

A Hand and a Home:

Foundations for Success

2019-2022 Statewide Action Plan

Wisconsin Interagency Council on Homelessness



I am so proud of this Council's first year as the state's main vehicle for combating and preventing homelessness. Siloes stink. They get in the way of good things happening. They're not usually the result of a nefarious drive to protect programs from competition or to defend one's turf. They're just the reality of different people in different agencies going about their jobs addressing different aspects of the same underlying problem.

This council breaks down those barriers. It focuses both agency leaders and line program managers on the core concern—homelessness—so we can better collaborate across our siloes to achieve meaningful outcomes in this important effort. I am personally grateful to all of the governmental and non-profit partners who have invested time, energy, and ideas in making this Council, and now this report, a true success for our state, especially for our most needy and vulnerable neighbors. I am especially appreciative of our outstanding director, Michael Luckey, who has been my travel buddy, idea instigator, and fellow poverty warrior this past year, and who has been the driving force making this report a reality.

One of the joys of my job is traveling Wisconsin meeting the people on the front lines of this fight, the real hands and feet of compassion who wash the sheets on the shelter beds day-in and day-out. And I meet the people sleeping in those shelter beds, fleeing from domestic abuse or dealing with a drug addiction or victims of an illness that led to bankruptcy and eviction. This report, and the recommendations it contains, is for all of them.

Rebecca Kleefisch

Lt. Governor Rebecca Kleefisch

November 27, 2018

Wisconsin Interagency Council on Homelessness

Michael Luckey, Director

*Many of the images used in this plan are provided by the (In)Visible: Homelessness in Appleton project. In November 2015, area individuals who were homeless or on the edge of homelessness were given cameras and journals to record snapshots of their lives. Their inclusion in this report gives its readers a better impression of what homelessness looks like and feels like by those who experienced it. *

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Background of the Council

The **Wisconsin Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH)** was created by 2017 Wisconsin Act 74, which received unanimous support in both the Assembly and the Senate. Thanks to legislative leadership and the guidance of Lt. Governor Rebecca Kleefisch, the ICH held its first meeting in February of 2018. Its inaugural director was hired in April, and shortly thereafter the council began fulfilling one of its statutory requirements: “[**establishing**] a statewide policy with the purpose of preventing and ending homelessness in this state.” It will continue to meet under that statutory authority to ensure implementation of the plan across its constituent agencies, with updates and amendments as needed.

Creating a statewide council on homelessness was identified as a top priority by advocacy groups. Modeled after other state councils and the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, we believe the Wisconsin Interagency Council on Homelessness has two distinct strengths. The first is the active participation of the four Continuum of Care organizations. The second is the evident commitment at the highest level of Wisconsin’s government. Each of the member agencies has indicated its dedication to this council’s mission by committing senior leader’s time and active involvement in the Council’s meetings and broader activities. In addition, the council is chaired by the Lieutenant Governor of the state, who donated space in her capitol office for the director to work out of, and who is an ardent supporter of the council’s work and the work being done by homeless advocates and service providers across Wisconsin.

2017 Act 74 was signed into law by Governor Scott Walker on November 27, 2017. On November 27, 2018, the Wisconsin Interagency Council on Homelessness released this inaugural statewide plan to prevent and end homelessness.

This plan was accomplished at such a speed due to the working knowledge of advocates and service providers throughout the state and the expertise of those involved in all aspects of state government. Its urgency cannot be understated, nor can the impact the Council believes it will have.

Council Membership

Rebecca Kleefisch, Lieutenant Governor: Chair

Steve Michels, Assistant Deputy Secretary: Department of Administration

Eloise Anderson, Secretary: Department of Children and Families

Cathy Jess, Secretary: Department of Corrections:

Linda Seemeyer, Secretary: Department of Health Services

Emilie Amundson, Chief of Staff: Department of Public Instruction

Ray Allen, Secretary: Department of Workforce Development

Dan Zimmerman, Secretary: Department of Veterans Affairs

Wyman Winston, Executive Director: Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority

Gai Lorenzen, CoC Lead: Continuum of Care for the City and County of Racine, U.A.

Torrie Kopp Mueller, CoC Coordinator: Homeless Services Consortium of Dane County

Steve Mahan/Rafael Acevedo, CoC Leads: Milwaukee Continuum of Care

Carrie Poser, Director: Wisconsin Balance of State Continuum of Care, Inc.

Act 74 also created a second team responsible for the implementation and development of policies identified by the Council. Their input has been invaluable. Those members are:

Sara Buschman (DOA), Brad Wassink (DCF), Silvia Jackson (DOC), Jennifer Malcore (DHS), Elisabeth Portz (DHS), Leah Ramirez (DHS), Susan Piazza (DPI), Kristine Nadolski (DPI), BJ Dernbach (DWD), Andrew Evenson (DWD), Ken Grant (DVA), Debi Towns (WHEDA), Adam Smith (Institute for Community Alliances), Adrienne Roach (End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin), Brad Paul (WisCAP), Chris Mokler (Wisconsin Apartment Association), James Mathy (Milwaukee County Housing Division), Jani Koester (Madison Metropolitan School District), Joe Volk (Wisconsin Coalition Against Homelessness), Meika Burnikel (Family Services of Northeast Wisconsin), Nancy Jensen (Apartment Association of South Central Wisconsin), Sarah Diedrick-Kasdorf (Wisconsin Counties Association), Claire Shanahan (Milwaukee COC), Ryan Graham (BOSCO), Gai Lorenzen (Racine COC), Torrie Kopp Mueller (Madison COC)

Guiding Principles

By adopting this plan and the strategies it contains, the Wisconsin Interagency Council on Homelessness is endorsing a vision for homeless services. That vision is built on the following pillars:

- 1) The Wisconsin Interagency Council on Homelessness adheres to a Housing First mindset which assumes all Wisconsinites are housing ready. Housing First is a mindset, not a program. The Council must recognize it as a part of a diverse set of strategies necessary to addressing all forms of homelessness.
- 2) “Housing First” does not and cannot mean “Housing Only.” Simply moving someone onto a housing subsidy rarely guarantees financial stability, nor will it necessarily treat the underlying issues that caused homelessness in the first place.
- 3) Evidence-based case management is a key part of any homeless response. Case management must be embraced by both the service provider and the client.

- 4) Any long-term success must not be judged on the number of people added to government programs or placed in shelter beds; it must be judged on the number of people responsibly moved into independent living with low likelihood of returning to homelessness or financial insecurity.
- 5) A Wisconsin where no one ever becomes homeless for any reason is unrealistic. **A Wisconsin where homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring is an achievable goal** that we must all strive towards.
- 6) Progress should be measured by evidence and data. Where adequate data does not exist, Council members should prioritize data collection, sharing, and analysis.



What is the purpose of this plan?

This report is meant to establish priorities and strategies voted on by the executive branch of the Wisconsin state government and the four Continuum of Care organizations. The plan will build out from vision to principles to themes to recommendations. The principles are timeless; the recommendations reflect our current policy context: some will be for increased investments to successful programming, some will be

encouragements to adopt identified best practices, and some will be specific policy proposals. The Interagency Council on Homelessness may not be in the position to enact every recommendation – some recommendations will be beyond the powers of the executive branch or those of state government. Because of that, the Interagency Council on Homelessness envisions that:

- This plan outlines the best approach to combatting homelessness in the state of Wisconsin.
- State government is eager to lead on homeless policy whenever possible and, in the cases it cannot, is determined to be a willing partner to municipalities, counties, federal entities, faith-based organizations, private enterprises, and others dedicated to ending homelessness in their communities.
- The strategies included in the plan should be re-evaluated frequently for implementation and efficacy. Further meetings of the Council will establish a rubric for the strategies that require sustained effort, with clearly defined accountability and timelines.
- Ending homelessness will take a sustained, multi-faceted approach. By writing this plan, the Council, state government, and Wisconsin as a whole is beginning a long endeavor.

The strategies which involve an increase in funding have performance metrics associated with them to determine the impact of the state’s investment. Many of these will involve data required by HUD, so that data should be available.¹ In addition, the state will need to measure progress in our homeless response system as a whole. To do this, Wisconsin should adopt the same performance measures used by our neighbors in Minnesota’s Interagency Council on Homelessness. Those overall measures, primarily assessed using data from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), will follow the vision of this plan’s

fifth guiding principle: that homelessness be rare, brief, and non-recurring, and prevented whenever possible. They are:

- “Reduction in the number of people who become homeless for the first time (‘prevent’).
- Reduction in the total number of people experiencing homelessness (‘rare’).
- Reduction in the length of time people experience homelessness (‘brief’).
- Reduction in the number of people who return to homelessness (‘[non-recurring]’).”²

Data and Picture as it Stands

In 2017, a total of 21,906 people experiencing homelessness received services and shelter from HMIS agencies in Wisconsin.³ Thanks to our Point-in-Time (PIT) Count, we know that on a given winter night we have upwards of 3,470 people sleeping in places not meant for human habitation. Anecdotally, these places include cars, sidewalks, park benches, forests, parking garages, and caves.

We know that 17,905 people stayed in emergency shelters – 10,015 of them staying in shelters outside of Milwaukee, Dane, and Racine counties. 56% of clients served by HMIS were single adults, and roughly 75% of those were men. For those experiencing homelessness as a family unit, the majority (65%) were households with one adult and at least one child.

Homeless youth are defined as those aged 18-24. They represent 10% of persons served by HMIS homeless service providers in Wisconsin in 2017. The majority of youth (63%) were served as singles, not as members of a family. For children experiencing homelessness, aged 17 and below, 92% were members of a family unit – this leaves 494 unaccompanied children, or about 2% of the total homeless population. Of the children experiencing homelessness, 89% were teens (aged 13-17).

10% of adults experiencing homelessness in Wisconsin are veterans. Of all adults who sought emergency shelter through HMIS agencies, 6% are veterans.

Chronic homelessness has a separate, lengthy definition from the federal government. At its core, these are the individuals with a documented disability whose length of homelessness has been at least 12 months. Of those people served by HMIS providers, 8% were chronically homeless. Nearly 50% of all chronically homeless persons were served in Milwaukee and Dane Counties.

We do know that significant disparities exist. A Black or African American Wisconsinite was more likely by a factor of 10 to experience homelessness than was their white, non-Hispanic or Latino/a neighbor (1:46 vs. 1:454). Among the LGBT community, rates of homelessness are also elevated, especially among youth: as many as 40% of youth experiencing homelessness identified as LGBT.⁴

However, we know that this is not the full picture. Housing insecurity and unsustainable housing situations go far beyond the HUD definitions of homeless that are collected into HMIS.

A different definition of homelessness, that which is included in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, defines “homeless children and youths” as “individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.”⁵ This is a more expansive definition than that used by HUD, because it also includes “children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons.”⁶ In the 2016-17 school year, there were 19,264 children attending Wisconsin public schools who met this definition.⁷ Of those, 14,888 were “doubled up.”

If a student is identified as homeless under McKinney-Vento, the school district of origin and/or current residence must provide no-cost transportation to and from school for the remainder of the school year. This alone adds

significant costs to the school district. The human cost of homelessness for the student is even greater. Even when controlling for poverty, homelessness has been proven to lead to higher rates of absenteeism and disciplinary actions and a demonstrably lower academic performance in English Language, Math, and Science.⁸ Strategy 5.1 of this plan will begin the difficult process of merging the individual-level data of those children who meet both the McKinney-Vento and HUD definitions of homelessness. This is of vital importance.

The numbers we see above are too high. They are also incomplete. The PIT Count is limited to the numbers of people that volunteers can find on a given night – people sleeping outside, in the dark, who are experienced in and sometimes incentivized to remain as hidden as possible. These PIT areas can also cover hundreds of square miles, including thick forest and inaccessible terrain. On top of that, we have a large number of Wisconsinites – how many, we cannot truly know – who are insecure in their housing and are unstably housed.

It is for all these people – these citizens of our state – that the Interagency Council on Homelessness submits its plan to prevent and end homelessness in Wisconsin.





Theme 1: Focus on the Continuum

The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness has defined “ending homelessness” as “[having] a comprehensive response in place that ensures homelessness is prevented whenever possible, or if it can’t be prevented, **it is a rare, brief, and one-time experience.**”⁹ This means that communities across Wisconsin must have the capacity to:

- Identify and engage those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
- Identify and access prevention resources so people can maintain their current housing.
- Divert people from entering the homeless services system whenever possible.
- Shelter and provide crisis services for those who do become homeless.
- Rapidly move people from the streets and shelter into housing that fits their need.
- Assist with the transition from the homeless services system first into independent living, or other subsidized housing if and only if that is necessary.

It is appropriate to view the homeless services system as a true “Continuum of Care.” Too much

attention paid to any singular aspect of the continuum at the expense of others weakens the system as a whole. As a 2011 report suggests: “Homelessness assistance should not be merely three hots and a cot, nor a promise of services only should a person remain homeless; rather, the homelessness assistance system should help people to resolve their crises, access on-going sources of support in the community, and provide basic safety net assistance such as emergency shelter and temporary rental assistance as needed.”¹⁰ Reflecting this reality, the Wisconsin Interagency Council on Homelessness recommends adopting the following strategies as a comprehensive package.

Strategy 1.1: Increase Prevention Funding

The State of Wisconsin, through the Division of Energy, Housing and Community Resources (DEHCR) at the Department of Administration, administers the Homeless Prevention Program (HPP). This is authorized under §16.303, Wis. Stats., and is intended to “make grants or loans... to persons or families of low or moderate income to defray housing costs of the person or family.” Priority is given to homeless individuals and families.

An analysis of the causes of homelessness, for those who lost their housing, showed that a temporary “income shock” was a greater factor than the cost of rent.¹¹ Correcting for that temporary setback can lead to positive results. Research done by Matthew Desmond in Milwaukee showed a decrease in evictions during the time when prevention funding was being distributed under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.¹² To stabilize a person or family in times of need, a high-functioning homeless response system should include prevention as a key piece. Those who receive prevention funds from Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) providers should also enter participants into the

HMIS system to track success rates at an individual level.

Recommendation:

- Increase Homeless Prevention Program by \$500,000 annually.

Strategy 1.2: Begin State Diversion Programming

Diversion has been called “the cornerstone of an effective community response to homelessness.”¹³ Successful diversion “prevents homelessness for people seeking shelter by helping them identify immediate alternate housing arrangements and, if necessary, connecting them with services and financial assistance to help them return to permanent housing.”¹⁴ Those in immediate need of a place to stay, rather than a looming crisis, should be targeted for diversion, if it is determined to be in their best interest.

Diversion requires resources alongside a dedicated and trained staff. Services this staff might provide include: searching for housing, providing a rental subsidy, other financial assistance, utility assistance, case management, mediation, connection to mainstream resources, or legal services.¹⁵ To measure efficacy of diversion, the participants must also be entered into the HMIS system.

Recommendations:

- Amend §16.303, Wis. Stats., and ch. Adm 89, Wis. adm. code, to identify diversion as a distinct application item in the Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP).
- Increase HPP funding by \$300,000 annually, specifically for diversion.

Strategy 1.3: Increase State Shelter Subsidy Grant

Emergency shelter is a critical piece in any community’s homeless response. Shelter must not be thought of as a long-term solution, but it does serve multiple purposes. It offers a bed and a meal

in times of crisis, it is a convenient spot for community resources to gather and provide outreach, and it offers short-term respite until more permanent housing becomes available. HMIS data from October 2016 – September 2017 shows that 90% of all homeless persons were served in emergency shelters.

The State Shelter Subsidy Grant (SSSG) was established through 1991 Wisconsin Act 39, governed by §16.308, Wis. Stats., and ch. Adm 86, Wis. adm. code. Eligible uses include renovation or expansion of existing shelter facilities, development of an existing building into a shelter, expansion of shelter services, and operating expenses. Funding has remained at nearly the same level since the program’s creation more than 25 years ago.

Recommendation:

- Increase the State Shelter Subsidy Grant funding by \$500,000 annually.

Here is an example of successful diversion:

For the past two months Alex has been living in a spare room in his cousin’s basement. He started working recently but has yet to receive his first paycheck. He stays up late watching the television loudly, and though he eats dinner with his cousin’s family, he has not helped with the cable or grocery bills. One day the two get into an argument which results in Alex being kicked out of the spare room. He shows up at a homeless shelter, claiming he has nowhere else to go. Trained diversion staff finds out about his previous living situation and offers mediation between Alex and his cousin. Though the cousin is hesitant, they eventually work out a plan where Alex will turn the TV off at a reasonable hour and will split grocery costs, and he is able to move back in. Though Alex’s housing is still not ideal, he has remained outside of the homeless system.

Strategy 1.4: Create Performance Metrics for Certain State Shelter Subsidy Grant Applications

Aside from language that regulates how much money must be spent in certain geographic areas of the state, the only evaluation criterion used to determine award amounts of the SSSG is “the number of shelter days to be provided during the year for which the grant application is submitted.” With an influx of additional state funding, this is an opportunity to create a better framework for success. Shelters should be rewarded for good case management and for providing responsible exits to permanent housing.



There are some shelters which receive large grants through the SSSG and rely upon it for a significant portion of their operating expenses. Because of the bare-bones nature of emergency shelter, especially in more rural settings, there are other shelters which use the SSSG to offset miscellaneous expenses and request it in a lower amount.

Recommendation:

- Create additional performance metrics when considering SSSG applications. These could include successful housing placements, provision of trained case management, length of stay reductions, low return rates, or connection with

employment and/or increased hours worked or wages earned.

When considering these new metrics, lawmakers should keep in mind that:

- Some shelters may have internal policies that artificially inflate or deflate these numbers
- Some SSSG recipients that operate voucher programming, especially those without shelter beds or available housing units, transition clients from expensive vouchers to cheaper shelter beds. This should not automatically be counted as a negative.
- Careful consideration must be made so those who use SSSG as a small piece of their funding do not become overburdened by reporting requirements.

Strategy 1.5: Eliminate Discrepancy within SSSG

There is an inconsistency between the administrative rule for SSSG and the statute which governs that rule. §16.308(3)(a)(1), Wis. Stats., limits the SSSG award to no more than 50% of a facility’s operating budget, while ch. Adm 86, Wis. adm. code limits the award to no more than 25% of a facility’s operating budget.

Recommendations:

- Eliminate language within ADM 86.05(2) creating an inconsistency with its underlying statute

Strategy 1.6: Increase Housing Assistance Program (HAP) Funding

The Housing Assistance Program (HAP) is authorized under §16.306, Wis. Stats., to provide grants to operate housing and associated

supportive services for the homeless. These programs are meant to facilitate the movement of homeless persons to independent living. The 2017-19 Wisconsin State Budget opened its eligibility from purely Transitional Housing (TH) to also include all housing program types. As such, it is one of the state's main housing assistance programs and underfunded at only \$300,000 per year.

Recommendation:

- Increase Housing Assistance Program funding by \$900,000 annually

Strategy 1.7: Encourage Homeless Preferences for Housing Choice Vouchers

All Public Housing Agencies (PHAs) have significant flexibility in establishing procedures and priorities for waiting lists and tenant selection, within the overall framework provided by federal law. Each PHA is required to establish an Annual Plan that describes the PHA's approach to meeting local housing needs among low- and very-low income people.¹⁶ Working with the local homeless network – particularly a Continuum of Care body – to establish a wait list preference for homeless individuals and families is one strategy available to PHAs to expand housing opportunities through the Public Housing and Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) programs.¹⁷ If there are two income-qualifying individuals on a waiting list, one of whom is living in a shelter and the other of whom is living with a family but would prefer a place of his or her own, the Council believes the best outcome for the system is for the person taking a bed in the temporary shelter to receive the voucher first.

2017 Wisconsin Act 75 permitted the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA), the state's housing agency, to implement a homeless preference on the Housing Choice Vouchers it oversees. Testimony in favor of that legislation focused on assisting people in moving from expensive Permanent Supportive

Housing (PSH) or Rapid Re-Housing (RRH) programs into more mainstream housing subsidies, if that path is required.¹⁸ The vouchers available to WHEDA are only a small slice of the total HCVs in the state.

Recommendations:

- All Public Housing Agencies that administer Public Housing and/or Housing Choice Voucher programs should work with their local Continuum of Care to adopt a homeless preference for a portion of their vouchers.

Strategy 1.8: Encourage Landlords to Accept Housing Choice Vouchers



A Housing Choice Voucher does no good if there are no places to rent that will accept it. Recognizing that for some, subsidized housing is a key point on their journey out of homelessness, the Wisconsin Interagency Council on Homelessness recommends that the legislature, the Council's member agencies, and local units of government pursue innovative approaches to encourage landlords to

accept Housing Choice Vouchers in communities where it has become an issue.

Theme 2: Case Management Makes the Difference

One of the reasons combatting homelessness on an individual level is so complicated is that the immediate problem – the need for housing – is often accompanied by other lingering and difficult personal challenges.

Major difficulties to overcome include the exhausting daily grind of searching for housing, jobs, medical assistance, government benefits, childcare, and the myriad other tasks one needs to accomplish to get back on one’s feet, all while staying in a place not meant for human habitation or non-permanent housing.

Though case management can come in many different forms, one thing is clear: it works. Successful case management has been linked to better housing outcomes, better physical and mental health, decreased abuse of drugs and alcohol, better re-integration into society, decreased costs for crisis response systems, and an overall improvement in quality of life.¹⁹ Some people may need frequent visits from case managers who intensively help manage their issues with substance abuse, mental health, and housing needs. Others may need weekly support to assist with job searches and finances. Case managers should also receive support and encouragement to adopt best practices like trauma-informed care and motivational interviewing.

One common theme the Council has heard from communities statewide is that it is difficult to fund adequate case management. Oftentimes any remaining money left from construction is spent on operational expenses such as utilities, custodial services, or nightly staffing. The Interagency Council on Homelessness recommends two solutions: First, a greater emphasis on funding case

management from government entities; second, a greater emphasis on funding case management from private benefactors. A small difference in attractiveness and amenities in a housing program may not lead to a change in client success; a small difference in case management quality and availability almost certainly will.

A SMALL DIFFERENCE IN ATTRACTIVENESS AND AMENITIES IN A HOUSING PROGRAM MAY NOT LEAD TO A CHANGE IN CLIENT SUCCESS; A SMALL DIFFERENCE IN CASE MANAGEMENT QUALITY AND AVAILABILITY ALMOST CERTAINLY WILL.

Strategy 2.1: Submit Medicaid Waiver and Pursue Other Medicaid Initiatives

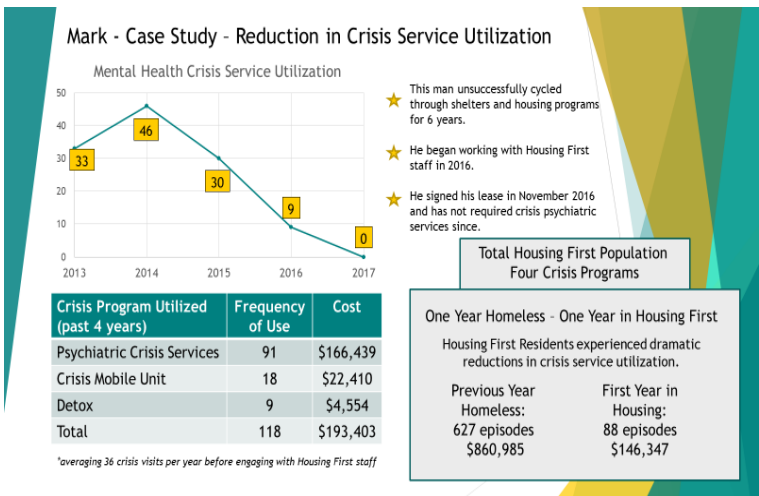
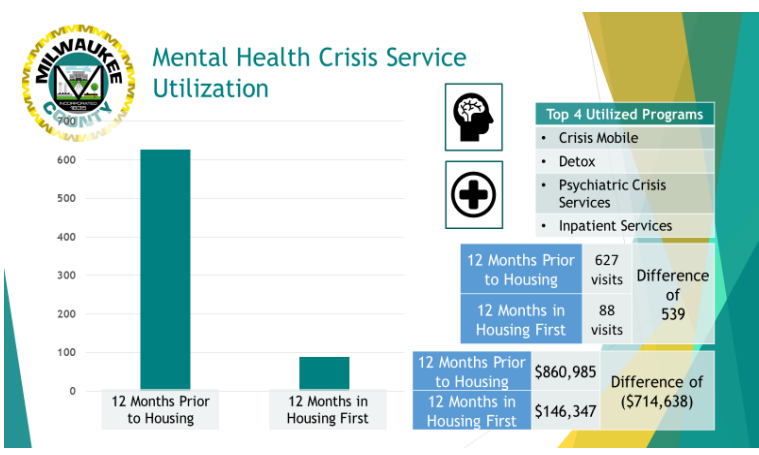
Supportive housing, when directed at the right population, can improve health outcomes and reduce Medicaid spending.²⁰ A 2015 Informational Bulletin from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), acknowledges that providing housing-related activities and services is a cost-effective approach.²¹ The Bulletin reaffirms that CMS will not pay for room and board for Medicaid members but will allow states flexibility to reimburse providers for pre-tenancy support and tenancy sustaining services. Several states have moved forward with CMS guidance through state plan amendments and waiver submissions to implement housing service supports for individuals experiencing homelessness or at risk of becoming homeless.²²

The 2017-19 state budget created a position within the Wisconsin Department of Health Services to “coordinate a federal waiver request to permit DHS

to use Medical Assistance funds for intensive care management services intended to assist homeless Medical Assistance recipients to obtain permanent housing.”²³ Approval of this waiver would be a sea change in the way Wisconsin pays for case management services.

Additional initiatives exist within Medicaid to address this population. These include, but are not limited to, increasing homelessness screening upon enrollment, prioritizing homelessness in quality initiatives, increasing the use of diagnosis codes to identify and document homelessness, continuing to support comprehensive care coordination for members, and enhancing data sharing capabilities across health and social systems.

A fantastic model for case management exists in Wisconsin through the Veterans Outreach and Recovery Program (VORP), which began as a collaboration between the Wisconsin Departments of Veterans Affairs (DVA) and Health Services (DHS). It is funded as a pilot throughout the state of Wisconsin, operating in 11 zones, at \$719,800 in GPR for Fiscal Year 2018-19. By offering person-to-person outreach and evidence-based service methods, VORP focuses on all dimensions of recovery for a veteran in need. An example case: A 60-year-old Army Veteran struggling with an addiction to alcohol and crack cocaine was referred to the VORP program by the Manitowoc County Veterans Service Office. The Veteran was transported to an Appleton hospital for a medical check, screened for housing, sheltered, fed, clothed, given hygiene products, and enrolled in a substance use treatment program. Most importantly, he was ultimately given housing through a HUD VASH voucher and connected with a full-time social worker.



Recommendations:

- The Council strongly supports efforts by DHS to submit the Medicaid waiver request and encourages CMS and DHHS to approve it rapidly. The Council should be the standard-bearer for this proposal and should work to seamlessly implement the reforms this waiver could bring.
- Explore other Medicaid initiatives to address homelessness and health.

Strategy 2.2: Increase Funding for Wisconsin Homeless Case Management Services Grant Program

The 2017-19 state budget created the Homeless Case Management Services (HCMS) Grant program within DEHCR, funded at \$500,000 in Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) funds. Under this grant program, DEHCR awards funds to provide

case management to those living in emergency shelters for: services related to financial management, services intended to ensure continuation of children’s school enrollment and attendance, services to enroll unemployed or underemployed parents in the Food Stamp Employment and Training (FSET) program or the Wisconsin Works (W-2) program, or other employment-related services. In this first award round, a number of quality applications but a limited pool of funds resulted in missed opportunities within the very competitive scoring spread.

Important investments can be made by focusing on a shelter’s mobility, not just its facility. This type of grant program assists shelters by moving people through them quickly and back into permanent housing.

Recommendation:

- Increase funding for the HCMS Grant program by \$500,000 annually.

Strategy 2.3: Expand Eligibility and Timing of Case Management

One overlooked benefit of case management is the simple act of a person supporting another person: being available to talk, offer financial counseling, or lend support when speaking with family or landlords. Those types of intervention are helpful at every point in the continuum.

Those receiving prevention dollars, whether through Emergency Assistance or other programs, should be eligible for case management assistance so future prevention payments are not needed. There is some shared eligibility and referrals between various programs within agencies, but the Council should focus on making that the norm across all systems.

Recommendation:

- Evaluate the level of case management provided from the moment one becomes precariously housed through the goal of financial and housing independence. When case management is difficult to find, grant programs should be created through legislation to make it available.

Strategy 2.4: Support Professional Development of Case Managers

Like any profession, effective case management requires training and continuing education. It is important that those working with the homeless population are aware of and adhere to industry best practices. It is even more important to be proactive and responsive when implementing a Housing First program, as participation in case management is not a requirement to maintain housing. This can lead to challenges for case managers, most notably in rural areas. It can be immensely frustrating to drive some of the large distances between program participants, only to find them unavailable or uninterested in receiving those services.

Milwaukee County, thanks in part to the emphasis they have placed on training case managers, has a 100% voluntary participation rate for their clients accepting case management. Milwaukee County’s housing retention rate has also hovered around 96%. It is not a stretch to see the two as related.

The Wisconsin Interagency Council on Homelessness recognizes that it may be difficult to afford some of the operational costs that quality case management requires – travel, office space, and continuing education.

Recommendation:

- Examine current state grants to determine whether they are flexible enough to be used for such purposes. If no such programs

exist, the state should create new grants to support professional development services.

Strategy 2.5: Support Efforts to Increase Numbers of Mental Health/Addiction Professionals

Having a mental health disorder, including substance addiction, is a serious risk factor of becoming homeless. Those who are identified as chronically homeless suffer from mental illness at an elevated rate.²⁴ While seeking input from service providers around the state, a common concern especially among rural communities was the lack of qualified mental health and addiction professionals. While the Council does not endorse any specific policy in this section, it does recognize the need to increase access to mental health and addiction counseling to benefit those experiencing homelessness and these issues at the same time, including the support for telehealth options.

Theme 3: Housing and Work

At the time of this writing, there are 105,007 available jobs through the Job Center of Wisconsin website.²⁵ The unemployment rate has sat below three percent for the ninth consecutive month.²⁶ There are more people working in Wisconsin than at any other time in our state's history. Wisconsin must, at this time especially, focus on those who are not participating in the workforce. Why aren't they? How can we connect them with work? How can we connect their work with their search for housing?

As was previously stated, the Interagency Council on Homelessness supports an approach that ensures any incident of homelessness is rare, brief, and one-time. The best way to prevent a slide back into homelessness once the temporary supports of subsidies and case management are no longer available is to prepare for a lifetime of independence through gainful employment. In addition to the need for financial self-sufficiency,

the Interagency Council on Homelessness believes that work itself has value; people experience dignity, meaning, and community through work. We agree with the US Interagency Council: "One of the most effective ways to support individuals as they move out of homelessness and into permanent housing is increasing access to meaningful and sustainable career training and employment pathways."²⁷



The State of Wisconsin offers nearly 40 different workforce development programs, using a mix of federal and state dollars, administered by eight different agencies.²⁸ However, the Wisconsin Coalition Against Homelessness has identified barriers that have historically led to a disconnect between the worlds of employment services and the homeless services.²⁹ These barriers include a focus on those whose severe disabilities pose challenges to work and a lack of knowledge of workforce development approaches and practices. While there may be some individual successes in communities throughout the state, as a general rule those two systems need to understand each other better and work together more. This must be a two-way effort.

Employers struggling to fill open jobs should take note of existing programming the state offers to

hire the economically disadvantaged. Employers should also be involved in local discussions about workforce housing needs. Housing must be seen as an essential counterpart to employment. Housing development, therefore, is economic development.

Strategy 3.1: Collect Uniform Data on Employment Needs of Homeless Individuals

The first step in tailoring a workforce development program for those experiencing or at risk of homelessness is to get a complete picture of the needs that community faces. Though many programs that use HMIS ask questions about employment, the variance in questions asked and how that data is formatted means that reliable statewide data cannot be provided.

Recommendation:

- The four COCs should adopt uniform requirements on questions HMIS providers must ask related to employment. These may include questions about: employment status, wages earned, hours worked, type of work, employment services already received, employment interests, length of employment, job satisfaction, and proximity to housing.

Strategy 3.2: Require Representation of COC Boards on Workforce Development Boards and Vice-Versa

Each Continuum of Care, through its bylaws, can select its Board of Directors. The Wisconsin DWD authorizes 11 Workforce Development boards, geographically distributed throughout the state. Representation would improve collaboration among housing networks, job agencies, and employers.

Recommendations:

- Each COC should require that a member of its Board of Directors be an appropriate

regional Workforce Development Board member.

- Each Workforce Development Board should require that it contain a representative from an appropriate COC. If this requires a change in statute or administrative rule, the Council endorses legislation to accomplish this goal.

Strategy 3.3: Emphasize Identification of Homeless Youth (18-24) and Homeless Adults as Targeted Populations within Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Strategic Plans

The current WIOA State Plan does address serving the homeless. The next version of the plan will begin being updated in Summer/Fall 2019 with a submission to the U.S. Department of Labor targeted for Spring/Summer 2020.

Recommendation:

- Throughout that planning process, the following questions should be asked and satisfactorily included³⁰:
 - Are homeless job seekers specifically and adequately represented in the State Plan's workforce development efforts?
 - Will the State Plan provide an extensive approach to employment services which involves cooperation with partner programs and agencies? Will the plan specifically encourage coordination with homeless services?
 - Will the proposed employer services help potential employers to understand and reap the benefits of hiring homeless job seekers?
 - Will workforce systems, under the proposed Plan updates, offer opportunities for homeless job seekers to increase their wages or advance their careers by emphasizing competitive employment with opportunities for development?

- Does the plan address improving employment services for youth, specifically homeless youth?



Strategy 3.4: Increase funding for Skills Enhancement Program

Skills Enhancement Grants are distributed to community action agencies under §49.265(3)(b)11, Wis. Stats. Those who participate – 92% of whom are low-income parents – are helped to overcome barriers to education, emphasizing “short-term, demand-driven, job-focused post-secondary training.”³¹ The program embraces many of the same ideas also supported by the Council: comprehensive case management, individualized training goals, and leveraging of other funds.

Recommendation:

- Increase Skills Enhancement Grant funding by \$250,000 annually.

Strategy 3.5: Use Existing Grants for Supportive Employment

The Department of Workforce Development and the Wisconsin Policy Forum have identified 38 employment and training programs in Wisconsin.³² They are authorized and, in some cases, funded by seven federal agencies, and administered and funded by eight state agencies. Each program comes with its own unique requirements for services, target customers, and number of participants. Some, like the Wisconsin Fast Forward program, can be utilized to meet the needs of homeless jobseekers. A new round of Fast Forward grants entitled “Jump Start,” was created in October of 2018 to focus specifically on soft skills training. This is exactly in line with Strategy 3.5.

Recommendation:

- Examine workforce development programs to determine whether they are written with enough flexibility to authorize homeless individuals as a target population. Where that is available, a larger emphasis should be placed on meeting the needs of these individuals.

Theme 4: Housing Access & Affordability

The first step out of homelessness is being able to find and afford a place to live. In some areas of the state the main problem is the cost of rent. In others, it is the low quality or availability of housing stock. Some communities begin with a low percentage of rental units and then couple that with a low vacancy rate. In many places, these all go hand in hand. Complicating all of this, some people are simply unable to find a landlord who will rent to them – either on their own or in tandem with a Housing Choice Voucher.

Strategy 4.1: Create Grant for Housing Navigation

The community of Balsam Lake, WI, funded a housing navigator position to work with private landlords to secure new units. Indianhead COC lead Duana Bremer has described how meaningful this position has been for their homeless response. Indianhead COC has done a good job of partnering with housing authorities and other public housing agencies, to the point where they are contacting Indianhead COC when they have an opening. However, this supply of units is not enough to meet demand. Having a housing navigator has opened new doors in the private housing market for their clients.

Those with a history of homelessness may also have a history of evictions or criminal convictions that hinder a landlord's willingness to rent to that individual. Some communities, partly because of a lack of engagement with housing providers, may have very few units available for rent. Housing navigators work with housing providers as well as clients and case managers to provide a link between available units and those who need to rent affordable housing.

Recommendation:

- Create a state grant within DEHCR, funded at \$300,000 annually, to allow for COCs to hire housing navigators throughout the state.

Strategy 4.2: Allow 16- and 17-year-olds to Enter into Housing Contracts

Minors experiencing homelessness face an additional hurdle when they are unaccompanied by a guardian: the inability to consent or contract for housing services. A handful of states around the country have eliminated this barrier through legislation.

The State of Wisconsin, through 2017 Wisconsin Act 11, has already enacted legislation that recognizes the unique needs of unaccompanied

and homeless youth. This new policy would be another step in that same direction.

Important pieces of these laws include: 1) eligibility being limited to those who are 16 or 17 years old, or unmarried and pregnant or parenting, 2) the knowledge that the youth understands the benefits, responsibilities, risks, and limits of these services and agrees to adhere to the rules and participate in recommended services, 3) the consent of the parent or legal guardian, or the implied consent if that is unavailable.³³

Recommendation:

- Adopt legislation similar to that enacted in California, Hawaii, Indiana, Missouri, Oregon, Texas, and Wyoming to allow for minors to consent for housing and related services.

Strategy 4.3: Create Grant for Minor Repairs for Affordable Housing

All federally funded housing programs, including the HOME Investment Partnerships (HOME), Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) Program, Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program and HUD Section 8 Voucher Program require all housing units to be "clean, safe and sanitary." To ensure this, all potential units for inclusion in these programs must first pass a Housing Quality Standards (HQS) inspection. The inspection, rightfully, is comprehensive and demanding, but may require landlords to make significant investments to achieve compliance. As a result, some grantees have had to disqualify multiple potential housing units due to the landlord's financial inability to make the necessary investments to achieve HQS compliance.

One of the highest barriers to affordable housing is a lack of available, quality housing units for persons of low and moderate income. The problem is especially acute in rural areas due to the age of existing dwellings coupled with a low proportion of rental units. While several funding streams exist to build and rehabilitate housing units, there is no

easily available funding source to specifically address housing rehabilitation on a large scale for this purpose.

Recommendations:

- Create a state-funded program, initially funded at \$500,000, within DEHCR to make small forgivable loans to landlords to address HQS deficiencies. By accepting this grant, each funded unit must pass HQS inspection in each year of the award period. Those who rent to low and moderate income would, after a certain time period, have the loan forgiven.

Strategy 4.4: Align and Deploy Resources of Existing State Programming for Construction/Rehabilitation of Affordable Housing Units

Many low-income housing providers are well-versed and experienced in pursuing myriad funding streams to fund their projects. The state should ensure that for all programs eligible to be used for expansion of affordable housing options, that expansion is the priority.

By prioritizing business attraction and retention, Wisconsin’s economy has made incredible gains. As was stated earlier, the next step of economic development must be housing development. A great deal of attention has been paid to talent attraction and retention, to serve Wisconsin’s workforce needs. Another pressing need – one which directly affects the workforce – is the construction and rehabilitation of new housing units.

The Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG), a federal funding stream largely administered by DEHCR, has as its primary purpose “the provision of decent affordable housing, a suitable living environment, and the expansion of economic opportunities, principally for the benefit of persons of low and moderate income.”³⁴ A local unit of government receiving CDBG dollars should

make affordable housing its top priority. Housing development is economic development.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development is expanding its Moving to Work (MTW) Demonstration Program. In collaboration with their local PHAs, municipal and county governments can apply to be a part of this expansion. MTW sites are given more flexibility within their existing funding levels to realize greater cost savings, self-sufficiency, and housing choices.³⁵

The Focus on Energy Program within the Public Service Commission’s Office of Energy Innovation is another area that could be better purposed towards affordable housing development. Funded by the state’s investor-owned utilities, it is governed by §196.374(2)(a), Wis. Stats. This is meant to reduce energy by working with eligible Wisconsin residents and businesses to install cost-effective energy efficiency and renewable energy projects. Some low-income housing developers have used this program to reduce cost during construction and ongoing operation. It should be further utilized.

THE FIRST STEP OUT OF HOMELESSNESS IS BEING ABLE TO FIND AND AFFORD A PLACE TO LIVE.

The three examples given above are a small part of a larger initiative: reimagining and repurposing state programming to develop more affordable housing units. To encourage more of these creative funding strategies, the Wisconsin Interagency Council on Homelessness recommends that the Director publish on its website a compilation of all existing programming that could be used in any way for the construction and/or rehabilitation of affordable housing.

Strategy 4.5: Explore Host Home Programs for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

Most, if not all, of the rural communities in the State of Wisconsin face significant challenges providing shelter and housing options for youth.

One strategy, identified in a report offering recommendations for the State of Florida, is to allow for the creation of “host homes.” As defined in this report, “[host] homes are community-based, flexible housing models that provide short-term shelter or transitional housing for youth age 18 and older in the home of a volunteer host family. These are voluntary arrangements rather than formal ‘placements.’ Typically, a community network works with a service provider to recruit hosts, train host families, provide case management to youth, and connect the youth to the local school district’s McKinney-Vento liaison for education support. Conflict mediation and cultural competency training for host families helps to minimize further displacement of the young person that might occur due to poor communication or failure to set boundaries.”³⁶

Recommendations:

- Examine state law to determine whether there are any barriers to implementing host homes.
- Where barriers exist, Wisconsin should adopt legislation to remove them.
- Local communities should determine whether this solution could satisfy a need.

Theme 5: Silo Breaking

The Interagency Council on Homelessness was created to encourage collaboration, data sharing, and innovative multi-agency programming to address the roots of homelessness, rather than simply managing the results.³⁷ This section specifically addresses some areas where partnerships can be strengthened.

Strategy 5.1: Begin Data Sharing between Department of Public Instruction and HMIS

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act authorized the federal Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program and is the primary piece of federal legislation related to the

education of children and youth experiencing homelessness. The 2015 passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) reauthorized this legislation. This text defines “homeless children and youths” as those who “lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.” This is a different definition than is used by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and therefore different than what is eligible for COC-funded projects that enter data into HMIS.



Currently every school district in Wisconsin is required to compile information on students they identified as homeless under McKinney-Vento. Therefore we know that, as an aggregate, there were 19,264 homeless students enrolled in Wisconsin public schools.³⁸ Just how many of these students were identified as homeless by their local COC is unknown because student-level data is collected by each district and executing data sharing between HMIS and each of the 421 school districts would be unworkable. However, the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) will begin collecting student-level data through their statewide WISEdata system. This would make some sort of data sharing agreement possible.

The Wisconsin Interagency Council on Homelessness believes the ability to compare data on which individuals were served by school districts, COC-funded homeless programs, or both,

is vital to truly understand the homeless and housing insecurity picture around the state.

Recommendation:

- Execute a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to begin this partnership.

Strategy 5.2: Build Better Relationships between Department of Corrections and COCs

The Department of Corrections operates Emergency Housing, Halfway Houses, Short Term Housing, Supplemental Housing, and Transitional Housing programs, through their Purchase of Offender Goods and Services (POGS) Treatment Programs through the Division of Community Corrections.³⁹ Emergency Housing is defined as “day to day accommodations at hotels/motels or boarding houses (30-60 days).” These programs are operated through eight regions.

“HOUSING DEVELOPMENT IS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT”

The current Emergency Housing system operates outside of any seamless, coordinated approach – the type of redundancy and potential waste that the Council was created to eliminate. The level of funding for the Emergency Housing program is inadequate to last even the full Fiscal Year. These exiting offenders have no automatic link with case management. The temporary hotel/motel stay therefore does nothing but offer a short-term solution to a long-term concern: that of finding permanent, stable housing.

An individual cannot exit the corrections system directly into the homeless services system. However, there are many ways to provide better collaboration between the two systems. A simple partnership between each POGS region and each local homeless consortium would be a significant step forward. The POGS program could pay for one night of emergency housing before a person exiting the corrections system enters the local homeless system, if necessary. The state could shift the

remainder of the funding to grants to local consortia for reserved spots for exiting offenders, which could place them in existing systems linked to case management.

Recommendation:

- Further the partnership between the DOC and COCs, and examine whether a change in funding priorities, and therefore new legislation, is needed.

Strategy 5.3: Examine Referral between State Programs and COCs

Certain programs, like the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) within the Department of Workforce Development, inquire about housing status of their participants. However, as is the case with DVR, these programs operate under varying definitions of “homelessness” and an identification of homeless does not necessarily mean that person is coordinating with the local homeless response system.

Recommendations:

- Evaluate state programs to determine which already ask about housing status, and which programs need to build in that capacity.
- Examine whether legislation is needed to require those who self-identify as “homeless” or provide information that would reasonably lead an employee to suspect that person is homeless to be referred to their local homeless response system.

Strategy 5.4: Evaluate Local Knowledge and Performance of State Programs

Some of the State of Wisconsin’s homeless response is offered through grant programs to local organizations. Another key piece is through mainstream programming available for homeless individuals. These resources include: Emergency Assistance and Wisconsin Works (W-2) through

DCF, Foodshare Employment Training (FSET), SSI Medicaid, and BadgerCare Plus through DHS, Assistance to Needy Veterans Grant (ANVG) through DVA, and the Veteran Employment Program and Vocational Rehabilitation program through DWD. It is critical that homeless individuals, those at risk of homelessness, and area service providers are aware of these resources and that the administering agencies work to make these resources easy to understand and utilize for those groups.

Recommendation:

- Create a framework for periodic review of these state programs. The review should focus on each program’s degree of participation in their local homeless response.

Theme 6: A Community Response

Homelessness is not a problem that exists in a vacuum. It affects communities in myriad ways: through their schools, businesses, daycares, jails, transportation networks, community agencies, libraries, parks systems, and just about everything else. Just as the Interagency Council on Homelessness brings together agencies that oversee many different programs combatting homelessness, it is the Council’s view that communities statewide should also form their own partnerships. The Interagency Council on Homelessness will act as a support service for cities, villages, towns, and counties that wish to deepen their understanding of homelessness and form a proactive, local response.

In addition to subdivisions of government, a good homeless response system relies on the generosity and efforts of the private sector. Faith-based organizations can often be the gold standard for good homelessness programming. There is also a growing movement across the country for hospitals, HMOs, and insurers to become more

involved in housing, as a way to affect the social determinants of health.

Strategy 6.1: Develop Model Policies for Community Meetings and Community Responses

Project RUSH (Research to Understand and Solve Homelessness) in Appleton is an innovative example of a flexible, community-driven approach. Betsy Borns, Project RUSH Manager, works in collaboration with the local homeless consortium to build partnerships and grow their programming. Thanks to this ability to work on behalf of the consortium to develop policy and build community relationships, Appleton opened a day resource center earlier this fall. New programs, inspired by best practices and experiments Project RUSH is able to discover through travels around the state and the country, are able to be embraced and adopted more quickly thanks to the flexibility this type of structure provides.

The best response to homelessness is a robust local response, with connections to federal and state resources where appropriate. It is imperative that local leaders, including all elected and appointed officials, as well as all community programs, are attuned with the local homeless response network. This includes numerous organizations being actively involved in a homeless response, like: each Aging and Disability Resource Center, shelter, housing provider, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation agency, faith-based provider, FoodShare Employment and Training center, housing developer, landlord organization, HeadStart, Community Action Agency, legal assistance group, skills program, County Veterans Service Office, Veterans Outreach Recovery Program, Supportive Services for Veteran Families representative, job center, day center, resource facility, school district, transportation network, DV shelter, community clinic, hospital, U.S. Department of Agriculture housing group, chamber of commerce, UW Extension, Tribe, tribal liaison,

fire department, law enforcement entity, food pantry, public health agency, housing authority, technical college, and W-2 program. They should know where and when to refer a person who presents as homeless. They should also have an easy-to-read and readily available contact sheet to provide to anyone who they identify as homeless or at risk of homelessness. Some communities are even creating smartphone apps to provide a more accessible, immediate outreach method.

This type of collaboration is the backbone of a successful local response.

Recommendations:

- Develop model policies for community response.
- Design and designate an award of recognition for communities that have this type of system in place.
- Work with the legislature to codify these requirements in statute.
- Determine whether to pursue legislation that gives grant preferences for communities that operate under this type of collaborative model.

Strategy 6.2: Better Link Existing Sober Living with Housing

More than a third of individuals who are homeless experience alcohol and drug problems, and up to two-thirds have a lifetime history of an alcohol or drug disorder.^{40,41,42} A lack of stable housing tends to exacerbate these addictions. Efforts to house individuals suffering from alcohol and drug problems include models embracing different levels of sobriety. Under Housing First systems, there are low barriers for entry and absolute sobriety is rarely a requirement. Another model is that of Sober Living Houses (SLHs), which are alcohol- and drug-free living environments. SLHs can look very different from one another – some charge residential fees, some have an on-site

manager, some have residents rotate through leadership positions.

A key aspect of a functioning homeless response is for housing decisions to be client-directed. Existing Sober Living Houses and other sobriety programs are viable housing options for those who have cooccurring issues of homelessness and substance abuse. The state, as well as local homeless response groups, should view sober living facilities through this lens.

Strategy 6.3: Work with Health Systems to Identify and Serve Homeless Populations

Hudson County, New Jersey, recently launched a pilot program to use rental vouchers in combination with intense support services to assist those who have co-occurring high rates of homelessness, hospital stays, and jail stays. The County will realize savings through its jail budget and will use some of that money to pay for services, along with the private dollars from the hospitals that also expect long-term savings. Identification of super-utilizers of both hospitals and jails is key and is expected to lead to greater cost savings. Milwaukee County has seen the same. 98% of their participants in the Housing First Initiative had a municipal citation during the 12 months prior to entry, but during their first 12 months in the program that number dropped to 9%. The total municipal violations dropped from 348 to 61. A client who had previously had 18 municipal violations in 2013, after receiving housing in November 2015, did not have a single violation in 2016 or 2017.

Those who are homeless access hospital services “in ways that are costly and unavoidable and do not resolve their underlying health crises.”⁴³ The American Hospital Association has identified homelessness as being linked with: elevated rates of chronic health conditions like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), infectious diseases like

pneumonia, tuberculosis, and HIV, mental health, psychotic, and affective disorders, a shortened lifespan, increased stress, developmental delays among children, and asthma.⁴⁴ To reduce costs to the health services field, it is best to solve one major underlying health concern – housing. Much of the scientific consensus revolves around the idea of “social determinants of health.” Among these, housing is one of the largest.

It may be cost-efficient to reduce health costs by reducing “homelessness and other forms of housing instability – through case management, supportive housing (supportive services combined with housing), housing subsidies or neighborhood revitalization.”⁴⁵

Many hospitals and health plans are partnering with local housing agencies to provide diverse types of housing for the needs of the homeless in their communities, such as respite and recovery housing as well as direct housing subsidies. In fact, housing is specifically identified as a category for community benefit based on a Community Needs Health Assessment (CNHA) that non-profit hospitals must perform.⁴⁶ This type of partnership is happening in Milwaukee County, and should be further explored and expanded to new markets to determine statewide viability.

In addition, simple acts like a better identification of patients who are experiencing homelessness or a housing crisis would benefit the local response. The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) recommends that hospitals recognize housing/homelessness as a “vital sign” that should be integrated into routine screening when vulnerable patients visit a hospital.⁴⁷ This can be done through consistent use of the ICD-10 (International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision) diagnosis code for homelessness (Z59.0) in medical records. Hospitals should also check given addresses against local homeless shelters. There should be consistency within and between health systems for when to appropriately use the

Z59.0 diagnosis code through adopting the same screening practices that would trigger the use of this code in medical records. Uniform data collection could lead to better data sharing in the future.

Health plans can also contribute to a reduction in homelessness in communities where they operate. Some strategies to consider would include: developing or enhancing care coordination services, screening every member upon enrollment to document homelessness, using claims data to identify homeless members and how they over- or under-utilize the health care system, partnering with community organizations and homeless/housing programs for referral, conducting a cost analysis for covering for in-lieu of services that Medicaid cannot reimburse (i.e. cell phones, rent, furniture, transportation to work, etc.), and including social determinants of health in their organization’s strategic planning.



The Wisconsin Interagency Council on Homelessness encourages health systems to partner with their local homeless coalitions to determine how to invest in mutually beneficial housing strategies. Local systems should also build partnerships with jails, in order to prioritize housing among those with high utilization rates to realize cost savings. Some lower-hanging fruit has also been identified above.

Strategy 6.4: Encourage counties to pursue Pay for Success programming

Pay for Success (PFS), sometimes known as Social Impact Bonding (SIB), is a financing mechanism that “shifts financial risk from a traditional funder – usually government – to a new investor, who provides up-front capital to scale an evidence-based social program to improve outcomes for a vulnerable population.”⁴⁸ If the outcomes are achieved, the funder repays the investment. If they are not, the funder does not.

Developing supportive housing is a common model that PFS programs are pursuing. For the most part, these are done at a county or local level: Santa Clara County (CA), Denver, Salt Lake County (UT), Los Angeles County, Cuyahoga County (OH). Shortages of supportive housing exist throughout the state, and the Wisconsin Interagency Council on Homelessness supports a county or municipal government exploring this idea further.

Other Considerations

Homelessness is exhausting: a physically and mentally taxing experience that touches almost every aspect of a person’s daily life. While at the Off the Square Club, operated in Madison by Lutheran Social Services, a teenage mother of an infant child offered how much of a struggle it is to get her feet under her when she must begin worrying at around 1pm every day where she and her child are going to spend the night.

Some of her concerns are not addressed in this plan. They were simply too large in scope to reasonably identify a solution in the timeline identified by the council. However, any plan to prevent and end homelessness needs to identify that those experiencing homelessness struggle with these issues daily. The Wisconsin Interagency Council on Homelessness asks that lawmakers and advocates continue to place a high importance on the following:

1) Transportation

For a person who is homeless where transportation options are limited, a car could mean everything from a place to sleep – albeit an inadequate one – to the path to employment and independence. The Council should remain focused on the transportation needs of the homeless, which in many cases include public transit. That public transit needs to be available from the areas where lower-cost housing is available, sometimes outside of city centers or dense neighborhoods. If an individual is using a car, an untimely mechanical problem could mean the difference between holding down a job and being unemployed again. It is important to remember that many of these homeless individuals, especially those who have been homeless for a long time, do not have the same support networks of family and friends that other citizens do.

The State of Wisconsin offers the RIDESHARE program for work commuters. Various other entities, especially Community Action Agencies, offer independent programs to assist low-income individuals with their transportation needs. These include zero interest auto loans for purchase or repair, driver’s education scholarships, financial assistance for license renewal, transit ambassador assistance, paratransit, or rides directly to work, school, social events, medical appointments, or other necessary errands.

As the Council continues to pursue policies to increase independence and stability, it must continue to recognize the role adequate transportation options and mobility have in this arena.

2) Childcare for Homeless Families

Any parent who works needs to know their child is taken care of while they are away. The same is true for parents who are searching for work. Interviews and travel take time. Those parents learning new skills in technical schools, four-year universities,

and workforce development programs have the same need as well. Though the Wisconsin Shares program does offer a Childcare Subsidy for work, education, and other activities assigned and approved by a W-2 or FSET agency, some homeless families are still unable to make ends meet. This should be a continued focus of the Council.

3) Domestic Violence and Homelessness

The HMIS data for 2017 shows that 23% of homeless individuals were victims of domestic violence. This does not necessarily mean that the domestic violence was a direct cause of their homelessness, but in many cases that is true. Domestic violence shelters are not eligible to apply for SSSG funding. They receive federal and state funding in different ways.

When domestic violence shelters are full, that adds an additional strain on traditional homeless shelters. The reverse is also true. While this plan specifically calls for an increase to SSSG, conversations must also be had about increasing the base rate of funding for shelters that provide an immediate, safe place to stay for those fleeing emergency situations of domestic violence.

4) Social Mobility

People should not be afraid to take higher-paying jobs. Wages have increased dramatically in Wisconsin. The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics calculates that the state's average weekly wage has increased by nearly 32% - \$234 more for the average worker – since 2010, well outpacing inflation.⁴⁹ Anecdotally, however, many Wisconsinites have said they are not able to take advantage of this wage growth. One strategy provided above is to focus on the Skills Enhancement Program, to help those who are underemployed increase their take-home pay. The Council should not lose focus on these people.

Another gigantic hurdle, and a potential explanation for the disconnect above, is the “benefit cliff” – the drops in benefits that occur

when earnings are increased. Sometimes benefit cliffs “are more like rolling hills rather than steep drops[,] but in either case they make you feel like you are running in place, when you think you should be getting ahead by earning more,” according to UMass Boston report.⁵⁰ The same report identifies that working families with young children, especially single parent families, can be the most susceptible to these challenges.

The Wisconsin Interagency Council on Homelessness requests that policymakers continue to focus on creating opportunity and assisting those earning low wages to increase their earned income, while being mindful of the harsh realities of benefit cliffs.

5) Access to Benefits

The social safety net includes both federal and state programs. This plan has identified that access to things like W-2, TANF Emergency Assistance, and other benefit programs can be a step on the climb out of poverty. One of the guiding principles of the Council is also that success should be measured not by the number of people entering these programs, but by the number of people responsibly leaving them. However, we should not shy away from using these existing benefits to reach those who truly need them.

Program models like SOAR help increase and accelerate the approval of applications for Supplemental Security Income (SSI)/Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI).⁵¹ It is important to remain focused on providing these services to those who truly need them. SSI/SSDI and related programs are not a panacea, and improper placement of individuals onto these programs weakens trust in the system and can limit a person's ability to reach his or her full potential. For those who do rely on assistance from the state, the Wisconsin Interagency Council on Homelessness encourages exploring and investing in models to increase access to these programs.

6) A Dual Generational Solution

There is a growing amount of interest in what is called either the “Dual-Generation” or “Two-Generation” approach. At its core is the premise that addressing both the needs of parents and children leads to a family’s increased chance of success. Combining both “high-quality early education (PreK-3rd)” along with “sectoral, cohort-based job training leading to high-skill / high-wage employment, supplemented by wrap-around family and peer support services,” will result in “long-term academic and economic success for low-income families.”⁵² These success factors can be demonstrated by better economic assets, health and well-being, and social capital.⁵³

Wisconsin was selected to participate in the demonstration project for PROMISE, a joint endeavor among many federal and state agencies with the shared goal of supporting teens in families that receive Supplemental Social Security Income (SSI) to achieve their education and career goals. Wisconsin Promise ended in September 2018, and the results from the program can be viewed at <https://promisewi.com>.

7) Education Outside of K-12

Homelessness occurs for children younger than kindergartners and students in postsecondary education. The state must engage early childhood programs like Head Start, to determine whether barriers exist for those experiencing homelessness. If that is the case, those barriers should be removed and families experiencing homelessness should receive special attention. The state must also engage with its institutions of higher education to determine whether barriers to success exist for youth, young adults, and adults experiencing homelessness, including those who are parents.

8) Partnerships with Faith Community

A person’s faith can be the driving factor behind a desire to help the disadvantaged. Religious organizations provide some of the most

meaningful, powerful, and local examples of volunteerism done right. Their help should always be encouraged, and local programs should look to strengthen those partnerships whenever possible.

Two specific examples in Wisconsin were brought to the attention of the Council, and they are worth mentioning here: the first in Dane County, the second in Waukesha County.

A collaboration between the YWCA Madison, The Road Home Dane County, and local congregations or other groups led to the Second Chance Apartment Project.⁵⁴ This program serves 16-20 families at any given time in scattered site housing. Each family is paired with a case manager and pays 30% of their income in rent to YWCA, with a portion of that going into an Individualized Development Account (IDA) which can be used to pay past debts or meet employment or educational goals. Local congregations or other groups help pay for rent, provide volunteer mentors to work with the family, provide furniture and housewares for each family, and assist with property maintenance and management.

Family Promise of Waukesha County asks for no money from the state. It is a non-profit organization that assists local homeless families and their children.⁵⁵ Participants are provided with overnight shelter, meals, and support. Fourteen host churches offer a week’s stay on a rotating basis, and fourteen support churches provide financial assistance, meals, and additional services. The Day Center provides one-on-one case management to create individual plans towards self-sufficiency, and to connect families with existing community services to find job training, employment, daycare, and affordable housing. Families generally work through the program in 45-60 days.

The Council applauds the efforts of these programs and their volunteers, and similar programs that exist in Wisconsin.

Performance Metrics:

Strategy 1.1: Increase Prevention Funding

- Reduction in evictions (Eviction Lab Data)
- Decrease in the number of persons entering Emergency Shelter (ES), Safe Haven (SH), and Transitional Housing (TH) projects with no prior enrollment in HMIS
- Decrease in the number of persons entering ES, SH, TH, and Permanent Housing (PH) projects with no prior enrollment in HMIS
- Individual success for prevention recipients, where appropriate

Strategy 1.2: Begin State Diversion Programming

- Decrease in the number of persons entering ES, SH, and TH projects with no prior enrollment in HMIS
- Decrease in the number of persons entering ES, SH, TH, and PH projects with no prior enrollment in HMIS
- Individual success for diversion recipients, where appropriate

Strategy 1.3: State Shelter Subsidy Grant Increase

- Reduction in length of time persons remain homeless
- Reduction in PIT counts of unsheltered homeless persons

Strategy 1.4: Create Performance Metrics for Certain State Shelter Subsidy Grant Applications

- Reduction in length of time persons remain homeless
- Reduction in extent to which persons who exit homelessness to permanent housing destinations return to homelessness within 6 to 12 months and 24 months
- Increase in exits to permanent housing destinations

Strategy 1.6: Increase Housing Assistance Program (HAP) Funding

- Decrease in PIT counts of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons
- Decrease in annual counts of sheltered homeless persons in HMIS
- Increase in exit to or retention of permanent housing

Strategy 2.2: Increase Funding for Wisconsin Homeless Case Management Services Grant Program

- Decrease in length of time persons remain homeless
- Decrease in extent to which persons who exit homelessness to permanent housing destinations return to homelessness within 6 to 12 months and 24 months
- Increase in {earned income, non-employment cash income, total income} for {adult system stayers during the reporting period, adult system leavers}

Strategy 3.4: Increase funding for Skills Enhancement Program

- Increase in earned income for {adult system stayers during the reporting period, adult system leavers}, for providers that partner with Skills Enhancement Program

Strategy 4.1: Create Grant for Housing Navigation

- Reduction in length of time persons remain homeless
- Increase in exits to permanent housing destinations
- Increase in exit to or retention of permanent housing

Strategy 4.3: Create Grant for minor repairs for affordable housing

- Reduction in PIT counts of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons
- Reduction in annual counts of sheltered homeless persons in HMIS

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