

Date of Hearing: March 26, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Matt Haney, Chair

AB 249 (Ramos) – As Introduced January 15, 2025

SUBJECT: Housing: Homeless Housing, Assistance, and Prevention program: youth-specific processes and coordinated entry systems

SUMMARY: Requires Continuums of Care (CoCs) receiving Homelessness Housing, Assistance, and Prevention (HHAP) Program funding to utilize future funding to create and maintain youth-specific coordinated entry systems (CES). Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Defines “youth-specific” to mean for a homeless youth, defined as an unaccompanied youth between 12 and 24 years of age, inclusive, who is experiencing homelessness, as defined in subsection (2) of Section 725 of the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. Sec. 11434a(2)). “Homeless youth” includes unaccompanied youth who are pregnant or parenting.
- 2) Requires upon appropriation, beginning with the 2026-27 fiscal year, the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) to annually certify that CoCs do all of the following:
 - a) Create or maintain a youth-specific process with their respective CES that specify the following:
 - i) How youth are matched to youth-specific resources;
 - ii) The means by which youth can access the CES, which shall include factors in addition to length of time experiencing homelessness; and
 - iii) How youth accessing the CES through adult or family programs can access youth-specific supports.
 - b) Implement a youth-specific assessment tool that considers the unique needs of youth experiencing homelessness and the unique presentation of homelessness among youth;
 - c) Create a body or identify an existing body composed of youth with lived experience of homelessness that the CoC and other HHAP grantees shall consult with regularly to receive input on policies, program design, and implementation of interventions for youth; and
 - d) Create an array of youth-specific housing inventory to align with the needs of youth in their region.
- 3) Provides that if a CoC already maintains a youth-specific coordinated entry system, the CoC must document all of the following in their application:

- a) How the CoC's housing assessment is youth-specific, including how the assessment is trauma-informed; and
- b) The CoC's prioritization policy.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Established HHAP to provide jurisdictions with one-time grant funds to support regional coordination and expand or develop local capacity to address their immediate homelessness challenges informed by a best-practices framework focused on moving homeless individuals and families into permanent housing and supporting the efforts of those individuals and families to maintain their permanent housing. Directs the California Interagency Council on Homelessness (Cal-ICH) to administer HHAP. (Government Code (GOV) Section 50216)
- 2) Requires HHAP to be used for evidence-based solutions that address and prevent homelessness among eligible populations, including any of the following:
 - a) Rapid rehousing, including rental subsidies and incentives to landlords, such as security deposits and holding fees;
 - b) Operating subsidies in new and existing affordable or supportive housing units, emergency shelters, and navigation centers. Operating subsidies may include operating reserves;
 - c) Street outreach to assist persons experiencing homelessness to access permanent housing and services;
 - d) Services coordination, which may include access to workforce, education, and training programs, or other services needed to promote housing stability in supportive housing;
 - e) Systems support for activities necessary to create regional partnerships and maintain a homeless services and housing delivery system, particularly for vulnerable populations, including families and homeless youth;
 - f) Delivery of permanent housing and innovative housing solutions, such as hotel and motel conversions;
 - g) Prevention and shelter diversion to permanent housing, including rental subsidies; and
 - h) Interim sheltering, limited to newly developed clinically enhanced congregate shelters, new or existing noncongregate shelters, and operations of existing navigation centers and shelters based on demonstrated need. Demonstrated need for purposes of this paragraph shall be based on the following:
 - i) The number of available shelter beds in the city, county, or region served by a CoC;
 - ii) The number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in the homeless point-in-time count;
 - iii) Shelter vacancy rate in the summer and winter months;

- iv) Percentage of exits from emergency shelters to permanent housing solutions; and
 - v) A plan to connect residents to permanent housing. (GOV 50220.7)
- 3) Requires, beginning with the third round of HHAP, applicants to provide the following information for all rounds of program allocations through a data collection, reporting, performance monitoring, and accountability framework, as established by Cal-ICH:
- a) Data on the applicant's progress towards meeting their outcome goals, which must be submitted annually on December 31 of each year through the duration of the program;
 - b) If the applicant has not made significant progress toward their outcome goals, the applicant must submit a description of barriers and possible solutions to those barriers;
 - c) Applicants that do not demonstrate significant progress towards meeting outcome goals must accept technical assistance from Cal-ICH and may also be required to limit the allowable uses of these program funds, as determined by the council;
 - d) A quarterly fiscal report of program funds expended and obligated in each allowable budget category approved in their application for program funds; and
 - e) If the applicant has not made significant progress toward their outcome goals, then the applicant must report on their outcome goals in their quarterly report. (GOV 50220.7)
- 4) Requires Cal-ICH to post a statewide report that aggregates each applicant's outcome goals into a single statewide set of metrics. (GOV 50220.7)
- 5) Requires each recipient that receives a round three program allocation to submit to Cal-ICH a final report, as well as detailed uses of all program funds, no later than October 1, 2026. (GOV 50220.7)
- 6) Requires each recipient that receives a round four program allocation to submit to Cal-ICH a final report, as well as detailed uses of all program funds, no later than October 1, 2027. (GOV 50220.7)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown.

COMMENTS:

Author's Statement: According to the author, "In order to tackle chronic homelessness among our state's youth, we need to fix the services intended to help them. I believe the solutions are already in place, but the system that is supposed to help facilitate the process and to provide equity in services is unable to identify the individuals who are at greater risk in our community. AB 249 aims to fix CES by including youth-specific entry points that would assess the unique circumstances our youth face and allow them to qualify for services sooner rather than later. This bill will ensure that our youth gets the support they need to be uplifted and allowed to continue moving forward in life."

HHAP: The HHAP program was created to provide jurisdictions funding to expand or develop local capacity to address their immediate homelessness challenges informed by a best-practices framework focused on moving homeless individuals and families into permanent housing and

supporting the efforts of those individuals and families to maintain their permanent housing. Large cities (with a population of 300,000 or more), counties, CoCs, and tribes can apply for HHAP funding. There have been five rounds of funding for HHAP. Applicants recently received their fifth round of funding and a sixth round is available. While Round 3 of the HHAP Program required applicants to develop a Local Action Plan and performance goals, it did not require regional coordination. Round 5 of HHAP required applicants to develop a regionally coordinated homeless action plan and apply as a region.

The Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP) and subsequently HHAP requires applicants to use a percentage of their allocation to assist homeless youth. A total of \$276 million from both programs must be used by local jurisdictions to address youth homelessness. The John Burton Foundation analyzed the impact these funds had regionally on the reducing the number of homelessness youth by comparing the 2020 point-in-time-count (PIT) to the 2022 PIT. They found a 21% reduction in homelessness among unaccompanied youth. California's decrease in youth homelessness is 2.6 times greater than the reduction in all other states – all other states decreased by 8%.

Round 3 and 4 both authorized the use of HHAP funds to create a youth-specific CES or youth-specific coordinated entry access points, or to improve the coordinated entry assessment tool to ensure that it contemplates the specific needs of youth experiencing homelessness.

Homeless Youth in California: According to the 2024 PIT count, there are over 185,000 people experiencing homelessness in California on any given night and 14% of those people are unaccompanied children and transitional-age youth, with the majority (93%) between 18 and 24 years old. Youth homelessness is often rooted in family conflict. Other contributing factors include economic circumstances like poverty and housing insecurity, racial disparities, and mental health and substance use disorders. Young people who have had involvement with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems are also more likely to become homeless. Evidence has also shown that being homeless as a youth is a key indicator of adult homelessness.

Coordinated Entry Systems: In 2012, the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) began requiring CoCs to use a CES. In 2017 HUD mandated the use of CES for all CoCs as a condition of receiving federal funds. CES is a CoC-established system-wide process to quickly and equitably coordinate the access, assessment, prioritization and referrals to housing and services for people experiencing or at imminent risk of homelessness. CES is an evidence-based strategy that focuses on housing and service coordination designed to link people experiencing homelessness to the most appropriate housing solution based on their needs.

There are 44 CoCs in the state. Each CoC geographically covers the county in which it is situated. A CoC is either controlled by county government or it is created as a nonprofit with representation from local nonprofit homelessness services providers and in some cases representatives from the county and cities it covers geographically. The CES is meant to be a community-wide tool and therefore people entered into system are from the entire county. The CES is also meant to remove racial bias in who is prioritized for housing and services and prioritize people based on need. Significant racial disproportionality exists among those experiencing homelessness, with people who identify as Black/African American very overrepresented.

CESs prioritize individuals for housing based on the length of time they have been homeless. Youth experience homelessness differently than adults. They are more likely to cycle in and out of homelessness, staying temporarily with friends or family, but not securing a permanent housing solution.

HUD has provided guidance to CoCs on developing and implementing a coordinated entry processes specific to working with runaway and homeless youth populations but does not mandate inclusion. HUD encourages CoCs with a network of youth-serving programs to consider whether they would better serve youth by creating coordinated entry access points dedicated to underage and transition aged youth. Access points can be located in areas where homeless youth feel comfortable and safe, staffed with people who specialize in working with youth. In addition, CoCs should ensure that if they use separate coordinated entry points for youth that those youth can still access assistance from other parts of the homeless assistance system and that youth who access other coordinated entry points can access assistance from youth serving programs. This bill would require HCD to certify that a CoCs maintains a youth-specific CES to receive HHAP funding in a future appropriation.

Federal Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project (YHDP): The goal of YHDP is to support selected communities, including rural, suburban, and urban areas across the United States, in the development and implementation of a coordinated community approach to preventing and ending youth homelessness. Several California CoCs have received funding and technical assistance from YHDP to create a youth-specific CES, including CA-Humboldt County CoC (\$1.13 mil), CA-Bakersfield/Kern County CoC (\$5.26 mil), CA-San Diego City and County CoC (\$9.75 mil), CA-Riverside City & County CoC (\$7.50 mil), CA-Sacramento City & County CoC (\$6.51 mil.), and CA-Santa Maria/Santa Barbara County CoC (\$5.17 mil.).

Cost Pressures: In an effort to create a more coordinated response to homelessness, the state utilizes local CES data. In 2021, AB 977 (Gabriel), Chapter 397, Statutes of 2021 required counties and non-profits that receive state funding for any program that address homelessness to enter data into CES. This data is inputted into the CES by the CoC. CoCs submit annual data from the CES to Cal-ICH that is entered into the state's Homeless Data Information System. CoCs did not receive additional funding for this purpose. HHAP funding can be used by CoCs to update the CES, an important priority in continuing to improve the local response system. However, HHAP funding in Round 5 and 6 has shifted toward greater accountability for moving people experiencing homelessness into permanent housing. Beyond funding from HHAP, the state does not provide any funding to CoCs to maintain CES – all of this funding comes from the federal government, which requires CoCs to maintain a CES to receive federal dollars. Should federal funding stop flowing to CoCs for this purpose, the Legislature may need to consider focusing limited HHAP dollars narrowly on the cost of housing people experiencing homelessness and away from needed strategies that improve coordination and accountability in addressing homelessness.

Arguments in Support: According to the sponsor, the California Coalition for Youth, “this bill provides a developmentally-appropriate fix to the gap in services and ensures Continuums of Care include youth-specific entry points, assessment, and prioritization scores, and youth appropriate housing and services. With an effective, youth-centered process, it reduces the number of interviews that require repeating highly personal information, often involving traumatic experiences, and reduces the amount of time it takes to receive housing and supportive services. Further, the bill requires Continuums of Care to have housing in their inventory

specifically for youth that aligns with the needs of youth in the region and the creation of youth with lived experience advisory boards for cities, counties and CoCs to consult with to design interventions for youth.”

Arguments in Opposition: None on file.

Committee Amendments: As currently drafted, CoCs are required to “create” an array of youth-specific housing inventory to align with the needs of youth in their region. To better align the role of the CoC the committee may wish to consider refining this language to require the CoC to “identify” a youth-specific housing inventory. CoCs do not build all of the units in the county for homeless youth and therefore it would be more appropriate for them to identify available units.

Related Legislation:

AB 2520 (Ramos) of 2024 would have required CoCs to create a youth-specific CESs with HHAP funding. This bill was held on suspense in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

Double-referred: This bill was also referred to the Assembly Committee on Human Services where it will be heard should it pass out of this committee.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Coalition for Youth (Sponsor)
Alliance for Children's Rights
Bill Wilson Center
California Alliance of Caregivers
California Apartment Association
California Court Appointed Special Advocate Association
Children Now
Community Solutions
Covenant House California
Family Assistance Program
First Place for Youth
Home Start INC.
Larkin Street Youth Services
National Network for Youth
Orangewood Foundation
Ready for Life Host Homes
Redwood Community Action Agency's Youth Service Bureau
Safe Place for Youth
San Diego Youth Services
Schoolhouse Connection
Sycamores
YMCA of San Diego County

Opposition

None on file.

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