



**WORKING GROUP:** SHIFT TO “HOUSING FIRST”

## **INITIATIVE: RAPID REHOUSING**

Embrace the *housing first* approach to ending homelessness by moving the chronic homeless from the streets, shelters, medical and mental institutions, correctional facilities, and foster care into permanent housing with wrap-around services.

### **The Situation**

According to the most recent homeless count released in 2005, there are about 7,600 unhoused people on any given night in Santa Clara County. This number is the basis for an estimated 20,000 people who experience homelessness in a year. This extreme poverty and human misery exists amid a community known for its wealth and high standard of living. In spite of significant resources from many sectors, the problem of homelessness continues increase.

Many communities across the nation are heeding the call from Washington to end homelessness rather than just manage. They are shifting to the *housing first* model whereby homeless individuals are placed directly into permanent housing, skipping the emergency shelter system whenever possible. Providing well designed and managed permanent housing is actually less costly to the taxpayers since costs for emergency rooms, police, and jails are reduced. San Francisco’s cost/benefit analysis revealed that an estimated cost \$16,000 a year to permanently house and provide services to a formerly homeless person, while a person living on the street had an annual average cost of \$61,000.

### **Progress to Date**

The *housing first* model is being adopted in many metropolitan areas around the nation and is the centerpiece of both the City and County 10-year plans to end homelessness. The County of Santa Clara recently established a Housing Plus Fund of \$4 million to assist in the development of housing units for the homeless mentally ill. The fund was created with \$2 million from the County’s Affordable Housing Fund and \$2 million from the County’s Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) one-time money. Awards were recently approved to four new projects which will result in 49 units of housing for this population. Each of the 49 tenants will also receive supportive services, including rental assistance if necessary, from the County’s MHSA Full Service Partnerships Program.

Other Housing First programs in the County are funded by federal grants, including Serial Inebriates Program administered by EHC Lifebuilders, Shelter Plus Care, administered by the Housing Authority, and Off the Streets to Housing administered by the City of Palo Alto.



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**Proposed Strategies**

1. Educate property owners and managers to remove stigma of renting to extremely low income and formerly homeless people.
2. Increase by 2,500 the number of units of permanent housing available to chronically unhoused people.
3. Encourage the Housing Authority to establish a permanent set aside of at least 100 Section 8 Housing Vouchers each year for formerly homeless individuals and families.
4. Encourage the Housing Authority to work with affordable housing developers to apply for additional project based certificates from HUD.
5. Assist in the development of permanent housing with supportive services for people coming out of domestic violence situations.
6. Continue to maximize use of MHSA (Proposition 63) funds to create new supportive housing units.
7. Encourage local jurisdictions to allocate at least 30% of housing resources to extremely low income housing units with a goal of creating more permanent housing for the homeless.