



100-DAY CHALLENGE CASE STUDIES

SACRAMENTO, CA: ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH AS A BARRIER TO HOUSING

The Sacramento 100-Day Challenge Team established a focus on serving youth with significant mental health issues that create challenges to becoming stably housed. By the end of the Challenge, 56% of youth who had been housed had experienced significant mental health symptoms that created barriers to housing.

HOW SACRAMENTO MADE IT HAPPEN

Members of the Sacramento 100-Day Challenge Team found that they had been serving an increasing number of youth with mental health needs that contribute to or exacerbate their experience of homelessness and create barriers to attaining housing. The team realized that efforts to stabilize housing for youth through the 100-Day Challenge will be less successful if mental health and wellness are not also addressed in an intentional, thoughtful, and strategic way. As a result, Sacramento set an ambitious goal that 65% of all youth housed during the 100-Day Challenge would be youth who were experiencing stress or significant mental health symptoms as a barrier to housing.

The Sacramento 100-Day Challenge Team brought representatives from the local mental and behavioral health systems to the table to develop a coordinated response to the mental health needs of youth experiencing homelessness. Mental health leaders agreed to create a universal mental health screening tool that could be used across providers to identify youth with significant mental health symptoms. Homeless and housing service providers began to offer more intensive, mental health focused-case management and worked to more quickly connect youth identified as experiencing mental health symptoms to mental health providers. As a result of these efforts, 56% of youth who had been connected to housing and supports during the 100-Day Challenge had experienced stress or mental health symptoms that created barriers to housing.

Key Takeaways:

- Mental health symptoms can create barriers to attaining and maintaining housing for youth experiencing homelessness.
- Communities should build capacity across the homeless and mental health systems to identify and make appropriate referrals for youth experiencing both homelessness and significant mental health symptoms.
- Housing and homeless service providers can work with their local mental health system to coordinate housing and wellness services and improve strategies for identifying youth experiencing both homelessness and mental health symptoms.
- Communities should provide a broad range of mental health supports for youth both with and without a mental health diagnosis.
- Communities can explore housing options that support mental health wellness and ensure these options are available to youth with significant mental health needs.

LESSONS LEARNED

1) Bring Mental and Behavioral Health System Leaders to the Table

The Sacramento 100-Day Challenge Team recognized the importance of bringing mental and behavioral health systems leaders to the table to address the specific needs of youth with mental health issues who are experiencing homelessness. Their outreach efforts reached the Program Coordinator of Sacramento County Mental Health's Division of Behavioral Health Services, whose involvement in the 100-Day Challenge efforts helped youth housing providers navigate the complexities of behavioral health programs and make better referrals for mental health services for their clients. Coordination with Sacramento County Mental Health also helped the 100-Day Challenge Team access critical data on youth engaged with behavioral health while still honoring their confidentiality. Homeless and housing service providers in Sacramento now have a clear point of contact within the behavioral health system of care to help address the mental health needs of youth experiencing homelessness.

2) Improve Cross-System Efforts to Identify Youth with Significant Mental Health Symptoms Who Are Experiencing Homelessness

In order to connect youth experiencing mental health symptoms to housing and supports, the Sacramento 100-Day Challenge Team improved efforts to identify youth with significant mental health symptoms who are experiencing homelessness in both the homeless and mental health systems of care. The Sacramento 100-Day Challenge Team began by connecting with every youth on the Coordinated Entry by-name list to update information, determine eligibilities, and discern current needs, including any mental health symptoms they may be experiencing. Case conferencing was launched and open to all providers working with youth experiencing homelessness to discuss youth strengths and needs, including any mental health and wellness challenges. The development of a youth informed mental health screening tool that can be used by all providers will also improve Sacramento's cross-system capacity to identify youth whose stress or symptoms create challenges to becoming stably housed.

3) Provide Broad Access to Mental Health Services and Supports

Sacramento's 100-Day Challenge encouraged the community to understand and address the broad mental health needs of youth experiencing homelessness, including youth who do not have a mental health diagnosis but are experiencing mental health symptoms that create barriers to housing. Sacramento has worked to quickly connect youth who have a mental health diagnosis to services within the mental health system and to provide a broad range of mental health supports within the homeless response system for all youth experiencing mental health challenges regardless of if they have a diagnosis. Mental health services and supports available to all youth experiencing mental health challenges include intensive case management, 1:1 counseling, and support groups.

4) Explore Housing Options for Youth that are Oriented Towards Mental Health Wellness

The inclusion of mental health wellness into Sacramento's 100-Day Challenge goal reflects the community's recognition that mental health and housing work together to impact stability for youth experiencing homelessness. Sacramento has been able to leverage the work of the 100-Day Challenge to improve matching of youth identified as experiencing mental health challenges to housing options that support mental health wellness, including rapid re-housing and permanent supportive housing programs that provide intensive case management and wraparound mental health services. Sacramento has also been working to explore new options that provide housing with a mental health focus, including state-funded housing with Medicaid supports and housing opportunities within the local mental health system of care.