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MAY 1, 2017

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Homelessness Drops in Chittenden County for Third Straight Year

Chittenden County Homeless Alliance's collaborative campaign to end homelessness results in 12% decrease this year and 45% drop since 2014; Alliance calls for more investment in housing

Burlington, Vermont – Members of the Chittenden County Homeless Alliance and Mayor Miro Weinberger today announced more progress towards their shared goal of eliminating homelessness in Chittenden County, with this year's Point in Time count indicating a 12% drop in the number of homeless individuals. This progress includes a reduction in both the number of families experiencing homelessness and those who are chronically homeless. The 12% drop brings the overall decrease in homelessness to 45% over the past four years. The January count found 291 people in shelters, other temporary housing options, or completely unsheltered.

"The reduction this year, and for the past three years running, is a testament to collaboration and making sure we all have our eyes on the same prize," said Erin Ahearn of the Community Health Centers of Burlington and a co-chair of the Homeless Alliance. "We have steadily decreased homelessness across all demographics and can see a future where homelessness is rare and brief."

The Point in Time count is completed at the end of January each year in communities across the country. The count offers an opportunity to collect data on not only the numbers of people experiencing homelessness, but additional information such as household size, numbers living with mental illness or substance dependency, or the number of veterans without permanent housing. In this way, the count not only provides an ability to evaluate progress year-over-year, but also helps identify where services and resources may be deployed better.

"This third year in a row of decreases is an indication that the public investments to reduce and eliminate homelessness are working. There's more work to do – but the fact that we're making progress signals to us that we will succeed in meeting our goal of eliminating homelessness with additional investment in new housing, services and rental assistance," added Margaret Bozik of the Champlain Housing Trust and the other co-chair of the Alliance.

"I am encouraged to see how much progress we have made as a community to address homelessness by focusing resources on the most vulnerable and pursuing innovative new strategies," said Mayor Miro Weinberger. "I have great hope that with our continued collaboration we can bring an end to homelessness in Chittenden County. The \$35 million Housing Bond proposal in front of the Legislature would be a big boost towards that goal."

Progress towards ending homelessness in Chittenden County has benefited from Housing First strategies spearheaded members of the Alliance, adopted as policy by the City of Burlington in 2015, and supported by many partners, which focus resources on addressing the needs of the chronically homeless.

Several key projects have helped individuals experiencing homelessness find permanent housing over the last several years:

- In 2014, Champlain Housing Trust's Harbor Place, a motel in Shelburne which offers supportive services, opened and has not only saved money but been more effective at helping people find permanent housing than the simple motel voucher program.
- Beacon Apartments in South Burlington opened by the Champlain Housing Trust and Community Health Centers of Burlington in early 2015 with the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB), United Way of Northwest Vermont, University of Vermont Medical Center, and Shelter plus Care vouchers administered by the Burlington Housing Authority. Beacon Apartments houses and supports 19 individuals who were chronically homeless and who had medical vulnerabilities.
- Community Health Centers of Burlington ran a low-barrier warming shelter in Burlington this past winter, building on the work of COTS and the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity the previous two winters.
- With the support of the City of Burlington, Housing Vermont and state funders like VHCB, the Committee on Temporary Shelter reopened its Daystation in April, 2017. In the same building 14 new apartments were constructed, four of which are dedicated to people who were formerly homeless.
- The Champlain Housing Trust and the University of Vermont Medical Center are turning the Bel Aire motel to into apartments for people who have been homeless or are unable to be discharged from a hospital bed for lack of a better option. The Community Health Centers of Burlington will provide services on site.
- Several communities are looking to using local Housing Trust Funds to address housing challenges: the Town of Williston is exploring creating a new trust fund, the City of South Burlington established one in 2015, and the City of Burlington has doubled its contribution to its housing trust fund.

In addition to this year's 12% drop in the number of homeless individuals, the Chittenden County Point in Time count demonstrated several other positive trends. Since 2015, progress has been made by:

- Decreasing chronic homelessness by 56%;
- Lowering family homelessness by 29%;
- Reducing homelessness among people with severe mental illness by 42%; and
- Dropping incidence of homelessness with those affected by substance use disorder by 70%.

In spite of this progress, nearly 300 individuals continue to live without homes in Chittenden County. The Alliance and Mayor Weinberger urged leaders in Montpelier to pass the proposed \$35 million dollar Housing Bond to support future efforts to address the needs of homeless individuals, or individuals at risk of becoming homeless, in Chittenden County.

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The Chittenden County Homeless Alliance is a coalition of individuals, organizations, and government who support our vision of a safe, decent, affordable, stable home for every person and family in Chittenden County. Its mission is to end homelessness in Chittenden County by being a forum for gathering information, building consensus, coordinating efforts, and advocating the end of homelessness through prevention, early intervention, and remediation.