SHELTER DEFINITIONS

Emergency Shelter

Temporary, short-term shelter and crisis services to homeless individuals and families. For many, emergency shelter is the only option to immediately alleviate a short-term housing crisis. Like other successful interventions, emergency shelters maintain a strong focus on quickly assisting individuals and families in moving to permanent housing, either on their own or with the assistance of another intervention via the Coordinated Entry System (e.g., rapid rehousing).

Current Shelter Network

In Snohomish County, emergency shelters operate under a variety of program models, including year-round, drop-in, and seasonal (i.e., shelters that are open during the cold weather season); some emergency shelters are also targeted to specific subpopulations, such as youth, or survivors of domestic violence. Snohomish County’s current shelter network includes 446 year-round and approximately 197 seasonal/overflow beds.

Expanded Sheltering Efforts During COVID-19

In addition to our year-round sheltering efforts, we’ve increased our sheltering capacity to address the public health crisis facing our unsheltered population. Approximately 88 motel/hotel units have been added to our capacity through the county-wide voucher program, The Salvation Army motel program, and the Hand Up Project Shelter Pilot. The Salvation Army’s Everett Seasonal Shelter has remained open during the pandemic which has also increased our capacity by another 45 beds.

Year-Round vs. Seasonal/Cold Weather Shelters

Year-round shelters provide time limited shelter and services to individuals and/or families 365 days per year. Comparatively, seasonal or cold weather shelters in Snohomish County are generally mobilized during certain cold weather months and provides shelter when the temperature is anticipated to be at or below freezing (during the months of November through March).

Overnight vs. Comprehensive Shelters

Overnight shelters provide temporary beds for individuals and families experiencing homelessness where each morning, they “check out,” and if they continue to need shelter, they can “check in” again. By contrast, comprehensive shelters provide individuals and families with shelter beds/rooms that are available 24 hours per day. In Snohomish County, the median length of stay was 48 nights in Federal Fiscal Year 2019, due largely to the scarcity of affordable permanent housing. Most individuals and families who access shelter rarely return to shelter once they have obtained permanent housing.

Abstinence vs. Low-Barrier Shelters

Some shelters require individuals and families be “clean and sober,” while other shelters do not have sobriety requirements for admittance. Low barrier shelters do not screen individuals and families out based on such factors as sobriety, poor credit, evictions, or criminal histories. Low barrier shelters align with the growing body of evidence that a low barrier, housing first strategy is more effective for individuals in need of behavioral health services than abstinence-based housing; ensuring the homeless housing and service system is accessible to those most in need. The philosophy behind a low barrier, housing first approach is that the need for housing must be addressed before most individuals can actively and successfully engage in treatment and address other major life challenges. Low-barrier shelters can increase system efficiencies by creating pathways to permanent housing for chronic utilizers of emergency services.

Stand Alone vs. Integrated Shelters

While some shelters are designed exclusively to provide temporary shelter beds and services, others offer shelter and services that are integrated with other interventions, such as rapid rehousing. A few family shelter programs in Snohomish County currently integrate their shelter with rapid rehousing assistance, providing a permanent housing “exit strategy” (direct access to short term rental assistance and services).