

The Anti-Poverty Impacts of Expanding Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers

Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University

This fact sheet estimates the anti-poverty impacts of an expansion of the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program. Run by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and administered by state and local housing agencies, the Section 8 voucher program is the nation's largest form of rental assistance. It is a powerful anti-poverty tool for those who receive it. But funding restrictions, including the fact that housing agencies face caps in the number of vouchers they can administer, plus funding cuts over the past decade, mean that only one in four households (23 percent) eligible for Section 8 vouchers receive them.¹ During the 2020 Presidential campaign, President Biden proposed transforming Section 8 vouchers into an entitlement program so that all who are eligible can receive one. In prior work, we detailed the [poverty impacts of combining expanded vouchers with expanded refundable tax credits](#) (including the Child Tax Credit). This analysis examines the standalone anti-poverty impacts of a housing voucher expansion, with national and state-level results.

Table 1. Estimated reduction in poverty under a Section 8 Housing Voucher expansion

	Poverty rate under current law	Poverty rate with Section 8 expansion	Percentage point reduction	Percent reduction
Population level	12.7%	9.9%	2.9%	22.6%
Race and ethnicity				
<i>American Indian or Alaska Native</i>	19.0%	15.4%	3.6%	19.1%
<i>Asian American & Pacific Islander</i>	14.0%	11.1%	2.9%	20.9%
<i>Black, non-Latino</i>	20.4%	15.1%	5.2%	25.7%
<i>Latino</i>	20.3%	13.4%	6.9%	33.8%
<i>Multiracial & all other groups</i>	13.1%	10.1%	3.1%	23.4%
<i>White, non-Latino</i>	8.7%	7.5%	1.2%	13.5%
Age				
<i>Under 18 (children)</i>	13.6%	9.1%	4.6%	33.7%
<i>18 to 61 (working age)</i>	12.2%	9.5%	2.6%	21.7%
<i>62+ (older person under HUD definition)</i>	13.4%	11.7%	1.6%	12.2%
Disability Status				
<i>Individuals with disabilities</i>	21.2%	16.0%	5.2%	24.6%
Metro-area residence				
<i>Not in metro area</i>	12.1%	10.6%	1.5%	12.2%
<i>In metro area</i>	12.8%	9.7%	3.1%	24.0%

¹ See Center on Budget and Policy Priorities analyses of the [share of low-income renters](#) who do not receive federal rental assistance and [recent trends](#) in federal rental assistance funding.

Note: Due to rounding, some totals may not correspond with the sum of the separate figures. See ‘Terms Defined’ for additional information on terminology and ‘Source’ for a note on sample size constraints.

Table 2. Estimated reduction in poverty under a Section 8 Housing Voucher expansion, by state

	Poverty rate under current law	Poverty rate with Section 8 expansion	Percentage point reduction	Percent reduction
Alabama	14.2%	12.7%	1.5%	10.6%
Alaska	13.8%	11.5%	2.2%	16.1%
Arizona	13.8%	10.5%	3.4%	24.3%
Arkansas	13.7%	11.4%	2.3%	16.8%
California	18.6%	12.2%	6.4%	34.3%
Colorado	11.5%	8.6%	3.0%	25.6%
Connecticut	12.2%	9.8%	2.4%	19.9%
Delaware	11.6%	9.5%	2.1%	17.9%
DC	19.4%	14.3%	5.1%	26.2%
Florida	17.0%	13.5%	3.5%	20.3%
Georgia	14.5%	12.1%	2.5%	17.0%
Hawaii	14.5%	10.4%	4.2%	28.7%
Idaho	9.3%	8.1%	1.2%	12.6%
Illinois	12.6%	9.8%	2.8%	22.1%
Indiana	11.2%	9.5%	1.6%	14.6%
Iowa	7.6%	6.4%	1.2%	15.2%
Kansas	8.3%	7.4%	0.9%	10.7%
Kentucky	12.1%	10.7%	1.4%	11.3%
Louisiana	17.2%	14.0%	3.2%	18.7%
Maine	10.2%	8.6%	1.6%	15.6%
Maryland	13.0%	9.7%	3.3%	25.4%
Massachusetts	11.9%	8.7%	3.1%	26.3%
Michigan	10.6%	9.4%	1.2%	11.1%
Minnesota	7.1%	5.9%	1.2%	17.1%
Mississippi	15.6%	13.6%	2.0%	13.1%
Missouri	10.5%	8.9%	1.6%	15.3%
Montana	9.9%	8.4%	1.4%	14.7%
Nebraska	9.7%	8.1%	1.6%	16.8%
Nevada	13.7%	10.5%	3.2%	23.5%
New Hampshire	8.6%	7.2%	1.4%	16.1%
New Jersey	14.2%	10.1%	4.1%	29.1%
New Mexico	14.3%	11.9%	2.4%	16.7%
New York	14.7%	10.1%	4.6%	31.6%
North Carolina	14.1%	11.6%	2.5%	17.8%
North Dakota	10.7%	9.0%	1.7%	15.9%

	Poverty rate under current law	Poverty rate with Section 8 expansion	Percentage point reduction	Percent reduction
Ohio	10.8%	8.7%	2.1%	19.4%
Oklahoma	11.3%	10.0%	1.4%	12.0%
Oregon	12.4%	9.8%	2.5%	20.5%
Pennsylvania	11.5%	9.3%	2.2%	19.2%
Rhode Island	8.6%	6.3%	2.3%	26.5%
South Carolina	12.7%	11.1%	1.5%	12.1%
South Dakota	10.2%	9.2%	1.1%	10.4%
Tennessee	12.0%	10.4%	1.6%	13.2%
Texas	14.7%	11.9%	2.7%	18.6%
Utah	8.6%	7.4%	1.2%	14.2%
Vermont	10.2%	9.1%	1.1%	10.7%
Virginia	13.4%	10.6%	2.9%	21.3%
Washington	9.8%	7.3%	2.5%	25.4%
West Virginia	13.6%	12.1%	1.5%	11.0%
Wisconsin	8.2%	6.8%	1.4%	16.9%
Wyoming	10.7%	9.2%	1.5%	14.2%

Note: Due to rounding, some totals may not correspond with the sum of the separate figures. See ‘Terms Defined’ for additional information on terminology and ‘Source’ for a note on sample size constraints. Results for smaller population states should be interpreted with caution due to sample size constraints.

Table 3. Estimated reduction in deep poverty (under 50% of SPM poverty threshold) with a Section 8 Housing Voucher expansion

	Poverty rate under current law	Poverty rate with Section 8 expansion	Percentage point reduction	Percent reduction
Population level	4.1%	3.1%	1.0%	24.4%
Race and ethnicity				
<i>American Indian or Alaska Native</i>	6.8%	5.6%	1.2%	18.1%
<i>Asian American & Pacific Islander</i>	5.4%	4.6%	0.8%	15.6%
<i>Black, non-Latino</i>	6.0%	4.2%	1.8%	29.8%
<i>Latino</i>	4.8%	2.8%	2.0%	41.3%
<i>Multiracial & all other groups</i>	4.5%	2.9%	1.6%	34.7%
<i>White, non-Latino</i>	3.4%	2.8%	0.6%	16.5%
Age				
<i>Under 18 (children)</i>	3.3%	2.0%	1.3%	40.4%
<i>18 to 61 (working age)</i>	4.2%	3.2%	1.0%	24.3%
<i>62+ (older person under HUD definition)</i>	5.0%	4.4%	0.6%	12.5%
Disability Status				
<i>Individuals with disabilities</i>	5.4%	4.1%	1.3%	24.7%
Metro-area residence				
<i>Not in metro area</i>	4.7%	4.1%	0.6%	13.7%
<i>In metro area</i>	4.1%	3.0%	1.1%	26.2%

Note: Due to rounding, some totals may not correspond with the sum of the separate figures. See ‘Terms Defined’ for additional information on terminology and ‘Source’ for a note on sample size constraints.

Terms Defined

‘Latino’: this term represents anyone who is of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, as reported in the Current Population Survey. In our tables, we use the term ‘Latino’ as opposed to ‘Hispanic’ or ‘Spanish origin’ because it is more inclusive of all people with origins in Latin America, including people with origins in Brazil and/or within many indigenous groups. Some people have adopted the term ‘Latinx’ to remove the gender binary implied in Latino(a), but it is not widely used in most settings. Therefore, we stay consistent with the Census Bureau’s wording and use the term Latino in this fact sheet. In characterizing a diverse group of people, we acknowledge that individuals will self-identify in complex ways and as communities adopt new identities over time, we aim to update our language as needed.

‘Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM)’: we use this framework to estimate poverty rates. The SPM accounts for cash and noncash government benefits, necessary expenses like taxes, health care, commuting, and child care, and adjusts for family size and local housing costs, to estimate poverty rates. For a two-parent, two-child family in an average cost city, the SPM income threshold is approximately \$28,000 per year. The SPM is reported along with the official poverty measure (OPM) by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Source

Calculated by the Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University using data from the Annual Social and Economic Supplement to the Current Population Survey (2019). Data retrieved from IPUMS-CPS, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org. National level results are calculated using one year (2019) of CPS-ASEC data, with the exception of results for multiracial and Native American and Indigenous individuals, which are calculated using three years of CPS-ASEC data (2017 to 2019). Results for these groups should be interpreted with caution due to sample size constraints. State level results are calculated using three years of CPS-ASEC data (2017 to 2019); results for smaller population states should be interpreted with caution due to sample size constraints. To model the impacts of a Section 8 voucher expansion in the CPS data, we follow the same methods detailed in [Collyer et al. \(2020\)](#).

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