

Heading Home: Planning to End Homelessness in Southwest Minnesota

Homelessness in Southwestern MN

According to most recent count of homeless persons, nearly 200 people are homeless on an average night in the 18-county area of southwest Minnesota: 50 single adults, 39 families with children, and 4 unaccompanied youth. Outside the Twin Cities metro area, 28% of homeless men are veterans and 61% have a chronic health problem. Fifty-seven percent of homeless adults in southwestern Minnesota have children with them.



In southwest Minnesota, homeless persons don't sleep in boxes on streets; they instead sleep in vehicles, hunting shacks, storage facilities, tents, doubled-up with others, on porches, in jails, emergency rooms, and in parks. One family, John and Tina and their two children, was living in an apartment in southwest Minnesota. John was working, and Tina was on bedrest due to complications in her pregnancy. When John was laid off due to his company downsizing, they went from self-sustaining to poverty in a matter of weeks. John had difficulty finding employment, and they couldn't pay their rent. After they were evicted from their apartment, they stayed with a friend for a few nights because they didn't know where else to go. Homelessness programs through the local community action agency assisted them with their rent for two months. John found employment and they were back on track, their housing stabilized.

Bird's Eye View: [Heading Home MN](#), the State's Plan to End Long-Term Homelessness

In March 2004, a workgroup established by the legislature at the request of Governor Tim Pawlenty completed a state plan to end long-term homelessness by 2010. The plan calls for multi-disciplinary (housing, human services, corrections), multi-sector (government, business, nonprofit), and multi-jurisdictional (federal, state and local) strategies to address long-term homelessness. In June 2007, the plan was recalibrated to reflect the experience of three years of implementation.

The goal is to provide housing and appropriate support services to those experiencing long-term homelessness – single adults, unaccompanied youth and families with children – so they can be successfully housed over the long-term. The strategy is to create 4,000 units of permanent supportive housing – affordable housing with coordinated services designed to keep families housed. In addition, emphasis was placed on preventing homelessness for families and individuals.

The Department of Human Services, MN Housing Finance Agency, MN Department of Corrections and foundations have prioritized projects that provide permanent supportive housing for long-term homelessness. Local services agencies, landlords, housing developers, businesses, county agencies, and philanthropy all play a role in coordinating and leveraging resources to fund and support cost-effective supportive housing resulting in improved outcomes and efficient use of public dollars.

The Local Strategy: [Heading Home Southwest Minnesota Plan to End Homelessness](#)

In Southwestern Minnesota, our strategy in ending long term homelessness is to:

- **Make Effective Use of Resources.** Knowing what we have and what we need helps us avoid duplicating efforts and provides cost effective and better outcomes in fighting homelessness.
- **Take Control of Rural Homelessness.** Gaining knowledge about our own communities' housing needs helps us to create effective, local solutions.
- **Build a Strong Regional Voice.** Joining together, we can speak with authority to legislators, state agencies, and large foundations regarding the housing and service needs of our region.
- **Ensure Accountability for Goals.** Creating a public plan with many local agencies helps us to identify the roles we all can play in ending homelessness for our neighbors.
- **Become a Strong Partner with other Regions in Minnesota.** Heading Home Plans are being created or implemented to cover the entire state, including regional and city plans.

Our Solution in Southwestern MN

Emergency services like detox centers, emergency rooms, and law enforcement facilities are often used to provide immediate reprieve for homeless families and individuals. Emergency services are extremely expensive for taxpayers and they do nothing to improve the longer-term housing situation of the homeless households assisted.

In order to make effective use of resources to take control of rural homelessness, we are implementing three major initiatives. These three methods have shown to be cost-effective and successful strategies to end homelessness, resulting in better outcomes for homeless households and savings for local governments: homelessness prevention, rapid re-housing, and permanent supportive housing.

1. Homelessness Prevention

Preventing homelessness by assisting people to keep their housing is the most cost-effective method of avoiding the trauma and instability of homelessness. In Southwest MN, over 300 households per year maintain their housing through homelessness prevention services, including temporary rent and mortgage assistance, first month's rent and deposit, utility assistance, and other emergency. These programs are coordinated by Southwestern Minnesota Opportunity Council, Heartland Community Action, Western Community Action, and Prairie Five CAC. In addition, thousands of households per year free up money for housing payments and other essentials by accessing their local food shelf.

2. Rapid Re-housing

Providing effective housing search and placement services help homeless people find affordable private real estate options. Transitional housing programs with services and budget counseling, limited-term rental assistance for individuals on waiting lists for housing subsidies, and advocacy to landlords help over 250 households to quickly regain control of their housing situation and build long-term stability in the private market. Community action agencies and mental health centers and teams provide these essential services.

3. Permanent Supportive Housing

Permanent affordable housing combined with supportive services designed to increase housing stability, well-being and independence of persistently homeless people. 95% of formerly homeless families living in permanent supportive housing are stabilized housed one year later and 71% two years after moving into supportive housing. When employment services are provided in supportive housing, there are increases of 50% in earned income of tenants and increases of 40% in the rate of employment.

Supportive housing is proven to help people who are persistently homeless find stability in a home of their own. Supportive housing's combination of permanent, affordable housing and available services works well for people who face the most complex challenges—people who are not only homeless, but who also have very low incomes and serious, persistent issues that may include substance use, mental illness, and HIV/AIDS.

Be part of the Solution

To Support the Heading Home Plan, request a draft copy, or suggest changes to the Plan, please contact Jennifer Schuller, Southwest CoC Coordinator at jschuller@swmhp.org or 507-836-8673 x409. Remember, the plan is just the beginning. The plan will be finalized in Summer 2008 and work will begin to end homelessness in Southwest Minnesota. To stay involved after the plan, ask Jennifer or any CoC member about opportunities in your community.



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