

WISCONSIN COALITION AGAINST HOMELESSNESS

SUMMER 2019 NEWSLETTER

THE PROGRESS CONTINUES...

At the end of 2018, WCAH was able to look back on the year with great satisfaction for its accomplishments.

- The first new state money for homeless programs in 25 years was hitting the street. Family shelters throughout the state received \$1 million increasing the number of case managers to provide support for families to obtain permanent housing.
- The very much anticipated Medicaid waiver for homeless program funding was finally on track after some delay. The waiver has the potential to bring millions of dollars of support to Wisconsin for a variety of services including case management, mental health outreach, landlord-tenant advocacy, housing navigation, etc.
- A full-time staff person was hired and charged to coordinate the efforts of the Department of Health Services staff including the pursuit of the Medicaid waiver.
- And finally, in the fall of 2018 and after a years' worth of work, the Inter Agency Council on Homelessness issued the first action plan developed by state government to confront the homeless crisis entitled "A Hand and A Home" which included budget recommendations for the upcoming budget, totaling \$7.5 million for the next biennium.

Then the state elected a new Governor.

WCAH took no position on the governor's race, but going into 2019, a significant challenge was in play in terms of maintaining momentum around the issue of homelessness and to continue the amazing progress that had made in such a short time. The most significant concerns included:

- First, the Inter Agency Council as the driver for state policy around homelessness had been successful because the former Lt. Governor agreed to chair it. This ensured that the cabinet secretaries would understand that their participation was essential to success of the Council. The effectiveness of the council relies on the full support of the Executive Office

of the State. Whether or not Governor Evers' administration would fully support and staff the council was unknown.

- We were concerned that the Inter Agency Council plan, including the \$7.5 million in new funding recommendations, would be significantly altered or eliminated as the new biennium budget was being developed.
- And, we were unsure that the all-important homeless Medicaid waiver might not be pursued vigorously by the new administration.

With those challenges facing us, WCAH staff, board, and members went to work. Largely, due to our advocacy, Governor Tony Evers agreed to Chair the Inter Agency Council, thus assuring that the Council would continue with participation from the highest levels of State government. In addition, the Governor agreed to embrace the elements of the established Council plan and to include the funding recommendations in his budget submission to the legislature. The Assembly Republicans authored eight new bills, also containing funding the council report recommended. And finally, the new administration decided to not only embrace the homeless Medicaid waiver, but to move it from a pilot in a few counties to a state-wide initiative.

WHERE WE ARE TODAY...

Governor Evers has named a new director of the Inter Agency Council, Michael Basford, and convened the first organizational meeting of the Council. Having the Governor as the Chair of the Inter-Agency Council is a strong signal that his administration supports the importance of the Council.

On the budget front, the Joint Finance Committee did not approve the specific uses of funding contained in the Council plan and the Governor's budget, but did set aside \$7.5 million for new homeless programming. Those new funds are included in the approved budget for the next two years. The Assembly passed all the individual bills, thus endorsing the funding and program recommendations contained in the Council plan and the Governor's budget. It is our expectation that the Senate will take up and agree with the Assembly bills in September and in short, new funding for Homeless Prevention, Diversion, Shelters, Housing Assistance, Housing Navigators, and Workforce Development Services will be made available before this winter.

Finally, a draft of the Homeless Medicaid Waiver should be available for public comment before the end of this year and hopefully submitted to the Federal Government early in 2020.

TAKING STOCK...

WOW!!!! What an amazing four years! When we formed WCAH no one in State government was talking about homelessness. There was no plan. There had not been any new investment in homeless services in 25 years.

Today, largely due to the advocacy of WCAH, we have an Interagency Council chaired by the Governor which means that the complex issues surrounding homelessness have been discussed within State government and most importantly, once per quarter, the Governor and his cabinet meet to focus on policies and approaches to reduce homelessness. The issue has become a priority issue within state government!

Pending Senate action this fall, homeless resources provided by the state increase from \$ 3.2 million per year to \$8.5 million; an increase of over 250% in the last four years!

The Medicaid waiver is moving forward and will hopefully provide future funding for homeless programs in the millions of dollars.

And finally, and perhaps more important than anything else, WCAH has been able to keep homelessness in Wisconsin a bipartisan issue with the press citing it as one of the few areas which have transcended party politics and prompted the development of policy and funding supports with ideas, coordination and cooperation from both sides of the aisle.

Thanks to all who have made this progress possible. It proves that competent, targeted, and energetic advocacy really can make a difference!