



Legislative Report

Runaway and Homeless Youth Report

Office of Economic Opportunity

December 2022

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Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 3.197, requires the disclosure of the cost to prepare this report. The estimated cost of preparing this report is \$65,000

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I. Executive summary

This report was prepared in response to Laws of Minnesota 2021, 1st Special Session, Chapter 7, Article 7, Section 29, which requires that a report on Runaway and Homeless Youth be submitted to the Minnesota State Legislature. The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Minnesota Legislature about unique causes of youth homelessness, targeted responses to youth homelessness, and recommendations based on existing reports and analysis on how to end youth homelessness. Staff from the Department of Human Services Office of Economic Opportunity and Wilder Research prepared this report.

Multiple sources inform this report, including:

- A scan of current literature and reports
- An online survey about funding with staff from organizations who administer federal and state funding for youth homelessness
- Semi-structured telephone interviews with key experts
- Facilitated discussion with Youth Services Network leaders
- Focus groups with youth with lived experience of homelessness
- An online survey completed by youth with lived experience of homelessness

Key findings from the report

The following key findings have been highlighted in multiple other studies and reports. The overall characteristics, funding complexities, and barriers and gaps are not unique to Minnesota and the youth who are experiencing homelessness.

Youth experiencing homelessness in Minnesota are resilient and have a diverse set of backgrounds, experiences, and identities.

- Wilder Research estimates that there were approximately 4,900 youth experiencing homelessness on any given night in 2018, and 13,300 youth who experienced homelessness at some point during the year.
- African American and American Indian youth are overrepresented in Minnesota's homeless population; this is true in both metro and greater Minnesota. LGBTQIA+ youth are also homeless at higher rates.
- The vast majority of youth experienced adverse and traumatic experiences in childhood, and many experienced violence during their housing instability.

It is extremely difficult to get an accurate picture of funding for youth homelessness in Minnesota.

- The lack of clarity is due to the complexity of the funding itself; the sheer number of federal and state agencies involved; multiple regulations; and the piecemeal approach to funding specific services, populations, and geographic areas.

Many service providers in Minnesota have made it a priority to incorporate best practices into their work to address youth homelessness.

- Many Minnesota programs that serve youth experiencing homelessness integrate nine evidence-based youth development principles into their work and offer a continuum of services to support youth.
- Service providers point to the flexibility and impact of Minnesota’s Homeless Youth Act, which offers more flexibility than federal HUD funding for addressing youth needs.
- State agencies, youth serving organizations, and policy initiatives are developing a practice of centering youth voice and leadership in programming and services.

Many barriers and gaps in resources and supports for youth experiencing homelessness were consistently mentioned in multiple studies, reports, and feedback from youth and other experts. However, they continue to persist and create challenges to addressing youth homelessness.

- Systems were built on policies and practices of racism and oppression.
- The Coordinated Entry System¹ is not as accessible or responsive as youth need it to be.
- Definitions and regulations may make it difficult or impossible for youth to get the services they need.
- Much of the funding is tied to unrealistic expectations or unresponsive to the developmental needs of youth.
- There is need to integrate youth voice in identifying solutions that address these gaps.

Recommendations based on findings

This is the message to the legislature: By investing in the youth response to homelessness, we can make systems improvements all the way up the chain in delivering services. Getting upstream with youth can make a difference over the long term. -program director

In preparation for this report, Wilder Research reviewed multiple national and Minnesota-based studies, as well as gathered input directly from local community experts, including youth with lived experiences. The same themes emerged again and again: the problem of youth homelessness can be addressed, but there need to be significant changes to a piecemeal system that will allow for more respectful, creative, flexible, and individualized access, supports, and services for youth.

A comprehensive study completed by Chapin Hall, which included intensive work from Hennepin County, overlaps with the findings of this report and includes the following findings and recommendations (Morton et al., 2017, p. 4).

¹Minnesota Continuums of Care (CoC) have complied with provisions of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development interim rule [24 CFR 578.7(a)(8)] to develop a “centralized or coordinated process designed to coordinate program participant intake assessment and provision of referrals” for families and persons experiencing homelessness. The Coordinated Entry System is intended to be easily accessed by individuals and families seeking housing or services...and includes a comprehensive and standardized assessment tool.” From <https://www.mnhousing.gov/sites/multifamily/coordinatedentry>

Voices of Youth Count (national): Key findings

Finding 1. Youth homelessness is a broad and hidden challenge

Finding 2. Youth homelessness involves diverse experiences and circumstances

Finding 3. Prevention and early intervention are essential

Finding 4. Youth homelessness affects urban and rural youth at similar levels

Finding 5. Some youth are at greater risk of experiencing homelessness

Voices of Youth Count (national): Recommendations

- ✓ Conduct national estimates of youth homelessness biennially to track our progress in ending youth homelessness. See Finding 1.
- ✓ Fund housing interventions, services, outreach, and prevention efforts in accordance with the scale of youth homelessness, accounting for different needs. See Finding 1.
- ✓ Encourage assessment and service delivery decisions that are responsive to the diversity and fluidity of circumstances among youth experiencing homelessness. See Finding 2.
- ✓ Build prevention efforts in systems where youth likely to experience homelessness are in our care: child welfare, juvenile justice, and education. See Finding 3.
- ✓ Acknowledge unique developmental and housing needs for a young population, and adapt services to meet those needs. See Finding 3.
- ✓ Tailor supports for rural youth experiencing homelessness to account for more limited service infrastructure over a larger terrain. See Finding 4.
- ✓ Develop strategies to address the disproportionate risk for homelessness among specific subpopulations, including pregnant and parenting, LGBT, African American and Hispanic youth, and young people without high school diplomas. See Finding 5

Minnesota-specific recommendations

For this report, we integrated the Voices of Youth Count study findings and recommendations into the overarching Minnesota-specific recommendations synthesized from other reports reviewed, as well as feedback provided by local experts and youth with lived experience. It should be noted that these six recommendations are the themes that rose to the top. However, there are multiple additional other issues that need to be addressed, including those outlined in the Barriers and Gaps section of this report.

Recommendation 1

Create a streamlined, comprehensive, holistic response to youth homelessness that addresses fragmentation, reduces barriers, and enables youth to get the immediate and long-term supports they need.

We are putting youth into situations that actually put them at higher risk. We have to recognize this. Systems as they operate now are going to create more trauma.

– program director

The systems are not set up to work together. There's the homeless response system, the corrections system, the foster care system – all of these systems. And then there is support for adults, families, single adults, and youth. Feels like they are all in their own silos. They need to be working together to be addressing homelessness. Don't think putting young people in a box is really helpful to them, rather than supporting them more holistically. – program director

State and federal funding priorities and performance metrics don't fit into the scope of how we should be serving youth. They don't meet the needs of youth.

– program director

How do we all do our part instead of operating in silos? If you put young people in the middle, what is to surround them? We can figure this out – who can do what. For example, if we have a young person who is experiencing homelessness and their family needs resources, we can easily devise a system of coordination among services and resources available in the area. – program director

- ✓ Funding and services to prevent and address youth homelessness are piecemeal. There is no single coordinated “system” or response to youth homelessness. The multiple systems (housing, safety net, etc.) are confusing and include verifications and red tape that make access nearly impossible to navigate. Experts state that the systems were designed with a lens of mistrust of people experiencing homelessness (requiring traumatized people to tell their story and prove their needs are valid again and again), and built on top of past discriminatory policies (such as racist redlining, housing covenants, and systematically removing Indigenous children from their communities). There are currently multiple roadblocks that youth must attempt to hurdle to get the supports they need.
- ✓ Many barriers and gaps in resources and supports for youth experiencing homelessness were consistently mentioned in multiple studies, reports, and feedback from youth and other experts. However, they continue to persist, and a fragmented approach to fixing the system’s issues has been ineffective in addressing youth homelessness.
- ✓ There is a need for inter-system collaboration to ensure a holistic and unified approach. As part of this, there should be additional focus on building connections and working relationships across systems and across the state (i.e., corrections, child protection, behavioral health, medical care) in order to best meet the needs of youth. Half of the youth who gave feedback about recommendations for this report, said that better coordination in the systems that support them is a priority. It should be noted, however, that community experts state that increased coordination across systems will not solve the problem if each system itself is built on policies and approaches that perpetuate an over-representation of BIPOC youth.
- ✓ Build prevention efforts in systems where youth likely to experience homelessness are in our care: child welfare, juvenile justice, and education (Morton et al., 2017). Services offered up stream may alleviate difficulties for families and individuals in the future.
- ✓ The infrastructure currently in place requires youth providers to do significant data management and their organization may have little IT capacity. In addition, it is critical that the data that is collected is purposeful, useful, and used to inform decision-making and address population-specific needs.

Recommendation 2.

Find ways to increase funding that promote flexibility and responsiveness, encourage service specialization and expertise (depth rather than breadth), and reduce competition for organizations that serve youth experiencing homelessness.

While the amount of philanthropic investments in this area is unknown, these private contributions are best viewed solely as an insufficient and uncoordinated triage effort to fill the historic shortfalls of government investment in this area. The leadership role of the government in the work of ending youth homelessness would be best expressed by designing and creating a fully funded public system that prevents any young Minnesotan from experiencing homelessness in the first place.

– representative from philanthropy

- ✓ Overwhelmingly, providers, local experts, and a review of financial data show a funding system that is nearly impossible to navigate, emphasizes fragmentation of services, silos providers and systems, and creates competition and a need for providers to do everything for every population, rather than specialize and individualize.
 - ✓ Repeatedly, providers and youth talked about the need for funding to be flexible so that immediate and individualized needs of youth can be met. The Homeless Youth Act was cited by many informants as a great precedent for flexible funding for programs, and Direct Cash Transfer programs were given as an example of flexible funding directly for youth.
 - ✓ Over half of the youth (56%) who gave feedback about recommendations for this report stated that changing eligibility requirements so they could qualify for housing or assistance was a top priority.
 - ✓ In addition, the majority of youth who gave feedback for this report stated that food assistance (47%) and case management or help accessing services (44%) were the most important to them. Although housing may be an overarching need, services that meet basic needs are critical.
 - ✓ Fund housing interventions, services, outreach, and prevention efforts in accordance with the scale of youth homelessness, accounting for different needs (Morton et al., 2017).
-

Recommendation 3.

Support youth workers who provide critical frontline services for youth experiencing homelessness.

We need to raise the bar everywhere on what youth workers are paid to do this work. The work they do is so important, and it's a lot of crisis work, and they are getting \$17 to \$18 per hour. It's not sustainable, and it's not fair. So, if we want to create a really solid workforce that can provide for these young people, we need to pay them livable wage. The low wages are a threat to the sector for sure. – program director

- ✓ There is an urgent need to address burnout among youth workers, due to the constant urgency of working in a crisis mode. Youth workers may be witness to violence, death, overdoses, and the trauma of the youth with whom they work. Yet, according to stakeholders, the youth workers do not always receive adequate training to allow them to effectively intervene and provide support. In addition, youth workers are not adequately compensated with livable wages or wages that reflect the critical importance of their work, and turnover in many programs is high.
- ✓ The recruitment and retention of high quality youth workers is a critical foundation to best meeting urgent and long-term, trauma-informed, and developmental needs of youth experiencing homelessness.
- ✓ Many key informants identified a shortage of trained providers (73%), especially psychiatric prescribers (60%), and an inability to retain or recruit prescribers (60%) as some of the primary gaps in services. Key informants in greater Minnesota were more likely to cite these shortages as barriers to service provision than respondents in the Twin Cities metro area.

Recommendation 4.

Redesign the current assessment and “Coordinated Entry” system to support youth at risk of homelessness and those who are experiencing homelessness. Address complex definitions and requirements that limit how and when youth qualify for assistance and constrain providers’ abilities to meet immediate needs of youth. The current approach is not responsive to the unique circumstances and fluctuating needs of youth who are experiencing homelessness.

We need to be able to meet youth where they are. Policies and procedures make things inflexible. – program director

The system perpetuates disparities. We talk about safety nets, and yet you have to check so many boxes to be able to get services with arbitrary time frames and arbitrary amounts of actual support you can get. These systems are not person-centered; they are centered on how much money was invested and what are the outcomes (which are numbers rather than actual human beings). – program director

- ✓ The current assessment process in place is not responsive to meet the immediate needs of youth. Respondents noted that a youth may present with an urgent housing crisis at one location, but may be required to go to another location to get assessed for Coordinated Entry. In the meantime, shelters may have empty beds available, waiting for the Coordinated Entry System to locate a youth who had made it to high priority. The lag time creates even more of a system that requires youth to cobble together different places to stay, increasing their vulnerability.
- ✓ Inequitable screening tools perpetuate racial inequalities in the supports available to people who are experiencing homelessness, and prioritize White people over people who identify as BIPOC (Wilkey et al., 2019).
- ✓ Coordinated Entry requirements may also compel youth to prove needs and qualifications to be considered for assistance. For example, respondents noted that youth may not qualify for shelter or housing under Coordinated Entry unless they stay outside or in shelter or meet other bureaucratic requirements.
- ✓ Current definitions of homelessness are confusing and criteria for entering programs are too restrictive. There is a need to clarify and expand HUD eligibility criteria to meet the urgent and longer term needs of youth.
- ✓ Youth experiencing homelessness are not a homogeneous group and cannot be expected to have identical needs. One size does not fit all in developing or providing supports.
- ✓ Encourage assessment and service delivery decisions that are responsive to the diversity and fluidity of circumstances among youth experiencing homelessness (Morton et al., 2017).

Recommendation 5.

Advance and sustain a laser focus on preventing and ending homelessness among youth experiencing homelessness who identify as BIPOC and LGBTQIA+, as well as parenting youth, and youth living in rural areas of Minnesota.

We are so stuck in intervention-based responses. We need to go upstream and address all the risk factors. – program director

We need programs where young people can see adults who look like them and are running the programs that are supporting them, and also walking along side them.
– program director

- ✓ Address barriers and bureaucratic red tape faced by culturally specific organizations to access funding. Funding for these organizations may need to be initially focused on building capacity.
- ✓ Develop strategies to address the disproportionate risk for homelessness among specific subpopulations, including pregnant and parenting, LGBT, African American, and Indigenous youth (Morton et al., 2017).
- ✓ Tailor supports for rural youth experiencing homelessness to account for more limited service infrastructure over a larger terrain (Morton et al., 2017).

Recommendation 6.

Because each youth has their own story and changing needs, approaches need to be individualized and youth voices need to be integrated into planning, design, and decision-making about services and systems that support them.

Centering youth voice with high representation of priority needs is the most important strategy to consider. Don't do harm by not having youth voice as prominent. – program director

No decisions about me, without me.
– youth respondent

- ✓ Youth experiencing homelessness in Minnesota are resilient and have a diverse set of backgrounds, experiences, and identities. One size does not fit all.
- ✓ Services and housing need to be tailored to the needs of youth, recognize that most youth have histories of trauma, include harm reduction approaches, and recognize that youth's needs and circumstances change.
- ✓ Acknowledge unique developmental and housing needs for a young population, and adapt services to meet those needs (Morton et al., 2017).
- ✓ Youth perspective and voice need to be centered in local and statewide conversations about approaches and policies that will prevent and end homelessness. They are the experts, understand changing dynamics, and can give concrete guidance about solutions.

II. Legislation

- 245.4 Sec. 29. **2022 REPORT TO LEGISLATURE ON RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS**
- 245.5 **YOUTH.**
- 245.6 Subdivision 1.Report development. The commissioner of human services is exempt
- 245.7 from preparing the report required under Minnesota Statutes, section 256K.45, subdivision
- 245.8 2, in 2023 and shall instead update the information in the 2007 legislative report on runaway
- 245.9 and homeless youth. In developing the updated report, the commissioner must use existing
- 245.10 data, studies, and analysis provided by state, county, and other entities including:
- 245.11 (1) Minnesota Housing Finance Agency analysis on housing availability;
- 245.12 (2) the Minnesota state plan to end homelessness;
- 245.13 (3) the continuum of care counts of youth experiencing homelessness and assessments
- 245.14 as provided by Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) required coordinated
- 245.15 entry systems;
- 245.16 (4) the biannual Department of Human Services report on the Homeless Youth Act;
- 245.17 (5) the Wilder Research homeless study;
- 245.18 (6) the Voices of Youth Count sponsored by Hennepin County; and
- 245.19 (7) privately funded analysis, including:
- 245.20 (i) nine evidence-based principles to support youth in overcoming homelessness;
- 245.21 (ii) the return on investment analysis conducted for YouthLink by Foldes Consulting;
- 245.22 and
- 245.23 (iii) the evaluation of Homeless Youth Act resources conducted by Rainbow Research.
- 245.24 **Subd. 2.Key elements; due date.**(a) The report must include three key elements where
- 245.25 significant learning has occurred in the state since the 2007 report, including:
- 245.26 (1) the unique causes of youth homelessness;

245.27 (2) targeted responses to youth homelessness, including the significance of positive
245.28 youth development as fundamental to each targeted response; and
245.29 (3) recommendations based on existing reports and analysis on how to end youth
245.30 homelessness.

246.1 (b) To the extent that data is available, the report must include:

246.2 (1) a general accounting of the federal and philanthropic funds leveraged to support
246.3 homeless youth activities;

246.4 (2) a general accounting of the increase in volunteer responses to support youth
246.5 experiencing homelessness; and

246.6 (3) a data-driven accounting of geographic areas or distinct populations that have gaps
246.7 in service or are not yet served by homeless youth responses.

246.8 (c) The commissioner of human services shall consult with and incorporate the expertise
246.9 of community-based providers of homeless youth services and other expert stakeholders to
246.10 complete the report. The commissioner shall submit the report to the chairs and ranking
246.11 minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over youth homelessness
246.12 by December 15, 2022.

III. Introduction

Purpose of report

This report was prepared in response to Laws of Minnesota 2021, 1st Special Session, Chapter 7, Article 7, Section 29, which requires that a report on Runaway and Homeless Youth be submitted to the Minnesota State Legislature. Its purpose is to update information included in the 2007 report, and provide information to the Minnesota Legislature about:

1. Unique causes of youth homelessness
2. Targeted responses to youth homelessness
3. Recommendations based on existing reports and analysis on how to end youth homelessness
4. Funding leveraged to support homeless youth activities (including the volunteer response)
5. Gaps in services or responses to youth homelessness

Contents of report

This report is organized according to the following sections:

- Legislation for the Runaway and Homeless Youth report
- Data on youth homelessness
- Funding for youth homelessness
- Current programs and approaches to youth homelessness
- Barriers and gaps for resources and services
- Recommendations for addressing youth homelessness

Staff from the Department of Human Services (DHS), Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), and Wilder Research prepared this report. Staff used data gathered from:

- A scan of current literature and reports (See Appendix G: References)
- An online survey about funding completed by 18 staff from agencies receiving funding (federal, state, county) for youth experiencing homelessness
- Semi-structured interviews with 16 key experts
- Facilitated discussion with 13 executive directors associated with the Youth Services Network
- Three focus groups with youth with lived experience
- An online survey completed by 121 youth with lived experience

A full description of the methodology is in Appendix A.

IV. Data on youth homelessness

Youth experiencing homelessness in Minnesota are resilient and have a diverse set of backgrounds, experiences, and identities.

Key findings:

Wilder Research estimates that there were approximately 4,900 youth experiencing homelessness on any given night in 2018, and 13,300 youth who experience homelessness at some point during the year.

Studies have shown that rates of homelessness are fairly even across urban and rural areas; however, well over half of youth who experience homelessness are counted in the Metro area.

African American and American Indian youth are overrepresented in Minnesota's homeless population; this is true in both metro and greater Minnesota. LGBTQIA+ youth are also homeless at higher rates.

The vast majority of youth experienced adverse and traumatic experiences in childhood, and many experienced violence during their housing instability.

Residential social service placements and serious conflict at home continue to be common precursors to homelessness among youth.

Over two-thirds of youth experiencing homelessness have a chronic health condition, most commonly a diagnosed mental health condition.

One-third of youth experiencing homelessness have young children of their own; rates are higher in greater Minnesota.

Studies attempting to count the number of unique cases of youth homelessness largely use point-in-time information. Quantifying the true frequency of youth homelessness is a significant challenge because youth tend to move in and out of homelessness, and youth work hard to mask or hide their homelessness (EASD, 2021). Studies conducted since the original legislative report completed in 2007, including the annual HUD January Point-in-Time (PIT) Count, the triennial Minnesota Homeless Study conducted by Wilder Research, and the Hennepin County Voices of Youth Count (VoYC) conducted by Chapin Hall, used different federal criteria in their counts.

In this report, “unaccompanied youth” and “youth on their own” are used synonymously. These terms refer to youth experiencing homelessness who are age 24 and younger who are not with a parent or guardian, and may be parenting their own children. Some literature, reports, and program information also refer to two sub-populations of unaccompanied youth: those under age 18 (sometimes referred to as “minors,” and those who are age 18-24 (sometimes referred to as “young adults”).

Counts and estimates

Finding youth in a one-night study

Young people on their own are some of the least visible and most vulnerable people experiencing homelessness. They may not wish to stay in adult shelters and there are fewer youth shelters available, especially in greater Minnesota. Youth frequently move around, staying temporarily with friends, in cars, on transit, or in other temporary situations. Finding youth outside of the shelter system is extremely difficult, and the numbers reported here are an undercount.

One night counts

The 2022 January Point-In-Time (PIT) Count conducted for HUD by each Continuum of Care (CoC) region in Minnesota recorded **604** unaccompanied youth, age 24 and younger, who were experiencing homelessness in Minnesota (Institute for Community Alliances, personal communication, October 24, 2022). Numbers cannot be compared to 2021 because the HUD PIT count was impacted significantly by the COVID-19 pandemic, and most regions of the state did not conduct an unsheltered count. However, the 2022 numbers are down from **746** counted in the 2020 HUD PIT Count.

The number of youth counted in the Minnesota Homeless Study, conducted by Wilder Research, is slightly higher than those counted in the HUD PIT Counts. This is due in part because of seasonal differences (October versus January), slightly different methodology (counting youth who are very temporarily doubled up or couch hopping), and the inclusion of some outreach activities. On October 25, 2018, Wilder Research counted **1,484** youth experiencing homelessness in Minnesota (Figure 1). While rates of adult and older adult homelessness increased between 2015 and 2018, rates of youth homelessness remained relatively unchanged from 2015 (1,463). Youth on their own make up 15% of Minnesota's homeless population (Pittman et al., 2020).

1. Change in Minnesota counts by age group, 2015 to 2018

	2015 study	2018 study	% change (2015 to 2018)
Children (17 and younger) with parents	3,296	3,265	-1%
Youth on their own (24 and younger)	1,463	1,484	+1%
Adults (25-54)	3,637	4,382	+20%
Older adults (55 and older)	843	1,054	+25%

Source: Homelessness in Minnesota, Detailed findings from the 2018 Minnesota Homeless Study, Wilder Research.

The Minnesota Homeless Study data are backed up by other studies with similar findings. The Chapin Hall Voices of Youth Count (VoYC) found that on a single night in June 2016 there were **911** homeless and unstably housed youth, age 13 to 25 years old in Hennepin County. This Hennepin County count integrates data from a Brief Youth Survey, a visual count, and data from Hennepin County Homeless Management Information System

(HMIS). Furthermore, 477 students in Hennepin County who were eligible for McKinney-Vento services were unaccompanied youth during the 2014-2015 school year (Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 2017).²

Estimates (one night and over the course of a year)

Any point-in-time count will underrepresent the total number of people experiencing homelessness, since many people living outside of the shelter system are not found on the night of the study. This is especially true of youth on their own, who often couch-hop or find other temporary places to stay, as well as people experiencing homelessness in suburban locations and greater Minnesota where there are fewer shelters.

Using Minnesota Homeless Study data, Minnesota Student Survey data, and other estimating techniques, Wilder Research estimates that there were approximately **4,900** youth experiencing homelessness on any given night and **13,300** youth who experienced homelessness at least one night in 2018 (Figure 2).

2. Estimated number of youth experiencing homelessness on any given night and over the course of a year in Minnesota, 2018

	Count of youth in shelters	Count of youth not in shelters	Estimate of additional uncounted youth	Estimated total
On any given night				
Young adults age 18-24	856	436	1,925 ^a	3,217 ^a
Unaccompanied minors under age 18	122	70	1,467 ^a	1,659 ^a
Total (One night)	978	506	3,392^a	4,876^a
Over the course of the year				
Young adults age 18-24				7,500 ^a
Unaccompanied minors under age 18				5,800 ^a
Total (Annual Estimate)				13,300^a

^a The estimation methods for young adults, unaccompanied minors, and children with parents were updated for 2018. As a result, the estimates cannot be directly compared to those from earlier studies.

^b Although overall counts (reported earlier) include homeless people (of unknown age) in detox on the night of the survey (48 in 2018), the estimation technique used includes them within the estimated number of people not in shelter (uncounted) on the night of the study.

Source: 2018 Minnesota Homeless Study, Wilder Research.

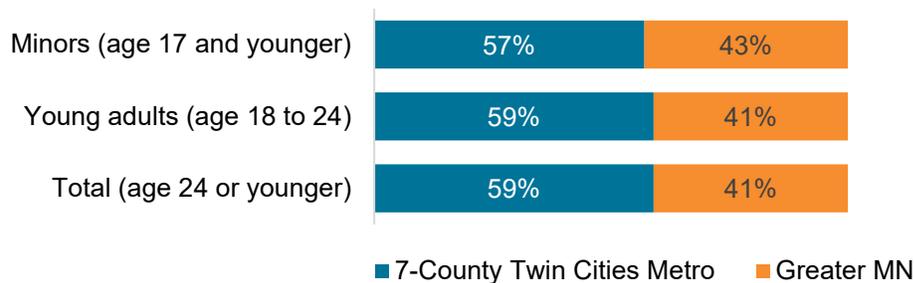
² “The US Department of Education’s Office of Elementary and Secondary Education requires state educational agencies (SEAs) to submit information about the number and characteristics of homeless students enrolled in public school. These data are used to determine whether homeless children and youth have equal access to free appropriate public education as required under Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act, which authorizes the federal Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program.”

Geographic spread

Beyond point-in-time studies, national estimates from the 2017 survey conducted by VoYC suggest that approximately one in 10 American young adults age 18-25 (more than 3 million) and at least one in 30 adolescent minors age 13 to 17 (700,000 or more) experiences some form of homelessness in a 12-month period (Morton et al., 2017). According to the same national survey study, rural and urban counties across the country share similar youth homelessness rates. In predominantly rural counties, 9.2% of young adults age 18 to 25 reported any homelessness during a 12-month period. In predominantly urban counties, the prevalence rate was 9.6%. The household prevalence rates for any homelessness during a 12-month period for youth age 13 to 17 were also statistically equal between rural and urban counties (4.4% and 4.2%, respectively).

Focusing on Minnesota, although there is likely an even spread of youth homelessness in urban, suburban, and rural areas, over half (59%) of youth experiencing homelessness are counted in the Twin Cities metro (Figure 3). This may be due to youth being found in areas in which services and shelters are located, and because youth homelessness is less visible in rural areas. Two-thirds of homeless youth (68%) have lived in Minnesota for more than 10 years.

3. Current location of youth experiencing homelessness in Minnesota, 2018



Source: 2018 Minnesota Homeless Study, Wilder Research.

Nearly half of youth are not in a formal shelter (outside or temporarily doubled up).

Youth are especially mobile and often cobble together many different options in order to find a place to stay. On the night of the Wilder study, 54% of youth were in a shelter or transitional housing program, or are about to be evicted from housing with nowhere else to go. However, youth were asked here they had stayed in the 30 days prior: 38% had spent more than a week doubled up with a friend or a family member on a very temporary basis, and 22% had spent more than a week outside. More than 1 in 4 youth were turned away from a shelter in the last three months because there was no space available.

Characteristics of youth experiencing homelessness

All information included here, unless otherwise noted, is from the “Homelessness in Minnesota: Detailed Findings from the 2018 Minnesota Homeless Study,” published by Wilder Research (Pittman et al., 2020).³

African Americans, American Indians, and youth who identify as LGBTQIA+ are particularly over-represented among the homeless population. Racial disparities exist in both the Twin-Cities Metro and greater Minnesota.

Two-thirds (67%) of youth experiencing homelessness are African American, American Indian, Asian, Hispanic, or multi-racial. Generational impacts of discriminatory housing policies, child welfare policies, and other systemic inequities have contributed to the overrepresentation of Black and Indigenous people in the homeless population. This disproportionality extends to youth experiencing homelessness (age 24 and younger), where 34% of those interviewed identified as Black or African American (compared to 9% of the Minnesota population) and 15% identified as American Indian (compared to 1% of the Minnesota population).

African Americans make up nearly half of the population of youth experiencing homelessness in the metro area, while White youth make up over half of the population of youth experiencing homelessness in Greater Minnesota (Figure 4). Twelve percent of youth experiencing homelessness statewide identify as of Hispanic or Latino origin.

4. Racial backgrounds of youth experiencing homelessness in Minnesota, by region

	7-County Twin Cities Metro	Greater Minnesota	Statewide
African American	47%	16%	34%
White or Caucasian	20%	52%	33%
American Indian	13%	17%	15%
Multi-racial	12%	10%	11%
African born	3%	1%	2%
Other	3%	1%	2%
Not specified	2%	2%	2%
Asian or Pacific Islander	1%	1%	1%

Source: 2018 Minnesota Homeless Study, Wilder Research

³ The most recently available data on youth homelessness from Wilder Research is from 2018. The 2021 study was postponed due to the pandemic.

Discrimination is also associated with the overrepresentation of [those who identify as LGBTQIA+ in the homeless population](#). Twenty-three percent of youth (age 24 and younger) experiencing homelessness identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning (LGBTQ). Interpersonal issues and conflict at home are particularly prevalent for LGBTQIA+ youth who most commonly reported becoming homeless due to problems getting along with someone they lived with (54%). In a subset of questions asked only of respondents age 20 or younger, 76% of LGBTQIA+ youth said that frequent fighting with parents or guardians was a main or partial cause of becoming homeless. Of note, 31% of LGBTQIA+ respondents age 20 or younger reported lack of tolerance for their sexual orientation or gender identity as a contributor to their homelessness.

Violence and abuse often lead to unstable housing situations. Higher percentages of LGBTQIA+ respondents reported a range of childhood trauma experiences than their non-LGBTQIA+ peers, in addition to relationship violence and sexual exploitation (see also, [Characteristics of People who Identify as LGBTQ Experiencing Homelessness in Minnesota](#), Wilder Research).

In terms of gender identity, over half of youth experiencing homelessness identify as female (56%), 41% identify as male, and 2% identify as non-binary or gender fluid. Three percent identify as transgender.

Key findings about youth experiencing homelessness

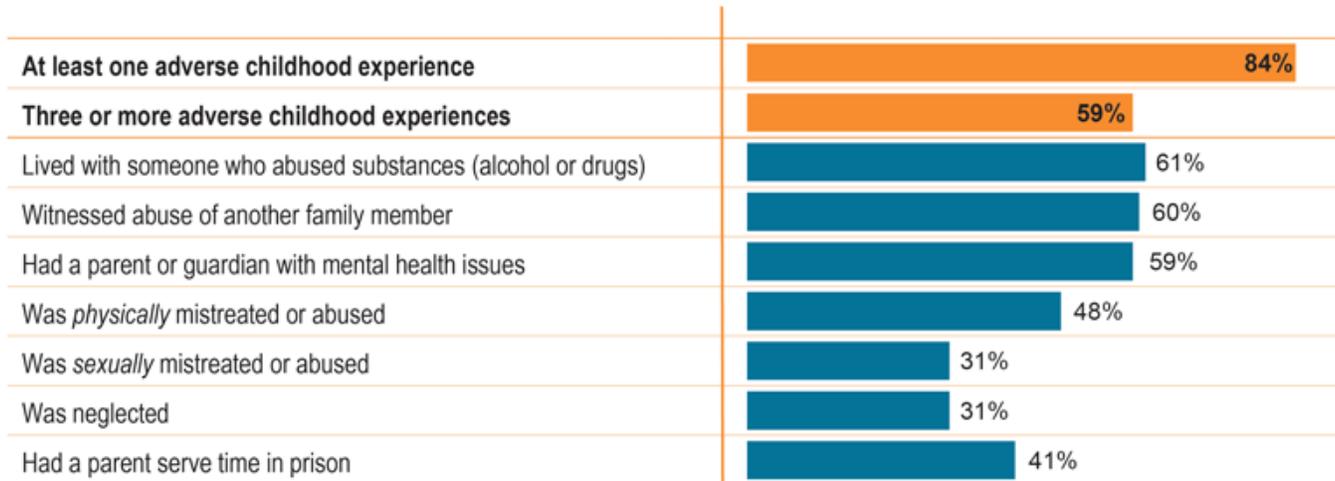
The majority of youth experiencing homelessness (84%) had experienced adverse and traumatic experiences in childhood; many are experiencing violence while homeless

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) include abuse, neglect, and other potentially traumatic experiences that occur during childhood. The effects of ACEs are compounding. This means that the more ACEs a person experiences, the more severe the consequences on their health. A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) study on ACEs found that adults who have experienced four or more ACEs during their lifetime had a higher risk of mental illness, behavioral problems, and diseases later in life. In addition to those included in the ACEs study, there are a multitude of other traumatic events, especially those that occur in childhood that can impact the developing brain. For instance, systematic racism and historical trauma have also been found to impact the brain and put people at higher risk of developing health-related issues. ACEs are just one aspect of multiple studies that show that prolonged or “[toxic stress](#)” can impact the way the brain processes information, makes decisions, and solves problems.

The Minnesota Homeless Study found that an alarming 84% of youth had experienced at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE), including trauma and abuse. On average, youth had experienced 3.2 ACEs, putting them at greater risk of health issues as adults.

In 2018, the most common adverse childhood experiences among youth experiencing homelessness were having lived with someone who abused substances (61%), witnessing the abuse of another family member (60%), and had a parent with mental health problems (59%) (Figure 5).⁴

5. Adverse childhood experiences



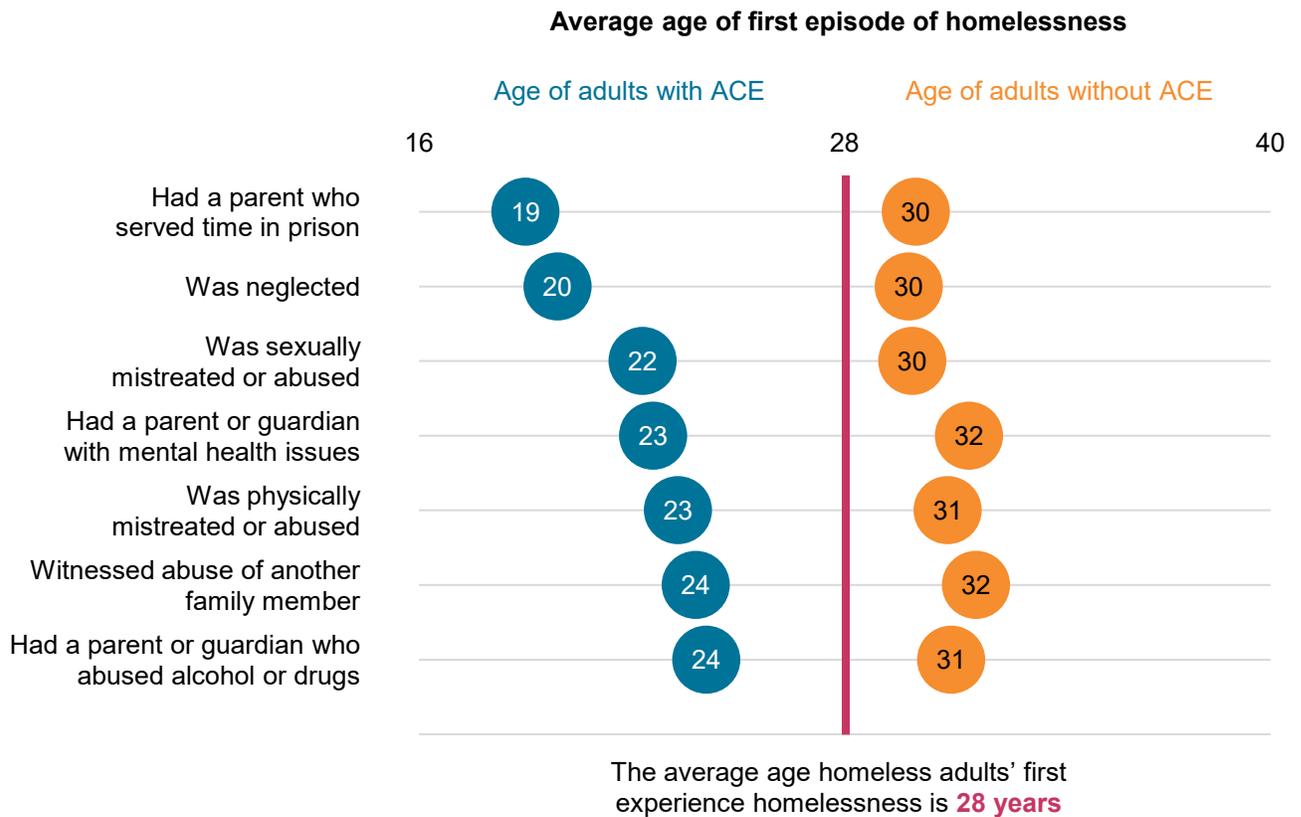
Note. The Minnesota Homeless Study includes selected questions around adverse childhood experiences. It is important to note that the study does not include a comprehensive list of adverse childhood experiences. In addition, question wording differs from those on the Family Health History questionnaire used in the 1998 CDC-Kaiser Permanente Adverse Childhood Experiences Study.

Source: Homelessness in Minnesota, Detailed findings from the 2018 Minnesota Homeless Study, Wilder Research.

The average age at which homeless adults first experienced homelessness is 28, but for those reporting an adverse childhood experience, the average age of first episode of homelessness is 8 to 11 years younger. Figure 6 compares the average age of first episode of homelessness for those reporting an ACE to those who did not report an ACE. For example, for those who were neglected as a child, the average age of the first episode of homelessness was 20 years. Those without this ACE had an average age of first episode of homelessness of 30 years.

⁴ The Minnesota Homeless Study survey asks people whether they had experienced any of seven different adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), as described by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It should be noted that, generally, there are 11 ACEs measured, but for the purposes of this research, we only ask about the seven most severe (and combine emotional and physical neglect into one category).

6. Average age of first episode of homelessness by type of ACE experienced



Source: Homelessness in Minnesota, Detailed findings from the 2018 Minnesota Homeless Study, Wilder Research.

This disparity is explained in part because youth experiencing homelessness (age 24 and younger) are more likely than older age groups to report an ACE. However, even when we examine ACE data of older age groups of homeless adults, those with ACEs also experienced homelessness at a younger age than those without ACEs. For example, the average age of first episode of homelessness for middle age homeless adults (age 35-54) was 22 years for those who had a parent who served time in prison when they were children. This compares to an average age of 31 for the first episode of homelessness for middle age homeless adults who did not report this ACE.

Many youth face violence while they are precariously housed.

People experiencing homelessness, especially those who identify as female, often have more exposure to violence and exploitation. In the 2018 Minnesota Homeless Study, over half of female-identifying youth (57%) and 43% of male-identifying youth had at least one experience with violence or exploitation. Of the experiences, they most often said they had stayed in an abusive situation because there were no other housing options (Figure 7).

Although their numbers are small, rates of violence and exploitation are even higher among those who identify as non-binary or gender fluid, with 79% of non-binary youth reporting at least one experience with violence or sexual exploitation.

7. Experience with violence and trading sex for basic needs, by youth’s gender identity

	Youth (age 24 or younger)	
	Female	Male
At least one experience of violence or sexual exploitation	57%	43%
Stayed in an abusive situation due to no other housing options	43%	27%
Left last housing because of abuse by someone they lived with	28%	17%
Physically or sexually attacked while homeless	28%	18%
Had to be sexual with someone to get shelter, clothing, or food	22%	13%

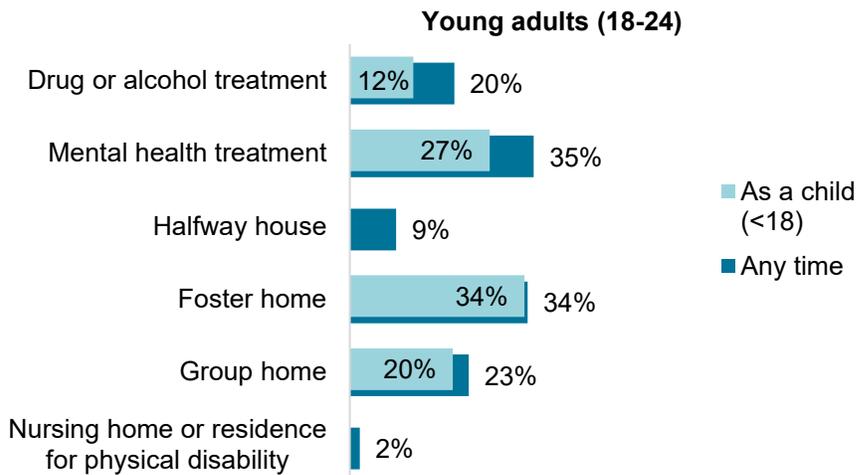
Source: 2018 Homeless Study, Characteristics Fact Sheet, Wilder Research

Residential social service placements and serious conflict at home continue to be common precursors to homelessness among youth.

Out-of-home placements in childhood, such as foster care or other social service placements, are known to increase the likelihood of homelessness (Courtney et al., 2011). One-third of young adults (age 18-24) were placed in foster care (Figure 8), compared to under one-quarter (23%) of all adults.

More than one-half (52%) of young adults (age 18-24) had been in a social service placement as a child. This compares to less than one-third (31%) of homeless adults 25 and older and 34% of homeless adults age 18 and older. Childhood social services placement is associated with earlier ages of first homelessness.

8. Out-of-home placements



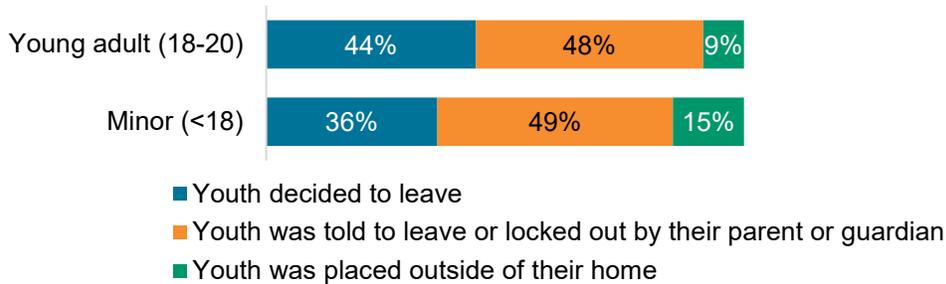
Source: Homelessness in Minnesota, Detailed findings from the 2018 Minnesota Homeless Study, Wilder Research.

16% of youth reported leaving one of these social service or treatment facilities in the last 12 months. For those who left, 47% reported they did not have a stable place to live when they left and 41% reported they received help finding a stable place to live before they left.

Many youth left home because they were kicked out or placed outside of their homes.

Almost two-thirds (64%) of minors were kicked out or placed outside of their home when they last left their living situation with their parent or guardian (56% of 18-20 year olds; Figure 9).

9. Reasons for leaving home



Source: 2018 Minnesota Homeless Study, Wilder Research

Key findings about reasons for leaving their housing include the following:

- The most common reason for becoming homeless is “fighting frequently with parents or guardians.” 72% of minors (33% main cause); 66% of young adults 18-20 (36% main cause).
- 35% of minors didn’t feel safe; 34% of young adults 18-20.
- 48% of minors weren’t willing to live by their parents’ rules; 46% of young adults 18-20.
- 45% of young adults report “difficulty getting along with other people” as a reason they left their last housing. 60% of minors; 50% of young adults 18-20.

Over two-thirds of youth experiencing homelessness have a chronic health condition, most commonly a diagnosed mental health condition.

Seven in 10 youth experienced a chronic mental or physical health condition or substance abuse disorder. Although youth rates of physical health conditions and substance use disorder are lower than the adult population, youth and adults have similar rates of serious mental health conditions (64%).

More than half of youth (60%) reported that they felt they need to see a health professional about a health care problem. For the 59% of youth that said they have a regular place they go for medical care, the majority (72%) said they go to a clinic that requires insurance or fees followed by a free clinic (12%). Youth living in the metro area were more likely to report the use of a free clinic compared with youth in greater Minnesota (18% and 5%, respectively). Youth experiencing homelessness disproportionately received care in the emergency room (42% in the past 6 months).

Key learnings about youth homelessness since 2007

There is a need to intervene early and focus on prevention: many homeless adults were first homeless as a young person.

Most adults experiencing homelessness (77%) have had multiple experiences with homelessness, and many adults have experienced repeated homelessness starting from an early age. Over a third (36%) of adults experiencing homelessness first became homeless at or before age 18, and one-half (52%) first became homeless by the time they were age 24. The most common age (i.e., modal age) of first homelessness for adults was 18 years old.

The proportion of homeless adults' first experiencing homelessness at or before 18 years old varies by demographic characteristics:

- 54% of American Indian adults, 33% of Black or African American adults, and 30% of White adults first experienced homelessness by the age of 18
- 57% of adults who identify as LGBTQIA+ and 34% of non-LGBTQIA+ adults first experienced homelessness by the age of 18
- 42% of women and 31% of men first experienced homelessness by the age of 18

Beyond childhood histories of homelessness is the reality of homelessness in the next generation. A third of youth experiencing homelessness have children of their own (32% statewide; 31% metro and 44% greater Minnesota). The 2018 Minnesota Homeless Study counted 280 youth age 24 or younger who had 428 children with them.

Youth experiencing homelessness do not yet have the severity or chronicity of some of the problems experienced by homeless adults, including chronic physical health problems, substance abuse, and traumatic brain injury, and, thus, intervening early can make a long-term positive impact and break the cycle of instability for the next generation.

There is an increased need for shelter and affordable housing, especially that which meets the diverse needs of youth.

The number of youth who were not in a formal shelter (outside or temporarily doubled up) increased by 11% between 2015 and 2018. In 2018, more than 1 in 5 youth (22%) spent more than a week outside, and 38% spent more than a week doubled up, in the month of the study. This indicates that both shelter and affordable housing availability is not meeting the need.

A better understanding of the needs of youth who are experiencing homelessness has also highlighted the increased need for specialized services to meet their needs. The 2017 VoYC report (Morton et al., 2018) recommended the following:

Acknowledge unique developmental and housing needs for a young population, and adapt services to meet those needs. (p. 4)

Research has also highlighted the need for shelter and housing that meet the needs of diverse subpopulations of youth. Recommendations from the VoYC reports (Morton et al., 2017) include the following:

Develop strategies to address the disproportionate risk for homelessness among specific subpopulations, including pregnant and parenting, LGBT, African American and Hispanic youth, and young people without high school diplomas. (p. 4)

Tailor supports for rural youth experiencing homelessness to account for more limited service infrastructure over a larger terrain. (p. 4)

There is an increase in chronic health conditions

The percentage of youth with at least one chronic health condition (71%) has been increasing among youth experiencing homelessness since the completion of the last legislative report in 2007 (Figure 10).

10. Chronic health conditions among the population of youth experiencing homelessness in Minnesota, by study year

Youth 24 and younger	2006	2009	2012	2015	2018
At least one chronic health condition	66%	61%	68%	68%	71%
Serious mental illness (except anxiety or panic disorder)	49%	46%	53%	54%	60% ^a
Physical health conditions	32%	31%	37%	36%	33% ^b
Substance use disorder	17%	14%	16%	13%	16%

^a For consistency in the trend, “anxiety or panic disorder” (first asked in 2015) is omitted from “serious mental illness” in this table. When included, 64% of youth experiencing homelessness report having a “serious mental illness.”

^b For consistency in the trend, “cancer” and “chronic pain” (first asked in 2018) are omitted from “physical health conditions” in this table. When included, 39% of youth experiencing homelessness report having a “physical health condition.”

Source: 2018 Homeless Study, Characteristics Fact Sheet, Wilder Research

V. Homeless Youth Act grantee data

Data below is from Homeless Youth Act funded shelter and housing programs from the time period of July 1, 2020-June 30, 2022, unless indicated otherwise. It does not include outreach and drop-in programs, as this information is not collected from those programs.

Disability status of homeless youth:

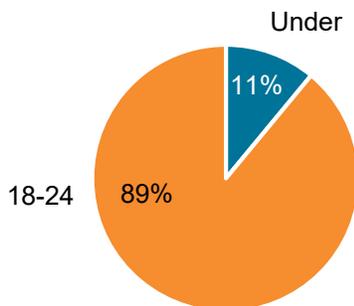
- Thirty-nine percent (39%) reported having a disability of long duration, compared to thirty-two percent (32%) in the 2021 HYA Legislative Report. When limited to youth heads of household, forty-four percent (44%) reported having a disability of long duration.
 - Of the youth reporting a disability of long duration, seventy-three percent (73%) reported having a serious mental illness, compared to fifty-nine percent (59%) in the 2021 report.

Extent of youth homelessness:

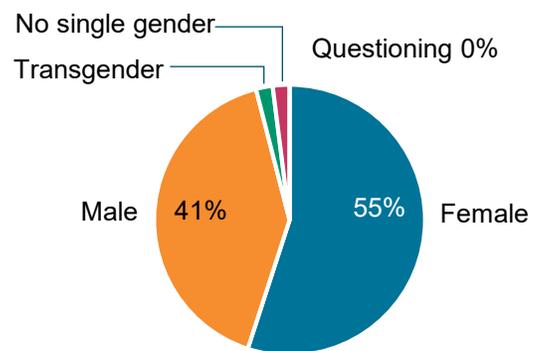
- Forty-five percent (45%) met Minnesota’s definition of long-term homelessness, which means having experienced continuous homelessness for one year, or four episodes in the past three years. This is compared to forty-six percent (46%) in the 2021 HYA Legislative Report.

Demographics of homeless youth:

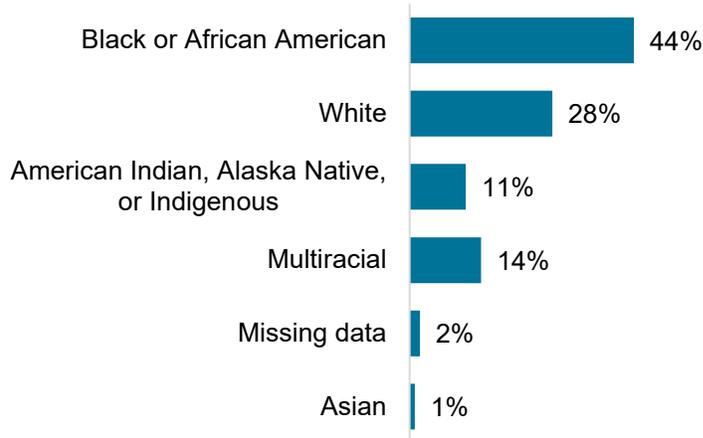
11. Age – Youth served in HYA funded shelter and housing



12. Gender – Youth served in HYA funded shelter and housing



13. Race – Youth served in HYA funded shelter and housing



A. Details about grant awards

Funding available, requests and awards

The Homeless Youth Act was funded at \$11.238 million for the 2022-2023 biennium; \$11.024 million was distributed through a competitive Request for Proposals process. \$214,000 of the funding was used towards grant management, data collection and administrative expenses. Scoring criteria included, but was not limited to, program capacity and program design (accessibility of services, appropriateness of services, cost effectiveness, etc.), program revenue and budget, geographic location and previous performance.

Fundable activities

As defined in statute, program activities include prevention, outreach, drop-in, emergency shelter, and housing, described in Table 14 below.

14. Description of Homeless Youth Act activities

Program activities	Description
Prevention	Activities that contribute to prevention of homelessness. Prevention activities happen within the context of outreach and drop-in programs.
Outreach	Outreach programs locate, build relationships with, and meet the immediate needs of youth who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness, while working to connect youth with a range of services, including housing. Activities also include cross-training and collaboration with Safe Harbor programs and services.
Drop-in	Drop-in center programs provide youth (who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness) with basic needs including meals, a safe place during the day, and supportive services to assist them in securing housing. Drop-in centers provide walk-in access to crisis intervention and case management services.

Program activities	Description
Emergency shelter	Shelter programs provide youth with walk-in access to emergency, short- and medium-term residential care. These programs provide safe, dignified shelter, including private shower facilities, beds and meals.
Housing	Housing programs can be site-based (i.e., all units in one facility) or scattered-site (i.e., units in apartments in the community), and can include host home models (youth housed with host families). Housing programs assist youth in locating and maintaining safe, dignified housing, and provide support services while being housed. Housing models may be time limited, offering assistance for typically up to 24 months, or non-time limited, such as permanent housing models.

All activities outlined in Table 14 include a range of services including, but not limited to:

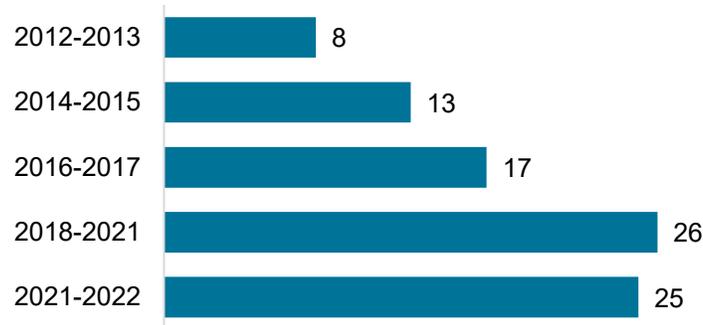
- Basic needs and crisis intervention services
- Family connection, counseling and reunification
- Case management
- Individual and group counseling
- Mental health services
- Substance abuse treatment/counseling
- Medical and dental health care
- Transportation
- Housing resources
- Education and employment opportunities
- Recreational activities
- Advocacy
- Food/hot meals
- Assistance navigating systems
- After-care and follow-up services

Breakdown of funding

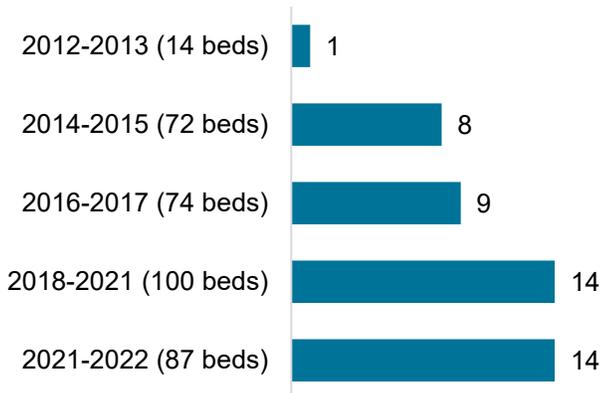
The Department of Human Services provided funding to 33 grantees towards the operations of 74 program activities for youth (many of the 33 grantees provide multiple program activities). Figure 15 below shows the number of awards by program activity, and Figure 15 shows the dollar amount funded by program activity.

15. Number of programs receiving HYA funds by program activity

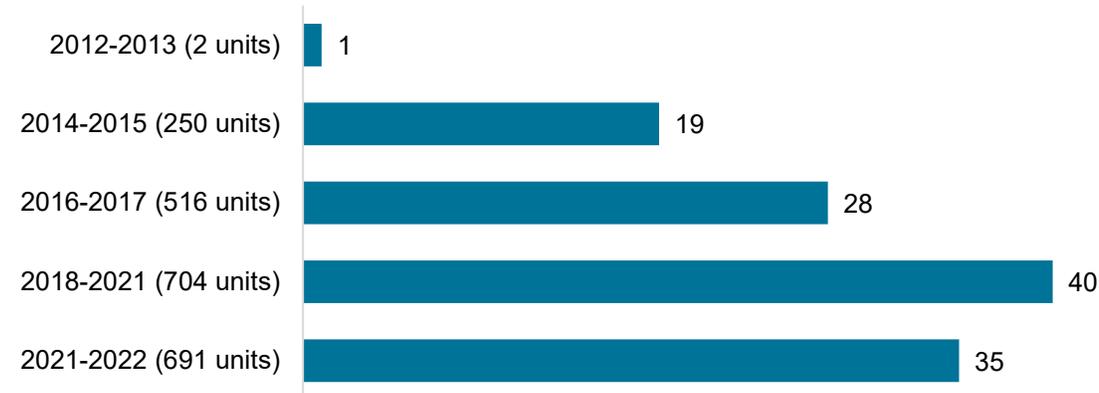
Outreach/Drop-in



Shelter



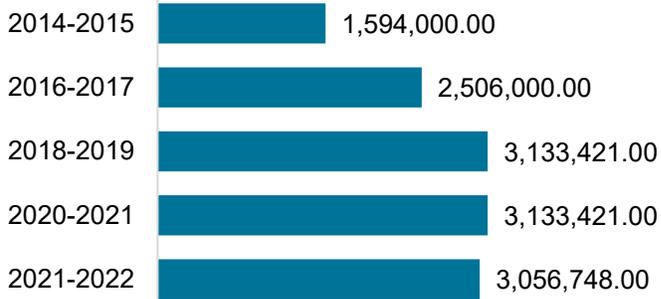
Housing



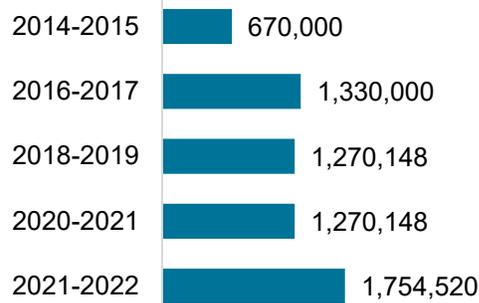
Housing and shelter units are offered through a variety of models, including residential or congregate settings, hotel/motel vouchers, host homes, and scattered-site housing in apartments. In addition, housing may be time-limited in design (e.g., transitional housing or rapid re-housing models), or non-time limited (e.g., permanent supportive housing models).

16. Distribution of Funds by Program Activity

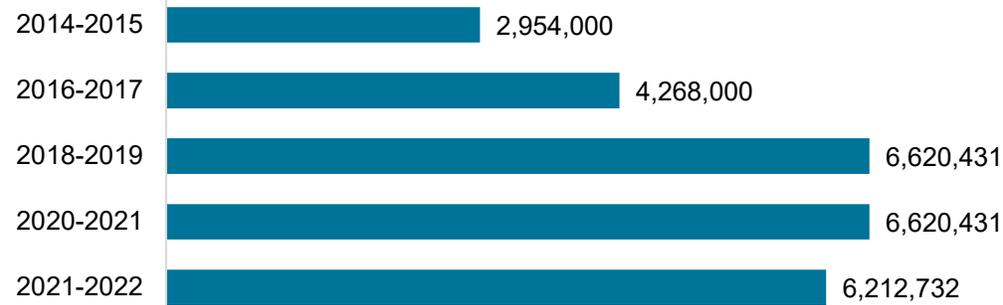
Outreach/Drop-in



Shelter



Housing



Technical assistance

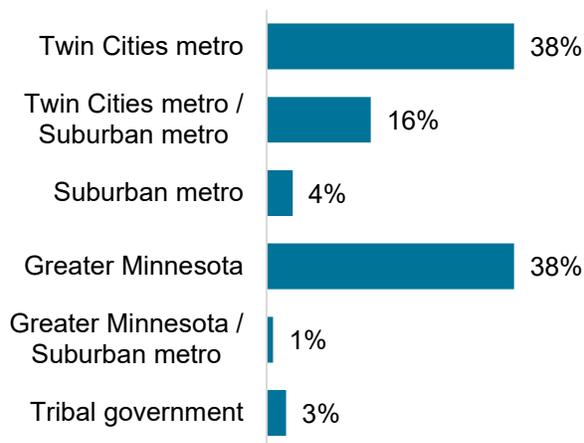


Geographic distribution of funds

Distribution of funds was made with consideration of geographic needs. Four in 10 youth (41 percent) identified by Wilder Research in the 2018 homeless study were in greater Minnesota.⁵ As seen in Figure 17, Homeless Youth Act funding distribution was in-line with geographic need.

- 17 organizations proposed projects in greater Minnesota, 15 (88 percent) were at least partially funded.
- 2 Tribal Nations proposed projects, both (100 percent) were at least partially funded.
- 23 organizations proposed projects in the seven-county Twin Cities metro area, 17 (74 percent) were at least partially funded.⁶

17. Geographic distribution of funds



B. Outputs and outcome indicators

Data reported below is collected through semi-annual and annual reports submitted by Homeless Youth Act funded grantees. Aggregate data from drop-in center and outreach programs is collected via Excel spreadsheets while housing and shelter program data is collected through the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Since the previous legislative report in 2018, these tools have been updated to capture programmatic outputs and outcomes in more detail.

⁵ <https://www.wilder.org/wilder-research/research-library/single-night-count-people-experiencing-homelessness-2018-minnesota>

⁶ One organization was funded for projects in greater Minnesota and the seven-county Twin Cities metro area.

Below is a summary of data collected for the period July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2022.

Drop-in center outputs

Due to the crisis and short-term nature of drop-in services, outputs are collected as opposed to outcomes, as follows:

There were 5,486 youth⁷ who visited drop-in centers 41,866 times:

- One-hundred percent of those youth received access to food, clothing, showers, transportation and crisis intervention services.

Drop-in centers provided:

- 15,587 bus tokens and 1,695 bus cards.
- 100,583 meals.
- 594 hours of legal advocacy/services.

At agencies providing services beyond basic needs:

- 3,214 youth were connected with on-going case management (as defined by the agency).
- 203 youth participated in a formalized education program, and 206 participated in a formalized employment/vocational training program.
- 2,066 youth connected with the coordinated entry system.

Outreach outputs

Due to the crisis and short-term nature of outreach services, outputs are collected as opposed to outcomes, as follows:

There were 2,938 youth⁸ who were served during outreach:

- All youth received access to basic needs assistance in the form of food, weather-appropriate garments, transportation, and crisis intervention services.
- Outreach workers documented 9,203 interactions with youth during outreach.

Outreach workers provided:

- 25,634 supplies (socks, nutritious snacks, bus tokens, etc.).
- 2,558 referrals to available services (health care, drop-in facilities, employment programs, etc.).
- 412 connections to the coordinated entry system.

⁷ HYA grantees report unduplicated counts of youth for their drop-in center programs; however, we are unable to de-duplicate these counts across grantees.

⁸ HYA grantees report unduplicated counts of youth for their outreach programs; however, we are unable to de-duplicate these counts across grantees.

Shelter outputs and outcomes

There were 950 unduplicated youth heads of household served in shelter, with 100 percent receiving basic needs services in the form of shelter, food, clothing, showers, referral to medical and mental health services if needed, transportation and case management.

Due to the nature of emergency shelter, some youth receive short-term services, while others receive a longer term, deeper level of service intervention. Of those youth who received a deeper level of service intervention:

- 504 had an individualized case plan.
- 447 were connected to education-related support services, and 481 were connected with employment-related support services.
- 499 were assisted in connecting and building a relationship with a family member or other positive, supportive adult.

Housing outputs and outcomes

- **There were 1,287 unduplicated youth heads of household served in housing.**
- 554 of the 848 youth (65%) who exited the housing program during the reporting period moved into stable housing upon exit. This is compared to 411 of 693 youth (59%) in the 2021 report.
 - 70% of youth identifying as White exited to stable housing
 - 64% of youth identifying as Black, Indigenous, or Person of Color (BIPOC) exited to stable housing
- 923 youth were connected with employment-related services.
- Twenty-three percent (23%) of those served obtained employment during the reporting period. This is compared to fifteen percent (15%) in the 2021 report.

Housing status after exit

Over the past several years, the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) has expanded its capabilities to identify instances of housing instability without requiring direct support staff to enter their post-exit follow ups with youth into the system.

The information below was gathered using data of youth who exited a HYA housing program and identifying if they had an interaction with the homeless system anywhere in Minnesota within 6 or 24 months after program exit, as captured by HMIS.

Housing status 6-months after exit⁹

- Total youth exits: 1,541.
- 1,384 or 90% of all youth who exited a HYA housing program did not have a record of housing instability within 6 months of program exit.
- 157 or 10% of all youth had at least one record of housing instability within 6 months of exit from a HYA housing program.

Housing status 24-months after exit¹⁰

- Total youth exists: 2,209.
- 1,877 or 85% of youth who exited a HYA housing program did not have a record of housing instability within 24 months of program exit.
- 332 or 15% of youth had at least one record of housing instability within 24 months of exit from a HYA housing program.

C. Shelter-Linked Mental Health Grant

Shelter-Linked Mental Health is a set of mental health focused services targeted to youth experiencing homelessness and youth experiencing sexual exploitation. The reporting section in the Homeless Youth Act Legislation was updated to require information on the Shelter-Linked Mental Health grant be included in this report. The purpose of Shelter-Linked Mental Health services is to integrate mental health services into programs for youth experiencing homelessness and/or sexual exploitation through partnerships between homeless youth and Safe Harbor programs, with community-based mental health providers. Modeled after the School-Linked Mental Health grant program, the Shelter-Linked Mental Health grant program aims to lower barriers to access and support youth in obtaining and maintaining needed mental health services. During the 2019 legislative session, \$500,000 was appropriated for the 2020-2021 biennium for Shelter-Linked Mental Health services. Activities supported by Shelter-Linked Mental Health funds include:

- Programming to prepare youth to receive mental health services
- Assisting youth in obtaining health insurance
- On-site mental health services, including group skills and therapy sessions and individual therapy sessions
- Staff consultation and training
- Ancillary support services

⁹ Data are for youth who exited a HYA housing program sometime between July 1, 2020 and December 31, 2021. This is to allow the six months of time to assess housing status after program exit.

¹⁰ Data are for youth who exited a HYA housing program sometime between July 1, 2018 and June 30, 2020. This is to allow the six months of time to assess housing status after program exit.

The Shelter Linked Mental Health Grant was funded at \$500,000 for the 2022-2023 biennium; \$500,000 was distributed through a contract amendment process.

Shelter-linked mental health program agencies and activities

Below is a breakdown of agencies funded and services that they are providing with the grant funds:

Twin Cities Metro Area

180 Degrees: Awarded \$80,000 for the biennium.

- Mental Health Services (including individual therapy and family therapy, medication and diagnostic evaluations) for youth who are uninsured at Brittany’s Place and Hope House.
- Mental Health case consultation and training for shelter staff.

Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis (Hope Street Program): Awarded \$70,000 for the biennium.

- Collaborate with Headway Emotional Health to provide five hours of onsite mental health services for youth in the program.
- Provide mental health case consultation and training for staff.

Face to Face Health and Counseling Inc.: Awarded \$260,000 for the biennium.

- Provide Mental Health services at three youth serving organizations in the Twin Cities. These include Face to Face Health and Counseling Inc., Ain Dah Yung, and Avenues for Youth.
- Provide mental health case consultation and training for staff across the three organizations.

Greater Minnesota

Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota (Duluth): Awarded \$60,000 for the biennium.

- Provide mental health services to youth at Another Door Shelter (site based) and Renaissance Transitional housing (site based).
- Provide mental health case consultation, trauma screening and psychoeducation on trauma to program staff.

MAHUBE-OTWA Community Action Partnership, Inc.: Awarded \$30,000 for the biennium

- Provide trauma informed practices training for staff
- Collaborate with Steller Human Services to provide a variety of mental health services for youth experiencing homelessness.

Shelter-linked mental health outputs

Data reported below is collected through semi-annual and annual reports submitted by Shelter Linked Mental Health Grant funded agencies.

Below is a summary of data collected from Shelter Linked Mental Health Grantees for the period of July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2022.

- There were 539 youth¹¹ who received mental health services with 1,199 mental health visits.
 - 43 of the youth served would otherwise not have been eligible for mental health services due to being uninsured/underinsured.¹²
 - 133 of the youth served didn't have health insurance upon engaging in mental health services and program staff supported them in getting insurance.¹³
- Mental health services provided:
 - 760 one on one therapy sessions.
 - 222 group therapy sessions.
 - 1,044 Auxiliary/Ancillary services were provided. Auxiliary/Ancillary services includes but is not limited to the following activities; financial assistance with deductibles, transportation support, less formal mental health services, relationship building, help with accessing insurance and any gap services utilized in supporting youth to get mental health services.
- There were 93 shelter/housing staff trainings on mental health related topics.

¹¹ Shelter-Linked Mental Health grantees report unduplicated counts of youth for their programs in six-month increments. We are unable to de-duplicate these person counts across reporting periods or grantees.

¹² One grantee reported that this information is unknown, so this is likely an undercount.

¹³ One grantee reported that this information is unknown, so this is likely an undercount. This grantee is different than the grantee referred to in the prior footnote.

VI. Funding for youth homelessness

It is extremely difficult to get an accurate picture of funding for youth homelessness in Minnesota.

Key findings:

It is difficult to understand the full scope and funding amounts provided by government sources for youth homelessness in Minnesota.

There is no single or principal source with ready access to comprehensive funding information.

The lack of clarity is due to the complexity of the funding itself; the sheer number of federal and state agencies involved; multiple regulations; and the piecemeal approach to funding specific services, populations, and geographic areas.

Funding from private philanthropy for youth homelessness is equally difficult to ascertain, due to the sheer number of private funding sources.

For this report, 15 programs were able to estimate youth-specific homelessness funding. This funding totaled \$18,514,539 in FY22.

Staff identified a wide range of gaps related to funding in Minnesota, including funding for specific types of programming, supports tailored to subpopulations of youth, and in greater Minnesota.

Research shows that interventions designed to support youth experiencing homelessness, enabling them to be housed and employed, can reduce or alleviate public costs.

Government funding to support youth homelessness comes from a variety of sources and is often combined with funding for the general homeless population. In addition, youth experiencing homelessness may be eligible for “mainstream” safety net funding for low-income populations such as the Minnesota Family Investment Program, General Assistance, Medical Assistance, Social Security Disability Insurance, SNAP (“food stamps”), etc. Some subpopulations have access to other benefits such as Veterans benefits, Social Security survivor benefits, or [Extended Foster Care](#) benefits.

Funding for responses to homelessness occur at every level of government and through philanthropic and other private sources. They flow to a wide range of partners and responses, including some that are specifically focused on one or more subpopulations (e.g., youth, families, and people with long histories of homelessness). Interventions may focus on activities to prevent homelessness from occurring, provide housing, shelter, or support during an episode of homelessness, or help someone exiting homelessness remain stably housed after exiting homelessness into housing. Some funds are directed to specific settings or residential programs, others focus on supporting people over time in a variety of living situations. People living in some settings (e.g., shelter or transitional housing) are considered homeless during their stay, whereas in other settings they are housed and no longer homeless.

- Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2021

The scope of this report is funding that is specifically directed towards youth experiencing homelessness, and does not include funds that are allocated to the general homeless population or low-income people. In Minnesota, specific funding for youth experiencing homelessness comes from a number of sources, including:

1. State government funds, such as the Homeless Youth Act.
2. Federal government funds from Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Department of Health and Human Services, such as HUD CoC funding; DHHS Family Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) funding; Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) both for the State overall and for special “entitlement areas”¹⁴ (regions of the state that get additional funds), and special one-time grants or initiatives such as the HUD Youth Homelessness Demonstration Projects (YHDP) awarded to Hennepin County and Northwest Minnesota CoC regions.
6. Limited tribal and local government funds, which may use one-time funds or a patchwork of funding to respond to the needs of youth experiencing homelessness in their communities.
7. Philanthropic funds, in some cases directed toward systems change efforts and in others awarded directly to organizations that provide services to youth experiencing homelessness.

This report focused on state and federal government funds that specifically target youth experiencing homelessness. Although efforts were made to collect information about philanthropic funding for youth homelessness, researchers determined that there could not be a valid or accurate summary of private funding within the scope and timeline of this report. On the one hand, philanthropy may not separate out its funding to provide services specifically for youth from its funding for other populations of people experiencing homelessness. On the other hand, it is nearly impossible to get an accurate picture of spending by private philanthropy because of the vast number of private funders in Minnesota. As one representative from philanthropy stated:

I appreciate the work of trying to gather this information, but I have concerns about our ability to provide anything even approaching an accurate representation of philanthropic funds directed to services supporting youth experiencing homelessness.

The [Minnesota Council on Foundations](#) has ~160 grantmaking members, but that does not represent anywhere near all grantmaking organizations in the state. Even gathering a comprehensive reporting on homeless youth funding from the fifteen members of the [Heading Home Minnesota Funders Collaborative](#) would be a challenging endeavor, and yet would still only represent less than 10% of the organizational membership of the Minnesota Council on Foundations. I would not be confident nor comfortable having such a partial and incomplete number represent the data that is being requested for this legislative report.

¹⁴ DHS-OEO administers the balance-of-state ESG funds for greater Minnesota areas, but entitlement areas such as Hennepin, Ramsey and St. Louis counties receive direct funding from HUD through ESG, and HUD CoC funding.

Summary of government funding

A note about funding. It should be noted that it is extremely difficult to ensure that this funding information is fully comprehensive. This is because of the complexity of the funding, the sheer number of federal and state agencies and regulations involved, and the piecemeal approach to funding specific services, populations, and geographic areas. There is no single source for ready access to all of the information.

Federal awards are often made on timeframes that do not align with this analysis (e.g., multi-year awards with grant years that do not align to State fiscal years). HUD's Continuum of Care program (\$36.5 million in Federal Fiscal Year 2020) is the key federal program that is exclusively focused on homelessness and does not go through state agencies. For this analysis, we asked CoC regional coordinators to parse out the funding that they receive that is allocated for youth specifically, and they shared that this is a difficult task. Funds are distributed to multiple agencies, many of which serve various populations of homeless people with youth being a small proportion. Therefore the information provided on HUD CoC funding is likely not an accurate estimate.

In addition, during the past two years, there were several federal Covid-19 related relief funds that were distributed to Minnesota localities, including federal CARES Act and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). This funding was not included in the analysis because it is time limited, and information about distribution for Minnesota's youth homeless population is not known.

Wilder Research examined the Minnesota Homeless Programs Fiscal Summary completed by the Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness (2021) and sent a follow-up request to government administrators with knowledge of youth-specific funding. Twenty staff completed a survey that collected information about funding amounts.

Due to the aforementioned complexities, the following tables should be examined with the understanding that it is extremely difficult to accurately separate out youth-specific funding from a range of funding sources that serve homeless populations. In fact, in several cases, agency staff reported that there were limitations to what information they could provide in this context. With these caveats in mind, of the 13 programs that could report youth-specific homelessness funding, this funding totaled \$18,514,539 in FY22 (Figure 18).

18. State and federal funding directed at youth homelessness, FY 22

Program	Funding source	Activities	Total funded (all populations) FY 22	Funding for youth (24 and younger) FY 22	Number of programs funded for youth	Number of youth served in FY 22
Homeless Youth Act (DHS)	State	Support services and operating costs (outreach, drop-in, emergency shelter, supportive housing)	\$5,619,000	\$5,619,000	33 Providers were funded for 74 Program activities	10,661
Family Homeless Prevention and Assistance Program (Minnesota Housing)	State	Financial and short-term rental assistance, support services	\$10,269,000	\$1,796,973	20	878
Hennepin County YHDP/Youth Housing and Homelessness Services (YHHS)	Federal	Wide range of youth related services	\$1,700,000	\$1,700,000	6	210 ^a
Emergency Services Program (DHS)	State	Support services and operating costs for shelter and outreach (one-time funds)	\$6,844,000	\$679,000	13	1351
Emergency Solutions Grant (HUD): directly to entitlement areas	Federal	Support services and operating costs for shelter and outreach	\$2,323,592	More than \$664,476 (See Figure 19)	Not able to estimate	Not able to estimate
Transitional Housing Program (DHS)	State	Support services and operating costs	\$3,184,000	\$600,000	8	80
Housing Support (DHS)	State	Income supplement program	\$187,000,000	\$443,569 ^b	1	Not able to estimate
Shelter-linked Mental Health (DHS)	State	Mental health services in shelter	\$250,000	\$250,000	4 HYA Providers	539

Program	Funding source	Activities	Total funded (all populations) FY 22	Funding for youth (24 and younger) FY 22	Number of programs funded for youth	Number of youth served in FY 22
Emergency Solutions Grant (DHS): non-entitlement areas	Federal	Support services and operating costs for shelter and outreach	\$2,219,778	Not Available/ Distributed geographically & then to programs, including some youth agencies	Not able to estimate	150
Long-Term Homelessness Supportive Services Fund (DHS)	State		\$6,910,000	Not able to estimate	Not able to estimate	344
Family Youth Service Bureau Runaway Youth (FYSB-RH) for Region 5C	Federal		\$6,219,839	\$6,219,839	33	Not able to estimate
Northwest CoC	Federal		\$1,485,520	\$701,763	4	Not able to estimate
St. Louis County-Duluth CoC	Federal		\$3,299,657	\$157,375	3	Not able to estimate
Southwest CoC	Federal			\$106,234	1	6
Northeast CoC	Federal			\$19,879	1	Not able to estimate

Note. Some programs for the general populations were asked these questions, but were unable to provide any youth specific funding, program, or numbers served because information is not collected that way. This included Housing Trust Fund, Programs for Assistance in the Transition from Homelessness (SAMHSA), Crisis Housing Assistance Program, and DPS/OJP Housing. In addition, for those who did provide youth-specific funding amounts, some of these were estimates. In addition, only 4 of the 11 CoC regions were able to report due to the demands of other deadlines.

^aAnticipated

^bFor emergency shelter

^cMN is part of Region 5 which consists of 6 states (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, MN, Ohio, and WI). The country is broken up into 10 regions and every state is part of a region. Funding is extremely competitive. Funds can support Street Outreach, Basic Center (what they call shelter), and transitional housing. Basic Center and Street Outreach program funding is given out in three-year cycles and transitional housing is given out in a five year cycle. Providers must reapply and it is extremely competitive funding. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/fysb/fact-sheet/runaway-and-homeless-youth-program-fact-sheet>

The total amount of Federal Emergency Services Grants funding that was directed to entitlement areas in FY 2022 was \$2,323,592. The amounts used for youth homelessness were not able to be estimated. Figure 19 shows the specific funding amounts given by the federal government to regions of Minnesota.

19. Federal Emergency Services Grants (ESG) directed to entitlement areas, FY 22

Entitlement area	Total Federal ESG funds distributed	Estimated amount for youth homelessness
Minneapolis	\$949,746	\$223,570
St. Paul	\$585,887	Not available
Hennepin County	\$248,868	Not available
Dakota County	\$162,970	\$307,500
Duluth	\$206,998	\$133,406
St. Louis County	\$169,123	Not available
Total distributed to entitlement areas	\$2,323,592	\$664,476

Respondents were also asked to estimate the amount of youth-specific funding that was provided for prevention, outreach, shelter, supportive housing, and other supports. As with other funding questions, it was difficult for staff responsible for many of the general homeless population funding sources to determine this level of specificity, particularly related to youth. Of the 12 funding programs for which staff were able to estimate, the amounts for each program are outlined in Figure 20.

20. Estimates of youth-specific ESG funding

Type of support	Estimated amount
Prevention	\$804,192
Outreach	\$1,996,336
Shelter	\$3,660,768
Supportive housing	\$11,618,323
Other	\$3,469,157

Respondents estimated the percentage of total funding that were directed to specific subpopulations of youth, including those living in greater Minnesota, youth identifying as LGBTQIA+, youth identifying as BIPOC, parenting youth, and youth who are unsheltered or couch-hopping (Figure 21). Many programs were unable to estimate to this level of specificity.

21. Estimated percentage of funding amount directed to specific populations of youth

Funding Program	Amount for youth under 25 (A)	Number of programs funded for youth	Percentage of the amount of funding (A) for youth under 25 directed toward:					Couch hopping
			Greater MN	LGBTQ+	BIPOC	Parenting	Unsheltered	
Family Homeless Prevention and Assistance Program	\$1,796,973	20	39%	(NA) ^a	67%	41%	11%	1%
Transitional Housing Program	\$600,000	8	63%	(NA)	(NA)	66%	50%	50%
Emergency Services Program	\$679,000	13	36%	25%	70%	10%	50%	50%
Hennepin County YHDP/Youth Housing and Homelessness Services (YHHS)	\$1,700,000	6	0%	17%	(NA)	(NA)	100% ^b	0%
Dakota County (ESG)	\$307,500	2	30%	20%	80%	15%	75%	25%
Region 5 (FYSB-RH)	\$6,219,839	33	43%	(NA)	(NA)	7%	100%	(NA)
Northwest CoC	\$701,763	4	100%	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
St. Louis County-Duluth CoC	\$157,375	3	100%	50%	25%	25%	100%	0%
Southwest CoC	\$106,234	1	100%	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	100%	1%
Minneapolis ESG	\$223,570	1	0%	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	100%	0%
Duluth ESG	\$133,406	5	100%	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	17%	0%
Estimated average percentage for each population group			56%	28%	61%	27%	70%	16%

^a Not tracked or not available

^b Unsheltered and sheltered

Respondents' opinions about gaps in funding

Staff who responded to the funding survey were also asked about regions of the state that may not be well-served by current funding. They shared the following perspectives on regional gaps in funding:

Northwest Minnesota needs additional services - it is the biggest region in our service area with the least amount of service options.

Lack of affordable and accessible housing limits providers all over the state of Minnesota in applying for these funds; as well as little to no investment by the state for acquisition or capital needs in transitional housing programs.

The southern region of the state could use more Safe Harbor shelter services. We don't have any Safe Harbor residential shelter or site-based residential transitional housing programs in the southern region of the state.

In general, there is a lack of service providers in greater Minnesota which is challenging due to physical distance between individuals and providers--this is often especially challenging for vulnerable young adults. In general, Southwest Minnesota doesn't have many providers. This is true for other, more rural CoCs. While [state agency] tries to be mindful of geographic distribution, there aren't always applicants and never adequate resources to meet needs.

We presume that there are regions in the state that are not well served, and [state agency] would likely have a better perspective on this. Ultimately this is also a County or Tribal issue as it relates to Housing Support: we don't know the local priorities, but are always willing to share what we know about where people are or are not using our programs.

Funds are limited in amount and to those grantees contracted with as result of competitive RFP.

I cannot speak to the other regions of the state--only Southwest CoC region. We find it difficult to use these funds due to the federal definition homelessness requirement. Youth are not well served with this definition and long-term homelessness is extra difficult to prove for youth.

There is not enough housing programs that are youth specific in our region of the state, also not enough emergency shelter funds or options.

Staff were also asked to share their opinions about the biggest gaps in funding for youth homelessness. They shared the following insights:

Landlord risk funding that would incentivize landlords to rent to youth or mediation that landlords/youth could access when having a rental unit issue. For our entire program, we estimate that we serve about 10% of those that are eligible to be served, so funding overall would be helpful.

More services needed for LGBTQI+ youth, male-identifying youth who are trafficked or exploited, more supportive and shelter needed for youth who are victims of labor trafficking and exploitation.

Youth workers need to be paid a livable wage to create consistency and retention among staff.

Prevention services to support youth to stay connected with supportive adults who they may be living with/couch hopping with that aren't their parents. Also mental health services that are specialized in working with youth and working with BIPOC and LGBTQ+ youth, and youth who have experienced trauma. More culturally specific and culturally responsive services are needed too.

1) Lack of adequate and effective prevention services. 2) Lack of Whole Family Support to keep young people in their homes (if safe). 3) Lack of adequate, effective, and safe out of home placement options.

Programs (shelter) for youth that are doubled up and therefore not meeting HUD's definition of literal homelessness. Culturally specific programs (shelter and housing). Programs (shelter and housing) for trans youth.

Biggest gaps not covered might be in outreach, shelter, navigation. Unclear or restrictive emergency shelter policies are probably a barrier. OEO likely has already provided a very robust answer to this question, but here are some additional thoughts: 1. Services for minor youth who are experiencing homelessness is a huge issue. There is a lot of debate over how/who should serve them (community-based providers vs. child protection vs. someone else). 2. There is also an issue around what happens when youth "age out" of their youth funded program. If someone enters when they are 24 and have to exit on their 25th birthday, moving to an adult program is an issue when there are not enough programs to serve adults.

It would be great to see more services and supports for youth who are parenting or who are caregiving for other family members.

Prevention.

Transportation, access to credit building programs, financial literacy programming, and accessible housing (i.e., landlords don't accept vouchers or young people without history).

Needing housing options for parenting youth, youth aging out of foster care, shared housing options, more rental assistance for couch hopping youth, and more funding for support services for all youth programming.

Transportation for runaway and homeless youth who live in rural areas or counties not readily served by existing homeless youth providers. Funding for certain aspects of crisis stabilization (such as safe drug use via safe space or clean needles) are tough to fund due to government constraints.

Additional prevention and street outreach.

CoC funds are often not as flexible as what is needed or youth services. State of Minnesota funds are a much better match for youth-serving agencies and could be used to fill the gaps left by HUD CoC funds. BIPOC and tribally run youth programs are very needed across the state.

Return on Investment studies

Several studies—national and local—have examined the economic burden of youth homelessness. National estimates based on 2011 dollars for each “opportunity youth,” calculated a cost of \$258,240 lifetime annual taxpayer burden from age 16 and a \$755,900 lifetime annual social burden from age 16. Note this study is not specific to youth experiencing homelessness, rather it includes youth who have not completed education, are un- or underemployed, in the criminal justice system, have physical/mental health conditions, and/or family caregiving responsibilities and are not earning an income or investing in their human capital (Belfield et al., 2012).

A study and white paper examined the outcomes and return on investment for 1,451 youth experiencing homelessness in Minnesota (the 2011 YouthLink cohort) who were participating in a drop-in and case management model. The study estimated the short- and long-term costs of youth homelessness to taxpayers and society in Hennepin County if youth homelessness goes unaddressed.

The study found the largest costs to taxpayers come from the criminal justice system and welfare payments. The total lifetime fiscal cost of each YouthLink participant was calculated to be \$248,182 (\$17,152 for 2011 alone). The total lifetime social cost was estimated at \$613,182 (\$18,638 for 2011 alone). Costs to taxpayers that could be avoided as the result of interventions for each youth experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness who becomes a productive, tax-paying citizen at age 20, equaled \$211,059 in lifetime fiscal costs (Foldes & Lubov, 2015).

A subsequent white paper based on this same work with YouthLink participants estimated that 1,451 non-disabled youth would cost taxpayers \$360 million (in 2011 dollars) total. The study found the drop-in and case management model for working with unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness to be effective at achieving desired long-term outcomes, particularly in areas of housing and education (Foldes et al., 2022b).

Volunteer response to youth homelessness

Minnesota is well known for its culture of volunteerism. However, it is nearly impossible to quantify the response to a particular issue, such as youth homelessness. There are hundreds of non-profit organizations that provide services to youth, including schools, libraries, outreach programs, food shelves, hot meal programs, drop-in centers, mental and behavioral health programs, healthcare agencies, shelters, and housing programs.

Although a comprehensive accounting of volunteer response to youth homelessness is not feasible for this report, Wilder Research asked a sample of organizations whose mission is to serve youth experiencing homelessness. The following is a compilation of the volunteer response from eight members of the Youth Services Network (many of whom receive funding from the Homeless Youth Act).

For the most recent fiscal year for which information was available:

- 2,492 volunteers served 8 youth homelessness organizations
- The average number of volunteers per agency was 310 (ranging from 15-1,291)

- The average number of volunteer hours in the most recent fiscal year was 17

It should be noted that the contributions from volunteers' work reported above took place during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic limited some of the in-person activities typically filled by volunteers. Staff who coordinate volunteers may also have faced strain in job responsibilities and barriers in effectively engaging volunteers during the pandemic. Finally, although the volunteer response may be strong, it does not take the place of a high quality, consistent, trauma-informed, professional workforce.

VII. Current programs and approaches to youth homelessness

Service providers in Minnesota have made it a priority to incorporate guiding principles and best practices into their work to address youth homelessness.

Key findings:

Many Minnesota programs that serve youth experiencing homelessness integrate nine evidence-based youth development principles into their work and offer a continuum of services to support youth.

Service providers point to the flexibility and impact of Minnesota’s Homeless Youth Act, which offers more flexibility than federal HUD funding for addressing youth needs.

There are currently several innovative systems change initiatives underway in Minnesota to prevent and end youth homelessness. They are led by youth and involve multiple sectors of the community.

Promising practices include integrating schools into prevention work, addressing needs holistically beyond housing, providing intensive counseling and case management services, and developing culturally specific services for BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ youth.

Beyond its systems change efforts, Minnesota has several programs that are recognized widely as effective in addressing youth homelessness.

State agencies, youth serving organizations, and policy initiatives are developing a practice of centering youth voice and leadership in programming and services.

Minnesota has many innovative approaches and a reputation for strong collaboration to address youth homelessness. However, like many other states, there is a need for more financial and staffing resources to support best practices, and there is a serious gap in resources, services, and coordination to support prevention.

In Minnesota, there is some structural fragmentation due to different requirements of funding streams and the fact that each HUD Continuum of Care region is asked to apply individually for federal funding. Despite this, youth service providers report that they work well together to share best practices, targeted approaches, and lessons learned. One important outcome of this collaboration is the development and adherence to the grounding principles to address this work.

Grounding principles

Our services are not universal and they are not a one-size-fits-all model. All of the intake processes, the resources, the wrap-around services that we do, we specialize for that population of youth that we serve. This is in our “Nine Evidence-based Principles” and is in everything that we do, because we have heard our [youth] council tell us how our services have to be catered to the population [we] are serving. - program director

Program staff and key experts shared that their work with youth experiencing homelessness is guided by the nine evidence-based principles developed by the Homeless Youth Collaborative on Developmental Evaluation (and adopted on December 5, 2013), and referenced these concepts frequently in the course of the interviews. They emphasized the importance of keeping these principles integrated and in the center of every aspect of their work.

Nine evidence-based, guiding principles to help youth overcome homelessness¹⁵

The principles begin with the perspective that youth are on a journey; all of our interactions with youth are filtered through that **journey** perspective. This means we must be **trauma-informed, non-judgmental** and work to **reduce harm**. By holding these principles, we can build a **trusting** relationship that allows us to focus on **youths' strengths** and opportunities for **positive development**. Through all of this, we approach youth as **whole beings** through a youth-focused **collaborative** system of support.

Journey-Oriented: Interact with youth to help them understand the interconnectedness of past, present, and future as they decide where they want to go and how to get there.

Trauma-Informed: Recognize that most homeless youth have experienced trauma; build relationships, responses, and services on that knowledge.

Non-Judgmental: Interact with youth without labeling or judging them on the basis of background, experiences, choices, or behaviors.

Harm Reduction: Contain the effects of risky behavior in the short-term and seek to reduce its effects in the long-term.

Trusting Youth-Adult Relationships: Build relationships by interacting with youth in an honest, dependable, authentic, caring, and supportive way.

Strengths-Based: Start with and build upon the skills, strengths, and positive characteristics of each youth.

Positive Youth Development: Provide opportunities for youth to build a sense of competency, usefulness, belonging, and power.

Holistic: Engage youth in a manner that recognizes that mental, physical, spiritual, and social health are interconnected and interrelated.

Collaboration: Establish a principles-based, youth-focused system of support that integrates practices, procedures, and services within and across agencies, systems, and policies.

¹⁵ Principles developed by the Homeless Youth Collaborative on Developmental Evaluation and adopted on December 5, 2013.

One key expert articulated this work in the following way:

We know the types of services needed, but it's more about the approach that is important, such as trauma-informed services, knowledge and understanding of adolescent development, brain development. The complexity of working with young people cannot be minimized within the programs. – program director

Framework to end youth homelessness

The Promising Program Models Guidebook developed by HUD in 2016 describes five key models and program components. Three of these components—schools, drop-in centers, and host homes—were also mentioned specifically by stakeholders as important practices in Minnesota.

Model	Components
Primary prevention	Encourage family resiliency School-based prevention Support foster care transitions and transitions to community after leaving juvenile justice or adult correctional systems
Identification and engagement	Mobile street outreach Drop-In centers Family engagement
Emergency and crisis response	Youth shelters and emergency services Host homes Transitional housing and transitional living
Tailored housing and services	Rapid re-housing Non-time-limited supportive housing
Engaging youth	Meaningfully involving youth in decisions that affect them, their peers, and their communities (p. 12)

Successful systemic approaches in Minnesota

Flexible spending through the Homeless Youth Act

I just feel that in our state the positive thing we have going for us is the Homeless Youth Act. Not every state has one, and it's an incredible start, and I feel like the Homeless Youth Act is one of the silver bullets – if we can keep giving additional resources to that, that does have the inclusive definition of homelessness. It supports a continuum of services (doesn't play the Hunger Games with one or the other). It will fund everything, including culturally specific services. If we can keep working on increasing that, while also reforming child protection and juvenile justice, we really can eventually reduce and end homelessness. I feel like with the Homeless Youth Act we have a really good chance of doing something here. – program director

Described in depth in Section V., the Homeless Youth Act provides flexible funding for a vital continuum of services, all needed to help support youth to access, engage, and sustain the unique level of service need they have – until they have achieved stability needed to proceed into their hopeful futures. The continuum reflects specific areas of service, staffed with the capacity to support youth to build and sustain relationships with caring adults who can support them along their journey.

The Minnesota Homeless Youth Act Continuum includes:

- Street Outreach – meeting youth where they are, helping meet immediate need and building relationships to help identify how to best resolve their housing or related crisis.
- Drop-in Centers – resources, support to assess and meet needs, and locations where youth can obtain safety and next steps for housing and life stability.
- Youth Shelter – safe housing, case management, and support to transition to sustainable housing.
- Transitional Housing – time-limited housing opportunities designed to support youth to stabilize, establish education, employment, and other life plans.
- Permanent Supportive Housing – designed for youth with significant barriers to have the stability needed to address life challenges while achieving progress on established life goals.

Starting in 2020, a new “Shelter-Linked Mental Health” grant program began providing funding to support mental health services in Homeless Youth Act programs. In interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders and providers, experts serving homeless youth point to the importance of the Homeless Youth Act’s fewer restrictions and flexibility to target the urgent and unique needs of homeless youth.

A culture of collaboration

Minnesota’s youth serving agencies have worked closely together to serve and advocate for youth experiencing homelessness. One example is the [Youth Services Network](#), which provides youth with information about a variety of services available to them. Executive directors of youth-serving agencies in Minnesota meet regularly to share information, reduce barriers, and elevate key issues and barriers.

In addition, there has been strong collaboration between youth-serving agencies and the Minnesota Department of Human Services, Office of Economic Opportunity (who administers the Homeless Youth Act funds). As one provider states:

Overall, I really appreciate OEO’s approach in just wanting to be very responsive, creative, and trying to solve these issues under the constriction or rules that they have to follow. They are very responsive and wanting to be sure that client/youth needs are met; that’s great. And I think more and more permission should be given to doing this work this way. – stakeholder

Federally and locally funded demonstration projects for system improvement

Two regions of Minnesota have been awarded competitive HUD Youth Homelessness Demonstration Projects (YHDP) in the past few years. These include the Northwest Minnesota CoC region in 2019 and the Hennepin County CoC region in 2021. The program is a federal initiative to support selected communities as they develop

and implement a coordinated community approach to preventing and ending youth homelessness. As YHDP communities, the [Northwest Minnesota region](#) and [Hennepin County](#) developed a coordinated community plan to guide strategies and interventions to reach their goals: ensuring youth homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring (Figure 22). This work is led by youth with lived experiences of housing instability and includes a diverse group of stakeholders across systems, including education, child welfare and corrections. Federal funding supports this work that includes the use of data to inform systems change initiatives.

22. Youth Homelessness Service Continuum



Source: Hennepin County Coordinated Community Plan

As described in the Hennepin County Coordinated Community Plan (2021, p. 43), prevention programs include case management, diversion and rapid resolution, and prevention services. Entry points include drop-in centers and street outreach. Emergency shelters and short-term housing include shelters, rapid re-housing, and transitional housing. Stable housing includes permanent housing. Host homes can provide both short-term or emergency housing and stable housing.

In addition to these federally-funded demonstration projects, there have been several other promising initiatives. In 2017, Hennepin County led a collaborative local effort, connected to a national initiative, to house 150 young people in 100 days, and to connect 75% of these young people with employment. At the end of this “100-day challenge,” Hennepin County and its partners had housed 236 young people and connected 135 young people to employment, exceeding its initial numerical targets (Heading Home Together, Minnesota’s 2018-2020 Action Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness, Minnesota Interagency Council On Homelessness, 2018).

Promising programs and practices

Findings in the literature and input of stakeholders highlighted additional approaches that appear to support the success of youth who are experiencing homelessness. These approaches are discussed below.

Addressing needs holistically, beyond housing

Washington State developed a strategic approach to prevent and end youth homelessness that recognizes that the solution is more than obtaining stable housing. The plan outlines a broad framework that addresses the following key components confronting risk factors and pathways:

1. Stable housing
2. Family reconciliation
3. Permanent connections
4. Education and employment
5. Social and emotional well-being

A report from the Office of Homeless Youth (2016) suggests that, in addition to strategies aimed at providing both interventions to families and youth who are at risk of experiencing homelessness and a response system for those currently experiencing homelessness, other interventions are needed to eradicate underlying factors that contribute to homelessness such as family conflict, poverty, and mental illness.

Youth and other stakeholders also discussed the importance of programs that provide services beyond housing. As one respondent stated, it is not acceptable to house a youth and not deal with mental health, chemical dependency, physical health, and other barriers. Other respondents discussed the importance of meeting basic needs, such as food, clothing, and transportation, as well as providing financial support, access to education and employment, and childcare. Finally, respondents emphasized the importance of ready access to a broad array of services through a continuum of supports so that youth may have access to what they need, without having to go to multiple programs.

The role of schools

A report by Civic Enterprises and Hart Research Associates from 2017, discusses, in depth, the role of schools in addressing youth homelessness. “In an otherwise chaotic time of homelessness, schools can be pillars of stability,” it notes (Ingram et al., 2017, p. 4). However, resources necessary to address student homelessness have not kept up with the need (e.g., funding, time, and staff). Results from the study point to key recommendations for schools:

1. Refine and standardize systems for identifying homeless students
2. Focus on outreach efforts to inform homeless students and their families of their rights (per McKinney-Vento)
3. Actively work with students to help them stay in school (emotional and concrete supports)
4. Actively work to connect homeless students to outside supports
5. Leverage early warning systems to prevent student homelessness (Ingram et al., 2017, p. 8-9)

Several stakeholders also mentioned that schools can be an important partner in supporting youth, particularly in an effort to intervene early and provide resources to support families. School staff, including teachers, coaches, and health care staff, may be on the front lines of noticing when youth are struggling. They can build relationships with youth and families, and help them access services. In addition, in rural areas, schools are often

pivotal organizations in a community. In this way, supports and services that are embedded in schools are key. One respondent summarized the critical role of schools in the following way:

Start with the schools. Most young people have some schooling, so we need more programs in the schools. The first sign of being at-risk, the first red flags can be seen in the schools.
– program director

Intensive counseling and case management

Several studies have suggested that more intensive mental health care and case management can provide important supports for youth who are experiencing homelessness by addressing risk-related knowledge and behaviors and social-emotional well-being (Morton et al., 2018, p. 178). In addition, drop-in and case management models have seen some success in long-term outcomes of housing and education as shown through a case study of the Youth Link model. These outcomes were supported even further through intensive case management efforts. The authors suggest that measuring the impact on publicly-funded financial support may require further study, as gaining long-term financial self-sufficiency can take substantial time (Foldes et al., 2015).

Many respondents mentioned the importance of connections for youth, which are central in developing supportive relationships with service providers, such as case managers and other adults. One program staff member talked about the importance of drop-in centers as spaces where youth can show up when they need to, engage with community, and build trust. In addition, respondents mentioned that drop-in centers may be especially valuable in rural areas where youth may be more disconnected and isolated.

Culturally specific services

Youth and other experts who responded to questions for this report emphasized the critical importance of providing services and supports that meet the needs of youth with diverse backgrounds and needs. Such services and programs can be empowering and highlight strengths in their cultures and identities, as well as meet the need for connections with peers. For example, culturally specific programs for Black and Indigenous youth can connect youth with their history, cultural practices, language, and peers, while programs for LGBTQIA+ youth can affirm their experiences and build community and relationships. Respondents also mentioned the need for staff who are representative of the populations they are serving.

The importance of tailored approaches that support the range of youth backgrounds and experience were also highlighted in an article by HUD:

"[Y]outh with different lived experiences of homelessness require more targeted and effective approaches to prevent housing instability and support exits to homelessness". Tailored resources, staff training, and programming that incorporates youth voice is important to addressing homelessness among young people with intersection identities and backgrounds (HUD USER, 2022).

Three Minnesota programs

There are numerous, successful programs in Minnesota that serve youth who are experiencing homelessness. There is also a great deal of overlap between interventions and programs, and combining multiple approaches appears to be the most effective way to provide supports to youth as individuals with unique needs. The following three programs were specifically mentioned by providers and other key experts, and are shared here as examples of the range of effective approaches that serve youth experiencing homelessness in Minnesota.

Landlord Risk Mitigation program

The Landlord Risk Mitigation program pilot, implemented in a rural Continuum of Care region, has shown promising results in reducing the amount of time that youth remain homeless. This program builds connections that encourage landlords to rent to people experiencing homelessness and provides a way for people with housing barriers, such as a criminal background or no rental history, to have stable housing. Case managers vouch for the youth and offer landlords a guarantee for backup funding in the event of problems, as well as provide ongoing case management supports to youth. And landlords, case managers, and youth work together to manage a positive experience and maintain open communication (Fargo-Moorhead Coalition to End Homelessness).

Host homes program

Host homes programs were highlighted by respondents as successful models for providing housing stability for youth, particularly in rural areas and for youth who identify as LGBTQIA+. Where supports and housing may be more spread out in rural areas, host homes function as scattered-site housing, filling the deficits in infrastructure and alleviating the need for bricks and mortar shelters. One respondent mentioned the host home program in Crow Wing County as an example. In addition, host homes for youth who identify as LGBTQIA+ can be important, as the hosts tend to also identify as LGBTQIA+ and may provide crucial mentoring, connections to community, and other supports. One respondent referenced the success of the Avenues for Youth program in the metro area.

First Born program

The First Born program for first-time parents provides early interventions for young parents experiencing homelessness in a northern Continuum of Care region. The curriculum is designed to offer supports to families by addressing the intergenerational transmission of difficulties. The program emphasizes relationships and coordinated services. (Originating in New Mexico, it was “named as one of the nation’s 10 most innovative and exemplary prevention programs in 2002 by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention.”)

Practice of incorporating youth voice in programming and services

In Minnesota, there are multiple examples of state agencies, youth-serving organizations, and policy initiatives that are developing a practice of centering youth voice and leadership in programming and services. Some of these youth leadership initiatives have been going on for multiple years, especially at youth shelters.

In 2022, the Interagency Council on Homelessness contracted with Rainbow Research to hire 11 consultants with lived experience of homelessness to lead a community-driven process to develop a [definition of housing, racial, and health justice for people facing homelessness](#). The process involved participation of over 140 people in five working group sessions and three community conversations. Included in this work were the strong voices of youth with lived experience.

Many state agencies integrate youth councils and leadership boards into planning around grants and policy.

VIII. Barriers and gaps for resources and services

We know what the barriers are – we just need to act on them. What are we willing to do?
– program director

Many barriers and gaps in resources and supports for youth experiencing homelessness were consistently mentioned in multiple studies, reports, and feedback from youth and other experts. However, they continue to persist and create challenges to addressing youth homelessness.

Key findings:

Systems were built on policies and practices of racism and oppression.

The Coordinated Entry System is not as accessible or responsive as youth need it to be.

Definitions and regulations may make it difficult or impossible for youth to get the services they need.

Much of the funding is tied to unrealistic expectations or unresponsive to the developmental needs of youth.

There are multiple gaps in services and supports for youth, including lack of affordable housing, limited availability of shelter and housing programs specifically for youth, limited capacity and availability of a range of supports beyond housing, and the need to support and adequately pay youth workers.

There are also gaps related to specific populations, including youth who identify as BIPOC, LGBTQIA+ (especially transgender and non-binary youth), older youth, and youth in rural areas. These gaps also extend to youth transitioning from foster care and other settings, as well as providing prevention services for youth in crisis and those at risk of homelessness.

There is a need to integrate youth voice in identifying solutions that address these gaps.

Overview

The literature and opinions of key stakeholders, experts, and youth interviewed for this report agree on many of the main barriers and limitations that make it difficult for youth experiencing homelessness to obtain or navigate services, as well as the main gaps where connections or resources are missing. Many of these challenges have been highlighted consistently over many years in literature and reports.

Homeless youth providers interviewed in 2018 for the national Voices of Youth Count (VoYC) survey noted the following key challenges in resources and services for youth experiencing homelessness. These are also reflected in the comments from youth with lived experience and other key experts, who contributed their perspectives for this report.

1. Lack of shelter, housing, and placement
2. Measuring the size of the problem
3. Legal limitations to services as minors become non-minors

4. Inability to reconnect youth with family given conflict at home
5. Serving special populations, including LGBTQ populations and populations living with disabilities
6. Access to health care and education, including transportation
7. Cycle of entering and leaving the system
8. Limited outreach efforts to identify more youth in need
9. Human trafficking (Morton et al., 2018)

Main barriers

Systems that were built on policies and practices of racism and oppression

The literature and experts' perspectives point to root causes of homelessness—generational poverty, historical legacies of bias, and patterns of historical and generational trauma that perpetuate the crisis of people living without permanent housing or access to affordable, quality housing. Respondents discussed at length that structures based on deeply rooted beliefs about race and a supposition that people are trying to steal or scam the systems result in highly regulated systems that benefit White people and screen out BIPOC youth who need assistance. Some of these structures may manifest racism in a more subtle way, but some youth may also experience blatant racism in their communities. One respondent provided the following example:

Racism, homophobia, transphobia: a majority of the youth that are experiencing homelessness in our state are Black, brown, LGBTQ. That's because of racism, which, among other things increases poverty, which increases homelessness. On top of that, it's a racist response. If it were a majority of white middle class kids experiencing homelessness, we would have all kinds of resources ready. There is not a general sense of urgency across the whole state because it's Black and brown kids. – program director

With a long history of broken trust in the government and systems, youth may also be hesitant to seek formal services, which require that they share extensive, personal information. This lack of trust can be exacerbated if program staff do not reflect the culture, race, or identities of youth they are serving, or offer culturally responsive services. Several youth focus group participants emphasized that staff should be representative of the youth they work with, so they can feel more comfortable and have one less thing to worry about. Another respondent described it in this way:

To address these barriers, we need staff that reflect these communities and opportunities for young people to connect with members of the community who share an identity. - program director

Finally, respondents pointed out that it may be difficult for culturally specific programs to access funding. Factors such as being relatively new or less well-established as an organization, cultural or language barriers, and layers of requirements in the application process can reduce the ability of programs to compete for funding with larger, non-culturally specific organizations.

The Coordinated Entry System is not as accessible or responsive as youth need it to be

The Coordinated Entry System, which deserves its own mention due to its sheer complexity, is one system that is widely viewed as a significant barrier for youth who are seeking housing or other assistance. Youth with lived experience of homelessness and service providers in Minnesota highlighted the following limitations associated with the Coordinated Entry System:

- Inequitable screening practices that make BIPOC youth ineligible for supports
- Burdensome eligibility requirements and varied definitions of homelessness
- Definitions that require youth to prove a current level of need to qualify for supports
- A complex system that requires multiple steps and often leads to delays in securing shelter

In the online survey and focus groups, youth with lived experience were asked what services and supports we need more of in Minnesota. The greatest proportion of youth (66%) said Minnesota needs a good way to access housing or shelter when youth are at risk of homelessness (better coordinated entry services). Almost one-quarter (23%) of youth also identified this as the top priority for Minnesota (Appendix B, Figures B3 and B4).

One program director offered the following description of difficulties with the Coordinated Entry System:

Our Coordinated Entry System is a huge barrier. Nothing is perfect, but, prior to Coordinated Entry, a youth could call us or be referred by a street outreach worker, and we could get them into our own housing program. Now, if a youth calls us, we have to refer them back to [the county's] Coordinated Entry System and they have to do a Coordinated Entry assessment. To get that assessment, you have to be living in a shelter for 14 days or be in a place unfit for human habitation, and have that documented by an outreach worker. To get a Coordinated Entry assessment, you have to meet their definition of homelessness and getting the assessment done is also a barrier because you have to go to a certain place, between certain hours on a certain day – and maybe a young person can't do that. After the assessment is done, the Coordinated Entry assessor will send our staff the referral for the youth, and, by then, the youth might not even be a match for our program, or no longer want to join the program, or no longer be homeless. It creates all these extra steps and barriers to get in. What ends up happening, then, is that providers like us have a lot of openings. That housing unit has been sitting empty and, meanwhile, there are kids on the street. It's just the most crazy system ever. – program director

Youth who participated in the focus groups echoed this description and described the frustrations of delays in access. One youth expressed it in this way:

Sometimes we can't wait. We have to get into something right away. It's not always safe for youth. – youth focus group participant

In response to concerns about ways in which the Coordinated Entry System may contribute to, reinforce, and perpetuate racial inequities for BIPOC individuals accessing housing resources, a 2019 study conducted an analysis of racial equity within the Coordinated Entry System. In particular, the primary assessment tool, the VI-SPDAT (Vulnerability Index-Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool), has been criticized for a lack of validity and reliability for assessing vulnerability. The study concluded that the assessment tools perpetuate racial inequities in the supports available to people who are experiencing homelessness, with scores that deem

White people more vulnerable than people who identify as BIPOC. As a result, White people may receive priority access to Permanent Supportive Housing/Housing First programs, even though BIPOC individuals are overrepresented in the homeless population (Wilkey et al.).

While significant barriers may be evident in the Coordinated Entry System, many of the challenges also result from a lack of programs or resources. In a study, conducted by the Departments of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Health and Human Services (HHS) (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2021), providers who serve young adults experiencing homelessness noted the following challenges to obtaining housing for youth, specifically through the Coordinated Entry Systems:

1. Lack of available programs and services for youth
2. Lack of programs specific to or appropriate for youth
3. HUD definition of homelessness does not include all youth experiencing homelessness
4. Youth are prioritized lower than adults--difficult to obtain housing
5. Lack of resources specific to/appropriate for pregnant/parenting youth
6. Lack of resources specific to/appropriate for LGBTQ youth (p. 24)

Further detail about many of these challenges, which are also general barriers, are discussed below.

Definitions and regulations may make it difficult or impossible for youth to get the services they need

The definition of homelessness itself is a barrier. Our community all worked together to pass the Homeless Youth Act (we are thankful that's the one OEO uses). That definition is what makes sense – it's inclusive. Unfortunately, there are all kinds of other definitions that are used, for example, if you receive HUD funding, county funding, MN Housing funding, whatever. It makes it really hard because these don't typically include couch hopping or doubled-up youth, or youth have to be documented as living in a shelter or place unfit for human habitation. A lot of youth fall through the cracks when they don't meet the definition and they are not able to get into shelter or get a Coordinated Entry assessment for housing. – stakeholder

Burdensome regulations based on inconsistent definitions are one of the barriers to addressing youth homelessness most commonly identified by youth and other key experts. For example, in the online survey and in the focus groups, youth with lived experience of homelessness were asked what services and supports we need more of in Minnesota. More than half of youth (56%) said Minnesota needs to change the eligibility requirements so that youth can qualify for housing or assistance, such as food stamps or not needing a guardian signature for a minor to have shelter (Appendix B, Figure B3). One youth who participated in a focus group said that the rules are confusing and just asking for help should be enough to get help. Another youth said that there are so many steps and restrictions that make it difficult to get help, and this can result in youth who most need the help not accessing it.

Other rules mentioned by respondents that can create barriers to access for youth include:

- Parents or guardians being required to provide consent to minors (even when relationships with these same parents or guardians may be a primary reason why the youth are experiencing homelessness)

- Minors being unable to sign leases
- Youth needing to prove a certain level of need or a specific diagnosis before being eligible for access to services
- Shelters that do not permit families to stay together

Much of the funding is tied to unrealistic expectations or unresponsive to the developmental needs of youth

Some people need more help or more time. We are trying to better ourselves, but we're being rushed. – youth focus group participant

Homeless kids grow up too fast, but we're still missing all the life skills. – youth focus group participant

Another barrier identified by key experts involves funding allotments that may include time limits, and may not be connected to realistic expectations or meaningful outcomes. Respondents explained that funders may have unrealistic views about the amount of effort and time youth need to achieve stability or changes, and emphasized the importance of making allowances for youth, simply by virtue of their age. In addition, respondents highlighted the need for considering the impact of trauma and complexity of life circumstances on young people's ability to demonstrate tangible results within a prescribed amount of time. Key experts suggested that funding allotments and outcomes would be best developed by the providers and youth who are engaged in the issues. One provider summarized these unrealistic expectations in the following way:

Internal work takes time. Funders and legislators want a quick fix. Tangible results are real, but there are other results that aren't obvious right away. Work is complex and not linear.
– stakeholder

The Heading Home Together report, submitted by the Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness (2018), offered the following explanation:

“The transition to adulthood for many young people includes some degree of housing instability and often relies on shared housing or nontraditional housing settings. Homelessness programs are often premised on living arrangements for adults and have been slow to support living situations more commonly used by youth. In addition, performance expectations and eligibility requirements can often create penalties or disincentives for levels of mobility that are common and developmentally appropriate for young people (p.17).”

In addition, respondents expressed frustration with funding that is rigid and prescriptive, and typically tied to specific needs or outcomes. Providers feel critically limited in their ability to match supports to the real-time needs of the youth they serve. For example, providers may have access to funding, but it may be limited to rental assistance, or require a youth to have an address or their name on a lease, for example. Or youth may simply need money for food or medicine, rather than housing.

While respondents appreciate the flexibility offered through Homeless Youth Act funding, they also emphasized the need for further flexible funding to do their jobs and respond to unique circumstances, individual needs, and priorities. They were also clear about the fact that the people on the ground are best suited to determine the

most effective use of funds in their service area. Youth experiencing homelessness are not a homogeneous group and cannot be expected to have identical needs. Two program directors summarized this view in the following ways:

One size does not fit all for youth experiencing homelessness. – program director

We need flexibility to provide what each youth needs. Most funding provides band-aid fixes and requires a certain number of youth served. A little money is spread out among many youth.

What if we had flexibility to serve fewer youth with more resources? Or a combination, based on actual need? – program director

Provide funds that are flexible. This opens up an important door to REALLY work with youth. This is vital. Funds to use with youth, based on what staff see and what the youth need.

– program director

Gaps related to lack of resources and funding

Insufficient funding continues to plague organizations that provide housing and services for youth experiencing homelessness, and this is perhaps the greatest need overall. One respondent highlighted the issue of continued flat or decreased funding that is exacerbated by increasing numbers of youth with increasingly complex needs. Another spoke of funding levels that maintain the status quo, while being moved around based on shifting trends.

We know a lot about the root causes of homelessness, but the resources are not directed there. I think it is time for us to think differently and really help programs that prevent youth from becoming homeless. – stakeholder

Limited resources result in many gaps, described below, including insufficient units of affordable housing, fewer critical programs for housing and additional supports, a lack of livable wages for the staff who work with youth, a limited focus on prevention, and needs of diverse populations.

Lack of affordable housing

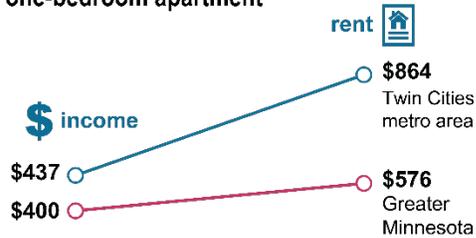
We need more inventory for affordable housing. – program director

We need places that people want to live that are clean, safe, dignified. – program director

The 2020 report on the HUD Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program stated that “high rents (relative to wages) and low vacancy rates make it difficult for people experiencing homelessness to access permanent housing. This is especially challenging for youth who may not have credit or rental and employment histories (Rog, et al., p. 27).” The 2018 Wilder Homelessness Study also found that a lack of affordable or subsidized housing continues to be a significant problem for people experiencing homelessness in Minnesota. Monthly income and fair market rent are at odds, and many youth are simply unable to afford rent or house payments (Figure 23). More than half (54%) of all youth said they had trouble finding housing because there was nothing they could afford.

23. Discrepancies between rent and income

For youth experiencing homelessness in Minnesota, monthly median income is less than the fair market rent for a one-bedroom apartment



Source: Homelessness in Minnesota, Detailed findings from the 2018 Minnesota Homeless Study, Wilder Research.

As mentioned in the previous section, housing for youth also needs to take into consideration their desire to live with roommates, and enable subsidized housing that supports their needs as young people in transition. In addition, key experts emphasized the need for affordable housing that is safe and high quality. In more rural areas where transportation is limited, it is also important to have housing that is accessible to essential services and activities such as childcare, health care, groceries, and jobs.

Limited availability of shelter and housing programs specifically for youth

In a study by Voice of Youth Count (VoYC), specific to Hennepin County, Minnesota, homeless youth providers indicated that there is an unmet need for housing among Hennepin County's homeless and unstably housed youth. Most of the homeless youth-operated transitional and supportive housing programs had waiting lists, and nearly all of the emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, and supportive housing programs reported that they had to turn youth away in the past year (Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 2017).

A national study by VoYC, also in 2017, found similar results, with transitional housing program providers reporting waiting lists and emergency shelter providers reporting having to turn youth away. In addition, regulations established by Federal Basic Center Program funding guidelines mean that emergency shelters cannot serve youth for more than 21 days, and only youth age 13 to 17 can be served with those funds (Morton, et al.).

More than one-quarter (28%) of youth interviewed for the Wilder Minnesota Homeless Study (2018) also reported that they had been turned away from shelter due to a lack of space. About one-third (32%) said they ended up sleeping at a friend or family member's house, while about one quarter each (23%) said they slept outdoors or in a car or other enclosed place not meant for housing. In addition, 39% of youth said they were currently on a waiting list for public housing, Section 8 housing, or some other type of housing with financial assistance. Youth said they had been on the waiting list for an average of six months.

Limited capacity and availability of a range of supports, beyond housing

The more holistic a program can be, with housing as one component of need, and weave in other services and supports within the same setting, seems to be more productive than trying to coordinate all of these different pieces around a young person. - stakeholder

Gaps in the availability of stable, affordable housing for youth operate in tandem with limited capacity in adjacent services such as mental health services, drop-in centers, job training, childcare, and simply being able to meet basic needs with clothing, food, and transportation. People interviewed for this report spoke about the need for more programs and services that address needs beyond housing. But respondents also discussed the importance of services and supports that are provided by those with expertise in working with youth, trauma, or cultural communities, for example. One youth had the following to say:

We need more shelters just for youth only, but not just a place to lay our heads. We need information and services. Sometimes we don't know where to start. – youth focus group participant

Youth experiencing homelessness who were interviewed for the Wilder Homeless Study (2018) listed a range of services that they both used and found the most useful. The six most frequently used services and benefits during the month of the study were transportation assistance (49%), free hot meals (45%), food stamps (44%), drop-in centers (37%), food shelves (35%), and free or almost free clothing shelves (34%). Youth also reported that food stamps, transportation assistance, free hot meals, and drop-in centers were among the most helpful services they used. Beyond these services and benefits, 60% of youth also reported needing to see a professional about at least one health care need such as tooth or gum problems, emotional or mental health problems, physical health problems, or alcohol or drug problems.

Youth who participated in the focus groups or completed the online survey were asked about the services and supports they found the most helpful while they were experiencing homelessness. The largest proportions of youth named non-housing supports as the most helpful, such as food assistance (47%) and case management or help with accessing services (44%). They found other services less helpful. Forty percent of youth said they found transitional or supportive housing programs the most helpful, followed by drop-in centers (36%), outreach workers (36%), emergency shelters (26%), and mental health services (25%).

Workforce needs: support and pay for youth workers

Respondents expressed concern about burnout among youth workers due to the constant urgency of working in a crisis mode. Youth workers may witness violence, death, overdoses, and the trauma of the youth with whom they work. Yet, according to stakeholders, the youth workers do not always receive necessary training to allow them to effectively intervene and provide support. In addition, youth workers are not adequately compensated with livable wages or wages that reflect the critical importance of their work, and turnover in many programs is high. The retention of workers is important in order to best serve the needs of youth experiencing homelessness. One respondent said the following:

We can't pay staff adequately, so organizations churn through staff. Organizations cannot do work effectively as a system with so much turnover. Wages have to be higher! If this goes unaddressed, it will ultimately cost more money. – program director

Gaps related to specific youth populations

Inadequate services and supports for diverse populations of youth

Gaps in services for youth experiencing homelessness in general can be magnified for BIPOC, LGBTQ-identifying, and parenting youth, as well as those who live in rural locations. Respondents noted that these gaps in services for specific youth populations exist and stressed the importance of funding and developing both housing-focused and adjunct services programs to meet diverse needs. Respondents also largely agreed that there are limited numbers and availability of: culturally specific programs; programs for LGBTQIA+-identifying youth, including transgender and non-binary youth, as well as male and male-presenting youth; supports for pregnant and parenting youth, as well as young families; services overall in rural areas, and programs that support older youth.

Key experts highlighted the realities of youth experiencing homelessness in rural areas, including greater geographic spread; challenges with little or no transportation to access supports, including public transportation; services catered to adults; limited affordable housing, as well as affordable housing that is close to essential services and activities; and fewer services overall (e.g., mental health, Safe Harbor). They explained that youth experiencing homelessness in rural areas may also be more isolated and more difficult to identify, as they are more likely to be doubled up or couch-hopping. Government staff who responded to the funding survey also explained that greater Minnesota is generally not well-served by current funding (See Chapter VI: Funding for Youth Homelessness). One youth who responded to the survey suggested that having a one-stop shop for services could address some of the difficulties associated with having to travel to get to places, with no money and no transportation.

Youth and other key experts identified the following gaps as priorities to address overall:

- Mental and chemical health services (and particularly in rural areas)
- Family mediation support
- Services specifically for youth with intersecting identities (e.g., race and gender or sexual identity)
- Services specifically for transgender, non-binary, male and male-presenting youth
- Low-barrier housing
- Housing that focuses on and supports community
- Workforce and job skills support

The following are examples of the comments made by respondents:

There are a lot of gaps in services in terms of culturally specific providers – definitely an issue, especially for our BIPOC youth (they want spaces where they don't have to explain their identity and explain some of the trauma that comes with the identities that they hold – also some of the resilience that comes with the identities they hold. A lot of the service providers don't really look like the youth they are serving – a huge gap. – program director

It's harder for the youth to find housing because nothing is very affordable. Especially with them having children, it's hard to find something for a good price so that you can have enough to feed yourself and your children. – program director

Youth are aged up to 25 and there's no shelters for anyone who is 21–25. That needs to be addressed. – youth survey respondent

Connection to resources is more difficult in rural areas. There are not enough youth service providers in rural areas; not many services that are specifically tailored for youth. – program director

Additional support needed for youth transitioning from foster care and other systems

The needs of youth who leave foster care because they are too old were particularly highlighted by many key experts interviewed for this study. They stressed the importance of helping these youth so they do not age out of foster care and into the homeless system.

Youth aging out of foster care need to be stably housed through age 26. That would reduce youth homelessness. – program director

This need is confirmed by findings from the Wilder Research study (2018). One-third of youth said they had lived in a foster home. Of those who had left foster care in the past 12 months, just half (50%) said they had a stable place to live, including 58% of youth in greater Minnesota and 33% in the Twin Cities metro area. However, youth reported also leaving other systems and not having a stable place to live. For example, according to the same Wilder Research study (2018), nearly two-thirds (63%) of youth said they had been in a correctional facility in the past 2 years. Over two-thirds (68%) said they were homeless when they went into the facility and one-third (34%) said they had a stable place to leave when they left. One youth summarized it in the following way:

Once you turn 16 or 17, and especially if you're a male, the system stops caring about you and drags its feet because it knows you're about to turn 18 and flip over into a different system. That's [messed] up. Seen it happen to way too many people. – youth survey respondent

Limited focus on prevention and intervening early with youth who are at risk of homelessness

We have to reckon with the fact that prevention requires structural changes. Inequalities and risk factors are very embedded. Prevention is fuzzy and takes a lot of time. Even with adequate funding, changes take a very long time. – stakeholder

We are so stuck in intervention-based responses. We need to get upstream and address social determinants of health, lack of housing, violent environments. ALL the risk factors need to be addressed upstream. There will always be people who are at risk of homelessness. - program director

Program experts and youth interviewed for this report were clear about a lack of concerted efforts focused on prevention, with more attention needed for upstream work. Much of the current work on youth homelessness involves strategies designed to respond to existing problems. While there will likely always be families and youth at risk of homelessness, early intervention can reduce the likelihood of homelessness or mitigate its impact or tenure. Some respondents wondered if funding that is used for youth in shelters or foster care could be redirected to prevention efforts with families, for example, so that youth would never enter the foster care system.

A review of evidence on the effectiveness of interventions to prevent and address youth homelessness found that interventions do in fact have positive effects on outcomes for youth. The authors explained that prevention efforts “that incorporated methods of identifying at-risk populations for youth homelessness and aligning tailored supports and services to meet their needs succeeded in reducing the likelihood of these youth experiencing homelessness” (Morton et al., 2018, p. 178).

Related to prevention measures, research also indicates that earlier interventions can also be important in addressing homelessness overall. For example, the Wilder study (2018) found that intervening early can be the key to breaking the cycle of homelessness for youth, and preventing more severe problems with physical health issues, substance abuse, and traumatic brain injuries. Many homeless adults reported that they had experienced repeated homelessness from an early age, with half (52%) surveyed for the study becoming homeless for the first time by the time they turned 24, and more than one-third (36%) becoming homeless for the first time at or before age 18 (Pittman et al., 2020).

In addition to identifying prevention, broadly, as a major gap, youth, program staff, and other stakeholders identified a number of practices and strategies that could be implemented as prevention efforts, including:

- Stabilizing and strengthening families before there is a crisis
- Addressing known risk factors such as social determinants of health, socioeconomic circumstances, lack of affordable housing, systems that perpetuate demographic disparities
- Early identification of at-risk youth and families
- Improved access to mental health services
- Providing tailored supports that meet the actual needs of individuals and families

The 2020 HUD Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program report identified supportive services, rental assistance, family counseling and intervention services, financial assistance that is not for rent, and legal assistance as the most common types of prevention services provided for youth (Rog et al., p. 15).

Including youth perspective

The importance of including the perspectives of youth in the development and delivery of services and supports for youth experiencing homelessness was emphasized repeatedly by youth and other stakeholders interviewed and surveyed for this report. There was overall consensus from people with lived experience, and those who support them, that the current system of response is modeled after a system that serves adults and includes rules and regulations that were developed by people who do not work on the front lines. Two respondents described this in the following ways:

[It's important to] have programs that provide what youth actually need vs. just an allotment of resources. What is being measured and what programs are trying to accomplish may not align. Outcomes that matter may not be measurable. – program director

We need to work with young people themselves to create the programming, to create the opportunity, to create what's going to work. It's not rocket science. Let's take 20 years of things that we've done wrong and just stop doing them. And then actually work with the people closest to the issues, which are the young people themselves, to lead and drive what's actually going to work. – program director

IX. Recommendations based on findings

This is the message to the legislature: By investing in the youth response to homelessness, we can make systems improvements all the way up the chain in delivering services. Getting upstream with youth can make a difference over the long term. -program director

In preparation for this report, Wilder Research reviewed multiple national and Minnesota-based studies, as well as gathered input directly from local community experts, including youth with lived experiences. The same themes emerged again and again: the problem of youth homelessness can be addressed, but there need to be significant changes to a piecemeal system that will allow for more respectful, creative, flexible, and individualized access, supports, and services for youth.

A comprehensive study completed by Chapin Hall, which included intensive work from Hennepin County, overlaps with the findings of this report and includes the following findings and recommendations (Morton et al., 2017, p. 4).

Voices of Youth Count (national): Key findings

Finding 1. Youth homelessness is a broad and hidden challenge

Finding 2. Youth homelessness involves diverse experiences and circumstances

Finding 3. Prevention and early intervention are essential

Finding 4. Youth homelessness affects urban and rural youth at similar levels

Finding 5. Some youth are at greater risk of experiencing homelessness

Voices of Youth Count (national): Recommendations

- ✓ Conduct national estimates of youth homelessness biennially to track our progress in ending youth homelessness. See Finding 1.
- ✓ Fund housing interventions, services, outreach, and prevention efforts in accordance with the scale of youth homelessness, accounting for different needs. See Finding 1.
- ✓ Encourage assessment and service delivery decisions that are responsive to the diversity and fluidity of circumstances among youth experiencing homelessness. See Finding 2.
- ✓ Build prevention efforts in systems where youth likely to experience homelessness are in our care: child welfare, juvenile justice, and education. See Finding 3.
- ✓ Acknowledge unique developmental and housing needs for a young population, and adapt services to meet those needs. See Finding 3.
- ✓ Tailor supports for rural youth experiencing homelessness to account for more limited service infrastructure over a larger terrain. See Finding 4.
- ✓ Develop strategies to address the disproportionate risk for homelessness among specific subpopulations, including pregnant and parenting, LGBT, African American and Hispanic youth, and young people without high school diplomas. See Finding 5

Minnesota-specific recommendations

For this report, we integrated the Voices of Youth Count study findings and recommendations into the overarching Minnesota-specific recommendations synthesized from other reports reviewed, as well as feedback provided by local experts and youth with lived experience. It should be noted that these six recommendations are the themes that rose to the top. However, there are multiple additional other issues that need to be addressed, including those outlined in the Barriers and Gaps section of this report.

Recommendation 1

Create a streamlined, comprehensive, holistic response to youth homelessness that addresses fragmentation, reduces barriers, and enables youth to get the immediate and long-term supports they need.

We are putting youth into situations that actually put them at higher risk. We have to recognize this. Systems as they operate now are going to create more trauma.

– program director

The systems are not set up to work together. There's the homeless response system, the corrections system, the foster care system – all of these systems. And then there is support for adults, families, single adults, and youth. Feels like they are all in their own silos. They need to be working together to be addressing homelessness. Don't think putting young people in a box is really helpful to them, rather than supporting them more holistically. – program director

State and federal funding priorities and performance metrics don't fit into the scope of how we should be serving youth. They don't meet the needs of youth.

– program director

How do we all do our part instead of operating in silos? If you put young people in the middle, what is to surround them? We can figure this out – who can do what. For example, if we have a young person who is experiencing homelessness and their family needs resources, we can easily devise a system of coordination among services and resources available in the area. – program director

- ✓ Funding and services to prevent and address youth homelessness are piecemeal. There is no single coordinated “system” or response to youth homelessness. The multiple systems (housing, safety net, etc.) are confusing and include verifications and red tape that make access nearly impossible to navigate. Experts state that the systems were designed with a lens of mistrust of people experiencing homelessness (requiring traumatized people to tell their story and prove their needs are valid again and again), and built on top of past discriminatory policies (such as racist redlining, housing covenants, and systematically removing Indigenous children from their communities). There are currently multiple roadblocks that youth must attempt to hurdle to get the supports they need.
 - ✓ Many barriers and gaps in resources and supports for youth experiencing homelessness were consistently mentioned in multiple studies, reports, and feedback from youth and other experts. However, they continue to persist, and a fragmented approach to fixing the system’s issues has been ineffective in addressing youth homelessness.
 - ✓ There is a need for inter-system collaboration to ensure a holistic and unified approach. As part of this, there should be additional focus on building connections and working relationships across systems and across the state (i.e., corrections, child protection, behavioral health, medical care) in order to best meet the needs of youth. Half of the youth who gave feedback about recommendations for this report, said that better coordination in the systems that support them is a priority. It should be noted, however, that community experts state that increased coordination across systems will not solve the problem if each system itself is built on policies and approaches that perpetuate an over-representation of BIPOC youth.
 - ✓ Build prevention efforts in systems where youth likely to experience homelessness are in our care: child welfare, juvenile justice, and education (Morton et al., 2017). Services offered up stream may alleviate difficulties for families and individuals in the future.
 - ✓ The infrastructure currently in place requires youth providers to do significant data management and their organization may have little IT capacity. In addition, it is critical that the data that is collected is purposeful, useful, and used to inform decision-making and address population-specific needs.
-

Recommendation 2.

Find ways to increase funding that promote flexibility and responsiveness, encourage service specialization and expertise (depth rather than breadth), and reduce competition for organizations that serve youth experiencing homelessness.

While the amount of philanthropic investments in this area is unknown, these private contributions are best viewed solely as an insufficient and uncoordinated triage effort to fill the historic shortfalls of government investment in this area. The leadership role of the government in the work of ending youth homelessness would be best expressed by designing and creating a fully funded public system that prevents any young Minnesotan from experiencing homelessness in the first place.
– representative from philanthropy

- ✓ Overwhelmingly, providers, local experts, and a review of financial data show a funding system that is nearly impossible to navigate, emphasizes fragmentation of services, silos providers and systems, and creates competition and a need for providers to do everything for every population, rather than specialize and individualize.
 - ✓ Repeatedly, providers and youth talked about the need for funding to be flexible so that immediate and individualized needs of youth can be met. The Homeless Youth Act was cited by many informants as a great precedent for flexible funding for programs, and Direct Cash Transfer programs were given as an example of flexible funding directly for youth.
 - ✓ Over half of the youth (56%) who gave feedback about recommendations for this report stated that changing eligibility requirements so they could qualify for housing or assistance was a top priority.
 - ✓ In addition, the majority of youth who gave feedback for this report stated that food assistance (47%) and case management or help accessing services (44%) were the most important to them. Although housing may be an overarching need, services that meet basic needs are critical.
 - ✓ Fund housing interventions, services, outreach, and prevention efforts in accordance with the scale of youth homelessness, accounting for different needs (Morton et al., 2017).
-

Recommendation 3.

Support youth workers who provide critical frontline services for youth experiencing homelessness.

We need to raise the bar everywhere on what youth workers are paid to do this work. The work they do is so important, and it's a lot of crisis work, and they are getting \$17 to \$18 per hour. It's not sustainable, and it's not fair. So, if we want to create a really solid workforce that can provide for these young people, we need to pay them livable wage. The low wages are a threat to the sector for sure. – program director

- ✓ There is an urgent need to address burnout among youth workers, due to the constant urgency of working in a crisis mode. Youth workers may be witness to violence, death, overdoses, and the trauma of the youth with whom they work. Yet, according to stakeholders, the youth workers do not always receive adequate training to allow them to effectively intervene and provide support. In addition, youth workers are not adequately compensated with livable wages or wages that reflect the critical importance of their work, and turnover in many programs is high.
 - ✓ The recruitment and retention of high quality youth workers is a critical foundation to best meeting urgent and long-term, trauma-informed, and developmental needs of youth experiencing homelessness.
 - ✓ Many key informants identified a shortage of trained providers (73%), especially psychiatric prescribers (60%), and an inability to retain or recruit prescribers (60%) as some of the primary gaps in services. Key informants in greater Minnesota were more likely to cite these shortages as barriers to service provision than respondents in the Twin Cities metro area.
-

Recommendation 4.

Redesign the current assessment and “Coordinated Entry” system to support youth at risk of homelessness and those who are experiencing homelessness. Address complex definitions and requirements that limit how and when youth qualify for assistance and constrain providers’ abilities to meet immediate needs of youth. The current approach is not responsive to the unique circumstances and fluctuating needs of youth who are experiencing homelessness.

We need to be able to meet youth where they are. Policies and procedures make things inflexible. – program director

The system perpetuates disparities. We talk about safety nets, and yet you have to check so many boxes to be able to get services with arbitrary time frames and arbitrary amounts of actual support you can get. These systems are not person-centered; they are centered on how much money was invested and what are the outcomes (which are numbers rather than actual human beings). – program director

- ✓ The current assessment process in place is not responsive to meet the immediate needs of youth. Respondents noted that a youth may present with an urgent housing crisis at one location, but may be required to go to another location to get assessed for Coordinated Entry. In the meantime, shelters may have empty beds available, waiting for the Coordinated Entry System to locate a youth who had made it to high priority. The lag time creates even more of a system that requires youth to cobble together different places to stay, increasing their vulnerability.
- ✓ Inequitable screening tools perpetuate racial inequalities in the supports available to people who are experiencing homelessness, and prioritize White people over people who identify as BIPOC (Wilkey et al., 2019).
- ✓ Coordinated Entry requirements may also compel youth to prove needs and qualifications to be considered for assistance. For example, respondents noted that youth may not qualify for shelter or housing under Coordinated Entry unless they stay outside or in shelter or meet other bureaucratic requirements.
- ✓ Current definitions of homelessness are confusing and criteria for entering programs are too restrictive. There is a need to ensure that clarify and expand HUD eligibility criteria to meet the urgent and longer term needs of youth.
- ✓ Youth experiencing homelessness are not a homogeneous group and cannot be expected to have identical needs. One size does not fit all in developing or providing supports.
- ✓ Encourage assessment and service delivery decisions that are responsive to the diversity and fluidity of circumstances among youth experiencing homelessness (Morton et al., 2017).

Recommendation 5.

Advance and sustain a laser focus on preventing and ending homelessness among youth experiencing homelessness who identify as BIPOC and LGBTQIA+, as well as parenting youth, and youth living in rural areas of Minnesota.

We are so stuck in intervention-based responses. We need to go upstream and address all the risk factors. – program director

We need programs where young people can see adults who look like them and are running the programs that are supporting them, and also walking along side them.
– program director

- ✓ Address barriers and bureaucratic red tape faced by culturally specific organizations to access funding. Funding for these organizations may need to be initially focused on building capacity.
- ✓ Develop strategies to address the disproportionate risk for homelessness among specific subpopulations, including pregnant and parenting, LGBT, African American, and Indigenous youth (Morton et al., 2017).
- ✓ Tailor supports for rural youth experiencing homelessness to account for more limited service infrastructure over a larger terrain (Morton et al., 2017).

Recommendation 6.

Because each youth has their own story and changing needs, approaches need to be individualized and youth voices need to be integrated into planning, design, and decision-making about services and systems that support them.

Centering youth voice with high representation of priority needs is the most important strategy to consider.

Don't do harm by not having youth voice as prominent. – program director

No decisions about me, without me.
– youth respondent

- ✓ Youth experiencing homelessness in Minnesota are resilient and have a diverse set of backgrounds, experiences, and identities. One size does not fit all.
- ✓ Services and housing need to be tailored to the needs of youth, recognize that most youth have histories of trauma, include harm reduction approaches, and recognize that youth's needs and circumstances change.
- ✓ Acknowledge unique developmental and housing needs for a young population, and adapt services to meet those needs (Morton et al., 2017).
- ✓ Youth perspective and voice need to be centered in local and statewide conversations about approaches and policies that will prevent and end homelessness. They are the experts, understand changing dynamics, and can give concrete guidance about solutions.

Appendix A: Methodology

This Appendix outlines and describes the multiple methods used to collect information for this report. Sources for information included:

- A scan of current literature and reports
- An online survey about funding with staff from organizations who administer federal and state funding for youth homelessness
- Semi-structured telephone interviews with key experts
- Facilitated discussion with Youth Services Network leaders
- Focus groups with youth with lived experience of homelessness
- An online survey completed by youth with lived experience of homelessness

Literature scan

According to the guidelines in Laws of Minnesota 2021, 1st Special Session, Chapter 7, Article 7, Section 29, Wilder Research staff completed a review of the following:

...Existing data, studies, and analysis provided by state, county, and other entities including:

(1) Minnesota Housing Finance Agency analysis on housing availability;

(2) the Minnesota state plan to end homelessness;

(3) the continuum of care counts of youth experiencing homelessness and assessments as provided by Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) required coordinated entry systems;

(4) the biannual Department of Human Services report on the Homeless Youth Act;

(5) the Wilder Research homeless study;

(6) the Voices of Youth Count sponsored by Hennepin County; and

(7) privately funded analysis, including:

(i) nine evidence-based principles to support youth in overcoming homelessness

(ii) the return on investment analysis conducted for YouthLink by Foldes Consulting; and (iii) the evaluation of Homeless Youth Act resources conducted by Rainbow Research. (p. 245)

Wilder Research also reviewed other relevant articles and reports. The goal of this review was to develop the framework and data collection tools needed to address:

- Unique causes of youth homelessness
- Targeted responses to youth homelessness
- Regional needs and gaps
- Costs of homelessness
- Expert opinions on recommendations for ending youth homelessness

The full list of references is located in Appendix G.

Funding survey

Wilder Research developed an online survey and sent links to individuals identified by OEO staff as those who could share information on funding for services for youth experiencing homelessness in Minnesota. On the contact list were administrators from state, regions (Continuum of Care regions), and counties who are responsible for administering funding, some of which targeted youth homelessness. Funding sources include:

- General funds for Minnesota
- Federal funds for Minnesota
- Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) funding from HUD
- Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) funding
- Continuum of Care (CoC) funding in a number of municipalities and regions were also asked to provide more detailed information

Potential respondents received an email with information about the survey, along with an electronic link to the online survey. Respondents who did not complete the survey by the deadline received additional reminders, including personalized emails from OEO staff asking for their compliance.

Contacts were asked to respond to questions about:

- The amount of funding that went to programs that focused on services for youth under the age of 25
- The amount of funding that was earmarked for specific types of programs (i.e., prevention, outreach, shelter, supportive housing, other supports and services)
- The percentages of funds that were directed to specific subpopulations of youth (i.e., greater Minnesota, those who identify as LGBTQIA+, those who identify as BIPOC, parenting, unsheltered, couch-hopping)
- Numbers of youth served by the funds
- Gaps in the funding
- COVID-related funding

State program staff were also asked to respond to the information included in the Fiscal Summary of State Homeless Programs document, for General Fund and Federal funding in FY20 and FY21, and budgeted in FY22.

Seventeen contacts completed the survey, including 10 of 15 staff responsible for General and Federal funds, and 7 out of 17 staff responsible for ESG, CoC or FYSB-RHY funding.

The results are summarized in Section VI: Funding for youth homelessness.

Interviews with key experts

Staff from OEO and Wilder Research developed a list of key experts and stakeholders associated with a range of programs and organizations. Wilder Research engaged these key experts in one-hour telephone interviews. Fifteen individuals completed the interviews, representing 11 organizations including:

- Minnesota Department of Human Services Office of Economic Opportunity
- Minnesota Department of Health
- Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness
- Shelters and programs serving youth experiencing homelessness in greater Minnesota and the metro area
- Minnesota Continuum of Care regions
- Tribal nations
- Philanthropic organizations

Key experts responded to questions about:

- Effective programs and approaches, including those for sub-populations of youth
- Strategies for preventing youth homelessness
- Barriers and gaps for addressing disparities in youth homelessness, including those for sub-populations of youth
- Priority gaps to address
- Priority strategies to address

Discussion with Youth Services Network leaders

Wilder Research attended a regularly scheduled meeting with the Youth Services Network, and led a facilitated discussion with 13 leaders. The purpose of the discussion was to receive their input for this report, including their recommendations for addressing youth homelessness in Minnesota.

Topics covered during the discussion included:

- Ideas and strategies for preventing youth homelessness
- Barriers and gaps to addressing disparities in youth homelessness (particularly related to BIPOC youth and youth identifying as LGBTQIA+)
- Priorities for serving youth experiencing homelessness in Minnesota
- The best ways to engage youth experiencing homelessness, in order to include youth voice in the results

A follow-up email was sent to YSN leaders to collect information about the number of volunteers their organization had used in the most recent fiscal year.

Perspectives of youth with lived experiences of homelessness

To hear directly from youth with lived experiences of homelessness, Wilder staff conducted three focus groups with 16 youth and received responses to an online survey from 112 youth. In order to protect participants'

confidentiality, responses were combined for the two groups. Full results from the focus groups and online survey are located in Appendix B. Background characteristics of participants include the following:

- 45% of youth identified as Black or African American, 38% identified as White, 23% identified as American Indian, and 14% identified as Hispanic or Latino
- More than half of respondents (55%) reported they lived in Greater Minnesota (outside the 7-county metro area)
- The age range of respondents was 17-24 years, with an average age of 21 years old

Focus groups with youth

With the assistance of Youth Services Network staff, Wilder staff arranged to attend three Youth Action Board meetings and conduct focus groups with the youth in attendance. The purpose of the focus groups was to hear directly from the youth with lived experiences of homelessness. Two focus groups followed a hybrid model, with at least some youth joining via Zoom. In one case, researchers also joined via Zoom. One focus group was conducted with both youth and researchers attending in person. The responses of the youth remained anonymous, their participation was voluntary, and they were not required to answer any questions they preferred not to answer. After the focus groups, each participant received a \$50 gift card to thank them for their time. A total of 16 youth participated in the focus groups.

At the beginning of each focus group, participants were asked to complete a brief questionnaire with questions about the services and supports that had been the most helpful to them while they were experiencing homelessness, as well as services or supports they thought there should be more of in Minnesota. Responses to these questions were used as a springboard for the focus group discussions. Participants were also asked to answer several questions about basic demographic characteristics, including race and ethnicity, age, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

Other topics covered in the focus groups included:

- Priority services for youth experiencing homelessness
- Specific services needed to meet the needs of youth who identify as BIPOC and/or LGBTQIA+
- Supports, services, or changes to the system that could help prevent youth from becoming homeless
- What they would like legislators and policymakers to know about and address regarding youth homelessness

Online survey of youth

To supplement the focus group participation and extend the reach of the data collection outside of the 7-County Metro Area, Wilder Research programmed a brief online survey and asked program leaders to distribute the invitation to youth served through their programs. A total of 112 youth completed at least part of the online survey. The survey was accessed another 207 times, but individuals did not answer any questions.

Topics covered in the online survey included:

- Services and supports that had been the most helpful to youth while they were experiencing homelessness
- Services or supports youth thought there should be more of in Minnesota, including those that would meet the needs of youth who identify as BIPOC and/or LGBTQIA+
- Priority services for youth experiencing homelessness
- Supports, services, or changes to the system that could help prevent youth from becoming homeless
- What they would like legislators and policymakers to know about and address regarding youth homelessness
- Basic demographics information about race or ethnicity, age, and where they live

Appendix B: Data tables

B1. Demographic characteristics of youth participating in focus groups or completing online survey

Characteristics	#	%
Race (multiple responses possible) (N=94)		
Black/African/African American	42	45%
White	36	38%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	22	23%
Hispanic/Latinx/Latino	13	14%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	2	2%
Asian/Asian American	2	2%
Middle Eastern/North African	1	1%
Location (N=92)		
7-County Metro area	41	45%
Greater Minnesota	51	55%
Age (N=79)		
Range	17-24 years	
Mean	21 years	

Note: Focus group participants were also asked about their gender identify and LGBTQAI+ identity. Due to the small number of responses and to protect confidentiality, this information is not reported. Focus group participants were not asked whether they live in the metro area or greater Minnesota. All youth had the option of declining to respond to any question.

B2. Services and supports youth say have been most important while experiencing homelessness (N=121)

Services and supports	#	%
Food assistance (e.g., food stamps or free meal sites)	57	47%
Case management or help with accessing services	53	44%
Transitional or supportive housing programs	49	40%
Drop-in centers	44	36%
Outreach workers/services	43	36%
Emergency shelters	32	26%
Mental health services	30	25%
Something else? <u>Head Start, Crisis Center, SSI</u>	3	2%

B3. Services and supports youth say they need more of (N=108)

Services and supports <i>(Multiple responses possible)</i>	#	%
A good way to access housing or shelter when you were at-risk of homelessness (better coordinated entry services)	71	66%
Changing the eligibility requirements so that you could qualify for housing or assistance (e.g., food stamps, not needing a guardian signature for a minor to have shelter)	60	56%
Coordination of the systems that provide supports to help you (e.g., schools, foster care, social services, mental health, etc.)	55	51%
Help with the process of finding assistance (e.g., paperwork, phone calls, appointments)	55	51%
Outreach services or drop-in centers (+weekends)	54	50%
Mental health or chemical dependency services for yourself or your family members	53	49%
Shelters or housing that are just for youth	52	48%
Services targeted to BIPOC youth	27	25%
Services targeted to LGBTQ+ youth	26	24%
Services targeted to something else <u> Dental care </u>	1	1%

B4. Services and supports youth say are priority needs (N=97)

Services and supports	#	%
A good way to access housing or shelter when you were at-risk of homelessness (better coordinated entry services)	23	23%
Coordination of the systems that provide supports to help you (e.g., schools, foster care, social services, mental health, etc.)	13	13%
Mental health or chemical dependency services for yourself or your family members	12	12%
Changing the eligibility requirements so that you could qualify for housing or assistance (e.g., food stamps, not needing a guardian signature for a minor to have shelter)	12	12%
Shelters or housing that are just for youth	12	12%
Outreach services or drop-in centers (+weekends)	11	11%
Help with the process of finding assistance (e.g., paperwork, phone calls, appointments)	10	10%
Services targeted to BIPOC youth	2	2%
Services targeted to LGBTQ+ youth	2	2%
Services targeted to something else	0	0

B5. Strategies key experts say are priorities for serving Minnesota’s youth who are experiencing homelessness (N=15)

Strategies	Number of times ranked in top 3 priorities
Services and interventions that are tailored and responsive to the diversity and circumstances of youth experiencing homelessness (one size does not fit all)	9
More shelters and housing that are youth-specific	8
Assistance for youth who ask, even if they don’t meet the “official” definitions of homelessness	6
Prevention efforts with improved/increased outreach to identify homeless and at-risk youth	5
Coordinated approach/collaboration across systems for providing services (education, criminal justice, CPS, employment)	4
Drop-in and intensive, supportive/relational case management model of care	3
Boosted efforts in schools to identify and provide services for students who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness	3
Shelter-linked mental health services	2

Appendix C: Homeless Youth Act Grantees

Agency	Counties targeted (primarily)	Activity
Ain Dah Yung	Ramsey, Hennepin	Housing
Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency, Inc.	St. Louis, Itasca, Koochiching	Outreach, shelter, housing
Avenues for Youth	Hennepin, Ramsey	Outreach, shelter, housing
Beacon Interfaith	Hennepin, Ramsey	Housing
Bois Forte Tribal Council	St. Louis, Koochiching, Boise Forte Reservation	Outreach, housing
Catholic Charities of St. Cloud	Stearns, Benton, Sherburne, Wright, Anoka, Morrison, Todd, Mille Lacs, Cass, Chisago, Wadena, Crow Wing, Isanti, Kanabec, Pine, Morrison	Shelter, housing
Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis	Hennepin	Shelter
Center City Housing	Olmsted	Housing
Community Action Center of Northfield	Rice	Outreach
Evergreen Youth	Beltrami, Cass, Clearwater, Hubbard, Mahnomon	Drop-in, housing
Face to Face Health and Counseling Service, Inc.	Ramsey	Drop-in, housing
Hope for Youth	Anoka and North Metro Suburbs	Drop-in, housing
Inter-County Community Council, Inc.	Pennington, Red Lake, Polk, Clearwater	Housing
Lakes and Pines Community Action	Atkin, Carlton, Pine, Chisago, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs	Housing
Lakes & Prairies Community Action Partnerships, Inc.	Clay, Wilkin	Outreach, housing

Agency	Counties targeted (primarily)	Activity
Leech Lake Reservation Housing Authority	Cass, Beltrami, Itasca, Hubbard	Housing
Life House	St. Louis	Drop-in, shelter, housing
Lutheran Social Service (Brainerd)	Crow Wing, Todd, Morrison,	Outreach, shelter
Lutheran Social Service (Duluth)	St. Louis	Shelter, housing
Lutheran Social Service (Mankato)	Blue Earth, Nicollet, Le Sueur, Brown, Waseca, Sibley, Watonwan, Faribault, Steele	Outreach, drop-in, shelter, housing
Lutheran Social Service (Rochester)	Olmsted, Rice, Goodhue, Wabasha, Dodge, Mower, Fillmore, Winona, Houston	Outreach, shelter, housing
Lutheran Social Service (Metro youth services)	Ramsey, Hennepin, Dakota, Washington, Anoka, Scott, Carver	Outreach, shelter, housing
Lutheran Social Service (Willmar)	Kandiyohi, Renville, Chippewa, Swift, Meeker, McLeod	Outreach, shelter, housing
MAHUBE-OTWA	Mahnomen, Hubbard, Becker, Otter Tail, Wadena	Housing
Mid MN Legal Assistance	Hennepin, Ramsey	Outreach
MoveFwd	Hennepin	Outreach, drop-in, housing
Northfield Union of Youth	Dakota, Rice	Drop-in, shelter
Oasis for Youth	Hennepin	Drop-in, housing
Open Doors for Youth	Sherburne, Wright	Drop-in
Pillsbury United Communities	Hennepin	Outreach
Salvation Army—Booth Brown	Ramsey	Shelter
Scott-Carver-Dakota CAP Agency, Inc.	Carver, Scott	Housing

Agency	Counties targeted (primarily)	Activity
The Bridge for Youth	Ramsey, Hennepin, Washington, Dakota	Housing
The Link	Hennepin, Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Scott, Washington	Drop-in, emergency shelter, housing
United Community Action Partnership	Lincoln, Lyon, Redwood, Cottonwood, Jackson, Renville, Kandiyohi, Meeker, McLeod Nobles, Pipestone,	Shelter, housing
YMCA Greater Twin Cities—Emma B. Howe	Hennepin, Ramsey, Washington, Anoka	Outreach, housing
YWCA Duluth	St. Louis, Carlton, Lake, Douglas	Housing
YouthLink	Hennepin	Drop-in, housing

Appendix D: Runaway and Homeless Youth Legislation

- 245.4 Sec. 29. 2022 REPORT TO LEGISLATURE ON RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS
- 245.5 YOUTH.
- 245.6 Subdivision 1. Report development. The commissioner of human services is exempt
- 245.7 from preparing the report required under Minnesota Statutes, section 256K.45, subdivision
- 245.8 2, in 2023 and shall instead update the information in the 2007 legislative report on runaway
- 245.9 and homeless youth. In developing the updated report, the commissioner must use existing
- 245.10 data, studies, and analysis provided by state, county, and other entities including:
- 245.11 (1) Minnesota Housing Finance Agency analysis on housing availability;
- 245.12 (2) the Minnesota state plan to end homelessness;
- 245.13 (3) the continuum of care counts of youth experiencing homelessness and assessments
- 245.14 as provided by Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) required coordinated
- 245.15 entry systems;
- 245.16 (4) the biannual Department of Human Services report on the Homeless Youth Act;
- 245.17 (5) the Wilder Research homeless study;
- 245.18 (6) the Voices of Youth Count sponsored by Hennepin County; and
- 245.19 (7) privately funded analysis, including:
- 245.20 (i) nine evidence-based principles to support youth in overcoming homelessness;
- 245.21 (ii) the return on investment analysis conducted for YouthLink by Foldes Consulting;
- 245.22 and
- 245.23 (iii) the evaluation of Homeless Youth Act resources conducted by Rainbow Research.
- 245.24 Subd. 2. Key elements; due date. (a) The report must include three key elements where
- 245.25 significant learning has occurred in the state since the 2007 report, including:

- 245.26 (1) the unique causes of youth homelessness;
- 245.27 (2) targeted responses to youth homelessness, including the significance of positive
- 245.28 youth development as fundamental to each targeted response; and
- 245.29 (3) recommendations based on existing reports and analysis on how to end youth
- 245.30 homelessness.
- 246.1 (b) To the extent that data is available, the report must include:
- 246.2 (1) a general accounting of the federal and philanthropic funds leveraged to support
- 246.3 homeless youth activities;
- 246.4 (2) a general accounting of the increase in volunteer responses to support youth
- 246.5 experiencing homelessness; and
- 246.6 (3) a data-driven accounting of geographic areas or distinct populations that have gaps
- 246.7 in service or are not yet served by homeless youth responses.
- 246.8 (c) The commissioner of human services shall consult with and incorporate the expertise
- 246.9 of community-based providers of homeless youth services and other expert stakeholders to
- 246.10 complete the report. The commissioner shall submit the report to the chairs and ranking
- 246.11 minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over youth homelessness
- 246.12 by December 15, 2022.

Appendix E: Homeless Youth Act Statute

256K.45 HOMELESS YOUTH ACT.

Subdivision 1. Grant program established. The commissioner of human services shall establish a Homeless Youth Act fund and award grants to providers who are committed to serving homeless youth and youth at risk of homelessness, to provide street and community outreach and drop-in programs, emergency shelter programs, and integrated supportive housing and transitional living programs, consistent with the program descriptions in this section to reduce the incidence of homelessness among youth.

Subd. 1a. Definitions. (a) The definitions in this subdivision apply to this section.

(b) "Commissioner" means the commissioner of human services.

(c) "Homeless youth" means a person 24 years of age or younger who is unaccompanied by a parent or guardian and is without shelter where appropriate care and supervision are available, whose parent or legal guardian is unable or unwilling to provide shelter and care, or who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. The following are not fixed, regular, or adequate nighttime residences:

(1) a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations;

(2) an institution or a publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations;

(3) transitional housing;

(4) a temporary placement with a peer, friend, or family member that has not offered permanent residence, a residential lease, or temporary lodging for more than 30 days; or

(5) a public or private place not designed for, nor ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

Homeless youth does not include persons incarcerated or otherwise detained under federal or state law.

(d) "Youth at risk of homelessness" means a person 24 years of age or younger whose status or circumstances indicate a significant danger of experiencing homelessness in the near future. Status or circumstances that indicate a significant danger may include: (1) youth exiting out-of-home placements; (2) youth who previously were homeless; (3) youth whose parents or primary caregivers are or were previously homeless; (4) youth who are exposed to abuse and neglect in their homes; (5) youth who experience conflict with parents due to chemical or alcohol dependency, mental health disabilities, or other disabilities; and (6) runaways.

(e) "Runaway" means an unmarried child under the age of 18 years who is absent from the home of a parent or guardian or other lawful placement without the consent of the parent, guardian, or lawful custodian.

Subd. 2. Homeless youth report. The commissioner shall prepare a biennial report, beginning in February 2015, which provides meaningful information to the legislative committees having jurisdiction over the issue of homeless youth, that includes, but is not limited to: (1) a list of the areas of the state with the greatest need for

services and housing for homeless youth, and the level and nature of the needs identified; (2) details about grants made, including shelter-linked youth mental health grants under section [256K.46](#); (3) the distribution of funds throughout the state based on population need; (4) follow-up information, if available, on the status of homeless youth and whether they have stable housing two years after services are provided; and (5) any other outcomes for populations served to determine the effectiveness of the programs and use of funding.

Subd.3. Street and Community Outreach and Drop-in program. Youth drop-in centers must provide walk-in access to crisis intervention and ongoing supportive services including one-to-one case management services on a self-referral basis. Street and community outreach programs must locate, contact, and provide information, referrals, and services to homeless youth, youth at risk of homelessness, and runaways. Information, referrals, and services provided may include, but are not limited to:

- (1) family reunification services;
- (2) conflict resolution or mediation counseling;
- (3) assistance in obtaining temporary emergency shelter;
- (4) assistance in obtaining food, clothing, medical care, or mental health counseling;
- (5) counseling regarding violence, sexual exploitation, substance abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, and pregnancy;
- (6) referrals to other agencies that provide support services to homeless youth, youth at risk of homelessness, and runaways;
- (7) assistance with education, employment, and independent living skills;
- (8) aftercare services;
- (9) specialized services for highly vulnerable runaways and homeless youth, including teen parents, emotionally disturbed and mentally ill youth, and sexually exploited youth; and
- (10) homelessness prevention.

Subd.4. Emergency shelter program. (a) Emergency shelter programs must provide homeless youth and runaways with referral and walk-in access to emergency, short-term residential care. The program shall provide homeless youth and runaways with safe, dignified shelter, including private shower facilities, beds, and at least one meal each day; and shall assist a runaway and homeless youth with reunification with the family or legal guardian when required or appropriate.

(b) The services provided at emergency shelters may include, but are not limited to:

- (1) family reunification services;
- (2) individual, family, and group counseling;
- (3) assistance obtaining clothing;

- (4) access to medical and dental care and mental health counseling;
- (5) education and employment services;
- (6) recreational activities;
- (7) advocacy and referral services;
- (8) independent living skills training;
- (9) aftercare and follow-up services;
- (10) transportation; and
- (11) homelessness prevention.

Subd.5. Supportive housing and transitional living programs. Transitional living programs must help homeless youth and youth at risk of homelessness to find and maintain safe, dignified housing. The program may also provide rental assistance and related supportive services, or refer youth to other organizations or agencies that provide such services. Services provided may include, but are not limited to:

- (1) educational assessment and referrals to educational programs;
- (2) career planning, employment, work skill training, and independent living skills training;
- (3) job placement;
- (4) budgeting and money management;
- (5) assistance in securing housing appropriate to needs and income;
- (6) counseling regarding violence, sexual exploitation, substance abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, and pregnancy;
- (7) referral for medical services or chemical dependency treatment;
- (8) parenting skills;
- (9) self-sufficiency support services or life skill training;
- (10) aftercare and follow-up services; and
- (11) homelessness prevention.

Subd.6.Funding. Funds appropriated for this section may be expended on programs described under subdivisions 3 to 5, technical assistance, and capacity building to meet the greatest need on a statewide basis. The commissioner will provide outreach, technical assistance, and program development support to increase capacity to new and existing service providers to better meet needs statewide, particularly in areas where services for homeless youth have not been established, especially in greater Minnesota.

Appendix F: Shelter-Linked Mental Health Grant Statute

256K.46 SHELTER-LINKED MENTAL HEALTH GRANT PROGRAM.

Subd.1. Establishment and Authority (a) The commissioner shall award grants to provide mental health services to homeless or sexually exploited youth. To be eligible, housing providers must partner with community-based mental health practitioners to provide a continuum of mental health services, including short-term crisis response, support for youth in longer-term housing settings, and ongoing relationships to support youth in other housing arrangements in the community for homeless or sexually exploited youth.

(b) The commissioner shall consult with the commissioner of management and budget to identify evidence-based mental health services for youth and give priority in awarding grants to proposals that include evidence-based mental health services for youth.

(c) The commissioner may make two-year grants under this section.

(d) Money appropriated for this section must be expended on activities described under subdivision 4, technical assistance, and capacity building to meet the greatest need on a statewide basis. The commissioner shall provide outreach, technical assistance, and program development support to increase capacity of new and existing service providers to better meet needs statewide, particularly in areas where shelter-linked youth mental health services have not been established, especially in greater Minnesota.

Subd.2. Definitions (a) The definitions in this subdivision apply to this section.

(b) "Commissioner" means the commissioner of human services, unless otherwise indicated.

(c) "Housing provider" means a shelter, housing program, or other entity providing services under the Homeless Youth Act in section [256K.45](#) and the Safe Harbor for Sexually Exploited Youth Act in section [145.4716](#).

(d) "Mental health practitioner" has the meaning given in section [245.462, subdivision 17](#).

(e) "Youth" has the meanings given for "homeless youth," "youth at risk for homelessness," and "runaway" in section [256K.45, subdivision 1a](#), "sexually exploited youth" in section [260C.007, subdivision 31](#), and "youth eligible for services" in section [145.4716, subdivision 3](#).

Subd.3. Eligibility. An eligible applicant for shelter-linked youth mental health grants under subdivision 1 is a housing provider that:

(1) demonstrates that the provider received targeted trauma training focused on sexual exploitation and adolescent experiences of homelessness; and

(2) partners with a community-based mental health practitioner who has demonstrated experience or access to training regarding adolescent development and trauma-informed responses.

Subd.4. Allowable Grant Activities. (a) Grant recipients may conduct the following activities with community-based mental health practitioners:

(1) develop programming to prepare youth to receive mental health services;

(2) provide on-site mental health services, including group skills and therapy sessions. Grant recipients are encouraged to use evidence-based mental health services;

(3) provide mental health case management, as defined in section [256B.0625, subdivision 20](#); and

(4) consult, train, and educate housing provider staff regarding mental health. Grant recipients are encouraged to provide staff with access to a mental health crisis line 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

(b) Only after promoting and assisting participants with obtaining health insurance coverage for which the participant is eligible, and only after mental health practitioners bill covered services to medical assistance or health plan companies, grant recipients may use grant funds to fill gaps in insurance coverage for mental health services.

(c) Grant funds may be used for purchasing equipment, connection charges, on-site coordination, set-up fees, and site fees to deliver shelter-linked youth mental health services defined in this subdivision via telemedicine consistent with section [256B.0625, subdivision 3b](#).

Subd. 5. Reporting. Grant recipients shall report annually on the use of shelter-linked youth mental health grants to the commissioner by December 31, beginning in 2020. Each report shall include the name and location of the grant recipient, the amount of each grant, the youth mental health services provided, and the number of youth receiving services. The commissioner shall determine the form required for the reports and may specify additional reporting requirements. The commissioner shall include the shelter-linked youth mental health services program in the biennial report required under section [256K.45, subdivision 2](#)

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