



NORTHWEST MICHIGAN
COALITION
TO END
HOMELESSNESS

DIVERSION AND RAPID EXIT PROGRAM

(GREATER GRAND TRAVERSE AREA)

NORTHWEST MICHIGAN COALITION TO END HOMELESSNESS

GOODWILL NORTHERN MICHIGAN AND

NORTHWEST MICHIGAN COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCY

DIVERSION AND RAPID EXIT PROGRAM

Overview

Diversion is a practice being implemented in communities across the country and is used to assist people to resolve their immediate housing crisis by accessing alternatives to entering emergency shelter or the experience of unsheltered living. The Northwest Michigan Coalition to End Homelessness believes that Diversion and Rapid Exit programming is the most effective way to prevent homelessness. Diversion is also a much more effective intervention from the perspective of homeless services systems and ending homelessness. Diversion stems the inflow into shelter; every person diverted makes a shelter bed available for someone else who needs it. It is considerably less costly, on average, than a shelter stay. Diversion avoids the emergency-related costs of unsheltered homelessness including ambulance use, sanitation, and interaction with law enforcement.

The NWCEH is aligned with the [National Alliance to End Homelessness \(NAEH\)](#) that diversion services have the greatest impact on the response to ending homelessness. Traditional prevention strategies focused on people facing eviction are no longer proven to have the greatest impact on stemming the inflow into homelessness. All preventative funding and staffing throughout the NWCEH will be aligned with diversion services and rapid-exit from shelter.



Diversion provides an opportunity to assist those who are requesting homeless housing resources (e.g. shelter) in finding possible housing options outside of the traditional homeless system, ensuring that immediate and alternative arrangements are fully explored and supported while reserving shelter beds for those who are the most vulnerable and have no other options.

Targeted Diversion services offer light-touch services with minimal financial assistance to people experiencing homelessness for the first time or those who have had no contact with the homeless

response system in the past 18 months. Diversion does not necessarily ensure that individuals or families will have housing that meets the standard affordability standard (meaning housing where the household pays only 30 percent of their income toward housing costs), nor is it designed to eliminate poverty or housing mobility. Within the Northwest Michigan Coalition to End Homelessness, providers refer to diversion services as creative problem solving.

The Northwest Michigan Coalition to End Homelessness is committed to the practice of Diversion as shelter capacity and housing stock remain limited. As in every community across the country, the need for homeless services in NW Michigan exceeds the resources available. Now, more than ever we must practice intensive and comprehensive diversion services to ensure every effort is being made at the front end of the homeless response system to address critical capacity issues. The intent of diversion is to give someone who has become homeless a positive alternative to entering emergency shelter or being unsheltered. Shelter can be traumatic, unhealthy, and unsafe. Some data show that people who enter shelter experience longer periods of homelessness than those who are diverted from it. No matter how well-run shelter is, clients prefer to be in housing, and housing is more likely to improve their well-being.

NWCEH is committed to changing the philosophy of the Coordinated Entry System to include comprehensive Diversion strategies across all access points and throughout the course of someone’s experience of homelessness.

From	To	Responsible party
What programs are you eligible for and who has a bed available	What would resolve your current housing crisis?	Call Center Staff
Assessment/Eligibility	Structured problem-solving conversation about household situation and resources	Street Outreach / Shelter and Diversion worker
Intake or put on wait list	Support crisis resolution to avoid shelter entry	Diversion Worker

Diversion Services

Diversion case managers will provide a combination of direct services and limited financial assistance to individuals and families between 14 and 30 days (varies depending on case) resulting in an alternate safe and stable housing arrangement. This removes the immediate need for additional homeless services including emergency shelter, or rapid-rehousing intervention.

Case managers will identify solutions and alternate housing arrangements to immediately resolve a client's housing crisis such as re-establishing lease terms with recent landlord or identifying a viable doubled-up situation with family or friends. Additionally, case managers will provide ongoing assessment for health and safety risks that may indicate diversion services are not an appropriate intervention. This includes situations when a client indicates they do not feel safe remaining in their current housing situation or that one or more members of their household have a chronic health or behavioral health condition that is being exasperated by their current housing situation.

For between 14 and 30 days, case managers will provide diversion services to identify a viable housing solution for identified clients. If the household cannot identify a housing solution, or a newly identified safety and/or health risk impacts their ability to remain in their housing, the case manager will consult with partners of the NWCEH to develop an appropriate next step for the client including a referral to temporary emergency shelter and/or street outreach. If entering a motel or a shelter for the first time, clients will be engaged at least once per day.

Diversion Outcomes

Effective Diversion practices can reduce the length of time homelessness, number of households experiencing homelessness and in turn increase the rate of households returning to housing and are not entering an already homelessness system.

DIVERSION OUTCOMES

1. Permanently back with family or friends
2. Return to their own residence
3. Temporarily diverted as they seek new housing
4. Relocating permanently to safe place out of town

Target Population

Individuals or families who present to the homeless response system as literally homeless should all be screened using diversion strategies at the first point of contact to the system. Those experiencing homelessness for the first time or who have had no contact with the homeless response system in the past 18 months are more likely to be successfully diverted than those who are experiencing chronic homelessness.

It is critical for all access points within the Coordinated Entry System are committed and are adherent to the workflows, processes, and procedures surrounding Diversion practices. The Call Center is often the first point of access for individuals and families accessing the homeless response system for the first time,

although it is not the last time Diversion should be implemented. Diversion is an intervention that can be effective at every system connection point while the person is still experiencing homelessness. For example, an initial diversion attempt will be made at the call center with every caller. Folks who meet the targeting criteria listed above will receive intensive diversion services by a diversion case manager. However, diversion conversations can and should be attempted during temporary emergency shelter stays as well as during meetings with street outreach providers.

Eligible Program Activities and Financial Expenses

This model is structured to provide light-touch services and limited financial assistance to help clients explore other possible options for securing housing outside of the traditional homeless serving system.

Services include:

- Initial meeting with the household to brainstorm/explore possible non-traditional options
- Mediation and/or dispute resolution with previous landlords, family or friends
- Referrals to mainstream services or other community resources

Eligible financial assistance includes:

- Payment for background and credit checks
- Landlord fees
- Move-in costs (including deposit and first month's rent; cost of moving truck; storage)
- Utility deposits and arrears
- Previous housing debt/rental arrears
- Transportation (including bus tickets for both local transportation and relocation)
- Grocery card
- Interpreter costs
- Fees for assistance securing ID's, birth certificates, social security cards
- Certifications or license fees related to school or employment
- Work or education related assistance
- Other types of financial costs that will help the family obtain housing