

Cross-Sector Collaboration to End Homelessness in Wisconsin

Background

Housing quality and access can have significant impacts on physical and mental health. During the development of Wisconsin's 2020 State Health Assessment and the [2023–2027 State Health Improvement Plan \(SHIP\)](#), healthy housing emerged as a top priority for the state's communities and public health system. Housing affordability, accessibility, safety and quality, appropriateness, and stability arose as major areas of concern. People experiencing or at risk of homelessness see the worst impacts of these systemic issues. To pursue improvement, the Wisconsin SHIP team facilitates a regular convening of cross-sector partners working to end homelessness across the state.

Convening the EHSCP Group

The Ending Homelessness through State-Continuum of Care Partnerships (EHSCP) group arose from Wisconsin's state-level COVID-19 pandemic response. During the response phase, staff from across state agencies, service providers, and other partners convened and collaborated to address [Emergency Support Function \(ESF\) #6](#). The work of the ESF6 group included supporting people experiencing homelessness in emergency circumstances, like a pandemic. In Wisconsin, members of this group included diverse representatives from the [Wisconsin Interagency Council on Homelessness](#), the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, [Continuum of Care](#) organizations, various state agencies, and the coordinating entity—the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. The department was represented by individuals from multiple divisions, including Quality Assurance, Medicaid Services, Care and Treatment Services, and a few programs within the Division of Public Health, including the Bureau of Aging and Disability Resources, Office of Preparedness and Emergency Health Care, and the State Health Improvement Plan facilitation team. Each partner contributed a unique perspective and assets. Each partner brought their own expertise to the table, as well as ideas for ways to address the challenges of homelessness by leveraging current activities.

Upon the unwinding of the COVID-19 response infrastructure, ESF6 group members identified the need to continue their work under a new name and new long-term goals. To ensure stability and continuity, the group was re-established under the umbrella and facilitation of the statutorily-required SHIP, which offers a backbone of sustainability to the group. The newly created EHSCP group re-committed themselves to addressing homelessness in Wisconsin through a deeper integration of homelessness and health services provisions.

Creating a Connected System

EHSCP now seeks to sustainably work at the intersection of health, homelessness, and housing insecurity in Wisconsin, focusing on deeper integration of services and collectively striving to improve

system coordination. By utilizing many of the key elements of the health in all policies (HiAP) strategy, this group takes on an enterprise-wide approach to addressing the underlying challenges of housing instability and homelessness, as well as associated health outcomes. At a strategic planning meeting in late 2023, the group identified their first long-term action-oriented aim to eliminate cases of people being discharged from medical facilities into homelessness.

Moving Forward

The EHSCP group is working together to engage stakeholders and partners; identify practices and policies that can be leveraged for change; identify assets, fiscal resources, and opportunities; reduce administrative barriers between agencies; share data; and increase cross agency partnership, connections, and aligned action. These goals align with the areas where using utilizing a HiAP framework can add value to the end results. For example, as the group pivoted from COVID-19 response to ongoing engagement, it has sought to establish a shared deeper understanding of each member organization's role in addressing homelessness, their assets, and challenges. This first action will allow the group to identify more short- and long-term opportunities for collective action towards system integration on both state and local level. Moving forward, the group hopes to maintain this infrastructure to create meaningful impact and serve as a model for a cross-sectoral, HiAP approach to addressing the most pressing needs of communities.

Additional Resources

[Continuum of Care: Dane County](#)

[Continuum of Care: Racine](#)

[Continuum of Care: Balance of State](#)

[Wisconsin Interagency Council on Homelessness](#)

This brief was developed in collaboration between ASTHO staff and Wisconsin Department of Health Services staff.