

Wilder Research

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Robust community response urges action toward long-term solutions to homelessness in Minnesota

Wilder Research report draws on experiences of providers and people in communities across the state who are navigating complex systems and resources

MINNEAPOLIS, May 10, 2023 — Homelessness has a devastating impact on the health and life expectancy of those with lived experience, including [UCare](#) members. In Minnesota, the death rate for those experiencing homelessness is triple that of the general population.* As the state's leading Medical Assistance health plan, UCare is invested in identifying actionable solutions to eliminate long-term homelessness. In collaboration with community partners [Hearth Connection](#) and [Wilder Research](#), the community-based health plan funded a study of the barriers and challenges that make it difficult for people to maintain stable housing. The result is the Wilder Research report, [Accessing and Maintaining Long-term Solutions to Homelessness](#), authored by Christin Lindberg and Kristin Dillon.

In-depth interviews with 21 people currently or formerly experiencing homelessness and surveys with 239 service providers yielded recommendations to make significant changes to a complex and under-funded system. The following recommendations were cited:

- Find ways to increase overall funding, including developing and maintaining affordable housing that meets both demand and people's needs. Address policies and systems that contribute to the gap between income and affordability, and availability of housing.
- Create a streamlined, comprehensive, holistic response to homelessness to reduce unnecessary systems complexities.

- Invest in and support the staff who provide critical frontline services. Staff are the backbone of the network of services and supports.
- Develop strategies and solutions that are focused on people and support relationships. Because each person has their own story and changing needs, approaches need to be individualized. Use an equity lens and trauma-informed approach to determine and meet individuals' needs.

“This research is an intentional look at realities in the field related to long-term solutions to homelessness. Recent conversations have focused on emergency crisis responses, and we wanted to address the full continuum,” explained Marcus Schmit, Hearth Connection Executive Director. “This report is the catalyst for the important next step of community conversations to deliver concrete action items to policymakers and legislators for the future.”

The state legislature is currently debating several bills to strengthen supportive housing for individuals and families who are at risk of or have experienced homelessness. The study supports the need for this funding.

“Stable housing for our members who experience chronic homelessness can be life changing,” said Tenbit Emiru, MD, MBA, PhD, UCare’s Executive Vice President and Chief Medical Officer. “Having a place to call home helps members and their families stay on track with routine and chronic condition care, and also to have long-term relationships with community health care providers. We see great potential for this study to create long-lasting better health for our members and their communities.”

According to Kristin Dillon, Associate Director of Research at Wilder Research, “This study had an important focus on capturing both the voices of individuals who have experienced homelessness and the providers who serve them. These two perspectives aligned on the need for a simpler, more transparent, human-centered system that allows for the important relationship-building and tailoring most essential for success.”

Two key examples of the perspectives of study respondents include the following:

Every individual experiencing homelessness or housing instability comes with their own story. As much as we can, we need to build flexibility into programs to make sure services and supports can be tailored to individuals' unique situation and to increase positive outcomes. – Provider

It’s a big challenge because you are always on pins and needles – you want to get your own place and you are always waiting for them to call; if you called, they often didn’t answer... It was challenging because there was nothing concrete. You didn’t know which ‘end was up’ at any given time. Many times, I had no idea where I would be the next week.

– Person with lived experience of homelessness

About UCare

[UCare](#) is an independent, nonprofit health plan providing health care and administrative services to nearly 660,000 members throughout Minnesota and parts of western Wisconsin. UCare partners with health care providers, counties, and community organizations to create and deliver Medicare, Medicaid and Individual & Family health plans.

The health plan addresses health care disparities and care access issues through a broad array of community initiatives. UCare has received Top Workplaces honors from the Star Tribune for 13 consecutive years since the rankings began in 2010.

About Hearth Connection

[Hearth Connection](#) is a nonprofit organization collaborating with government, service providers, and community partners in the shared effort to assist Minnesotans experiencing homelessness and housing instability. The organization works with more than 30 providers across Minnesota to advance supportive housing solutions through convening, capacity-building, and advocating for policy and systems change.

About Wilder Research

[Wilder Research](#) is a nationally respected independent research group at the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation. Through research and evaluation services, we help organizations throughout Minnesota and the country measure and improve their effectiveness, identify needs and solutions, and make data-informed decisions that improve lives.

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[*Minnesota Department of Health News Release, "People who experience homelessness face earlier and greater risk of death, report finds", Jan. 26, 2023](#)