

## **NE MN CoC Plan for Serving Individuals and Families Experiencing Homelessness with Severe Service Needs**

### **About the NE CoC**

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 NE Minnesota. CoC Coordinator funding and resources are very limited due to the low population density.

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.

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.

A total of 706 people were on the NE CoC Coordinated Entry (CE) System priority list from 7/1/2021 – 6/30/2022. Of these, 92 (13%) were unsheltered at the time they entered the CE system. Of unsheltered persons on the CE priority list, 58% exited to permanent housing during this time period. Just 7% exited to homelessness.

In FY2021, there were 195 heads of household on the NE CE priority list with severe service needs (more than one reported disabling condition and multiple episodes of homelessness). Of heads of households with severe service needs on the CE priority list, 68% who were not chronically homeless exited the list to permanent housing during this time period and 5% exited to homelessness. For those with severe service needs who were chronically homeless, 54% exited the list to permanent housing and 10 exited to homelessness.

The NE CoC is committed to continuing the decrease in the number of people experiencing homelessness,

and to decreasing the number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. We have plans in place to decrease the length of time that people wait for a referral from CE, and we will expand outreach to people who have lost their housing but are not connected to available shelter, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing and support service resources.

### **Vision**

This plan builds on Heading Home NE, 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 following priorities for the CoC.

#### Landlord Recruitment

- 1) Increased housing navigation services
- 2) Additional personal outreach to landlords
- 3) Increase funding for Security Deposits and First Month's Rent
- 4) Provide budgeting education and support to renters to ensure rent is paid on time.

#### Street Outreach

- 1) Hold community connect events in CoC communities
- 2) Secure funding for more housing navigators
- 3) Expand posters in community areas about available resources

#### Increase Immediate Access to Low-Barrier Shelter and Temporary Housing

- 1) Build or rehabilitate buildings to provide more shelter units
- 2) Increase transitional housing beds
- 3) Connect shelter guests to permanent housing options

#### Increase Immediate Access to Low-Barrier Permanent Housing

- 1) Develop more permanent supportive housing
- 2) Secure and provide more rental vouchers

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 stakeholders, 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(s) from the lived experience advisory group.

## **P1. Leveraging Housing Resources**

### **P-1a. Development of new units and creation of housing opportunities.**

#### **P-1a. Attachment - Leveraging Housing Commitment**

See the housing commitment leveraging letter attached in the esnaps application on Screen 4a.

#### **P-1b. Attachment – PHA Commitment**

See the PHA commitment letter attached in the esnaps application on Screen 4a.

### **P-1c: Landlord Recruitment:**

**P-1c.1.** The CoC's 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.

**P-1.c.1.a.** 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. To date, 12 households have been housed with an EHV, out of 15 allocated to the Koochiching Housing Authority.

**P-1c.2.** The NE CoC has implemented several new practices 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.

**P-1.c.2.** Some lessons learned 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.

**P1c.3.** 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 – Program staff/PHA 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 RRH and scattered-site PH and 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 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 PHAs, 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.

**P-2. Leveraging Healthcare Resources**

A goal of the Supplemental NOFO is to improve health outcomes and housing stability among people experiencing homelessness who have high vulnerabilities. To do this, the NE CoC is leveraging funds

requested from HUD with healthcare resources.

## **P-2. Attachment – Healthcare Leveraging Commitment**

See the healthcare commitment leveraging letter in the esnaps application on Screen 4A.

## **P3. Current Strategy to Identify, Shelter and House Those Experiencing Unsheltered Homelessness**

### **P3.a. Current Street Outreach Strategy**

**P3.a.1 and 2.** 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.

**P3.a.3.and 5.** 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 to 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.

**P3.a.4.** In the NE, 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.

**P3.a.6.** 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.

**P-3b: Current strategy to provide immediate access to low-barrier shelter and temporary housing for individuals and families experiencing unsheltered homelessness**

**P-3.b.1.** The NE CoC currently has an extremely low number of congregate (20) and non-congregate (12) shelter beds. The region also has 29 transitional housing units, including 10 units for homeless youth and 9 units for survivors of domestic violence. In 2021, 196 households accessed emergency shelter. They had an average of 23 days homeless.

A key goal for the NE CoC to increase immediate access to low barrier shelter and temporary housing is to increase the number of congregate and non-congregate shelter beds and transitional housing units. To achieve this goal, the CoC’s application for the Supplemental NOFO includes 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).

COVID-19 funding allowed housing and shelter providers in the region to expand shelter resources, and this expanded capacity continues in the following strategies:

- The NE CoC is dedicated to maximizing use of state, federal, and private resources for hotel-based shelter. Funding source information is widely shared, and funders are invited to and attend CoC meetings to share information about resources and application procedures.
- Shelter providers secured Minnesota Emergency Shelter Program (ESP) funds for motel vouchers
- Grace House Shelter is remodeling to provide private shelter units rather than congregate shelter space. During the pandemic, they used motel rooms to provide and expand shelter.
- Servants of Shelter purchased a motel and converted two units to shelter units.
- The NE CoC supports and participates in Homes for All legislative efforts to advocate for more State of Minnesota shelter capital funds to increase the number of available shelter beds.
- The NE CoC’s application to HUD includes additional hotel vouchers for persons who may pose a safety threat to others in congregate shelter or those who do not feel safe/are highly vulnerable (AEOA/KOOTASCA partnership).
- The NE CoC has a partnership with MN Dept. of Veteran Affairs to connect 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.

Other CoC strategies for providing immediate access to low barrier shelter and temporary housing includes the following activities:

- Increasing outreach to rural and tribal areas to identify individuals least likely to access services.
- Building relationships with area churches, businesses, police, and service providers to ensure they are aware of available resources and how to access them.
- Providing multiple options for shelter that align with client choice and need (hotel shelter, congregate shelter, tents/camping spaces, etc.)

**P-3.b.2.** The NE CoC does not have adequate temporary accommodations for all individuals and families experiencing unsheltered homelessness. There are no culturally-focused temporary accommodations in the NE CoC region, but the Leech Lake Tribe offers two emergency shelters just outside of the CoC's geography, and referrals are made to these shelters as needed.

The NE CoC has increased use of non-congregate shelter since the COVID pandemic. Grace House sheltered people in hotels as a public health response, and this strategy worked well at providing low-barrier culturally appropriate access to temporary accommodations.

**P-3.b.3.** The NE CoC has implemented a number of new practices within the past three years, including:

- Expanded hotel-based shelter for overflow shelter and as an option to prevent the spread of COVID.
- Equipped emergency shelters to serve as a platform for housing access. Emergency shelters intentionally link people to permanent housing resources without assessing housing "readiness," so that they can move through the system quickly. Shelter staff emphasize and maintain focus on assisting shelter guests to identify and connect to permanent housing.
- Shelter staff are Coordinated Entry assessors so they can directly link shelter guests rapidly to the NE CoC's coordinated entry processes that can further assess their needs and housing preferences
- Staff are trained in trauma-informed care and de-escalation techniques in order to help residents understand and conform to shelter expectations
- Shelter staff meet regularly with housing navigators to connect guests to housing navigation services

Lessons learned include:

- With low barrier shelter policies, we can serve people who would otherwise lose their shelter beds due to non-compliance.
- Screening people in, not out ensures that shelter is easier to access for people who are most vulnerable.

### **P-3c. Current strategy to provide immediate access to low-barrier permanent housing for individuals and families experiencing unsheltered homelessness**

**P-3.c.1.a.** The NE CoC currently has a low number of permanent supportive housing beds. There are 80 PSH year-round beds and 48 year-round RRH beds.

One key strategy for the NE CoC to increase immediate access to low barrier permanent housing for households experiencing unsheltered homelessness is to increase the number of permanent supportive housing and rapid rehousing beds. Recent CoC accomplishments in expanding permanent housing include:

- Aurora Heights opened in 2021. Partners include Itasca HRA, Northland Counseling Center and DW Jones Property Management. There are 56 units of affordable housing including 38 apartments and 18 townhomes. Fourteen units are dedicated to people who have experienced homelessness.
- Servants of Shelter in Koochiching County purchased the Northern Lights Motel in July 2022.

After remodeling, this motel project will include: 6 secure studio apartment spaces of warm, safe shelter for high barrier guests, and 13 1-bedroom apartments and 3 studio apartments for PSH.

- KOOTASCA Community Action launched a new housing development program to develop safe and affordable housing in Itasca and Koochiching Counties and was awarded \$12.8 million in MN Housing Tax Credits in 2022 for the Alexander Baker Housing Project. This old school will be remodeled to create 27-units of affordable rental units and 10 permanent supportive units.
- The CoC expanded access to Housing Support, a State program for persons with disabilities, and Housing Stabilization Services, a Medicaid service for persons with disabilities, to increase services in PSH. These programs help provide support services critical to helping people remain housed.

As a second key strategy, the NE CoC uses a Housing First approach to ensure the quickest possible access to low-barrier permanent supportive housing. The NE CoC requires that all applicants for CoC funding complete a Housing First questionnaire as part of their funding application, and the CoC's Review and Ranking Committee scores agencies based on their Housing First survey responses.

**P-3.c.1.b.** Because the NE CoC's key strategies are to create more units of low-barrier permanent supportive housing, the CoC established priorities for the Supplemental NOFA that prioritize permanent supportive housing and Housing First practices. The #1 ranked project for the Rural NOFO is a PSH project that will operate in two counties, providing site-based (Koochiching County) and scattered-site (Itasca County) PSH rental units for persons with long histories of homelessness, disabilities, and high service needs.

**P-3.c.2.** Creating more permanent supportive housing units and using a Housing First approach have been effective in improving regional housing stability. The CoC's FY 2021 System Performance measures show a 92% success rate for effective exits/retention from permanent housing projects. The NE CoC also has very low rates of returns to homelessness. In FY2021, the Return to Homelessness rates were: 2% for less than 6 months; 0%: 6-12 months; 3%: 13-24 months, and 4% in two years. Exits from PH had very low rates of returns: 2% for less than 6 months; 0%: 6-12 months; 1%: 13-24 months, and 2% in two years

**P-3.c.3.** Evidence that supports the use of the CoC's current strategy is:

- The high rate for effective exits/retention from permanent housing projects.
- Low rates of returns to homelessness.
- Published studies that show that low-barrier permanent supportive housing is effective at reducing homelessness and increasing housing stability.
- Published studies, such as Minnesota Housing's Evaluation of Permanent Supportive Housing Final Report (May 2020) show that PSH tenants report many improvements in their lives.

**P-3.c.4.** New practices that the CoC has implemented in the past three years for providing immediate access to low barrier permanent housing for individuals and families experiencing unsheltered homelessness include:

- Case consultation – More rapidly and accurately identifying shelter/housing options for individuals on the CE list. Accountability to providers to implement a Housing First approach with referrals.
- CES – Identify, assess, refer and connect people in crisis to housing assistance and services.
- Developed housing that can provide safer environments for Housing First/Harm Reduction and eliminate requirements for things like sobriety that are typically enforced in congregate/shared living spaces due to safety concerns.
- Expanded transition and sustaining services to provide 1:1 assistance and support to help locate and maintain housing that best meets individual needs.
- Housing navigators and project staff work to ensure that clients are entered into programs/housing that



best meets their self-identified cultural needs. This includes RRH program staff immediately housing clients in their program and working alongside them to enter into culturally specific housing programs when openings become available.

- The CoC promoted and offered training for case managers that included trauma-informed care, housing first, cultural understanding, conflict resolution and other topics to assist tenants with stability.

Lessons learned –

- More navigation services are needed CoC-wide to provide 1:1 assistance to clients to connect to projects and housing that meets their needs. Currently, our system relies too much on overworked case managers to act as navigators. The progress/success with navigation is not reflected in their funder reports and appears as though they have poor outcomes.
- Expanding access to longer term housing subsidies and support services increases successful access to permanent supportive housing and stability in permanent supporting.
  - Housing Stabilization Services – Medicaid billable transition and sustaining services
  - Housing Support – rental subsidies and supportive services
  - Community Living Infrastructure – housing navigation, outreach, and direct assistance (deposits, utility deposits, furniture, expungement fees, etc.)
  - Emergency Housing Vouchers

#### **P-4. Updating the CoC’s strategy to identify, shelter, and house individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness with data and performance.**

##### **P-4.1. Street Outreach**

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)

**P-4.1.b.** 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.

**P-4.1.c.** 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.

## **P-4.2 Low-Barrier Shelter and Temporary Accommodations**

**P-4.2.a. & P-4.2.b.** 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.

**P-4.2.c.** 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)

### **P-4.3 Permanent Housing**

**P-4.3.a.& P-4.3.b.** 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.

**P-5. Identify and Prioritize Households Experiencing or with Histories of Unsheltered Homelessness.**

**P-5.1.** 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.

**P-5.2.a.** 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.

**P-5.2.b.** 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.

**P-5.3.** 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.

**P-5.4.** 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:

- **P-5.4.a.** 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.
- **P-5.4.b.** 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.
- **P-5.4.c.** 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.

## **P-6: Involving individuals with lived experience of homelessness in decision-making-meaningful outreach.**

**P-6.1** 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.

**P-6.2** 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

## **P-6a Involving Individuals with Lived Experience of Homelessness in Decision-Making- Letter of Support from Working Group Comprised of Individuals with Lived Experience of Homelessness**

See attached Lived Experience Support Letter

## **P-7: Supporting underserved communities and supporting equitable community development.**

**P-7.1** 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.

**P-7.2** 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.

**P-7.3.** 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/undeserved 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.