



December 17, 2021

Regarding: Portland Business Alliance Endorsement of the Here Together Coalition's Updated Policy Framework and Near-Term Policy Solutions

To Here Together Colleagues:

The Portland Business Alliance is in support of the Here Together Coalition's Updated Policy Framework and Near-Term Policy Solutions that have been presented to us. We are hopeful that, as a community, we will continue to impact the current regional homelessness crisis and drive forward solution-oriented work.

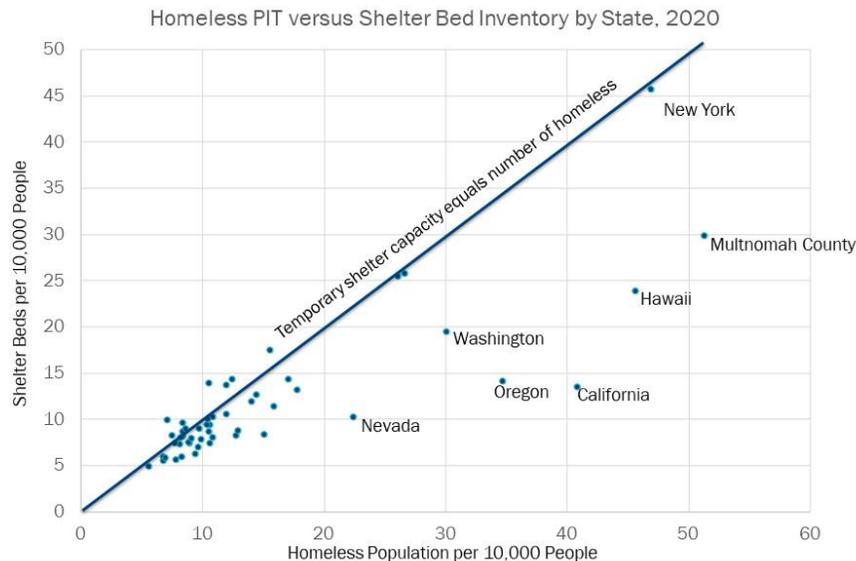
As you know, Alliance members and staff were part of the founding, drafting and campaign to enact Portland Metro, Oregon, Measure 26-210, Income and Business Taxes for Homeless Services in May 2020, the largest per-capita expenditure in the nation dedicated to homelessness. The Alliance has also actively participated in the drafting and enactments of several of the local implementing plans post-voter approval. Additionally, our members and staff remain dedicated to seeing successful management of our state's flagship government body entrusted to implement homeless services in our region through service on A Home for Everyone's executive *and* coordinating boards.

The Portland Business Alliance's strategic plan emphasizes collaboration as a core value, one that we want to commend your efforts in keeping the coalition – which passed the measure – together, and for the hard but necessary work of ensuring that what was promised by the campaign is delivered by the relevant government bodies.

Collectively, our members serve on innumerable provider boards; contribute technical and financial support across the spectrum of service provision, and actively advocate at the city, county, metro, state and federal levels for both the requisite policy and funding support necessary to reduce homelessness in our region and meet the distinct needs of individuals who find themselves unsheltered. We join with you in decrying the humanitarian conditions for the homeless who are unsheltered and recognize that Oregon is #2 in the nation in proportionate share of our homeless population that is unsheltered, a ranking which we should collectively reject and work to change.

While our organization is committed to working within the coalition, we feel it critical that we provide additional recommendations that we will be advocating for. We hope you join us in these efforts. The Alliance recognizes that this is an ongoing conversation and would like to identify areas of collective concern within this framework. It is our hope that by identifying these issue points, we can continue to drive forward healthy discussion and deliberation that will bolster more effective policy and contribute to the larger conversation around solutions to this crisis.

West Coast: High rates of homelessness and low bed inventory



Source: EDONorthwest analysis of HUD 2020 Point-In-Time Counts, HUD 2020 Housing Inventory Counts, and U.S. Census Bureau 2020 Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for the United States, Regions, States, and Puerto Rico. Notes: Shelter beds per 10,000 people include all-year round emergency shelter beds, transitional housing units, and safe haven beds for currently homeless individuals divided by state population. Line demonstrates a relationship of 1:1 shelter bed to individual experiencing homelessness (line is not the line of best fit to the data).

- Urgency in sheltering the unsheltered:** Data derived from the last Housing and Urban Development Point in Time Count reveals that Oregon has 1.3 percent of the nation’s population yet is home to 4.5 percent of the nation’s unsheltered homeless population. The Alliance is acutely aware of and has prioritized housing shortage by analyzing the critically-underbuilt housing market through our [Value of Jobs Coalition](#) report along with our endorsements of multiple housing bonds at the city and Metro level, and we have actively advocated for solutions to fix the far-too-slow permitting system and adjust zoning codes; as well as work with federal partners to enact and execute on various support mechanisms to build net new housing and repurpose existing underutilized commercial stock for housing needs; and, while we recognize housing is the undeniable causal link to the size of any region’s homeless population, it is also true that a massive shortfall in shelter facilities of all variety is the cause of our unsheltered crisis that continues to define our present humanitarian failings.

Simply put, we do not have enough shelter space, and we cannot accept that it is permissible to let people live, and die, on the streets of our region when a safe, dry place is all that could have prevented such a horrific outcome. A triage approach to rapidly building shelter space must take precedence. And while other regions face the same federal disinvestment as we do, as well as equally if not more expensive housing markets relative to median household income, those very same regions have prioritized providing shelter for nearly every individual on the street, as clearly evidenced by the illustration above. Shelter is an absolute need on the continuum to place the unsheltered into permanent, and if necessary, supportive housing.

- Mental Health and Chemical Addiction services.** As we work together to adequately build housing and shelter the unsheltered, one of the most important investments we can make to prevent further loss of life or the degradation of life today and into the

future is in health and human services. This includes targeted support for chemical addiction treatment and an expansion in mental health services and facilities in our region and state to combat the mental health degradation among the unsheltered and homeless particularly caused by a variety of new and horrific chemicals such as fentanyl and methamphetamine (specifically the 'P2P Meth'). **126 human beings lost their lives on our streets in 2021** in large part due to the epidemic of meth use to simply stay awake¹. The broadly available use of these substances is causing toxic brain injury that can become chronic. The effects of these new, lethal, and destructive chemicals are leading to a massive increase in mental health breakdowns and psychosis on our streets. These epidemics heighten longstanding issues of stressed and fraying behavioral health systems both locally and beyond.

By way of examples, the use of illegally manufactured or "street" fentanyl, which is widely available and highly lethal, is at times refractory to our best medication-assisted treatment for opioid use disorder as detailed by NPR last November²:

Again, In October 2021, *The Atlantic* specifically outlined the new variety of destructive methamphetamine that has become widely available as one that "Despite years of research, science has found no equivalent of methadone or Suboxone to help subdue meth cravings and allow people addicted to the drug a chance to break from it and begin repairing their life."³ Our behavioral health providers in our community have been surviving, thriving and delivering care despite a nation-wide and half-century long disinvestment in behavioral health programs.

As you may be aware, we concurrently face not only the upward trend of extremely dangerous chemical compounds on the streets, but also gaps in the involuntary commitment systems, and workforce shortages. These are all contributing factors aiding in the rise of acuity of behavioral health needs in the community, particularly among those who are homeless or at risk of experiencing homelessness. We ask you to join us in recognizing the importance of including support for services that connect people with treatment solutions for addiction issues and believe that this new reality and emphasis should be included in the coalition's proposed policy solutions for a more robust, accessible and resourced behavioral health system would provide a catalyzing effect to the already excellent proposed Near-Term Policy Solutions.

- **Addressing crime.** Homelessness is not in and of itself, criminal. We join with you in this fundamental evaluation. Any one of us could find ourselves unsheltered or homeless at any point. However, the presence of crime perpetrated on and among

¹ Foden-Vencil, Kristian (2021) At least 126 people died while homeless last year in Multnomah County <https://www.opb.org/article/2021/12/15/125-homeless-deaths-multnomah-county-oregon/>

² Mann, B. (2020). Street Fentanyl Surges In Western U.S., Leading To Thousands Of Deaths <https://www.npr.org/2020/11/17/934154859/street-fentanyl-surges-in-western-u-s-leading-to-thousands-of-deaths>

³ Quinones, S. (2021). 'I don't know that I would call it meth anymore.' <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/11/the-new-meth/620174/>

the most vulnerable, those living unsheltered, is a reality which should inspire us to more urgent action targeted to rapidly decreasing the unsheltered population through the expansion of safe, dry shelter facilities.

- **Maintenance of hygiene services.** The Here Together proposed framework places an emphasis on funding for hygiene services that also include street and litter cleaning. The Alliance supports this concept but urges the coalition to consider the addition of a focus on maintenance of hygiene services, like bathroom and sanitation sites, both for the users and a broader community. Similar solutions and programs have been undertaken by the City and relevant groups, and while important and effective, they have often been poorly maintained to the detriment of all. The Alliance supports a stronger focus on language and funding solutions to help maintain these important services.

The Portland Business Alliance reiterates our endorsement of these new Near-Term Policy Solutions and is honored to act as a signatory, showing our strong support to elected leaders around the region for Here Together's solutions-based approach to addressing what is arguably our most important issue in Portland and the region.

We hope that these identified points will prompt a larger conversation around Here Together's future policy frameworks. The Alliance looks forward to continuing to support the coalition in these discussions and working together to identify effective solutions for our community.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'AH', with a stylized, flowing script.

Andrew Hoan
President & CEO
Portland Business Alliance

CC: Regional, State-wide and Federal Elected Officials