



City of Arts & Innovation

# News Release

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

March 15, 2018

**Contact:**

Phil Pitchford

Communications Officer

951-826-5975

[ppitchford@riversideca.gov](mailto:ppitchford@riversideca.gov)

## **City of Riverside Approves Housing First Strategy to Address Homelessness**

*Unanimous vote by Riverside City Council changes City's approach*

RIVERSIDE, Calif. – A national “best practice” approach to reducing homelessness that helped Riverside house all of its homeless veterans in 2016 has been adopted as a citywide approach for getting people off the streets and into a stable environment.

Housing First, which emphasizes getting homeless individuals into housing as quickly as possible in order to effectively provide them with services like substance abuse counseling and job referrals, received a unanimous endorsement from the Riverside City Council on Tuesday (3/13).

“We made an important change today that recognizes that you cannot end homelessness without housing,” Mayor Rusty Bailey said. “As we continue working to get our neighbors without homes off the streets and back into a productive way of living, I’m proud of our city for taking this pro-active approach.”

The 7-0 policy change shifts Riverside away from the approach that it and most other cities have taken for many years – providing housing only after homeless individuals have completed other requirements, such as getting sober and finding employment.

Housing First is designed to help homeless people achieve the same goals, but it recognizes that such individuals are far more likely to be successful if they are housed permanently first, instead of last. Housing is the tool to achieve stability, not the goal in and of itself.

In addition to adopting the Housing First policy, the City Council approved memorandums of understanding with partner agencies, including: Riverside County Department of Behavioral Health; Riverside County Housing Authority; Step Up on Second; and Path of Life Ministries.

“Much work remains, but the City Council is confident that this approach will help our city make the kinds of gains we all want in terms of reducing homelessness,” Mayor Pro Tem Chris MacArthur said. “It’s encouraging to see us move from managing the problem toward a pathway that will help us eliminate it.”

The City believes that it can dramatically decrease homelessness during the next 10 years through the Housing First approach. Riverside has approximately 400 people living on the streets.

The City of Riverside now spends nearly \$2.8 million each year managing homelessness, including about \$2.1 million on the impacts of homelessness and nearly \$700,000 providing services to homeless individuals. These funds may manage the problem of homelessness, but they do not effectively reduce it.

Housing First, on the other hand, has been credited with: helping homeless individuals stay in housing, instead of rotating back and forth between shelters and the streets; saving money compared to the funds spent on emergency calls, cleaning up debris and encampments, and the cost to local hospitals; creating good neighbors who generate fewer calls for service than market-rate housing; getting people with physical and mental illnesses into housing easier, and providing rules for tenants that enable them to stay housed long-term.

Housing First units will be some of the most strongly managed affordable housing units in the city because of strict tenant rules, the provision of necessary services, and the strong case management approach to helping tenants remain housed.

The City of Riverside's Office of Homeless Solutions published its draft Housing First strategy in early January and collected public comment for about six weeks. The 142 comments received by email, letter and social media were included with the final draft of the plan that was approved by the City Council.

"Housing First has been shown to provide the best outcomes for some of the most at-risk people in Riverside," said Emilio Ramirez, Director of the Office of Homeless Solutions. "Working with our partners in the public, private, and non-profit sectors, we can go from managing homelessness to eliminating it."

A staff report on the program: <https://aquarius.riversideca.gov/clerkdb/0/doc/252982/Page1.aspx>

Footage of the City Council discussion can be found at the 3:42 mark of this video:  
[http://riversideca.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=2&clip\\_id=3050](http://riversideca.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=2&clip_id=3050)