PREVENTION WORKS!

Coordinated Homelessness Prevention Toolkit

Working Version 1

Practical guidance and tools for communities seeking to grow local efforts to prevent housing instability and homelessness

July 2026

About this version

This is a working first version of the toolkit. It is being fashioned into an easy-to-access, modular, do-it-yourself platform for communities growing local prevention efforts. More comprehensive tools, templates, examples, and step-by-step guidance will be added over time, including online modules that communities can use in the order that best fits local capacity, conditions, and opportunities.

Contents

Introduction 3
Acknowledgements and Inspirations 3
How to Use This Toolkit 3
Toolkit Components and Cross-References 4
Part 1. Framework for Coordinated Homelessness Prevention 6
Key Concepts & Definitions 6
Housing Insecurity Scale Example 8
Moving Beyond Emergencies 9
HOUSING SUPPORT ECOSYSTEM 10
5 Development Steps to Housing Urgent Care 11
Core Elements of Coordinated Prevention 12
Part 2. Needs Assessment Guide 14
HMIS Data Usability Review 14
Annual Inflow Analysis 14
Housing Insecurity Heat Mapping 15
Community Interviews 15
Part 3. Resources Assessment Guide 17
Environmental Scan 17
Coordinated Homelessness Prevention Partner Types 18
Environmental Scan and Partner Development Workbook 18
Community Interviews 19
Part 4. Coordinated Prevention Tools & Templates 20
About the Author 21

Introduction

This working toolkit helps communities develop, test, and strengthen **coordinated homelessness prevention** approaches. It brings together framework language, assessment guides, planning templates, screening examples, and pilot tools into one modular resource that can be adapted for local use.

This first version is intentionally practical and preliminary. It is intended to help communities begin or continue building local prevention infrastructure now, while a more comprehensive online, modular, do-it-yourself version is developed. Future modules are expected to include more detailed tools, examples, editable templates, implementation guidance, and practical decision-support resources that communities can use based on their own readiness, priorities, and capacity.

The toolkit is designed for Continuums of Care, local governments, coalitions, United Ways, Community Action Agencies, homelessness service providers, philanthropic organizations, healthcare and behavioral health partners, legal aid partners, schools, criminal justice partners, Veteran-serving organizations, and other cross-sector partners - any and all partners ready to grow coordinated, targeted homelessness prevention and housing stabilization initiatives intended to help people stay in safe, appropriate housing.

Note: For purposes of this toolkit, "Coordinated Prevention" is used as shorthand for "Coordinated Homelessness Prevention."

Acknowledgements and Inspirations

These materials are built upon over 30 years of direct professional work building local, regional and national best practices to prevent and end homelessness that are person-centered, equitable, effective, and efficient. Material also comes from coordinated prevention development work and lessons learned through the Housing Stabilization Learning Cohort, a three year multi-community learning and innovation pilot supported by Community Solutions and Tom Albanese/Element Consulting Group.

Materials have been expanded and updated into a **working toolkit** that can be used by any community seeking to strengthen homelessness prevention.

Other work around the U.S., Canada, Wales, and elsewhere also provides important inspiration for where homelessness prevention is heading and how communities can build rights-based approaches to housing stability. Consistent with international human rights principles recognizing adequate housing as a fundamental human right and the shared responsibility of governments and communities to prevent homelessness whenever possible, this toolkit is grounded in the belief that housing stability should be protected before a crisis becomes homelessness.

The time is now. We cannot expect solutions to come from federal or st to rely on ever-larger housing emergency rooms—we now have growing evidence, proven concepts, practical tools, and real-world examples developed and refined by people with lived experience, practitioners, service providers, funders, researchers, and system leaders over the past three decades. **Prevention works. Prevention now.**

How to Use This Toolkit

This toolkit is intentionally modular. It is not designed as a required sequence. Communities should start where it makes sense to start based on local capacity, current conditions, data readiness, partner relationships, funding, urgency, and the current state of coordinated homelessness prevention development. For example, one community may begin by developing shared definitions and a screening approach. Another may begin by mapping prevention resources and access points. Another may already have partners and funding ready and may use the pilot template first. The goal is to use the toolkit as a practical menu of building blocks, not a checklist that must be completed in order.

Common entry points based on your status and needs:

- **Define and align:** Use **Part 1 of the Toolkit** and the **Housing Insecurity Screening Tool** in the companion *Tools & Templates* document to establish shared definitions, housing insecurity risk levels, screening questions, and response guidance. This is often a critical starting point because local definitions shape screening, prioritization, referral pathways, and appropriate responses.

- **Understand need:** Use **Part 2 of the Toolkit** to examine HMIS data usability, inflow into homelessness, community experience, eviction data, geographic patterns, and other indicators of severe housing insecurity.
- **Map resources and partners:** Use **Part 3 of the Toolkit** and the **Environmental Scan & Partner Development Workbook** to inventory existing prevention resources, identify current and potential access points, assess gaps, and develop partner roles.
- **Assess current development:** Use the **Coordinated HP Development Checklist** in the companion *Tools & Templates* document to identify strengths, gaps, and practical priorities for development or improvement.
- **Organize and plan:** Use the **Coordinated HP Roadmap** in the companion ***Tools & Templates*** document to create a living action plan that assigns responsibility, establishes milestones and timelines, tracks progress, and helps partners understand where their work fits.
- **Test and learn:** Use the **Pilot Implementation Plan** and related tools to test one or more coordinated prevention elements on a smaller scale, collect quantitative and qualitative data, incorporate participant and partner feedback, and improve the approach before expanding.
- **Improve and scale:** Use pilot findings, participant experience, performance data, and the **Roadmap** to strengthen governance, improve policies and workflows, align funding, expand partnerships, and sustain coordinated prevention over time.

Toolkit Components and Cross-References

The **Prevention Works! Coordinated Homelessness Prevention Toolkit** is organized as three complementary, modular resources. Communities may use the full set or begin with the component that best matches local needs, capacity, and readiness. The resources are designed to work together, but they do not need to be completed in a fixed order.

- **Coordinated Homelessness Prevention Toolkit** provides the foundational framework and practical guidance for assessing local housing insecurity needs, resources, and partnership opportunities.
- **Coordinated Homelessness Prevention Tools & Templates** provides editable planning and implementation tools that communities can adapt for local use.
- **Coordinated HP Environmental Scan & Partner Development Workbook** provides an Excel-based tool for inventorying resources, mapping potential partners and access points, and documenting partnership opportunities.

Use the table below to identify a practical starting point and the related resources that can support the work.

Component	Use this when you need to…	Primary cross-references
Toolkit Part 1. Framework for Coordinated Homelessness Prevention	Establish shared concepts, definitions, housing insecurity risk levels, development steps, and the core elements of a coordinated prevention approach.	Housing Insecurity Screening Tool; Coordinated HP Development Checklist; Coordinated HP Roadmap
Toolkit Part 2. Needs Assessment Guide	Examine HMIS data usability, annual inflow into homelessness, geographic patterns of housing insecurity, and the experiences of people seeking or providing assistance.	Coordinated HP Development Checklist—Examine Needs; Coordinated HP Roadmap—Element 2; Pilot Implementation Plan
Toolkit Part 3. Resources Assessment Guide	Inventory existing prevention resources, understand partner types, identify current and potential access points, and assess opportunities for stronger cross-sector coordination.	Environmental Scan & Partner Development Workbook; Coordinated HP Development Checklist—Examine Resources; Coordinated HP Roadmap—Element 3
Coordinated HP Development Checklist	Quickly assess current prevention development, identify gaps, and select practical priorities for action or improvement.	All Toolkit Parts; Coordinated HP Roadmap; Environmental Scan & Partner Development Workbook

Component	Use this when you need to…	Primary cross-references
Coordinated HP Roadmap	Create and maintain a locally tailored action plan with milestones, timelines, responsible parties, and progress updates across the five development steps.	All Toolkit Parts; Coordinated HP Development Checklist; Pilot Implementation Plan; Environmental Scan & Partner Development Workbook
Pilot Implementation Plan	Design and manage a focused test of one or more coordinated prevention elements, including objectives, partners, roles, measures, feedback processes, and plans for sustainability or expansion.	Toolkit Parts 1–3; Coordinated HP Roadmap—Elements 4 and 5; Housing Insecurity Screening Tool; Environmental Scan & Partner Development Workbook
Housing Insecurity Screening Tool	Translate shared housing insecurity definitions into brief, standardized questions and risk-level guidance that can be adapted for local access points, triage, referral, and response processes.	Toolkit Part 1; Coordinated HP Development Checklist—Develop and Test; Coordinated HP Roadmap—Elements 1 and 4; Pilot Implementation Plan
Environmental Scan & Partner Development Workbook	Document current programs, resources, service areas, eligibility requirements, partner readiness, access points, service gaps, and potential partnership or pilot opportunities.	Toolkit Part 3; Coordinated HP Development Checklist—Examine Resources; Coordinated HP Roadmap—Element 3; Pilot Implementation Plan

ELEMENT HELP DESK

For a free initial consultation on how to use this toolkit, adapt the tools, or identify practical starting points for your community, contact Tom Albanese, LSW, Element Consulting Group at talbaneseconsulting.com.

Part 1. Framework for Coordinated Homelessness Prevention

Communities seeking to develop Coordinated Prevention approaches should begin by documenting locally adapted concepts and definitions to ensure a **shared vision and understanding** of key terms across partners. Documenting these definitions is a critical starting point for building risk screening, prioritization, referral workflows, and appropriate responses that are consistent, person-centered, and equitable.

Below are **key concepts and definitions**, **development steps**, and **core elements** of a coordinated homelessness prevention approach that communities can as a starting point. These can be adopted as-is or further refined and adapted and then used for local purposes to organize conversations, align partners, and establish a **shared roadmap for coordinated prevention**.

Key Concepts & Definitions

The following working definitions are based on established prevention frameworks, including approaches from the public health sector and long-standing homelessness prevention practices. Communities can adapt these definitions locally so partners share a common understanding of housing insecurity, risk, urgency, and resource targeting.

Housing Insecurity & Homelessness

Housing Insecurity is a condition in which a person or household lacks, or is at risk of losing, stable occupancy of housing that is affordable, safe, decent, and appropriate to their needs. It is an umbrella term that may include difficulty paying rent, mortgage, utilities, or other housing costs; excessive housing cost burden; rent or utility arrears; eviction or foreclosure risk; unsafe or inadequate housing conditions; overcrowding; frequent or involuntary moves; temporarily staying with other people; institutional discharge without a stable housing option; or other circumstances that threaten a household's ability to remain safely and consistently housed.

Housing insecurity exists along a continuum, ranging from less immediate but persistent affordability or housing-quality problems to an imminent loss of housing and, ultimately, literal homelessness. Not every household experiencing housing insecurity meets a federal definition of "homeless" or "at risk of homelessness," and those federal definitions should be applied separately when determining eligibility for a particular federally funded program.[1]

Homelessness generally refers to situations in which a person or family lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate place to live. Across the United States, there is **no single federal definition of homelessness.** Instead, different federal agencies and programs use related, but sometimes different, definitions based on their statutory purpose, eligibility requirements, and the populations they serve.

Literal homelessness refers to people who have no safe, stable place to live and are staying in emergency shelters, transitional housing or Safe Havens, hotels with help from a charity, government, or non-profit, places not meant for human habitation, or other unsafe situations commonly recognized as being literally homelessness. For purposes of this toolkit, literal homelessness is considered the **most severe form of housing insecurity,** typically reflecting situations where earlier prevention opportunities were exhausted, unavailable, or inaccessible.

This toolkit recognizes that homelessness exists along a continuum of housing insecurity and that many households experience significant housing instability long before becoming literally homeless. Communities should therefore approach homelessness and housing insecurity through a **person-centered lens** that recognizes each household's unique circumstances, strengths, preferences, and housing needs. Federal definitions remain important because they determine eligibility for specific programs, protections, and funding, but they should support—not replace—a comprehensive understanding of a household's situation and the earliest possible opportunity to stabilize housing.

[1] Adapted from federal housing-instability concepts used by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For this toolkit, housing insecurity is used as the broader umbrella term, while specific housing-risk levels describe the urgency and severity of a household's circumstances.

Homelessness Prevention

Homelessness Prevention includes policies, practices, and interventions that reduce the likelihood that someone will experience homelessness or return to homelessness after being housed. There are three broad types of prevention: primary, secondary, and tertiary. [2]

Primary Prevention: Broad structural and community-level strategies that apply to the general population and reduce the overall risk of housing instability.

Secondary Prevention: Interventions for people at imminent risk of homelessness or who have recently fallen into homelessness, including interventions like targeted homelessness prevention and diversion.

Targeted Homelessness Prevention: Assistance prioritized for households at greatest risk of literal homelessness within a defined period and who lack other safe housing options and resources without timely, individualized help. Federally funded homelessness prevention assistance for Veterans provided through the VA Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Program is a type of targeted homelessness prevention.

Diversion (sometimes called rapid resolution): Interventions focused on helping people avoid literal homelessness and emergency shelter or otherwise quickly resolve literal homelessness through problem-solving, mediation, natural supports, flexible assistance, and rapid connection to other resources.

Tertiary Prevention: Interventions that support people who have previously experienced homelessness to prevent a recurrence of homelessness.

Coordinated Homelessness Prevention: A community-wide approach that networks diverse community and cross-sector partners together to assist people who are housing insecure or homeless to resolve their crisis and avoid more traumatizing and costly responses, like emergency shelter and rehousing assistance.

Coordinated homelessness prevention uses shared criteria to identify people who are housing insecure across the community ecosystem, targets people who are most vulnerable and likely to become more housing insecure and literally homeless, quickly connects people to help like housing problem-solving and prevention services, and prioritizes support through established protocols for people with the most urgent needs.

Qualities of Targeted Prevention

- **Efficient:** Assistance reaches people who are most likely to become homeless without timely, individualized help.
- **Effective:** Assistance reduces or resolves a person's housing crisis, including stopping someone from becoming homeless. [3]
- **Equitable and evidence-informed:** Screening, prioritization, and resource decisions are grounded in data, research, and lived experience, with explicit attention to systemic disparities.

Screening and Assessment

Screening is a brief set of standardized questions used to quickly identify a person's immediate circumstances, level of housing instability or risk, safety concerns, and potential need for assistance. Screening helps determine whether assistance may be needed, how urgent the situation is, and what the most appropriate next step or referral should be. Screening is not intended to fully understand a household's circumstances or determine eligibility for every available resource. Screening can often occur naturally and during any conversation. Screening provides indicators for where and what to further examine (assess) with someone.

Assessment is generally a more comprehensive process used to better understand a household's housing history and current situation, strengths, needs, preferences, goals, risks, and available resources in order to identify appropriate interventions, services, and housing options. Assessments typically occur after initial screening when additional

[2] Stephen Gaetz, Erin Dej. (2017). A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

[3] Martha Burt, et al (2005): Strategies for Preventing Homelessness. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research.

information is needed to inform additional problem-solving, support, service planning, program eligibility and prioritization for available assistance.

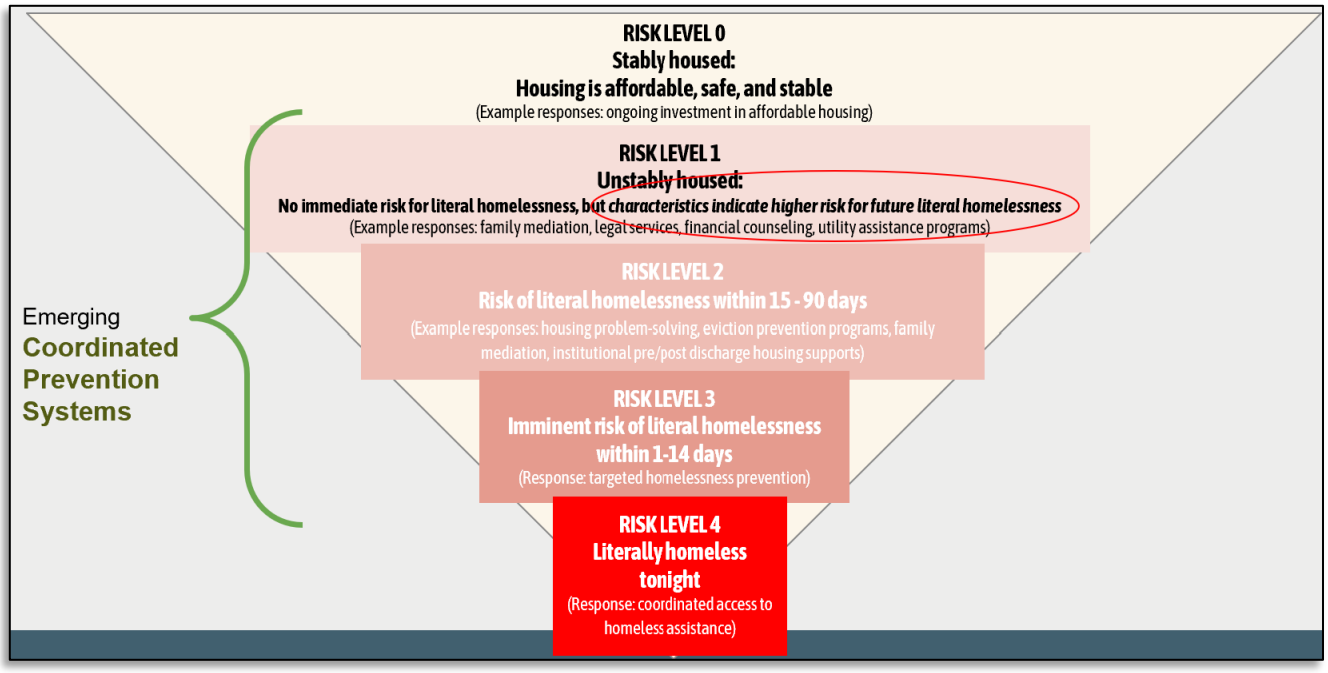
While the terms are often used interchangeably, **screening and assessment serve different purposes**. During an initial housing crisis, communities should generally "screen first, assess later." The priority is to quickly identify immediate safety concerns, determine whether the household can safely remain housed or resolve the crisis through housing problem-solving, and connect them to the appropriate next step. More comprehensive assessments should be reserved for households whose circumstances require additional planning, coordination, or ongoing assistance, helping reduce barriers, and to minimize duplication.

Housing Insecurity Scale Example

Establishing a common language around risk is task #1 for Coordinated Homelessness Prevention. A Housing Insecurity Scale or a similar standard typology provides diverse partners a common way to screen and respond to people with different housing needs and states of urgency. Common risk criteria and definitions are essential for consistent, person-centered, fair, and equitable support from available resources in the community.

The following example provides key indicators for Risk Levels related to housing insecurity, ranging from least to most severe (0 to 4). The scale is modeled, in part, from federal definitions and commonly used ways to identify people based on material risk factors who are most at risk for housing loss without intervention. The scale allows for adaptation and integration of additional housing insecurity indicators, including characteristics that suggest greater inherent risk for future literal homelessness, such as prior homelessness or youth aging out of foster care. Communities may use this as a starting point for developing local risk criteria based on standard definitions that are locally informed and embraced.

Risk Level		Living Situation	Housing Options & Resources
0	**Stably Housed**	• Current housing is safe; AND • Current housing is stable for the foreseeable future (e.g., sufficient income to pay rent and utilities, able to stay with host family/friend indefinitely)	Has housing options, financial resources, and/or support networks to maintain or obtain a safe place to stay for the foreseeable future.
1	**Unstably Housed**	• Current housing is safe; AND • No material risk of imminent risk of literal homelessness (i.e., not Risk Level 2-4); AND • Is currently experiencing general housing insecurity due to housing cost burden, housing conditions, frequent unplanned moves, and/or other characteristics and barriers indicative of higher risk for future literal homelessness. May be at-risk of housing loss in 3-6 months.	Has housing options, financial resources, and/or support networks to maintain or obtain a safe place to stay for the foreseeable future.
2	**At-Risk of Literal Homelessness within 15-90 Days**	• Current housing is safe; AND • Must leave current housing within 15-90 days (e.g., due to court-ordered eviction, landlord-issued eviction, foreclosure, safety or health risk, host family/friend limitation, etc.); OR • Must leave an institution (e.g., hospital, jail, treatment facility) within 15-90 days;	Does not have other housing options, financial resources, and/or support networks to maintain or obtain a safe place to stay *after* the next 15-90 days.
3	**Imminent Risk of Literal Homelessness (within 1-14 Days)**	• Current housing is safe; AND • Must leave current housing within 14 days (e.g., due to court-ordered eviction, foreclosure, imminent safety or health risk, host family/friend request to leave, family conflict, etc.); OR • Must leave an institution (e.g., hospital, jail, treatment facility) within 14 days;	Does not have other housing options, financial resources, and/or support networks to maintain or obtain a safe place to stay after the next 14 days.
4	**Literally Homeless Tonight**	• Is currently literally homeless and continues to have no other safe housing option tonight outside of available emergency shelter, Safe Haven, or transitional housing options; OR • Must leave current housing today (e.g., due to court-ordered eviction, foreclosure, immediate safety or health risk, host family/friend request to leave, etc.); OR • Must leave an institution (e.g., hospital, jail, treatment facility) today.	Does not have other housing options, financial resources, and/or support networks to maintain or obtain a safe place to stay tonight



Moving Beyond Emergencies

We are at an inflection point. The solution to ending homelessness is to prevent it in the first place. Communities across the U.S. and internationally are moving beyond just focusing on providing more emergency responses and instead are beefing up diversion and targeted prevention for people at greatest risk who not yet literally homeless or recently fell into homelessness without first getting help to avoid it.

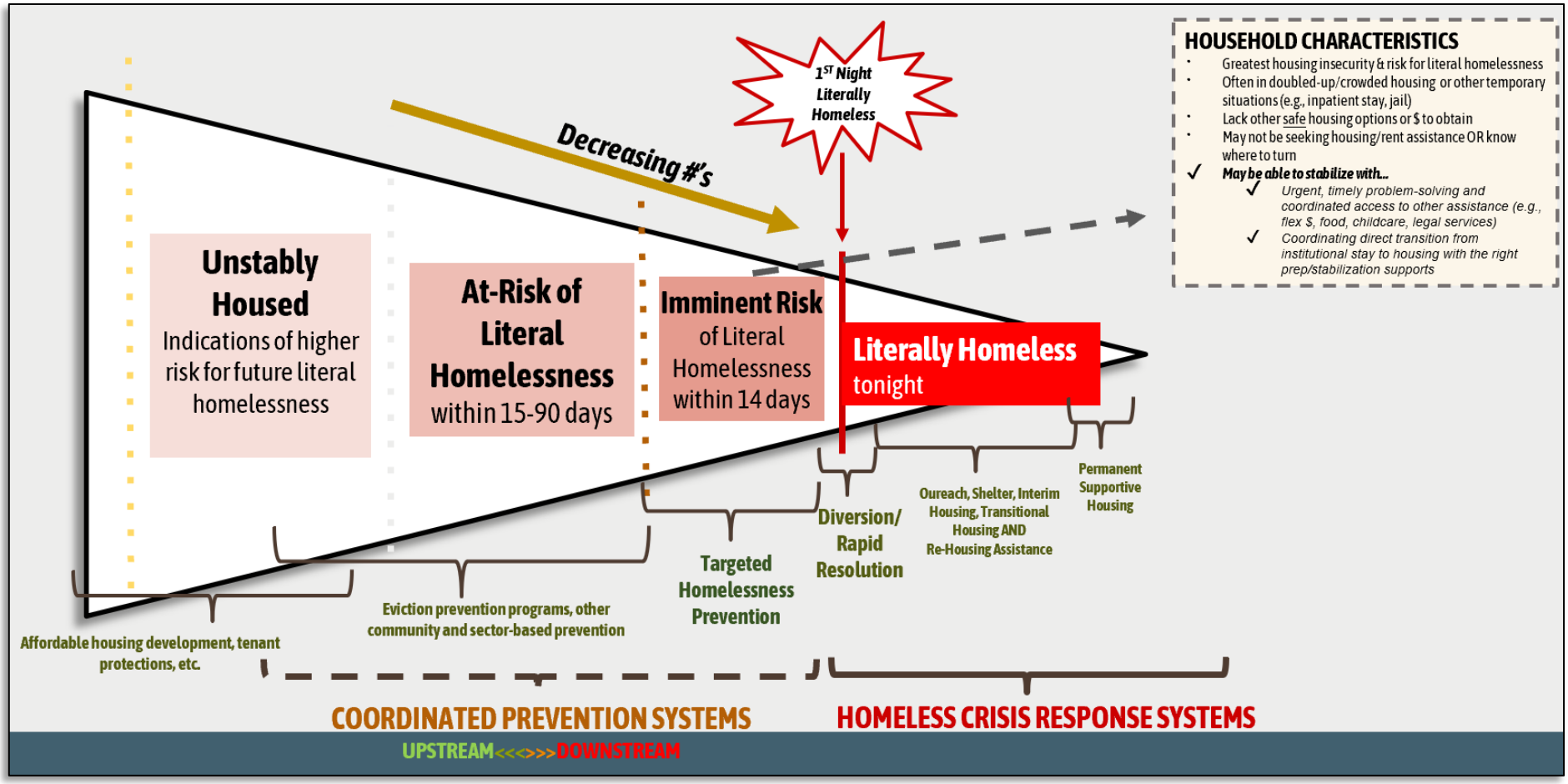
To go beyond the system front-door, to go "upstream", however, begins with establishing common language and concepts that provide partners with a way to see the entire community housing assistance ecosystem across the full spectrum of local need and responses – beyond just the homeless system "emergency room" – to grow a more complete ecosystem of housing stabilization and prevention supports, including coordinated prevention ("housing urgent care") that is scaled larger than the homeless system, similar to ratios of emergency rooms to urgent care sites in a community. Importantly, this allows partners across the community to envision a community where upstream interventions and stability supports are widely available, particularly for those experiencing an urgent housing need that is not yet a crisis. On any given day, there are increasingly smaller numbers of people in higher states of housing crisis.

Communities are increasingly realizing the public purpose and importance behind ensuring every community member has a safe, stable place to live. Building coordinated approaches to addressing housing needs and stabilizing housing for community members is how communities are creating new, community-grown, rights-based approaches to helping neighbors stay safely housed.

HOUSING URGENT CARE

Coordinated Homelessness Prevention approaches increase access to assistance before a more severe housing crisis occurs and thus reduce demand on already overwhelmed homeless crisis response systems. When done to scale, Coordinated Homelessness Prevention can act like ***housing urgent care***, providing help in community or institutional settings where people with urgent housing needs can get help earlier to avoid a housing emergency.

HOUSING SUPPORT ECOSYSTEM



5 Development Steps to Housing Urgent Care

Below are the key development steps (the 'recipe') communities are using to grow Coordinated Homelessness Prevention and get to scale. Communities can work on these in different orders and at different levels of intensity based on capacity, need, and existing work.

1. Set a Shared Vision, Governance Approach, and Core Team

Convene the people and organizations needed to guide prevention work, including people with lived experience and expertise. Establish roles, decision-making, shared definitions, and a practical roadmap. Establish a shared vision and understanding with key partners and then share widely. Align and integrate efforts with the CoC and other community efforts addressing housing insecurity. Grow beyond the CoC.

2. Assess Housing Insecurity Needs

Use HMIS, inflow, eviction, qualitative, and other readily available community data to understand who is becoming homeless and their characteristics (so we know who to look for before they wind up in shelter or unsheltered…), where housing insecurity is concentrated in the community, and the most critical needs to address.

3. Assess Resources & Partners

Inventory current prevention resources, access points, service providers, and cross-sector partners. Identify gaps and opportunities to improve access, coordination, targeting, and speed with existing and new partners and resources. Seek "non-traditional" partners (e.g., schools, libraries, barbershops, pantries).

4. Develop & Implement Core Elements

Develop, test, improve, and scale up core elements, such as shared screening, housing problem-solving, referral protocols, flexible financial assistance and related administration, and prioritization approaches for helping people get to currently available community resources when needed urgently**. As a first priority, ensure diversion and housing problem-solving assistance is first offered to anyone seeking shelter or identified as unhoused.**

5. Scale & Continuously Improve Core Elements

Use pilot learning, performance data, participant feedback, and partner experience to update policies, expand partnerships, align funding, and grow prevention partners, community awareness, and support for broader housing stability efforts and investments.

Core Elements of Coordinated Prevention

The following core elements (the 'ingredients') are what communities find are necessary to effectively implement and sustain coordinated prevention efforts. Many of these ingredients already exist in communities, including existing homeless system coordinated efforts to increase Housing Problem-Solving training, flexible financial assistance and direct cash assistance, and coordinating with healthcare, education, corrections, and other partners to move beyond "Coordinated Entry Systems" to homeless services and instead fashion "Coordinated Access Points" for coordinated prevention and housing stabilization services. A full **HOUSING SUPPORT ECOSYSTEM**.

Refer to these elements as guideposts for developing and scaling community-wide coordinated prevention approaches.

1. PARTNERS

Community and cross-sector partners formally engaged as **Access Points** and **Service Providers** across a wide variety of community-based and cross-sector settings.

- **Prevention Service Providers** are identified and organized to receive referrals and provide timely response and support for people who are housing insecure, including those most at risk of losing their housing. Priority providers include targeted homelessness prevention and diversion programs, including those funded with HUD Emergency Solutions Grants, VA SSVF, and any state or local funding for targeted prevention.
- **Non-targeted prevention resources** including providers administering emergency financial assistance, legal services, landlord and family mediation services, and other critical assistance that can be accessed either on a first come first serve basis OR on a prioritized and timely basis when needed (i.e., via mutual agreement and with use of standardized criteria, screening, and referral processes).
- **Access Point partners** are established across the community, including cross-sector partners such as health clinics and schools, and places such as libraries, recreation centers, and laundromats located in or serving areas where people are disproportionately housing insecure.
- **Memoranda of Agreement or Understanding** confirm commitments, roles, responsibilities, shared definitions of housing insecurity, and agreements around prioritized access for higher risk households.

2. ACCESS AND SERVICES

Housing Problem-Solving, flexible financial assistance, and prioritized access to other existing community resources and housing options that reduce risk and help stabilize housing.

- **Housing-focused screening and referral** approaches tailored to each partner setting and population and used across Access Points and Service Providers.
- **Housing Problem-Solving** – a first order, crisis intervention and trauma-informed approach used by both trained and certified staff and community members that focuses on immediate housing stabilization and resource connection.
- **Flexible financial assistance** immediately available that can address any financial need related to reducing imminent risk and stabilizing housing.
- **Prioritized and timely access** to other existing community resources reduces imminent risk for literal homelessness and promotes housing security.
- **Landlord partners and housing relocation support** help households avoid eviction or secure new housing.

3. MANUAL, TOOLS, AND GUIDANCE

For Access Points and Service Providers to consistently and equitably identify and assist higher-priority households.

- **Coordinated prevention manual** to define roles, responsibilities, policies, and procedures related to screening, services, prioritized access to assistance, data collection, and related activities.
- **Brief screening tools, prioritization protocols, and referral workflows** tailored for specific partner settings and facilitate connection to staff trained in Housing Problem-Solving and other prevention assistance.
- **Response and referral guidance** that is *regularly updated* and shared with Access Point and Service Provider partners, including risk-level response reminders, currently available prevention assistance, eligibility and documentation requirements, key contacts, expedited referral processes, and responsiveness expectations by risk level.

4. TRAINING

Regular training for Access Point and Service Provider partner staff on key skills, community resources, and all things housing.

- **Housing Problem-Solving training** and certification for staff at Access Points and Service Providers, including refresher and recertification training, as well as beginner and advanced versions for both community members and paid professionals.
- **Community prevention resource training** on eligibility, referral protocols, documentation requirements, and other key resources offered on a regular basis (e.g., quarterly) for direct service staff.
- **Community homeless crisis response system training**, including coordinated access, problem-solving, diversion, and shelter/outreach referral protocols and expectations.
- **Housing law and landlord/tenant rights and responsibilities training**, including review of legal documents such as leases and eviction notices and available legal remedies.
- **Affordable housing resources training**, including housing subsidy types, eligibility, referral protocols, and documentation requirements for all options in the community.
- **Other frontline crisis intervention training**, such as trauma-informed crisis intervention, immigration and refugee status issues and legal rights, educational rights, and supporting survivors of human trafficking.

5. MANAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

A backbone entity to lead and support partner recruitment, training, coordination, reporting, analysis, and ongoing system improvement and development.

- **System management and development staff** to support overall system management, partner coordination, meetings, resource development, communications, and related functions.
- **Dedicated support and resources for people with lived experience** to collaborate successfully and receive equitable compensation.
- **Data systems and staff** to support partner service referral and coordination, as well as data collection, reporting, and evaluation, including HMIS and community information and referral platforms.

Part 2. Needs Assessment Guide

This guide provides guidance for examining community data to better understand the characteristics and service needs of people who experience homelessness and severe housing insecurity. Guidance begins with examining the usability of currently available Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data and then provides tips and approaches for generating HMIS data reports to understand system **inflow across three groups**:

- **people who are newly homeless**
- **people returning to homelessness after exiting the system to other situations or being inactive**
- **people returning to homelessness after exiting the system to permanent housing**.

Guidance then turns to strategies for using other local data in combination with HMIS data to generate a community Housing Insecurity Heat Map. This guide concludes with questions to consider as data are examined, with an emphasis on using data to inform prevention targeting and initial piloting.

Cross-reference

Use this guide with Part 4, Element 2 of the Roadmap. Findings from this section should also inform Part 3, the Resources Assessment Guide, and the companion Environmental Scan and Partner Development Workbook.

HMIS Data Usability Review

Objective: Determine the data quality and usability of key HMIS data - how complete, current, and accurate they are - before using them for inflow analysis or prevention targeting.

Data to examine:

- Data used to identify when someone is newly homeless or returning to homelessness from housing or inactive status, including entry dates, exit dates, and exit destination.
- Prior living situation data to identify where people are immediately before system entry, including the location of the previous night and the zip code of last permanent address or other locational data.
- Demographic data to understand racial, ethnic, gender, disability, household size, and household configuration characteristics.

Questions to consider:

- Does the CoC have specific standards for timely, complete, and accurate HMIS data entry?
- Does the CoC assess and enforce compliance with HMIS data quality and timeliness standards on a regular basis, more frequently than annual LSA submission?
- Can a report be pulled that isolates each cohort: newly homeless, returns from inactive status, and returns from housing?
- Are data complete, accurate, and representative? That is, can they be used now to inform planning, targeting, etc?

Annual Inflow Analysis

Objective: Identify the key demographic and geographic characteristics of people who experience literal homelessness annually in the community. This helps the community understand the number and characteristics of people who become homeless, inform prevention targeting, and measure change over time.

Data to examine overall, by inflow cohort, and disaggregated by subpopulation:

- **Number of unduplicated people or households** inflowing into the homeless response system who are literally homeless.
- **Inflow changes over time and trends**, including estimated inflow for an upcoming annual period expected without additional prevention efforts.
- **Living situations and locations** of households prior to becoming literally homeless.

- **Demographic characteristics** of households becoming literally homeless, including disparities in overall rates of homelessness, access to crisis services and prevention assistance, outcomes, and other measures.
- **For people returning to homelessness: prior homeless response system involvement patterns and program enrollments**.

Questions to consider:

- At the population level, what does the HMIS inflow data represent? That is, what percent of the population that experiences literal homelessness annually is not included in HMIS data?
- Are data on people not included in HMIS data, such as people who do not consent or participate in non-HMIS programs, maintained elsewhere for a fuller picture?
- What are the racial, ethnic, gender, disability, and other key demographic and household characteristics?
- Are there major variances between inflow cohorts and subpopulations?
- Where are people staying *just prior to becoming literally homeless* in terms of specific living situations and locations?
- For those returning, what programs were people enrolled in last and are there opportunities for improvement related to client engagement prior to exit, housing stabilization, and eviction avoidance assistance?

Housing Insecurity Heat Mapping

Objective: Use HMIS inflow data, eviction data, and other *readily available data* to identify areas and groups experiencing higher or more severe housing insecurity.

Example data to examine by zip code or other geography-related data:

- Inflow data, including prior living situation locations and any other locational data.
- Eviction data, including filings, writs, set-outs, and related local court data.
- Extremely low-income household data, including household income, poverty levels, public assistance benefit recipients, and emergency rental assistance recipients.
- Other available data evidencing economic distress, housing cost burden, displacement risk, or disparity.

Questions to consider:

- What are the top areas or zip codes where people are experiencing housing insecurity?
- How does the Housing Insecurity Heat Map intersect with and relate to other community needs assessments, heat maps, and area demographics?
- Are there current or potential access points or service partners in areas with the highest housing insecurity that the community can partner with?
- How should findings from this needs assessment guide the resources assessment, environmental scan, and pilot design?

Community Interviews

Objective: Understand and document common user experiences with accessing emergency homeless assistance resources, along with experiences and insights from coordinated entry/diversion assistance providers and frontline staff.

Data to examine:

- **Qualitative information** from interviews and/or focus groups with people using homeless assistance regarding their experiences and insights.
- **Qualitative information** from interviews and/or focus groups with frontline staff regarding their experiences and insights.

Questions to consider:

- What do people know about homeless crisis response and diversion assistance and how to access it?
- What do people experience when they are trying to access homeless assistance, including diversion assistance just prior to literal homelessness?

- What do people experience after they have resolved their homelessness crisis and are in housing with regard to service supports, resources, and prevention safeguards available to avoid a return to homelessness?
- What do frontline staff experience when they are trying to provide housing problem-solving and diversion assistance or stabilize someone in housing to avoid a return to homelessness, with regard to needed support, resources, and training?
- Are there opportunities to improve access, timeliness, or the effectiveness of diversion and/or housing stabilization services?

Part 3. Resources Assessment Guide

This guide provides guidance and access to a template that can be used for conducting an environmental scan of currently available community prevention resources, completing community interviews to gain a fuller understanding of how people access those resources, and identifying considerations for aligning and developing partnerships to support a Coordinated Prevention approach.

Examples of different community partners that might participate in a community's Coordinated Prevention system or approach are provided, along with potential opportunities and considerations for partnering and improving coordination, targeting, and expedited access to prevention assistance for households with more severe and urgent needs. Resources and potential partners to examine include current diversion and targeted homelessness prevention assistance providers, community providers that administer prevention-related resources, and potential access points where people can be screened and offered direct assistance or connection to assistance, including key cross-sector partners such as healthcare, education, criminal justice, child welfare, aging, disability services, and Veteran-serving organizations.

The resource assessment should be informed by community members through community interviews, which can be conducted as part of the needs assessment process in Part 2. These interviews should focus on how people learn about and access prevention assistance, what the experience and steps are like for them, and what could be improved.

This assessment should be guided by inflow analysis and community data pointing to areas where there is greater housing insecurity and literal homelessness occurring and where more robust and immediately accessible housing problem-solving and prevention resources are more urgently needed. Communities may choose to be selective when first compiling partner information, including focusing only on certain areas with higher need.

Companion workbook

Use the **Element Environmental Scan and Partner Development Workbook** to inventory organizations, programs, access points, services, funding, target populations, and partnership opportunities. The workbook corresponds to this Part 3 guide and Part 4, Element 3 of the Roadmap.

Environmental Scan

Objective: Inventory and assess current prevention resources and potential partners within a defined geographic area, such as a Continuum of Care geographic area or areas with higher housing insecurity based on heat map analysis. Information should be used to understand current prevention-related resources based on Coordinated Homelessness Prevention partner types and to consider the extent to which prevention resources and Core Elements of Coordinated Prevention are already in place or can be strengthened.

Data to examine:

- **Current homeless response system coordinated entry or similar access point providers**, locations, capacity, and current referral relationships with community partners.
- **All existing diversion and targeted homelessness prevention programs**, including their specific funding sources and requirements.
- **Emergency rental assistance providers** across all funding sources.
- **Major community service providers** commonly used by people with financial, food, or other material assistance needs, such as Community Action Agencies, The Salvation Army, and other local nonprofits.
- **Other service providers** that offer social supports for lower-income households, such as food pantries, drop-in centers, and child care centers.
- **Partners operating public facilities** in lower-income, higher housing insecurity areas, such as libraries, recreation centers, school personnel, and homeless school liaisons.
- **Cross-sector partners** serving housing-insecure populations that conduct or may be willing to conduct coordinated approaches to screening, assisting, and linking people to available resources, including those with more urgent or complex needs.
- **Faith-based organizations, trusted community organizations, and business partners** such as barbershops, laundromats, and Veteran Service Organizations that may be willing to share information and connect people in need as Access Points.

Coordinated Homelessness Prevention Partner Types

Diversion and Targeted Homelessness Prevention Service Providers

Description: Programs funded and designed to provide diversion and/or targeted homelessness prevention for households at risk of literal homelessness within a specific timeframe, such as tonight, within 14 days, or within 30 days, but for targeted prevention assistance.

Current practices: Diversion assistance typically focuses on safe alternatives for people seeking shelter or who are newly homeless. Targeted prevention programs screen in and prioritize higher-risk households as part of eligibility and intake procedures. These services often provide more in-depth assessment, housing problem-solving, financial assistance, and housing relocation or stabilization supports. They are often not as fully integrated or coordinated as they could be.

Coordinated prevention opportunities: Integrate diversion and targeted prevention for seamless transition to additional assistance; establish screening and triage protocols; immediately connect eligible at-risk Veterans to VA-funded SSVF; train and certify staff on intensive Housing Problem-Solving.

Examples: ESG diversion and prevention providers; SSVF providers; local targeted prevention programs.

Other Prevention-Related Service Providers

Description: Social service agencies and other entities that intentionally or incidentally provide prevention-related assistance, such as financial, food, material, legal, mediation, or other service supports for at-risk households.

Current practices: Community resources that may help stabilize housing and prevent housing loss are diverse and varied. Assistance is often first come, first served and typically has only a limited and indirect effect on the number of people needing emergency shelter each night. Community providers typically do not prioritize assistance or screen for more urgent and severe forms of housing insecurity risk.

Coordinated prevention opportunities: Use standardized brief screening tools to identify higher-risk households; train staff on intensive Housing Problem-Solving; establish formal processes for expedited referral and access to prevention-related services when needed to prevent literal homelessness.

Examples: Community Action Agency; Legal Aid; FEMA Emergency Food and Shelter Program provider; HEAP provider; housing counseling agency.

Access Points (non-service provider)

Description: Any entity encountering households who may be at risk of housing instability or homelessness that is willing and able to conduct light screening and resource connections. These entities generally do not provide prevention-related services or cannot engage as prevention service providers.

Current practices: Various partners across the community encounter people who are housing insecure and formally or informally offer information, referral, or warm connections. Many cross-sector partners screen for critical needs, such as social determinants of health, but lack a formal expedited process for connecting people with the most urgent or severe needs.

Coordinated prevention opportunities: Use standardized brief screening tools to identify higher-risk households; train staff on basic Housing Problem-Solving; establish clear escalation paths and expedited referral processes for urgent cases.

Examples: Primary care or urgent care clinic; library branch; homeless school liaison; eviction court staff or program; property management company; recreation center; food pantry.

Environmental Scan and Partner Development Workbook

The companion **Environmental Scan and Partner Development Workbook** is intended to be used with Part 3 and Part 4, Element 3 of this toolkit.

Workbook Sheet	Purpose	Toolkit Reference
Read Me	Provides instructions, definitions, and suggested use.	Introduction; Part 3
Environmental Scan	Inventory organizations, programs, services, partner types, service areas, funding, and notes.	Part 3 Environmental Scan; Part 4 Element 3
Partner Types	Summarizes coordinated prevention partner types and opportunities.	Part 3 Partner Types

Crosswalk	Links workbook columns to toolkit sections and planning decisions.	Parts 3-5

Questions to Consider

- Are programs currently funded to provide targeted homelessness prevention part of a coordinated prevention approach, such as coordinated entry, front-door diversion, or similar access pathways?
- If not, what barriers prevent those providers from participating in coordinated access to diversion or prevention for people seeking emergency shelter or engaging with street outreach for the first time?
- In areas with higher housing insecurity, are there current or potential partners physically located in or readily accessible to people living in those areas?
- Which entities might be interested and motivated to participate in initial testing and development of coordinated prevention approaches, including screening/triage, housing problem-solving, and resource navigation?
- Are any entities obvious choices as potential key partners or hubs in priority areas, such as lead housing resource centers or providers for other access point partners?
- How do people currently learn about and access these providers?
- Are these potential access point partners who might screen and offer assistance with prioritized access to targeted homelessness prevention?
- Are there entities that should be invited to have representation on the Core Prevention Team?
- Would prevention-related providers be open to using standardized screening questions to identify households at imminent risk and provide immediate Housing Problem-Solving and prioritized assistance?
- Do any partners currently have staff trained in Housing Problem-Solving?
- How interested and willing are providers in having staff trained in Housing Problem-Solving and participating in Coordinated Prevention approaches?
- What other information is needed to understand the universe of potential partners and partnership opportunities?
- What other community coalitions or networks exist where entities convene to discuss and coordinate emergency rental assistance or related housing stability resources? What opportunities exist to leverage and collaborate with existing efforts?

Community Interviews

Objective: Understand and document common user experiences with accessing prevention assistance resources, along with experiences and insights from prevention staff.

Data to examine:

- **Qualitative information** from interviews and/or focus groups with *people using prevention assistance* regarding their experiences and insights.
- **Qualitative information** from interviews and/or focus groups with *frontline staff* regarding their experiences and insights.

Questions to consider:

- What do people know about prevention assistance and how to access it?
- What do people experience when they are trying to access prevention assistance, including during a housing crisis?
- What do people experience after they have resolved their housing crisis with regard to service supports, resources, and prevention safeguards available to avoid a return to homelessness?
- What do frontline staff experience when trying to provide prevention assistance, including needed support, resources, and training?
- Are there opportunities to improve access, timeliness, or effectiveness of prevention - including increasing targeted homelessness prevention so it is most readily accessible to those most in need?

Part 4. Coordinated Prevention Tools & Templates

Coordinated prevention tools and templates below and available in editable MS Word format can be used as-is or adapted to meet local planning and implementation needs.

Coordinated Homelessness Prevention Development Checklist

The **Coordinated Homelessness Prevention Development Checklist** is another planning support tool community partners can use to quickly identify areas for development or improvement as they build more formal, focused, and lasting access and service partnerships across the community

Critical starting point

Before building new partnerships to identify at-risk households, first ensure diversion and housing problem-solving are currently in use across every homeless system access point. If not, this is a critical first step that can yield immediate results while broader prevention infrastructure is developed.

Coordinated Prevention Roadmap

The **Coordinated Prevention Roadmap** template can be used as a local, individualized community action plan. The purpose of this tool is to help a Core Prevention Team or similar lead group adopt, adapt, and reference a plan on a regular basis to identify needed steps and timelines, list action items and responsible parties, and track progress. The Roadmap should be an iterative document reviewed and updated regularly by the community lead group or Core Prevention Team. It can be adapted to whatever format or platform works best locally, such as a shared document, project management platform, or collaborative planning tool.

Use flexibly

The roadmap is not a required sequence. Communities may start with the element that best matches current capacity, opportunities, or urgent needs. For example, some communities may begin with a pilot, while others may begin with data analysis, partner mapping, or shared definitions and screening. The example timeframes in the template reflect a community that chooses to start with step 1 and continue to step 5.

Pilot Implementation Plan

The **Pilot Implementation Plan** template can be used by to develop an actionable plan to pilot one or more coordinated prevention elements. A pilot may test partnerships in priority neighborhoods, shared screening, housing problem-solving, expedited referral, flexible financial assistance, priority access to existing resources, or other locally defined strategies.

Before going live

The Core Prevention Team and key implementation partners should review and agree to the pilot plan before launch. The plan may be adapted to fit local needs.

Housing Insecurity Screening Tool

The **Housing Insecurity Screening Tool** example is based on a standardized housing insecurity risk typology. Communities should adapt the language, response guidance, referral points, confidentiality practices, consent language, and resource options to fit local policy and practice. The purpose is not only to ask questions; it is to operationalize local definitions so partners can identify risk consistently and match people to appropriate responses.

Critical starting point

Setting local definitions is foundational. Once partners agree on what “stably housed,” “unstably housed,” “at-risk,” “imminent risk,” and “literally homeless tonight” mean locally, they can build screening questions, risk-level response guidance, referral pathways, and prioritization protocols that are clearer, faster, and more equitable.

About the Author

Tom Albanese, L.S.W., has worked to prevent and end homelessness since 1992 and is the founder of Element Consulting Group, LLC. His prevention work began early in his career, when as a new shelter director he helped organize community partners to identify and help households experiencing a housing crisis with problem-solving and connecting people to resources before turning to an already over-taxed tiny rural shelter. Tom subsequently served in a leadership capacity at the Community Shelter Board in Columbus, Ohio, leading system planning and implementation efforts.

He left CSB to work for Abt Associates and led national technical assistance for HUD's Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program and co-led the VA's Supportive Services for Veteran Families program TA team, supporting coordinated prevention initiatives in communities nationwide, and contributing to national guidance, standards, research, and evaluation. He continues to serve on the VA team, supporting communities to prevent and end homelessness among Veterans.

Over more than three decades, Tom has helped communities across the country design, implement, evaluate, and strengthen homelessness prevention, diversion, rapid rehousing, coordinated entry, and housing stability systems. Through Element Consulting Group, Tom continues to help communities build practical, data-informed, and people-centered approaches that prevent housing loss and homelessness.

For further assistance contact Tom at: talbanese@talbaneseconsulting.com