

A Letter To The Community: Let's Take Bold Action Together To Solve Chronic Homelessness in King County

We represent a cross-sector collaboration of Seattle-area business leaders, nonprofits, healthcare professionals, academics and researchers, advocates and more. We are calling upon our community to **take bold action to solve chronic homelessness, by investing in the data-driven solution of permanent supportive housing** at the level we need.

We believe that a concerted effort to **house people experiencing chronic homelessness is crucial to our region's recovery** from the COVID-19 pandemic. If we can make a difference with chronic homelessness — people with the greatest barriers to housing often considered “the hardest to house” — we can generate momentum to solve homelessness overall.

We invite others to join us in supporting **the framework proposed by the Third Door Coalition.**

- Third Door's analysis suggests that **6,500 people are experiencing unsheltered chronic homelessness** in our region. That's about twice the number from previous estimates.
- People who are chronically homeless are **particularly vulnerable**: living exposed on the street, they suffer from higher rates of poor health, untreated mental illness and substance use disorder when compared to homeless populations generally.
- Chronic homelessness is **costly**: the way we currently respond to it often results in the highest frequency use of first responders, emergency room services, hospitalization, jail, probation, and courts.
- By federal definition, people experiencing chronic homelessness also have at least one disabling condition that prevents them from working or maintaining housing without support; accordingly, **they are the least likely to exit homelessness without intervention.**
- These disabling conditions render them **particularly vulnerable to COVID-19**; they are twice as likely to be hospitalized and 2-3 times as likely to die as the general population.

The solution is permanent supportive housing. Permanent supportive housing is consistently proven to be the most humane and cost-effective solution. Other initiatives to respond to this population are also essential and complement this proposal, but the centerpiece of a comprehensive plan is permanent supportive housing. It provides a safe, stable home with hygiene facilities and a space to socially isolate if needed, and access to healthcare and voluntary services. Our region is a **pioneer in this strategy** through nationally respected local organizations like DESC and Plymouth Housing.

This approach was critical before COVID-19; it is even more critical now in light of it, and will remain critical even after the pandemic subsides.

After nearly two years of research, the Third Door Coalition has developed a **proposal to fund the permanent supportive housing we need.** Using some of the best evidence and data available, they determined the gap, analyzed the cost barriers to building that housing, and identified solutions to those barriers. They propose a **public-private partnership to make it happen.** Along the way, Third Door shared their concept with, and sought input from, hundreds of community members.

We, the undersigned, agree that:

- **We need the support of a county-wide, broad-based, cross-sector coalition** of businesses, nonprofit service providers, academic institutions, healthcare providers, faith communities, advocacy organizations, funders, individuals, government and more.
- The clear solution is to **build, lease, or otherwise provide enough permanent supportive housing** to meet the needs of people experiencing chronic homelessness in King County.
- Government alone cannot solve the issue, especially with the strain on budgets as a result of the pandemic. **A public-private partnership** can fund the level of permanent supportive housing we need.
- **The time to act is now.**

Our region is known for innovation. Global leaders in business, world-class academic institutions, a generous philanthropic sector, dynamic nonprofits, and caring community members call this region home. But until now we have never responded to homelessness at the level it requires — despite the state of emergency declared nearly five years ago.

The Third Door Coalition was established on the belief that we can move beyond polarization and come together on collaborative paths to solve homelessness. Our community has been longing for an approach like this and a proposal we can get behind. **We don't need to agree on everything, as long as we can agree that permanent supportive housing is the best solution.**

We pledge to work together on refining and implementing the proposal from the Third Door Coalition, with the goal of solving chronic homelessness in King County within five years; we invite the larger community to join us in a collective effort.

Signed,

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