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## **County Pilot Program Could Cut Homeless Costs**

More than half of the all homeless people in South Dakota live in Minnehaha County. A recent study revealed the top 11 users of homeless programs and services cost taxpayers nearly \$340,000 a year. So, county leaders are putting a pilot program in place that may help to reduce that expense.

It's not hard to find evidence of the chronically homeless in Sioux Falls; those who have trouble maintaining a place to live, who also typically have an alcohol addiction. They are a small group of people who cost taxpayers a large amount of money.

Hugh Grogan with Minnehaha County's Health & Human Services Office says that money can be put to better use.

"Despite of that money we are spending we still have people who were homeless and we're hoping we can reduce admissions to detoxification, jail and the hospital emergency room where the big costs are," Grogan said.

Grogan says in the past, programs that required people to stop drinking before they'd receive help didn't have much of an impact, because so many people would simply pass up treatment rather than give up the bottle. That's why the county is testing a new "housing first" approach that will focus on getting chronically homeless people a place to live, and then address other issues.

"Part of our goal is to create some stability with a place to live and support services that would possibly make them want to quit drinking," Grogan said.

Grogan says it's much easier to get the homeless the help they need in other parts of their lives when they're not worried about where to sleep.

"And once you get those housing arrangements in place other things start to fall into place and for some of them it does make an impact where they can turn their lives around," Grogan said.

This week, the Minnehaha County Commission granted Grogan's office \$46,000 to hire another staff member, who will work individually with chronically homeless individuals on housing and other issues.

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