
Shift Happens: Making Housing First Work in the Real World

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Lauren Pareti

lpareti@housinginnovations.us





Welcome

- Benjamin Jeffrey, Policy Advisor & Consultant – Phoenix, AZ
- Lauren Pareti, Senior Associate, Housing Innovations
- Goals for the Session
- Housekeeping
- Slides available in Whova.
- Let's make this a discussion.
- Let's breathe.
 - Think about something that brings you joy.

Agenda

Introductions and Background

What is Housing First (HF)?

What makes HF work?

Challenges & Strategies for Success



Who is in the Session?



- Shelter Provider
- Street Outreach Provider
- Rapid Rehousing Provider
- Permanent Supportive Housing Provider
- Other Service Provider
- Person with Lived Experience
- Housing Developer
- Property Manager
- Government Staff Person
- Housing Authority
- Advocate
- Funder
- Consultant
- Others?

Introductions

- Find someone you do not know.
- Introduce yourself (name, affiliations, location etc.)
- Talk for two minutes about why you came to this session.



Housing First (HF) Background



- Based on beliefs about housing rights and readiness
 - Based in the research, evidence, science
 - Solution to homelessness
 - Does not require people to “perform” to earn housing
 - Without HF, many very sick and vulnerable people would remain homeless
- ...and it is messy
- Targeting: Low barrier approach
 - Everyone deserves housing
 - High expectations: Has the same rights **and** responsibilities as anyone else in housing

What is Housing First?

- HF is a shift from the *housing ready* approach.
- *Everyone* is ready for housing, regardless of complexity or severity of needs.
- Evidence-based practice (EBP) **model** for Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)
- **System**-wide orientation and **response**
 - All programs serving homeless people can implement HF practices.



Federal Programs & Housing First

- HF adopted as federal policy during G.W. Bush administration
- Veteran's Administration (VA) still uses HF in VASH.
- HUD is not enforcing HF in the CoC Program.
 - Does not prevent CoCs or State/Local government from maintaining HF requirements.
 - Does not prevent providers from using HF.
- Many communities are staying the course on HF.



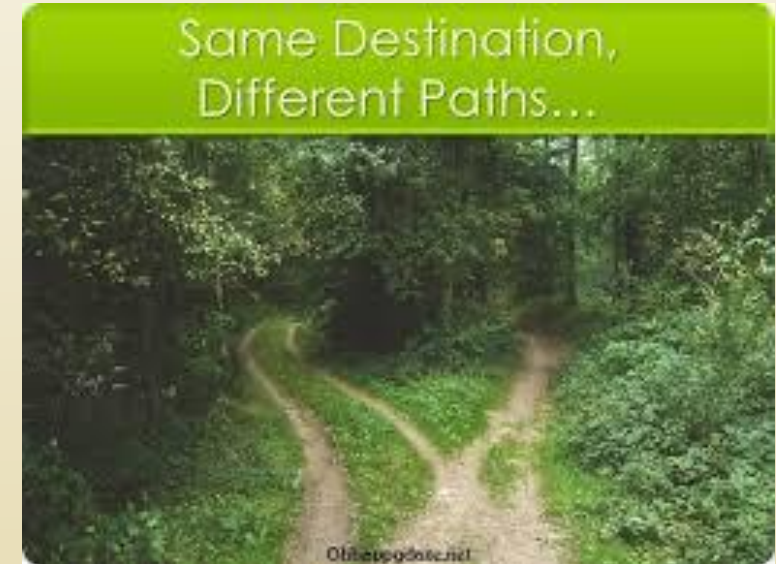
Your ideas matter!

For some, not requiring treatment can feel like:

- Leaving people without proper support or
- Enabling harmful behaviors

For others:

- Housing saves lives.
- People can access treatment & services more successfully from housing.
- Working with people in the way they decide is right for them makes sense.
- Even if treatment is required, people still need to engage with the treatment program or it is not going to work.



Taking the pulse

- How many people are using Housing First in their programs?
- How many people are struggling with HF implementation?
- How many people love HF?
- How many people wish HF would go away?



Housing First Principles



Quick/immediate access to housing while providing needed services to support stable tenancies



Housing is not contingent on compliance with treatment or services. However, HF is housing **AND** services



Services are voluntary for participants, **but not staff** – **assertive engagement**



Services are provided to assist participants to meet lease obligations or shelter rules. Same rules as anyone

Housing First is Not

**Housing Only
or
Anything Goes**

- Housing is the beginning but not the end.



Housing First Practices



Low barrier to access: not rejected for no income, bad credit, substance use etc.



Link to community supports



Behavioral expectations are set by community and lease. Consistent responses



Services address housing stabilization and participants' **self-identified goals** (recovery orientation)



Core Elements of Housing First



Assertive engagement - services voluntary for participants but NOT FOR STAFF

Focus on comfort, relief and personal needs and goals

Based on personal goals (participant-driven) - connect to hopes and dreams

Assist with structure, purpose and role during transition to housing

Connect to formal and informal supports

Identify & build motivation to maintain housing (e.g., employment, family connections)

Build confidence, hope and sense of competence

Core Elements of Housing First - 2

- High expectations –same as for any other tenant
- Rules in shelter and transitional housing mirror lease expectations
- PSH follows standard lease
- Lease is consistent with other leases in the community
- Rules/lease are enforced
- Case Management focused on assuming full rights & responsibilities of tenancy – teach skills
- Service staff and property management/landlords must coordinate



Core Elements of Housing First -



Work to change behaviors that violate lease/rules & interfere with housing stability

- Use of alcohol or drugs without lease violations not a reason for eviction/discharge

Assist with recovery as defined by each person

Assist to regain or build valued roles & responsibilities

HF - Shelter & Transitional Housing



- Low barrier at intake.
- Length of stay as brief as possible
- Services focus on Housing Planning/Location & quick exits
- Rules mirror a standard lease, ensure safety & are enforced
- Low demand approach (not no demand); high expectations
- Teach tenancy skills -how to comply with a lease
- Center client choice
- Help access income & community-based services
- Person-centered - use evidence-based practices.
- Due process when discharging
- Separate rule enforcer & services roles

HF - Permanent Housing



Choice/Affordability of housing

Housing integrated into community

Separation of housing & services - active coordination

Low demand - Not no demand

Teach tenancy skills & lease compliance

Access to treatment and community services

Goal-based recovery practice

Assertive landlord enforces lease; Services assist tenant

Common Challenges

- Lack of buy-in for the model
- Lease/ rules not enforced or inconsistent enforcement
- Participant behaviors are challenging to staff, other participants, and landlords
- Participants are reluctant to engage
- Landlords are reluctant to rent
- Staff give up
- Staff don't have enough time to keep up with intensive needs
- Others?



Tips for Success – Direct Service Staff & Supervisors



- Engagement, relationship building & hope are key!
- Build compassion for participants – addiction, trauma, mental health, etc.
- Provide intensive services during transitions
- “Environmentalize” housing access/housing success
 - Focus on housing goals from day one
 - Support stable tenancy through all activities and services
 - Celebrate housing successes - Tenant of the month, incentives, parties, others?
- Partner with landlords/ property management:
 - Clear expectations, consistent enforcement of rules/ lease, services to help meet expectations

Tips for Success – Provider Agency Management



- Pass up contracts that don't allow sufficient staffing
- Ensure staff are getting 1:1 supervision and clinical support
- Provide access to training (Critical Time Intervention (CTI), Motivational Interviewing, Harm Reduction, Recovery & Trauma-informed models)
- Separate functions: lease/rules enforcement and services
- Stay the course even if your CoC or funder does not

Tips for Success – CoCs & Other Funders

- Establish clear standards for HF practice
- Evaluate alignment with HF standards
 - *Access: Coordinated Entry*
 - *Post Entry: Monitoring and Project Evaluation*
- Provide training and support to strengthen alignment
- Create a culture that....
 - *Believes in, cares about and loves people until they can believe in, care about and love themselves*



Veterans Administration Supportive Housing (VASH)

- Since 2012, VA's efforts to prevent & end Veteran homelessness have been built around a Housing First approach.
- VASH has served more than 178,000 Veterans since it started.
- Since 2010, Veteran homelessness has decreased by over 50%
- 83 communities & 3 states have effectively ended Veteran homelessness.
- Learn more about how [HF has helped VA cut Veteran homelessness](#) in half.



Benjamin Jeffrey



SHIFT HAPPENS: THREE MAJOR SHIFTS IN HOUSING FIRST, 1992–2025

2025 NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
ENDING HOMELESSNESS
June 30–July 2, 2025 Washington, D.C. #NAEH2025

“Those who don’t learn from history are condemned to repeat it”

Benjamin Jeffrey

President, MACV Foundation

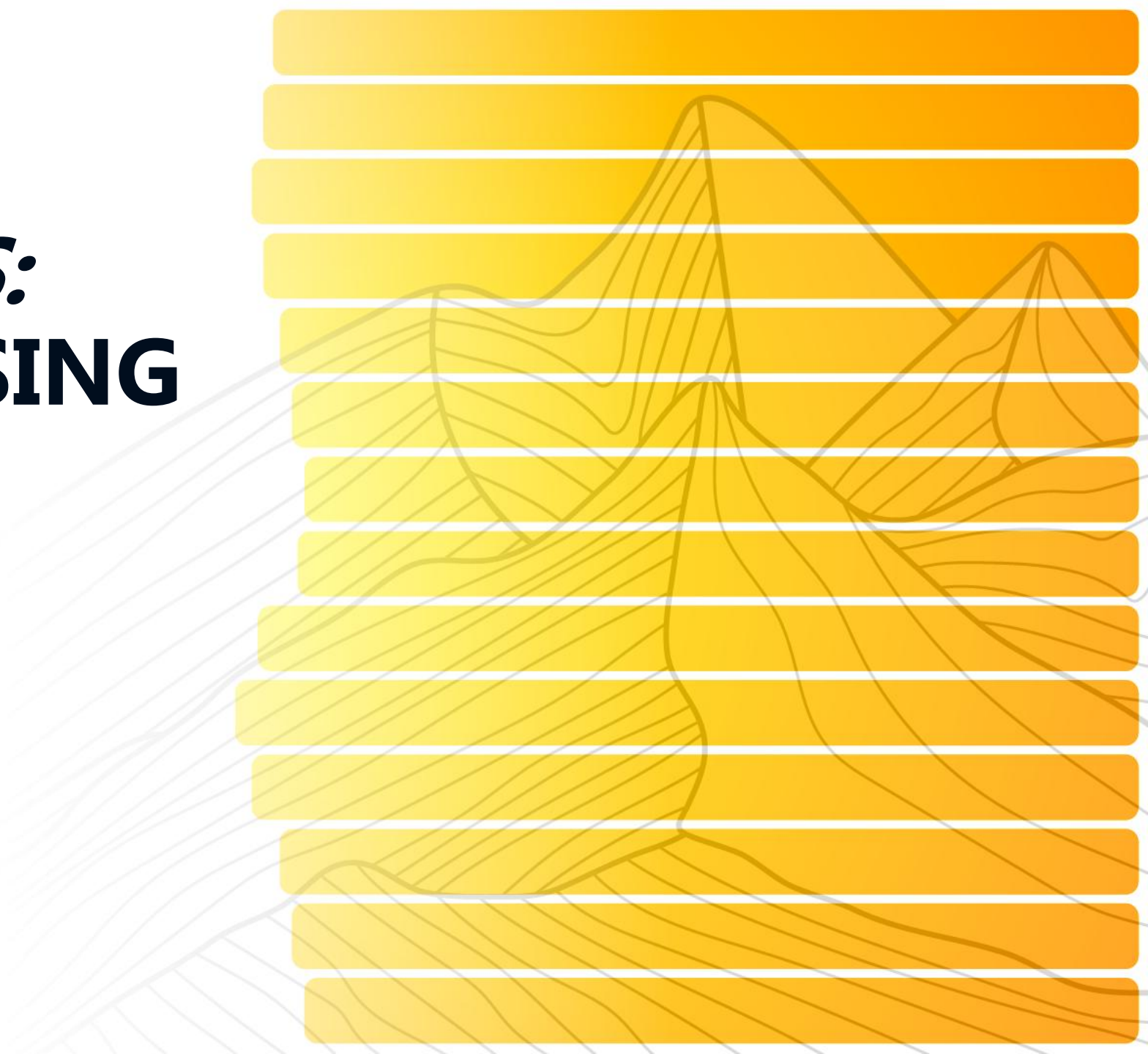
Program Consultant, Tanner Community Development Corporation

Session premise: Outlining three national-level shifts in Housing First thinking since 1992

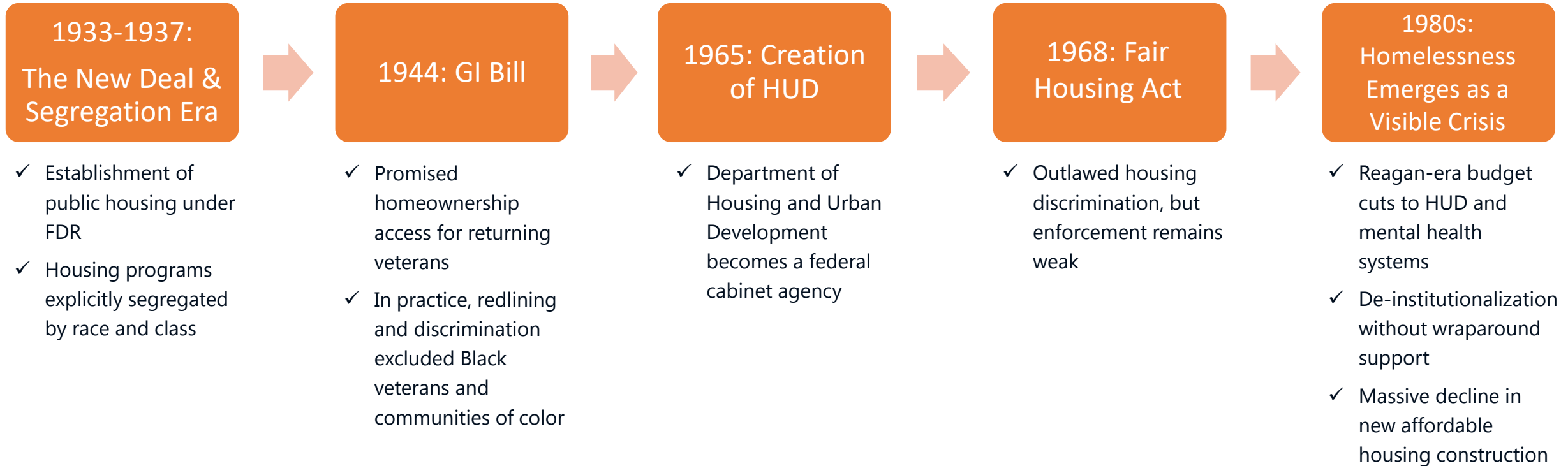
Session goal: Ground ourselves in history, walk through each shift, and connect the Housing First legacy to real-world work happening on the ground in Phoenix, Arizona in 2025



FOUNDATIONS:
FEDERAL HOUSING
POLICY &
SYSTEMIC
EVOLUTION
(1933–1980s)



FOUNDATIONS: FEDERAL HOUSING POLICY & SYSTEMIC EVOLUTION (1933–1980s)



Ending Homelessness is Possible.

***THE ROAD TO
HOUSING FIRST:
POLICY EXPANSION
& SYSTEMIC
PATCHWORK
(1986–1991)***

THE ROAD TO HOUSING FIRST: POLICY EXPANSION & SYSTEMIC PATCHWORK (1986–1991)

1986:

Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC)

- Established to incentivize private developers—becomes dominant affordable housing production tool
- IRS provides billions of dollars in tax credits to state public housing authorities (PHAs)
- PHAs award developers with credits to build affordable housing
- Developers sell credits to investors and banks, enabling projects to get built

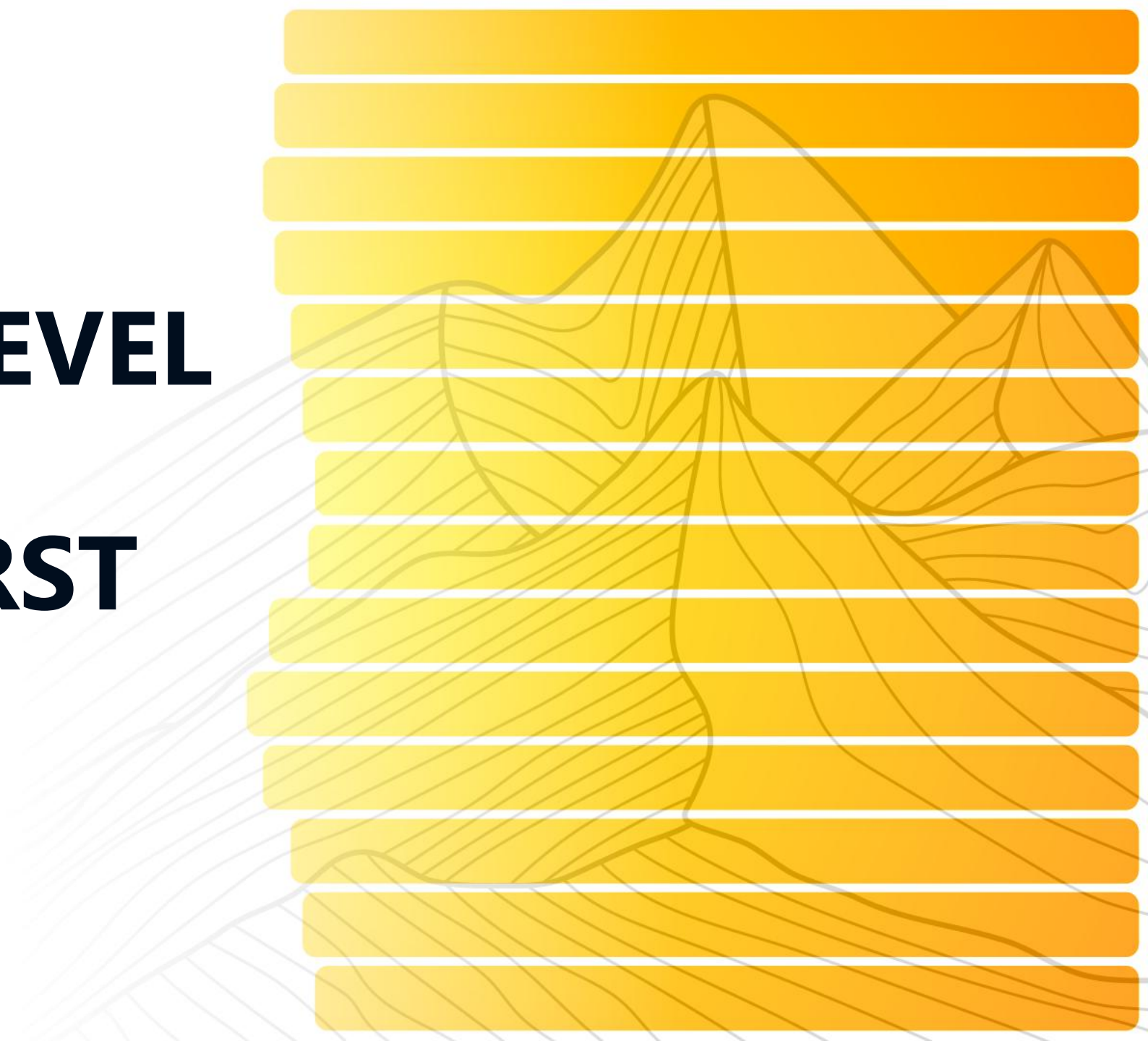
Late 1980s–Early 1990s:

Shelter-Based Crisis Response

- Proliferation of emergency shelters and transitional housing
- Emphasis on compliance models (e.g., sobriety, employment readiness)
- High recidivism, low permanent exit rates

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NATIONAL-LEVEL SHIFTS IN HOUSING FIRST THINKING



SHIFT ONE: THE CLINICAL BREAKTHROUGH (1992–1995)

1992: Dr. Sam Tsemberis launches Pathways to Housing in NYC

Evidence-based pilot for chronically homeless individuals with mental illness

Radical shift: Housing is provided first, without preconditions



Results:

- 88% housing retention after 5 years
- Lower hospitalizations, incarceration, shelter stays
- Human dignity, autonomy, and recovery-based philosophy redefined

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SHIFT TWO: FROM GAUSSIAN TO POWER LAW

NATIONAL POLICY TRANSFORMATION

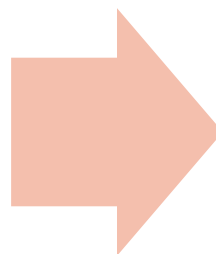
(2000–2007)

2000–2005:

Bush Administration quietly tests Housing First pilots via HUD-VASH and SAMHSA

2007:

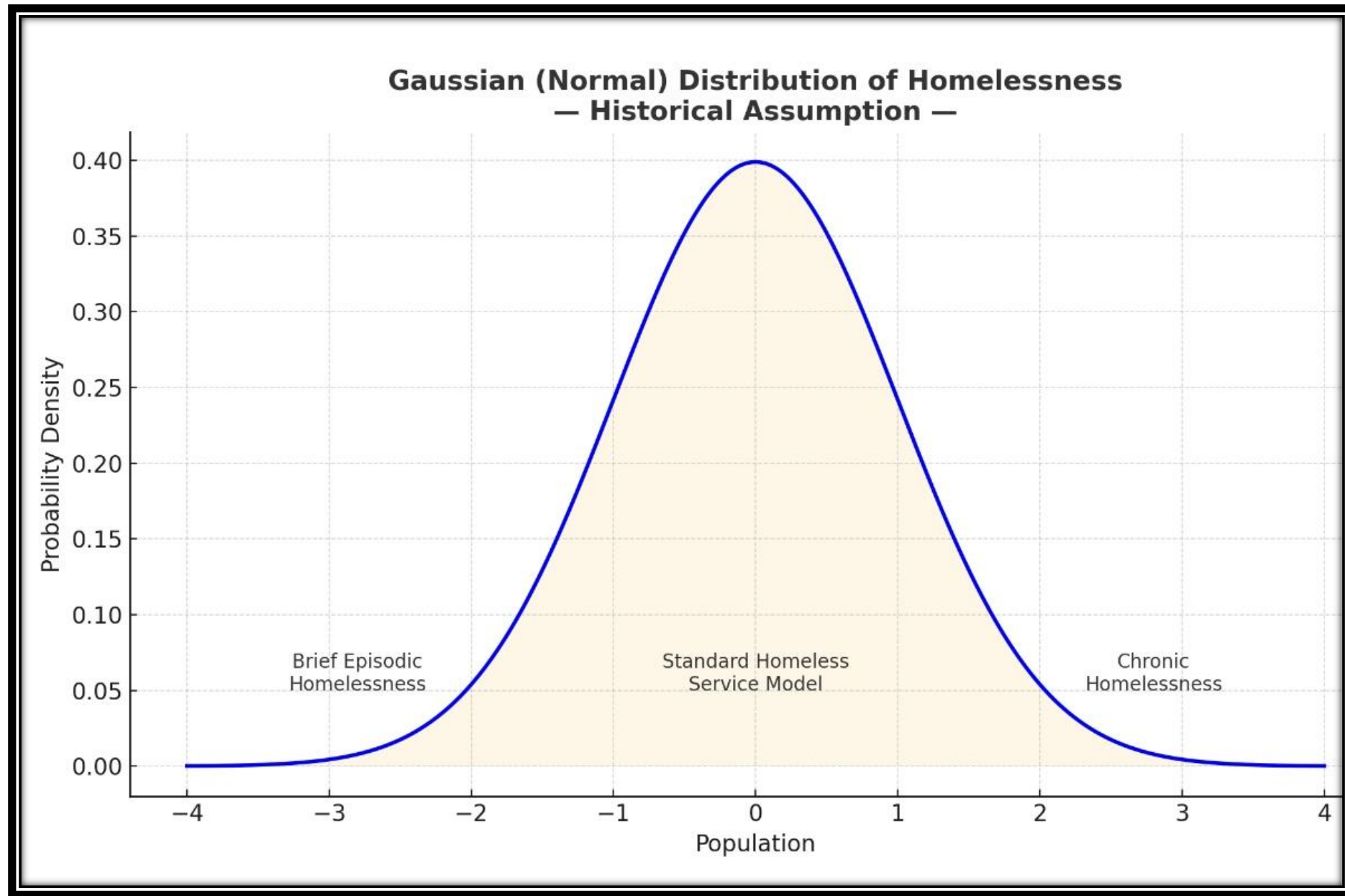
U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness formally adopts Housing First as federal policy



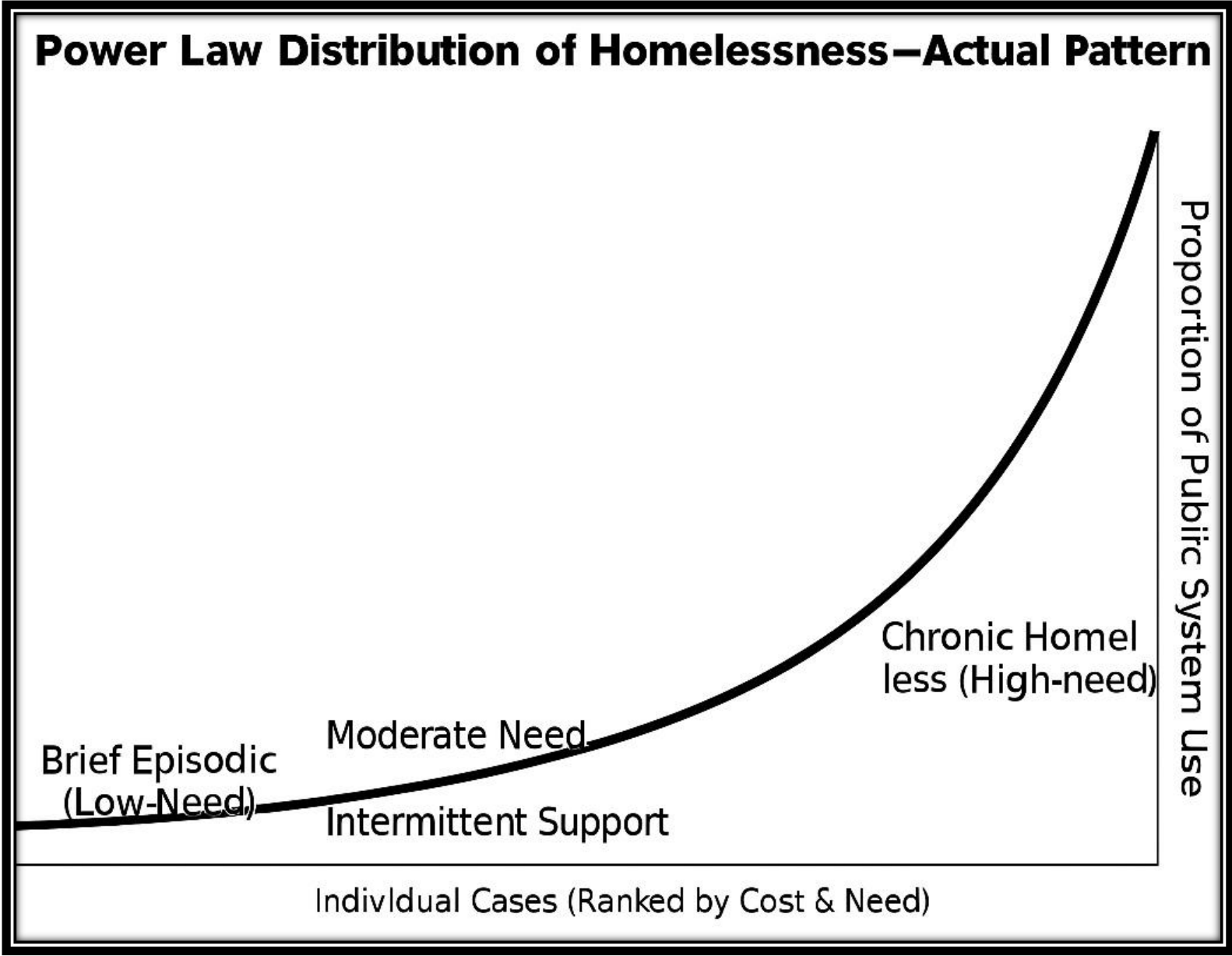
Why the shift?

- Government statisticians recognize chronic homelessness follows a power law, not a normal distribution
- A small subset of high-needs individuals incur outsized public costs—solved best by permanent supportive housing
- Cost-benefit analysis: It's cheaper to house than to cycle people through ERs, jails, shelters, and crisis systems

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Ending Homelessness is Possible.



Ending Homelessness is Possible.

LESSONS FROM THE POWER LAW ERA (2007–2024)

- 17 years of uneven implementation across the U.S.

- Fidelity to Housing First varies widely by city, Continuum of Care (CoC), and funding constraints

- **Success stories:**

- Salt Lake City, Houston, and others reduce chronic homelessness with high-fidelity models

- **Failures:**

- Many cities implement “Housing First” in name only—without funding services or prioritizing most vulnerable

- **Takeaway:**

- Housing First works—when done right

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SHIFT THREE: THE 2025 RETREAT FROM HOUSING FIRST

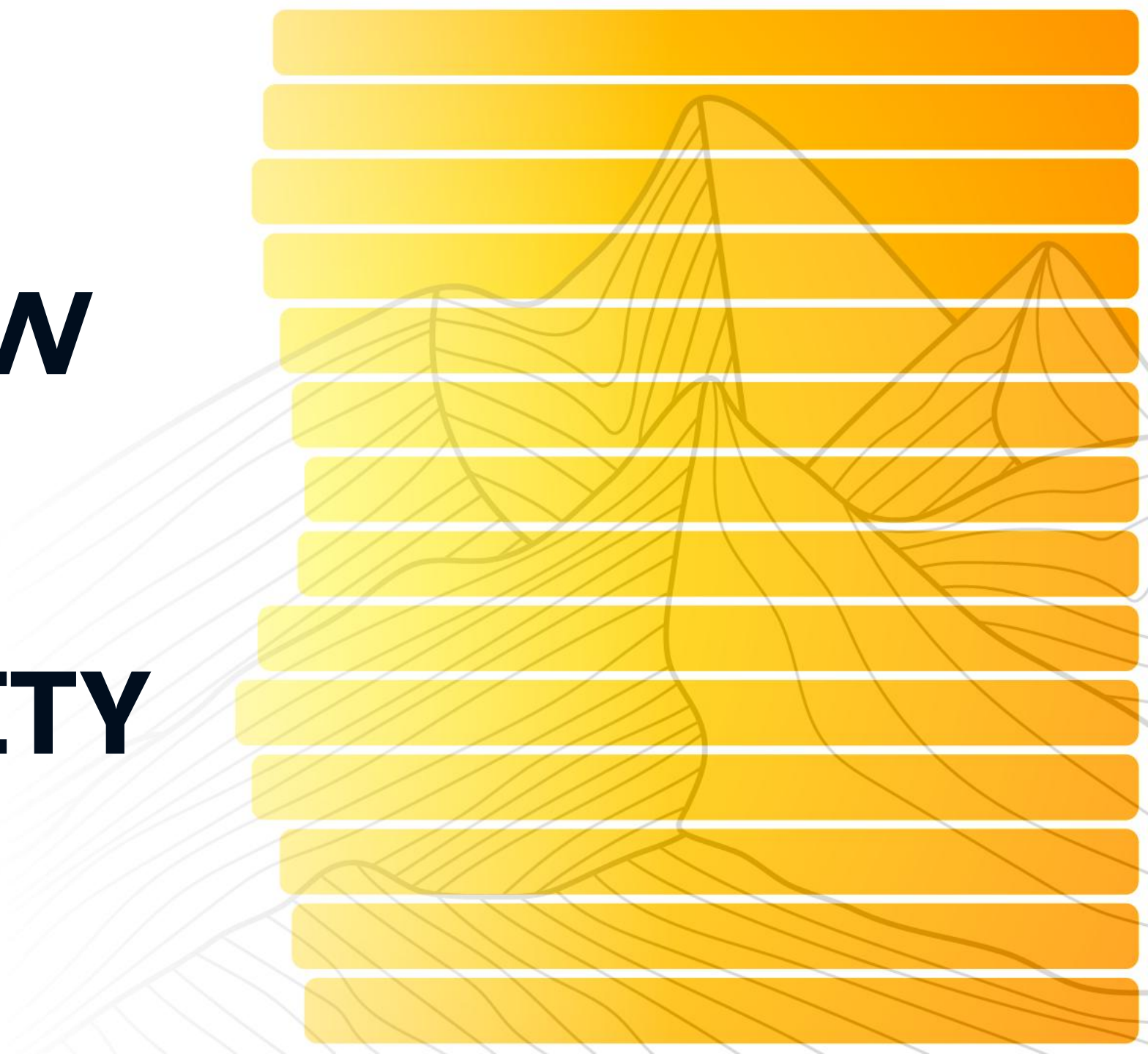
Trump's FY2026 "skinny budget" slashes HUD and homelessness funding

Executive Order creates a centralized veteran "independence" center model—diverts funds from housing

Ideological attack on Housing First language, fidelity, and funding mechanisms

Risk: National abandonment of proven solutions in favor of punitive, shelter-based, or congregate warehousing models

ARIZONA ON THE BRINK: CRISIS & OPPORTUNITY



ARIZONA ON THE BRINK: CRISIS & OPPORTUNITY



Phoenix ranks top five in unsheltered homelessness growth

Veterans, seniors, and medically vulnerable populations left behind

State-level political divisions intensify pressure on providers and CoCs

MACV Foundation and Tanner CDC step into the gap with innovative response

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SOLUTIONS IN MOTION: **TANNER THOMAS VILLAGE FOR VETERANS**



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NEXT GENERATION TRANSFORMATIONAL PROGRAMMING

Tanner Thomas Village for Veterans

- Breaking ground August 2025, opening Summer 2026
- 37 one-bedroom casitas in a three-acre gated community
- On-site resource center will provide case management and navigation services

TANNER VILLAGE FOR VETERANS: WRAPAROUND SUPPORT TARGETS

Philosophy

- Veterans respond to structure, mission, and clear pathways to stability through attractive transformational programming

Wraparound approach targets

- Addressing all social determinants of health through a 10 Pillars of Support comprehensive approach

Additional Notes:

- PSH (Permanent Supportive Housing) model with wraparound services in conjunction with HUD-VASH social worker collaboration
- Program will adhere to CTI (Critical Time Intervention) principles
- On-site staff will work hand-in-hand with HUD-VASH social workers to ensure adequate service deliverables

“It is our patriotic moral obligation to honor the social contract we have with veterans”

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WHERE SHIFT HAPPENS NEXT?

Remember:

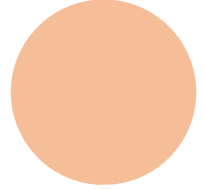
1. Housing First was born from necessity
2. It became policy because it worked
3. It's under attack now—because it still works and challenges the status quo

We're not just here to remember history.

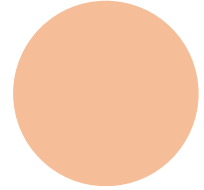
We're here to protect it, prove it, and push it forward.

Ending Homelessness is Possible.

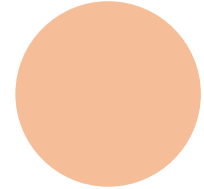
CALL TO ACTION: **A LEGACY IN OUR HANDS**



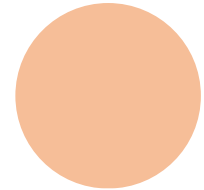
Let's not allow another generation to suffer from policies we already know how to fix



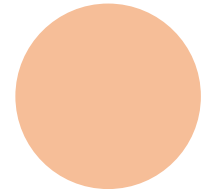
The evidence is in



The challenge is political, cultural, and moral



This isn't just a policy discussion



It's a question of national character—and whether we have the courage to follow the truth

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***IN
CONCLUSION...***



IN CONCLUSION...

I am a formerly homeless veteran who served my country honorably, then spent 3½ years lost in addiction and chronic homelessness

In the last four years of my sobriety, I've committed myself to public service and system transformation in Maricopa County, Arizona

Each year, over 500 homeless individuals die in the Phoenix region—most from heat-related causes

Unsheltered homelessness has grown by 25% in just the past year

We must build innovative and transformational systems that respond to the urgency of this crisis—and prove to the political powers that solutions are possible

Just as a case manager meets a client 50/50, we must meet power with partnership:
Courage matched with collaboration

People need skin in the game—because dignity and self-esteem are built when someone is trusted to participate in their own future

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IN CONCLUSION...

Let's not forget... The next generation of homeless services leaders may be sleeping tonight under a bridge or cycling in and out of jail, just like I once was

If we abandon Housing First, those future leaders may not survive & the movement will lose voices it hasn't even heard yet

I'm standing here today because someone believed in this model; I'm living proof that Housing First works

The therapeutic value of one homeless addict veteran helping another—is simply without parallel.



Ending Homelessness is Possible.



MINUTES OF SERVICE

Link: <https://youtu.be/JUVDpQ9coOs?si=hWTUNUWk2zZ7jKMS>

Ending Homelessness is Possible.

LET'S CONNECT... THANK YOU!

BENJAMIN JEFFREY

President, MACV Foundation



**Veteran
Crisis Line**

📞 Call: 988 (Press 1)

📱 Text: 838255

💬 **VeteransCrisisLine**

💡 **Social Impact Strategist**

✚ **Systemic Change Architect**

🇺🇸 **Veteran Advocate**

⚓ **United States Navy Veteran**

☎ 602-741-5307 benjaminjeffreyTTVV@outlook.com

🌐 www.macv.org



*"It's our nation's patriotic moral obligation to honor the social contract we have with veterans.
MACV Foundation: Mobilizing America's Commitment to Veterans."*

Ending Homelessness is Possible.



Please share your thoughts...

Turn to the person next to you and share one reflection/thought about this discussion.



Final Comments and
Questions

Thank you and good luck!

HF Resources



- [Basic Information on Housing First](#)
- [NAEH Interactive Tool to Access Research on Housing First](#)
- [Summary of Research on Housing First](#)
- [Comprehensive Review of Research on Housing First Outcomes](#)
- [Motivational Interviewing](#)
- [Critical Time Intervention](#)

Resources for Tenancy Education

- Tenant laws differ by state and locality
resources for state specific information:
 - [State Attorney General's Office](#)
 - [State Bar Association](#)
 - [Legal Aid Organization](#)
- [RentWise Workbook](#): University of Nebraska
(resource to teach tenancy skills)

