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MEMO

To: Honorable Members of the Los Angeles City Council

From: Sophia Rice, Chief Program Officer *Sophia Rice*
[Sophia Rice \(Mar 25, 2026 10:27:22 PDT\)](#)

Date: March 25, 2026

CC: Paul Rubenstein, Deputy Chief External Relations Officer

Re: **Report Back on Coordinated Entry System Updates (Council File 19-1576-S1)**

This memorandum is submitted in response to [Council File 19-1576-S1](#), approved by the Los Angeles City Council on January 14, 2026. Among other directives, the motion requests the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) to report back on the Coordinated Entry System (CES) matching system as well as the Time Limited Subsidy (TLS) program's matching processes. This report outlines existing CES processes and recent improvements and provides context for future iterations of the matching system.

RECOMMENDATION

That the City Council, subject to the approval of the Mayor of Los Angeles:

- Note and file this report.

BACKGROUND

As a Continuum of Care, LAHSA is required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to establish and operate a Coordinated Entry System (CES)¹, with the intention of increasing efficiency and fairness in access to local systems and prioritizing people who are most in need of homelessness assistance. Starting in 2013, HUD established minimum requirements for the CES program, including that it must cover the entire Continuum of Care (CoC), be easily accessible and well-advertised, include a standardized assessment, and have specific policies for those fleeing domestic violence².

Even prior to these requirements, in 2010, the Los Angeles CoC began laying the groundwork for a CES, and an early system version was put into practice in 2011. After a series of pilots in Skid Row and a subsequent series of pilot programs, the preliminary CES usage was expanded to all Service Planning Areas (SPAs) in 2014³. In 2018, LAHSA selected the use of industry-leading assessment tools developed by OrgCode: the VI-SPDAT, the VI-FSPDAT for families⁴, and the Next Step Tool for youth⁵. The VI-SPDAT, or the Vulnerability Index-Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool, is a verbal questionnaire about

¹ <https://www.lahsa.org/ces/>

² <https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/17-01cpdn.pdf>

³ <https://www.lahsa.org/ces/home/about/>

⁴ <https://www.lahsa.org/documents?id=1439-form-1439-ces-survey-for-families-vi-fspdat.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.lahsa.org/documents?id=1308-form-1308-ces-survey-for-youth.pdf&ref=hmis>



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housing history, health, and safety. It is intended to be administered by trained service providers to people seeking homeless services.

Concurrently, LAHSA launched the Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness (BPEH) in 2018. The purpose of this working group was to examine the factors that contribute to Black people being overrepresented in the homeless population, to identify opportunities for increased racial equity in the homelessness response system, and to develop recommendations to more effectively meet the needs of Black people experiencing homelessness. Among several findings and recommendations, the BPEH Committee's final report included an evaluation of the efficacy, appropriateness, and outcomes of existing LAHSA CES tools, especially as they relate to connecting vulnerable Black participants to housing services. The report concluded that the CES questions were lengthy, duplicative, and insensitive to the lived experience of those being assessed, and it charged LAHSA with conducting an analysis of the VI-SPDAT to resolve these findings.

CESTTRR PROJECT

The Coordinated Entry System Triage Tool Research and Refinement (CESTTRR) was a three-year research project between March 2020 and May 2023, prompted by the BPEH findings. The project was funded by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, Home for Good Funders Collaborative, and USC's Homelessness Policy Research Institute. The researchers were an interdisciplinary team from the University of Southern California and the University of California, Los Angeles. While LAHSA neither funded the research nor led it, LAHSA participated in the Core Planning Group to oversee the project, alongside United Way Home for Good, LA County Department of Mental Health, LA County Department of Health Services, LA County Homeless Initiative, and the CESTTRR Community Advisory Board⁷.

The primary goal of the CESTTRR study was to analyze the adult CES tools used by the Los Angeles CoC, namely the VI-SPDAT, through a racial equity lens, as well as make recommendations to improve equitable outcomes. Accordingly, the CESTTRR Project had three primary investigative goals in the development of a new triage tool. They were⁸:

1. "ASSESSMENT -- the language, length, order, and type of questions in the actual tool."
2. "ADMINISTRATION -- the who, where, when, and how we survey participants."
3. "APPLICATION -- how we score and what we do with the data collected."

⁷ <https://www.lahsa.org/documents?id=7737-cesttrr-report-faq.pdf>

⁸ <https://cais.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/CESTTRR-Final-Report-2023.pdf>



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The methods for the CESTTRR Project were community-focused and utilized data science to probe question language, tool administration, and recommendations for equitable administration and scoring. To ground their quantitative research in qualitative experiences, the CESTTRR team created a Community Advisory Board (CAB). The CAB members consisted primarily of people with lived experience and homeless services providers who participated in the analysis and assessments of both the VI-SPDAT and the revised CES Triage Tool. The CAB informed qualitative analysis, while the quantitative analysis relied on defined metrics for equity and bias. The research team also trained machine learning algorithms to predict participant adverse outcomes using prior VI-SPDAT assessment data, including two years of post-assessment outcomes.

In 2023, the CESTTRR team published the revised CES Triage Tool and recommendations for the implementation of the new tool pertaining to the areas of score utilization, administration, training, translation, and ongoing evaluation. The results followed the goals laid out for the project:

1. **ASSESSMENT** – While the VI-SPDAT questionnaire contains thirty-five questions, the Revised Triage Tool is nineteen questions. The revision of the CES tool was trauma-informed and bolstered by qualitative understanding of what works for both people experiencing homelessness and providers administering the tool. Additionally, the research team utilized data science to predict “adverse outcomes” such as interactions with law enforcement, hospitalizations, psychiatric holds, and death. Adverse outcomes were defined with input from the CAB.
2. **ADMINISTRATION** – The CESTTRR team included recommendations for the administration of the assessment to increase trust and trauma-informed practice. Based on qualitative research with the CAB, these include “instructions to not administer the tool at first meeting, asking the client their preferred pronouns, asking the client if they would like someone else to administer the tool, and asking the client if they need to take a break after difficult questions are asked.”⁹
3. **APPLICATION** – Data evaluation showed that the VI-SPDAT scoring system is not much more accurate than random chance at predicting adverse outcomes, and that the scoring outcomes were biased toward White clients relative to Black and Latinx clients. By adjusting the questions and scoring, the team produced the revised assessment tool. This new tool not only addresses concerns about insensitivity but also improves the accuracy of predicting adverse outcomes by 11% and reduces bias from 5.9% to 0.7% for Black clients, and from 3.2% to 0.2% for Latinx clients. Consequently, LAHSA’s new scoring system is more accurate and less racially biased than the original VI-SPDAT scoring system.

⁹ <https://cais.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/CESTTRR-Final-Report-2023.pdf>



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The CESTTRR Project findings on the racial bias of the VI-SPDAT align with growing nationwide research about its inequitable outcomes¹⁰. Many homelessness organizations, including the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH), recognize that the VI-SPDAT, while instrumental in delivering homeless services to those with the most need, could benefit from more focus on fair outcomes and ease of use¹¹. OrgCode, the creators of the VI-SPDAT, made the decision to phase out support for the VI-SPDAT as of 2022, due in part to equity concerns. While CoCs are still able to use the tool, OrgCode has no plans to develop or sponsor a new or revised version, instead urging CoCs to defer to experts in racial and gender equity in homeless services planning¹². This was precisely LAHSA's goal with the CESTTRR Project and the implementation of the revised CES Triage Tool developed by the CESTTRR Project, the LA HAT.

LOS ANGELES HOMELESS ASSESSMENT TOOL (LA HAT)

In response to the CESTTRR team's research, LAHSA began to implement the Los Angeles Homeless Assessment Tool (LA HAT)¹³ after its approval by the CES Policy Council on December 4, 2024. In alignment with the CESTTRR report findings, the LA HAT aims to reduce biases that were identified in the VI-SPDAT, shorten the overall assessment time, increase question clarity, reduce trauma reactions, and diminish potential stigma. The questions mirrored the questions recommended by the CESTTRR study.

LAHSA's Lived Experience Advisory Board (LEAB) and the Homeless Youth Forum of Los Angeles (HYFLA) were engaged in a process to name the new tool. The name "LA HAT" was also evaluated for risk and suitability, and it is reflective of the purpose of the tool: to provide an inclusive, holistic assessment of individual vulnerabilities and needs¹⁴. Through collaboration with A.C.T.I.O.N. to Healing and partnership with LEAB; HYFLA; and direct services providers, LAHSA developed a training curriculum to prepare service provider staff to administer the LA HAT with culturally relevant strategies, trauma-informed practices, client-centered approaches, and learnings aimed to reduce biases in tool administration. The LA HAT Training also outlines the purpose of the tool and the changes made through the CESTTRR process. Providers learn about the context for disparities in the homeless service system, recommended ways to build rapport with participants, including responsiveness to non-verbal and cultural cues. Additionally, providers are instructed on entering data into HMIS and understanding LA HAT scores. This 7-hour in person and virtual training takes an interactive approach that includes tools and techniques such as demonstrations, role play, practice with constructive feedback, and reviewing case scenarios.

¹⁰ https://c4innovates.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/CES_Racial_Equity-Analysis_Oct112019.pdf

¹¹ https://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/NextGenTools_VISPDATBrief_08-30-22.pdf

¹² <https://www.orgcode.com/blog/a-message-from-orgcode-on-the-vi-spd-at-moving-forward>

¹³ <https://www.lahsa.org/documents?id=8675-los-angeles-housing-assessment-tool-la-hat-pdf>

¹⁴ <https://www.lahsa.org/documents?id=8996-naming-the-tool-developed-by-the-cesttrr-project-process-and-outcomes-report.pdf>



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LAHSA's CES Policy Council adopted the suggested score threshold of 17 as well as the training recommendations for trauma-informed administration of the new assessment. The phase-in of the revised CES assessment tool began in early 2025, with the goal of eventually replacing the VI-SPDAT CES Survey for Adults. The VI-FSPDAT continues to be used for families, and the Next Step Tool remains the preferred tool for youth. LAHSA contracted with Arc4Justice (A4J), a top evaluator of CES nationwide, to perform an early implementation evaluation of the LA HAT. A4J surveyed and hosted focus groups with service providers who have administered the LA HAT and listening sessions with participants with lived experiences of the LA HAT and/or homelessness. The introduction of the LA HAT was widely understood as a long-overdue attempt to correct racial bias embedded in earlier assessment tools and to move Los Angeles closer to a more just prioritization framework. Many acknowledged the seriousness of that intent. In practice, however, some expressed confusion about when and how the LA HAT should be used, and questions about people who qualified under prior tools but no longer meet thresholds under the new system. LAHSA is currently working with providers and the CES Policy Council to respond to the valuable input received regarding new tool implementation challenges. Even with those challenges, across data sources, the LA HAT was widely viewed as an improvement in tone, engagement, and dignity at the point of assessment, reflecting the system's capacity to respond meaningfully to evidence and community advocacy.

LAHSA is currently phasing in the use of the LA HAT to connect participants to Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) resources. Many people within the Los Angeles homelessness system have already been assessed using the LA HAT. At the same time, the VI-SPDAT continues to be eligible for connection to PSH during the phased introduction of the LA HAT. LAHSA does not require reassessment for those who have taken the VI-SPDAT unless a participant requests it or a significant life change has occurred that might affect eligibility for PSH¹⁵.

There will be a three-phase process to transition to full use of the LA HAT:

1. Phase 1: Launch (COMPLETE)
 - a. Adopt the LA HAT as a CES assessment for adults in PSH prioritization
 - b. Make the LA HAT accessible in LA County's nine threshold languages (Armenian, Cambodian, Chinese, Farsi, Korean, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese)
 - c. Train 3,000 LAHSA and service provider staff to administer the LA HAT
 - d. Provide access to the LA HAT to 700+ programs through the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)
2. Phase 2: Expand (CURRENT STEP)

¹⁵ <https://www.lahsa.org/news?article=1033-los-angeles-housing-assessment-tool-la-hat->



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- a. Evaluate the outcomes of the Phase 1 launch of the LA HAT
 - b. Determine a timeline for retiring the VI-SPDAT and adjust to exclusive usage of the LA HAT
 - c. Expand training capacity and continue training until all Unsheltered (Outreach), Interim Housing, and Housing Navigation programs have access to the LA HAT tool
3. Phase 3: Maintain (FUTURE STATE)
 - a. Retire the VI-SPDAT survey for adults
 - b. Establish ongoing training and technical assistance focused exclusively on the LA HAT
 - c. Establish ongoing evaluation processes for the continued improvement of the implementation of the LA HAT

Within Phase 2, work is being done with LAHSA's CES Policy Council to transition from the VI-SPDAT to the LA HAT using data-driven approaches. LAHSA is beginning to gather preliminary data, discussing the initial analysis and beginning additional quantitative evaluation. Additionally, LAHSA is working with the CES Policy Council to plan the VI-SPDAT's phase-out in order to properly analyze the outcome data of the LA HAT on its own. LAHSA welcomes the opportunity to share its findings with the City Council of Los Angeles.

It is critical to note that the LA HAT is *not* LAHSA's *matching system* for PSH. LA HAT is an *assessment tool* that gives insight into participants' vulnerability, and it is just one of many factors that are considered when determining PSH eligibility. To be matched with PSH, participants must not only have an eligible LA HAT score, but must also be document-ready, and actively enrolled in a program (Outreach, Time-Limited Subsidies, Interim Housing, Housing Navigation, etc.). Additionally, they must meet specific eligibility criteria of a housing unit to be matched to that resource, such as disability requirements for ADA units. Other criteria can include income requirements (Income below 30% or 50% Area Median Income, for example) or chronic homelessness status (documented disability and homelessness of either 12 consecutive months or 4+ periods of homelessness that total 12 months over a period of 3 years). Participants that meet all eligibility criteria constitute the pool that can be matched from. After all eligibility criteria are met, participants closest in proximity are prioritized (only for project-based resources). If multiple people are the same distance from the PSH resource, or the housing resource is tenant-based, those with the longest duration of homelessness are prioritized.

TIME LIMITED SUBSIDIES

The Time-Limited Subsidy (TLS) program is a LAHSA-administered voucher program that assists people experiencing homelessness with both rental assistance and case management. LAHSA's TLS programs funded with local funding sources are currently in a ramp-down phase due to the loss of some one-time funding sources. Therefore, there have been no new enrollments into adult and family TLS programs since April of 2025. New enrollments in this system are expected to resume when the number of slots equals



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the available ongoing funding and turnover units become available once again. Historically, the local TLS program has not been matched through CES to ensure that participants are matched as quickly as possible.

Separately, a redesigned City Time Limited Subsidy Program will commence this year that will infuse a batch of 2,000 new slots to assist the City of Los Angeles in meeting its LA Alliance settlement goals. This new program leverages the learnings captured from the existing system. The following household eligibility requirements for these new slots were approved by the City Council of Los Angeles:

1. Currently experiencing homelessness
2. Residing in a City-funded Interim Housing site
3. Valid identification card in LAHSA's HMIS
4. Not currently matched to PSH
5. Eligible to be counted toward the LA Alliance goal

Eligible households will then be prioritized by length of stay at a City-funded Interim Housing Site, with stays of over 12 months prioritized first.