

Rapid Re-Housing: A History and Core Components

Rapid re-housing has become an increasingly important tool in a community's response to homelessness. The model has shown success on the individual level – helping households exit homelessness and not return to shelter. Additionally, it has helped communities decrease the number of people experiencing homelessness and the amount of time households spend homeless.

Rapid re-housing places a priority on moving a family or individual experiencing homelessness into permanent housing as quickly as possible, ideally within 30 days of a client becoming homeless and entering a program. While originally aimed primarily at people experiencing homelessness due to short-term financial crises, programs across the country have begun to assist individuals and families who are traditionally perceived as more difficult to serve. This includes people with limited or no income, survivors of domestic violence, and those with substance abuse issues. Although the duration of financial assistance may vary, many programs find that, on average, four to six months of financial assistance is sufficient to stably re-house a household.

This paper will provide a brief background on rapid re-housing, current research on the strategy, and add detail and context to the [three core components of the model](#): housing identification, rent and move-in assistance, and rapid re-housing case management and services.

History

Rapid re-housing first emerged as a promising model when a [number of programs organically began the practice](#). Beyond Shelter in Los Angeles, California; the Rapid Exit program in Hennepin County, Minnesota; and the Shelter to Independent Living program in Lancaster, Pennsylvania were among the first programs to begin experimenting with short term financial assistance and “rapid exit” concepts for people experiencing homelessness. On the heels of their success other communities followed and rapid re-housing for families and individuals has increasingly become a staple of a successful response to homelessness. It eventually became a bipartisan priority in the federal response to homelessness. Below are highlights of the development of rapid re-housing on the federal level.

- 2008 – The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) began accepting applications for the [Rapid Re-Housing Demonstration Project](#) and eventually distributed \$25 million to 23 communities to pilot rapid re-housing.
- 2009 – Congress appropriated \$1.5 billion for the [Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing program \(HPRP\)](#) in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, serving an estimated 1.4 million people with prevention and rapid re-housing assistance over three years.
- 2009 – Congress enacted the [Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing \(HEARTH\) Act](#), which reauthorized the McKinney-Vento homeless assistance programs administered by HUD, established rapid re-housing as a newly eligible activity, and recognized it as an activity that has proven to be effective at reducing homelessness.
- 2012 – The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) began distributing grants under the newly created [Supportive Services for Veteran Families \(SSVF\) program](#) that provides rapid re-housing and homelessness prevention assistance to veterans and their families, funding 85 grantees and serving 21,000 veteran households in the first year of the program.

- 2013 – U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released an [Information Memorandum to state Temporary Assistance for Needy Families \(TANF\)](#) agencies encouraging the use of TANF funds to support rapid re-housing.
- 2014 – The VA redoubled its efforts to end veteran homelessness through rapid re-housing by accepting applications for SSVF [“surge” grants in 78 communities](#).
- 2014 – The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) and its federal partners released a [framework for ending family homelessness](#) that relies heavily on rapid re-housing.
- 2014 – The National Alliance to End Homelessness (Alliance) released the [Core Components of Rapid Re-housing](#), developed in collaboration with USICH, HUD, and VA. These components, detailed more fully below, are meant to establish a clear definition of rapid re-housing and help guide the Alliance, USICH, and other federal agencies’ efforts to expand rapid re-housing implementation to address homelessness.

Since federal rapid re-housing funds became available, a number of communities prioritizing rapid re-housing as a response to homelessness have seen significant decreases in their homeless populations. For example, from 2012 to 2014, [Memphis, Tennessee](#) saw an overall decrease in homelessness of 21 percent and a 25.6 percent decrease in family homelessness. Between 2007 and 2014, [Mercer County, New Jersey](#) decreased family homelessness by 66 percent. Additional [communities experiencing decreases include](#): Spokane, Washington; [Boise, Idaho](#); Las Vegas, Nevada; and Richmond, Virginia. [Other localities](#), including Palm Beach County, Florida; Alameda County, California; Salt Lake County, Utah; and the State of Michigan, have seen decreases in the amount of time that households spend homeless, less recidivism, and improved permanent housing outcomes relative to other available interventions.

Evidence of Effectiveness

There are limited national studies available on rapid re-housing. HUD released the evaluation of the [first](#) and [second years](#) of the HPRP program, finding nearly 85 percent of rapid re-housing program participants exited to permanent housing. Participants included families and individuals. *The [Family Options Study](#)*, being conducted by HUD, is comparing families’ use of permanent housing subsidies, community based rapid re-housing, project based transitional housing, and usual care using a random assignment design. Final results from the study will not be available for some time, but the [interim report](#) examined enrolled families’ characteristics and take-up data on the offered interventions. The interim report showed that, compared to transitional housing programs, rapid re-housing programs were more likely to help all the families referred to them, and the families were more likely to follow through and access the available assistance. Of those families randomly assigned to rapid re-housing, only nine percent were found to be ineligible. Of those families randomly assigned to transitional housing, 16 percent were found ineligible. Additionally, 43 percent of families assigned to transitional housing independently chose not to enter the program, while only 28 percent of families opted out of entering a rapid re-housing program.

HUD is not the only funder and evaluator of rapid re-housing. The SSVF program administered by VA is being continuously evaluated by the National Center on Homelessness among Veterans. The [year one evaluation](#) shows the results of the efforts of 85 grantees and the 21,100 veteran households served. The evaluation shows that overall, rapid re-housing was very successful for both families and single individuals. A year after exiting the SSVF program, only 10 percent of families and 16 percent of individuals had returned to homelessness. Single individuals returning to homelessness were more likely to have had a prior history of homelessness. Veterans in families were more likely to return to homelessness if they had a disabling condition. Interestingly, there was no significant correlation

between income level at entry to the SSVF program and increased risk of return to homelessness indicating that programs should not shy away from rapidly re-housing households that appear to have less of a chance of succeeding due to income.

In addition to these national studies, studies from states and individual jurisdictions are emerging. In [an evaluation of 14 Continuum of Cares in 7 states](#), 75 percent of rapid re-housing participants were found to exit to permanent housing, much higher than from emergency shelter (16 percent) or transitional housing (42 percent). The average cost per exit to permanent housing was significantly lower for rapid re-housing (about \$4,100) than it was for either shelter (about \$10,000) or transitional housing (about \$22,200).

Two statewide studies of Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) data have also supported rapid re-housing as a model with low returns to homelessness. The [Georgia Department of Community Affairs](#) found, in a state-wide administrative data analysis, that persons exiting emergency shelter and transitional housing programs were respectively 4 and 4.7 times more likely to return to homelessness than those exiting rapid re-housing programs. The [Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness](#) found that, of those families who exited rapid re-housing programs in Connecticut in 2010, 95 percent had not returned to shelter three years later.

Local research on rapid re-housing demonstrates not only low rates of returns to homelessness, but also better employment outcomes. A [Washington State Department of Commerce study](#) found that, when creating a matched comparison group, working-age adults who received rapid re-housing were 50 percent more likely to be employed during the quarter they received assistance. Additionally, they were 25 percent more likely to be employed over the following year and earned about \$422 more than their peers who were not rapidly re-housed.

Core Components

The Alliance, USICH, HUD, and the VA, with input from other federal agencies, created a [set of core components](#) that should be present in any program in order for it to be considered a rapid re-housing program. While particular federal programs that fund rapid re-housing may contain additional components and requirements, at a minimum these core components run throughout all federal rapid re-housing programs.

There are three core components of rapid re-housing: housing identification, rent and move-in assistance (financial), and rapid re-housing case management and services. While all three components are present and available in effective rapid re-housing programs, there are instances where the components are provided by different entities or agencies, or where a household does not utilize all three. Rapid re-housing is designed to help individuals and families quickly exit homelessness and return to permanent housing. A key element of rapid re-housing is the “Housing First” philosophy, which offers housing without preconditions such as employment, income, lack of a criminal background, or sobriety. If issues such as these need to be addressed, the household can address them most effectively once they are in housing.

[The text in bold below is the accepted core components. *The non-bold text, a description of the components, is the opinion of the National Alliance to End Homelessness, alone, and has not been approved by the federal agencies.*]

Category One: Housing Identification

Recruit landlords to provide housing opportunities for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. On the most basic level, a rapid re-housing program helps individuals and families [identify and secure housing](#). Programs do this by identifying available affordable rental units, and by recruiting landlords willing to rent to homeless families and individuals, including those who may have poor credit histories, past evictions, or other tenant qualification issues.

Address potential barriers to landlord participation such as concern about the short term nature of rental assistance and tenant qualifications. Landlord participation and acceptance of the program is key to a program's ability to re-house households quickly—ideally within 30 days of program entry. Programs should address landlord concerns about possible tenants as well as concern around the short-term nature of financial assistance. Effective programs accomplish this by assuring support to landlords during the move-in process and by offering landlords a direct contact at the program in the event they have issues with a tenant placed by the program. When legally permitted, some programs also offer enhanced damage deposits, or create other financial mechanisms to alleviate landlords' concerns over the nature of the tenants or the subsidies.

Assist households to find and secure appropriate rental housing. Beyond landlord recruitment, programs must also match households to appropriate housing—housing for which they will be able to pay the rent after financial assistance ends; that is decent; and, especially in the case of survivors of domestic violence, that is safe. Effective programs accomplish this by recruiting many landlords to provide a variety of housing options in a variety of neighborhoods and by serving as a resource to households during the housing search, location, and application process. With regard to a household's ability to afford rent after the termination of financial assistance, programs should not assume this can be accurately assessed at the time of entry. Effective programs and jurisdictions have found that even households that had zero income at entry to a rapid re-housing program are able to maintain housing once program involvement ends.

Funding sources for rapid re-housing often require an inspection to ensure the decency and safety of a housing unit for which financial assistance will be provided. Rapid re-housing programs should work to facilitate and expedite the inspection process so as to minimize delays in a household moving into a unit. In the absence of an inspection requirement, programs should still ensure a unit's habitability and safety before moving in a household.

Category Two: Rent and Move-In Assistance

Provide assistance to cover move-in costs, deposits, and the rental and/or utility assistance (typically six months or less) necessary to allow individuals and families to move immediately out of homelessness and to stabilize in permanent housing. The [amount and duration](#) of financial assistance provided by a rapid re-housing program can vary, but at a minimum, programs should provide the assistance necessary for households to move immediately out of homelessness and to stabilize in permanent housing. Programs can provide funds to assist with move-in costs, security deposits, rental payments, and utility assistance. In some instances, a first month's rent or security deposit is sufficient for a household to exit homelessness and data show that programs typically provide financial assistance for six months or less; but many funding streams allow assistance for up to 24 months if necessary.

Financial assistance in a rapid re-housing program can come in the form of a full subsidy, covering the full rent for a period of time, or a shallow subsidy, covering a portion of the rent. Some programs may

start with a full subsidy and gradually step down the assistance a household receives. Programs interested in helping as many households as possible may employ a [progressive engagement](#) model in which programs provide minimal amounts of assistance to all households initially and then extend or intensify the assistance provided as-needed based on an ongoing assessment of household needs.

Category Three: Rapid re-housing case management and services.

Help individuals and families experiencing homelessness identify and select among various permanent housing options based on their unique needs, preferences, and financial resources. Rapid re-housing programs play an important role in assisting the household with the selection of a permanent housing option that meets the household's unique needs. Ensuring a household is placed in a unit that meets its financial situation and lifestyle needs, such as school, work, family, and support networks, will increase the likelihood that households will remain stably housed once program assistance ends. Effective programs attempt to provide households with choices in housing and often adopt creative strategies, such as renting rooms or accessory units, co-tenancy, or shared housing, to increase the likelihood that households want to remain and can afford to remain in their unit of choice once financial assistance ends. Preliminary outcome data have shown that households, even when unemployed or underemployed at entry to a rapid re-housing program, still manage to stay housed after financial assistance ends. Strategies that providers use to mitigate a household's lack of employment include help accessing public benefits and creating shared living situations to minimize rent costs in addition to traditional services geared towards helping a household establish employment.

Help individuals and families experiencing homelessness address issues that may impede access to housing (such as credit history, arrears, and legal issues). Program-related case management and services are an essential component of rapid re-housing programs. These services must be guided by the unique needs and wants of individuals and families experiencing homelessness. One function of rapid re-housing case management is to immediately begin to address such issues as credit history, evictions, arrears, and legal issues that may prevent a household from being able to obtain a lease. Programs should still work to find housing for households with challenging histories because, in some cases, a program may be able to negotiate with a landlord to overlook an unfavorable credit or rental history. In other cases, a program can work to have some debts removed by paying arrearages or by working with creditors to remove items from credit history.

Help individuals and families negotiate manageable and appropriate lease agreements with landlords. One of the most important functions of rapid re-housing case management is to help households negotiate manageable lease agreements with landlords and to help households understand their rights and responsibilities as tenants. It is imperative that any lease agreement provides the tenant with the same rights and responsibilities as a typical community lease holder and that the financial terms of the lease are such that the household has a reasonable ability to assume rental costs once financial support ends. Effective programs also make themselves available to both tenants and landlords to resolve disputes and issues that may arise, as well as provide tenants with skills necessary to be a good tenant and develop positive relations with the landlord. In instances when eviction is threatened, effective programs will help the household negotiate and relocate to another unit with another landlord without an eviction, if necessary.

Make appropriate and time-limited services and supports available to families and individuals to allow them to stabilize quickly in permanent housing. Each household entering a rapid re-housing program faces unique barriers and challenges, and programs must be flexible enough to provide the services and assistance necessary. In some instances, a household may be able to easily stabilize in

housing with limited, one-time assistance and have no need for services. In other instances, a household may need or request additional services, such as employment or job training services, in order to stabilize in housing. Successful programs have the capacity to appropriately assess a household's unique situation, and to provide the [necessary services and resources](#), either internally or through a connection to community-based assistance. All participation in services should be voluntary and driven by the household.

Monitor participants' housing stability and be available to resolve crises, at a minimum during the time rapid re-housing assistance is provided. While services are voluntary, it is appropriate and essential that program staff is able to monitor the progress of participants' housing stability and be available to assist in the resolution of any crises that threaten that stability. This could include employment issues, barriers to benefits, transportation challenges, and family conflict. A program's ability to intervene or assist a household after a family or individual has transitioned off financial assistance can be integral to ongoing housing stability and preventing a recurrence of homelessness.

Provide or assist the household with connections to resources that help them improve their safety and well-being and achieve their long-term goals. This includes providing or ensuring that the household has access to resources related to benefits, employment and community-based services (if needed/appropriate) so that they can sustain rent payments independently when rental assistance ends. It is not necessary that all services provided to a household originate within the agency providing financial assistance. A successful rapid re-housing program has relationships with and linkages to other service providers, benefits counselors, employment agencies, and community-based services. Again, depending on unique needs and preferences, a household should have access to programs and services that will offer them the opportunity to achieve both short- and long-term well-being and stability. While a rapid re-housing program should provide opportunities for a household to access services they may want or need, a household's housing should never be contingent on participation in a service plan.

Ensure that services provided are client-directed, respectful of individuals' rights to self-determination, and voluntary. Unless basic, program-related case management is required by statute or regulation, participation in services should not be required to receive rapid re-housing assistance. Regardless of the depth and breadth of case management and services available, all services provided must be client-directed, meaning they are respectful of individuals' rights to self-determination. Services and case management compliance should be voluntary, unless required by statute or regulation for the program's funding stream. Participation in additional services should never be a requirement for a household to receive rapid re-housing assistance.

Conclusion

Overall, rapid re-housing is an important new tool in a community's efforts to end homelessness. While monitoring of the effectiveness of the intervention continues, thus far rapid re-housing appears to have encouraging outcomes: decreased length of homelessness, fewer returns to homelessness, lower costs per household than other interventions, and decreased homelessness in communities. On an individual level, rapid re-housing minimizes the amount of time an individual or family spends homeless and rapidly helps them stabilize in their own housing. Creating interventions and planning systemically around the model's core components – housing identification, rent and move-in assistance, and rapid re-housing case management and services – should be a high priority for communities.