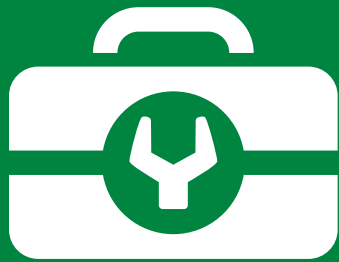


Pathways Home

A Regional Homelessness Action Plan for
Local and Tribal Governments



Prevention and Diversion Toolkit

January 2024

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Executive Summary

*The inflow of individuals who are experiencing homelessness for the first time in Maricopa County is rising. With limited available shelter resources, it is paramount that early, targeted, and accessible support services are made available to those at risk of experiencing homelessness. In part, this can be achieved through increasing available **Prevention** and **Diversion** programs across the region.*



*As part of a comprehensive process of national research and local stakeholder engagement,¹ coordinating and expanding regional homelessness prevention and diversion efforts was identified as one of the five strategies to support a coordinated, effective regional response to homelessness. This was later codified as part of **Pathways Home: A Regional Action Plan for Local and Tribal Governments.**²*

*The **Prevention & Diversion Toolkit**, developed in coordination with the Maricopa Regional Continuum of Care (MRCoC) Local Jurisdiction Collaborative, seeks to consolidate information on the programs currently operating in the region, methods to fund or expand programs, and best practices learned from model programs.*

For support or more information, please contact MAG staff at HSinfo@azmag.gov.

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1. Regional Homelessness Strategies Portfolio, <https://azmag.gov/Portals/0/Documents/Homelessness/Regional-Homelessness-Strategies-Portfolio-DRAFT.pdf>
 2. Pathways Home, <https://azmag.gov/Portals/0/Homelessness/Regional-Homelessness-Strategies/PR/Pathways-Home-Plan.pdf>

What are Prevention and Diversion?

Prevention and **Diversion** are two system approaches that can be integrated in a community's response to housing crises prior to clients entering service.

These interventions are specifically targeted to support households at risk of homelessness who are not yet unhoused, or those who have recently lost their housing. By leveraging existing community resources, including those not specifically targeted to addressing homelessness, jurisdictions can help lessen displacement and demand for shelter beds, ensure households retain their housing, and reduce the impact of homelessness on social services and emergency systems.

Overview

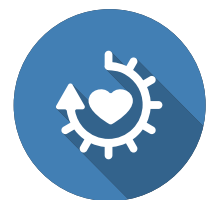
Prevention programs help people who are at risk of losing housing to avoid the loss of their home. Prevention stops housing crises before they occur, or it safeguards those who face such crises from experiencing homelessness.

Common prevention programs include:

- Rental or Utility Assistance
- Legal Aid for Eviction Prevention
- Case Management or Housing Navigators
- Landlord Engagement and Mediation
- Tenant Education Programs

Diversion programs, also known as Housing Problem-Solving, can support families and individuals who have just lost their housing to find immediate, safe alternatives to shelter or housing services. Diversion is a client-driven approach that should afford the opportunity to creatively engage and find resolutions with providers. Common diversion programs include:

- Flexible Funding for any Barrier (i.e. Moving Costs, Car Repairs, Application Fees, etc.)
- Discharge Planning
- Connections to Mainstream Resources



Benefits

Maximizing utilization of Prevention and Diversion programs can be beneficial to jurisdictions, the homeless response system, and the individuals and families affected in the following ways:



1. Homelessness often creates a cycle that is difficult to break. Once someone becomes homeless, it can become more challenging to find employment, access services, and secure stable housing. Before this occurs, households can be **empowered** with the tools and resources they need to overcome housing challenges. Prevention and Diversion respect client dignity and autonomy.
2. These programs are also **cost-effective**. According to a 2023 study from the University of Notre Dame, individuals supported with an average of \$2,000 “were 81 percent less likely to become homeless within six months and 73 percent less likely within 12 months.”³ This is significant when compared to the average annual operating cost of a participant in a Rapid Rehousing program (\$17,224) or a scattered-site Permanent Supportive Housing unit (\$20,679).
3. Lastly, these programs emphasize an efficient use of already limited resources. Preventing or diverting households **reduces system inflow**, allowing shelters or other providers to focus on those who are already homeless and in need of immediate assistance. Despite a challenging economic landscape in 2021, flexible pandemic-related federal programs such as eviction moratoria and Emergency Rental Assistance correlated with “a substantial reduction in the number of people entering homelessness.”⁴

3. Targeted prevention stops homelessness before it starts, <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2023/07/230713141223.htm>

4. Rise in homelessness averted amidst worsening housing needs in 2021, <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/pdredge/pdr-edge-frm-asst-sec-082223.html>

Who to Serve

Despite the potential of Prevention and Diversion, maximizing the impact of these programs comes with challenges. It may seem as though there is an inherent contradiction between effectively prioritizing clients while also maintaining accessibility to services. However, research has provided some guidance to whom assistance should be provided.



- Homeless prevention may make the most difference for people with the highest needs. A study in Chicago resulted in lower income callers being 88% less likely to enter shelter after receipt of assistance when compared to the higher income group.⁵ A study based on a predictive risk model also found that serving individuals most likely to enter shelter could increase the efficiency of homeless prevention services.⁶
- With this, programs may also want to consider proactive outreach to underrepresented or hidden populations. Some individuals with the highest needs may be dissuaded from prevention services due to their immigration status, the stigmatization or embarrassment of accessing services, or any number of reasons. Those who are couch-surfing or doubled-up now may in turn become high utilizers of the homeless response system down the line.

5. The impact of homelessness prevention programs on homelessness, <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.aag0833>

6. Efficient targeting of homelessness prevention services for families, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3969118/>

Current Landscape

Prevention and Diversion services are offered in some fashion throughout the region. An updated directory of homeless prevention services is maintained by **Arizona 211**, which offers 24/7 information and referrals to individuals throughout Arizona.



- The Arizona Department of Economic Security oversees two statewide programs funded by federal dollars: the **Arizona Rental Assistance Program** (ARAP) and the **Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program** (LIHEAP). **Some jurisdictions** also offer prevention services directly to their residents, including but not limited to rent or utility assistance, case management, and eviction prevention.
- Many non-profit organizations also have homelessness prevention programs. For example, both **AZ Eviction Help** and **Community Legal Services** offer help to those facing eviction through a mixture of legal support and education, mediation between tenants and landlords, or even financial assistance for unpaid rent or late fees. Other examples will be described below.
- Across the region, individuals can also access homelessness prevention services through **Community Action Programs**. Specific services will vary by location, though common examples include utility or mortgage assistance, rental deposits, or eviction prevention. **Maricopa County** serves as a centralized CAP Office for much of the region, though some cities maintain separate programs. One such example is the **Avondale Resource Center**, where a wide range of **local partners** are housed directly in the facility or offered as referrals to those seeking services.

Prevention Case Study

St. Vincent de Paul

The Society of **St. Vincent de Paul** (SVdP) has offered homeless prevention services for decades. Through a mixture of community referral and word-of-mouth, the Resource Center offers a variety of services to individuals at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness. Following an assessment to triage the situation, clients may be offered rental or utility assistance, case management, landlord engagement, or other appropriate resources. In some cases, this could be non-financial, such as a script to assist conversations with a utility company.



- Staff will first work to assist clients in resolving any immediate crises, such as preventing an impending eviction. Ultimately, they identify long-term success for clients as stability through connection to mainstream benefits relevant to the client, such as SSI or SSDI.
- The agency is supported by around ten different funding sources and a variety of partnerships, resulting in about \$5 million annually spent on homelessness prevention. For prevention efforts at roughly \$2,000 per household, SVdP estimates the region would need an additional \$25 million total to stop all flow of new homelessness.

Diversion Case Study

Human Services Campus

Throughout Maricopa County, diversion conversations accompany client intake at each Coordinated Entry Access Point. Providers and staff that work directly with individuals experiencing homelessness or the risk of homelessness are highly encouraged to become familiar with some of the resources available to support Diversion efforts. This includes a sample [Diversion conversation flowchart](#), or an in-depth training on Diversion best practices available to individuals with access to the [CoC Learning Gateway](#).

- This is particularly true at the **Human Services Campus** (HSC), the Singles Coordinated Entry lead. Prior to assessing individuals with the VI-SPDAT, program staff will complete a diversion conversation to explore alternative options and, if possible, create an action plan. If there is a housing solution outside of the homeless response system, there are flexible funds allocated specifically to diversion. These funds may help pay for transportation, storage fees, or even car registration fees.
- HSC estimates 100 clients are diverted from homelessness each month, and 95% do not return to homelessness. Client follow-up occurs every 6 months and repeat clients may not use diversion funds more than once a year.



Expanding Prevention Programs

If your jurisdiction has an appetite to increase the impact of homeless prevention throughout the region, there are multiple possible approaches with varying levels of financial and staff commitment. Consider the following chart to determine possible routes based on resources available:

	<p>Staff Capacity, Limited Funding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing public awareness of available resources and the process of accessing them Building partnerships with local providers and ensuring ongoing coordination of services
<p>Funding Available, Limited Staff Capacity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awarding financial support to local non-profits already providing such services (see <i>Appendix B</i>) 	<p>Staff Capacity and Funding Available:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing direct assistance through the expansion, or creation of, jurisdiction-led programs

For Our City - Chandler also presents a unique approach for jurisdictions. This entity serves as a distinct community network for the city, partnering with local non-profits, businesses, and faith-based organizations. In addition to offering an organizational hub for these resources, its structure also allows for it to accept donations or fundraise for additional financial support.



Potential Funding Sources

Funding sources available to jurisdictions are not always conducive to the flexibility that Prevention and Diversion programs thrive on, especially when compared to many of the temporary appropriations made available to jurisdictions following the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there are still ways to support these programs within funding regulations. This section will explore some common examples of this.



Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds are eligible for homelessness prevention detailed in [Chapter 7: Public Services](#) and [24 CFR Part 570](#). These include but are not limited to:

- Emergency assistance paid directly to a service provider on behalf of an individual or family for no more than three consecutive months.⁸
- Housing counseling, for either homeownership or rental housing as defined by [24 CFR 5.111](#). Such counseling may include responsibilities of tenancy, affordability of renting, and eviction prevention.⁹
- Legal services, such as foreclosure mitigation/prevention or landlord/tenant matters.⁶
- Other public services, such as employment training, substance abuse recovery programs, or transportation services.⁶

Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) funds designate Homelessness Prevention as an eligible program component in [24 CFR 576.103](#). This includes rental assistance, rental arrears, rental application fees, security deposits, advance payment of last month's rent, utility deposits and payments, moving costs, housing search and placement, housing stability case management, mediation, legal services, and credit repair.¹⁰

7. Continuing Emergency Rental Assistance, https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/Continuing_ERA_Final.pdf

8. 24 CFR 570.207(b)(4)

9. 24 CFR 570.201(e)

10. ESG Program Fact Sheet, <https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/EmergencySolutionsGrantsProgramFactSheet.pdf>

General Funds may vary in flexibility depending on the city, but Human Services funds can generally be used for Prevention and Diversion. While Gift Clause considerations may limit direct assistance to residents, jurisdictions may consider funding programs through an existing non-profit or a non-profit arm of the jurisdiction.

The **AHCCCS Housing and Health Opportunities (H2O) Demonstration** may soon become a valuable source of coordination for jurisdictions upon its implementation. [Read more here.](#)

Effective Implementation

Generally speaking, the earlier that assistance is available, the more cost-effective it is in the long term. Rather than providing support in direct *response* to a crisis, assistance may prevent a crisis from happening in the first place. Consider the following checklists below when implementing or supporting programs:



General:

- Is the application process accessible? Ensure forms and materials use plain language that clearly demonstrates the program processes.
- Are you proactively outreaching those who might need services? Consider transmitting information through unconventional methods, such as school districts or community centers.
- Are there ongoing conversations with the organization to ensure the partner's scope of services is truly understood?
- Are there opportunities for feedback loops or iteration with evolving client needs?

Prevention:

- Are funds rapidly available (7-10 days), with minimal or expedited waitlists?
- Does the program discharge to upstream services, with a path to long-term support?

Diversion:

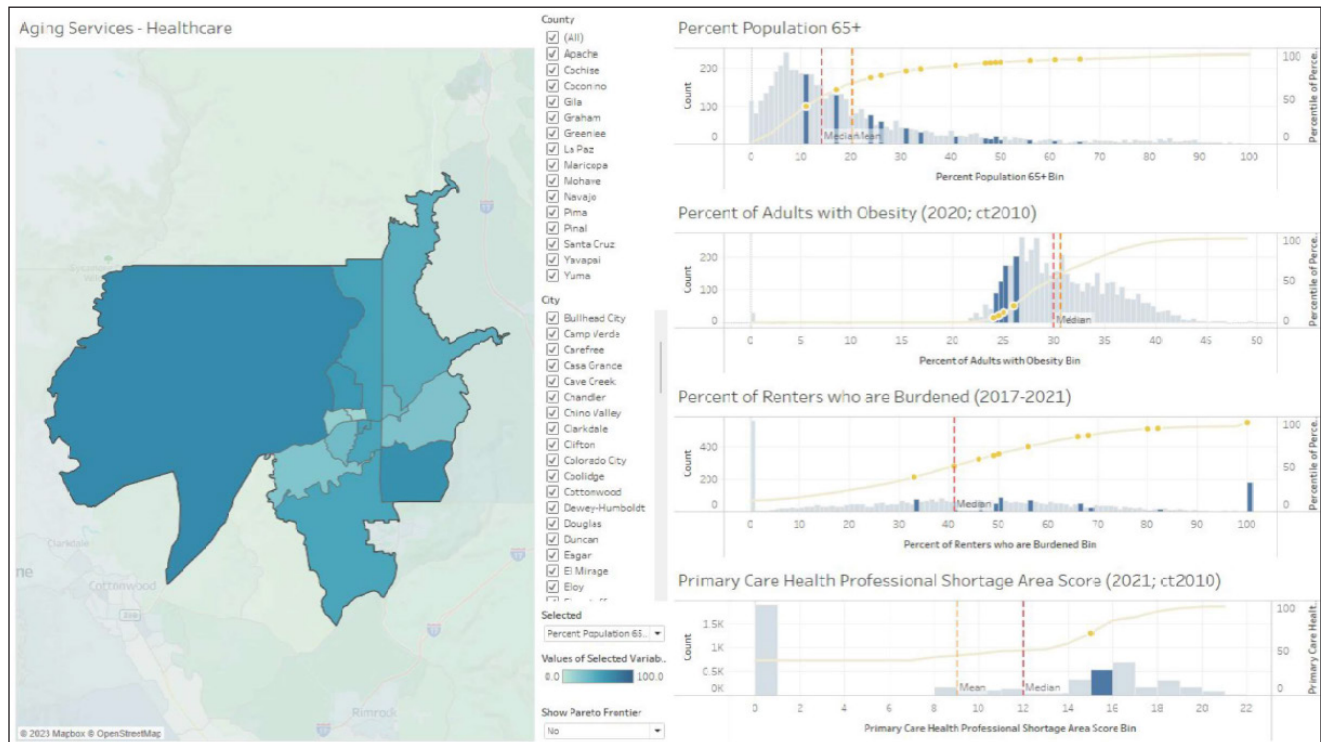
- Are diversion conversations occurring at various points in a client relationship?
- Is there flexibility in process and funds, allowing for staff and client creativity?
- Do diversion conversations consider supports that exist outside the homeless system?

Upstream Solutions

Though we have already discussed the importance of early intervention, it is possible for homelessness prevention to occur even sooner through strategically addressing risk levels at the community level. The **SDOH Mapping Tool**, developed by the Arizona Housing Analytics Collaborative (AzHAC), leverages public data to assist in such decision-making.

The interactive tool may help identify and prioritize locations that are particularly vulnerable, determine the services that it lacks access to, or otherwise target new resources or interventions.

To access this tool, please request a viewer license by contacting azhac@asu.edu.





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