

**Testimony for the Record Submitted to
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity
"Exploring the Use of
Data Driven Methods and Community Collaboration
to Reduce Veteran Homelessness."**

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President and Chief Executive Officer of Community Solutions

Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Levin, distinguished members of the Subcommittee, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the critical issue of ending Veteran homelessness. My name is Rosanne Haggerty, I am the President and Chief Executive Officer of Community Solutions.

First, I would like to acknowledge the tremendous progress that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has made in reducing Veteran homelessness. I especially want to recognize the adoption of the One Team approach, which involves coordinated actions and program interconnections aimed at ending Veteran homelessness and provides Veterans, regardless of their entry point, with a holistic housing and service plan tailored to their personal choices. Community Solutions is honored to work with the VA and community partners throughout the country toward our joint mission of ending Veteran homelessness and seeing that all Veterans receive the help they need to live with dignity. Additionally, I want to extend my thanks to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) for their tireless work in this critical effort.

[Community Solutions](#) is a national non-profit organization working toward a lasting end to homelessness. We support a network of more than 140 US communities of all sizes, rural, urban, and suburban across 38 states as well as with more than 70 international communities in five countries outside the US. Our aim is to reach a tipping point where homelessness is understood as solvable, progress is expected, and a critical mass of communities are achieving measurable reductions by the end of 2026. Working with communities, we provide the backbone support for an initiative called [Built for Zero](#) (BfZ). BfZ uses a rigorous, data-driven methodology to help communities change how local

homeless response systems work and the impact they can achieve toward making homelessness rare and brief. BfZ communities create a unified, multi-agency team focused on that goal and collaborate to create and work from a comprehensive, by name, real time operating awareness of each person experiencing homelessness in their area.

This shared view of the dynamics of homelessness enables communities to align their efforts and resources to achieve measurable results. Local teams are able to see what's working to reduce homelessness and quickly detect when shifts in strategy are needed. These coordinated teams can target interventions to improve individual outcomes while creating a high performing local prevention and response system to make homelessness itself increasingly rare and brief.

Quality data is the key to the BfZ methodology; quite simply, communities identify every individual experiencing homelessness by name. Privacy is protected through formal releases of information and strict access protocols. Local teams continually update this information at least monthly. This common operating picture enables each individual to benefit from the full array of local resources to overcome their homelessness, and enables the community team to understand and respond quickly to trends and opportunities to accelerate overall progress.

[Real-time, by-name data has proven to be a game changer for every type of community working to end Veteran homelessness.](#) It focuses front line workers from multiple organizations on the individual Veteran and how best to serve him or her. It gives these workers, whether from the VA, local homeless services or the housing authority the timely information needed to diagnose individual and system challenges, to problem solve, coordinate services, track progress and course correct as needed. It gives local system leaders and policy makers the actionable information they need to know what's working or and where things are stuck. This real time data reporting also enables teams to test ideas, innovate, and apply practices like continuous quality improvement needed to achieve measurable results. Communities that utilize by-name data demonstrate the power of precise, up-to-date information to enable significant progress.

Currently, over 80 communities within the Built for Zero network are focused on reducing Veteran homelessness. Of these, 45 communities have seen measurable reductions and among these, 12 communities have made Veteran homelessness rare and brief.

These local teams are demonstrating that the foundational elements for reducing Veteran homelessness are a unified team and knowing every Veteran experiencing homelessness in their community by-name in real time.

We see this in communities of all sizes and types that have successfully adopted the use of quality real-time data. For instance, Chattanooga and Central Tennessee have made Veteran homelessness rare and brief. Gulf Coast, Mississippi can rehouse any Veteran who

becomes homeless within 11 days. [Detroit, Michigan](#) has reduced Veteran homelessness by 50%, leveraging data to coordinate services and expedite housing placements. Similarly, Metro Denver has reduced Veteran homelessness by 30%. The Twin Cities have reduced Veteran homelessness by 24%. In [Charlotte, North Carolina](#), efforts toward quality data on Veterans have led to making de-identified data available to the public to galvanize local support for ending Veteran homelessness. These examples illustrate the power of quality real-time data to drive measurable reductions in Veteran homelessness across diverse communities.

The tenaciousness of these communities to shift to a team based approach to ending Veteran homelessness and develop quality data highlights the potential for accelerating progress nationally in reducing Veteran and all homelessness. This level of local collaboration and individual level awareness may have other impacts. For example, improved collaboration and data may allow for quicker and more precise identification of Veterans at risk of suicide. By identifying Veterans who are struggling, community teams can connect them with critical resources and support before they reach a crisis point.

Our vision is that every community in the United States, regardless of size or resources, can leverage data to its fullest potential to confidently identify and assist every person experiencing homelessness. This approach not only benefits individuals in housing crises but enables local teams to identify bottlenecks, optimize their resources and respond swiftly to emerging trends to reduce homelessness overall.

To harness the potential of quality data, we recommend several policy changes:

- 1. Adopt the use of By-Name Data to drive reductions in Veteran homelessness.**
Reconfigure systems, including the already strong HOMES data system to adopt a by-name data model. This approach allows for personalized tracking of each Veteran, facilitates targeted coordination of services such as through the One Team model being used by the VA, and accelerates their path to a stable home.
- 2. Shift data standards to rely on regularly collected and reported real-time data.**
Once aggregated and de-identified, use current data as the primary performance indicator for progress in addressing Veteran homelessness. It provides a continuous and therefore more accurate picture of Veteran homelessness and allows for timely and targeted interventions to ensure no Veteran is left behind.
- 3. Enhance VA and community data sharing for homeless Veterans.**
The federal government can enhance data sharing between the VA and community partners providing services for homeless Veterans. Cleland Dole Section 309 mandates that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development collaboratively develop a system for effective data sharing and reporting between the community-wide Homeless Management Information

System (HMIS), as defined in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, and the VA's Homeless Operations Management and Evaluation System (HOMES) ([Cleland Dole Section 309, H.R. 2617, 117th Congress](#)). This system, which must be operational by the end of 2025, aims to improve service coordination and support for homeless Veterans by securely integrating these data systems, thereby enhancing personalized and expedited care. Adopting a by-name data methodology for Veterans' homelessness will further personalize and expedite care, ensuring Veterans receive the timely and individualized support they need. Strengthening these data-sharing practices will enhance Veterans' access to essential services.

These policies can enhance the effectiveness of local housing systems and help make homelessness for Veterans across the nation rare and brief. Community Solutions is proud to support the VA, HUD, and USICH and our community partners in these efforts to help end Veteran homelessness once and for all.

We have attached additional information to our written testimony, providing detailed insights into the impact of real-time, by-name data and how it is being utilized by communities across the country to drive reductions in homelessness. This includes a comprehensive breakdown of our approach to data modernization as a tool to end homelessness, along with a PowerPoint presentation on Built for Zero's approach to quality data.

Thank you for your time and attention. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

Homelessness Data Modernization Policy Brief

The Power of Real-Time, By Name Data to Reduce Homelessness

What's needed?

National efforts to reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness are lagging, in part, because we don't have the right data to accurately drive solutions.



The federal government can accelerate efforts to reduce homelessness by investing in a high quality, real-time, by name data homeless platform. Starting with a by-name list of everyone who is homeless helps communities to better coordinate services and house people faster. Monthly reports generated from real time data give leaders better data analytics to use. This data model has been tested through the philanthropically-supported, national "built for zero" model and once prioritized, could be accomplished through a modified Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).

Our vision

Every community in the United States, regardless of size or resources, should be able to leverage technology to its fullest potential to confidently and confidentially identify every person experiencing homelessness by name in real time. This data then allows communities to coordinate services, identify log jams, make sure their resources are being used to best advantage, and help systems to identify and respond to trends promptly and strategically.

Real-time, by-name data is proving to be a game changer for communities across the country that are solving homelessness.

While homelessness may be rising nationally, communities large and small are reducing homelessness by leveraging data to accelerate their efforts. Modernizing homeless response systems built on real-time, by-name data improves the delivery of the right assistance to individuals, and enables local, state, and federal stakeholders to monitor progress and problem-solve more quickly, accurately, and effectively.



Examples of communities where by-name data has accelerated reductions in chronic homelessness:

- [Detroit, MI](#) : Achieved a 50% reduction in veteran homelessness.
- [St. Louis, MO](#): Largest city to achieve Quality Data on all singles.
- [Missoula, MT](#): First city in Montana to achieve Quality Data on all singles.
- [Charlotte, NC](#): LA large city with Quality Data for veterans, noted for making their [data public](#) and utilizing an innovative approach to reporting.
- [Washoe County/Reno, NV](#): Achieved Quality Data for all singles.
- [Shenandoah Valley, VA](#): Rural community successfully figuring out and making Quality Data work.
- [Denver, CO](#): Implementing a subregional approach to achieve Quality Data, demonstrating effective results through this method.



It's time to put HMIS to work to reduce homelessness.

While HMIS works well for program compliance, it falls short as a tool to drive reductions. Communities have to pay vendors to generate reports from their own data for case management, care coordination, and system improvement. We are not fully leveraging the power of data to solve homelessness. And we can.

What policies are needed?

The federal government should enable communities to fully utilize HMIS to drive reductions in the number of people experiencing homelessness. HMIS and reports should provide real-time, person-specific support and system analytics by enacting these policies.

- 1. The federal government should clarify that HMIS is more than just a tool for compliance. It is a dynamic platform to actively combat homelessness.** Federal legislators should emphasize that HMIS was created with the purpose of serving as a real-time, modern, person-centered platform to drive down homelessness. The goal of this clarification is to ensure that HUD has the authority to modernize HMIS to better support program operations and ensure the platform's efficacy in addressing homelessness.
- 2. Update the HMIS Data Standards.** HMIS systems must have the capability to produce a by-name list on a real-time basis. This list should be designed for use by front line workers in the homeless system to coordinate services and accelerate the housing process. From that by-name list (de-identified and aggregated), regular reports, once coded through the HMIS software, should be able to produce dashboards identifying inflow and outflow, trends and patterns. Specifically, reports should show the number of people who are newly homeless and those who have been housed or are inactive with the goal of creating an accurate, real time picture of homelessness in the community.

3. **Require HMIS to be interoperable with data from all related systems including physical and behavioral health, public housing, criminal justice, child welfare, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.** The goal of interoperability is to center the needs and goals of the people experiencing homelessness, coordinate and speed up service delivery, and break down barriers created by data incompatibility. Action by HUD is needed to establish the standard of interoperability between these large systems.
4. **Provide communities, through the HUD-funded Continuums of Care (CoCs), the software tools and administrative permissions necessary to access and use their own data in real time to ensure effective housing and support services.** The HMIS Data Standards should require software vendors to allow open source Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) and provide a standardized number of administrative licenses so that CoCs can query data and create internal reports consistently and affordably.
5. **Federal legislators should work with HUD streamline HMIS by undertaking a study to identify and eliminate data elements that are duplicative, do not advance the goal of reducing homelessness, and/or ensure grant compliance.** While monitoring taxpayer dollars and providing oversight falls within HUD's mandate, Congress could prioritize data requests that support elevating trends.
6. **Congress should support and encourage the use of local real time data reports to align efforts and build stronger partnerships between CoCs, state and local leaders, and people with lived experience.** Communities that have close partnerships among stakeholders reduce homelessness by working together toward shared goals.

High quality, real time, by name data standards defined.

Ensure that the data for quality, real time, by-name data meet these standards.

1. **Comprehensive**, verifiably encompassing each person experiencing homelessness within a given population living on the street, in shelters, or in other programs serving people experiencing homelessness.
2. **Person-specific** means knowing who people are, by their names, with social histories, resource eligibility, and goals to determine the best and fastest path to stable housing.
3. **Continuously updated**, meaning that the overall number of people experiencing homelessness, as well as their flows and pathways through the homeless response system, are equitable and can be monitored and dynamically understood.
4. **Reliable and extractable** for frequent analytics on a community's entire homelessness response system.
5. **Interoperable** with upstream systems such as physical and behavioral health, foster care, and criminal justice as well as across geographies and CoCs.
6. **Private and consent-based** in accordance with all relevant policies and laws.

About Community Solutions

Community Solutions powers Built for Zero (BFZ), a national network of more than 130 communities that adopt a rigorous, data-driven, public health approach to making homelessness rare and brief. More than 30% of BFZ communities have achieved a measurable reduction in homelessness. Community Solutions was awarded the MacArthur Foundation **100&Change** competition for a \$100 million grant through which we have piloted, tested and proven the real time, by name data modernization methodology presented in this brief to help the nation end homelessness leaving no one behind.

Built for Zero's Quality Data Approach to Drive Reductions in Homelessness

*Empowering Communities through Data-Driven Solutions and
Collaborative Efforts*

Adam Ruege, Director, Strategy & Evaluation

Built For Zero.

COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS

A MOVEMENT TO END HOMELESSNESS



Community Solutions is a nonprofit that leads Built for Zero, a national initiative of more than 100 cities and counties committed to measurably ending homelessness.

Homelessness is solvable. This isn't a statement of aspiration — communities across the country are proving it.

100+ CITIES AND COUNTIES IN BUILT FOR ZERO

14 HAVE REACHED FUNCTIONAL ZERO FOR A POPULATION

43 HAVE DRIVEN MEASURABLE REDUCTIONS

Built for Zero - Core Elements

THE PROBLEMS



No single actor is fully accountable for ending homelessness in a community. Each local agency or program holds its own small piece of the solution, but no one has their eye on how the pieces fit together.



Funders evaluate success on the performance of individual housing programs, not on whether a community collectively reduces homelessness. But single programs don't get us to zero — whole communities do.



A once-a-year count of a problem that changes nightly. Annual street counts are a snapshot; your community needs a video. Getting to zero takes line of sight into how people move through your system over time.



Housing supply paralysis. Expanded housing resources are crucial, but many cities have dramatically expanded housing supply without making a dent in homelessness. The reason? They never fixed the housing system.

THE BUILT FOR ZERO SOLUTIONS



An integrated, command center team. Key agencies, like the Continuum of Care, the housing authority, local government, and the VA, work together every week toward a shared definition of zero.



Community-level measurement. Built for Zero communities measure success by the total number of people experiencing homelessness, not by program outcomes. Data enables communities to rapidly test new ideas and understand if those efforts are working.



Comprehensive, real-time, by-name data. Built for Zero communities know everyone experiencing homelessness by name, in real time. The result is more tailored solutions for individuals and a clearer picture of the system as a whole.



Strategic, data-driven housing investments. Built for Zero communities use real-time data to secure the housing resources they need and target them for the greatest possible reductions in homelessness.



Vision

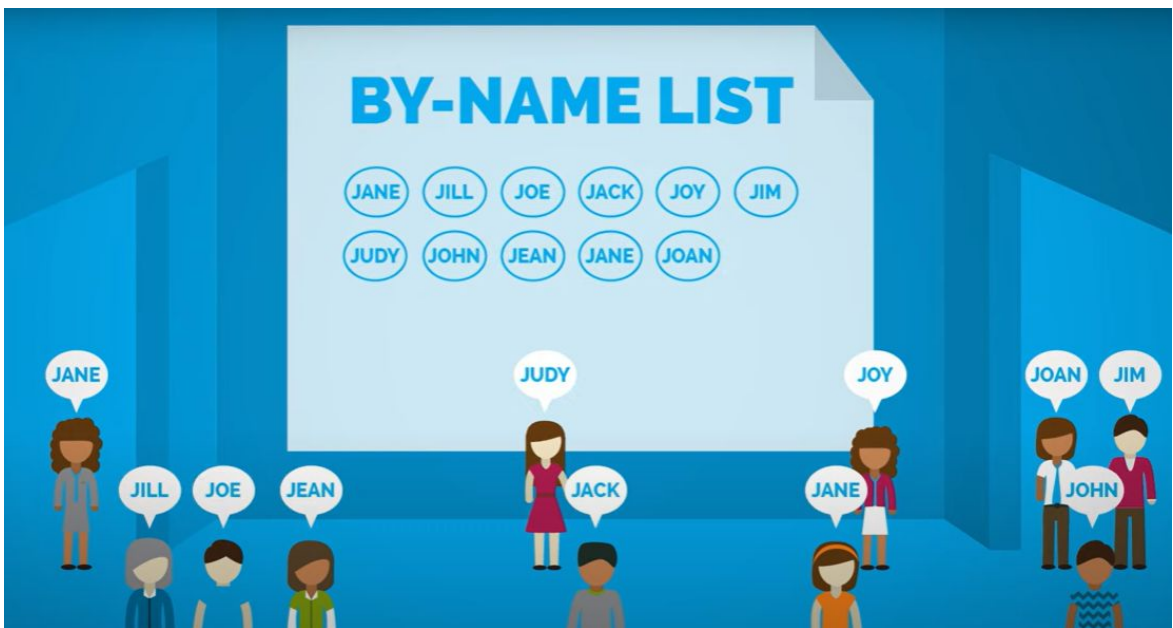
Every community in the United States, regardless of size or resources, can leverage technology to its fullest potential to confidently identify every individual experiencing homelessness, understanding the unique challenges they face and the specific actions required to achieve lasting solutions.

This data allows communities to not only understand individual stories but also identify trends and patterns. With this valuable information, communities can work collaboratively to develop strategic action plans to prevent and end homelessness for all.

Core Elements of Quality Data

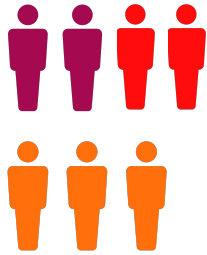
It all starts with a By-Name List:

A comprehensive list of every person in a community experiencing homelessness, updated in real time. Using information collected and shared with their consent, each person on the list has a file that includes their name, homeless history, health, and housing needs.

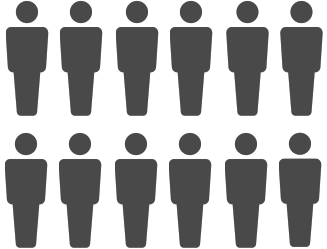


Built for Zero Data Model

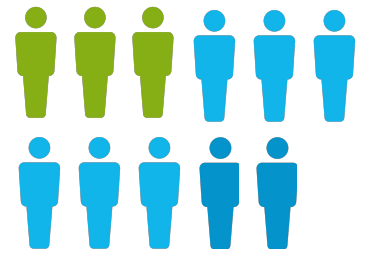
INFLOW



ACTIVELY HOMELESS




OUTFLOW




 **INFLOW:**
Newly identified

 **INFLOW:**
Returned from housing

 **INFLOW:**
Returned from inactive

 **OUTFLOW:**
Housing placements

 **OUTFLOW:**
Moved to inactive

 **OUTFLOW:**
No longer meets population criteria

Core Elements of Quality Data

Comprehensive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All agencies and programs sharing data in a single place• List includes people sleeping in temporary accommodation and on the streets
Person-Specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Each person has an entry that includes their name, history, health and housing needs• Each person can be followed through the system
Regularly Updated	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• List is updated monthly, at a minimum• As people's housing status changes, so do their list entries
Quantitative Reliability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Data balances month over month, just like your checkbook

Assessing for Quality Data

Effective Outreach Systems

Defined geographic outreach

Coordinated, effective outreach

Provider Participation

90% of providers reporting data

90% of actively homeless included in system

Policies & Procedures

Data submission, updating and review policies

Inactive policies

Non-consent policies

Outreach policies

Data Infrastructure

All inflow tracked

All outflow tracked

Homeless status tracked

Population status tracked

Demographic information tracked

We work with over **130 communities**, at varying levels of intensity, to achieve these standards through data coaching, application of technology, capacity building, and deployment of asynchronous tools.

Results

Since 2016, **72 communities across the United States** have achieved the Quality Data Standard for at least one subpopulation (e.g., Veterans, Chronic) or a broader population (all single adults). These communities now possess the capability **to accurately understand the total number of actively homeless** individuals, including detailed insights into the causes of both inflow and outflow.

Leveraging this foundational data, communities have improved coordination and overall system performance. Notably:

- **14 communities have reached the "functional zero"** milestone* for at least one subpopulation, meaning that homelessness is rare and brief.
- **42 communities have achieved a measurable reduction in homelessness**, demonstrating significant progress towards reducing homelessness.

Communities consistently report their data to Built for Zero on a monthly basis. This data is transformed into actionable dashboards and tools, empowering communities to implement strategies that effectively reduce homelessness

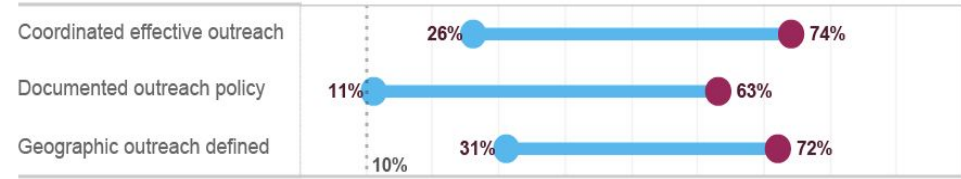
*[Functional Zero - Community Solutions](#)

Results

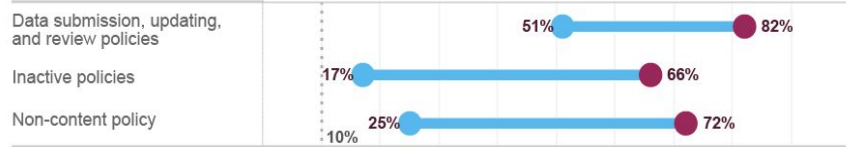
Higher standards have led to improved data quality in HMIS systems.

In the year one ORS Impact Evaluation Report, they **identified key improvements** in data quality, provider participation, and unsheltered outreach among communities.

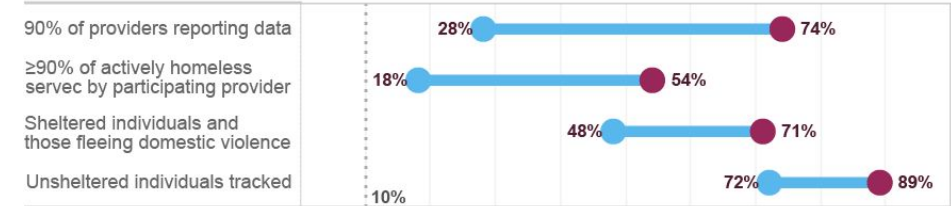
Outreach



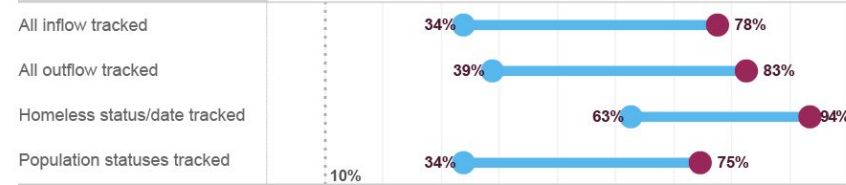
Policies and Procedures



Provider Participation

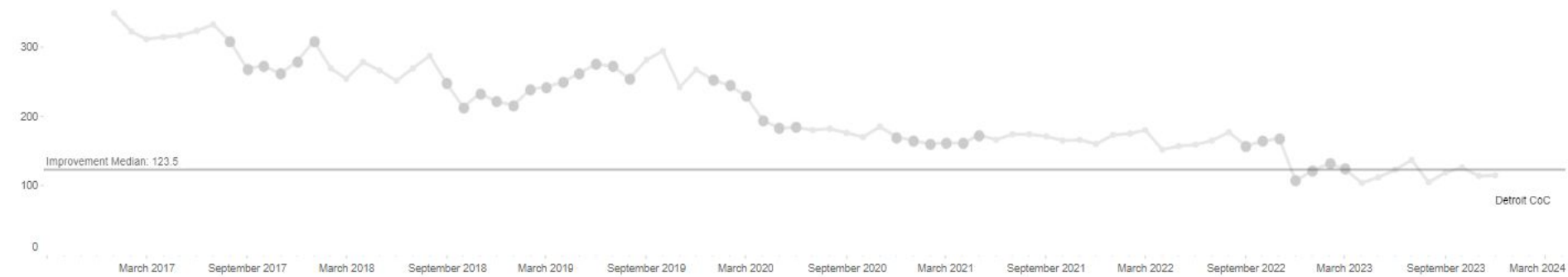


Data Infrastructure

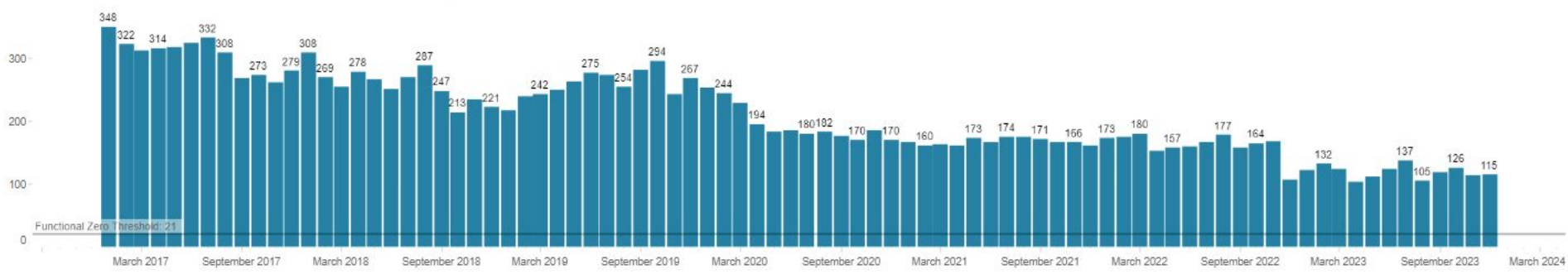


How Communities are using data... Veterans

Actively Homeless Monthly Veteran Single Adults data with signal indicators for Shifts

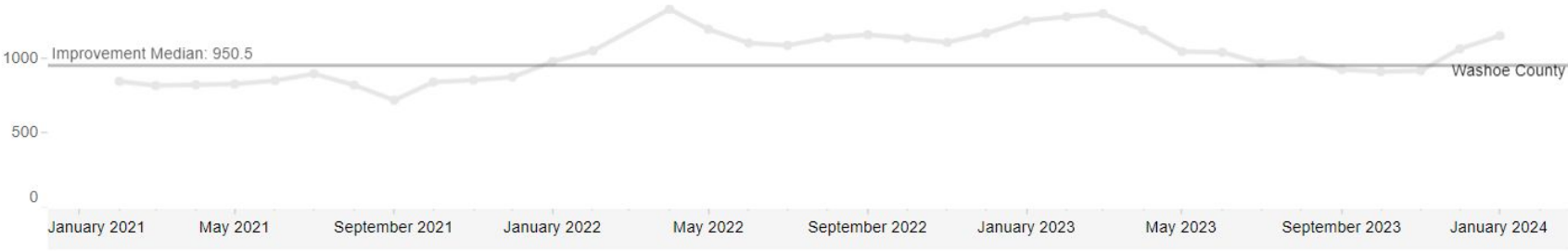


Actively Homeless Population Monthly count for Veteran Single Adults

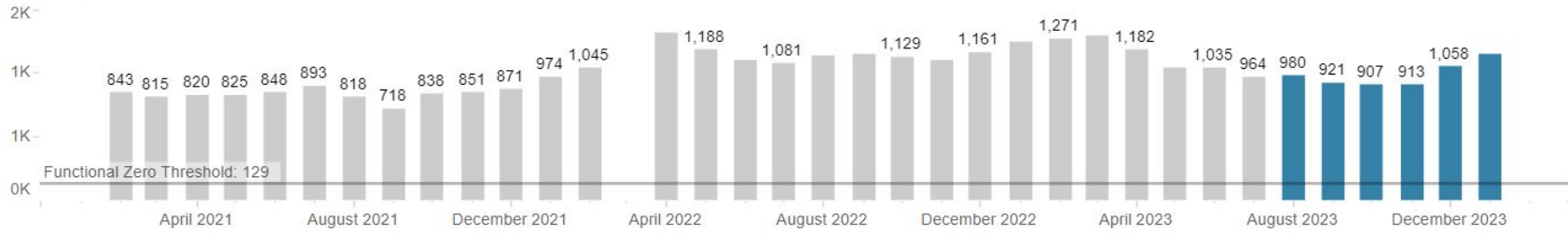


How Communities are using data...All Singles

Actively Homeless Monthly All Single Adults data with signal indicators for Shifts

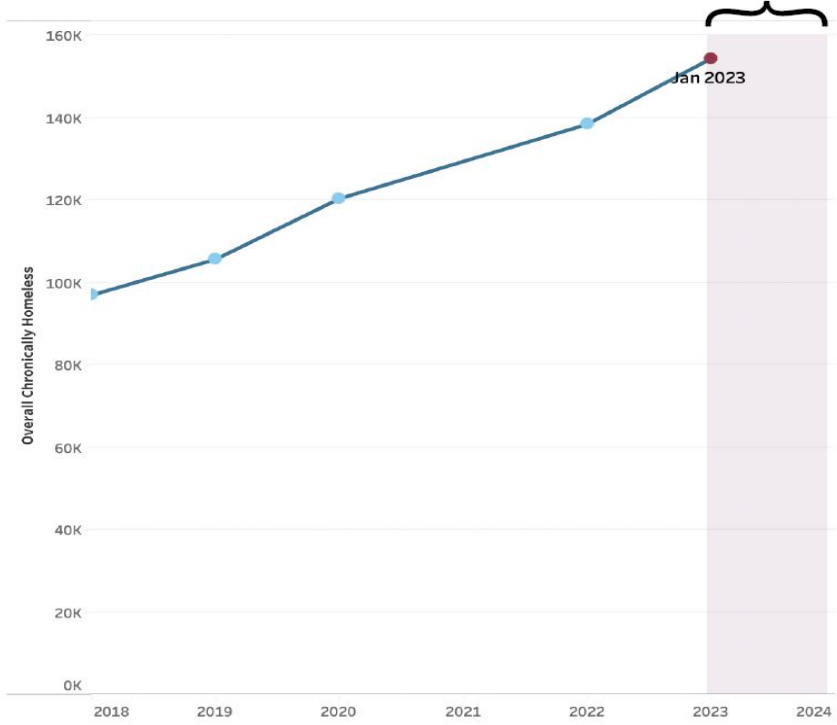


Actively Homeless Population Monthly count for All Single Adults



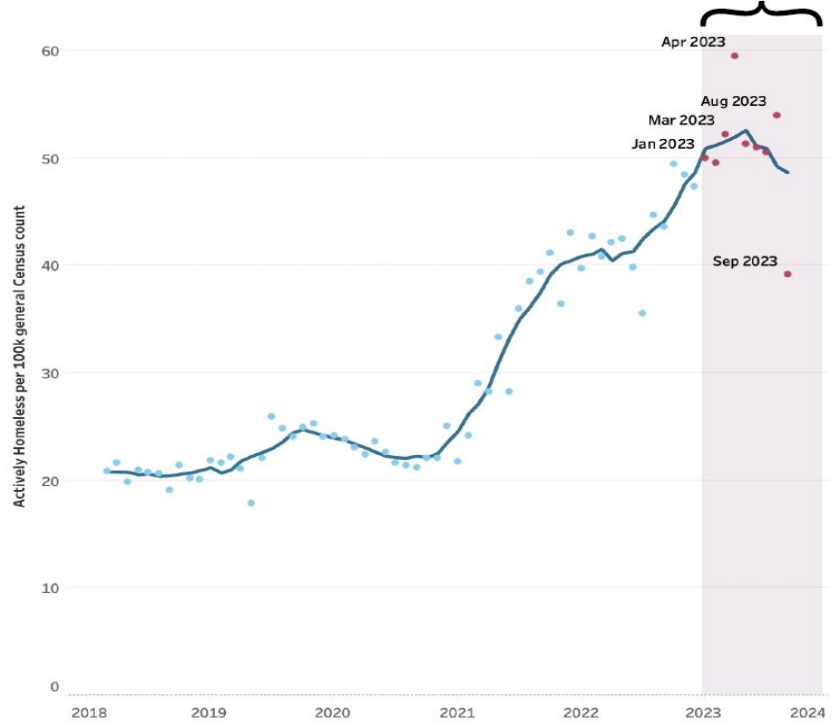
How we could use the data nationally...Chronic

2023 Data available as of today
HUD Chronically Homeless Count



Data for 2021 does not display the total count of people experiencing homelessness due to pandemic-related disruptions to counts

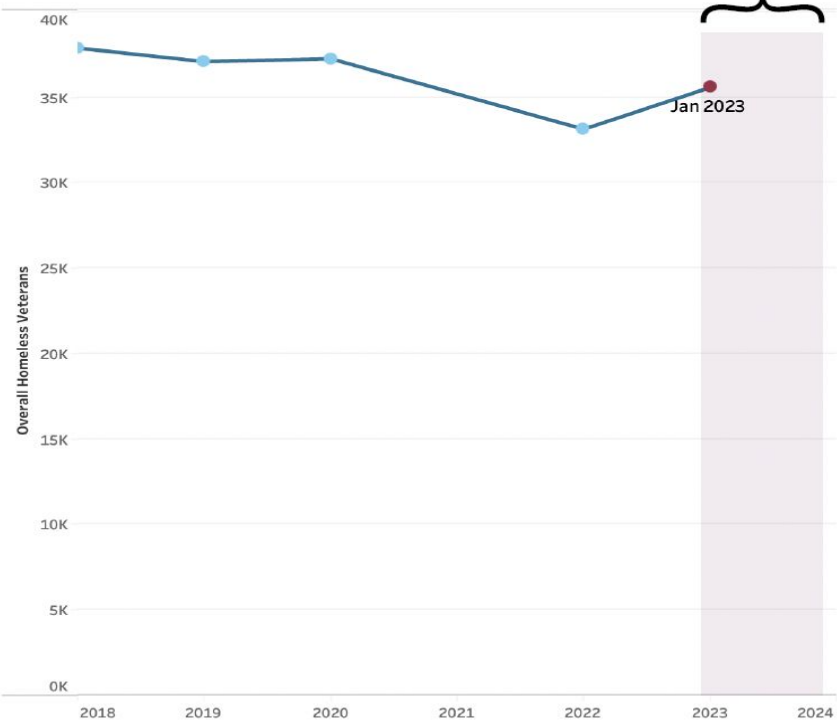
2023 Data available as of today
BfZ Chronic Homeless Count



Counts are over a denominator of County-level Census and multiplied by 100k
Solid line represents a moving average over 6 periods

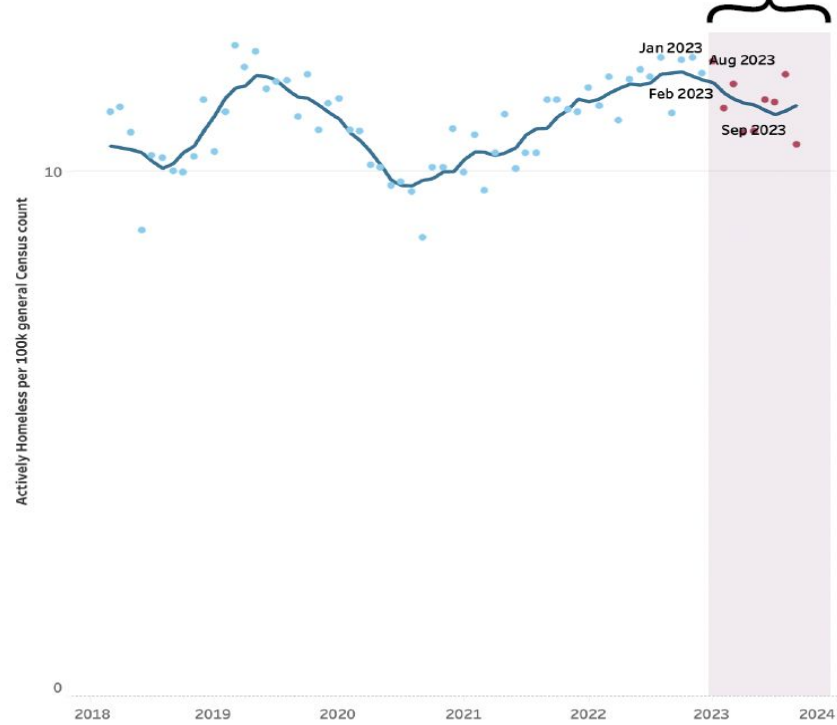
How we could use the data nationally...Veterans

2023 Data available as of today
HUD Veteran Homeless Count



Data for 2021 does not display the total count of people experiencing homelessness due to pandemic-related disruptions to counts

2023 Data available as of today
BfZ Veteran Homeless Count



Counts are over a denominator of County-level Census and multiplied by 100k
 Solid line represents a moving average over 6 periods

Resources

[Community Solutions](#) Website

By-Name Data Website: [What is a by-name list? - Community Solutions.](#)

Primer Video on By-Name Data:

[How By-Name Data Helps Communities End Homelessness](#)

Questions? ARuege@community.solutions