Central Ohio Stable Housing Network

The **Central Ohio Stable Housing Network (COSHN)** is being established to provide a community-wide, coordinated approach to keep individuals and families stably housed. The resources of COSHN will help prevent evictions and homelessness in Columbus and Franklin County. This **WORKING DRAFT** document describes COSHN's **Background, Mission, Core Strategies, Working Framework**, as well as its **Initial Investments**.

Background

The Central Ohio Stable Housing Network (COSHN) builds on decades of learning from efforts in Columbus and Franklin County, as well as, from around the country. These lessons provide coordinated approaches to accessing and targeting resources to prevent homelessness and promote housing stability.

The need for more robust and effective local homelessness prevention approaches surfaced in the mid-2000's, when Community Shelter Board (CSB) examined its investments in prevention and concluded that they could be more effective at reducing literal homelessness (the absence of any safe, temporary or permanent housing other than emergency shelter or the street). A new approach, built on community partnerships and prioritized access, was necessary to help people with more urgent or critical homelessness prevention needs. This culminated with the inclusion of a strategy to develop a coordinated prevention model in the final **Rebuilding Lives Updated Strategy** (2008).[i] Momentum on this strategy began in earnest following a 2015 evaluation conducted by Abt Associates for CSB documenting that a major driver for the dramatic rise in family homelessness occurring at the time was the lack of "*…a concerted effort on the part of the broader Columbus community, not just CSB and homeless system providers, …to reduce the number of families requesting and receiving emergency shelter*."[ii]

Subsequently, in 2016, a diverse task force, chaired by former Franklin County Commissioner Marilyn Brown, created an action plan to be more intentional about advancing prevention strategies to improve the lives of families in Columbus/Franklin County. Emerging from this work was the creation of the Prevent Family Homelessness Collaborative (PFHC). Simultaneously, the need for coordinated prevention was again lifted up in the updated community plan to prevent and end homelessness, **A Place to Call Home** (2018).[iii]

> "From the vantage point of the homeless crisis response system, targeted interventions have the greatest impact relative to preventing entry to emergency shelter or a night on the street. Housing crises are costly both for individuals and families and the broader community. Resources to prevent homelessness should focus on people at greatest risk of needing emergency shelter the soonest, including those who have greatest risk of being harmed by the experience of homelessness and/or who will be less able to exit homelessness without significant assistance. Improvements to coordinating access to targeted assistance community-wide are needed, along with further alignment of current community-based emergency assistance resources for maximum impact on reducing literal homelessness."
>
> *A Place to Call Home:* **A framework for action to address homelessness in Columbus and Franklin County, Ohio.** Columbus/Franklin County Continuum of Care, May 2018

From 2016 to 2019, PFHC leadership coordinated efforts to better align public-private resources and, in concert with CSB, supported efforts to design, pilot, and share learning on interventions to prevent family homelessness and improve housing stabilization. An important foundation of this early work was the development of a "risk typology" – that is, a way to differentiate how "at-risk" of literal homelessness a given household is based on their current housing and resources. Franklin County Department of Job and Family Services, Community Shelter Board, and PFCH coordinated work with numerous direct service partners to design and test standardized screening questions based on national best practices and aligned with the risk typology.

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This continues to be used as a basis for a shared understanding of how different "prevention" resources are used and offers policy makers, planners, and providers alike a common language for organizing and targeting resources. See **Appendix B**.

The Prevent Family Homelessness Collaborative sunset in 2019. In its place two new efforts were launched to carry forward the work – a new Housing Stabilization Coalition (HSC) focused on eviction prevention and other 'upstream' strategies, and a CSB-led Homelessness Prevention Network (HPN).[iv] The HPN formally launched in Fall 2020 following CSB's receipt of a three-year demonstration grant from Nationwide Foundation with the intention of further developing housing problem-solving and prioritized access to prevention assistance for families and pregnant women most at-risk of literal homelessness. The approach of the HPN centered on use of standardized screening, triage, and prioritization processes by a diverse set of Access Points and Service Providers, particularly in areas with high housing insecurity, so that highest risk households could be more readily identified, engaged, offered housing problem-solving assistance, and, if needed, prioritized access to additional targeted prevention assistance directly or via referral to another HPN service providers.

Simultaneously, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and the infusion of emergency rental assistance funding, the HSC continued to serve as a platform to organize and inform efforts to coordinate and ensure community access to emergency rental assistance. In 2021, the City of Columbus formed an ERA Cohort of emergency rental assistance providers and eviction prevention agencies to coordinate the implementation of the ERA initiatives. This ERA Cohort has expanded into the development of working groups focused on areas such as Eviction Court practices, landlord engagement, improving tenant support, improving ERA implementation, and ensuring equity. There was high overlap between community partners that provided support in both the HPN and the HSC and ERA Cohort.

In recent months, representatives from the City of Columbus, Franklin County, Community Shelter Board, the Affordable Housing Alliance of Central Ohio (AHACO), along with key ERA implementation partners – IMPACT Community Action and COMPASS – have convened to reflect and build on the Housing Stabilization Coalition, the Homelessness Prevention Network, and the City's ERA Cohort. Partners agreed in June 2023 to officially form the new **Central Ohio Stable Housing Network (COSHN)** to provide a community-wide "network" approach to preventing evictions and homelessness and to promote housing security for all residents.

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Mission

The **Mission** of the Central Ohio Stable Housing Network is: *"Keeping individuals and families stably housed." **We pursue this mission by working together to engage all communities in Central Ohio, prevent housing instability and homelessness, and center equity in housing stabilization.***

Working Framework

COSHN is using a **Coordinated Prevention Framework** to practice and document our shared understanding of approaches that reduce housing insecurity generally, while also preventing literal homelessness and inflow of individuals and families into the homeless crisis response system. This **Working Framework** is a direct outgrowth, and represents the further evolution, of work conducted by community partners as described above. The **Rationale**, **Core Elements** and **Core Principles** for the Working Framework are provided below.

Rationale

The **Working Framework** is a starting point for developing and broadly deploying the core elements and principles of a coordinated prevention model across a wide variety of community-based organizations and cross-sector partners e.g., healthcare, education, child welfare, criminal justice. In this framework individuals and families facing housing insecurity can more readily access housing-focused support to resolve or avoid a housing emergency. These core elements include standardized screening, response and referral tools, housing problem-solving, access to flexible financial assistance, and more targeted and intensive support for households with the greatest urgency, vulnerability and/or unique housing assistance and stabilization needs, including concerted efforts to develop and build partnerships with rental property owners and managers.

The shared understanding and definitions included here provide a basis for coordinating training, information, referral and triage resources, and flexible support for people experiencing housing insecurity in Columbus and Franklin County, including specific prioritization protocols for accessing targeted prevention resources for those with greater risk and vulnerability.

This document provides a starting point for a coordinated prevention framework that:
- Memorializes our collective understanding and purpose around reducing housing insecurity and preventing all forms of homelessness, most especially literal homelessness.
- Helps to clarify where eviction prevention and other resources fit relative to preventing literal homelessness versus other forms of homelessness and housing insecurity.
- Supports more equitable investment of prevention resources toward addressing housing insecurity and homelessness, allowing resources to be properly characterized and measured relative to their actual impact.
- Helps to align and directly connect emergency housing and prevention resources with other sectors (e.g., health, education, criminal justice).
- Provides a means to quickly connect people to housing help no matter when or where their need arises.

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Core Elements

COSHN is being formed using the following **Core Elements** for coordinated prevention identified as key elements during the earlier HPN pilot:

1. **Shared Vision, Understanding & Commitment to Prevention** related to housing insecurity and literal homelessness.

2. **Coordinated, Housing-Focused Access Points & Service Providers** across a wide variety of "upstream" community-based and cross-sector settings.

3. **Standardized Housing Insecurity Screening, Response, and Referral Tools and Protocols** including broad use of housing problem-solving, coordinated access and prioritization approaches, and flexible funding to address urgent prevention and stabilization needs.

4. **Shared Data Culture & Platform** supporting data collection, service referral and coordination, and reporting.

5. **Ongoing Backbone Entity Support** for partner recruitment, ongoing training, reporting and analysis, and ongoing system management, expansion, and improvement.

Core Principles

We recognize that to be maximally impactful, prevention assistance should adhere to be **coordinated, efficient, effective, equitable & evidence-based/evidence-informed**. Our approach to preventing housing instability and homelessness adheres to these principles in the following ways:

- **Coordinated**: Community-wide approaches to coordinate a wide variety of prevention assistance using common risk screening criteria to identify people who are housing insecure, including those who are at greatest risk for literal homelessness and in need of targeted prevention and homeless diversion assistance. Coordinated prevention approaches offer immediate, coordinated access to housing problem-solving and prevention-related resources, including prioritized access to assistance for people with more urgent prevention needs.

  - *Full spectrum approach:* Coordinated prevention approaches are intentionally designed to acknowledge and serve a diversity of housing situations and assistance needs, fluidly supporting the whole spectrum of needs from "upstream" (leaseholders) to "downstream" (non-leaseholders, those needing diversion/immediate rehousing or assistance to stabilize in-place).

- **Effective**: Prevention activities capable of helping someone reduce or eliminate their housing crisis, including stopping someone from becoming homeless. To be effective, activities are easily found, accessed, and timely. **Housing problem-solving**, **flexible financial assistance**, and **individualized housing search/stabilization supports** are key features of effective prevention approaches.

- **Efficient**: Prevention activities that seek to prevent <u>literal homelessness</u> are well targeted, delivering effective activities to people who are very likely to become literally homeless unless they receive timely, individualized help ("but for" prevention assistance), which may need to be intensive and offered by more specialized housing-focused staff.[v] In Columbus and Franklin County, such staff are trained and available through the Homeless Hotline and through the newly funded Housing Resource Specialists, described in the next section. Additional key aspects:

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- *No wrong door:* Prevention services are low barrier and accessible through every touch point in COSHN and beyond, including mainstream and charitable service contexts (food banks, etc.).

- *Targeted and timely:* Limited resources are targeted, when needed, to those with proven risk factors (e.g., history of homelessness, informal living situation, household makeup) and vulnerabilities (e.g., disabled, fleeing violence, higher housing barriers). Services are rendered in a nimble and timely fashion and, whenever possible, are provided the same day with flexible resources to meet urgent needs.

- **Equitable & Evidence-Based/Informed:** All services are rooted in evidence-based or evidence-informed practices that are formed through data-informed research and prioritization. These practices center on those most at-risk, assure services do not have needless constraints and documentation barriers, and account for racial and other inequities using housing insecurity data, such as eviction filing data, zip code of last address for shelter entries, and public benefit (e.g., TANF) data. COSHN planning, development, and implementation is peer supported and led wherever possible and efforts are continually made to increase authentic involvement of and support for people with lived experience in COSHN.

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Core Strategies & Current Investments

The core strategies of COSHN center on promoting housing well-being and equity through actions and investments that provide a coordinated, community-wide stable housing **Infrastructure** with **Capacity** and means to **Prevent** housing instability and homelessness and promote housing **Resilience**, **Connection**, and **Stability**.

Coordinated investments are being made by COSHN members to impact the growing eviction filing numbers in Columbus and Franklin County and promote housing stability for all residents. Current coordinated investments include:

Coordinated Emergency Rental and Utility Assistance

Emergency rental assistance administered by a centralized third-party, along with other flexible emergency aid, to prevent eviction and housing loss, stabilize current safe housing situations, and/or provide other stable housing options.

- ✓ **City of Columbus: Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA2) Funding**
  - Centralized rental assistance application and payment processing.
  - 25 nonprofit agencies providing ERA outreach and intake processing
- ✓ **Franklin County: ERA2 Funding**
  - Contracts with Franklin County Department of Job & Family Services (JFS) to provide emergency rental assistance under the Prevention, Retention, and Contingency program umbrella.

Coordinated Emergency Rehousing Assistance

Emergency rehousing assistance is offered when a tenant or tenants face emergency displacement due to ongoing life and safety concerns, including when a tenant experiences a city-issued emergency vacate order, an emergency utility shut off, recent fire or other disaster, or other ongoing life and/or safety concerns.

- ✓ **City of Columbus**
  - Emergency Vacate Rehousing Fund (Compass)
  - Housing Locator Specialist to Assist with Emergency Vacates
  - Additional wrap around services through Columbus Public Health Neighborhood Social Work Department
- ✓ **Community Shelter Board**
  - Partners in the Crisis Response System with expertise in emergency shelter and supportive services provision

Homelessness Prevention Network (HPN)

Building on the success of the **CSB-led HPN Pilot,** HPN provides an "urgent care" approach to helping households who are more at-risk for literal homelessness and/or are more vulnerable, including double-up households, with immediate crisis intervention, problem-solving, and navigation to stabilization resources.

- ✓ **City of Columbus**
  - Expanding the HPN to **28** provider agencies, each with city-funded (ERA 2), full-time *Housing Resource Specialists (HRS)* for 2 years to be housed at provider agencies in community-based settings to provide timely access to housing crisis intervention-focused assistance. HRS staff:

- o Will be specially trained to focus on housing crisis intervention and offer immediate housing problem-solving for the most urgent and complex situations.
  - o Will connect households to appropriate next step housing stability supports.
  - o Will collaborate with neighborhood "access point" referral partners and other HRS and ERA providers to make sure households with the greatest urgency and need are quickly connected to neighborhood HRS assistance and/or other housing resources.
- Additional Funding for Community Shelter Board as the **HPN Backbone**.

✓ **Community Shelter Board (HPN Backbone)**
- **HPN** planning, development, management, facilitation, and technical support, including technical assistance to establish agency and program-specific screening and referral protocols.
- **Housing Problem-Solving** training and certification, including train-the-trainer tracks, for HRS staff and HPN partners to increase housing competencies around housing crisis intervention, housing resources, and referral steps tailored to various audiences, including:
  - o **Housing Resource Specialists (HRS)** who receive intensive, certificate-based training.
  - o **Access Point referral partners** and community members receive introductory "**housing first aid**".
- **Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)** administration for tracking, evaluation, including training and technical assistance.
- **Flexible funding** for urgent, non-typical financial needs to stabilize housing.
- **Funding for targeted homelessness prevention,** including intensive diversion, Housing Problem-Solving, and short-term Housing-Focused Case Management:
  - o **Netcare Access:** Homeless Hotline diversion services for families and single adults.
  - o **Gladden Community House (GCH):** intensive diversion, problem-solving, and targeted prevention programs for families.
  - o **Home for Families (HFF):** targeted homelessness prevention for expectant mothers.
  - o **Huckleberry House:** outreach and targeted homelessness prevention for youth under 25.
  - o **Volunteers of America Ohio & Indiana:** VA-funded targeted homelessness prevention for Veterans.

Housing-Focused Case Management (HFCM)

Specialized, housing-focused case management supports for specific housing unstable populations within structured programming to provide more specialized housing stabilization support for households who remain at high risk.

✓ **City of Columbus**
- **Success Bridge**: funding for HFF to continue HFCM services through **Success Bridge**, an evidence-based approach to stabilize housing insecure Columbus State Community College students.
- **Freedom A La Carte:** funding to support housing program connecting human trafficking survivors connected with organization programming with resources to obtain and maintain stable housing.
- **CelebrateOne:** funding to support ongoing housing initiatives, Housing Pregnant Women and Healthy Beginnings at Home.
  - o **Housing Pregnant Women** initiative is the roll-out of a standardized care pathway to assist pregnant women who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, to obtain safe stable

housing through earlier intervention that prevents homelessness.

- ○ ***Healthy Beginnings at Home (HBAH)*** is a research project to test the impact of providing rental assistance with housing stabilization services to unstably housed pregnant individuals at risk of infant mortality. HBAH addresses inequities in affordable housing access that contribute to high rates of homelessness, housing instability and poor health outcomes for families of color.

✓ **Franklin County**

- ▪ ***Resiliency Bridge***: funding for HFF to continue HFCM services through ***Resiliency Bridge***, an evidence-based approach to help low-wage earners gain entry to high-demand, downturn-resistant sectors by aligning multiple human services systems and maximizing the impact of short-term housing assistance for long-term financial autonomy.

Community Information and Referral Resources

To support easy and equitable access to community rental assistance and housing crisis response resources.

✓ **Affordable Housing Alliance of Central Ohio (AHACO)**

- ▪ ***Rentfull614*** (*https://www.rentful614.com/*) website and resource portal serving as a Frankin County's one-stop resource for eviction prevention information and referrals.

Cross-Sector Partnerships

Additional **cross-sector partnerships** with healthcare, education, justice, and child welfare partners to identify, support, and stabilize people in housing upon transition from an institutional setting or when they come into contact with different community services and institutions.

- ▪ **Franklin County Children Services**
  - ▪ ***Gladden Community House:*** funding for targeted prevention services for families coming into contact with FCCS for housing and other material needs.
- ▪ **Columbus City Schools** (current HPN access point partner)
- ▪ **Franklin County Municipal Court Self-Help Resource Center** (current HPN access point partner)
- ▪ Additional partnerships are planned or under-development.

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Appendix A: Key Building Block Concepts

The following concepts are working definitions based on established frameworks for prevention, particularly those arising from the public health sector, that are useful for a shared language, understanding, and action to address all forms of housing insecurity.

Homelessness Prevention

Homelessness prevention refers to policies, practices, and interventions that reduce the likelihood that someone will experience homelessness. It also means providing those who have been homeless with the necessary resources and support to stabilize their housing, enhance integration and social inclusion, and ultimately reduce the risk of the recurrence of homelessness.

Three general types of Homelessness Prevention (HP):

- **Primary**: Structural-level initiatives that apply to everyone, to reduce the risk of homelessness and build protective factors.

- **Secondary**: Intervention strategies aimed at those who are at imminent risk of homelessness (i.e., received an eviction notice) as well as those who have recently become homeless, with the aim of avoiding homelessness or moving out of homelessness as quickly as possible.

    - **Targeted Homelessness Prevention and Diversion** are forms of secondary homelessness prevention that targets assistance to households at greatest risk for literal homelessness within a defined period (e.g., 14 days or less) and who lack other safe housing options and resources to avoid literal homelessness "but for" timely and individualized prevention assistance.
    - Targeted HP relies on standardized risk and vulnerability screening to identify people most at-risk for literal homelessness. Homelessness Prevention activities funded under Federal **Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG)** and **Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Programs** are targeted based on federal eligibility requirements**.**

- **Tertiary**: Prevention initiatives that support individuals and families who have previously experienced homelessness to ensure that it doesn't happen again.[vi]
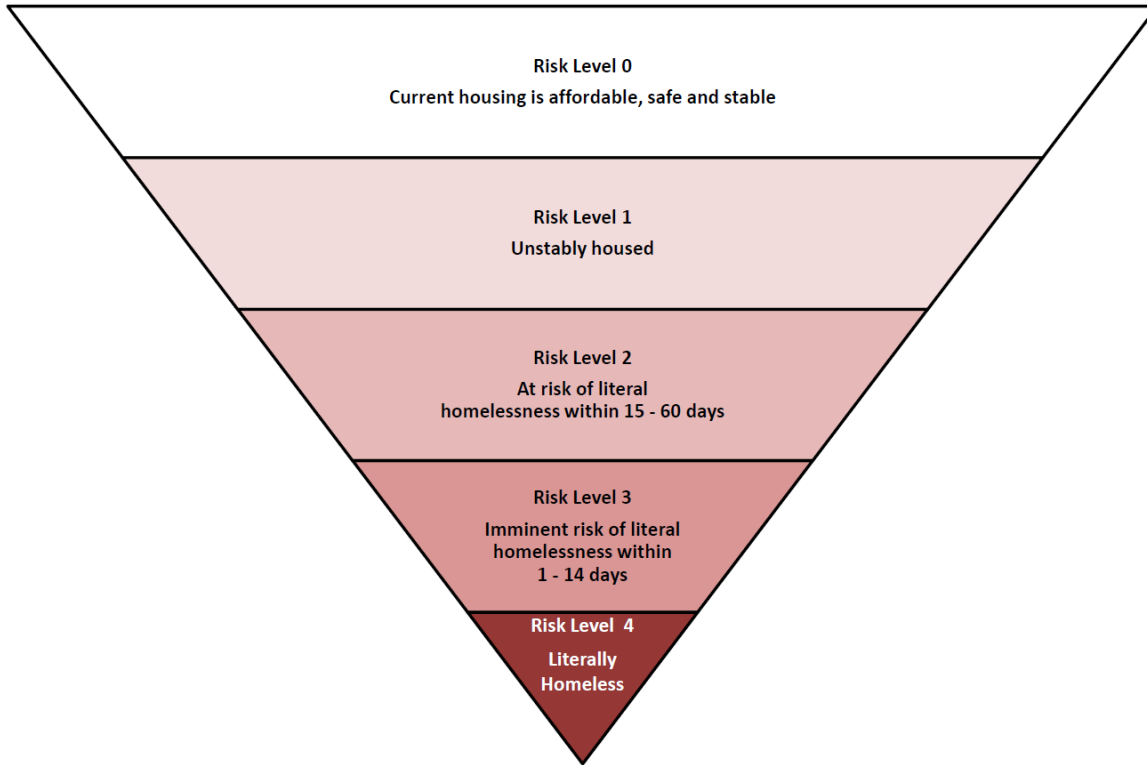
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Appendix B: Housing Insecurity Risk Levels

Housing Insecurity

"Housing insecurity is a measure of how close a person or family is to being homeless, determined by factors such as being behind on mortgage or rent, making multiple moves, living in a shelter, and experiencing homelessness."[vii] The **Housing Insecurity Scale** below is based in part on federal at-risk definitions for HUD ESG and VA SSVF that identify people who are most at–risk based on their current circumstances and other empirically-based vulnerabilities, such as prior experiences of homelessness.

	Risk Level	Living Situation	Housing Options & Resources
0	**Stably Housed**	• Current housing is safe; AND • Current housing is stable for the foreseeable future (e.g., sufficient income to pay rent and utilities, able to stay with host family/friend indefinitely)	<u>Has</u> housing options, financial resources, and/or support networks to maintain or obtain a safe place to stay for *foreseeable* future.
1	**Unstably Housed**	• Current housing is safe; AND • No material risk of imminent risk of literal homelessness (i.e., not Risk Level 2-4); AND • Is currently experiencing general housing insecurity due to housing cost burden, housing conditions, frequent unplanned moves, and/or other characteristics and barriers indicative of higher risk for future literal homelessness. May be at-risk of housing loss in 2-6 months.	<u>Has</u> housing options, financial resources, and/or support networks to maintain or obtain a safe place to stay for *foreseeable* future.
2	**At-Risk of Literal Homelessness (within 15-60 Days)**	• Current housing is safe; AND • Must leave current housing within <u>15-90 days</u> (e.g., due to court-ordered eviction, landlord-issued eviction, foreclosure, safety or health risk, host family/friend limitation, etc.); OR • Must leave an institution (e.g., hospital, jail, treatment facility) within <u>15-60 days</u>;	<u>Does not have other</u> housing options, financial resources, and/or support networks to maintain or obtain a safe place to stay *after* the <u>next 15-60 days.</u>
3	**Imminent Risk of Literal Homelessness (within 1-14 Days)**	• Current housing is safe; AND • Must leave current housing within <u>14 days</u> (e.g., due to court-ordered eviction, foreclosure, imminent safety or health risk, host family/friend request to leave, family conflict, etc.); OR • Must leave an institution (e.g., hospital, jail, treatment facility) within <u>14 days</u>;	<u>Does not have</u> other housing options, financial resources, and/or support networks to maintain or obtain a safe place to stay after the <u>next 14 days</u>.
4	**Literally Homeless Tonight**	• Is currently literally homeless and continues to have no other safe housing option tonight outside of available emergency shelter, Safe Haven, or transitional housing options; OR • Must leave current housing <u>today</u> (e.g., due to court-ordered eviction, foreclosure, immediate safety or health risk, host family/friend request to leave, etc.)<u>;</u> OR • Must leave an institution (e.g., hospital, jail, treatment facility) <u>today</u>.	<u>Does not have</u> other housing options, financial resources, and/or support networks to maintain or obtain a safe place to stay <u>tonight</u>

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Risk Level 0
Current housing is affordable, safe and stable

Risk Level 1
Unstably housed

Risk Level 2
At risk of literal
homelessness within 15 - 60 days

Risk Level 3
Imminent risk of literal
homelessness within
1 - 14 days

Risk Level 4
Literally
Homeless

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Appendix C: Endnotes

[i] https://66381bb28b9f956a91e2-e08000a6fb874088c6b1d3b8bebbb337.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/files-Rebuilding-Lives-New-Strategies-for-a-New-Era-Final-Report-April-2008.pdf

[ii] https://66381bb28b9f956a91e2-e08000a6fb874088c6b1d3b8bebbb337.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/files-StudyofhomelessnessFinalReport73115.pdf

[iii] https://www.csb.org/how-we-do-it/community-plan

[iv] https://www.csb.org/how-we-do-it/homelessness-prevention-network

[v] Martha Burt, et al (2005): Strategies for Preventing Homelessness. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research.

[vi] Stephen Gaetz & Erin Dej. (2017). A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

[vii] Boston Medical Center, Housing Security | Boston Medical Center (bmc.org) (accessed 06.09.2023)