

A number of research studies have demonstrated the positive effect that supportive housing has on residential stability among formerly homeless individuals. Approximately 75-85% of those who enter supportive housing are still housed after one year. In addition, many of those who leave supportive housing do so for positive reasons – often to enter more independent settings after they have stabilized. However, others leave for less positive reasons, and some research exists that may give practitioners clues as to why these people may not be as successful in supportive housing.

FINDING: Supportive housing has a positive impact on housing retention, even among tenants with long histories of homelessness and the most severe psychiatric disorders.

The evaluation of the Closer to Home Initiative – a project targeted to people who were chronically homeless – found that 83% of the tenants were still in supportive housing after one year and 77% after two years. The retention rate was high even among those tenants with the most severe psychiatric and substance use disorders – 79% were still housed one year after placement.¹ Similarly, an evaluation of two supportive housing projects in San Francisco, also targeting chronically homeless individuals, found that 81% of tenants remained in housing for at least one year. The large majority of the tenants in these two projects had dual psychiatric and substance use disorders.² A recent report released by HUD shows similar retention rates – an analysis of three cohorts of supportive housing residents in Philadelphia between 2001 and 2003 found that over three-quarters stayed for one year or more.³

FINDING: When tenants leave supportive housing, many go on to more independent living arrangements in their communities.

Fewer studies have tracked tenants' outcomes after leaving supportive housing - however, there is some indication that many leave for positive reasons. According to the same HUD report, around one-third of those leaving supportive housing move on to more independent living arrangements in the community. Interviews conducted with 100 former residents revealed that those leaving for positive reasons almost always left supportive housing voluntarily and described their leaving as a means of seeking more opportunity and independence in their lives. These individuals often had a housing subsidy upon exit and demonstrated a high degree of independent living skills. In essence, they “graduated” and no longer needed the intensive residential support provided to them in supportive housing (Wong et al. 2006).

FINDING: Those who had less positive outcomes after leaving supportive housing were more likely to have left involuntarily.

The HUD report found that two-thirds of those leaving supportive housing left for more intensive or restrictive residential situations (such as congregate residential settings), institutions (hospitals and correctional facilities), or became homeless again. Based on their interviews with former residents, the researchers found that these individuals often left supportive housing involuntarily because of failure to follow program rules and regulations, drug and alcohol use, and an inability to manage psychotropic medication. While the study did not track differential outcomes based on the type of supportive housing model, some of these tenants may have been more likely to stay in housing had they been in a project with a low demand philosophy. However, more research will need to be done in order to fully answer this question.

¹ S Barrow, G Soto, P Cordova, *Final Report on the Evaluation of the Closer to Home Initiative*, (Corporation for Supportive Housing, 2004).

² Tia Martinez and Martha Burt. *Impact of Permanent Supportive Housing on the Use of Acute Care Health Services by Homeless Adults* (Psychiatric Services, July 2006 Vol. 57, No.7).

³ YI Wong, et al., *Predicting Staying or Leaving in Permanent Supportive Housing that Serves Homeless People with Serious Mental Illness*. (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research, March 2006).