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Our Position

Mental Health America of Texas supports access to safe and affordable community-based housing for individuals with mental health conditions and substance use disorders. We advocate for evidence-based programs for integrated supportive housing that offer permanent housing opportunities in the community and services to support a person's ability to maintain stable housing, like case management, employment services, and community-based education.

Background

In the United States, a person is at greater risk for homelessness if he/she has a serious mental illness. A 2011 study by the Texas Interagency Council for the Homeless found that 21.5% of homeless individuals in Texas have a serious mental illness.¹ Although there are many different programs in place to address the intersection of homelessness and mental health, many people still find themselves without support or the ability to find stable and safe housing.

Housing and Supplemental Security Income

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a federal Social Security program that provides money to elderly people or people with disabilities to help them meet basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter.² However, qualifying for the Supplemental Security Income program does not guarantee that an individual with a disability (such as a serious mental illness) will be able to cover his or her housing and other living expenses. According to one recent report on the housing crisis for people with disabilities, individuals in Texas receiving SSI had to spend about 93% of the monthly payment in order to afford average statewide rent for a one-bedroom unit and 79% to afford a studio/efficiency housing unit during the study period.³ When people with disabilities must spend most of their SSI on housing, they are left with little to no remaining funds to afford other basic needs, like food, medical costs, clothing, and transportation.

Olmstead v. L.C. & the Texas Promoting Independence Initiative

In a 1999 landmark case, the Supreme Court found that "unjustified isolation of individuals with disabilities" violates Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act.⁴ In *Olmstead v. L.C.*, the Court held that public entities must reasonably provide for community-based services for persons with disabilities when such

¹ Annual Report and Pathways Home Addendum, TEXAS INTERAGENCY COUNCIL FOR THE HOMELESS (2012), <http://www.tdhca.state.tx.us/tich/docs/12-AnnualReport-PathwaysHome.pdf>.

² Supplemental Security Income Home Page – 2015 Edition, SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION, <https://www.ssa.gov/ssi> (last visited Oct. 15, 2015).

³ Emily Cooper, Lauren Knott, Lisa Sloane & Andrew Zovistoski, Priced Out in 2014: The Housing Crisis for People with Disabilities, TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE COLLABORATIVE, INC. (June 2015), <http://www.tacinc.org/media/52012/Priced%20Out%20in%202014.pdf>.

⁴ *Olmstead v. L.C.*, 527 U.S. 581.

services are appropriate and the affected persons do not object to community-based treatment.⁵ In response, Texas instituted the Promoting Independence Initiative through the Health and Human Services Commission to monitor and prioritize community-based opportunities for people with disabilities in Texas.⁶ Starting in 2001, the Promoting Independence Advisory Committee has provided recommendations for community integration in Texas through the Texas Promoting Independence Plan.⁷ The most recent Promoting Independence Plan in 2012 included 27 recommendations regarding seven main categories related to increasing community-based services in Texas, including “increased community options and supports,” “increased behavioral health services and supports,” and “increased integrated housing.”⁸

Integrated Supportive Housing

Integrated supportive housing (also known as permanent supportive housing) is “decent, safe, affordable, community-based housing” that combines long-term housing assistance for people with disabilities, people with substance use disorders, or people experiencing homelessness with support services designed to help people maintain long-term stable housing.⁹ Under integrated supportive housing programs, people have private permanent spaces and are entitled to the same rights and responsibilities of tenants in the community. However, people living in supportive housing also have the opportunity to access services “designed to address their individual needs and preferences,” like case management, individual or group counseling, and connections to treatment, health care, and employment in their community.¹⁰ Studies have shown that when people have access to housing and support services in a community-based setting, they are more likely to maintain housing stability and take meaningful steps towards recovery and independence.¹¹

Although there is no single model for integrated supportive housing, there are three primary forms that service providers traditionally adopt:

- Single-site housing: tenants live in units in the same building or groups of buildings, while receiving support services on- or off-site;
- Scattered-site housing: tenants live in independent apartments (either private or agency-owned), and tenants access support services through home visits by service providers or at other locations in their community; and
- Mixed housing: tenants live in developments or building that house both supportive housing tenants and tenants not involved in the supportive housing program.¹²

⁵ Id.

⁶ Texas Promoting Independence Plan, TEXAS HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION (Jan. 9, 2001).

http://www.dads.state.tx.us/providers/pi/piplan/2001_piplan.pdf.

⁷ Id.

⁸ Texas Health and Human Services Commission (Dec. 2012). 2012 Revised Texas Promoting Independence Plan. Retrieved October 9, 2015 from <http://www.dads.state.tx.us/providers/pi/piplan/2012revisedpiplan.pdf>.

⁹ Permanent Supportive Housing, UNITED STATES INTERAGENCY COUNCIL ON HOMELESSNESS, [usich.gov/usich_resources/solutions/explore/permanent_supportive_housing](http://www.usich.gov/usich_resources/solutions/explore/permanent_supportive_housing) (last visited Oct. 9, 2015).

¹⁰ Id.

¹¹ Thomas Byrne, Jamison D. Fargo, Ann Elizabeth Montgomery, Ellen Munley & Dennis P. Culhane, The Relationship between Community Investment in Permanent Supportive Housing and Chronic Homelessness, 88 SOCIAL SERVICE REVIEW 234, 236 (Jun. 2014).

¹² UNITED STATES INTERAGENCY COUNCIL ON HOMELESSNESS, *supra* note 9.

Regardless of the model used, many service providers recognize the importance of using evidence-based practices with tenants involved in integrated supportive housing, including integrated treatment for co-occurring disorders, illness management and recovery, supported employment, and Housing First.¹³

Housing First

In many housing settings, providers require people in need of housing to demonstrate “housing readiness,” like entering treatment before requesting housing support.¹⁴ For many people experiencing homelessness, including people with mental health conditions or substance use disorders, these “housing readiness” preconditions are impossible to achieve without stable housing; consequently, many people experiencing homelessness are unable to access meaningful housing support.¹⁵ Housing First is a specific approach within integrated supportive housing where service providers offer permanent, affordable housing for people experiencing homelessness as quickly as possible, without requiring preconditions or participation in services to receive housing.¹⁶ After people have housing through a Housing First program, providers offer voluntary services that support people in maintaining housing long-term.¹⁷ As the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness states, “Housing provides a foundation from which a person or family can access the services and supports they need to achieve stability, begin the recovery process, and pursue personal goals.”¹⁸

As mentioned earlier, studies show that supported housing can improve housing outcomes and help people stay housed over an extended period of time.¹⁹ There is also evidence that supported housing is beneficial for people with substance abuse disorders.²⁰ However, permanent supportive housing works not only on an individual level by supporting people’s ability to receive and maintain safe and stable housing; a 2014 longitudinal study in the Social Service Review also found that “increased investment in permanent supportive housing decreased the rate of chronic homelessness by 35 percent” from 2007-2012. In other words, permanent supportive housing helps individuals and our communities in ending chronic homelessness.²¹

Some argue that increasing investments in permanent supportive housing and other housing programs aimed at alleviating chronic homelessness, including for people with mental health conditions or substance use disorders, will overburden taxpayers and therefore is not a cost-effective method for addressing homelessness in America. However, many studies have found that prioritizing housing needs for people experiencing homelessness or institutionalization costs the government and taxpayers considerably less than institutional care costs and other costs related to chronic homelessness, including repeated

¹³ Id.

¹⁴ Housing First, UNITED STATES INTERAGENCY COUNCIL ON HOMELESSNESS, usich.gov/usich_resources/solutions/explore/housing_first (last visited Oct. 9, 2015).

¹⁵ Id.

¹⁶ Housing First, NATIONAL ALLIANCE TO END HOMELESSNESS, www.endhomelessness.org/pages/housing_first (last visited Oct. 9, 2015).

¹⁷ Id.

¹⁸ UNITED STATES INTERAGENCY COUNCIL ON HOMELESSNESS, *supra* note 14.

¹⁹ Thomas Byrne, *supra* note 11.

²⁰ William Anthony, Megan Kash, Annette Olschewski & Sally Rogers, Systematic Review of Supported Housing Literature 1993-2008, BOSTON UNIVERSITY CENTER FOR PSYCHIATRIC REHABILITATION (2009), <http://www.bu.edu/drrk/research-syntheses/psychiatric-disabilities/supported-housing/>.

²¹ Sarah Mesrobian, Study: Permanent Supportive Housing Reduces Homelessness, NATIONAL ALLIANCE TO END HOMELESSNESS (Jul. 8, 2014), <http://www.endhomelessness.org/blog/entry/study-permanent-supportive-housing-decreases-homelessness>. See also Thomas Byrne, *supra* note 18.

hospitalizations, incarceration, and emergency shelter.²² In fact, one 2012 study identified that permanent supportive housing through a housing voucher program for one person costs less than one-third of the most conservative cost estimate for a state hospital bed.²³ Accordingly, increased funding of permanent supportive housing can actually lessen the economic burden on taxpayers while also increasing people's access to meaningful services and stable housing.

Recommendations

Because of the proven benefits of integrated supportive housing for (1) helping people with mental health conditions and substance use disorders find and maintain stable housing and support services and (2) decreasing rates of chronic homelessness on the population-level, Mental Health America of Texas recommends that:

- individuals, legislators, advocates, and community members support and promote increasing investments in integrated supportive housing in Texas (including through continued commitment to the Texas Promoting Independence Initiative);
- policymakers and service providers continue to prioritize integration in housing for people with mental health conditions in accordance with *Olmstead v. LC*;
- current supportive housing for people with mental health conditions or substance use disorders use evidence-based programs and policies, like Housing First; and
- advocates and community members focus on public education and outreach to support our communities in the continuing movement towards inclusion.

For more information on housing for people with mental health conditions or substance use disorders, visit Mental Health America's position statement on community inclusion after *Olmstead*.²⁴

²² See Emily Cooper at note 3 on 8-9.

²³ Id. See also United States Fact Sheet: The Housing Voucher Program, CENTER FOR BUDGET AND POLICY PRIORITIES (2014), <http://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/US.pdf> (last visited Oct. 14, 2015).

²⁴ Community Inclusion after *Olmstead*, MENTAL HEALTH AMERICA (Mar. 7, 2015), <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/housing>.