

While increasing nationwide, homelessness in Dallas has declined over the last year, thanks in part to the difference the Health to Home medical respite program is making in helping individuals recover from both homelessness and physical and behavioral health needs.



○ ○ ○ ○ ○ A safe place to Recover and heal

Medical respite care is acute and post-acute care for people experiencing homelessness who do not have a safe place to recover and heal. It is a proven model for reducing hospital re-admissions and length of in-patient stays for these neighbors, and, importantly, it provides access to needed social services and housing placements. The Health to Home medical respite program is a partnership between Texas Health and Austin Street Center, one of the largest low-barrier homeless shelters in Dallas.

Texas Health staff provide supervised medical care, and Austin Street provides access to behavioral health and social services aimed at addressing the underlying causes of homelessness. The ultimate goal of the program is to help these neighbors recover from both homelessness and medical ailments through social supports and stable housing.

Since its inception in 2020, Health to Home has enrolled and served 427 individuals.



Hopelessness to Hope

For most of his life, Charles carried an invisible but crushing weight: depression.

"I had a career, a marriage, a life, but didn't realize how deep the depression ran until I was 40," he said. It was after his second divorce that clarity struck. "Looking back, I think I've been depressed since childhood. For the past 20 years, the symptoms were unmistakable."

"Things came to a head two years ago. I rage-quit my job and let my lease run out," Charles recalls. "I didn't want to try anymore." When he was diagnosed with skin cancer, the weight grew even heavier. His physical and emotional health began to collapse at the same time. "My medical issues were too much to handle," he says. "Homelessness was looming. I was despondent."

The world felt too heavy to carry. "The largest challenge was not caring anymore about anything. Just wishing for it all to be over."

Then, something unexpected happened.

During a hospital visit, Charles was introduced to Parkland Hospital staff who encouraged him to enter the Texas Health Medical Respite program at Austin Street Center.

My first reaction was skepticism. I'd been through homelessness before. I had some help in the past, but I never received any help or referrals for mental health. I figured this would be the same.

— CHARLES

CONTINUED ON BACK

But from the very beginning, something felt different.

“The respite staff were encouraging, hands-on, and committed,” Charles says. “They truly cared. People had said they cared before, but I never believed them. This time, I believed the Health to Home staff — Kikki, Trish, and Nik — and I didn’t want to let them down.”

Through consistent encouragement, connection, and support, Charles began to heal, not just physically, but emotionally. One of his greatest challenges was learning to care about life again.

“Respite gave me hope,” he says. “They reminded me that it wasn’t too late to try.”

Slowly, encouragement turned into hope, and hope into action.

“Now I want to live,” he says. “I want to make new friends, enjoy the theater, and cook healthy, meaningful meals again. I can even picture having a social life and being active. I never thought I’d feel this way. You have to want the change as much as the people helping you. And you have to take your time and not squander what you’re given.”

The journey to permanent housing took time, but with each step, his strength returned.

“It was long, but it didn’t feel overwhelming,” Charles says. “Once I received my benefits and got my medical issues under control, I had the energy and motivation to find a good place to live. It always felt like a matter of when, not if.”

Today, Charles is no longer just surviving, he is rebuilding. And he has a message for others who might be where he once was.

You have to want the change as much as the people who care about you. Take your time. I had to do baby steps at first, and that worked well for me. Then I would say, do not squander the resources provided. I had to learn to be humble because growth requires humility. There are incredible private resources out there. They need to find the courage to ask, because it can truly be transformative. — CHARLES



I never thought I'd feel this way again, but I do. I believe in life again. — CHARLES

Health to Home | 2025 Results

- 54** Individuals enrolled in medical respite program
- 50** Behavioral services provided
- 77** Connections made to a Primary Care Provider or a Patient-Centered Medical Home
- 970** Case management services provided to participants
- 295** Transportation services provided
- 73** Job trainings provided to participants
- 8** Participants placed with a job
- 23** Participants were connected to an appropriate housing solution



TexasHealth.org/Community-Health