



2022

NORTHEAST MN CONTINUUM OF CARE

PLAN TO SERVE INDIVIDUALS & FAMILIES WITH SEVERE SERVICE NEEDS

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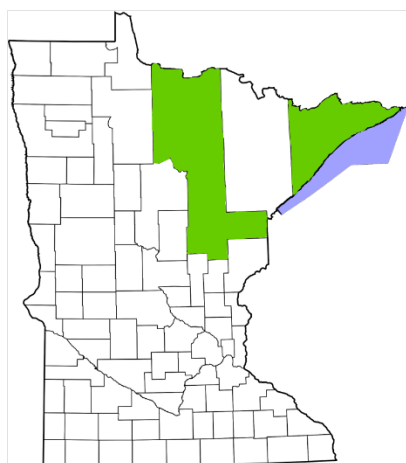
Background

About the Northeast Minnesota Continuum of Care

The Northeast Continuum of Care (NE COC) is a broad coalition of community partners that have been working, since 1997, to coordinate efforts to address homelessness in Northeast Minnesota and to meet the diverse needs of our local population.

It is governed by an elected CoC Governing Board, and there are six active committees who implement the CoC's plan to end homelessness. Over 35 organizations and individuals participate in the CoC Board and Committees.

The NE CoC Region includes 6 counties in Northeast Minnesota - Aitkin, Carlton, Cook, Itasca, Koochiching & Lake counties - and the Bois Forte, Fond du Lac, Leech Lake & Grand Portage Indian Reservations. The largest cities in this very rural region are Cloquet and Grand Rapids, with populations around 11,000.



Key organizations participate in the CoC and organize and participate in local homeless coalitions and the Minnesota Tribal Collaborative to Prevent and End Homelessness (MTC). These organizations, local coalitions, and the MTC do the critical grassroots work to develop services and housing options for homeless people; run high quality programs; coordinate resources efficiently; identify people who do not have housing; educate the public about homelessness and advocate for new resources to meet needs. Their efforts are the backbone of the accomplishments that have been made toward ending homelessness in Northeast Minnesota. CoC Coordinator funding and resources are very limited due to the low population density.

Key Responsibilities of the NE CoC

MAKE CRITICAL DECISIONS ABOUT THE ALLOCATION OF HOUSING RESOURCES IN OUR REGION



EVALUATE HOW OUR HOMELESS RESPONSE SYSTEM IS PERFORMING



IDENTIFY GAPS AND BARRIERS TO HOUSING AND SERVICES



DEVELOP COLLECTIVE STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS GAPS & BARRIERS

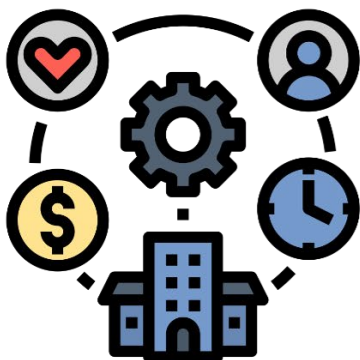
OVERSEE REGIONAL HOMELESS ASSISTANCE FUNDING

- **HUD HOMELESS ASSISTANCE FUNDS:**
 - CONTINUUM OF CARE (COC)
 - EMERGENCY SOLUTIONS GRANT (ESG)
- **MN HOUSING HOMELESS PREVENTION & ASSISTANCE FUNDS:**
 - FAMILY HOMELESS PREVENTION & ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (FHPAP) FUNDS FOR COOK, LAKE, ITASCA, & KOOCHICHING COUNTIES

CONDUCT THE ANNUAL HOMELESS POINT-IN-TIME COUNT



AN ANNUAL COUNT OF PEOPLE WHO ARE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS ON A SINGLE NIGHT IN JANUARY. THE PIT COUNT HELPS INFORM US ABOUT WHO IS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS AND WHAT THE NEEDS ARE IN OUR COMMUNITY.



OPERATE A REGIONAL COORDINATED ENTRY SYSTEM

COORDINATED ENTRY IS A PROCESS THAT HELPS CONNECT PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS TO PROGRAMS THAT MEET THEIR NEEDS FOR HOUSING AND SUPPORT.

COORDINATED ENTRY HELPS MAKE SURE ALL PEOPLE EXPERIENCING A HOUSING CRISIS HAVE FAIR AND EQUAL ACCESS TO HOUSING AND ASSISTANCE BASED ON THEIR STRENGTHS AND NEEDS.

Developing the CoC Plan

Vision

This plan builds on Heading Home Northeast, the original ten-year plan to end homelessness in this region. It builds on successful strategies that are working to prevent homelessness, to quickly house individuals and families who become homeless, to assist households to maintain their housing, and to connect people who have experienced homelessness to employment, health, and other mainstream resources. This plan documents the NE CoC's dedicated activities to reduce the number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness or with histories of unsheltered homelessness who have severe service needs.



Planning Process

To create a complete picture of the NE CoC region's homeless response system's ability to address the needs of people with severe service needs, the NE CoC gathered information from stakeholders at all levels of the Continuum of Care. Feedback was gathered from CoC board members, CoC general members and stakeholders, and persons with lived experience of homelessness.

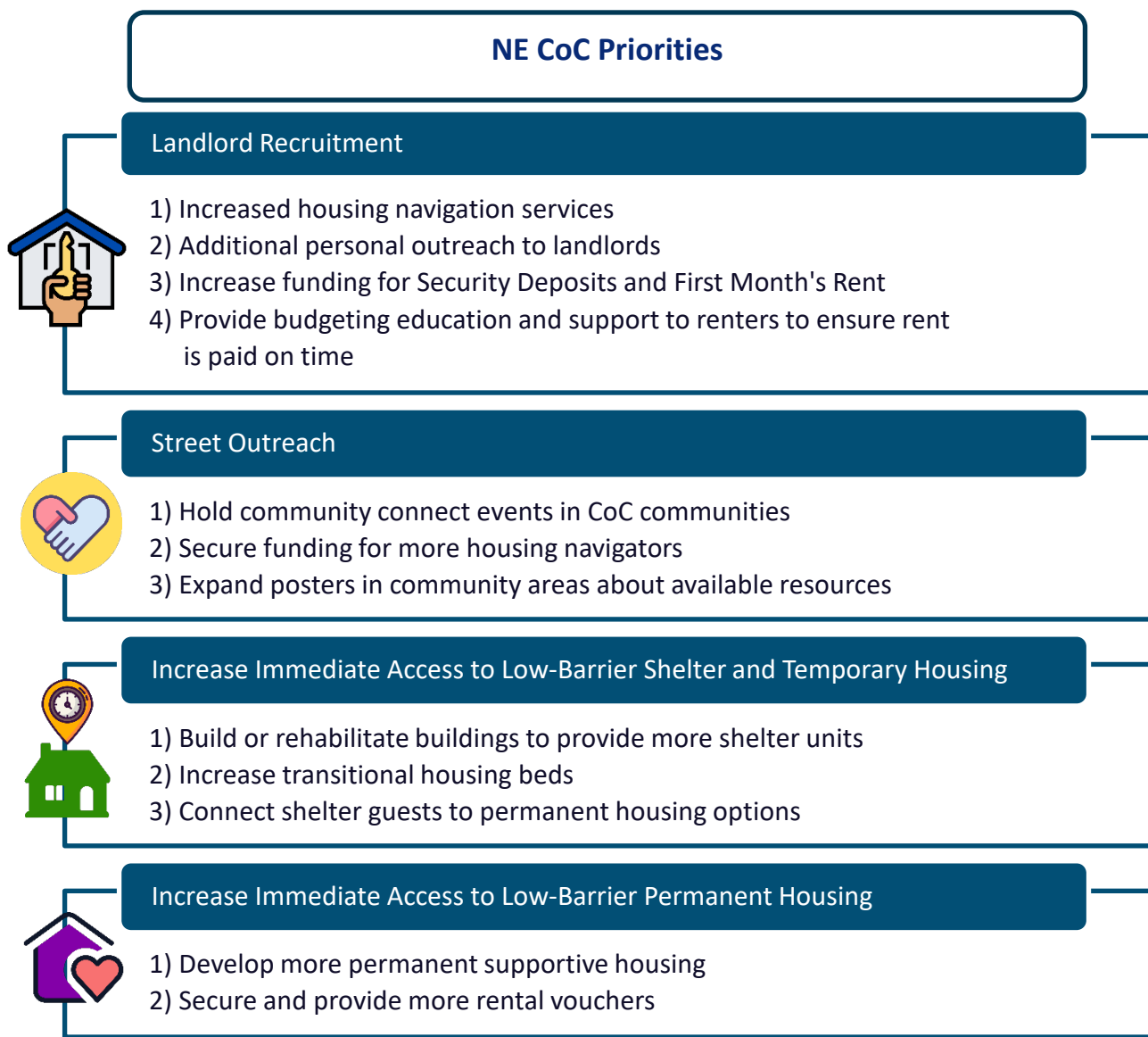
First, during a CoC Board meeting, the CoC general membership identified CoC's current strategies for outreach, low barrier emergency shelter and permanent housing, as well as gaps and disparities that exist. Information was then gathered from stakeholders and CoC members through discussions on key questions about shelter, outreach, and permanent housing. Participants were asked about current strategies and what is working well. They were asked about new initiatives or changes, and gaps and barriers.

The CoC developed an online questionnaire to collect input on priority strategies to provide responsive services to people experiencing homelessness. The questionnaire was distributed to CoC members and stakeholders. Case managers and agency staff were encouraged to engage clients in collecting this feedback through distribution of surveys. **Results indicated support for the CoC priorities listed in the chart below.**

Input was also gathered from people who have experienced homelessness in the NE CoC. CoC Coordinators shared the draft plan with information about current CoC strategies to provide outreach, shelter, and housing to unsheltered households and sought feedback on successful strategies to build on and ideas for new strategies. These individuals reviewed the plan and

provided input. Participants were invited to participate in the CoC's lived experience advisory committee and to engage in other CoC meetings to help implement and monitor the plan.

The information gathered through discussions with the CoC Governing board, CoC committees, CoC partners, and clients of CoC participating agencies informed this plan. Current strategies were identified along with areas for improvement and growth. The CoC Coordinator drafted the Plan, then the Plan underwent a period of public comment from the CoC general membership. It received approval from the CoC governing board as well as representative from the lived experience advisory group.



NE CoC Needs & Trends

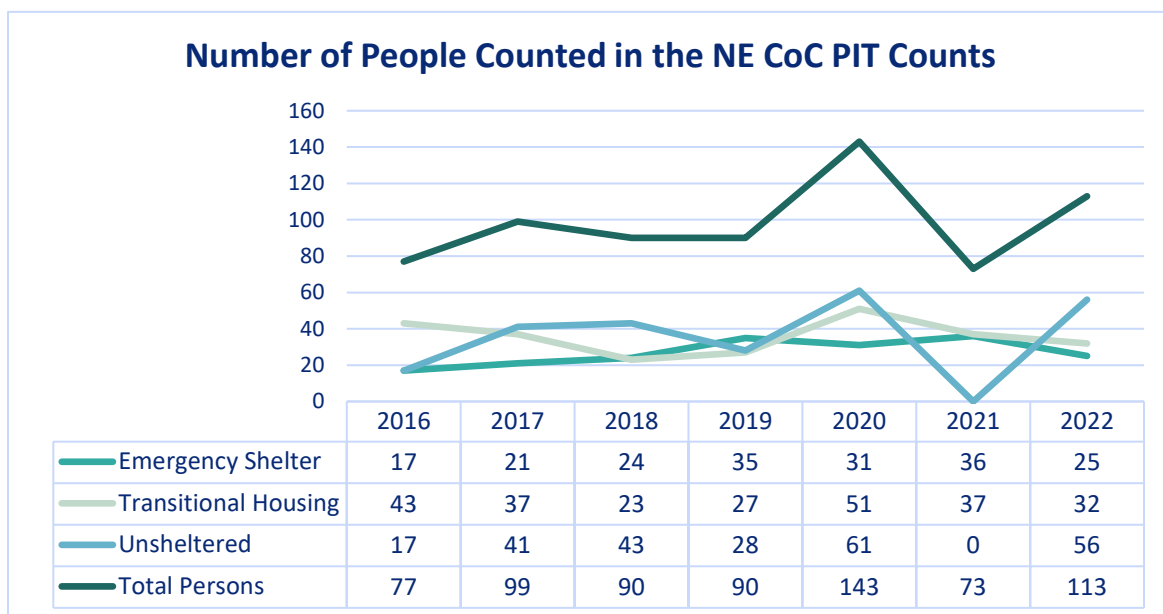
How Many People are without Housing?

Annual Homeless Point-in-Time Count

The 2022 NE CoC Point-in-Time Survey, a count of sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing homelessness on a single night in January, identified 113 people comprising 67 households as literally homeless. 25 people (22%) were in Emergency Shelters, 32 (28%) were in Transitional Housing, and 56 (50%) were Unsheltered. Overall homelessness decreased significantly from 2020 when 143 people in 95 households were counted on the night of the PIT. The percentage of people who were unsheltered increased, however, as 43% were unsheltered in the 2020 PIT.



HALF (50%) OF ALL PEOPLE
COUNTED IN THE NE CoC 2022
PIT COUNT WERE UNSHELTERED



Note: The NE CoC did not conduct an unsheltered PIT Count in 2021 due to the pandemic.

Vast rural spaces and the lack of emergency shelters in this rural area suggest that the PIT is an undercount of people without housing. Many people in our rural and tribal areas who lose housing are doubling up, living with family or friends, and sleeping on couches. In addition, the Tribes that are part of the NE CoC did not conduct their own PIT counts in 2022. When these counts are conducted in future years, the CoC will have a more accurate count of people without housing who are living in tribal areas.

Coordinated Entry Data

Coordinated Entry (CE) is a process that helps connect people experiencing homelessness to programs that meet their needs for housing and support. CE helps make sure all people experiencing a housing crisis have fair and equal access to housing and assistance based on their strengths and needs.

Through CE, people complete one common assessment and are placed on a shared list (Priority List) for local homeless programs. This helps prevent people who are in a housing crisis from having to go to multiple different agencies and fill out multiple applications to connect to homeless programs.

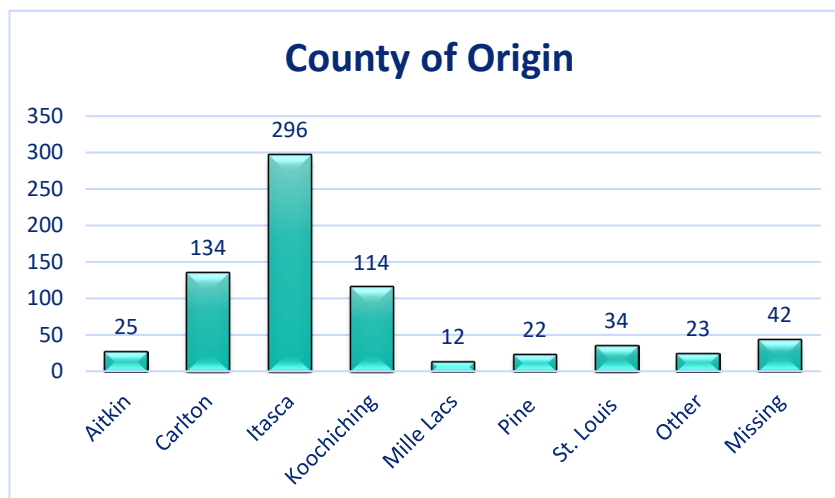
In the NE CoC, eligibility for housing programs that participate in CE includes people who are:

- Unsheltered - Living on the streets or in places not meant for habitation (like a camper or fish house without heat or water)
- Staying in emergency shelter
- At imminent risk of losing their housing within the next 14 days
- Temporarily staying with friends or family and have to leave in the next 14 days
- Leaving a domestic violence situation

There are seven nonprofit organizations and one Tribal organization, Fond du Lac Human Services, that provide CE Assessments in the NE CoC. There are 32 housing programs that accept referrals through Coordinated Entry, including one Tribal program: Fond du Lac Permanent Supportive Housing.

The number of households on the CE Priority List decreased but remains high.

- For the dates, 10/1/2021 – 9/30/2022, there were 702 households on the Priority List. For the same period the previous year, 768 households were on the List.
- The county with the highest percentage of households is Itasca (45%). Carlton has 14%, and Koochiching has 17%. Ten households from Lake County are on the list (2%).

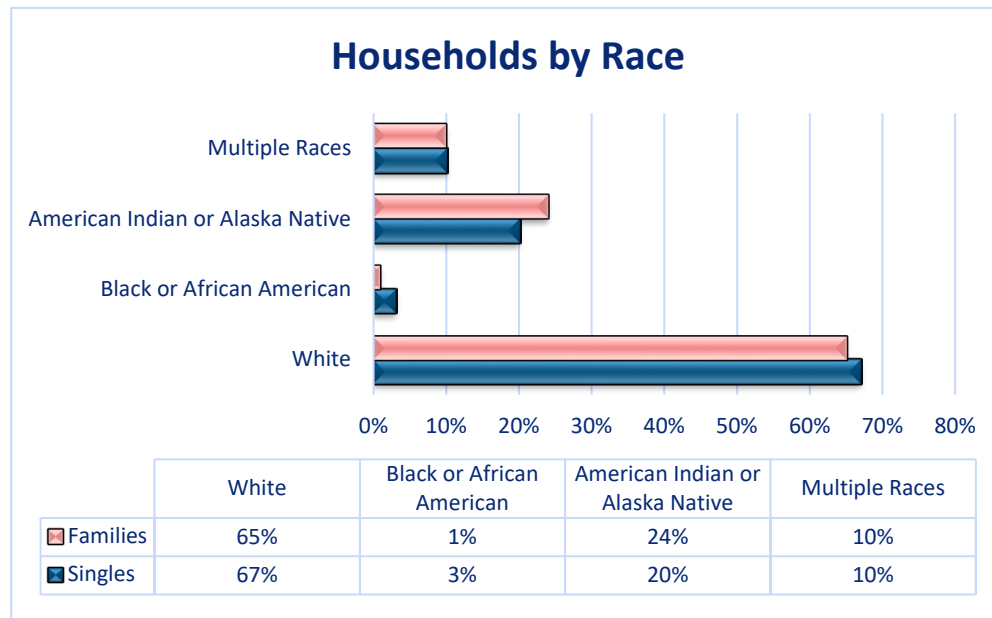


Adults without children make up the majority of households on the List.

- More of the households on the Priority List are Single Adults (adults without children) (69%). There were 487 single households on the list during this time period.

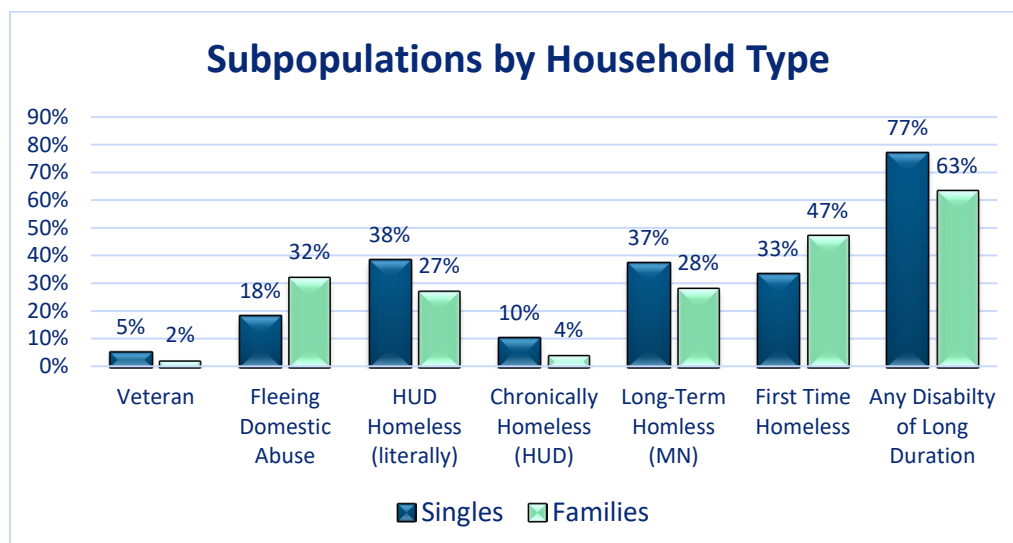
Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color are disproportionately represented on the List.

- Of singles on the Priority List, 33% were Black, American Indian, or other Persons of Color. Of families, 35% were Black, American Indian, or other Persons of Color.



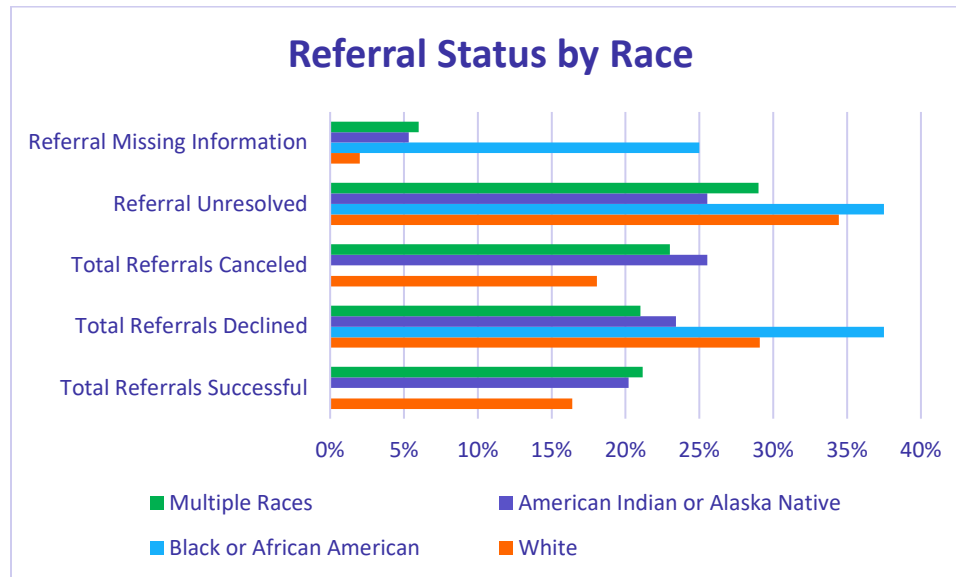
Households on the Priority List experience multiple barriers to housing stability.

- Of all households on the Priority List, 72% have a disability of long duration.
- 34% of households (239 households) meet HUD's definition of homeless.
- 34% of households (238 households) meet Minnesota's definition of long-term homeless.



Less than one in five households receive a successful referral to a housing program.

- Just 18% of the households received a successful referral to a housing program. A total of 80 referrals were successful, and families are more likely to have a success referral.
- Multiple Race and American Indian households had the highest percentage of successful referrals, at 21% and 20%.



Referrals are often unsuccessful because households cannot be reached by phone.

- The most frequent reason a referral is canceled or declined is that the client is unreachable. A total of 85 referrals were cancelled or declined for this reason – 37%.
- Other referrals were canceled or denied because the client found housing themselves or self-resolved their homelessness situation (15%) or they were ineligible for the program. (15%).



Over 1/3 (37%)
of unsuccessful Coordinated Entry
referrals in the NE CoC were due to
households being unreachable

American Indian households experienced greater challenges in receiving referrals.

- American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) households were the most likely to have their referral canceled because they are unreachable – 39%. They also had their referrals denied at a high rate because they were found ineligible – 22%.
- AI/AN households were the least likely to have their referral cancelled because they found housing or self-resolved their housing need – 6%

Over half over referrals were made for permanent housing, versus transitional housing or rapid rehousing because there were more openings for permanent housing.

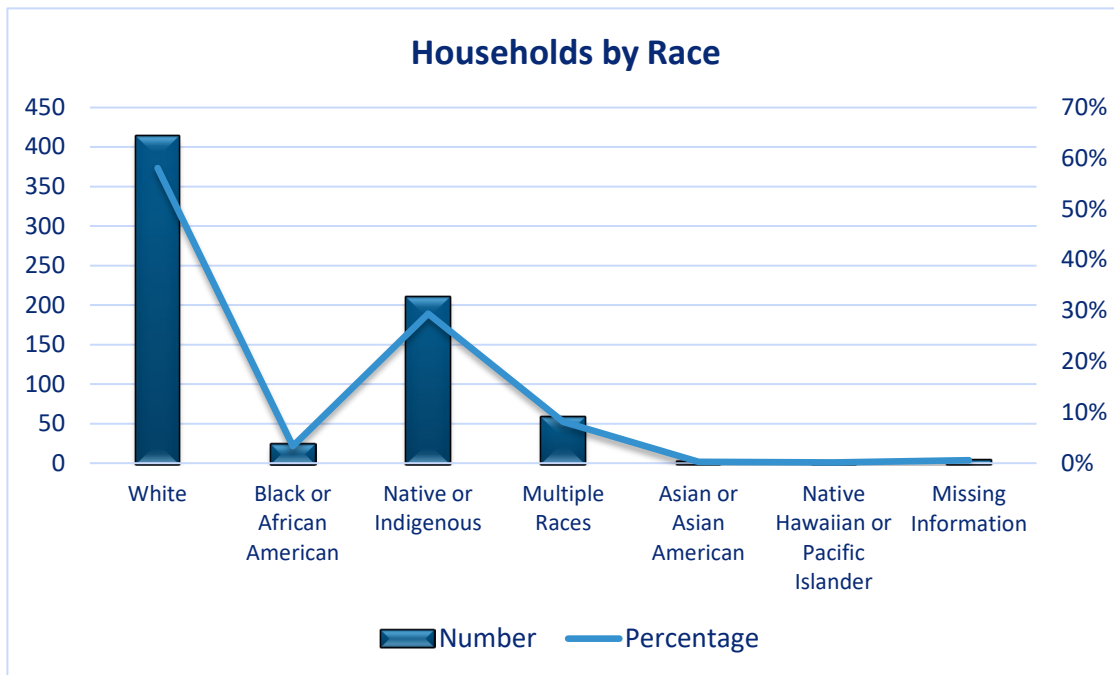
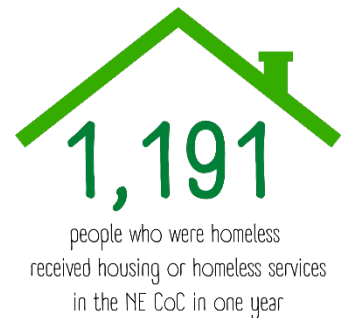
People Served in NE CoC Homeless Programs

Core Homeless Report

Organizations with HUD or State of Minnesota funding to provide services or housing to people who are homeless collect data in the Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS). The Core Report summarizes HMIS data collected by 61 programs. The following information reflects data collected from people who received services from 10/1/2021 – 9/30/2022 in the six-county region and on the areas of the Fond du Lac and Leech Lake reservations that fall within the NE region.

Demographic Data

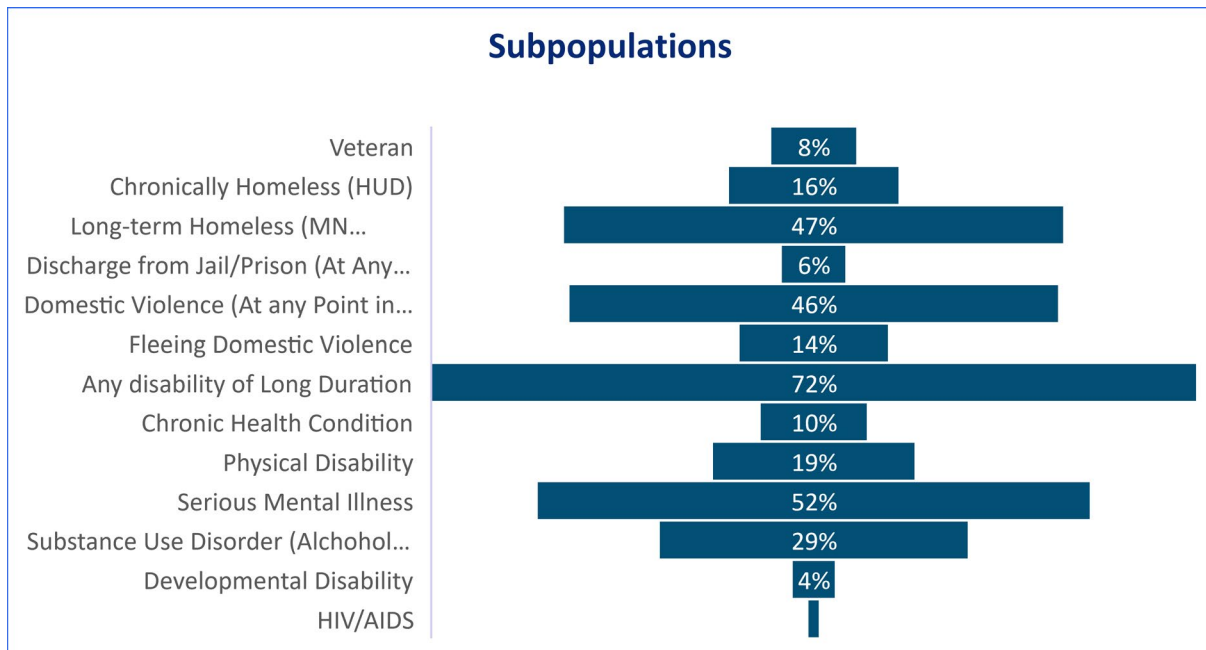
- 1,191 homeless people received housing or homeless services, including 387 children under 18.
- 711 homeless households were served.
- 32% of households were literally homeless at entry (outside, in a shelter, or in a place not meant for human habitation). Others were living in an institution, in transitional housing, or in permanent housing.



Note: In addition, 33% of households are Hispanic/Latino.

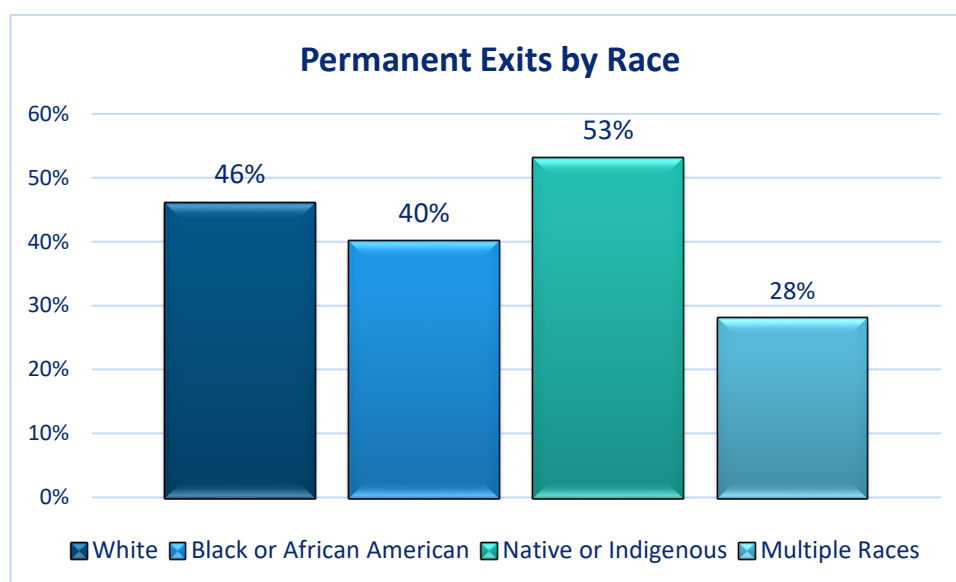
Subpopulations

- 72% of households had a disability of long duration, an increase of 4% over the previous year.



Exits to Permanent Destinations

- 429 households exited a homeless program during this time.
- 46% of households that left a homeless program (housing unit or homeless services) exited to a permanent destination. Nine percent exited to homelessness.
- Native American households had the highest rate of exits to permanent destinations.



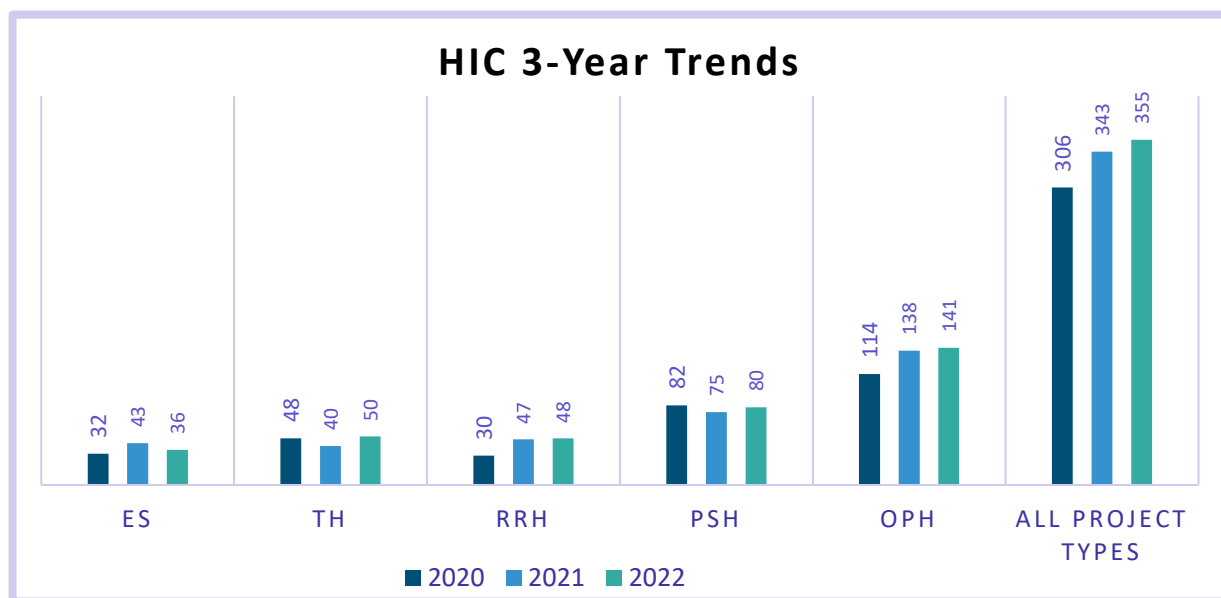
What Housing is Available for People Experiencing Homelessness?

Housing Inventory Chart

The Housing Inventory Chart (HIC) is a point-in-time inventory of provider programs that are dedicated to serving people who are homeless. There are five different program types in the NE Region: Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing, Rapid-Rehousing, Permanent Supportive Housing, and Other Permanent Housing. Overall, the number of beds designated to serve people experiencing homelessness in the NE CoC has increased by 16% from 2020 to 2021.

Project Type	NE CoC Bed Inventory		
	2020	2021	2022
Emergency Shelter (ES)	32	43	36
Transitional Housing (TH)	48	40	50
Rapid Rehousing (RRH)	30	47	48
Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)	82	75	80
Other Permanent Housing (OPH)	114	138	141
Total	306	343	355

Note: PSH is permanent housing in which housing assistance (e.g., long-term leasing or rental assistance) is paired with supportive services. OPH consists of Permanent Housing with Services (no disability required for entry) and PH – Housing Only



Strategies & Activities

The NE CoC strategies for the *CoC Plan to Serve Individuals and Families Experiencing Homelessness with Severe Service Needs* (“CoC Plan”) are categorized based on the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)’s direction in the [2022 Supplemental Notice of Funding Opportunity to Address Unsheltered Homelessness](#) (“Special NOFO”).

The CoC identified targeted strategies to provide direction toward making sure that homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring in the NE CoC region. Strategies were developed using input from the CoC Board, committees, work groups, and community members. The CoC collected information about current strategies, areas for improvement and growth, gaps and disparities, and new initiatives or changes. The strategies identified in this plan are intended to evolve based on increased understanding of local needs and evaluation of their effectiveness.



Leverage Housing Resources (Landlord Recruitment)

Current Landlord Recruitment Strategy

The CoC’s current strategy for landlord recruitment includes the following activities:

- Landlord forums – Educating landlords about available services and resources to support high barrier clients to maintain housing and to ensure risk mitigation.
- Provide higher deposits to help landlords feel more secure housing higher barrier clients
- Educate landlords about available services and prevention/rental assistance programs
- 1:1 outreach and relationship building from Case Managers
- Provide budgeting education and support to clients to ensure rent is paid on time
- Train CoC service staff to provide RentWise training prior to move in. Provide certificate to landlords.

- Landlord incentives – One-time payments to incentivize landlords to rent to persons with vouchers.
- Expand housing navigation services to assist households experiencing homelessness to find housing, advocate on their behalf with landlords, and help households move into their new homes.

The strategy has worked well to house 79 Rapid Rehousing (RRH) households in FY 2021, who stayed housed in the programs for an average of 185 days. Of households who left a RRH program, 80% exited to permanent housing. It has also worked well to house people with Emergency Housing Vouchers. As of October 2022, 12 households have been housed with an EHV, out of 15 allocated to the Koochiching Housing Authority.

Newly Implemented Practices

The NE CoC has implemented several new practices to recruit landlords within the past three years, including:

- Hosted landlord forums
- CoC outreach to local landlord associations
- Created educational/outreach materials to landlords with information about available programming
- Shared CoC program information with local rotary clubs, churches, etc.
- Outreach staff members built relationships with local churches and other groups
- Shared landlord lists with other programs
- Leveraged existing partnerships with landlords to expand number of units available for people experiencing homelessness and people using vouchers
- Expanded access to Housing Stabilization Services, a billable Medicaid service, to help clients sustain their housing and adhere to lease regulations.
- Increased availability of RRH – Short term rental assistance and deposit funds
- Addressed the need for more long-term resources. Increasing access to Housing Support through capacity building
- Expanded navigation services – 1:1 assistance to match clients with housing that best meets their needs and resources to make it sustainable.
- Secured flexible funding through the Minnesota Community Living Infrastructure (CLI) grant program. These flexible funds are available to assist people who are homeless or at risk. They are accessed through the region's Housing Specialists/Navigators and can be used for: back rent, first month's rent, security deposits, utility deposits, expungement fees.

Lessons Learned

Some lessons learned from implementing the above practices include:

- Having housing navigators on staff, who can outreach to and build relationships with landlords as part of their job function, is a strong asset in landlord engagement.
- It is critical to have flexible funds that can be utilized for moves, deposits, rent, and inspections.
- Successful landlord partnerships are locally driven, and work best when there are personal relationships between landlords and community partners.

Updating CoC Landlord Recruitment Strategy

Homeless program performance and effectiveness data is used to better understand the success of the NE CoC's landlord recruitment efforts. This includes the following data sources and measures:

- HMIS Data - Length of time between program entry and housing move-in for PH programs
- HMIS Data - Number of clients who exit programs/Coordinated Entry to rentals (non-program)
- HMIS Data - Program effectiveness in reducing returns to homelessness within one year
- Qualitative – Homeless program staff and Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) report back on number of landlords who are willing to accept program clients/clients with vouchers
- Community Needs Assessment data (CAP agencies)

To update the strategy, the CoC will identify Rapid Rehousing (RRH) and scattered-site Permanent Housing (PH) and Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) projects in the CoC that meet or exceed performance expectations for the length of time that people remain homeless and gather information from these providers to learn about their landlord recruitment strategies. These successful strategies will then be shared with other RRH and scattered-site PH/ PSH projects so they can improve landlord recruitment.

The CoC will also monitor Coordinated Entry (CE) exits to permanent housing and gather information from housing navigators who are having the highest rates of success assisting homeless households to secure housing units. Successful practices will be shared with other navigators and case managers to improve partnerships with landlords and decrease the time it takes households on the CE list to find a housing unit.

Reviewing qualitative data from Public Housing Authorities, housing program staff, and community needs assessments will help the CoC identify geographic areas where the landlord recruitment strategy should be targeted and where training of navigators, case managers, and housing program staff would be most beneficial.



Identify Households Experiencing Homelessness & Connect them to Resources (Street Outreach)

Current Street Outreach Strategies

Ensuring Street Outreach Teams are Coordinated & Outreach is Frequent

The CoC's current strategy for street outreach includes the following activities:

- The CoC has a monthly meeting for housing navigators and outreach staff to coordinate efforts. Street outreach is conducted on behalf of the community rather than any one agency.
- CoC outreach staff meet clients where they are physically, emotionally, and mentally to support them to have stable housing in the community. Outreach efforts by CoC providers include:
 - Communication with persons with lived experience to help them connect to services and to identify where other homeless persons may be located, ongoing.
 - Community Connect events are held to connect homeless persons to resources, annually.
 - Staff go to businesses/areas where persons that identify as homeless may go to provide education about services, at least monthly.
 - Emergency shelters communicate with faith communities, weekly.
 - Presence at food shelves, community dinners, fairs, etc. to distribute outreach materials, engage persons without housing and help connect them to services, weekly.
 - Collaboration with law enforcement to notify them of resources and collaborate on assisting persons they identify as homeless, ongoing.
 - Specialized outreach for youth experiencing trafficking with posters and resources at motels, rest areas, and truck stops; and making connections online, ongoing.
 - Collaboration with schools to identify youth and families at risk of or experiencing homelessness, ongoing, at least monthly.
 - Social media posts, posters in commonly accessed community areas about available resources, ongoing.

Helping People Exit Homelessness & Unsheltered Homelessness to Permanent Housing

Outreach staff and CoC providers who encounter people who are homeless or unsheltered are connected to the NE CoC's Coordinated Entry System (CES). People sleeping in unsheltered locations are assessed and prioritized for assistance in the same manner as any other person assessed through the coordinated entry process. The goal of outreach is to make connections to stable housing with the services and supports that individuals or families want, such as transportation, health care, mental health or substance abuse treatment, and access to benefits.

In the NE CoC, outreach staff do not require people to enter emergency shelter or transitional housing prior to accessing permanent housing. But they will make connections to shelter to

provide safe options while people without housing are waiting for a permanent housing opportunity. Currently 58% of unsheltered people on the NE CES list exit to permanent housing. Only 7% exit to homelessness.

Engaging Individuals & Families Who are Unsheltered and Highly Vulnerable and Connecting them to Permanent Housing

In the NE CoC, staff members providing outreach utilize a person-centered approach, focused on the individual's strengths and resources. They do not make assumptions about what a person might need. Outreach staff receive regular training in evidence-based practices, including trauma-informed care and motivational interviewing. They receive training in using culturally appropriate strategies. Outreach efforts are respectful and responsive to the beliefs and practices, sexual orientations, disability statuses, age, gender identities, cultural preferences, and linguistic needs of all individuals.

In the NE CoC, through the REAP (Racial Equity Accountability Project), we analyze homelessness data regarding racial inequities and disparities among people experiencing homelessness and tailor outreach, services, and housing to increase equity and decrease disparities. Specific measures currently used by the CoC to track progress toward preventing and eliminating disparities in the provision or outcome of homeless assistance include:

1. Percentage of Persons of Color within the homeless population compared to the overall geographic population;
2. Percentage of Persons of Color who access Coordinated Entry, PSH, TH, and RRH in the CoC; and
3. Comparison of access to shelter, housing, and services within the CoC by race and ethnicity.

Hiring People with Lived Experience

In the NE CoC, housing and service providers have hired people with lived experience of homelessness as navigators, case managers, and other direct service staff. In our rural area with little funds dedicated specifically to street outreach, these individuals with lived experience conduct many of the outreach activities, and they are skilled at meeting individuals and families “where they are at” and establishing trusting relationships. Evidence based strategies used to conduct outreach include: Motivational Interviewing, Trauma-informed Care, and Housing First.

Improve and Expand Street Outreach Strategies

To utilize data, performance, and best practices to improve and expand street outreach, the NE CoC will:

- Train all outreach workers to complete CE assessments on-site to reduce steps to accessing housing.

- Increase outreach and housing navigator staff – prioritize geographic areas with the highest numbers of unsheltered persons.
- Utilize HMIS to monitor whether persons with severe service needs are experiencing positive and equitable outcomes throughout the CoC - from street outreach to CE access to program exit. Incorporate qualitative and quantitative data points into monitoring and updating CoC strategies.
- Data points:
 - Number of people entering programs who are unsheltered (by project type)
 - Number of people engaged by street outreach who access CE
 - Percentage of people who were unsheltered at entry who had positive housing outcomes (by project type)

Connecting Street Outreach to Coordinated Entry and HMIS

To connect street outreach activities to coordinated entry or HMIS, the CoC will:

- Create new street outreach positions. Through a new Supplemental NOFO project, an outreach worker will partner with a cross-sector of community agencies, including the local police department, to identify unsheltered homeless persons and connect them to shelter and services, including CE. Outreach workers have a presence in schools, food shelves, community cafes, etc. to complete CE assessments and share information about CE, shelter, housing, and programs.
- Train all outreach workers to complete CE assessments on-site to reduce steps to accessing housing.
- Improve the ability of HMIS to track clients reached through outreach by expanding capacity of the system. Evaluate whether clients identified through outreach are accessing CE and CoC programs.
- Support outreach workers to provide transportation, access to technology, assistance with appointments, etc. to persons identified through street outreach to alleviate barriers to CE access.
- Include street outreach workers in CE Committee meetings and case consultation meetings. Involve outreach workers in referrals to programs to support warm hand offs.
- Connect high barrier clients identified through outreach to navigators to assist with connecting to CE and following the necessary steps to access housing and programs.

Incorporating New Partners in Street Outreach

To incorporate new partners in the NE CoC's outreach strategy, the CoC will:

- Conduct community outreach and education to inform community partners of available street outreach, resources, and how to access shelter and housing programs. Street outreach workers build relationships with area businesses, law enforcement, hospitals, health and behavioral health care providers, workforce, churches, schools, etc.

- Expand CE capacity through a new CE Rural Set Aside project to strengthen community partnerships and ensure communities are aware of how to access CoC programs and CE.
- Solicit public feedback on local homeless needs/solutions, including outreach, through community surveys. Distribute surveys to a broad array of community partners.
- Invite a cross-sector of community partners to participate in CoC Board and Committee meetings to inform CoC strategies.
- Target outreach to community partners based on input from persons with lived experience committee.



Increase Immediate Access to Low-Barrier Shelter & Temporary Accommodations

Improve Access to & Expand Shelter & Temporary Accommodations

To utilize data, performance, and best practices to improve access to and to expand, as necessary, low-barrier shelter and temporary accommodations, the NE CoC will:

- Continue to promote and offer training to shelter staff on person centered service, trauma-informed care, and housing first and harm reduction strategies.
- Increase outreach to rural and tribal areas to identify individuals least likely to access services.
- Build and strengthen relationships with area churches, businesses, police, and service providers to ensure they are aware of available resources and how to access them.
- Build on successful efforts to provide multiple options for shelter that align with client choice and need (hotel shelter, congregate shelter, tents/camping spaces, etc.).
- Seek and apply for funding that allows the CoC to expand availability of shelter options.
- Analyze HMIS, CE, PIT, and community needs assessment data to evaluate and monitor shelter needs and to develop and update CoC policies and priorities. Data points include:
 - Number of people who access shelter and temporary accommodations
 - Shelter bed inventory and bed utilization.
 - Demographics and subpopulations who access shelter and temporary accommodations
 - Length of time homeless by subpopulation.
 - Exit destinations by project type.
- Build and strengthen partnerships to provide and expand shelter and service options targeted toward specific subpopulations. Include partners in CoC Board and Committees to inform planning:
 - Veterans – Partner with MN Dept. of Veterans Affairs to connect unsheltered veterans to hotel vouchers through the Veterans Temporary Housing Voucher

Program for safe shelter while MN Assistance Council for Veterans provides case management and housing search and placement.

- Youth – Partner with AEOA to provide motel vouchers and support services to youth who do not feel safe or may pose a safety risk to others in congregate shelter.
- Domestic violence – Partner with local Victim Service Providers to identify needs and available resources for safe shelter for survivors and to inform CoC policies and strategies to connect survivors to shelter and programs.

New Practices Proposed in the 2022 Special NOFO

Specific new practices to support low-barrier shelter through the Special NOFO include:

- Additional motel/hotel vouchers for persons who may pose a safety threat to others in congregate shelter space or those who do not feel safe/are highly vulnerable (AEOA/KOOTASCA partnership). This program will fill critical gaps in CoC services by providing longer-term, low-barrier shelter options for persons with severe service needs while they wait to access programs/housing. Case managers will support them to meet their self-identified housing goals while in shelter.
- A new street outreach position that will partner closely with the local police dept. to identify persons in need of low-barrier shelter, connect them to available shelter options, and provide assistance to alleviate barriers to shelter access in this rural area with limited resources. This project will help inform CoC strategies to expand shelter by helping better identify unsheltered needs (HDC).
- Increased capacity of HMIS to support CoC monitoring and evaluation of needs for low barrier shelter including access to shelter, shelter bed utilization, geographic and subpopulation specific needs for shelter, number of unsheltered homeless persons who access shelter, CE, and housing programs (ICA).



Increase Immediate Access to Permanent Housing

Rapidly House Individuals & Families with Histories of Unsheltered Homelessness

To utilize data, performance, and best practices to improve and expand the CoCs ability to rapidly house, in permanent housing, individuals and families with histories of unsheltered homelessness, the NE CoC will build on successful strategies, including:

- Increase the number of permanent supportive housing beds and rapid rehousing beds. – The #1 ranked project for the Rural Set Aside is a PSH project that will operate in two

counties, providing site-based (Koochiching County) and scattered-site (Itasca County) PSH for persons with long histories of homelessness, disabilities, and high service needs.

- Support those least likely to access homeless assistance to obtain permanent housing – The #1 ranked Unsheltered Set Aside project includes a new street outreach worker who will partner with the police to identify and support unsheltered persons to connect to permanent housing. The CoC is expanding outreach through State programs to connect persons in rural and tribal areas to housing and programs.
- Improve CES – Identify, assess, refer and connect people in crisis to housing assistance and services. Increase CES capacity in rural areas through a new Rural CES grant. Through this project, the CE Manager will increase outreach to community partners, accelerate and improve the referral process, and decrease the length of time between CE access and permanent housing.
- Increase capacity to implement, monitor, and evaluate CoC strategies to rapidly house unsheltered households in permanent housing – Through the Unsheltered Set Aside Planning Grant, the CoC Coordinator will support the CoC to engage persons with lived experience, build and strengthen cross-sector partnerships including with mainstream housing and healthcare partners, and collect and analyze data to monitor and evaluate progress toward goals.
- Increase capacity of HMIS to support CoC monitoring and evaluation of successful exits to and retention of permanent housing through Rural and Unsheltered HMIS applications.
- Provide safe shelter options and support services to unsheltered households waiting to access permanent housing – A new Unsheltered Set Aside project will fill critical gaps in the homeless response system by providing hotel vouchers to safely shelter households with severe service needs while program staff support them to find permanent housing. This will allow households to connect with program staff more easily during housing search and placement.
- Case consultation – More rapidly and accurately identifying the best housing options for individuals on the CE list. Accountability to providers to implement a Housing First approach with referrals.
- Expand navigation, transition and sustaining services to provide 1:1 assistance and support to help locate and maintain housing that best meets individual needs.
- Promote and offer training for CoC program staff, including trauma-informed care, housing first, cultural understanding, conflict resolution and other topics to assist tenants with stability.
- Expand access to longer term housing subsidies and support services. Including:
 - Housing Stabilization Services (HSS) – a Medicaid benefit that provides housing transition and sustaining services to support households to obtain and maintain permanent housing.

- Housing Support – A MN program that provides room & board and services for people with disabilities and older adults who have low incomes.
- Community Living Infrastructure – A MN Dept. of Human Services grant program that provides funding for outreach, navigation, and administration to connect households to housing and services.
- Emergency Housing Vouchers
- Partner with local PHAs to connect CoC navigators and service providers to households with HCVs and other subsidies to help them obtain and maintain housing that meets their self-identified needs and choices.
- Analyze HMIS, PIT, HIC, and needs assessment data to monitor, evaluate and update strategies to rapidly house unsheltered persons in permanent housing. Data points include: Number of unsheltered persons who access programs and who exit to/maintain permanent housing (by project type); bed utilization; demographic and subpopulation data for unsheltered homeless persons; Number of unsheltered persons on the CE list who exit to permanent housing, including those who have multiple/long episodes of homelessness and who have more than one reported disabling condition; length of time unsheltered homeless persons experience homelessness by project type.



Other Strategies to End Homelessness in the NE CoC

Identify and Prioritize Households Experiencing or with Histories of Unsheltered Homelessness

Reduce Unsheltered Homelessness

Ensure Resources in the Special NOFO Reduce Unsheltered Homelessness

To ensure that resources provided with this NOFO will reduce unsheltered homelessness, the CoC will:

- Prioritize projects for funding that align with CoC priorities and strategies to reduce unsheltered homelessness and to serve households with severe service needs.
- Increase capacity of HMIS to support CoC monitoring and evaluation through Rural HMIS and Unsheltered HMIS applications.
- Analyze HMIS, PIT, and CE data to evaluate trends of unsheltered homelessness at the CoC level, county level, and for specific households served with projects funded through the Special NOFO. The CoC will communicate findings to CoC stakeholders and utilize data and community feedback to update strategies/priorities as needed.
- Evaluate projects funded through this NOFO for performance and effectiveness in supporting CoC priorities and goals to reduce unsheltered homelessness. Reallocate funding as needed to fill gaps and invest resources to expand highest-impact strategies.

Adopt Program Eligibility Processes that Reduce Unsheltered Homelessness

The NE CoC will adopt these program eligibility processes that reduce unsheltered homelessness:

- Prioritize funding for programs that comply with Housing First – Housing First reduces eligibility criteria for households seeking permanent housing.
- Prioritize households for program placement based on the CoC's written standards. Written standards prioritize households with severe service needs who have the longest histories of homelessness.
- Evaluate CoC-funded programs for performance to ensure households served meet CoC and HUD program eligibility requirements/guidelines and to monitor whether projects support systemwide strategies to reduce unsheltered homelessness.

Adopt Coordinated Entry Processes that Reduce Unsheltered Homelessness

The NE CoC will adopt CE processes that reduce unsheltered homelessness in the following ways:

- Prioritize households with the most severe service needs for programs. The CoC CE system prioritizes households that are chronically homeless. A high percentage of households experiencing chronic homelessness are unsheltered - 42% of all unsheltered persons served by a CoC program in 2021 were chronically homeless. CE also prioritizes households who have disabilities and who have experienced long and/or multiple episodes of homelessness.
- Utilize case consultation so CE assessors, navigators, and outreach workers will connect unsheltered households to shelter, mainstream housing, and mainstream benefits.
- Outreach workers will engage in CE case consultation and CE committee meetings to ensure unsheltered households identified in outreach access CE.
- Review process and prioritization policies and referrals to determine if CE programs are dedicated to those with the greatest service needs and if access to CE is truly low barrier for unsheltered and other high barrier households.

Connect People Who Are Unsheltered to Housing Resources

The NE CoC will use outreach to connect those who are unsheltered with housing resources by:

- Expanding street outreach to those who are least likely to access homeless assistance to connect them with housing resources. A new Unsheltered Set Aside project includes a street outreach worker who will partner with the police dept. to identify and support unsheltered persons to connect to permanent housing. The CoC is also expanding outreach through State funded programs to connect persons in rural and tribal areas to housing and programs.
- Building and strengthening partnerships – including with businesses, law enforcement, schools, healthcare providers, mainstream services, etc. – to ensure outreach efforts are targeted and coordinated across sectors to identify and engage unsheltered persons and connect them to resources.

- Training outreach workers to complete on-site coordinated entry assessments with unsheltered individuals to promote low barrier access to CE.
- Promote and offer training that helps outreach and other program staff to implement best practices including trauma-informed care, motivational interviewing, and housing first.
- Engage outreach staff in CE planning and in case consultation meetings.

Ensure People Who Are Unsheltered or Have Histories of Being Unsheltered Access Housing and Other Resources

Additional steps the NE CoC is taking to ensure people who are unsheltered or have histories of unsheltered homelessness can access housing and other resources in the community include:

- Increase access to identification:
 - Expand access to navigation services to support persons to obtain identification and other documentation necessary to access mainstream housing and benefits.
 - Provide assistance with fees required to obtain identification.
 - Provide transportation and assistance completing applications for identification.
 - Advocate for policy changes to improve access to identification, including expedited social security cards for persons who are homeless.
- Provide housing navigation services:
 - Expand navigation services to assist households experiencing homelessness to find housing, advocate on their behalf with landlords, and help households move into their new homes.
 - Engage navigators in CE case consultation meetings. Ensure persons on the CE list have access to navigation. Share successful strategies to engage persons who are homeless and to improve partnerships with landlords and decrease the time it takes households on the CE list to find a housing unit.
 - Foster relationships between outreach workers and navigators to improve access to navigation for unsheltered households.
 - Expand CE capacity through a Rural CE application to help bridge the gap in referrals to navigation and housing/programs.
- Provide access to health care and other supportive services:
 - Provide/promote training opportunities to outreach, navigators, and program staff on mainstream benefits.
 - Connect persons on the CE list to healthcare navigation services – CoC members are MNSure navigators and provide assistance with health insurance applications.
 - Provide warm referrals to health care and support services that align with clients' self-identified needs and goals.
 - Build and strengthen cross-sector partnerships with mainstream housing and healthcare partners to increase awareness of and access to mainstream health, housing, and services.

- Expand access to longer term support services that support housing stability – including Housing Stabilization Services and Housing Support.

Involving Individuals with Lived Experience of Homelessness in Decision-making

Outreach Efforts to Engage People with Lived Experience in a CoC Work Group

The CoC's outreach efforts to engage those with lived experience to develop a working group included:

- Ensured that the engagement was person-centered and trauma informed.
- Reached out to housing providers who have personal relationships with people with lived experience. These housing providers identified persons who would be interested in being a part of the working group and reached out to them personally.
- Defined clear expectations and roles.
- Allowed adequate time and space for workgroup members to be meaningfully engaged.
- Provided instructions and
- Provided stipends to members of the working group.

Meaningfully and Intentionally Integrating People with Lived Experience in CoC Decision-making

The NE CoC has equity as a goal and an expectation. We strive to ensure thoughtful, intentional, inclusive engagement that involves people with lived experience of homelessness throughout the decision-making process – identifying needs, brainstorming solutions, implementing programs and procedures, and evaluating the homeless response system. Some of the ways that the NE CoC integrates individuals and families experiencing homelessness include:

- Strongly encourage agencies to hire individuals with lived experience of homelessness. All shelters in the CoC have leadership with lived experience of homelessness.
- Actively recruit committee and CoC members with lived experience.
- Provides stipends to persons who participate in CoC activities.
- Create a variety of roles and opportunities for people to engage in small ways and build engagement as they find connection and stability.
- Support County Human Services to apply for funds to start lived experience work groups to inform policies and practices for accessing county benefits.
- Participates and supports with recruitment – Statewide Plan to End Homelessness. Consultants with lived experience led a statewide initiative to develop shared definitions of Housing, Health, and Racial Justice for a new statewide plan.
- Host a lived experience advisory committee

- Facilitate service staff bringing client feedback to Board and Committees to guide decision making
- Conduct surveys with clients to collect feedback and input on service delivery

Supporting Underserved Communities and Supporting Equitable Community Development.

Current Strategy to Identify Underserved Populations

The CoC's Diversity Equity and Inclusion Committee leads the current strategy to identify populations in the CoC's geography that have not been served in the homeless system at the same rate they are experiencing homelessness. The DEI Committee brings focused intention and planning to promote equity in the homeless response system. It has diverse representation and includes persons with lived experience of homelessness, tribal program staff, housing and service providers, DV providers, crisis intervention staff, and disability advocates who share a passion for advancing racial equity. The DEI Committee is currently participating in a data evaluation through the MN Racial Equity Accountability Project (REAP). This process includes collecting and evaluating quantitative and qualitative data to identify and address inequities to accessing housing/programs. As part of our regular data review processes, the CoC also analyzes data from HMIS, CE, PIT/HIC, and needs assessments to evaluate system performance, including inequities in our system, at least quarterly.

How Underserved Populations Interact with the Homeless System

Underserved communities in the CoC's geographic area interact with the homeless system in the following ways:

- American Indians represent less than 4% of the general population in NE CoC Counties (MN Compass). In 2021, 24% of all heads of household (HoH) on the NE CoC CE list were American Indian (HMIS). Over two-thirds (69%) of American Indians on the CE list exited CE without entering a CoC program in 2021 – only 12% on the CE list were housed in a CoC PH program. The rate of American Indians served by homeless programs in the CoC is higher than their rate of homelessness – 32% of all HoH who received housing and services in the CoC in 2021 were American Indian (HMIS). This is largely attributed to efforts of regional Tribes to expand/provide services directly and to engage in regional and statewide planning. The CoC engages representatives from tribal programs in planning, decision making, and CE access and case consultation. Their valuable participation is critical to inform how we serve the American Indian population.
- Persons with disabilities account for 71% of all HoH on the CE list and 68% of all persons served and housed in the CoC. In FY 2021, households who have a member with a disability faced the longest episodes of homelessness in the CoC (331 days vs. avg. of 296 days), and only 3% of this population had a PSH move-in date. The CoC is intentionally

building and strengthening relationships with representatives who have disabilities and disability advocates. The CoC is building capacity to provide services targeted to this population, including Housing Support and Housing Stabilization Services.

- Persons fleeing DV represent 16% of all HoH on the CE list and 15% of all HoH served in CoC programs. DV providers are actively engaged in CoC planning and CE case consultation to ensure DV survivors can quickly and safely access programs in the NE CoC.

Current Strategy to Provide Outreach, Engagement, and Housing Interventions to Underserved Populations

The NE CoC's current strategy to provide outreach, engagement, and housing interventions to serve populations experiencing homelessness that have not previously been served by the homeless system at the same rate they are experiencing homelessness is:

- CoC outreach, CE, and program staff meet clients where they are physically, emotionally, and mentally to support them to have stable housing in the community.
- Increase outreach to rural and tribal areas to identify individuals least likely to access services. Provide on-site CE assessments, resource applications, and warm referrals to mainstream health and services.
- Involve persons with lived experience in CoC planning through a Lived Experience Advisory Committee and engagement in CoC board and committee meetings.
- Recruit and engage representatives of populations overrepresented/underserved in homeless response system planning including victim service providers, disability advocates, veteran service providers, and tribal human service staff.
- Build and strengthen partnerships with a cross-sector of housing and service providers. - In 2021, 57 individuals representing 31 different entities participated in CoC Board meetings, including: Agency on Aging; Tribal housing & human services; persons with lived experience; housing authorities; homeless service agencies; youth providers; Veterans services; emergency shelters; corrections; disability advocates; mental health agencies; DV agencies, and the United Way.
- Prioritize projects for funding who provide culturally responsive services and who are actively working toward addressing inequities to housing access.