

Keeping Residents Housed: **Municipality Toolkit**

*Coordinating Municipal Response for Residents
Experiencing a Housing Crisis*



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Purpose of This Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to empower towns in addressing the housing needs of their residents by providing actionable strategies, resources, and guidance for housing stabilization and homelessness prevention. This toolkit is not only a resource but a call to action, encouraging municipalities to take proactive steps to stabilize their residents.

Coordinating across municipal departments offers significant benefits for both residents and local governments — especially when addressing housing crises. Below are the key advantages.

1. Faster, More Effective Help for Residents

- Ensures warm handoffs rather than bouncing residents between agencies
- Helps residents avoid deeper crisis (e.g., eviction → shelter → ER visits)
- Reduces delays in getting people the services they need (housing, health, income, etc.)
- Reduces call volume and wait times by connecting people with the right resources at the right time

2. Prevents Housing Loss and Homelessness

- Early detection through data from multiple departments (e.g., utility shutoffs, police calls, school absences)
- Proactive intervention by aligning housing, social services, and health teams
- Wraparound support keeps people stably housed

3. Saves Public Money

- Reduces expensive emergency responses (e.g., EMS, shelters, police)
- Avoids duplication of services and streamlines resource use
- Improves return on investment in housing and public health programs

4. Strengthens Trust with Residents

- Builds confidence in public institutions as being coordinated, caring, and responsive
- Improves satisfaction by reducing “the runaround” or re-explaining situations repeatedly
- Supports equity by ensuring marginalized residents don't fall through the cracks

5. Enables Better Planning and Policy

- Shared data improves understanding of housing needs and systemic gaps
- Helps target resources to high-risk zip codes or populations
- Enables evidence-based funding decisions and grant competitiveness

6. Improves Emergency and Crisis Response

- Cross-trained staff can respond jointly in real time (e.g., fire + housing + behavioral health)
- Clear communication channels ensure no one is missed in urgent situations
- Allows for coordinated efforts during extreme weather, fires, or mass evictions

7. Supports Systemic Change

- Coordination makes it easier to redesign and improve processes
- Builds a culture of collaboration that can extend beyond housing (e.g., youth, seniors, reentry)
- Enables a culture of continuous learning and improvement
- Allows other institutions to focus on their missions (e.g., teachers can teach stable families, businesses have a stable workforce, community members can participate in civic life)
- Aligns municipal work with broader community goals (e.g., equity, safety, thriving neighborhoods)

**PREVENTION/AT-RISK
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A.

Overview of the Housing Shortage

A. Overview of the Housing Shortage

The United States is facing a severe housing shortage marked by a shortage of affordable housing, rising rents, and increasing rates of homelessness. Post-pandemic surges in housing costs have laid bare the housing affordability shortage facing Americans. According to a report from the Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies, both homeowners and renters are struggling with high housing costs. On the for-sale side, millions of potential homebuyers have been priced out of the market by elevated home prices and interest rates. Homeowner cost burdens are also on the rise, driven by growing taxes and insurance costs. For renters, the number of those with cost burdens has reached an all-time high as rents have escalated. About 49.7% of renter households in 2023 spent more than 30% of their income on housing and related costs – a record-high share of renters facing housing cost burdens.¹ And economists agree — high housing costs are driven by a lack of affordable housing supply.²

According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, there is a shortage of affordable and available housing to extremely low-income households (ELI), whose incomes are at or below the poverty guideline or 30% of their area median income (AMI). Many of these households are severely cost-burdened, spending more than half of their income on housing. Severely cost-burdened poor households are more likely than other renters to sacrifice other necessities like healthy food and healthcare to pay the rent, and to experience unstable housing situations like evictions. Connecticut has a shortage of 94,446 rental homes.³

Without early intervention, people fall into homelessness, which is harder and costlier to resolve. In Connecticut, this reality is compounded by a severe housing shortage. The state has been identified as one of the most constrained housing markets in the nation, with a vacancy rate of just 3.5%, which is significantly lower than the national average of 6.6%. At the same time, the number of homes available for sale has collapsed by 78% compared to 2019, leaving families and individuals competing for far fewer options.⁴

¹ U.S. Census Bureau (2024). American Housing Survey. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/ahs.html>

² U.S. Department of the Treasury (2024). Addressing America's Housing Supply Shortage. Retrieved from <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases>

³ National Low Income Housing Coalition (2024). The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes. Retrieved from <https://nlihc.org/gap>

⁴ Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (2024). The Intersect: An Unbalanced Housing Market. Retrieved from <https://www.chfa.org/the-intersect/an-unbalanced-housing-market/>

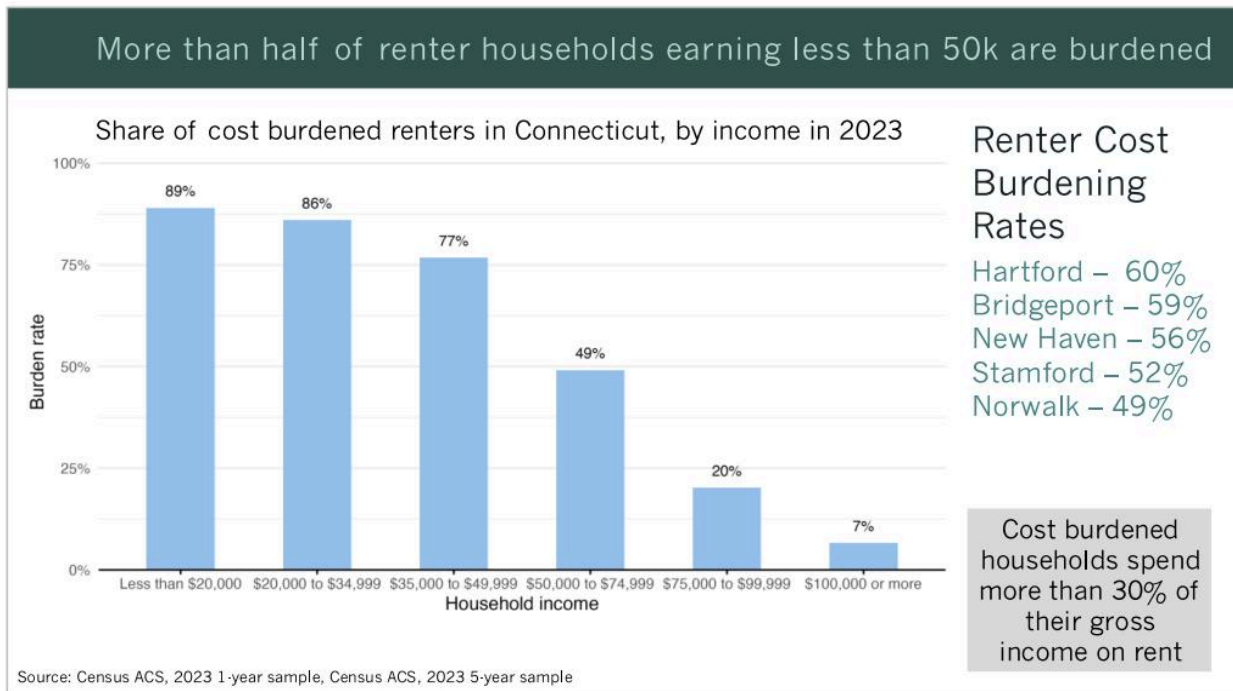


Figure 1. Connecticut's estimated housing shortage (CT Mirror, 2025)

Analysts estimate that Connecticut is short between 100,000 and 150,000 housing units, with some reports suggesting the gap is as high as 379,000 units.⁵ This shortage impacts nearly every income group, but it disproportionately affects the state's lowest-income renters.

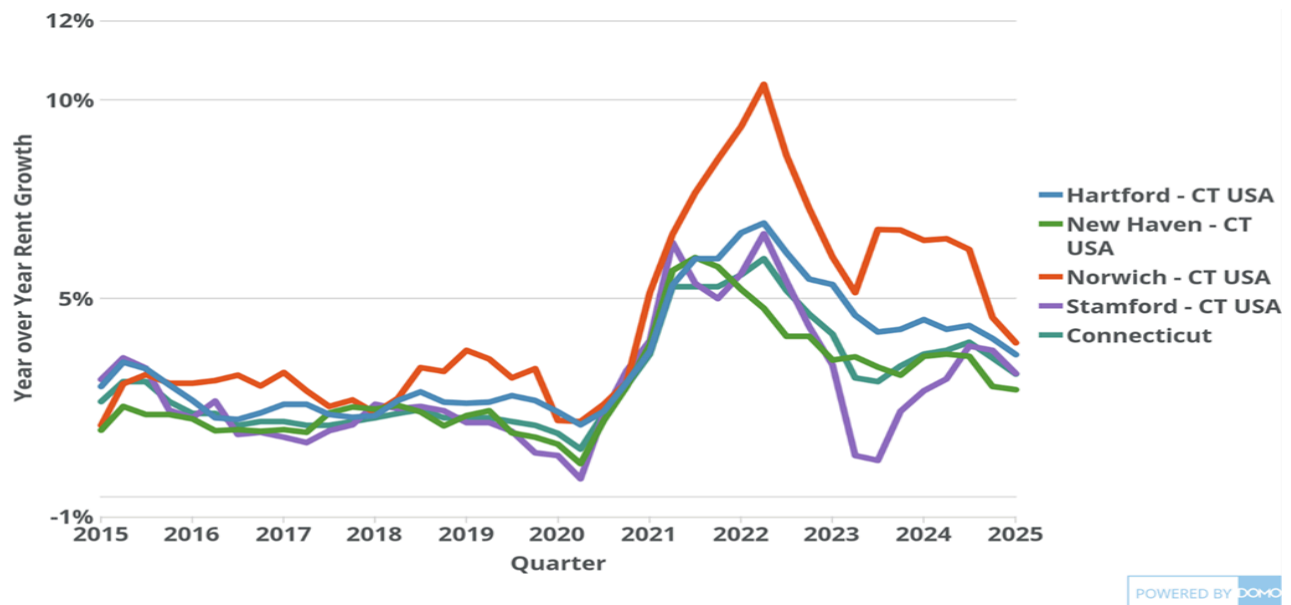


Figure 2. Connecticut rental vacancy rate trends.⁶

⁵ The Connecticut Mirror (2024). Connecticut's Housing Shortage May Be Worse Than We Think. Retrieved from <https://ctmirror.org/>

⁶ Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (2024). The Intersect: An Unbalanced Housing Market. Retrieved from <https://www.chfa.org/the-intersect/an-unbalanced-housing-market>

For extremely low-income households, there are only 22 affordable and available rental homes for every 100 households in need, leaving a deficit of nearly 94,000 units.⁷ Households earning up to 60% of the Area Median Income (AMI) also face steep challenges, with fewer than 53 affordable units per 100 renter households available.⁸

Rental market data further illustrates the housing shortage.. Although vacancy rates have inched up slightly since the pandemic, Connecticut still has one of the tightest rental markets in the country. This keeps rents high and prevents low-income families from accessing stable housing.

The consequences of this imbalance are significant. Homelessness in Connecticut rose by 13% between January 2023 and January 2024, with 3,410 people experiencing homelessness on a single night — nearly 700 of them children and almost 800 adults age 55 or older.⁹ Calls to 211 Connecticut for shelter-related needs surpassed 62,000 in 2024, representing 71% of all housing-related requests.¹⁰

These data and visuals make it clear that the shortage of affordable housing is not only a barrier to economic stability but also a driver of homelessness. Addressing this shortage through the production of affordable units, the preservation of existing housing, and early intervention is essential to preventing homelessness and avoiding the higher costs associated with crisis response.

⁷ National Low Income Housing Coalition (2024). *The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes*. Retrieved from <https://nlihc.org/gap>

⁸ Builders Patch (2024). *Affordable Housing Crisis Deepens Across the U.S.* Retrieved from <https://www.builderspatch.com/blog/affordable-housing-crisis-deepens-across-the-us/>

⁹ The Connecticut Mirror (2024). *Homelessness in Connecticut Increases by 13% as Rents Remain High*. Retrieved from <https://ctmirror.org/>

¹⁰ DataHaven (2024). *211 Connecticut Housing and Homelessness Requests Dashboard*. Retrieved from <https://www.ctdatahaven.org/>

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B.

Role of Municipalities in Stabilizing Residents in Your Community

*Coordinating Municipal Response to Residents in
Crisis*

B. Role of Municipalities

In Stabilizing Residents in Your Community

Municipalities have a unique and powerful role in preventing housing instability and supporting people at risk of homelessness. Because cities and towns are the closest level of government to residents, they can act with agility, tailor solutions to local needs, and deploy a mix of tools from regulatory levers like zoning and land use, to funding, service delivery, and partnerships to stabilize housing before crises escalate. Local governments influence rent rules, manage eviction diversion, provide emergency rental or utility assistance, coordinate legal aid, and maintain data systems that identify individuals at risk of housing loss. And crucially, they serve as conveners bringing together housing providers, nonprofits, state agencies, health/employment services, and community stakeholders to align efforts.

Key municipal-level strategies often include short-term financial assistance, eviction prevention programs (including right-to-counsel or mediation), use of public land or zoning incentives to produce affordable and supportive housing, investment in housing navigation and case management, and improving data systems for early intervention.

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

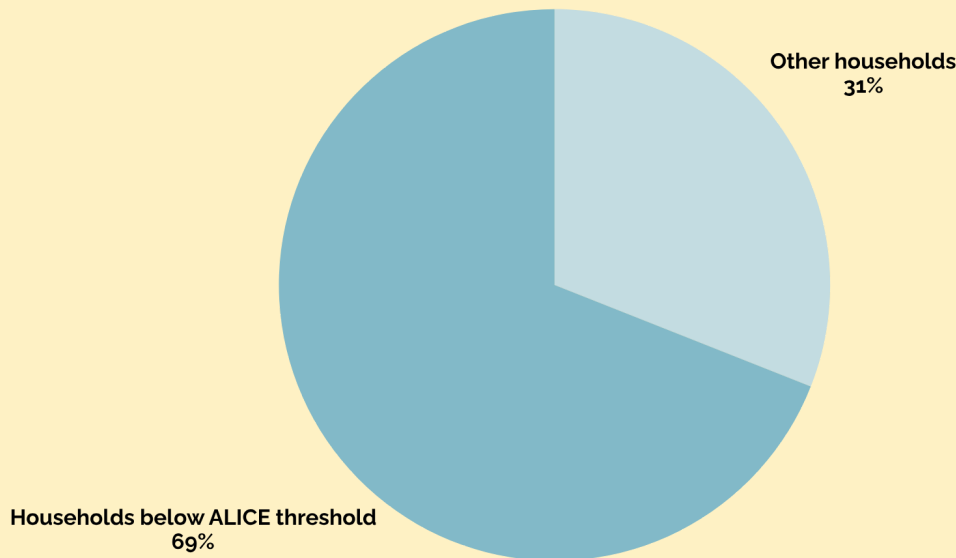
Keeping Residents Housed: United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut and the Rapid Response Fund

In the last year, United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut launched a Rapid Response Fund that assisted 353 individuals (representing 137 households) across 30 cities and towns in their region (United Way Inc., 2024). One of these cases is highlighted as a success story on page six of its 2024 Annual Report, and is also available as a video: *Meet Cassandra* ([Success story](#))

Municipalities that wish to participate complete a **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)**, which outlines the program and shared responsibilities. United Way typically works through the municipality's Social Services office. In some cases, referrals come through Youth Services, Senior Services, or the department that responds when residents contact town hall for urgent financial assistance. Once the MOU is finalized, participating agencies can refer eligible individuals for one-time financial assistance provided as a digital MasterCard. Importantly, this model ensures direct financial assistance to the individual, rather than channeling funds through the agency.

The significance of this program is underscored by findings from the **ALICE (Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained, Employed) Report**. ALICE data reveal that even households with earnings above the Federal Poverty Level often struggle to afford basic necessities. Nationally, nearly 69% of households below the ALICE threshold were rent-burdened in 2022 — spending more than 30% of their income on rent.¹¹

Rent Burden Among Households Below ALICE Threshold



Source: United for ALICE 2024

Figure 1. Rent burden among households below the ALICE threshold (2022).

This chart illustrates that a large majority of ALICE households are paying an unsustainable share of their income toward housing. This data provides critical context for understanding the importance of the Rapid Response Fund. When so many households live on the financial edge, even a single unexpected expense, such as a medical bill, car repair, or short-term loss of income, can push them into crisis and risk of eviction.

By providing direct, flexible financial aid, the Rapid Response Fund addresses these emergencies quickly, preventing housing loss and stabilizing households. Combined with strong municipal partnerships and clear program accountability, United Way's approach demonstrates how targeted, short-term assistance can create long-term

¹¹ United For ALICE (2024). Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) Report. Retrieved from <https://www.unitedforalice.org/national-reports>

community stability. This impact underscores United Way's broader role in supporting ALICE families and advancing housing security across the region.

The municipal role as convener, funder, regulator, and program designer is not just helpful; it can determine whether a community remains stable or falls into cycles of displacement and crisis.¹² In Connecticut, municipalities play a critical role in prevention efforts. They are often the first to recognize signs of local housing instability and, when equipped with tools like the Rapid Response Fund, can act quickly to stabilize residents before crises deepen. By leveraging local data, aligning with regional partners, and investing in targeted housing stability programs, municipalities can both strengthen collaboration with organizations like United Way and build pathways that prevent homelessness. This proactive approach ensures timely support for residents in crisis, while also creating the foundation for more specialized responses to the needs of vulnerable and high-risk populations.

¹² Planetizen, "What Is Displacement?," accessed October 9, 2025, <https://www.planetizen.com>

1. COORDINATING MUNICIPAL RESPONSE TO RESIDENTS IN CRISIS

Establish a Cross-Departmental Crisis Response

1. **Include key partners such as housing authorities, libraries, EMS/police, senior centers, youth/family services, and McKinney Vento Liaisons**
 - Form a cross-sector task force to coordinate responses to community housing needs. For example, this team can collaborate to develop integrated strategies for preventing homelessness, responding to behavioral health crises, and supporting at-risk youth.
 - Regular meetings and shared goals help foster teamwork to improve communication and create more effective, holistic service delivery.

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Hennepin County Suburban Cities, Minnesota — “Embedded Prevention” Teams

Context:

Suburban towns near Minneapolis with no homeless shelters.

What They Did:

Each municipality created a cross-departmental crisis protocol linking:

- City social services
- Police
- Schools (as safe access points)
- Referrals to the regional CES 'Coordinated Entry System' for regional term housing if needed

Impact:

- Stabilized thousands before displacement into the city.
- Schools and libraries as frontline identifiers is critical for smaller communities.

2. **Hold regular case conferencing meetings**
 - Schedule regular case conferencing meetings where staff from various departments, such as housing, mental health, EMS, and police, come together to discuss high-needs or at-risk individuals and families.

- For example, if multiple agencies identify a household at risk of eviction, they can coordinate efforts, share updates, and develop a unified prevention plan to keep the family stably housed.
- Utilize these meetings to ensure follow-through on referrals, minimize service duplication, and enhance outcomes through collaborative problem-solving.

3. Designate a crisis coordinator to lead communication

- Appoint a crisis coordinator to serve as the central point of contact for managing communication and coordination during individual or community housing crises.
- For example, during a severe weather emergency or a mental health-related community incident, the crisis coordinator ensures all departments—such as EMS, housing, and public safety—are sharing timely updates and working from the same response plan.
- This role helps streamline communication, prevent missteps, and ensure a more efficient, unified response across all involved agencies.

Connecting to Community Resources

In order for a community to thrive, it must be supported by a municipality that is equipped to meet the needs of all its residents, especially those who are at risk of housing instability. Effective homelessness prevention starts with clarity on a community's unique challenges and can support its residents. This section outlines actionable strategies and resources that can be utilized to identify and respond to needs, ensuring targeted and impactful support.

1. Community Assessment

A community assessment is a foundational homelessness prevention strategy. The purpose of this strategy is to gather a clear understanding of the current trends and needs. The assessment allows us to pinpoint who is most vulnerable,

Community Assessment strategies:

- Identifying At-Risk Populations - An analysis that supports identifying current vulnerable populations such as seniors, veterans, or youth.
- Resource mapping - (See below)
- Leverage available data - Examine housing instability patterns such as eviction rates, unemployment rates, and an increase in mental health crises

2. Community Assessment Strategy - (Resource Mapping)

Resource mapping is the process of identifying, organizing, and visualizing the assets, services, and supports within a community. By identifying current, local services such as rental assistance programs, shelters, legal aid, and mental health supports, it makes way to highlight strengths and gaps within the municipalities. Below is an example of agencies and supports in your community that can be identified.

Create a local Resource Map: Start by identifying who/what is in your community

- Town-based rental assistance programs
- Human services/social services department
- Nonprofits (food pantries, legal aid, eviction mediation, or nonprofits that provide rental assistance)
- Faith-based organizations
- Libraries and schools
- State or federal dollars
- Once you have mapped out potential local resources, start to engage those organizations to understand what assistance or support they have available

Here is a [**Resource Mapping Template**](#) designed for municipalities to assess their staffing, services, and funding capacity in support of residents experiencing or at risk of housing instability.

Using Local Data

1. **Municipalities can prevent housing loss most effectively when they combine smart use of data with proactive community outreach.** Data helps identify households already showing signs of risk, while outreach ensures that support reaches residents who may not appear in formal systems. Together, these strategies allow towns to intervene early, build trust, and connect residents with the right resources before a crisis escalates. Several sources provide early warning signs of housing instability.
 - **School McKinney-Vento liaisons** often notice when a student's family is struggling to stay housed.
 - **Police and fire departments** may flag high-need addresses where repeat crises point to underlying instability.
 - **Landlords and housing courts** can provide insight into households facing eviction or ongoing disputes. By integrating these data streams, municipalities can identify risk earlier and target prevention resources more effectively.
 - **Sharing Data Through a Common Dashboard**
To maximize impact, municipalities should not only collect but also share data across departments and partners.
 - **Secure agreements:** Draft **Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs)** with guidance from legal and IT teams to ensure data-sharing is secure, compliant, and protects resident privacy. For example, an MOU between the health department and local nonprofits can allow timely sharing of housing instability indicators while safeguarding confidentiality.
 - **Shared case management systems:** Use cloud-based platforms to track referrals, client contacts, and outcomes in real time. This ensures that when one department makes a referral, all partners can see progress updates and avoid duplication.

- **Monitoring high-risk indicators:** Partner with courts, utility companies, and emergency responders to receive regular reports on eviction filings, behavioral health crisis calls, and other red flags. This allows towns to connect households to services such as rental assistance or mental health support before displacement occurs.

2. Reaching Residents Beyond the Data

Not all at-risk households will appear in data systems. Many residents quietly struggle at home without contacting public agencies until it is too late. Municipalities can bridge this gap by ensuring information is visible and accessible in everyday community spaces.

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR OUTREACH

- **Local platforms:** Share updates on town websites and local Facebook pages.
Example: Posting reminders about rental assistance deadlines on a community board page.
- **High-traffic locations:** Place flyers in grocery stores, libraries, and corner shops.
Example: A flyer on eviction prevention resources was displayed at the local supermarket bulletin board.
- **Community events:** Set up information tables at fairs, farmers' markets, and town gatherings.
- **Trusted spaces:** Share messages through faith groups, barbershops, food pantries, and senior centers.
Example: Including housing stabilization resources in a church bulletin.

By combining **data-driven identification, cross-departmental information sharing, and proactive outreach**, municipalities can ensure that both visible and hidden at-risk residents are connected to timely, effective support.

Create Simple Referral Pathways

1. Train front-line staff to recognize crisis indicators

- Conduct regular training sessions for front-line staff — such as police officers, librarians, and community center workers — on how to identify signs of housing instability.
- Utilize role-playing scenarios and expert-led workshops to develop confidence in recognizing warning signs and responding effectively.
- Equip staff with clear protocols and resources to connect individuals in crisis with immediate support services or crisis intervention teams.

DIGITAL TOOLS

Unite Us (Nationwide)

What It Is:

A coordinated care network platform that connects health and social service providers through a shared referral system.

How It Works:

- Municipalities and local agencies use United Us to refer residents to housing assistance, food programs, legal aid, and healthcare.
- Real-time tracking of referrals ensures accountability and follow-up

Example Communities:

- North Carolina: Built a statewide NC Care 360 platform powered by Unite Us for health and social service referrals
- New York City: Uses Unite NYC to connect residents to services beyond healthcare, including housing stabilization.

2. Use referral forms or digital tools for streamlined support

- Implement standardized referral forms or user-friendly digital platforms that allow front-line staff to quickly input client information and send referrals directly to partner agencies.
- For example, a social worker at a police department can utilize a tablet-based tool to quickly connect someone experiencing housing instability with local prevention resources, ensuring timely and accurate sharing of information.
- Track referrals through the system to monitor follow-up and outcomes, improving coordination and accountability across service providers.

3. Identify liaisons in each department for follow-up

- Designate a staff member in each municipal department, such as housing, public health, and public safety, as a liaison responsible for tracking and following up on community referrals and service requests.
- For example, the liaison in the housing department ensures that residents referred for rental assistance receive timely support and updates the referring staff on progress.
- Hold regular interdepartmental meetings to review follow-up status, address challenges, and strengthen coordination across departments.

Embed Social Services in Public Settings

1. Place social workers in libraries, schools, and police departments

- Partner with local agencies to embed licensed social workers in libraries, schools, and police departments to provide on-site support for mental health, housing instability, and crisis intervention.
- For example, Station a social worker at a public library to assist individuals and families with connections to supportive resources and address challenges such as trauma or behavioral concerns before they escalate.
- Integrate social workers into multidisciplinary teams to improve coordinated response and reduce reliance on emergency services for non-criminal issues.

Align Funding to Support Crisis Response

1. Pool flexible funds from ARPA, ESG, CDBG, or general funds

- Combine flexible funding sources — such as ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act), ESG (Emergency Solutions Grant), CDBG (Community Development Block Grant), churches, and local general funds — to support comprehensive initiatives like a community resource center or mobile crisis response team.
- Use pooled funds to fill gaps not covered by restricted grants, such as staffing or supportive services.
- Establish clear guidelines and oversight to ensure funds are used strategically and align with community-identified priorities.

2. Apply for federal/state grants collaboratively

- Partner with local organizations, school districts, or neighboring municipalities to submit joint applications for federal or state grants that address shared goals
- Designate a lead agency to coordinate the application process, compile required data, and manage reporting requirements.
- Highlight collaborative strengths — such as shared resources, cross-sector expertise, or regional impact — to strengthen the proposal and improve competitiveness.

3. Track funding impact by goal (e.g., housing, mental health, youth)

- Create a tracking spreadsheet or dashboard that organizes each funded project by goal area (e.g., housing, mental health, youth programs).
- For each category, record the amount of funding allocated, services provided, number of people served, and measurable outcomes (e.g., reduced eviction rates, improved mental health access, increased youth participation).
- Update the data quarterly to evaluate progress, guide future funding decisions, and communicate impact to the public and stakeholders.

Communicate Clearly with the Public

1. Develop a crisis support portal and multilingual materials

- Use clear, simple language so that all residents can easily understand the message, no matter their background or level of education.

2. Use community ambassadors for outreach and education

- Recruit and train trusted community members — such as faith leaders, barbers, teachers, or youth mentors — to serve as ambassadors who share information about available services and help connect residents to support.
- For example, a community ambassador might host informal conversations at a local church or neighborhood event to educate residents about eviction prevention resources or mental health services.
- Ambassadors can also provide feedback from the community to municipal leaders, helping ensure programs are culturally responsive and aligned with local needs.

3. Ensure residents know where and how to seek help

- Provide information through multiple formats — such as flyers, websites, social media, and community meetings — and offer translation and interpretation services to ensure non-English-speaking communities are included and everyone has equitable access to information.
- For example, place posters with QR codes in libraries, bus stops, schools, and community centers that link to a centralized help website or hotline.
- Host public information sessions and partner with local organizations to ensure outreach reaches all neighborhoods, especially those with limited internet access or language barriers.

Municipalities play a crucial role in preventing homelessness and supporting housing stability for their residents. While there are clear benefits to being proactive, municipalities consistently face significant challenges. These include limited funding, scarce resources, and difficulties in effectively marketing available services to residents. Another hurdle is ensuring residents are connected to the right resources and service providers, which requires clear communication and coordination across multiple systems.

Despite these obstacles, there is a way to shift these challenges into strengths. Through sustained collaboration, improved communication, and a shared commitment to proactive interventions, municipalities can bridge service gaps. By taking a role in homelessness prevention, municipalities can help create stable, thriving communities with long-term, engaged residents.

2. SPECIAL POPULATIONS

Youth and Young Adults

Youth and young adults face unique risks for housing instability, including family conflict, aging out of foster care, and economic challenges. For LGBTQIA+ youth in particular, these risks are often heightened by family rejection, bullying, discrimination, or the absence of affirming services. In Connecticut, over 5,600 students were identified as experiencing homelessness during the 2023-2024 school year, representing an increase of 63% since 2021.

¹³ This growing trend highlights the importance of municipal prevention efforts.

Municipalities are uniquely positioned to partner with schools, youth services, and community providers to intervene early, stabilize families, and ensure young people remain connected to education and employment opportunities.

Collaboration with schools through the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act is critical. Each district has a liaison responsible for identifying and supporting students experiencing homelessness, ensuring school stability, transportation, and immediate enrollment. Municipalities can strengthen this connection by creating clear referral pathways from schools to municipal housing, prevention funds, and youth-focused services. By coordinating with schools and community providers, municipalities can help youth and young adults avoid entering the homeless response system altogether.

MUNICIPAL ACTIONS

- **Strengthen school partnerships:** Build regular communication between municipal housing staff and McKinney-Vento liaisons
- **Create referral systems:** Develop a simple process for schools to connect families and youth to prevention resources quickly
- **Invest in prevention funds:** Use local or state dollars to cover rental arrears, utilities, or short-motel stays for at-risk youth and families
- **Support youth housing options:** Encourage transitional housing, host homes, and rapid rehousing programs for ages 16-24
- **Provide workforce pathways:** Offer paid internships, job training, and stipends to stabilize income for youth at risk of losing housing
- **Offer legal and landlord supports:** Fund eviction prevention clinics and landlord mediation programs to keep youth in stable housing

¹³https://ctphilanthropy.org/news/696274/Hartford-Foundation-Awards-Grant-to-Support-Greater-Hartford-Students-Experiencing-Homelessness.htm?utm_source=

- **Collect and share data:** Use school and 2-1-1 data to identify trends and target interventions where they are needed most
- **Reduce stigma and increase awareness:** Share information about available supports in schools, libraries, and youth centers

KEY PREVENTION STRATEGIES

- **Early Risk Identification:** Collaborate with schools, youth programs, and local LGBTQIA+ centers to proactively identify youth at risk of family conflict or housing loss
- **Conflict Mediation & Family Engagement:** Invest in family mediation services and counseling that help address conflict early, aiming to repair relationships when safe and possible
- **Affirming Crisis Resources:** Ensure that any short-term housing or respite options are LGBTQIA-affirming, safe, and accessible without barriers
- **Training for Frontline Staff:** Equip municipal staff, teachers, case managers, and law enforcement with training on gender identity, sexual orientation, and trauma-informed care to reduce discrimination and build trust
- **Warm Referrals & Peer Navigation:** Partner with local LGBTQIA+, youth, and young adult organizations to offer peer navigation and direct referrals to mental health services, legal aid, and community supports
- **Safe Spaces & Community Networks:** Support drop-in centers, mentorship programs, and safe community spaces where youth and young adults can find belonging and stability outside of school or home

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Greater Hartford Region, Connecticut: Cross-Sector Student Homelessness Prevention

Context:

Greater Hartford's 17 school districts account for **16% of Connecticut's homeless students** — nearly **900 youth** — with no unified strategy between housing and education systems.

What They Did:

With funding from the **Hartford Foundation for Public Giving** and in collaboration with the **Governor's Kids Cabinet**, the **RE!NSTITUTE** led a **100-day initiative** to prevent 75 students experiencing McKinney-Vento homelessness from falling into unsheltered

homelessness.

Partners included:

- **Journey Home & Hands on Hartford** (housing and financial support)
- **211 & The Opportunity Center** (referrals, employment, supportive services)
- **School districts** (McKinney-Vento liaisons from Hartford, Windsor, and New Britain)

They developed shared referral tools, launched a Civic Roundtable, and held weekly case conferencing.

Impact:

55 students supported so far, **31% middle schoolers**. Most remained stably housed and in school. Schools now identify housing risks earlier, with stronger connections to regional supports.

Older Adults

Older adults, generally defined as individuals aged 55 and older, are an increasingly vulnerable population within the homelessness prevention system. Many face housing instability due to fixed incomes, rising rent costs, physical and cognitive health challenges, limited access to technology, and isolation. Municipalities have a critical role in identifying at-risk older adults early and coordinating services that promote aging in place, housing stability, and overall well-being.

Older adults experiencing homelessness often present with complex health conditions, disabilities, and mobility limitations. Some may be fire-time homeless due to an unexpected life event, such as the death of a spouse, eviction, or loss of income. Others may have experienced long-term or chronic homelessness. Because this population can be reluctant to seek help, prevention strategies must be proactive, coordinated, and respectful of their dignity and autonomy.

ACTIONS

Municipalities can enhance their response to older adult homelessness through the following actions:

- **Conduct targeted outreach and wellness checks** through senior centers, housing authorities, visiting nurse programs, and meal delivery services to identify those at risk of eviction or displacement
- **Strengthen eviction prevention partnerships** with landlords, housing courts, and legal aid to help older adults remain in their homes
- **Promote home modification and accessibility programs** that allow seniors to safely age in place
- **Ensure integration of aging services into homelessness prevention efforts**, including case conferencing that includes elder services agencies and healthcare providers
- **Expand access to benefits counseling** to help older adults maximize income through programs such as SNAP, SSI/SSDI, energy assistance, Medicaid
- **Train front-line staff on geriatric-specific issues**, including memory loss, mobility barriers, and elder abuse

RESOURCES

Below are several resources in Connecticut that can support municipalities in addressing the housing needs of older adults:

- **Connecticut Department of Aging and Disability Services** - Coordinates statewide programs that support aging in place, assistive technology, fall prevention, and benefits counseling
- **Area Agencies on Aging** - Regional nonprofit organization that offers case management, housing assistance, transportation, caregiver support, and connection to community-based aging services, including
 - **North Central Area Agency on Aging** - Serves 38 towns in the Greater Hartford region, offering services such as housing support, protective services, nutrition, and the CHOICES Medicare counseling program
 - **CHOICES Program** - A statewide, free counseling service that helps older adults and caregivers understand Medicare, long-term care options, and eligibility for benefits
 - **Connecticut Legal Services** - Elder Law Unit - Provides free or low-cost legal aid to older adults facing eviction, utility shutoff, housing discrimination, or denial of government benefits
 - **Senior Centers and Municipal Social Services** - Offer direct services to older adults, including wellness checks, transportation, social programming, and referrals for emergency housing or rental assistance

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

Below are several practices that can support municipalities in addressing the housing needs of older adults:

- Embedding social workers in housing authorities or senior centers to conduct proactive case management
- Utilizing health and housing data to tag high-risk older adults, such as those frequently using emergency rooms or adult protective services
- Developing naturally occurring retirement communities with supportive services embedded onsite
- Encouraging intergenerational housing models, where younger tenants support older adults in exchange for affordable rent

Veterans

Veterans are a distinct population within homelessness prevention systems, often facing complex challenges such as mental health conditions, substance use disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, physical disabilities, and difficulties navigating civilian housing and employment systems. While veteran homelessness has declined in Connecticut due to strong coordinated efforts, municipalities still play a vital role in ensuring housing crises are prevented and that veterans receive timely, tailored support.

Veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness may have unique eligibility for benefits and housing programs, but they may not always know how to access them. Some veterans, particularly those with other intersecting identities, may not feel comfortable engaging with traditional systems. Additionally, many veterans may live in rural or suburban communities where access to supportive housing and services is limited.

ACTIONS

Municipalities can help prevent homelessness among veterans through the following key actions:

- **Identify at-risk veterans early** by integrating veteran status into intake forms used by local housing providers, health departments, and social service agencies

- **Strengthen referral partnerships** with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Connecticut Veterans Legal Center, and veteran-specific housing benefits
- **Train municipal staff and community partners** to understand military culture, trauma-informed care, and the network of veteran-specific housing providers
- **Support outreach and peer navigation models** where veterans help engage other veterans who are reluctant to seek assistance
- **Coordinate local case conferencing with veteran housing providers** to align resources and ensure no veteran falls through the cracks
- **Include veterans in prevention funding strategies**, especially those not eligible for VA housing programs due to discharge status or length of service

RESOURCES

Below are several veteran-specific resources available in Connecticut to support municipalities in their prevention efforts:

- **Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs** - Offers a full continuum of care, including residential services, clinical supports, and employment assistance
- **U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs** - Connecticut Healthcare System - Provides primary care, mental health services, HUD-VASH supportive housing, and case management
- **Supportive Services for Veteran Families Providers** - Offer homelessness prevention, rapid rehousing, and case management for low-income veterans and their families
 - Community Renewal Team - Covers central Connecticut
 - Columbus House - Covers New Haven and surrounding areas
 - Supportive Housing Works - Covers Fairfield County
- **Connecticut Veterans Legal Center** - Provides legal support to help veterans resolve housing issues, upgrade discharge status, and access benefits
- **Veterans Inc** - Offers transitional housing and support services in southeastern Connecticut
- **211 of Connecticut** - Veterans can dial 211 and be connected to the Veterans Crisis Line or receive referrals for housing and basic needs

PREVENTION/AT-RISK
MUNICIPALITY
TOOLKIT

Conclusion

Conclusion

Municipalities play a crucial role in preventing homelessness and supporting housing stability for their residents. While there are clear benefits to being proactive, municipalities consistently face significant challenges. These include limited funding, scarce resources, and difficulties in effectively marketing available services to residents. Another hurdle is ensuring residents are connected to the right resources and service providers, which requires clear communication and coordination across multiple systems.

Despite these obstacles, there is a way to shift these challenges into strengths. Through sustained collaboration, improved communication, and a shared commitment to proactive interventions, municipalities can bridge service gaps. By taking a role in homelessness prevention, municipalities can help create stable, thriving communities with long-term, engaged residents.

For municipal staff, preventing homelessness is both a strategic and practical responsibility. Every instance of housing instability that goes unaddressed increases reliance on costly emergency systems — from shelters to public safety and healthcare. By identifying risks early, coordinating across departments, and aligning resources with community partners, staff can deliver more efficient services while reducing long-term expenditures. Active municipal engagement ensures that policies and programs not only protect residents from the trauma of homelessness but also safeguard municipal budgets, strengthen neighborhood stability, and build a more resilient local economy. In practice, prevention is not an added responsibility — it is a smarter, more cost-effective way of doing the work municipalities are already tasked to carry out.

If you have any questions or would like further support in engaging and supporting your residents, please contact Adriana Negron, Homeless Prevention Manager at Journey Home by emailing adriana.negron@journeyhomect.org