



STRATEGIC PLAN

Countywide plan for homelessness prevention 2026-2030

August 2025

Background: Homelessness prevention in Hennepin County

Hennepin County is committed to making homelessness rare, brief and nonrecurring and eliminating racial disparities in housing. Making homelessness rare, brief and nonrecurring requires a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach that prevents this traumatic experience for households at greatest risk, accelerates exits from homelessness into permanent housing for households currently in crisis, and supports those exiting homelessness to sustain their housing stability for the long term.

Homelessness prevention, the first prong in this approach, is an emerging discipline with a growing body of evidence that broadly points to the critical need for prevention in order to successfully address homelessness. Hennepin County is among a small group of early adopter communities that have invested resources in recent years to test and scale homelessness prevention strategies.

Hennepin County's prevention system originated with a focus on eviction prevention for its lowest-income renter households, given the prevalence of evictions, their connection to homelessness and adverse outcomes in other domains, and disparate impacts on communities of color. Evictions are the most visible form of housing loss. Ties to legal due process for tenants present clear opportunities for intervention. Hennepin County has molded several strategies around these intervention points and the needs and preferences of residents facing eviction. These include tenant navigation and triage, legal representation, and emergency rent assistance for low-income households at risk for eviction.

While eviction prevention remains a priority and critical pillar of Hennepin County's prevention system, eviction is not the only form of housing loss precipitating into homelessness. A recent needs assessment combining homelessness data and input from people with lived experience, providers, funders, and other partners has pointed to a multitude of pathways into homelessness. In fact, 95% of Hennepin County residents entering homelessness over the last three years (2022-2024) resided in three distinct high-risk housing situations immediately prior to their homelessness episode: (1) renter households at risk for eviction; (2) individuals and families in non-leased and unstable housing situations such as temporary stays with family or friends; and (3) people exiting justice and human service systems without a stable housing option upon discharge.

In response to the complexity in homelessness risk, this five-year plan represents an expanded, comprehensive approach that aims to disrupt these various pathways into homelessness. By fostering short- and long-term housing stability at scale among households experiencing these three high-risk housing situations, while prioritizing

resources for those at greatest risk (e.g. households within the lowest income bracket), Hennepin County's prevention system will maximally reduce the rate and volume of homelessness.

Planning process

Hennepin County facilitated a three-phased planning process to develop the Countywide Plan for Homelessness Prevention. These phases are summarized below.

Initial planning

The purpose of the initial planning was to establish baseline structure and definition for the plan, laying a foundation for more detailed planning work carried out in subsequent phases. Staff and partners worked toward the following deliverables in this phase:

- 1) Identification of a homelessness prevention framework
- 2) Establishment of a definition for "homelessness prevention"
- 3) Development of a North Star and top-level system goals

Needs assessment

The needs assessment phase centered around the development of a comprehensive mixed methods needs assessment. A steering committee involving Hennepin County staff, residents with lived experience of homelessness, and external partners led the needs assessment design, data collection, and analysis. Structured around the homelessness prevention framework and system goals, the needs assessment identified community-wide homelessness prevention needs and service gaps through the collection and analysis of the following:

- 1) Input from residents with lived experience, providers and other partners
- 2) Quantitative data from a variety of data systems. These insights directly informed the development of the Plan's objectives and strategies.

System planning

The system planning phase brought together residents with lived experience, providers, funders, and other homelessness prevention partners in the form of a System Planning Workgroup. This workgroup leveraged their collective expertise and the various insights from the needs assessment to develop a set of recommended objectives and strategies rolling up to each of the four system goals. Through multiple rounds of iteration and refinement, System Planning Workgroup recommendations as a whole and individual member feedback directly mapped to the plan's final objectives and strategies.

Prevention framework

To guide the overall direction and organization of its homelessness prevention system, Hennepin County has adopted the [United States Interagency Council on Homelessness federal framework for homelessness prevention](#), released in 2024. This framework organizes around three categories of homelessness prevention: (1) primary prevention; (2) diversion; and (3) rehousing and stabilization. Based on the target population for Hennepin County's homelessness prevention system (households at risk for literal homelessness) and given that the rehousing and stabilization category is specific to people currently experiencing or recently exited from homelessness, the primary prevention and diversion categories are most applicable.

Primary prevention promotes protective factors for housing stability for population groups that face heightened risks for homelessness (e.g. low-income renter households). Interventions might include eviction prevention, legal services, rental assistance (one-time, medium-term, or ongoing), and workforce development supports. Secondary prevention (also known as diversion) involves strategies for preventing homelessness among households whose current housing situation place them at imminent risk for sheltered or unsheltered homelessness (e.g. residents in temporary, unstable housing with family friends). All of the goals, objectives, and strategies laid out in this plan can be categorized as either primary or secondary prevention.

Definitions

Homelessness prevention systems across communities often vary in the populations they serve. While some prevention systems may limit their assistance to leaseholders or homeowners, others more expansively serve any high-risk population that isn't already in emergency shelter or sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation. Social service systems have also differed in their definition of homelessness, including HUD, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (select programs and funding streams) and the U.S. Department of Education.

Given this variance across federal agencies and prevention systems, it is critical for a clear and targeted prevention system to define "homelessness" and "homelessness prevention" for the purposes of its community, and its programs and services. Following from its North Star, Hennepin County has adopted the following definition:

Homelessness prevention includes promoting stable housing by increasing protective factors for those with highest risk of future homelessness and helping those who are at imminent risk of homelessness to resolve their housing crisis.

Applicable housing situations include households on leases, unstable temporary housing with friends or family, self-pay hotel/motel stays, and unstable exits from justice or human service systems (i.e. incarceration, foster care, treatment, hospitals, etc.).

North Star

Our homelessness prevention system's North Star is **to prevent homelessness for all Hennepin County residents.**

While homelessness affects and is affected by other domains (e.g. education, employment, behavioral health, justice, etc.), preventing homelessness with limited resources requires a clear point of orientation that guides resource uses and service design.

Through this North Star, our community can maximize the impact of limited resources, develop insights about service design that we can replicate and scale, and build a prevention system that is navigable, equitable, efficient, and targeted for those at greatest risk for homelessness.



Prevent homelessness for all
Hennepin County residents.

Goals, objectives, and strategies

Prevention system capacity

Hennepin County has received regular input from people with lived experience, providers, funders, and system partners, centering the need to strengthen coordination across agencies and programs, expanding service capacity, and improving efficiencies with delivering assistance.

These insights span across populations and relate to the functionality of the prevention system as a whole. This input was also emphasized during the needs assessment and system planning phases leading to this plan, including themes around improving alignment across prevention program processes and eligibility, centering best practices across all access points and services, reducing resident “runaround,” and expanding partnerships with property managers for the benefit of all housing situations and needs.

These themes most clearly roll up to a system goal that aims to strengthen and grow the capacity of the prevention system in service of equity, effectiveness, and efficiency. Six objectives, each with corresponding strategies, nest under this system goal, each representing stakeholder feedback around critical opportunities and needs for expansion and/or improvement. Given that these objectives do not pertain directly to programming for residents, we did not develop metrics.

Goal 1: Strengthen and grow the capacity of the prevention system

Objective 1: Ensure processes, tools, and services are low-barrier, culturally responsive, and accessible for all populations at risk for homelessness.

Metric: Not applicable

Strategy 1a: Integrate culturally responsive and culturally specific services across access points and programs, prioritizing disproportionately impacted populations and communities.

Strategy 1b: Allow for and embed peer supports in service models.

Objective 2: Refine and formalize an advisory and governance structure spanning the homelessness prevention system, centering the voices of various stakeholders including people with lived experience.

Metric: Not applicable

Strategy 2a: Conduct a landscape analysis of compliance needs and best practices related to partner engagement and effective system governance.
Strategy 2b: Convene an advisory body with expertise, including people with lived experience, to guide engagement, access, and services for households in unstable, temporary housing.
Strategy 2c: Convene an advisory body with expertise, including people with lived experience, to guide engagement, access, and service interventions for people exiting justice and human service systems.
Objective 3: Test and refine targeting approaches to effectively and equitably prioritize support services and financial assistance for residents at greatest risk for homelessness.
<i>Metric: Not applicable</i>
Strategy 3a: Develop and test predictive models for homelessness for application within prevention programs and across system partners.
Strategy 3b: Expand data sharing and integration across systems and providers.
Strategy 3c: Refine screening and assessment tools to align with risk factors most associated with homelessness.
Objective 4: Reduce resident "runaround" through aligned eligibility criteria, streamlined referrals, and coordinated service delivery across all agencies and programs.
<i>Metric: Not applicable</i>
Strategy 4a: Align eligibility criteria, forms, and documentation practices across prevention providers.
Strategy 4b: Develop and implement a system for managing financial assistance and support services in real-time across prevention providers and programs.
Strategy 4c: Create and provide training on a real-time roster of prevention and prevention-related resources (including eligibility criteria) used across prevention providers.
Strategy 4d: Maximally reduce financial assistance payment timelines through streamlined processing and payment processes.
Strategy 4e: Reduce or eliminate denial requirements as a precondition for eligibility.

Strategy 4f: Reduce duplication of assistance through coordination and integration across all prevention programs and funding streams.
Objective 5: Improve access to non-housing specific resources that support short- and long-term self-sufficiency and housing stability for residents at greatest risk for homelessness.
<i>Metric: Not applicable</i>
Strategy 5a: Build partnerships with workforce development partners and programs.
Strategy 5b: Leverage and connect residents to case management services available through partner systems, including health and behavioral health.
Strategy 5c: Provide training to prevention providers, partners, and advocates on non-housing specific resources available to people at risk homelessness across domains.
Objective 6: Build partnerships with property owners to expand access to housing opportunities, prevent eviction filings, and reduce unnecessary barriers for tenants to access and retain housing.
<i>Metric: Not applicable</i>
Strategy 6a: Build awareness and utilization of pre-filing eviction prevention resources among property managers.
Strategy 6b: Increase direct access to non-subsidized rental unit vacancies for prevention system participants through formal and/or informal unit inventories.
Strategy 6c: Engage and educate property managers about tenant-level barriers to housing access and the impacts of tenant screening practices.

Eviction prevention

Hennepin County’s longest-standing focus in the homelessness prevention arena is eviction prevention. Evictions disproportionately impact communities of color—Black and Indigenous households most acutely—and are associated with adverse impacts across other domains including health, education, and housing stability. Most relevant to the Hennepin County homelessness prevention system North Star, among the 19% of people experiencing homelessness who had previously lived in rental housing, the vast majority lost their housing due to an eviction. In response to disparities in eviction risk and adverse impacts of eviction at the individual and community levels, the second goal

established by this plan aims to improve housing stability among low-income renter households at imminent risk for eviction.

Goal 2:

Build housing stability among low-income renter households at imminent risk for eviction.

Objective 1: Sustain/expand support services and financial assistance for renter households at greatest risk for homelessness, including those at persistent risk for eviction, to address underlying barriers to housing stability.

Metric: Reduce persistent risk for eviction by 25% (measured by the rate of repeat emergency rental assistance requests over a 12-month period).

Strategy 1a: Test the efficacy of housing focused case management in reducing persistent risk for eviction.

Strategy 1b: Leverage sustainable sources of case management (e.g. Medicaid-reimbursable services) to expand and target housing focused support services for renter households facing persistent eviction risk.

Objective 2: Sustain/expand emergency rent assistance availability for low-income households facing eviction for nonpayment of rent.

Metric: Increase emergency rental assistance coverage to 75% of all tenants with an eviction court filing for nonpayment of rent.

Strategy 2a: Identify and secure new funding streams, both onetime and ongoing, across public and private sources.

Strategy 2b: Demonstrate the impact of emergency rent assistance on housing stability and outcomes in other relevant domains.

Strategy 2c: Convene an advisory body with expertise, including people with lived experience, to guide engagement, access, and service interventions for low-income renter households.

Objective 3: Address underlying barriers to tenant appearance at housing court with a focus on disproportionately impacted cultural groups and communities.

<i>Metric: Increase the tenant appearance rate at housing court to 75%.</i>
Strategy 3a: Partner with community-based organizations and people with lived experience representing disproportionately impacted communities to identify barriers to tenant appearance rates.
Strategy 3b: Develop and implement culturally relevant strategies, such as culturally specific outreach, to mitigate underlying barriers to appearance at housing court.
Objective 4: Sustain/expand utilization of legal representation available to low-income tenants facing eviction.
<i>Metric: To be developed after establishing a baseline.</i>
Strategy 4a: Promote awareness of and access to legal representation among tenants with past due rent both before and after court filings.
Strategy 4b: Target outreach promoting legal representation with communities and populations at greatest risk for eviction.

Building housing stability among people in precarious housing

Of the three primary pathways into homelessness identified by the system-wide needs assessment, exiting a precarious housing situation was the most common. Three out of five Hennepin County households entering homelessness between 2022 and 2024 previously resided in precarious housing, including temporary stays with family or friends and self-pay stays in motels or hotels. These situations are often unstable, and are driven by barriers—financial or otherwise—for a household to obtain or retain a permanent rental housing situation. Further, these households are given minimal advance notice (as short as 24 hours on average) when they are forced to leave their housing, as compared to several weeks for renter households who are facing eviction and afforded legal due process. Many households are unable to arrange for new temporary or permanent housing within such limited advance notice, resulting in an episode of homelessness.

Given the prevalence of this pathway into homelessness in Hennepin County, our community must build a prevention system that offers support and resources tailored to the needs of households in precarious housing.

Goal 3:

Foster short- and long-term housing stability for households residing in unstable, temporary housing situations.

Objective 1: Build out new, or enhance existing, county and community-based access points to effectively respond to the needs of residents in unstable, temporary housing.

Metric: To be developed after establishing a baseline.

Strategy 1a: Identify barriers and needs related to making timely requests for assistance among households residing in unstable, temporary housing at greatest risk for homelessness.

Strategy 1b: Leverage the capacity and/or functionality of similar access points, where practicable, that serve other subpopulations at risk for homelessness (e.g. renter households facing eviction and people seeking emergency shelter).

Objective 2: Develop and target outreach strategies to identify and engage households in unstable, temporary housing.

Metric: To be developed after establishing a baseline.

Strategy 2a: Establish baseline volumes of requests for assistance among households in unstable, temporary housing in order to measure the impact of new or expanded outreach strategies.

Strategy 2b: Identify and test effective and culturally responsive outreach strategies for households in unstable, temporary housing.

Objective 3: Ensure assistance for households in precarious housing is flexible and tailored to stabilizing in both leased and non-leased housing situations.

Metric: Not applicable

Strategy 3a: Review and revise relevant policies and practices to ensure assistance is tailored to households seeking stable housing in both leased and non-leased situations.

Strategy 3b: Develop a toolkit and training program to strengthen the capacity of community-based providers serving residents at risk for homelessness to support those in precarious housing to stabilize in housing for the short and long term.

Strategy 3c: Support residents seeking leased housing to opt into sustainable, reasonable, and affordable lease agreements.
Objective 4: Sustain/expand coverage of support services and financial assistance for residents in precarious housing to include all ZIP codes and subpopulations countywide.
<i>Metric: Expand support service and financial assistance coverage to serve 500 high-risk households residing in unstable, temporary housing annually.</i>
Strategy 4a: Leverage sustainable sources of case management (e.g. Medicaid-reimbursable services) to expand and target housing focused support services for households in unstable, temporary housing facing the greatest risk for homelessness.
Strategy 4b: Leverage existing system resources available to at-risk households in unstable, temporary housing situations (e.g. Foster Youth to Independence vouchers).
Strategy 4c: Identify and pursue flexible funding opportunities beyond public funding sources such as private and corporate philanthropy.
Strategy 4d: Scale School to Housing to serve families in all school districts in Hennepin County.

Preventing exits from systems into homelessness

People experiencing homelessness are more likely to have interacted with justice and human service systems over their lifetime as compared to their housed peers. For example, incarceration rates nationwide are ten times higher for people who have experienced at least one homelessness episode than those who haven't experienced an episode of homelessness. In Hennepin County, one in five youth experiencing homelessness have experience in foster care over their lifetime. This phenomenon, frequently referred to as the "Institution-to-Homelessness Pipeline," applies to both interactions with institutions over one's lifetime and instances in which an exit from a justice or human service system directly precipitates a person's experience of homelessness. One in six people entering homelessness in Hennepin County between 2022 and 2024 reported they had exited an incarceration, foster care, behavioral health treatment, or hospital setting immediately prior.

To equitably and effectively prevent homelessness for *all* residents, our community must disrupt pathways into homelessness from institutions. Given the complexity of, and variance in, policies and practices across systems, prevention strategies for people exiting institutions depend on cross-system partnerships that leverage the resources

and expertise of both the housing and homelessness system and justice and human service system partners.

Goal 4: Promote housing stability for people involved in and exiting justice and human service systems.

Objective 1: Integrate and expand housing-focused discharge planning in partnership with justice and human service systems, with a priority on programs and institutional settings from which residents exit to homelessness at the highest volume and rate.

Metric: To be developed after establishing a baseline.

Strategy 1a: Create real-time visibility for justice and human service system partners into households at greatest risk for homelessness.

Strategy 1b: Assess for refinement opportunities and constraints in current discharge planning policies and practices across systems.

Strategy 1c: Deliver training and technical assistance to high-priority justice and human service system partners to bolster a focus on housing stability in discharge planning policies and practices.

Objective 2: Sustain/expand the inventory and coverage of support services and financial assistance for people exiting systems.

Metric: To be developed after establishing a baseline.

Strategy 2a: In partnership with public housing authorities, maximize administrative and services capacity for special voucher programs including Foster Youth to Independence, Family Unification Program, and others.

Strategy 2b: Leverage sustainable sources of case management (e.g. Medicaid-reimbursable services) to expand and target housing focused support services for households exiting systems facing the greatest risk for homelessness.

Strategy 2c: Identify and leverage available resources (funding and services) across justice and human service systems for services and financial assistance targeted to people at greatest risk for homelessness.

Objective 3: Explore and implement, where practicable, a flexible financial assistance fund to support stable housing access for residents exiting systems.

Metric: To be developed after establishing a baseline.

Strategy 3a: Identify and leverage flexible resources (funding and services) across justice and human service systems.

Objective 4: Reduce and/or mitigate policy and practice-driven barriers to housing access for residents currently or formerly involved in justice and human service systems.

Metric: Not applicable

Strategy 4a: Promote pathways to, and resources for, criminal records expungement for populations at greatest risk for homelessness.

Strategy 4b: Deliver tenant rights education to high-barrier populations, including residents with histories of systems involvement.

Strategy 4c: Promote flexible and low-barrier tenant screening practices among property managers.