

UNLOCKING SOLUTIONS

Strategic Framework for Ending Unsheltered Homelessness

Homeless Systems Initiative

Table of Contents

Pg. 4	Homeless Systems Oversight	Pg. 8	Focus Area Goals and Objectives
Pg. 5	Roadmap to Success	Pg. 14	Conclusion
Pg. 6	Executive Summary	Pg. 15	Appendix



Homeless Systems Initiative

Vision

Create a coordinated, compassionate, and data-driven system where homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring.

Ending homelessness is possible, but it requires all of us. Our community roadmap outlines a bold, compassionate, and coordinated approach to ensure every neighbor has a safe and stable place to call home. By working together across sectors—housing, healthcare, outreach, and lived experience—we can prevent homelessness before it begins, respond quickly when it occurs, and create lasting solutions through supportive and affordable housing. This is more than a plan; it's a call to action. Join us in building a system that reflects our shared values of dignity, equity, and opportunity for all.

Thank You!

Thank you to the following partners who have offered their knowlege, resources, contributions, and dedication in addressing the needs of those experiencing homelessness in Linn County.

Pillar Champions

Strategic Investors



Homeless Systems Oversight

Introduction

In response to unsheltered homelessness, the City of Cedar Rapids contracted the National Alliance to End Homelessness in June 2023 to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the local homeless services system. Following this assessment, it was determined that establishing a governance structure to implement best practice solutions was essential. Acting on this recommendation, the City of Cedar Rapids and Linn County collaborated to create a Homeless Systems Manager position within the Housing Fund for Linn County. The primary responsibility of this role is to develop a coordinated, systematic approach to addressing homelessness by aligning resources and interventions. This effort is guided by a Homeless Systems Oversight Board, composed of influential community leaders.

Purpose

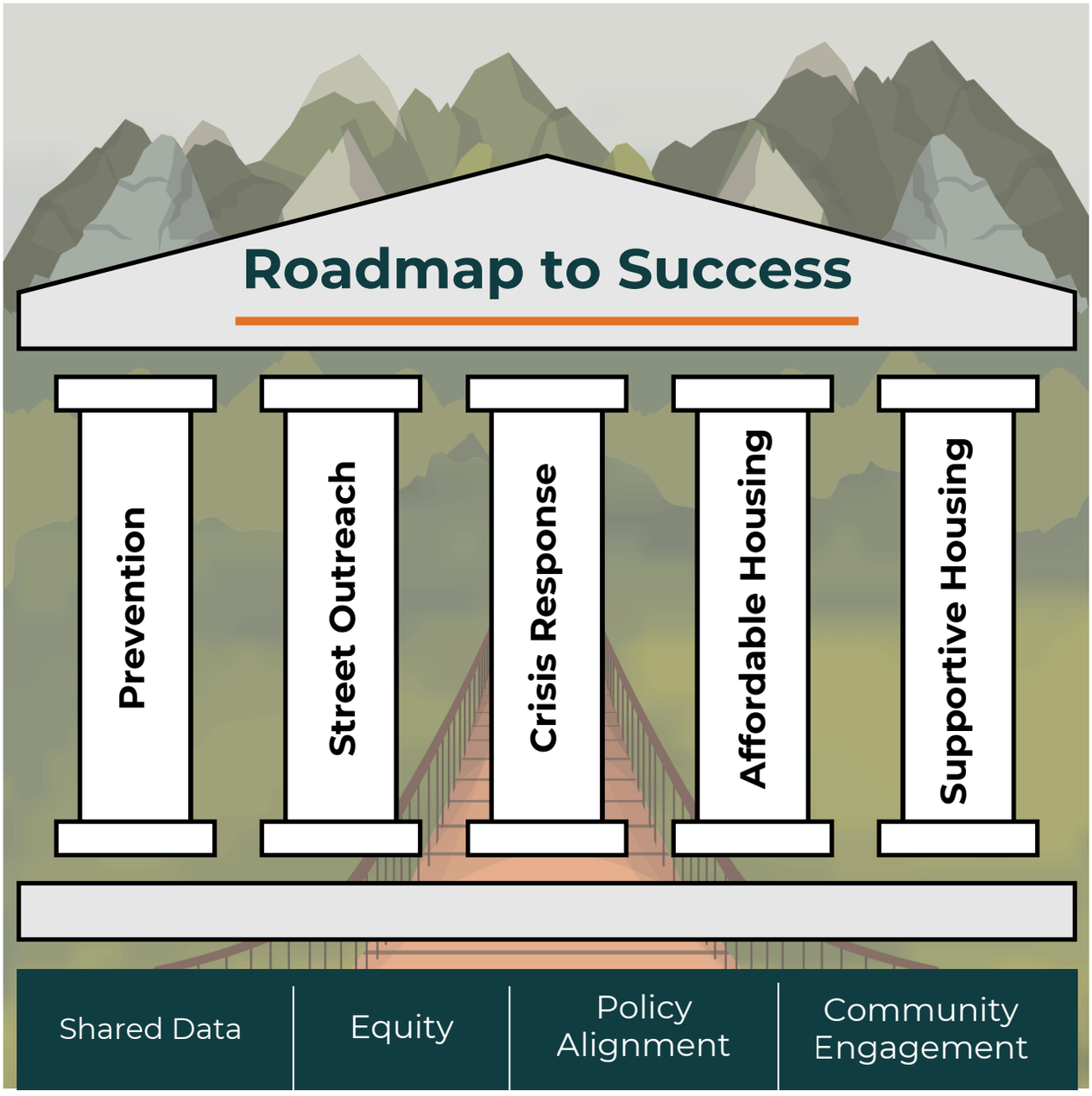
The Homeless Systems Oversight Board is tasked with providing oversight and support to the Homeless Systems Manager. Board members receive education on the complexities of the homeless services system, best practice interventions, and relevant federal regulations. Equipped with this expertise, the board will collaborate with the Homeless Systems Manager to shape policies and funding strategies that directly influence the community's efforts to end homelessness.

Goals

- Monitor best practice solutions to ensure homelessness is rare, brief and one-time.
- Create diverse housing opportunities.
- Establish a diversion system to change the course of those who are at imminent risk of homelessness.
- Establish system-wide performance measures.

Homeless Systems Initiative

The Homeless Systems Roadmap establishes a comprehensive framework to prevent and end homelessness through the development and implementation of five integrated strategies: prevention and diversion, coordinated street outreach, housing-focused crisis response, increased availability of affordable housing with integrated services and supportive housing expansion. System-wide drivers, such as data, equity, policy alignment, and community engagement, will support and guide all components.



Below is a snapshot of what homelessness looks like in Linn County.

Executive Summary

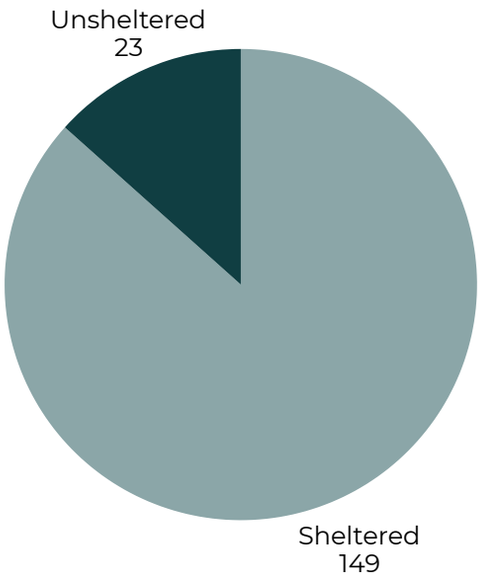
POINT-IN-TIME (PIT) *by living situation*

The PIT count records the number of individuals experiencing homelessness within the community on a single night in January and July each year. This graphic provides insight into the number of residents who were living either sheltered or unsheltered in 2025.

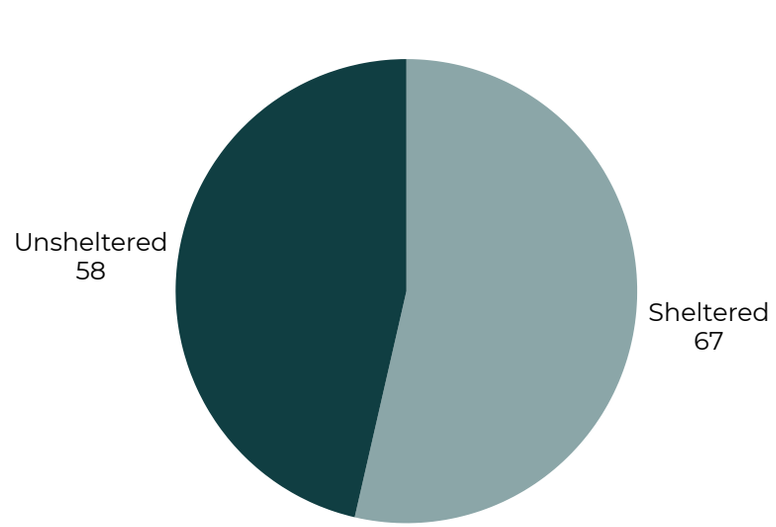
From 2024-2025, Linn County saw a

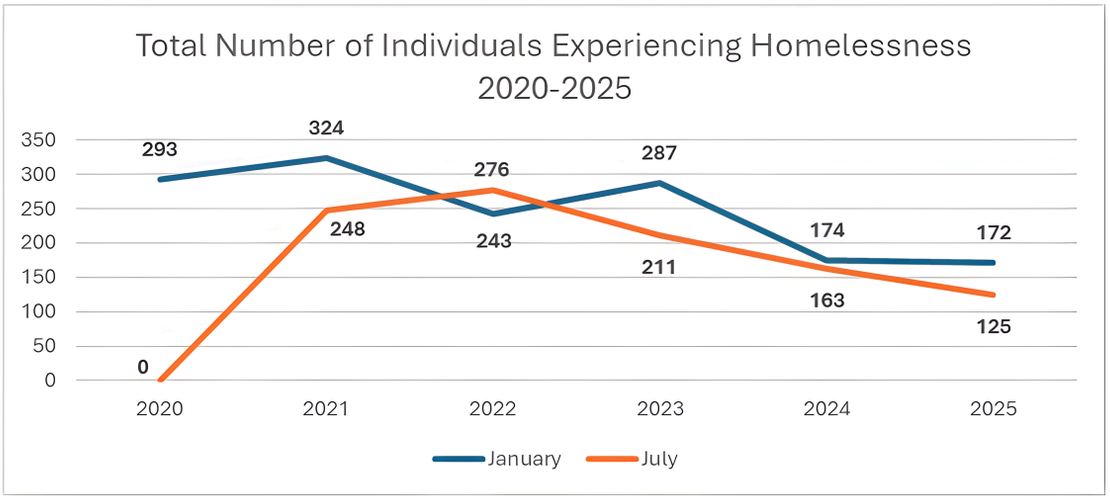
12% Decrease

January

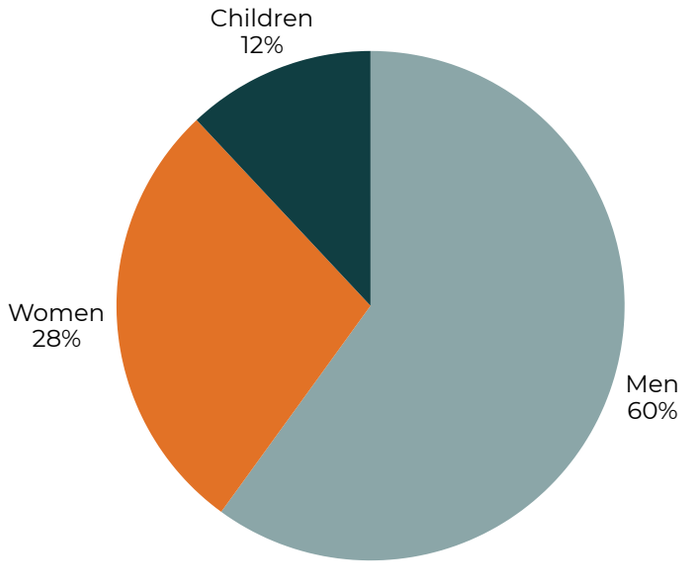


July





PIT POPULATIONS *by demographics*

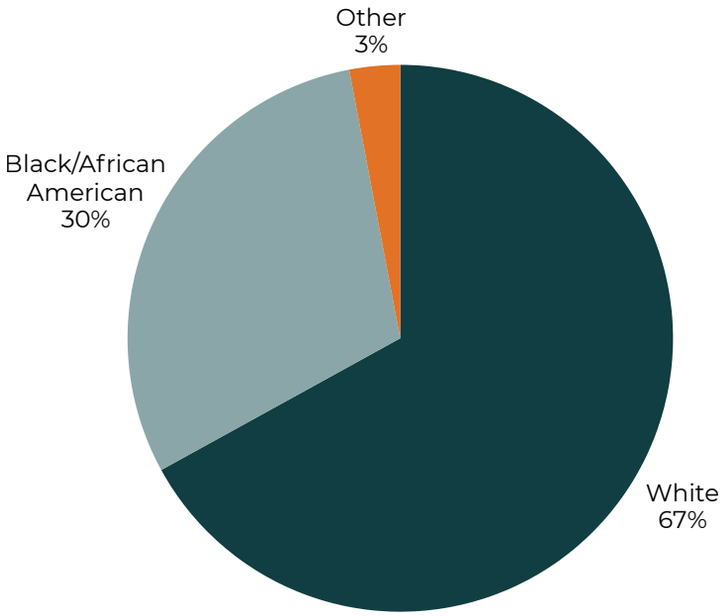


PIT Populations by Gender

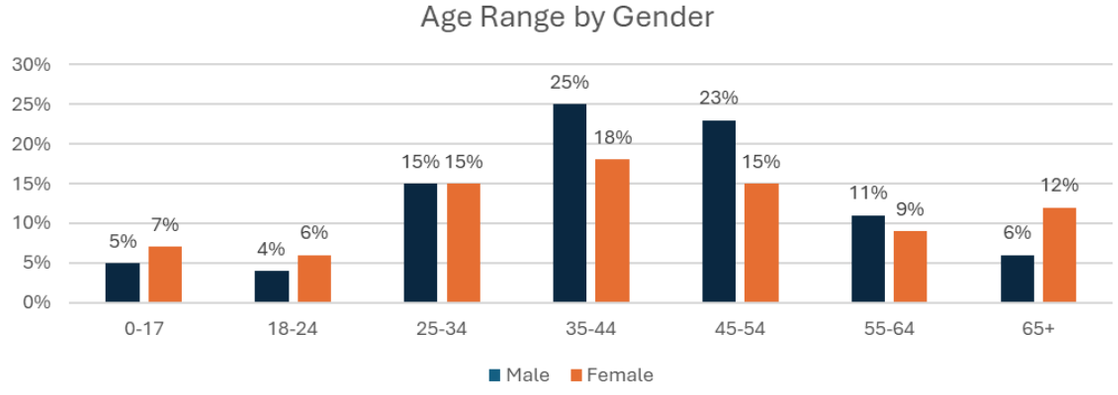
PIT Populations by Race/Ethnicity

2023 Linn County Census

- *White* ***81%***
- *Black/ African American* ***6%***
- *Multiracial* ***5%***
- *Asian* ***2%***
- *Hispanic/Latino* ***4%***



'Other" includes Asian, Hispanic/Latino, Multiracial



FOCUS AREA GOALS AND OBJECTIVES



The following provides an outline of the efforts to address homelessness in the county through the five established pillars.

- Prevention and Diversion
- Coordinated Street Outreach
- Housing Focused Crisis Response
- Increase Access to Affordable Housing
- Supportive Housing Expansion

HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION & DIVERSION

Goal Prevent households from entering literal homelessness by addressing housing crises early and assisting with resource connection outside of the homeless system.

Common Myth

Many people are just one crisis away from homelessness.

Fact: Most households rely on friends, family, or other supports during a crisis. By the time someone enters homelessness, they have usually exhausted those supports after experiencing multiple destabilizing events. Homelessness rarely results from a single setback. It is the result of compounded trauma, loss of income, housing instability, and the breakdown of natural support networks. Understanding this helps us focus on strengthening prevention and stabilizing households before their resources run out.

Key Objectives

- **Identify consistent funding to increase low-barrier homeless diversion programming.**
- **Partner with school districts and court systems to identify at-risk households to avoid homelessness.**
- **Train frontline staff in mediation, housing problem-solving and diversion techniques.**

70%

In 2025, 70% of households who initially sought emergency shelter were able to be diverted to friends or family for temporary shelter.

>1%

From 2021-2024, less than 1% of households who received an eviction in Linn County entered into the Homeless Services System.

75%

The 2022-2025 Diversion Report reflected that 75% of households who received financial assistance through a diversion program remained stable beyond 3 years.

3%

From 2022-2025, only 3% of households that received diversion lost their housing and entered into the Homeless Services System.

COORDINATED ENTRY STREET OUTREACH

Goal Engage unsheltered individuals with compassion, meet basic needs, build trust and connect to ongoing services.

Common Myth

People experiencing homelessness are choosing to be homeless.

Fact: Most individuals experiencing homelessness actively seek safe, stable housing. Yet, many face obstacles such as prior evictions, poor credit, criminal background checks, insufficient income to meet rental requirements, or a shortage of units affordable at their income level. Even when housing is secured, those with complex health or behavioral health needs may struggle without access to consistent, long-term supports. Homelessness is rarely a choice, it is the result of structural barriers within the housing and support systems that prevent people from accessing and sustaining safe, affordable homes.

Key Objectives

Create a coordinated outreach response to assist with encampment clean up, resource nagivation, and follow-up care.

Develop a peer-support component within the street outreach team.

Develop a Street Medicine Program to better address physical and mental health needs.

12%

Linn County saw a **12% decrease** in overall homelessness from 2024-2025.

90%

90% of those experiencing unsheltered homelessness are engaged with street outreach and actively seeking housing supports.



HOUSING FOCUSED CRISIS RESPONSE

Goal Ensure emergency shelter is a bridge to housing, not a destination.

Common Myth

More shelter space is the solution to solving homelessness.

Fact: Shelters play an essential role in protecting people from immediate harm. However, they are among the most expensive forms of intervention when used long term and do not address the underlying causes of homelessness. When shelter increases without access to permanent housing, individuals become stuck in the system. Lasting reductions in homelessness occur when communities invest in prevention, rapid rehousing, permanent supportive housing, and affordable housing development.

Key Objectives

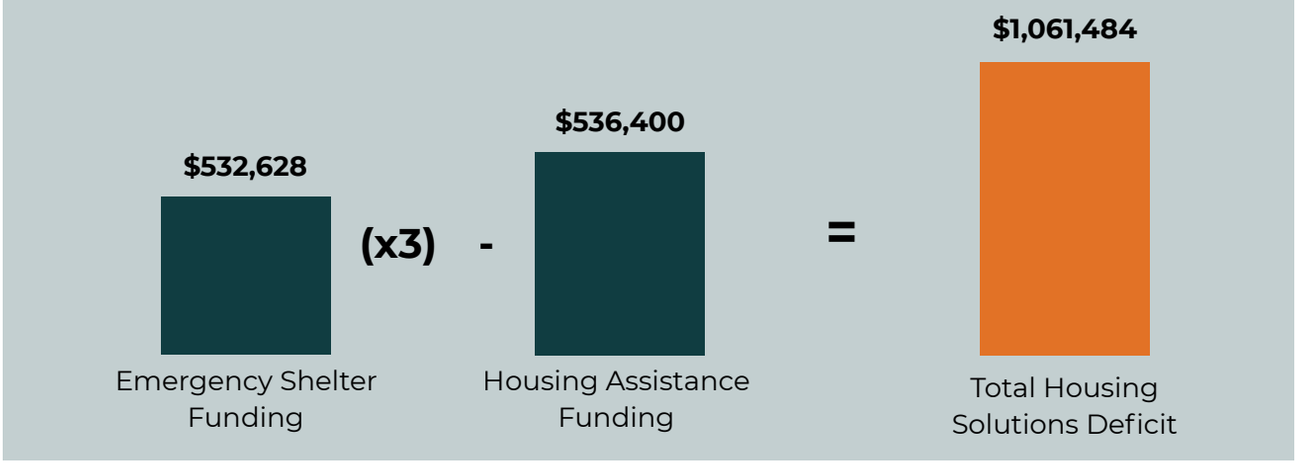
Ensure shelters operate with a low-barrier, housing first approach.

Ensure shelter remains a last resort for households who may have alternate sheltering options.

Ensure shelters have on-site case managers trained in housing and resource navigation.

Shelter should be viewed as a crisis response, not a solution. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, to effectively address homelessness with a solution-focused approach, **for every $1 put towards emergency shelter programming, $3 must be put toward housing solutions.**

2025 Federal and Local Funding Allocations



INCREASE ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Goal Expand permanent affordable housing options for low-income households with service needs.

Common Myth

Unhoused individuals don't want to work. They only want handouts.

Fact: Most individuals experiencing homelessness are employed in low-wage or part-time jobs. Others receive fixed incomes that fall far below what is required to afford rent in today's housing market. Even full-time work at minimum wage is often insufficient to secure stable housing. Additionally, maintaining steady employment while experiencing homelessness presents enormous barriers, including lack of transportation, hygiene facilities, safe storage for belongings, and stable sleep. Homelessness is not caused by a lack of work ethic. It is driven by the gap between income and housing costs, combined with barriers that make employment stability difficult without housing.

Key Objectives



Partner with Housing Authorities, developers, and nonprofits to preserve affordable units.



Develop a sustainability plan for the Landlord & Tenant Success Initiative Pilot.



Identify ways to increase access to vacant units within the housing market.

70%

According to the 2025 Linn County System Performance Measures Report, **70%** of households going through a Rapid Rehousing Program successfully obtain housing.

100%

Of the households enrolled in the Landlord & Tenant Success Pilot, **100%** of tenants pass their quarterly in-unit inspection.

103%

According to the 2024 Cedar Rapids Housing Needs Analysis, market rate rents increased **103% from 2013-2024**.

2%

According to the 2024 Cedar Rapids Housing Needs Analysis, deep subsidy units - where tenants must have an income no higher than 50% Area Median Income and pay no more than 30% of their income towards rent - only make up **2%** of the rental market.

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING EXPANSION

Goal Provide permanent housing with the right levels of support for all needs.

Supportive Housing is:

Long-term housing assistance paired with tailored individual supports, specifically designed for those experiencing chronic homelessness.

Common Myth

Homelessness is too large of a problem. It's too expensive to fix.

Fact: In 2025, an average of 148 people experienced homelessness in Cedar Rapids, a tangible number our community can resolve with the right investments. Moreover, research shows that keeping people housed is less expensive than allowing them to remain homeless and cycle through high-cost services like emergency rooms, shelters, and the criminal justice system. Stable housing paired with supports reduces costly emergency health care, jail time, and repeated shelter stays, yielding significant tax payer savings compared with long-term crisis responses.

Key Objectives

- **Increase permanent supportive housing inventory.**
- **Embed robust wraparound services (mental health, substance use, benefits, and healthcare).**
- **Establish a peer-support model for improved housing outcomes.**

35 Units

The current supportive housing stock within Cedar Rapids is 35 units.

75 Units

The current estimated need based on the current population is 75 units.





Conclusion

To make our community the most innovative and inclusive in the region, we must take bold, unified action to improve systems, elevate people, and strengthen neighborhoods. Addressing homelessness requires all of us. No single sector, organization, or agency can solve it alone. Lasting solutions depend on strong, sustained partnerships across our entire community.

This plan builds on proven strategies, data-driven practices, and the dedication of partners already doing the work, but its success depends on broader investment and engagement. Now is the time to step forward. By aligning resources, expertise, and leadership, we can create lasting solutions that uphold wellness, safety, and opportunity for every neighbor. Together, we can shape a community where homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring, and where every member of our community has the opportunity to succeed.

Homeless Systems Initiative

APPENDIX

Unsheltered: Unsheltered homelessness takes many forms in both urban, suburban, and rural settings. Unsheltered homelessness can be sleeping in vehicles, abandoned buildings, farms, and wilderness.

https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/unsheltered-homelessness/#:~:text=Unsheltered%20homelessness%20takes%20many%20forms,sleeping%20in%20vehicles%2C%20abandoned%20buildings

Doubled Up: regulations, "doubled up" refers to a situation where individuals or families are temporarily residing with friends or family members due to economic hardship, loss of housing, or similar reasons.

https://mecklenburghousingdata.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Charlotte-Mecklenburg-Housing-Homelessness-Dashboard-Definitions.pdf

Street Outreach refers to essential services provided to unsheltered individuals and families—those living in places not meant for human habitation (such as streets, parks, cars, or abandoned buildings).

https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/coc-esg-virtual-binders/esg-eligible-activities/street-outreach/#:~:text=What%20activities%20are%20eligible%20under,or%20unavailable%20within%20the%20area.

Point-in-Time Count (PIT) is an unduplicated, one-night estimate of both sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing homelessness. This count occurs annually during the last 10 days of January to provide a "snapshot" of homelessness in a community at a specific time **.**

https://endhomelessness.org/resources/policy-information/what-is-a-point-in-time-count/

Rapid Rehousing is a permanent housing intervention designed to move households experiencing literal homelessness into permanent housing as quickly as possible, typically within 30 days. It provides short-term (up to 3 months) to medium-term (4-24 months) tenant-based rental assistance and, in many cases, supportive services. The goal is to stabilize individuals with a one-year lease, often without preconditions like income or employment.

https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/coc-esg-virtual-binders/esg-program-components/rapid-re-housing/#:~:text=Rapid%20Re%2Dhousing%20activities%20are,CoC.

Area Median Income (AMI) is the midpoint of a specific geographic area's income distribution.

https://www.hud.loans/hud-loans-blog/what-is-area-median-income-ami/



Homeless
Systems Initiative