Homelessness Prevention in Pima County

Why We Need More, Existing Infrastructure, Gaps, & Best Practices

Zachary Simmons & Keith Gunnar Bentele

Presentation to Equitable Housing Strategies Subcommittee City of Tucson Commission on Equitable Housing and Development 6/24/25







How is Homeless Prevention Defined?

Rapid, time-limited assistance to vulnerable populations before housing is lost



How is Homeless Prevention Defined?

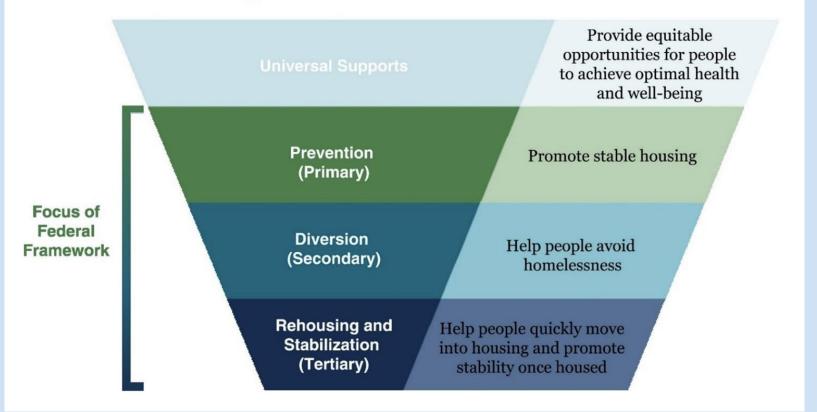
Rapid, time-limited assistance to vulnerable populations before housing is lost

Types of Homeless Prevention:

- 1. Legal: legal navigation, legal representation, domestic violence services
- 1. Supportive Services: landlord-tenant mediation, case management, employment services, intensive MH and/or SU, re-entry services
- 1. Financial Assistance: one-time or short-term financial assistance

^{*}Eviction prevention does not necessarily = homeless prevention





Source: U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness. *Ending Homelessness Before It Starts: A Federal Homelessness Prevention Framework*. September 2024

Outline

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- 2. What do we know about volume of need and inflow into homelessness locally?
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- 6. What would a better system look like?
- 7. Recommendations

Increasing Need and Decreasing Capacity to Serve: An Urgent Case for Local Homelessness Prevention

TUCSON PIMA COLLABORATION TO END HOMELESSNESS 2024 GAPS ANALYSIS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overall, this report paints a bleak picture and sends a clear signal that there is an urgent need to improve our local capacity to prevent homelessness. The data reviewed below indicate that the structural drivers of housing insecurity, including home values, rent prices, and poverty, all remain elevated in Pima County. Elevated housing insecurity is driving current levels of inflow into homelessness. Increased inflow is visible in the 59% increase in the number of unique households seeking homelessness-related services (by completing a coordinated entry assessment) between 2021 and 2023.

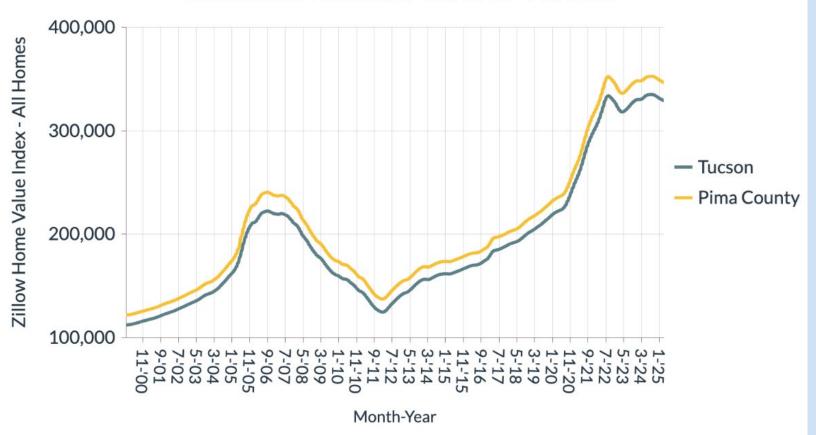
Tucson Rent Prices

Average/Median Rent Price Indicators: Dec-2014 - Apr-2025



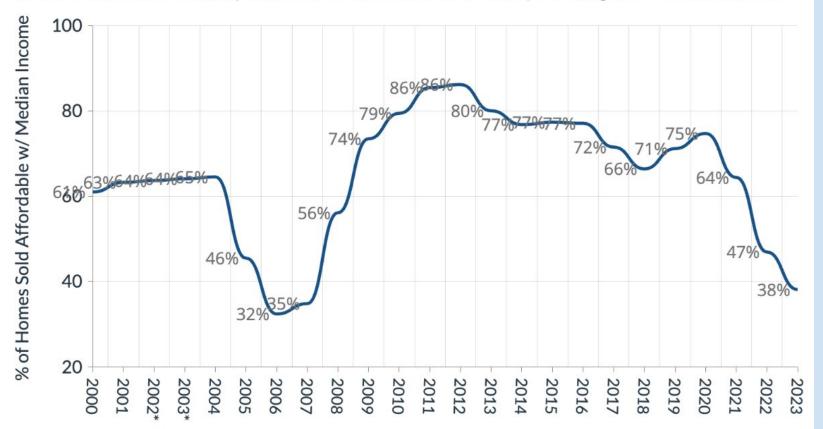
Home Values in Tucson and Pima County

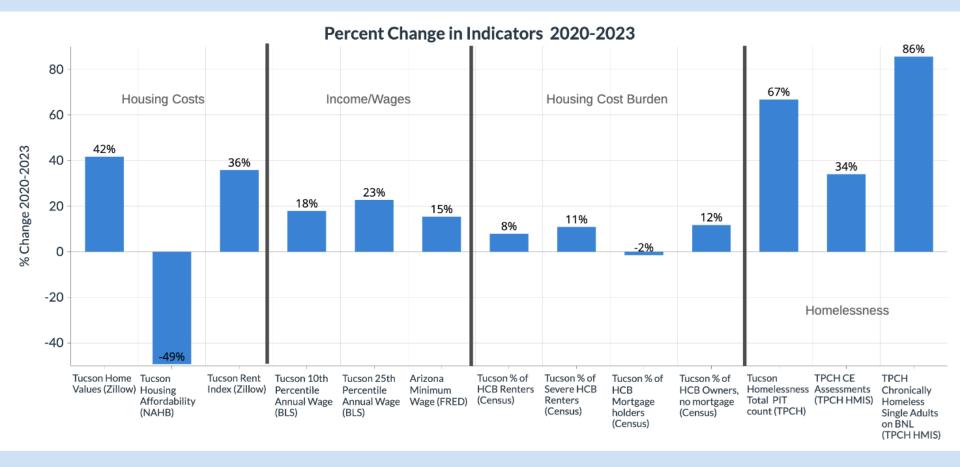
Zillow Home Value Index - Jan 2000 - Mar 2025



Tucson Housing Affordability

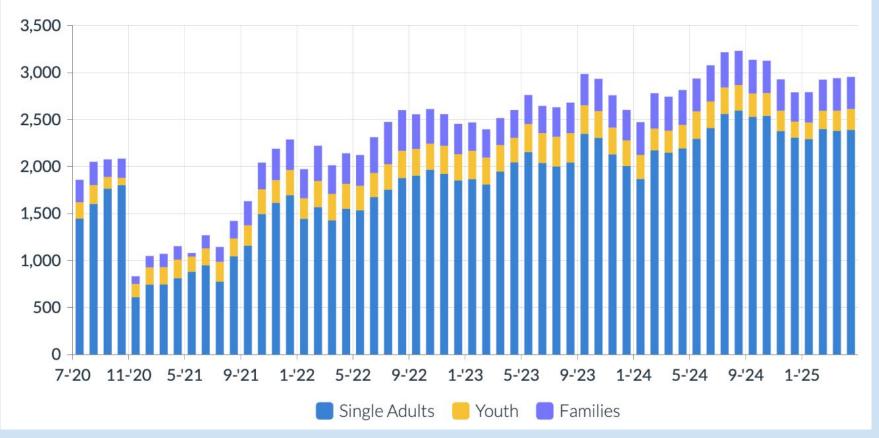
% of Homes Sold Annually that were Affordable to a Family Earning the Median Income





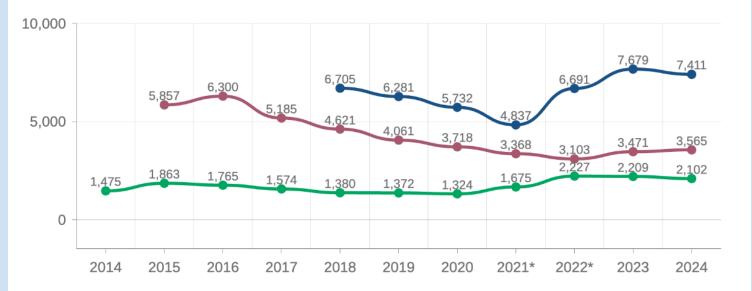
Total Households "Actively Homeless"

Tucson Pima Collaboration to End Homelessness - Jul 2020 - Apr 2025



Total Count of Unique Individuals Experiencing Homelessness

PIT & HMIS Counts for Tucson/Pima County CoC 2014-2024

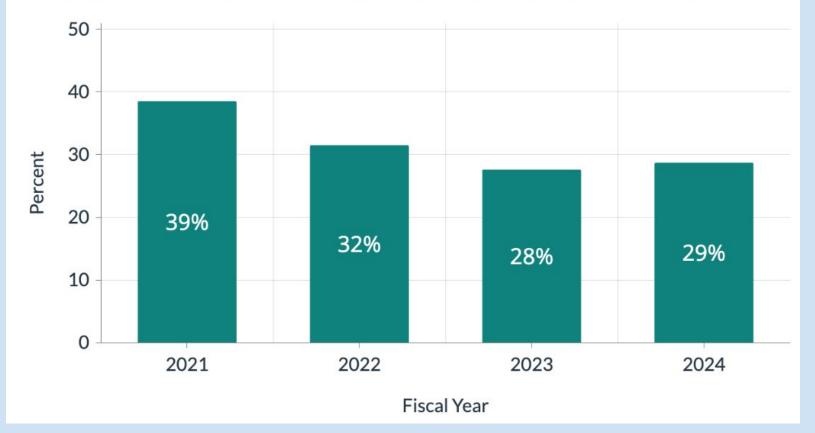


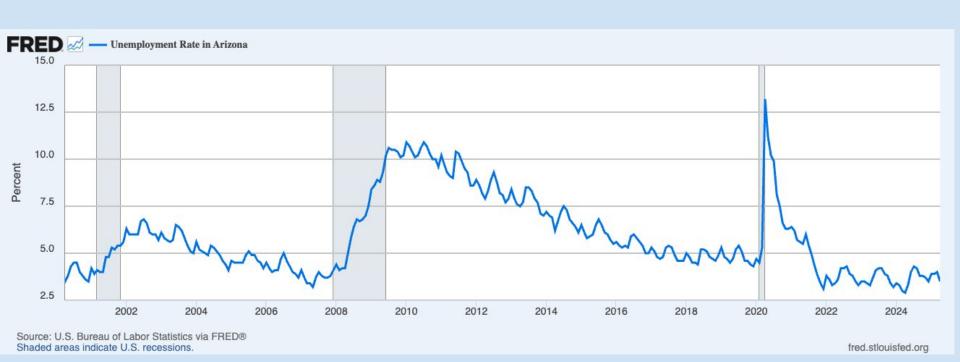
- Total HMIS Count of persons experiencing sheltered homelessness
- Total PIT Count of persons experiencing sheltered and unsheltered homelessness
- Total HMIS Count of unique HoH & Adults completing CE assessment (Fiscal Year)

*Unsheltered counts were estimated in 2021-2022 (using different techniques) due to the ongoing pandemic. Since the methodology used to generate these counts changed considerably between 2020, 2021, and 2022, an unknown portion of increases in these years are likely a result of changes in methodology.

Proportion of New CE Assessments Served in Annual Inflow

Unique Households Completing CE Assessment & Subsequently Served in a Shelter or Housing Program





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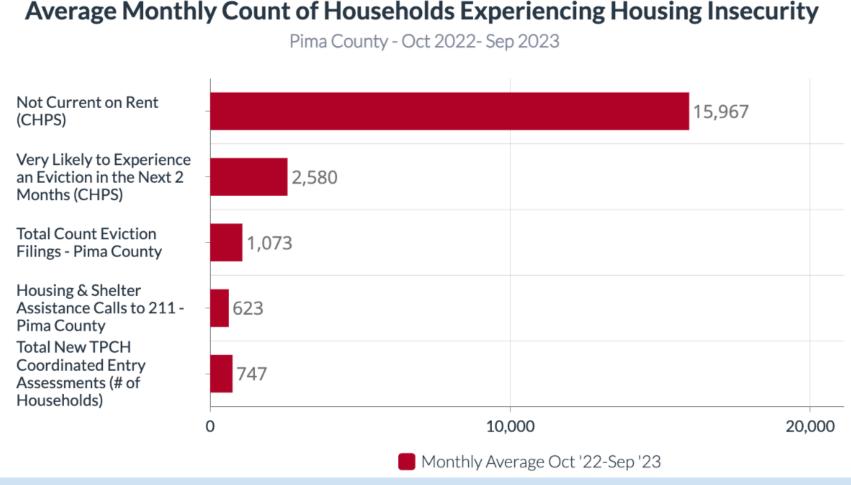
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recommendations for Local Government, Providers, and Funders:

Given the urgency of the current situation, it would be ideal for a local government office and/or a non-profit entity to house, direct, and staff this effort to build a community approach to homelessness prevention.

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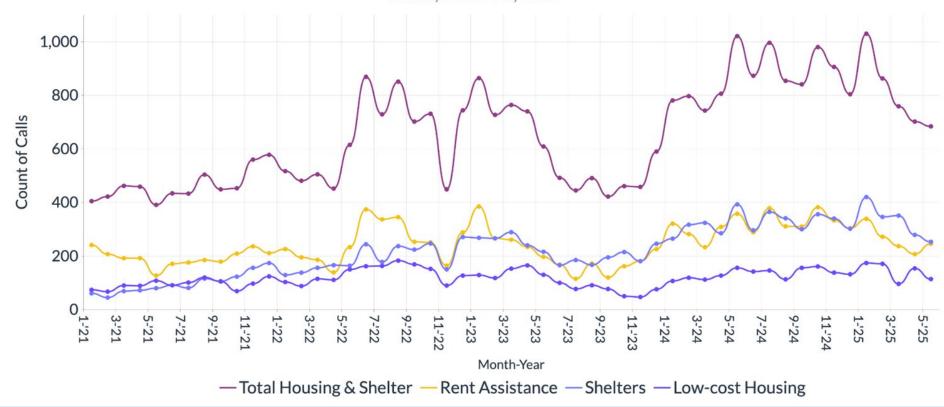


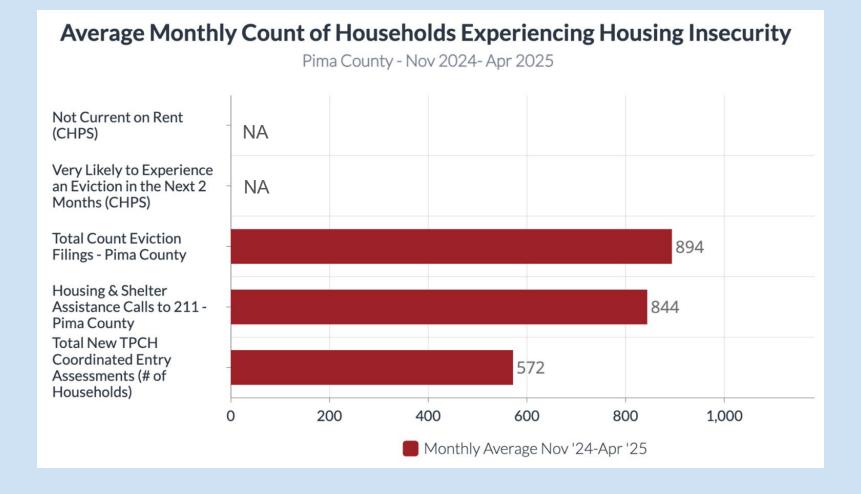


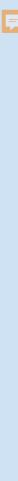
— SIROW Monthly Count - Eviction Filings



January 2021 - May 2025

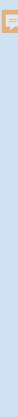






Current Living Situation of Households Completing TPCH Coordinated Entry Assessments CE Assessments from Nov 2024 to April 2025 Count of HH % of All CE Inflow % of Inflow % by Type

	Count of HH	% of All CE Inflow	% of Inflow	% by Type
	Monthly Average		Non-Homeless	
Homeless - Place Not Meant for Habitation	406	71%		
Homeless - ES/SH	98	17%		
Institution - Hospital	3	1%	5%	
Institution - Jail Prison Juvie	3	1%	4%	
Institution - LT Care or Nursing	1	0%	1%	
Institution - Psychiatric Hospital	1	0%	2%	
Institution - SUD Treatment or Detox	12	2%	18%	30%
Homeowner	0	0%	0%	
Renter no subsidy	7	1%	11%	
Renter with Subsidy	3	0%	4%	15%
Hotel	3	0%	4%	
Residential or Halfway House	1	0%	1%	
Staying with Family	11	2%	15%	
Staying with Friends	13	2%	18%	39%
Transitional Housing	10	2%	14%	14%
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Total HHs	572			



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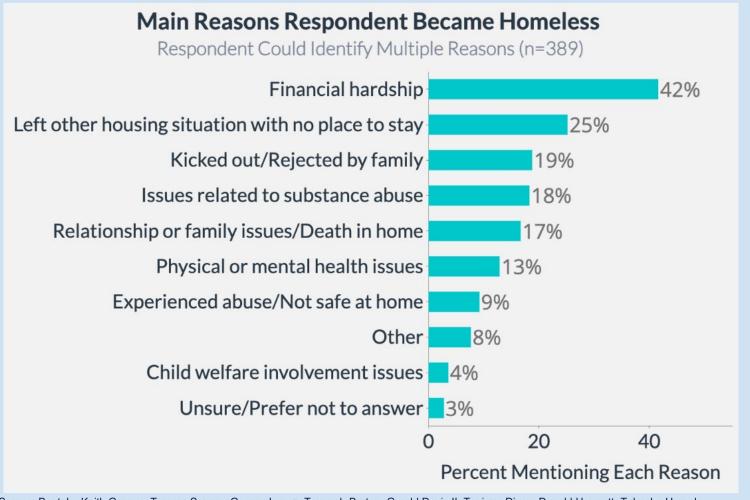
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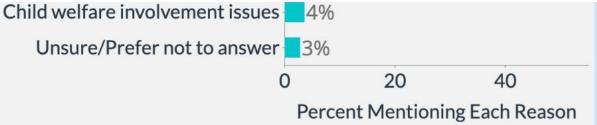
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Main Reasons Respondent Became Homeless

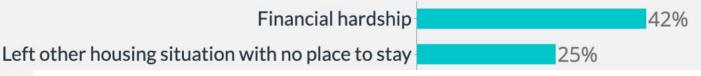
Respondent Could Identify Multiple Reasons (n=389)

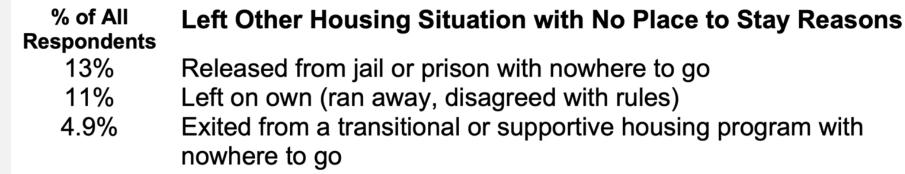


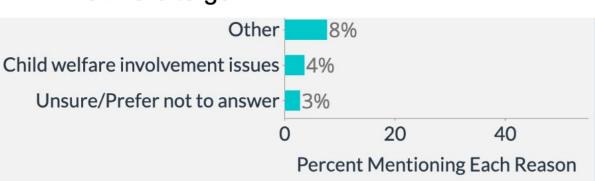


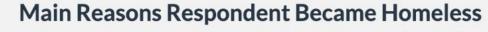


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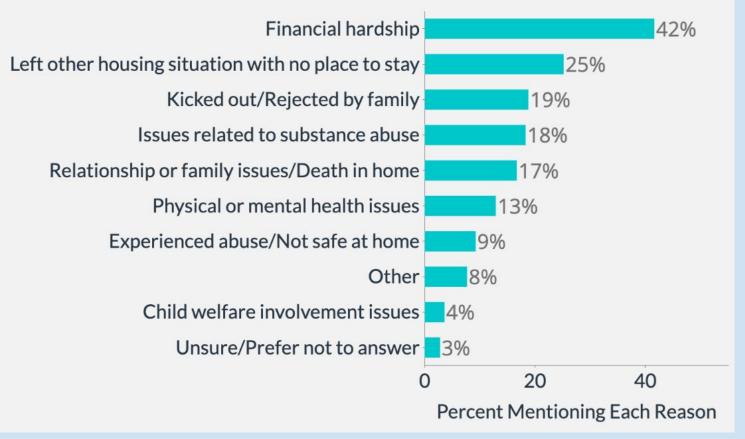








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Active Prevention Agencies































Requirements of Services

- Legal:
 - ~4 providers
- Supportive Services:
 - ~5 providers
- Financial Assistance: *Combination of one-time & short-term
 - ~13 providers

























Pros & Cons

Pros:

- Many providers = many opportunities
- Ability to specialize and coordinate with one another
- Diversity to serve many needs (one-time vs short-term)

Cons:

- Having too many services is confusing
- Sharing the same funding sources can be limiting
- No standardized requirements across agencies



















Supply vs Demand

Demand *not deduplicated

- Legal: ~250 calls
 - Most from a single agency is ~125/month
- Financial: ~1,000 calls
 - Most to a single agency is ~800/month

Supply

- Legal: ~120 households
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- Financial: ~50-100 households
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- ~ 50% of HHs in need of legal assistance are served
- ~ 5-10% of HHs in need of financial assistance are served

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 Community Assistance Division (CAD) front desk employee

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What did people seeking funds tell us?

- -Called many, many providers
- -If they were contacted, 211 provided long list of providers, most whom didn't have funds
- -Application & verification processes are arduous and ask for more information than seems necessary (privacy concerns)
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"211 is useless - they never point you in the right direction. The people that answer the phone and speak with you don't seem to be trained, they have no skin in the game... We need someone who will spend more time with you when it's needed."



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"I told them my story and the woman says, well, this is like the lottery. And she was like, you've gotta call. But they just they weren't communicative. I wouldn't hear from them. Then I'd reach out and then email them. Then they would email back weeks later. Then they would just ask a question. Then it was again, weeks later... and you can't get through and they won't answer the phone. So I sat and waited. Then finally, weeks and weeks later, I got denied."



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"I really thought that, when I'm going to call Emerge, they're going to have funding to get me the f**k out of this this environment, like right now, like they're going to say, 'absolutely, we have money. We have our own money.' But they didn't. I was calling them and waiting on hold... I was like, do you guys have financial assistance so that I can leave after hearing my whole story? No, you need (me) to call this number... and I was like, why did I call? Like, what do you do?"

Putting Ourselves in Their Shoes

What shows up on Google?

Putting Ourselves in Their Shoes

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- "Homeless prevention in (Tucson/Pima County)"
 - 3 shelters
 - 4 directory sites that were varying levels of helpful *some were out of date (referred to CARES Act programs ended in 2022)
 - 3 agencies that work in prevention
 - 1 agency that currently has prevention funds (Primavera)

Putting Ourselves in Their Shoes

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- "Eviction prevention in (Tucson/Pima County)"
 - 1 Shelter
 - 5 directory sites that were varying levels of helpful *some were out of date (referred to CARES Act programs ended in 2022)
 - 4 agencies that work in prevention
 - 2 financial
 - 2 legal

Some links did not work

ERROR 404 - NOT FOUND

Apologies, but the page you requested could not be found.

This site has stepped out for a bit

Home | Custom404

The page you are looking for has moved!

We apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused. Don't worry though, we are here to help!

Please try using the **search function above** to find the page you were looking for. If you still can't find what you need, please fill out <u>our feedback form</u> and we will be happy to assist you in locating the information you require.

Thank you for your patience and understanding as we continue to improve and update our website. We look forward to providing you with an exceptional online experience.



If you're the **site owner**, contact your hosting provider.

If you are a **visitor**, please check back soon.

- Some links did not work
- Other results showed out of date resources.

Funding for the Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) has been exhausted. Effective August 8, 2023, LIHWAP applications are no longer being accepted. Subject to available funding: 1) benefits will be disbursed to approved applicants in the order of approval, and 2) existing applications will be processed in the order received. Please monitor this webpage for any future program updates.

The Arizona Rental Assistance Program has ended and <u>applications are no longer being accepted.</u> Applications submitted on or before August 31, 2024 will continue to be processed.

This page will be temporarily maintained for archival purposes and to support the continued processing of existing applications.

There may be other programs available to you in your community! Visit 211.org , the Short-Term Crisis Services Program and your local Community Action Agency for help finding support.



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- Long wait times
 - Average wait time 12 minutes
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Most common feedback

- "I'm so sorry, we don't have any funding. Have you tried calling XYZ?"
- "We do not have funding, try calling back next month"
- "We can't help financially but if you are facing legal challenges we may be able to assist"
- "This agency does not provide assistance in your area"

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What is the Evidence for the Types of Homeless Prevention?

- 1. Legal: promising though inconclusive homeless prevention effects.
- 2. Supportive Services: little specific evidence about their isolated effects, although preliminary results are promising.
- 3. Financial Assistance: recent research suggests rapid, financial assistance is both effective and cost-saving.

(Evans et al., 2016; Evans et al., 2021; Greiner et al., 2012; Greiner et al., 2013;



Flexible "Flex" Fund Programs

- Financial assistance intended to:
 - Meet expressed and immediate needs
 - Be provided rapidly
 - Be easy to access & low-barrier
 - Often provided across populations
- May meet complex needs of individuals and families
- May better target high-need, minoritized populations than other programs
- Associated with housing security and positive health outcomes
- AzHAC statewide evaluation's preliminary evidence suggests it may prevent homelessness at a rate of 3 to 1 for funded vs. unfunded applicants
 - If used to reduce system inflow it may be as high as by 67%

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"We do our best to encourage landlords to accept assistance, but we often hear concerns that the tenant will fall behind again shortly after. Offering incentives can help, but not always. In my experience, if a landlord has had any kind of prior issue with a tenant, even if it's been resolved, they're much less likely to work with us, irrespective of the tenant's current cooperation."



Recommendations from Participants: Recent TPCH Homelessness Prevention Flex Fund Evaluation

- 1. Increase visibility of flex fund program
 - a. Outreach, advertising, ensure high-risk/burden populations are aware of assistance
- 2. Provide ongoing support as needed
 - a. Financial (increase amount or duration of support)
 - b. Case management / follow-up support
 - c. Legal assistance
- 3. Improve domestic violence responsiveness
 - a. Funding, services remove those affected from harm

Model Program: Predictive Modeling (PM) in LA County

- Prior to PM, UCLA evaluation showed that traditional HP was not targeting people at highest risk of homelessness
- When PM was introduced, it found persons most likely to experience homelessness were not identified by traditional HP
- Compared to traditional HP clients, people identified by PM were much more likely to receive MH and SU treatment, have physical health issues, and have criminal and homelessness histories
- The PM model is about 3.5 times better at identifying people likely to become homeless than case workers
- Research from LA's prevention unit estimates it cost \$6,500 to stabilize a participant's housing
- Results from an RCT are expected in 2027

LA Co. PM
uses machine
learning + LA
Co. data (including
ED; MH, SU and
medical treatment;
social safety net
program use; jails &
probation data)

Outline

- 1. Why do we need to improve our capacity for local homelessness prevention?
- 2. What do we know about volume of need and inflow into homelessness locally?
- 3. What does our current homelessness prevention "system" look like?
- 4. What do we know about the experiences of people seeking homelessness prevention services locally?
- 5. What do we already know about programs that are effective in preventing homelessness?
- 6. What would a better system look like?
- 7. Recommendations

Problem: There is no coordinated homelessness prevention system in Tucson/Pima County

Solutions: Local governments should collaborate on building a community approach to homelessness prevention. This would require dedicated and appropriately resourced staff to carry out something like the following steps:

1. Identify and Gather Partners

Steps from Ending Homelessness Before It Starts: A Federal Homelessness Prevention Framework

- 2. <u>Utilize Data to Inform Your Planning</u>
- 3. Map Services to Create Shared Understanding of Local Prevention Resources and Programs
- 4. <u>Develop an Action Plan</u>
- 5. Implement Plan, Track Outcomes, and Work Continuously to Improve

Problem: It is difficult for people to access accurate information about homelessness prevention resources

Solutions: Reduce burdens on clients to find real information/services

- -Remove inaccurate/outdated information (from web or voicemails)
- -Require publication dates to flyers and any service promotion (small change very impactful)
- -More housing stability navigators (to negotiate current flawed system)
- -Centralized repository of accurate information, very accessible multiple modes (web, phone, language accessibility, Hotline?)
 - -No wrong door-type referrals to a centralized access point

Any new systems should be funded/staffed with a long term commitment to filling this need indefinitely

Problem: Even if people had correct information about available supports/resources, these are supports are currently under resourced relative to need, and some households will not be eligible for supports or services. Currently existing systems can waste the time of clients and provide false hope

Solutions: Clients seeking supports need realistic information about likelihood of being served so they can make rational plans, and sometimes only need light housing navigation support

- -Provide clients with clear information about likelihood of being served and actual timelines involved
- -More Supportive Diversion: Provide a wider range of housing navigation supports, that include sustainability planning for household unlikely to be served via existing programs
- -e.g. referrals to home sharing programs or non-profit/faith-based/community organized housing options (especially relevant for households unlikely to engage with service providers)
- -Need to build more programs/staff to provide navigation and emergency housing to households in urgent situations unlikely to be resolved by existing programs

Problem: Vulnerable households and individuals are entering homelessness from institutions (hospitals, treatment centers, jail/prison) and housing programs (esp. Transitional Housing)

Solutions: Implement systems to better identify and support people who are at risk before they exit systems and enter the homelessness response system.

- -Screening for housing status in systems such as health care, mental health and substance use, child welfare, justice, education.
- -Better exit planning and/or re-entry supports for vulnerable households exiting systems and at high risk of homelessness
 - -More housing stability navigators, and resources needed for these folks

Problem: Homelessness prevention is underfunded locally relative to need (this will get worse whenever the economy slows)

Solutions: In the absence of funding from federal or state sources, local governments are in a uniquely appropriate moment for more local funding mechanisms to support homelessness prevention

Additional funds could support:

- -The programmatic recommendations made here (e.g. accessible centralized information, more navigators, etc.)
- -Flexible financial assistance for homelessness prevention not subject to restrictions or burdensome eligibility requirements found with other funding sources
- -Extensive sustainability planning supports (employment, health care, benefits, etc.) to reduce returns to prevention services

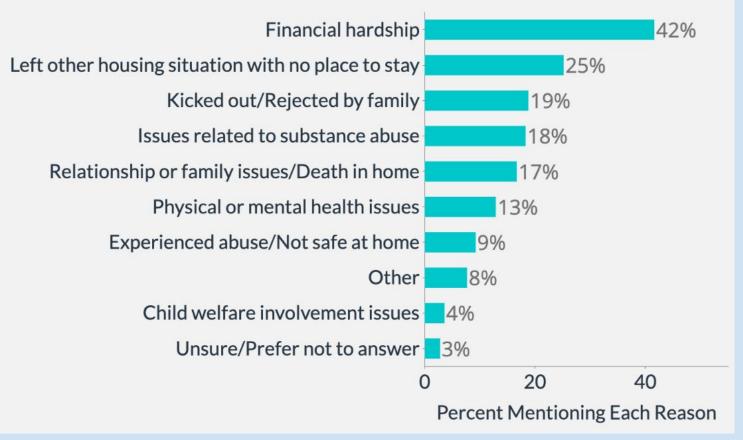
Problem: Homelessness prevention options need to be diverse and meet the different needs of people entering housing insecurity/homelessness for different reasons

Solutions: Prevention strategies should be diverse, data-driven, and responsive to the specific needs of households

- -Households facing financial challenges may need both financial assistance and sustainability planning for their current situation
- -Households with health care needs (physical, mental, or substance use related) may need additional navigation supports for both housing and healthcare services
- -Individuals fleeing abuse may need immediate emergency housing options, healthcare, and sustainability planning
- -Individuals exiting treatment, hospitalization, or incarceration may need different reentry supports and may face unique barriers to securing permanent housing
- -Local shelter system needs to be more transparent & accessible



Respondent Could Identify Multiple Reasons (n=389)



Source: Bentele, Keith Gunnar, Tamara Sargus, George Lopez, Tayonah Burton, Gerald Davis II, Taniqua Dixon, Donald Hargrett, Tahasha Harpole, Yanna Jones, Andres Montano, Stacee R. Sivley-Taylor, & Danna Williams. 2023. "No Judgement Here" City of Tucson Needs Assessment of Adults Experiencing Homelessness 2023. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona, Southwest Institute for Research on Women.

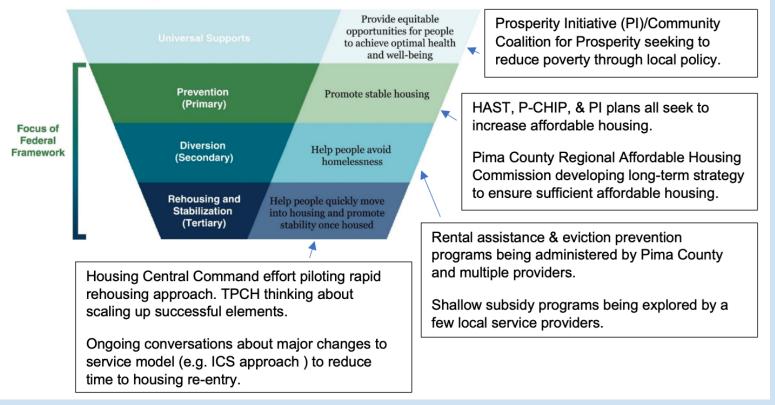
Problem: Homelessness prevention is more difficult to accomplish in the absence of abundant affordable housing

Solutions: More affordable housing

- -Fund and implement affordable housing strategies outlined in the Prosperity Initiative
- -Investments in adequate supply of affordable housing will reduce the longer term costs of homelessness prevention

Figure 37. Categories of Homelessness Prevention in Federal Homelessness Prevention Framework and Examples of Related Local Initiatives (not exhaustive)

Categories of Homelessness Prevention



Source: Bentele, K. G., & Shuman, S. (2025). Increasing Need and Decreasing Capacity to Serve: An Urgent Case for Local Homelessness Prevention - Tucson Pima Collaboration to End Homelessness 2024 Gaps Analysis. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona, Southwest Institute for Research on Women.

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