

Date of Hearing: April 23, 2024

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Alex Lee, Chair

AB 2520 (Ramos) – As Amended March 21, 2024

SUBJECT: Housing: youth-specific processes and coordinated entry systems

SUMMARY: Requires the California Interagency Council on Homelessness (Cal-ICH) to ensure a continuum of care (CoC) has a youth-specific process with their coordinated entry system (CES). Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires Cal-ICH, upon appropriation, and beginning with the 2026-27 fiscal year, to ensure a CoC create or maintain a documented, youth-specific process with their respective CES that requires this process to specify all of the following:
 - a) How youth are matched to youth-specific resources;
 - b) The means by which youth can access the CES, to include factors in addition to length of time experiencing homelessness;
 - c) How youth accessing the CES through adult or family programs can access youth-specific supports;
 - d) Implement a youth-specific assessment tool that considers the unique needs of youth experiencing homelessness and the unique presentation of homelessness among youth;
 - e) Create a body or identify an existing body composed of youth with lived experience of homelessness that the CoC and other Homeless Housing, Assistance, and Prevention Program (HHAP) grantees are required to consult with regularly to receive input on policies, program design, and implementation of interventions for youth; and,
 - f) Create an array of youth-specific housing inventory to align with the needs of youth in their region.
- 2) Requires, if a CoC states that they already maintain a youth-specific CES, the CoC to 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.
- 3) Defines "youth-specific" to mean for a homeless youth, as defined in existing law, an unaccompanied youth between 12 and 24 years of age, inclusive, who is experiencing homelessness, as defined the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. Specifies that "homeless youth" includes unaccompanied youth who are pregnant or parenting.
- 4) Makes legislative findings and declarations related to HHAP and that applicants can use their funding to create a youth-specific CES.

EXISTING LAW:

State law:

- 1) Establishes Cal-ICH, formerly known as the Homelessness Coordinating and Financing Council (HCFC), to oversee and coordinate the implementation of the Housing First guidelines and regulations in California and to identify resources and services that can be accessed to prevent and end homelessness in California. (Welfare and Institutions Code [WIC] 8255 § *et seq.*)
- 2) Defines "Housing First" practices as an evidence-based model that uses housing as a tool, rather than a reward, for recovery and centers on providing or connecting people experiencing homelessness to permanent housing as quickly as possible. (WIC § 8255 (d)(1))
- 3) 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 Cal-ICH to administer HHAP. (Health and Safety Code [HSC] § 50216 *et seq.*)
- 3) 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) Interim sheltering, limited to newly developed, clinically enhanced congregate shelters, new or existing non-congregate shelters, and operations of existing navigation centers and shelters based on demonstrated need. Specifies demonstrated need for purposes of these provisions to 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. (HSC § 50220.7)
- 4) Requires, beginning with the third round of HHAP, applicants to provide specified information for all rounds of program allocations through a data collection, reporting, performance monitoring, and accountability framework, as established by Cal-ICH. (HSC § 50223(a))

- 5) Requires Cal-ICH to post a statewide report that aggregates each applicant's outcome goals into a single statewide set of metrics. (HSC § 50223(a)(3))
- 6) 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. (HSC § 50223(b))
- 7) 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. (HSC § 50223(c))
- 8) Establishes requirements for applicants to receive a round four program allocation, including that the application should include a local homelessness action plan that assesses the current number of people experiencing homelessness and existing programs within the jurisdiction. Specifies the plan should address strategies to meet outcome goals, including improving CES to eliminate racial bias or creating youth-specific coordinated entry systems. (HSC § 50220.7(a))

Federal law:

- 9) Establishes the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act to address the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness. Homeless children and youth are defined as individuals without a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. It encompasses those living in shelters, motels, cars, parks, or other inadequate conditions. Defines unaccompanied youth as homeless children or youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian. (42 United States Code (U.S.C.) § 11434a(2))
- 10) Establishes the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness to coordinate a federal response to homelessness and create a national partnership at every level of government and with the private sector to end homelessness. (42 U.S.C. § 11311)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown, this bill has not been analyzed by a fiscal committee.

COMMENTS: This analysis is focused only on topics germane to the Assembly Human Services Committee's jurisdiction. For additional discussion, please see the Assembly Committee on Housing and Community Development's analysis.

Background: *The California Interagency Council on Homelessness.* Cal-ICH, as it is known today, began with the initial passage of SB 1380 (Mitchell), Chapter 847, Statutes of 2016, and the establishment of the HCFC. The goal of the HCFC was to implement Housing First practices across the state to reduce the prevalence and duration of homelessness in California. As the homelessness crisis worsened as we entered into the 2020 Coronavirus pandemic, it became apparent that more investments were needed to offer the proper resources and techniques to vulnerable California residents. In 2021, HCFC was renamed and restructured to become Cal-ICH. In addition to administration of Housing First policies, Cal-ICH now also works to provide purposeful coordination of services and benefits to align the many state departments using different programs to help address homelessness. Through an adopted Action Plan, developed with input from over 60 community entities, public agencies, nonprofits, and issue experts, Cal-ICH has landed on five action areas and goals for the state. As required by law, the Action Plan

was first adopted in March 2021 and has since been updated in September 2022 and September 2023. According to Cal-ICH, the plan focuses on the highest-priority strategies that will have the greatest impact, with a commitment to update activities annually. The latest update captures the full depth of activities related to housing and homelessness being implemented in Fiscal Year 2023-24. Cal-ICH operates under the Business, Consumer Services, and Housing Agency and is co-chaired by the Secretary of the California Health and Human Services Agency.

Continuums of Care. In the context of California homelessness, a CoC refers to an integrated system of care designed to guide and track homeless individuals and families through a comprehensive array of housing and services. The CoC provides tailored housing and services based on the specific needs of individuals experiencing homelessness. By addressing individual circumstances, CoCs aim to achieve housing stability and independence. CoCs involve local entities, often at the county or group-of-counties level, to administer housing assistance programs. These entities collaborate to create and implement action plans that prevent future homelessness and improve outcomes for those currently without stable housing. This bill would require Cal-ICH, to ensure a CoC has a documented, youth-specific process with their respective CES that requires information on how youth are matched to youth-specific resources and the means by which youth can access the CES. The bill also requires Cal-ICH to ensure that each CoC creates a body or identifies an existing body composed of youth with lived experience of homelessness that the CoC and other HHAP grantees are required to consult with regularly to receive input on policies, program design, and implementation of interventions for youth.

Coordinated Entry Systems: A CES is a vital component of the overall strategy to prevent and end youth homelessness. CES processes enable communities to effectively and efficiently use resources to house those experiencing or at-risk of homelessness. The goal is to make it easier for persons experiencing homelessness to access the housing and service resources that are best suited for them. CES processes are adapted specifically for working with runaway and homeless youth populations. These processes recognize the unique needs and developmental stages of young people who are unaccompanied and without stable housing. Youth-specific CES ensure that all community stakeholders, including runaway and homeless youth providers, child welfare agencies, school systems, justice systems, workforce partners, and other youth-serving organizations, collaborate in planning and implementing a responsive and developmentally appropriate CES processes. The intent is to standardize and streamline the process for youth access to homelessness-dedicated resources across the entire crisis response system, reducing the burden on youth to receive needed housing and supportive services. A youth-inclusive CES process involves several key components:

- Ensuring youth can easily enter the system and access services.
- Using tools to measure vulnerability and need for housing and related services.
- Determining who receives resources based on community-wide availability.
- Facilitating connections to appropriate housing options and support.

The Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention Program was established in 2019 and provides local jurisdictions with funds to support regional coordination and expand or develop local capacity to address their immediate homelessness challenges. Cal-ICH plays a crucial role in the HHAP grant program by overseeing implementation and ensuring that the program aligns

with guidelines and regulations, and focusing on evidence-based approaches like Housing First. The HHAP program consists of multiple funding rounds:

HHAP Round 1: A \$650 million grant supporting local jurisdictions in addressing immediate homelessness challenges, enhancing regional coordination, and expanding local capacity.

HHAP Round 2: A \$300 million grant to continue building on regional collaboration developed through previous Cal-ICH funding rounds and create unified regional responses to homelessness.

HHAP Rounds 3, 4, and 5: Each provides \$1 billion in flexible funding for local jurisdictions (including federally recognized tribal governments) to sustain efforts in ending and preventing homelessness.

Cal-ICH ensures that these funds are allocated effectively and used to improve regional and systems coordination and monitors progress, provides technical assistance, and ensures accountability. Cal-ICH is permitted to withhold funding until improvements are made, emphasizing program effectiveness and outcomes.

However, as noted in the April 2024 report by the Auditor of the State of California entitled *Homelessness in California The State Must Do More to Assess the Cost-Effectiveness of Its Homelessness Programs*, the Legislature intends to transfer all grant programs administered by Cal-ICH to the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) by July 2024 to allow Cal-ICH to better focus its efforts on providing statewide policy development and coordination.

HHAP provides funding for a variety of services that address multiple aspects of homelessness, including providing interim housing. According to the Auditor's report, Cal-ICH tracks the spending of HHAP funds by individual eligible use categories. Such tracking shows that, as of December 2022, about half of the HHAP Round 1 funding had been used for emergency shelters and operating subsidies. The amount used for each other eligible use was less than 15%. Grantees have until June 2026 to spend the funds from HHAP Rounds 2 and 3, and until June 2027 for Round 4.

Youth-Specific Coordinated Entry Systems: Youth-specific CES allow youth to be assessed against other youth, rather than against adults, including chronically homeless adults, whose time on the street will always place them above youth if vulnerability is measured by time spent on the street. Further, youth need housing options that meet their developmentally appropriate needs, which would include a mix of rapid rehousing, time-limited or interim housing, and permanent supportive housing. Current law encourages HHAP applicants to create a youth-specific CES but does not require that they do so. This bill would require CoCs to ensure there is a youth-specific process with their respective CES.

Author's Statement: According to the Author, "Addressing youth homelessness is a top priority and in order to do so it requires youth specific solutions. We know that up to 50% of adults experiencing chronic homelessness had their first homeless experience between the ages of 16-24. Additional research estimates 85% of people who experience long-term homelessness come from the "youth-to-adult" pipeline. With [this bill], we aim to provide a developmentally-appropriate fix to the gap in services and ensure Continuums of Care include youth-specific entry points, assessment, and prioritization scores, and youth appropriate housing and services. By

doing so, we can go a long way in reducing the number of people experiencing homelessness in the long run.”

Equity Implications: As noted in the 2023 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report to Congress from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development, California reported the largest number of unaccompanied youth (10,173 people), accounting for more than a fourth of all unaccompanied youth nationally (29%), with 68.2% of these youth being unsheltered. Between 2022 and 2023, the number of unaccompanied youth increased by 15%, representing an additional 4,613 youth. The 2023 figure is similar to the number observed in 2020, just before the onset of the pandemic. The challenges these youth face underscore the need for solutions to assist this vulnerable population.

Double referral: This bill was previously heard in the Assembly Housing and Community Development Committee, on March 20, 2024, and was approved on a 9-0 vote.

RELATED AND PRIOR LEGISLATION:

AB 1220 (Luz Rivas), Chapter 398, Statutes of 2021, renamed the HCFC to Cal-ICH, named the Secretary of the California Health and Human Services Agency as a co-chair, reconstituted the Cal-ICH membership, and required the Cal-ICH to meet at least twice yearly with an advisory committee, among other things.

SB 918 (Wiener), Chapter 841, Statutes of 2018, established the Homeless Youth Act of 2018 to better serve the state’s homeless youth population and required the HCFC to take on additional related responsibilities, including setting goals to prevent and end homelessness among youth in the state, defining outcome measures, and gathering data related to those goals.

SB 1380 (Mitchell), Chapter 847, Statutes of 2016, created the HCFC to implement Housing First policies throughout the state.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Coalition for Youth (Sponsor)
 Alliance for Children's Rights
 Bill Wilson Center
 Bright Futures for Youth
 California Alliance of Caregivers
 Children Now
 Covenant House California
 Family Assistance Program
 First Place for Youth
 Home Start, INC
 Larkin Street Youth Services
 Los Angeles LGBT Center
 National Network for Youth
 Orangewood Foundation
 Power CA Action

Sacramento LGBT Community Center
Safe Place for Youth
San Diego Youth Services
Steinberg Institute
YMCA of San Diego County

Opposition

None on file.

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