

LOB #157:

HYPOTHERMIA PREVENTION SERVICES

Purpose

The primary purpose of the Hypothermia Prevention Program is to prevent deaths among Fairfax County unsheltered homeless population as a result of exposure to the extreme cold. The program takes place in shelters, commercial space and houses of worship. Participants are provided meals and a safe place to sleep out of the elements. Case Management is also provided to participants of the program to link them with mainstream services and ideally connect them to permanent housing options.

Description

Hypothermia is a potentially life-threatening condition that occurs when a person's internal body temperature is less than 95 degrees Fahrenheit. This happens when a person is exposed to prolonged damp and cold temperatures without adequate protective clothing and shelter. The risk of hypothermia is particularly high for persons who are disabled by substance abuse or mental illness and who may be unaware of the fact that their body temperature has fallen to the point of danger.

Fairfax County's Hypothermia Prevention Program began in 2005. Contractors of the emergency shelter program are responsible for providing the hypothermia prevention efforts in their region. During the winter months the shelters have a no turn away policy and they can accommodate some additional people overnight to prevent hypothermia but demand for shelter exceeds the facilities' capacities. Additional space is needed to accommodate the numbers of homeless served through this program. Therefore, the County's Hypothermia Prevention program relies on community partnerships for its delivery and success. Major contributions are made by area faith-communities, who provide space and volunteers to prepare and serve meals at the hypothermia sites. The program utilizes more than 2,000 volunteers and has partnerships with more than 50 places of worship and other community partners across the County to provide safe overnight sleeping space for those experiencing homelessness. Coordination of the program is extremely complex and planning begins in July of each year. While each site manages their own location, coordination must take place across the regions to ensure a countywide program for 4 months of the year. The OPEH has staff dedicated to planning the program with the participants and the coordination of the program across the system. The program serves, on average, 200 clients per night and has served 1,000 or more clients per hypothermia season. Case management is offered to hypothermia program participants. Case managers strive to engage participants so that they may access the services and benefits for which they qualify. The case managers work with those that engage with the ultimate goal of housing them.

In addition, the Hypothermia Prevention Program supports the outreach component for the Homeless Healthcare Program (HHP). Fairfax County's Health Department manages the contract for HHP but it requires close coordination with outreach from the people working in the Hypothermia Prevention Program so that the connections between clients and services are made. HHP connects clients to medical care and other resources that the client would not routinely access.

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Benefits

Without the Hypothermia Prevention Program, it is likely that the community would have many deaths on the streets during the winter months. As noted in the description, the program serves, on average, 200 participants per night. If the County were to serve these clients directly, it would require the equivalent of four more shelters to accommodate the 200 participants per night during the hypothermia season. Using the Eleanor Kennedy Shelter as an example, this equates to in-kind contributions to the County of \$1.1 million per year.

Some of the homeless in the community are resistant to entering shelter for many reasons, including but not limited to serious mental illness, substance and/or alcohol abuse, traumatic stress, fear of government. This population is also the most vulnerable with the greatest need for shelter and services. While they are not comfortable going to a homeless shelter, many utilize the Hypothermia Prevention Program. As such, the program provides the opportunity to establish a relationship with these clients increasing the possibility of successfully linking them to much needed services and ultimately housing them. Through the HHP program, they also have the opportunity to access medical care. Because of the vulnerability of this population, this is critical to the survival of these individuals.

The program is not only lifesaving but one example of a successful public-private partnership. The program is a collaborative effort between numerous Fairfax County government agencies, several non-profit organizations and 150 faith communities, as well as more than 2,000 volunteers. As a result the program fosters opportunities for education about the needs of the homeless in the community and the relationships built often result in the continued engagement to help this population beyond the hypothermia season.

Mandates

There are no mandates for the Hypothermia Prevention Program; however, the facilities used to shelter participants must be in compliance with Fire and Building Codes. Since most of the locations for the program were not designed for overnight occupancy, there were some challenges with some of the facilities. A workgroup comprised of the Office of the County Executive, the Office to Prevent and End Homelessness, the Office of the County Attorney, Office of Public Affairs, Office of the Fire Marshall and the Department of Public Works and Environmental Services, and hypothermia program non-profit partners helped secure passage of a change to the 2012 capital State Code Adoption process that grants the County's Building Official the authority to grant a temporary change of use for a facility. This helps to ensure that private facilities in the Hypothermia Prevention Program can be approved for overnight occupancy in a more expedited manner and that the facilities meet all safety standards for such programs.

Trends and Challenges

While the amount of people served in the Hypothermia Program each year has not changed in recent years, there are differences in the population entering the program. The number of people accessing the program that are over the age of 55 is increasing, as is the number of young adults, ages 18 to 19 years old. Both of these populations have particular vulnerabilities associated with them.

As people age, especially those living on the streets, they often become more medically fragile. The homeless services system has very little capacity to serve them. There is a small Medical Respite Program in the Embury Rucker Shelter but its capacity to support this population is limited.

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Young adults also have limited options available to them. Emergency shelter environments are not appropriate environments for this population because, generally, they need different types of supports and/or more intensive services than an emergency shelter can provide. In addition, the requirements of HUD funded programs preclude them from entering their programs. For example, HUD funded permanent supportive housing programs require that the person be chronically homeless. It is unlikely that most homeless 18 year olds would meet this definition. There is no County program that is targeted to serving this population

Originally, the Hypothermia Prevention Program was established to prevent death on the streets in the winter months. A positive trend in the program is an increased emphasis on longer term results by linking the participants to services and to permanently housing as many participants as possible. The number successfully housed has increased each year since OPEH and its non-profit partners have added this as a priority of the program as illustrated by the following:

<u>Hypothermia Prevention Season</u>	<u>Number of Participants Permanently Housed</u>
2011-2012	9
2012-2013	17
2013-2014	19
2014-2015	64

Resources

Category	FY 2014 Actual	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Adopted
LOB #157: Hypothermia Prevention Services			
FUNDING			
<u>Expenditures:</u>			
Compensation	\$70,453	\$68,894	\$77,050
Operating Expenses	541,667	546,837	613,845
Total Expenditures	\$612,120	\$615,731	\$690,895
General Fund Revenue	\$0	\$0	\$0
Net Cost/(Savings) to General Fund	\$612,120	\$615,731	\$690,895
POSITIONS			
Authorized Positions/Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs)			
<u>Positions:</u>			
Regular	1 / 0.8	1 / 0.8	1 / 0.8
Total Positions	1 / 0.8	1 / 0.8	1 / 0.8

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Metrics

Metric Indicator	FY 2013 Actual	FY 2014 Actual	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Estimate	FY 2017 Estimate
Average cost per person served	\$548	\$583	\$580	\$580	\$580
Number of deaths reported due to Hypothermia	0	0	0	0	0

The trends in efficiency and outcomes for the Hypothermia Prevention program are positive. In fiscal years 2013 – 2015 no deaths in the Fairfax-Falls Church community were reported due to hypothermia.

The average County cost per person served in the Hypothermia Prevention Program in FY 2015 was \$580. This is only possible because of the immense value in cash and in-kind donations leveraged by the nonprofit organizations contracted to provide these services.

It is expected that the number of individuals utilizing the Hypothermia Prevention Program will remain fairly stable at around 1,000 people per season over the next few years. Ultimately the lack of housing that is affordable to extremely low-income renters is the primary reason why people are homeless in the Fairfax-Falls Church community and the shelters, including winter seasonal programs, are full to capacity. Increasingly higher rental prices and consistently low vacancy rates have created a housing market that excludes many households at the lowest income levels, especially those with a lack of stable employment and disabilities.