

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REENTRY AND HOMELESSNESS

Stephen Metraux, University of Delaware
Dana Hunt and Will Yetvin, Abt Associates

“Every prisoner facing discharge from a correctional institution must answer this question: ‘Where will I sleep tonight?’ For many returning prisoners, the family home provides an answer to that question. But reunions with families are not always possible...For some, the final answer to the question ‘Where will I sleep tonight?’ is a homeless shelter or the street.”¹

The rise of mass incarceration coincided with the emergence of contemporary homelessness in the early 1980s. The intersection between incarceration and the risk of homelessness is particularly salient for the more than 600,000 people released from prison and the nine million people released from jail annually.² In 2017, almost 52,000 individuals who entered emergency shelters or transitional housing programs came directly from correctional facilities,³ and this number does not include people whose homelessness was unsheltered or who experienced a delayed shelter entry after release.⁴

Incarceration and homelessness further overlap in that both disproportionately affect African American and other minority populations, as well as people with behavioral health disorders.⁵ For example, in 2015, 9.1 percent of Black men ages 20-34 were incarcerated, compared to 1.6 percent of their white counterparts.⁶ While African Americans only comprise 13.4 percent of the U.S. population, 34.4 percent of people experiencing homelessness as individuals in 2019 were African American.⁷

The full extent of the intersection between homelessness and incarceration is difficult to measure. The

¹ Travis, J. and Roman, C. (2004). Taking Stock: Housing, Homelessness, and Prisoner Reentry. 10.13140/RG.2.1.4698.5203.

² Council of State Governments, “National Reentry Resource Center Facts and Trends”. Retrieved from <https://csgjusticecenter.org/nrrc/facts-and-trends/>

³ Henry, M., Bishop, K., de Sousa, T., Shivji, A., & Watt, R. (2018). The 2017 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress: Part Two. Washington, DC: Department of Housing and Urban Development.

⁴ Remster, B. (2019). “A Life Course Analysis of Homeless Shelter Use among the Formerly Incarcerated.” *Justice Quarterly* 36, no. 3: 437–65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2017.1401653>

⁵ For more information on the nature of these interacting risk factors, see Texas Criminal Justice Coalition (2019) *Return to Nowhere The Revolving Door Between Incarceration and Homelessness*, available at: <https://www.texascjc.org/system/files/publications/Return%20to%20Nowhere%20The%20Revolving%20Door%20Between%20Incarceration%20and%20Homelessness.pdf>; Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (2018). *Report and Recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness*, available at: <https://www.lahsa.org/documents?id=2823-report-and-recommendations-of-the-ad-hoc-committee-on-black-people-experiencing-homelessness>; and Greenberg, GA & RA Rosenheck (2008). “Jail incarceration, homelessness, and mental health: a national study,” *Psychiatric Services* 59(2):170-7, doi: 10.1176/ps.2008.59.2.170, available at: <https://ps.psychiatryonline.org/doi/full/10.1176/ps.2008.59.2.170>.

⁶ Pettit, B., and Sykes, B., *Incarceration* (State of the Union 2017). Retrieved from Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality website: https://inequality.stanford.edu/sites/default/Pathways_SOTU_2017_incarceration.pdf.

⁷ Henry M., Watt, R., Mahathey, A., Ouellette, J., and Sitler, A., (2020). The 2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress: Part One. Washington, DC: US Department of Housing and Urban Development.

few studies with relevant findings indicate that as many as 11 percent of those exiting prison become homeless shortly after release. Corresponding rates for those exiting jails are lower, but because many more people are released from jails than from prisons, the number exiting jails who become homeless is even larger.⁸

The challenges that people face in securing housing upon re-entering the community from jail or prison are substantial and well-documented in the reentry literature. Homelessness is a particular concern for subpopulations such as people convicted of sex offenses,⁹ with substance abuse problems,¹⁰ or diagnosed mental illness.¹¹ Factors contributing to increased risk for homelessness also include unemployment and limited job skills, poverty, chronic health conditions, and weakened family and social support ties. A criminal record alone can limit access to public housing and housing vouchers, including moving in with family members who have those housing subsidies.¹² Discrimination by owners of private rental housing on the basis of race, disability, or criminal justice involvement can make it difficult for people reentering the community to find a place to live.¹³

Unstable housing also increases the risk of recidivism. The difficulty of finding stable housing often means that those returning from jails and prisons are limited to areas with high crime and poverty rates, limited or lower paying employment options, and proximity to prior criminal connections. Those contexts are also associated with substance abuse and mental illness treatment failure and with difficulties maintaining the conditions of probation or parole.¹⁴ However, even when the housing context puts a person at risk, housing stability provides a base from which reentering individuals can more readily establish positive social networks in the community, seek employment, adhere to their community supervision requirements, and avoid re-arrest.¹⁵ Studies show that achieving residential stability in the first weeks or months post release is particularly important both for maintaining housing stability and for

⁸ Metraux, S., Roman, C., & Cho, R. (2007). *Incarceration and Homelessness*. Washington, DC: Department of Housing and Urban Development

⁹ Socia, K. M., Levenson, J. S., Ackerman, A. R., & Harris, A. J. (2014). "Brothers under the bridge": Factors influencing the transience of registered sex offenders in Florida. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*. Advance online publication. doi:1079063214521472

¹⁰ Fries, L., Fedock, G., Kubiak, S. P. (2014). Role of gender, substance use, and serious mental illness in anticipated postjail homelessness. *Social Work Research*, 38, 107–116. doi:10.1093/swr/svu014

¹¹ Roman, Caterina Gouvis, Elizabeth Cincotta McBride & Jenny W. L. Osborne (2006). *Principles and Practice in Housing for Persons with Mental Illness Who Have Had Contact with the Justice System*.

¹² Herbert, C., Morenoff, J., & Harding, D. (2015). "Homelessness and Housing Insecurity Among Former Prisoners." *The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* : RSF 1, no. 2: 44–79. Herbert, Morenoff & Harding (2015)

¹³ For a review of structural factors contributing to homelessness, including housing and employment discrimination, see Shinn, M., and Khadduri, J. (2020), *In the Midst of Plenty: Homelessness and What To Do About It*. Wiley-Blackwell. ISBN 978-1-405-18124-2.

¹⁴ Clark, V. (2014). "Predicting Two Types of Recidivism Among Newly Released Prisoners: First Addresses as "Launch Pads" for Recidivism or Reentry Success."

¹⁵ Shaw, M. (2004). "Housing and Public Health." *Annual Review of Public Health* 25: 397–418. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.publhealth.25.101802.123036>.

Harding and Harding (2006). "Inclusion and exclusion in the re-housing of former prisoners."

preventing recidivism.¹⁶

This research synthesis focuses on programs that seek to disrupt the relationship between incarceration and subsequent homelessness. We review the existing evidence base on a set of interventions, from discharge planning, to transitional community corrections facilities, to temporary rental assistance, to supportive housing. We identify research gaps, both for those interventions and for others that appear to be promising practices but have not yet been adequately studied. We then discuss the implications for policymakers and practitioners.

Can effective discharge planning prevent homelessness?

A 2015 study of homelessness and housing insecurity among a large sample of former prisoners found that 50 percent of all moves occurred in the first eight weeks, and when former prisoners move, their risk for subsequent additional moves increase. Thus, providing housing stability in the first few weeks can lower the risk of future instability, homelessness, and recidivism.¹⁷

The first opportunity to prevent post-release homelessness is as part of the discharge planning that occurs during incarceration. Some level of discharge planning is available to most people who are released from prison,¹⁸ while the availability of discharge planning for shorter stays in jail is more uneven. The quality of discharge planning also varies. Backer and colleagues identify several components of effective discharge planning: needs assessments, case management, family engagement, skills building, and “in-reach,” in which community organizations go into carceral facilities to assist with preparing for an upcoming release.¹⁹ Housing is recognized as a central component of needs assessment and case management. The discharge planning process should identify people’s housing needs and assess their risk of becoming homeless. The most effective planning should provide for housing arrangements immediately upon release, the time when someone exiting incarceration is most vulnerable to becoming homeless.²⁰

Assessing the needs of people being released from prison is not enough. Even if comprehensive discharge planning is provided, it will have little impact on homelessness without sufficient resources for implementing the plan.²¹ Consequently, it is difficult to isolate the impact of discharge planning on

¹⁶ Lutze, Faith, Rosky, J. & Hamilton, Z. (2013). “Homelessness and Reentry: A Multisite Outcome Evaluation of Washington State’s Reentry Housing Program for High Risk Offenders.” *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 41: 471–91. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854813510164>.

¹⁷ Herbert et al. (2015). “Homelessness and Housing Insecurity Among Former Prisoners.”

¹⁸ La Vigne, N., Davies, E., Palmer, T., & Halberstadt, R. (2008). *Release Planning for Successful Reentry*. Washington DC: Urban Institute.

¹⁹ Backer, T., Howard, E., & Moran, G. (2007). “The Role of Effective Discharge Planning in Preventing Homelessness.” *The Journal of Primary Prevention*, no. 3–4: 229–43. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10935-007-0095-7>.

²⁰ La Vigne, N., Davies, E., Palmer, T., & Halberstadt, R. (2008). *Release Planning for Successful Reentry*. Washington DC: Urban Institute.

²¹ Backer et al. (2007). “The Role of Effective Discharge Planning in Preventing Homelessness”.

housing outcomes from the housing context into which the person is released.²² Taken together, in-reach programs that link people to housing providers before they leave prison or jail seem promising, but more rigorous evidence is needed on the effectiveness of these programs.

The US Department of Veterans Affairs provides in-reach services through its Veteran Justice Outreach (VJO)²³ and Health Care for Reentry Veterans (HCRV)²⁴ programs. VJO and HCRV assist incarcerated veterans in jail and in prison, respectively, with discharge planning and connections to VA housing, healthcare and benefits services upon release.²⁵ While both VJO and HCRV specifically target incarcerated veterans who demonstrate housing instability, there are to date no outcome studies that assess the extent to which either program has mitigated homelessness for program participants.

Can reentry programming avert homelessness?

People who exit incarceration are at highest risk for homelessness in the immediate post-release period. Discharge planning and related processes can identify those who are at heightened risk for homelessness upon release and can link people to available reentry supports. It then becomes the responsibility of a reentry initiative to provide these services. The effort to facilitate successful transitions from incarceration to community is a complex process that, in addition to housing, involves economic, social, health, vocational and other domains and the coordination of various entities and supports. At the same time, there is broad consensus that stable housing is a key element of successful reentry and should be secured immediately upon exiting incarceration.²⁶ Lack of stable housing (including episodes of homelessness) makes success in other domains of reentry more tenuous and increases the risk for re-arrest and a return to incarceration.²⁷

In the sections that follow, we summarize evidence for how three broad types of reentry programs affect housing stability and homelessness: community correction facilities; reentry programs that include rental assistance of various durations; and supportive housing initiatives. While these are the three types of reentry programs that have been evaluated as of late 2019, few studies have measured homelessness or

²² Moran et al. (2005). Evaluability Assessment of Discharge Planning and the Prevention of Homelessness. Washington, DC: Department of Health and Human Services.

²³ Finlay et al. (2014). U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Justice Outreach Program: Connecting Justice-Involved Veterans With Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Treatment. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 27(2), 203–222. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0887403414562601>

²⁴ Finlay et al. (2017). Use of Veterans Health Administration Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Treatment After Exiting Prison: The Health Care for Reentry Veterans Program. *Adm Policy Ment Health* 44, 177–187. [doi: 10.1007/s10488-015-0708-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-015-0708-z).

²⁵ Tsai J., Rosenheck, R. A., Kaspruw, W. J., & McGuire, J. F. (2014). Homelessness in a National Sample of Incarcerated Veterans in State and Federal Prisons. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health*, 41(3), 360–367; Blue-Howells, J. H., Clark, S. C., van den Berk-Clark, C., & McGuire, J. F. (2013). The US Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Justice Programs and the Sequential Intercept Model: Case Examples in National Dissemination of Intervention for Justice-Involved Veterans. *Psychological Services*, 10(1), 48–53. [doi: 10.1037/a0029652](https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029652).

²⁶ La Vigne et al. (2008). *Release Planning for Successful Reentry*.

²⁷ Travis, T. Solomon, A., & Waul, M. (2001). *From Prison to Home: The Dimensions and Consequences of Prisoner Reentry*. Washington DC: Urban Institute.

housing instability as outcomes. Instead they focus on other outcomes—in particular, recidivism. In the section on research gaps we discuss other approaches to reentry programming that have not yet been studied at all but should be tested.

Community corrections facilities (CCF)

Community Corrections Facilities include halfway houses, work release programs, and other congregate, community-based housing that are either part of an individual's incarceration or a condition of their release. While there are many models and configurations of such facilities, they are residential programs and usually include staff supervision and programmatic services designed to facilitate successful transitions into the community. CCFs can buffer against homelessness in that the residential placement is arranged while the individual is still under a correctional chain of custody and can offer a platform from which to arrange permanent housing and employment in the community. However, just as transitional programs in a homeless service context have received criticism for being a costly means to keep people in extended, temporary housing situations with no clear permanent housing provisions,²⁸ CCFs provide temporary shelter for the initial time in the community when individuals are most vulnerable to homelessness²⁹ but leave questions as to their ability to facilitate transitions to longer-term stable housing.

A recent review of the fairly extensive research literature on CCFs provides no findings on housing outcomes. The studies reviewed focus on recidivism and reoffending, and they point to mixed success in the ability of CCFs to reduce those outcomes. In addition to noting the absence of findings on employment and housing, Wong and colleagues call for future research to “consider the effectiveness of halfway houses on special populations as well as different program approaches.”³⁰ In sum, the evidence base for community corrections facilities as a means to reduce homelessness is weak.

Reentry programs providing housing placements and rental assistances

Several demonstration programs have provided housing supports to people exiting incarceration that, unlike CCR, do not give them a place in a residential facility. Housing supports in such programs provide case management, services such as employment supports, referrals to community housing agencies, and rental assistance with varying durations. Here, again, program evaluations rarely report housing outcomes. The impact of the housing supports provided often is difficult to disentangle from the other services that are typically provided by such programs. Nonetheless, a few programs have promising findings related to housing and homelessness.

²⁸ Tsai, J., Mares, A. S., & Rosenheck, R. A. (2010). A Multisite Comparison of Supported Housing for Chronically Homeless Adults: “Housing First” Versus “Residential Treatment First”. *Psychological Services*, 7(4), 219-232. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0020460>

²⁹ Wong et al. (2019). “Halfway Out: An Examination of the Effects of Halfway Houses on Criminal Recidivism.” *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 63, no. 7: 1018–37. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X18811964>.

³⁰ Ibid, 1034.

In the Minnesota Comprehensive Offender Reentry Plan (MCORP), housing assistance consisted solely of linking participants with community-based housing organizations. An evaluation showed rates of homelessness as being significantly lower for MCORP participants than for a control group. However, MCORP participants were more likely to report multiple moves than the controls, another measure of housing instability. In addition, the study's findings challenge the view that stable housing prevents recidivism. Housing outcomes, including homelessness, were not associated with any of the three recidivism measures that were measured by the evaluation.³¹

The Fortune Society, a non-profit organization in New York City, provides an array of services that include a limited stay in a facility when needed, as well as employment training, family reunification and mediation services, and mental and physical health referrals, to anyone who has done time in a New York City jail or a New York State prison. Abt Associates evaluated Fortune Society's programs using non-experimental multivariate analysis to account for the effects of measurable differences among Fortune clients and non-clients (people not using the services). The evaluation confirmed findings from other studies that the first month following release can be crucial to establishing housing stability. Fortune participants who were not homeless during their first month after release from jail were about one-third less likely to become homeless during any subsequent month. Even those Fortune participants who were homeless immediately after release from jail were about half as likely as non-participants to experience homelessness later. However, in contrast to the positive outcomes following release from New York City jails, no differences in homelessness were found for those released New York State prisons who used Fortune's services (compared to those who did not). A possible explanation is that the additional reentry programming available to people released from state prisons (compared to those released from jail) meant that those reentering from prisons who did not participate in Fortune were receiving services similar to Fortune.³²

A Washington State demonstration, the Housing Voucher Program (HVP)³³ paid private housing rent expenses for up to three months after an individual's release on good behavior, as an alternative to keeping the person in prison until permanent housing arrangements could be made. An evaluation compared those receiving the rent subsidy with a matched control group and found that every dollar invested in the rent subsidy saved more than 7 dollars in in prison costs, with no increase in recidivism or additional risk posed to the community from those released early.³⁴ While the study showed the cost effectiveness of release to temporary subsidized housing, the impact that the program had on longer-term housing stability was not measured.

³¹ Duhe, G. (2012). "Evaluating the Minnesota Comprehensive Offender Reentry Plan (MCORP): Results from a Randomized Experiment."

³² McDonald, D., Dyous, C. & Carlson, K. (2008). *The Effectiveness of Prisoner Reentry Services as Crime Control: The Fortune Society*. Cambridge, MA: Abt Associates Inc.

³³ Despite the similarity of the name, this is not the Housing Choice Voucher program funded by the federal government and administered by local housing authorities.

³⁴ Hamilton, Z., Kiegerl, A., & Hays, Z. (2015) Removing Release Impediments and Reducing Correctional Costs: An Evaluation of Washington State's Housing Voucher Program, *Justice Quarterly* 32 (2): 255-287.

Another Washington State program, the Reentry Housing Pilot Program (RHPP), provided a rent subsidy and case management for up to 12 months for offenders leaving prison who were considered “high risk” and without a viable release plan and who were willing to engage in various programmatic and therapeutic activities to facilitate successful integration into the community. A controlled evaluation of the study showed that the housing assistance provided by this program increased the likelihood of successful community integration as measured through recidivism. Those receiving housing through RHPP also had significantly lower levels of homelessness than a control group. In this case, those who experienced homelessness had higher risk for recidivism.³⁵

Positive outcomes for recidivism have also been found for reentry programs with more substantial housing components. The Alaska Housing Finance Corporation’s HOME Tenant Based Rental Assistance (TBRA) Program provides individuals on probation who are “motivated” and have financial needs with housing choice vouchers for up to two years.³⁶ The Homeless Assistance Rental Program (HARP) in Salt Lake City provided extended rental assistance and case management assistance for formerly incarcerated individuals.³⁷ While the reduced recidivism found for participants in both of these programs is promising, once again homelessness and other housing stability outcomes were not measured.

Supportive Housing

Supportive housing combines housing that has an ongoing rental subsidy with supportive services available to help people maintain their housing and address social service, healthcare and behavioral health needs. Many supportive housing programs follow a “housing first” model that provides people with direct placement into housing regardless of current behavioral health issues and without requiring that they accept services or treatment that may be offered. Numerous studies have documented the effectiveness of supportive housing and the housing first approach in successfully engaging high-needs people experiencing homelessness, placing them in housing, and preventing them from returning to homelessness. In addition, several studies have found that the costs of supportive housing are offset substantially by reductions in homeless services, inpatient hospitalization, and costs of incarceration costs.³⁸ Unlike the housing assistance provided in the other programs we have reviewed, the rental subsidy provided in supportive housing is permanent in the sense that it is available to tenants until they choose to move out or are unable to maintain their lease. The studies of supportive housing have had limited ability to disentangle the effect of the “permanence” of supportive housing from the effect of the

³⁵ Lutze et al. (2013). “Homelessness and Reentry: A Multisite Outcome Evaluation of Washington State’s Reentry Housing Program for High Risk Offenders.”

³⁶ Gutierrez, C. (2016). “2016 Recidivism Reduction Implementation Plan.” AK State Recidivism Reduction Workgroup. Retrieved from <http://mhtrust.org/mhtawp/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/2016-RRIP-FINAL.pdf>

³⁷ Hickert, A., and Taylor, M. J. (2011). “Supportive Housing for Addicted, Incarcerated Homeless Adults.” *Journal of Social Service Research* 37, no. 2: 136–51. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01488376.2011.547449>.

³⁸ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. *Permanent Supportive Housing Evidence-Based Practices*. <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Permanent-Supportive-Housing-Evidence-Based-Practices-EBP-KIT/SMA10-4510>; Seattle University School of Law Homeless Rights Advocacy Project (2018). *The Effectiveness of Housing First & Permanent Supportive Housing*. <https://law.seattleu.edu/Documents/korematsu/HRAP-Excerpts-of-Studies-on-Housing-First-Permanent-Supportive-Housing.pdf>.

available services, but they have found positive results from the package of housing and services.

A rigorously evaluated supportive housing program for justice-involved individuals is the Corporation for Supportive Housing's Frequent Users Systems Engagement (FUSE) model, which has been implemented in several sites. The New York City FUSE program provided supportive housing to roughly 200 individuals who had at least four jail and four shelter stays over the previous five years. A quasi-experimental evaluation of NYC FUSE found that 86 percent of participants had remained in permanent housing after two years, while only 42 percent of a comparison group did so. On average, FUSE participants spent 146.7 fewer days in shelter and 19.2 fewer days incarcerated than did the comparison group.³⁹ Another quasi-experimental study, of the Mecklenburg County (Charlotte NC) FUSE, found that, in addition to increased housing stability, FUSE participants had significantly fewer rearrests compared to a sample of individuals who were eligible and matched on demographics and prior arrest records but not chosen for FUSE.⁴⁰

In Denver, the Health and Housing Social Impact Bond (SIB) Program provides supportive housing to 285 people with records of chronic homelessness and frequent jail stays. Its funding structure, based on a performance-based contract with private or philanthropic lenders, uses a rigorous evaluation design to determine payouts to these investors. After two years, the housing retention rate among tenants was upwards of 85 percent, although 60 percent of these tenants had at least one jail stay. Those stays often were for less than a month, and most people were able to return to their housing upon release. The program is ongoing, and the evaluation will provide more detailed information in upcoming years and extend our understanding of jail and housing dynamics among this heavy services-using population.⁴¹

Supportive housing programs not targeted just to people leaving incarceration also have shown positive results for those participants with recent histories of incarceration. The VA administers a supportive housing program jointly with the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) known as HUD-VA Supportive Housing. HUD-VASH provides over 90,000 supportive housing units nationwide using scattered-site housing and a housing first model. The program serves veterans, who are overrepresented among segments of the homeless and the prison populations. Tsai and Rosenheck found extensive criminal justice involvement among 1,160 HUD-VASH tenants whose records they examined. They also found that the substantial improvements in housing outcomes found for the entire study group held for those with extensive justice involvement, who were neither more nor less likely to experience housing instability or homelessness.

³⁹ Aidala, A., McAllister, W., Yomogida, M., & Shubert, V. (2014). Frequent Users Service Enhancement 'Fuse' Initiative. Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health.

⁴⁰ Listwan, S., Hartman, J., & LaCourse, A. (2018). "Impact of the MeckFUSE Pilot Project: Recidivism Among the Chronically Homeless." *Justice Evaluation Journal* 1, no. 1: 96–108.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/24751979.2018.1478236>.

⁴¹ Cunningham et al. (2018). Denver Supportive Housing Social Impact Bond Initiative: Housing Stability Outcomes. Washington, DC: Urban Institute. Retrieved from:
https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/99180/denver_supportive_housing_social_impact_bond_initiative_3.pdf.

Other studies of supportive housing serving a broader population—not specifically targeted to those leaving incarceration—also have found that positive results for avoiding incarceration. For example, a study of 1,060 veterans who exited HUD-VASH found that only 70 (6.6 percent) went to a jail or prison. Although there was no comparison group, this study provides some evidence that supportive housing is effective for keeping veterans in the community.⁴²

Stronger evidence comes from the evaluation of a supportive housing program in Vancouver (Canada) targeted to individuals who had a current mental disorder. The evaluation found reductions in subsequent rearrests and incarcerations for those program participants who had prior criminal justice records. The study did not measure housing outcomes but did compare two different types of housing provided by the program. The study compared three randomized groups: treatment as usual (the existing and generally available services and supports for individuals experiencing homelessness and mental illness in Vancouver), scattered-site supportive housing, and project-based supportive housing. In the two years following randomization, participants in project-based supportive housing had on average 1.8 times fewer reconvictions than people in usual care had. Those in scattered-site supportive housing had 3.4 times fewer reconvictions.⁴³

What is the evidence base?

There is a consensus both that stable housing is an essential component of any successful reentry effort, and, conversely, that being homeless will impede successful community integration and increase the risk for reincarceration and reoffending. Despite the centrality of these principles, only scant evidence exists on the impact that various reentry programs and housing approaches have on obtaining stable housing and reducing homelessness.

The strongest evidence is for supportive housing, which has demonstrated ability to place and retain formerly incarcerated people in housing. Supportive housing serves people who are considered difficult to house because of long-term homelessness, disability (including mental illness and substance use), and histories of incarceration. While supportive housing is the most promising housing intervention, more research is needed to isolate the elements of this approach that contribute to the positive housing outcomes—for example, types of housing, duration of the housing subsidy, types and intensity of available services, and fidelity to a housing first approach.

Findings for the other types of programs that have been studied are more limited. There is some evidence that providing rental assistance for a limited period of time is associated with reductions in homelessness for people leaving incarceration, but the evidence is mixed, as is the design of these programs—the length

⁴² Tsai, J and Rosenheck, R. (2013) “Homeless Veterans in Supported Housing: Exploring the Impact of Criminal History”; Cusack, M. and Montgomery, A. (2017) “Examining the Bidirectional Association between Veteran Homelessness and Incarceration within the Context of Permanent Supportive Housing.” *Psychological Services* 14, no. 2: 250–56. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ser0000110>.

⁴³ Somers et al. (2013). “Housing First Reduces Re-Offending among Formerly Homeless Adults with Mental Disorders: Results of a Randomized Controlled Trial.”

and depth of the rent subsidy and the other transitional supports provided pre or post-release. No studies of community corrections facilities—halfway houses and other programs that provide a place to stay during the transition from jail or prison—have measured their effect on housing stability or homelessness after the transition ends.

What are the gaps in the evidence base?

Supportive housing is the approach that has been found most effective in facilitating housing stability in reentry populations. However, supportive housing, as an intensive and long-term program, is expensive and would not be needed for many people who leave prison or jail and who have neither disabilities nor long histories of prior homelessness.⁴⁴ The supportive housing provided within the homeless services system is appropriately targeted to people with chronic patterns of homelessness and not to people reentering the community from incarceration, who may not have such patterns. Thus to effectively address homelessness across the entire reentry population, additional approaches need to be developed and evaluated to serve those for whom supportive housing is inappropriate. These approaches should include CCF and rental assistance of various forms and durations, as reviewed earlier. They also should include approaches that have not yet been evaluated at all, starting with supports to make it easier for people to rejoin their families and remain stably housed in a family household.

Making housing with family an effective reentry option. Most people released from prison (and a substantial proportion of those released from jail) will initially exit to housing units rented or owned by their loved ones: spouses or partners, parents, grandparents, adult children, or other relatives.⁴⁵ The support provided by these families is instrumental in determining success or failure in remaining in the community during the first month of release.⁴⁶ While for some living with family can be a long-term source of stable housing, for others a host of problems can strain these situations and result in the reentering individual leaving that housing. Problems created or exacerbated with an extra person joining a household include financial burden, overcrowding, lease violations, and interpersonal incompatibilities.⁴⁷ Especially when the person leaving jail or prison does not find employment, shared living situations with family and friends can become tenuous and increase the risk of reoffending, as well as the risk of homelessness.⁴⁸ Conversely, a well-resourced household (based on the employment of the reentering person or of other family members) can provide stable housing and also increase the likelihood of a range

⁴⁴ Culhane, D. and Metraux, S. (2008). “Rearranging the Deck Chairs or Reallocating the Lifeboats?: Homelessness Assistance and Its Alternatives.”

⁴⁵ Baer et al. (2006). Understanding the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry: Research Findings from the Urban Institute’s Prisoner Reentry Portfolio. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

⁴⁶ Nelson, M., Deess, P., & Allen, C. (1999). The First Month Out: Post-incarceration Experiences in New York City. New York: Vera Institute of Justice.

⁴⁷ Christian, J., Mellow, J., & Thomas, S. (2006). Social and Economic Implications of Family Connections to Prisoners. *Journal of Criminal Justice* 34 no. 4: 443-452; McKay et al. (2016). If Family Matters: Supporting Family Relationships During Incarceration and Reentry. *Criminology & Public Policy* 15 no. 2: 529-542. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12209>

⁴⁸ Harding et al. (2017). Families, Prisoner Reentry, and Reintegration. 10.1007/978-3-319-43847-4_8.

of other positive reentry outcomes.⁴⁹

Programmatic assistance that supports the stability of family households would appear to be a key means to reduce risk for homelessness and otherwise facilitate successful reentry for many people.⁵⁰ Groups that convened to discuss this issue recommended more explicit family involvement in discharge planning and providing post-release resources for overcoming the difficulties of integrating a person exiting incarceration into a family household.⁵¹ The Vera Institute of Justice provides guidance on how to set up such supports.⁵² Financial subsidies, in the form of income assistance or rent supports, paid to the hosting household as part of the reentry arrangements could ultimately prove to be effective, inexpensive ways to avert homelessness and other negative, costly reentry outcomes. However, they have not yet been tested systematically and evaluated.

Reentry services could emulate approaches that the homeless services system has developed for providing supports that could fit well into reentry-based efforts to easing household financial burdens. These include systematic diversion techniques,⁵³ in which caseworkers work with people with fragile housing situations to come up with ways that the household could either continue staying safely in their current living situation or move to other housing where it would be easier to keep the household housed and intact. This problem-solving approach uses a variety of means to work out housing alternatives, and successful diversion may not require financial assistance. Short-term financial assistance could also be available when required to head off homelessness. Support for the family also could include family mediation sessions in the months that follow the immediate diversion from homelessness.

Sometimes the person returning from prison or jail could find stable housing by joining family members who live in public housing or are using tenant-based vouchers, but that requires overcoming barriers created by program rules. During the Obama Administration, the federal government urged local housing authorities to relax restrictions on allowing people with criminal records to rejoin loved ones in public and assisted housing. At least two housing authorities have developed such programs. The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) established the Family Re-entry Pilot Program (FRPP), which allows people with criminal records to move back in with their families in public housing under certain conditions.⁵⁴ In Baltimore, the local housing authority has limited housing disqualification periods to

⁴⁹ Sirois, C. (2019). Household Support and Social Integration in the Year After Prison. <https://doi.org/10.1111/socf.12549>

⁵⁰ Herbert, C., Morenoff, J., & Harding, D. (2015). "Homelessness and Housing Insecurity Among Former Prisoners." *The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* : RSF 1, no. 2: 44–79.

⁵¹ Christian et al. (2006). "Bringing Families In: Recommendations of the Incarceration, Reentry and the Family Roundtables." And Martinez (2009). "Family Connections and Prisoner Reentry."

⁵² Di Zerega & Villalobos Agudelo (2011). *Piloting a Tool for Reentry: A Promising Approach to Engaging Family Members*.

⁵³ National Alliance to End Homelessness. *Closing the Front Door: Creating a Successful Diversion Program for Homeless Families and Social Planning, Policy and Program Administration* (2013). What is Diversion? An Overview of Emergency Shelter Diversion as a Practice and the Local Context in Waterloo Region. Waterloo, ON: Regional Municipality of Waterloo. https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/Diversion_Report_Final.pdf

⁵⁴ Bae, J., di Zerega, M., Kang-Brown, J., Shanahan, R., & Subramanian, R. (2016). *Coming Home: An Evaluation of the New York City Housing Authority's Family Reentry Pilot Program*. New York: Vera Institute of Justice.

three years for felony convictions and 18 months for misdemeanors. The Baltimore Housing Authority also set aside 250 housing vouchers for chronically homeless families with at least one ex-offender and 50 vouchers for chronically homeless individuals who participated in Baltimore's Ex-Offender Program.⁵⁵ In a related effort, some jurisdictions have instituted "ban the box" legislation that prohibits landlords from asking about an applicant's criminal history when deciding whether to rent to prospective tenants.⁵⁶

Providing assistance in independent housing. Housing with family is not always available, or it may not be safe or conducive to successful reentry. In those cases, the person exiting incarceration will have to secure independent housing, meaning housing in which the formerly incarcerated person is the leaseholder. Accessing one's own housing upon reentry can be difficult, both because of the stigma attached to having a criminal record and because of inadequate income to pay the rent in available housing units. We have already described the limited evidence available from local programs that provide various levels of housing assistance and services short of placement into supportive housing to people leaving incarceration, but much more needs to be done to demonstrate and evaluate such approaches.

Here reentry services can again look to approaches used by homeless services systems. "Rapid rehousing" provides case management and a wide range of resources, including financial assistance, for placing a household (individual or family) in housing. Rent subsidies provided by rapid rehousing can last up to two years, but often are much shorter.⁵⁷ Similar to some of the reentry programs described earlier (for example, the Washington State Housing Voucher Program), programs not limited to people leaving incarceration use various ways of making the rental assistance less costly, including providing modest dollar amounts of assistance and encouraging shared living arrangements.⁵⁸ Because of the multiple forms of housing discrimination that may be faced by the reentry population, the rental assistance provided to a reentry population may need to include housing placement assistance informed by fair housing law and the resources available locally to enforce the law.

Housing difficult populations. We have already discussed supportive housing as a tested intervention that is applicable to subpopulations of those exiting incarceration such as people with mental health problems. Beyond evidence supporting the effectiveness of supportive housing for this subgroup, Roman, McBride and Osborne caution that housing approaches taken more generally for people with mental health problems may not always be transferable to people who also have histories of incarceration.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ National Housing Law Project. (2018). *An Affordable Home on Re-entry*. San Francisco, CA: Author.

⁵⁶ <https://nextcity.org/daily/entry/new-law-prevents-housing-discrimination-for-returning-citizens-in-cook-coun>
<https://www.marketwatch.com/story/a-new-seattle-housing-law-forbids-landlords-from-checking-into-tenants-criminal-history-but-does-it-go-too-far-2018-12-26>

⁵⁷ Dunton, L., and Brown, S. R. (2019). *Rapid re-housing in 2018: Program features and assistance models*. Abt Associates.

⁵⁸ Both these approaches to containing the costs of a rent subsidy are referred to as "shallow." Dasinger, L. K. Speigman, R. (2007). Homelessness Prevention: The Effect of a Shallow Rent Subsidy Program on Housing Outcomes among People with HIV or AIDS. *AIDS and Behavior* 11, 128–139. doi: 10.1007/s10461-007-9250-7.

⁵⁹ Roman, C.G., Cincotta, E., & Osborne, W.L. (2006). *Principles and Practice in Housing for Persons with Mental Illness Who Have Had Contact with the Justice System*. Washington DC: Urban Institute.

Despite the impact of substance use upon the risk for homelessness at reentry, research provides little guidance on interventions that reduce the risk of homelessness in this context. Generally, the research comes to the conclusion that, as Fitzpatrick-Lewis found in a review of relevant studies:

For homeless people with substance abuse issues or concurrent disorders, provision of housing was associated with decreased substance use, relapses from periods of substance abstinence, and health services utilization, and increased housing tenure.⁶⁰

Research specifically on supportive housing for people dealing with substance use issues also finds associations with positive housing outcomes, although associations between supportive housing and improved substance use outcomes are inconclusive.⁶¹ Housing programs generally take either an abstinence (i.e. no substance use) or a “harm reduction” (i.e., substance use tolerated while encouraging positive behaviors approach to substance use. While some studies have noted better substance use outcomes in abstinence programs,⁶² success with a particular approach may depend on the particular drug problem and the preferences of the individual resident.⁶³ Sober Living Housing (SLH), which is a self-sustaining, alcohol and drug free community-living model, has shown success in facilitating both housing tenure and sustained sobriety. Polcin and colleagues, who have done extensive research on SLH, make a case for the suitability of this model as reentry housing.⁶⁴ Given their findings, and that that SLH potentially can provide housing opportunities without requiring substantial funding, this approach deserves closer examination for housing people with substance use issues upon exiting incarceration.

People released from incarceration following sex offence convictions face restrictions imposed by many localities on where they are permitted to live, as well as broader stigmas that result in further difficulties related to securing housing. Many sex offenders have remained incarcerated past their release date for lack of a housing destination, been stuck for long periods of time in transitional facilities, or have become

⁶⁰ Fitzpatrick-Lewis, D., Ganann, R., Krishnaratne, S., Ciliska, D., Kouyoumdjian, F. & Hwang, S.W. (2011). “Effectiveness of interventions to improve the health and housing status of homeless people: a rapid systematic review.” *BMC Public Health* 11 (638). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-11-638>.

⁶¹ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2018). *Permanent Supportive Housing: Evaluating the Evidence for Improving Health Outcomes Among People Experiencing Chronic Homelessness*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17226/25133>.

⁶² For example, Milby, J.B., Schumacher, J.E., Wallace, D., Freedman, M.J., & Vuchinich, R.E. (2005). *American Journal of Public Health* 95(7): 1259-1265. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1449349/>

⁶³ Wittman, F.D., Polcin, D.L., & Sheridan, D. (2017). “The Architecture of Recovery: Two Kinds of Housing Assistance for Chronic Homeless Persons with Substance Use Disorders.” *Drugs & Alcohol Today* 17(3): 157-167.

⁶⁴ Relevant studies on SLH include: Polcin, D.L., Korcha, R., Bond, J. & Galloway, G. (2010). “What Did We Learn from Our Study on Sober Living Houses and Where Do We Go from Here?” *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*. 2010 Dec; 42(4): 425–433. Available at: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3057870/#_ffn_sectitle; and Polcin, D.L and Korcha, R. (2017). “Housing Status, Psychiatric Symptoms, and Substance Abuse Outcomes Among Sober Living House Residents over 18 Months.” *Addiction Disorders and Their Treatment* 16(3): 138–150. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29056875>. For SLH and reentry, see Polcin, D.L (2006). “What about Sober Living Houses for Parolees?” *Criminal Justice Studies* 19(3): 291-300; <https://doi.org/10.1080/14786010600921712>.

homeless without a means to resolve their homelessness.⁶⁵ Two directions have been taken in the few efforts to date seeking to address this problem. The first has been to develop innovative fixes amidst the current restrictive environment, such as the VA Palo Alto Health Care System's initiative, in partnership with the Santa Clara County Continuum of Care (CoC) that has provided supportive housing to Veterans with a history of sexual offense.⁶⁶ The second direction is a more systemic approach, such as Levenson's advocacy for "research-based policy reform" as a basis for challenging residence restriction laws that "legislat[e] individuals into homelessness."⁶⁷

Criminalization of homelessness. The criminalization of people experiencing homelessness contributes to the tie between local criminal justice and homelessness systems.⁶⁸ Localities have adopted a variety of statutes, often vague and open to interpretation, prohibiting a range of behaviors that can be associated with homelessness: disorderly conduct, squatting (trespassing), public intoxication, sleeping outside, and aggressive panhandling.⁶⁹ These are all misdemeanor crimes that can be punishable by time in county or local jail, a fine, or probation. Failure to pay the fine can result in bench warrants being issued and eventual re-incarceration. This has implications not only for prolonged justice involvement, but also for exiting homelessness. Several reports from both law enforcement and homelessness orientations have addressed ways in which underlying approaches that lead to criminalization can be mitigated.⁷⁰

Scaling up housing efforts. Many of the programs we have reviewed are pilot projects that served a small number of people and lasted for a limited time. Even larger initiatives such as the federal Second Chance Act of 2007 and the First Step Act of 2018 limit the funding of housing reentry initiatives to demonstration projects. Metraux, Roman, & Cho's critique, made over a decade ago, that reentry housing amounts to a "patchwork of 'boutique' programs," remains valid. A major gap in the evidence is how to

⁶⁵ Kras, K. R., Pleggenkuhle, B., & Huebner, B. M. (2016). "A New Way of Doing Time on the Outside: Sex Offenders' Pathways In and Out of a Transitional Housing Facility." *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 60(5), 512–534. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X14554194>; Cann, D., & Isom Scott, D. A. (2019). "Sex Offender Residence Restrictions and Homelessness: A Critical Look at South Carolina." *Criminal Justice Policy Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0887403419862334>; Rydberg, J. (2018). "Employment and Housing Challenges Experienced by Sex Offenders during Reentry on Parole." *Corrections* 3(1), 15-37. doi: 10.1080/23774657.2017.1369373

⁶⁶ National Homeless Program Office (2019). "VA Palo Alto Health Care System – Permanent Supportive Housing Veterans with a History of Sexual Offense." US Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Health Administration. Available at: <https://www.va.gov/homeless/promising-practices.asp>.

⁶⁷ Levenson, J.S. (2018). "Hidden challenges: Sex offenders legislate into homelessness." *Journal of Social Work* 18(3) 348–363. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468017316654811>. Quote on page 458.

⁶⁸ Herring, C., Yarbrough, D., & Alatorre, L. (2019). "Pervasive Penalty: How the Criminalization of Poverty Perpetuates Homelessness." *Social Problems*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spz004>.

⁶⁹ National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (2019). *Housing Not Handcuffs 2019: Ending the Criminalization of Homelessness in U.S. Cities*. Available at: <http://nlchp.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/HOUSING-NOT-HANDCUFFS-2019-FINAL.pdf>.

⁷⁰ See Chamard (2010). *The Problem of Homeless Encampments*. US Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. Available at: <https://popcenter.asu.edu/content/homeless-encampments-0>. US Interagency Council on Homelessness (2012). *Searching for Solutions: Constructive Alternatives to the Criminalization of Homelessness*. Available at: <https://www.usich.gov/tools-for-action/searching-out-solutions>. Police Executive Research Forum (2018), *The Police Response to Homelessness*, Available at: www.policeforum.org/assets/PoliceResponseToHomelessness.pdf.

scale-up reentry housing initiatives so as to establish sufficient capacity to meet the need for housing supports for those exiting incarceration.⁷¹

Measuring housing impacts of reentry programs. Most studies of reentry programs focus primarily on some measure of recidivism or reoffending. These are important outcomes, and recidivism indicates that a person has faced challenges in reintegrating into the community. However, these outcomes offer little insights on what factors help people maintain housing and avoid homelessness after release from incarceration. In addition to recidivism, research should track housing stability, labor force participation, and income levels in the intermediate (2-3 years) and longer term (5-10 years) periods after reentry. In addition, most studies rely on small samples of formerly incarcerated individuals that may not be generalizable to a larger reentry population and to other communities.⁷² Two monographs by Fontaine (one coauthored by Biess) provide frameworks for designing and evaluating reentry programming that focuses on housing outcomes.⁷³

Finally, research on the relationship between the length of stay in the criminal justice system and housing stability is lacking and needed. Those who have been incarcerated for long periods of time are more likely to lose contact with the support systems in their lives and may have higher risks of facing homelessness than those with shorter sentences.

What are the implications for policy and practice?

Fontaine and Biess summarize the substantial structural hurdles faced in addressing homelessness within the context of reentry:

Securing adequate permanent housing for the formerly incarcerated has been documented as a serious challenge local and state governments have found difficult to overcome. Systems are fragmented, and no particular agency is responsible for providing housing to individuals leaving prisons and jails.⁷⁴

Addressing this problem will require partnerships between criminal justice and homeless services systems; participation by mainstream providers of affordable housing; and involvement by policy-makers and funders at all levels of government. Our specific recommendations are as follows:

- Federal, state, and local criminal justice systems should provide adequate funding to ensure that discharge planning has the capacity to place people at risk of housing instability and

⁷¹ Metraux, Roman & Cho (2007), p. 9-21

⁷² Herbert et al. (2015). "Homelessness and Housing Insecurity Among Former Prisoners."

⁷³ Fontaine, J. and Biess, J. (2013). *Housing as a Platform for Formerly Incarcerated Persons*; Fontaine, J. (2013). *Examining Housing as a Pathway to Successful Reentry: A Demonstration Design Process*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

⁷⁴ Corporation for Supportive Housing (2015). *Promoting Access to Stable, Permanent Housing For All New Yorkers*.

homelessness into a stable residence in the first weeks following release. Discharge planning should include expanded in-reach programs that involve community-based housing providers and housing authorities.

- Departments of corrections should partner with community services systems to develop new resources and leverage existing community resources, not homeless services, to connect inmates with community housing prior to release. Homeless services systems, sometimes referred to as Continuums of Care, could be a thought partner, but planned exits to emergency shelter should not be viewed as an acceptable discharge outcome.
- Community services provider agencies and partners should advocate for policies that prohibit corrections facilities and programs from releasing persons to situations that would immediately result in homelessness. This would be consistent with US Department of Housing and Urban Development guidelines.⁷⁵
- Given its proven effectiveness, supportive housing needs to be more widely available for high-needs individuals leaving prisons and jails to the community.
- Correctional systems, with thought guidance from homeless services system, should continue to develop and evaluate innovative temporary and low-cost housing assistance for bridging the period between release from jail or prison that target people reentering the community who do not need the long-term subsidies and intensive services provided by supportive housing.
- Stakeholders in the criminal justice systems and community services systems should collaborate to design, fund, and evaluate reentry programming that support living with partners and in other family settings. Those supports would include diversion assistance, subsidies to renters and homeowners (including local or state tax credits for households that receive a reentering individual), and family mediation services.
- Justice systems should review the regulations regarding technical violations of probation of parole with sanctions that can result in reincarceration. Providing housing support or halfway house options as an alternative for returning to the original jail or prison facility may help ex-offenders maintain stable housing and reduce recidivism, resulting in long-term cost savings.⁷⁶
- Task forces at local, state, and possibly national levels should be established to develop policy changes and housing approaches to so that housing opportunities become more available to people with sex offense convictions.

⁷⁵ See HUD guideline to this effect at: <https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/40076C2.PDF>.

⁷⁶ Lutze et al. (2013). "Homelessness and Reentry: A Multisite Outcome Evaluation of Washington State's Reentry Housing Program for High Risk Offenders."

- Stakeholders in the criminal justice and housing services systems should work with public housing authority staff and boards to implement policies that apply housing rules in more flexible ways.⁷⁷ The National Housing Law Project has provided a list of policies to increase housing access for those with criminal records:⁷⁸
 - Individualized review of each applicant with required consideration of mitigating circumstances and or rehabilitation efforts.
 - Limit review of an applicant’s criminal history to certain convictions over a fixed period of time prior to admission, with time periods depending on seriousness of prior conviction.
 - Exclude categorical housing bans aside from what is required by federal law.
- Service providers and system planners should track outcomes to evaluate the success of interventions and policy changes, housing stability and homelessness prevention, as well as education and employment outcomes and recidivism in all forms of reentry housing.
- Federal government agencies and philanthropy should support the evaluation of community-level interventions with outcomes that go beyond recidivism and reoffending and include housing. Interventions that indicate effectiveness should be scaled up and tested across communities with different housing, employment, and criminal justice environments. With the limited research to date on effective approaches that link reentering individuals to housing, there is a need for new models and studies to build the knowledge base for what works that can be applied to a level commensurate with the magnitude of this problem.

⁷⁷ Bae, J., Finley, K., diZerega, M., & Kim, S. (2017). *Opening Doors: How to Develop Reentry Programs Using Examples from Public Housing Authorities*. Vera Institute of Justice.

⁷⁸ National Housing Law Project. (2018). *An Affordable Home on Re-entry*. San Francisco, CA: Author.