



## CITY OF WATERLOO HOUSING TASKFORCE

WATERLOO, IA 50703



**Date:** May 6, 2021  
**To:** Waterloo Housing Taskforce; Mayor Hart  
**From:** Annie Crooks; Kevin Kim Larson; Sophia Shubatt; Miranda Vermeer  
**Cc:** Carrie Schuettepelz; Travis Kraus; Iowa Initiative for Sustainable Communities  
**Re:** Homelessness in Waterloo  
**Appendix:** Coordinated Entry & Homeless Resources Infographic; BoS CoC Inventory

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### INTRODUCTION

Homelessness in Waterloo is an issue that poses significant economic, logistical, and ethical dilemmas for the city.

### SUMMARY

The problem of homelessness in Waterloo is exacerbated by a lack of coordination among stakeholders. As Waterloo seeks to address housing issues directly, tackling homelessness service gaps is an urgent step towards economic revitalization, and improvements in both quality of housing and quality of life for residents.

### BACKGROUND

The Waterloo area is currently served by eight federally funded providers which have 142 beds for those who need shelter. Put in context, this is one bed for every 478 residents. In contrast, the slightly smaller city of Dubuque, Iowa has a ratio of 1 bed for every 292 residents, and even the much larger city of Cedar Rapids has a much smaller ratio of beds to residents (1:263) than Waterloo. This finding is indicative of a serious need for additional homelessness resources.

Of Waterloo's beds, 71 are considered "emergency shelter," and are meant for those experiencing sudden or episodic homelessness. There are also 39 beds designated as transitional housing, or temporary services. However, studies have shown that emergency and transitional housing do not address the root causes of homelessness and take no steps toward actually ending the problem. Rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing on the other hand are considered best practices in homelessness service and outreach (See Best Practices). Waterloo currently has 17 permanent supportive housing beds and one rapid rehousing program with 15 beds. (See Appendix II)

Permanent housing is not only shown to be a more effective long-term solution to homelessness, but also has been proven to be economically beneficial to a city:

1. The average cost of providing permanent housing to an individual is \$12,800 per year.
2. Whereas a chronically homeless individual costs a taxpayer nearly \$36,000 per year (national average).
3. When provided with a permanent housing solution, these costs were reduced on average by 49.5 percent.

Based on these national averages, taxpayers could save nearly \$5,000 per chronically homeless individual housed each year.<sup>1</sup>

## STAKEHOLDERS

- **Iowa Balance of State Continuum of Care (IA BoS CoC)** - The Iowa Balance of State CoC coordinates homelessness programs across the state while also collecting data and communicating best practices. The organization would support greater participation in the CoC system to make a more encompassing network.
- **Waterloo City Council & Mayor Hart** - City leadership has an interest in improving the state of homelessness and obtaining federal and state funding. They would want to address the economic, moral, and logistical issues that accompany having a population of individuals experiencing homelessness as efficiently and ethically as possible.
- **Local Shelters & Programs** - Some shelters and programs may be opposed to joining because receiving federal funds means having to follow certain rules, including having low barriers to entry. Getting these programs on board would mean better collaboration between organizations and thus coverage for individuals experiencing homelessness.

## BEST PRACTICES

- **Detroit, Michigan Coordinated Entry System** - Detroit is considered to be a leader in regards to addressing homelessness. One way that Detroit leads the nation is its implementation and utilization of their coordinated entry system, called CAM Detroit. As required by HUD, CAM Detroit works with service providers throughout the Detroit area to connect the most at-risk individuals to housing and homelessness services. One aspect of the coordinated entry system that makes it so successful is the coordinated oversight provided by the CoC, the Homelessness Action Network of Detroit (HAND). HAND through their CAM Governance Committee, manage coordination among service providers in Detroit, assess the effectiveness of services, and release reports on areas of improvement for the CAM system. Detroit's success in creating a coordinated system is evident with a decrease in homelessness by 24 percent between 2016 and 2019.<sup>2</sup>
- **Iowa City, Iowa Permanent Supportive Housing** - Iowa City is a comparable city to Waterloo with a population of around 75,000 in 2019. Like Waterloo, Iowa City works under the state of Iowa Balance of State Continuum of Care system. Iowa City is an excellent example of a city who works with the Balance of State CoC to apply for state and federal funding to establish more permanent housing and rapid re-housing solutions in Iowa City. In 2017, the Johnson County Local Homelessness Coordinating Board was awarded 2.7 million dollars from a CoC homeless program grant to fund their housing first initiative called FUSE. This project has allowed the construction of permanent supportive housing units in Iowa City called Cross Park Place.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Ending Chronic Homelessness Saves Taxpayers Money." National Alliance to End Homelessness, October 18, 2018. <https://endhomelessness.org/resource/ending-chronic-homelessness-saves-taxpayers-money/>.

<sup>2</sup> "Annual Report for the Detroit Continuum of Care - 2019 State of Homelessness." Detroit : Homelessness Action Network of Detroit , December 2019.

<sup>3</sup> "FUSE -Housing First." Johnson County Local Homeless Coordinating Board. Accessed April 25, 2021. <http://www.jchomeless.org/fuse---housing-first.html>.

- **Seattle, Washington Resource Accessibility** - Seattle, Washington leads the nation not only in establishing a wide variety of programs and resources for individuals experiencing homelessness, but also in making these resources widely accessible through their State of Washington 2-1-1 system. This system encompasses website, phone and email services that are designed for connecting those experiencing need to appropriate services in their area. This system's website is exemplary in its layout, where 10 areas of need and the services available for each area are easily accessible on the front page of the site. Under the Homelessness and Housing section, there are five different housing resources available to choose from, where visitors can select the solution they are seeking. Once a desired solution is selected, the user is brought to an interactive map that shows service providers closest to the individual and what services each resource provides. In addition, visitors can search for resources by the problem they are experiencing to find solutions. Because the Washington 2-1-1 system can also be accessed via phone or email, these resources are accessible to those who do not have reliable internet services.<sup>4</sup>

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- **Revitalize and expand the Homeless Coordinating Board** - Through conversations with stakeholders, we have established that one of the main barriers to making progress on homelessness in Waterloo is the lack of coordination, especially with the IA BoS CoC. This board should include providers such as the Friends of the Family, Salvation Army, etc. as well as representatives from Waterloo, Black Hawk County, Cedar Falls, Black Hawk Veteran Affairs, and the University of Northern Iowa. Coordination is a necessary step to alleviate administrative costs, and deliver better housing for unhoused residents.
- **Focus resources on housing solutions, in addition to emergency solutions** - Waterloo's housing resources should be oriented towards permanent supportive housing, rapid rehousing, and individual data tracking. Doing so gives unhoused residents a better shot at becoming productive members of society, and reducing costs for providing services.<sup>5</sup>
- **Increase accessibility of information for those needing assistance** - For those with unstable housing situations, as well as the chronically unhoused, access to all the resources available to them is crucial. This means an easily understandable website with resources clearly laid out which directs people to the appropriate agency or city staff member who can help them with their specific needs. Offline printed resources are also useful and should be distributed widely among community partners. Anticipating the needs of residents keeps them in stable housing, and enables the city to reduce spending on services which are utilized by homeless residents due to emergency services, mental health emergency care, and other services.<sup>6</sup>

## **NEXT STEPS**

- **Organize the Homelessness Coordinating Board** - An initial action that can be taken is to identify potential members of the Homeless Coordinating Board, and begin structuring this body so as to include community members, the IA Bos CoC, and regional partners. This action demonstrates the City's active commitment to seriously addressing homelessness.
- **Obtain funding** - Seeking out additional resources is an urgent step to assist with homelessness. The Homeless Coordinating Board should see what resources are currently being sought, where opportunities lie, and who is responsible for ensuring grants, and

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<sup>4</sup> "What Do You Need Help with?" Washington 2-1-1. Washington 2-1-1. Accessed April 25, 2021. <https://search.wa211.org/>.

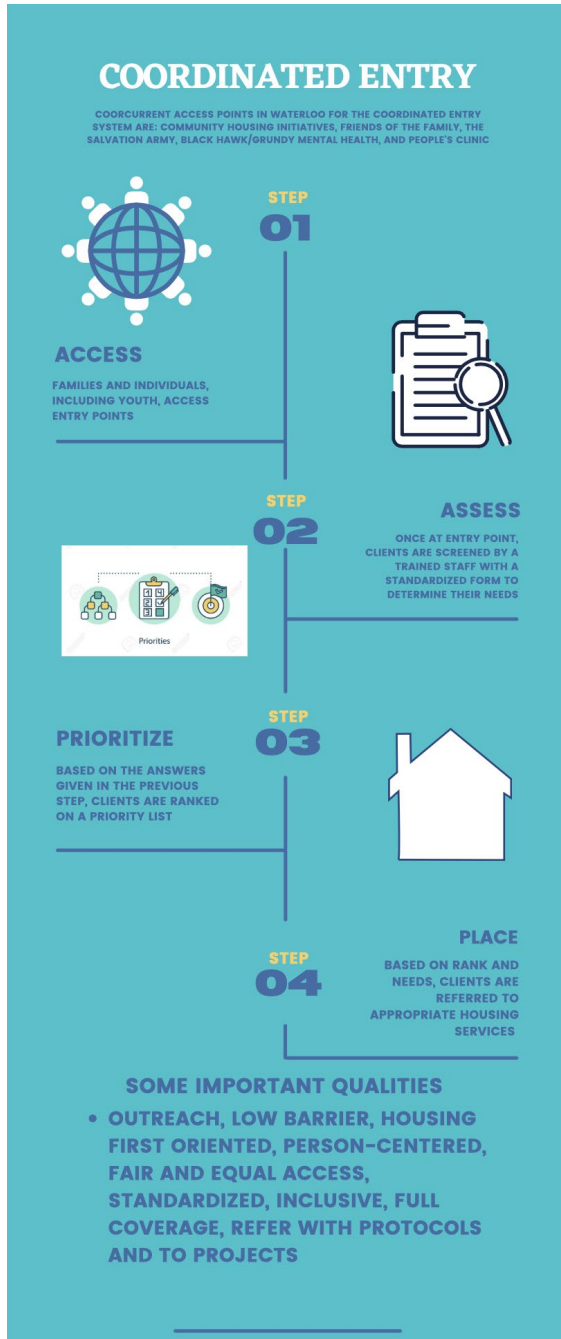
<sup>5</sup> Fisher, Benjamin W., Lindsay Mayberry, Marybeth Shinn, and Jill Khadduri. "Leaving Homelessness Behind: Housing Decisions among Families Exiting Shelter." *Housing Policy Debate* 24, no. 2 (January 1, 2014): 364–86.

<sup>6</sup> Burt, Martha. "Strategies for Preventing Homelessness," U.S. Department of Housing And Urban Development, May 2005.

funding is secured. A coordinated approach allows for a more efficient use of limited resources, and thus should be prioritized by the City.

- **Compile information** - Information on resources must be made easily available for housing insecure community members. This information will be made available on the Housing Taskforce website, and in print materials (see Appendix I). To create these materials, all available resources must be compiled, and organized. Doing so will both assist community members in need, and help inform the Homeless Coordinating Board's actions by providing a comprehensive understanding on the state of homelessness in Waterloo.

## APPENDIX I - Infographics



Coordinated Entry - [Link](#)



Homelessness Resources - [Link](#)

## APPENDIX II - Inventory

Inventory of Federally Funded Homelessness Resources in Waterloo:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1EajPW9vDegtKlgjL426CjjwapBAZ1FZ3PC1fJj6xey8/edit?usp=sharing>