



Wisconsin Housing First Coalition
In Partnership with Wisconsin's four Continuums of Care
March 2019

[About the WI Housing First Coalition](#)

The Wisconsin Housing First Coalition was founded in 2017 to promote the Housing First philosophy as an evidence-based model for ending homelessness statewide. The Housing First philosophy is that the most effective intervention for people experiencing homelessness is to provide safe and affordable housing first and then wraparound services to support maintenance of that housing.

The WI Housing First Coalition is a member-based organization that strives to end homelessness by advocating for and supporting effective, sound policies and practices that promote the Housing First philosophy. We do this by collaborating with current homeless service providers to educate policy and decision makers, and to provide training and technical assistance to providers and stakeholders to implement the principles of Housing First in programming and service delivery.

[Who is working to end homelessness?](#)

The state of Wisconsin has four Continuums of Care (CoCs), which are defined by HUD as “A program designed to assist sheltered and unsheltered homeless people by providing the housing and/or services needed to help individuals move into transitional and permanent housing, with the goal of long-term stability.” HUD requires representatives of relevant organizations to form a Continuum of Care to serve a specific geographic area. Relevant organizations include nonprofit homeless assistance providers, victim service providers, faith-based organizations, governments, businesses, advocates, public housing agencies, school districts, social service providers, mental health agencies, hospitals, universities, affordable housing developers, law enforcement, and organizations that serve veterans and homeless and formerly homeless individuals. In Wisconsin, there are four CoCs: Dane County, Milwaukee County, Racine County, and Balance of State; Balance of State is further broken down into 21 local CoCs. The CoCs provide strategy and coordinate funding streams to end homelessness in their communities. All CoCs endorse the Housing First philosophy.

[What is being done?](#)

Most funding for homeless services in Wisconsin comes from HUD. The CoCs receive planning funds and agencies within the CoCs receive HUD funds specifically for CoCs in addition to Emergency Solutions Grants and Community Development Block Grants, with additional funds from local City, County, and United Ways to work toward ending homelessness.

Each community has also implemented a program called Coordinated Entry to quantify and prioritize those who are currently experiencing literal homelessness in an emergency shelter or on the street. People are housed using a Housing

First approach, and the overall numbers of people experiencing homelessness statewide have dropped dramatically from 6,057 in 2015¹ to 4,907 in 2018².

In 2017, the Wisconsin legislature created the Wisconsin Interagency Council on Homelessness, which is a statewide body comprised of department secretaries and the CoC leads to work on statewide initiatives to end homelessness. At the end of 2018, the Interagency Council came out with a report with strategic priorities to address homelessness.³ The WI Housing First Coalition and all four CoCs appreciate and support the proposed bills and pieces in the Governor's budget that have since been put forth to bring life to the initiatives in this plan. The proposed \$3.75 million, if it passes in the budget, will provide some dollars for housing, service provision, and will assist homeless shelters. These dollars will be utilized to provide essential services to those currently experiencing homelessness, and is a start to addressing homelessness, however, a Housing First-focused solution will include sufficient housing dollars with support services for those experiencing homelessness.

What is needed?

The funding received from HUD and local resources are helpful but ultimately are not enough. State resources dedicated to housing and support services costs would make an impact on homelessness statewide. The WI Housing First Coalition estimates an annual investment of \$45 million will make it possible to end homelessness.

As a step toward the full annual investment cost, the four CoCs put together estimates for their communities to end homelessness using the Housing First approach. The approach includes funding two pieces: rental assistance and support services. The length of the intervention varies based on the household's needs, but the CoCs estimate 12-months of support per household. Each CoC put together an estimate of the cost of assistance needed based on looking at who is currently (as of March 12, 2019) homeless and seeking services. The target population are those that do not meet HUD's definition of chronic homeless but are higher barrier than those successfully served in less intensive programming models, also funded by HUD. In other words, this is the population that is falling through the cracks. These are households that have a disability and have been homeless for less than 12 months or do not have a disability and have been homeless for 12 months or more. These households do not meet the definition of chronically homeless so are not prioritized for Permanent Supportive Housing. At the same time, they likely have more needs than what is provided in a traditional Rapid Rehousing program. Thus, this population was selected as the target group.

Furthermore, focusing on a specific population to target an intervention has helped CoCs strive to reach a specific, measureable, and attainable goal. The following table shows the subpopulation of people who are not served by other funding sources (non-chronically homeless but needing longer-term services) and broken into singles and households with children.

¹ https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/reportmanagement/published/CoC_PopSub_State_WI_2015.pdf

² https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/reportmanagement/published/CoC_PopSub_State_WI_2018.pdf

³ https://doa.wi.gov/Documents/A%20Hand%20and%20a%20Home_WICH%20Statewide%20Plan.pdf

The proposed \$3.75 million is a step toward ending homelessness and addresses a variety of response systems within the homeless crisis response system that are absolutely necessary. The WI Housing First Coalition and the four CoCs recommend adding into the state budget regularly each year toward the goal of investing what it will take to end homelessness statewide, which is approximately \$45 million (see the WI Housing First Coalition White Paper, November 2018). We suggest the following:

- 1) Year 1- Invest in Reducing Family & Child Homelessness: \$6.3 million additional

Year 1 Total Budget: \$10 million

CoC	Number of Households w/ Children	Annual Cost Estimate Per Household w/ Children- Rent and Services	Annual Need Estimate for Households w/ Children
Balance of State	236	\$19,986	\$4.7 million
Dane County	49	\$18,305	\$896,945
Milwaukee County	54	\$12,000	\$648,000
Racine County	4	\$13,518	\$54,072
Total Statewide: \$6.3 million			

- 2) Year 2 & 3- Invest in Reducing Single Adult Homelessness: \$12 million annually

Year 2 Total Budget: \$22 million

Year 3 Total Budget: \$34 million

CoC	Number of Single Households	Annual Cost Estimate Per Household- Rent and Services	Annual Need Estimate for Single Households
Balance of State	857	\$15,546	\$13.3 million
Dane County	246	\$18,305	\$4.5 million
Milwaukee County	480	\$10,000	\$4.8 million
Racine County	71	\$13,518	\$959,778
Total Statewide: \$23.5 million (increase budget by half over two years to get to total)			

- 3) Year 4- Invest in Ending Homelessness Statewide: based on annual Point in Time data

Year 4 Total Budget: \$45 million

In addition to these budget initiatives, the WI Housing First Coalition endorses the initiatives proposed in the Interagency Council's plan, including supporting a Medicaid waiver to help pay for support services and increased collaboration across silos and looking into ways to align budget priorities across departments toward a Housing First philosophy for all who need housing. Implementing these strategies and prioritizing state funding to address homelessness will contribute to a reduction of homelessness statewide.

For additional information on Housing First or to discuss the concepts contained herein, please contact:

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