

# Crossroads to Justice

## Minnesota Housing

Special Needs Housing: Combating Homelessness

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## Crossroads to Justice

A growing gap in housing that is affordable, insufficient incomes, persistent institutional racism, lack of adequate healthcare, and increasingly dangerous and highly addictive substances have created a daunting environment to tackle the issue of homelessness.

[Crossroads to Justice](#), the new strategic plan of the Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness outlines a bold response to this growing issue by bringing an integrated housing, racial, and health justice approach for people facing homelessness in Minnesota to guide the work of state government. This person-centered and impact-oriented plan was co-developed and will be co-implemented by paid consultants who have faced homelessness, is championed by Governor Tim Walz and Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan, and is advanced by staff and leaders proactively coordinating across 14 state agencies.

### The goal

Crossroads to Justice holds a mandate to drive action, as well as to promote continuous learning and improvement over the next four years. The Council will measure progress, adjust actions as needed for greater impact and communicate regularly with partners across the state.

Ultimately, the Council is responsible for achieving the results in this plan. Throughout the implementation, the Council will monitor **two primary metrics**:

1. The number of Minnesotans experiencing homelessness, according to the annual one-time Point-in-Time Count (Goal: 15% reduction by December 2026); and
2. A reduction in the inequities of who experiences homelessness, according to the annual one-time Point-in-Time Count and American Community Survey.

In addition to monitoring progress on the overarching metrics, the plan commits to **five bold results**, each with unique measures used to track progress:

1. Council agencies will collaborate and co-lead with impacted communities that have been historically oppressed and excluded such as Black, Brown and people of color, poor/low income, LGBTQIA2S+, people with disabilities, older adults, foreign-born, people who have faced homelessness and Tribal Nations to implement the action plan on housing, racial and health justice.
2. Homelessness is prevented whenever possible, and services and supports are provided to ensure no one returns to homelessness.
3. A robust crisis response geared towards housing outcomes supports people staying outside, in emergency shelters and in community.
4. People facing homelessness have access to housing options that meet their needs and honor their choices.
5. Homelessness is treated as a crucial health and public health crisis wherever it occurs.

Aligned strategies and actions reflecting the highest-impact opportunities were selected, with staff leads identified at each relevant agency.

## How we got here

In 2022, after the shared experience of working with partners across Minnesota to protect and support people facing homelessness during the pandemic, while confronting the racism and injustice in our systems following the murder of George Floyd, Governor Walz and Lieutenant Governor Flanagan tasked the Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness with developing a strategic plan focused on justice. They sought a housing, racial and health justice approach for people facing homelessness in Minnesota to guide the work of state government on this issue for the remainder of their second term.

The plan is the culmination of a year-and-a-half-long process that was co-led by 10 paid Justice Consultants, all people who faced homelessness and represented different experiences and different parts of the state. Consultants were paid \$50 per hour for an average of 16 hours per month under a contract that lasted for 18 months. Other expenses such as transportation and meals were reimbursed. Rainbow Research, a contracted nonprofit partner, selected consultants from a pool of more than 200 applicants, and following a high-level orientation, they selected state agencies to partner with consultants based on interest area and skill.

Partnership work included developing definitions of justice with statewide community partners, identifying priority results, narrowing strategies and actions, and synchronizing efforts across 14 agencies and dozens of departments. Consultants and agency staff met at least weekly to explore pertinent aspects of the agency's work that could be brought to bear to reduce barriers, simplify systems, target funding and promote equity in supporting people facing homelessness. Regular touchpoints between Justice Consultants, Council staff and Rainbow Research helped surface feedback, deepen mutual understanding, address bottlenecks or gaps, and consider adjustments in real time.

On October 27, 2023, the Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness committed to *Crossroads to Justice: Minnesota's New Pathways to Housing, Racial and Health Justice for People Facing Homelessness*. The Council is a cabinet-level body led by Lieutenant Governor Flanagan and is comprised of the commissioners of 13 state agencies and the chair of the Metropolitan Council. This historic vote represented the start of the next chapter – implementation – of the plan.

## What makes this plan different

### **It was co-led and co-created with people closest to the issue.**

While strategic state plans in the past have been critical to building toward this moment, none of the previous plans have so intentionally been created with people with lived expertise at the center of the work. The Justice Consultants were involved in every step of this plan's creation.

"We learned the vital importance of co-leading and co-creating every step of the process with people who have faced homelessness," said Cathy ten Broeke, Executive Director of the Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness. "This included new practices, such as always inviting a Justice Consultant to participate in media interviews about the plan and conducting conference presentations together."

The broad engagement with partners throughout the state informed every part of plan development, including the definitions of justice, the bold results and the strategies and actions the Council is committing to implement and improve upon over the next four years.

### **It is powered by the biggest investment in housing and homelessness in state history.**

After a historic 2023 Legislative Session, the Governor signed into law a [\\$2.6 billion housing stability package](#) to fuel many of the actions in this plan. The investments will increase prevention assistance, shelter capacity, rental assistance, housing development, and services and supports people need to find and keep their housing. These increased resources coupled with the plan's focus on justice and centering people who have faced homelessness in the work represent a significant change.

### **The Administration made housing stability and homelessness one of its biggest priorities.**

The commitment to work across all parts of state government to support people facing homelessness extends to the coordination and collaboration across multiple interagency efforts at the state. Crossroads to Justice is Minnesota's roadmap for housing stability. The Executive Director of the Council sits on the Governor's Opioids, Substance Use, and Addiction Subcabinet and works closely with the Children's Cabinet, Olmstead Subcabinet and the Subcabinet on Climate. These interagency efforts leverage the power of the entire Administration to advance their priorities and recognize the intersectionality of these critical issues.

"Crossroads to Justice is helping change the way we do business in state government," said Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan. "The model of having paid justice consultants with lived experience at the table, discussing the most important aspects of the work with the Commissioners and highest level staff, is one we're already replicating and will continue to learn from. It's about truly co-creating the strategic direction together and ensuring the expertise of people who have faced homelessness informs every step of our work going forward."

### **The work is replicable.**

Entities of any size can utilize the process and values that created Crossroads to Justice. Paid co-leadership with people who have faced homelessness, intentional coordination across distinct bodies, a recognition that everyone has a role to play, slowing down to get the process right, proactive and responsive community engagement, and holding justice as the "North Star" can and should be indispensable components of any meaningful housing stability endeavor.

"The Justice Consultants often reminded us that it takes time to build community and build shared understanding, so don't rush the process," said ten Broeke. "Go at a pace that allows everyone's expertise to come through and intentional learning to happen, because we each have an important perspective to contribute. The best results emerge from persistent collaboration."

## HOUSING

# First-of-its-kind statewide plan to combat homelessness in Minnesota rolls out this spring

The Crossroads to Justice plan was crafted with help from formerly unhoused Minnesotans.



by **Katelyn Vue**  
January 22, 2024



Residents and volunteers built yurts, heated by wood stoves, to provide shelter and warmth through Minnesota's harsh winter at Camp Nenookaasi in south Minneapolis. Camp residents were evicted in early January 2024. Credit: Aaron Nesheim | Sahan Journal

An ambitious plan to coordinate Minnesota's response to homelessness across agencies — shaped by those who have directly experienced housing instability — will swing into action this spring.

The “**Crossroads to Justice**” strategic plan aims to reduce homelessness statewide by 15 percent by 2026 and to narrow the large racial disparities in those experiencing homelessness. Another goal is to reduce the disparities in mortality and improve the health of people facing homelessness.

“This plan, which will be our north star for our state agencies, is comprehensive covering approaches like increasing shelter capacity, as well as how to approach related needs such as ensuring that addiction treatment and recovery resources are widely accessible,” Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan said in a statement.

Last year, Governor Tim Walz signed a historic **\$2.6 billion housing stability package**; some of those funds will fuel the plan’s action steps, including increased funding for homeless shelters, rental assistance, affordable housing and support to help people find and keep housing.

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In 2022, Walz and Flanagan delegated the Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness (MICH), a cabinet-level state advisory group leading state efforts on housing stability, to launch efforts crafting the plan. Over the next four years, about a dozen state and regional agencies will work to implement the plan’s action steps to reduce barriers to benefits, housing and jobs, among other initiatives.

Agency-specific efforts range from better access to state workforce programs, to a pilot program to improve food assistance to those who cycle in and out of homelessness, to better housing and benefits for veterans, to more transitional housing for those leaving prison.

The plan will shape priorities during the next Legislative session, said MICH Executive Director Cathy ten Broeke, who has worked in state government and direct homelessness response for over 30 years.

The \$2.6 billion state investment in housing efforts “is a huge down payment on this work,” she said.

Crossroads to Justice is the first plan of its kind to incorporate people who have experienced housing instability or homelessness justice consultants. The consultants will continue to be involved in the implementation stage.

One of the twelve justice consultants, Marlena Jasch, is an enrolled member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe who currently lives in St. Cloud.

Between 2017 to 2019, Jasch was homeless while on a housing waitlist. She said she struggled to find safe, available spaces in shelters in the rural communities where she lived including Melrose and Sauk Centre. She spent summers living in a tent and winters in her car.

In 2019, a rapid rehousing program helped her secure an apartment, she said. She was also on track to become a licensed practice nurse.

However, she said COVID-19 restrictions disrupted her plans. And after police responded to a domestic violence call at her apartment, her landlord filed to evict her. In 2021, she became homeless again for a couple of months. Jasch said in those months, she was still fleeing her abuser while they were stalking her.

She sought temporary housing at a local shelter for domestic violence survivors, but was turned down because “my actual domestic assault had not been within the last couple of days,” she said. She eventually found a place at a shared house.

“I brought that also into my experience as a consultant,” Jasch said, referring to domestic violence leading to homelessness. “It was important to me that that got brought to the table, and added to the list, but it was very new to be bringing that to [state agencies] and for them to be working on it as it relates to this plan.”

As a justice consultant, she specifically wanted to collaborate with the Department of Public Safety, Department of Corrections, Department of Human Services to create action steps. She also worked with the state department of administration.

One of the action steps resulting from working together is a Domestic Violence Housing First program that will be implemented through the Department of Human Services, which is trauma-informed and survivor-centered housing assistance that focuses on rapidly housing domestic violence survivors, then providing ongoing support services.

Her experience as a Native woman also shaped her approach, Jasch said.

In Minnesota, Native Americans are 28 times more likely to experience homelessness than non-Latino whites, according to the plan. Several of the plan's action steps highlight increasing funding opportunities and expanding relationships with tribal nations and urban tribal communities.

“I felt like this process, first of all, gave power to the consultants but then in turn, we were able to encourage these large agencies, but also the individual employees working at these agencies, to see the importance of power-sharing and community,” said Michael Giovanis, one of the justice consultants who contributed to the report.

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Minnesota Now with Cathy Wurzer

## Minnesota turns to lived experience of homelessness to shape new housing plan

Cathy Wurzer and Lindsey Seavert January 31, 2024 1:42 PM



Volunteers help Camp Nenookaasi residents pack their belongings as the City of Minneapolis clears the encampment on Tuesday.

Ben Hovland | MPR News

The number of Minnesotans experiencing homelessness on a single night in January is upwards of 8,000 people, according to a 2023 survey. The problem is persistent and complex, as shown in [Tuesday's eviction of the Nenookaasi encampment in south Minneapolis](#).

This all comes as the State of Minnesota is about to roll out a new housing justice plan, with a first-of-its-kind approach. The state hired people who have lived experience of homelessness to lead the way, shaping policy with their firsthand experiences. The goal is to reduce homelessness statewide by 15 percent by 2026.

MPR News host Cathy Wurzer talked with Executive Director of the Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness Executive Director

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Cathy ten Broeke and Mason Persons, a justice consultant hired to help the state form the new plan.

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### Audio transcript

CATHY WURZER: The number of Minnesotans experiencing homelessness on a single night in January is upward of about 8,000 people. That's according to a survey last year of unhoused people in our communities. The problem is persistent and complex as we saw yesterday with the eviction of the Newcastle encampment in Minneapolis. This all comes as the state of Minnesota is about to roll out a new housing justice plan with a first of its kind approach.

The state hired people who have lived experience of homelessness to lead the way, shaping policy with their firsthand experiences in a goal to reduce homelessness statewide by 15% by the year 2026. Joining us to talk more about this plan is Cathy ten Broeke, the executive director of the Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness and Mason Persons, a justice consultant hired to help the state form this new plan. Mason and Cathy, welcome to the program.

CATHY TEN BROEKE: Thank you so much, Cathy.

CATHY WURZER: Real pleasure to have you here. Mason, I'm going to start with you if that's OK. How did you get involved in the state's new housing plan? Because you do have lived experience.

MASON PERSONS: Yes, I do. I started advocating for myself and other people like me when I was about 18, 19 years old. I'm 26 now. I started when I was in a housing program. I got opportunities to speak about my experience. And I've been doing it ever since then. I do national work as well as local. I found this position because I wanted to focus on Minnesota. Because that's where my experience is. And we've spent a year creating the Crossroads to Justice Plan-- from brainstorming to implementation, including coming up with the name, which was by me specifically.

CATHY WURZER: By the way, what is a justice consultant?

MASON PERSONS: A justice consultant is a person with lived experiences--

experience in homelessness, using that expertise to guide local and national change in policy, government, and legislature.

CATHY WURZER: Cathy, let's talk about what happened last year when the governor signed into law this \$2.6 billion plan to go toward housing stability in the state of Minnesota. I know you and I have talked over the years. You've been working many, many years to end homelessness in our state. What kind of situation are we in here? We keep hearing about a crisis. And we've heard about this crisis for a long time. What's different now?

CATHY TEN BROEKE: Thanks, Cathy. Well, I mean, despite just incredible work over many years by partners across the state, we are still dealing with an ever increasing gap in housing that's truly affordable in this country. And that's no different in Minnesota. And incomes still do not keep pace with the rising cost of housing. And then, I think, you add in the persistent challenges that we have around access to health care and services, increasingly dangerous substances on our streets.

And we are in a crisis. This is a really challenging moment for us. And I think what is so different with this plan that Mason was so deeply a part of and the rest of our justice consultants is, first and foremost, that it was built with them in the lead at every step of the way. But as you mentioned, it's also fueled by the largest investment in housing and homelessness in state history and all the years I've been doing this work-- just remarkable. So with that investment, we see that really as the fuel for this work to create more housing that will really work for people, regardless of their circumstances in the state.

CATHY WURZER: Cathy, I'm a little surprised that folks like Mason haven't been brought into the conversation before, after all these years. Is that not been happening to this point?

CATHY TEN BROEKE: Well, here's what I was-- certainly it has been happening at some degree. But in all my years, I've never seen an effort quite like this where from the very beginning of a process, which I think is so important, people with lived experience were brought on and paid to be at every conversation, every meeting to really co-lead the work with community, to bring us the kinds of solutions that we needed to invest in at the state, and to still be with us-- a year and a half of work together. And now as we move into implementation, we are on the verge of hiring 14 more people with lived experience of homelessness to guide this work with all of the state agencies. We never want to do this work any other way.

CATHY WURZER: Mason, it's been said that trying to work within large institutional systems is pretty tough. So have you had any-- what kind of frustrations have you had as you've been helping others, and talking about your lived experiences, and what you think should be done? And I know you're doing that. But what is the frustration at times?

MASON PERSONS: This is actually something that we go into. If you look at the Crossroads to Justice Plan on the Minnesota Housing website, we have a vision statement that we co-wrote together. And we mentioned that we are pulling from our traumas to be able to do this work. And a lot of people in these government spaces just have not had to deal with the same adversities we have had.

So it really is just exhausting on a lot of different levels. It's mentally, physically, spiritually exhausting to do this work and have to educate people in your everyday life as well as people in these government spaces. Even the most wonderful well-meaning people can still say and do things that at the end of the

day make the work feel even heavier than it already is when you have to constantly think of and remember the terrible things that you went through to be able to do this work. So that's one of the big ones.

CATHY WURZER: Are you seeing any light at the end of the tunnel though as you've been working in the group?

MASON PERSONS: Oh, definitely. I work specifically with MN Housing now. I've continued my consulting work with MN Housing specifically because I was working with them on the Crossroads to Justice Plan. When we were all working together as consultants, we were able to pick, which agencies within the Interagency Council we wanted to work with.

And I chose MN Housing because I was vaguely familiar with them. And the people at MN Housing have just been so forward thinking and very excited to do this work. So being around that energy has made me feel like this will happen. People believe in it. And they're not just saying they believe in it. But they're also actively working on implementing it.

CATHY WURZER: There is, of course, wide racial disparities in the state, Cathy. You brought that up. We know that a disproportionate number of Native Black and Brown Minnesotans experience homelessness. We just had that large story yesterday about Camp Nenookaasi in Minneapolis being primarily Native folks. And they closed it down a second time. The new housing plan that you're working on, how does it deal with persistent racial disparities in some of these vulnerable populations?

CATHY TEN BROEKE: So, I mean, this is a really important part of this justice plan. And what we are going to be measuring in terms of our success is not only if we are able to bring down the overall numbers of people experiencing homelessness but also, are we changing the disparities? Are we changing the harm-- repairing some of the harm that has caused the disparities we see in our communities?

So the very first result that we go for in this plan is that we are going to collaborate and co-lead with impacted communities that have been historically oppressed and excluded. And every agency has committed to hiring people with lived experience of homelessness. We're working on ensuring more equitable funding opportunities for communities disproportionately impacted and tribal nations-- being very transparent and accountable.

But then if you go through all of the results, at the core of each of the strategies is the work on equity. So for example, on the-- thinking about the encampment work, a robust crisis response really has to work directly with people who are experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Understand and listen to what they are telling us that they need and want that will truly work for them and work to really build the solution around that. So centering those voices is so critical to equity work. We've started a new interagency equity team at the state now that's going to help direct and guide all of this work as well to make sure that at every step of the way, that's really central to how we do.

CATHY WURZER: Mason, if you're with us here, I'm wondering as you-- as we wrap up this conversation, how do you make sure that officials are not just checking a box and setting a big goal? And it's just not going to be-- might fall short of the mark?

MASON PERSONS: A big one is not only having people in justice consultant positions holding people in government positions accountable but also people within government holding each other accountable. What I want to see and what

MN Housing and the Interagency Council are working on is connecting with each other. There's a reason why the name is called Crossroads to Justice. Because there are many intersections in this work. And it's all very interconnected. So everyone within government can hold themselves and each other accountable. And that is the best way to be able to move this stuff forward.

CATHY WURZER: Mason Persons, I appreciate your time. Cathy ten Broeke, always a pleasure. Thank you.

CATHY TEN BROEKE: Thanks so much.

MASON PERSONS: Thank you.

CATHY WURZER: Cathy ten Broeke is the executive director of Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness. And Mason Persons is a justice consultant hired to help with this new plan.

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