**Fiscal Facts: Milwaukee Health Care Stakeholders Investing in Housing Supports**

Milwaukee County’s private-sector health care stakeholders increasingly are investing in strategies to help find and stabilize housing for the individuals they serve, and early assessments suggest these efforts are making a positive difference.

While promising, such efforts could be better informed by enhanced data collection, a recent Wisconsin Policy Forum report found. Barriers to further progress remain in the county's larger challenges related to quality affordable housing, as well as emergency shelter capacity for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

The Milwaukee Health Care Partnership (MHCP) was created in 2007 to coordinate and expand the efforts of health systems, federally qualified health centers, and local and state governments to improve health outcomes for low-income and underserved populations. In 2019, MHCP piloted Housing is Health (HIH) and has expanded it since. The program works with hospitals and primary care providers throughout Milwaukee County to identify individuals who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness when they enter health care settings, and connect them through a shared process with supports to achieve housing stability.

When a person who is homeless or shows housing vulnerability enters a participating medical facility, they are screened to determine their basic housing needs. If appropriate, a referral is made to a process that provides additional assessment, then connects them to needed interventions and supports.

Since its inception in 2019, HIH has grown in partnership with health care providers including Ascension Wisconsin, Aurora Health Care, Froedtert ThedaCare Health Inc., the Children’s Wisconsin Midtown Clinic, Milwaukee County’s five federally qualified health centers, and the largest free clinic serving the uninsured, Bread of Healing Clinic. After fewer than 100 referrals were made in 2019, the program grew to nearly 300 referrals in both 2020 and 2021, then up to 653 in 2022. Of these, 142 clients received initial permanent housing placement as a result of their participation in HIH in 2022.

Several health insurers and specialty providers in Milwaukee County similarly are investing in housing supports for their patients and members. Greater coordination and collaboration among these entities in areas such as data collection and sharing and standardization of practices may be beneficial in improving and expanding housing services. Gaps in the county’s larger affordable housing and homelessness prevention landscape also hamper the initiative’s potential.

Looking nationally, some communities attempt not only to help individuals better navigate their housing systems, as in Milwaukee County, but also try to influence the systems directly -- including with “bricks and mortar” investments in new housing. Examples can be found in Denver and Atlanta, where initiatives are underway to directly build housing that can serve patients. Private health care stakeholders in other cities are also investing directly in supportive housing services and in medical respite housing for recovering patients who no longer require hospitalization but are not yet ready to move into permanent housing.

*This information is a service of the Wisconsin Policy Forum, the state’s leading resource for nonpartisan state and local government research and civic education. Learn more at* [*wispolicyforum.org*](https://wispolicyforum.org/research/state-tax-burden-up-but-overall-burden-still-falling/)*.*