



**35th Wisconsin Family Impact Seminar
January 25, 2017**

A Place to Call Home: Evidence-Based Strategies for Addressing Homelessness across Wisconsin

Executive Summary

During the 2016 federal fiscal year in Wisconsin, 22,050 people experiencing homelessness received services and shelter from providers that use the state's tracking system. Homelessness is not just a Milwaukee or Madison concern, nor is it limited to single adults: 58% of Wisconsinites receiving homeless services lived outside Milwaukee and Dane counties, and 46% were members of a family with minor children. Approximately 9% of those receiving services were veterans. Homelessness not only causes poor outcomes for the families and individuals affected; it can be costly for taxpayers in terms of emergency shelter costs, medical expenses, criminal justice system intervention, and other public services. Children who experience homelessness are particularly vulnerable to negative outcomes and more likely to become homeless as adults.

The Family Impact Seminars view policy issues through the lens of both research and family impact. The briefing report summarized here provides an overview of the state of homelessness in Wisconsin, including information about who is homeless and the funding sources currently used to address the problem. In addition, the report highlights the work of researchers who have decades of experience studying evidence-based, cost-effective ways to reduce and prevent homelessness.

Who is Homeless in Wisconsin?

Adam Smith, Director of Wisconsin's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), reviewed two ways to count people who are experiencing homelessness in Wisconsin. The first method counts people who use homeless services and shelters over the course of 12 months. The second, the annual Point-in-Time (PIT) count, is conducted on one night in January. The 2016 PIT count revealed that 5,685 people were counted as literally homeless in the state that night. Of this population, 22% had a severe mental illness, 22% were victims of domestic violence, and 15% had chronic substance abuse. In recent years, the federal government, states, and communities have learned how to more effectively address and end homelessness. As such, Smith reported that programs and funding priorities are changing, providing

policymakers with an opportunity to focus on ensuring that families and individuals experiencing homelessness have access to evidence-based services and shelter.

What Programs Work Best for Homeless Families?

Jill Khadduri, Senior Fellow at Abt Associates, summarized results from the Family Options Study, a rigorous three-year experiment sponsored by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The study looked at which housing and services interventions work best to improve the housing stability and well-being of families experiencing homelessness. Families were randomly assigned to receive priority access to one of three programs: (1) long-term housing subsidies; (2) rapid re-housing assistance; or (3) service-intensive, project-based transitional housing; or access to the "usual care" that was available within the community.

By far, priority access to long-term housing subsidies led to the best outcomes for reducing family homelessness. Compared to usual care, priority access to long-term subsidies reduced the proportion of families who reported being recently homeless by more than one-half. Families with priority access to long-term subsidies also reported improvements in adult and child well-being and reduced food insecurity. Although providing priority access to long-term subsidies cost 9% more than not giving families priority access to any particular program, the numerous benefits suggest there is a return on the investment in long-term subsidies. The other two interventions, when compared to regular care, showed few positive changes in any of the domains. The striking positive impacts of providing priority access to long-term subsidies suggest that for most families, homelessness is a housing affordability problem that can be remedied with long-term housing subsidies without the provision of specialized services.

How Can States Address Homelessness?

Martha Burt, an Affiliated Scholar with the Urban Institute, reported that the homeless population is diverse, and multiple, interacting structural and individual factors lead to

Using research to build better public policy for families

The Wisconsin Family Impact Seminars are an initiative of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Chancellor's Office and Robert M. La Follette School of Public Affairs, with financial support from the Phyllis M. Northway Fund.

homelessness. Rigorous research suggests that access to affordable housing is key to reducing homelessness and improving individual and family well-being, and simply providing services without housing will not be effective. Permanent supportive housing has been particularly effective in reducing chronic homelessness.

States can do many things to make housing more affordable through policies and practices that increase the supply of affordable housing and make existing housing more affordable to individual households through rent subsidies. For example, New Jersey has built more affordable housing per capita in high-opportunity communities near good schools and jobs than any other state, using a wide range of local, state, and federal funding sources. Other successful state strategies for addressing homelessness include rental assistance, capital/construction assistance, bond financing, local taxes, cross-jurisdictional planning, inclusionary zoning, and programs to address specific household needs. The key to making many of these policy options work for individuals and families is an integrated service system.

What Programs are Funded in Wisconsin?

Rachel Janke from the Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau summarized the sources and amounts of funding provided by the State and the federal government for programs related to homelessness or homelessness prevention in Wisconsin. Some programs target specific populations (such as individuals with a disability, individuals with mental illness or

a substance abuse disorder, and veterans), while others address homelessness and housing in general. Funded activities may include: rental assistance; housing vouchers; foreclosure prevention payments; utility bill assistance; supportive services and outreach to homeless individuals; operation of transitional housing, emergency shelters, or housing voucher programs; housing rehabilitation; renovation or capital improvements to emergency and transitional housing facilities; low-income housing tax credits for housing developments; multifamily housing development loans; Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) project costs; and administrative expenses. In addition to programs related to homelessness or prevention of homelessness, a summary of programs that provide other types of services relating to homelessness was included as an appendix to this chapter.

Viewing Homelessness through the Family Impact Lens

Homelessness is a costly problem experienced by many families across Wisconsin; however, there are evidence-based, cost-effective ways to reduce homelessness and help more families succeed. Importantly, attaining stable housing sets up families to be more successful at work and school, and is key to providing a nurturing environment in which children can thrive. When families have safe, affordable housing, they also are better able to take care of their family members; thus, reducing the burden on the public safety net. States can play a key role in fostering this success. ●

Seminar Presenters and Moderator

Adam Smith

Director, Wisconsin Homeless Management Information System
Institute for Community Alliances
adam.smith@icalliances.org | www.icalliances.org

Jill Khadduri

Principal Associate and Abt Senior Fellow
Abt Associates
jill_khadduri@abassoc.com | www.abtassociates.org

Martha Burt

Affiliated Scholar, Urban Institute & Principal, MRB
Consulting
mrbconsulting.nm@gmail.com

Moderator: Hilary Shager

Associate Director, La Follette School of Public Affairs
Director, Wisconsin Family Impact Seminars
(608) 263-2409 | hshager@lafollette.wisc.edu

The briefing report and video/audio of the presentations are available on our website at www.wisfamilyimpact.org.

Since 1993, the Wisconsin Family Impact Seminars have connected state policymakers with objective, high-quality research on timely issues such as early brain development, corrections, foster care, and workforce development. The seminars aim to (a) build greater respect for and use of research in policy decisions; (b) encourage policymakers to examine policies and programs through a family impact lens; and (c) provide neutral, nonpartisan opportunities for legislators to engage in open dialogue, foster relationships, and find common ground.

Check out our website (www.wisfamilyimpact.org) for audio and video of nearly 100 speakers, 35 briefing reports, and other resources from the seminars. The information in this summary was taken from the briefing report. The full report, as well as the speakers' presentations, can be downloaded from our website. Hard copies of the report and handouts are available to state legislators at no charge by contacting Heidi Normandin, Associate Director of the Family Impact Seminars, at (608) 263-2353 or hjnorman@wisc.edu.