

Defining an End to Homelessness

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Why does a common definition matter?

What gets measured gets done.

What gets measured and fed back gets done well.

What gets rewarded gets repeated.

- ✓ Articulates values and what the system aims to achieve
- ✓ Informs investment decisions
- ✓ Identifies system gaps, needed policy changes, resource advocacy
- ✓ Demonstrates measurable progress in ending homelessness
- ✓ Drives continuous quality & performance improvements
- ✓ Promotes service integration across systems
- ✓ Helps address concern and skepticism about “what it really means to end homelessness”

Canada

Discerning ‘Functional and Absolute Zero’: Defining and Measuring an End to Homelessness in Canada

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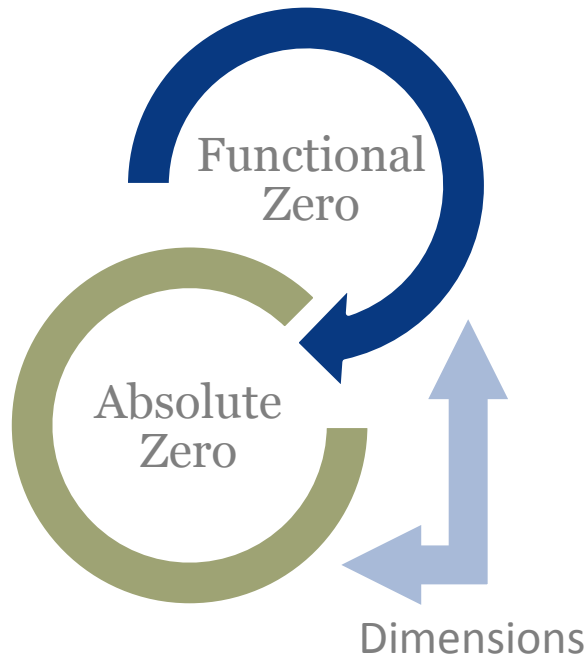
Methods

- Fulsome process with initial Discussion Paper (Nov 2016), revised based on feedback (Jan 2017)
- Review of 60 jurisdictions internationally & available literature
- Online survey with lived experience, service agencies, funder & government stakeholders
 - 158 survey responses – of which 42 lived exp.
- Virtual Town Halls (43 participants)
- Presentations of concepts for input at 2 national homelessness conferences (CAEH 2015 & 2016)

Key Findings

- Conflict between idea of Absolute Zero and Functional Zero
 - Tensions in input from ppl with lived experience, service provider, policy maker perspectives did not always align
- No consistency on definitions or criteria across jurisdictions
 - Emerging attempts in US to create federal criteria; little progress in Canada

Proposed Canadian Definition



A **Functional Zero** end to homelessness means that communities have a systematic response in place that ensures homelessness (unsheltered homeless, sheltered home, provisionally accommodated or imminent risk of homelessness) is prevented whenever possible or is otherwise a rare, brief, and non-recurring experience.

Absolute Zero refers to a true end to homelessness, where everyone has access to supports and appropriate housing so that no one becomes homeless (unsheltered homeless, sheltered homeless, or provisionally accommodated) or at risk in the first place.

Dimensions: Lived Experience, Homelessness Prevention Systems, Public Systems

Rather than opposite concepts, Functional Zero describes progress towards an Absolute Zero end to homelessness

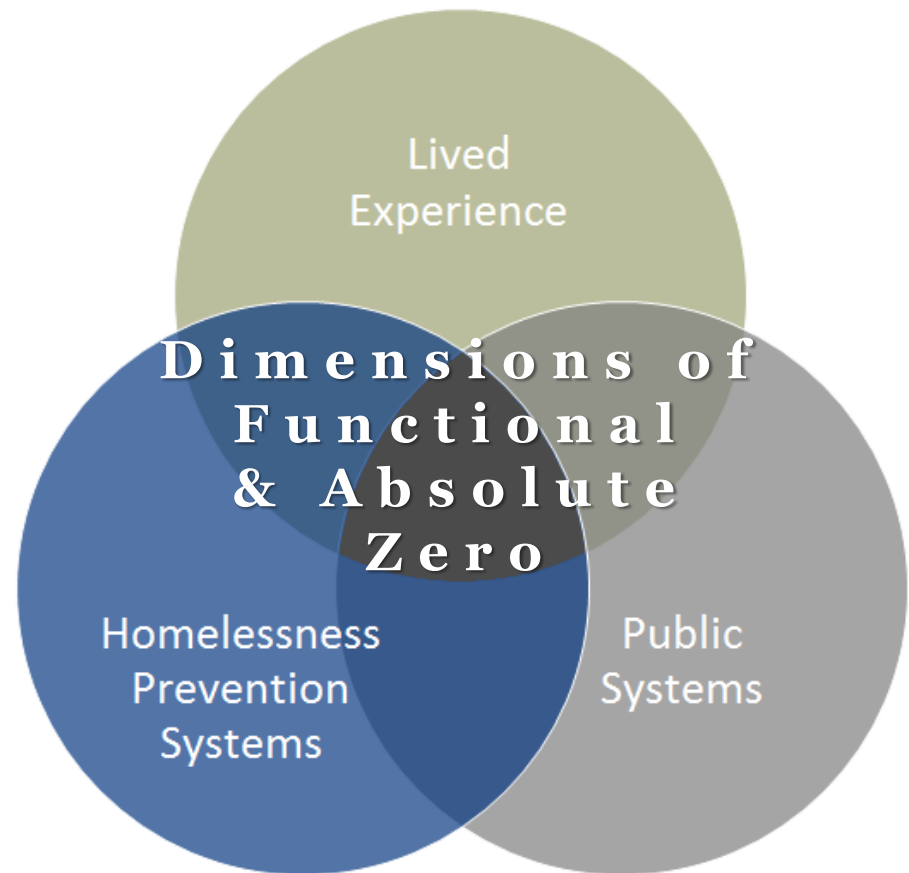
Proposed Measures

Functional Zero

- 15 Key Performance Indicators

Absolute Zero

- 10 Key Performance Indicators



Example Indicators

Functional Zero Indicators	Absolute Zero Indicators	Verification Sources
Indicators of Progress towards Outcome	Indicators of Outcome Achievement	Examples
<p>Total number of unsheltered persons and emergency sheltered is consistently decreasing year-over-year towards 0.</p>	<p>The total number of homeless persons will be zero at any point-in-time.</p>	<p>System/program-level data analysis (HIFIS, PIT Count, HMIS, program/system evaluations)</p>
<p>Length of stay in emergency shelter/unsheltered is less than 10 days for anyone during course of the year. This performance is improved/maintained year-over-year.</p>		<p>System of care site visits</p>
<p>Number moving into permanent housing is greater than or equal to number entering homeless-serving system any given month. This performance is improved/maintained year-over-year.</p>	<p>All persons experiencing housing instability have ready access to the right housing and supports they need in major life areas (housing, life skills, family conflict, violence, social networks and relationships, drug and alcohol use, physical health, emotional and mental health), so that they do not experience housing instability in the first place.</p>	<p>Stakeholder consultations</p>
<p>All unsheltered persons in a community are engaged with services and have been offered low-barrier shelter and housing at least every two weeks. This performance is improved/maintained year-over-year.</p>		<p>Service standards assessments</p>

United States

Operational Definition of an End to Homelessness

– US Interagency Council on Homelessness (2015)

An end to homelessness does not mean that no one will ever experience a housing crisis again....

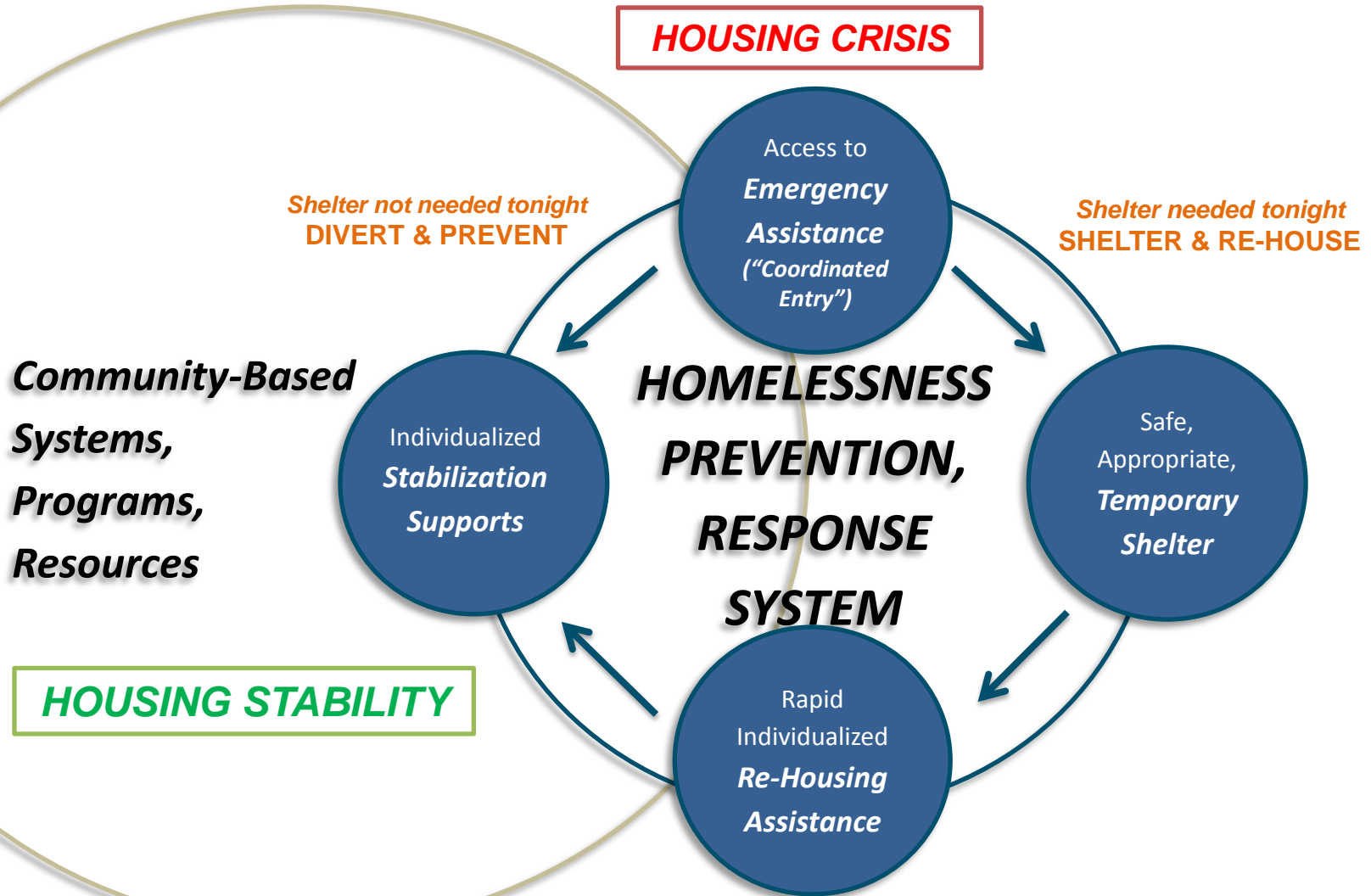
An end to homelessness means that every community will have a **systematic response in place** that ensures homelessness is **prevented whenever possible or is otherwise a rare, brief, and non-recurring** experience.

Essential System Elements for an End to Homelessness – USICH (2015)

- **Quickly identify** and **engage** people at-risk of and experiencing homelessness.
- Intervene to **prevent** the loss of housing and **divert** people from entering the homelessness services system.
- Provide immediate **access to shelter and crisis services**, without barriers to entry, while permanent stable housing and appropriate supports are being secured.
- When homelessness does occur, **quickly connect people to housing** assistance and services—tailored to their unique needs and strengths—to help them achieve and maintain stable housing.

Homeless Crisis Response System

4 Basic Functions



Operationalizing an End to Homelessness in the U.S.

- **Example: U.S. Military Veterans**

- **2012-current:**

- ✓ *major* additional Federal investment
- ✓ Mayors Challenge, national, state, community surge efforts

- **2015: Federal Criteria and Benchmarks published**

- **2010-2016 point-in-time count: 47% reduction**

Criteria & Benchmarks

- Criteria examine a community's crisis response system to determine if the system is operating within the context of key principles such as Housing First, immediate access to low barrier shelter, quick access to permanent housing, and limited use of service intensive transitional housing.
- Benchmarks are data points that "prove" the system's alignment with criteria.

Getting from here to there...

Community Plan

- Mission
- Goals
- Strategies
- Measures

System Design

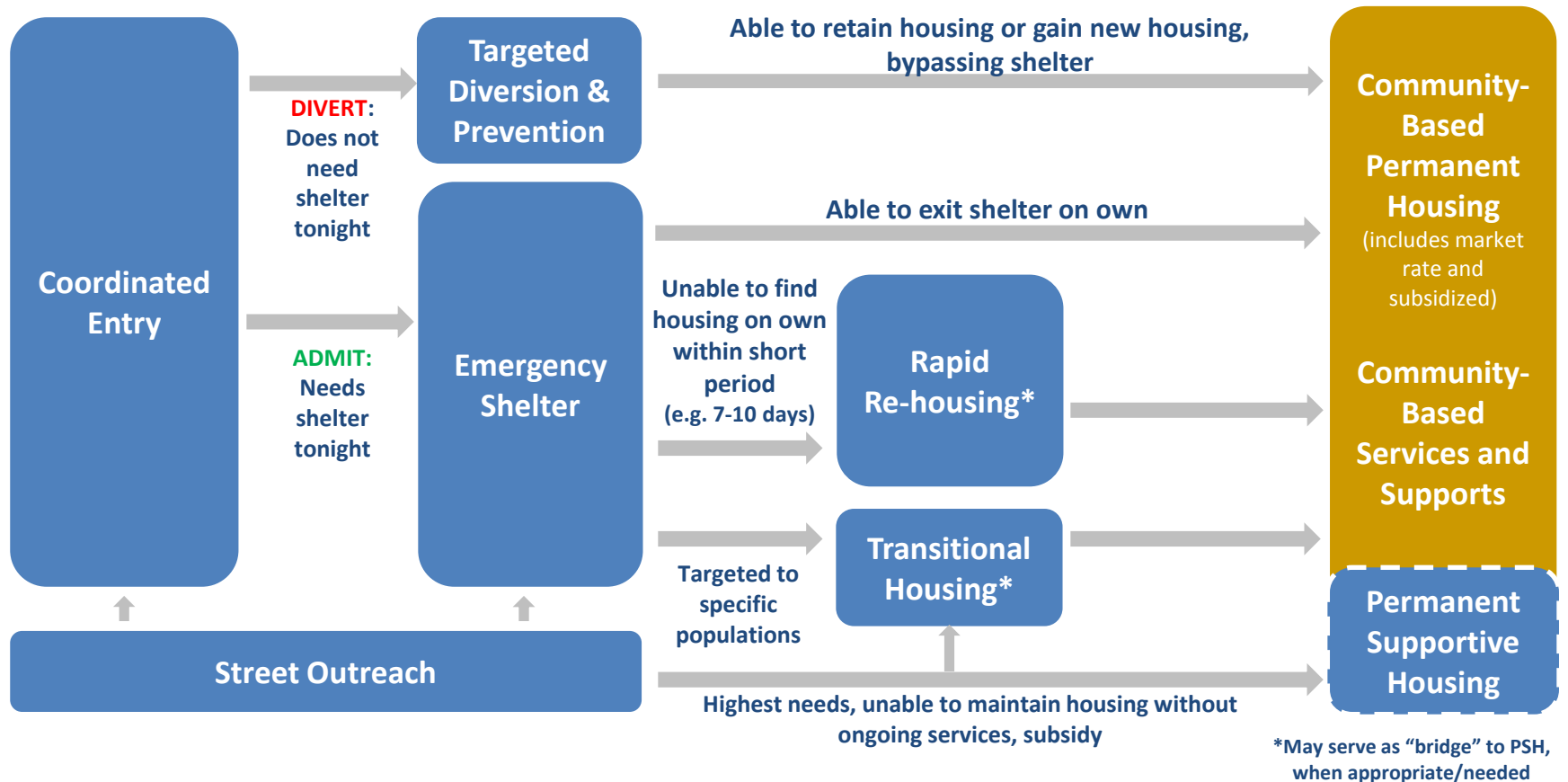
- Provider alignment
- Process flow
- Accountabilities
- Data collection



System Implementation/Operations

HOMELESS CRISIS RESPONSE SYSTEM

General Components & Client Flow



Veterans 'Sub-System' Features – Columbus, OH

- Comprehensive identification of Veterans at any defined 'entry point'
- Standardized, coordinated system entry & screening
- Immediate offer of low-barrier shelter (no one unsheltered due to lack of shelter)
- Immediate offer of housing placement, stabilization assistance
- Weekly system operations workgroup & case conference meetings
- Daily system monitoring, utilization review
- Regular performance monitoring against federal benchmarks

Lessons

- ✓ **Functional zero** is only a **milestone** – achievement can be *fleeting*
- ✓ Clear **goals** and **plan** understood among stakeholders and public
 - ✓ Articulate what system is expected to do in **practice** (e.g., comprehensive outreach, immediate and unconditional provision of low-barrier shelter and re-housing assistance) and expected **performance** (e.g., length of time to housing, rate of returns) relative to community demand and resources
- ✓ **Legitimacy** requires involvement of **people with lived experience, thoroughness**
- ✓ Achieving and sustaining optimized system requires ongoing commitment, effort, political support, and community-wide system with:
 - ✓ Defined, accountable **leadership, governance**
 - ✓ **Backbone entity** sufficiently resourced and empowered to support planning, partner coordination, resource development and allocation, data collection and evaluation, continuous improvement, external advocacy
- ✓ **System-wide** adherence to **Housing First** practices
- ✓ **Vigilance** to ensure **universal access** to:
 - *Emergency assistance*
 - *Temporary shelter*
 - *Re-housing assistance*
 - *Stabilization supports*