

Leveraging Collaboration To Demonstrate How To Effectively Prevent Homelessness

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Overview

In 2019, 211/CIE San Diego and the Salvation Army secured funding from The Regional Taskforce on Homelessness (RTFH) to establish a collaborative initiative of 11 service providers with the goal of taking advantage of a one-time state funding to do cross-organization care coordination to demonstrate the essential impact homelessness prevention programs have on keeping people housed. In fact, because of the system-wide data that was able to be collected using the legal and technical infrastructure of the Community Information Exchange (CIE), the initiative's efforts showed that within the first 30 days, those enrolled in the homelessness prevention programs were over 15 times less likely to become homeless compared to those who were not enrolled.

The initiative's care coordination goals were to streamline eligibility screening, program access, and capture reportable outcomes for impact analysis. An essential source of analysis' data came from the Regional Task Force on Homelessness (RTFH) through their longstanding partnership and data sharing with the CIE.

Background

The Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP) was a block grant authorized by California Senate Bill 850, signed into law in 2018, that provided \$500 million in funding to cities and Continuums of Care to address homelessness in their communities. The City of San Diego and RTFH received a combined \$32.9 million^{1,2}. Approximately \$10.1 million was allocated for rental homelessness prevention assistance or subsidies³. In order to leverage this one-time funding, 11 homeless service partners and members of the CIE came together to implement the HEAP Homelessness Prevention initiative (Table 1).

211/CIE San Diego
Adjoin: Veterans Division (formerly Veterans Community Services, VCS)
Alpha Project
Home Start, Inc.
Interfaith Community Services, Inc. (ICS)
Interfaith Shelter Network (ISN)
The Salvation Army
San Diego Housing Commission (SDHC)
The San Diego LGBT Center
SBCS, Inc. (Formerly South Bay Community Services)
Veterans Village of San Diego (VVSD)

Table 1 – Community partners and CIE network members implementing HEAP Homelessness Prevention

To be eligible, clients must have been stably housed and have also experienced a recent, destabilizing event. Clients must also have already exhausted all available formal and informal financial supports and would be at imminent risk of homelessness if they did not receive immediate, one-time funding, and if they do, will go back to being independently stably housed. To create a screening tool with the necessary level of specificity and sophistication, the collaborative partners developed an agreed upon screening tool that leveraged several existing homelessness prevention screening tools. Once refined and collectively adopted, the screening tool was used to identify HEAP eligible clients and direct HEAP-ineligible clients to other supportive services and programs. The workgroup also created shared partner agreements that included the use of CIE to streamline screening and send/receive closed-loop, electronic referrals.

HEAP provided resources from July 2019 to July 2021. During this time, two Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) events and multiple COVID-19-funded resources were also available, giving San Diego County residents multiple housing aid options, adding to the complexity of HEAP implementation. This report examines housing outcomes and the effectiveness of the HEAP Homelessness Prevention funds in preventing homelessness for clients screened eligible.

About 211/CIE San Diego

211 San Diego is a local, non-profit organization, connecting people to the community and health services they need. 211 San Diego manages an online database of free or low-cost services and operates a multilingual contact center to help those calling 2-1-1 to find available services. Our mission is to seamlessly connect people to resources, and partner with our community to transform how people access help. To improve and change how people access the care they need, 211 San Diego invested in and serves as the backbone organization for the Community Information Exchange (CIE).

A CIE is an ecosystem comprised of multidisciplinary network partners that use a shared language, a resource database, and an integrated technology platform to deliver enhanced community care planning. Care planning tools enable partners to integrate data from multiple sources and make bi-directional referrals to create a shared longitudinal record. By focusing on these core components, a CIE enables communities to shift away from a reactive approach to providing care toward proactive, holistic, person-centered care.

The community-governed infrastructure enables information to be effectively and responsibly shared among many organizations, using different, interoperable technologies, in support of holistic coordination of care and equitable systems change. Specifically, a CIE enables the sharing of data among multiple kinds of stakeholders – such as providers who need to share data to provide more holistic care, people in need who must navigate complex systems of care, and researchers and decision-makers.

As critical infrastructure that supports many stakeholders, using many different technologies, a CIE can enhance understanding of individuals' and communities' needs, improving service accessibility, service outcomes, and the health and well-being of a community.



About Regional Taskforce on Homelessness

The Regional Task Force on Homelessness (RTFH) in San Diego serves as the lead agency for both the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and the Continuum of Care (CoC) for the region, playing a central role in addressing homelessness. As the lead HMIS agency, RTFH manages critical data on homelessness, which informs decision-making, tracks progress, and helps coordinate efforts across service providers. In its role as the CoC lead, RTFH works with government entities, nonprofit organizations, and community partners to develop and implement strategies that address the root causes of homelessness. The task force leads efforts to streamline service delivery, ensure accountability, and align funding to foster long-term solutions for housing stability and supportive services throughout San Diego County.

The RTFH's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) is utilized by over 80 service providers running more than 600 programs, and it tracks data for over 45,000 individuals annually. With over 1,500 active users, the system helps monitor client services and activities across various programs, regardless of funding sources. The HMIS is client-centric, allowing shared access to client data among users based on consent, reducing duplication of records. Additionally, it serves as a platform for tracking the Coordinated Entry process, guiding clients from initial assessments through to referrals that connect them with long-term housing resources within the region.

Leveraging the CIE Network and Infrastructure

Built on San Diego County's strong tradition of collaboration amongst homeless service providers, RTFH and regional leads hosted several discussions for how the community might leverage HEAP funds for the greatest impact and good.

From these discussions, CIE and the Salvation Army lead meetings focused on homelessness prevention and how San Diego could counter prevailing narratives about the effectiveness of homelessness prevention programs. Narratives such as the ineffectiveness of the screening tools used to identify the very specific target population for a homelessness prevention program, or that people would be able to self-resolve without funds, and conversely, that those who would become homeless would do so regardless of intervention. The collaborative was committed to leveraging the HEAP one-time funding to create system-wide coordination of implementation that would prove San Diego's ability prevent homelessness.

The role of the CIE was to act as the shared legal data-sharing framework and technical infrastructure that would enable this system-wide coordination of activities. The collaborative understood that in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of prevention programs, they would need to agree to adopt shared program design and capture shared data, which was only possible by conducting activities in the existing CIE infrastructure and using the established data integration with the RTFH stewarded Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).

Program Design

Eligibility & Outcomes

This analysis primarily focuses on 1,124 people who were screened as eligible for HEAP homelessness prevention funds within the CIE and the rates of those people staying housed or becoming homeless within the next six months depending on if they received funding or not.

Population & Demographics

Among clients eligible for HEAP, there was a higher proportion of African American clients, clients with incomplete college degrees, who had full-time employment, had an AMI of 31%-50%, and had military or veteran status. In contrast, clients who were never eligible for HEAP were more likely to be of Hispanic and Latinx race and ethnicity, have incomplete high school degrees, be unemployed, and have an AMI of less than or equal to 30%.

Housing Outcomes

Housing outcomes for eligible clients were collected from the RTFH Homeless Management Information System and proxy data based on CIE documented information, including Program Enrollments (when clients enrolled in services in the community), Assessments (tools that assess a person's overall situation within 14 social domains of health and wellness), Needs (reasons why a client was referred to a particular service), Intakes and Forms, and Surveys (screening tools used for specific programs or covering a range of topics).

Outcomes were assessed during three ranges of time to capture the immediate and persistent effects of the program (Figure 1). Clients' last reported outcome was carried forward if no new information was available.

Clients who did not have any outcome information reported post-screening or enrollment were recorded as "no additional data."

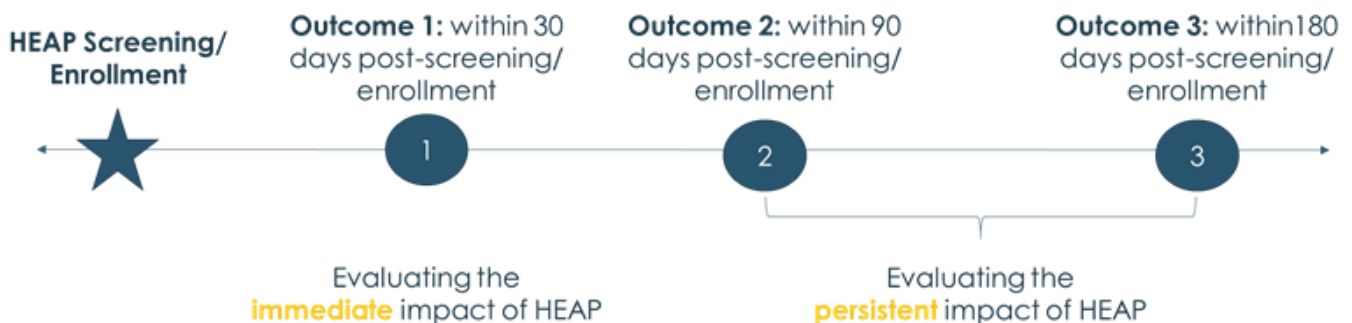


Figure 1 - Outcome timelines for analysis

Program Results

As shown in Figure 2, enrollment in HEAP Homelessness Prevention services was associated with fewer clients experiencing homelessness and a greater proportion of clients remaining housed during all time periods as compared to eligible clients who were never enrolled.

- Within the first 30 days, those enrolled in HEAP were over 15 times less likely to become homeless compared to those who were not enrolled in HEAP.
- Within 90 days, those enrolled in HEAP were almost 7 times less likely to become homeless compared to those who were not enrolled in HEAP.
- Within 180 days, those enrolled in HEAP were 6.5 times less likely to become homeless compared to those who were not enrolled in HEAP.

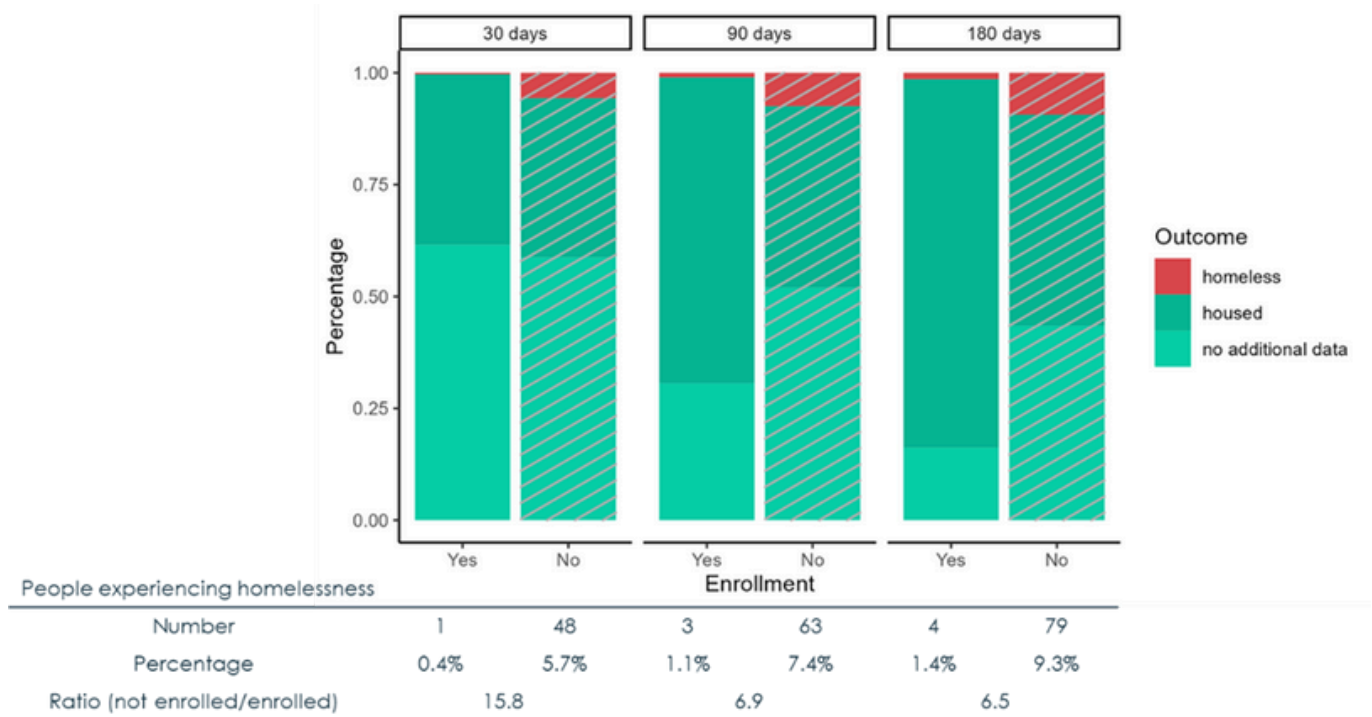


Figure 2 - HEAP outcomes among eligible clients who were enrolled compared to eligible clients who were not enrolled within the next 30 days, 90 days, and 180 days.

Additional Services

Care coordination continued in the community, and enrollment in social services was documented within the CIE after screening and enrollment in HEAP.

Homeless Prevention Services, California Alternate Rates for Energy Program (CARE), and CalFresh Enrollment Services were among the top 5 programs accessed following enrollment in HEAP (Table 2A) or after screening if not enrolled in HEAP (Table 2B). Eligible and HEAP-enrolled clients also received support from Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF). However, clients who were eligible for HEAP but never enrolled in the program were over two times more likely to not be enrolled in any other programs compared to clients who were enrolled in HEAP (56.4% vs 23.4%; Tables 2B and 2A, respectively).

Program	Enrolled Clients (count)	Enrolled Clients (%)
No other program enrollments	65	23.4
Homeless Prevention Services	31	11.2
California Alternate Rates for Energy Program (CARE)	26	9.4
CalFresh Enrollment Services	9	3.2
Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF)	8	2.9

Table 2A – Other programs accessed among eligible clients after enrollment in HEAP

Program	Not Enrolled Clients (count)	Not Enrolled Clients (%)
No other program enrollments	477	56.4
Homeless Prevention Services	64	7.6
California Alternate Rates for Energy Program (CARE)	127	15.0
CalFresh Enrollment Services	63	7.4
Coordinated Entry System	23	2.7

Table 2B – Other programs accessed among eligible clients who did not enroll in HEAP after screening

Value of Homelessness Prevention Funding

Eligible clients enrolled in HEAP received an average of \$2,028. This one-time funding helped almost 99% of eligible and enrolled clients remain housed over the next six months. In contrast, 9.3% (n = 79) of clients who were eligible for HEAP but not enrolled experienced homelessness within the next six months.

According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the average annual service cost per individual who experiences chronic homelessness is \$35,578⁴. Based on the estimated rates of experiencing homelessness in this study, the cost savings of HEAP homelessness prevention initiative for eligible clients was \$880,000 dollars, or a 24% reduction in costs compared to having no HEAP prevention services.

	HEAP Prevention Services	No HEAP Prevention Services
Eligible Clients (n)	1124	1124
Clients Experiencing Homelessness (n(%))	16 (1.4%)	105 (9.3%)
Services Costs per Person Experiencing Homelessness ^a	\$35,578.00	\$35,578.00
HEAP Enrollment Costs per Person ^b	\$2,028.00	\$ -
Total Service Costs	\$559,855.41	\$3,719,039.50
Total HEAP Enrollment	\$2,279,472.00	\$ -
Total Costs	\$2,839,327.41	\$3,719,039.50
Cost Savings	\$879,712.09	N/A
Cost Reduction	24%	N/A

Table 3 – Estimated cost comparisons of HEAP prevention services versus no prevention services for eligible clients.

^a estimated number of clients experiencing homelessness if they had the same rate as eligible enrolled or eligible not enrolled clients in this analysis, respectively

^b estimated service costs per year per person experiencing chronic homelessness according to the National Alliance to End Homelessness (2015)

Summary

HEAP Homelessness Prevention was effective at keeping clients housed. Overall, eligible clients enrolled in HEAP were 6.5 times less likely to experience homelessness within the next six months compared to eligible clients who were not enrolled in HEAP.

Homelessness prevention programs such as HEAP ultimately save money and protect people from the health, safety, and psychological trauma associated with experiencing homelessness. The existence of this critical data analysis underscores the vital role of a cross-sector Community Information Exchange and the community's willingness to take advantage of its infrastructure to do system-wide planning, collaboration and care coordination.

Project Leadership Contributors

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Collective Impact & Further Opportunities

- As the eligibility window for homelessness prevention programs are very narrow, there are opportunities to analyze impact and relative rates of remaining house v becoming homeless with a broader eligibility framework (e.g. lower FPI or shorter rates of independent housing stability)
- From this initial work, further analysis could be done with intersectional data that examines the impact of additional social services accessed and how co-occurring interventions impact health and wellness outcomes, and systemic access issues of these services.
- Impact of technology that enables proactive access to services in tandem with one another for greatest maximization of one-time funds (i.e. Implementation of an service “eligibility engine” could be used to stack simultaneous access to services for the greatest potential stabilizing effect).

References

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