Promoting Health and Cost Control in States:

How States Can Improve Community Health & Well-being Through Policy Change

Rapid Re-housing/Housing First

KEY TAKEAWAYS

What are Rapid Re-Housing Programs?

- Rapid re-housing programs provide temporary support services that help people experiencing homelessness move quickly into permanent housing.

- Programs that incorporate a Housing First approach connect homeless individuals with permanent housing, without preconditions, offer ongoing supports and treatment and are grounded in the belief that addressing housing needs first puts individuals on a pathway to then be better able to address other needs.

How do Rapid Re-Housing Programs Improve Health?

- Rapid re-housing programs decrease rates of homelessness, increase access to social services, can improve food security, and lead to better physical and mental health outcomes.

What are the Economic Impacts of Rapid Re-Housing Programs?

- Rapid re-housing and Housing First policies decrease costs to shelters and reduce emergency room use and costs.

Background

The connection between health and housing is well documented. Research shows that lack of access to a stable home is detrimental to an individual's health. People who experience chronic homelessness or face housing instability typically experience poorer physical and mental health outcomes. Yet, many Americans struggle to maintain a safe and healthy place to live. The most recent national estimate of homelessness in the United States, identified 553,830 people as experiencing homelessness on a single night in 2018.[1]

One effective strategy to help people who experience chronic homelessness is to assist these individuals to quickly move into permanent housing and facilitate access to supportive services. States can address homelessness by adopting policies that support rapid re-housing programs, which provide temporary support services to help homeless individuals move into permanent housing. By prioritizing permanent housing, participants secure a basic need and can quickly exit homelessness. The programs usually include assistance in identifying housing, rent and moving assistance, and case-management services.[2] The Housing First method is an approach that also quickly moves people into permanent housing without preconditions, such as sobriety or service participation, along with ongoing supports and treatment.[3,4] Helping homeless individuals secure basic needs, like housing, creates a foundation to stand on before they move on to address issues like securing a job or addressing substance issues.

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What States Can Do

States can reduce homelessness by establishing rapid re-housing programs in coordination with municipalities and nonprofit organizations, as well as specifically authorize and allocate funds. States, counties, and municipalities have all implemented rapid re-housing programs and many are also administered by local nonprofit organizations.[5,6,7,8,9] Original research indicates that nine states have enacted laws that specifically address rapid re-housing. However, this does not include states that have directed funds to rapid re-housing initiatives through larger pieces of legislation. The laws included in this policy domain either allow, encourage, or require the use of a rapid re-housing approach to help people experiencing homelessness obtain housing.

Rapid Re-Housing Policies Help People Find Homes

There is strong evidence indicating that both rapid re-housing programs and Housing First policies are effective at reducing homelessness by connecting people with permanent housing. Rapid re-housing programs decrease rates of homelessness, decrease the length of time families and individuals remain homeless, and increase access to social services.[10] Participation in a rapid re-housing program may also lead to increased food security, improved physical and mental health, and increased income.[11] One evaluation of a rapid re-housing program for military veterans and their families found that over 80 percent of program participants secured permanent housing without assistance following completion of the program.[12]
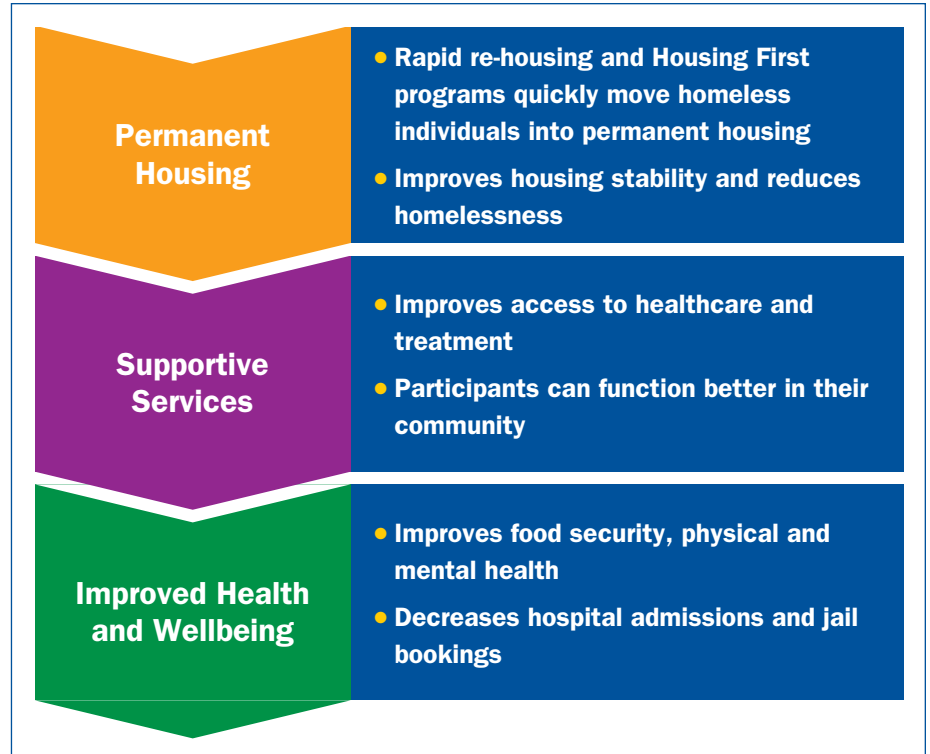
Housing First policies have been shown to reduce homelessness and hospital use for populations with behavioral health issues, including mental illness, substance misuse, and addiction.[13,14,15,16,17] Housing First policies also reduce disparities, improve housing stability, improve mental health, and facilitate access to treatment for substance misuse.[18] Additionally, when Housing First policies are paired with strong case management they can improve participants' ability to function within their communities.[19]

Rapid Re-Housing & Housing First Policies are Cost Effective

Programs that help individuals quickly exit homelessness and return to permanent housing are cost effective and reduce healthcare expenditures. Studies show that Housing First policies decrease shelters' expense and reduce emergency room visits and associated costs.[20,21] An evaluation showed that the rapid re-housing component of Housing First policies can reduce costs associated with acute care services for individuals with persistent mental illness and substance misuse problems, including reduced hospital admissions and jail bookings.[22] The same study estimated that the difference in costs for participants and comparison group members was $36,579, which far outweighs the program costs of $18,600 per person per year.[23]

Permanent Housing
- Rapid re-housing and Housing First programs quickly move homeless individuals into permanent housing
- Improves housing stability and reduces homelessness

Supportive Services
- Improves access to healthcare and treatment
- Participants can function better in their community

Improved Health and Wellbeing
- Improves food security, physical and mental health
- Decreases hospital admissions and jail bookings

Interested in learning more about Rapid Re-Housing & Housing First and other evidence-based policies? Visit the PHACCS website *to read the full report and other policy briefs for our 13 recommended policies.*

TAKEAWAYS FOR MULTIPLE AUDIENCES – COMMUNICATING THE IMPORTANCE AND IMPACT OF RAPID RE-HOUSING POLICIES

Policymakers

- Rapid re-housing programs and Housing First policies help people quickly exit homelessness and enter permanent housing, a critical first step before they can address economic security and health issues.

- Rapid re-housing programs reduce costs to shelters, decrease hospital admissions, and jail bookings.

- Rapid re-housing programs should let participants enter the program regardless of income, sobriety, and involvement with the criminal justice system.

Public Health Professionals

- Housing First policies reduce disparities, improve housing stability, advance mental health and well-being, and facilitate access to treatment for substance misuse and addiction.

- Pairing Housing First programs with strong case management can improve participants' ability to function in their communities.

- Participating in rapid re-housing programs can increase food security, improve physical and mental health, and increase access to social services.

Community Members

- Housing First programs recognize that individuals who are homeless can more easily maintain employment and address their health needs when they have permanent housing.

- Rapid re-housing programs decrease rates of homelessness and decrease the length of time families and individuals remain homeless.

Endnotes

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