



A 2022 Analysis of Homelessness in the Wisconsin Balance of State Continuum of Care

WIBOSCOC Gaps and Needs Committee

May 2023

Executive Summary

Homelessness and housing insecurity continue to plague communities in all corners of our state. As of January 2020, Wisconsin had an estimated 4,515 experiencing homelessness on any given day, as reported by Continuums of Care to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

The Wisconsin Balance of State Continuum of Care (WIBOSCOC) is a 501(c)3 membership organization comprised of agencies who serve, support, and care about those experiencing homelessness. We represent all the counties in Wisconsin, except Dane, Milwaukee, and Racine.

Each year, the Gaps and Needs Committee of WIBOSCOC develops and administers two surveys: one for service providers and community partners who have a role or vested interest in addressing homelessness in their community (“provider survey”); and one for people that are currently homeless or at risk of becoming homeless or have been homeless or at risk of becoming homeless in the past 12 months (“client survey”). The surveys aim to gather the following feedback from people who live and/or work in Wisconsin's 69 county area that makes up the Balance of State CoC:

- What’s going well in BOSCOG-funded services?
- What other community supports are needed?
- How can the BOSCOG address gaps, barriers, concerns?

Data presented in this report is aggregated data from all 21 local coalitions within the Balance of State. To receive your local coalition’s data separately, please contact the BOSCOG Gaps and Needs Committee Chair.

Overview of Data Collected

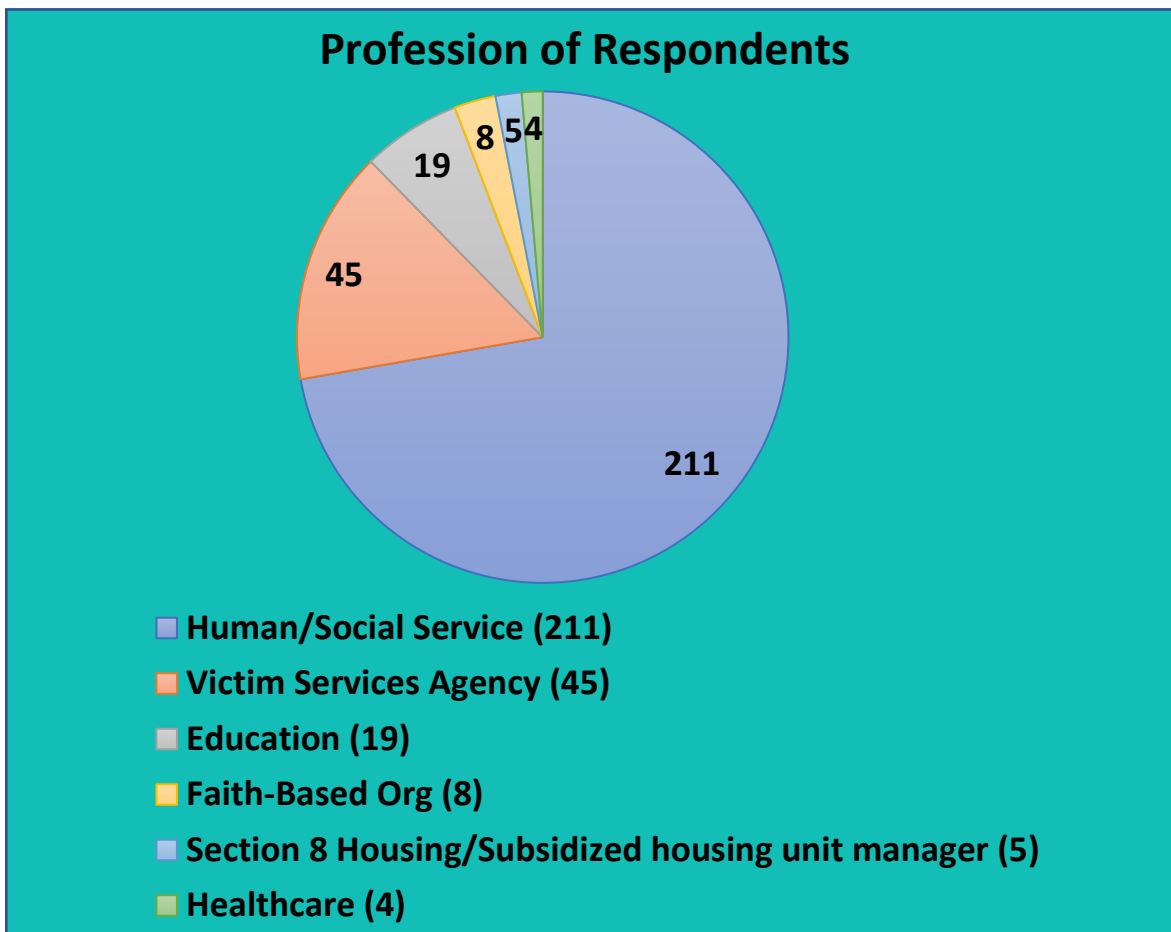
The 2022 Gaps and Needs Committee feedback surveys were open for three months, from late November 2022 through late January 2023. **We received 313 client survey responses and 375 provider survey responses. This report (the first report of this kind produced by the BOSCOG Gaps and Needs Committee) will present highlights and summaries of key findings from the 2022 surveys returned. At the end of this report, we will show how the data collected through the surveys can translate into action steps, as we urge local coalitions to consider this data as you develop strategies for addressing and reducing homelessness in your area.**

2022 Provider Survey Responses Overview

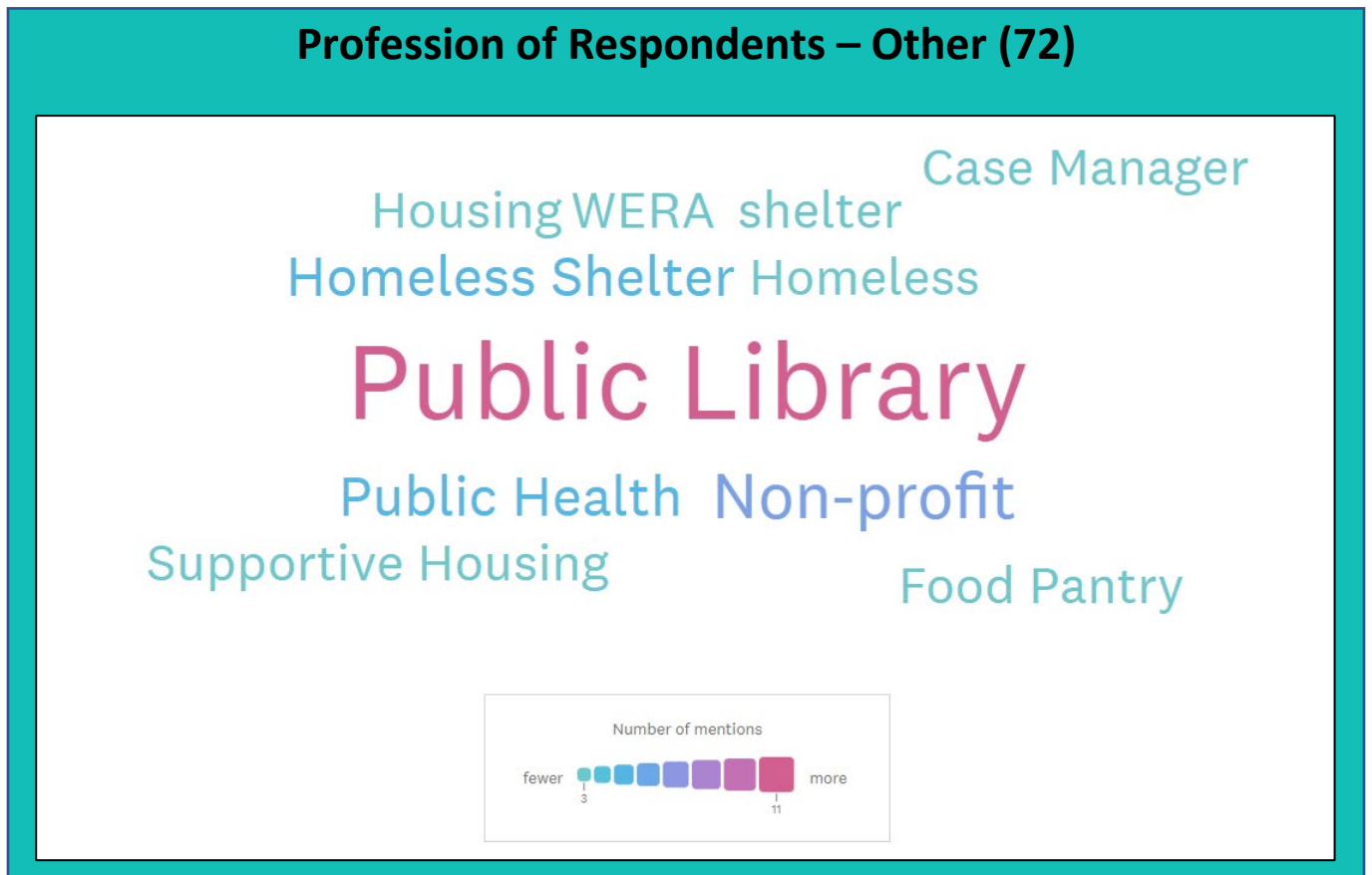
We asked for 25 responses to each survey from each of the 21 local coalitions in the Balance of State. The following coalitions met or exceeded that goal:

- Brown
- Fox Cities
- Kenosha
- Southwest
- WinnebagoLand

Who did we hear from?



There were 72 respondents to the provider survey who indicated they were not affiliated with any of the multiple-choice options for professions listed in the survey. Several responses were from public library personnel. Other responses are depicted in this word cloud according to the frequency that they appeared as write-in responses:

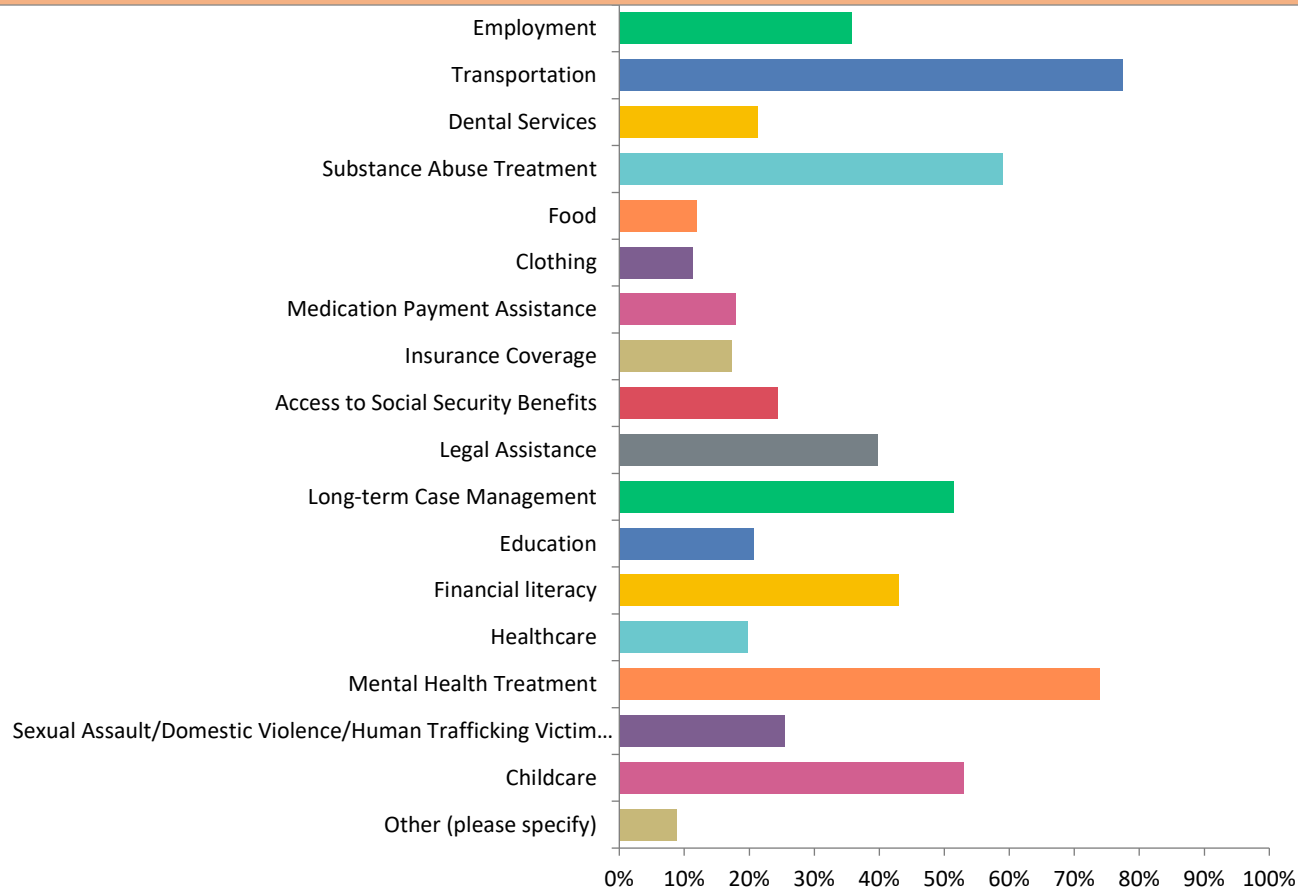


Providers were asked: Are services meeting the needs?

- 31% of respondents feel as though the services offered within their local housing coalition meet the needs of those experiencing homelessness;
- 49% do not;
- 20% are unsure

Representative comments included those who feel that the system is “reactive vs. strategic and preventative,” and the needs of those seeking services are ***often beyond the capacity of what they can provide.***

From your perspective, what (if any) non-housing resources do you see as lacking in your local housing coalition that may be contributing to homelessness and housing instability in the communities you serve? Check all that apply.



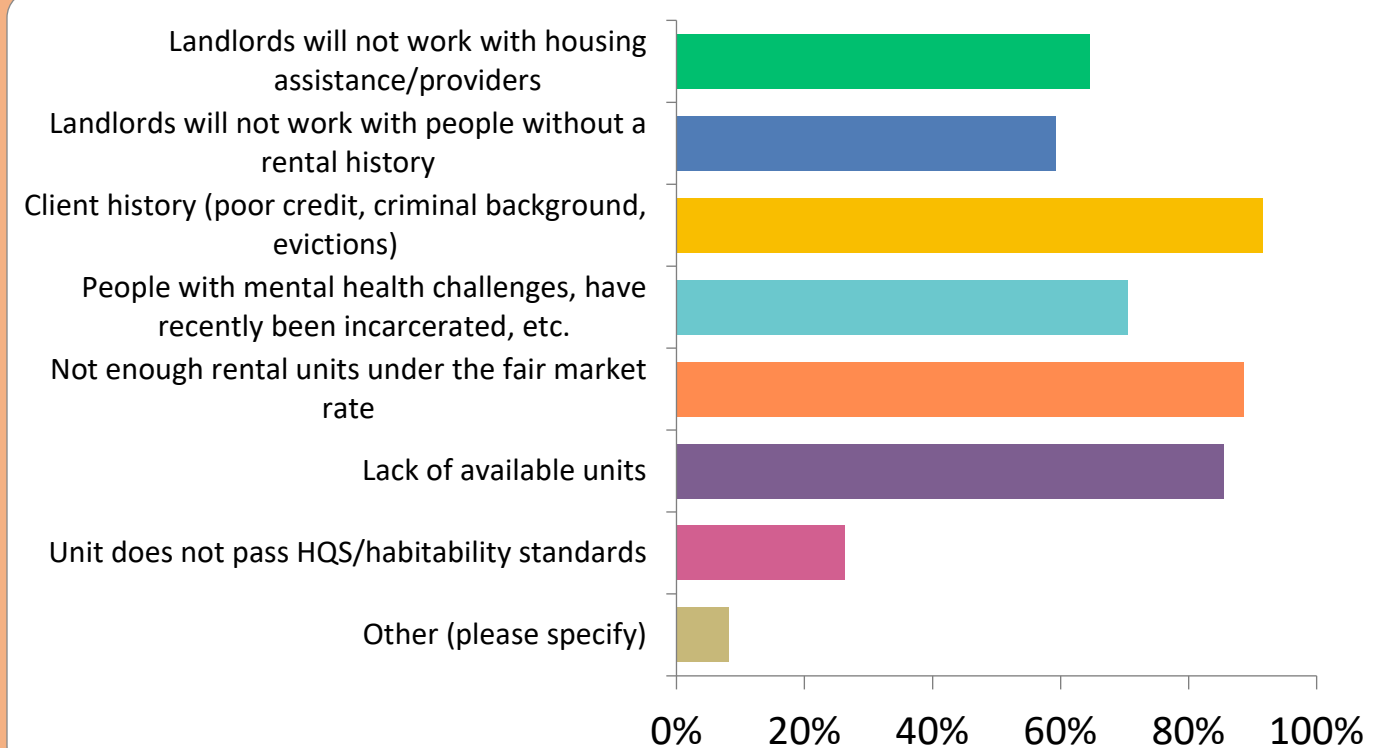
Top five non-housing resources lacking in communities that may be contributing to homelessness and housing instability:

- 1. Transportation (indicated by 77% of respondents)**
- 2. Mental Health Treatment (indicated by 74% of respondents)**
- 3. Substance Abuse Treatment (indicated by 59% of respondents)**
- 4. Childcare (indicated by 53% of respondents)**
- 5. Long-term Case Management (indicated by 51% of respondents)**

“Childcare is a large barrier for single parent households with young children. They are unable to work without their entire paycheck going to daycare, they are unable to find housing without being able to work.”

“The majority of people we meet on the street suffer from mental illness. Relationship building goes a long way to steering people to help that is available. More daytime shelter services (especially on weekends) could definitely open opportunities for interaction.”

What are the barriers for people accessing affordable housing in your area? (check all that apply)



Top five barriers for people accessing affordable housing:

1. Client history (poor credit, criminal background, evictions) (indicated by 92% of respondents)
2. Not enough rental units under the fair market rate (indicated by 89% of respondents)
3. Lack of available units (indicated by 86% of respondents)
4. People with mental health challenges, have recently been incarcerated, etc. (indicated by 71% of respondents)
5. Landlords will not work with housing assistance/providers (indicated by 65% of respondents)

“There needs to be laws about how quickly and how much landlords can raise rent. I have seen several families whose rent has more than doubled with lease renewals. We do not have anywhere near enough apartments that are under fair market rate.”

Summary:

The BOSCOG Gaps and Needs Committee was unsurprised by the narrative comments that accompanied the quantitative results in the provider survey. Housing services and programming in and of itself will not end homelessness, it must be combined with big picture advocacy and service coordination to meet the myriad of issues that people facing housing insecurity encounter when trying to get their basic needs met and sustain self-sufficiency.

“Remember that unhoused folks are people and that any of us could be unhoused under unforeseen circumstances. Practice patience, compassion, and understanding and avoid talking down to folks when presenting information or offering services. Reiterate this to people while training/sharing resources.”



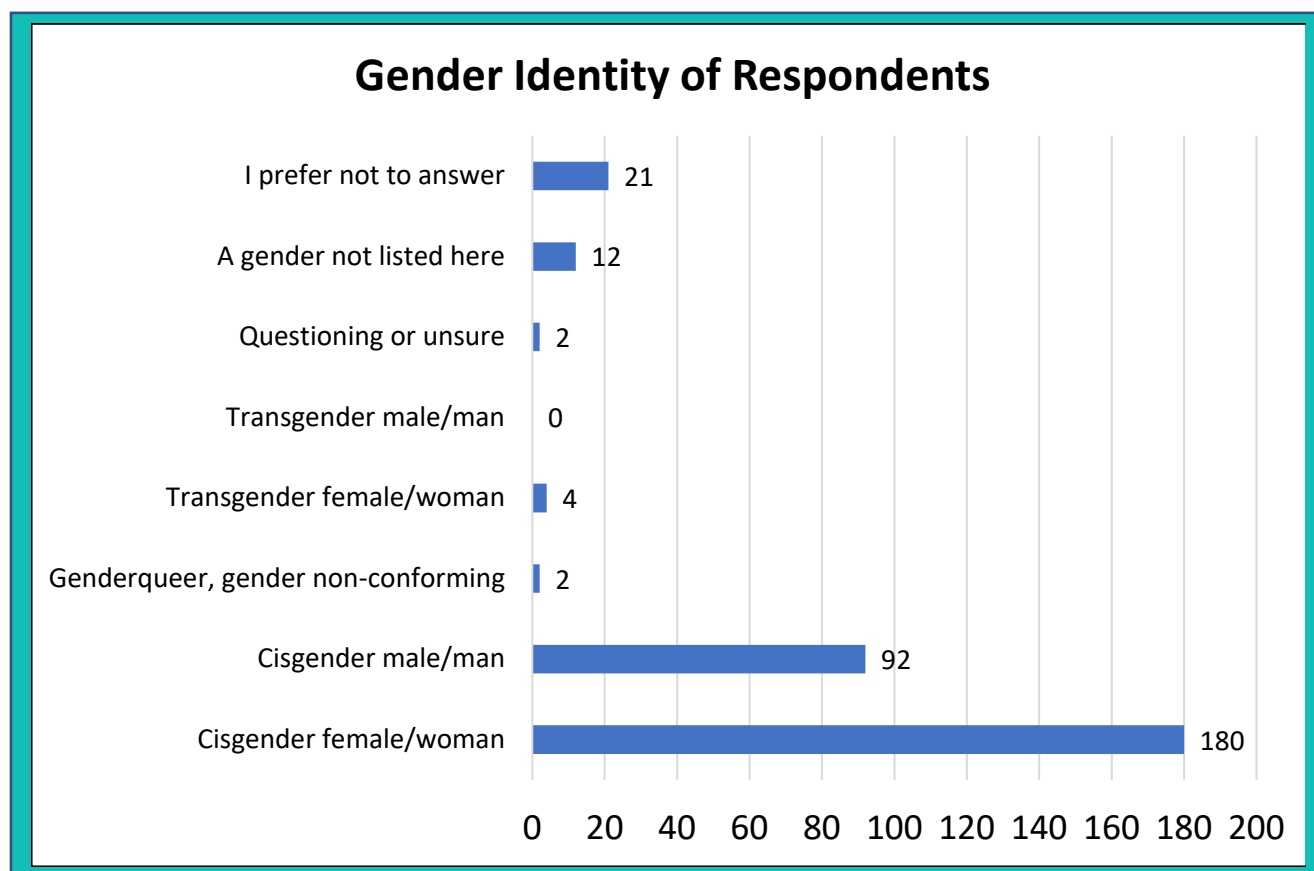
2022 Client Survey Responses Overview

We asked for 25 responses to each survey from each of the 21 local coalitions in the Balance of State. The following coalitions met or exceeded that goal:

- Fox Cities
- Kenosha
- Central
- Northeast
- Waukesha

Who did we hear from?

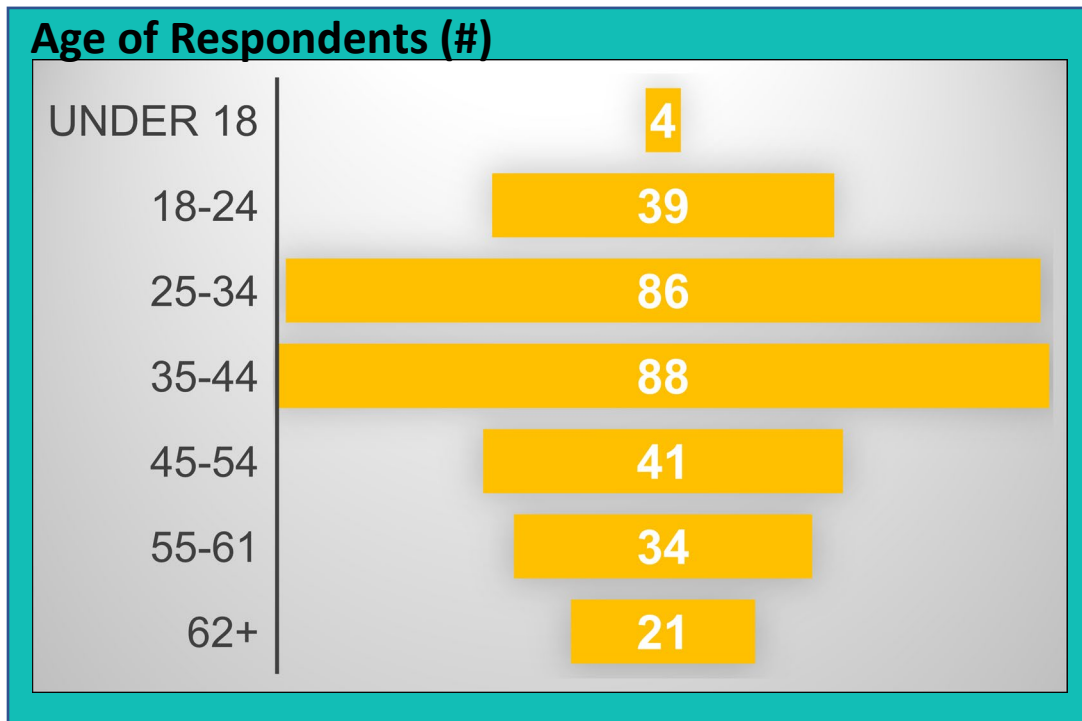
To better understand how to interpret the results of the client survey, it's important to understand the identities and circumstances of those who took the survey. Consistent with years past, we obtained nearly double the number of responses from cisgender females as compared to cisgender males. Nearly 13% of respondents had another gender identity or preferred not to answer.



57.51% cisgender female/woman

29.39% cisgender male/man

56% of respondents were between the ages of 25-44.



Most respondents identified as White (64.54%), and Non-Hispanic or Latinx (81.47%).

What is your race? (check all that apply)

American Indian or Alaska Native	7.67%
Asian	1.92%
Black or African American	20.77%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.64%
White or Caucasian	64.54%
Biracial	0%
Multiracial	0%
I prefer not to answer.	3.19%
Other (please specify)	6.39%

What is your ethnicity?

Non-Hispanic or Latinx	81.47%
Hispanic or Latinx	9.27%
I prefer not to answer	9.27%

What led up to your situation of being homeless or at risk of becoming homeless? (check all that apply)

27% - fleeing domestic violence

17% - received an eviction notice: past-due rent or fees

9% - received an eviction notice: dispute with tenants or landlord

5% - received an eviction notice: violation of the lease agreement

1% - received a foreclosure notice

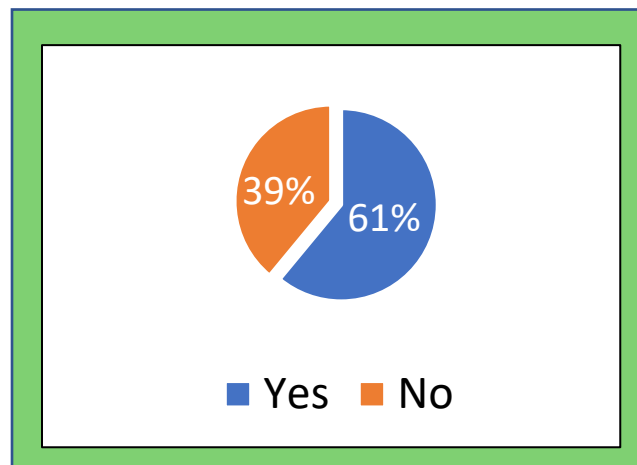
48% - none of the above

Common write in responses:

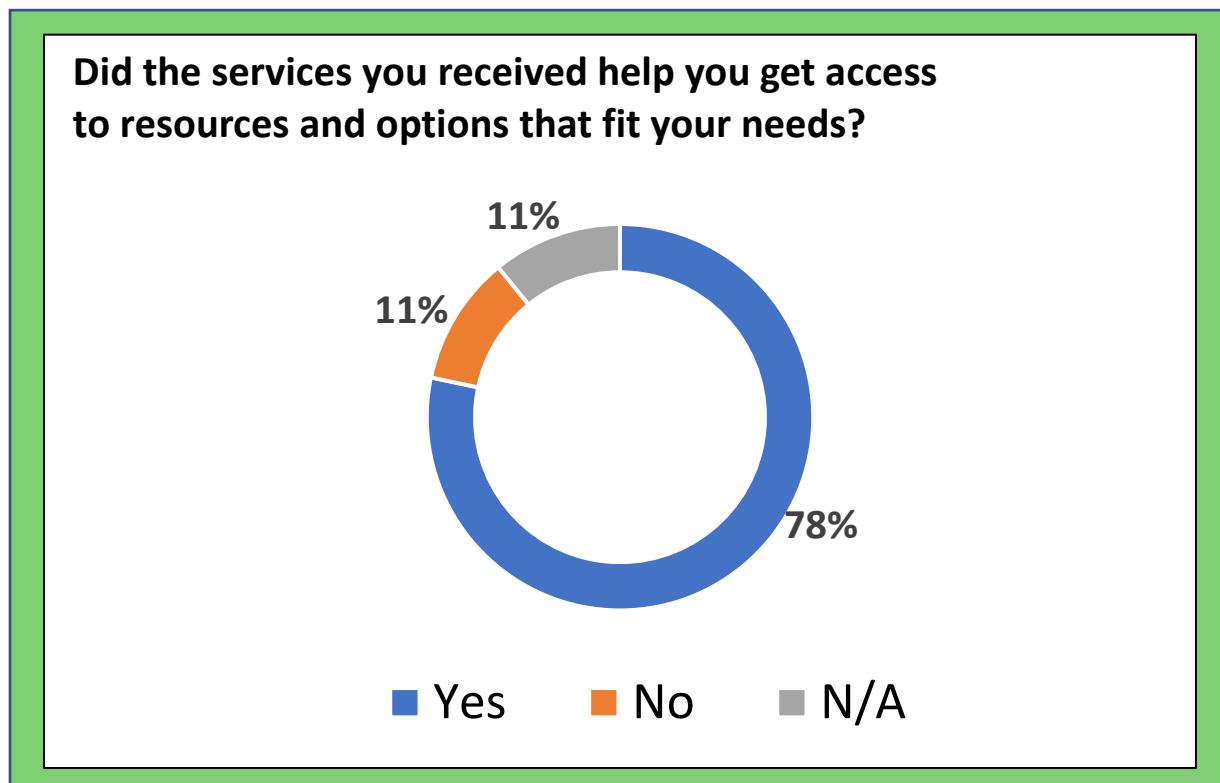
- Asked to leave (no eviction notice)
- Incarceration
- Parental/elder abuse
- Death of caretaker
- Landlord sold building/was foreclosed on
- House fire
- House deemed uninhabitable
- Medical bills
- Laid off of work

The frequency and breadth of circumstances that lead up to housing insecurity are often things beyond one's control, yet the public perception of the issue of homelessness and housing insecurity is often that it's an issue of personal failure. Economic insecurity coupled with circumstances beyond one's control can cause long-lasting ripple effects for vulnerable families in our communities.

When people reach out for help, we want our homeless service response systems to be nimble, responsive, and easily accessible. Respondents to the client survey were asked: ***Within the first 24 hours of experiencing homelessness or becoming at risk of homelessness, were you able to get connected to services and resources?***



We are, of course, interested in knowing not only if people get connected to services, but how helpful those services were for resolving the client's housing instability concern. 78% of respondents indicated that the services they received helped direct them to resources and options to meet their needs. 11% of respondents said no, and 11% did not access services.



"Hope and dignity are great motivators."

Respondents were asked: Where are you now?

I am in a safe, affordable apartment. I received assistance with the first few months rent to get me on my feet, but will be paying my own rent going forward.

I am in an income based apartment thanks to the services of SWCAP. They helped get me set up with household products, etc. They paid the security deposit & I am set up.

"Tonight is my last night in Pillars adult shelter. From here on out I'll be living in my car in the sub zero Temps. A wonderful way for a 70 yrs old woman to be treated."

"Temporarily paid apartment by a program, it's safe. I'll be homeless again by this time next year unless assistance pulls through, or I stop being sick."

"Harbor House was amazing. They assisted me in finding an apartment and helping with my 1st months rent and security deposit. The ongoing outreach support was a true life saver. I am now in my own apartment and looking forward to the future."

"Safely housed and in counseling and sober."

What other services are needed in your area?

"More LGBT resources, help for folks who are disabled but under 55 years old. Help for folks without any income/unable to work. AND please fight for Laws supporting funding for shelters that house all genders, ages and types of people, folks with disabilities! Laws making having accessible units mandatory and vouchers accepted by certain landlords so a whole town not accepting a voucher never happens.

"Not in my neighborhood" is discrimination."

"Learning how to build credit, financial assistance to help obtain driver's license to those who are in need, rehabilitation services for those struggling with addiction, sober living units."

Summary:

The perspective of clients accessing services in the Balance of State echoes the comments from the provider survey. These issues are not unique to this year, nor are they unique to the Balance of State. Data available to local coalitions can help tailor services and macro-level advocacy efforts to address the unique needs of those experiencing housing insecurity in each of the 21 local housing coalitions in the Balance of State. Providing homelessness and housing services to those experiencing housing insecurity is one facet of the work; working towards altering the conditions that allow housing insecurity to persist is another important aspect that housing providers working with clients day in and day out unfortunately often do not have capacity for.

Top 5 Things Needed to End Homelessness

The Balance of State CoC Director, Carrie Poser, discussed the “Top Five Things Needed to End Homelessness” during a recent presentation at a quarterly Balance of State meeting. Those items are in the left column in the table below, and in the right column are associated summaries from the 2022 client and provider surveys that underscore these points.

	From CoC Director	From Gaps and Needs Committee Survey Summary
Strong Coalition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse perspectives including people with lived experience • Focused on ending homelessness, not managing it • Willing to be creative and focused on needs of the population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination of services across coalitions, better understanding of one another’s services, smoother referral process • More effective when diverse providers are involved in the solutions i.e. police liaison, school district staff, non-secular organizations, people with lived experience • Faster access to services (housing and non-housing) • Address other related costs that reduce homelessness – transportation/vehicle assistance, household/personal bills assistance, public transport, childcare.
Strong Homeless Crisis Response System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that the system includes: prevention, diversion, outreach, intake & assessment, emergency services, housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination of services across coalitions, better understanding of one another’s services and roles, smoother referral process

	<p>solutions, and case management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How much of each service is needed, what performance is expected, what outcomes are reached, what can be improved? • Enhance coordinated entry system to ensure all people experiencing homelessness have access to prioritization list referral 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shelter programs – diverse, accessible, larger, longer stays • Housing – affordable, diverse types and for specific populations, short term, subsidized, permanent • Police (and others) trained to be better prepared to deal with the homeless population and knowledge of resources. • More translators, more LGBTQ resources, more case managers trained in mental health, more access to rehab services. • More disability social workers (help filling out forms for disability).
<p>Commitment to Ending Homelessness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case conferencing, problem solving, and seeking permanent housing solutions for everyone identified as homeless • Enhanced case management with team approach across sectors (including mental health and addiction services & supports), using housing first philosophy, being 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working on the bigger picture - More people on the ground making progress with coalitions, policy and landlords. • Political involvement that will change housing costs and increase people's income. • Advocate for loosening up the federal restrictions and requirements. • Address other related costs that reduce homelessness –

	<p>client centered and trauma informed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on reducing inflow into the system and increasing outflow with positive client outcomes 	<p>transportation/vehicle assistance, household/personal bills assistance, public transport, childcare</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More disability social workers (help filling out forms for disability)
Affordable Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must have places for people to live • Units must be affordable (below 60% County Median Income, focus on 0-30% County Median Income) • Units must be accessible and meet basic housing quality standards (safe and sanitary) • Units must be rent reasonable and within fair market rent for the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for increasing FMR • Affordable, diverse types and for specific populations, short term, subsidized, permanent • Political involvement that will change housing costs and increase people's income. • Advocate for loosening up the federal restrictions and requirements.
Landlords of Existing Properties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willing to work with people who are seeking to end their homelessness • Issues with credit or no credit • Negative rental history or no rental history • Criminal background • Willing to accept housing vouchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looking over one eviction, instituting a second chance program, education around what it means to work with service providers • Educating communities to address stigma related to housing sex offenders, providing education that all sex offenses aren't the same

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willing to make necessary repairs to bring units into compliance with basic housing quality standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing mediation assistance?
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"We get constant calls that people have nowhere to go, and there is absolutely no resources in the area that we can give them, because we ARE the resource, and we can't help."

"Raise the FMR so that we have access to more units, partner with local furniture stores to help furnish units, create a partnership with a local laundromat to provide free laundry days to participants, providing bus passes, creating and managing support groups with regularity to assist participants socially."

"Instead of funneling so much of the tax dollars to the police, there needs to be more dedicated tax money for community social workers, services, (librarians), and things that help build up the city, rather than protecting against what we assume is bad or wrong."



Three Key Questions

As your coalition considers the gaps and needs in your area through feedback from our annual surveys and prioritization list data available from HMIS, we encourage you to take stock of your available housing programs and funding to ask yourselves:

1. Do you have the “right projects” in your coalition?
2. Do you have the “right funding” for those projects?
3. Do you have the “right amount” of permanent housing options available for those in need?

Right Projects: What does your current need tell you about what resources or tools need to be changed?

- Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) level – ongoing, longer-term assistance to address mental health and AODA
- Rapid Re-housing with Intensive Case Management (RRH ICM) – more intense, flexible case management, follow up
- Rapid Re-housing (RRH) – light touch case management

Right Funding: CoC & ESG (government funding) are just a few tools in the toolbox. It cannot end homelessness by itself.

- There are specific things these funding sources cannot pay for (i.e. access to internet, gas cards).
- There are specific priorities for government funding, where foundation funding can be flexible or target the areas that remain unmet.

Right Amount: Permanent housing options includes creative housing solutions that meet individual needs.

- Requires active recruitment, education, and support for landlords
- Requires advocacy and commitment for more housing units available to those with imperfect records and low/no income
- Requires adding vouchers when possible, targeting subpopulation needs (youth, domestic violence survivors, veterans, etc.), and creating flow between Section 8 and those exiting PSH programs (i.e. moving on or up)

Gaps and Needs Committee Recommendations and Conclusions

How might we incorporate this feedback into the work of the BOSCOC committees, and as individual agencies serving those experiencing homelessness?

Our committee spent time looking at cumulative results of the 2022 surveys and discussing themes in the data, and based on the data, brainstormed some potential strategies to incorporate on the local and statewide level:

- Look at other places in WI/nationwide for innovative solutions – BOSCOC isn't unique in experiencing these challenges. Ex., tiny homes in Oshkosh, Madison; purchasing a school to renovate for transitional housing in Rock County. We should not feel limited in thinking creatively about addressing root causes of homelessness and housing insecurity. Look to people with lived experience for guidance.
- Confronting big banks and private entities that have decision-making power about the use of abandoned buildings, grassroots organizing. Check out Oakland movement [moms4housing](#) – group of moms started this movement through protesting because they were homeless and there were so many abandoned buildings in the city.
- Engaging the faith community as a whole – engaging with interfaith working groups on the state level.
- Training offered through the BOSCOC could be focused on civic engagement, educating elected officials about issues affecting their constituents.
- Connecting to the Interagency Council on Homelessness and feeling linked to the bigger picture is needed for people on the ground doing the work.
- Creating a flexible pot of money for “homeless needs” at agencies, i.e., the things that grant funds can't cover, but that are needed by people experiencing homelessness.
- Look into landlord recruitment events, that have been successful in Atlanta, Chicago, Detroit, Honolulu, Seattle, to draw attention specifically to the issue of veteran homelessness. Landlords that are already working with homeless providers help recruit landlords who are interested but hesitant.

What information aren't we getting that would be helpful to collect moving forward?

- First, there's a need to shift more questions to have dropdown options instead of open-ended responses, which will make it easier to group and analyze responses. For example, language spoken at home; and the question on the client survey inquiring about where they are now.
- Asking about veteran status, and incorporating any veteran-specific questions?

We welcome your input on what would be useful for your coalition!

What's next?

Coalition leads and board members will receive 2022 client and provider survey data from our committee with their local coalition's survey results. We encourage you to discuss at your local coalition meetings and come up with goals based on themes in the feedback.

- What do you notice from your local data?
- **How do we work together to improve outcomes for those we serve?**