

# GREATER RICHMOND CONTINUUM OF CARE

## Greater Richmond Continuum of Care: Local Public Sector Investment Strategy Approach

Background: Providers in our regional homeless services system, the Greater Richmond Continuum of Care, serve approximately 1,000 regional residents each day by providing emergency shelter and targeted housing programs such as rapid re-housing and permanent supportive housing. It's important to acknowledge this impact, be grateful for the work of frontline homeless services staff, and recognize the need for more resources.

The Richmond region is a national leader in solving homelessness. The partnerships among the coordinated and compassionate members of the Greater Richmond Continuum of Care have helped find permanent housing for more than 11,410 unique individuals in the past 10 years.

The GRCoC allocates more than \$9 million dollars in federal and state funding each year and these funds are highly targeted and monitored and aligned with the regional funding priorities<sup>1</sup> set by the Board. GRCoC providers combine the \$9 million in public funds with significant private fundraising to serve regional residents each day. Homeless service providers maximize their limited resources so they can say yes to helping as many people as possible, but the reality remains that we can't give someone a resource that we don't have.

Our local communities need to invest in expanding resources for people pushed into homelessness. When we expand resources, we can get more people on the pathway to a permanent home. Providers in the Greater Richmond Continuum of Care come together to work through highly complex and interconnected challenges so they can have the biggest impact possible. The Greater Richmond Continuum of Care has already completed extensive planning and strategy work so our system can quickly scale when more resources are added. We have comprehensive processes grounded in input from people experiencing homelessness in place to allow our system to expand capacity and help more people when more resources are allocated to homeless services.

Recent investments to expand emergency shelter capacity are critical and will make a noticeable impact in our community; especially if these investments are paired with additional resources strategically aligned to quickly assist more people to move out of emergency shelter and into stable housing.

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<sup>1</sup> 2023-24 Community Priorities for Coordinated Funding, approved in March 2023:  
<https://irp.cdn-website.com/b42b4d18/files/uploaded/2023-24%20Community%20Priorities%20for%20Coordinated%20Funding.pdf>

Investment Strategy: Process Considerations: Given the stability of the GRCoC providers over time, it is likely that GRCoC providers could provide additional services for persons experiencing homelessness with increased and sustained resources that supported and strengthened existing staffing and operations.

- An example would be the increase in housing-focused case management staff. If ongoing operational and staffing funding were provided to GRCoC providers to hire and retain qualified case management staff at competitive wages, providers would be able to offer more assistance to each household and reduce the length of stay in programs.
- Reducing the length of stay of households in emergency shelter and rapid re-housing programs would allow more households to be served by these experienced providers.
- Additional investments in proven programs are needed to address increased community needs post-pandemic and it is critical to ensure the continuity and organizational capacity of the high quality and effective programs provided year in and year out by GRCoC providers.
- These funds will not solve the lack of inventory of deeply affordable housing, but qualified staff can help people experiencing homelessness navigate the tight housing market, secure a roommate to split costs, safely reunite with family or friends, or connect to income through employment or benefits.

Setting up a strategic regional investment fund for the GRCoC would allow localities in the Richmond region to contribute to the strategic and measurable expansion of homeless assistance programs. This could be aligned with the existing private, federal, and state funding at the GRCoC and aligned with the increased City investments in emergency shelter in CY 2023.

Funding could be allocated to Homeward for the GRCoC. In 2023 Homeward developed an application process to solicit proposals from GRCoC providers to expand services with the \$1 million City of Richmond investment (approved in Dec. 2022 and allocated in May 2023) focused on addressing the needs of unsheltered households. The requests for proposals and timeline are posted here: <https://www.endhomelessnessrva.org/city-of-richmond>.

Homeward worked with the Ranking Committee and the GRCoC to approve the process and strategies for this funding. Homeward is monitoring the outcomes of these projects and compiling reports for the City. All household data is entered into HCIS (our local service coordination database) which allows for coordinated services and tracking of client need, services provided, and outcomes.

Over time, the specific programs needed in the community may change or evolve and funding can be targeted to the most pressing needs and opportunities. Multi-year funding would be impactful so that agencies can hire additional staff to increase and expand services.

Investment Strategies: Additional local public sector funding would amplify the work of the coordinated network of homeless assistance programs. Specific strategies to be funded include:

- Support for emergency shelter operations to off-set the rising costs of providing high quality housing-focused support and of maintaining expanded opening hours to better serve program participants
- Housing navigation staff at GRCoC partner agencies including outreach, shelter, and housing programs.
- Expanding Bringing Families Home to link housing navigation with school and DSS resources.
- Expanding outreach services so that outreach providers can engage more unsheltered households throughout the region.
- Providing flexible funding to resolve homelessness.
- Targeted prevention programs to be used to divert people from entering the homeless assistance system. These funds could also be used as very targeted local rental assistance program to assist households served by a homeless services provider who move into permanent housing and later need additional supports to maintain their stability.

Governance Recommendation: Set up a GRCoC task force on local public strategic investments comprised of representatives from Richmond, Chesterfield, and Henrico to inform and guide conversations on strategic local investments that align with GRCoC resources.