

IN THE CITIES AND COUNTIES: GAINESVILLE AND ALACHUA COUNTY UNVEIL NEW 10-YEAR PLAN

GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA. Gainesville Mayor Pegeen Hanrahan and Alachua County Commissioner Rodney Long joined forces last week in a county-wide summit to unveil their new 10-Year Plan for the region. United States Interagency Council on Homelessness Executive Director Philip Mangano, invited to keynote the unveiling at the Martin Luther King, Jr., Multipurpose Center, joined the partners for Gainesville Region /Alachua County Empowerment (GRACE), the results of six months' of planning by a broad partnership of public and private representatives.

Director Mangano applauded the planners for their survey of best practices nationally and their use of cost benefit analysis: "You have brought important new cost insights to the table from health care and law enforcement, and then set goals to change the status quo in your community." Based on local law enforcement estimates that \$1 millin is being spent annually in addressing homelessness, planners developed an agenda of no-cost policy changes that could changes how law enforcement and the courts interact with many homeless individuals and expedite results that support people in accessing jobs and housing.

The Plan set goals of expanding housing opportunity, increasing access to services through a first entry/one stop center; increasing access to free medical care; providing supportive services (such as life skills, budgeting, job training, mentoring, etc.); increasing faith-based initiatives; reducing the number of homeless arrests; implementing an effective discharge planning system; and prevention through education, job training, and supportive services. The plan also calls for the creation of an Office of Homelessness to coordinate services, implement the Homeless Management Information System; seek funding, and facilitate the implementation of the 10-year plan.

In conducting cost benefit analysis, planners found that the Meridian Behavioral Healthcare's Crisis Stabilization Unit (CSU) reported that homeless patients stay approximately five days at CSU versus three to four days for non-homeless patients. The extra length of stay results in an additional cost of approximately \$500 per homeless patient.

According to Shands Healthcare officials, two of their Gainesville hospitals incur over \$3 million in uncompensated emergency room expenses due to homeless persons' visits to the emergency room (ER), which average approximately \$700 per visit. Shands officials point to a high number of instances where the ER visit could have been avoided with improved access to preventive care.