The Problem
On any given night in Wisconsin, there are over 3,000 people experiencing literal homelessness.

An additional 10,000 people have called 211 asking for housing help since January 2023.

Housing stability is crucial to economic and community health and well-being.

Housing First
Housing First is a paradigm for solving homelessness.

The two basic principles are: 1) housing dollars to support people getting and maintaining housing; 2) wraparound supports to help people keep their housing.

The State of Homelessness and Housing Instability in Wisconsin

Over 3,000 Wisconsin residents experience homelessness on any given night. Not only does homelessness cause trauma to the individuals and families who experience it, it also increases the likelihood of chronic and acute illness, substance abuse and a child’s inability to learn.

Homelessness impacts the community as a whole. According to the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, one person experiencing chronic homelessness could cost taxpayers between $30,000 and $50,000 per year. These costs may result from unnecessary hospital emergency rooms and inpatient utilization, detox programs and other behavioral health treatment, the justice system and shelter use.

Studies have shown that providing permanent housing under a Housing First model for those experiencing homelessness sharply decreases usage of emergency services resulting in improved quality of life for those in housing and a reduction in taxpayer dollars spent on providing care.

The Solution

Using a Housing First paradigm focuses on housing people, rather than focusing on emergency services. This paradigm can be used when considering homelessness prevention and homeless interventions. The solution is elegant: provide support to house people and provide supportive services to keep people housed.

We support the many promising measures in the Governor’s budget that support Housing First, including:
- $1 million GPR in each fiscal year for the Homelessness Prevention Program
- $1 million GPR in each year for the creation of a new diversion program
- $700,000 GPR in each fiscal year for the State Shelter Subsidy Grant
- $5 million GPR in each fiscal year for the Housing Assistance Program
- $500,000 TANF in each fiscal year for the Homeless Case Management Services Grant
- $250,000 GPR in each fiscal year increase for the Skills Enhancement Grant at the Department of Children and Families
- $2 million GPR in each fiscal year to create a new housing quality standards grant to increase the availability in quality affordable housing
- $600,000 GPR in each fiscal year to create a grant for housing navigation
- $1 million GPR in each fiscal year for a new rental assistance program for homeless veterans
- Creating a Medicaid community health benefit that invests $25,500,000 all funds over the biennium for nonmedical services to reduce and prevent health disparities that result from the economic and social determinants of health. Services include housing referrals, nutritional mentoring, stress management, and other services that would positively impact an individual’s economic and social condition

We encourage Wisconsin decision-makers to:

- **Increase State funding of housing assistance.** Currently, most of the housing assistance for households experiencing homelessness in Wisconsin comes from the federal government. If the State put more resources towards housing assistance, we could drastically reduce the number of people who are homeless. There are increases in homeless assistance in this current budget, but we need a strong investment in this area to provide housing assistance to everyone experiencing homelessness. For **$36 million annually**, we could provide assistance to match the 3,000 households experience on any given night.

- **Expand flexible State funding for tenancy support services.** Recently, the State has applied to expand its use of Medicaid to include tenancy support services. Expanding this implementation will free up agency funds for additional services. Furthermore, the State should increase its investment in housing navigation and case management to provide for sufficient service dollars for ACT (Assertive Community Treatment) model service delivery in supportive housing programs. This model creates a whole treatment team to wrap around tenants, including housing support, behavioral health treatment and therapy, primary care, employment support, and more.

- **Motivate property owners to be a part of the solution.** Incentivizing property owners to work with homeless service programs through financial means may help increase the housing stock available. Furthermore, legislators should pass regulations that ensure tenants are treated fairly and have quality housing. One way to do this is to pass anti-discrimination regulations around accepting vouchers for payment, and limiting requirements that property owners are able to give applicants, such as having a specific amount of income compared with the rent amount.