FAQs
Investing in homelessness solutions
September 2019 announcement

Why now?
First, we have a community plan, Anchored Home, Anchorage’s strategic roadmap for effectively ending homelessness. Find it here. We have a committed mayor, Ethan Berkowitz. After a summer of uncertainty, there is clarity around state dollars for homelessness services for the coming year. We also have the will of significant funders. Critical elements are lining up to make sure that homelessness in our community is, as we like to underscore, rare, brief and one-time.

Where will the money go?
For a variety of programs and services from supportive housing to cutting edge approaches. New funds already are helping to identify and track people who are experiencing homelessness. This tracking does more than generate data; it also helps people connect with services. The data will help assess what works well — and what doesn’t. Other areas for funding include additional supportive housing that provides subsidies and case management; a landlord liaison program, which will help work through small conflicts before they become big ones; and navigators, who help guide those experiencing homelessness to services that specifically benefit them. Our community’s Anchored Home plan will guide the work.

How will it work?
This funding is designed to be flexible, to fill gaps in services, and to be informed by data. Partners will coordinate significant investment to target biggest needs. If needs change, these funds can be redirected.

Is $40 million enough?
Forty million dollars spread out over 5 years is not enough to solve this problem alone. However, when leveraged and aligned with other resources, we believe that we can turn the corner on solving this issue. The funds will help pay for new strategies, will help scale up existing strategies, and will help strengthen our infrastructure. We expect the partners’ commitments will be enough to create this structure — and add to the inventory of housing and supports.

Why the focus on Anchorage?
We support reducing homelessness statewide. The largest number of people experiencing homelessness are in Anchorage, many relocated from other places in the state. We are starting here with a major new commitment of funds, but are continuing statewide work as well. This includes expansion of Forget-Me-Not Manor in Juneau, a new day shelter in Ketchikan and support for the Fairbanks Rescue Mission.
Does this replace state and federal funding?
Definitely not! That funding is essential as a base that helps pay for shelters, supportive housing and case management. These private funders would not be investing if Anchorage didn’t already have this base funding. There are different roles for funding from each sector. Federal or state funding can’t pay for certain things, and this private funding can help target some of those gaps.

How many homeless people are in Anchorage?
At any given time, around 1,100 individuals. But over the course of a month, as many as 2,400 people may touch some part of the existing homelessness services system. Our homeless count has been essentially flat for four years while other West Coast cities are seeing an increase.

Isn’t this just subsidizing folks who should be working?
People find themselves experiencing homelessness for many reasons including debilitating injuries, mental illness and addiction. Most people will be able move back to independence, as evidenced by the fact that we have only 300 to 400 people experiencing chronic homelessness but 2,400 people interact with the homelessness system in any given month. People need partnership and assistance to move on with their lives. A few people with severe disabilities will need assistance all of their lives. We as a community can provide that help.

Can we really solve homelessness?
We wouldn’t be investing millions if we didn’t believe so. In Houston, Texas, the number of people experiencing homelessness dropped by half over four years after a new collaborative partnership changed the approach there. Other places like Rockford, Illinois, and Montgomery County, Maryland, have also made great strides or have effectively eliminated homelessness for some populations like veterans.

If an individual wants to help, what can they do?
There is a role for everyone in our community who wants to help solve homelessness. Look for opportunities to volunteer at a local shelter or service provider, look for opportunities to donate to those organizations, and try to educate yourself and others about the root causes of homelessness. Stay informed about solutions in our community.

If the plan works, how will Anchorage look different?
There will be many fewer people in homeless camps. Anyone experiencing homelessness will be connected to the system of care more quickly. We know that there will always be people experiencing crisis or circumstances that result in temporary homelessness, but we can put the system and supports in place to quickly move them out of homelessness and keep them in a home. People no longer will spend their lives in shelters, in camps and on friend’s couches or floors.