



Working Together: Olmstead and Ending Chronic Homelessness

Moving towards securing stable, integrated housing for all people with disabilities.

The Olmstead Plan

On June 22, 1999, the United States Supreme Court held in *Olmstead v. L.C.* that unjustified segregation of persons with disabilities constitutes discrimination in violation of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The Olmstead decision requires public entities to provide services in the most integrated setting possible, according to the person's choice.

In 2015, Minnesota adopted **“Putting the Promise of Olmstead into Practice,” a plan to provide people with disabilities opportunities to live, work, and be served in integrated settings.** The plan was developed as the result of a federal court order and is overseen by a subcabinet composed of eight state agencies. It includes goals to increase and improve transition and planning services, housing, supportive services, crisis and safety interventions, transportation, education and employment for people with disabilities.

Ending Chronic Homelessness

The Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness, comprised of 11 state agency Commissioners and Governor Mark Dayton's office, is accountable for leading the State's effort to achieve a shared vision: Housing stability for every Minnesotan.

Because Minnesotans experiencing chronic homelessness are among our most vulnerable people and because ending chronic homelessness is compassionate, fiscally responsible and possible, **the Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness has committed to the goal of ending chronic homelessness by the end of 2017.** People experiencing chronic homelessness are those who have a disability and have been homeless for over a year or periodically over several years. In one night in January 2015, over 1,200 Minnesotans were chronically homeless.

How do these initiatives align?

People experiencing homelessness often have disabilities.

According to the 2012 Wilder Survey of Minnesotans experiencing homelessness, 82 percent of all adults surveyed reported either a serious mental illness, chronic health condition, substance abuse disorder, or evidence of a traumatic brain injury. The high rate of disabilities puts people experiencing homelessness at risk of institutionalization; in fact, twenty percent had lived in a group home at some point in their lives.

Shelters are not integrated settings.

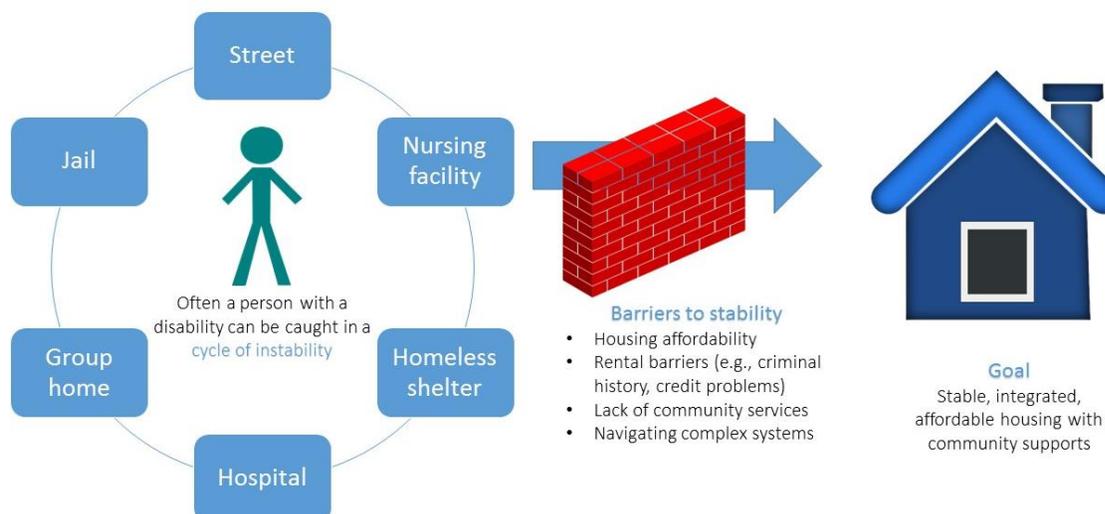
The need for emergency shelter is an unfortunate reality of our current system where many people's incomes cannot keep up with rising housing costs. Shelters too often become de facto permanent housing for many people with disabilities, who can spend years cycling through emergency services. Shelters significantly limit a person's ability to fully participate in the community, and under Olmstead are not considered an acceptable option for people with disabilities who are discharged from institutions.

Protecting choice in housing maintains dignity and increases quality of life for all people with disabilities.

People with disabilities may have very limited resources and opportunities, but the Olmstead decision protects their right to make important choices about where they live, who they live with, and who they receive services from.

By working together, we can address the significant disparities in who has access to housing and service.

A 2015 analysis of people receiving services from DHS who are unstably housed found that blacks and American Indians are more likely to be homeless or institutionalized and less likely to be receiving care coordination services. In addition, people with Serious Mental Illness (SMI) or a substance abuse disorder are more likely to be homeless, and people with SMI are more likely to be institutionalized.



How do we leverage each other's efforts?

There are many ways that these plans can work together. Some ideas include:

Collaborate on solutions

- **Advance permanent supportive housing** as a best practice for both people experiencing homelessness and people living in segregated settings
- **Increase housing options** for all people with disabilities through more effective income supplement programs, new affordable housing opportunities, and more accessible community services
- **Build relationships with landlords** to increase rental options in the private market for people that have a difficult time renting.
- Develop new strategies for **increasing competitive employment** for people with disabilities.
- **Enhance crisis services** to better prevent institutionalization and homelessness.
- **Develop Housing Support Services as a health care benefit** available to anyone with a disability struggling with maintaining housing in the community.
- **Preserve existing housing and services options** that help people remain in the community.

Improve the current system

- Use the principles of Olmstead to **increase the quality and level of integration of housing** for people with disabilities.
- **Ensure choice** within assessment and referral systems such as MNChoices and homeless Coordinated Entry systems. These systems should collaborate to help people with disabilities understand and access the array of housing and service options available to them.
- **Share best practices and learning** around person-centered planning and practices and supporting people in housing successfully.
- **Improve person-centered transition planning** for people with disabilities in segregated settings to avoid homelessness.
- **Improve mainstream services** to ensure people with disabilities have access to all the available resources that could help them with housing in the community.
- **Ensure transportation systems are working for people with disabilities** and providing the necessary connections between housing, employment, and community life.

- **Identify youth with disabilities** in the foster care, juvenile justice and education systems who may be at risk of homelessness or institutionalization to **proactively support their transitions to adulthood**.

Advocate for people with disabilities

- **Create a united front** between the “disability” and “homeless” advocacy communities to promote the importance of stable, integrated housing.
- Advocate for policy reforms to **improve access to housing for people with criminal backgrounds**.
- **Coordinate data** to tell a powerful story about the impact of housing instability, and show progress as these initiatives are implemented.
- Provide **public education** on the benefits of including people with disabilities in the community and the negative impacts of housing instability.

Call to action

We can end the practice of elderly and severely disabled people sleeping on the floors of emergency shelters year after year.

We can give people with disabilities meaningful options to move out of institutions or homelessness and into their own homes.

By working together, we have the power to ensure that ALL people with disabilities have access to safe, stable housing in the community.

Housing and Support Services, Department of Human Services

651-431-3300

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