

The annual Point in Time Count of Homelessness occurs across the nation this evening, January 31st, marking one night each year where the number of individuals that are homeless are counted to determine the scope of homelessness across the country. **Last year in the state of Vermont, over 1,100 individuals were identified through this count.** For rural areas of the state that have limited emergency housing resources, the number can become vastly underreported with homelessness “hidden” as those that are “couch surfing” or living with family members or friends are not able to be counted in this effort. Through the network of regional nonprofit agencies and organizations, Vermont is making strides to combat homelessness, and provide access to affordable and safe housing for all individuals, especially for those with limited incomes, those with disabilities, and those that have other special needs. Through these efforts, in 2016 Vermont experienced a 25% reduction in chronic homelessness, and with assistance from the Corporation for Supportive Housing, developed the Vermont Roadmap to End Homelessness.

The Roadmap to End Homelessness lays out action steps to continue the work that is being done across Vermont, and states **“An expanded portfolio of supportive housing must be created and maintained over time as a key resource in order for Vermont to end homelessness”**. The need for expanded supportive housing speaks directly to the work that the Designated Agency (DA) system does to support those individuals served to maintain housing once units can be accessed. DA’s provide case management supports, transportation needs, emergency care, and ongoing therapeutic interventions to name just a few, but for those individuals that experience mental health and substance use challenges, those wrap around interventions most often mean the difference between housing and homelessness.

Funding and policy need to be targeted for the “three-legged stool” of supportive housing: capital, operating/rental subsidies, and supportive services. In addition, housing resources need to be spread across all communities, and not solely consolidated in larger areas. Vermont is a state defined by the character of each small town, and each citizen contributes to the fabric of those towns. With the ongoing concern around an underfunded DA system, without adequate resources, this leg of the stool continues to become more wobbly year after year, threatening the stability of all those that depend on that support to maintain their housing. If that support becomes inadequate, it will play out across systems and the impacts being felt everywhere from higher unemployment rates, higher utilization of Emergency Room care, poorer health outcomes and others avenues.