



PUBLIC & GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

PUBLIC SERVICES BUILDING
2051 KAEN ROAD | OREGON CITY, OR 97045

August 1, 2024

BCC Agenda Date/Item: _____

Board of County Commissioners
Clackamas County

A Board Recognition of the County Program/Project to Receive a 2024 National Association of Counties (NACo) Award. Total value is \$0.

Previous Board Action/Review	none		
Performance Clackamas	1. Which indicator of success does this item affect? Ensure safe, healthy and secure communities		
Counsel Review	Yes/No	Procurement Review	Yes/No
Contact Person	Ed Nieto, Public and Government Affairs	Contact Phone	971-284-7094

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Clackamas County received the only 2024 Achievement Award from the National Association of Counties (NACo) that was awarded in the state of Oregon. The NACo Achievement Awards Program recognizes innovative county government programs, which are judged on:

- Innovation and creativity
- Measurable results and effectiveness
- Enhanced level of citizen participation in, or the understanding of, government programs.

The winning entry was: Clackamas County Coordinated Housing Access Improvement Program

Imagine having a trusted guide to help you through a housing crisis – that’s what the Coordinated Housing Access (CHA) program offers in Clackamas County. CHA provides a single door that assesses and refers people in need to all of the county’s housing resources.

When housing insecurity strikes – whether it’s struggling to make rent, doubled-up with friends, or sleeping in a car – CHA is the lifeline. People in a housing crisis connect with a trained, compassionate CHA assessor who listens intently to their story, pinpointing immediate needs while drawing upon local resources to find the right program fit.

The CHA assessment is finely tuned to match people with the precise level of support they require. Someone experiencing recent homelessness might find themselves directed towards a rapid rehousing program for short-term assistance. A long-term resident of the streets may be steered towards a permanent supportive housing solution. People are also guided to problem solve, and may receive other social service referrals including to physical and mental health programs.

CHA has conducted 27,366 housing assessments in three years. As part of Clackamas County’s housing

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services programs, CHA has contributed to a 65% decrease in homelessness from 2019 to 2023.

RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends the Board receive this presentation on the county's 2024 NACo award.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "A. Holowetzki".

Tonia Holowetzki

Interim Director, Public & Government Affairs

Attachment: Clackamas CHA NACo Award Application

Program Title: Clackamas County Coordinated Housing Access Improvement Program

Award Category: Human Services

Abstract

Imagine having a trusted guide to help you through a housing crisis – that's what the Coordinated Housing Access (CHA) program offers in Clackamas County. CHA provides a single door that assesses and refers people in need to all of the county's housing resources.

When housing insecurity strikes – whether it's struggling to make rent, doubled-up with friends, or sleeping in a car – CHA is the lifeline. People in a housing crisis connect with a trained, compassionate CHA assessor who listens intently to their story, pinpointing immediate needs while drawing upon local resources to find the right program fit.

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CHA has conducted 27,366 housing assessments in three years. As part of Clackamas County's housing services programs, CHA has contributed to a 65% decrease in homelessness from 2019 to 2023, during a period when homelessness increased nationally.

The Problem and Need for the Program

Clackamas County, with a population of 423,173 (2023), faces critical levels of homelessness in the urban greater Portland-Metro and surrounding suburban and rural areas (please see map in uploaded supplemental materials). This comes amidst soaring housing costs and low vacancy rates. Homelessness and access to housing and services also look very different in our diverse urban and vast rural areas.

In the past, accessing housing services resembled navigating a maze, dependent on personal connections and intricate system knowledge. People in need of housing that they could afford had to get themselves on a different waitlist for every apartment, an especially impossible task for people experiencing homelessness, those without technology access, diverse language speakers, those without transportation, and those with disabilities. Prior to 2020, just tens of people were placed in permanent supportive housing per year.

The emergence of COVID-19 and the resulting increase of people in a housing crisis exacerbated the strain on the county's housing access system. With only two staff members answering an overwhelming influx of inquiries, the system faced a backlog of over 1600 people seeking assistance. Recognizing this urgent need, Clackamas County launched the Coordinated Housing

Access (CHA) improvement program in 2021. CHA provides a single door that can refer people in need to all of the county's housing resources.

Program Description

In Clackamas County, when housing insecurity strikes – whether it's struggling to make rent, couch-surfing with a friend, sleeping in a car or tent, escaping domestic violence, or unaccompanied youth – Coordinated Housing Access (CHA) is the lifeline. People in a housing crisis connect with a compassionate CHA assessor who listens intently to their story, pinpointing immediate needs while drawing upon local resources to find the right program fit.

The CHA assessment is finely tuned to match people with the precise level of support they require. For instance, someone experiencing recent homelessness might find themselves directed towards a rapid rehousing program for short-term assistance. A long-term resident of the streets may be steered towards a permanent supportive housing solution. Permanent supportive housing is a housing type for people who have experienced prolonged homelessness and who have a disabling physical or mental health condition. This housing includes social services that wrap around the resident to meet their unique needs and enable them to retain their housing. If someone has lost their job, experienced a reduction in hours, or encountered other financial challenges, CHA connects them with the appropriate employment resources. Assessments are provided in the caller's language, including sign language, and are accessible to people with various abilities. Continuous improvement of the assessment and the whole system is done through monthly CHA workgroups with partners.

CHA is more than just connecting dots; it's about problem solving with people to divert them away from homelessness (called diversion). Employing active listening and a strengths-based approach, assessors empower callers, believing that the seeds of resolution lie within them. This philosophy guides every step of the assessment process, ensuring a gentle yet effective touch in finding the best path forward.

The CHA team listens attentively, understanding each caller's needs through a thoughtful assessment process. They connect individuals with the appropriate services and support available in our county, ensuring prompt assistance tailored to their situation.

This program embodies community collaboration, offering a helping hand to those at risk of homelessness. With CHA, Clackamas County becomes a place of solidarity, where everyone works together to support those in need. With CHA leading the way, the journey toward stable housing becomes a collective effort. Each call represents resilience, and every solution brings hope for a brighter future. In uncertain times, CHA remains a reliable resource, offering pathways to stability and security.

A standout innovative feature of the CHA program is its emphasis on homelessness diversion. Diversion involves finding innovative solutions to housing crises without resorting to traditional resources like shelters or temporary housing. Instead, CHA assessors collaborate with individuals to identify their strengths and community resources, empowering them to develop their own strategies to avoid homelessness.

For instance, if someone is facing eviction due to a temporary financial setback, CHA might assist them in negotiating a payment plan with their landlord or connecting them with local financial assistance programs to cover rent arrears. CHA connects people with other social service programs and resources such as employment, education, addiction treatment, physical and mental health treatment, and other resources when those challenges are contributing to their housing crisis. By harnessing the individual's strengths and community support networks, CHA enables people to remain housed and circumvent the trauma of homelessness.

Recognizing the increase in homelessness due to COVID-19 and housing prices, and the obscure path for residents to access housing resources, the Clackamas County Health, Housing and Human Services department conceived the CHA evolution program in 2020. The program first began with one-time COVID-19 resources and then ongoing funding from a new local tax measure dedicated to ending homelessness through supportive housing services. The program began with six public focus groups conducted by the Coalition of Communities of Color in 2020 and 2021. The primary goal of these focus groups was to understand how the county could better meet the housing needs of residents, focusing on the perspectives of BIPOC, immigrant and refugee, low income, and housing insecure community members. The research results are included as supplemental materials.

Next, the CHA Evolution Workgroup occurred from February to May 2021, a 10-week series of intensive meetings to determine how to implement the community's wish list to improve housing access. This workgroup created the road map for the program that would be created over the next three years. This workgroup included numerous community partners that serve people with social service and housing needs. The cross-collaboration of every community partner and agency was the best part of the work group, because it takes effective collaboration towards a common goal to create large-scale change. All diverse identities were represented including BIPOC, native tribe, and LGBTQIA+ voices.

In 2021, the county had funding for four CHA staff, which was not enough people to clear the backlog of calls and conduct assessments. Therefore CHA innovated by training assessors from nonprofit partners as well as creating a volunteer assessor group. This training, called Housing First Aid, became a key component of the CHA program. As of early 2024, more 200 community partners have received this intensive 2-day training. The training includes trauma-informed care, activated listening, homelessness diversion, and the information on the county's housing resources (see supplemental materials). Thanks to training community based organizations, people in need can also be entered into CHA at schools, community-based social service organizations, and shelters. CHA continued quality improvements and expansion in 2022.

In 2023, CHA was fully funded to include two management staff and eight on-staff assessors. Today, people only need to call a single phone number that is answered live seven days a week from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., in multiple languages and with accessibility options. CHA assessments are also available in-person.

In 2024, CHA is partnering with the organization 211 which has expertise in providing a community services hotline. The contract allows 211 to staff CHA's housing-specific hotline, while county staff focus on problem solving with callers.

As part of Clackamas County's housing services programs, CHA has contributed to a 65% decrease in homelessness from 2019 to 2023, an unprecedented decrease in a period when homelessness is increasing nationally.

CHA tracks the number of assessments, which is the same as the number of people served and the number of diversion services provided. When appropriate, CHA refers people to rent assistance, eviction prevention services, and housing placements. These placements are also measured. These outcomes are found in the program results section.

Responding to Economic Downturn

During tough economic times, such as when jobs are scarce or work hours are reduced, many individuals in Clackamas County face the very scary prospect of losing their homes. In these moments of uncertainty, CHA serves as a crucial lifeline, offering invaluable support to those going through housing insecurity.

In essence, diversion through CHA not only prevents homelessness but also fosters self-reliance and resilience. It equips individuals with the confidence and skills to navigate through adversity and come up with creative solutions to housing challenges, ensuring they emerge from difficult times with newfound strength and stability. So, when faced with economic hardships, CHA serves as a beacon of hope, guiding individuals towards stability and empowerment.

When COVID-19 caused a financial, employment and housing crisis for many residents, Clackamas County saw and responded to this need. Addressing this new economic reality, and with new ongoing funding from a local tax measure dedicated to ending homelessness through supportive housing services, the County increased funding for CHA, emergency shelter, rent assistance, and long-term housing.

Advancing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Due to historical discrimination in housing, housing crises and homelessness disproportionately affect people of color. From the beginning the CHA improvement program collaborated with the Coalition of Communities of Color to conduct analyses and focus groups tailored for BIPOC people. By actively seeking and valuing feedback, CHA ensures that the perspectives of marginalized communities are not only heard but also incorporated into ongoing work.

70% of CHA staff work with a personal diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) coach. These sessions deepen understanding of the historical roots of racism in our area and empower staff to address and reverse these inequities. CHA always uses a DEI lens in programming and hiring, with half of CHA assessors bilingual Spanish.

CHA’s language line, provided by an outside vendor, is an immediate interpretation service for any language including sign language. We want people to use their most comfortable language, even if they speak English. Assessments and diversion conversations can also be done in writing and in-person for people with access challenges. Assessors can travel to meet people, including doing assessments at homeless encampments. Agencies such as the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization are trained in assessments so that people can work with someone of their same culture.

Through the CHA improvement program, we have worked on continual improvement processes to make the assessment simpler, more accessible and more trauma-informed. The assessment does not ask anything simply for data purposes unless it will help the person. The CHA assessment was evaluated by people of color and others with diverse backgrounds and identities to ensure the questions make sense, speak to traditionally underserved groups, and are culturally sensitive.

Through these concerted efforts, CHA strives to create a more inclusive and equitable housing system that fosters opportunity and dignity for all residents of Clackamas County.

The Cost of the Program

FY23-24 Budget:	
Coordinated Housing Access	
Personnel Services	966,476
Materials & Services	5,259
Allocated/Indirect Costs	151,796
211 contract	662,975
Total	1,786,506

This chart shows the coordinated housing access 2023-2024 fiscal year ongoing operating budget that goes from July 1 through June 30. This budget represents a fully staffed and implemented program. In the ramp-up phase, prior years had lower budgets. There were no capital costs for this program, as the CHA team uses existing space in the social services office. Personal services includes salary and benefits for a supervisor, a program coordinator, and 8 assessors. Materials and services includes employee mileage, community engagement food and supplies, and the language line. Allocated/indirect costs are allocated to other county

departments such as government relations, IT, HR, finance, and county counsel. The 211 contract provides trained overflow call-takers for evenings, weekends and holidays.

Program Results and Success

In 2021, CHA assessors answered 6202 calls and inquiries. They answered 8706 inquiries in 2022 and 12,458 in 2023. This totaled **27,366 inquiries**. Assessments increased 100% from 2021 to 2023, showing the increase in the program's capacity.

Each of the 27,366 inquiries received a trauma-informed CHA assessment, individualized resources and referral to partner agencies when possible. Each person was engaged in a housing problem-solving conversation, where CHA assessors used a strength-based homelessness diversion approach.

CHA is the door that leads to three potential paths: rent assistance and eviction prevention; placement in permanent supportive housing; or homelessness diversion through referral to other appropriate resources. From 2021 to 2023, CHA led to the following outcomes:

- **13,265** people served through rent assistance and eviction prevention
- **1646** people served through placement in permanent supportive housing
- All **27,366** inquirers received homeless diversion

Clackamas County has **reduced homelessness by 65%** from 2019 through 2023 thanks to our coordinated housing services system, which includes CHA along with many other programs such as rent assistance, permanent supportive housing, shelter, and youth housing. Our goal is to eliminate chronic homelessness in Clackamas County by ensuring that any episodes of homelessness are rare, brief, and do not reoccur.

Rachel is one person who found support, housing, employment and a new lease on life through the CHA door. Mental and emotional scars led Rachel to homelessness, staying in shelters, friends' houses, tents, cars and motels. As Rachel reached out for help, she began to learn how to grieve and take better care of herself. Rachel began volunteering with a homeless shelter where she receive a Coordinated Housing Access assessment. Through this Rachel was prioritized for a long-term rent assistance voucher. Rachel also accepted a management position with the shelter. Rachel's photo and video are included with the uploaded supplemental materials.

Was this program supported using ARPA Fund?

Yes

Worthiness of Award

CHA offers an incredibly needed new and improved service to our public by providing a single door for people in a housing crisis to get help. Housing and homeless services are notorious across the country for being complicated and difficult to navigate at best. Other coordinated

housing entry systems have varying degrees of compliance, collaboration with partners, and navigability for users, and may only refer to certain housing resources and not to all. Clackamas County has innovated by transforming our coordinated housing access program into a caring network of support that is a friend for people in crisis. CHA can refer to all of the housing resources in the county, is well-publicized, and is simple and accessible for users.

The CHA improvement program was a highly effective use of new revenue sources that have recently become available in our area, including one-time COVID-19 funding, a Metro-area housing bond, a local supportive housing services tax that voters passed, COVID and ARPA funds, and increased state and Federal grants.

The CHA improvement program provides vastly upgraded human services training to county staff and community-based service providers. Assessors learn how to provide a sense of help and relief rather than presenting a brick wall to users. The publicity for CHA and the strong county-wide collaboration also enhances the public's understanding of how to access their local government's housing resources.

The CHA improvement program has relied on strong intergovernmental cooperation with the 16 cities in our county. The county works regularly with our cities including formal monthly meetings between county and city managers and our county commissioners and mayors. CHA sends referrals to city-operated programs and also accepts referrals from cities. We cannot solve homelessness in silos, so we work together knowing that our only path is through a coordinated and collaborative system with all parties having a voice.

CHA has provided help to 27,366 people in three years. The results of our investments in CHA and in our housing services system and resources are shown by the 65% reduction in homelessness in Clackamas County from 2019 to 2023.

Clackamas County has a robust and compliant fund-based accounting system. Our internal controls are stringent and include, for grant related charges, both program and fiscal review to ensure adequate documentation is present, and that all expenses are eligible and appropriate. We work closely with our funders to align spending and eligible expenses to grant requirements, and we use Federal, state and local funding in a manner that provides the highest possible level of benefit to our citizens.

Supplemental Materials separate PDF