

# *Preventing and Ending Homelessness for Single Adults*

Martha Burt, Urban Institute

Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance

Annual Conference

Worcester, MA, October 19, 2006

# *Homelessness: A Public Issue for Almost 25 Years*

- Current “wave” of homelessness began with the bad recession of 1981-82 – women and families first appeared on the streets
- Boston was among the first to start counting—in 1983, then 1986, and annually since then
- Massachusetts recognized that “housing is a clinical issue” with DMH’s Special Homeless Initiative, Facilities Consolidation Fund, rental assistance for people with SPMI, other funding

## *Early Emphases*

- As you know, the first response was emergency shelter
- Also food, some health care, clothing
- Taking care of the basic needs of those already homeless
- As you also know, these responses did not end homelessness – nor do they do so now

## *Shifts in Emphasis*

- As emergency shelters developed and demand stayed high, providers recognized that shelter was not enough to help some people move from homelessness to housing and stay there
- For those perceived to “need more” – more time to solidify sobriety, more time to develop basic life and work skills, good parenting etc.
- Transitional housing programs were the proposed solution

# *Paradigm Shifts*

- But both emergency shelter and transitional housing programs focus, perforce, on those already homeless
- Already in the early and late 1990s, a few communities were beginning to look at their activities and ask whether they were going after the right goal
- Result: moving from managing homelessness to structuring a system that would END it

# *Examples of Communities that Shifted Paradigms Early*

- Columbus – early 1990s
  - Redevelopment → study → assessment of what would be needed and what street people would accept → decision to develop and mobilization of resources → mostly project-based → all disabilities → authority in an NPO
- San Francisco – mid-1990s
  - City office (OMH, in DPH) realized had capacity to do both services and housing → got consulting help from CSH for capital development → set up HHISN and DAH → recently expanded → mostly project-based → SPMI and substance abuse → street counts are down!!

# *Examples of Communities that Shifted Paradigms Early*

- New York City – early 1990s
  - Consent decree led to first NY/NY in 1991 → mostly scattered-site → ACT teams provide service component → limited to SPMI, with SA under control if present → 2 further agreements → authority in city homeless agency, NPOs deliver
- Philadelphia – late 1990s
  - Sidewalk Ordinance stimulated → agreement with significant new \$ → combined outreach, police, and housing development → mostly SPMI, some dual → mostly project-based → orchestrated by city homeless agency

# *The National Paradigm Shift for Long-Term Homeless Single Adults*

- 2000 – NAEH develops 10-year plan to end *all* homelessness
- 2001 – HUD secretary commits to federal goal of ending *chronic* homelessness in 10 years
- Federal ICH revived, pushes 10-year plans
- 200+ states and cities develop 10-year plans
- HUD now asking communities to report progress every year, with their CoC applications
- Major change – how/why did it happen – and how real is it?

# *Why a Paradigm Shift Nationally?*

- Evidence
  - Of subgroup that stayed homeless for very long times and consumed major shelter resources (Culhane et al., then others locally)
  - That subgroup was small enough (150,000-250,000) that one could envision actually solving its homelessness (NSHAPC, Burt)
  - That a technology exists that works for this population (PSH, whether “housing first” or not)
  - That the technology is cost-effective (Culhane et al., Rosenheck et al.), or at least its extra cost gives extra benefits
- And the use of this evidence for advocacy

# *No Such Thing as “The Homeless” : Recognizing the Flow*

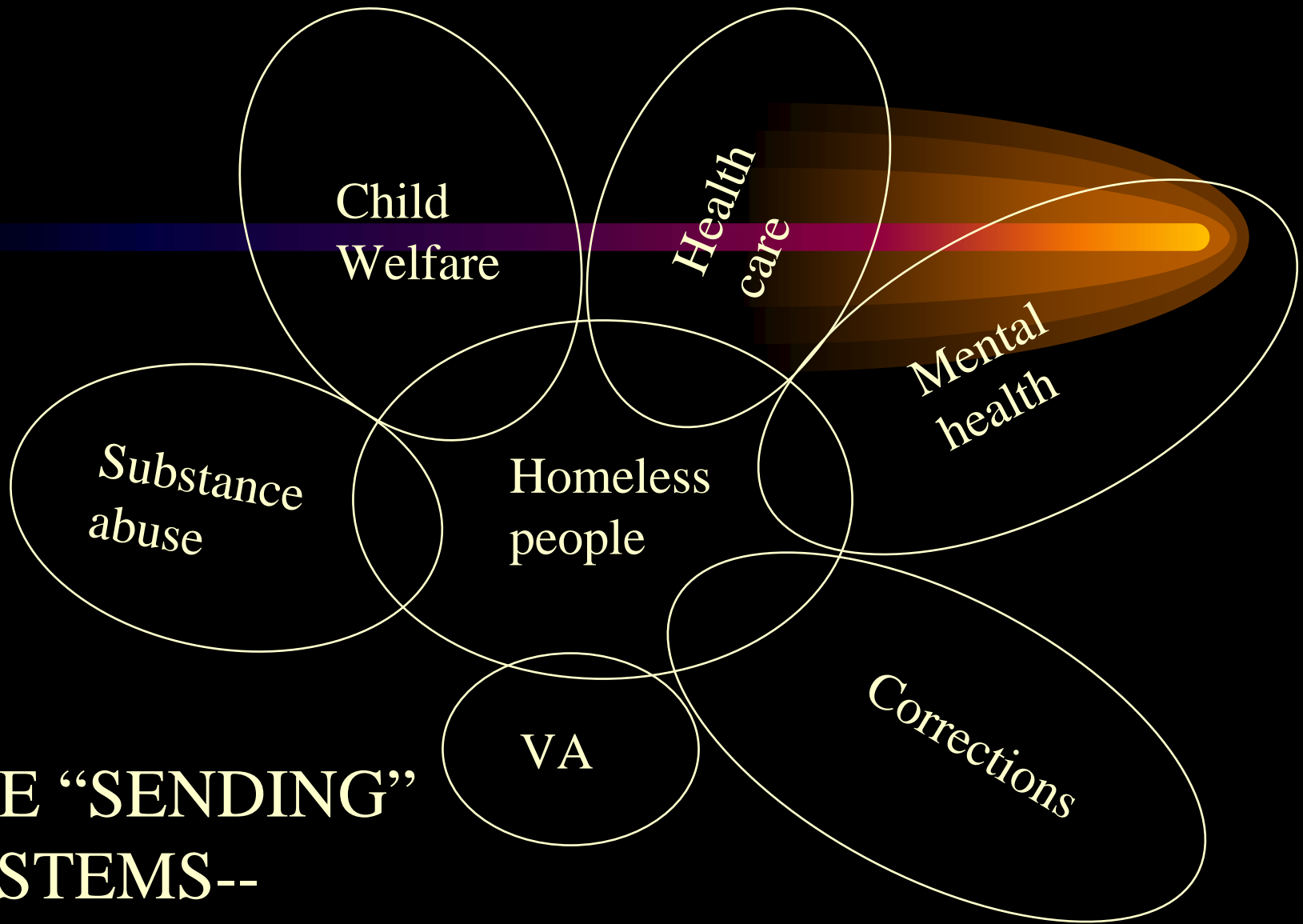
- However many people are homeless in a community today –
- At least 4 to 5 times that many people will experience homelessness over a year’s time
- Comes out to no less than 1 in 20, and often as many as 1 in 10, poor people each year
- Not so different for families and single adults, at least according to shelter tracking databases

# *Need to Look at Structures*

- Anything this immense cannot be attributable solely to “personal problems”
- Have to look at, and do something about, societal structures related to housing and housing affordability
- Price of housing has steadily increased for at least 25 years
- Earning power of low-income households, those with little or no training beyond high school, has not increased in real terms since 1973
- Within this context, those with the most vulnerabilities lose first, but others soon follow

# *So, What Will It Take to End Homelessness for Single Adults?*

- Stopping the flow into homelessness
  - Can think of as two components – “random” and system-based
  - Can do most about the system-based, so start there
- Increasing the flow out of homelessness, and assuring that it doesn’t reverse itself
  - Requires housing
  - But housing often is not enough – requires the services to help people stabilize in housing and not lose it
- Neither can happen without major involvement of mainstream public agencies



**THE “SENDING”  
SYSTEMS--  
THE PROBLEM? THE SOLUTION?**

# *The “Sending” Systems Must Play Their Part*

- Be able to identify homelessness risk among “their” people, at intake, at discharge, along the way (data implications)
- Assess benefits to themselves (e.g., lower recidivism/relapse/return)
- Assess the ways that stable housing contributes to their own mission
- Identify potential partners to address issues

# *The Solution, to Quote Robert Hayes, is “Housing, Housing, and Housing”*

- For those whose disabilities have contributed to being homeless for a long time, simple housing is not enough – we have a variety of “housing + services” models that are known to help
- But affordable housing for the larger low-income population is also needed, and would work for many (Quigley et al.)

# *The Last Piece, Then, Is To Build the Infrastructure*

- Affordable housing without service supports for those who can – through either production subsidies or rental assistance
- Permanent supportive housing with services for those who can't
- Transitional housing linked to institutional discharge for those who probably could with enough time and assistance

# *Without Housing, Nothing Else Works*

