

# COUNTY OF EL DORADO

## HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Don Semon  
Director



## MEMORANDUM

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DATE: February 16, 2022

TO: Honorable Board of Supervisors

Cc: Don Ashton, Chief Administrative Officer

FROM: Don Semon, Director of Health and Human Services Agency *DS*

SUBJECT: EDOK Draft Strategic Plan on Homelessness

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On February 10, 2022, our CAO, Don Ashton, reached out to me in preparation for the upcoming BOS presentation on Tuesday, February 22, 2022 for the El Dorado Opportunity Knocks (EDOK) draft strategic plan on homelessness. As this presentation is being done by EDOK, he requested any feedback or suggestions I might have regarding the draft strategic plan. Specifically, he asked if I was satisfied with the plan as written. He communicated that he felt it would be beneficial for your Board to have my perspective as you are reviewing the material and preparing for the discussion on February 22nd. As a result, I agreed to provide your Board with this memo.

While I have only personally been aware of these efforts over the past three years in my role as the HHS Director, the history of Opportunity Knocks and the intent to impact homelessness through joint efforts of our jurisdictions, hospitals, faith based partners, non-profit organizations, and interested community members spans back nearly a decade now. Through countless hours of work by a wide range of individuals and organizations since 2013, with the intent to improve available data, funding, and outcomes for homeless residents, Opportunity Knock's evolution and eventual merger with the Continuum of Care (CoC) has led to a list of programs being developed that have exited 1,350 residents from homelessness between 2018 and 2021. These achievements are remarkable and should be celebrated as a milestone, and at the same time, there continues to be a need for more work ahead as single adults, families, youth and children, veterans, and many more of our residents currently face or are at risk of facing homelessness, each day. This is not unique to El Dorado County, as communities across California and the United States face these same or similar challenges. Unfortunately, due to a number of layered and complex issues such as deficits in housing stock across California, deficits in affordable and workforce housing across each State in the U.S, the complexity of financing additional affordable and workforce housing, the need for robust community service providers with expertise in housing retention through mental health or substance use services, and much more, the issue of homelessness can and will only be best addressed through a multi-disciplinary approach across all sectors of the community. No one entity can do this work alone while impacting the entirety of homelessness.

EDOK has reached a defining moment, now with an opportunity to further improve our local system response to homelessness and its ability to serve our residents, through the development of a 5-year strategic plan on homelessness. As each subpopulation has unique

needs, and as it will take more years to develop adequate permanent housing opportunities and services expertise to have the greatest impact on homelessness, the targeted strategies developed in the draft plan through countless surveys, focus groups, issue summit meetings, and community feedback has been pulled together to frame the best way to tackle this community issue, with an emphasis on addressing the short, medium, and long-term needs of residents facing homelessness.

Some key questions for us all to consider are:

- If a resident falls into crisis and loses their housing, do they have family or friends that can temporarily house them? If they don't have friends or family that can support them, where can they go? Are they forced to leave their community to seek help?
- If someone doesn't have a place to go, and they ultimately sleep outside, what services and supports can be available to help them get out of unsheltered homelessness as quickly as possible? If those services and programs don't exist, what happens long-term with residents being stuck facing homelessness?
- If a resident facing homelessness does have a place to go temporarily, what services and programs can be available to help them gain access to a permanent housing destination, and most importantly what assistance can be provided to help them retain that housing, long-term?

While there are many more questions that are equally important to pose, these are some of the key questions that homeless strategic plans seek to answer in each community. The answers to these questions can vary depending on the resources available and the subpopulations seeking assistance. There is never a "one-size fits all" strategy to impact homelessness.

Homeless strategic plans have been drafted by communities across the United State for many years. They are the best, proven tools to helping communities achieve a range of goals across sectors, ensuring and supporting as collaborative of an approach as possible in order to have the greatest impact on homelessness. Your communities now have the opportunity to benefit from a plan that focuses on memorializing our local data, outcomes, and available funding, thereafter laying out key strategies that are proven to provide the biggest impact to homelessness through homeless research that has developed over the past 30+ years.

Many world and community leaders throughout time have made reference to serving the most vulnerable with famous quotes, for example: "A civilization is measured by how it treats its weakest members." "The power of community to create health is far greater than any physician, clinic or hospital." I would imagine that many of the leaders and individuals involved in Opportunity Knocks over the years often contemplated quotes like these, as a means of ensuring that what was being prioritized and pursued always came down to doing the right thing for El Dorado County residents, regardless of where they live in the County, in order to help create a system where no resident facing homelessness would be forced to remain homeless, long-term.

In closing this memo, I'd like to remind your Board that EDOK, our Continuum of Care, is not a single organization. It is a collaborative, made up of jurisdictional representatives, hospital partners, countless community leaders and partners, local service providers, and constituents throughout the community, from South Lake Tahoe and over to the western slope. This draft plan and the strategies within were driven and created by these countless individuals and organizations who understand homelessness locally, who see the needs and where gaps exist, and who have an understanding of what should be done to continue improving our

ability to impact homelessness. The draft plan, perhaps most importantly, was also driven by your residents facing homelessness, providing feedback through surveys, focus groups, and engagement, so that the plan encompasses their experience with homelessness and what they would need and are seeking to help them get out of their individual situations. These collective efforts are providing this community with the best and most accurate information on strategies that can have the greatest impact to date on homelessness, not based upon beliefs, but based upon the current state of homelessness throughout the community and proven program strategies that can be developed and implemented this year, and over the coming 5 years.

HHSa is extremely pleased with the draft 5-year strategic plan on homelessness. It is an example of what can happen when you have a very transparent process that includes a rigorous amount of community input, combined with the input from folks who have lived experience with homelessness. It also contains the wisdom and experience of those who work in the field of homelessness, along with the research, evidence and data necessary to ensure the best possible outcomes for the homeless residence of El Dorado County. By developing and capitalizing on this plan, it should be expected that further milestones can be achieved in this area, with improved outcomes over the coming years ahead.

Lastly, by finalizing this plan, the County of El Dorado will gain access to nearly \$900,000 that can be used toward goals within the plan in Fiscal Year (FY) 2021-22, as well as an estimated equal amount in FY 2022-23. This provides the County with a unique opportunity to consider areas of interest within the plan where State funds can be leveraged and targeted to support residents in need. The State is requiring this plan as the application for all funding moving forward, and as such, completing these final steps can ensure that State funding can continue flowing into El Dorado County, adding additional tools, and housing outcomes for our most vulnerable residents.