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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 8, 2024

**CSB Community Summit “I AM...” Announces New Assessment Results
Highlighting Urgent Homelessness Challenges in Central Ohio**

Columbus, Franklin County – Community Shelter Board (CSB) today released the findings of an assessment of Central Ohio’s Homeless Response System, which has been underway since November 2022. Led by Focus Strategies, a national consulting firm, and RAMA Consulting Group, the assessment focused on the system's readiness, responsiveness, and available resources. The findings were shared during the summit titled "I AM...Making Space, Creating Solutions, Disrupting Systems," held on October 8, 2024.

The summit highlighted the year-and-a-half work of the steering committee and underscored the need for continued engagement from community leaders, business partners, neighborhoods, community members, and nonprofit organizations.

The assessment uncovered significant findings, revealing that the destabilization of housing in Central Ohio has far outpaced the national average. The region’s median gross rent has increased by 34% from 2017 to the present, compared to only 29% nationally. Similarly, rental availability in Central Ohio has decreased by 40% since 2017, more than double the national average. Without intervention, homelessness is predicted to increase by as much as 68% in the next four years.

“Like many growing U.S. cities, Columbus is experiencing a significant increase in people experiencing homelessness. However, if we act now to increase supports for people and the supply of affordable housing, we can avoid the crisis so many cities now find themselves in,” said Michael Wilkos, Chair of the Columbus and Franklin County Continuum of Care.

For more information on the assessment’s findings, visit <https://www.csb.org/how-we-do-it/community-assessment>.

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About Community Shelter Board

Community Shelter Board leads a coordinated community effort to ensure that everyone has a place to call home in Columbus and Franklin County, Ohio. As the system leader for the prevention and response to homelessness in Central Ohio, CSB collaborates with service provider organizations in Franklin County to create a responsive network that ensures effective and ready use of community resources for people experiencing homelessness. Over the past 10 years, CSB's system of care has housed more than 35,000 men, women, and children facing homelessness.

Community Shelter Board is funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the City of Columbus, Franklin County Board of Commissioners, the State of Ohio, United Way of Central Ohio, Nationwide Foundation, American Electric Power Foundation, The Columbus Foundation, and many other public and private investors. Visit us at www.csb.org.

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F O C U S
strategies

COLUMBUS AND FRANKLIN COUNTY

COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT FINAL REPORT

Prepared for Community Shelter Board by Focus Strategies

October 2024



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The homelessness response system in Columbus and Franklin County, led by Community Shelter Board (CSB), has seen significant success over the years. Notable achievements include:

- CSB has been a national leader in collecting and reporting data, and CSB has been looked to as a model for using performance management and data-driven decisionmaking in homelessness response.
- CSB's design as a centralized funding structure for the region's homelessness response system was innovative when first implemented and is still seen as an advantageous model for ensuring a coordinated and efficient allocation of resources.
- The Columbus and Franklin County community has had sustained success in reducing homelessness – especially unsheltered homelessness – among families and pregnant people.

Despite the system's strong history and foundation, homelessness has increased in recent years¹ because the community context has changed. The region is experiencing an affordable housing crisis that is more acute than national trends:



Median gross rent has increased by 34% from \$887 in 2017 to \$1,186 in 2022. Over the same period, the national median gross rent increased less steeply, by 29%.²



Rental vacancy rates fell by 40% from 6.3% in 2017 to 3.8% in 2022. Over the same period, national vacancy rates fell less severely, by 19%.³



Only 26 housing units are available per 100 extremely low-income households compared with 34 housing units nationally.⁴

¹ From 2013 to 2024, the number of people counted in the annual Point-in-Time increased from 1,472 individuals to 2,380, a 62% increase. Unsheltered homelessness has more than doubled, from 244 individuals in 2013 to 514 individuals in 2024. Point-in-Time estimates are published by CSB and can be accessed at <https://www.csb.org/how-we-do-it/point-in-time-count>

² U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2017 and ACS 2022 5-year estimates, B25064: Median Gross Rent (Dollars), accessed March 6, 2024, www.data.census.gov; U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2017 and ACS 2022 5-year estimates, B25031: Median Gross Rent by Bedrooms, accessed February 26, 2024, www.data.census.gov.

³ U.S. Census Bureau, "Housing Vacancies and Homeownership: Annual Statistics: 2022, Table 6," accessed February 21, 2024, <https://www.census.gov/housing/hvs/data/prevann.html>; U.S. Census Bureau, "Housing Vacancies and Homeownership: Annual Statistics: 2022, Table 3," accessed February 26, 2024, <https://www.census.gov/housing/hvs/data/prevann.html>.

⁴ National Low Income Housing Coalition, "The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes," March 2024, <https://nlihc.org/gap>.



Amid these changes, CSB on behalf of key funders in the region, commissioned Focus Strategies to conduct a Comprehensive Community Assessment (“Assessment”) to describe the current state of the homelessness response system and recommend changes to move the community toward its desired future state. This desired future state includes being a community that:

- Grows in a way that works for all;
- Maximizes livability and quality life for all; and,
- Has an equitable, stable, and dynamic homelessness response system to respond to the community’s current and anticipated needs.

Findings from the Assessment indicate the homelessness response system must be scaled to align with the changing housing market and population dynamics.

In addition to the community and economic shifts that necessitate scaling the homelessness response system to match current and forecasted needs, several other challenges need to be addressed. Currently, Black households are overrepresented in the homelessness response system. Creating the equitable and livable community desired requires addressing these disparities. In addition, although the system is right-sized⁵ for families, it is not scaled for adults, the largest population of people experiencing homelessness. Finally, the system, particularly shelters rely on one-time and expiring funding, impacting the system’s and provider’s sense of stability and ability to plan, while at the same time potentially affecting the community’s ability to effectively address homelessness in the coming years.

Recommendations are designed to scale the homelessness response system to meet the size of the problem of homelessness given projected market conditions. These recommendations include taking each intervention type to scale and optimizing the homelessness response system. CSB and providers are making several changes to increase the capacity of the

homelessness response system and update program models to better meet community needs, which the homelessness response system can build on. Recommendations are tailored to identified challenges, build on system strengths, and make progress toward the desired future state, including strategies to:

⁵ "Right-sized" means that there are enough safe and dignified shelter and housing opportunities, as indicated by no one sleeping outside or in vehicles.





Move upstream by diverting more people from experiencing homelessness



Optimize the system by improving performance within critical interventions and expanding subsidies available



Scale housing by adding units of rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing



Enhance equity, engagement, and learning throughout the system

The region has a history of conducting extensive planning and research, but it has not always achieved the alignment required to follow through on needed efforts. The homelessness response system is likely to continue to struggle to meet current demand and continue to fall short on the goal of reducing homelessness, if action is not taken.

Given the significance of housing market changes in recent years, and anticipated continued regional growth, a bias toward action may hedge against the risk of declines in existing system capacity and support changes needed to more effectively address homelessness. CSB, funders, and community leaders will be best positioned to make progress toward becoming a community that is livable, equitable, and promotes well-being for all, by recommitting to the current funding structure, identifying stable funds to replace the one-time funding supporting system operations, and swiftly creating opportunities to implement the recommendations in this Assessment.

Learn more about the assessment

