Thanks to our collective advocacy, DC’s Fiscal Year 2022 budget included over 2,470 Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) vouchers: a historic investment that will help us reach our shared goal of ending chronic homelessness!

Now that the funding has been secured, we turn our focus towards ensuring those resources are implemented as intended and in a timely manner.

We have an ambitious goal before us. Implementing these vouchers - the most ever allocated in one fiscal year- will require significant shifts in operations and a renewed commitment to meeting the unique needs of our unhoused neighbors.

PSH voucher matches are behind schedule, but can still all be used by September 30
As of January 2022, DC had ended homelessness for just 100 individuals with Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH). While it was never realistic for all 2,400 vouchers to be used within the first 4 months of the Fiscal Year, this number is behind the pace we had hoped to have achieved by now.

This slower than anticipated rollout is a critical opportunity for the DC Council, the Department of Human Services, the DC Housing Authority, and housing providers to collectively address issues that may be delaying implementation and push for lasting solutions.

We must act with a sense of urgency
In December, the 2021 Annual Homeless Memorial Vigil, led by the People for Fairness Coalition, mourned 69 people who passed away in 2021 without housing, including 22 people who were matched to housing resources, but died before they moved into their homes. These deaths remind us that our collective work to end homelessness is urgent and that we must eliminate the red tape that stands between our unhoused neighbors and safe, stable housing.

The sooner this money is spent, the sooner our neighbors will exit homelessness.

Recommendations for the Department of Human Services
These recommendations come from a broad group of DHS contracted PSH providers, outreach workers, advocates, and people with lived experience of homelessness.

- **Reduce or eliminate burdensome documentation requirements**, such as the need for birth certificates or other identifying documents.
  - We are pleased that DHS is supportive of reducing or eliminating burdensome requirements that are obstacles to housing through the process of self-certification. We encourage DHS to continue to work with DCHA to ensure these vital changes are implemented quickly.

- **Scale up current efforts to expand landlord partnerships and increase housing market capacity**
  - Create and maintain a repository of pre-approved units and better coordinate with landlords to find units quickly.
Finalize the creation of the Central Unit Repository

- Finding available rental units while respecting client choice can be challenging. Although the creation of a Central Unit Repository has been underway for many years through the ICH, DHS, DHCD, TCP, and community partners, it has still not been finalized. Currently, each provider conducts their own landlord outreach and engagement. The Central Unit Repository would enable providers to utilize a centralized and shared database of available units, thereby increasing client choice, allowing cross-agency resource sharing, speeding up unit selection, and increasing interest in landlord participation by making it easy for them to advertise available units.

- Better educate and recruit landlords and help them through the voucher process.

**DHS Internal procedures:**

- We are pleased to learn that DHS is in the process of creating an updated organizational chart with relevant agencies and departments and are hopeful that this will be updated and shared on a regular basis.

- This must be done in tandem with clear escalation and troubleshooting policies and the assurance that clients and providers have consistent points of contact.

  - Currently, providers are often unsure who to contact to troubleshoot client concerns and end up spending valuable time cold-calling DHS contacts. A clear policy with clear points of contact will enable providers and clients to better communicate with DHS. Additionally, this will support a system of accountability and feedback between DHS and provider organizations.

- Until recently, DHS would not escalate delays in the LRSP application process to DCHA until 8 weeks after submission of application. We are pleased that DHS has reduced this time to 20 days.

**Focus on addressing hiring constraints and supporting providers:**

- DHS has repeatedly stated that staffing, or the lack thereof, is the biggest hurdle to getting money out the door and keys in hand. Staffing is indeed an issue. As such, DHS must work proactively to ensure that providers can hire well qualified workers for these vital roles.

- While DHS has reduced some barriers and is open to flexible requirements on case-by-case bases, this openness must be reflected in contracts and policy.

- DHS should reduce hiring barriers while also increasing compensation for PSH case managers. As such, we recommend that DHS enact the following changes for all PSH providers:
  
  - increase salary ranges and consider signing bonuses
  - reduce or eliminate background checks and educational requirements for housing case managers, especially for people with lived experience of homelessness, whose lived expertise is the best education for this work.

- DHS should consider the creation of a peer-training program similar to the one housed at The Department of Behavioral Health.

- DHS should consider partnership with the Department of Employment Services to promote job openings at contracted providers, host job fairs, and leverage all available methods to increase recruitment for these vital roles.

- Increase training and transparency associated with the switch to Medicaid billing for PSH services.
- Increase training quality and accountability for case managers so that all providers can provide the same high-quality, client centered support rooted in local and national best practices for optimal service delivery.
- We thank DHS for reducing contact requirement minimums and planning to increase provider rates. This allows for more client-focused and client-centered case management.

- **Address the growing use of fees to discriminate against voucher holders**
  - As landlords continue to use fees not covered by PSH vouchers (amenity fees, trash fees, etc), clients are increasingly prevented from moving into units of their choice. This is a new iteration of voucher discrimination, which is already rampant in DC. As such, DHS must allow PSH providers to pay these and other fees out of their contracted amount.

- **Expand the use of Bridge Housing/ PEP-V**
  - We applaud DHS’s use of bridge housing and support the continuation of this program. However, we do not think that 100% of PEP-V should be used for bridge housing. As COVID-19 continues, there need to be non-congregate options available for people who are not matched to housing. With 100% FEMA reimbursement available, we demand that DHS expand PEP-V beyond bridge housing to de-densify shelters and mitigate the spread of COVID-19.