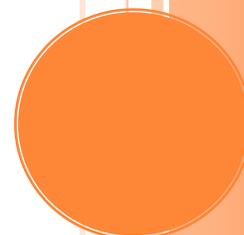


POLICY BRIEF:

Homelessness Prevention

Combating homelessness requires effective strategies to reduce the number of families and individuals who become homeless, in addition to helping currently homeless families and individuals move into permanent housing.

10/8/2015



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Thousands of individuals and families fall into homelessness every month in Los Angeles due to a variety of reasons, such as eviction, illness, losing a job, or the end of a relationship. Combating homelessness requires effective strategies to reduce the number of families and individuals who become homeless, in addition to helping currently homeless families and individuals move into permanent housing.

Current Efforts

County of Los Angeles

DPSS Emergency Assistance to Prevent Eviction for CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work (WtW) Families: Helps CalWORKs WtW families who are behind in rent and/or utility bills due to a financial crisis which could lead to an eviction and homelessness. It provides eligible families with a once-in-a-lifetime maximum of up to \$2,000 to pay their past due rent and/or utilities for up to two months to help them keep their housing.

DPSS Housing Relocation Program (HRP) for CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work families: Provides a one-time-only relocation subsidy of up to \$1,500 to eligible CalWORKs WtW participants working 20 hours or more per week or with a documented offer of employment for 20 hours or more per week. Travel time from current housing to employment/day care must exceed 1-hour one-way. In addition, the rent for the prospective residence must not exceed 60% of the family's total monthly household income. The HRP pays up to \$1,500 for move-in costs and an additional \$405 for appliances (stove and/or refrigerator) if not available in the rental housing.

DPSS CalWORKs Homeless Assistance Program: Provides temporary and permanent housing assistance. Temporary assistance includes temporary shelter payments to housing families while they are looking for permanent housing. Permanent assistance helps homeless families secure a permanent residence or provides up to two months back rent when the family has received a pay rent or quit notice.

DPSS 4-Month Rental Assistance Program for CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work Families: Helps homeless CalWORKs WtW families to remain in non-subsidized permanent housing by providing a short-term rental subsidy. Families receiving Permanent Homeless Assistance, Moving Assistance, and/or Emergency Assistance to Prevent Eviction may qualify for a monthly rental subsidy of up to \$300 - \$500 per family (based on the family size) for up to four consecutive months. The length

of this subsidy can be extended for families in the CalWORKs Family Stabilization Program.

DPSS General Relief (GR): GR assists needy adults who are ineligible for State or Federal assistance. An average GR case consists of one person (living alone), w/no income or resources. The maximum monthly GR grant for one person is \$221/\$374 for 2 persons. If eligible for GR, the following aid may be available while GR is pending:

- Aid to prevent eviction;
- Aid to prevent utility shut-off or to restore utilities;
- Aid to 1st paycheck;
- Meal and housing vouchers;
- Transportation to seek jobs/keep medical appointments, etc. and
- Expedited CalFresh benefits.

DMH Mental Health Housing Assistance Program: Provides funding to assist mental health consumers without the financial resources to afford the costs associated with moving into permanent housing (i.e. security deposit, household goods needed to start a home) and/or avoid eviction due to unexpected financial hardship.

DMH MHSA Housing Assistance Program: Provides funding to assist directly operated Full Services Partnerships with consumer's permanent housing move-in costs, on-going rental assistance, and purchase of household goods to start a home; as well as avoid an eviction due to an unexpected financial hardship.

DMH TAY Transitional Housing Program: In collaboration with the Department of Children and Family Services, this program provides housing to emancipated TAY with mental illness exiting the foster care system and at risk of becoming homeless.

CDC Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG): ESG provides funding to: (1) engage homeless individuals and families living on the street; (2) improve the number and quality of emergency shelters for homeless individuals and families; (3) help operate these shelters; (4) provide essential services to shelter residents, (5) rapidly re-house homeless individuals and families, and (6) prevent families/individuals from becoming homeless. The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority administers the ESG program for the County's Community Development Commission. Total ESG funds available for 2015-2016 are \$1,879,396.

City of Los Angeles

Homeless Prevention and Rapid Rehousing Program: From 2009 to 2012, the City of Los Angeles had a homelessness prevention program as part of the federally funded Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Rehousing Program. This program

provided case managers, legal aid, and financial assistance to households facing eviction that were the most likely to experience homelessness and showed the greatest likelihood of achieving stability with a brief intervention. The homelessness prevention portion of the City's HPRP program served 4,246 people at a cost of \$10,300,669.

Other Efforts

Shriver Housing Project: The State of California's Sargent Shriver Civil Counsel Act funds a collaboration between four legal aid organizations: Inner City Law Center, the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles, Neighborhood Legal Services, and Public Counsel. The collaboration provides legal representation to low-income people facing eviction when their landlord is represented by an attorney. During the two-and-a-half years from March 2013 through September 2015, the collaboration helped 12,256 people prepare answers to unlawful detainers while providing full legal representation to over 6,461 of these individuals or families. One of the programs recently reported the outcomes from their most recent 500 cases. Inner City Law Center kept 41% of the 500 families that received full-scope representation in their existing homes. The families that had to leave their homes usually received time and the financial cushion needed to have a soft landing into another stable housing situation. In these cases, tenants facing eviction obtained an average of \$5,200 in relocation benefits or waived rent, an average of more than 60 days time to move, and usually an agreement that the case record be sealed, which protects their ability to rent in the future.

Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF): The Veteran Administration's Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program has a significant homelessness prevention component. SSVF provides a range of supportive services designed to resolve immediate crises and promote housing stability, including: (1) outreach services; (2) case management services; (3) assistance in obtaining various VA benefits and a wide array of other benefits, including health care services, daily living services, transportation services, income support services, fiduciary and payee services, legal services, child care, housing counseling, and other services necessary for maintaining independent living; and (4) temporary financial assistance paid to a third party, including rental assistance, security or utility deposits, moving costs, child care costs, transportation costs, emergency supplies, general housing assistance and other emergency supplies. SSVF serves veterans at the highest risk of becoming or remaining homeless. Because SSVF prioritizes veteran families earning less than 30% of the area median income, SSVF often supports veterans who may have little or no income and who have multiple barriers to housing stability. SSVF's homelessness prevention program is generally considered to be quite successful. A recent study (linked below) found that 94% of families and 90% of individuals receiving SSVF homelessness prevention assistance remained housed after one year, and 89% of the families and 82% of the individuals were still housed after two years.

Discharges into Homelessness: There are a number of ongoing local efforts to target people who are being “discharged into homelessness”; however, those efforts are being discussed in the Discharges into Homelessness policy summits.

Comparative Perspective and Best Practices

New York City

While many jurisdictions have homelessness prevention programs, New York City’s (NYC) efforts are particularly instructive, as it is the only place in the country that faces homelessness on the same scale as Los Angeles County.

NYC’s signature homeless prevention program is the Homebase Community Prevention Program. Homebase case managers have broad authority to intervene in flexible ways to stabilize long-term housing. The result is very intensive outreach, case management, and wrap-around services that aim to keep families stably housed. Homebase case managers help their clients find employment, mediate with their landlords, seek health care, apply for public benefits, access legal services, pay rent, find child care and obtain long-term housing stability. Of the 16,000 families taken on by Homebase case managers in fiscal year 2015, 95% are still in their homes. The most recent NYC budget doubled funding for Homebase, bringing the investment to \$42 million annually.

It is worth highlighting four significant differences between New York City and Los Angeles County:

- NYC has a much more extensive infrastructure of available rental subsidies for low-income families in danger of becoming homeless.
- Family homelessness is much more prevalent in NYC (78% of the point in time count as opposed to 18% in LA).
- New Yorkers enjoy a constitutional right to shelter that does not exist in California. This right partially explains why more than 90% of NYC’s homeless are sheltered as opposed to only 30% of LA’s homeless.
- NYC currently dedicates far more money to providing legal services to low-income families facing eviction than is the case in Los Angeles County, and NYC is further expanding these services. NYC has committed that by mid-2017, it will be spending \$60 million annually on legal representation to address the flow of people becoming homeless.

In 2011, researchers from Columbia University found a statistically significant reduction in homelessness in the neighborhoods where the program was operating. In 2013, Abt Associates found “not only a substantial reduction in the average amount of time families spend in shelter — a reduction from 32.2 nights to 9.6 nights over two years — but also that the savings from this reduction in shelter use were greater than the cost of operating the Homebase Community Prevention program.”

NYC's experience demonstrates that, for families in imminent danger of homelessness, case managers who have significant financial subsidies and legal services available to them and who are empowered to do whatever it takes to keep these targeted families stably housed can successfully decrease homelessness and reduce public expenditures.

Discussion Questions

- (1) **What would be the key elements of a robust local homelessness prevention program?** Key elements could include sophisticated targeting, flexible interventions, and sufficient resources.
- (2) **How would homelessness prevention for single adults and youth differ from homelessness prevention for families?**
- (3) **What local policy changes would help low-income families and individuals remain stably housed?** Potential policy changes include:
 - **Rental Registry:** Create City and County rental registries to track vacancies and the rental amounts. Already done by Santa Monica and West Hollywood.
 - **Good Cause:** Extend good cause eviction protection to all rental units. Already implemented in the Cities of Glendale, San Diego, and Richmond.
 - **Limit Rent Increases:** Limit rent increases in rent-stabilized properties by removing any floor on minimum increases and capping the maximum cumulative annual increase.
 - **Anti-Harassment:** Enact anti-harassment laws that establish standards and impose penalties on landlords who attempt to illegally evict tenants. Already implemented by the Cities of Oakland, San Francisco, East Palo Alto, Santa Monica, and West Hollywood.
- (4) **What important aspects of homelessness prevention is this briefing paper missing?**
- (5) **What could be the role of the faith-based community in this process, as they may be aware of those in their circle who might be in danger of becoming homeless?**
- (6) **What resources, referrals and services does the 2-1-1 hotline provide for people facing eviction?**

Resources

- Are there dollars that LA County and/or cities are currently spending to serve homeless families/individuals which could instead be used to prevent homelessness?
- Is there additional revenue that LA County and/or cities could generate to pay for, or reimburse the cost of homelessness prevention?

Legislative Advocacy

- Are there any changes in local, state or federal law which should be pursued?

Potential Policy Options

- Fund a regional homelessness prevention program that provides case management, financial assistance, and legal services to individuals and/or families in imminent danger of homelessness.
- Make policy changes such as those set forth in the above Discussion Questions that would make it easier for people to become and stay stably housed.
- Extend the current CalWORKs Emergency Assistance to Prevent Eviction Program for CalWORKs welfare-to-work families to include CalWORKs non-welfare-to-work families.
- Leverage public assistance connections by increasing the use of County public assistance programs to identify and connect families and individuals at risk of homelessness with homelessness prevention services.
- Local government could work with landlords to identify families and individuals who may be evicted as a result of not paying rent. Local government could provide information to the landlords or directly to the renters to connect renters to agencies and programs to prevent them from becoming homeless.

Additional References and Resources

Daniel Flaming and Patrick Burns, *All Alone: Antecedents of Chronic Homelessness*, Economic Roundtable (August 25, 2015) (“Public assistance programs can be a catalyst for connecting at-risk and homeless recipients with crucial services and reducing the massive public costs associated with chronic homelessness.”) (<http://economicrt.org/publication/all-alone/>)

Adam Murray, *Preventing Homelessness in the City of Los Angeles*, Inner City Law Center (September 22, 2015) (Proposes “a targeted, flexible, well-resourced approach to homelessness prevention for the City of Los Angeles.”)

(<http://www.innereitylaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Homeless-Prevention-Proposal-for-LA-final.pdf>)

Nipped in the bud: Paying to keep people in their homes can sometimes save cities money. The Economist (June 6, 2015) (Great overview of homelessness prevention efforts in New York and elsewhere.) (<http://www.economist.com/news/usa/21653678-paying-keep-people-their-homes-can-sometimes-save-cities-money-nipped-bud>)

NYC to Target Evictions in Bid to Curb Homelessness, The Wall Street Journal (September 28, 2015) (Discusses New York City's recent commitment that "by mid-2017, the city will be spending \$60 million annually—up from about \$34 million now—on an expanded legal team to address the flow of homeless into an already overburdened shelter system and the number of people living on the streets.") (<http://www.wsj.com/articles/nyc-to-target-evictions-in-bid-to-curb-homelessness-1443401502>)

Oakland passes anti-harassment ordinance to protect renters, Indy bay, East Bay (November 9, 2014) (Discusses Oakland's tenant protection ordinance, which "is based on similar anti-harassment policies in cities that prohibit various forms of harassment including San Francisco, East Palo Alto, Santa Monica and West Hollywood, in the effort to curb landlord harassment. The TPO prohibits 16 types of harassment in Oakland that a landlord may use to bully or harass tenants out of their housing.") (<https://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2014/11/09/18763966.php>)

Marie Clare Tran-Leung, *When Discretion Means Denial: A National Perspective on Criminal Records Barriers to Federally Subsidized Housing,* Shriver Center (February 2015) ("[O]verly restrictive policies against people with criminal records can lead to a vicious cycle where 'the difficulties in reintegrating into the community increase the risk of homelessness for released prisoners.'") (<http://povertylaw.org/sites/default/files/images/publications/WDMD-final.pdf>)

Homelessness Prevention, United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (Best practices re homelessness prevention) (http://usich.gov/usich_resources/solutions/explore/homelessness_prevention)

Why Do Some Homeless People Who Are Housed Become Homeless Again? National Alliance to End Homelessness (September 29, 2015) (http://www.endhomelessness.org/blog/entry/why-do-some-homeless-people-who-are-housed-become-homeless-again#.Vgr35_IVikr)