



The Blueprint to Address Homelessness in Polk County

2025-2029

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Homelessness in Polk County

Scale of Homelessness

It is estimated that there are 626 households (more than 700 people) experiencing homelessness on any given night in the Des Moines/Polk County Continuum of Care's (CoC's) geographic area.

This point-in-time estimate includes nearly 500 households (about 600 people) staying in shelters and transitional housing programs, and 147 people counted as experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Although not finalized when this plan was published, 2025 Point-in-Time (PIT) numbers show increases in overall and unsheltered homelessness.

Many more people are identified as experiencing homelessness over the course of a year. During FY 2024 an estimated annual total of 3,194 households (4,017 people) experienced homelessness sometime during the federal fiscal year and were served by the homelessness response system.

More than 300 of these households were families with children and nearly 2,870 were single adult households.

These households represent about 0.8% of the total general population of 505,255 persons from the U.S. Census 2024 estimates for all of Polk County.

Note: Throughout this plan references to Polk County are intended to mean the greater Des Moines metropolitan area, including all municipalities within Polk County.

Key Demographics

A review of demographic data regarding people experiencing homelessness and being served through the homelessness response system in Polk County reveals the following:

- A majority of people experiencing homelessness in Des Moines are single adults, and of those adults, 30% are women, 69% are men, and 1% are either transgender, questioning or of no single gender.
- Single adults who indicate experiencing domestic violence represent 26% of the adult population, but the rate of reported domestic violence nearly doubles for unsheltered families at 50%.
- While Black individuals make up only 11% of the Polk County population, they are overrepresented in the homelessness system, making up 35% of people experiencing homelessness.



¹ 2024 Point-in-Time (PIT) Count, HDX2.0

² The CoC's geographic area includes all of Polk County

³ FY24 IA-502 LSA Polk County SPM submission to HUD

Overview and Focus of the Plan

To address the needs of these households, the Polk County CoC, led by Homeward, the nonprofit tasked by the community to spearhead homelessness system planning efforts, has adopted **The Blueprint to Address Homelessness** (The Blueprint) to reduce homelessness over the next five years, and chart a path for eventual elimination of all homelessness.

From September 2024 to March 2025, people with lived experiences of homelessness, service providers in the homelessness system, business leaders, elected officials, and other community stakeholders throughout the region developed The Blueprint, shaping its priorities, strategies for improvement, goals, and values.

The Blueprint reflects community-defined priorities for improving services and resources within the homelessness response system and ultimately for achieving better housing and life outcomes for residents who experience homelessness in Polk County. It will be used as a roadmap by system leaders, partners, and stakeholders over the next five years, guiding decision-making, program design, service delivery, and funding efforts.

At its core, The Blueprint emphasizes Improvement Strategies to reduce inflow into the homelessness system, accelerate exits out of homelessness, and build economic self-sufficiency and well-being of people experiencing a housing crisis. The Implementation Strategy of this plan defines how the community actively manages the work, including a reorganization of the homeless oversight system structure, activating a re-organized Homeless Coordinating Council, and launching prioritized strategies within each focus area.

The activation of The Blueprint will require a more effective, comprehensive, actively managed and collaborative homelessness response system – a system that respects and values each person needing

Blueprint Implementation Strategy Steps

This work will be actively managed by:

- Reorganizing the homeless system oversight structure
- Activating a reorganized Homeless Coordinating Council
- Launching prioritized strategies within each focus area



Leading with Equity and Justice

Equity, justice, and the leadership of people with lived experience of homelessness play key roles in program design, service delivery, funding opportunities, and decision making in the Polk County homelessness response system. In addition to an equity analysis of disparate outcomes among underserved and disadvantaged populations among the System Performance Measures, an equitable response will also focus on the following:

- Equitable representation of people with lived experience of Polk County's homelessness response system and the provision of adequate information and support to ensure that they can serve as full partners within decision-making processes.
- Equitable representation of people of color, youth, LGBTQIA+, and other communities disproportionately impacted by housing instability and homelessness.
- Active engagement of people working in a wide range of staff and leadership roles within the system.

Performance Indicators and Improvement Focus Areas

7 Key Performance Indicators

The Improvement Strategies outlined in The Blueprint aim to reach the following goals for the Polk County homelessness system:

Indicator 1:

Reduction in the number of persons who are homeless.

Indicator 2:

Reduction in the number of persons who become homeless for the first time.

Indicator 3:

Reduction in the length of time persons remain homeless.

Indicator 4:

Increase in the percentage of people who exit to or retain permanent housing.

Indicator 5:

Reduction in the percentage of persons who return to homelessness after exiting to permanent housing.

Indicator 6:

Reduction in the percentage of persons who receive prevention assistance and then subsequently experience homelessness.

Indicator 7:

Increase in the percentage of adults who gain or increase income.

7 Strategic Improvement Focus Areas

To drive progress toward goals, The Blueprint features seven Strategic Improvement Focus Areas centered on system-wide improvements and on strengthening core elements of the homelessness response system:

- 1. Reduce Inflow.** Homelessness prevention is a highly useful and effective strategy for reducing inflow into homelessness systems. By addressing the root causes of homelessness and intervening before people lose their homes, prevention can reduce the overall number of individuals experiencing homelessness and help alleviate the pressures on emergency shelters and other resources.
- 2. Improve Crisis Response Capacity.** Emergency shelters are not just a temporary housing solution; they are an essential component of a larger crisis response and rehousing system aimed at helping people exit homelessness and regain stability, health, and independence.
- 3. End Unsheltered Homelessness.** Reducing unsheltered homelessness is a complex issue requiring Housing First, low-barrier crisis shelter, rapid resolution housing, and permanent supportive housing.
- 4. Accelerate Exits from Homelessness to Stable Housing.** Expansion of specialized housing programs is necessary to address the range of complex, interrelated issues that contribute to homelessness.
- 5. Strengthen Connections to Adjacent Systems.** Institutional partners adjacent to the homelessness system have a critical role to play in identifying and supporting the housing stability needs of people exiting those systems.
- 6. Actively Manage the System for Results.** Achieving high rates of success and impact requires active system management based on real-time, comprehensive, and accurate data. System managers must use data to monitor programming, track outcomes, and inform policy decisions and operational considerations most likely to support system goals.
- 7. Expand Affordable Housing Options.** Public housing agencies and affordable housing developers must work in close collaboration with homelessness systems and other supportive service providers to leverage funding opportunities, reduce barriers to tenant selection, and expand partnerships across all jurisdictions and sectors to expand affordable housing access for people at the lowest levels of income and at highest risk of continued homelessness.



STRATEGIC IMPROVEMENT FOCUS AREAS AND STRATEGIES

Strategic Focus Areas

The Blueprint includes improvement strategies and activities for driving progress within the following 7 Strategic Improvement Focus Areas, organized to drive progress on system-wide improvements and on strengthening specific elements of the homelessness response system.

System-Wide Improvements

- ▶ **Focus Area 1**
Reduce Inflow
- ▶ **Focus Area 2**
Improve Crisis Response Capacity
- ▶ **Focus Area 3**
End Unsheltered Homelessness
- ▶ **Focus Area 4**
Accelerate Exits from Homelessness to Stable Housing
- ▶ **Focus Area 5**
Strengthen Connections to Adjacent Systems
- ▶ **Focus Area 6**
Active System Management
- ▶ **Focus Area 7**
Expand Supply of Affordable Housing



FOCUS AREA 1

REDUCE SYSTEM INFLOW:

Focus Area Manager: Centralized Intake Lead

IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVES

Activities within this Focus Area drive progress toward the following Key Performance Indicators:

- Reduction in the number of persons who are homeless
- Reduction in the number of persons who become homeless for the first time

Improvement Strategies

► Improvement Strategy 1.A: Homelessness Prevention Assistance

Design and secure funding for a homelessness prevention program to include emergency financial assistance for rent, utilities, and relocation assistance. Provide support services to include strengthening tenancy skills, mediation with property owners, family counseling when warranted and requested, housing budgeting, and connection to community services and benefits.

Strategy Lead

HOME, Inc.

Supporting Organizations

Homeward; City of Des Moines; Polk County; Nationwide Insurance; Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines; and homelessness services and housing organizations

Timeframe

Initiate in July 2025

Resource Investment

50 annual service slots at \$2,775 per slot - **\$138,750**

1 FTE Case Manager – annual salary for direct service case manager

Implementation Milestones

- Program design and service standards developed in partnership with homelessness assistance providers. Program design and service standards approved by CoC Board.
- Resources secured through partnerships with philanthropy, hospital systems, business sector, and government entities.
- Specialized engagement of targeted prevention population and successful prevention of shelter enrollment for enrolled participants.

► Improvement Strategy 1.B: Risk Screening

Develop intake and assessment tools to identify people at risk of homelessness among a broad population of disadvantaged individuals and families already in contact with social services, government programs, hospital and justice systems, and educational systems. Screening protocol to be administered by staff within adjacent systems.

Strategy Lead

Primary Health Care
(PHC)

Supporting Organizations

Homeward; United Way of Central Iowa; hospital systems; criminal justice system; homelessness services and housing organizations; DHS; and foster care organizations

Timeframe

Initiate in 2025

Resource Investment

Additional planning resources sufficient for risk screening assessment planning, design and analysis

Implementation Milestones

- Resources secured through partnerships with philanthropy, hospital systems, business sector, and government entities.
- Analysis of administrative data from Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) and public systems to identify homelessness risk factors.
- Testing and refinement of screening tools and protocols.

► Improvement Strategy 1.C: Community Resources Inventory

Establish and maintain a more robust centralized accounting of crisis response resources for use by community members, crisis assistance providers, and people who experience a housing crisis.

Strategy Lead

United Way of
Central Iowa

Supporting Organizations

Homeward; 2-1-1; Nationwide Insurance; Community Foundation; and homelessness services and housing organizations

Timeframe

Initiate in 2025

Resource Investment

Resource investment sufficient for ongoing inventory analysis, vetting, and publication of Resource Inventory

Implementation Milestones

- Initial inventory of crisis response services available throughout the metro region with focus on eligibility criteria, application processes, and designated points of contact for ongoing updates and coordination.
- Testing and review of resources to assess applicability, accessibility, and impact.
- Regularly updated and refreshed resource inventory.

► **Improvement Strategy 1.D: Des Moines Municipal Housing Agency (DMMHA) Targeting**

Target Homelessness Prevention and tenancy stabilization supports, including emergency rental assistance, to all current Public Housing residents with a history of homelessness who are actively engaged in eviction proceedings, or have substantial past due rent.

Strategy Lead

DMMHA

Supporting Organizations

Homeward; PHC, City of Des Moines

Timeframe

Initiate in
2026, following
implementation
of Homelessness
Prevention Program

Resource Investment

Resource investment sufficient for ongoing administrative data matching and analysis of DMMHA systems and HMIS

Implementation Milestones

- Develop data sharing agreement to enable identification by Centralized Intake provider (PHC) of all DMMHA residents who are at risk of homelessness.
- Design engagement and communication protocols for all targeted DMMHA residents.
- Develop evaluation plan to assess impact.

► **Improvement Strategy 1.E: Emergency Shelter Waitlist Targeting**

Target Homelessness Prevention assistance, including emergency rental assistance and support services to all households on the emergency shelter waiting list.

Strategy Lead

Primary Health Care

Supporting Organizations

Homeward; Polk County; Central Iowa Shelter & Services (CISS)

Timeframe

Initiate in
2026, following
implementation
of Homelessness
Prevention Program

Resource Investment

Resource investment sufficient for ongoing tracking and analysis of waitlist data

Implementation Milestones

- Refine emergency shelter waiting list data to track key indicators of homelessness risk, location of targeted households for immediate follow-up, and risk mitigation and housing plan status.
- Design engagement and communication protocols for all targeted waiting list households.
- Develop evaluation plan to assess impact.

FOCUS AREA 2

IMPROVE CRISIS RESPONSE CAPACITY:

Focus Area Manager: Homeward

IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVES

Activities within this Action Area are focused on driving progress toward the following Objectives:

- Reductions in the length of time persons remain homeless (whether in unsheltered or sheltered locations)
- Increase in percentage of people who exit to or retain permanent housing
- Reduction in the percentage of persons who return to homelessness after exiting to permanent housing

Improvement Strategies

► Improvement Strategy 2.A: Expand Emergency Shelter Capacity for Families by 30 Units

Design and fund emergency shelter for families with a priority on serving families residing in temporary accommodations that are unsafe such as cars, abandoned buildings, and doubled up situations where household violence, human trafficking, and severe overcrowding are evident. Families include households with at least one adult and one dependent child.

Strategy Lead

Polk County

Supporting Organizations

Homeward; City of Des Moines; City of West Des Moines; and homelessness services and housing organizations serving families

Timeframe

Initiate in 2025

Resource Investment

30 emergency shelter units at \$18,675 annually per slot - **\$560,250**

Implementation Milestones

- Resources secured.
- Emergency shelter design and service standards developed in partnership with homelessness assistance providers. Program design and service standards approved by CoC Board.
- Specialized targeting and engagement protocols developed for families based on highest risk for harm or victimization without the benefit of receiving crisis housing.

► Improvement Strategy 2.B: Expand Emergency Shelter Capacity for Single Adults by 50 Units

Design and fund non-congregate emergency shelter for single adults older than 24 with a priority on serving highly vulnerable persons residing in temporary accommodations that are unsafe such as homeless encampments, abandoned buildings, and other unsheltered accommodations where violence, human trafficking, and severe overcrowding are evident.

Strategy Lead
City of Des Moines

Supporting Organizations

Homeward; Polk County; criminal justice and public safety systems, public defender and City Attorney, and homelessness services and housing organizations serving single adults

Timeframe
Initiate in 2026

Resource Investment

50 emergency shelter units at \$14,175 annually per slot - **\$708,750**

Implementation Milestones

- Resources secured.
- Emergency shelter design and service standards developed in partnership with homelessness assistance providers. Program design and service standards approved by CoC Board.
- Specialized targeting and engagement protocols developed for families based on highest risk for harm or victimization without the benefit of receiving crisis housing.

► Improvement Strategy 2.C: Shelter Standards with Housing-Focused Case Management

Define a baseline set of facility, operational, and service provision standards that all area shelters will comply with to best serve individuals needing assistance. Standards will include guidance for participating in system-wide inventory management, engaging difficult to serve participants, managing non-compliance with rules, and accommodating pets among other operational issues.

Strategy Lead
Homeward

Supporting Organizations

City of Des Moines; Polk County; and homelessness services and housing organizations serving single adults

Timeframe
Initiate in 2025

Resource Investment

Resources necessary are currently included within homelessness system planning and operations funding

Implementation Milestones

- Define operational policies and practices for **housing-focused case management**.
 - Explore opportunities for crisis resolution upon initial contact, during Centralized Intake assessment, when outreach staff initially encounter unsheltered persons, and throughout regular contact during first 30 days of outreach services and any emergency shelter stays.

- Explore crisis resolution through CoC resources (Rapid Rehousing and Permanent Supportive Housing) and non-CoC resources (private rental housing, relocation, family reunification, employment, and temporary institutional settings).
- Address housing barriers inhibiting rapid resolution of homelessness such as criminal records, lack of employment, legal issues, past due rent and/or utility payments, behavioral health needs.
- Update data management systems (HMIS) to accommodate real-time collection and management of housing plans for all shelter clients with all affiliated services providers able to access client records.
- Align shelter standards, housing-focused case management, flex fund resources (See 2.D) below), and system-wide training for all operators of emergency shelter programs for single adults.

► Improvement Strategy 2.D: Flex Fund

Establish and fully fund a **Flex Fund** for use by Centralized Intake and Emergency Shelter operators to facilitate accelerated exits from shelter into safe, appropriate housing arrangements. An average of not more than \$1,000 per household provided to shelter participants who would otherwise exit shelter independently if not for modest financial barriers.

Strategy Lead

Homeward

Supporting Organizations

City of Des Moines; Polk County; and homelessness services and housing organizations serving single adults

Timeframe

Initiate in 2025

Resource Investment

150 flex fund slots at \$1,000 annually per slot - **\$150,000**

10% overhead must be added to Flex Fund to account for administration

Implementation Milestones

- Define operational policies and practices for **Flex Fund** administration.
- Identify and support organization to administer **Flex Fund**.
- Align shelter standards, housing-focused case management, **Flex Fund** resources, and system-wide training for all operators of emergency shelter programs for single adults.

FOCUS AREA 3

END UNSHELTERED HOMELESSNESS:

Focus Area Manager: Homeward

IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVES

Activities within this Focus Area drive progress toward the following Key Performance Indicators:

- Reduction in the number of persons who are homeless
- Reduction in the length of time persons remain homeless
- Increase in the percentage of people who exit to or retain permanent housing
- Reduction in the percentage of persons who return to homelessness after exiting to permanent housing

Improvement Strategies

► Improvement Strategy 3.A: Coordinated Outreach

Established structured and coordinated outreach plan to ensure all outreach service providers (inclusive of first responders, nonprofits, and public systems) are operating in alignment with established practice standards, outreach schedules, coverage areas, and engagement and rehousing strategies.

Strategy Lead

Homeward

Supporting Organizations

City of Des Moines; Polk County; Law enforcement and first responders; CISS; and homelessness services and housing organizations serving single adults

Timeframe

Initiate in 2025

Resource Investment

Sufficient resources are currently included within homelessness system planning and operations funding

Implementation Milestones

- Convene all system stakeholders to develop a unifying, system-wide strategy for engagement, navigation, and rehousing supports for persons experiencing unsheltered homelessness.
- Establish system goals, objectives, roles and responsibilities, and evidence-based activities associated with reducing unsheltered homelessness.
- Define the array of housing and supportive services resources available to outreach teams in their efforts to engage unsheltered individuals and support housing placement and stability. Ensure resource availability, eligibility requirements, and application procedures are known and available to all outreach teams.
- Identify resource gaps and barriers inhibiting outreach teams' efforts to successfully end unsheltered homelessness.
- Based on gaps and barriers, identify a system improvement plan to expand availability and accessibility of needed outreach and engagement supports for persons experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

► Improvement Strategy 3.B: Outreach Standards

Define a baseline set of operational and service provision standards that all Polk County metro outreach providers comply with. Standards will include guidance for engaging unhoused people with trauma-responsive services, connecting difficult-to-serve participants with appropriate crisis response, and differentiating roles and responsibilities for public space management, enforcement of anti-camping ordinances, and client engagement and rehousing services.

Strategy Lead

Homeward

Supporting Organizations

City of Des Moines; Polk County; Law enforcement and first responders; CISS; and homelessness services and housing organizations serving unsheltered participants

Timeframe

Initiate in 2025

Resource Investment

Resources necessary for this activity are currently included within homelessness system planning and operations funding and must be continued to ensure successful Blueprint implementation

Implementation Milestones

- Evidence and research are gathered on effective outreach practices.
- A working group of outreach practitioners, first responders, public safety officers, health care providers, and Centralized Intake staff is convened to review research and evidence and identify recommendations for Outreach Standards.
- Draft Outreach Standards are aligned with system goals and practices for reducing unsheltered homelessness, ensuring crisis shelter services are accessible and available to all, and accelerating access to safe, appropriate housing options for unsheltered persons and persons with the greatest barriers to accessing needed housing resources.

► Improvement Strategy 3.C: Rapid Exit from Street/Camps

Connect persons residing in unsheltered situations to the Rapid Exit intervention model (see Focus Area 4). Rapid Exit includes housing-focused case management resources, housing units, access to Flex Fund resources, rehousing navigation supports, and advocacy and client empowerment supports.

Strategy Lead

Centralized
Intake Lead

Supporting Organizations

Homeward, CISS, City of Des Moines; Polk County; Law enforcement and first responders; and homelessness services and housing organizations serving unsheltered participants

Timeframe

Initiate in 2025

Resource Investment

Sufficient planning resources are currently included within homelessness system planning and operations funding. Use of additional housing resources are included in investment needs covered in other sections of this Blueprint

Implementation Milestones

- Conduct research on communities that have successfully reduced unsheltered homelessness by employing a Rapid Exit strategy (aka direct from streets to housing initiative, often responsible for unsheltered encampment decommissioning efforts).
- Conduct an inventory of core elements of Rapid Exit strategy, including the following: geographically targeted engagement; creation and management of a By Name List (BNL) of persons in defined geographic locations scheduled for decommissioning/resolution, identification of housing resources needed to meet the specific, individualized needs of each person on the BNL; coordination of all sectors necessary for successful unsheltered encampment resolution such as police and other first responders, hospital systems, neighborhood groups, Centralized Intake, and others.
- Draft guidelines and operating specifications for Rapid Exit program design.
- Identify additional resource needs for successful implementation of Rapid Exit.

► Improvement Strategy 3.D: Specialized Housing Services Team

Fund and operate an expanded team of street outreach professionals with clinical expertise who can engage, treat, and connect unsheltered persons to housing resources. Target participants who have historically not engaged in traditional outreach and shelter resources. The Specialized Housing Services Team is responsible for implementing the Rapid Exit from Streets/Camps initiative.

Strategy Lead

Centralized
Intake Lead

Supporting Organizations

City of Des Moines; Polk County; Law enforcement and first responders; CISS; and homelessness services and housing organizations serving unsheltered participants

Timeframe

Design program
model in 2025
Initiate team
operations in 2026

Resource Investment

A new specialized housing services team of outreach providers, consisting of up to 6 FTEs at \$75,000 per member for fully loaded compensation package - **\$450,000**. Costs of fully loaded compensation package includes overhead, administration and other direct costs required to complete the work (i.e. transportation, computers, training, etc.)

Implementation Milestones

- Define required staff skill sets necessary to operate an effective team. Skills may include housing-focused engagement and case management, psychiatric nursing services, knowledge of housing resources and Centralized Intake protocols.
- Outreach training curricula developed and in place that offers capacity building opportunities on the topics of Housing First practices, engaging participants who are resistant to services; critical time intervention; harm reduction practices; housing-focused case management in a street-based setting; reducing barriers to housing location; providing engagement services in a manner that affirms sexual orientation and gender identity of individuals; and supporting participants in managing their tenant obligations as lease holders.
- Ongoing funding source secured for staffing and services costs, technology needs, and administration of specialized outreach team.

FOCUS AREA 4

ACCELERATE EXITS FROM HOMELESSNESS TO STABLE HOUSING:

Focus Area Manager: Homeward

IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVES

Activities within this Focus Area drive progress toward the following Key Performance Indicators:

- Reduction in the number of persons who are homeless
- Reduction in the number of persons who become homeless for the first time
- Reductions in the length of time persons remain homeless
- Increase in the percentage of people who exit to or retain permanent housing
- Reduction in the percentage of persons who return to homelessness after exiting to permanent housing
- Reduction in the percentage of persons assisted with prevention assistance who subsequently experience homelessness

Improvement Strategies

► Improvement Strategy 4.A: Rapid Exit (Housing-Focused Case Management)

Design crisis resolution strategies to assist participants not prioritized for CoC housing resources.

Rapid Exit, also referred to as **housing-focused case management**, must include several key elements that support accelerated housing placements for households unable to exit homelessness independently:

- Dedicated housing unit acquisition team who secures rental units in the private market, or other safe, appropriate housing placement options.
- Flex fund that provides modest financial assistance.
- Housing navigation support that assists participants to identify, apply, secure, and move into safe, appropriate housing options.
- Direct coordination with Centralized Intake to leverage CoC housing resources active client care coordination and system management to ensure system performance objectives are achieved.

Strategy Lead

Centralized
Intake Lead

Supporting Organizations

Homeward, CISS, City of Des Moines; Polk County; Law enforcement and first responders; and homelessness services and housing organizations

Timeframe

Initiate in 2025

Resource Investment

Rapid Exit package of resources includes housing problem assistance and **Flex Fund** of modest financial assistance of \$1,500 per housing, serving 50-100 households for a total cost of ~ **\$150,000**. Additional funding to support administration and overhead costs up to 10% of Flex Fund total

Dedicated housing unit acquisition team of 4.0 FTEs dedicated to finding and securing sufficient private market rental units to support at least 50 monthly housing placements

Implementation Milestones

- Convene key partners by July of 2025 and develop workplan to implement Rapid Exit activities.
- Process launched for gathering participants' satisfaction with access to services and supports in early 2026 and findings used to implement additional program improvements.

► Improvement Strategy 4.B: Expand Rapid Rehousing by 340 Annual Slots

Increase RRH for 5 families and 335 single adults annually. RRH is most impactful to individuals and as a system resource when directed to households who experience longer periods of homelessness and find themselves unable to access the private rental market without intermediate-term rental assistance and housing stabilization services.

Strategy Lead

Homeward
(with HCC Director)

Supporting Organizations

City of Des Moines; Polk County; and homelessness services and housing organizations

Timeframe

25-50 units in 2025
50-100 units in 2026
100-150 units in 2027
200-250 units in 2028
250-340 units in 2029

Resource Investment

340 rapid rehousing slots at \$19,560 annually per slot - **\$6,650,400**
Annual cost estimates are dependent on the actual number of new RRH slots that come online each year

Implementation Milestones

- Resources secured through partnerships with philanthropy, hospital systems, business sector, and government entities.
- Rapid Rehousing design and service standards developed in partnership with homelessness assistance providers. Program design and service standards approved by CoC Board.
- Specialized targeting and engagement protocols developed for families and single adults based on profile of households least likely to exit shelter and acquire stable housing independently in the absence of targeted RRH assistance.

► **Improvement Strategy 4.C: Expand Permanent Supportive Housing Capacity by 540 Annual Slots**

Increase PSH for 17 families and 523 single adults annually. PSH is the most effective, evidence-based model for addressing the housing needs of disabled persons with severe service needs experiencing long term homelessness. PSH expansion needs include specialized projects for specific subpopulations, including persons with complex needs who benefit from assisted living, persons suffering from untreated co-occurring conditions, and persons with disabilities.

Strategy Lead

Homeward
(with HCC Director)

Supporting Organizations

Iowa Finance Authority; Polk County Housing Trust Fund; Affordable Housing Developers; City of Des Moines; Polk County; and homelessness services and housing organizations

Timeframe

25-50 units in 2025
50-100 units in 2026
100-150 units in 2027
200-250 units in 2028
250-540 units in 2029

Resource Investment

540 PSH slots at \$22,000 annually per slot (average includes family and single adult units)- **\$11,880,000**

Implementation Milestones

- Investment strategy and funding commitments secured for a 5-year PSH expansion plan.
- Permanent Supportive Housing design and service standards developed in partnership with homelessness assistance providers. Program design and service standards approved by CoC Board and HCC.
- Specialized targeting and engagement protocols developed for families and single adults based on profile of households least likely to exit shelter and acquire stable housing independently in the absence of targeted PSH assistance.

► **Improvement Strategy 4.D: Housing Stabilization Services Expansion**

Define and adopt system-wide, baseline standards for high quality housing stabilization services that promote evidence-based practices for client engagement, housing planning, and residential stabilization. Ensure system-compliant case management services are available to all CoC program participants to promote successful tenancy skills, economic self-sufficiency, and positive physical and behavioral health outcomes.

Strategy Lead

Homeward
(with HCC Director)

Supporting Organizations

Iowa Finance Authority; Polk County Housing Trust Fund; Affordable Housing Developers; City of Des Moines; Polk County; and homelessness services and housing organizations

Timeframe

2025

Resource Investment

Sufficient planning and activity management resources are currently included within existing homelessness system planning and operations funding or in other sections of this Blueprint

Implementation Milestones

- Define a standard set of housing stabilization services as a baseline requirement for all crisis shelter and housing assistance providers.
- Adopt housing stabilization services package as a baseline standard for CoC homelessness assistance providers.
- Define an annual budget for training and capacity building based on feedback from Focus Area Managers and Improvement Strategy Leads and the individual, strategy-level work plans each group develops.
- Establish and fund training and capacity building opportunities to ensure all direct care workers have access to the housing-focused services and resources, and staff are delivering housing-focused services in fidelity to CoC adopted standards.

FOCUS AREA 5

CONNECTIONS TO ADJACENT SYSTEMS:

Focus Area Manager: Homeward

IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVES

Activities within this Focus Area are focused on driving progress toward the following Objectives:

- Reduction in the number of persons who are homeless
- Reduction in the number of persons who become homeless for the first time
- Reductions in the length of time persons remain homeless
- Increase in percentage of people who exit to or retain permanent housing
- Reduction in the percentage of persons who return to homelessness after exiting to permanent housing
- Reduction in the percentage of persons assisted with prevention assistance who subsequently experience homelessness
- Increase in the percentage of adults who gain or increase income

Improvement Strategies

► Improvement Strategy 5.A: Discharge Planning

Clarify roles and expectations related to discharges from institutional settings (jails, hospitals, treatment centers, foster care, and rehabilitation services). Comprehensive assessment of housing needs and identification of housing strategies prior to discharge will help address one of the critical factors that contributes to homelessness. Individuals exiting institutions must secure stable housing prior to discharge or have a viable interim housing plan that supports a transition to stable housing. Dedicated case management and housing stabilization planning on the part of institutional partners, connected to the Rapid Exit/Housing-Focused Case Management resources within the CoC system, will help to reduce exits directly to homelessness.

Strategy Lead

Polk County

Supporting Organizations

Homeward; CISS; City of Des Moines Attorney and Public Defender's Office; County Child Welfare Services; Iowa Hospital Association and local hospital system partners, and homelessness services and housing organizations

Timeframe

Initiate in 2025

Resource Investment

Required planning and activity management resources are currently included within existing homelessness system planning and operations funding or in other sections of this Blueprint

Implementation Milestones

- Convene key partners by October of 2025 and develop workplan to implement a list of coordination and information sharing activities.
- Develop Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for public system and CoC to define effective partnership roles for identification and prevention of discharges directly to homelessness.
- All partners execute MOU by mid-2026.

► Improvement Strategy 5.B: System Coordination Training and Support

Design and deliver training to staff at all levels of the homelessness system, including direct care staff, managers, executive leadership, and Board leadership. Ensure that training materials clearly communicate the intended CoC goals and process flow maps, inventory of programs and service resources, eligibility and application guidelines, and partnerships with adjacent systems such as public housing agencies, behavioral health, education, corrections, law enforcement, and workforce development. Trainings must enforce evidence-based strategies and practices for reducing homelessness.

Strategy Lead

Homeward

Supporting Organizations

CISS; City of Des Moines; Polk County; Des Moines Municipal Housing Agency; Primary Health Care; Behavioral Health; Des Moines Public Schools; Workforce Development; Des Moines Police Department; Polk County Sheriff's Office; homelessness assistance providers; Institute for Community Alliances (ICA)

Timeframe

Initiate in 2025

Resource Investment

Sufficient planning and activity management resources are currently included within existing homelessness system planning and operations funding or in other sections of The Blueprint

Implementation Milestones

- Convene key partners by September of 2025 and develop workplan to implement a curriculum for other system roles, services, eligibility, and outcomes.
- Develop training curricula by January of 2026.
- All system partners trained by end of 2026.

► Improvement Strategy 5.C: Transportation Assistance

Increase access to public transit, rideshare services, and vehicle maintenance resources to ensure people experiencing homelessness can travel to investigate and locate housing options, apply for employment, attend training and school, access childcare services, and manage the day-to-day activities of resolving their homeless status and securing housing.

Strategy Lead

Homeward

Supporting Organizations

DART, United Way of Central Iowa

Timeframe

Initiate in 2025

Resource Investment

Sufficient planning and activity management resources are currently included within existing homelessness system planning and operations funding or in other sections of this Blueprint

Implementation Milestones

- Convene transportation partners to identify opportunities for CoC coordination, alignment, and integration with longer-term regional transportation plans.
- Develop MOU that codifies agreement for coordination.
- All partners execute MOU in 2026.

► Improvement Strategy 5.D: Workforce Development

Partnerships between workforce and homeless service systems are key to building economic opportunity and advancement for people experiencing homelessness. By targeting employment opportunities and providing job training and other resources in a coordinated way, central Iowa will strengthen pathways to employment and housing stability. This collaboration can reduce resource demands on the homeless system of care as households transition to self-sufficiency – creating regional partnerships with multiple entities, including public agencies, nonprofit service providers, and the business community, and using homeless Centralized Intake and workforce development Boards as springboards for integration.

Strategy Lead

Evelyn K. Davis Center
for Working Families

Supporting Organizations

Homeward; United Way of Central Iowa; Greater DSM Partnership;
Project Iowa; homelessness assistance providers

Timeframe

Initiate in 2025

Resource Investment

Sufficient planning and activity management resources are currently included within existing homelessness system planning and operations funding or in other sections of this Blueprint

Implementation Milestones

- Convene key partners by September of 2025 and develop workplan to implement a list of coordination and information sharing activities.
- Develop protocols for workforce and employment assessment as a component of Centralized Intake assessments.
- Centralized Intake protocols and tools updated in 2026.

FOCUS AREA 6

ACTIVE SYSTEM MANAGEMENT:

Focus Area Manager: Homeward

IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVES

Activities within this Focus Area are focused on driving progress toward the following Objectives:

- Reduction in the number of persons who are homeless
- Reduction in the number of persons who become homeless for the first time
- Reductions in the length of time persons remain homeless
- Increase in percentage of people who exit to or retain permanent housing
- Reduction in the percentage of persons who return to homelessness after exiting to permanent housing
- Reduction in the percentage of persons assisted with prevention assistance who subsequently experience homelessness
- Increase in the percentage of adults who gain or increase income

Improvement Strategies

► Improvement Strategy 6.A: Strengthen HMIS Participation

Ensure **all** homeless assistance providers, agencies, and projects are successful users of HMIS, contributing accurate, complete, and timely data on all project participants. Users of HMIS enter all universally required data elements and adhere to HMIS data quality and participation standards.

Strategy Lead
Homeward

Supporting Organizations

Institute for Community Alliances (ICA); HCC, all homelessness assistance providers in Polk County

Timeframe
Initiate in 2025

Resource Investment

Sufficient planning and activity management resources are currently included within existing homelessness system planning and operations funding or in other sections of this Blueprint

Implementation Milestones

- Establish HMIS participation guidelines and standards.
- All funding contracts executed through any CoC partner (City of Des Moines, Polk County, Iowa Finance Authority, Polk County Housing Trust Fund) require adherence to HMIS participation guidelines and standards.
- Engage CoC partners who do not receive CoC or other public funding and compel compliance with HMIS participation guidelines and standards.

► Improvement Strategy 6.B: Identify Frequent System Users

Leverage HMIS records on an ongoing basis to identify system returners and frequent users of homelessness assistance. Target frequent users for specialized engagement and more intensive housing support services.

Strategy Lead

ICA

Supporting Organizations

Homeward; Centralized Intake Lead

Timeframe

Initiate in 2025

Resource Investment

Sufficient planning and activity management resources are currently included within existing homelessness system planning and operations funding or in other sections of this Blueprint

Implementation Milestones

- Identify criteria for frequent system users and/or returners to the CoC system.
- Build standard functionality in HMIS to flag and report on frequent users.
- Explore opportunities for specialized engagement, enhanced services, and prioritized access to crisis services and housing supports for frequent users and returners.

► Improvement Strategy 6.C: Improve Centralized Intake

Fully integrate diversion and housing problem solving assistance into existing Centralized Intake interviews for all new system users. Provide housing-focused case management, Flex Fund support, and discharge planning from adjacent systems. Track results of engagement, navigation through system resources, and outcomes. Make adjustments to Centralized Intake protocols and tools based on data-informed opportunities for greater impact and efficiency.

Strategy Lead

Centralized Intake

Supporting Organizations

Homeward; CISS; ICA; outreach providers; homelessness assistance providers

Timeframe

Initiate in 2025

Resource Investment

Sufficient planning and activity management resources are currently included within existing homelessness system planning and operations funding or in other sections of this Blueprint

Implementation Milestones

- Conduct a comprehensive assessment of Centralized Intake effectiveness, efficiency and consistency with CoC performance goals.
- Identify opportunities for expansion of CI functionality and access using technology for outreach and shelter workers such as mobile devices and tablets.
- Develop policy changes and protocol updates to ensure Centralized Intake is fully leveraging Rapid Exit resources such as **Flex Fund, housing-focused case management, discharge planning, homelessness prevention assistance, and specialized engagement and services for frequent system users.**

► **Improvement Strategy 6.D: Leverage Data for Active System Monitoring and Service Coordination**

System-wide administrative records capture the delivery of an array of services (prevention, shelter, short-term housing, housing navigation, and supportive housing) and whether households re-enter the homelessness system after exiting it. Active system management uses data daily to track program utilization, demographic patterns of outcomes to assess equity of availability and impact, and effective and efficient functioning of the homelessness system. Data informs compliance with agreed upon standards, effectiveness of system policies, and need for operational changes and corrections to achieve the desired system impact.

Strategy Lead

**Homeward
(with HCC Director)**

Supporting Organizations

Centralized Intake-PHC; CISS; ICA; City of Des Moines; Polk County; and homelessness services and housing organizations

Timeframe

Initiate in 2025

Resource Investment

Sufficient planning and activity management resources are currently included within existing homelessness system planning and operations funding or in other sections of this Blueprint

Implementation Milestones

- Convene key partners by July of 2025 and develop workplan to implement active system management objectives:
 1. Real-time shelter bed availability and assignment process.
 2. Real-time RRH and PSH unit availability, including case load capacity for case managers.
 3. Real-time housing plans and status updates for participants in active housing-focused case management services.
 4. Identification of enhanced engagement and specialized services for frequent system users.
 5. Integration of outreach coordination plans with CoC By-Name List. Identify protocol for identifying high priority clients for targeted engagement and encampment decommissioning.
- Develop HMIS expansion plans to accommodate identified active system management functionality needs.

FOCUS AREA 7

AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT:

Focus Area Manager: Polk County Housing Trust Fund

IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVES

Activities within this Focus Area are focused on driving progress toward the following Objectives:

- Reduction in the number of persons who are homeless
- Reduction in the number of persons who become homeless for the first time
- Reductions in the length of time persons remain homeless
- Increase in percentage of people who exit to or retain permanent housing
- Reduction in the percentage of persons who return to homelessness after exiting to permanent housing
- Reduction in the percentage of persons assisted with prevention assistance who subsequently experience homelessness
- Increase in the percentage of adults who gain or increase income

Improvement Strategies

► Improvement Strategy 7.A: Secure Dedicated Housing Choice Vouchers (HCVs) for Affordable Housing Operating Subsidies

Update the DMMHA Administrative Plan to include specific preferences and/or set asides for persons exiting homelessness to receive housing subsidy vouchers and access to DMMHA operated units.

Strategy Lead

Des Moines
Metropolitan Housing
Authority (DMMHA)

Supporting Organizations

Homeward; PCHTF; IFA; Capital Crossroads

Timeframe

Initiate in 2025

Resource Investment

Required planning and activity management resources are currently included within existing homelessness system planning and operations funding or in other sections of this Blueprint

Implementation Milestones

- Convene key partners by July of 2025 and develop workplan to implement homeless preference criteria.
- Update DMMHA Administrative Plan.

► **Improvement Strategy 7.B: Create an User Needs Assessment to Identify Strategies to Increase Affordable Housing Units for Very and Extremely Low Income (VLI & ELI) People.**

Identify current affordability gap and specific number of additional new housing units required at a city level to meet the forecasted demand for affordable housing over the next five years.

Strategy Lead

Polk County Housing
Trust Fund

Supporting Organizations

Homeward; PCHTF; IFA; all Polk County jurisdictions; affordable housing
developers

Timeframe

Initiate in 2025

Resource Investment

Required planning and activity management resources are currently
included within existing homelessness system planning and operations
funding or in other sections of this Blueprint

Implementation Milestones

- Establish committee by September 2025.
- Convene and create workplan by November 2025.

► **Improvement Strategy 7.C: Streamline Financing and Approval Process**

Advocate with Iowa State Legislature to remove regulatory barriers and streamline financing
approval process.

Strategy Lead

Polk County Housing
Trust Fund

Supporting Organizations

IFA; HCC; Homeward; Greater DSM Partnership; affordable housing
developers; local elected officials

Timeframe

Initiate in 2025

Resource Investment

Required planning and activity management resources are currently
included within existing homelessness system planning and operations
funding or in other sections of this Blueprint

Implementation Milestones

- Establish committee by August 2025.
- Convene and create list of affordable housing development advocacy positions by November 2025.
- Develop Legislative Advocacy Plan December 2025.

► **Improvement Strategy 7.D: Leverage Low Income Housing Tax Credit Financing**

Explore opportunities to incorporate Extremely Low-Income housing units within State of Iowa Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) financing through IFA's Qualified Allocation Plan (QAP).

Strategy Lead

Polk County Housing
Trust Fund

Supporting Organizations

IFA; Homeward; affordable housing developers; local elected officials

Timeframe

Initiate in 2025

Resource Investment

Required planning and activity management resources are currently included within existing homelessness system planning and operations funding or in other sections of this Blueprint

Implementation Milestones

- Establish committee by November 2025.
- Convene and create workplan to accomplish progress towards LIHTC recommended process improvements.



IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Oversight and Partnerships

Guiding System Improvements

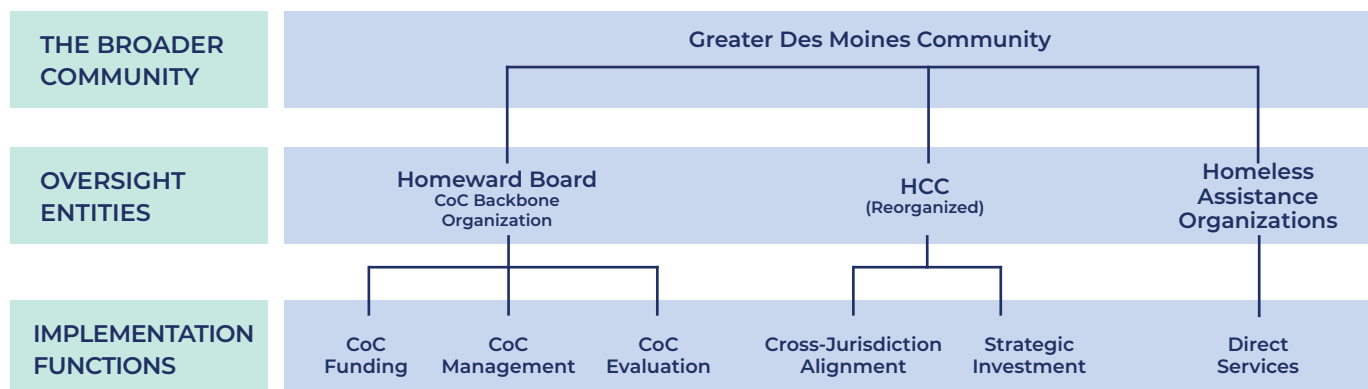
The achievement of this Blueprint's vision will require a more effective, comprehensive, and collaborative homelessness response system – a system that respects and values each person needing assistance and that uses the best practices for providing person-centered, holistic housing and services solutions for Polk County residents at-risk of or experiencing literal homelessness.

The following must be embraced as principles in implementing this Blueprint:

- Manage for results with a clear framework for accountability
- Share responsibility for outcomes and quality
- Align improvement efforts across jurisdictions
- Support staff professional development and advancement
- Collaborate and share knowledge

Shared Leadership at All Levels

All stakeholders have a role to play to support the achievement of system goals across the 7 different **Improvement Focus Areas** by ensuring that actions are strategic, aligned, and impactful and activate leaders at all levels to ensure accountability for success.



The Broader Community – broad array of stakeholders from all sectors who commit to advancing Blueprint goals and strategic actions.

Oversight Entities – independent organizations and entities responsible for carrying out improvement strategies in alignment with Blueprint goals.

Implementation Entities – multi-disciplinary and cross sector teams, work groups, task forces responsible for managing day-to-day work and supporting Blueprint activities.

Implementation Structure

In complex, multi-stakeholder systems, creating an environment to support effective strategic plan implementation requires defined roles and responsibilities, clear expectations, transparency, and a system of checks and balances. Currently CoC planning, funding, oversight, strategic alignment, performance management, and capacity building functions are distributed across multiple entities with different levels of responsibility and accountability. This distributed model of management can contribute to confusion and missed opportunities for effective leadership. Successful implementation of the Polk County Blueprint will require translating improvement strategies into actionable steps, identifying and aligning resources, organizing and motivating teams, and continuously monitoring progress to ensure that Blueprint objectives are achieved.

Implementation Objectives

1. Reconceive Continuum of Care structures and protocols, including the CoC Charter, to support Blueprint implementation.
2. Activate a reorganized Homelessness Coordinating Council (**HCC**) with executive level public and private sector leadership to address identified challenges and gaps within the system and support leveraging, scaling, and alignment of funding resources to support Blueprint implementation.
3. Launch Strategies within each Focus Area with designated “leads” shepherding progress as stewards of implementation.
4. Monitor Blueprint progress at the HCC and implement course corrections when necessary.

Initial Implementation Activities for Blueprint Launch

As illustrated by Exhibit A and Exhibit B the Improvement Strategies will require structures that are already in place (the CoC Board and Committees, HCC, Private Funders, Homelessness Service Organizations) along with new, additional roles to fill implementation gaps (Focus Area Managers and Strategy Leads).

Blueprint implementation will require additional staff capacity and expertise at Homeward, the backbone organization supporting Blueprint management. Additional staffing needs will be determined as initial planning efforts among Focus Areas managers and Strategy leads meet and identify staffing support needs from Homeward. Homeward’s staffing capacity and operating budget will require adjustments and expansion to ensure successful Blueprint implementation. Specific staffing and budgeting requirements will be identified during the first phase of Blueprint implementation.



► 1. REORGANIZE HOMELESSNESS SYSTEM OVERSIGHT STRUCTURE TO SUPPORT PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Strategy Lead

Homeward
(as CoC backbone)

Activity Lead

Homeward (as
CoC backbone)

Timeframe

June to September
2025

Supporting Organizations

HCC, City of Des Moines, Polk County, Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines, CoC Board members/partners

Implementation Activity 1. Reconceive CoC Charter:

Reconceive CoC Charter to provide a stronger foundation for plan implementation, including (but not limited to) clarifying roles and decision-making protocols, updating committee structure to support Blueprint implementation, and revisiting Board membership to improve representation. Recommended issues to be addressed via process include, but are not limited to:

- Clarify roles and domain of CoC Board vis-a-vis HCC (e.g., CoC Board decision-making authority on HUD requirements, and a forum for discussion and feedback on other issues and topics);
- Establish metrics to guide appointments to CoC Board and committees;
- Establish new committee structure to support Blueprint implementation;
- Complete a comprehensive inventory of homelessness system operational responsibilities assigned to Homeward via CoC Board oversight and new system expansion and operational requirements associated with HCC and the Blueprint. Include role and responsibility clarification in CoC Charter and HCC Charter documents.
- Create requirement for annual committee work plans to support alignment with Blueprint priorities and support CoC Board's ability to identify when deliverables will be coming out of committee for discussion/adoption

Activity Lead

Homeward (as
CoC backbone)

Timeframe

2025

Implementation Activity 2. Align CoC committees to Blueprint priorities and recruit members for these committees to support Blueprint implementation:

Implement new committees and/or align existing committees within the CoC governance structure to support Blueprint implementation. The total number of committees will be based on Homeward's capacity to support staffing functions as outlined in Exhibit A, currently estimated at up to nine committees. Domain of committees for 2025 will depend on early implementation priorities as outlined in the Blueprint and will be updated based on CoC protocols for developing annual priorities in future years. Homeward staff should collaborate with subject matter expert staff in other entities, such as City of Des Moines, Polk County, and Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines, as needed to set up committees.

Activity Lead

Homeward (as
CoC backbone)

Timeframe

Initiate in 2026 for
any newly created
committees

Implementation Activity 3. Develop Committee Work Plans:

The creation of annual work plans is intended to a) ensure alignment around annual priorities, b) ensure each committee has a clear understanding of its roles and responsibilities vis-à-vis other committees and ensure the CoC Board and HCC understands what different committees are working on and when to expect and agendaize final deliverables and recommendations coming out of different committees throughout the year. The timeframe listed is for year one, but the creation of work plans should be completed on an annual basis to reflect implementation priorities for the subsequent year.

Implementation Milestones

- Updated Charter adopted by CoC General Membership.
- MOUs between CoC Board and designated entities (e.g. Homeward, HCC) executed.
- Committees necessary for Blueprint implementation launched, with staffing support identified.

► 2. ACTIVATE A REORGANIZED HOMELESSNESS COORDINATING COUNCIL (HCC)

Strategy Lead

Community
Foundation of Greater
Des Moines

Supporting Organizations

Homeward, City of Des Moines

Activity Lead

Community
Foundation

Timeframe

2025

Implementation Activity 1. Create job description for Director of the HCC and recruit staff person:

The HCC will require dedicated senior-level staffing to support partner outreach and relationship management, convening support (such as agenda development, meeting facilitation, follow-up), and technical support to partner agencies as needed to advance objectives. Additionally, this staff position will be responsible for coordinating closely with the senior-level staff person responsible for guiding/overseeing CoC backbone responsibilities.

Activity Lead

Community
Foundation

Timeframe

Initiate in 2025 and
finalize in early 2026

Implementation Activity 2. Develop MOU to support role clarity and coordination protocols with CoC Backbone:

A Memorandum of Understanding between the convener of the HCC and Homeward (as CoC backbone) will support role clarity and the creation of protocols for coordination between entities.

Activity Lead

Community
Foundation

Timeframe

Initiate in 2025 and
finalize in 2026

Implementation Activity 3. Develop bylaws to codify establishment and operation of a reorganized HCC:

The creation of rules to outline the purpose, membership, structure, and protocols of the HCC will ensure all members understand the objectives of the body and their roles and responsibilities as members. The HCC will have co-chairs, one of which must be a member of the CoC Board to support alignment and coordination.

Activity Lead
Homeward (as
CoC backbone)

Timeframe
2025

Implementation Activity 4: Identify and recruit members for the HCC:

Although partner relationship management is an ongoing activity, launching the HCC will require an initial surge of effort to recruit partners and get the right people to the table. This includes one-on-one meetings with strategic partners to update them on the Blueprint, discuss the role and objectives of the HCC, discuss what is being asked of HCC members (both generally as a group and individually as a change agent within the community), the level of representation requested, and the anticipated time commitment.

Implementation Milestones

- Reorganized HCC launches, with staffing and supporting documents in place.
- Position description for HCC Director is drafted and approved by HCC.

► 3. LAUNCH PRIORITIZED STRATEGIES WITHIN EACH FOCUS AREAS

Strategy Lead
Agencies identified as
leads of Year 1 Focus
Areas and Improvement
Strategies

Supporting Organizations
Homeward

Activity Lead
Agencies
identified as leads
of Year 1 Activities

Timeframe
July to September
2025

Implementation Activity 1: Identify staffing needs for Blueprint Strategies:

While this Blueprint identifies Focus Area Managers and Strategy Leads, the agencies listed in the Blueprint will subsequently need to identify specific staff to lead the work and serve as points of contact for the community.

Activity Lead
Initiate in 2025 and
2026 (start timeframes
depend on activities)

Timeframe
July to September
2025

Implementation Activity 2: Develop initial project plans:

Once staff have been identified, project plans should be developed to guide the implementation of each specific strategy, including identifying options, risks, resource needs, a strategy for measuring progress, action steps and owners, and a timeline for initial Blueprint activities. Project plans will also identify which CoC committee will be used to provide updates and gather stakeholder input, as well as how the work will involve people with lived experience of homelessness. Each Focus Area manager should work with Strategy leads to identify how supporting partners will be engaged in planning and decision making.

Implementation Milestones

- Staff identified for all 2025 Activities within the Blueprint.
- Focus Area Managers have established plan for coordination between managers to enhance oversight of Blueprint activities.
- Strategy Leads begin reporting on progress, challenges, and plans to HCC

Exhibit A. Homeward/CoC and HCC, Purpose & Responsibilities

Homeward / CoC Board

Purpose:

To provide direction and oversight of homelessness response system.

- Includes broad ranging representation (government agencies, people with lived experience of homelessness, service providers, landlords/developers, etc.) with focus on engaged leadership and intersectionality.
- Provides oversight of system-level staffing entities (Collaborative Applicant, HMIS Administrator, Centralized Intake Management Entity, Backbone).
- Determines annual priorities.
- Tracks/monitors system performance and identifies changes/course corrections as needed.
- Makes decisions on/ensures compliance with Housing and Urban Development CoC requirements.
- Staffed by Homeward, CoC Backbone organization.

Sample Duties:

- Regularly reviews system performance and identifies annual project/funding priorities for CoC Program funds
- Identifies framework for HUD CoC competition (priorities, rating/ranking criteria, etc.); approves project applications.
- Provides guidance/decisions on Point-In-Time Count methodology
- Approves Centralized Intake prioritization protocols and policy decision
- Develops/adopts programmatic standards (e.g., shelter standards that should be incorporated in Requests for proposals and monitored against; PSH case management standards)

Convener:

- Homeward serves as “lead” for the CoC entity, as outlined in the CoC’s charter.

HCC

Purpose:

To leverage, scale, and align funding resources to support Blueprint implementation and community activation.

- Public and private sector agency funders, elected official, and executive leaders (cross-system)
- Executive level participants to ensure ability to direct resources, make decisions, and problem-solve at highest levels
- Includes funder rep(s) from CoC Board to support alignment.
- Ensures alignment of Blueprint activities with broader community goals and initiatives (e.g. region-wide housing, education, transportation, nutrition assistance, health goals)
- Staffed by a new executive. Co-located with Homeward.

Sample Duties:

- Determines highest/best use of different funding sources (e.g., if Community Development Block Grant or HOME funds can be used for shelter development/rehab/purchase, Emergency Solutions Grant funds could be reserved for shelter operations or services).
- Develop/issue a joint RFP to provide resources from different agencies (e.g., housing subsidies, case management services, behavioral health supports) via a singular process.
- Align requirements across funding agencies (e.g., all agencies funding PSH work to use consistent standards – e.g., adherence to Housing First principles, use of Centralized Intake to fill vacancies, consistent case management ratios and standards)
- Identify mainstream funding sources that can be better targeted to meet homelessness response system needs (e.g., Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program).
- Identify additional federal and state resources partner agencies could be pursuing
- Pursue private sector partnerships to fill system level gaps.

Convener:

- Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines

Exhibit A. Homeward/CoC and HCC, Purpose & Responsibilities (continued)

Focus Area Managers

- Accountable to HCC Director
- Provides oversight of and support to Strategy Leads within their Focus Area.
- Works with Strategy Leads to identify, communicate, and secure resource needs.
- Convenes Strategy Leads within their Focus area to support alignment.
- Meets with other Focus Area Managers, as needed, to support alignment across strategies.

Strategy Leads

- Accountable to HCC Director
- Scopes project/develops project plan (i.e., identifies options, opportunities, risks, resource needs, strategy for measuring progress, timeline, action steps/owners, etc.).
- Identifies the types and scale of resources needed to advance work; coordinates with Focus Area Manager to communicate information as appropriate.
- Coordinates with relevant CoC backbone staff and committee chairs to agendaize items at CoC committee meetings to share updates, solicit feedback, etc. with community stakeholders.
- Works with CoC backbone to determine how best to engage people with lived experience in work (e.g., hosting shelter townhalls to obtain input/feedback, involving Persons with Lived Experience of Homelessness (PWLEH) on developing RFP/RFQ content, involving PWLEH on proposal review panels, etc.).
- Coordinates with Focus Area Managers to provide info/updates to CoC backbone to support overall progress reporting on Strategic Plan.

Homeward Staff

- Manages selection/seating of Board & committee members per protocols outlined in charter (e.g., issue invitations, lead recruitment, oversee selection process, manage onboarding/training of new members).
- Plan/facilitates Board and committee meetings – e.g., works w/ chairs to plan agendas, facilitate meetings, record/distribute minutes, track completion of action items.

- Supports participation by PWLEH– e.g., recruits, onboards and trains members; provides meeting prep support; ensures PWLEH have tools needed to participate (e.g., access to technology, transportation assistance); administers stipends.
- Leads partnership development and stakeholder engagement – e.g., one-on-one engagement of partners, both existing and new, to educate, develop buy-in, seek support in filling gaps, etc.
- Coordinates system performance review and annual planning – e.g., works with Focus Area Managers, HMIS team, and others to compile information needed to assess system performance and progress against the plan; facilitates planning process to identify needed changes/ course corrections based on that information; and ensures public distribution of information.
- Provides CoC membership management – e.g., issues invitations, plans/hosts meetings, manages communications, manages trainings.
- Leads collaborative process for developing written standards for CoC.

CoC Board & Committee Chairs

- Provides strategic thought partnership on issues coming under the chair's purview.
- Works with CoC backbone to develop annual work plan/ priorities/timeline and tentative meeting schedule.
- Supports CoC backbone in ensuring adequate participation/ representation by assisting with outreach and recruitment.
- Participates in prep meetings with CoC backbone to develop agenda, identify follow-up tasks and assignments, identify materials needed, etc.
- Assists with scheduling and logistics, as agreed upon with CoC backbone.
- Assists with meeting facilitation, as agreed upon with CoC backbone.
- Assists with recording and distributing meeting minutes, as agreed upon with CoC backbone.
- Reports out on behalf of committee to CoC Board (or on behalf of Board to other bodies – e.g., General Membership).

Performance Measurement Framework

Commitment to Performance Measurement

In the implementation of this Blueprint, the partners are also committed to regular, ongoing, and transparent performance measurement activities to assess the overall performance of the homelessness response system and to tailor and refine Focus Areas and Strategies within The Blueprint to have the greatest impact possible.

System performance monitoring is a necessary component of active system management and will be essential for assessing the impact of activities implemented under The Blueprint.

Homeward already collects and tracks substantial data related to system performance. These existing data and metrics combined with new system performance targets included in The Blueprint are essential for tracking progress toward an improved crisis response and accelerated exits to permanent housing.

Documenting baseline performance in key areas during initial Blueprint implementation and then monitoring progress toward system goals will enable homelessness response system stakeholders to gauge progress, evaluate impact, and consider opportunities for mid-course corrections and adjustments.

As outlined in Tables 1 and 2 in the pages below, The Blueprint's Performance Measurement Framework identifies system improvement targets that will support the community's assessment of its progress toward system optimization and programmatic improvements focused on reducing inflow, improving crisis response activities, and accelerating exits to successful housing outcomes.

System improvement targets, under the direction of Homeward, with support from ICA as the lead entity for HMIS, should be assessed by household type (e.g. single adults, households with children, and unaccompanied youth) and by CoC program component where applicable.

Targets within this Performance Measurement Framework are organized into two categories:

Table 1: Performance Targets for Improved Crisis Response

Table 2: Performance Targets for Accelerated Exits to Permanent Housing



Table 1: Performance Targets for Improved Crisis Response

	Performance Metrics	Program Types Included	Recommended Target or Standard
1	<p>Project Occupancy</p> <p>Number of days in period x number of occupied units) / number of days in period x contracted units</p>	<p>Emergency Shelter</p> <p>Transitional Housing</p> <p>Rapid Rehousing</p> <p>Permanent Supportive Housing</p>	<p>All projects are fully occupied, or at least 90% of full enrollment</p>
2	<p>Length of Time Homeless</p> <p>Average cumulative, unduplicated number of days that households were served in SO, ES, PSH, or TH projects; and days in RRH and PSH prior to move-in</p>	<p>Street Outreach (SO)</p> <p>Emergency Shelter (ES)</p> <p>Transitional Housing (TH)</p> <p>Rapid Rehousing (RRH)</p> <p>Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)</p>	<p>Not more than:</p> <p>120 days for Emergency Shelter + Permanent Supportive Housing prior to move-in</p> <p>60 days for Emergency Shelter + Rapid Rehousing prior to move-in</p>
3	<p>Length of time from Centralized Intake referral date until date housed (By Name List [BNL] Priority List)</p> <p>For all new enrollments during period, average number of days from Centralized Intake referral to housing move in by type</p>	<p><i>Centralized Intake referrals to:</i></p> <p>Rapid Rehousing</p> <p>Permanent Supportive Housing (Scattered Site)</p> <p>Permanent Supportive Housing (Single Site)</p> <p>Permanent Supportive Housing (LIHTC Properties)</p> <p>Other Permanent Housing</p>	<p>Not more than 14 days for Permanent Supportive Housing (Single Site)</p> <p>Not more than 60 days for Permanent Supportive Housing (Scattered Site and LIHTC Properties)</p>
4	<p>Length of Enrollment Time in Program</p> <p>For all new enrollments during period, average number of days from project enrollment to project exit by type</p>	<p>Street Outreach</p> <p>Emergency Shelter</p>	<p>Street Outreach: 90 days average</p> <p>Emergency Shelter: 60 days average for singles; 120 days average for families</p>

Table 2: Performance Targets for Accelerated Exits to Permanent Housing

	Performance Metrics
5	<p>Exited to or Remained in Permanent Housing*</p> <p>Percentage of all participants served during period who move into housing or are still in permanent housing on last day of tracking period.</p> <p>*Exclusive of deceased participants and all other non-applicable exits as defined in HMIS Standards</p>
6	<p>Exits to Streets, Shelter and Unknown</p> <p>Percentage of all persons who exited to streets, shelter, or unknown location</p>
7	<p>Return to Homelessness within 0-6 months</p> <p>7.1) Persons who exited to any non-homeless destination and subsequently enrolled after 30 days in a homeless project within 1-6 months of their exit.</p> <p>7.2) Persons who exited any project type to permanent housing and subsequently enrolled in a homeless project and subsequently enrolled in a homelessness project within 6 months of their exit.</p>
8	<p>Return to Homelessness within 7-12 months</p> <p>8.1) Persons who exited to any non-homeless destination and subsequently enrolled after 30 days in a homelessness project between 7 and 12 months after their exit.</p> <p>8.2) Persons who exited any project type to permanent housing and subsequently enrolled in a homelessness project between 7 and 12 months after their exit.</p>
9	<p>Referrals from Priority List (BNL Priority List)</p> <p>Number of persons by acuity group; number of chronic persons by acuity group; number of persons ready for housing by acuity group; number of persons referred by acuity group; disaggregated all by race and other noted characteristics</p>
10	<p>Reductions in Chronic Homelessness</p> <p>Number of persons who meet the HUD definition for chronic homelessness</p>

Program Types Included	Recommended Target or Standard
Street Outreach Emergency Shelter Transitional Housing Rapid Rehousing Permanent Supportive Housing	Street Outreach: At least 40% Emergency Shelter: At least 60% Transitional Housing: At least 70% Rapid Rehousing: At least 80% Permanent Supportive Housing: At least 90%
Street Outreach Emergency Shelter Transitional Housing Rapid Rehousing Permanent Supportive Housing	Street Outreach and Emergency Shelter: To be monitored with eventual target based on review of baseline data Transitional Housing, Rapid Rehousing, Permanent Supportive Housing: Less than 10%
Emergency Shelter Transitional Housing Rapid Rehousing Permanent Supportive Housing	7.1) Less than 5% 7.2) Less than 5%
Emergency Shelter Transitional Housing Rapid Rehousing Permanent Supportive Housing	8.1) Less than 10% 8.2) Less than 10%
All persons on active priority list from most recent 90-day period	No disparate rates of referrals by race, gender, household size, type of disability, age and other attributes as appropriate
Street Outreach Emergency Shelter	10% reduction year-over-year



GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Glossary of Terms

Annual Performance Report (APR): HUD funding recipients must submit an Annual Performance Report annually. The APR dataset represents the most up to date HMIS information, which is collected following HUD determined Data Standards. This report is used to track the progress and performance of HUD funded programs nationally.

Continuum of Care (CoC): Representatives from relevant organizations within a geographic area establish a Continuum of Care to carry out the duties established by HUD in the HEARTH Act. Relevant organizations include nonprofit homeless assistance providers, victim service providers, faith-based organizations, governments, businesses, advocates, public housing agencies, school districts, social service providers, mental health agencies, hospitals, universities, affordable housing developers, law enforcement, and organizations that serve veterans and homeless and formerly homeless individuals.

Coordinated Entry System (CES): Coordinated entry system is a consistent, streamlined process for accessing the resources available in the homeless crisis response system. Through coordinated entry, a CoC ensures that the highest need, most vulnerable households in the community are prioritized for services and that the housing and supportive services in the system are used as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Centralized Intake (CI): Coordinated entry system used in Polk County and managed by Primary Health Care.

Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG): ESG is a homeless assistance grant source from the federal government, administered by HUD. ESG is a part of an entitlement grant program, a formula-based financial assistance amount allocated directly to local entitlement jurisdictions based on successful submission of the jurisdiction's Consolidated Plan.

Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS): An HMIS is a computerized data collection application designed to capture client-level information over time on the characteristics of service needs of men, women, and children experiencing homelessness, while also protecting client confidentiality. It is designed to aggregate client-level data to generate an unduplicated count of clients served within a community's system of homeless services. An HMIS may also cover a statewide or regional area, and include several CoCs. HMIS can provide data on client characteristics and service utilization.

Housing and Urban Development (HUD), United States Department of: The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development is the federal department primarily responsible for funding housing and homelessness assistance, and establishing federal policy related to homelessness system design and programmatic operations.

Housing First: Housing First is an approach to quickly and successfully connect individuals and families experiencing homelessness to permanent housing without preconditions and barriers to entry, such as sobriety, treatment or service participation requirements. Supportive services are offered to maximize housing stability and prevent returns to homelessness as opposed to addressing predetermined treatment goals prior to permanent housing entry.

Housing Inventory Count (HIC): One night count of inventory from programs within a CoC that provide beds and units to serve people experiencing homelessness or who were homeless at entry. The HIC categorizes interventions as Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing, Rapid Re-housing, Safe Haven, Permanent Supportive Housing, and Other Permanent Housing.

Institute for Community Alliances (ICA): ICA is a not-for-profit organization based in Des Moines, Iowa. ICA functions as the HMIS Lead Agency and/or HMIS System Administrator in 14 states, providing technical assistance and training support for more than 4,000 database users.

Longitudinal System Analysis (LSA): Report generated by HMIS that captures information about individuals experiencing homelessness who utilize Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing, and Permanent Housing interventions within the CoC's system of care. The LSA is submitted to HUD on an annual basis and provided to Congress to provide an understanding of homelessness nationwide.

People with Lived Experience of Homelessness (PWLEH): People with lived experience of homelessness have direct experience of literal homelessness and/or housing instability. Their engagement and participation in homelessness system planning and oversight ensures that services and housing approaches are centered in a client-focused design perspective.

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH): Permanent Supportive Housing is permanent housing in which housing assistance (e.g., long-term leasing or rental assistance) and supportive services are provided to assist households with at least one member (adult or child) with a disability in achieving housing stability.

Point-In Time (PIT) count: One night count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons; reported by CoCs into the Homeless Data Exchange (HDX). CoCs can choose to conduct these counts each year, but they are only required to conduct them every other year during the last week in January.

Rapid Rehousing (RRH): RRH is permanent housing that provides short-term (up to three months) and medium-term (4-24 months) tenant-based rental assistance and supportive services to households experiencing homelessness.

Street Outreach (SO): Street outreach is the practice of direct contact and engagement with persons experiencing unsheltered homelessness on the streets, in public spaces, and in places not intended for prolonged habitation. The primary goal of SO is to engage persons and connect them to housing and supportive services that support permanent housing placement and sustainability.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): Managed by Iowa Health and Human Services, SNAP provides nutrition benefits to supplement the food budget of needy families so they can purchase healthy food and move towards self-sufficiency.

System Performance Measures (SPMs): Criteria established by HUD to measure the system-level performance of a CoC in preventing or ending homelessness. As a component of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, CoCs are required to report these measures to HUD and are expected to use SPMs to analyze the effectiveness of specific projects or project types.

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF): TANF is a federally funded, state-run program that provides assistance to households with children experiencing low income, aiming to foster economic security and stability through cash payments and various services like job preparation and childcare.

Transitional Housing (TH): Transitional Housing is a programmatic approach for persons experiencing literal homelessness. The TH model is characterized by intensive services and time-limited supports.

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