



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Mayor and Council Members

**THRU:** Christopher Shorter, Assistant City Manager  
Rodney Gonzales, Assistant City Manager

**FROM:** Vella Karman, Interim Homeless Strategy Officer

**DATE:** September 11, 2020

**SUBJECT:** Update on Services for Addressing Homelessness

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This memorandum serves to provide updates on the City's overall efforts to address homelessness, including the ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the continued commitment to align our efforts with the *Action Plan to End Homelessness*. The topics addressed in this memorandum include:

- 1. Facilities Activated for COVID-19 Emergency Response**  
IsoFac and ProLodges
- 2. CARES Act Funding**  
Federal and State Grants
- 3. Neighborhood Housing and Community Development**  
New Housing Development and RENT program
- 4. Downtown Austin Community Court**  
Temporary Move to Terrazas Library; COVID-19 Emergency Response; Intensive Case Management Program; Community Service Restitution; Virtual Dockets
- 5. Community Health Paramedics (CHP) & Homeless Outreach Street Team (HOST)**  
CHP and HOST Highlights; Center for Court Innovation Webinar
- 6. Food Access**  
Eating Apart Together Initiative
- 7. Homelessness Priority Communications Team**  
Digital Communications; Communications Support to Departments; Internal & External Engagement
- 8. Public Space Management**  
Clean City Strategy – Violet Bag Program; Violet KeepSafe Personal Storage Facility; Underpass Clean-up Process
- 9. Homelessness Strategy and Coordination**  
Homeless Services Division; System-wide Strategies and Actions

## 1. Facilities Activated for COVID-19 Emergency Response

As communicated in previous updates to Mayor and Council, the City has established two types of facilities to serve those impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, including members of our community experiencing homelessness. The City is operating two types of facilities including one Isolation Facility and five sites for Protective Lodging.

Isolation Facilities (IsoFac): An Isolation Facility is for individuals who are under monitoring, under investigation, or are COVID-19 positive **and** cannot safely self-isolate. Any individuals (including individuals experiencing homelessness) who meet established criteria are welcome at the IsoFac. The City currently has secured emergency temporary occupancy of a hotel to be operated as an IsoFac for individuals meeting the criteria stated above.

1. 6121 N. IH-35 (near US Hwy 290) (District 4): capacity for 204 guests

An [informational flyer](http://austintexas.gov/department/covid-19-information/symptoms-testing-and-care) on the IsoFac can be found at <http://austintexas.gov/department/covid-19-information/symptoms-testing-and-care> (click on Isolation Facility) in multiple languages.

Protective Lodging (ProLodges): ProLodges are temporary shelter options for individuals who are at high risk of severe complications should they become infected with COVID-19, per CDC guidance, **and** do not have a safe place to maintain physical separation from others as a precautionary measure.

The City has secured emergency temporary occupancy of multiple properties for this purpose and is currently operating five ProLodge facilities. The property located at 7400 N. IH-35 is currently being leased for temporary ProLodge operations. That property is also in the due diligence period for acquisition as part of the long-term motel conversion strategy to increase permanent supportive housing (PSH) units in the community, and the conversion to housing would begin after ProLodge operations have ended. The property located at 2711 S IH-35 was purchased by the City in April 2020 as part of the motel conversion strategy. After completing minor renovations and repairs, it is initially being used for ProLodge operations as part of the temporary emergency response.

1. 4200 S IH-35 (near Ben White Blvd) [District 3]: capacity for 110 guests
2. 8010 N IH-35 (near US Hwy 183) [District 4]: capacity for 60 guests
3. 3105 N IH-35 (near 31st Street) [District 9]: capacity for 55 guests
4. 7400 N IH-35 (near US Hwy 183) [District 4]: capacity for 65 guests
5. 2711 S IH-35 (near Oltorf) [District 3]: capacity for 50 guests

The following property is under contract for leased use, should the need arise, to prevent and mitigate the spread of COVID-19, and reduce potential hospital surge and ventilator use:

1. 5812 N IH-35 (near US Hwy 290) [District 4]: capacity for 100 guests

Operations at both facility types report up through the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and have been ordered by the Austin-Travis County Interim Health Authority, Dr. Mark Escott. These resources play an important part in the infection control strategy to prevent and mitigate spread of disease, and to protect the health and safety of individuals across the community.

## **2. CARES Act Funding**

In March, 2020, Congress passed and the President signed into law the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), an economic relief package intended to protect Americans from the public health and economic impacts of COVID-19. Multiple grants and allocations of funding are part of the CARES Act, including three grants for assisting individuals and households with rental assistance and other housing supports.

### Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG-CV)

As part of the CARES Act, \$4 billion was included nationwide for the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG-CV) through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The City of Austin received notification of the first allocation of \$2,354,866, and City Council approved acceptance of this [grant](#) to “prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus, among individuals and families who are homeless or receiving homeless assistance and to support additional homeless assistance and homelessness prevention activities to mitigate the impacts created by coronavirus.” The State of Texas was also notified of a first round allocation through the Texas Department of Housing & Community Affairs, and designated \$1,041,851 for homeless services to Austin/Travis County through the Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO) as coordinating entity. The City of Austin and ECHO released a joint solicitation for rapid rehousing services targeted for guests at the ProLodges. City and State contracts are being finalized with service providers, program staff are being hired and services will begin in the coming weeks.

On July 22, 2020, HUD announced a second round of ESG-CV funding would be allocated in the amount of \$10.8 million to the City of Austin. HUD released requirements and guidance for this funding on September 1, 2020, and planning is underway for distribution of these funds.

### Community Development Block Grant (CDBG-CV)

Another formula grant released by HUD through the CARES Act is the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG-CV). The City of Austin received \$4,620,659, of which \$1 million is planned for provision of Emergency Rental Assistance for households affected by the economic impacts of COVID-19.

### Community Services Block Grant (CSBG-CV)

The Community Services Block Grant (CSBG-CV), administered by the Texas Department of Housing & Community Affairs, will be used to provide housing stability services for households at risk of homelessness. Austin Public Health (APH) released a solicitation for \$1,208,177 in funding to distribute direct financial assistance on behalf of APH Neighborhood Center clients, who are low-income residents impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **3. Neighborhood Housing and Community Development**

### New Housing Development for PSH and RRH

At their 9/3/2020 meeting, the Austin Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC) authorized a loan to Espero Austin at Rutland, LP in an amount not to exceed \$2,507,214 for a multi-family rental development to be known as Espero at Rutland, to be located at or near 1934 Rutland Drive. The project will be developed by a partnership between Caritas of Austin and The Vecino Group. Caritas of Austin has a mission to prevent and end homelessness in Austin, and for the last 14 years has operated supportive housing through various leasing partnerships across the city. The Vecino

Group is a national developer of mission driven housing with 23 active projects in 12 states, including 18 supportive housing developments.

AHFC funding will be utilized for development costs of 171 units of deeply affordable rental housing. This project will help advance the City's goal of increasing housing stock available for Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH), as well as Rapid Rehousing (RRH) programs. 101 of the apartments will be set aside for households experiencing homelessness, as referred by ECHO, the local homeless Continuum of Care lead agency. Of those units, 44 will be restricted to individuals experiencing long-term homelessness. 27 units will be available for households earning at or below 30% median family income (MFI), 117 units will be available for households earning at or below 40% MFI, and 27 units will be available for households earning at or below 50% MFI. All units will be efficiency apartments. The developers will be pursuing Low Income Housing Tax Credits. Construction will optimally begin in late 2021 (best case) with units available in 2022-2023.

#### Homelessness Prevention

Neighborhood Housing and Community Development recently launched the second phase of the RENT (Relief of Emergency Needs for Tenants) program. The RENT program is providing rental support for households who have reported average current income of \$14,905; of applicants to date, 77% are extremely low income, earning under 30% of the area MFI. The program's eviction prevention services such as increased landlord/tenant mediation and legal representation in court proceedings will be crucial tools ensuring that Austinites don't face the mounting wave of evictions that have been predicted; contracts will be in place for these eviction prevention services before the end of September. The RENT program will prove to be impactful in the City's efforts to prevent families from moving into homelessness.

## **4. Downtown Austin Community Court**

#### Temporary Move to Terrazas Library

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Downtown Austin Community Court (DACC) has continued to offer walk-in triage case management services to provide individuals experiencing homelessness with information on COVID-19 and safety planning, provide access to resource navigation and basic needs, and help facilitate connection to other essential services. From March 16 through September 3, DACC has had 3,543 interactions with individuals through triage case management. Since March, the average daily individuals served through triage case management has continued to increase significantly with an average of 37 individuals served per day in July and August, compared to an average of 22 individuals in March. These numbers do not reflect the numerous individuals daily who are able to access basic hygiene resources through use of the restrooms at DACC, or the clients that case managers continue to work with remotely.

The increased community need for services during the pandemic, partnered with the need for social distancing and other precautionary measures, has made providing services at DACC a challenge. DACC partnered with the Austin Public Library to find a solution and ensure continuation of quality walk-in services for individuals experiencing homelessness. On August 17, 2020, DACC temporarily moved triage case management services to Terrazas Branch Library, located at 1105 E. Cesar Chavez St, Austin, TX 78702. Hours of operation from 8:00am-5:00pm Monday through Friday remain unchanged.

The temporary move will allow more people to wait inside for services. It will also improve service

efficiency by increasing the space for additional staff onsite, while continuing COVID-19 safety precautions for guests and staff. Terrazas Branch Library was selected partially due to the close proximity to DACC and downtown Austin, and easy access to public transit. The Capital Metro 17 bus route has a stop within less than one block of Terrazas Library. Triage case management services will continue at Terrazas Library until public libraries reopen to the public, and triage case management will then transition back to DACC, located at 719 E. 6<sup>th</sup> Street.

### Bed Management Team

DACC has been staffing the Bed Management Team (BMT), a unit within the Emergency Operations Center (EOC), since March 30 with the goal of limiting community spread of COVID-19 by isolating medically fragile individuals that are unable to shelter in place. The Bed Management Team receives referrals from community medical and social service providers and then assesses and identifies medically vulnerable individuals that are medically high-risk. The medical criteria is determined by Austin Public Health, and if a client meets criteria and space is available, the BMT coordinates the transportation and placement of those individuals into one of the City of Austin's five Protective Lodges (ProLodges). Direct referrals are made to the ISOFAC, if an individual has tested positive for COVID-19 and/or is experiencing symptoms and awaiting test results.

DACC has, at various times, had 10 of their 12 Clinical Case Managers staffing the BMT 7 days a week. DACC is currently in the process of transitioning the 3 remaining clinical case managers away from the BMT, as DACC has assisted in successfully training replacements for the BMT from Austin Municipal Court. This will allow DACC Clinical Case Managers the opportunity to return to their regular job duty of helping to connect adults experiencing homelessness with essential social services and housing. This transition is tentatively planned for completion by September 19th, 2020. The case managers transitioning off the BMT will be engaging the clients that they were already providing case management services to and engaging new clients, most of whom are currently at the ProLodges.

### ProLodge Support

Additional Case Management Staff: On August 27, 2020, the City Council approved agenda item 20200827-15, which authorized the addition of 5.0 grant-funded positions to serve as DACC Clinical Case Managers and the addition of 1.0 grant-funded position to serve as a DACC Clinical Case Manager Supervisor. The 6.0 FTE's will provide client-centered and housing-focused case management services for individuals currently sheltered at ProLodges. These case management services will assist individuals in securing housing solutions and long-term stability. Without case management services and housing with funding provided through this grant, these individuals would be at risk of returning to unsheltered homelessness when the ProLodges are no longer in operation as part of the City's public health response to COVID-19. Grant funds for staff and housing assistance are available for a two-year period, through July 22, 2022. Due to the critical need for services and the time sensitive nature of this work, DACC is working with Human Resources to expedite the process for hiring of staff.

The grant funds are for an Emergency Solutions Grant Program Rapid Rehousing expansion. The Rapid Rehousing approach will allow DACC to locate housing, at market rate, and financially support a minimum of 100 individuals experiencing homelessness who are currently residing in a ProLodge, through July 2022. For those individuals who do not have the capacity to self-sustain by July 2022, DACC case managers will look at other PSH options that do not require that the individual maintain a level of income that is unattainable while allowing them to remain housed permanently.

Serving High-Risk Individuals at ProLodges: DACC Case Management staff targeted 36 individuals who were identified, at intake, as high-risk for contraction of COVID-19 and severe complications due to medical vulnerability, who are currently sheltered at ProLodge locations. These individuals are currently being served by DACC's Intensive Case Management (ICM) program. ICM staff is working to develop housing plans to help these individuals transition to stable and long-term housing.

Of the 36 individuals assigned to DACC, 21 are enrolled in DACC's Intensive Case Management program. Six of those 21 clients have been housed in DACC-funded Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) units available through a social services agreement with Front Steps, while 2 other clients were housed by other community-based affordable housing. The remaining individuals will be assessed for their ability to self-resolve and/or pay fair market rent with minimal financial assistance. Community based affordable housing will be pursued through Community First Village, Housing Authority of the City of Austin, Housing Authority of Travis County and Foundation Communities. Other clients that require more intense and ongoing assistance with housing and support services could be placed in DACC-funded PSH units through contracts with Front Steps and/or Foundation Communities.

Coordinated Assessment (CA) scores for these 36 individuals reflect that 32 individuals qualify for PSH; 12 of those individuals identified with the highest level of need with scores ranging from 15-17. The mean CA score for all 36 individuals was 12.25. The demographic breakdown for these 36 high-risk individuals is as follows:

- 72% Male
- 28% Female
- 50% Black/African-American
- 42% White / Caucasian
- 8% Hispanic / Latino

DACC has also offered access to its current social service contracts to other community partners providing case management services for individuals staying at the ProLodges. These partners include Front Steps, Salvation Army, Integral Care and others. Resources available through these contracts include funding for detox services, substance use treatment, peer support services and transitional housing. To date, one client has accessed the services from the Road to Recovery Program.

#### Intensive Case Management

DACC has continued Intensive Case Management (ICM) services throughout the pandemic response, with a focus on remote services and in-person services as needed. Social distancing and other precautionary measures related to preventing the spread of COVID-19 are in place. With many of the ICM staff reassigned to help with the BMT, remaining ICM staff have temporarily absorbed client caseloads in order to maintain service continuity. As was mentioned in the April 27, 2020 memo to Mayor and Council, DACC provided clients with cell phones early in the pandemic response to enable continued communication with individuals served through this program. In addition to working with ICM case managers, clients are also able to access in-person services and communicate with their case managers through in-person triage case management.

#### Community Service Restitution

DACC's Community Service Restitution (CSR) Unit enables City and Travis County residents to meet public service hour requirements through graffiti abatement, right of way maintenance, public space management through safe space, underpass, and restoration cleaning, and other municipal

purpose jobs. This includes the collection of many tons of trash throughout Austin, at the request of Austin Resource Recovery, Austin Code, Parks and Recreation, Austin Public Health, Police and other City departments and community stakeholders. All 6 CSR Crew Leaders and the CSR Program Manager have been assigned to the City's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and have been dedicating all work hours to helping meet the needs at ProLodges onsite since the pandemic response began in March.

Crew leaders may return to work on City projects as needed on an individual basis when the EOC assignment is completed. Additionally, the Travis County Probation Department has not determined when they will resume their operation or when probationers will be available to work on CSR crews. Community Court and Municipal Court judges have also not resumed in person dockets nor have they begun directing defendants to DACC CSR work crews. DACC CSR Crews will resume full functionality when ProLodge assistance is no longer needed, safe transport practices can be reestablished or alternative transportation options to projects have been identified, and projects that allow for safe social distancing are available. The third item should not be a barrier, given that projects completed by CSR are almost entirely outside, and typically in large areas that easily allow for social distancing.

#### Virtual Dockets

Both Austin Municipal Court and DACC have begun operating virtual dockets where individuals may be able to resolve City of Austin Class C cases online. Members of the public may contact each court directly to ask questions or to arrange a virtual docket. DACC is in the process of setting up a system at Terrazas Library so that individuals experiencing homelessness that would like to resolve citations and otherwise wouldn't have access to the necessary technology may come to DACC and have access to resources and assistance from staff as needed.

## **5. Community Health Paramedics and Homeless Outreach Street Team**

#### Community Health Paramedics (CHP) Highlights

For the first weeks of the pandemic, the CHP team visited over sixty camps to assess immediate needs of individuals experiencing homelessness. The feedback from these efforts supported immediate deployment of restrooms, hand washing stations and sanitation services at camps across the city. Additionally, CHP delivered food and water to camps for the initial weeks of the pandemic, from donations received from citizens, churches, EMS explorers, Austin EMS Association, until the City's EAT program was fully established with volunteers.

Throughout the pandemic, CHP staff have worked to connect individuals experiencing homelessness to services. CHP engaged with an encampment of young adults (ages 17-23) and connected them to LifeWorks; 4 out of the 5 were connected to housing. During the month of August, CHP & CommUnity Care Street Medicine team served thirty individuals by providing Suboxone induction and follow up care. These clients have been able to maintain the therapy and not use heroin. CHP has assisted a client in collaboration with Street Medicine to wean a client off heroin use, which resulted in a diversion out of homelessness as there was family willing to help the client but only if sober. Texas Harm Reduction has assisted CHP with providing funding for treatment.

CHP have been supporting efforts at the ProLodges to help improve strategies, policies, and access to services. This has included helping to establish eligibility criteria for ProLodge system based on

CDC guidelines for medical vulnerability and participating biweekly with the team triaging the ProLodge wait list by medical vulnerability. CHP have performed targeted outreach to locate and screen the most medically vulnerable individuals experiencing homelessness for ProLodge placement and have provided on the ground locating and coordination of individuals who were selected to enter a ProLodge. CHP have also been accessible to City and Integral Care staff at all five ProLodges for guidance on medical and social services navigation, case coordination, medical assessment, treatment planning, medication assistance and MAP applications.

Homeless Outreach Street Team (HOST) Highlights

Throughout the pandemic, HOST has continued proactive outreach in the community to serve individuals experiencing homelessness. These services have included connecting individuals with medical, mental health and basic needs services, collaborating with public safety to improve services and approaches to interactions, and outreach around cleanup efforts as follows:

- Provision of medication management assistance
- Coordination of substance abuse treatment
- Collaboration with City of Austin departments on Clean City Strategy
- Provided connection to medical and dental care services
- Provided connection to mental health services
- Assisted with food/water & mask/hand sanitizer distribution along with EAT Initiative
- Connected clients to Intensive Case Management Program at DACC
- Provided de-escalation assistance to APD
- Issued APD ID’s to help reduce barriers in TX ID process
- Intervened in downtown 911 calls to help better allocate emergency resources (HOST APD & CHP)

Diversions (March - July 2020): One of the primary goals and benefits of HOST is providing individuals experiencing homelessness with the appropriate level of care that best meets their needs. This approach also leads to a reduction of emergency response and criminal justice involvement through diversions from hospital emergency rooms, jails, and psychiatric hospitals. The following table includes diversions throughout the pandemic.

<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>From Hospital ER</b>	<b>From Jail</b>	<b>From Psychiatric Hospital</b>
March	25	1	3
April	4	0	0
May	8	2	0
June	22	2	6
July	15	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>

Contacts (March - July 2020): HOST provides services to any individual experiencing homelessness they encounter and can visit with an individual multiple times in order to complete the work needed by the individual. The number of contacts reflect the visits the team has with their clients and the unduplicated client count reflects the number of unique individuals the team encountered during each time frame. The months of April through July reflects the reduction of clients in the targeted downtown/west campus area due to the introduction of the ProLodges during



the Pandemic, increase of other duties required by the partner agencies in response to the pandemic and other factors not identified by this data collection.

<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Unduplicated Clients</b>	<b>Contacts</b>
March	163	209
April	34	106
May	34	123
June	66	227
July	43	209
<b>Total</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>874</b>

### Center for Court Innovation Webinar

On August 25, 2020, members of HOST including APD, DACC, EMS, and Integral Care were featured in a webinar hosted by The Center for Court Innovation titled *Spotlighting the Austin, Texas HOST Team: A cross-agency collaboration serving people experiencing homelessness*. The discussion reached a national audience, and focused on the collaborative effort across City departments and our local mental health authority to serve individuals experiencing homelessness holistically, with some emphasis on how services have been able to continue during the pandemic.

## **6. Food Access**

### Eating Apart Together Initiative

The Eating Apart Together (EAT) Initiative has provided more than 450,000 meals to people experiencing homelessness during the response to COVID-19, with contracts to continue through the fall. Since its inception in March 2020, the EAT Initiative has continued to provide food, water, face coverings, toilet paper, COVID-19 information, hygiene supplies, and pet food to people experiencing unsheltered homelessness as an emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This crisis has presented unique challenges to the ability for unsheltered individuals to access these needed resources. The EAT Initiative sought to address these challenges by utilizing the power of community collaboration, strategic planning and implementation to ensure to the extent possible individuals are being connected to needed items. The EAT Initiative is housed within the Homelessness Group of the EOC and is led by staff from multiple City of Austin departments in collaboration with Travis County Constables, volunteer organizations, faith-based organizations, and social service agencies. Distributing basic needs to individuals where they live has been a key component of the City's infection control strategy during the pandemic, to encourage limited mobility and prevent spread of COVID-19.

EAT deploys multiple strategies to get resources to people in need tailored to their location. EAT distributes prepared meals targeted to the downtown core, shelf stable meal bags designed specifically for the downtown core or encampments with encampment meal bags being more robust. In order to provide services to geographically hard to reach encampments, EAT devised a strategy utilizing homeless outreach groups to deliver shelf stable meal bags, water and other items to individuals experiencing homelessness in their encampments. With the assistance of the homelessness outreach providers, the EAT Initiative continues to receive valuable information regarding the needs of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness to include the need for trash removal or additional servicing of porta-potties and hygiene stations. The outreach groups have observed an increase in people who are new to homelessness due to the economic impacts of

COVID-19. This information is crucial to bringing the needed services to individuals and assists with coordination of services, system planning, and public space management.

EAT is not limited to the provision of food and resources to people in need; it has also created an opportunity for increased connection between outreach providers and individuals, which can increase trust in the homeless response system with the potential of increasing individuals' engagement in services, ultimately leading to the ending of their homelessness. The EAT Initiative has observed a need for greater and continued community collaboration around food access for people experiencing homelessness to leverage the power of the community in addressing nutritional needs and homelessness on a systems level with the goal of understanding how they intersect and impact one another.

EAT Distribution Hub & Contracts

The EAT distribution Hub moved operations from the Austin Convention Center to the Palmer Event Center the week of July 15, 2020 due to EOC preparations at the Austin Convention Center. The EAT Initiative is currently approved to continue operations at the Palmer Event Center until October 8, 2020.

Prepared meals for the EAT Initiative are currently being sourced through a contract with Revolution Foods. Shelf stable food was initially provided by the Central Texas Food Bank and transitioned to a contract with Sysco Central Texas beginning August 1, 2020.

Continuation of COVID-19 Response

The Eating Apart Together Initiative will continue to examine food access needs for people experiencing homelessness as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic to ascertain the need for continued services. The EAT Initiative is currently discussing what a possible demobilization plan would look like as well as investigating the future of food access for people experiencing homelessness in Austin.

Through the beginning of September, EAT has distributed approximately:

<u>Eating Apart Together Initiative</u>	
74,376	Revolution Foods prepared meals
33,650	Revolution Foods shelf stable meals
272,000	Central Texas Food Bank shelf stable meals
85,000	Sysco Central Texas shelf stable meals
10,000 +	Face coverings
7 pallets	Dog food for pets
14,000	Gallons of bottled water
120,000	Individual bottles of water

## 7. Homelessness Priority Communications Team

The Homelessness Priority Communications Team within the Communications and Public Information Office continues to focus on developing shared and consistent values-based language and messaging while communicating directly with people experiencing homelessness and communicating to the general public regarding services provided by the City of Austin.

### Digital Communications

The first iteration of the [Dashboard on homelessness](#) launched on August 10<sup>th</sup>. The interactive tool, developed in partnership by the Communications & Public Information Office (CPIO) and Communications & Technology Management's (CTM) Office of Design and Delivery, will help Council and constituents better understand the needs of our homeless neighbors and the impacts of City initiatives to help meet those needs.

The team is working on usability testing, the next iteration of data sets, and exploring design elements to offer the ability to drilldown into the datasets to include more narrative and stories, including videos, pictures, informational one-pagers, etc.

A new content strategy for the [homelessness website](#) also launched on August 10<sup>th</sup>. The website was reconfigured to include information about City efforts on homelessness as well as information for those experiencing homelessness on how to stay safe and meet needs during the COVID-19 crisis.

COVID-19 has changed the flow of information for people experiencing homelessness to stay safe, meet their needs and access services in Austin. The City has developed the Homeless Texting Alert System, a one-way text messaging system to get critical information out quickly and effectively. The program launched in early September with approximately 600 numbers from phones distributed by Integral Care, the Downtown Austin Community Court, and Front Steps. Additional numbers can be added at any time and without risk sending duplicate messages. This program is another communication tool that can influence action and build trust with people experiencing homelessness across the city.

### Communications Support to City Departments

- Communications staff assist Public Works, EMS, HOST, APH, DACC and social services providers with communications on various strategies
- The homelessness communications team is partnering with several departments to create a field guide for Austinites experiencing homelessness. The guide will contain evergreen information including wildfire safety, leave-no-trace principles, service provider information, City services, and more

### Internal and External Engagement

Beginning Thursday August 27<sup>th</sup>, the City of Austin launched the first ever Week of Action to Help End Homelessness. The Week of Action is a seven-day coordinated communication campaign that encourages community members to take actions that help to end homelessness. Each day has a different type of action, allowing Austinites to decide how to participate in a meaningful way. The schedule for the Week of Action:

- Thursday, 8/27 - **Prepare** for the Week of Action
- Friday, 8/28 - **Learn** about homelessness in our community

- Saturday, 8/29 - **Create** something to help end homelessness
- Sunday, 8/30 - **Share** what you have created
- Monday, 8/31 - **Call** on our community to take action
- Tuesday, 9/1 - **Give** what you can to keep momentum going
- Wednesday, 9/2 - **Thank** the helpers all around us

To improve the safety and health of people experiencing homelessness, the homelessness communications team is partnering with APD to create a training on the City's current posture on people camping in public spaces which aligns with CDC recommendations. The training will include values-based language to connect with constituents and create a framework for positive discussions.

The homelessness communications team continues to:

- Collaborate with the Emergency Operations Center and the Joint Information Center on media inquiries and general communications needs regarding homelessness during the pandemic emergency response, and
- Distributes 2,000 COVID-19 educational flyers through the EAT Initiative's food access/basic needs bags and existing City and community channels each week

## 8. Public Space Management

### Clean City Strategy

The Clean City Strategy engages people experiencing homelessness to keep our community clean, healthy and safe through several programs including the Violet Bag Program, the Violet KeepSafe Storage Program, Public Space Cleaning Service Program, and Grounds Restoration Program. The goal of the strategy is to:

- Facilitate clean and hygienic living
- Prevent dangerous conditions for residents, drivers and neighbors
- Maintain the environmental quality of our ecosystem
- Provide access points to the resources and services available for supporting homeless individuals

### Violet Bag Program

Austin Resource Recovery (ARR) continues to expand the Violet Bag program. This program provides violet-colored trash bags to individuals experiencing homelessness close to encampments with a high volume of trash-related issues, and then coordinates pick-up at designated sites. The number of sites now totals 19, with all receiving at least daily service. ARR is actively working to add additional violet bag sites to match the number of sites that Public Works (PW) cleans monthly. The current site list includes:

Highway 71/Packsaddle Pass  
 Highway 71/Menchaca  
 Highway 71/I-35  
 Highway 71/Burleson  
 I-35/Airport Boulevard  
 I-35/6<sup>th</sup>  
 I-35/7<sup>th</sup>  
 I-35/8<sup>th</sup>  
 I-35/Cesar Chavez

Terrazas Branch Library-receiving twice per day service  
183/Cameron (2 kiosks)  
183/Burnet (2 kiosks)  
183/Oak Knoll  
183/Ohlen  
183/Pond Springs  
Pleasant Valley/Cesar Chavez (near the IBC Bank)  
7<sup>th</sup> Street/Gonzalez  
Pleasant Valley/Riverside Drive (located in the median)  
Menchaca/Slaughter Lane

ARR is partnering with PW to initiate a pilot program in October at two locations including Highway 71 at Packsaddle Pass, and Highway 183 at Cameron Road. The pilot program involves working with the community members residing at the locations to help with trash and debris removal.

These two sites are current Violet Bag locations and were chosen based on volume of material as well as space availability to safely place a dumpster. The pilot will be conducted once a month for three months. After the pilot cleaning is completed, Public Works will come through and remove any remaining debris. Results will be reported to City Council in early 2021.

#### *Violet KeepSafe Personal Storage Facility*

In 2020, the City of Austin launched the Violet KeepSafe Storage program, a transitional storage service that helps people experiencing homelessness keep their possessions safe while navigating their way around the community and out of homelessness. Inspired by programs developed in San Diego, Louisville, Eugene, and other cities, the Office of Design and Delivery collaborated with the Austin Homeless Advisory Council (AHAC) and members of the Austin design community to develop a pilot housed at the former HealthSouth parking garage.

Austin Resource Recovery (ARR) has set up the Storage Center, where hundreds of purple bins with locks are available to hold important documents, meaningful keepsakes, and bulky personal items, lightening the load for appointments with service providers or potential employers. During operational hours (Monday- Friday, 7 a.m. - 10 a.m., 3 p.m. - 7 p.m.) people experiencing homelessness can access their bin by presenting their bin tag, key, or other identifying document to an attendant who delivers the bin to a private area. As the program grows, the City will coordinate with service providers to make case managers available for assistance and guidance for people experiencing homelessness. The City also plans to expand the program to include satellite storage locations accessible beyond downtown, where Front Steps is already using purple bins for personal storage at the ARCH.

#### *Underpass Clean-up Process*

As was addressed in the August 20, 2020 [Memorandum to Mayor and Council](#), The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) maintains highway bridge infrastructure throughout the City for safety. As the City and TxDOT have worked in partnership, the need arose for the City to manage underpass cleanups, as the City is better equipped to provide outreach and services to individuals impacted by these efforts. Additionally, this provides the City the opportunity to conduct work as part of the City's overall Clean City Strategy, and align efforts with the City's Violet Bag Program. These cleanups are intended to make areas safer for all Austin residents, especially individuals that may be living in these areas.

Information was provided regarding efforts and the new path forward to address concerns, previous Council guidance, and improve overall practices and services to residents. In addition to the Violet Bag Program Expansion and Storage Program listed above, staff are improving signage including more information and translation of all materials into Spanish, and training is being provided for all City and contract staff working closely with vulnerable populations. Monthly processes will also be transformed in regards to outreach, reporting, increased partnership with social service providers, and regular scheduling of cleanups on set days to lessen the impact. All changes and efforts prioritize the City's commitment to removing debris and trash while respecting the integrity of any vulnerable population

## **9. Homelessness Strategy and Coordination Efforts**

### Homeless Services Division

The Homeless Services Division (HSD) in Austin Public Health was created in early 2020 for the purpose of coordinating homelessness efforts across City departments and with community partners. Since the onset of the pandemic, interim and temporary HSD staff have been assigned to the COVID-19 emergency response under the EOC, planning, implementing and maintaining operations for ProLodges, the EAT Initiative, temporary hygiene resources, and coordination with homeless shelters and outreach teams to promote health and safety (including testing, hygiene supplies, education and safety protocols, and facilitating access to the IsoFac when needed). As part of the approved Fiscal Year 2020-2021 Budget, regular staff positions will be added to HSD to support the ongoing work to prevent and end homelessness. The hiring process for the Homeless Strategy Officer is underway and the [position](#) is currently posted on the City's website with recruitment being led by Affion Public.

### System-wide Strategies and Actions

Following the release of the [Investing for Results: Priorities and Recommendations for a Systems Approach to End Homelessness](#) report, City staff have continued to work with ECHO, contracted consultants and community partners through the P3 (Public-Private Partnership) Homelessness Task Force to develop actionable steps to implement key recommendations. This group is reviewing data and current programs with a goal of expanding community capacity and resources for interventions including homelessness prevention, diversion, emergency shelter, rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing.

City staff remain committed to addressing all aspects of homelessness effectively, collaboratively, and with commitment and compassion. Efforts are underway across all departments involved with this critical issue and City priority to develop a 90-day plan for coordinated and intentional efforts including areas such as expanded cleanups, communication and engagement, enforcement of illegal dumping, housing options, parkland management, access to basic needs and service mapping, and data driven decision making. We continue to welcome input from Council, stakeholders, and members of the community including our neighbors experiencing homelessness, and will continue to provide updates as programming and services are transformed and expanded to meet community needs.

CC: Spencer Cronk, City Manager  
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City Department Directors and Assistant Directors  
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