



**COVID-19**

## **Homeless System Response: Homelessness Prevention: Effective and Efficient Prevention Programs**

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act investment supports longer-term housing strategies that address the public health crisis and advance the goal of ending homelessness. Prevention programs reduce homelessness when they are both effective and efficient. Effective interventions help people find and maintain stable housing and avoid homelessness. Efficient interventions assist people who would experience homelessness in their absence. This document highlights several homelessness prevention programs that have been efficient and effective. For more detailed information about the highlighted strategies, please watch the [Prevention webinar](#).

### **Homebase: New York City, NY**

#### ***A diversely funded prevention intervention in a dense urban area***

[Homebase](#), a New York City homelessness prevention initiative, is coordinated by the city's Department of Homeless Services (DHS). DHS works directly with community service providers throughout the five boroughs to administer assistance; this offers households the convenience of seeking support close to home. The program is funded with both federal and local dollars including funds from Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Emergency Solutions Grant Program (ESG), and the city. Households in need may contact individual organizations that offer assistance in their borough, identified on the Homebase website, or by dialing the city's 311 hotline.

Using a research-based assessment tool to measure risk, the program targets low-income households most likely to enter the emergency shelter system without access to assistance. The range of assistance types varies and is offered depending on the level of risk for each household. Homebase offers "brief" assistance to those households that need a lighter-touch intervention to mediate their housing crisis, as well as a "full" approach for those households that need a more intensive intervention in order to obtain or maintain housing stability. Assistance may include crisis intervention to prevent eviction, emergency rental assistance, money management counseling, supportive services to develop an individualized housing plan, education and job placement assistance, relocation assistance, or short-term rental assistance.

### **Mississippi Home Corporation: Mississippi**

#### ***A prevention program serving low-income households across a vast rural geography***

Homelessness prevention activities in Mississippi are funded by ESG dollars that flow through the state recipient, Mississippi Home Corporation. Each of the three CoCs receive ESG funds to engage in homelessness prevention activities. For the Balance of State CoC, which covers 71 counties, six agencies offer ESG-funded prevention activities to households in need. Those seeking assistance can reach out through a number of channels, including Mississippi United to End Homelessness (the Collaborative Applicant), to determine eligibility and connect with a community resource.

The Balance of State CoC prevention program targets extremely low-income households most likely to enter the homeless system if not for this assistance. Households are paired with a case manager regardless of the type of financial assistance they receive, and case managers work alongside the household to resolve the housing crisis. Oftentimes case managers will connect with a non-ESG funded community resource—such as a church's discretionary funds—to resolve the crisis, thus reserving ESG funds for additional needs that cannot be served through other sources. Case managers stay connected with households as long as assistance is needed.

Although six agencies across a 71-county footprint sounds daunting, the Balance of State CoC is supported by regional coalitions consisting of community partners that have connections in each part of the state. Word of mouth is an integral part of how households find assistance—community partners have a no wrong door approach and connect households in need with whatever resources they can find to support the household in maintaining its housing stability. Partnerships, both formal and informal, are key to serving households in more rural parts of the state.

## HomeStart: Boston, MA

### ***A prevention program that highlights the cost-benefit of eviction prevention and subsidy retention***

[HomeStart, Inc.](#) is a nonprofit focused on housing advocacy for homeless and at-risk households. With a team of advocates dedicated to eviction prevention, HomeStart uses a combination of case management and financial assistance to ensure households at highest risk for entering emergency shelter are prevented from doing so. This program is funded through federal resources like ESG as well as private fundraising, philanthropy, and per-intervention reimbursement partnerships with property owners. HomeStart has found the benefits of prevention extend beyond the housing stability and social/emotional wellbeing of the households served: there is also cost savings for taxpayers and property owners. HomeStart's total cost per household to halt an eviction is approximately \$2K. In comparison, Massachusetts property owners spend \$6K-\$10K to execute an eviction and the state spends more than \$30K each time a family enters the shelter system.

HomeStart's model includes an eviction prevention hotline, staffed by an advocate who conducts an initial risk assessment over the phone. HomeStart screens for households at high risk of displacement and homelessness (generally at the stage of court-based non-payment eviction) with tenancies that can be sustainable after short-term intervention. HomeStart assigns a prevention advocate that works directly with the household and provides services tailored to meet the household's needs, including but not limited to: directly negotiating with property owners, accompanying clients to housing court and mediation appointments, helping clients develop a plan to address barriers to housing stability, providing financial assistance, connecting households to community resources and mainstream benefits, and following up with stabilization case management for up to 12 months. Finally, HomeStart maintains close partnerships with the local legal aid organization and the local public housing authority to strengthen collective efforts to prevent eviction and subsidy loss for vulnerable households.

## MACCH Connect: Omaha, NE

### ***A prevention program taking a unique approach to staffing during the COVID-19 pandemic***

The Metro Area CoC for the Homeless (MACCH) offers housing problem-solving services for those experiencing a housing crisis within a three-county, two-state area. Funded through private dollars from local foundations, households experiencing a housing crisis get connected to problem-solving services including targeted prevention, diversion, and rapid exit. Informed by the CoC's data, prevention services are targeted to households with incomes under 80 percent Area Median Income (AMI) that are within 20 days of experiencing literal homelessness and most likely to enter the homeless system. Households with less than 30 percent AMI will qualify automatically for financial assistance; households closer to 80 percent AMI are screened further and must meet certain criteria for assistance.

Households in need may access assistance through coordinated entry or by referrals from community partners. MACCH's problem solvers work with each household to connect with community resources to determine if there are options outside of prevention funds that can assist with the housing crisis. If financial assistance is required, it is offered only if it connects directly to safe housing options. MACCH has found that the average cost per household is below \$1K for rental assistance and rental arrears; this amount is less than local housing costs because the problem solvers are able to supplement prevention funds with other community resources as well as resources within an individual's own network.

As this approach is ever-evolving, MACCH has partnered with the local school system and furloughed school counselors to serve as problem solvers—households benefit from working with trained clinicians and employing furloughed workers helps minimize COVID-19's impact on local unemployment rates.