

Press Release



HUNDREDS TO BE SERVED IN BOLD PROPOSAL TO SLASH CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS BY 20 PERCENT IN CATHOLIC CHARITIES, ARCHDIOCESE AND PROVIDENCE COLLABORATION

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PORTLAND, Ore. — Multnomah County's most recent count of homeless citizens tallied 4,177 people; 4,177 men, women and children sleeping in tents, in cars, or on the sidewalk. Even worse, that figure was up 10 percent from the previous count two years earlier. A third of these individuals are chronically homeless and have been living on the street for more than a year. People who are chronically homeless often require significant assistance accessing support services, health care, and drug and alcohol addiction programs in order to succeed in permanent housing.

Citing this chronic housing crisis throughout the nation, [Catholic Charities USA](#) has launched an ambitious plan to slash chronic homelessness by 20 percent. In Portland, this will be the focus of work coordinated by Catholic Charities in partnership with Catholic parishes that choose to offer new housing alternatives to those in need, as well as Providence for health care services.

Portland is one of five cities selected by the national social service agency to be the initial participants in the Healthy Housing Initiative to reduce chronic homelessness by bringing together the resources of local Catholic organizations. In Oregon this includes Catholic Charities, Providence Health & Services, and the Archdiocese of Portland. The other cities are Detroit, Mich., Las Vegas, Nev., St. Louis, Mo., and Spokane, Wash.

According to Deacon Richard Birkel, Ph.D., Catholic Charities of Oregon executive director, the initiative will create permanent supportive housing for up to 300 people in the county. Local Catholic

parishes are integral to the success of the initiative. “Our first step is to meet with parishes to learn of their interest and support for potential projects that could be built on their property or repurpose existing buildings that are not in use,” said Birkel. “We are working with the Archdiocese of Portland to create an inventory of properties in the area that can help with our goal of serving those who are chronically homeless.”

The projects will include small buildings with as few as five and as many as 50 units that can be more easily integrated into parish neighborhoods. The proposals would include a mix of new development and repurposing of existing facilities.

“As people of faith and partners with the communities we live in, we want to help address the issue of homelessness,” said the Most Rev. Alexander K. Sample, Archbishop of Portland. “The plight of our neighbors on the streets weighs on the hearts and minds of so many of us. We are grateful for this opportunity to work together with Catholic Charities and Providence to be part of the solution and provide practical help to those who are desperate for adequate housing and health care.”

In addition to providing housing stability, the initiative will help those served to become self-sufficient through access to financial empowerment services, employment or income assistance and participation in mental and physical health services. The proposal is projected to decrease hospital readmission rates for the newly-housed individuals by at least 50 percent and connect 100 percent of them with primary health care and behavioral health services within 5 years.

“At Providence our Mission calls us to care for the poor and vulnerable,” said Lisa Vance, Providence Health & Services Oregon chief executive. “We believe health is a human right, and partnering with Catholic Charities and the Archdiocese is an innovative and meaningful way to make a difference. So many people who experience chronic homelessness are also dealing with serious mental illness, disabilities, substance abuse disorders and chronic health conditions.”

[Catholic Charities of Oregon](#) already has a successful record of creating [affordable housing](#) and support services for many who are homeless. The organization’s housing transitions program serves more than 1,000 women annually. The Kenton Women’s Village provides transitional housing with intensive case management for up to 20 women at a time, and in the first 18 months the program housed 21 formerly chronically homeless women. A strong indicator of success is that 80 percent of the participants remain in housing a year after entering the programs.

Catholic Charities will build on this success by partnering with Providence to deepen the connections between health and housing. Additional partners, including financial institutions, foundations and local and federal governments, also will collaborate in the multimillion dollar effort.

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*Founded in 1933, **Catholic Charities** is one of the oldest social service organizations in the State of Oregon. Our mission calls us to partner with the most vulnerable among us to achieve lasting solutions to poverty and injustice. We envision a society in which all people: thrive economically, socially, and spiritually; cultivate diverse, respectful and just communities; and, recognize the inherent dignity and sanctity of all human life. In pursuit of our mission and vision, we offer a broad array of social services that not only meet the very basic needs of our clients but that also provide them with the tools, knowledge, and support needed to improve their situations and break free from the bonds of poverty.*

***The Archdiocese of Portland** seeks to bring the love of Jesus to all those in western Oregon through worship, prayer, worship, service and formation. From the coast to the Cascades, our local church serves 450,000 Roman Catholics by infusing the faithful of the Archdiocese with a keen sense of faith, hope, and purpose – all of which can be truly found in a vibrant relationship with Jesus Christ, who offers a love that transforms and unites.*

***Providence Health & Services in Oregon** offers a comprehensive array of health and education services through its eight hospitals, medical clinics, health plans, long-term care facilities and home health services. With more than 20,000 employees, Providence is the state's largest private employer. It is part of Providence St. Joseph Health, which is a national, not-for-profit Catholic health system comprising a diverse family of organizations and driven by a belief that health is a human right. With 51 hospitals, 829 physician clinics, senior services, supportive housing, and many other health and educational services, the health system and its partners employ more than 119,000 caregivers serving communities across seven states – Alaska, California, Montana, New Mexico, Oregon, Texas, and Washington with system offices based in Renton, Wash., and Irvine, Calif.*