



## Pursuing Social Justice and Equity by Ending Chronic Homelessness in Washington, DC

2019-2022 Strategic Plan

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Miriam's Kitchen is a critical leader in ending chronic homelessness in Washington, DC. Since adopting our vision, thousands of individuals now have the dignity of a home and chronic homelessness has declined by 34%—but more progress is urgently needed. Thousands of individuals still experience homelessness repeatedly or for years and need access to safe, affordable housing.

Ending chronic homelessness will require:

- Addressing root causes of homelessness
- Preventing homelessness and chronic homelessness
- Significantly increasing access and supply of housing for individuals experiencing homelessness
- Building a sustainable, person-centered system that drives reductions in homelessness

To finish the work of ending chronic homelessness, Miriam's Kitchen will continue to steward our vision of ending chronic homelessness, while also broadening efforts to address homelessness and housing instability more broadly, since they are interconnected with chronic homelessness.

Our strategic plan sets our vision for scaling up our work to impact:

1. Individuals: Helping individuals obtain housing as well as the support, resources, and health connections to thrive in housing.
2. Systems: Ending chronic homelessness city-wide through policy change that prevents homelessness, increases access to and supply of housing, and addresses root causes of homelessness.
3. Culture: Ending chronic homelessness requires a shift in our collective culture. We will change the way we think about, talk about, and respond to homelessness, and mobilize others to do the same.

### Our Foundation

Miriam's Kitchen was founded in 1983 to meet the urgent needs of people experiencing homelessness in downtown Washington, DC. Over the years, our support and services grew along with the number of individuals experiencing homelessness across the District. As the problem grew, we knew that our solutions needed to change.

In 2010, we changed our vision to end chronic homelessness in Washington, DC. Nearly 10 years into this vision, we have seen substantial progress.

- Miriam’s Kitchen has helped end homelessness for thousands of individuals across the District. Every day, we work to end homelessness for the individuals who access our services.
- Miriam’s Kitchen has worked to end homelessness city-wide through our advocacy, which has leveraged \$112 million in housing resources over 5 years and produced systems improvements that have propelled DC’s progress towards providing every person with the dignity of a home.
- From 2010-2019, there has been a 34% reduction in chronic homelessness and a 42% reduction in veteran homelessness.
- From 2015-2018, nearly 5,000 single adults moved from homelessness to housing, including 489 individuals helped by Miriam’s Kitchen to obtain housing.
- From 2015 – 2019, we significantly scaled up our commitment to pursuing racial equity and fostering the leadership of individuals with lived experience of homelessness both internally and externally. The result of these efforts include increased programs, policies, capacity, and resources to integrate this work into how we plan, implement, and evaluate our work in partnership with a wide variety of stakeholders.

Despite incredible progress, we know more must be done to end chronic homelessness, and Miriam’s Kitchen is a critical leader in helping the District get there.

## Our Future and Our Driving Forces

Miriam’s Kitchen is a recognized leader in pursuing social justice and equity through ending chronic homelessness. We envision a just and equitable Washington where everyone has the resources, freedom, and opportunities they need to thrive. Everyone benefits from a just and equitable DC and everyone has the responsibility to help build it.

We are committed to our vision of ending chronic homelessness because of our core beliefs:

- **Everyone deserves the dignity of a home.** The strongest, most vibrant DC community is a city where everyone has safe, decent, and affordable housing.
- **Ending chronic homelessness is possible** when our community has the political will, dedicates the resources, builds an effective system, and focuses on partnerships with people with lived experience of homelessness, individuals, and other key partners from the non-profit, government, philanthropy, and business sectors.
- **Ending chronic homelessness is cost-effective.** It costs less tax payer money for the District to *end* chronic homelessness than it does to manage it. Between the costs of shelter, hospitals, police interaction, and other emergency services, it costs the city less to provide Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH), the gold standard for ending chronic homelessness, than it does to do nothing.
- **Individuals with lived experience of homelessness are critical leaders** in ending chronic homelessness in DC. We have a responsibility to ensure that our work is not only informed by individuals who have experienced homelessness, but also that they are true partners and decision makers in our work.
- **Ending chronic homelessness and addressing racial inequities are interconnected.** To create an inclusive community where everyone can thrive, we must invest aggressively in housing resources and boldly address the root causes of homelessness that are disproportionately impacting our black and brown neighbors. We use our skills and expertise to stand strong with others and repair the effects of centuries of race-based discrimination in housing and social policy in DC.

## Our Impact and Initiatives

Miriam's Kitchen creates meaningful change through our direct services, advocacy that catalyzes social justice at the city level, system orchestration, and leadership throughout all our initiatives. Our strategic plan sets our vision for scaling up our work to impact:

### **Individuals: Helping individuals obtain housing as well as the support, resources, and health connections to thrive in housing**

**Goal:** From 2019-2022, we will connect 500 individuals to the dignity of a home through Miriam's Kitchen's direct services programs, ending over 3,500 years and over 1 million days of homelessness.

**Strategies:** We will accomplish this by:

1. Growing our permanent supportive housing portfolio.
  2. Expanding outreach.
  3. Innovating to increase the housing impact and guest-centeredness of our dining room services.
1. Growing Miriam's Kitchen's permanent supportive housing portfolio: Recognizing our substantial PSH footprint, we will continue evaluating opportunities for steady, careful growth of the Miriam's Kitchen PSH program up to serving 250 residents. Growth decisions will emphasize maximizing impact on ending chronic homelessness in DC and maintaining high quality services through creating structures that ensure adequate staff and resident support. We anticipate PSH growth would primarily focus on site-based PSH partnerships that broaden the types of high-quality PSH models available to meet unique client needs. We will also continue efforts to develop a building in Foggy Bottom that has PSH, office space, and new program space.
  2. Expanding outreach: We will actively seek opportunities to double our current street outreach capacity through government funding and private sector partnerships to support a comprehensive, housing-focused street outreach network. Outreach growth decisions will emphasize maintaining high quality teams and maximizing impact on ending chronic homelessness in DC. Outreach expansion could involve increased walking-based street outreach in nearby downtown areas or adding outreach capacity in areas of the city outside of downtown that would require expanded outreach capacities for Miriam's Kitchen.
  3. Innovating to increasing the housing impact and guest-centeredness of our dining room services: Healthy meals, case management, studio activities, and SOAR continue to be an essential tool to meet basic needs, build transformative relationships, and make connections to resources. To increase our impact on guests obtaining housing, increasing income, making effective connections to health, as well as to improve guest satisfaction and our ability to meet guests needs, we will:
    - Explore ways to adjust dining room services to provide better services and meet guest needs.
    - Implement new creative housing strategies to help more guests obtain housing.
    - Identify opportunities to integrate our meal capacities with other Miriam's Kitchen programs, such as developing trainings for preparing meals with fresh ingredients at site-based PSH partnerships or a meal delivery service for PSH residents.
    - Build and maintain a dedicated pool of volunteers who help prepare nutritious meals from fresh ingredients.

**Systems:**  
**Ending chronic homelessness city-wide through policy change that prevents homelessness, increases access to and supply of housing, and addresses root causes of homelessness.**

Goal: From 2019-2022, we will push to end chronic homelessness in alignment with Homeward DC, the city's strategic plan to end homelessness. We must work to ensure that everyone experiencing chronic homelessness has the dignity of a home and that no one experiences chronic homelessness. This will take scaling up our advocacy staff, capacity, and impact.

Strategies: We will accomplish this by:

1. Facilitating new investments in housing to end chronic homelessness.
  2. Preventing and responding to inflow into chronic homelessness.
  3. Increasing affordable housing.
  4. Examining and addressing root causes of homelessness.
  5. Scaling up our city-wide movement to end chronic homelessness.
1. Facilitating new investments in housing to end chronic homelessness: Significantly expand DC's capacity to invest in housing by leveraging the private sector and promoting new tax policies.
  2. Preventing and responding to inflow into chronic homelessness: Housing ends homelessness, but housing alone is not enough. To significantly reduce chronic homelessness, we must stem the flow of people entering homelessness. We will develop and support strategic efforts to decrease the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness in DC each year, such as:
    - Ensuring that people recently experiencing homelessness have timely access to housing resources and other service supports so that they do not experience chronic homelessness.
    - Creating flexible resources and approaches to prevent people from newly entering homelessness or returning to homelessness.
  3. Increasing affordable housing: We have a long history of supporting organizations leading the way to expand access to affordable housing. We will increase our advocacy leadership in this area, including through partnership with organizations led by people of color and individuals with lived experience of housing instability.
  4. Examining and addressing root causes of homelessness: Any strategy to reduce chronic homelessness requires an exploration of the root causes of homelessness as well as the major barriers to exiting homelessness, including (but not limited to): affordable housing scarcity, stagnant wages and theft, broken health care and criminal justice systems, structural oppression, limited housing resources, and more. We must also examine how systemic racism has historically contributed to homelessness and how it currently creates race-based inequities across sectors that contribute to and exacerbate homelessness every single day.
  5. Scale up our city-wide movement to end chronic homelessness: The Way Home Campaign, an advocacy movement created by and led by Miriam's Kitchen, has brought together thousands of advocates and over 100 partner organizations to end chronic homelessness. More advocacy capacity is needed to broaden our reach, deepen our engagement, and further inspire action.

**Culture:**  
**Ending chronic homelessness requires a shift in our collective culture. We will change the way we think about, talk about, and respond to homelessness, and mobilize others to do the same.**

Goal: From 2019-2022, we will invest in shaping a bold narrative around long-term homelessness, work to meaningfully change the way people of color experience our organization and its impact, and allocate resources to actualize equity in our organization and community.

Strategies: We will accomplish this by:

1. Advancing equity in our organization and community.
2. Creating a communications team and strategy that advances our mission and brand.
3. Securing the resources, structures, and staffing to shift our collective culture.

1. Advancing Equity in our Organization and Community: by acting at these four levels:

We will act to advance equity at these four levels:

- Individual and Interpersonal: We will actively confront our own biases and privilege, remain open to the work we must do to address internalized oppressive values, prioritizing healthy relationships, and elevate and create structures to support guest collaboration across our work.
- Organizational: We will build a work environment that embodies inclusion and belonging, that respects and encourages the unique contributions of each staff member, that embraces constructive tension, and creates safe spaces for bringing our fuller selves to this work.
- Structural: We understand that systemic and institutional inequities, especially racial inequities, present barriers to ending chronic homelessness in DC and will employ the tools we need to disrupt that which restricts our guests from thriving.
- Community: We will create the change we want to see. We will challenge inequities in housing and homelessness by working for policy and social change in the broader community, learn from and stand with community members, and model how to do this critical work for other organizations.

2. Creating a communications team and strategy that advances our mission and brand: A dedicated, robust communications infrastructure is necessary to realizing our mission of ending chronic homelessness. We cannot create widespread change, mobilize stakeholders, or shift the culture of how we prevent and address homelessness without significant resources and capacity in this area. Key strategies include:

- Building a communications department with the staffing, expertise, strategy, and resources needed to realize our mission.
- Developing and implementing a bold narrative around chronic homelessness, including its root causes of and its solutions.
- Increasing the visibility, leadership, and sustainability of Miriam's Kitchen and our impact.
- Implementing strategies that expand our audience, deepen engagement, and inspire action.
- Strengthening our collaborative, trauma-informed, and guest-led story telling process.

3. Securing the resources, structures, and staffing to shift our collective culture: To help DC become a more just and equitable city, we must expand partnerships with stakeholders across our community to better understand and address the root causes of homelessness. To do this we will:
  - Continue to build diverse funding streams that support our mission, especially our equity, advocacy, and communications work.
  - Build relationships with partners who are working towards and/or are critical players in building a just and equitable DC.

## Measuring Our Impact

Since ending chronic homelessness in DC requires being nimble and responsive to a dynamic, changing environment, we have established continuous measurement, evaluation, and learning practices to guide our work.

Incremental progress toward ending chronic homelessness is tracked city-wide through a regular dashboard of how many people are currently experiencing homelessness, how many people have newly entered homelessness or have returned to homelessness, and how many people have obtained housing or are no longer accessing the DC homeless services system. Trends from these dashboards, other tools for measuring system performance, and collaborative input from our guests, staff, and other provider partners will give us regular feedback on how to be directing our direct services and advocacy work.

Miriam's Kitchen is committed to monitoring its progress through systemic measurement of all work. We annually review our balanced scorecard and update our objectives and measures that we know will end chronic homelessness in DC. Each department sets annual targets for their measures and report monthly against these targets. Quarterly, each department reviews its progress against targets and adjusts as needed. This annual evaluation cycle allows us to continuously measure progress while being nimble and responsive to the environment.

We diligently work to ensure that we hold ourselves accountable for goals around racial equity and guest collaboration, even when it is difficult to measure progress. At the same time, we recognize that in order to meaningful evaluation and learning in this area may require alternative or additional forms of target-setting and measurement.

## Miriam's Kitchen Strong Foundation

In order for Miriam's Kitchen to successfully achieve our mission of ending chronic homelessness in DC, we also need to diligently steward the Miriam's Kitchen Strong Foundation – our values, culture, capacities to support our work, and commitments to how we carry out our work.

It will be critical for Miriam's Kitchen to keep assessing what is needed to maintain and increase investments and capacity-building to carry out our values and maintain a Miriam's Kitchen Strong Foundation.

The following areas are the focus of our efforts to diligently steward our Miriam's Kitchen Strong Foundation:

### *Values-driven Culture*

We are committed to continue nurturing and living out our core values as we execute this plan:

1. Our guests are at the center of everything we do
2. Our work is to create social justice and meaningful change
3. We are good stewards of our relationships and resources
4. We work hard and have fun together

### *Racial Equity*

When any person—man, woman, child, elderly, veteran—does not have a safe place to sleep, then we have failed as a society. At Miriam's Kitchen, 51% of the guests in our dining room are African-American and 80% of guests are people of color. This is not a coincidence. Research shows race is a predictive factor of health, education, wealth—and housing outcomes. Our mission to end chronic homelessness demands we become engaged with its root causes. This is clear: structural racism (as seen in redlining, racial restrictive covenants, and other discriminatory housing policies) is a root cause of chronic homelessness. In addition to connecting our guests to housing, we need to address racially unjust systems that funnel people into homelessness, dismantle the policies that keep them homeless, and create sustainable change so people don't fall back into homelessness.

### *Guest Collaboration*

Our guests – and other individuals with lived experience of homelessness - are critical leaders in ending chronic homelessness in DC. As such, we must ensure not only that our work is informed by our guests – their experiences, their expertise, and their choices – but also that they are true partners in our work. To foster guest collaboration, we recognize our guests as leaders and facilitate opportunities for our guests to develop as leaders and to meaningfully participate in decision making that impacts their lives. Our most fundamental value at Miriam's Kitchen is that our guests are the center of everything we do. But it is not enough simply to state this value; we must live it. To truly put our guests at the center, we must invest in structures, capacity, and resources to support this challenging, but mission critical work.

### *Trauma-Informed Approaches and Resilience*

Our guests have experienced high levels of trauma - before becoming homeless, during their experience of homelessness, within the context of oppressive institutions and systems, and that which comes from historical and generational trauma. We also recognize that staff can experience vicarious trauma as we work with individuals who have experienced trauma. We are committed to providing adequate training and comprehensive trauma-informed support to staff. We will continue and strengthen comprehensive training, structures, and approaches we put in place to offer trauma-informed care to our guests and to support everyone in work that touches on trauma, grief, and loss. We know it is critical to recognize the incredible resilience of our guests and staff as a strength as we partner together.

### *Secure the financial and other resources needed to accomplish our goals*

We will refine our partnership model to build and grow partners who model excellence in our values of creating a just and equitable DC. We will find new and cultivate steadfast partners to expand our leadership in ending chronic and veteran homelessness in DC. We know we cannot do this alone – that’s why our partners are critical to our success.

### *Performance Management Structures and Capacity to Support Our Work*

To successfully execute this plan, we know we must pay attention to capacity needs (personnel, expertise, resources, software, etc.) to maintain current status and implement successful growth, such as:

- Ensuring staff have the tools and resources they need (in the areas of office space, HR, Finance, technology, etc.) to be effective in their jobs.
- Maintaining Miriam’s Kitchen’s value-driven culture during growth.
- Strengthening structures, capacity, and resources to implement racial equity and guest collaboration efforts, including (but not limited to) HR efforts to recruit, retain, and support staff of color and staff with lived experience of homelessness.
- Committing to measurement, evaluation, and learning across the organization so that we know how our strategic plan efforts are having an impact and we can always be learning and adapting our strategies.
- Implementing strong data systems to track work and continue to map improvements and develop a coordinated data system.