



Advancing a Qualified Workforce in Homeless Services through University-Based Training and Specialization

Prepared by: Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH)
Consultant: Donna Gallup, Ed.D., MSW



PROJECT PARTNERS:

THE LOS ANGELES CENTER OF EXCELLENCE FOR LABOR MARKET
RESEARCH, PARTICIPATING UNIVERSITIES, PROVIDERS, PERSONS WITH
LIVED EXPERIENCE, AND UNITED WAY OF GREATER LOS ANGELES



2025

I. Executive Summary

Los Angeles County's homeless services sector is facing a critical workforce crisis: weak pipeline of qualified professionals, high turnover, and an educational pipeline misaligned with real-world needs. This report—produced by the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) in collaboration with universities, providers, and people with lived experience—offers a bold, evidence-driven response.

Drawing from over two years of research and engagement with more than 120 stakeholders, the findings illuminate the urgent need for a trauma-informed, field-ready, and client-centered workforce. The data are clear: bachelor's-level roles are dramatically understaffed, providers struggle to find prepared candidates, and clients seek professionals who bring both empathy and expertise.

To meet this moment, the report proposes a University-Based Certificate and Specialization Program in Homeless Services. Grounded in stakeholder insights and labor market data, this solution includes structured coursework, paid internships, and stipends tied to post-graduation service. It prepares college graduates to enter the homeless services sector, but also to stay in the field.

This isn't just a curriculum—it's a workforce development strategy built for impact. By aligning education, experience, and employer needs, the proposed model addresses systemic gaps while honoring the voices of those delivering and receiving services.

II. Background and Project Overview

The Homeless Social Work Education (HSWE) Program (2018–2024) trained 92 MSW interns across six cohorts and eight universities using a structured curriculum, supervised practicum, and ongoing cohort learning. This project was supported by generous support from CSH, Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), and the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation.

The HSWE Program was evaluated using a modified validated tool, Attitudes Toward Homeless Inventory. The pre- and post- ATHI demonstrated significant shifts in attitudes in the following areas:

- Societal causes of homelessness and willingness to associate with homeless individuals in the areas of direct work with homeless populations;
- Beliefs about homeless people and discrimination against homeless individuals, understanding of program costs to address homelessness;
- The role of government in addressing the homeless problem.

In addition, a survey of graduates of the first five HSWE cohorts conducted between March and August of 2023 has shown significant positive outcomes:

- 40% of alumni are currently working in the homeless sector, many in leadership positions;
- 80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed to the statement “the training prepared [them] for a career in the homeless sector;”
- 60% reported that the program influenced their career decisions.

Comments reflected the program's foundational understanding of the homeless sector, career influence, and preparation for their roles.

Following the success of the above HSWE Program, this project's goals were to connect with appropriate stakeholders (universities, nonprofit partners, and persons with lived experience) to identify gaps, opportunities, capacity needs and goals to develop foundational knowledge to address workforce needs in the Los Angeles County homeless sector. In addition to gathering data and information from stakeholders to advise on the development of a strategy, the Los Angeles Center of Excellence for Labor Market Research was engaged to complete labor market research and provide an analysis for the LA County homeless workforce. This two-faceted approach ensured that both quantitative labor market data and qualitative stakeholder insights informed the design of a comprehensive workforce development strategy tailored to the unique needs of the LA County homeless services sector.

III. Methodology: Stakeholder Engagement and Data Collection

From mid-2024 to early 2025, over 120 individuals participated in structured interviews, surveys, and focus groups. Stakeholders included:

- Survey of 73 individuals working in the homeless services sector (frontline to leadership roles);
- Staff and leaders from over 20 LA County homeless services partners;
- Program Directors/Deans from 10 universities;
- 29 Persons with lived experience (PWLE).

Data were thematically coded and triangulated with findings from the following documents and additional reports and sources as footnoted throughout this report.



Reports commissioned through this ongoing project:

Appendix A: LAHSA White Paper and Appendices A/B (2024)

Appendix B: Workforce Needs Assessment in the Homeless Services Sector for Los Angeles County Report by The Los Angeles Center of Excellence for Labor Market Research (2025)

IV. Project Findings

A. Stakeholder Analysis

Multiple data sources, including surveys and focus groups with clients, providers, and agency leaders, clearly articulate the critical competencies and educational priorities for professionals entering or advancing in the homeless services workforce. These insights offer a roadmap for a curriculum grounded in field realities and the needs of both clients and staff.

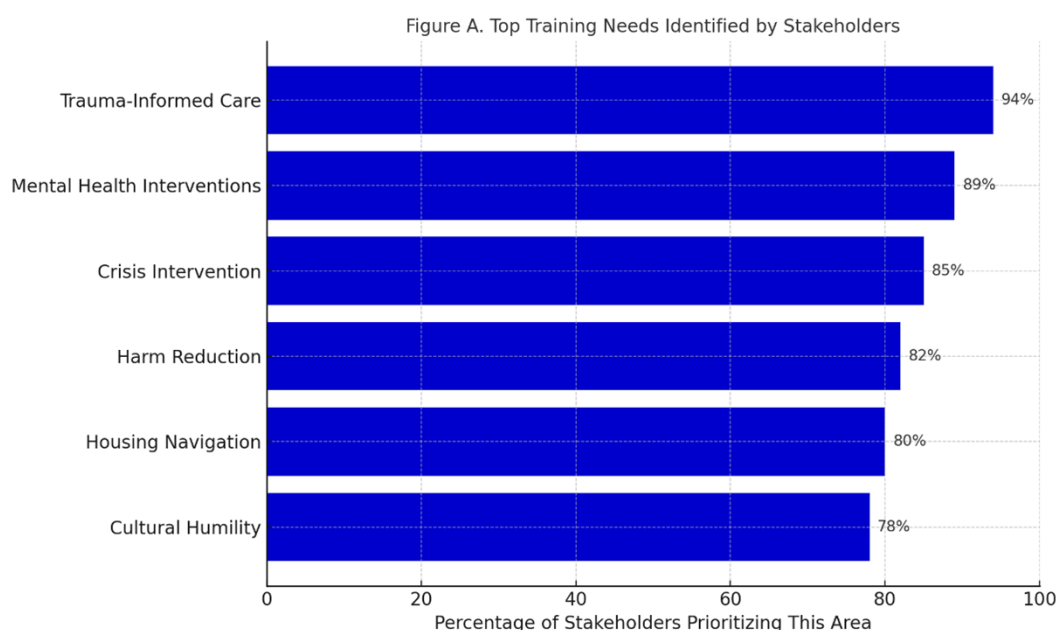
Competency Priorities Across Stakeholders

Across all reports, several core competencies emerged as universally necessary for effective service delivery (see also Figure A below):

- Trauma-Informed Care – Recognized as the most essential training area by providers and clients alike;
- Mental Health Interventions – Emphasized for both client care and staff wellness;
- Crisis Intervention and Conflict De-escalation – Identified as vital for managing emergencies and high-stress encounters;
- Harm Reduction – Rated highly for substance use support and engagement;

- Case Management and Documentation – Foundational for service coordination and accountability;
- Cultural Humility and Responsiveness – Needed for ethical engagement with diverse populations;
- Housing First and Housing Navigation – Practical skills for implementing client-centered, housing-focused approaches;
- Ethical Decision-Making – Critical for maintaining integrity and trust;
- Use of Evidence-Based Practices – Encouraged to ensure effective interventions.

Figure A. Top Training Needs Identified by Stakeholders

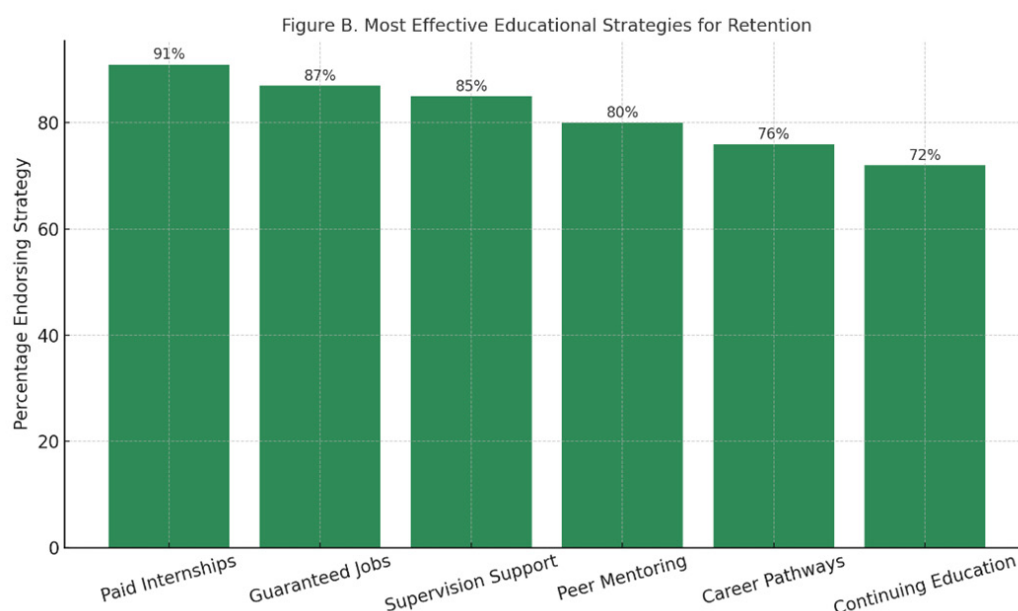


i. Provider and Leadership Input

From the CSH Workforce Provider Survey, Focus Group (5/16/2024) and Leadership Data supported by the Center of Excellence for Labor Market Research Workforce Needs Assessment:

- Senior leaders identified that finding candidates with relevant experience or those who can articulate transferable skills is a major challenge;
- Safety concerns and stigma working with people experiencing homelessness further complicates recruitment and deters some potential candidates;
- Filling direct service roles requiring degrees and certifications along with senior management roles are an ongoing challenge;
- Structured internships and clear career paths help recruit new staff, as many interns move into full-time roles. However, limited provider capacity makes it hard to host and manage interns;
- Empathy and adaptability were ranked highest among essential traits;
- Burnout and turnover were linked to high case-loads, lack of supervision, and emotional demands;
- Leaders in the focus group emphasized the need to be creative with alternative scheduling, hybrid work, and a focus on wellness to retain staff;
- According to the survey, paid internships, guaranteed jobs, and professional development were the top strategies to attract and retain talent (see also Figure B below);
- Bachelor's degrees were deemed the most essential educational credential for the sector (69%).

Figure B. Most Effective Educational Strategies for Retention



ii. Persons With Lived Experience (PWLE) Perspectives

In the survey and focus group (6/21/2024), PWLE reported:

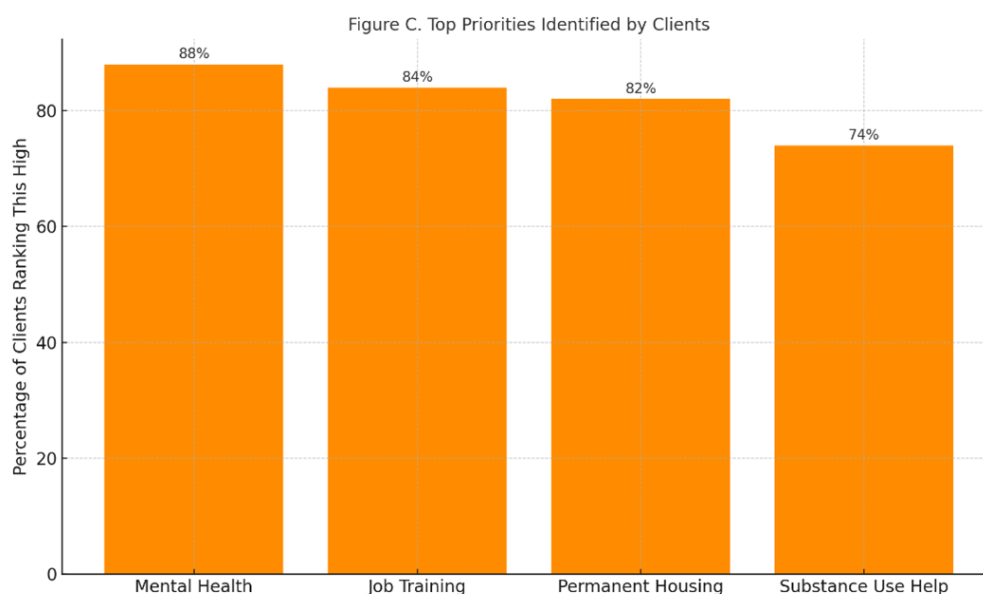
- Focus group participants stated that case managers need better training in providing personalized support, understanding marginalized populations and experiences, and showing more empathy;
- There is a preference for in-person support, better staff retention to build longer-term relationships, and fewer handoffs across multiple providers;
- PWLE indicated mental health, job training, and housing as top service priorities to support more staff training (see also Figure C below);
- PWLE emphasized the importance of practitioners who understand their whole range of needs—not just individual issues—and who can communicate with them effectively.

Summary of Identified Gaps in Current Training by Providers and PWLE

Participants and agencies reported key deficiencies in current training for staff:

- Insufficient understanding of mental illness and trauma among staff;
- Weak preparation in navigating the homeless services system;
- Lack of support for managing vicarious trauma and client death;
- Minimal practical experience before entering the workforce;
- Rare exposure to the history of housing policy or career sustainability models.

Figure C. Top Priorities Identified by Clients



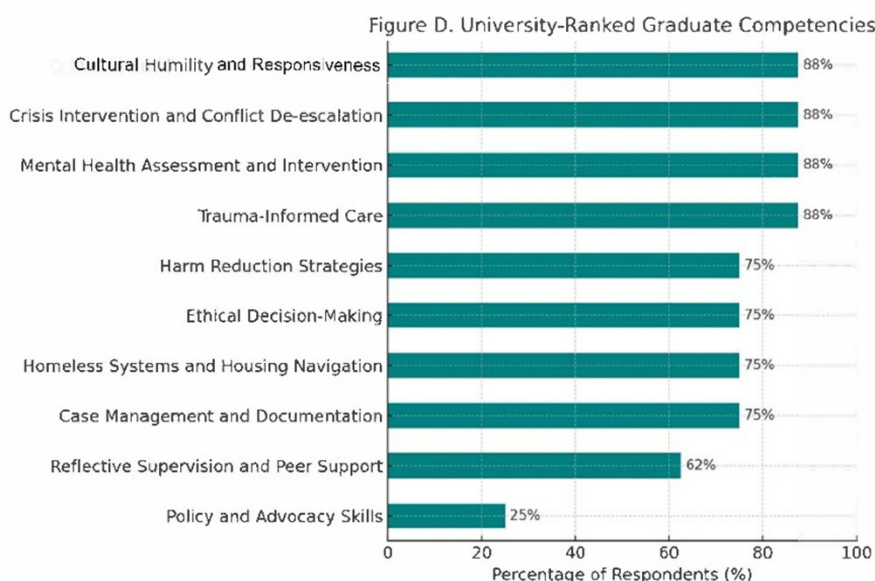
iii. Social Work Dean/Director Perspective

Faculty and university-affiliated stakeholders were surveyed to identify the most important competencies for graduates entering the homeless services workforce. Among the 10 ranked skill areas, the most frequently selected competencies are outlined in Figure D below:

This data reinforces stakeholder themes from previous focus groups and provider interviews: that technical skills must be paired with cultural and emotional competence. The highest-rated training priorities—trauma-informed care, crisis management, and respectful engagement with clients of all backgrounds—underscore the need for hands-on, values-driven training in university curriculum design.

Leaders of university social work programs reported the primary barriers to offering homelessness-focused courses or curricula are a perceived lack of student interest and limited faculty expertise in this area. Additionally, they cited their reluctance to refer students to homeless service providers due to absence of paid placements and structured internships with high-quality supervision required to meet the academic and graduation standards as significant obstacles.

Figure D. University-Ranked Graduate Competencies



Summary of Identified Gaps in Current Training by Providers and PWLE

Curriculum development should include:

1. Core courses in trauma, mental health, harm reduction, and crisis response;
2. Practical instruction in case management, documentation, and funding systems;
3. Paid field-based learning: structured internships, peer mentoring, and reflective supervision;
4. Modules on social determinants, governance systems, and professional ethics;
5. Continuing education in client engagement and motivational interviewing.

Stakeholder Engagement and Workforce Needs Summary

The stakeholder assessment reveals a critical gap between the current workforce and the skills needed to serve people experiencing homelessness. Despite the central role of trauma-informed care, mental health support, and crisis response, most new professionals lack targeted preparation in these areas. Providers face ongoing challenges in recruiting staff with both technical skills and emotional intelligence, while high turnover continues to strain the system. Without a formal university-based curriculum and paid internships to boost interest and readiness, the sector will remain understaffed and ill-equipped. A university-level intervention is essential to build a skilled, stable, and compassionate homeless services workforce.

B. The Los Angeles Center of Excellence for Labor Market Research

Key Findings (see also Appendix B)

Workforce Demand & Educational Supply Gap Summary: 7,561 annual job openings projected in homeless services across eight key occupations with only 2,175 awards conferred annually by local postsecondary institutions, which is less than one-third of demand.

Turnover & Retention Contribute to Workforce Deficit

1. Average turnover rate: 39%; highest for Rehabilitation Counselors (60%) and lowest for Social Workers, All Other (27%).
2. Top causes of turnover include:
 - A. Low pay and financial instability;
 - B. Emotional burnout and secondary trauma;
 - C. Limited supervision, advancement, and role clarity;
 - D. High workloads and complex client needs.
3. Turnover disrupts service continuity and delays licensure for associate clinicians due to supervisor shortages.

Compensation & Wage Disparities

1. Wages range from \$21.33/hour (Rehabilitation Counselors) to \$44.14/hour (Healthcare Social Workers).
2. Many workers in the sector earn below the LA County self-sufficiency standard wage of \$24.03/hour.

Educational Infrastructure

1. Educational supply is highly concentrated in several institutions:
 - A. USC alone accounts for one-third of degrees;
 - B. California State University (CSU)-Los Angeles and CSU-Long Beach provide another 30%.
2. Geographic gaps persist: Institutions in high-need areas must expand offerings (e.g., Metro LA, South LA, San Fernando Valley).
3. Programs in areas like vocational rehabilitation, addiction counseling, and mental health are offered by only one or two institutions.

Educational Pathway Imbalance

1. Undersupply of bachelor's-level graduates
 - A. "Occupations that only require a bachelor's degree are critically underfilled, limiting access to entry-level positions that could strengthen the sector from the ground up."
 - B. Case managers, outreach workers, and housing navigators are among the most affected.
2. Entry-level roles are critical and understaffed
 - A. "Without increased investment in bachelor's-level program capacity... the county will struggle to fill critical frontline positions."

For example:

1. Community and Social Service Specialists: 547 annual job openings vs. only 119 relevant bachelor's-level completions.
2. Substance Abuse Counselors: 2,360 annual openings vs. 89 sub-bachelor's completions.

WORKFORCE RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE LABOR MARKET REPORT



Expand bachelor's-level programs in social work and human services



Improve supervised internship and practicum opportunities



Offer financial incentives (stipends, loan forgiveness)



Build targeted pipelines in high-need geographic areas



Develop clear career ladders and licensure support pathways

V. Additional Published Homeless Services Workforce Reports

Workforce Instability

- 83% of employees would consider leaving for better pay and benefits.¹
- Only 39% of service providers felt graduates were job-ready, in contrast to nearly double the rate reported by universities. This signals a disconnect in workforce preparation.²
- Over 90 distinct job titles were found across 116 participants, revealing a lack of standardization in roles and titles.³
- Factors contributing to attrition include burnout, low salaries, and unmanageable caseloads.⁴

Recruitment & Hiring Challenges

- The KPMG sector-wide assessment identified pervasive inconsistencies in recruitment, hiring, and onboarding practices across homeless services providers in Los Angeles County.⁵
- Similarly, a 2024 statewide study involving 120 organizations highlighted systemic hiring barriers facing nonprofit homeless service providers across California.⁶
- 44% of employees preferred hybrid work models, yet many agencies lacked formal flexibility or remote work policies.⁷

Training & Supervision Gaps

- Only around 50% of employees were assigned mentors, and 13 of 18 focus groups cited a lack of job-specific training as a barrier to success.⁸
- Workforce gaps were particularly prominent in skills such as documentation, conflict resolution, policy advocacy, and reflective practice.⁹
- Internationally, workers identified unmet demand for long-term, in-depth training in trauma, ethics, and resilience, along with structured peer learning and supervision opportunities.¹⁰
- The structure and quality of internships significantly impact students' post-graduation employment decisions.¹¹
- Supportive managerial styles and work environments can retain workers even when salaries are low.¹²
- Field/practicum instructors and agency-based supervisors often feel unprepared and most agencies offer insufficient training or mentorship to new supervisors.¹³

Educational Alignment & Program Design

- The largest gaps identified in social work job postings were in treatment planning (21%), discharge planning (17%), psychosocial assessments (16%), and case management (15%).¹⁴
- Universities were encouraged to integrate practice-based content earlier in curriculum development and to tailor master's-level programs to be more accessible via online formats.¹⁵
- 54.3% of completions in 2022 were from distance-based programs, reinforcing the importance of flexible educational delivery to meet workforce demands.¹⁶
- These findings support the case for a proposed specialization or certificate program tailored to the homeless services sector workforce gaps.¹⁷
- Academic programs often fail to adequately train MSW students in supervisory roles, despite many entering such positions soon after graduation.¹⁸

Workforce Accessibility

- According to Gallup–Lumina, 57% of unenrolled adults had recently considered postsecondary education, and 89% believed a credential would improve employment prospects.¹⁹
- Mental health, caregiving responsibilities, and cost were identified as key barriers—especially for women and Hispanic learners—that must be addressed in program design.²⁰
- Crime and urban stressors discourage long-term commitments in metropolitan social work roles.²¹

¹ KPMG and United Way. "Current State Assessment Report." *Homeless Sector Workforce Analysis*. August 26, 2022.

² Inside Higher Ed. 2025 *Graduate Readiness Report*.

³ KPMG and United Way (n 1)

⁴ Dos Santos, L. M., & Lo, H. F. (2024). Motivations, Career Decisions, and Decision-Making Processes of Mid-Aged Master of Social Work Students. *Social Work Education*, 43(8), 2135–2153.

⁵ KPMG and United Way (n 1)

⁶ Turner Center for Housing Innovation, UCSF, and Abt Associates. (2024). *Study on California Homeless Services Workforce Challenges*.

⁷ KPMG and United Way (n 1)

⁸ KPMG and United Way (n 1)

⁹ Inside Higher Ed (n 2)

¹⁰ Opletalová, A., & Truhlářová, Z. (2023). *Educational needs of social workers in the practice of social work in the area of ending housing distress*.

¹¹ Dos Santos (n 4)

¹² Dos Santos (n 4)

¹³ Mason, K., & Harris, J. (2025). Crossing the threshold: addressing multiple exclusion homelessness in social work education. *Social Work Education*, 1–19.

¹⁴ Social Work eBook. (2024). *Trends & Predictions: Opportunities for Higher Ed to Close Workforce Gaps in Social Work*.

¹⁵ Social Work eBook (n 14)

VI. Proposed Solution: Certificate and Specialization Model

A. Investing in Workforce Development: Stipend and Certificate Programs in Social Services

As social service systems across the U.S. grapple with workforce shortages, various national, state, and local initiatives have emerged to attract, train, and retain professionals in critical fields like behavioral health, public child welfare, and community-based outreach. These programs offer stipends, scholarships, and practical placement experiences in exchange for service commitments. The following section summarizes a sample of models that can inform a similar approach for the homeless services sector in Los Angeles.

Connecticut Health Horizons (UConn School of Social Work and Nursing)

- Though based in Connecticut, this model provides a replicable framework. It includes funding for faculty hiring, student stipends, and practicum development in behavioral health and public education settings, especially those focused on underserved youth.²²

Behavioral Health Scholarship Program (BHSP) – HCAI

- Administered by the California Department of Health Care Access and Information (HCAI), BHSP offers up to \$25,000 in scholarships for behavioral health students pursuing certificates or graduate degrees. Recipients must commit to working in underserved areas for one-year post-graduation.²³

CalOptima/CSU Fullerton MSW Stipend Program

- A \$5 million collaboration between CalOptima and CSU Fullerton supports MSW students through \$20,000 annual stipends in exchange for post-graduation employment in public health or contracted provider agencies.²⁴

Los Angeles County Mental Health Hiring Incentive Pilot Program

- In response to persistent staffing shortages in mobile mental health and crisis response teams, Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (DMH) implemented a range of incentives including signing bonuses, student loan forgiveness, and

streamlined hiring pathways.

- As of 2023, the County Board of Supervisors launched a pilot program with 14 new job incentives to fill gaps in street outreach, school mental health, and 911 alternative response teams.²⁵

Greater Southern California Social Work Education Council (GSWEC) Stipend Programs

- GSWEC is a privately supported consortium of Southern California schools of social work and partnering agencies focused on preparing MSW students for careers in aging. It offers stipends, specialized field placements, and educational programming to promote workforce development in geriatric and older adult services across health-care, community, and long-term care settings.²⁶

Title IV-E Public Child Welfare Training Program – LA DCFS/CalSWEC

- The Title IV-E program provides full tuition and stipends to MSW students preparing for careers in public child welfare. Students must complete field placements with Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and work for the agency after graduation.²⁷

The examples above demonstrate the effectiveness of stipends and service-based training in stabilizing and growing the human services workforce. Common elements include financial assistance, experiential learning, and post-graduation employment pipelines.

¹⁶ Social Work eBook (n 14)

¹⁷ Social Work eBook (n 14)

¹⁸ Mason (n 13)

¹⁹ Gallup–Lumina Foundation. *2025 Report on Adult Learners and Postsecondary Access*.

²⁰ Gallup–Lumina Foundation (n 19)

²¹ Dos Santos (n 4)

²² Kashef, Z. & O'Connell, A. *UConn Nursing, Social Work Awarded \$6M to Address Workforce Shortages in Critical Fields*. UConn Today, March 1, 2023. Retrieved from <https://today.uconn.edu/2023/03/school-of-social-work-awarded-state-funds-to-increase-workforce-serving-youth-mental-health>

²³ California Department of Health Care Access and Information. (2025). Behavioral Health Scholarship Program Grant Guide Addendum I. Retrieved from <https://hcai.ca.gov>

²⁴ California State University, Fullerton & CalOptima. *CSUF-CalOptima MSW Stipend Program Launch*. Epoch Times, May 17, 2023.

²⁵ Scauzillo, S. (2023, April 6). LA County ramps up incentives to recruit mental health workers for street teams. Los Angeles Daily News. Retrieved from <https://www.dailynews.com>

²⁶ Greater Southern California Social Work Education Council (GSWEC). "Stipend Programs." Retrieved from <https://gsweconow.org>

²⁷ California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC). Public Child Welfare (Title IV-E) Training Program. Retrieved from <https://calswec-berkeley.edu/programs/public-child-welfare-training-program>

B. Recommendations: A Certificate-Based Strategy to Strengthen the Homeless Services Workforce

Across stakeholder groups engaged in this project, including frontline staff, leadership, persons with lived experience (PWLE), and university educators, there is a clear and urgent consensus: the homeless services workforce in Los Angeles County lacks structured educational pipelines, supportive field/practicum experiences, and financial incentives needed to attract and retain qualified professionals. The data collected in this report, supported by the Labor Market analysis and current reports and literature, confirms a significant mismatch between workforce demand and available training, especially in entry- and mid-level roles.

To address this crisis, we recommend the implementation of a Homeless Services Workforce Certificate and Specialization Program grounded in the following strategic objectives:

1. Establish a Formal Certificate Program Focused on the Homeless Services Sector

- a. Develop and launch a university-based certificate program—hosted through LA County four-year institutions—designed to prepare undergraduate and graduate students for careers in the homeless services field. This addresses the current absence of standardized curricula and leverages the success of the prior HSWE initiative.
- b. Justification: University leaders confirmed a lack of expertise and low interest in homeless services has resulted in limited course offerings related to homelessness. A formal certificate, supported by incentives and partnerships, will help standardize training, enhance credibility, and stimulate enrollment.

2. Integrate Coursework with Structured, Paid Internships

- a. Include two required university-level courses (Homeless Systems Navigation and Interventions in Homeless Services), alongside a 600-hour supervised internship in an LA County homeless services agency.
- b. Justification: Both students and providers identified the lack of practical experience as a barrier to success. Agencies report that interns often transition into staff roles, but homeless services organizations struggle to host them due to capacity constraints. Structured and

compensated internships create a pipeline while reducing agency burden.

3. Offer Financial Support Tied to Employment Commitment

- a. Provide educational stipends forgivable upon fulfillment of a one- to two-year post-graduate employment commitment in LA County.
- b. Justification: As in behavioral health and public child welfare models, stipends incentivize students to pursue specialized training and reduce economic barriers that disproportionately affect low-income students.

4. Embed Competency-Based Learning and Cohort Support

- a. Incorporate evaluation tools such as the Attitudes Toward Homeless Inventory (ATHI) and self-assessments along with cohort seminars focused on trauma-informed care, working with clients from a wide range of backgrounds, crisis management, and ethical practice.
- b. Justification: Evaluation of the HSWE program showed significant growth in student attitudes and skill development. Peer learning and reflection are associated with higher job satisfaction and longer tenure in the field.

5. Develop University-Agency Partnerships to Sustain the Pipeline

- a. Coordinate cross-sector partnerships to ensure the program is responsive to field conditions, supports quality supervision, and aligns with workforce needs.
- b. Justification: Providers cited difficulty finding candidates with relevant skills and navigating vicarious trauma. The program should require agency input to design applied training, while supporting agencies to host and train interns effectively.

VII. Alignment with Report Findings and System Goals

This recommended certificate model directly aligns with:

- Stakeholder-identified competencies (e.g., trauma-informed care, housing navigation, documentation, and working with clients from a range of backgrounds and experiences) as outlined in the stakeholder engagement process;
- Educational gaps identified by university and current reports and literature (e.g., minimal exposure to the housing system, lack of workforce readiness, and limited prepared field/practicum supervision);
- Labor market data from the Los Angeles Center of Excellence for Labor Market Research showing workforce shortages and low educational supply, especially in bachelor's-level frontline roles;
- Successful precedents from national, state and county stipend programs that pair financial support with service commitments.
- LA County priorities outlined in Measure A:
 - Measure A identifies a critical need for a long-term strategy to recruit and retain qualified homeless services staff.
 - Measure A calls for incentives that attract new professionals to the field. This program includes stipends tied to a service commitment, reducing financial barriers and promoting employment in high-need roles.
 - Measure A prioritizes equipping the workforce with core competencies such as trauma-informed care, housing navigation, and harm reduction—all of which are core components of the proposed certificate curriculum.
- Measure A recognizes the need to relieve provider agencies from the full burden of recruitment and training. This model fosters university–agency partnerships, providing structured internships and supervision support aligned with County program goals.
- HHAP 4 funding which requires local jurisdictions to implement outcome-driven strategies that reduce homelessness, increase service capacity, and enhance accountability.

VIII. Conclusion: A Pathway to a Skilled, Stable, and Compassionate Workforce

The proposed Los Angeles County Certificate in Homeless Services is not just a curriculum—it is a workforce strategy. By embedding a specialized curriculum and field/practicum experiences in homeless services into the university system, this model can ensure a steady supply of qualified professionals ready to respond to one of the most urgent public health challenges of our time.

In doing so, it echoes the voices of those closest to the work—providers, clients, and students—and translates evidence into action that can build a more effective and sustainable homeless services system.

ABOUT CSH

CSH's mission is to advance supportive housing by advocating for effective policies, strategically investing in communities, and strengthening the supportive housing field. We accomplish our mission through three core services:

1. Training, Technical Assistance, and Thought Leadership: CSH strengthens the affordable and supportive housing fields with research-backed tools, trainings, resources, and knowledge sharing.
2. Investment: CSH boosts affordable and supportive housing unit creation and programs that help people thrive through powerful capital funds, specialty loan products, grant making, and development expertise.
3. Policy and Advocacy: CSH engages government leaders and public agencies through systems reform, policy collaboration, and advocacy.

Acknowledgements

This report was generously commissioned by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), specifically with fierce advocacy and contract management by Vanessa Rios, Senior Advisor, Workforce Development. Our gratitude extends to the project consultants who drove the multi-faceted and complex data collection and design of this report: Donna Gallup, Ed.D, MSW and Luke Meyer, Los Angeles Region Director of the Center of Excellence for Labor Market Research hosted by Mt. San Antonio College. We also want to recognize the CSH staff who seamlessly facilitated this process: Dara Weinger, Joseph Dominguez, Sabrina Fields-Alesana, Jessica Tien, Edith Gimm, Wendy Culajay, and David Howden



Appendix A:

LAHSA White Paper Brief and Appendices A/B

Stipend Support for MSW Interns in Homeless Agencies

Program Overview

Since 2018, with leadership from CSH and partners, The Homelessness Social Work Education (HSWE) Program has successfully changed attitudes toward homeless and recruited master's level social workers to a career in homeless sector (See also Appendix A: Background of Program and Homeless Workforce Deficit). The HSWE Partners include representatives from Azusa Pacific University (APU), University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), University of Southern California (USC), UMass Global and the California State Universities (Northridge, Dominguez Hills, Los Angeles, and Long Beach).

The program's foundational outcomes are:

- Enhanced MSW field educational learning through targeted placements in homeless service agencies.
- Increased workforce of social workers committed to careers in the homeless sector.
- Expansion of homeless provider capacity.

The program's cohort model includes specialized training, student stipends, and peer learning. Eligible students must be specialization/final year students, reside in Southern California, and be placed at internship sites delivering services to homeless individuals in Los Angeles County. See also Appendix B for Program Data 2018-2024.

Justification for Stipend Support

The social work profession is facing significant challenges, as detailed in the NASW "Profile of the Social Work Workforce" report. A significant issue for social work graduates is that educational debt at graduation is substantial. Among the 2019 graduates the mean educational debt was \$66,000, of which \$49,000 was from their social work education. Thirty-three percent indicated they had not received any support. Debt from their social work education was substantially higher for Black/African Americans than for Whites (mean debt \$66,000 vs. \$45,000) and for Hispanics compared with non-Hispanics (\$53,000 vs. \$48,000). This is quite high given that the mean starting salary for new MSWs was only \$47,100.

Impact of the Program

Since its inception in 2018, the program has graduated 92 MSWs, completed annual program evaluation using the Attitudes Towards Homeless Inventory. While capacity building was no longer available due to lack of funding after the first two years, the training program paired with a targeted placement working in the homeless sector has continued. Overall, the Program has shown significant positive outcomes:

- Significant improvements in beliefs about societal causes of homelessness and willingness to associate with homeless individuals in the areas of direct work with homeless populations, beliefs about homeless people and discrimination against homeless, understanding of program costs to address homelessness, and the role of government in addressing the homeless problem
- 40% of alumni are currently working in the homeless sector, many in leadership positions.
- 80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed to the statement "the training prepared them for a career in the homeless sector."
- 60% reported that the program influenced their career decisions.
- Alumni comments reflect the program's foundational understanding of the homeless sector, career influence, and preparation for their roles.

Finally, the homeless sector is competing for social workers and jobs in high demand. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, mental health counselors and healthcare social workers are listed as in the top 10 most new jobs and most openings requiring a graduate degree. These issues underscore the need for supportive measures such as stipends to incentivize MSW interns to pursue and sustain careers in the homeless sector.

Enhancing Training and Retention: The Homeless Social Work Education (HSWE) program addresses these issues by providing comprehensive training, which has proven to prepare interns effectively for careers in the sector. The curriculum includes modules on policy, advocacy, research, subpopulations, and leadership, ensuring well-rounded and prepared social workers.

Capacity Building and Clinical Support: Hosting MSW interns at homeless agencies significantly contributes to capacity building and increases clinical support for clients experiencing homelessness. Interns bring fresh perspectives, energy, and up-to-date academic knowledge that can enhance service delivery. By integrating interns into their teams, homeless services agencies can extend their reach, offer more personalized support to clients, and increase their overall service capacity. This additional support is crucial in addressing the complex and multifaceted needs of individuals experiencing homelessness.

Economic Justification: Providing stipends for MSW interns aligns with industry standards and ensures that interns can fully commit to their training without financial strain. This investment will help build a robust pipeline of skilled social workers, ready to tackle the complex challenges of homelessness.

Incentivizing Careers in the Homeless Sector: MSW interns have numerous placement options and career choices upon graduation. Offering a stipend serves as a powerful incentive for these interns to choose a career in the homeless sector over other opportunities. Financial support during their training period reduces the economic burden on students, allowing them to focus on their professional development while gaining valuable experience. This financial encouragement can attract more interns to the homeless sector, fostering a committed and prepared workforce dedicated to addressing homelessness.

Recommendations

- **Sustained Public Investment:** We recommend sustained public investment in the HSWE program, including stipends for MSW interns. This funding will ensure continuity and allow for the expansion of training opportunities, ultimately strengthening the homeless service workforce.
- **Focus on Representation:** Hiring and retaining people of all identities and backgrounds, including those who are significantly overrepresented among the homeless population in Los Angeles County, is imperative. This strategic focus is critical for enhancing program effectiveness and fostering belonging, ensuring a workforce that comprehensively understands and effectively meets community needs. Support for a diverse range of graduates not only engages them in the training program but also cultivates their leadership and mentoring capabilities within their communities. This approach is essential for achieving sustainable impact and advancing community development goals.
- **Continued Data Collection:** Ongoing collection of qualitative and quantitative data from students, alumni, and providers will help refine the program and demonstrate its long-term impact. This data should include demographic information, hours completed, and overall experience.

Conclusion

The HSWE program has demonstrated its value in preparing social workers for careers in the homeless sector, enhancing provider capacity, and addressing workforce shortages. By hosting MSW interns, homeless agencies can build capacity and increase clinical support for clients. With sustained public investment and stipend support, this program can continue to grow, ultimately making a significant impact on homelessness services in Southern California.

Stipend Support for MSW Interns in Homeless Agencies

Appendix A-1

Background of Program and Homeless Workforce Deficit

In 2017, Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) was funded by the Hilton Foundation to develop a pilot program to address a workforce deficit in the homeless sector in Los Angeles County. In collaboration with the Southern California Consortium of master's in social work (MSW) programs an innovative and impactful pilot program was developed to recruit social workers into careers working with those experiencing homelessness. The pilot ran for two academic years 2018-2020 establishing a need and demonstrating success not only in training master's level social workers for careers in the homeless sector, but also in building nonprofit capacity and relationships with MSW Programs.

In 2020, with a successful program built and strong foundation, the Homeless Social Work Education (HSWE) Program continued the important work of the pilot with leadership from CSH, USC's Ben Henwood, and Project Consultant, Donna Gallup. The HSWE Program not only provided a year-long training for second/advanced year social work students, but it also focused on capacity building in the sector by providing clinical supervision for homeless services agencies that lacked a qualified social worker on staff. With 92 graduates over the past six years, the program has not only gathered evaluation data on its impact on attitudes toward homelessness but is also shaping MSW graduates' career choices to pursue work in the homeless services sector. This white paper outlines the program's impact and makes a case for sustained public investment, including stipends for participating interns.

Addressing Workforce Shortages in the Homeless Sector

The homeless services sector faces significant workforce challenges, which hinder the effective delivery of services to those in need. Research by Gallup et al. (2020) and Gallup et al. (2022) provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of targeted training programs and collaborative field placements in mitigating social worker shortages. Gallup et al. (2020) found that collaborative social work field placements

can significantly enhance the readiness and commitment of MSW interns to work in the homeless sector, thereby addressing workforce shortages and improving service delivery. Additionally, Gallup et al. (2022) highlighted the importance of training programs in shifting social worker attitudes towards homelessness, which leads to more effective and compassionate service delivery.

Nationally, the workforce deficits in the homeless sector point to a need for additional targeted training and strategy. The Strategic Human Capital Management report by the U.S. GAO (2020) emphasizes the persistent skills gaps within the federal workforce despite ongoing efforts to address them. These gaps are a root cause of inefficiencies in high-risk areas across government services. The report highlights the importance of robust workforce planning and training to mitigate these skills gaps such as long-term strategies for strategies for staff development or maintaining an inventory of employee skills and competencies. Additionally, The National Governor's Association (2023) issued a report noting developing career pathways is essential for building the talent pipeline in the healthcare sector. Addressing healthcare workforce shortages, especially for those working with vulnerable adults, requires a multifaceted approach that includes stakeholder engagement, data collection, employer partnerships, program evaluation, and sustainability efforts.

Within the broader human services sector, recent studies are also pointing to more specific issues in the workforce for those serving individuals experiencing homelessness. The National Alliance to End Homelessness Workforce Survey (2023) analyzed the responses of over 5,000 people from the U.S. homeless services workforce. The report outlined how job-related stress, low compensation, and burnout contribute to high turnover rates in the field. Approximately 71% of respondents reported experiencing job-related stress and a substantial number indicated that their salaries were insufficient to meet basic needs.

Stipend Support for MSW Interns in Homeless Agencies Appendix A-1 (continued)

A study by the United Way of Greater Los Angeles and KPMG (2022) examined data collected from 52 organizations serving the Los Angeles County homeless sector. The study revealed that attrition rates in the homeless sector in LA County are three times higher than the expected 10%. This study also identified a "lack of training" as a significant challenge and projected that a 31% increase in the current workforce is needed to achieve optimal staffing levels in the future. Moreover, Los Angeles County has ramped up incentives to recruit mental health workers for street outreach teams, recognizing the critical need for mental health services among the homeless population. The county implemented measures such as signing bonuses, student loan forgiveness, and streamlined application processes to attract more workers. However, these efforts have had limited success, indicating that more comprehensive strategies are needed to address the underlying workforce issues.

In conclusion, addressing workforce shortages in the homeless sector requires a multi-faceted strategy that includes targeted training programs, collaborative field placements, and comprehensive incentives. By integrating these strategies, we can build a robust pipeline of skilled social workers ready to tackle the complex challenges of homelessness.

Stipend Support for MSW Interns in
Homeless Agencies
Appendix B-1

**Homeless Social Work Education Data
(2018-2024)**

Internship Hours Completed 2018-2024			
University	# Interns	Hours/Intern	Total Hours
APU	21	480/600 AS	10,320
CSUDH	20	540	10,800
CSULA	1	600	600
CSULB	16	500	8,000
CSUN	7	600	4,200
UCLA	2	620	1,240
UMass Global	2	400	800
USC	23	550	12,650
Totals	92 Interns		48,610

Currently Works in Homeless Services		
Yes	37	40%
No	43	47%
Unsure	12	13%
Total	92 Interns	100%

Stipend Support for MSW Interns in
Homeless Agencies
Appendix B-1 (continued)

**Homeless Social Work Education Data
(2018-2024)**

Demographics		
Race	#	%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	2	2%
Asian	5	6%
Black	13	14%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1	1%
White	61	66%
Other	10	11%
Total	92 Interns	100%
Ethnicity	#	%
Hispanic	39	42%
Not Hispanic	53	58%
Total	92 Interns	100%
Gender	#	%
Male	21	23%
Female	69	75%
Nonbinary	2	2%
Total	92 Interns	100%

Appendix B:

Workforce Needs Assessment of the Homeless Services Sector in Los Angeles County prepared by the Los Angeles Center of Excellence for Labor Market Research

[View the Full Report](#)



Appendix C:

Stakeholder Survey Results

MSW Expansion Project: Build a skilled workforce for homelessness response.

Summary Report: Qualtrics Survey April – July 2024

Workforce Survey and Challenges in the Homeless Sector

1. Workforce Composition and Education Levels

Respondents to the survey shared their employment roles and educational backgrounds:

- Employment Levels:
 - Agency leadership: 44%
 - Program-level management: 25%
 - Frontline/direct services staff: 19%
 - Admin/support/advocacy staff: 12%
- Educational Requirements:
The most common educational requirement for working in the homeless sector:
 - Bachelor's degree: 69%
 - Master's degree: 23%
 - Doctoral degree: 8%

2. Key Skills and Traits for Homeless Sector Professionals

Survey respondents ranked essential traits and skills for those working in the homeless sector:

- Essential Traits:
 - Adaptability: Mean ranking of 3.69
 - Empathy: Mean ranking of 2.69
- Core Skills:
 - Communication skills: Mean ranking of 4.19
 - Cultural humility: Mean ranking of 3.88

3. Client Needs and Insights

Respondents provided insights into client living situations and their support preferences:

- Living Situations:
 - 28.57% live on the streets
 - 42.86% are formerly homeless but now housed
 - 28.57% live with friends or family
- Most Needed Assistance:
 - Mental health support: 14.29%
 - Housing assistance: 8.57%
 - Job training/employment assistance: 8.57%
- Preferred Support Modalities:
 - In-person meetings: 42.86%
 - Phone calls/text messages: 14.29%
- Important Service Qualities:
 - 57.14% of clients want service providers who can meet all their needs to reduce the number of people they have to contact.

4. Challenges in Hiring and Retention

Respondents highlighted significant barriers to hiring and retaining staff:

- Biggest Hiring Challenges:
 - Funding constraints for competitive salaries: 32.79%
 - Limited pool of qualified candidates: 22.95%
 - Competition from other sectors: 18.03%
- Retention Issues:
 - Burnout/compassion fatigue: 26.15%
 - Higher salary offers from other organizations: 24.62%

Appendix C:

Stakeholder Survey Results

MSW Expansion Project: Build a skilled workforce for homelessness response.

5. Strategies to Address Workforce Challenges

Respondents identified strategies to improve hiring and retention:

- Incentives to Attract Talent:
 - Paid internships: 21.82%
 - Guaranteed employment post-graduation: 18.18%
- Agency Initiatives:
 - Agencies are working on improving competitive salaries, benefits, and professional development opportunities to address hiring challenges.

6. Educational Findings

Survey respondents shared their views on the types of degrees most useful in the homeless sector:

- Most Useful Degrees:
 - Social Work
 - Human Services
 - Counseling and Psychology
- Moderately Useful Degrees:
 - Public Policy/Administration
 - Nonprofit Management
- Least Useful Degrees:
 - Nursing/Public Health
 - Criminal Justice

7. Future Outlook and Opportunities

Respondents see a growing need for workers with skills related to managing the impacts of low-paying jobs and high living costs. Retention priorities include enhancing training and support, improving compensation, and preventing burnout to retain talent.

Curriculum Recommendations from Provider Survey

Based on respondent feedback, the following curriculum topics are deemed critical for homelessness services:

- Trauma-Informed Care Principles (Mean rating: 9.75)
- Mental Health Interventions (Mean rating: 9.13)
- Harm Reduction Approaches to Substance Use Treatment (Mean rating: 9.06)
- Systemic Racism, Oppression, and Discrimination (Mean rating: 8.73)
- Crisis Intervention (Mean rating: 8.88)

Recommendations to Enhance Higher Education Outcomes for Homeless Sector Careers

1. Incorporate Practical, Hands-on Experience in Curriculum

Respondents consistently emphasized the need for real-world skills that go beyond theoretical knowledge.

Recommendations:

- Increase opportunities for internships, fieldwork, and practicums within organizations that serve people experiencing homelessness. Develop service-learning courses where students can engage directly with clients or communities facing housing instability.
- Establish collaborative partnerships between universities and homeless services agencies for co-creating programs that offer both academic credit and valuable field experience.

2. Focus on Trauma-Informed Care and Cultural Competency

Working with individuals who have experienced homelessness requires deep knowledge of trauma-informed approaches and cultural humility.

Recommendations:

- Ensure courses emphasize trauma-informed care principles, cultural competence, and empathy-based communication as core competencies.
- Integrate training on systemic racism, oppression, and discrimination into the curriculum to prepare students for addressing the root causes of homelessness and serving diverse populations effectively.

3. Expand Degree Relevance Through Multidisciplinary Training

Survey respondents suggested that degrees in social work and human services are most useful, but there's room to better align other degree programs with sector needs.

Recommendations:

- Encourage interdisciplinary programs that combine public policy, nonprofit management, counseling, and human services to produce well-rounded graduates with diverse skill sets.
- Enhance coursework in mental health interventions, housing policies, and harm reduction strategies across relevant fields.

4. Create Career Pathways for Students Post-Graduation

Respondents highlighted the importance of retaining talent by creating pathways to employment after graduation.

Recommendations:

- Establish guaranteed employment programs where students have the option of joining partner agencies after graduation.
- Provide paid internships that transition into full-time roles, allowing students to earn income while gaining critical experience.

5. Offer Mental Health and Burnout Prevention Training

Many respondents mentioned burnout and compassion fatigue as major issues in retention.

Recommendations:

- Integrate courses that cover self-care, stress management, and burnout prevention strategies to help students build resilience early on.
- Introduce workforce wellness modules as part of degree programs, ensuring students are equipped to manage the emotional demands of the work.

6. Incentivize Careers in the Homeless Sector

Funding and compensation remain key issues in attracting talent to the sector.

Recommendations:

- Advocate for scholarships and loan forgiveness programs targeted at students pursuing careers in homeless services.
- Partner with government and nonprofit agencies to offer tuition reimbursement or stipends for students committing to work in the sector for a specified time after graduation.

7. Develop Advanced Certificates and Continuing Education Programs

Continuous professional development is key to retaining talent.

Recommendations:

- Design certificate programs for continuing education in areas like crisis intervention, harm reduction, and housing-first approaches.
- Collaborate with homeless service providers to create professional development opportunities for alumni working in the sector, encouraging career-long learning and advancement.



www.csh.org