

Achieving Housing Stability Together

Opportunities for Partnership between Public Housing Agencies and Heading Home: Minnesota's Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness

Public Housing Agencies (PHAs) – including housing and redevelopment agencies (HRAs), community development agencies (CDAs), economic development agencies (EDAs), and related entities – provide critical services to thousands of vulnerable, low-income, and disabled Minnesotans. For many of these Minnesotans, housing stability would be unlikely or unattainable without the public housing, rental assistance, or other supports delivered by PHAs. PHA roles are not limited to the housing they directly provide, but also include supporting and incubating new housing development opportunities and serving as a community focal point for affordable housing issues. At the same time, PHAs typically face significant and often growing pressures, in terms of demand on available resources, multiple competing priorities, complex program rules and administrative requirements, and financial and performance incentives that can often impede the kind of innovation that PHAs strive to bring to their work.

Minnesota's homeless response system – which includes private nonprofit organizations and public agencies at every level of government – is currently organizing itself in a new way to make progress on a problem often regarded as intractable. Today, over 9,000 Minnesotans experience homelessness on any given night, and many more are at significant risk of homelessness.¹ Contrary to common perceptions, families and children make up the largest segment of this population. While this number is large, as of October 2015, the statewide count of people experiencing homelessness had decreased 12 percent since 2014, the first drop since 2011. The decreases are attributed in part to the strategic use of available resources, and new systems being established across the state for connecting each person or family experiencing homelessness with the specific resources needed to end their homelessness.

In December 2013, the Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness (MICH) adopted *Heading Home: Minnesota's Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness*. The Council consists of the heads of 11 State agencies, Governor Mark Dayton's office, and the Metropolitan Council. MICH guides implementation of this plan, which identifies specific strategies across eight cross-cutting priorities and four population-specific goals. To achieve a lasting and sustained reduction in homelessness in Minnesota, MICH recognizes all available resources – not just those specifically focused on homelessness – must be playing the largest role they can.

To that end, this document aims to identify a number of opportunities for greater partnership between PHAs and the homeless response system that would allow for existing programs, within existing authority, to have an even greater impact on homelessness in Minnesota. Rather than a prescriptive additional set of requirements, these six Opportunity Areas are intended as a range of options that PHAs in Minnesota can contemplate implementing in partnership with the homeless response system.

¹ http://mnhomeless.org/pdfs/2015_homeless-counts-fact-sheet.pdf

Opportunity Area 1: Engaging and Partnering with Continuum of Care (CoC) Groups

All PHA commitments to ending homelessness are enhanced when done in partnership with other funder groups, particularly local Continuum of Care groups, even if the PHA does not manage specific homeless assistance programs. PHAs don't always think of themselves as "funders" but when allocating resources for a specific use like allocating a number of housing vouchers for a new permanent supportive housing project, that's exactly the role they take on. Planning and funding collaborations provides assurances to PHAs for resources invested, ensures projects are fully-funded and aligned with community priorities and plans to end homelessness. Contact information for each CoC is listed in Appendix A.

STRATEGIES

Provide cross training between PHAs and COCs.

Participate in COC planning process.

Attend or host annual (or more frequent) meetings with COC Coordinators and PHA directors to support communication, planning and partnership efforts.

PHA BENEFITS

Increase PHA understanding of COC system and overall homeless service needs in local community.

Increase COC understanding of PHA structure and decision making authority and role in supporting housing stability for all in local community.

HOW TO/NEXT STEPS

[Identify the continuum of care in your jurisdiction and contact the COC Coordinator](#)

- Attend COC meeting.
- Invite the COC Coordinator to an HRA meeting.
- Invite COC Coordinators to MN NAHRO meetings and conferences
- Participate in "coordinated assessment" discussions and planning.

[Learn more strategies to support collaboration and partnership with COCs.](#)

[Dara Lee, Executive Director of Clay County HRA](#) already partnering with her local CoC.

The HRA actively participates in the monthly COC meetings as well as including participates on in the Coordinated Entry System (CES) Governance and CES Implementation Committees. As a result of participation and engagement with the COC, the; Clay County HRA does the following:

- Actively works to identify, clarify and adjust policies to make programs more accessible;
 - Has adopted a homeless preference which includes transitional housing participants.
- Is a willing partner in seeking and administering new funding opportunities to expand homeless services and resources.
- Only uses CES as the only for entrance into the HRA's homeless designated units (both site and voucher based).

Opportunity Area 2: Building capacity for population-specific programs

When offered by HUD, PHAs can choose to apply for special purpose vouchers targeted to specific populations experiencing homelessness (example: Family Unification Program). PHAs can also leverage resources like Continuum of Care Grants, Community Development Block Grants, and Emergency Solutions Grants programs to provide support services like case management services to project based buildings.

Preferences, Screening and Eligibility: PHAs can establish a local preference to help people who have been homeless and/or have special needs reach the top of their waitlists, and can establish policies and practices that take into account factors in a person's life that show they are getting back on track. The goal of effective screening is determining a reasonable likelihood that an applicant can comply with a standard public housing lease. Rigid requirements for rental housing history or absence of criminal history can exclude applicants who could have successful tenancies.

Eviction Prevention: Although necessary in appropriate cases, evictions from public housing cost money and staff time; and can leave families with little or no housing alternatives. Evictions can be especially destabilizing events for families with children. There are many ways PHAs might attempt to lower eviction rates while protecting the safety or well-being of all tenants.

STRATEGIES

Set preferences to prioritize homeless households.

Implement MICH Foundational Service Practices (FSP).

Adopt practices that are consistent with the HUD Fair Housing memo on tenant screening based on criminal histories .

Connect tenants at risk of eviction to homeless prevention resources through counties, FHPAP, and CoC.

PHA BENEFITS

Established preferences increase access to housing programs for applicants experiencing homelessness.

Implementation of FSP decreases barriers to access.

Expands housing opportunities to individuals experiencing homelessness with a criminal history.

Promotes Fair Housing.

HOW TO/NEXT STEPS

[Review HUD's Toolkit which offers a framework for the adoption of a homeless preference.](#)

[Invite MICH representative to discuss implementation of the FSPs.](#)

[Review HUD's guidance on use of criminal records.](#)

[Review provisions in regulations on discretionary vs. mandatory denials and terminations.](#)

Make county, FHPAP, and CoC contacts.

Homeless Preference Established

Public Housing Authorities with an established homeless preference for housing choice vouchers include Minneapolis Public Housing, Plymouth Housing and Redevelopment Authority and the Southeastern Minnesota Multi-County Housing and Redevelopment Authority.

Opportunity Area 3: Expanding Landlord Recruitment and Retention

Identifying, engaging, and encouraging landlords to rent to people experiencing homelessness can help address the barriers household may encounter when searching and attempting to utilize a voucher. Additionally, this strategy also supports creating housing options and fully utilizing (leasing) all available vouchers, to assist eligible individuals and families who need them.

STRATEGIES

Run a consistent, fair HCV program that balances tenant rights and accountability, while being responsive to the concerns of owners, who are necessary partners.

Partner with organizations to provide tenant readiness certifications and mobility counseling.

Create a statewide resource to play an intermediary between landlord and housing/homeless system.

Partner with organizations to leverage tenant loan fund, incentive and/or risk mitigation program to reduce landlord financial risks.

Promote the availability of support for formerly homeless tenants and homeless prevention services.

PHA BENEFITS

Increases number of informed landlords who are willing to accept households with challenging barriers.

Improves voucher portability and utilization and choice.

Allows NAHRO to stay ahead of statewide trends regarding housing stability once voucher is accepted, landlord needs and housing options gaps in the rental market.

HOW TO/NEXT STEPS

[Learn from other communities highlighted in HUD's Landlord Recruitment and Engagement Resource Document.](#)

[Contact Dominic Mitchell with St. Paul PHA to learn more about landlord recruitment, establishing a landlord advisory group and providing annual opportunities to hear their concerns, provide HUD and local updates and funding opportunities.](#)

[Strategize with your COC on landlord engagement, service partnerships and responses to the needs of landlords.](#)

[Set up appointment with Jennifer Keogh to learn more about the Metropolitan Community Choice Program](#)

St. Paul PHA Landlord Resources

St. Paul PHA offers a free orientation session to new and existing Section 8 / Housing Choice Voucher landlords to introduce the PHA, the program and resources available to support the partnership.

Metropolitan Community Choice Program

The Met Council HRA assists families with Housing Choice Vouchers find housing in areas of opportunity by hiring Mobility Counselors as staff to help with housing search, transition into unit and support to participating landlords by providing

- Direct contact to address any immediate concerns
- Timely HRA rent payments
- Damage deposits ready at lease signing.

Opportunity Area 4: Increasing Housing Stability with Services and Opportunities

Once families are housed, PHAs can work to help ensure that participants have the supports they need to remain stably housed. To the extent possible, the provision of supportive services should be customized with the needs of tenants in mind. Supportive services are intended to help ensure housing stability and to maximize each tenant's ability to live independently. Some examples include case management, mental health services, financial management, employment and senior services.

STRATEGIES

Establish programs to provide opportunities for tenants to create income savings while utilizing housing assistance.

Leverage State rental assistance programs like Housing Trust Fund and Bridges Program in creating new housing opportunities for homeless households.

PHA BENEFITS

Helps PHAs link housing assistance with resources to help households make progress towards and achieve related self-sufficiency goals.

Opportunity to leverage housing assistance funding with HUD and non HUD sources to create opportunities for residents.

Administering the Bridges program expands housing options to individuals with higher barriers related to their mental health and/or criminal history.

HOW TO/NEXT STEPS

[Contact the St. Paul PHA to learn more about the scholarship programs available to support residents pursuing educational and career goals.](#)

[Contact the Northwest Minnesota Multi County Housing and Redevelopment Authority to learn how the HUD ROSS award is administered to connect residents to education, job training and financial literacy services.](#)

[Contact Minnesota Housing, when funding is available, to learn more about how your PHA can apply for funding.](#)

The Red Wing Bridges Rental Assistance Program

The PHA provides housing assistance for people with very low incomes and a serious mental illness and people with serious mental illness who are also experiencing long-term homelessness. In partnership with Goodhue County Human Services, up to 10 households with rental assistance between \$250-500.

St. Paul PHA Resident Resources

The St. Paul PHA recognizes the importance of encouraging students to pursue a career that leads to economic independence and self-sufficiency. As a result, several scholarship opportunities are available each year to Section 8 and Public Housing residents.

Opportunity Area 5: Increasing Capacity of Existing Housing Stock

Supportive housing is a scarce resource and should be targeted to serve those who need it most. Some tenants find that after years in supportive housing they don't need the same level of service they once did, but they still need subsidized housing. PHAs can respond by providing resources to help tenants who want to "move on" while freeing up units for those waiting for supportive housing. MTW status is not required to establish a "Moving-On/ Moving-Up (aka Step Down) initiative.

STRATEGIES

Use available discretion to give higher priority for Housing Choice Voucher to allow the transition out of a supportive housing unit.

For PBV supportive housing, residents have top priority to receive an available voucher after 12 months residence in the PBV unit. PHAs can voluntarily assist supportive housing projects that do not have PBV units in the same way.

Create shallow subsidy options when possible to support additional units for households with greater self-sufficiency.

PHA BENEFITS

Expands housing options for households who no longer need transitional or permanent supportive housing

HOW TO/NEXT STEPS

[Contact CSH for training and technical assistance to help your PHA create, implement, and sustain Moving On programs.](#)

[Review USICH's guidance and PHA examples of on how to develop a move on strategy.](#)

Dakota County CDA Preference

The Dakota County CDA has established a local preference to provide priority to a maximum of 24 families per year that have been terminated or are at risk of termination from the Dakota County Supportive Housing Unit's two year Transitional Housing Program.

Opportunity Area 6: Affirming and Elevating PHAs' role in Housing Stability for Minnesotans

PHAs play a critical role for Minnesota to successfully implement the State plan to prevent and end homelessness. MN NAHRO can champion the goal of housing stability for the most vulnerable members of our community by supporting, promoting and highlighting engagement strategies across homeless and non-homeless programs. In this way MN NAHRO can give credit to the agencies (large and small) that are actively engaged, and encourage other agencies to increase their own efforts to prevent and end homelessness.

STRATEGIES

Leverage MN NAHRO convening to talk about engagement and progress towards preventing and ending homelessness.

Dedicate time to meet with COC coordinator group to talk about coordination and alignment across the state.

Partner with MN Housing to develop communication materials to share with NAHRO.

PHA BENEFITS

Building relationship with COC Coordinators individually and as a group will strengthen opportunities for partnership and collaboration on expanding housing assistance statewide.

Calling attention to existing efforts by the PHAs highlights their role, their commitments and their impact on the lives of the most vulnerable Minnesotans.

HOW TO/NEXT STEPS

Dedicate the next round of regional NAHRO meetings to review, discuss and respond to this document.
(insert link to document when ready)

[Invite Minnesota COC Coordinators to a NAHRO board meeting and/or the September Convening](#)

Identify 3-5 NAHRO messages regarding current PHA efforts and commitments to increase housing stability across Minnesota.

Spread the Word

Publish efforts like the PHA Engagement to Prevent and End Homelessness Guide of the MN NAHRO website, the North Central Regional Council of NAHRO (NCRC NAHRO) quarterly publication, etc.

Thank you to the [Minnesota Chapter of the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials \(NAHRO\)](#) and their Executive Director, Shannon Guernsey, Executive Director, for their partnership and support in efforts to ensure housing stability for all Minnesotans.

Thank you to the Minnesota NAHRO board of directors and their President, Barbara Dacy for their partnership and support in forming the PHA Engagement to Prevent and End Homelessness Workgroup.

PHA Engagement to Prevent and End Homelessness Workgroup

Jill Bengtson	Executive Director, Kandiyohi County, McLeod County and Willmar Housing and Redevelopment Authority
Gwen Chase	Housing Program Specialist, Kandiyohi County Housing and Redevelopment Authority
Eric Grumdahl	Special Advisor on Ending Veteran Homelessness, Minnesota Department Veteran Affairs and the Minnesota Office to Prevent and End Homelessness
Al Hester	Housing Policy Director, St Paul Public Housing Agency
Jennifer Keogh	HRA Assistant Manager Community Development, Metropolitan Council
Dara Lee	Executive Director, Clay County Housing and Redevelopment Authority
Josephine Pufpaff	Senior Program Manager, Corporation, Supportive Housing
Joel Salzer	Business Manager, Multifamily Programs, Minnesota Housing

For more information, please contact:

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[Minnesota Housing](#)
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Appendix A: Continuum of Care Coordinators

CoC Regions	CoC Coordinator Contact Information
Central	AG Huot Central MN Housing Partnership 320.259.0393 AG@cmhp.net
Hennepin County	Laura DeRosier Hennepin County Continuum of Care Coordinator Minneapolis/Hennepin County Office to End Homelessness 612.543.3726 laura.derosier@hennepin.us
Northeast	Patty Beech Northeast MN CoC Coordinator 218.525.4957 pattybeechconsulting@gmail.com
Northwest	Carla Solem Northwest MN CoC Coordinator 701.306.1944 carlas@cableone.net
Ramsey County	TBD, in the meantime: Maria Wetherall Chair, Heading Home Ramsey Director, Ramsey County Veterans Service Office 651.266.2544 maria.wetherall@co.ramsey.mn.us
Southeast	Jennifer Prins Three Rivers Community Action 507.732.8577 jprins@threeriverscap.org
Southwest	Justin Vorbach SW Minnesota Housing Partnership 507.530.2942 justinv@swmhp.org
St. Louis County	Charles Obije St. Louis CoC Coordinator 218.725.5236 ObijeC@stlouiscountymn.gov
Suburban Metropolitan Area Continuum ("SMAC", including Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Scott, and Washington counties)	Abby Guilford SMAC coordinator 763.458.9790 abby@mesh-mn.org
West Central	Carla Solem West Central MN CoC Coordinator 701.306.1944 hthcoordinator@cableone.net