were often experiencing depression and anxiety, in many cases directly related to their homelessness, and had few options for regular counseling and support. While many interviewees were working, these jobs were not paying enough to meaningfully improve their living situation or pay for their own services out of pocket. Interviewees suggested ACCGov increase investment in work partnerships that would lead to above-minimum-wage employment.

Table 10: Interview Participant Demographics

Interviewee	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Household Type	Employment Status	Housing Situation
1	Transgender woman	Black	Single adult	Part-time	Unsheltered
2	Woman	Black	Single adult	Unemployed	Unsheltered
3	Woman	Black	Single adult	Unemployed	Unsheltered
4	Man	Hispanic	Single adult	Full-time	Unsheltered
5	Man	White	Single adult	Full-time	Unsheltered
6	Man	White	Adults & children	Unemployed	Unsheltered
7	Woman	White	Adults & children	Full-time	Unsheltered
8	Woman	White	Adults & children	Unemployed	Sheltered
9	Woman	Black	Adults & children	Unemployed	Housed & at risk
10	Woman	Black	Adults & children	Full-time student	Sheltered
11	Woman	Black	Adults & children	Full-time student	Sheltered
12	Woman	Black	Adults & children	Full-time	Sheltered
13	Woman	Black	Adults & children	Full-time	Sheltered
14	Woman	White	Adults & children	Full-time	Sheltered
15	Woman	White	Adults only	Unemployed	Recently housed

16	Man	White	Adults only	Unemployed	Recently housed
17	Man	Black	Single adult	Unemployed	Unsheltered
18	Woman	Black	Single adult	Unemployed	Recently housed
19	Woman	White	Single adult	Unemployed	Recently housed
20	Man	Black	Single adult	Unemployed	Recently housed

Appendix B: Provider Interview Summary

Between March 28 and May 8, 2023, consultants conducted virtual interviews with representatives from 20 providers in Athens. Interviews were approximately one hour long and discussed unsheltered and sheltered homelessness, permanent housing, and services and support. Individuals were selected for the interviews based on their previous participation in stakeholder conversations and their work with people experiencing homelessness. A variety of individuals were interviewed, including housing providers, behavioral and medical professionals, staff who provide educational services, and business owners. The following were common themes across the interviews as they relate to strategic plan goals.

Table 11. Organizations Participating in Provider Interviews

Organization	Type
Athens Area Homeless Shelter	Homeless services
Advantage Behavioral Health Services	Health and Homeless Services
The Ark	Homeless services
Athens Alliance Coalition (First Step encampment)	Homeless services
Athens-Clarke County Library	Public entity
Athens Housing Authority	Public entity
Athens Nurses Clinic	Health
Bigger Vision of Athens	Homeless services
Chamber of Commerce	Other non-profit
The Cottage	Victim service provider
Family Promise	Homeless services
Goodwill of North Georgia	Other non-profit
Local college	Public entity
Local high school	Public entity
Local university	Public entity
Lydia's Place	Victim service provider
Project Safe	Victim service provider
Safe D Athens, Inc.	Other non-profit
The Salvation Army	Homeless services
The Sparrow's Nest	Homeless services

Funding Availability

Providers reported a variety of funding utilized to pay for services and activities. Housing providers often had a mix of state and federal government funds, private donations, and money received via grants from foundations. Some agencies that provided services to a distinct group of people (such as youth) only used private funds. Respondents discussed frustrations with funding, as it was often difficult to understand what federal funds were available and applicable to their work, and the application process was unclear and arduous. Those who received government funding desired less bureaucracy to gain access to federal funds received. Several respondents stated that there were delays with ACCGov's timely execution of contracts and receipt of reimbursement of funds, which may have partially been in response to untimely submissions of documentation by grantees.

Street Outreach

Respondents discussed the benefits and need for robust street outreach in Athens-Clarke County. However, there were several concerns with current street outreach delivery. When asked, most social support service providers were unfamiliar with the details regarding street outreach, were not sure who to contact, could not provide details regarding street outreach, and did not know who to contact about outreach. Other providers more in tune with outreach efforts indicated that the current number of case providers available to conduct street outreach did not meet the demand for outreach. Providers also mentioned that the lack of staff capacity could be partially addressed if more than one organization conducted street outreach, as is currently the case.

Access to Shelter and Transitional Housing

When asked about current issues with shelters in Athens-Clarke County, the majority of respondents discussed the need for more—more space, more housing, and more staff. One provider discussed how temporarily housing people in hotels was cost-prohibitive and suggested, as one possible solution, that the county purchase a hotel for the provision of non-congregate shelter at a free or reduced rate. All respondents also stated that, given the specific needs of survivors of human trafficking or domestic violence, separate shelters should be provided to increase a sense of safety and security.

Respondents believed the need for non-congregate shelters was preferable to congregate shelter, as it afforded more privacy and protection, particularly for families and youth. One exception to this noted by a respondent was for individuals with substance use issues. In that case, they suggested that a congregate shelter would be preferable, as it allowed for more client oversight. Respondents did acknowledge that non-congregate shelter is a more costly option than congregate shelter and requires a bigger footprint to serve the same number of people, but respondents also believed that the benefits outweigh that.

While most providers indicated additional transitional housing would be a benefit, several cons were discussed. One provider believed that transitional housing was not always well taken care of and could be an eyesore and, therefore, was concerned about the effects on the surrounding community. The way to mitigate these concerns would be to ensure the property management company took appropriate care.

Providers interviewed had mixed opinions on the sanctioned encampment in Athens-Clarke County that has been operating since 2022. Many providers acknowledged that the encampment is serving a helpful purpose in that individuals are provided a stable location to

have a tent. However, many providers also noted that living in a tent is not a viable long-term solution, and efforts and funding should be focused on affordable housing. Other concerns with the encampment included the current management agency, safety, a need for heat during colder months, and a lack of bathroom facilities on site.

Access to Permanent Housing

Every service provider interviewed discussed the lack of available affordable permanent housing in Athens-Clarke County. Providers explained that the lack of affordable housing is due to low stock, which they believe is partly caused by landlords' unwillingness to work with government programs. More than one provider stated that some landlords have had negative experiences with some local agencies that created hesitation to continue working with them or other service providers. Multiple providers discussed the use of landlord financial incentives to encourage cooperation and collaboration with local agencies. Incentives may include paying for housing up front, paying a higher deposit, or paying late fees as incurred. Other providers also discussed the importance of personal relationships with landlords to successfully house individuals experiencing homelessness.

Supportive Services

Multiple providers indicated that there is a need for expanded behavioral health and mental health services. One provider suggested the expansion of services to include other agencies, and other providers acknowledged that mental illness creates instability in multiple ways, including employment and relationships that can then influence housing access.

Providers had many other suggestions for expanded or new social support services, including general funds for people experiencing homelessness that can be put toward a security deposit or other monetary needs that would help prevent future homelessness. Others suggested supportive services included teaching life skills, such as ways to improve a credit score, eviction assistance, and childcare assistance either via funding or the development of a separate childcare center.

When asked what ACCGov could do to support people experiencing homelessness, the most frequently mentioned service was transportation. Providers encouraged ACCGov to keep public transportation affordable and accessible. If possible, it would be ideal to expand bus hours and routes to better support shift workers and provide transportation to all parts of the county.²⁸ Other suggestions for ACCGov included support for job training programs and increasing the minimum wage, potentially by providing a subsidy. Finally, one individual proposed developing a paid staff position on the Homeless Coalition to support coordination and collaboration between service providers. That individual could be a central source of information for providers and the community. One individual interviewed also suggested that ACCGov provide an incentive for local businesses or landlords to encourage their engagement with people experiencing homelessness.

Communication and Coordination of Services

Several providers interviewed stated that, while they know Athens-Clarke County has many different services available to support people experiencing homelessness, they were unsure of

²⁸ Notable areas of Athens-Clarke County not currently served by the [Athens-Clarke County Transit System](#) include the Atlanta Highway west of the mall, the Caterpillar plant, US 441 north of town, Tallasseee Rd, a large swath of the southeastern portion of the county, and most of Timothy Road.

all the services available and were unaware of one central location to access that information. There was a belief among these providers that knowledge of available services was held by an individual within an agency rather than organizational networking. Some providers believed there was an overlap of services being provided, particularly around food opportunities, and that there was a lack of communication and coordination between service providers.

Housing and shelter providers seemed to have a better understanding of the services available to people experiencing homelessness as they work to connect individuals with needed services; however, several supportive service providers were unaware of the gamut of services available. One service provider mentioned a shared database that is voluntarily used to track clients (with their consent) and ensures people receive all needed services. This database was not mentioned by all providers interviewed and it is not an official tracking system for the county or CoC.

Regarding service access by individuals experiencing homelessness, several providers stated that individuals relied on word of mouth to gain an understanding of where they could go to access needed services.

Appendix C: Business Survey

There were 240 total responses to the business survey, representing all business sectors and geographic areas of Athens. The goal of this survey was to understand how homelessness was impacting the business community and what partnerships may be possible to help reduce the impact of homelessness. The survey was administered by ACCGov and distributed throughout Athens-Clarke County via email blasts to local business owners and managers, the county website, and on social media. ACCGov also partnered with business leaders to encourage their network to respond.

The results of this survey show that the business community frequently comes in contact with people experiencing homelessness and many businesses are investing effort in trying to help people. Sometimes, businesses need to call for help when people experiencing homelessness are being disruptive to their business activities or appear to be experiencing an emergency. In these cases, businesses are most likely to call the police. Many businesses are not engaging with homeless service providers, often because they do not know how. Most respondents reported being open to partnering with homeless service providers and learning more about how they can best serve the Athens community. The full results of the survey are in the tables below.

Q1. Where is your establishment located?

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Atlanta Highway Corridor	24	10.04%
Baxter Street/Alps Road/Beech	11	4.60%
Boulevard/Chase Street Warehouse	8	3.35%
Downtown Athens	80	33.47%
East Athens—Triangle Plaza	2	0.84%
Eastside Athens—Gaines School	12	5.02%
Five Points	13	5.44%
Highway 129/Jefferson Road	4	1.67%
Highway 29/Hull Road/Danielsville	5	2.09%
Lexington Road Corridor	3	1.26%
Newton Bridge Road	3	1.26%
North Avenue	3	1.26%
Prince Avenue/Normaltown	36	15.06%
West Broad Street	9	3.77%
Winterville	1	0.42%

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Other	25	10.46%

Q2. What type of establishment do you operate?

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Accommodation and Food Services	15	6.28%
Administrative Support, Waste Management	3	1.26%
Agriculture, Fishing, Hunting	2	0.84%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	9	3.77%
Construction	9	3.77%
Educational Services	7	2.93%
Finance and Insurance	16	6.69%
Healthcare and Social Services	17	7.11%
Information	1	0.42%
Management of Companies and Ent	3	1.26%
Manufacturing	3	1.26%
Other	27	11.30%
Professional, Scientific	22	9.21%
Public Administration	1	0.42%
Real Estate, Rental, and Leasing	24	10.04%
Retail Trade	71	29.71%
Transportation and Warehousing	4	1.67%
Utilities	5	2.09%

Q3. What is your role within the business?

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Owner	148	61.67%
Manager	53	22.08%
Other Employee	39	16.25%

Q4. On average, how many days per week are you physically present at your business?

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
1–2 days	14	5.83%
3–4 days	39	16.25%
5 or more days	183	76.25%
Less than once a week	4	1.67%

Q5. How long have you owned, managed, or worked at the business?

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
1–2 years	26	10.83%
3–4 years	37	15.42%
5 or more years	163	67.92%
Less than one year	14	5.83%

Q6. How often do people experiencing homelessness come inside or near your place of business?

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Daily	125	52.30%
A few times a week	47	19.67%
Once a week	18	7.53%
At least once a month	22	9.21%
Every few months	14	5.86%
Never	13	5.44%

Q7. How often do you interact with people experiencing homelessness inside or near your place of business?

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Daily	75	31.51%
A few times a week	64	26.89%
Once a week	33	13.87%
At least once a month	21	8.82%
Every few months	24	10.08%
Never	21	8.82%

Q8. In the last 12 months, have you had an encounter with someone experiencing homelessness that required you to call for assistance? This may include a health emergency or a safety issue.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
No	118	49.17%
Yes	122	50.83%

Q8a. When you needed assistance with someone experiencing homelessness, who did you call? Select all that apply.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Police	106	86.89%
Hospitals or Medical Personnel	10	8.20%
Homeless Service Providers/Outreach Teams	8	6.56%
Other	10	8.20%

Q8b. How helpful was your experience with...

Response	Number of Respondents (Very Helpful/Somewhat Helpful)	Percentage of Respondents (Very Helpful/Somewhat Helpful)
Police	75	70.75%
Hospitals or Medical Personnel	7	70%
Homeless Service Providers/Outreach Teams	5	62.5%

Q8c. How satisfied are you with homeless services and outreach teams' response to homelessness in the area of your business?

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Very satisfied	2	25.00%
Somewhat satisfied	5	62.50%
Very unsatisfied	1	12.50%

Q8d. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Homeless services and outreach teams...

Response	Number of Respondents (Strongly Agree/Agree)	Percentage of Respondents (Strongly Agree/Agree)
...are able to respond promptly to my requests	3	37.5%
...connect people experiencing homelessness to the resources they need	2	25%
...help me understand the resources available to my organization to help address homelessness	4	50%

Q9. Have you ever contacted the homeless service system about someone experiencing homelessness at your place of business, for a non-health emergency or safety issue?

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
No	205	85.42%
Yes	35	14.58%

Q9a. What happened as a result of this contact?

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
I called but was never connected to anyone	5	14.29%
Nothing happened as a result of this contact	5	14.29%
Person in need was connected to services	11	31.43%
Person in need left my business	10	28.57%

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Unsure	4	11.43%

Q9b. Why have you never contacted the homeless service system about someone experiencing homelessness at your place of business? Select all that apply.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
I do not think they would help	25	12.25%
I don't know who to contact	99	48.53%
No emergency services offered	5	2.45%
Person experiencing homelessness doesn't want to engage with service providers	26	12.75%
I haven't needed to contact anyone	45	22.06%
Other	16	7.8%

Q10. Has your business offered direct assistance to people experiencing homelessness (i.e., not through a provider)?

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
No	145	60.67%
Yes, currently	39	16.32%
Yes, in the past	55	23.01%

Q11. Has your business partnered with local providers to assist people experiencing homelessness in the community?

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents

No	167	70.17%
Yes, currently	37	15.55%
Yes, in the past	34	14.29%

Q12. Would you be willing to continue to or to start a partnership with local providers to address homelessness in the community?

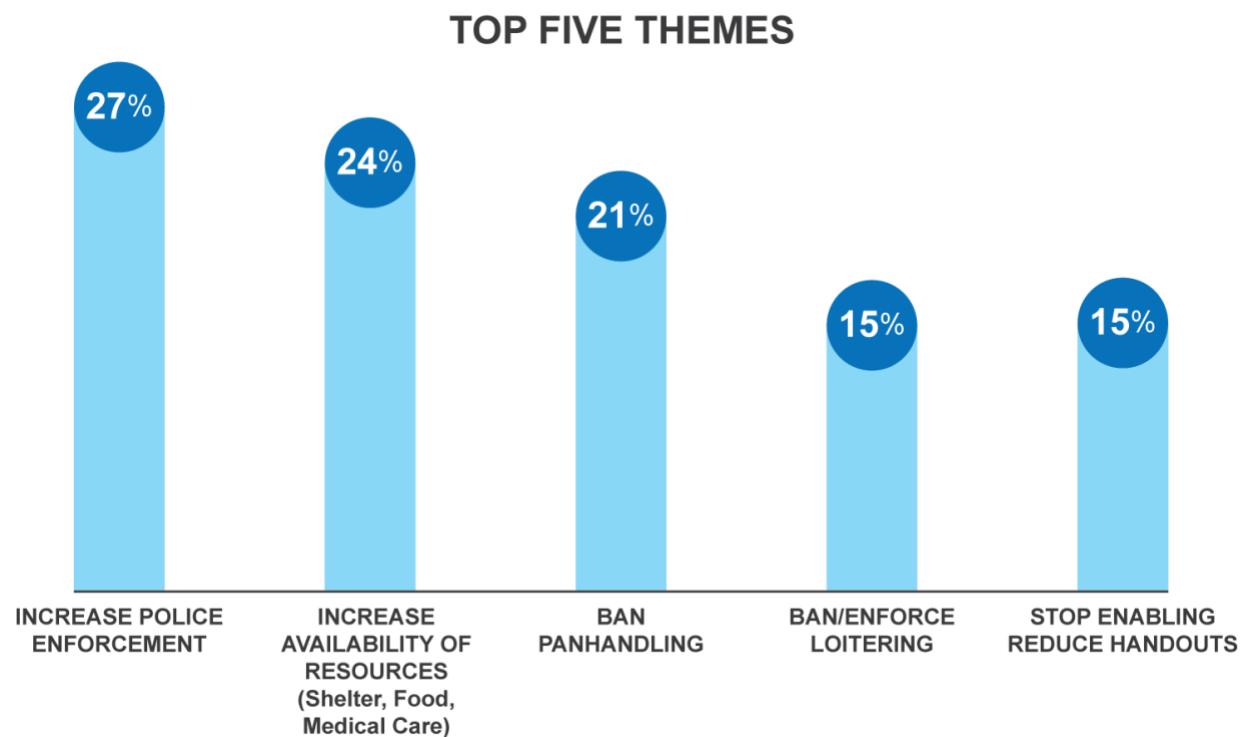
Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Maybe	89	37.71%
No	87	36.86%
Yes	60	25.42%

Q12a. How would you like to partner with local providers to address homelessness in the community?

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Make financial donations to providers	34	23.78%
Donate meals or other services to providers	39	27.27%
Learn more about the issue of homelessness, including root causes	53	37.06%
Learn more about resources available to help my establishment address homelessness	100	69.93%
Other	12	8.39%

Q13. Do you have any suggestions on how ACCGov and the community at large could support your business in addressing homeless issues in the community?

Categorized themes from responses:



Appendix D: Student Survey

Students are an important part of the Athens-Clarke County community. During the community listening sessions, participants representing the public school system and institutions of higher education stated that many students experience housing insecurity and homelessness. To capture those perspectives, ACCGov administered a survey for students 18 years and older, which received 60 total responses.

Findings from the survey indicate that many students do experience housing insecurity in Athens-Clarke County. This is most commonly due to rising rental prices. When students experience a housing crisis, they most often turn to friends and family for support. Few engage with local service providers, meaning student needs may be underrepresented in local homelessness data. The full results of the survey are below.

Q1. Are you at least 18 years old?

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	59	100%

Q2. Are you currently enrolled in school?

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	53	92.98%
No	4	7.02%

Q3. Are you experiencing homelessness or housing instability?

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
No	37	69.81%
Yes	16	30.19%

Q4. Have you experienced a housing crisis in the past year? This may include being evicted, being asked to leave, or being unable to pay rent.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
No	44	83.02%
Yes	9	16.98%

Q4a. What led to this housing crisis? Select all that apply.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Conflict with the landlord	2	22.22%
Conflict with someone else	3	33.33%
Loss of income	2	22.22%
Could not afford rent increase	4	44.44%
Damage to the property (e.g., fire or flood)	1	11.11%

Q5. What is your current housing situation?

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Living in university housing	5	9.43%
Renting off-campus apartment or house by myself	10	18.87%
Renting off-campus apartment with others	31	58.49%
Staying in my car or outside	2	3.77%
Staying with friends or family	3	5.66%
Other	2	3.77%

Q6. How long has this been your living situation?

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
1–3 months	1	1.89%
3–6 months	3	5.66%
6–12 months	16	30.19%
More than 1 year	33	62.26%

Q7. When was the last time you had a permanent place to live?

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Less than 1 month ago	1	1.89%
3–6 months ago	1	1.89%
6–12 months ago	1	1.89%
More than 1 year ago	6	11.32%
I have always had a permanent place to live	44	83.02%

Q8. When you have experienced housing issues, who would you contact for help? Select all that apply.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Friends or family	18	33.96%
Campus resource	5	9.43%
Local government	1	1.89%
Local service provider or nonprofit	5	9.43%
Faith community	2	3.77%
Online (e.g., GoFundMe)	4	7.55%
I have not experienced a housing issue	33	62.26%

Q9. Have you experienced gender-based violence?

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
No	37	69.81%
Prefer not to answer	3	5.66%
Yes	13	24.53%

Q9a. Was this experience related to your housing situation?

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
No	9	69.23%
Prefer not to answer	1	7.69%
Yes	3	23.08%

Appendix E: Provider Survey

Based on the draft goals and strategies of this plan, a survey was created by ACCGov and Cloudburst to allow for feedback from local service providers prior to the draft being finalized. The survey received 27 responses and was distributed by ACCGov. Overall, the top priorities identified by providers closely reflect the key strategies included in this plan. The text notes the places where providers prioritized an item higher than what is reflected in the plan. Points of deviation are limited to the development of site-based PSH (which is a focus of the [HOME-ARP allocation plan](#)), independent management of the CoC (which is supported by this plan, though as a subsequent step to staffing and other capacity building priorities), and access to non-emergency mental health services (which is already funded by ARPA through other initiatives).

Q1. Are you or the agency you are employed with currently a member of the Continuum of Care?

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
No	14	56.00%
Yes	11	44.00%

Q2. Thinking about how to strengthen the capacity of the Continuum of Care, which of these strategies would be the most important?

Strategy	Rank	Average Score (out of 7)
Dedicated staffing for the Athens Homeless Coalition	1	5.91
Engagement and participation of people with lived experience in the Continuum	2	5.18
Taking steps to support an independent nonprofit community that manages the continuum of care	3	4.73
Improving coordinated entry policy and implementation	4	3.82
Training for Continuum of Care board members and ACCGov	5	3.36
Strengthening Continuum of Care governance	6	2.64
Creating written standards for every program	7	2.36

Strategy	Percentage of Respondents (n=11)						
	Ranked #1	Ranked #2	Ranked #3	Ranked #4	Ranked #5	Ranked #6	Ranked #7
Dedicated staffing for the Athens Homeless Coalition	54.55%	18.18%	9.09%	9.09%	0%	9.09%	0%
Engagement and participation of people with lived experience in the Continuum	18.18%	27.27%	36.36%	0%	9.09%	9.09%	0%
Taking steps to support an independent nonprofit community that manages the continuum of care	18.18%	18.18%	27.27%	9.09%	18.18%	0%	9.09%
Improving coordinated entry policy and implementation	9.09%	18.18%	9.09%	18.18%	9.09%	27.27%	9.09%
Training for Continuum of Care board members and ACCGov	0%	9.09%	18.18%	27.27%	0%	36.36%	9.09%
Strengthening Continuum of Care governance	0%	9.09%	0%	9.09%	36.36%	18.18%	27.27%
Creating written standards for every program	0%	0%	0%	27.27%	27.27%	0%	45.45%

Q3. Thinking about how to ease unsheltered homelessness, which of these strategies would be the most important?

Strategy	Rank	Average Score (out of 4)
A housing surge for people living in encampments (including unsanctioned encampments)	1	3.08
Implementing a comprehensive street outreach program	2	2.84
Developing an inclement weather policy	3	2.04
Creating personal property storage for unsheltered people	4	2.04

Strategy	Percentage of Respondents (n=25)			
	Ranked #1	Ranked #2	Ranked #3	Ranked #4
A housing surge for people living in encampments (including unsanctioned encampments)	40%	36%	16%	8%
Implementing a comprehensive street outreach program	36%	28%	20%	16%
Developing an inclement weather policy	16%	12%	32%	40%
Creating personal property storage for unsheltered people	8%	24%	32%	36%

Q4. Thinking about how to improve shelter and transitional housing programs, which of these strategies would be the most important?

Strategy	Rank	Average Score (out of 4)
Create or convert a non-congregate shelter facility	1	3.12
Coordinate shelter access across providers	2	2.52
Establish low-barrier shelter policies	3	2.24
Implement diversion and rapid exit programs	4	2.12

Strategy	Percentage of Respondents (n=25)			
	Ranked #1	Ranked #2	Ranked #3	Ranked #4
Create or convert a non-congregate shelter facility	40%	36%	20%	4%
Coordinate shelter access across providers	24%	24%	32%	20%
Establish low-barrier shelter policies	12%	28%	32%	28%
Implement diversion and rapid exit programs	24%	12%	16%	48%

Q5. Thinking about how to increase access to permanent housing for people exiting or at risk of homelessness, which of these strategies would be the most important?

Strategy	Rank	Average Score (out of 6)
Developing site-based permanent supportive housing	1	4.30
Establishing a flexible housing fund	2	3.93
Implementing landlord engagement strategies and risk mitigation resources	3	3.56
Creating comprehensive housing navigation across providers	4	3.41
Establishing a “Moving On” program for people currently living in permanent supportive housing or other long-term scattered-site homeless housing programs to access a Housing Choice Voucher.	5	3.04
Establishing a homeless preference for available housing vouchers and subsidies.	6	2.78

Strategy	Percentage of Respondents (n=27)					
	Ranked #1	Ranked #2	Ranked #3	Ranked #4	Ranked #5	Ranked #6
Developing site-based permanent supportive housing	29.63%	18.52%	22.22%	18.52%	3.7%	7.41%
Establishing a flexible housing fund	25.93%	14.81%	22.22%	11.11%	14.81%	11.11%
Implementing landlord engagement strategies and risk mitigation resources	11.11%	22.22%	22.22%	14.81%	14.81%	14.81%

mitigation resources						
Creating comprehensive housing navigation across providers	22.22%	14.81%	3.7%	22.22%	14.81%	22.22%
Establishing a “Moving On” program for people currently living in permanent supportive housing or other long-term scattered-site homeless housing programs to access a Housing Choice Voucher.	3.7%	14.81%	18.52%	22.22%	25.93%	14.81%
Establishing a homeless preference for available housing vouchers and subsidies.	7.41%	14.81%	11.11%	11.11%	25.93%	29.63%

Q6. Thinking about how to increase housing stability for people exiting or at-risk of homelessness, which of these strategies would be the most important?

Strategy	Rank	Average Score (out of 4)
Establish employment programs for people experiencing homelessness to increase job opportunities and stability	1	2.80
Provide access to non-emergency mental health services	2	2.60
Expand case management for people who are housed	3	2.40
Establish eviction mediation processes	4	2.16

Strategy	Percentage of Respondents (n=25)			
	Ranked #1	Ranked #2	Ranked #3	Ranked #4
Establish employment programs for people experiencing homelessness to increase job opportunities and stability	32%	28%	28%	12%
Provide access to non-emergency mental health services	32%	24%	16%	28%
Expand case management for people who are housed	16%	32%	32%	20%
Establish eviction mediation processes	20%	16%	24%	40%

Appendix F: Listening Sessions

ACCGov organized eight listening sessions for this strategic plan, four of which overlapped with outreach for the [HOME-ARP allocation plan](#). Each session was designed for a specific type of stakeholder (e.g., homeless service providers, non-health supportive service providers). In total, more than 30 stakeholders from the Athens-Clarke County community attended these focused sessions. The themes from these sessions are described below.

Table 11. Listening Session Dates and Audiences

Date	Audience	Purpose
January 18, 2023	Homeless service providers	HOME-ARP & Homelessness Strategic Plan
January 18, 2023	Non-health support services	HOME-ARP & Homelessness Strategic Plan
January 18, 2023	Victim service providers	HOME-ARP & Homelessness Strategic Plan
January 19, 2023	Health support services	HOME-ARP & Homelessness Strategic Plan
February 28, 2023	Faith-based and low-barrier providers	Homelessness Strategic Plan
March 7, 2023	Student support and educators	Homelessness Strategic Plan
March 8, 2023	Local businesses	Homelessness Strategic Plan
March 17, 2023	Neighborhood associations	Homelessness Strategic Plan

Need for Affordable Housing

Participants unanimously agreed there is a great need for affordable housing. Providers additionally noted that these units should be available based on a sliding scale to accommodate different levels of affordability for different households. Many participants described a broad need for housing cost relief, as both rents and homeownership costs (e.g., property tax) have risen, leading to housing crises even for those with steady incomes. Student representatives added that rising housing costs have pushed families outside of the Clarke-County School District, resulting in a need for children's education and activities to switch schools and leading to increased need among college students who are experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity.

Need for Additional Shelter

Shelter operators who participated in the listening sessions stated that they operate on a constant waitlist and never have enough beds or resources to meet the number of requests received. Service providers noted a need for additional low-barrier shelters in the community, expressing support for models that provide intensive case management and open access for clients to enter and exit at any time of day. Student and victim service support representatives also noted the lack of shelter, adding that many people who come to them for help end up sleeping in cars due to a lack of shelter space. Neighborhood representatives had mixed experiences with shelters operating close to housing, with some expressing support and others

stating new shelter and the sanctioned encampment had led to an increase in neighborhood disruptions (e.g., littering). Overall, the participants of the sessions supported new shelters over further increases in unsheltered homelessness.

Supportive Services

Participants noted that while there are many services currently available in Athens-Clarke County, the expansion of current programs and new offerings was necessary to fully serve people experiencing and at risk of experiencing homelessness. Participants emphasized the importance of mental and behavioral health services, including medication management and ongoing counseling needs. These services were of top importance for neighborhood leaders, who expressed concern over substance use among people living unsheltered. Many participants noted that current providers did not have the capacity to reach everyone in need and suggested increasing funding for outreach services. Additionally, some participants noted the need for low-barrier programs, services, and shelters for people actively struggling with substance use or mental health issues.

Coordination and Education

Participants noted that organizations need additional staff to carry out overall coordination and community education activities. They also suggested hiring a paid staff member for the Athens Homeless Coalition to provide system-wide support. Providers expressed support for additional staff within ACCGov to support streamlined funding processes for homeless services. Businesses and neighborhood leaders expressed a strong willingness to collaborate with homeless service providers to address unsheltered homelessness and support people to enter services; however, they did not know who to contact or how homeless services generally operated. They suggested educational events for partnerships between providers and the Athens-Clarke County community to learn about ways to collaborate.