



# Houston's approach to Homelessness

Lance Gilliam

Board Chair, Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County





**T**HE STRUGGLE TO solve homelessness is getting harder nearly everywhere. Yet recent years have still seen many more victories than defeats. And the biggest victory is in greater Houston, which over the last decade has cut homelessness by more than half.

Houston's story holds lessons for Los Angeles. The chief one is that solving homelessness is less about economics than about strategic clarity and execution.

Evidence that homelessness is *not* an inescapable fact of modern post-industrial life is not hard to find. From the time systematic counting began in 2007 to the last official count in 2020, the homeless population fell nationwide by 10.3%.

The decline has been especially significant among homeless families with children, which is particularly good news.

If that good news seems too removed from the particular woes of West Coast mega-cities, note that while homelessness in Los Angeles County was doubling over the last decade, it was significantly dropping in Long Beach — in the same crazed Southern California housing market and same unequal local economy. It's also fallen in Pasadena and Glendale, the two other cities that handle homelessness separately from the rest of the county.

L.A. and Houston are the second- and fourth-largest cities in the country, two vast, highly diverse Sun Belt sprawls. Houston has slightly higher poverty levels, while L.A.'s unemployment rate fell close to Houston's leading into the pandemic.

One significant difference:



LUIS SINCO Los Angeles Times

**A DOWNTOWN** L.A. encampment. The city vacillates between wanting to end homelessness and making it more comfortable.

**Second Opinion ::**  
 BIG IDEAS ON GLOBAL CHALLENGES

# The homelessness quandary

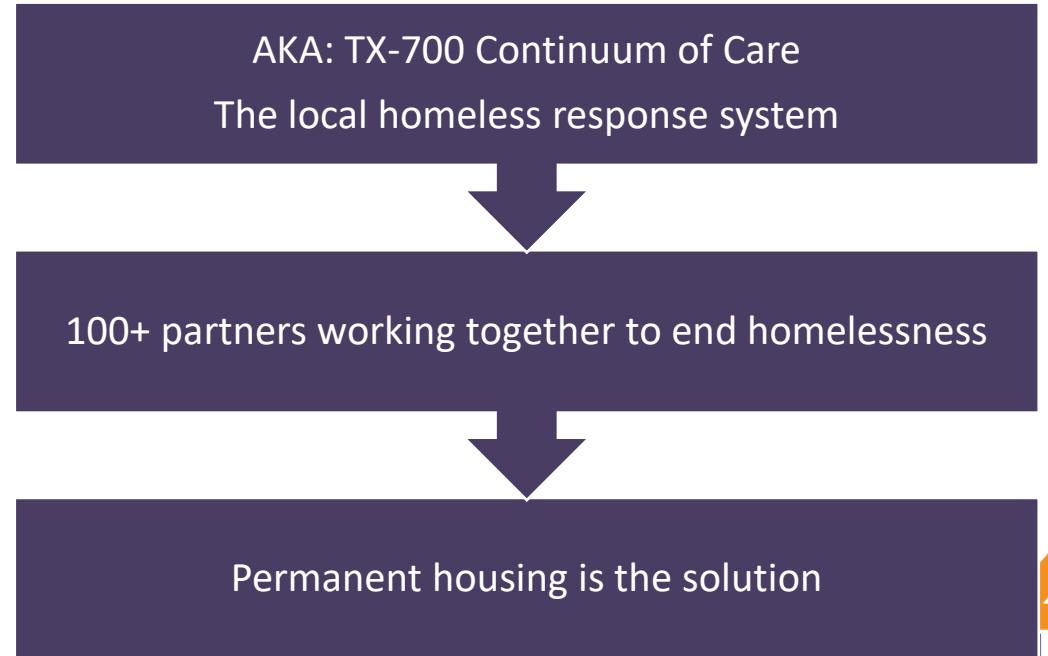
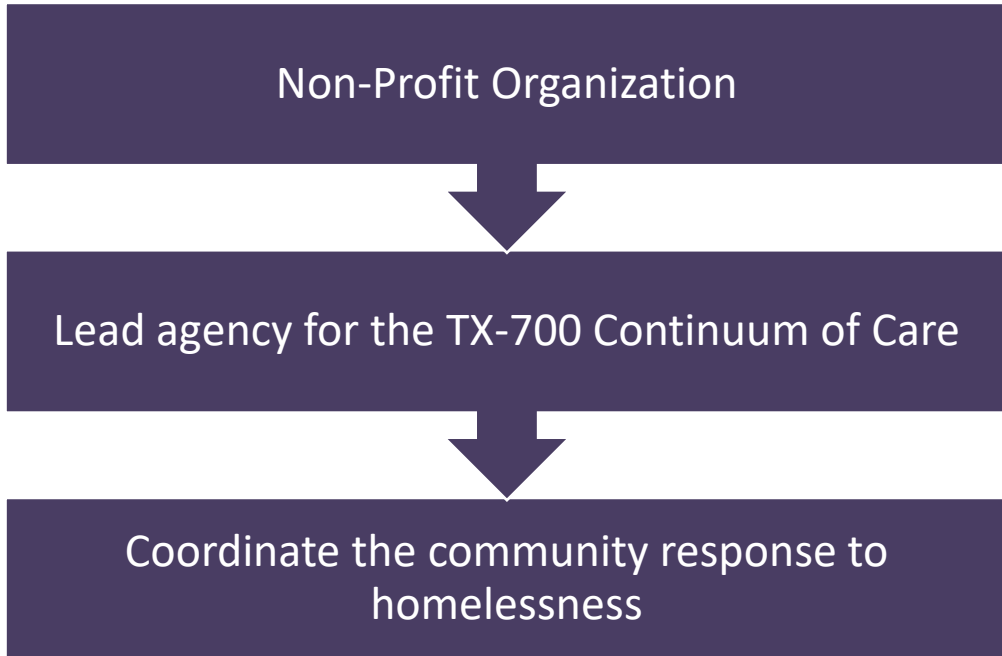
Houston has cut homelessness over the last decade by more than half. The big takeaway for L.A.: Strategic clarity and execution lead to success.

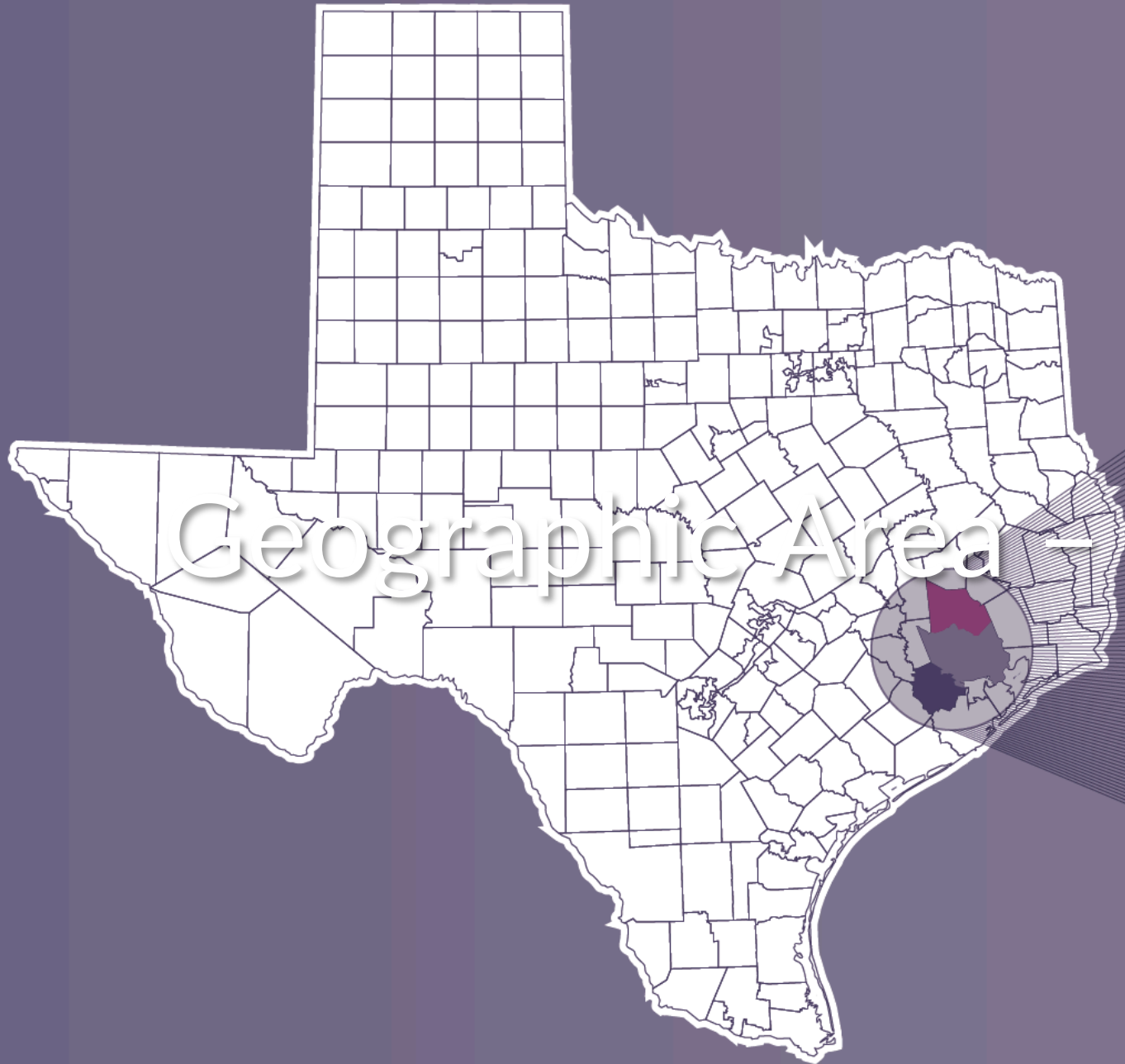




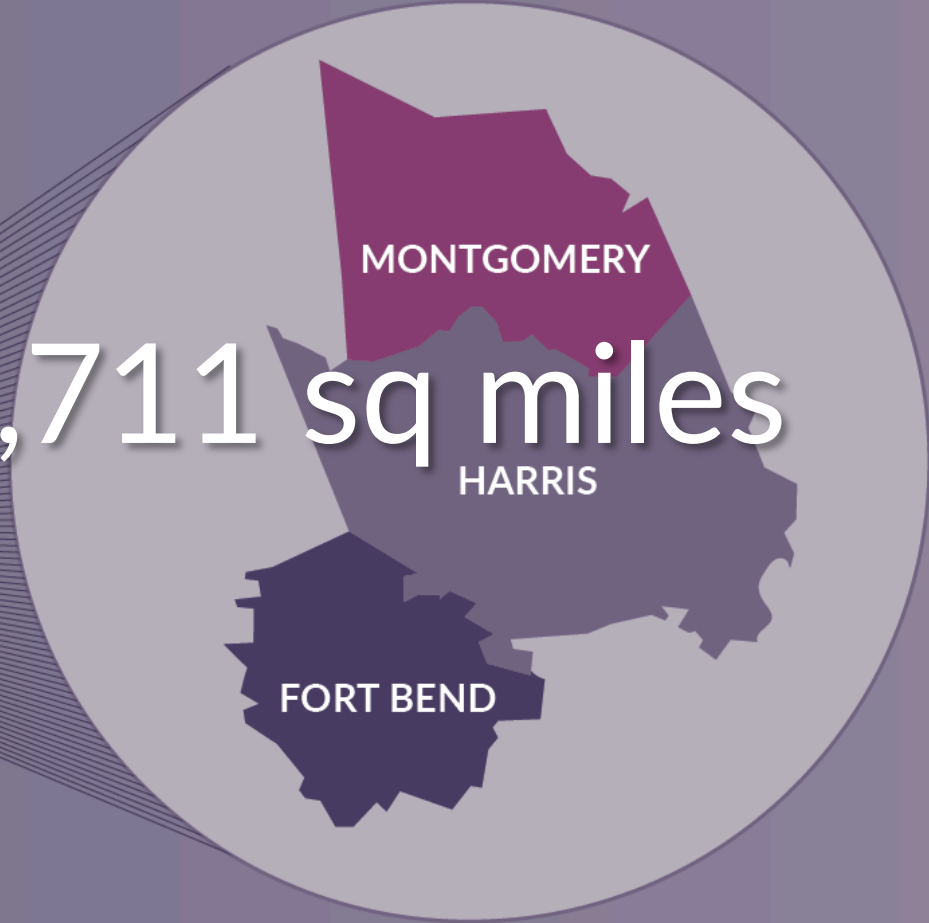
COALITION  
FOR THE  
HOMELESS

# The Way Home





Geographic Area – 3,711 sq miles

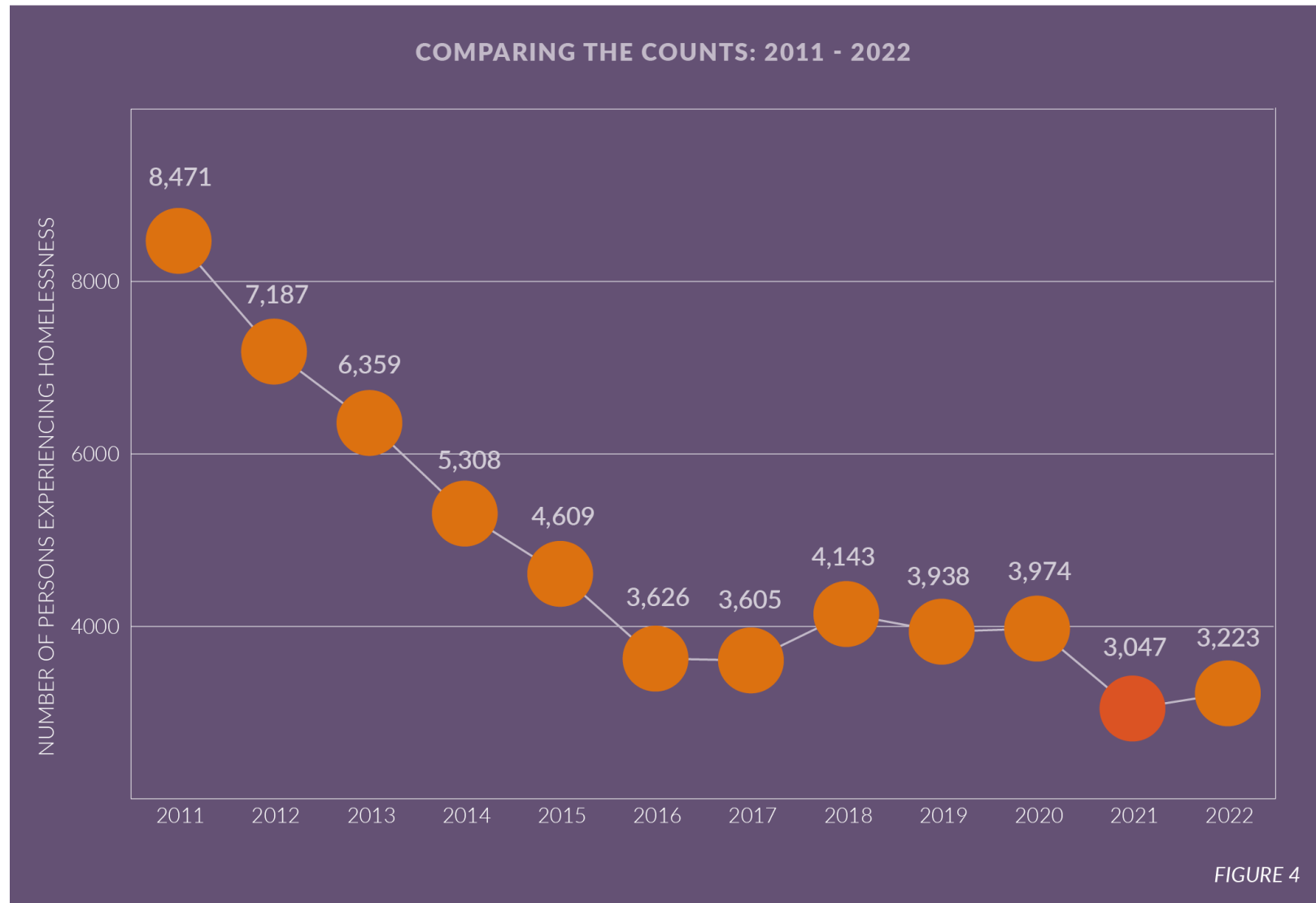


MONTGOMERY

HARRIS

FORT BEND

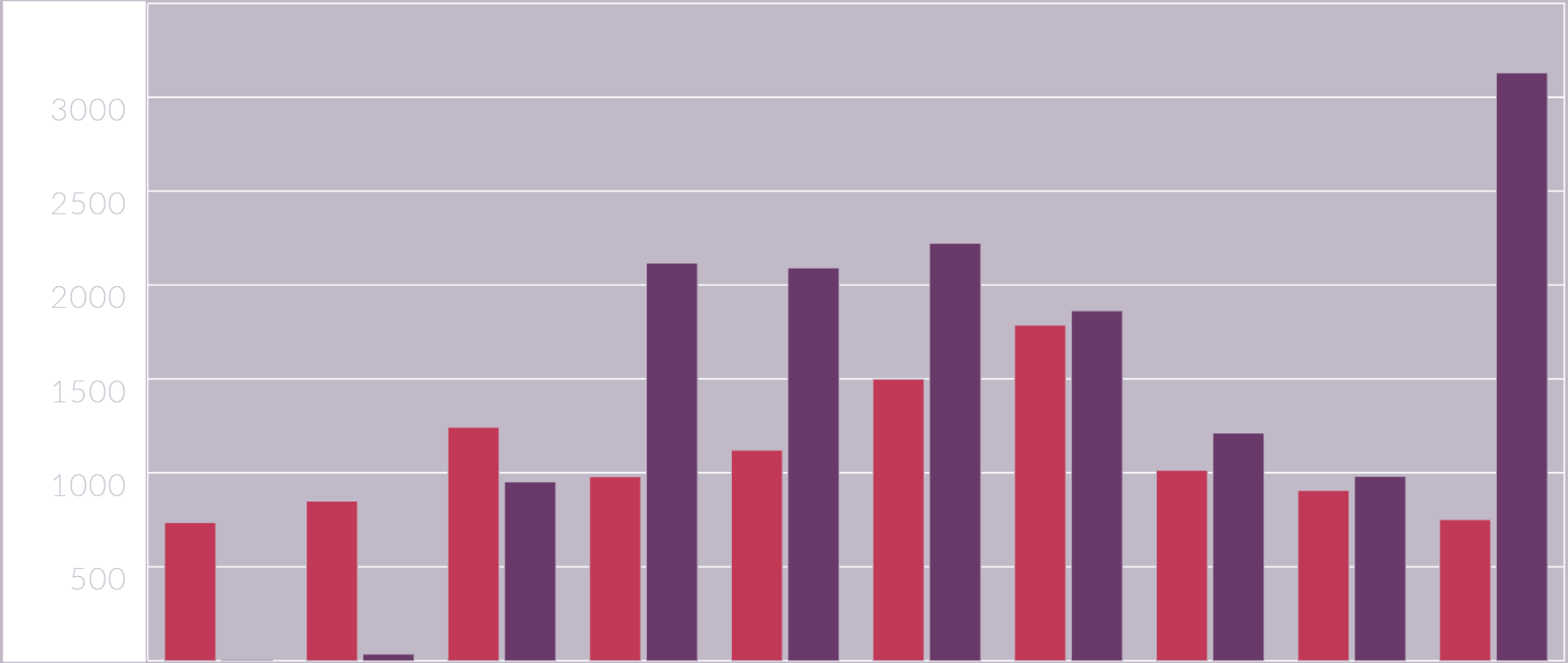
Houston leads the nation in housing & reducing homelessness



**Note:** Counts prior to 2017 include Harris and Fort Bend counties only. Counts 2017 and after also include Montgomery County. 2021 Count employed different methodology due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



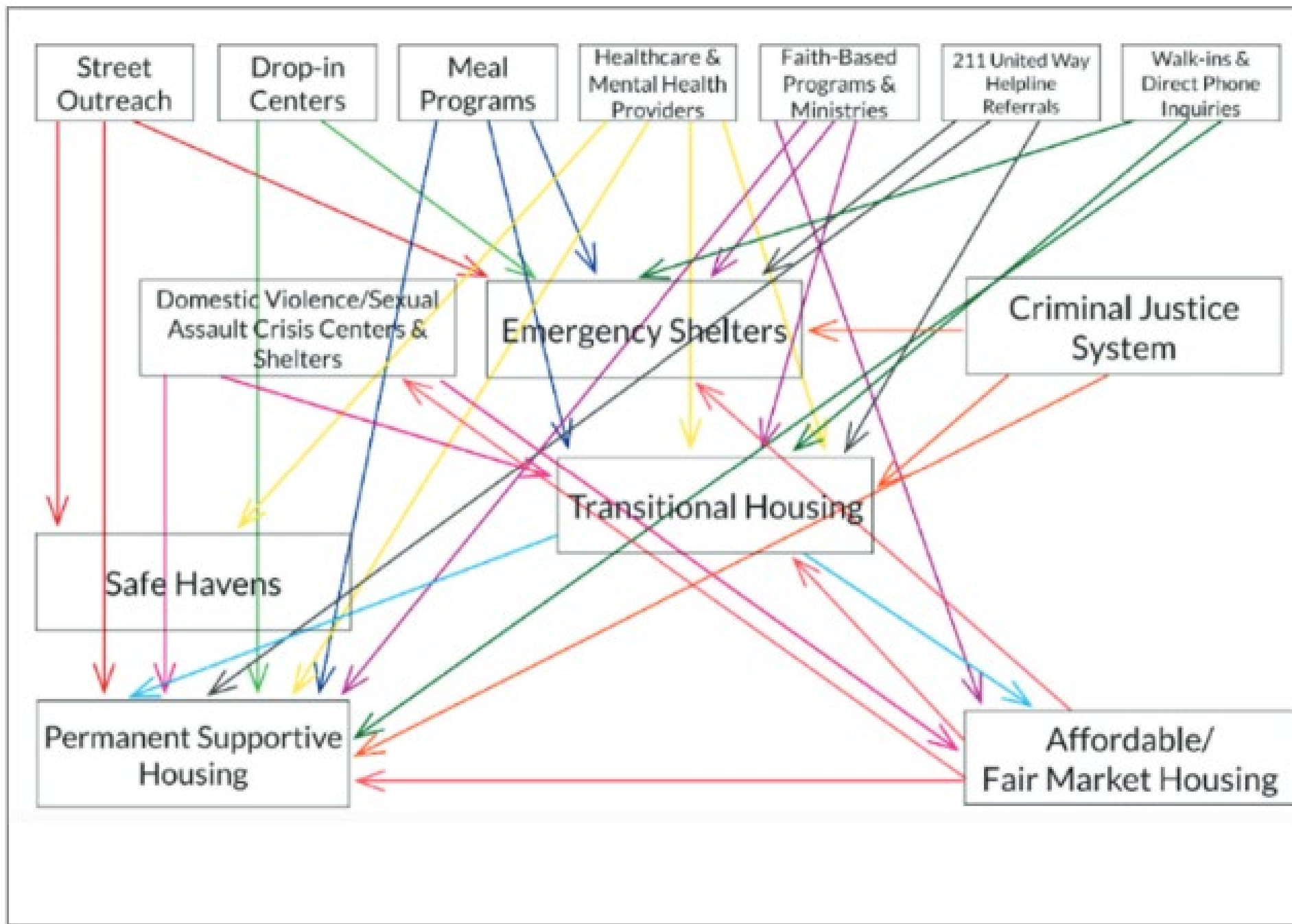
# INDIVIDUALS PLACED IN PERMANENT HOUSING 2012-2021

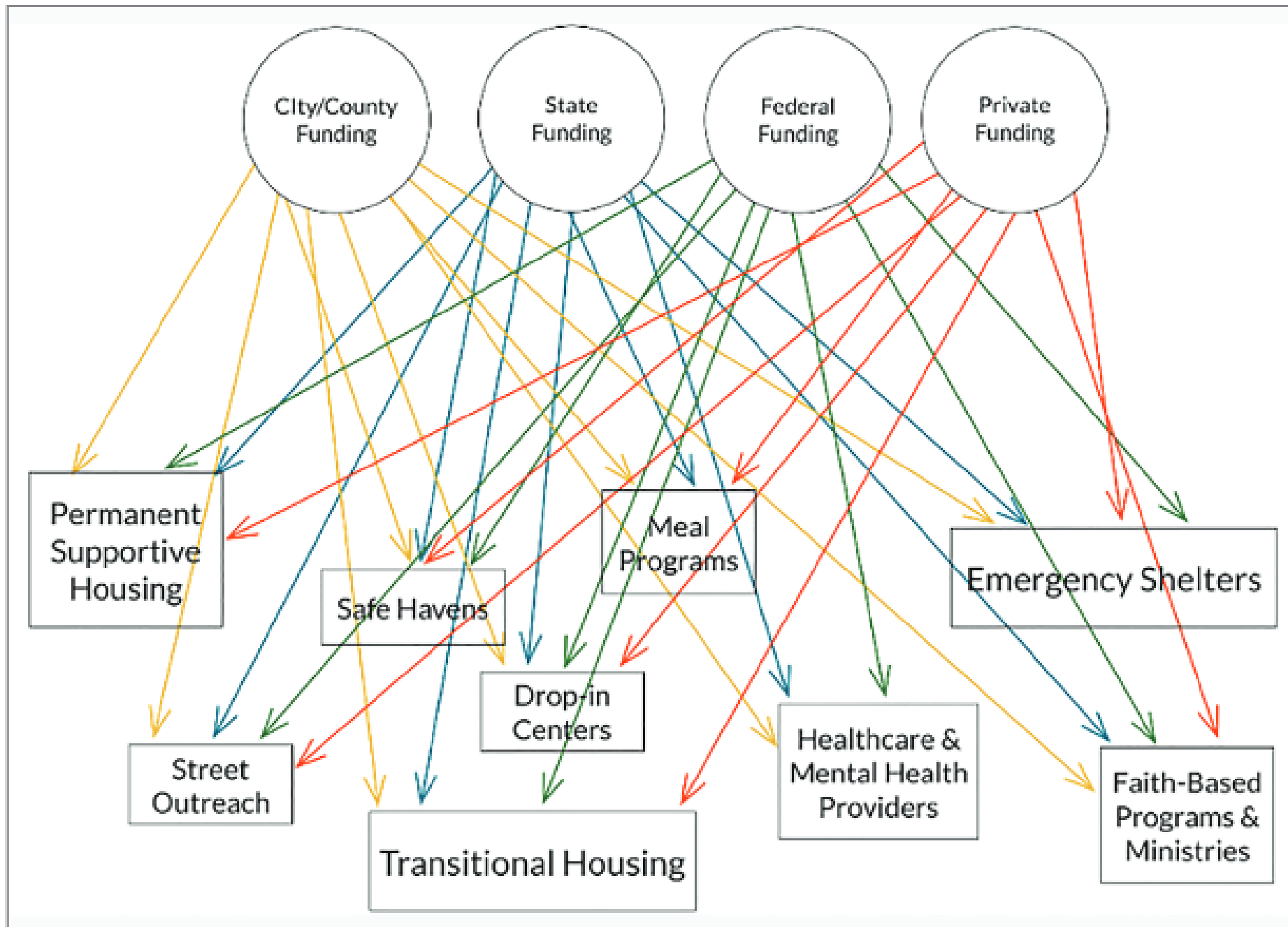


PSH  RRH 

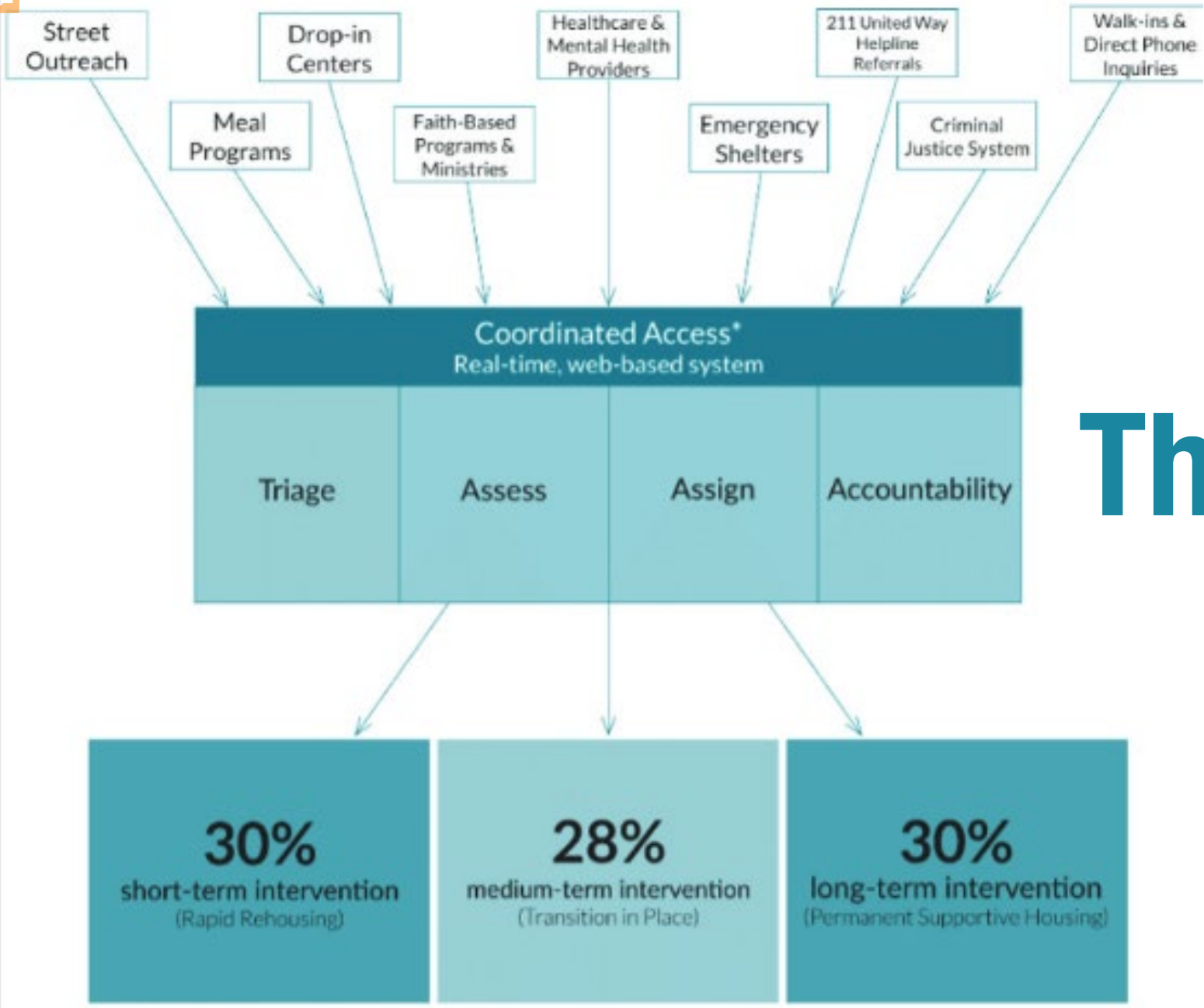
FIGURE 13











# The Way Home

\* 12% of the homeless population will solve their homelessness on their own





# The Way Home Steering Committee

## **Officers:**

**Chair - Barbie Brashear, Harris County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council**

**Vice Chair - Barbie Robinson, Harris County Public Health**

**Secretary - Dr. Martin Negron, Harris County Community Services Department**

## **Fixed Position Representatives:**

**Sara Rogers, City of Pasadena Community Development**

**Carol Borrego - Fort Bend County Community Development**

**Horace Allison, Harris County Housing Authority**

**Mark Thiele, Houston Housing Authority**

**Marc Eichenbaum - Houston Housing & Community Development**

**Rebecca Ansley, Montgomery County Community Development**

## **At-Large Representatives:**

**Jennifer Herring, Harris County Sheriff's Office**

**Tracey Burdine, Harris Health System**

**Alan Watkins, Houston Housing Collaborative**

**Dr. Roberta Scott, Houston Independent School District**

**Dr. Evanthe Collins, The Harris Center**

**Dr. Theresa Tran, UT Health**

## **Provider Representatives:**

**Preston Witt, Harmony House**

**Becky Landes, The Beacon**

## **Consumer Representatives:**

**Gregory Dread, Lived Experience**

**Nakia Sims, Lived Experience**





# Housing First



permanent housing



supportive services



life stability





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# Community COVID HOUSING PROGRAM



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FOR THE  
HOMELESS





## Overview

- On July 1, 2020, Houston, Harris County, Coalition announced \$65M plan to house 5,000 people by October 2022
- Housing is healthcare



# Proposed Strategy

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Bridge to Permanent Supportive Housing

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12-Month Rapid Re-housing

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Diversion

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Auxiliary/ Social Distancing Emergency Shelter

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Mental Health Case Management

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Enhanced Street Outreach

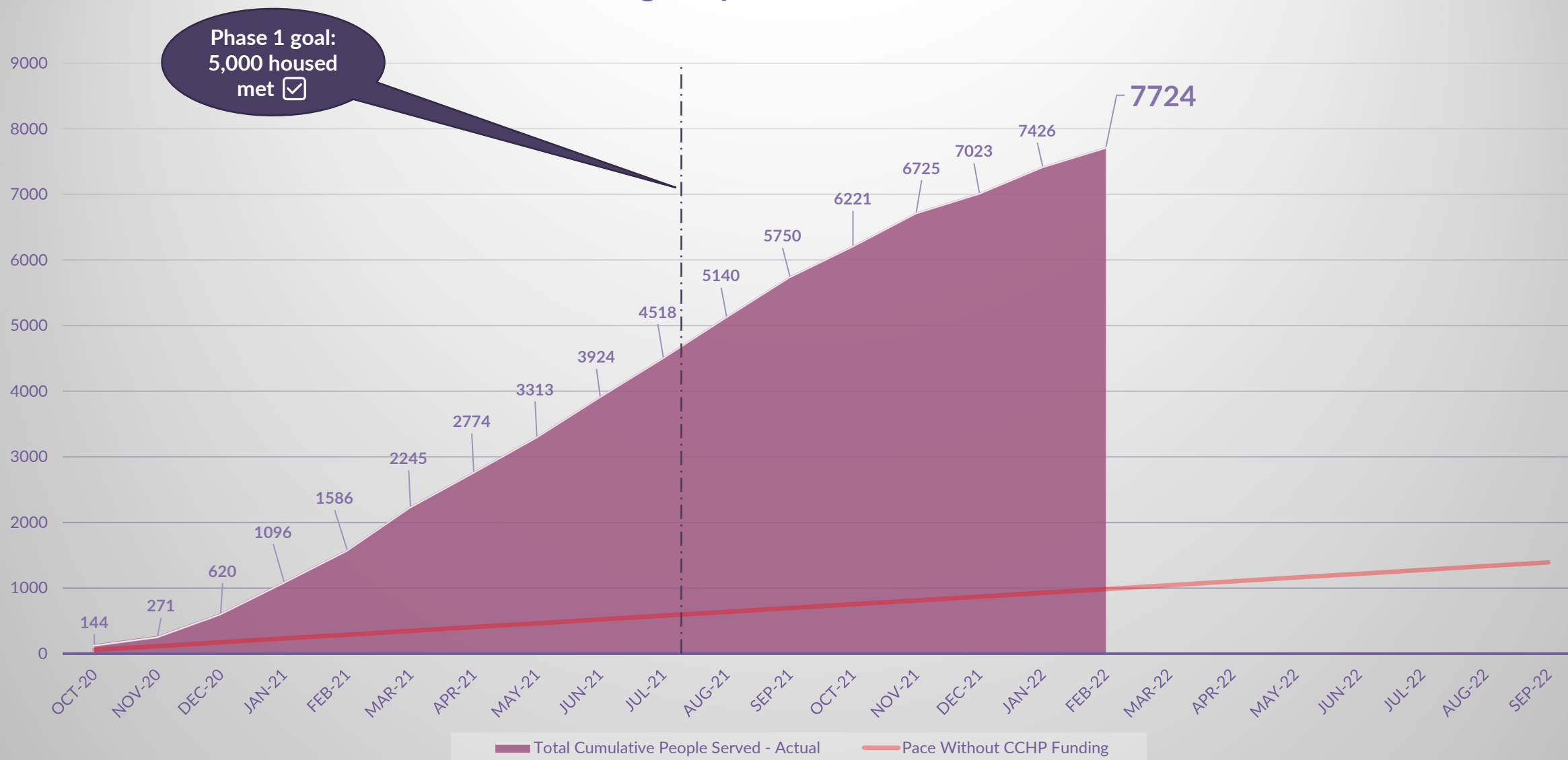
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PSH Housing Preservation



# The Way Home System Performance

## CCHP Funding People Housed Tracker (as of 2/21/22)






*Community*  
**COVID HOUSING**  
PROGRAM

Photos courtesy of The Salvation Army of Greater Houston





# Encampment Response Strategy

- The CCHP allowed for the roll-out of an Encampment Decommissioning program that has demonstrated proven results in placing individuals living on the streets into housing.
  - Official [Encampment Response Strategy](#) available.
  - Currently being used by HUD as a national best practice.
  - Houston Chronicle [cover story](#) featured our efforts.
- 

# Encampment Summary

Encampments  
Decommissioned

19

Individuals  
Engaged

372

Individuals  
Housed or On  
Path to Being  
House

245

Individuals  
Self-Resolved

92

Individuals  
Refused

35

# Encampment at Allen Parkway and 45 North

Before



After





# CCHP Phase 2

Advancing our System  
with ARPA

# HOUSTON CHRONICLE

THURSDAY, JANUARY 27, 2022 • HOUSTONCHRONICLE.COM • VOL. 121, NO. 106 • \$2.00 ★★

## City, Harris County invest \$100M in plan to cut homelessness in half

By R.A. Schuetz  
STAFF WRITER

Houston and Harris County announced Wednesday afternoon a \$100 million increase in funds they are funneling into efforts to reduce homelessness in the area. They had previously committed \$65 million in federal COVID-related funding to the initiative.

"In Houston, we either go big or we go home," said Mayor Syl-

vester Turner in a press conference announcing the funds. "And today, we are going big so ... Houstonians can go home." He said he hoped the funds would help cut the region's homeless population in half by helping people secure housing.

"Housing is a human right," said Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo. "And in Harris County, housing is something we fight for together."

The announcement came

hours after city council voted, 13 to 4, to fund the transformation of a city-owned building in Fifth Ward into a place where people moved out of an encampment can live, along with pets and loved ones, while they await their permanent housing. The facility, known as a navigation center, is key to a plan by the city, Harris County, and their partners to reduce the number of people living in the streets.

*Homeless continues on A8*



Jon Shapley / Staff file photo

Police officers hand out blankets last year. A new program is moving people from encampments to permanent housing.

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"In Houston, we either go big or we go home. And today, we are going big so...Houstonians can go home!" -Houston Mayor, Sylvester Turner

# Houston and Harris County announce increased investment in efforts to reduce homelessness by \$100 million.

# ARPA Funding for PSH and RRH Expansion to End Chronic and Unsheltered Homelessness by 2024

**\$20M+**

State of  
Texas



**\$40M+**

Harris  
County



**\$40M+**

City of  
Houston



House another 7,000  
through 2024



# What has made the difference?



Focus on providing permanent housing with supportive services



Steering Committee for the homeless response system led by public **funders** and adjacent systems

Appoints the lead agency (the Coalition for the Homeless)  
Sets the system's long-term strategy



Most vulnerable individuals prioritized for housing (Coordinated Access)



Nonprofit service providers streamlined services so as not to overlap



# The lead agency must

1

Have a macro  
viewpoint

2

Have flexibility,  
independence and  
energy to overcome  
bureaucratic hurdles

3

Obtain appropriate  
public and private  
financial support to  
sustain itself and  
the system





# Three key strengths



SCALE OF EFFORT



EXCELLENT  
ORGANIZATION



PRAGMATISM





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