



Department of Housing Services



2024 Community and Service Provider Listening Sessions

In August of 2024, the Washington County Department of Housing Services conducted two listening sessions to gather community feedback on housing services and needs. These sessions - one focused on service providers and another on the general public - painted a comprehensive picture of both the successes and challenges in addressing housing insecurity in Washington County.

Provider Session

The provider session drew significant engagement, with **124 attendees**, predominantly members or employees of homeless services provider agencies. (For details on attendees, see Appendix A.1.) Providers highlighted several bright spots in the current system, including the strong collaborative network that has developed between culturally specific developers, landlord property managers, and Continuums of Care. These partnerships have proven effective in supporting unhoused community members. Providers also expressed appreciation for the county's adoption of the “housing first” approach and the increased funding made available through SHS and Metro bonds.



Providers also raised **concerns about system capacity and unmet needs**. Mental and behavioral health support emerged as a critical gap, especially for high-need individuals and adolescents with chronic mental health issues. The strain of high caseloads, language support challenges, and burnout has limited their ability to provide essential support services like recovery programs, skills training, and workforce development.

When discussing resource allocation, **providers strongly favored targeted interventions over a balanced approach**. They emphasized the importance of preventative measures, such as short-term rental support and eviction prevention services, viewing these as crucial tools to help people maintain their housing. Mental health, recovery, and transitional services were consistently identified as top funding priorities. The providers also highlighted several underserved populations requiring special attention, including people with developmental disabilities and dementia, foster youth aging out of care, single parents, and the elderly. (For details on questions asked of providers, see Appendix A.2.)



Department of Housing Services



Public Session

The public session was held in person and **attended by 26 community members**. (For details on attendees, see Appendix B.1.) Most participants reported learning about housing resources through other county service providers, emphasizing the value of service providers as a critical connection between participants and county services and programs.

Several core themes were common through the public session conversations. (For the list of conversation topics, see Appendix B.2.) **Accessibility emerged as a significant concern**, with participants describing numerous barriers to entering and maintaining housing programs. These ranged from practical challenges like shelter policies prohibiting pets or partners to systemic issues such as limited service availability and strict eligibility criteria. People with significant and persistent mental illness faced particular difficulties, often experiencing disproportionate eviction rates due to limited program flexibility.

The most frequently discussed theme (31 instances) was the **need for expanded wraparound services to meet diverse and increasing community needs**. Mental and behavioral health support in shelters and transitional housing was particularly emphasized, with participants stressing the importance of continuing these services even after individuals secure stable housing. The community called for expanded medical care access, stronger peer support networks, and increased legal aid to help navigate tenant rights and prevent evictions.





Department of Housing Services



Concerns about program quality and accountability were the second most discussed theme (23 instances), with participants sharing mixed experiences. While some praised quick placements and meaningful support from provider agencies, others described frustrations with long waitlists, and inconsistent caseworker support. Housing conditions and landlord accountability emerged as particular pain points.

Broader socioeconomic challenges were a recurring theme across discussions, highlighting how rising living costs, low wages, and social stigma create compounding barriers to housing stability. Attendees noted that the fundamental lack of affordable housing options “locks out” low-to-moderate-income individuals. Proposed solutions ranged from rent control to universal basic income.

Community Engagement Next Steps

Both sessions emphasized the importance of a user-friendly, up-to-date website as a crucial tool for sharing information about housing services. This was seen as key to improving public engagement with Housing Services Department work.



The listening sessions offered the Washington County Department of Housing Services, community members, and service providers a platform to discuss the county’s most pressing housing and homelessness issues. Convened to inform strategic systems changes and address equity in housing services, these sessions facilitated dialogue among participants, from service providers to those directly impacted. Attendees shared concerns and proposed solutions to improve housing services, reduce housing insecurity, and address homelessness moving forward.

Department of Housing Services community engagement staff will take next steps to ensure this final report and findings will be shared on our website and with community partners and service providers, listening session attendees, staff, and other partners of interest. In consideration for listening session(s) the county hopes to host in the future, community engagement staff will consider the limits and recommendations shared in this report for future planning.

The Executive Team within the Department of Housing Services will be responsible for how these findings will be integrated and considered for future programmatic and policy improvements, including state and local policy advocacy efforts, which includes following up with the community on how that feedback has been integrated.



Department of Housing Services



Appendix

A.1 Provider Session - Attendees

Group/Organization Affiliation	Attendees	%
Citizen Volunteer/Advocate.	8	6%
Other to include elected official, funding organization/foundation, etc.	31	25%
Person employed by agency providing housing and/or support services to include treatment, healthcare, DV, outreach, other wrap-around services.	70	56%
Person with lived experience of homelessness (PLEH) employed by agency providing homeless services/housing supports.	14	11%
Person with lived experience of homelessness (PLEH) providing advocacy and/or volunteering to improve the homeless system of care.	1	1%
Grand Total	124	100%

Race/Ethnicity	Attendees	%
African American	6	5%
Asian or Pacific Islander	4	3%
Caucasian/non-Hispanic	56	45%
Hispanic	23	19%
Other	7	6%
Prefer not to answer	2	2%
Unknown	2	2%
(blank)	24	19%
Grand Total	124	100%

Sexual Orientation	Attendees	%
Bisexual	8	6%
Gay or Lesbian	3	2%
Prefer not to say	13	10%
Straight/Heterosexual	73	59%
(blank)	27	22%
Grand Total	124	100%

Gender	Attendees	%
Female	77	62%
Male	16	13%
Nonbinary or third gender	1	1%
Prefer not to say	4	3%
(blank)	26	21%
Grand Total	124	100%

Age	Attendees	%
18-25	5	4%
26-40	30	24%
41-55	35	28%
55+	15	12%
(blank)	39	31%
Grand Total	124	100%



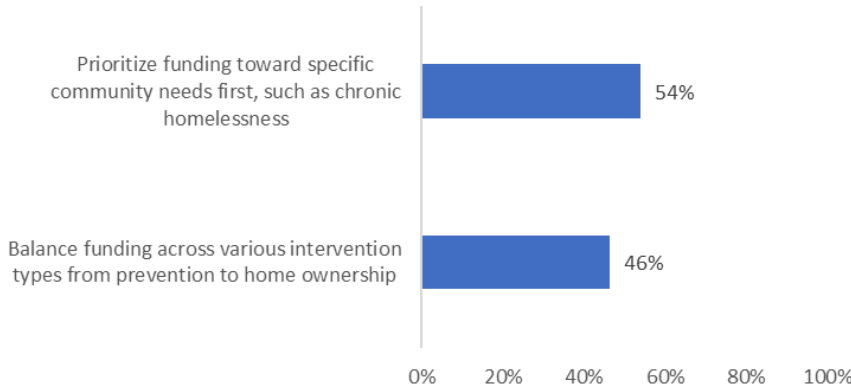
Department of Housing Services



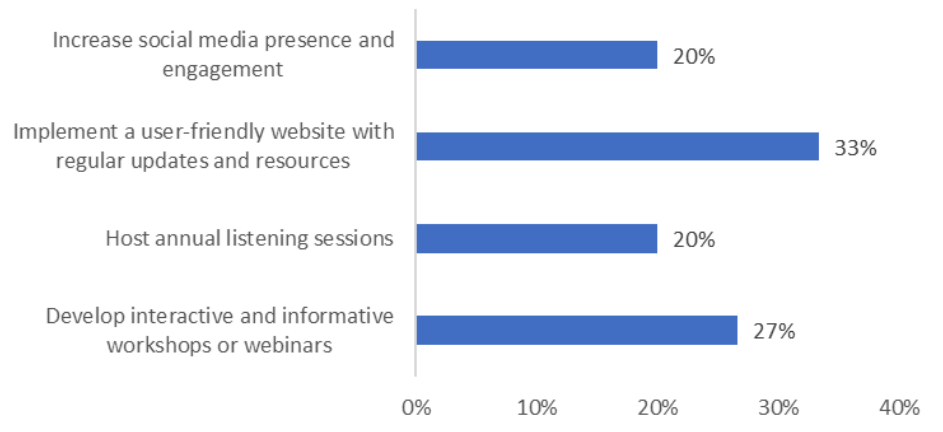
How Do You Recommend We Distribute Resources for Community Interventions?

Appendix

A.2 Provider Session -- Questions



How Can we Better Inform and Engage the Public About Our Work?



Breakout Discussion

In the provider session, each group was assigned one of four priorities: 1) expanding housing opportunity 2) support housing stability 3) prevent and address homelessness 4) preserve affordability. Due to the number of attendees and flow of discussion, participants were asked to consider the remaining priorities, equity and systems change, in their discussions.

- What’s working well in our system right now?
- What are the unmet needs or barriers you see in your community right now?
- Do you recommend a balanced approach of funding many intervention types...or would you recommend prioritizing a specific kind of community need...and what would you prioritize?



Department of Housing Services



Appendix

B.1 Public Session - Attendees

Race/Ethnicity	Participants	%
African American	3	12%
Caucasian/non-Hispanic	15	58%
Hispanic	5	19%
Other	3	12%
Grand Total	26	100%

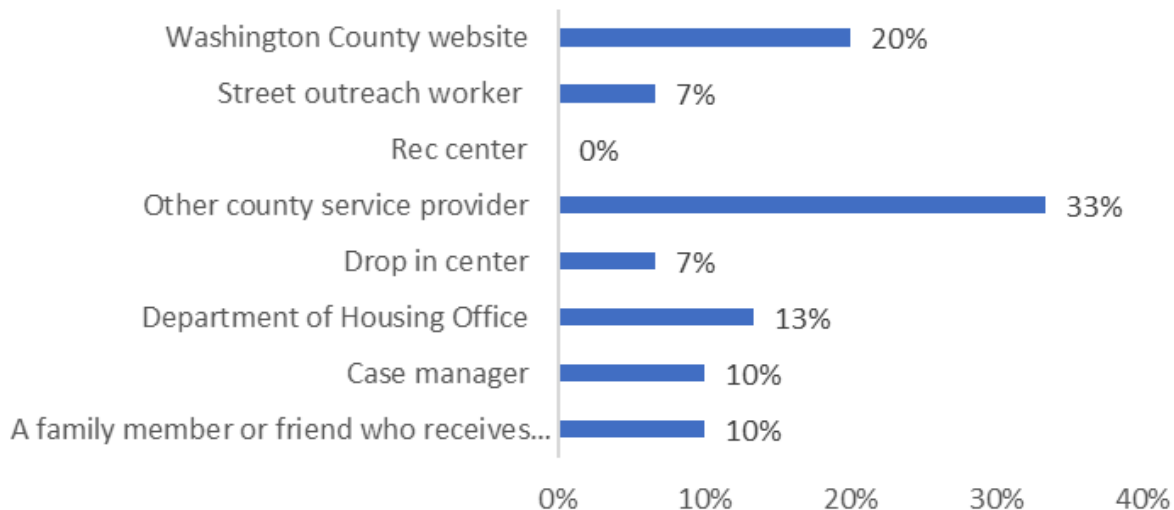
Sexual Orientation	Participants	%
Bisexual	1	4%
Prefer to self-describe	2	8%
Straight/Heterosexual	22	85%
(blank)	1	4%
Grand Total	26	100%

Age	Participants	%
18-25	1	4%
26-40	6	23%
41-55	11	42%
55+	8	31%
Grand Total	26	100%

Gender	Participants	%
Female	21	81%
Male	4	15%
Non-binary or third gender	1	4%
Grand Total	26	100%

B.2 Public Session - Questions

How Did You Learn About Housing Resources in Washington County?

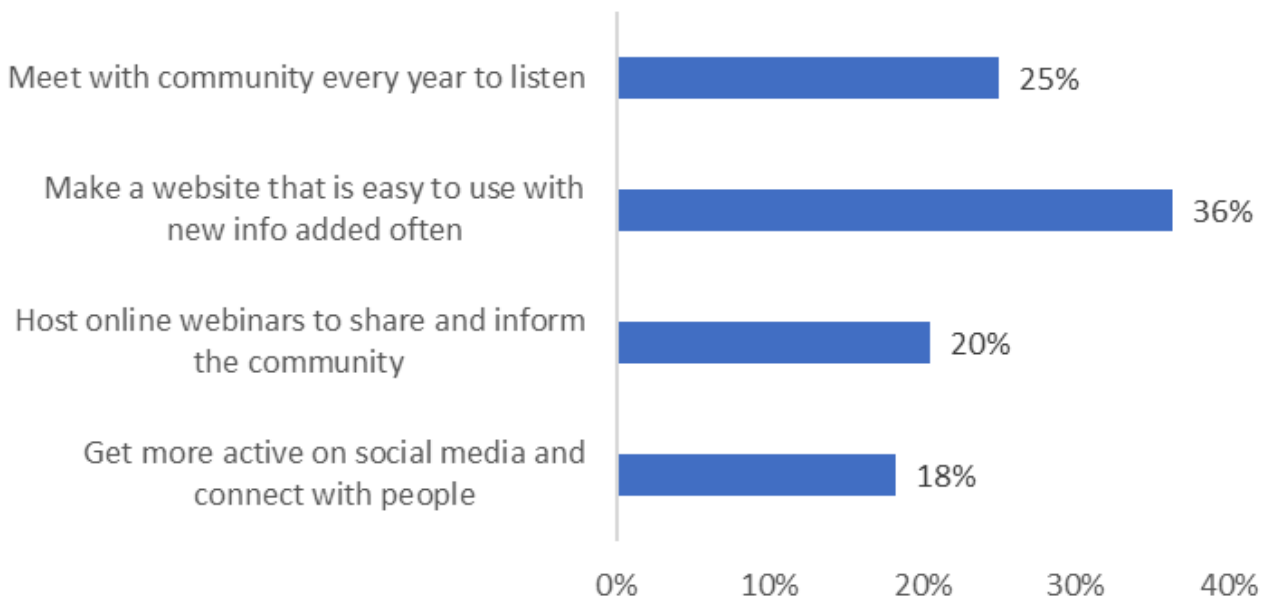




Department of Housing Services



How Would You Prefer to Be Informed About County Housing News & Updates?



Breakout Discussion

In the breakout tables, in the public session, participants were all provided the same four questions:

1. What's the greatest need you see related to housing for you, your loved ones, and your neighbors?
2. Have you or a loved one received help from a program with shelter or housing? What was your experience?
3. What type of help do you think is important so that our neighbors can stay in their home?
4. How can we improve the way we help community members experiencing homelessness, those who might lose their home, or those looking to purchase a home?

It is important to note that each breakout room and table included 2 staff/advisory board members responsible for facilitating and notetaking the discussion.