



Rural Homelessness and The Federal Strategic Plan

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WVCEH is...

The West Virginia Coalition to End Homelessness (WVCEH) is the lead agency for the Balance of State Continuum of Care.

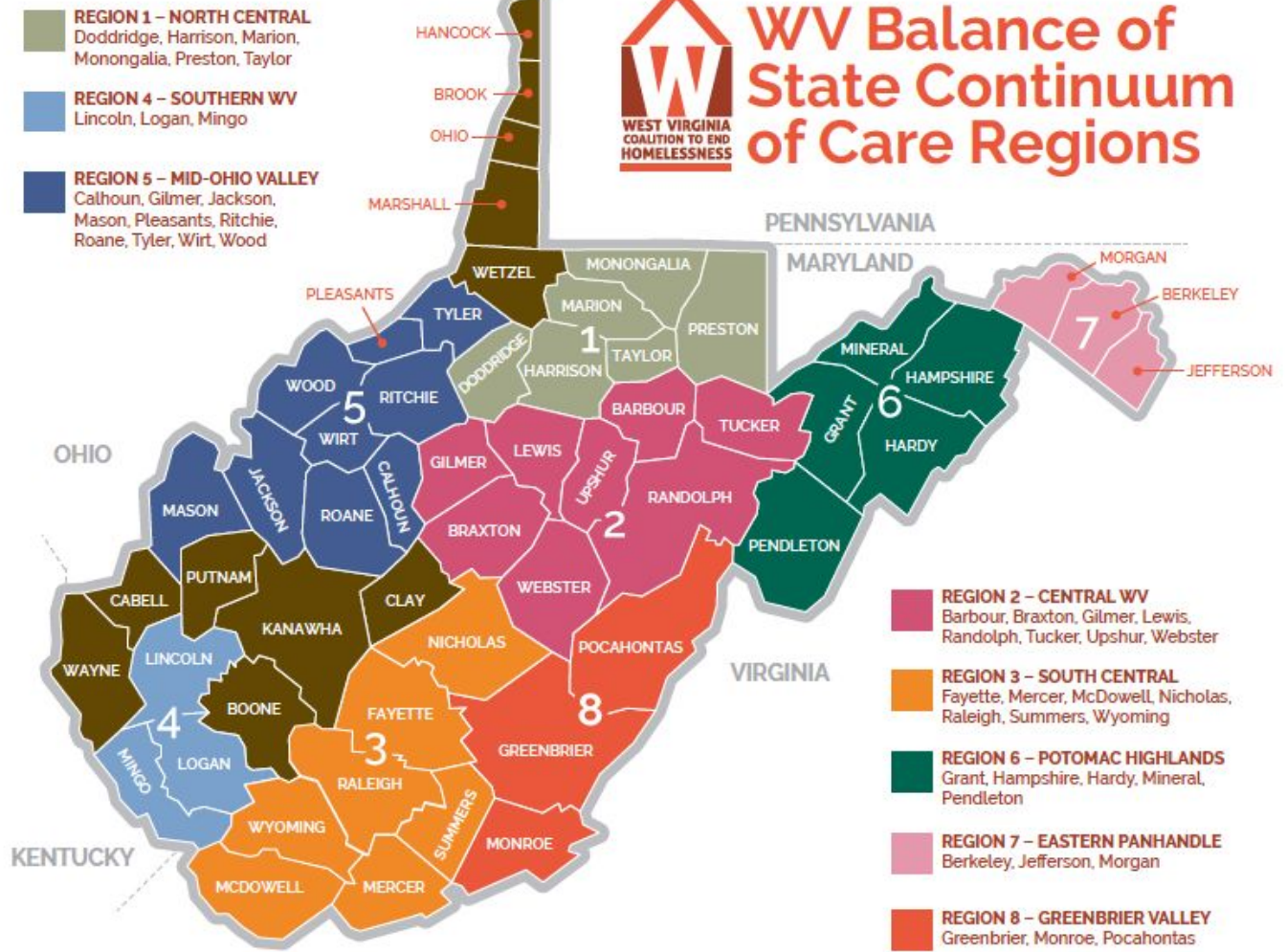
- Covers 44 of the 55 counties in WV
- Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) lead
- Coordinated Entry lead
- SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery state lead
- Oversees DHHR Homelessness Assistance Funding for the contract shelters statewide
- Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) lead
- Education, outreach, and advocacy (Fair Housing, homelessness, etc.)

Direct Service Provider

- Largest direct service provider in the state
 - Street Outreach
 - Coordinated Entry
 - Rapid Rehousing
 - Permanent Supportive Housing
 - Mobile Recovery Services
 - Youth and Family Service Navigation and Housing Programs



WV Balance of State Continuum of Care Regions



Point-in-Time Counts

Our data, for the most part, reflects national trends.

	Overall	Chronic	Family	Veteran	Youth
2010	1,375	356	487	-	-
2017	-	-	-	-	93
2020	731	102	99	74	57
2023	767	156	83	43	78

Rural Homelessness: Some Not-Very-Fun Facts

- More people moving from rural to urban areas nationwide
- More people than ever are leaving WV
 - From 2010 to 2020, the population dropped 3.2%, or about 59,000 people
 - West Virginia was one of only seven states to lose a congressional seat following the 2020 census
- Folks in rural WV have a higher poverty and unemployment rate than folks in urban WV
 - Lower high school graduation rates, lower average income
- Rural communities generally view homelessness as an urban issue
- Lack of reliable infrastructure
 - No public transit, no cell service, no high speed internet, rarely ADA friendly, food deserts
 - High barrier shelters, if any exist
 - Impact of climate change

Successful Strategies in Rural Communities

- Meet people where they're at!
- Connecting folks with supportive services they may not be aware of due to information gap
- Landlord liaison program
- Community engagement & partnership building
- Commitment to flexibility

Trends in Rural Homelessness in WV

A Lack of Affordable Housing

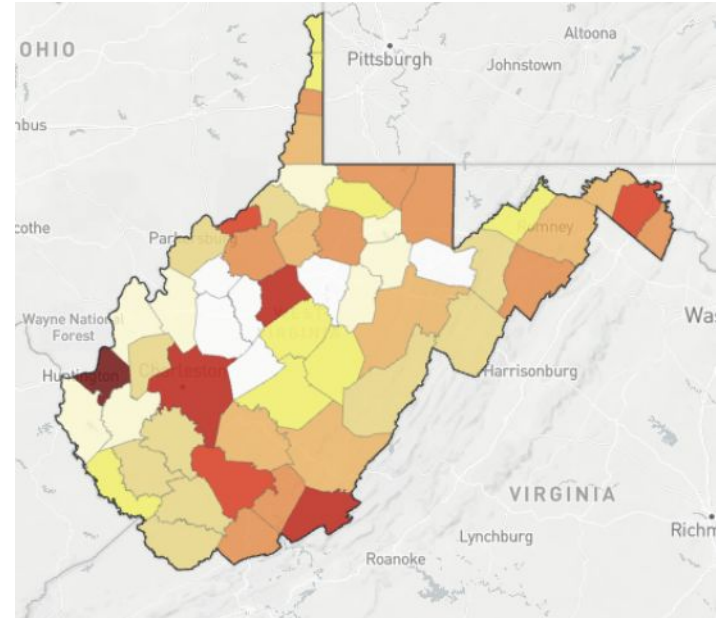
- Shocking, I know
- In WV, 33% of renter households are Extremely Low Income, meaning their income is at or below the poverty line
 - Of those 33% ELI renters, 66% spend more than half of their income on housing
- Rural rental market is so limited. If you own the only rental units in the entire county, there's no incentive to rent to ELI households or folks experiencing homelessness
- Rarely are these units accessible
- Huge barrier to housing our clients

The Political Climate

- SB 239 - Behavioral health providers, treatment specialists, statewide government leaders and community stakeholders assess a breakdown of homeless demographics
 - “Whether WV homeless populations concentrate in certain places and why”
 - “Determination of percent of homeless that lives in another state/jurisdiction in the past 3 years”
 - 82% of the clients we serve are local to the community
 - “Analysis of whether any HHS benefits offered in WV attract homeless/at-risk populations”
- Criminalization of homelessness, harmful rhetoric, stigmatization, “permissive cruelty”

Pushback Against Harm Reduction

- April 2021 - SB 334 requires programs offering syringe exchanges to host a number of other harm reduction services, force them to deny clean needles to those who don't return with their used needles and require them to only serve clients with state IDs in order to operate.
 - August 2021 HIV outbreak in Kanawha County
 - Less testing and access to clean syringes in rural areas



Severity of Client Need

- Rise in unsheltered and chronic homelessness
 - Clients with severe mental illness
- We're seeing probably 1 in 4 clients in active drug use
 - Prevalence of polysubstance use, meth, fentanyl
 - Cuts to harm reduction make this harder to address
- Our direct service staff is not equipped to handle many of the situations they face on a daily basis
 - Street outreach and case managers can not function as emergency responders, clinicians, recovery coaches, etc. and still do their jobs
 - Burnout is inevitable

The FSP & Rural West Virginia

Foundations

- Equity
 - Black West Virginians make up 3.5% of the population but 13.5% of the homeless population
 - Working with people with lived experience
- Data and Evidence
 - Data as the key metric for reducing and ending homelessness
- Collaboration
 - Built for Zero - Initiative with Community Solutions with the goal of reaching a “functional zero” among the chronically homeless population in the BoS.
 - Fostering new partnerships and strengthening existing ones

Solutions

- Scaling up housing and supports
 - Senator Manchin awarded \$1.7 million to WVCEH to rehab and built units in Barbour and Harrison counties
 - Developing master leasing
- Improved homelessness response
 - Case conferencing through Built for Zero
- Prevent homelessness
 - Lessons learned from the Mountaineer Rental Assistance Program

Things I love about the FSP

- Data sharing across partner agencies
 - Would help close the information gap
 - Discharge planning– folks exiting hospitals or prison straight to homelessness
- Attention to marginalized groups
 - WV has the highest per capita rate of transgender youth in the country (2017)
- Continued commitment to Housing First philosophy
- Investing in the well-being of service providers
- Opportunities for education
- Comprehensive, collaborative approach
 - Homelessness doesn't exist in a vacuum!
 - HRS can't continue to function as the very bottom of the social safety net



Final Thoughts

