



### **What is a 10-Year Plan?**

A 10-Year Plan is a blueprint for ending chronic homelessness in a given community. The concept originated with the National Alliance to End Homelessness and was adopted as part of the *Chronic Homelessness Initiative* a nationwide campaign coordinated by the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, to target federal, state, and local homeless assistance and other resources to people who meet the federal definition of "chronically homeless." To date, more than 300 cities and states are developing or have adopted 10-Year Plans.

### **How Did the Process Develop Locally?**

In late 2005, Bakersfield Mayor Harvey L. Hall convened a committee of service providers and local government agency representatives to begin work on a 10-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness. Led by United Way of Kern County, and the Kern County Homeless Collaborative, a 10-Year Plan Committee was formed to oversee the process. The Committee included more than 35 partners from the nonprofit, government, faith and business communities. Working groups tackled different aspects of the problem to develop the plan.

At the urging of the Interagency Council on Homelessness, the 10-Year Plan Committee adopted a "Housing First" approach. (To access the full 10-Year Plan go to [www.kernhomeless.com](http://www.kernhomeless.com)).

### **What is a Housing First Approach?**

A *housing first* approach seeks to help persons exit homelessness as quickly as possible by placing them in permanent housing and giving them access to needed services. This approach assumes that the factors that have contributed to a person's homelessness can best be remedied once the individual is housed rather than in emergency shelters or transitional settings. It also accepts that for some lifelong support may be required to prevent the reoccurrence of homelessness.

### **What is Chronic Homelessness?**

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, a chronically homeless person is someone who is alone, disabled, and has been homeless for one year or more or have been homeless four or more times in the past 3 years.

It is estimated that the chronically homeless make up slightly more than 10% of those who experience homelessness over the course of a year. They are most often severely disabled with a mental health condition, physical illness or substance abuse problem.

They are the most visible segment of the homeless population and the focus of community frustration due to their ongoing habitation of public places and their non-conforming behavior. Though a small percentage of the overall yearly homeless population, chronically homeless people consume the majority of resources within the homeless service system and are costly to taxpayers because of their frequent interactions with hospitals, mental health crisis services, detox programs, and the criminal justice system.

### **How Many Chronically Homeless People Do We Have in Kern County?**

Based on a homeless survey completed in 2006 and a point-in-time homeless census taken in January of 2007, we know that on any given night in Kern County there are over 1,500 people who are homeless including almost 200 children. Of the 1,500 it is estimated that at least 300 are chronically homeless.

## How Much Does it Cost the Community to Care for the Chronically Homeless?

It is difficult to determine the exact cost since complete numbers are not available. However, based on national figures from several studies, it is reasonable to assume that the community is spending between **\$40,000 and \$50,000 per person per year** on services. Some figures are available to provide insight into costs to the county:

- *Law enforcement.* **The cost of law enforcement response calls involving the chronically homeless in Metro Bakersfield in 2005 was estimated to be \$123,420.** Looking at calls to just two of the city's homeless service providers shows that Bakersfield Police responded to **270** calls for services. In addition, **862** arrests were made of subjects listing the shelters as their home address.
- *Ambulance transport.* Homeless patient transport costs over a two year period were **\$416,000. One chronic homeless individual alone led to \$171,000 in costs.** Since most costs are not reimbursable this debt has to be absorbed by the service provider.
- *Hospitalization.* Kern County Mental Health tracked 151 chronically homeless individuals enrolled in a recent state program over the course of a year. **In the 12 months prior to enrollment these 151 individuals spent 1,397 days in the hospital at an estimated cost of \$1,397,000 to the County. These same individuals also spent 2,072 days incarcerated at an estimated cost of \$186,480 to the County.**

## What Can We Do?

*Home First! Kern County's 10-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness* has identified three objectives and established 15 goals that if implemented, will direct us away from managing chronic homelessness and toward ending it in 10 Years.

The three main objectives of the plan focus on:

- *Prevention* - closing the front door to homelessness by preventing it whenever possible.
- *Housing stability* - opening the back door to housing stability by embracing a housing first model that focuses on rapid re-housing and provides security and opportunity along with wraparound services.
- *Creating additional permanent supportive and affordable housing units* - building the infrastructure by focusing on construction, rehabilitation and affordable housing preservation.

## How Much Will This Cost?

Ending homelessness is not going to be easy or inexpensive. The solution involves more than offering a cot and a hot meal. When thinking of costs there are four realities that we as a community must face.

- Ending chronic homelessness will require a greater integration and coordination of existing resources
- Ending chronic homelessness will require leveraging resources from every segment of the community
- Ending chronic homelessness will require that major resources be redirected to focus on supportive housing
- The costs of ending chronic homelessness are greater than the current resources available

Though the initial costs of implementing *Home First!* may seem high, the long-term financial and social costs of maintaining the status-quo are much higher. Communities that have already implemented their 10-year plans have seen tremendous savings in supportive services to the chronically homeless. One study has identified annual savings of as much as **\$18,000** per chronically homeless person per year for each unit of service-enriched, supportive housing built in place of emergency shelter beds. By implementing a housing first approach, these savings can be passed along to pay for other costs associated with implementing the 10-Year Plan.

## How Can I Help?

Support the creation of a Housing Trust Fund

Lobby for the adoption and implementation of *Home First!* in our community

For more information on getting involved contact United Way of Kern County (661) 834-2734