



HEADING HOME: MINNESOTA'S PLAN TO PREVENT AND END HOMELESSNESS



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LETTER FROM GOVERNOR DAYTON

I am pleased that *Heading Home: Minnesota's Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness* reflects public input and strong interagency collaboration among the 11 agency commissioners and staff.

I strongly believe all Minnesotans should have access to safe and stable housing and I am committed to the plan's objectives and strategies. Stable housing results in better educational outcomes for our children, a stronger workforce now and in the future, increased public safety, better health, reduced health care costs, and reduced disparities among communities.

The plan to prevent and end homelessness lays out concrete action steps for state agencies and opportunities for the state to partner with the private sector. These steps build on the progress my administration has made through bonding support for housing for Minnesotans at risk of homelessness, increased funding for the Homeless Youth Act, and rental assistance for families with school-age children and those most likely to become homeless.

Minnesotans care deeply about ending homelessness. We believe working people should be able to afford a place to live, and that people with physical or mental health needs must have a place to call home. However, there is no easy solution, and certainly state government cannot do it alone. Based on our values, both individually and collectively, we must solve the problem of homelessness together—as Minnesotans, as communities, as non-profits and businesses, and as government.

By working as a statewide team to implement this plan, Minnesota can and will solve big problems like homelessness and deliver results for Minnesotans.

Mark Dayton, Governor
State of Minnesota

LETTER FROM COMMISSIONERS TINGERTHAL AND JESSON

As co-chairs of the Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness, we are honored to present Minnesota's Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness: a plan that both builds on what has been working to end homelessness for some of Minnesota's most vulnerable people and presents new, coordinated strategies to stabilize housing for all Minnesotans, including children, who experience or are at risk of homelessness.

Over the past year, the Council has been re-formed to include Commissioners from eleven state agencies: Corrections, Education, Employment and Economic Development, Health, Higher Education, Human Rights, Human Services, Housing, Public Safety, Transportation and Veterans Affairs. These Commissioners, along with the Governor's Chief of Staff, comprise the Council, which began its work by engaging a new state director to prevent and end homelessness and drafting a new state plan.

This plan differs from previous efforts to address homelessness among Minnesotans, primarily because it establishes accountabilities for all Commissioners and their staff. In addition to a plan with a long-term vision, we asked our senior leaders and state director to bring clear actions that agencies will implement over the next two years. The plan identifies these actions and describes the results we want. We will measure these results and hold each other accountable for producing them.

The Council drew ideas for the plan and the actions to be accomplished in the next two years from a broad spectrum of stakeholders across Minnesota, as well as from work being done at the federal level and in other states. We expect to continue consulting the community and adjusting the plan as needed over the course of its implementation. The Council has adopted the actions included in the plan and committed the agencies to participating in full. The Council will continue to meet and measure our progress and report on that progress to the people of Minnesota.

We stand ready to work with our colleagues – and partners throughout the state – to make government work better for our fellow Minnesotans in greatest need. We feel privileged to be working together for a better Minnesota: a Minnesota that honors the dignity of each and maximizes the potential of all.

Lucinda Jesson, Commissioner
Department of Human Services

Mary Tingerthal, Commissioner
Minnesota Housing

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“There is nothing more important than a good, safe, secure home.”

Rosalynn Carter

Stable housing is out of reach for far too many Minnesotans. Systemic changes over the past several decades have resulted in incomes not keeping pace with the cost of housing. In addition to the more than 10,000 Minnesotans who are homeless on any given night, another 248,000 are paying more than half of their income on housing. This disconnect between incomes and the cost of housing undermines our state’s ability to improve educational outcomes for our children, build a stronger workforce, improve health, and reduce disparities. While we are aware that the full solution to homelessness, including addressing income inequality, will require the commitment of many sectors and all levels of government, this plan focuses on strategies and actions state agencies are and can be pursuing. These strategies set us on a path not only to *end* homelessness for more families and individuals, but also to *substantially prevent* homelessness, by addressing some of the most significant barriers to maintaining housing stability.

The Vision

The long-term vision of the Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness is **Housing Stability for All Minnesotans**. The Interagency Council is contributing to this overarching result by focusing on solving the most egregious form of housing instability – homelessness. The role of the Council is to lead the state in efforts to prevent and end homelessness for all Minnesotans.

What does it mean to prevent and end homelessness?

Preventing Homelessness means that families and individuals are helped to reduce their likelihood of becoming homeless and avoid crises that, without intervention, would precipitate a loss of housing.

Ending Homelessness means that if a family or individual does become homeless, we will have a crisis response system to assess their needs and quickly provide them the opportunity to access stable housing. It does **not** mean that no one will experience homelessness ever again.

Why does it matter to prevent and end homelessness?

Preventing and ending homelessness matters to Minnesota’s future. Children and youth need stable homes to succeed in school, to develop relationships with peers and community, and eventually to contribute to society as adults. Families and single adults, including Veterans, need stable homes to secure and maintain health and employment.

Preventing and ending homelessness also matters to the future financial health of our community. Homelessness is expensive. By turning expenditures on homelessness to investments in housing stability, we can both advance the well-being of Minnesotans and maximize the value of public investments in housing.

The Outcomes We Seek for Minnesotans

Our long-term objective is to prevent and end homelessness for **all** Minnesotans. We intend to decrease each year the number of all people experiencing homelessness. Toward this objective, The Interagency Council on Homelessness is prioritizing these measurable outcomes:

Ending homelessness means quickly providing opportunities to access stable housing when someone becomes homeless.

- **Prevent and End Homelessness for Families with Children and Unaccompanied Youth by 2020**

We will make preventing and ending family and child homelessness a priority focus area. While we have made progress in other populations, family and child homelessness continues to rise in our state (Wilder, 2012). We must reverse this trend now – for the future of our children and our state.

- **Finish the Job of Ending Homelessness for Veterans and for People Experiencing Chronic Homelessness by 2015**

We have already made significant progress on ending homelessness for Veterans and people with disabilities and, with the Federal government's continued investment on behalf of these populations, we could be the first state in the country to essentially "end" Veteran and chronic homelessness.

The Two-Year Action Plan

Earlier this year the Interagency Council on Homelessness requested that the State Director to Prevent and End Homelessness identify a core set of actions with the greatest potential for progress toward these objectives. The Director worked with leaders and key staff within the eleven Council agencies, as well as a broad group of community stakeholders, to create a collective two-year action plan. To guide the development of the action plan, the Council identified nine areas of opportunity that hold the greatest potential to create change.

These guiding "levers" are:

- Prevent homelessness, especially at transition points of youth and adult systems of care
- Reduce barriers and increase access to critical mainstream programs and services
- Improve the coordination and compatibility of existing resources
- Improve targeting of existing resources to ensure they are most effective
- Improve the quality and access to data to drive policy and better service delivery
- Reduce disparities through culturally responsible actions and approaches
- Increase investments in what we know works
- Align with and build on our work with Federal, local and tribal plans to end homelessness
- Increase public education, awareness and engagement

The Strategies and Actions

Using these levers as guides, The Minnesota Interagency Council has identified twelve strategies and associated actions that the State can take that will have the biggest impact on preventing and ending homelessness for Minnesota families and individuals over the next two years.

- 1. Because stable housing is out of reach for far too many Minnesotans...**

We will pursue **increased investments in affordable housing and rental assistance** in order to assist Minnesota families and individuals trying to afford a safe place to call home.
- 2. Because children and youth make up nearly one-half of all people experiencing homelessness in Minnesota and homelessness has especially detrimental and long-term impacts on children...**

We will create **new supportive housing opportunities** for the most vulnerable families and provide them with the support necessary to maintain their housing and ensure that the developmental needs of young children are met.
- 3. Because a decent paying job is the best defense against homelessness...**

We will **evaluate current workforce training and employment programs** to assess and improve access to these programs with the goal of increasing incomes for adults and youth experiencing or at risk of homelessness. We will **identify and address common risk factors of job seekers** who are homeless, such as a lack of transportation and/or child care. We will **increase identification, outreach and engagement with students who are experiencing homelessness while pursuing higher education** to increase the likelihood of graduation.
- 4. Because we know that many people experiencing homelessness have difficulty accessing existing resources, such as food support, primary health care, early childhood programs, and childcare...**

We will **identify and assess publicly-funded income, health and social services that can help families and individuals avoid homelessness**. These programs will be reviewed for capacity, eligibility, and other potential barriers that may exclude or make access difficult for people without stable housing.
- 5. Because we believe that housing stability is critical to a person's health...**

We will **maximize the use of health care funding and services to promote improved health outcomes** through stable housing for people with disabilities experiencing homelessness.
- 6. Because people involved in the correctional system are more likely to return to that system when they do not have stable housing...**

We will work with corrections agencies and community providers to facilitate access to stable housing for offenders supervised in the community who are most at-risk of homelessness in order to **increase the effectiveness of existing interventions**.

7. Because we are poised to end Veterans homelessness in this state...

We will aggressively focus on finishing the job by **ending homelessness for Veterans on a Veteran-by-Veteran basis**. Collaboration between the VA and other homeless service providers will ensure that each Veteran experiencing homelessness has the tools they need to become stably housed.

8. Because at-risk young people emerging into adulthood are highly vulnerable to becoming homeless...

We will focus on **improving the transitions** young people face when they leave foster care, juvenile corrections, or other systems, by identifying those youth most likely to become homeless. We will connect these youth to critical, holistic services with the goal of ensuring long-term stability and avoiding negative outcomes, including sexual exploitation.

9. Because homeless and highly mobile students are at an enormous academic disadvantage...

We will work with local school districts to **identify homeless and highly mobile students and connect them and their families with services**. We will train school liaisons, increase access to resources where needed, and require formal connections with local homeless service collaboratives.

10. Because the racial disparities represented among people experiencing homelessness are unacceptable and undermine all other efforts to reduce disparities and close the achievement gap...

We will, in partnership with culturally specific communities, including Tribal Nations, **prioritize funding** for efforts most successful at improving housing stability in communities disproportionately impacted by homelessness.

11. Because we must use limited resources in the most effective way possible...

We will improve our ability to provide the right services at the right time for families and individuals experiencing homelessness. We will work with local communities throughout Minnesota to **develop a coordinated assessment** process and tools.

12. Because high quality data drives better planning, policy and results...

We will create an **Ending Homelessness dashboard** that is updated regularly and linked to this plan. To do this, we will strengthen Minnesota's Homeless Management Information System and homeless point-in-time counts, and connect these data sources with statewide mainstream systems. We will work to **integrate data systems** that pull data for assessment, research, and evaluation.

In adopting this plan, The Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness commits our agencies to working together to implement these twelve strategies and their accompanying actions (found in detail in the body of the report). We know we cannot do this alone and we look forward to working with our local government, community, philanthropic, and private sector partners to ensure that all Minnesotans have a place to call home.