

Housing First

The only lasting solution to homelessness is permanent housing. Far too often, however, we attempt to treat the symptoms of homelessness instead of its root cause.



For years, homeless service providers worked to offer medical and mental health care, addiction counseling, job training and countless other services to people living on the streets. Most homeless people were told they had to earn their way to permanent housing by checking these supplementary boxes.

While the intentions behind this approach were good, the unfortunate result was that very few people ever escaped the streets.

100,000 Homes communities believe this traditional approach is backwards, and the data agrees with them.

Countless studies have now shown that we must offer housing first, not last, if we want to help people out of homelessness. An immediate connection to permanent supportive housing can ensure that over 80% of homeless individuals remain housed, even among clients with severe substance abuse and mental health conditions.

The bottom line is that it is just too difficult to battle addiction, take care of serious physical and mental health conditions or find steady employment while simultaneously battling homelessness. Contrary to popular opinion, these things are not precursors to housing. Instead, they stem from the safety and stability that comes from having a permanent home in the first place. That's why all 100,000 Homes communities adopt a "Housing First" approach.

Housing First is a simple philosophy that dictates that the most vulnerable and chronic people experiencing homelessness be offered the choice to move into permanent housing combined with available supportive services ("permanent supportive housing") right away. It discourages imposing conditions on permanent housing, whether related to health, employment or sobriety. This approach has a documented track record of ending people's homelessness while often encouraging them to make their own choices to get healthy, quit drugs and alcohol, and find employment when possible.

Studies also show that Housing First approaches involving permanent supportive housing tend to be much cheaper for taxpayers than allowing people to remain homeless. As homeless individuals with the highest health and service needs benefit from the stability of housing, they are better able to tend to their needs in productive, self-driven and long-term ways. As a result, they make less frequent use of expensive, publicly funded services like emergency rooms, shelters and jails.

Ultimately, Housing First is based on the simple idea that a homeless individual will be most successful when able to make his or her own informed decisions about housing and health. Housing and services are made available when a homeless individual chooses them, not as a requirement or mandatory condition. This breeds a sense of independence and self-efficacy that is often instrumental in helping individuals remain safe, healthy and housed.
- See more at: <http://100khomes.org/read-the-manifesto/housing-first#sthash.UAxLKi1X.dpuf>