

Vouchers, Utility Assistance, Financial Assistance Community Session Meeting Summary

Vouchers, Utility Assistance, Financial Assistance Solutions Jam Session

The following strategies and priorities to improve the Detroit housing supply and rehousing system were developed by Detroit community members present during the session:

#	Description of solution	Improvement or Innovation?	Impact of solution
Example	Ensure that all households who participate in RRH or PSH are linked to low-cost or affordable internet.	Improvement	RRH and PSH participants will be better able to access community services, employment, and education programs to improve their economic stability.
Example	Advocate to MSHDA that “data matching” occurs between MSHDA HCV/ Housing Agent data sets and state HMIS systems. Adding unique identifiers (HMIS#s) has the possibility to further disaggregate voucher data as well as drill down to more client level solutions when a homeless household receives voucher.	Innovation	Adding HMIS# for system level data matching allows critical information sharing regarding identifying a person’s current living situation and/or identifying advocates or frontline staff to assist and aid in the process. Being able to tie this information back to the CoC also allows for further research and data insights regarding the efficacy of the homeless

			preference housing choice voucher.
1	Flexible funding with Section 8 and vouchers have been very successful in other communities e.g. giving people \$1000 to use however they want as they know what they need		
2	Direct Aid assistance without restrictions.		
3	Rent negotiator-Have specific positions that work with Landlords and the agent for the resident (Not the case manager)		
4	System punishes individuals who are not in a shelter. We should open up and provide services to those who are couch surfing, staying with relatives (services not just for those literally homeless).		
5	Landlords should sign leases with Section 8 entities so they can be held accountable, like with rent increases.		
6	Supporting source of income policies that are in legislation to ensure units are available without discrimination		
7	Working with MSHDA to support data informed voucher matching process		
8	Advocating for more FUP/other subsidy vouchers for youth, which other communities have but we don't		
9	Better supports for landlords and property owners to participate in the work and get into compliance		
10	Not all tenants receiving Section 8 will be able to gather info quickly. A lot of people becoming homeless are because landlords are not getting paid by entities who issue Section 8 vouchers.		

	Eviction cases proceeding even though it's against the contracts. Improve processes for processing payments.		
11	We need legal aid to be more connected		
12	Support financial literacy and budgeting support for new tenants		
13	Utility assistance and negotiating with utility companies when there are arrears		
14	Rent negotiator who works with landlord and coordinates with case manager and housing navigator		
15	Voucher holders need to know their rights (improved tenant rights education)		
16	Small stipends for a short time for voucher holders to help tide folks over as they transition out of homelessness		
17	Risk mitigation fund that can be offered to property managers and landlords that would make renting to Section 8 holders more attractive		
18	Tenant Bill of Rights		
19	Allowing information and client exchange between CoC members and non CoC member organizations. Data access barriers.		
20	Six month to a year supplement. When people are homeless and obtain vouchers and get on their feet, then everything increases. "Income disregard" policies exist in other communities.		
21	Furniture assistance for voucher holders (Detroit Housing Furniture Bank). Can we use a school building for this kind of innovation?		

	Could also provide housing resources like sheets and plates.		
22	Flexible financial assistance. Letting folks decide for themselves what they need.		
23	General theme: Voucher process and lease up process is not trauma informed for those who are already in crisis. What kind of analysis can we do to look at the process and make improvements? Looking at both pre and post lease up. A lot of communities have done this analysis.		
24	If I give them motion forms and request right to counsel and give copy of ordinance, clients will have more legal representation than bare minimum. Fee waiver is filed first with Bridge Card or other benefits and then motion is filed. You will get breakout room if you just ask in court. We need more education on right to counsel and how to go about these processes.		
25	Education about people's rights as a voucher holder		
26	One of the most important things I have found is that the City has individuals who will be taking calls from residents. These individuals need to have this info in hands so they can be correctly guided and serviced. In Macomb and Oakland, getting customer service from individuals who take phone calls is totally different. They are totally aware of all the services plus tenants' rights education. Not sure if we have lack of customer service training or lack of information.		
27	When working with DV survivors who are getting vouchers, they		

	will accept Section 8 vouchers wherever they can get it. It takes people away from their jobs, schools, familiar surroundings. Could we give transportation assistance? Daycare assistance?		
28	Tenant rights books should be in every shelter, bus stop, etc.		
29	Telling the stories of how people are hurt by the current processes may help get attention		
30	Education for your rights would be pivotal but like any issue in government, people should be appointed automatically (lawyers) as soon as you enter a house with your voucher. Lawyer can help as you document what is wrong with the home at move in. Helpful to have lawyers through the entire process.		
31	New department that focuses on gaps in homelessness funding		
32	Keeping people homeless for small requirements in HUD inspection processes may be going too far. I would rather have bigger fixes completed. Happy medium where landlords have time to fix minor things but big things are being addressed (we can't move you here if there is flooding, mold, etc.). In some communities, there is flexible funding to help landlords make modest repairs		
33	MSHDA, housing agents: they need to do a better job of vetting who they are giving this money to. A lot of these property managers are slums, don't have real estate licenses, and are being paid governmental funds.		

34	Working with DV population, they have a voucher and we are waiting ridiculous times to get an inspection completed. Lots of little things holding people up from moving in (countertops and doorknobs). There should be a designated time frame to get these processes completed.		
35	Survivors go through a whole slew of trauma so when they get to these homes, they feel like they can't complain and should be grateful. Landlords should go through ethics, trauma informed training.		
36	How can we help people who are experiencing homelessness but are not on the streets directly (like those living in cars and are struggling to afford bills). We should have airbnbs, another voucher program, for this kind of population.		
37	Can we have a housing program for people to have temp housing so they can take the time to stack and save up their money? Creating a new voucher program for airbnbs to house folks.		
38	How does MSHDA ensure inspections are valid and they are passing? We've had our own inspectors go in behind housing agent inspections and found they don't pass.		
39	Housing counselors: We paired every voucher with a housing counselor who did a briefing with clients, tenant rights, helped client with housing search and lease up process, helped educate the landlord. They also did inspections and were the client advocate so engendered more trust in the		

	process. Housing counselor can work with landlord to remediate issues. We could forego eviction process because an advocate was there to explain the process to the client and landlord without ever going to legal aid.		
40	I was told I was on the Section 8 list and I didn't know what that was. I did the work to find the information and resources. There has to be a lot of communication to clients within shelters. It's important for us to get our own mail so the client directly gets their mail.		
41	Better processes of allowing people to update information online, not requiring people to bring information in person.		
42	I work with families at one of the shelters and when clients meet with navigation and are submitted to various housing programs (PBV, HCV), there is no follow up communication. Only communication we can give to long term stayers in shelter is giving a website. Can we get more follow-ups, more communication from MSHDA? No additional communication unless there is a pull and pulls are not frequent.		
43	We still operate in snail mail and it's not acceptable given our large program. We are moving to online, paperless system to better administer voucher program across the state. We recognize we are losing families from being pulled and losing out because they don't receive initial packet.		
44	We partner with HARAs and they receive notification when families		

	are pulled. HARA receives notification that families are pulled so they can reach out to agencies working with clients. In Detroit it's the CAM. As we move to more paperless system, we will be using text messages to remind folks to update applications, sending out emails reminding them to do recertification. We recognize we have a lot of work to do and we are behind on technology. Taking initial steps in 2024.		
45	Change the process in eligibility criteria in Detroit. If shelter is limited, then being in shelter can't be criteria for being put on the MSHDA voucher list.		
46	Making PO boxes available to people experiencing homelessness for up to a year		
47	Support for better system integration with the CES (CAM) program submitting documentation for HCV recertification (doing it more automatically)		
48	Providers should bring culturally specific services		
49	Need for translation services at every point		
50	Challenges with large families finding units; targeted outreach to landlords who can accommodate		
51	Prevalence of DV/SA that families are experiencing and services need to be trauma informed to address that issue		
52	I have personal experience with independent living and assisted living facilities and have seen illegal utility hook ups. A lot of		

	<p>them are getting shut down and people become homeless. Better oversight for these kinds of facilities.</p>		
53	<p>Clients don't always have access to the internet unless they are in the shelter. Right now, if you are in shelter, you get more services. There is an outreach team and they will be overwhelmed. Barriers need to be eliminated from MSHDA on down because if you call shelter, there is no space. We will have same meeting next year if we don't reduce barriers. If you make a dollar over the voucher limit, all of a sudden you have issues.</p>		
54	<p>Role reversal that we hold our funders accountable. Every agency or org we are saying is failing, you go back to their leadership and they say they need more funding. We need our funders to sit at the table and hear this and figure out how they can fund what we need. How do we gain more funding for our city?</p>		
55	<p>We need stronger partnerships with our energy companies so we can advocate that certain populations should be the first groups to get arrears taken care of or payment plans etc.</p>		
56	<p>Change needs to happen on national level, with voting, legislative advocacy, etc.</p>		
57	<p>Utilities: Utility companies will let no payments go for such a long time that in order to get utility assistance, there is a cap. I would like to understand more about how we can help people before it gets to the point that we can't</p>		

	find a provider to pay \$1000 in past due bills		
58	In the past you had regular communication with MDHHS, DTE, and Coc providers. Where is that now?		
59	Having a similar HCV workflow for agencies to follow, to assist clients, in maintaining and closing gaps in service.		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Supporting advocacy work that directly affects voucher process (such as Source of Income protections, etc.) -MSHDA/RPI data matching with HMIS to improve voucher acquisition -Advocating for FUP/FYI vouchers for our community (youth specific) -Consider Direct Cash Transfer (DCT) projects (Point Source Youth) who show positive outcomes reflected in their data reporting (youth specific) -Providing supports for landlord and property management who report wanting to work with voucher recipients, but feeling overwhelmed by the process and timelines and lack of support to understand their responsibilities and how to comply specifically -LL recruitment efforts to include education and direct TA type support -Automation around financial assistance distribution as some landlords report hesitancy to lease with a voucher due to the agency 		

	<p>check not coming consistently or on time</p> <p>-Improving the processes around connecting veterans to veterans programming and supports to access veteran specific vouchers</p> <p>-More funding for programs like SHP to decrease barriers holding up the process of leasing up from shelter with a voucher</p> <p>-Data informed system integration/automation with CES providers to ensure recertifications are being received in a timely manner</p> <p>-Better supports in place for specific demographics to address unique needs like: seniors using technology, understanding process, extended time, parenting grandparents, etc. // youth more transient, more digital, transportation needs // ESL language barriers with paperwork, more instantly available translation services // Frequent users of medical/health systems like emergency rooms // etc.</p> <p>-Collaborative partnerships with other CoC and non-CoC programs serving specific populations to share the financial assistance and CM supports for households pulled</p>		
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Working to obtain the data on actual lease-ups of households pulled -Housing Navigation to decrease time spent in housing search phase (separate from LL acquisition, resource navigation, other navigation) -Collaborative partnerships with homeownership programs funded to serve similar demographics, connecting clients who are interested and eligible as an additional pathway to housing, and perhaps connecting with the orgs who are already doing this outreach work -Better supports and education for waitlist applicants to access and use the online MSHDA portal -Continuing to encourage MSHDA to move to more modern way of communications in addition to "snail mail" -Ensuring clients are involved in the inspection process and/or have a system in place to note their agreement or disagreement with the outcome of the inspection		
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