

September 2025



# PATHWAYS HOME

## SPECIALIZED HOUSING PLAN



LA CROSSE COUNTY



# Executive Summary

The Specialized Housing plan aims to determine the right combination of housing and support services needed to achieve functional zero homelessness. It prioritizes a diverse range of low-barrier housing options, ensuring individuals are quickly placed in homes that align with their unique needs and level of support required for long-term stability.

Most people transitioning from homelessness face obstacles that make traditional housing unattainable. These challenges may include limited income, inconsistent rental history, criminal records, or struggles with mental health and substance use. To truly help individuals regain stability, we must provide housing solutions that meet them where they are and support their journey toward sustainability.

## Our Findings

Based on a full year of system-wide data we have a thorough understanding of our current homeless population and the level of support they require in housing. By analyzing our inflow to homelessness and our system outflow, we can forecast the net inflow through 2028. We combined that information to project the required specialized housing our system needs to be able to achieve Functional Zero by the end of 2028.

We have identified five housing categories based on required support services rather than specific housing types, allowing for flexible strategies to build the necessary system capacity. Those that need 24/7 skilled care will be placed in suitable assisted living spaces and do not require any incremental housing development given the small number of placements required. The Specialized Housing capacity required for functional zero is:

- 80 units with intensive supports (20 in process leaves a gap of 60 units)
- 172 units with moderate supports (16 in process leaves a gap of 156 units)
- 182 units with light supports (70 placements through existing units and 9 in process leaves a gap of 103 units)

Our combined specialized housing gap to fill is projected to be 319 units to achieve Functional Zero by the end of 2028. Since external factors influence homelessness rates, we continually monitor data for changes. Our housing forecast is updated at least twice a year—or more frequently if significant shifts occur—to ensure responsiveness to evolving community needs.

## How You Can Help

Pledge to be a financial supporter of Pathways Home. We're also for looking for nonprofits, housing agencies, and developers to help us partner with landlords, innovate housing solutions, and expand supportive services.

# Pathways Home: The Story So Far

Pathways Home is a collaborative homelessness response plan led by La Crosse County and the City of La Crosse, with the shared goal of achieving **Functional Zero Homelessness** in our community by **2029**. The plan was launched in **January 2024** following a joint meeting of the La Crosse County Board and the City of La Crosse Common Council, marking a unified commitment to addressing homelessness through coordinated, data-driven action.

The first year of Pathways Home focused on building the **interconnected systems** that form the backbone of our local homelessness response. These systems are designed to support clear decision-making, cross-sector collaboration, and real-time accountability. Highlights from 2024 include:

- Launched weekly **Pathways conferencing meetings** with a broad network of local partners
- Established a new **specialized unit** within La Crosse County Human Services
- Defined **clear pathways to housing navigation and case management support**
- Developed the **Pathways to Housing List**, a by-name, real-time tracking tool
- **Expanded our network of partner agencies** entering and using shared data
- Strengthened **data quality and security** across all systems
- Launched our **public-facing data dashboard** at [lacrossecounty.org/pathwayshome](https://lacrossecounty.org/pathwayshome)
- Supported the development of approximately 50 new units of specialized housing

Since its launch, Pathways Home has helped house **200 people** from the Pathways to Housing List — a milestone made possible by the dedication and collaboration of partner agencies. This report represents the next phase of our project: to define the specialized housing need in our community and build a clear plan to meet it.

## What is Functional Zero?

**Functional Zero is a goal used by many communities to effectively end homelessness. It means that homelessness is prevented whenever possible, and when it does occur, it is rare, brief, and unlikely to happen again. For our community, reaching Functional Zero means that the number of people experiencing homelessness never exceeds our capacity to move them into permanent housing.**



# The Pathways Home System

We are committed to transparency and accountability in our efforts to end homelessness. Each month, key system metrics are published on the Pathways Data Dashboard to provide an update on progress.

## Pathways Conferencing

Pathways Conferencing is a weekly, solution-focused meeting that brings together a multidisciplinary team of approximately 20 local agencies. This collaborative effort is designed to creatively and compassionately address homelessness in the City of La Crosse. At the heart of Pathways Conferencing is a commitment to “shrinking the change”—breaking down barriers and identifying small, achievable steps that move individuals closer to permanent housing each week.



The team uses the Pathways to Housing List—a comprehensive, by-name list of every household currently experiencing homelessness in La Crosse. This tool helps us better understand each household's unique housing needs and preferences, allowing for tailored support and coordinated resources. Through this data-informed and person-centered approach, we aim not just to place people in housing, but to help them stay housed for the long term.

## Launching the Specialized Unit

In the summer of 2024, La Crosse County Human Services took a significant step forward in its approach to ending long-term homelessness by launching a new Specialized Behavioral Health Unit. Housed within the Integrated Support & Recovery Services section of the department, this dedicated unit was created to better respond to the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness who also face complex behavioral health and substance use challenges.

The unit is composed of a multidisciplinary team of six social workers divided between two core functions: outreach and engagement and case management. The outreach team works directly in the community—meeting people in public spaces, shelters, and temporary housing settings—to build trust, assess needs, and connect individuals with essential services. Once individuals are ready to move forward, the case management team provides sustained support focused on housing stabilization, mental health treatment, recovery coordination, and access to other long-term supports.

This person-centered, relationship-driven approach represents a significant shift in how La Crosse County addresses homelessness. Rather than waiting for individuals to seek help or become involved in emergency or justice systems, the Specialized Unit works proactively to meet people where they are and walk with them through recovery and re-entry into stable housing.



The momentum behind this unit has continued to build. In June 2025, La Crosse County secured new funding to support its expansion.

A \$350,000 Deflection Grant from the Wisconsin Department of Justice, awarded in June 2025, will support the addition of a seventh social worker focused on deflection—diverting individuals away from the criminal justice system and into treatment and housing pathways.

The goals of the deflection initiative are ambitious yet measurable:

- Provide intensive case management to at least 50 individuals per year
- Use specialized placements to house at least 15 people annually
- Ensure that 75% of participants access treatment services within 21 days of initial engagement
- Reduce both overdose deaths and criminal justice system involvement through coordinated, community-based care

Additionally, the Specialized Unit recently launched a new Housing Support Services program funded through Wisconsin's Medicaid 1915(i) waiver. This program allows staff to offer more targeted housing case management, relocation assistance, and other stabilizing supports to eligible individuals. These expanded services not only fill existing gaps but also increase the County's capacity to support individuals in complex situations over the long term.

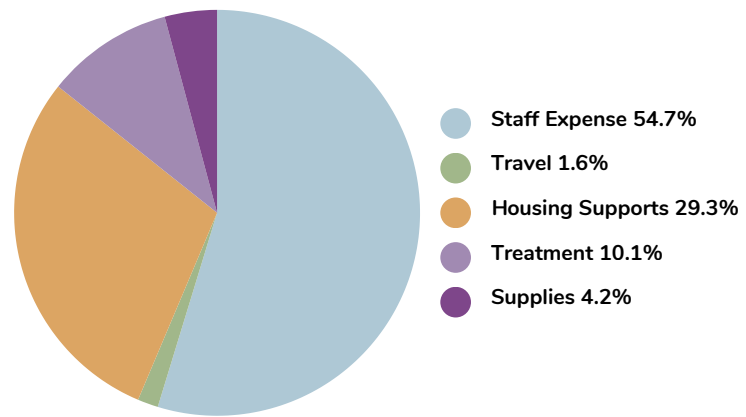
Looking ahead, the unit plans to incorporate peer support specialists—individuals with lived experience of homelessness and recovery—into the team. These roles are critical in building trust, offering hope, and modeling the possibility of sustained recovery and housing stability.

The ability to secure both Medicaid funding and deflection grant support speaks to the credibility and growing impact of the integrated model being implemented through Pathways Home.

## Matching Housing Support to Need

The level of support needed in housing is assessed by how frequently a person requires assistance or intervention to remain stable, safe, and connected to services. Some individuals may thrive with minimal contact or occasional check-ins, while others may need daily interactions or continuous on-site support. This approach combines models from behavioral health and long-term care systems to create a consistent framework for evaluating needs. It helps housing programs and partners align resources effectively and ensures individuals receive the right level of support to maintain housing and achieve long-term stability.

### Deflection Grant Budget (\$350,000)



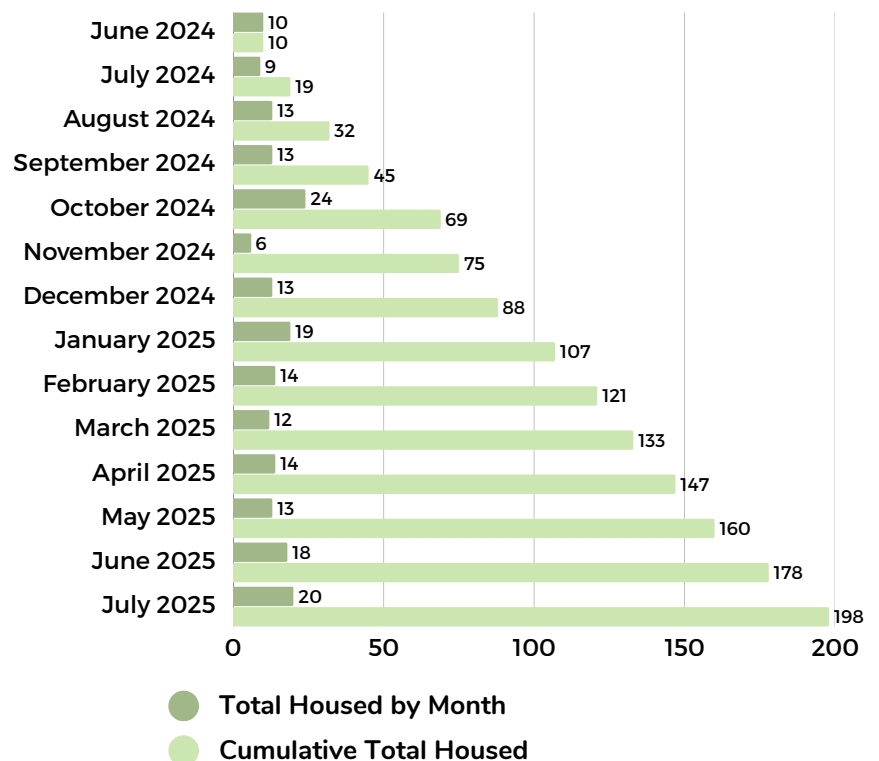
# Pathways Data Dashboard

We are committed to transparency and accountability in our efforts to end homelessness. Each month, we publish key system metrics on the Pathways Data Dashboard to provide a clear picture of local progress. Maintained through the daily work of the Pathways Home team and our community partners,

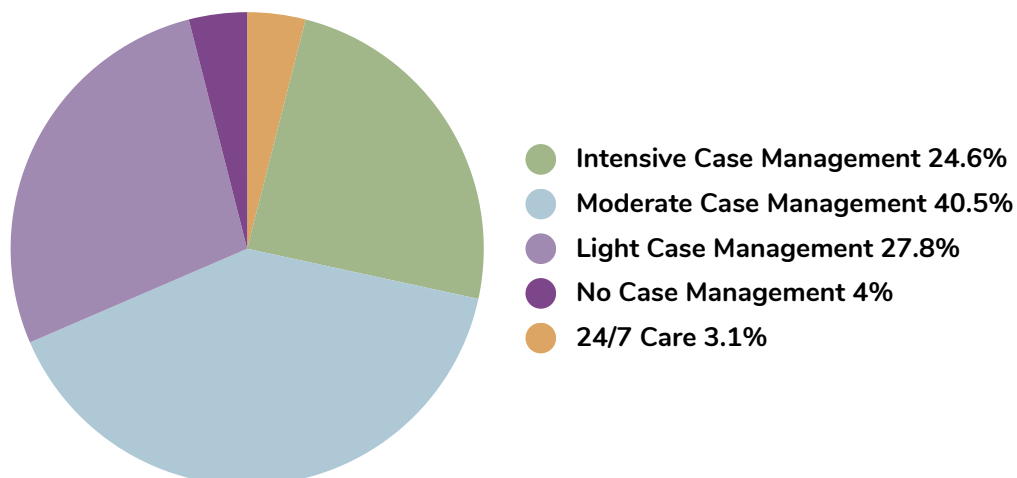
the dashboard is built on an accurate, real-time by-name list of individuals experiencing homelessness and their support needs. It tracks the total number of people experiencing homelessness in La Crosse, the number of households placed into housing each month, and the level of support required to help them remain housed.

This data is the foundation of the Specialized Housing Plan. It guides our strategy, helps us refine housing capacity needs, and allows us to monitor program outcomes over time. The dashboard also highlights where additional resources or new approaches are needed, ensuring our efforts remain responsive and effective. View the dashboard at [lacrossecounty.org/pathwayshome](https://lacrossecounty.org/pathwayshome).

## Pathways Households Placed in Housing



## Level of Case Management Required (July 2025)





# Specialized Housing Plan

The categories of housing needed by 2029 to reach Functional Zero homelessness in our community can be grouped into four categories:

1. 24/7 Care
2. Intensive Case Management Units
3. Moderate Case Management Units
4. No or Light Case Management Units

The number of units required in each category—based on current data and projections of our homeless population—is outlined below. This section also presents strategies to expand the availability of these units. Achieving our goal will require strong system coordination and continued collaboration across our network of community partners.

## Our Goal

The Specialized Housing plan aims to determine the right combination of housing and support services needed to achieve functional zero homelessness. It prioritizes a diverse range of low-barrier housing options, ensuring individuals are quickly placed in homes that align with their unique needs and level of support required for long-term stability.

Most people transitioning from homelessness face obstacles that make traditional housing unattainable. These challenges may include limited income, inconsistent rental history, criminal records, or struggles with mental health and substance use. To truly help individuals regain stability, we must provide housing solutions that meet them where they are and support their journey toward sustainability.

## Our Methodology

Our approach combines locally collected data with evidence-based research to predict system inflow and outflow, helping us assess the need for specialized housing. We have identified five housing categories based on required support services rather than specific housing types, allowing for flexible strategies to build the necessary system capacity.

Through community outreach, we connect individuals experiencing homelessness in La Crosse to Pathways Home. Our intake assessment gathers essential information to understand each person's housing barriers and support needs, ensuring they receive the right level of assistance for long-term stability. This process also provides an accurate and continuously updated count of those in need of specialized housing.

To anticipate future housing needs, we analyze current homelessness inflow metrics, adjusting projections based on the effectiveness of our prevention programs. Since external factors influence homelessness rates, we continually monitor data for changes. Our housing forecast is updated at least twice a year—or more frequently if significant shifts occur—to ensure responsiveness to evolving community needs.

# 1. 24/7 Care

## Level of support needed in housing:

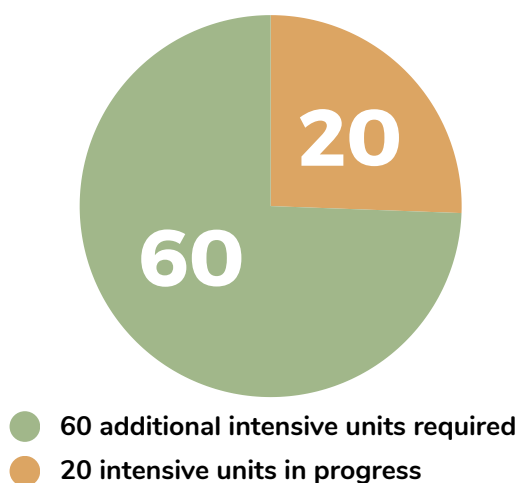
**24/7 Onsite Staffing:** Continuous on-site staffing is available. The individual is fully dependent requiring skilled hands-on care and/or supervision to manage complex medical and disability-related needs in addition to their housing.

**Total Number of 24/7 Placement Needed: 14**

**Housing Strategy:** Collaborate with Managed Care Organizations to leverage existing 24/7 care facilities in region.

# 2. Housing with Intensive Supports

**Total Intensive Units Needed: 80**



## Level of support needed in housing:

**Intensive Case Management:** Contact daily or near-daily support with multi-disciplinary team involvement. The individual is essentially dependent on others to maintain their health, safety, daily living routine, and housing.

**Housing strategy:** Partner with agencies that provide near 24/7 oversight with daily care to build needed capacity (examples Karuna's city-funded project and the housing being developed by La Crosse County at Hillview).

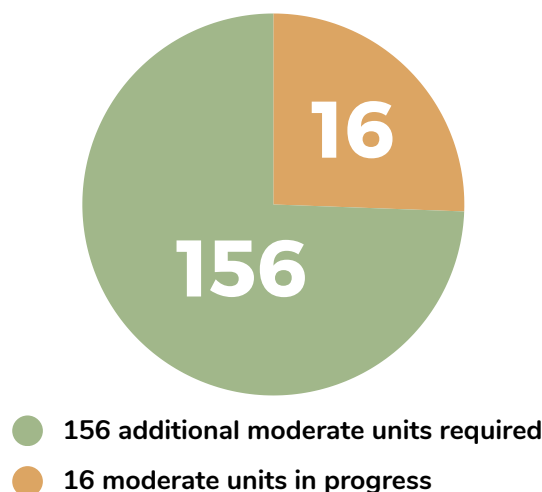
# 3. Units with Moderate Support

**Total Moderate Units Needed: 172**

## Level of support needed in housing:

**Moderate Case Management:** Contact once or twice per week, but not daily. The individual is semi-independent and needs consistent outside support and services to manage health, safety, daily living, and housing.

**Housing strategy:** Partner with agencies to build needed agency owned supportive housing capacity. Launch Pathways and agency held lease program.





## 4. Units with Light Support

### Level of support needed in housing:

**No Case Management:** No formal case management is needed. The individual is essentially independent and manages their own supports as well as housing.

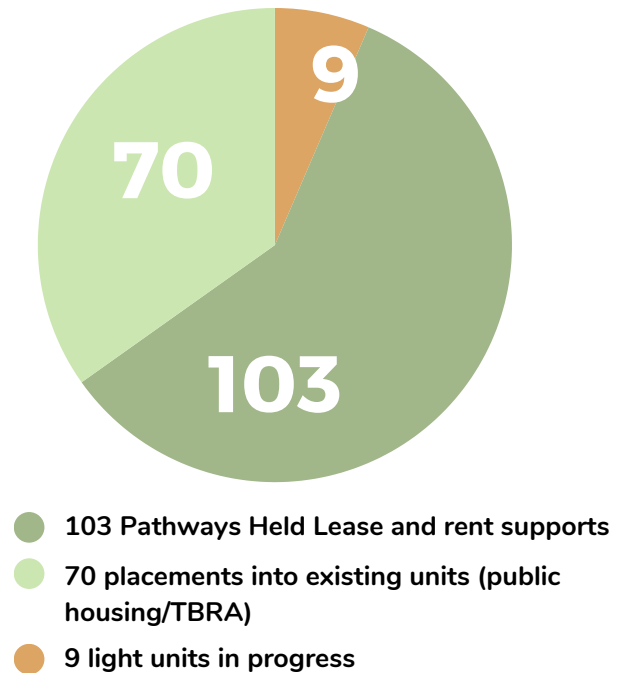
**Light Case Management:** Monthly contact. The individual is independent with some outside supports and basic interventions, such as to check-in calls and resource guidance.

### Housing strategy:

**Public Housing, Private with Vouchers, Affordable Housing (set aside units)**

- Support City of La Crosse as it implements its affordable housing strategy.
- Grow landlord acceptance of vouchers by more landlord protection options.
- Partner with Public Housing to reduce eviction rates.
- Support developers to create more set aside units like the Collective on 4th.

**Total Light Units Needed: 182**



Pathways Conferencing Team

# Showcasing Early Housing Wins

## Collective on 4th

The Collective on 4th is a 62-unit mixed-income housing development created in partnership with the City of La Crosse. It supports the community's goal of reducing homelessness by increasing access to affordable, stable housing.

Thirteen units are reserved for households experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Through Pathways Conferencing and the Pathways to Housing List, Pathways Home makes exclusive referrals to these set-aside units. This targeted approach ensures households are matched with appropriate permanent housing and connected to the supportive services they need to maintain stability and thrive.



## Hillview Transitional Housing



Hillview Housing is a 10-bed transitional program opening in Fall 2025 for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness and significant mental health challenges. It offers low-barrier housing for up to 24 months, with rent scaled to each resident's ability to pay.

The program combines housing with on-site supports, including case management, peer support, and behavioral health services provided through County programs like Comprehensive Community Services (CCS). Partnerships with nonprofit and community organizations will expand the range of services available to residents.

Hillview Housing advances key goals in the County's Strategic Plan and the Pathways Home initiative by addressing gaps in housing, increasing access to support services, and reducing chronic homelessness. Designed for individuals who have struggled in other settings, the program provides a critical step toward long-term housing stability.



# ARPA-Funded Housing

In December 2024, the City of La Crosse awarded two housing contracts through its Pathways Home Specialized Housing Solutions request for proposals, allocating \$1.1 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding.

Karuna was awarded funding to develop 10 units with intensive support services, while Couleecap received funding to create 16 units offering moderate support. Both projects are actively moving forward and represent a critical step in expanding specialized housing with appropriate case management for individuals exiting homelessness.

## Next Steps

To establish the necessary specialized housing capacity, we will:

- Collaborate with developers, agencies, property managers, landlords, and local housing authorities to create a portfolio of specialized housing solutions tailored to each housing category.
- Identify existing financing options to support the most promising projects, ensuring they provide sustainable, long-term housing solutions.
- Develop the Pathways community fund to bridge funding gaps for key projects, bringing us closer to functional zero homelessness.



Progress updates will be shared monthly on the Pathways dashboard to ensure accountability and transparency. Achieving functional zero is possible through strong community engagement and support.



Total Navigation Team



# PATHWAYS HOME: AN INTEGRATED AND COMPASSIONATE APPROACH TO ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS IN LA CROSSE

“Our aim is to ensure Functional Zero  
is not a one-time achievement, but a  
sustained reality.”

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[lacrossecounty.org/pathwayshome](http://lacrossecounty.org/pathwayshome)



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