

Downtown Austin Community Court

Homeless Services

Introduction

Downtown Austin Community Court's mission is to administer justice equitably and compassionately to foster trust and accountability, and to utilize a client-centered and housing-focused intensive case management model to help individuals experiencing homelessness achieve long-term stability.

DACC's ultimate goal is to help the individuals served access stable housing and appropriate behavioral health and social service supports, which in turn improves their overall quality of life. These improvements for the people served also helps to reduce use of all public systems including hospitals, jails, and emergency response.

This document serves as an introduction to the Downtown Austin Community Court's (DACC) homeless services, with a particular focus on case management and outreach efforts. This high-level overview includes:

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1. Intensive Case Management

1a. Mission & Overview:

Downtown Austin Community Court's (DACC) Intensive Case Management (ICM) program aims to end homelessness by providing comprehensive, long term services to individuals experiencing homelessness.

In Fiscal Year 2009, DACC identified a targeted group of Frequent Utilizers, including individuals who had 25 or more legal cases with DACC and at least one active case in the last two years. At its highest, there were 443 Frequent Utilizers in 2015, which decreased to 108 in 2019. Frequent Utilizers are experiencing homelessness, and may have issues with substance use, physical health and/or mental health, and in some cases, have extensive criminal justice involvement at all levels. To serve these individuals effectively and with a compassionate approach, DACC created the ICM Program.

ICM prioritizes using an evidenced-based model of wraparound interventions to help individuals served achieve long-term stability and improve their quality of life. All resources, whether provided internally or externally are based on best practices including person-centered services, Trauma-Informed Care, and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. Critical Time Intervention is one of the most important components of DACC's ICM Program, which connects individuals to services as soon as they are ready to engage.

DACC serves as a critical safety net for individuals who may never have been willing to engage in services, or who have not been successful in any other programs. DACC's approach is different from many other service providers in that we'll continue to work with someone rather than exiting them due to behavioral or other issues. DACC recognizes these challenges are often associated with mental health and/or substance use issues. DACC staff use their compassionate approach and clinical expertise to help individuals through any challenges and continue to provide access to services based on each individual's needs.

1b. Pathways into ICM Services:

DACC primarily serves as a social service organization for some of the most vulnerable individuals in the community. Most of the people served have tri-occurring issues related to physical health, mental health, and substance use. Many individuals served also have history with the criminal justice system, traumatic brain injuries, and/or intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

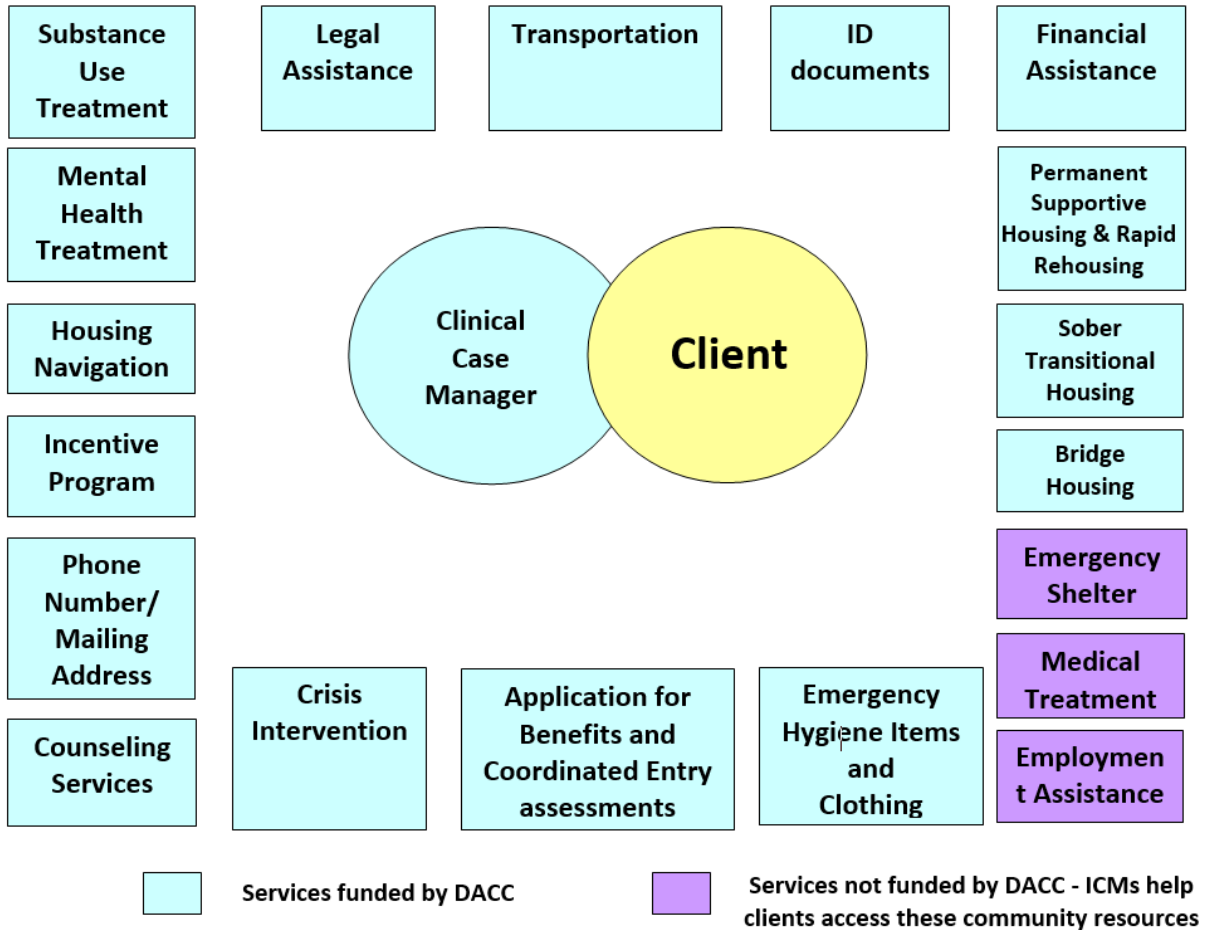
There are multiple pathways into services through the ICM program. These entry points include the ability to receive walk-in clients and referrals from the Homeless Outreach Street Team (HOST), which have both increased over time due to the trust DACC has built within the homeless community. ICM also serves individuals with cases that come before DACC. Additionally, service providers seek assistance and refer highly acute and vulnerable clients to DACC when they think an individual may meet the criteria established for prioritizing individuals seeking case management assistance.

When a case management slot becomes available in the ICM program, there is prioritization HOST referrals, followed by walk-in requests for case management services from individuals experiencing homelessness, then referrals from other organizations and frequent utilizers (individuals with a multitude of cases with DACC). For the latter, clients are prioritized based on acuity and the presence of mental and physical health issues, substance use, and involvement in the criminal justice system.

1c. Wraparound Services & Resources:

In addition to connecting individuals with public benefits and housing, DACC funds and manages social service contracts that provide access to permanent supportive housing (PSH), rapid rehousing (RRH), transitional housing, bridge housing, peer support services, substance use treatment and an array of comprehensive social service supports to assist clients in acquiring long-term stability. The table below reflects the services ICM case managers are able to either provide directly or connect individuals to through DACC funded resources. In line with best practices, DACC also provides incentives for engagement such as bus passes and food gift cards. DACC maintains an emergency supplies closet, which includes clothing and hygiene products to help meet immediate needs of individuals DACC serves.

DACC Case Management Wrap-Around Services



Social services are funded through the City’s General Fund, which provides DACC more flexibility than many grant-funded programs to establish terms and timeline for services. This enables ICM clients to access services as long as they’re needed. ICM staff will continue to provide case management services after an individual is housed if that’s what that person needs to maintain their stability. Additionally, DACC has some flexibility on expenses, which enables the provision of items such as identification documents, cell phones, prescription copays, prosthetic devices, and work clothes.

1d. Case Management Staff Credentials:

Due to the high acuity of individuals DACC serves from a mental health and substance use perspective, DACC employs a medical approach to case management services. Each ICM staff member has clinical expertise, which ensures the quality of service are able to meet the needs of individuals served productively and compassionately. To that end, each ICM employee has a Master’s degree and a clinical license in the State of Texas. Masters-level social workers are often interested in pursuing the next level of education to become a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. This process requires clinical supervision, which individuals pay for or obtain through employers that offer clinical supervision as part of employment. This process requires a

minimum of 100 hours of clinical supervision over a minimum of 24 months. By providing this clinical supervision for ICM staff, DACC is able to provide a significant benefit for employees and help to recruit and retain a highly qualified workforce.

2. Triage Case Management

DACC provides walk-in case management services, which individuals experiencing homelessness may access during regular weekday business hours.

The types of services that can be accessed through Triage Case Management include (but are not limited to):

- ID's/Vital Documents including scheduling DPS appointments
- Assistance with applying for food stamps, reinstatement or renewal of SNAP benefits
- Linking to medical and behavioral health care
- Assistance in applying for or renewing Medical Assistance Program benefits
- Assistance with applying for federal stimulus checks related to Coronavirus relief
- Applying for unemployment benefits
- Linking to employment services
- Resource navigation
- Coordinate linkage to other agencies
- Docket search for upcoming court cases, information on warrants. Individuals will not be arrested for outstanding tickets or warrants if entering Downtown Austin Community Court.
- Storage of vital documents
- Use of DACC mailing address

During the COVID-19 pandemic, DACC triage case management services continued without interruption, with modifications made to protect the health and safety of individuals served and staff. DACC's triage case management program was one of the only walk-in services in the community that remained open during the pandemic, and the number of individuals served daily nearly tripled during this time.

3. Outreach & Engagement

3a. Homeless Outreach Street Team

DACC is part of the Homeless Outreach Street Team (HOST), a collaboration between Integral Care, Austin Police Department, Emergency Medical Services, and DACC. HOST is a critical piece of the larger effort to move individuals from homelessness to improved well-being and housing stability. HOST's goal is to identify individuals experiencing homelessness, learn what challenges they face, and work to connect them to services such as medical and behavioral healthcare, case management, and housing.

DACC serves multiple functions within HOST. DACC has a dedicated Clinical Case Manager on HOST that dedicates their time to outreach within the community and connecting individuals

experiencing homelessness with services and basic needs. Many of the individuals engaged by HOST have not previously been willing to engage in services, or may have been excluded from other services following behavioral issues related to mental health and/or substance use issues. DACC prioritizes referrals into the ICM program to ensure that individuals ready to engage are able to have a dedicated case manager and access ongoing services. Through an interlocal agreement, DACC also funds multiple Integral Care staff that serve on HOST.

3b. Homeless Health and Wellness Center Partnership

In January 2021, the Austin City Council approved funding to expand behavioral health services for individuals experiencing homelessness through an agreement with Integral Care, the Local Mental Health Authority for Travis County. The agreement is funded collaboratively by DACC and the Downtown Austin Alliance, with Integral Care supporting the operations of the 3000 Oak Springs Clinic through grants from Health and Human Services Commission and Episcopal Health Foundation.

This Homeless Health and Wellness program (Program) integrates behavioral health services with primary health care. The housing-focused and person-centered case management services through this agreement closely mirror the approach of DACC's ICM Program. This Program expands upon Integral Care's continuum of services ranging from outreach and engagement to permanent housing by increasing access to specialty mental health and substance use treatment and primary care for individuals experiencing homelessness. Individuals that have the highest needs and greatest vulnerabilities on DACC's waitlist for Intensive Case Management and those identified and referred by HOST are prioritized for services. These services meet a critical unmet need with the capacity to provide intensive case management and rehabilitation services for to up to 100 individuals at a time.

Conclusion

Some of the biggest keys to DACC's success have been internal and external collaborations, a commitment to continually evolving services, and prioritizing compassion as the foundational value for all of our work and through every single person working for DACC. DACC welcomes inquiries for more information about our approach to services and collaborations. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions; DACC can be reached at ComCourt@austintexas.gov or 512-974-4879