

## **El Paso Helps: Sustaining a Coordinated Homelessness Response as Public Infrastructure Purpose**

This briefing provides an overview of El Paso Helps as a coordinated homelessness response system, summarizes demonstrated results and system impacts, and outlines why sustaining and enhancing this effort through public-private partnership is essential. The intent is to inform policy discussion and partner engagement.

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### **I. El Paso Helps as Public Infrastructure**

El Paso Helps operates as a form of public infrastructure—not because it is labeled as such, but because of how it functions. The system integrates prevention, street outreach, shelter, stabilization, housing placement, and medical and behavioral health response into a single coordinated framework that operates continuously rather than episodically.

Like other infrastructure systems (public safety, emergency response, public health), El Paso Helps addresses a predictable and recurring community condition. Unsheltered homelessness is not random or fleeting; it concentrates in specific corridors, recurs among individuals with long-term instability, and directly affects emergency services, hospitals, public spaces, and neighborhoods if unmanaged. Effective response therefore requires standing capacity, coordination, and readiness—rather than one-time interventions.

#### **Coordinated System Components**

El Paso Helps brings together complementary roles that function as a single system:

- **United Way of El Paso County** provides upstream prevention and housing stabilization, preventing households from entering homelessness.
- **Amistad** conducts street outreach and housing placement, engaging individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness and navigating them toward shelter or housing.
- **The Opportunity Center / Welcome Center** operates as the front-door stabilization and triage hub, providing safety, assessment, shelter access, and placement coordination.

Individually, these functions reduce homelessness at distinct stages. Collectively, they form a durable response that protects downstream systems from crisis overload.

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## II. Demonstrated Results and System Performance

The aggregated results presented to Council demonstrate meaningful, system-level impact:

- **Prevention:** United Way stabilized 4,862 individuals (1,942 households), with the majority never entering emergency shelter or crisis systems—preventing significant downstream costs and disruption.
- **Street Outreach and Housing Placement:** Amistad engaged 1,355 individuals through outreach and placed 221 individuals into housing, serving as the primary engagement and navigation partner for unsheltered homelessness.
- **Stabilization and Triage (Welcome Center):** The Welcome Center served 2,946 individuals, facilitated 562 permanent housing placements, and coordinated 547 shelter or program placements, along with 134 medical and behavioral-health placements. These outcomes reflect the system’s ability to match individuals to appropriate destinations based on acuity and need.

Annualized averages show that, on a typical year-over-year basis, the system stabilizes approximately:

- 1,216 individuals per year through prevention
- 361 individuals per year through outreach and navigation
- 818 individuals per year through stabilization and triage, resulting in roughly 412 placements annually across all destination types, including about 156 permanent housing placements.

Importantly, these figures are **system outputs**, not additive totals. Individuals may move between prevention, outreach, shelter, health care, and housing over time—reflecting real-world pathways rather than duplication or inefficiency.

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## III. Community and System Cost Implications

The analysis estimates annual avoided or protected community costs in the range of \$9.6 million to \$22.3 million, with a midpoint of approximately \$16 million per year. These estimates reflect reduced demand on:

- emergency shelter operations,
- emergency medical services and hospitals,
- law enforcement and courts,
- and impacts on quality of place and economic activity.

These are not budget savings returned to a single department, but costs avoided across the system. Without coordinated response capacity, these costs shift rapidly to emergency rooms, police and fire responses, and unmanaged public spaces.

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#### **IV. Why Reliance on Federal Dollars Alone Is Insufficient**

Federal funding has been essential to launching and expanding El Paso Helps and remains a critical resource. However, federal funding is:

- time-limited,
- program-specific,
- cycle-based, and
- subject to policy changes outside local control.

As a result, federal resources tend to support surges of activity rather than sustained baseline capacity. This dynamic is visible in large-scale outreach efforts that demonstrate strong outcomes when resources align but require extraordinary coordination and temporary mobilization.

Homelessness itself, by contrast, is continuous and predictable. Relying on episodic funding to address a continuous condition creates unavoidable gaps that push pressure back onto hospitals, emergency responders, and public spaces.

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#### **V. The Role of Public-Private Partnership**

Sustaining El Paso Helps as effective infrastructure requires a public-private partnership model that complements federal funding rather than replacing it. This approach recognizes that:

- hospitals already absorb significant uncompensated care costs tied to homelessness,
- police and fire services respond repeatedly to non-criminal crises when stabilization pathways are limited,
- community and philanthropic partners often step in during visible emergencies.

A structured partnership approach aligns these shared impacts into shared stewardship-supporting continuity, smoothing funding volatility, and preserving system capacity between federal cycles.

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#### **VI. Key Takeaway**

##### **El Paso Helps is already functioning as public infrastructure.**

The evidence now demonstrates effectiveness, coordination, and measurable system impact. The remaining policy question is not whether the model works, but how the community sustains and strengthens it over time.

Reliance on federal dollars alone leads to episodic response. A public-private partnership model supports continuity, protects critical systems, and allows El Paso to manage homelessness proactively rather than reactively.

# EL PASO HELPS: COORDINATED SYSTEM FLOW

A Continuum of Care From Prevention to Long-Term Stability

