

Cathy ten Broeke interview, State Director to Prevent and End Homelessness

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1. What more can be done to increase housing for the 0 – 30 AMI population?

The Interagency Council on Homelessness, composed of MN Housing Commissioner Mary Tingerthal, DHS Commissioner Emily Piper, the Metropolitan Council Chair and other commissioners, has a goal of housing stability for veterans this year, the chronic homeless next year and family and youth by 2020. Means of achieving this goal include: 5,000 more new affordable housing units (0– 60 AMI) by 2020, in addition to the 4,000 units already preserved or created. (She will get us the number of those units that serve 0 – 30 AMI.) Housing can be funded through bonding, more Housing Trust Fund money (for rental assistance) or through DHS's Group Residential Housing (GRH) funding that be used for housing but also for housing services.

In addition to financial resources, we need advocacy for communities to be open to local changes to increase our ability to engage and work with landlords. For instance, often vets have housing vouchers and services to assist them with living there, but no landlord will take them. Some local jurisdictions incent landlords in various ways. Madison, WI has a local ordinance saying things on renters' criminal background checks not related to tenancy cannot be used as a basis for denial.

2. What specific action can occur to address homelessness with youth?

Highlights from the webpage youth section are: a focus on minor youth who are 18 or under through 2017 by creating more housing options, having more connections with loving, caring supportive adults, more funding for host houses and drop-in shelters, early intervention in schools for those who could become homeless by teaching early warning signs and having outreach. Every student should have a home where they can do homework. \$5m has been allocated for the Homeless Youth Act. Also adapt the child welfare system to be responsive to homeless youth. These efforts are very new and hold incredible promise.

The federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act requires school districts to identify a homeless student liaison to help students navigate for housing and connect them with services. Funding is a problem though.

3. What can be done when the current housing market allows landlords of affordable housing units to screen potential renters too stringently, e.g., for credit ratings, unlawful detainers or criminal records? These problems often exist in the very population government-funded affordable housing is built to serve.

Minnesota recently allocated \$250,000 for a risk mitigation pool for landlords to access if they take a chance on a renter but end up with eviction or repair costs.

Keys for Heroes funding is newly available to incent landlords to rent to veterans, i.e., a \$1,000 bonus per vet.

The mental health task force recommends exploring the state role in preventing police calls that are really mental health crises calls from counting in landlord's three strikes and you get evicted policies.

HUD has recently released guidelines aimed at reducing the potential of landlord abuse of requirements used to screen tenants.

4. Do Independent Housing Options (IHOs) have the same screening issues? Will these units show up in Met Council data?

She doesn't know about IHOs and referred us to DHS who oversees CADI waivers that open the door to this housing.

5. What more can the state do, besides providing more funds for more affordable housing?

A lot. Prevent homelessness in the first place through rental assistance funding and providing connections to stabilizing factors, e.g., employment help.

6. What recommendations is the Governor's Mental Health Task Force making on affordable housing?

Recommendation #7 is Achieving Housing Stability. The governor and legislature are charged with ensuring that everyone with mental illness has access to housing they can afford.

Minnesota Housing administers both the Interagency Council referenced above and the Olmstead Act who, along with DHS, are directed to model current housing, current housing needs and the gap in needed housing and services.

Protect and target housing and support services.

More bonding money.

More rental assistance.

Target prevention resources.

Make connections between agencies.

The loss of naturally occurring affordable housing is another problem. The Greater Minnesota Housing fund received \$10m to address this. (Warren Hanson is their president and he could tell us if any of this money is for the metro area.

More money for landlord risk.

Monitor and enforce fair housing practices.

7. Which of these things can be improved at the city level? What could cities do better? How can the League help?

Some already mentioned above. Also ensure zoning is appropriately flexible to allow affordable housing, e.g., allowing housing to be replaced if it was grandfathered in an area no longer zoned for it. Mitigate NIMBYs.

Build local leadership, such as the League of Women Voters! Educate the community as to why it's good for everybody to have adequate housing in the community. Housing stability is key to having a good local economy; it adds positive benefits such as safety, helping provide a local workforce, a better mental health system and better student educational outcomes.

Host community gatherings and facilitate community conversations. Be proactive. Don't wait until there is a heated hearing with armed sides.

Cities could develop creative ways to incent landlords. The Mayor of Minneapolis is calling 100 landlords on Veterans Day to urge them to accept applicants who need their housing.

8. What lessons learned from addressing homelessness in veterans can be applied to housing other homeless people?

This is the only area where the federal government has increased revenues.

Having a very clear focused population and asking for the right level of funding for them helped to get government buy in and make this housing and needed support services nonpartisan.

They developed a registry of every veteran. If anyone knew of a homeless veteran they could call 1-888-LinkVet to get them on the list. People gather around a table to meet the housing needs of each homeless vet, including specific services.

This same model could be applied to other groups, e.g., school kids, people with mental illness and youth.