



HOUSING THE HOMELESS

North Dakota's 10-Year Plan to
End Long Term Homelessness

2013 Progress Report



North Dakota Interagency Council on Homelessness
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Dear Governor Dalrymple:

It is my pleasure to deliver to you an update to the state's 10-Year Plan to End Long Term Homelessness on behalf of the North Dakota Interagency Council on Homelessness.

The 10-year plan was published in 2008 and after five years, North Dakota has changed dramatically in ways that were not foreseen at the time. We have seen both successes and challenges in the battle against homelessness. The economic boom in North Dakota has drawn thousands of new people to the state and, with limited existing resources, communities and agencies have struggled to keep up with the influx. This holds especially true for the homeless system of care.

The member agencies of the Interagency Council have been working to accomplish the goals that were set out in the 10-year plan. Aided by new tools and a refocusing of existing resources, we have taken important steps to help address the evolving homeless situation in North Dakota. But more is left to do.

In this report, you will find a review of what we have accomplished as well as the continuing challenges as we work to realize the ultimate goal of ending long-term homelessness in North Dakota.

The Interagency Council also identified recommendations that we feel would be helpful in achieving that goal. We respectfully request your consideration of these proposals.

On behalf of the Interagency Council, I want to thank you for your support of our efforts. I also know that you share my gratitude for the men and women who work every day on the front lines in numerous local organizations across the state to house the homeless. By working together in the next five years, we can help address the issues of long-term homelessness in our state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jolene Kline". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jolene" and last name "Kline" clearly legible.

Jolene Kline, chair
North Dakota Interagency Council on Homelessness



North Dakota's Plan to End Long-Term Homelessness

2013 Progress Report and Recommendations

Accomplishments

Strategy # 1- Develop Permanent Supportive Housing

The idea of permanent supportive housing (PSH) adopts the “Housing First” evidence based practice in which a homeless individual is placed into a stable housing situation as a platform for delivering needed supportive services. The goal identified in the 10-year plan was the creation of 50 new units per year to reach the overall goal of 461 new units of PSH by 2018.

When the plan was adopted in 2008, there were 422 PSH beds in North Dakota targeted specifically to people who are homeless. Currently, there are 719 total PSH beds with 167 new beds being added since 2010. These new beds include additional Veterans Administration Supportive Housing, transitional youth and domestic violence crisis center capacity.

State and federal funds have been deployed to help create new housing units across the state to help mitigate the incidence of homelessness. The federal Low Income Housing Tax Credit program (LIHTC), Neighborhood Stabilization Program, Community Development Block Grants, and HOME Investment Partnerships Program are being used alongside state resources like the Housing Incentive Fund (HIF).

Since 2010, these programs administered by the North Dakota Housing Finance Agency (NDHFA) and the Department of Commerce’s Division of Community Services (DCS), have helped with the creation or rehabilitation of 2,016 affordable housing units across North Dakota. Specifically, LIHTC has helped rehab 106 housing units and create 171 new units with services for senior, disabled and homeless households and provided 113 handicapped accessible units. HIF has become the largest development program in the state with more than 1,000 units created under that program since its inception in 2011. This addition of affordable units statewide has made it easier for those with Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) vouchers to find and afford housing.

Cooper House, a 42-unit PSH project in Fargo, was recognized by the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officers with a best practices award. A recently published cost-benefit analysis of Cooper House also shows significant cost savings from putting homeless individuals into permanent housing as a platform for supportive service delivery.

At the local level, resources are maximized to address homelessness.

Strategy # 2- Improve the Ability to Pay Rent

DCS has focused the Emergency Solutions Grant on emergency shelter and homelessness prevention and activities to include short- and medium-term rental assistance and services to stabilize and rapidly re-house individuals and households who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. In 2013, \$432,359 was awarded to 24 agencies across North Dakota.



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The North Dakota Homeless Grant (NDHG) was implemented after the 2013 legislature appropriated \$2 million to the Department of Commerce to provide grants to reduce homelessness. The grant was designed after the federal Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG), but also to have more flexibility for addressing the needs of the homeless and providing more rental assistance targeted to permanent supportive housing. The grant also funds shelter operations, stabilization services for homeless prevention and rapid re-housing and the use of the Homeless Management Information System (a database system used for homeless data analysis). For 2013-2014, \$1,682,360 was awarded to 29 sub-recipients under both NDHG and ESG, including more than \$250,000 in rental assistance under NDHG. There is \$750,000 left in the NDHG program to be allocated for the 2014-2015 grant period.

In total since 2010, more than \$373,000 in HOME funds have been used across the state for tenant-based rental assistance for 177 households and 1,746 households have received nearly \$403,000 in security deposit assistance.

A working group is meeting to set the framework for a statewide landlord risk mitigation fund which will help moderate the risk of renting to people that face homelessness as a result of screening barriers.

The North Dakota Department of Human Services (DHS) receives the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Project for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) grant. The program provides case management; one-time rental assistance to prevent eviction; security deposit assistance; or providing representative payee services to those who are suffering from serious mental illness or a co-occurring serious mental illness and substance abuse disorder and who are homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless. As a preventative measure when Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and PRIDE clients are facing an eviction notice, the program assists with one to three month's rent. Each of the state's eight regional Human Services Centers divide up the \$300,000 PATH grant funds each year.

Job Service North Dakota, through the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), has assisted unemployed homeless individuals and runaway youth in accessing training and skill development programs and directing them to appropriate employment opportunities. Services including job search assistance, job relocation assistance, identification of skills and workforce skill development are provided to qualifying individuals.

From January 1, 2011, to September 2013 there were 87 homeless individuals who participated in the WIA program in North Dakota, with 26 still active. The Southwest Customer Service Area has had the largest number of participants at 40 followed by the Southeast Area at 20, the Northeast Area at 19, and the Northwest Area at eight.

Forty-one of the 61 homeless individuals who have left the WIA program were employed in the first three months after exiting, 14 were not employed, and six were recent exits where it cannot yet be determined if they became employed after leaving the program.

For the time period January 1, 2011, to September 2013, 4,199 veterans registered in the Job Service Employment Services labor exchange system to search for jobs. Two hundred eighty-nine of those veterans designated that they were homeless. Data is not available to determine how many of the veterans or homeless veterans became employed.



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With 1,000 individuals entering the prison system in a given year, the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DOCR) renewed its efforts to focus on preparation for re-entry into the community and to reduce recidivism. Education plays a key role in this process. Lack of education and workforce skills among inmates are significant barriers in obtaining employment upon release.

DOCR implemented the “Read Right” program within the adult facilities in June 2010. On average, 300 inmate students per month participate in educational programming within the adult prison system.

Educational programs and vocational training that provide marketable skills to inmates are provided by the DOCR. The most recent vocational program implemented within the DOCR is a welding skills training program with industry certification.

Re-entry skills training shows a quarterly snapshot average of 80.6 percent of students entering employment upon release and 83.3 percent of students retaining employment three months after release. Earnings per quarter after release averaged \$10,000.

Strategy # 3- Expand Supportive Services to Wrap Around Housing

DOCR recently published a new web tool called the “Barriers to Housing Assessment” that case managers/ case workers can use to assist clients in identifying opportunities and barriers to stable and affordable housing. The tool consists of about 37 questions with some subcomponents that are used to gather a broad array of information. Based upon the response to the questions, a report is generated which points the case manager and client towards opportunities (things such as service providers, information resources providers and action steps) and barriers (things that will be prohibitive of accessing services or impediment such as having to register as a sex offender, being prohibited from HUD funded housing due to a conviction for drug manufacturing).

DOCR has established re-entry teams in Bismarck, Fargo, Grand Forks and Devils Lake consisting of community stakeholders that provide wrap around case management and supervision of offenders who are re-entering society. Department of Human Services, Adult Education, Job Service, housing authorities, judges, tribal entities, local law enforcement and others are involved. Among the outcomes tracked are housing status and this effort has improved housing stability for offenders and has been particularly successful in terms of housing in the Devils Lake area.

The North Dakota Coalition for Homeless People (NDCHP) works with sub-grantees including the Salvation Army and Community Action Agencies to administer the Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) program. The program provides eligible Veteran families with outreach, case management, and assistance in obtaining VA and other benefits which may include: health care services, daily living services, personal financial planning, transportation services, fiduciary and payee services, legal services, child care services, and housing counseling. In addition, Veteran families may qualify for assistance with time-limited payments to third parties for rent, utilities, moving expenses and licensed child care. Since the program was instituted in North Dakota, more than \$437,000 in temporary financial assistance has been provided to veteran families.

Statewide, programs and initiatives undertaken include:



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- DHS has implemented an Integrated Dual Disorder Treatment (IDDT) model in three regions and is currently expanding this program to the remaining regions;
- Improved discharge planning (ex. jails, hospitals) to help prevent people from becoming homeless;
- Improved relationships with healthcare providers and correctional institutions to offer greater levels of housing resource information to minimize discharge to the streets; and,
- A Transitional Jobs program was created at Southeast Human Services, in addition to more homeless case management services.

DHS provides case management services to the homeless through the regional Human Service Centers. As part of the intensive case management activities, PATH Coordinators go directly to homeless shelters, and other locations in communities to assist homeless individuals with obtaining services including housing. The program assisted 769 individuals in Federal Fiscal Year 2012.

Strategy # 4- Strengthen Prevention and Outreach Programs

Both the NDHG and SSVF programs have prevention and rapid rehousing components that provide temporary financial assistance and case management. Additionally, the SSVF program employs a statewide outreach specialist with a focus on tribal areas.

Project Service Connect has become an annual event in communities around the state. Homeless/Hunger Awareness Week activities have also been initiated. In most of the larger cities in North Dakota, the faith community has taken on an expanded outreach and emergency mission during winter months. These church sheltering operations have been crucial in providing a warm place to sleep for homeless individuals when weather conditions are life-threatening.

Strategy # 5- Collect & Disseminate Data Relating to Long-term Homelessness

NDCHP initiated a summer Point In Time (PIT) count in addition to the HUD mandated January PIT in 2011 to document the well-known fluctuation in homeless populations. Following the 2011 count, in which more unsheltered homeless were found than those in traditional shelter facilities, NDCHP published "The Tipping Point: Unsheltered outnumber Sheltered, the Unintended Consequences of a Robust Economy." The report provides qualitative as well as quantitative data on the increasing number of homeless individuals in the state and their needs for housing. The semi-annual count has continued each year exceeding HUD requirements and providing for a better understanding of homelessness in North Dakota.

The number of homeless and projected shelter needs was highlighted in NDHFA's Statewide Housing Needs Assessment report that was published in 2012.

PIT data has been utilized as a key measure on the North Dakota Compass website which provides information on social indicators.

Additionally, NDCHP is working with stakeholders throughout the state to develop the Coordinated Assess-



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ment Referral and Evaluation System (CARES) which will provide a uniform assessment and referral system, but will also become a useful tool in assessing housing and service gaps within the homeless response system.

Challenges

Affordable housing

Housing shortages and increased housing costs put the most vulnerable populations under stress and at risk of homelessness. Extremely low-income households have seen limited housing options in many communities as market rate rents have risen and housing vouchers have become less usable.

Unemployment and an inability to pay rent are major causes of homelessness, according to the NDCHP Point-in-Time Survey. In 2012, 41 percent of the long-term homeless reported an inability to pay rent as the reason for their homelessness. That number is up significantly from 28 percent in 2011 and 39 percent in 2010. Unemployment was cited in 2012 by 39 percent as the chief cause. This is also up significantly from 21 percent in 2011 and 32 percent in 2010. These unemployment rates are in stark contrast to the state's overall unemployment rate which has been the lowest in the nation for several years, further illustrating the barriers to employment many homeless individuals face.

Emergency support

Emergency and transitional shelters for individuals and families have been operating at near maximum capacity and many communities lack formalized homeless intervention facilities. In 2011, the state reached a critical tipping point where the number of unsheltered homeless outnumbered those in traditional/emergency shelter situations. This is not to understate the remarkable and historic response among North Dakota's communities of faith when people have needs. That stated, it is reasonable to acknowledge that congregations cannot be expected to meet and engage people facing homelessness on all levels of housing and services.

Financial resources

With cutbacks on federal funding for housing programs, more emphasis has been put on state resources. The increased Housing Incentive Fund was completely awarded to projects within fewer than six months and had requests for more than \$67.5 million – nearly double the \$35.4 million available for the FY 2013-15 biennium.

Increased costs for land, materials and labor have required additional equity per project to bring down rent costs to an affordable level. The Low Income Housing Tax Credit program has seen a steady decline in the number of projects that are able to be funded because of increased costs in recent years.

Available supportive services

Substance abuse, medical problems and mental illness are prominent factors for long-term homeless individuals, according to the Point-in-Time Survey. Because of the complexity of delivering the needed sup-



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portive services to address these issues, there is often a gap between housing and services.

Community buy-in

While affordable housing development has accelerated, there remains resistance to new projects. Likewise, proposals to offer homeless programs in communities where none had existed previously have met opposition. According to a survey of community leaders and housing stakeholders taken in conjunction with the 2012 North Dakota Statewide Housing Needs Assessment, only 2.4 percent of respondents expected new units of permanent supportive housing to be built in their community in the next five years.

Increased numbers of people experiencing homelessness

While the number of homeless saw a moderate decrease from 2010 to 2012, the number increased dramatically from 2012 to 2013. There were 972 homeless individuals counted in the January 2012 Point in Time survey, but that number increased 113 percent during the January 2013 survey when 2,069 individuals were counted. The number of persons experiencing homelessness decreased to 1,258 in 2014, but that number is still higher than the previous peak in 2010. While it is positive that there were fewer homeless persons counted in 2014, it is suspected that more people in rural areas were not counted and that there is movement of homeless persons across state borders. The numbers also don't count the number of people precariously housed who are at risk of literal homelessness. In 2014, 1,049 precariously housed persons were counted and it is estimated that there are many more who went uncounted.

Recommendations

The Interagency Council has identified several recommendations to address the ongoing challenges of long-term homelessness.

Develop permanent supportive housing

- The Housing Incentive Fund should be reauthorized to help increase the number of permanent supportive housing units.
- A statewide landlord risk mitigation fund should be created and funded.

Improve the ability to pay rent

- A non-traditional rental assistance program targeted to permanent supportive housing units should be established.
- Additional units of housing that are eligible under traditional housing rental assistance programs including Housing Choice Vouchers and VASH vouchers should be incentivized.
- Based on the limited federal funding available to train individuals for the numerous job opportunities in the state, the NDICH encourages the state to invest training funds specifically for homeless individuals. The designated training funds would potentially enhance the skills of homeless individuals, increase the



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pool of skilled workers, and address the workforce needs of employers in the state.

Expand supportive services that wrap around housing

- The network of existing supportive services for the homeless should be enhanced to maximize the effective delivery through permanent supportive housing.
- A greater linkage and better communication should be facilitated between service and housing providers.
- Adequate funding should be secured for case management for homeless individuals with a disability, serious mental illness, substance abuse issues or a combination thereof.

Strengthen prevention and outreach programs

- Support efforts to develop a statewide system of coordinated assessment and referral to ensure that homeless persons are matched with the right intervention, as quickly as possible.
- The North Dakota Homeless Grant should be reauthorized with an ongoing and permanent funding source.
- Relationships and partnerships that underlie North Dakota's efforts to reduce and end long-term homelessness should continue to be strengthened, with an eye to breaking down silos and increasing cross-agency understanding and competency.
- The capacity of local and regional homeless coalitions should be expanded to reduce the burden on direct-service homeless agencies in managing the day-to-day operations of the coalitions.

Collect and disseminate data relating to long-term homelessness

- The cost-benefit analysis of Cooper House should be widely disseminated as evidence of the effectiveness of the Housing First model in North Dakota.
- Point-in-Time survey data should be consistently used to measure the effectiveness of homelessness interventions.
- Best practices should be determined for community education on homelessness issues.
- Awareness materials utilizing information from the statewide Homeless Management Information System should be created that can be shared with legislators, policy makers, agencies and communities in a relevant and impactful manner.