

A photograph of a modern apartment building with colorful balconies in shades of red, teal, and yellow. The building has a contemporary design with large windows and metal railings. The image is overlaid with a white semi-transparent box containing text.

# **STATUS OF STAKEHOLDER DISCUSSIONS**

**YEAR 2**

**REVISED - DECEMBER 23, 2022**

**Pathways to Housing Security**

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

# THE WILLIAM D. RUCKELSHAUS CENTER

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

The William D. Ruckelshaus Center is a neutral resource for collaborative problem solving in the State of Washington and the Pacific Northwest, dedicated to assisting public, private, tribal, non-profit, and other community leaders in their efforts to build consensus and resolve conflicts around difficult public policy issues. It is a joint effort of the University of Washington (hosted by the Daniel J. Evans School of Public Policy and Governance) and Washington State University (hosted and administered by WSU Extension).

For more information visit: <https://ruckelshauscenter.wsu.edu/about/>



## William D. Ruckelshaus Center Project Team

Phyllis Shulman, M.A. Project Co-Lead  
Bridget B. Kelly, M.D., Ph.D., Burke Kelly Consulting  
Jed Chalupa, M.A.  
Kevin Harris, M.P.A., M.B.A.  
Amanda Murphy, M.M.A.  
Molly Stenovec, M.S.  
Alec Solemslie, M.Sc., M.P.A.  
Hazel Wilburn, B.S.

### DISCLAIMER

The following status update was prepared by the William D. Ruckelshaus Center (Center). University leadership and the Center's Advisory Board support the preparation of this and other reports produced under the Center's auspices. This information does not represent the views of the universities, Advisory Board members, or the Center's staff and faculty.

## **SUMMARY OF KEY THEMES**

This update on the status of stakeholder discussions was prepared to satisfy part of the second reporting requirement under Section 6 of House Bill 1277 (HB 1277). The overall goal of HB 1277, Section 6 is to engage in a multi-year endeavor to explore the nature and scope of housing instability and homelessness in Washington, develop a shared information base, and engage key entities in the development of options and recommendations for a long-term strategy to improve services and outcomes and develop a path to permanent housing solutions. The issue of homelessness and housing instability is complex and multi-faceted. To explore the issue and identify how to address it requires attention to the social and political landscape and the role of various relevant structural aspects.

This status update describes the progress made in 2022 by the William D. Ruckelshaus Center (the Center) toward the ultimate objective of identifying desired principles, options, and recommendations for a long-term strategy to improve housing security in Washington State. It provides key themes emerging from interviews so far about what facilitated discussions, with whom, and around which areas of concerns and opportunities would be most useful in 2023.

Four major themes are worth highlighting as key areas of potential emphasis in further discussions among stakeholders. The first is a shift in how the causes of homelessness and housing instability are understood, grappling with the reality that there are multiple factors that contribute, both to the high per capita rate of homelessness and also to the circumstances and needs of those experiencing or at risk of homelessness. For a strategy to be comprehensive, the input from stakeholders indicates a need to shift away from seeking to identify and isolate a shortlist of 'root' causes of homelessness and use those to drive strategy. Rather, there is an emerging recognition of the necessity to design a strategy that takes into account the multiple known contributing factors and the compounding ways in which they interact to affect housing security at every level and stage.

Another major theme from our interviews is a clear picture of the many interdependent pieces that make up the housing assistance landscape in Washington State. The systems, services, and providers that contribute to housing assistance are situated in various, sometimes disparate contexts. A wide range of services are relevant and needed, but are implemented in various settings, by practitioners from many disciplines, funded through multiple governmental and nongovernmental sources, and operating under the management or regulatory oversight of diverse agencies with varying policies, incentives, and constraints. As a result, efforts to address homelessness and housing instability are often siloed and fragmented.

Layering these two themes within the concept of housing security becomes even more complex. Housing needs are often thought of in categories, for example: emergency shelter, supportive housing, transitional housing, affordable housing, the real estate market. However, most stakeholders describe housing security as a continuum, and effective programs or policies in any of the categories ultimately depend on the state of the rest of the categories. Emergency shelter is temporary by design but serves that function well only if there is a connection to affordable permanent housing options, for which availability is affected by the housing market, which shifts alongside patterns of growth and the economy.

Third, the insights shared by interviewees helped elucidate that many of the components needed in a long-term strategy have aspects that are in tension with each other. Navigating those tensions is necessary for an integrated, effective, and widely accepted strategy. Illuminating and grappling with tensions in complex issues can create dynamic energy, supply diversity of thought, and bring focus to the areas that have the most potential to produce meaningful change. These tensions could be areas of opportunity if the discourse shifts away from treating them as discrete and opposing choices (e.g., right or wrong, most or least important). A more constructive view would be to recognize them as coexisting, interconnected considerations that reveal a continuum of options. A productive discourse can consider what adjustments to the balance between and among them is needed to better address homelessness and housing instability.

Finally, a cumulative theme is that the interview insights so far have begun to identify and clarify what conditions would be needed in order to formulate and implement a long-term strategy to make sustained progress towards housing security in Washington State. These conditions include grappling with central tensions, recognizing a holistic and complex understanding of the issues, adopting a systems lens that takes into account inherent interdependencies, cultivating a shared foundational understanding, identifying guiding principles, and building and sustaining trusting relationships. Tending to these conditions will make it possible to develop a strategy that provides a comprehensive framework in which to formulate, assess, and adapt actions over time that can work in combination—and risk failing in isolation.

The Center is now turning to the work we have planned for 2023. We will continue to employ multiple methodologies in an iterative approach. Using the available knowledge base and broadening our facilitated discussions, we will identify desired principles, options, and recommendations for a long-term strategy, with clarity about the degree of convergence across the various sources of information we have gathered. We anticipate that in our final report in December 2023, we will be able to include the following: guiding principles; potential components for a long-term strategy, with ways to guide investment decisions and ways to assess whether those investments are contributing to the desired results; tangible next steps needed to develop such a strategy; and areas that will benefit from continuous engagement to build and act on collaborative knowledge.

# Table of Contents *(Revised - December 23, 2022)*

<b>Summary of Key Themes . . . . .</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>I. Introduction . . . . .</b>	<b>3</b>
Overall Approach.....	3
Overview of the Policy Landscape.....	4
Summary of Stakeholder Discussions Reported in December 2021.....	9
Approach to Stakeholder Discussions in 2022.....	9
<b>II. Interview Insights</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Concerns, Barriers, and Opportunities.....</b>	<b>12</b>
The Challenge of Scale.....	12
Response That Is Not Fit-For-Purpose.....	12
Factors That Contribute to Homelessness and Housing Instability.....	13
Knowledge Base.....	14
Differences in Worldviews.....	14
Interdependencies.....	14
Sense of Opportunity.....	15
<b>Desired Principles.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Fundamental Questions.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Engagement Process Suggestions and Cautions.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>III. Laying the Groundwork for a Long-Term Strategy</b>	<b>19</b>
Understanding Homelessness and Housing Instability.....	20
Navigating the Complexity of Housing Assistance.....	22
Central Tensions.....	23
Conditions Needed For A Long-Term Strategy.....	25

<b>IV. Looking Ahead: Stakeholder Discussion Plans for 2023</b>	<b>25</b>
Guiding Questions For Design of Facilitated Discussions.....	25
Cycles of Facilitated Discussions.....	27
<b>V. Conclusion . . . . .</b>	<b>27</b>
Appendix A: About the Ruckelshaus Center	
Appendix B: Interviewees in 2022	
Appendix C: Guiding Questions for Discussions	

# I. Introduction

In HB 1277 Section 6, part (2), the Legislature calls for stakeholder discussions about root causes of housing instability and homelessness within Washington State and about concerns, barriers, opportunities, and desired principles for a long-term strategy. The goals of such a strategy would be to improve outcomes and services for persons at risk of or experiencing homelessness and develop pathways to permanent housing solutions.

The William D. Ruckelshaus Center (the Center) is carrying out these stakeholder discussions (see Appendix A for more information about the Center). This status update is part of the second annual interim report requested in the legislation. The third culminating report in 2023 will provide options and recommendations for a long-term strategy that have been identified through facilitated discussions.

In this status update, we first provide our overall approach, a brief overview of the policy landscape as context for our stakeholder engagement, a summary of insights from interviews conducted in 2021 and reported previously, and a description of our approach to stakeholder discussions in 2022. We then report the key themes that are emerging out of the insights from the 2022 discussions. This is followed by a preview of our planned approach to facilitated stakeholder discussions in 2023.

## OVERALL APPROACH

Homelessness and housing instability represent one of modern society's most complex and multifaceted issues. To respond to this, a long-term strategy must similarly be multidimensional and versatile. As the Center draws on its extensive experience convening diverse groups to inform public policy and designs engagement around this issue, we have recognized the need to shift from convening models that engage a defined subset of individuals in timebound efforts on isolated topics, to a more iterative and adaptive engagement approach. With this recognition, we utilize the *Deliberative Cycle of Inquiry* mindset as a practical model to describe and guide our work.<sup>1</sup>

The *Deliberative Cycle of Inquiry* model is well suited to the goals of this legislation because it recognizes that multi-faceted and exceedingly complex issues, such as homelessness and housing instability, can never be fully addressed with a one-off event or even a series of events aimed at identifying singular, discrete actions intended to solve the issue. These kinds of issues cannot be solved but instead need to be continuously managed. This is further reinforced by what we have heard in interviews, as discussed below. Developed to help grapple with this kind of complexity, the model offers cyclical and continuous engagement comprised of four stages: *Issue analysis, Convening, Facilitating deliberative engagement, and Reporting*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Carcasson, M., & Sprain, L. (2016). Beyond problem solving: Reconceptualizing the work of public deliberation as deliberative inquiry. *CommunicationTheory*, 26. 41-63. doi: 10.1111/comt.12055

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

The purpose of this iterative approach is not to seek immediate or isolated actions. Instead, it is a process to deepen shared understanding, move toward coherence across perspectives, and build collaborative efforts that are sustained over time, allowing for shifts as the context changes (such as the ongoing effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic). Using this cyclical approach will enable ideas for how to improve the response to homelessness and housing instability to emerge throughout the process. The approach provides a framework for us to periodically regroup and deepen our analysis, then continue our facilitation of relevant stakeholders. We will refine emerging ideas in multiple collaborative engagements designed to inform each other.

To date, the initial fact-finding (described in the *Status of Fact-Finding* part of this report) and stakeholder discussions have used several cycles of issue analyses, project team convenings, and facilitated engagements on a small scale through semi-structured interviews, described in the sections that follow. The later preview of our work in 2023 describes how we will continue to follow the *Deliberative Cycle of Inquiry* as we progressively broaden our convenings and facilitated deliberative engagements designed to iteratively identify options and recommendations. This will culminate in an integrated synthesis, yielding a report that identifies where our multiple lines of work converge on options and recommendations for a long-term strategy toward housing security. A further aspiration is that our process could establish precedents for how collaborative contributions can continue to develop and adapt a long-term strategy as it is implemented, as will be necessary to address a shifting issue as complex as housing security.

## OVERVIEW OF THE POLICY LANDSCAPE

Efforts to reduce homelessness and increase housing security in Washington State fall under the policy and regulatory arena of agencies and elected bodies at all levels of government and are further affected by the judicial branch through court rulings. The following provides a broad overview as context for our stakeholder discussions in 2022 and as groundwork for our future exploration of how the statutory and regulatory landscape in Washington affects efforts to address homelessness and housing instability.

### *Federal Government*

In the United States, the implementation of housing assistance is, for the most part, decentralized. While states retain much control in addressing the issue of homelessness, they operate in a context of federal policies and resources. Most federal housing assistance is administered through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.<sup>3</sup> The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness coordinates among the multiple federal agencies that have a role in contributing to the response to homelessness. The Council provides tools and information and has developed a federal strategic plan.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.hud.gov/topics>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.usich.gov/tools-for-action/home-together-federal-strategic-plan-to-prevent-and-end-homelessness>

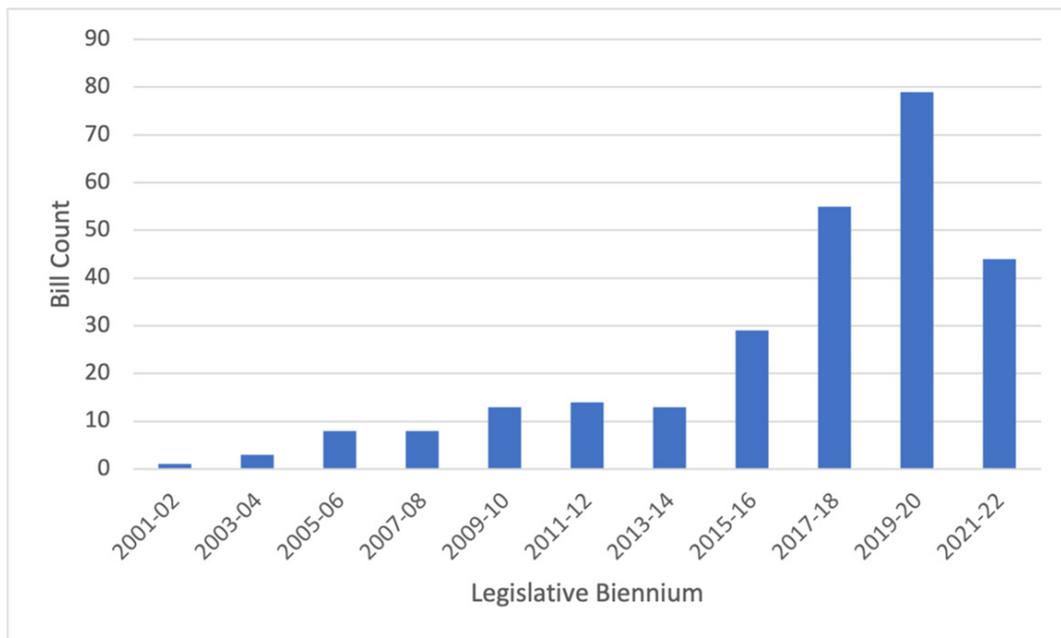
### Washington State Government

Washington State has a similarly decentralized approach, where counties and communities develop and implement programs with resources and guidance from state agencies and the Legislature.

The Washington State Department of Commerce plays a key role, acting as the main coordinator for state and federal housing-related policies and distributing resources to other jurisdictions and communities. Commerce also has roles related to housing that range from capital funding for affordable housing stock<sup>5</sup> to building housing infrastructure<sup>6</sup> to growth management, including housing goals. They are also responsible for a State Strategic Plan and an Annual Report to the Legislature on Washington State’s efforts to address homelessness.<sup>7</sup> Many other state agencies are also involved in work that supports housing security—some of that work is coordinated and informed through entities such as the Washington State Advisory Council on Homelessness and the Interagency Council on Homelessness.<sup>8</sup>

The legislative context in Washington State reflects an increasing response to homelessness over time. As shown in Figure 1, in the last two decades, the overall trend has been an increase in proposed legislation associated with the descriptive tag “Homeless Persons”.<sup>9</sup> There was a peak in the 2019-2020 sessions, in part due to legislative activity in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 1. Legislative Activity Related to “Homeless Persons:” Bills Proposed from 2001-2022



<sup>5</sup> <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/building-infrastructure/housing/housing-trust-fund/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/building-infrastructure/housing/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/serving-communities/homelessness/state-strategic-plan-annual-report-and-audits/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/about-us/boards-and-commissions/homeless-councils/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://app.leg.wa.gov/billinfo/>

During the most recent legislative biennium, 2021-2022, policymakers proposed 44 bills with the descriptive tag “Homeless Persons,” and 12 ultimately became session law. Bills considered in the 2021-2022 biennium reflect a broad range of topics. Many related to funding,<sup>10</sup> homes and housing, mental health, substance use disorders and included either Washington State Department of Commerce or the Health Care Authority. Many bills focused on discrete topics, such as fiscal flexibility for housing during the public health emergency, coordinating transitions from health care facilities, drug and alcohol possession and consumption within housing/shelters, identification documentation for individuals experiencing homelessness, employment and hiring incentives, legal financial support, new taxes to support local homeless support programs, and renter protections. More than 200 government and community-based entities, with organizational missions reflecting a broad array of issues, testified on these bills. The extensive legislative activity, range of topics, and level of engagement from interested organizations provides a glimpse of the breadth and complexity of the housing policy landscape in Washington State.

### *Local Government*

In Washington State, local governments also play a large role in housing. Public funds that provide housing support for persons and households experiencing homelessness are allocated by county, and each county develops a homeless housing plan for its jurisdictional area. These plans must be consistent with local plan guidelines issued by the Department of Commerce, with annual reports on plan accomplishments.<sup>11</sup>

There are a variety of other roles that counties and municipalities have in the response to homelessness and a lack of affordable housing.<sup>12</sup> Local zoning, regulations, fees, and permit procedures determine what housing can be built, using what land, and in what quantity.<sup>13</sup> Local governments also have a role in creating and supporting infrastructure that facilitates housing development and accessibility, such as transportation. They are instrumental in other structural factors that intersect with housing, such as local economic development. In some communities, local governments directly fund affordable housing, through housing levies and funding contributions, and various other forms of housing assistance. Many local governments also develop local comprehensive plans to implement the GMA and address housing security in their local context.

In many places, there are also a variety of partnership or coalition approaches across local jurisdictions. These are formed, for example, to build shared understanding of housing challenges, collaborate on the development of affordable housing, jointly address homelessness, and share resources. Some regions spanning multiple jurisdictions have

<sup>10</sup> <https://medium.com/wagovernor/transformational-investments-in-transportation-housing-and-climate-lead-as-legislature-adjourns-a48a8657d4cf>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/serving-communities/homelessness/local-government-5-year-plans/>

<sup>12</sup> For examples of the options available to municipalities, see [https://wacities.org/docs/default-source/resources/h3manual.pdf?sfvrsn=b5d1594f\\_11](https://wacities.org/docs/default-source/resources/h3manual.pdf?sfvrsn=b5d1594f_11).

<sup>13</sup> For more on the effects of various planning regulations on housing, see the [Department of Commerce, Housing Memorandum: Issues Affecting Housing Availability and Affordability](#).

institutions dedicated to the purpose of coordinating and supporting a regional approach.<sup>14</sup> These institutions carry out activities such as developing regional strategies and needs assessments; supporting jurisdictions in their development of local housing targets, housing strategies, and implementation plans; and providing guidance, technical assistance, and data and information tracking.

### *Court Rulings*

State and local governments are primarily responsible for addressing homelessness and housing, but occasionally face restrictions from federal and state courts. Many of these restrictions have been in response to the increasing reliance of municipal governments on law enforcement to address homelessness through punitive measures. Supreme Court rulings have somewhat limited this practice, with *Papachristou v. City of Jacksonville* (1972)<sup>15</sup> and *Kolender v. Lawson* (1982)<sup>16</sup> which held that overbroad vagrancy laws and vague anti-loitering statutes were a violation of Due Process.<sup>17</sup> In response, more narrowly tailored laws restricting access to public spaces began in the early 1980s and served as the foundation for current anti-nuisance ordinances<sup>18</sup> or ‘quality of life’ laws<sup>19</sup> that became increasingly popular in the 1990s, pioneered by New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.

Anti-nuisance ordinances that punish homeless individuals include laws prohibiting panhandling, begging in public, sleeping in public, sleeping/living in vehicles, loitering, food sharing, and camping in public spaces. These laws have increased since 2006, with 48 states having at least one anti-nuisance law in 2021.<sup>20</sup> Assessing the municipal codes in 187 cities, the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty found that city-wide bans on camping increased 69%, camping bans in select public areas increased nearly 50%, bans on loitering and vagrancy increased 88%, and sitting/lying down bans increased 52%.<sup>21</sup>

Laws criminalizing sleeping in public, sleeping in vehicles, and panhandling have been overturned by federal courts. *Reed v. Town of Gilbert* (2015)<sup>22</sup> may be the most far-reaching of these rulings, as the U.S. Supreme Court held laws that treat speakers or signs differently based on their content receive strict scrutiny. Since the decision, several panhandling laws have been overturned.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, <https://www.psrc.org/our-work/housing>

<sup>15</sup> *Papachristou v. City of Jacksonville* - 405 U.S. 156, 92 S. Ct. 839 (1972)

<sup>16</sup> *Kolender v. Lawson*, 461 U.S. 352 (1983)

<sup>17</sup> Hafetz. (2003). Homeless Legal Advocacy: New Challenges and Directions for the Future. *Fordham Urban Law Journal*, 30(3), 1215.

<sup>18</sup> Saelinger, D. (2006). Nowhere to go: The impacts of city ordinances criminalizing homelessness. *Geo. J. on Poverty Law & Policy*, 13, 545.

<sup>19</sup> Tartakovsky, J. (2021). “From Vagrancy to Homeless Rights: A Brief History of the ‘Law’ of Homelessness.” In Winegarden, W., Tartakovsky, J., Jackson, K., & Rufo, C. F. No Way Home: *The Crisis of Homelessness and How to Fix It with Intelligence and Humanity*. Encounter Books.

<sup>20</sup> National Homelessness Law Center. (2021). Housing not handcuffs 2021: State law supplement. Retrieved from <https://homelesslaw.org/criminalization/>.

<sup>21</sup> National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty. (2021). Housing not handcuffs: Ending the criminalization of homelessness in U.S. Cities. Retrieved from <https://homelesslaw.org/criminalization/>.

<sup>22</sup> *Reed v. Town of Gilbert*, 576 U.S. 155 (2015).

<sup>23</sup> Hudson, D. L. Jr. (2019). The Content-Discrimination Principle and the Impact of *Reed v. Town of Gilbert*. *Case Western Reserve Law Review*, 70(2), 259–282.

While *Reed* has limited the ability to target panhandling, federal decisions regarding access to public spaces are much more narrow and do not prevent cities and states from enforcing anti-nuisance laws to target homelessness (Tartakovsky, 2021).<sup>24</sup> Quality of life laws were prevalent in Washington cities in 2015. In a survey of 72 cities, Olson and MacDonald<sup>25</sup> found that new ordinances targeting individuals experiencing homelessness increased by more than 50%. Over three-quarters of the cities surveyed (78%) targeted sitting in public spaces, and the new ordinances often overlapped to “compound provisions that criminalize multiple, and often unrelated behaviors.”<sup>26</sup> While these laws can reduce the visibility of homelessness in public spaces, they are ineffective for addressing the structural or individual causes of homelessness and they are often expensive.<sup>27</sup>

Long-term impacts of decisions regarding sleeping ordinances are less clear. In *Dessertain v. City of Los Angeles* (2014),<sup>28</sup> the Ninth Circuit found a Los Angeles statute prohibiting living in a vehicle violated the Due Process Clause for being too vague. Recently, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the Ninth Circuit’s decision in *Martin v Boise*, which found sleeping or camping ordinances were a violation of the eighth amendment when enough shelter beds are not available.<sup>29</sup> The finding in *Martin* is narrow and does not prevent criminalizing homelessness in public spaces.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, subsequent trial court rulings have further narrowed the scope of *Martin v Boise* by finding it only prevents city-wide bans, and criminal sanctions and criminal procedures.<sup>31</sup>

While there are limited restrictions in federal case law, the Washington State Supreme Court’s decision in *Seattle v. Long* (2020)<sup>32</sup> will have lasting ramifications for individuals who live in their vehicles. First, the court found the impound fees imposed by Seattle when Long’s truck was impounded were excessive fines in violation of the eighth amendment of the Washington State constitution. Second, the court ruled that since Long’s vehicle was his primary residence, Washington State’s Homestead Act applied. In response, the Washington State Legislature has convened a working group to, among other things, determine how to identify vehicles used as residences, how to modify timelines for auction for vehicles used as residences, and how to determine when towing and storage fees are excessive.<sup>33</sup> The impacts of the *Seattle v Long* ruling and the processes for updating state and municipal law to meet the standards set in the case remain to be seen.

---

<sup>24</sup> Tartakovsky (2021).

<sup>25</sup> Olson, J., MacDonald, S., & Rankin, S. (2015). Washington’s War on the Visibly Poor: A Survey of Criminalizing Ordinances & Their Enforcement [SSRN Scholarly Paper]. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2602318>

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. i

<sup>27</sup> National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (2021).

<sup>28</sup> *Desertain v. City of Los Angeles*, 754 F.3d. 1147 (2014).

<sup>29</sup> Boeckel, C. (2021). *Martin v. Boise: Sleeping in Public* (Case Summary). *Idaho Law Review Spotlight*, 1(2), 1.

<sup>30</sup> *Martin v. City of Boise* (n.d.) *Harvard Law Review*. Retrieved from: [https://harvardlawreview.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/699-706\\_Online.pdf](https://harvardlawreview.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/699-706_Online.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> Tartakovsky (2021).

<sup>32</sup> *City of Seattle v. Long*, 463 P.3d 135 (Wash. Ct. App. 2020).

<sup>33</sup> ESSB 5689, Section 109, lines 16-29.

## SUMMARY OF STAKEHOLDER DISCUSSIONS REPORTED IN DECEMBER 2021

The preceding report for this project, in 2021, provided a broad overview of the historical context and current landscape of housing policies and services and described initial insights from key stakeholders. The stakeholder discussions started in 2021 with the perspectives of those with statewide leadership roles in efforts to address homelessness and housing instability. We conducted semi-structured individual interviews with participants from the Governor's Office, the Office of Financial Management, the Department of Commerce, and the Legislature. The perspectives of these interviewees revealed several common patterns about homelessness and housing instability, including the urgency of this issue in Washington State, the need and motivation to create effective and efficient policy solutions, the importance of regional variation, and the relevance of bipartisan stakeholder buy-in. The stakeholders included in these interviews all described the need to reevaluate approaches in Washington State and to strategically develop evidence-based ways of addressing housing instability and homelessness. A more detailed description of the ideas and themes from these discussions can be found in *Pathways to Housing Security: Phase 1 Report*.<sup>34</sup> These initial discussions served to clarify legislative intent and priorities, to provide an initial understanding of concerns and areas of opportunity, and to shape our overall approach to further fact-finding and stakeholder discussions.

## APPROACH TO STAKEHOLDER DISCUSSIONS IN 2022

### *Analysis and Increasing Capacity*

Building from the foundation provided by the initial stakeholder discussions in 2021, our first step in early 2022 was to further clarify the priority domains of inquiry and plan for our next cycle of stakeholder discussions. To this end, we continued to review relevant background documents and conducted internal consultations with facilitation design experts, experts in housing research and implementation of housing assistance, and our partner team at the Division of Governmental Studies and Services to coordinate our respective workstreams. In parallel, we recruited and onboarded three additional team members, expanding our capacity in engagement design, project management, and facilitation.

### *Planning Our Engagement Approach*

The internal analysis and planning work enabled us to design and implement our next cycle of stakeholder discussions, with the purpose of elucidating what kinds of engagement, with whom, and around which issue areas would most usefully explore what is needed to enable sustained progress towards housing security in Washington State. Our approach, at this stage, was to conduct individual or small group interviews to understand what a range of stakeholders identify as concerns, opportunities, principles, key questions, and suggestions for facilitating productive engagement.

---

<sup>34</sup> <https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2180/2021/12/Pathways-to-Housing-Security-Report-FINAL.pdf>

Engaging stakeholders in interviews allowed for greater flexibility in coordinating timing with a variety of stakeholders based on their individual availability rather than group scheduling. We were also able to elicit insights that were informed by more candor and confidentiality than what small and large group discussions would allow. This was especially important at this stage in our process for two reasons. One was to help us identify and prepare for areas of sensitivity, conflict, or entrenchment. The other was to prompt open thinking about what areas have the highest potential to yield value through subsequent facilitated engagement forums that will be held in 2023.

### *Interview Planning and Participation*

As we reached out to interviewees, we were dedicated to engaging enough of a range of individuals and groups—across roles, sectors, levels of jurisdiction, and regions—to adequately inform the iterative design of convenings and facilitated engagements. Those participating in these interviews to date included key legislative and agency stakeholders; leaders of relevant task forces and working groups; county and city level leadership; providers in housing development, affordable housing, housing assistance, mental health, and substance abuse; stakeholders representing the interests of those experiencing homelessness and housing instability; and university-based subject matter experts. We recognize that to robustly inform a long-term strategy, there is a wider range of roles, perspectives, and experiences needed than those we have spoken with individually so far. We plan to widely expand the number and range of stakeholders included in our facilitated discussions in 2023.

Since July 2022, we have conducted a series of 41 open-ended, semi-structured interviews with a total of 44 interview participants. The individuals who participated are listed in Appendix B. All participants understood that this report would present aggregated themes, with no statement attributed to any individual. Interviewees could also opt out of having their name and affiliation listed in the report. Participants were contacted via email by one member of our project team. Once each interview was scheduled, two or three members of the project team attended, with one or two dedicated to facilitating the interview and one dedicated to taking notes. Each interview took place using a virtual meeting platform (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams) and lasted 30 to 60 minutes depending on the availability of the interviewee. Prior to the scheduled meeting time, we provided participants context about the purpose of the interview and our overarching questions. For each interview, we prepared a tailored guide, prioritizing a subset of interview questions from our template, which can be found in Appendix C.

### *Legislative and Executive Appointees*

In HB 1277, Section 6, the Legislature directed the appointment of elected officials from the two largest caucuses in the Washington State House and Washington State Senate, who were named in 2021, and three gubernatorial appointments from the executive branch, who were named in 2022 (see Table 1). These appointments provide the project team with specific individuals with whom to engage in the State Legislature and Executive Office. During this

reporting period, these appointees were updated or onboarded by email with the offer of a virtual meeting, subject to their availability. As reflected in Appendix C, some of the appointees also participated in interviews.

**Table 1. Legislative and Executive Appointments**

Name	Affiliation
Rep. Frank Chopp	Washington State House of Representatives, Democratic Caucus
Rep. Greg Gilday	Washington State House of Representatives, Republican Caucus
Sen. John Braun	Washington State Senate, Republican Caucus
Sen. Patty Kuderer	Washington State Senate, Democratic Caucus
Teesha Kirschbaum	Washington State Health Care Authority
Melodie Pazolt	Washington State Department of Commerce
Theresa Slusher	Department of Social and Health Services

### *Conversations with Tribal Liaisons*

The legislation specified that the Center interact with willing participants from tribal governments. The Center recognizes that tribal governments have a critical role, including treaty and trust rights, in housing and that government-to-government relationships with Washington State are an important part of housing-related policies and services. Further, tribal organizations and other organizations who serve tribal members are among those involved in providing housing-related programs and services in municipal, county, and state jurisdictions. In this reporting period, we started by reaching out to tribal liaisons in the Department of Commerce, the Legislature, the University of Washington, and Washington State University. We will continue to follow up with these advisors in late 2022 and early 2023 to seek ongoing guidance on how to invite participation in ways that are meaningful and appropriate.

Our conversations with these advisors so far have provided us with guidance on good practices for our outreach as well as specific suggestions that we are currently incorporating in our ongoing cycle of individual and small group engagement. In the near term, we plan to reach out to the tribal liaisons of other state agencies that provide housing assistance or related services, existing coalitions of tribal organizations working in housing, and leaders of tribal housing authorities. The insights shared with us will then inform how we invite broader participation and offer responsive timelines and opportunities for engagement for those tribes and tribal organizations who would like to interact with this work in 2023.

## II. Interview Insights

### CONCERNS, BARRIERS, AND OPPORTUNITIES

As interviewees discussed their priorities for potential facilitated discussions and what kinds of discourse and engagement they think would be most (or least) productive, most described numerous challenges as well as some areas of opportunity. While interviewees did not all share the same priorities, several areas of convergence came up throughout discussions of their top concerns. Many similar themes were raised even when interviewees were talking about the issues at different levels, from direct service provision to local and state policies and strategies. In this section, we have synthesized themes we heard around areas of concern that interviewees tended to describe as barriers to progress, or ‘sticking points,’ that, if ‘unstuck,’ could reveal new opportunities for a long-term strategy to improve how homelessness and housing instability are addressed in Washington State. Identifying these areas will inform our next cycle of engagement, when we will explore specific barriers and ideas about opportunities for change across a larger number and broader range of stakeholder perspectives.

#### *The Challenge of Scale*

Most interviewees expressed concern that the scale of homelessness seems insurmountable and/or intractable even with expanding investment, especially given mixed results in successfully getting individuals into housing solutions. Several people highlighted a related challenge that the scale and severity of homelessness calls for speed, but the approaches that are most effective and lasting require time and patience. In parallel to concerns raised about the scale of homelessness, most interviewees shared a concern about the growing lack of affordable housing across income levels and the relatively small amount of public investment for affordable housing when compared to the vast need. Interviewees gave examples of difficulties in meeting the need for housing security at scale, including not just cost and time but also other challenges. These were in the areas of workforce (such as increasing burden on a limited housing assistance workforce and not enough available workforce in the building industries), policies and regulations (such as eligibility requirements and funding timeframes), and politics (such as resistance to solutions among constituents).

#### *Response That is Not Fit-For-Purpose*

Interviewees who described the challenge of scale noted how the status quo of housing policies and services is not adequate to the need. Many observed that the current response similarly does not match their experiences of other aspects of addressing homelessness and housing security. One pattern frequently described is that the persistent need for an immediate crisis response means that leaders and service providers are stuck in a reactive mode, with so much focus on solving the problems of today that there is little bandwidth

available—whether financial, energetic, or motivational—to explore how to make a more lasting shift for the future. Several people described how little capacity there is for discussions that enable reflection and learning beyond making short-term adjustments at the margins. Some interviewees shared their perspective that the system does not work for big and bold ideas. Others cited that the way things work now tends to reinforce boundaries between stakeholders, such as working in siloes or competing for resources. This can get in the way of working collaboratively even when that is needed and desired.

### *Factors that Contribute to Homelessness and Housing Instability*

In talking about the ‘causes’ of the current homelessness and housing crisis, interviewees emphasized multiple contributing factors. The structural, economic, social, and health factors discussed in interviews included those identified in HB 1277, Section 6 (i.e., shortage of affordable housing; local land use planning and property management policies; unemployment and lack of access to adequate wage jobs; mental health, developmental, and physical disabilities; chemical and alcohol dependency; and family instability and conflict). Interviewees also raised many of the additional factors identified in the literature review described in the *Status of Fact-Finding* part of this report (e.g., income and wealth inequality, structural racism, and other forms of systemic disadvantage). Interviewees also highlighted other specific factors. For example, many emphasized a lack of access to care and services as an exacerbating factor for those experiencing both homelessness and behavioral health needs or chronic illnesses. Another factor that emerged in the interviews is the challenges experienced by those transitioning into or between systems such as immigrating to the US, aging out of the foster care system, or reentering the community from the criminal justice system.

While interviewees have a shared understanding of the multitude of important contributing factors, there was divergence about which are the most substantial, or at the ‘root’. For example, the availability of affordable housing was top of mind across most interviewees. Many saw this as foundational, although there were numerous factors identified that contribute to the lack of affordable housing. Some cautioned that increasing the supply of housing is necessary but not sufficient. Others saw economic security as even more foundational. Still others identified equitable access to housing and the legacy of historically discriminatory policies as the core factor.

Some focused most on what factors explain the high per capita rate of homelessness statewide or in geographic locations within the state. Others focused on the factors that help explain who is most vulnerable and how to best assist those who are experiencing or at imminent risk of homelessness. Many recognized that to be comprehensive, a strategy cannot seek to address some factors at the exclusion of others, but instead will need to grapple with multiple factors and how they connect to each other.

### *Knowledge Base*

With regard to the knowledge base about homelessness and housing instability, two main views emerged among interviewees. Some described a variation of 'we still have more to learn'. Specific examples included needing more data about the causes of homelessness and housing instability in Washington in order to better understand how to address them and more data about what works. Other interviewees described the view that 'we already know what we need to know about the causes and necessary solutions, we just do not have the will to act on that knowledge.' As one put it, "we have the answers, we just don't like them." Some saw doing another study and report, including this work, as avoiding action. These interviewees each presented a sense of certainty about what actions are needed, but the actions they were certain about were not always the same across interviewees.

Between these two seemingly opposite views, some interviewees expressed a more intermediate position, with common ground about some areas where more information is needed. One area was wanting more knowledge about how best to apply available research and examples of successful approaches to diverse contexts and on a larger scale. Another area was concern about the accuracy, accessibility, comprehensiveness, and utility of some of the current data being collected and research being conducted. Among those sharing this more intermediate perspective on the state of the knowledge base, there was a divergence in their comfort level with proceeding based on 'best available' knowledge versus waiting to proceed until more clarity is achieved on what is most likely to work.

### *Differences in Worldviews*

Many interviewees noted that addressing homelessness is difficult in part because of the diverse range of worldviews and multiple, sometimes differing, entrenched narratives about people who experience homelessness, the causes, and the solutions. Among interviewees, some of those differences are clearly recognized, while others may go unrecognized or may be described using language in different ways. Several described a cycle in which the reaction to the increasing visibility of homelessness may reinforce ideas or policies that are already entrenched more than it leads to new ideas and possibilities.

### *Interdependencies*

Most interviewees brought up one or more major forms of interdependence related to housing and homelessness. In some cases, intersections between sectors, such as health and housing, were described as opportunities; but often the theme of interdependence manifested as a concern about fragmentation or silos as a barrier. These included fragmentation across levels of government and jurisdictions, between the public and private sectors, and across domains of policies, programs, and services (health, social services, employment, funding, transportation, planning, and land use). Some further described fragmentation within these categories. One area of fragmentation described by many interviewees is that programs and services are delivered at the local level and are dependent

on context, yet many policies and funding mechanisms remain at the regional, state, and federal levels. Some shared that the understanding of success itself becomes fragmented, as what 'counts' as success differs across levels of government as well as across service sectors. This can be problematic when what contributes to whether success is achieved varies for different populations and in different contexts.

Many interviewees highlighted challenges resulting from interdependencies with the dynamics of supply and demand in the housing market, which some saw as separate from the spheres of influence of those who are involved in homelessness and housing instability. A few went even more broad, noting that there could be both challenges and opportunities as a result of interdependencies with other major issues facing the state, such as the pandemic recovery, economic stability and growth, income and wealth inequality, and climate change.

### *Sense of Opportunity*

When asked about what might make this an opportune time to explore a long-term strategy, many participants described the current elevated attention being paid to housing and homelessness as a window of opportunity. Across interviewees, they saw increasing attention in a variety of contexts, such as:

- media coverage,
- public sentiment,
- role in political campaigns,
- presence in policy discussions,
- number of people experiencing homelessness,
- visibility of encampments,
- increasing sense of "crisis," and
- widening impact of housing unaffordability.

Other concurrent factors that interviewees saw as making this an opportune time for a shift in the status quo included the trend of increased bipartisan support for bills related to housing and homelessness. A few participants specifically mentioned [House Bill 1220](#) as a window of opportunity because it includes by-county needs assessments for housing at different price points, target setting, and reporting.<sup>35</sup> Others mentioned that the recent investments and policy changes related to the pandemic and the recent integration of housing in Medicaid have created the opportunity to try new or scaled up approaches. While interviewees often expressed cautiousness regarding not yet knowing how effective these will be, they also described them as having opened a new sense of possibility.

---

<sup>35</sup> <https://app.leg.wa.gov/bills/summary?BillNumber=1220&Year=2021&Initiative=false>

## DESIRED PRINCIPLES

To help us prepare for future facilitated discussions about desired principles in a long-term strategy, we asked interviewees what they see as core principles that should guide services and policies related to housing. There was variation in their perspectives on what the specific principles should be. However, several thematic areas emerged as important to focus on when we continue our exploration of desired principles, including:

- interdependency of homelessness and housing affordability;
- achieving an equitable response to the homelessness and housing crisis;
- rights, responsibilities, and accountability;
- speed and sustainability;
- central consistency and local specificity;
- clarity about whose voices should contribute in what ways; and
- interdependency of roles and responsibilities across sectors, levels, and jurisdictions.

## FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

We also asked interviewees what they identify as the fundamental questions that need to be explored about homelessness and housing instability. Their responses reflected considerable variety, but overall they tended to talk about the questions they raised in three broad ways:

- foundational questions around which shared understanding or coherence is needed to make progress;
- difficult questions that tend to be avoided or left unresolved, cause conflict, or seem intractable; and
- transformative questions that have the most potential to shift the status quo and change things in significant ways.

Interviewees raised and discussed some questions in ways that could fall into more than one of these categories. For example, some difficult questions would need to be grappled with in order to reach shared understanding. Other difficult questions could, if navigated successfully, transform how those working to address housing instability and homelessness approach the issues. While acknowledging that overlap and interconnectedness, in Figure 2 we have synthesized the fundamental questions raised in the category (foundational, difficult, or transformative) in which the conversations around the question most typically aligned.

Figure 2.

---

## Foundational Questions

---

- *What are the reasons we have this crisis?*
- *What is the fundamental 'core' that everyone can agree to?*
- *Where is coherence/ agreement necessary and where can difference be functional?*
- *What components make up a 'pathway to housing security'?*
- *Do funding mechanisms match desired outcomes or principles?*
- *How can we most usefully contextualize and adapt examples/ evidence from one place to another?*
- *What needs to be universal/foundational about programs and services and what can be flexible/tailored to local context?*
- *What individual, programmatic, and systemic interdependencies are essential?*
- *What needs to be coordinated at what level (e.g., policies, systems, services, individuals)?*
- *Who can address which aspects of the problem?*
- *How should funding be allocated? By services or products provided? By individuals or communities served?*
- *What interactions across levels, sectors, and types of services are needed to sustain a mutual understanding of what success looks like?*
- *What does the housing workforce need to be?*
- *How do we make progress toward both acute and long-term needs?*
- *How can we intentionally embed what we need to do for the short term in what we strive to achieve in the long term?*

Figure 2. cont.

---

## Difficult Questions

---

- *What is the role of government?*
- *What possibilities are there regarding the for-profit housing market and housing's role as an investment or commodity?*
- *Do the services we invest in match the needs?*
- *What is the common ground between requirement-driven and low-barrier approaches?*
- *What would take 'anywhere but here' off the table?*
- *How can the politics be named and navigated more productively?*
- *What mental models coexist in the 'ecosystem'? How much divergence or convergence is there among them? How do they affect the feasibility and acceptability of potential actions?*
- *What unifies the various 'mobilized' forces? What differentiates them? What divides them?*
- *How are homelessness and housing instability viewed and how does that affect our ability to converge on policies and services?*
- *What are we collectively willing to do?*

---

## Transformative Questions

---

- *What conditions would make it possible for big ideas and transformative changes to be taken up?*
- *If there is a shift in objectives, what could it shift to?*
- *How do we need to structure learning and adaption to support a long-term strategy? What do we most need to know? Who holds what knowledge?*
- *What do people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and housing instability need and want, in their own terms?*
- *What is the role of the next generation in a long-term strategy? What needs to be done to change the practices and mindsets of those currently working in the system compared to those who will be working in the system in the coming decades?*
- *What would it look like to design a long-term strategy around the interdependencies?*
- *How are decisions made? Who decides? Who influences decisions? How can current governance be changed to better match what is needed?*

## ENGAGEMENT PROCESS SUGGESTIONS AND CAUTIONS

Interviewees offered many useful insights to inform the design of our engagement processes. Most tended to favor smaller engagements and recognized the need to incorporate diverse perspectives from across the housing landscape, including new combinations of perspectives. With some exceptions, interviewees suggested that the focus of our engagement should not be too narrow. However, as described above, they expressed a variety of views regarding priorities for the content and scope of engagements. Many noted the importance of framing complicated ideas in accurate, yet manageable, ways.

Many interviewees emphasized the need to incorporate those with direct experience of homelessness or housing instability and those directly providing services. Several specifically mentioned the potential for our process to benefit from lessons learned from the process of the Governor's Poverty Reduction Working Group.<sup>36</sup> Several interviewees recommended that honoraria be offered in recognition of the time and expertise participants share. In particular, they cautioned that those whose current employment does not cover participation in these kinds of engagement, such as those with expertise from their lived experience of homelessness and many frontline service providers, should not be expected to participate without compensation and other means of offsetting the cost of participating (e.g., transportation, childcare, or foregone work shifts). Some also emphasized the importance of using trauma-informed approaches when including those who have experienced homelessness or housing instability.

Many interviewees shared the following note of caution: both the overwhelming scale of the housing need and a sense of fatigue after many decades of strategies and workgroups and investments have contributed to widespread feelings of frustration and burnout. Several observed that it is difficult for people to consider new ideas. They noted varying reasons why certain ideas are difficult to discuss, such as public perceptions, politics, competition for resources, a history of perceived false promises or surface level engagements, a lack of shared understanding or knowledge, and the potential for engagement to be retraumatizing.

## III. Laying the Groundwork for a Long-Term Strategy

The insights shared by the stakeholders we have heard from so far have provided a range and depth of perspectives. Across the interviews, many themes and questions surfaced that could be explored in our expanded cycle of facilitated discussions in 2023. In our synthesis and analysis of these insights, four overarching themes emerged from the interviews. These themes serve as groundwork that will guide the focus and design of our further facilitated

---

<sup>36</sup> <https://dismantlepovertyinwa.com>

discussions. They include a shift in how the causes of homelessness and housing instability are understood; a deepening recognition of the inherent complexity of housing security; key tensions that need to be grappled with to get to a coherent, effective, and widely accepted strategy; and the multiple conditions that are needed in order to develop a long-term strategy.

## UNDERSTANDING HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING INSTABILITY

The effort to understand the causes of homelessness, how they contribute, and how to address them is an area of considerable ongoing discourse in research, policy, and practice communities. Many contributing factors have been recognized, studied, and discussed extensively over time. Across our discussions with stakeholders, what surfaced about these multiple factors were differences between the ways they are explored in the research and what is needed for practical application. The implications of those differences are worth describing here, so that our efforts in 2023 can include dialogue about them. This will enrich how we move from research to options for the practical development and implementation of a strategy.

One implication that arose relates to the challenge of drawing conclusions across the diverse available research. Studies are often designed narrowly to address specific questions and are conducted in a specific context, which can constrain how broadly applicable the results are. Different factors tend to be studied from different disciplinary perspectives, using different conceptual framings and different methodologies. For example, research about economic factors is done differently than research about behavioral health. Studies are also conducted in different timeframes, contexts, geographies, and populations. Some factors that matter in practice are not studied as widely as others. Decisions about what is included or excluded influence what meaningful comparisons can be made across studies, what conclusions can be drawn, and how generalizable those conclusions will be across contexts.

A key way in which the narrowness of research questions manifests in addressing homelessness and housing instability is that much of the research has sought to disentangle the multiple factors and assess their singular contribution. Yet our discussions with stakeholders highlight that, in practice, the factors remain entangled, and for a strategy to be comprehensive and useful for policymakers and practitioners, it will need to grapple with that full complexity. The input from interviewees indicates a need to shift away from identifying the most 'root' causes and narrowing down to address that shortlist, and instead calls for a strategy that takes into account both the multiple known contributing factors and the ways in which they interact. A promising trend is that, as described in *Pathways to Housing Security: Phase 1 Report*,<sup>37</sup> scholars have also increasingly shifted to this more integrative view, recognizing that homelessness results from compounding structural and individual factors in a given time period and location.

---

<sup>37</sup> <https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2180/2021/12/Pathways-to-Housing-Security-Report-FINAL.pdf>

A second implication that surfaced in discussions around research on the causes of homelessness is that there are two important purposes being considered. One focuses on explaining the per capita rate of homelessness in a given location, such as statewide or in a county or community. Another focuses on explaining how to identify and meet the needs of individuals and families who are currently experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Although some contributing factors may overlap, the questions asked and approaches taken depend on which purpose is being pursued. Further, the markers of a successful outcome are different. When studying rates of homelessness, a 50% decline might be a success. However, for those who continue to experience homelessness, that decline means very little. For them, studies that inform how to meet their varied and sometimes complex needs are more meaningful.

Both of these purposes were emphasized by stakeholders in our discussions. Reducing the rate of homelessness in Washington State was described by most stakeholders as critical for long-term progress at scale. This discourse emphasized first and foremost factors that affect the availability and affordability of housing, including the policy environment and other structural and economic issues that interact with geographic characteristics and population demographics.

At the same time, many stakeholders cautioned that the available options to affect the supply, affordability, and accessibility of housing can be challenging to adopt and implement, often vary according to local context, will take time to have the desired effect, and, unless designed with attention to equity, may have the longest lag for those who are most affected and most vulnerable. Hence, the perspectives of interviewees, taken together, made clear that a comprehensive and useful strategy needs to use the available knowledge base to consider how to *both* reduce the rate of homelessness *and* assist those experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Another implication about the use of research surfaced around informing housing assistance programs and services. There was an emphasis by many interviewees on the important interplay between who is at greater risk of experiencing homelessness and the factors that contribute to whether that risk is made real. For a strategy to be cognizant of this interplay, the research on the individual and familial factors that amplify vulnerability and the research on the structural mechanisms that produce homelessness are most useful when understood in combination. This integration is useful because the two lines of research serve different yet interrelated purposes in the design of intervention strategies. One helps identify who needs assistance and the other yields options for how to intervene.

Understanding racial disparities, for example, is useful when integrated with an understanding of the structural racism that, if addressed, could reduce those disparities. Assessing how earning potential affects an individual's ability to afford a home is useful when it is integrated with an understanding of income inequality. A better understanding about the subset of individuals experiencing homelessness who are living with co-occurring mental

illness, substance use disorder, or other chronic illnesses is most useful when integrated with an understanding of the structural factors that can be addressed, such as the availability and accessibility of health and behavioral health services.

Further, isolating the discussion of individual factors has the potential to perpetuate narratives that blame homelessness on personal traits, weaknesses, or failings (discussed in *Pathways to Housing Security: Phase 1 Report*<sup>38</sup>). Inherent individual identities or co-occurring conditions are not ‘causes’ of homelessness, but for those who hold them, structural factors interact to disproportionately amplify vulnerability to experiencing homelessness.

One final consideration about how to use the available research will inform our ongoing work. The purpose of a strategy is not viewed by most stakeholders as Washington State choosing whether to advance housing security *or* ensure economic security *or* promote health and behavioral health. These are interrelated aspects to thriving as a state, and the government has a role in all of them. Further discussions about developing a long-term strategy, based on a comprehensive and integrated understanding of homelessness and housing instability, can seek to advance housing security in ways that mutually reinforce other important and related goals.

## NAVIGATING THE COMPLEXITY OF HOUSING ASSISTANCE

Taken together, the range of perspectives shared by interviewees paints a picture of the complex and interdependent pieces that make up the housing assistance landscape in Washington State. The systems, services, and providers that contribute to housing assistance are situated in various, sometimes disparate contexts. Our interviews made clear that a wide range of services are relevant and needed, but are also implemented in various settings, by practitioners from many disciplines, funded through multiple governmental and nongovernmental sources, and operating under the management or regulatory oversight of diverse agencies with varying policies, incentives, and constraints. As a result, achieving coherence is challenging, and efforts to address homelessness and housing instability are often siloed and fragmented.

Yet the concept of housing security itself is arguably even more complex. Housing needs are often thought of in categories, for example: emergency shelter, supportive housing, transitional housing, affordable housing, the real estate market. While different interviewees described distinct aspects of each category, it also became clear that housing security is a continuum, and effective programs or policies in any of the categories ultimately depend on the state of the rest of the categories. For instance, emergency shelter is temporary by design, but serves that function well only if there is a connection to affordable permanent housing options, for which availability is affected by the housing market, which shifts alongside patterns of growth and the economy. A few interviewees described how housing security intersects with other factors that contribute to whether individuals, families, and communities can thrive such as economic security, health, and safety.

<sup>38</sup> <https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2180/2021/12/Pathways-to-Housing-Security-Report-FINAL.pdf>

## CENTRAL TENSIONS

In Section 6 of HB 1277, the Legislature outlined several components that should be included in a long-term strategy to improve outcomes for individuals. Those include:

- address the root causes of the problem,
- clearly assign responsibilities,
- support localization both to address specific community needs and to recognize that each community must play a part in the solution,
- respect property owner rights,
- encourage private sector involvement in solutions and service, and
- develop pathways to permanent housing solutions and associated services.

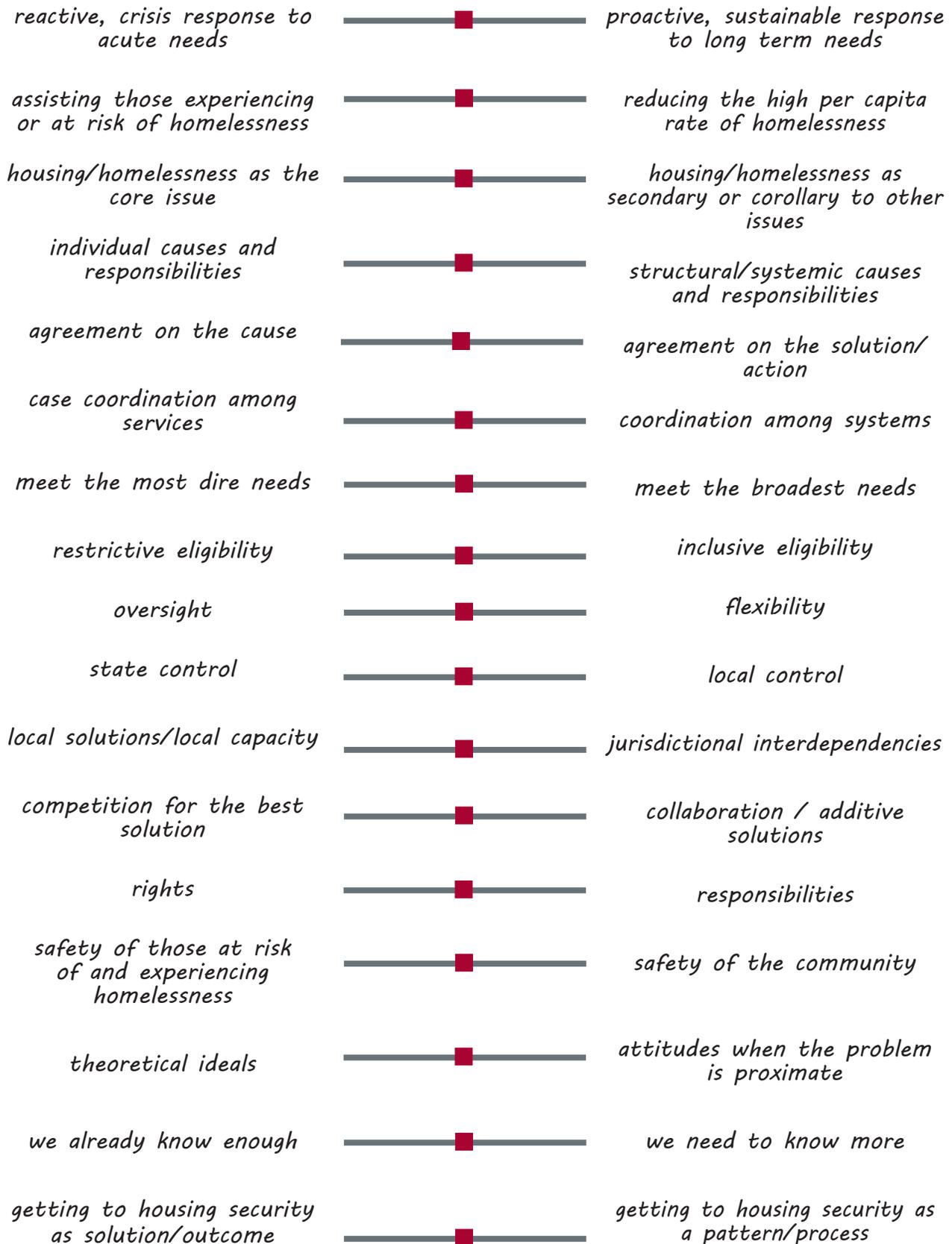
Our discussions with stakeholders reinforce, deepen, and expand upon the elements put forth in the legislation. Further, the insights shared by interviewees helped elucidate that many of the components warranted in a long-term strategy have aspects that are in tension with each other, and navigating those tensions is necessary for a coherent, effective, and widely accepted strategy. Some of these tensions were explicitly named by interviewees as areas of conflict or sensitivity that get in the way of progress, while others became apparent in our analysis across interviews.

Although not a comprehensive list, Figure 3 synthesizes some of the tensions that stood out most across interviews. As we design our next cycles of facilitated discussions, we will pay close attention to these tensions as important spaces for opportunity. Illuminating and grappling with tensions in complex issues can create dynamic energy, supply diversity of thought, and bring focus to the areas that have the most potential to produce meaningful change. These tensions could be areas of opportunity if the discourse shifts away from treating them as discrete and opposing choices (e.g., right or wrong; most or least important). Instead, a more constructive view would be to recognize them as coexisting considerations that reveal a continuum of options needing sustained attention.

Further, many of these tensions are connected to each other such that choices affecting one will have an impact on others. For instance, the balance between state control and local control is related to the balance between oversight and flexibility. In another example, whether the 'causes' of homelessness are understood as more individual or more structural affects how much agreement there is on the extent to which solutions, such as coordination, need to be individual or systemic. The discourse could become more productive if it is less about making the case for either one or the other and more about what adjustments to the balance between and among them is needed to better address homelessness and housing instability.

Figure 3.

**Tensions that stood out most across interviews**



## CONDITIONS NEEDED FOR A LONG-TERM STRATEGY

The insights so far from this cycle of interviews have also begun to identify and clarify what conditions would be needed in order to formulate and implement a long-term strategy to make sustained progress towards housing security in Washington State. These conditions include grappling with central tensions, recognizing a holistic and complex understanding of the issues, adopting a systems lens that takes into account inherent interdependencies, cultivating a shared foundational understanding, identifying guiding principles, and building and sustaining trusting relationships. Tending to these conditions will make it possible to develop a strategy that provides a coherent framework in which to formulate, assess, and adapt actions over time that can work in combination—and risk failing in isolation. Some aspects of this foundational work are already underway, and as our work continues into 2023 we will build on such efforts toward an ongoing and evolving strategic approach for Washington State.

## IV. Looking Ahead: Stakeholder Discussion Plans for 2023

In HB 1277 Section 6, part (2)(d) the Legislature directs the Center’s work to culminate in facilitated discussions for the purpose of identifying options and recommendations to develop and implement a long-term strategy for housing security. Building on the emerging themes and ideas from our stakeholder discussions so far, we will continue to be guided by the *Deliberative Cycle of Inquiry* model as we both broaden our collaborative engagement and focus our design to iteratively identify, refine, and seek convergence on options and recommendations.

### GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR DESIGN OF FACILITATED DISCUSSIONS

In our design and implementation of this work, we will use a few guiding questions to ensure productive progress toward building a long-term strategy. These questions include: (1) how can our work productively add to already existing efforts without duplicating, (2) how do we invigorate energy around the issues of homelessness and housing instability, and (3) what content should be addressed now?

#### *Building On What Exists*

A reoccurring perspective that surfaced in our interviews was the idea that ‘we do not need another report.’ This was often associated with frustration that efforts continue to spend money ‘finding answers we already know.’ This feeling was not universally shared; however, because it emerged as a prominent feeling across diverse leaders working to address homelessness and housing insecurity, it requires attention as we move forward in bringing divergent voices together. Further, we recognize that thousands of entities and organizations

across the state currently work on this issue at different scales, contributing in different ways. Our interviews to date have provided insight from key players doing the work on how to engage relevant stakeholders to build trust in each other and facilitate opportunities to contribute together in new ways of seeking sustained responses to homelessness and housing instability. As we continue to convene and facilitate broader collaborative processes in 2023, we will use previous and current efforts and knowledge as building blocks. Due to our expressed commitment to contributing in new ways, nearly all individuals interviewed have expressed their willingness to continue to engage with us.

### *Invigorating Discussion*

Connected to our emphasis on adding new value is a recognition of fatigue. As many interviewees noted, people working to address homelessness and housing instability have been doing so for years, only to see increasing numbers of people living unsheltered—a reality that was compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a sense that, even to the extent that we have effective solutions, intervention is not happening at a sufficient scale to address the issue. Some interviewees recognized a lack of new perspectives seeking to help address the issue and saw potential for new perspectives to bring new ideas and energy. In a related line of thinking, some raised the idea that a long-term strategy might benefit from more involvement from the next generation who will continue efforts. Recognizing these insights, the Center is dedicated to designing engagement that ensures diversity across facilitated event participants and brings new excitement to address homelessness and housing instability. Our 2023 efforts will therefore be guided by questions such as:

- How can we reframe the questions that have historically been asked? What new questions would bring new energy?
- How can new areas of connection be forged? How can we bring in those who have not previously been included?
- How can our engagement break away from traditional structures and invite active involvement?
- How can our work learn from failures and struggles while productively centering areas of success and possibility?

### *What To Focus On First*

The final main guiding question is what should be the focus of our 2023 engagement? Homelessness and housing instability are both large and compounding issues. Taking them on together in identifying a long-term strategy that spans across multiple communities and experiences necessitates a long-term strategic process. Earlier in the report we synthesized three types of interconnected questions that we heard from interviewees: (1) foundational questions, (2) difficult questions, and (3) transformative

questions. We also described how the interview insights helped identify multiple conditions that are needed for an effective long-term strategy. Our facilitated discussions in the next year will not be able to address all of the important questions nor will we be able to tend to all of the conditions needed. As we draw on the many ideas and suggestion from interviewees to design opportunities for collaborative engagement, we will balance what we were asked to achieve; what is feasible in the available timeframe; what near-term actions can fuel a long-term strategy; and what would be the most productive, reinvigorating, and least redundant place to help Washington State start on a renewed and robust long-term trajectory towards housing security.

## **CYCLES OF FACILITATED DISCUSSIONS**

Most interviewees suggested that smaller engagements are most needed for this work. Consistent with that, in 2023 we will begin by convening smaller groups in collaborative discourse which we design based on what has been elicited so far in the fact-finding and our stakeholder discussions. To start, these groups will be convened around similar interests, practices, and backgrounds, as well as some mixed perspectives that we recognize as potentially benefiting from interaction and collaboration. These smaller discussions will help us narrow down what strategic subset of questions to focus on while helping to prioritize concerns and elicit options. In parallel, we will continuously regroup to deepen our analysis of the issues based on new collaborative insights and to plan subsequent facilitated convenings.

These subsequent events will then bring the collaborative knowledge gained, and individuals who participated, from the smaller enclaves to larger facilitated processes that engage diverse individuals from across sectors and perspectives. These larger processes will continue to be built around areas that we have identified through stakeholder input as the most productive options and recommendations for a long-term strategy. The iteration from a cycle of smaller convenings that feed into a cycle of subsequent larger convenings will enable us to respond to observations from interviewees both that smaller engagements are likely to be more productive and that ultimately there is a need to integrate diverse perspectives from across the housing landscape.

## **V. Conclusion**

In this status update, we have provided an overview of progress so far in conducting the Legislature's requested stakeholder discussions. This has yielded information about the importance of conceptualizing causes as multiple interacting factors that contribute to homelessness, the complex landscape of policies and services related to housing assistance that is offered in the state, the many areas of concern to be explored, and the conditions that need to be tended to for it to be possible to make progress toward a long-term strategy for housing security in Washington.

The Center will now turn to the work we have planned for 2023. As we shift to the next cycles of work, we will continue to employ multiple methodologies in an iterative approach to expand our use of the available knowledge base and broaden our facilitated discussions to identify desired principles, options, and recommendations for a long-term strategy, with clarity about the degree of convergence across the various sources of information we have gathered. We anticipate that in our final report in December 2023 we will be able to include the following: guiding principles; potential components for a long-term strategy, with ways to guide investment decisions and ways to assess whether those investments are contributing to the desired results; tangible next steps needed to develop such a strategy; and areas that will benefit from continuous engagement to build and act on collaborative knowledge.

# THE WILLIAM D. RUCKELSHAUS CENTER

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

## WHO WE ARE

The Center is a joint effort of Washington State University and the University of Washington, created to foster collaborative public policy in Washington State and the Pacific Northwest. The Center is hosted and administered at WSU by WSU Extension and hosted at UW by the Daniel J. Evans School of Public Policy and Governance.

The mission of the William D. Ruckelshaus Center (Center) is to help parties involved in complex public policy challenges in the State of Washington and the Pacific Northwest tap university expertise to develop collaborative, durable, and effective solutions.

The Center envisions a future in which government leaders, policy makers, and community members routinely employ tools of collaborative decision-making to design, conduct, and implement successful public policy processes.

Areas we work include:

- land use
- healthcare
- agriculture
- transportation
- natural resources
- community and economic development; and
- federal, state, tribal, and local governance.



If you have questions about a situation or think you have a project for the Ruckelshaus Center, please contact us:

[ruckelshauscenter@wsu.edu](mailto:ruckelshauscenter@wsu.edu)

206-428-3021

## Appendix B: Interviewees in 2022

The following are the names and affiliations of individuals who participated in interviews and informed the development of this report.

Name	Affiliations
Francis Adewale	Spokane Community Court; Washington State Reentry Council
Dave Andersen	Washington State Department of Commerce
Jacob Bezanson	Washington State Department of Corrections
Sherri Berdine	University of Washington Office of External Affairs
Senator John Braun	Washington State Senate
Paul Carlson	Seattle University; United States Interagency Council on Homelessness
Hong Chhuor	Plymouth Housing Group
Representative Frank Chopp	Washington State House of Representatives
Gregg Colburn	University of Washington Runstad Department of Real Estate
Marc Dones	King County Regional Homelessness Authority
Mahnaz Eshetu	Refugee Women’s Alliance
Rachel Fyall	University of Washington Evans School of Public Policy & Governance
Kristina Giscombe	Plymouth Housing Group
Michelle Gladstone-Wade	Washington State Department of Commerce
Emily Grossman	Washington State Department of Commerce
Conor Hansen	SRM Construction; Washington State Affordable Housing Advisory Board
Molly Harbarger	The Seattle Times
Drayton Jackson	Foundation of Homeless & Poverty Management; Governor’s Poverty Reduction Workgroup Steering Committee
Kirsten Jewell	Kitsap County Housing & Homelessness Division; Washington State Advisory Council on Homelessness
Eric Johnson	Washington State Association of Counties
Ron Judd	Washington State Department of Transportation
Kim Justice	Washington State Office of Homeless Youth
Tedd Kelleher	Washington State Department of Commerce
Lowel Krueger	Association of Washington Housing Authorities; Yakima Housing Authority
Senator Patty Kuderer	Washington State House of Representatives

Noha Mahgoub	Washington State Office of the Governor
Marianne Marlow	Washington Mental Health Counselors Association
Tiffani McCoy	Real Change
Katy Miller	United States Interagency Council on Homelessness
Rachael Myers	Washington Low Income Housing Alliance
Linda Olsen	Washington State Advisory Council on Homelessness; Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Faith Pettis	Pacifica Law Group; Seattle Housing Affordability & Livability Task Force
Kenneth Pimpleton	Tacoma Community College Human Services Program; Washington State Department of Health Substance Use Disorder Professional Advisory Committee
Tim Probst	Governor's Poverty Reduction Workgroup; Washington State Employment Security Department
Kurtis Robinson	Revive Center for Returning Citizens
Senator June Robinson	Washington State Senate
Rodney Robinson	Campaign to Prevent & End Youth & Young Adult Homelessness in Pierce County; Pierce County Continuum of Care Oversight Committee
Paul Rosenthal	Plymouth Housing Group
Bill Rumpf	Mercy Housing Northwest; Washington State Housing Finance Commission
Carl Schroeder	Association of Washington Cities
Theresa Slusher	Washington State Department of Social & Health Services
Andi Smith	Ballmer Group
Paul Trautman	Community Frameworks Spokane; Washington State Affordable Housing Advisory Board
Jenny White	Washington Mental Health Counselors Association

## Appendix C: Guiding Questions for Discussions

*For us to explore what is needed for a long-term strategy, what engagement processes would you suggest?*

- What has been successful in other efforts to collaborate on strategy?
- When have you seen things push past the status quo and how has that happened?
- What needs to change in the conversation about housing and homelessness? What would make that change possible?
- What shift in objectives, or participants, or approaches could bring new energy and possibilities for progress?
- What would effectively take into account interdependencies?
- What would it take for this to be an opportune moment for change? To what extent do you see those conditions now or foresee them in the future?

*What processes do you think would not be productive?*

- What tends to be avoided or left unresolved?
- What do you think is needed to address any existing stalemates or difficult relationships?
- Where do efforts to hold difficult conversations get stuck or backfire?

*What fundamental questions need to be asked about homelessness and housing instability?*

- What important questions are going unasked?
- What questions would be asked by those experiencing housing instability or providing services that are not being asked by policy makers?
- What might make this an opportune time to explore these questions?
- How should these questions be discussed differently than in the past?
- What foregone conclusions or common assumptions have a stronghold?
- Which questions are hardest for people to discuss, and why?
- What information is missing that has held up progress?

*Who needs to interact more about addressing homelessness and housing instability?*

- What would those interactions yield?
- Who do you wish you interacted with more? What would you most like to share with and learn from them?
- What part of your perspective or knowledge do you think others are missing?
- What do you wish you knew more about?
- What do you wish you had more time to discuss with others?
- Who needs to be more involved to explore questions about homelessness and housing instability?
- What perspectives or interests tend to dominate? What perspectives go unheard?

*What core principles should guide policies and services for homelessness and housing?*

- Which principles do you think have wide agreement?
- Which would likely be areas of disagreement?
- Is agreement needed in those areas?
- What could help get to alignment despite differences?