



FEBRUARY 2026

Impact Report



**Opening
Doors**

Mission

The goal of the Opening Doors Initiative is to make homelessness rare, brief and nonrecurring.

The Housing Collective's Opening Doors Initiative (ODI) manages the homelessness emergency response system throughout western Connecticut, including Fairfield County, Litchfield County, and greater Waterbury. **We serve as a backbone organization, providing dedicated staff and administrative support to align, coordinate, and measure the efforts of more than 150 partner organizations within the system like shelters, landlords, and social service providers.** We ensure the entire system is operating efficiently and effectively, so that individuals and families experiencing homelessness can quickly find and keep permanent housing.

The Opening Doors Initiative is made up of Opening Doors Fairfield County (ODFC), and the Northwest Connecticut Coordinated Access Network (CAN). ODFC is one of two Continuums of Care (CoC) in Connecticut, regional planning bodies designated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that coordinate housing and services for people experiencing homelessness. ODFC and the Northwest CAN are also two of seven Coordinated Access Networks in Connecticut originally established by the CT Department of Housing and partner groups in 2014 to manage homelessness response at the regional level.

CONTACT

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Introduction

Throughout 2025, the Housing Collective’s Opening Doors Initiative (ODI) continued to serve as the backbone of the homeless emergency response system across Western Connecticut. **This was a tumultuous year for the sector, from the proposed federal funding freeze in January to the severe funding cuts proposed by the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development in December. Throughout, the ODI team responded to chaos with coordination.**

Our team coordinated efforts between Connecticut and 19 other states to ensure that Continuums of Care could continue to operate in the face of shrinking federal resources. At the same time, responding to uncertainty at the federal level, we increased our efforts to secure resources at the state level. Alongside partners, we successfully secured dedicated funding in the Connecticut state budget for cold weather assistance. In addition, we secured a commitment from Governor Ned Lamont to cover potential federal cuts to rental assistance for the first half of 2026.

Meanwhile, ODI continued to provide backbone support to the system with as little disruption as possible. We continued facilitating communication, aligning resources, and delivering training and support to frontline staff throughout Fairfield County and Northwest Connecticut. In deep collaboration with our partners, we continued to transform the way services are delivered to vulnerable residents: keeping people housed, improving outcomes, strengthening shelter diversion efforts, enhancing system-wide data, and advancing long-term systems change



“The Housing Collective’s support has been really vital to everything that we do here in the Northwest Coordinated Access Network and has really been the glue that’s been keeping us together and moving our systems forward in a real tangible way.”

**- Jered Bruzas, Chief Impact Officer
United Way of Greater Waterbury**



Highlights

RESPONDING TO FEDERAL CUTS

After the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) proposed eliminating up to 70% of Connecticut's homelessness response funding, the Housing Collective fought back. We encouraged coordination between CT Attorney General William Tong and AGs from 19 other states who filed lawsuits to stop the cuts. In response to these lawsuits, U.S. HUD revoked the cuts. Meanwhile, CT Governor Ned Lamont announced the state would cover rental assistance for the first half of 2026 in response to sustained outreach from ODI and our state and regional partners.

SECURING COLD WEATHER RESOURCES

Alongside state and regional partners, our team successfully pressured Governor Lamont and the General Assembly to set aside \$5 million annually in the state budget for cold weather assistance for the homeless emergency response system. We helped secure this funding through a mixture of public awareness, media outreach, and government relations efforts including roundtables with lawmakers, a [joint op-ed](#) in the Connecticut Post with Central Connecticut Coast YMCA, and direct outreach to decision makers.

[>read the case study](#)

LEVERAGING STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

ODI continued to leverage strategic communications to change the narrative around homelessness and build public will for solutions. We coordinated deeply with media outlets to ensure our initiative and our partners were represented in two investigative series from CT Insider, [Two Connecticut](#)s and [48 Hours of Homelessness](#). These series uplifted the stories of unhoused people in Connecticut and [impacted decisionmaking at the state level](#). In addition, we published three op-eds, two co-authored with partners, to further shape the conversation.

[>read the coverage](#)



In partnership with the National Alliance to End Homelessness, we held a three-part training on Housing Problem-Solving to help providers resolve housing crises when subsidies are limited.

PROVIDING PEER SUPPORT

In direct response to feedback from our partner network, ODI prioritized providing peer-to-peer learning opportunities for partners in 2025. We hosted 11 trainings between Fairfield County and Northwest Connecticut on topics including tenants rights, housing problem solving, motivational interviewing, de-escalation and difficult conversations, and more. These trainings brought in local and national experts from the National Association to End Homelessness, Central CT State University, Pollack Peacebuilding Systems, and the CT Fair Housing Center.

EQUIPPING LANDLORD PARTNERS

ODI partnered with United Way of Greater Waterbury to host a three-part Landlord Learning Series designed to equip landlords and property owners with the knowledge and resources needed to create mutually beneficial relationships between them and their tenants. During these webinars, participants learned how to take advantage of rental subsidies and how to better understand tenants who have experienced homelessness, while hearing directly from landlords who have experience working with at-risk populations.

[> watch the series](#)

COLLABORATING TO FIND HOUSING SOLUTIONS

The ODI team continued to facilitate bi-weekly, in-person meetings within greater Bridgeport, Danbury, Norwalk, Stamford, and Northwest CT where service providers came together to identify housing solutions for people experiencing homelessness. Relying on a list maintained by the ODI team, together providers would identify a housing solution for every person in the region experiencing homelessness, while prioritizing resources for people facing the greatest barriers to housing.

[> read the case study](#)

STRATEGIC PLANNING IN NORTHWEST CT

The ODI team developed a strategic plan with the Northwest CT Coordinated Access Network through a series of intensive, in-person strategy sessions with the partner network, conducted in partnership with organizational transformation consultants Abby Miller and Jen Miller Cribbs. The strategic plan includes a vision, and set of 5 primary goals for focus.



I help support the front entry operations of the homeless response system for Northwest and Fairfield County regions. I come from a family of social workers; the passion to want to help others feels very natural. Learning how to navigate systems and understand the differences in which they operated is what drives me.”

**- Gabrielle Gauvin
Director, Opening Doors Initiative**

ODI by the Numbers

TRACKING PROGRESS, DRIVING RESULTS

4,304

people engaged through the homelessness response system

2,515

people housed

2,004

people diverted from homelessness

1,688

people placed into shelter

446

people placed into rapid rehousing

360

people placed into permanent housing

26

trainings and events hosted for frontline staff

21

news stories

Looking Ahead

EXPANDING IMPACT, STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS



The Opening Doors Initiative will continue to remain adaptable as we navigate uncertainty from the federal government, while strengthening our day-to-day operations as a backbone for the homeless response system in Western Connecticut. As U.S. HUD de-prioritizes permanent housing, we will strive to move our system to a model based more on transitional housing while doing the least amount of harm to the population. We will focus on securing full funding for the system from U.S. HUD, preserving the existing Permanent Supportive Housing resources that do exist in Connecticut, and restructuring our team to be flexible and efficient in the face of potential future funding changes from U.S. HUD. At the state level, we will advocate for additional resources for prevention, including flexible funding and additional staff capacity for the system.