

# Homeless response strategy 2020-2025:

Making homelessness rare, brief and nonrecurring

# Core beliefs

## Homelessness is unacceptable

Nobody should be without the safety, security and dignity of a home.

## We have solutions to homelessness

We are capable of mobilizing resources to help keep people in their homes or help them find and sustain new homes.

# Central premise

**Hennepin County's three-pronged approach moves our strategy forward.  
We aim to make homelessness:**

Rare	Brief	Nonrecurring
Reduce the number of new entries into homelessness	Accelerate the rate at which people who experience homelessness can exit into permanent housing	Minimize the number of returns to homelessness for people who have previously exited into housing

# Fundamental principles

1. **Housing** is the foundation for health and well-being and is fundamental to success in education and employment.
2. Everyone experiencing housing instability and homelessness deserves to be treated with **dignity and respect**.
3. Everyone has their own unique blend of strengths, resources and experiences. **They are the experts** on their circumstances.
4. Housing instability and homelessness most harms communities of color in Hennepin County; our services should **be culturally responsive** wherever practicable.
5. Homelessness is often both the cause and the consequence of trauma; services and systems must **be trauma-informed**.

# Fundamental principles (continued)

6. Those working within the system, not those who require assistance, should **shoulder the burden** of navigating complex systems, funding streams and programs.
7. The priority when working with people experiencing homelessness – in sheltered or unsheltered settings – should be helping those individuals and households **access housing as a matter of urgency**.
8. Emergency homeless shelters should **be easy to access** by people experiencing homelessness but should not be considered a place for people with no income or low income to reside indefinitely.
9. Unsheltered homelessness represents a **serious health and safety risk** and is not a dignified form of shelter.
10. **Housing ends homelessness.** Everyone can be housed.

# Theory of change



## Individual

Make 1-to-1 connections with residents in need of housing



## Housing market

Increase quantity, quality and variety of housing to meet demand



## Systems

Maintain diverse partnerships that include people with lived experience of housing instability

# Rare: Priorities and progress

## 1. Expand partnerships with and build capacity in systems that interact with at-risk households

### Our work

Allocated **\$2m per year** in new funding to Stable Homes Stable Schools in Minneapolis, **increasing capacity by 300-400 families** per year.

Created 'School to Housing,' **allocating \$3m a year** for rent assistance and case management to **~200 households per year** in 8 school districts with the highest rates of homeless and highly mobile students outside of Minneapolis.

Delivered housing resource and best-practice **training to more than 5,000 direct service professionals** across behavioral health, child welfare, aging and disability, and corrections systems since 2020.

# Rare: Priorities and progress

## 2. Simplify and streamline delivery of emergency financial assistance

### Our work

Administered **\$58m in federal** pandemic **emergency rent assistance (ERA)**; new unit disbursed more than \$30m. Ranked among the top 20% nationwide, **we served 3,870 households.**

A new unit **administers \$10m+ a year** in state and county funding, **helping more than 2,400 residents** facing imminent eviction and/or homelessness each year.

Tenant Resource Connections (TRC) launched in 2020. In 2024, we responded to **150+ calls a week** from people facing eviction, initiating **70 ERA applications a week.**

In 2025, all **emergency rental assistance was fully centralized** across county funding streams and programs through RentHelp Hennepin.



# Rare: Priorities and progress



## 3. Pursue opportunities to provide ongoing rental assistance to at-risk households

### Our work

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The creation of the Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) network with four Public Housing Authorities led to **143 new rental assistance vouchers for young people who have experienced foster care**, a group at extremely high risk of entering homelessness. To date, 76 vouchers have been put into use and at least an additional 65 vouchers are available in 2025.

# Rare: Priorities and progress

## 4. Provide case management supports for the most at-risk households

### Our work

Alongside the FYI vouchers for youth with foster care involvement (see Priority 3), **\$255,000 per year for support services** has been allocated in new federal, state and local funds for this group.

Hennepin County contracts for homelessness prevention support services and has reconfigured the Family Homeless Prevention and Assistance Program to allow community-based agencies to focus on and specialize in support while the County processes payments. Currently, we provide more than **\$2.7 million a year for homelessness prevention support services.**

# Rare: Priorities and progress

## 5. Ensure legal representation for low-income households facing eviction

### Our work

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Adult Representation Services committed **\$3.2 million in annual funding for 18.5 full time employees to ensure legal representation at Housing Court** for all low-income residents facing eviction. All low-income residents now have access to this option at Housing Court, compared to about 10% before the pandemic.

Hennepin County Human Services committed **more than \$300,000 in annual funding to staff 3 full time employees to assist residents in applying for emergency rental assistance**, expediting access for the most critical cases and helping avoid evictions alongside the legal representation team.

# Brief: Priorities and progress



## 1. Help people access community-based resources as an alternative to shelter

### Our work

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January 2023 saw the launch of the 'Hennepin Shelter Hotline' service. Funded at **\$1m per year**, Catholic Charities staff work with callers to help residents identify alternatives to entering a formal homeless shelter. **The shelter hotline assists ~40 households each week to find safe alternatives to entering homeless shelters.**

# Brief: Priorities and progress

## 2. Lower barriers to emergency shelter

### Our work

**Eliminated self-pay requirements** that had been in place in all family shelter and 24-hour single adult shelter programs.

**Launched four shelter programs** for underserved populations, an investment of **\$9.7m in capital and \$6.5m in annual operating funds:**

- American Indian Community Development Corporation Homeward Bound (a 50-bed culturally specific shelter)
- Avivo Village (a 100-bed shelter with intensive chemical and mental health supports for people coming from encampments)
- Catholic Charities Medical Respite (a 30-bed shelter with supports from Healthcare for the Homeless)
- Salvation Army Women's Only Shelter (30 bed, a small scale shelter for people who identify as female)

# Brief: Priorities and progress

## 2. Lower barriers to emergency shelter

### Our work

**Provided \$7.25m in capital funding toward acquisition/development of three new shelter buildings** needed to replace and improve existing programs

**Provided \$3.2m toward physical improvements in other existing shelter programs**, adding storage, laundry, restroom and air filtration improvements

**Increased 24/7 operations** (as opposed to overnight only) in single adult shelters from 15% **to 75% of total beds at cost of \$3m per year.**

# Brief: Priorities and progress

## 3. Provide person-centered support focused on urgently moving people to housing

### Our work

**Invested \$3m a year to create the Homeless to Housing team.**

The team **housed its 1,500th person from homelessness** in December 2024 with a 96% retention rate during two years in operation.

**Invested \$700,000 a year to create the Streets to Housing team, a 7-FTE** encampment response team. Launched in late 2022, Streets to Housing has served 1,090 households, with 264 recorded exits to permanent housing and 144 into emergency shelter.

**Invested \$800,000 per year in increased case management for shelter providers** to help move their guests to permanent housing.

# Brief: Priorities and progress

## 4. Maximize efficient and effective use of homeless-designated resources

### Our work

The Coordinated Entry System (CES) team makes **200+ referrals of people in shelters or unsheltered settings** to homeless designated housing programs per month.

Hennepin County **increased CES team capacity by 2 FTE** (now 6 total) to strengthen the system, improve referral quality and outcomes and to expedite the housing referral timeline.

Effective prioritization of **veterans** experiencing homelessness and people experiencing **chronic homelessness** through the CES has led to **sustained reductions in homelessness for both groups.**



# Brief: Priorities and progress

## 5. Maximize use of mainstream housing resources

### Our work

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The Homeless to Housing team works with people to pursue personalized housing options:

**15% of housing outcomes to date involve rentals without any subsidies.**

**15% involve non-homeless subsidies**, including rentals in public housing.

**5% of housing outcomes involve residential or halfway house settings** with no homeless criteria (4%) or long-term care facility or nursing homes (1%).

# Nonrecurring: Priorities and progress

## 1. Increase supply of targeted permanent supportive housing

### Our work

Hennepin County's Housing and Economic Development has awarded **\$24.76m to 26 projects to create 575 deeply affordable and supportive housing units** by the end of 2024 through the Supportive Housing Strategy.

Housing Stability partnered in the creation of **678 new housing opportunities** that started taking referrals in 2024:

- 30% were in site-based permanent supportive housing programs.
- 67% were scattered site permanent supportive housing.
- 65 were funded through the Supportive Housing Strategy.

# Nonrecurring: Priorities and progress

## 2. Increase supply of single-room occupancy housing

### Our work

Housing and Economic Development (HED) has led efforts in increasing the supply of Single Room Occupancy (SRO) housing. We purchased five motels and assisted a partner to purchase a sixth between 2020 and 2022. Of the five:

- Two renovated and fully operational facilities provide 83 units of deeply affordable SRO housing (30% AMI).
- One was sold to a nonprofit partner that will develop 40 units of deeply affordable housing.
- One is under contract with a nonprofit partner that will develop a culturally tailored substance use treatment center.
- The fifth, Federal Plaza, is part of the emergency shelter response system; we will convert it to SRO housing in the future.

# Nonrecurring: Priorities and progress

## 3. Maximize mainstream support services, including Medicaid Housing Stabilization Services (HSS)

### Our work

Since the rollout of Medicaid Housing Stabilization Services, we have helped build partners' capacity to bill Medicaid, adding two staff and **allocating \$230,000 in grants.**

HSS created and led 24 provider trainings in **2024**; a total of 995 attendees represented **200 provider agencies.**

We provided feedback and recommendations to DHS on the implementation of the DHS Homelessness, Housing and Support Services Administration.

# Nonrecurring: Priorities and progress

## 4. Seek reforms and alternatives to the Housing Support program

### Our work

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Hennepin County actively supported legislative change for people living in Housing Support community-based settings who would only be required to pay **30% of their income** toward rent. This **simplifies the program for more than 400 households** and removes barriers to use of the program.

Hennepin County also allocated **\$5 million in capital improvement grants for Board and Lodge** Housing Support facilities toward renovations including adding and improving outdoor spaces, air conditioning, private rooms, new bathrooms, and laundry rooms. This was successfully completed at the end of 2024.

# Nonrecurring: Priorities and progress

## 5. Create pathways to training and employment

### Our work

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We developed the Employment and Training Services for People Exiting Homelessness pilot program in partnership with the Hennepin County Office of Workforce Development. The program had **208 new referrals in 2024**:

- 74% of referrals have resulted in program enrollment and service participation.
- 30 enrollees now work part time or full time.
- 67 who exited the program now work part time or full time.
- 88 completed training and education programs or paid work experience and 28 were still in progress at year's end.
- Average wage earnings is \$18.55 for those enrolled and working and \$17.86 for those who have exited.