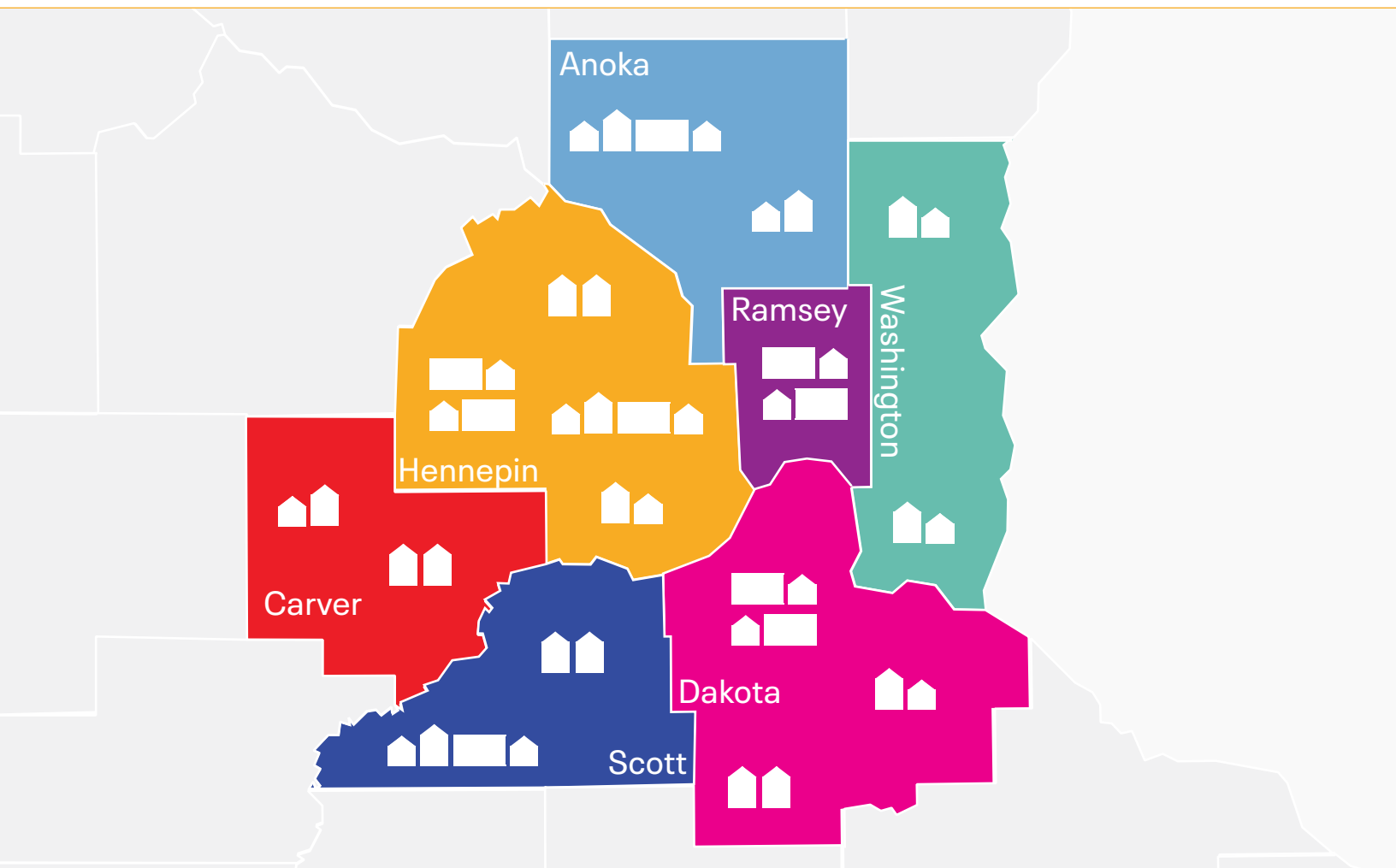


# Twin Cities Regional Opportunities for Advancing Racial Equity

Nov 2020 - August 2021



The Heading Home Minnesota Funders Collaborative (HHMFC) contracted with the National Innovation Service (NIS) Center for Housing Justice (CHJ) to build upon past efforts at regionalization; and to create an approach to cross-jurisdictional efforts that has the potential to transform local efforts for a more regional system that builds toward housing justice. The Center for Housing Justice performed a systems audit as the first step in creating a blueprint for moving towards a more regional system. The systems audit contained in this report is a reflection of major themes around barriers to regional approaches to preventing and ending homelessness that frequently surfaced among those community members and stakeholders in the region that were interviewed. It is the first part of the full blueprint that will be released in the summer of 2021 to inform a path forward toward regionalization that leads to housing justice.

The NIS Center for Housing Justice designs equitable public institutions in partnership with impacted communities to drive systems transformation. Learn more about the team [here](#).

This work was completed in collaboration with and informed by:

Heading Home Minnesota Funders Collaborative  
Saint Paul Minnesota Foundation  
Twin Cities Regional Advisory Members  
Regional Metro Committee  
Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness  
Unsheltered Design Regional Advisory Group  
Continuum of Care Coordinators  
StreetOutreach Network  
Equity in Place  
The many individuals and activist groups that offered their time, subject matter expertise, accountability partnership and joy to this process

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# Executive Summary

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## Introduction

The Twin Cities Regionalization Effort to Prevent and End Homelessness aims to advance systemic strategies that unearth the rooted and historical racial inequities in the region that are leaving local entities feeling perpetually behind in their efforts.

The theory of change for regionalization in the Twin Cities Metro Region is simple: when we focus on building collective power, we can operationalize equity, actualize justice, create thriving communities, and end homelessness. The Blueprint has the opportunity to:

- guide the region in implementing a regional kitchen table – a space that shifts power, brings in a more diverse set of community stakeholder, and addresses structural barriers rooted in racism;
- be a catalyst for being and acting different in the work to end homelessness; and
- start the regional journey to not only end homelessness but reach housing justice.

NIS conducted a systems audit that included review of policies and practices, interviews and group conversations with people across the Twin Cities region. The audit findings reflect the major themes that frequently surfaced among the community members and stakeholders and barriers to regionalization. The findings also inform the three proposed actions to begin to address the barriers identified and provide a Blueprint for moving towards housing justice in the region. The audit also provides an in-depth background on the root causes of racial inequity and injustice in the metro region, based on current research, data, and the social and economic conditions connected to the social justice movement and the pandemic; analyzing the way in which it shapes the collective response to homelessness and housing.

## Framing

NIS oriented the approach to the blueprint by asking the following questions and being guided by the answers:

### **1. What new information can be offered back to the community?**

In conversation with stakeholders across the region, we heard resonance in the significant workarounds people across the system, especially individuals and families with lived experience, are having to do in response to larger

systematic challenges. Outreach workers, mutual aid organizers, county staff, and individuals with lived experience provided concrete examples of the ways in which they navigate different and conflicting policies and practices across the metro region when attempting to access services, establish and maintain communication regarding service coordination, and maintain assistance being received (both housing and supports). Although this challenge has long been known to individuals engaged in this process, what was revealed as new is the reach and significance of the burden the system has placed on individuals and households attempting to meet their own housing, supports, and community needs across seven metro counties and the three Continuum of Care (CoC) boundaries.

This calls for a new way of addressing these barriers that moves the power and authority to design and implement strategies away from a small group of system leaders toward a coalition of people with direct system experiences in order to center what will work best for the person and not what works best for the system.

## **2. What can be different about this process? This effort?**

Most individuals engaged in this process asked NIS how this effort is different from previous attempts. NIS offers two responses back to this inquiry:

- This process intentionally and explicitly centers the impact of system barriers on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

We must consistently acknowledge and name the origin of policies and structural mechanisms currently used to reduce and end homelessness in our community that also perpetuate the harmful and traumatizing experiences and outcomes for Black, Indigenous, and People of color experiencing housing instability and homelessness. We must also see these strategies, while well-meaning, as being layered on top of historical racism embedded in decades of housing system decisions. By doing so, this effort also sets the stage for strategies and solutions that center positive and dignified outcomes from this effort.

- This process identifies system barriers by centering the expertise of individuals who have first-hand experience navigating the crisis response system (outreach, emergency shelter, housing assistance, human services, and benefits), community members implementing solutions outside of the crisis response system, and those at the frontline (outreach workers and homeless service providers).
- The process decenters the traditional priority placed on the written word (policies, plans, and procedures) and on subject matter experts. Instead, the proof points and/or evidence highly valued in this process is the qualitative experiences and wisdom of individuals who have had to navigate what we call the system for multiple years as single individuals and families. From here, we build out proof points with data, policy research, and in dialogue with subject matter experts.

### **3. What will need to be different moving forward?**

A blueprint, no matter how compelling and beautifully curated is only one piece of the work to advance regional approaches to racial equity and housing justice. In order to make this blueprint different, and for it not to be another report without action, the community will need to commit to a design and implementation phase that prioritizes the following:

- Forming a coalition of leaders who will plan for transformation that has the greatest potential to improve the lives of Black, Indigenous, People of Color in the twin cities metro area and can unleash new opportunities to successfully engage and advance future iterations of housing justice.
- Shifting the power and authority to set priorities of a regional vision to Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Queer individuals and households with lived experiences
- Securing commitments of policymakers, system leaders, and philanthropy to influence and use their power to act upon the vision, goals, and strategies.

## **So What Did We Learn? Overview of Audit Findings**

### **1. Lacking a Regional Vision and Shared Goals to Prevent and End Homelessness**

In conversations with local stakeholders and members of the community who have experienced homelessness, it was consistently expressed that there is a severe need for strategic vision and community-driven goals to prevent and end homelessness across the seven-county metro region; and the vision and goals must include regional prevention and regional housing preservation and development goals. There is currently limited collaboration across counties, cities, CoCs, and the state to set and implement a regional vision beyond responding to the immediate dual crisis of the pandemic and unsheltered homelessness. There is also very little collective goal-setting led by BIPOC community leaders and individuals impacted by policy, practice, and budget decisions made regionally. Furthermore, collaboration is disincentivized by encouraging competition, particularly across counties through state and county funding processes.

### **2. Human Services Access and Navigation across Counties**

Human services—including public assistance programs, behavioral and substance abuse services, and health care—are critical to the housing stability and health of individuals and families experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness. Although Minnesota has made significant investments in human services at both the state and county level, access to and navigation of these services by people experiencing homelessness continues to be a major barrier to addressing homelessness and housing instability throughout the seven-county metro region. The major barriers

include administrative barriers to transferring public assistance benefits when moving across counties, inequitable distribution of behavioral health and substance abuse services across the region, and the culture of safeguarding county investments in human services and homelessness programs due to the fear of future human service cost to the county driven by County of Financial Responsibility.

### **3. Siloed Continuum of Care Priorities and Coordinated Entry Systems**

The Twin Cities metro is home to three CoCs (Hennepin, St. Paul, Ramsey and Suburban Metro Area Counties) that manage separate coordinated entry systems that cover the seven metro counties. Years of under-resourced service and housing inventories have led the CoCs to continue to prioritize based on individual vulnerability and a scarcity model, while individuals and families continue to carry the overwhelming burden in navigating access to the three coordinated entry systems to identify available housing and supports to meet their individual needs. The overrepresentation of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color in the population of people experiencing housing instability results in coordinated entry acting as a system tool that perpetuates racial inequity in access, experience, and outcomes for those Black, Indigenous, and People of Color in the seven metro county area.

## **The Proposed Actions**

In this audit report, NIS describes what we learned through interviews, community conversations, workshops, and a materials audit about the responses to homelessness and housing instability as the system currently operates and is experienced by the community. Through continued stakeholder engagement, proposed strategies were developed to shift the identified barriers into drivers of regional strategies to prevent and end homelessness were developed and informed following three actions.

**Proposed Action 1** is the foundational action of creating a regional kitchen table that can offer a different way of making regional funding and strategy decisions, with a more diverse set of stakeholders, led by people with lived expertise, and oriented around justice. Led with the Regional Advisory Group, proceeding with the table would include incremental steps towards 1) building a more sustainable kitchen table over the next 3-5 years, and 2) launching the beginning work of Proposed Action 2 and 3.

**Proposed Action 2** offers a set of strategies that can better align housing and homelessness resources across the region to begin transforming the system and moving towards housing justice. Strategies include more immediate action that can be taken in the Winter and Spring of 2022, including system modeling and strategic investment planning across the region. It also outlines medium to long term actions around coordinated entry and ongoing modeling and investment planning, that can be taken over the next 3 years. This work should be launched and sustained by the regional kitchen table in Proposed Action 1.

**Proposed Action 3** offers a set of strategies that can help to build out more equitable access to quality human services across the region and be paired with the housing and homelessness resources discussed in Proposed Action 2. Strategies include medium term and long term actions that can help to improve public benefits and build out more behavioral health and substance abuse services in the region. This work should also be launched and sustained by the regional kitchen table in Proposed Action 1 to ensure it is aligned with the work being done in Proposed Action 2.

The three actions are not meant to be taken sequentially but are interconnected, with parts of each happening simultaneously.

### What Comes Next

Led by the Regional Advisory Group, key stakeholders will be engaged through Fall/Winter 2021 to better understand their interest, needs, and desires to create a different type of planning and decision-making table; with the goal of the engagements being to come to a community decision on proceeding with the table in 2022.



Josephine Pufpaff  
Director of Community and Coalition Building  
Center for Housing Justice, NIS



# Introduction

## What is a blueprint for regionalization?

There have been several attempts in recent years to regionalize tasks and specific homeless system response efforts in the Twin Cities metro region. Each effort has resulted in strategies and solutions to respond to homeless crises and sometimes reduce the harm experienced by people experiencing homelessness. This effort aims to advance systemic strategies that unearth the rooted and historical racial inequities in the region that are leaving local entities feeling perpetually behind in their efforts collectively.

The Heading Home Minnesota Funders Collaborative (HHMFC) contracted with the National Innovation Service (NIS) Center for Housing Justice (CHJ) to build upon past efforts at regionalization, and create an approach to cross-jurisdictional efforts that has the potential to transform local efforts toward a regional system that builds toward housing justice. **The blueprint for regionalization is a reflection of major themes that frequently surfaced among those community members and stakeholders in the Twin Cities that we interviewed in informing a path forward toward regionalization that leads to housing justice.**

## What is different about this from past attempts?

To understand what it means to advance regionalization built on **racial equity** and **housing justice** requires an understanding of the origin of policies and practices that already exist in those spaces. Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) have historically experienced housing instability and homelessness at significantly greater

### Racial Equity

is not just the absence of overt racial discrimination; it is also the presence of deliberate policies and practices that provide everyone with the support they need to improve the quality of their lives. It is a state in which all people in a given society have equal rights and opportunities. To pursue equity, policies and frameworks for society must address the underlying and systemic differences of opportunity and access to social resources.

### Housing Justice

Housing justice for us means guaranteeing opportunities for everyone in our country to have affordable, safe, accessible, stable housing through a racial justice approach.

rates than their white counterparts. This disproportionality is the result of [systemic racism and histories of white supremacist policy](#) enacted to deprive BIPOC communities of access to resources and wealth-building mechanisms—including homeownership. While experiencing homelessness, (in addition to the trauma suffered through the experience of homelessness) institutional and systemic racism from within the homeless response system, especially its services, [results in harmful and negative outcomes](#).

In [A Brief Timeline of Race and Homelessness in America](#), the National Innovation Service and our partners in the [National Racial Equity Working Group](#) outline the historical connections between race and homelessness in the United States, including a timeline that

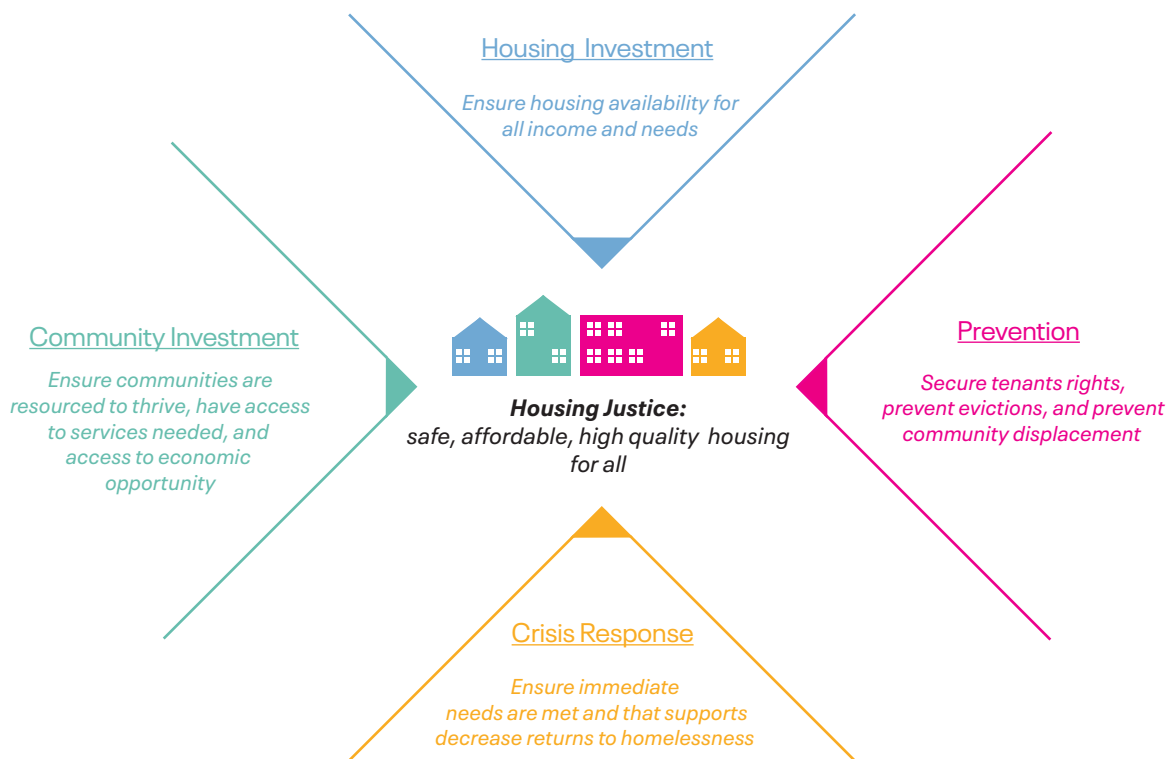
illuminates the origin of policies and practices that drive homeless response systems today. A system built on racial equity and housing justice must be able to identify and translate historical and present-day racist trauma into policy, practice, and action that both redresses previous harm and moves toward a new reality.

For the Twin Cities Metro Region, a series of events have catalyzed to make now the time to move forward on regionalization for housing justice. In the last few years, the region built out infrastructure in its efforts to respond to unsheltered homelessness, but the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the

cracks and flaws in responses to homelessness that are focused on crisis and shelter rather than preventing homelessness and supplying affordable housing to meet local demand. The murder of George Floyd, and the local and national response to his murder, exposed the racist foundations of many systems purporting to serve people; housing is no exception. Advancing housing justice through regionalization requires that the people living in the Twin Cities Metro Region to stand behind and push for housing justice. The blueprint reflects a path for getting there.

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## Understanding Crisis Response in a Housing Justice Framework



*With housing justice at the center, crisis response serves as one of several complimentary approaches to securing safe, affordable, high quality housing for all. Together, these approaches create a comprehensive support for centering housing by focusing on availability, accessibility, and security or a 'safety net,' for when availability and accessibility aren't meeting their goals.*

*Racial equity must be embedded within all four of these approaches for Housing justice to be achieved.*

## What is the theory of change?

The theory of change for regionalization in the Twin Cities Metro Region is simple: when we focus on building collective power, we can actualize justice, create thriving communities, and end homelessness.

We understand power to be fundamentally rooted in people. When power is redistributed to and spread amongst the people most harmed by systems meant to help them, those systems are actively transformed into ones where every community member doesn't merely remain housed but thrives as well. System transformation happens by comprehensively redistributing power, resources, and authority.

This kind of system must be approached regionally if we are to comprehensively prevent and end homelessness. The local network and fabric of infrastructure, costs of living, and the interconnectedness and interdependence of people, families, and communities across counties require this regional approach.



# Background

The Regional Blueprint for Housing Justice is a strategy framework that indicates a way forward for the region. For the purpose of this blueprint, the **Twin Cities Metro Region** is defined as the geographic region that is Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, and Washington counties and includes communities, planning and advocacy bodies and local governments within them. In addition to the geographic reach and current functions of the homeless response system; the effort also included investigating the overlapping roles, jurisdictional authorities, investments, and advocacy of key agents and entities that are currently charged with preventing and ending homelessness in the region.

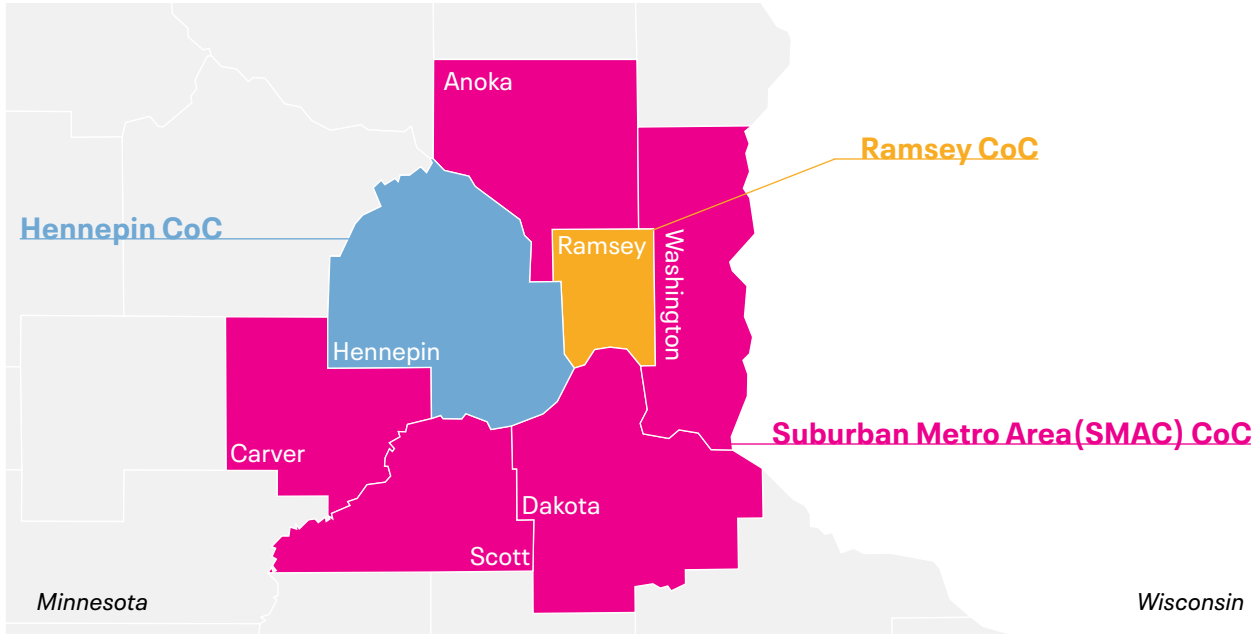
The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly exacerbated racial inequity and socioeconomic burdens on communities of color and Indigenous communities across the country. Decades of activism among Black, Indigenous and communities of color

have already highlighted these growing and cumulative effects of structural racism. When George Floyd was murdered on May 25, 2020, he became one of the millions whose dreams and lives have been stolen in North America to uphold White supremacy, exposing the transformation necessary not only across the country but very explicitly right here in the Twin Cities region.

The [Minnesota Paradox](#) demonstrates how effective the state’s systems are at perpetuating inequity and inequality. The state’s rates of racial disparities are some of the worst in the nation.

Rates of homelessness, unemployment, maternal mortality, infant mortality, incarceration, arrests, are disproportionately high among Black and Indigenous people in Minnesota while life expectancy, income, wealth, and homeownership rates are lower. These disparities are intentional outcomes

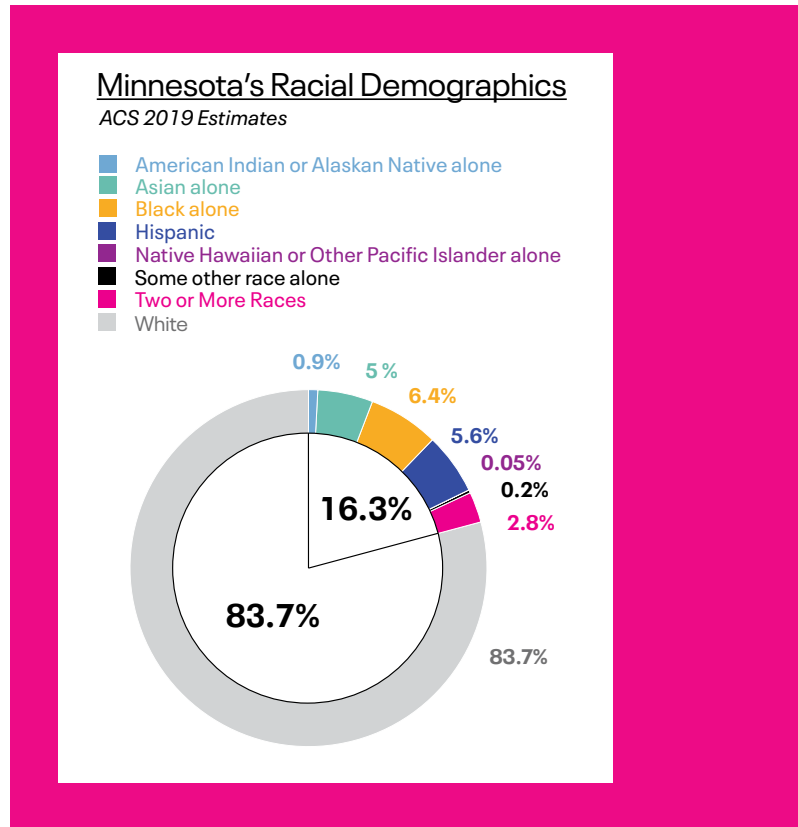
## Twin Cities Metro Area Continuum of Care Regions



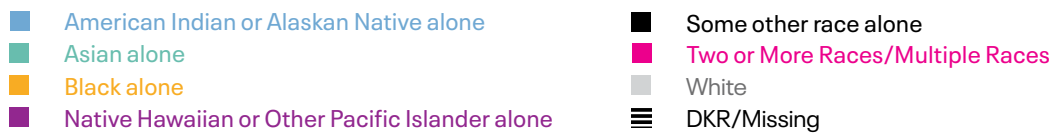
of systems built to oppress. [Recent research](#) shows that residential segregation even reinforces other disparities, demonstrating the intersecting and compounding effects of these systems of oppression.

Black and African Americans in Minnesota only make up 7% of the state's population but accounted for 56% of the people counted as experiencing homelessness in the Twin Cities region on a single night last year. Indigenous people, defined by the government as Native American and Alaskan Natives, represent 1.4% of the state's population and yet 6.5% of the people counted on that night in the region were identified as Indigenous.

These alarming data points only scratch the surface. Recent research found that Black and African Americans who are experiencing homelessness in the Suburban Metro Area Continuum of Care (SMAC) are [more likely to move into temporary housing or double up](#)

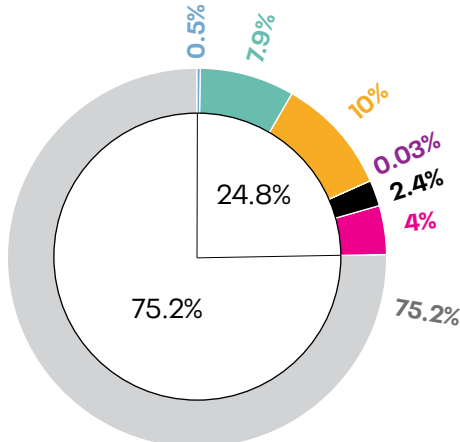


### Regional 7-County Racial Disproportionality of People Experiencing Homelessness



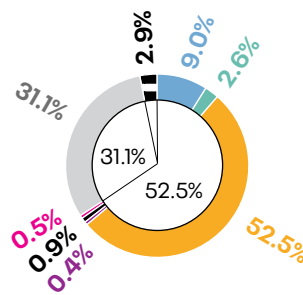
#### 7-County Racial Demographics

ACS 2019 Estimates



#### HMIS Active Priority List Racial Demographics

MN HMIS Dashboard, 1/1/20 - 12/31/20



[with other households](#) after receiving services while others are connected more frequently to permanent housing options and services.

Disproportionate rates of homelessness are the direct product of the last century of housing policy in the region and in the nation more broadly. Before many Black and African American families were planting roots in the region and before the Great Migration, White landowners began laying the groundwork for housing segregation. Law and policy were key tools in achieving this segregation with White landowners using racially restrictive covenants to block Black and African Americans from buying property, policies now considered to be the [Jim Crow rules of the North](#). Segregation did not begin in the Twin Cities region until 1910, when a White resident and property developer wrote the community's [first housing racially restrictive covenant](#) into a deed, paving the way for Black and African Americans in the Twin Cities to now have [the lowest rates of homeownership](#) in the entire country.

Racially restrictive covenants have evolved. Today, "race-neutral" language stands in place of explicit racism. Barriers to access, convoluted processes and regulations, and overt interpersonal racism prevent BIPOC communities from attaining and sustaining housing stability or having meaningful choice in housing options. In an initial analysis of the data available from 211, HMIS, Wilder Research, and the American Community Survey (ACS) we found:

- [Native Americans are overrepresented](#) in the population of people experiencing homelessness by a factor of 12, and Native Americans are 26 times more likely to experience homelessness than White people.
- Among the suburbs, Anoka County has the most disproportionate number of Black individuals experiencing homelessness. Hennepin County has the highest rate of disproportionality, followed by Ramsey, then Anoka.

- Anoka County had a higher rate of United Way 211 "First Call for Help" calls based on its population size, even taking its poverty rate into account. Calls coming from Hennepin County were less than proportional to its size in the region, as were calls from Washington, Dakota, and Carver Counties.
- The only counties to report that there are individuals who identify as Asian experiencing homelessness were Dakota (2%), Ramsey (3%), and Hennepin (1%). Homelessness among Asian folks seems likely to be undercounted in Hennepin County, while the rate of homelessness among Asian people is higher in Dakota County than in other suburban counties.

Recent efforts have attempted to address these disparities. The Unsheltered Redesign Committee produced an initial framework for a regional approach to respond to the unsheltered population in the Twin Cities metro area. Published in February 2019, the [Responding Effectively as a Region to Unsheltered Homelessness in the Twin Cities Metro Area Framework](#) introduced key system components, defined the unified governance structure, political will, and public awareness needed to advance a regional approach to unsheltered homelessness. The framework also delivered recommendations and established the Regional Advisory Committee to provide direction, oversight, strategic thinking, and guidance as strategies were implemented across the region, most of which were adapted for and advanced during the COVID pandemic.

As of April 2021, the Regional Advisory Committee celebrated the following accomplishments:

- The creation of over 2,800 temporary shelter options (typically hotel/motel), cover staffing, and provide food and personal protective equipment.

- The creation of ongoing additional emergency shelter capacity for over 300 Minnesotans.
- The innovative use of the [Housing Support](#) program to promote COVID-safe congregate settings and implement a hotel-to-home model connecting people staying outdoors with permanent housing.

Despite this work and efforts to adapt to the changing environment in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, housing instability and homelessness are [rising in the region for BIPOC individuals and families](#), as is the case [across the country](#).

The pandemic itself has impacted the capacity of the region to respond to homelessness. It has also created economic instability—due to health and health care challenges as well as due to the profound impacts on employment in the service sector—for even more households, those households are disproportionately BIPOC. The pandemic has exacerbated historical racism embedded in employment

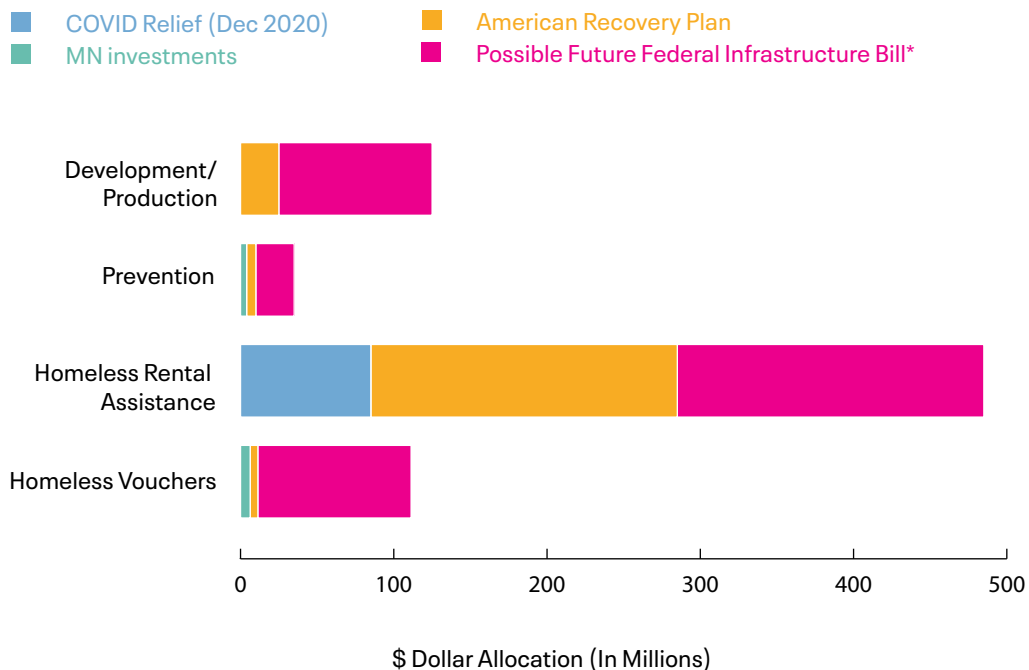
systems, as well. Housing insecurity has only increased in the face of these challenges.

When considering the scale of the challenge the pandemic has presented and layering it onto the historical and current patterns of racism in housing, the decades of scaled divestment in housing, and the mounting unaffordability for people with extremely low incomes, the path forward can seem daunting.

Yet alongside these challenges, the state and the federal government have both allocated historic investments in housing and homeless assistance. There is a new opportunity with funding allocated at scales that have not been imagined in recent history. This funding is aimed at preventing homelessness, providing short-term and long-term rental assistance, and providing capital investments to build the supply of housing at affordable rates.

While the amounts of the investments in the chart above may shift marginally, the truth of the moment holds: there are already significant new housing resources flowing into Minnesota, with more potentially coming

### Additional COVID-19 Pandemic-responsive Investments





in another infrastructure bill currently being negotiated by the federal government, which are reflected in the chart above as possible projections. The scale of these investments will demand new approaches and in some instances the need to re-imagine substantial changes in policy, investments in infrastructure and a change management plan.

The scale of this opportunity offers a catalyzing decision point:

- keep making decisions about resource allocation, spending, and priorities in the ways that fuel the racial disparities and inequities described above; or
- invite a new approach that includes and responds to people who have historically been left at the margins, and understands the nature of the funding decisions as interconnected regionally.

These new and substantial resources provide a platform to consider a blueprint that addresses the findings discussed in detail below.

## Approach and Process

Shifting toward housing justice requires centering voices of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color who have experienced the homelessness crisis response system in jurisdictions across the Twin Cities Metro Region; hearing successes and failures of prior efforts from system administrators, and; building a vision together for what would need to change to achieve housing justice for the region. The Center for Housing Justice (CHJ) held those values in a process with three core components: 1) a policy and decision-making audit; 2) community engagement and; 3) building community support. The process (for phase 1) began in December 2020 and will conclude June 2021. For a detailed description of the approach and process see Appendix A.





## Audit Findings

# Preventing and Ending Homelessness Regionally

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NIS was contracted to first complete a systems audit to map the current regional response to preventing and ending homelessness. This audit centered on the needs of people experiencing homelessness as defined by individuals and groups engaged in the process. The scope of the audit included understanding movement across systems and jurisdiction borders, was informed by the current social justice movements and the response to the COVID pandemic, and mapped efforts to promote equitable access to quality and affordable housing.

The findings presented below meet principles below that collectively reflect our organizational values, informed by HHMFC's guiding questions and—most importantly—what was expected by the Regional Advisory Group. These guiding principles will continue to evolve and expand as the Blueprint Coalition is formed to complete the final proposal and in preparation for Phase II. Our shared principles at this time are:

1. Do the findings identify systematic barriers to housing justice, including equitable access, experience, and outcomes across the region?
2. Are the findings consistent with what we heard from the community?
3. Were the findings and this report center the experiences of individuals who have had to navigate these systems and have been impacted by them?
4. Do the findings drive toward solutions that are incremental, structural, and transformative?
5. Did the process of conducting the systems audit and drafting the findings also identify ongoing opportunities to:
  - a. Achieving role clarity, authority, and leadership for a regional vision, priority setting, and investments in solutions?
  - b. Understanding where power lies to advance the solutions needed?
  - c. Surfacing clear opportunities to build on existing structures and mechanisms to scale person-centered policies and practices?
  - d. Identifying the level of investment needed in prevention and affordable housing regionally?

# Lacking a Regional Vision and Shared Goals to Prevent and End Homelessness

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## Overview

In conversations with local stakeholders and members of the community who have experienced homelessness, it was consistently expressed that there is a severe need for strategic vision and community-driven goals to prevent and end homelessness across the seven-county metro region. While ending homelessness and building housing justice in the region will be a multi-step process, the first step is to get on the same page about what the region is attempting to accomplish, and rooting those goals in the values of the community.

There was widespread agreement amongst local leaders that, in order to begin operating collaboratively, the first step would be to come together as a regional coalition and begin to create a vision for housing justice that is rooted in racial equity and that addresses prevention, crisis response, and safe and affordable housing. It was made clear that city, county, and state-level leaders need to come together around affordable housing production across the metro region and establish broader goals around prevention and the affordable housing resources that are needed.

Articulated goals and investments in tenant rights and protections, housing preservation, and production to meet the need for deeply affordable housing options for individuals and families with extremely low incomes and/or experiencing homelessness are all critical to pursuing this shared vision.

Prevention and diversion solutions have been built onto The homeless response system

for quite some time now. For example, investments like the Federal Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP) from 2009-2012 and in community-led initiatives to prevent unnecessary interactions with the crisis response system, a collective understanding of the benefits of preventative solutions has evolved locally. The call for housing justice requires the field to think more broadly and “upstream” than the experiences and prevalence known to the front end of the homeless response system. It is necessary to increase and target investments in community-based solutions that eliminate the need and inflow of individuals and families who are struggling against poverty, exploitative housing markets, and a reliance on short-term and shallow supports.

There is no regional vision that explicitly calls out the impact of housing discrimination, continued displacement, no-fault and/or inappropriate evictions, and the lack of renter protections, which drives the region’s current strategy of building out the existing crisis response systems per county and continuum of care, instead of a call to action that addresses these inflow levers at a regional level. [Equity in Place’s 2020 Policy agenda](#) has clearly outlined a missed opportunity at a regional level to address these inequitable practices through local and state policy.

The [2021 State of the State’s Housing 2021 Report](#) by the Minnesota Housing Partnership reported that the Twin Cities region contains 61 percent of the state’s population of extremely low-income renters (ELI), or renter

households that earn less than 30 percent of area median income (AMI). Additionally, while there are 103,140 ELI renter households in the region, there are only 35,105 units that are affordable and available to ELI renter households.

Furthermore, a vision for housing justice must include investments to achieve higher levels of homeownership in BIPOC communities, but there is a significant gap to close. According to the [Minnesota Housing Partnership](#), the Twin Cities region has the largest homeownership gap in the state and the largest population of BIPOC households in the region. While the region accounts for 76 percent of BIPOC households in the state, only 40 percent of BIPOC households are homeowners, compared to 75 percent of White households — a 35 percent gap.

## What is the evidence? What did we learn?

**Barrier 1: Collaboration and collective goal-setting led by BIPOC community leaders and individuals who have been impacted by policy and practice decisions is disincentivized by encouraging competition, particularly across counties through state and county funding processes.**

A consistent theme found throughout the audit was the systemic tendency to not collaborate across jurisdictions. This is largely attributed to the ways in which current funding structures operate, creating a huge barrier for meaningful collaboration amongst the region. The competition encouraged by this structure drives siloed approaches to the issue of housing and homelessness, and this shows up in everything from coordinated entry to the design and evaluation of policy and programs. For a coalition to be built across counties, communities must be incentivized to work together to center the needs of people experiencing homelessness and housing instability.

In conversations with community leaders and people with lived experience of homelessness and housing instability, it was often stated that the way funding moves through local and national government institutions is a driving factor in sustaining poverty and homelessness. This is attributed to overhead costs and decision-making that is not driven by individuals impacted by those policies

**“To end homelessness, first we have to address it and prevent it. we need to discuss the problems in order to end it.”**

**- Community Member**

and practices. While this issue is not unique to the Twin Cities, it is clear that the way current funding structures operate ensures that not enough resources are reaching the communities they are intended to support.

This gap in impact can be bridged through establishing equitable decision-making processes with Black, Brown, and Indigenous community leaders and individuals most impacted by policies and practices. Investing in the decision-making power of these communities will be essential in reversing a long legacy of harm by collaboratively establishing a plan to invest in intensive and deliberate resources.

**“There’s a power dynamic and tension across jurisdictions in determining what to do and when to do it.”**

**- Community Member**

**“This summer, we would go to the city, they would say the responsibility lies in the county, the county would say the responsibility lies in the city and the state, and then the state wouldn’t return our calls. It’s a cascade of failures.”**

**- Community Member**

**Barrier 2: The dual current crises of unsheltered homelessness and the pandemic only allowing for the capacity to deal with the immediate crisis response.**

While the current number of people experiencing homelessness in the Twin Cities is unknown, the visibility of unsheltered people has risen dramatically over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. The state’s emergency response to the pandemic shut down many public spaces, such as libraries and the pandemic has restricted space in shelters and prompted many to pitch tents outdoors rather than risk illness in indoor spaces.

In July of 2020, the largest outdoor encampment in the metro area’s history, at Powderhorn Park, had [560 tents, where an estimated 800 people lived](#). The number of people living on the streets or in cars, parks, or skyways was 980 at last count, almost five times higher than in 2015, [driven largely by a lack of affordable housing](#). While the homelessness crisis has long existed in the Twin Cities, the visibility of encampments like the one at Powderhorn Park increases public urgency and raises pressures from housed neighbors.

As we have seen across the country and in the Twin Cities, the COVID-19 pandemic has only furthered these dynamics, compounding the long-standing unsheltered crisis, a legacy

**“We tackle emergencies, we tackle problems but are not guided by a particular vision beyond “let’s end homelessness.” We are in a reactionary mode and hard to step out of and be planful.”**

**- Community Member**

of structural racism, and a global pandemic. According to state health officials, Black and Indigenous Minnesotans have died from the coronavirus at [disproportionately high rates](#). While there is widespread agreement that the present urgency of the unsheltered homelessness crisis is a legitimate concern, the scale of the crisis has largely only allowed for the response system to attend to the present crisis and decrease capacity for long-term visioning for the future.

**Barrier 3: A legacy of structural racism within the history of housing service provision, locally and nationally.**

To illustrate structural racism in housing within the Twin Cities, one can point to the way public service provision is spread out across counties: housing programs are more prevalent in some areas and far less prevalent in others. This type of disparate programming structure is often pointed to as a way to maintain race and class segregation. It is essential to consider this structural segregation when attempting to understand the region's struggles to come together and devise a collective vision.

It is impossible to talk about dynamics between suburban and urban counties without acknowledging that Black people in the U.S. were prohibited from buying homes in the suburbs from the 1940s-1960s by the Federal Housing Administration and gained none of the equity appreciation that their White counterparts gained. Additionally, the FHA subsidized mass-production builders to create area [subdivisions that were "White-only"](#) and they subsidized the White families who were living in the central city to move into White-only suburbs. The effects of this continuing legacy of racism persists today: Black and Indigenous people make up less than 15% of the Twin Cities' population but account for 65% of all people experiencing homelessness.

**"The outcomes of my job are measured by the community statistics on reductions and exits. My number one goal is to bring in resources, so I have to compete, even though we all have the same goal, but want the most resources."**

**- Community Member**

**"Any vision has to be built on and connected to racist histories of access to education and housing. We need to acknowledge that history and pivot from it intentionally. We need to be explicit about covenants, gentrification, and limited access to education."**

**- Community Member**

Counties aren't just counties and communities aren't just communities; they're made up of people. Regional power dynamics and relationships between areas need to be explicitly stated and understood. When creating a plan for regional goal-setting, it's important to not only be clear that different counties are composed of different racial groups and socioeconomic classes, but also to recognize why that is the case in the first place. Being explicit about the foundational racism that led to regional population differences will be essential to building coalitions across county and community lines.

**"How do we get to a system where the county government doesn't have to lead everything? I want to envision a future in which the community can set the priorities."**

**- Community Member**

# Human Services Access and Navigation across Counties

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## Overview

Human services—including public assistance programs, behavioral and substance abuse services, and health care—are critical to the housing stability and health of individuals and families experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness. Although Minnesota has significant investments in human services at both the state and county level, access to and navigation of these services by people experiencing homelessness continues to be a major barrier to addressing homelessness and housing instability throughout the seven-county metro region.

The majority of public benefits programs including general assistance, housing supports, SNAP benefits, and TANF are funded through federal and state dollars but processed and managed by individual county human services departments. When a person moves across county lines the case must be transferred to the new county of residence after 60 days or residing in the new county. The processing of the transfers, including disputes between counties on residency, can lead to large barriers for people experiencing homelessness as they try to navigate which county office is managing their case; it can even lead to a disruption of benefits due to confusion on who they must work with to meet the requirements of the different public benefit programs.

Behavioral health and substance abuse services are also managed by individual counties but also require counties to match investments from the state and federal government. Counties cover these match

requirements through county and city taxes, [local government aid](#), and grants by DHS. There are different levels of investment in human services across the seven counties in the funds they receive from the state, grants, and the county tax dollars invested in human services.

There is also a set of complex state legislation ([chapter 256G of the Minnesota State statute](#)), referred to as County of Financial Responsibility (CFR), that governs the financial responsibility for counties to cover part of the costs of the behavioral and substance abuse services, and how county responsibility for those costs transfers as a person moves.

For those experiencing homelessness, this has led to a complex web of rules and regulations to navigate in accessing critical public benefits and human services in both the counties they are experiencing homelessness in and the counties in which they are attempting to access homelessness services and/or housing.

The law has also created perverse incentives for counties to withhold investments in crisis shelter, homeless services, specialized housing, including permanent supportive housing, and in-patient behavioral health and substance abuse treatment because of the cost of providing human services to those who may utilize the resources within the county. The result is a lack of robust homeless and human services in some of the metro regions, and a mismatch between where the services



are accessible to where affordable and safe housing may be available.

Although county workers bear some of the burdens helping to verify eligibility and transfer assistance as a person moves across the region, the overwhelming burden lies on the person experiencing homelessness. They are often faced with difficult decisions around where they should go to access housing and services and what effects taking a job or housing placement across the seven counties may have on their ability to obtain or remain stably housed.

Structural racism is also deeply embedded in the distribution of human services within the Twin Cities and across the seven-county metro region and the access and navigation of those services by people experiencing homelessness and housing instability. The majority of people experiencing homelessness in Hennepin and Ramsey counties are Black and Indigenous and a disproportionate number of Black and Indigenous people are experiencing homelessness across the seven-county metro region, linking homelessness and race across the region.

Within the Twin Cities, the structural racism is evident even in the location of public human services remaining concentrated in certain areas of the cities as a way to keep people in certain neighborhoods and hidden from others. In the region, structural racism is embedded in the culture of not investing county tax dollars in human services in parts of the region as a way of [keeping the region segregated](#) between the Twin Cities and the suburbs. Although this linkage may not be explicitly stated, it is embedded into the system of funding and has real effects on the ways in which Black and Indigenous people experiencing homelessness can move across the region while accessing the housing and services needed.

## What is the evidence? What did we learn?

**Barrier 1: Access to human services for people experiencing homelessness is negatively affected by State law that governs county of financial responsibility and by the culture it has created to safeguard county investment in and access to human services**

**“It feels like another form of segregation and it is particularly triggering as POC!”**

**- Community Member**

**“More willing to share financial resources and capacity- especially if funding better follows people where they go. County of Financial Responsibility - we need to rethink how that works and counties can feel like they aren’t taking on an unfunded burden we would be willing to take down more barriers.”**

**- Community Member**

- 1. The relationship between behavioral and substance abuse services and a county’s fiscal responsibility for sharing the cost of the services has led to a culture of safeguarding the types of services developed throughout the**



**region and access to those services. It also contributes to a lack of investment in homelessness housing and services that may be perceived as bringing in people who will need behavioral and substance abuse services.**

The effects of the county of financial responsibility law go beyond the text of the law. It has created a culture in the region of safeguarding human services for those that are considered to be the county's residents and putting in administrative barriers to access in order to ensure the safeguards.

It also drives counties to decline to build crisis shelters, specialized housing for people with substance abuse and mental health issues, permanent supportive housing, and other homeless services because most of these shelter and housing types are not considered [excluded time](#) under the law; meaning that if a person were to move into the county to utilize the shelter and/or housing they county of financial responsibility for administering public benefits and cost sharing any behavioral health and substance abuse services shifts to the county after 60 days. This results in people experiencing homelessness having to move across county lines to access crisis resources, losing the connection to their home community while shifting the financial responsibility to another county.

Structural racism is built into these barriers to access: the majority of people who experience homelessness in the Twin Cities are Black and Indigenous and the barriers to accessing human services as they move across county lines contributes to keeping Black and Indigenous people experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity in the Twin Cities and out of the suburban counties. It also contributes to Black and Indigenous people experiencing homelessness in the suburban counties needing to move to the Twin Cities to access critical services such as shelter. These decisions to severely limit resources in some counties and to push people

experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity toward the central core of the Twin Cities contributes to the racial segregation of the region.

The culture of safeguarding access to public human services has been described in the following ways:

- Disinvestment in homelessness services (shelter, outreach, and other critical supports) because of the cost to the county to provide the potential human services needed by people experiencing homelessness.
- Divestment from critical types of human services such as specialized behavioral health and substance abuse treatment programs because of the financial cost to the county to provide the human services for those accessing the service, and the belief that those accessing will not be from the county where the services are being offered.

## **2. The requirements and procedures around transferring the administration of public benefits as people move across county lines is negatively impacting people experiencing homelessness.**

The [law requires the administration of public benefit programs including, General Assistance \(GA\), the Minnesota Family Investment Program \(MFIP\), and Housing Support program](#), to be transferred when a person is residing in a different county for two calendar months of non-excluded time. Emergency shelters for people experiencing homelessness are [considered non-excluded time](#), meaning that if a person accesses an emergency shelter in a different county and resides in that shelter for two calendar months the administration of their public benefits case must be transferred to the county where they are seeking shelter. Similarly, if they leave the county to access a housing placement in another county they must transfer their case to the new county.

With limited emergency housing across the region, people often move across county lines in order to access emergency shelter or other options to try and stay safe. The limited affordable housing options across the region means people experiencing homelessness often may be placed by the homeless response system in another county or choose housing that is affordable with the assistance offered in another county. The result of both cases is that people experiencing homelessness are often highly mobile and experience more frequent moves across county lines, making the administration of their public benefits more complicated and highly inefficient for the counties and more importantly, for people experiencing homelessness. These complications can lead to a disruption in critical benefits and delays in the ability to be quickly re-housed or stay stably housed.

The administration of public benefits across counties is further complicated by an outdated transfer process that relies on mailing files across transferring counties as opposed to electronic file shares and by a lack of county financial workers to process the applications and transfers. This leads to delays in transfers; unfunded administrative costs to the county to process the transfers; and the need for people experiencing homelessness to have multiple engagements across counties with multiple agencies while trying to navigate their benefits.

The requirements to transfer cases to new counties have been described in the following ways:

- A barrier to continuing public benefits without delays or gaps in services due to the time and outdated process of transferring cases.
- A barrier to being able to quickly move people out of a shelter or unsheltered homelessness due to the inability to quickly align benefits when their county

of residence is in a neighboring county.

- A large unfunded administrative cost to counties due to the staff time needed to transfer cases and process applications.

### **3. County of Financial Responsibility (CFR) and the culture of protecting financial liability for human services has a negative effect on accessing and navigating residential behavioral health and substance abuse services.**

The law gives individuals eligibility to the housing support program funded by the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) for up to three months after being discharged from residential behavioral health treatment if the person has no fixed and adequate housing upon discharge, with the responsibility being on the county of last residence before entering a facility.

The CFR State legislation also outlines a county's financial responsibility to pay for costs related to the use of civil commitment and the aftercare services upon discharge, ensuring the county pays for the residential services/state hospital stays if the person is ready to leave but the county has not found adequate housing and services for discharge.

This complex set of state law is an administrative burden to county social workers trying to assist individuals in accessing critical services while ensuring secured housing upon exiting the residential center or a civil commitment and it is a large fiscal burden to counties that are trying to place people with high barriers into communities with limited resources.

The resources spent on paying for state hospital costs are resources that could be used to invest in behavioral health and housing in the community of origin to more quickly exit people from these services but instead, the funds are paid by the county to the state and put back into state general funds not

necessarily used for human services.

This current setup is also a burden to the individual seeking services and having to navigate the county responsible for paying for the service while in the crisis of trying to secure a safe, affordable place to live near any outpatient services and support they may need, including for those trying to relocate to another community across county lines in order to access residential substance abuse or mental health services. When moving across county lines the county of origin must continue to pay for services in the new county, as it is considered excluded time under CFR, and it must be coordinated through the county of residence human services agency. This often leads to people becoming lost between multiple county human services agencies, resulting in disruption or complete loss of services and support.

The requirements around County of Financial Responsibility and accessing residential behavioral health and substance abuse services have been described in the following ways:

- A deterrent to funding inpatient and residential services due to the potential financial burden of providing human services for those accessing and leaving the programs.
- A reason to avoid the structural racism embedded in the decision to not invest in behavioral health and substance abuse services across counties.
- A large financial burden to counties who struggle to find housing for people coming out of civil commitment with high barriers, particularly in counties who have not invested in the services in their county needed to safely house the individuals.

**Barrier 2: Differing state and county investments across the region on human**

**services has created unequal access to services and mismatches between where services are located and where affordable housing is accessible for people experiencing homelessness.**

**1. The region lacks the necessary human services to ensure equitable access in communities of people's choice**

As described above, there are disproportionate investments in human services across the county from local government assistance, county tax funds, and state grants. CFR, particularly the county cost match for behavioral health and substance abuse services, is one contributing factor to the differing human services across counties, but is not the sole factor. The culture built around county human services and the decisions to not invest in services believed to encourage people from other counties to relocate or to encourage people in the county to access human services has also greatly contributed to the inequitable distribution and access of human services.

This all has led to a mismatch between where services are located and where a person may choose to live based on housing availability, employment, and social ties. People experiencing homelessness must often make complex choices on where to live based on where they can access needed services and affordable housing, many times making sacrifices in one area of need to meet the other area of need. Those accessing housing assistance from one of the three Continuum of Care (CoC) bodies in the region also must make decisions on taking the housing option available to them, even when it is not near accessible services, or prolonging their homelessness.

The lack of equitable public human services across the region has been described in the following ways:

- A form of modern-day redlining that contributes to more Black and Indigenous

people being essentially locked out of certain areas of the region due to the disproportionate amount of Black and Indigenous people experiencing homelessness and attempting to navigate services.

- A shifting of financial responsibility between counties where more services are available, and therefore more residents of the region may move to access services.

## **2. The administrative burden of applying for and receiving state grants contributes to less state investment and less available human services in the outer counties**

Counties, particularly smaller counties, with less human service agency infrastructure struggle with the administrative burden of applying for and administering state-funded human services grants. The staff time and resources to respond to funding requests, along with reporting requirements and unfunded administrative work connected to the grants result in some counties being

unable to apply for certain funding streams from the state further contributing to the inequitable distribution and access of human services across the region. The grants also require a deep level of coordination across the 7-county metro region, and there is often little to no dedicated funding towards the staff time required to effectively plan and coordinate across counties.

The administrative burden of applying for and administering state grants for human services has been described in the following ways:

- An unfunded financial burden connected to applying for and administering the grants that takes away from staff capacity that could be used to serve individuals and families.
- A large staffing drain to plan and coordinate the grants with little to no dedicated funding to support the system planning and coordination across the region.

# Siloed Continuum of Care Priorities and Coordinated Entry Systems

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## Overview

A Continuum of Care (CoC) is a regional or local planning body that coordinates housing and services funding for homeless families, youth, and individuals. HUD requires each CoC to establish and operate a “centralized or coordinated assessment system” (referred to as “coordinated entry” or “coordinated entry process or CES”) to increase the efficiency of local crisis response systems and improving fairness and ease of access to resources, including mainstream resources.

Coordinated entry processes are intended to help communities prioritize people who are most in need of assistance and are determined by using an assessment, vulnerability scoring, prioritization policies, and eligibility that connects people to potential housing and services.

Additionally, coordinated entry incorporates project-specific requirements to inform matches and referrals of individuals prioritized for available housing options available in the community. A limitation to the current inventory across the region is the capacity to both move individuals seamlessly from shelter to housing, but also from housing programs like rapid rehousing to more permanent and affordable housing.

Housing options (available emergency shelter, permanent supportive housing, and rapid rehousing beds and units) are tracked as a point-in-time count in what’s called the Housing Inventory Count (HIC). This annual count is intended to track all beds and units available to meet the needs of people

experiencing homelessness and informs who is prioritized through a coordinated entry process. More broadly, the housing inventory count allows for communities to compare rates of housing instability and homelessness (based on data available through a data management system) and the capacity of the “system” to meet the need. Data points available through the count include the types of housing options (ES, PSH, RRH) available in a specific CoC geographic area, as well as the rates of utilization of available options.

The Twin Cities metro is home to three CoCs (Hennepin, St. Paul, Ramsey and Suburban Metro Area Counties) that manage separate coordinated entry systems which cover 100% of the seven metro county area.

Over the past decade, Hennepin, Ramsey, and Suburban Metro Area Counties (SMAC) Continuum of Cares have worked to be in communication and in collaboration with each other, as well as with additional Continuums of Cares statewide. A few examples from 2020:

- SMAC celebrated the end of veteran homelessness per USICH benchmarks (achieving functional zero) by implementing a system that can identify and quickly rehouse Veterans experiencing homelessness. This regional initiative demonstrated the ability and capacity to focus cross-jurisdictional strategies, resources, and data to achieve a shared goal.
- The statewide Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) governing

board, inclusive of the three CoCs, provided strategic direction and decision-making support to Minnesota's HMIS system. In the past year, the work of this board included improving data standards to support CoC's understanding of disparities in experience and outcomes, raising awareness of ways in which HMIS perpetuates racism for BIPOC individuals and households, and developing ongoing strategies to center anti-racism and racial equity in the system.

## What is the evidence? What did we learn?

**Barrier 1: Under-resourced service and housing inventory will require the CoCs to continue to perpetuate the need to prioritize based on individual vulnerability and a scarcity model.**

Coordinated entry strategies are intended to connect households at risk of or experiencing homelessness to housing and support available in the continuum of care geographic area. The ability to meet the needs of households known to the CoC is limited to the availability of prevention assistance, emergency beds, rental assistance, housing programs, and affordable housing units in a community. The 2020 community needs assessments identified the following gaps and barriers from within the current capacity and ability for the system to respond to the needs of individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

In recent community need assessments and coordinated entry evaluations across the three continuums of cares, the following examples were identified as barriers to decreasing wait times for housing placement and slow movement of prioritization lists.

- Inadequate supply of crisis housing options (emergency shelter beds, hotel rooms, etc) making it difficult to stay connected to and in communication with individuals and households waiting for housing placement.
- A lack of frequent vacancies in housing programs that meet the needs of those on the priority list (housing with support services packaging) and/or the availability of rental assistance without a service package to support housing stability.
- Low inventory and vacancy rates in the private market making it difficult to shop with a voucher in the required

timeframe provided to an individual or family.

Front-end responses to housing instability and homelessness, investments in and eligibility criteria for services like outreach, emergency assistance, crisis housing, and emergency shelter, and diversion dictate to coordinated entry who should be prioritized for these resources in a continuum of care region. For those who achieve getting on a prioritization list; housing placement is not guaranteed and dependent on additional factors that include communication between the list manager or assessor and a contact representing the housing option and the ability to remain in contact while remaining homeless so as to not lose your "place in line."

In response to the increasing unsheltered population, the twin cities region has increased emergency shelters which led to adjustments within coordinated entry systems meant to facilitate movement through and towards housing placement. However, when the system makes adjustments to respond to inflow into coordinated entry, it must also be able to adjust on the back end to support exits to housing opportunities.

Targeted investments in subpopulations (for example families or veterans) and based on definitions of homelessness (for example chronic homelessness or long-term homeless) dictates who is then prioritized by coordinated entry policies to ensure households meeting these subpopulations and homelessness definitions access the available resources.

A particular barrier in increasing exits to longer-term housing opportunities is the limited permanent supportive housing (PSH) units available to the three metro area continuums of care. Permanent supportive housing has been a critical housing solution for many individuals and households experiencing homelessness with support service needs. The three metro area CoC's have prioritized investments in permanent supportive housing based on needs assessments over several

years and what is available continuously to not meet the need compounded with the continued lack of deeply affordable housing units for folks to move on to. With the low vacancy rates of PSH units, all three CoCs experience very low turnover rates resulting in longer wait times for households seeking PSH.

Philosophically, coordinated entry systems are meant to connect people in need (inflow) to permanent housing opportunities (outflow) in a world where the available housing opportunities reflect housing options that meet the needs of the household, promote choice and self-determination.

In reality, coordinated entry systems are rooted in a scarcity framework requiring the tools, the policies, and the people implementing the system to normalize the following common beliefs:

1. The resources available are finite and therefore we cannot meet the needs of everyone
2. Decisions have to be made about who is worthy of getting their needs met
3. The system "is what it is" and it took a lot to get here. Why risk what we have achieved.

These beliefs, although not explicitly named or acknowledged, inform the culture of coordinated entry policies and procedures. They create boundaries on what is considered possible, and what and who is centered in designing and advancing improvements.

**Barrier 2: Individuals and families currently carry an undue burden in navigating access to the three coordinated entry systems to identify available housing and supports to meet their individual needs.**

Although the continuums of care have each implemented coordinated entry systems to serve their geographic regions, individuals and families continue to access all three systems as they navigate what their individual needs are and available options restricted to each continuum of care. Through this process, several examples were provided to help illustrate the burden placed on individuals and families because of the natural movement across the county and continuum of care boundaries. For example:

*A family (a single parent with two children) originally had residency in Ramsey county, had one child in daycare and one in school but was able to access emergency shelter in Hennepin County. As a result, this family accessed Hennepin County's coordinated entry system and has been provided housing opportunities in Hennepin County although they have prioritized continuing their child's education and meeting their child care needs in Ramsey County.*

*A single adult assessed through SMAC's coordinated entry system may have access to an inventory that represents a broader geographic area but, in reality, is now being offered housing in Carver County although they identify with a community in Washington County.*

To navigate this barrier multiple community stakeholders shared strategies to support individuals and families navigating the three systems noting that a critical part of access was first working through varying homeless definition eligibility, residency requirements guiding eligibility, and potential housing and supports available in each continuum of

care and county. Of note were the following strategies:

- Outreach workers talked about carrying around assessments for the three coordinated entry systems to provide an opportunity to walk through and discuss the differences and to support clients making an informed choice of which system to navigate first.
- Assessors shared experiences of families and individuals asking about vulnerability scoring and prioritization policies before completing the assessment based on what they had learned and/or heard about who was having success navigating a specific coordinated entry system.

Lastly, for those who received an assessment: due to the long wait times and or perceptions about who's experience resulted in a housing placement, there was a common reflection in our process that access to coordinated entry demonstrated by a completed assessment in no way meant an individual or family would receive housing. What individuals shared was linked to both understanding existing prioritization lists used to move individuals and families along with referrals to housing opportunities, as well as the limited availability of diverse housing options to meet the needs of people waiting.



**Barrier 3: Coordinated entry systems perpetuate racial inequities in experiences and outcomes for BIPOC communities.**

Multiple studies across the Twin Cities metro area and statewide have documented the racial disproportionality of low-income residents experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness. More locally, communities can track and monitor system performance based on race, ethnicity, gender, and disability, through their individual coordinated entry data dashboards hosted by ICA, the state's HMIS administrator. These dashboards have served to inform coordinated entry policies and procedures in the pursuit of equitable and transparent access to housing and support resources available in a community.

In the last year, ICA identified ways in which the HMIS system could be used to address racial disparities and acknowledged ways in which the system continued to create barriers for Black, Indigenous, and people of color interacting with coordinated entry. Key points identified include:

- A lack of cultural responsiveness in the homeless response system
- The impact of an assessor's racial and experiential background
- A lack of data regarding on who is unable to access the system

Beyond the experience of accessing coordinated entry, however, are the continued barriers residents face in accessing housing and supports they need, based on additional individual vulnerabilities and in the face of navigating additional systemic racism based on system involvements. Identified through interviews, community workshops, and with the Regional Advisory Group, the following subpopulations of individuals and families continue to experience significant barriers in accessing housing and supports and reporting negative outcomes related to their criminal background/history, need for treatment and recovery services, parenting as a transitional aged youth (16-24) and as newly homeless with fewer vulnerabilities than those on established priority lists.

**Barrier 4: Limited ability to provide a person-centered and trauma-informed experience that results in connections to the housing and supports needed in a community of their choice.**

A disheartening theme throughout the stakeholder interviews, community workshops, and in conversation with the advisory group was the common experience of individuals and households describing experiences with the coordinated entry systems as difficult to navigate, disrespectful, dehumanizing, and not transparent. Although the scope of this work does not assess every experience of an individual or household served by all three of the coordinated entry system, these common experiences point to the limitations of the existing systems that are in theory intended to provide a [person-centered approach](#), in a time of crisis with the intent of gathering very personal information for the sake of connecting them to a housing solution.

As the most tangible and public-facing component to what communities call the “homeless response system,” coordinated entry acts as the first step and/or connection to finding help. Reflected through community workshop discussions, participants talked about the disconnect between the community’s perception of what coordinated entry is, what is available through coordinated entry and who can receive help through coordinated entry.

The commitment to providing a trauma-informed, person-centered experience is dependent on the capacity of coordinate entry systems to 1) connect people to housing and supports that they need, 2) in their community of choice, 3) in the shortest amount of time possible, and 4) without putting those people at any more risk or in harm’s way as a condition to be served.

“You are telling people to go back to a system that didn’t treat them with respect and mistreated- they have to make a choice to go back to that system or choose homelessness. i had something lined up but had to go to shelter to get the key.”

- Community Member

## Actions

# Preventing and Ending Homelessness Regionally

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This section contains three proposed actions that can begin to address the barriers identified in the system's audit and provide a Blueprint for moving towards housing justice in the region. The three actions are not meant to be taken sequentially but are interconnected with parts of each happening simultaneously.

Proposed Action 1 is the foundational action of creating a regional kitchen table that can offer a different way of making regional funding and strategy decisions, with a more diverse set of stakeholders, led by people with lived experiences, and oriented around justice. The Regional Advisory Group should engage stakeholders of the table through the Fall of 2021 to better understand their interest, needs, and desires to create a different type of planning and decision-making table; with the goal of the engagements being to come to a community decision on proceeding with the table in 2022. Proceeding with the table would include incremental steps towards 1) building a more sustainable kitchen table over the next 3-5 years, and 2) launching the beginning work of Proposed Action 2 and 3.

Proposed Action 2 offers a set of strategies that can better align housing and homelessness resources across the region to begin transforming the system and moving towards housing justice. Strategies include more immediate action that can be taken in the Winter and Spring of 2022, including system modeling and strategic investment planning across the region. It also outlines medium to long term actions around coordinated entry and ongoing modeling and investment planning, that can be taken over the next 3 years. This work should be launched and sustained by the regional kitchen table in Proposed Action 1.

Proposed Action 3 offers a set of strategies that can help to build out more equitable access to quality human services across the region and be paired with the housing and homelessness resources discussed in Proposed Action 2. Strategies include medium term and long term actions that can help to improve public benefits and build out more behavioral health and substance abuse services in the region. This work should also be launched and sustained by the regional kitchen table in Proposed Action 1 to ensure it is aligned with the work being done in Proposed Action 2.

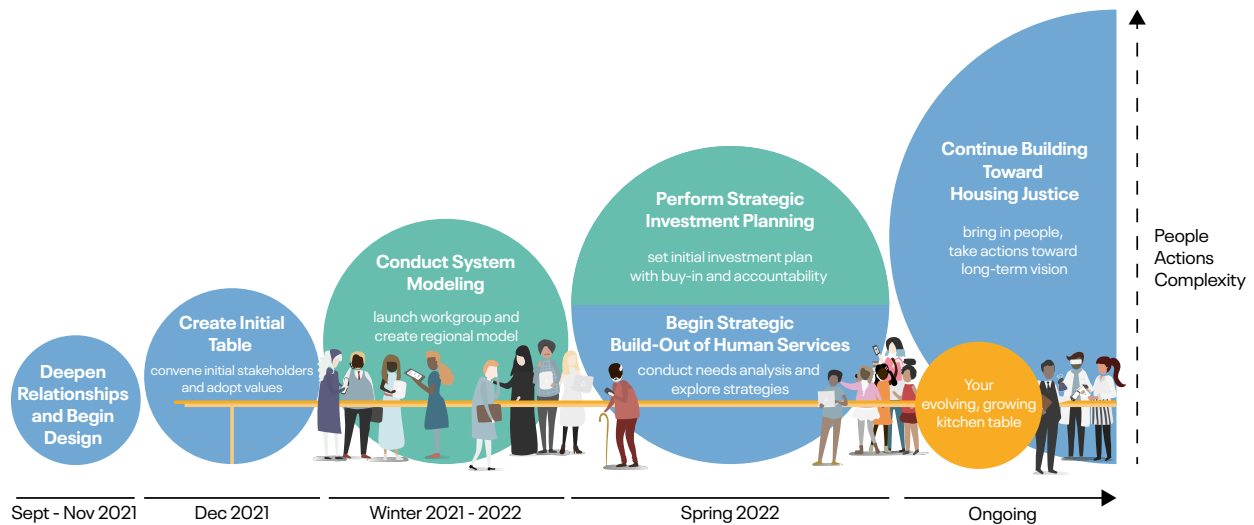
## Action 01

# Build a Regional Kitchen Table

The regional kitchen table is the foundation for creating, holding the possibility of change, and implementing a regional vision to prevent and end homelessness rooted in racial equity and housing justice.



Listen to Vachel, a Regional Advisory Group member, describe the need to include people of lived in decision making.



## Overview

Creating collaborative and strategic tables to advance efforts to address the crisis of homelessness is not a new concept to the Twin Cities Metro Region. However, a key finding from the deep level of community engagement done throughout this process is the absence of a decision-making table that owns a regional vision and goals on housing justice, is co-designed by a diverse group of stakeholders that are in deep relationship with each other, led by people with lived experiences, and possess the organizing power to shift policies, practices and investments to advance a more

**“Housing justice for us means guaranteeing opportunities for everyone in our country to have affordable, safe, accessible, stable housing through a racial justice approach.”**

**- Community Member**

comprehensive housing justice agenda. The regional kitchen table described in the proposed action below can offer a path forward that takes the lesson learned from past collaboration efforts and combines it with a new way of organizing that can lead to more justice orientated results.

Beginning to build the regional kitchen table through a lens of justice can offer ways to:

- be in relationship with a more diverse set of stakeholders
- grow the leadership of people with lived experiences
- shift power dynamics in the way regional decisions are made on strategy and funding,
- center racial equity,
- stay accountable to those most affected by homelessness, and
- build the organizing efforts it will take to make structural changes at the city, county, and state levels that will be needed to end homelessness.

This proposed action is at the foundation of building out the long-term housing justice agenda for the region; it offers guidance on building blocks to a regional kitchen table. Although the work of Proposed Action 1 is realistically a 3-5 year goal for the region, it will be critical for the community to take the first step in deciding to form the table by the end of 2021. This initial steps includes engaging critical stakeholders in the Fall of 2021 to better understand their interest, needs, and desires to create a different type of planning and decision-making table. This engagement should lead to a community decision on proceeding in 2022 to form the table and begin building out the strategies needed to address Proposed Actions 2 and 3.

The building blocks of a regional kitchen table outlined below are not meant to be sequential

steps but a set of strategies that build off of each other and reinforce each other while creating the foundation needed to develop and implement a regional vision and goals.

## Building Blocks

- 1. Build the structure** by using transformative organizing to bring together a diverse set of community stakeholders, help pivot decision-making and governance away from white dominant culture norms, and support the behavioral and structural changes needed to build regional kitchen table that can support the pursuit of Justice.
- 2. Staff the table** to ensure the capacity to convene, hold the work, track the progress, and continually nurture the process.
- 3. Develop shared values** that ground the regional kitchen table in housing justice, starting with the 3 values developed through the Blueprint community engagement.
- 4. Set regional goals** that address the prevention, crisis response, and affordable housing needs of the region through a race equity lens, while also addressing the quality of experience of people moving through the system.
- 5. Implement accountability measures** that not only track progress on goals but ensure that progress is being seen equitably across Black, Brown, Indigenous, and LGBTQ communities.
- 6. Grow the political will and strategy** critical to making the structural changes to policies related to land use, zoning, crisis response, housing development, and other important policy areas effecting homelessness.

# 01. Use Transformative Organizing to Build the Structure

**Using transformative organizing to build the structure will help to bring together a diverse set of community stakeholders, pivot decision-making and governance away from white dominant culture norms, and support the behavioral and structural changes needed to pursue housing justice.**

A regional goal and vision rooted in justice demands a new table or structure that can support changes in individual, group, and system behaviors, the organizing of and engaging of a diverse set of stakeholders, and the power sharing and decision-making necessary to move forward housing justice in the region. Often when communities think about what it will take to make significant shifts across stakeholders toward a common goal, they will use the terms “building a table” or “setting a table” where people can come together and make decisions.

**In many professionalized settings, or system-oriented settings, this table is imagined to be, and operationalized to be one that feels more like a table in a boardroom than one in a kitchen. A boardroom table** is one where business is conducted; “professional” norms are adhered to, and boundaries are upheld between the personal and professional selves for attendees. Many of the current tables in the Twin Cities Metro Region, including the 3 Continuum of Care (CoC), the Regional Metro Council (RMC), and the Metro Area Housing Coordination Board are orientated in this way. **A kitchen table** offers something different; a place where whole people commune together, meet their basic needs and their social emotional ones, and sometimes make

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**- Steve Williams, Demanding Justice**

decisions together. Transformative organizing is more like the kitchen table. It is not only a way to bring one’s whole self into collaborative work, but it is a way to force that collaborative work into dismantling structural oppression. To move towards housing justice the Twin Cities Metro Region needs to establish a **regional kitchen table**.

Creating this foundation will demand a new way of organizing and transformative organizing offers a framework for this new way forward. If the region moves forward with creating this new kitchen table it must remember that this type of organizing and foundation building is a long term goal. The goal of an initial launch by the start of 2022, if the community decides to proceed, should be seen as the preliminary table that can continue to grow in membership, decision-making, and activities over the course of the next 3-5 years.

Because the region is made up of a variety of separate entities making decisions about both policies/rules and money the first step should be to conduct a series of one-on-one

stakeholder meetings in the Fall of 2021, led by the Regional Advisory Group. The engagements can help in understanding the needs of the various stakeholder, their interest in creating a new table, and their willingness to shift power over time to a table led by people with lived experience. These one-on-one stakeholder meeting should include those in the stakeholder map, including the 3 CoCs, the seven county human services offices making up the RMC, lived experience groups including, the Regional Expert Network, Freedom from the Streets, Voices for Change, and SMAC Director's Council, and the Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness. After the Fall engagements, it will be critical for the community to make a decision by the end of the year to proceed in 2022 with a regional kitchen table in order to launch other major actions outlined in the Blueprint.

## Considerations on Behavior Changes and Structural Needs

### Behavioral changes needed at the regional kitchen table

In order for Twin Cities Metro regionalization to be possible, the region will not only have to transform the kinds of people who are shoulder to shoulder planning, determining strategy, making decisions and implementing, but also the individuals in the region will have to transform themselves. So much so, that when the region thinks about who it is that will make justice a reality, it will have to understand that it is no longer someone else, but it is "us". It is people experiencing housing instability and homelessness, it is people whose labor upholds the systems exacting harm. And as the region transforms the work together, the "us" are also transformed. See the resource section below for more information on what it means to transform the "us" around the kitchen table.

Transformative organizing offers not only a different way of doing things, but a different way of being while doing them. It means shifting away from the [norms of white dominant culture](#), like power hoarding and comfort with predominantly white leadership, into authentic shared power and leadership of people who have experienced housing instability. In order for the Twin Cities Metro Region to achieve different results than prior efforts, the most recent example being the regional work on unsheltered homelessness, there has to be a shift in power. Power shifts in transformative organizing are rooted in democracy, meaning expertise comes from the power of people with different life experiences, skills and training, and decision-making processes have to accommodate the variance in the expertise. See the resource section below for more information on what it means to shift power and decision-making at a regional kitchen table through transformative organizing.

### Structural needs of the regional kitchen table

At the same time that the regional kitchen table is working to change who they are in movement together, they have to focus on key stakeholder participation and make decisions about whose buy-in is essential for moving forward. Decisions about housing and homelessness are currently occurring at many different levels and across a variety of stakeholders. One-on-one engagements led by the Regional Advisory Group, with stakeholders in Fall 2021 could help to address the below considerations in the short-term, while longer term membership and governance is addressed in 2022 if the community decides to proceed with the Regional Kitchen Table.

#### *Stakeholder Considerations*

More immediate decisions will need to be made on which key governmental and community stakeholders to consider including in the launch of the regional kitchen table and



which can be brought in over the course of the next year as the kitchen table is built out.

More immediate stakeholders to consider include:

- leadership members of the three CoC in the region,
- county human services officials,
- city human services officials that have direct allocation of city, state, or federal funds for homelessness and housing,
- prevention fund administrators,
- affordable and public housing developers and administrators,
- state office representatives like Department of Human Services (DHS) and Minnesota Housing,
- key lived experience groups, including the Regional Advisory Group for the Blueprint, the Regional Experts Network (REN), those with lived experience connected to the CoCs, and
- grassroots organizations, such as The Alliance, Metropolitan Urban Indian Directors, Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless (MCH) and Housing Justice Center.

Stakeholders that should be considered over the course of the next year include:

- land use and zoning board representatives,
- elected officials (city and county), and
- organizing/advocacy groups, such as the City of Lakes and Rondo Community Land Trusts and INQUILINXS UNIDXS POR JUSTICIA
- The regional kitchen table must have clear connections to existing stakeholder tables including the RMC and Metro Area Housing Coordination Board, the 3 CoC governing boards, the Met Council, and the Minnesota

Interagency Council on Homelessness (MICH). See the resource section below for more information on stakeholder considerations for the kitchen table.

### *Decision-making Considerations*

In order for actions to move forward across the region there needs to be a transparent and reliable decision-making process that includes people across the stakeholder groups outlined, as well as people with lived expertise of housing instability and homelessness. The process should formalize responsibilities, roles, structure/organizing, communication, accountability, and the types of decisions that are included and excluded from the process. The decision-making process should also be clear about the integrity and accountability to the values and relational needs of the collective, as discussed above and decided upon.



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Stakeholders that should be considered over the course of the next year include:

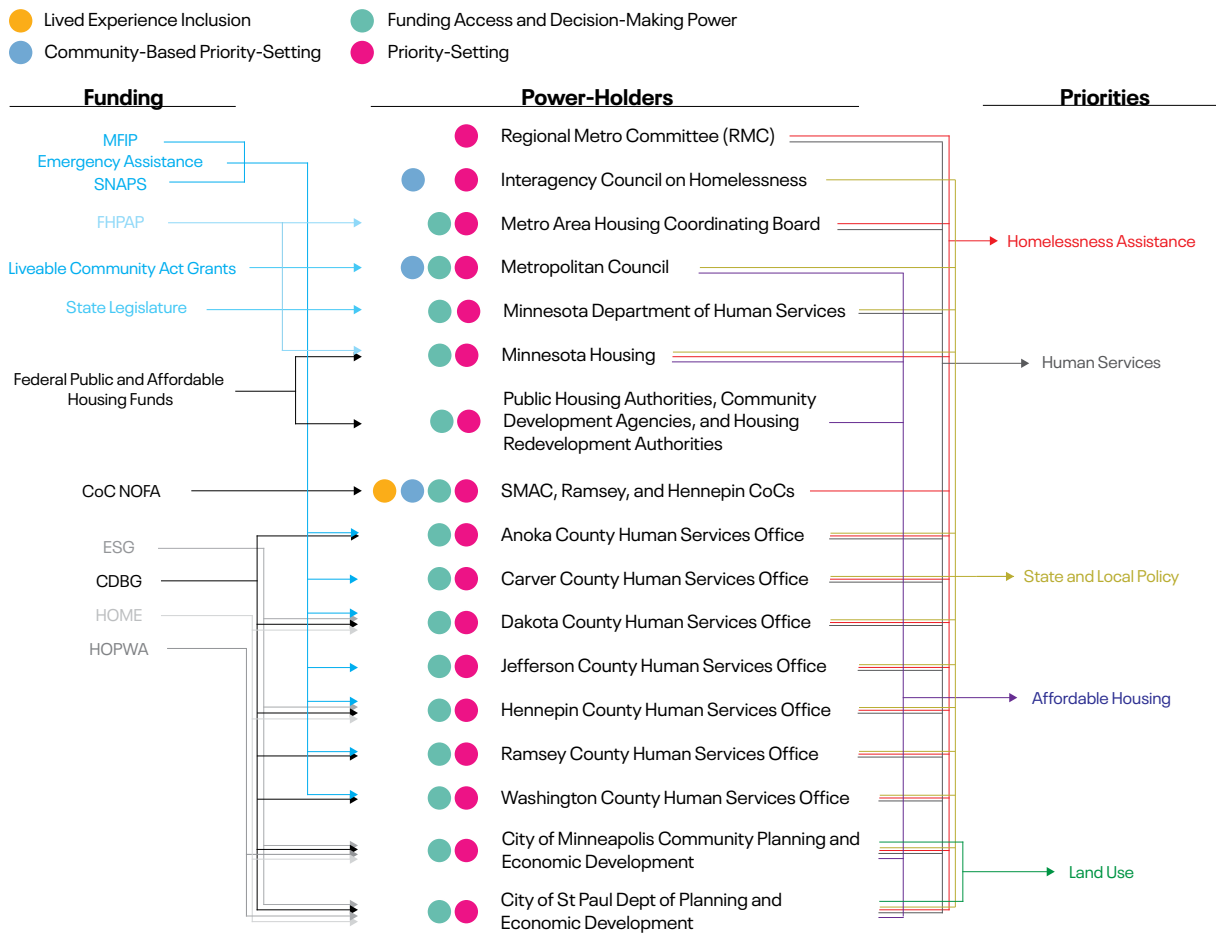
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### Regional Funding Access, Decision-Making, and Priority-Setting Power



## 02. Staff the Table

**Staffing the table effectively will help to ensure the table's capacity to convene, hold the complex work, track the progress in an way that is accountable to the community, and continually nurture the process.**

The level of transformative planning and decision-making being proposed for the regional kitchen table will require an investment in the staffing structure of the table. A common pitfall in many communities is underinvesting in system planning and the staffing and support it takes to move to community-based strategy creation and implementation. Through the interviews and workshops in the region, it was clearly articulated that the various existing tables, including the RMC and Housing Coordination Board, are in need of staffing capacity to do deeper strategic planning, to truly collaborate

with people with lived experiences, and to look beyond the current crisis. The success of the regional kitchen table will be deeply connected the ability to support a comprehensive staffing structure. This structure should include:

- an investment in a transformative organizer
- compensated positions for people with lived experiences
- staffing capacity for key stakeholders
- experts from outside the regional kitchen table, when needed

### Staffing Considerations

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#### **Invest in a transformative organizer**

A table that is structured differently will also need an organizer that is trained to facilitate and partner differently. The region should consider looking to community organizers working within and outside of the homelessness field, one that can offer support in reorienting the key stockholders to a new way of showing up to the table and an new way of acting while around the table. The organizer should have lived experience of homelessness.

#### **Center people with lived experience is the staffing structure**

The staffing structure should center people with lived experience, both in the choosing of the organizer and in the broader staffing structure to ensure it is truly led by people with lived experience. This should include budgeting for people with lived experiences to be on workgroup and leadership bodies and for people with lived experiences to take leadership roles that will require more hours beyond participating in meetings. There are several established group of experts with lived experience in the region, including the Regional Advisory Group, the Regional Expert Network, and SMAC's Director's Council, that should help to develop these positions and potentially fill the positions.

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**Offer staff capacity to key stakeholders to engage in the table**

Partnering stakeholders such as county and city human service offices, state agencies, providers, and community-based organizations often have little to no budget to support their staff in participating in system planning. Public and private funders in the region will need to develop strategies to support the capacity to participate which may include, operations budget support or embedding staff positions across key stakeholder.

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**Utilize experts when needed**

It will be critical for the regional kitchen table to be organized and led by local leaders and experts. Those leaders and experts should have a clear process for identifying when expert support is needed from outside of the stakeholder participating at the table and local funders should have a clear process for supporting experts to come in for defined sets of work outlined by the regional kitchen table. This process should be led by the leadership of the table and not any single funder to ensure that experts being brought in are being done so under the decision-making structure of the table.

## 03. Develop Shared Goals

**Developing a set of shared values will ground the regional kitchen table in housing justice, starting with the 3 values developed through the Blueprint community engagement.**

Any structure or “table” that moves the region toward justice must be rooted in a set of shared values. In order to meaningfully establish shared values across the regional kitchen table, a process must be facilitated in which all values are respected and meaningfully assessed, and integrated into the regionalization process. Ongoing assessment of the regionalization process should not only measure success by quantitative goal setting, but also by evaluating performance against the established values of the decision-making at the kitchen table. While the established values need to be looked at as a meaningful metric of the project’s success, they should also be able to be reassessed and revised on a continuous basis. These shared values can be used to develop a regional vision. Through the

Blueprint community engagement process, a set of shared values were established by over 150 workshop participants. These values could be further explored in the one-on-one engagements with stockholders in the fall of 2021 launch until longer-term membership and governance is established over the course of the 2022, whereupon more comprehensive values can be adopted and a vision statement drafted. These values can also be integrated into the way the initial membership of the regional kitchen table performs the system modeling and investment planning in proposed action 2. See the resource section for examples of regional efforts around the country and their values and vision statements.

### Shared Values from Community Workshops

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**Center BIPOC, LGBTQ, and people experiencing homelessness in the regional vision and decision-making**

Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) communities most affected by homelessness and housing insecurity must be at the center of the regional kitchen table’s decision-making. This means creating an environment in which members of these communities are comfortable and empowered enough to meaningfully collaborate, starting with open, honest conversation about needs and interests. If and when values are shared that differ from those shared by groups who have existing decision-making power, thoughts offered up by members of these communities need to be held in equal or greater regard. The entire regionalization process must be able to be meaningfully led by the contributions of these groups.

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### **Moving away from scarcity and crisis decision-making to abundance and housing justice**

As a part of the value-setting process, the regional kitchen table must establish a holistic approach to building housing justice, recognizing that it must encompass consideration of not only crisis response, but thorough plans for prevention and affordable housing throughout the region. Robust political will must be fostered to not only respond to the unsheltered crisis, but to the factors that prevent it and those that can sustain an end to it. As more resources are coming available from federal stimulus bills, state budgets, and private investments, it is critical to begin shifting away from making decisions on funding and priorities based on an extreme scarcity of resources and start looking at the new and existing resources more collectively to make more strategic decisions from a mindset of abundance.

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### **Starting to dismantle the structural racism rooted in the creation and access of housing and services that leads to an urban/suburban divide**

A system-wide familiarity with the history of racist housing practices locally and nationally, such as redlining, restrictive covenants, and segregation, must be established in order to meaningfully begin to dismantle and reverse its decades-long effects. Even now, a form of modern-day redlining contributes to Black and Indigenous people being essentially locked out of certain areas of the region due to the disproportionate amount of Black and Indigenous people experiencing homelessness and attempting to navigate services. As outlined in the system audit, Black and Indigenous people make up less than 15% of the Twin Cities' population but account for 65% of all people experiencing homelessness – that inequality is the direct product of policies designed to produce such outcomes. Measurable and sustainable commitments must be made to dismantle the urban and suburban divide in how resources are accessed, starting by centering the input of those affected by these practices.



## 04. Set Regional Goals

**Setting regional goals will help address the prevention, crisis response, and affordable housing needs of the region through a race equity lens, while also addressing the quality of experience of people moving through the system.**

The regional kitchen table must also be organized around a set of clearly defined regional goals. Ones that encompass all aspects of housing justice – prevention, crisis response, affordable housing, and that are connected to the set of shared values discussed above. These goals need to be broad reaching, long-term goals that can be broken into immediate and medium term goals/benchmarks as the region moves towards housing justice.

Strategies contained in Proposed Action 2 and 3 are examples of how to establish some of those immediate and medium term goals that can help move towards the larger goals

that must be set, implemented, and held accountable by the table being formed. For example, regional system modeling outlined in Proposed Action 2 will help to establish more immediate goals on the types and amounts of housing needed in the region and can help to build towards the longer term regional goals on housing. The regional kitchen table can begin working on the more immediate goal setting in the regional system model at the start of 2022 while working through the building blocks outlined in this section that can lead to the establishment of more comprehensive, longer-term goals on housing justice in the first year of the Regional Kitchen Table.

### Considerations for Setting Regional Goals

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#### **Set SMART goals: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-based**

The regional kitchen table will need to establish goals as specific as possible to ensure both effective planning and effective measurement. The table will need to ensure these goals are reasonably accomplished within a given timeframe, though hold the plan with enough flexibility to allow for the complications that can come with huge system changes. A concerted and cooperative effort to ensure that regional goals being set are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-based will be foundational to the table's success.

#### **Create a timeline**

The regional kitchen table will need to set a timeline that is both reasonable and ambitious, tracking progress against the collectively agreed upon timeline. A process must also be in place to meaningfully prioritize tasks and establish timelines for each component of the plan. Ownership of each task must be established and continuously assessed, and members of the regional table must hold each other and the community accountable to the established timelines.

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## **Measure and track progress against established values**

Accountability mechanisms must be in place not only to track progress against measurable, time-based goals, but against the values established by the regional kitchen table. An assessment by the regional kitchen table on whether or not progress is embodying the set values will have to be thorough, intentional, and ongoing.

## 05. Implement Accountability Measures

**Implementing transparent accountability measures will help track progress on goals and ensure that progress is being seen equitably across Black, Brown, Indigenous, and LGBTQ communities.**

Instituting a robust accountability system within the regional kitchen table will be essential to building a comprehensive regional vision and goals. After measurable goals are created, a system must be in place to track those goals. Progress must be continuously assessed by everyone at the table, starting with measuring achievement of goals against the initial values set by BIPOC and LGBTQ communities most affected by homelessness. This assessment must happen with input

from the entire leadership team, and progress must be shared openly. The first attempt at accountability can be connected to the system modeling and investment planning strategy for the region that will be outlined in Proposed Action 2; helping to ensure that the recommendations of the modeling group are implemented. Longer term accountability measures can be developed over the coming year with the formation of the regional kitchen table.

### Considerations for Moving to Transparent Accountability

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#### **Consider and pivot away from white dominate norms**

In order to authentically track progress, an accountability process must be built that is inclusive of consideration of white dominant culture norms. Racial equity trainers define white dominant culture norms as “the explicit to subtle ways that the norms, preferences and fears of white European descended people overwhelmingly shape how we organize our work and institutions, see ourselves and others, interact with one another and with time, and make decisions.” Attention to countering these norms is particularly essential in an accountability process, where people’s visions for a transformed future are on the table, and the internal functioning of that decision-making table can heavily influence the project as a whole.

Some relevant norms to track might include:

- Power hoarding to power sharing
- Either/or thinking to systems and complexity thinking
- Fear of open conflict to direct and constructive feedback
- Progress is bigger, more to progress is sustainability and quality
- Rushed priorities and timelines to priorities and timelines set for sustainability and equity

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**Build out specific accountability mechanisms for individuals, the regional kitchen table, and for those with the power to implement the goals, including elected officials and government offices**

Specific accountability mechanisms must be in place for each holder of a given goal – meaning that an open line of communication must be held at the CoC, county government, state office, and local organizing levels to track follow through on recommendations. Living into the values and practices needed to advance regionalization will require an approach to accountability that addresses and transforms individual, interpersonal and institutional bias. It is important to note here that taking action on addressing racist structures, policies and behaviors cannot wait for (predominantly white) individuals to do their individual work to understand internalized privilege and bias. Accountability on both the individual and institutional levels will be foundational to establishing an equitable, meaningful planning process.

An example of building these accountability measures for the system modeling and investment planning in Proposed Action 2 may include:

- Creating a leadership team and decision-making process for the modeling and investment planning that centers people with lived experience, with feedback loops to ensure true decision-making power
- Creating a clear process for review of recommendations by the 3 CoCs and the city, county, and state administrators of CoC, Emergency Solutions Grants, HOME, and state funds in the region to report back on the adoption or rejection of investment recommendations by those with the authority over the funding sources

## 06. Implement Accountability Measures

**Growing the political will and strategy on housing justice is critical to making the structural changes to policies related to land use, zoning, crisis response, housing development, and other critical areas.**

The regional kitchen table will need to play a key role in building the political will and strategy to move the regional vision and should consider the following steps in buffing the political will and strategy. The first and most important step to address the structural barriers to address housing justice is to be

clear about what the structural barriers are. Once the barriers are clear, the next step is to make the connections to the people and processes that govern and enforce those barriers. The third step is to develop the strategy and tactics needed to move people, policies and practice.

### Ways to Take Action on the 3 Steps

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#### **Identify structural barriers to housing justice**

It is helpful to think about what the categories of barriers are that keep the current structures in place. The categories elevated here are policies, practices, political/electoral drivers, and behavioral norms. This list is not meant to be exhaustive, but a way to start thinking through each of the elements that present barriers. Examples of policy barriers include zoning and land use restrictions, targeted funding streams that limit use, and eroded tenancy rights. Examples of political and electoral barriers include timing of decisions needing to be made competing with an election cycle, regular turnover of political leadership. Examples of behavioral norms include meeting culture; underdeveloped capacity to be in conflict about ideas, particularly for white people in ideas/conversations pertaining to race; and discomfort with varied types of expertise (e.g. lived expertise versus scholarship versus job-developed expertise).

#### **Conduct a political power mapping exercise to understand who (people) and how (processes) decisions are made regarding the barriers**

There are many tools available to conduct a power analysis that maps key people and processes, and their relationships to influence and their proximity to support for housing justice, and your vision, values, and goals. See the resources section below for examples.

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## **Develop the strategy and tactics needed to move people, policies and practice**

In order to make progress against the barriers outlined, the region needs to develop both strategy and tactics that will begin shifts toward housing justice. These strategies and corresponding tactics will have to take into account the political realities of the region and have a plan of action to shift elected officials where it is not possible to move. Strategy and tactics will likely need to include:

- Considering different audiences and partners and how they need particular tactics (i.e. general public vs. knowledgeable stakeholders.)
- Considering your communications content (message) and the process needed to reinforce the narrative you are trying to shift
- Creating a targeted strategy that is political/electoral in nature, or determining alliances with similar strategies that may already exist. Based on power mapping, determine which current elected officials are onboard, which are movable and which are not, and respond accordingly. Do this in regular cycles to catch political shifts in the short term; and work to move the voter base in the long term

## Action 02

# Begin Aligning Housing Resources Across the Region

Aligning housing resources through system modeling, strategic investment planning, and improving access, can lead to transforming the work to end homelessness.



Listen to Vachel describe the need to align housing resources.



## Overview

Throughout the community engagement process, stakeholders including system leaders, people with lived experience and those at the front lines of homelessness identified 1) the lack of necessary housing resources across the entire region, 2) the inequitable supply of existing resources across the counties within the region, and 3) the structural issues to accessing the

resources available, particularly as people are moving across county boundaries while experiencing homelessness. With the significant new financial investment in housing and homelessness in recent federal and state legislative packages, we are in a critical moment to begin addressing all three of these identified issues and transform the way in which the region approaches homelessness.

Proposed Action 2 outlines more immediate and medium term strategies that can begin aligning those resources in a way that can address the above issues, begin building the housing justice agenda in the region, and flex the regional decision-making muscle of the regional kitchen table discussed in Action 1; that muscle will be critical to create and implement the long-term regional vision for housing justice. Proposed Action 2 can help to build the short/medium term housing goals for the region while the regional kitchen table moves to creating longer term, more comprehensive housing goals over the next year.

## Strategies for Proposed Action 2:

1. Create a regional system model that can predict the levels and types of prevention, crisis response, and long term housing needed and the possible new and existing local, state, and federal funding sources that can be utilized & utilize it to set more immediate housing goals for the new regional kitchen table
2. Performing regional strategic investment planning can bring in a diverse set of stakeholders from prevention to affordable housing and include people with lived experiences to make more equitable decisions on what to fund across the regional system model.
3. Better align the 3 coordinated entry systems to ensure more aligned and streamlined access to CoC funds across the continuums and to ensure regional pathways to the prevention and affordable housing options being developed



# 01. Create a Regional System Model

**Creating a regional system model will help predict the levels and types of prevention, crisis response, and long term housing needed and the possible new and existing local, state, and federal funding sources that can be utilized & utilize it to set more immediate housing goals for the new regional kitchen table.**

In the fall of 2021, the regional kitchen table should begin creating a regional system model for housing justice that includes prevention, crisis housing, & affordable housing, starting with the new federal and state investments under the recovery bills. This system model can be utilized to set the more immediate housing goals for the regional kitchen table as the longer term, more comprehensive goals are set over the course of the next year.

System modeling, a community-driven planning process in which representatives across the homeless response system collaborate to determine the “right size” of program and services needed across the region based on local data and experiences of individuals. The process of system modeling

accounts for the relationship between how people access resources, move across programs and the average length of time people are using different types of programs.

By centering the values set within the foundational work of Proposed Action 1, the process of system modeling offers an opportunity for the region to apply an equitable decision-making that directly impacts the type and scale of system resources that are needed to meet the needs of households across the region. It can offer a tangible step toward setting and enacting the larger housing justice goals being set at the regional kitchen table discussed in Proposed Action 1.

## Steps to Creating a Regional System

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### **1. Convene an equitable regional modeling workgroup directly connected to the regional kitchen table**

The region should explicitly center equitable participation across the system modeling process. Specifically, system modeling should ensure participation from people with lived experience of the programs and services within the community that represent different population perspectives (e.g. youth, families, single adults, etc). In addition, the workgroup should include positional representation such as CoC leadership; local HMIS data analysts; housing service providers; local funders; county human service agency representatives, and state offices that support housing planning efforts. All workgroup participants should be representative of diverse identities including, but not limited to Black, Asian, Latinx, Pacific Islanders, and Indigenous people. In addition, include people who identify as LGBTQ; people living with disabilities; people with experience in the criminal system, people with lived experience of homeless. All participants should

be compensated for their time and expertise throughout the process if not paid via representing an agency or other organization as an employee.

As part of this action step, the system modeling regional workgroup should create smaller groups to perform system modeling across the 3 CoC, using the same methods and tools, and accounting for the resources that are not confined to the boundaries of the CoC. The smaller groups should ensure there is cross-over among the stakeholder performing the system models within each CoC and then re-convene as a regional workgroup, inclusive of the 3 CoC to create a region-wide model.

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## **2. Identify a modeling tool to use**

Homeless system modeling has been performed across many communities – specifically the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) applied this practice as part of the coordinated community planning process as an effective tool to identify program needs and scale for new funds. Different HUD Technical Assistance (TA) firms (e.g. Abt Associates) have access to these tools and can provide technical support for the overall process.

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## **3. Prepare system data necessary for modeling**

While no system has perfect data, it is important to have an understanding of key data inputs to support your modeling process. The workgroup should collaborate with homeless system data leads to identify estimates of the following data:

Who experiences homelessness in each CoC? Disaggregate this data based on race & ethnicity.

1. What is the annual number of people accessing the system based on population type?
2. What types of housing and services are currently available for these individuals and families, and what types of housing and services most effectively serve various populations?
3. For each type of intervention (e.g., rapid re-housing, permanent supportive housing, etc.) how many beds or housing units does the CoC currently provide?
4. How are those programs utilized?
5. How well does the current distribution address the need, and how many beds or units are needed to effectively end homelessness?

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#### **4. Align the regional vision and set the values for the process rooted in equity**

As the workgroup begins the modeling process, it is important to clearly articulate the vision and core values as a group to create explicit accountability to equity throughout the modeling process; these should be aligned with the values of the regional kitchen table.

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#### **5. Map out the system components & understand how programs are utilized**

The workgroup will then need to map out the components that reflect the vision of the regional system and identify the component types that are part of the broader system vision. Examples of component types include, prevention, diversion/problem solving, crisis housing, rapid re-housing, permanent supportive housing, and other affordable housing. For existing components, the group will map out how each of these components are typically utilized (e.g. all people who stay in shelter also access an additional housing resource) and include descriptions of what each of the program components include.

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#### **6. Identify the “ideal” pathways & assumptions based off data**

From this place, the workgroup can identify what the pathways should be set up as the region moves toward its vision of housing justice. The group should collectively set assumptions about the number and percentage of people that need each pathway to exit homelessness and the average length of assistance needed for each program type. Examples of pathways include, entering crisis housing and moving to rapid rehousing, or going directly from outreach with an unsheltered into a housing voucher.

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#### **7. Input the data in the modeling tool and review outcomes with the community stakeholders**

After the steps have been completed, the workgroup will input data within the model tool and review results with the regional stakeholders. The group should reflect back the regional vision, program component types and scale of resources needed to achieve the housing justice agenda and make adjustments as needed to best authentically reflect the regional system needs.

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## **8. Apply the model to strategic investment planning & commit to a continuous alignment process**

On a quarterly basis, the workgroup should update the data within the modeling tool to adjust for any real-time insights or necessary changes to allocations to maximize its usefulness. As will be discussed in the coordinated investment planning process, this model should be used to inform key decisions on program type and scale across each of the 3 CoC and city and county human services departments administering homelessness funds within the region to inform funding priorities.

## 02. Perform Regional Strategic Investment Planning

**Performing regional strategic investment planning can bring in a diverse set of stakeholder from prevention to affordable housing and include people with lived experiences to make more equitable decisions on what to fund across the regional system model.**

Building off the system modeling outlined above, it is critical to maximize the opportunity to strategically align new resources and utilize existing funds in new ways to strategically fill identified gaps across the housing justice agenda in the region. The process can help to identify ongoing strategies on how funding can and should be prioritized based on intentional strategy and equitable decision-making.

The regional kitchen table should launch the strategic investment planning in the Winter

of 2021-22. Although some decisions on new federal and state funding may need to be established before the planning can occur, it can still offer a guide for the next round of investment and even open discussions for ways that initial investments can pivot over time to better align with the modeling and investment planning that is driven by the community. This process will be the first major step in shifting decision-making power to a broader group of regional stakeholders.

### Steps to Aligning Resources Alongside the Regional System Model

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**Practice an equity-based decision-making process to make equitable funding decisions that center people with lived experiences and Black, Indigenous, Brown and LGBTQ communities**

Consistent with the system modeling process, the workgroup's coordinated investment planning requires intentional and authentic collaboration that centers communities most deeply impacted by inequity across the region. Funding decisions that directly impact communities that have experienced historical and current marginalization cannot be made without those whose lives are being impacted.

**Consider using the HUD coordinated investment planning tool**

While there may be other tools and methods for coordinating investments across the regional systems, the [HUD Rehousing & Coordinated Investment Planning tool](#) provides an adequate tool to coordinate funding across federal, state, county, CoC and private levels. This tool will utilize some of the inputs provided through system modeling, but provides more specificity on investments, timing considerations and how decisions are typically made regarding those funds.

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### **Create estimates of program component costs per person**

Based on input from providers who have operated different program types, the workgroup should identify how much typical staff, operations, housing, and administrative costs are per housing program model. As many programs are not yet paying equitable wages, round estimates upwards towards costs that would align with housing justice agenda values.

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### **Create a resource inventory of all funding resources & decision-making**

Next, the workgroup should create a chart with all sources of funding that supports programs across the region. Within the chart, include federal, state, local and philanthropic funding with amounts (actual or estimated); any population restrictions; allowable costs/activities; allowable project types (e.g. PSH, RRH, or non restricted); who is responsible for making the funding decision; any fund-specific priorities/dedication; and timeline for utilization of funds and/or renewal. This could be further built out over time to include an analysis of what decision-making is legislative and administrative in order to better create gaps and power analysis that can lead to more long term change in resources and decision-making.

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### **Use the regional system model data to create a regional system funding strategy**

Finally, the workgroup should come back to the larger the regional kitchen table to analyze existing system funds against the regional system vision. Reflection questions to work through across the table:

- What funding is not being utilized most impactfully?
- What new funds are available and where are they most needed based on our regional modeling process?

The regional kitchen table should use this information to create a regional system funding strategy with concrete actions steps for funders and accountability commitments. This process will require project coordination across different groups and should be invested in equitably. This project coordination should be the work of the larger regional kitchen table; this work should be seen as the more immediate steps in moving the regional vision and goals to be set and implemented by the regional kitchen table.

## 03. Better Align the 3 Coordinated Entry Systems

**Better aligning the 3 coordinated entry systems will help to ensure more streamlined access to CoC funds across the continuums and help to ensure regional pathways to the prevention and affordable housing options being developed through modeling and investment planning.**

The regional table should evaluate each coordinated entry system and chart a path for alignment in approach and implementation to improve access to the full set of housing justice resources being built out across the region. As more resources are coming online across CoC funding and other state and federal funds geared at addressing homelessness, it will be critical that the coordinated entry systems across the 3 CoCs are aligned and highly functioning to improve access. The 3 CoCs should focus on improving direct access to CoC funded projects through coordinated entry while also ensuring a clear set of pathways from coordinated entry to non-CoC funded projects, particularly the large new investments in [Rent Help MN](#), and state, county, and city newly funded ESG, HOME, and HOPWA projects. As discussed above

these new funding sources have the potential to build out prevention, crisis response, and affordable housing resources.

Coordinated entry will need to be able to respond to connecting people in crisis to a broader and deeper set of resources, even if those resources do not have formal entry through the coordinated entry system. This strategy is a medium term goal that can be developed over the course of the next 3 years as these projects come online and can contribute to the long term goals of the regional kitchen table. Broader strategy and accountability measures should be directly connected to the forming regional kitchen table to help ensure this work is part of the longer term goals of the kitchen table that can help lead to housing justice.

### Ways to Improve Coordinated Entry across the 3 CoCs

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#### **Establish regular coordination meetings across the 3 CoC leadership teams**

The regional kitchen table should host more regular coordination meetings across the 3 CoC coordinated entry lead agencies, that includes people with lived experiences using coordinated entry can help to identify areas of potential alignment and develop strategies to better match the experiences of people across the Coordinated Entry Systems (CES) systems. Suburban Metro Area CoC (SMAC) Director's Council efforts to align CES across the 5 counties in the SMAC CoC is a great example of the power of these types of coordination meetings, particularly those led by people with lived experience.

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### **Evaluate CES policies & procedures across the 3 CoCs to identify where there can be strategic alignment in accessing CoC resources**

The 3 CoC could utilize the coordination meetings to evaluate the CES policies and procedures across the 3 systems, particularly those related to access, assessment, prioritization, and referral. An example of this time of alignment is the work SMAC and Ramsey have been doing to align behind the same assessment. The process is helping to understand how to improve the experience of those who might be moving across the CoC and identifying areas that can further be aligned to continue improving the experience. Differing policies around access, assessment, prioritization, and referrals may make sense when centering the needs of administering a system but for a person trying to address their housing needs across county boundaries, it leads to barriers to more quickly accessing needed resources.

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### **Align strategies across the 3 Coordinated Entry Systems for access and connection to prevention and affordable housing resources in the region**

As the region moves to making more strategic investment decisions, as discussed above, it will be critical to ensure that access to those resources can be easily connected through the three coordinated entry systems. This must include access to prevention programs and affordable housing programs being developed. The strategies to create person-centered pathways into these programs should look similar across all three CoCs helping to ensure ease and equity in access to these newly developing programs. These strategies may include ideas identified during interviews and workshops, including universal housing applications across the Public Housing Authorities and other publicly funded affordable housing programs in the region, and a universal application for all prevention funds building off the lessons learned from the RentHelpMN efforts.

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### **Implement continuous improvement strategies through a regional lens**

As the regional kitchen table move to more closely align the 3 CoC systems it must ensure that alignment is having the intended impact, especially on equitable access for BIPOC and LGBTQ people experiencing homelessness. The 3 CoCs should more regularly look at the experiences of people who are utilizing more than one CoC, who are transferring across CoCs, and who are accessing non-CoC funded resources across the region including vouchers, public housing, public rental assistance, and other programs that move outside of CoC boundaries. This should be directly connected to accountability measures being developed at the regional kitchen table.

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**The individual CoCs must also continue to take action on improving coordinated entry to the experience of BIPOC, Queer, & Transgender populations using coordinated entry. See the resource section below for more information on possible strategies.**



## Action 03

# Improve Access to and Navigation of Human Services Across the Region

Improving access to and navigation of human services across the region for people experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity will help to ensure services are matched with the housing resources being built out across the region



Listen to Laquita, a Regional Advisory Group member, offer centralization of human services as a way to improve access to and navigation of human services



## Overview

Access to and the navigation of human services, while experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity was identified as a major barrier to regionally ending homelessness. It most often shows up in

accessing and navigating public benefits, substance abuse services and mental health services. As new housing investments become available across the region, it will be critical to ensure that people navigating these housing

resources have the human services they may want and need. The work to improve human services should be directly connected to the system modeling and investment planning efforts, to ensure that the housing and service strategies are linked.. The regional kitchen table should hold the planning and strategy for both because moving to a more person-centered approach to administering public benefits across county lines and addressing the inequity of substance abuse and mental health resources across counties in the region is critical to the long term goal of housing justice.

### Strategies for Proposed Action 3 include:

1. Utilize a person-centered approach to public benefits, particularly in accessing and transferring benefits, in order to ensure that county boundaries have no effect on obtaining and maintaining the public benefits needed to maintain housing and ensure food security
2. Address equitable access to services, particularly quality behavioral health and substance abuse services, to ensure that people have access to the supports needed to live in the place and community of their choice

# 01. Utilize a Person-Centered Approach to Public Benefits

**Moving to a person-centered approach, particularly in accessing and transferring benefits, will help to ensure that county boundaries have no effect on obtaining and maintaining the public benefits needed to maintain housing and ensure food security.**

As outlined in the system audit findings, accessing and transferring the administration across county offices of public benefits such as SNAP, MFIP, Emergency Assistance, and Housing Supports benefits can be a major burden for people experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity as they may move at higher rates. As indicated by 2019 Department of Human Services data, close to 14,000 people who had ever experienced homelessness in the metro area moved across one county line with their benefits, 56% of those movers had experienced homelessness in the 2019 data year. Much smaller numbers of individuals moved across 2 or more county lines in a year with benefits but the percentage of those who did move that often who had experienced homelessness grew higher the more moves recorded. The most common benefits individuals experiencing homelessness are moving with include SNAPS

and MFIP, two critical public benefits that help with food and economic security critical to individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

For these 14,000 households a year it is critical that the counties and state partner to implement a more person-centered approach to accessing and transferring the administration of public benefits. An interruption or loss in benefits can result in a crisis for people already experiencing homelessness or housing instability and the added trauma of re-applying and navigating a complex system can make the trauma of experiencing homelessness that much worse.

The regional kitchen table can offer the structure for bringing together the diverse set of stakeholders and political advocacy that will be needed to take action.

## Person-Centered Strategies

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### **Fully fund and implement electronic universal applications for public benefits and electronic file transfers across county human service offices**

The state is currently working on technology pilots connected to certain public benefits to increase the ability to more rapidly apply virtually. These efforts could be built upon with a fully-funded technology effort by the state legislature to make the application and transfer of the administration of public benefits across any county lines more accessible and streamlined. This would help to ensure that people moving around the region to access shelter or other housing options could apply for all public benefits through one universal application from anywhere in the region, including any county human services office in the region. It would also help to ensure that they could maintain public benefits when moving by simply submitting a new address and having the files transferred to the new county human services.

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### **Explore changes to state laws on the county of financial responsibility to ensure people moving to access shelter or other housing options are not lost in the transfer process**

Possible changes could include lengthening the amount of time before a person has to transfer the administration of their benefits to a new county upon moving; creating a state-administered pool that allows people moving to access shelter or housing the ability to have the public benefits directly administered by the state until they have stabilized their housing in a county of residence; and improving the process in which DHS intervenes when counties are contesting county of residence. These changes would require state law changes and should be further explored and compared with any current efforts underway at the state office.

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### **Dedicate state funds to counties to fully staff and train county financial services workers**

County Human Services offices must find funds to hire county workers to process and administer public benefits. There are often far too few workers leading to long wait times for appointments, slow processing of applications and transfers, and large caseloads that contribute to harmful experiences by people experiencing homelessness. State dedicated funds to ensure that counties could have full staff and could offer comprehensive training on trauma informed care and other person centered approaches could greatly improve the experiences of people on public benefits.

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### **Reduce barriers to continuing benefits**

As proposed in recent administration proposals and by leadership at DHS, public benefits re-verification should move to every six months allowing for a longer time to maintain benefits without the burden of continual re-certification. This recommendation was also proposed in a state report on [improving the health of people living in deep poverty](#). The state should also consider continuing flexibilities that were offered during COVID-19, including virtual case management meetings and virtual document verification. Although technology can be a barrier for experiencing homelessness, it is often less of a barrier than traveling far distances from encampments, shelters, or housing across the region as they are experiencing homelessness and the access to technology is something that can more easily be addressed by homeless serving programs.

## O2. Address Equitable Access to Services

**Addressing equitable access to services, particularly quality behavioral health and substance abuse services, will help to ensure that people have access to the supports needed to live in the place and community of their choice.**

As described in the system audit findings there are vast disparities in access to quality person-centered behavioral health and substance abuse services across the region, particularly for those experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity. Ensuring access to these quality services is essential to the success of the homelessness response for those who are in need of behavioral health and substance

abuse services; optional, quality services connected to housing are a documented best practice in addressing homelessness.

The region needs a more concerted effort to understand the need, cost, and funding strategies that can improve access to quality person-centered services, particularly for BIPOC and LGBTQ communities.

### Strategies to Address Equitable Access

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**Conduct a cost analysis to public systems (hospitals, corrections, shelter programs, child welfare, and other human services) of high utilizers who experience homelessness across the region to better understand cost in the region**

The region should start with any more localized studies conducted and build to a full regional understanding of the cost to public systems in the region. Better understanding which public systems are bearing the cost related to untreated behavioral health and substance abuse issues will allow for better partnerships across systems to improve access to these critical services. And doing this study from a racially explicit lens will help to understand the race disparity and the racially explicit strategies that may be needed to address the disparities. When conducting the study it will be critical for the regional kitchen table to bring in state and county corrections and child welfare agencies and the public and private hospital systems, all of which serve people who become entangled in the systems due to lack of access to substance abuse and behavioral health services, and all of which are discharging people with mental health and substance abuse needs into homelessness.

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**Analyze cost-sharing proposals throughout the region with a power analysis to understand the authority and roles in implementing the proposals**

Human Service leaders in the region should analyze any existing cost-sharing proposal in the region to better understand past work done to address cost burdens across the system and build out behavioral health and substance abuse services. That analysis should include a power analysis to understand who has the authority and funding to act and what roles different system leaders and elected officials may need to play. After the analysis of existing proposals, the kitchen table should convene to explore new proposals to ensure that each county in the region has an approach to building out more quality services that are explicitly geared at best serving BIPOC and LGBTQ communities.

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**Ensure that the substance abuse and behavioral health services are paired with the supports needed to improve access by people experiencing homelessness**

As the region builds out these clinical services it will be critical that the supports are connected to ensure access and sustained success. These supports should include transportation, technology (for those who prefer virtual sessions), child care, peer-support workers, and case management. People experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity face immense challenges in accessing these types of support which is directly linked to lower access and engagement in clinical services. These support should be offered for the length of time necessary to be successful, including for a minimum of a year after a person has been stably housed, to ensure continued success. These types of support can often be offered through homelessness and housing programs; another reason it will be critical for the regional kitchen table to link this planning to the system modeling and investment planning discussed in Proposed Action 2.

It will also be critical to specialize these types of supports for specific sub-populations. See resource section below for considerations on different sub-populations.

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**Begin to pilot existing community generated ideas that will increase equitable access to substance abuse and behavioral services and the support**

In addition to the deeper cost-sharing proposals developed and/or enacted across the public system, there are other existing ideas that were discussed in interviews conducted as part of the Blueprint creation. The regional kitchen table should begin to explore the feasibility of these community proposals and work to pilot those assessed to be viable and to have the potential community impact. Examples of additional supports that would increase access to services for specific subpopulations.

# Appendix

# Approach and Process

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Shifting toward housing justice requires centering voices of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color who have experienced the homelessness crisis response system in jurisdictions across the Twin Cities Metro Region; hearing successes and failures of prior efforts from system administrators, and; building a vision together for what would need to change to achieve housing justice for the region. The Center for Housing Justice (CHJ) held those values in a process with three core components: 1) a policy and decision-making audit; 2) community engagement and; 3) building community support. The process (for phase 1) began in December 2020 and will conclude June 2021.

## Policy and Decision-Making Audit

The policy and decision-making audit consisted of a review of regional policy and decision-making drivers, mapping key regional stakeholders, and reviewing related efforts and “calls for action” of organized grassroots movements in the region.

The policy and decision-making driver elements of the audit focused at the state, regional, county, city, and Continuum of Care (CoC) levels. CHJ reviewed previous and existing efforts to institutionalize coordination and funding allocation regionally. At the regional level, CHJ analyzed tools used by the Metropolitan Council, collaborations and negotiations amongst metro cities, and analyzed provider capacity to meet rental assistance and service needs within and across county boundaries. At the county level, CHJ analyzed the cooperative agreement among metro counties to jointly receive and administer grants, the authority of the Housing Coordination Board, and the implications, power, and reach of the County of Financial Responsibility (CFR) requirements. At the CoC

level, CHJ focused on the coordinated entry systems across the region.

CHJ also created a regional stakeholder map to identify the formal and informal power structures across the jurisdictions and region when it comes to priority-setting, decision-making, and financial allocations related to housing and homelessness in the region. The map includes statewide and regional governmental entities, organizing and advocacy groups, CoCs, regional collaborations and coordinating bodies, and philanthropic partners.

CHJ conducted a review of grassroots organizing efforts in the region, particularly where there are demands for housing. We conducted a review of materials posted online and conducted outreach to grassroots organizations to gather additional information.

## Regional Advisory Group

An advisory group was established to partner with the CHJ team in the systems audit as subject matter experts, to inform the audit findings report, and to advise and contribute to the development of the blueprint proposal and coalition in preparation for Phase II.

The Regional Advisory Group consists of 20 members that also represent diverse personal experiences navigating the homeless response system in the seven counties. Members also identified as activists, community organizers, and workers at the front line of homeless services.

Through biweekly strategy meetings, community workshops, and stakeholder-specific meetings, members contributed to shaping the audit findings and participated in setting the tone and framing of the report. They will continue to stay engaged in the next phase of the work as possible solutions are



proposed to complete the blueprint. Please note that this document also refers to the Regional Advisory Committee, the advisory body formed in response to the Responding Effectively as a Region to Unsheltered Homelessness in the Twin Cities Metro Area Framework. These two advisory bodies operate independently of each other.

## Community Engagement

CHJ conducted community engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic, using a host of virtual and online tools to facilitate conversations with key community stakeholders and people who have lived experience of homelessness and housing instability. We talked to people one-on-one in an interview-style format, conducted listening sessions with groups of stakeholders that were pre-organized; arranged focus groups to hear from specific communities, and arranged virtual workshops to digest information and provide feedback in larger group sessions. CHJ also created an advisory group of people with lived experience from counties across the region.

CHJ started with a list of recommended system stakeholders from across the seven-county metro region that originated from current and past efforts, including the regional response to unsheltered homelessness, existing planning bodies that include the Regional Metro Committee, the Regional Advisory Committee, and the Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness. The list included county administrators, leaders in state government, philanthropy, Continuum of Care (CoC), homeless service providers, intermediaries and policy advocacy groups.

Concurrently, CHJ reached out to people not involved in the homelessness systems regionally, but who were key community members. This list included people involved in grassroots organizing and people who have lived experience of homelessness or have sought housing assistance. In both of these groups, we explicitly identified and centered

the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and trans\* people.

CHJ spoke with system leaders and people with lived experience in each of the seven metro counties through interviews, focus groups, and by joining pre-existing meetings. Once these conversations were completed, CHJ synthesized the information gathered and identified three major barriers to regionalization. The team then conducted five workshops with community members to refine the synthesis.

## Building Community Support

For true regionalization toward housing justice to be successful, the effort must truly come from the people. CHJ views our role as facilitators of pointed and intentional conversations to identify the most likely paths forward. In this role, we are deeply grateful for the time that the people in the region have taken to engage with us, hold difficult conversations and space, and dream together about a vision for housing that views it as a human right, accessible and available to everyone. The success of regionalization will be entirely based on the ability of varied, diverse, and inclusive groups of community stakeholders leaning into a vision of system transformation that centers power in new ways. Based on our conversations with the people in the metro region, you have expressed unity in such a vision.

## Limitations

While we did reach out to a broad and varied group of community members in conducting the audit; we recognize that time and distance have meant that we did not speak to everyone who could have offered insight into regionalization. We hope that there will be future opportunities to grow and evolve the work as it continues and that those who we were unable to speak with will have future opportunities to engage.

CHJ also recognizes that this engagement

took place during the height of the 2020-2021 surges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Pandemic fatigue, grief, and loss have undoubtedly played a role. We have not taken a close look at this role, but feel it in the ways people can show up. Additionally, all of the

correspondence CHJ has had with Twin Cities regional stakeholders has been conducted in a virtual environment. The work is both deeply personal and emotional, and the limitations of human interaction via computer and telephone have been deeply felt.

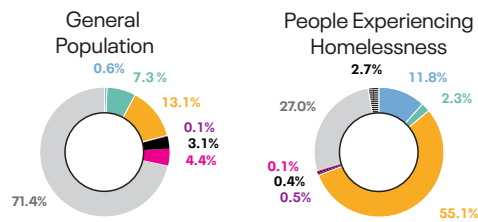
## Activities

| NIS Approach                         | Activities   |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| <p><b>System Materials Audit</b></p> | <p>Systematic Review of Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Homeless and Housing Systems</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unsheltered Design Team Recommendations</li> <li>• Regional Metro Committee Collaborative Agreement</li> <li>• Metropolitan Council Housing Policies and Plans</li> <li>• HUD/Continuum of Care Materials</li> <li>• Heading Home Equity System Recommendations</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Health and Human Services</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• County of Financial Responsibility</li> <li>• County and City Strategic Plans</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Grassroots Organizing Movement</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A review of drafted demands at the intersection of the people and ideas leading the grassroots movement for black lives and the construct of the current housing systems in the region.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Regional Models</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All Home Regional Impact Council</li> <li>• Seattle/King County Regional Authority</li> <li>• Chicago Metropolitan Area for Planning</li> <li>• Metropolitan Council</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Community Engagement</b></p>   | <p>Participatory research:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-depth interviews</li> <li>• <b>Community Workshops</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional Metro Council</li> <li>• Regional Advisory Committee</li> <li>• CoCs Leadership Bodies</li> <li>• Streetworks Outreach Network</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Regional Advisory Group</b></li> <li>• <b>Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness</b></li> <li>• <b>Subject Matter Expert Sessions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CoC Priorities and Coordinated Entry Systems (CES)</li> <li>• Metro Housing Coordinating Board</li> <li>• Regional Advisory Group</li> </ul> </li> </ul>  |

# 2020 Hennepin CoC Demographics Comparison

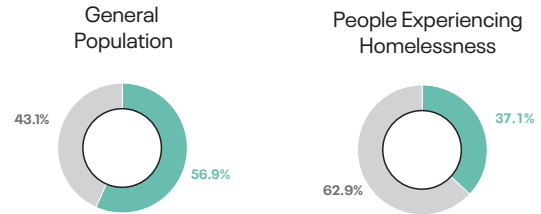
## Racial Disproportionality

- American Indian or Alaskan Native alone
- Asian alone
- Black alone
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander alone
- Some other race alone
- Two or More Races/Multiple Races
- White
- DKR/Missing



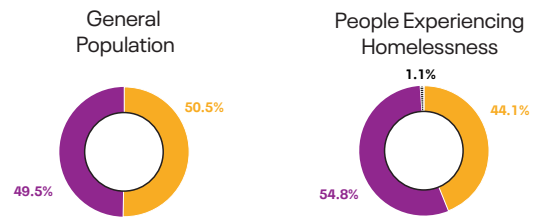
## Family Type Comparison

- Families
- Single People



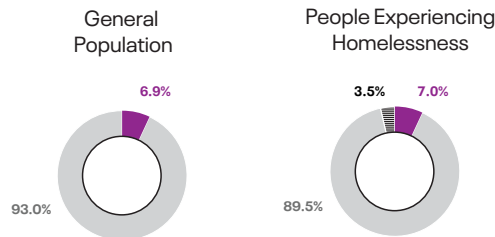
## Gender Comparison\*

- Female
- Male
- Unknown/ Not Available



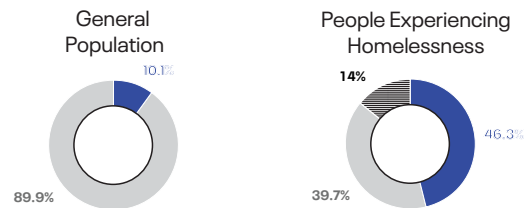
## Ethnicity Comparison

- Hispanic
- Not Hispanic
- Unkown



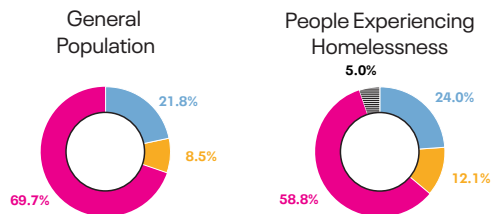
## Disability Status Disproportionality

- Has Disability
- Does not have Disability
- Unkown



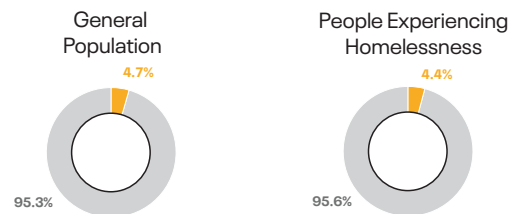
## Age Disproportionality

- less than 18
- 18 - 24
- older than 24
- Unknown



## Veteran Comparison

- Veteran
- Not a Veteran

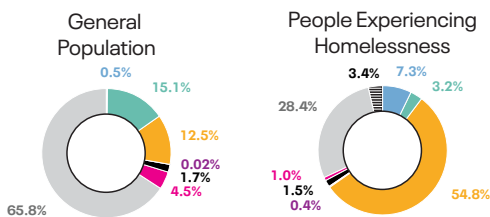


General Population: ACS 2019 Estimates  
 People Experiencing Homelessness: MN HMIS Dashboard 2021

# 2020 Ramsey CoC Demographics Comparison

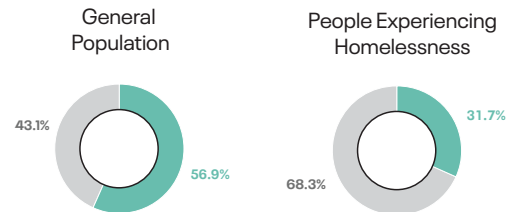
## Racial Disproportionality

- American Indian or Alaskan Native alone
- Asian alone
- Black alone
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander alone
- Some other race alone
- Two or More Races/Multiple Races
- White
- DKR/Missing



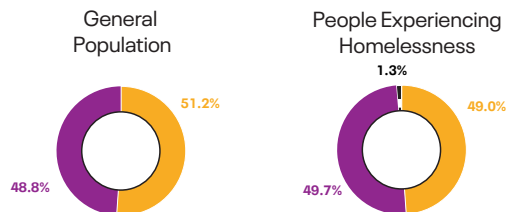
## Family Type Comparison

- Families
- Single People



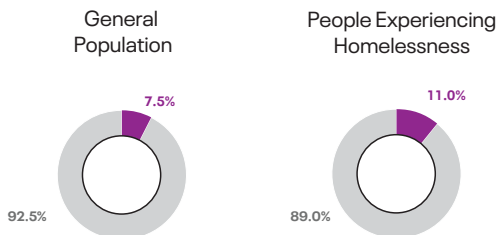
## Gender Comparison\*

- Female
- Male
- Unknown/ Not Available



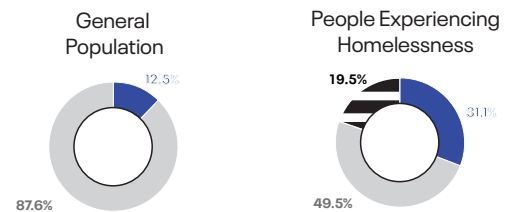
## Ethnicity Comparison

- Hispanic
- Not Hispanic
- Unkown



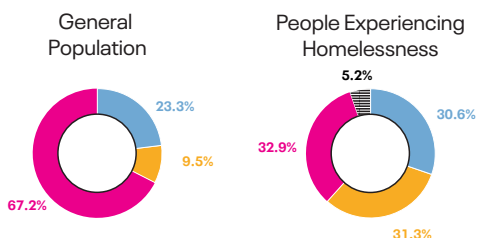
## Disability Status Disproportionality

- Has Disability
- Does not have Disability
- Unkown



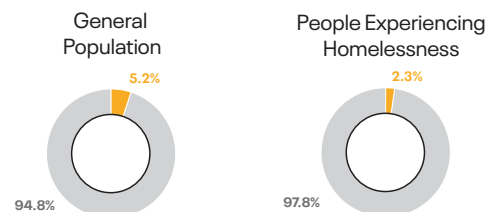
## Age Disproportionality

- less than 18
- 18 - 24
- older than 24
- Unknown



## Veteran Comparison

- Veteran
- Not a Veteran

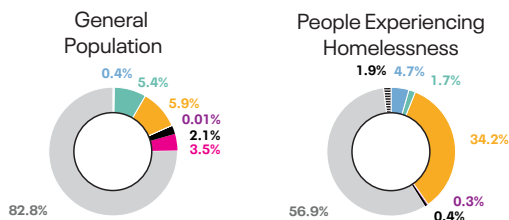


General Population: ACS 2019 Estimates  
 People Experiencing Homelessness: MN HMIS Dashboard 2021

# 2020 Suburban Metro Area CoC Demographics Comparison

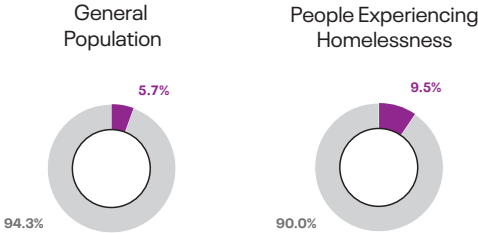
## Racial Disproportionality

- American Indian or Alaskan Native alone
- Asian alone
- Black alone
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander alone
- Some other race alone
- Two or More Races/Multiple Races
- White
- ▨ DKR/Missing



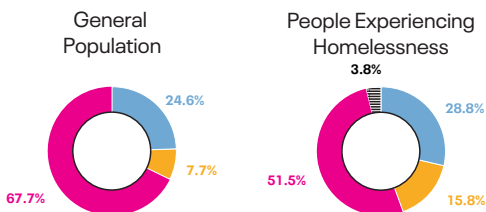
## Ethnicity Comparison

- Hispanic
- Not Hispanic
- ▨ Unknown



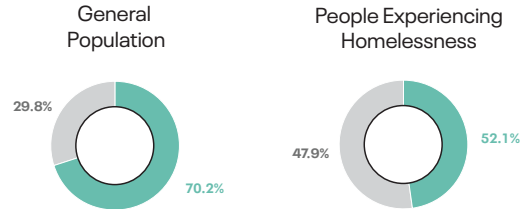
## Age Disproportionality

- less than 18
- 18 - 24
- older than 24
- ▨ Unknown



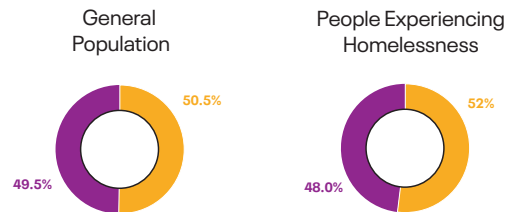
## Family Type Comparison

- Families
- Single People



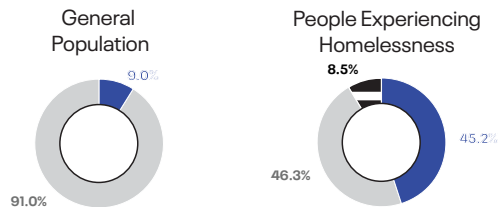
## Gender Comparison\*

- Female
- Male
- ▨ Unknown/ Not Available



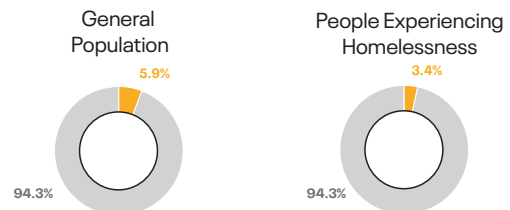
## Disability Status Disproportionality

- Has Disability
- Does not have Disability
- ▨ Unknown



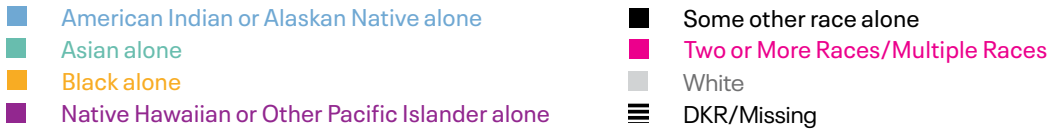
## Veteran Comparison

- Veteran
- Not a Veteran



General Population: ACS 2019 Estimates  
 People Experiencing Homelessness: MN HMIS Dashboard 2021

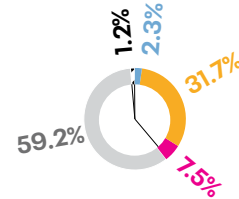
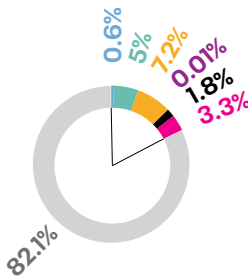
# 2019 Racial Disproportionality of People Experiencing Homelessness by County



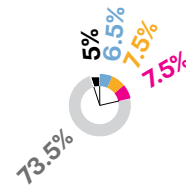
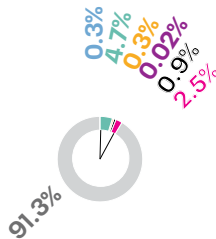
**7-County  
Racial Demographics**  
ACS 2019

**HMIS Active Priority List  
Racial Demographics**  
MN HMIS Dashboard, 3/23/19 - 3/23/2020

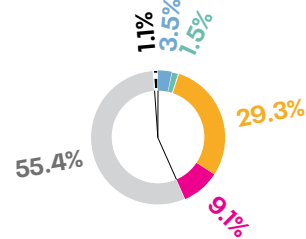
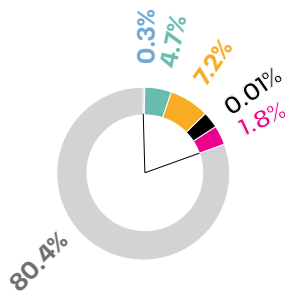
Anoka



Carver

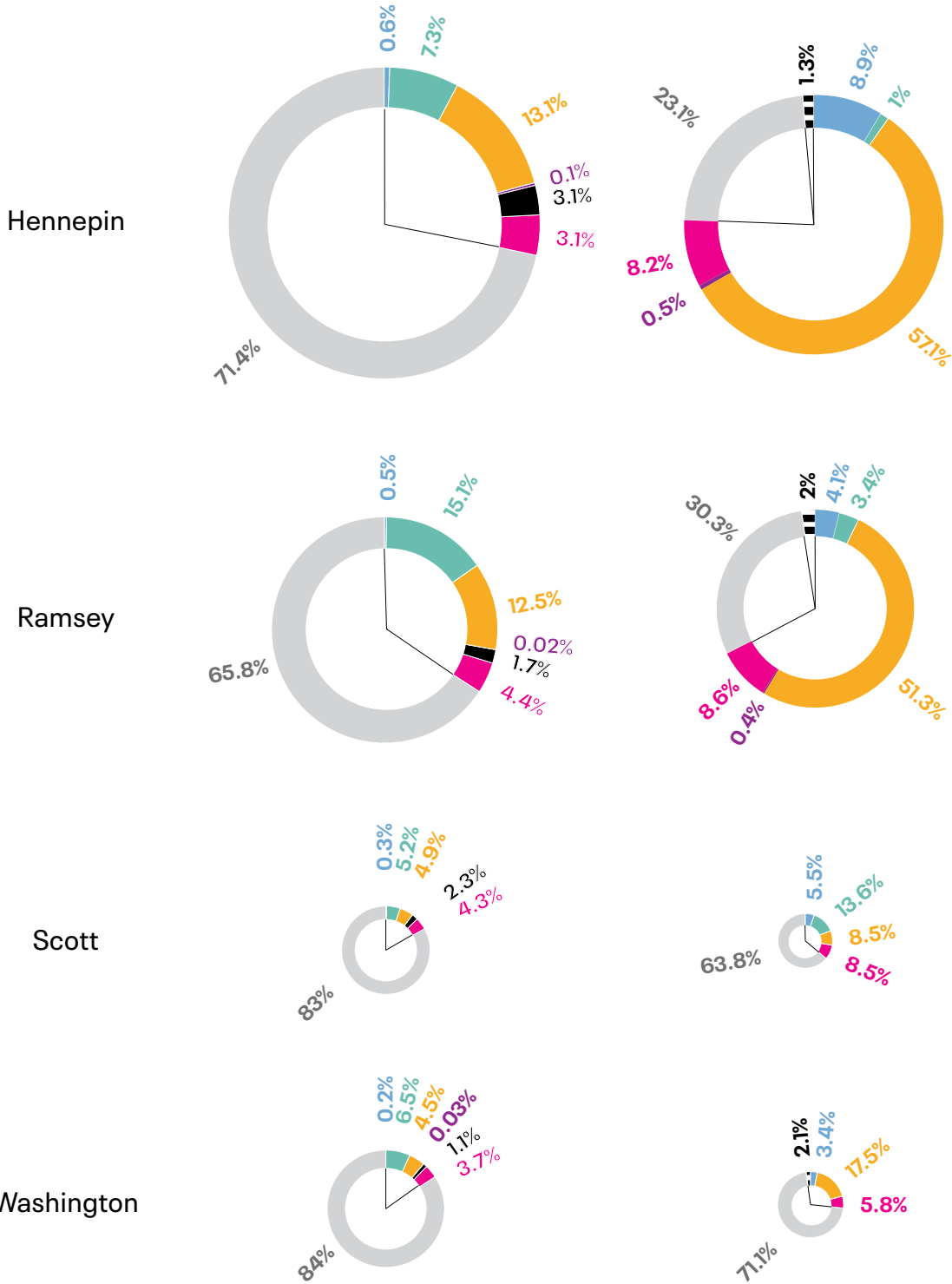


Dakota



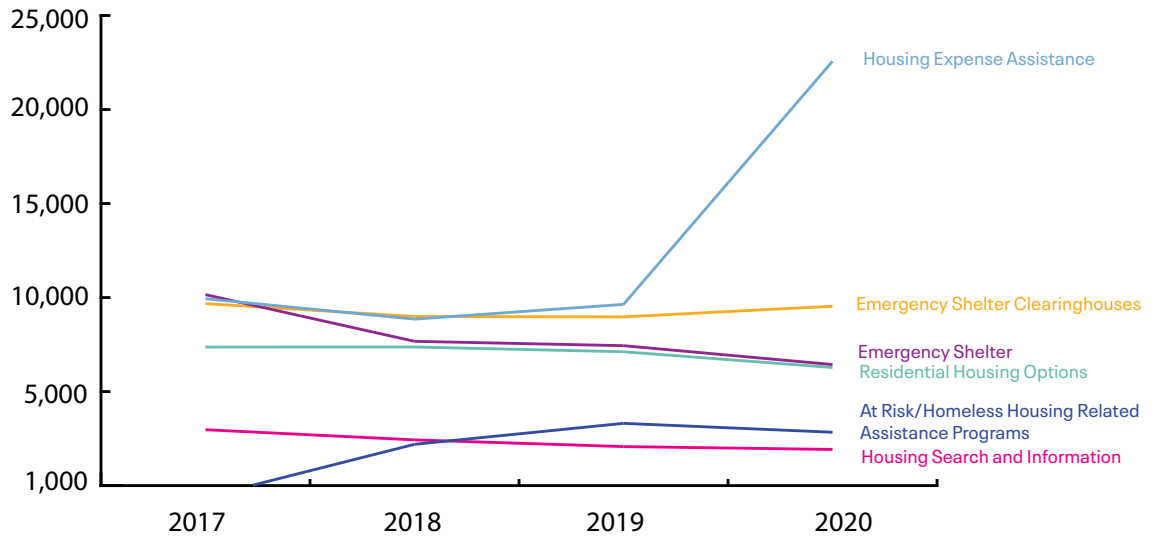
7-County  
Racial Demographics  
ACS 2019

HMIS Active Priority List  
Racial Demographics  
MN HMIS Dashboard, 3/23/19 - 3/23/2020



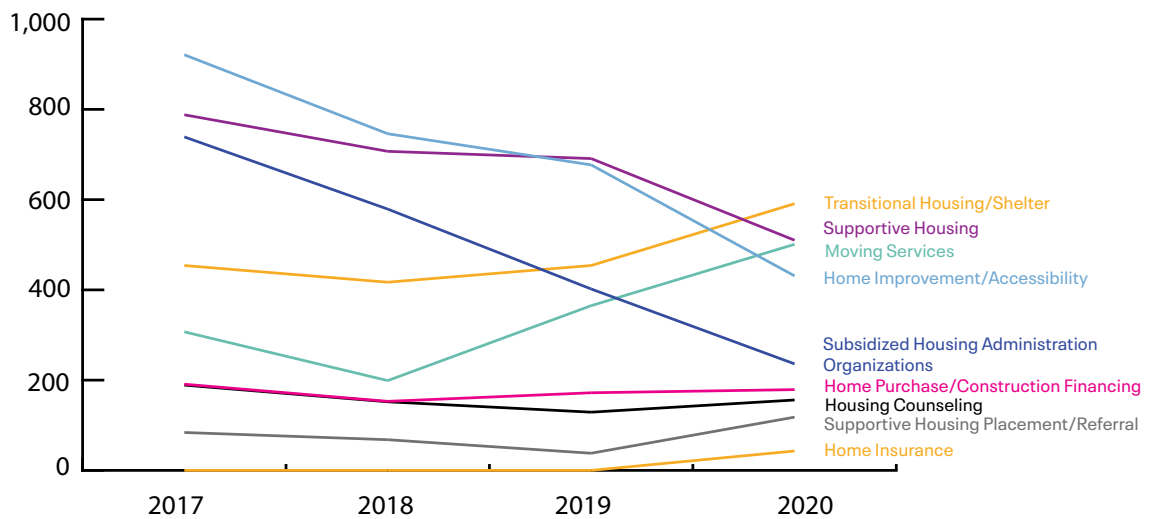
## 211 Housing Call Categories 2017 - 2020

211 Housing Calls over 1000 Annual Calls 2017 - 2020



211 Housing Calls under 1000 annual Calls 2017 - 2020

211 Housing Calls under 1000 annual Calls 2017 -2020





## More Details on Action 01 Strategies

### Strategy 01: Use transformative organizing to build the structure

#### More information on what it means to transform the “us” around the kitchen table

As the region moves toward creating a kitchen table, the values of the collective, centered on BIPOC and LGBTQ thriving lives, must tangibly be the organizing foundation for every conversation; they must become a collective part of the air that the people sitting around the table breathe. To do so means valuing humanity of one another, quite literally in the ways you create and share physical space with one another (especially in a post-COVID-19 environment) but also in a virtual gathering environment, where agreements and intentions are a foundational part of collective work. It means, consistently and actively working to set an environment where each of “us” can be in right relationship with one another. It means, actions that build trust are essential. When system actors join people with lived experience (“members of the oppressor class join the oppressed in their struggle for liberation”) the danger is the recreation of the cycle of oppression, unless there is active work to transform selves in a way that also builds trust.

“They talk about the people, but they do not trust them; and trusting the people is the indispensable precondition for revolutionary change. A real humanist can be identified more by his trust in the people, which engages him in their struggle, than by a thousand actions in their favor without that trust”

- Paulo Freire- Pedagogy of the Oppressed

#### More information on what it means to shift power and decision-making at regional kitchen table through transformative organizing

Shifting power and decision-making also means that those around the table can't cling to the way they think something ought to be. Participatory decision-making and true shared power means being willing to move as ideas and new information moves, so long as it's consistent with the values the table has set together. It also means seeking a shift in the way the table thinks about who is a part of “the work” from you/them to us/we. Not waiting for someone else (or expecting some other group) to come up with the ideas and push the change; it is seeing “myself” as an

activator of the change.

Systems have a tendency to protect what is already there, the work done to date, the structures that already exist, or settling for what is practical versus what is just. Sometimes it is that people working within the systems have malicious intent, but not always. The systems are doing what they are designed to do.

### **More information on stakeholder considerations for the kitchen table**

#### *Stakeholder roles at the kitchen table*

It is important to consider who key people (personalities) are, but also what key roles are, and the identities that the people in the roles hold, particularly leadership roles. There should be a preference for participation from BIPOC people and people with lived experiences. And the structure must hold room for current participation with active dissonance toward the goals while moving a process along that can shift into new representation aligned with the behavioral considerations in the Blueprint.

#### *Stakeholders with lived experiences at the kitchen table*

In addition, the current group of people who have been advisors to the development of this Blueprint should shift into a more formal role as decision-makers on the actions outlined within the blueprint. This will mean ensuring that the advisory body is adequately paid for their work and supported in their preparation and involvement in decision making. As their formalization continues, this may require a process in which they make decisions on their own governance, decision-making, leadership, and role in the regionalization process. It may also mean tracking that the group is representative of the other lived experience groups and community organizers discussed in the Blueprint.

#### *Kitchen Table's connection to existing stakeholder tables*

There should be clear delineation of responsibilities, power, and authority among the tables to ensure that they are supportive of each other's work, building off of each other's work, and all aligned toward Housing Justice. There will naturally be overlap in membership and representation, but there should be consistent efforts to make sure membership overlap continues with key stakeholder tables, building continued pathways and feedback loops.

## **Strategy 03: Develop Shared Values**

### **More information on regional efforts around the county that created mission/**

**"Perhaps the greatest danger to the transformative organization attempting to find the revolutionary edge of reform fights is dressing a reformist fight in revolutionary rhetoric."**

**- Steve Williams**

## vision statements based off shared values

### [Seattle/King County RHA](#)

Our **mission** is to significantly decrease the incidence of homelessness throughout King County, using equity and social justice principles.

Our **theory of change**: If we create a homelessness response system that centers customer voice (the voices of those who have lived experience of homelessness), then we will be able to focus on responding to needs and eliminating inequities, in order to end homelessness for all.

### [Atlanta Regional Commission \(ARC\)](#)

#### **Mission Statement**

The Atlanta Regional Commission advances the national and international standing of the region by leveraging the uniqueness of its evolving communities, anticipating and responding to current realities and driving a data-driven planning process that provides a high quality of life, balancing social, economic and environmental needs of all our communities.

#### **Vision Statement**

The Atlanta Regional Commission employs shared foresight, expert staff, the ability to convene diverse communities and its reputation as a regional and national leader in order to support local governments. This, in turn, enhances the lives of all our citizens by providing world-class infrastructure, builds a competitive economy and shapes a regional ecosystem of healthy and livable communities.

#### **Value Statement**

- **Regional Leadership:** We build and foster regional leadership to address and act on critical challenges and opportunities.
- **Creative Solutions:** We anticipate challenges and develop creative, holistic solutions based on professional knowledge and shared foresight, community engagement and collaboration with our partners.
- **Public Service:** We are accountable to our stakeholders, try to exceed their expectations and exhibit the highest standard of ethical conduct.

### [Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning \(CMAP\)](#)

#### Core Values

- **SERVE WITH PASSION**
  - We are passionate about serving the people of metropolitan Chicago. We build public trust by being good stewards of public resources and proactively sharing information.
- **PURSUE EQUITY**
  - We are guided by the principle that everyone has a right to opportunity and a high quality of life. We work to realize equity for all.

- FOSTER COLLABORATION
  - We believe inclusion and collaboration strengthens our work. We seek out the voices of those who often go unheard or face barriers to public participation.
- LEAD WITH EXCELLENCE
  - We lead on issues that advance the region. We believe in the power of data and the story it tells. We identify and share solutions and inspire others to adapt them for their communities.
- DRIVE INNOVATION
  - We are driven by the desire to find more efficient methods to achieve the most impact. We do this by seeking new solutions to old problems, taking calculated risks, and daring to try them.

# More Details on Action 02 Strategies

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## Strategy 03: Better align the 3 coordinated entry systems

### **More information on person-centered and trauma informed practices**

#### **Implement a quality improvement process that centers the experiences of BIPOC, Queer & Transgender populations and regularly evaluate experiences and outcomes**

This process should include leadership from people representing BIPOC, Queer, and Transgender communities that have experienced the coordinated entry system. It should utilize both qualitative and quantitative data analysis. Qualitative data is critical to better understand the true experience of marginalized communities. And the data analysis should be done through a racially explicit analysis.

#### **Implicit bias training for all CE staff and leadership**

It is critical for all staff who have direct service interactions with BIPOC and LGBTQ communities, and their managers, to undergo implicit bias training on a regular basis. These training help staff and leadership understand the ways in which they may be biased toward the behaviors or appearance of historically marginalized groups and how this bias can have a direct impact on the ability to obtain housing and end homelessness.

#### **Implement trauma-aware approach**

As reflected in the barriers, for the people experiencing the coordinated entry process, the process in itself has been experienced as traumatic. Pivoting towards a trauma-aware approach for coordinated entry staff is critical for improving the experiences of people experiencing active housing crises and reducing experiences of retraumatization.

Some key strategies that can be applied:

- Assessment questions:
  - Identify opportunity to use trauma-informed language within the coordinated entry assessment and assess for opportunities to address implicit bias

- Client Engagement:
  - Acknowledge the whole person, what they may be experiencing and ask consent
  - Be transparent on the type of information that may be asked of them
  - Bring the person (or families) into the planning process for housing match and placement – use accessible language and provide all information.
  - Be aware of the physical space where assessments or communication is taking place. Ensure people have access to quiet space and that also allows for safety and easy exit if they wish to leave at any point.
- Provide on-going support and care for staff impacted by secondary trauma. Work with the team to identify ways in which they would feel most supported emotionally and structurally.

# Resource Documents

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## Action 1

- This document helps us think about how to use narrative to influence change: [Changing Our Narrative About Narrative | Othering & Belonging Institute](#)
- These sites provide more substance on the ideas in transformative organizing. They can help you ground your approach: [DEMAND EVERYTHING | Steve Williams](#) & [Transformative Organizing – Towards Liberation of Self and Society](#)
- Liberation House provides a suite of supports that are grounded in Transformative Organizing. More info, to contact or hire them, see [liberationhouse.org – LiberationHouse](#)
- Power Mapping can be conducted in several different ways, and most involve identifying decision-makers along a matrix of support and influence. Here are a few examples to get started: [Power Mapping and Analysis – The Commons](#); [Power Mapping: A Tool for Strategy & Influence](#); [Power mapping template – The Change Agency](#)

## Action 2

- [SMAC Directors Council CE effort](#)
- [Metropolitan Council 2040 Housing Policy Plan](#)
- Report from Safe Housing Partnerships on recommendations on transformation Coordinated Entry Systems to increase survivor action to housing option. [Transforming Our Coordinated Entry Systems to Increase Survivors' Access to Housing Options](#)
- In partnership with Building Changes and four CoCs, C4 Innovations conducted an analysis designed to examine the potential for CES assessments to perpetuate racial inequities. [Coordinated Entry Systems: Racial Equity Analysis of Assessment Data](#)
- This document prepared by homelessness technical assistance providers provides helpful recommendations for how communities can thoughtfully build out equitable stakeholder engagement. [Untapped Expertise: Strategies for Stakeholder Engagement When Developing Your Coordinated Investment Plan](#)
- National Innovation Service blog on An Equitable Systems Transformation Framework for COVID-19. Provides domains to transform towards system change towards equity. <https://www.nis.us/blog>
- The Stella P Race & Ethnicity Analysis Guide provides technical instructions for communities who wish to run HMIS specific reports in preparation for system modeling: [Stella P Race and Ethnicity Analysis Guide](#)
- Coordinated Investment Planning – this spreadsheet is a framework for communities to define and quantify their need for housing supports and services in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to plan to fulfill these needs with existing and newly available

funding sources. [COVID-19 Homeless System Response: Rehousing and Coordinated Investment Planning Tool](#). COVID 19 Homeless System Response Equity Driven Changes to Coordinated Entry

- Technical Assistance Collaborative provides community examples of how communities are working with young people with lived experience creating payment equity. <https://www.tacinc.org/resources/the-gab-on-yabs/>

### Action 3

- The [Innovative Models in Health and Housing](#) brief, prepared by Mercy Housing and the Low Income Investment Fund for the California Endowment and the Kresge Foundation.
- Starting as a pilot project funded by the Melville Trust, [Secure Jobs Connecticut 2.0](#) works across the CoC and the public workforce system to increase employment opportunities for people experiencing homelessness. The model includes job navigators, network building with employers and other services, flex funding for transportation, childcare and other services, and case conferencing across systems.
- [One Roof](#) is a promising practice bringing together the child welfare system, homeless response system, and affordable housing behind the unifying goal of creating supportive housing for child welfare involved families. Their [8 Step Roadmap](#) to partnership offers a framework for partnering, goal setting, and implementing cross-system initiatives.