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Earl Edwards, Co-Facilitator

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California Policy Lab
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COMMITTEE REPORT & RECOMMENDATION WORK GROUP MEMBERS
Dr. Va Leica Adams Kellum, Work Group Lead
Chanel A-Mansour
Dr. Jack Barbour
Monique King-Viehland
Veronica Lewis
Suzette Shaw
Reba Stevens
Pete White

SRO Housing Corporation
St. Joseph Center

FOCUS GROUP & INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS
Homeless Youth Forum of Los Angeles
LAHSA Lived Experience Advisory Board
Los Angeles Black Worker Center
People Assisting the Homeless (PATH)
Southern California Health & Rehabilitation Program (SCHARP) Oasis House
St. Joseph Center
The Church without Walls
The Hospitality Training Academy
Timelist Group
UNITE HERE
Los Angeles County Department of Workforce Development, Aging and Community Services (WDACS)

COMMITTEE MEETING PRESENTERS & PANELISTS
Corrin Buchanan, Los Angeles County Office of Diversion and Reentry (ODR)
Rule Buchanan, Homeless Youth Forum of Los Angeles
Susan Burton, A New Way of Life Reentry Project (ANWOL)
Kenny Clipper, St. Joseph Center
Melody Darden, LA LGBT Center
Derek Day, Brilliant Corners
Kennetta Fells, Mental Health America
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Doug Guthrie, Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA)
Joshua Hall, Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA)
Donald Holt, Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA)

NIKYRA HOUSTON, LAHSA Lived Experience Advisory Board
Gloria Johnson, LAHSA Lived Experience Advisory Board
Cynthia McCoy-Miller, Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)
Robert Medina, Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)
Colleen Murphy, Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA)

Dr. Norweeta Milburn, Homelessness Policy Research Institute Race Equity Working Group
Michael Nalat, Homelessness Policy Research Institute Race Equity Working Group
Audrey Pearson, SSG HOPICS
Jennifer Rachal, People Assisting the Homeless Supervisor
Mark Ridley-Thomas, Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, Second District
Joseph Robertson, Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (DMH)
Janey Rountree, Homelessness Policy Research Institute | California Policy Lab
Tanisha Saunders, Child Welfare Advocate
Reba Stevens, LAHSA Lived Experience Advisory Board
Dr. Till Von Wachter, Homelessness Policy Research Institute Race Equity Working Group
 Lakesha Williams, Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA)

Dr. V. Gail Winston, Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)

Photography by Leroy Hamilton
Dear Reader:

The persistent overrepresentation of Black people among the population experiencing homelessness is a troubling reality across the United States, and Los Angeles is no exception. In recognition of the urgent need to dedicate focused attention to better understand and address this critical issue, the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) Commission called for the creation of an Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness to lead this effort.

We are pleased to share with you the enclosed report summarizing the key insights illuminated by this Committee’s work as well as the Committee’s recommendations for necessary actions to advance equity and eliminate racial disparities impacting Black people experiencing homelessness across Los Angeles County.

A theme that cut across the Committee’s work was the acknowledgement that racism has contributed to, and remains intertwined with, homelessness. As such, ending homelessness will require a collective commitment to dismantling racism and addressing racial disparities, and sustained support from funders, policymakers, mainstream systems of care, service providers, and community partners.

The LAHSA Commission and LAHSA staff are committed to carefully examining policies and practices within the homeless services system and look forward to working with our City, County, and community partners to institute practices that advance equity within other systems of care that also serve those experiencing and at risk of homelessness.

LAHSA is also committed to infusing the use of a racial equity lens throughout all aspects of the organization’s work, in alignment with the recommendations of this Committee. As a key first step in this endeavor, we are establishing a racial equity initiative within the organization. This ongoing initiative will focus both on ensuring equity in the agency’s hiring and contracting practices, and on fostering the use of a racial equity lens in all aspects of the organization’s work.

On behalf of LAHSA staff and the LAHSA Commission, we extend our sincere thanks to the partners and community members, particularly the individuals with lived experience of homelessness, who were vital contributors to this work. We appreciate their active engagement throughout this process and the rich insights they offered to inform the Committee’s work. And finally, we want to acknowledge the members of this Committee for their tireless dedication of time, energy, and passion to this endeavor, and for their willingness to engage in often challenging but critical conversations. We are grateful for their contributions and look forward to working together to carry out the urgent recommendations they have put forth.

Sincerely,

Kelli Bernard  
Chair, LAHSA Commission  
Vice Chair, Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness

Jacqueline Waggoner  
LAHSA Commissioner  
Chair, Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness

Peter Lynn  
Executive Director  
LAHSA
Executive Summary

Black people are more likely than White people to experience homelessness in the United States, including in Los Angeles County. In 2017, Black people represented only 9% of the general population in Los Angeles County yet comprised 40% of the population experiencing homelessness. The impact of institutional and structural racism in education, criminal justice, housing, employment, health care, and access to opportunities cannot be denied: homelessness is a by-product of racism in America.
In April 2018, the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) launched the Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness (hereafter referred to as Committee). The purpose of the Committee was to: 1) examine the factors contributing to the overrepresentation of Black people among the population experiencing homelessness, 2) identify opportunities to increase racial equity within the homeless service delivery system, and 3) develop recommendations to more effectively meet the needs of Black people experiencing homelessness. To guide its efforts, the Committee employed a six-step Racial Equity Toolkit process. The Toolkit process provided the basis from which the Committee developed recommendations.

As part of the Toolkit process, the Committee adopted a racial equity outcome to guide its work: **Eliminate racial disparities impacting Black people experiencing homelessness by ensuring racial equity within the homeless crisis response system.**

Through a series of community listening sessions and focus groups, the Committee learned from service providers and community members and heard directly from youth and adults with lived experience in areas with high concentrations of Black people experiencing homelessness. Additionally, a group of researchers from the Race Equity Working Group of the Homelessness Policy Research Institute (HPRI) provided research and data analysis in response to various questions facing the Committee. Key insights illuminated through this multi-layered community feedback and data analysis provided the basis for the Committee’s recommendations, which are outlined in this report.

The Committee examined institutional barriers facing Black people in various upstream and mainstream systems—including housing and labor markets, the criminal justice system, and the child welfare system—and explored how these barriers lead to overrepresentation in the population experiencing homelessness. The Committee also examined the experiences and outcomes of Black people within the homeless services system and in permanent housing more broadly (including public and affordable housing).
Key insights that emerged from the Committee’s work include the following:

- For lasting change to occur, institutional barriers across agencies and mainstream systems must be dismantled to eliminate the racial disparities and systemic racism affecting Black people experiencing homelessness.

- The mounting affordable housing crisis in the state and in the Los Angeles region, paired with persistently low, stagnant, and declining wages, exacerbates homelessness and particularly affects Black people.

- The interconnectedness of incarceration and homelessness creates a revolving door that only serves to make the plight of homelessness more challenging and complex.

- Black people experiencing homelessness have disproportionately high rates of child welfare system involvement.

- Care and empathy are crucial components of outreach and case management services—and of policy and program design. These components must be embedded within agency leadership and decision-making bodies that support direct service delivery. When asked, “What would have kept you from becoming homeless?” participants, in different words, responded, “having someone who cared about me.”

- The inclusion of Black people with lived experience of homelessness in all aspects of program and policy design, implementation, evaluation, and service delivery, is critical to ensuring that programs and services effectively meet the needs of those they are intended to serve.

- The quality of interim housing varies across facilities, and for some, living in a shelter can be a traumatizing or re-traumatizing experience.
Executive Summary

Despite local investment to expand the permanent housing resources within the Los Angeles County Coordinated Entry System (CES), a gap in housing availability remains, as the number of participants in need of permanent housing resources greatly exceeds the available supply. This scarcity of resources often results in people living in unsheltered conditions or in interim housing for extended periods of time.

Although CES appears to place Black people experiencing homelessness into housing at proportional rates, Black people served through CES permanent housing interventions experienced a higher rate of returns to homelessness than all other race and ethnic groups. This points to a significant need for further research to better understand what is causing this disparity and what additional supports are needed to improve housing stability and retention.

Recommendations to address barriers identified throughout the Committee’s work

The Committee developed a robust set of recommendations that aim to address barriers identified throughout the Committee’s work. These recommendations are outlined in Part III of this report and address a wide range of issues. The overarching aims of the recommendations included within this report are to:

- Improve data collection, analysis, and collaborative research to better understand and track issues affecting Black people experiencing homelessness.
- Advance racially-equitable policies, programs, and funding across institutions, including LAHSA, homeless service providers, and City and County agencies.
- Enhance cross-system collaboration and partnerships to more effectively prevent and reduce the time spent in homelessness and improve housing retention and stability for Black people experiencing homelessness.
- Expand capacity building and training opportunities to ensure service providers understand the impact of institutional racism and racial bias on Black people experiencing homelessness.
- Target investments and funding enhancements to initiatives aimed at reducing disparities and ensuring sufficient funding for services and programs supporting Black people experiencing homelessness.
- Implement targeted improvements to service delivery within the Los Angeles County CES and other systems of care in which Black people experiencing homelessness are overrepresented, to address barriers and improve outcomes for Black people.
- Expand advocacy at federal, state, and local government levels for progressive and racially equitable policies, programs, and (direct or indirect) funding impacting Black people experiencing homelessness.

This report summarizes the key insights and recommendations that emerged from the Committee’s work and outlines the commitment and action needed from LAHSA, the County of Los Angeles, the City of Los Angeles, and service providers, to eliminate racial disparities impacting Black people experiencing homelessness and achieve greater racial equity in the homeless crisis response system.
Next Steps

Areas for Future Research

LAHSA is partnering with HPRI’s Race Equity working group to improve data collection, analysis, and collaborative research to better understand and track issues affecting Black people experiencing homelessness. HPRI is a countywide effort that includes over 30 scholars and policymakers collaborating on research to end homelessness in Los Angeles County. HPRI’s Race Equity working group is dedicated to conducting research to understand and reduce inequities in and around the homelessness system, with a purposeful emphasis on racial inequities.
Next Steps

In alignment with the Committee’s recommendations, the research process will be collaborative, involving people with lived experience, Black people, and service providers in conceptualizing, planning, and conducting research, including by engaging clients who have had successful outcomes to determine success factors, and clients who have returned to homelessness to understand causes. In order to conduct the necessary research, HPRI and LAHSA will seek funding to support both quantitative and qualitative analyses into the issues identified by the Committee.

Analysis of the CES Triage Tools’ equity impacts is one of the Committee’s initial priorities. This analysis will build on previous research focused on the youth triage tool’s application in several cities across the country, examining the relationship among tool results, recommended intervention, and success in that intervention—and whether there are specific characteristics (including race) that influence outcomes in particular intervention types. LAHSA’s partnership will allow for not only the expansion of this body of research beyond the youth population to include adults and families, but also a deeper understanding of local trends in both the accuracy of CES Triage Tools to predict successful outcomes in various interventions and in the equity of these outcomes.

Next Steps Required to Advance Racial Equity Outcomes

To reach the Committee’s racial equity outcome, local government leadership must advance racial equity and work in collaboration with regional and national partners, both within government, with community partners, and across sectors. Already, Los Angeles City, Los Angeles County, and LAHSA have begun to take actions to address some of the structural issues that too often contribute to Black people experiencing homelessness, as highlighted throughout the report. Critical next steps are highlighted below.

Capacity building: Implementing racial equity strategies—whether providing trainings to direct service providers, collecting and analyzing data, creating new and/or expanded programs, or hiring additional case managers—require adequate resources. Advancing racial equity is reliant on appropriate funding and adequate staffing. Whether it is new funding or a reallocation of current resources, LAHSA and its City And County partners must ensure that sufficient long-term resources are available to implement the recommendations contained within this report. Additionally, funders must commit to ensuring that their budget review process includes an examination of racial equity impact and that budgetary decisions consider and advance racial equity goals.

Establishing methods for evaluation and measurement of racial equity efforts: Working with governmental and community partners, LAHSA will establish methods to evaluate the varied recommendations selected for implementation. No matter how well intended it is, not every recommendation will, in fact, meet its objective; thus, evaluation and measurement processes must be developed to ensure policies and programs are producing the desired outcome. Each initiative, from the development of new trainings, to offering more comprehensive, wrap-around services, to funding more supportive housing units, must be subject to objective quantitative and qualitative analyses to determine: 1) whether the particular policy or program is working as intended and advancing racial equity, and 2) if not, what adjustments are needed to ensure effectiveness or what other strategy is better suited to accomplish the objective.
Accountability and report-back: The evaluation of policies and programs, as discussed above, is a critical aspect of accountability. Evaluation results—both racial equity gains and disappointments—must consistently inform government leaders, agencies, community partners, and the public. Ongoing community report-back engagement serves multiple purposes. First, it is responsive to the community’s desire for transparent, straightforward, timely, and consistent information regarding homeless services efforts. Second, it provides an infrastructure for community feedback and for data collection. Most importantly, reporting back sends a powerful message: those responsible for government services are accountable to those experiencing homelessness. Ultimately, the report-back function provides the basis for building trust and relationships with the community, which are critical to creating real and lasting change.

Building the movement for racial equity: Responsibility for and commitment to racial equity remains relatively new to government agencies. LAHSA’s racial equity efforts and commitment to sharing its successes and challenges, while learning from its partners and community, supports the movement for racial equity that is growing locally and across the nation. LAHSA’s opportunity is to advance the use of a racial equity toolkit approach in all areas of its work, to collaborate on and promote other racial equity efforts within government, and to serve as an important voice for racial equity within the homeless crisis response system.

To view the full report, visit www.lahsa.org.
Appendix: Committee Members

**LAHSA Commission Committee Members**
Jacqueline Waggoner, *LAHSA Commission, Chair*
Kelli Bernard, *LAHSA Commission, Vice-Chair*

**Committee Members**
Dr. Va LeCia Adams Kellum, *St. Joseph Center*
Chancela Al-Mansour, *Housing Rights Center*
Dr. Edward Anderson, *McCarty Memorial Christian Church*
Dr. Jack Barbour, *Southern California Health & Rehabilitation Program*
Wendell Blassingame, *Skid Row Resident/Veteran*
Rachel Brasher, *LA City Councilmember, Marqueece Harris-Dawson, Council District 8*
Dr. Oliver Buie, *Holman United Methodist Church*
Chela Demuir-Cartier, *Unique Woman’s Coalition*
Robin Hughes, *Abode Communities*
Janet Kelly, *Sanctuary of Hope*
Monique King-Viehland, *Community Development Commission of the County of Los Angeles*
Veronica Lewis, *SSG/HOPICS*
Juantan Mark, *Los Angeles County Department of Health Services*
Nova Mirari, *Homeless Youth Forum of Los Angeles*
Anita Nelson, *SRO Housing Corporation*
Alisa Orduna, *City of Santa Monica*
Molly Rysman, *Supervisor Sheila Kuehl, Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, Third District*
Suzette Shaw, *Skid Row Resident/Human Services Advocate with homeless lived experience*
Brenda Shackley, *Office of Mayor Eric Garcetti*
Lola Smallwood Cuevas, *Los Angeles Black Worker Center*
Sean Spear, *City of Los Angeles Housing + Community Investment Department*
Reba Stevens, *Advocate with homeless lived experience*
Pete White, *Los Angeles Community Action Network*
Dhakshile Wickrema, *Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, Second District*

**Consultant Support**
Patricia Lally, *Lead Equity Consultant*
Earl Edwards, *Co-Facilitator*

**LAHSA Staff Support**
Sarah Mahin, *Director of Policy & Systems*
Erin Cox, *Policy Supervisor*
Marisa Conner, *Policy Analyst*
Eileen Bryson, *Commission Liaison*