IT’S OPEN!
The region’s first year-round, low-barrier shelter for adults experiencing homelessness opened in late November, just in time for winter. Second Avenue Commons is the culmination of more than three years of planning and an unprecedented public-private partnership to support our community’s most vulnerable individuals and help them move toward permanent, stable housing.

Safe, welcoming, compassionate
Second Avenue Commons was thoughtfully designed to be a welcoming, safe space for adults experiencing homelessness. “Low-barrier” refers to its inclusive nature — open to individuals, couples, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and even allowing pets (dogs and cats) to stay with their owners. Guests have access to shelter, engagement center services, linkages to services, showers, hygiene kits, laundry facilities, meals, medication delivery, and secure storage for belongings. All COVID safety protocols are followed.

Located at 700 Second Ave in Downtown Pittsburgh, the Commons provides comprehensive “wrap-around” services and linkages to address the complex issues that often go hand-in-hand with homelessness, including housing insecurity, mental health and substance use disorders, and unemployment. “There are so many complicated factors that lead to homelessness, and our goal is always to meet people where they are, judgment free,” said Michael Turk, vice president of community and wellness services for Pittsburgh Mercy. Existing street outreach programs have flexible workspace at the Commons.

“Second Avenue Commons is a long-awaited centralized resource to serve our most vulnerable, unhoused citizens. It represents an exciting new level of compassion and collaboration.”

Dr. Jim Withers, founder and medical director of Pittsburgh Mercy’s Operation Safety Net, medical director of Homeless Services at Pittsburgh Mercy, and co-medical director of Second Avenue Commons.

BY THE NUMBERS
Second Avenue Commons:
- Five story, 42,000-square-foot facility, open 24/7 every day
- 95 shelter beds run by Pittsburgh Mercy
- 43 single-room occupancy (SRO) units run by NDC Asset Management
- 1 primary care clinic run by UPMC, open weekdays
- 1 engagement center run by Pittsburgh Mercy, open weekdays
- 8 hours of quiet time daily (10 p.m. to 6 a.m.)
**Best practices in trauma-informed care**

The design of the Commons was informed by research on best practices and lessons learned from comparable facilities around the U.S. — including those in Portland, Oregon, and New York City — and by local subject matter experts who address homelessness in Allegheny County.

“Our work at the Commons is grounded in the principles of harm reduction,” said Jacqueline Hunter, senior manager of Homeless Services at Pittsburgh Mercy. “No one is compelled to change any behavior until they are ready, able, and willing to do so. Colleagues have been trained in trauma-informed care, crisis intervention, and de-escalation techniques, plus First Aid, CPR, AED, and other relevant skills.”

**Honored to be chosen for this important role**

Following a rigorous and highly competitive two-year process, Pittsburgh Mercy was honored to be selected by Allegheny County Department of Human Services to operate the Commons. Given our vast experience in this area — including 30+ years of running Operation Safety Net (OSN), our award-winning, innovative homeless service program founded and headed by Dr. Jim Withers, medical director of Homeless Services at Pittsburgh Mercy — Pittsburgh Mercy was a logical choice. Pittsburgh Mercy will oversee day-to-day shelter operations in collaboration with Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS), Community Kitchen Pittsburgh, Second Avenue Commons Inc., and UPMC.

**ANNUAL CANDLELIGHT MEMORIAL SERVICE**

Each year, on the longest night of the year, homeless service providers throughout the country host public events to remember and honor those who have died while experiencing homelessness. Pittsburgh Mercy’s Operation Safety Net has held its annual candlelight vigil on the winter solstice since 1998. Bronze plaques listing the names of every person who died on the streets are mounted below the highway overpass, both as a tribute to the lives lost and a reminder of the hardships endured by so many fellow citizens.

This year’s service on December 21 honored the 13 individuals who are known to have died while street homeless in Allegheny County in 2022. The keynote address by Dr. Jimmy Miller from AHN Center for Inclusion Health was accompanied by remarks from Dr. Jim Withers, Danielle Schnauber, and Ben Talik. Music was provided by Smokestack Lightning band.