

2025

Pathways to **Wellness**

Bringing new resources
to the wellness ecosystem.



Message from Mayor Cherelle L. Parker



After I was sworn in as Philadelphia's 100th Mayor on January 2, 2024, I signed an Executive Order that same day, directing our Police Commissioner, Managing Director and Chief Public Safety Director to develop a comprehensive Public Safety Plan for Philadelphia.

That executive order directed our top police and public safety officials to develop a plan to work with other City departments to **access every available resource to restore communities** where homelessness, gun violence, substance use disorders, and undiagnosed, untreated mental health issues have destroyed lives and families in once- safe and beautiful neighborhoods.

Our police and public safety leaders delivered that Plan on our 100th Day in office. Then, the Parker administration went to work to improve public health and safety by building out a comprehensive new health and wellness plan to address gaps in the system identified by leaders running the city's major healthcare, addiction treatment service and insurance providers. They confirmed that a plan to fill in those gaps through Philadelphia government working with these providers had never existed before.

We are developing innovative ways for our City government to take a more active role in addressing the public health crisis caused by the opioid epidemic. We not only want to put an end to encampments of people living on the streets of Kensington and other areas of the city affected by substance use disorder, mental health challenges and homelessness, we are committed to helping those individuals get the help they need, in a way that's never been done before in Philadelphia.

We are building out, in record-breaking time, a new continuum of care that is anchored on the notion that recovery care and long-term housing are essential for long-term wellness.

This is a heavy lift, and progress will be felt in stages, but it is happening. Doing nothing is not an option, and we are at war with the status quo. We can, must and will think big and act with urgency.

We are thankful to our many different partners and stakeholders who are coming together to solve our public safety and public health crises in Philadelphia — we must all work collaboratively in order to succeed. We are unwavering in our focus every day — a safer, cleaner and greener Philadelphia, with access to economic opportunity for all.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cherelle L. Parker".

Mayor Cherelle L. Parker

prevention
intervention
enforcement

restoring neighborhoods

Spurred by the humanitarian crisis and community challenges in Kensington, the Parker Administration's Wellness Ecosystem initiative represents a **historic effort to bring new focus, collaboration, and resources** to address the entrenched problems of substance use disorder and homelessness and their impacts on neighborhoods in Philadelphia.

How did we reach this crisis-level situation?

Escalating drug potency and unpredictability.

The street drug supply has become increasingly potent and unpredictable, significantly raising the risk of overdose. Fentanyl is now often mixed with other substances, such as xylazine ("tranq") and medetomidine, tranquilizers used by veterinarians — never intended for human use. This combination can suppress breathing, making overdose reversal challenging and causing severe wounds that complicate access to treatment for substance use disorder.

Complex health needs. Many individuals battling substance use disorder face co-occurring physical and behavioral health conditions that require proper treatment to support recovery. Working collaboratively in 2024, the Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services (DBHIDS), the Office of Homeless Services (OHS), the Philadelphia Department of Public Health's [Substance Use Prevention and Harm Reduction](#), the Office of Public Safety's Overdose Response Unit (ORU), and The Office of Community Empowerment and Opportunity (CEO)'s Philly Counts team engaged thousands of individuals on the street and at home, addressing a complex set of physical and mental health needs.

Community safety and the drug trade. The drug trade has profoundly impacted community safety, fostering a pervasive sense of lawlessness that has allowed the nation's most severe open-air drug market to develop in Kensington. Easy access to guns — legal and illegal — further worsens the issue, contributing to violence and instability. [While gun violence and murders dropped dramatically in 2024](#), guns continue to contribute to violence and instability — especially in Kensington.

Persistent housing instability. Housing instability remains a complex and persistent challenge. Philadelphia's public and private homeless outreach organizations engage thousands of individuals annually living on the streets and in cars, abandoned buildings, public transportation stations/centers, and other places unfit for human habitation. Root causes include unemployment/underemployment, limited affordable housing, barriers to appropriate physical and behavioral health care, domestic violence, systemic oppression, racial inequality, and substance use challenges.

The Parker Administration's Wellness Ecosystem initiative aims to address these interconnected issues with a comprehensive, collaborative approach to improve outcomes for individuals and communities alike.

At any given time, more than 800 people experiencing homelessness and substance use disorder are living on the streets of Kensington. Additionally, there is often a 200+ person waiting list for those who have completed inpatient treatment and need continued support services at recovery housing programs, yet not enough beds exist.



Our Approach to Expanding the Pathway to Wellness

Philadelphia is home to hundreds of organizations working to optimize long-term outcomes for those struggling with substance use disorder, their families and neighbors, and the City at large.

The vast existing network includes medical providers, homeless outreach organizations, behavioral health advocates, law enforcement, philanthropic partners, and so many more. By strengthening and expanding our wellness ecosystem, Mayor Parker's vision is to **support the work *already underway* in a city with some of the country's best medical and health systems and build out a more coordinated Wellness Ecosystem to connect these organizations as the City's partners.**

To meet this need, **The Parker Administration is making a bold investment in developing innovative, outcome-driven wellness centers across Philadelphia** to offer a path for people to leave the streets behind, stabilize in their recovery, and, ultimately, thrive.



Through a balanced approach leveraging street-level outreach and enforcement to link people to resources, more individuals will access recovery services and housing stability while improving the quality of life of the community overall.

We will expand the current wellness ecosystem by:

- 1. Reaching more individuals:** Our strategy includes expanding bed capacity by over 1,000 across the housing and service continuum to assist a more significant number of people living unsheltered toward recovery from substance use disorder.
- 2. Educating residents:** To reach people in their homes, our new [Citywide Outreach and Engagement](#) workgroup led by the Office of Public Safety's Overdose Response Unit has launched a new successful door-to-door canvassing program that provides residents with information and resources to prevent overdoses at home.
- 3. Increasing safe housing options:** Recognizing why people choose to stay on the streets over seeking shelter and treatment and finding new ways to encourage change, the City is seeking to create stabilization by offering accessible recovery housing and a path for individuals who seek permanent housing and a renewed quality of life.
- 4. Improving law enforcement response:** Through the Kensington Initiative, the Philadelphia Police Department is now implementing its 5-Phased Plan to reduce the unsheltered population along the Kensington Corridor by approximately 20 percent while addressing quality-of-life issues, which requires a multifaceted approach and long-term strategies.
- 5. Avoiding a cycle of incarceration:** The City is actively developing diversion programs for people arrested for public drug use to prioritize treatment and pathways to recovery over incarceration. The Office of Public Safety is piloting a new Wellness Court in Kensington in which police would conduct sweeps to arrest people who are using drugs on the street, give them summary citations, offer them treatment and diversion programs, and bring them before a judge that same day.
- 6. Cultivating employment opportunities:** Increasing viable options for employment will help to move individuals off the streets, allowing for greater individual independence and an increase in the overall quality of life for the whole community.
- 7. Long-term services:** In the long term, we will be able to assist a more significant number of people with immediately available residential recovery resources and, ultimately, a gateway to permanent housing.

How this approach works toward the Parker Administration's promise of a safer, cleaner, greener Philadelphia — with economic opportunity for all.

SAFE

Treatment, housing, and recovery support save lives for the people caught in the cycles of homelessness and substance use disorder. In turn, communities are safer when drug activity is reduced on the street.

CLEAN

When people have increased access to housing and supports, neighborhoods can undergo revitalization and thrive.

GREEN

Wellness Centers are developed to repurpose existing assets with sustainable practices.

WITH ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL

People who become stable in recovery and housing can re-enter the workforce and participate in the mainstream economy.

stability dignity hope

The Importance of an Expanded Wellness Ecosystem in Philadelphia

When people experiencing homelessness and substance use disorder are in crisis, cycling in and out of care, and on and off the streets, having multiple interventions with multiple open doors is crucial. One can never predict what the right time will be for someone to seize the opportunity to change their life.

Over 90 percent of homeless individuals experience mental health and/or substance use challenges, underscoring the critical need for integrated care.

Through vision and intention, the City's work to enhance the wellness ecosystem simplifies the process by increasing access points that include comprehensive assessment complete with multi-agency coordination and a human-centered approach. The humanity and dignity of a person are preserved, and outcomes are improved through referrals that treat people as individuals and not numbers.

To coordinate efforts that meet people where they are, our approach to expand the current wellness ecosystem will allow people to access crisis care and medically assisted treatment through street outreach and trauma-informed law enforcement contacts. Skilled outreach teams, assessment providers, and the newly created Wellness Court will offer quick and streamlined entry. From the initial intervention, clients will move from inpatient treatment for 30 to 90 days to recovery-based housing for up to one year.

Each step brings stability, dignity, and hope, setting people on a path to integrate back into the community through a steady recovery, access to income, and permanent housing. In the Wellness Ecosystem, there are a number of open doors with a variety of supports, all leading to the same place. The journey may look different, but the destination remains the same.

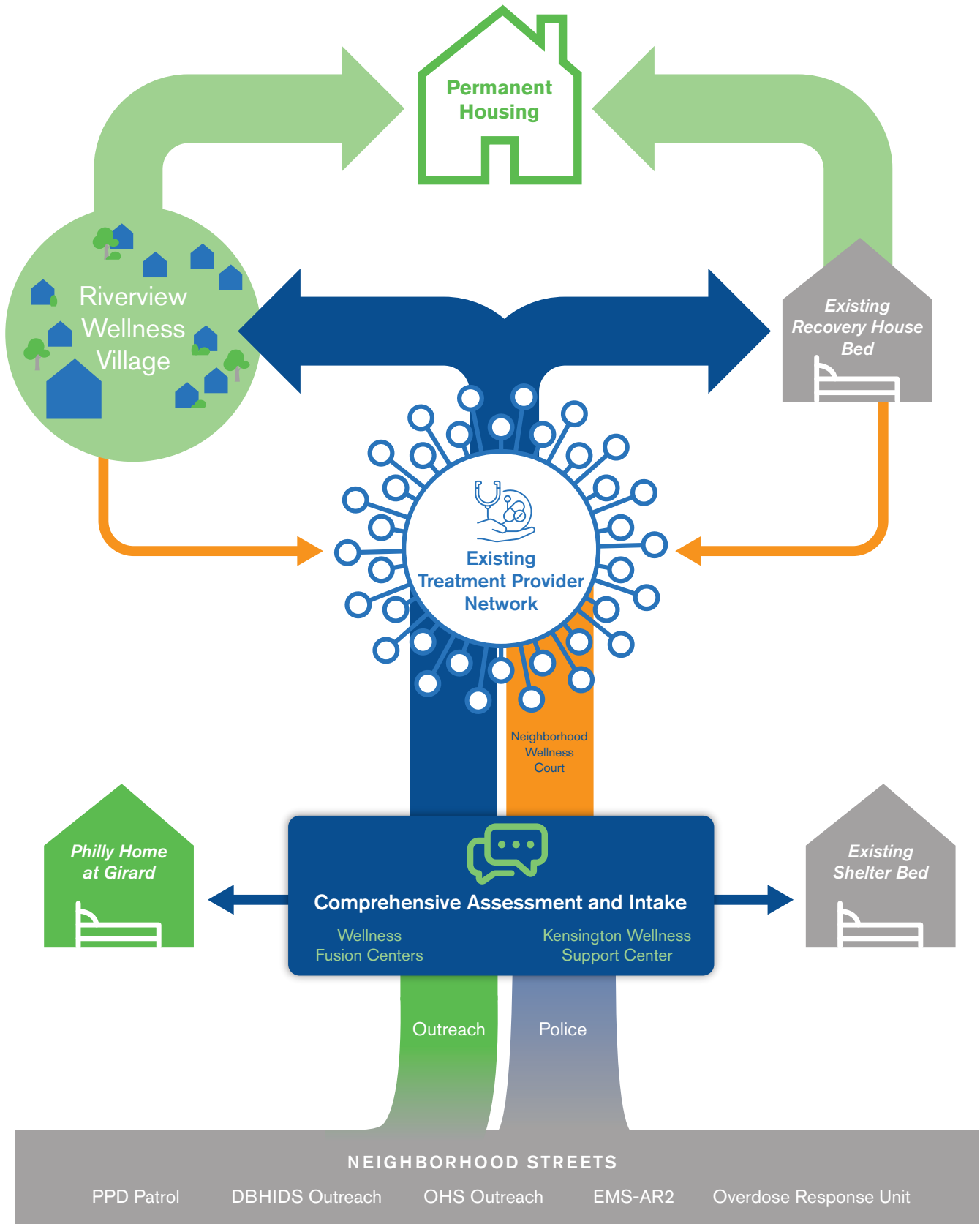
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Seeing this come together so quickly, I see the vision in which this can help so many. It inspires my officers and me to continue our work. Finally starting to see light at the end of the tunnel.”

— Pedro Rosario, Deputy Commissioner
Kensington Initiative & East Police Division Operations

Pathways to Wellness

A long-term, sustainable continuum of care and alternatives to incarceration.



partnerships collaboration recovery

The value of community

The transition from active substance use into lasting recovery is often a difficult and emotionally trying journey. The risk of relapse is exceptionally high, with 40-60 percent of individuals returning to substance use. Relapse, at best, demands a second chance or a change in treatment. At worst, it can lead to death.

“Early recovery,” or the first 12 months into the recovery journey, is a crucial time during which individuals contend with raw core clinical issues such as family history, unresolved trauma, grief and loss, low frustration tolerance, lack of coping strategies, and other factors that make them susceptible to relapse. Meaningfully navigating those issues can lead to more successful outcomes. Further, it has also been shown that an individual's “social capital” and proximity to a supportive community are critical aspects of achieving and maintaining recovery.

Community, camaraderie, empathy, and guidance are necessary ingredients in helping an individual remain on track as they navigate their way into a healthy lifestyle of recovery. This is true for individuals recently discharged from inpatient treatment, criminal justice custody, or anyone seeking a safe, drug-free living environment conducive to recovery.

Those in early recovery need a support network with friends and family who are not actively engaging in substance use, peers with lived experience, trained recovery housing staff, clinical support, and access to community resources — these are all essential components to helping individuals maintain recovery.

That’s what you’ll find at the Riverview Wellness Village, a foundational part of the city’s expanded wellness ecosystem.



Riverview Wellness Village

The goal of the Riverview Wellness Village is to provide recovery-based housing to allow residents access to the care and resources they need to stabilize. At Riverview Wellness Village, comprehensive health services are provided in a positive, stable living environment with a community conducive to recovery. Residents have access to a range of recovery options, onsite classes, workforce development opportunities, and more to help them prepare for independent living. After one year, residents will seek permanent housing with continued support.

The Riverview Wellness Village property is located in the Holmesburg section of Northeast Philadelphia. The Village encompasses a Meeting House, which houses most of the indoor amenities, and six smaller residential cottages with the capacity for over 300 residents. All cottages and the main building are interconnected by corridors and solariums, except Fernwood East and West, which is a stand-alone building located on the northwest side of the site.

Individuals served at the new Riverview Wellness Village will include men and women 18 years old or older.

The addition of Riverview Wellness Village into the City's continuum of care expands access to recovery-based housing coupled with comprehensive health services for those with substance use disorder; provides additional supportive services, such as basic education, workforce development, and life-skills programming; and establishes a housing continuum that will assist a more significant number of people toward recovery and housing stabilization.

Our skilled providers will offer:

- Primary healthcare services
- Chronic disease management
- Nutritional counseling
- Exercise and fitness training
- Activities of daily living
- Individual and small group consultations
- Accessibility for residents with mobility concerns
- Education and workforce opportunities
- Culinary training
- Art therapy
- Community gardening
- Recreational activities

access to care and housing

continuum of care

Addressing the social determinants of health

Success at the Riverview Wellness Village will be defined by the residents' ability to improve in all areas of the social determinants of health.

Riverview grants residents access to onsite services designed to cultivate a balanced, fulfilling life free from substance use by:

- Increasing participation in recovery programming and residential stability among residents.
- Improving physical and behavioral health and reducing substance use-related health concerns for residents.
- Operating compassionate, outcome-oriented services that meet residents' needs and interests.
- Providing residents with the skills and abilities they will need to thrive when they exit the program, from basic living skills to job training and placement.
- Operating safe and dignified housing spaces with high-quality residential services.
- Offering treatment interventions that are evidence-based, person-centered, and appropriate for the population served, including individual, family, group therapy, medication management, and psychoeducation as appropriate.

These interventions will result with residents at Riverview Wellness Village who exit successfully with:

- stable, permanent housing
- access to income through employment and/or benefits
- improved mental and physical health status and access to ongoing care
- food security
- increased social capital and community supports

Expanding Pathways to Wellness



Philly Home at Girard, located at Fairmount, was launched in May of 2024 to offer immediate access for people in Kensington experiencing homelessness and substance use disorder. PHG is formerly a nursing home and has capacity for 180 individuals who are referred by street outreach teams. The goal is for people to become stabilized in shelter and then move from PHS into residential substance use disorder treatment or supportive housing.



In its second step, the vacant City-owned Riverview campus at 7979 State Road, was identified as an ideal location for new recovery housing. The site is a 20-acre property owned by the City since 1910 and, since 1914, has housed the indigent poor. As early as 1965, the property also provided various levels of medical care on site, and most recently, was operated as a City shelter. Riverview has been fully renovated and opened as Riverview Wellness Village, starting with over 300 beds of recovery-based housing and room for expansion as needs and demand changes, as well as market forces.

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The Parker Administration is making good on its commitment to engage and listen to the communities they serve. By bringing people together, the Mayor and her team have begun making much needed investments in Philadelphia that are bringing new and innovative services to historically underserved neighborhoods. These proactive efforts are laying the groundwork for an inclusive approach to behavioral health services that will ultimately make healthcare more effective and accessible while reducing costs to the taxpayers.”

— Joe Martz, CEO of Merakey

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I was homeless in Kensington for two summers and two winters straight. I was very grateful that it (signing up for an Emergency Housing Voucher) was fairly easy. I feel extremely comfortable because my daughter feels comfortable.”

— Ryan, A Beneficiary of Services

