



The State of Homelessness in Wisconsin

2015 Homeless Management
Information System (HMIS) Report

July 2016





Milwaukee Police Department's Lt. Liam Looney and Milwaukee VA Medical Center's Public Affairs Officer Gary Kunich interview with local media about Milwaukee's homeless underneath an interstate in downtown Milwaukee during the January 2015 Point-in-Time Count. A handful of homeless live under this bridge, by the cover of darkness. Photo courtesy of Ben Slane.

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LETTER FROM THE STATE DIRECTOR

In 2010, the federal administration released Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness. Benchmarks were set to prevent and end homelessness among veterans by 2015, to end chronic homelessness by 2015 (later changed to 2017), to prevent and end homelessness for families, youth, and children by 2020, and to set a path for ending all types of homelessness.¹

Contrary to the decline in homelessness witnessed at a national level, the number of persons experiencing homelessness in Wisconsin has increased in the past five years. With this report we aim to provide an overview of homelessness in Wisconsin to inform and advance community efforts of ending homelessness.

This annual report on homelessness in Wisconsin is based on data compiled through the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), which collects real-time data on approximately 80% of homeless projects and nearly 90% of beds in the state. The data do not include information from domestic violence shelters, from persons living with friends or family, or on unsheltered persons who had no interactions with homeless service providers using HMIS. Based on the findings in this report, we recommend:

For Government Bodies and Funding Agencies

- Continue to fund the work of homeless service providers at current or increased levels, focusing on project performance and providing appropriate services.

For Homeless Service Providers

- Focus on data quality for the new HMIS questions associated with the chronic homeless definition, especially for night-by-night shelters.
- Continue to implement coordinated entry and prioritize chronically homeless clients with the longest duration of homelessness and the most significant service needs for permanent housing.
- Increase proportion of beds that are designated as permanent housing as opposed to temporary shelter.
- Consider reducing transitional housing inventory in favor of permanent housing beds.

Thank you for your support as we work to end homelessness in Wisconsin.



Adam Smith
Wisconsin Director

HOMELESSNESS IN WISCONSIN



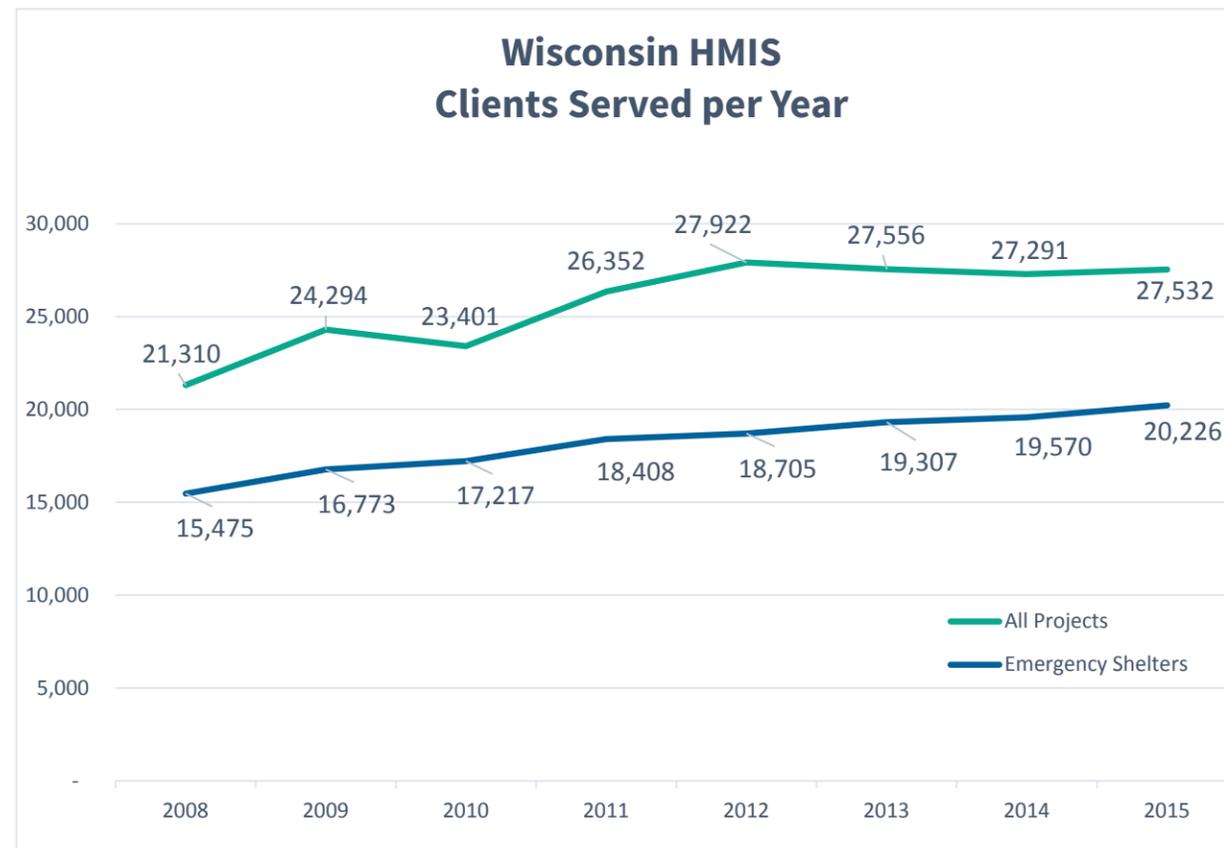
A graffiti-painted wall under I-94 in Milwaukee serves as home to a few people. Here, a Veterans Affairs social worker, a police officer and local media participate in the homeless count. Photo courtesy of Ben Slane.

State Estimates

27,532 clients experiencing homelessness received services and shelter from HMIS agencies in Wisconsin in 2015. 20,226 clients (73%) used emergency shelter or motel vouchers. Some clients received longer-term temporary services and housing in transitional housing (15%) and safe haven (1%) projects. 11% of clients entered rapid re-housing projects, which aim to return individuals and families to permanent housing as quickly as possible. 3% of clients entered permanent supportive housing during 2015, and 18% received services through homeless outreach.

The number of clients experiencing homelessness in Wisconsin who were served by HMIS projects has increased by 18% since 2010. Similarly, the number of persons using emergency shelter for at least one night has increased by 17% since 2010. In the past two years, the total number of clients served by HMIS agencies has stayed about the same.

On the night of January 28, 2015, volunteers in Wisconsin surveyed 6,057 persons experiencing homelessness. 442 (7%) were unsheltered, sleeping in places not meant for human habitation.

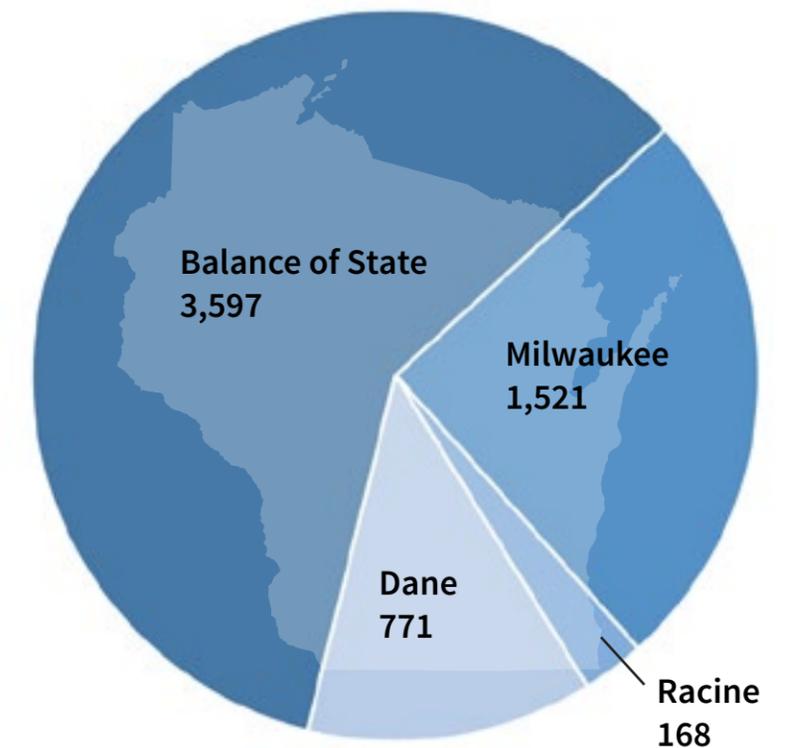


Regional Distribution

Nationally, the distribution of persons experiencing homelessness is overwhelmingly urban. Urban areas have the highest rates of homelessness followed by “mostly urban” areas, while the rates of homelessness within rural communities varies widely. Many people in rural areas facing extreme poverty will live “doubled up” with family or friends, or they may live in substandard housing. In other cases, they may leave rural areas for the promise of increased employment opportunities and social services in larger communities.²

The greatest number of persons experiencing homelessness in Wisconsin are in and around population centers. In 2015, 44% of homeless clients were served in Milwaukee and Dane counties. While a large portion of Wisconsin’s population (about 25%) live in these two counties, they also have some of the highest rates of homelessness in the state. Milwaukee County, the Coulee region (greater La Crosse area), Dane County, and Brown County have the highest rates of homelessness in Wisconsin from 0.8% to 0.9%. This is 20%-45% higher than the average rate of homelessness in Wisconsin.

6,057
persons
experienced
homelessness
in one night



POPULATION IN DEPTH



Two homeless individuals take an offer of a warm ride to a warming room at Desetar Ministry on Windlake Ave in Milwaukee during January 2015's Point-in-Time Count. Photo courtesy of Ben Slane.

Homeless Single Adults

53% of clients experiencing homelessness who were served by HMIS projects in 2015 are single adults. The majority of single adults are men (72%). 57% of single adults experiencing homelessness in Wisconsin have a disabling condition of long duration.

Some single adults may be good candidates for diversion or rapid re-housing. 34% of single adults who used emergency shelters stayed for less than one week, and more than half (60%) spent less than 30 days in shelter in 2015.

Homeless Families and Children

43% of persons experiencing homelessness in Wisconsin who sought services did so as members of a family or household. 94% of these households contain at least one adult and one child. 6% of households are adults only, though they may include adult children. The majority of families (70%) are households with one adult and at least one child.

27% of clients in families who used emergency shelters stayed for less than one week, and more than half (55%) spent less than 30 days in shelter in 2015. These families may be good candidates for diversion or rapid re-housing.

53% of clients served by HMIS projects in 2015 were single adults



Youth and Unaccompanied Homeless Children

Youth ages 18-24 represent 13% of persons served by HMIS homeless service providers in Wisconsin in 2015. The majority of youth (72%) are served as singles, not as members of a family.

Transgender youth experience homelessness at a higher rate than their peers. An estimated 0.3% of the total US population is transgender, and 0.8% of youth experiencing homelessness in Wisconsin identify as transgender. According to the Williams Institute, as many as 40% of youth experiencing homelessness identify as LGBT*.^{3,4} (As most homeless service providers in Wisconsin do not collect information on sexual orientation, this data is not available at the local level.)

LGBT+ individuals may face discrimination and rejection from family members, which can play a role in becoming homeless and struggling to regain housing. Many shelters in Wisconsin and throughout the United States are sex segregated, and LGBT+ individuals often have difficulty finding shelters that are safe and welcoming.⁵

HUD's Equal Access Rule requires that HUD-funded housing and shelter programs are available to individuals and families without regard to actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status. HUD expects that providers place a client in a shelter or facility that corresponds to the gender with which they identify, taking the client's own health and safety concerns into consideration.⁶

Unaccompanied Children

Nearly 90% of children who experience homelessness are members of a family unit. In 2015, there were 873 unaccompanied children who received homeless services. This is about 3% of the total homeless population. 90% of unaccompanied children are teens (age 13-17) compared to 9% of children experiencing homelessness as members of a family unit.

Beginning April 15, 2015, all Runaway and Homeless Youth Program grantees were required to use HMIS. The Runaway and Homeless Youth Program (RHY) supports street outreach, emergency shelters, and longer-term transitional living and maternity group home programs.⁷ The addition of these projects to HMIS allows us to gain a better sense of homelessness among unaccompanied teens and children in Wisconsin.**

** LGBT stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender. LGBT+ serves to include all other communities associated with the LGBT community.*

*** Because new projects serving children and youth were added to the HMIS database in 2015, we do not recommend a direct comparison of the number of youth and children experiencing homelessness to previous years.*

Photo courtesy of U.S. Department of Agriculture / [CC BY 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/)

Homeless Veterans

About 9% of adults in the United States and Wisconsin are U.S. military veterans.⁸ According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, about 12% of the adult homeless population are veterans.⁹ 7% of adults who sought emergency shelter in Wisconsin in 2015 are veterans, and 11% of adults experiencing homelessness in Wisconsin are veterans.

Veterans are more likely to be served in transitional housing than other persons experiencing homelessness in Wisconsin. In 2015, 30% of all veterans experiencing homelessness were in transitional housing compared to 15% of all Wisconsinites experiencing homelessness. Scaled by the population of clients experiencing homelessness, there are twice as many transitional housing beds available for veterans as opposed to non-veterans.

The majority of veterans experiencing homelessness in Wisconsin (90%) are single adults. 10% of veterans experiencing homelessness in Wisconsin are between the ages of 18 and 30, and 33% are between 31 and 50 years of age. They are older than the population of all adults experiencing homelessness in Wisconsin, as well as the population of single adults experiencing homelessness. The veteran population as a whole is aging, and veterans are older than the population of all adults in the United States.¹⁰



Photo courtesy of Milwaukee Homeless Veterans Initiative

Chronically Homeless



Photo courtesy of Lauren Frohne / [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#)

An estimated 7-14% of clients served by HMIS providers in 2015 were chronically homeless.

In December 2015, HUD released final rule on the definition of chronic homelessness.

According to HUD, an individual is experiencing chronic homelessness if they:

- Reside in a place not meant for habitation, a safe haven, or in an emergency shelter
- Has been homeless and residing in such a place for at least 1 year or at least 4 separate occasions in the last 3 years. (The 4 episodes of homelessness must sum to 12 months.)
- Has a diagnosable disability (substance abuse disorder, serious mental illness, developmental disability, PTSD, cognitive impairments, or chronic physical illness or disability).

Families are defined as experiencing chronic homelessness if at least one adult head of household meets the definition of chronic homelessness.

Along with the definition change came additional data elements to identify clients who are experiencing chronic homelessness. Many projects, especially large night-by-night shelters, have struggled to collect the necessary data elements to determine chronic homeless status. More than 40% of clients served by HMIS providers in 2015 were missing data for one or more essential questions.

BED INVENTORY

Emergency shelters, transitional housing, and safe havens provide temporary shelter for persons experiencing homelessness. Permanent supportive housing and rapid re-housing provide housing and end homelessness. In Wisconsin, 30% of beds are dedicated to permanent housing, and 70% are dedicated to shelter. Nationally, almost 50% of beds are dedicated to permanent housing.

12% of permanent housing beds in Wisconsin are rapid re-housing, about 4% less than nationally. 44% of temporary beds in Wisconsin are in transitional housing, about 7% more than the national allocation.

As stated above, there are more transitional housing beds available for veterans than for the general population.

Since 2010, the number of emergency shelter beds has increased 22% and the number of permanent supportive housing beds has increased by 43%. The number of safe haven beds did not change, and the number of transitional housing beds varied but Wisconsin began 2015 with about the same inventory as 2010.

*Since 2010,
the number
of permanent
supportive
housing beds
has increased
by 43%.*

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Nancy Monarrez, ICA System Administrator and co-lead of the point-in-time count, interviews with Milwaukee Public Television. She talks about the importance of communities reaching out to those in need, where she, and about a dozen other agencies, including VA, and civic groups assist in the count. Photo courtesy of Ben Slane.

ABOUT ICA

The *State of Homelessness in Wisconsin* (July 2016) was compiled by the Institute for Community Alliances (ICA) through the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) reporting tool. An [interactive companion](#) to this report is available on our website.

ICA is a non-profit organization based in Des Moines, Iowa that provides HMIS training and support for homeless service agencies around the country. The Institute for Community Alliances engages in research and produces reports on homelessness and related issues. In cooperation with state and federal agencies, private research firms, and university researchers, ICA works to inform regional and national efforts to end homelessness.

We welcome your questions, feedback, and input. Please direct correspondence to:

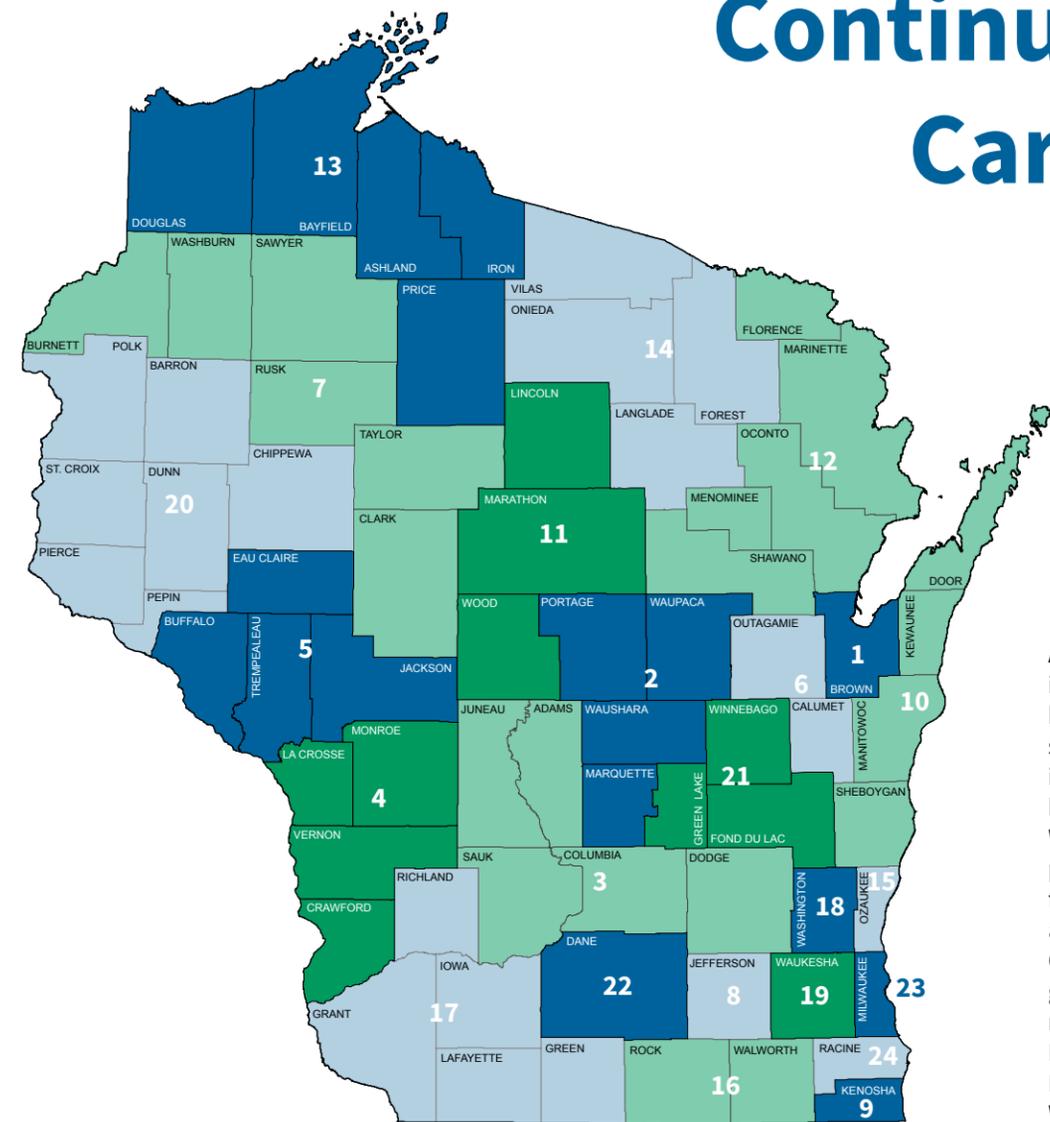
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If you would like to see your organization in next year's annual report, please e-mail photos to Kinnic Eagan at kinnic.eagan@icalliances.org.

Continuum of Care Map



A Continuum of Care (CoC) is a community planning body working to deliver services and housing to individuals experiencing homelessness. Many Wisconsin housing programs for homeless and formerly homeless persons are funded through HUD Continuum of Care Program grants. HUD collects and reports data on the Dane, Milwaukee, Racine, and Balance of State CoCs in Wisconsin.

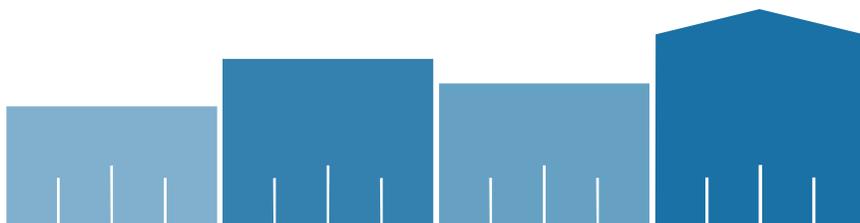
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|----|------------------------|----|-------------------------|
| 1 | BOS - Brown CoC | 13 | BOS - Northwest CoC |
| 2 | BOS - CAP CoC | 14 | BOS - N*Wish CoC |
| 3 | BOS - Central CoC | 15 | BOS - Ozaukee CoC |
| 4 | BOS - Coulee CoC | 16 | BOS - Rock Walworth CoC |
| 5 | BOS - Dairyland CoC | 17 | BOS - Southwest CoC |
| 6 | BOS - Fox Cities CoC | 18 | BOS - Washington CoC |
| 7 | BOS - Indianhead CoC | 19 | BOS - Waukesha CoC |
| 8 | BOS - Jefferson CoC | 20 | BOS - West Central CoC |
| 9 | BOS - Kenosha CoC | 21 | BOS - WinnebagoLand CoC |
| 10 | BOS - Lakeshore CoC | 22 | Dane CoC |
| 11 | BOS - Northcentral CoC | 23 | Milwaukee CoC |
| 12 | BOS - Northeast CoC | 24 | Racine CoC |



Tutor helping a child at Grace Place Shelter,
photo courtesy of The Salvation Army

Everyone Deserves a Home

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