

# Promising Practices for Addressing the Housing Shortage

## A Summary of the Gaps Analysis Process Webinar (June 2019)

The Gaps Analysis is an ongoing process to understand and improve access to services systems for older adults, persons with disabilities, and children, youth and adults living with mental health conditions in Minnesota. A key step in this process is to identify promising strategies to improve service access. To facilitate this, the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) and Wilder Research hosted four webinars highlighting current strategies to address prioritized service access issues. During the June 27 webinar, four panelists shared their experiences implementing strategies to address Minnesota's housing shortage.

The webinar discussion highlighted key considerations for local stakeholders considering similar strategies, such as critical partnerships, resources needed, and barriers encountered. Below are some of the key themes and resources that arose during the discussion.

## Housing shortage in the context of this discussion

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In this context, the housing shortage includes a shortage of services or strategies to ensure housing access and stability. Housing access and stability includes local and regional efforts to ensure that housing and service system partnerships are in place to prevent and end homelessness, assist with access to housing opportunities, and ensure housing stability. This includes:

- Coordination of services and supports that promote housing and service choice
- Assessment of housing and service needs
- Development of new housing opportunities, services, and resources to ensure housing access and stability

## Panelists and featured initiatives

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**Barb Jeanetta**, [Alliance Housing Inc. \(https://www.alliancehousinginc.org/\)](https://www.alliancehousinginc.org/),  
[bjeanetta@alliancehousinginc.org](mailto:bjeanetta@alliancehousinginc.org)

*Featured initiative:* Alliance Housing is a nonprofit organization that builds and manages affordable rental housing for people with very low incomes and, often, those who need a second chance because of a history of convictions, poor credit, or other barriers. They also offer flexible property management, with a willingness to address behavior issues or erratic income streams to keep tenants housed. In response to a growing need for housing for older,

single adults with a history of homelessness, Alliance will soon open a 44-unit building in Minneapolis' Longfellow neighborhood.

**Natalie Matthewson**, [Region 7E Adult Mental Health Initiative \(AMHI\)](https://adultmentalhealth.org) (<https://adultmentalhealth.org>) and [Resource Training & Solutions, Inc.](https://www.resourcecoop-mn.gov) (<https://www.resourcecoop-mn.gov>)

*Featured initiative:* Willow Grove is a new supportive housing development for individuals impacted by serious and persistent mental illness. Located in North Branch, the development will include 20 single occupancy apartments, of which seven units will be designated for people experiencing long-term homelessness. The development came in response to the closure of the regional community mental health center and a survey of clients across east central Minnesota that showed people would benefit most from having access to mental health assessments and treatment, as well as housing subsidies.

With a target open date of December 2019, Willow Grove is a unique collaboration between owner and housing provider Central Minnesota Housing Partnership, the Regional Adult Mental Health Initiative Governing Board, counties and county case managers, and the service provider Nystrom & Associates. Willow Grove will have an onsite Adult Rehabilitative Mental Health Services (ARMHS) worker and a service coordinator who can provide targeted case management and assist with finding services.

**Michelle Wincell O'Leary**, [Touchstone Mental Health Housing Innovation Programs](https://www.touchstonemh.org/programs/housing/) (<https://www.touchstonemh.org/programs/housing/>), [MWincell@touchstonemh.org](mailto:MWincell@touchstonemh.org)

*Featured initiative:* Touchstone Mental Health provides innovative, person-centered services for adults with mental health issues. Their Housing Innovation services grew out of concerns that people in higher levels of care may no longer qualify for housing and could face homelessness. Through this program, they assist people in obtaining safe, affordable housing, and offer in-home mental health interventions, independent living skills, assistance with household tasks, and 24-hour emergency phone support.

Touchstone takes a person-centered approach that involves working with the whole person and considering a person's priorities, needs, and life goals. Their flexible services mean they can adjust the level of support and help people stay where they are living.

*"We really delved into the world of home and community-based services or waived services to learn [about] service options we could provide, including housing search and access, independent living skills and a number of other services. And we blended that with our knowledge of mental health services and supports so the agency has the ability to provide things like case management or ARMHS or waived services at various intensities in*

*community housing scattered site or single apartment building locations across the Twin Cities.” – Michelle Wincell O’Leary, Touchstone Mental Health*

**Stephen Horn**, Minnesota Department of Human Services, Disability Service Division (<https://mn.gov/dhs/people-we-serve/people-with-disabilities/>), [DSD.ResponseCenter@state.mn.us](mailto:DSD.ResponseCenter@state.mn.us)

*Featured initiative:* DHS is working on implementing the [HCBS Settings Rule](https://mn.gov/dhs/partners-and-providers/news-initiatives-reports-workgroups/long-term-services-and-supports/hcbs-transition/hcbs-ep.jsp) (<https://mn.gov/dhs/partners-and-providers/news-initiatives-reports-workgroups/long-term-services-and-supports/hcbs-transition/hcbs-ep.jsp>) and designing new, and revising existing, HCBS waiver services to flexibly support people to live in a variety of arrangements. See the [Waiver Reimagine](https://mn.gov/dhs/partners-and-providers/news-initiatives-reports-workgroups/long-term-services-and-supports/waiver-reimagine/) (<https://mn.gov/dhs/partners-and-providers/news-initiatives-reports-workgroups/long-term-services-and-supports/waiver-reimagine/>) webpage for more information. DHS has several strategies to support people where they choose to live, including:

- HCBS waiver services that assist in finding, moving, and sustaining housing.
  - [Caregiver Living Expense](https://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/idcplg?IdcService=GET_DYNAMIC_CONVERSION&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&dDocName=id_002430) ([https://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/idcplg?IdcService=GET\\_DYNAMIC\\_CONVERSION&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&dDocName=id\\_002430](https://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/idcplg?IdcService=GET_DYNAMIC_CONVERSION&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&dDocName=id_002430)) helps a person who is on a waiver program and living in their own home to have a caregiver live with them. The caregiver’s room and board may be covered, allowing for more manageable housing costs.
  - [Housing Access Coordination](https://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/idcplg?IdcService=GET_DYNAMIC_CONVERSION&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&dDocName=id_051586) ([https://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/idcplg?IdcService=GET\\_DYNAMIC\\_CONVERSION&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&dDocName=id\\_051586](https://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/idcplg?IdcService=GET_DYNAMIC_CONVERSION&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&dDocName=id_051586)) supports the ability to find, plan, move, and then have ongoing navigation services.
  - [Transitional Services](https://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/idcplg?IdcService=GET_DYNAMIC_CONVERSION&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&dDocName=id_053178) ([https://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/idcplg?IdcService=GET\\_DYNAMIC\\_CONVERSION&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&dDocName=id\\_053178](https://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/idcplg?IdcService=GET_DYNAMIC_CONVERSION&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&dDocName=id_053178)) supports the purchase of essential furnishings and payment of a security deposit for someone moving into their own home.
- Over 30 different services between disability waivers, like Individualized Home Supports.
- [Employment First](https://mn.gov/dhs/partners-and-providers/news-initiatives-reports-workgroups/long-term-services-and-supports/employment-first/) (<https://mn.gov/dhs/partners-and-providers/news-initiatives-reports-workgroups/long-term-services-and-supports/employment-first/>), Minnesota’s plan for competitive, integrated employment.
- [HCBS waiver employment services](https://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/idcplg?IdcService=GET_DYNAMIC_CONVERSION&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&dDocName=DHS-292987) ([https://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/idcplg?IdcService=GET\\_DYNAMIC\\_CONVERSION&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&dDocName=DHS-292987](https://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/idcplg?IdcService=GET_DYNAMIC_CONVERSION&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&dDocName=DHS-292987)) support a person in exploring their employment opportunities and provide ongoing support and job coaching.

## Key themes and highlights

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### Panelists discussed the financial and other resources that support their initiatives.

- All of the funding that Alliance Housing receives for housing construction and rehabilitation comes from government sources. They also received a DHS Live Well at Home grant to help with planning, preparation, and furnishings for new construction in Longfellow.

*"Alliance, as a mission-focused organization, chooses that its rents will only cover 90% to 95% of its property management cost. We do charitable fundraising to fill that gap in what rents won't cover. And we're able to pass that benefit along to our tenants."*

*– Barb Jeanetta, Alliance Housing*

- Region 7E AMHI receives funding from government sources, like Minnesota Housing, bonds, and low-income credits. They also receive DHS funds to help fund local providers and agencies who work with individuals with severe and persistent mental illness to help fill service gaps. They use smaller, local grants to furnish apartments.

### Partnerships and collaboration were important for all of the featured initiatives.

- Touchstone focuses on developing partnerships with landlords, property managers, and housing developers to find partners with similar values. They work together to keep the person they are serving housed and focused on their mental and physical health. They reach new partners through activities like events for landlords to learn about Touchstone's services. They also have partnerships around specific waived services.

*"I think it's the collaborative relationships in the community that you're working in. So meeting the other providers, ... people who do things or provide things different from what we provide, whether it's pharmacists, or MDs, or food shelves, or places that offer low cost furnishings and clothing or donations. There's a really wide range of potential partnerships to support the many needs that people have that we serve."*

*– Michelle Wincell O'Leary, Touchstone Mental Health*

- Region 7E AMHI is working with consumers, case workers, and other professionals in the region to identify needs. They maintain strong partnerships with the local advisory councils, of which at least half of members are impacted by mental illness. They also engage local nonprofits and businesses with donation options.

*"[Make] sure to bring the consumers into the conversation to work together because this ... is not something that is easily done alone. So it's just really important to work together as a community."*

*– Natalie Matthewson, Region 7E AMHI*

## Multiple panelists discussed the ways they make services more flexible for the individuals who need them.

- Touchstone Mental Health highlighted the importance of flexibility in meeting their clients' needs, particularly via operational things, like being willing to shift caseloads up and down and being able to provide more services to individuals when they need it.
- DHS is looking at the scope of what is allowed under existing services. They want the service to meet a person's needs in ways that makes sense for them, as opposed to the person trying to fit their life into the service.

*"[DHS is working] to ensure the service has flexibility, that people have access to staff when they need it, whether in person or through some technology solutions, and that a service can be functionally or dynamically accessed."*

*– Stephen Horn, DHS*

- Alliance Housing looks for ways to keep tenants stably housed by setting clear expectations and addressing issues quickly. They bring service providers into the conversation early, if applicable, to work together to change the behavior that threatens someone's housing stability. They also work with flexible rent payments (weekly, biweekly, carrying the balance), and maneuvering emergency assistance resources to help tenants with a one-time hurdle.

*"So our property managers are really great at setting clear expectations. And when there's a variance from those, pretty quickly and civilly getting back to the tenant to let them know."*

*– Barb Jeanetta, Alliance Housing*

## Panelists shared strategies for addressing access to housing for cultural and ethnic communities.

- Touchstone Mental Health was serving many 50+ year old men, both African American and African, so they held focus groups with people they were serving to learn more about their needs, and incorporated these learnings into their staff supervision and training.
- Touchstone Mental Health is also working on an agency-wide diversity, equity, and inclusion plan.

*"[T]o be person-centered and to serve people well, you need to meet people where they're at and that includes what their experiences, their ethnic background, racial background, any kind of background that is important to them. It's our job to ensure that we're good listeners and that we connect resources, whether it's our own or others, to best support people and what they need."* – Michelle Wincell O'Leary, Touchstone Mental Health

## Navigating barriers and challenges takes many forms.

- Region 7E AMHI identified a budgeting challenge for service provision at Willow Grove. They cannot plan for the number of residents who will use the service, since residents can use an ARMHS worker or a separate provider of their choice. They talked to similar housing projects about how they have navigated that uncertainty, what they learned, and their best practices.
- Touchstone Mental Health identified several ways they navigate a tight housing market with tenants who have barriers.
  - Criminal background, especially from long ago, can be a barrier. Touchstone will advocate for a potential tenant to help demonstrate the ways they have been working toward stability.
  - If income requirements are a barrier, Touchstone has a discussion with the landlords who are willing to be flexible about resources.

*"If we kind of look at all the ways in which a person has resources that can count towards income, if they are using food shelves and getting donated things, we strive to kind of broaden the view of how people pay their bills."*

*– Michelle Wincell O'Leary, Touchstone Mental Health*

- To help ensure timely rent payment and engender confidence among landlords, they worked with the county to become a housing support provider. Thus, landlords know the rent is going to be paid through another source.
- Because the market moves so fast, they make sure they are ready by having applications and information on hand. When a unit becomes available, they can respond very quickly.
- They also provide education to landlords through ongoing meetings or for all property management staff at an agency. They work collaboratively to understand landlords' perspectives, and assure them that they are there to be helpful.
- Alliance Housing highlighted the option of running a background check ahead of time so tenants can correct mistakes, problems, or proactively address credit or criminal background concerns with the landlord.
- Alliance Housing also identified a particular government funding challenge: capital funders want service and rent assistance funding tied to the property, while human service agencies want service dollars tied to the tenant or client so they do not lose their support. DHS indicated that it is finding ways to address this barrier in the long term.

## Panelists shared other strategies and approaches that have helped meet housing needs.

- Region V+ is building a serious and persistent mental illness housing option in Baxter, Minnesota with the goal of reducing hospitalizations and keeping individuals housed. Using a model from the Beacon Hill Project in Grand Rapids, Minnesota, it will consist of a mix of housing (income-based, housing with supports, etc.) and 24/7 support services.
- Touchstone Mental Health has found that when people are in crisis, hospitalized, or in treatment, that many of their property managers are willing to give at least a three-month hold on an apartment. As a service provider, they can keep supporting tenants so that they do not lose housing in the process.

*"That's a very significant trust building factor with the folks that we serve, knowing that we're supporting them in the background with that and they can work on what they need to work on and not be worried about when they get out, their housing's [going to] be gone."*

*– Michelle Wincell O'Leary, Touchstone Mental Health*

- Touchstone also highlighted two staff factors that have helped them provide effective services: build a strong service team with a variety of expertise and provide strong mental health training and supervision for their staff.
- DHS has attempted to incorporate within statute and guidance the ability for a provider to do a transitional co-lease or cosigning. The provider will cosign, then work to transition to just the renter, with conversation and navigation along the way to ensure payment.
- Alliance Housing has almost 50 licensed sleeping rooms available for individuals coming off the street with various barriers to housing. They are a simple, inexpensive option for many people and are less expensive to build and operate. Alliance views them as a good starting point for many individuals and can keep people from being too isolated.

## Resources

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During the webinar, panelists shared resources that could be useful to others addressing housing shortages.

- Community-Based Service Manual (CBSM) [Waiver Programs Overview](https://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/idcplg?IdcService=GET_DYNAMIC_CONVERSION&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&dDocName=id_000852) ([https://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/idcplg?IdcService=GET\\_DYNAMIC\\_CONVERSION&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&dDocName=id\\_000852](https://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/idcplg?IdcService=GET_DYNAMIC_CONVERSION&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&dDocName=id_000852)) provides details about the waiver and alternative care program services that are available to meet the needs of people with disabilities and older adults.
- [Housing Benefits 101](https://mn.hb101.org/) (<https://mn.hb101.org/>) helps people who need affordable housing and supports to maintain it understand the range of housing options and support services available.
- [Disability Benefits 101](https://mn.db101.org) (<https://mn.db101.org>) helps people with disabilities learn how income may impact benefits so they can make informed choices, reduce fears, and ensure work is part of the plan.
- [DHS Housing and Homelessness](https://mn.gov/dhs/partners-and-providers/program-overviews/housing-and-homelessness/) (<https://mn.gov/dhs/partners-and-providers/program-overviews/housing-and-homelessness/>) provides information and resources that enable people to live in the community of their choice.
- [Beyond Backgrounds](https://www.housinglink.org/HousingResources/beyond-backgrounds-for-renters) (<https://www.housinglink.org/HousingResources/beyond-backgrounds-for-renters>) provides funds under qualifying circumstances to property owners in five Twin Cities metro area counties who rent to someone who does not meet their initial screening criteria.
- [Homes for All](https://www.homesforallmn.org) (<https://www.homesforallmn.org>) is a coalition of nonprofits, service providers, developers, government agencies, and more working for statewide policy that supports housing stability.

## Next steps

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Complete recordings of the webinars will be available on the [DHS Gaps Analysis website \(https://mn.gov/dhs/partners-and-providers/news-initiatives-reports-workgroups/long-term-services-and-supports/gaps-analysis/\)](https://mn.gov/dhs/partners-and-providers/news-initiatives-reports-workgroups/long-term-services-and-supports/gaps-analysis/).

If you have questions about the DHS Gaps Analysis process, contact [dhs.gapsanalysis@state.mn.us](mailto:dhs.gapsanalysis@state.mn.us).