



Accomplishments

2023



Allegheny County
Department of
Human Services



Throughout 2023, thousands of our neighbors turned to Allegheny County DHS for help in finding care for an older adult in their family, paying for child care, preventing an eviction, handling a mental health crisis, or resolving many other “human services” needs.

That is what DHS is here to do—help people during their most vulnerable times by providing them with services and support that prevent and resolve crises. We help children and youth grow up safer and healthier and adults live more securely and independently. In these ways, the human services we plan, fund and deliver are helping individuals and families in Allegheny County thrive.

You’ll see your county human services in the programs of over 300 agencies and in the social workers, peers, and outreach staff working all throughout the county. These staff run out-of-school-time programs, answer hotlines, investigate reports of potential harm to children and vulnerable adults, deliver meals to seniors and run Senior Centers, make home visits to families with newborns, and do the administrative work that makes our human services run efficiently.

The 2023 accomplishments we feature here are those of staff, providers and volunteers. We are grateful to them and to all of our county’s residents who are there for their neighbors in times of need.

Accomplishments

Here are the 2023 accomplishments that stand out. There are many, many other achievements that people have told us about. We chose the ones that made the biggest difference.

Goal: Improve access to care

Getting the help you need, when you need it is the heart of good access to care. This starts with knowing where to turn (where are the front doors to human services?), but also involves effective triage (are those with the greatest needs getting help first?). DHS worked with community partners on both parts of access.

Accomplishments: Access

To improve access to care in in 2023, DHS and its partners:

- Improved the responsiveness of our two main helplines
 - DHS increased its investments in the key helplines (211 and Allegheny Link), which made both able to serve more callers, faster. For the Allegheny Link, this led to a 13% increase in number of callers served and a 70% reduction in wait time. For 211, the reduction in wait time also was 70%.
- Expanded the availability of behavioral health care
 - We launched a fellowship program that provides incentives for more staff to work in behavioral health. This program increased by 100 the number of staff now providing services that’d had great difficulty in recruiting staff and they now provide care to thousands of additional people. It also decreased the waitlist for Family-Based Mental Health care.
 - DHS expanded drug and alcohol services by adding a new model of “treatment plus housing” for individuals and their families, increasing recovery housing for women, and adding more case management for young people—which led to a 60% increase in case management services for youth.

- Expanded the reach of our programs and the number of people served
 - The Hello Baby program is now county-wide, reaching every family in the top 20% of families in need and active in all hospitals. Of the higher-need families, 40% (1,179 families), chose to enroll in a service.
 - We increased the variety and number meals served to older adults. We also increased the flexibility of meal delivery to older adults.
- Directed more of our services to those in greatest need
 - By applying economic principles to our OPTIONS program, more high-need older adults are receiving services, such as personal care and housekeeping, that help them remain able to continue to live in their homes and communities. These changes also reduced the waiting list by one-third.
 - To benefit people with serious mental illness who need supported housing, DHS is now using a risk tool that identifies those with the highest risk of emergency department and mental health inpatient stays so they can be top priority. By applying this tool, more housing that is designated for these individuals is now occupied by them.

Goal: Prevent harm

When DHS can help people avert crises and solve their issues, that can prevent their going to the hospital or an inpatient mental health stay, or involvement with the justice system. When DHS provides support and services at an early point in the lives of children, youth and families (for example, preventing eviction or reducing family stress), it can make a lifelong difference to their health and wellbeing.

Accomplishments: Prevent harm

To advance this goal during 2023, DHS and its partners:

- Helped prevent violence
 - With our community partners, we launched the Community Violence Reduction Initiative in communities with high rates of violence: Braddock, Clairton, Duquesne, East Pittsburgh, Homestead, McKeesport, McKees Rocks, Mt. Oliver, North Braddock, Penn Hills (hot spot neighborhoods), Rankin, Stowe Township, Turtle Creek, Wilkinsburg, and Pittsburgh neighborhoods in the South Hilltop and eastern neighborhoods such as Homewood and East Hills. These partners and several cross-county agencies are now delivering evidence-based programs that prevent/interrupt violence and are working to engage those at highest risk of gun violence involvement.
- Created safe spaces for people who are experiencing homelessness
 - We made more shelter beds and warming centers available throughout the county by decentralizing shelter and increasing this county's capacity for places to stay, get food, and get connected to housing, peer support, treatment and services.
 - DHS and its partners (including the City of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh Regional Transit (PRT), Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership and local homeless outreach agencies) created and staffed a Code Blue shelter during emergency weather. This new shelter served 375 individuals throughout the winter.
- Improved health outcomes
 - By supporting older adults in a new program that helps transition them home from the hospital, DHS and its partners reduced their readmissions by 50%.

- DHS worked to address crises for people with intellectual disabilities or autism by implementing an evidence-based model that aims to increase housing stability and reduce the need for hospital stays.
- For people in the Allegheny County Jail, we expanded Medication Assisted Treatment to sustain recovery and reduce recidivism.

Goal: Prevent overuse of coercive services

DHS (and government, generally) has great responsibilities, including protecting children, youth and vulnerable adults. With that comes significant authority. We seek to use this power as narrowly as possible while still protecting individuals and communities.

Accomplishments: Preventing overuse of coercive services

To prevent overuse of coercive services, DHS and our partners:

- Reduced the number of case openings in child welfare by 47% and reduced the number of home removals by 23% (2023 compared to 2020).
- Expanded support for people in crisis, including by adding 15 providers of informal mental health services, supporting respite services delivered by peers, and adding a mobile response team for crises in Downtown Pittsburgh.
- Expanded the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) program to 11 communities. This program provides police with alternatives to arrest and incarceration.
- Launched a legal support, connection and intervention program to reduce recidivism for people with intellectual disabilities or autism who are at risk of arrest and jail.

Goal: Increase economic security

There is no doubt that poverty is the reason most people need social services. The nation's response to poverty used to be to provide cash (public assistance, subsidized housing) and tax credits. Today, there is far less cash assistance per family than in years past and a bigger gap between the need for subsidized housing and the supply—but an increase in spending on services. Research is showing that investments of direct cash assistance plus services have positive results for children and families. DHS is interested in investments like these that will build economic security, when evidence shows this would be beneficial and when funding makes it possible.

Accomplishments: Economic Security

To advance this goal during 2023, DHS and its partners:

- Increased direct cash assistance + services
 - DHS and its partners made it more affordable for 14,000 low-income individuals to take the bus to work and appointments through a new discounted bus fare program. A study of the pilot program found it increased ridership and participants' access to employment, healthcare, education, training, and social services.
 - Our Grandfamilies program provided financial resources to over 900 older adults who are caring for children/youth. This program won a USAging Achievement Award.
 - DHS increased the rate we pay for kin/relatives to provide foster care for children, bringing the kin foster care rate to parity with others who provide foster care. This adjustment was a fair, necessary adjustment to their incomes.

- DHS' program of cash assistance for young adults provided over 1,000 youth involved with child welfare or homeless services with a one-time payment of \$4,000 that they could use to pay rent and bills, purchase a vehicle, buy uniforms and clothes, and deposit money into a bank account. Participating youth did all of these, with some youth reporting that this cash assistance allowed them to pay rent a month in advance and gain greater financial security.
- Made housing more stable
 - DHS and its partners prevented evictions through landlord-tenant mediations (1,156 households), legal representation (828 households) and \$15 million in Emergency Rental Assistance Program funds (serving 1,300 households).
 - DHS supported the development of an application system so homeowners could apply for the Allegheny County Whole Homes Repair program to request financial assistance to repair their properties. During 2023, over 100 homeowners made repairs that kept their houses habitable; hundreds of other homeowners have applied and are on the wait list.
 - We worked with our partners on the Choice Neighborhood project to secure a \$50 million federal grant that will create opportunities for increased education, employment, and economic stability for 700 individuals who live in Bedford Dwellings, City of Pittsburgh.



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