



SAN DIEGO
Regional Task Force
on Homelessness

San Diego City and County Continuum of Care

ACTION PLAN: Addressing Homelessness Among Black San Diegans



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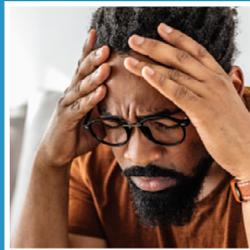
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PART 1:
INTRODUCTION



LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY

The overrepresentation of **Black people experiencing homelessness is pervasive** across the United States, and San Diego is no different. Black San Diegans make up 28% of the homeless population in our region even though they only represent 5% of the overall population. This is the result of historical, systemic, pervasive racial discrimination and ongoing inequity in our nation and community. The Ad Hoc Committee on Homelessness Among Black San Diegans—a committee of the **Continuum of Care** led by the Regional Task Force on Homelessness—is pleased to share this Action Plan that provides detailed recommendations to reduce and eliminate disparities in the homeless services system. This report provides concrete action items to realize system change and serves as an urgent call to action for all stakeholders, including government partners, public/private funders and homeless service organizations to better meet the needs of Black San Diegans experiencing or at-risk of homelessness.

The work of this Committee is bookended by the brutal murder of George Floyd and the waning of the COVID pandemic to a possible endemic. These events have changed our lives in profound ways, however, for Black Americans the risks are exacerbated. Black people often live with an **increased risk of encountering racial discrimination and encountering police brutality** in our daily lives. Compounding this reality are the **poor health outcomes and higher morbidity related to COVID-19** that we experience as a result of structural inequities in healthcare. The physical and psychological burden of these unfortunate realities is heavy and compounding and makes the work of our Committee all the more critical.

The problems identified herein are complex and intersectional. The Continuum of Care (CoC) is committed to ensuring racial equity within the homeless crisis response system, but we cannot do it alone. Meaningful systemic change will require a whole community response with active participation from elected officials, government partners, community organizations and individual San Diegans. This report outlines the first meaningful steps that we must take to create a more equitable homeless service system. At the end of this report, we ask all of our stakeholders to pledge their support in meeting the bold actions outlined. We remain hopeful that with a united voice, a focus on immediate action and a long term commitment to ending homelessness that we will achieve racial equality and work to end the systemic injustices that have disproportionately impacted Black people in San Diego.

In Partnership,



Sean Spear
CoC Board Chair



Tamera Kohler
RTFH, Chief Executive Officer



Pastor Rolland Slade
AdHoc Committee Co-Chair
Meridian Baptist Church, RTFH Board Member



Hanan Scrapper
AdHoc Committee Co-Chair
PATH

WHO WE ARE

In July 2020 the CoC board approved the creation of the Ad Hoc Committee on Addressing Homelessness Among Black San Diegans. During a census of unhoused people in 2020 referred to as the Point-In-Time (PIT) count, Black people accounted for 21% of the unsheltered population and 30% of the sheltered population, while only accounting for **5.5% of the general population in San Diego** County. Unsurprisingly, Black people are overrepresented in every part of the homeless system. Overrepresentation is often explained as a situation when a group's representation exceeds expectations. Additionally, **HUD** has identified that across all age groups, genders, household types, and across geographies, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color are reported as experiencing higher rates of homelessness, longer periods of homelessness, fewer exits to permanent housing, and higher rates of returns to homelessness.

The purpose of the Ad Hoc Committee is to

- **explore the factors contributing to these disparities among Black people experiencing homelessness,**
- **listen and engage in extensive public dialogue with community stakeholders, and**
- **to develop a series of recommendations that the CoC can take to better address the impacts of systemic racism and its effects within the homeless crisis response system.**

The Ad Hoc Committee formed two subcommittees, Community Engagement and Data, to carry out its work. The Community Engagement Subcommittee was formed to lead and design community participation and collaboration processes in order to listen to critical voices in San Diego. The input received from the community engagement activities focused specifically on people with lived experience heavily informed the development of the Action Plan items. The Data Subcommittee was formed to analyze existing data on racial disparities. The local quantitative information throughout this report was produced by the Data Subcommittee in collaboration with the **Regional Task Force on Homelessness' Homeless Management Information System** (RTFH HMIS). The Data subcommittee's objective was more than just analyzing homeless data on race which can sometimes be very program specific and hard to contextualize outside the homeless system. With guidance from the RTFH HMIS department and the **Center for Budget Policy Priorities**, the data subcommittee members developed key metrics that the community could measure against to determine progress in achieving greater equity in the homeless system. Every objective outlined in this report is grounded in the voices of people who participated in community engagement meetings and data points that amplify the objective. The timeline for execution of the items outlined in this Action Plan is two (2) years.

WHO WE ARE

AD HOC COMMITTEE ON ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS AMONG BLACK SAN DIEGANS

Rolland Slade, Co-Chair
Meridian Baptist Church, RTFH Board Member

Hanan Scrapper, Co-Chair
PATH

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YMCA

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Deputy City Manager, City of San José
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Veterans Village of San Diego

Curtis Howard
All of Us or None – San Diego

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Community HousingWorks

James Carter
City of San Diego

Ben Mendoza
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Celese Turner
HEAL Network

Sean Elo-Rivera
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Naveed Harris
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Mandavision Strategies

RTFH CoC SUPPORT TO AD HOC COMMITTEE

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Equity in Action, Project Manager

Michele S. Williams
Equity in Action, Principal

Taniqua Carthens
Equity in Action, Sr. Support Specialist

OUR THANKS AND GRATITUDE

All people who shared their lived experience of being Black and homeless in San Diego through focus groups, individual interviews and stakeholder engagements

All homeless service organizations that hosted and helped engage Black persons experiencing homelessness in San Diego to share their experience at stakeholder engagements

All homeless provider staff who shared their observations, experiences and feedback with the Ad Hoc Committee

Members of the Ad Hoc Committee Addressing Homelessness Amongst Black San Diegans for sharing their time, passion and expertise to support the creation of the Action Plan

The Center for Budget and Policy Priorities for supporting the development of this Action Plan's Guiding Metrics

The Arlene and Michael Rosen Foundation (AMRF) for their continued support of including the voice of people with lived experience and providing a grant to RTFH to provide monetary support to people with lived expertise for sharing their truth.

Kaiser Permanente for their continued support and commitment to addressing racial disparities by providing funding to RTFH to support the ongoing work of this committee.

*Committee as of July 2022

ACTION PLAN INTRODUCTION

Impactful change, especially at the system level can be challenging. Even when all stakeholders can agree that change is needed, it can be difficult to carry out. The Ad Hoc Committee knew that this report would bring to light issues that Black people in San Diego have known for a long time, but have not voiced and shared them for public discourse. As a result, this Committee spent a lot of time in thoughtful deliberation about what we wanted to do with our new understanding. We determined that the measure of our equity work cannot solely be to illuminate these issues and injustices. Indeed, the measure of our equity work must be about improving permanent housing outcomes for Black people experiencing homelessness in San Diego. We decided to focus our efforts on the actions that must take place after the truths described herein are brought to light. Thus, this Action Plan is not the culmination of our work but the beginning of it.

Race is the **largest predictive factor** for homelessness in the United States. And today in the San Diego region, where Black people make up only five percent of the population,

Black people are:

- **6 times more likely than non-Black people to experience homelessness**
- **5 times more likely than non-Black people to experience unsheltered homelessness.**
- **7 times more likely than non-Blacks to experience sheltered homelessness.**

These are staggering and sobering truths that are difficult to absorb. This Committee may not carry regulatory or funding authority, but the power we do exercise through the issuance of this report is identifying the collective social responsibility that our governments, funders, nonprofits and community members have to unify around these items. There is work to be done by every stakeholder in the San Diego community. Therefore, this Action Plan functions as a community invitation to sign on, participate and support our ongoing work to make San Diego a more equitable place for all people, but specifically those of us who are Black who have lived quietly on the margins of this community for far too long.

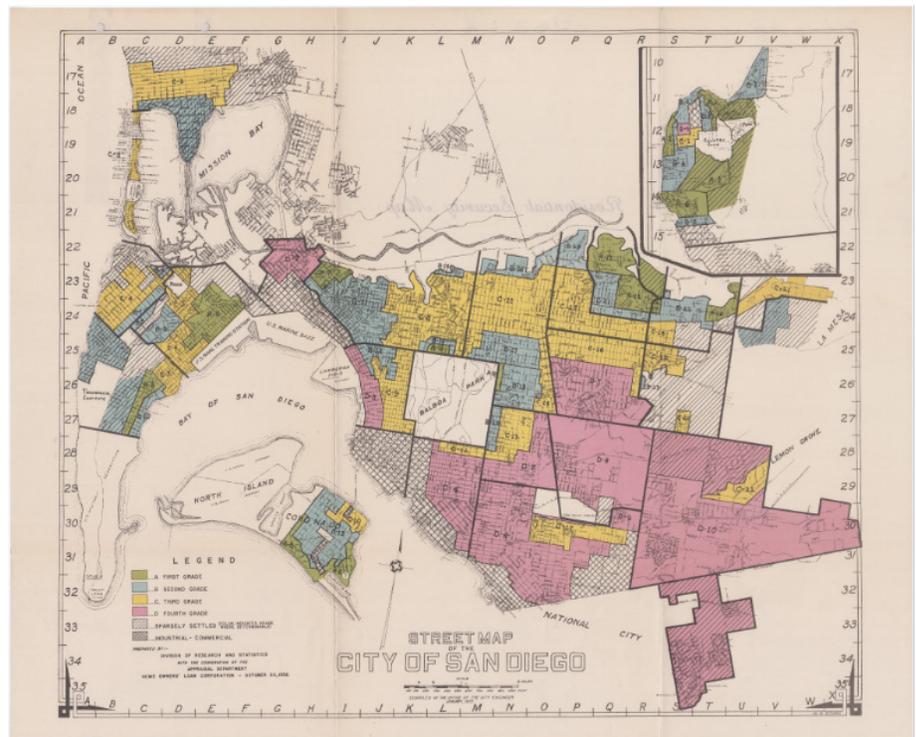
The second part of this Committee's work is a collaboration with the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP). The Ad Hoc Committee engaged CBPP after our data subcommittee's preliminary analysis of Emergency Housing Voucher data revealed inequitable referrals to vouchers based on race across the region. To further our findings, we partnered with a premier research and policy institution to help our community understand racial disparities in access to housing in a variety of programs. We also wanted to identify proxies for race that could be used right now to improve equity in access to permanent housing vouchers. The results of CBPP's report will be released this summer. We hope the results of this collaboration will inform much of the data action items described in this report.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

A historical context is useful in understanding the recommendations in this Action Plan. Housing discrimination based on race is deeply rooted in American history with lingering effects in today's housing system. During the early 1900s, racially restrictive covenants began to emerge throughout the country with [California](#) leading these efforts. Racially restrictive covenants were agreements between buyers and sellers that limited the sale, lease, or rent of properties to minority groups such as Blacks, Latinos, Asians, Irish and Jewish people. These racially restrictive covenants were imposed by realtors particularly in White, affluent neighborhoods, effectively segregating many cities across the country. These covenants were used extensively in San Diego to limit the sale of properties to “undesirable races” in prime real estate areas such as [La Jolla](#).

Racially restrictive covenants created a private system between realtors, buyers, sellers and local governments. [Enforcement](#) typically depended on the private parties involved in the transaction, supported by the judicial system. When the [Federal Housing Authority](#) (FHA) was established in 1934, racially restrictive covenants were used in tandem with the practice of redlining—originally established by the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC). This discriminatory practice used color-coded maps that ranked real estate areas based largely on race and socioeconomic factors. Areas that were coded green were often White and affluent, and were seen as loan worthy residential areas. Conversely, areas that were labeled red were often inhabited by people of color and impoverished. Areas that were labeled in red were considered high risk and the FHA would seldom guarantee loans in these areas. Mortgage applicants who were White were more likely to be granted loans that were guaranteed by the FHA, allowing them to purchase homes through subsidized mortgages. On the other hand, people of color were often denied loan applications because the FHA would not guarantee their loans, making the purchase of homes virtually impossible or only relegated to [red-lined neighborhoods](#). A [1935 HOLC map of San Diego](#) shows much of La Jolla in green, and many parts of the south, such as [Logan Heights](#), in red. [Today](#), these areas continue to be separated by race and [wealth](#). >>>

[\(Home Owners’ Loan Corporation, January 1935\)](#)



Racially restrictive covenants and redlining were effectively **government sponsored racial segregation**, both of which had lasting effects still visible today. Areas that were ranked in green, primarily White and affluent, benefited from better schools, parks and other public amenities. Green-marked areas also benefited from higher property values, allowing people to accrue equity on their homes and thus create generational wealth for their posterity. Areas that were ranked in red were mainly inhabited by people of color and lower income. These areas often lacked good schools, parks, and other public amenities such as grocery stores and hospitals. In many communities, a defining distinction between the areas coded red and other areas was the presence of Black, Latino, and/or other people of color. Furthermore, intrusive highways, industrial zones and liquor stores were often thrust into redlined areas leading to **poor public health outcomes** and **higher crime rates**. **Interstate 8** essentially divides green and red areas originally ranked by HOLC, continuing to separate wealthier communities in the north and lower-income communities in the south.

Racially restrictive covenants and redlining were designed to segregate minority and White communities from one another. Despite their unconstitutionality and efforts to reverse these discriminatory housing practices through the **Fair Housing Act of 1964**, their effects are still visible today, especially in areas like San Diego where these policies were tenacious. A 2022 analysis by **Zillow** of data from the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act shows that Black applicants are almost twice as likely to be denied a mortgage compared to White applicants. When it comes to renting, a study by **Zillow** shows that Black renters in San Diego are more rent burdened than anywhere else in the country. According to **HUD**, individuals are rent burdened when they pay more than 30% of their income on rent. Paying more than 50% of your income towards rent is considered severely rent burdened. Housing affordability, in combination with other socioeconomic factors compounded by a history of housing discrimination, may explain why in San Diego, Black people are 6 times more likely than non-Black people to experience homelessness.

In the next section, we'll discuss the Community Engagement sessions that took place and the themes that resulted from the gathered data. Based on the qualitative data we collected, complemented by a quantitative analysis of homelessness in San Diego, we've drafted six detailed recommendations to help reduce and eliminate racial disparities in the homeless services system.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & METHODOLOGY

**“WHITE PEOPLE CAN BE ANGRY OR ACT OUT, IF A BLACK PERSON DOES THAT
— IT’S THREATENING.”**

— Emergency Shelter Focus Group

The Community Engagement Subcommittee used qualitative data to complement broader numerical findings with personal accounts from Black persons with lived experience of homelessness, staff and leadership of homeless service organizations, as well as subject matter experts at the local, state and national levels. The Community Engagement Subcommittee directed, coordinated and designed engagement sessions with the following foundational goals;

- **To highlight issues and problems that would be otherwise undetectable in numerical data,**
- **To help leaders and decision makers gain critical insights into homeless system barriers,**
- **To inform community exploration of the limits of different homeless interventions and examine the way in which program constructs may limit access for Black people and most importantly,**
- **To empower communities and organizations to remedy racial disparities and,**
- **To amplify the human experience of being Black and homeless in San Diego.**

These goals grounded the community engagement sessions and surveys to authentically inform recommendations from the Ad Hoc Committee to the Continuum of Care Board.

To limit biases that may arise in qualitative data analysis when facilitated by internal partners, Ad Hoc Committee consultants from [Equity in Action](#) led community engagement sessions. Community Engagement sessions used an open-ended discussion style that was participant-guided and designed to amplify themes and issues from unique human experiences. The ethical principles of respect, beneficence and justice grounded their engagement.

The first half of the approach involved understanding the personal impact of race on access to homeless services and housing. This strategy engaged Black persons with the lived experience of homelessness via:

- **Focus group discussions:** facilitated, semi-structured group conversations used to collect information on experiences of a group and to generate a range of perspectives about issues of concern to the affected group
- **In-depth interviews:** semi-structured, one-on-one conversations with persons, appropriate for collecting data on individuals’ own histories, perspectives and experiences, particularly when delicate topics are being explored, and
- **Informed consent:** [Equity in Action](#) collected informed consent to ensure participants were in agreement and understanding to share their experiences willingly and to ensure participants were adequately informed about all aspects of the work of the Ad Hoc Committee.

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Of the 12 community engagement sessions, one session was virtual with the remainder being held in unsheltered settings and in shelter and housing programs throughout San Diego. Vital to selection of engagement sites and subpopulations was the emphasis on gaining diverse perspectives across the region and to meet people where they were. Each session lasted 1-2 hours, catering to the interest of the group and/or individual. Participants were compensated for their time and contribution with a \$50 gift card provided through a grant secured by RTFH from the Arlene and Michael Rosen Foundation. In total, 64 individuals shared their experiences. Through this process, the following themes emerged:

- 1. Being Black impacts your access to the crisis response system.**
- 2. Black people do not understand how to get into housing.**
- 3. [Mainstream services](#) (which can include Medicaid, foodstamps, TANF, SSI, workforce investment, and substance abuse sub-grants) are discriminatory and are not designed or administered effectively for Black people.**
- 4. Lack of fair and equal treatment across the homeless system deeply impacts Black people.**

The second half of engagement efforts were aimed at engaging mainstream partners, system partners, homeless service leaders, frontline staff and decision makers. This strategy engaged these groups through:

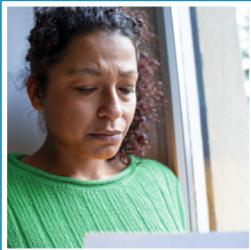
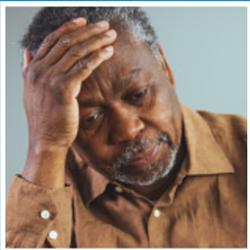
- **In-depth interviews with partner stakeholders**
- **Virtual Community Engagement sessions with homeless service leaders, homeless service front line staff, broader San Diego community** (85 participants)
- **Online survey of homeless service organizations** (25% participation rate by homeless service organizations)

Responses were used to explore factors contributing to disparities among Black persons experiencing homelessness and help plan Continuum of Care work around equity.

The Community Engagement Committee distributed a 13-part survey gathering information from homeless service provider leadership through open- and close-ended questions. The following themes emerged from survey data and virtual community engagement sessions with stakeholders:

- **Need for increased assessment of formal and informal policies, practices and organizational culture across the Continuum of Care.**
- **Few opportunities to influence decisions and grow within organizations for Black people.**
- **Leadership at homeless organizations continues to be majority White**
- **Little recruitment of Black people or people with lived experience in homeless service organizations.**
- **Genuine interest for more training and/or education related to diversity, equity and inclusion at all levels of the Continuum of Care.**

PART 2:
ACTION ITEMS



DEVELOP A HMIS DATA DASHBOARD TO TRACK OUR PROGRESS ON EQUITY GOALS

“IF YOU’RE BLACK, YOU HAVE TO BEAT THE DOOR DOWN AND BE PERSISTENT IN GETTING BENEFITS, THOSE CATS THAT DON’T BEAT THE DOOR DOWN AREN’T GOING TO GET INTO HOUSING”

— Participant in Veterans Focus Group

“THERE’S A LOT OF HIDDEN HELP IN SAN DIEGO.”

— Participant in Unsheltered Focus Group

Black people are more likely than people who are not-Black to be on the “do not return” list at city-funded shelters.* (See Transforming the Crisis Response System).

The data that is used to drive decision-making, performance and funding in the homeless system and many others is quantitative. Dashboards are a great way to highlight areas of the most significant community need. The RTFH has created data dashboards to track progress on a variety of performance objectives for the Continuum of Care. Building out an equity dashboard will help the CoC to identify disparities, track emerging trends, monitor performance towards common objectives and increase transparency. Additionally, in order to understand the entire context of inequity impacting Black people, data cannot just be analyzed in a silo. The Ad Hoc Committee has centered the voices of people with lived experience and we have learned that there is a need for more meaningful engagement with behavioral health systems, foster care and systems that focus on youth. We must look at all of the systems that touch people who are homeless and, more specifically, their effectiveness at reaching Black people. We are aware that cross-systems data-sharing is challenging. Exploring data sharing strategies such as periodic [one time data match](#) for critical subpopulations such as foster care and behavioral health would be an appropriate place for regional partners to explore collaboratively.

In partnership with the RTFH, the HMIS data committee and mainstream partners, the Committee would like to identify indicators to track in a HMIS data dashboard that are:

- **Actionable:** taking data to policy-makers and political leadership to inform resource allocation.
 - Track data on Do Not Returns, Access to Shelter and Permanent Housing resources including Emergency Housing Vouchers, by race.
- **Investigative:** monitoring and tracking access to crisis response services and prioritization and permanent housing approval to determine what connections are lacking or need to be strengthened across systems.
 - Attempt to engage in one-time data match analysis between mainstream systems with shared populations such as Foster Care, Justice Involved and Behavioral Health Partners.
- **Informational:** describe what populations look like, service use and frequency, needs, gaps, process.

* Information provided by the City of San Diego Homeless Solutions and Strategies

ACTION ITEM #2

INCLUSIVE PROCUREMENT

“HOMELESS PROGRAMS BELIEVE WHITE PEOPLE AND THEIR ISSUES. THEY WANT BLACK PEOPLE TO PROVE THEIR ISSUES BEFORE THEY LET YOU IN.”

— Participant in Unsheltered Focus Group

“CASE MANAGERS HOLD OUR PEOPLE TO A DIFFERENT STANDARD. THEY MAKE ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT HOW A BLACK PERSON WILL ACT AND WHAT THEY NEED.”

— Participant in Unsheltered Focus Group

Less than 11% of front line staff working in support, monitoring and case management positions at homeless services organizations are Black.

The way in which our community plans, allocates and spends its resources is one of the most meaningful ways of demonstrating our commitment to creating a more equitable homeless system for Black people.

It is critically important for Black people seeking homeless services to receive support from staff members that share their lived experiences with race, in the same way that we hire staff with other cultural competency skills such as language. The inclusion of Black leaders in decision making and power structures will help to ensure the perspective and lived experience with race is centered in our work.

There is no “one-size-fits-all” process for inclusion. Instead, the Committee challenges philanthropy, the Continuum of Care, the county, city and state to set goals related to increasing racial equity and identifying the methods to evaluate our processes. The Committee provides the following recommendations to all funding stakeholders.

Action Steps:

- **Create seats at the table to bring in more diverse representation on existing funding committees.**
- **Include people with lived experience on decision making committees.**
- **Analyze the current landscape of service providers to determine how accessible our programs are for Black people.**
- **Incorporate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) training and education as a requirement consistently in contracts for people at all levels of homeless serving organizations.**
- **Explore whether proxies for race can be used to target resources to Black people and have lived in poorer neighborhoods.**

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

“BEHAVIOR BY BLACK PEOPLE IS SEEN AS DANGEROUS FROM THE TIME THEY ENTER SCHOOL TO THE TIME THEY LEAVE THE CONVALESCENT HOME”

— Front Line Worker in Homeless Services Organization

“COPS GET CALLED ON THE BLACK GUY THAT ACTS OUT, BUT NOT ON WHITE GIRLS THAT ACT OUT”

— Youth In-depth Interview

80% of Homeless service organizations requested support with training and education on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI).

Front-line program staff are often the first people individuals experiencing homelessness interact with when seeking services from an organization. In many communities, front-line staff are tasked with the implementation of the mission, vision and values of an organization without the level of experience and training held by senior leadership. Regular and appropriate training of all organizational staff and volunteers in racial equity, diversity and inclusion is critical to guaranteeing Black San Diegans experiencing homelessness have positive interactions with the homeless service system. The unique historical and social contexts surrounding Black persons in America have influenced this population’s hesitancy and lack of comfort when interacting with and seeking supportive services. Organizations often perpetuate inequities present in the system, consciously or unconsciously, by program staff and leadership. Organizations as a whole need to be prepared at all levels, from frontline staff to executive leadership, to understand and accommodate the needs of Black people in accessing housing and other services in the San Diego community. Race equity, diversity and inclusion benefits not only Black San Diegans experiencing homelessness, but entire marginalized communities and the organizations that serve them.

Action Steps:

- **Expand training opportunities for all staff with a particular focus on front line program staff on specific DEI topics, such as implicit bias, creating an equitable culture, understanding the effects of racial trauma, Anti-racism and Anti-oppression.**
- **Annually assess if program policies, practices and procedures are inclusive and sensitive to the various cultures of those receiving homeless services.**
- **Provide training on recruiting practices to support diversifying front line staff and leadership.**

MENTORSHIP OF BLACK-LED ORGANIZATIONS

“YOU HAVE TO KNOW THE RIGHT ANSWERS TO GET INTO HOUSING”

— Participant in Emergency Shelter Focus Group

Less than 5% of leadership positions at homeless serving organizations are held by Black people.

We learned from our community engagement sessions that creating trusting relationships with participants was essential to engaging in services, creating a safe environment and identifying housing. Having their experience understood, being treated with respect were key requests across all subpopulations that participated in focus groups.

Black-led social change organizations are organizations with predominantly Black boards and executive leadership, staff and constituents. Nationally, Black-led organizations in the homeless service sphere demonstrate **cultural humility** in their approach to working with people who are homeless. They operate with the equality of Black people at the core of their work, but serve all people regardless of race. Unfortunately, many Black-led organizations often lack adequate funding for their programs when compared to White-led organizations. Black-led organizations across the country **report** smaller organizational budgets and less access to financial support from funding sources. This lack of connection to financial resources in Black-led organizations leads to the limited capacities of these organizations to drive and sustain social change.

Action Steps:

- **The Continuum of Care will acknowledge the definition of black-led organizations as organizations that have predominantly black boards, executive leadership and staff. These organizations will serve all constituents referred to them regardless of race.**
- **Expand strategies for outreach and engagement of culturally competent providers when funding opportunities arise.**
- **Encourage equity focused subcontracting with Black-led organizations so that additional services and new providers can be brought into the homeless services system.**
- **Mentor Black-led organizations in the areas of financial and grants management so that they may be better equipped to receive federal funds.**

CENTER THE VOICES OF PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE WHO ARE BLACK

“CASE MANAGERS HOLD OUR PEOPLE TO A DIFFERENT STANDARD. THEY MAKE ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT HOW A BLACK PERSON WILL ACT AND WHAT THEY NEED.”

— Participant in an Emergency Shelter Focus Group

Homeless systems must commit to the exploration of experiences and insights from Black people and those currently experiencing or who have experienced homelessness. To create a more equitable, participatory culture within organizations, service providers should be prepared to engage people with lived experience at all levels of organizational planning. People with lived experience have first-hand knowledge of the complexities of navigating the homeless service system that is valuable to advancing equity in organizations that serve them. By keeping the experiences and insights of people with lived experience at the center of system change, organizations can begin to share power and transform oppressive structures that silence and marginalize this population.

Action Steps:

- **Create a [lived experience advisory committee](#) of the CoC Board. Plan specific and clear goals about how the committee will operate and how their input will inform policies, procedures and other organizational operations.**
- **Acknowledge and address potential hesitancy from persons with lived experience to interact with a system that may have failed to meet their needs in the past.**
- **Consider barriers to participation and anticipate strain for participation by holding meetings at consistent intervals, compensating appropriately for meetings and providing other benefits such as childcare for meetings, a meal/snack or transportation reimbursement.**
- **Ask homeless service providers to commit to including people with lived experience in all areas of organizational personnel including staff and volunteers.**
- **Encourage homeless service providers to create their own resident advisory boards to incorporate the perspectives and recommendations of people with lived experience in their programs.**

TRANSFORM THE CRISIS RESPONSE SYSTEM

“PEOPLE THINK IT’S OKAY TO SLEEP OUTSIDE HERE BECAUSE IT’S NICE OUTSIDE. I HAD TO SLEEP OUTSIDE IN A TENT. I LET MY KIDS USE MY BODY AS A PILLOW SO THEY WOULDN’T FEEL THE COLD CONCRETE.”

— Mother in a Family Program

“PROGRAMS BELIEVE WHITE TRAUMA NOT BLACK TRAUMA AND IT’S THE EXACT SAME TRAUMA”

— Youth In-depth Interview

Permanent Housing programs (except for RRH) accept referrals of black people at a disproportionately lower rate to their representation in the homeless service system.

Effective [crisis response systems](#) must help individuals and families meet basic survival needs like access to shelter, food, and personal hygiene needs while also providing pathways to [housing opportunities](#). Black people who participated in community engagement sessions, provided detailed guidance on why the existing crisis response system is not meeting the basic survival needs of individuals and the long term connections to housing. The general mantra from most homeless systems is that they are focused on creating permanent solutions to homelessness. The unintended consequence of this generally good policy priority is often an underfunding of appropriate basic survival needs and the provision of too few permanent housing resources. This leaves the majority of the homeless population underserved in every aspect of daily living. The San Diego region’s repeated instances of infectious disease outbreaks such as [shigellosis](#), [hepatitis A](#) and [tuberculosis](#) for people who are homeless in sheltered and unsheltered settings amplifies the need for basic survival needs to be met as well as permanent housing solutions. There is some equity analysis that homeless funders must consider when stating that they will only prioritize the long term housing needs of people who are homeless and not adequately address the short term survival needs. The Committee’s community engagement meetings voiced a demand for safe, suitable shelter in every subpopulation engaged to adequately meet basic survival needs and achieve a measure of stabilization and a demand for more permanent housing pathways. Working as a region to address the following system vulnerabilities can help to strengthen the crisis response network for all people experiencing homelessness.

Action Steps:

- **Access to housing should not be tied to mainstream service connections:** The San Diego region has many government funders of permanent housing. The permanent housing resources of these partner organizations is critical to saving lives. However, many of these housing opportunities are managed by mainstream systems that structure their housing resources to only serve people who are already connected with their systems. These “self-referrals” can create barriers for Black people to obtain services and housing. Black people have less access to [mental health services](#), >>>

substance abuse services and basic healthcare in comparison to others, which results in decreased access to associated permanent housing resources.

- **Increase availability of shelter and other basic survival needs; monitor data on access for Black people:** Black people in every community engagement session provided harrowing accounts of trying to access shelter and how repeated attempts and failures to access basic needs exacerbated their physical health, mental health and trust in the system. While the focus of the homeless system must be providing permanent housing, if our resource analysis determines that we cannot provide this for everyone quickly, the San Diego region must also invest in ensuring that safe shelter and basic services are available for everyone who cannot access permanent housing.
- **Increase access to mainstream systems identified as having barriers:** Harmful **false narratives** persist that people who are homeless do not want recovery services, behavioral health support or **supportive services**. However access to these pivotal services was an important theme in every community engagement session. Black people have not had easy experiences accessing these services across the United State and San Diego is no different. Our mainstream partners must collaborate to create easier, person centric access strategies for Black people.
- **Shelter Based Do Not Return List Review:** Staff at homeless programs reported that anecdotally Black people are often barred from entering shelters. This extreme sanction was described as almost never used on people who are not Black. Denying access to a lifesaving service such as shelter is a serious sanction that should not be undertaken lightly for anyone. All homeless system programs must describe how this sanction is administered in writing and track and review how this sanction is being implemented at shelters. Training must be provided to limit this bias and the potentially life-threatening implication for Black people.
- **Documentation Review:** Exploring as a system how our policies and procedures may negatively impact Black people is a common equity analysis activity. The Ad Hoc Committee recommends that the homeless system undertake a review of federally required **Written Standards** and existing other overarching homeless system policies and procedures to determine if they disproportionately impact Black people. Providing guidance on how individual programs within the homeless system can undertake this analysis within their agency must also occur.

PART 3:

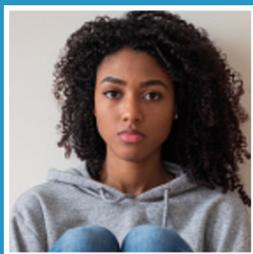
NEXT STEPS

The work of the Ad Hoc Committee over the next year will build on the hard work put into creating this report by implementing achievable action that will positively impact Black San Diegans experiencing homelessness. That means ensuring the action items listed above are implemented throughout the region. These steps are foundational to a system-wide change in how our homelessness response system interacts with Black San Diegans experiencing homelessness while also bringing more Black San Diegans into the work of ending someone's homelessness. We know that these are big asks for those involved in homelessness but they are necessary to improve the lives of so many here in San Diego County.

We also know that there's more to be done beyond these action steps. That's why this Ad Hoc Committee will continue to serve the Continuum of Care with returning and new members who will work to implement these important recommendations . We will also continue to look at every available opportunity to make change, including determining, when appropriate, if legislative actions can be taken at a municipal or county level to further the objective of making our homeless response more equitable.

While we know we're breaking ground with this Committee, we're not here to celebrate those firsts. We're here to materially improve the lives of Black San Diegans experiencing homelessness. That work does not end with this report or by being the first city to recognize through data the real hardship Black San Diegans living on our streets face.

The Continuum of Care cannot do this work alone. If you would like to partner with us as we foster the implementation of these action steps please reach out to admin@rtfhsd.org. Let's work together to build a better and more equitable San Diego.





**SAN DIEGO
Regional Task Force
on Homelessness**

rtfhSD.org

The RTFH is responsible for collecting, tracking, and reporting on a significant amount of data as it pertains to homelessness in our region. Our thanks to Lisa DeMarco of DeMarco Design for the impactful layout and design.