

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-Office Communication

Date: April 20, 2022

To: Interested Parties

From: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

Subject: Reimagining and modernizing the provision of human services in Milwaukee County

To achieve equity and healthy outcomes for all residents of Milwaukee County, let's explore a hybrid model to deliver resources provided by Department of Health and Human Services in neighborhoods, through local community centers, and in partnership with municipalities. This community-centered option would reduce the sole reliance on a facilities-based approach as the hub for delivery of human services. Presented now are only constructions options, and, we have a once in a generation opportunity to explore how we can achieve cost-savings and allow for resources to be routed more directly to service delivery rather than administrative operations.

As the country transitions to a new stage of the COVID-19 pandemic, we further have an obligation to reflect and let this experience inform our actions. What have we learned about the needs of residents and staff that allows for a reevaluation? Instead of returning to a status quo that does not always best serve residents, especially if we were to face another pandemic, let's design a reimagined standard with an equity lens that centers residents. That intent prompts us to consider whether residents would be better served by a dispersed model rather than a facilities-centered one.

The dignity of our residents is a priority in the delivery of services. If our goal is to connect residents with the services they need, we must ensure that it is an easy, safe, and positive experience. Transportation is an impediment that the County needs to consider. Not everyone owns a vehicle and not everyone is serviced by a bus route that brings them directly to 12th and Vliet. Travel and accessing resources takes time. Stopping by your neighborhood library on your lunch break to sign up for a needed program is more conducive than trying to take time off work to travel downtown and wait for an indiscriminate amount of time. People are more comfortable when they are somewhere familiar to them. We all know that systems can perpetuate shame. Increased accessibility closer to home supports the goal of removing the stigma of seeking out lifesaving services and strengthens our relationship with community.

The Milwaukee County Department of Health and Human Services could pursue a hybrid-model that brings assistance directly to residents through deployment of services in community centers, such as Milwaukee Public Libraries and Milwaukee County senior centers, and into the homes of residents. The Department could also explore partnering with local community organizations. Increasing accessibility and salience of our services is a critical way we achieve racial equity in pursuit of becoming the healthiest county in the state of Wisconsin.

As Milwaukee County continues towards becoming carbon neutral by 2050, this pathway forward also could promote efficient use of existing resources and enable cost-savings ([File No. 21-389](#)). Milwaukee County could utilize facilities that we already own, find synchronicities where City and County resources overlap, and avoid creating investments that will incur costs to maintain. Resources are placed into staffing capabilities and service delivery, instead of facilities.

DHHS adopted a “No Wrong Door” policy as part of its 2020-2025 [strategic plan](#), enabling residents seeking services the ability to receive assistance no matter which point of contact they encounter. This reimaged model of service delivery aligns with the “No Wrong Door” model because we meet residents where they are at.

Service delivery in this manner is possible. New York City recently deployed the Mayor’s [Public Engagement Unit](#) (PEU) to directly connect city residents with services. Through [mobile units](#), city agencies travel throughout all boroughs providing “financial empowerment, tenant resources, benefits enrollment, small business support, career services and health insurance education.”

In Marin City, California, community organizations partnered with local governments to bring services directly into the community via a permanent presence at a local school and recurrent [pop-up events](#). Residents were able to sign up for energy assistance, rental assistance, and referrals to the Homeless Outreach team, cash assistance, childcare, and economic opportunity programs. Similarly, Riverside County, California partnered with local community organizations to host pop-events throughout the region to bring emergency rental assistance [directly to residents](#) in convenient locations.

In [Monmouth County](#), New Jersey, “representatives from the Monmouth County Department of Human Services and several Community-Based organizations” were “on-site at several convenient locations throughout the week to take Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) applications and provide information about other resources available.” In addition to these pop-up events, Monmouth County launched a new program in 2022: [Assisting Community through Services](#) (ACTS) with the goal of introducing “place-based activities, initiatives that bring supports and services to residents in the local community where they live, increasing access and promoting resident wellness and engagement.

In conclusion, Milwaukee County’s vision is that by achieving racial equity, we will become the healthiest county in the state of Wisconsin. With that vision, we consider what promotes racial and health equity when making decisions. Before we commit to a new construction option, it is imperative that we come together as a body to reimagine how we envision service delivery to ensure we are reaching those who need it and use a racial health and equity lens. Delivering services directly to residents in their communities and homes is a modern way to ensure equity across the board.