

# **Welcome Home**

**Addressing Homelessness and  
the Need for Affordable  
Housing in Eau Claire**



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# Executive Summary

It's up to us as a community to come together, support each other, and create the local solutions we need. Real change starts locally: right here, right now, one neighbor at a time.

The Housing Our Neighbors Planning Collaborative was created not to reinvent the wheel, but to build upon the significant efforts already underway in Eau Claire.

This Collaborative shares a bold vision: **to make homelessness in Eau Claire County rare, brief, and non-recurring within five years.** This vision will require a coordinated, efficient, and impactful homeless response system—a system built on consistent local leadership and strengthened through community collaboration.


## THE CHALLENGE:

Eau Claire County is facing a growing homelessness crisis, mirroring troubling national trends. As of July 2025, the county needs at least 336 additional housing units with supportive services to meet current demand. Homelessness impacts everyone—individuals, families, healthcare, law enforcement, and local economies. Without immediate and coordinated action, the human and financial costs will continue to rise.

## THE OPPORTUNITY:

The community has responded with dedication and compassion, expanding services and increasing investments from both City and County governments. Local organizations and initiatives have made real progress—but stronger, more unified leadership is needed now to drive measurable outcomes, ensure accountability, and elevate the voices of people with lived experience.

## THE PLAN:



This plan brings together existing resources, builds on local strengths, and applies evidence-based strategies to tackle homelessness. It leverages past housing studies and current realities to address homelessness and expand supportive, deeply affordable housing for everyone. Grounded in lessons already learned and shaped by local input, this plan aims to move past fragmented responses to homelessness. Through transparency, shared leadership, and ongoing evaluation, Eau Claire can achieve a sustainable, community-driven solution—making homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring within five years.

**Strategic  
data  
sharing**

**Align  
the  
system**

**Prevent  
homelessness**

**Ensure  
affordable  
housing**

**Strengthen  
outreach**

**Community  
engagement**



# Housing Our Neighbors Planning Collaborative

*Participating organizations as of August 2025:*



We offer special thanks to:

- City of Eau Claire Housing Authority
- Eau Claire County Housing Authority
- Eau Claire Area School District Homeless Liaison
- Eau Claire Police Department
- LaCrosse County Pathways Home
- Sara Larsen Services
- Eau Claire County's Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC),
- Wisconsin Balance of State Continuum of Care
- University of Wisconsin Extension
- University of Wisconsin - Madison LaFollette School of Public Affairs
- Milwaukee County Housing Administrator and the Street Outreach Team
- Eau Claire City-County Health Department Communications Specialist

We especially acknowledge the voices of those with lived experience of homelessness, whose courage and insight grounded this plan in real-world experience — especially Seth Champion, Mara Langreck, and Justin Fierke.

Finally, thank you to the countless community members, government employees, and service providers whose dedication continues to drive our collective effort to reach functional zero in Eau Claire County.



# A community responsibility

As discussed, homelessness is a complex issue - one that has been a national problem for centuries. There is no one, simple solution. **It is NOT the responsibility of a single entity to address all of the factors at play.** The responsibility lies with everyone in the community. Together, we make a system that must respond to and prevent homelessness.



Healthcare systems



Churches and faith-based groups



Philanthropic entities



Government organizations



Landlords, developers, and neighborhoods



Nonprofits and service providers



Businesses



Law enforcement and justice systems



Community members



# Who is this report for?



This report has several goals:

- Providing background information on homelessness and housing in Eau Claire County
- Discussing previous initiatives and how we got to this point
- Defining the Housing Our Neighbors Planning Collaborative and the work being done
- Describing the strategies our community prioritizes to address homelessness

This information is for anyone who hopes to improve the lives of our neighbors in Eau Claire. Reducing homelessness makes a better community for all, and we hope to listen to the voices of all who are impacted by this growing issue. Whether you're a community member, local government leader, business owner, someone with lived or living experience, nonprofit organization, homelessness service provider, or you just like Eau Claire - you bring a crucial perspective and play an important part in addressing and managing the systemic issue of homelessness.

## How do we use it?

This plan is not meant to provide a step-by-step process to end homelessness. While significant work has been done, there's still a lot more work to do, and that work can only be done by finding collaborative, creative solutions. This plan aims to provide direction and long-term goals that we hope to achieve over the next 1, 5, and 10 years. The information and strategies have been prioritized and created by people who represent many different sectors in Eau Claire - all these people helped create a single shared vision and framework that can drive our work.

When things feel confusing, hopeless, or all around just too hard, we hope this plan will bring us back to what we hope to achieve: **making homelessness brief, rare, and non-reoccurring for our neighbors in Eau Claire County.**



# Grounding in experience

Throughout this report, a central and reoccurring theme is the grounding of our work in the voices of people who have experienced or are currently experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity in Eau Claire. While one can empathize and sympathize to the best of their ability, no one can truly understand what it means to be homeless if they have never been in a similar situation themselves. When people affected by a problem aren't included, solutions can miss important context and make people who are typically excluded feel even more left out.

Our neighbors with lived/living experience provide critically important insights, perspectives, and ideas. Rather than being told what they need, they provided direct input and feedback so our plan can accurately address the needs of the people who need solutions the most. They control the story.

The use of the term "neighbors experiencing homelessness" signifies the communal and social relationship we as a community have to one another. We avoid using othering language (for example, "the unhoused" or "the homeless"). Person-first language (for example, saying "a person experiencing homelessness" rather than "a homeless person") is used to prioritize the person rather their situation.



**Our first battle in ending homelessness is realizing people who experience homelessness are human.**

**Someone who is unhoused in your community is your neighbor.**



*National Coalition for Ending Homelessness*



# Eau Claire cares!

Significant work has been done to address the needs of people experiencing homelessness, and much of that work continues today. Funding, resources, expertise, and knowledge have all been dedicated through countless hours of work to support our community members and decrease the numbers of people experiencing homelessness:



Participating in workgroups and coalitions



Providing consistent outreach and resources



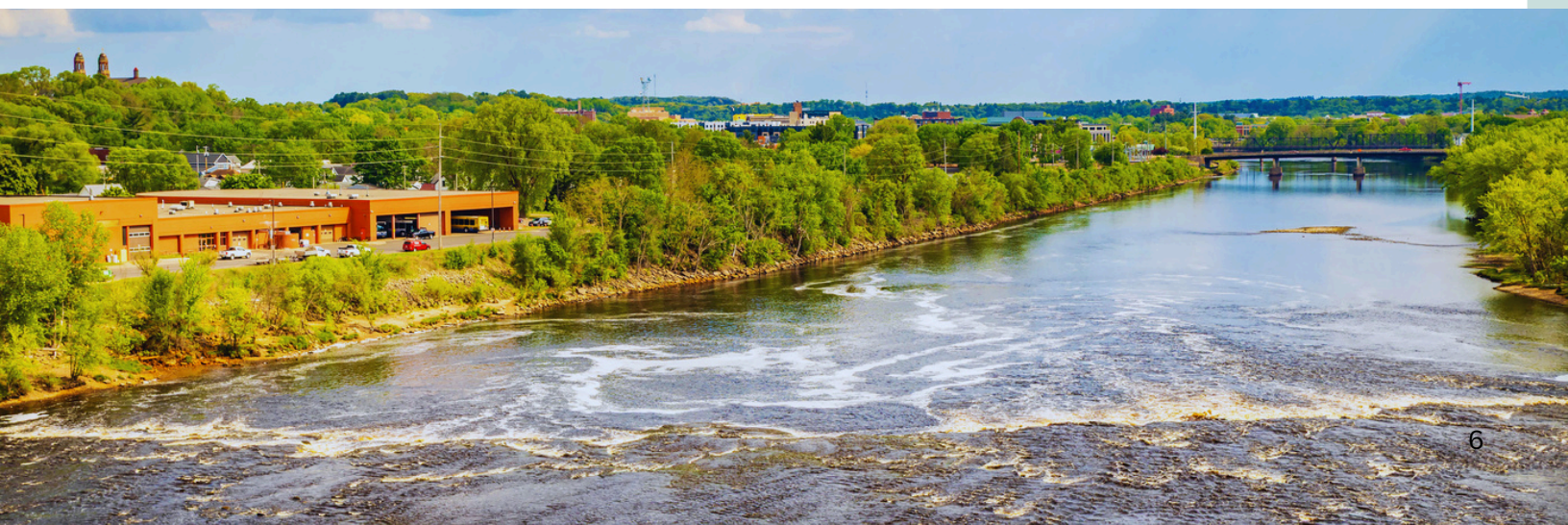
Supporting local day and night shelters



Maintaining safe and affordable housing

With a problem as complex as homelessness, there isn't a single answer. Even addressing just one need of someone experiencing homelessness, like food, mental health support, or helping them find affordable housing, can overload an organization's capacity as they navigate multiple challenges with limited resources.

**The only way to provide full, comprehensive support is for organizations in our community to work together.**



# Defining homelessness

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has created four categories to define **homelessness** in the United States:

- 1. Literally Homeless:** A person or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.
- 2. Imminent Risk of Homelessness:** A person or family who will imminently lose their primary nighttime residence.
- 3. Homeless Under Other Federal Statutes:** Unaccompanied youth younger than 25, or families with Category 3 children and youth, who don't otherwise qualify as homeless.
- 4. Fleeing/Attempting to Flee Domestic Violence:** A person or family who 1) is fleeing, or is attempting to flee, domestic violence; 2) has no other residence; and 3) lacks the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing.

Homelessness includes, but is not limited to:



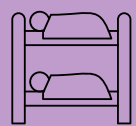
People sleeping in their car



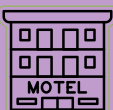
People sleeping outside



People staying in emergency shelters



People doubling up with family or friends



People living in motels/hotels

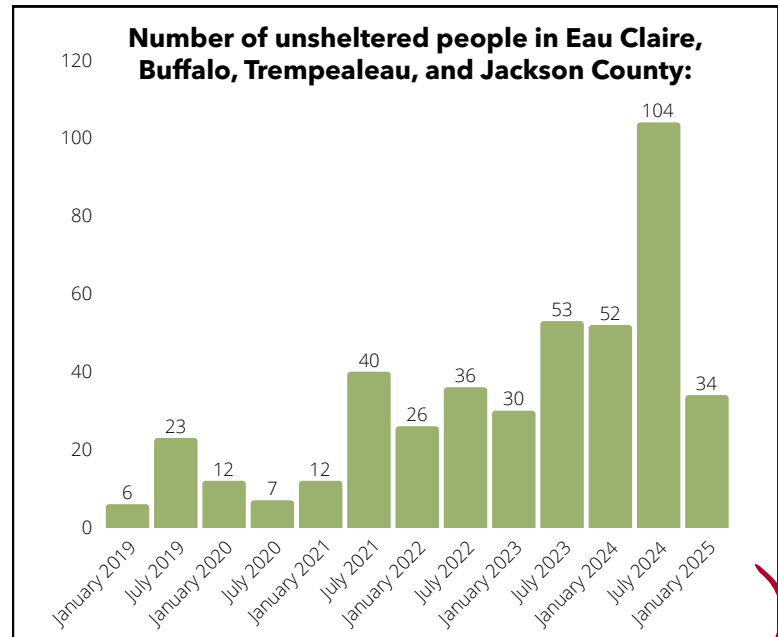


People living in places not meant for human habitation, like storage units

# What is the problem?

## Homelessness is increasing in western Wisconsin.

While it's difficult to get a definitive count of people who are unhoused, there are multiple sources that can provide an estimate. One is the Point-In-Time (PIT) count, a twice-yearly count of sheltered and unsheltered people found on a single night. The PIT is conducted by local Continuums of Care (*described on page 18*), where volunteers count the number of people found unsheltered between 11pm and 6am on a given day. This data helps inform nationwide trends.

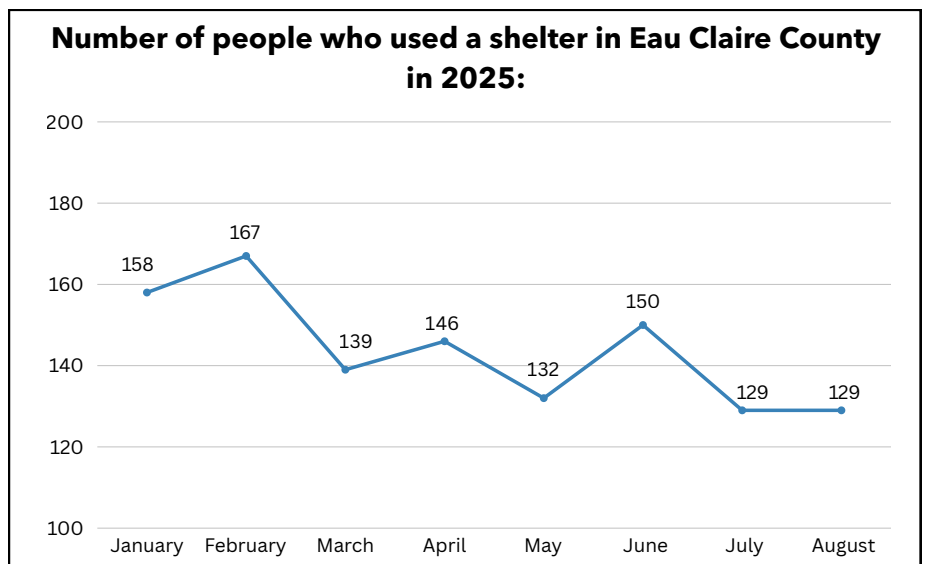


### Why the sudden drop in 2025? Is homelessness decreasing?

Not necessarily. The January 2025 PIT was conducted on a night when the temperatures were below zero and shelters put extreme weather procedures in place to go over their capacities. This number does not include **175 people** who were in shelter, and **16 people** who were observed but didn't provide enough information to be included in the count. PIT counts often miss people who are sleeping in their cars, couch surfing, or staying in remote locations as well, **suggesting this number is a continuous underestimate.**

### 120+ people staying in overnight shelter

During 2025, the number of people staying in a shelter in Eau Claire has ranged from **167 people** in February to **129 people** in July and August. It's common for more people to stay in shelter during colder months, but overall, the numbers have remained relatively the same.



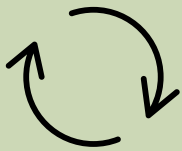


# A difficult cycle

It's no surprise that being unable to pay for housing can lead to an individual becoming homeless. There are many reasons why someone may become homeless - however, those same reasons can be even more difficult to overcome once an individual or family loses housing.



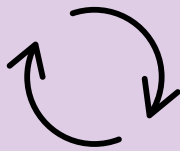
People may lose their housing while incarcerated due to not paying rent, and a criminal record can make it difficult to obtain housing.



People experiencing homelessness are at a higher risk of becoming incarcerated: they're more likely to interact with law enforcement outside and be unable to pay fines or attend court hearings.



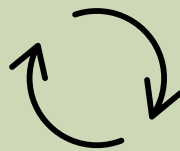
Losing a job can make it difficult or impossible to pay for housing, especially for people who were struggling to afford basic needs even while employed.



Lack of transportation, laundry services, storage and showers can make it difficult it to get and maintain steady employment.



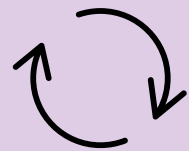
Substance misuse involving alcohol, opioids, or other drugs can have financial implications, impact employment and relationships, and lead to legal problems or health issues.



Whether or not someone has previous experience, substances are often used as a coping mechanism to deal with the chronic stress of being unhoused.



People with mental illness and trauma may face difficulty maintaining a job and housing, especially when they lack access to care.



People are more at risk for sleep disruptions, chronic stress, exposure to violence, and other traumatic situations that can hurt their mental wellbeing.

## Some populations are more likely to become homeless

Across the United States, other groups have higher rates of homelessness. Youth aging out of foster care can lack social support and the credit or rental history needed to get a lease. Veterans may struggle with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), other medical conditions, and the transition to civilian life. Domestic violence victims are often financially dependent on their abusers and may have limited support networks. The expensive price of housing adds an additional barrier to accessing housing.

Studies have shown that racial and ethnic minorities and LGBTQ+ groups are at a higher risk as well. Historic and current policies, such as redlining and discrimination in employment, make it difficult to secure and maintain housing.

# Unsheltered = higher health risks

Homelessness is a very complex issue, with implications ranging from the federal level to our local policies. However, the impacts are felt directly by our neighbors experiencing homelessness. When people don't have consistent and safe shelter, they're at much higher risk for poor health outcomes. Addressing homelessness doesn't just mean getting people into housing - it's giving people the opportunity to be healthy and thrive.

## **Mental health**

Stress, uncertainty, and threats to safety while experiencing homelessness increase risk for mental illnesses, such as anxiety, depression, and PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder).

## **Weather exposure**

Poor health outcomes are more common for our unsheltered neighbors experiencing homelessness during extreme weather, including frostbite, heat stroke, and dehydration. It's common for people to camp near bodies of water, risking drowning or injury during floods.

## **Substance misuse**

Substance use can develop or worsen when someone is experiencing homelessness.

People may be using substances to cope, and it can be difficult to consider quitting when their basic needs (shelter and food) aren't being met.



## **Infectious diseases**

When people are unsheltered, they may gather with others in shelters or encampments, which can increase the risk of illnesses spreading. People may not be able to access clean water or hygiene facilities to prevent illness.

## **Chronic conditions**

Chronic health conditions like asthma, high blood pressure, and diabetes can get worse on the street. People often lack access to health care and a place to store medications, and have limited access to healthy foods.

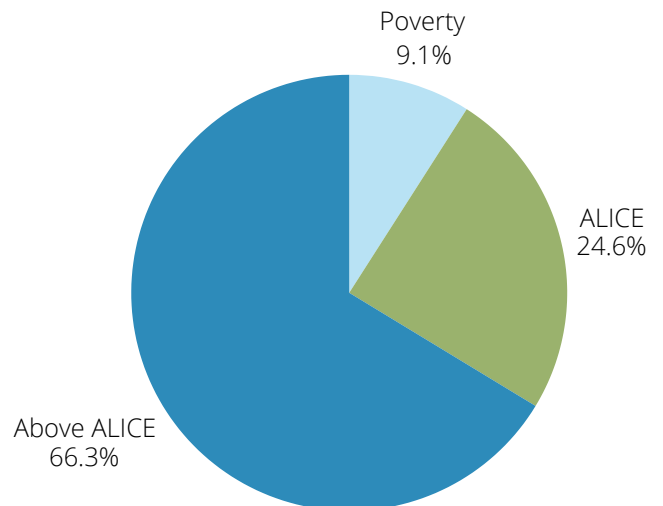
# Many are at risk

## Households struggle to afford basic needs in Eau Claire County

ALICE (*Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed*) describes households that earn more than the Federal Poverty Level, but less than the basic cost of living for the county, which is also called the ALICE threshold. This means they struggle to afford basic essentials like food, rent, healthcare, and childcare.

In 2023, there were **11,024 ALICE households** and **4,056 households in poverty in Eau Claire County**. Even though they're employed, these households may be one surprise expense away from losing their housing and becoming homeless.

Financial statuses of Eau Claire County households, 2023



## One-third of Eau Claire households are cost-burdened

Total rent as a percentage of household income	Percentage of total households
Less than 15%	18.8
15.0-19.9	17.9
20.0-24.9	13.3
25.0-29.9	11.4
30.3-34.9	7.4
35.0+	31.2

Source: 2020 American Community Survey

Households are considered cost-burdened if they spend more than 30% of their income on housing. This leaves households:

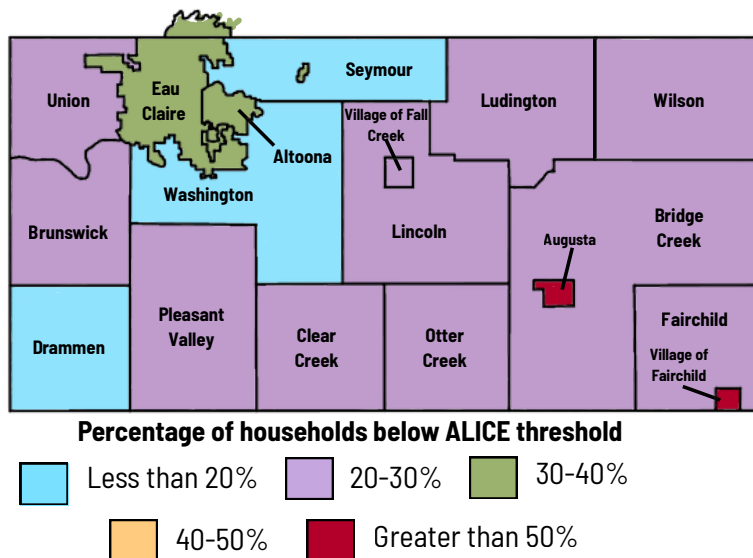
- With little money for necessities like healthcare or healthy food
- Unable to save money for emergencies, leaving them vulnerable when unexpected expenses come up
- At a higher risk of eviction, which once put on their record, makes it difficult to obtain housing again
- More likely to double up in units or settle for substandard housing, like homes with mold, water leaks, or no air conditioning or heat

**A spike in cost-burdened households often correlates with an increase in people experiencing homelessness the following year.**



# A concern across the county

Rural communities in Eau Claire County have greater than 50% of people struggling to afford basic needs.



Across the country, homelessness and housing insecurity are typically associated with big cities and urban municipalities. However, rural communities often have people who are struggling to pay for basic expenses. Services and shelters for unhoused people are usually located in cities, so people may travel there to get the support they need.

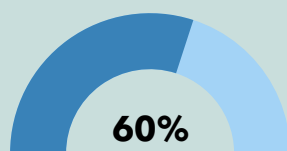
## Housing named a top health issue for Eau Claire County

Every three years, the Eau Claire City-County Health Department performs a community-wide health assessment. It identifies our community's top health priorities.

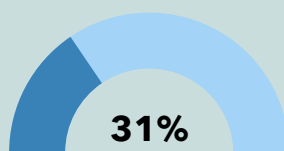
In the 2024 assessment, **a lack of safe or affordable housing** was one of the top five health issues chosen by people who live and work in the county.

1. Alcohol misuse
2. Poor mental health
3. Lack of access to childcare or unaffordable childcare
4. Substance misuse
- 5. Lack of safe or affordable housing**

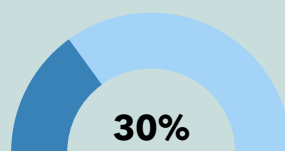
## What people had to say about housing in the 2024 assessment:



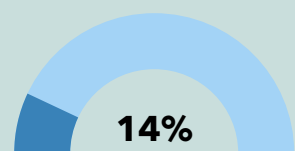
Housing is very expensive throughout the county



Having (or not having) safe and affordable housing affects all other parts of one's life



There is a lack of housing stock in this area



Much of the available housing in the area is in unsafe conditions

# People need affordable housing

Both the City of Eau Claire and Eau Claire County have Housing Authorities as part of the local government. The role of a housing authority is to help provide safe and accessible housing for people of low and moderate incomes at prices they can afford. Many of these programs come with funding from the federal government. There are barriers to getting on the list and staying on the list, and there are also not enough units available to support the people who need them.

**Hundreds of households are on the county and city housing authority wait lists, meaning it could be up to two years before they can access housing.**

**707 households** are on the **City of Eau Claire Housing Authority** waiting list\*

**Average time on list:** 18-24 months

**513**

need one-  
bedroom  
units

**56**

households  
that are  
homeless

**422**

households  
on voucher  
list

*\*as of September 2025*

**421 people** are on the **Eau Claire County Housing Authority** waiting list\*

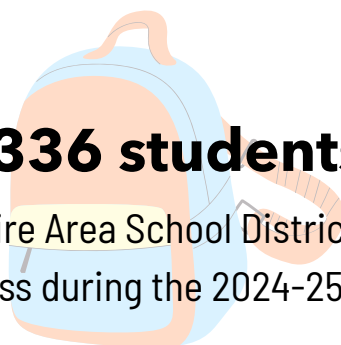
**301**

need one-  
bedroom  
units

*\*as of September 2025*

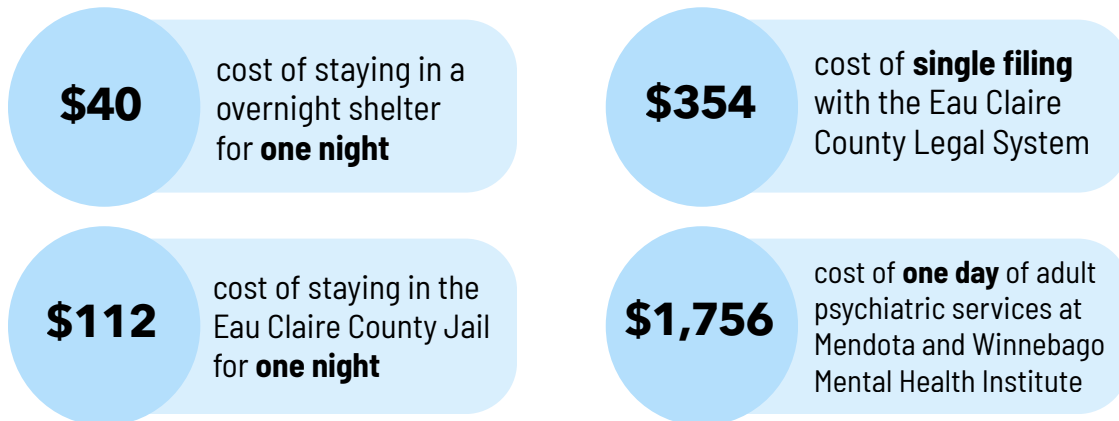
**336 students**

in the Eau Claire Area School District experienced  
homelessness during the 2024-25 school year



# Homelessness is expensive

When people don't have a place to stay, they're at a higher risk of interacting with the criminal justice systems due to issues such as camping, loitering, and public urination. People with previous incarcerations are at a higher risk of becoming homeless and then re-entering the justice system. Some may see sending people to jail or in-patient psychiatric services as a solution. **Not only are these options typically involuntary and may not address the root causes of homelessness, but a significant portion of these public services are paid for by the community.**

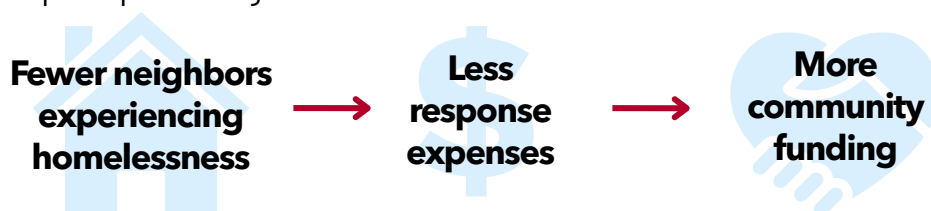


These costs don't include time for staff directly responding to help our unhoused neighbors, addressing environmental impacts (cleaning up parks and encampments), or other expenses like health care costs.

## Many strings attached

Why don't we take the money we spend on addressing homelessness and instead use it to build houses? Unfortunately, funding usually comes with many restrictions. Federal, state, and local policies often dictate what funds can be spent on. They may require staff time and response to certain issues, meaning our time and effort can't be redirected elsewhere.

While we wish we could transfer funds to more upstream services, we need to invest in both long- and short-term efforts to improve our current circumstances. We need advocacy to change the current methods for funding this continuum at the state and national level. Meanwhile, the goal of this plan is to work locally alongside organizations to decrease the number of people experiencing homelessness.





# Reducing Homelessness Requires Housing

Our understanding of homelessness has been profoundly shaped by the insights from research like "Homelessness is a Housing Problem" by Gregg Colburn and Clayton Page Aldern.

The book emphasizes one key truth: homelessness is mostly the result of a scarce supply of affordable housing and the relentless rise in housing costs. These displace people and their families.

These findings have guided this plan. Effective solutions must focus on expanding housing supply, improving affordability, maintaining existing affordable housing, and ensuring equitable access to stable, safe, and affordable homes for everyone.

## Housing must come with services

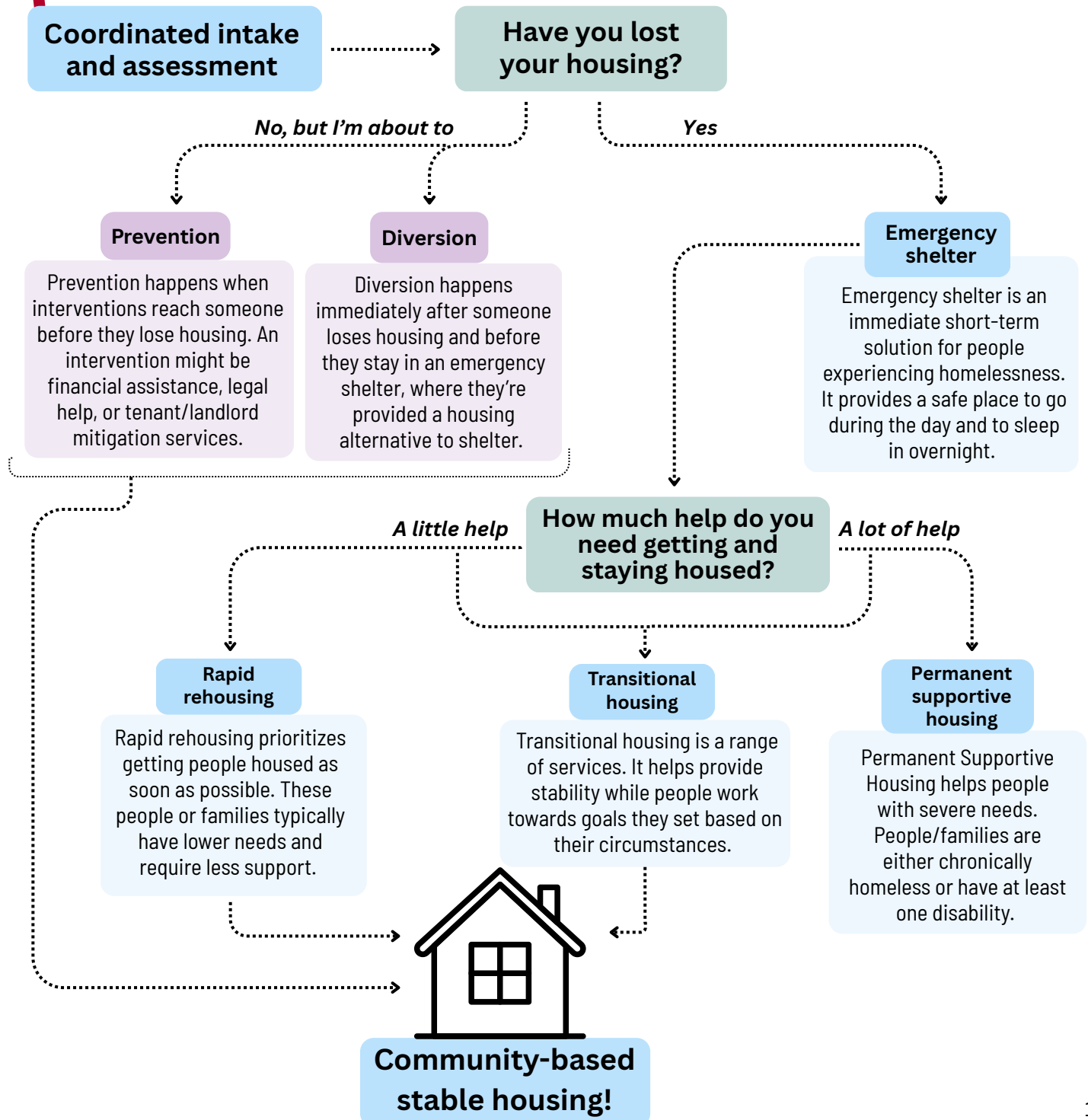
### Guiding principles for our Housing with Services model:



# Homelessness response system

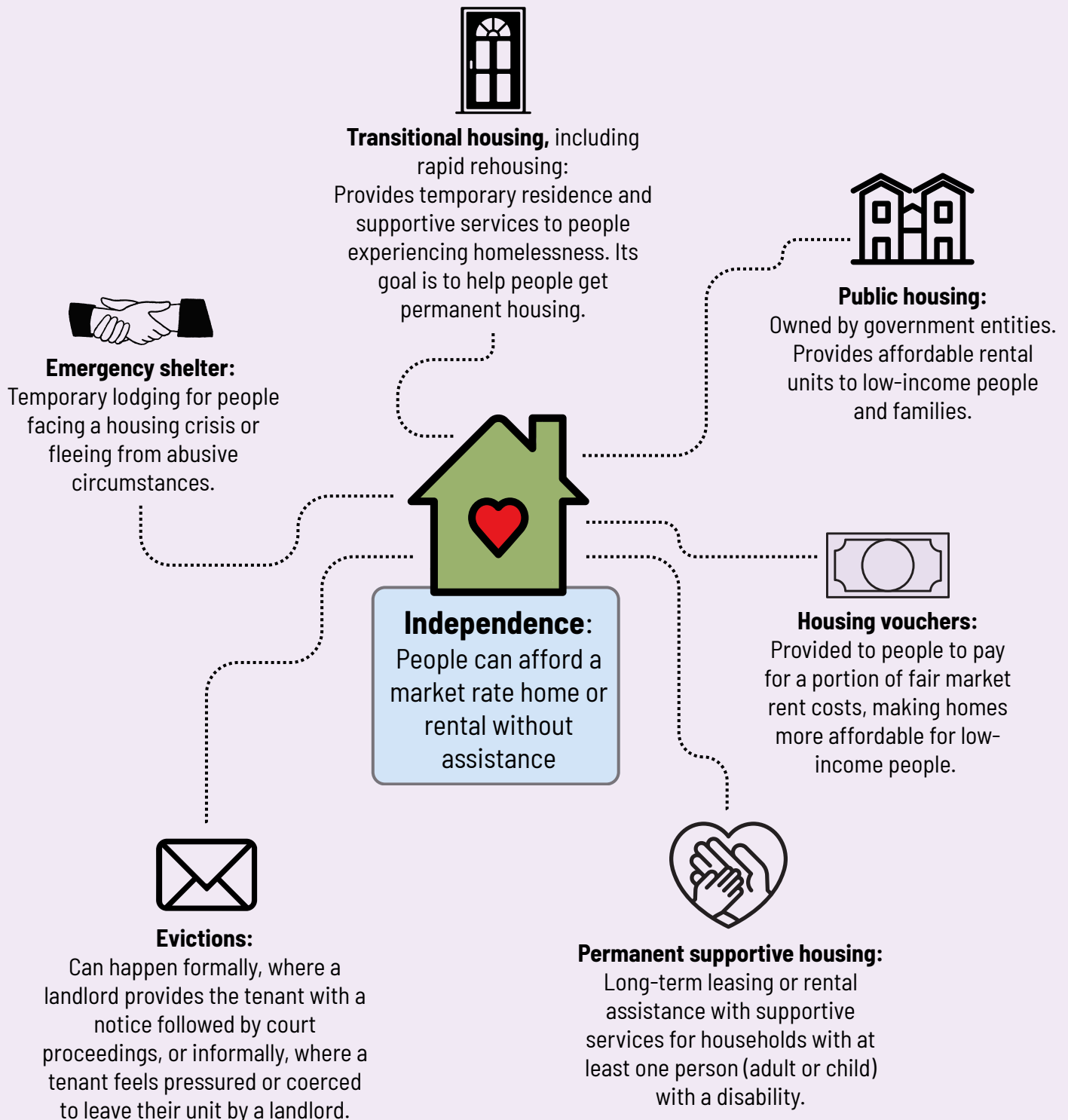
The homeless response system includes the organizations and entities within an area that serve people experiencing homelessness. Levels of involvement range from the federal government allocating funding to service providers directly helping people. All must be financially supported and work efficiently together.

**START**



# Housing is a continuum

There are several types of housing assistance that help people reach the end goal of stable housing. There is no single process that works for everyone, and people may switch between types of assistance before finding stability.



# Continuum of care

One of the most structured parts of the homelessness response system is the **continuum of care**.

Designed by the federal government, the continuum of care is aimed at providing services and support to help people (including unaccompanied youth) and families experiencing homelessness into transitional and permanent housing, with the goal of long-term stability. This includes:

- Improving coordination and integration with mainstream resources and other programs
- Improving data collection and performance measurement
- Allowing each community to tailor programs to their own strengths and challenges

## U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

A federal agency that oversees national housing programs and policies and distributes dedicated housing funds to states.

## Balance of State (BoS)

Milwaukee, Dane, and Racine counties work under their own CoCs. The other 69 counties in Wisconsin fall under the Balance of State (BoS), which is made up of local coalitions.

## Local Service Providers

Not all service providers are a part of the coalition, but they do play a role in the services people experiencing homelessness need. These include organizations that give shelter, housing, meals, supportive services, and more.

## Continuum of Care (CoC)

A program that encourages communities' commitment to end homelessness in their region. Funding from HUD is provided to the CoC, nonprofit organizations, and other local government agencies. Funds are then distributed to sub-recipients who directly serve the community.

## Dairyland Housing Coalition

Eau Claire County belongs to the Dairyland Housing Coalition along with Jackson, Buffalo, and Trempealeau counties. Members of the coalition include service providers, local nonprofits, government agencies, faith-based organizations, and more.



# Coordinated Entry

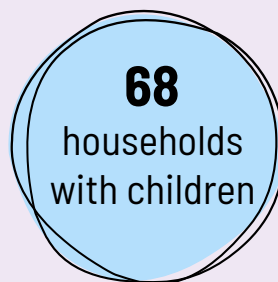
## **The Homeless Management Response System (HMIS):**

- Is a system used to collect client-level data and data on the housing and services people and families at risk of and experiencing homelessness receive.
- The HMIS system is governed by the Wisconsin CoCs.
- Local data is managed by each CoC.

## **Coordinated Entry (CE):**

- Is a process that standardizes the way people and families at risk of or experiencing homelessness are assessed for and referred to housing and services.
- Organizations that receive funding from HUD are required to use this process, resulting in people being referred to the Coordinated Entry list when they need housing.

## **On the Coordinated Entry list in the Dairyland Housing Coalition, which serves Eau Claire County:**



*\*15 are households without children, 25 are households with children*

## **People on the CE list are prioritized for different types of housing due to several factors, including:**

- Length of time homeless
- Number of times homeless
- Number and severity of behavioral and/or medical problems
- Age
- Other factors that vary by community

While the CE list is beneficial, this means people who aren't considered "high priority" often remain low on the list. That turns into significant time waiting for housing opportunities. Additionally, a "break" in homelessness - which is defined as staying in a stable location meant for human habitation for more than 7 days or an institutional stay greater than 90 days - can change your prioritization on the list because of HUD definitions of "literally homeless."

# How do other communities track data?

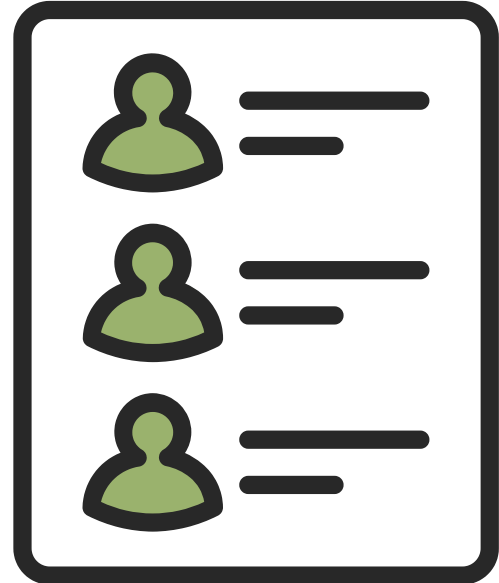
**Point-in-time (PIT) data** is helpful, but it only counts the number of those who are unsheltered that evening.

**Coordinated Entry (CE)** is a more consistent estimate since it's continuously updated, but some shelters or service providers may not have access to this data or may not be able to see data others have entered. The Housing Authorities have numbers, but with many people on multiple lists, it's hard to get an unduplicated total.

**A By-Name list** is a comprehensive list of every neighbor experiencing homelessness (Community Solutions). This provides us with an accurate number of people who are homeless, which is beneficial to quantify the number of resources we need. The By-Name list is a secure, private data system that can only be accessed by people who have signed a Memorandum of Understanding. This protects how the data will be stored and used.

Not only is this helpful for allocating resources, but also for providing more direct care. When people have to travel to multiple different organizations to get resources, they often have to describe their histories and traumas multiple times to receive the most appropriate care, which can be emotionally challenging and harm their mental health. The By-Name List can be curated so organizations only need to collect the minimum of necessary information, streamlining the process.

Lastly, some housing programs or choices have stipulations that can stop people from being eligible for housing. This might include income requirements, criminal history, being a registered sex offender, credit checks, eviction history, landlord references, or others. The By-Name List lets us work outside these boundaries and help people experiencing homelessness find a housing option that fits their needs.



# What's the goal?



**Homelessness will be brief,  
rare, and non-recurring.**



Homelessness is not new, and there's not a single reason why people become homeless. Factors can be large and system-wide, like changes in the economy, or individual life circumstances, like an unexpected health issue. These factors can combine and escalate until someone's housing is at risk.

It's impossible to predict or mitigate the complex web of reasons someone may become homeless.

## How do we measure our goal?



**People  
becoming  
housed**



**People  
becoming  
unhoused**



This plan hopes to achieve a realistic goal of preventing homelessness and making it a rare and brief situation when it does occur. The goal is to reach functional zero, as described by Community Solutions.

**To achieve this goal, the number of people exiting homelessness must be less than the number of people entering homelessness.**



# OUR VISION



***Eau Claire County is a community  
where homelessness is rare, brief,  
and non-recurring.***



# How did this collaborative start?

**Before  
2024**

Partners have provided a continuum of services to help respond to the needs of people experiencing homelessness and to help individuals reach housing stability. This need has grown in recent decades.

**Summer  
2024**

With need growing, the Eau Claire County Department of Human Services restructured to enable creation of an Assistant Director position who could spearhead efforts to assess and strengthen linkages and solutions for our homelessness response system.

**Fall  
2024**

Two efforts increased the public's focus on helping to contribute to solutions. Two organizations (Home for Good and CC We Adapt) brought *Beyond the Bridge: A Solution to Homelessness* to Eau Claire. The film emphasized the need for housing and coordination within community. Separately, Western Dairyland, in combination with Hope Gospel, launched an effort to create a permanent Day Resource Center that will co-locate services for people who are unhoused.

**October  
2024**

The Eau Claire County Department of Human Services, Eau Claire City-County Health Department, and the Eau Claire Area Chamber of Commerce began meeting regularly to understand what the current need is, what data is available, and how to build on work done by previous initiatives.

**This created the Housing Our Neighbors Planning Collaborative.**

**December  
2024**

The newly-formed Planning Collaborative invited James Mathy, a leader in homelessness work from the Milwaukee County Housing Division, to meet with local leaders in Eau Claire. The goals of meeting were to 1) build a shared understanding of homelessness in Eau Claire, 2) explore a potential community collaboration, and 3) develop a vision for the collaborative's goals and to commit to working together.

**May  
2025**

The Planning Collaborative hosted three meetings with homelessness service providers to get input on the strengths and weaknesses of Eau Claire's current homelessness response system. In collaboration with University of Wisconsin-Madison's La Follette School of Public Affairs, an assembly was held to get community feedback.

**Since  
May**

The Planning Collaborative meets regularly with individuals, organizations, people with lived/living experience, and local leaders to collaborate and work on coordinating services and improving our results.

# Guiding principles for the work

These guiding principles will keep our work coordinated, consistent, fair, and transparent.

## **Shift power within the collaborative**

- Focus on our mission of empowering our clients (service providers, people experiencing homelessness) by providing direct and indirect support

## **Emphasize the voices of the community**

- Be purposeful with communication; lean into the insights of the people who are impacted and affected by homelessness
- Define and use a shared vocabulary to support a common understanding

## **Ground our work in data and context and target solutions**

- Separate data by demographics to understand problems and root causes
- Ensure the data is high-quality, used ethically, and collected with transparency
- Consult community members, including neighbors and business owners, and people with lived/living experience during the data collection and analysis

## **In addition to programs and services, focus on systemic change**

- Use Coordinated Entry and available funding to build off each organization's strengths and create a unified collaborative
- Focus on changing underlying systems, not just adding new programs or services

## **Build fair leadership and accountability**

- Build a system that boosts the voices of people who are less often heard, and purposefully move them into leadership roles with support
- Be accountable for reporting metrics and delivering on commitments
- Establish and maintain a clear point of contact for communication
- Regularly establish and review action plans
- Regularly update investors with metrics on cost savings and goals

# How this plan was developed

## We learned...

### Built background context in Eau Claire

- Reviewed previous and current efforts aimed at addressing homelessness
- Had one-to-one conversations with people experiencing homelessness, service providers, community leaders, and citizens
- Built trust and understanding about the reality of homelessness in our area.

### Performed site visits with other communities

- Visited communities that have developed plans and made advancements in addressing homelessness, including Brown, La Crosse, and Milwaukee counties
- Talked with leaders and practitioners to understand their processes, how their efforts moved forward, and key strategies that contributed to their success.

### Convened on December 18, 2024:

- Gathered with key interest holders, including representatives from local government, healthcare, business, and social services
- Facilitated by Milwaukee County Housing Administrator Jim Mathy
- Discussed the scope of the homelessness challenge, shared findings, and collectively identified core priorities and principles efforts.

## We listened...

### Conducted a SOAR (*Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results*) analysis

- Participants included service providers, people with lived/living experience, local leaders from the December 18th meeting, and representatives from County Board, City Council, and Board of Health (*see Appendix A*)
- Identified existing assets, explored opportunities for innovation and collaboration, discussed shared goals for the future, and defined measurable results

### Hosted a community assembly

- Brought together a randomly selected, diverse group of 21 residents
- Learned about the complexities of homelessness, heard from experts and people with lived/living experience, and ended the day creating recommendations that represent the collective wisdom of the community (*see Appendix C*)
- Facilitated by the University of Wisconsin-Madison LaFollette School of Public Policy

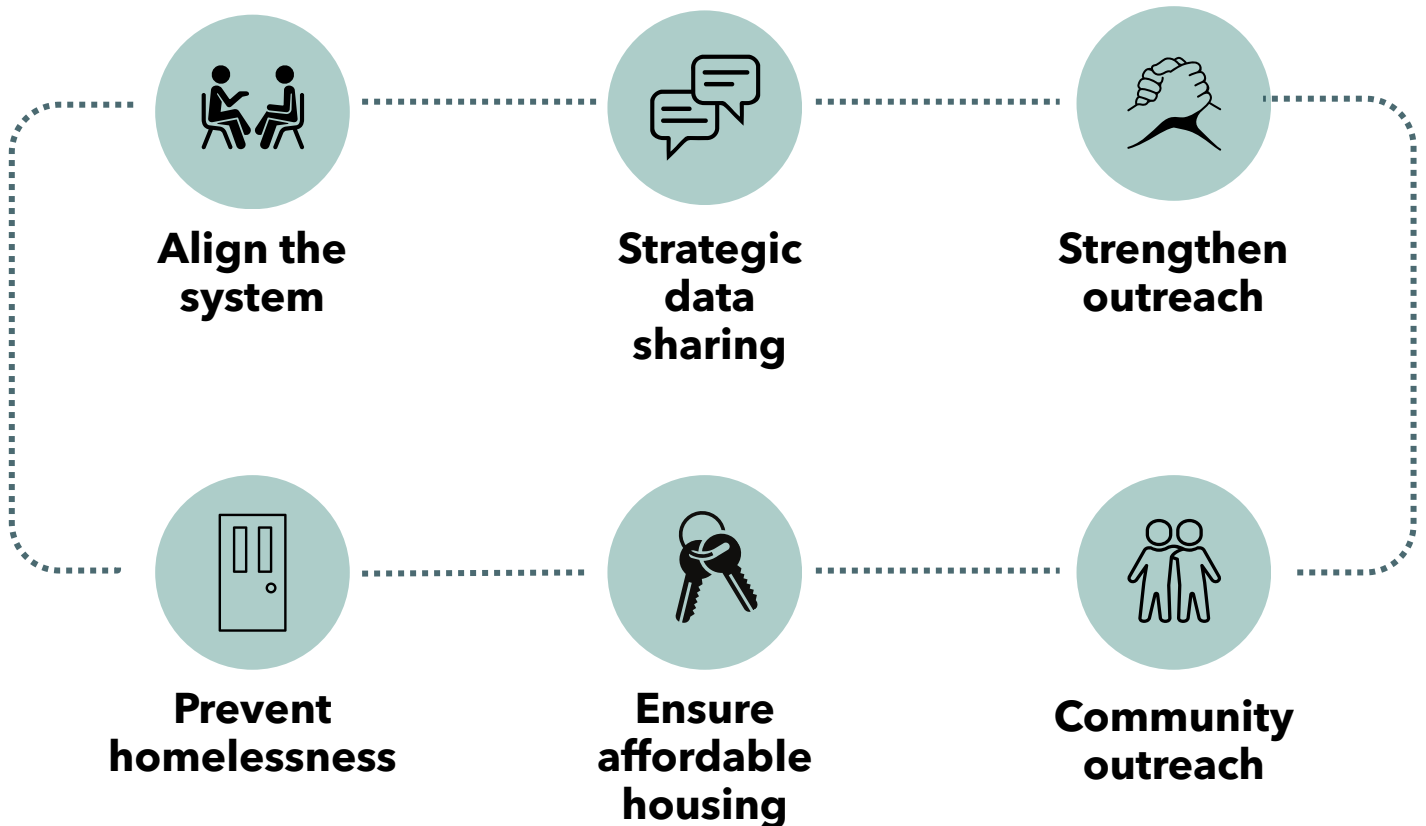
### Organized service providers meetings

- Coordinated workshops for organizations that work directly with people experiencing homelessness and people with lived/living experience.
- Worked to identify and solve shared problems, shared best practices, identified systemic barriers, and co-created strategies that are practical and effective within our local ecosystem.

# Strategies

Using the data and information gathered in the last year, the collaborative created six strategies to address the biggest themes that emerged.

These strategies will guide us toward decreasing homelessness in Eau Claire County:





# Crisis Services Are Necessary

**To ensure homelessness is brief, we need immediate response services for people who are in crisis.**

It is important to note that some of the initiatives and priorities identified in these strategies are already in progress due to the great work done by our community. However, changing an entire system, even at a local level, can take a long time.

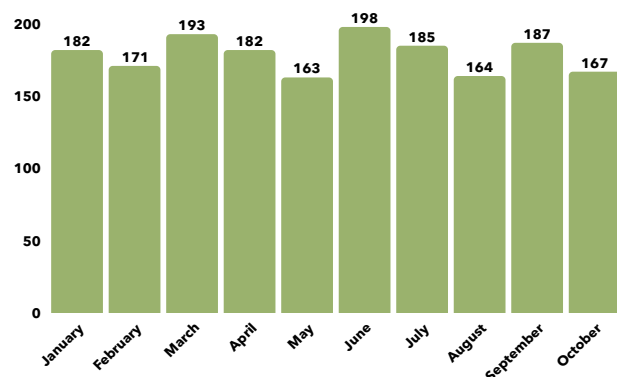
Created out of community collaboration, one initiative underway is a new day resource center in Eau Claire that will provide consistent daytime shelter to neighbors experiencing homelessness while the overnight shelters are closed. A key component of this new building is to increase coordination among entities and bring a variety of services to the individuals. Over 20 organizations will be holding meetings and office space on site.

A crucial part of the homelessness response system is the emergency services immediately available to people when they are in need. **We will always need services such as day and night shelters where people can be safe from the elements and access resources. We also need first responders who can provide aid during physical and mental health crisis.**

**Right now, we are seeing an overwhelming utilization of these services.** In 2025, the day shelter in Eau Claire saw over 160 unique individuals per month. Sometimes, that number is closer to 200. We don't currently have a response system in place to respond to this volume, leading to increased interactions with emergency services like the police or paramedics.

The goal of this plan is not to remove or replace any of the services that provide the necessary care people need. In fact, we are dependent on them, as they provide people with lifesaving resources and often serve as a first-entry point into services. Instead, the goal is to identify the ways we can improve the homeless response system so that the responsibility of the work is not placed solely on these parts.

**Number of Unique Individuals Utilizing Day Shelter in 2025**



Over time, implementing the new plan will decrease the number of people utilizing shelter and increase the number of people with stable, secure housing. We will continue to work and build our collaborative system to ultimately decrease the need for emergency services and the work of crisis responders.

# Strategy 1: Align the System

**We will cultivate a strong network among all local homeless service providers and government entities.** This will improve our coordination and reinforce a unified approach to ending homelessness. It will help us:

- Work to create faster, smoother experiences and significantly better outcomes for people and families experiencing homelessness.
- Foster deep collaboration and transparent communication
- Promote accessibility and capacity of all service areas, including supports for mental health and substance misuse treatment, ensuring individuals receive the supports they need
- Strategically pool resources and avoid duplicating efforts to create a responsive network that prioritizes person-centered care and significantly improves people's journey to stable housing

## Priorities:

- Simplify the process of learning about, applying for, and accessing housing with support services
- Strengthen connections between local organizations and agencies to improve collaboration
- Clearly articulate a strong and dedicated leadership structure among the collaborative
- Incorporate a LEAB (Lived Experience Advisory Board) and the perspectives of people with lived/living experience to bring the most important voices to the forefront of our work
- Use accurate, local, and contextual data to make decisions about missing services and resources
- Create a clear communication plan to share information with community residents, businesses, organizations, and others



## One-Year Action Plan

- **Create a roadmap that clearly articulates entry points into services for people experiencing homelessness.**
  - Streamline how people access the available services
- **Create a resource map that's shared with the public.**
  - Clarify roles and establish coordination between organizations to avoid duplicating efforts
- **Create a formal leadership structure with guaranteed roles and compensation for people with lived/living experiences**
  - Support this collaborative and ensure people with lived/living experience are involved in decision-making

## Who's involved?

- People experiencing homelessness
- Local government
- Service providers
- Healthcare systems
- Law enforcement

## Metrics to measure progress

- Amount of time people spend on housing lists (*coordinated entry list, Housing Authority lists, or others*)
- Number of warm handoffs between agencies
- Average number of interactions people have with different organizations
- Ability to name and trust partners within the local network of service providers

# Strategy 2: Share Data Strategically

We will establish a comprehensive, real-time data collection and sharing system. This will **create a clear and accurate understanding of homelessness in our community**. It will help us:

- Understand how many people are experiencing homelessness, giving us the ability to organize data by demographic (for example, singles, families, seniors, veterans). This will help us **identify what types and levels of supportive housing units we need**.
- Enable service providers to access necessary information about people's histories and needs. **This will let people avoid having to re-tell traumatic experiences repeatedly** just to receive basic services.
- Ensure **our decisions are guided by evidence, resources are allocated where they can have the biggest impact, and our collaborative efforts align to help as many people as we can**.

## Priorities:

- Integrate a "high-quality, real-time, by-name" data system for all homeless service providers
- Consistently monitor progress and share information transparently with our community
- Protect the privacy of our neighbors by creating clear data sharing guidelines that only include necessary information
- Use data to encourage continuous improvement in our community's homeless response system by:
  - Helping agencies and organizations share information, which may improve collaboration
  - Continuing to identify gaps in our current system and working to close them
  - Letting accurate local data guide the creation of local budgets, policies, and strategic actions



## One-Year Action Items

- **Establish data sharing agreements between homelessness service providers**
  - Encourage collaboration while ensuring clients' privacy and safety
- **Design and develop the "By-Name" data system**
  - Allow providers to input data into the system to quantify the number and needs of our community
- **Create a dashboard so de-identified data can be publicly and regularly reported**
  - This will encourage community involvement in progress, outcomes, and areas for improvement

## Who are the key players?

- People experiencing homelessness
- Local government
- Service providers
- Healthcare systems
- People who share the community vision

## Metrics to measure progress

- Number of people homeless in Eau Claire
- Number of organizations involved in entering data into the "By-Name" List
- Measuring risk factors and outcomes related to homelessness and housing, such as services used, time spent homeless, or others.

# Strategy 3: Strengthen Outreach

We will **change how our community engages with and supports our neighbors experiencing homelessness** and recognize the profound trauma many have endured, often at the hands of institutions intended to help.

- Shift away from law enforcement agencies as the primary responders by investing in compassionate, multidisciplinary outreach teams that meet people exactly where they are
- Expand peer support services, leveraging the powerful voices of people with lived/living experience to build trust, help people access the services they need, and ensure every interaction is supportive and respects individual dignity.

## Priorities:

- Expand the capacity and resources of outreach teams that meet people experiencing homelessness where they are and link them with what they need
- Include staff trained in different fields, such as medicine and social work, and provide training opportunities so that people are best prepared to meet the needs of our neighbors
- Focus on housing people who regularly cycle through homelessness and incarceration, and who have frequent contacts with other crisis services
- Strengthen re-entry support for people who are leaving institutionalized contexts into Eau Claire County by reaching out in advance

### 1 Year Action Items

- **Design, fund, and launch a multidisciplinary, trauma-informed outreach team for Eau Claire County**
  - Reach more people overall, and bring services and compassionate care to people who need it
- **Encourage opportunities to integrate and expand peer support services across our local homelessness response system**
  - Promote the training and hiring of people with lived experience
- **Identify and engage people with the most frequent law enforcement interactions and focus on diversion and trauma-informed engagement**
  - Break the cycle between homelessness, crisis, and incarceration by using evidence-based best practices

### Who's involved?

- People experiencing homelessness
- Local government
- Service providers
- Healthcare systems
- Law enforcement

### Metrics to measure progress

- Number of interactions with people experiencing homelessness and the homeless response system
- Number of referrals made and followed up on
- Number of emergency services and law enforcement encounters responding to neighbors experiencing homelessness



# Strategy 4: Prevent Homelessness

Our primary goal is to prevent people and families from experiencing homelessness in the first place **by intervening before they become homeless.**

- Implement **robust early intervention strategies** and strengthen support networks for people who are at risk of homelessness
- Address the **root causes of homelessness**, including not enough highly affordable housing, inadequate rental assistance programs, and discriminatory policies and practices that make it hard for certain groups of people to find housing
- Help vulnerable community members access the **resources and support they need** to maintain stable housing.

## Priorities:

- Strengthen relationships with landlords and housing authorities to better identify early warning signs of eviction
- Strengthen relationships with landlords and housing authorities to support offering more secure housing for hard-to-rent-to groups, such as those with a criminal record
- Increase local rental assistance programs to act as a barrier to eviction when hardships arise
- Build paths to permanent housing for people at highest risk of homelessness, including people aging out of foster care and people who have recently left incarceration
- Use creative funding sources, like Medicaid's 1915i, to support more housing options
- Explore innovative housing options that are inexpensive and high-quality



### 1 Year Action Items

- **Pilot a low-cost landlord engagement and relationship-building program**
  - Strengthen communication to integrate supports for people before eviction happens
- **Quantify what local rental assistance is available and streamline access**
  - Determine the amount of assistance available and how to best distribute it
- **Build paths to housing for groups with barriers**
  - Expand access to housing for people leaving incarceration, people aging out of foster care, and other groups

### Who's involved?

- People experiencing homelessness
- Local government
- Service providers
- Landlords
- City and County Housing Authority

### Metrics to measure progress

- Number of evictions in the county and breakdown by reason
- Availability of resources and use of resources for people who need additional supportive services
- Number of rental assistance dollars being used and amount that are available

# Strategy 5: Ensure Affordable Housing

We commit to **developing and maintaining genuinely affordable, permanent housing** with integrated supportive services for everyone in our community.

- Focus on providing housing and services **without artificial barriers about 'readiness'**
- Focus on creating housing where **rent does not exceed 30% of a person's income**
- Ensure housing comes with **necessary wrap-around supports**
- Increase the **supply of dignified, stable homes** that let people thrive

## Priorities:

- Develop and adopt a regional comprehensive housing plan that builds on the findings and recommendations of the 2023 Eau Claire Regional Housing Study.
- Expand availability of housing within current market conditions:
  - Develop positive relationships with landlords to support potential tenants, during the process of securing housing and throughout their lease
  - Explore opportunities to support housing, such as master leases, double security deposits, utility assistance, and household furnishings.
- Support the development of affordable housing stock through a variety of funding sources
- Support the creation of a local subsidy program and encourage business incentives for workforce housing
- Promote the building of public housing and public-nonprofit collaborative housing

### 1 Year Action Items

- **Promote short-term housing options and create a roadmap to access**
  - Get people housed as soon as possible
- **Develop a long-term regional housing plan describing the number and types of units needed**
  - When we better understand what we need, resources can be allocated effectively
- **Work with landlords and developers to develop a report on increasing affordable housing stock**
  - Identify ways to increase housing in our current environment

### Who's involved?

- Neighbors experiencing homelessness
- Landlords
- Developers
- Local government\*
- City and County Housing Authority

### Metrics to measure progress

- Number of people who become housed after experiencing homelessness
- Number of available housing units where total cost is less than 30% of area median income
- Number of housing units with long-term supports based on tenants' needs

\*Note from the City of Eau Claire: the City of Eau Claire cannot fund this work as they rely on property taxes for funding

# Strategy 6: Heightening Community Engagement

We will build a **deeply engaged community** that understands, supports, and participates in ending homelessness.

- Share the stories of our work, highlight our successes, and create educational campaigns that directly address the stigma associated with homelessness.
- Foster strong relationships that support connection and belonging across all sectors—including businesses, faith groups, and residents
- Create a compassionate and informed community where everyone embraces a shared responsibility to ensure everyone has stable housing

## Priorities:

- Collect, develop, and share stories that create a common, shared narrative while still exploring nuance (homelessness in rural communities, among college students, etc.)
- Engage faith groups, businesses and other residents to support our neighbors who are homeless and people recently housed
- Ensure natural supports are embedded in personal housing plans
- Create purposeful community education about homelessness

### 1 Year Action Items

- **Develop a website stories and education about homelessness**
  - Provide us opportunities to learn from our neighbors with lived/living experiences of homelessness
- **Create positive community events for unhoused and housed people to interact**
  - Break down walls and stigma around homelessness and promote community
- **Explore programs that offer social supports while in housing**
  - Ensure that people in housing feel welcome and belonging in their community

### Who's involved?

- Neighbors experiencing homelessness
- Community organizations
- Service providers
- Lived/living experience advisory board (LEAB)

### Metrics to measure progress

- Amount of engagement with education campaigns by the community
- Number of public engagement opportunities and attendance

# What can you do?

**The vision:  
to make homelessness in Eau Claire County rare, brief,  
and non-recurring within five years.**

Whether it be from large organizations, small startups, individuals, families, book clubs, pickleball teams - we hope you can see yourself and your neighbors in this plan. **With a vision as bold as ours, we need all the help we can get!** The only way we can achieve this goal is through working together as a community to create local solutions. We ask you to review the strategies, determine where you see yourself, and dedicate your skills and resource to achieving our goals.



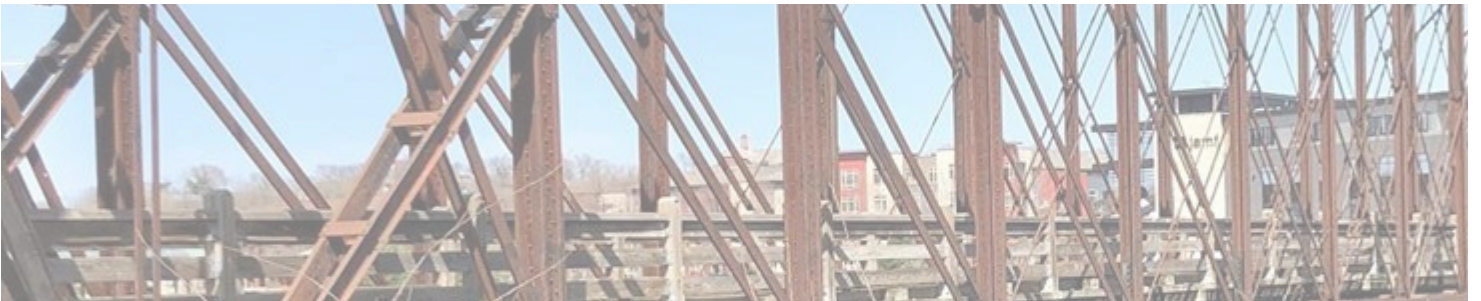
**Reach out and let us know where you want to contribute!**

Email [echousingcollab@eauclairecounty.gov](mailto:echousingcollab@eauclairecounty.gov) to share your individual, group, or organizations strengths and where you want to help this initiative.





# THANK YOU!



**Housing Our Neighbors Planning Collaborative**  
**[echousingcollab@eauclairecounty.gov](mailto:echousingcollab@eauclairecounty.gov)**





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# Appendix A: Eau Claire Regional Leader SOAR

## **Summary of Key Insights:**

The survey data reveals a community with a strong foundation of existing programs, services, and human capital dedicated to addressing homelessness in Eau Claire County. There's a clear understanding of the need for improved coordination, increased financial investment, and a shift towards Housing First models.

**Strengths:** The system benefits from established shelters (Sojourner House, Beacon House), diverse service providers (Western Dairyland, Catholic Charities), and the highly anticipated Day Resource Center. There's significant human capital with caring individuals, knowledgeable staff, and strong leadership within some organizations. Political will exists at the city level, and there's a cultural desire to help, although tempered by conflicting views and concerns about individual responsibility.

**Opportunities:** The most frequently cited opportunities revolve around enhanced collaboration, creating a truly unified system, and addressing gaps in housing (transitional, low-barrier, alternative safe spaces). There's a desire to secure more consistent and diverse funding streams, particularly from corporations, and to focus on upstream prevention.

**Aspirations:** The overarching aspiration is to get people housed, ideally through a Housing First approach, and to shift community perceptions to view unhoused individuals as neighbors. There's a strong desire for a comprehensive, master plan that integrates all service providers and reflects the community's diversity.

**Results:** Success will be measured by tangible reductions in homelessness (fewer unsheltered individuals, less shelter attendance), shorter periods of homelessness, and increased housing stability. Improved community conditions (less trash, fewer encampments, reduced law enforcement calls) and a positive shift in community perception are also crucial indicators.

## **Strengths (Community Capitals Framework)**

### **1. Programs and Services:**

- **Key Strengths:**

- Sojourner House and Beacon House are frequently mentioned as providing sheltering and a place for individuals to go.
- Family Promise, Catholic Charities, and Hope Gospel are recognized programs.
- Western Dairyland offers a variety of programs.
- The upcoming Day Resource Center is highly anticipated as a site that may be able to facilitate better coordination
- Availability of social work services and legal service consultation at the library.
- Multiple services addressing food insecurity.
- The Dairyland Housing Coalition is identified as a collaborative system.

### **2. Built Capital (Infrastructure and Physical Assets):**

- **Key Strengths:**

- Existing buildings like Sojourner House
- Some low-income housing exists.
- Public transportation and the Free Clinic are available infrastructure.
- The Gibson Street building purchased by Western Dairyland for the Day Resource Center.

- **Potential Areas for Exploration:**

- Repurposing former big box stores, Sacred Heart, or other underutilized real estate for housing.
- Utilizing parking facilities/lots (including church parking lots or city parkland) for tiny homes.

### **3. Financial Capital (Monetary Resources and Investments):**

- **Key Strengths:**

- Federal, state, and local tax support for programs.
- Some charitable support for direct services.
- Fundraising activities of individuals and groups like Catholic Charities.
- City of Eau Claire CDBG and HOME funds, and County resources.
- Eau Claire Community Foundation, Pablo Foundation, and Mayo have been historically supportive.

- **Challenges/Areas for Growth:**

- Questionable future funding.
- Need for city and county government to build sustaining funds into budgets.
- Advocacy for more investment from Marshfield and private companies.
- Lack of capital investment despite community wealth; a call for more corporate givers.

#### **4. Political Capital (Access to Power, Influence, and Decision-Making):**

- **Key Strengths:**

- Majority support on county and city boards for meeting needs.
- City and county officials are actively discussing homelessness.
- Strong capital at the city level and fairly strong at the county.
- Strong connections to state representatives
- Local government (County, City, School District) is perceived as fairly accessible.
- A progressive City Council with good working relationships.
- An advocacy community that works at the state level.

- **Challenges:**

- Competing priorities and tight budgets make action more difficult.

#### **5. Natural Capital (Access to Green Spaces and Safe Environments):**

- **Key Strengths:**

- Multiple parks and open areas available on public transit routes.
- City has many green spaces, trails, and parks that impact well-being.
- The park system and greenspace generally offer good places for individuals.
- Beautiful rivers.

- **Challenges/Concerns:**

- Limited access to camping.
- Safety issues regarding children in green spaces where homeless individuals may be.
- People being pushed out of areas due to encampments.
- The "balance" of providing safe spaces for both those experiencing homelessness and the general public.

#### **6. Cultural Capital (Shared Values, Beliefs, and Traditions):**

##### **Key Strengths:**

- Leaders for the most part are supportive of helping the homeless.
- Great common interest in helping the unhoused among most Eau Claire residents.
- Strong current of understanding, problem-solving, and care for fellow human beings.
- Significant culture change since 2019 Sprint Cycle, with increased understanding of needs.
- Community stakeholders know how to "play the long game" and sustain efforts.
- People really care and want to do good work.

- **Challenges:**

- "Charity model of helping 'the homeless'".
- Lack of responsibility from the homeless population (e.g., picking up after oneself, sober living).
- "Oftentimes homelessness is a choice" perspective.
- Different theories about the root cause of homelessness.
- Conflicting priorities about what should be addressed first.
- People are overwhelmed by the increase in individuals living without a home, leading to reactions distant from welcoming.

## **7. Human Capital (Knowledge, Skills, Abilities, and Talents):**

- **Key Strengths:**

- Knowledgeable city and county staff.
- Many caring individuals.
- Organizations engaging with the unhoused have talents and experience.
- James Mathy (from Milwaukee) is a valuable resource.
- Health Department leadership is strong, focused on collaboration and relationship development.
- "Rich in Human Capital!".
- The human capital exists to "play the long game".
- Lots of smart and innovative people.

- **Challenges:**

- Hard to keep people in low-paying, not highly regarded jobs.
- Not always coordinated or "rowing in the same direction," which impedes progress.
- Lack of a full-time leader to get everyone moving in the same direction.

## **8. Social Capital (Networks, Relationships, and Trust):**

- **Key Strengths:**

- Current emphasis on working together.
- Capacity for leadership from Western Dairyland and Human Services.
- Cross-organization collaboration is a big asset.
- Health Department leadership focused on collaboration and relationship development.

- **Challenges:**

- Tendency to retreat into silos when challenges arise.
- Competition for financial resources hindering cooperation.
- Less effective social capital currently; groups don't always work together.

## **9. Other Strengths:**

- The Dairyland Housing Coalition is a collaborative system.

## **Opportunities:**

- **Housing Solutions:**

- Day resource center, overnight housing, Housing First services.
- More transitional housing (low barrier).
- Bolstering shelter space.
- Safe alternative spaces for those who won't go into overnight shelters.
- Public restroom facilities.
- Recommending studying the 2019 Sprint Cycle report for community effort successes.



## **Opportunities (continued):**

- **Collaboration & Coordination:**

- Current emphasis on working together with capacity for leadership.
- Need for dedicated employees who are validated for their work and have proper direction.
- Broader collaboration network to better coordinate and orchestrate efforts.
- Ensure inclusion of all constituents and key decision-makers (city planning, health dept, individual agencies, healthcare systems, mental health providers).
- Getting groups together, buying into a shared vision, crafting a plan, and partners showing up.
- Identifying service and need gaps and creating a grid of who does what.
- Strategic thinking, transparency, and willingness to prioritize collective needs over individual plans.

- **Funding & Investment:**

- Advocating for Marshfield and private companies to invest in a fund.
- Engaging and educating the community to get long-term support.
- Addressing Root Causes & Prevention:
- Identifying most common contributors to homelessness.
- Developing upstream programs/services to prevent homelessness.

- **Cultural Shift:**

- Encouraging picking up after oneself and sober living.
- Expecting better behavior and enforcing rules.

## **Aspirations:**

- **Comprehensive & Coordinated System:**

- Comprehensive master plan showing how various providers fit in.
- Building out components of a Housing First model to get people housed ASAP.
- Focus on getting people into homes, even unconventional ones, with supportive services.

- **Shifting Perceptions:**

- Looking at the homeless population as neighbors, not a scourge.
- Solving Homelessness (or working towards it):
- Working toward solving homelessness, acknowledging it may never be totally solved.
- To have a roof over their head for those who want one, with wrap-around services for success.

- **Collective Effort & Diversity:**

- Collective desire to house people.
- Collective effort reflecting diversity of community, with intentional outreach to diverse community leaders.

## **Results (Key Indicators of Success):**

- **Reduced Homelessness & Shelter Usage:**

- Less people using overnight shelter and day resource center.
- Less homeless youth.
- Homelessness count numbers reduced.
- Sojourner attendance reduced.
- Lower rate of unsheltered/housing insecure individuals & families.
- Short duration of homelessness

- **Improved Community Conditions:**

- Less trash where homeless spend time.
- No one sleeping outside in nasty weather.
- Community members looking at homeless as neighbors.
- Law enforcement measures a decrease in encampments and overall decrease in calls related to unhoused people.

- **Housing Stability:**

- "We got people into HOMES!" or "We stabilized housing and made sure X # of people could stay in their homes!".
- Core neighborhoods/downtown having only a dozen folks on the street but seeking housing at any one time.

- **Service Measurement:**

- Measuring the number of clients served across the board and tracking over time.
- Overall Well-being:
- People will be housed and healthy.

# Appendix B: Homeless Service Providers SOAR Analysis

## Summary Notes:

- There is a desire among organizations and the community to build a system of open communication, coordination, and collaboration, with an emphasis on involvement from people with lived and living experience, to serve our community efficiently and effectively.
- We have a community full of people and organizations who are committed and passionate about addressing homelessness in Eau Claire, as well as buy in from multiple different sectors. There is a desire to address systematic barriers and determinants.
- Through working together, we hope to build capacity throughout the community, support the needs of each individual and organizations, and develop a better understanding of what people are doing in the community.
- Together, we need to work with developers in providing more affordable housing options to people experiencing homelessness with sufficient social support and wrap-around services, with dedicated outreach efforts focused on self-determination, agency, and meeting people where they are at.
- We want to improve the data we have on homelessness in Eau Claire so that we can identify and effectively address the problem, advocate for and utilize the needed resources, and hold one another accountable to making a tangible difference.

## STRENGTHS

- Our community is very caring and supportive of the initiatives being done.
- Community members, as well as local businesses and larger corporations, respond quickly and efficiently to calls for help.
- There are a lot of committed and passionate organizations and people in the community that have dedicated time, effort, knowledge, and experience to work previously and continue to do so.
- Collaboration and different initiatives are already occurring between many organizations.
- Faith base networks have expressed interest in supporting initiatives.
- Diverse perspectives and many ideas are shared about wanting to help others.
- There are multiple organizations that address the broad spectrum of needs for those experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity.
- This includes shelters, meals, housing initiatives, transportation services, student support, etc.
- Many organizations realize that others might fit the needs of an individual more and are willing to refer out.

## **STRENGTHS (continued)**

- Our community has many philanthropic partners willing to dedicate funds to different projects.
  - We also receive a wide variety of grant funding, federal funding, and funding from private organizations.
  - There may be financial resources that are available but untapped in Eau Claire.
  - As barriers arise, many people are creative with how they use their funding to address the needs of their clients.
- We have strong political capital and support from local government, as many City Council and County Board members are invested and supportive of initiatives.
  - The healthcare sector is also involved and interested in helping those who experience homelessness.
  - We have regional partnerships across the area and state.
- Eau Claire has many spaces and parks where people can go and feel safe.
  - A strong technology/WIFI network in Eau Claire allows people who are unhoused to better access resources and information.
- We have centralized leadership through the Eau Claire County Department of Human Services.
- The unhoused community in Eau Claire works together and supports each other.
  - Organizations understand the importance of incorporating those with lived experience and encourage them to be the leaders in initiatives.
- We have great relationships with the media. They are very responsive, and many stories are approached with a positive lens.

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

- We need to establish a clear understanding of what is happening in the community, as well as accurately understand how much housing we have at various levels.
  - We need to work on collaboration and improving communication between groups.
- We need to work together to address the barriers that come with housing people (criminal records, addiction, landlord hesitations, documentation, etc.), as well as finding ways to support people as they receive housing.
  - Building up a peer support infrastructure means peer support specialists can connect tenants with willing landlords, support them as they transition into housing, and help them to thrive.
  - It is very important to meet people where they are at and directly link clients to what they need.
    - We need to find a way to centralized resources so that people do not need to travel to multiple locations before they find the help they need.

## **OPPORTUNITIES (continued)**

- We need to find resources that help people become employed and maintain employment while they are in housing.
- We need to improve communication between organizations to increase efficiency and prevent duplicated efforts
  - Finding a centralized way to share client information prevents them from getting fatigued and frustrated from filling out paperwork, sharing their story, etc.
  - This can also prevent people from falling through the cracks of the system and allows more people to be reached with quality services.
- Going forward, it is important that we address the needs of all the populations present in Eau Claire, including those that are not stereotypically considered homeless (college students, those sleeping on couches, those who are doubled up, etc.).
- We need to find a way to focus on prevention and address some of the upstream factors that lead to people becoming unhoused.
  - We need better infrastructure to address encampments ethically.
- We need to expand and build our relationships with landlords and developers to make sure they are included in conversations and planning.
- We need to address issues such as transportation, particularly in rural areas of the county, and how we can make sure people are receiving housing where they want to live.
  - We need to find way to work more efficiently and collaboratively with other communities across the Chippewa Valley Region.

## **ASPIRATIONS**

- A goal going forward is to have more cohesion and coordination between services. To decrease duplication of efforts, we need to increase the understanding of what is going on where.
  - Hope the Day Resource Center will facilitate coordination of services, as well as build upon the outreach being done by Block by Block.
  - We must check our own expectations and assumptions for the roles of these organizations and instead work together to maximize resources and be more efficient.
  - This collaboration should have a noticeable impact, with an emphasis on diversion and prevention.
- We would like to collect quality data that supports our initiatives going forward.
- Going forward, we hope to build trust and relationships with landlords.
  - We hope to develop and increase the stock of affordable housing in Eau Claire, including through incentives for developers, tax credit housing, and engagement with the Tenant Landlord Resource Center.



## **ASPIRATIONS (continued)**

- There should not be a singular solution or option for housing. People should be able to choose where they want to live, and we must continue to provide and promote social support as they transition into housing.
  - Alternative avenues should be explored outside of the Coordinated Entry list for those who do not rank high in their vulnerability.
- Peer support specialists can provide specialized support in overcoming the individual barriers someone is facing, again emphasizing that we meet the client where they are at and they control how they want to engage with services.
  - Peer support specialists should work in tandem to case management.
  - This can allow us to reach more people, including those in vulnerable transition states, such as being released from prison, discharged from the hospital because of a drug overdose, etc.
- We hope to have an outreach team that can respond to emergency calls rather than law enforcement and can directly connect people with housing and services.
- We hope to have a team that coordinates care and supportive services offered to a client. Instead of forwarding a client's needs onto another organization, find which services they need at that time and who has the capacity to support them.
- We hope to engage with people who may not know about services or typically fly under the radar (students, those doubled up, those couch surfing, etc.)
- We hope to effectively communicate with the public the need to better address homelessness, including sharing the humanitarian benefits and explaining the costs associated with being unhoused.

## **RESULTS**

- Individuals with lived and living experience will be engaged in the conversation and decision-making process.
  - We will follow up to make sure those who receive housing are successful and supported.
- Look at crime rates and interactions with law enforcement (see how Street Ambassadors are impacting these conversations).
- Have and use quality data to see decreases in:
  - Number of people unhoused
  - Number of affordable units available
  - Number of people in shelter
  - The average length of homelessness
  - Number of people returning to homelessness
  - Time spent on the Coordinated Entry and other housing lists

## **RESULTS (continued)**

- See increases in:
  - Affordable housing units available for everyone in the community
  - Sustainable funding sources
  - Spots needed for mental health and AODA services (or utilization of)
- See improved communications with the different entities working on homelessness.
- Look at the costs of homelessness and the cost savings
- A website will be available with centralized resources and information.
- People are continually engaged for the long-haul.
  - We hope to see additional engagement from local and state government in providing resources.

## **NOTES FROM WRAP UP DISCUSSION**

- People appreciated the chance to come together and would like to continue to find ways to connect so that we can build capacity, support one another, and learn about what people are doing in the community.
- A heavy emphasis is placed on incorporating the voices and feedback of people with lived and living experience.
- We need to have better data, as well as ways to share that data and client information so we can understand the complete scope of homelessness in Eau Claire.
- A lot of energy is dedicated to this cause, and we need to continue to collaborate going forward.
- We need to find housing for people and make sure they are sufficiently supported with resources to stay housed.
  - We must make sure there is an individualized approach to getting people housing and providing services.

# Appendix C: Priorities Identified in Community Assembly

**1. EDUCATION:** Widely distribute information on homelessness and housing insecurity in Eau Claire County. Materials should contextualize information and help change/de-stigmatize the narrative about homelessness.

**2. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:** Develop community events (e.g., Food Truck Friday) that would bring community members and those experiencing homelessness together. “We learn by engaging one another and working together.”

**3. RESOURCES:** Create a simplified roadmap that shows how people can get services. Try to meet people where they are – consider flyers with QR codes, an app, etc. Investigate standardizing processes (e.g., one system for referrals and data management). Identify resource gaps. Engage service providers and organizations.

**4. FUNDING:** Find diverse, sustainable funding sources and facilitate collaboration for funding. Find ways to build capacity and a system-wide focus. Increase transparency of spending and outcomes.

**5. WHAT'S WORKING:** Look at what other communities are doing and implement best practices. Collaborate on data dashboards and highlight successes of the “community coming together.”

**6. RE-ENTRY:** Create a system that meets the needs of people who have been incarcerated to support their return to the community. Increase the availability of transitional living.

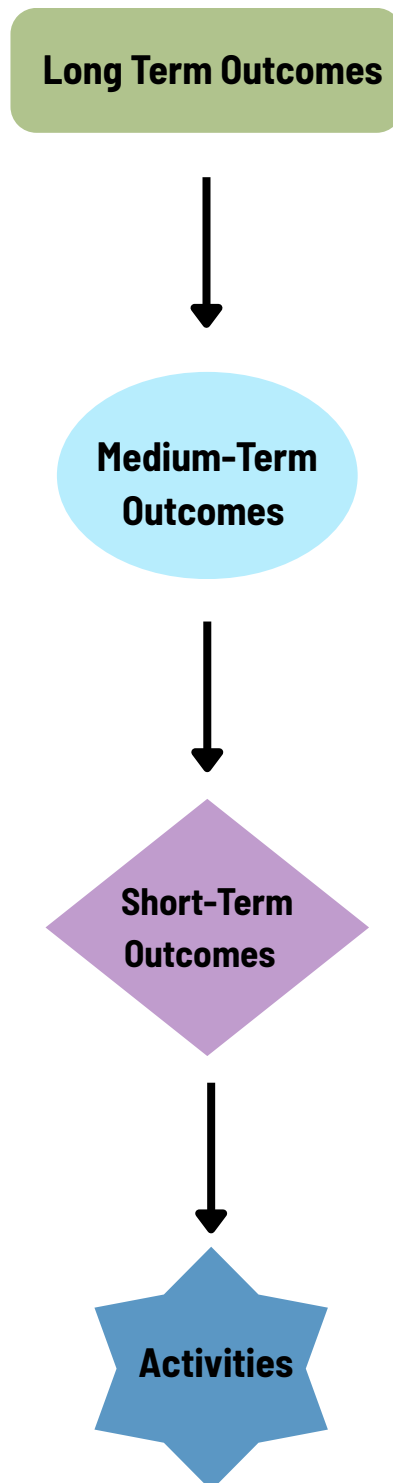
**7. LIVED EXPERIENCE:** Help center the voices of people with lived and living experience in decision-making processes. Support peer mentorship efforts, address gaps in peer support, and create a continuum of care. Ensure that engagement is thoughtful and meaningful (not just “check the box”).

**8. COLLABORATION:** Be mindful of the difference between coordination and collaboration: coordination is organizing various elements; collaboration involves relationship-building and developing “working trust” to achieve shared goals. Focus on collaboration.

**9. POLICY AND SYSTEMS CHANGE:** Encourage the City and County to collaborate on a housing development strategy for the unhoused and housing insecure. Redefine what “affordable” means (e.g., ALICE methodology).

**10. DE-CRIMINALIZATION:** Allocate funding for outreach teams to non-criminal activity, with an emphasis on meeting individuals’ needs, including those related to substance misuse and mental health. Work with law enforcement and learn from previous Homeless Outreach Transition (HOT) Team experience.

# Appendix D: Theories of Change from Homeless Service Providers



## Theme: Prevent people from becoming unhoused (tenant and landlord awareness)

Long-Term Outcomes	Informal eviction rate is less than 1%	Formal eviction rate is less than 1%	Decrease number of individuals becoming unhoused
Medium Term Outcomes	Fair housing taskforce with right representation		
	Relationship building with landlord, tenants, and service providers		
	Landlord education		
Short Term Outcomes	Engage landlords – generate list of landlords, provide resources to all landlords, and identify barriers to housing from landlords perspective		
Medium Term Outcomes	Mandatory mediation for eviction and foreclosure		
	Advocate to change housing authority looking at evictions and legal support		
	Legal aid		
	Increase EC tenant landlord resource center capacity		
	Landlord fund		
	Robust prevention program with unrestricted funding		
	Tenant education and access to education		
Short Term Outcomes	Increase awareness of resources available for tenant education and how to be a successful tenant		
Activities	Tenant classes		



## Theme: Supportive services and collaboration

Long Term Outcomes	95% of people who experience homelessness stay housed		Period someone experiences homelessness is short		
Medium Term Outcome	Increase/develop programming that supports people that are housed (rent, therapy, case management)		Support for folks moving into housing (peer support)	Regional mental health center (crisis, drug, AODA)	Increase awareness of community resources and make it easy for people at risk of becoming homeless to access
Short Term Outcomes	Collaborate with surrounding jurisdictions to agree on service areas – funding	Identify peer support network that currently exists		Identify barriers individuals face	Work to eliminate redundancy among programs
		Look at specialty AODA, DV, mental health			
		Look at capacity of organizations and networks			
Activities	Build collaborative community resource	Create a comprehensive database of housing in ECC		Therapy, case management, peer support	
Medium Term Outcomes	Peer mentorship	Supportive case management provided	Financial resources	One collaborative software referral app	
Short Term Outcomes	Develop a data sharing system	Create an app with resources	Presentations by Unite Us by HFG		Functioning full bod website for resources (capacity or not)
Activities	Expand peer support services		Develop and implement a data sharing system		Study costs of homelessness

## Theme: Built environment and affordable housing

<b>Long Term Outcome</b>	<b>Increase number of people permanently housed</b>	
Medium Term Outcomes	More affordable appropriate housing within two years (increase amount of affordable housing (many meanings))	
	Transitional housing (groups for support and education)	Increased housing for very low-income households (new
Short Term Outcomes	Identify transitional housing that currently exists and increase knowledge of program availability (through website?)	
Medium Term Outcomes	Community land trust	
	Build houses, 4plexes, 8plexes, skyscrapers	
	Landlord relationships	
	Connect land purchases, tenants, and volunteers	
Activities	Activities, funds, fundraisers, to get costs down	

## Team: Outreach

<b>Long Term Outcomes</b>	<b>Proportional representation in housing stability, ensuring no demographic group is overrepresented in our homelessness data</b>		
Medium Term Outcomes	Build outreach		
Short Term Outcomes	Outreach team (jails/prisons, call line, neighborhood resource officer, peer support)	Collaboration & education with first responders (possibility bring in outreach team instead)	
Activities	Develop and implement outreach team	Community engagement	Get to know people
Medium Term Outcomes	Triage system		
Short Term Outcomes	Identify agencies that are working with people experiencing homelessness, agencies coming together to discuss case management, DOC probation requirements, triage form shared		
Activities	Continue EC ambassadors program to connect w/ individuals and connect them to resources		

# Appendix E: Findings from Previous Meetings

The Coalition to End Homelessness identified key opportunities to pursue. The most common was prevention, with a focus on how the system can prevent people from becoming homeless. The conversations touched on co-occurring behavioral health disorders which significantly impact our neighbors experiencing homeless. While these are crucial considerations, this plan is focused on housing-first strategies. Getting people into stable housing is an essential foundation for individuals to address their behavioral health needs by collaborating with vital services.

## Desired Future

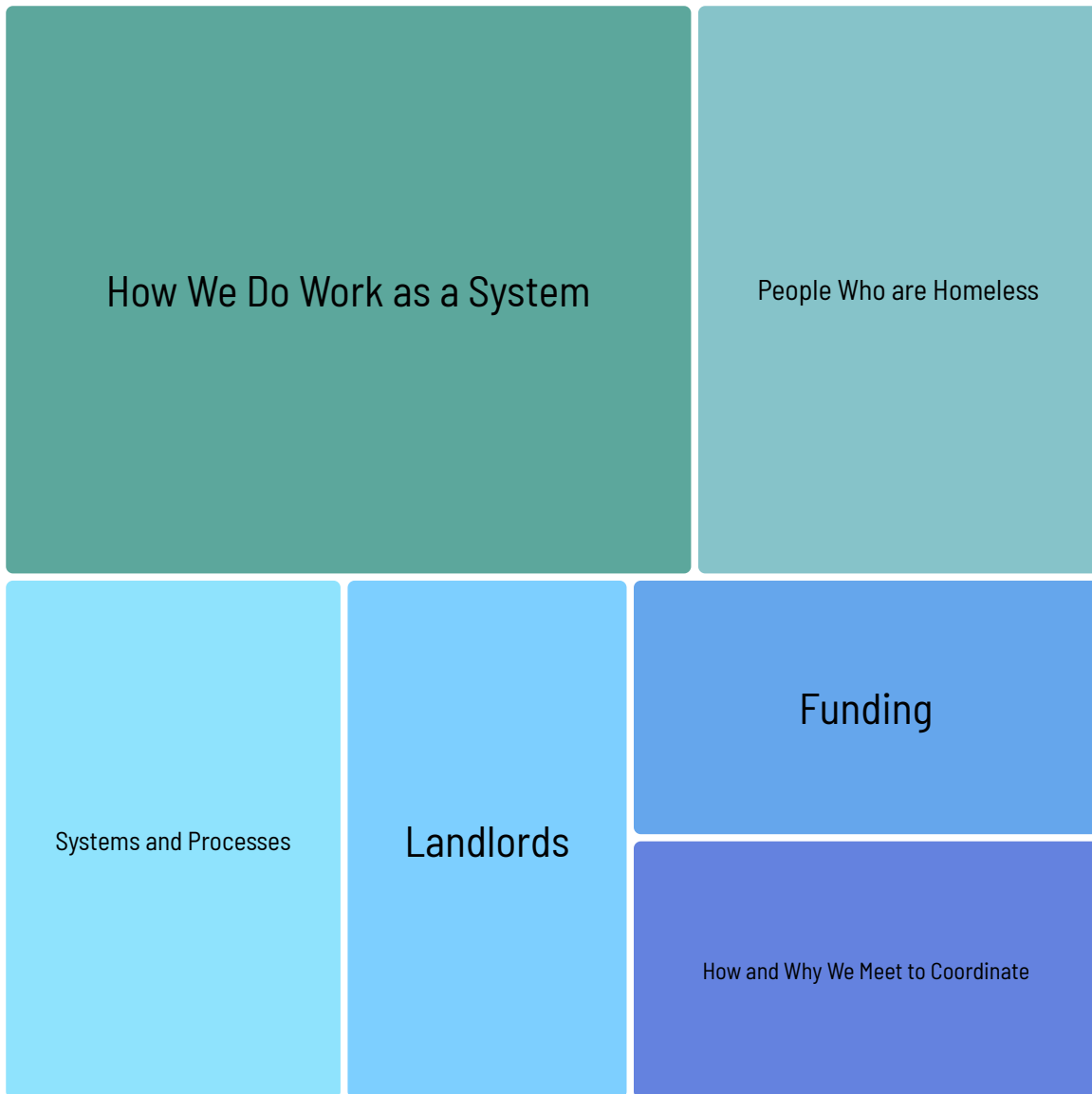
Previous efforts also identified a range of potential goals that homeless service providers and the Eau Claire Community as a whole could advance in order to strengthen the collective response to homelessness.

- Access to behavioral health care
- Decriminalizing drugs
- Develop more houses
- Eliminate hunger
- Funding for social support systems
- Increase trust among all folks
- Landlord required to work with very low income
- Landlord work to keep people housed
- One-stop-shop and case worker
- Revamp other systems of care
- Systems to help people stay in homes
- Trust rebuilt between neighbors experiencing homelessness and service providers



## Challenges

When reviewing the meeting minutes from previous efforts we noticed that previous conversations focused on challenges within the homeless system. Providers were often most critical of themselves and their own barriers to collaborate meaningfully with one another to meet the needs of vulnerable community members.. The table below represents the most common challenges that were reflected in meeting minutes.



"Covid raised issues, people rallied with a sense of urgency, now that covid as drawn down we have lost the momentum. People are burnt out. Now there are finger pointing and reliance on homeless providers. [I want] better collaboration."