

# CVHEART

## Coachella Valley Homeless Engagement & Action Response Team



## A Collaborative and Regional Approach to Homelessness in Coachella Valley

Prepared by Greg Rodriguez  
January 2020

## Executive Summary

*Every person who lives in Coachella Valley has a right to safe, comfortable and adequate housing.*

This report sets forth a bold vision for a regional collaborative approach to addressing homelessness in the Coachella Valley. The creation of the Coachella Valley Homelessness Engagement & and Action Response Team (CVHEART) collaborative aims to more efficiently and effectively house and provide resources to our homeless residents. This collaborative stems from the recommended action steps submitted by Barbara Poppe in her report to the Desert Healthcare District entitled “The Path Forward.” The Coachella Valley Association of Government’s (CVAG) Homelessness Committee took up the charge to define what the purpose, scope and structure of CVHEART would be.

This initial report highlights the complex issue of homelessness in the Valley and how it touches numerous governmental agencies and nonprofit organizations. It attempts to identify areas where we excel, and others where we need to break down silos and implement better practices for working together. It provides not only a landscape of current homeless activities and resources, but it also goes into great detail on where we need to go and how we need to think about addressing homelessness going forward.

This report is not meant to be the final say on this matter. In fact, just as homelessness is ever changing, so will the ways in which we address it. One of the main themes throughout this report is the need for flexibility and the means and willingness to change course when necessary in order to achieve greater outcomes. This can only work by working together.

Additionally, CVHEART can serve as a model for other jurisdictions on how a regional collaborative on homelessness can be effective when everyone is at the table. The terms “regional”, “collaborative” and “leverage” will be used quite frequently to emphasize the importance of these terms in actually achieving the desired results of collectively ending the homeless epidemic we face.

Coachella Valley elected officials recognized that homelessness needed to be addressed over a decade ago. Since then, we have begun to adopt a regional approach through the CVAG Homelessness Committee. This has been demonstrated by changes in programming to address current needs, speaking with one voice as a governmental body, and backing up the commitment with financial resources from cities, the County of Riverside, the Tribes and the Desert Healthcare District. The creation of CVHEART is meant to elevate CVAG’s Homelessness Committee’s passion, dedication and work to the next level and to achieve the mission of “Every resident who lives in the Coachella Valley has a right to safe, comfortable and adequate housing.”

## Introduction

Every resident who lives in the Coachella Valley has a right to safe, comfortable and adequate housing. This report is a bold step to achieve that mission statement. It is imperative that through all our actions we keep that mission in our minds. The establishment of the Coachella Valley Homelessness Engagement & Action Response Team (CVHEART) as a regional collaborative to address homelessness aims to fulfill that mission.

Homelessness on the streets, in cars, in our shelters and other precarious situations seems to be getting worse every day. This is not just a Coachella Valley problem; this is an issue facing the entire country, especially on the west coast. It is essential that we create systems change to decrease the silos and work collaboratively to effectively and efficiently provide services and resources to un-housed residents. It can be extremely frustrating to elected officials, homeless service providers, government agencies and residents alike that all the great work we are doing doesn't seem to be helping.

It is important to note that the Coachella Valley is a leader in Riverside County and the State of California for our level of attention to the issue of homelessness and the provision of services to our homeless populations. We have a strong network of service providers such as Martha's Village and Kitchen, Coachella Valley Rescue Mission (CVRM), Shelter From the Storm, Operation Safe House, Path of Life Ministries, Jewish Family Services, and Well in the Desert working 24/7 providing prevention services, shelter services, workforce training, substance use assistance and behavioral health services just to name a few. In addition to these larger organizations, the Valley is blessed to have a number of faith based and community based organizations providing food and essentials to our homeless residents. The County of Riverside and many of our cities in the Valley also provide substantial services and resources.

It is clear that we have an abundance of organizations and agencies working on ending homelessness, but we can do much better. CVHEART is the tool to bring all of these efforts together into a system-wide approach that focuses on who does what well, who may be duplicating others efforts, what are capacity issues, how we leverage and expend resources more effectively, and most importantly how do we work collaboratively in the Coachella Valley region to fulfill the mission that every resident who lives in the Coachella Valley has a right to safe, comfortable and adequate housing.

This report will give a brief overview on the history of our regional approach and the steps taken to get us to the formation of CVHEART. We will look at the methodology of this report, set the landscape of the complexity of this issue, and more importantly provide a comprehensive look at solutions and evidenced based best practices to move forward. The conclusion of the report will give direction on

next steps to formalize and implement the ideals, goals and visions of CVHEART. The easy part is looking at what we are doing now and knowing what we need to do collaboratively together. It is the implementation and sustainability of the regional approach that will be difficult, but if any region is ready for the task, it is the Coachella Valley.

## Our Roadmap to a Regional Collaborative

Before going in depth on the elements of the Coachella Valley Homelessness Engagement & Action response Team (CVHEART), it is important to know how we got here. As mentioned, the Coachella Valley has already started addressing homelessness through regional coordination, whether that has been through service providers working together or government agencies working side by side. While rudimentary at first, our regional approach has evolved over the years and the realization of greater coordination and collaboration has been realized.

In 2006, the Coachella Valley Association of Governments (CVAG) established the CVAG Homeless Committee primarily to address the need for a homeless shelter on the west side of the Valley. At that time, Martha's and CVRM were the only shelter services in the Valley, both of which were on the east end of the Valley. The CVAG Homelessness Committee was comprised of one elected representative from each of the nine CVAG member cities, a representative from Riverside County, and ex-officio members representing our major service providers and agencies. In 2018, a representative from the Desert Healthcare District was added. It is important to note here that the City of Blythe also has a representative. While this report and collaborative focus on Coachella Valley, Blythe is still part of our sphere of influence and we will address their homelessness needs as well.

The early stages of the Committee's work focused on the establishment of Roy's Desert Resource Center. At the time, this was seen as a visionary facility that would not only be a shelter for sleeping, but would also provide complete navigation and wrap-around services. County Supervisor Roy Wilson and the CVAG Homeless Committee took the lead on implementing on this effort. The charge was to have the County and the nine cities in the Coachella Valley contribute financially to the ongoing operations of Roy's. The facility opened in 2009 with all the best of intentions to address homelessness in the West Valley.

While the initial opening and operations were heralded as a success, the reality about the ability of cities to contribute set in soon after, especially since this was at the height of the recession and elimination of Redevelopment Agency funds from the State. Additionally, the facility's somewhat remote location north of I-10 was extremely problematic in terms of accessibility and the sustainability of the wrap around services just didn't come to fruition. Eventually, Roy's became just a place to

sleep at night. Vans would bring homeless individuals up to Roy's in the evening and then take them back to the streets and parks in the morning.

In 2017, Jewish Family Services of San Diego, the contracted operator of Roy's, decided to not seek a renewal of the contract. CVAG's Homeless Committee was tasked with identifying next steps. Since only two to three cities and the County were contributing to the operations, and only sleeping services were provided, the committee decided to take a new direction in addressing homelessness by moving away from a shelter focused model to the Housing First approach. The decision was made to close Roy's as a shelter. Faced with immediate needs on how to assist those that were utilizing Roy's, the County and local service providers implemented a rapid response initiative and were quite successful in housing a good majority of the clients. This activity will be addressed later in the report as well.

The CVAG Homelessness Committee established the 'Western Coachella Valley Navigation Program' and contracted with Path of Life Ministries to provide intake offices, crisis stabilization units, preventative services and linkages to other homelessness services and housing programs. It quickly became clear that a broader regional approach was necessary. The scope of the program expanded to encompass the entire Valley and become known as CV Housing First. While there were some initial communication and capacity issues, as with any startup program, CV Housing First has been proven to be an effective model for addressing homelessness by connecting people with housing solutions they can sustain over time.

In addition to agreeing to shift toward a housing first model, cities began committing resources to sustain the program. Initially, just some of the cities contributed. Then, in 2017, the Desert Healthcare District (DHCD) stepped up to incentivize participation by offering a \$100,000 match for each city that contributed. As of this writing, eight of the nine cities contribute \$100,000, resulting in an \$800,000 match from DHCD. Additional program funding comes from Riverside County and the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians.

In 2018, The Desert Healthcare District furthered its commitment to addressing homelessness on a regional level by commissioning Barbara Poppe for a needs/gap analysis of homelessness in the Coachella Valley. Barbara did an extensive dive into the issue with numerous stakeholder interviews, working groups, research, data collection and assessment of best practices. The report entitled, *The Path Forward*, was submitted to the Desert Healthcare District in late 2018 and to the CVAG Homeless Committee in early 2019.

*The Path Forward* report is extremely comprehensive and divided recommendations into four pillars. The first pillar, agreed to by all the participants, focus groups and the core team was the establishment of a collaborative for the Coachella Valley. The CVAG Homelessness Committee and the DHCD agreed with the recommendation and decided to move forward with that suggestion. The report can be viewed on the Desert Healthcare District's website at

<https://www.dhcd.org/media/491/B%20Poppe%20Presentation%20to%20DHCD%20Board.pdf>.

Once the general direction was chosen, the key questions became: What would a collaborative look like? What would it do? And who would oversee it? Riverside County Supervisor V. Manuel Perez offered dedicated support to map out answers to these questions in collaboration with CVAG and the Homelessness Committee, which is the purpose of this report.

## Methodology

In addition to CVAG’s history of homelessness programing, funding and attention, as well as the Desert Healthcare District ‘s contributions, as the author of this report, I have spent two and a half years deeply immersed in homeless services and issues specific to Coachella Valley, as well as the County of Riverside and the State of California. I am an active participant in Riverside County’s Continuum of Care, in addition to conferences, research, special initiatives and participation in other collective impact/collaborative organizations that have significantly contributed to the formation of this report and the Coachella Valley Homelessness Engagement & Action Response Team (CVHEART).

The following is a comprehensive, but not all-inclusive, list of the agencies, organizations and providers that have played a role in the formation of CVHEART and this report:

### **Government Public Service Agencies**

Governor Newsom’s Homeless Task Force	Riverside County Executive Office
Coachella Valley Association of Governments	Continuum of Care (COC)
COC Board of Governance	COC Planning Committee
COC Housing and Sustainability Committee	Encampment Protocol Committee
Community Action Partnership (CAP)	Housing Authority of Riverside
Department of Public and Social Services	Riverside County Office on Aging
Riverside County Animal Services	Riverside County Parks
Riverside Emergency Management Dept.	Riverside Flood Control
Code Enforcement	Workforce Development
City of Blythe	City of Cathedral City
City of Coachella	City of Desert Hot Springs
City of Indian Wells	City of Indio
City of La Quinta	City of Palm Desert
City of Palm Springs	City of Rancho Mirage
Riverside County Housing Review Committee	

### **Law Enforcement**

Riverside County Sheriff	Riverside County Probation
Cathedral City Police Dept.	Desert Hot Springs Police Dept.

Indio Police Dept.

Palm Springs Police Dept.

**Service Providers**

ABC Recovery Center  
Catholic Charities  
Desert ARC  
Family Services of the Desert  
Galilee Center  
Jewish Family Services San Diego  
LGBT Community Center of the Desert  
Martha's Village and Kitchen  
Mission Outreach Project  
Path of Life  
Safe House of the Desert/Harrison House  
Shelter From the Storm  
Street Life Project  
The Narrow Door  
The Well in the Desert

Coachella Valley Rescue Mission  
Desert AIDS Project  
DHS Family Resource Center  
FIND Food Bank  
Hidden Harvest  
Jewish Family Services-Desert  
Mama's House  
Michael's House  
Olive Crest  
Riverside Latino Commission  
Salvation Army  
Soroptimist House of Hope  
Transitional Age Youth Center  
Ranch Recovery Centers  
Transgender Community Coalition

**Education**

Palm Springs Unified School District  
Coachella Valley Unified School District  
Desert Sands Unified School District  
PS Unified School District

College of the Desert  
One Future Coachella Valley  
CSUSB

**Healthcare**

Borrego Health  
Coachella Valley Volunteers in Medicine  
Desert Healthcare District and Foundation  
Inland Empire Health Plan (IEHP)  
Riverside University Health System (RUHS)  
RUHS Population Health  
RUHS Community Health Centers

Clinicas de Salud del Pueblo  
Desert AIDS Project  
Flying Doctors  
RI International Urgent Care  
RUHS Behavioral Health  
RUHS Public Health  
UCR School of Medicine and clinics

**Housing**

Coachella Valley Housing Coalition  
Riverside County Housing Authority  
Renaissance National CORE

Habitat for Humanity  
Lift to Rise  
Palm Communities

**Foundations and Advocacy Groups**

Regional Access Project Foundation  
California Partners

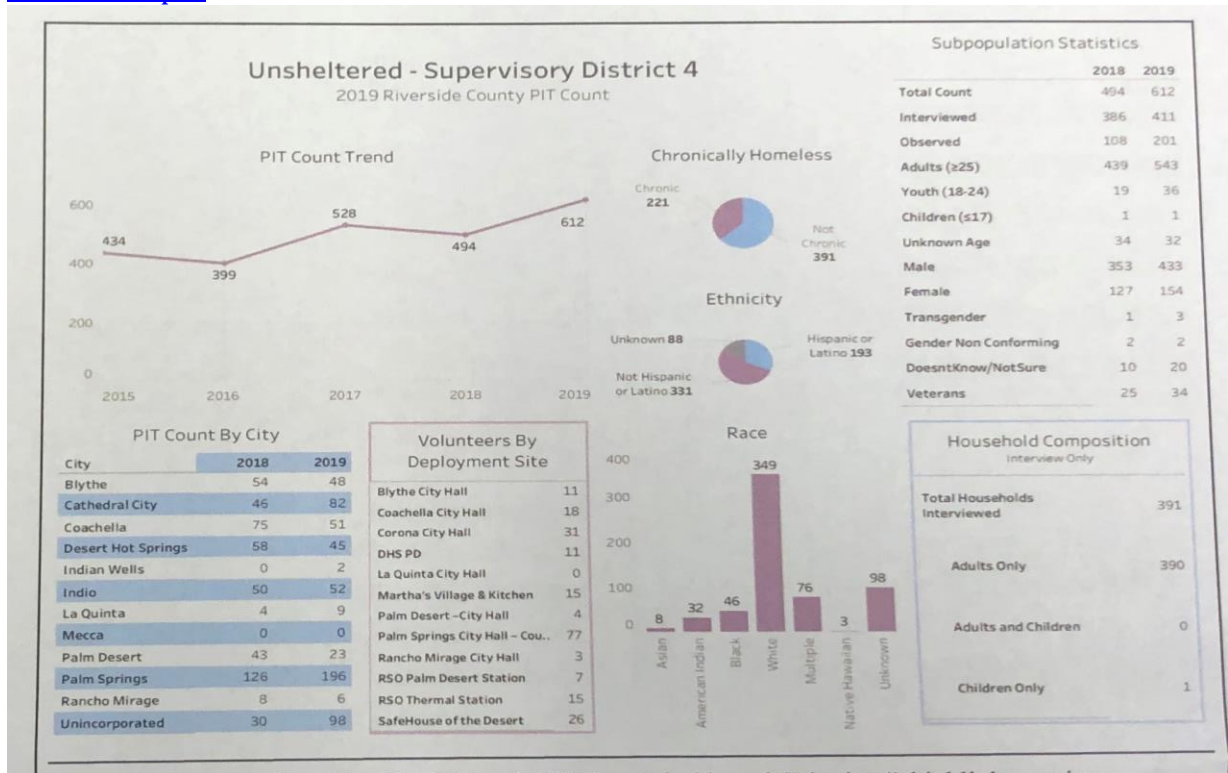
Leadership Council

# The Coachella Valley Landscape

As already noted, homelessness is rapidly reaching crisis levels. The purpose of this section is not to get in the weeds on the actual numbers of homelessness in the Coachella Valley, but to educate and emphasize how extensive the issue is and how many different agencies, organizations and groups the issue affects.

Annually, there is the Point in Time (PIT) count mandated by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). It is important to realize this is simply a count of a certain time and everyone knows it is not truly an actual count of the real numbers of homelessness individuals in any community. It should also be noted that as methodologies change in counting-more volunteers and improvements in technology-numbers would understandably increase.

Below is a snapshot of the 2019 PIT count for the Coachella Valley/4<sup>th</sup> Supervisorial District. A deeper dive into the count can be found at the Riverside County DPSS website: <http://dpss.co.riverside.ca.us/files/pit/2019-homeless-point-in-time-count-report.pdf> “The Path Forward” report by Barbara Poppe and the Desert Healthcare District also provides a good analysis of the Coachella Valley numbers: <https://www.dhcd.org/media/491/B%20Poppe%20Presentation%20to%20DHCD%20Board.pdf>





So, we've got a problem. Thankfully, we also have a lot of people dedicated to working on solutions. The following illustrations demonstrate just three of the layers in our regional homelessness response system to provide an example of the weight and scope of what's involved, even at a somewhat superficial level. You could drill down even further, by mapping similar graphs within each service organization or agency.

1: Organizations, Agencies and Community Groups that Touch the Homeless Issue in Coachella Valley.



## 2: The Reach of Agencies Solely Within Just One Organization (Riverside County).



### 3: Network of Service Providers Working In Coachella Valley.



Choreographing this system and effectively leveraging each partner's strengths to work toward a common goal is a complex and enormous undertaking. It's like a major airport with hundreds of flights waiting to take off and land every day. CVHEART will be like air traffic control, making sure the system runs seamlessly and stays on track, with flexibility needed to redirect and change course in response to unexpected or emerging conditions. Homelessness is an ever-changing, fluid and complex issue. The CV HEART collaborative will lead alignment of the activities, programs, and resource development to achieve region-wide solutions to address homelessness. With the number of lives on the line and scale of resources involved, this is one major step forward that we cannot afford to ignore.

# CVHEART

## Coachella Valley Homelessness Engagement & Action Response Team

By now there should be a good understanding of where we have been, what our current landscape is, and the importance of moving forward with a regional collaborative approach to addressing homelessness in the Coachella Valley. This section will be comprehensive, focusing on general concepts as well as concrete specific programs, initiatives and actions for regional and collaborative solutions.

So why the acronym CVHEART? First of all, it wouldn't be homelessness or government without an acronym. Both realms are full of them. Seriously though, the choice of this acronym spells out the multi-faceted aspects of addressing homelessness. It is about homeless, engagement, actions, responses and a collaborative team. It also serves as a way to stay focused on each section and how they all tie together. Finally, it's catchy, memorable, and will lend itself well to outreach and public education.

## C

### Collaboration

Collaboration, collective impact, breaking down silos, or it takes a village, are not merely buzz words. These terms have been used for years to address complex problems and systems change. It is more than evident that the complex issue of homelessness will never be effectively addressed without collaboration. The Coachella Valley's homelessness situation, or any region for that matter, cannot be addressed by one entity alone. Neither governmental bodies nor nonprofits can effectively tackle this issue by themselves. They do, however, need to work well together, share information, and avoid duplicating efforts in order to be effective. This level of collaboration doesn't just happen on its own.

CVAG's Homeless Committee realized the need for a collaborative approach over a decade ago. While currently a collaborative of the nine Coachella Valley cities, Riverside County and the Desert Healthcare District, the committee knows we must rise to the next level. The evolution of CVHEART is that next level.

We have excellent organizations and agencies that are addressing homelessness in the valley, but we also have the potential to do much more working together. The collaborative can help to identify what agencies and programs do what best and help to support those efforts further. At the same time, the collaborative can identify gaps that can be filled by capacity building or other service providers.

CVHEART must also work to expand the sphere of collaboration outside of just the current governmental agencies and a few non-profit service providers. We must further engage the business community, law enforcement, tribal governments, the faith community, neighborhood organizations, the education system, health systems, financial institutions and private individuals to join in the effort to address our homeless population. As noted previously, this issue touches a wide array of players and those players must be at the table to make an effective impact.

#### **CVHEART Roles and Responsibilities:**

- Create a shared agenda and clear measurable goals.
- Identifying, maintaining and elevating best practices across the region.
- Identifying and securing funding resources for both programs and capacity building from public and private funding sources.
- Engaging and obtaining commitments for additional collaborative partners.
- Identifying and advocating for homelessness and housing policies at the city, county, state and federal levels.
- Provide training and technical assistance to service providers.
- Utilize data to track performance and offer assistance on course corrections as needed.
- Create public awareness of the collaborative and provider's work in addressing homelessness in the Coachella Valley.

## **Commitment**

The success of CVHEART will rely on the continued commitment of our current players: Riverside County, the nine cities in the Coachella Valley, the Desert Healthcare District, the tribes and our non-profit partners. Additionally, as we engage more collaborative partners, we must demonstrate the value of committing to this cause. Commitment is not just about buy-in, but actually committing to best practices, seeking innovative and collaborative solutions to homelessness, and the ongoing and increased commitment of financial resources critical to addressing this issue.

CVHEART can also advocate for increased policy and resource commitments from the state and federal governments. Homelessness in the Coachella Valley is not something we can address without the commitment of those entities. While the regional collaborative approach will achieve success, drastically reducing homelessness in all parts of the country are going to require policy and resource commitments from all levels of government.

# V

## **Visionary**

The collaborative must play a visionary role. Working together, we must look at short, medium and long-term goals and solutions. The homelessness issue is an ever-changing one and what may be working today may not be applicable one year or five years down the road. Additionally, as funding streams change and other government mandates are put in place, CVHEART must have the foresight and flexibility to adapt to those mandates and changes.

## **Viability**

As the collaborative, CVHEART should work to ensure viability of current projects and initiatives. Through data driven analysis, technical assistance, monitoring and reporting, the collaborative can determine successful outcomes and potential missteps and elevate the successes and course correct the deficiencies.

Viability also means sustainability. This is not only the sustainability of the collaborative itself, but more importantly the sustainability of initiatives, programs, providers and capital projects. While we are currently seeing a greater financial commitment by the State and more flexibility in the use of those funds, we can't be guaranteed that this will continue. As we obtain and allocate resources through CVHEART, decisions must not only be made on the efficacy of the program currently, but also what is the sustainability plan to prevent any loss or gaps in service to our homeless population.

# H

## **Housing**

The only way we will effectively and significantly reduce homelessness is to increase the supply of housing for all income levels. Our region, like many others, is critically lacking a decent supply of affordable and workforce housing. Because of that, over half of households in the Coachella Valley are rent burdened. 79 percent of households that earn less than \$50,000 per year are rent burdened. A household is considered "rent burdened" if rent comprises more than 30 percent of the household's total income.

CVHEART must be a major player in the efforts underway to increase the supply of affordable and workforce housing. We must support and help elevate initiatives, like the Connect Capital Program, a partnership between Lift to Rise and the Economic Development Agency of Riverside County, to reduce rent burden by 30 percent in 10 years. This goal would require building 9,881 housing units. It is a lofty goal, but a solid foundation has been laid by Lift to Rise and funding is being identified to see this production come to fruition.

The collaborative can advocate for policies and resources to assist in the production of housing for all income levels. Working with organizations like Lift to Rise and the Coachella Valley Housing Coalition we can help identify barriers in policy and funding streams, and utilize the partnerships within the collaborative for greater advocacy impact.

In addition to the basic need of affordable housing units, CVHEART must help to find ways fulfill the need for housing units that directly affect homelessness programing and services. This is especially true as we utilize the Housing First model. Our outreach workers have clients they could put in housing today, but we don't have the doors for them. We also have individuals and families with a section 8 voucher in hand without a place to call home.

Supporting and enhancing landlord locator services, and landlord mitigation initiatives can assist in providing actual doors for the various levels of housing needed in the stream of moving people from the street to permanent housing. The following are examples of the types of units required and all of these are currently in short supply for the Coachella Valley:

- Emergency shelter units in western Coachella Valley
- Crisis Stabilization Units
- Rapid Rehousing Units
- Permanent Supportive Housing Units
- Section 8 Voucher Units
- Shared Housing
- Sober Living
- College Campus Housing

The CVAG Homeless Committee can also play a vital role in addressing affordable and income appropriate housing needs. While CVAG has tended not to deal with housing issues, the members of the homeless committee know that homelessness will not be solved without housing. It may be appropriate for the committee to become the CVAG Homeless and Housing Committee. As the collaborative addresses the homeless issues more in depth than the homeless committee, the committee could work in conjunction with Lift to Rise, the County and developers to address initiatives and regional collaboration on housing policy.

# E

## **Engagement**

We have previously talked about the role CVHEART can play in the engagement of more partners within the collaborative and increasing the commitment of a regional approach to homeless solutions. Increasing the participation of the faith community, the business sector, law enforcement, the education system will be essential to truly make an impact. Additionally, there are County agencies and initiatives that the collaborative can partner with such as Adult Protective Services and the Whole Person Care initiative, which we are not fully tapped into. We can also increase our level of engagement for prevention with DPSS and Behavioral Health.

It can also be the role of the collaborative to engage the CVAG Homeless Committee Ex-Officio members in a more productive and meaningful manner. Instead of those members attending the CVAG Homeless Committee meeting where not much input is allowed or needed, we can elevate the input in the regional approaches through much better interactive engagement within the collaborative. This would be especially true if the CVAG Homeless and Housing Committee was focusing more of their attention on housing issues.

We have already witnessed the success of such engagement through our responses to the summer cooling centers, initial rapid resolution training, west valley navigation center, and recent engagements in discussion about the upcoming Homeless Housing Assistance Program (HHAP) funding. This type of engagement should be done a regular basis, not only around training, policy or resource issues, but also on individual case management and sharing of best practices for actual immediate remedies.

## **Emergencies**

It should be quite apparent that CVAG collaborative work responds extremely well to emergency situations. Whether it was the closure of Roy's, the 2019 summer overnight cooling centers, redirection of HEAP funding, or reporting and monitoring issues we have been able to be nimble and flexible to meet the challenges. While we would always like to think we are prepared for anything, the nature of homelessness lends itself to times of emergency situations. CVHEART's role will be to work to establish protocols and procedures for collaborative action in case of emergency situations.

While some may not characterize encampments as emergencies, the flexible, coordinated and rapid response practices we have employed in urgent situations will, and should, apply to encampments. Encampments may be one of the most challenging issues we face, but as demonstrated in previous encampment clean-up



initiatives, they require comprehensive planning and collaboration.

## **Education**

CVHEART has already demonstrated the success of educational/training initiatives like the rapid resolution/diversion training in 2019. Our service providers and agencies will constantly require ongoing education, especially as best practices and funding resources are constantly changing. These training sessions also provide a great opportunity to facilitate cross agency and organizational networking and problem solving. Additionally, by the collaborative providing some forms of technical assistance this augments the educational opportunities.

More importantly in the area of education, CVHEART should play a major role in addressing the youth homelessness within our educational system. This is being experienced at both our primary and secondary institutions. It is estimated that on average there are 3,000 students experiencing some sort of homelessness between our three primary school districts in the Coachella Valley. It is important to note that under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Act, the definition of homelessness is much broader than under the HUD definition. For example this would include families doubled and tripled up in housing, couch surfing, and sleeping in RVs and automobiles.

Each school district has a dedicated staff person to work with these students. The collaborative should work with the districts to make sure they are adequately staffed, there is standardized training, and that clear referral process are set up to public and nonprofit agencies. CVHEART should also explore piloting outreach and case management programming with the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) to not only link students and families to services and assistance, but actively work to break the cycle of homelessness at a young age.

## **A**

## **Assistance**

While the collaborative will not necessarily be a direct provider of assistance before, during and after homelessness, it does serve a purpose as a clearinghouse and resource for all the assistance that is available. We are blessed with numerous public agencies and non-profit organizations that provide an abundance of services. The problem is that a lot of our precariously housed residents and homeless individuals do not know where to find them. CVHEART can assist in linking, not only individuals, but organizations to direct services and resources.

The collaborative can maintain a comprehensive directory of resources both in print and online (See Appendix 1). It should be a priority to ensure that the directories are kept current and added to as new services and initiatives come into being. CVHEART should also immediately work to enhance the County's 24 hour hotline. The one thing you hear most often is, I don't know who to call, or when you do call one number there are so many needless and inappropriate referrals to others. A truly dedicated homeless services hotline with well trained staff is essential.

One area that CVHEART can work to expand and advocate for is the need for greater supportive services and longer case management periods. In order for the Housing First model to be truly effective, it is essential that clients are getting the correct amount of wrap around services. We also have to realize that many of those we serve will require supportive services for more than the one year we typically provide.

Assistance also means prevention. While most of our programing and focus tends to be on services for those already homeless through shelters, navigation centers and Housing First programs, or employing rapid resolution and diversion for those falling into homeless, we have got to do a better job preventing people from becoming homeless. It is far less expensive to keep someone in a home and prevents escalation of behavioral health and substance use issues. Critical components to preventing individuals from falling into homelessness include:

- Flexible funds for rent, deposits, utilities, car repairs
- Legal support before and during eviction processes
- Better tracking of evictions as they occur
- Education on tenant rights
- Connection to services which address factors that could lead to homelessness (e.g. job loss, domestic violence, mental health disorders, substance use, etc.)

## **Access**

The CVAG homeless committee was formed over a decade ago specifically to address access to shelter services in the western portion of the Coachella Valley. The development of CVHEART is also about how we improve the volume and efficiency of access to services and housing for our homeless residents. There are basically three primary access points to target as entrances to homelessness. They are from the street, from hospitals and from our jails or prisons.

The collaborative can play a vital role in making sure we are all working together to make sure those access points are functioning in an efficient and low barrier manner. Each access point has its own unique challenges, but they also have really good best practices in the Coachella Valley and Riverside County. The following breakdown of each primary access point illustrates the best practices we should

continue to support, as well as enhance, and some of the policies and programs we need to implement to ensure efficient and quality access to homelessness services.

➤ **From the Street**

- Utilizing rapid response/diversion techniques for those just falling into homelessness.
- Establishment of a West Valley Navigation Center that is low barrier and takes into account the need to accommodate, partners, pets and possessions. Main facility located in Palm Springs with satellite navigation centers in Desert Hot Springs and Cathedral City.
- Expansion of the number of housing units to facilitate the effective use of the Housing First model.
- Providing detox services.

➤ **From the Hospital or Clinic Setting**

- Expanding the health plans and hospitals roles in homelessness housing and supportive services.
- Supporting and expanding the use of street medicine as an outreach and engagement tool for additional services and housing.
- Increasing respite care beds.
- Advocating for more board and care facilities and increasing the MediCal reimbursement rate.
- Continued expansion of behavioral health and substance use treatment.

➤ **From the Justice System**

- Continuation of the Whole Person Care initiatives.
- Expansion of the Indio Community Outreach Resource Program (CORP).
- Expansion of Drug Court and Family Preservation programs.
- Enhancing Riverside County's Probation Department's homelessness prevention efforts.

## **Advocacy**

CVHEART's role in advocacy has been mentioned numerous times in this document. As policies and resource allocations change, it is imperative that we are aware of those changes as they are happening, and more importantly, weigh in on how those changes will benefit or negatively impact our efforts to combat homelessness. We can also propose and advance policies and initiatives at the regional, state and federal level.

The following are just a few **examples of current policies and initiatives** for CVHEART advocacy:

- Increased funding from the State and Federal Governments.
- Sustainable funding sources to provide certainty.
- Funding stream flexibility and equity.
- Increased MediCal and SSI reimbursement rates for board and care facilities.
- Wrap around service reimbursements under the proposed CalAIM reforms.
- Support efforts to prevent unnecessary evictions and rent hikes.
- Decrease the bureaucracy around reporting and contract negotiations.
- Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and Coordinated Entry System (CES) standardization, integration and modernization.
- Address housing density, zoning, and California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) barriers to affordable housing development.
- Advocate against NIMBYism (Not in My Backyard).

## R

### Regional

While the CVAG Homeless Committee has already been functioning in a regional approach, the role of the collaborative will be to expand those regional efforts outside of just city government entities. Addressing homeless services and funding regionally is not only more cost effective, but will also leverage the amount of outreach, services and housing we can provide.

Both the State and Federal governments are heavily emphasizing the need for regional approaches to homelessness solutions. CVAG has already demonstrated, through the Desert Healthcare District matching funds, the success of regional funding opportunities to leverage other dollars. Going forward, regional approaches will also be crucial in attracting foundation and private donations.

The Coachella Valley homeless population can be somewhat transient in nature within the valley, especially since services are scattered throughout the valley. Additionally, not all jurisdictions are equal in the ability to provide resources to address homelessness. Utilizing a regional approach for service delivery, housing and resource allocation increases the chances of valley-wide reductions in our homeless residents.

### Resources

It goes without saying that one of the major roles of CVHEART will be to **identify and secure funding sources** for program development and sustainability. As mentioned previously, we need to be advocating and securing steady sources of revenue to ensure certainty in the operations of our service providers and housing

programs. The collaborative can also assist in facilitating the leveraging of funds through grant and private funding opportunities.

Through its visioning process CVHEART can set short, medium and long term goals and objectives and assign funding streams to those timelines. Funding streams will continually change and the collaborative must be engaged in those changes as they occur and more importantly be ready to capitalize on resources as they become available.

We have already witnessed the effectiveness of city contributions to a regional approach. The collaborative must look at ways to increase those commitments and leverage those dollars. Additionally, we must look at pooling resources for regional programs. Individual cities paying directly for services on their own, may not be the most cost effective means if a more regional pooling of resources can achieve the same results. Furthermore, we should be looking at how we can leverage our local resources with current County resources to increase the efficacy of our homeless solutions.

In addition to money as a resource, CVHEART can help facilitate and promote other resources for homelessness solutions in the following ways:

- Training and technical assistance.
- Increased internal infrastructure-staffing capacity for grant writing, reporting and monitoring.
- 24 hour hotline.
- Resource directory-See attached appendix.
- Current and future funding opportunities.

## T

### **Training**

In addition to CVHEART's training and technical assistance mentioned previously, the collaborative should work to increase and strengthen training and work force opportunities within our homeless solutions. It should be obvious that even if we are housing individuals, if they do not have a sufficient income, or any form of employment, the homeless cycle will continue. HUD is now emphasizing the need for workforce development programs. The collaborative should work with Martha's Village, CVRM and the County Workforce Development Department to further develop current programs and look for opportunities to expand those.

There is great potential for job creation for formerly homeless individuals in the area of homeless services. Formerly homeless individuals are prime candidates for peer professionals. Riverside County is a national leader in substance use peer programs and we could utilize that model for homeless peer employment.

Additionally, we should work to establish some certification programs for homeless services, from outreach workers all the way up to executive directors.

## **Tracking**

Data is essential in order to measure success and failure. CVHEART will focus heavily on data driven results to ensure efficacy and positive outcomes. Data will also be utilized to assess initiatives and programs and determine if technical assistance or course correction is needed. Data should not be seen as punitive, but used as a tool for better outcomes.

The collaborative should work to establish common metrics for consistent reporting as well as emphasize the need for sharing data amongst providers and agencies. Monitoring of data will be a key component as well. Additional data improvements are as follows:

- Improve HMIS functionality.
- Expand HMIS to include non-HUD funded community residential programs and non-residential services.
- Use HMIS as a tool for coordinating street outreach.
- Use HMIS for prevention and rapid resolution tracking.
- Identify research partner to support data analysis and research for cross-system strategies.
- Provide community dashboards and data analysis to support the collaborative.

## **Telling the Story**

One area government agencies and some nonprofits fail at is not telling their story. The public may seem to think that nothing is being done to address homelessness and that simply is not true. We must do a better job at letting our elected leaders and the general public know the successes we are achieving in prevention, housing, employment and family reunification. While homelessness still seems to surround us, we are making headway throughout the Coachella Valley and Riverside County.

CVHEART can play a vital role in telling this story. Through marketing and social media efforts we can highlight our partners on what they do and magnify the successes achieved. We can do a better job of branding our coordinated activities and giving our communities a sense of heightened activity around homeless solutions. We can publicize how community members can help and we can raise private funds by promoting community awareness and education about the problem of and solutions to homelessness in the Coachella Valley.

# Where Will It Live?

Hopefully by now there should be a pretty comprehensive understanding of the Coachella Valley homelessness landscape, current homeless solutions being employed and areas where we could increase our capacity and effectiveness. It should be clear that the work explained throughout this document will be much more impactful and successful working in a collaborative way. The development of CVHEART is the means to fulfill that collaboration.

Operationalizing collaboration starts with figuring out where it will live. Whatever structure the collaborative takes, it is imperative that there is a sense of legitimacy. CVHEART should be guided by the collaborative members itself, but within an operational structure. Staffing and infrastructure will depend on which model is chosen. It is the recommendation from this report that the CVAG Homeless Committee establish a subcommittee to weigh the pros and cons of the four options presented below and recommend the structure to be implemented. These are in no particular priority order and are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

## **Option 1: Creation of a Separate Nonprofit**

CVHEART would be established as a separate 501c3 nonprofit entity with its own board and governance structure and set of bylaws.

## **Option 2: Collaborative Operations Within the Desert Healthcare District**

As recommended in the original proposals after the Poppe report, CVHEART would be housed within DHCD utilizing the current operational and fiscal infrastructure.

## **Option 3: Homeless Services Division within CVAG**

CVHEART would be housed within CVAG utilizing the current infrastructure already within this regional government authority.

## **Option 4: Creation of a Regional Continuum of Care (COC)**

CVHEART would become a Continuum of Care (COC). There are two options in this scenario. The CVHEART COC could be a stand-alone HUD sanctioned COC with a Board of Governance and HUD sanctioned charter. The other option is to become a regional COC under the current Riverside County COC structure.

Whichever option is chosen, it is still recommended that CVAG maintain a Homeless and Housing Committee comprised of elected representatives from the County and jurisdictional cities. CVHEART would provide regular updates and recommendations for policy actions to the committee.

# Conclusion

Every resident who lives in the Coachella Valley has a right to safe, comfortable and adequate housing. This report is a bold step to achieve that mission statement. It is imperative that through all our actions we keep that mission in our minds. The establishment of the Coachella Valley Homelessness Engagement & Action Response Team (CVHEART) as a regional collaborative to address homelessness aims to fulfill that mission. This introductory paragraph is repeated here because it captures the essence of our Valley's commitment to and compassion for homelessness individuals.

Ideally this document can provide a comprehensive view of homelessness efforts in the region. This is a living breathing report. As has been mentioned numerous times, the world of homelessness is ever changing. CVHEART will need to continually assess aspects of this report and adjust accordingly as circumstances warrant.

Even without a formal name or structure, we have already seen the effectiveness of our collaborative efforts over these past few months. As evidenced in this report, there is a lot more that can be done. It is clearly apparent there is no lack of will amongst our cities, public agencies and our nonprofit service providers to go to the next level together. We are blessed in the Coachella Valley for the desires of everyone to work together. CVHEART creates a space to facilitate that even more.

Once again, it is important to recognize the vision the CVAG Homeless Committee had over a decade ago to approach the issues at that time in a regional manner. Moreover, the last two years have shown an even greater commitment by our elected officials and CVAG to adopt new and innovative approaches as the homelessness situation has grown. The elevation of this past work to the next level with the establishment of CVHEART is a significant advancement for a successful collaborative and regional approach to homeless solutions.



# Addendum #1-August 2020

In early 2020, following the presentation of this report on best practices for homelessness response, collaborative structures and operation, four options were presented to the CVAG Homelessness Committee for consideration. In response, an ad-hoc subcommittee was appointed to further explore each option and return to the Homelessness Committee with a recommended option for implementation. The Subcommittee considered the following options for formally structuring the Coachella Valley homelessness response collaborative:

1. Oversight by the Desert Healthcare District
2. Form a New Nonprofit
3. Oversight by CVAG
4. Form a Continuum of Care (CoC)

This option was further defined within two directions:

- A. Form Separate Coachella Valley Continuum of Care
- B. Become Regional Continuum of Care Within the Riverside Continuum of Care

CVAG staff and I worked with staff from large, small, and mid-sized communities in Southern California and beyond, as well as direct contact with the appropriate regional and federal HUD contacts that oversee Continuums of Care, to analyze the pros and cons of a standalone CoC or regional CoC approach. We determined due to funding considerations, staffing issues, and depletion of the impact of the County's CoC, that a sub-regional CoC would be the best recommendation to the subcommittee.

The Subcommittee unanimously supported a combination of Options 3 & 4, agreeing that CVAG would be best equipped to house a regional collaborative following a Continuum of Care model pending additional information on Option 4. Additional Information Prior to making a recommendation, the Subcommittee put forth the following questions.

## **What is the problem we're trying to solve?**

Does Coachella Valley have a clear and uniformly shared action plan for addressing homelessness in the desert? Does Coachella Valley have the authority needed to support and hold partners accountable for making progress toward shared goals driven by data? Is Coachella Valley receiving its fair share of State and Federal resources in order to be effective?

Without a collaborative structure in place, our region lacks:

- The ability to use data to form a comprehensive understanding of homelessness and homelessness response unique to our area;
- The ability to encourage providers to work together toward shared goals using shared standards, and hold them accountable for reporting on progress;
- Dedicated allocation from state, federal, and other funding sources.

### **What is a Continuum of Care?**

A Continuum of Care (CoC) is well-established model for streamlining effective homeless services. On the most basic level, CoCs set shared goals and performance measurement mechanisms in order to redistribute pooled resources for homelessness response in a specific geographic area. CoCs are designated by and beholden to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. In return, CoCs receive direct allocation of State and Federal funds.

### **What are the pros/cons of Option 4A vs 4B?**

Option 4A proposes that Coachella Valley entirely split off from the Riverside County Continuum of Care. Option 4B proposes that Coachella Valley become a subdivision of Riverside County's Continuum of Care – with its own governance, dedicated funding allocation, and performance measurement.

While Option 4A (standalone CoC) could give Coachella Valley more autonomy to set its own course, it would be substantial administrative lift with no immediate guarantee of increased funding for Coachella Valley; there are no federal/state dollars to support startup costs; and according to HUD, fracturing a CoC is a last resort measure when a the relationship between a given area and its CoC have become irreconcilably strained and counterproductive.

Option 4B (CoC subdivision) is a middle ground solution that could be achieved within a more reasonable timeframe, assuming the County is agreeable and cooperative. Nearly all large CoCs subdivide into 'service planning areas' as a way to strengthen regional autonomy without having to shoulder the entire administrative burden involved in operating a standalone CoC. Generally, sub-CoCs receive a dedicated funding allocation from the parent CoC and are responsible for setting priorities, allocating funding, and determining how performance is tracked/measured. Furthermore, the County has concurrently expressed interest in regionalized CoCs along the lines of Option 4B as part of its strategic planning process.

**If Coachella Valley had its own sub-CoC, what could we do?** It would give Coachella Valley a more stable funding source, ability to encourage service providers to work together, and ability to set and track progress toward shared data-driven goals. Specifically:

- Conduct a CV-focused homeless count, updated on a more frequent schedule
- Manage our own coordinated entry system tracking
- Set Valley-wide goals and reallocate funding to multiple providers based on those priorities
- Structure our own data and standards, and produce consistent performance reports for the entire Valley

### **What would it take to establish and operate a sub-CoC?**

To establish a regional CoC, Coachella Valley would need to work with the County to update its CoC governance charter, define a Valley-specific funding allocation, and determine administrative support for the CoC.

At its meeting on May 5, the Subcommittee reconfirmed support for a combination of Options 3 and 4B. Following this direction, CVAG staff and I resumed discussion with HUD staff. HUD expressed informal support for the sub-CoC direction (Option 4B), starting with a focus on regionalized data collection and goal setting. On May 20<sup>th</sup> the CVAG Homeless Committee unanimously approved the subcommittee's recommendation and the CVAG Executive Committee unanimously concurred on June 8<sup>th</sup>. The recommended next step was to discuss options with the County, which as previously noted has concurrently expressed interest in regionalizing its CoC. Coachella Valley could pilot this concept with the County.

Additionally, on February 25, 2020 the Desert Healthcare Foundation Board voted to approve Resolution #20-01 for the DHCF to be available to serve as a fiscal agent of CVHEART, especially for philanthropic contributions to the collaborative.

While discussions with the County continue on a formalized structure, I have been working on an organizational flow chart, structure of an advisory committee, and potential staffing needs. With the COVID 19 pandemic hitting us in March, some of the administrative work was sidelined, however the reality is the coordinated and collaborative approach to addressing homelessness services and individuals in the Coachella Valley materialized in the following ways.

- Regular calls amongst providers for COVID 19 status updates on testing, homeless provider protocols, shelter and encampment response and access to personal protective equipment (PPEs).
- Acquisition and distribution of PPEs, sanitizer, diapers and additional COVID response materials.
- Expansion of food delivery and distribution sites.

- Communication and coordination for the Great Plates program to serve meals to in-bound seniors.
- Coordination with County on implementation of Project Room Key that provided hotel rooms during the pandemic to 179 individuals in the Coachella Valley, and as of August 15, 2020, has transitioned 25 of those to permanent housing.
- Increased crisis stabilization units to 25 for CV Housing First program.
- Assistance with UnitedLift for rental assistance initiative.
- Coordination with County and City of Palm Springs for a potential 75 to 85 permanent housing development under the Governor's Project Home Key.