



WI Balance of State CoC Policies and Priorities

Mission

The mission of the Balance of State CoC is to end homelessness by supporting local coalitions throughout Wisconsin.

With shared responsibility and driven by youth leadership and cross-sector collaboration the Wisconsin Balance of State CoC Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program's (YHDP) mission is to prevent youth homelessness whenever possible and if it is not, ensure that the experience is rare, brief and non-recurring.

Purpose

The Restated Articles of Incorporation for the organization state that the purpose of the organization is to:

- promote community-wide commitment to the goal of ending homelessness
- promote the quick rehousing of homeless individuals (including unaccompanied youth) and families, while minimizing the trauma and dislocation caused to homeless individuals, families, and communities by homelessness
- promote access to and effective utilization of mainstream programs by homeless individuals and families, and
- optimize self-sufficiency among individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

YHDP Vision

To this end, we envision a future in Wisconsin where all youth and young adults:

- Receive immediate and equitable access to everything they need to thrive in housing, education, employment, well-being and positive community connections.
- Access inclusive and individualized, wrap-around supports to create a mentally and physically healthy environment for growing and learning.
- Take power with leadership opportunities at every level in the youth-serving system.
- Thrive in a variety of housing options that meet the individual needs of youth by providing youth-directed services, connections to community resources and paths to life-long stability through immediate assessment and progressive engagement.
- Partner with culturally affirming and trauma-informed providers that address the specific needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and any other gender or sexual identity letters and words cannot yet fully describe (LGBTQIA+); Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC); pregnant and parenting youth; youth fleeing violence, and survivors of human trafficking. Acknowledge the impact of policies that increase systematic disparities of race, disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity.
- Advocate for changes in policy that support, rather than penalize youth seeking self-determination and self-sufficiency.
- Support the mental health and overall wellness needs of youth through close collaboration with mental health, substance abuse, and health systems and by uplifting youth to follow their passions through a positive youth development framework.



YHDP Goals

The Balance of State CoC CCP goals are:

(1) Stable Housing – Youth and young adults are immediately provided with safe, supported, and flexible housing options that reflect their individual needs and pave the way for long term, sustainable housing;

(2) Permanent Connections – Youth and young adults are supported in cultivating consistent, self-identified people who can respectfully guide, support and advocate with them to get their needs met;

(3) Education and Employment – Youth and young adults have access to educational resources to achieve their career goals, helping to prevent homelessness for at-risk youth and young adults and create sustainable pathways to income and housing for youth and young adults experiencing homelessness;

(4) Social and Emotional Wellbeing – The health and well-being of youth and young adults are prioritized by meeting youth where they are and providing them with the resources and supports they need to achieve happiness, health, self-sufficiency, and self-actualization.

(5) Systems Change – Increase cross-system coordination and collaboration with a commitment to authentic youth voice.

Diversity Statement

At the Wisconsin Balance of State Continuum of Care, diversity and inclusion are an important part of who we are. We build an inclusive culture that encourages, supports, and celebrates the diverse voices of our employees and members. It fuels our innovation and connects us to the clients and communities we serve.

The Wisconsin Balance of State Continuum of Care values a diverse, inclusive, and equitable environment where all employees and stakeholders, regardless of their gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, age, sexual orientation or identity, education, disability, and social or economic standing, feels recognized and respected. We are committed to a culturally competent environment and provide equal opportunity for employment and membership within our organization. We respect and value diverse life experiences and heritages to ensure that all voices are valued and heard.

Expectations

All applications for new funding (CoC Competition) and sub-grantee applications released by the Balance of State CoC have outlined the following requirements for new projects:

- **Housing First philosophy and low barrier to entry:** Housing First is a model of housing assistance that prioritizes rapid placement and stabilization in permanent housing that does not have service participation requirements or preconditions (such as sobriety or a minimum income threshold). This approach quickly connects people experiencing homelessness to permanent housing:
 - No barriers to entry (e.g. sobriety, treatment, or service participation requirements);
 - No preconditions (e.g. sobriety, income);



- Does not terminate program participants from the project for lack of participation in the program (e.g. supportive service participants requirements or rules beyond normal tenancy rules).
- **Coordinated Entry:** Project applicants are required to comply with the policy and procedures, written standards, and order of priority for the specific project type requested. Participation includes but is not limited to: pre-screen, assessment, referral, follow-up. At the time of the application, if an agency does not currently use coordinated entry, a commitment to work with the CoC on establishing compliance will be sufficient. The CoC will work with the organization to incorporate the project into the coordinated entry process based on the project type, intended population, and needs of the project.
- **Balance of State COC:** Project applicants are required to comply with the Balance of State COC bylaws, governance charter, and other policy and procedure manuals as approved by the Board or membership. This includes, but is not limited to:
 - Committee participation. In the event this results in a hardship for the organization, the agency shall provide a written request for this requirement to be modified. The written request must be provided before an executed sub-grant contract is signed.
 - Actively involved in the Point-in-Time overnight street/known location count twice a year (4th Wednesday of January and July)
 - Active involvement in their local coalition. In the event this results in a hardship for the organization, the agency shall provide a written request for this requirement to be modified. The written request must be provided before an executed sub-grant contract is signed.
 - Attendance at quarterly Balance of State meetings. As of the date of this application, the quarterly meetings are conducted virtually, free of charge, recorded, and posted for future viewing. At the time of application, a commitment to future participation is sufficient. If the quarterly meetings return to an in-person platform and attendance is a hardship for the organization, the agency shall provide a written request for this requirement to be modified.
 - Good Standing with Balance of State CoC policies.

CoC-wide Policies (summaries)

(1) Criminalization of Homelessness Policy

The purpose of the policy on criminalization of homelessness is to ensure agencies receiving funding (state and/or federal) to end homelessness are not promoting criminalizing homelessness policy priorities, ordinances, regulations, rules or laws. Each coalition shall develop a regional plan to address the criminalization of homelessness in their communities. The plan shall include strategies to educate and engage local policymakers, law enforcement, local businesses, and other community leaders and service providers. Agencies and staff acting on behalf of an agency shall not support the criminalization of homelessness.

(2) Involuntary Family Separation and Non-Discrimination Policy



The purpose of the policy is to serve as a family, any family identifying as a family without discrimination or involuntary separation. This includes:

- Families at family shelters must not be separated when entering shelter.
- There can be no inquiry, documentation requirement, or proof related to family status, gender identification and/or sexual orientation.
- The prohibition on inquiries or documentation does not prohibit inquiries related to an individual's gender identity for the limited purpose of determining placement in temporary, singles-only emergency shelters which are limited to one sex because they have shared bedrooms or bathrooms, or for determining the number of bedrooms to which a household may be entitled.

CoC-funded Specific Policies (summaries)

(1) Education of Homeless Children and Youth

The purpose of the policy is to ensure CoC-funded agencies in the WIBOS inform program participants of their eligibility for education services and ensure their access to those services under Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. Agencies are required to demonstrate:

- collaboration with local school districts;
- consideration of educational needs of children entering shelter;
- programs established policies and practices that are consistent with, and do not restrict the exercise of rights provided by the Act;
- programs that provide housing or services to families have designated a staff person to ensure that children are enrolled in school and connected to the appropriate services within the community.

(2) Healthcare Enrollment and Health Insurance Education Policy

The purpose of the policy is to ensure CoC-funded agencies are compliant with the following:

- Educating and assisting all people experiencing homelessness with access to healthcare enrollment services, including referrals to enrollment specialists or healthcare navigators.
- Educating and assisting all people experiencing homelessness on the use of health care benefits
- Ensuring all agencies working with people experiencing homelessness have written policies and procedures in their manual addressing access to health care and education about health care.

The policy reiterates the already existing HUD requirement for CoC-funded projects to help program participants in accessing and how to use mainstream benefits for which they are eligible.

(3) Policy on Equal Access and Gender Identity Rule

The purpose of this policy is to ensure CoC and EHH funded agencies are compliant with:

- The final rule requiring that HUD's housing programs be made available to individuals and families without regard to actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status.
- The final rule also prohibits recipients or subrecipients of HUD funds from inquiring about sexual orientation or gender identity to determine eligibility for programs, benefits, housing, or services.



This policy is intended to establish the standard for WIBOSCO in regards to equal access and gender identity rights. This policy will remain a WIBOSCO requirement regardless of any change at the federal level.

Grant recipients are required to develop in writing, implement, and document procedures to ensure implementation of the Equal Access Rule. Specifically, agencies must:

- Placement and accommodation in projects are made in accordance with an individual's gender identity.
- Implement an anti-harassment policy that includes transgender and non-gender conforming in the list of groups vulnerable to harassment and/or list of protected groups.
- Have a formal grievance process that is prompt, transparent and consistent in managing and resolving violations.
- Include confidentiality practices that keep a project participant's transgender status confidential, unless the participant gives permission to share this information.
- Allow for project participants to request a private space for intake and data collection.
- Outline safety practices including respecting the project participant's evaluation of their own safety with regard to proposed housing options and accommodating the project participants' reasonable requests regarding safety.

All HUD COC funded and EHH funded projects in the WIBOS will use appropriate, inclusive language in communications, publications, trainings, personnel handbooks, and other policy documents that affirms the CoC's commitment to serving all eligible clients in adherence with the HUD Equal Access Rule.

All HUD COC funded and EHH funded projects in the WIBOS will ensure all project participants understand their rights to equal access, including privacy rights and the implication of releasing information.