



PROJECT FACT SHEET

COMMUNITY DRIVEN APPROACHES TO ADDRESS FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO STRUCTURAL RACISM IN PUBLIC HEALTH

CONTACT INFORMATION

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FUNDING INFORMATION

Funding Mechanism

Cooperative Agreement
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Recipient Organization

Boston Public Health Commission

Project Period: 9/30/2022 – 9/29/2025

PROJECT BACKGROUND

This project, led by the Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC), addresses the impact of structural racism on homeless individuals in Boston affected by substance disorder. The project will review policies and practices to address the needs of unsheltered homeless individuals, including those in the Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard (“Mass. & Cass”) area of Boston. In January 2022, over 140 individuals living in a tent encampment in the area were moved to six newly established low-threshold transitional housing sites where individuals receive support services, including housing navigation. Over half of the people living in the encampments were Black or Latinx[1], underscoring racial inequities of unsheltered individuals both in Boston and nationally.[2] Homelessness sits at the intersection of racial inequities across systems and policies, including housing, behavioral health services, and the criminal justice system.

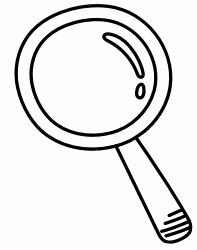
While the low-threshold policy has increased access to housing and shelter for nearly 500 individuals experiencing substance use disorder in Boston in the first year, there is a need to assess and identify policies and practices to develop an effective, equitable, sustainable low-threshold housing and service model. This project will assess the racial equity impact of the new low-threshold housing response. Through a multisector working group process, upstream policy options to reduce the burden of homelessness among residents of color in Boston will also be identified to support dissemination and implementation.

1] City of Boston. Long-term Strategic Outlook: Serving the Mass. & Cass area and unsheltered individuals in Boston, May 2022. Available at <https://www.boston.gov/government/cabinets/boston-public-health-commission/mass-and-cass-showing-whats-possible>.

[2] Oliver J, Wilkey C, Richard M, et al. Racial Inequity and Homelessness: Findings from the SPARC Study, Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science (2021).



PROJECT ACTIVITIES



POLICY ANALYSIS

- Assess and identify policies and practices important to the racially equitable provision of low-threshold housing and supportive services in Boston for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness and SUD.



MULTISECTOR WORKING GROUP

- Convene and meet regularly with a multisector working group addressing housing policies and response to review and propose policy changes.
- Develop a sustainability plan for implementation of policies and practices.



MONITORING & EVALUATION

- Evaluate the impact of existing and to-be-identified low-threshold housing policies and practices on racially equitable access to housing services for unsheltered individuals with SUD.

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DISSEMINATION

- Train community stakeholders in methods for community engagement and reducing stigma around homelessness and SUD
- Deploy community-led engagement teams in 3 Boston neighborhoods
- Create a report for local, statewide and national dissemination of best practices



KEY OUTCOMES

Through analysis, evaluation and engagement with the multisector working group, this project will contribute to the following outcomes:

- Increased equitable provision, access, and utilization of housing services for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness and SUD
- Improved quality of life outcomes for unsheltered homeless individuals with SUD
- Reduced number of unsheltered homeless persons by at least 40% compared to before the low-threshold housing policies went into effect (December 2021)
- Increased collaboration with multisector partners
- Increased capacity among community-based organizations to address the issue of unsheltered homelessness

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