

The Law Enforcement Response to Homelessness

Identifying High-Priority Needs to Improve Law Enforcement Strategies for Addressing Homelessness

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Police often are the first (and sometimes the only) point of government contact for persons experiencing homelessness (PEH). Law enforcement officers typically encounter persons experiencing *unsheltered* homelessness, or those whose primary residence is a public or private space that is not designated for the regular accommodation of people. In contrast, police encounter individuals experiencing *sheltered* homelessness less frequently because they primarily reside in shelters or temporary housing (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development [HUD], 2007). Although addressing the root causes of homelessness is beyond the scope of the law enforcement mandate, police still respond to community concerns and issues of public safety associated with homelessness. Although it has been common for police to rely on traditional law enforcement powers in dealing with homelessness, we have witnessed a shift away from arrest-focused methods in favor of approaches that are designed to foster positive relationships with PEH, help assess the individual needs of each person or area, and guide homeless or unsheltered individuals to the services they require, when they are available. Such approaches often involve close partnerships with public and private service providers, other government agencies, and community stakeholders. As homelessness continues to be a concern across the country, it is critical to examine the important role of the police in responding to the problem and the ways in which innovative efforts can be supported.

On behalf of the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) and the RAND Corporation convened a workshop to address the law enforcement response to homelessness. This effort is one of many from a multiyear collaboration, the Priority Criminal Justice Needs Initiative, to develop expert-identified technology and policy needs on issues affecting the criminal justice system. The purpose of this workshop was to inform a research agenda for NIJ and other stakeholders to discover and implement novel law enforcement responses to homelessness. The meeting took place on February 5 and 6, 2020, in Washington, D.C., at the NIJ offices within the Office of Justice Programs headquarters. Practitioners, academics, and individuals

SELECTED PRIORITY NEEDS



RESULTS

Promising law enforcement practices and policy

- Best practices, protocols, and training should be identified and published for agencies and employees who remove homeless encampments.
- Research should be conducted to identify the most promising practices for improving officer health and wellness.

Partnerships and collaboration with service providers and communities

- Research should be conducted to identify the potential waste, costs, and benefits associated with siloed service provision.
- A promising practices guide should be developed that will help law enforcement and other key stakeholders conduct public outreach and improve community relations with respect to law enforcement's options to respond to homeless issues.

Data collection, integration, and evaluation

- Research should be conducted to identify existing best practices and potential promising practices to address the issues of inadequate data collection, information synthesis, and knowledge development for agencies working with PEH.
- Funds should be invested to evaluate how existing information systems (e.g., computer-aided dispatch [CAD], records management systems [RMS], and homelessness management information systems [HMIS]) are used for informing agency and political responses.

Basic research and public education

- Existing research should be examined or new research should be conducted to identify the top reasons why individuals do not engage in needed services.
- Research should be conducted to identify the gaps, costs, risks, and benefits of various levels of behavioral health services.

associated with organizations helping to address homelessness were invited to be participants based on our consultation of the research literature and with federal partners and known law enforcement agencies that have been engaged with the problem around the United States, with care taken to bring in perspectives from various regions. This workshop explored issues and opportunities faced by law enforcement with respect to homelessness and identified *needs* (i.e., problems or opportunities and accompanying solutions) for addressing them. Participants were led through structured discussions on three topics: (1) police perspectives toward homelessness; (2) partnerships and broader solutions; and (3) data, tracking, and evaluation. Throughout the workshop, participants were asked to identify needs arising from the discussion.

Following the discussions, experts participated in a ranking exercise to identify the most-important needs. Overall, 19 of the identified needs were categorized as high-priority. These needs fell into four general categories: (1) promising law enforcement practices and policy, (2) partnerships and collaboration with service providers and communities, (3) data collection, integration, and evaluation, and (4) basic research and public education. We discuss the 19 high-priority needs that emerged through this exercise and provide additional context based on participant discussions.

WHAT WE FOUND

- There are numerous factors influencing the nature and scope of homelessness within jurisdictions. Although poverty and the lack of affordable housing are broadly considered the key variables at play, homelessness can manifest differently across the country. For example, some areas have more challenges with unsheltered homelessness, particularly in locales with a mild climate, while other communities might experience challenges related to sheltered populations. The specific needs of these populations might not be the same. So, although common themes exist, there are few—if any—universally applicable solutions.

Although poverty and the lack of affordable housing are broadly considered the key variables at play, homelessness can manifest differently across the country.

- Homelessness does not occur in a vacuum; it is intertwined with other social challenges, such as mental illness and substance use. As first responders, police are on the front lines in responding to these problems, often with limited response options beyond taking people to jail or a hospital. Without the necessary systems to remedy the underlying causes of these frequently co-occurring issues, PEH often cycle in and out of the criminal justice system, leading to frustration among officers. Even when resources are available, people in need might consistently decline services.
- Law enforcement is not equipped to address the underlying causes of homelessness, and multistakeholder partnerships therefore are a vital part of any solution. Nevertheless, police often are the first called on to respond to homelessness-related issues. Police must constantly balance the lack of tools and resources to respond in a meaningful way with pressure from the community and business leaders to “do something” about homelessness, while also respecting the legal rights afforded to PEH. As eyes and ears in the field, police can play an important role in engaging with PEH. Collaborative efforts among law enforcement, other government agencies, social services providers, and community leaders are key to ensuring that individuals are connected with appropriate services. Additionally, such collaborations help frame a clear scope of activity for police, allowing for more-efficient use of law enforcement powers in service to the community.
- It is critical that jurisdiction-wide efforts are made to acquire and share data and that common, standardized metrics of success are defined to measure whether responses achieve the desired results. Innovative methods for collecting data on the populations of PEH include, for example, issuing specialized identification cards or documents to track service utilization (PERF, 2018); creating a single point of entry for services; and tagging all relevant interactions as homeless-involved, regardless of whether criminal activity occurred. Data gathered using a comprehensive research agenda would inform new programs, such as multisystem response teams, which would encourage multistakeholder partnerships among law enforcement, service providers, and researchers. Ongoing data analysis would help define the nature of homelessness in each jurisdiction, inform solutions to fill gaps or needs left unaddressed by existing responses, and evaluate whether new approaches achieve intended outcomes.

HOMELESSNESS IN THE UNITED STATES

Homelessness is defined by HUD as an “[i]ndividual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence” (HUD, undated). Referred to more specifically as *literally homeless*, this designation includes individuals and families living in public or private spaces that are not intended for human habitation, publicly or privately operated shelters, and institutions with their former residence being in a shelter or public place. Additional categories of homelessness defined by HUD include persons at imminent risk of homelessness, homeless under other federal statutes, and fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence (HUD, undated). Importantly, the meaning of the term *homelessness* depends on the context in which it is being used (Munthe-Kass, Berg, and Blaasvær, 2018).

To better understand the scale of homelessness in the United States, in 1998, Congress authorized HUD to collect information about the number of PEH in the country (Congressional Research Service, 2018). These estimates are provided as part of HUD’s *Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress*, which was first issued in 2007. This annual report describes two methods for estimating the size of the population of PEH: (1) point-in-time (PIT) counts and (2) Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) full-year estimates (HUD, undated). PIT counts are reported by local Continuum of Care Programs as part of their applications for funding through the Homeless Assistance Act. PIT counts provide a snapshot of all PEH, regardless of living situation (i.e., sheltered or unsheltered), on a single night during the last week of January. The specific method of conducting PIT counts can vary each year and across communities, although guidelines have been established to standardize time frames for data collection and to remove duplicate counts (see Henry et al., 2018; HUD, undated; and HUD, 2014). The most recent PIT counts available are from 2019 and are included in the 2019 AHAR (Henry et al., 2020). According to these figures, nearly 568,000 individuals experienced sheltered or unsheltered homelessness on a given night in 2019 (HUD, 2019). While this represents a more than 10-percent decrease over the past decade, it also reflects a nearly 3-percent increase over the previous year. The most recent PIT counts show that most individuals who experienced homelessness on a given night were White (48 percent), non-Hispanic (78 percent), male (61 percent), over the age of 24 (73 percent), and living without children (69 percent). Nearly one-fifth (19 percent) were considered *chronically homeless*,

meaning a person “with a disability who has been continuously homeless for 1 year or more or has experienced at least four episodes of homelessness in the last 3 years” (Henry et al., 2020, p. 2). Furthermore, 21 percent of PEH were experiencing severe mental health disorders, and 16 percent were experiencing substance use disorders.

In contrast, HMIS estimates provide deduplicated counts of people who use a housing program or service (e.g., emergency shelter, transitional housing), thus reflecting those experiencing sheltered homelessness. Full-year estimates are derived from HMIS data collected between October and September from a nationally representative sample of communities. The most recent HMIS estimates were released as part of the 2017 AHAR and show that just more than 1.4 million people experienced sheltered homelessness that year (Henry et al., 2018). While this represents a decline in sheltered homelessness of less than one-half of a percentage point, it reflects a decrease of more than 11 percent over the past decade. Compared with the PIT counts, most individuals who experienced sheltered homelessness were Black or African American (43 percent), non-Hispanic (83 percent), male (62 percent), between the ages of 31 and 50 (33 percent), and living alone (65 percent).

Factors Contributing to Homelessness

Jennifer Wolch and colleagues, 2007, recommends considering two questions when assessing the factors that contribute to homelessness: (1) Why does homelessness exist and (2) who is most vulnerable to becoming homeless? Regarding the first

ABBREVIATIONS

CAD	computer-aided dispatch
HMIS	homelessness management information systems
HUD	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
HUD-VASH	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development–Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing
NASEM	National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine
NIJ	National Institute of Justice
PEH	persons experiencing homelessness
PERF	Police Executive Research Forum
PSH	permanent supportive housing
PIT	point in time
RMS	records management system

question, one of the major driving forces behind homelessness is the lack of affordable housing options (see Munthe-Kass, Berg, and Blaasv er, 2018). A 2019 report by the Council of Economic Advisers highlighted two affordability issues that also help explain the differences in homelessness rates across the country: specifically, housing units at excessive costs (which can be because of overregulation) and a limited supply of homeless shelters. Another major factor is poverty, whether because of a lack of employment opportunities or labor participation or the heightened cost of urban living coupled with a lack of affordable housing (Council of Economic Advisers, 2019).

Individuals who suffer from a severe mental health disorder or substance use disorder, have a previous criminal history and/or history of incarceration, have low income, and have weak social connections and/or family support are more at risk for becoming homeless than individuals without those risk factors (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, 2018; Shelton et al., 2009). These risk factors often correlate more with the population of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness than with the population of those experiencing transient homelessness, and some of these vulnerabilities result in initial requests for service (e.g., response to disorderly calls, public intoxication), with which law enforcement has extensive experience independent of homelessness.

Policing and Homelessness

Law enforcement is often on the front lines in responding to community concerns, even if the concerns themselves are not within a traditional policing scope. This phenomenon has been seen with police response to the opioid crisis, for which law enforcement serves as the initial government contact with opioid users (see Goodison et al., 2019). However, the dynamic

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between police and PEH far predates the recent opioid crisis. For example, PERF conducted a national survey in 1993 asking law enforcement agencies about homelessness (see PERF, 2018, p. 24; Plotkin and Narr, 1993). At that time, 69 percent of agencies believed that homelessness was predominantly a police problem when it came to immediate response, yet about two-thirds of agencies did not seek to identify the chronically homeless and about one-half provided no special training on interacting with PEH. Unsurprisingly, more than eight of ten agencies did not have either an individual or a unit assigned to homelessness response. Additionally, agencies knew that law enforcement alone could not address homelessness—almost 97 percent of responding departments believed that a referral arrangement was needed to effectively address homelessness.

Numerous agencies across the United States now consider outreach to populations of PEH to be critical to overall policing strategy. In 2018, PERF held a conference with more than 250 attendees to discuss police responses, highlight innovation, and provide recommendations based on promising practices (PERF, 2018). Among the key recommendations were suggestions for agencies to develop a problem-solving, multidisciplinary approach to response; leverage and support homeless outreach team models; support initiatives that decrease barriers for PEH, such as homeless courts and alternatives to fines and fees; and collect data to evaluate programs moving forward.

Evaluation of Programs

The existing body of homelessness program evaluations has yielded mixed results and inconsistent guidance. Three recent works—a meta-analysis of homelessness intervention programs (Munthe-Kaas, Berg, and Blaasv er, 2018), a report on the state of homelessness in America (Council of Economic Advisers, 2019), and a 2018 report by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM)—all illustrate the research challenges facing this topic.

Munthe-Kaas, Berg, and Blaasv er, 2018, conducted a meta-analysis to summarize the current state of evaluation research on the effectiveness of various housing program interventions to reduce homelessness.¹ The varied definitions of homelessness worldwide generally cover the literal absence of a dwelling, social discrimination or exclusion, and the legal rights to tenancy and dignity. Munthe-Kaas, Berg, and Blaasv er use the Norwegian definition to broadly quantify homelessness as a person who lacks “a place to stay for the night; is referred to an emergency or temporary shelter/accommodation; is a ward of the correctional [system] and due to be released in two

months at the latest; is a resident of an institution and due to be discharged in two months at the latest; [or] lives with friends, acquaintances or family on a temporary basis” (2018, p. 10). The risk factors of homelessness under this definition include mental health disorders, chronic physical illness, substance use disorders, and recent release from prison. To outline the effectiveness of various housing programs in improving stability and reducing homelessness, Munthe-Kaas, Berg, and Blaasvør evaluated randomized controlled trials from 43 relevant studies using the Grading of Recommendations Assessment, Development, and Evaluation approach to test certainty in primary outcomes.

The results highlighted programs that were shown to produce better outcomes than typical services that were available. This produced a range of levels of certainty from very low to moderate, with most studies exhibiting a high bias risk because of poor reporting, no blinding, or insufficient randomization. Many of the interventions and case-management strategies were shown to reduce homelessness and improve housing stability. There was no implication that these programs produce worse outcomes than the services that are currently in place. For future research, the authors recommended that (1) solutions for disadvantaged youth, (2) abstinence-dependent housing with close case management or daily treatment, and (3) non-abstinence-dependent housing with group or individual living options should be considered. Additionally, Housing First interventions should be compared with programs other than the usual services. Housing First is an approach that prioritizes permanent housing for PEH, providing them with basic necessities to live and giving them the opportunity to address such issues as unemployment and substance use (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2016). Finally, Munthe-Kaas, Berg, and Blaasvør recommend that worldwide interventions should be considered, which have been an area of development since the meta-analysis was conducted (see, for example, Goering et al., 2014; and Jacups, Rogerson, and Kinchin, 2018).

Two recent reports on federal policies on homelessness are worth discussing in greater depth. The 2019 Council of Economic Advisers report, titled *The State of Homelessness in America*, is an important policy document in which several significant arguments and assertions are made about the shortcomings of previous federal policies to reduce homelessness, although many of these claims have not been empirically demonstrated. The 2018 NASEM report on permanent supportive housing (PSH) provides significant, empirically supported

assessments and recommendations based on outcomes from federal policy on PSH.

Previous federal efforts supported the expansion of PSH. Initially, this followed a treatment first model, in which individuals experiencing chronic homelessness, mental illness, or substance use disorders were required to undergo mental health or substance abuse treatment prior to eligibility for permanent housing (NASEM, 2018). Many subsequent efforts, however, transitioned to the provision of PSH with few qualifiers, such as medication compliance or abstinence, along with rapid rehousing (i.e., a short-term subsidy for those who do not require long-term assistance), which funded 282,000 additional placements, increasing placements by 149 percent. The Council of Economic Advisers report cites several studies that assessed the impact of Housing First programs on individual outcomes and demonstrated favorable results, such as reducing the number of days individuals are homeless. Because these studies focus on individual-level outcomes, however, they are unable to estimate the effect of Housing First on the size of the population of PEH. The Council of Economic Advisers report suggests several potential confounding mechanisms that might undermine short-term reductions in homelessness stemming from housing initiatives, although many of these mechanisms have not been empirically supported. Examples include the suggestion that housing programs might increase housing demand and increase the cost of housing, or that the promise of eventual permanent housing could encourage people to stay homeless and remain in shelters longer to qualify for housing. Both reports suggest that, despite efforts to standardize data collection on PEH, inconsistent local and regional definitions of homelessness, inadequate integration of different data-collection systems, and poor documentation of unsheltered homeless individuals make it challenging to identify homelessness-related trends with high confidence. The Council of Economic Advisers report suggests that Housing First does not appear to have a larger impact on risk factors for homelessness, such as substance use and mental health disorders, than other approaches and suggests that it is more expensive than other alternatives. The NASEM report notes that PSH is important in increasing the ability of some individuals to become and remain housed and documents the positive effect that housing stability has on a broad variety of health outcomes. However, it notes significant gaps in available evidence, especially from longer-term assessments of PSH on health outcomes. These gaps led the committees to conclude that there is neither substantial evidence that PSH contributes



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to improved health outcomes nor sufficient evidence to demonstrate that it is cost-effective.

There are other studies underway, particularly regarding law enforcement and homelessness. Policing researchers are working with the City of Indio, California, and its police department to evaluate the Community Outreach Resource Program, which is designed to connect unsheltered persons with service providers and aftercare (PERF, 2018, pp. 50–52). Initial results are promising for the process and outcome evaluation, which used a mixed-methods approach of surveys and in-depth client and staff interviews. Implementation fidelity is strong, which is particularly critical with a multidisciplinary approach, and key outcomes, such as stable housing, employment, and perceptions of the police and other city services, have all seen improvements.

In sum, the state of evaluation research yields some preliminary, evidence-based conclusions about practices that are effective in addressing homelessness. For example, a Housing First model has been rigorously shown to improve housing stability (Goering et al., 2014). Nevertheless, many programs, including interventions that fundamentally disagree on approach, have weak support when evaluated rigorously (Munthe-Kass, Berg, and Blaasvør, 2018; NASEM, 2018). The Council of Economic Advisers and NASEM reports also suggest potential challenges in the basic measurement of issues associated with homelessness, which can make it difficult to draw conclusions with high confidence from the existing body of research. Although current research is attempting to provide more clarity, the overall state of the literature, especially in terms of the interaction of law enforcement and PEH, is still largely unknown or unclear. Because of the limited conclusive literature and the fact that many programs and research efforts historically have not explicitly included law enforcement, the RAND Corporation and PERF, on behalf of NIJ, organized a workshop of practitioners and researchers to discuss current law enforcement responses to homelessness and identify the highest-priority needs to support and improve existing efforts.

Methodology

The purpose of this workshop was to inform a research agenda for NIJ and other stakeholders to discover and implement novel law enforcement responses to homelessness. The meeting was held on February 5 and 6, 2020, in Washington, D.C., at the NIJ offices within the Office of Justice Programs headquarters. The workshop produced a prioritized list of needs to (1) support law enforcement and other stakeholders in helping PEH

locate and transition to permanent housing and (2) address other challenges associated with homelessness. Salient needs were captured from semi-structured discussions among a multidisciplinary group of experts from all over the country, including those in law enforcement, social services, community advocacy, and academia. The panel discussion was intended to offer different stakeholders' perspectives on the issue of homelessness. Discussions revolved around four general, yet inter-related, areas: (1) the scope of the problem; (2) the police role in responding to homelessness; (3) partnerships and broader solutions; and (4) data, tracking, and evaluation. Following the discussions, participants were led through a ranking exercise to generate a prioritized set of needs. Results were then clustered into top, middle, and bottom tiers through the use of the Delphi method, a technique developed at RAND to elicit expert opinion about well-defined questions in a systematic and structured way (RAND Corporation, undated). For a detailed description of the prioritization method, please consult the technical appendix included with this report.

RESULTS

During the panel discussion, the workshop participants identified a total of 40 needs. After the workshop, these needs were assessed and grouped into the following four broad operational categories (which are related to the four topical themes of the workshop):

- Promising law enforcement practices and policy needs are related to identifying, further evaluating, or disseminating promising law enforcement strategies for interacting with PEH.
- Partnerships and collaboration with service providers and communities needs are related to fostering, improving, and using partnerships and collaborating with service providers, communities, and other criminal justice agencies to better address stakeholder needs.
- Data collection, integration, and evaluation needs are related to identifying appropriate data to collect, integrating and sharing those data appropriately with partners, and evaluating those data to better inform decisionmaking.
- Basic research and public education needs are related to more-foundational information-gathering on the problem of homelessness and disseminating promising strategies for addressing it.

Each identified need was sorted into one of these four categories after the workshop. The total list of needs, sorted by tier and category, is shown in Table A.3 in the appendix. Of the 40 needs,

- six were related to promising law enforcement practices and policy
- ten were related to partnerships and collaboration with service providers and communities
- ten were related to data collection, integration, and evaluation
- 14 were related to basic research and public education.

During the prioritization exercise at the workshop, 19 of these needs were identified as high-priority. These 19 top-tier needs are shown in Table 1. Note that, in several cases, when participants identified a problem or opportunity, they identified multiple potential needs associated with the same issue. Issues that have multiple associated needs are labeled as such in the table.

Top-Tier Needs

Top-tier needs were evenly split among the four themes, with four needs related to data collection, integration, and evaluation and five needs each related to the other themes. Notably, despite the fact that only six of the 40 total needs pertained to promising law enforcement practices and policy, five of these six needs were identified as high-priority. Three of these needs called for identifying and evaluating promising strategies for addressing challenges related to encampments of PEH. The first two needs called for identifying promising strategies for managing the personal property of encampment residents and providing advance notice to them when encampments are removed. The third need noted that the environment in encampments often presents a risk to officer safety when such hazards as needles, weapons, or waste are present. This need called for research to identify promising practices to ensure officer health and safety in encampments. The fourth need called for an evaluation of the benefits of innovative law enforcement approaches to mitigating justice problems that could contribute to homelessness. Examples of such innovative strategies mentioned by the participants include warrant-clearing events, where individuals may have warrants cleared and receive new court dates, allowing officers to avoid eventually arresting them. The final need in this category is related to the significant mental health burden that officers might experience from

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frequently interacting with those who are unable or unwilling to take advantage of the services available for PEH. This need called for research into promising strategies for managing the mental health burden of officers who frequently interact with PEH.

Participants identified five high-priority needs related to law enforcement working with service providers, community groups, and other criminal justice agencies to address the problem of homelessness in a coordinated manner. Identified problems in this category included “siloe d” responses to homelessness (i.e., each stakeholder responds in their own way without coordinating with other partners), limited options for law enforcement to respond to minor incidents involving PEH, and flawed public perspectives about what law enforcement may and may not do. Two high-priority needs related to siloe d responses called for (1) identifying potential benefits and funding sources for developing networks of partners to collaborate on homelessness and (2) conducting research to quantify the resources wasted by maintaining a siloe d response. When considering the limited options law enforcement has for responding to minor homelessness-related incidents, participants prioritized (1) highlighting promising practices for making connections between law enforcement agencies and service providers and (2) evaluating existing programs that divert PEH away from the criminal justice system. Finally, participants prioritized the development of a guide to help law enforcement and other stakeholders educate their communities on the rules and roles mandating how law enforcement can and should be responding to homelessness.

Participants spent considerable time discussing effective strategies for collecting useful data, integrating and sharing those data among agencies and partners, and evaluating those

data to inform decisionmaking. Participants noted that definitions of terms and codes for tracking interactions with PEH are inadequate. Moreover, efforts to synthesize the data that are collected and share it appropriately with all relevant partners might produce database products that are actionable for only some users, leading others to abandon the data products when determining how to best fulfill roles and serve PEH. Participants noted needs to identify promising practices for adding tracking codes to existing information systems and evaluating how these systems are used to inform agency and community responses. Participants discussed the diversity of opinions from one locale to the next in how to define terms and collect data, and they prioritized a need for efforts to promote local collaboration between law enforcement and community stakeholders on locally relevant definitions of terms. Finally, reflecting both the perceived importance of promoting collaboration and the lack of widely known and effective strategies to do so, participants prioritized a need to conduct research generally on promising approaches to data collection, information synthesis, and knowledge-development efforts across multiple agencies and partners.

As a result of the perceived dearth of quality research and the lack of public knowledge on a variety of topics that are important to the issue of homelessness, participants identified five needs that called for more-foundational basic research and public education that could be evaluated to guide policymaking by law enforcement agencies and communities. At the most basic level, participants prioritized a need for research into the most important types of data, approaches, and tools needed to design more-rigorous research methods (e.g., what alternative methods for collecting, sharing, or synthesizing data on law enforcement interactions with PEH would allow researchers

Table 1. The 19 Top-Tier Needs

Problem or Opportunity	Need
Promising law enforcement practices and policy	
Many agencies have innovative approaches to addressing justice problems that affect homelessness (e.g., warrant-clearing events), but the value of these efforts is not known.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct evaluations of these efforts to identify the promising practices and benefits.
When local jurisdictions remove encampments (or fleets of unauthorized recreational vehicles), it is difficult to properly store, manage, and dispose of property.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and publish best practices, protocols, and training for agencies and employees who remove homeless encampments.
The different policies among different agencies (and property owners) on providing notice and retaining or storing property when removing encampments (or fleets of unauthorized recreational vehicles) are a source of confusion in interagency coordination.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify promising practices with respect to sharing and publishing notice and storage requirements.
There is a significant impact on officer health and wellness when working with PEH.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct research to identify the most promising practices for improving officer health and wellness.
The nature of the environment in homeless encampments (e.g., needles, weapons, waste) can present a health hazard to officers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify promising practices for officer safety in these environments.
Partnerships and collaboration with service providers and communities	
Most U.S. responses to homelessness are “siloed” into, for example, law enforcement, service provision, and individual jurisdictions, which results in wasted resources and ineffective responses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the potential benefits of developing multidepartmental, multijurisdictional, and multisectoral collaboration and response (including more-flexible funding models). • Conduct research to identify the potential waste, costs, and benefits associated with siloed service provision.
Law enforcement has limited choices to respond to frequent, minor incidents related to homelessness. ^a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and highlight existing best practices where agencies can make effective connections with services. • Conduct evaluations of the existing diversion and deflection programs (i.e., alternatives to the justice system) that some agencies and jurisdictions are implementing.
The general public often has a flawed perspective about what law enforcement can and cannot do to respond to homelessness (i.e., rules and roles).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a promising practices guide that will help law enforcement and other key stakeholders conduct public outreach and improve community relations with respect to law enforcement’s options to respond to homeless issues.
Data collection, integration, and evaluation	
Data collection, information synthesis, and knowledge-development efforts are insufficient across the agencies that are working with PEH (law enforcement, housing, and behavioral health). ^a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct research to identify existing best practices and potential promising practices to address this issue. • Invest funds in evaluating how existing information systems (e.g., CAD, RMS, and HMIS) are used for informing agency and political responses.
Agencies’ CAD/RMS systems are not used to track when other calls (e.g., tents, health issues, other crimes) involve an individual experiencing homelessness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify promising practices for adding tracking codes to CAD/RMS systems for both initiation and disposition.
There is not a consistent set of definitions for collecting data on relevant conditions (e.g., homelessness, living situations, mental health). ^a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fund local research efforts that engage and collaborate with law enforcement and community stakeholders to develop definitions that are locally relevant.

Table 1—Continued

Problem or Opportunity	Need
Basic research and public education	
Individuals might decline services because the existing solutions are not tailored to their needs (e.g., services are not trauma informed, are clinic or institutional only, or do not allow individuals to bring their property or pets with them). ^a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine existing research or conduct new research to identify the top reasons why individuals do not engage in needed services.
There are high-frequency utilizers who have a significant impact on law enforcement and other public services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct research to quantify the prevalence and impact of this problem.
There is a lack of recognition of the impact of insufficient behavioral health services on the homelessness problem.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct research to identify the gaps, costs, risks, and benefits of various levels of behavioral health services.
There is not enough foundational research to inform the design of more-rigorous research methods.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct research to identify the most important types of data and identify approaches and tools for collecting those data.
Homelessness and substance use disorders are frequently interrelated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate existing approaches to addressing homelessness to assess the intersection of homelessness and substance use disorders.

^a Multiple needs were associated with this issue, but the others did not fall in the top tier. See the technical appendix for a complete list of needs.

access to better information?). Beyond this, participants prioritized needs for research on the following interrelated topics:

- an assessment of the impact of inadequate behavioral health services on homelessness
- an assessment of the relationship between homelessness and substance use disorders (e.g., understanding how substance use disorders lead to an individual experiencing homelessness and vice versa, and how or when they are best addressed together)
- an assessment of the prevalence and impact of high-frequency utilizers (e.g., Is there a small percentage of PEH who are associated with the majority of the law enforcement interactions and service use?)
- an assessment of the reasons why some PEH may decline or opt not to engage in available services (e.g., Are the services inadequate? Are there other barriers to their utilization?).

DISCUSSION

The goal of the workshop was to have experts identify the highest-priority needs to inform a research agenda that can support and improve existing law enforcement efforts toward addressing homelessness. The discussion began with an overview of homelessness to better understand the nature and scope of the problem at hand. Subsequent topics included the role of

the police in responding to homelessness; the important role of partnerships and broader solutions to homelessness; and, finally, the value of data for tracking the problem and evaluating efforts. In this section, we provide further context from the workshop discussion on the identified needs. Although statements in this discussion should be presumed to be derived from the opinions and assertions of the workshop participants, references to other literature sources have been included where appropriate to provide more detail and support for the assertions and opinions discussed by the participants during the workshop (for example, where a participant might have mentioned a program or policy implemented by an agency and where this program is described in a journal or news article).

Generalized National Efforts and Community-Specific Solutions *There Are No Easy Solutions to Homelessness*

Homelessness is inherently difficult to resolve because it has varied and complex causes precluding a single solution. The nature of homelessness and corresponding problems might vary across jurisdictions, requiring interventions that are tailored to the needs of the individual and community (Shinn and Cohen, 2019). As an example, the panel members explained how sheltered homelessness might be an issue in some communities, while unsheltered homelessness might be an issue in others. The distinction in these types of homelessness is important because the shared characteristics of the individuals in each population differ. Although the issue of sheltered versus unsheltered

PEH can emerge within local communities, experts suggested that the divide was largely a regional issue in the United States, with the Eastern states primarily experiencing the former and Western states the latter.² Generally, law enforcement will have a more direct role in responding to unsheltered individuals living on the streets.

The size of populations of PEH typically varies across different communities as well. One expert suggested that larger cities tend to have much larger populations of PEH, in both raw count and per capita rate, than smaller towns, municipalities, and rural communities. Responses that are successful in communities with a smaller population of PEH are not necessarily scalable to larger jurisdictions. Additionally, some communities are seeing an increase in older PEH (Corporation for Supportive Housing, 2011). Experts noted that older adults often find that it is more difficult for them to navigate the service system, and current programs are not designed to comprehensively handle issues related to aging. Older individuals can have distinct financial circumstances as compared with younger individuals, such as preexisting and ongoing medical costs, an inability to work, or the death of a previous caretaker. Another growing demographic in populations of PEH seen in some communities is students, including those at both primary and secondary levels of education, because of estranged parental relationships, economic hardship, or behavioral challenges for both the parents and the student (National Center for Homeless Education, 2020). Experts agreed that more research is needed on how to best tailor interventions to the specific needs of communities.

According to the experts, a key factor influencing homelessness is the unavailability of affordable housing options. The cost of housing is affected by numerous factors that can vary by jurisdiction, such as housing regulations, population growth, residential demand within neighborhoods, and even the availability of homeless shelters (see Council of Economic Advisers, 2019). Many experts recommended large-scale Housing First initiatives to provide an additional subsidized housing option, although there was little agreement among the panel members about specifics beyond immediately available housing without precondition. Experts in support of these policies pointed to the success of the HUD–Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program.³ This program provides comprehensive, built-in services and case worker involvement (similar to Housing First models), but it is scaled for the smaller population of veterans through U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers. Although HUD-VASH is popular among

policymakers and has been credited with lowering the population of veterans experiencing homelessness nationally, similar centralized programs that are directly managed by the federal government have not been created for nonveterans. However, other HUD programs and case management (e.g., Shelter Plus Care) seek to provide vouchers for rental assistance at the local level for vulnerable populations. Given the simultaneous efforts to provide housing, services, and monitoring within an efficient single-administrator framework, HUD-VASH would be challenging to scale upward to larger populations, according to panel members. To illustrate the scale difference, the population of veterans experiencing homelessness is estimated to be less than 10 percent, and often below 5 percent, of the national population of PEH. Other experts noted that providing housing alone is not a viable long-term solution, and the provision of mental health and substance use treatment services (as is done in HUD-VASH and Shelter Plus Care) is essential to individuals' transition out of homelessness.

The Interaction Between Homelessness and Criminal Justice

Experts believed that although research supports housing strategies, communities might be skeptical of funding such initiatives and might prefer law enforcement interventions (Katz et al., 2003; Shinn, 2009). Part of the challenge is a lack of standardized, generalizable metrics for housing programs that are easily understandable by the community. In contrast, law enforcement action is more easily calculated by and relat-

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Many PEH enter the criminal justice system because of issues that are unrelated to their housing status.

able to community members (e.g., number of arrests), and communities see law enforcement responses as more immediate because police are a phone call away from being on site for a wide variety of public concerns. However, experts discussed the oversimplicity of this view and how the lack of housing might increase the amount of time individuals spend in pretrial detention, jail, or prison and, therefore, might increase the rate of parole and probation violations. Alternatively, the participants noted how, in some cases, individuals cycle in and out of jail or prison, often for low-level crimes, which itself could lead to homelessness. In these instances, individuals move through the system too quickly for intervention with needed social or medical services. Some experts suggested that alternative models within corrections systems could be developed for rapid case management to ensure that brief touch points can still be used; the ability to have quick, established options within the corrections setting would allow greater coverage for those for whom limited confinement times preclude extended assessment. Collectively, the demands on the criminal justice system often might cost more than providing housing alone (Heilbrun et al., 2012), although other panel members suggested that this point should be further studied by conducting benefit-cost evaluations to show the value of housing approaches relative to criminal justice intervention.

At the same time, many PEH enter the criminal justice system because of issues that are unrelated to their housing status. Experts suggested that a key point at which individuals can connect with housing services is when they are released from jail or prison. If a person is experiencing homelessness at intake but a detention facility does not screen for housing status, the individual might be discharged back into homelessness upon release. One expert recommended implementing a housing screen at entry into jail or prison so that detention staff can discuss plans and options with individuals *before* they are released. A common barrier to housing access post-release is that landlords often do not allow tenants with a criminal history. Similarly, finding employment can be difficult because many employers screen for and choose not to employ individuals with a criminal history or no fixed address. Furthermore, PEH often do not have the requisite identification documents—birth cer-

tificate, Social Security card, driver's license—needed to obtain housing or employment, which complicates both matters. Experts recommended assigning case managers to individuals while they are in jail or prison to help them navigate and overcome these barriers and develop a home plan for successfully reentering the community.

Law Enforcement Has Experience with Key Issues Related to Homelessness Challenges Connected with Social Services

Although the challenge of homelessness might vary widely across jurisdictions, law enforcement has daily experience with issues that are highly related to homelessness; specifically, mental health crises, substance use disorders, and criminal victimization. The panel members discussed how homelessness can affect every facet of a person's life and how problems are compounded by these and other co-occurring issues. Police are also aware of the challenges connecting any population—and especially PEH—with useful social services. The challenge is twofold: first in the structure of services provided and second in the use of services by the population.

First, panel members explained that the gap in services dates to the deinstitutionalization of psychiatric facilities in the late 1970s and early 1980s—because of widespread abuse documented in state psychiatric facilities, the goal of deinstitutionalization was to create a system of community-based care. Although facilities were closed, community programs largely did not come to fruition, resulting in former patients becoming homeless and going without care.

According to the experts, many existing services are inadequate, particularly for the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness, substance use disorders, and/or mental health disorders (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009). For example, many services are still clinic-based (i.e., designed for clients to come to them rather than to connect via outreach), which might not be ideal for inherently transient or hidden populations. As one expert panel member explained, “current programs are based on self-determination, but if the system is not set up to help people who cannot say yes to services, then we will continue to cycle people into the streets.” Participants

agreed that programs should be person-centered and consider the circumstances PEH face, although providing this level of resources can be challenging. Additionally, the experts agreed that law enforcement should be included in the design of programs, given the police's role in interacting with eligible populations.

Additionally, panel members noted that jurisdictions often lack referral options for substance use or mental health disorders. Although some communities have services in place, quality and availability can differ considerably. One expert explained that their community has a dedicated facility for substance use treatment (but not mental health treatment), although it is poorly advertised and located far from downtown, where PEH are typically located. Participants suggested that certain leverage points, such as fines with the possibility of forgiveness, can be helpful incentives to encourage participation in programs. Experts agreed that barriers to treatment and other services discourage officers from using them.

According to experts, the second challenge in connecting PEH with useful social services—particularly for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness—is that some are “resistant” to services that are offered to them (they consistently choose to decline services or opt not to engage with available services intended to address their needs).⁴ Panel members highlighted several reasons why individuals might consistently decline services, such as program inadequacy, previous negative interaction with law enforcement or service providers, or the inability to understand the services offered. There also are practical concerns, such as reluctance to leave their property behind for fear of it being stolen; separation from family members, friends, and pets; or a lack of transportation to maintain status in a treatment program. Experts noted that it often takes many interactions with a single person before they might accept services.

Solutions to this lack of service use are not easy to determine. Some panel members recommended assessing involuntary commitment powers (see Sabatini, 2020) or legislative changes to make treatment enrollment mandatory in mental health courts. Others, noting a fundamental misunderstanding of the individual decisionmaking processes behind decisions to decline services, suggested that further research was needed on the topic. One example of such research includes conducting focus groups with PEH to better understand barriers and finding ways to effectively communicate those barriers to the public. Understanding these reasons allows officers to more effectively connect individuals with appropriate services and shows the community that officers care about the well-being of

PEH. At the same time, the participants expressed the importance of educating the public on service-provision barriers, both to remove the stigma of homelessness and to discredit the inaccurate assumption that police are doing nothing to help.

Police Responses to Homelessness-Related Challenges

Law enforcement is accustomed to monitoring trends and enforcement related to drug activity. Experts expressed growing concern over methamphetamine use, which has become a major challenge among populations of PEH in some cities because of the increasing availability, affordability, and purity of the drug on the market. Drug problems can differ across communities; indeed, one expert reported no issues with methamphetamine or heroin but indicated that synthetic marijuana laced with other drugs is a significant challenge in their community. The panel members largely agreed that polysubstance use is a major problem among populations of PEH. For example, one participant explained how substance use can be functional for someone who lives on the streets: Sleeping at night can be dangerous, so stimulants are used to stay awake at night, while depressives are used during the day to facilitate rest. The use of dangerous substances can negatively affect the mental and physical well-being of PEH. Experts also agreed that the intersectionality of these and other issues, such as trauma history, with homelessness requires further examination.

There is a higher likelihood of criminal involvement and victimization among PEH, which is often linked to substance use and mental health issues, even if experts note that the causal mechanism is not always clear, because homelessness might simply increase the risk of being caught committing a crime (Fischer et al., 2008). Several panel members reported intelligence regarding extensive gang activity and other crime within homeless encampments in their communities but also noted that crime and victimization are rarely reported. One expert explained that most crimes committed by PEH in their jurisdiction are nonviolent and are typically committed against

Experts agreed that barriers to treatment and other services discourage officers from using them.

other persons living in encampments. Experts were concerned that low-level crimes, such as public disturbances or trespassing violations, are being overlooked by officers, who have few options beyond issuing citations or making arrests when referral to treatment or other services might be more effective to address the problem. When officers transport individuals to jail or to a hospital, detentions are typically short and lack the services necessary to address the needs of PEH, so individuals encounter the officers again. The experts explained that this can lead to significant frustration among officers, and, in some cases, might result in lower arrest rates when officers see no appreciable outcomes for their efforts.

Along with the health and well-being of PEH, the panel members emphasized the importance of safeguarding the mental and physical health of officers and social workers involved. Entering encampments can be dangerous, with hazardous waste or used needles posing the risk of exposure to disease or other physical distress. Additionally, the panel members discussed the idea that the stress of interacting with the population of PEH can take a mental toll on officers, especially in cases in which individuals consistently decline efforts to help. The experts observed that service providers often are unwilling to enter unfamiliar encampments without law enforcement because of the possibility of gang activity, traps, or weapons hidden in the area, making the security and robustness of officer health even more important to successful outcomes. Some solutions posed by the participants included implementing preemptive strategies, such as targeting and arresting known drug traffickers a week before cleaning out a camp, informing individuals living in the encampment of their rights to be moved to a shelter

Despite lacking the tools and resources to address the underlying causes of homelessness, police are constantly under pressure from business leaders and members of the community to “fix” homelessness.

environment or to have their belongings stored, and making services available to establish an environment of trust. Participants felt that such solutions could ensure the safety of officers and outreach workers, along with helping the individuals in the encampment feel comfortable.

Law Enforcement Plays an Important Role but Needs Partners to Effect Changes to Homelessness

Police Are at the Front Lines of Homelessness

Law enforcement, and the criminal justice system more generally, is neither intended to nor able to unilaterally resolve complex social problems, such as homelessness. However, participants explained how law enforcement agencies often are positioned to lead the response because police officers can be easily and quickly summoned at any time of day while patrolling the streets or via emergency responses systems. As one expert stated, “the demands on law enforcement are huge; there is no mandatory response from social services, no expectation that an outreach worker will respond on demand.” Despite lacking the tools and resources to address the underlying causes of homelessness, police are constantly under pressure from business leaders and members of the community to “fix” homelessness, who often call officers to move PEH along or use powers of arrest to remove individuals from the street. However, legal guidelines emerging from recent cases (e.g., *Martin v. City of Boise*) set limits on how police can interact with PEH (National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2019).⁵ Experts also discussed how traditional methods of enforcement (e.g., arrest, citation, fines) fail to address the underlying causes of homelessness and can even compound problems by reducing PEH’s willingness to interact with police or reducing PEH’s ability to escape from chronic homelessness (e.g., ineligibility for a job or housing because of a criminal record).

Given the central role of police response in day-to-day social problems, panel members agreed that any solution to homelessness must involve law enforcement. As first responders, police officers are uniquely positioned to engage PEH and connect them with services. Police can build trust and foster relationships with unsheltered populations through positive, noncriminal interactions, allowing for better assessment of needs and collection of data to track problems and inform responses. Experts reported that many agencies have sought new approaches involving dedicated units that are specially trained to conduct outreach with PEH, although staffing shortages have precluded this approach in some jurisdictions.

Partnerships are critical for delineating the scope of law enforcement responsibilities in addressing homelessness, which allows resources to be used more efficiently to promote public safety.

The law enforcement participants on the panel also highlighted efforts to reduce barriers to housing, employment, and other resources, such as warrant-clearing events or forgiving individuals' fines and fees. Some examples of these efforts include initiatives in Los Angeles County, such as an annual warrant-clearing event for traffic and nonviolent misdemeanor warrants (CBSN Los Angeles, 2020) and the development of an Office of Diversion and Reentry (Hunter and Scherling, 2019; Ochoa et al., 2019). Although these are promising tools, experts called for more research in this area. Additionally, these practices are typically done informally and on an ad-hoc basis, without the guarantee that they would continue with a change in leadership. If the programs are effective, agencies would need to find ways to formalize practices into policies and procedures to maximize their use.

The Legal Responsibilities and Limitations of Police

Police must also play a role in maintaining order and public safety in encampments, which, experts stated, poses a series of complicated issues for law enforcement. The decision in *Martin v. City of Boise* highlights this challenge: Jurisdictions in the Ninth Circuit cannot ban individuals from sleeping in public when adequate shelter or indoor alternatives are unavailable (*Martin v. City of Boise*, 2019).⁶ Panel members noted that some jurisdictions have enacted a "Homeless Bill of Rights," which prohibits law enforcement from removing encampments unless there is an immediate public health risk (National Coalition for the Homeless, undated; National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 2017). In such cases, those living in the encampment must be given a 15-day notice prior to encampment removal and must be provided with supply bins to temporarily store their property. Experts noted that many jurisdictions have adopted similar laws, although specific procedures and timelines varied. In other communities, law enforcement agencies have adopted their own guidelines independent from jurisdictional rules. One expert described how their local agency uses a three-day notification period but conducts outreach to encamp-

ments for 45 days before a notice is posted. Although many approaches to cleanup have been implemented, no rigorous evaluations exist to determine what works best. Experts recommended additional study of how cleanups affect an individual experiencing homelessness over the short and long terms.

Another issue identified by the experts is individuals' accumulation of personal belongings that are stored in public, the legal ambiguities regarding what constitutes trash versus property, and how many personal items can be kept on public sidewalks. This is further complicated when considering other laws, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act, which requires public spaces to be accessible to all persons, regardless of ability. There is also uncertainty in the law regarding people living in recreational vehicles and campers and whether they could be considered homeless and part of an encampment. Recreational vehicles and campers parked in residential communities are a significant concern for homeowners and can pose serious threats to the environment, but there are often no clear regulations on this issue. Experts suggested that training on these issues is necessary so that encampments are managed fairly by authorities, and when cleanups are conducted, they are completed with respect for the dignity of people who live there. Participants also stated that there is a need for consistent written protocols and guidelines in this area.

Multidisciplinary Collaborations Amplify Response Strengths and Minimize Weaknesses

Police play an important role in the response to homelessness, but collaborative efforts among law enforcement, other government agencies, social service providers, community leaders, and researchers are key to ensuring that individuals are successfully transitioned out of homelessness. Partnerships are critical for delineating the scope of law enforcement responsibilities in addressing homelessness, which allows resources to be used more efficiently to promote public safety. Experts emphasized the importance of including advocates and people with lived experience in any partnerships to reduce homelessness. It was

also suggested that partnerships be structured at the regional level because populations of PEH might drift between neighboring communities, creating gaps in response.

Experts reported on various initiatives between police and other stakeholders in co-responding and other response alternatives beyond criminal justice sanctions to incidents involving PEH. Co-response approaches typically pair a police officer with a social worker to more effectively engage individuals dealing with trauma and other problems related to substance use and mental health disorders. One expert explained how their jurisdiction is experimenting with responses that are designed to ease police burden in cases without criminal activity. The program pairs paramedics with crisis workers, and teams are dispatched to calls that involve homelessness-related issues (but no criminal element) through the emergency response system. The goal is to send personnel with the appropriate tools and training to help people in crisis while alleviating law enforcement's workload. The program was designed based on successful models in other cities around their state and will begin as a pilot program. A program in Seattle, composed of Seattle Navigation Teams and Homeless Outreach Teams, inspired this pilot (PERF, 2018).

It was noted that, although pilot programs are a good way to test new solution concepts, they can lead to criticism in many cases if the community expects a rapid response to any problem. Unaddressed criticism can then generate public dissatisfaction about the way the problem is being addressed or the ways in which PEH are being treated. A key area for collaboration identified by the experts is communicating to the public about homelessness. This includes communicating about the scope of the problem, causes of homelessness, barriers to treatment and service entry, legal rules and restrictions on what law enforcement can do to address homelessness, and ongoing efforts to prevent and reduce homelessness in communities. Working together to communicate with the public reduces the burden on law enforcement and distributes responsibility for the problem among all partners.

Experts discussed the fact that key stakeholders currently operate in silos rather than coordinate efforts for a consistent, seamless response. Challenges with partnerships identified by the experts include a lack of common terms to define the problems, conflicting policies and procedures, and differing goals. In some communities, there is a deep tension between law enforcement and social service providers, which results in unwillingness from either side to collaborate. High-profile cases of police use of force against homeless individuals have sparked sharp criticism from the public, which has made other stakeholders reluctant to work with law enforcement. In other communities, competition for funding can create tension among social service providers and can discourage collaboration.

Acquiring and Sharing Data Is Necessary to Measure Strategy Outcomes Available Data on Homelessness Often Are Not Robust and Use Varying Definitions

PIT counts and HMIS estimates are critical sources of information about the homelessness problem, but the panel members noted that these data are limited by a lack of standardized definitions and divergent collection methodologies. As an example, experts suggested that even the term *homelessness* lacks a clear definition. There are several definitions at the federal level alone. For example, *youth homelessness* is defined differently by the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, the U.S. Department of Education, and HUD, which present distinct counts depending on the definition used (Youth.gov, undated). Although there was some discussion of developing a national definition, experts agreed that local standards often are quicker to develop and more readily accepted by the community. Another concern is that it is particularly difficult to collect valid and reliable data on individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness, given the characteristics of the population and the brief nature of their contact with government officials.

To inform appropriate interventions, panel members emphasized the importance of collecting high-quality data.

It is particularly difficult to collect valid and reliable data on individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness, given the characteristics of the population and the brief nature of their contact with government officials.

Better data would enable front-end analysis to better understand the nature of homelessness (e.g., unsheltered versus sheltered individuals; aging in the streets; homelessness among students; co-occurring issues, such as substance use or mental health disorders) in a given community and inform the development of tailored responses. As experts explained, comprehensive data would allow jurisdictions to tell a story about the characteristics and needs of PEH in their communities. Data also would allow for the rigorous evaluation of new policies and programs that are implemented to address homelessness.

Many public and private groups across the country already collect data on homelessness in their own communities. According to the experts, however, these efforts are typically independent, and stakeholders operate largely in silos. The panel members agreed that it is critical for stakeholders to collaborate on data collection and analysis. Partnerships would distribute the responsibility for data collection among all relevant stakeholders, avoid replication of efforts while coupling finite resources and expertise, link key data to generate holistic insights about the homelessness problem, and allow stakeholders to coordinate efforts for a more effective response.

One challenge to independent collections is that some stakeholders consider their agency's data to be proprietary and might be reluctant to share. In response, experts highlighted the need for a technological solution to be developed to foster collaborative data-sharing arrangements. This solution should consider allowing for information to be recorded quickly and from mobile devices (e.g., cell phones, tablets) to accommodate those in the field. PERF, 2018, highlighted several promising data-sharing practices between law enforcement and other stakeholders, including those from panel participants in Long Beach, California; Indio, California; Seattle, Washington; and Vacaville, California.

Improving Data to Allow for Better Problem Analysis and Evaluation of Interventions

Experts identified several areas where data are lacking and, as a result, the field has limited generalizable knowledge regarding the scope and nature of homelessness. For example, the participants agreed that longitudinal data on homelessness are rare but could provide helpful insights into transitions into and out of homelessness, including factors that affect housing status over time and the unique trajectories of individuals from different backgrounds. Panel members also noted that little data exist on encampments, which can be difficult to measure and track. More fundamentally, experts explained that few—if

any—noncriminal police encounters with PEH are recorded. Therefore, it can be difficult for agencies to determine what percentage of their workload involves this population. Tracking these interactions, what actions officers take, and what the resulting outcomes are could inform benefit-cost evaluations of new programs.

Experts suggested that a small number of people within the population of PEH likely accounts for the majority of homelessness-related calls for service and that being able to identify these individuals would allow for prioritization of resources. Furthermore, a component of tracking calls involving homelessness requires uniform policies and training standards for dispatchers or officers to accurately and consistently identify housing status. In some communities, however, there also might be public concern about tracking people based on their housing status. Although experts noted that social services providers are likely better situated to lead any designated data-collection programs, given their familiarity with definitions and central role in coordinating services for those in need, the panel members commented that many stakeholders might not see data collection as within their scope without a designated authority by the jurisdiction.

Limited data on homelessness and stakeholder responses have resulted in weak program evaluation or in programs going completely unstudied. The participants noted that a comprehensive research agenda is necessary to fully grasp the various causes of homelessness and to find the most-effective solutions to address them. A research agenda would include designing mechanisms for pairing researchers with law enforcement agencies; identifying data to collect to assess jurisdiction-specific problems; identifying important research questions; and designing process and outcome evaluations to study the effectiveness of new policies, programs, and practices that are implemented. Importantly, researchers noted the need for deploying diverse research methods to study homelessness, including qualitative methods and randomized controlled trials, depending on the research question. Overall, panel members agreed that, given the limited state of comprehensive data on homelessness, the field is likely not ready for advanced evaluation and randomized controlled trial designs because some of the fundamental questions regarding homelessness (e.g., a standard definition of homelessness, true count of those experiencing homelessness) remain unanswered.

Experts commented that one challenge is that it can be difficult for researchers to identify law enforcement agencies that are motivated to be involved in research. On the other hand,

Effective solutions to homelessness must involve extensive collaboration among multidisciplinary stakeholders, such as the police, social services providers, health providers (e.g., psychiatrists, nurses, and other medical professionals), community leaders, and those with lived experience.

law enforcement agencies often are skeptical of participating in research studies without having a voice in the design and implementation of programs. It takes time to develop strong, trusted relationships between research groups and law enforcement agencies. The panel members recommended developing a system to pair researchers with law enforcement agencies to facilitate this process. In addition, participants recommended including a variety of stakeholders when planning for research, before any new approaches are implemented. Law enforcement, social services providers, and other stakeholders typically have different goals and definitions of success, which can complicate evaluation efforts if they are not addressed initially. It is critical that the stakeholders develop agreed-upon metrics of success before any program evaluation is conducted.

Finally, experts highlighted the conflict between research timelines and the desire to solve problems immediately. This is partially related to the timing of grant cycles, which panel members noted can be challenging to account for when their local budgets need to be established in advance and they often cannot wait years for funding or results. At the local police level, years can see turnover in policymakers, police leaders, and line-level staff who have begun a program, making it difficult to carry out long-term research. Rigorous research studies, such as randomized controlled trials, typically require many months or years to implement, can be very expensive, and can present potential ethical concerns.⁷ To address this issue, experts noted that agencies can use a stepwise approach, preferring pilot studies prior to jurisdiction-wide evaluations. However, success in the pilot often creates pressure for full program implementation before a more-robust evaluation can be planned. Experts called for more flexibility in grant funds and experimentation with innovative methodologies, such as rapid randomized controlled trials, to improve the timing of studies and actionable results.

CONCLUSION

The police have a long history of responding to homelessness and the significant challenges it poses to society. As first responders, police are often the first and only government actors called on by members of the community to do something about people they see living in the streets. However, officers often find themselves unable to directly address the complex causes of homelessness, such as a lack of affordable housing, employment challenges, and health problems. Although these issues are outside the traditional scope of law enforcement, homelessness will continue to present challenges in policing. Our experts identified 19 high-priority needs that collectively represent an actionable research agenda to support police responses to PEH. These needs include finding ways to better define the nature and scope of homelessness to assess the needs of these communities. The needs also involve developing a better understanding of related issues, such as substance use and mental health disorders, and ensuring that resources exist to support responses that specifically address these issues. Importantly, effective solutions to homelessness must involve extensive collaboration among multidisciplinary stakeholders, such as the police, social services providers, health providers (e.g., psychiatrists, nurses, and other medical professionals), community leaders, and those with lived experience. Although police are uniquely positioned to engage with PEH, they should have the ability to refer them to and connect them with other stakeholders who can provide on-demand, low-barrier access to needed services. Underpinning these issues is the need for valid and reliable data to support problem analysis, tracking, and evaluation. Current data are limited, and those that exist are fragmented among various stakeholders. Key measures for success and definitions of common terms must be identified by stakeholders to inform what data should be collected, how,

and by whom. Furthermore, mechanisms must be developed to share data among stakeholders and coordinate efforts. Data-collection efforts must involve researcher partnerships and include plans to evaluate responses to support evidence-based decisionmaking. Responding to these needs can improve the current police response to homelessness and improve the safety and well-being of communities across the country.

TECHNICAL APPENDIX

In this appendix, we present additional details about the workshop agenda and the process for identifying and prioritizing needs for the law enforcement response to homelessness. Through this process, we developed the research agenda that structured the topics presented in the main report. The descriptions in this appendix are adapted from those in previous Priority Criminal Justice Needs Initiative publications and reflect adjustments to the needs identification and prioritization process implemented at this workshop.

Pre-Workshop Activities

We recruited panel members by identifying knowledgeable individuals through existing professional and social networks (e.g., LinkedIn) and by reviewing literature published on the topic. Potential attendees were divided into three categories: law enforcement, academia, and social services or advocacy. Additionally, potential attendees were assigned a geographic region (Northeast, South, Midwest, and West). The goal for these workshops was to have even splits overall across categories and regions and to have a panel of at least 12 voting attendees. Our team identified an initial sample of 25 potential attendees. We then extended invitations to those individuals and provided a brief description of the workshop's focus areas. Ten of the initial 25 declined participation, although four of the ten people

who declined provided an alternate potential attendee from their organization who we subsequently invited. All alternate invitees accepted. We received no response from five potential attendees after multiple follow-up emails. Three confirmed participants requested to invite an additional attendee from their jurisdiction to provide additional insight into the response to homelessness. Finally, one federal attendee came from an invitation to HUD from NIJ. A total of 18 voting participants attended the workshop.

In advance of the workshop, participants were provided an opportunity to identify the issues and topics that they felt would be important to discuss during the workshop. We structured the workshop agenda and discussion as shown in Table A.1 based on a comprehensive literature review and input from the workshop participants.

Identification and Prioritization of Needs

During the workshop, we asked the participants to discuss the challenges that they or the practitioners they work with face. We also asked them to identify areas where additional research and development investment could help alleviate the challenges. During these discussions, participants suggested additional areas that are potentially worthy of research or investment. Participants also considered whether there were areas that were not included in the existing list and suggested new ones. Although the process of expert elicitation that we describe in this appendix was designed to gather unbiased, representative results from experts and practitioners in the field, there are several limitations that could affect the findings. The process typically elicits opinions from a relatively small group of experts. As a result, although we attempted to make the group as representative as possible of different disciplines, perspectives, and geographic regions, the final output of the workshop likely will be significantly influenced by the specific group of experts invited to participate. It is possible that the findings

Table A.1. Workshop Agenda

Day 1

Welcome and Introductions
 Initial Discussion of Workshop Functions and Objectives
 Police Perspectives Toward Homelessness
 Partnerships and Broader Solutions
 Review Key Benefits and Challenges Identified During Day 1, Prioritize Discussion for Day 2

Day 2

Summary of Day 1 and Overview of Agenda for Day 2
 Data, Tracking, and Evaluation
 Review and Final Brainstorming Session
 Final Needs Prioritization
 Panel Review and Next Steps

from the workshop would vary were a different group of experts selected. Moreover, although the discussion moderators made every effort to act as neutral parties when eliciting opinions from the collected experts, the background and experience of the moderators had the potential to influence the questions they posed to the group and how they phrased those questions. This also could introduce bias that could influence the findings.

To develop and prioritize a list of technology and policy issues that are likely to benefit from research and investment, we followed a process similar to one that has been used in previous Priority Criminal Justice Needs Initiative workshops (see, for example, Jackson et al., 2015; Jackson et al., 2016, and references therein). The needs were prioritized using a variation of the Delphi method, a technique developed at RAND to elicit expert opinion about well-defined questions in a systematic and structured way (RAND Corporation, undated). Participants discussed and refined problems and identified potential solutions (or *needs*) that could address each problem. In addition, needs could be framed in response to opportunities to improve performance by adopting or adapting a new approach or practice (e.g., applying a new technology or tool in the sector that had not been used before).

At the end of the discussion of each topic, participants were given an opportunity to review and revise the list of problems and opportunities they had identified. The participants' combined lists for each topic were displayed one by one using Microsoft PowerPoint slides that were edited in real time to incorporate participant revisions and comments.

Once the panel agreed on the wording of each slide, we asked them to anonymously vote using a handheld device (specifically, the ResponseCard RF LCD from Turning Technologies). Each participant was asked to individually score each problem or opportunity and its associated needs using a 1–9 scale for two dimensions: importance and probability of success.

For the *importance* dimension, participants were instructed that 1 was a low score and 9 was a high score. Participants were told to score a need's importance with a 1 if it would have little or no impact on the problem and with a 9 if it would reduce the impact of the problem by 20 percent or more. Anchoring the scale with percentage improvements in the need's performance is intended to help make rating values more comparable from participant to participant.

For the *probability of success* dimension, participants were instructed to treat the 1–9 scale as a percentage chance that the need could be met and broadly implemented successfully.

That is, they could assign the need's chance of success between 10 percent (i.e., a rating of 1) and 90 percent (i.e., a rating of 9). This dimension was intended to include not only technical concerns (i.e., whether the need would be hard to meet) but also the effect of factors that might cause practitioners to not adopt the new technology, policy, or practice even if it was developed. Such factors could include, for example, cost, effect on practitioner workloads, other staffing concerns, and societal concerns.

After the participants rated the needs displayed on a particular slide (i.e., for either importance or probability of success), we displayed a histogram-style summary of participant responses. If there was significant disagreement among the participants (the degree of disagreement was determined by the research team's visual inspection of the histogram), they were asked to discuss or explain their votes at one end of the spectrum or the other. If a second round of discussion occurred, participants were given an opportunity to adjust their ratings on the same question. This second-round rating was optional, and any rating submitted by a participant would replace their first-round rating. This process was repeated for each question and dimension at the end of each topic area. Figure A.1 shows an example of a slide on the importance dimension, with related issue, need, and histogram. Figure A.2 shows a slide on the probability of success dimension.

Once the participants had completed this rating process for all topic areas, we put the needs into a single prioritized list. We ordered the list by calculating an expected value using the method outlined in Jackson et al., 2016. For each need, we multiplied the final (second-round) ratings for importance and probability of success to produce an expected value. We then calculated the median of that product across all of the respondents and used that as the group's collective expected value score for the need.

We clustered the resulting expected value scores into three tiers using a hierarchical clustering algorithm. The algorithm we used was the "ward.D" spherical algorithm from the "stats" library in the R statistical package, version 3.5. We chose this algorithm to minimize within-cluster variance when determining the breaks between tiers. The choice of three tiers is arbitrary but was done in part to remain consistent across the set of technology workshops that we have conducted for NIJ. Also, the choice of three tiers represents a manageable system for policymakers. Specifically, the top-tier needs are the priorities that should be the primary policymaking focus, the middle-tier needs should be examined closely, and the bottom-tier needs are probably not worth much attention in the short

term (unless, for example, they can be addressed with existing technology or approaches that can be readily and cheaply adapted to the identified need).

Because the participants initially rated the needs one topic area at a time, we gave them an opportunity at the end of the workshop to review and weigh in on the tiered list of all identified needs. The intention of this step was to let the panel members see the needs in the context of the other tiered needs and allow them to consider whether there were some that appeared too high or low relative to the others. To collect these assessments, we printed the entire tiered list and distributed it to the participants. This step allowed the participants to see all of the ranked needs collected across the day-and-a-half workshop, providing a top-level view that is complementary to the rankings provided session by session. Participants were then asked to examine where each of the needs landed on the overall tiered list and whether this ordering was appropriate or needed fine-tuning. Participants had the option to indicate whether each problem and need pairing should be voted up or down on the list. An example of this form is provided in Table A.2.

We then tallied the participants' third-round responses and applied those votes to produce a final list of prioritized and tiered needs. To adjust the expected values using the up and down votes from the third round of prioritization, we implemented a method equivalent to the one we used in previous work (Hollywood et al., 2016). Specifically, if every panel member voted "up" for a need that was at the bottom of the list, then the collective effect of those votes should be to move the need to the top. (The opposite would happen if every participant voted "down" for a need that was at the top of the list.) To determine the point value of a single vote, we divided the full range of expected values by the number of participants voting.

To prevent the (somewhat rare) situation in which small numbers of votes have an unintended outsized impact—for example, when some or all of the needs in one tier have the same or very similar expected values—we also set a threshold that at least 25 percent of the workshop participants must have voted on that need (and then rounding to the nearest full participant). For this workshop, there were 18 participants, so for any votes to have an effect, at least five participants would have had to have voted to move the need up or down.

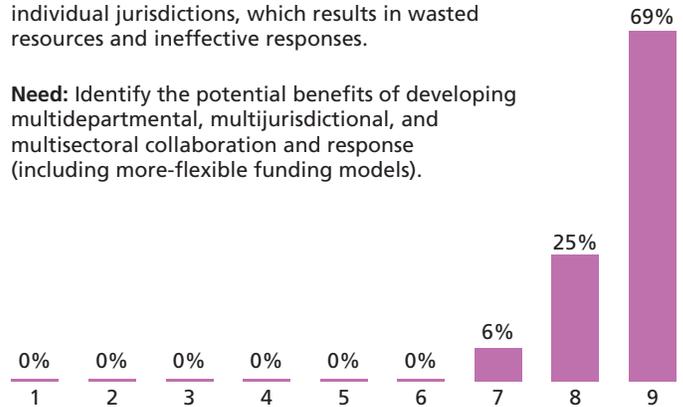
After applying the up and down vote points to the second round expected values, we compared the modified scores with the boundary values for the tiers to see whether the change was enough to move any needs up or down in the prioritization. (Note that there were gaps between these boundaries, so some

Figure A.1. Example Slide for Rating the Importance of a Need

16a. How *important* is this?

Issue: Most U.S. responses to homelessness are "siloed" into, for example, law enforcement, service provision, and individual jurisdictions, which results in wasted resources and ineffective responses.

Need: Identify the potential benefits of developing multidepartmental, multijurisdictional, and multisectoral collaboration and response (including more-flexible funding models).



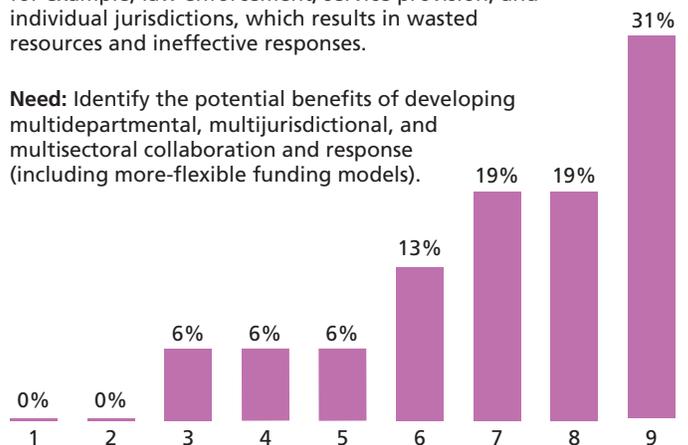
NOTE: Percentages on each question did not always sum to 100 percent because of rounding and variation in the number of participants who voted on each need.

Figure A.2. Example Slide for Rating the Probability of Success of a Need

6b. What is the *probability of success*?

Issue: Most U.S. responses to homelessness are "siloed" into, for example, law enforcement, service provision, and individual jurisdictions, which results in wasted resources and ineffective responses.

Need: Identify the potential benefits of developing multidepartmental, multijurisdictional, and multisectoral collaboration and response (including more-flexible funding models).



NOTE: Percentages on each question did not always sum to 100 percent because of rounding and variation in the number of participants who voted on each need.

of the modified expected values could fall in between tiers. See Figure A.3.) As with prior work, we set a higher bar for a need to move up or down two tiers (from Tier 1 to Tier 3, or vice versa) than for a need to move to the tier immediately above or below. Specifically, a need could *increase by one tier* if its modified expected value was higher than the highest expected value score in its initial tier. And a need could *decrease by one tier* if

Table A.2. Example of the Delphi Round 3 Voting Form

Question	Tier	Vote Up	Vote Down
Tier 1			
Issue: The nature of the environment in homeless encampments (e.g., needles, weapons, waste) can present a health hazard to officers. Need: Identify promising practices for officer safety in these environments.	1		
Issue: Individuals might decline services because the existing solutions are not tailored to their needs (e.g., services are not trauma informed, are clinic or institutional only, or do not allow individuals to bring their property or pets with them). Need: Examine existing research or conduct new research to identify the top reasons why individuals do not engage in needed services.	1		
Tier 2			
Issue: Agency staff do not have enough time to assist with data-collection efforts. Need: Identify the level of funding and effort that is needed to support typical research needs.	2		
Issue: Individuals might decline services because the existing solutions are not tailored to their needs (e.g., services are not trauma informed, are clinic or institutional only, or do not allow individuals to bring their property or pets with them). Need: Examine existing research or conduct new research to identify the impact on law enforcement from insufficient or inadequate services.	2		
Tier 3			
Issue: It can be difficult to prioritize individuals for housing and services. Need: Study the promising practices about how communities and law enforcement can work together to create policies that appropriately prioritize access to services (e.g., vulnerability index).	3		
Issue: Homelessness often results from reentry challenges after incarceration (e.g., prison or jail). Need: Identify costs, benefits, and promising practices with respect to assembling “home plans” for people who are preparing for release from a correctional system.	3		

NOTE: Shaded cells indicate that up or down votes were not possible (e.g., Tier 1 is the top tier, so it was impossible to upvote items in that tier).

its modified expected value was lower than the lowest expected value in its initial tier. However, *to increase or decrease by two tiers* (possible only for needs that started in Tier 1 or Tier 3), the score had to increase or decrease by an amount that fully placed the need into the range two tiers away. For example, for a Tier 3 need to jump to Tier 1, its expected value score had to fall within the boundaries of Tier 1, not just within the gap between Tier 1 and Tier 2. See Figure A.3, which illustrates the greater score change required for a need to move two tiers (one need on the far right of the figure) compared with one tier (all other examples shown).

Applying these decision rules to integrate the participants’ third-round inputs into the final tiering of needs resulted in numerical separations between tiers that were less clear than the separations that resulted when we used the clustering algorithm in the initial tiering. This can occur because, for example, when the final expected value score for a need that was originally

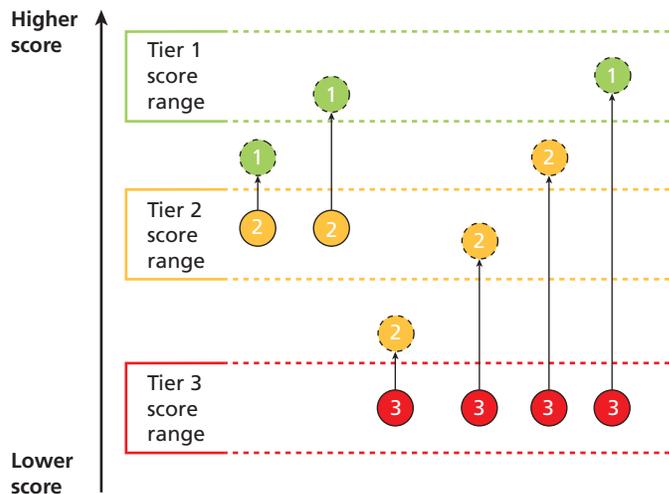
in Tier 3 falls just below the boundary value for Tier 1, that need’s final score could be higher than that of some other needs in the item’s new tier (Tier 2). See Figure A.4, which shows the distribution of the needs by expected value score after the second-round rating process and then after the third-round voting process.

As a result of the third round of voting, 38 needs did not change position, one need rose by one tier, and one need rose by two tiers. No needs fell by one or more tiers. The output from this process became the final ranking of the panel’s prioritized results.

The complete list of identified needs is shown in Table A.3, and the needs are sorted by tier and theme. Of the 40 identified needs,

- six were related to promising law enforcement practices and policy (five of which were high-priority)
- ten were related to partnerships and collaboration with service providers and communities (five of which were high-priority)
- ten were related to data collection, integration, and evaluation (four of which were high-priority)
- 14 were related to basic research and public education (five of which were high-priority).

Figure A.3. How a Need’s Increase in Expected Value Might Result in Its Movement Across Tier Boundaries



NOTE: Each example need’s original tier is shown by a circle with a solid border (the two needs starting in Tier 2 and the four needs starting in Tier 3). Each need’s new tier after the third-round score adjustment is shown by the connected circle with a dotted border.

Figure A.4. Distribution of the Tiered Needs Following Rounds 2 and 3

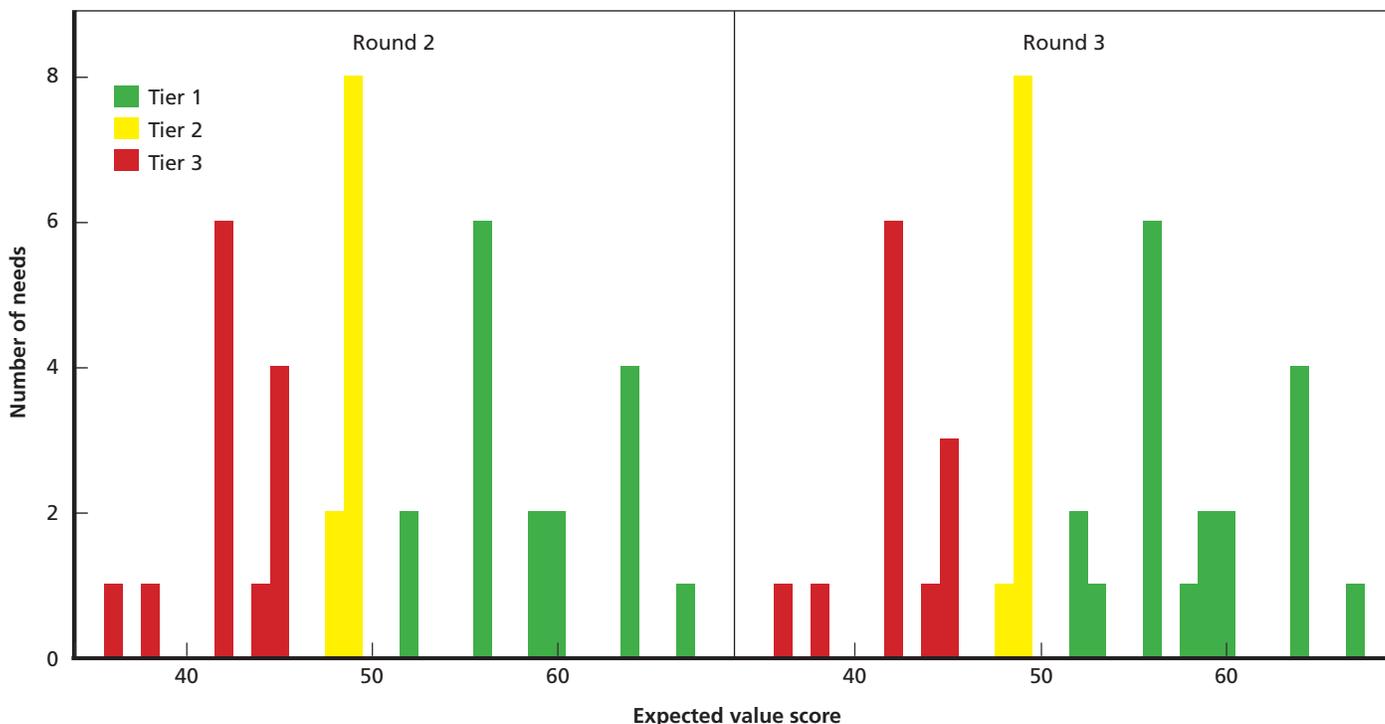


Table A.3. Complete List of Needs, by Tier

Problem or Opportunity	Need	Tier
Promising law enforcement practices and policy		
Many agencies have innovative approaches to addressing justice problems that affect homelessness (e.g., warrant-clearing events), but the value of these efforts is not known.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct evaluations of these efforts to identify the promising practices and benefits. 	1
When local jurisdictions remove encampments (or fleets of unauthorized recreational vehicles), it is difficult to properly store, manage, and dispose of property.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and publish best practices, protocols, and training for agencies and employees who remove homeless encampments. 	
The different policies among different agencies (and property owners) regarding providing notice and retaining or storing property when removing encampments (or fleets of unauthorized recreational vehicles) are a source of confusion in interagency coordination.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify promising practices with respect to sharing and publishing notice and storage requirements. 	
There is a significant impact on officer health and wellness when working with PEH.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct research to identify the most promising practices for improving officer health and wellness. 	
The nature of the environment in homeless encampments (e.g., needles, weapons, waste) can present a health hazard to officers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify promising practices for officer safety in these environments. 	
Partnerships and collaboration with service providers and communities		
Most U.S. responses to homelessness are “siloed” into, for example, law enforcement, service provision, and individual jurisdictions, which results in wasted resources and ineffective responses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the potential benefits of developing multidepartmental, multijurisdictional, and multisectoral collaboration and response (including more-flexible funding models). • Conduct research to identify the potential waste, costs, and benefits associated with siloed service provision. 	1
Law enforcement has limited choices to respond to frequent, minor incidents related to homelessness. ^a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and highlight existing best practices where agencies can make effective connections with services. • Conduct evaluations of the existing diversion and deflection programs (i.e., alternatives to the justice system) that some agencies and jurisdictions are implementing. 	
The general public often has a flawed perspective about what law enforcement can and cannot do to respond to homelessness (i.e., rules and roles).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a promising practices guide that will help law enforcement and other key stakeholders conduct public outreach and improve community relations with respect to law enforcement’s options to respond to homeless issues. 	
Data collection, integration, and evaluation		
Data collection, information synthesis, and knowledge-development efforts are insufficient across the agencies that are working with PEH (law enforcement, housing, and behavioral health). ^a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct research to identify existing best practices and potential promising practices to address this issue. • Invest funds in evaluating how existing information systems (e.g., CAD, RMS, and HMIS) are used for informing agency and political responses. 	1
Agencies’ CAD/RMS systems are not used to track when other calls (e.g., tents, health issues, other crimes) involve an individual experiencing homelessness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify promising practices for adding tracking codes to CAD/RMS systems for both initiation and disposition. 	
There is not a consistent set of definitions for collecting data on relevant conditions (e.g., homelessness, living situations, mental health). ^a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fund local research efforts that engage and collaborate with law enforcement and community stakeholders to develop definitions that are locally relevant. 	

Table A.3—Continued

Problem or Opportunity	Need	Tier
Basic research and public education		
Individuals might decline services because the existing solutions are not tailored to their needs (e.g., services are not trauma informed, are clinic or institutional only, or do not allow individuals to bring their property or pets with them). ^a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine existing research or conduct new research to identify the top reasons why individuals do not engage in needed services. 	1
There are high-frequency utilizers who have a significant impact on law enforcement and other public services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct research to quantify the prevalence and impact of this problem. 	
There is a lack of recognition of the impact of insufficient behavioral health services on the problem of homelessness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct research to identify the gaps, costs, risks, and benefits of various levels of behavioral health services. 	
There is not enough foundational research to inform the design of more-rigorous research methods.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct research to identify the most-important types of data and identify approaches and tools for collecting those data. 	
Homelessness and substance use disorders are frequently interrelated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate existing approaches to addressing homelessness to assess the intersection of homelessness and substance use disorders. 	
Promising law enforcement practices and policy		
There is an increasing homelessness problem on kindergarten through 12th grade (K–12), college, and university campuses. ^a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct research to identify the training needs for officers. 	2
Data collection, integration, and evaluation		
Practitioners are not aware of the available methodologies for conducting research and when each one might be appropriate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a guide for practitioners to identify common and useful research methodologies and when each one is most appropriate (e.g., maybe the “silver standard” is sufficient when the “gold standard” is too difficult or not applicable). 	2
Data collection, information synthesis, and knowledge development efforts are insufficient across the agencies that are working with PEH (law enforcement, housing, and behavioral health). ^a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a model platform that addresses the bulk of jurisdictions’ (and agencies’) needs for short- and long-term information-sharing. 	
Basic research and public education		
Agency staff do not have enough time to assist with data-collection efforts. ^a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a research “dating service” that assists with matching agencies with professional researchers. • Identify the level of funding and effort that is needed to support typical research needs. 	2
Agency leadership and staff do not have enough time to assist with developing research questions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a research “dating service” that assists with matching agencies with professional researchers. 	
Traditional research methods do not provide interim results quickly enough to be both useful and desirable to managers and politicians.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop guidance for practitioners that will help them decide when there is enough information and confidence in research findings that it is appropriate to take action. 	
There is an increasing homelessness problem on K–12, college, and university campuses. ^a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct research to identify the scope and depth of the problem. 	

Table A.3—Continued

Problem or Opportunity	Need	Tier
Individuals might decline services because the existing solutions are not tailored to their needs (e.g., services are not trauma informed, are clinic or institutional only, or do not allow individuals to bring their property or pets with them). ^a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine existing research or conduct new research to identify the impact on law enforcement from insufficient or inadequate services. 	
Partnerships and collaboration with service providers and communities		
It can be difficult to prioritize individuals for housing and services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Study the promising practices on how communities and law enforcement can work together to create policies that appropriately prioritize access to services (e.g., vulnerability index). 	3
Homelessness often results from reentry challenges after incarceration (e.g., prison or jail). ^a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify costs, benefits, and promising practices with respect to assembling “home plans” for people who are preparing for release from a correctional system. 	
Law enforcement has limited choices to respond to frequent, minor incidents related to homelessness. ^a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with law enforcement to design model behavioral health systems and housing services that consider the typical conditions and urgent needs they encounter with PEH. 	
New initiatives to improve service provision or law enforcement responses often suffer from not having an agreed upon definition for what success is.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop some model policies that work across the variety of agencies that are working with PEH (law enforcement, housing, behavioral health). 	
There is a trend in some encampments toward an increasing presence of and influence from criminal organizations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct research to identify promising practices related to assembling special teams to improve public safety and relationships with community members. 	
Data collection, integration, and evaluation		
Agency staff do not have enough time to assist with data collection efforts. ^a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a guide that encourages agencies to make connections with local research resources (neighboring colleges and universities, etc.) 	3
There is not a consistent set of definitions for collecting data on relevant conditions (e.g., homelessness, living situations, mental health). ^a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a national set of data definitions for law enforcement and community stakeholders to inform data collection. 	
Practitioners do not have enough access to the results of research and data-collection efforts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask funding agencies to include provisions to require transitional research. 	
Homelessness often results from reentry challenges after incarceration (e.g., prison or jail). ^a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop an interface that allows law enforcement and service providers to connect PEH with services and track service utilization. 	
Basic research and public education		
Public decisionmaking with respect to potential responses to homelessness is not able to consider the full range of public expenditures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct research to quantify the costs of public expenditures for populations of PEH. 	3
PEH often have frequent contacts with the elements of the justice system (law enforcement, courts, and corrections) and, as a result, affect required resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct research to identify the impacts of homeless individuals on the entire justice system (law enforcement, courts, and corrections). 	
Homelessness often results from reentry challenges after incarceration (e.g., prison or jail). ^a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the costs and benefits of identifying populations that are cycling through homelessness, justice, and corrections. 	

^a This problem or opportunity is associated with needs that fell into different tiers.

Notes

¹ Notably, none of the included studies focused on or substantively addressed the role of law enforcement, although it is likely that police would play some role in the interventions.

² Although experts agreed that regional climate played a role—specifically, unsheltered living is more prominent in areas where conditions are more temperate year-round and without harsh winters—policy also influences the geographic distribution. For example, *Callahan v. Carey* led to policy changes requiring public officials to find “board and lodging” for PEH in New York State (*Callahan v. Carey*, 1979). A more recent example holds to the entire U.S. Ninth Circuit, *Martin v. City of Boise*, where individuals could not be criminally penalized for sleeping on public property when adequate alternatives do not exist. Interestingly, because the Ninth Circuit covers many Western U.S. states, policy adjustments made as a result could shift unsheltered populations into shelter in the future.

³ See U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2019, for more information on the HUD-VASH program.

⁴ Several experts were concerned with the term *service resistance* because refusal might result from a rational decision to decline services, especially when services are inadequate (in other words, clients are not service-resistant; services are client-resistant). PEH might have experienced additional trauma that created emotional and psychological barriers to treatment compliance, particularly given the noted inadequacy of some services. Panel members agreed that finding a term to adequately explain why certain individuals decline services that encompasses all possibilities while avoiding stigmatization is important. Accurate terms allow law enforcement and other stakeholders to better explain to the public and policymakers why individuals are not readily enrolled in treatment programs.

⁵ In 2019, the U.S. Supreme Court denied a petition by the city of Boise to review this case from the U.S. Ninth Circuit (*City of Boise, Idaho, Petitioner v. Robert Martin, et al.*, 2019). This left in place a lower court ruling that a jurisdiction cannot prohibit sleeping in public and PEH cannot be criminally penalized for sleeping on public property when adequate alternatives do not exist.

⁶ Although this case would suggest that police cannot arrest those sleeping in public, some jurisdictions in the Ninth Circuit are claiming that the ruling does not apply to them because the question in the *Martin v. City of Boise* case involved an outright, universal prohibition on any sleeping or camping in public. Such cities as Seattle and Oakland do not have universal bans, and city attorneys argue that the ruling therefore is not applicable (see Davila, 2018). Additionally, for purposes of *Martin v. City of Boise*, people experiencing unsheltered homelessness may still be removed from public property if they refuse available shelter space (see Asimov, 2018).

⁷ Ethical concerns can manifest in multiple ways, including the inability for a research question to be directly studied in a randomized controlled trial (e.g., directly studying the effect of marriage on offending would require random assignment of marriage) or the belief that withholding a social service effectively denies benefit to a population. Although both are serious considerations weighed by funders, organizations, and institutional review boards to ensure human subject protection, the latter challenge of denying benefit might be easier to address in practice. If the social service benefit (to include not only outcomes but also potential costs and unintended consequences) is not fully known, and if an experiment is a cost-effective way to determine results within a limited yet representative scale (i.e., not using a full population to test programs), there can be less resistance to randomized controlled trials, at least within policing, as seen in the more than 100 randomized controlled trials conducted in the field since 1970 (Cordner, 2020).

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The RAND Justice Policy Program

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About This Report

On behalf of the U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice (NIJ), the RAND Corporation, in partnership with the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), RTI International, and the University of Denver, is carrying out a research effort to assess and prioritize technology and related needs across the criminal justice community. This research effort, called the Priority Criminal Justice Needs Initiative, is a component of the Criminal Justice Requirements & Resources Consortium (RRC) and is intended to support innovation within the criminal justice enterprise. For more information about the RRC and the Priority Criminal Justice Needs Initiative, please see www.rand.org/well-being/justice-policy/projects/priority-criminal-justice-needs.

This report is one product of that effort. In February 2020, PERF and RAND researchers conducted an expert workshop to address the law enforcement response to homelessness. This report presents the proceedings of that workshop, topics considered, needs that the panel participants developed, and overarching themes that emerged from the panel discussions. This report and the results it presents should be of interest to law enforcement agencies, community leaders, the research community focused on homelessness, and regions and municipalities more generally that are experiencing issues related to homelessness.

Other RAND research reports from the Priority Criminal Justice Needs Initiative that might be of interest are

- Sean E. Goodison, Michael J. D. Vermeer, Jeremy D. Barnum, Dulani Woods, and Brian A. Jackson, *Law Enforcement Efforts to Fight the Opioid Crisis: Convening Police Leaders, Multidisciplinary Partners, and Researchers to Identify Promising Practices and to Inform a Research Agenda*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-3064-NIJ, 2019
- John S. Hollywood, Sean E. Goodison, Dulani Woods, Michael J. D. Vermeer, and Brian A. Jackson, *Fostering Innovation to Respond to Top Challenges in Law Enforcement: Proceedings of the National Institute of Justice's 2018 Chiefs' Panel on Priority Law Enforcement Issues and Needs*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2930-NIJ, 2019.

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