

# Housing First Initiative Annual Report

## 2018

### Who We Are

Homeward 2020, now in the final phase of its ten-year plan to make homelessness rare, short-lived and non-recurring in Fort Collins, seeks to produce actionable, community-level data on the issue of homelessness and—equipped with that data—identify and promote solutions that increase housing options, housing placements and housing retention for people experiencing homelessness.

As part of that effort, Homeward 2020 and Homeward Alliance partnered in mid-2017 to create the Housing First Initiative (HFI): a two-year pilot project based at the Murphy Center. HFI collects City-level data on the issue of homelessness, pilots “housing-first” solutions and provides intensive case management to people who are chronically homeless.

HFI reports share local data and learning experiences, highlight new partnerships and identify trends and gaps.

### Definitions

- This report does not represent everyone who is homeless in Fort Collins. The Murphy Center alone serves about 3,000 people each year, many of whom have been homeless for less than six months.
- Unless otherwise noted, the data in this report pertains only to individuals who have been homeless in Fort Collins for six months or longer. Sample sizes vary between data points.
- HFI’s definition of chronic homelessness (six months or longer in Fort Collins) is more inclusive than the federal government’s definition of chronic homelessness.
- Reports include data from Homeward Alliance, Catholic Charities, Fort Collins Rescue Mission, Outreach Fort Collins, the Coordinated Assessment and Housing Placement system group and other agencies in the community and at the Murphy Center.



### Why This Matters

Marla Cleary, HFI Director

Over a 45-day stretch in mid-2018, two people who were homeless—both among the top 15 most-vulnerable members of our community, as measured by a standard assessment tool—died on the streets of Fort Collins.

These were not aberrations, but rather reflections of a known concern.

People experiencing homelessness, and particularly those who sleep outside, have mortality rates far higher than people with homes. One recent report, published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, found that people who were homeless and unsheltered were nearly 10 times more likely to die (over a 10-year period) than people with housing. The average age at death was 53.

What’s more, we know how to prevent these deaths. When we focus on securing housing for people who are homeless, we literally save lives.

Housing First Initiative represents our best attempt to get to the heart of the issue: to define the scope of the problem, identify what works and what is missing and implement the interventions today that get results.

Every person deserves the right to live (and die) in a home. We cannot accept homelessness. We must act now and invest more in what we know can make homelessness rare, short-lived and non-recurring.



## HFI Timeline

- June 2017**  
HFI launches
- July 2017**  
HFI pilots volunteer Advocates\*
- August 2017**  
HFI celebrates first participant to obtain housing
- September 2017**  
Governor Hickenlooper visits the Murphy Center\*\* to learn more about local efforts
- October 2017**  
In partnership with Housing Catalyst, HFI is granted five project-based housing vouchers from Colorado Department of Local Affairs
- January 2018**  
HFI develops and receives funding for "Contingency Fund" to meet unexpected, housing-related needs
- March 2018**  
HFI and Homeward 2020 launch online data dashboard: Addressing Long-Term Homelessness in Fort Collins
- May 2018**  
Homeward Alliance commits to use of BitFocus, a robust database and case management software
- July 2018**  
HFI joins regional Continuum of Care Governing Board
- September 2018**  
HFI releases first annual report and hosts panel discussion on state of homelessness in Fort Collins

\*HFI trained volunteers as "Housing Advocates" to offer long-term, supportive services to HFI participants. After piloting this approach, HFI shifted its volunteer focus to meet short-term housing search and move-in needs.

\*\*The Murphy Center is the hub of services for individuals and families experiencing homelessness or housing instability in our community.

## Housing First Principles

### Harm Reduction

Best-practice strategy that seeks to lessen, but not necessarily eliminate, the negative impacts of drug and alcohol use. HFI does not require program participants to be sober, but rather helps individuals avoid risky behaviors and reduce the harms associated with substance use.

### Trauma Informed Care

Proven principle of service provision through which practitioners identify—and help participants manage—the consequences of trauma, past and present. HFI meets people where they are, understanding that many are recovering from or actively experiencing trauma.

### Housing First

Evidence-based theory with a simple, but transformative, underlying assumption: housing is a prerequisite to everything. People who are homeless are far more likely to overcome or effectively manage personal obstacles—mental-health issues, substance-use disorders, physical disabilities, unemployment—when they have roofs over their heads.



## HFI Data Analysis

- There are **378 people experiencing long-term homelessness** (six months or longer) in Fort Collins.
- During the month of June, **15 individuals entered long-term homelessness**, meaning that they hit the six-month mark of experiencing homelessness. The primary reasons reported include: asked to leave/evicted, bad credit, lost job/couldn't find work and mental illness.
- Among 64 HFI participants who secured housing, **61 remain housed today**.
- On average, HFI participants **experience homelessness for four years** with over 72 participants experiencing homelessness ten years or longer.

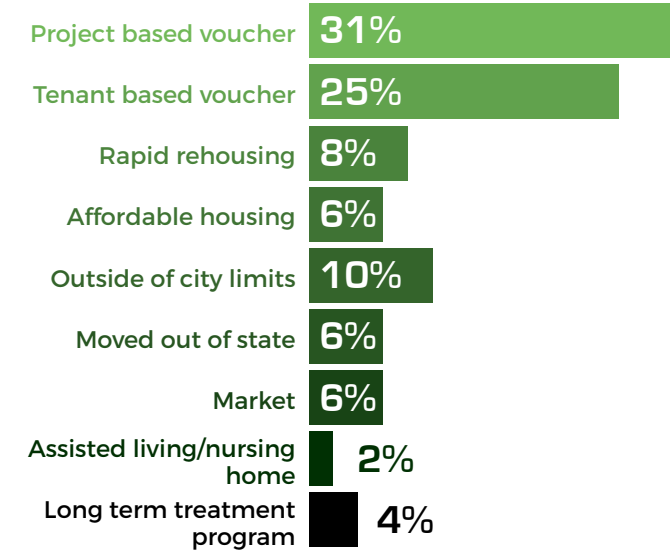
For more data and information: [homeward2020.org/data-dashboard](http://homeward2020.org/data-dashboard)

## HFI Data Snapshot

### Number of People Housed from June 2017 to June 2018



### Housing Secured by Type (n = 48)



### Top Five Self-Reported Contributing Factors to Homelessness\*



\*Participants can select multiple reasons.

### Seniors Experiencing Homelessness

Fort Collins currently has **38 seniors (61+)** experiencing long-term homelessness

**60%** of these seniors have a self-reported disability

**9%** of these seniors are veterans

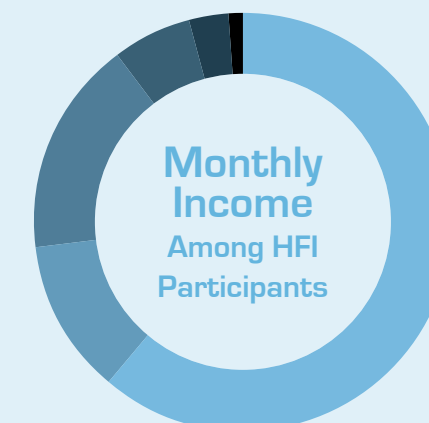
## The Cost Burden of Rent

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines cost-burdened families as those "who pay more than 30% of their income for housing" and "may have difficulty affording necessities such as food, clothing, transportation and medical care." Severe rent burden is defined as paying more than 50% of one's income on rent.



Average rent for a one-bedroom in Fort Collins/Loveland in 2017:  
**\$1,179.01**

Income required for this not to be cost-burdened:  
**\$3,930/month**



- 61.3%** \$0/No income
- 12%** \$1 - \$499
- 16.5%** \$500 - \$999
- 6.3%** \$1,000 - \$1,400
- 2.8%** \$1,500 - \$1,999
- 1.1%** \$2,000+

# Program and System Analysis

## HFI Strengths

**Data Collection:** HFI manages a robust data system that empowers the program to identify system trends and housing solutions, target service delivery and lead or participate in community data initiatives.

**Supportive Housing:** HFI helps individuals cut through the red tape and access existing housing in Fort Collins. The program maintains a flexible fund for housing expenses, develops relationships with private landlords and forms partnerships with nonprofit housing providers. Housing Catalyst plans to open 60 new units of permanent supportive housing in 2020; up to 20 of those units are designated for HFI participants.

**Collaboration:** Collaboration is shared communication and coordination with a purpose. HFI collaborates with diverse stakeholders at the system and individual levels, working to create community change and provide participants with customized support.

**Agency Alignment:** Homeward Alliance operates the Murphy Center and nine programs, including HFI. The agency has added new programs and adjusted existing programs to align more-closely with HFI and respond to community opportunities and gaps.

### Community Gaps

**Lack of Affordable Housing Options:** Despite recent gains, the demand for subsidized and affordable housing—housing vouchers, permanent supportive housing units, affordable housing—continues to exceed the supply in northern Colorado. The inventory is especially low for people who earn between 30% and 50% of the Area Median Income (AMI).

**Shortage of Supportive Services:** Housing is the first and most critical step toward stability. Many HFI participants, however, also require ongoing supportive services: intensive case management, counseling, medically-assisted treatments, in-home healthcare, legal assistance and more. Numerous agencies provide housing-retention services to people who escape homelessness, but those services are extremely limited.

**Barriers to Housing Access:** Many individuals who are homeless face numerous barriers to housing: credit issues, poor tenant record, criminal histories and more. HFI engages regularly with landlords to reduce or eliminate these barriers, but significant gaps remain.

### HFI Recommendations

**Develop new affordable units, invest in permanent supportive housing projects and provide funds to programs that make housing affordable for people with zero or extremely-limited incomes.**

**Develop or fund programs that provide flexible, client-centered services to people who are homeless or formerly-homeless, with an emphasis on programs that provide long-term or permanent support.**

**Promote landlord engagement and education and invest in programs that reduce or eliminate barriers to housing access.**

**Invest time and funding in initiatives that produce actionable, system-level data on the issue of homelessness.**

## HFI Participation in System-Level Work

**FUSE Project:** FUSE is a nationally-renowned, supportive housing model through which communities identify and provide intensive, housing-focused support to individuals (a) with complex medical and behavioral health challenges and (b) who are the highest users of emergency rooms, jails, shelters, clinics and other costly crisis services. Homeward 2020 is convening stakeholders to initiate a FUSE project in Fall 2018.

**Housing Placement:** HFI continues to contribute to the development of a robust, regional Coordinated Assessment and Housing Placement System, identifying individuals experiencing homelessness and streamlining housing access across Larimer and Weld Counties.

**Data Collection:** HFI participates in numerous local collaboratives that seek to improve data collection and sharing, enhance service coordination and more-clearly identify system strengths and gaps. Homeward Alliance (including HFI) expects to soon launch a customized agency database that will integrate with the statewide, Housing and Urban Development (HUD)-mandated Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).

