

Hi there, I'm Secretary Kody Kinsley, from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. I am honored to welcome you all to the annual "Bringing it Home: Ending Homelessness in North Carolina" conference.

I am grateful for our partners at the North Carolina Coalition to End Homelessness and the North Carolina Housing Coalition who have joined us to sponsor this year's conference, and for all their hard work serving the people of our state.

We are all here because we share a similar goal – working toward a North Carolina where all individuals and families can thrive in their communities. That's why we've set out three priorities for the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services: investing in behavioral health and resilience, focusing on child and family well-being, and building a strong and inclusive workforce.

A key factor in all these priorities is access to safe, quality, affordable housing.

While safe and stable housing has long been recognized as a critical social determinant of health, the COVID-19 pandemic reaffirmed that housing instability and homelessness –is also a public health crisis.

It's no surprise COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on individuals experiencing homelessness. As so many of you know well, people without secure housing are more likely to live in conditions that prevent social distancing, often lack PPE to keep themselves and others safe, and may be more likely to have underlying health conditions that increase their risk of serious illness from COVID-19. Many others have seen their housing situation newly destabilized during the pandemic and the worsening housing crisis that has resulted. The COVID pandemic reenforced that housing and health are deeply linked.

During this crisis, DHHS housing programs have seen an unprecedented level of need. Our Emergency Solutions Grant program has long provided essential emergency services to homeless individuals and families. During the pandemic, they have also deployed \$55 million in COVID relief funds to help pay for shelter costs, purchase equipment, help individuals pay their rent and utility bills, conduct outreach, enhance IT systems, and support homelessness prevention activities.

At the same time, we have been working to maximize additional tools we have to address the root causes of homelessness. We know that healthcare—what we think of as happening in a hospital or clinic—only accounts for 20% of a person's overall health. Research shows that all the other parts of a person's life—whether they are safe from violence, have access to healthy food, and have access to safe and stable housing—account for the remaining 80%. That's why we became the first state in the nation authorized to use Medicaid dollars to pay for services addressing the underlying drivers of health for high-needs Medicaid beneficiaries. Last month, we launched Pilots in three regions of the state to pay for food services, and next month we will add housing and transportation services. If these Pilots are effective, North Carolina will provide

a national model for states looking to prevent and address housing instability – and ultimately improve health – using Medicaid funding. Meanwhile, all of you have stepped up, despite high need and limited resources. Over the past year, over 10,000 North Carolinians were served in emergency or temporary shelters, 1300 were supported by Homelessness prevention programs, over 2500 North Carolinians were connected to support through Street Outreach programs, and over 4000 were supported by Rapid Rehousing programs. I am deeply thankful for your work. Your response continues to ensure the most vulnerable North Carolinians are cared for.

Your work also underscores that there is still much work to be done. Our continued partnership will be key to ensuring we learn from the lessons of the past two years, keeping vulnerable individuals and families healthy, and spending recovery dollars effectively,

I want to again express my deepest gratitude for each and every person working on the front lines to create housing stability and opportunity for all North Carolinians. I look forward to seeing how, together, we will make lasting progress ensuring EVERY person in our communities has safe, stable housing, and the dignity it provides.