

Joint Office of Homeless Services (JOHS) responses to questions from the N/NE Oversight Committee

You can find additional context in PHB's July and September 2021 memos to the N/NE Oversight Committee, and in Attachment A of the July memo, which provides an overview of Coordinated Access.

1. Is Urban League the only partner, if not who are the other partners?

The Urban League is the only Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) services provider for Renaissance Commons, but they are not the only partner agency in Coordinated Access. The adult and family Coordinated Access systems include over 30 participating agencies. You can find a list of those agencies here: ahomeforeveryone.net/coordinatedaccess.

All of our partner agencies have trained staff who complete Coordinated Access assessments. We only refer participants who are interested in culturally specific services for the Black community to Urban League's housing programs, though participants interested in culturally specific services are also offered other available resources. Assessors are trained on how to have a conversation with participants about what culturally specific services are and the intent of this question on the assessment. The network of assessors gives people who are not connected to the Urban League an opportunity to receive culturally specific services, but our referral process is flexible so that the Urban League can also continue to serve some of the people they are already engaged with in their housing programs.

2. Is there consistent and ongoing funding for the Urban League to do this work?

Yes. The JOHS funds the Urban League to provide a range of services including outreach and engagement, Coordinated Access assessment and navigation, housing placement and retention, and Permanent Supportive Housing. JOHS funding for this base program budget increased significantly over the past six years - from \$0.4M in FY 16 when the contract began to \$1.24M in FY 21. Additionally, in FY 21, as part of its broader COVID-19 emergency response, the JOHS worked with the Urban League to open the first culturally specific emergency shelter in Oregon designed to support a successful transition into permanent housing for Black people experiencing homelessness.

The JOHS is working with the Urban League to further expand their base programming in FY 22. While JOHS funding is subject to annual appropriations by Multnomah County and the City of Portland, we are

committed to protecting and expanding our funding of the Urban League and other culturally specific organizations.

3. What is the future accountability mechanism for checking into this set of units with respect to the goal of housing people with generational ties to NE Portland?

The JOHS will work with PHB, the Urban League and REACH to implement the revised proposal outlined in PHB's September 2021 memo to the N/NE Oversight Committee. We will refer households into the PSH units at Renaissance Commons who are on both the Preference Policy and Coordinated Access lists who are also eligible for PSH and seeking culturally specific services for the Black community.

Households meeting these criteria will be referred in order of Preference Policy points. The JOHS can provide regular updates on progress and demographics of households served in these units to the N/NE Oversight Committee at its meetings annually, or more frequently as requested.

The JOHS and our service partners regularly review demographic data of those served through Coordinated Access to understand and improve access for communities of color. We will also regularly review demographic data of those served at Renaissance Commons through this amended process to make sure that we are effectively serving Black households.

4. What is the diversity of the staff at the Joint Office?

These were the racial demographics of the internal JOHS staff (excluding the Covid-19 response team) as of Spring 2021:

JOHS Office Staff Race/Ethnicity

(41 individuals - 31 FTE and 9 Limited Duration Positions)

- 56.1% Identify as White
- 9.8% Identify as Latino or Hispanic
- 7.3% Identify as Black or African American
- 7.3% Identify as Asian
- 7.3% Identify as Two or More Races
- 7.3% Declined to Answer
- 2.4% Identify as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

We also want to highlight the ways in which the JOHS advances racial equity through our work. While hiring and supporting diverse staff is a critical component of this, it fits into a larger set of strategies. We are working to push racial equity forward both internally through our work with managers and staff, and

externally through our work with partners. We also acknowledge that this is ongoing work and we are persistently identifying strategies to improve upon it.

Some of the ways that the JOHS works to advance racial equity through our work include:

- The JOHS and A Home for Everyone adopted a Racial Equity Lens tool to use in our work and decision making.
- The JOHS works to hire, train and support diverse staff and leadership who are committed to racial equity. Some examples of this include employing interview questions that center experiences and competencies related to advancing racial equity and valuing the expertise gained through lived experience; holding monthly all-staff equity meetings for shared equity learning and planning; holding bi-monthly identity-based affinity group spaces to support one another and to unpack the impacts of racism and White supremacy on us as individuals and on our work; and developing work plans that center racial equity.
- The JOHS has an Equity Manager who oversees a team charged with supporting racial equity initiatives and holding the office accountable to racial equity commitments. This team is also supported by an Equity Committee that includes staff from across the JOHS who review policies and practices through an equity lens and provide recommendations to the office.
- The JOHS includes questions about racial equity and cultural responsiveness in solicitations and procurements, as well as evaluation criteria related to an organizations' ability to effectively serve communities of color.
- The JOHS includes racial equity standards in all contracts, and requires that all contractors develop and maintain an equity plan and incorporate culturally responsive practices into their service delivery models.
- The JOHS invests in culturally specific organizations to provide a range of services from outreach and engagement to permanent housing and retention services, and prioritizes new funds for culturally specific organizations.
- The JOHS works with our service partners to collect and analyze demographic data related to who is served in our programs and the outcomes of those programs. The data is broken out by inclusive race and ethnicity categories. This data is shared with the A Home For Everyone Coordinating Board quarterly, and is reviewed regularly by JOHS

staff and system-level leadership teams to inform programming and to ensure that each community of color is accessing services at or above the rate that they appear in the homeless population, and achieving outcomes at or above those of non-Hispanic, White participants.

5. Who is developing (re-developing) the assessment?

Adult and family system providers are working with JOHS staff and an outside technical assistance (TA) provider, Focus Strategies, to create a new assessment tool and re-evaluate our policies and processes. We selected Focus Strategies in part because of their demonstrated commitment to incorporating racial equity into their work with communities. The new tool process and revision of our policies is occurring under the leadership of the Coordinated Access adult and family systems of care and the assessment oversight committee. The oversight committee has eleven members from ten organizations - six of the ten organizations are culturally specific and the majority of committee members have lived experience of homelessness. Final decisions by the JOHS and our governing board related to the new assessment tool and revised system policies are heavily weighted by the recommendations and feedback from these groups.

The next phase of the project is our community engagement process with a qualified vendor who can provide culturally responsive and culturally specific engagement. We are still in the selection process for this vendor. The focus of this engagement will be BIPOC households with lived experience of homelessness since these are the communities most disproportionately impacted by homelessness and often overlooked in standardized assessments.

6. How/who decides if an applicant gets onto the list?

Everyone who meets basic eligibility requirements and completes a Coordinated Access assessment is placed on the prioritized list. Basic eligibility requirements vary somewhat by population-specific system based on the requirements of the resources available, but generally include anyone who is experiencing or at imminent risk of experiencing homelessness (including households who are doubled up or in other unstable or non-permanent situations). More than thirty-five partner organizations across the DV, youth, family and adult systems support households across the County to receive an assessment that gets them on a Coordinated Access (CA) list. Households can connect with CA through community hotlines, shelters and day centers. People can self-refer to receive a Coordinated Access assessment,

and many providers outside of the homeless services system refer people into the system to receive an assessment. Mobile teams conduct outreach to those least likely to seek out services in the absence of special outreach, including communities of color. This includes outreach through community gathering places such as churches, schools, libraries, community centers, and community events. There are mobile teams that focus on engaging with different populations including the Black community, and there are plans to expand those mobile teams this fiscal year.

7. How many Black people have been served through the program with Urban League? Joint office?

The presentation gave us data on referrals, but not placements or outcomes for Black people. What is that data?

Below are some data points to give you a sense of how Black people are served in A Home For Everyone (AHFE) housing programs and by the Urban League specifically. AHFE housing programs include those funded directly by the JOHS as well as those funded by other local, state and federal sources. We are sharing FY 20 data because FY 21 ended in June and the year-end data is not yet available. You can find more data on the AHFE website at: <http://ahomeforeveryone.net/outcome-reports>.

- In FY 20 (between July 2019 and June 2020), 12,240 people were served in a housing program. 63% of people served identified as BIPOC and 39% of people served identified as Black or African American.
- In FY 20, 4,860 people were served in a Permanent Supportive Housing (a subset of the 12,240 listed above). 45.9% of people served identified as BIPOC and 20% of people served identified as Black or African American. *Please note: at the JOHS's May presentation to the N/NE Oversight Committee, we presented data on people in adult-only households served in PSH. This data reflects all people served in PSH (including families with children).*
- In FY 20, 106 people were referred and housed through Coordinated Access for adults. 69.8% served identified as BIPOC and 34% of people served identified as Black or African American. *Please note: at the JOHS's May presentation to the N/NE Oversight Committee, the data we presented said 103 people were referred and housed and 31.1% identified as Black or African American. Data has been updated since that meeting so that is why there is a slight change in numbers.*

- Among those who were able to be contacted after program exit, 85% of all individuals and 84% of Black/African American individuals were still in housing 12 months after exiting a permanent housing program.
- In FY 20, 51 people were served in Project Haven PSH, a culturally specific PSH project led by the Urban League. 100% of people served identified as Black or African American.

8. How are people that are not living on the street/in a shelter included? Black people are more likely to be couch surfing, doubling up, living in cars in a relative’s driveway, etc.

The substantial majority of our permanent supportive housing (PSH) relies on federal, state, and now Metro resources that can only serve individuals and families experiencing “chronic homelessness”. This includes people with disabling conditions who are experiencing long-term “literal homelessness” (living outside, in shelters, cars, RVs, or other places “not meant for human habitation”), and generally does not include those who are doubled up. Black and African American households are significantly overrepresented among those experiencing chronic homelessness - in the 2019 Point-In-Time County¹, Black and African American households made up 13% of the population experiencing chronic homelessness compared to 7.2% of the general population in Multnomah County. Our City, County and certain Metro resources are more flexible and can serve people experiencing various forms of homelessness (including people who are doubled up or couch surfing). Recognizing the tension between the eligibility restrictions of many of our funding sources and our racial equity commitments, we work with our provider partners to prioritize flexible funds for programs designed to serve communities of color, immigrant communities and other communities where the experience of homelessness often includes being doubled up. We fund outreach and engagement teams that focus on engaging with people experiencing less visible forms of homelessness, including those who are living in cars or RVs, camping in remote areas, doubled up or couch surfing.

¹ The Point-in-Time (PIT) Count is a nationwide effort every two years to count the number of unsheltered people on a single night in January. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) started the count in 2003, each community does their own count, and it is a requirement to receive federal funding for homeless programs. The PIT Count is sometimes considered an undercount, as it only counts people that are visibly experiencing homelessness on a single night. See “3.1 What the PIT Count Does and Does Not Tell Us” in the JOHS report, [2019 Point-In-Time Count of Homelessness in Portland/Gresham/Multnomah County, Oregon](#).

9. What's the plan to report back on progress to the OC?

The JOHS can provide regular updates on progress and demographics of households served in the PSH units at Renaissance Commons to the N/NE Oversight Committee at its meetings annually, or more frequently as requested.

10. Millions of dollars are going into the JOHS for services, how does the contract with Urban league compare to contracts for non-culturally specific organizations?

The JOHS is committed to investing in culturally specific organizations and programs to provide a range of services from outreach and engagement to permanent housing and retention services. In FY 21, approximately 25% of the JOHS's program budget was designated to fund culturally specific services (\$13.9M of \$55.6M), and many other programs prioritize services for BIPOC households. The JOHS is currently working to allocate the new Metro Supportive Housing Services funding, which will bring in up to \$100M/year in new dollars for at least the next ten years, and is committed to prioritizing funds for culturally specific organizations.

We recognize the critical role that culturally specific organizations play in serving communities of color, and we also hold all of our grantees responsible for incorporating culturally responsive practices into their service delivery models.

11. I don't get what's being promised (and tracked ongoing) about these *units.*

There are 30 units of Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) at Renaissance Commons. PHB's July 2021 memo to the N/NE Oversight Committee provides context for why and how these 30 units of PSH were created. The JOHS is providing rent subsidies and funding to the Urban League to provide ongoing onsite services to support the households placed into these 30 units.

PSH is specifically designed and funded to serve individuals and families experiencing chronic homelessness (those with disabling conditions who are experiencing long-term literal homelessness). Black and African American households are significantly overrepresented within the chronic homeless population. The JOHS will work with PHB, the Urban League and REACH to implement the revised proposal outlined in PHB's September 2021 memo to the N/NE Oversight Committee. We will refer households who are on both the Preference Policy and Coordinated Access lists who are also eligible for PSH and seeking culturally specific services for the Black community.

12. Is it that always these 30 units are only for UL served individuals? And that they will always be serving only culturally matched folks?

The updated proposal prioritizes referrals into these 30 units for households who are on both the Preference Policy and Coordinated Access lists, and who are eligible for PSH and seeking culturally specific services for the Black community. Every third referral will come directly from the Urban League to enable service continuity for households they are already working with who need PSH. We're including information below about the initial referral process used for these 30 PSH units at Renaissance Commons, the current Coordinated Access process, and the proposed future process.

Initial process: The initial process was to overlay the N/NE Preference list with households entered into the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)² who were eligible for PSH. This was the first time a process like this was used and it resulted in a significant number (approximately 10 of 30) of Non-Hispanic, White households being placed into a culturally specific PSH project intended to serve Black households. To address this issue, we adjusted the process to referring households on the N/NE Preference list who were in HMIS and eligible for PSH, and who were also seeking culturally specific services. Twenty-two of the thirty PSH units were filled through this process.

Current process: Once the initial process was exhausted, we shifted to using the Coordinated Access process for referring households into a culturally specific program. Through this process, $\frac{1}{3}$ of referred households already have a relationship with the culturally specific organization and the remaining $\frac{2}{3}$ of households are seeking culturally specific services, but not necessarily connected to the organization. For Renaissance Commons, Urban League identified all 8 of the remaining initial referrals from the Coordinated Access list. These 8 households all identify as Black or African American.

Proposed future process: PHB's September 2021 memo to the N/NE Oversight Committee outlines an updated proposal for referrals into these 30 PSH units going forward. This process is also described in our response to Question 13 below.

² The Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) is the primary database used for collecting, storing, and reporting on data from the homeless services system. The HMIS database is mandated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to receive federal funding. The City of Portland manages the HMIS database for Multnomah County and for other Homeless Continuum of Care systems across Oregon.

13. Getting away from the preference policy means there are several links that have to be aligned to get to the end of focusing on people with historic ties.

Based on the Committee's feedback, data from the initial lease-up of the PSH units at Renaissance Commons, and data from the current N/NE Preference and Coordinated Access Lists, JOHS worked with PHB and the Urban League to come up with the updated proposal that's outlined in PHB's September 2021 memo. The updated proposal is to refer households who are on both the Preference Policy and Coordinated Access lists who are also eligible for PSH and seeking culturally specific services for the Black community. Households meeting these criteria will be referred in order of Preference Policy points. Every third referral will come directly from the Urban League to enable service continuity for households they are already working with who need PSH.

PHB and the JOHS cross-referenced the two lists in August 2021 and found that of the 342 people on the Preference Policy List, 8 people were on both lists and eligible for PSH. Of those 8 people, 5 were also seeking culturally specific services for the Black community. The new proposed process would prioritize these households for referral into the PSH units at Renaissance Commons.

14. I would like to hear zero more about the JOHS internal process except its commitment to maintaining funding and relationship with UL.

The Urban League is an essential partner for the JOHS and we are committed to prioritizing funding to sustain and build upon that partnership, both for Renaissance Commons and in other areas of our homelessness response.