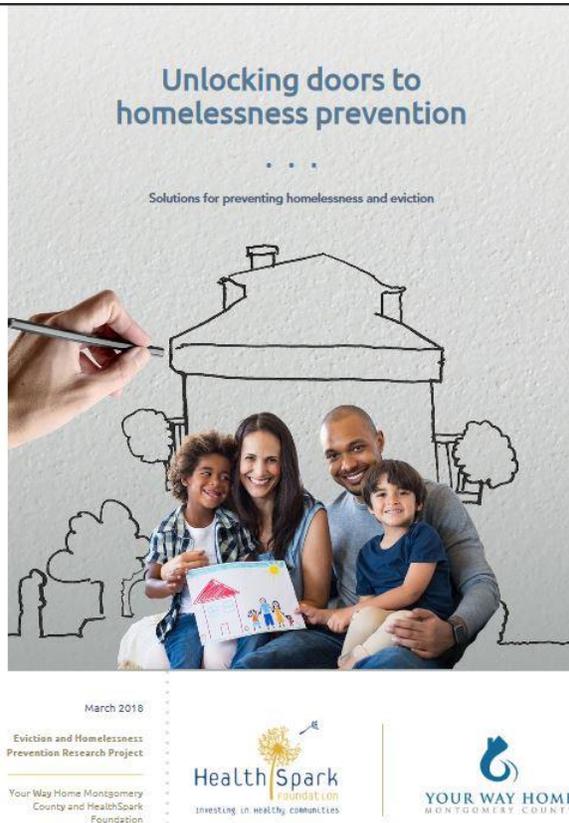


TIPS TO BEGIN TACKLING HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION



You’ve probably heard this caution about homelessness prevention: “Most people who receive prevention assistance would not have become homeless even without assistance.” Helping those who are currently experiencing homelessness is challenging; also considering the needs of those who aren’t yet unsheltered or staying in a shelter is daunting. Yet, dating back to my days at USICH and before, I’ve had nagging doubt and conviction that we needed to begin working on prevention strategies that could stem the “inflow” into homelessness.

Working with **Your Way Home**, my consulting firm, Barbara Poppe and Associates, recently completed a study sponsored by **HealthSpark Foundation** to help develop a homelessness and eviction prevention strategy for Montgomery County, PA. The

final report, ***Unlocking Doors to Homelessness Prevention: Solutions for Preventing Homelessness and Eviction***, includes information on our research process, the models we studied, and the local implementation status. It shares tips for philanthropy, community partners, and local governments looking to adopt similar strategies in their own communities. The study has led to the launch of two pilot projects to address homelessness prevention, the **Eviction Prevention and Intervention Coalition (EPIC)** and **The Sprout Initiative**.

Pursuing such efforts can strengthen families and communities in many ways. Keeping children stably in school reduces the churn that has been shown to affect academic achievement. Neighborhoods with lower rates of eviction are more cohesive and economically stable. And housing stability leads to better health outcomes, which saves money for health systems and taxpayers.

“Unlocking Doors” charts a path forward for Continuums of Care (CoCs) to begin tackling “upstream” homelessness prevention in a smart, strategic way. Some of the lessons we learned include:

1. Embark on this journey only if you have the solid base of a well-functioning homelessness crisis response system and strong allies and partners beyond it. Your crisis response system must provide solid diversion assistance for those who are at greatest risk of imminent homelessness. Additionally, a CoC primarily or exclusively composed of homelessness assistance providers should not undertake this work alone.
2. Educate (and re-educate) CoC partners and allies that the loss of housing due to eviction (whether legal or informal) has harmful consequences to the household and the community, even if they do not go on to experience homelessness and require assistance through the homelessness crisis response system.
3. Homelessness and eviction prevention should be viewed as a range of potential interventions along a spectrum from highly targeted to broad. Review data to determine greatest needs and potential for impact.
4. Regardless of which approach is selected, each prevention initiative will need housing stabilization supports that address immediate and long-term needs paired with rental assistance. Access to legal services is frequently needed as well.
5. Due to the breadth and extent of needs, CoCs should consider a pilot approach to get started rather than building a comprehensive strategic plan that will be hard to implement.
6. Engage a cross-sector of allies in the pilot selection process to determine the type and scope of projects to be developed. Philanthropy can be a key partner for convening stakeholders and investing in the pilot.
7. Mobilize and engage the community about the need and solutions. Prevention is the very long game.

Ending homelessness is possible. It takes knowledge of what works, political will, sufficient resources, and a set of smart strategies that are implemented well locally. “Unlocking Doors” describes a path forward for communities to begin to tackle and stop the flow of families and individuals into homelessness through eviction and homelessness prevention. By assessing needs as well as the community’s interest in tackling new challenges, communities can test models and scale up what works. Success in one area can build and advance the political will necessary to achieve our vision that no one should be without a safe, stable place to call home.

Barbara Poppe is a past Executive Director of the US Interagency Council on Homelessness.