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Summit Brings City, Counties, States Together to Address Homelessness Through Supportive Housing



Speakers from the Los Angeles area joined local representatives from health care, housing and government for a Supportive Housing Summit held at CareOregon, Portland, Oregon. (Left to right) Chris Ko, United Way of Greater Los Angeles; Debbie Thiele, Corporation for Supportive Housing;

Jerry Ramirez, Los Angeles County; Alison Klurfeld, Los Angeles Care; Whitney Lawrence, Department of Health Services, Los Angeles County.

CareOregon

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This week, locally based health care and housing leaders, and city and county representatives met with organizations from Los Angeles to learn how other communities are creating and then leveraging coordination to end homelessness. Sponsors of the summit include CareOregon, Kaiser Permanente and Portland Metro.

“Supportive housing solves chronic homelessness, but cannot deliver the results the people of Portland, Multnomah County and Oregon expect unless it is properly planned, implemented and available to everyone who needs it,” said Debbie Thiele, Western Region Managing Director for Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH).

“The effectiveness is tied directly to a coordinated community approach like the one being adopted in Los Angeles where leaders in health care, business, nonprofits and local governments are joining together collaboratively to plan and implement a strategy that identifies, assesses and then acts quickly to permanently house those facing homelessness,” says Thiele.

Summit speakers, including LA Care Health Plan, Corporation for Supportive Housing and the United Way of Greater Los Angeles, elaborated on efforts to bring resources and sectors not normally involved in planning to the table when strategies are being formulated and carried out. One example of a new funding source was a 5-year grant from LA Care to provide case management and rental subsidies for 300 individuals experiencing homelessness.

The speakers also stressed the importance of recognizing that supportive housing is not the same thing as affordable housing, and that it takes education to help communities understand the value of permanent supportive housing over temporary shelters.

“I’m so encouraged by what I’ve already seen in Oregon,” said Thiele. “LA has gotten real about the problem. When you get real about what it takes to solve the housing crisis, it changes everything. This kind of peer-to-peer conversation is what it takes to move things forward.”

Because housing issues cross jurisdictional boundaries, local leaders recently embarked on several regional planning and funding initiatives. For example, the Metro-funded “Tri-county

Equitable Housing Strategy to Expand Permanent Supportive Housing for People Experiencing Chronic Homelessness” brings together leaders from Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington Counties. Together they are developing, prioritizing and beginning implementation of strategies, including assessment and coordination of investment strategies and financial tools, to produce additional supportive housing for people experiencing chronic homelessness.

Many people experiencing chronic homelessness are disabled and have experienced prolonged or repeated periods of homelessness. They are some of the most medically frail and historically marginalized members of our communities.

“There are more than 8,000 students experiencing homelessness in greater Portland each year, including 400 in my home city of Hillsboro,” said Metro Council President Tom Hughes. “We have to work together to help families find stable homes across our region.”

“Housing is health,” says Eric C. Hunter, President and CEO of CareOregon, which hosted the event. “Of all the social determinants of health it is the foundation; and because we know that the housing crisis is complex, we need to weave together many strategies based on cooperation among every partner with a stake in the homelessness crisis.”

According to Chris Ko, United Way of Greater Los Angeles, communities must deepen private sector involvement, improve data measurement, pilot innovations and build systems.

“Today we were able to gain valuable insight into how a diverse and complex community like Los Angeles is coming together to address homelessness,” said Tracy Dannen-Grace, Community Partnerships and Philanthropy, Kaiser Permanente. “It’s important for us to learn what is, and isn’t, working in other communities so we can move forward together to solve this public health crisis.