



# DENVER

## *Beyond Planning*



April 2010

*Promising Practices to Successfully Implement Your Ten Year Plan*

Denver, CO has experienced tremendous success in implementing its Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness, **Denver's Road Home**. Much of Denver's implementation success can be attributed to a few core practices that any community can replicate. This paper presents information on these practices: Denver's approach to drafting its Ten Year Plan; its strategies for leadership, community engagement, and accountability; the system infrastructure; and the city's approach to funding its homeless assistance system.

In 2005, city officials, providers, and private sector partners in Denver completed *Denver's Road Home*. Based on Housing First principles, *Denver's Road Home* identifies overarching goals to reduce homelessness by 75 percent over five years and end it in ten years. The plan identifies eight primary goals.

- Development of housing opportunities
- Improved shelter
- Increased access to prevention resources
- Provision of home-based case management
- Increased homelessness outreach
- Provision of education, training, and employment opportunities
- Community awareness and support
- Reformed approaches to zoning and land use to support the development of new housing opportunities

Within two years of completing the plan, Denver reduced overall homelessness by 11 percent and chronic homelessness by 36 percent, demonstrating significant progress towards its overarching five year goal. Additionally, the city has assisted more than 3,200 homeless people in obtaining employment, developed over 1,500 new housing units for homeless people, and has over 500 new units of supportive housing in its pipeline. Within the goal to develop housing opportunities, the city specified the creation of 942 permanent supportive housing units. The city has developed 60 percent of this housing stock and is on track to accomplish this goal in 2010. Denver has also made significant progress on other goals, including increasing community awareness and support, which is discussed in detail below.

## The Plan

Denver's approach to developing content for *Denver's Road Home* is a key component in the city's success. From the outset, all community members were invited to participate in the plan's development. The Mayor's Commission on Homelessness (discussed below) led discussions of the plan in local community areas and made the economic and moral cases for the system's transformation. Plan developers assessed the city's homeless population and established target service groups based primarily on the number of homeless episodes and length of homelessness. They also used the assessment to determine and prioritize two primary causes of homelessness: insufficient income and lack of affordable housing. Planners then determined mainstream program linkages and cross-agency service collaborations that would address these problems and meet the needs of each target population. Based on this information, they assessed the system's capacity to respond accordingly, and identified service, financial, policy and other resource gaps and opportunities. The authors outlined the city's future continuum model within *Denver's Road Home*, and used the plan to present a step-by-step guide to reconfigure the city's homeless services system. The plan is specific enough to hold stakeholders accountable for a few targeted efforts that achieve the system's goals and overcome its limitations. The plan serves as an annually updated work plan for all stakeholders involved in the system's transformation.

## Leadership, Engagement, and Accountability

Denver's strategies to maintain solid leadership and accountability are critical to implementing *Denver's Road Home*. When the Mayor and City Council took on the challenge to end homelessness, the Mayor appointed a 41-member Commission on Homelessness to draft the Ten Year Plan and help lead its implementation. The Commission consists of community members who are critical to the city's success, including homeless persons, government representatives, nonprofit providers, businesses, funders, city council members, and local neighborhood representatives. Commission members organized themselves into committees based on the plan's goals, and authorized the creation of a lead, public-nonprofit agency named *Denver's Road Home* (DRH). The Commission performs many, though not all, responsibilities that are traditionally associated with



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a nonprofit board of directors for DRH and an interagency council for the community. For example the Commission votes on key decisions that impact funding, major service changes, and the overall direction of the system, and some Commission members help select contract agencies to perform services.

DRH is not only accountable to the Commission and the Mayor, but the entity also obtains stakeholder input and coordinates cross-agency collaboration. One way DRH completes these tasks is by convening monthly and quarterly work meetings to identify successes, challenges, and new strategies, as well as check progress toward short-, intermediate-, and long-term objectives. The meetings address activities such as case management and service strategies, fundraising, and service contract fulfillment. Meetings involve only those stakeholders who are relevant to a specific task or objective. DRH convenes all stakeholders annually to assess progress on the plan and adjust its approach to changes in the environment.

DRH also builds other stakeholder engagement efforts into its activities. Continuum members, community members, and even organizations that do not partner directly with the city are invited to participate in the annual planning process. Additionally, DRH staff attend local neighborhood association meetings to gain their perspective on services and outcomes. In conjunction with the Mile High United Way and with help from a public relations consultant, DRH hosts creative community events such as pajama parties to end homelessness and runs television and newspaper educational campaigns. DRH also engages the faith-based community through *Project Homeless Connect*, and the Metropolitan Denver Homeless Initiative coordinates regional collaboration in partnership with DRH and the state's Interagency Council on Homelessness. Finally, the Executive Directors of DRH and the Mile High United Way spend significant time individually interacting with the public, government partners, and local providers.

## Infrastructure

DRH's infrastructure represents another key implementation strategy used in Denver. While creating a public-nonprofit agency may not be feasible for every community, the management techniques used by DRH can be replicated. Specifically, appointing a key person whose chief responsibilities are to coordinate *all* continuum activities and engage *all* continuum stakeholders

in one central vision is one of the most effective strategies practiced in Denver and other communities. Support from Denver's Mayor that underscores this leadership role, the Mayor's willingness to prioritize homelessness, and a strong partnership with the Mile High United Way are also critical to the agency's ability to lead successfully. Further, DRH's investment in other agencies both interpersonally and more formally through service agreements fosters cooperation and collaboration. Finally, DRH manages funding and evaluation for all continuum service providers and partners. This authority contributes significantly to the agency's ability to lead implementation.

## Funding and Resources

Denver uses private funds to leverage public financial resources and achieve *Denver's Road Home's* seventh goal. To date, over 33 foundations, hundreds of businesses and individual donors have been engaged in Denver's efforts to end homelessness. Denver has raised over \$46 million private dollars to support implementation activities. The integration of private funds was made possible through relationships with individual philanthropists and community leaders as well as partnerships with major local businesses and the Downtown Business District. The Mayor and DRH's Executive Director engaged these community members from the beginning of the planning process and continue to engage them formally as members of the Commission. Along with the Mile High United Way, the fundraising arm and fiscal agent for DRH, these private partners are also members of DRH's Resource Allocations Committee. The Resource Allocations Committee determines which activities will be funded with private money and how to use private funds to appropriately supplement public funds. The vice president of a local business chairs the committee, and DRH's Executive Director oversees the committee's activities.

The National Alliance to End Homelessness is a nonprofit organization dedicated to solving the problem of homelessness and preventing its continued growth. Our mission is to mobilize all sectors of society in an alliance to end homelessness.