

Housing as a Human Right: Next Steps to Health Equity

Webinar Summary and Call to Action



Webinar Focus

The Partners for Advancing Health Equity Collaborative hosted the webinar, *Housing as a Human Right: Next Steps to Health Equity* on September 26, 2022. Panelists discussed inequities in access to quality housing across the United States. Panelists highlighted policies, economic practices, and historical issues that contribute to ongoing cycles of homelessness. This report provides a synthesis of key takeaways, solutions, and action steps identified from the webinar.

Webinar Voices

- › **Thomas LaVeist**, Dean, [Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine](#)
- › **Anna Rausch**, Vice President of Program Operations, [Coalition for the Homeless](#)
- › **Sydney Shivers**, Deputy Director, [Mayor's Office of Community Assets and Investments, City of New Orleans](#)
- › **Y. Frank Southall**, Organizing and Community Engagement Manager, [Jane Place Neighborhood Sustainability Initiative](#)

Key Resources

- [Health and Housing Equity](#)
- [Housing as a Health Determinant](#)
- [Disarming the Great Affordable Housing Debate](#)

Your Voice

P4HE values collaboration. If there is a resource on this topic that you would like to share with us, provide it [here](#).

Key Takeaways

Housing inequities impact Americans across the life course and disproportionately affect marginalized communities, children, young adults, and [older adults](#). Expanded access to safe and adequate housing requires interdisciplinary efforts to ensure that safe housing, a human right, is guaranteed for all. Challenges include housing affordability, poor infrastructure quality, gentrification, displacement, and community divestment. Homelessness in the United States has also intensified in recent years due to the [COVID-19 pandemic](#).

Call To Action



"Housing-related health inequalities impact Americans across the life course, and, because housing is an important determinant of health, it is critical that we identify the next steps in solving housing inequities." Thomas LaVeist, Dean, Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine

Below we've summarized immediate steps to be taken to address the injustices in achieving housing equity.

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> Establish cross-sector, community-driven partnerships grounded in transparency, data, and solutions.

Housing equity is a complex issue that requires collaboration from partners across various disciplines in the community. It is important to break down silos of communication by bringing together private home and landowners, community members, and leaders from various government agencies and non-profits. Collaboration across communities hastens the effort through the sharing of challenges and successes of other programs, allowing a proactive [problem-solving approach](#).



"Helping solutions require a 'both and' approach. We need financial resources. We need collaborations among sectors, and we need support for policy reforms. [For example], think about the ways that your clients or the communities you work with are impacted by lack of housing access, and where you would like to see more housing opportunities in your community. There are a ton of ways that hospital industries can leverage their resources to provide workforce housing and get involved with advocacy."

Sydney Shivers, Deputy Director, Mayor's Office of Community Assets and Investments, City of New Orleans

Cross-sector collaboration from a [systems perspective](#) helps to ensure that solutions are effective and sustainable. Programs that offer incentives, such as those that reimburse investors who provide housing and [payment in lieu of taxes](#) programs, can help. Overall, collaboration allows for strategies

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to be developed for the most vulnerable by "...bringing folks to the table to vet and talk through new ideas and provide feedback, so that we are able to strategically address the needs of the [area]."

Sydney Shivers, Deputy Director, Mayor's Office of Community Assets and Investments, City of New Orleans

› Establish habitability standards and strengthen renters' rights.

Large multinational corporations have taken advantage of historically disadvantaged and divested communities, as well as a lack of proper ordinances that prevent fair treatment of renters. This has resulted in housing projects that lack affordable, quality housing units. The implementation of policies and healthy housing ordinances can hold landlords accountable for specific health and safety standards. An ordinance recently passed in [New Orleans](#), which also offers establishes a rental registry for the city to track private rental market. Communities must also provide resources to assist tenants in [understanding their rights](#) and support legal action against landlords for unjust evictions or subpar living standards.



"When you drive throughout New Orleans you will see big multi-family unit apartment complexes that are completely abandoned. We know that if [landlords] were forced to make repairs they would ultimately bring more units into operation, which provides more housing. This is an important issue, because when we think about a lot of our unhoused community members, people who are working class and receive Federal subsidies, they are not living in these complexes because there is such a housing crunch." Y. Frank Southall, Organizing and Community Engagement Manager, Jane Place Neighborhood Sustainability Initiative

› Encourage landlords and community members to participate in rapid rehousing efforts.

Part of this accountability effort should include moving toward positive change. Cooperation from landlords is an important next step in housing efforts to reduce and prevent homelessness such as rapid rehousing. [Rapid Rehousing](#) relies on relationships with landlords to quickly identify housing and prevent homelessness. Rapid Re-Housing is offered without conditions such as employment or sobriety. It includes three steps: (1) housing identification that builds relationships with landlords to ensure access to housing units; (2) rent and move-in assistance to support unhoused persons with being able to secure a place to live; and (3) case management to help support stabilization and connect persons to services they need. The goal of Rapid Re-Housing is to keep people in their homes long term.

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> Build and strengthen community resources.



"Housing determines so much about access and predictors of success in other sectors in peoples' lives." Sydney Shivers, Deputy Director, Mayor's Office of Community Assets and Investments, City of New Orleans

Housing equity also involves quality of living conditions which can include [access to green spaces](#), [public transportation](#), healthy food, education, and employment. Like housing, these community resources are associated with positive health outcomes. Investing in historically underdeveloped, low-income communities can improve quality of life for residents and increase opportunities for success. Local leaders and policymakers can implement programs that redevelop existing communities to provide resources and programs that rehouse people who live in poor conditions. Developing [Community Land Trusts](#), such as the one in [Houston, Texas](#) can be a strong economic and social investment for members of the community. Community Land Trusts grant the community autonomy to determine how land should be utilized and prevent the privatization of public spaces.

Houston's *Encampment Response Strategy Team* includes Coalition for the Homeless, police and sheriff's departments, and mental health professionals who work alongside each other to clear encampments and facilitate transitions to permanent housing. The group [published a blueprint](#) to help other cities replicate this approach.

> Increase production of affordable housing across the country.

Programs such as the Emergency Housing Voucher (EHV) established by the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 help expand access to housing. However, such programs are constrained by the [availability of affordable housing](#) for voucher recipients. The lack of available affordable housing has been linked [with increased rates of homelessness](#). Lack of zoning and construction permits allowing for the development of affordable housing, combined with the increasing cost of living, has made affordable housing scarce and almost impossible for people to obtain. Panelists called for the exploration of new [land use](#) strategies and housing policies to combat this challenge.

State of the Science



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Housing First.

Housing First is an approach to ending homelessness which aligns with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. This approach states that before being able to address needs such as employment or mental health, people first need to feel secure in their basic needs, such as food and housing. There is a growing body of research on the housing approach and broader health behaviors, such as substance misuse, which contribute to the cycle of chronic homelessness.



"Without safe equitable, affordable housing... you really can't address any of these issues that people are dealing with in terms of their mental, emotional, physical health." Y. Frank Southall, Organizing and Community Engagement Manager, Jane Place Neighborhood Sustainability Initiative

Homelessness as a contributor to negative health outcomes.

Great Depression-era redlining practices created housing inequities which, in turn, contributed to health inequities. Research shows that individuals living in redlined communities experience higher rates of air pollution and asthma. Reports indicate that expanding access to stable housing would have broader impacts by reducing the burden on the healthcare system and improving health related outcomes.¹ This includes impacts on homeless children who are four times more likely to experience delays in brain development and have been shown to have higher rates of emotional, behavioral, and mental health challenges than their non-homeless peers.

Economic benefits of addressing homelessness.

In addition to the psychological trauma impacting unhoused individuals, homelessness generates costs to society through excessive use of emergency care, citations given to people sleeping in public spaces, and interactions with the criminal justice system. Taxpayers and the community are the ones who are burdened covering the costs of these cyclical processes.



"We did a study, and it costs around \$70,000-\$90,000 for someone to remain homeless, but only about \$20,000 dollars to provide them with rental and supportive housing services for a year. If you do the math per person, you can save quite a bit of money." Ana Rausch, Vice

President of Program Operations, Coalition for the Homeless

It is most effective and cost efficient to house people rather than to repeatedly arrest, jail, and send individuals to medical and mental health facilities. Supportive housing is correlated with increased employment, higher incomes, higher rates of school attendance for children, and less need for

¹ [2021 Point-In-Time Homeless Count & Survey](#)

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public services such as homeless shelters, and prisons.² Initiatives such as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) [housing counseling](#) program [contribute to racial equity in housing](#) that have been shown an economic benefit of up to \$29 billion.

About P4HE

The P4HE Collaborative harmonizes goals, advances learning, and facilitates collaboration to improve health equity. It is led by the Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine and is part of the Tulane Institute for Innovations in Health Equity. Support for this program is provided by ICF. Funding is provided by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.



Foster

the co-creation and spread of knowledge.



Sharpen

our research tools to focus on solutions; facts and stories.



Disrupt

traditional research approaches.



Harmonize

our voices.



Challenge

the status quo.



Shine

light on practices that are indefensible, irrational and inconsistent.

² [The Solution That Saves Lives: Summary Report: Position Statement 38: Supportive Housing and Housing First](#)

To learn more about these issues, or Partners for Health Equity's calls to action, a resource library including a full recording of this, and all previous P4HE Webinars, can be found on the P4HE [website](#).