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MCH Innovations Database Practice Summary & Implementation Guidance

Ohio Department of Health Youth Homelessness Program

The grant program funds community-based organization to provide innovative housing supports to prevent and end youth homelessness in Ohio.



Location
Ohio



Topic Area
Family & Youth Engagement, Safe and Connected Communities



Setting
Community



Population Focus
Adolescent & Young Adults



Date Added
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Section 1: Practice Summary

PRACTICE DESCRIPTION

The services for Homelessness Youth and Homeless Pregnant Youth is a grant program (HY) administered by the Ohio Department of Health (ODH). The purpose of this grant is to support the work of organizations taking an innovative approach to serve Ohio youth experiencing homelessness. The grant currently funds 13 non-profit organizations to provide housing and support to youth in 34 Ohio counties. The program specifically targets unaccompanied homeless youth who are 14 to 24 years of age, with an emphasis on pregnant or parenting youth.

In 2019, ODH received funding through the state budget and has maintained funding during each budget cycle since.

This grant funding was designed to be flexible for agencies working to prevent and end homelessness. The program uses the definition of homelessness outlined in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987, which includes any individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. The McKinney-Vento definition encompasses key populations excluded from other funding sources, such as those who are informally sharing the housing owned or rented by other people on a time limited bases (i.e., “couch surfing”). Federal funding sources use “literally homeless” as the definition for eligibility, making it more difficult to support youth who are unhoused and for preventing youth homelessness. Literally “homeless” includes individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and includes living in a place not meant for human habitation (e.g., streets, cars, abandoned buildings), living in an emergency shelter or transitional housing and exiting an institution (e.g., jail, hospital) where they resided for 90 days or less, if they were in a place not meant for habitation or shelter immediately before entering the institution. Many youth who are head of household or unaccompanied stay with friends or family “couch surfing” while trying to access housing assistance, making the broader McKinney-Vento definition an easier way to access housing support.

The overarching goal of the HY program is to end and prevent homelessness in Ohio. The grant deliverables include housing, such as transitional, emergency housing/shelter, homelessness prevention, host homes, shared housing and other pilot programs. Staff-time and other expenses for supportive services are allowable which include physical and mental health, basic needs, crisis intervention, education or employment, case management, housing advocacy, family connection, counseling and reunification, assisting with navigating systems, after-care and follow-up services, and support with connections to the community. These services are often implemented through street outreach and drop-in centers. Community engagement strategies are also supported, as well as funds to develop or enhance a Youth Advisory Board. The grant requires subrecipients to attend quarterly project directors’ meetings and monthly Community of Practice meetings to encourage and foster statewide collaboration and sharing best practices.

The HY grant is predominately funded through the state’s General Revenue Fund (GRF) but also finds support through the Maternal Child Health (MCH) Block Grant, Title V Program through staffing, program guidance and leadership. Since 2020, the HY program has been administered through leveraging MCH staff to oversee the grant. Due to the continued program success and strong data collection and support through the state budget, ODH hired a full-time Youth Homelessness Coordinator in 2023 to oversee the program, who is partially funded by Title V. The full-time Youth Homelessness Coordinator has allowed the program to expand its technical assistance efforts, quality improvement for data collection metrics and state-level coordination efforts for housing. HY is included in the MCHBG Adolescent Health Domain with progress reported in the 2026 application and annual reports.



This program serves both rural and urban youth. HY subrecipients vary in size and agency type and include local health departments, community action agencies, Goodwill and other nonprofit agencies across the state. The HY grant includes deliverables that allow flexibility for implementation. Some funded agencies focus primarily on pregnant or parenting youth utilizing their staff and existing programs, some sub-contract for housing services or support services from other community agencies.

The HY program continues to grow and improve through continuous quality improvement community engagement and youth voice. Showing program outcomes through quality data collection using the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) has been the most efficient method for capturing quantitative data. Data collection and technical assistance for subrecipients is maintained through a contract with Coalition on Housing and Homelessness in Ohio (COHHIO). Using HMIS allows the HY program to align with HUD data standards and most subrecipients already use HMIS. COHHIO developed a data dashboard, which can be easily accessed and utilized by local agencies. ODH and COHHIO are exploring ways to use the dashboard to expand on youth homelessness data collection in Ohio. Agencies also submit success stories to ODH to communicate program success and impact.

CORE COMPONENTS & PRACTICE ACTIVITIES

The core components of the HY program align with the deliverables, which include:

- (1) Education and training through monthly Community of Practice (CoP) and Quarterly Project Directors meetings are intended to help local agencies learn from one another. CoP meetings are designed to engage frontline staff at the subrecipient agencies. CoP presentations focus on best practices when directly working with youth experiencing homelessness. CoP topics include Trauma-Informed Care, Serving Youth, Motivational Interviewing and Narrative Medicine, Exit Interviewing, Landlord Recruitment and Retention and Human Trafficking. Project Director meetings are used to engage upper-level staff at the agencies who manage the program and expenditure reports and admin-type functions for the grant. Presentations during these meetings focus on big-picture implementation and innovative housing projects and ideas as well as data collection and quality improvement efforts for the grant. The purpose for both meetings is to encourage staff to collaborate and engage in meaningful conversations and to support each other.
- (2) Housing assistance funds are used to provide housing for youth. Project types include Transitional Housing/ Transitional Living, Rapid Re-housing, Emergency housing/shelter, Homelessness prevention, Host Homes, Shared Housing, Other pilot programs.
- (3) Supportive Services may be related to physical and mental health, basic needs and crisis intervention, education or employment, case management, housing advocacy, family connection, counseling and reunification, assisting with navigating systems, after-care and follow-up services, support with connection to the community.
- (4) Street and community outreach programs locate, contact, and provide information, referrals, and services to homeless youth. Agencies commonly combine these efforts with supportive services to provide holistic care to eligible clients.
- (5) Evaluation is conducted through ongoing data collection through HMIS.



- (6) Youth Advisory Committee is an optional deliverable that provides funding for agencies to engage with youth to inform their program efforts. Staff time to support this work and gift-card incentives to compensate youth for their time and experience are allowable under this deliverable.

Core Components & Practice Activities

Core Component	Activities	Operational Details
Education and training	Community of Practice and ODH Project Director meetings	Engage HY subrecipients in monthly community of practice sessions to share best practices and quarterly project director meetings focused on topics that relate to youth homelessness.
Housing	Flexible funds to support youth experiencing homelessness	Provide funds for housing types that align with HUD including transitional housing, emergency housing/shelter, homelessness prevention, host homes, shared housing and other pilot programs.
Support services and Drop-in	Referrals and linkages to community resources	Support services may be related to physical and mental health, basic needs and crisis intervention, education or employment, case management, housing advocacy, family connection, counseling and reunification, assisting with navigating systems, after-care and follow up services, support with connection to the community.
Street and Community Outreach	Community engagement	Work with local community partners to identify and connect with youth experiencing homelessness in their communities.
Evaluation	Data collection through HMIS	Submit quarterly data collection through HMIS
Youth Engagement (Optional)	Youth Advisory Board	Connect with youth who have lived experience and living experience who face homelessness. Funds can be used to support staff and provide incentives for youth who participate.



COMMUNITY WELLBEING

The HY grant was designed to be a flexible source of funds that support local efforts. Lack of housing is a public health problem and impacts the whole community. This grant provides comprehensive support services to youth and includes funds for housing assistance as well as support services. ODH understands the importance of allowing and supporting staff time to build relationships with youth and wraparound services that can help to stop the cycle of homelessness. Staff provide referrals to youth for physical and mental health, basic needs, crisis intervention, education, employment, housing advocacy, family connection, counseling and reunification, assisting with navigating systems, after-care and follow up services and support with connection to the community. The HY grant includes both housing and support services to provide immediate housing and support services to help youth gain skills and support to support themselves and maintain stable housing in the future.

EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS

There are many challenges collecting data on homeless youth, particularly under the expanded McKinney-Vento definition. Youth.Gov highlights the difficulties of collecting an overall number of youth experiencing homelessness due to variations in the definition, time frame, and age range used. Estimates suggest as many as 4.2 million youth and young adults (700,000 youth aged 13-17 and 3.5 million youth ages 18-25) are homeless within the United States each year. According to The Ohio Department of Workforce and Development school data, there were over 10,339 high school aged children that experienced homelessness during the 2023 school year. Furthermore, there were nearly 800 unaccompanied homeless youth reported to Housing and Urban Development during the 2023 point in time count.

In 2021, ODH contracted with COHHIO to develop a data collection system for the HY program and provide technical assistance to ODH staff and HY subrecipients for evaluation. Originally, the grant collected data but lacked a consistent way of collecting unduplicated data elements from varying different housing projects implemented by subrecipients agencies. COHHIO assisted subrecipients in setting up specific projects within HMIS or a comparable database to collect data. COHHIO worked with ODH to identify common data elements collect for this project, identifying the HUD data collection standards the HY grant is most closely aligned with. COHHIO also developed a public-facing Youth Data Dashboard that provides accessible, completed and frequently (on a quarterly basis) updated data to subrecipients and ODH. Using HMIS allows ODH to look at outcomes, including the number of youths who exited the program to permanent housing, many to rental by client with no ongoing subsidy.

In addition to collecting the most accurate and complete quantitative data, ODH has found the value in collecting client success stories to add a qualitative data element. While the data below can show the success of the HY program through solid data points, it does not highlight the effects of the program at an individual level. By asking agencies to submit client success stories in their program reports, it allows the opportunity for clients to share their success in their own words beyond the numbers that show the overall success of the program.



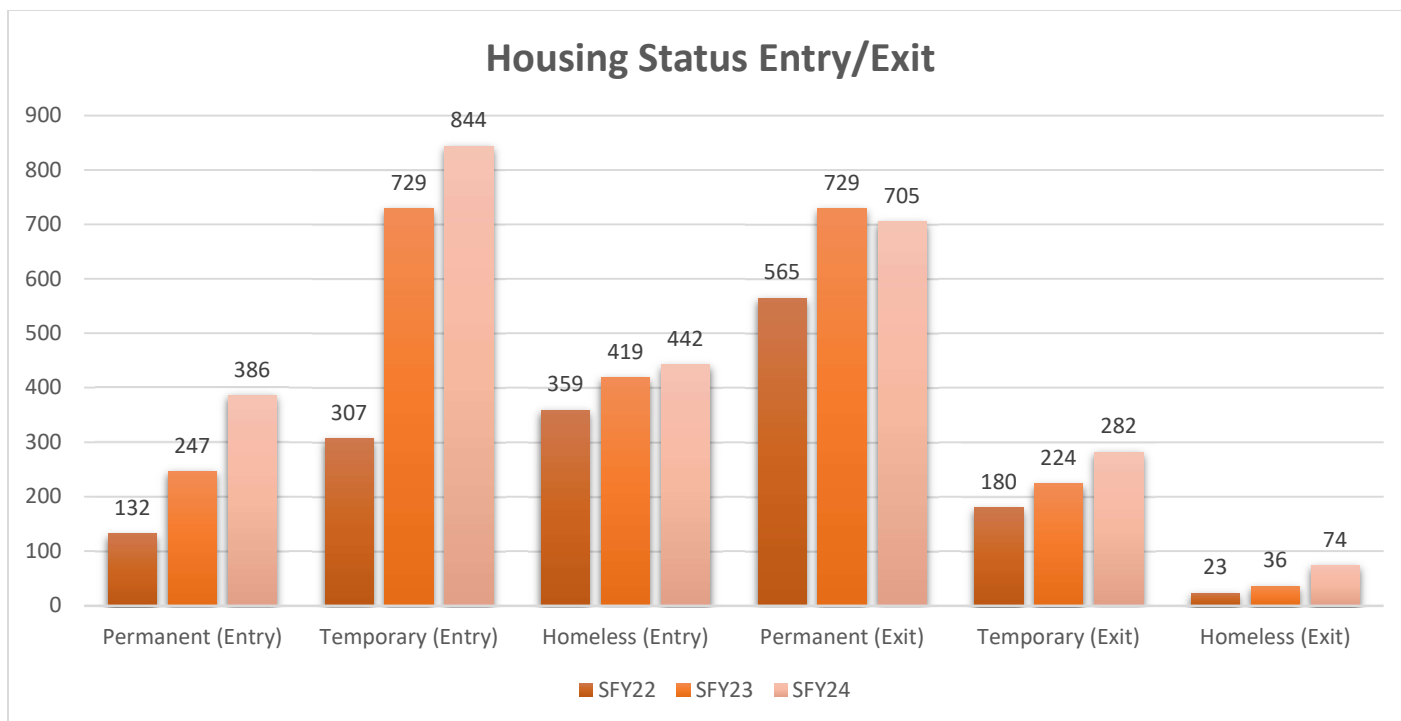
	SFY22	SFY23	SFY24
# of unduplicated youth served.	882	1,023	1,206
# of youth receiving counseling services.	110	99	79
# of youth who responded they are pregnant.	52	62	55
# of youth who responded they are parenting.	79	85	98
# of youth served who were exited during the period.	767	881	955
# of youth who exited to permanent housing	446	516	520
# of youth who exited to rental by client, with no ongoing housing subsidy.	207	241	277

The chart above includes several data points within each SFY timeframe to show the success of the HY program. Comparing the number of unduplicated youth served, there was a significant increase from the inaugural program year (SFY22) with 882 youth served to 1,206 youth served in the most current year (SFY24).

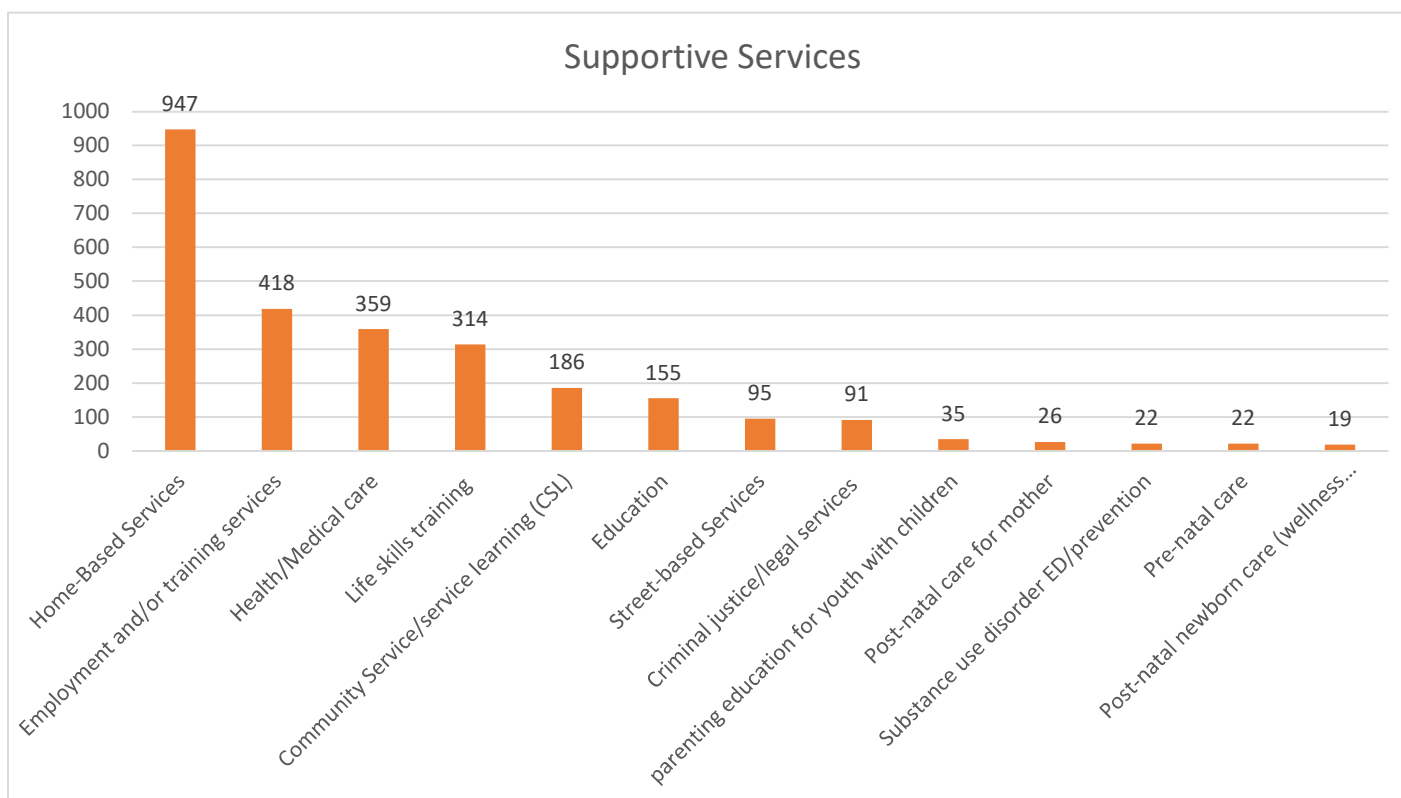
Additionally, the number of youth who exited to rental by client with no ongoing housing subsidy is an important data point to highlight. This specifically shows how many youth were able to move into a rental unit where they are responsible for paying the full market rent, without receiving ongoing financial assistance or subsidy specific for housing from a government program. While exiting to permanent housing is important, showing the number of youth that can maintain their own housing cost after exiting the program can also indicate that the client is moving toward self-sufficiency.

The HY grant has a two-year cycle that follows the state biennium budget. Each grant cycle has allowed ODH to evaluate the program by reviewing the data, outcomes and success stories while preparing for competitive solicitation. Each grant cycle results in deliverable, data and program changes to improve the HY grant. The CoP and Project Director's meetings also help ODH gather feedback on program deliverables and data collection.





The chart above shows each client's housing status at program intake (entry) and program completion (exit) from 2021-2025. The bar graph shows the total number of clients who have entered and exited the program but does not reflect individual outcomes. Even with this limitation, the graph shows the overall increase in clients exiting the program to permanent housing.



The chart above shows supportive services that were provided to clients from 2021-2025.



Success stories: (names have been changed to protect client identity)

Sophie is a 21-year-old mother of an infant, and she was referred to our program for support after facing significant challenges securing stable housing. Sophie had a history of couch-surfing with family members and friends and consistently paying rent during the times she had an apartment. We assigned Sophie a resource advocate to work with her on assessing her needs, removing barriers, and helping Sophie move forward toward her goals. Together, they discussed Sophie's economic situation, and her difficulties with "making ends meet." She engaged in parenting education using our evidence-based Help Me Grow curriculum. Today she is enrolled in the nursing program at Columbus State Community College. Sophie's resilience to overcome obstacles and make decisions in line with her priorities has created a stable and nurturing environment for her and her child. As she continues her journey and becomes a nurse, Sophie does so with confidence.

Tasha is a 22-year-old female, who self-referred to the Young Adult Outreach & Housing program (YAOH). Tasha and her partner lost their apartment in Detroit, MI, prompting them to relocate to Cleveland. Upon arriving in Cleveland, they stayed in a car for a month before moving in with a family member. Tasha's family is not accepting of her relationship with her female partner, and they were quickly kicked out of the family member's home. During her time at the shelter, Tasha was referred to the Rapid Rehousing program and applied to various income-based housing options. She and her partner were able to locate housing and focus on their independence. Ms. Smith worked diligently with young adult outreach and housing case manager to accomplish goals and transitioned her time to focus on finding employment to obtain income to help with financial needs and education. While receiving short-term rental assistance from the Rapid Rehousing program, Tasha was able to attend school and obtain employment. She has completed the Rapid Rehousing program and is ready to pay her own rent, she and her partner have developed a budget and have been utilizing the budget successfully for the last several months. Tasha continues to work with her YAOH case manager and identified a desire for long term case management services which her YAOH case manager will assist with linkage.



Section 2: Implementation Guidance

COLLABORATORS AND PARTNERS

During the inception of the program, ODH sought feedback from external stakeholders and partners to understand the landscape of youth homelessness in Ohio and how to best implement a new grant program for youth experiencing homelessness. Stakeholders encouraged aligning with Housing and Urban Development (HUD) project types, data metrics and standards but provide flexible funding to support innovative approaches when serving youth ages 14-24 who are experiencing homelessness. The HY grant uses the broader McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness is used for client eligibility. This definition allows programs to expand programming beyond youth who are literally homeless to include youth at risk of homelessness. Furthermore, agencies can use grant funds for staff time to provide supportive services to eligible clients. While funding to support housing is necessary, one important component of programming for youth is providing wraparound services. Many youth experiencing homelessness need health or mental health services, in addition to learning independent living skills before they are able to live independently.

ODH continues to support data collection and quality improvement through partnerships. During the summer of 2024, an AMCHP Graduate Student Epidemiology Program (GSEP) intern conducted an exploratory analysis of the youth homelessness data available from all Ohio government agencies and nonprofit organization partners. The intern produced a report with a description of available data sources, data analysis, and recommendations. This project worked to engage other state agencies and community agencies working to end youth homelessness. The final report included recommendations that ODH is working on, including establishing a youth homelessness data workgroup to better leverage existing data and look for ways to align efforts.

The (COHHIO) has been essential to the HY program. Their contract to manage all data collection has allowed ODH to show the impact and success of the program to agency leadership and the legislature. The technical assistance, training, and support to subrecipients under the ODH Youth Homelessness grant has helped local agencies better serve youth and foster statewide connections among subrecipients. The data collected by COHHIO covers all 34 counties in which subrecipients provide services. ODH also utilizes our partnership with COHHIO to make changes to data collection metrics and to grant deliverables.

Showing success, impact and securing funding will continue to be a priority for ODH. As mentioned above, the HY grant is predominately funded through the state budget, but the program is supported by the MCHBG Title V program through staffing, program guidance and leadership. This grant was competitive in SFY26 and ODH approved 18 proposals for funding. The HY subrecipients requested funds are greater than the state allocation, so MCHBG funds are being used to support each agency at 75%.



Practice Collaborators and Partners

Partner/ Collaborator	How are they involved in decision-making throughout practice processes?	How are you partnering with this group?	Does this stakeholder have lived experience/come from a community impacted by the practice?
Coalition on Housing and Homelessness in Ohio (COHHIO)	ODH contracts with COHHIO for program support and technical assistance. ODH asks COHHIO for guidance on specific housing-related strategies, especially data collection.	ODH contracts with COHHIO to support HY subrecipients and program staff for data collection through the Youth Data Dashboard. COHHIO developed the HMIS app and dashboard for this project.	COHHIO are the statewide experts on housing and have a state-wide Youth Advisory Board and many representatives with lived experience to help inform decision making.
Coalition of State Agencies Supporting Housing (COSASH)	ODH shares HY updates and projects with the group and ODH asks for guidance and feedback to ensure that we aren't duplicating efforts.	ODH meets with COSASH on a regular basis and has representation from many state agencies who support housing initiatives.	Yes, many state agencies have parent representatives or youth advisory boards to seek feedback from the population that they serve.
HY Subrecipients	HY subrecipients participate in an ODH services tracking interview facilitated by COHHIO to provide feedback on the current services set-up and data collection.	ODH uses the COHHIO interview report to inform the HY program and data metrics. COHHIO makes recommendations based on the feedback from the report.	Yes, each HY subrecipients works directly with youth who are experiencing and many support youth advisory boards.

REPLICATION

The HY program began with funding through the General Revenue Fund to support youth experiencing homelessness. This was the result of advocacy from the director of health and her youth homelessness lived experience. It is important to find a champion for this work who understands the impact of housing on public health.

After the funds are secured, data, stakeholder input and community engagement and lived experience should be used to determine grant goals, objectives and data collection methods. The use of the McKinney Vento



definition is encouraged to expand programming to work with youth that are sharing housing with others instead of the rigid “literally homeless” definition. Grant deliverables should include both housing and support services to provide shelter, healthcare, education, employment and life skills to help youth find stable housing with no ongoing subsidy. A deliverable for HMIS data collection is also essential to measure impact.

Ongoing support for subrecipients implementing the HY program at the local level. Technical assistance for data collection and meeting deliverables should be available to subrecipients through dedicated HY staff or a contract with an HMIS and housing expert. Quality data collection works to evaluate and modify the program for continuous quality improvement and showing impact to funders. Program reports and success stories that detail local challenges, success and client success stories are essential tools to help guide technical assistance efforts. Community of Practice meetings for front line staff to support subrecipients can help to build statewide connection among agencies doing similar work. These meetings offer a space for the local agencies to troubleshoot and learn from each other.

Each grant cycle should include an evaluation of the program that includes data analysis, feedback from subrecipients and other stakeholders.

INTERNAL CAPACITY

ODH was able to support the HY program leveraging Title V funds for staffing. For three years, the Adolescent Health Coordinator oversaw the solicitation, application review, and subrecipient program and expenditure reports. The COHHIO contract was used to provide technical assistance for data collection and to oversee the CoP and help with project director meetings.

In 2023, ODH hired a full time Youth Homelessness Coordinator. The increased staff capacity has allowed the program to expand the ODH-technical assistance and support in-house for subrecipients. ODH will lead the CoP meetings for the SFY26 HY program and will continue to hold quarterly project director meetings. The increased internal staffing capacity has allowed ODH to work on statewide housing projects and engage with other state agencies who are supporting youth homelessness initiatives and prevention.

PRACTICE TIMELINE

Phase: Planning/Pre-Implementation		
Activity Description	Time Needed	Responsible Party
Collect data on youth homelessness and determine program criteria, guidance, and best practices	3-6 months	ODH



Conduct listening sessions with key stakeholders and partners.	3-6 months	ODH
Determine program goal and design a grant solicitation with deliverables that will act as action steps toward goal	3 months	ODH
Secure funding	Time varies depending on state budget processes	ODH leadership, legislative affairs
Application Review process	4 months	ODH

Phase: Implementation

Activity Description	Time Needed	Responsible Party
Conduct project director meetings, CoP and other activities to on-board subrecipient agencies	Quarterly Project Director meetings with the initial meeting one month after the beginning of the grant period. CoP meetings monthly.	ODH
Provide technical assistance and monitor grant program through program and expenditure reports.	Ongoing	ODH and COHHIO
Utilize data and success stories for continuous quality improvement	Ongoing	ODH, HY subrecipients, COHHIO



Phase: Sustainability

Activity Description	Time Needed	Responsible Party
Quantitative and qualitative data collection.	Ongoing	ODH, COHHIO, Subrecipients
Review and update solicitation based on feedback from previous grant cycle.	3-6 months	ODH
Dashboard or data visualization to share success with leadership and legislature.	One year after implementation.	ODH, COHHIO, Subrecipients
Engagement and Communication with other State Agencies, Housing Stakeholders and the legislator	Ongoing	ODH

PRACTICE COST

Budget

Activity/Item	Brief Description	Quantity	Total
Subgrant with local agencies	Funding for local implementation of a program that includes funds for housing and support services	Varies based on funding. HY subrecipients receive ~\$110,000-\$302,000 per year. The program is scalable based on funding.	~\$1.8 million - \$3 million per year.



Contract for youth homelessness technical assistance and data collection support	Ensure that you have housing and homeless expertise available for subrecipients and program to support technical assistance needs.	~\$200,000 per year.	~\$200,000 per year.
Staffing	Youth Homelessness Coordinator to oversee subrecipient program.	Varies by salary, experience and education. Programs can consider leveraging Title V funds.	~\$100,000
Total Amount:			\$2,100,000

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Investing in a data infrastructure is essential to measuring success and showing outcome data to funders.
2. Using the McKinney Vento definition of homelessness allows for more flexible funding to better serve youth. The barrier to using this definition is that comparing data across programs is difficult due to the difference.
3. Providing gift cards as compensation for client participation can help build a strong Youth Advisory Board. This can increase youth voice and allow those with lived experience to have an impact on the programs being implemented.
4. Partnerships are crucial in this work, both at the state and local level. At the state level, it is necessary to understand what other programs and infrastructure exist and to leverage existing programs and supports. At the local level, the most successful programs are the ones with strong local partnerships. Youth experiencing homelessness have many needs and one organization is not able to do it all.

The grant first kicked off in early 2020, right before the COVID-19 pandemic hit so there were a variety of challenges in implementing a new grant program, especially for agencies who were on the front lines of the pandemic. Both ODH and the funded agencies had issues with staff capacity.

Data collection was mentioned as a challenge for the first year. The program was designed to be flexible, but that created challenges with data collection. Implementing a data collection system, while providing funding and support for grantees to implement the process was beneficial to the program. It was also important to explain the need to the funded organizations and continue to support data collection, while also sharing back the data regularly with the grantees.



NEXT STEPS

ODH received funding in the 2026-2027 state budget to support the HY grant and received more grant applications than ever before in previous cycles, with requests exceeding the state budget allocation. ODH will utilize MCHBG funds to support the program. ODH is going to support COHHIO for data support including maintenance and system upgrades to the Youth Data Dashboard. ODH and COHHIO are also exploring using this data collection system and Youth Data Dashboard to non-ODH funded programs to collect better statewide youth homelessness data.

ODH seeks to build upon past work in data collection and explore other metrics connecting housing status to health outcomes. With a full-time Youth Homelessness Coordinator, ODH has additional capacity to identify opportunities to connect the HY program to other Title V work and other ODH adolescent health programs. COHHIO will also continue to maintain and provide enhancements to the Youth Data Dashboard.

RESOURCES PROVIDED

- [COHHIO Youth Initiative](#)
- [COHHIO ODH Youth Homelessness](#)
- [COHHIO Youth Data Dashboard](#)
- [ODH Youth Homelessness](#)

