

Housing First: The Cheapest, Most Effective Solution to Homelessness

What is housing first?

- Housing first is a highly effective approach to ending chronic homelessness that emphasizes providing people experiencing homelessness with permanent housing right away and then offering other services as needed.
- Stable housing puts people in a better position to benefit voluntarily from needed services over time. In contrast with less effective traditional approaches, housing first does not force homeless people to complete or comply with treatment, mental health care, employment training or other services in order to access and maintain permanent housing, but rather offers these services *alongside* housing.

Housing first ends homelessness.

- Numerous studies find that housing first ends homelessness for chronically homeless individuals faster, more often & more permanently than treatment-based approaches.¹
- The vast majority of housing first tenants (85% on average) do not return to homelessness, remaining stably housed at rates that often exceed those of their counterparts in traditional treatment first programs.²

Housing first saves taxpayers money.

- Housing first measurably lowers taxpayer costs by reducing chronically homeless people's reliance on expensive services like shelters, psychiatric hospitals and the emergency room. Permanent supportive housing is far cheaper than these services.³
- For example, a 2014 study found the cost of homelessness in Central Florida to be \$31,065 per year -- primarily from inpatient hospitalizations, emergency room fees and criminal justice costs. In contrast, the study found that providing permanent housing for these chronically homeless individuals costs just \$10,051 per person/year -- **one third the cost of leaving these individuals on the streets.**⁴

Housing first is mainstream.

- Housing first was instituted as federal policy under the George W. Bush Administration and has been expanded under the Obama Administration.
- The US Departments of Veterans Affairs & Housing and Urban Development have realigned their programs to prioritize housing first -- **encouraging a +22% drop in chronic homelessness and a +33% drop in veteran homelessness since 2009.**

¹ Padgett, D. K., Gulcur, L., & Tsemberis, S. (2006). Housing first services for people who are homeless with co-occurring serious mental illness and substance abuse. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 16(1), 74-83.

Tsemberis, S., Gulcur, L., & Nakae, M. (2004). Housing first, consumer choice, and harm reduction for homeless individuals with a dual diagnosis. *Journal Information*, 94(4).

² Pearson, C., Montgomery, A. E., & Locke, G. (2009). Housing stability among homeless individuals with serious mental illness participating in housing first programs. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 37(3), 404-417.

Stefancic, A., & Tsemberis, S. (2007). Housing first for long-term shelter dwellers with psychiatric disabilities in a suburban county: A four-year study of housing access and retention. *The Journal of Primary Prevention*, 28(3-4), 265-279.

³ Larimer, M. E., Malone, D. K., Garner, M. D., Atkins, D. C., Burlingham, B., Lonczak, H. S., ... & Marlatt, G. A. (2009). Health care and public service use and costs before and after provision of housing for chronically homeless persons with severe alcohol problems. *JAMA: the Journal of the American Medical Association*, 301(13), 1349-1357.

Gulcur, L., Stefancic, A., Shinn, M., Tsemberis, S., & Fischer, S. N. (2003). Housing, hospitalization, and cost outcomes for homeless individuals with psychiatric disabilities participating in continuum of care and housing first programmes. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 13(2), 171-186.

⁴ Shinn, G. (2014). *The Cost of Long-Term Homelessness in Central Florida*. Central Florida Commission on Homelessness.