Massachusetts State Plan To End Youth Homelessness

Table of Contents

Charting the Course and Creating the Infrastructure
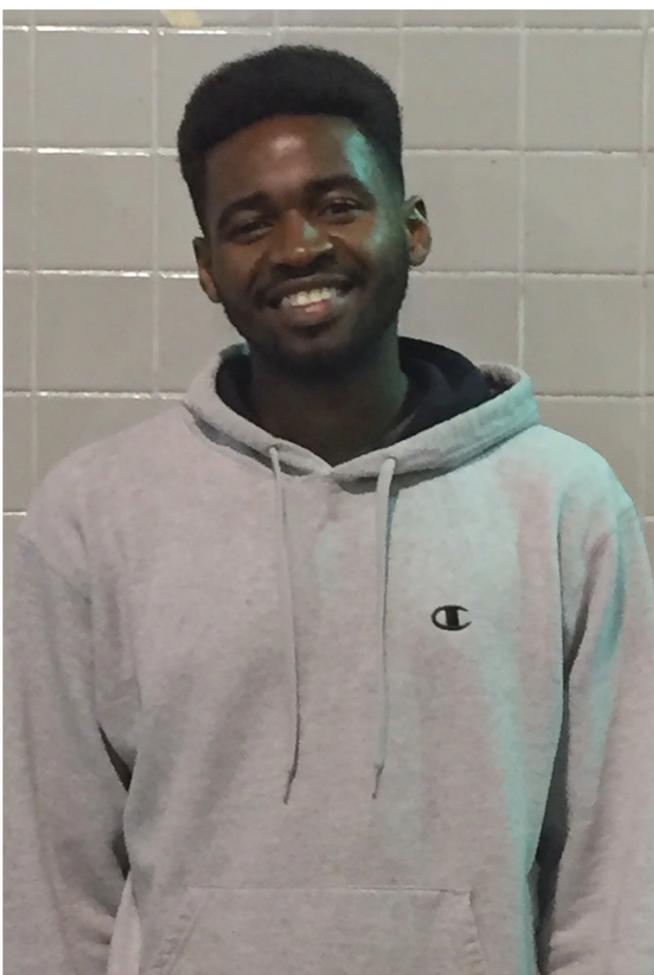
"Let's end youth homelessness together."

– Tomoni, Lynn

"Happy Halloween! Celebrating my victories: new baby, new apartment, new start."

– Brianna, Lynn
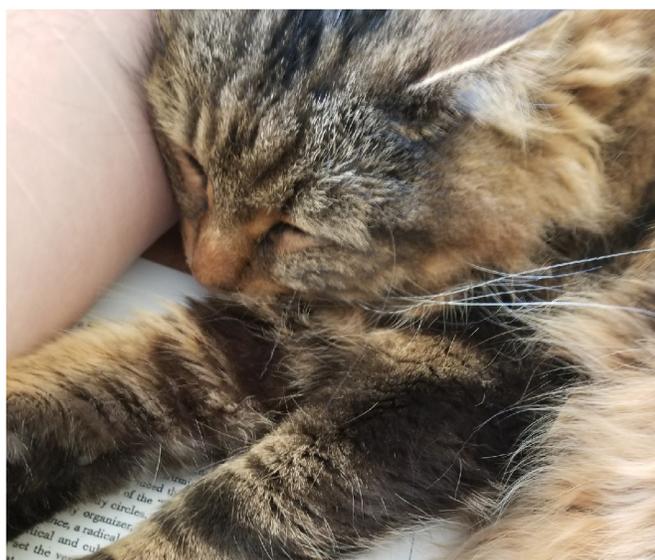
"With a reminder of my past, I'm working towards my future . . . plus cats."

– Jocelyn, Lynn

The photos throughout this document were collected as a part of a statewide PhotoVoice project funded by the Liberty Mutual Foundation. The majority of images were captured via cell phones of youth and young adults experiencing homelessness.

"I am homeless, and it is cold. This morning everyone had to leave the [shelter] because there was a fight. My friends and I went to church, and eventually we were allowed back in, because it is so cold. This sleeping bag jacket is massive on me; so big I waddle when I walk. It keeps me warm, though. It's my birthday, and I'm twenty-three. My soon-to-be girlfriend is taking my photo. No one knows, but I wasn't entered into the lottery for a spot in the [shelter] this weekend; I was guaranteed a spot because it is my birthday weekend."

– M.N., Boston

PART I. The Plan

Executive Summary

VISION: The Commonwealth of Massachusetts envisions a future where we end homelessness among youth and young adults (YYA) by making homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring, and where every YYA is safe, supported, and able to use their strengths fully. We acknowledge that YYA will continue to face life's challenges; however, we can create systems that will catch them when they fall. Our goal is to build a system in which every community in the Commonwealth has coordinated, developmentally appropriate, and trauma-informed resources that are effective, regionally accessible, and reliably funded.

PROCESS: The Plan is the culmination of a 12-month process of interviews, literature and data review, focus groups with YYA experiencing homelessness, and stakeholder engagement. The Plan integrates key recommendations and insights from the local, state, and national levels, drawing on the "Federal Framework to End Youth Homelessness" developed by the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness as well as feedback from state and local partners about the current needs and strengths of programs and systems serving YYA across the Commonwealth. Eight evidence-based practices and valued principles are central to the Plan: harm reduction, trauma-informed care, positive youth development, Housing First, culturally responsive services, racial equity, authentic youth and young adult engagement, and multi-system approaches.

The Plan begins with recommendations and action steps that lay out an achievable path to ending youth homelessness in Massachusetts. A detailed description of the process and research that informed the recommendations then follows. Throughout the document, the Plan spotlights Massachusetts programs and practices to highlight some of the exemplary work currently happening in the Commonwealth.

RECOMMENDATIONS: There are six primary recommendations in the plan, one of which is an enveloping strategy: *implement a coordinated statewide response to youth homelessness.* Achieving the outcomes in this overarching recommendation will enable the advancement of the other recommendations through the creation of central leadership, strengthened interagency collaboration, and enhanced regional capacity to prevent and end youth homelessness. The six recommendations are:

(1) Implement a coordinated statewide response to youth homelessness;

(2) Expand the current spectrum of accountable and evidence-informed models of housing and services;

(3) Enhance early identification, connection, and outreach systems to improve young people's connection to existing resources;

(4) Improve education, employment, and credentialing opportunities in order to support young people's access to long-term, sustainable employment and income;

(5) Create systematic outcome measurement systems and data-sharing opportunities; and

(6) Create a structure to support authentic youth and young adult involvement statewide.

The recommendations and the accompanying action plan serve as a roadmap for ending youth homelessness for the Executive Branch, the Legislature, and regional networks and Continuums of Care (CoCs). Regional networks and CoCs are encouraged to further develop their own regionalized strategies and plans to end youth homelessness.

Introduction

Every night hundreds of youth and young adults (YYA) across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts find themselves experiencing homelessness due to a variety of intersecting causes. Limited affordable housing, inconsistent transitions out of justice or child welfare systems, substance use and mental health disorders, rejection due to gender identity and sexual orientation, racial discrimination, and trauma are some of the many factors that contribute to young adults finding themselves unstably housed on a friend's couch, in a shelter, or on the street. Though it is impossible to intercept every variable that could jeopardize the housing stability of YYA, the Massachusetts State Plan to End Youth Homelessness (the Plan) was created to help the Commonwealth develop a system that prevents more young people from experiencing crises, identifies them more quickly when a crisis occurs, and responds immediately with the supports that young people need to either prevent or end their experience of homelessness. This was a multi-stakeholder initiative in which young people with lived experience co-developed this report, alongside providers, stakeholders, and state agencies.

The Plan is the culmination of a 12-month process of interviews, literature and data review, focus groups, and stakeholder engagement. The Plan is uniquely ordered, beginning with recommendations and action steps as a way to emphasize the achievable path to ending youth homelessness in the Commonwealth. The recommendations and action plan are followed by a detailed description of the process and research that informed the recommendations and action plan. Throughout the document, examples of Massachusetts' programs and practices are spotlighted in order to highlight some of the exemplary work currently happening in the Commonwealth.

"I've been homeless long enough that I've accepted that living in a car is a way of living. It's been so long that it doesn't even bother me anymore. It's like, 'Time to go to bed, put down the back seat.' It's my home now."

- YYA, 19, Orleans

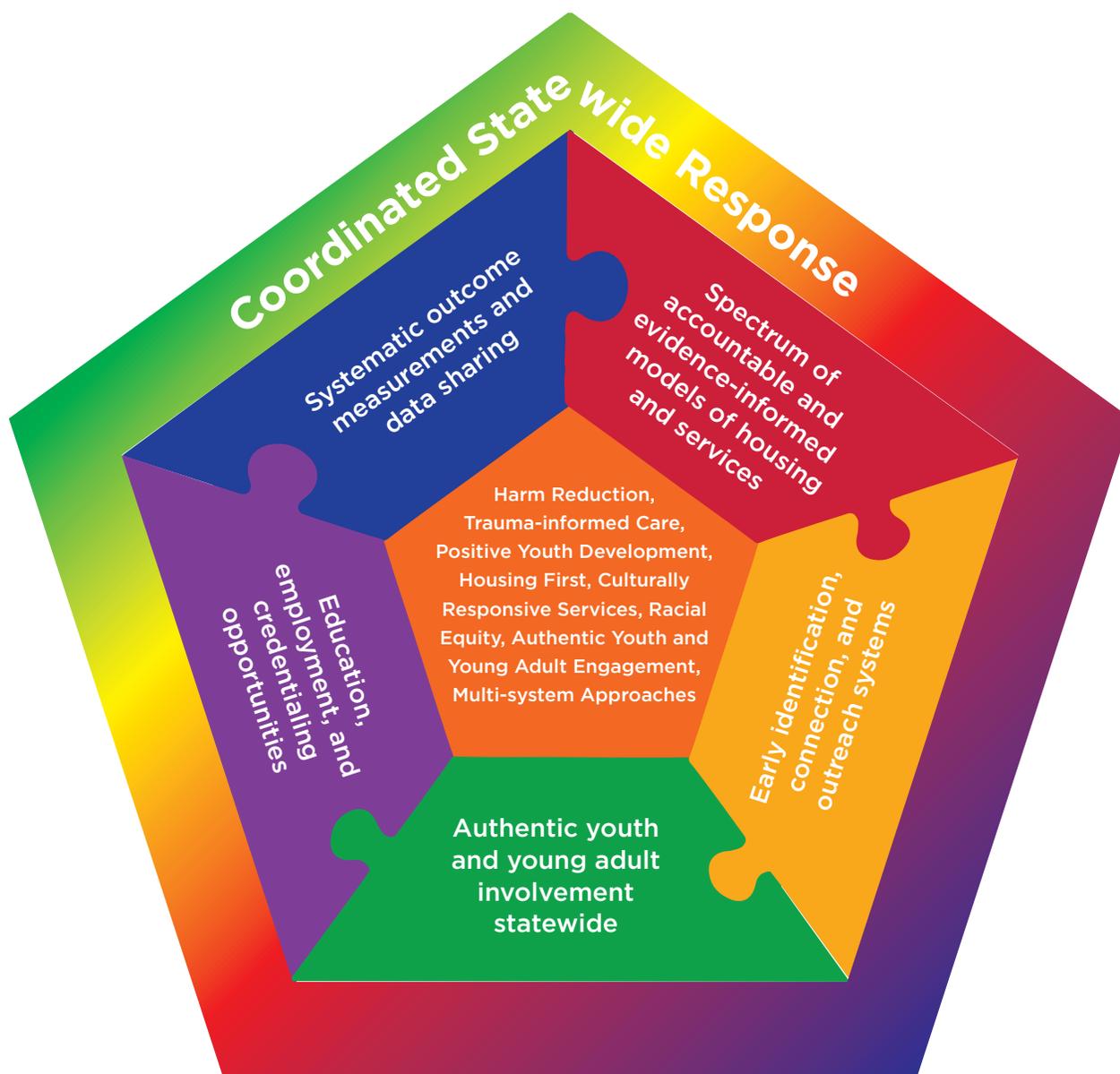*"If [people] have never experienced homelessness, they have no idea what it is like to not have food, not have a place to live, place to shower, not have a laundry machine or heat. You can't understand that unless you experience it—you're always thinking, 'Is this the last place I'm going to have shelter over my head?'"*
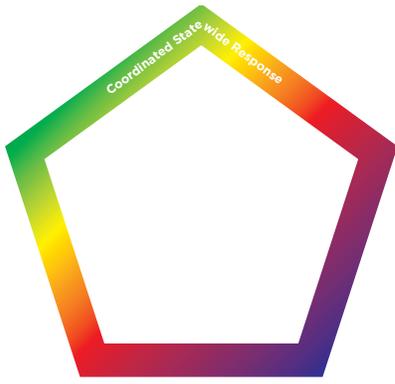
- YYA, 22, Lynn

Recommendations

Content for this Plan came from interviews with state agencies; a statewide survey of providers; roundtable discussions; focus groups with YYA experiencing homelessness; literature reviews; and analysis of existing national, state, and local data. Six broad categories of need emerged: (1) the need for a coordinated statewide response to youth homelessness; (2) the need for a robust spectrum of appropriate housing and services; (3) the need for YYA experiencing housing instability to be identified and appropriately connected with supports and services in a timely way; (4) the need for collaboration and funding streams to support education, employment, and credentialing opportunities; (5) the need for data to be consistent and uniform and for outcomes to be systematically monitored; and (6) the need for ongoing, statewide YYA engagement. The needs were developed into a set of six recommendation.

Of the six recommendations, the first is an enveloping strategy: **implement a coordinated statewide response to youth homelessness.** Achieving the first and most important recommendation will enable the advancement of the other five recommendations through the creation of central leadership, strengthened interagency collaboration, and enhanced regional capacity to prevent and end youth homelessness. The following is a description of proposed recommendations and specific outcomes to guide the implementation of each recommendation.

Coordinated Statewide Response

Systematic outcome measurements and data sharing

Spectrum of accountable and evidence-informed models of housing and services

Harm Reduction, Trauma-informed Care, Positive Youth Development, Housing First, Culturally Responsive Services, Racial Equity, Authentic Youth and Young Adult Engagement, Multi-system Approaches

Education, employment, and credentialing opportunities

Early identification, connection, and outreach systems

Authentic youth and young adult involvement statewide

RECOMMENDATION 1: Implement a coordinated statewide response to youth homelessness

This recommendation is seen as the container for all other recommendations in the Plan. A coordinated statewide response to youth homelessness will be achieved when the following outcomes have been accomplished:

Outcome 1: Enhanced state-level operational capacity to prevent and end youth homelessness.

> **Strategy A**: Identify and hire an Executive Director for the Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (UHY Commission).[1]

> **Strategy B:** Compile state agencies' mandates and initiatives connected to YYA homelessness and regularly present these at UHY Commission meetings.

Outcome 2: Enhanced regional capacity to prevent and end youth homelessness.

> **Strategy A:** Assess regional capacities to prevent and end YYA homelessness.

> **Strategy B:** Provide training and technical assistance for conducting regional needs assessments.

> **Strategy C:** Provide training and technical assistance for developing regional plans to end YYA homelessness.

Outcome 3: Enhanced connection among direct service programs throughout the state.

> **Strategy A:** Convene a daylong, annual, statewide retreat for service providers to share evidence-based best practices, challenges, resources, and data collection efforts.

> **Strategy B**: Create an online platform for learning community and resource sharing.

Data gathered from stakeholder interviews, provider surveys, focus groups, and roundtable discussions all highlighted the need for a coordinated statewide response in order for Massachusetts to address and end homelessness among YYA. Stakeholders described such a coordinated response as including dedicated staff to lead and manage a state-level response; a coordinated effort to align the various champions, leaders, and advocates into a collective effort; a structure to support the development of regional and local plans; and a network of connected and supported programs and services.

The stakeholders interviewed indicated that the ability to plan and implement a statewide coordinated system for YYA experiencing housing instability depends on having dedicated staff to lead project activities and engage state and regional stakeholders in continuing plan development and implementation. Unanimously, interviewees cited the lack of dedicated and focused staff as a significant barrier to advancing the work of addressing and ending YYA homelessness in the Commonwealth. The primary recommendation is that the state establish a full-time Executive Director of the UHY Commission and house the Executive Director within the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS), reporting to the Executive Director of the Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness (ICHH). EOHHS has funds earmarked for the UHY Commission, and this position could be initially supported by some of those funds. With focused leadership, the Commission could further progress on its mandate to provide comprehensive and effective responses to the unique needs of this population through facilitation of information sharing, including across state agencies.

One of the roles of the Executive Director will be to enhance the capacity of the UHY Commission to support regional responses to prevent and end youth homelessness. The Executive Director will have the capacity to provide training and technical assistance to Continuums of Care (CoCs) and regional housing networks to conduct needs assessments and develop local plans to end youth homelessness. The Executive Director will also be in a position to provide ongoing coordination, training, and information sharing to local providers.

---

1. See Part II of the Plan, "Legislative History," for more information on the UHY Commission.

"There is no shelter [here] for youth. There is no assisted housing, subsidized or affordable housing for kids trying to stay in high school or go to college. I can get them to food pantries, sign them up for health insurance and SNAP but I can't find them a roof so they can continue to better themselves and transition into self-sufficiency. They need a safe place to keep their belongings; they need to not spend their day hustling for a place to sleep, so they can focus on being their best selves and getting the counseling, the medical services, and the education they need to be successful."

– Provider Survey

Spectrum of accountable and evidence-informed models of housing and services

RECOMMENDATION 2: Expand the current spectrum of accountable and evidence-informed models of housing and services

Outcome 1: A flexible, regional response to YYA homelessness is developed, including shelter, triage, assessment, and housing services and supports.

> **Strategy A:** Establish the numbers of existing and needed units and models of housing statewide.
>
> **Strategy B:** Identify the numbers and types of existing and needed support services statewide.
>
> **Strategy C:** Identify and evaluate current and potential funding for housing, including supportive housing, and services statewide.
>
> **Strategy D:** Identify or create one low-barrier resource center (drop-in center) for YYA in every region (as stand-alone centers or integrated into existing programs or centers).

Outcome 2: Housing and service needs for subpopulations of unaccompanied homeless youth are addressed, and partnerships with state agencies are developed to ensure appropriate statewide services.

> **Strategy A:** Create working groups for each subpopulation identified in the report comprised of advocates, people with lived experience, providers, the Executive Director of the UHY Commission, and state agencies that provide services to the subpopulations. Alternatively, integrate the Executive Director of the UHY Commission and YYA with lived experience of homelessness into existing working groups.
>
> **Strategy B:** Each working group assesses current resources and utilization, service needs, barriers, and relevant policy.
>
> **Strategy C:** Each working group creates an appropriate training plan to train state agencies and service providers on needs, best practices, and cultural competencies.
>
> **Strategy D:** Each working group implements training plan.

Outcome 3: Housing opportunities available to YYA are established and expanded.

> **Strategy A:** Work with DHCD to prioritize YYA housing rental rounds supporting a range of housing options, including low-threshold units.
>
> **Strategy B:** Explore models of how housing/rent collection may be made flexible for this population (while still fostering accountability and responsibility), including exploration of rapid re-housing models for YYA.
>
> **Strategy C:** Increase funding for rental subsidies.

Outcome 4: Stable funds are made available for supportive services.

> **Strategy A:** Partner with the Bureau of Substance Addiction Services (BSAS), the Department of Mental Health (DMH), and MassHealth to explore appropriate reimbursable tenancy supports for YYA.
>
> **Strategy B:** Inventory state and federal funding streams for possible use to support programs and services and develop additional resources / funding streams, as needed, based on above assessment.

Outcome 5: Number of bed nights for young adults in adult shelters statewide is reduced through diversion.

> **Strategy A:** Assess how current outreach, shelter, and other YYA access points are incorporating diversion practices.
>
> **Strategy B:** Train providers in family and community engagement for the purpose of diversion to complement primary prevention efforts.
>
> **Strategy C:** Develop and distribute best-practice guidelines for serving YYA in adult shelters based on recommendations from youth and providers and practices in other states.
>
> **Strategy D:** Ensure all adult shelters know local and regional youth-specific resources

Outcome 6: Programs and services have access to flexible funding to meet the needs of individual YYA.

> **Strategy A:** Support continued dedicated state funding with program-level flexibility.
>
> **Strategy B**: Utilize dedicated state funding to leverage additional private and foundation resources.

Interviews with state agencies, focus groups, and the provider survey all emphasized both the widespread lack of affordable housing and the vast regional differences in the availability of housing models, units, and youth-specific support services. Both YYA and service providers expressed concerns regarding the lack of resources available to YYA experiencing homelessness in many areas of the state. Conversely, Boston-area providers, who currently have a range of youth services including drop-in centers and YYA shelters, reported having to send young adults outside of the city, away from their support systems, in order to obtain affordable housing. Without access to housing, young adults are staying in unsafe accommodations or accessing the adult emergency shelter system, which places them at risk for violence, abuse, and exploitation.

In order to advocate for adequate expansion of housing throughout the Commonwealth, the existing number of units and models of housing available to YYA must be established first. This includes housing units and subsidies available through the Department of Housing and Community Development's Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program, the state-funded public housing program, and the Alternative Housing Voucher Program. Once baseline numbers are better established, there can be identification and evaluation of current and potential funding for housing, including permanent supportive housing, and services across the state. Temporary, transitional, and permanent housing across the state must also include a supply and range of options that do not require sobriety, have minimum income requirements, or require absence of a criminal record. The presence or creation of low-threshold supports and services, such as drop-in centers, in every region was also identified as a key strategy for improving YYA stability. Then, when YYA experiencing homelessness are connected to appropriate housing and services, they will have a stable foundation from which they can address their other areas of need, such as education, employment, and substance use.

Each subpopulation represented among YYA experiencing homelessness has specific service delivery needs (see pages 54-66 for more information on subpopulations, including data and service delivery needs). These subpopulations include LGBTQ youth; pregnant and parenting youth; youth under 18; victims of sexual trafficking and exploitation; youth with multiple systems involvement; YYA with mental health and substance use disorders; undocumented and immigrant youth; college students experiencing hunger and homelessness; and YYA who are experiencing intimate partner violence. Part of this recommendation is for the UHY Commission to create working groups, co-chaired by the new Executive Director of the UHY Commission and leading experts in these areas, to identify best practices and models for screening, assessment, and intervention with these subpopulations. Alternatively, the Executive Director can join existing working groups of other commissions or bodies that focus on the subpopulations, but not on YYA homelessness, in order to ensure the needs of young adults experiencing homelessness from each subpopulation are highlighted. Each working group also will be tasked with developing appropriate materials to train state agencies and service providers on the integration of needs, best practices, and cultural competencies. It is also important to note that many YYA have characteristics associated with multiple subpopulations (e.g., an LGBTQ YYA with a substance use disorder who is experiencing domestic violence). A key role for the UHY Commission Executive Director and the working groups will be to support a holistic approach to service delivery for YYA with multiple challenges.

It is also imperative to divert young adults from emergency shelters, particularly adult emergency shelters, as much as possible. Diversion for YYA is only just beginning to be discussed nationally, and the best definitions for "diversion" are coming from the adult and family homelessness realm. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, a successfully implemented diversion program "will improve the ability of a homeless assistance system to target shelter resources effectively, perform well on [HUD performance] measures, and, most importantly, help families safely avoid a traumatic and stressful homeless episode."[2] The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) developed a set of community-level criteria for ending youth homelessness, including that "the community uses prevention and diversion strategies whenever possible, and otherwise provides immediate access to low-barrier crisis housing and services to any youth who needs and wants it."[3] It is recommended that a statewide assessment be conducted to understand how current outreach, shelter, and other YYA access points are incorporating diversion practices. CoCs may then be trained in family and community engagement for the purpose of diversion to complement primary prevention efforts.

2 "Closing the Front Door: Creating a Successful Diversion Program for Homeless Families." National Alliance to End Homelessness. Accessed March 26, 2018.
http://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/creating-a-successul-diversion-program.pdf.
3 "Criteria and Benchmarks for Achieving the Goal of Ending Youth Homelessness." United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. January 2017. Accessed March 25, 2018.
https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Youth_Criteria_Benchmarks_FINAL.pdf.

"Nothing is ever readily available. Housing or help. There is help out there, don't get me wrong. But most of the time there tends to be a wait list. You get called back after three months, and by that time, it's just too late."

– YYA, 19, Framingham

"Wish I knew what the resources were— what places provided what help. I would have [gone to get services] at the moment I got kicked out."

– YYA, 20, Greenfield

"As long as you have abusive and neglectful families, you will always have homeless youth. Your job [as a service provider] is to get us off the streets as quickly as possible—because the longer we're on the streets, the more bad things happen to us, and the more bad things happen to us, the harder it is to get off the streets."

– YYA, 19, Boston

Once housed, many YYA will have a continued need for support services, and these services will need stable funding mechanisms attached. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) Bureau of Substance Addiction Services (BSAS) and the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health (DMH) have specialized services for supportive case management for YYA and are currently working with Medicaid (MassHealth) to explore funding for supportive case management services that include specialized staffing patterns for YYA. It is recommended that the UHY Commission partner with BSAS, DMH, MassHealth, and other funding sources to inform appropriate reimbursable tenancy supports for young adults.

Additionally, providers from across the Commonwealth articulated the need for flexible funding pools in order to access direct financial assistance to meet the variety of needs of YYA experiencing housing instability. One provider referred to these flexible funds as "barrier-buster money"— funding that could address and overcome unique issues such as child-care arrears, transportation, or small legal fees. Such funds are a needed resource for overcoming barriers to stability for many YYA.

Early identification, connection, and outreach systems

RECOMMENDATION 3: Enhance early identification, connection, and outreach systems to improve young people's connection to existing resources

Outcome 1: Improved ability to identify YYA at risk of housing instability and homelessness within programs not primarily focused on homelessness, including youth transitioning out of state systems of care.

> **Strategy A:** Create a "protocol for identification" and related training material that can be used statewide and distributed by state agencies and CoCs to providers and other entities (courts, hospitals, schools, etc.) to identify youth at risk of homelessness.

> **Strategy B:** Connect with the EOHHS Transition Planning Workgroup to identify and implement recommendations. This can include the convening of appropriate state agency collaborators to ensure effective transition planning for youth and young adults as well as a coordinated approach to providing services to this population.

Outcome 2: Reduced amount of time between a YYA experiencing housing instability and connecting with services and supports.

> **Strategy A:** Develop an integrated, up-to-date, statewide referral system and/or online resource guide that includes a map of statewide distribution of resources.

> **Strategy B:** Create a statewide awareness campaign that includes social media to encourage YYA who are facing housing instability to reach out early to service providers, and ensure distribution of the campaign in high schools and campuses.

As previously mentioned, USICH recommends that YYA be prevented or diverted from experiencing homelessness whenever possible, and they suggest this be accomplished through "substantial partnership" with schools, the child welfare and justice systems, employment, physical and behavioral health, and other youth-serving programs.[4] However, many of these entities do not currently have an adequate understanding of or ability to recognize housing instability in YYA, and even if they do, they often do not know where to refer a young person who needs support services. Nearly two-thirds of surveyed providers reported a need for a comprehensive, "consistently updated" resource guide, stating that they either did not currently have one or it was not YYA-specific, and therefore they often did not know the appropriate options for their clients.

Likewise, young adults also expressed feeling alone when facing housing instability. Throughout the focus groups, numerous YYA experiencing homelessness expressed a feeling of isolation, commenting that they did not know anyone else experiencing similar situations or resources to support them. When asked about the moment they realized they were "capital-H Homeless," many said it was the moment they had nowhere to go and no one to turn to. This period of isolation was not only stressful, but also presented a window for violence, victimization, and exploitation. Many focus group participants expressed wishing they had known about available resources earlier, as an earlier connection could have prevented some negative outcomes.

---

4 Ibid.

In order to ensure that YYA experiencing homelessness are quickly identified and appropriately connected with services and supports, a number of state-level actions can be undertaken. By improving the ability for agencies beyond those that focus on homeless services, including schools and state systems of care, to identify youth at risk for homelessness, prevention and intervention points can be accessed earlier. Creating and integrating an identification tool and connection protocol into existing risk assessments and intake processes can accomplish this. The identification tool should be based on other research-based identification tools, such as the Youth Assessment Prioritization Tool (YAP), used in Canada to assess YYA's risk of homelessness and identify needed supports.[5]

Additionally, the Transition Planning Workgroup of EOHHS is in the process of finalizing a report outlining best practices and recommendations for individuals who are transitioning to or from an EOHHS agency and/or related service system, including YYA transitioning out of state care. Integrating that work into youth homelessness prevention will be crucial to ensuring early identification and connection.

Another action to minimize the time between the start of housing instability and connection to supports and services would be to create an integrated, up-to-date, statewide referral system and/or online resource guide. Youth in focus groups reported that they had trouble finding resources. When left without options, YYA often simply Google some combination of "homeless," "teen," and "help." Unfortunately, such searches often produce only results on adult services, such as adult homeless shelters or food pantries, neither of which are appropriately equipped to meet the prevention, intervention, or developmental needs of YYA. Additionally, some providers reported not being able to adequately connect with potential clients to inform them of services offered. A continuously updated online resource guide might easily fill this gap. The Youth Services Network of Minnesota developed a mobile-optimized web application designed to easily connect youth who are "homeless, in crisis, or at risk of either" to the services they need.[6] The app includes daily updates of shelter bed availability sorted by distance from current location, ways to connect with outreach workers, drop-in centers, food resources, and medical and crisis line resources. It aims to be a comprehensive resource for youth in Minnesota facing housing instability and homelessness. Having a similar resource created in Massachusetts would create a platform for a statewide information campaign to be launched, assuring youth that they are not alone in their struggles and encouraging them to reach out to service providers as early as possible.

Education, employment, and credentialing opportunities

RECOMMENDATION 4: Improve education, employment, and credentialing opportunities in order to support young people's access to long-term, sustainable employment and income

Outcome 1: Improved outcomes, including graduation rates, for high school students facing housing instability.

> **Strategy A:** Facilitate connections between education and credentialing programs (such as DESE, WIOA Youth programs, recovery high schools, etc.) and direct service providers to create new partnerships and expand access to resources.

Outcome 2: A comprehensive approach to mitigating housing challenges and economic insecurity of current and prospective college students.

> **Strategy A**: Develop a "handoff protocol" for when students who are experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity transition from high school to college.

> **Strategy B:** Utilize the results of the 2017-18 survey of college students in Massachusetts, done in partnership with the Wisconsin HOPE Lab, to determine areas of highest need.

> **Strategy C:** Create a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) at all college and university campuses, including at 100% of public college campuses.

> **Strategy D**: Facilitate relationships between SPOCs at local campuses and local YYA service providers focusing explicitly on unaccompanied youth.

Outcome 3: Improved opportunities for YYA experiencing or at risk of homelessness to further their employment and training opportunities.

> **Strategy A:** Identify, focus, expand, and replicate models of public-private partnership (like the Private Industry Council in Boston) as well as social enterprise opportunities (such as More Than Words, the Haven Project).

> **Strategy B:** Connect the UHY Commission with Workforce Development Boards to understand existing WIOA Youth programs that offer work experiences and skills training for YYA.

5 "THIS is the YAP Tool." Homeless Hub. Accessed March 27, 2018. http://homelesshub.ca/blog/yap-tool.
6 "Youth Services Network: Helping Youth Find Shelter and Services." Youth Services Network. Accessed March 26, 2018. https://www.ysnmn.org/#/home.

Education and employment are core outcomes within the USICH "Framework to End Youth Homelessness," and their importance was consistently affirmed in focus groups, interviews, and the provider survey. Unfortunately, there are also multiple barriers that YYA experiencing homelessness encounter when trying to advance their education and employment opportunities: Who has funding to pay for educational advancement? How can a young person obtain a job that pays more than minimum wage? Where do college students experiencing homelessness go when dorms are closed during vacations and summers? Many of these concerns stem from a lack of coordination between education/employment providers and the programs that specifically serve YYA experiencing homelessness.

EDUCATION: Connections should be facilitated among state-level educational support systems and regional service providers so that there is expanded access to resources. Making these connections at both high school and college levels will ensure a continuum of supports for YYA, thus improving outcomes, such as high school and college graduation rates, for students facing housing instability. There should be continued partnership between the UHY Commission, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), the Department of Higher Education (DHE), and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Youth Program[7] to aid students who are unaccompanied and experiencing housing instability. One strategy to achieve this goal includes the creation of a "handoff protocol" for when students who are experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity transition from high school to college.

In May 2018, DHE will release the results of a survey of students' basic needs across the state's public higher education system. The data from this survey, the first of its kind in the United States, can offer insight as to what the areas of highest need are. Additionally, while the majority of public college campuses in Massachusetts already have a Single Point of Contact (SPOC),[8] it is recommended to increase this number at all college and university campuses, including having SPOCs at 100% of public college campuses.

EMPLOYMENT: Massachusetts has an opportunity to increase its workforce potential by connecting YYA experiencing homelessness to the labor market. The new Executive Director of the UHY Commission will facilitate connections between the UHY Commission members and WIOA Youth and their 16 regional Workforce Boards. Additional opportunities for connecting YYA into the workforce may arise from an identification and expansion of current models of public-private partnership (like the Private Industry Council in Boston[9]) as well as social enterprise opportunities.

---

[7] The Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development's Department of Career Services provides oversight of the federally funded Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Youth Program. WIOA Youth allocates funds to Workforce Boards in 16 areas throughout Massachusetts to procure services designed to help in-school and out-of-school youth complete their secondary education, enter into postsecondary education/training, or enter into employment.

[8] Single Points of Contact (SPOCs) are designated safe and supportive college administrators who are committed to helping unaccompanied homeless youth successfully navigate the college-going process. SPOCs implement a streamlined process on their campuses to help young adults successfully matriculate into higher education and address barriers to enhance academic advancement. SPOCs also can help address multiple barriers including the waiving of application and other fees at higher education institutions (when possible); changing the timing of housing deposits so that students can pay when financial aid is received by the student; and connecting students with other community and higher education resources such as financial literacy, peer support groups, food banks, etc.

[9] Boston Private Industry Council. Accessed March 27, 2018. https://www.bostonpic.org/about-us/overview. From the Boston PIC: "The Boston Private Industry Council is both the city's Workforce Development Board and its school-to-career intermediary organization. The PIC brings together employers, educators, and workforce organizations, often by industry sector, to help guide the agenda for education and workforce preparation." The Workforce Boards are funded through the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development.

"Employment is crucial, because if someone can pay rent, they don't have to sit around and hope and wait for a voucher or affordable housing unit."

– Provider Survey

"Getting a job is really hard without experience. But someone just has to take a chance on you. How are you going to get experience, if you need experience to get experience?"

– YYA, 23, Springfield

"It's hard to form true integrated service delivery systems if you don't have good data access to scope out the problem."

– Stakeholder

SPOTLIGHT:

**SOCIAL ENTERPRISE -
THE HAVEN PROJECT, LYNN, MA**

Opened in 2012, the Haven Project serves unaccompanied homeless young adults ages 17-24 from communities north of Boston. The Haven Project offers a drop-in center, on-site preparation for the High School Equivalency Test (HiSET), a social enterprise, host homes, and a transitional apartment. In January of 2016, they began an innovative job-training program via a coffee shop, "Land of A Thousand Hills Café." Half of the café staff are Haven Project clients who receive an income and individualized job coaching to learn the skills to be successful in further employment opportunities. In early 2017, 20 youth were hired in the café, and these jobs provided opportunities to gain experience, references, and constructive feedback in a supportive environment. Then, in the summer of 2017, in order to create more low-barrier employment opportunities, the program developed a line of products to positively engage their highest-risk clients in paid skill development. The job program also develops partnerships with community businesses to ensure successful transition to full-time employment and secondary education.

Systematic outcome measurements and data sharing

RECOMMENDATION 5: Create systematic outcome measurement systems and data-sharing opportunities

Outcome 1: Alignment of statewide definition of "unaccompanied homeless youth" across state-funded services.

> **Strategy A:** Catalogue existing eligibility criteria for resources dedicated to YYA experiencing homelessness and housing instability, including: (1) definitions of "homeless youth and young adults;" (2) funding source (federal, state, etc.); and (3) services provided.
>
> **Strategy B:** Adopt common definition of "unaccompanied homeless youth" (including age ranges) across service delivery and housing systems.

Outcome 2: Statewide dashboard/monitoring platform for population size and characteristics.

> **Strategy A:** Partner with statewide CoC/HMIS data warehouse team to explore how this data informs a coordinated statewide response to YYA homelessness.
>
> **Strategy B:** Engage with non-HUD-funded providers to understand opportunities and overcome barriers to use of HMIS.
>
> **Strategy C:** Compare and align intake forms statewide to ensure standardized data collection.
>
> **Strategy D:** Identify and collect data from a range of existing statewide data sources to improve baseline estimates of young adults experiencing and at risk of homelessness.
>
> **Strategy E:** Develop a dashboard/outcome-monitoring platform.

Outcome 3: Inter-/multi-agency data-matching agreements to identify agency involvement of youth.

> **Strategy A:** Refer to draft Transition Planning document to identify barriers to sharing data across agencies and other EOHHS initiatives.
>
> **Strategy B:** Create multi-agency data-sharing agreements.

While it is anecdotally known that unaccompanied homeless youth are served by multiple state agencies, there is nevertheless a limited understanding of who they are, how many there are, and how they are utilizing these services. In every state agency interview the question was asked, "How does your agency define 'homelessness' for a youth and/or young adult?" Many respondents had no answer at all, stating that their agency did not have capacity for adopting a standard definition, and if there were young people who were experiencing homelessness while being served by these agencies, this was often not well documented. Without a uniform definition, data collection becomes unreliable, and without reliable data it is not possible to define the scope and scale of the issue or track progress.

In order to prevent and end youth homelessness in Massachusetts, one must first be able to define and measure the problem. Recently, Massachusetts has made some significant progress collecting data through the annual statewide Youth Count (see Appendix E: 2017 Massachusetts Youth Count Survey Tool) as well as the new survey of matriculated college students in Massachusetts from the Wisconsin HOPE Lab and the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education. However, an even more intentional and coordinated strategy is needed for obtaining and compiling data across state agencies in order to fully advance the understanding of the issue and refine the plan to end youth homelessness in the Commonwealth.

This plan recommends alignment of the UHY Commission's definition of unaccompanied youth across state-funded services, recognizing the importance of also needing to catalogue and understand existing external (i.e., non-state) definitions of homeless youth and young adults by other funding source and services provided. The recommendation also includes creating a statewide data dashboard to have an easy-to-understand visual representation of data and outcomes monitoring. Partnering with EOHHS's statewide Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) "data warehouse" as well as the Department of Public Health's Chapter 55 homelessness prevention data will be key action steps towards obtaining data to achieve this outcome.

"I believe that we can all learn from each other. Without the wrap-around and support of all of our communities, we are failing at working towards the same goal together."

– Provider Survey

Authentic youth and young adult involvement statewide

RECOMMENDATION 6: Create a structure to support authentic youth and young adult involvement statewide

Outcome 1: Definition of authentic youth and young adult engagement and contextual guidance provided to state agencies, communities, and partners.

> **Strategy A:** Develop guidance for making meetings safe and welcoming spaces where YYA with lived experience are comfortable participating and contributing.

> **Strategy B:** Create statewide guidance policy on youth engagement that includes evidence-based practices in partnership and decision-making capacity.

Outcome 2: Improved statewide capacity for youth and young adult engagement.

> **Strategy A:** Identify an agency in each region to develop and host a Youth Action Board (YAB).

> **Strategy B**: Create tools, trainings, and resources to develop, support, and sustain local YYA leadership and YABs.

> **Strategy C:** Identify funding streams to support YAB development at local and state levels.

> **Strategy D:** Convene an annual meeting / daylong retreat for YYA from across the state who have experienced housing instability and are interested in taking leadership in their communities. The retreat will include workshops on facilitation, advocacy, training, connection, and communication.

> **Strategy E:** Develop a statewide network of local YABs with paid opportunities for work, training, and skill building.

Another theme that consistently came up in focus groups, provider surveys, and stakeholder interviews was the need for more leadership by and leadership development of young adults with lived experiences of homelessness. While providers and interviewees expressed valuing youth engagement and desiring more opportunities to utilize YYA's dynamic lived experience in programs and at the state level, they felt that they needed adequate support or resources to make it a reality. Focus group participants throughout the state also voiced a desire for more engagement, more opportunities to interact with peers, and more opportunities to use their voices and experiences to influence perception, program-ming, policy, and practice.

Encouraging local Youth Action Boards (YABs) is one way to cultivate leadership of YYA. YABs, also referred to as Youth Advisory Boards, integrate youth into the planning and implementation decision making on policies and planning that directly affect them. The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) "Guide for Engaging Youth in Decision Making and Planning" describes YABs as a best practice, saying, "They provide important development opportunities for the young people who participate, serve as a sounding board for stakeholder ideas, and generate invalu-able new ideas that can only come with first hand perspective. YABs should be an ongoing, YYA led community initiative . . ."[10] A number of state-level programs as well as cities across Massachusetts currently have active YABs that could be used to develop material and provide trainings, further cultivating the YYA leadership base and providing more opportunities for skill development and income generation.

Creating statewide guidance on youth and young adult engagement that includes best practices in partnership and decision-making capacity is a vital component in developing structures for authentic YYA involvement. It is essential that there are clear and defined standards to inform and ensure authentic community and provider partnership with YYA, and an understanding of practices to best support YYA in taking on authentic leadership roles. Once young adult leaders are engaged at the local level, the ultimate goal of a unified and structured statewide network of YABs will be attainable.

[10] "Guide for Engaging Youth in Decision Making and Planning." HUD Exchange. Accessed March 26, 2018.
https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Guide-for-Engaging-Youth-in-Decision-Making-and-Planning.pdf.

YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD

BY T.C., 23, BOSTON

The YAB looks a lot like the 6:45 am sunrise
And feels a lot like knowing you're not the only
 homeless youth in your city
It seems like it's too early to be up and homeless
But the knowledge you have is the force that drives
 you forward.

That is the Youth Advisory Board to me –
The feeling that you can walk out of a homeless shelter
AND homelessness all together
With your head held high and your
Chest pumped forward

"The Youth Advisory Board has shown me that I have a voice, and that voice is strong and fully capable to make a change."

– YYA, 19, Boston

"We can't expand to special populations such as LGBTQ, trafficked youth, etc., until their voice is incorporated into the planning."

– Stakeholder
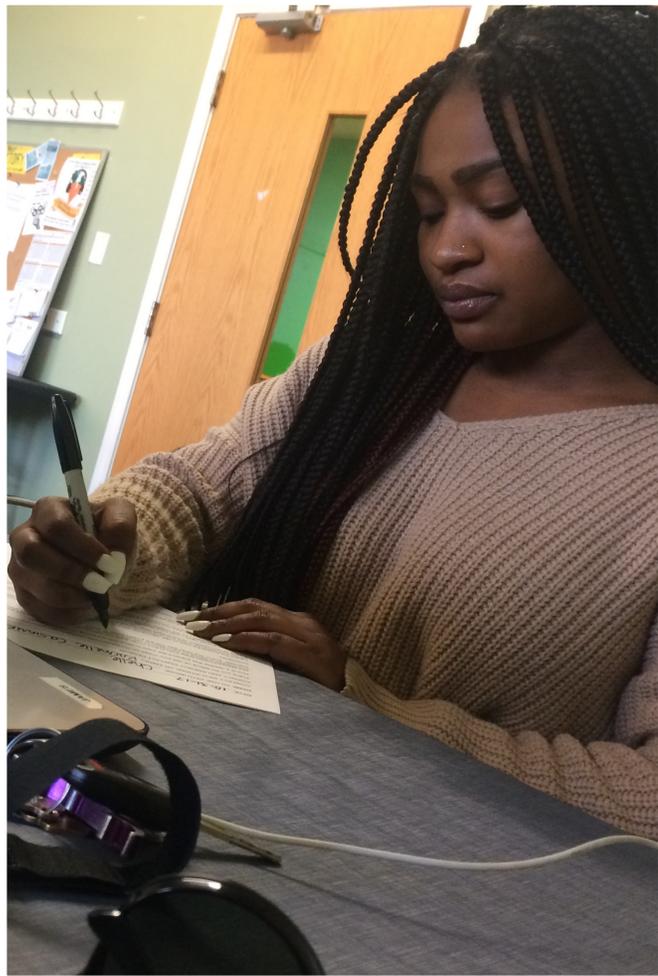
"Diligence is key."

– Rachelle, Lynn

*"I am unsure about everything.
Nothing is definite. I am unsure
if this is going to be a safe place
to sleep; unsure of what you're
going to eat. You're just unsure
about everything."*

– J.A., 20, Orleans

Photo Credit: Maxwell Nashashuk
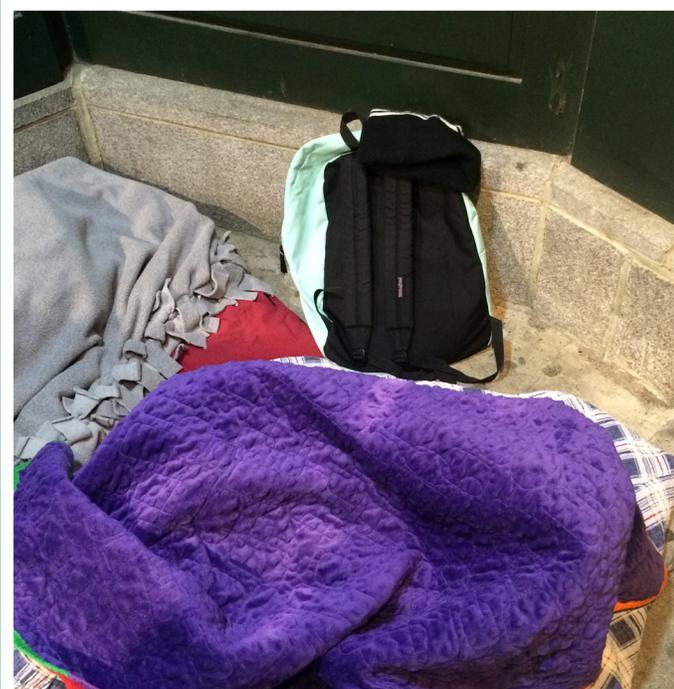
"When I first experienced homelessness, I didn't know what to do. It felt like someone closed a door in my face and didn't care about me anymore. So, I did what any other teen would do. I went to Brooklawn Park. Lucky there are resources in our community that allowed me to put a roof over my head. I called 1-800-HOMELESS and after talking with [the supervisor at a local program] I gained access to the two-year program. I've been in the program for two months now and working towards becoming independent with no financial obligations. What I'm really trying to say is when the going gets rough it's easy to give up and quit. But that only will make the situation tougher and ultimately creating more hardships for myself . . ."

– David F., 19, New Bedford

ACTION PLAN

The following table expands each recommendation into a series of action steps. Each outcome was derived from identified needs and is accompanied with short (1-year), medium (1- to 3-year) and long-term (3- to 5-year) strategies to address the need alongside designated ownership. Outcomes and strategy completion will rely on an implementation strategy that leverages targeted funding for youth services and takes advantage of federal, state, and local resource availability. It is important to note that the order of the outcomes and strategies below does not necessarily prescribe an order in which they must be completed.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Implement a coordinated statewide response to youth homelessness								
OUTCOME	**STRATEGY**	**STAKEHOLDERS**	**TIMEFRAME**				**POSSIBLE WITH CURRENT FUNDING RESOURCES?**	
			SHORT	MEDIUM	LONG	ONGOING	YES	NO
1) Enhanced state-level operational capacity to prevent and end youth homelessness.	**A:** Identify and hire an Executive Director for the Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (UHY Commission).	UHY Commission lead with Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness (ICHH), Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS), state agencies	●				●	
	B: Compile state agencies' mandates and initiatives connected to YYA homelessness and regularly present these at UHY Commission meetings.	UHY Commission, Executive Director of UHY Commission	●			●	●	
2) Enhanced regional capacity to prevent and end youth homelessness.	**A**: Assess regional capacities to prevent and end YYA homelessness.	Executive Director of UHY Commission, Continuums of Care (CoCs), Youth Action Boards (YABs)		●		●		
	B: Provide training and technical assistance for conducting regional needs assessments.	Executive Director of UHY Commission, CoCs, YABs	●					●
	C: Provide training and technical assistance for developing regional plans to end YYA homelessness.	Executive Director of UHY Commission, consultants, foundations		●				●
3) Enhanced connection among direct service programs throughout the state.	**A:** Convene a daylong, annual, statewide retreat for service providers to share evidence-based best practices, challenges, resources, and data collection efforts.	Executive Director of UHY Commission, UHY Commission members, local providers	●			●		●
	B: Create an online platform for learning community and resource sharing.	Executive Director of UHY Commission, external consultant, UHY Commission members, local providers		●		●		●

RECOMMENDATION 2: Expand the current spectrum of accountable and evidence-informed models of housing and services								
OUTCOME	**STRATEGY**	**STAKEHOLDERS**	**TIMEFRAME**				**POSSIBLE WITH CURRENT FUNDING RESOURCES?**	
			SHORT	MEDIUM	LONG	ONGOING	YES	NO
1) A flexible, regional response to YYA homelessness is developed including shelter, triage, assessment, and housing services and supports.	**A:** Establish the numbers of existing and needed units and models of housing statewide.	Mayor's forums, CoCs, local providers, Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) local office, YABs, ICHH, advocates		●			●	
	B: Identify the numbers and types of existing and needed support services statewide.	Mayor's forums, CoCs, local providers, DHCD, HUD local office, YABs, ICHH, advocates		●			●	
	C: Identify and evaluate current and potential funding for housing, including supportive housing, and services statewide.	Same as above	●				●	
	D: Identify or create one low-barrier resource center (drop-in center) for YYA in every region (as stand-alone centers or integrated into existing programs or centers).	Mayor's forums, CoCs, local providers, DHCD, HUD local office, YABs, ICHH, Family Resource Centers (FRCs), Housing Consumer Education Centers, Department of Public Health (DPH), advocates			●	●		●
2) Housing and service needs for subpopulations of unaccompanied homeless youth are addressed, and partnerships with state agencies are developed to ensure appropriate statewide services.	**A:** Create working groups for each subpopulation identified in the report comprised of advocates, people with lived experience, providers, the Executive Director of the UHY Commission and state agencies that provide services to the subpopulations. Alternatively, integrate the Executive Director of the UHY Commission and YYA with lived experience of homelessness into existing working groups.	Executive Director of UHY Commission, service providers, DPH / Bureau of Substance Addiction Services (BSAS), CoCs *For each subpopulation, stakeholders may include: advocates, people with lived experience, providers, Executive Director of UHY Commission, and state agencies that provide services to the special populations*	●			●		●
	B: Each working group assesses current resources and utilization, service needs, barriers, and relevant policy.	Same as above	●			●		●
	C: Each working group creates an appropriate training plan to train state agencies and service providers on needs, best practices, and cultural competencies.	Same as above	●			●		●
	D: Each working group implements training plan.	Same as above	●			●		●

RECOMMENDATION 2: Expand the current spectrum of accountable and evidence-informed models of housing and services								
OUTCOME	**STRATEGY**	**STAKEHOLDERS**	**TIMEFRAME**				**POSSIBLE WITH CURRENT FUNDING RESOURCES?**	
			SHORT	MEDIUM	LONG	ONGOING	YES	NO
3) Housing opportunities available to YYA are established and expanded.	**A:** Work with DHCD to prioritize YYA housing rental rounds supporting a range of housing options, including low-threshold units.	DHCD, advocates		●				●
	B: Explore models of how housing/rent collection may be made flexible for this population (while still fostering accountability and responsibility), including exploration of rapid re-housing models for YYA.	Same as above	●			●		●
	C: Increase funding for rental subsidies.	Same as above			●	●		●
4) Stable funds are made available for supportive services.	**A:** Partner with the Bureau of Substance Addiction Services (BSAS), the Department of Mental Health (DMH) and MassHealth to explore appropriate reimbursable tenancy supports for YYA.	MassHealth, DPH/BSAS, DMH, ICHH, Executive Director of UHY Commission, Massachusetts Housing & Shelter Alliance (MHSA)		●	●		●	
	B: Inventory state and federal funding streams for possible use to support programs and services and develop additional resources / funding streams, as needed, based on above assessment.	Executive Director of UHY Commission, MHSA	●				●	
5) Number of bed nights for young adults in adult shelters statewide is reduced through diversion.	**A:** Assess how current outreach, shelter, and other YYA access points are incorporating diversion practices.	Executive Director of UHY Commission, shelters, CoCs	●			●		●
	B: Train providers in family and community engagement for the purpose of diversion to complement primary prevention efforts.	Consultant, UHY Commission, providers		●		●		●
	C: Develop and distribute best-practice guidelines and recommendations for serving YYA in adult shelters based on recommendations from youth and providers and practices in other states.	Executive Director of UHY Commission, YABs, shelters	●		●			●
	D: Ensure all adult shelters know local and regional youth-specific resources.	EOHHS, ICHH, UHY Commission	●		●			

RECOMMENDATION 2: Expand the current spectrum of accountable and evidence-informed models of housing and services								
OUTCOME	**STRATEGY**	**STAKEHOLDERS**	**TIMEFRAME**				**POSSIBLE WITH CURRENT FUNDING RESOURCES?**	
			SHORT	MEDIUM	LONG	ONGOING	YES	NO
6) Programs and services have access to flexible funding to meet the needs of individual YYA.	**A:** Support continued dedicated state funding with program-level flexibility.	Executive Branch, Legislature, advocates	●			●		●
	B: Utilize dedicated state funding to leverage additional private and foundation resources.	Executive Director of UHY Commission, foundations, CoCs		●		●		
RECOMMENDATION 3: Enhance early identification, connection, and outreach systems to improve young people's connection to existing resources								
1) Improved ability to identify YYA at risk of housing instability and homelessness within programs not primarily focused on homeless-ness, including youth transitioning out of state systems of care.	**A:** Create a "protocol for identification" and related training material that can be used statewide and distributed by state agencies and CoCs to providers and other entities (courts, hospitals, schools, etc.) to identify youth at risk of homelessness.	Executive Director of UHY Commission; DPH / Chapter 55 data; state agencies; local providers; YABs; Department of Children and Families (DCF), including Family Resource Centers (FRCs), CoCs	●			●		●
	B: Connect with the EOHHS Transition Planning Workgroup to identify and implement recommendations. This can include the convening of appropriate state agency collaborators to ensure effective transition planning for youth and young adults as well as a coordinated approach to providing services to this population.	Executive Director of UHY Commission, EOHHS Transition Planning Workgroup	●			●	●	
2) Reduced amount of time between a YYA experiencing housing instability and connecting with services and supports.	**A:** Develop an integrated, up-to-date, statewide referral system and/or online resource guide that includes a map of statewide distribution of resources.	Executive Director of UHY Commission, external consultant, providers		●		●		●
	B: Create a statewide awareness campaign that includes social media to encourage YYA who are facing housing instability to reach out early to service providers, and ensure distribution of the campaign in high schools and campuses.	Executive Director of UHY Commission, UHY Commission members, CoCs, YAB, pro-bono advertising agency		●				●

RECOMMENDATION 4: Improve education, employment, and credentialing opportunities in order to support young people's access to long-term, sustainable employment and income								
OUTCOME	**STRATEGY**	**STAKEHOLDERS**	**TIMEFRAME**				**POSSIBLE WITH CURRENT FUNDING RESOURCES?**	
			SHORT	**MEDIUM**	**LONG**	**ONGOING**	**YES**	**NO**
1) Improved outcomes, including graduation rates, for high school students facing housing instability.	**A:** Facilitate connections between education and credentialing programs (such as DESE, WIOA Youth programs, recovery high schools, etc.) and direct service providers to create new partnerships and expand access to resources.	Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), WIOA Youth programs, DCF, Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, Executive Director of UHY Commission (to coordinate service providers), Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission	●			●	●	
2) A comprehensive approach to mitigating housing challenges and economic insecurity of current and prospective college students.	**A:** Develop a "handoff protocol" for when students who are experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity transition from high school to college.	Department of Higher Education (DHE), Executive Director of UHY Commission, MA public colleges and universities, DESE, UHY Commission		●		●	●	
	B: Utilize the results of the 2017-18 survey of college students in Massachusetts, done in partnership with the Wisconsin HOPE Lab, to determine areas of highest need.	Same as above		●		●	●	
	C: Create a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) at all college and university campuses, including at 100% of public college campuses.	DHE			●			●
	D: Facilitate relationships between SPOCs at local campuses and local YYA service providers focusing explicitly on unaccompanied youth.	DHE, Executive Director of UHY Commission, providers, UHY Commission	●			●		●
3) Improved opportunities for YYA experiencing or at risk of homelessness to further their employment and training opportunities.	**A:** Identify, focus, expand, and replicate models of public-private partnership (like the Private Industry Council in Boston) as well as social enterprise opportunities (such as More Than Words, the Haven Project).	Local providers, business associations, local industry leaders, mayors, Executive Director of UHY Commission, Workforce Development Boards		●		●		●
	B: Connect the UHY Commission with Workforce Development Boards to understand existing WIOA Youth programs that offer work experiences and skills training for YYA.	Executive Director of UHY Commission, UHY Commission members, WIOA Youth, Workforce Development Boards	●			●		●

RECOMMENDATION 5: Create systematic outcome measurement systems and data-sharing opportunities

OUTCOME	STRATEGY	STAKEHOLDERS	TIMEFRAME				POSSIBLE WITH CURRENT FUNDING RESOURCES?	
			SHORT	MEDIUM	LONG	ONGOING	YES	NO
1) Alignment of statewide definition of "unaccompanied homeless youth" across state-funded services.	**A:** Catalogue existing eligibility criteria for resources dedicated to YYA experiencing homelessness and housing instability, including: (1) definitions of "homeless youth and young adults;" (2) funding source (federal, state, etc.); and (3) services provided.	Executive Director of UHY Commission, ICHH, UHY Commission	●				●	
	B: Adopt common definition of "unaccompanied homeless youth" (including age ranges) across service delivery and housing systems.	EOHHS, ICHH, UHY Commission		●		●	●	
2) Statewide dashboard/monitoring platform for population size and characteristics.	**A:** Partner with statewide CoC/HMIS data warehouse team to explore how this data informs a coordinated statewide response to YYA homelessness.	DHCD / ICHH / CoC / Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) workgroup, Executive Director of UHY Commission, YAB, Identification and Connection Working Group		●		●		●
	B: Engage with non-HUD-funded providers to understand opportunities and overcome barriers to use of HMIS.	DHCD, EOHHS, Executive Director of UHY Commission, CoCs, providers		●			●	
	C: Compare and align intake forms statewide to ensure standardized data collection.	Local providers, Executive Director of UHY Commission, Identification and Connection Working Group	●			●	●	
	D: Identify and collect data from a range of existing statewide data sources to improve baseline estimates of young adults experiencing and at risk of homelessness.	WIOA Youth programs, Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth, DPH / Chapter 55, Identification and Connection Working Group, DESE, DHE, CoCs, youth-serving programs, Executive Director of UHY Commission, data warehouse	●			●		●
	E: Develop a dashboard/outcome-monitoring platform.	Outside technology technical assistance, DPH, EOHHS			●	●		●
3) Inter-/multi-agency data-matching agreements to identify agency involvement of youth.	**A:** Refer to draft Transition Planning document to identify barriers to sharing data across agencies and other EOHHS initiatives.	Executive Director of UHY Commission, EOHHS Master Data Management Initiative, Transition Planning Workgroup		●		●	●	
	B: Create multi-agency data sharing agreements.	Executive Director of UHY Commission, EOHHS Master Data Management Initiative, Transition Planning Workgroup, EOHHS Information Technology, EOHHS Legal		●		●		●

RECOMMENDATION 6: Create a structure to support authentic youth and young adult involvement statewide								
OUTCOME	**STRATEGY**	**STAKEHOLDERS**	**TIMEFRAME**				**POSSIBLE WITH CURRENT FUNDING RESOURCES?**	
			SHORT	MEDIUM	LONG	ONGOING	YES	NO
1) Definition of authentic youth engagement and contextual guidance provided to state agencies, communities, and partners.	**A:** Develop guidance for making meetings safe and welcoming spaces where YYA with lived experience are comfortable participating and contributing.	UHY Commission, consultants	●				●	
	B: Create statewide guidance policy on youth engagement that includes evidence-based practices in partnership and decision-making capacity.	Executive Director of UHY Commission, UHY Commission, Boston Youth Action Board, YYA with lived experience across the state	●					●
2) Improved statewide capacity for youth and young adult engagement.	**A:** Identify an agency in each region to develop and host a Youth Action Board (YAB).	Executive Director of UHY Commission, consultants	●					
	B: Create tools, trainings, and resources to develop, support, and sustain local YYA leadership and YABs.	Executive Director of UHY Commission, youth consultants, service providers, CoCs		●				
	C: Identify funding streams to support YAB development at local and state levels.	Executive Director of UHY Commission, private foundations, CoCs	●			●		●
	D: Convene an annual meeting / daylong retreat for YYA from across the state who have experienced housing instability and are interested in taking leadership in their communities. The retreat will include workshops on facilitation, advocacy, training, connection, and communication.	Executive Director of UHY Commission, YABs, service providers, CoCs		●		●		●
	E: Develop a statewide network of local YABs with paid opportunities for work, training, and skill building.	Executive Director of UHY Commission, YABs, service providers, CoCs, foundations		●		●		●

"This door is like my life broken but still together. I've tried putting all the pieces back together but by the time I find them they don't fit. There's no puzzle and life I won't quit. Every piece to the door swings back and forth like every life relationship. Are you gonna look like the door and throw a fit or change yourself, and say that's it? These are just some words from a crooked kid who is trying to go legit."

– Ryan M., 23, Boston

"When I was homeless, I stayed all over the place. At my job, in a junkyard car, in the woods on a pile of leaves, and if I smelled good enough I would go to a bar and hope someone would take me home."

– YYA, 22, Boston

"When it really hit me [that I was homeless], was when I had to go pee. And I was outside. And I had to go the other one and I couldn't even do it because I had no napkins, no toilet paper, no nothing. I just felt like not a real person, not a real human anymore."

– YYA, 19, Springfield

Q: "At what point did you realize you were 'capital-H Homeless?'"
A: "It was the moment when I said to myself, 'Where the hell am I going to sleep tonight?'"

– YYA, 22, Greenfield

"This young man, knocked off his feet and feeling like he's lost, will find the strength to get back up once again."

– Eli, Lynn

"Artistic expressions at the Haven Project's paint night"

– George, Lynn

"You're energetically and emotionally drained when you don't have enough to eat. And getting enough when you're on the streets is hard."

– D.J., 19, Springfield

PART II:
Background and Data

Definitions

Policies, programming, and research about young people experiencing homelessness need consistent definitions[11,12] for the terms "youth" and "homeless." Leading experts define the population of homeless "youth" as being between the ages of 14 and 24 years. However, "adult" is often defined as being over the age of 18 for legal purposes and also in adult homeless statistics. This situation makes it difficult to develop coordinated policies or track outcomes and trends.

The definition that was agreed upon by the Massachusetts Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth in 2013 was that "Unaccompanied Homeless Youth" shall mean: a person 24 years of age or younger who is not in the physical custody of a parent or legal guardian, and who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. "Fixed" refers to a residence that is stationary, permanent, and not subject to change. "Regular" means a dwelling at which a person resides on a regular basis (i.e., nightly). "Adequate" means that the dwelling provides safe shelter, meeting both physical and psychological needs of the youth. All three components of this definition—age, connection to a parent or guardian, and housing status—must be met in order for a person to be considered an unaccompanied homeless youth.[13]

It is important to note that in order to qualify for certain types of housing, a person must meet the definition of "literal homelessness" as defined by HUD. HUD defines homelessness as one of four categories,[14,15] and Category 1 Literal Homelessness is defined as: "Individuals and families who live in a place not meant for human habitation (including the streets or in their car), emergency shelter, transitional housing, and hotels paid for by a government or charitable organization."

However, even with a definition of homelessness broader than HUD's definition of "literal homelessness," the definition used by the Massachusetts UHY Commission is in line with federal efforts to end youth homelessness. USICH, the United States Department of Education, the United States Department of Health and Human Services, and HUD have all collaborated to develop a set of community-level criteria and benchmarks for ending youth homelessness that applies to all youth and young adults under the age of 25 who are unaccompanied by a parent, legal guardian, or caretaker and who meet any federal definition of homelessness[16] (see Appendix A for federal definitions of homelessness).

In addition to a lack of secure housing, young people experiencing homelessness, like all young people, are undergoing significant social, physical, emotional, and cognitive changes. The universal challenges of these developmental changes are magnified by the complex experiences of housing instability.

Legislative History

STRUCTURE OF THE COMMISSION: The Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth was established through Outside Section 208 of the Fiscal Year 2013 (FY13) Budget, signed into law on July 8, 2012. The UHY Commission was then reconstituted through Chapter 450 of the Acts of 2014.[17] The purpose of the UHY Commission is to study and make recommendations regarding services for unaccompanied youth and young adults experiencing homelessness in Massachusetts, to ultimately provide comprehensive and effective responses to the unique needs of this population. The focus of the UHY Commission's work specifically includes assessing the barriers to serving unaccompanied homeless youth who are LGBTQ+ or under 18 years of age; assessing the impact of mandated reporting requirements on unaccompanied homeless youths' access to services; and improving the Commonwealth's ability to identify, connect with, and reduce barriers for unaccompanied homeless youth. The UHY Commission, chaired by EOHHS, includes a wide membership, representing youth, state government, service providers, and advocates.

11 Edidin, J. P., Z. Ganim, and N. S. Karnik. "The Mental and Physical Health of Homeless Youth: A Literature Review." *Child Psychiatry Hum Dev* 43, no. 3 (June 2012): 354-75. doi:10.1007/s10578-011-0270-1.
12 "Federal Definitions." Youth.gov. Accessed March 26, 2018. https://youth.gov/youth-topics/runaway-and-homeless-youth/federal-definitions.
13 "The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth: Report to the Great and General Court, Executive Office of the Governor, and the Office of the Child Advocate." Mass.gov. 2013. Accessed March 26, 2018. http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/eohhs/cyf/uhy032013.pdf.
14 Category 3 is the only one that specifically mentions youth; however, youth are eligible and much more likely to qualify for assistance under the other categories.
15 "Children and Youth and HUD's Homeless Definition." HUD Exchange. Accessed March 26, 2018. https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/HUDs-Homeless-Definition-as-it-Relates-to-Children-and-Youth.pdf.
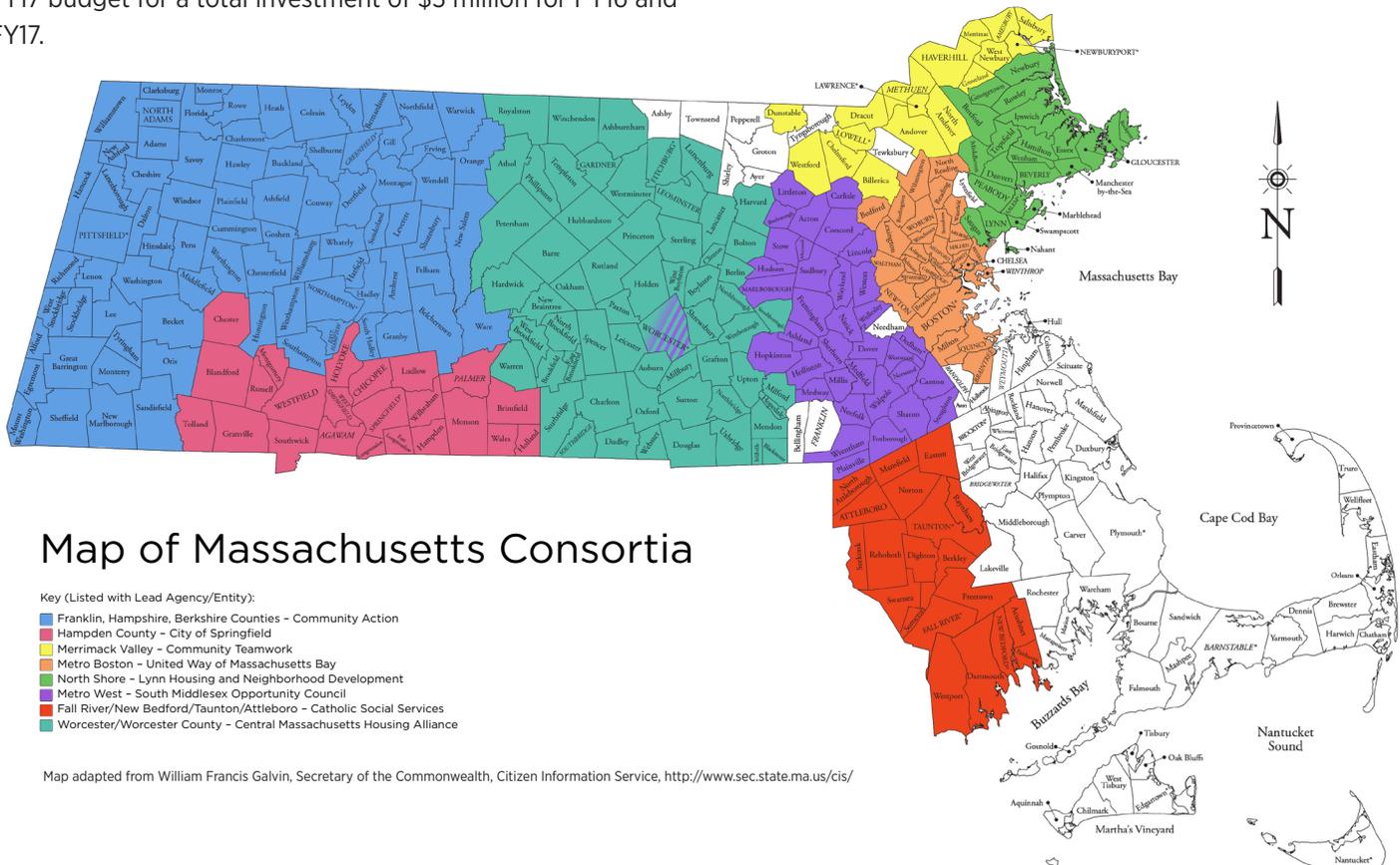**16** "Criteria and Benchmarks for Achieving the Goal of Ending Youth Homelessness." United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. January 2017. Accessed March 26, 2018. https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Youth_Criteria_Benchmarks_FINAL.pdf.
17 *Bill H.4517: An Act promoting housing and support services to unaccompanied homeless youths.* The General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Accessed March 28, 2018. https://malegislature.gov/Bills/188/H4517.

STATEWIDE YOUTH COUNT: In 2014, Massachusetts conducted the first-in-the-nation statewide count of young adults experiencing homelessness. The Massachusetts Youth Count, under the oversight of the UHY Commission, has taken place annually since 2014 and is coordinated through the CoCs. In May 2017, the UHY Commission conducted the fourth annual Youth Count with participation from all 16 CoCs. The 2017 Youth Count surveyed 2,711 youth and young adults, 501 of whom met the UHY Commission's definition for homelessness, with 354 who met the HUD definition of homelessness.[18]

HOUSING AND SUPPORT SERVICES FOR UNACCOMPANIED HOMELESS YOUTH:[19,20] *An Act promoting housing and support services to unaccompanied homeless youths,* passed by the Massachusetts Legislature in December 2014 and signed into law in January 2015, was created to increase housing opportunities and expand support services for youth and young adults ages 24 and younger who are experiencing homelessness outside the custody or care of a parent or guardian. For FY16, the Legislature allocated $2 million to Line Item 4000-0007 to implement the law. Due to the time required to complete a procurement process and establish a statewide network of consortia, $1 million was distributed in FY16 and the remaining $1 million was made available to support the consortia in FY17. An additional $1 million was included in the FY17 budget for a total investment of $3 million for FY16 and FY17.

The funding went to eight youth service providers that contracted with eight regional consortia (established under a different line item) spanning the Commonwealth (see map, below). Each consortium/youth provider had the necessary flexibility to develop and curate an individualized regional response that suited the specific needs of the young adult populations central to the design of services and interventions. All of the consortia/youth providers provided case management, supportive services and outreach, coordinated assessments, and flexible financial assistance to meet unique financial barriers to stability, such as utility arrears, move-in costs, child-care fees, transportation needs, rental assistance, and subsidies. The consortia also focused on collaboration and network development, working across systems and silos to create collaborative relationships and networks that included the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), local high schools and alternative education programs, the State Police High Risk Victims Unit, institutes of higher education including community colleges, housing authorities, the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA), veterans' organizations, the Department of Children and Families (DCF), immigration support organizations, health centers/substance use treatment programs, and social service providers.

Map of Massachusetts Consortia

Key (Listed with Lead Agency/Entity):
- Franklin, Hampshire, Berkshire Counties – Community Action
- Hampden County – City of Springfield
- Merrimack Valley – Community Teamwork
- Metro Boston – United Way of Massachusetts Bay
- North Shore – Lynn Housing and Neighborhood Development
- Metro West – South Middlesex Opportunity Council
- Fall River/New Bedford/Taunton/Attleboro – Catholic Social Services
- Worcester/Worcester County – Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance

Map adapted from William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth, Citizen Information Service, http://www.sec.state.ma.us/cis/

---

[18] See Appendix E for sample questionnaire from the 2017 Massachusetts Youth Count. The full 2017 Massachusetts Youth Count report and methodology can be found at Mass.gov on the Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness page at https://www.mass.gov/ichh-action-plans.
[19] Line Item 4000-0007 of the Massachusetts state budget. Information about the state budget, including past budgets, is available at https://malegislature.gov/Budget.
[20] MA General Law Chapter 6A, Sections 16W and 16X "Chapter 450." Session Law. The General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Accessed March 27, 2018. https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2014/Chapter450.

Scope and Process of Creating Plan

This plan represents a strategic approach to prevent and end youth homelessness in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Statistics and best practices, alongside portraits of special populations, offer a lens to view current needs and strengths in the Commonwealth, alongside the previously outlined recommendations. The recommendations and the accompanying action plan serve as a roadmap for ending youth homelessness for the Executive Branch and the Legislature, as well as for regional networks and CoCs that are encouraged to develop their own regional plans to end youth homelessness.

This report was developed between February 2017 and January 2018 via a team of consultants with expertise in homelessness and housing policy, qualitative research, and direct service, as well as with lived experience of young adult homelessness. The Executive Director of the Massachusetts Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness (ICHH) provided direct oversight to the team in conjunction with the UHY Commission. The consultants interviewed stakeholders from state agencies; conducted focus groups with young adults who were experiencing homelessness; surveyed homeless service providers; and held roundtable dialogues with representatives from the EOHHS-funded Youth Demonstration Projects, service providers, CoC leads, and advocates.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS: The interviews asked a series of questions in the following categories: (1) definitions; (2) measurement systems and data; (3) communication and collaboration; (4) organizational support; and (5) direct support and engagement of youth and young adults. Each interview was approximately 75 minutes in length and followed the developed interview protocol (see Appendix B for a sample stakeholder interview guide). When consent was given, interviews were recorded and then transcribed. All transcriptions and notes were kept confidential by the consultants. Notes were then coded and analyzed for themes, with special attention paid to identified gaps and opportunities.

Interviews were conducted using the above protocol between May and August 2017 with Commissioners and content experts across the following state-level departments and offices:

- Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness (ICHH)
- Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS), Office of Children, Youth and Families
- Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD), *including follow-up with WIOA Youth*

- Department of Public Health (DPH), including additional follow-up with:
    Bureau of Substance Addiction Services (BSAS)
    Bureau of Community Health and Prevention (BCHAP)
- Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)
- Department of Mental Health (DMH)
- Department of Children and Families (DCF)
- Department of Youth Services (DYS)
- Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)
- Department of Higher Education (DHE)
- Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA)
- Department of Developmental Services (DDS)
- MassHealth/Medicaid

Additionally, unstructured interviews were conducted with:
- Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth
- Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless
- Local and national advocate and youth engagement expert
- Massachusetts Housing & Shelter Alliance (MHSA)

FOCUS GROUPS: With the support of the Liberty Mutual Foundation, nine focus groups were conducted across the Commonwealth with 55 young adults who had experienced homelessness and housing instability. One of these groups was conducted at an LGBTQ-specific agency to ensure capturing experiences of this subpopulation. Groups were organized with local service providers and facilitated by trained YYA with lived experience of homelessness. The protocol was developed to understand participants' direct and varied experiences of housing instability, identify barriers to services and opportunities for intervention, and collect recommendations for service and policy improvement. Groups were recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed for themes and regional differences. Focus groups were conducted in Boston (two groups), Springfield, Framingham, New Bedford, Orleans, Lynn, Greenfield, and Lowell (a sample focus group guide can be found in Appendix C).
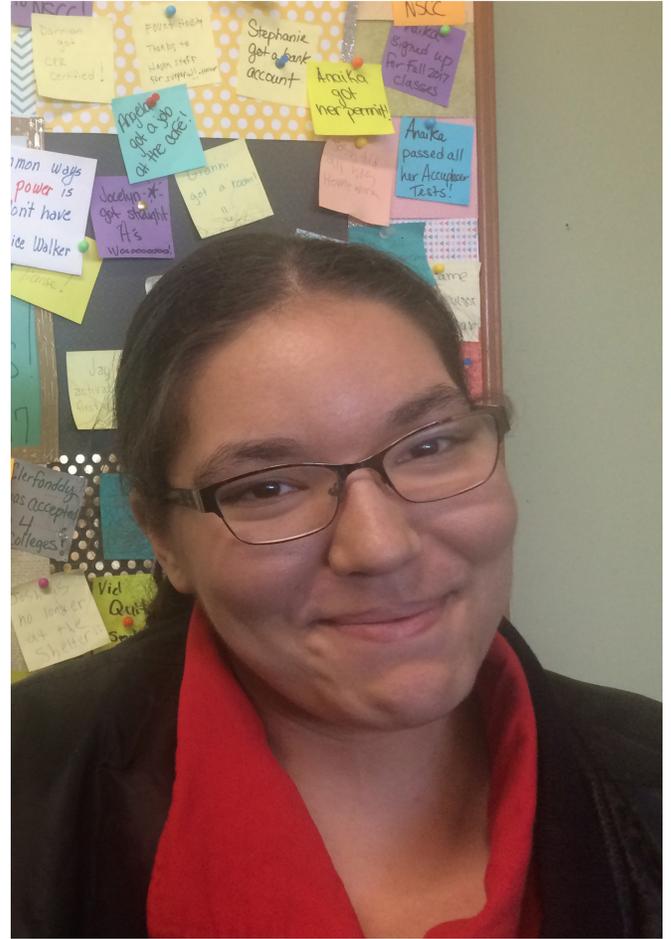
"The family dynamics directly affect me. I have less supports, getting to school is really hard. I can't ask my mom for money, not even $10. My mom can't take care of herself, so how is she going to be able to take care of me?"

– S.R., 18, Springfield

Photo Credit: Maxwell Nashashuk

"I hope everyone is happy and has peace."

– Destini, 20, Lynn

"For some people being homeless
is a way of Life
Home sweet home where Ingredients roam
a part of me we welcome thee.
Please wipe your feet, wash your hands, and after a week we will wash the fans. . . .
There are Rules to make and goals to break
a house on a hill or a house on a lake.
A curious cat or an insidious bat. . . .
but seriously stay on track."

– Tiquan D., 24, New Bedford

"Six days to Christmas. Suicidal. Homeless. I think sleeping in the laundromat is better than outside, but I am wrong. It is colder, and I can't stop shivering. I want to die even more than before. Who, though, can I ask for help? I'm all alone."

– M.N., Boston

PROVIDER SURVEY: Direct service staff have unique perspectives on the challenges faced by both individuals and organizations and contributed another layer of depth to the understanding of the work needed in the Commonwealth. A survey was sent out via Survey Monkey to providers in every CoC and regional consortium, and providers were encouraged to share the survey with their networks. Ultimately, 117 surveys were completed, with every CoC and consortium represented in the survey results (see Appendix D for the Provider Survey). Surveys were analyzed for themes and regional differences.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS: Two roundtable discussions were conducted with community and provider stakeholders. One included CoC leaders and consortia representatives, focusing on understanding the particular regional landscapes and challenges, including the development of local plans to end YYA homelessness, the impact of funding structures organized by regional structure versus by CoC, and the perceived need for a more coordinated statewide response. The second discussion was conducted at the annual Massachusetts Housing & Shelter Alliance (MHSA) retreat, with participation from direct service providers and organizational leaders. This meeting shared initial results of the Provider Survey, refined recommendations, and identified additional areas of examination for the Plan.

STEERING COMMITTEE: A Steering Committee was convened, composed of a diverse set of leaders who brought additional expertise to guide the development of this Plan. Steering Committee members included young people who have experienced homelessness, state agency personnel, service providers, advocates, funders, and others (see Acknowledgments for the full committee membership). Five public meetings were held, the primary focus of which was shaping the content of the report. Additionally, feedback was solicited electronically to define outcomes, develop the recommendations, and identify priorities.

YOUTH PhotoVoice: An additional component of the Plan was visual. In addition to supporting focus groups, funding from the Liberty Mutual Foundation allowed the project to create a statewide PhotoVoice project where YYA from across the Commonwealth were invited to share images, artwork, and writing that communicated their experiences of being young and unstably housed. Contributors were compensated with Visa gift cards and gave signed consent to let the project use their material. Their work is integrated throughout the Plan and may be used for further community education and advocacy.

Core Best Practices and Guiding Principles

This plan is guided by the USICH Opening Doors "Framework to End Youth Homelessness." Opening Doors is the nation's first comprehensive strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness, and the accompanying "Framework to End Youth Homelessness" was added as an amendment in 2015. The Framework offers the following guidance: "Intervention strategies should strengthen the protective factors in which a youth is lacking and reduce the risk factors with which a
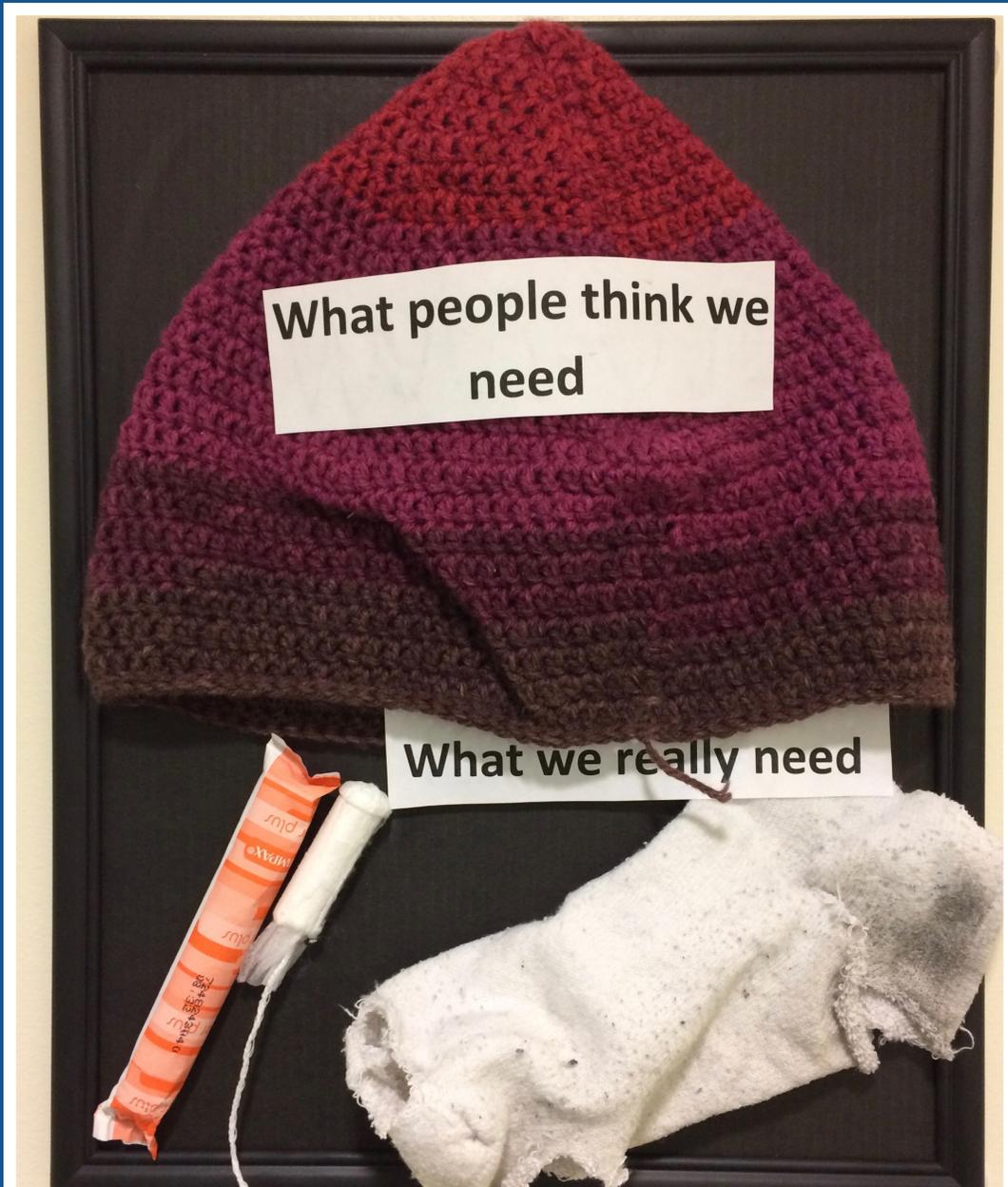
youth is burdened."[21] The framework prioritizes outcomes in stable housing, permanent connections, education or employment, and social and emotional well-being.

Additionally, there are eight evidence-based practices and valued principles that are central assumptions of the Plan, and all work emanating from the Plan is expected to incorporate them. They include:

Harm Reduction, Trauma-informed Care, Positive Youth Development, Housing First, Culturally Responsive Services, Racial Equity, Authentic Youth and Young Adult Engagement, Multi-system Approaches

- Harm Reduction
- Trauma-informed Care
- Positive Youth Development
- Housing First
- Culturally Responsive Services
- Racial Equity
- Authentic Youth and Young Adult Engagement
- Multi-system Approaches

21 "Framework to End Youth Homelessness: A Resource Text for Dialogue and Action." United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. February 2013. Accessed March 26, 2018. https://www.usich.gov/tools-for-action/framework-for-ending-youth-homelessness.

What people think we need

What we really need

Artwork by C.C., 24, Lynn

SPOTLIGHT:

**POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT –
MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH SERVICES**

"At DYS, we promote positive change among the youth we serve." The Massachusetts Department of Youth Services (DYS) is a state agency that serves youth committed as juvenile delinquents or youthful offenders. DYS employs a continuum model of services and supervision guided by the tenets of positive youth development (PYD) and the science of adolescent brain development. DYS strives to promote positive change in the youth committed to state care and custody by engaging in partnerships with communities, families, and government and provider agencies. By working in close collaboration with these entities, DYS continues to engage youth in rehabilitative services and help make communities better and safer places to live. DYS appreciates that positive change requires youth choice and has incorporated the value of youth and family input into decisions and case planning. The adoption of a PYD-focused approach to working with DYS-involved youth ensures that youths' strengths are identified and supported and that all youth are given opportunities to enrich their lives, become contributing members of their communities upon discharge, and optimize their potential for success.

HARM REDUCTION: Harm reduction is a philosophy and set of strategies aimed at reducing the negative consequences of harmful behaviors.[22] It focuses on the prevention of harm, rather than the prevention of behaviors. Harm reduction strategies target individuals, environments, and policies in an effort to protect the health and safety of individuals and communities. The ideas of "meeting people where they are at," celebrating any movement towards health and wellness, and ensuring that the client is in control of the direction and pace of change, are central to a harm reduction approach and have been indicated as a best practice in working with young adults experiencing homelessness and housing instability.

TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE AND POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: Broadly speaking, trauma-informed care emphasizes creating individualized and tailored responses in settings and relationships in which a person can heal, and positive youth development emphasizes settings and relationships that support a young person's ability to thrive.[23]

Most unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness have experienced significant trauma that may include exposure to multiple types of abuse, neglect, and violence. Additionally, the experience of homelessness in and of itself is often traumatic. The federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) defines a program, organization, or system as "trauma-informed" when it meets the following criteria: "1. *Realizes* the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; 2. *Recognizes* the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system; 3. *Responds* by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and 4. Seeks to actively resist *re-traumatization.*"[24] Trauma-informed approaches are fundamentally built on safety, connection, transparency, collaboration, choice, and empowerment.[25] It is critical that all programs and strategies are trauma-informed in all aspects of how they approach and support young people to move towards improved stability, health, and well-being.

Positive youth development (PYD) builds on the healing promoted through trauma-informed care by ensuring that YYA have opportunities to develop skills and talents through positive interactions with others and by contributing to programs and projects. PYD recognizes, utilizes, and builds upon youths' strengths, and intentionally creates opportunities for mentoring, growth, and development. Many practitioners discuss the "5C's" of PYD as creating "competence, connection, character, confidence, and caring."[26,27] These best practices should be integrated into all programs, systems, and policies designed to support YYA achieve better core outcomes (housing, education, employment, social and emotional well-being, etc.). This Plan reinforces the need to tie these best practices together through strategic service delivery and housing models for youth experiencing homelessness.

HOUSING FIRST: HUD defines Housing First as "a proven approach in which people experiencing homelessness are offered permanent housing with few to no treatment preconditions, behavioral contingencies, or barriers. Supportive services are offered to maximize housing stability and prevent returns to homelessness as opposed to addressing predetermined treatment goals prior to permanent housing entry."[28] Additional services offered often include supports for substance use and mental health disorders, education and employment, primary health care, and community connections. However, as researcher Steven Gaetz has emphasized, a Housing First approach for YYA may require slightly different approaches and accommodations than for older adults and must take into account the "developmental, social, and legal needs of young adults."[29,30]

22 "Principles of Harm Reduction." Harm Reduction Coalition. Accessed March 26, 2018. http://harmreduction.org/about-us/principles-of-harm-reduction/.
23 "Ending Youth Homelessness: Using the Preliminary Intervention Model in Your Community's Response." United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. March 18, 2014. Accessed March 26, 2018. https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/PYIM_1.pdf.
24 "Trauma-Informed Approach and Trauma-Specific Interventions." Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. August 14, 2015. Accessed March 26, 2018. https://www.samhsa.gov/nctic/trauma-interventions.
25 Kinniburgh, K. & Blaustein, M. "ARC: Attachment, Self-Regulation, and Competency: A comprehensive framework for intervention with complexly traumatized youth." *PsychEXTRA Dataset*. doi:10.1037/e732542011-001.
26 Pittman, K., Irby, M., Tolman, J., Yohalem, N., & Ferber, T. (2003). *Preventing Problems, Promoting Development, Encouraging Engagement: Competing Priorities or Inseparable Goals?* Based upon Pittman, K. & Irby, M. (1996). *Preventing Problems or Promoting Development?* Washington, DC: The Forum for Youth Investment, Impact Strategies, Inc. Available online at www.forumfyi.org. Accessed March 26, 2018.
27 "The 5 C's of Positive Youth Development." Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. Accessed March 26, 2018. http://dhhs.ne.gov/publichealth/MCAH/Documents/HYN2015-FiveCs_YouthDevelopment.pdf.
28 "Housing First in Permanent Supportive Housing." HUD Exchange. Accessed March 26, 2018. https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Housing-First-Permanent-Supportive-Housing-Brief.pdf.
29 Gaetz, Stephen. "A Safe & Decent Place to Live: Towards a Housing First Framework for Youth." Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press. 2014. Accessed March 26, 2018. http://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/HFFWYouth-FullReport_0.pdf.
30 Schneir, A., MPH, Casey, E., LCSW & Krummes, E., LCSW. "Creating Trauma-Informed Coordinated Entry Systems for Youth." 2016. (Issue brief). Hollywood Homeless Youth Partnership. Accessed March 29, 2018. http://hhyp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Creating-Trauma-Informed-CES-for-Youth.Final_.pdf.

SPOTLIGHT:

HOUSING FIRST – MASSACHUSETTS HOUSING & SHELTER ALLIANCE

In 2013, the Massachusetts Housing & Shelter Alliance (MHSA) launched a new permanent supportive housing program for LGBTQ unaccompanied homeless young adults in partnership with AIDS Action Committee of Massachusetts, DIAL/SELF Youth & Community Services, and Justice Resource Institute. In addition to developmentally appropriate services tailored to the specific needs of LGBTQ young adults, the 32-unit pilot implemented the principles outlined in MHSA's Home & Healthy for Good initiative, which has demonstrated that providing housing and supportive services to chronically homeless individuals through a low-threshold, Housing First model is less costly and more effective than managing their homelessness and health problems on the street or in shelter.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SERVICES: It is essential when developing strategies to end and prevent youth homelessness that work is done to understand and apply the values, cultural and linguistic traditions, social and ethnic structures, and geopolitical history of the community that is being served. According to the United States Office of Minority Health, culturally responsive services are defined as "services that are respectful of and responsive to cultural and linguistic needs."[31] Despite the misconceptions that culture refers only to knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors influenced by race or ethnicity, the concept also includes factors such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, level of education, physical capacity, spirituality and religion, sexual orientation, and regional influences. This broader definition is important, as culturally displaced people may have specific barriers that impede their ability to access services in the same way as others.[32] In addition to culturally responsive strategies and models, cultural responsiveness is also an essential component of data collection. Intentional use of culturally appropriate phrasing and approaches to data collection around particularly sensitive issues like race, gender identity, and sexuality plays a fundamental role in ethical data collection. All services and supports recommended in this Plan are expected to be culturally responsive.

RACIAL EQUITY: Strategies to prevent and end youth homelessness must also address racial disparities and inequities. Racial disparities and inequities in the adult homelessness system are well documented, with 41% of people utilizing shelter systems identifying as African American and/or Black[33] while making up only 13.3% of the general population.[34] A 2011 study by George Carter from the Census Bureau found that even when controlling for poverty, African American / Black people were significantly more likely to become homeless than their White counterparts.[35]

Young adults of color are impacted by many of the same forces that impact rates of homelessness among adults of color, including discrimination, education, employment, income disparities, and disproportionate incarceration rates.[36] For example, the 2017 Massachusetts Youth Count reported that of the 501 young adults who met the UHY Commission's definition for homeless, 68% were youth of color.[37] Nationally, the Voices of Youth Count study on youth homelessness reports that Hispanic, non-White youth had a 33% higher risk of reporting homelessness and that African American YYA are further at risk, stating: "Among racial and ethnic groups, African American youth were especially overrepresented, with an 83% increased risk of having experienced homelessness over youth of other races. Higher risk for African American youth experiencing homelessness compared to other races remained even when controlling for other factors like income and education."[38] This Plan recognizes the need to view all strategies for ending youth homelessness through the lens of racial equity. Racial equity is not just the absence of overt racial discrimination; it is also the presence of deliberate policies and practices that provide people with the support they need to improve the quality of their lives.[39] This includes ensuring that the makeup of leadership and decision-making bodies is representative of historically marginalized communities as well as analyzing proposed interventions for their impact on YYA from marginalized and historically disenfranchised communities. This also includes work for White people involved in the Plan to understand and reduce the negative impacts of White supremacy both on an interpersonal and systemic level.

AUTHENTIC YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT ENGAGEMENT: This plan is grounded in the belief that the ideas and insights of YYA with lived experience should be at the front and center of any movement to end youth homelessness. Beyond simply sharing their experiences, YYA with lived experiences should be involved in information gathering, idea testing, and decision making at local and state levels. The True Colors Foundation states that "authentic youth collaboration is about more than inviting a young person to share the stories of their past; it is also about providing the space for them to share their visions for the future."[40] Creating welcoming and accommodating spaces is not easy; the work of authentically involving YYA with lived experiences includes building trust, creating opportunities for meaningful engagement, investing in leadership development, addressing "adultism," and the commitment to work through conflicts, and must be central to the work of ending youth homelessness in Massachusetts.

31 "National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Health Care (Executive Summary)." The Office of Minority Health. Accessed March 27, 2018. https://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/content.aspx?ID=2154.
32 National Health Care for the Homeless Council. "Addressing Cultural and Linguistic Competence in the HCH Setting: A Brief Guide." Homeless Hub. Accessed March 27, 2018. http://homelesshub.ca/resource/addressing-cultural-and-linguistic-competence-hch-setting-brief-guide.
33 "2017 AHAR: Part 1 - PIT Estimates of Homelessness in the U.S." HUD Exchange. Accessed March 27, 2018. https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/5639/2017-ahar-part-1-pit-estimates-of-homelessness-in-the-us/.
34 "QuickFacts." U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: UNITED STATES. Accessed March 27, 2018. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045216.
35 Carter, G. R., III. "From Exclusion to Destitution: Race, Affordable Housing, and Homelessness." Accessed March 27, 2018. http://www.thecyberhood.net/documents/papers/cityscape.pdf.
36 Olivet, Jeff, and Marc Dones. "t3 Threads: Changing the Conversation: Racism and Youth Homelessness." t3. Accessed March 27, 2018. http://us.thinkt3.com/blog/racism-and-youth-homelessness.
37 "Massachusetts Youth Count 2017." Mass.gov. https://www.mass.gov/ichh-action-plans.
38 Morton, M.H., Dworsky, A., & Samuels, G.M. "Missed Opportunities: Youth Homelessness in America." Accessed March 27, 2018. http://voicesofyouthcount.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ChapinHall_VoYC_1-Pager_Final_111517.pdf.
39 "Resilient Boston: An Equitable and Connected City." City of Boston, Mayor's Office of Resilience & Racial Equity. Accessed March 27, 2018. https://www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/document-file-07-2017/resilient_boston.pdf.
40 "Youth Collaboration Toolkit." 40 to None Network. Accessed March 27, 2018. https://network.truecolorsfund.org/youth-collaboration-toolkit/.

SPOTLIGHT:

AUTHENTIC YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT ENGAGEMENT – MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH

The Department of Mental Health (DMH) integrates youth and young adult voice into the work of the agency through two State Mental Health Planning Council sub-committees, the Youth Development Committee (YDC) and the Statewide Young Adult Council (SYAC). The YDC was formed with young adults and providers in August 2001 to begin to address issues faced by youth aging out of the mental health system; and in 2007, SYAC was formed with only young adults to ensure that youth voice has a prominent role at DMH. Young adults with lived experience of mental health challenges and the mental health system chair both committees; and they develop the agenda, topics for discussion, and goals and objectives of the committees. Over the years, SYAC/YDC has added youth voice into various DMH and EOHHS initiatives, providing input on Department reprocurements, changing language on the Massachusetts Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Assessment, and providing input into the Child Behavioral Health Initiative (CBHI) and Caring Together.

As a former SYAC co-chair said, *"SYAC is a place where young adults with mental health issues can have their voice heard to other young adults, general populations, families, and the system. SYAC is a megaphone for young adults with mental health challenges."*

MULTI-SYSTEM APPROACHES: Many young adults experiencing housing instability and homelessness have had multiple interactions with other public systems before they experience homelessness. The education, child welfare, behavioral health, and criminal and juvenile justice systems are often connected with young people before they experience homelessness. However, most often these systems are not set up to identify risk for homelessness or communicate with one another, nor are they singularly equipped to address the multiple needs of young adults experiencing homelessness and housing instability. Identifying cross sections that make young people especially vulnerable or system involvement that puts YYA at a particular risk of homelessness is a core element of the Plan's strategic process and is highlighted in the section on subpopulations. It is essential that these agencies and systems develop strategies at critical points of intersection to improve communication, share information, and develop a holistic multi-systems approach. This approach must be able to meet the needs that accompany overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage that young people face in navigating these various agencies and services. Intentional, ongoing, and multi-system collaboration is needed to best serve young adults interacting with, transitioning from, and exiting these state systems, and an intersectional approach is a central component of the Plan.

Numbers and Characteristics

Every night there are hundreds of youth and young adults experiencing homelessness without a parent or guardian, and they may be found in every community of Massachusetts. Over the course of a year, that number is estimated to be over 3,000 in Massachusetts, and according to recent data from Chapin Hall, across America that number may total upwards of 4.2 million youth and young adults who experienced a form of homelessness in the past 12 months.[41]

The traditional method used to understand the prevalence of homelessness in the United States is the HUD-mandated Point-in-Time (PIT) counts. The PIT count is conducted on a single night during the last 10 days in January and counts the number of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons by household type and subpopulation. In recent years, HUD has expanded PIT data collection to include information on the number of young adults and youth under 18 who are experiencing homelessness without a parent or guardian present. The 2017 PIT count reported that there were approximately 40,800 unaccompanied homeless youth nationally,[42] roughly 7% of the total homeless population and 11% of people experiencing homelessness as individuals. In Massachusetts, the 2017 PIT count reported 469 unaccompanied youth in Massachusetts, or 7.6% of people experiencing homelessness as individuals; and of these young people, 62 (13%) were unsheltered, and 57 individuals were under the age of 18.[43]

In recognition that traditional counts, such as the HUD PIT count, often fail to identify and count hidden homeless populations such as youth, Massachusetts also conducts a separate statewide initiative to survey unaccompanied youth who are experiencing homelessness. In May 2017, the UHY Commission conducted the fourth annual Massachusetts Youth Count, with participation from all 16 Continuums of Care. The 2017 Count included 2,711 surveys from people 24 years old or younger, and of these, 501 met the Commission's definition of homelessness and 354 met the HUD definition of homelessness (see Part II, "Definitions").[44] A large number of respondents (558) reported that they were not currently homeless but had been homeless in the past, and 50 responded that they were housed at the time of the survey but did not have a safe place to stay for the next 14 days.

It is important to remember that the HUD PIT count and the Massachusetts Youth Count only represent the number of young people experiencing homelessness at a single point in time. When examining data that accounts for young people over the course of a year, that number increases to *at least* 3,000 YYA experiencing homelessness in 2017. DESE reported 1,038 unaccompanied YYA in the public school system. The EOHHS-funded demonstration projects reported that they received over 1,200 unduplicated referrals to their programs, and ultimately were able to serve 799 unaccompanied youth. DTA reported serving 1,368 unaccompanied pregnant and parenting youth, and BSAS enrolled 3,578 YYA who were classified as homeless into their treatment system.

41 Morton, M.H., Dworsky, A., & Samuels, G.M. "Missed Opportunities: Youth Homelessness in America." Accessed March 27, 2018. http://voicesofyouthcount.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ChapinHall_VoYC_1-Pager_Final_111517.pdf.
42 "2017 AHAR: Part 1 - PIT Estimates of Homelessness in the U.S." HUD Exchange. Accessed March 27, 2018. https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/5639/2017-ahar-part-1-pit-estimates-of-homelessness-in-the-us/.
43 "2017 Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Programs Homeless Populations and Subpopulations." HUD Exchange. November 7, 2017. Accessed March 26, 2018. https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/reportmanagement/published/CoC_PopSub_State_MA_2017.pdf.
44 "Massachusetts Youth Count 2017." Mass.gov. https://www.mass.gov/ichh-action-plans.

Unaccompanied Homeless Youth	
Point-in-time counts	
HUD PIT, January 2017[45]	469
MA Youth Count, May 2017[46]	501
Annual counts	
Demonstration Projects, FY17[47]	799 (20% LGBT)
DESE 2016-17 school year[48]	1,038
DPH/BSAS enrollments in treatment system, FY17[49]	3,578
DTA, 2017[50] (pregnant and parenting YYA ages 14-24)	1,368
Program-level data, FY17	
Bridge Over Troubled Waters[51] (Boston)	1,500 (estimated)
DIAL/SELF[52] (Greenfield)	202
LUK[53] (Worcester)	114

YYA Homeless or at Risk of Homelessness Pursuing Education and Employment	
WIOA Youth[54]	**307**
In FY16 there were 307 (14%) of the 2,195 young people served by WIOA Youth programs who identified themselves as homeless	
Demonstration Projects, FY17[55]	**667 (84% of total)**
Enrolled in education or workforce training/development program	
United States Department of Education, MA 2016 FAFSA data[56]	**1,020**
Students enrolled at Massachusetts public campuses who were homeless or at risk of homelessness	

Program-level numbers provide another data point helpful in determining baseline estimates of unaccompanied YYA experiencing homelessness in Massachusetts per year. The three Massachusetts programs receiving federal Health and Human Services Runaway and Homeless Youth funding report the following for FY17: Bridge Over Troubled Waters in Boston served an estimated 1,500 unaccompanied homeless youth; DIAL/SELF Youth & Community Services in Greenfield served 202 individuals; and LUK in Worcester served 114 individuals. Just those three agencies served approximately 1,800 YYA in one year. There may be some duplication of the individuals using those programs; however, the programs are geographically distant from each other and the client overlap, if present, can be assumed to be minimal.

While baseline counts provide a snapshot of the number of YYA struggling with homelessness and housing instability, they provide little information about the individuals represented. Examining the data from the Massachusetts Youth Count gives further insight. Of the 501 who met the Commission's definition for experiencing homeless:[57]

- 22.8% identified as LGBTQ
- 56% identified as Latinx, Black, or Multiracial; 28% identified as White
- 50% became homeless before age 18
- 5.6% were currently under age 18
- 39% had ever been in placed in a group home or residential placement
- 26.4% had juvenile or criminal justice involvement

Data also tells us that youth experiencing homelessness in Massachusetts are resilient, and many are accessing the education and employment services available to support them.

45 "HUD 2017 Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Programs Homeless Populations and Subpopulations." HUD Exchange. November 7, 2017. Accessed March 26, 2018. https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/reportmanagement/published/CoC_PopSub_State_MA_2017.pdf.
46 "Massachusetts Youth Count 2017." Mass.gov. https://www.mass.gov/ichh-action-plans.
47 EOHHS. "Data from EOHHS Demonstration Projects." E-mail message to author. August 29, 2017.
48 DESE. "Massachusetts Department Of Elementary And Secondary Education Homeless Student Program Data 2016-17 Report." E-mail message to author. September 8, 2017.
49 BSAS. "Treatment statistics prepared by the Office of Statistics and Evaluation, Bureau of Substance Addiction Services, MDPH on April 6th, 2018 with data as of March 9th, 2018." E-mail message to author. April 6, 2018.
50 DTA. "Pregnant and parenting youth and young adult data from FY17." E-mail message to author. November 29, 2017.
51 Bridge Over Troubled Waters. "Data from FY17." E-mail message to author. November 29, 2017.
52 DIAL/SELF. "Data from FY17." E-mail message to author. November 29, 2017.
53 LUK. "Data from FY17." E-mail message to author. November 29, 2017.
54 EOLWFD. "Number of WIOA Youth Identified as Homeless FY16." E-mail message to author. September 12, 2017.
55 EOHHS. "Data from EOHHS Demonstration Projects." E-mail message to author. August 29, 2017.
56 Data from the United States Department of Education's Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). FAFSA is a form that can be prepared annually by current and prospective college students (undergraduate and graduate) in the United States to determine their eligibility for student financial aid. Only 48.5% of prospective and current students complete this form. "FAFSA® Data by Postsecondary School and State of Legal Residence." Federal Student Aid. December 12, 2017. Accessed March 27, 2018. https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/about/data-center/student/application-volume/fafsa-school-state.
57 "Massachusetts Youth Count 2017." Mass.gov. https://www.mass.gov/ichh-action-plans.

"We're youth—and that's not a good thing. People assume that people our age don't usually go homeless."

– YYA, 19, Orleans

"My friends won't talk to me anymore. They think I have a disease."

– YYA, 20, Orleans

"My family didn't want me [because I am gay]. I'm too unique for them . . ."

– YYA, 21, Boston

"You have to experience things at this age that you just shouldn't. You see people being raped, killed, and shot. It messes you up."

– YYA, 18, Springfield

Subpopulations

In addition to the general data on Massachusetts' youth and young adults experiencing homelessness and housing instability, there are a number of subpopulations that have been identified locally and nationally and require special note. These subpopulations, many but not all of which are listed below, have additional characteristics and needs that require more tailored responses and approaches, and for some, being a part of the subpopulation itself puts an individual at a higher risk of experiencing homelessness. YYA of color are not specifically included as a noted subpopulation, as racial equity is included as a guiding principle. It is also important to note that many YYA have characteristics associated with multiple subpopulations (e.g., an LGBTQ youth with a substance use disorder who is experiencing domestic violence). This requires holistic approaches to service delivery for YYA with multiple challenges.

LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, QUESTIONING, QUEER (LGBTQ+) YYA: LGBTQ populations are overrepresented among youth experiencing homelessness. Nationally, while 7% of youth overall identify as LGBTQ,[58] an estimated 20-40% of youth who are homeless identify as LGBTQ.[59] Voices of Youth Count reported in "Missed Opportunities: Youth Homelessness in America" that LGBT youth had a 120% higher risk of reporting homelessness.[60] In the 2017 Massachusetts Youth Count, 23% of respondents who met the Commission's definition for homeless identified as LGBTQ. LGBTQ youth likely face these disparities in homelessness because they face high levels of rejection by families (including foster families), are more likely to become engaged in the juvenile justice system (due to factors such as acting out or defending themselves against violence or bullying), and are less likely to find culturally competent state or private services that can help them prevent homelessness.[61,62] Moreover, not only does this stigmatization and rejection lead to them to having higher levels of homelessness, but it also exacerbates the severity of their conditions while experiencing homelessness, as young people who identify as LGBTQ are at elevated risk for violence, victimization, and exploitation while unstably housed. Within the LGBTQ population, transgender individuals are further marginalized and poorly served in mainstream services.

Best practices in working with this population include culturally responsive programming and services; placement in sex-segregated spaces based on gender identity, rather than biological sex; providing education on the differences between sexual orientation, biological sex, gender identity, and gender expression, as well as on current laws and the political climate; integrating inclusive measures such as gender-inclusive bathrooms; having LGBTQ+ affinity groups; and increasing representation and visibility (e.g., LGBTQ staff or board members; displaying rainbow images and safe space signage).

VICTIMS OF SEXUAL TRAFFICKING AND EXPLOITATION: The Plan recognizes that sexual trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) is a global problem that victimizes youth of all genders. CSEC occurs when individuals buy, trade, or sell sexual acts with a minor. The *Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000* defines sex trafficking as "the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purposes of a commercial sex act."[63]

A history of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse is often common among victims. A study conducted by West Coast Children's Clinic in 2012 found that 86% of exploited youth had involvement in child welfare and close to 80% had involvement with juvenile justice. In addition, a history of running away or current status as a runaway and homelessness increases risk of commercial sexual exploitation.[64] Sexual exploitation can increase the risk of homelessness; and homelessness increases the risk of sexual exploitation.

58 Gallup, Inc. "In U.S., More Adults Identifying as LGBT." Gallup.com. January 11, 2017. Accessed March 27, 2018. http://news.gallup.com/poll/201731/lgbt-identification-rises.aspx.
59 Durso, L.E., & Gates, G.J. "Serving Our Youth: Findings from a National Survey of Service Providers Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth Who Are Homeless or At Risk of Becoming Homeless." Williams Institute. July 16, 2012. Accessed March 27, 2018. https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/research/safe-schools-and-youth/serving-our-youth-july-2012/.
60 Morton, M.H., Dworsky, A., & Samuels, G.M. "Missed Opportunities: Youth Homelessness in America." Accessed March 27, 2018. http://voicesofyouthcount.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ChapinHall_VoYC_1-Pager_Final_111517.pdf.
61 Keuroghlian, Alex S., Derri Shtasel, and Ellen L. Bassuk. "Out on the Street: A Public Health and Policy Agenda for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth Who Are Homeless." *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 84, no. 1 (2014): 66-72. doi:10.1037/h0098852.
62 Ray, N. "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth: An Epidemic of Homelessness." National LGBTQ Task Force. October 7, 2014. Accessed March 27, 2018. http://www.thetaskforce.org/lgbt-youth-an-epidemic-of-homelessness/.
63 "Chapter 78 - Trafficking Victims Protection." United States Code. Accessed March 26, 2018. http://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title22/chapter78&edition=prelim.
64 "Research to Action: Sexually Exploited Minors Needs and Strengths." WestCoast Children's Clinic. Accessed March 27, 2018. http://www.westcoastcc.org/research-to-action-sexually-exploited-minors-needs-and-strengths/.

BY ANONYMOUS YYA IN MA

I met him while I was feeling upset.
He gave me his phone number, but I lost it.
A couple weeks later I bumped into him again in the Boston Commons. He offered to buy me dinner, and I accepted. He asked if I would come over to his place to stay the night and I accepted that, too.

He bought me a pack of smokes and some beer. I overdrank, and he offered me $150 to have sex. I wasn't exactly thinking very clearly – but I accepted that, too.
I needed the money.
I laid down for a few minutes on the couch after all was said and done …
but then I got up and almost didn't make it to the toilet to puke.

The next morning I woke up before him.
I woke him up before I left so that he could pay my way-on the bus and give me my money.
I never saw him again.
I realized what lengths I could go to get what I needed – how low I would go.
My morals were destroyed.
I knew how to get what I wanted and needed;
I knew how to survive.

Youth who have experienced both homelessness and sexual exploitation may look similar to their non-exploited peers—they may be couch surfing, staying in shelters, or living outside. However, the majority of exploited youth—particularly girls, young women, and transgender youth—in the Commonwealth remain invisible. According to service providers, they are often under the control of exploiters and spend the majority of their time in hotels, motels, and apartments where they report exchanging sex with upwards of 10 men per night. It is believed that the PIT and Youth Count miss these youth as they are not in shelters or the typical places that youth experiencing homelessness congregate.

There are currently no available baseline numbers for commercially sexually exploited youth and young adults in Massachusetts. Because these youth are so frequently invisible until they are encountered by law enforcement or other youth service providers, any count would be an undercount. However, the statistics from My Life My Choice, a Boston-based, exploitation-focused service provider, offer a snapshot of these particularly vulnerable young people. In FY17, the program served 204 young people, and 85% were involved with DCF.[65] Their average reported age of entry into the commercial sex industry was 14 years old.

Though not explicitly meeting the definition of sexual exploitation when experienced by someone over 18, it is important to note that the exchange of sex for survival needs (including food and shelter) is a common occurrence for YYA experiencing homelessness. The Massachusetts Youth Count found that 13.5% of youth experiencing homelessness reported having exchanged sex for money, housing, or other needs, as compared to 2.2% of housed youth.[66] Additionally, 25% of LGBT-identified youth reported having ever exchanged sex for money.[67] These exchanges, while not technically exploitation, place youth at increased vulnerability for violence, victimization, and other negative health outcomes such as trauma, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and unintended pregnancies.

There are a number of ways agencies and programs can be culturally responsive to sexual exploitation and vulnerability. They include training non-CSEC-specific providers to identify, respond to, and refer exploited youth to specialized programs; utilizing a trauma-informed approach; making sure that services are individualized; providing choices and options to the youth; conducting safety planning and harm reduction; connecting with culturally appropriate health care providers; and being consistent with services. In addition, collaborating with law enforcement and child welfare agencies are indicated as best practices.

65 Goldblatt Grace, Lisa. "Data from My Life My Choice." E-mail message to author. November 13, 2017.
66 "Massachusetts Youth Count 2017." Mass.gov. https://www.mass.gov/ichh-action-plans.
67 Ibid.

PREGNANT AND PARENTING YOUNG ADULTS:

Pregnant and parenting YYA experiencing homelessness have similar needs as other YYA populations as well as additional responsibilities related to providing care for their children. The nationwide 2017 Voices of Youth Count found that parenting youth were three times more likely to experience homelessness than their non-parenting peers, and unmarried parenting youth had a 200% higher risk of reporting homelessness than their married peers.[68] The Massachusetts Youth Count data shows that of the 501 youth who met the state definition of homelessness, 26% were pregnant or parenting, and of these 66% had custody of their children. As a point of comparison, only 3.6% of housed and never-homeless youth and young adults were pregnant or parenting, and 76% of them had custody of their children.[69] Additionally, the Department of Transitional Assistance reported that as of the writing of this Plan they had 1,383 pregnant and parenting youth ages 14-24 considered homeless in their system.

Some of the essential and unique needs of this population include: accessible, adequate, and affordable child care; direct housing support; education/employment and vocational support; navigation of health care appointments (for self and child); financial support with groceries/meals; transportation (including transportation for children to daycare); and laundry facilities. It is also important to consider the needs of parenting fathers in addition to parenting mothers. Mentoring by other parents, including fathers, who have experienced homelessness as young parents is highly recommended for this population, as well as providing parenting and life skills support that is tailored to young parents. Additionally, communication and collaboration across multiple systems is required to best serve this population.

YOUTH UNDER 18:

Unaccompanied youth under the age of 18 face special challenges, ranging from individual developmental capacity to institutional, legal, and policy barriers to accessing services and supports. Many minors who find themselves disconnected from family structures and experiencing housing instability face the additional barrier of a lack of accessible, developmentally and age-appropriate resources, including safe transitions to the adult systems. The 2013 Massachusetts Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Report explored ways that mandatory reporting laws might be creating an inadvertent barrier to services for unaccompanied minors. Many, though not all, of these minors experiencing homelessness are or were connected to the Department of Children and Families (DCF) or the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). According to the 2017 Massachusetts Youth Count data, 51% of youth experiencing homelessness first became homeless before the age of 18.[70] Consequently, this population demands additional consideration, especially as a target for diversion, prevention, and intervention strategies.

Best practices in working with this population include: understanding and complying with mandated reporting laws; encouraging educational continuation; transition planning with DCF; assessing for sexual exploitation; embedding services in high schools; and providing flexible, low-threshold housing and programming options.

68 Morton, M.H., Dworsky, A., & Samuels, G.M. "Missed Opportunities: Youth Homelessness in America." Accessed March 27, 2018. http://voicesofyouthcount.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ChapinHall_VoYC_1-Pager_Final_111517.pdf.
69 "Massachusetts Youth Count 2017." Mass.gov. https://www.mass.gov/ichh-action-plans.
70 Ibid.

"We're expected to be on the same level with families who have already had housing history, education, and work experience. When in reality we have hardly any, which makes us look less desirable to landlords, schools, and employers as we're young and homeless. Older families get more favor as they've got more experience and 'appear to have just fallen on bad times' and us young parents 'appear irresponsible' along with naive."

– YYA, 22, Lawrence

"For me, the first time I ran away from foster care was my ultimate scare factor. After that I was a little used to it—I knew what to do to get by. The first time I was so scared because I have nothing to eat, I only have three pairs of clothes, I don't know where I am going to sleep, how I was going to take a shower, how I was going to be able to get to school, if I was even going to be able to go to school. A lot of that just was a bunch of things at once that scared the **** out of me—like, all of a sudden, this was really serious."

– YYA, 18, Framingham

YYA WITH LESS THAN HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA OR GED/HiSET: In Massachusetts, the 2017 Youth Count reported that 45% of YYA who met the Commission's definition for homelessness were neither in school nor had a diploma.[71] This data supports national data that indicates that YYA without a high school diploma or high school equivalency (HiSET/GED) are at a significant risk of homelessness. Voices of Youth Count revealed that young adults with less than a high school diploma or GED had a 346% higher risk of experiencing homelessness than their peers who completed high school and noted that ". . . of all of the indicators assessed, the lack of a high school diploma or General Equivalency Diploma (GED) was the most strongly correlated with higher risk of homelessness."[72]

Best practices in ensuring educational attainment for high school students include addressing the stresses and instability of homelessness, integrating services into high schools and alternative education programs, dropout prevention and school reconnection services, and working across systems to ensure multiple needs are met.

YYA WITH CRIMINAL JUSTICE INVOLVEMENT: According to the 2017 Youth Count data, 26.4% of YYA experiencing homelessness had juvenile or criminal justice involvement.[73] It is important to note that some of the crimes committed may be directly related to the experience of homelessness; for example, trespassing, loitering, public urination, sitting or lying down in particular public places, shoplifting in order to obtain food, or engaging in physical altercations while on the streets.[74] Additionally, young adults experiencing homelessness who also have criminal records or who have sexual offenses on their criminal record face additional barriers to exiting homelessness. The Center for Economic and Policy Research found that people who have been imprisoned are 30% less likely to find a job than their non-incarcerated counterparts.[75] Such charges can impede individuals' ability to receive housing vouchers, access employment, and ultimately obtain stability upon reentry into communities. These limitations then place individuals at a high risk for recidivism and provide an additional barrier to exiting homelessness. Attention must also be paid to communities that have jails and prisons. Youth and young adults may be released into homelessness and displaced from their community of origin after serving a sentence, which adds an additional population with specific needs to services and providers in that region. Youth and young adults displaced

by incarceration experience barriers and limitations that may prevent them from effectively accessing services and regaining housing stability. Young adults with a history of incarceration may also have different and more specific needs than the general population of young people utilizing services in a given region.

Young adults involved with gangs are a population often overlooked in discussions on YYA homelessness, and it is important to note that not all gang-involved individuals have also been involved with the criminal justice system. There is very little information about the impact that gang involvement has on homelessness for young adults, though anecdotal evidence from violence prevention programming indicates that housing instability and homelessness is a salient issue for this population. YYA with a history of gang involvement may have changing or different housing needs based on whether they intend to exit a gang or access housing outside their community of origin. Recognizing the intersections that gang involvement has with criminal justice systems, violence, and trauma is a critical component to providing effective services and supports to this population.

Best practices to meet the needs of young adults with history of incarceration include cross-systems collaboration, developing prevention and diversion opportunities, housing-related services, education and employment programs, gang-intervention, and alternatives to arrest. Additionally, in its policy brief "Youth Homelessness and Juvenile Justice: Opportunities for Collaboration and Impact," the Coalition for Juvenile Justice recommends improvement to reentry planning by "including better transition planning for youth exiting the . . . justice system, including housing, education, employment, and family-focused services (such as mediation or counseling to help youth reunify with their families in a safe and healthy way)."[76]

[71] Ibid.
[72] Morton, M.H., Dworsky, A., & Samuels, G.M. "Missed Opportunities: Youth Homelessness in America." Accessed March 27, 2018. http://voicesofyouthcount.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ChapinHall_VoYC_1-Pager_Final_111517.pdf.
[73] "Massachusetts Youth Count 2017." Mass.gov. https://www.mass.gov/icchh-action-plans.
[74] "Youth Homelessness and Juvenile Justice: Opportunities for Collaboration and Impact." Coalition for Juvenile Justice. Accessed March 27, 2018. http://www.juvjustice.org/resources/1014.
[75] Bucknor, Cherrie, and Alan Barber. "The Price We Pay: Economic Costs of Barriers to Employment for Former Prisoners and People Convicted of Felonies." CEPR. Accessed March 27, 2018. http://cepr.net/publications/reports/the-price-we-pay-economic-costs-of-barriers-to-employment-for-former-prisoners-and-people-convicted-of-felonies.
[76] "Youth Homelessness and Juvenile Justice: Opportunities for Collaboration and Impact." Coalition for Juvenile Justice. Accessed March 27, 2018. http://www.juvjustice.org/resources/1014.

SPOTLIGHT:

WORKING WITH HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS – YouthHarbors

A program of Justice Resource Institute, YouthHarbors is embedded in high school to serve homeless, unaccompanied students and YYA ages 18-22 in Massachusetts by connecting them with housing assistance, an adult support network, and individualized life skills development lessons so they can find safety in appropriate housing, graduate high school, and break the cycle of homelessness and poverty. The YouthHarbors program utilizes a wraparound model for service delivery that carefully crafts an individualized and flexible plan so as to meet the unique needs of each youth experiencing homelessness. Clients generally stay in the program for a total of 6 to 12 months, after which they are eligible for alumni services.

"You get stuck in your head, and then stuck in your life."

– YYA, 22, Boston

"You emotionally can't go on. You wake up every morning not wanting to move. You have no motivation, so you stay in your bed all day . . . You just want to lay there and cry. And sometimes, you can't even cry. That's how overwhelmed you are. Can't give yourself the basic needs you need when you're so depressed. You just want to die all the time . . ."

– YYA, 19, Springfield

UNDOCUMENTED AND IMMIGRANT YYA: Undocumented and immigrant YYA experiencing homelessness are often hidden from youth-serving agencies. Many of these youth have come to the United States for safety and/or economic opportunity. Some come with families, others arrive as unaccompanied minors. Their reluctance to engage with those perceived to be in positions of authority, fear of being deported, and language barriers all increase the risk for this population to remain hidden. Though statistics on the prevalence of this population are limited, the 2017 Massachusetts Youth Count identified that 15% of the YYA experiencing homelessness in Boston were born outside of the United States.[77] Effective strategies for providing services to this population include providing services in native languages through bicultural staff, providing services in communities in which YYA reside/are from, and taking time to build trusting relationships.

YYA WITH MENTAL HEALTH AND/OR SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS

MENTAL HEALTH: The experience of homelessness is an additional stressor during a period of developmental changes that are inherently stressful. In addition to creating new experiences of trauma, the stress of experiencing homelessness can exacerbate preexisting and underlying mental health conditions. In its 2014 briefing "Complex Trauma: Facts for Service Providers Working with Youth and Young Adults," the National Child Traumatic Stress Network describes YYA experiencing homelessness as a population that has "experienced early and multiple traumas," describing that "these factors can lead to mental health challenges including depression, anxiety, PTSD, suicidal ideation, attachment issues, and substance use disorders."[78] Some researchers have found rates as high as 80-84% of homeless young adults in their studies meeting diagnostic criteria for a psychiatric disorder.[79,80] While many traumatic events occur before individuals leave home, YYA are likely to experience further violence, victimization, and trauma while on the street. This creates an environment where YYA are forced to attempt to address the trauma of their past while actively experiencing the trauma of their present circumstances.

The 2017 Massachusetts Youth Count reported that 22% of youth experiencing homelessness in Massachusetts self-reported the need for mental health services.[81] Barriers for YYA with mental health disorders include connection with and access to culturally responsive mental health services, difficulty accessing and storing medication, making and keeping appointments, and the pervasive stress of homelessness. A 24-year-old participant in a focus group in Boston described this as the "Catch-22 of homelessness"—"If you can't be stable, you can't get stable." Best practices for this subpopulation include trauma-informed services; accessible and culturally appropriate mental health services; and programs or service models that address multiple aspects of the individual, including complex mental and physical health issues, multiple stressors and risk factors, and competing priorities.

77 "Massachusetts Youth Count 2017." Mass.gov. https://www.mass.gov/ichh-action-plans.
78 "Complex Trauma: Facts for Service Providers Working with Homeless Youth and Young Adults." National Child Traumatic Stress Network. Accessed March 27, 2018.
http://www.nctsn.org/products/complex-trauma-facts-service-providers-working-homeless-youth-and-young-adults.
79 Castro AL, Gustafson EL, Ford AE, Edidin JP, et al. "Psychiatric disorders, high-risk behavior, and chronicity of episodes among predominantly African American homeless Chicago Youth." *JHCPU.* 2014; 25(3):1201-1216.
80 Quimby, Ernika G., Jennifer P. Edidin, Zoe Ganim, Erika Gustafson, Scott J. Hunter, and Niranjan S. Karnik. "Psychiatric Disorders and Substance Use in Homeless Youth: A Preliminary Comparison of San Francisco and Chicago." *Behavioral Sciences* 2, no. 3 (2012): 186-94. doi:10.3390/bs2030186.
81 "Massachusetts Youth Count 2017." Mass.gov. https://www.mass.gov/ichh-action-plans.

SUBSTANCE USE: The National Health Care for the Homeless Council reports that substance use rates among youth experiencing homelessness are consistently higher than rates among their housed peers.[82] Other research supports this statement, and a 2014 study of 601 homeless youth found that 60% of participants met DSM-IV-TR diagnostic criteria for a substance use disorder for at least one substance, with 50% meeting DSM-IV-TR criteria for alcohol addiction, 60% for drug addiction, and 49% for substance dependence.[83] The YYA participants from the focus groups conducted as part of this Plan often described substance use as a coping mechanism to deal with the stressors of homelessness.

Additionally, substance use among homeless youth often places them at risk for further negative health consequences. Studies have found that homeless youth using substances are more likely than their non-using peers to engage in sexual behaviors that put them at elevated risk for STIs and unintended pregnancies, such as unprotected sex, sex while under the influence of drugs or alcohol, and multiple partners.[84,85] Furthermore, program approaches to client substance use can inhibit relationship formation and continuation. A National Health Care for the Homeless research review on "Behavioral Health among Youth Experiencing Homelessness" quotes Mary Howe, a service provider in San Francisco, as saying, *"I hear a lot of the youth we work with referred to as 'hard to reach' or 'service resistant,' and I can't disagree more with those statements. They are on our streets and in our parks; they are in plain view. How much easier can they be to reach? They want services, but the truth is they want services that accept them the way they are, provide them with the things they need by people that treat them as individuals with respect and dignity."*[86] Best practices in working with youth and young adults using substances include harm reduction approaches; reducing stigma; providing access to culturally responsive treatment; understanding legal issues; an emphasis on engagement; multiple modalities of addressing substance use; and an integration of substance use services with other mental and physical health services.

82 "In Focus: Behavioral Health among Youth Experiencing Homelessness." National Health Care for the Homeless Council. November 2, 2015. Accessed March 27, 2018. https://www.nhchc.org/2015/10/in-focus-behavioral-health-among-youth-experiencing-homelessness/.
83 Bender, Kimberly, Sanna Thompson, Kristin Ferguson, and Lisa Langenderfer. "Substance Use Predictors of Victimization Profiles among Homeless Youth: A Latent Class Analysis." *Journal of Adolescence* 37, no. 2 (2014): 155-64. doi:10.1016/j.adolescence.2013.11.007.
84 Kennedy, David P., Joan S. Tucker, Harold D. Green, Daniela Golinelli, and Brett Ewing. "Unprotected Sex of Homeless Youth: Results from a Multilevel Dyadic Analysis of Individual, Social Network, and Relationship Factors." *AIDS and Behavior* 16, no. 7 (2012): 2015-032. doi:10.1007/s10461-012-0195-0.
85 Tucker, Joan S., Gery W. Ryan, Daniela Golinelli, Brett Ewing, Suzanne L. Wenzel, David P. Kennedy, Harold D. Green, and Annie Zhou. "Substance Use and Other Risk Factors for Unprotected Sex: Results from an Event-Based Study of Homeless Youth." *AIDS and Behavior* 16, no. 6 (2011): 1699-707. doi:10.1007/s10461-011-0017-9.
86 National Health Care for the Homeless Council. (September 2016). Substance Abuse Among Youth Experiencing Homelessness. Healing Hands, 20:2. (Author: Melissa Jean, Writer). Nashville, TN: Accessed March 26, 2018. Available at: https://www.nhchc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/healing-hands-substance-use-among-youth-experiencing-homelessness-v2-web-ready.pdf.

Opioid Epidemic

The opioid epidemic was recently declared a national public health emergency.[87] However, while opioid-related deaths are on the rise across the entire country, the opioid-related death rate in Massachusetts has far surpassed the national average, with an especially sharp rise in the last few years. Opioid-related overdose deaths in Massachusetts recently declined in 2017 by an estimated 8.3% compared to 2016;[88] nevertheless, opioid-related deaths in the Commonwealth were more than five times higher in 2016 than in 2000, with a 46% increase over 2014.[89] According to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health's (DPH) Chapter 55 report,[90] approximately 4% of individuals age 11 or older have an opioid use disorder in Massachusetts and, in 2015, roughly two out of every three people who died from opioids were younger than 45. In the first half of 2017, 7% of all 15- to 24-year-old deaths in Massachusetts were from opioid-related fatal overdoses.[91] Fortunately, YYA are seeking help and the DPH Bureau of Substance Addiction Services reports that in FY17 there were 3,578 YYA ages 14-24 classified as homeless who enrolled into the treatment system.[92]

87 "President Donald J. Trump Is Taking Action on Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis." The White House. Accessed March 28, 2018. https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/10/26/president-donald-j-trump-taking-action-drug-addiction-and-opioid-crisis.
88 "Opioid-related Overdose Deaths in 2017 Fell by More than 8 Percent." Mass.gov. Accessed April 9, 2018. https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2017/11/15/2017-annual-update-action-items-gov-working-group.pdf.
89 "Data Brief: Opioid-Related Overdose Deaths Among Massachusetts Residents." Mass.gov. August 2017. Accessed March 28. 2018. https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2017/08/31/data-brief-overdose-deaths-aug-2017.pdf.
90 "Chapter 55 Data Visualization." Mass.gov. Accessed March 28, 2018. http://www.mass.gov/chapter55/.
91 "Opioid-Related Overdose Deaths, All Intents, MA Residents – Demographic Data Highlights." Mass.gov. August 2017. Accessed March 28, 2018. https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2017/08/31/opioid-demographic-aug-2017.pdf.
92 BSAS. "Treatment statistics prepared by the Office of Statistics and Evaluation, Bureau of Substance Addiction Services, MDPH on April 6th, 2018 with data as of March 9th, 2018." E-mail message to author. April 6, 2018.

"You can't get into college without good grades. You can't move forward without school. But how are you supposed to do your homework if you're on the streets? And now, everything is online. Not everyone has access to a computer. And they say things like 'it's only $500 to get a computer.' How am I supposed to get that?"

– YYA, 19, Springfield

"A home would allow me the security to go to school without worrying about having my possessions being stolen or how I am going to get to class from wherever I spent the night."

– YYA, 24, Boston

COLLEGE STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HUNGER AND HOMELESSNESS: Among unaccompanied homeless youth in the Commonwealth, students who are enrolled in the state's colleges and universities represent a population of unique interest and growing concern. Nationwide, a 2016 Wisconsin HOPE Lab survey of students at more than 70 campuses found that one in three community college students experienced hunger, half were housing insecure, and 14% were homeless.[93] According to Voices of Youth Count national data, 29% of young adults who experienced homelessness were enrolled in college or another educational program at the time that they experienced homelessness.[94] The United States Department of Education reports that 1,020 students on Massachusetts public campuses experienced housing instability and food insecurity in 2016.[95] These struggles often go unknown to faculty, administrators, and others who could be in a position to help.

During the 2017-18 academic year, Massachusetts public colleges and universities became the first state system in the United States to survey students with the goal of identifying the specific nature and magnitude of the economic challenges they face. The survey results, due for release in May 2018, will help quantify the extent of food and housing insecurity facing students in a state that ranks high in housing costs and low in financial aid dollars awarded to those living in poverty. Anecdotal reports from the state's public campuses indicate that a growing number of students are losing their housing due to rent increases and evictions, as well as disruptive family situations. Campus staff at 24 of Massachusetts' 29 public campuses reported to the Department of Higher Education in 2016 that they were aware of homeless students who had matriculated and were attending classes while "couch surfing" or living in cars or emergency shelters. One student who testified about his experiences before the Board of Higher Education told of living at Logan Airport for several months while attending classes at Bunker Hill Community College. Recently, the Department of Higher Education has learned of a group of students living in tents in the woods in Gardner, Massachusetts, while attending Mount Wachusett Community College.

From a state policy standpoint, supporting homeless students already enrolled in higher education—even if the population

is relatively small—makes sense. These individuals have demonstrated great resilience and persistence in confronting challenges to enrollment, retention, and graduation and are already on a path to economic self-sufficiency—assuming they can muster the supports needed to succeed in obtaining postsecondary credentials. The Department of Higher Education is currently collaborating with staff from the Executive Office of Health and Human Services to identify resources and create partnership models that might allow homeless students to find housing both on and off campus.

DOMESTIC AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE: Intimate partner violence (IPV) can be a contributing factor in homelessness, both in the impact of violence on the ability to sustain employment (and therefore housing) as well as the challenge of where a person can go to escape a violent partner. Agencies serving YYA experiencing homelessness may face particular challenges in serving YYA who are also experiencing domestic violence, including serving both partners; finding safe, confidential, and developmentally appropriate domestic violence shelters; and addressing the protective factors a violent partner may provide against other street violence. The "Runaway & Homeless Youth and Relationship Violence Toolkit"[96,97] suggests that best practices to create effective, meaningful, and appropriate services for YYA experiencing homelessness and intimate partner violence include increasing youth provider awareness of approaches, responses, and resources for addressing IPV, as well as creating partnerships between IPV programs and service providers working with youth experiencing homelessness.

93 Goldrick-Rab, S., Richardson, J., & Hernandez, A. (2017). "Hungry and Homeless In College: Results from a National Study of Basic Needs Insecurity In Higher Education (Rep.)." Wisconsin HOPE Lab. Accessed March 26, 2018. doi:http://wihopelab.com/publications/Hungry-and-Homeless-in-College-Report.pdf.

94 Morton, M.H., Dworsky, A., & Samuels, G.M. "Missed Opportunities: Youth Homelessness in America." Accessed March 27, 2018. http://voicesofyouthcount.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ChapinHall_VoYC_1-Pager_Final_111517.pdf.

95 Data from the United States Department of Education's Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). FAFSA is a form that can be prepared annually by current and prospective college students (undergraduate and graduate) in the United States to determine their eligibility for student financial aid. Only 48.5% of prospective and current students complete this form.
"FAFSA® Data by Postsecondary School and State of Legal Residence." Federal Student Aid. December 12, 2017. Accessed March 27, 2018. https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/about/data-center/student/application-volume/fafsa-school-state.
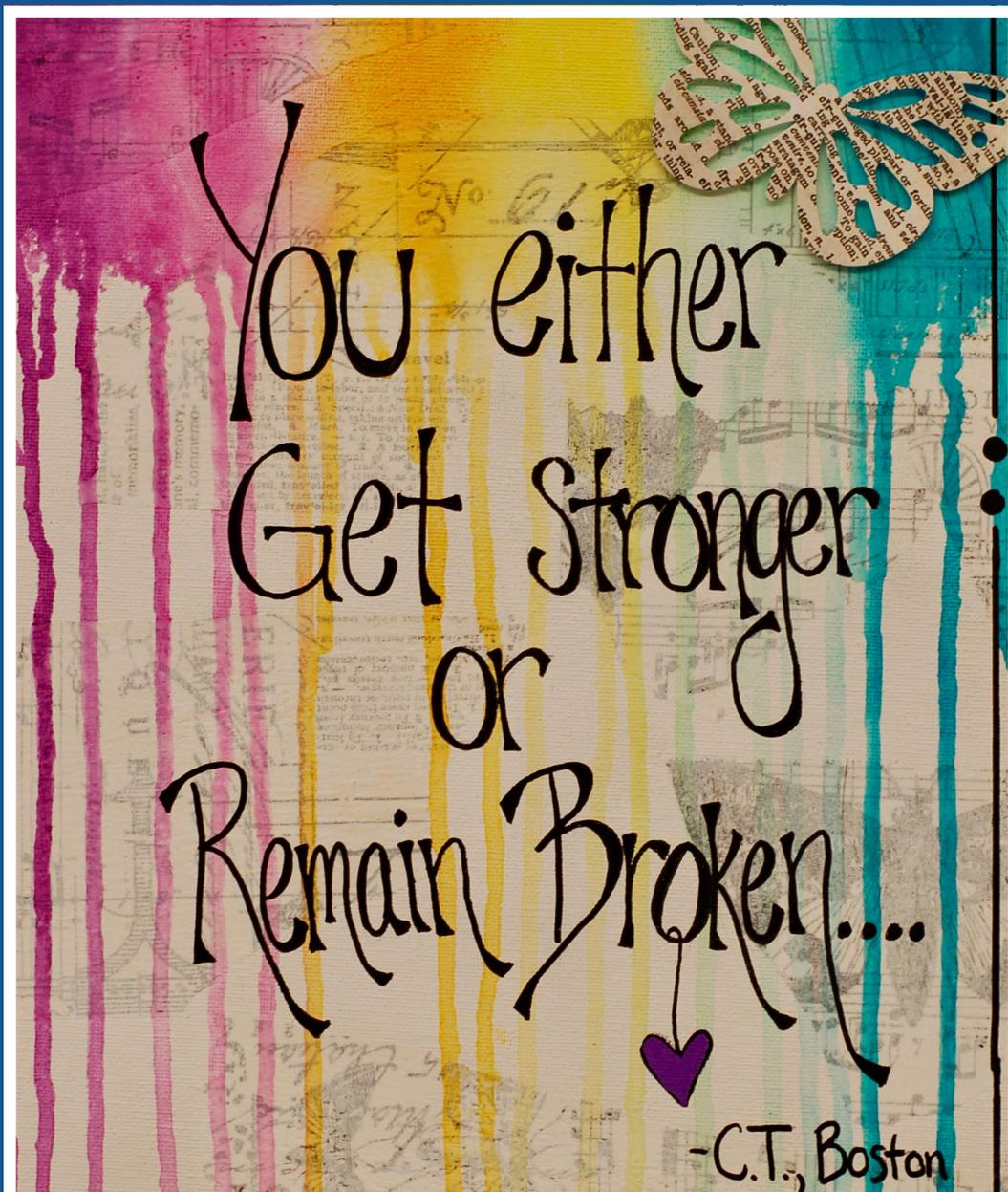
96 "Runaway & Homeless Youth and Relationship Violence Toolkit." NRCDV. Accessed March 28, 2018. https://www.nrcdv.org/rhydvtoolkit/index.html.

97 Ibid. According to the authors: "*This Toolkit was developed by and for advocates in the runaway and homeless youth (RHY) and domestic and sexual assault (DV/SA) fields to help programs better address relationship violence with runaway and homeless youth. The Toolkit organizes information, resources, tips and tools drawn from the wealth of information gathered when the two service systems were convened through local collaborative projects funded by the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.*"

Conclusion

This plan was written with the urgency of knowing many youth and young adults who are currently experiencing homelessness and housing instability. We hope that the framing, data, recommendations, and strategies presented can serve as a deep and loud call to action so that every youth and young adult in the Commonwealth can be housed, safe, supported, and able to fully use their strengths and talents. The new Executive Director of the Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Commission in collaboration with the Massachusetts Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness will continue to revisit this document annually.

Quote by CT, Boston; artwork by Stephanie Mero

Acknowledgements

"In high school, before I was 18, my mom had untreated bipolar disorder. I was her punching bag and she kept threatening to kick me out . . . There were weeks when she told me I just couldn't be in the house before 10pm. I remember on Easter, during my senior year in high school, I had to be out of the house but everything was closed. It was pouring rain, and there was nowhere for me to go. I just sat in the park in the pouring rain."

– J.A., 20, Orleans

Photo Credit: Maxwell Nashashuk

During the Winter of 2014

While trying to write for this project, I fought frequently with memories summoned by the topic. My first drafts were angry, and I don't want people reading this to just read another tragic story of a victim in a flawed system. My intention is to see change made. My belief is that, "homelessness is preventable through resources." The rise of new buildings does not negate the crisis of homelessness.

In the winter of 2014-15, my toxic living situation left me homeless just as I started college. I dropped out in an attempt to hurry along this phase of my life and planned to return to school at a later point.

I saw my case as simple I needed a job to have a home. I set my eyes on employment with vigor, as a home would allow me the security to go to school without worrying about having my possession being stolen or how I was going to get to class from where ever I spent the night. I quickly learned that my problem was not limited to one solution. I met youth, who had found places to live, would often lose them, because of the rising cost of living. It was further engraved that education would provide me with stability. Here is illustrated one of the many conundrums of homelessness. How could I secure a home with a job that cannot meet the cost of living, and if education is the answer then where am I offered the space, support and recourse to do so. Shelter staff, at best are kind, but are mostly uneducated in the resources that are available. The worst of staff have no interest as the job they have as staff is just another means for money in this battle to keep our heads above water at risk of becoming homeless.

We don't just need housing. We need resources to continue our education, we need to better train and educate shelter staff in safe and supportive care. Problems are not compartmentalized. Homelessness does not have a clear course. It cannot be defined in a type of person but can define a city by how they choose to address it.

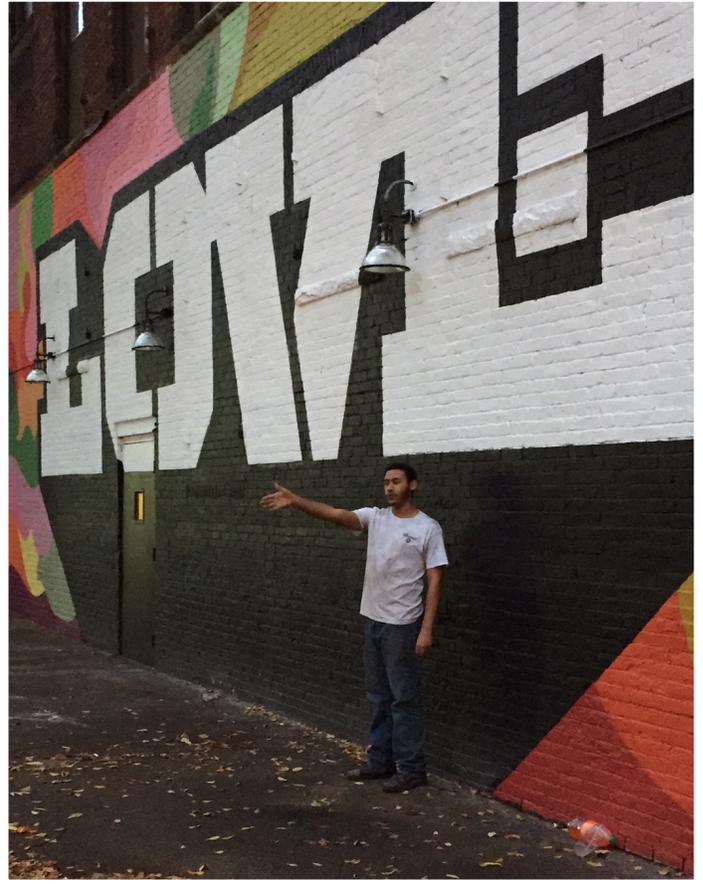**– M.S., 25, Boston**

Photo Credit: Maxwell Nashashuk

"Sleeping out on the streets started getting too dangerous. I moved out into the woods with a few people, but even that is dangerous. Cops watch those woods and can come back there at any time."

– M.R., 22, Boston

"I'm a kind and loving person."

– Gouchet, Lynn

"I used to sneak into my family's house to shower. I know their schedule and I know they leave the back door unlocked. So, I would go and shower. But then a neighbor saw me and called the police. That didn't end well."

- S.D., 23, Springfield

Photo Credit: Maxwell Nashashuk

BY E.L., 19, BOSTON

The life of a jacket is fairly simple, it hangs in the closet quietly strung up by someone, and waits, in a small dark enclosure till whomever owns the jacket takes it out when they deem fit, when they're cold and when they benefit from it,

So jacket gives all it can to let the person benefit from the resources the jacket holds.

It's repaid by being put back in the closet when it's no longer needed, doesn't benefit anyone in one said situation, as if the jacket doesn't have anything else to give?

I never understood why the jacket was only taken out when she was cold, so i BEG to ask, why couldn't she take me out to admire me? Thank me for keeping her warm, knowledge that i kept her warm, think of me as something worthy.. of not being locked away and forgotten when she didn't want to bother with me, I was your child,

Don't look up, Don't fidget so much, can they tell i'm carrying more than one bag? Does it look normal, does it look strange? I've already tucked all i can under the seat, on my lap. On my back and the straps are holding the weight of the world on me, pushing down on my shoulders, spreading a pain i couldn't quite name yet, smothering my hope, I don't need this jacket anymore, it echoes as loud as the simple hellos people yelled into the grand canyon for fun.

The first twenty four hours felt like i was a pebble thrown from a bridge being watched to see if it ever hit the water, waiting for a noise, my voice, for it to never be heard, what once was the grip of your angry hands holding me down it was now the straps of my bag which held everything i came to own ..what i could carry anyways. You didn't leave me with much time.

I never stopped looking the same after that day, but once a bite was taken from me it was found out too late, what was happening..what i was going through, too late, now you feel almost as ruined as me,

A caterpillar taken from its cocoon too soon, plucked from the battered tree branch that once was called home, even if it was bumped, bruised and broken, that's all i ever knew, Life was to be a box of chocolates they say, because we never know what we're going to get, the delight of finding something new and exciting, so..why were all my chocolates expired.

Expired.., yeah, that's how i felt two weeks in, one is to look at you .. and you are seen as to be full of life, hope, nothing bad could possibly be going on, you never think someone is homeless by looking at them, but the person is just there, always there, i'm always here..waiting for consumption

I'm doing okay on my own i guess but god, to have a home.. To have pack to fit in without a question on my identity, my past, to feel fire and **** do i want to burn, burn down everything and take in what i lost.

Four months in, i'm fine on my own, i don't need your offer of a battered branch to cling to, i'm fine on my own but i admit the weather is getting colder, i'm..doing okay on my own but to which i hear "i'm so ready to go home" i yearn for their warmth.

I'm doing okay on my own, but the wolves have always traveled in packs and ****, mom..it's freezing being alone and i don't have a jacket.

Appendices

Appendix A: Federal Definitions Of Homelessness

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT (HUD)

HUD defines homelessness as one of four categories. Category 3 is the only one that specifically mentions youth; however, youth are eligible and much more likely to qualify for assistance under the other categories.

HUD Categories of Homelessness:[98]

Category 1 Literal Homelessness: "Individuals and families who live in a place not meant for human habitation (including the streets or in their car), emergency shelter, transitional housing, and hotels paid for by a government or charitable organization."

Category 2 Imminent Risk of Homelessness: "Individuals or families who will lose their primary nighttime residence within 14 days and [have] no other resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing."

Category 3 Homeless Under Other Statutes: "Unaccompanied youth under 25 years of age, or families with children and youth, who do not meet any of the other categories but are homeless under other federal statutes, have not had a lease and have moved 2 or more times in the past 60 days and are likely to remain unstable because of special needs or barriers."

Category 4 Fleeing Domestic Violence: "Individuals or families who are fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking and who lack resources and support networks to obtain other permanent housing."

FEDERAL MCKINNEY-VENTO ACT

"Unaccompanied homeless youth" is defined under The *McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act,* as amended by *S. 896 Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act of 2009,* as youth who currently lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, and/or "(A) have experienced a long term period without living independently in permanent housing, (B) have experienced persistent instability as measured by frequent moves over such period, and (C) can be expected to continue in such status for an extended period of time because of chronic disabilities, chronic physical health or mental health conditions, substance addiction, histories of domestic violence or childhood abuse, the presence of a child or youth with a disability, or multiple barriers to employment."[99]

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES (HHS):

A homeless individual is defined in Section 330(h)(5)(A) as "an individual who lacks housing (without regard to whether the individual is a member of a family), including an individual whose primary residence during the night is a supervised public or private facility (e.g., shelters) that provides temporary living accommodations, and an individual who is a resident in transitional housing." A homeless person is an individual without permanent housing who may live on the streets; stay in a shelter, mission, single room occupancy facilities, abandoned building, or vehicle; or in any other unstable or non-permanent situation.[100]

---

[98] "HUD's Homeless Definition as It Relates to Children and Youth." HUD Exchange. Accessed March 28, 2018. https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/4062/huds-definition-of-homeless-as-it-relates-to-children-and-youth/.

[99] The *McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act* as amended by *S. 896 The Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act of 2009:* SEC. 103. [42 USC 11302]. GENERAL DEFINITION OF HOMELESS INDIVIDUAL. HUD Exchange. Accessed March 28, 2018. https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/HomelessAssistanceActAmendedbyHEARTH.pdf.

[100] Section 330 of the *Public Health Service Act* (42 U.S.C., 254b). Accessed March 28, 2018. https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/USCODE-2010-title42/pdf/USCODE-2010-title42-chap6A-subchapII-partD-subparti.pdf.

Appendix B: Sample Stakeholder Interview Guide

<u>Questions for State Stakeholder Interviews</u>

Definitions

1)   How does your agency define "homelessness" for a youth and/or young adult?

2)   How do you know if there are youth or young adults experiencing homelessness within your system (DCF, EOLWD, etc.)? (Is there a specific question your agency asks?)

Measurement Systems and Data

3)   Does your agency have a way to flag a YYA who is at-risk for becoming homeless?

4)   How/where do you collect data on housing status (homeless, at-risk, etc.)?

5)   Why might a young person experiencing homelessness NOT want to disclose their status to your agency? (Maybe under 18? CORI? Children?)

Communication and Collaboration

6)   When a YYA becomes homeless (or is identified) is there an internal conversation that occurs? If so, what does that look like?

7)   What other agencies are you talking to/collaborating with (formally and informally) in regards to YYA homelessness?

8)   What and/or who helps these inter-agency conversations? What partners could better facilitate these conversations, and more specifically, who has the role/resources/responsibility to facilitate these conversations?

9)   What might such a protocol for interagency collaboration look like, so it's not a one-off process? What has worked in the past and how might it be improved/enhanced?

10)   What gets in the way of inter-agency collaboration?

11)   How might the needs of YYA experiencing homelessness in YOUR system be different from YYA experiencing homelessness in other systems?

12)   When a young person is about to be discharged from your agency, how might transition planning be enhanced to prevent homelessness?

13) Tell me more about how your agency handles crisis response and intervention versus long-term solutions for stability of a young person experiencing homelessness.

Backbone Support

14) What funding streams support your agency's work with young people experiencing homelessness?

15) Is the issue of YYA homelessness something that everyone in your agency is sensitive and equipped to work with? Or it is outsourced / a pet project of someone?

16) What does your agency need in order to better support YYA experiencing homelessness? (Resources? Training? Forums for collaboration?)

17) How has state-level policy impacted your work at ___ (agency). Are there other policies that would be helpful?

18) How can you envision this State Plan supporting a regional approach to ending youth homelessness?

19) Are you familiar with the Demonstration Projects? If so, how have they impacted your work and outlook on this issue?

20) MA does not currently have a central/state-level office or position focusing solely on youth homelessness issues. If this were created, how might a central state office/leadership position better support your work? What sort of responsibilities would you want to see in the job description?

Direct Support to YYA

21) What are some of the supports and services your agency offers YYA who are experiencing homelessness?

22) What does YYA involvement / leadership development look like within your agency? What might better support your work around this?

23) Are there ways that programs funded by your agency intentionally connect and support YYA to discover and develop their talents and strengths?

Final question:

24) What do you think should be done to better support YYA who experience homelessness in MA?

Appendix C: Sample Focus Group Guide

YYA Focus Groups—MA STATE PLAN TO END YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

I.   Introduction –
●   Individual introductions
●   Group agreements
●   Definitions

II.   Supports/Barriers
We want to start by looking at barriers – what gets in the way of you getting your needs met? (Needs such as education, employment, income, housing, mental and physical health, and support). The way we are going to do this is as a game.

Instructions:
1)   Divide into 2 or 3 groups (try to have no more than 3 people per group) – count off by 2s or 3s or just divide by location in the room.

Once group is divided:
2)   Each group is going to get a pad with the letters A-Z written on it.
3)   Each group gets a marker for each person in the group (2 or 3 markers per group).
4)   We are going to give you all 3 minutes to come up with a list of things that get in the way of getting your needs met. You can write down one word for each letter. After the 3 minutes is up, we will compare your lists.
5)   HOWEVER, your team will only get points for unique words – words that the other teams haven't also come up with.

DISCUSSION:
●   At each word identified, ask why or how it's a barrier – what does it get in the way of doing? (Limit time to one minute—facilitator gets to judge if team gets a point or not).
●   After all of the words are discussed, ask: "Are any additional barriers that we / the state should know about?"

III.   Systems
●   The purpose of this first activity is to get information directly from you about barriers, gaps, best practices, and opportunities to improve the systems that affect YYA experiencing homelessness.

What are the systems you interact / have interacted with?

Activity:
●   Large post-it papers around the room with various systems

● Each person gets a post-it pad (all the same color), puts the post-it on a page if has had interaction (doesn't have to be good interaction) with that system.

Three rounds:
● Round One (YELLOW post-it) "What systems were you connected with before you became unstably housed (if more than one time with the same system, add a "x2," etc. to it).

● Round Two (PINK post-it) "What systems were you connected with while experiencing homelessness?"

● Round Three (BLUE post-it) "Who did you tell / who knew you were homeless?"
o Systems to include:
● DYS / juvenile justice
● Criminal justice / legal system / adult corrections system
● DCF / foster care / CHINS
● High School
● GED prep classes / HiSET
● VoTech or other employment program such as Job Corps
● Individual therapist
● Department of Mental Health
● DTA / public benefits: food stamps, WIC
● DDS: SSI/SSDI
● Health care / doctor
● Housing authority
● Higher ed (colleges)
● Substance use treatment
● Social services (general)
● LGBTQ support service
● Other (write in on the post-it note)

Discussion:
● What do you notice? Does it seem like there are any trends or similarities?
o *Probe: is there anything to note about systems or people who were connected with (pink note) but didn't tell (blue note)?*

We are going to shift to asking some more personal questions about your experiences, and if you are comfortable, we would like you to speak specifically about your experiences rather than more generally about other people's experiences.

1) At what point did you realize that you were going to be "capital-H Homeless"? (What was happening? At what point in your life?)
o *Probe: Looking back, was there a time that you were actually homeless but didn't think that you were?*

2)   When you first found yourself without a stable place to stay, was anyone or any organization or any system helpful?

●   Is there anyone / any organization that could have helped you that didn't?

3)   At what point did you realize that you HAD to tell someone?
o   Was there anyone you intentionally did NOT tell? Why?
o   What made it difficult to tell people?

4)   How did you find resources, programs, or supports (internet, social network?)?
●   If you looked on the internet, what did you Google?

Next, we are going to ask some questions that will ask you to reflect a bit on your experiences…

5)   Looking back, is there anything that you wish had been done by a provider when you first found yourself in the situation?

6)   What advice would you give yourself or other people in this situation?

 IV.   Summary questions: A few last questions…
1) Do you think there is anything that is different about being young and unstable HERE than in other places in the state? What/why? (Note if compare to other states…)

2) Are there ways that you feel your sexual orientation or gender identity have impacted your experience with homelessness or housing instability? (Only if it seems to pertain and feels safe.)

3) Are there ways that you feel your racial or ethnic identity have impacted your experience with homelessness or housing instability?

4)   In summary, we are trying to write a Plan for the State to better support and eventually end youth homelessness. What do you wish people knew about what it's like to be young and unstably housed? Think about service providers, policy makers, the general public…
o   Go around room, each person can say one or two things
o   What do providers not realize about what it's like to be young and unstably housed?
o   What do you think would surprise most people?

5)   If we could magically get the State to do one or two things to better support and/or end YYA homelessness, what would you recommend? Or, what would you change if you had the power to change things?

 V. PhotoVoice Project introduction

VI. Conclusion and Evaluation; Plus/Delta Evaluation

Appendix D: Statewide Provider Survey

State Plan to End Youth Homelessness- Provider survey

Survey Goal:

In creating the MA State Plan to End Youth and Young Adult (YYA) Homelessness, we have been collecting information from many sources including focus groups with YYA who have experienced homelessness and interviews with State agencies and leaders. Direct service staff have unique perspectives on the challenges faced by individuals AND organizations and can lend another layer of depth to our understanding of the work needed to be done in the Commonwealth to ensure that homelessness for youth and young adults is rare, brief, and/or a one-time occurrence. With this in mind, we invite you to contribute your feedback and insight to ensure the State Plan to End YYA Homelessness reflects your experiences.

If you have any questions, comments, or want to be further involved in the State Plan, please contact Ayala Livny at ayala.livny.consulting@gmail.com

<u>**Questions:**</u> **A. DEMOGRAPHICS:**

1)Was your agency or program a participant in the FY17 State-funded demonstration projects?

- yes
- no
- Don't know

1A) If yes, which consortium/region was your agency a part of?

- Merrimack Valley/ CTI
- Metro Boston/United Way of Massachusetts Bay
- Fall River/ Catholic Social Services
- Franklin, Hampshire, Berkshire Counties / Community Action
- North Shore / Lynn Housing and Neighborhood Development
- Worcester/ Central Mass Housing Alliance
- Hampden County - City of Springfield
- Metro West - SMOC (Framingham)

2) What CoC are you a part of?

- Attleboro/Taunton/Bristol County
- Balance of State
- Boston
- Cambridge
- Cape Cod/Islands

- Fall River
- Gloucester/Haverhill/Salem/Essex (North Shore)
- Lowell
- Lynn
- New Bedford
- Pittsfield/Northampton/Berkshire/Franklin/Hampshire Counties
- Quincy/Brockton/Weymouth/Plymouth City and County CoC
- Somerville
- Springfield/Holyoke/Chicopee/Westfield/Hampden County
- Worcester City and County
- I DON'T KNOW WHAT CoC WE ARE A PART OF

B. Outreach:

Some YYA Focus Group participants identified that there was a significant gap of time between their first experience of homelessness and connecting with a service organization. They also identified that this gap of time was when they were most vulnerable to violence and exploitation.

3) How do you currently identify or reach out to potential clients?

- Street Outreach
- Referrals (if yes, from whom_____)
- Peer Outreach (formal)
- Peer Outreach (informal/ word of mouth)
- Collaborations
- Advertisements
- On-line/ Internet outreach (if yes, what sites/forums _____)
- Other

4) What makes it difficult for you to connect with potential clients that would benefit from your programs?

C. Resources

YYA focus group participants also identified not knowing the resources available to them, even if they are connected to a service program.

5) Is there a resource guide SPECIFICALLY for services available for YYA experiencing homelessness in your community?

- Yes, paper
- Yes, online
- There is a resource guide, but it's not specific for youth/ young adults
- No

5A) *If yes, which agency created the guide(s)? _____

5B) If there is a guide, is it something that you use?

- Frequently
- Rarely
- Never, please explain why _____

6) What would make it easier for YOU to know about and connect with other services available to your clients?

7) What additional types of services/programs/resources are most needed in your community to prevent and end YYA Homelessness? Please rank in order of importance to you. We assume that all of the items below would be culturally competent, trauma-informed, and developmentally appropriate.

- Emergency shelter
- Transitional housing
- Permanent Supported Housing
- Employment services
- General Case Management
- Mental Health Services
- Substance Use Disorder Services
- Physical health / medical services
- LGBTQ+ supports
- Education support and services
- Recreational activities
- Life skills support
- Other _____

D. Flexible funding

Many programs have access to flexible funding to meet a variety of needs of their clients. We know that some flexible funding dollars are now decreasing, and we are trying to learn more about how important they have been.

8) Has your program had access to flexible funds?

- Yes
- No

9) If you have had access to flexible funds, what have you used them for?

- Housing/rent costs: if yes, please describe_____
- Transportation
- Child Care
- Legal fees
- Work-related needs
- Education-related needs
- IDs
- Other _____

10) Could you share one short story of the flexible funding meeting a significant unmet need?

E. Staff Connection

11) How connected do you feel to other providers IN YOUR COMMUNITY doing similar work?

- Not at all
- Occasionally connected
- Connected
- Very Connected

12) How connected do you feel to other providers OUTSIDE OF YOUR COMMUNITY doing similar work?

- Not at all
- Occasionally connected
- Connected
- Very Connected

13) What might you gain from a better connection to providers outside your community doing similar work?

14) Can you share an example of a time that you being connected (or disconnected) from other services has impacted your ability to serve your clients?

15) How connected do you feel to your local CoC?

- Not at all
- Occasionally connected
- Connected
- Very connected

15b) (if applicable) Can you share an example of how you have benefitted from a connection to your local CoC?

F. Other Comments

16) Is there anything else you think we should know as we are making recommendations for how the State of MA can make YYA Homelessness rare, brief, and a one-time occurrence?

Appendix E: 2017 Massachusetts Youth Count Survey Tool

The 2017 Massachusetts Youth Count Report can be found at https://www.mass.gov/ichh-action-plans.
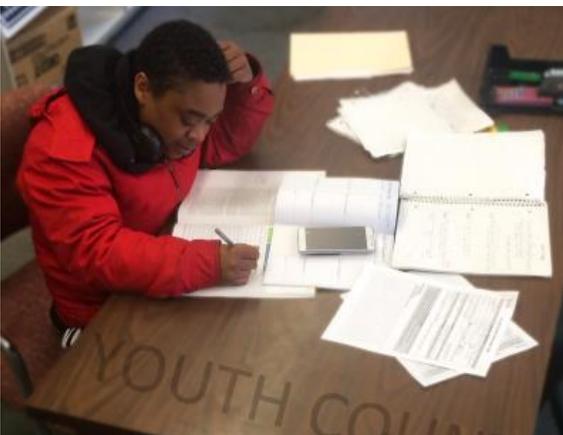
2017 Massachusetts Youth Count Housing and Homelessness Survey

This survey is being administered by the Massachusetts Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth and the local Continuum of Care, so that the state and local providers can better understand the housing and service needs of youth and young adults under the age of 25 in Massachusetts. Over the past two years, the results of similar surveys have helped the Legislature to invest a total of $3 million in housing and services for young people who have experienced housing instability. Your answers will remain confidential. There are 30 questions. **Please respond to all of the questions you feel comfortable answering.** We greatly appreciate your participation!

****

1. Have you already taken this survey in the past two weeks? ☐ Yes   ☐ No

2. What are your initials (the first letter of each of your names)? _____ / _____ /_____ (first/middle/last)

3a. What is your age? _____ years old

3b. What is your date of birth? ____/_____/_____ (month/day/year)

4a. What is your primary language? _____

4b. If your primary language is one other than English, are you taking this survey in your primary language?
- ☐   Yes, someone is reading the questions to me in my primary language
- ☐   Yes, this paper or electronic version has been translated into my primary language
- ☐   No, I am taking this survey in a language that is not my primary language

We are asking the following set of questions to better understand your housing situation.

5.   Where did you sleep last night?

[CHECK ONE OPTION THAT BEST MATCHES YOUR ANSWER]

- ☐   Shelter (emergency, temporary)
- ☐   Transitional housing
- ☐   Hotel or motel
- ☐   Own apartment or house
- ☐   Parent or guardian's home
- ☐   Other relative's home
- ☐   Foster family's home
- ☐   Home of friend or friend's family
- ☐   Home of boyfriend/girlfriend/partner
- ☐   Car or other vehicle
- ☐   Abandoned building/vacant unit/squat
- ☐   On a train/bus or in train/bus station
- ☐   24-hour restaurant/Laundromat or other business/retail establishment
- ☐   Anywhere outside (street, park, viaduct)
- ☐   Hospital or emergency room
- ☐   Residential treatment facility
- ☐   Juvenile detention center or jail
- ☐   Other (Please specify: _____ _____)

6.   How long have you stayed/lived in the place you stayed last night?

☐ Fewer than 6 months   ☐ 6-12 months ☐ More than 12 months

7.   Do you have a safe place where you can stay on a regular basis for at least the next 14 days?
☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☐ Unsure

8.   Are you currently experiencing homelessness?
☐ Yes ☐ No, but I have experienced homelessness in the past   ☐ No, and I never have experienced homelessness
☐ Unsure Comment: _____

We are asking the following set of questions to learn if you are "accompanied", that is living with your parent or guardian, and your history of being out on your own.

9. Have you ever left home and been out on your own?
   - ☐ Yes, I left when I was___ years old, and have not returned home
   - ☐ I left home when I was __ years old, but later returned home
   - ☐ I still am with my parent/guardian/foster parent, and have not left home yet

10. If you are **not** living with your parent/guardian/foster parent now, what are the reasons?
    [CHECK <u>ALL</u> THAT APPLY]

    - ☐ I was fighting with my parent/guardian/foster parent
    - ☐ My parent/guardian/foster parent abused drugs or alcohol
    - ☐ My parent/guardian/foster parent died
    - ☐ My house was too small for everyone to live there
    - ☐ I was abused or neglected (physically, emotionally, or sexually)
    - ☐ I did not feel safe due to violence or unsafe activities in my house
    - ☐ My family lost our housing

    - ☐ I left foster care
    - ☐ I was released from jail or detention facility
    - ☐ I was/am pregnant or got someone else pregnant
    - ☐ My sexual orientation and/or gender identity
    - ☐ My use of drugs or alcohol
    - ☐ I was told to leave
    - ☐ I wanted to leave
    - ☐ Other:_____
      _____

We are asking the following set of questions to better understand your demographics (place of birth, age, education, income, etc.), as well as your experiences in trying to access needed resources.

11. Where were you born?

    ☐ In this city/town   ☐ Another place in Massachusetts   ☐ Outside of Massachusetts, but in the U.S.

    ☐ Outside the U.S.   ☐ Don't know

12. Which city/town are you in right now, taking this survey? _____

13. Have you been staying overnight in the city/town where you are taking this survey?

    ☐ Yes   ☐ No, I am staying in _____ (city/town)

14. Do you have a high school diploma, HiSET degree, or GED?

    ☐ Yes   ☐ No

15. Are you currently attending school or another education program?

    ☐ Yes   ☐ No

16. Are you currently employed at a job for which you receive a pay stub or pay check?

    ☐ Yes   ☐ No

17. Have you ever served in the U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force or Coast Guard?
    ☐ Yes ☐ No

(Please continue-- two pages to go!)

18. Have you ever been in foster care?

☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☐ Unsure

19. Have you ever lived in a structured group home or residential program?
☐Yes   ☐No

20. Have you ever been in juvenile detention, prison or jail?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

21a. Are you pregnant or parenting?

☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☐ Unsure

21b. If you are parenting, do you have custody of your child(ren)? In other words, are you responsible for caring for your child(ren) on a day-to-day basis?

☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☐ Not applicable

22. What are your sources of income? **[CHECK ALL THAT APPLY]**
   - ☐ Full-time job
   - ☐ Part-time job and/or temporary job
   - ☐ Money from "under the table" work
   - ☐ Cash assistance from DTA/Welfare or DCF
   - ☐ Social Security/disability payments
   - ☐ Unemployment benefits
   - ☐ Hustling/selling drugs
   - ☐ Sex work/turning tricks
   - ☐ Panhandling/spanging
   - ☐ Child support
   - ☐ Money from family members or friends
   - ☐ None
   - ☐ Other:_____

23. Have you ever exchanged sex (including sexual intercourse, oral sex, or any sexual interaction) for food, a place to stay, money, or other necessities?   ☐Yes   ☐ No

24. In the last year, have you tried to get help from any of the following services/programs?
   [CHECK ALL THAT APPLY]
   - ☐ Shelter or short-term/transitional housing
   - ☐ Long-term housing (such as Section 8 or public housing)
   - ☐ Educational support (enrolling in school or GED/HiSET program)
   - ☐ Job training, life skills training, or career placement
   - ☐ Health care services
   - ☐ Family support (such as conflict mediation or parenting support)
   - ☐ Child care
   - ☐ Nutritional assistance (such as Food Stamps/SNAP or free meals)
   - ☐ Cash assistance (such as DTA/Welfare benefits or Social Security Disability benefits)
   - ☐ Domestic violence/sexual assault counseling
   - ☐ Counseling or other mental health services
   - ☐ Substance use/alcohol treatment program
   - ☐ No, I haven't tried to access help
   - ☐ Other:_____

25. Did you get the help you needed?
   - ☐ Yes, all of the help I needed   ☐Some of the help I needed   ☐No, none of the help I needed

26. If you did not receive all of the help you needed, why was that? **[CHECK ALL THAT APPLY]**

- ☐ Transportation
- ☐ Sent somewhere else
- ☐ Language barrier
- ☐ Put on waiting list
- ☐ Paperwork
- ☐ I.D./documents
- ☐ Didn't hear back
- ☐ Didn't have health insurance

- ☐ Didn't know where to go
- ☐ Didn't qualify for help
- ☐ Didn't feel comfortable/safe
- ☐ Didn't follow through or return for services
- ☐ Didn't ask for help
- ☐ Didn't have money
- ☐ Didn't have regular access to a phone or email
- ☐ Other:_____

27. What is your race/ethnicity? **[CHECK ALL THAT APPLY]**

- ☐ White
- ☐ Black/African American
- ☐ Hispanic/Latino/Latina/Latinx
- ☐ Asian

- ☐ American Indian/Alaskan Native
- ☐ Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- ☐ Other (Specify:_____)

28. How would you describe your gender identity? **[CHECK ALL THAT APPLY]**

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Transgender – Male to Female
- ☐ Transgender – Female to Male

- ☐ Genderqueer/Gender-Nonconforming
- ☐ Agender
- ☐ Two-Spirit
- ☐ Other (Specify:_____)

29. Which of the following best fits how you think about your sexual orientation? **[CHECK ALL THAT APPLY]**

- ☐ Gay, Lesbian
- ☐ Bisexual
- ☐ Straight
- ☐ Queer

- ☐ Questioning
- ☐ Pansexual
- ☐ Asexual
- ☐ Other (Specify:_____)

30. Do you have any comments or insights you would like to share with the Massachusetts Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth?

_____

_____

_____

Thank you!

As noted above, all of your answers will remain confidential. Your participation is deeply appreciated and a key contribution in helping Massachusetts better understand housing instability among youth and young adults.

For more information about this survey and the work to expand housing and resources for youth and young adults experiencing housing instability, please contact the Massachusetts Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth: massachusettsyouthcount@gmail.com.

****
For official use only-- Survey date: _____ Survey site: _____
Administering organization/Youth Count Ambassador: _____ 4

88