

Homelessness Taskforce Overview

Background: In September 2021 Sedgwick County and the City of Wichita asked the Mental Health and Substance Abuse Coalition to identify options to address the downtown population of people experiencing homelessness and to report back in 60 days. That 60-Day Taskforce on Downtown Homelessness provided recommendations included in the requested report to the County and City governing bodies in a February 2022 joint meeting.

The 60-day process included problem identification, geographical area, clarification on the population and recommended next steps. The Coalition hosted three meetings with a variety of providers. One of the specific recommendations was to develop a long-term Homelessness Taskforce with the City of Wichita serving as a lead by hiring a third-party facilitator. Funding was committed in August 2022, and the City hired the PPMC to facilitate the taskforce.

Participants: The report (p. 38) stated that “engaging diverse perspectives in this process will be important to have an effective community solution.” The Taskforce will include representatives from homeless service providers, domestic abuse service providers, people with lived experience, faith groups, law enforcement, City and County elected leaders and staff, law, landlords, United Way of the Plains – Continuum of Care, Project Hope, Mental Health & Substance Coalition, business, education, and health care providers.

Meetings and Outcomes: Beginning in January, the Taskforce representatives will meet monthly to build upon existing recommendations and collaborate to continuously move our community toward best practices identified which include:

- Provide additional flexible, sustainable funding for emergency shelter funding and low-barrier housing options as a short-term solution. Continuous funding is needed for a common intake center and centralized case management. These efforts will need financial support from the public and private sector.
- Create a “very low barrier shelter” bed space in order to adopt enforcement policies to address nuisance behaviors of transient populations.
- Coordinate street outreach conducted by different organizations to ensure coverage and outreach aren’t duplicated or lacking.
- Conduct specific outreach to service providers and businesses so that they can discuss and resolve ongoing issues in their area with their assigned community policing officer.

- Provide community de-escalation training and resource training to best prepare downtown stakeholders on crisis situations involving transient population.
- Develop an education and media campaign that helps donors understand where their funds would most be effectively utilized and distributed.
- Develop and install effective signage in areas generally occupied by panhandlers that allows individuals to find information on where they can donate their time, money, or goods to provide positive outcomes for those in need.
- Assist with implementing a long-term solution of building a centralized social service hub/campus, where service providers are in one place and can have a “warm handoff” to other providers.

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