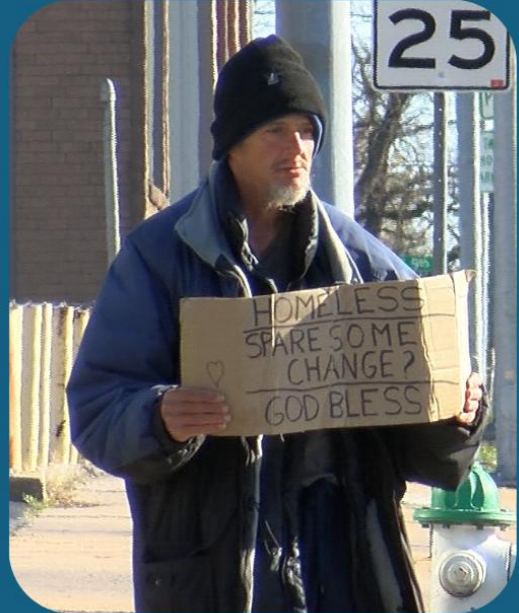




JOPLIN REPORT ON HOMELESSNESS 2025

**A YEAR OF PROGRESS,
A FUTURE OF PROMISE.**



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Letter to the Community

Dear Residents, Leaders, and Advocates of Joplin,

I am honored to share this report with you—not as an abstract study but as a deeply personal reflection of nearly a decade of firsthand experience working in homelessness services in our community. Joplin is a city I love, and it is out of that love that I feel compelled to provide this detailed needs assessment.

While we may never fully eliminate homelessness, I believe that with a clear and intentional path, we can make a profound difference. The challenges outlined in this report are not just numbers and statistics; they represent real people—our neighbors, our veterans, our families, and our youth—who are struggling to find stability in a system that is often complex and under-resourced. I have seen these challenges up close, both in Joplin and across Missouri, where I recently helped coordinate a statewide program assessing shelter services and identifying critical gaps in care.

This report is the result of that experience, combined with the voices of those on the front lines—service providers, community leaders, and most importantly, individuals experiencing homelessness themselves. It is meant to serve as a tool for action, offering data-driven insights and practical solutions to move Joplin toward a more compassionate, effective response to homelessness.

I invite you to read this report not just as an observer but as someone with the power to create change. Whether you are a policymaker, a business owner, a faith leader, or a concerned citizen, your role in addressing this crisis matters. The solutions outlined here require commitment, collaboration, and the belief that every person deserves a place to call home.

I hope this assessment serves as a catalyst for meaningful conversations and, more importantly, for action. Joplin has always been a community defined by its resilience and generosity. With that spirit, I believe we can take steps to ensure that homelessness is not an insurmountable reality but a challenge we are committed to addressing with clarity, compassion, and resolve.

Thank you for taking the time to engage with this report and for your dedication to building a stronger, more inclusive Joplin.

With gratitude and hope,

Joshua Shackles
Needs Assessment Coordinator & Advocate
Joplin, Missouri

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REPORT ON HOMELESSNESS IN JOPLIN, MISSOURI

INTRODUCTION

Homelessness remains one of the most pressing social challenges in Joplin, Missouri, as the city grapples with increasing numbers of individuals and families experiencing housing instability. While homelessness is a national issue, its impact varies significantly at the local level due to factors such as economic conditions, housing policies, and the availability of social services. In Joplin, the rise in homelessness has been driven by a combination of financial shifts, a lack of affordable housing, and gaps in support services for vulnerable populations. As a regional hub, Joplin attracts individuals from surrounding areas seeking assistance, further straining limited resources. Additionally, systemic factors such as wage stagnation, job insecurity, and barriers to accessing social programs have exacerbated the crisis, making it more difficult for those experiencing homelessness to secure stable housing and long-term support.

This report provides a comprehensive analysis of homelessness in Joplin, drawing on the latest data, policy discussions, and service interventions. It highlights the demographics of those affected, examines systemic barriers to stable housing, and evaluates the effectiveness of current programs and policies. The report also explores the community's response to homelessness, including the role of public perception, faith-based initiatives, and business engagement in shaping solutions. Furthermore, it assesses the city's performance against System Performance Measures (SPMs), which track factors such as returns to homelessness, length of time homeless, and employment outcomes for individuals in housing programs. Understanding these indicators is crucial for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of Joplin's current homelessness response and identifying areas for improvement.

The structure of this report is divided into twelve parts, each addressing a key aspect of the homelessness crisis in Joplin. The first section outlines the scope of the issue, providing an overview of the Point-in-Time (PIT) and Housing Inventory Count (HIC) data to establish baseline figures for the number of sheltered and unsheltered individuals. These figures offer insights into homelessness trends over time and help determine whether interventions are having the desired impact. Subsequent sections delve into economic and structural causes, the characteristics of those affected, barriers to accessing housing and services, and proposed solutions for both short- and long-term intervention strategies. The latter sections focus on funding sustainability, policy recommendations, public engagement, and an action plan for mitigating homelessness in Joplin.

As homelessness continues to evolve in Joplin, a data-driven approach is essential for developing effective interventions. This report aims to inform policymakers, service providers, and community stakeholders by presenting evidence-based strategies to reduce homelessness and improve housing stability. Through collaborative efforts across multiple sectors, Joplin has the opportunity to create a more inclusive and supportive community where homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring. Achieving this goal will require sustained commitment, increased funding, and a shift in both policy and public perception. With thoughtful planning and proactive engagement, Joplin can build a model for addressing homelessness that not only meets the immediate needs of those affected but also fosters long-term stability and economic inclusion for the entire community.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION & SCOPE OF THE CRISIS

Chapter 1 provides a foundational understanding of homelessness in Joplin by examining the scale of the crisis, the factors driving homelessness, and the systemic challenges limiting effective interventions. It establishes a data-driven framework to assess trends over time, compare Joplin's situation to similar cities, and identify service gaps that contribute to rising homelessness. The chapter begins by outlining the extent of homelessness in the community, highlighting the significant increase in unsheltered individuals and the decline in available housing resources. It then defines key terms and measurement standards used to track homelessness, ensuring that all stakeholders operate from a common understanding of how homelessness is categorized and assessed. The historical context of homelessness in Joplin is also explored, tracing the long-term effects of significant events like the 2011 EF-5 tornado and the COVID-19 pandemic, which have exacerbated housing instability and placed additional strain on local shelters and services.

Additionally, the chapter introduces HUD's System Performance Measures (SPMs), which serve as essential metrics for evaluating the effectiveness of Joplin's homelessness response. By analyzing data on the length of time individuals remain homeless, rates of return to homelessness, employment trends, and first-time homelessness, this chapter highlights the critical need for improved service coordination and data-driven policy decisions. The chapter concludes by proposing a broad set of solutions, emphasizing the need for expanded emergency and supportive housing, enhanced mental health and addiction treatment services, and stronger tenant protections. These discussions set the stage for the rest of the report, which will delve deeper into the structural causes of homelessness, assess the impact of economic trends on housing stability, and outline evidence-based strategies to address the growing crisis in Joplin.

1.1 OVERVIEW OF HOMELESSNESS IN JOPLIN

Homelessness in Joplin, Missouri, has grown into a significant social challenge, impacting individuals, families, and the community at large. As a regional hub, Joplin serves as a center for services, employment, and commerce, which inadvertently attracts individuals experiencing homelessness from surrounding rural areas. The issue has been further exacerbated by economic fluctuations, increasing housing costs, and limitations in shelter capacity and social services. The rise in homelessness reflects broader national trends in housing instability and affordability challenges. Yet, Joplin's unique geographic and economic position intensifies these factors, making it a focal point for both the causes and potential solutions to homelessness.

According to the 2024 Point-in-Time (PIT) Count, Joplin recorded 129 unsheltered individuals, marking a 111 percent increase from 2023. The total homeless population, including those in emergency shelters and transitional housing, reached 292 individuals in 2024. This stark rise in unsheltered homelessness highlights gaps in shelter availability, affordable housing, and supportive services. The increase suggests that many individuals who previously had temporary shelter options are now forced to remain on the streets due to limited resources and rising rental costs that outpace financial assistance programs. Additionally, economic displacement and structural shifts in the job market have created new vulnerabilities for low-income residents who may be one financial crisis away from homelessness.

The Housing Inventory Count (HIC) for 2024 shows a 52 percent decrease in Rapid Rehousing (RRH) beds and a 25 percent decrease in youth shelter beds, limiting the ability of service providers to accommodate those in need. These numbers suggest that Joplin's existing homelessness response infrastructure is struggling to keep pace with increasing demand. Furthermore, the lack of available permanent supportive housing means that individuals with chronic homelessness are left without a long-term solution, contributing to repeated cycles of housing instability. Additionally, transportation barriers and limited employment opportunities exacerbate the issue, preventing many individuals from securing the stable incomes necessary to sustain long-term housing solutions.

1.2 KEY DEFINITIONS & MEASUREMENT STANDARDS

Understanding homelessness requires a clear framework for defining and measuring the issue accurately. Various agencies and institutions use different definitions, which impact how homelessness is identified, documented, and addressed in Joplin. The definitions used in this report help contextualize the data presented and highlight potential gaps in service eligibility. Additionally, HUD System Performance Measures (SPMs) serve as critical benchmarks for evaluating the effectiveness of local homelessness response efforts, offering key insights into service gaps and long-term housing stability.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines homelessness as individuals and families who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. This includes those living in emergency shelters, transitional housing, or places not meant for human habitation, such as cars, parks, abandoned buildings, or other unsafe environments. Additionally, HUD considers individuals at imminent risk of losing their housing as part of the broader spectrum of housing instability, though they may not qualify for all HUD-funded programs.

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act provides a broader definition of homelessness, primarily for children and youth, which encompasses individuals living in doubled-up situations due to economic hardship, residing in motels, hotels, campgrounds, emergency shelters, or awaiting foster care placement. This distinction is critical because families experiencing these forms of housing instability may not qualify for HUD-funded housing assistance but still face severe risks of homelessness. School districts, which report homelessness under McKinney-Vento standards, often record significantly higher numbers of homeless children than those captured in HUD data, revealing that traditional homelessness counts may underestimate the accurate scale of the crisis in Joplin.

In addition to these primary definitions, other key terms are relevant to homelessness measurement and service provision:

Unsheltered Homelessness: Individuals living in public or private places not designed for regular sleeping accommodations, such as streets, vehicles, or abandoned buildings.

Sheltered Homelessness: Individuals residing in emergency shelters, transitional housing, or other temporary housing programs funded by HUD or other agencies.

Chronic Homelessness: Defined by HUD as individuals or families who have been homeless for at least 12 months continuously or have experienced four or more episodes of homelessness within the past three years while also living with a disabling condition (mental illness, substance use disorder, or physical disability).

Housing First: A policy approach that prioritizes immediate access to stable housing without preconditions such as sobriety, employment, or participation in treatment programs. This model has been shown to reduce chronic homelessness and improve long-term housing retention rates.

Rapid Rehousing (RRH): Short-term rental assistance and support services designed to help individuals and families quickly exit homelessness and stabilize in permanent housing.

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH): Long-term housing with integrated case management and supportive services for individuals with disabilities or chronic homelessness history.

Homeless Management Information System (HMIS): A national database used to track homelessness services and outcomes required for HUD-funded programs.

DATA COLLECTION AND REPORTING CHALLENGES

Accurate data collection is essential for securing funding and designing effective homelessness interventions. However, some major service providers in Joplin do not participate in HMIS tracking, leading to gaps in data and incomplete assessments of homelessness in the region. These blind spots make it more difficult to access federal and state funding and limit data-driven policy development. Expanding HMIS participation and improving data-sharing among service providers will enhance the accuracy of official statistics, helping ensure that resources are targeted effectively and that all individuals experiencing homelessness receive appropriate support.

By integrating HUD's System Performance Measures with local PIT and HIC data, Joplin can better track long-term progress, refine service delivery, and advocate for expanded resources. Strengthening data transparency and regional collaboration will be crucial in reducing homelessness and improving housing stability across the community.

1.3 HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF HOMELESSNESS IN JOPLIN

Economic trends, natural disasters, and changes in policy have shaped Joplin's homelessness crisis. The EF-5 tornado on May 22, 2011, one of the deadliest and most destructive in U.S. history, destroyed over 7,500 homes and displaced thousands of residents. The destruction of affordable rental units disproportionately affected low-income families, many of whom lacked the resources to rebuild or relocate permanently. While federal aid and temporary housing assistance provided short-term relief, long-term affordability issues persisted. Rent prices in Joplin rose in the years following the disaster, pricing many low-income renters out of the market. Homeowners who lost their properties but did not qualify for sufficient insurance payouts or rebuilding assistance were also at high risk of housing instability. The reduction in available rental stock forced many individuals into precarious housing situations, contributing to an increase in homelessness over the following decade.

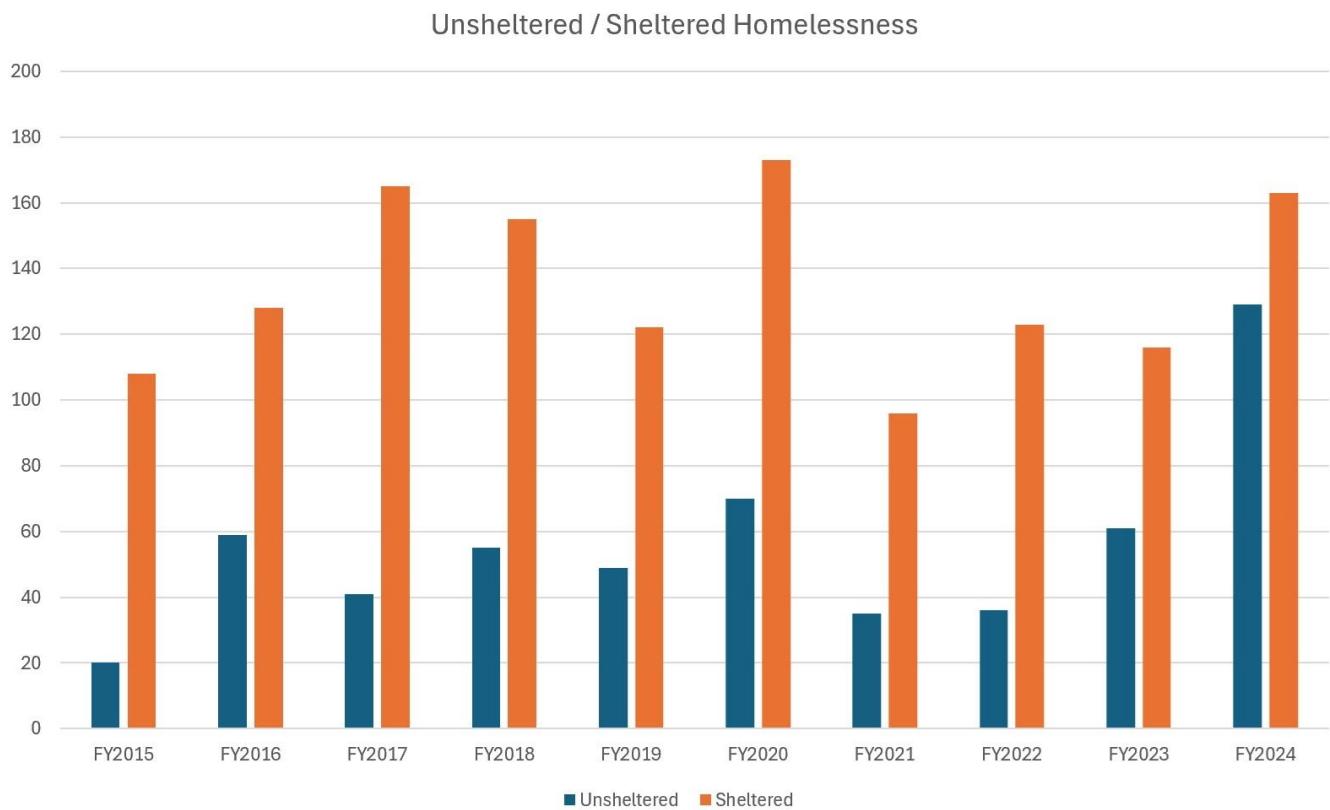
The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated housing insecurity in Joplin. Widespread job losses, wage reductions, and medical expenses left many renters unable to pay their housing costs. Emergency shelters faced reduced capacity due to social distancing requirements, forcing some people experiencing homelessness to seek alternatives such as motels, vehicles, or overcrowded housing with family members. Federal and state eviction moratoriums temporarily prevented large-scale displacement, but when they expired in 2021, evictions surged. In Missouri, approximately 6% of households face eviction filings annually, with low-income and Black renters experiencing higher rates of displacement. Even with emergency rental assistance programs, many tenants still struggled to recover financially, mainly as inflation drove up the cost of living. While some were able to remain housed through short-term aid programs, others fell into homelessness as rental relief funds ran out.

Between 2019 and 2023, Joplin experienced a substantial increase in unsheltered homelessness. In 2019, 49 individuals were recorded as unsheltered, while by 2023, that number had risen to 61. The most dramatic change occurred between 2022 and 2023, when the unsheltered population jumped from 36 to 61, an increase of 111%. During the same period, the number of people in emergency shelters fluctuated, peaking at 173 in 2020 before declining to 116 in 2023. These shifts indicate a growing gap in available shelter services and long-term housing solutions. Rising rent prices in Joplin have also contributed to increased housing instability. Many individuals receiving housing choice vouchers through government assistance programs struggle to find units that accept the vouchers, as rental costs have exceeded the fair market rate limits set by assistance programs.

Another significant factor influencing homelessness in Joplin has been the lack of mental health and substance use treatment services. Many individuals experiencing homelessness report co-occurring mental health disorders, substance use issues, or physical disabilities, yet Joplin lacks sufficient supportive housing options to address these needs. The city has no dedicated low-barrier shelter for individuals actively struggling with substance use, limiting available options for a significant portion of the homeless population. Additionally, the closure of psychiatric institutions and reductions in mental health funding in Missouri have left many individuals without the care they need.

As a result, people with chronic illnesses and disabilities often find themselves cycling between homelessness, emergency rooms, and the criminal justice system, further exacerbating their instability.

The historical context of homelessness in Joplin underscores the need for long-term solutions that address both immediate shelter needs and systemic barriers to housing. Expanding permanent supportive housing for individuals with disabilities, increasing access to mental health and addiction treatment programs, and restoring lost rapid rehousing capacity would significantly improve housing stability in the city. Data collection efforts also need improvement, as not all service providers currently participate in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), leading to gaps in data that hinder funding and policy decisions. Establishing more coordinated services, eviction prevention programs, and housing-first initiatives could provide sustainable solutions to mitigate Joplin’s rising homelessness rates. Looking ahead, targeted investments in affordable housing, rental assistance, and case management services will be critical in addressing both short-term needs and long-term housing security for Joplin’s most vulnerable populations.



1.4 SYSTEM PERFORMANCE MEASURES (SPMS) & WHY THEY MATTER

To effectively address homelessness, communities must have measurable benchmarks to evaluate the impact of their interventions. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires Continuum of Care (CoC) programs to track System Performance Measures (SPMs) to assess the effectiveness of homelessness response efforts. These measures provide data-driven insights into how well local strategies reduce homelessness, improve housing stability, and promote financial independence. The Institute for Community Alliances (ICA) compiles and reports these measures for Joplin, ensuring that stakeholders can analyze trends and make informed decisions.

UNDERSTANDING HUD SYSTEM PERFORMANCE MEASURES

HUD has established seven key System Performance Measures (SPMs) that evaluate the overall efficiency of homelessness programs:

1. **Length of Time Homeless** – Measures the average and median duration individuals and families experience homelessness, assessing whether interventions effectively reduce the time spent without stable housing.
2. **Returns to Homelessness** – Tracks the percentage of individuals who exit homelessness to permanent housing but later return within 6, 12, or 24 months, indicating whether support services are helping sustain long-term stability.
3. **Number of Homeless Persons** – Analyzes year-over-year changes in Point-in-Time (PIT) counts and Housing Inventory Counts (HIC) to identify trends in homelessness rates and service demand.
4. **Employment and Income Growth** – Measures changes in income levels for individuals in CoC-funded programs, reflecting the ability of housing interventions to support financial stability and self-sufficiency.
5. **Number of First-Time Homeless**—This statistic identifies the number of people entering homelessness for the first time, highlighting the effectiveness of preventative strategies such as rental assistance and eviction diversion programs.
6. **Successful Placements from Outreach Programs**—This measure assesses the effectiveness of outreach efforts by assessing how many people engaged through street outreach successfully transition into permanent or temporary housing.
7. **Housing Retention in Permanent Housing Programs** – Measures stability rates for individuals placed in permanent supportive housing (PSH) or other long-term housing solutions, ensuring that individuals remain housed over time.

APPLYING SPM DATA TO IMPROVE HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE

SPM data for Joplin from 2023 and 2024 indicates several areas of concern. The length of time people remain homeless has increased, with many individuals staying unsheltered longer due to limited shelter capacity and rising rental costs. The rate of returns to homelessness remains high, suggesting that people leaving homelessness may not receive adequate long-term support to maintain stability. Additionally, employment and income growth among individuals in CoC-funded programs is low, showing that economic barriers remain a significant challenge for long-term housing security. The increasing number of first-time homeless individuals also demonstrates the need for stronger preventative measures to stop people from entering the homelessness system in the first place.

By leveraging SPM data, Joplin can prioritize funding and resources to address the most pressing issues. Expanding participation in SPM reporting and HMIS tracking will enhance real-time data collection, allowing policymakers and service providers to adapt quickly to emerging trends. Increased coordination between emergency shelters, outreach teams, and housing programs will help ensure that individuals experiencing homelessness receive the right services at the right time. Additionally, strengthening rental assistance programs, eviction prevention services and employment support initiatives can improve long-term housing stability and reduce reliance on shelters.

SPMs serve as critical indicators of success, guiding decision-makers toward evidence-based solutions that create a more sustainable and effective homelessness response system. By continuously evaluating these measures, Joplin can ensure that its strategies remain responsive, efficient, and focused on achieving long-term housing stability for all residents.

1.5 YEAR-OVER-YEAR DATA ANALYSIS WITH SPRINGFIELD COMPARISON

A review of Joplin's 2023 Point-in-Time (PIT) count shows that 255 individuals were experiencing homelessness, reflecting a 10% increase from 2022. Of these, 61 were unsheltered, representing a 69% increase compared to the previous year. This rise in unsheltered homelessness indicates a growing need for emergency services, mainly as sheltered homelessness saw a slight decline (-6%), which may point to reduced shelter capacity or increased barriers to access. In comparison, Springfield, MO, recorded 617 homeless individuals in 2023, with 159 unsheltered—indicating that, while Springfield has a larger total population, Joplin has a higher rate of unsheltered homelessness per capita.

Another significant concern is the availability of Rapid Rehousing (RRH) and Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) beds. In Joplin, RRH capacity has declined by 52% from 2023 to 2024, which may explain the rising unsheltered numbers. Springfield, on the other hand, has maintained consistent bed utilization rates above 85%, suggesting a more stable housing intervention framework. Additionally, Joplin has a more significant proportion of homeless children (65% of its total homeless population) compared to Springfield, where one in six homeless individuals is under 18. This discrepancy highlights the need for increased youth and family support services in Joplin.

Further analysis of veteran and chronic homelessness trends shows mixed results. Joplin's chronic homelessness increased by 119% from 2022 to 2023, which suggests that more individuals are experiencing long-term housing instability. However, Springfield reported only 35 chronically homeless individuals in its 2023 PIT count, significantly lower than Joplin's proportionate numbers. Similarly, Joplin recorded 47 homeless veterans, while Springfield had 56, despite Springfield's larger total population. This suggests that veterans make up a higher percentage of Joplin's homeless population, emphasizing the need for specialized veteran housing initiatives.

Moving forward, Joplin must expand its data collection efforts and increase service accessibility. Springfield's relative success in housing stability, veteran support, and bed utilization can serve as a model for Joplin. Key strategies should include enhancing rapid rehousing efforts, increasing emergency shelter capacity, and creating a dedicated service coordination network for at-risk youth and veterans. By implementing these measures and strengthening multi-year comparative analyses, Joplin can develop a more effective and sustainable homelessness response system.

1.6 PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

This report aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of homelessness in Joplin, integrating key data sources such as Point-in-Time (PIT) counts, Housing Inventory Counts (HIC), System Performance Measures (SPMs) from HUD, and local service provider reports. These data points offer a detailed picture of homelessness trends, including sheltered and unsheltered populations, length of time homeless, returns to homelessness, and system performance metrics. The report also examines underlying factors contributing to homelessness, such as housing affordability, eviction rates, mental health, substance use challenges, and service gaps. Analyzing these elements aims to inform policymakers, service providers, and community stakeholders about the scale, scope, and evolving nature of homelessness in Joplin.

Beyond quantifying homelessness, this report identifies opportunities to improve service coordination, leverage funding sources, and adapt local policies to address the crisis better. It highlights gaps in shelter capacity, rapid rehousing availability, and permanent supportive housing programs while also recognizing the importance of street outreach, case management, and mental health services. By benchmarking Joplin's homelessness trends against similar cities, such as Springfield, MO, the report offers a comparative perspective that can help refine strategies and ensure that best practices are considered. Additionally, it emphasizes the need for enhanced participation in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) to improve data collection, inter-agency collaboration, and the ability to track long-term outcomes.

A primary objective of this report is to provide evidence-based recommendations that address both immediate relief efforts and long-term systemic changes. These include expanding affordable and supportive housing, implementing stronger eviction prevention measures, strengthening tenant protections, and increasing investment in mental health and addiction treatment services. The report also explores strategies for reducing barriers to shelter access, improving workforce development programs, and fostering community partnerships to support individuals at risk of homelessness. Additionally, it underscores the importance of public awareness campaigns to combat misconceptions and stigma surrounding homelessness, which can influence policy decisions and community support for shelter expansion efforts.

Ultimately, this report serves as a strategic framework for action, guiding nonprofit organizations, government agencies, businesses, and residents toward a cohesive, long-term plan to prevent and reduce homelessness in Joplin. By aligning local resources, policy initiatives, and community-driven solutions, Joplin can build a more effective and sustainable homelessness response system. The following sections of this report will further explore the economic and structural causes of homelessness, including housing affordability challenges, eviction trends, and the impact of transportation accessibility on employment opportunities.

1.7 OVERVIEW OF SOLUTIONS PROPOSED

Addressing homelessness in Joplin requires a multifaceted approach that balances immediate relief efforts with long-term systemic changes. Expanding low-income housing and implementing Housing First programs are key strategies to provide stable living environments for those in need. A key focus should be on increasing access to permanent supportive housing (PSH), particularly given the city's high rate of chronic homelessness. The decline in Rapid Rehousing (RRH) capacity also highlights the urgency of restoring and expanding short-term housing interventions to prevent individuals from becoming unsheltered. Additionally, the development of transitional housing programs can help bridge the gap for those moving from emergency shelters to permanent housing.

A robust mental health and addiction treatment infrastructure is critical to addressing the root causes of homelessness. Many individuals experiencing homelessness struggle with co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders, which create barriers to maintaining stable housing. Expanding outreach-based behavioral health services and integrating mental health professionals into street outreach teams can improve access to treatment for those who are disengaged from traditional healthcare systems. Additionally, collaborations with hospitals, crisis stabilization units, and harm reduction programs can ensure that individuals receive ongoing support beyond emergency interventions.

Enhancing data tracking and participation in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) is essential to improving resource allocation and ensuring service providers have an accurate understanding of homelessness trends. Developing a coordinated entry system that prioritizes the most vulnerable populations can help streamline access to housing programs. Improved cross-agency collaboration between shelters, healthcare providers, law enforcement, and social services can also ensure that individuals do not fall through the cracks. Expanding real-time data collection, such as through mobile outreach teams and case managers, can provide a clearer picture of hidden homelessness and housing instability within the community.

Public awareness campaigns and community engagement initiatives are necessary to combat the stigma surrounding homelessness and reduce resistance to shelter expansion efforts. Many proposed shelter and housing projects have faced pushback due to NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) opposition, delaying much-needed services. Increasing public education on the economic and social benefits of supportive housing, along with fostering partnerships with local businesses and faith-based organizations, can build broader community support. Finally, strengthening tenant protections, expanding eviction prevention programs, and increasing rental assistance funding can help prevent individuals and families from falling into homelessness in the first place. The next section of this

report will explore the economic and structural causes of homelessness in Joplin, including housing affordability challenges, eviction rates, and the impact of transportation accessibility on employment opportunities.

1.8 SUMMARY & KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 1 provides a foundational understanding of homelessness in Joplin, outlining its scale, causes, and systemic challenges. It highlights the significant increase in unsheltered individuals, the decline in available housing resources, and the barriers that prevent effective intervention. The chapter also establishes key definitions and measurement standards, such as HUD's System Performance Measures and the McKinney-Vento Act, ensuring stakeholders operate from a common framework.

The historical context of homelessness in Joplin is explored, noting the long-term impact of significant events like the 2011 EF-5 tornado and the COVID-19 pandemic. Data from the 2024 Point-in-Time Count and Housing Inventory Count highlight increasing homelessness trends, reinforcing the urgency of targeted interventions. The chapter concludes by emphasizing the need for expanded emergency and supportive housing, stronger tenant protections, and enhanced mental health and addiction treatment services as the foundation for a sustainable response.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CHAPTER 1

- Expand emergency shelter and housing options by increasing the availability of low-barrier shelters for individuals with addiction or mental health struggles. Restore rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing capacity to prevent chronic homelessness.
- To improve the accuracy of homelessness data and enhance data collection and tracking by requiring full participation in the Homeless Management Information System. Utilize system performance measures to assess service effectiveness and adjust policies accordingly.
- Strengthen tenant protections and eviction prevention by expanding rental assistance and legal aid programs to reduce the risk of homelessness. Develop a tenant protection policy to prevent unjust evictions.
- Improve mental health and addiction services by increasing outreach-based behavioral health programs to reach individuals in unsheltered conditions. Strengthen collaboration between mental health providers, shelters, and law enforcement to create a more integrated support system.
- Address housing affordability challenges by exploring zoning reforms and developer incentives to increase affordable housing stock. Advocate for additional public-private partnerships to create more low-income rental units.
- Launch educational campaigns to combat homelessness-related stigma and increase public awareness and community engagement. Foster partnerships with faith-based organizations, businesses, and local leaders to build community support for new housing initiatives.

CHAPTER 2: ECONOMIC & STRUCTURAL CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness in Joplin is driven by a complex set of economic and structural challenges that have made it increasingly difficult for low-income individuals and families to secure stable housing. Rising rent costs, a shortage of affordable housing, and stagnant wages have created a widening gap between what residents can afford and the available housing options. Many low-income renters are forced to dedicate an unsustainable portion of their income to housing, leaving little room for unexpected financial emergencies. As a result, eviction rates have risen, and more individuals are experiencing homelessness for the first time. Additionally, the lack of housing options for individuals with disabilities, seniors, and those experiencing chronic homelessness further exacerbates the crisis. The structural issues contributing to homelessness in Joplin extend beyond the housing market, with limited access to transportation, job opportunities, and social services creating additional barriers to long-term stability.

This chapter explores the economic and structural factors that contribute to homelessness in Joplin, beginning with the decline in affordable housing and the impact of rising rent prices. It examines how increasing eviction rates have displaced vulnerable residents and discusses the persistent gap between housing supply and demand. The chapter also highlights the challenges faced by individuals experiencing homelessness due to employment barriers, transportation limitations, and regional disparities in service availability. Finally, it explores policy debates surrounding different approaches to homelessness intervention, such as Housing First versus Treatment First models. Understanding these economic and structural causes is essential for developing targeted solutions that not only provide immediate relief but also address the root causes of homelessness in Joplin.

2.1 DECLINE IN AFFORDABLE HOUSING & RENT INCREASES

Over the past decade, Joplin has experienced a significant decline in affordable housing coupled with rapid rent increases, making it increasingly difficult for low- and middle-income residents to find stable housing.

In 2014, rental costs in Joplin were much lower, with one-bedroom apartments averaging \$463, two-bedroom units at \$617, and three-bedroom homes around \$843. These rates were relatively affordable compared to median wages, and many residents were able to secure housing without spending an excessive portion of their income on rent. However, since then, rents have surged dramatically, far outpacing wage growth and inflation.

By 2024, the median rent for a one-bedroom apartment ranged between \$780 and \$955, while two-bedroom units were priced between \$1,003 and \$1,100. Three-bedroom units now average \$1,358 per month. These increases represent an 87.4% rise for one-bedroom units, a 70.4% increase for two-bedroom apartments, and a 61.1% spike for three-bedroom homes compared to 2014.

Several factors have contributed to this crisis. Housing supply shortages have played a significant role, as new housing developments in Joplin have not kept pace with demand, particularly for affordable rental units. Developers have focused on market-rate and higher-end housing, leaving fewer options for low- and moderate-income households. As housing options have become more limited, competition for available rental units has intensified, driving up prices incredibly as more people are priced out of homeownership and forced to rent.

The loss of affordable housing has also worsened the situation. Many rental units that were once considered affordable have transitioned to higher market rates due to property improvements, changes in ownership, or increasing demand. Additionally, some landlords have stopped accepting housing vouchers, further restricting access to affordable rental options for low-income tenants.

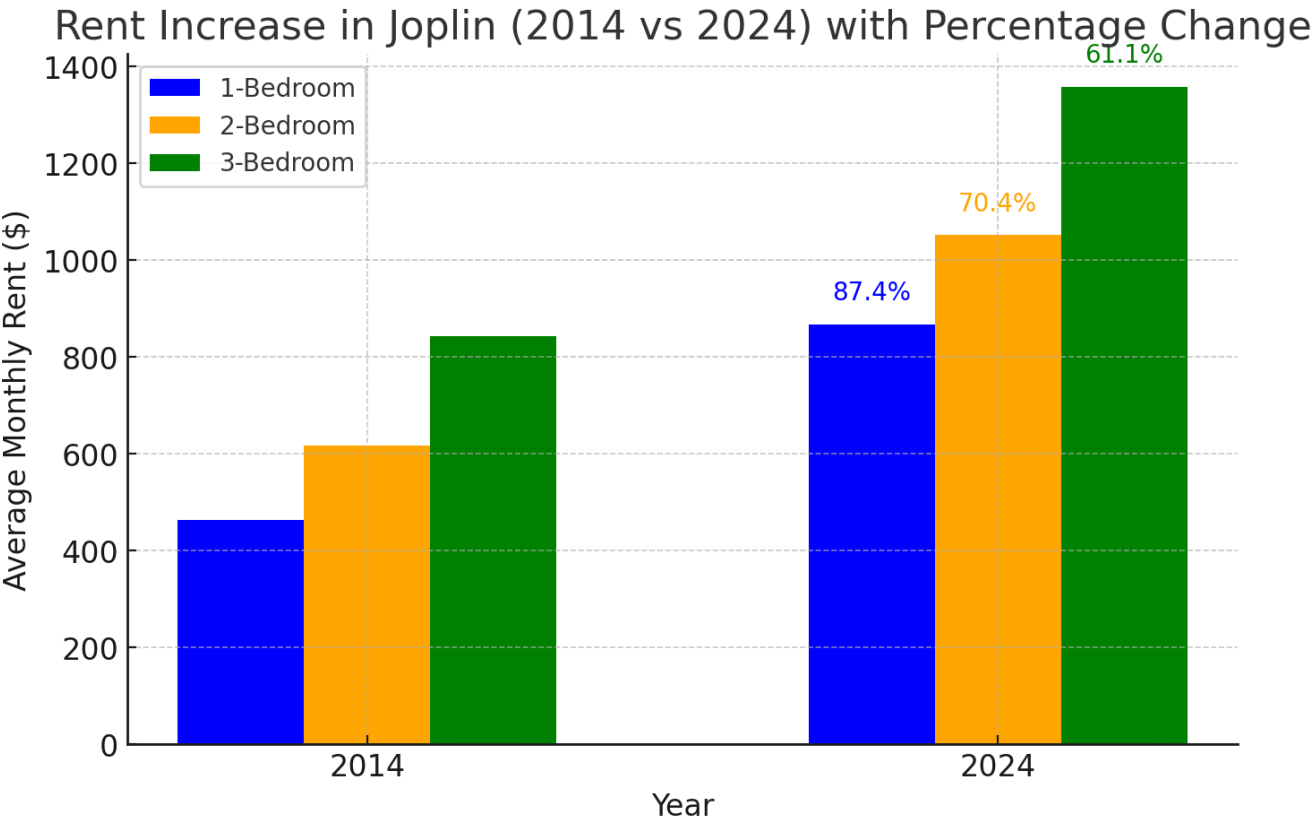
At the same time, wages have not kept up with rising rents. While rent has increased by over 60-80% in the past decade, wage growth has been much slower. More residents are now spending over 30% of their income on rent, leaving less money for necessities like food, healthcare, and utilities. This has led to a rise in rent-burdened households, particularly among low-income families and individuals.

Existing subsidized housing programs have been unable to keep up with demand, leading to long waitlists for assistance. Housing vouchers, meant to help low-income residents afford rent, have not kept pace with the increasing cost of housing. Many renters struggle to find units within the program’s limits, and some landlords refuse to accept vouchers due to concerns over delayed payments and regulatory requirements. This disparity between voucher values and rental prices has further limited access to stable housing for vulnerable populations.

The consequences of this crisis are becoming more evident. Rising rents have led to an increase in evictions, housing instability, and homelessness. More individuals and families are being forced into temporary shelters, overcrowded living arrangements, or even homelessness as they struggle to find housing they can afford. Many households now dedicate an unsustainable portion of their income to rent, often having to make difficult choices between housing and other necessities.

Seniors and individuals with disabilities face even more significant challenges, as many of the available low-cost units do not meet accessibility requirements. With few affordable homeownership opportunities, renting remains the only viable option for many, contributing to long-term financial insecurity and economic instability.

The decline in affordable housing and rising rent costs have created a growing crisis in Joplin. Without intervention, these trends will continue to widen the gap between housing costs and household income, pushing more residents into precarious living situations and exacerbating the challenges of housing insecurity and homelessness.



2.2 EVICTION RATES & TENANT DISPLACEMENT

Evictions are a major driver of homelessness in Joplin, disproportionately affecting low-income families and communities of color. In Missouri, approximately 6% of households face eviction filings annually, with Black renters

experiencing eviction rates 1.5 to 2 times higher than white renters. Statewide, 42% of renters are cost-burdened, meaning they spend over 35% of their income on rent, a financial strain that increases their risk of eviction. Among racial groups, this burden is even higher for Black (54%), mixed-race (47%), and Hispanic (43%) renters. The leading causes of eviction in Joplin include job loss, medical debt, and unpaid rent, compounded by the lack of tenant protections and limited access to legal assistance for low-income individuals facing displacement.

The expiration of pandemic-era eviction protections has contributed to rising eviction rates, as landlords resumed eviction proceedings against tenants who had fallen behind on rent due to financial hardships caused by job losses and inflation. In many cases, renters are evicted for owing only one or two months' rent, with little opportunity to negotiate repayment plans or secure emergency rental assistance. Some landlords have increased eviction filings as a means of replacing long-term tenants with higher-paying renters, further reducing housing stability for low-income residents. Reports from regional housing advocates indicate a sharp rise in calls for assistance from families on the verge of losing their homes, reflecting the growing need for eviction prevention measures.

Once evicted, many individuals struggle to secure new housing due to financial constraints and the stigma of an eviction record. Landlords frequently screen prospective tenants based on past evictions, making it difficult for displaced renters to find stable housing even after recovering financially. The eviction process often results in long-term housing instability, forcing families into overcrowded living conditions, extended motel stays, or emergency shelters. These conditions disrupt children's education, employment stability, and access to healthcare, reinforcing cycles of poverty. National research shows that families with children are disproportionately affected by evictions, increasing their risk of repeated homelessness.

Even when rental assistance programs exist, many tenants remain unaware of their rights or lack access to legal aid to challenge wrongful evictions. Some tenants vacate their homes upon receiving an eviction notice without realizing they may have legal options to negotiate with landlords or contest the eviction in court. Expanding legal aid programs and implementing right-to-counsel initiatives for tenants facing eviction could prevent unnecessary housing loss. Cities that have adopted right-to-counsel programs have seen eviction rates decrease by up to 50%, leading to more excellent housing stability for vulnerable renters. Without targeted policy interventions, eviction rates in Joplin are likely to remain high, pushing more individuals into homelessness. Establishing eviction prevention services, including rental assistance, landlord-tenant mediation, and legal support, could help stabilize at-risk households and reduce homelessness caused by displacement. Expanding tenant education programs can also empower renters with the knowledge and resources to better navigate landlord disputes and housing court proceedings. Addressing eviction rates through proactive housing policies and legal protections will be critical in ensuring long-term housing stability for Joplin's most vulnerable residents.

2.3 HOUSING INVENTORY VS. DEMAND

The 2024 Housing Inventory Count (HIC) highlights the growing gap between available housing and the increasing demand for affordable units. Rapid Rehousing (RRH) beds, which provide short-term rental assistance to homeless individuals transitioning to permanent housing, decreased by 52 percent between 2023 and 2024. Youth-specific shelter beds also saw a significant reduction, declining by 25 percent in the same period. These reductions have placed additional strain on emergency shelters, many of which are operating at full capacity with limited resources to accommodate new arrivals. The decline in available emergency and transitional housing beds reflects broader funding challenges and an increased reliance on overstretched service providers who are unable to meet the growing need for assistance.

Despite the growing need for affordable housing, vacancy rates in Joplin remain low, and many landlords continue to resist renting to voucher holders. This reluctance stems from concerns over rental payment delays, property upkeep regulations, and negative perceptions of low-income tenants. Some landlords have also shifted units away from long-

term rentals in favor of short-term leasing models, further decreasing the supply of affordable housing. The shortage of available housing, combined with restrictive rental practices, has contributed to a rise in unsheltered homelessness, particularly among individuals who have recently experienced eviction or job loss.

Additionally, housing construction in Joplin has primarily been focused on market-rate developments, leaving lower-income renters with fewer options. The city's lack of new affordable housing units, combined with rising rental costs and stagnant wages, has exacerbated housing insecurity. Efforts to expand the housing inventory for low-income residents have been limited, with few new subsidized or mixed-income developments breaking ground.

To address these challenges, Joplin should:

- Incentivize the development of affordable housing through tax credits, grants, and zoning adjustments.
- Encourage landlord participation in voucher programs by offering risk mitigation funds, guaranteed rent payments, and streamlined inspection processes.
- Support the expansion of RRH and Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) to provide stable housing options for those exiting homelessness.
- Advocate for increased funding for emergency shelters and transitional housing to bridge the gap between homelessness and permanent housing solutions.
- Strengthen partnerships with developers and nonprofit housing organizations to ensure that affordable housing construction meets the growing demand.

Without targeted policy interventions and investment in affordable housing development, the gap between housing supply and demand will continue to widen, increasing homelessness rates and housing instability in Joplin. Expanding affordable housing initiatives and removing barriers to rental access will be critical in stabilizing the housing market and preventing further displacement of vulnerable residents.

2.4 FIRST-TIME HOMELESSNESS

First-time homelessness is a critical indicator of economic instability and gaps in preventative measures. The HUD System Performance Measure (SPM) 5 tracks individuals who become homeless for the first time and have no prior history of utilizing emergency shelters or transitional housing services. Local data suggests a rise in first-time homelessness in Joplin, though comprehensive statistics remain incomplete. However, service providers report an increase in working individuals and families experiencing homelessness due to rent increases, unexpected financial emergencies, and the depletion of short-term safety nets such as rental assistance or emergency housing support.

Economic factors such as inflation, wage stagnation, and financial shocks—including medical debt, car repairs, and sudden job loss—are major contributors to first-time homelessness. Many households in Joplin live paycheck to paycheck, leaving them vulnerable to housing loss in the event of an emergency. The growing affordability gap has made it increasingly difficult for individuals facing financial hardship to secure alternative housing options, often forcing them into shelters, motels, or unstable living situations with family and friends.

Additionally, rising eviction rates in Joplin have pushed more individuals into homelessness, particularly those without a prior history of housing instability. Limited access to eviction prevention resources, rental assistance, and legal aid further exacerbate the problem. Households that previously may have been able to recover from a short-term financial setback are now finding it more challenging to regain housing stability due to low vacancy rates, restrictive rental policies, and landlords unwilling to rent to individuals with eviction records.

TO ADDRESS THIS ISSUE, JOPLIN SHOULD IMPLEMENT:

- Expanded emergency rental assistance programs to prevent at-risk households from entering homelessness.

- A dedicated emergency housing stabilization fund to provide short-term financial relief for individuals facing eviction or unexpected housing disruptions.
- Stronger tenant protection policies that include mediation services and legal aid to help renters facing eviction navigate their options.
- Financial literacy and housing readiness programs that equip renters with budgeting skills, credit counseling, and strategies to build rental history stability.
- More accessible diversion programs that identify at-risk individuals early and provide targeted support to help them avoid entering the shelter system.

Without proactive measures to prevent first-time homelessness, housing instability will continue to rise in Joplin, disproportionately impacting low-income individuals and families. Expanding preventative resources, increasing financial safety nets, and addressing the affordability crisis will be essential to reducing new instances of homelessness and helping Joplin residents maintain stable housing.

2.5 TRANSPORTATION & JOB ACCESS FOR THE HOMELESS

Limited transportation options further compound economic barriers for individuals experiencing homelessness in Joplin. While the city has restarted its trolley service and expanded the CARs program, accessibility remains a significant challenge for many unsheltered individuals seeking employment, medical care, and social services. Many available job opportunities require reliable transportation, yet most unsheltered individuals lack the means to afford a vehicle, purchase fuel, or utilize public transit regularly.

Public transportation routes in Joplin remain limited, with infrequent service and gaps in coverage, making it difficult for individuals to commute to job opportunities located outside the downtown area, where most homelessness services are concentrated. Many entry-level and service industry jobs, which are accessible to individuals experiencing homelessness, are located in industrial parks, retail centers, and suburban areas—places that public transit does not adequately serve. This disconnect between affordable housing locations and employment centers further exacerbates housing instability and financial hardship for low-income residents.

Additionally, transportation barriers affect access to essential services, including healthcare, job training programs, and childcare facilities. Homeless individuals often rely on walking long distances, which is not feasible for those with disabilities, medical conditions, or children. Limited transit options also hinder individuals who work late-night or early-morning shifts, as existing services do not operate during off-peak hours.

To bridge the transportation gap and improve economic stability for homeless individuals, Joplin should implement the following:

- Expanding transit routes and service hours will ensure better connectivity between affordable housing areas, employment centers, and key service providers.
- Subsidized transportation vouchers or low-cost transit passes for individuals experiencing homelessness to facilitate job searches, work commutes, and medical appointments.
- Employer-sponsored transportation programs, including shuttle services from affordable housing locations to major employment hubs.
- Creation of employment hubs near affordable housing developments, offering on-site job training and work opportunities within walking distance of shelter and low-income housing locations.
- Enhanced public-private partnerships, leveraging nonprofits, businesses, and government agencies to fund ride-share credits, bike-sharing programs, and expanded transit subsidies for low-income individuals.

Without adequate transportation infrastructure, many homeless individuals remain trapped in cycles of poverty and housing instability, unable to secure or maintain steady employment. Expanding affordable and accessible transportation options will be essential to helping individuals transition from homelessness to financial independence while ensuring equal access to job opportunities and basic services.

2.6 REGIONAL DISPARITIES: RURAL VS. URBAN HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness is often perceived as an urban issue, but rural homelessness presents unique challenges that are frequently overlooked. In Jasper and Newton counties, individuals experiencing homelessness outside Joplin face barriers that differ significantly from those in the city. Limited infrastructure, lack of transportation, and fewer emergency shelters or service providers make accessing housing assistance and social services nearly impossible for rural homeless populations. Many rely on informal, temporary solutions such as couch-surfing, living in vehicles, camping in remote areas, or staying in unsafe, abandoned structures. The lack of designated rural homeless programs further exacerbates the problem, leaving many individuals without any formal support system or pathways to stable housing.

One of the key concerns is whether rural homeless populations are being accurately counted. In Jasper and Newton counties, the PIT (Point-in-Time) count methodology was improved by dividing the region into 16 distinct zones, allowing for a more detailed analysis of rural homelessness. However, despite these efforts, many rural homeless individuals remain uncaptured due to their less visible living situations and avoidance of traditional homelessness services. People staying in barns, makeshift encampments, or doubling up in overcrowded housing situations often do not engage with service providers, leading to significant underrepresentation in official homelessness data. This data gap impacts funding allocations and policy decisions, usually funneling most homelessness resources into urban areas like Joplin while rural areas remain underserved.

Another major challenge is transportation access. In rural areas, individuals without personal vehicles struggle to reach emergency shelters, food assistance programs, medical care, and workforce services in Joplin. Unlike urban settings, public transit options are nonexistent or highly limited, making it difficult for individuals to travel to appointments, job interviews, or social service offices. This lack of mobility isolates rural homeless populations and prevents them from accessing stabilization resources available in Joplin.

The economic factors contributing to rural homelessness also differ from those in urban settings. Many rural communities have higher unemployment rates, fewer job training programs, and lower wages, making it difficult for individuals to afford stable housing. Additionally, the limited availability of rental units and the decline of small-town economies have reduced affordable housing options. Rural individuals often do not qualify for traditional homelessness services due to technical definitions that require visible street homelessness, even though they are experiencing extreme housing instability.

To bridge the accessibility gap for rural homeless individuals, policymakers must consider regionally tailored solutions that extend beyond Joplin's city limits. Potential strategies include:

- Expanding mobile outreach services to deliver food, medical care, and housing navigation support directly to rural areas.
- Increasing funding for regional transportation initiatives, such as low-cost ride-share programs or rural shuttle services that connect individuals to Joplin-based services.
- Developing rural-based emergency shelters or transitional housing options to prevent individuals from needing to relocate to Joplin for assistance.
- Establishing rural drop-in service centers where individuals can access case management, employment services, and essential resources.

- Enhancing coordination between Joplin-based service providers and rural agencies to ensure that homeless individuals in smaller communities receive equal access to housing and financial assistance programs.

Without targeted efforts to address rural homelessness, individuals outside of Joplin will continue to fall through the cracks, forced to rely on unsafe and unstable living conditions. Expanding rural homelessness services, improving transportation access, and increasing outreach efforts will be essential in ensuring that housing assistance is truly regional and inclusive of all individuals experiencing homelessness, regardless of their location.

2.7 COMPETING IDEOLOGIES: HOUSING FIRST VS. PEOPLE FIRST APPROACHES IN JOPLIN

In Joplin, there is an ongoing debate between two primary ideological approaches to addressing homelessness: Housing First and People First (or Treatment First). These differing philosophies influence policy decisions, funding allocations, and service models, creating tensions in how local organizations, policymakers, and the broader community respond to homelessness.

HOUSING FIRST: A MODEL ROOTED IN STABILITY

The Housing First approach is based on the belief that stable housing is a fundamental human right and that individuals experiencing homelessness should be housed immediately and without preconditions. This model prioritizes placing individuals into permanent housing as quickly as possible, then providing wraparound support services such as mental health care, addiction treatment, job training, and case management to help them achieve long-term stability.

Key principles of Housing First include:

- No preconditions for entry (such as sobriety, employment, or treatment participation).
- Harm reduction strategies rather than strict abstinence requirements.
- Supportive services are offered but not mandated for housing retention.
- Long-term cost savings, as research shows it reduces reliance on emergency services, law enforcement, and healthcare systems.

Many national organizations, including the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), promote Housing First as the most effective strategy for reducing chronic homelessness. Proponents argue that stable housing allows individuals to address underlying issues more effectively while forcing treatment or employment before housing leads to increased instability and service disengagement.

PEOPLE FIRST (TREATMENT FIRST) APPROACH: A STRUCTURED PATHWAY TO HOUSING

In contrast, the People First (or Treatment First) approach prioritizes self-sufficiency, behavioral changes, and personal responsibility before housing placement. This model, which is favored by some faith-based groups, law enforcement agencies, and conservative policymakers, argues that individuals must demonstrate readiness by addressing issues such as substance use, unemployment, or mental health conditions before being given permanent housing.

Core tenets of the People First model include:

- Emergency shelters and transitional programs as primary interventions.
- Mandated participation in treatment programs as a prerequisite for housing.
- Behavioral conditions for continued support, such as maintaining employment or sobriety.

- A belief that individuals should "earn" housing by demonstrating responsibility and independence.

Supporters of this approach argue that providing housing without requiring personal accountability creates dependency on services and fails to address the root causes of homelessness. They advocate for structured job training, addiction recovery, and financial management programs as stepping stones toward long-term housing stability.

TENSIONS & CHALLENGES IN JOPLIN

Joplin's homelessness response is influenced by both ideological frameworks, often creating conflicting policies and program priorities:

- Some nonprofits and housing advocates push for Housing First models, seeking funding for low-barrier shelters, permanent supportive housing, and harm reduction services.
- Faith-based organizations and some policymakers lean toward People First models, supporting transitional housing, behavioral accountability, and workforce development programs as prerequisites for permanent housing.
- Law enforcement and business groups often express concerns that Housing First models without accountability measures could encourage long-term dependence on services.

This ideological divide affects funding allocations, zoning policies, and service delivery strategies in Joplin. Some shelters enforce strict entry criteria, making it difficult for individuals with active substance use disorders or untreated mental health conditions to access stable housing. Meanwhile, Housing First programs struggle with limited funding and community resistance, as many landlords refuse to rent to voucher holders or formerly homeless individuals.

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE: A HYBRID APPROACH

To create a more unified and effective homelessness response, Joplin can explore a hybrid approach that incorporates elements of both Housing First and People First models:

- Expand low-barrier housing options while offering voluntary supportive services to encourage self-sufficiency.
- Incentivize treatment participation by offering graduated levels of support that provide additional resources for individuals engaged in job training, education, or addiction recovery programs.
- Increase funding for both permanent housing and transitional programs, ensuring individuals have multiple pathways to stability based on their needs.
- Develop partnerships between Housing First and People First organizations, fostering collaborative service models rather than competing ideologies.

By balancing immediate housing interventions with long-term personal development supports, Joplin can build a more inclusive and effective homelessness strategy, reducing both street homelessness and long-term service dependency.

2.8 SUMMARY & KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 2 examines the economic and structural causes of homelessness in Joplin, highlighting the role of rising rent costs, a shortage of affordable housing, and stagnant wages in increasing housing instability. Many low-income renters spend an unsustainable portion of their income on housing, leaving them vulnerable to eviction and

homelessness. The chapter discusses the persistent gap between housing supply and demand, noting the reduction in available rental assistance programs and the reluctance of landlords to accept vouchers. Additionally, the impact of employment barriers, transportation limitations, and disparities in regional service availability is explored, showing how structural challenges prevent individuals from securing stable housing.

The chapter also presents the ongoing debate between Housing First and People First (Treatment First) approaches to homelessness intervention, highlighting the benefits and limitations of each model. While Housing First prioritizes immediate access to stable housing without preconditions, People First emphasizes personal responsibility and structured treatment before housing placement. The discussion underscores the need for a balanced approach that integrates elements of both models to create a more effective homelessness response system in Joplin.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CHAPTER 2

Expand Affordable Housing Initiatives

- Incentivize the development of affordable housing through tax credits, grants, and zoning adjustments.
- Encourage landlord participation in voucher programs by offering risk mitigation funds, guaranteed rent payments, and streamlined inspection processes.
- Support the expansion of rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing to provide stable housing options for those exiting homelessness.

Strengthen Eviction Prevention Strategies

- Expand emergency rental assistance programs to prevent at-risk households from becoming homeless.
- Establish a dedicated emergency housing stabilization fund for individuals facing eviction or financial hardship.
- Implement right-to-counsel programs to provide legal aid for tenants facing eviction proceedings.

Improve Transportation and Job Access

- Expand public transit routes and service hours to connect affordable housing areas with job opportunities and essential services.
- Offer subsidized transportation vouchers or low-cost transit passes for individuals experiencing homelessness.
- Develop employer-sponsored transportation programs to support workers in securing and maintaining jobs.

Address Rural Homelessness and Service Gaps

- Expand mobile outreach services to provide food, medical care, and housing assistance to rural homeless populations.
- Develop regional transportation initiatives, such as ride-share programs or rural shuttle services, to improve access to Joplin-based services.
- Establish rural-based emergency shelters or transitional housing to prevent individuals from needing to relocate to Joplin for assistance.

Integrate Housing First and People First Models

- Expand low-barrier housing options while offering voluntary supportive services for individuals in need.
- Incentivize participation in job training, education, and addiction recovery programs by offering graduated levels of support.

- Foster partnerships between Housing First and People First organizations to create a more collaborative service model.

Increase Funding and Support for Shelter and Housing Programs

- Advocate for increased funding for emergency shelters and transitional housing to bridge the gap between homelessness and permanent housing.
- Strengthen partnerships with developers and nonprofit housing organizations to ensure that affordable housing construction meets the growing demand.
- Implement stronger tenant protection policies to safeguard low-income renters from displacement and housing discrimination.

CHAPTER 3: WHO EXPERIENCES HOMELESSNESS?

Homelessness in Joplin affects a diverse range of individuals, each facing unique challenges that contribute to housing instability. Families with children, young adults aging out of the foster care system, veterans, chronically homeless individuals, and marginalized communities all experience homelessness for different reasons. While economic factors such as job loss, rising rent, and insufficient affordable housing are common causes, additional barriers—including mental health conditions, substance use, racial disparities, and discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals—can make it even more difficult to secure stable housing. Understanding these different populations and the distinct challenges they face is crucial to developing targeted interventions that address their specific needs and reduce the risk of long-term homelessness.

This chapter explores the key groups experiencing homelessness in Joplin, starting with families and children who are affected by housing instability and educational disruptions. It examines the high risk of homelessness among youth aging out of foster care, the ongoing challenges faced by veterans, and the persistent issue of chronic homelessness. The chapter also highlights the racial disparities in housing instability, the impact of mental health and substance use on homelessness, and the unique barriers faced by LGBTQ+ individuals seeking shelter. By identifying the distinct factors contributing to homelessness among these populations, this chapter provides a foundation for policies and programs aimed at improving housing stability and support services for the most vulnerable members of the Joplin community.

3.1 FAMILIES & CHILDREN

Homelessness among families and children remains a pressing issue in Joplin, with significant implications for education, stability, and long-term well-being. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act defines homelessness broadly to include children who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. This consists of those living in shelters, motels, cars, or doubled-up with other families due to economic hardship. According to McKinney-Vento data, over 500 students in the Joplin School District have been identified as experiencing homelessness. Housing instability disrupts their education, often leading to frequent school transfers, lower academic performance, and increased absenteeism. Additionally, homeless students usually experience higher levels of stress and trauma, which can have long-term effects on their emotional and psychological development.

Schools play a critical role in supporting homeless students, but coordination with service providers is essential to ensuring children and their families receive the necessary resources. School liaisons, shelters, and community organizations must collaborate to provide access to stable housing, transportation assistance, and counseling services. Strengthening partnerships between schools and homeless service providers can improve long-term outcomes for affected students and reduce the risk of intergenerational homelessness. Providing wraparound services, such as after-school tutoring, nutrition assistance, and mental health counseling, can also help mitigate the adverse effects of homelessness on children. Greater community awareness and advocacy for funding increases in school-based support programs can further strengthen these efforts.

3.2 YOUTH AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE

Youth aging out of the foster care system are at high risk of experiencing homelessness due to limited support systems, financial instability, and a lack of affordable housing. While no exact data exists on the number of foster youth in Jasper and Newton Counties who become homeless upon exiting care, national studies indicate that nearly 20 percent of youth leaving foster care experience homelessness within two to four years. This risk increases for those who have limited access to education, job training, or strong social networks to help them transition into

adulthood. Many foster youth lack the necessary life skills to navigate financial independence, secure employment, and maintain stable housing.

The transition from foster care to independent living presents multiple challenges, including securing employment, obtaining stable housing, and accessing social support networks. Many youth lack the life skills necessary to navigate rental agreements, financial responsibilities, and employment requirements. Without dedicated housing programs and case management services, these individuals face a heightened risk of chronic homelessness. Additionally, those who experience mental health conditions or past trauma may struggle to access the necessary healthcare or counseling services that would improve their stability. Without a safety net, many former foster youth become homeless within months of aging out of the system.

Expanding transitional housing programs and wraparound services tailored for former foster youth could reduce homelessness rates in this vulnerable population. Implementing mentorship programs, rental assistance, and career development initiatives would also increase long-term stability and economic security for these young adults. Local organizations could collaborate with businesses and educational institutions to create job training programs, financial literacy courses, and apprenticeships to help foster youth secure employment and independent housing.

3.3 VETERANS & CHRONICALLY HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS

Veterans and individuals experiencing chronic homelessness represent two distinct but overlapping groups within Joplin's homeless population. The 2024 Point-in-Time (PIT) count indicates that veteran homelessness in Joplin decreased by 9 percent from the previous year, reflecting the impact of veteran-specific housing and support programs. Federal initiatives such as HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) and local partnerships have contributed to this decline by providing rental assistance and case management services. However, many veterans still struggle to access stable housing due to barriers such as PTSD, physical disabilities, and a lack of employment opportunities.

Despite this progress, chronic homelessness remains a persistent issue. The number of chronically homeless individuals in Joplin declined by 20 percent between 2023 and 2024. However, those experiencing chronic homelessness—defined as individuals who have been homeless for a year or longer and have a disabling condition—often require intensive and long-term support to exit homelessness permanently. Many struggle with mental illness, substance use disorders, or co-occurring conditions that make it challenging to maintain stable housing without ongoing assistance. The combination of untreated mental illness and lack of permanent supportive housing makes it difficult for many chronically homeless individuals to achieve long-term stability.

Permanent supportive housing (PSH) programs, which combine affordable housing with wraparound services, have been effective in reducing chronic homelessness. Expanding access to these programs in Joplin could help further lower the number of individuals cycling in and out of homelessness due to persistent barriers to stability. Additional outreach efforts focused on engaging chronically homeless individuals and connecting them with comprehensive mental health and addiction treatment services would improve long-term housing retention rates.

3.4 MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE

Mental health conditions and substance use disorders remain significant barriers to stable housing for many individuals experiencing homelessness in Joplin. System Performance Measure (SPM) 1, which tracks the length of time individuals remain homeless, highlights that many remain unhoused longer due to untreated mental health conditions and addiction. The lack of adequate mental health treatment services in the region leaves many without

access to psychiatric care, therapy, or medication-assisted treatment for substance use disorders. This prolongs homelessness and increases the likelihood of repeated hospitalizations or interactions with law enforcement.

Limited access to treatment facilities and long wait times for mental health and addiction recovery programs exacerbate the problem. Individuals in need of detox services, medication-assisted treatment, or psychiatric care often face delays in receiving the necessary care, prolonging their homelessness and increasing their risk of crises. Some shelters in Joplin maintain sobriety requirements, making it difficult for individuals actively struggling with addiction to access emergency housing.

Expanding access to low-barrier shelters that accept individuals regardless of substance use status, increasing funding for mental health and addiction treatment programs, and integrating healthcare services into homelessness response initiatives could significantly improve outcomes for those affected by these challenges. Offering mobile mental health services and peer support recovery programs could also create more accessible options for treatment.

3.5 LGBTQ+ HOMELESSNESS & SHELTER ACCESS

LGBTQ+ individuals experiencing homelessness face unique challenges, particularly regarding shelter access and discrimination. While no local data currently exists on LGBTQ+ homelessness in Joplin, state-level reports indicate that transgender individuals and LGBTQ+ youth often encounter barriers to accessing emergency shelters. Many traditional shelters operate based on gendered housing models that fail to accommodate nonbinary or transgender individuals safely. This leads to increased risks for LGBTQ+ individuals, who may experience harassment or violence in unsafe housing situations or be forced to remain in unstable environments to avoid discrimination.

A significant barrier to shelter access is the lack of policies ensuring that LGBTQ+ individuals are housed according to their gender identity. Many shelters still follow outdated practices that place individuals based on biological sex rather than gender identity, creating discomfort and safety concerns. Furthermore, LGBTQ+ youth, who make up a disproportionate percentage of homeless youth nationwide, often lack family support and face higher risks of mental health struggles, substance use, and exploitation. Without dedicated housing programs tailored to their needs, these young individuals are at an increased risk of chronic homelessness.

Another challenge is the limited availability of LGBTQ+-specific services in Joplin. While national organizations have developed best practices for inclusive shelter policies and LGBTQ+-affirming housing models, implementation in smaller communities remains inconsistent. Expanding shelter accessibility, training staff in LGBTQ+ cultural competency, and increasing funding for LGBTQ+-specific housing programs could help bridge this service gap. Additionally, establishing clear non-discrimination policies and monitoring compliance can ensure that shelters provide a welcoming and supportive environment for all individuals. Creating LGBTQ+ drop-in centers or transitional housing programs would also provide a safer alternative for those facing discrimination in traditional shelter systems.

3.6 INDIVIDUALS TRAPPED IN JOPLIN DUE TO HOMELESSNESS

While many people experiencing homelessness in Joplin are long-term residents, nearly 20% of all individuals experiencing homelessness in the city are stranded due to financial, legal, or logistical barriers preventing them from returning home. Some originally came to Joplin in search of employment or housing opportunities but were unable to secure stable living arrangements. Others arrived due to family breakdowns, displacement from disasters, release from hospitals or treatment facilities, or post-incarceration transitions—only to find themselves unable to leave.

A lack of transportation is one of the most significant barriers keeping individuals stranded. Many people experiencing homelessness do not have the financial means to afford bus tickets, gas, or vehicle repairs that would allow them to reunite with support networks elsewhere. Public transportation options are minimal, with no direct or affordable routes to other cities where individuals might have family or job prospects. Even when assistance programs exist, they are often underfunded or challenging to access, leaving many without a viable way to leave the city.

Hospital and treatment center discharges without a housing plan also contribute to this issue. A significant portion of those trapped in Joplin were released from hospitals, detox centers, or mental health facilities without a stable place to recover. Many hospitals, facing capacity constraints and financial pressures, discharge patients to shelters or the streets when they lack insurance or family support. This practice increases the number of medically vulnerable individuals experiencing homelessness. Without medical care or a stable recovery environment, chronic conditions worsen, making it even harder for individuals to find work or secure stable housing elsewhere.

Legal and documentation issues further complicate the situation. Many individuals experiencing homelessness do not have valid identification, birth certificates, or social security cards, making it nearly impossible to secure employment, housing, or travel arrangements. Some face additional challenges due to unresolved legal issues, such as outstanding warrants or probation restrictions, which prevent them from relocating to another city where they might have support. Without assistance in resolving these obstacles, they remain stuck in a cycle of homelessness in Joplin.

The unintended consequences of service availability can also trap individuals. While Joplin's shelters and food assistance programs provide critical relief, they do not always offer clear pathways to long-term stability. Some who initially sought temporary aid in Joplin become stuck due to a lack of options to transition elsewhere. Without a system that evaluates whether relocation is the best option for an individual, people remain dependent on local services with no clear way out.

Financial instability is another factor. Many individuals experiencing homelessness in Joplin cannot afford to leave due to a lack of income or employment opportunities in their home communities. Temporary or gig work may provide just enough for daily survival but not enough to cover the costs associated with relocating. As a result, even those who want to return to family or job opportunities elsewhere find themselves unable to afford the trip.

The impact of being trapped in Joplin extends beyond the individuals themselves. Nearly one in five people experiencing homelessness in the city falls into this category, making it a significant driver of long-term homelessness. The inability to leave often prolongs homelessness for individuals who might have better support systems elsewhere. Shelters and service providers continue to bear the burden of long-term cases that could be resolved through relocation, straining already limited resources. Hospitals, shelters, and law enforcement agencies repeatedly interact with individuals who have no means of leaving, creating an inefficient and costly cycle of temporary assistance rather than sustainable solutions. The longer individuals remain stranded without stability, the more their mental health deteriorates, and the more likely they are to experience repeated hospitalizations, substance use struggles, or interactions with the criminal justice system.

Addressing this issue requires expanding transportation assistance programs that provide bus or travel vouchers for those who have stable housing options in other communities. A structured relocation support initiative, coordinated with shelters, hospitals, and service providers, could help connect individuals with resources outside of Joplin. Additionally, hospitals and treatment centers should implement discharge coordination programs to ensure that patients have a stable housing or transportation plan before being released. Strengthening partnerships with transitional housing programs would provide recovery-focused placements, preventing individuals from being discharged directly into homelessness.

Improving access to identification and legal assistance is also essential. Offering free ID recovery services would allow individuals to obtain the necessary documents to secure employment, housing, and travel arrangements. Collaborating with legal aid organizations to resolve outstanding warrants or probation-related restrictions would also reduce barriers that prevent individuals from relocating to cities where they have support.

Finally, Joplin must strengthen coordination with out-of-state and regional service providers to ensure that individuals who would benefit from relocation have access to it. Establishing agreements with shelters, hospitals, and housing programs in other cities could help people transition to locations where they have family, employment opportunities, or social support networks. Service providers should incorporate relocation assessments into their housing plans, determining whether remaining in Joplin is genuinely in an individual's best interest or if assisting them in returning to their home community would provide better long-term stability.

By addressing these challenges, Joplin can prevent individuals from becoming permanently stranded, reduce the burden on local homelessness services, and create better long-term outcomes for those seeking stability. A coordinated, humane approach to relocation could help nearly one in five people experiencing homelessness in Joplin find a sustainable path forward—whether in the city or elsewhere.

3.7 OLDER ADULTS & SENIOR HOMELESSNESS

While homelessness is often associated with younger individuals and families, older adults represent a growing segment of the homeless population in Joplin. The rising cost of housing, fixed retirement incomes, and unexpected medical expenses make seniors particularly vulnerable to homelessness. Many older adults in Joplin live on Social Security alone, which often fails to cover rent, utilities, and medical bills. Without adequate safety nets, a single financial emergency—such as a rent increase, medical crisis, or job loss—can result in eviction and homelessness.

Older adults experiencing homelessness face unique challenges that differ from younger individuals. Many struggle with chronic health conditions, mobility impairments, or cognitive decline, making it challenging to navigate traditional homeless services. Shelters are often not equipped to handle individuals with limited mobility, medical needs, or age-related disabilities. This results in seniors cycling between emergency rooms, temporary shelters, and unstable housing situations, with no permanent solution in sight.

One of the key factors driving senior homelessness is the lack of affordable, age-friendly housing options in Joplin. The waiting list for subsidized senior housing is long, and many seniors do not qualify for disability benefits even when they struggle with medical issues. In addition, seniors who rely on family support often find themselves at risk if those relationships break down or caregivers pass away.

Potential Solutions:

Addressing senior homelessness in Joplin requires specialized interventions that recognize the unique needs of this population. Expanding permanent supportive housing with on-site medical services, increasing rental assistance for seniors on fixed incomes, and developing low-income senior housing with accessibility features could help reduce homelessness among older adults. Additionally, partnerships with healthcare providers and senior service agencies could improve outreach efforts and ensure that vulnerable seniors receive the support they need before they lose their housing.

3.8 RACIAL DISPARITIES IN HOMELESSNESS

Racial disparities in homelessness are evident in Joplin, mirroring national trends where minority populations experience homelessness at disproportionately high rates. Black/African Americans make up approximately 7

percent of Joplin’s homeless population despite comprising only 2.9 percent of the general population. These disparities can be attributed to historical inequities in housing access, employment discrimination, and systemic barriers to financial stability. The racial wealth gap, redlining practices, and higher unemployment rates among Black and other minority communities contribute to their increased risk of housing instability.

One significant contributing factor to racial disparities in homelessness is eviction rates. Studies indicate that Black renters face higher eviction rates than white renters, a trend that holds in Missouri as well. Eviction disproportionately affects households of color due to factors such as lower median wages, job discrimination, and limited access to legal representation. Disparities in rental assistance approval rates also contribute to the increased risk of homelessness among minority populations. Without targeted policy changes that address systemic racism in housing and employment, racial disparities in homelessness will continue to persist.

Addressing racial disparities in homelessness requires targeted interventions, including stronger tenant protections, equitable access to rental assistance, and policies that address systemic barriers in employment and housing. Ensuring that service providers implement culturally responsive programs can help bridge the gap and improve housing outcomes for marginalized communities. Providing legal aid resources to challenge wrongful evictions and expanding outreach programs tailored toward communities of color would help mitigate these disparities.

3.9 SUMMARY & KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 3 explores the diverse populations experiencing homelessness in Joplin, highlighting how factors such as family instability, aging out of foster care, military service, racial disparities, mental health challenges, and discrimination contribute to housing insecurity. Families with children face significant disruptions to education and well-being, while youth aging out of foster care struggle with financial instability and lack of life skills, making them highly vulnerable to homelessness. Veterans often contend with PTSD, disabilities, and employment challenges despite the availability of veteran-specific programs.

The chapter also discusses how chronic homelessness persists among individuals facing mental health and substance use disorders, often requiring long-term supportive housing interventions. Racial disparities in eviction and housing instability disproportionately affect Black residents, while LGBTQ+ individuals face discrimination in shelters and limited service options. Additionally, senior homelessness is on the rise due to fixed incomes, medical expenses, and a shortage of age-friendly housing. Understanding the unique needs of these populations is crucial for designing effective and inclusive homelessness prevention and intervention strategies in Joplin.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CHAPTER 3

Expand Support Services for Homeless Families and Children

- Strengthen collaboration between schools and service providers to ensure access to stable housing, transportation assistance, and counseling services.
- Increase funding for school-based support programs, such as after-school tutoring, nutrition assistance, and mental health counseling.

Enhance Transitional Support for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care

- Expand transitional housing programs specifically for former foster youth to prevent homelessness upon aging out of care.
- Implement mentorship programs, job training initiatives, and financial literacy courses to help foster youth achieve long-term stability.

Increase Housing and Support Programs for Veterans and Chronically Homeless Individuals

- Expand access to permanent supportive housing (PSH) programs to reduce chronic homelessness.
- Strengthen outreach efforts to connect chronically homeless individuals with mental health and addiction recovery services.
- Improve coordination between veteran support organizations and local housing initiatives.

Address Racial Disparities in Homelessness

- Implement stronger tenant protections and equitable access to rental assistance for communities of color.
- Increase outreach and education programs to help marginalized groups navigate housing and employment opportunities.
- Expand legal aid services to prevent unjust evictions and combat discriminatory rental practices.

Improve Access to Mental Health and Addiction Treatment Services

- Expand funding for mental health and addiction treatment programs, including low-barrier access to services.
- Increase the availability of integrated healthcare services within shelters and housing programs.
- Establish mobile mental health outreach teams to reach unhoused individuals in crisis.

Ensure LGBTQ+ Inclusive Housing and Shelter Access

- Implement non-discrimination policies in shelters and ensure that individuals are housed according to their gender identity.
- Train shelter staff in LGBTQ+ cultural competency to create a more inclusive environment.
- Develop LGBTQ+ transitional housing and drop-in centers for individuals facing discrimination in traditional shelter systems.

Expand Senior Housing and Assistance Programs

- Increase the availability of age-friendly, low-income housing options for older adults.
- Strengthen partnerships between healthcare providers and homelessness service agencies to address the medical and accessibility needs of senior individuals experiencing homelessness.
- Provide targeted rental assistance and financial aid to seniors on fixed incomes to prevent housing loss.

Fully Fund and Expand the Homebound Program

- Ensure full funding for the Homebound Program, which assists individuals who wish to return to their home communities but lack the financial resources to do so.
- Provide additional case management services to assess eligibility, secure travel arrangements, and coordinate with service providers in destination cities.
- Strengthen partnerships with shelters, hospitals, and housing agencies to identify and support individuals who would benefit from relocation assistance.

CHAPTER 4: MAJOR HOMELESSNESS SERVICE PROVIDERS IN JOPLIN

Addressing homelessness requires a network of organizations working together to provide housing, shelter, outreach, and support services. Joplin has a range of service providers, including nonprofit agencies, faith-based missions, and regional coalitions, all playing critical roles in assisting individuals experiencing homelessness. Some organizations focus on emergency relief, offering food and shelter, while others provide long-term support, such as job training, mental health care, and permanent housing solutions. The effectiveness of these providers depends on their ability to collaborate, share resources, and align efforts with evidence-based practices to ensure individuals receive the right services at the right time.

This chapter explores the key organizations involved in Joplin's homelessness response, highlighting their unique contributions and challenges. It examines the role of the Joplin Homeless Coalition in coordinating local services, the efforts of the Regional Commission on Homelessness in securing funding and shaping policy, and the housing assistance programs led by the Economic Security Corporation. Additionally, it profiles shelters and missions like Souls Harbor and Watered Gardens, which provide emergency and transitional housing, as well as specialized programs such as The Homebound Program, which assists individuals in reconnecting with stable support systems. Understanding the landscape of homelessness service providers in Joplin is essential for identifying strengths, addressing service gaps, and fostering stronger partnerships to improve housing stability across the region.

4.1 JOPLIN HOMELESS COALITION

The Joplin Homeless Coalition plays a pivotal role in coordinating efforts to address homelessness within the community. By bringing together service providers, nonprofit organizations, and faith-based groups, the coalition ensures a comprehensive and unified response to homelessness in Joplin. Its primary function is to oversee Coordinated Entry, a system designed to connect individuals experiencing homelessness with housing and supportive services efficiently. Through this structured approach, the coalition prioritizes the most vulnerable individuals, ensuring they receive the assistance they need while preventing duplication of services. By maintaining close relationships with local shelters, food pantries, housing programs, and behavioral health services, the coalition works to streamline the process of moving individuals from crises to long-term stability.

In addition to service coordination, the Joplin Homeless Coalition actively engages in policy advocacy and community education. The coalition works alongside local government officials, housing advocates, and service providers to push for legislative changes that expand eviction prevention programs, increase funding for homelessness services, and improve tenant protections. This advocacy extends beyond Joplin, as the coalition collaborates with state and federal agencies to align local initiatives with broader housing and homelessness policies. Public engagement is another critical component of their work, with the coalition organizing volunteer opportunities, public awareness campaigns, and fundraising initiatives to ensure ongoing support for local homelessness programs.

One of the coalition's key annual efforts is the Point-in-Time (PIT) count, a federally mandated assessment that tracks the number of individuals experiencing homelessness in Joplin. This data collection effort helps determine funding levels, service needs, and policy priorities, ensuring that resources are allocated effectively. Volunteers and coalition members canvass the city to identify unsheltered individuals, document service gaps, and evaluate trends in housing instability. The results of the PIT count help shape strategic plans for homelessness prevention and intervention, guiding both immediate relief efforts and long-term policy decisions. Through its collaborative approach and commitment to systemic change, the Joplin Homeless Coalition remains a cornerstone in the fight to end homelessness in the region.

4.2 THE REGIONAL COMMISSION ON HOMELESSNESS

The Regional Commission on Homelessness serves as the strategic backbone for homelessness response efforts in Joplin and surrounding areas. Unlike direct service providers, the commission focuses on policy development, funding coordination, and long-term planning to create sustainable solutions for homelessness prevention and reduction. One of its primary responsibilities is securing state and federal funding for local homelessness initiatives and ensuring that resources are available to support emergency shelters, transitional housing, and supportive services. By managing funding streams and grant applications, the commission helps direct financial resources to the most effective programs, maximizing impact and efficiency across the region.

Beyond funding, the Regional Commission on Homelessness plays a key role in coordinating regional efforts to ensure that housing, shelter, and supportive services are aligned with best practices. This involves bringing together local government agencies, nonprofits, faith-based groups, and housing developers to create a collaborative approach to addressing homelessness. The commission works to establish uniform standards and data-driven strategies, ensuring that service providers operate efficiently and avoid unnecessary duplication of efforts. By acting as a regional convener, the commission strengthens interagency partnerships and helps streamline policy implementation across multiple jurisdictions.

A significant focus of the commission is long-term planning and policy advocacy. Recognizing that homelessness is a multi-faceted issue, the commission engages with lawmakers, business leaders, and housing advocates to drive policy changes that increase affordable housing availability and improve tenant protections. It also facilitates discussions on zoning reforms, housing development incentives, and regional infrastructure investments that directly impact housing accessibility. While the Joplin Homeless Coalition manages the day-to-day coordination of direct services, the Regional Commission on Homelessness ensures that a strong policy framework and sustainable funding structure are in place to support long-term progress in reducing homelessness.

4.3 ECONOMIC SECURITY CORPORATION OF SOUTHWEST AREA (ESC)

The Economic Security Corporation of Southwest Area plays a vital role in Joplin's homelessness response by providing housing assistance, financial support, and case management services to individuals and families in need. As the lead housing agency in the region, ESC oversees multiple programs designed to prevent homelessness and promote long-term housing stability. By managing key initiatives such as rental assistance programs and homelessness prevention services, ESC works to ensure that low-income residents have access to the resources needed to secure and maintain safe housing. Through its partnerships with local shelters, landlords, and service providers, ESC helps bridge the gap between housing insecurity and permanent stability.

One of ESC's most impactful programs is rapid rehousing, which provides short-term rental assistance and case management to individuals transitioning from homelessness. This program helps clients regain stability by covering initial housing costs while offering supportive services that promote long-term independence. Additionally, ESC administers emergency shelter grants that provide funding to shelters and related support services, ensuring that those in crisis have access to immediate relief. For families seeking stable housing, the organization manages the Housing Choice Voucher Program, commonly known as Section 8, which assists low-income households in finding affordable rental units. These programs collectively address multiple stages of housing insecurity, from emergency shelter to long-term affordability.

Beyond rental assistance, ESC also offers homeowner assistance programs that focus on housing rehabilitation and foreclosure prevention. These initiatives help families maintain their homes by providing funding for essential repairs and financial aid for those facing the risk of foreclosure. ESC's role in coordinated entry further strengthens the regional homelessness response by ensuring that individuals are efficiently connected to the appropriate housing resources based on their specific needs. By collaborating with local service providers and leveraging state and

federal funding, ESC continues to be a cornerstone in Joplin's efforts to combat homelessness and support economic security for vulnerable populations.

4.4 SOULS HARBOR

Souls Harbor is a faith-based emergency shelter in Joplin that provides housing, meals, and support services to men experiencing homelessness. The organization's mission is to not only offer immediate shelter but also equip individuals with the skills and resources needed to achieve long-term stability. With a focus on personal accountability and structured case management, Souls Harbor helps residents transition from crises to self-sufficiency through a combination of temporary housing, employment assistance, and spiritual guidance. By addressing both physical and emotional needs, the shelter creates an environment where individuals can work toward financial independence and long-term housing stability.

One of the core components of Souls Harbor's programming is its transitional housing initiative, which supports residents as they work toward independence. Through structured case management, residents receive assistance with job searches, financial literacy, and personal development. Workforce development services are a key aspect of the shelter's approach, providing skill-building programs and job search assistance to help residents secure stable employment. These services not only increase economic opportunities for individuals but also reduce the likelihood of returning to homelessness. By equipping residents with essential job skills and connecting them with potential employers, Souls Harbor plays a crucial role in breaking cycles of housing instability.

In addition to housing and employment support, Souls Harbor integrates spiritual counseling and life skills training into its programming. Recognizing that emotional and mental well-being is essential for long-term success, the shelter offers faith-based mentorship, addiction recovery resources, and personal development workshops. This holistic approach helps individuals address the root causes of their homelessness while fostering personal growth and resilience. By combining emergency shelter with structured support services, Souls Harbor provides a pathway for men experiencing homelessness to rebuild their lives and regain independence.

4.5 WATERED GARDENS GOSPEL RESCUE MISSION

Watered Gardens Gospel Rescue Mission is a faith-based organization dedicated to serving individuals and families experiencing homelessness in Joplin. The mission provides emergency shelter, addiction recovery support, and job training programs, helping individuals transition from crises to long-term stability. With a commitment to personal responsibility and structured support, Watered Gardens operates under a People First approach, requiring active participation in case management and rehabilitation programs. By offering both immediate relief and long-term solutions, the mission plays a vital role in addressing homelessness and poverty in the community.

A key component of Watered Gardens' approach is its long-term rehabilitation programs, which focus on addiction recovery and life skills training. These programs provide residents with structured support, helping them overcome substance abuse and develop essential skills for independent living. In addition, the mission offers employment assistance and job placement services, equipping residents with the tools needed to secure stable employment. The combination of recovery support and workforce development increases the likelihood of long-term success for those seeking to rebuild their lives.

Watered Gardens also offers a work-for-stay program, allowing residents to contribute to the mission while preparing for independent living. This program fosters accountability and self-sufficiency by providing individuals with opportunities to engage in meaningful work while receiving housing and support. By integrating personal responsibility with faith-based mentorship, Watered Gardens creates an environment where individuals can grow

emotionally, spiritually, and professionally. The mission's holistic approach ensures that those experiencing homelessness have access to the necessary resources and support to achieve lasting stability.

4.6 THE SALVATION ARMY – JOPLIN

The Salvation Army in Joplin provides essential services to individuals and families experiencing financial hardship and housing instability. While it does not offer emergency shelters, the organization focuses on food assistance, rental and utility support, and case management services to help prevent homelessness before it occurs. Through its comprehensive approach, The Salvation Army works to stabilize individuals in crisis by providing financial relief and resources that support long-term self-sufficiency. By addressing immediate needs and connecting individuals to community resources, The Salvation Army plays a key role in preventing displacement and housing loss.

One of its most impactful programs is its meal and food assistance services, which ensure that individuals and families in need have access to nutritious food. The organization provides daily meals to those experiencing food insecurity and operates a food pantry that distributes groceries to low-income households. This service is vital for individuals who are struggling to meet basic needs, including those at risk of homelessness. By alleviating food insecurity, The Salvation Army helps individuals allocate their limited financial resources toward rent and other essential expenses, reducing the risk of eviction.

Beyond food assistance, The Salvation Army provides rental and utility assistance programs designed to help families avoid eviction and maintain stable housing. Individuals who are facing financial hardship can receive support to cover past-due rent, electricity, water, and heating costs. Additionally, The Salvation Army offers case management and workforce development services, equipping individuals with job training and employment opportunities to increase financial stability. These services help individuals regain independence and prevent recurring economic crises, reinforcing The Salvation Army's role as a preventative and supportive service provider in Joplin's homelessness response network.

4.7 CATHOLIC CHARITIES OF SOUTHERN MISSOURI

Catholic Charities of Southern Missouri plays a vital role in preventing homelessness and stabilizing individuals and families in crisis. By focusing on homelessness prevention and housing stabilization, the organization provides critical support to those at risk of eviction or financial hardship. Through its emergency rental assistance programs, Catholic Charities helps individuals cover past-due rent, preventing displacement and allowing them to remain in their homes. This proactive approach not only reduces the number of people entering homelessness but also alleviates the stress and disruption that come with housing insecurity.

In addition to financial aid, Catholic Charities offers case management services to help individuals navigate housing barriers and secure long-term stability. Case managers work closely with clients to identify solutions for their specific challenges, such as securing permanent housing, negotiating with landlords, or accessing additional community resources. The organization also provides financial literacy education, equipping tenants with the skills needed to budget effectively, manage expenses, and maintain stable housing. These services empower individuals to build a stronger financial foundation, reducing their risk of future housing instability.

Beyond housing assistance, Catholic Charities supports individuals and families facing broader crises, including natural disasters and family emergencies. The organization provides disaster relief services, offering immediate assistance to those impacted by unforeseen hardships. This holistic approach ensures that vulnerable populations receive both short-term aid and long-term guidance, helping them regain stability and avoid future housing challenges. By combining financial assistance, case management, and educational programs, Catholic Charities of

Southern Missouri continues to be a key resource in Joplin's efforts to prevent homelessness and promote long-term economic security.

4.8 OZARK CENTER & BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ozark Center & Behavioral Health Services plays a crucial role in addressing the intersection of mental health, substance use, and housing instability in Joplin. Many individuals experiencing homelessness struggle with behavioral health conditions that create barriers to stable housing and employment. Ozark Center provides a range of mental health and addiction treatment services designed to help individuals regain stability and work toward long-term recovery. By offering outpatient therapy and crisis intervention, the organization ensures that individuals experiencing mental health crises receive timely and appropriate care, reducing the likelihood of hospitalization or prolonged homelessness.

For those facing substance use disorders, Ozark Center provides specialized treatment and residential recovery programs that offer structured support. These programs help individuals address addiction while equipping them with coping mechanisms and life skills necessary for independent living. By incorporating housing support into treatment plans, Ozark Center assists individuals in securing stable living environments where they can continue their recovery journey. This integrated approach reduces the cycle of homelessness that often accompanies untreated addiction and mental health conditions.

Beyond treatment, Ozark Center offers case management services for individuals with severe mental illness who require additional support in maintaining housing. Case managers work closely with clients to connect them with housing resources, assist with daily living skills, and ensure continued access to medical and therapeutic care. By aligning behavioral health services with housing initiatives, Ozark Center plays a key role in preventing chronic homelessness among vulnerable individuals. Their comprehensive approach to mental health care helps ensure that individuals receive not just emergency treatment but also the long-term support necessary for lasting stability.

4.9 THE NEXT STEP JOPLIN

The Next Step Joplin is a volunteer-run nonprofit organization dedicated to helping individuals experiencing homelessness overcome immediate barriers to stability. Unlike traditional shelters or service agencies, The Next Step focuses on providing direct support to those in need by addressing essential requirements such as identification, transportation, and food access. Many people experiencing homelessness face challenges in obtaining the necessary documents for employment and housing, making identification assistance one of the organization's most impactful services. By helping individuals secure birth certificates, Social Security cards, and photo IDs, The Next Step ensures that they can access housing programs, apply for jobs, and enroll in support services.

Transportation support is another critical service offered by The Next Step Joplin. Many job opportunities, medical appointments, and housing resources require reliable transportation, which is often unavailable to those experiencing homelessness. To bridge this gap, The Next Step provides bus passes, rides, and logistical assistance to help individuals reach necessary destinations. Whether it is a job interview, a doctor's appointment, or a shelter, transportation assistance ensures that individuals can take tangible steps toward improving their circumstances. Additionally, the organization offers free meals, relying on community donations and volunteer support to provide food to those in need. This service not only addresses immediate hunger but also strengthens community engagement by encouraging local participation in the fight against homelessness.

Beyond meeting basic needs, The Next Step Joplin actively connects individuals with long-term support through case management and referrals. The organization helps people navigate housing programs, addiction recovery services, and employment opportunities, ensuring that they have access to resources that promote lasting stability.

Community engagement is also central to its mission, with The Next Step organizing donation drives and awareness campaigns to increase resources for those in need. Located at 833 S. Main St. in Joplin, the organization operates as a hands-on outreach center where individuals can receive immediate support and take meaningful steps toward rebuilding their lives. Through its comprehensive and community-driven approach, The Next Step, Joplin plays a crucial role in addressing homelessness and empowering individuals to regain self-sufficiency.

4.10 THE HOMEBOUND PROGRAM

The Homebound Program, operated by Higher Society, is a transportation assistance initiative aimed at helping individuals who are stranded in Joplin reconnect with stable housing or support networks in other locations. Many people experiencing homelessness find themselves stuck in an unfamiliar city with no way to return to family, employment opportunities, or housing programs that could offer long-term stability. By providing transportation assistance, Homebound helps individuals leave Joplin when a better support system is available elsewhere, ensuring they are not left without options in a place where they have no personal or financial resources.

One of the key services offered by the Homebound Program is bus ticket assistance, which enables individuals to travel to verified destinations where stable housing or supportive services are available. Homebound staff work to confirm that individuals have a legitimate place to stay upon arrival, such as a family member's home, a job placement, or a housing program willing to accept them. This travel coordination ensures that those receiving assistance are not simply relocated to another city without a plan but are instead transported to a location where they have a real opportunity to rebuild their lives. This approach helps reduce unsheltered homelessness in Joplin while giving individuals a path toward stability.

In addition to direct transportation support, Homebound collaborates with shelters, case managers, and local service providers to identify individuals who would benefit from relocation assistance. Many people who come through local shelters or outreach programs express a desire to return to their home communities but lack the financial resources to do so. By filling this critical gap, the Homebound Program prevents individuals from becoming chronically homeless in Joplin when they have viable housing options elsewhere. Through its targeted approach to relocation assistance, Homebound serves as a key resource for reducing homelessness while ensuring that individuals receive the help they need to reconnect with their existing support networks.

4.11 SUMMARY & KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the significant homelessness service providers in Joplin, detailing their roles in emergency shelters, housing assistance, outreach, and supportive services. The Joplin Homeless Coalition coordinates efforts among various agencies, while the Regional Commission on Homelessness focuses on securing funding and shaping long-term policy solutions. Economic Security Corporation administers housing assistance programs, including rapid rehousing and rental support. At the same time, faith-based organizations such as Souls Harbor and Watered Gardens provide emergency shelter, job training, and addiction recovery services.

Although Joplin has a variety of service providers, a significant gap remains in the availability of low-barrier shelters. Many existing shelters have strict requirements, such as sobriety or religious participation, and capacity issues, which prevent some individuals from accessing critical housing support. Additionally, specialized programs such as The Homebound Program and The Next Step Joplin provide essential outreach services. Still, without accessible emergency shelter options for individuals with complex needs—including those with mental health challenges or active substance use—many people remain unsheltered. Addressing this gap is critical to improving the overall effectiveness of Joplin's homelessness response system.

KEY RECOMMENDATION FROM CHAPTER 4

Establish a Publicly Funded Low-Barrier Shelter

- Create a shelter that allows entry regardless of sobriety, mental health conditions, or other restrictive criteria, ensuring that individuals with complex needs have access to immediate housing.
- Secure public funding to support the shelter's operations, ensuring sustainability without reliance on private donations or faith-based conditions.
- Provide on-site case management and healthcare services to connect individuals with long-term housing, addiction treatment, and mental health support.
- Coordinate with existing service providers to integrate the shelter into Joplin's broader homelessness response network.

CHAPTER 5: VOICES OF HOMELESSNESS – PERSONAL ACCOUNTS & LIVED EXPERIENCES

Numbers and statistics provide critical insight into the homelessness crisis in Joplin, but behind every data point is a human story. This chapter aims to bring those stories to the forefront, offering firsthand accounts from individuals experiencing homelessness, service providers, and landlords. These narratives will help illustrate the real-world challenges, barriers, and potential solutions that cannot be fully understood through numbers alone.

5.1 PERSONAL STORIES OF HOMELESSNESS IN JOPLIN

SARAH'S STORY – A SINGLE MOTHER FACING EVICTION

Sarah, a 32-year-old mother of two, never imagined she would be homeless. After losing her job due to a local company downsizing, she struggled to keep up with rent payments. With no family in the area and an eviction notice on her door, she sought assistance. She applied for rental aid from Catholic Charities, but the total rent due was more than they could provide. Without enough assistance to cover her outstanding rent, her landlord proceeded with the eviction, leaving her and her children without a home.

Desperate for options, Sarah called legal aid to explore her rights and attempted to secure a spot at the Washington Family Hope Center, but it was already full. With nowhere else to turn, she and her children spent two weeks living in their car, doing their best to maintain a sense of normalcy while she searched for a stable solution.

As the days stretched on, Sarah became increasingly fearful that child protective services might intervene. The fear of losing her children weighed heavily on her, adding to the overwhelming stress of their situation. Eventually, out of desperation, she moved in with an older man who offered them a place to stay, ensuring her children had stability and a roof over their heads.

"I never thought I would be in this situation," Sarah says, reflecting on the emotional and financial toll of homelessness. "I just wanted to keep my kids safe and make sure they had a place to sleep." Her story highlights the immense challenges faced by single mothers experiencing homelessness, the limited availability of emergency shelter, and the difficult choices that many are forced to make in their struggle for stability.

MICHAEL'S STORY – A VETERAN STRUGGLING WITH PTSD AND HOUSING STABILITY

Michael, a 56-year-old Marine Corps veteran, spent six years living unsheltered before learning about the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) program. For most of that time, he survived on the streets, often avoiding shelters because of their strict sobriety requirements. "I came back from service with PTSD, and things just started falling apart. Jobs didn't last, relationships didn't last, and before I knew it, I was on the street," he explains. Alcohol became his way of coping with trauma, but it also made finding stable housing nearly impossible.

Despite being eligible for VA housing assistance, Michael was unaware of the full range of resources available to him. The long waitlists and bureaucratic hurdles discouraged him from applying, and our shelters required sobriety before entry—something that felt unattainable without first having a stable place to stay. "The shelters here require you to be sober before they let you in, but I needed a place first before I could even think about treatment," he says.

Eventually, an outreach worker connected him with the VASH program, which provided a housing voucher along with supportive services tailored to veterans facing chronic homelessness. For the first time in years, he had a secure place to sleep and the ability to focus on recovery. "Once I got into housing, everything else started to make sense," Michael says. "I could finally breathe, think about my future, and start getting the help I needed."

His story underscores the critical need for low-barrier housing options for veterans, especially those struggling with mental health and substance use. Michael's journey from the streets to stability highlights the life-changing impact of supportive housing programs and the importance of outreach efforts to ensure that every veteran knows about the resources available to them.

LARRY'S STORY – SURVIVING ON THE MARGINS

Larry has been living on the streets of Joplin for years, struggling to survive in a system that doesn't seem to have a place for him. Around ten years ago, he was hit by a bus, an accident that left him with lasting cognitive issues that make even the simplest tasks difficult. He needs serious help, but without the ability to keep appointments, manage paperwork, or follow up with caseworkers, he continuously falls through the cracks. Each time he gets assigned a case manager, he loses them quickly—either by missing too many meetings, failing to complete the necessary steps, or getting overwhelmed by the process.

Despite his apparent disabilities, Larry has no Social Security benefits or disability assistance. The bureaucratic system that determines eligibility is impossible for him to navigate alone. "I don't even know where to start," he admits. "They tell me I need paperwork, a mailing address, a phone... but I don't have any of that. How am I supposed to do this?" Without a permanent address or reliable communication, the process of securing benefits—already lengthy and challenging for many—feels entirely out of reach for him.

His erratic behavior has led to his removal from every shelter in the area. He doesn't mean to cause problems, but his cognitive impairments and difficulty following rules have made him unwelcome in the very places meant to help. "I don't try to make trouble," Larry says. "But sometimes I just don't understand what they want from me." With nowhere else to go, he tries to avoid downtown, where he knows business owners and residents don't want him around. But the reality is that he has no way to survive without panhandling.

A couple of times a week, he spends an hour or two holding a sign, hoping for enough change to get food or other necessities. "If I'm lucky, I make about \$20 in an hour," he says. "That's enough to eat for a couple of days." He doesn't like drawing attention to himself, but with no income and no assistance, this small amount of money is the difference between making it through another day or going hungry.

For years, he slept under the bridge in Pennsylvania, where he could stay out of sight and avoid conflict. But that area is no longer an option, forcing him to find new places to sleep. With no other alternatives, he now sleeps in downtown doorways, trying to stay warm during the colder months. "I don't want to be in front of businesses, but I don't have anywhere else to go," he says. "I just try to stay out of the way."

Larry's story reflects the harsh reality faced by the most vulnerable members of Joplin's homeless population—those who are unable to access even the most basic support services. He isn't violent, he isn't a criminal, but he is deeply stuck in a system that isn't designed for people like him—those with severe cognitive impairments, no family, and no ability to advocate for themselves. Without intervention, he will continue living on the streets, losing case managers, and getting pushed out of every space he tries to exist in.

Larry doesn't need temporary shelter; he needs long-term supportive housing, specialized case management, and a way to access disability benefits without navigating the process alone. Until solutions like these are in place, he—and many others like him—will remain trapped in survival mode, moving from one doorway to another, just trying to make it through the night.

5.2 PERSPECTIVES FROM SERVICE PROVIDERS

EMILY'S STORY – THE STRUGGLE TO FIND HOUSING FOR THOSE IN NEED

As a caseworker at a Joplin mental health provider, Emily has seen firsthand how difficult it is to move people from homelessness into stable housing. Despite the availability of housing vouchers, the process is slow, and the most significant challenge remains the severe shortage of affordable units. "Even when people qualify for vouchers—which takes forever by itself—they can't find landlords who will take them," she explains. The reluctance of property owners to accept housing assistance creates a bottleneck in the system, forcing caseworkers to spend months searching for just one available unit. "Sometimes, it takes two caseworkers three months just to find a unit for one person," she says, highlighting the immense strain on both service providers and those in need of housing.

Emily emphasizes that many individuals experiencing homelessness need a little help to regain stability, but without the proper support, they remain trapped in a cycle of instability. "There are so many people who just need a little help to get back on their feet, but without the right support, they get stuck in the cycle of homelessness," she says. The combination of long voucher approval times, a lack of landlord participation, and limited funding for case management leaves people stranded without options. "We need more funding, more outreach, and more landlords willing to work with housing programs," she urges. Until these barriers are addressed, Joplin will continue struggling to place qualified individuals into stable housing, prolonging their time spent in shelters or on the streets.

A FIREFIGHTER'S PERSPECTIVE – THE HIDDEN DANGERS OF DISPLACEMENT

As locations where unsheltered individuals seek refuge are removed, those experiencing homelessness are left with fewer and fewer options. While the intent behind clearing encampments is often to improve public safety or restore public spaces, the reality is that without alternative shelter options, people are forced into increasingly dangerous situations.

One Joplin firefighter, who has responded to multiple emergency calls involving individuals experiencing homelessness, describes the grim consequences of this displacement:

"When shelters are full, and encampments are cleared, people don't just disappear. They go wherever they can find cover from the cold. More and more, that means uninhabited buildings—abandoned homes, empty storefronts, and historic structures that aren't meant to be lived in. They use whatever materials they can find to stay warm—cardboard, candles, space heaters, and sometimes even open flames. And that's how we end up with tragedies."

Joplin has already witnessed the devastating consequences of unsheltered individuals seeking refuge in abandoned structures. The Carnegie Library fire and the destruction of The Olivia, both historic landmarks, are stark reminders of what happens when people have nowhere else to go. These fires are not only property losses but also public safety hazards that put lives at risk, including those of first responders.

"When we get a call about a fire in an abandoned building, we know there's a good chance someone is inside. And if they're not inside, we're likely to find them somewhere else—curled up outside with hypothermia or, worse, already gone. It's heartbreaking."

This perspective underscores the urgent need for more emergency shelter beds, warming centers, and transitional housing options. Without safe and accessible places to go, individuals will continue taking desperate risks to survive, leading to more preventable deaths and disasters.

5.3 PERSPECTIVES FROM LANDLORDS

CONCERNS ABOUT HOUSING VOUCHERS – A LANDLORD’S PERSPECTIVE

Many landlords in Joplin hesitate to accept housing vouchers due to concerns about low payment rates, tenant behavior, and community backlash. David, a local property owner with two multi-family properties, has considered participating in voucher programs but remains hesitant due to ongoing challenges he has witnessed firsthand. While he understands the need for affordable housing, he finds that the program does not offer enough financial security for property owners.

"The biggest issue is that the voucher amount isn't enough to cover the full cost of renting out a unit," David explains. "Market rents have gone up, but the voucher program hasn't kept up. I could rent to a regular tenant for \$200 more per month, so why would I take a voucher when I'm already taking a loss?" This gap in payment makes it difficult for landlords to justify participating, especially when they still have to cover maintenance costs, property taxes, and rising insurance premiums.

Beyond financial concerns, David has also observed behavioral issues with some tenants who have struggled with homelessness. "I've had tenants who bring their homeless friends around, and suddenly extra people are hanging around the property all the time," he says. "They're not technically on the lease, but they're sleeping over, coming and going at all hours, and it becomes a liability." The increased foot traffic and unauthorized guests raise concerns about property damage and potential lease violations, making David wary of renting to voucher holders.

Another major challenge comes from community opposition. "The neighbors don't like living next to someone they perceive as homeless, and they complain about every single thing," David explains. Even when the tenant is following the rules, the presence of a voucher recipient in the neighborhood often leads to exaggerated complaints from other residents. "If they sit outside too long, if they have visitors if they don't keep their yard perfectly neat—the neighbors are calling me constantly, expecting me to do something about it," he says. The ongoing tension between tenants and neighbors makes managing properties more difficult and adds another layer of stress for landlords.

David believes that more landlords would be open to participating in voucher programs if specific concerns were addressed. "If the payment was competitive with market rent and if there was some kind of risk mitigation fund to cover damages, I'd be more willing to consider it," he suggests. He also believes there should be more accountability for tenants regarding property upkeep and guest policies. "We need a system where landlords aren't left footing the bill when things go wrong," he says.

For Joplin to increase the number of landlords willing to accept housing vouchers, city officials and housing advocates may need to focus on bridging the gap between property owners and assistance programs. Offering financial incentives, improving program oversight, and educating the community about the realities of voucher tenants could help alleviate concerns and create more housing opportunities. As David puts it, "I want to help, but I can't afford to take a loss, deal with endless complaints, and risk damage to my property. The system needs to work for landlords, too, or we're just going to keep saying no."

5.4 PERSPECTIVE OF BUSINESS OWNERS

CONCERNS ABOUT LOITERING - THE PERSPECTIVE OF A DOWNTOWN JOPLIN BUSINESS

For many downtown Joplin business owners, the presence of individuals experiencing homelessness creates a complicated reality—one that stirs both compassion and concern. Lisa, who owns a small business downtown, has faced this challenge for months. Nearly every morning, she finds someone sleeping in her shop's doorway when she

arrives for work. While the individuals she encounters are always polite, the experience is unsettling. "They're always nice," she says, "but it's still scary to unlock the door when someone is lying there."

Beyond her discomfort, Lisa frequently hears from customers who say they feel uneasy about visiting downtown. "I've had people tell me they avoid coming here because they feel uncomfortable with the number of homeless individuals standing around on the sidewalks," she explains. While she knows that homelessness is not a crime and that most of these individuals mean no harm, she also understands that perceptions of safety can affect her business. If customers feel nervous or hesitant about coming downtown, it directly impacts their ability to stay open.

Lisa has considered filing a trespass affidavit with the Joplin Police Department, which would allow officers to remove individuals from her storefront. However, she wrestles with the ethical dilemma. "I don't want to make someone's life even harder just because they have nowhere else to go," she says. "But at the same time, I need to protect my business and make sure customers feel comfortable coming in." This internal conflict reflects the broader tension between businesses and homelessness response efforts—business owners don't want to criminalize homelessness. Still, they also need solutions that work for everyone.

One of Lisa's biggest concerns is that Joplin's shelters require people to leave early in the morning, leaving them with nowhere to go during the day. Without designated daytime resources, many individuals remain downtown, standing on street corners or sitting in public spaces. "That's part of the problem," she explains. "They're forced out of the shelters every morning, so they have nowhere else to be. They're not doing anything wrong, but they... linger. And that makes people uncomfortable."

Lisa wishes there were day centers, community spaces, or expanded services downtown where people could go instead of loitering in front of businesses. She believes that instead of just pushing people out of doorways or issuing citations, Joplin needs a sustainable plan that provides places for people to exist during the day. "We can't just keep shuffling them around," she says. "We need real solutions—places where they can go, get resources, and have a chance to get back on their feet."

Her perspective underscores the urgent need for daytime services, such as a drop-in center, expanded outreach programs, or designated spaces where individuals experiencing homelessness can receive support without disrupting businesses. Strengthening collaboration between city officials, service providers, and business owners could help develop solutions that address both the needs of vulnerable individuals and the concerns of the downtown community. Lisa doesn't want to displace people—she wants to see a system where they have somewhere to go, something to do, and a real chance to rebuild their lives.

THE PERSPECTIVE OF A JOPLIN HOTEL MANAGER

For Mark, the manager of a hotel near I-44 and Rangeline, homelessness is more than just a social issue—it's a daily operational challenge that affects guests, staff, and Joplin's reputation as a tourism destination. His hotel, located near the interstate, is one of many that sees a steady stream of travelers, businesspeople, and families passing through town. But increasingly, it has also become a hotspot for homeless individuals seeking shelter, using hotel facilities, or lingering around the property, creating a tricky balancing act between compassion and business necessity.

"Customers don't feel safe," Mark explains. "It's not that every homeless person is causing trouble, but when guests see people wandering the parking lot at night, sleeping near the dumpsters, or approaching them for money, they don't feel comfortable staying here." He's had guests cut their trips short or outright cancel reservations after encountering individuals near the hotel. "Perception is everything in the hospitality industry," he says. "If people feel unsafe, they won't come back. And they'll tell others not to come either."

One of Mark's biggest frustrations is that the hotel is far from the police department, meaning response times can be longer when incidents occur. "We have to call the police a lot, but it's usually for petty things—people refusing to

leave, panhandling near the entrance, trying to sleep in the stairwells or abandoned vehicles," he says. While most situations don't escalate into serious crimes, they take valuable time and energy away from running the business.

Beyond the immediate impact on his hotel, Mark worries about the long-term effects on Joplin's tourism industry. "Hotels and restaurants around here rely on people coming off the highway and choosing to stay in Joplin rather than driving on to Springfield or Tulsa," he says. "If visitors start associating Joplin with feeling unsafe, that's a huge problem—not just for hotels, but for the entire local economy."

He acknowledges that homelessness is a complex issue that can't be solved overnight but believes there needs to be better interventions, particularly near commercial and high-traffic areas. "I know the police are overwhelmed, and I know service providers are stretched thin," he says. "But we need better strategies—whether that's increased outreach, more resources near the interstate, or even a stronger presence of law enforcement in the area."

Mark doesn't believe that simply arresting people or moving them to another part of town is the solution. However, he also thinks the city must do more to protect businesses, workers, and visitors from the unintended consequences of a growing homeless population. "We're running a business here," he says. "And when you have to spend half your time dealing with issues that aren't about hospitality, that's a problem."

Ultimately, Mark wants to see a balanced approach—one that helps people in need but also ensures that Joplin remains a safe, welcoming place for visitors. "We all want the same thing," he says: a safe, thriving community. But right now, it feels like no one has a real plan to fix this, and businesses like mine are the ones paying the price."

5.5 CASE STUDY COMPARISONS – LEARNING FROM OTHER CITIES

SALT LAKE CITY, UT: PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Salt Lake City has emphasized public-private partnerships to expand affordable housing and improve landlord participation in voucher programs. The city collaborates with developers through tax incentives, low-interest loans, and zoning reforms to encourage the construction of mixed-income housing. For example, the city has invested over \$70 million in affordable housing initiatives since 2010, using a combination of public funding and private investment to create more units for low-income residents.

Additionally, Salt Lake City has streamlined regulatory processes to reduce construction delays and incentivize landlords to accept housing vouchers by offering risk mitigation funds and guaranteed rent payments. Programs like these have increased the number of landlords willing to work with housing assistance programs, reducing the bottleneck of voucher holders struggling to find housing. This strategy could be highly relevant to Joplin, where landlord resistance and the limited supply of affordable units are significant barriers.

COLUMBUS, OH: HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION & COORDINATED OUTREACH

Columbus has successfully reduced homelessness by focusing on prevention programs and a highly coordinated outreach system. Unlike many cities that primarily address homelessness through shelter expansion, Columbus invests in targeted eviction prevention, short-term rental assistance, and tenant mediation services. These efforts keep individuals housed before they reach the point of eviction or chronic homelessness.

One of the city's most effective programs is its "Stable Families Initiative," which provides case management, legal support, and financial assistance to at-risk households. The city also uses predictive data analytics to identify neighborhoods with high eviction rates and proactively provide services before residents lose their homes. In Joplin, where eviction rates and landlord resistance are significant challenges, adopting a data-driven prevention approach could help reduce the flow of individuals into homelessness.

CHATTANOOGA, TN: EXPANDING LOW-BARRIER SHELTER & WORKFORCE HOUSING

Chattanooga has made significant strides in low-barrier shelter expansion and workforce housing initiatives. The city recognized that many individuals experiencing homelessness were unable to access shelters due to entry restrictions like sobriety requirements, curfews, or documentation barriers. In response, Chattanooga invested in low-barrier shelters that provide flexible entry requirements while still offering supportive services like mental health counseling and employment assistance.

Additionally, Chattanooga has focused on workforce housing, a crucial factor for cities with high rates of low-income workers struggling with rent affordability. The city has introduced zoning reforms to allow for more "missing middle" housing, including duplexes, triplexes, and accessory dwelling units (ADUs), making it easier to develop affordable rental options. Given that Joplin faces a shortage of rental units priced for low-income workers, similar zoning updates and workforce housing incentives could be valuable.

5.6 WHICH LESSONS APPLY TO JOPLIN?

From Salt Lake City—Joplin could strengthen public-private partnerships to expand the supply of affordable housing and improve landlord participation in voucher programs. Risk mitigation funds, tax incentives, and zoning reforms can increase the number of available units for low-income residents.

From Columbus—Joplin could implement more robust homelessness prevention strategies by strengthening eviction diversion programs, rental assistance, and legal aid services before individuals reach a crisis point.

From Chattanooga – Joplin could benefit from expanding low-barrier shelters and developing more workforce housing options by adjusting zoning policies and increasing access to rental units for low-income workers.

By combining Salt Lake City's housing incentives, Columbus' prevention strategies, and Chattanooga's shelter and workforce housing initiatives, Joplin could build a more sustainable and comprehensive response to homelessness beyond Housing First.

5.7 SUMMARY & KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 5 presents personal accounts from individuals experiencing homelessness, service providers, landlords, and business owners, illustrating the human impact of housing instability in Joplin. The stories reveal the struggles faced by vulnerable populations, including single parents, veterans, and individuals with disabilities, many of whom encounter significant barriers to securing stable housing. Sarah's story highlights the difficult choices faced by single mothers navigating eviction. At the same time, Michael's experience underscores the need for low-barrier housing options for veterans with PTSD and substance use disorders. Larry's case demonstrates how individuals with cognitive impairments often struggle to access disability benefits and supportive housing due to bureaucratic challenges.

Service providers discuss the difficulties in securing housing for those in need, citing long waitlists, landlord reluctance to accept vouchers, and a lack of affordable units. Landlords express concerns about financial risks, tenant behavior, and community pushback, highlighting the need for incentives and risk mitigation programs. Business owners in downtown Joplin and the hospitality industry describe the tensions created by visible homelessness, emphasizing the need for designated daytime services and outreach initiatives. The case studies of Salt Lake City, Columbus, and Chattanooga provide insights into adequate housing and homelessness prevention strategies that could be adapted for Joplin, including public-private partnerships, eviction diversion programs, and expanded low-barrier shelter models.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CHAPTER 5

Establish a Regional Housing Task Force

- Form a coalition that includes government officials, business leaders, developers, and service providers to coordinate efforts to expand affordable housing projects.
- Ensure collaboration between housing developers and service providers to create sustainable solutions that integrate supportive services into new developments.

Expand Partnerships with Local Employers

- Work with businesses to develop housing assistance programs for low-income workers, ensuring that employment opportunities align with stable housing solutions.
- Encourage employer-sponsored workforce development initiatives to help individuals transition from homelessness to long-term stability.

Advocate for State and Federal Funding

- Secure additional rental assistance and eviction prevention funds to support households at risk of homelessness.
- Expand funding for low-barrier shelter programs that provide immediate housing access without preconditions, especially for individuals with mental health and substance use challenges.

Educate Landlords and Community Stakeholders

- Launch an awareness campaign to inform landlords about the benefits of accepting housing vouchers and participating in rental assistance programs.
- Provide training sessions and resources to help landlords navigate voucher programs and eviction diversion strategies, addressing common concerns about financial risks and tenant accountability.

CHAPTER 6: BARRIERS TO ACCESSING HOUSING & SERVICES

While Joplin has several homelessness service providers and housing programs, significant barriers prevent many individuals from accessing shelter and securing stable housing. These challenges range from restrictive shelter policies to legal and systemic obstacles that disproportionately affect the most vulnerable populations. Many people experiencing homelessness face barriers such as sobriety requirements, documentation issues, or a lack of available shelter beds that force them to remain unsheltered. Others struggle with the criminalization of homelessness, limited accessibility for people with disabilities, or resistance from local communities when new shelters and affordable housing developments are proposed. These barriers often compound, making it difficult for individuals to transition out of homelessness and into long-term stability.

This chapter explores the various challenges preventing people from accessing housing and homelessness services in Joplin. It examines why some individuals remain unsheltered despite the availability of housing programs, how local policies contribute to the criminalization of homelessness, and how community resistance has halted critical shelter expansion projects. Additional sections discuss the difficulties faced by individuals with disabilities, people with pets, and those reliant on rental assistance programs that landlords frequently reject. Finally, the chapter addresses the issue of housing retention, highlighting the need for ongoing support services to prevent individuals from returning to homelessness after securing housing. Understanding these barriers is essential for developing targeted solutions that remove obstacles, increase service accessibility, and create a more inclusive and effective homelessness response system in Joplin.

6.1 WHY SOME PEOPLE REMAIN UNSHELTERED

Despite the reported availability of 574 beds across various housing programs in Joplin, only 34% of these beds are designated for emergency shelters, and many of those are reserved for specific populations, such as women and children. This distinction is crucial, as many of the beds counted in reports belong to transitional housing, rapid rehousing, and permanent supportive housing programs—none of which provide immediate overnight shelter for individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness. The limited number of emergency shelter beds, coupled with restrictive entry requirements, results in many individuals choosing or being forced to remain unsheltered.

Many local shelters have curfews, sobriety requirements, and communal living arrangements that deter potential residents. For individuals struggling with substance use disorders, shelters that mandate sobriety as a precondition for entry are often not a viable option. Additionally, individuals with untreated mental health conditions may find congregate shelters overwhelming or unsafe, leading them to opt for encampments, vehicles, or other alternative sleeping arrangements. Survivors of domestic violence or individuals with PTSD may also struggle in environments that lack private spaces, further reducing their willingness to enter a shelter.

Another significant barrier is the lack of a centralized day shelter in Joplin. While overnight shelters provide a place to sleep, individuals who do not qualify for shelter admission—or who choose not to enter due to personal concerns—often have no designated space to go during the day. This leaves many people experiencing homelessness in public spaces, parking lots, or encampments, increasing visibility in the community and contributing to complaints about loitering. Without access to a stable, safe daytime environment, it becomes even more challenging for individuals to engage in job searches, attend medical appointments, or seek long-term housing solutions.

Addressing the gaps in shelter availability and accessibility will require increasing emergency shelter capacity, implementing low-barrier shelter options, and creating daytime resource centers where individuals can access services, rest, and plan their next steps toward stability. Expanding shelter options to include pet-friendly, trauma-informed, and harm-reduction-based models could also help reduce the number of unsheltered individuals in Joplin.

6.2 CRIMINALIZATION OF HOMELESSNESS

Local ordinances in Joplin increasingly target behaviors commonly associated with homelessness, such as loitering, panhandling, and trespassing. The city has enacted and expanded laws restricting public camping, prohibiting individuals from occupying transit stops, and enforcing trespassing regulations on both public and private properties. These policies are implemented through citations, fines, and arrests, which disproportionately affect individuals experiencing homelessness and create additional barriers to securing stable housing and employment.

One of the most significant policy changes is the Camping Ordinance Revision, which makes it unlawful to camp or store personal property in parks, streets, or other public spaces. This ordinance mandates that law enforcement officers confirm the availability of a shelter bed before issuing citations or making arrests. However, given that only 34% of Joplin's reported shelter beds are designated for emergency use—many of which are restricted to specific populations such as women or children—this requirement may not always be met. If an individual refuses an available shelter space, they are subject to legal consequences, including citations and potential incarceration.

In addition to restricting camping, Joplin has intensified its efforts to clear encampments. In 2024 alone, significant sweeps took place at the Pennsylvania Viaduct and 4th & Murphy, displacing individuals who had no guaranteed alternative shelter. These cleanups frequently occur without sufficient notice or relocation support, forcing people to move from one location to another without resolving the underlying issues that contribute to their homelessness. Similar policies have been criticized in other cities for pushing people further into the margins of society, making it harder for outreach teams to provide services and support.

Other policies directly affect individuals experiencing homelessness by restricting access to public spaces. The revised Parks Ordinance now explicitly prohibits camping and "disallowed activities" within city parks. New security cameras and lighting are being installed in eight public parks, further increasing monitoring and enforcement efforts. Transit stop regulations have also been strengthened following the relaunch of Joplin's trolley system, limiting how long individuals can remain in transit areas. Additionally, the city is reviewing a Shopping Cart/Stolen Property Ordinance, which could be used to penalize individuals carrying personal belongings in carts, a common practice among those experiencing homelessness.

The criminalization of homelessness in Joplin follows a broader national trend, but unlike some cities that have implemented diversion programs, Joplin currently offers only limited alternatives to incarceration. The Community Resource Unit (CRU) within the police department plays a role in connecting individuals to shelters and services. Still, there is no dedicated Homeless Court or formalized pre-arrest diversion program to direct individuals away from the criminal justice system. Without these alternatives, law enforcement officers frequently encounter repeat offenders as individuals cycle through citations, emergency rooms, and temporary shelters without long-term solutions.

The continued reliance on law enforcement as a primary response to homelessness raises concerns about the long-term effectiveness of these policies. Criminalizing survival behaviors does not address the root causes of homelessness and often exacerbates the challenges individuals face when trying to find stable housing or employment. Expanding diversion programs, legal aid services and housing-first strategies could provide a more sustainable approach, reducing the burden on law enforcement while better addressing the needs of those experiencing homelessness in Joplin.

6.3 NIMBY RESISTANCE TO SHELTER EXPANSION

Efforts to expand shelter capacity and housing programs in Joplin have consistently faced opposition from community groups and local stakeholders, a phenomenon often referred to as Not In My Backyard (NIMBY) resistance. Proposals such as The Lincoln Heights Project, The Depot Shelter, and an expansion project at Royal

Heights Nazarene Church have encountered significant pushback from residents concerned about property values, neighborhood safety, and the potential impact on the character of their communities.

The Lincoln Heights Project, planned for the former site of The Botany Shop, was designed to create transitional housing for people experiencing homelessness. However, local opposition—driven by fears of increased crime, declining property values, and the belief that the project would bring in unhoused individuals from outside Joplin—ultimately led to its cancellation. Despite evidence from other cities showing that well-managed supportive housing projects do not increase crime rates, opposition from residents stalled the project and prevented the development of a much-needed housing solution.

Similarly, Royal Heights Nazarene Church attempted to establish a permanent shelter for homeless individuals but faced strong NIMBY opposition. While the church had successfully operated a cold-weather shelter that provided refuge during extreme winter conditions, their attempt to transition into a permanent housing facility was blocked due to neighborhood resistance. Opponents cited concerns over safety and the potential for long-term encampments despite the fact that structured shelters with support services reduce street homelessness rather than increase it.

The Depot Shelter, intended as an emergency shelter solution, lasted only two months before closing. Although it was created to provide temporary relief for individuals without housing, it quickly faced pressure from the surrounding community. Concerns about safety, the visibility of homelessness, and the shelter's impact on nearby businesses and residences contributed to its short lifespan. The rapid closure of The Depot Shelter highlights the ongoing difficulties in sustaining emergency housing solutions in Joplin when local resistance prevents long-term planning and stability.

Misinformation plays a significant role in fueling community opposition. Many residents believe that shelters attract individuals experiencing homelessness from outside the area, increasing the burden on local resources. However, data from Joplin's Point-in-Time Count contradicts this assumption, showing that most individuals experiencing homelessness in Joplin are long-term residents of Jasper and Newton Counties. Additionally, studies from other cities indicate that providing stable housing and supportive services reduces visible homelessness and improves neighborhood stability rather than worsening community conditions.

As a result of these NIMBY challenges, the development of new emergency shelter capacity has been slow, and much of Joplin's homelessness response remains concentrated in the downtown area, where existing shelters and service providers operate. Without additional shelter beds and low-barrier housing options, Joplin's unsheltered homeless population has more than doubled in the past year, and encampments continue to form in areas where emergency housing is unavailable.

Overcoming NIMBY resistance will require public education, policy reforms, and stronger community engagement. Addressing concerns through transparent communication, data-driven approaches, and success stories from other cities could help shift public perception and increase local support for future shelter expansion projects. Without action, Joplin will continue to struggle with the lack of available shelter beds, leaving many individuals without safe and stable housing options.

6.4 BARRIERS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Individuals with disabilities face significant challenges in accessing emergency shelter and permanent housing in Joplin. Watered Gardens and Souls Harbor, the city's only emergency shelters, are not fully ADA-compliant. Both shelters have critical services located on their second floors without elevator access, making them inaccessible for individuals with mobility impairments. For people using wheelchairs or walkers, this effectively limits their ability to receive necessary shelter, meals, and support services.

Beyond physical accessibility, cognitive disabilities, and mental health conditions create additional barriers to securing housing and shelter. Many individuals experiencing homelessness struggle with navigating complex application processes for housing programs due to paperwork requirements, strict eligibility criteria, and the lack of disability accommodations. Case management services are limited, leaving many individuals without the support needed to apply for housing assistance or to maintain stable housing once they receive it.

Even for those who do secure housing, many transitional and permanent supportive housing units in Joplin are not fully ADA-compliant. The lack of accessible bathrooms, ramps, and wheelchair-friendly doorways reduces options for people with disabilities. Transportation barriers further compound the issue, as many housing programs require travel to multiple offices or agencies to complete applications, attend meetings, or receive services—something that is not feasible for those with mobility challenges.

These barriers leave some of Joplin’s most vulnerable residents without access to critical shelter and housing services, forcing them to rely on short-term solutions, stay in unsafe environments, or remain unsheltered entirely. Expanding ADA-compliant shelter capacity, implementing accessibility improvements at Watered Gardens and Souls Harbor, and ensuring case management services are available for individuals with disabilities would help bridge this service gap and improve housing access for people with disabilities.

6.5 PEOPLE WITH PETS

For many individuals experiencing homelessness, pets are more than just animals; they provide companionship, emotional support, protection, and a sense of stability in an otherwise uncertain world. However, pet ownership creates significant barriers to accessing shelters, transitional housing, and rental units. Many emergency shelters in Joplin do not allow animals, forcing pet owners to choose between seeking shelter and remaining unsheltered with their pets. Given the deep emotional bond between individuals and their animals, many choose to stay on the streets rather than surrender their companions.

One of the few local organizations that accommodate homeless individuals with pets is the Minnie Hackney Community Service Center, which provides shelter during extreme cold weather. However, its current activation threshold requires temperatures to drop to 10 degrees or lower for three consecutive days before opening. While this service is critical for preventing cold-related injuries and deaths, the strict temperature requirement means that many homeless individuals and their pets remain exposed to harsh conditions even when temperatures are dangerously low but above the activation threshold. Expanding the availability of pet-friendly shelter options beyond extreme weather events would provide a more sustainable solution for this vulnerable population.

Shelters often prohibit pets due to concerns such as allergies, liability risks, space limitations, and potential conflicts between animals. Some facilities do allow service animals, but this does not extend to emotional support animals or personal pets. Additionally, many pet owners experiencing homelessness lack access to affordable veterinary care, vaccinations, and pet food, making it difficult to ensure their animals receive proper care. Without these resources, pet owners are further marginalized from traditional housing options and support services.

To better support individuals experiencing homelessness with pets, Joplin could consider implementing pet-friendly shelter initiatives, such as designated pet areas within existing shelters, partnerships with local veterinary clinics for free or low-cost animal care, and temporary foster care programs for pets when their owners are in crisis. Other cities have successfully adopted models where shelters provide secure kennels or pet-friendly dormitory spaces, allowing people to access housing and services without having to surrender their pets.

Addressing the needs of homeless pet owners requires a compassionate, balanced approach that acknowledges pets' role in providing emotional stability while maintaining safety and accessibility for all shelter residents. Expanding emergency pet-friendly shelters, fostering stronger collaboration with animal welfare organizations, and

creating low-barrier housing solutions would significantly improve shelter participation rates and overall well-being for both people and their animals.

6.6 LANDLORD & RENTAL MARKET BARRIERS

Individuals who receive housing vouchers or rental assistance, such as Section 8 or Rapid Rehousing, frequently struggle to secure rental units in Joplin. Despite the availability of 532 housing vouchers administered by the Joplin Housing Authority, many landlords refuse to accept them due to concerns over delayed payments, bureaucratic requirements, and tenant reliability. The reluctance to participate in rental assistance programs significantly limits housing options for low-income individuals and families trying to transition out of homelessness.

Housing discrimination, while technically prohibited in some jurisdictions, is not consistently enforced in Missouri. Unlike cities such as Kansas City, Missouri, which recently passed an ordinance banning discrimination based on income source, Joplin currently has no legal protections preventing landlords from rejecting tenants solely because they rely on vouchers. Studies show that 75-92% of landlords nationwide do not accept housing vouchers, but voucher utilization rates increase by 5-15 percentage points in areas with legal protections against discrimination. Without such policies in place, Joplin renters using assistance programs face severe limitations in securing stable housing.

Securing a lease is even more difficult for individuals with unstable employment histories, past evictions, or criminal records. Many landlords impose strict income requirements, credit checks, and rental history criteria that exclude low-income tenants, particularly those exiting homelessness. Given the rising cost of rent in Joplin, voucher recipients often struggle to find landlords willing to accept payments within HUD's Fair Market Rent guidelines. This further reduces available housing options and prolongs the time individuals and families remain homeless.

Joplin's Public Housing Authority currently manages 275 dwelling units, but the demand for affordable housing far exceeds supply. The waiting lists for public housing and Section 8 vouchers can be extensive, leaving many without immediate access to stable housing. Additionally, Missouri legislators have considered overturning Kansas City's income-based housing protections, signaling broader resistance at the state level to policies that could help low-income renters secure stable housing.

Addressing these barriers requires proactive solutions, including financial incentives for landlords to accept vouchers, faster processing of rental assistance payments, and stronger tenant protections to prevent housing discrimination. Implementing a landlord risk mitigation fund—a policy adopted in other cities—could reduce perceived risks for property owners and encourage greater participation in housing assistance programs. Without such measures, many individuals in Joplin will continue to struggle to transition from homelessness into stable housing.

6.7 HOUSING RETENTION CHALLENGES

Securing housing is only the first step; maintaining long-term stability presents additional challenges. Many individuals who transition into housing experience economic instability, untreated mental health conditions, or addiction relapse, leading to high rates of returns to homelessness. Without proper support services, rental assistance extensions, or case management, individuals and families risk eviction, forcing them back into shelters or unsheltered situations.

System Performance Measure (SPM) 2, which tracks returns to homelessness, indicates that a significant portion of individuals in Joplin experience repeat episodes of homelessness due to:

- Job loss or inconsistent income – Economic instability makes it difficult for individuals to afford rent consistently. Many low-income workers in Joplin have jobs with unpredictable hours or wages below a living standard, increasing their vulnerability to eviction.
- Limited access to case management and support services – Many formerly homeless individuals do not receive ongoing support to help them maintain their housing, making it difficult to comply with lease requirements, navigate landlord disputes, or budget effectively.
- Lack of mental health or addiction treatment – Untreated conditions increase the risk of eviction or voluntary departures from housing, as individuals struggling with mental health crises or substance use often find it challenging to maintain stability in permanent housing.

According to the Missouri Housing Development Commission’s 2023 Homelessness Study, returns to homelessness are a critical indicator of system effectiveness, highlighting the need for follow-up services and intervention strategies to prevent repeat episodes of homelessness. In many cases, individuals placed in housing are left without adequate support, increasing the likelihood of eviction, lease violations, or voluntary exits from housing programs.

Joplin lacks a structured, citywide housing retention program, leaving many individuals at risk of becoming homeless again due to a lack of resources after placement. Best practices from other cities have shown that wraparound services, rental subsidy extensions, and dedicated housing retention caseworkers significantly improve long-term stability. Without expanded supportive services, individuals exiting homelessness in Joplin will continue to face high rates of recidivism into homelessness, further straining the emergency shelter system and public resources.

6.8 SUMMARY & KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 6 examines the systemic barriers preventing individuals experiencing homelessness in Joplin from accessing housing and critical services. Although Joplin has a network of service providers and housing programs, many individuals remain unsheltered due to restrictive shelter policies, lack of available beds, and the criminalization of homelessness. Sobriety requirements, curfews, and communal living conditions deter individuals struggling with addiction, PTSD, or cognitive disabilities from utilizing shelter services. Additionally, the city’s approach to homelessness enforcement—through camping bans, encampment sweeps, and increased policing—creates additional challenges for those seeking stability.

The chapter also highlights Not In My Backyard (NIMBY) resistance to shelter expansion, which has resulted in canceled projects such as The Lincoln Heights Project and The Depot Shelter. This resistance, driven by misconceptions about crime and property values, has prevented the development of essential emergency housing. Further barriers exist for individuals with disabilities, pet owners, and those reliant on housing vouchers, as many rental properties remain inaccessible or refuse to accept assistance programs. Even when individuals secure housing, high rates of returns to homelessness indicate the need for more substantial post-housing support, including case management and financial assistance.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CHAPTER 6

Expand Low-Barrier Shelter Capacity

- Establish additional emergency shelter beds that do not require sobriety, curfews, or religious participation, ensuring accessibility for individuals with mental health conditions, substance use disorders, and PTSD.
- Develop daytime resource centers to reduce loitering and provide stable spaces for individuals to access job training, medical care, and social services.

Reform Local Ordinances to Decriminalize Homelessness

- Shift law enforcement approaches away from criminalizing survival behaviors by implementing homeless diversion programs that connect individuals to services instead of issuing fines or making arrests.
- Expand the Community Resource Unit (CRU) within the police department to provide more non-punitive engagement and referrals for individuals experiencing homelessness.

Increase Public Education to Counter NIMBY Resistance

- Launch community engagement campaigns to address misinformation about homelessness and highlight the benefits of supportive housing and low-barrier shelters.
- Provide data-driven presentations to city officials and residents demonstrating how shelter expansion improves public safety and community stability.

Improve Accessibility for People with Disabilities

- Ensure that all emergency shelters and transitional housing facilities are ADA-compliant, including adding ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms.
- Expand case management services to assist individuals with cognitive disabilities in navigating housing applications, Social Security benefits, and disability services.

Develop Pet-Friendly Shelter Options

- Establish designated pet-friendly shelters or kennel partnerships to ensure individuals do not have to choose between their pets and housing.
- Work with local veterinary clinics to provide vaccinations and basic care for pets owned by individuals experiencing homelessness.

Encourage Landlord Participation in Rental Assistance Programs

- Create a Landlord Risk Mitigation Fund to cover potential damages or non-payment concerns, increasing the number of landlords willing to accept housing vouchers.
- Advocate for tenant protections and source-of-income anti-discrimination policies to prevent landlords from rejecting voucher holders solely based on income type.

Implement a Housing Retention Program

- Establish a post-housing case management system to assist individuals in maintaining stability through financial counseling, conflict mediation, and job assistance.
- Secure funding for rental subsidies and eviction prevention services to reduce returns to homelessness caused by economic instability.

CHAPTER 7: SOLUTIONS & FUTURE INITIATIVES

Addressing homelessness in Joplin requires a combination of immediate interventions and long-term policy solutions. While emergency shelters and transitional housing programs provide short-term relief, sustainable solutions must focus on increasing affordable housing, expanding support services, and strengthening programs that prevent individuals from returning to homelessness. Many of the barriers that prevent people from securing stable housing—such as income instability, rental discrimination, and mental health challenges—require systemic changes that go beyond traditional homelessness services. By implementing evidence-based practices and fostering stronger partnerships between government agencies, nonprofits, and the private sector, Joplin can create a more effective and compassionate response to homelessness.

This chapter explores key strategies to improve housing stability and prevent future homelessness. It begins by examining the challenges of housing retention, particularly for individuals transitioning from emergency shelters and rapid rehousing programs. It then discusses the urgent need for increased shelter capacity and expanded supportive services to assist better those experiencing homelessness. Workforce development programs, mental health and addiction treatment services, and rental market reforms are also explored as critical components of a comprehensive solution. Additionally, this chapter highlights the importance of public education and awareness campaigns to combat misinformation and build community support for new housing initiatives. By implementing these solutions and investing in long-term strategies, Joplin can reduce homelessness and create a more inclusive and sustainable housing system.

7.1 HOUSING RETENTION CHALLENGES

Securing housing is only the first step; maintaining long-term stability presents additional challenges. Many individuals who transition into housing experience economic instability, untreated mental health conditions, or addiction relapse, leading to high rates of returns to homelessness. Without proper support services, rental assistance extensions, or case management, individuals and families risk eviction, forcing them back into shelters or unsheltered situations.

Joplin's housing inventory includes 243 Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) beds, 46 Rapid Rehousing (RRH) beds, and 80 Transitional Housing (TH) beds. However, housing retention remains a significant issue, particularly for those in RRH and TH programs, where time-limited assistance does not always provide enough stability for long-term success.

System Performance Measure (SPM) 2, which tracks returns to homelessness, indicates that a significant portion of individuals in Joplin experience repeat episodes of homelessness due to:

- Job loss or inconsistent income – Economic instability makes it difficult for individuals to afford rent consistently. Many low-income workers in Joplin have jobs with unpredictable hours or wages below a living standard, increasing their vulnerability to eviction.
- Limited access to case management and support services – Many formerly homeless individuals do not receive ongoing support to help them maintain their housing, making it difficult to comply with lease requirements, navigate landlord disputes, or budget effectively.
- Lack of mental health or addiction treatment – Untreated conditions increase the risk of eviction or voluntary departures from housing, as individuals struggling with mental health crises or substance use often find it challenging to maintain stability in permanent housing.

According to the Missouri Housing Development Commission's 2023 Homelessness Study, returns to homelessness are a critical indicator of system effectiveness, highlighting the need for follow-up services and intervention strategies

to prevent repeat episodes of homelessness. In many cases, individuals placed in housing are left without adequate support, increasing the likelihood of eviction, lease violations, or voluntary exits from housing programs.

Joplin lacks a structured, citywide housing retention program, leaving many individuals at risk of becoming homeless again due to a lack of resources after placement. Best practices from other cities have shown that wraparound services, rental subsidy extensions, and dedicated housing retention caseworkers significantly improve long-term stability. Without expanded supportive services, individuals exiting homelessness in Joplin will continue to face high rates of recidivism into homelessness, further straining the emergency shelter system and public resources.

7.2 INCREASING SHELTER BEDS & SUPPORT SERVICES

Joplin's emergency shelter system remains severely limited, with only two primary shelters—Watered Gardens and Souls Harbor—providing most of the overnight accommodations for individuals experiencing homelessness. Despite a 111% increase in unsheltered homelessness from 2023 to 2024, there has been no significant expansion of emergency shelter capacity to meet the rising demand.

Souls Harbor operates a 54-bed emergency shelter, while Watered Gardens Outreach Center provides over 40 shelter beds at its main facility. Additionally, the Washington Family Hope Center, run by Watered Gardens, offers six family units on the first floor (30 beds) and nine family units on the second floor (45 beds), bringing the total number of available shelter beds in Joplin to approximately 115 across both facilities. However, the majority of these beds are designated for specific populations, such as families, women, or individuals enrolled in recovery programs.

Emergency shelter availability is not exclusive to Joplin, as limited shelter beds exist in Carthage and Neosho. However, these facilities have restricted capacity and specific eligibility requirements, making them inaccessible to many individuals seeking emergency housing. The geographic concentration of services in Joplin remains a significant barrier, as individuals in rural areas must travel long distances to access shelter services, often with no reliable transportation options.

Another major issue within Joplin's shelter system is accessibility. Both Watered Gardens and Souls Harbor operate services on their second floors without elevators, creating significant barriers for individuals with mobility impairments. Additionally, many shelters impose restrictive entry requirements, such as sobriety mandates, curfews, and limitations based on gender or family status. These policies often exclude individuals who may need shelter the most, forcing them to remain unsheltered or seek alternative arrangements.

The Salvation Army's Resource Connect, scheduled to launch in March 2025, is designed to improve service coordination among providers. However, this initiative will not add new emergency shelter beds. Instead, Resource Connect will function as a weekly hub where individuals experiencing homelessness can connect with housing services, employment programs, healthcare providers, and other essential resources. While this initiative will help streamline access to social services, it does not increase the availability of overnight shelter beds or directly address the critical shortage of emergency housing options.

Despite the rising need for emergency shelters, no new emergency shelters have been developed in recent years. As a result, many individuals experiencing homelessness in Joplin, Carthage, and Neosho remain unsheltered, sleeping in encampments, vehicles, or public spaces. The lack of immediate shelter options continues to strain local resources, leaving many individuals without a safe place to stay.

OVERCOMING FIRE SAFETY BARRIERS TO SHELTER EXPANSION

One of the most significant barriers to expanding emergency shelter capacity in Joplin is fire safety compliance, particularly the requirement for sprinkler systems in shelter facilities. While these regulations are essential for

ensuring the safety of shelter residents, the high cost of installing sprinkler systems in existing buildings has prevented multiple potential shelter locations from opening. Several buildings in Joplin could be immediately converted into emergency shelters, but without a sprinkler system, they remain legally unusable.

For many nonprofit organizations and service providers, the upfront cost of a sprinkler system—typically between \$50,000 and \$150,000—is prohibitive. This has created an unintended regulatory barrier, effectively blocking the expansion of emergency housing options. Without financial assistance, many service providers cannot bring older buildings into compliance with modern fire safety codes, limiting their ability to meet the growing demand for shelter beds.

7.3 WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & ECONOMIC STABILITY

One of the most significant barriers to escaping homelessness is the lack of stable employment opportunities. System Performance Measure (SPM) 4 evaluates employment and income growth among individuals participating in housing programs, providing insight into economic stability. In Joplin, employment growth among formerly homeless individuals remains a challenge due to limited job training programs and employer hesitation in hiring those with past housing instability.

To address these challenges, Joplin can leverage existing workforce development initiatives:

- **CHANCE Program:** A specialized workforce initiative offered by the Economic Security Corporation of Southwest Area, this program provides 80 hours of life skills training to homeless individuals, preparing them for job searching and offering ongoing support through case management.
- **SkillUP Program:** This free initiative is available to Missouri SNAP recipients, including those in Joplin. It provides skills training, job coaching, and direct employer connections to help participants secure sustainable employment.
- **Missouri Work Assistance (MWA) Program:** This program supports Temporary Assistance recipients by offering job readiness training, work experience, employment placement assistance, and retention support.

Collaborating with local businesses to create employment opportunities for homeless individuals is a key step toward long-term housing stability. Workforce development programs that offer job training, apprenticeships, and certification courses can help individuals secure steady employment with livable wages. Encouraging employer engagement through financial incentives and workforce support programs can further enhance employment opportunities.

To incentivize businesses, Joplin could expand access to existing tax credit programs such as:

- **Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC):** This is a federal program that allows employers to claim a tax credit of up to 40% on the first \$6,000 of wages paid to eligible employees, including those facing significant employment barriers.
- **Homeless Hiring Tax Credit:** This is a model implemented in some states that offers financial incentives to businesses hiring homeless individuals. While Missouri does not currently have such a program, advocating for a state-level initiative could increase employer participation.

Additionally, workforce development agencies and homeless service providers should strengthen partnerships to create direct pathways from homelessness to employment. Expanding job placement programs, integrating wraparound services like financial literacy training, and providing post-employment support will ensure long-term economic stability for individuals transitioning out of homelessness.

By investing in these workforce initiatives, Joplin can build a stronger, more inclusive economy while helping individuals achieve self-sufficiency and long-term housing stability.

7.4 STRENGTHENING MENTAL HEALTH & ADDICTION TREATMENT

Mental health and substance use disorders are significant factors contributing to homelessness in Joplin. While there are established service providers offering behavioral health treatment, many individuals experiencing homelessness struggle to access or remain engaged in care. The demand for treatment continues to outpace available resources, leaving many without the support needed to stabilize their conditions and transition into permanent housing.

The Ozark Center, affiliated with Freeman Health System, is the region's most comprehensive behavioral healthcare provider. It offers a range of services, including individual and group therapy, psychiatric medication management, residential care, acute inpatient care, and 24-hour crisis intervention. For individuals in immediate distress, Ozark Center Crisis Services operates a 24/7 crisis intervention hotline and provides in-person evaluations. These services play a critical role in addressing mental health emergencies among individuals experiencing homelessness. However, there are long wait times for non-emergency psychiatric services and limited outreach programs tailored explicitly for the unhoused population.

In addition to Ozark Center, ACCESS Family Care, a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC), provides fully available behavioral health services alongside primary medical and dental care. ACCESS operates an outreach program in downtown Joplin, ensuring that homeless individuals can receive essential health screenings, mental health counseling, and substance use treatment referrals. However, despite ACCESS Family Care's broad availability, effective treatment often requires collaboration among multiple providers to ensure patients receive consistent follow-up care, medication adherence support, and long-term case management.

In early 2024, the Joplin Police Department (JPD) implemented a social work integration program to embed social workers within law enforcement. This initiative aims to improve responses to mental health crises, reduce unnecessary arrests, and direct individuals toward treatment instead of incarceration. While this represents a step toward a more compassionate approach to crisis intervention, it does not replace the need for expanded treatment services or affordable housing options for individuals struggling with chronic mental illness and addiction.

Despite these resources, Joplin lacks a dedicated inpatient detox or long-term rehabilitation facility for substance use treatment. Individuals seeking detox or medication-assisted treatment (MAT) for opioid and alcohol use disorders must often travel to Springfield, Kansas City, or Tulsa due to the absence of a local residential rehab program. This lack of accessible detox and rehabilitation services creates significant barriers for individuals experiencing homelessness, as many cannot afford transportation, sustain engagement in outpatient care, or meet requirements for admission to distant facilities.

Without local inpatient detox and rehabilitation options, many individuals experiencing homelessness in Joplin remain untreated, cycling between emergency shelters, jails, and hospitals. Expanding immediate-access detox programs, increasing the availability of MAT, and developing a local residential rehab facility would provide a more comprehensive response to addiction and mental health challenges faced by Joplin's unhoused population.

PROPOSED SOLUTION: A SPRINKLER GRANT PROGRAM OR PRIVATE FUND

To overcome this challenge, the City of Joplin should establish a Sprinkler Grant Program, providing funding assistance to shelters needing fire suppression system upgrades. This could be funded through:

- City resources allocated for shelter expansion
- State housing grants designated for emergency services

- Federal programs that support shelter infrastructure improvements

Alternatively, the city could partner with local businesses, philanthropic organizations, and private donors to establish a Sprinkler Assistance Fund. A public-private funding model would allow organizations to apply for financial aid to cover the cost of fire safety retrofitting, immediately unlocking new emergency shelter capacity.

Investing in sprinkler system funding would be a cost-effective, high-impact initiative that would maximize the use of existing buildings rather than requiring new shelter construction. By addressing this logistical barrier, Joplin can quickly expand its emergency shelter capacity and provide safe, accessible housing to individuals currently forced to remain unsheltered.

7.5 RENTAL APPLICATION BARRIERS AND THE NEED FOR A COMMUNITY-BASED RENTAL APPLICATION PROGRAM

One of the most significant challenges faced by low-income renters and individuals transitioning out of homelessness in Joplin is the cost and complexity of rental applications. Many landlords charge non-refundable application fees, which can range from \$25 to \$75 per application. Given the competitive rental market and limited availability of affordable units, prospective tenants often must apply to multiple properties before securing housing. For individuals with little or no disposable income, this financial burden quickly becomes a significant barrier to securing stable housing.

Beyond financial concerns, rental application processes often disadvantage individuals with poor credit history, past evictions, or criminal records. Even for those who receive housing vouchers or Rapid Rehousing assistance, many landlords conduct strict screening procedures that effectively exclude vulnerable applicants. This results in many individuals spending months searching for housing, exhausting financial resources, and, in some cases, losing their housing assistance due to delays in lease approvals.

A potential solution to this issue is the development of a Community-Based Rental Application Program, which would allow low-income renters to complete a single rental application that multiple landlords can access. This centralized application system could help streamline the housing search process, reduce costs for tenants, and increase housing accessibility for voucher holders and other low-income residents.

While this program does not yet exist in Joplin, it has been successfully implemented in other cities with positive outcomes for both tenants and landlords. To encourage participation, landlords could be offered incentives such as rental guarantees, security deposit assistance, or tax credits to offset perceived risks. Establishing a program of this nature would require collaboration between local housing authorities, nonprofits, and property management companies to ensure its effectiveness.

Without immediate policy changes or the implementation of a rental assistance program, many low-income renters in Joplin will continue to struggle with application costs and screening barriers, prolonging their housing instability. Creating a community-wide rental application system could serve as a long-term solution to increasing housing accessibility and affordability for the city's most vulnerable populations.

7.6 PUBLIC EDUCATION & AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

One of the persistent challenges in addressing homelessness in Joplin is the stigma and misinformation surrounding the issue. Many residents hold misconceptions about the causes of homelessness, believing that individuals choose to remain unhoused or that providing services will attract more homeless individuals to Joplin. These false narratives

fuel public opposition to shelters, housing programs, and supportive services, making it more difficult to implement practical solutions. To combat these challenges, public education campaigns are essential to shift perceptions, build community support, and reduce barriers to expanding housing resources.

The Regional Commission on Homelessness has announced plans to conduct a series of public workshops aimed at educating residents, businesses, and policymakers on the realities of homelessness in Joplin. These workshops will provide data-driven insights into the local homeless population, the economic impact of homelessness, and the effectiveness of various intervention strategies. They will also offer an opportunity for community members to ask questions, express concerns, and learn about ongoing initiatives.

In addition to workshops, broader community engagement strategies could include town hall meetings, local media campaigns, and storytelling initiatives that amplify the voices of individuals with lived experiences of homelessness. Personal stories and firsthand accounts can be powerful tools in breaking down stigma and fostering empathy. Schools, businesses, and faith-based organizations can also play a role in educating their communities and promoting solutions such as housing-first programs, mental health services, and workforce development.

To combat NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) resistance, targeted outreach will be critical in neighborhoods where new shelters or housing developments are proposed. Addressing concerns proactively through public forums, neighborhood discussions, and open Q&A sessions can help residents better understand the safeguards and benefits associated with housing initiatives. Policymakers must take an active role in these efforts by clearly communicating the economic and social benefits of reducing homelessness, including cost savings in emergency services, law enforcement, and healthcare.

Through consistent, fact-based public education efforts, Joplin can work toward reducing stigma, increasing public support, and creating a more informed and engaged community that is invested in meaningful solutions to homelessness.

7.7 SUMMARY & KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 7 outlines a comprehensive approach to addressing homelessness in Joplin, focusing on housing retention, emergency shelter expansion, workforce development, mental health services, rental application barriers, and public education initiatives.

Housing retention is a significant challenge, as individuals who transition into housing often lack economic stability, case management, and mental health support, leading to high rates of eviction and returns to homelessness. While Joplin has permanent supportive housing, rapid rehousing, and transitional housing programs, they remain insufficient to meet the growing need. The city also faces a severe shortage of emergency shelter beds, particularly for individuals with disabilities, those with pets, and those struggling with addiction.

Economic instability is another major factor contributing to homelessness, with limited job training programs and employer hesitancy to hire individuals with past housing instability. Mental health and addiction treatment services remain underfunded and inaccessible, with long wait times and no dedicated detox facility in Joplin.

Additionally, rental application fees, strict screening criteria, and landlord discrimination against housing voucher recipients create significant barriers for individuals attempting to secure stable housing. Finally, public stigma and misinformation about homelessness fuel resistance to new shelter projects, making it challenging to implement practical solutions.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CHAPTER 7

- Establish a housing retention program that includes long-term case management services to assist formerly homeless individuals with budgeting, tenant rights, and landlord mediation. Expanding rental subsidy programs and financial assistance for individuals at risk of eviction will help prevent returns to homelessness. Increasing access to mental health and addiction support services is also necessary to maintain housing stability.
- Expand emergency shelter capacity and accessibility by developing a publicly funded low-barrier shelter that does not impose sobriety, curfews, or restrictive entry requirements. Ensuring all shelters are ADA-compliant will allow individuals with disabilities to access services. Creating pet-friendly shelter options and increasing daytime resource centers will provide safe spaces for job searches, medical appointments, and social service access.
- Strengthen workforce development programs and economic stability by fostering partnerships between employers and workforce training programs to connect homeless individuals with stable employment opportunities. Providing tax incentives for businesses that hire individuals experiencing homelessness and expanding job readiness training, apprenticeships, and certification programs will improve employability and income stability.
- Establish a dedicated inpatient detox and rehabilitation facility in Joplin to increase access to mental health and addiction treatment. Expanding street outreach and mobile mental health services will connect unsheltered individuals with treatment options. Reducing wait times for psychiatric services by increasing funding for behavioral health programs will improve long-term outcomes.
- Create a community-based rental application program that allows low-income tenants to apply to multiple properties with a single application. Providing financial incentives for landlords who participate in rental assistance programs, including a landlord risk mitigation fund to cover potential damages, will encourage participation. Advocating for source-of-income anti-discrimination protections will prevent landlords from rejecting tenants solely based on housing vouchers.
- Launch a public education and awareness campaign to address misinformation about homelessness. Hosting community workshops and public forums, developing media campaigns and storytelling initiatives, and working with local businesses, schools, and faith-based organizations will help educate the public on practical solutions. Engaging with communities resistant to new housing initiatives through targeted outreach and fact-based presentations will help reduce opposition.

CHAPTER 8: FUNDING & FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

The effectiveness of Joplin's homelessness response depends not only on service availability but also on the financial stability of shelters, housing programs, and supportive services. While federal and state funding provides the majority of financial support for homelessness programs, these grants are often competitive, short-term, and restricted in scope. At the local level, Joplin's direct monetary contributions to homelessness services remain limited, leaving service providers reliant on unpredictable external funding sources. The lack of a dedicated municipal funding stream for shelters, rental assistance, and outreach programs has created significant challenges in expanding services and addressing the growing demand for housing solutions. Without sustainable and diversified funding, Joplin's ability to reduce homelessness and improve long-term housing stability remains uncertain.

This chapter examines Joplin's current spending on homelessness and evaluates whether existing funding sources are sufficient to meet the needs of the growing homeless population. It explores federal and state funding contributions, the role of private donations, and the potential for alternative financing models such as public-private partnerships, social impact bonds, and dedicated tax measures. Additionally, the chapter assesses the long-term sustainability of Joplin's homelessness funding, highlighting areas where additional investment is needed. As homelessness continues to rise, identifying reliable and scalable funding solutions will be critical in ensuring that shelters, housing programs, and support services can operate effectively and expand to meet future needs.

8.1 JOPLIN'S CURRENT SPENDING ON HOMELESSNESS

Joplin's direct financial investment in addressing homelessness remains limited, with the city allocating approximately \$125,000 annually to the Regional Commission on Homelessness. This funding primarily supports the coordination of homelessness services but does not directly finance emergency shelters, transitional housing, rental assistance, or mental health outreach. Instead, the city relies heavily on federal and state grants, nonprofit organizations, and private funding sources to sustain homelessness response efforts.

Compared to similarly sized cities, Joplin's municipal spending on homelessness services is relatively low. There is currently no dedicated local funding stream, such as a homelessness tax, general fund allocation, or bond measure, to provide stable financial support for shelters and housing programs. The absence of consistent municipal funding creates significant challenges in expanding shelter capacity, maintaining outreach programs, and improving access to essential supportive services.

The Hidden Costs of Homelessness in Joplin

While Joplin's direct spending on homelessness remains low, the indirect costs absorbed by the city and its residents are significantly higher. The burden of homelessness falls heavily on public safety services, healthcare providers, and the local economy, creating a financial strain that is mainly untracked in city budgets. Studies from comparable cities indicate that the total annual cost of homelessness, including emergency services, policing, healthcare, and economic losses—can range from \$30,000 to \$50,000 per homeless individual per year. With an estimated 300 individuals experiencing homelessness in Joplin, this could mean an annual hidden cost of between \$9 million and \$15 million to the community.

- **Law Enforcement & Public Safety:**

Joplin Police Department (JPD) officers regularly respond to calls related to trespassing, loitering, disturbances, and welfare checks involving individuals experiencing homelessness. Each police response, from an officer's time to administrative processing, is estimated to cost between \$300 and \$500 per incident. Homeless individuals also frequently cycle through the criminal justice system for minor offenses, further straining jail resources, court systems, and public defenders.

- **Fire & Emergency Medical Services (EMS):**

Joplin's firefighters and EMS teams frequently respond to medical emergencies, exposure-related injuries, and fires caused by makeshift encampments or abandoned buildings used for shelter. The Carnegie Library and The Olivia fires illustrate the real dangers posed by displaced individuals seeking refuge in unsafe locations. The cumulative costs of emergency medical transports, fire suppression efforts, and repeated EMS calls can add an estimated \$10,000 to \$20,000 per unsheltered individual per year.

- **Hospital & Healthcare Costs:**

Without stable housing and access to preventive care, many individuals experiencing homelessness rely on Freeman Hospital's emergency department for treatable conditions such as untreated infections, diabetic complications, respiratory illnesses, and substance withdrawal. National research suggests that emergency medical care for an individual experiencing homelessness can range from \$30,000 to \$50,000 per year, with repeated ER visits, hospitalizations, and crisis care.

- **Lost Revenue from Tourism & Business Impact:**

Public perception of homelessness in high-traffic areas, particularly downtown Joplin and business corridors, may deter customers, reduce foot traffic, and affect local economic growth. If local businesses experience even a 5-10% decrease in revenue due to safety concerns or negative perceptions, this could translate into millions of dollars in lost revenue annually for the community. Additionally, the visibility of homelessness may impact tourism, conventions, and outside investments, further limiting the city's economic potential.

8.2 FEDERAL & STATE FUNDING CONTRIBUTIONS

The majority of Joplin's homelessness services are supported by federal and state funding, mainly through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Continuum of Care (CoC) program. In Fiscal Year 2024, Joplin's CoC was awarded \$844,782 to fund Permanent Supportive Housing, Rapid Rehousing, and other critical housing programs. These funds are distributed among several key initiatives:

- \$337,751 for Permanent Supportive Housing through the Missouri Department of Mental Health
- \$103,152 for Shelter Plus Care housing programs
- \$90,224 for Rapid Rehousing services provided by the Economic Security Corporation (ESC)
- \$69,778 for programs targeting the chronically homeless
- \$46,394 for additional Rapid Rehousing initiatives
- \$31,038 for Catholic Charities' Rapid Rehousing efforts
- \$50,000 for planning and administrative grants

While this funding is critical for Joplin's long-term housing solutions, it does not provide substantial resources for emergency shelter operations or immediate crisis intervention. The CoC funding is primarily focused on moving individuals into permanent housing rather than expanding shelter capacity or addressing the root causes of homelessness.

In addition to HUD funding, Joplin receives state-level financial support through programs such as the Missouri Department of Mental Health's Rental Assistance Program (RAP), which provides rental subsidies to low-income individuals. The Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) grant also helps fund outreach services aimed at connecting homeless individuals with mental health and substance use treatment resources.

Despite these funding sources, Joplin's overall allocation remains insufficient to meet the increasing demand for homelessness services. State and federal grants are often time-limited, highly competitive, and tied to strict eligibility requirements, leaving many individuals without access to critical services. Because the majority of HUD funding

prioritizes permanent housing solutions, immediate crisis response efforts—including emergency shelter, mental health crisis intervention, and addiction treatment—remain underfunded.

To secure additional funding, Joplin should increase state and federal advocacy efforts, expand partnerships with state agencies, and apply for more competitive federal grants. Additionally, exploring alternative funding mechanisms, such as social impact bonds or countywide tax initiatives, could help ensure long-term financial sustainability for Joplin’s homelessness response.

8.3 BREAKDOWN OF FUNDING SOURCES

Funding for homelessness services in Joplin comes primarily from federal and state grants, supplemented by limited local government allocations and private contributions. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Continuum of Care (CoC) program is the largest funding source, providing \$844,782 in Fiscal Year 2024 for Permanent Supportive Housing, Rapid Rehousing, and Shelter Plus Care programs. These funds are distributed across several local agencies, with the Economic Security Corporation (ESC) serving as the primary recipient.

State funding plays a critical role in supplementing federal grants. The Missouri Department of Mental Health’s Rental Assistance Program (RAP) and the Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) grant provide financial support for rental subsidies and outreach services connecting individuals to mental health and addiction treatment. However, these funds are primarily designated for housing-related expenses and do not provide direct operational support for emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, or crisis intervention services.

Despite the substantial contribution of federal and state funding, Joplin lacks a dedicated local funding stream for homelessness services. The city’s direct allocation of \$125,000 annually to the Regional Commission on Homelessness is modest compared to the need. It does not support the expansion of emergency shelter capacity, outreach programs, or supportive services. Unlike some municipalities that utilize local taxes or general fund allocations, Joplin relies heavily on fluctuating grant-based funding, which makes long-term planning and service expansion difficult.

Private funding sources, including corporate sponsorships, philanthropic donations, and community fundraising efforts, provide additional support but remain inconsistent. Some local businesses contribute through financial support, in-kind donations to shelters, or workforce development initiatives aimed at hiring individuals transitioning out of homelessness. However, private-sector engagement is not widespread, and there is no structured corporate giving program focused on homelessness solutions in Joplin. Expanding corporate social responsibility initiatives and establishing a matching grant program for businesses willing to invest in homelessness solutions could increase financial stability.

Community involvement remains a vital but underutilized component of the funding landscape. While local nonprofits and faith-based organizations rely on volunteer efforts and grassroots donations, limited data exists on how many Joplin residents actively contribute to or support homelessness service organizations. Increasing public awareness and participation through educational campaigns and fundraising initiatives could enhance financial support from individuals and community groups.

To create a more sustainable funding structure, Joplin may need to explore additional revenue sources such as a countywide tax initiative, bond measure, or dedicated social impact fund. Without a consistent and diversified funding model, service providers remain dependent on unpredictable grant cycles and emergency fundraising efforts, limiting their ability to effectively address the city’s rising homelessness crisis.

8.4 IS CURRENT FUNDING SUSTAINABLE?

The sustainability of funding remains one of the most pressing challenges in Joplin's homelessness response strategy. The city's reliance on competitive federal grants and limited local funding creates an unpredictable financial landscape that makes long-term planning difficult. System Performance Measure (SPM) 2, which tracks returns to homelessness, underscores the impact of inadequate long-term investment. When individuals exit homelessness without sufficient financial and social support, many find themselves back on the streets, cycling through emergency shelters, temporary housing, or unsheltered conditions.

One of the most significant consequences of funding shortages has been the 52% decrease in Rapid Rehousing (RRH) beds over the past year. This sharp decline limits the number of people who can transition from shelters to stable housing, forcing many to remain in emergency shelters or unsheltered conditions. Without a sufficient supply of RRH units, service providers face increasing difficulties in moving individuals through the housing continuum.

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) has been a proven solution for addressing chronic homelessness, yet funding limitations threaten its sustainability in Joplin. Currently, 243 PSH beds exist in the region, but maintaining and expanding this inventory requires consistent operational funding. While HUD's Continuum of Care (CoC) program provides significant funding for PSH, it is competitive and requires annual renewal, leaving service providers uncertain about long-term financial stability.

Reliance on one-time grants for homelessness services also presents a structural funding challenge. Many essential programs—such as street outreach, housing navigation, and case management—operate on short-term funding cycles, making it difficult to establish lasting, effective support systems. In contrast, cities that have dedicated revenue streams, such as homelessness taxes or housing trust funds, have demonstrated greater long-term stability in addressing homelessness.

Joplin lacks a dedicated local funding source for homelessness services. The city's \$125,000 annual allocation to the Regional Commission on Homelessness is a small fraction of the financial resources needed to sustain emergency shelter operations, rental assistance programs, and wraparound support services. Without additional funding streams, including potential countywide tax measures, public-private partnerships, or philanthropic investments, existing services will remain underfunded and unable to scale to meet the growing demand.

To create a sustainable financial model, Joplin must reduce its dependence on fluctuating federal grants and establish long-term local funding mechanisms. This could include increasing direct city and county allocations, incentivizing private-sector contributions, or exploring Social Impact Bonds, where private investors fund homelessness solutions and receive returns based on measurable outcomes. Without these investments, gaps in funding will persist, leading to continued reductions in RRH and PSH availability, increased reliance on emergency shelters, and higher rates of chronic and unsheltered homelessness in the region.

8.5 POTENTIAL REVENUE FROM LOCAL TAX OR BOND MEASURES

Addressing Joplin's homelessness crisis requires sustainable funding sources beyond federal and state grants, which are often inconsistent and limited in scope. One potential solution is implementing a countywide sales tax or housing bond measure dedicated to funding homelessness services. A 1% sales tax increase in both Jasper and Newton Counties could generate substantial revenue to support emergency shelters, rental assistance programs, and the development of affordable housing.

Based on recent financial data, Jasper County collected approximately \$8.5 million from its general sales tax in 2021. A 1% sales tax increase could generate an additional \$8.5 million annually for countywide initiatives. In Newton County, sales tax revenue data is more limited, but estimates suggest that a 1% increase could bring in an additional

\$2 million to \$4.5 million per year. Combined, these measures could generate between \$10.5 million and \$13 million annually, providing a dedicated funding stream for long-term homelessness solutions.

Community outreach and education campaigns would be essential in building public support for such a tax measure. Many voters may be hesitant to approve new taxes, making it crucial to highlight the long-term economic benefits of addressing homelessness. Research from other cities has shown that investments in housing and supportive services significantly reduce public spending on emergency healthcare, law enforcement, and crisis response.

In addition to a sales tax, a housing bond could be another viable funding option. A targeted bond measure could finance the construction of new affordable housing units, addressing the ongoing shortage of low-income rental properties in Joplin. Policymakers would need to assess the feasibility of a bond initiative, including voter support, potential revenue, and how funds would be allocated.

Given the rising rates of unsheltered homelessness in Joplin and the declining availability of Rapid Rehousing and emergency shelter beds, securing dedicated local funding is crucial. While federal and state funding provides critical support, it is not enough to meet the increasing demand for services. A well-structured sales tax or bond measure, with clear goals and accountability measures, could ensure long-term stability in Joplin's homelessness response system.

8.6 EXPLORING SOCIAL IMPACT BONDS & PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

Joplin faces significant funding challenges in its homelessness response efforts, making it essential to explore alternative financing models beyond traditional public funding. Social Impact Bonds (SIBs) and public-private partnerships (PPPs) have emerged as innovative solutions in other cities, demonstrating success in expanding homelessness services, increasing housing availability, and reducing reliance on emergency interventions.

SOCIAL IMPACT BONDS (SIBS) AS A FUNDING MECHANISM

Social Impact Bonds provide a performance-based funding model in which private investors fund social programs upfront, and the government repays them based on the program's success in meeting predefined goals. This model has been used to finance housing-first programs and supportive services in various cities across the U.S.

In Denver, Colorado, an SIB initiative provided permanent supportive housing and case management services for chronically homeless individuals who frequently used emergency services. The program successfully reduced jail stays and emergency room visits, demonstrating cost savings for the city while improving housing stability. Similarly, Massachusetts implemented an SIB to expand permanent supportive housing for up to 800 individuals, focusing on long-term housing retention and reduced dependence on high-cost social services.

Joplin could implement an SIB model targeting chronic homelessness by focusing on housing-first programs and supportive services. Private investors or philanthropic organizations could provide initial funding, with repayment contingent on meeting measurable outcomes such as reduced returns to homelessness, decreased law enforcement encounters, or increased employment rates among program participants.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS FOR HOMELESSNESS SOLUTIONS

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) leverage resources from both government agencies and private entities to develop affordable housing, expand shelter capacity, and fund wraparound services. Many cities have successfully used PPPs to create sustainable funding sources for homelessness services.

For example, New York City has partnered with private developers to construct affordable housing units by offering tax incentives, reducing regulatory barriers, and providing funding assistance. Additionally, organizations like Nuveen have invested in preserving low-cost housing through public-private collaborations, ensuring long-term affordability for low-income residents.

In Joplin, a PPP approach could engage local real estate developers, businesses, and nonprofit organizations to finance and construct affordable housing projects. The city could provide incentives such as tax abatements, infrastructure support, or expedited permitting to encourage private investment in affordable and supportive housing solutions.

POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS FOR JOPLIN

Joplin could explore a range of applications for SIBs and PPPs to address homelessness:

- **Affordable Housing Development:** Collaborate with developers to construct or rehabilitate low-income housing units through tax-incentivized investment programs.
- **Supportive Housing Programs:** Use SIBs to fund permanent supportive housing initiatives, ensuring individuals receive both housing and essential services.
- **Employment & Workforce Development:** Provide private-sector employers with financial incentives to participate in hiring initiatives for individuals exiting homelessness.

By diversifying funding sources through SIBs and PPPs, Joplin can enhance its response to homelessness without over-reliance on limited public funds. Encouraging private-sector engagement in long-term solutions will be critical in addressing both short-term shelter needs and long-term housing stability.

8.7 SUMMARY & KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 8 examines the financial sustainability of Joplin's homelessness response, evaluating current funding sources, gaps in financial support, and potential solutions for securing long-term resources. While federal and state grants provide the bulk of funding for housing programs, local investment remains limited, leaving service providers vulnerable to unpredictable funding cycles. Without a dedicated municipal funding stream, Joplin struggles to expand emergency shelters, maintain outreach services, and improve long-term housing stability for its growing homeless population.

Joplin currently allocates only \$125,000 annually to homelessness services, primarily for coordination efforts rather than direct shelter operations or housing support. The city relies heavily on federal grants such as HUD's Continuum of Care program, which provided \$844,782 in 2024 for permanent supportive housing and rapid rehousing programs. However, these funds are restricted to housing solutions rather than emergency shelter operations or immediate crisis intervention.

The reliance on inconsistent funding sources has created significant challenges in sustaining homelessness services. Rapid rehousing units have declined by 52% over the past year, limiting the ability to transition individuals into stable housing. Permanent supportive housing programs face similar financial uncertainty, as annual HUD grant renewals

are not guaranteed. Unlike cities with dedicated homelessness taxes or public-private partnerships, Joplin's financial strategy remains reactive rather than proactive, making it difficult to plan for long-term solutions.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CHAPTER 8

- **Establish a dedicated local funding stream** to support emergency shelters, outreach services, and rental assistance programs. This could include a countywide sales tax initiative, a general fund allocation, or a housing trust fund to ensure consistent funding beyond federal and state grants.
- **Advocate for increased state and federal funding** by expanding partnerships with state agencies and applying for more competitive grants. Strengthening lobbying efforts to secure additional funding for emergency shelters and rapid rehousing programs could help close existing gaps.
- **Implement a public-private partnership (PPP) model** to encourage private investment in affordable housing and homelessness solutions. Offering tax incentives and infrastructure support to developers could help fund new low-income housing projects.
- **Explore Social Impact Bonds (SIBs)** as a performance-based funding model. This model allows private investors to finance housing-first programs in exchange for government repayment based on measurable success rates. This model has been successfully implemented in cities such as Denver and New York to expand permanent supportive housing.
- **Launch a community-wide corporate giving initiative** that encourages local businesses to invest in homelessness services through matching grants, workforce training partnerships, and direct financial contributions. Expanding private-sector involvement can provide an additional revenue source for critical services.
- **Develop a regional funding strategy** that includes coordination between Jasper and Newton Counties to pool resources for homelessness response efforts. A regional tax measure could generate sustainable funding for long-term housing solutions.
- **Increase public engagement and education efforts** to build support for new funding initiatives. Community outreach campaigns should highlight the cost savings associated with reducing homelessness, such as decreased emergency healthcare and law enforcement expenses.

CHAPTER 9: POLICY & LEGISLATIVE GAPS IN JOPLIN

Joplin's ability to address homelessness is shaped by local, state, and federal policies that govern tenant rights, housing development, emergency shelter services, and funding distribution. However, significant legislative gaps exist, making it difficult for low-income residents to secure stable housing and for service providers to expand their capacity. The lack of tenant protections, restrictive zoning laws, and limited municipal funding create systemic barriers that contribute to rising homelessness. Additionally, enforcement-based policies such as anti-camping ordinances and eviction proceedings often exacerbate housing instability rather than providing long-term solutions. Without targeted policy reforms, Joplin's homelessness response will remain reactive rather than preventative.

This chapter examines the key policy challenges affecting homelessness in Joplin and explores legislative solutions that could improve housing accessibility, shelter availability, and long-term stability. It addresses the absence of tenant protections, barriers to affordable housing development, and gaps in emergency shelter regulations. The chapter also highlights issues within the public housing system, the need for stronger government oversight, and the importance of improving data transparency and accountability. By identifying these legislative gaps, policymakers and community leaders can work toward comprehensive policy changes that reduce homelessness, protect vulnerable renters, and create a more sustainable housing system in Joplin.

9.1 LACK OF TENANT PROTECTIONS & RENT CONTROL

Missouri law heavily favors landlords, leaving tenants with limited legal protections against eviction and rent increases. Unlike other states with more substantial tenant rights, Missouri lacks rent control policies, meaning landlords can raise rent without restrictions. Additionally, Missouri is a "no-cause eviction" state, meaning landlords can terminate leases without providing a specific reason as long as proper notice is given. This legal imbalance contributes to housing instability, particularly for low-income renters who struggle to find alternative housing when displaced.

Joplin has seen a rise in evictions, with many tenants facing sudden displacement due to job loss, medical debt, or unexpected rent hikes. The absence of a tenant right-to-counsel program further exacerbates the issue, as tenants often go to court without legal representation, while landlords typically have legal counsel. Studies from cities such as New York and San Francisco have shown that providing tenants with free legal aid in eviction proceedings significantly reduces eviction rates and improves housing stability.

Legal Aid of Western Missouri (LAWMO) is crucial in providing free legal representation for low-income tenants in Jasper and Newton counties. Their Joplin office offers eviction defense services, landlord-tenant dispute mediation, and assistance with accessing public housing benefits. However, the demand for legal assistance far exceeds the organization's capacity, leaving many tenants without the support needed to navigate eviction cases.

Beyond eviction protections, Joplin lacks any form of rent stabilization policy, allowing rental prices to increase unchecked. While rent control policies have been adopted in cities across the country to prevent rapid displacement, Missouri law currently prohibits local governments from enacting rent control ordinances, limiting policy options at the municipal level.

To address these challenges, Joplin could explore tenant protection policies such as eviction diversion programs, rental assistance expansion, and more vigorous enforcement of landlord accountability. Additionally, increasing funding for legal aid services could ensure that more tenants receive representation in housing court, preventing unjust evictions and reducing the risk of homelessness. Expanding tenant education initiatives could also help renters understand their rights and take proactive steps to protect themselves from predatory rental practices.

9.2 ZONING & REGULATORY BARRIERS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Zoning regulations in Joplin have historically created challenges for the development of affordable housing by enforcing density restrictions, parking minimums, and exclusionary zoning policies that prioritize single-family homes over multi-unit developments. These restrictions limit developers' ability to build low-income housing options, contributing to the ongoing housing crisis and homelessness in the city.

A step forward occurred in August 2023 when the Joplin City Council approved a zoning code update that facilitates the construction of tiny homes, a housing model aimed at increasing affordable options for individuals experiencing homelessness or at risk of displacement. This update incorporated Appendix Q of the 2018 International Residential Code (IRC), which sets specific safety and building standards for tiny houses—defined as dwellings of 400 square feet or less. Appendix Q provides flexibility in areas such as ceiling height, loft accessibility, and emergency egress, making it easier to develop safe, habitable tiny homes within city limits. The revised zoning now permits tiny homes on permanent foundations in designated residential areas, provided they meet local building codes and are connected to water, electricity, and sewage systems.

The recent introduction of tiny home projects in Joplin signals progress. Vita Nova Village, a nonprofit-led initiative, began developing 20 tiny homes at 12th and South Byers Avenue in July 2024, with the goal of providing housing and

wraparound services to individuals experiencing homelessness. This project, along with similar efforts, highlights a growing recognition of alternative housing solutions.

Despite this progress, barriers remain. Joplin's zoning code still favors single-family housing, restricting the development of Missing Middle Housing—which includes duplexes, triplexes, and accessory dwelling units (ADUs). Many cities have successfully reformed zoning policies to allow for higher-density, mixed-use residential developments, significantly expanding affordable housing options. However, Joplin has yet to make such changes, leaving a gap in attainable housing for low-income residents.

Additionally, parking minimums and lot size requirements remain an obstacle for developers seeking to build multi-unit or low-cost housing. These regulations increase construction costs and reduce the feasibility of developing smaller, more affordable housing units. Without modifications, they continue to discourage private sector investment in affordable housing.

Moving forward, Joplin could further expand housing availability by reducing density restrictions, eliminating excessive parking requirements, and creating incentives for the private sector to develop affordable housing. Other cities have successfully leveraged tax abatements, expedited permitting, and inclusionary zoning policies to encourage developers to build low-income housing and similar strategies could be explored locally.

While the tiny home initiative represents a positive step, comprehensive zoning reform remains necessary to address long-term affordability and increase access to stable housing for Joplin's vulnerable populations.

9.3 GAPS IN EMERGENCY SHELTER & TRANSITIONAL HOUSING POLICIES

Joplin's emergency shelter and transitional housing systems face significant gaps that impact accessibility, data collection, and overall capacity. Nearly all emergency shelter services are provided by faith-based organizations, and limited secular options and strict shelter policies create barriers for many individuals experiencing homelessness. Additionally, inconsistent participation in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and a lack of publicly funded shelters hinder the city's ability to track and address service gaps effectively.

LIMITED HMIS PARTICIPATION & DATA COLLECTION CHALLENGES

One of the key gaps in Joplin's shelter system is the lack of comprehensive data collection. Until recently, none of Joplin's emergency shelters participated in HMIS, the federal data system used to track homelessness trends, service utilization, and funding eligibility. In February 2025, Souls Harbor joined HMIS, allowing for better tracking of individuals served and housing outcomes. However, Watered Gardens continues to decline participation, citing faith-based concerns over federal reporting requirements.

Since Watered Gardens is one of the largest emergency shelters in Joplin, its absence from HMIS creates significant data gaps. Without full participation, local officials lack a complete picture of emergency shelter utilization, demand, and service outcomes, which affects funding eligibility and long-term planning.

LACK OF PUBLICLY FUNDED EMERGENCY SHELTERS

Another significant gap in Joplin's homelessness response is the absence of publicly funded shelters. Unlike many other cities that allocate local tax dollars to emergency shelters, Joplin relies entirely on faith-based and privately funded organizations for shelter services. This creates challenges in expanding shelter capacity, ensuring equitable access, and meeting diverse needs, such as pet-friendly or low-barrier shelter options.

Additionally, many faith-based shelters impose strict entry requirements, such as sobriety mandates and participation in religious services, which can exclude individuals struggling with substance use disorders or those

uncomfortable with faith-based programming. A secular, publicly funded shelter could help fill gaps in service delivery and provide an alternative for individuals who do not fit within the parameters of existing faith-based shelters.

SHIFT TOWARD TRANSITIONAL HOUSING & CAPACITY CHALLENGES

Transitional housing programs provide individuals with structured, longer-term support before they transition into permanent housing. However, Joplin's emergency shelter system has been shifting its focus away from emergency services and toward transitional housing, creating a shortage of emergency shelter beds.

Souls Harbor, for example, has prioritized expanding transitional housing programs over emergency shelter beds. While this shift supports long-term stability, it reduces immediate shelter availability, leaving unsheltered individuals with fewer emergency options.

At the same time, Joplin lacks sufficient funding for transitional housing programs, meaning many individuals who could benefit from structured, supportive housing face long waitlists or service gaps. While transitional housing is a key component of addressing homelessness, it must be balanced with maintaining emergency shelter capacity to meet immediate needs.

ADDRESSING SHELTER & TRANSITIONAL HOUSING GAPS

Joplin's reliance on privately funded, faith-based shelters has left critical gaps in emergency shelter availability and accessibility. Addressing these gaps requires:

- Expanding HMIS Participation – Ensuring all shelters participate in HMIS will improve data tracking, help identify service gaps, and increase funding eligibility.
- Developing a Publicly Funded Emergency Shelter – Creating a non-faith-based, publicly funded shelter would ensure broader access for individuals who do not fit into existing faith-based programs.
- Increasing Accessibility for People with Disabilities – Upgrading shelter facilities to be fully ADA-compliant would ensure that people with mobility impairments can access services.
- Creating More Pet-Friendly Shelter Options—Expanding low-barrier, pet-friendly shelters would encourage more individuals to seek safe housing rather than remain unsheltered.
- Balancing Emergency Shelter & Transitional Housing Capacity – While transitional housing remains essential, Joplin must maintain enough emergency shelter beds to meet immediate needs.

By addressing these policy and capacity gaps, Joplin can build a more inclusive and effective shelter system, ensuring that no individual experiencing homelessness is left without safe and accessible shelter options.

9.4 PUBLIC HOUSING AUTHORITY BARRIERS & VOUCHER ACCEPTANCE

The Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) in Jasper and Newton Counties administer the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program, commonly known as Section 8. This program assists low-income individuals and families in securing rental housing in the private market. However, despite the availability of these vouchers, many recipients struggle to find landlords willing to accept them, leaving them at risk of continued housing instability or homelessness.

A primary barrier to voucher acceptance is landlord reluctance, driven by concerns over bureaucratic red tape, delayed payments, and tenant reliability. Many landlords perceive the HCV program as complex and time-consuming, citing lengthy inspection processes and slow reimbursement timelines as deterrents to participation. In some cases, landlords may also have concerns about property damage or difficulties in evicting tenants should issues arise. Research has shown that approximately 50% of landlords believe participating in the voucher program is

too administratively burdensome, while 70% cite concerns over property damage as a reason for declining voucher holders.

Another key challenge is the limited payment standards set by PHAs, which establish the maximum subsidy for rental units. These standards are typically set between 90% and 110% of HUD's Fair Market Rent (FMR) for a given area. However, as rental costs in Joplin continue to rise, voucher amounts often fail to cover market-rate housing, further restricting the options available to voucher recipients. Additionally, voucher holders are required to pay at least 30% of their adjusted monthly income toward rent and utilities. If the rent exceeds the PHA's payment standard, tenants must cover the difference—provided it does not push their total rent burden beyond 40% of their income at lease signing. These financial constraints make it difficult for individuals with limited incomes to secure stable housing.

Discrimination against voucher holders is another significant obstacle. Missouri does not have a source-of-income discrimination law, meaning landlords are legally allowed to refuse tenants who rely on housing assistance. This creates additional barriers for low-income renters, particularly those with past evictions, criminal records, or unstable employment histories. Studies show that in areas without legal protections, many landlords actively avoid renting to voucher holders, effectively reducing the number of available units.

The underutilization of vouchers remains a persistent issue. In some regions, as many as 20% of issued vouchers go unused because recipients cannot find a landlord willing to accept them. In Joplin, while specific local data on voucher utilization is unavailable, anecdotal reports from service providers indicate that a significant number of recipients struggle to secure housing within the allowable timeframe, leading to expired vouchers and continued homelessness.

Potential solutions to increase landlord participation include creating a Landlord Risk Fund, which could cover damages beyond security deposits, alleviating concerns about property damage. Expedited processing for voucher payments and reducing administrative burdens could also make the program more appealing to landlords. Some cities have successfully implemented landlord incentive programs, offering signing bonuses or guaranteed rent payments to encourage broader acceptance of housing vouchers.

Expanding legal protections for voucher holders, such as prohibiting source-of-income discrimination, could further increase acceptance rates and ensure that more low-income individuals can access safe and stable housing. However, without policy changes and financial incentives to encourage landlord participation, the challenges surrounding voucher acceptance in Joplin will likely persist, limiting the effectiveness of the Housing Choice Voucher program in addressing homelessness and housing instability.

9.5 STRENGTHENING LOCAL GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT

Joplin's homelessness response is undergoing structural changes with the introduction of the Regional Commission on Homelessness, which is intended to provide a more coordinated approach to policy planning. However, this commission is still in its early stages and not yet fully functional. It will work directly with the Joplin City Council to develop strategic plans for addressing homelessness, though it currently lacks dedicated funding and enforcement authority.

The Continuum of Care (CoC) will continue to manage HUD-related grants and housing programs, ensuring that federal funding supports Permanent Supportive Housing, Rapid Rehousing, and other essential services. However, the CoC's role is limited to housing-related programs and does not extend to broader policy initiatives or the development of homelessness prevention strategies at the local level.

Currently, Joplin lacks a fully resourced municipal department, or city-run office focused exclusively on homelessness prevention and service coordination. The Coordinated Entry System helps connect individuals to

housing. Still, it does not have the authority or resources to drive systemic policy changes or oversee all homelessness-related programs in the city. The absence of a dedicated government office has resulted in fragmented service delivery, inconsistent policy implementation, and a lack of long-term planning for reducing homelessness.

Another major challenge is the allocation of municipal resources. A significant portion of the city's spending on homelessness is directed toward law enforcement efforts, such as issuing citations for loitering and panhandling, rather than toward prevention and housing solutions. Research from other cities has demonstrated that shifting funds toward Housing First models and supportive services leads to cost savings by reducing the demand for emergency healthcare, policing, and the judicial system.

To improve oversight and coordination, the Regional Commission on Homelessness will need additional resources to ensure its effectiveness in working with city leaders, service providers, and regional agencies. Establishing a clear operational structure, securing dedicated funding, and formalizing partnerships with state and federal agencies will be crucial next steps. Additionally, the city should consider reallocating a portion of its budget toward prevention and housing initiatives to create a more sustainable and proactive approach to reducing homelessness. By strengthening the commission's role and improving governmental coordination, Joplin can take meaningful steps toward a more effective and accountable homelessness response system.

9.6 IMPROVING DATA TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY

Effective policy development and funding allocation require accurate and comprehensive data collection. System Performance Measure (SPM) 7 evaluates how well local agencies report homelessness-related data through the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). However, Joplin faces challenges in ensuring full HMIS participation among service providers, leading to gaps in data collection and limiting the ability to track homelessness trends comprehensively.

Currently, Souls Harbor began participating in HMIS in February 2025, making progress toward improving data integration. However, Watered Gardens, one of the city's largest emergency shelter providers, does not participate in HMIS due to religious beliefs, meaning a significant portion of Joplin's sheltered homeless population is not included in official counts. Additionally, Joplin does not have any publicly funded shelters, which further complicates data collection and oversight. The absence of comprehensive HMIS participation affects the city's ability to secure federal funding, as HUD prioritizes communities with robust data tracking systems.

Aligning Joplin's data collection practices with HUD's best practices is necessary to improve transparency. This could involve incentivizing HMIS participation through funding eligibility requirements or developing a parallel data collection system for providers that do not participate in HMIS. Strengthening data tracking would allow for a more accurate Point-in-Time (PIT) count, better assessment of shelter utilization, and improved resource allocation.

Another step toward increased accountability would be the publication of annual homelessness impact reports. These reports could detail service utilization rates, funding allocations, and housing program outcomes. Other cities have successfully implemented open data portals that track key homelessness metrics in real-time, allowing policymakers, service providers, and the public to access transparent, up-to-date information on homelessness trends and available resources.

By improving data collection and transparency, Joplin can enhance its ability to secure funding, improve service coordination, and develop evidence-based policies. Strengthening HMIS participation and public accountability measures would also increase community trust and engagement, leading to more effective long-term solutions for addressing homelessness.

9.7 SUMMARY & KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 9 examines the policy and legislative gaps in Joplin that contribute to homelessness and housing instability. Local and state laws governing tenant rights, zoning, emergency shelter regulations, and housing assistance programs create systemic barriers for low-income residents and service providers. While recent zoning updates have allowed for tiny home developments, broader reforms are needed to expand affordable housing options. Additionally, the absence of tenant protections, publicly funded emergency shelters, and landlord participation in housing voucher programs further complicates efforts to reduce homelessness.

Beyond policy gaps, Joplin lacks a dedicated city department focused on homelessness prevention. Instead, it relies on fragmented service delivery and enforcement-based policies that often penalize individuals experiencing homelessness rather than providing long-term solutions. Data collection and transparency remain significant challenges, as major shelter providers do not fully participate in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), limiting the city's ability to track trends and allocate resources effectively.

Additionally, this chapter highlights the hidden financial costs of homelessness, which extend far beyond direct city spending. The burden on law enforcement, fire and EMS services, hospitals, and local businesses results in an estimated \$9 million to \$15 million in annual hidden costs to the community. These expenses include frequent police responses, emergency medical care, incarceration, fire suppression efforts, and economic losses from decreased tourism and business revenue. Addressing these systemic challenges through proactive investment in housing solutions, supportive services, and funding reforms could reduce long-term financial strain while creating a more effective and sustainable approach to homelessness prevention in Joplin.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CHAPTER 9

- **Expand tenant protections** by advocating for eviction diversion programs, rental assistance expansion, and increased funding for legal aid services. Establishing a tenant right-to-counsel initiative could help prevent unjust evictions and reduce homelessness.
- **Reform zoning policies** to encourage the development of affordable and mixed-income housing. Reducing density restrictions, eliminating excessive parking requirements, and creating incentives for private developers could increase housing accessibility.
- **Increase HMIS participation** among all emergency shelters and housing programs to improve data collection, enhance service coordination, and secure additional federal funding.
- **Establish a publicly funded, non-faith-based emergency shelter** to ensure broader accessibility, particularly for individuals who do not meet the entry requirements of existing faith-based programs.
- **Develop a Landlord Risk Mitigation Fund** to encourage more landlords to accept housing vouchers. The fund would provide financial protection against damages and expedited payment processing.
- **Strengthen the Regional Commission on Homelessness** by securing dedicated funding, expanding its authority, and formalizing partnerships with state and federal agencies to improve oversight and coordination of homelessness initiatives.
- **Reallocate municipal resources** toward prevention and housing-first strategies rather than enforcement-based measures such as anti-camping ordinances and frequent encampment sweeps.
- **Enhance public data transparency** by publishing annual homelessness impact reports and developing an open data portal that tracks key metrics in real-time.

CHAPTER 10: PUBLIC OPINION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Public perception plays a significant role in shaping Joplin's response to homelessness. Community attitudes influence policy decisions, funding allocations, and the success of shelter and housing initiatives. While some residents support expanding services and implementing long-term solutions, others remain skeptical or resistant, often citing concerns about crime, property values, and the belief that additional shelters will attract more people experiencing homelessness from outside the area. Misinformation and stigma continue to hinder progress, making public education and engagement critical in fostering a more informed and supportive community. Without widespread public backing, efforts to expand emergency shelters, increase affordable housing, and improve social services will continue to face challenges.

This chapter explores how Joplin residents perceive homelessness and how NIMBY resistance has impacted past shelter and housing projects. It highlights the crucial role that faith-based organizations, local businesses, and workforce development initiatives play in shaping public attitudes and providing direct services. Additionally, the chapter examines strategies for increasing public awareness, strengthening advocacy efforts, and expanding volunteer engagement to create a more unified and proactive response to homelessness. By improving communication between service providers, policymakers, and the community, Joplin can work toward solutions that balance public concerns with practical strategies to reduce homelessness and improve overall housing stability.

10.1 JOPLIN RESIDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF HOMELESSNESS

Public opinion plays a critical role in shaping policy responses to homelessness in Joplin. However, there is limited formal data on how residents perceive homelessness, emergency shelters, and housing initiatives. A 2023 community survey collected responses from over 1,000 residents, providing insight into public concerns and attitudes toward homelessness. Additionally, focus groups conducted with key stakeholders, including city officials, business owners, and service providers, helped assess community perspectives.

Anecdotal evidence suggests a divided public perception. Some residents recognize homelessness as a growing issue that requires immediate action, while others express skepticism about expanding services. A persistent belief is that Joplin attracts individuals experiencing homelessness from outside the region. Past studies indicated that a significant portion of Joplin's homeless population had come from other areas. However, service providers and law enforcement note that this migration is mainly due to Joplin's status as a regional hub for social services and job opportunities. Misconceptions persist that expanding shelter and housing options will increase homelessness despite evidence demonstrating that housing-first models reduce crime and improve long-term economic stability.

Concerns over property values, public safety, and the visibility of homelessness have fueled opposition to new shelter and affordable housing projects. High-profile incidents involving unsheltered individuals have further reinforced negative perceptions, leading some residents to favor stricter enforcement measures rather than investments in housing and services.

Education campaigns and increased public engagement are essential to address these misconceptions and build community support for sustainable solutions. The Regional Commission on Homelessness has begun efforts to improve transparency and public awareness, but broader outreach is needed. Strategies such as town hall meetings, media campaigns, and personal testimonies from individuals with lived experiences of homelessness could help reshape public perception. Publishing annual homelessness reports and providing real-time data through open-access portals could also enhance community understanding and accountability.

A more informed public could significantly increase support for policies that prioritize housing stability over punitive measures. Moving forward, aligning public education efforts with data-driven solutions will be essential in shaping Joplin's response to homelessness.

10.2 NIMBY RESISTANCE & ITS CONSEQUENCES

Not In My Backyard (NIMBY) opposition has been a significant barrier to expanding shelter and housing programs in Joplin. The Lincoln Heights Project, which was proposed at the former site of The Botany Shop, was ultimately canceled due to neighborhood resistance. Similarly, The Depot Shelter, a temporary emergency shelter, operated for only two months before shutting down, in part due to community concerns. Royal Heights Nazarene Church also faced local opposition when attempting to establish a permanent shelter, with residents expressing fears about its impact on the surrounding area.

Common objections to new shelter developments in Joplin include concerns over crime, declining property values, and the perception that expanding services will attract more individuals experiencing homelessness from outside the region. While these concerns are frequently voiced in public meetings and neighborhood forums, data from other cities suggests that well-managed shelters do not contribute to rising crime rates or decreased property values. Instead, studies indicate that stable housing reduces overall crime and improves public safety by decreasing the number of individuals living unsheltered.

Joplin's status as a regional hub for services means that even without new shelters, individuals experiencing homelessness will continue to seek assistance in the city. The alternative to shelters is an increase in encampments and public space usage, which can lead to more significant challenges for both residents and service providers. However, community opposition has created an uneven distribution of services, with most shelters and supportive housing concentrated in downtown Joplin. This limits access for individuals in other parts of the city and contributes to overcrowding in existing facilities.

Other cities facing similar NIMBY resistance have found success through proactive community engagement and public education campaigns. One effective strategy is involving neighborhood associations and local businesses early in the planning process to address concerns before opposition solidifies. Additionally, highlighting success stories from other communities where shelters have led to positive outcomes—such as reduced emergency service costs and improved neighborhood stability—can help counter misinformation.

Joplin's Regional Commission on Homelessness has begun efforts to improve public awareness about homelessness and its solutions, but overcoming NIMBY resistance will require a coordinated effort from policymakers, service providers, and community leaders. Future shelter proposals may benefit from increased transparency, clear communication of community benefits, and commitments to ongoing neighborhood collaboration. Addressing these concerns proactively will be key to expanding the city's capacity to provide safe and stable housing for its most vulnerable residents.

10.3 ROLE OF FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS IN HOMELESS SERVICES

Faith-based organizations play a crucial role in Joplin's response to homelessness, providing essential services such as shelter, food assistance, case management, and workforce development. Watered Gardens and Souls Harbor operate Joplin's only emergency shelters, offering beds for those in need, while Catholic Charities provides housing assistance and social services. These organizations often step in where government resources are lacking, relying on congregational support and private donations to sustain their programs.

Beyond direct service provision, faith-based organizations have a unique position within the community that allows them to foster dialogue and collaboration around homelessness issues. Given their broad networks and established trust among residents, they could serve as critical intermediaries in addressing NIMBY's resistance to shelter expansion and affordable housing projects. By engaging with congregations, neighborhood groups, and local businesses, they can provide firsthand insights into the realities of homelessness and work to dispel misconceptions.

Some cities have successfully leveraged faith-based coalitions as advocates for housing solutions. In these cases, religious leaders have worked alongside policymakers to promote shelter expansion, transitional housing programs, and rental assistance initiatives. In Joplin, faith-based organizations already engage in advocacy through public forums and direct outreach, but further integration into city planning and policy discussions could strengthen their impact.

Community involvement is key to shifting public attitudes toward homelessness, and faith-based organizations can play a central role in these efforts. Hosting educational workshops, organizing volunteer opportunities, and facilitating discussions between service providers and concerned residents can help bridge the gap between those advocating for expanded services and those hesitant to support new developments. By positioning themselves as both service providers and community liaisons, faith-based groups can help build broader support for sustainable and compassionate solutions to homelessness in Joplin.

10.4 BUSINESS COMMUNITY & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The local business community plays a pivotal role in addressing homelessness by supporting workforce development and employment initiatives. System Performance Measure (SPM) 4 tracks employment growth among homeless individuals, but Joplin lacks comprehensive data on how many formerly homeless residents are securing and maintaining jobs. Without clear employment outcomes, it isn't easy to assess the effectiveness of existing workforce programs in helping individuals achieve long-term financial stability.

The Joplin Job Center offers various services to assist job seekers, including career counseling, job search assistance, resume writing support and vocational training. Additionally, the center provides adult education programs, financial literacy courses, and apprenticeship opportunities designed to help individuals gain the skills necessary to secure stable employment. However, these programs are not always accessible to individuals experiencing homelessness, who may face barriers such as lack of transportation, identification documents, or a stable address.

Employer participation in job training programs and hiring initiatives can significantly impact homelessness reduction efforts. However, many businesses remain hesitant to hire individuals with gaps in their employment history, past evictions, or criminal records. Establishing employer incentive programs, such as wage subsidies or tax credits for businesses hiring formerly homeless individuals, could encourage participation and create pathways to economic stability. Some cities have successfully introduced workforce development models that integrate vocational training with housing assistance, helping individuals transition into long-term employment while maintaining stable housing.

Community engagement is essential to the success of these initiatives. Local businesses can collaborate with workforce development agencies and social service providers to design training programs that address employer needs while accommodating individuals facing housing instability. Strengthening these partnerships can create a more inclusive labor market that benefits both businesses and job seekers.

Public awareness campaigns highlighting the benefits of inclusive hiring practices can also help shift perceptions and reduce the stigma associated with hiring individuals who have experienced homelessness. Sharing success stories of businesses that have successfully employed individuals transitioning out of homelessness can encourage broader participation and demonstrate the long-term economic benefits of workforce inclusion.

By fostering stronger connections between the business community, workforce training programs, and homelessness service providers, Joplin can create sustainable employment pathways that help individuals achieve long-term housing stability and financial independence.

10.5 PUBLIC AWARENESS & ADVOCACY STRATEGIES

Public awareness campaigns are essential for changing perceptions of homelessness and increasing community support for practical solutions. In Joplin, misconceptions about homelessness persist, including the belief that most homeless individuals choose their circumstances or that expanding services will attract more people experiencing homelessness to the area. Addressing these misunderstandings through targeted public education efforts can help foster community engagement and support for evidence-based interventions.

One of the most effective strategies for shifting public perception is storytelling initiatives that center on the experiences of individuals who have transitioned from homelessness to stability. Personal narratives humanize the issue, countering harmful stereotypes and demonstrating the real-life impact of housing assistance, employment programs, and supportive services. Many cities have used storytelling campaigns in collaboration with local media and social organizations to reshape public attitudes and encourage investment in long-term solutions.

Public forums, educational workshops, and partnerships with local institutions—including schools, churches, and civic organizations—can also provide opportunities to engage the community in meaningful discussions about the root causes of homelessness and potential solutions. Local leaders and policymakers must take an active role in these discussions, providing transparent information about homelessness trends, resource allocation, and the effectiveness of different interventions.

Social media campaigns and collaborations with community influencers can further amplify accurate information, combat misinformation, and highlight positive outcomes from local homelessness programs. Interactive initiatives, such as community service events or volunteer opportunities, can also provide residents with direct engagement experiences that challenge preconceived notions about homelessness and encourage long-term advocacy.

To successfully implement these strategies, Joplin’s homelessness response organizations should work collectively with business leaders, nonprofit groups, and faith-based communities to promote unified messaging. A well-coordinated public awareness campaign that combines data-driven narratives with real-life success stories can create broader community buy-in, reduce NIMBY opposition, and increase support for housing and service expansion initiatives.

10.6 VOLUNTEERISM & COMMUNITY-DRIVEN SOLUTIONS

Community-driven initiatives and volunteer engagement play crucial roles in Joplin’s homelessness response. However, comprehensive data on how many residents actively participate in volunteer efforts or contribute to homeless service organizations are lacking. Understanding the scale of community involvement can help identify gaps and opportunities for increasing public participation.

Several local organizations, including The Next Step Joplin and Minnie Hackney Community Service Center, provide direct services and rely heavily on volunteers and community support. The Next Step Joplin assists individuals in obtaining birth certificates, Social Security cards, photo identification, and transportation while also operating food distribution programs. Volunteers are critical in helping manage these services, ensuring that individuals experiencing homelessness can access essential resources. Similarly, the Minnie Hackney Community Service

Center has been a cornerstone of community engagement since 1946, offering meeting spaces, educational programs, and cultural initiatives aimed at serving marginalized populations.

Residents looking to get involved can sign up to volunteer for most area shelters and programs through the Joplin Homeless Coalition website. This centralized platform helps connect volunteers with organizations in need, ensuring that shelters, outreach programs, and food distribution centers have the necessary support.

Encouraging more volunteer participation can enhance service capacity and increase public investment in homelessness solutions. Local businesses, civic groups, and student organizations can be mobilized to assist shelters, food distribution efforts, and employment mentorship programs. Hosting regular volunteer drives and publicizing the impact of community engagement may inspire more residents to contribute their time, skills, or financial support.

Faith-based organizations remain key players in volunteer-driven services. They could expand their efforts by organizing fundraising initiatives, awareness events, and skill-building workshops for individuals transitioning out of homelessness. Establishing a coalition of dedicated volunteers who focus on direct service, policy advocacy, and long-term support could further strengthen the city's response to homelessness.

The next section of this report will focus on long-term housing outcomes, tracking the effectiveness of various housing models, and analyzing the sustainability of homelessness reduction efforts in Joplin.

10.7 SUMMARY & KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 10 examines the role of public perception, community engagement, and advocacy in shaping Joplin's homelessness response. While some residents support expanding services and implementing long-term solutions, others remain skeptical, often due to misinformation and concerns about crime, property values, and service expansion attracting individuals experiencing homelessness from outside the area. NIMBY's opposition has significantly hindered past shelter and affordable housing projects, creating barriers to service expansion. Faith-based organizations, local businesses, and workforce development initiatives play crucial roles in shaping public attitudes and providing direct services. Increasing public awareness, strengthening advocacy efforts, and expanding volunteer engagement are essential to creating a more unified and proactive response to homelessness.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CHAPTER 10

Expand Public Education Campaigns

- Increase awareness about the realities of homelessness through town hall meetings, media outreach, and social media campaigns.
- Share personal success stories from individuals who have transitioned from homelessness to stability to counter harmful stereotypes.
- Publish annual homelessness reports and provide real-time data through an open-access portal to improve transparency and accountability.

Address NIMBY Opposition with Proactive Community Engagement

- Involve neighborhood associations, businesses, and residents early in the planning process for shelters and housing projects.
- Highlight success stories from other cities that demonstrate the benefits of well-managed shelters and supportive housing.

- Establish ongoing communication forums where community members can voice concerns and receive factual information about homelessness solutions.

Strengthen the Role of Faith-Based Organizations in Advocacy

- Encourage faith-based groups to facilitate discussions between service providers, policymakers, and skeptical community members.
- Expand interfaith coalitions focused on homelessness solutions and advocacy efforts for shelter expansion and tenant protections.
- Host educational workshops within congregations to address misconceptions and promote evidence-based solutions.

Enhance Workforce Development & Employer Engagement

- Strengthen partnerships between businesses, workforce training programs, and service providers to create employment pathways for individuals transitioning out of homelessness.
- Establish employer incentive programs, such as wage subsidies or tax credits, to encourage businesses to hire individuals with housing instability.
- Develop community-supported job training initiatives that align with local labor market needs and ensure stable employment opportunities.

Increase Public Awareness & Advocacy Efforts

- Launch storytelling initiatives that humanize homelessness and highlight the success of housing and employment programs.
- Partner with local schools, civic groups, and media outlets to share accurate information and dispel myths about homelessness.
- Encourage civic engagement by organizing community service events and volunteer opportunities that foster direct interaction with service providers.

Expand Volunteerism & Community Engagement

- Promote volunteer opportunities at shelters, food distribution programs, and job mentorship initiatives through centralized platforms such as the Joplin Homeless Coalition website.
- Engage local businesses, faith-based groups, and student organizations in fundraising and service projects that support housing initiatives.
- Develop structured community-led initiatives that focus on long-term service commitments, advocacy, and policy engagement.

CHAPTER 11: LONG-TERM HOUSING OUTCOMES & RECIDIVISM

Securing stable housing is a crucial milestone for individuals exiting homelessness, but long-term success depends on continued support and economic stability. Many individuals who transition into housing face challenges such as employment insecurity, rising rental costs, and mental health or addiction struggles, which can increase their risk of returning to homelessness. In Joplin, Permanent Supportive Housing and Rapid Rehousing programs serve as key solutions, but funding limitations and a shortage of affordable units create ongoing barriers to success. Tracking housing retention rates and addressing gaps in post-housing support services are essential to ensuring long-term stability and reducing recidivism.

This chapter examines the effectiveness of different housing models, including Housing First, Permanent Supportive Housing, and Rapid Rehousing, in preventing returns to homelessness. It explores systemic challenges such as employment instability, rental market barriers, and behavioral health needs that impact housing retention. Additionally, it highlights racial disparities in housing outcomes and the need for improved data collection to measure program success. By identifying key factors contributing to recidivism and outlining best practices for sustaining housing stability, this chapter provides a framework for strengthening Joplin's long-term approach to homelessness reduction.

11.1 EFFECTIVENESS OF HOUSING FIRST & PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Housing First is a well-documented approach to addressing chronic homelessness. It focuses on providing stable housing before requiring individuals to meet conditions such as employment, sobriety, or mental health treatment. This model has been widely implemented across the U.S. due to its high success rates in promoting long-term housing stability and improving overall well-being. Research from cities that have adopted Housing First shows housing retention rates of 85-90%, significantly higher than traditional transitional housing models.

In Joplin, Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) serves as the primary long-term housing solution for individuals with high barriers to independent living, such as those with disabilities, chronic health conditions, or severe mental illness. As of 2024, Joplin had 243 PSH beds providing stable housing combined with supportive services, including case management, mental health treatment, and addiction recovery support. These services are essential for maintaining long-term housing stability, particularly for individuals who have struggled with repeated episodes of homelessness.

System Performance Measure (SPM) 6 tracks housing retention rates among individuals placed in supportive housing. However, Joplin lacks publicly available data on the percentage of individuals who remain housed after one year in PSH programs. This data gap makes it difficult to measure the long-term effectiveness of Joplin's PSH efforts compared to national benchmarks. Improved data collection and transparency would provide more precise insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the current system.

Despite its effectiveness, Joplin's PSH programs face significant funding shortages, limiting the ability to expand housing availability. Case managers often carry high caseloads, reducing their capacity to provide individualized support for newly housed clients. The lack of long-term funding commitments for rental subsidies and supportive services further constrains the city's ability to expand PSH programs.

One of the critical challenges is that many individuals exiting homelessness require ongoing support to maintain stability. Without adequate case management and wraparound services, some individuals may struggle with lease compliance, financial management, or untreated mental health conditions, increasing their risk of eviction and a return to homelessness. Additionally, PSH expansion is hindered by the limited availability of affordable rental units and landlord reluctance to accept housing vouchers.

Expanding PSH in Joplin will require sustained investment in rental assistance, case management, and healthcare coordination. Strengthening partnerships between service providers, healthcare systems, and local government agencies could improve long-term outcomes for those in supportive housing. Addressing current funding and resource limitations will be critical to reducing chronic homelessness and ensuring that PSH continues to serve as a viable long-term solution in Joplin.

11.2 RAPID REHOUSING VS. TRANSITIONAL HOUSING SUCCESS RATES

Rapid Rehousing (RRH) and Transitional Housing (TH) serve distinct roles in Joplin's homelessness response, but both have faced challenges in ensuring long-term housing stability. System Performance Measure (SPM) 2, which tracks returns to homelessness, suggests that a significant number of individuals exiting homelessness through RRH struggle to maintain permanent housing after short-term rental assistance ends. The limited financial independence of RRH participants, coupled with the city's rising rental costs and limited affordable housing options, has contributed to higher return-to-homelessness rates.

As of 2024, Joplin has 46 RRH beds, but a 52% decrease in RRH funding has reduced program capacity, limiting the number of individuals who can transition from shelters into stable housing. RRH provides short-term rental assistance (typically lasting 3 to 12 months) and case management services to help individuals secure employment and long-term housing. However, SPM 4, which measures employment and income growth, indicates that many individuals exiting RRH remain in low-wage jobs, making it challenging to afford market-rate housing once subsidies end.

In contrast, Transitional Housing (TH) offers a more structured approach, with 80 TH beds currently available. Souls Harbor has increasingly prioritized TH as a strategy for individuals who need extended stabilization before transitioning to independent living. TH programs provide residents with structured case management, job training, and life skills education, often for up to 24 months. While more resource-intensive than RRH, TH is particularly effective for individuals with complex needs, such as survivors of domestic violence, those recovering from substance use disorders, and people who require additional time to develop financial stability.

A review of SPM 2 data is necessary to compare the success rates of RRH and TH in preventing returns to homelessness. While RRH is effective in quickly rehousing individuals, the short duration of assistance may not be sufficient for long-term stability without continued employment support and extended rental subsidies. TH, while offering longer support, requires more significant financial investment and may not be suitable for individuals who need permanent, low-barrier housing solutions.

Expanding financial assistance beyond standard RRH limits, integrating workforce development into housing programs, and ensuring stronger landlord participation in voucher programs will be critical to improving overall housing retention. Additionally, Joplin must assess whether RRH funding reductions have contributed to increased shelter stays or unsheltered homelessness, as fewer available RRH placements may leave more individuals without stable exits from homelessness.

11.3 BARRIERS TO LONG-TERM HOUSING STABILITY

Even after securing housing, many individuals in Joplin continue to face challenges that put them at risk of eviction and a return to homelessness. System Performance Measure (SPM) 5, which tracks first-time homelessness, indicates that a significant portion of Joplin's homeless population consists of individuals experiencing homelessness for the first time due to economic instability, housing affordability issues, and a lack of support services.

Key Contributing Factors to Housing Instability:

- **Employment Insecurity:** Many formerly homeless individuals rely on low-wage or temporary jobs. With Missouri's minimum wage at \$12.30 per hour in 2024, a full-time worker would need to earn \$16.48 per hour to afford a one-bedroom rental at fair market value in Jasper and Newton counties. This disparity leaves many at risk of eviction once short-term rental assistance ends.
- **Lack of Continued Case Management:** While case management is available in some housing programs, Joplin lacks a structured follow-up system for individuals who transition into permanent housing. The CoC Application for FY 2024 highlights that the city's Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) programs operate at full capacity (243 beds), limiting access to continued supportive services after initial stabilization.
- **Limited Affordable Housing & Landlord Reluctance to Accept Vouchers:**
 1. Joplin's Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program has a utilization rate of only 67% due to landlord reluctance.
 2. Only 34% of new admissions in Jasper County's Public Housing Agency came from individuals experiencing homelessness, suggesting that voucher holders face significant challenges in finding landlords who will accept housing assistance.
- **Behavioral Health Challenges:** According to SPM data, 28% of individuals who returned to homelessness in 2023 had a documented mental health condition, while 21% had a substance use disorder. Without ongoing access to mental health or addiction recovery services, many struggle with lease compliance and eviction risks.
- **Housing Retention & Return to Homelessness:**
- SPM 2 tracks returns to homelessness within 6, 12, and 24 months after exiting a housing program. Preliminary data shows:
 1. 24% of individuals in Rapid Rehousing (RRH) programs returned to homelessness within 24 months of exiting the program.
 2. In comparison, 14% of those in Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) remained stably housed for 24 months, demonstrating the importance of long-term assistance.

ADDRESSING THE BARRIERS:

Without sustained rental support and wraparound services, individuals who transition out of homelessness are at high risk of re-entering the system. Expanding tenancy support programs, eviction prevention initiatives, and employment stabilization efforts could help reduce the return-to-homelessness rate and improve long-term housing retention in Joplin.

11.4 RACIAL DISPARITIES IN HOUSING RETENTION

Racial disparities in housing retention and homelessness remain a persistent issue both nationally and locally. Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) face disproportionately higher eviction rates, lower housing retention, and increased barriers to stable housing. In Joplin, Black/African Americans make up 7% of the homeless population, despite comprising only 2.9% of the general population. This overrepresentation suggests significant racial disparities in eviction rates, housing accessibility, and long-term housing retention.

DISPARITIES IN HOUSING STABILITY & EVICTION RATES

System Performance Measure (SPM 2) tracks returns to homelessness among individuals who have exited shelters, transitional housing, or Rapid Rehousing (RRH) programs. Although the SPM report does not currently break down

data by race, national trends suggest that BIPOC individuals face higher rates of returns to homelessness due to systemic barriers such as:

- Discriminatory rental practices – Landlords may be less willing to rent to tenants with housing vouchers or past evictions, disproportionately impacting Black and Hispanic renters.
- Economic disparities – The median household income for Black Missourians is 28% lower than for white residents, limiting their ability to afford stable housing.
- Eviction trends – In Missouri, Black renters are 2.5 times more likely to be evicted than white renters, and eviction filings often result in long-term housing instability.

BARRIERS IN HOUSING RETENTION

- Limited Access to Rental Assistance: Black households in Missouri apply for rental assistance at higher rates but are less likely to receive aid due to stricter eligibility requirements and administrative hurdles.
- Higher Shelter Entry & Re-Entry Rates: Preliminary SPM data suggests that BIPOC individuals in Joplin are more likely to enter emergency shelters or return to homelessness after housing placement. This pattern indicates systemic barriers to long-term housing retention.
- Disparities in Housing Vouchers: Only 34% of new admissions in Joplin’s public housing system come from individuals experiencing homelessness, with racial disparities affecting voucher acceptance and access to rental units.

ADDRESSING RACIAL DISPARITIES IN HOUSING RETENTION

Addressing racial disparities in housing requires targeted policy interventions and systemic changes, including:

- Legal aid for tenants to prevent unjust evictions and ensure housing stability.
- Expanded rental assistance programs that prioritize individuals at high risk of homelessness.
- Stronger enforcement of anti-discrimination policies in the housing market.
- Increased landlord engagement to expand housing options for BIPOC voucher holders.

Further analysis of SPM 2 data disaggregated by race would provide a clearer understanding of disparities in Joplin’s housing retention rates. Without direct interventions, BIPOC individuals will remain at a heightened risk of housing instability, eviction, and long-term homelessness.

11.5 TRACKING & REDUCING CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS

Chronic homelessness—defined as individuals who experience homelessness for 12 consecutive months or at least four episodes of homelessness in three years while living with a disabling condition—remains one of the most persistent and challenging aspects of Joplin’s homelessness crisis. Individuals experiencing chronic homelessness often require long-term interventions due to complex needs, including mental health conditions, substance use disorders, and physical disabilities. System Performance Measure (SPM) 1, which tracks the Length of Time Homeless, and SPM 2, which measures Returns to Homelessness, indicate that a significant portion of individuals continue to cycle through Joplin’s homeless services without achieving long-term stability. While some progress has been made, with the Joplin Continuum of Care (CoC) recording a 20% decline in chronic homelessness from 2022 to 2023, this reduction has not been sustained. Unsheltered chronic homelessness rose sharply by 111% from 2023 to 2024, highlighting significant gaps in Joplin’s ability to provide long-term housing solutions.

Joplin currently has 243 Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) beds, designed to provide stable housing with integrated support services for individuals with the highest barriers to independent living. However, demand far exceeds the available capacity, leaving many individuals on long waitlists and contributing to prolonged homelessness. For those fortunate enough to secure PSH placements, long-term success depends on continued access to services such as case management, mental health care, and substance use treatment. Without these supports, housing stability becomes tenuous, increasing the likelihood of eviction or voluntary exits from PSH programs. Additionally, SPM 2 data suggests that high recidivism rates remain a major issue, with many individuals exiting shelters only to return within six to twelve months due to a lack of sustainable support systems.

One of the greatest barriers to reducing chronic homelessness in Joplin is the limited coordination between service providers. The city does not have a fully integrated data-sharing system, making it difficult to track individuals as they move between shelters, healthcare facilities, and interactions with law enforcement. This lack of integration leads to fragmented service delivery, with individuals often falling through the cracks or receiving duplicative services without a cohesive case management plan. Additionally, case managers face high caseloads and staffing shortages, limiting their ability to provide the intensive, individualized support necessary for those with complex needs. Many individuals experiencing chronic homelessness also struggle with severe mental illness or substance use disorders, yet treatment access remains a significant challenge. Long wait times for psychiatric care, medication-assisted treatment, and residential substance use programs contribute to cycles of crisis, hospitalization, and eventual returns to homelessness.

Joplin can learn from other cities that have successfully reduced chronic homelessness through targeted interventions. One of the most effective solutions is expanding Permanent Supportive Housing with long-term rental subsidies and comprehensive wraparound services. PSH has been widely recognized as one of the best strategies for stabilizing individuals with chronic homelessness, reducing overall public costs, and improving long-term health outcomes. However, PSH expansion requires sustained funding commitments from federal, state, and local sources.

Another critical intervention is the development of hospital and jail diversion programs. Many individuals experiencing chronic homelessness frequently cycle through emergency rooms, psychiatric facilities, and the criminal justice system. These interactions are costly and often fail to address the root causes of homelessness. Establishing dedicated discharge planning programs that connect individuals to housing and case management immediately upon leaving hospitals or jails can significantly reduce the likelihood of them returning to the streets. Some cities have implemented medical respite programs, where individuals recovering from health conditions can receive temporary housing and healthcare services, preventing further deterioration of their conditions and increasing the likelihood of securing long-term housing.

Improving data coordination is another necessary step in addressing chronic homelessness. Requiring full participation in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) among all shelters and outreach providers would enhance Joplin's ability to track individuals, assess service needs, and allocate resources more effectively. Currently, not all emergency shelters in Joplin participate in HMIS, creating major gaps in data collection. Without accurate and comprehensive data, local policymakers and service providers cannot effectively measure progress or make informed decisions about resource distribution. Enhanced data-sharing agreements between hospitals, behavioral health providers, law enforcement, and homelessness service agencies would improve overall system coordination and ensure that individuals receive the appropriate interventions at the right time.

Housing retention is another area that requires urgent attention. Even when individuals are placed in housing, many struggle to maintain stability due to challenges such as financial insecurity, untreated mental health conditions, and difficulties navigating landlord-tenant relationships. To address this, Joplin should prioritize housing retention efforts through intensive case management, flexible rental assistance programs, and peer support networks. Cities that have successfully reduced chronic homelessness have implemented tenancy support programs, where case managers regularly check in with tenants, assist with budgeting and lease compliance, and provide ongoing connections to mental health and employment services. Expanding rental assistance beyond the current limits of

Rapid Rehousing would also help individuals transition more smoothly into permanent housing, giving them additional time to build financial stability before being required to pay full market rent.

Joplin must also address the structural barriers that make it difficult to expand supportive housing programs. One major challenge is the limited availability of affordable rental units, as many landlords are hesitant to accept housing vouchers or tenants with past evictions. Landlord engagement programs, including risk mitigation funds, guaranteed rental payments, and property tax incentives, could encourage more landlords to participate in housing assistance programs. Additionally, zoning reforms to allow for higher-density housing, mixed-use developments, and accessory dwelling units could increase the overall supply of affordable housing in Joplin, making it easier for individuals to find long-term housing solutions.

Joplin has an opportunity to make significant progress in reducing chronic homelessness, but doing so will require a sustained commitment to evidence-based solutions, increased investment in long-term housing programs, and stronger coordination between service providers. Expanding Permanent Supportive Housing, enhancing case management services, and improving access to mental health and addiction treatment are key strategies that have proven successful in other communities. Without significant expansion of long-term housing resources and improved service coordination, Joplin will continue to struggle with persistent chronic homelessness.

Investing in housing stability, enhanced case management, and better data tracking will be critical in preventing individuals from repeatedly cycling through homelessness. By prioritizing long-term solutions over temporary fixes, Joplin can work toward a future where chronic homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring.

11.6 SOLUTIONS FOR LONG-TERM STABILITY

Reducing recidivism and improving long-term housing stability in Joplin requires a multifaceted approach that addresses housing retention, economic security, and ongoing supportive services. System Performance Measure (SPM) 2 highlights that many individuals in Joplin return to homelessness within 6-12 months after securing housing, underscoring the need for sustained interventions.

KEY STRATEGIES FOR HOUSING STABILITY

Expand Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) for High-Need Individuals

- With 243 PSH beds available in Joplin, demand exceeds supply, leaving many without long-term housing options.
- Increasing PSH units and securing dedicated funding for rental subsidies would ensure individuals with severe disabilities or chronic homelessness receive stable housing.

Enhance Rental Assistance & Flexible Housing Support

- 46 Rapid Rehousing (RRH) beds are currently available, but funding shortages led to a 52% decrease in capacity.
- Extending rental subsidies for RRH participants beyond the current timeframe could help tenants stabilize financially before market-rate rents become unsustainable.

Strengthen Workforce Development & Financial Stability Programs

- SPM 4 shows employment rates among homeless individuals remain low, contributing to housing instability.
- Expanding workforce training, wage assistance, and employer incentive programs can promote financial independence, helping individuals sustain housing long-term.

Increase Landlord Participation in Voucher Programs

- Many individuals with housing vouchers struggle to find landlords willing to accept them, leading to long housing search periods and high return-to-homelessness rates.
- Introducing landlord incentives, such as damage mitigation funds, risk-reduction programs, or property tax incentives, could increase participation and expand affordable housing options.

Improve Case Management & Post-Housing Support

- A lack of ongoing case management contributes to high eviction rates, particularly for individuals transitioning from homelessness to independent living.
- Expanding post-housing support services, including tenancy training, eviction prevention programs, and peer mentorship, could help tenants navigate challenges and prevent a return to homelessness.

Enhance Data-Driven Decision-Making & Inter-Agency Coordination

- Limited HMIS participation among service providers restricts data accuracy, making it difficult to assess program effectiveness.
- Requiring full HMIS participation, publishing annual homelessness impact reports, and integrating cross-agency data-sharing could improve transparency and program outcomes.

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE LONG-TERM RESPONSE

Joplin must invest in permanent housing solutions, economic empowerment, and sustained case management to break the cycle of homelessness. Strengthening local funding mechanisms, expanding housing retention support, and improving inter-agency coordination will be critical in ensuring sustainable housing stability for vulnerable populations.

The next section will focus on policy recommendations, legislative actions, and strategies for strengthening Joplin's homelessness response framework.

11.7 SUMMARY & KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 11 examines long-term housing outcomes and the risk of returning to homelessness in Joplin. While securing stable housing is a crucial step, many individuals face challenges such as employment instability, high rental costs, and behavioral health issues that increase their risk of eviction. Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) and Rapid Rehousing (RRH) serve as key solutions, but funding shortages and a lack of affordable rental units hinder long-term success. Additionally, racial disparities and systemic barriers affect housing retention rates, highlighting the need for targeted interventions. Improving data collection, expanding case management services, and increasing landlord participation in housing programs are essential to reducing recidivism and ensuring long-term stability.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CHAPTER 11

Expand Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) for High-Need Individuals

- Increase the number of PSH units beyond the current 243 beds to meet demand.
- Secure long-term funding for rental subsidies and wraparound services to ensure stability for individuals with chronic homelessness and disabilities.
- Improve interagency collaboration to provide consistent healthcare, addiction treatment, and employment support.

Enhance Rental Assistance & Flexible Housing Support

- Reverse the 52% reduction in RRH funding to ensure individuals transitioning out of homelessness receive adequate financial support.
- Extend rental subsidies beyond the current RRH time limits to allow individuals to establish financial stability before transitioning to market-rate housing.
- Implement emergency rental assistance programs to prevent evictions and reduce returns to homelessness.

Strengthen Workforce Development & Economic Stability Programs

- Integrate job training and financial literacy programs into RRH and PSH services.
- Expand employer incentive programs (e.g., wage subsidies, tax credits) to encourage businesses to hire individuals exiting homelessness.
- Increase collaboration between workforce development agencies and housing programs to create direct employment pathways.

Increase Landlord Participation in Housing Voucher Programs

- Establish landlord incentive programs, such as risk mitigation funds, damage protection guarantees, and streamlined payment processing, to encourage participation in voucher programs.
- Advocate for source-of-income discrimination protections to prevent landlords from refusing tenants solely based on housing assistance.
- Strengthen relationships between public housing authorities and private landlords to expand rental options for voucher holders.

Improve Case Management & Post-Housing Support

- Develop a structured, citywide housing retention program that provides continued case management for individuals after securing housing.
- Expand eviction prevention initiatives, including legal aid for tenants and mediation services between landlords and formerly homeless renters.
- Increase the availability of peer mentorship and tenant training programs to help individuals maintain stable housing.

Address Racial Disparities in Housing Retention

- Improve data collection on racial disparities in housing outcomes and integrate findings into policy decisions.
- Expand legal aid and advocacy efforts for BIPOC renters to combat discriminatory rental practices.
- Increase outreach efforts to ensure equitable access to rental assistance and housing support programs.

Improve Data Tracking & Interagency Coordination

- All service providers must fully participate in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) to improve data accuracy and funding allocation.
- Establish data-sharing agreements between hospitals, law enforcement, and housing agencies to ensure individuals experiencing chronic homelessness receive coordinated support.
- Publish annual homelessness impact reports to increase transparency and inform policy decisions.

Expand Housing First Initiatives & Reduce Chronic Homelessness

- Increase the availability of low-barrier, Housing-First-Oriented programs that provide immediate housing without preconditions such as sobriety or employment.
- Develop hospital and jail diversion programs to connect individuals experiencing homelessness with housing and support services immediately upon discharge.
- Expand medical respite programs to provide temporary housing and healthcare for individuals recovering from health conditions.

CHAPTER 12: STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness is a complex issue that requires a coordinated, multi-tiered response to reduce housing instability and create long-term solutions effectively. Addressing this challenge in Joplin involves a combination of immediate relief efforts, mid-term policy interventions, and long-term structural changes that ensure sustainable housing options. From expanding low-barrier shelters and increasing access to mental health services to incentivizing private, affordable housing development, each strategy plays a critical role in building a more inclusive and supportive community. This chapter outlines a range of targeted approaches designed to address the root causes of homelessness, enhance access to essential services, and create pathways to stable, permanent housing.

A successful response to homelessness requires both urgency and strategic planning. Short-term initiatives focus on expanding rental assistance, strengthening eviction protections, and increasing coordination between service providers. Mid-term strategies address systemic gaps, such as shelter capacity, workforce training, and supportive housing expansion. Meanwhile, long-term efforts will require significant investment, including large-scale affordable housing developments, permanent funding mechanisms, and comprehensive healthcare infrastructure improvements. By implementing these strategies in a phased approach, Joplin can create lasting change, reduce homelessness, and foster a community where all residents have access to safe and stable housing.

12.1 EXPAND AFFORDABLE & SUPPORTIVE HOUSING OPTIONS

Addressing homelessness in Joplin requires a multi-faceted approach to increase the availability of affordable and supportive housing. The current housing shortage, coupled with restrictive shelter policies, creates significant barriers for individuals attempting to transition out of homelessness. Expanding low-barrier shelters, increasing the supply of Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) and Rapid Rehousing (RRH) units, and fostering public-private collaborations can create sustainable pathways to housing stability.

INCREASE THE AVAILABILITY OF LOW-BARRIER SHELTERS

Many of Joplin's existing emergency shelters enforce entry restrictions, including sobriety requirements, curfews, and mandatory participation in religious or recovery programs. While these policies aim to promote structure, they inadvertently exclude some of the most vulnerable individuals, including those struggling with substance use disorders or mental health conditions. Low-barrier shelters provide immediate, accessible housing without strict preconditions, ensuring that individuals can receive support in a safe environment regardless of their circumstances.

Key Actions:

- Develop low-barrier shelters that allow entry without sobriety, curfews, or extensive intake requirements.
- Implement trauma-informed and harm-reduction approaches to provide shelter for individuals actively using substances.
- Designate specific spaces for people with disabilities, those with mental health conditions, and individuals fleeing domestic violence.
- Offer flexible shelter options, such as overnight accommodations and transitional beds that allow individuals to stabilize before moving into long-term housing.
- Establish a Sprinkler Grant Program or Assistance Fund to help service providers cover the cost of fire safety compliance, allowing more buildings to be converted into emergency shelters.

EXPAND PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING (PSH)

PSH is a proven model for reducing chronic homelessness by providing long-term rental assistance and on-site supportive services, including case management, mental health treatment, and addiction recovery support. In Joplin,

the demand for PSH far exceeds available capacity, leaving many individuals with disabilities or chronic conditions without stable housing.

Key Actions:

- Increase the number of PSH units in Joplin by leveraging federal and state funding sources, such as HUD’s Continuum of Care (CoC) program.
- Develop mixed-income housing models that integrate PSH within broader affordable housing developments.
- Ensure ongoing funding for wraparound services, including mental health care, employment assistance, and peer support programs.
- Strengthen partnerships with healthcare providers to integrate medical and behavioral health services within PSH facilities.

Invest in Rapid Rehousing (RRH) Programs

RRH is designed to help individuals and families quickly escape homelessness by providing short-term rental assistance and supportive services. However, current RRH programs in Joplin face funding limitations, making it difficult for participants to sustain long-term housing stability.

Key Actions:

- Extend rental assistance durations in RRH programs to allow more time for financial stabilization.
- Increase flexibility in RRH funding to accommodate individuals with higher barriers to securing independent housing.
- Expand case management services to provide ongoing support, including financial literacy education, employment assistance, and landlord mediation.
- Develop partnerships with landlords to increase RRH participants' access to affordable rental units.

INCENTIVIZE PRIVATE DEVELOPMENT OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Private developers play a crucial role in increasing the supply of affordable housing. However, restrictive zoning regulations, high construction costs, and limited financial incentives have slowed the growth of affordable housing options in Joplin. By offering tax incentives, zoning reforms, and targeted grants, the city can encourage private investment in housing solutions.

Key Actions:

- Establish tax credit programs for developers who build affordable housing units.
- Implement zoning reforms to allow for higher-density housing, including duplexes, triplexes, and accessory dwelling units (ADUs).
- Provide fast-track permitting and reduced regulatory barriers for developers focused on affordable and supportive housing projects.
- Launch a city-backed grant program to subsidize the construction of low-income housing units.

PROMOTE PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS (PPPS) AND SOCIAL IMPACT BONDS (SIBS)

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) can leverage both government and private sector resources to fund housing initiatives. Additionally, Social Impact Bonds (SIBs) offer an innovative financing model where private investors fund housing programs with the expectation of government repayment if specific outcomes—such as reduced homelessness—are achieved.

Key Actions:

- Establish a PPP model where local businesses and nonprofits co-invest in affordable housing projects.
- Work with banks and private investors to create a local Social Impact Bond (SIB) initiative to fund supportive housing.
- Encourage corporate sponsorships and philanthropic contributions to supplement public funding for homelessness solutions.
- Develop employer-assisted housing programs, where businesses provide financial incentives for employees to secure stable housing.

ESTABLISH PET-FRIENDLY SHELTERS

Many individuals experiencing homelessness refuse shelter services because they are unwilling to abandon their pets. Currently, most shelters in Joplin do not allow animals, creating a significant barrier for pet owners seeking housing. Establishing pet-friendly shelters can remove this obstacle and improve shelter participation rates.

Key Actions:

- Designate specific shelters that are pet-friendly, with on-site kennels and veterinary care services.
- Partner with animal welfare organizations to provide pet food, vaccinations, and temporary foster care for shelter residents.
- Expand outreach programs to identify individuals who remain unsheltered due to pet restrictions and connect them to housing resources.
- Incorporate pet-inclusive policies in future low-barrier shelter developments.

SUMMARY

Expanding affordable and supportive housing options is a critical step toward reducing homelessness in Joplin. By increasing the availability of low-barrier shelters, investing in long-term supportive housing, and incentivizing private development, the city can create a more inclusive and effective homelessness response system. Additionally, innovative funding mechanisms such as public-private partnerships and Social Impact Bonds can help sustain these efforts over time. Addressing barriers to shelter participation—such as pet restrictions—will further ensure that individuals have access to safe, stable housing regardless of their circumstances.

12.2 FULLY FUND AND EXPAND THE HOMEBOUND PROGRAM

Ensuring that individuals experiencing homelessness in Joplin have access to stable housing does not always mean keeping them in the city. Nearly 20% of Joplin’s homeless population consists of individuals who want to return to their home communities but are unable to do so due to financial or logistical barriers. The Homebound Program plays a critical role in reconnecting these individuals with their natural supports, including family, friends, and stable housing opportunities in their home communities. By providing a one-time trip home and verifying that they have a safe and stable place to go, the program reduces the burden on Joplin’s shelters and service providers while ensuring individuals can return to environments where they have existing support systems.

STRENGTHEN HOMEBOUND PROGRAM FUNDING AND ACCESSIBILITY

The Homebound Program assists individuals who have family members or other reliable housing options in another city but lack the means to return. Many of these individuals became stranded in Joplin due to job loss, medical crises,

or failed relocation attempts, leaving them without a way to return to their support networks. A case worker verifies that the individual has a confirmed place to stay by contacting family members or friends before travel is arranged. This approach ensures that the relocation is safe and sustainable, preventing individuals from becoming homeless again upon arrival.

Key Actions:

- **Ensure full and sustainable funding** for the Homebound Program, which provides transportation assistance for individuals with verified housing and support networks outside of Joplin.
- **Expand outreach efforts** to identify individuals eligible for the program, prioritizing those with safe housing arrangements already in place.
- **Increase case management services** to facilitate family communication, confirm living arrangements, and coordinate travel logistics.
- **Strengthen partnerships with shelters, hospitals, and service providers** to ensure that individuals are assessed for Homebound eligibility before being placed in emergency shelters or long-term programs in Joplin.

EXPAND TRANSPORTATION ASSISTANCE OPTIONS

A lack of transportation is one of the biggest obstacles preventing individuals from leaving Joplin and returning to their families. While the Homebound Program provides one-time travel assistance, demand for the service often exceeds available funding, leaving many individuals stranded in the city. Expanding transportation resources would ensure that everyone eligible for the program can take advantage of it.

Key Actions:

- **Increase funding for travel vouchers** to cover bus, train, or gas expenses for individuals traveling to a confirmed housing arrangement.
- **Develop partnerships with transportation providers** to create discounted or subsidized travel options for program participants.
- **Ensure that individuals traveling long distances receive additional support**, such as meal assistance or layover accommodations when needed.

COORDINATE WITH FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT NETWORKS

The success of the Homebound Program depends on verifying that individuals have a safe and stable place to return to. Caseworkers play a crucial role in facilitating communication between individuals and their families to ensure that the housing arrangement is reliable and that the family or host is prepared to receive them. This prevents individuals from returning to unstable environments where they may become homeless again.

Key Actions:

- **Require case workers to verify housing arrangements** by speaking directly with family members or friends before travel is arranged.
- **Provide essential mediation services** to help repair strained family relationships when necessary, increasing the likelihood of long-term stability.
- **Ensure that individuals receive guidance on available resources in their home communities** so they can access additional support if needed.

SUMMARY

Entirely funding and expanding the Homebound Program is a critical step toward reducing homelessness in Joplin. By providing one-time transportation home, verifying stable housing arrangements, and ensuring that individuals reconnect with their natural support networks, the program helps prevent long-term homelessness while relieving pressure on local shelters and services. With increased funding and coordination, Joplin can ensure that those who have a safe place to go are able to return, allowing resources to be focused on individuals who genuinely need local support.

12.3 STRENGTHEN EVICTION PREVENTION & TENANT PROTECTIONS

Preventing eviction is one of the most effective ways to reduce homelessness and housing instability in Joplin. Many individuals and families fall into homelessness due to financial hardships, unexpected job loss, medical emergencies, or rising rental costs. Strengthening eviction prevention efforts and tenant protections can provide crucial safeguards, ensuring that vulnerable renters remain housed. Expanding rental assistance, improving legal aid access, and implementing systemic reforms will help create a more equitable and stable housing environment.

EXPAND RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS & ESTABLISH AN EMERGENCY HOUSING STABILIZATION FUND

Emergency rental assistance provides financial support for tenants at risk of eviction due to temporary financial hardships. While existing programs offer some relief, many households fall through the cracks due to funding limitations and eligibility restrictions. A dedicated Emergency Housing Stabilization Fund could serve as a rapid-response resource to help tenants remain housed.

Key Actions:

- Expand existing rental assistance programs by securing additional funding from state and federal sources, including HUD's Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) program.
- Create a flexible, locally funded Emergency Housing Stabilization Fund to assist renters with short-term financial aid when federal/state funds are exhausted.
- Ensure timely processing of rental assistance applications to prevent evictions before they occur.
- Partner with local financial institutions to provide interest-free emergency micro-loans for renters in crisis.

Expected Impact:

- Reduced eviction rates and homelessness recidivism.
- Faster assistance for tenants experiencing short-term financial hardship.
- Improved relationships between tenants and landlords by preventing rent arrears.

IMPLEMENT RIGHT-TO-COUNSEL PROGRAMS FOR TENANTS FACING EVICTION

Legal representation significantly increases a tenant's ability to avoid eviction or negotiate a more favorable outcome, yet most low-income renters in Joplin lack access to legal assistance. A Right-to-Counsel program would ensure that tenants receive legal aid when facing eviction proceedings.

Key Actions:

- Establish a city-funded Right-to-Counsel program to provide free legal representation for low-income tenants in eviction court.
- Expand funding for Legal Aid of Western Missouri to support eviction defense services.
- Implement mediation programs between landlords and tenants to resolve disputes before eviction filings occur.
- Create a Tenant Advocacy Hotline to provide immediate legal advice and referrals.

Expected Impact:

- Increased eviction case dismissals and negotiated settlements.
- Reduced displacement and entry into homelessness.
- Improved legal awareness among tenants regarding their rights.

ADVOCATE FOR SOURCE-OF-INCOME ANTI-DISCRIMINATION PROTECTIONS

Many landlords in Joplin refuse to accept tenants using housing vouchers or rental assistance programs, significantly limiting housing options for low-income renters. Implementing source-of-income (SOI) protections would prohibit landlords from discriminating against tenants based on the way they pay rent.

Key Actions:

- Lobby for local and state legislation that bans discrimination based on income source, ensuring tenants using housing vouchers, disability payments, or other public benefits are not unfairly denied housing.
- Launch a landlord incentive program that provides financial security (e.g., damage mitigation funds, tax breaks) to property owners who rent to voucher holders.
- Educate landlords about the benefits of participating in housing voucher programs, including stable rental payments and access to risk-reduction funds.

Expected Impact:

- Increased access to rental housing for voucher holders.
- More equitable housing opportunities for low-income residents.
- Greater participation from landlords in rental assistance programs.

CREATE A COMMUNITY-BASED RENTAL APPLICATION SYSTEM

Many low-income renters face multiple barriers when applying for housing, including high application fees, credit history checks, and past eviction records. A centralized community-based rental application system would streamline the process by allowing tenants to submit a single rental application that multiple landlords can access.

Key Actions:

- Develop an online rental application portal that allows tenants to submit a standardized rental application shared across multiple landlords.
- Offer financial assistance for application fees to reduce upfront costs for low-income renters.
- Provide tenant education workshops on improving credit scores, navigating the rental market, and securing stable housing.
- Encourage landlords to participate in the system through incentives such as waived city fees or expedited inspection processes.

Expected Impact:

- Reduced financial burden for low-income renters.
- Faster housing placements and increased accessibility for those with mental barriers.
- Improved transparency between tenants and landlords.

STRENGTHEN POST-HOUSING SUPPORT THROUGH LONG-TERM CASE MANAGEMENT & FINANCIAL LITERACY PROGRAMS

Securing housing is only the first step; maintaining it requires ongoing support. Many individuals who exit homelessness struggle with financial management, landlord-tenant disputes, and unexpected hardships. A post-housing support system can help tenants sustain stable housing and avoid future evictions.

Key Actions:

- Expand case management services to provide continued support for individuals transitioning from homelessness to stable housing.
- Implement financial literacy and budgeting workshops to help tenants manage rent payments, build credit, and avoid eviction.
- Offer mediation services for tenants and landlords to prevent disputes from escalating into eviction proceedings.
- Develop a peer mentorship program in which formerly homeless individuals who have successfully maintained housing provide guidance and support to new tenants.

Expected Impact:

- Increased housing stability and reduced eviction rates.
- Improved financial independence among formerly homeless individuals.
- Stronger relationships between tenants and landlords.

Summary

Strengthening eviction prevention and tenant protections is a proactive approach to reducing homelessness and housing instability in Joplin. By expanding rental assistance programs, providing legal representation for tenants, implementing source-of-income protections, and creating a streamlined rental application system, the city can significantly decrease eviction rates and improve housing retention. Additionally, long-term case management and financial literacy programs will ensure that individuals who secure housing have the tools and support needed to maintain it. These strategies will contribute to a more stable, inclusive, and equitable housing system that prevents homelessness before it begins.

12.4 IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH, ADDICTION, & HEALTHCARE SERVICES

Expanding mental health and addiction services is essential to addressing homelessness in Joplin. Many individuals experiencing homelessness struggle with untreated mental health conditions or substance use disorders, which create barriers to stable housing and employment. Strengthening outreach programs, increasing access to treatment, and integrating healthcare services into shelters and housing programs will improve long-term outcomes and reduce the cycle of homelessness.

ESTABLISH MOBILE OUTREACH TEAMS FOR MENTAL HEALTH & ADDICTION SERVICES

Mobile crisis response teams provide on-the-ground support for individuals experiencing mental health crises or substance use issues. These teams can conduct street outreach, provide emergency care, and connect individuals to long-term treatment programs.

Key Actions:

- Expand existing mobile outreach efforts by formalizing partnerships between Ozark Center, Access Family Care, and local shelters to provide behavioral health services directly to individuals experiencing homelessness.
- Increase funding for crisis intervention teams that operate alongside Joplin Police Department's Behavioral Health Unit to de-escalate mental health crises and connect individuals to appropriate care.
- Implement a 24/7 behavioral health response team that can engage with individuals in encampments, emergency shelters, and transitional housing programs.
- Provide ongoing training for law enforcement and first responders to improve their ability to interact with individuals in crisis.

Expected Impact:

- Reduced emergency room visits and hospitalizations for mental health-related crises.
- Improved early intervention and crisis stabilization, preventing further deterioration of mental health conditions.
- Increased engagement in long-term treatment programs, leading to higher housing retention rates.

CREATE A DEDICATED INPATIENT DETOX & REHABILITATION FACILITY WITH LOW-BARRIER ENTRY

Joplin currently lacks a local inpatient detox and rehabilitation center, forcing individuals to travel to Springfield, Kansas City, or Tulsa for treatment. Many people experiencing homelessness cannot access these distant facilities due to a lack of transportation or rigid admission requirements.

Key Actions:

- Secure funding for a local detox and rehabilitation facility that prioritizes low-barrier entry and same-day admission.
- Partner with Ozark Center, Access Family Care, and other healthcare providers to establish a medically supervised detox program that offers medication-assisted treatment (MAT).
- Implement peer support programs within the facility to assist individuals in their transition from detox to stable housing.
- Ensure the facility provides integrated services, including mental health counseling, primary healthcare, and housing navigation.

Expected Impact:

- Increased access to immediate treatment for substance use disorders.
- Reduced wait times and transportation barriers for those seeking detox and rehabilitation services.
- Greater housing stability for individuals completing treatment programs.

EXPAND MENTAL HEALTH INTEGRATION WITHIN SHELTERS & HOUSING PROGRAMS

Many emergency shelters and transitional housing programs lack embedded behavioral health services, limiting access to essential mental health care for residents.

Key Actions:

- Formalize partnerships with Ozark Center and Access Family Care to provide regular psychiatric care and counseling services within emergency shelters and transitional housing programs.
- Train shelter staff to recognize signs of mental health and substance use crises and provide de-escalation techniques.
- Implement on-site telehealth services for mental health treatment to increase accessibility.
- Expand case management services to ensure that individuals receive continuous mental health support after exiting shelters.

Expected Impact:

- Increased access to mental health services for individuals in shelters and transitional housing.
- Improved housing retention rates for individuals with mental health conditions.
- Reduced reliance on emergency services for behavioral health crises.

IMPLEMENT MEDICAL RESPITE PROGRAMS FOR INDIVIDUALS RECOVERING FROM HEALTH CONDITIONS

Many individuals experiencing homelessness struggle to recover from illnesses or surgeries due to lack of stable housing. Medical respite programs provide temporary housing and healthcare support for those recovering from medical conditions.

Key Actions:

- Develop a medical respite care program in partnership with Ozark Center, Access Family Care, and local hospitals to provide short-term housing and medical supervision.
- Establish dedicated respite care beds within existing shelters or transitional housing facilities.
- Provide wraparound services, including nursing care, medication management, and case management, to ensure a smooth transition to stable housing after recovery.
- Integrate hospital discharge planning with homelessness services to prevent individuals from being discharged onto the streets.

Expected Impact:

- Improved recovery outcomes for individuals experiencing homelessness with acute medical conditions.
- Reduced hospital readmissions and emergency room visits.
- Increased opportunities for stable housing placements post-recovery.

DEVELOP HOSPITAL & JAIL DIVERSION PROGRAMS TO CONNECT INDIVIDUALS WITH HOUSING UPON DISCHARGE

Many individuals experiencing homelessness cycle between hospitals, jails, and emergency shelters without receiving the long-term support they need. Hospital and jail diversion programs provide direct pathways to housing and treatment instead of discharging individuals back into homelessness.

Key Actions:

- Establish a formal hospital discharge coordination program between Ozark Center, Access Family Care, Freeman Health System, and Mercy Hospital to connect patients to housing and behavioral health services upon release.

- Expand the existing jail diversion program by partnering with Joplin Police Department’s Behavioral Health Unit to provide case management and direct referrals to housing programs.
- Implement a dedicated housing navigator within hospitals and correctional facilities to ensure that individuals exiting these systems receive immediate placement in supportive housing.
- Create a funding mechanism to provide short-term rental assistance for individuals transitioning from jails or hospitals to stable housing.

Expected Impact:

- Fewer individuals being discharged from hospitals and jails into homelessness.
- Improved coordination between healthcare providers, law enforcement, and housing services.
- Increased stability and reduced recidivism rates among individuals exiting the criminal justice and healthcare systems.

SUMMARY

Strengthening mental health, addiction, and healthcare services is a critical component of Joplin’s strategy to reduce homelessness. By expanding mobile outreach teams, establishing a dedicated detox and rehabilitation facility, integrating mental health services into shelters, and developing hospital and jail diversion programs, the city can create a more effective and compassionate response to homelessness. Formalizing partnerships with Ozark Center, Access Family Care, and other healthcare providers will ensure that individuals receive the necessary support to achieve stability and long-term housing success.

12.5 ENHANCE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & ECONOMIC STABILITY

Stable employment is a critical factor in preventing homelessness and ensuring long-term housing stability. Many individuals experiencing homelessness face barriers to securing and maintaining employment, including a lack of job training, limited transportation options, and employer hesitancy to hire individuals with gaps in work history. Strengthening workforce development programs and creating economic opportunities will help individuals transition into stable employment, increasing financial independence and reducing reliance on emergency housing services.

EXPAND JOB TRAINING AND APPRENTICESHIPS TAILORED TO LOCAL LABOR MARKET NEEDS

Workforce development programs should align with industries that offer sustainable wages and long-term career growth opportunities. Expanding job training initiatives will provide individuals transitioning out of homelessness with the skills needed to secure stable employment.

Key Actions:

- Strengthen partnerships with local employers, trade schools, and workforce agencies to offer training programs in high-demand fields such as healthcare, manufacturing, and skilled trades.
- Expand apprenticeship programs that provide hands-on experience and a direct path to employment.
- Increase funding for workforce development initiatives that prioritize individuals experiencing or exiting homelessness.
- Develop job readiness programs that include resume-building, interview coaching, and financial literacy training.

Expected Impact:

- Increased employment rates among formerly homeless individuals.
- Improved access to long-term, high-paying job opportunities.
- Greater economic self-sufficiency, reducing the likelihood of returning to homelessness.

PROVIDE EMPLOYER INCENTIVES FOR HIRING INDIVIDUALS TRANSITIONING OUT OF HOMELESSNESS

Many employers are hesitant to hire individuals with past housing instability due to concerns about work readiness and retention. Offering financial incentives and risk-mitigation measures can encourage businesses to provide stable employment opportunities.

Key Actions:

- Implement wage subsidies and hiring tax credits for businesses that employ individuals transitioning out of homelessness.
- Establish an employer support program that provides ongoing coaching and mediation services to help employees maintain job stability.
- Launch a public awareness campaign to educate employers on the benefits of inclusive hiring practices.

Expected Impact:

- Increased hiring rates among individuals with housing instability.
- Reduced stigma surrounding employment gaps due to homelessness.
- Strengthened collaboration between workforce agencies, businesses, and social service providers.

STRENGTHEN TRANSPORTATION ACCESS TO SUPPORT EMPLOYMENT

Lack of reliable transportation is a significant barrier for individuals seeking employment. Addressing this challenge through subsidized transit programs and employer-sponsored commuter benefits will improve job access and retention.

Key Actions:

- Provide subsidized or free transit passes for low-income workers.
- Expand employer-sponsored commuter programs that offer transportation assistance for workers without personal vehicles.
- Improve transit routes and schedules to connect job seekers with employment centers.
- Develop a car assistance program that helps individuals purchase or repair vehicles for commuting purposes.

Expected Impact:

- Increased job retention and attendance among individuals experiencing financial hardship.
- Reduced transportation-related barriers to employment.
- Greater workforce participation in underserved areas.

DEVELOP DAYTIME RESOURCE CENTERS TO SUPPORT JOB SEARCHES AND SOCIAL SERVICES

Daytime resource centers provide essential support for individuals seeking employment, offering access to job search assistance, medical care, and other stabilizing services. These centers help bridge the gap between homelessness and workforce integration.

Key Actions:

- Establish daytime resource centers where individuals can access computers, job listings, and resume assistance.
- Integrate healthcare, mental health, and social services into workforce development programs to support long-term employment stability.
- Partner with existing shelters, workforce agencies, and community health providers to ensure seamless service coordination.
- Develop mentorship programs that connect individuals with career coaches and peer support networks.

Expected Impact:

- Improved employment success rates for individuals transitioning from homelessness.
- Reduced barriers to securing and maintaining stable jobs.
- Enhanced coordination between employment services and social support programs.

SUMMARY

Enhancing workforce development and economic stability is a crucial component of addressing homelessness in Joplin. Expanding job training programs, incentivizing employers to hire individuals with housing instability, improving transportation access, and developing daytime resource centers will create a more inclusive labor market. These strategies will help individuals achieve financial independence, reducing their risk of returning to homelessness while strengthening the local economy.

12.6 ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS AMONG VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

Certain groups are disproportionately affected by homelessness and require targeted interventions to ensure they receive appropriate support. Families with children, youth aging out of foster care, veterans, LGBTQ+ individuals, and seniors each face unique challenges that can lead to housing instability. Strengthening housing initiatives, expanding tailored support services, and improving coordination between agencies will help address homelessness among these vulnerable populations.

STRENGTHEN HOUSING AND SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

Families experiencing homelessness often face multiple barriers, including childcare needs, employment challenges, and difficulties accessing stable housing. Ensuring that families receive comprehensive support will help reduce intergenerational homelessness and provide children with greater stability.

Key Actions:

- Expand emergency and transitional housing options specifically for families with children.
- Integrate housing services with schools to identify at-risk students and provide early intervention.
- Establish childcare assistance programs to help parents secure stable employment and housing.
- Develop family reunification programs that assist families in reconnecting with relatives when appropriate.

Expected Impact:

- Increased stability for children and reduced disruption to education.
- Greater access to employment for parents, reducing long-term dependency on social services.

- Lower rates of family homelessness through early intervention and comprehensive support.

EXPAND TRANSITIONAL HOUSING AND MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS FOR YOUTH AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE

Youth exiting the foster care system face an increased risk of homelessness due to limited financial resources, lack of familial support, and difficulty securing stable housing. Expanding transitional housing programs and mentorship initiatives can help these young adults successfully transition into independence.

Key Actions:

- Increase the availability of transitional housing units with extended support services.
- Develop mentorship programs connecting former foster youth with supportive adults and career guidance.
- Provide financial literacy and life skills training to help youth navigate housing, employment, and budgeting.
- Collaborate with schools, child welfare agencies, and housing providers to create seamless transition programs.

Expected Impact:

- Reduced homelessness rates among youth exiting foster care.
- Greater economic stability and career readiness for young adults.
- Improved long-term housing outcomes through early intervention.

IMPROVE HOUSING ACCESS FOR VETERANS THROUGH PSH EXPANSION AND OUTREACH COORDINATION

Veterans experiencing homelessness often face challenges related to mental health, physical disabilities, and reintegration into civilian life. Expanding Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) and increasing outreach efforts will help ensure that no veteran is left without stable housing.

Key Actions:

- Increase the number of PSH units designated for veterans.
- Strengthen coordination between veteran services, housing programs, and healthcare providers.
- Expand employment assistance and job training initiatives tailored to veterans.
- Develop rapid-response outreach teams to connect unsheltered veterans with immediate resources.

Expected Impact:

- Lower rates of veteran homelessness through improved housing stability.
- Enhanced access to mental health and medical care for veterans.
- Increased workforce participation among formerly homeless veterans.

ENSURE LGBTQ+ INCLUSIVE SHELTER POLICIES AND STAFF CULTURAL COMPETENCY TRAINING

LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly transgender and non-binary people, face significant barriers in accessing safe and inclusive shelters. Many report discrimination, harassment, or denial of services based on their gender identity or sexual orientation. Establishing inclusive shelter policies and training staff on cultural competency will ensure equitable access to housing support.

Key Actions:

- Implement non-discrimination policies within all emergency shelters and housing programs.
- Train shelter staff on LGBTQ+ cultural competency, ensuring respectful and inclusive service delivery.
- Create dedicated housing options for LGBTQ+ individuals facing high barriers to shelter access.
- Partner with LGBTQ+ advocacy organizations to improve outreach and support services.

Expected Impact:

- Increased safety and accessibility of shelter services for LGBTQ+ individuals.
- Reduced homelessness rates among LGBTQ+ youth and adults.
- Stronger partnerships between housing agencies and LGBTQ+ support organizations.

DEVELOP SENIOR HOUSING OPTIONS WITH INTEGRATED HEALTHCARE AND RENTAL ASSISTANCE

Seniors experiencing homelessness or housing instability face unique challenges, including limited income, chronic health conditions, and mobility concerns. Expanding affordable senior housing with integrated healthcare services will help older adults maintain stability and improve their quality of life.

Key Actions:

- Develop affordable housing options specifically designed for seniors, with on-site healthcare and case management.
- Increase rental assistance programs for older adults on fixed incomes.
- Strengthen partnerships with healthcare providers to ensure seniors receive medical support alongside housing services.
- Expand home modification programs to allow seniors to age in place safely.

Expected Impact:

- Reduced homelessness rates among elderly individuals.
- Improved health outcomes through integrated housing and medical care.
- Greater economic stability for seniors on fixed incomes.

SUMMARY

Addressing homelessness among vulnerable populations requires tailored solutions that recognize the unique barriers faced by families, youth aging out of foster care, veterans, LGBTQ+ individuals, and seniors. Expanding targeted housing programs, increasing access to supportive services, and fostering interagency collaboration will help ensure that all individuals, regardless of their circumstances, have access to safe and stable housing. By prioritizing these vulnerable groups, Joplin can create a more inclusive and effective homelessness response system.

12.7 INCREASE LANDLORD PARTICIPATION & HOUSING ACCESS

A key challenge in Joplin's homelessness response is the limited participation of landlords in rental assistance programs. Many low-income individuals and those exiting homelessness struggle to find landlords willing to accept housing vouchers due to concerns over payment reliability, property damage, and bureaucratic hurdles. Expanding landlord participation through financial incentives, streamlined processes, and targeted education will help increase the availability of rental units for individuals transitioning out of homelessness.

CREATE A LANDLORD RISK MITIGATION FUND TO ADDRESS CONCERNS OVER DAMAGES AND NON-PAYMENT

Landlords often hesitate to rent to individuals with past evictions, credit issues, or housing vouchers due to perceived financial risks. A Landlord Risk Mitigation Fund would provide financial security for property owners, addressing concerns about damages, missed rent payments, or legal expenses related to tenancy issues.

Key Actions:

- Establish a publicly or philanthropically funded risk mitigation pool to compensate landlords for property damages beyond security deposits.
- Offer reimbursement for unpaid rent in cases where tenants face unexpected financial hardship.
- Provide emergency legal support to landlords in cases of lease violations to encourage program participation.
- Develop a streamlined claims process for landlords to access funds quickly when needed.

Expected Impact:

- Increased willingness of landlords to rent to voucher holders and individuals with rental barriers.
- Greater availability of affordable rental units, reducing housing wait times.
- Improved landlord-tenant relationships by providing financial security for property owners.

STREAMLINE HOUSING VOUCHER PROCESSES WITH FASTER INSPECTIONS AND GUARANTEED PAYMENTS

Landlords frequently cite delays in the housing voucher process—such as lengthy inspections, slow payments, and administrative inefficiencies—as barriers to participation. Addressing these challenges will encourage more landlords to accept tenants with vouchers, expanding rental options for low-income individuals.

Key Actions:

- Reduce wait times for voucher processing and unit inspections by increasing housing authority staffing and digitalizing paperwork.
- Implement a pre-approved housing list where landlords can receive advanced inspection certification before tenant placement.
- Guarantee timely rent payments by establishing direct deposit systems and expedited disbursement processes.
- Develop a landlord hotline to provide real-time support for payment or compliance issues.

Expected Impact:

- Faster placement of individuals transitioning out of homelessness into stable housing.
- Increased landlord participation in housing voucher programs.
- Reduced administrative barriers that slow down the leasing process.

EDUCATE LANDLORDS ON THE BENEFITS OF RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS THROUGH TARGETED OUTREACH

Many landlords are unaware of the advantages of participating in rental assistance programs, including consistent rental payments, reduced vacancies, and tenant support services. A dedicated landlord outreach campaign will help correct misconceptions and promote participation in housing programs.

Key Actions:

- Develop informational materials outlining financial incentives, risk mitigation strategies, and support services available to landlords.
- Host landlord workshops and networking events to address concerns and showcase success stories of rental assistance programs.
- Create an online portal where landlords can easily enroll in housing programs, list available units, and access support services.
- Offer property tax incentives or fee waivers for landlords who commit to renting to housing voucher recipients.

Expected Impact:

- Increased awareness among landlords of the benefits of rental assistance programs.
- Higher acceptance rates of housing vouchers and rental subsidies.
- Strengthened collaboration between property owners and housing agencies to reduce homelessness.

SUMMARY

Increasing landlord participation in housing programs is critical to expanding rental access for low-income residents and those exiting homelessness. By implementing a Landlord Risk Mitigation Fund, streamlining voucher processes, and providing targeted education and outreach, Joplin can encourage more landlords to participate in rental assistance programs. These strategies will create a more accessible and equitable rental market, ultimately reducing housing instability and homelessness in the city.

12.8 REFORM POLICIES TO DECRIMINALIZE HOMELESSNESS

Criminalizing homelessness through punitive measures such as anti-camping laws, panhandling bans, and frequent arrests does not address the root causes of housing instability. Instead, it further entrenches individuals in homelessness by creating criminal records, fines, and barriers to securing housing and employment. Shifting from an enforcement-based approach to one centered on service connection, diversion programs, and alternative courts can help break the cycle of homelessness while improving public safety and community well-being.

SHIFT FROM ENFORCEMENT-BASED MEASURES TO HOMELESS COURTS

Traditional fines and jail time for minor offenses related to homelessness, such as loitering or sleeping in public spaces, exacerbate the problem by pushing individuals deeper into poverty. Homeless courts provide an alternative by redirecting individuals into housing, mental health services, and employment programs rather than penalizing them financially or legally.

Key Actions:

- Establish a specialized homeless court where individuals cited for non-violent offenses can have their cases dismissed in exchange for participation in housing programs, mental health treatment, or job training.
- Partner with legal aid organizations to provide representation for individuals facing homelessness-related citations.
- Develop agreements with local shelters and service providers to ensure individuals referred by the court have access to stable housing and support.

- Educate law enforcement, judges, and public defenders on the benefits of diversion programs for individuals experiencing homelessness.

Expected Impact:

- Reduced criminalization of homelessness and fewer individuals burdened with fines or jail time.
- Increased engagement in housing and support services.
- Lower costs for law enforcement, courts, and emergency medical services by decreasing unnecessary arrests and incarceration.

EXPAND HOMELESS DIVERSION PROGRAMS

Many cities have successfully implemented homeless diversion programs that provide individuals with immediate access to resources instead of citations or arrests. These programs ensure that individuals in crisis receive the support they need without unnecessary legal intervention.

Key Actions:

- Develop a pre-arrest diversion program allowing law enforcement officers to refer individuals to homeless service providers instead of issuing fines or making arrests.
- Expand funding for street outreach teams that engage with unhoused individuals before they have encounters with law enforcement.
- Partner with crisis intervention programs to ensure individuals experiencing mental health or substance use issues receive medical care and housing support rather than being incarcerated.
- Create a coordinated referral system linking diversion program participants with rapid rehousing, transitional housing, and workforce training opportunities.

Expected Impact:

- Fewer arrests and legal penalties for individuals experiencing homelessness.
- Increased utilization of housing and support services.
- Strengthened collaboration between law enforcement, social service providers, and the legal system.

ENHANCE COMMUNITY RESOURCE UNITS (CRUS) FOR NON-PUNITIVE ENGAGEMENT

Many cities have restructured their law enforcement response to homelessness by establishing specialized units focused on non-punitive engagement. Community Resource Units (CRUs) work alongside social workers and outreach teams to provide assistance rather than enforcement.

Key Actions:

- Expand Joplin Police Department's Behavioral Health Unit to increase the number of officers trained in crisis intervention and non-enforcement engagement with unhoused individuals.
- Establish co-response teams that pair law enforcement officers with social workers, mental health professionals, and housing navigators to conduct outreach and service referrals.
- Train officers in de-escalation techniques and trauma-informed approaches to interacting with individuals experiencing homelessness.
- Develop a data-sharing system between law enforcement and homeless service providers to ensure coordinated support for individuals with frequent police interactions.

Expected Impact:

- Reduced reliance on law enforcement for homelessness response.
- Increased access to supportive services through direct engagement.
- Improved community relations and trust between law enforcement and individuals experiencing homelessness.

SUMMARY

Reforming policies to decriminalize homelessness is a necessary step toward creating a more effective and compassionate response to housing instability. By shifting from enforcement-based approaches to homeless courts, diversion programs, and non-punitive engagement through Community Resource Units, Joplin can reduce unnecessary criminalization while connecting individuals with the support they need. These strategies will not only improve outcomes for those experiencing homelessness but also enhance public safety and reduce the costs associated with law enforcement and incarceration.

12.9 STRENGTHEN REGIONAL COORDINATION & DATA TRACKING

Addressing homelessness effectively requires seamless coordination among service providers, government agencies, and community organizations. Fragmented service delivery and inconsistent data collection create inefficiencies, leaving gaps in care and limiting access to funding opportunities. Strengthening regional collaboration and improving data tracking will enhance the effectiveness of homelessness interventions, streamline service referrals, and ensure that resources are allocated based on real-time needs.

REQUIRE FULL PARTICIPATION IN THE HOMELESS MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM (HMIS)

The Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) is a federally mandated database used to track homelessness trends, service utilization, and funding eligibility. While some service providers in Joplin participate in HMIS, others, including key shelters and outreach programs, do not, creating significant data gaps that hinder effective planning.

Key Actions:

- Mandate HMIS participation for all homelessness service providers receiving public funding, ensuring a comprehensive database of individuals served.
- Provide technical support and training to smaller shelters and outreach programs to integrate them into HMIS.
- Establish data-sharing agreements between the city, regional service providers, and state agencies to improve cross-agency collaboration.
- Use HMIS data to identify service gaps, monitor housing retention rates, and adjust funding priorities based on emerging trends.

Expected Impact:

- More accurate data on homelessness trends and service utilization.
- Improved ability to secure federal and state funding based on complete data reporting.
- Increased efficiency in Coordinated Entry, ensuring individuals receive the most appropriate housing interventions.

DEVELOP INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION BETWEEN HOUSING, HEALTHCARE, LAW ENFORCEMENT, AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES

A successful homelessness response requires coordinated efforts across multiple sectors, including housing, healthcare, law enforcement, and workforce development. Without a unified strategy, individuals experiencing homelessness often cycle between shelters, emergency rooms, jails, and temporary assistance programs without receiving long-term solutions.

Key Actions:

- Formalize a regional task force composed of representatives from housing services, healthcare providers (including Access Family Care and Ozark Center), law enforcement, employment agencies, and local government officials.
- Create a centralized referral system that allows agencies to coordinate care and share case management information while maintaining confidentiality protections.
- Establish regular cross-agency meetings to discuss trends, service capacity, and collaboration opportunities.
- Implement a coordinated discharge planning protocol between hospitals, jails, and shelters to prevent individuals from being released into homelessness.

Expected Impact:

- Improved coordination between service providers, reducing duplication of efforts and gaps in care.
- Faster access to housing, medical care, and employment resources for individuals exiting homelessness.
- Enhanced ability to track individuals across multiple systems, ensuring they receive the necessary support to maintain housing stability.

PUBLISH ANNUAL HOMELESSNESS IMPACT REPORTS & PROVIDE TRANSPARENT, REAL-TIME DATA

Public transparency and community engagement are critical to maintaining trust and securing ongoing support for homelessness initiatives. Regularly publishing homelessness impact reports and making data accessible in real-time will allow policymakers, service providers, and residents to track progress, identify emerging challenges, and advocate for effective solutions.

Key Actions:

- Develop an open-access homelessness data portal where key metrics—such as the number of individuals housed, shelter utilization rates, and return-to-homelessness statistics—are updated regularly.
- Publish an annual homelessness impact report detailing service outcomes, funding allocations, and program effectiveness.
- Host public forums and presentations to share findings with community stakeholders, business leaders, and advocacy groups.
- Collaborate with research institutions and universities to conduct studies on homelessness trends, barriers to housing stability, and best practices for service delivery.

Expected Impact:

- Increased transparency and accountability in homelessness response efforts.
- Enhanced ability to track the effectiveness of various programs and adjust strategies accordingly.

- Stronger public and political support for evidence-based solutions to homelessness.

SUMMARY

Strengthening regional coordination and improving data tracking are essential for creating a more efficient and effective homelessness response system in Joplin. Requiring full HMIS participation, fostering interagency collaboration, and publishing real-time homelessness data will ensure that resources are allocated strategically, service gaps are addressed, and funding opportunities are maximized. These efforts will lead to better service coordination, improved housing outcomes, and a more informed community working toward long-term solutions.

12.10 EXPAND PUBLIC EDUCATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Public perception and community involvement play a crucial role in shaping the effectiveness of homelessness response efforts. Misconceptions about homelessness, concerns over crime and property values, and resistance to new shelters or housing developments often create barriers to implementing evidence-based solutions. Strengthening public education and engagement can build community support, reduce stigma, and encourage collaboration between local stakeholders.

LAUNCH AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS TO COUNTER MISINFORMATION AND NIMBY OPPOSITION

Many residents hold misconceptions about homelessness, believing that providing more services will "attract" individuals from outside Joplin or that shelters increase crime. These narratives fuel Not In My Backyard (NIMBY) resistance, leading to opposition against new housing developments and service expansions. Public education campaigns can help correct misinformation and foster empathy.

Key Actions:

- Develop a fact-based public awareness campaign highlighting the root causes of homelessness, the effectiveness of housing-first solutions, and the economic benefits of reducing homelessness.
- Utilize local media, social media platforms, and community newsletters to share success stories of individuals who have transitioned out of homelessness.
- Create short documentary-style videos featuring firsthand accounts from service providers, formerly homeless individuals, and local leaders to humanize the issue.
- Partner with local schools and universities to integrate educational programs about homelessness and social services into community outreach projects.
- Engage with local businesses to provide informational materials about homelessness and ways they can contribute to solutions.

Expected Impact:

- Increased public understanding of homelessness as a systemic issue rather than an individual choice.
- Reduced resistance to shelter and housing initiatives.
- Greater support for policy changes that expand affordable housing and services.

ENGAGE FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS, BUSINESSES, AND CIVIC GROUPS IN HOMELESSNESS ADVOCACY

Faith-based organizations, local businesses, and civic groups are influential in shaping public opinion and community initiatives. Many of these groups already provide direct services, such as shelters, food programs, and job training, but a more coordinated advocacy effort can drive long-term policy change and funding commitments.

Key Actions:

- Establish a Homelessness Advocacy Coalition composed of representatives from faith-based groups, businesses, and civic organizations to collaborate on solutions.
- Organize networking events where business leaders and community organizations can explore ways to support workforce development initiatives for individuals exiting homelessness.
- Encourage places of worship to integrate homelessness education into sermons, volunteer initiatives, and outreach programs.
- Partner with business associations to develop corporate social responsibility initiatives focused on homelessness prevention and job placement programs.
- Encourage civic groups, such as Rotary Clubs and neighborhood associations, to adopt homelessness as a community impact focus.

Expected Impact:

- Expanded network of homelessness advocates working toward policy and funding solutions.
- Stronger partnerships between service providers, businesses, and faith-based organizations.
- Increased volunteer participation and financial support for local homelessness programs.

HOST COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS AND PUBLIC FORUMS TO PROMOTE EVIDENCE-BASED SOLUTIONS

Community discussions that allow for open dialogue and education are essential for addressing concerns and building consensus on homelessness initiatives. Many residents may support efforts to address homelessness but feel uninformed about the best approaches or worry about potential impacts on their neighborhoods. Hosting public forums provides opportunities to engage residents, address concerns, and showcase the effectiveness of various solutions.

Key Actions:

- Organize town hall meetings and public forums where policymakers, service providers, and community members can discuss challenges and solutions related to homelessness.
- Hold "myth vs. fact" educational sessions where experts address common misconceptions about homelessness and housing programs.
- Offer training sessions for landlords on the benefits of accepting housing vouchers and participating in rental assistance programs.
- Implement storytelling initiatives where individuals who have experienced homelessness share their journeys to help shift public perception.
- Develop a speaker series featuring experts on housing policy, mental health, and homelessness solutions to educate community members.

Expected Impact:

- Increased public engagement in homelessness solutions.
- Reduced opposition to shelters, affordable housing, and supportive services.
- More informed and proactive community participation in homelessness response efforts.

SUMMARY

Expanding public education and community engagement is essential to overcoming misinformation, reducing NIMBY opposition, and fostering a more supportive environment for homelessness solutions in Joplin. By launching

awareness campaigns, engaging key community stakeholders, and hosting educational workshops, the city can create a more informed and involved public. These efforts will not only build stronger support for evidence-based solutions but also encourage broader participation in advocacy, funding, and volunteer initiatives.

12.11 SECURE LONG-TERM FUNDING FOR HOMELESSNESS SOLUTIONS

A sustainable and well-funded homelessness response system is essential for maintaining emergency shelters, expanding affordable housing, and providing supportive services. While Joplin receives federal and state funding for homelessness programs, these grants are often time-limited, competitive, and insufficient to meet the growing need. Establishing stable, long-term funding sources will ensure that emergency response efforts, housing initiatives, and prevention programs remain effective and scalable over time.

ADVOCATE FOR STATE AND FEDERAL FUNDING INCREASES FOR EMERGENCY SHELTERS AND RAPID REHOUSING

Joplin relies heavily on federal funding, particularly from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), to support Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH), Rapid Rehousing (RRH), and emergency shelter operations. However, these resources are often inadequate to meet local demand. Strengthening advocacy efforts at the state and federal levels can help secure additional funding to sustain and expand key homelessness initiatives.

Key Actions:

- Engage with Missouri state legislators and congressional representatives to advocate for increased funding for homelessness prevention and housing programs.
- Actively participate in state-level coalitions, such as the Missouri Interagency Council on Homelessness, to push for expanded state funding allocations.
- Submit competitive applications for additional HUD grants, including the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) program and Continuum of Care (CoC) funding.
- Partner with regional municipalities to advocate for a larger share of state housing funds for Joplin's homelessness programs.
- Support policy initiatives that allocate state budget surpluses toward affordable housing development and rental assistance programs.

Expected Impact:

- Increased funding for emergency shelters, transitional housing, and rapid rehousing programs.
- Stronger state and federal support for local homelessness prevention initiatives.
- Greater access to long-term housing assistance for individuals transitioning out of homelessness.

ESTABLISH LOCAL FUNDING STREAMS THROUGH SALES TAX INITIATIVES, HOUSING TRUST FUNDS, OR GENERAL FUND ALLOCATIONS

Federal and state funding is critical but unpredictable, making it essential for Joplin to develop local funding mechanisms to sustain homelessness response efforts. Many cities have successfully implemented dedicated funding streams for housing and homelessness services through local taxes, housing trust funds, and municipal budget allocations.

Key Actions:

- Propose a citywide or countywide sales tax initiative dedicated to funding homelessness solutions, with clear public accountability measures.
- Establish a Housing Trust Fund to finance affordable housing development and rental assistance programs, sourcing funds from developer fees, tax increment financing (TIF), or other local revenue sources.
- Allocate a dedicated percentage of Joplin’s general fund budget toward homelessness prevention and housing initiatives.
- Explore impact fees or inclusionary zoning policies that require new developments to contribute to affordable housing funds.
- Create a bond measure to fund the construction of new affordable housing units and Permanent Supportive Housing facilities.

Expected Impact:

- More reliable, long-term funding for housing and homelessness services.
- Reduced dependence on competitive and unstable federal grant cycles.
- Greater financial flexibility to expand emergency shelter capacity and affordable housing projects.

EXPAND CORPORATE AND PHILANTHROPIC PARTNERSHIPS TO GENERATE SUSTAINABLE SUPPORT

Engaging the private sector and philanthropic organizations can provide additional financial resources and strategic partnerships to strengthen Joplin’s homelessness response. Many corporations, foundations, and high-net-worth individuals are interested in supporting housing stability efforts, particularly through workforce development, housing initiatives, and community-based services.

Key Actions:

- Develop a Corporate Sponsorship Program, offering local businesses incentives to fund homelessness services in exchange for public recognition or tax benefits.
- Partner with regional and national philanthropic foundations to secure multi-year grants for supportive housing, job training, and mental health services.
- Create a Homelessness Innovation Fund that allows private donors to invest in evidence-based pilot programs aimed at reducing homelessness.
- Encourage local businesses to participate in workforce development programs that provide employment opportunities for individuals transitioning out of homelessness.
- Collaborate with hospitals and healthcare organizations to co-fund medical respite programs and housing-focused health interventions.

Expected Impact:

- Increased financial support from private sector partners, reducing reliance on public funding.
- More sustainable funding sources for critical services, including emergency shelters and case management programs.
- Stronger collaboration between businesses, nonprofits, and government agencies to create holistic homelessness solutions.

SUMMARY

Securing long-term funding is crucial for ensuring that Joplin's homelessness response remains effective and resilient. By advocating for increased state and federal funding, establishing local revenue sources through taxes and housing trust funds, and expanding private-sector and philanthropic partnerships, Joplin can build a more sustainable and well-resourced homelessness prevention system. These efforts will help create permanent solutions that reduce homelessness, improve housing stability, and foster long-term economic and social benefits for the community.

12.12 SHORT-TERM (1-2 YEARS)

These are initiatives that require minimal infrastructure investment and can be implemented through policy changes, existing funding, or immediate coordination efforts.

STRENGTHEN EVICTION PREVENTION & TENANT PROTECTIONS

- Expand rental assistance programs and establish an emergency housing stabilization fund.
- Implement right-to-counsel programs for tenants facing eviction.
- Advocate for source-of-income anti-discrimination protections.
- Create a community-based rental application system for low-income tenants.
- Strengthen post-housing support through case management and financial literacy programs.

FULLY FUND THE HOMEBOUND PROGRAM

- Secure full funding to expand the Homebound Program, ensuring that individuals experiencing homelessness who wish to return to family or support networks in other communities can do so safely.
- Increase outreach and case management capacity to verify housing arrangements before travel and coordinate with families to ensure a smooth transition.
- Expand transportation assistance options by providing more bus and train vouchers and working with transportation providers to subsidize costs.
- Strengthen partnerships with shelters, hospitals, and law enforcement agencies to identify individuals eligible for the program and offer relocation as an immediate housing solution.

ESTABLISH A SPRINKLER GRANT PROGRAM OR ASSISTANCE FUND

- Create a dedicated funding program to help nonprofit shelters and service providers cover the high cost of sprinkler system installation, allowing more buildings to be converted into emergency shelters.
- Secure city, state, and federal funding for fire safety upgrades, ensuring that compliance costs do not financially burden shelter providers.
- Partner with private donors, businesses, and philanthropic organizations to establish a Sprinkler Assistance Fund, which will help shelters meet fire code requirements.
- Streamline the grant application process to provide quick and accessible funding to shelters in need, reducing bureaucratic delays in expanding emergency housing.
- Advocate for policy adjustments or waivers to make fire safety compliance more achievable for nonprofit shelter providers while maintaining necessary safety standards.

IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH, ADDICTION, & HEALTHCARE SERVICES

- Establish mobile outreach teams for mental health and addiction services.
- Expand mental health integration within shelters and housing programs.
- Develop hospital and jail diversion programs to connect individuals with housing upon discharge.
- Strengthen partnerships between shelters and healthcare providers, including Access Family Care and Ozark Center.
- Expand Joplin Police Department's Behavioral Health Unit to improve crisis intervention.

INCREASE LANDLORD PARTICIPATION & HOUSING ACCESS

- Create a landlord risk mitigation fund to address concerns over damages and non-payment.
- Streamline housing voucher processes with faster inspections and guaranteed payments.
- Educate landlords on the benefits of rental assistance programs through targeted outreach.

REFORM POLICIES TO DECRIMINALIZE HOMELESSNESS

- Shift from enforcement-based measures to homeless courts, offering alternatives to fines and incarceration.
- Expand homeless diversion programs that connect individuals to services instead of issuing fines or arrests.
- Enhance Community Resource Units within law enforcement for non-punitive engagement.

STRENGTHEN REGIONAL COORDINATION & DATA TRACKING

- Full participation is required in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).
- Develop interagency collaboration between housing, healthcare, law enforcement, and workforce development agencies.
- Publish annual homelessness impact reports and provide real-time data through an open-access portal.

EXPAND PUBLIC EDUCATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Launch awareness campaigns to counter misinformation and NIMBY opposition.
- Engage faith-based organizations, businesses, and civic groups in homelessness advocacy.
- Host community workshops and public forums to promote evidence-based solutions.

12.13 MID-TERM GOALS (3-5 YEARS)

These goals require moderate investment, potential zoning or policy changes, and new infrastructure development that may take multiple years to secure funding and implement.

EXPAND AFFORDABLE & SUPPORTIVE HOUSING OPTIONS

- Increase the availability of low-barrier shelters, including funding and location planning.
- Expand Permanent Supportive Housing units with long-term rental subsidies and wraparound services.
- Invest in Rapid Rehousing programs with flexible rental assistance and more extended support periods.
- Establish pet-friendly shelters to remove barriers for individuals with animals.

ENHANCE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & ECONOMIC STABILITY

- Expand job training and apprenticeships tailored to local labor market needs.

- Provide employer incentives such as wage subsidies and tax credits for hiring individuals transitioning out of homelessness.
- Strengthen transportation access by offering subsidized transit passes and employer-sponsored commuter programs.
- Develop daytime resource centers to support job searches, medical care, and social services.

ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS AMONG VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

- Strengthen housing and support for families and children, integrating services with schools.
- Expand transitional housing and mentorship programs for youth aging out of foster care.
- Improve housing access for veterans by increasing Permanent Supportive Housing units and outreach coordination.
- Ensure LGBTQ+ inclusive shelter policies with staff trained in cultural competency.
- Develop senior housing options with integrated healthcare and rental assistance.

SECURE LONG-TERM FUNDING FOR HOMELESSNESS SOLUTIONS

- Establish local funding streams through a housing trust fund, developer fees, or general fund allocations.
- Expand corporate and philanthropic partnerships to generate sustainable support.
- Advocate for increased state and federal funding for emergency shelters and rapid rehousing.

12.14 LONG-TERM GOALS (10 YEARS)

These require significant investment, state or federal funding approvals, tax bonds, or extensive infrastructure development.

EXPAND AFFORDABLE & SUPPORTIVE HOUSING OPTIONS

- Incentivize private development of affordable housing through tax credits, zoning reforms, and grants.
- Promote public-private partnerships and social impact bonds to fund housing initiatives.
- Develop new shelter facilities and supportive housing developments through capital investment.

IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH, ADDICTION, & HEALTHCARE SERVICES

- Create a dedicated inpatient detox and rehabilitation facility with low-barrier entry.
- Implement medical respite programs to provide temporary housing for individuals recovering from health conditions.
- Build long-term housing integrated with behavioral health and medical services.

SECURE SUSTAINABLE LONG-TERM FUNDING

- Propose tax bond measures to finance large-scale housing and shelter development projects.
- Establish a permanent sales tax initiative or municipal funding mechanism dedicated to homelessness prevention.

CONCLUSION: A PATH FORWARD FOR ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS IN JOPLIN

Homelessness in Joplin is a complex and growing crisis that requires a comprehensive, coordinated, and sustained response. This report examined the economic, structural, and systemic factors contributing to homelessness in the region, highlighting the critical challenges faced by individuals experiencing housing instability. From the rise in unsheltered homelessness to the lack of affordable housing, the gaps in emergency shelter capacity, and the ongoing struggles with mental health and substance use treatment, Joplin's response to homelessness must evolve to meet the needs of its most vulnerable residents. While many service providers and agencies work tirelessly to address these issues, a fragmented system, limited funding, and policy barriers continue to hinder progress.

A successful response to homelessness must be multi-faceted, addressing both immediate needs and long-term systemic challenges. Emergency shelters and crisis intervention programs provide essential short-term relief, but without a strong housing continuum, individuals risk cycling in and out of homelessness. Expanding Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH), increasing the availability of Rapid Rehousing (RRH), and ensuring adequate funding for rental assistance programs are necessary steps toward creating long-term stability. Joplin must also focus on preventive strategies, such as strengthening eviction prevention policies, expanding legal aid for tenants, and increasing financial literacy programs to help at-risk residents maintain housing before they experience homelessness.

At the policy level, legislative gaps at both the local and state levels must be addressed. Missouri's weak tenant protections, lack of rent control, and permissive eviction laws disproportionately impact low-income renters and contribute to housing instability. The absence of a right-to-counsel program leaves many tenants vulnerable to eviction proceedings without legal representation. Local efforts to strengthen rental protections, create mediation programs, and expand funding for emergency rental assistance could significantly reduce homelessness rates. Additionally, revising zoning laws to encourage the development of affordable and mixed-income housing will be critical in addressing the long-term housing shortage.

Despite these challenges, Joplin has key assets that can be leveraged to create a more effective homelessness response system. The Regional Commission on Homelessness, the Joplin Homeless Coalition, and numerous faith-based and nonprofit organizations provide essential services and advocacy efforts. Strengthening coordination between these groups and improving data transparency through increased participation in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) will enhance the effectiveness of local programs. Accurate data collection is vital for securing additional funding, identifying service gaps, and ensuring that resources are directed toward evidence-based solutions.

Public perception and community engagement play a crucial role in shaping homelessness policy and determining the success of new initiatives. Misconceptions about homelessness, concerns about crime and property values, and opposition to new shelter projects have slowed progress in Joplin. Public awareness campaigns, educational outreach, and community dialogues can help shift narratives and build broader support for housing-first solutions. Engaging residents in volunteer efforts, service projects, and advocacy initiatives can foster a sense of shared responsibility and help bridge divides between housed and unhoused community members.

The role of the business community and workforce development programs in reducing homelessness cannot be overstated. Employment stability is a key factor in maintaining housing. Yet, many individuals experiencing homelessness struggle to find and retain jobs due to barriers such as lack of transportation, criminal records, or gaps in work history. Strengthening workforce development programs, expanding employer incentives for hiring individuals exiting homelessness, and integrating job training initiatives into housing programs can improve long-term economic security for vulnerable populations.

Funding remains one of the biggest obstacles to addressing homelessness in Joplin. The city currently lacks a dedicated local funding stream for homelessness services, relying primarily on federal and state grants. However, these grants are often restricted, competitive, and insufficient to meet the growing demand for services. Establishing a Housing Trust Fund, implementing a countywide tax initiative, or exploring public-private partnerships could provide a more sustainable financial model. Cities that have successfully reduced homelessness have done so by investing in long-term solutions, such as Permanent Supportive Housing and affordable housing development, rather than relying solely on emergency shelters and short-term interventions.

Joplin also has an opportunity to strengthen regional and state partnerships to enhance its response to homelessness. Neighboring municipalities, state agencies, and advocacy organizations must work collaboratively to address the root causes of homelessness, streamline service delivery, and ensure that funding is allocated where it is most needed. Expanding participation in statewide homelessness initiatives, engaging in inter-agency data sharing, and leveraging state and federal resources will strengthen the city's capacity to provide effective, coordinated services.

Addressing homelessness in Joplin will require bold action, sustained investment, and a commitment to data-driven, person-centered solutions. The evidence is clear: providing stable housing first, combined with supportive services, significantly reduces chronic homelessness, improves individual well-being, and lowers overall public costs. The Housing First model, which prioritizes immediate access to stable housing without preconditions, has proven effective in cities across the country. Joplin should expand its adoption of this model while ensuring that adequate case management and wraparound services are available to support long-term success.

In the next five years, Joplin can make significant progress in reducing homelessness through targeted policy reforms, service expansion, and increased community engagement. Expanding emergency shelter capacity, increasing rental assistance programs, strengthening eviction protections, and fostering regional collaboration will be essential in meeting immediate needs. Simultaneously, investments in permanent housing, workforce development, and mental health treatment will provide long-term solutions that break the cycle of homelessness.

Joplin has the framework and community dedication needed to enact meaningful changes, but success will depend on strong leadership, sustained advocacy, and a willingness to implement bold, evidence-based policies. By fostering collaboration among local government, service providers, business leaders, and residents, the city can move toward a future where homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring. Addressing homelessness is not just a moral imperative, it is an economic and social necessity that benefits the entire community. The time to act is now.

EXHIBIT A: PUBLIC SAFETY SALES TAX PROPOSAL FOR ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS IN JOPLIN

To address the growing challenges of homelessness, housing instability, and public safety in Joplin, a one percent sales tax increase is proposed in both Jasper and Newton counties. This dedicated funding measure will support law enforcement, fire and emergency medical services, emergency shelters, housing programs, and mental health interventions. The tax is projected to generate one hundred five million dollars over ten years, with funds allocated to specific initiatives that address homeless outreach, eviction prevention, shelter expansion, workforce development, and regional coordination.

To ensure transparency, accountability, and the most effective use of these funds, each county will establish a governing board responsible for overseeing the allocation and implementation of tax revenue. These boards will be composed of representatives from law enforcement, fire and emergency medical services, homelessness service providers, local government officials, and community stakeholders. Their primary function will be to evaluate funding priorities, monitor program effectiveness, and ensure that resources are directed toward evidence-based solutions that provide measurable benefits to the community.

Each board will set annual funding priorities based on emerging needs, such as shifts in homelessness trends, changes in emergency response demands, and program performance data. They will conduct regular reviews of funded initiatives, tracking key indicators such as crisis intervention outcomes, reductions in chronic homelessness, and the effectiveness of housing and workforce development programs. Public reporting requirements will ensure that the tax revenue is managed transparently, allowing residents to see how funds are being used to improve both public safety and housing stability.

By establishing these governing boards, Jasper and Newton counties will ensure that tax revenue is spent responsibly, effectively, and in alignment with community priorities. This oversight will provide flexibility to adapt strategies as conditions evolve, ensuring that the region takes a proactive and sustainable approach to addressing homelessness and public safety over the next decade.

BREAKDOWN OF FUNDING ALLOCATIONS

PUBLIC SAFETY AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE – \$42,000,000 (40.0%)

A significant portion of the funds will be directed toward ensuring adequate law enforcement, fire, and emergency medical services to respond to crises involving individuals experiencing homelessness. These services play a critical role in maintaining public safety, addressing emergencies, and connecting individuals with appropriate support services.

Law enforcement grants will receive twenty-one million dollars over ten years to support payroll for officers engaged in crisis intervention, homeless outreach, and community policing efforts. Officers trained in de-escalation and crisis response will work directly with service providers to engage with individuals experiencing homelessness in a non-punitive, supportive manner. These funds will also help expand partnerships between law enforcement and mental health professionals to create co-responder programs that reduce unnecessary arrests and emergency room visits. Funding may also be used to supplement salaries for specialized units, provide advanced training in crisis

intervention and trauma-informed policing, and purchase necessary equipment such as radios, mobile outreach technology, and protective gear.

Fire and emergency medical services will also receive twenty-one million dollars over ten years to ensure emergency response capacity for shelters, encampments, and vulnerable populations. Emergency responders are frequently called to assist individuals experiencing medical crises, overdoses, or exposure-related health issues. These funds will help strengthen coordination between EMS, hospitals, and shelters to improve emergency response times, expand mobile medical outreach teams, and ensure that first responders have the resources they need to manage homelessness-related emergencies effectively. Funding can also be used to increase staffing, provide specialized training for responding to medical emergencies related to homelessness, and purchase life-saving equipment such as naloxone for overdose reversal, portable defibrillators, and cold-weather response gear.

This funding will allow law enforcement, fire, and emergency medical personnel to enhance their ability to respond effectively to crises while ensuring that individuals experiencing homelessness receive appropriate care and support.

HOUSING STABILITY AND PREVENTION PROGRAMS – \$7,350,000 (7.0%)

These initiatives focus on preventing evictions, increasing landlord participation, and ensuring vulnerable populations receive proper housing assistance.

Eviction prevention and tenant protections will receive three million one hundred fifty thousand dollars over ten years to expand rental assistance, right-to-counsel programs, emergency housing stabilization funds, and tenant protections. The homebound program expansion will be allocated the same amount to fully fund relocation assistance, transportation vouchers, and case management to help individuals experiencing homelessness return to verified support systems in other communities. Landlord participation and housing access will receive two million one hundred thousand dollars to establish a landlord risk mitigation fund and streamline the housing voucher process.

SHELTER EXPANSION AND SUPPORT SERVICES – \$26,775,000 (25.5%)

Building and staffing low-barrier emergency shelters and increasing access to wraparound mental health and addiction treatment services is a critical step in reducing long-term homelessness. These shelters provide individuals experiencing homelessness with stable, secure environments where they can access necessary support services, including case management, healthcare, and pathways to permanent housing.

Shelter construction and staffing will receive twenty-one million dollars over ten years to fund the construction and operation of new shelters, ensuring twenty-four-hour access with on-site services. To maximize accessibility and service coordination, the primary shelter should be constructed in Newton County within one-half mile of I-44 and Rangeline Road at the most affordable location. This area is strategically chosen due to its proximity to the Department of Motor Vehicles and the Social Security Office, which are essential for individuals experiencing homelessness to obtain identification, access benefits, and secure employment.

Establishing the shelter in this location will ensure that those in need are within walking distance of critical services while also being positioned along a major transportation corridor. To further enhance accessibility, this plan

recommends relocating the Joplin bus station to this area, ensuring that individuals utilizing shelter services have direct access to public transportation. This move would improve connectivity between the shelter, workforce programs, medical facilities, and other essential services.

The sprinkler grant program will receive three million one hundred fifty thousand dollars to provide fire safety upgrades to nonprofit shelters, ensuring compliance with safety regulations and increasing overall shelter capacity. Mental health and addiction services will receive one million five hundred seventy-five thousand dollars to expand mobile outreach teams, crisis diversion programs, and behavioral health services integrated within shelters. An additional one million fifty thousand dollars will be allocated for comprehensive mental health and addiction services, including inpatient detox facilities, medical respite programs, and integrated behavioral health housing to provide ongoing care and stability for individuals transitioning out of homelessness.

By constructing the primary shelter in Newton County near I-44 and Rangeline Road, the region can ensure a centralized, accessible hub for homelessness services, reducing barriers to assistance while improving coordination between housing programs, public transportation, and essential government services.

REGIONAL COORDINATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT – \$7,350,000 (7.0%)

Ensuring that services work together efficiently and providing economic stability programs will help reduce homelessness over time.

Workforce development and economic stability initiatives will receive two million one hundred thousand dollars over ten years to expand job training, wage subsidies, and transportation access to help individuals transition out of homelessness. Support for vulnerable populations, including families, youth aging out of foster care, veterans, LGBTQ+ individuals, and seniors, will be allocated one million fifty thousand dollars. Regional coordination and data tracking will receive the same amount to ensure full participation in the homeless management information system, interagency collaboration, and real-time homelessness tracking. Public education and community engagement will receive two million one hundred thousand dollars to fund awareness campaigns, community workshops, and outreach efforts. Homelessness decriminalization and law enforcement reform will be allocated one million fifty thousand dollars to establish homeless courts, diversion programs, and alternatives to incarceration.

LARGE-SCALE AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT – \$17,850,000 (17.0%)

Seventeen million eight hundred fifty thousand dollars over ten years will be used to encourage private affordable housing construction, establish public-private partnerships, and increase the availability of long-term housing solutions for individuals transitioning out of homelessness and those at risk of housing instability.

A significant portion of these funds will be dedicated to incentivizing private developers to construct affordable housing units by offering tax credits, low-interest loans, and direct subsidies. These incentives will help offset the high costs of construction and encourage the development of housing that remains accessible to low-income individuals and families. In addition, zoning reforms and streamlined

permitting processes will be explored to reduce barriers that often delay or prevent the construction of affordable housing projects.

The funding will also be used to expand public-private partnerships, bringing together city and county governments, nonprofit housing organizations, and private developers to create mixed-income housing developments. These partnerships will ensure that affordable housing is integrated into the broader community rather than being isolated, helping to promote economic diversity and prevent the concentration of poverty. The goal is to create developments that include a mix of affordable, workforce, and market-rate housing, ensuring long-term sustainability.

A portion of the funding will also go toward supportive housing programs, ensuring that individuals who secure affordable housing have access to wraparound services, including case management, mental health support, job placement assistance, and life skills training. These services are critical in maintaining long-term housing stability and reducing the risk of individuals returning to homelessness.

To maximize the impact of this funding further, the program will explore partnerships with faith-based organizations, land banks, and community development corporations to identify underutilized properties that can be repurposed for affordable housing. Additionally, efforts will be made to encourage homeownership opportunities for low-income families through down payment assistance programs and first-time homebuyer incentives.

By investing in long-term housing solutions, this initiative will not only provide immediate relief to those experiencing homelessness but also create a sustainable and scalable model for affordable housing development in Joplin and surrounding areas. These efforts will ensure that individuals and families have access to stable, safe, and affordable housing, reducing the strain on emergency shelters and social services while strengthening the overall community.

SUSTAINABLE FUNDING AND LONG-TERM INVESTMENTS – \$3,675,000 (3.5%)

A portion of the funds will be reserved for long-term sustainability efforts to ensure that the programs and services established through this initiative continue beyond the initial ten-year funding cycle. Without a stable and reliable funding source, many homelessness prevention and housing programs face uncertainty once initial grants and tax measures expire. By creating dedicated, long-term financial mechanisms, this initiative will provide ongoing support for public safety, shelter expansion, mental health services, and affordable housing development.

One million five hundred seventy-five thousand dollars will be allocated to establish a municipal housing trust fund, which will serve as a dedicated financial resource to support affordable housing projects, rental assistance programs, and homelessness prevention initiatives. Housing trust funds are a proven model used in cities across the country to provide permanent funding for housing solutions. The goal of this fund will be to leverage local tax revenue, state and federal grants, and private contributions to ensure long-term financial support for housing stability efforts.

Additionally, a portion of the funds will be used to explore and implement tax bond measures that can generate additional revenue for homelessness response and housing development. These bonds would allow the city and county governments to secure upfront capital for large-scale projects, such as the construction of permanent supportive housing and affordable rental units, while repaying the bonds over time through dedicated funding sources.

A key long-term strategy will be establishing or supporting nonprofit builders who can take advantage of federal and state funding opportunities, such as the HUD Continuum of Care (CoC) Builds Grant, which was recently available to communities looking to expand their permanent supportive housing capacity. Unlike for-profit developers, nonprofit builders focus on mission-driven development rather than maximizing profits, allowing them to create and maintain deeply affordable housing for low-income and formerly homeless individuals.

By investing in local nonprofit housing developers, Jasper and Newton counties can help create a sustainable pipeline of affordable housing construction that is eligible for state and federal funding programs. This initiative will also work to identify underutilized land and vacant buildings that can be converted into housing, reducing the overall costs of development while increasing the speed of project completion.

To further enhance the impact of nonprofit builders, the initiative will focus on capacity-building efforts, such as training local nonprofits on how to apply for and manage large federal housing grants, forming partnerships with experienced developers, and providing pre-development funding to cover the early costs of site selection, permitting, and feasibility studies.

By prioritizing nonprofit-driven housing development, this initiative ensures that new affordable housing remains permanently accessible to those in need, rather than subject to market fluctuations or for-profit interests. Establishing strong nonprofit housing organizations will position the region to continuously compete for new housing grants and development opportunities, ensuring long-term investment in safe, stable, and affordable housing for the community.

PROPOSED BUDGET OF 1% SALES TAX IN JASPER/NEWTON COUNTIES

Initiative	Estimated Cost (Annual)	Project Rate	Total Project Cost (10 Years)	Description
Law Enforcement Grants (Payroll Support)	\$ 2,100,000.00	20.00%	\$ 21,000,000.00	Funding for law enforcement payroll to support crisis intervention, homeless outreach, and community policing efforts.
Fire/EMS Grants (Payroll Support)	\$ 2,100,000.00	20.00%	\$ 21,000,000.00	Funding for fire and EMS payroll to ensure emergency medical and fire response capacity for shelters and encampments.

Eviction Prevention & Tenant Protections	\$ 315,000.00	3.00%	\$ 3,150,000.00	Rental assistance programs, emergency stabilization funds, right-to-counsel programs, source-of-income protections, and financial literacy programs.
Homebound Program Expansion	\$ 315,000.00	3.00%	\$ 3,150,000.00	Funding for relocation assistance, transportation vouchers, and increased case management capacity.
Sprinkler Grant Program	\$ 315,000.00	3.00%	\$ 3,150,000.00	Grants for nonprofit shelters to upgrade fire safety compliance and expand emergency shelter capacity.
Mental Health & Addiction Services	\$ 157,500.00	1.50%	\$ 1,575,000.00	Mobile outreach teams, shelter-based mental health services, hospital/jail diversion programs, expanded Behavioral Health Unit.
Landlord Participation & Housing Access	\$ 210,000.00	2.00%	\$ 2,100,000.00	Landlord risk mitigation fund, streamlined housing voucher processing, landlord outreach, and education.
Homelessness Decriminalization & Law Enforcement Reform	\$ 105,000.00	1.00%	\$ 1,050,000.00	Establish homeless courts and diversion programs, and expand non-punitive law enforcement engagement.
Regional Coordination & Data Tracking	\$ 105,000.00	1.00%	\$ 1,050,000.00	Full participation in HMIS, interagency collaboration, homelessness impact reports, and open-access data portal.
Public Education & Community Engagement	\$ 210,000.00	2.00%	\$ 2,100,000.00	Awareness campaigns, community workshops, faith-based outreach, and public forums.
Shelter Construction & Staffing	\$ 2,100,000.00	20.00%	\$21,000,000.00	Building and staffing new low-barrier shelters with wraparound services, ensuring 24/7 operations and security.
Workforce Development & Economic Stability	\$ 210,000.00	2.00%	\$ 2,100,000.00	Expand job training, offer wage subsidies, increase transportation access, and create daytime resource centers.
Support for Vulnerable Populations	\$ 105,000.00	1.00%	\$1,050,000.00	Strengthen services for families, youth aging out of foster care, veterans, LGBTQ+ individuals, and seniors.
Strengthen Regional Coordination & Public Education	\$ 105,000.00	1.00%	\$ 1,050,000.00	Increase interagency collaboration, enhance public awareness campaigns, and improve real-time homelessness data tracking.

Large-Scale Affordable Housing Development	\$ 1,785,000.00	17.00%	\$ 17,850,000.00	Incentivize private, affordable housing development, establish public-private housing partnerships, and build new shelter facilities.
Comprehensive Mental Health & Addiction Services	\$ 105,000.00	1.00%	\$ 1,050,000.00	Develop inpatient detox/rehabilitation facilities, medical respite programs, and integrated behavioral health housing.
Secure Sustainable Long-Term Funding	\$ 157,500.00	1.50%	\$ 1,575,000.00	Implement tax bond measures, expand corporate/philanthropic partnerships, and create a dedicated municipal funding mechanism.
Total		100%	\$ 105,000,000.00	

PROJECTED IMPACT

This tax proposal is designed to improve public safety, reduce homelessness, and enhance housing stability through targeted, evidence-based interventions. Expected outcomes include reduced strain on law enforcement and emergency responders, expanded access to mental health and addiction treatment, increased shelter capacity and affordable housing availability, stronger eviction prevention programs, improved coordination among regional agencies, and sustainable long-term funding mechanisms.

SUMMARY

The one percent sales tax initiative represents a balanced, community-driven approach to addressing homelessness and public safety in Joplin. By strategically allocating funds to law enforcement, fire and emergency medical services, shelter expansion, eviction prevention, mental health services, and workforce development, this measure provides a sustainable and effective response to the growing crisis. Through accountability, transparency, and a commitment to evidence-based solutions, this initiative will help Joplin become a leader in tackling homelessness while ensuring public safety remains a top priority.

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