

# Solutions to End Homelessness

Mayor Tim Keller's administration and the Department of Family and Community Services (FCS) have developed strategies, initiatives and programs to strengthen Albuquerque's homeless crisis-response system. Homelessness is a harsh reality in all cities and our multifaceted approach includes emergency shelter, transitional housing, access to services and more. In collaboration with our community partners, we're addressing immediate needs while working to build the city's first centrally-located, 24/7, year-round Gateway Center system for the unhoused.

## Westside Emergency Housing Center (WEHC)

- Expanded year-round emergency shelter beds and lengthened the temporary winter shelter to be open year-round.
- Provides emergency housing for 250–450 people each night, depending on weather conditions.
- Extended weekend hours to remain open all day because few resources were available for people in town. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the WEHC has been open 24/7 and has provided three meals each day.

## Gateway Centers

- FCS has been planning for centrally located centers with robust supportive services to help residents access permanent housing and other resources.
- In fall 2019, voters approved \$14 million in General Obligation bond funding for a new Gateway Center.
- FCS conducted an extensive public input process in fall 2019 and early winter 2020 to solicit community input on the locations and services for the Gateway Center.
- The City acquired Gibson Medical Center in April 2021 as the site for its first Gateway Center. This will allow us to create a services and health hub to deliver compassionate solutions to the unhoused.



## COVID Response

- As the pandemic made its way to New Mexico, FCS convened a cross-disciplinary group of key medical providers, community service providers, and State agencies to build from existing partnerships that we had developed in 2019 to offer medical care at the WEHC.
- This team—which called itself the “Corona Crushers”—successfully prevented massive community spread of COVID-19 among those experiencing homelessness. This system of care included:
  - A City-appointed medical director to oversee the system of screening, testing, mitigation, training and care at the WEHC.
  - Hotels that provided safe places for people without homes to self-isolate as well as provide behavioral health and other supports as needed to maintain COVID isolation.
  - Three Wellness Motels that provided non-congregate shelter to the most vulnerable, including those over age 60, people with underlying health conditions, and families with young children.
- Over 400 people in 100 households have participated in the “Fast-Track to Housing” program, operating from one of the City’s Wellness Hotels, and are in various stages of moving into affordable, permanent housing. As of July 2021, an estimated 144 people in 36 households have signed a lease—many of whom are families with young children.
- A coordinated system of discharge with local hospital emergency rooms, to ensure those with COVID-19 who do not have a home are able to safely self-isolate.



“ Our experience at the Wellness-2 hotel was really amazing. All the staff were really helpful to me and my kids. Everyone worked really hard to help us. COVID made things difficult, but they still helped us with things like referrals, finding doctors and getting transportation. These people didn't even know us. I can't say enough good things about them.”

— Melanie Alvarez



- As a result, the City has provided shelter to an unprecedented number of people to protect them from contracting and spreading COVID-19. During the fall, winter, and spring, between 600–900 people have been sheltered each night, of whom 175–225 are children.

#### Affordable Rental Housing

- At the same time, the Keller administration is focused on increasing the supply for affordable rental housing, including housing with supportive services for those who need it.
- In 2020, the City commissioned the Urban Institute to conduct an affordable rental housing needs assessment, which included specific recommendations on how the City can increase affordable rental housing.



24/7



Services at the WEHC

Over 400 people housed through Fast-track to Housing

- Between FY18 and FY21, the City has increased its annual investment in supportive housing by 44%, which will house approximately 370 previously homeless households.
- In spring 2021, the City appropriated another \$10 million for the Workforce Housing Trust Fund, which will be used in the next two years to construct or rehab high quality housing that is affordable to low- and moderate-income Albuquerque residents.

- The City has partnered with the State of NM to launch a \$170 million rental assistance program to prevent eviction for low- and moderate-income renters who have been impacted from COVID-19.

#### Encampments

- FCS is also working to meet the needs of people who sleep outside in public spaces. A team coordinates the City's response to encampments on public property and works closely with non-profit service providers, to connect people to resources and housing.
- In spring 2020, FCS and the Albuquerque Police Department developed formal policies for addressing encampments, in order to minimize interactions with law enforcement and ensure the City is not criminalizing homelessness.



“ Each family and individual we are able to help find stable housing is a success. The Gateway Centers will expand our ability to remove barriers and help our formerly unhoused neighbors find permanent homes.”

—Mayor Tim Keller