

SHUT OUT, from page 4

to increase by roughly 35 percent, or \$17.4 million. Of those additional funds, \$2.5 million will be used for eviction prevention services and an additional \$14.9 million in rental assistance and housing placement services.

This includes dedicated funds from the city of Portland, Multnomah County, Home Forward, City of Gresham and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Continuum of Care program.

According to the Portland Housing Bureau, median household income, indexed for inflation, declined by 8 percent between 2000 and 2014, while median rent has increased by almost 30 percent.

But in Portland's white-hot housing market with a vacancy rate of less than 2 percent and new development primarily catering to only the wealthiest of renters, rental assistance can't keep up.

"Rental assistance is limited because it is tied to the dynamics and the geography of the private market," said Andy Miller, the executive director of Human Solutions, the social service agency that serves homeless families and operates the only year-round shelter in Multnomah County. "And those dynamics are not working for housing stability right now."

"Families are needing longer periods of support. The monthly level of support is greater, so the total cost in terms of public dollars per household is higher. You're also seeing longer lengths of time to find (housing)," said Marc Jolin, the director of the Joint Office of Homeless Services. "The big thing that has changed is how rapidly rents are rising and the growing deficit for housing for very low income people."

According to Zumper's National Rent Report, released this month, the average price for a one-bedroom apartment in Portland is now \$1,400, a 2.9 percent increase in one month.

Colling said situations like the one James Brown and Denise William faced are becoming more common. "In the last two years, the bulk of my job has switched," Colling said, from helping homeless people move into housing to preserving affordable housing. "I have a lot of people who are

stably housed that I'm trying to find new housing for, more than I ever have."

Miller said that Human Solutions' shelter numbers are 30 percent higher than last year. Nearly half of those people, Human Solutions estimates, are homeless for the first time in their lives and cite eviction as the reason for their homelessness.

"The demand for service is greater than it has ever been," Stacy Borke, the director of housing services for Transition Projects, Inc., the social service agency that runs the Bud Clark Center and serves homeless, single adults. Even

though the recession, according to the federal government, ended in 2009, "wait lists for shelters are longer than they have ever been," Borke said.

The "newly homeless," as service providers call them, are not in need of the social services typically associated with homelessness, like case management, addiction or mental health counseling. "It's an issue of poverty. They literally just can't afford (the rent) anymore," said Shannon Singleton, the executive director of JOIN.

"There is a clear connection between the increasing rents and people winding up homeless," Jolin said.

Because of higher rents, rental assistance funds are being used to help fewer people for longer stretches of time.

According to Multnomah County, two years ago, approximately \$5,000 was spent to place one family in housing and provide rent assistance for six months. Now, it takes between \$6,000 and \$8,500 to provide the same service.

Human Solutions rental assistance budget for the 2016-2017 fiscal year is the same as last year's: \$2.3 million dollars. Miller estimates that amount of money will provide assistance to 73 percent of the households that Human Solutions assisted last year.

In 2014-2015, the average rent assistance payment Human Solutions paid was \$714 a

month and the agency provided an average of seven months of assistance to its clients. During the agency's 2015-2016 fiscal year, the average rent its clients paid increased by 12 percent, to approximately \$900 a month. The average rental assistance payment Human Solutions provided increased to \$763 a month. The average length of assistance climbed to eight months.

And in the last year, Miller said, the average rent that Human Solutions is helping pay has increased by 11 percent, and the average amount of assistance the

agency is providing has increased by 7 percent.

"We run out of assistance regularly," Miller said. "The notion that folks are not choosing to seek assistance is not borne out by our experience. We have to shut down our phone lines all the time."

Other agencies tell similar stories. Borke said that the average monthly rent payment Transition Projects helps its clients pay — whether they have a Section 8 voucher or pay fair-market rent — has increased by 34 percent.

Last year, Singleton said JOIN ran out of rental assistance dollars six months into its fiscal year, in December 2015. It received additional funding after the City of Portland and Multnomah County provided more resources for rental assistance.

She said that JOIN is seeing higher numbers of people become stably housed for a few months but then come back within a few months for more assistance because of an increase in rent, work hours were cut, or, like Brown and William, the move-in costs are too high.

"I think a couple years ago, the move-in costs would still have been a barrier for people living in poverty, but they wouldn't have needed the ongoing assistance," she said.

The solution, providers say, is simple. "Adding units to the mix is what is going to improve this, for everybody," Borke said.

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— ANDY MILLER
HUMAN SOLUTIONS

"We have an absolute shortage of housing."

Singleton said there needs to be more housing units with restricted rent increases. "We really do lack units for folks who are the lowest income ranges," she said. "If there isn't something done to create more housing, we'll continue to see the migration of poor folks farther and farther east or into Beaverton and Hillsboro. Possibly Vancouver."

Borke believes housing instability and homelessness for Portland's poorest citizens won't end until thousands of units are built that are affordable for people with only a few hundred dollars for rent. "It's a tough subject," she said. "But it has to exist. Because people's incomes are not increasing at the same rate that the cost of housing is."

Colling is currently trying to find housing for a single mother who paid \$1,300 a month in rent. The rent was increased to \$1,700 a month. It will be raised again this fall. Her daughter is disabled; they have a service dog that needs a big yard. She is on a Section 8 voucher, Colling said, and is "worried about it not qualifying."

Situations like hers, Colling said, is stressful.

"We would much rather spend the majority of our time getting people off the street," he said.

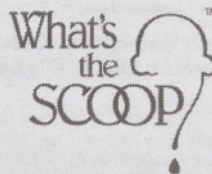
Brown said he and his fiancée are happy with the apartment they're living in. He serves on the board of Potluck in the Park, which provides free meals in downtown Portland every Sunday, and the amount of time it takes for him to get to downtown Portland is much longer. "It makes it hard," he said. "But we (do it) without batting an eye."

Some of the fear he felt when he was evicted, though, has not gone away.

"The thing that scares me to this day is that this apartment building we live in (now), that same company is going to come and buy this complex and kick us out again," he said. "And we'll just have to move farther and farther and farther out. It's scary."

Until he had been evicted, it was a thought that had never entered his mind before.

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