

Background/Executive Summary

The [Natrona Collective Health Trust](#) (“the Trust”) was founded in 1977 as the Wyoming Medical Center (WMC) Foundation to support the needs of the hospital. Following WMC’s affiliation with Banner Health, they converted to a private health foundation and renamed to Natrona Collective Health Trust. The Trust is the largest private foundation in Wyoming and is committed to improving the health and well-being of the residents of Natrona County. The Trust has long recognized the connection between housing and health outcomes and has begun investing in staff capacity and resources to address homelessness and housing instability. Building on this foundation, the Trust is now partnering with CSH to develop a formal housing strategy as part of its upcoming strategic plan.

CSH’s process has drawn on four sources: 1) a review of local and statewide housing data and reports, 2) an online survey that was open to a broad subset of local partners, including community members, local government, funding entities, and service providers (referred to in this report as the community-wide survey), 3) a survey that CHT staff facilitated collection of at shelters and service organizations to gain the perspective of people with lived experience of homelessness and/or housing instability (referred to in this report as the lived experience survey), and 4) two facilitated community conversations with key partners across Natrona County.

Environmental Scan of Existing Resources Summary

In 2024, the [Wyoming Community Development Authority](#) (WCDA) released its Statewide Housing Needs Assessment, which highlighted unique challenges related to housing in Natrona County. Additionally, WCDA created a [local look-up tool](#) related to this work, which reveals that Natrona County has one of the highest affordability / rental gaps for households with income below \$25,000, with a shortage of 1,117 units that are affordable to households earning \$25k or less. The [WY Statewide Continuum of Care \(CoC\) also analyzed data from 2019-2024 from the US Census](#) tables and the WY Department of Health data. They were able to analyze 11 risk indicators for homelessness using county-level data. Natrona County scored incredibly high in prevalence of risk factors with 5+ risk factors. [The Wyoming Statewide Strategic Housing Action plan](#) was published in January 2025 and provided additional key information at a statewide perspective. Collectively, these reports and analysis highlight the urgency and intensity of Natrona County’s housing shortage.

Themes

Affordability

Housing affordability emerged as the single most pressing challenge across every component of the environmental scan, community conversations, and surveys. In the community-wide survey, 66% of respondents identified high housing costs and the lack of affordable units as a primary cause of housing instability. The impact of these rising costs is reflected with approximately 55% of lived experience survey respondents who have experienced homelessness in the past 5 years sharing that they had sheltered outside at some point in their experience of homelessness. Qualitative feedback reinforces the depth of this burden. Respondents described the “majority of income going to rent,” leaving “nothing left for the extras like food, healthcare, recreation, transportation,” and shared stories of families being separated or forced into unsafe environments due to the scarcity of affordable units. In the community conversation, developing low-barrier, deeply affordable housing paired with supportive services surfaced as a top indicator of success in addressing homelessness in Natrona County.

“[What are the greatest barriers to accessing stable and affordable housing in Natrona County?] Price, price, price.” - Lived Experience Survey Respondent

“The shortage of affordable and supportive housing in Natrona County leads to poorer physical and mental health, increased financial stress, and barriers to accessing care and community support. People on fixed incomes often have to settle for subpar units or locations with limited transportation and services. Long waitlists, coupled with rigorous application processes, make achieving stability even more complicated.” -Community-Wide Survey Respondent

High Barriers to Housing Access & Shelter

Beyond affordability, the second most prevalent theme across all sources was the multitude of barriers that prevent people from obtaining housing or shelter. For housing, this includes a history of justice-system involvement, past evictions, poor credit, application fees, security deposits, and limited landlord willingness to work with voucher programs. For shelter, these barriers included substance use/sobriety requirements, having a pet, and program/service requirements. The community-wide survey data revealed that 40% of respondents identified high-barrier low-income housing as a major obstacle. Survey respondents shared restrictive eligibility criteria and documentation requirements as challenges in the existing low-income housing stock. Having a history of justice-system involvement was cited as a top barrier to housing access in both the community-wide survey (24% of respondents) and the lived experience survey (17% of respondents). Mental health also surfaced as a barrier to housing stability in the community-wide survey data, as respondents listed mental health needs among the top barriers, and service providers noted that people with substance use disorder and severe and persistent mental illness often do not have the support they need to obtain and

maintain housing. Having low-barrier housing and shelter to address the needs of every individual was cited as the top metric for success during the community conversations when participants were asked, “What would success in addressing housing and homelessness in Natrona County look like 5 years from now?”

“Reduce the number of hoops people have to jump through to get a roof over their heads.” -Lived Experience Survey Respondent

“There's lots of untapped resources through the Housing Authority because they choose to be more strict than federal requirements force them to be.” - Community-Wide Survey Respondent

Public Perception & Centering Lived Experience

Stigma surrounding homelessness and housing insecurity remains a significant barrier to meaningful communitywide engagement. In community conversations, people shared negative public narratives and misconceptions about people experiencing homelessness, compounding the challenges individuals face, and impeding local progress. Additionally, folks in the lived experience survey highlighted the importance of being asked for their opinions, and taking action based on their input.-

Stigma toward those experiencing homelessness create additional hurdles.” - Community-Wide Survey Respondent

“Just because we don't have access to the same necessities you do, it doesn't make us gross, mooches or worthless. Just different struggles. Please know that most of us are battling things we will never tell anyone.”-Lived Experience Survey Respondent

Access to Services

A theme that arose primarily from the community conversations was the importance of access to individualized services. A key service provider that was highlighted as exceptional in the lived experience survey was [Kind Grounds](#), a navigation and resource center for unhoused individuals. 18% of individuals that responded to the lived experience survey listed Kind Grounds as a program that provided individualized, accessible services. While Kind Grounds can provide support for day shelter and emergency weather, people in the community conversations highlighted the importance of providing services across the housing spectrum, including transitional and permanent housing. Participants highlighted the need for individualized case management, especially focused on housing stability and prevention.

Expand and improve social services offered to tenants like case management or behavioral health services.” -Lived Experience Survey Respondent

“Financial help is always great, but we need more hands-on help.” -Lived Experience Survey Respondent

Partnerships

Collaboration emerged as one of Natrona County’s greatest strengths. The community-wide survey and community conversations consistently highlighted that the conversation is already happening around housing. People mentioned The Trust’s Summit gathering as a valuable tool to build collaboration and momentum. Community members shared partnerships between schools, shelters, health systems, legal agencies, and community organizations as promising models. These include initiatives like the Situation Table, collaborations between the school system and Seton House, the school system and the Mission, and cross-sector work through the Plans to Safe Care Coalition.
