

Topic: Housing policy and tradeoffs  
April 17, 2019  
Advanced Health Policy

About 90,000 people in the US are chronically homeless and 70% are unhoused. On any given night about half a million people in the US are staying in shelters or otherwise insufficiently housed. (Source: NASEM report below)

Chronic homelessness commands attention in health policy and research due to negative health outcomes and associated costs. Meanwhile among those who are renting, about 50% (21 million people) are moderately or severely cost burdened (rent > 30% and 50% of income). (Source: Harvard JCHS report below). Housing insecurity also leads to poorer health outcomes, especially among children.

Policy discussions tend to focus on one problem or the other, and it is important not to conflate chronic homelessness and general housing insecurity. Both chronic homelessness and housing insecurity have unique deleterious health effects. They are problems that tend to affect different segments of the population. However there are similarities. Both groups tend to have low political efficacy, low visibility, and high risk for chronic illness and increased healthcare costs. The strategies to address each problem may be seen as complementary or

**Housing First** is an approach to assisting people with chronic homelessness that does not require sobriety, employment/education, or mental health treatment as preconditions to being housed. **Permanent supportive housing (PSH)** does not place time limits on the provision of housing and includes optional support services.

**Social Housing**, including housing bonds, subsidized housing, and set-asides, is directed at housing the working poor and middle class with or without behavioral prerequisites.

Questions:

What are the important considerations for the feasibility and acceptability of policies addressing housing insecurity or chronic homelessness?

Considering the National Academies report, how might more creative spending strategies and flexible budgets address these problems? How could bridging gaps between distinct departments like HUD/HHS reframe the problem? Could a health-in-all-policies approach be effective here?

How should we think about trade-offs in these policies? E.g. Breadth vs. depth of assistance, intensity of need/intervention, scarcity.

What impact does the visibility of homelessness or housing insecurity have on the policy stages? e.g. getting PSH on the agenda, involving affected people in decision making, problematizing homelessness vs. homeless people, low political efficacy of the working class.

### THE PROMISE OF SUPPORTIVE HOUSING FOR GOOD HEALTH



Source: Corporation for Supportive Housing

Papers and briefs to **SKIM**:

The following link is a Housing First/PSH fact sheet:

<http://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/housing-first-fact-sheet.pdf>

This is the opening chapter from the National Academies 2018 report on PSH and health evidence:

<https://www.nap.edu/nap-cgi/skimchap.cgi?recid=25133&chap=1-11>

Please read page 1-4 and skim the remainder for recommendations.

This is a brief with policy recommendations from the US Interagency Council on Homelessness:

<https://www.oregon.gov/ohcs/CRD/hss/provider-resources/10-Strategies-to-End-Chronic-Homelessness.pdf>

**Skim** Chapter 5 for Rental Affordability background:

<https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/research-areas/reports/americas-rental-housing-2017>

An example of Portland area social housing, with an eye toward correcting historical injustice:

<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/phb/article/671059>

**Optional:** This is a long document but easy to skim, comparing different social housing models in Finland, Sweden, and Vienna, Austria with recommendations for implementation in the US. The appendix (p. 33) has models of cross-subsidization to promote socioeconomic integration and high quality in public housing. Don't spend too much time on it, but just get the gist.

<https://www.peoplespolicyproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/SocialHousing.pdf>

**Optional:** The bidirectional relationship between housing insecurity and poor health

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11606-017-4255-z>