

Orange County Continuum of Care

COORDINATED ENTRY SYSTEM (CES) EVALUATION



Why this evaluation was done

With support from the Samueli Foundation, the Orange County Continuum of Care (CoC) retained Element Consulting Group to conduct an independent review of how well the CoC’s Coordinated Entry System (CES) connects people facing homelessness to housing and services. **The goal is to understand what is working, where people and providers encounter barriers, and what the community can do next to make the system more accessible, fair, consistent, and effective.**

WHAT IS CES CES is the community process established by the CoC for helping people experiencing or at risk of homelessness in Orange County reach available housing and services. It includes partner agencies who help people access assistance via assessment, prioritization when needed, and referral. CES is not meant to be a waiting list – it is a means to connect people to housing and services needed to resolve a housing crisis.	WHOSE WORK WAS REVIEWED The evaluation reviews the community’s shared implementation of CES – including how it is designed, operates, and performs for different groups, like youth and single adults, as well as how partners work with CES to assist people across access points, housing providers, and partner systems. It is not an evaluation of OCC alone.
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What the evaluation included

DATA REVIEW FY 2024-25 HMIS and administrative data, focused on 15,913 heads of household enrolled in street outreach, emergency shelter, or transitional housing.	COMMUNITY VOICES 69 survey responses, 11 interviews, and 12 focus groups - including 7 groups with 74 people who had experienced or were currently homeless.
POLICY AND PRACTICE REVIEW CES policies, federal and local requirements, workflows, system maps, prior findings, and how the process worked in practice.	EQUITY FOCUS Results by population and geography, with compensated advisors who had lived experience helping shape the approach and interpret findings.

What was learned

The system has a solid foundation: written policies, dedicated staff, privacy and nondiscrimination protections, separate pathways for different populations, and a strong data system. On the ground, people consistently said that responsive, knowledgeable caseworkers make all the difference. The Veteran pathway offers a useful model for coordinated communication, case conferencing, and navigation.

35% received a Housing Needs Assessment	7.7% of assessed households received a housing referral	40.5% of housing matches led to a confirmed move-in	22% returned to homelessness system-wide
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The central finding: Orange County has the pieces of a coordinated system, but too few households consistently move from initial contact through assessment, referral, and successful housing placement. **The greatest gaps are in access, prioritization, referral, communication, and the level of support provided before, during, and after a match.**

What needs to improve

- **Make the front door easier to find and offer immediate assistance to address housing needs.** Expand and support access points and build a clear prevention and diversion pathway.
- **Assess people consistently and at the right time.** Update screening and assessment to better reflect urgency, vulnerability, housing needs, service needs, and eligibility for different services, benefits, housing.
- **Prepare for housing earlier.** Help people being matched to obtain documents; make clear who is ready to move forward.
- **Redesign the system for people.** Build easy to follow guidance and tools for navigating assistance designed *by and for* people in need and program staff.
- **Improve matching and follow-through.** Confirm eligibility earlier, reduce delays and denials, and assign a **responsible provider** for individualized assistance until housing is stabilized or placement/warm handoff occurs.
- **Use data for improvement.** Track access, referrals, denials, move-ins, returns to homelessness, disparities, and participant experience throughout the year and actively use for improvements.
- **Connect CES to other systems and larger community response.** Align housing, health, behavioral health, benefits, workforce, aging, child welfare, and local government resources.

The recommended path forward

The report includes **38 recommendations and 9 innovation opportunities**. Together, they call for three kinds of work to move forward at the same time:

1 Fix the system

Correct policy and practice gaps so CES works fairly, consistently, and efficiently.

2 Align resources

Better connect housing, services, prevention, and other community resources to the level of need.

3 Strengthen governance

Clarify roles, decisions, oversight, partner participation, and accountability for results.

This is shared work. Some actions are operational changes to be led by OCC and CES operators. Others require decisions and investment by the CoC Board and broader community partners and systems. More than half of the recommended actions and innovation opportunities are expected to require mainly staff time, policy changes, or modest procedural improvements.

How community partners can help

- **Participate in work planning.** Help set priorities, owners, timelines, and measures of progress.
- **Improve the experience now.** Give clear information, avoid repeated requests, prepare documents early, and stay connected through handoffs.
- **Keep lived experience at the center.** Continue to include and compensate people directly affected by homelessness in design, testing, and oversight.
- **Meet in the middle:** Work toward integrated screening, assessment, referral protocols for services, benefits, and housing across sectors.
- **Share data and feedback.** Identify where people drop out, wait, are denied, or face unequal outcomes - and use the information to improve.
- **Connect resources.** Identify housing, flexible assistance, services, and mainstream supports that can prevent or shorten homelessness.
- **Track results together.** Use a public workplan tied to the CoC strategic plan and regular progress reviews so the community can see what changed and whether it helped.

The goals are straightforward: more neighbors safely housed, fewer needing or waiting for shelter, more moving to safe and stable housing faster and continuing to remain stable.