



COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Exploration of a Center to Serve Chinatown

2020-05-30

May 2020 - May is Mental Health Awareness Month. I believe that there is so much to be hopeful about when it comes to treating those who are the hardest to help. These are the individuals who are trapped by seemingly inescapable mental health issues and drug addiction.

This month we received news that there is government support for an initiative that we strongly believe will reduce homelessness in downtown Honolulu. If located on the outskirts of Chinatown, this could serve as a new triage and transfer station unlike anything else based in this community. It would fill an unmet need and add a critical navigation service that has the potential to accelerate moving more who are homeless in to a system of care and out of this area. It holds promise that Chinatown will become a safer place for all to enjoy.

The potential program is being reviewed by city government and we invite the community to learn about this opportunity.

[Read the transcript](#) or watch a recording of our [Community Forum on Homeless Solutions in Chinatown](#) from Friday, May 29 and learn more about this potential project below. Mahalo to *The Honolulu Star-Advertiser* for sharing our perspective on this issue. Our May 28 editorial can be read [here](#).

With gratitude,

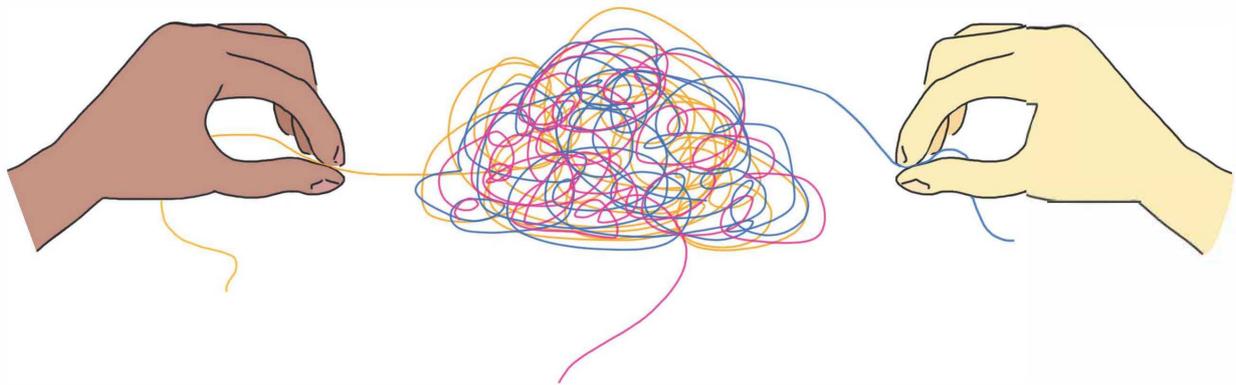


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A PROPOSED PROJECT

Chinatown Homeless Triage & Cares Station

Untangling a web of resources to begin a path to wellness



History of Homelessness in Chinatown: A persistent challenge

Homelessness in Chinatown has persisted for more than a century. In 1894, Hawaiian Star reported 800 “vagrants” in Honolulu’s Chinatown. Today, the issue is exacerbated by modern problems of highly addictive drugs (methamphetamines, heroin, etc.) and the deinstitutionalization of the mental health system, leaving the most vulnerable on the streets.

Contributing factors vary from economic challenges to family conflict to more complex and darker issues such as alcoholism, gambling addictions, human trafficking and experiences of trauma. Homelessness will continue to exist as long as the problems and vices that draw people to the streets continue. We are committed to reduce the prevalence of homelessness and associated societal ills as best we can. We choose to leave a light of hope on, so when a homeless individual decides to make a life change we are ready to help support and navigate a clear path for them out of their situation.

IHS, The Institute for Human Services Inc. has a long history of service on the streets of Chinatown. In 1978, Rev. Claude DuTeil struck up conversations with those who were homeless and offered coffee, peanut butter sandwiches, and hope for brighter days. Born from those early experiences, the nonprofit IHS evolved. After more than 40 years of specializing in homelessness, IHS' varied solutions have become increasingly integrated and sophisticated. The more we understand and learn from those we serve, the more robust and specialized our solutions have become.

Where we are today: A web of available solutions, difficult for some to untangle

Currently, there are many services in the Chinatown area and across our island that are designed to provide solutions to specific problems afflicting the homeless, such as chronic health conditions, mental illness, and substance abuse. What we urgently need are programs that can effectively help navigate people through this complex web of existing services and provide a safe space to wait briefly while the services and individuals are matched and readied.

It is often difficult to get a chronically homeless person to accept help because the sequence of steps involved in connecting them to care can take time to complete. These steps typically include: completing an interview to assess needs, completing forms and documents-many of which may be online now, getting matched to the right program, finding an available bed, getting a little more mentally or physically prepared and cleaned up and finally completing an admission process for the next program. In an ideal world, all of these steps could be completed in an afternoon, but the reality is that it can sometimes take a couple days. If the individual willing to accept help is left on the streets during this time, they could fall deeper or disappear before getting the help they need.

We believe that homelessness is not healthy for individuals or society and want to get people off of the streets as quickly as possible. The longer someone is on the streets, the more difficult it becomes to reintegrate them back into the community in a healthy and productive manner. We believe that having a navigation hub in Chinatown is critical to getting people off the streets and into support services across the island. Chinatown should not be a central place where homeless individuals congregate, but it currently has the highest concentration of homeless individuals on Oahu. Providing a solution in an area of intense need makes sense and enables us to connect with and serve even those most resistant to services.

A Proposed Solution - Homeless Triage & CARES Station (HTACS)

The HTACS would provide a safe space for short-term and immediate navigation and stabilization services for chronically homeless or medically frail people who are vulnerable to coronavirus infection or may become a public health threat because of their lack of resources, poor judgment and impaired cognition to social distance, wear a mask and carry out general hygiene practices. HTACS would serve to stabilize clients close to "home," and keep them away from the lure of street vices while awaiting services. It would provide the opportunity for service providers to fan an ember of client motivation without us missing the window of

client readiness. It would enable us to hold the client's hand through this pivotal process and spark lasting change.

Homeless individuals serviced at the HTACS would quickly be assessed, readied, and diverted to other places where they can receive specialized care and housing according to their assessed needs.

HTACS goals include:

- Get chronically homeless individuals off the streets of Chinatown and downtown
- Increase public safety so as to create a safer place for people to live and work in Chinatown
- Reduce the risk of COVID infection and any infectious disease risk in Chinatown for those who shop, dine and visit the area

Proposed Center Features

Target Population: Vulnerable unsheltered people in the Chinatown/downtown area whose chronic homelessness is often accompanied by mental illness or substance abuse.

Services: Outreach, intensive case management, and stabilization to prepare this population to engage in additional services. Will also provide linkage with other needed resources including detox or substance abuse treatment, medical care, housing and legal services. Short-term overnight stays may be necessary for individuals who are quite vulnerable and have nowhere else to go. The target length of stay is 24-72 hours until more permanent services can be arranged.

Referrals & Admission: Because we do not want people to line up outside our doors, we will be engaging individuals one-on-one before bringing them to the facility. We will accept referrals from neighborhood constituents and will prioritize and serve as space is available. We will work with the Honolulu Police Department, other service providers and their case managers and outreach teams, businesses and residents to help people move off the streets into more humane environments.

Space Utilization: We anticipate accommodating up to six individuals overnight with hygiene facilities. These beds are not expected to be in use everyday. When there are persons occupying those beds, there will be supervision provided around the clock. There will also be an intake office and additional office space for outreach individuals and case management services.

Frequently Asked Questions

There are many homeless service providers in Chinatown already. Why do we need another?

As noted above, there are many services in the Chinatown area and across our island that are designed to provide solutions to specific problems afflicting the homeless. What we urgently need are programs that can effectively help navigate people through this complex web of existing services and provide a safe space to wait while the services and individuals are matched and readied.

Last year IHS serviced 560 unique homeless individuals in Chinatown, through the Joint Outreach Center.

Hawaii's homeless problem is immense. To truly break the cycle of homelessness, we need to address the root of each individual's reasons for being homeless and connect them directly to the appropriate services to help. That is the role of the HTACS and the unique need it will fill in Chinatown.

Is the proposed HTACS in Chinatown similar to the Punawai Rest Stop?

HTACS is not designed to be a duplication of services, it will be the outreach, navigation, and stabilization hub where homeless individuals who are ready for change can get routed to the help they need.

The Punawai Reststop is a hygiene center that is open to the public where people can come and go to access hygiene facilities and services. Entrance to HTACS is by admission only and offers a more personalized service of stabilizing and referring clients to intermediate treatment and permanent housing solutions.

As a COVID initiative, would this draw people who are potentially sick to the center?

Our project is eligible for CARES CDBG funding because it will help reduce the spread of COVID19 by taking people off the street who are potential vectors or are very vulnerable if they were to become infected. It is more preventive in nature. But it will work hand in hand with other service sites that can test, quarantine and treat for COVID 19.

Where will individuals go after spending time at HTACS?

A myriad of homeless solution providers have become a part of Chinatown and the broader community. Having a broad and rich array of is important as there is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Each individual needs different services and supports along the way and each person has a different potential best launching and landing scenariot. For some to get off the streets may mean a temporary period of time in drug rehabilitation, or day treatment for mental health services, or simply placement into a shelter until a job and housing can be found. For permanent living placement, individual living is not always the answer, it may mean a group home for those with cognitive limitations or a care home for those medically vulnerable. Each situation and individual is unique which is why intensive case management and support can be critical in enacting lasting change.

How will IHS prevent public loitering and encampments near this center?

HTACS will be different in that it is not a place to drop in. It can only be accessed through invitation by IHS outreach and case management staff or referrals from Chinatown constituents.

IHS currently operates 10 different sites with different homeless services across the island. Homeless persons gravitate toward areas where they can access basic resources like food and water. Out of 10 sites, only our two primary shelters on Sumner and Kaaahi Streets provide these types of services and have people congregating outside. The other sites do not. Many of the homeless people who remain close to two of our emergency shelters do so because they want to remain close to medical help and food. We discourage persons who have been exited from our shelters from remaining nearby. We also report illegal sidewalk

encampments because they have also triggered relapse among our guests and have resulted in violence that is not welcome near our shelters.

HTACS is again not a drop in and WILL NOT provide services that encourage people to congregate near the facility. Rather we hope to provide support to the neighborhood by getting homeless individuals making public disturbances off the streets.

Why is IHS asking for community input now?

The proposal process was a preliminary step to gauge interest in funding. Now that proposal was selected as worthy of funding, we want to hear from stakeholders and engage the community further. The community input, discussion and listening phase has begun and we are hosting informational sessions as well as reaching out to bring the community closer. We want this to be a joint collaboration that results in a solution that benefits all of Chinatown, especially the merchants and residents as they recover from the economic impact of the COVID crisis.

See answers to [additional questions](#) from the Community Forum on Homeless Solutions in Chinatown

How can I help or learn more?

1. Explore our website and follow us on [Facebook](#) to learn about homelessness and IHS.
2. Refer anyone who has an interest or questions about the development of this project to us so that we can meet and share our ideas.