



Relocation of Individuals Experiencing Homelessness

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Background

About Homelessness

Homelessness is a complex and pervasive social problem in the United States. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development [estimates](#) that on any single night in 2022 there were more than 582,500 people experiencing homelessness, an [increase](#) of 6% since 2017. This estimate is commonly considered an undercount due to [varying definitions of homelessness](#), difficulties with contacting unhoused people and other [methodological challenges](#) with the mandated [point-in-time count](#). Of the people experiencing homelessness in 2022, 22% were considered [chronically homeless](#), 6% were veterans and 5% were unaccompanied youth under the age of 25 years old.

A [lack of a stable support system](#) is one [factor](#) that can further complicate a person experiencing homelessness' situation. This may be particularly true for individuals [aging out of foster care](#), [being discharged from healthcare providers](#), or [exiting the justice system](#). A recent [study](#) about the impact of social relationships on people experiencing homelessness indicates social and community integration as a persistent challenge for people who transition from homelessness into permanent housing. Given the positive impact of [social connections](#) to health and wellbeing, policymakers are looking into different strategies to safely and effectively reduce homelessness.

About Relocation

One strategy policymakers have considered is referred to as "homelessness relocation." While there is limited evidence regarding the efficacy of this practice in reducing the homelessness population within a particular jurisdiction, research has indicated an integral component to the success of these programs is an individual's choice to relocate and the verification of stable housing at their intended destination. Alternatively, the [involuntary displacement of individuals](#) can result in individuals returning to homelessness, becoming hospitalized or increased mortality.

Recent Relevant Legislation

Hawaii introduced legislation ([HB 791, 2023](#)) to establish a housing assistance program. Within the program, housing coordinators would assist families with a variety of needs, including relocating out-of-state to receive additional services. The bill is currently pending.

Hawaii introduced legislation ([SB 471, 2023](#)) that would allow a court to order homeless services in lieu of prosecution if an individual is charged with unauthorized camping. Services can include relocation programs that provide transportation to locations where supports may be better provided. The bill is currently pending.

New Jersey introduced legislation ([A 2897, 2012](#)) that would require cities and counties prepare a case

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management plan and arrange for supportive services prior to relocating an individual experiencing homelessness to anywhere else in the state. The bill failed to pass the state legislature.

West Virginia ([SB 239, 2023](#)) requires the state’s Bureau for Behavioral Health to conduct a study on homelessness. The study must include 1) an analysis of whether West Virginia homeless populations concentrate in certain counties or municipalities and why; 2) a determination if state policy causes the homeless population to relocate to certain counties or municipalities; and 3) a determination of percentage of homeless individuals that lived in another state or jurisdiction in the past three years or are from another state or jurisdiction.

Relevant Relocation Programs

There are several programs working to reunite individuals experiencing homelessness with their families and communities to support better outcomes on the path from homelessness. The [Traveler’s Aid International](#) program can purchase bus or train tickets for individuals experiencing homelessness to connect them with family and supports elsewhere. The National Runaway Safeline and Greyhound Inc. partner together for the [Home Free](#) program which provides bus tickets to help youth ages 12-21 who self-identify as homeless to travel home or to a stable place to receive supportive services.

Denver’s [Family Reunification Program](#) provides transportation assistance and reunites individuals experiencing homelessness with family in another city.

New York City’s [Project Reconnect](#) provides one-way travel assistance—including bus, train or plane tickets—to individuals or families experiencing homelessness

Pomona’s [A Way Home](#) program provides free bus tickets for homeless individuals to reunite with family members who live out of the area.

San Diego’s [Family Reunification Program](#) provides transportation and other supportive services to reconnect unsheltered individuals or those at-risk of becoming homeless with support systems throughout the country.

San Francisco’s [Homeward Bound Program](#) offers financial assistance for travel expenses for individuals experiencing homelessness to connect them with family, friends or other support systems.

Other Relevant Policy Levers to Reduce Homelessness

The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness recently released [All In: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness](#). Within this plan they consider different opportunities for all levels of government to prevent and reduce homelessness, including by reducing housing instability. Below are a couple

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of relevant strategies states are using to move people from homeless to housing and to prevent people from becoming homeless.

Housing First

[Housing First](#) approaches reducing homelessness by prioritizing permanent housing. This intervention is commonly introduced through one of two programs. The first, [Permanent Supportive Housing](#) (PSH) is for individuals and families with chronic illnesses, disabilities, mental health issues, or substance use disorders who have experienced long-term or chronic homelessness. The second program, [Rapid Re-housing](#), is designed for individuals and families who do not need a lot of additional supports and services. Below are some resources regarding the efficacy of Housing First models.

- [Housing First: A Review of the Evidence](#), HUD. Highlights: Several studies have found that, compared with the treatment first model, Housing First approaches offer greater long-term housing stability, especially among people experiencing chronic homelessness. Some studies have found that Housing First programs may also reduce costs by shortening stays in hospitals, residential substance abuse programs, nursing homes, and prisons.
- [The Preventive Effect of Housing First on Health Care Utilization and Costs Among Chronically Homeless Individuals](#), The Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation: This study found
 - Individuals enrolled in permanent supportive housing programs had significantly lower per-person, per-year average health care costs.
 - Individuals in the programs received significantly more mental health services but the cost was more than offset by lower utilization of inpatient and emergency department services.
 - Expanding supportive housing models may produce health care cost savings and also have preventive effects of more consistent access to mental health services.

Eviction Alternatives

Evictions for nonpayment of rent can [impact](#) families and lead to homelessness, legal issues and negative credit reports. Due to a [lack of affordable housing supply](#), many [policymakers have focused](#) on helping families maintain housing and avoid displacement by creating eviction prevention policies and [limiting the reasons](#) property providers can evict their tenants. States have considered [right to counsel policies](#) guarantee tenants legal representation during eviction proceedings. Alternative approaches to traditional eviction proceedings include landlord-tenant mediation and dispute [resolution programs](#) or [eviction diversion programs](#). States can also establish [landlord mitigation funds](#) to reimburse landlords for property damages, outstanding rent and other expenses related to participation in public housing voucher programs.

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