

Aligning Systems with Communities to Advance Equity through Shared Measurement:

The Los Angeles Homeless Initiative

Lead organization:	Los Angeles County Chief Executive Office (the governing body is the county's five-person Board of Supervisors)
Lead system:	County government
Partner systems:	Community development and housing, health services, social services, education, children and family services, consumer and business affairs, probation, sheriff's department, philanthropy
Location:	Los Angeles County, California
Population	10 million (most populous county in the United States)
Year founded:	2015
Measurement:	Data dashboards; report cards and evaluations that track more than 200 measures, including the number of people who receive services across various strategies, funding allocations, and performance evaluation measures

How did the initiative get started?

To address Los Angeles (LA) County's persistent and rising homelessness crisis, the county's Board of Supervisors launched the LA County Homeless Initiative within LA County's Chief Executive Office in August 2015. The initial goal of the initiative was to develop a comprehensive set of strategies to address homelessness in Los Angeles County. The Homeless Initiative began an inclusive planning process that included representatives from various County departments, the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, and cities, as well as stakeholders from business, philanthropy, service providers, and community-based organizations. This collaboration produced 47 initial strategies to address homelessness in LA County. The county's Board of Supervisors approved the initial strategies in February 2016, and included an investment of \$100 million to begin implementation. To establish an ongoing source of revenue, the Board of Supervisors supported passage of Measure H, a ballot measure for a quarter-cent sales tax for 10 years that would provide approximately \$355 million annually to support the implementation of Homeless Initiative strategies. In March 2017, the voters of LA County passed Measure H with close to 70% support; the Board of Supervisors also approved four additional strategies.

The LA County Homeless Initiative currently includes 51 strategies to prevent and reduce homelessness, grouped into six focus areas: preventing homelessness, subsidizing housing, increasing income, providing

case management services, creating a coordinated system, and increasing affordable housing for people experiencing homelessness. Each strategy has designated lead and partnering organizations that work together to develop detailed implementation plans, evaluation plans, and budgets.

How does the initiative use shared measurement?

The LA County Homeless Initiative uses shared measurement to track progress and evaluate success.

To make progress in reducing homelessness, the initiative uses measures shared with several partners to monitor and evaluate activities and guide strategy implementation. The initiative created a performance evaluation framework to track measures on three levels: macro-level system measures to gauge the performance of LA County's overall homeless services system, meso-level program measures to aggregate strategy-specific outcomes, and micro-level strategy measures for each individual strategy. These measures are reported in annual evaluation reports.

Shared measurement systems support system partnerships. The LA County Homeless Initiative works closely with the county's Chief Information Office to use data from the county's central measurement system, the Information Hub. The Information Hub pulls data from multiple systems, including public health, housing, social services, and law enforcement. The initiative uses data from the Information Hub to report on different measures. Although the Information Hub was an ongoing effort in the county, the homeless initiative fueled its growth and significance. The initiative collaborated with system partners to develop a new information system, the County Homeless Information Portal, or CHIP, which sources data from the Information Hub to facilitate care coordination among service providers across different systems.

Measurement aligns partners' goals and programming. Shared measurement helps partners align their implementation of different programs under the same initiative strategy. For strategies with more than one lead partner administering parallel programs, aligning measures helps to integrate data from the Information Hub and other sources to evaluate a strategy's overall outcomes. Shared measurement also helps the initiative team frame conversations with different agencies to ensure a shared understanding of what measures should reflect. Elizabeth Ben-Ishai, lead measurement analyst, explains, *"We were measuring things that we thought were the same but were actually different, which is really important in terms of the accuracy of our reporting but also gives us insight into how we are doing business and operating the programs, and gives us an opportunity that we have a shared understanding of what success looks like. Does placing someone in a rapid rehousing spot count as a permanent housing placement, or is it only after they exit the subsidy program and are paying some part of the rent? The data issues are linked to the overall understanding of success."*

Measurement provides external and internal accountability. When developing implementation and evaluation plans, strategy leads and partners co-develop and co-select measurement processes and outcomes. In conjunction with partners, the LA County Homeless Initiative team evaluates measures regularly and reports them through interactive data dashboards, quarterly progress reports, and annual evaluation reports. At public meetings like town halls, the initiative communicates measures from these sources and discusses results with stakeholders and community members to track implementation of strategies, and support accountability and public transparency. Measurement also helps align different

levels of the initiative, such as leadership, program implementation, and data collection and analysis, in order to support internal accountability, decision making, and consistent learning.

How do systems work together?

Systems collaborate continuously. The LA County Homeless Initiative reflects close and ongoing collaboration among the partners who cocreated the strategies. To develop these strategies, the LA County Chief Executive Office hosted 18 policy summits in 2015 on nine topics, which brought to the table 25 county departments, 30 cities, and more than 100 community partners and stakeholders. Participants identified strategies that reflected common priorities and agreed on the need for sustained collaboration to address the complexity of homelessness. Lead and partnering organizations worked closely with each other to develop implementation and evaluation plans for each strategy, using shared measurements and data to which all contributed. To circumvent legal challenges to sharing data freely across different systems, the county implemented new legislation that enabled systems to collaborate. Partners also gather annually at a policy summit to deliberate on progress, funding recommendations and decisions for the following year. Gerardo Ramirez, manager for LA County Homeless Initiative, says, *“We rarely do things in a bubble. We are always working with partners and the service providers and the people on the ground doing the implementation. The initiative is grounded in partnership and is working with all the various stakeholders to make our systems successful.”*

Systems work together to develop and reassess measures. The process of developing and assessing measures to track and evaluate initiative strategies involves the close, continuous collaboration of lead and partnering agencies and the LA County Homeless Initiative team. Periodically, the initiative team hosts conference calls with partners to troubleshoot issues and align partners’ understanding of what the measures intend to capture. Mr. Ramirez explains, *“From the beginning that has been part of our process—to work with our partners at every step—and performance measurement is a big part of it.”*

The team regularly reviews and reassesses the utility and accuracy of measures *“to make sure those metrics that were developed at the start of the initiative still make sense now that we are several years into it,”* says Dr. Ben-Ishai. *“There have been times where we have changed [the measures]. We try to have an ongoing dialogue with the data people and the program people. Sometimes we get into a situation where the data people say we will report on what you told us, without considering if that’s what we want to know. We try to have that ongoing dialogue, I encourage them to ask questions, what is it that we are getting from each of these metrics and is it the right thing?”*

Systems share governance and funding. Lead and partnering systems share governance across strategies, including decision making and day-to-day operations. Shared funding mechanisms also support shared governance. The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), a Joint Powers Agreement between county and city governments, receives funding from Measure H as well as other county funding to implement county-led strategies to reduce homelessness. There is a high level of coordination between the county and LAHSA since the county (via Measure H) provides LAHSA with most of their funding. The LA County Homeless Initiative also coordinates with other systems to ensure they remain consistent with the goals and scope designated and approved by the county’s Chief Executive Office. Although systems receive funding from Measure H for 21 Homeless Initiative strategies, the

initiative makes creative use of policy levers and program redesign to acquire additional city, state, and federal funding. Some strategies leverage systems' existing funding sources or incorporate design changes to enhance pre-existing programs under Homeless Initiative goals while maintaining existing federal and state funding.



Spotlight on Using Shared Measurement: The COVID-19 Response

The LA County Homeless Initiative plays an important role in the county's COVID-19 response. COVID-19 presented an urgent need on two fronts: to identify and meet the needs of people at risk for homelessness, and to mitigate the spread of the illness in the county. Part of the initiative's Measure H funding went to support COVID-19 response because people experiencing homelessness might be unable to follow public health guidelines for hygiene, isolation, and sheltering in place. The LA Homeless Services Authority, a main collaborator, is working with the LA County Chief Executive Office, Department of Health Services and Department of Public Health, to implement two new programs for people experiencing homelessness. Project Roomkey provides housing in motels and hotels for people experiencing homelessness who are also at risk of developing complications from COVID-19, and the Medical Sheltering program provides housing with on-site medical care for people experiencing homelessness who test positive for COVID-19.

Mr. Ramirez explains, *"The Office of Homelessness [which operates the Homeless Initiative] is unique in that we do a lot of program budget work. The fact that our office is closely aligned with the Chief Executive Office, to make decisions on the budget and policy, and have close ties with the budget people—that assisted us in moving the current COVID-19 response in an effective manner. Our director pushed the envelope in helping achieve the response. This may not have happened, or not happened as quickly, if [the Homeless Initiative] did not exist or was not within the Chief Executive Office."*

By building on existing trust and collaborative relationships with partners, the county could share measurements across systems efficiently, using data linkages between measures in the Information Hub from the LA Homeless Services Authority, Department of Public Health, and Department of Health Services. Shared measurement helped make connections that were crucial for gaining a complete picture of the community's needs, risks, locations, and existing resources by identifying people who tested positive for COVID-19 and people in high-risk groups in a timely manner. The team used data from shared measurement to guide decision making to prevent outbreaks at shelters, and to plan service delivery for healthcare, food, and shelter.

Trust and relationships among collaborating agencies helped ensure that data were accurate, and that linked data would be leveraged effectively. Dr. Ben-Ishai says, *"Our ability to work across systems and agencies during [COVID-19] was aided by the fact that we had established relationships and practices. It was crucial to the response."*

How does the initiative address equity?

Equity is a primary concern of the initiative, and there is a strong commitment to addressing the disproportionality of homelessness among people of color. By design, several strategies in the initiative incentivize collective upstream action to address the causes of poverty and socio-economic inequity associated with homelessness, such as low income, lack of affordable housing, and limited education. Specific strategies focus on preventing homelessness in people of color, veterans, the elderly, women, children, people previously incarcerated, and those recovering from substance use.

The LA Homeless Services Authority, a lead partner for many strategies in the initiative, houses the Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness. This committee provides initiative partners with guidance on examining policies and practices within systems with the goal of instituting practices that advance equity in systems of care. In addition, the initiative sorts program enrollment and service participation by race, ethnicity, age, and gender to help track and address disparities, and it is working to become more systematic in reporting outcomes based on different demographics.

How does the initiative engage community members?

The initiative encourages community participation in many ways. Community members provide input on public reports to ensure that data accurately reflect communities' stories. Data dashboards and quarterly reports are publicly accessible and show how the initiative affects community well-being. Although community members do not directly develop or select measures, program implementation teams solicit community members' feedback on measures. For instance, a Lived Experience Advisory Board, which includes individuals who have previously or are currently experiencing homelessness, provides input on strategy implementation and evaluation plans. Community members are also invited to attend the initiative's annual budget planning meeting. In addition, activities under the Homeless Initiative create job opportunities that enable community members to work directly on different strategies, such as expanding capacity and community outreach.

Lessons Learned

- In this initiative, government plays a significant and successful role in stewarding complex, large-scale efforts by seeding collaboration and offering resources. For the LA County Homeless Initiative, the LA County Chief Executive Office gave partners ownership of specific strategies to develop and implement on their own while it provided a centralized system and measurement framework that fostered a sense of shared goals and responsibility in partners.
- For the Homeless Initiative, establishing a sustainable and shared funding source early on was critical to sustaining shared measurement and alignment.

- The democratic process can support alignment and community engagement in county- or state-level initiatives. Having a “galvanized” public that invests tax dollars to fund an initiative could significantly influence the ways that an initiative uses and reports on measurement. By publicly funding the initiative through voter-approved taxes, the LA County Homeless Initiative built in the level of community engagement necessary for transparency and accountability, which made measurement even more essential.
- Strong partnerships built on shared values support cross-system alignment by laying a foundation for trust that facilitates shared measurement. By engaging partners at the inception of the initiative and at key decision-making stages (such as plan development and funding allocation), the initiative built buy-in and trust throughout the process.

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