MOTION

In 2010, Los Angeles began working to create a Coordinated Entry System (CES) to coordinate the work of service providers, maintain a real-time list of individuals experiencing homelessness in local communities, and equitably and efficiently match people to available housing resources and services that best fit their needs. In 2011, an early version of CES was put into practice in a series of pilots in Skid Row. After further development via pilots, the CES was introduced to seven communities throughout LA County and in 2014, CES was expanded to all eight Service Planning Areas (SPAs) in the County.

Today, CES is managed by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) and comprises three systems: adults, families with children, and youth. Information about people experiencing homelessness is entered into the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) database, and families or individuals are then referred to appropriate resources across the County that meet their needs.

CES also determines prioritization for placement of people experiencing homelessness in interim housing and permanent housing units. Using a scoring system called the Vulnerability Index and a survey called the Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT), individuals are assigned a score based on their acuity, with higher scores receiving higher prioritization for housing.

In a context of persistent interim and permanent housing shortage relative to the population on LA's streets, CES has served as a necessary triage tool for distributing scarce resources and services. But since its implementation, service providers have observed profound issues with CES’s vulnerability assessment tool, including racial disparities. A recent investigation by The Markup and The Los Angeles Times found that the VI-SPDAT consistently assigned higher vulnerability scores on white adults and youth over Black and Latino equivalents, effectively charting a more rapid pathway for white clients to obtain housing.

Service providers and people experiencing homelessness have also critiqued CES and the VI-SPDAT for delivering inaccurate need assessments—partly due to the requirement for clients to self-report diagnoses and other personal details, which directly influences acuity scores—and for being difficult to adapt to a broader range of housing interventions, including place-based strategies like Encampment-to-Home.

In addition to asking for changes to the assessment tool that underlies CES, service providers have noted other factors that cause challenges and delays. They have pointed out that, although they work to ensure all their clients have completed applications and obtained necessary documents, some clients are “document-ready” or “match-ready” before others, regardless of their vulnerability score. They advocate for clients who are “match-ready” to be considered for housing placement immediately while others complete required documents.

Service providers have also noted delays arising from the L.A. County Department of Health Services (DHS) taking up to 30 days to locate referred clients when they receive referrals for case
management, which could be mitigated by referring more than one client at a time to each available case management slot.

LAHSA recently updated its core CES policies to allow for greater flexibility and ability to respond to the shifting needs of the homeless population and the homeless services system. This has allowed for innovative solutions to be piloted before being codified and implemented system-wide. These are steps in the right direction, but further improvements to CES are needed.

The Coordinated Entry System represents the first and most essential step from the street to housing for tens of thousands of people experiencing homelessness. If we want to ensure equity and efficiency in interim and permanent housing placements, we must undertake the project of reforming and improving CES.

I THEREFORE MOVE that the City Council instruct LAHSA, with assistance from the Housing Authority of the City of LA and homeless service providers, to report back within 30 days with a plan to reform and improve the Coordinated Entry System to address factors that cause bias in acuity scores and significant delays in matching people to housing units. This report should include consideration of:

- Adopting an alternative assessment tool to the VI-SPDAT that has been evaluated for racial bias and reduces reliance on self-reporting by clients, in addition to potentially incorporating data about utilization of emergency services such as jails, police/Sheriff, emergency rooms, mental health beds, and the child welfare system when determining a vulnerability score;
- Making CES more compatible with place-based interventions such as Encampment-to-Home based on successes in other localities where this has been done, such as Santa Monica;
- Indicating clearly in CES which households are “match-ready” and prioritizing those households for housing matches;
- Referring two households to the County DHS for each case management service slot to reduce delays due to challenges locating clients; and
- Developing and offering training for new and existing Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) developers about the PSH population, CES, and the pivotal role developers play in fostering housing stability for formerly homeless households.

PRESENTED BY:

NITHYA RAMAN
Councilmember, 4th District

KATY YAROSLAVSKY
Councilmember, 5th District

BOB BLUMENFIELD
Councilmember, 3rd District

SECONDED BY:

MAR 10 2023