After 10 years of aggressively working to end homelessness, the issue still exists in Hennepin County. We continue working toward this goal, while also ending homelessness each day, one person at a time.

Homelessness affects our entire community, and therefore requires a community-wide response.

In 2006, a diverse team of representatives throughout Minneapolis and Hennepin County developed a plan to tackle the issue together. Homelessness should be rare, brief and non-recurring – that was the principle that guided their work.

The plan laid out six goals: prevention, outreach, housing opportunities, service delivery, systems improvements and self-support. Strategies focused on not only treating the symptoms of homelessness, but also preventing people from experiencing it.

During the plan’s implementation, several external events made addressing homelessness more complicated, including the housing market crash that led to record-high foreclosures and the Great Recession.

However, partnerships formed during the past decade helped mitigate the impact of these unfortunate events and helped thousands of people find homes.

We continually adapt our work to anticipate and respond to external factors that affect our community. We cannot control the economy or societal changes, but we are learning how to help people to be resilient in an ever-changing environment.
"In all my years working on this issue, I had never before seen the kind of coordination and collaboration that took place throughout the course of this plan. Over 125 nonprofit partners, government staff, faith communities, philanthropic organizations and business leaders worked together to create housing stability for thousands of people in Hennepin County."

- Mikkel Beckmen, Director of Office of Housing Stability, Hennepin County

“Ending homelessness is an ambitious goal but an attainable goal that is beneficial for the community as a whole. It is good for the person or family in need, good for businesses and neighborhoods, good for law enforcement and good for taxpayers.”

- Cathy ten Broeke, State Director to Prevent and End Homelessness, Minnesota

"We continue to focus on creating housing opportunities for the poorest people in the community and connecting the work of ending homelessness to larger systems – child welfare, workforce development, healthcare, corrections – so that we can have an even bigger impact."

- David Hewitt, Director of Office to End Homelessness, Hennepin County
At the start of the plan, the economy was strong. Unemployment was low and family shelter use was declining.

As the recession unfolded, low-income residents began feeling its impact. More people began seeking shelter.
Prevention

Efforts targeted different people who were most at risk for experiencing homelessness.

- **Youth**: Hennepin County extended foster care to age 21 and sponsored mediation training for youth workers.

- **People in transition**: The Minneapolis Foundation funded a worker to help people transition to housing after receiving medical care or becoming involved in the criminal justice system.

- **Families**: The State of Minnesota doubled funding for the Homelessness Prevention and Assistance Program, which provided homeless prevention services to more than 3,000 households and rapid rehousing to approximately 3,000 households.
Outreach

With a better understanding of the homelessness issue, the community worked to connect people with the appropriate resources.

- **People without shelter:** The City of Minneapolis began the Street Outreach Program, which provided case management and housing supports to more than 200 unsheltered people each year. St. Stephen’s Human Services began to take quarterly counts of people experiencing homelessness without shelter.

- **Youth:** Hennepin County expanded outreach to youth facing homelessness. The StreetWorks Collaborative organized 12 youth-serving agencies to provide services to youth living outside. Other youth-provider collaborations included Hennepin Youth Action Group, Youth Services Network, Metro Youth Services Redesign Collaborative and Youth Moving Forward.

- **Veterans:** The Minnesota Assistance Council on Veterans hired an outreach worker to connect veterans to housing.

Housing opportunities

People experiencing homelessness had access to new housing resources and those at risk of homelessness had access to support.

- **Increased housing supports:** Group residential housing (GRH) and other subsidies expanded, creating 1,912 housing opportunities between 2007 and 2010.

- **Support for youth:** Nicollet Square opened in 2010, a 42-unit supportive housing complex. During the plan, 243 youth housing units opened. Youth also connected with housing through Avenues for Homeless Youth’s GLBT Host Home Program.

- **Services for refugees:** Downtown Congregations to End Homelessness (DCEH), along with the Minneapolis Downtown Council, raised funds to support case workers to place people into group residential housing (GRH) apartments.

- **Services for veterans:** The HUD Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing program received 205 vouchers between 2008 and 2011 to house veterans and their families.
Service delivery and systems improvement

Events and programs connected people to resources to help stabilize their housing.

- **Transition from jail to community:**
  The Frequent User Service Enhancement program and Transition from Jail to Community team began to help people leaving Hennepin County correctional facilities. Minneapolis Police Department began the Downtown 100 program pairing policing with social services.

- **Collaboration:** About 2,000 people attended Project Homeless Connect events, which brought together more than 150 nonprofits, 400 service providers and 1,000 volunteers. The Adult Opportunity Center and Youth Opportunity Center also began providing services.

- **Hennepin University Partnership:**
  The Office to End Homelessness worked with University of Minnesota students, who supported specific public policy inquiries and conducted extensive research on refugee homelessness.

Self-support

People had improved access to education, career and transportation resources to become self-sufficient.

- **Education:** United Way led a program that helped low-income households take advantage of federal earned income tax credits and state working family credit.

- **Access to transportation:**
  Homeless Against Homelessness worked successfully to pass legislation allowing homeless-serving agencies to purchase transit passes at half price.

Phase 1: Collaboration and connections, 2007 – 2010
Christine Michels, Catholic Charities
“The community was so committed to finding a solution for the individuals downtown without a place to go.”
Building trust and connections to housing

In 2010, social service agencies joined representatives of the business and faith communities to form an initiative that ultimately helped house 1,000 people.

**Organizing around the cause**

Downtown businesses and Downtown Congregations to End Homelessness helped raise more than $350,000 of start-up funds to hire 10 case managers.

This team of social workers connected people experiencing homelessness and disabilities to group residential housing. Building trust with clients and property owners was crucial to their work.

“A big aspect of what we did was reach out to landlords to participate and take a chance on some of our individuals who had no rental history, poor rental history or criminal backgrounds,” said Christine Michels of Catholic Charities.

Within the first year of the program, 150 people secured permanent housing or were in the final stages of securing it.

Michels recalled working with clients who made tremendous changes in their lives after securing stable housing.

“Everything was stacked against them. There was more reason to believe that they weren’t going to succeed, but they did,” she said. “This initiative had a big impact, so we should look at this type of initiative again.”
During the middle years of the plan, the recession wore on. The number of families requesting shelter continued to grow, especially for the poorest residents.

Most of these families relied on Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) grants, which had not increased since 1986.

In response to these crises, the community focused on an emergency homelessness response.

A tornado that tore through North Minneapolis in 2011 exacerbated the lack of affordable housing. Of the 7,000 homes in the area, more than half, or 3,700, sustained minor to severe damage from the storm.
Phase 2: Crisis response and targeted services, 2011 – 2013

Prevention

Resources shifted to people who were dangerously at risk of homelessness, and focused on individualized services coupled with cash assistance.

- Family Homeless Prevention and Assistance Program: The state continued to provide the program with $4 million per biennium.
Outreach

Resources targeted people who were involved with the criminal justice system or experiencing street homelessness.

- **Reducing livability offenses:**
  St. Stephen’s established a special court for those experiencing homelessness who also were enmeshed in the criminal justice system. This effort grew into Housing Outreach to Minneapolitans Establishing Stability (HOMES Court).

Housing opportunities

New connections helped veterans and people experiencing medical issues to access housing.

- **Health-supported housing:** Exodus Hotel began housing people with medical conditions requiring nursing management. The Dorothy Day Center in St. Paul also adopted the same model. Health Care for the Homeless began monitoring medical beds at Salvation Army Harbor Light shelter.

Impact of HOMES Court

The program provided services to 79 participants in its first phase, saving nearly $140,000 on costly intervention services.

![Chart showing costs savings](chart.png)

Costs savings per person / per day

- **Jail:** $132.24
- **Shelter:** $8.70
- **Detox:** $364.06
Service delivery and systems improvement

New resources and legislation served people at risk for homelessness and those experiencing chronic homelessness.

- **Chronically homeless:** The Top 51 Project launched in 2012 with a focus on single adults with the longest shelter stays. In its pilot phase, about two-thirds of clients found permanent housing.

- **Veterans:** Veterans Community Resource and Referral Center opened to support veterans with health care, employment, housing, benefits and treatment services.

- **Sexually exploited youth:** The State of Minnesota passed the Safe Harbor Law requiring agencies to treat sexually-exploited youth under 18 as victims. In 2014, Hennepin County adopted the No Wrong Door model, which offers trauma-informed outreach across the spectrum of county services.

Self-support

Adults and youth gained access to new housing and employment resources.

- **Employment services:** Adult Opportunity Center launched the Heading Home Employment Collaborative in 2011 in partnership with Goodwill/Easter Seals and Project for Pride in Living, an employment program that emphasized increased income as a way to make housing affordable.

- **Expanded youth services:** With the help of the Otto Bremer Foundation, YouthLink opened during the school day to serve young adults who were staying in adult shelters.

Phase 2: Crisis response and targeted services, 2011 – 2013
Brittany, Participant
“This is my sanctuary, where my children play, sleep, learn and know they’re home. I haven’t slept anywhere else with my children since we got our apartment.”
Brittany teared up as she looked around her home, where her son was napping and her daughter was finger painting. She recalled her struggles experiencing homelessness as a young mother – and her first night at home.

Brittany was expecting her first child when she found out she could no longer stay with her family, who were in an unstable housing situation.

“I wasn’t a drug addict and didn’t gamble,” she said. “I had a job and still ended up homeless.”

Despite working, Brittany couldn’t afford much on her own. She ended up sleeping on a friend’s couch and then in a shelter, with limited access to food or personal hygiene items. At one point, she was hospitalized for dehydration and exhaustion.

“You can lose your bed or have your belongings thrown away with a wrong move or a bad day,” she said. “It’s hard for someone who has never been homeless to know the way it makes you feel.”

Brittany eventually connected with the Stable Families Initiative, a partnership between Hennepin County and Simpson Housing.

She received help to secure an apartment for her family.

Through this initiative, Brittany received comprehensive support in parenting, housing, financial literacy and life skills. Most importantly, program staff provided her with emotional support and help navigating a maze of social services.
As the economy recovered, the community turned to broader systems change to increase funding and embed an array of services.

The plan shifted to align with state and federal targets. HUD began to require that communities follow its Housing First philosophy, which reduces barriers into housing.

Hennepin County also began the Coordinated Entry System during this period, another HUD requirement.

This system prioritizes housing resources for people with the most urgent needs.
Phase 3: Systems change, 2014 – 2017

Prevention

Parenting help and emergency assistance help families avoid homelessness.

- **Housing loss prevention:** The Stable Families Initiative worked to prevent housed families from returning to homelessness. Outcomes from a pilot program indicate that participants maintained their housing and, on average, increased their income by 77 percent.

- **Parenting support:** The Parent Support Outreach Program connects families in emergency shelter to parenting help. Each year, 10 partner agencies serve about 900 families.
“Before, I would often feel helpless when a patron experiencing homelessness needed help… I now have a person I can connect them to and [the outreach coordinator] has taught me some resources I can use when she is not available.” – library staff member

Outreach

A targeted initiative provides needed connections to medical care, housing, transportation, education, employment and more.

- **Mental health:** The Integrated Access Team provides support to residents with mental illness and chemical dependence in the Hennepin County Public Safety Facility, during their transition back into the community.

- **Involving the business community:** The Minneapolis Downtown Council’s 2025 plan includes ending street homelessness. Committees met to develop strategies for outreach at Hennepin County Library – Minneapolis Central.

Housing opportunities

State and federal programs provide housing for families and people who are chronically homeless.

- **Chronically homeless:** HUD-funded programs moved toward a Housing First philosophy, prioritizing the chronically homeless for help. All housing that is funded through homeless programs at the federal, state and local level received housing referrals through Hennepin County’s Coordinated Entry System.

- **Families:** Minnesota Housing provided housing subsidies for 19 families participating in the Stable Families Initiative. Federal funding provided 72 housing subsidies for the same initiative.
Service delivery and systems improvement

Changes streamline the process for finding shelter, housing, employment and more.

- **Housing placement:** The county Coordinated Entry System launched – a system that prioritizes the most vulnerable for housing placement. In its first year, the program referred 963 single adults and 701 families to housing.

- **Youth shelter:** The Link opened Passageways in Prior Lake, which provides shelter and housing for sexually-exploited youth. The Safe Harbor Act in 2016 extended eligibility for shelter services through age 24.

- **Coordinated shelter:** Adult Shelter Connect launched in 2016. This one-step system to reserve shelter beds gives people certainty about where they will be staying each night. In its first 10 months of operation, the system connected more than 5,000 people to shelter.

Self-support

Partnerships help connect youth and adults with employment opportunities.

- **Workforce:** Heartland Alliance is funding work with Hennepin County to retool the workforce system to meet the needs of youth experiencing homelessness.

- **Employment services:** Hennepin County contracts with Goodwill-Easter Seals to provide enhanced employment services for families in shelter.

- **Connections to jobs:** The Heading Home Employment Collaborative continues. Between its inception in 2011 and 2016, it served over 1,000 participants. The program placed more than half of its participants in employment with average wages of $11 per hour at 36 hours per week.
Sarah Hunt, Housing referral coordinator

“Before, people had to retell their trauma over and over again. Now, people complete the intake process one time”
Resources for the most vulnerable

The Coordinated Entry System, launched in April 2016, targets people with the most immediate needs – those in homeless shelters or on the street.

Sarah Hunt recalled her arduous experiences referring clients to housing before the launch of the Coordinated Entry System.

She often received emails addressed to hundreds of people about upcoming vacancies. Then, she spent hours filling out intake packets with hopeful clients who later faced rejection.

“What ended up happening is the people who were being left behind were most vulnerable,” Hunt said.

Streamlining the system

Hunt, who has been a housing referral coordinator for the system since its launch, said her current experience connecting people to housing is more efficient.

The system also eliminates some barriers, such as requiring documentation at intake.

“We are putting the onus on housing providers and reshaping the community’s approach to housing these families,” she said.

Overcoming challenges

Hunt said the first year of Coordinated Entry involved making the program operational and efficient. Moving into the second year, the program is focusing on customer service and tailoring services to the community.

The program has already overcome challenges. For example, Coordinated Entry now uses Front Door Social Services as an access point for domestic abuse survivors who may be staying at shelters throughout the state.

“The bottom line is efficiently using resources to give them to the most vulnerable in the community,” Hunt said.
We continue to work toward ending homelessness one person at a time. Our endeavors help individuals and families exit homelessness and find their pathway into housing.

As a decade of work on Heading Home Hennepin concludes, our community has helped thousands of families and individuals move away from homelessness.

Far too many people, however, still lack safe and stable housing. Many more are at risk of losing their homes.

While the Great Recession is behind us, we are now facing a tight housing market and historically low vacancy rates. Higher rents and greater competition are pushing the most vulnerable out of housing.

When no other options remain, people turn to the homeless response system. In 2016, almost 9,000 people approached homeless services for the first time.

Through the work of the 10-year plan, the community has made challenging but necessary changes to the way we develop, prioritize, and coordinate our resources. In the face of great demand, our community is seeking to continually improve emergency services, one-to-one support, and access to housing for the most vulnerable people in our community.

I am greatly appreciative of everyone who contributes to these efforts, including government, non-profit sector, and faith and business community partners. Your continued work and support is improving the lives of all Hennepin County residents.

David Hewitt
Director of Office to End Homelessness, Hennepin County
We continue to focus on creating housing opportunities for the poorest people in the community and connecting the work of ending homelessness to larger systems – child welfare, workforce development, healthcare, corrections – so that we can have an even bigger impact.

- David Hewitt, Director of Office to End Homelessness, Hennepin County

### Phase 3: Systems change, 2014-2017

- New affordable rental units: 6,975
  - 6,274
  - 1,571
- New rental units: 1,751
  - 1,499
  - 1,054
- Cost-burdened renters: $1,021
  - $1,055
  - $1,248

### Executive committee members

**Chairs**

- Betsy Hodges, Mayor of Minneapolis
- Janis Callison, Hennepin County Commissioner
- Steve Cramer, CEO and President, Minneapolis Downtown Council

**Members**

- Lisa Bender, Minneapolis City Council
- Andrea Brennan, City of Minneapolis
- Kimberly Carpenter, community representative
- Chester Cooper, Hennepin County
- Jennifer DeCubellis, Hennepin County
- Kathie Doty, Hennepin University Partnership
- Margo Geffen, Hennepin County
- Marion Greene, Hennepin County Board of Commissioners
- Maria Hanratty, University of Minnesota
- David Hough, Hennepin County
- John Knowland, community representative
- Megan O’Meara, Greater Twin Cities United Way
- Ross Owen, Hennepin Health
- Melissa Pohlman, Downtown Congregations to End Homelessness
- John Quincy, Minneapolis City Council
- Danielle Robertshaw, Hennepin County Medical Center
- David Rubedor, City of Minneapolis
- Greg Russ, Minneapolis Public Housing Authority
- Ellen Sahli, Family Housing Fund
- Jean Sazevich, Heading Home Minnesota Funders Collaborative
- Cathy ten Broeke, Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness
- Patrick Troska, Jay and Rose Phillips Family Foundation
- Luke Weisberg, community representative
- Jodi Wentland, Hennepin County
- Shane Zahn, Minneapolis SafeZone
Contact the Office to End Homelessness
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