



Dane County Tackles Homelessness-Incarceration Cycle Through National Peer Network

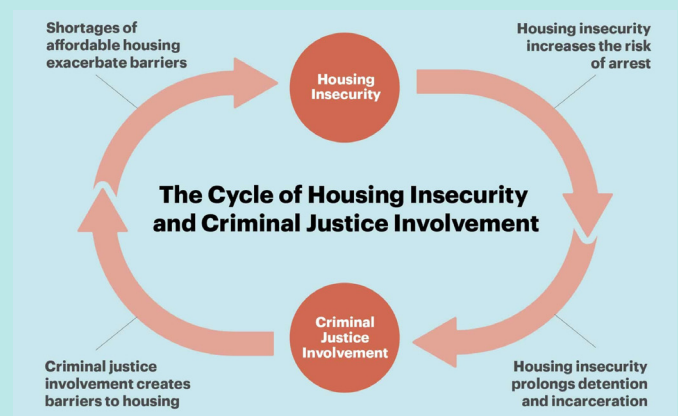
In the Spring of 2025, Dane County joined the Housing Justice Peer Network, a 16-month-long peer learning and technical assistance opportunity aimed at helping jurisdictions disrupt the reinforcing relationship between housing instability and criminal justice system involvement. This document outlines the relationship between housing status and criminal justice involvement, describes the hurdles municipalities face in addressing these issues, and details the work Dane County is undertaking as part of the peer network to provide solutions to these challenges.

How are housing instability and criminal justice system involvement related?

Criminal justice system involvement and housing insecurity are deeply intertwined. People impacted by the justice system are far more likely to experience homelessness and housing insecurity. And people experiencing homelessness are more likely to be arrested and experience worse outcomes in the criminal justice system.

Across the country, justice-involved people face higher rates of housing insecurity and homelessness compared to people with no history of incarceration. A 2021 meta-analysis of 18 studies found that people in prisons were over 20 times more likely to be homeless than the general population.¹

Individuals experiencing homelessness often experience high rates of arrest. In a survey of 581 homeless adults in Oklahoma City, it was found that 76 percent of them had been arrested at some point in their lives.² A 2021 study of 433 older adults experiencing homelessness found that 84 percent had lifetime experiences of jail stays, and that 23 percent had been arrested in a six-month follow-up period.³ Justice system-involved individuals also encounter significant barriers in the housing market and often face exclusion from subsidized housing. They are also more likely to be detained pre-trial, less likely to participate in diversion programs, and more likely to experience prolonged incarceration.



The 2025 Housing Justice Peer Network

The Center for Justice Innovation and the Housing Solutions Lab launched the 2025 Housing Justice Peer Network in April of this year. This nationwide initiative brings together local leaders to share knowledge and strategies for breaking the vicious cycle of homelessness and incarceration. The goal is to further the development of local cross-sector partnerships and learn from the experiences of other communities. The program includes interactive learning sessions, presentations from research and policy experts, and individualized technical support to help develop tailored policy solutions in each jurisdiction. Dane County is one of eight cross-sector teams selected for this opportunity. Other teams include Dayton, OH; Kansas City, MO; Memphis, TN; Toledo, OH; Pittsburgh, PA; Oakland, CA; and Prince George's County, MD.

¹ Bashir, A. Y., Moloney, N., Elzain, M. E., Delaunoy, I., Sheikhi, A., O'Donnell, P., Dunne, C. P., Kelly, B. D., & Gulati, G. (2021). From nowhere to nowhere. Homelessness and incarceration: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *International Journal of Prisoner Health*, 17(4), 452–461. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijph-01-2021-0010>

² Gonzalez, J. R., Jetelina, K. K., Roberts, M., Reitzel, L. R., Kendzor, D., Walters, S., & Businelle, M. S. (2017). Criminal justice system involvement among homeless adults. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 43(2), 158–166. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-017-9413-7>

³ Garcia-Grossman, I., Kaplan, L., Valle, K., Guzman, D., Williams, B., & Kushel, M. (2021). Factors associated with incarceration in older adults experiencing homelessness: Results from the HOPE HOME Study. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 37(5), 1088–1096. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-021-06897-0>

What solutions have cities across the country used to break the homelessness-incarceration cycle?

Innovative solutions exist to address the cycle of housing insecurity and justice involvement.

In 2024, the Center for Justice Innovation and the Housing Solutions Lab released a joint report highlighting programs that target the intersection of housing insecurity and criminal justice involvement, the barriers these programs face, and pathways to solutions.⁴ The report, titled *Housing is Justice: Exploring State and Local Innovations*, found that policy and programmatic innovations in this space fall into four broad categories.

- **Preventing criminal justice involvement:** The best way to address the housing consequences of justice involvement is to prevent such involvement in the first place. This can be achieved through programs that divert people away from the system and connect them with the necessary resources to avoid future involvement.
- **Connecting justice-involved people to resources and support:** These are programs that incorporate housing resources into the criminal justice system. These programs recognize that the different touchpoints of the justice system are opportunities to identify and address the housing needs of those affected.
- **Expanding access to housing:** There are two strategies for expanding access to existing housing: removing barriers to housing or prioritizing justice-involved people for existing housing resources.
- **Increasing housing supply:** To address the affordable housing shortage, it is essential to build more housing. While that's not so easy to do, some localities are managing to increase the supply of housing for justice-involved people.

Why aren't these solutions more common?

Practitioners at the intersection of these fields face barriers to creating meaningful partnerships and effective solutions.

While promising interventions exist, they can be difficult to create and implement. Practitioners aiming to address criminal justice and housing issues face challenges like siloed criminal justice and housing agencies, misaligned incentives for solving these problems, and a lack of funding and local support for collaboration. However, when stakeholders are engaged early and often and their goals align, effective, cross-sector relationships are fostered, and innovation can flourish. This is further enhanced by ensuring the right team members are in the correct roles. The *Housing is Justice: Exploring State and Local Innovations* report details how successful jurisdictions have achieved this.

What steps Dane County is taking to develop local solutions?

2025 Work

- Dane County representation: Office of Justice Reform, Juvenile Court Program, and Dane County Human Services - Division of Housing Access and Affordability (HAA)
 - Understanding national best practices regarding homelessness and incarceration.
 - elevating system impacted voice
 - Working collectively to use youth justice data, adult justice data, HMIS, and eviction data to more fully understand the scope and potential solutions.
 - Cross agency collaboration to eliminate silos and effectively move solutions forward.
 - Granted \$2000 community engagement award.

2026 Work & Beyond

- Engagement
 - Communities;
 - Peer centered focus groups -lifting voices of individuals with lived experience.
 - Homeless Services
 - Advocacy organizations
 - Stakeholder(s) engagement;
 - CJC
 - CCHIC/CoC
 - PP&J, HHN
 - Reentry and reintegration partners;
 - Dane County Jail
 - Law enforcement
 - Behavioral Health
 - Community Corrections
- Building effective frameworks

⁴ Yager, J., Adler, J., House, S., Williams, B., Galvez, M., Balogun, A., Carrier, N., & Aiken, C. (2024, January). *Housing is justice: Exploring state and local innovations*. Housing Solutions Lab. https://www.local housingsolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Housing-is-Justice-Exploring-State-and-Local-Innovations_V8.pdf

