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IMPACTS OF HOUSING SUPPORTS: PERSONS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS AND EX-OFFENDERS

The provision of housing supports for individuals at risk of homelessness is a concern to both policymakers and local communities impacted by homelessness.

After the 2009 Legislative session, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (Institute) was asked to participate in a Housing Focus Group, and provide a summary of research findings on the effectiveness of housing programs for populations at risk of homelessness. In this report, we examine the impact of housing supports for persons with mental illness and for ex-offenders returning to the community following incarceration.

For persons with mental illness, we looked for evidence regarding the impact of housing supports on homelessness, hospitalization, and crime outcomes. For ex-offenders, we investigated the effect of housing supports on criminal recidivism.

We begin by providing some background on housing support programs for persons with mental illness and for prisoners seeking to re-enter the community. We briefly explain the methods we use to determine which housing programs are effective, before presenting our findings. Then, we discuss the effects of housing supports on outcomes for persons with mental illness and for ex-offenders.

BACKGROUND

During the 2009 Legislative session, a proposed bill would have created a focus group to study issues related to housing for vulnerable populations such as "...those suffering from mental illness, those with criminal backgrounds, and those who have chemical or alcohol dependency issues."¹ Although the bill did not pass, a volunteer group was convened by legislators to address the same issues. This Housing Focus Group requested that the Institute review the research literature and provide

Summary

This report presents preliminary findings from a review of the literature on housing support programs for ex-offenders and persons with serious mental illness.

Methods

We conducted a systematic review of all the research evidence we could locate on housing supports for adults with mental illness and for ex-offenders. We analyzed 16 rigorous comparison group evaluations of programs in our meta-analytic approach. We then estimated the average effect of housing supports on outcomes for persons with mental illness and ex-offenders. These outcomes included homelessness, crime, and the utilization of hospital services.

Findings

Persons With Mental Illness. Providing housing supports for this population reduced homelessness, use of hospital services, and crime among program participants.

Ex-offenders. The literature on housing programs for ex-offenders is limited. After reviewing the research, we found only one rigorous study focusing exclusively on housing for ex-offenders. Commonly, housing for ex-prisoners is but one component within broader community-based offender reentry programs. We found seven studies evaluating reentry programs that included housing support.

- ✓ Three of these studies evaluated reentry programs for the *general population of ex-offenders*. These studies showed no significant effect on recidivism.
- ✓ Four of the reentry programs were intensive interventions for *serious, violent offenders*. These programs significantly reduced recidivism by 12 percent. Because these programs provided services in addition to housing, we cannot know how much housing contributed to the reduction in recidivism.

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¹ SSB 5219

information regarding the effectiveness of housing programs for these populations. Given time constraints, we report here on outcomes of housing support for ex-offenders and persons with mental illness. In an upcoming report, we will examine the effects of housing for persons with alcohol and substance abuse issues.

Housing Supports for Persons With Mental Illness

Over time, variations in housing support models for mentally ill individuals have been developed. A common theme underlying housing support programs for these individuals is the concurrent provision of housing assistance in addition to other support services such as health care, mental health treatment, and substance abuse treatment.

A number of research studies have investigated the effect of housing supports for persons with mental illness on outcomes such as homelessness, use of hospital services, and crime.

Housing Support for Ex-offenders

Offenders released from prison may not have suitable housing in the community. In Washington State, 19 percent of offenders released from prison or jail reported being homeless or transient for at least one month in the six months prior to their incarceration.²

Housing assistance for ex-offenders may be offered as a stand-alone program. More frequently, it is provided to ex-offenders as part of an overall reentry program that assists prisoners in accessing health, employment, vocational training, drug abuse treatment, and financial management services.

Research Questions for This Study

We investigated two main questions:

- 1) What is the impact of housing supports on **persons with mental illness**? The outcomes reported for this population were homelessness, hospitalization, and crime.
- 2) What is the impact of housing supports in programs for **ex-offenders**? In particular, we examined the effect of housing supports on recidivism among people returning to the community after incarceration.

² Institute analysis of data from the Offender Needs Assessment Tool. The Department of Corrections began administering this tool in the summer of 2008. The statistics represent 37,768 offenders completing the assessment between August 2008 and September 2009.

METHODS

To conduct the analysis described in this report, we considered all available studies published in English that evaluated housing supports for ex-offenders and mentally ill individuals. To be included in our review, we require that an evaluation's research design include control or comparison groups.

Random assignment studies are preferred, but we allowed quasi-experimental or non-experimental studies when the comparison group was well-matched to the treatment group, or when adequate statistical procedures were employed to guard against selection bias. We then used formal statistical hypothesis testing procedures—meta-analysis—to determine what the weight of the evidence tells us about the effectiveness of housing support programs.³

In this review, we did not include studies that evaluated or compared the effectiveness of different types of housing. Rather, we examined the effects of participating in a housing support program compared with no housing support.

In our review of housing assistance for ex-offenders, we included programs that provided housing for offenders after their release from jail or prison. In most of these programs, housing was only one aspect of programs providing multiple services. We did not include programs such as halfway houses or work release programs⁴ because offenders in those settings are technically still in custody.

FINDINGS

In this section, we describe the outcomes associated with the provision of housing supports to ex-offenders and individuals with mental illness. The results of our analysis can be found in Exhibit 1.

Effectiveness of Housing for Persons With Mental Illness

We located five rigorous comparison group studies on the effects of housing assistance for mentally ill individuals. One study provided information on five housing programs, so we included a total of nine programs in our analysis.

³ For further explanation of our research procedures, see Appendix A in the Institute report, S. Aos, R. Lieb, J. Mayfield, M. Miller, & A. Pennucci (2004). *Benefits and costs of prevention and early intervention programs for youth*. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, Document No. 04-07-3901.

⁴ E. Drake (2007). *Does participation in Washington's work release facilities reduce recidivism?* Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, Document No. 07-11-1201.

We identified three key outcomes from these studies, although not all studies measured each outcome. The outcomes included were homelessness, hospitalization, and crime.

1) Impact on Homelessness

Three studies (seven programs) evaluated the impact of supported housing on homelessness.

On average, the combined effects from these studies revealed that provision of housing supports for persons with mental illness significantly reduced homelessness by 34 percent.

2) Impact on Use of Hospital Services

Four studies provided findings on the impact of housing supports on the use of hospital services. The results indicate a significant reduction in the use of hospital services (measured as either days in hospital or hospital expenses) among mentally ill recipients of housing support.

3) Impact on Crime

Two studies measured the impact of housing supports on crime in populations of homeless people with mental illness. Receipt of housing supports significantly reduced crime by 5 percent in this population.

Effectiveness of Housing for Ex-offenders

We found one rigorous evaluation of a program for ex-offenders where the only service provided was housing. Because housing supports are most commonly provided as one component of offender reentry programs, we expanded our search to include reentry programs. Reentry programs typically provide returning offenders with access to a number of services, such as substance abuse treatment, skills and jobs training, education, and housing assistance.

We identified a total of seven rigorous studies. One program was exclusively housing, and six others provided housing as part of a broader reentry program.

Three of the studies were for the *general population of ex-offenders*. These programs had no significant effect on recidivism.

Four of the studies examined intensive, multi-faceted programs for *serious, violent offenders*. These four programs significantly reduced future crime. In this group of studies, the recidivism rate for those in the reentry programs was 31 percent, 4 percentage points less than the comparison groups—a reduction of 12 percent. Because housing was only one aspect of these programs, we cannot know whether or to

what extent the housing component contributed to reductions in recidivism.

The literature on housing for prisoners returning to the community is growing. We expect that in a few years, there will be an increased number of studies looking specifically at outcomes associated with housing programs for ex-offenders.

In Washington State, the Reentry Housing Pilot Program (RHPP) was established in January 2008⁵ to provide housing assistance for ex-offenders. The program provides up to 12 months of housing support to qualified high-risk and high-need offenders; the program also provides assistance in securing employment and other aspects of self-sustainability. It is too early to determine the effect of this new reentry housing program on recidivism. An evaluation of the program is ongoing; the final report will be available in February 2011.^{6,7}

In addition, the Justice Policy Center at the Urban Institute has three on-going projects related to housing for ex-offenders.⁸

CONCLUSIONS

In this initial review of the literature, this report reveals the following:

- ✓ Housing assistance for persons with mental illness significantly reduced homelessness, hospitalization, and crime when compared to similar individuals who did not participate in a housing program.
- ✓ Reentry programs that included housing support for the general population of ex-offenders did not affect the incidence of recidivism.
- ✓ Reentry programs for serious violent ex-offenders significantly reduced recidivism.

⁵ ESSB 6157, Chapter 483, Laws of 2007

⁶ Faith Lutze, Washington State University, personal communication.

⁷ In 2009, the Legislature created a second program for ex-offenders. SB 5525 provides up to three months of housing vouchers for offenders eligible for release but lacking suitable housing. As far as we know, there are no plans to evaluate the voucher program.

⁸ <http://www.urban.org/center/jpc/projects/index.cfm>

Exhibit 1

Meta-Analytic Estimates of Standardized Mean Difference Effect Sizes for Housing Support Programs

Type of Program or Policy (and its effect on outcomes included in the meta-analysis)	Number of Effect Sizes Included in the Analysis (Number of cases in the treatment groups)	Meta-Analytic Results Before Applying Institute Adjustments					Adjusted Effect Size (estimated effect after adjustments for the methodological quality of the evidence, outcome measure relevance, and researcher involvement)
		Fixed Effects Model			Random Effects Model		
		Weighted Mean Effect Size		Homogeneity Test	Weighted Mean Effect Size		
		ES	p-value	p-value	ES	p-value	
Housing Supports for Persons With Mental Illness							
Homelessness	7 (600)	-0.359	.00	ns	na	na	-0.310
Hospitalization	4 (1,195)	-0.189	.00	ns	na	na	-0.120
Crime	2 (3,466)	-0.080	.00	ns	na	na	-0.038
Housing Supports for the General Population of Ex-offenders							
Crime	3 (759)	0.072	0.182	ns	na	na	0.000
Housing Supports for Serious Violent Ex-offenders							
Crime	4 (749)	-0.228	.00	ns	na	na	-0.115

Notes: ns=not significant, na=not applicable.

Exhibit 2

Citations for the Studies Used in the Meta-Analysis

Programs for Ex-Offenders

Bouffard, J. A., & Bergeron, L. E. (2006). Reentry works: The implementation and effectiveness of a serious and violent offender reentry initiative. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation, 44*(2/3), 1-29.

Jacobs, E., & Western, B. (2007, October). *Report on the evaluation of the ComALERT prisoner reentry program*. Brooklyn, NY: Office of the King's County District Attorney.

Mayfield, J. (2009) *The Dangerously Mentally Ill Offender Program: Four-year felony recidivism and cost effectiveness*. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, Document No. 09-02-1901.

McLean, M., & Butler, S. (2008, June). *Recidivism survival analysis of the serious and violent offender reentry initiative 2003-2007*. Laramie: University of Wyoming, Wyoming Survey & Analysis Center.

Roman, J., Brooks, L., Lagerson, E., Chalfin, A., & Tereschchenko, B. (2007, January). *Impact and cost benefit analysis of the Maryland Reentry Partnership Initiative*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

Wilson, J. A., & Davis, R. C. (2006). Good intentions meet hard realities: An evaluation of the Project Greenlight reentry program. *Criminology and Public Policy, 5*(2), 303-338.

Worcel, S. D., Burrus, S. W. M., & Finigan, M. W. (2009, January). *A study of substance-free transitional housing and community corrections in Washington County, Oregon*. Portland, OR: NPC Research.

Programs for Persons With Mental Illness

Culhane, D. P., Metraux, S., & Hadley, T. (2002). Public service reductions associated with placement of homeless persons with severe mental illness in supportive housing. *Housing Policy Debate, 13*(1), 107-163.

Lipton, F. R., Nutt, S., & Sabatini, A. (1988). Housing the homeless mentally ill: A longitudinal study of a treatment approach. *Hospital & Community Psychiatry, 39*(1), 40-45.

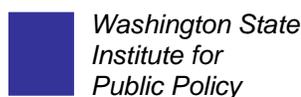
Rosenheck, R., Kasparow, W., Frisman, L., & Liu-Mares, W. (2003). Cost-effectiveness of supported housing for homeless persons with mental illness. *Archives of General Psychiatry, 60*:940-951.

Sadowski, L. S., Kee, R. A., VanderWeele, T. J., & Buchanan, D. (2009). Effect of a housing and case management program on emergency department visits and hospitalizations among chronically ill homeless adults: A randomized trial. *JAMA: the Journal of the American Medical Association, 301*(17), 1771-1778.

Shern, D. L., Felton, C. J., Hough, R. L., Lehman, A. F., Goldfinger, S., Valencia, E., & Wood, P. A. (1997). Housing outcomes for homeless adults with mental illness: Results from the second-round McKinney Program. *Psychiatric Services, 48*(2), 239-241. [This study provided information on five programs.]

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