

# Homelessness Mitigation Plan 2022 Legislative Report



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This report can be provided in another format upon request.

## Table of contents

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>Executive summary</b> .....                                    | <b>2</b>  |
| Recommendations for the Minnesota Department of Corrections ..... | 3         |
| Recommendations to the legislature.....                           | 4         |
| <b>I. Background</b> .....  | <b>5</b>  |
| Legislation .....   | 5         |
| Exploration of the problem.....                                   | 6         |
| <b>II. Journey to the present</b> .....                           | <b>18</b> |
| Approaches in the work.....                                       | 18        |
| The shaping of the recommendations.....                           | 21        |
| Intersections internal to the DOC.....                            | 33        |
| Intersections outside the DOC.....                                | 36        |
| <b>III. Recommendations</b> .....                                 | <b>38</b> |
| Recommendations for the DOC.....                                  | 38        |
| Recommendations for the legislature .....                         | 41        |
| Recommendations aligned with legislative requirements .....       | 45        |
| <b>IV. Metrics for measuring success</b> .....                    | <b>46</b> |

# Executive summary

As the third largest state agency, the Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC) is responsible for operating 11 adult and juvenile facilities and providing community supervision in 52 of 87 Minnesota counties.<sup>1</sup> In 2021, the average daily population of DOC facilities was 7,663. During this year, DOC saw 3,752 admissions and 5,005 releases, of which 3,683 were to supervised release from its facilities.<sup>2</sup>

Homelessness is a critical issue within the State of Minnesota and a barrier to the successful reintegration and housing stability of individuals leaving Minnesota prisons and for those on correctional supervision within communities. Research has shown a correlation between experiences of homelessness and recidivism. This does not mean that persons who experience homelessness are dangerous; instead, it illuminates that housing stability is foundational to success in reentry from incarceration and that the corrections system can do more to support housing stability and prevent homelessness. Individuals facing homelessness after incarceration are vulnerable to more involvement in the justice system when they cannot follow the conditions of correctional supervision.<sup>3</sup> They may not be able to maintain a stable residence, for example, and may lack transportation options to meet with corrections agents. It is important to note these are technical violations of release and not new criminal acts.

For the first time in the history of the State of Minnesota, the DOC worked with the legislature in 2021 to require itself to develop a homelessness mitigation plan, and to report data to the legislature and the public. This report is the result of this collaborative mandate. Although the DOC is the author of this report, the information detailed within is the result of efforts and voices of hundreds of people across the state who are deeply connected to, involved in, work in, and impacted by the corrections system. The recommendations in this report arose out of the collaborative efforts of DOC frontline professionals, partnerships with state agencies, correctional service delivery system partners, community service providers, and persons with lived experience of homelessness. As a result, the implementation and success of these recommendations will rely on the shared accountability and collaboration of these entities working together toward a common goal.

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<sup>1</sup> Minnesota Department of Corrections, *Correctional Delivery Systems*, February 2022, [https://mn.gov/doc/assets/Correctional%20Delivery%20Systems\\_tcm1089-461952.pdf](https://mn.gov/doc/assets/Correctional%20Delivery%20Systems_tcm1089-461952.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Minnesota Department of Corrections, *Minnesota Department of Corrections Adult Prison Population Summary, as of 7/1/2021*, July 2021, [https://mn.gov/doc/assets/Adult%20Prison%20Population%20Summary%207-1-2021\\_tcm1089-493212.pdf](https://mn.gov/doc/assets/Adult%20Prison%20Population%20Summary%207-1-2021_tcm1089-493212.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> "Homelessness After Reentry Leads to Higher Recidivism Rates," *Interrogating Justice*, April 30, 2021, <https://interrogatingjustice.org/challenges-after-release/homelessness-after-reentry-leads-to-higher-recidivism-rates/>.

## The Problem

**25%** of releases from Minnesota Correctional Facilities (MCFs) were released to homelessness in calendar year 2021.

**57%** of releases from MCFs to homelessness in 2021 represented persons who identify as **Black, Indigenous, and/or persons of color (BIPOC)**.



## 2021 Session Laws

The Department of Corrections must create a **homelessness mitigation plan** that includes:

- **Redesigning of business practices and policies** to boost efforts to prevent homelessness for all persons released from prison;
- Efforts to **increase interagency and intergovernmental collaboration** between state, local, and tribal governmental units to identify and leverage shared resources;
- **Development of internal metrics** for the agency to report on its progress toward implementing the plan and achieving the plan's goals.



## The Recommendations

### Recommendations for the Minnesota Department of Corrections

1. **Conduct equity reviews** on all DOC policies to promote consistency across the department and equitable access to transformational services and supports for staff, incarcerated people, people on supervision, and the public.
2. **Design and implement training** of the newly revised Agent Assignment Release Planning Policy 203.018. Communication and support of the revisions are critical to ensure staff implement the policy as intended.
3. **Implement a Collaborative Case Consultation process** across all MCFs and Community Corrections Act Agencies. This pilot program has shown positive results and should be used more widely.
4. **Implement the Self-Reported Assessment tool** across MCFs. This is a foundational piece of the agency's person-centered approach and will provide the DOC with the granular data it needs to further improve services. The improved data will help:
  - Align and target DOC housing resources to meet needs of individuals leaving MCFs and persons on correctional supervision within communities across the state.

- Improve business processes and practices for helping individuals who are corrections-system-involved plan for housing stability.
- Connect with community stakeholders across the state to develop person-centered and community-centered resources and services to mitigate homelessness and support housing stability.

## Recommendations to the legislature

### Recommendations for the DOC to provide direct service to mitigate homelessness and support housing stability

1. Allocate permanent funding to the DOC for **temporary rental assistance**.
2. Invest in **culturally specific, trauma-informed housing and homeless resources and services** that are inclusive to individuals exiting jail, prison institutions, and treatment facilities.
3. Fund **two full-time Housing Coordinators** within the DOC. These professionals would be a resource to all corrections community partners across all delivery systems.
4. Provide resource gap funding to **connect individuals exiting MCFs with new Medical Assistance housing stabilization benefits**.
5. Invest in **data systems to connect the DOC to other state and federal systems**. Better system collaboration would help the corrections system more effectively support people exiting incarceration and on correctional supervision within communities.

To support long-term housing stability, all foundational components that contribute to this goal must be addressed: mental health, physical health, employment, education, and pro-social supports. The DOC recognizes the value of the interconnectedness of these components and the recommendations detailed later in the report reflect the development of this holistic approach. Furthermore, the lives of people who experience homelessness and housing instability show up across systems. As required by statute, state agencies must collaborate across systems and function as one. The legislature should support that work in the following ways:

- Reduce policy barriers that prohibit access to housing and homeless resources
- Appropriate funding resources to increase the amount and accessibility of housing and shelter services
- Create affordable and accessible housing
- Appropriate funding resources to create and expand adequate services and supports for housing stability.

# I. Background

## Legislation

In May 2021, the Minnesota Legislature created new annual reporting requirements for the Department of Corrections (DOC) related to homelessness and homeless releases (Laws of Minnesota 2021, Reg. Sess. Chapter 24, Section 3). [Minn. Stat. § 241.068](#) requires the DOC to file a written report with the legislature by February 15 of each year, reporting on a variety of data related to homelessness and releases from state prisons.

The statute also requires the development of a homelessness mitigation plan for individuals released from prison in Minnesota. Beginning in 2024, the annual report will contain information detailing progress made under the homelessness mitigation plan.

At minimum, the homelessness mitigation plan must include:

1. redesigning of business practices and policies to boost efforts to prevent homelessness for all persons released from prison;
2. efforts to increase interagency and intergovernmental collaboration between state, local and tribal governmental units to identify and leverage shared resources; and
3. development of internal metrics for the agency to report on its progress toward implementing the plan and achieving the plan's goals.

The plan is responsive to these minimum requirements, and the DOC acknowledges that this is only the beginning. This plan will not resolve all the issues that currently impact the ability of many people leaving prison to get adequate housing. It is a start, and the work will make a meaningful difference.

The development of this plan is 20 months in the making and has involved the voices of many individuals, including corrections systems professionals from all delivery systems<sup>4</sup>, community partners, and impacted persons. DOC staff engaged people using a variety of methods:

- Engaging online through social media and surveys (247 participants, and 28 surveys completed).
- Connecting with individuals virtually and in person:
  - Virtual Statewide Transitions Coalitions with approximately 150 participants.
  - Approximately 700 referrals for assistance for persons facing homelessness, either in the community or exiting from Minnesota Correctional Facilities.
- Facilitating engagements that included over 500 professionals, impacted persons, and community partners.

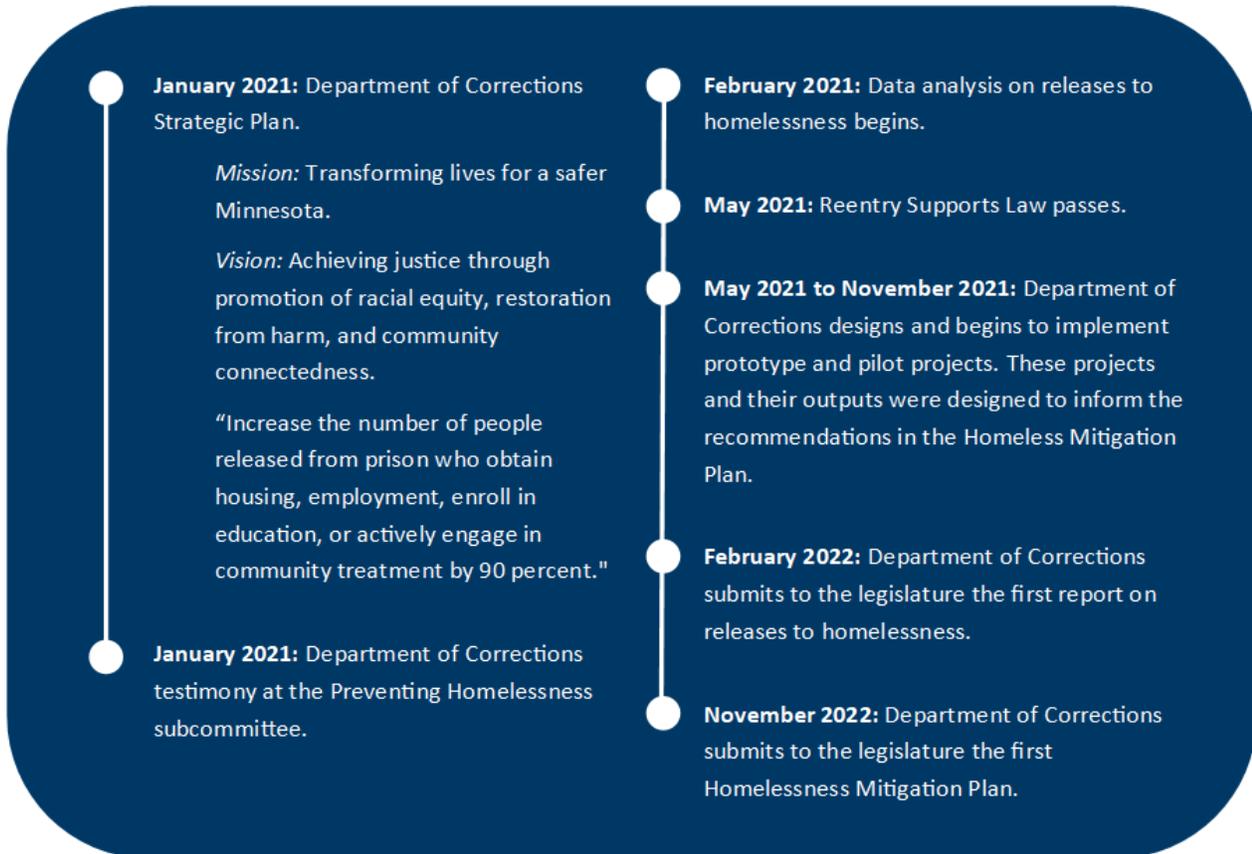
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<sup>4</sup> Minnesota Department of Corrections, *Correctional Delivery Systems*, February 2022, [https://mn.gov/doc/assets/Correctional%20Delivery%20Systems\\_tcm1089-461952.pdf](https://mn.gov/doc/assets/Correctional%20Delivery%20Systems_tcm1089-461952.pdf).

- Surveying corrections system leaders across the nation through the Correctional Leaders Association.<sup>5</sup>

The DOC is grateful to everyone who generously shared their lived experiences and time without compensation from the DOC. These contributions are invaluable and are the foundation for this plan. This report is the collective voice and perspectives of all these individuals, inside and outside the DOC. Continued connection with these stakeholders will serve to refine and transform practices, policies, and systems change within the corrections system in the State of Minnesota.

**Figure 1. Timeline of recent DOC work to end homelessness**



## Exploration of the problem

This section provides background on how individuals within the corrections system intersect with the problem of homelessness, and what broad roles the system can play to end homelessness.

<sup>5</sup> DOC Commissioner Paul Schnell requested information on data tracking, policy, and processes related to homelessness, homelessness mitigation, and housing stability support. A few states indicated they prohibit releases to homelessness and mitigate this issue through investment in community-based housing resources. Other respondents stated they have no data, policy, and/or plan.

Below are definitions of key terms used throughout this report. In the 2022 Homelessness Release Report, releases to homelessness were identified as “sheltered” and “unsheltered” releases.<sup>6</sup> These terms have different operational definitions within the homeless and housing service system. For clarity, the DOC will begin referring to these releases as Homeless Releases to Known Locations and Homeless Releases to Unknown Locations. To authentically capture the problem of homelessness and housing instability experienced by individuals who are corrections-system-involved, the DOC shaped definitions based on feedback from impacted persons.

## Definitions

### Impacted Person

A person involved in the corrections system within a Minnesota Correctional Facility (MCF) or in the community, and/or their parent, caregiver, or child.

### Homeless Releases to Known Locations

An individual released from an MCF (regardless of length of time incarcerated) to a temporary living arrangement. This includes transitional housing, as well as hotels and motels paid for by a charitable organization or by federal, state, local, and tribal government programs.

### Homeless Releases to Unknown Locations

An individual released from an MCF (regardless of length of time incarcerated) who does not know where they will stay the night of release. This includes, but is not limited to, release plans that identify an individual released to the “county of commitment,” “agent’s office,” “homeless,” or an emergency homeless shelter. Access to shelters or supportive services cannot be guaranteed or reserved before the person is released from the MCF.

## People released to homelessness by the DOC

Stable housing is critical to successful reentry into Minnesota communities. When individuals are released from incarceration, access to employment, housing, positive connections in the community, medical care, and medication are important to ensuring a successful transition to the community. However, when individuals leave one of the 11 Minnesota Correctional Facilities (MCFs), many face homelessness and housing instability. In calendar year 2021, 1,128 releases from MCFs were to homeless known and unknown locations (see earlier definitions box), representing almost 25 percent of all releases.<sup>7</sup>

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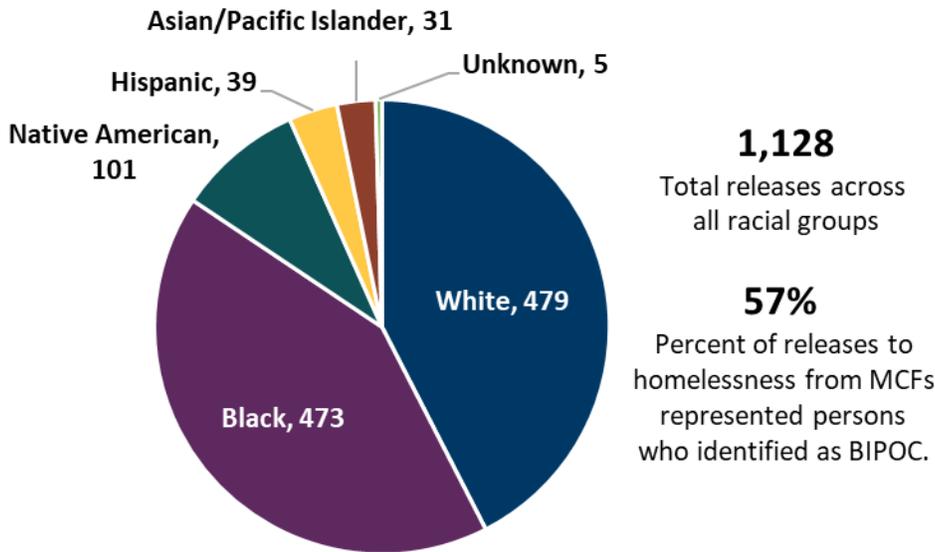
<sup>6</sup> Minnesota Department of Corrections, *Homelessness 2021 Legislative Report*, February 2022, [https://mn.gov/doc/assets/2021%20-%20Homelessness%20Release%20Legislative%20Report\\_tcm1089-519043.pdf](https://mn.gov/doc/assets/2021%20-%20Homelessness%20Release%20Legislative%20Report_tcm1089-519043.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Minnesota Department of Corrections, *Homelessness 2021 Legislative Report*.

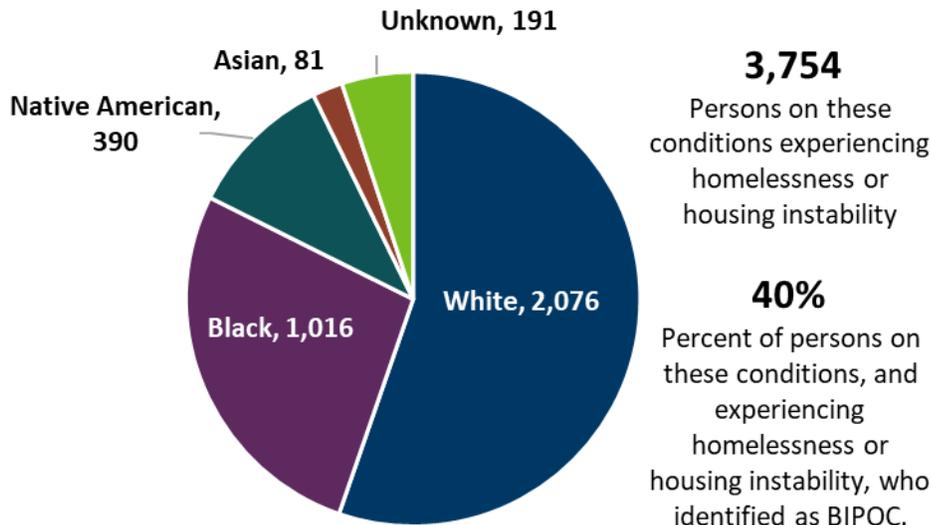


DOC data further show that individuals who identify as Black, Indigenous, and/or persons of color (BIPOC) are disproportionately represented within the criminal legal system, and in homeless releases from MCFs to known and unknown locations (as shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3). Due to lack of resources, the corrections system is not actively working to prevent releases to homelessness, particularly among BIPOC individuals, which in turn is perpetuating and exacerbating disparities.

**Figure 2. Total homeless releases to known and unknown locations from incarceration at an MCF, 2021 data by race**



**Figure 3. People in Minnesota on supervised release or probation and experiencing homelessness or housing instability, 2021 data by race**



## Definitions<sup>8</sup>

### Supervised release

Community supervision for those who committed felony offenses are released from prison on their court-ordered release date. In Minnesota, state law requires most people serve two-thirds of their sentence in prison and one-third in the community under supervision. Some people who require greater supervision are placed on intensive supervised release.

### Probation

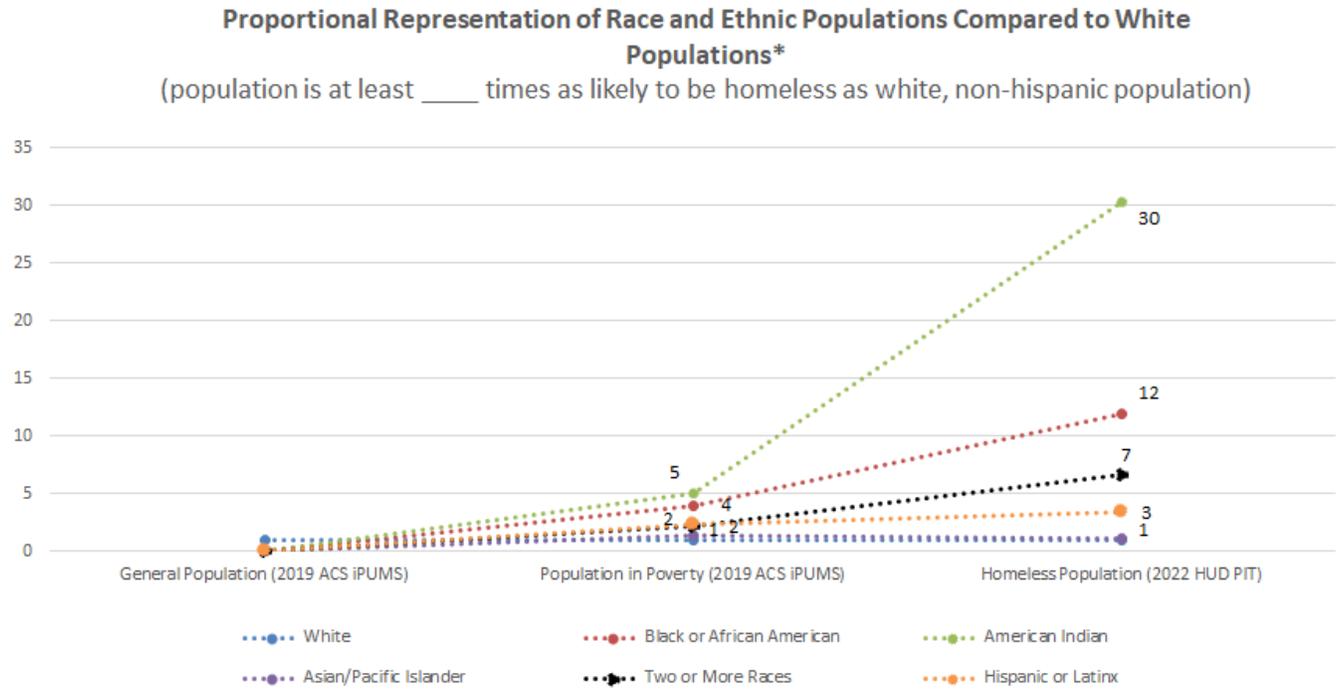
A community supervision sanction imposed on a person by the court as an alternative to or in conjunction with confinement or intermediate sanctions. They may be convicted of felony, gross misdemeanor, or misdemeanor offenses.

The disparate impact of homelessness on BIPOC individuals involved in the corrections system mirrors that of homelessness data within the state, which implies cyclical engagement between the two systems. Figure 4 shows how BIPOC Minnesotans are more likely to experience homelessness than white Minnesotans. For example, in 2022, the Black and African American population was at least 12 times as likely and American Indian population was 30 times as likely as the white, non-Hispanic population to face homelessness.

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<sup>8</sup> Minnesota Department of Corrections, *Correctional Delivery Systems*.

**Figure 4. BIPOC Minnesotans are more likely to experience homelessness than white Minnesotans<sup>9</sup>**



\*Best estimates based on available data. Minnesota Housing tabulation of data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (2019 1-year sample, iPUMS microdata).

Although the DOC’s metrics show a higher percentage of BIPOC individuals released to or experiencing homelessness or housing stability than white individuals, the disparities are still smaller in the DOC than in the overall population experiencing homelessness. As shown in Table 1, the two most recent estimates of homelessness in Minnesota showed 62 percent of people experiencing homelessness identified as BIPOC.<sup>10</sup> This is higher than the DOC’s 57 percent and 40 percent rates.

<sup>9</sup> “Resources & Data,” Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness, accessed August 23, 2022, <https://mich.mn.gov/resources>.

<sup>10</sup> The Point in Time (PIT) is an annual count of how many people are experiencing homelessness on a single night in January, required by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Wilder Research conducts face-to-face interviews with people experiencing homelessness every three years.

**Table 1. BIPOC representation in different homelessness counts**

| <b>Metric</b>  | <b>Percent of people that identified as BIPOC</b> | <b>Number of people counted (all races)</b> |
|--|---|---|
| Total homeless releases to known and unknown locations from incarceration at an MCF, 2021            | 57%   | 1,128                                       |
| People on supervised release or probation and experiencing homelessness or housing instability, 2021 | 40%   | 3,754                                       |
| People in MN experiencing homelessness, 2022 (PIT) <sup>11</sup>                                     | 62%   | 7,917                                       |
| People in MN experiencing homelessness, 2018 (Wilder) <sup>12</sup>                                  | 62%   | 6,351                                       |

## Addressing homelessness and supporting housing stability across the enterprise

The DOC has been a partner to Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness (MICH) since 2013. MICH is a cabinet-level body led by Lieutenant Governor Flanagan leads and is composed of the commissioners of 13 state agencies and the chair of the Metropolitan Council.

The Council was formed in its current structure in 2013 and has developed three iterations of a statewide strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness. The current plan in development is a Justice Strategic Plan focused on achieving housing, racial, and health justice for people facing homelessness. MICH is working with a team of hired consultants with lived experience of homelessness to develop the next plan in phases. In phase 1, the consultants worked with community to develop an operational definition of housing, health, and racial justice. The Council committed to those definitions in June 2022 to drive the state’s work.<sup>13</sup> Consultants are now in phase 2 focused on developing results and strategies that will drive the state’s work toward achieving housing, racial, and health justice for people facing homelessness.

The following agencies are members of the Council:

- Department of Corrections
- Department of Education
- Department of Employment and Economic Development
- Department of Health
- Department of Human Rights
- Department of Human Services

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<sup>11</sup> Minnesota’s HMIS, 2022 PIT Infographic, 2022, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e163f4f3411163c1a7fdc95/t/62cc406e568923562d77b944/1657553007263/2022+PIT+Infographics.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Wilder Research, 2018 Minnesota Homeless Study: Statewide Survey Data, June 2019, [https://www.wilder.org/sites/default/files/minnesota-homeless-study/2018/interviews/StatewideMNAdult2018\\_Tables1-19\\_Demographics.pdf](https://www.wilder.org/sites/default/files/minnesota-homeless-study/2018/interviews/StatewideMNAdult2018_Tables1-19_Demographics.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> “Definition of Housing, Racial, and Health Justice for People Experiencing Homelessness Final,” Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness, June 10, 2022, <https://mich.mn.gov/definition-housing-racial-and-health-justice-people-experiencing-homelessness-final-june-10-2022>.

- Department of Public Safety
- Department of Revenue
- Department of Transportation
- Department of Veterans Affairs
- Metropolitan Council
- Minnesota Housing
- Minnesota Management and Budget
- Office of Higher Education

The DOC Homelessness Mitigation Plan will align with and work under the umbrella of the developing statewide Justice Strategic Plan.

**Figure 5. MICH justice framework<sup>14</sup>**



## **The corrections system as an intervention point to mitigate homelessness and support housing stability**

The intersection between justice system involvement and the experience of homelessness provides the corrections system an opportunity to prevent and address experiences of homelessness and introduce interventions to support housing stability.

Due to a lack of community-based resources that are inclusive to justice-involved individuals, the DOC has made investments in temporary and transitional housing resources for approximately 25 years. These investments have positioned the DOC to help mitigate homelessness and introduce interventions to support housing stability. The DOC housing and homeless resources are intended to meet the emergency needs of individuals at the time of release, and to provide an approved residence option for persons on intensive supervision. Based on the recent, clearer understanding from data of the problem of homelessness and housing instability experienced by persons exiting MCFs, it is evident the current state-

<sup>14</sup> “Justice Strategic Plan,” Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness, accessed November 14, 2022, <https://mich.mn.gov/justice-strategic-plan>.

funded resources are insufficient to meet the needs and were unintentionally designed without consideration of housing and homeless best practices in mind.

The problem of homelessness and the needs of individuals who have experienced chronic homelessness are complex. Understanding the resources, services, and best practices to serve people with histories of chronic homelessness is a professional skill that requires training, education, and knowledge of the inner workings of a system outside the corrections world. At present, corrections professionals are not trained in this discipline and lack access to the technical tools and resources to navigate these needs. In addition, individuals exiting incarceration and treatment settings face systemic eligibility barriers to access community-based services. Additional hurdles they face include:

- local government residency restrictions targeted toward registrants,<sup>15</sup>
- low rental vacancy rates across the state,
- a lack of affordable housing,
- overarching barriers faced by individuals with criminal histories leasing rental property, and
- a lack of access to needed services and resources in communities across the state.

Although this plan does not address these hurdles directly, the detailed recommendations will be a start to identifying solutions to these barriers in the future.

It is worth noting the lack of inclusive community-based resources, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, made the difficult job of corrections system professionals even more challenging. Incarcerated individuals and corrections system professionals have both endured high rates of infection, which significantly impacted programming and operations in prisons. The DOC limited corrections professionals' opportunities for face-to-face visits with incarcerated persons to reduce the spread of COVID-19, and staffing shortages further impeded efforts to effectively do release planning. These challenging circumstances have had negative impacts on incarcerated individuals and corrections system professionals alike.

The figure and table on the following pages show the hypothetical journey of John Doe, an incarcerated individual leaving a prison in Minnesota. Although the story presented is fictional, it is based on real experiences from individuals involved in a culturally specific transitional housing pilot project between DOC and Anishinaabe Endaad (an organization serving Native Americans in northern Minnesota). The purpose of this journey map is to highlight the DOC release planning policy, and the systemic barriers faced by persons involved in the corrections system and the professionals who assist them in this endeavor.

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<sup>15</sup> Individuals required to register as a "predatory offender."



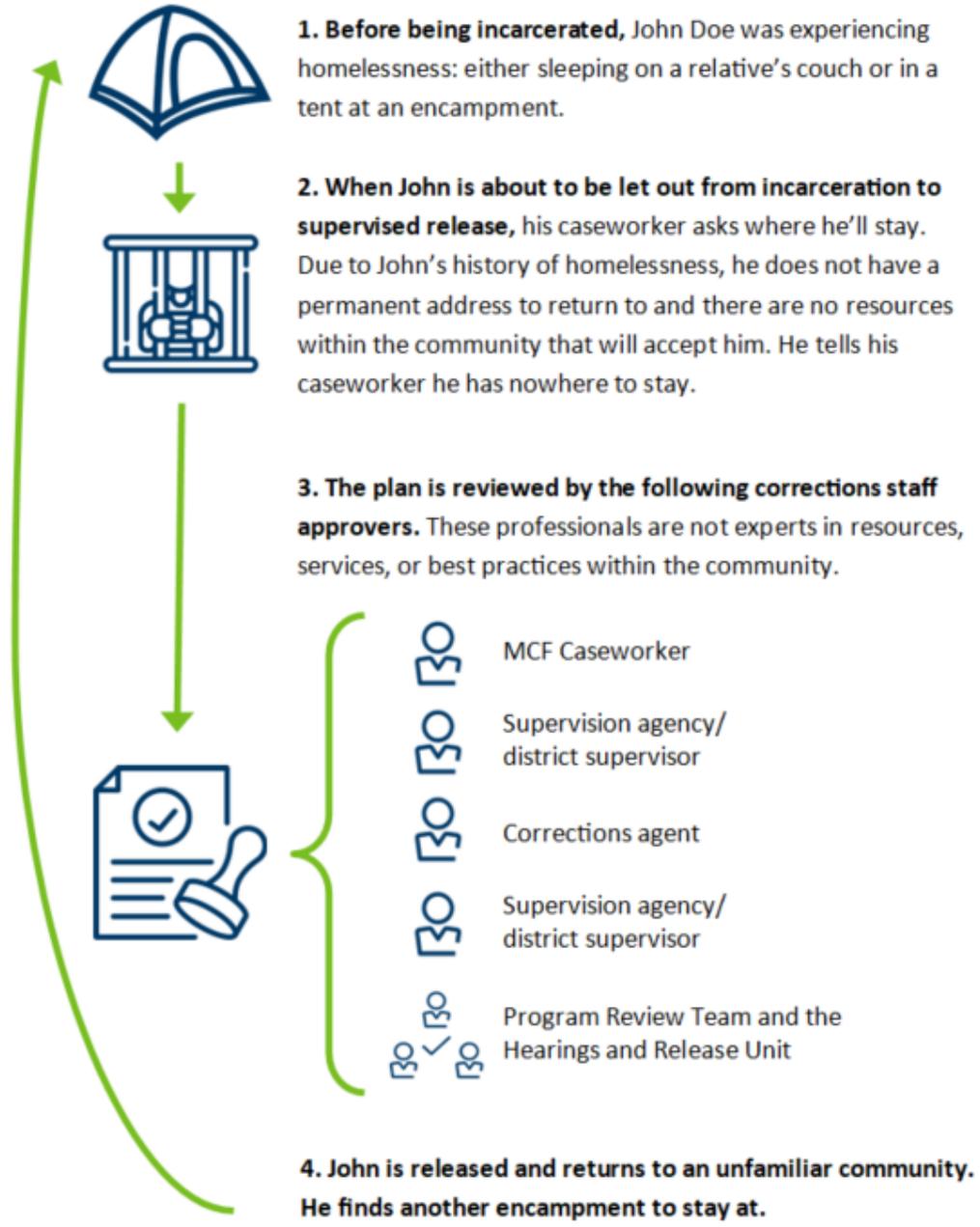
## About John Doe

**Name:** John Doe

**Incarcerated at:** MCF Faribault

**Post-incarceration status:** Supervised Release

Figure 6. John Doe’s experience in release planning from an MCF



On September 1, 2022, the DOC added a procedure to policy 203.018 “Agent Assignment and Release Planning” that states:

If the person does not have a release option other than their assigned agent’s office, within 60 days or one-third of the time remaining for short-term persons before their scheduled release date, the caseworker must initiate a conference call with the assigned agent and the person to explore homelessness mitigation options. All mitigation efforts must be documented in the Court Services Tracking System (CSTS) and the Correctional Operations Management System (COMS) including what options have been investigated and why they were not suitable or available. Efforts must include community, county, or state homeless assistance options.<sup>16</sup>

The table below describes policy implementation prior to the change.

**Table 2. DOC’s five touch points along an individual’s release planning journey**

| Step | Agent Assignment and Release Planning, Policy No. 203.018   | John Doe’s Journey  |
|------|---|---|
| 0    | <p><b>The caseworker requests agent assignment and determines the county of supervision.</b></p> <p>The caseworker must meet with the incarcerated person to determine residency options and verify the address and availability of the option most suited to the person’s release plan. The incarcerated person is responsible for participating in the release planning process by proposing specific placement options. The caseworker submits a request for agent assignment.</p> | <p>Due to high rates of COVID-19 infection, the caseworker writes a memo to John Doe asking about the address he’ll be released to. This memo is sent through the internal facility mail.</p> <p>John doesn’t give a specific address because he has nowhere to stay—he was experiencing homelessness before going to prison. For the six months before he was incarcerated, he was staying with relatives. However, his background meant that he was not allowed to be on the lease in that building, so he was staying there in secret, which put his relatives at risk of eviction. There were times when he had to stay in a tent in an encampment. This was also a risk because government entities sometimes evict people and bulldoze encampments.</p> <p>John’s relatives are not always able to help him. As a child, his parents were both incarcerated, so he lived with his grandmother. Currently, he does not know where his parents are as they both periodically experience homelessness. He cannot stay with his grandmother because she has many relatives already living with her.</p> |

<sup>16</sup> Minnesota Department of Corrections, *Policy 203.018 Agent Assignment and Release Planning*, August 1, 2022, [https://policy.doc.mn.gov/DocPolicy/PolicyDoc.aspx?name=203.018\\_.pdf](https://policy.doc.mn.gov/DocPolicy/PolicyDoc.aspx?name=203.018_.pdf).



| Step | Agent Assignment and Release Planning, Policy No. 203.018   | John Doe’s Journey  |
|------|---|---|
| 1    | <p><b>The caseworker and the incarcerated person review placement options.</b></p> <p>Among other things, the case worker and the incarcerated person discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determination of a suitable and available proposed residence.</li> <li>• Review of historical ties to a county and/or community.</li> <li>• If a person does not have a proposed residence or sufficient historical ties, the release planning reverts to the corrections agency providing supervision within the county of commitment.</li> <li>• Assessment and exploration of treatment needs. If the person is admitted to treatment upon release from incarceration, the supervision and release planning responsibility remains with the county of proposed residence after treatment, county of historical ties, or county of commitment if there are no historical ties.</li> </ul> | <p>Since John faced homelessness prior to commitment to the DOC, staff can’t identify historical ties to a community. As a result, he is returning to the county that convicted him and sentenced him to serve time at an MCF (also known as the county of commitment). This is not a familiar community to him.</p> <p>John’s caseworker puts “homeless” into the release plan and no specific address because one does not exist. The caseworker is not familiar with housing resources or services within the community where John is going, and there are few resources in that rural setting.</p> <p>The caseworker is not aware of John’s Anishinaabe culture, or any resources and services that would specifically meet his cultural needs. DOC policy does not require caseworkers to provide housing or culturally specific resources for John.</p> |
| 2    | <p><b>Corrections supervision agency has been identified and a corrections agent is assigned.</b></p> <p>Residential funding for housing resources post release may be explored by the corrections professionals assisting with release planning.<sup>17</sup></p> <p>The Adult Halfway House/Emergency Housing Fund provides financial assistance for persons leaving MCFs to stay in halfway houses or other emergency housing. It is only available to persons on intensive supervised release, and the state has just a few adult halfway houses.</p>   | <p>The corrections agent determines John is not eligible for “Adult Halfway House/Emergency Housing Fund Use” because he is not going to be on intensive supervised release.</p>  |

<sup>17</sup> Minnesota Department of Corrections, *Policy 205.130 Adult Halfway House/Emergency Housing Fund Use*, September 3, 2019, <https://policy.doc.mn.gov/DOCPolicy/PolicyDoc?name=205.130.pdf>.

| Step | Agent Assignment and Release Planning, Policy No. 203.018   | John Doe's Journey  |
|------|---|---|
| 3    | <b>The corrections agent reviews the proposed plan.</b>   | The corrections agent in the county reviews John's release plan to "homeless" and approves it.  |
| 4    | <b>The agent's district supervisor approves the release plan.</b>   | <p>The corrections agent's district supervisor reviews the release plan to "homeless" and approves it.</p> <p>Local housing and homelessness services have policies and criteria that mean John can't connect with them before he's released; he has to wait until he's in their community.</p>                       |
| 5    | <p><b>The Program Review Team (PRT)<sup>18</sup> and the Hearings and Release Unit (HRU)<sup>19</sup> approve the plan.</b></p> <p>Per policy, the PRT Reentry Review includes the following:</p> <p>The caseworker meets with the offender to review the release plans and conditions of release as approved by the community services agency (see Policy 203.018 "Agent Assignment and Release Planning"). After the PRT, the caseworker submits the plan to the HRU<sup>20</sup> for final review and approval.<sup>21</sup></p> | <p>The PRT and HRU review the release plan to "homeless" and approve it.</p> <p>John's proposed release plan to "homeless" is officially approved. He's released to homelessness and does not know where he will sleep his first night in the community. He may find a new encampment that will help shelter him.</p> |

<sup>18</sup> Minnesota Department of Corrections, *Policy 203.010 Case Management Process*, January 15, 2019, <https://policy.doc.mn.gov/DocPolicy/PolicyDoc.aspx?name=203.010.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> Minnesota Department of Corrections, *Policy Number 106.112 Approval and Modification of Release Plans*, July 13, 2018, <https://policy.doc.mn.gov/DocPolicy/PolicyDoc.aspx?name=106.112.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> Minnesota Statutes 2021, section article 243.05, subdivision 4.

<sup>21</sup> Minnesota Department of Corrections, *Policy 203.010 Case Management Process*.

## II. Journey to the present

### Approaches in the work

Effective systems change will mean people have equitable access and opportunity to homeless and housing resources, and frontline professionals have the necessary supports to mitigate homelessness and support housing stability. Although achieving that future will require the combined efforts of many governmental and non-governmental organizations, the DOC recognizes the leadership role it must play.

In its work, the DOC has relied on an article by Yordanos Eyoel, John Kania, and Kim Syman called “Deconstructing the Bird Cage: How Social Entrepreneurs are Catalyzing Systems Change.”<sup>22</sup> The authors describe six interdependent conditions of systems change:

1. Policies
2. Practices
3. Resource flows
4. Relationships and connections
5. Power dynamics
6. Mental models

The authors explained that multiple parties in the system must work on all six conditions to achieve systems change. They wrote, “Consistent with the bird cage metaphor, just deconstructing one bar of the bird cage leaves many other bars that will keep the bird trapped.”<sup>23</sup> Because the corrections system has multiple components,<sup>24</sup> the DOC alone cannot address all six conditions to mitigate homelessness and support housing stability. Creating equitable access to interventions, resources, and services to support housing stability will require centering the voices and experiences of frontline professionals and community partners, as well as collaboration across all systems.

**“There is no systems change without organizational change, and no organizational change without individual change.”**

- *“Deconstructing the Bird Cage: How Social Entrepreneurs Are Catalyzing Systems Change”*<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Yordanos Eyoel, John Kania, and Kim Syman, *Deconstructing the Bird Cage: How Social Entrepreneurs Are Catalyzing Systems Change*, January 31, 2020, [https://issuu.com/newprofit/docs/deconstructing\\_the\\_birdcage](https://issuu.com/newprofit/docs/deconstructing_the_birdcage).

<sup>23</sup> Eyoel, Kania, and Syman, *Deconstructing the Bird Cage*.

<sup>24</sup> Minnesota Department of Corrections, *Correctional Delivery Systems*.

<sup>25</sup> Eyoel, Kania, and Syman, *Deconstructing the Bird Cage*.

In addition to the six interdependent conditions, the DOC’s work has also relied on human-centered design work, representative data, and partnerships.

## Human-centered design

The DOC used human-centered design (HCD) principles and practices to shape the recommendations in this plan.<sup>26</sup> At its core, HCD methods require rigorous exploration of the problem space—the problem of homelessness, the history of the issue, and the people involved. This includes, and is not limited to, listening to and observing the interactions of individuals in the problem space. Understanding the problem space involves observations, perceptions, and deep listening to answer a fundamental question: “What is actually going on here?” This intentional and deep exploration creates opportunities to understand policy, practice, and systems barriers. It also provides opportunities to isolate and identify scalable solutions and best practices. The data gathered through HCD methods shape the conceptual frameworks that then create innovative opportunities to change systems.

HCD principles and practices honor and validate solutions to complex problems that often already exist on a small and/or informal scale. The methods also rely on individuals within the problem space as the core experts in designing solutions. This approach to systems change creates a menu of potential innovative solutions that can be customized to meet the needs of a geographic community and/or a community of people.

Because HCD involves mapping backward from the intersection of the problem, it represents a “bottom-up” approach. This solution-seeking methodology has long been connected to the health care system<sup>27</sup> and designing effective data management systems,<sup>28</sup> and is a developing approach within the justice system.<sup>29</sup> It creates opportunities for those most impacted by the issue to be the architects for the solutions.

**“[I]f you design solutions to meet the needs of the most marginalized communities [...] you have designed solutions to meet the needs of all individuals.”**

*- Dr. Andrea Jenkins, Minneapolis City Council  
Vice President*

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<sup>26</sup> “What is Human-Centered Design?” Designkit, accessed September 25, 2022, <https://www.designkit.org/human-centered-design>.

<sup>27</sup> Gordon O. Matheson, Chris Pacione, Rebecca K. Shultz, and Martin Klügl, “Leveraging human-centered design in chronic disease prevention,” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 48, no. 4 (2015): 472–479.

<sup>28</sup> George M. Samaras and Richard L. Horst, “A systems engineering perspective on the human-centered design of health information systems,” *Journal of Biomedical Informatics* 38, no. 1 (2005): 61–74.

<sup>29</sup> Margaret Hagan, “A human-centered design approach to access to justice: generating new prototypes and hypotheses for interventions to make courts user-friendly,” *Ind. JL & Soc. Equal.* 6 (2018): 199.

In developing this plan, the DOC's use of HCD principles and practices allowed staff to focus on the most disparately impacted individuals, test innovative ideas, and identify solutions and best practices to scale up and across to other communities.

## Using the data available

DOC staff have used whatever data is available to guide their work in this area. However, the data available to understand the scope of homelessness within the corrections system is relatively new and is only representative data. In this report, representative data means basic, transactional data like a person's name, gender, and race. It assists with guiding direction, making inferences, and confirming what anecdotally may be known to be true. The DOC used this type of data in its design work and when shaping this report's recommendations; for example, it helped quantify homelessness and housing instability experienced by persons who are involved in the corrections system.

The work to date has shown the need for more granular data that has specific information on individuals' needs. If the DOC had more granular data, staff could make specific business decisions to meet the needs of the people they serve. (For example, targeting and shaping specific housing resources for specific needs of individuals, and reducing barriers to create seamless pathways to interventions that support housing stability.) The DOC is working internally and in collaboration with community partners to gather and collect more granular data for future reporting and planning efforts.

## Building partnerships

According to the article "Deconstructing the Birdcage," one way to accomplish systems change is by building a movement. The authors define this as "Strengthening agency amongst a group of individuals (often marginalized) who share common cause so that they have greater personal and collective capacity to change oppressive systems and achieve their goals."<sup>30</sup>

**"Successful movements require a robust network of resources and infrastructure as well as the fluidity to capture opportunity itself as it rises."**

- *"Deconstructing the Bird Cage: How Social Entrepreneurs Are Catalyzing Systems Change"*<sup>31</sup>

For the DOC, supporting this movement toward system change means nurturing and building meaningful partnerships with other state agencies, local government, tribal government, and private and non-profit

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<sup>30</sup> Eyoel, Kania, and Syman, *Deconstructing the Bird Cage*.

<sup>31</sup> Eyoel, Kania, and Syman, *Deconstructing the Bird Cage*.

community partners. It means moving beyond the historical transactional arrangements typical between government entities and community partners where the relationship is structured and defined by government.

Scoping the problem and impacts of homelessness within the corrections system in an intentional way is a recent effort in the State of Minnesota. In 2021, the DOC included this goal in its strategic plan: “Increase the number of people released from prison who, within 30 days, obtain housing, meaningful employment, enroll in education programming, or actively engage in community-based treatment by 90 percent.”<sup>32</sup>

## The shaping of the recommendations

Operationalizing change within the corrections system to mitigate homelessness and support housing stability is gaining national attention and momentum, fueled by years of best practices in reentry, advancing racial equity, and work focused on justice reinvestment.<sup>33</sup> In the United States, there are no defined road maps for corrections systems to mitigate homelessness because each state, community, impacted person, and system partner is distinct.

With few other examples to draw from, prototypes (low- or no-cost projects) and pilots (projects that require a financial investment) became critical components of the DOC’s work and have framed a direction for moving forward. These projects focused on identifying how the corrections systems’ lack of resources perpetuates and exacerbates homelessness, housing instability, and racial inequities. The following is a summary of key projects and their results that informed the recommendations within the plan.

## Collaborative Case Consultation

The Collaborative Case Consultation (CCC) prototype arose from the case conferencing care model, which is most notably connected with health care systems work. At its foundation, this model is a team-based approach to analyzing an individual’s information, needs, and cares. It allows for intentional exploration of barriers, dynamic group problem solving, and experiential learning.<sup>34</sup>

For purposes of this work and plan development, the CCC prototype was designed based on the following:

- engagement with corrections systems professionals at MCFs and other correctional system delivery systems that regularly engage with individuals who are preparing for release from MCFs,
- borrowed case conferencing best practices,<sup>35</sup> and

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<sup>32</sup> Minnesota Department of Corrections, *Strategic Plan 2020–2022*,

[https://mn.gov/doc/assets/MN%20DOC%20Strategic%20Plan%2020-22\\_tcm1089-462395.pdf](https://mn.gov/doc/assets/MN%20DOC%20Strategic%20Plan%2020-22_tcm1089-462395.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> “National Initiative Aims to Improve Reentry Outcomes by 2030,” Council of State Governments, April 25, 2022,

<https://csjusticecenter.org/2022/04/25/national-initiative-aims-to-improve-reentry-outcomes-by-2030/>.

<sup>34</sup> Sigrid Nakrem, Geir-Tore Stensvik, Richard John Skjong, and Joan Ostaszkiwicz, “Staff experiences with implementing a case conferencing care model in nursing homes: a focus group study,” *BCM Health Services Research* (2019),

[https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6438011/pdf/12913\\_2019\\_Article\\_4034.pdf](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6438011/pdf/12913_2019_Article_4034.pdf).

<sup>35</sup> J. Simon Bell, Parisa Aslani, Andrew J. McLachlan, Paula Whitehead, Timothy F. Chen, “Mental Health Case Conferences in Primary Care: Content and Treatment Decision-making,” *Research in Social and Administrative Pharmacy* 3, no. 1 (2007): 86–103, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1551741106000519>.

- the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Social Determinants of health.<sup>36</sup>

In the CCC prototype, corrections professionals from multiple disciplines meet to explore ways to mitigate releases to homelessness and create opportunities to support housing stability for released individuals. This group of professionals may include:

- DOC Community Stability Program Director, Housing Coordinator and Community Stability Support Coordinator, and key members of the Community Stability Team within the DOC Reentry unit. Their roles and responsibilities focus on outreach, engagement, and technical assistance for resource and service development across the state, with specific focus on oversight and connections between DOC housing resources and existing community-based resources.
- The frontline professionals (e.g., corrections agent, caseworker, health services release planner, and/or community service provider) who are working with the individual on correctional supervision in the community or planning for release from incarceration.

The DOC is currently prototyping this approach internally at MCFs in Faribault and Togo; with Tri-County Community Corrections, a local corrections system partner; and in referrals to the Community Stability Team Housing Coordinator that require more in-depth intensive staffing. Consultation involves the parties meeting to discuss individual cases and broader approaches, like policies and organizational changes. When working on an individual’s release plan, these professionals collaboratively examine:

- an individual’s history within the community prior to incarceration (e.g., history of homelessness),
- an individual’s history of involvement within the corrections system (what worked and what did not appear to be supportive),
- the individual’s goals and plan for housing stability,
- the individual’s needs, including but not limited to any disabilities and health concerns, and
- available community-based resources and services.

After analyzing that information, team members:

- brainstorm solutions to barriers and challenges,
- clarify and rectify misinterpretations of policy,
- identify resources and services to meet the needs of the individual,
- strategize approaches for engaging the individual in the immediate homeless mitigation plan and connecting to a plan for long-term housing stability.<sup>37</sup>

Although it is too soon to fully measure the effectiveness and impacts of the CCC prototype on releases to homelessness from MCFs and overarching data on homelessness and housing instability for individuals on supervised release and probation within the community, staff have observed the following:

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<sup>36</sup> “About Social Determinants of Health,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed September 15, 2022, <https://www.cdc.gov/socialdeterminants/about.html>.

<sup>37</sup> Many homelessness mitigation plans begin with a short-term temporary option. After connection with community-based resources, a more involved plan for long-term housing stability evolves.

- Mitigation of homelessness and support to the corrections systems professionals relied heavily on a temporary gap funding resource and the expertise and focused technical assistance of the Community Stability Team, specifically the DOC Housing Coordinator.
  - There are insufficient resources within the community that are inclusive to individuals exiting from incarceration and those who are justice-involved within the community. In addition, these resources vary in number across the state and are non-existent in Greater Minnesota. Homeless releases to known locations are not safe for the individual, do not support a plan for housing stability, and are ineffective for community correctional supervision.
  - Emergency shelter resources across the state are inconsistent, and many have screening criteria that deny service to individuals with certain criminal convictions. Additionally, these resources have inconsistent bed space available because they are based on the needs of the individuals entering the shelter. During outbreaks of COVID-19, these beds were sometimes unavailable because of isolation and quarantine periods.
  - The criminal justice and corrections systems and the housing and homeless service systems each have their own languages. The role and responsibility of the DOC Housing Coordinator is to serve as a connection to meld together resources and services within each system for the benefit of supporting housing stability for the corrections-involved individual.
- The community-based resources and services that mitigate homelessness and support housing stability are complex to navigate. Justice-involved individuals can have a hard time accessing these supports while they are incarcerated and can face barriers accessing them with their criminal history. For most corrections system professionals, navigating these resources is an acquired skill learned through experiences and interactions within each release plan. Connecting the individuals they work with to these resources requires them to be in a constant space of learning.
- Corrections systems professionals that felt supported as professionals were more engaged and effective with the CCC model.
  - An unanticipated positive effect: corrections professionals that work within the community took extra steps beyond requirements to connect with community partners. This resulted in a closer connection between the local corrections system and a community partner that focuses on providing services for substance use disorder, mental health concerns, and housing stabilization services. At present, these partners are strategizing to improve their collaborative connection. Their approaches include designing a local multidisciplinary team and exploring capacity building through a housing resource specialist specifically connected with community corrections.<sup>38</sup>
  - In the past few years, many of the frontline professionals responsible for assisting individuals with release plans were not able to physically meet with incarcerated persons. The pandemic and staffing shortages made it unsafe to meet in person, and meant these staff were sometimes assigned other duties (for example, assisting with COVID testing, ensuring that meals were prepared and distributed, and serving as a Correctional Officer). This highlights the holistic impacts of staff’s mental and physical health on the mission of the agency, “Transforming lives for a safer Minnesota.”<sup>39</sup> According to Schwartz et al.,

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<sup>38</sup> The partners referenced are Tri-County Community Corrections (<https://www.communitycorrections-tccc.org/>) and Alluma (<https://allumacares.org/>).

<sup>39</sup> “Vision, Mission, Values and Goals,” Minnesota Department of Corrections, accessed November 7, 2022, <https://mn.gov/doc/about/agency-background-history/vision-mission-values/>.



- prolonged activation of the “stress response system” affects a corrections professional’s ability to effectively engage with their work responsibilities.<sup>40</sup> This creates ripple effects that extend to the individuals they engage with inside incarceration settings.<sup>41</sup>
- Staff noticed more requests for help through this prototype from corrections systems professionals who work with individuals that must have an approved residence as a part of their conditions of release.<sup>42</sup>
  - Many corrections systems professionals were misinterpreting practices as policies and misinterpreting the policy that guides release planning.<sup>43</sup>
    - This observation supports training and education on the policy change to 203.018 Agent Assignment and Release Planning. If frontline professionals and their leaders are not trained on the technical components of the policy, they could misinterpret the policy and not fulfill the policy’s intent.
  - The number of referrals for technical assistance to the DOC Community Stability for homelessness mitigation and housing stability planning increased from 422 in 2021 to 693 in 2022. This demonstrates corrections systems professionals are gaining awareness of the problem and centering it within their work, even without a major policy change.
  - Through the opportunity of temporary federal grant funding, the DOC was able to hire a Housing Coordinator. This expanded staff capacity to be responsive to homelessness mitigation and to support housing stabilization.

The CCC prototype results to date show how important it is to redesign business practices and policies. This work can help reduce releases to homelessness from MCFs and among individuals on correctional supervision within the community.

## Culturally specific transitional housing

According to the DOC’s 2021 Homelessness Legislative Report, 57 percent of releases to homelessness were releases of BIPOC individuals.<sup>44</sup> Parallel data provided through the MICH depicts a disproportionate representation of BIPOC individuals experiencing homelessness within the community.<sup>45</sup>

To help address these problems, the DOC accessed grant funding through the Coronavirus Emergency Solutions Fund to create culturally specific, trauma-informed transitional housing pilot projects.

The DOC began with projects to serve Native American individuals released from MCFs and on correctional supervision within the community. The target population served was selected based on the following:

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<sup>40</sup> Joseph A. Schwartz, Douglas A. Granger, and Jessica L. Calvi, “The Implications of Stress among Correctional Officer: A Summary of the Risks and Promising Intervention Strategies,” Preprint version 1.0, (November 2022): 16.

<sup>41</sup> Schwartz, Granger, and Calvi, “The Implications of Stress among Correctional Officers.”

<sup>42</sup> Per program policy, individuals released to Intensive Supervised Release and the Challenge Incarceration program must have an approved residence.

<sup>43</sup> Minnesota Department of Corrections, *Policy 203.018 Agent Assignment and Release Planning*.

<sup>44</sup> Minnesota Department of Corrections, *Homelessness 2021 Legislative Report*.

<sup>45</sup> Resources & Data,” Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness. According to the MICH, Native American Minnesotans are 22 times more likely to experience homelessness and 24 times more likely to experience unsheltered homelessness than their white, non-Hispanic counterparts.

- Disproportionate legal-system involvement,
- Overrepresentation of Native American individuals incarcerated in MCFs,
- Disproportionate representation of Native American individuals released from MCFs to homelessness from incarceration, and
- Disproportionate representation of Native American individuals experiencing homelessness within the community.

These pilot projects were designed to serve two geographic communities in the northwest region of the state, where there are few community-based housing resources inclusive to justice-involved individuals.

Co-created with community partners, these projects aimed to build capacity within the broader community system, as a supplement to the DOC’s own internal projects and community-based resource development. There are few culturally specific, trauma-informed housing resources in the United States, and even fewer specifically designed for the Indigenous communities and nations within Minnesota. These pilot projects will help develop models for transitional housing resources for a population egregiously impacted by historical trauma, systemic racism, legal system involvement, homelessness, and other public health calamities (including the recent impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>46</sup>).

**“I needed more for after I left [the corrections system]. I was jumping at any change and trying to get my kids back while staying on a friend’s couch and I know now that wasn’t the right thing to do. It wasn’t a good situation. I had housing assistance issues, banking issues... A lot of help that sounds so good on the inside doesn’t actually happen on the outside.”**

*- A Native American woman interviewed as a part of the grant<sup>47</sup>*

Most importantly, these are not DOC-led initiatives. These projects focus on supporting community resources owned by, operated by, and serving Indigenous persons. Despite the challenges with doing so, the DOC aimed to move beyond the historical transactional relationships between Indigenous communities

<sup>46</sup> “COVID-19 Among American Indian and Alaska Native Persons—23 States, January 31–July 3, 2020,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, August 28, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6934e1.htm>.

<sup>47</sup> “Native Women & Incarceration in MN: Improving Criminal Justice Response to Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, and Stalking Victims,” Violence Free Minnesota, Minnesota Indian Women’s Sexual Assault Coalition (MIWSAC), and Northwest Indian Community Development Center, accessed September 15, 2022, <https://mnhttf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Native-Women-and-Incarceration-Slides.pdf>.

and government structures. Instead, in each of these pilot projects, community partners and the DOC worked to develop meaningful relationships based on trust, humility, and friendship.

Northwest Indian Community Development Center (NWICDC)<sup>48</sup> and Anishinaabe Endaad (AE)<sup>49</sup> host the pilot projects for culturally specific transitional housing. The projects use a trauma-informed health and housing model, in which the underlying approach is anchored by traditional Indigenous teachings.

Supporting culturally specific transitional housing is an opportunity for the DOC to participate in housing resource development in a restorative way, one that is organic to community and co-created and operated by persons with lived experience of homelessness. The work to date has shown how critical it is for housing resource development to be both person- and community-centered.

## Healing House

The Healing House model grew out of a U.S. Office of Violence Against Women collaborative grant project that included the DOC, Violence Free Minnesota, Minnesota Indian Women’s Sexual Assault Coalition (MIWSAC), and NWICDC. That project centered the voices of 62 Native American women. The women were largely survivors of abuse and trauma, and all had histories of corrections system involvement or were incarcerated at the MCF in Shakopee. These individuals identified housing instability as one of the key barriers to success upon release from incarceration.<sup>50</sup>

**“Starting at age 10, I was getting in trouble for truancy. I got molested at that age and never reported it, and that’s when I started running away.”**

*- A Native American woman interviewed as a part of the grant<sup>51</sup>*

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<sup>48</sup> “About,” Northwest Indian Community Development Center, accessed August 23, 2022, <https://www.nwicdc.org/about>.

<sup>49</sup> “Program Overview,” Anishinaabe Endaad, accessed August 23, 2022, <https://www.endaad.com/program-overview>.

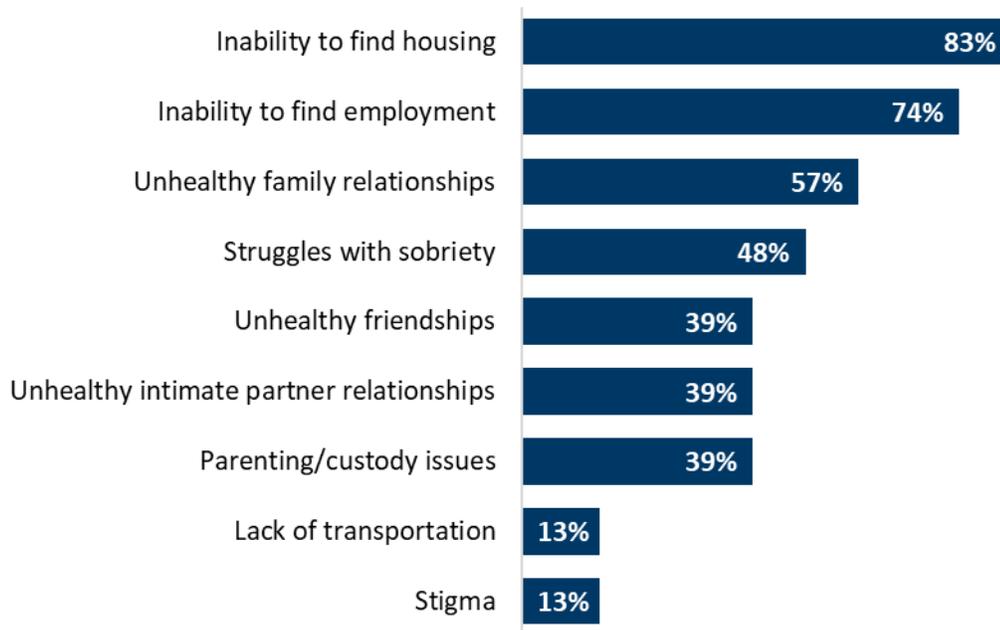
<sup>50</sup> “Native American Women & Incarceration in MN,” Violence Free Minnesota.

<sup>51</sup> Violence Free Minnesota, *Native American Women & Incarceration in Minnesota*, July 2022.

**Figure 7. Findings from the Native American Women and Incarceration in Minnesota study<sup>52</sup>**

**Barriers to success upon release**

Interviews with 62 Native American women who had been incarcerated in MCF Shakopee revealed that housing was the most common challenge after their release.



Grant funding provided the opportunity to build on the road map from these persons with lived experience. The DOC and NWICDC embarked on a journey to bring the Healing House Conceptual Framework to the community. The report from Violence Free Minnesota described the approach well:

The Healing House model, conceptualized by individuals with lived experience, is an intentional space for corrections systems-involved Native American women to begin their journey towards healing and housing stability. The Healing House is a space where women can address their trauma, with a specific focus on sexual and domestic violence victimization. Instead of pressure to secure housing and employment immediately upon release, women will focus on healing from trauma—what we believe is needed to create long-term stability and end cyclical involvement in the corrections system.<sup>53</sup>

Human-centered design has been a foundational concept for this pilot. All parts of Healing House—from the physical space to the programming to the policies—were developed with direct input from Native American women involved in the corrections system. Only Native American women from this community who are on supervised release and/or on probation with the DOC can participate in the pilot.

The Healing House pilot project includes a core team of corrections systems professionals (including the Tribal Director for the DOC) and NWICDC community partners that focus on:

<sup>52</sup> “Native American Women & Incarceration in MN,” Violence Free Minnesota.

<sup>53</sup> Violence Free Minnesota, *Native American Women & Incarceration in Minnesota*, July 2022.

- Identifying and testing possible solutions to challenges.
- Identifying and capturing key components to the Healing House model development.
- Developing an open, transparent, comfortable, and responsive relationship between the DOC and NWICDC.
- Supporting residents as they work toward personally defined goals.

Included within the Healing House model is a staffed position that functions as a housing coordinator. This staff person is an employee of NWICDC and manages residence operations, tenant selection, and oversight of lodging agreements. They also connect specifically and frequently with women at the residence on resources and culturally specific services. In addition to the supports residents receive at the house, residents also participate in a culturally responsive reentry program called Ombishkaa at NWICDC. Within the community of Bemidji, Ombishkaa “provides comprehensive services, information and resources that support the stability of Indigenous men and women who have experienced incarceration.”<sup>54</sup>

**Figure 8. The entrance to Healing House**



Results from the Healing House so far include:

- The development of three units of inclusive transitional housing targeted to serve corrections-involved Native American women in the community of Bemidji.
- Model development for culturally responsive, trauma-informed transitional housing, targeted to serve Native American women that is intentionally connected with a community-based, culturally specific reentry program.
- It is important to move beyond transactional relationships with Native-American-led community partners. The act of “partnership” cannot be defined by the government processes and structure; instead, it means walking alongside the community partner in whatever way is needed on that day.
- To date, all the residents have had children or are expecting children, have substance use concerns, and have lengthy histories of homelessness and housing instability. For most, this is their first experience in a stable residence.
  - One resident is a participant of a local treatment court. She was homeless for over two years prior to her residency at the Healing House. Her community corrections agent shared with Community Stability staff that “this is the most successful and stable time she has had in my experience working with her.” (This pilot project will help study this resource as a possible intervention to prevent commitment to an MCF.) She had her first ever meeting

<sup>54</sup> “Ombishkaa,” Northwest Indian Community Development Center, accessed September 23, 2022, <https://www.nwicdc.org/ombishkaa>.

with a property owner for a rental residence in her life on September 22, 2022, and Ombishkaa staff were able to support her in this connection.

- Many of the residents are in relationships in which their partners are experiencing homelessness. This has been a significant cause of concern for these individuals while participating in this program. (This suggests the need to further explore family-focused, two-generational, transitional housing resource development that is inclusive to justice-involved individuals.)
- All residents have said they have never been in a residence like the Healing House. One participant stated, “I have never felt so supported.”

In planning for the future, community partners reengaged 12 Native American women in a feasibility study in which these women with lived experience “provided guidance and input to create the foundation of an architectural study of a potential building project of restorative and supportive housing.”<sup>55</sup>

### **Anishinaabe Endaad**

The relationship between AE and the DOC began four years ago, with AE’s initial development of culturally specific housing resources and services inclusive to justice-involved Native American people within the community. The partnership further developed through an opportunity provided by grant funding, following the expansion of AE services in northwestern Minnesota on White Earth Reservation. Eligible participants for this pilot project are Native American men from the region who are on supervised release and/or probation with the DOC.

Robert B. Smith, Minisinawayebenaise (“Echoing Thunderbird”), Cultural Integration Coordinator with AE, shared this with the DOC about the project:

The Anishinaabe Endaad (AE) supportive housing with Traditional name of “Wiichiyegameg” will engage willing participants in activities that teach, promote, and foster positive development and appreciation of the Anishinaabe Ojibwe Culture. The AE Culture program is sensitive to increasing attention to the impacts of addictions and trauma on behavior. The program strives to understand “what happened to you” versus the standard applied question “what’s wrong with you.” Where there is trauma, we focus on healing as the answer.

The traditional name for Anishinaabe Endaad is Wiichiyegameg, meaning a helping healing house. The name was gifted to Anishinaabe Endaad at a Traditional Ceremony conducted at Naicatchewenin First Nation north of Fort Frances Ontario, Canada. The offering of Asemaa (tobacco) and gifts were accepted the prior week as an eligible cultural participant at Ceremony. The name provides the spiritual impetus of Anishinaabe Endaad to have culturally relevant direct services to resident clients who wish to engage and participate in culture services.

The purpose of the AE culture program is to promote Anishinaabe Wellness by utilizing a culturally based and traditional model of lifestyle. This involves participation and attendance at spiritual and cultural ceremonies ranging from personal health care to customary rituals for encouragement of

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<sup>55</sup> DSGW Architecture, *The Healing House Feasibility Study*, 2022.

good living. The good living is defined in a set of seven clusters of beliefs of the Anishinaabe Minobimadiziwin.

The pilot core team consists of corrections systems professionals (including the DOC Tribal Director) and the AE team of professionals. This core team meets frequently and focuses on:

- Supporting participants as they work toward their self-defined goals.
- Offering key housing stabilization services, including:
  - Supporting the building of natural housing supports and resources in the community, including supports and resources related to a person’s cultural identity.<sup>56</sup> This also includes creating opportunities for experiential learning and for a participant to “reclaim their culture.”<sup>57</sup>
  - Promoting and supporting cultural practice needs and understandings with landlords, property managers, and neighbors.<sup>58</sup>
- Specific to the DOC, acknowledging and understanding the value of culture for an individual who is in recovery, lacking housing stability, and corrections-system involved.
- Capturing key components to the development of the model that is central to this housing resource.
- Strategizing and testing possible solutions to challenges and barriers.
- Developing an open, transparent, comfortable, and responsive relationship between the DOC and AE.

The AE/DOC pilot project has already provided these takeaways:

- The pilot project brought an additional eight housing units to the northwest region of the state on White Earth Reservation.
- All participants thus far have remained stably housed within the housing resource or have moved to permanent housing.
- The “pilot” framework allows for a nimble, creative, and iterative space to be responsive to the participants’ needs, and the development of a strong partnership between AE and the DOC.
- The grant funding through the pilot project provided the up-front financial support for AE to design and develop a culturally responsive, trauma-informed housing stabilization services program. The presence of culture through spirituality and traditional teachings provides a supportive, welcoming, and healing space for Indigenous men returning to this community. One participant stated, “I’ve never been to a program like this.”
- Transparent, responsive, and humble communication has been foundational to positive relationship development between AE and DOC and has had positive impacts on participants.

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<sup>56</sup> “Housing Stabilization Services,” Minnesota Department of Human Services, accessed August 23, 2022, <https://mn.gov/dhs/partners-and-providers/policies-procedures/housing-and-homelessness/housing-stabilization-services/housing-stabilization-services.jsp>.

<sup>57</sup> Quote from Robert B. Smith, Minisinawayebenaise (translation: Echoing Thunderbird), Cultural Integration Coordinator with Anishinaabe Endaad.

<sup>58</sup> “Housing Stabilization Services,” Minnesota Department of Human Services.

- Focusing on “real time” outcomes allows participants and the core team to celebrate first jobs, moves to permanent housing, and effective problem solving by participants.

One community corrections agent in the region with a client in the residence shared:

I can't begin to thank you enough for the service(s) you are providing. My client went on for approximately 15 minutes about how grateful he is for the program/service you are providing to him. He was discussing how you all have provided him with a brand new safe and secure residence, which he is proud to call home. He indicated you have been giving him responsibilities, which shows you are trusting him. He raved about the staff and how great they are to him. I also spoke with the staff and the experience was nothing short of pleasant, helpful, and knowledgeable. My client is not struggling just to survive, and it appears that he may actually be thriving. I can tell by his attitude and his remarks that he is doing extremely well. He expressed nothing short of gratefulness for your program and your staff. I hope he has shared his sentiments about your program to all of you. What you are doing is having a profound impact on this individual and I sincerely thank you all for what you are doing. I hope you can continue with your positive endeavors. This is a much-needed resource.

## Overall takeaways

The culturally specific transitional housing pilots provide framing for a new trauma-informed model. The learnings from this project may influence the redesign of business practices and policies around preventing homelessness for persons releasing from MCFs, persons on correctional supervision within the community, and all persons and families affected by the correctional system. Additionally, they illuminate the importance of building capacity to partner with community and government entities in authentically relational ways that build trust. The project also highlights how systems need to understand the complexities of impacted people's lives, and how empathetic awareness supports these individuals in their journeys to housing stability. The lessons learned from these pilot projects influenced all the proposed recommendations in this plan, and the resulting models are potentially scalable to other communities across the state.

## Bridging Benefits

The Bridging Benefits pilot project arose out of The Combined Application Form Group (CAF) Pilot Initiative. That pilot project targeted individuals identified as “high” or “very high” risk of recidivism and assisted them with applications for health insurance and other public assistance (cash, emergency aid, food, or housing) prior to release from incarceration. This project was a collaboration between the DOC and the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS).<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Minnesota Department of Human Services, *Minnesota Statewide Initiative to Reduce Recidivism: Combined Application Form Joint Department Pilot Initiative, Follow-Up Evaluation Report on Recidivism and Homelessness Outcomes*, September 2018, [https://mn.gov/doc/assets/DOC%20DHS%20CAF%20Pilot%20Project%20Evaluation%202018\\_tcm1089-362911.pdf](https://mn.gov/doc/assets/DOC%20DHS%20CAF%20Pilot%20Project%20Evaluation%202018_tcm1089-362911.pdf).



The state evaluated the post-release outcomes of the 219 participants (released between September 2017 and May 2018) after the initial pilot, and then again three years later. The results showed the program seemed to make a difference:<sup>60</sup>

- **In the first year after release**, data showed new incarcerations were two-thirds less for CAF Pilot Initiative participants than for the comparison group.
- **Three years after release**, participants in the CAF Pilot Initiative were nearly half as likely as people in the comparison group to have a new incarceration.
- **In the first year after release**, the participants in the CAF Pilot Initiative experiencing homelessness were about one-third less than the comparison group.

Through grant funding received by DHS, the CAF Pilot Initiative evolved into the Bridging Benefits project. From the start of the CAF Pilot Initiative to the present day of the Bridging Benefits collaborative, the purpose of the work remains the same: all persons leaving incarceration have assistance to access the federal, state, and county resources to support their successful transition to the community. However, given the evaluation results and the recent baseline data reported by the DOC on people releasing to homelessness to known and unknown locations, this project is now focusing on serving individuals who are preparing for release from incarceration and facing homelessness.

The Bridging Benefits work is supported and guided by a multi-sector, multi-government group of human services and corrections system professionals. The goals and objectives of this work continue to be:

### Goals

- Provide and maintain a sound, sustainable application process with permanent resources, built-in incentives, and collaboration.
- Participants are successful in their communities, showing reductions in recidivism and use of other costly services.

### Objectives

- The prioritization of health and well-being by reducing disparities, promoting safer communities, being responsive, and providing a continuum of care for individuals.
- Continuously improve processes, policy, and practices through stakeholder collaboration and data and implementation science principles.
- Secure adequate funding to provide efficient and effective delivery of services.

Results since the program began focusing on a new population:

- Through the temporary federal funding, DHS hired additional staff to expand the capacity of the Bridging Benefits team.
- Reignited energy and momentum around a developing best practice and connecting it with person-centered systems reform work within the corrections system.

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<sup>60</sup> Minnesota Department of Human Services, *Combined Application Form Joint Departmental Pilot Initiative: Follow-Up Evaluation Report on Recidivism and Homelessness Outcomes*, August 2021, <https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfserver/Public/DHS-8158A-ENG>.

- The team is testing an updated referral process in several business units within the corrections system.
- The team has explored access to data systems to better understand the needs of individuals preparing to release from MCFs.

The Bridging Benefits work informs strategies for redesigning business practices and policies to prevent homelessness in individuals released from incarceration. Although this work is anchored in interagency and intergovernmental collaboration, there are significant opportunities to grow it through new partnerships with tribal nations, state agencies, and local government agencies. Lastly, there is great evaluation potential across multiple corrections and human service data systems. These project results influenced all the proposed recommendations in this plan.

## Intersections internal to the DOC

### Current DOC housing and homeless resources

The DOC has invested in post-release housing resources for at least 25 years. These housing resources were developed based on the correction system's perception of need and some data that scoped the issue of housing instability. However, these resources were not designed based on housing and homeless service best practices.

The DOC currently invests in housing resources in the following ways:

- **Temporary or short-term funding:** this is typically used to fund motel stays, temporary rental assistance for room rentals, or gap funding to connect with a community housing resource.
- **Adult Community-Based Residential Correctional Facilities:** this consists of licensed group living settings in a few communities within Minnesota.<sup>61</sup>
- **DOC leasing of private residences in communities across the state:** temporary living for individuals on supervised release.

There is no framework in place to measure the effectiveness of these resources in meeting a person's needs and supporting a successful transition to the community and housing stability. For example, many current DOC housing resources are available to individuals for only a few months. Since the passage of the Reentry Supports Law,<sup>62</sup> staff have learned a lot through the person-centered work of understanding the needs of individuals incarcerated in MCFs and facing a release to homelessness.

In general, common experiences among this target population include but are not limited to:

- long histories of housing instability,
- lengthy histories of institutionalization beginning at a young age,

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<sup>61</sup> Minnesota Rules, chapter 2920, online. Accessed September 14, 2022.

<sup>62</sup> Laws of Minnesota 2021, Reg. Sess. Chapter 24.

- histories of trauma, few (if any) positive pro-social supports,
- identification as BIPOC,
- health-related concerns (most prominent are mental health and substance use), and
- a lack of community-based resources and services that will be inclusive to an individual with these barriers.

The current DOC housing resources are insufficient to supporting individuals with high barriers to housing stability.

## Other intersecting internal work

### Person-centered focus

Beginning in 2020, the DOC began to lay the foundation for implementing a person-centered approach within its operations and organizational structure. The core components of a person-centered approach are:

- A comprehensive intake and assessment process that focuses on the strengths and needs of an individual served by the DOC. This includes the implementation of a “Self-Reported Assessment,” a redesigned and reimagined intake process. Through the assessment tool, individuals can self-report their needs and priority goal areas when they are admitted to an MCF.
- Multi-disciplinary teams work in partnership with individuals to design and deliver transformational services.
- DOC professionals and individuals served by the DOC use a truly collaborative process to develop individualized, front-end-loaded program plans.

### Education

The focus of education opportunities for persons incarcerated in MCFs is creating opportunities to connect with living wage employment and ensuring individuals have the necessary supports to reach desired education goals. As such, the DOC is focused on capacity building to meet the primary and secondary education needs of incarcerated persons, and fortifying connections to career opportunities within communities that are responsive to labor market deficits in the current workforce.

### Employment

The DOC is working to increase employment readiness and retention among the incarcerated population and to connect individuals being released to living wage jobs. Current efforts focus on investing in and expanding the evidence-based DOC EMPLOY Program to make it available to all persons releasing from prisons. Additionally, the DOC is working toward implementing community-based contract services for pre- and post-release employment services, which include Cognitive Behavioral Intervention Employment training, job readiness, and career laddering.

## **Transitions services**

As the DOC advances toward a more holistic, person-centered approach, staff are redesigning reentry services programs. COVID-19 has provided opportunities to review and assess priorities for reentry programming and the ability to provide programming in new formats. Among other things, MCFs have procured and installed new, electronic equipment to provide virtual programming. This has the potential to provide a continuum and variety of services to offer reentering individuals the opportunity to connect with community partners. Staff are also completing a review of all curriculum and services, focusing on pertinent reentry topics, and providing an overview of the variety of activities individuals can complete prior to release.

In addition to those efforts, staff are working to ensure that individuals releasing from incarceration leave with forms of identification—specifically, with a Social Security card and either a Minnesota state identification card or a driver’s license. Recently, all MCFs started providing online-proctored Class D written exams to mitigate additional barriers prior to release.

More partnerships with community partners, and the collaborative feedback from them, are helping drive the DOC’s changes and overall direction, ensuring a continuum of quality programming prior to reentry.

## **Alternatives to incarceration**

When an individual in Minnesota violates the conditions of their release from incarceration, has their release revoked, and returns to prison, they have few possibilities of receiving cognitive programming to target their risk areas. Across the state, staff are exploring a variety of intervention centers to help reduce recidivism by providing supervised release agents with alternatives to incarceration.

Instead of returning to incarceration, an individual can receive community-based programming, supervision, and accountability. These 45-day programs offer effective interventions to people who need additional support in the community. Program staff provide case planning for each participant to address the individual needs that contributed to their community adjustment challenges. The programs provide an opportunity for participants to remain within a community correctional setting, which means they stay more tied to their community supports, employment, and families—all of which are vital in the person’s reentry success.

## **Equity review of DOC policies**

Centering equity is a key part of implementing a person-centered approach. To that end, the DOC is including an equity component in its policy review process for all existing and new policies. Policy chairs will be trained to analyze unintended consequences of policy language, particularly those that result in fewer people accessing a privilege or benefit provided by the DOC or those that create unnecessary barriers. The overall goal is to reduce inequities in service delivery and employment practices. Policy equity reviews are expected to promote consistency across the department and equitable access to transformational services and supports for staff, incarcerated people, people on supervision, and the public.

## Intersections outside the DOC

Outside the DOC, other state and federal groups are also working to center housing stability and support transition into the community from incarceration, disengagement with corrections systems, and end homelessness. The two most relevant projects happening elsewhere within the state are the Minnesota Olmstead Plan and the MICH Justice Strategic Plan.

**Figure 9. Some of Minnesota’s plans around homelessness and corrections**



### Justice Strategic Plan

As discussed on page 9, the MICH is developing a Justice Strategic Plan. This plan is “focused on achieving housing, racial, and health justice for people experiencing homelessness.”<sup>63</sup>

MICH contracted with Rainbow Research to lead work groups and community conversations, and used that input to define what housing, racial, and health justice means for people experiencing homelessness. The project is now in phase 2, which involves developing results and strategies to achieve the results to drive the state’s work towards achieving justice.

The definitions of housing, racial, and health justice in the Justice Strategic Plan strongly align with the DOC’s work to end people releasing to homelessness. It is the intention of the DOC to fit this plan under the umbrella of the developing Justice Strategic Plan.

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<sup>63</sup> “Justice Strategic Plan,” Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness, accessed July 26, 2022, <https://mich.mn.gov/justice-strategic-plan>.

## Olmstead Plan

The DOC is a member of the Olmstead Subcabinet, which helps ensure state agencies meet their Olmstead Plan goals. The Olmstead Implementation Office (OIO) describes the Olmstead Plan as “a set of goals our state must meet so that people with disabilities can live, learn, work, and enjoy life alongside everyone else in the community.”<sup>64</sup>

In addition to participating on the Olmstead Subcabinet, DOC staff participate in different workgroups run by the OIO. This past year they proposed two amendments to identify barriers to accessibility within DOC policies, and to understand the overlap between persons with disabilities with persons released from MCFs to homeless releases to known and unknown locations.

### Proposed Olmstead amendments:

1. DOC will conduct a comprehensive review of policies and practices. The focus of the review will identify areas that need improvement related to person-centeredness, inclusivity, accessibility, and equity.
2. DOC will develop a system to respond to the needs of individuals with disabilities on correctional supervision and experiencing a release to an unknown location.
  - a. Develop a process to track the number of persons with disabilities or disabling conditions who are on correctional supervision and are currently experiencing a homeless release to an unknown location.
  - b. Develop a response strategy to meet the needs of these individuals. (In part through this Homelessness Mitigation Plan.)

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<sup>64</sup> “The Minnesota Olmstead Plan,” Minnesota Olmstead Implementation Office, accessed June 3, 2022, <https://mn.gov/olmstead/mn-olmstead-plan/about-mn-olmstead-plan/>.

# III. Recommendations

The DOC offers the following recommendations to guide its own work and to legislature.

## Recommendations for the DOC

### 1. Conduct equity reviews of existing and new policies

Due to the disproportionate representation of releases of BIPOC persons from MCFs to homelessness, the DOC should prioritize equity reviews of all policies that inform release planning. For example, the DOC should conduct equity reviews of policies related to case management processes, DOC housing resources, and release planning.

### 2. Design and implement training of the revised release planning policy

The DOC updated Agent Assignment Release Planning Policy 203.018 in September 2022. Staff anticipate that this change, if appropriately resourced and understood, will result in fewer releases to homelessness. The DOC should continue to prioritize training and provide resources for staff subject to this policy to maximize its effectiveness. Communication and support of the revisions are critical to ensure staff implement the policy as intended.

The DOC's February 2024 report to the legislature will include measures of the impact of this policy change. It will also evaluate the effects of a new practice directed by the DOC Hearings and Release Unit (as of 9/21/2022) related to accurately coding and documenting release plans to homelessness.

### 3. Implement a collaborative case consultation process

The CCC model showed promise with assisting corrections system professionals in adopting the perspective that it is their role to mitigate homelessness and introduce interventions to support housing stability. This work has shown that providing more empathetic support to staff can help reduce releases to homelessness. To expand the positive effects of this program, all MCFs and Community Corrections Act agencies should implement CCC. Implementation will require sufficient resources and should include a streamlined referral and response process, as well as metrics for evaluating progress.

### 4. Implement the Self-Reported Assessment tool

The DOC should implement the Self-Reported Assessment tool across MCFs. This is a foundational piece of the agency's person-centered approach and will provide the DOC with the granular data it needs to further improve services. The DOC should create an implementation plan for this effort, one that includes ongoing reporting on metrics and reporting for persons experiencing homelessness prior to commitment to an MCF.

The experience of homelessness is unique to every person and is influenced by their needs and circumstances. Current DOC data systems do not capture key information about individuals that would help professionals better support an incarcerated person. The current systems focus on transactional, representative data, like a person's name, gender, and race. This type of data has influenced the direction of the DOC's work. For example, the data identifying disproportionate representation of Native American individuals in corrections systems and experiencing homelessness showed the need for more culturally specific housing.

However, representative data does not provide enough detail for the DOC to make specific business decisions and create systems change. For instance, the system does not have more granular data on a person's history of housing instability, whether they have any disabilities, or if they identify as LGBTQIA+. Collecting granular data would support more individualized approaches, better system approaches, and better system advocacy.

### **More individualized approaches**

Developing more granular metrics will help the DOC develop targeted approaches for each person to help them achieve housing stability. For example, if a professional were aware of the individual's cultural identity, chronic history of homelessness, and substance-use disorder concerns, they would be able to offer more culturally specific resources to the individual. If information is provided to better understand the corrections-system-involved person, systems can develop strategies, services, and resources to be responsive to their needs.

### **Better system approaches**

If the DOC had more granular data, it could design better approaches not only for specific individuals, but for different groups within the corrections system. As an example, more detailed data would help the DOC develop better approaches to individuals on intensive supervised release (ISR). The DOC's current data shows that in 2020, 55 percent of individuals on ISR were released to a homeless release to a known location. Granular data would help the DOC analyze the connection between people on ISR and people who experience homelessness. Studying that relationship could include asking questions like:

- What do these individuals have in common?
- How would these individuals explain what they need to support disconnecting from the corrections system?
- How might this inform the targeting and framing of DOC-funded housing resources?
- What community dynamics influence or impact someone's success after release?
- What do effective interactions and relationships look like between a client and their corrections agent?

The resulting data, drawn in part from more granular data, would help the DOC change its policies and practices to help people achieve housing stability and stay out of the corrections system.



## **Better system advocacy**

Collecting more granular data will also help the DOC advocate for needed criminal justice and corrections reform. As an example, the DOC Community Stability unit theorizes that many incarcerated people released to homelessness to an unknown location have a disability. They can't currently support that claim with any data, though; their theory is based only on anecdotal experiences they've had with clients. To effectively redesign policies and practices to prevent homelessness among corrections-system-involved individuals, it is critical to know how many people with diagnosed disabilities are being released to homeless to an unknown location. If the number is as large as staff suspect, that would inform how the DOC and other state agencies advocate for reform. The state would be able to support more reform efforts that would give people with disabilities the support they need.

People who are in corrections systems are often entangled with multiple state systems. Right now, many systems are not built or used to holistically and interconnectedly support people. However, there is shared accountability across all systems, levels of government, and communities when seeking solutions together. Data can serve as the synthesis between shared accountability and shared purpose.

## **5. Additional recommendations**

### **Collect more qualitative data**

Better quantitative data would help the corrections system target more individualized approaches and take on broader reform efforts but collecting more qualitative data is just as important. The corrections system needs to hear directly from people who have experienced homelessness to better understand what would help them achieve housing stability. The system cannot be responsive to people's needs if it doesn't fully understand them, and quantitative data will never capture the depth of a person's needs and experiences.

Among other things, the corrections system needs to listen to people who have experienced homelessness when designing additional quantitative and qualitative ways to collect information from people entering the corrections system. People with lived experience can best explain what the DOC should know about them to effectively connect with them and create housing stability plans.

### **Strengthen partnerships with corrections and housing system partners**

The lives of the individuals who are cyclically engaged in the legal system and experience homelessness and housing instability within the community do not fall within one system or another. No one system is at fault more than any other. Institutional racism is replicated and threaded throughout these systems, which perpetuates and exacerbates this vicious cycle for many Minnesotans. To support effective and successful implementation of reimagined practices and policies, the corrections system needs to build staff capacity to connect meaningfully and authentically with people and communities. It must engage impacted persons, community partners, and frontline professionals empathetically and effectively to support what is needed for systems change. Meeting the intended requirements of this plan requires time to learn and develop skills and change systems' philosophies and values. Building capacity within all stakeholder spaces to focus on the most marginalized and impacted communities is paramount.

## **Develop a larger advocacy role**

To really effect systems change, the DOC should position itself as more of an advocate, from the individual-worker level up to the agencywide level. For individual corrections professionals, advocacy means supporting their clients by connecting with community partners and other resources. For the agency, advocacy means connecting with other agencies and organizations. In the spirit of One Minnesota, it means understanding how every group's work intersects, and finding ways to support others that are developing resources and working to end homelessness.

## **Use human-centered design principles and practices to continue with systems change**

Human-centered design principles and practices have formed and shaped the work detailed in this report. These principles and practices are key to centering the voices of those individuals at the intersection of the problem and providing agency and autonomy to share and design solutions.

The dynamic and complex nature of the problems of homelessness and housing instability require systems to be nimble to iterations of solutions and approaches to the work. Human-centered design principles and practices create opportunities to seek innovative interventions that may be organic to one community and scalable to others.

# **Recommendations for the legislature**

The DOC offers the following recommendations to the legislature that affect the DOC directly and that affect the DOC's state agency partners to mitigate homelessness in Minnesota.

## **Legislative recommendations about DOC priorities**

### **1. Provide resources for temporary homelessness and housing funds**

The legislature should allocate permanent funding to the DOC for temporary rental assistance. The funding resource is a technical tool that creates a bridge for individuals to transition to the community and connect to community-based housing and homeless services. It also creates spaces for effective community correctional supervision. Most community-based homeless and housing resources have local policies and eligibility criteria that are not inclusive to individuals releasing from MCFs. For instance, the Hennepin County coordinated entry guidance states "people who are 'couch-hopping,' in jail, treatment or any transition setting are not considered eligible for a coordinated entry assessment."<sup>65</sup> (Coordinated entry is considered the "front door" to accessing homeless and housing services within Hennepin County.)

Currently, DOC Rental Assistance is not adequately or consistently resourced and has been reliant on the budgets of DOC Field Services and the DOC Reentry Unit to maintain resources to meet the need. This is not sustainable. As discussed on page 5, more than 1,100 releases from MCFs were to homelessness in

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<sup>65</sup> "Coordinated Entry homeless assistance," Hennepin County, accessed October 3, 2022, <https://www.hennepin.us/coordinated-entry>.

calendar year 2021.<sup>66</sup> The current funding capacity cannot meet the scope of the problem identified through data.

The DOC strategic plan set a goal of increasing the number of people released from prison who obtain housing, obtain employment, enroll in education, or actively engage in community treatment. As the DOC and the corrections system are recognizing the importance of housing stability, the referrals for assistance to the Housing Coordinator have steadily increased. Current resources cannot meet the continued demand for staff and funding support.

## **2. Invest in culturally specific, trauma-informed housing and homeless resources and services**

As discussed on page 5, representative data already shows that BIPOC Minnesotans are disproportionately represented within the criminal legal system and in releases to homelessness. Based on anecdotal evidence, more granular data would likely show that other populations are also disproportionately incarcerated and released to homelessness, like people with disabilities.

Because these populations are overrepresented, the legislature should invest in culturally specific, trauma-informed resources that have the best chance of helping these groups achieve housing stability. These resources should be available to individuals exiting jail, prison institutions, and treatment facilities.

## **3. Fund Housing Coordinator positions**

The DOC Community Stability Team shoulders much of the responsibility for homelessness mitigation, supporting housing stability, and technical assistance for resources development. The current DOC Housing Coordinator is temporarily funded through COVID-19 Emergency Solutions Grant.

To support this important work, the legislature should fund two full-time Housing Coordinators. Although the positions would be housed within the DOC, these professionals would be a resource to corrections community partners across all delivery systems, along with all community partners. That includes public, private, and non-profit entities across all counties and tribal nations. Funding these positions permanently will increase the agency's capacity to support staff across the state and to build key partnerships with other organizations.

## **4. Fund housing stabilization prerelease services**

The legislature should provide resource gap funding for housing stabilization prerelease services. Housing Stabilization Services is a new Minnesota Medical Assistance (MA) benefit to help people with disabilities—including mental illness and substance use disorders—and seniors find and keep stable housing, which is foundational to individuals living healthy lives.<sup>67</sup> This recommendation would create an effective connection to these services when an individual is planning for release from an MCF; currently, federal Medicaid policy does not allow billing to MA during the pre-release period.

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<sup>66</sup> Minnesota Department of Corrections, *Homelessness 2021 Legislative Report*.

<sup>67</sup> "Housing Stabilization Services," Minnesota Department of Human Services.

## 5. Fund connection of homelessness and housing data

The legislature should provide funding to help the DOC connect its own data systems to other existing data management systems. For example, the Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS), required by several federal and state funders, is a web-based database used by over 220 homeless service organizations across the state to collect client-level data on households experiencing or at risk of homelessness.<sup>68</sup> The DOC does not currently have access to this system and would require funding and resources to gain it.

Better collaboration across systems would assist the corrections system in more effectively supporting people exiting incarceration and on correctional supervision within communities. It would also align the DOC's homelessness and housing resources to the existing network of state and federal funding resources. For example, DHS has several data systems for state-funded, county-operated services and resources. Viewing access to these systems would provide qualified corrections professionals the information they need to meaningfully connect with individuals on their goals, transitions plans, and overall needs.

The DOC anticipates it will need more funding at the beginning to create these data connections, and a smaller amount of ongoing funding to support the connections over time.

## DOC legislative recommendations supporting the holistic outcome of housing stability

- **Family Stabilization and Support:**
  - Support the creation of a Family Support Unit.
  - Reduce and/or eliminate the cost of calls to family members/support persons.
  - Support the development of Family Support Release Services.
- **Reentry Supports:**
  - Support funding for peer navigators and reentry and community supports.
  - Increase and enhance health services release planning (specific services and resources targeted to opioid use disorder).
  - Fund a culturally specific early release pilot for Native American persons.
  - Support funding for alternatives to incarceration.
- **Community Supervision:** Provide funding opportunities for corrections system partners (Community Corrections Act agencies, county probation offices, and tribal nation governments) to design and implement interventions that respond to homelessness and promote housing stability for persons who are corrections-system-involved. This is inclusive to funding for intervention centers to provide high-risk individuals an intermediate step before being returned to prison.
- **Transformative Education:**
  - Increase capacity for Adult Basic Education and higher education opportunities, inclusive to staffing, space, technology, and partnerships with institutions of higher education.
  - Increase early release opportunities for education.

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<sup>68</sup> "What is HMIS?" Minnesota's HMIS, accessed August 23, 2022, <https://www.hmismn.org/about>.

- **Pathways to Employment:**
  - Expand the EMPLOY program.
  - Fund the creation of the Public Safety and Economic Opportunity Unit (collaborative partnership between DOC and the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development).
- **Fund investments in the case management business unit within DOC.**
- **Public Safety Data Infrastructure:** Fund a proposal to overhaul the DOC’s outdated technology and systems for more effective and comprehensive data collection and analysis.<sup>69</sup>
- **Recruitment, Retention, and Staff Wellness:** Fund enhancements to meet mental health and wellness needs of corrections system staff who are overburdened with experiences of traumatic events and the current staffing crisis. Investments are needed to create an organizational structure that is responsive to the mental health and physiological needs of the workforce and support safety within the workplace.<sup>70 71</sup>
- **Fund the Minnesota Rehabilitation and Reinvestment Act (MRRRA):** MRRRA is a data-driven proposal focused on earned incentivized release that frontloads evidence-based interventions, treatment, and programming to encourage participation. MRRRA will support public safety outcomes including housing stability as it focuses on the programming that supports disengagement with the justice system.

## Legislative recommendations about state agency partners’ priorities

The state continues to develop interagency budget proposals to achieve housing stability. DOC is a part of legislative recommendations focused on housing stability with seven other state agencies. Housing stability is focused on the continuum of preventing and ending homelessness, creating a health rental market for renters with a low income, and closing the disparities in homeownership. The strategies to achieve housing stability center on increasing the amount of housing and shelter, addressing the affordability of housing, increasing the accessibility of housing and shelter, and ensuring individuals have adequate services and supports.<sup>72</sup> As an example, these interagency proposals highlight things needed to achieve housing stability:

- Appropriate funding resources to increase housing and shelter services.
- Appropriate funding resources and reduce policy barriers to create affordable and accessible housing.
  - Legislative proposal specific to the Minnesota Department of Human Services:
    - *Reducing Recidivism through Evidence-Based Community Housing Interventions.* This proposal will continue and establish ongoing funding for the successful Bridging Benefits project that helps people with disabling conditions leaving MCFs

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<sup>69</sup> Office of the Legislative Auditor, *Safety in State Correctional Facilities*, January 2021, <https://www.auditor.leg.state.mn.us/ped/updates/2021/safetycfacilities.pdf>.

<sup>70</sup> Joseph A. Schwartz, Douglas A. Granger, and Jessica L. Calvi, “The Implications of Stress among Correctional Officers: A Summary of the Risks and Promising Intervention Strategies,” Preprint version 1.0, (November 2022): 16.

<sup>71</sup> Office of the Legislative Auditor, *Safety in State Correctional Facilities*.

<sup>72</sup> In the immediate future, the Governor’s budget will be released in January of 2023 and will illuminate specific priorities from agency partners.

connect with public benefits. Additionally, the proposal establishes Housing Support presumptive eligibility for eligible persons leaving incarceration without stable housing.

- Appropriate funding resources to create and expand adequate services and supports for housing stability including supports for mental health and substance use.

## Recommendations aligned with legislative requirements

The table below shows how the above recommendations relate to the legislative requirements for the homelessness mitigation plan.

**Table 3. Recommendations aligned with legislative requirements**

| Legislative requirement  | Related plan recommendations  |
|--|---|
| Redesign business practices and policies                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct equity reviews of existing and new policies</li> <li>• Design and implement training of the revised release planning policy</li> <li>• Implement a collaborative case consultation process</li> <li>• Implement the Self-Reported Assessment tool</li> <li>• Fund Housing Coordinator positions</li> <li>• Fund housing stabilization prerelease services</li> </ul> |
| Increase collaboration between state, local, and tribal government | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invest in culturally specific, trauma-informed housing and homeless resources and services</li> <li>• Fund alignment of homelessness and housing data</li> <li>• Implement a collaborative case consultation process</li> </ul>  |
| Develop internal metrics   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design and implement training of the revised release planning policy</li> <li>• Implement the Self-Reported Assessment tool</li> <li>• Fund alignment of homelessness and housing data</li> </ul>  |

## IV. Metrics for measuring success

As the DOC continues its work to help end homelessness, it should use different metrics to evaluate progress. [Minn. Stat. § 241.068](#) already requires the DOC to file a written report with the legislature by February 15 of each year that includes:

- The total number released to homelessness from prison.
- The total number released to homelessness by each MCF.
- The total number released to homelessness by county of release.
- The total number under supervised, intensive supervised, or conditional release following release from prison who reported experiencing homelessness or lack of housing stability.

In addition, the DOC should use these metrics for evaluating progress:

- **Statewide Supervision System County-Race-Gender report:** This report details homelessness and housing instability experienced by persons on correctional supervision, disaggregated by county, race, and gender.
- **DOC Self-Reported Intake Assessment:** This redesigned and reimagined intake process allows individuals to self-report their needs and priority goal areas when they are admitted to an MCF. This tool will offer a variety of new metrics for the DOC to use in evaluating its homelessness mitigation efforts.
- **Informal evaluation through community engagement:** As the DOC engages its own staff and its partners about this work, it should continue to ask professionals for their feedback on the DOC's efforts. Questions to ask could include: What has the DOC done that was successful? What has the DOC done that didn't work as planned? What was interesting about the DOC's efforts? This will help the DOC to practice rapid cycle learning and to constantly revise its approaches.
- **Stories from impacted persons:** Qualitative feedback from people at the center of this work—particularly persons who identify as BIPOC—should be weighed just as much as quantitative data. Their perspectives and their stories are an equally important measure of whether the DOC's efforts are working for everyone.