

AHAC History:

The Austin Homelessness Advisory Council (AHAC), previously named the Austin Homelessness Advisory Committee, is a group of approximately 15 individuals with lived experience with homelessness in Austin. AHAC was created in 2017 with support from Austin's Innovation Office and a Bloomberg Philanthropies Grant. The Innovation Office utilized the group's expertise to prototype different programs and services being developed to serve the homeless community, and helped facilitate input sessions with other City departments and outside providers regarding a wide array of issues impacting individuals experiencing homelessness.

Beginning in March 2019, Downtown Austin Community Court (DACC) took over facilitation and administrative support of AHAC. Prior to COVID-19, AHAC met on a biweekly basis to provide input on processes, programs, and practices impacting and serving individuals experiencing homelessness. Since DACC began support for this group, AHAC has developed a formal resolution with recommendations for the City Council regarding storage options that was formally recommended by the DACC Advisory Board (<http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=321920>). AHAC is currently in the process of developing recommendations related to a coordinated case management system. AHAC has also provided feedback regarding City practices and community program services to:

- Neighborhood Housing and Community Development
- The Office of Police Oversight
- Austin Public Health
- Downtown Austin Community Court
- Front Steps
- The Homeless Strategy Office
- The Watershed Protection Department
- Austin Water Utility
- The Austin Transportation Department
- Yellow Bike Project
- Gensler – an architecture firm, with discussion around Austin growth and urban environment
- Veterans Affairs
- Integral Care on two occasions about case management and 2020 Census outreach efforts
- The Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO) on two occasions regarding the Coordinated Assessment process and the hotel project purchased by the City for Permanent Supportive Housing
- The Austin Communications and Public Information Office
- The Office of Design and Delivery
- The Innovation Office

AHAC's overall mission is primarily centered around ensuring that individuals experiencing homelessness have a voice in every process, program, and practice impacting and serving individuals experiencing homelessness. As the group continues their work, DACC continues to provide support and outreach to ensure that the City and service providers know that AHAC is an invaluable resource as we work as a community to effectively address homelessness. While DACC provides facilitation and administrative support for this group, the work of AHAC including their recommendations, formal input, and adoption of their bylaws belongs to the AHAC Members. This is intentional to ensure that any work done by this group truly represents their voices as individuals and as a group with lived experience.

To accommodate AHAC's continued work while also keeping everyone safe during the pandemic, we've switched to a survey format. AHAC Members come every two weeks to drop off their completed survey

from the previous meeting, and pick up a new survey to fill out for the following meeting (along with the participation incentives we provide). During the pandemic, we've continued to have a fairly good turnout with between 12-14 members of the 15 member group participating each time. AHAC's survey history during the pandemic includes the following:

AHAC Work Summary during COVID-19

December 21 – Feedback provided to the Austin Public Health Homeless Services Division (HSD)

Background: Background: The Austin Public Health Homeless Services Division (HSD) seeks to understand what outreach, crisis assistance, and stabilization services are most valuable to people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. The *Investing for Results* report, released on July 22, 2020, includes an extensive review of the City of Austin's investments in homeless services. Homeless Services Division asks your help to better understand the outreach, support, and crisis assistance needs of people experiencing homelessness.

December 7 – Feedback provided to the Office of Innovation

Background: Austin's Office of Innovation is working on a platform where you can *upload, store* and *share* all of your IDs and documents digitally from any device. This project, formerly known as 'MyPass' seeks to facilitate access to services for people experiencing homelessness by providing a way to keep your documents safe and enable them to be digitally notarized.

This grant-funded project is at the MVP stage (minimum viable product) and has been designed with care to be inclusive of and accessible to people experiencing homelessness with a diverse range of cognitive and digital literacy abilities. We have developed an array of features to make the platform accessible and to help people upload, store and hold onto their documents.

There are two things AHAC can help us with:

The first is about rebranding. Questions related to this will try to get your reaction to some alternative names for the platform as well as designate a place for you to suggest your own. This is in hopes of finding a name better suited to describe the platform that isn't 'MyPass.'

The second is about your experience in dealing with a system that relies heavily on IDs and documents. By learning where, how and when you use IDs and documents, we can better understand which organizations we need to approach and integrate with the platform to ensure it is helpful to you.

The Office of Innovation team thanks you for your continued contributions to the research, design and development of this digital document platform. We look forward to your feedback!

November 23 – Feedback provided to the AHAC Facilitators

Background: When we began this survey approach in March in response to COVID-19, we never imagined we would still be in the middle of this pandemic 8 months later. In the short term, it appears for at least several more months it may not be safe to meet in person. While DACC will closely monitor local public health orders and bring AHAC back together as soon as it's safe, we wanted to dedicate a meeting to hearing from you all about how you feel AHAC has been going during this time, what can be improved, and ideas you have for AHAC long term. We also want to hear feedback from you all about a few housekeeping things, such as any changes in contact information and the proposed AHAC calendar for 2020.

Since we can't have this discussion in person, we've added more context than usual for many of the questions in this survey. Please be thorough in your responses, and feel free to contact us outside this survey if you'd like to talk through this, or anything else, over the phone or via email. We appreciate you

all and look forward to getting your feedback so we can keep working together, even with the limitations we're currently facing.

As we enter the holiday season, and Thanksgiving this week, please know that we are very thankful for each of you.

November 9 – Feedback provided to the Homeless Outreach Street Team (HOST)

Background: The Homeless Outreach Street Team (HOST) is an interdisciplinary team made of members from Austin Travis County Emergency Medical Services, Austin Police Department, Downtown Austin Community Court, and Integral Care. This team's purpose is to meet with individuals experiencing homelessness, find out the barriers they are facing and connect them to services.

One of the members for HOST is the Peer Support Specialist who uses their own lived experience with homelessness to build trust and help others navigate the system and access services. The role of Peer Support is a newer role starting in 2018 for HOST via the Integral Care part of the team.

HOST is currently working on training documents for future new team members in order to continue the quality of services their clients expect. In order to be prepared for any changes in staffing, training is being developed. HOST would like your input on what should be considered when creating training and building support for future Peer Support Specialists on HOST.

At present, the Peer Support Specialist is required to have a Peer Specialist Training and Certification or be able to obtain within one year. The position is also supported by a Licensed Clinical Social Worker with opportunity for supervision and staffing of cases.

October 26 – Feedback provided to the Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO)

Background: Landlord Engagement Services are a necessary part of the system that helps increase the availability of housing units for individuals seeking help. This process involves building relationships with landlords to increase the number of units available in the community, lower screening requirements for potential tenants which eliminates some barriers, and increase the number of properties willing to work with ECHO and partners to help with housing stability support on an ongoing basis. Housing programs can include:

- Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH): An intervention that combines ongoing assistance with rent and utilities, along with intensive supportive services with may include mental health, physical health, and/or substance use services to address the needs of participants who typically experienced long-term homelessness and/or have disabling conditions. The support for this program is intended to be in place as long as the participant needs it, which can be indefinitely.
- Rapid Rehousing (RRH): Provides short-term rental assistance and services. The goals are to help people obtain housing quickly, increase self-sufficiency, and stay housed. It is offered without preconditions (such as employment, income, absence of criminal record, or sobriety) and the resources and services provided are typically tailored to the needs of the person. This support typically ranges from 3 months to 24 months, with a goal of participants being able to pay rent on their own after the program ends.

ECHO is asking for your help to determine the scope, future, and function of Landlord Engagement Services in our community. Clients using Rapid Rehousing (RRH) and Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) services need access to low-barrier, quality rental units. For the past five years, ECHO's Community Housing Department has provided centralized landlord engagement services to create those partnerships with landlords and make units available to PSH and RRH providers. To do this work, ECHO works with property owners and property managers in apartments throughout the City to get commitments to house people experiencing homelessness enrolled in RRH or PSH programming. Priorities for the ECHO Community Housing team include creating access to units that meet the funding requirements and meet the needs of the clients. In turn, ECHO's Community Housing team makes these units available to the agencies in the community who are working with those clients and need assistance getting access to apartments that will house their clients.

ECHO has started a planning process that will allow the community to make recommendations of how this work should be continued. We are looking at national best practices and guidance, along with working with a group of providers of RRH and PSH services, industry experts, and people with lived experience. Your feedback will be helpful for this group to make sure we are considering the priorities of people with lived experience.

October 12 – Feedback provided to Austin Public Health

Background: On October 15, 2020, Austin Public Health (APH) will resume its daily monitoring of the weather to gauge the need for opening Cold Weather Shelters. APH works alongside other city agencies, such as Homeland Security and Emergency Management, the ARCH, Front Steps, and CapMetro, to provide a place for those to take shelter on nights where the city of Austin is experiencing instances of extreme cold weather. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, cold-weather sheltering will look different than it has in past years.

Us at APH and the City of Austin are first and foremost, public servants dedicated to providing help and aid to every person in Austin. In order to better serve you, we are interested in your input regarding how cold-weather shelters have worked for you in the past and how we can make them better work for you in the future.

We at APH would also appreciate your input on current and future COVID-19 messaging and outreach. When a COVID-19 vaccine does come out, APH will be ensuring that all populations have access to receiving it. In this way, we can work towards the goal of ending this pandemic.

September 28 – Feedback provided to Socks for the Sole

Background: Socks for the Sole is a student-run 501(c)(3) non-profit at the University of Texas at Austin. Our mission is to provide people experiencing homelessness in Austin with socks and other under-donated essentials. We focus on socks because of how important they are for an individual's health and because they are highly requested. As an organization, we hold volunteer events where we drive and walk around the city and pass out new socks to people experiencing homelessness. We also pass out other items such as food, water, underwear, hats and gloves, tampons, and first aid kits. We work with several different businesses and organizations around the country to collect these items. We want to make it as easy as possible for people to access these items, so we try to be as mobile as possible.

We want to make sure we are effectively and appropriately assisting in meeting some of the resource needs of individuals experiencing homelessness. We hope that the feedback we receive from these questions will help improve our organization's work so that we can better cater to the needs of the individuals experiencing homelessness in Austin. Our goal is to be able to reach as many people experiencing homelessness in Austin as possible and to provide them with the items they need the most.

September 14 – Feedback provided to the Austin Public Health (APH)

Background: Austin Public Health (APH) anticipates putting out solicitations in the future to fund different types of housing programs for individuals experiencing homelessness. APH would like your input on the types of programs that should be prioritized and what questions should be asked of potential providers.

The potential solicitations could have a similar process to what many AHAC Members helped Downtown Community Court with last year related to funding for housing and other social services.

This survey is broken into the three following sections:

Section 1: Application Questions for Potential Service Providers

Section 2: Eligibility for Services

Section 3: Evaluation Process

August 31 – Feedback provided to the Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO)

Background: Coordinated Entry is a system where people experiencing homelessness programs can apply for multiple potential housing programs at the same time. Its primary goals are to make it easier for

people to ask for help from all possible programs at once instead of having to apply to each program separately and then check on multiple separate waitlists.

Part of Coordinated Entry is Coordinated Assessment, which is a series of questions that tries to help people identify which possible housing programs or agencies they're eligible for and most interested in. If there are multiple eligible people applying for the same one opening, then some of those questions are also used to determine who gets offered assistance first and who has to wait longer for the same program. The Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO) is the primary agency responsible for running the Coordinated Entry system, but the community as a whole decides what questions should be part of the process and how those answers should affect how people get offered housing programs. AHAC has provided feedback in the past how things are working with Coordinated Entry overall, and ECHO would now like your feedback as experts within our community on which specific changes you would like to see made to the system in the next year.

August 17 – Feedback provided to the City of Austin's Service Design Lab

Background: Each year the City of Austin provides funding for the plastic pocket guide that is made by House the Homeless. This year, the City's Service Design Lab would like to improve the pocket guide and make it larger. We want to include information and content from people with lived experience of homelessness. This new guide could be a pamphlet, a magazine, or a little book if necessary. We would like to create this guide with you.

August 3 - Feedback provided to Mary's Place in Seattle, Washington:

Background: Mary's Place is a homeless service organization located in Seattle, Washington that provides services for families experiencing homelessness. We have five different shelter locations that provide 24-hour services for families as well as a street outreach team that connects with families who are living unsheltered to help them develop a path to housing. We are committed to making sure that our services work well for the families who stay in our shelters and access our outreach program. We are looking to develop a formal way for current guests and outreach participants to share their lived expertise and help us make improvements to our programs and services. We would like to create a Consumer Advisory Committee, much like the one you all currently serve on in Austin. We have never had a committee like this before, and are designing our committee from scratch. We would love to hear about your experience and get suggestions from you so that we can design a committee that truly values and honors the expertise of our guests and participants and results in meaningful change for our agency. Our main goal is to have services that are truly client centered and meet the needs of our guests and participants so that their families are able to transition from homelessness to housing.

July 20 - Feedback provided to the Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO):

Background: On July 2, 2020 the Austin City Council adopted an Order that will be in effect until August 15. It is possible that this Order could be amended or extended through additional action. With some limited exception, this Order requires individuals and businesses to practice social distancing, hygiene, and face covering behaviors, and prohibits gatherings of more than 10 persons at most outdoor areas, events, and establishments. Additionally, City resources such as libraries and neighborhood centers have been closed during the pandemic, and many social service providers have shifted to service models that are offered over the phone or internet rather than in person, or have paused services until the public health emergency is under control.

Local numbers and guidance from health authorities will help to guide the City in the process to develop phases toward fully reopening. We are interested in your input regarding your current access to resources, as well as your comfort level and preferences for how you think the reopening process should be handled.

July 6 - Feedback provided to the Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO):

Background: The Point in Time (PIT) Count is an annual census of the homeless population in Austin and Travis County. Conducting a PIT Count is required of all communities that want to receive housing

assistance funding from the federal department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). In our community, the PIT Count consists of several hundred volunteers dividing into teams and canvassing the entire Austin/Travis County area early in the morning and completing short surveys with the people volunteers find. The Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO) is the primary agency responsible for planning for the PIT Count, but many other homeless service providers also contribute. In the past, planning around the PIT Count has focused primarily on training and organizing volunteers. However, we understand that the PIT Count can be an intrusive and potentially unpleasant experience for the individuals staying outside that volunteers are trying to count. While there are some aspects about the PIT Count that are mandated by HUD and can't be changed (for example, HUD says the Count must occur in the last week of January), we want to do a better job incorporating the feedback from people with lived expertise of homelessness in our preparations for the 2021 PIT Count. To that end, we've included several questions below about your perceptions of and suggestions to improve the PIT Count. Planning for the PIT Count is an ongoing process, and we've included information at the end of this survey if you'd like to provide additional feedback later or become more involved in the planning process.

June 22 - Feedback provided to the Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO):

Background: The Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO) is developing two communications projects and is seeking input from people with lived experience for both of them. The first project is a Facebook page specifically for people experiencing homelessness to find resources during the COVID-19 pandemic. This project is based on feedback from another survey that identified gaps in information that was available and found that Facebook was a common way people experiencing homelessness find resources. The page would be constantly updated by service providers and serve as a central location to find food, hygiene, internet, and other resources.

The second project is a communications plan for ECHO as an organization. ECHO wants to identify needs within our community to help focus public conversations throughout the next year, and this can't be done effectively without hearing from people with lived experience. The second half of these survey questions will help ECHO develop a plan that is helpful to both the homeless community and the public at large.

June 8 – Feedback provided to the City of Austin:

Background: Historically, individuals with lived experience are often left out of the discussion when decisions are being made. Policies and services sometimes miss the mark on meeting the explicit needs of these people, directly impacting service providers' ability to maintain relationships. AHAC was created to build a platform where people who have experienced homelessness in the City can influence the function and delivery of homelessness services in our community.

On May 25, 2020, George Floyd was murdered by a police officer in Minneapolis. This has understandably led to grief and outrage in communities across the country, and sparked protests and community conversations about the critical importance of acknowledging, addressing, and healing racism. Protests are an important part of our democracy, but also can have some unintended consequences. The City is interested in hearing your perspective on:

- How protests may have impacted individuals experiencing homelessness, and how they can be conducted safely alongside homeless communities
- What the City can do to help eliminate institutional racism
- How to provide more equitable services for everyone including black and brown communities, individuals experiencing homelessness, low-income individuals and families, and other vulnerable populations.

May 27 – Reflection and Personal Perspective provided to Downtown Austin Community Court (*facilitators of AHAC*):

Background: In the city of Austin, those with lived experience are often left out of the discussion. Policies and services often miss the mark on meeting the explicit needs of these people, directly impacting

service providers' ability to maintain relationships. AHAC was created to build a platform where people who have experienced homelessness in the City can influence the function and delivery of homelessness services in our community. This writing activity is designed to capture your personal thoughts about participating in AHAC.

May 11 - Feedback provided to the City of Austin and the Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO):

Background: The City of Austin and the Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO) are working on creating a COVID-19 Homeless Response Plan for our community.

The plan includes the following Five Goals

1. Setting up screening processes for people experiencing homelessness staying in shelters or on the street
2. Getting and operating sites/rooms to provide housing for people experiencing homelessness
3. Putting effective ways to get and keep people housed in place while the economy recovers
4. Making sure social distancing, safety, and hygiene procedures are in place at existing emergency shelters
5. Addressing the needs of unsheltered people, including people living in encampments

The Response Planning Management Team has created a series of workgroups to focus on making recommendations and carrying out certain parts of this plan. We recognize the importance of your input and thank you for your time.

April 27 - Feedback provided to The Office of Police Oversight and Downtown Austin Community Court:

Background: The Community Preparedness and Education Cabinet is a city task force created to work with community leaders and organizers to ensure that critical information is provided by various means with the purpose of reaching the communities most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, creating messages that resonate, establishing social cohesion at a district or neighborhood level, and ensuring that the information provided is actionable by the community. The Office of Police Oversight, who AHAC has worked with before, reached out to ask for AHAC's input on the following questions to help inform the Cabinet's work.

April 13 - Feedback provided to The Office of Design and Delivery:

Background: The Office of Design and Delivery is undertaking user research to understand how the city can better communicate with the Austin community about homelessness, especially in regards to data. This work is occurring in partnership between the Communications and Public Information Office and Communication and Technology Management with the goal of creating a digital communications strategy around homelessness. Complete findings and recommendations will be shared out in May with departmental staff and with AHAC.

March 30 - Feedback provided to Downtown Austin Community Court (DACC):

Background: AHAC voted to work together to develop a recommendation for the City Council related to a coordinated case management system. In a previous meeting, AHAC agreed on multiple items that should be addressed in a coordinated case management recommendation including:

- 1) Definition
- 2) Background/lived experience examples of positive and negative experiences with case management
- 3) City-focused recommendations (items that the City can address either through policy or funding)
- 4) Components of a coordinated case management system including:
 - a. Communication structure & system
 - i. Between case managers & clients

- ii. Between case managers & service providers
- b. List of types of services & service providers that should be included in the coordinated case management system
- c. Review of existing case management models to see what good practices can be built upon
- d. Referral process including warm handoffs and follow up
 - i. Set a minimum standard and a gold standard/best practice
- e. Respectful Interactions & Customer Service