



## Ending Homelessness for Children and Families

Homelessness in Ohio has [increased 30% since 2012](#) – an increase driven largely by a growing number of children entering the homeless system. Minors now account for 29% of the more than 76,000 Ohioans who experienced homelessness during a single year.

The longer a family is homeless the longer it takes a family to regain stability and provide a healthy foundation for children to thrive. The best way to fight homelessness is to prevent it.

### Policy

Over the years, housing providers have developed powerful strategies to divert people away from shelters and into housing. Given the long-term, negative effects of housing insecurity on a child's health, education and economic future, homeless children must be prioritized. We are so grateful that the DeWine administration has already started to take action. He understands that now more than ever, housing is healthcare. We look forward to working with him to continue developing a range of options that will quickly move children out of homelessness into permanent homes:

- **Housing Now for Homeless Families**: Rapid Rehousing (RRH) provides wrap-around services and housing assistance to quickly move families and pregnant women out of homelessness into homes of their own. Homelessness Prevention provides immediate financial assistance to stabilize families before they lose their home. The TANF-funded Housing Now for Homeless Families, administered by the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio, provides RRH and homelessness prevention services to help families remedy underlying challenges like unemployment, health conditions, and domestic violence to regain housing stability. Evidence shows these interventions are highly effective. In Franklin County, 82% of homeless families with minor children in emergency shelter who received RRH services successfully secured permanent housing.
- **Youth Homelessness**: The \$5 million appropriation for the Ohio Department of Health to address homelessness among youth and pregnant women is helping these extremely vulnerable Ohioans secure safe, decent housing during this pandemic. Given the long-lasting impact the public health crisis and recession will have on this population, this line item should be continued and even expanded in the next biennial budget to support effective local programs

that are combining housing assistance with age-appropriate services to move young adults out of homelessness and into permanent housing.

- **Healthy Beginnings at Home:** Housing insecurity is one of the key factors correlated with adverse birth outcomes associated with the high rate of infant mortality, particularly among low-income Black and brown families. Healthy Beginnings at Home, a pilot project in Columbus funded in part by Ohio Housing Finance Agency (OHFA), greatly improved birth and health outcomes for extremely low-income pregnant women and new mothers who received time-limited rental assistance coordinated with healthcare and social services. This effort should be continued and expanded to additional communities with very high rates of infant mortality.
- **Ohio Housing Trust Fund:** The OHTF is the primary source of state funding for local homeless and affordable housing programs. Over the past 25 years, the OHTF has generated over \$1 billion for affordable housing development and preservation projects, home repair and accessibility programs for seniors and Ohioans with disabilities, and local homeless services agencies throughout the state. However, the growing shortage of affordable housing has outstripped OHTF revenue. Even with a modest fee increase in the last budget, the OHTF will generate less revenue than the \$50 million/year that it produced over 15 years ago. A well-funded Housing Trust Fund will leverage far more private and federal resources to empower the State to respond more aggressively and effectively to the urgent and increased housing needs in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

## Challenge

Ohio faces a broad range of housing issues that limit opportunities for people to succeed. Most concerning is the fact that increasing numbers of children and families are entering the homeless system each year. There are nearly 22,000 children in Ohio's homeless system each year – a number that is rapidly increasing. Children who experience homelessness are at much greater risk for long-term problems with physical and mental health, academic achievement, and future economic success.

Also disturbing is the fact that African-Americans are vastly over-represented in Ohio's homeless population. Black Ohioans are only 13% of the state's residents, but make up nearly 50% of the homeless population.

Fortunately, homelessness is a solvable problem. Over the last decade, veteran homelessness has dropped by 56% in Ohio and chronic homelessness has fallen by 61%. These populations were given priority through effective Housing First interventions, like supportive housing; a modest increase in federal funding; and improved collaboration among governmental and nonprofit agencies. Applying the same kind of strategic focus that worked to reduce veteran and chronic homelessness can work to move thousands of children and families off the streets into stable homes.

## Opportunity

Housing is universally acknowledged as a critical need for those trying to overcome addiction or mental illness, children aging out of foster care, people with disabilities exiting institutions, seniors facing premature nursing home placement and mothers trying to raise healthy babies. When it comes to children's homelessness and the growing lack of affordable housing, the DeWine Administration has the opportunity to build a brighter future for struggling families.

## Support Child Well-Being: Budget Recommendation

- \$25 million annual TANF allocation to Housing Now for Homeless Families
- Build on the \$5 million for ODH program for homeless youth and pregnant women
- Invest \$3 million to extend and expand Healthy Beginnings at Home pilot by adding communities with high rates of infant mortality
- Expand the Ohio Housing Trust Fund

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