



About the CoC: How We Incorporate Lived Experience March 2024

Working in homelessness prevention demands empathy of everyone involved. We have a duty to understand the factors that result in people experiencing homelessness. We also know that the Continuum of Care (CoC) model and our work must take direction from the voices of those we serve.

Typically, those with lived experiences have the best understanding of how to create solutions that make a difference. People who are currently or formerly experiencing housing insecurity have the most direct knowledge of the problems that exist and the solutions that are the most effective. This is why it is so important to intentionally center their perspectives in the decision-making structure of our work, at every level. Other large cities—such as Austin and Baltimore—have made great strides in codifying the role that currently and formerly unhoused folx have in CoC work. Specifically, this means writing their perspectives into CoC policies and processes. Our goal is to do the same locally.

At MACCH, we know that the key to ending homelessness lies in the lived experience and guidance of those who have or are currently experiencing it. We believe that meaningful involvement of folx with lived expertise needs to happen in every space, including employment, and especially in spaces with power. To align with this, we support two groups: our Community Action Board and Youth Action Board.

These groups are spaces where folx with similar experiences can be together in a safe environment, learn more about the CoC, guide CoC decisions, and access professional development in our advocacy work. Unfortunately, not all nonprofits are led by lived experience, so having established Action Boards in our CoC empowers our partners to work with folx who have experienced housing insecurity when it comes to making decisions.

Both our Action Boards have been involved in and influenced the development of our updated Coordinated Entry prioritization. YAB has been integral to assisting us in the grant application process, for such programs as Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) and

Youth Homelessness System Improvement (YHSI). Additionally, we reserve two voting seats on the MACCH board for YAB members, which includes opportunities to impact many sectors of our homelessness prevention work.

While these groups are an important space for former and currently unhoused folx to connect, we must remember that their stories are important. For this reason, those of us who work in Homelessness Prevention need to provide safe spaces for folks to share their stories without retraumatizing them.

Our collective goal is for our CAB and YAB groups to be involved in every sector of our work including funding processes, reviewing housing programs, and beyond. If you or somebody you know is interested in sharing their lived experience and helping others find resources and exit homelessness, please reach out to [Taylor Novak](#) about joining one of our Action Boards. To ensure that the input provided is based on experiences within recent systems, members of our Action Boards must have recent experience (within the last seven years) with homelessness or housing instability. To join YAB, members should be between the ages of 18-24.

If you are engaged in Homelessness Prevention, HUD has a number of resources on incorporating folx' lived experience into our work:

- [COVID-19 Homeless System Response: Engaging Individuals with Lived Expertise](#)
- [COVID-19 Homeless System Response: Guidance for Recruiting, Hiring, and Retaining People with Lived Experience and Expertise of Homelessness](#)
- [COVID-19 Homeless System Response: Paying People with Lived Experience and Expertise](#)
- [Nothing About Us Without Us: Seven Principles for Leadership and Inclusion of People with Lived Experience of Homelessness](#)

If you or a neighbor are facing housing instability, please connect with MACCH through our Access Points and CoC organizations in our community. Our CoC's network of resources helps prevent individuals and families from facing housing insecurity and gain access to safe, quality housing.

Please follow us on Facebook [@MACCHOMAHA](#) and X [@MACCH_OMA](#) to stay connected and engage in our community's collective response to housing insecurity in Douglas, Sarpy, and Pottawattamie Counties.

Sources:

<https://nationalhomeless.org/lived-experience/>

<https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/centering-lived-experience/#:~:text=Those%20with%20lived%20experiences%20of,are%20the%20most%20effective%20solutions.>

<https://www.hudexchange.info/news/snaps-in-focus-integrating-persons-with-lived-experiences-in-our-efforts-to-prevent-and-end-homelessness/>