



Wisconsin Balance of State Newsletter - Second September 2024 Edition

The second edition of the Wisconsin Balance of State newsletter for the month will delve deeper into strategies for addressing criminalization of homelessness efforts in the region.

Something we hear all the time from community members: "I don't like seeing people living outside"

The response: I hear you, none of us want people to have to live outside. Part of this work is advocating for long-term solutions, so people have access to housing their whole lives.

- Criminalizing homelessness is often a short-term solution that does not result in a person getting off the street long-term
- It is cheaper for us as a system to house people first instead of using our public safety resources and law enforcement again and again
- We as a homeless service system can't solve every problem. We know that housing is what solves a homelessness crisis. Boosting housing resources and availability will help us make sure no one ever has to sleep outside.

Be on the lookout for the WIBOS anti-criminalization toolkit for more tools on having these conversations in your community.

Anti-Criminalization of Homelessness Practice Highlight: Human Centered Crisis Response

Criminalization of homelessness policies are often a mismatch of response. We know some situations are best fit for law enforcement, but not all. At times we look to criminalization-style policies because this is the resource we know, there are already law enforcement systems in place, and we believe this response will bring safety. WIBOS and reputable sources argue that there are other ways to respond to calls from your community that respect dignity and safety more.

Street Outreach

Effective street outreach is:

- Housing-Focused
- Coordinated
- Ongoing

Street outreach provides an alternative to calling law enforcement. This reduces potential traumatization from continuous contact with police. It also allows for the outreach worker to have a trusting relationship with the person experiencing homelessness, as they can work on that person's goals together. This also frees up law enforcement time and resources for other efforts.

Questions to ask in your community:

- Do we have street outreach that is meeting the needs of our community?
- What connections are people with lived experience asking for?
- How do we increase housing supply to have places for street outreach workers to connect people to?
- Are we doing regular outreach for the whole community and not just responding to crises around encampments?
- Is street outreach coordinating with other parts of the homeless service delivery system?

Addressing Basic Needs and Providing Healthcare

Housing is healthcare. In addition to providing connections to housing as an intervention to address long-term healthcare needs, communities should provide immediate resources for acute issues.

The United States Inter-Agency Council on Homelessness provides the below potential action steps:

- Ensure access to healthy food and preparation materials.
- Deploy outreach, street medicine, mobile medical, and veterinary teams to encampments.
- Ensure basic hygiene is accessible to people living in encampments.
- Provide public sanitation services to encampments (e.g., garbage collection, facility maintenance, and regular cleaning).
- Ensure access to opioid-reversal medication to respond to drug overdoses and needle disposal to prevent the spread of infectious diseases.

Provide Storage

The solution to a housing crisis is housing, and there are temporary strategies to employ in the meantime. Many people experiencing unsheltered homelessness report that sweeps of homeless encampments cause them to lose the possessions they do have. These could include necessary medications, vital documents, and sentimental items. A potential strategy to offer peace of mind to people experiencing homelessness is to offer storage lockers or help pay for storage for items.

Some details to consider with this option:

- Provide storage for personal belongings for an amount of time that aligns with how long it typically takes to get placed into permanent housing—and locate storage facilities in places that are accessible to people.
- Label and photograph all belongings.
- Maintain records of the owner's name, contact information, and outreach worker/case manager.
- Ensure encampment residents are aware of the location, hours, and requirements for accessing their belongings in a storage facility

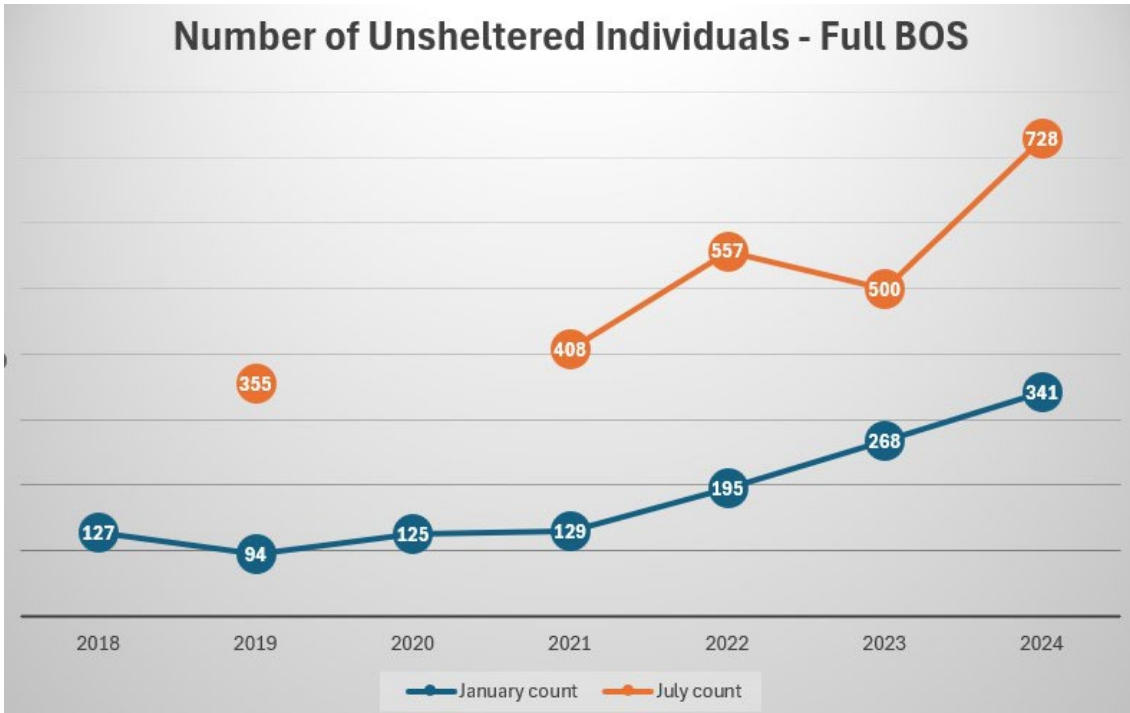
[For an in-depth guide on encampment resolution, click here!](#)



Looking for a lunch recommendation for Kenosha? Try [Tacos El Norte!](#)

Point In Time Highlight

Thank you to all who participated in the winter and summer annual counts of people experiencing homelessness!



Wisconsin Balance of State July PIT Count by Coalition

Coalition	Total Number Unsheltered HH	Total Number of Unsheltered People
Brown	102	154
Central	13	14
Coulee	40	41
Dairyland	72	104
East Central	4	4
Fox Cities	113	148
Jefferson	11	14
Kenosha	16	18
Lakeshore	61	63
North Central	12	12
Northeast	15	15
NWISH	1	1
Northwest	23	25
Ozaukee	1	1
Rock Walworth	24	25
Rural North	4	4
Southwest	9	9
Washington	0	0
Waukesha	35	37
West Central	1	1
Winnebagoland	28	38



Mark your calendars for the [Wisconsin Balance of State second annual conference](#)

The 2025 theme words are: **INNOVATE** | **ADVOCATE** | **COLLABORATE**

February 18-19, 2025 - Tundra Lodge Green Bay, WI

It's time to support people in registering to vote!

Remember that efforts must be focused on voter registration and/or education efforts, and they must not endorse any specific candidate or party.

To assist people in finding out what is on the ballot in their community and checking to see if someone is already registered, visit [here](#) or [here](#) for the Spanish version.

Thank you to Sarah Isaak for highlighting this information. For the full guide from NAEH on voter registration, visit the link [here](#).

Do you have content or announcements you would like highlighted in our newsletter? Reach out to erika.olson@wibos.org

