Glossary of Terms

Defining Homelessness
Ending Homelessness: An end to homelessness means every community will have a comprehensive response in place that ensures homelessness is prevented whenever possible, or if it can't be prevented, it is a rare, brief, and one-time experience.

Homelessness: Describes the situation of an individual, family or community without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household's financial, mental, cognitive, behaviorial or physical challenges, and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, unhealthy, unsafe, stressful and distressing.

Housing First: A recovery-oriented approach to ending homelessness that centers on quickly moving people experiencing homelessness into independent and permanent housing. It is followed by provision of additional supports and services as needed.

Social Factors of Homelessness
Structural factors: Economic and societal issues that affect opportunities and social environments for individuals.

Poverty: A multifaceted concept, which may include social, economic, and political elements. Absolute poverty, extreme poverty, or destitution refers to the complete lack of the means necessary to meet basic personal needs such as food, clothing and shelter.

Housing Exclusion: The failure of society to ensure adequate systems, funding and support are in place so that all people, even in crisis situations, have access to housing.

System failure: Occurs when other systems of care and support fail, requiring vulnerable people to turn to the homelessness sector, when other mainstream services could have prevented this need.

Severe housing cost burden: When a household spends more than 50% of its pre-tax income on housing costs.

System Solutions
Primary prevention: Working upstream to reduce risks of homelessness for individuals and families. Typically involves universal interventions directed at whole communities.

System prevention: Working with institutions to stop the flow of individuals from mental health care, child protection and corrections into homelessness.

Navigation Centers: Coordinate care and services across housing, shelter, mental, behavioral, and physical health care delivery systems.

Continuum of Care: Designed to promote communitywide commitment to the goal of ending homelessness; provide funding for efforts by nonprofit providers, and State and local governments to quickly rehouse homeless individuals and families while minimizing the trauma and dislocation caused to homeless individuals, families, and communities by homelessness; promote access to and effect utilization of mainstream programs by homeless individuals and families; and optimize self-sufficiency among individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

Coordinated entry: Creates a streamlined process for people experiencing homelessness to initially access homeless services—and allows communities to prioritize scarce resources for those with the greatest and most immediate needs.

Coordinated intake and assessment: A standardized approach to assessing a person's current situation, the acuity of their needs and the services they currently receive and may require in the future, taking into account the background factors that contribute to risk and resilience, changes in acuity, and the role of friends, family, caregivers, community and environmental factors.

Services Solutions
Inreach: Contacts and case management within institutional settings to ensure positive exits into supportive and safe systems of care (foster care, jails, schools, hospitals, etc.).

Outreach: Moving outside the walls of the agency to engage people experiencing homelessness who may be disconnected and alienated not only from mainstream services and supports, but from the very services targeting homeless persons, as well.

Diversion: The provision of alternative temporary housing options, supports and interventions designed to reduce reliance on emergency shelter system.

Low barrier access: Accepting people as they are and providing a place of shelter or permanent living for those who may have no other option.

Trauma Informed Care: Treating a whole person, taking into account past trauma and the resulting coping mechanisms when attempting to understand behaviors and treat the patient.

Housing Solutions
Housing policy: The actions of government, including legislation and program delivery, which have a direct or indirect impact on housing supply and availability, housing standards and urban planning.

Eviction Prevention: Any strategy or program, usually geared at renters designed to keep individuals and families in their home and avoid homelessness.

Rapid rehousing: An approach to housing that is similar to Housing First as it has no "readiness requirement." This approach is often best suited for people experiencing episodic and transitional homelessness.

Supportive housing: A proven solution combing affordable housing with services that help people who face the most complex challenges to live with stability and autonomy.

Affordable Housing: Any type of housing, including rental/home ownership, permanent/temporary, for-profit/non-profit, that costs less than 30% of a household's pre-tax income.

Transitional/Bridge Housing: Supportive, yet temporary type of accommodation meant to bridge the gap from homelessness to permanent housing by offering structure, medically assisted addiction treatment, supervision, support, life skills, education, etc.