

IN THE CITIES AND COUNTIES: NEW DATA FROM SEATTLE'S 1811 EASTLAKE HOUSING FIRST INITIATIVE DEMONSTRATE 50 PERCENT REDUCTION IN COSTS AND \$4 MILLION SAVINGS



SEATTLE, WASHINGTON. "Findings suggest that permanent, rather than temporary, housing may be necessary to fully realize these cost savings because benefits continued to accrue the longer these individuals were housed," reads the dispassionate research finding in the new issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* focused on evaluation of Seattle's 1811 Eastlake Housing First initiative for chronic inebriates. But the rather dry observation about "what works" to end homelessness is newly supported by a documented cost savings of over \$4 million for the 95 individuals who were the subject of the study and who had previously cost local taxpayers \$8.2 million in hospitalizations, emergency services, jail time, detox, and sobering center visits.

After one year in housing, the same individuals cost taxpayers only \$4 million, and researchers also found that residents drank less the longer they remained housed, and their cost to public systems continued to decline. After being housed, the per person costs per month declined to \$1,492 after six months and \$958 after one year. The total cost for all 95 participants for one year was \$4,094,291, a reduction of more than \$4 million.

"The evidence continues to indicate that the Housing First model is better for the homeless person, better for the community, and better for the taxpayer," indicated Philip Mangano, United States Interagency Council on Homelessness Executive Director. "You don't need to be Warren Buffet to understand the wisdom of this initiative."



The new research was unveiled at a press conference in Seattle this week, where Downtown Emergency Service Center Executive Director Bill Hobson, whose agency operates 1811 Eastlake, stated: "The Housing First model was developed in response to the problem of

long-term homelessness among those living with severe mental illnesses and substance abuse problems."

"In most US cities, people with behavioral health disabilities die on the streets far more frequently than any other subset of the homeless population," he said. "Before they die, they use large amounts of taxpayer-funded services in our healthcare and criminal justice systems." The 1811 Eastlake study, funded by the Substance Abuse Policy Research Program (SAPRP) of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, represents the first U.S. controlled assessment of the effectiveness of Housing First specifically targeting chronically homeless alcoholics.

Mr. Hobson, with lead researcher Mary E. Larimer, PhD, professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences and adjunct professor of psychology at the University of Washington, was joined by outgoing King County Executive Ron Sims, who has been nominated by President Obama to be Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Mr. Sims, who has been widely recognized during his three terms as County Executive and served as Co-Chair of the Committee to End Homelessness in King County, acknowledged that he had been skeptical of the Housing First strategy for chronically homeless alcoholics.

"This is an extraordinarily successful program," said Mr. Sims at the press event, noting, "Our return on investment has exceeded any expectation." Pictured above are (left to right) Mr. Sims, Dr. Larimer, and Mr. Hobson.

USICH *e-news* 4/2/09