Why Housing Matters

INSIDE
Why Housing Matters > 2
The Case for Public and Assisted Housing > 2
– Why Do We Need Assisted Housing? > 2
– The Role of Housing Assistance > 3
– The Current Need for Housing Assistance > 4
– The Current Supply of Assisted Housing > 5
Who Is Assisted? Public Housing and Housing Choice Voucher Residents > 6
– Resident Profiles > 6
– Housing as a Stepping Stone > 8
– Housing as a Support > 9
– Assisted Housing in Your Community > 10
About Public and Affordable Housing Research Corporation > 12
Why Housing Matters...

As more and more Americans need affordable housing, federal rental assistance provides an impactful and cost effective way to improve people’s lives while at the same time improving our communities. It provides not just a place to live, but a stable platform from which residents and their children can access critical resources that will allow them to change their lives. This report brings together data on who needs housing assistance, those who receive housing assistance, and the impact of housing assistance providers in our communities to help to illustrate why housing matters.

The Case for Housing Assistance

Why Do We Need Housing Assistance?

Housing is central to our quality of life. Research shows that having a stable, safe, and decent place to live is essential to maintaining a stable job, proper health and nutrition, and improvements in education. Stable housing is particularly important for children whose childhood experiences can either limit or increase their opportunities as adults.

Since it is central to quality of life, it follows that housing is also the most expensive part of the average American’s budget. In 2012, Americans spent the most on housing; nearly 33% of their total expenditures. The maximum expense recommended by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for housing is 30% of adjusted annual household income. Any spending on rent and utilities above this amount is considered a ‘housing cost burden’. However, the percentage families spend on housing varies by income. The poorest 20% of Americans spent 40% of their total expenditures on housing in 2012, since there are fewer adequate affordable options available at such low price points. In fact, a household would need to make $39,080/year or $18.79/hour working full-time to afford an average two bedroom apartment. This reality causes many families to become financially strapped, or suffer from housing deficiencies like instability, homelessness, or poor quality housing.

As seen in [Figure 1.1], low-income families experience more housing instability than their wealthier counterparts. Twice as many households living in poverty moved in the past year as did households at least one step above the US poverty level in 2012.

Low-income renters also live much more frequently than do renters with higher earnings in sub-standard, overcrowded, or unaffordable housing; the main criteria HUD uses to define a ‘housing problem.’ Of these housing problems, housing cost burdens are the most prevalent. As seen in [Figure 1.2], more than 50% of...
Nearly 80% of extremely and very low-income renters have housing problems compared to over 13% of higher income renters. Likewise, two-thirds of extremely low-income renters have severe housing problems compared with just under 6% of higher income renters.

**The Role of Housing Assistance**

Housing assistance provides a federal subsidy, tax incentive, or mortgage insurance to make housing affordable to low-income families. In doing so it combats the problems associated with unaffordable and inadequate housing and provides decent, safe, and stable homes for over eight million families, which totals over 18 million individual Americans. Assisted housing programs make homes affordable in a number of ways. The Public Housing Program funds a physical ‘bricks and mortar’ unit of affordable housing made available to families at 30% of their income. The Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program, also referred to as Section 8, reimburses a private landlord for the difference between market rent and the amount a family can afford to pay for a unit. This subsidy can either follow the tenant as they move or be attached to a specific property. The Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) Program provides tax incentives to developers to build units for low-income families. There are also special housing subsidies for veterans, the elderly and disabled, homeless families, families living in rural areas, and those suffering from AIDS.

As seen in [Figure 1.3], by reducing how much low-income families must spend to have the same quality of housing, housing assistance allows them to afford other important necessities like healthcare, nutritious food, school supplies, transportation to work, or job training. In this way, assisted housing can free low-income families and their children from overburdening housing costs, allowing them to adjust their budget to have more options to improve their economic situation. The average Public Housing and HCV Program housing costs...
(an average tenant rent of $309/month\textsuperscript{8} plus utility expenses) are well below the US median gross rent of $889/month and just below what a family of four making 30% of the HUD adjusted national median income ($19,200) can afford\textsuperscript{9}. And with the average income of all Public Housing and HCV Program households (not accounting for family size) at only $13,146/year\textsuperscript{10} and the median income closer to $11,000/year\textsuperscript{11}, housing assistance plays a crucial role in providing stability to many low-income families.

THE CURRENT NEED FOR HOUSING ASSISTANCE
There continues to be a growing need for affordable housing. While incomes and rents are both increasing each year, the rate of growth in income does not match the higher rate of growth in rent. As seen in [Figure 2.1], the median gross rent increased 5.8% from 2007 to 2009, while median income only increased at a rate of 2.7% during this time. From 2009 to 2012, median gross rent increased at a rate of 7.6% and median income grew at a rate of just 0.8%. This trend means that more and more families are finding rent less affordable because their incomes are not keeping up with their housing costs.

Indeed, as seen in [Figure 2.2], nearly half of all renters are cost burdened. Almost one-quarter of all renters are severely cost burdened, paying in excess of 50% of their household income on rent. Moreover, the number of households experiencing housing problems including cost burdens has increased 43% since 2007 suggesting that a financial squeeze is forcing more families into inadequate and unaffordable housing.\textsuperscript{12}

At the same time that families can afford less housing, the number of people seeking affordable housing is growing. Between 2006 and 2012, the number of families considered to have extremely low incomes rose nearly 20%\textsuperscript{13}. And as the housing market declined during the recession, more households became renters because

Nearly half of all renters are cost burdened.

PAHRC tabulation of Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) 2013 data based on 2006-2010 ACS five year estimates.

\textsuperscript{45\%} of all renters are cost burdened

\textsuperscript{45\%} of all renters are cost burdened

\textsuperscript{23\%} of all renters are severely cost burdened

\textsuperscript{23\%} of all renters are severely cost burdened

\textsuperscript{house} = approximately 380,000 households
they lost their homes or stayed in the rental market because they put off buying a home. This increase in the number of higher income renters led rents to rise and squeezed out low-income individuals from the rental market. Today, there are fewer rental options available to everyone, but especially to low-income renters.

As seen in [Figure 2.3], there is now a major shortage of rental units available to households making 30% of the area median income or below. There are just 3.3 million affordable available units for 11.5 million households. Nationally, just 8.3% of all adequate rental units are affordable to those making below 30% of the area median income. This trend varies by region, with some areas providing even fewer affordable units to extremely low-income families. More expensive areas of the country could have as few as 6% of adequate rental units affordable to extremely low-income families. As such, many poor renters must make a choice to either settle for sub-standard housing or pay much more than they can afford.

**The Current Supply of Assisted Housing**

Currently, there are nearly six million existing physical units of federally assisted housing with affordability restrictions and/or direct subsidies and almost 2.5 million HCV rental assistance vouchers to aid the over 19 million potentially qualifying households. Thus, while 16.5% of all American households might qualify for rental assistance, only 4% receive deeply subsidized rental assistance, or rental assistance that reduces the amount of rent a family must pay. Another 1% live in properties with affordability restrictions. Only one-quarter of potentially qualifying households receive deeply subsidized rental assistance.

Exacerbating the situation, existing-built stock of assisted housing is decreasing as federal and state funding for affordable housing decreases and investments are not made to renovate existing properties or private landlords and developers find it too costly to keep units affordable. Ready-built assisted housing units,

Without housing assistance, there would be only one affordable unit for every 100 ELI renters in the US. With housing assistance, there are 29 affordable units for every 100 ELI renters.

**Figure 2.3** Affordable Available Units with Adequate Kitchen and Plumbing Facilities and the Number of Extremely Low-Income (ELI) Families in 2012

- **11.5 Million** ELI Renter Households
- **3.3 Million** Affordable, Available Units

Urban Institute tabulation of ACS 2012 one year estimates and HUD administrative data.

**Figure 3.1** Percent of All Adequate Rental Units Affordable to Extremely Low-Income Renters by State

- 6% – 10%
- 10.1% – 15%
- 15.1% – 20%
- 20.1% – 25%
- 25.1% – 40%

PAHRC Tabulation of CHAS 2013 data based on 2006-2010 ACS five year estimates. For county-level information see the Urban Institute’s ‘County Affordability Map’ at http://www.urban.org/housingaffordability/
often referred to as project-based housing, are an important source of affordable housing in almost every community across the country. Unfortunately, the number of public housing units has decreased nearly ten percent over the last decade, as seen in [Figure 3.2]. Some of these units have been transferred to other assisted housing programs. However, this loss will likely increase as the necessary Public Housing Capital Funds are not appropriated to repair buildings that are estimated to already need nearly $26B in delayed repairs22. And during Sequestration, other assisted housing programs experienced cuts, which further decreased the aid available to families23.

As such, assisted housing providers cannot currently meet the expansive need for affordable housing. Indeed, the need outweighs the demand for these programs so much so that waiting lists for public housing or voucher assistance in many areas have been closed for years and are still extremely long.

[FIGURE 3.2] INVENTORY OF PUBLIC HOUSING UNITS TO HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHERS (2000-2013)

Vouchers

[FIGURE 4.1] HOUSEHOLDS RECEIVING HCV OR PUBLIC HOUSING ASSISTANCE IN 2013

[FIGURE 4.2] POTENTIAL DISTRIBUTION OF PUBLIC HOUSING AND HCV RESIDENTS WITH WAGE INCOME BY AGE AND DISABILITY STATUS

WHO BENEFITS FROM ASSISTED HOUSING?

WHO IS ASSISTED? PUBLIC HOUSING AND HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER RESIDENTS

The suite of federal housing assistance programs serves over eight million families, which totals over 18 million individual Americans – each year24. Of these programs, the Public Housing and HCV Programs together serve over three million families, which totals nearly seven million individuals, each year25. Most households receiving housing assistance through the Public Housing and HCV Programs are headed by a senior or disabled individual or have children, as seen in [Figure 4.1].

Considering all household members, over 42% of the individuals assisted through the Public Housing or HCV Program are children under the age of 18, as illustrated in [Figure 4.3].

Contrary to stereotypes of Public Housing and HCV recipients, many households that are not elderly or disabled have a household member in the workplace as seen in [Figure 4.2]. While one-third of household heads earn wages from work, a much larger percentage of families receiving assistance are working when we consider that 50% of all households in the HCV and Public Housing Programs are elderly or disabled and may be unable to work. In 2012, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimated that 62% of assisted non-elderly, non-disabled households were attached to the labor market.27 Moreover, 75% of able-bodied, working age households have children and nearly 90% of households with children are headed by single females who would necessarily have difficulty juggling work and childcare. Only 42% of residents receive other subsidies to help make ends meet like food stamps or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and just one-quarter receive other income like alimony or child support.

The Public Housing and HCV Programs primarily serve extremely low-income households, who make 30% or less of the area median income, and very low-income households, making 30% to 50% of the area median income. As [Figure 4.4], illustrates, over two-thirds of families served by these two assisted housing programs are extremely low-income.
42% of all household members assisted are children.

**[Figure 4.3]** The Ratio of Children to Adults Assisted by the Public Housing and HCV Program in 2013

- 58% Adults
- 42% Children (under 18)

3.9 Million Adults  
6.7 Million People Assisted  
2.8 Million Children


*Data missing from HUD system. Includes: not applicable, incomplete address information provided, don’t know, not reported.

**[Figure 4.4]** Income Distribution of Households Served by the Public Housing and HCV Programs in 2013

Combined  
Vouchers  
Public Housing


*Data missing from HUD system. Includes: not applicable, incomplete address information provided, don’t know, not reported.
Housing as a Stepping Stone

For most families, receiving a housing subsidy is a stepping stone to better things. [Figure 5.1] illustrates that a short stay in assisted housing is typical. In public housing, about half of households stay just five years or less. Many of those staying longer than five years likely represent chronically disabled individuals or seniors aging in place, who have fixed incomes and cannot enter the workforce.

Yet the average time families receive housing assistance through these programs is longer in regions where housing is especially expensive. For example, in rental markets with very low vacancy and very high rents, like New York, New York, or Los Angeles, California, it is harder for families to find jobs that pay enough to support decent housing. In these markets, families need more time to position themselves to afford housing and consequently stay longer in assisted housing, on average. [Figure 5.2] illustrates the link between a longer stay in assisted housing and the cost of living in an area. States reporting longer average stays for residents (shaded in darker blue) are home to the nation’s highest cost housing (the top ten most expensive housing markets are listed).

Receiving housing assistance allows recipients to improve their job skills and education, save for their own home, or focus on their children’s education and well-being. Many also gain access to special job training programs, childcare, or homeownership programs through initiatives sponsored by the Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) that manage housing assistance programs. People like Kimm, (bottom of page 9) are able to bounce back from hardship to realize dreams like further education and homeownership. In 2013, nearly 9,703 assisted households were working toward homeownership with a homeownership voucher, which incrementally helps a family to pay the full mortgage of their own home.28
Housing as a Support

The majority of household heads receiving housing assistance through the Public Housing or HCV Program are elderly or have disabilities that prevent them from working in an average workplace. These residents not only need an affordable place to live, but in many cases they need places to live that are equipped for special needs or close to critical services. There may be a shortage of such units in the private market in some areas or those that exist may not be affordable.

As seen in [Figure 6.1], more than half of all senior renters experience housing cost burdens and almost one-quarter experience severe housing cost burdens. As such, assisted housing is an essential support for seniors as they age. The importance of affordable housing for seniors will increase as a larger percentage of our population enters retirement.

Similarly, disabled individuals face employment constraints over their lifetimes and need similar supports linked to housing. Forty percent of households in the Public Housing or HCV Program have a household head with a disability as seen in [Figure 6.2]. Assisted housing often serves as a platform for services and provides specialized living arrangements that allow disabled residents to be more independent and have access to greater social interaction.

Assisted housing also serves veterans who may need additional help transitioning back into civilian life. On average, assisted housing programs aid nearly 300,000 veterans each year, nearly 10,000 of them were at some time homeless.

KIMM, HOUSTON, TEXAS

“I NEVER IMAGINED THIS FOR ME. INSTEAD OF WAITING FOR THINGS TO HAPPEN, I MADE THEM HAPPEN.”

As a waitress making hourly wages in Houston, Texas, Kimm was having difficulty making ends meet for herself and her 11-year-old daughter. The lack of stability was daunting, and Kimm just could not get ahead. After her waitressing hours were cut, she could no longer afford to pay her rent. She knew she needed a second job to continue making enough money to keep her apartment, but without an education, Kimm knew her options were limited.

Soon, Kimm was accepted into public housing. Through her housing authority, she participated in “Dress for Success,” a non-profit organization which gave her access to business attire, helped improve her presentation skills in a professional setting, and tutored her in financial literacy. Learning how to save and be financially responsible put Kimm on the path to homeownership. Kimm also enrolled in “Dress for Success” mentoring program and was connected with a mentor based in the medical field. Her mentor helped Kimm secure scholarship assistance and establish herself academically.

Today, Kimm has an associate’s degree, a bachelor’s degree, a master’s degree, and is working on her PhD. She is also a proud homeowner. Kimm attributes her success to the stability provided to her by living in public housing. For more success stories like Kimm’s, visit www.ReThinkHousing.org.
For every $1 spent by a PHA, $2.12 is returned to local community’s economy.

$1 Spent   $2.12 Returned
By a PHA    To Local Community


ASSISTED HOUSING IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Assisted housing comes in a variety of forms and exists in most cities, towns, and rural areas. Most communities have some form of housing assistance. In fact, 97% of US counties contain at least one physical unit of federally subsidized housing\textsuperscript{10}. Assisted housing properties are also found in US territories like Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands.

The development and operation of assisted housing is an important part of the local economic and social fabric of communities. Local PHAs manage public housing units and in most cases, vouchers that are distributed within their jurisdiction. PHAs are stable local employers, and provide housing that may allow low-income workers to live closer to places of employment. They also play a central role in community revitalization projects and boost the economy through construction projects and other contracted services.

In fact, studies have found PHAs to be economic generators. Improvement projects to public housing buildings and the development of new public housing units injects $2.12 back into the local community for every $1 spent\textsuperscript{31}. PHAs also provide important social supports in communities by helping to reduce poverty. They also help families and individuals avoid more costly public support systems such as homeless shelters and emergency rooms. In this way, dollars spent on housing assistance go a long way to help our economy and limit costs to other support systems.

Assisted housing is an essential part of our communities and vital to the lives of the people residing there. As more and more people find it harder to afford a home, it remains a critical resource and an important policy priority.

For more information on the findings contained in this report or to learn more about PAHRC, please visit our website at www.pahrc.org.

SUPPORTED BY OUR PARTNERS

For more information about the importance of assisted housing and affordable housing policy please visit our partner’s sites.

ABOUT PUBLIC AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING RESEARCH CORPORATION

The Public and Affordable Housing Research Corporation (PAHRC) is a nonprofit organization that was incorporated in Connecticut in March 2011.

Its Mission is to provide independent research and relevant data to support the efforts of the public and affordable housing industry and its stakeholders.

Its Vision is to be a central hub for current data and research on public and affordable housing.

PAHRC engages in collaborative research with a number of industry group partners to provide current information about important public and affordable housing issues. In addition to research, PAHRC compiles data relevant to affordable housing issues from a wide variety of primary and secondary sources in order to make this data available to affordable housing industry members as well as the general public.

PAHRC is a part of HAI Group, which is a family of companies that serves the public and affordable housing community with special, niche insurance programs as well as other value-added products and services. A recognized leader and expert in the public and affordable housing industry, HAI Group is dedicated to providing reliable insurance, research, training, and software solutions.