



**SUPPORTIVE HOUSING'S
VITAL ROLE
IN ADDRESSING THE
OPIOID EPIDEMIC IN
NEW YORK STATE**

CSH Policy Brief | December 2015

“Supportive housing has proved to be an effective solution.”

**NY General Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie
NY General Assembly**



“Supportive housing is vital for combatting chronic homelessness and the factors that keep thousands of New Yorkers without a home.”

**NY Assemblymember Andrew Hevesi
Chair of the General Assembly Social Services Committee**



“Supportive housing really works. Actually 85% of people who are homeless with addiction problems who get into supportive housing programs are successful.”

**NY State Senator Catharine Young
Chair of the Senate Housing, Construction and Community Development Committee**



“Look at what’s contributing to homelessness – mental illness, addictions, substance abuse. We have a huge problem in the State of New York with the heroin epidemic, and it’s causing a great deal of families to be torn apart...and it’s raising up the homelessness rates around the state. It’s a quality of life issue we have to address...supportive housing, we have found, to be successful with those individuals who have struggled with addictions.”

**NY State Senator George Amedore
Chair of the Senate Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Committee**



“(CSH) study estimates that nearly 32,000 supportive housing units must be created in the near future just to meet this identified need (for homeless individuals and families). If all of these new units are created, well over 50% of them will house people with serious substance use disorders who will require intensive community-based services to increase their chances of recovery.”

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Scope of Heroin Problem

Nationwide, drug overdose mortality has been on the rise for the past two decades, while the number of heroin-associated fatalities is up by 39%.¹ Heroin-related deaths quadrupled between 2000 and 2013, and many believe this is the worst drug overdose epidemic in United States history.² In contrast to other drug epidemics in recent history, which had disproportionately impacted poor, urban communities, today's heroin crisis is affecting suburbs and small towns.³

New York State has experienced a sharp increase in the rates of illicit opiate use and associated adverse consequences, such as overdose, over the last decade. Nearly half of drug treatment admissions in the State are associated with an addiction to opioids and heroin-involved overdose deaths have increased significantly since 2004.⁴

In New York State, admissions to drug treatment involving heroin as the primary drug of abuse were 25% higher in 2013 than in 2007.⁵ In some areas the increases during the same period were far more alarming, such as in Erie County (77%); Albany County (132%); and Onondaga County (211%). Western New York has been particularly hard-hit by overdoses related to fentanyl (a synthetic opioid that is used either alone or in combination with heroin). Communities statewide have been reeling from the casualties. Heroin-related deaths outpaced murders in New York City for the past two years and Erie County experienced 10 opioid overdoses in a 24 hour period in July 2015.^{6,7} Without immediate, comprehensive actions based on proven solutions, this epidemic will only get worse.

The CDC reports that heroin “abuse and availability are likely to continue to increase in the near term. Heroin abuse will also increase as more CPDs [controlled prescription drug] abusers switch to heroin as a more available and cheaper alternative.”⁸

Impact on Homelessness

Chronic homelessness is strongly correlated with substance use disorders, and persons with addictions are over-represented among the chronically homeless population.⁹ Substance use can be both a cause and consequence of homelessness, and a significant barrier to exiting homelessness. Research has documented the chronic difficulties of improving treatment outcomes unless basic needs such as housing are addressed.¹⁰

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Agency (SAMHSA) estimates that 35-40% of all individuals experiencing homelessness in the U.S. are living with a substance use disorder, and that approximately 50% to 70% of persons who are homeless with mental illness misuse substances.

There are high rates of substance use among already vulnerable homeless subpopulations, including chronically homeless individuals, frequent utilizers of health services, formerly incarcerated and veterans.

“If those with problem heroin use remain homeless, then even if they are motivated to change, the lack of stability, the difficulties in accessing treatment without a stable address, and in keeping away from other drug users, will reduce the likelihood that they will be able to sustain change over the long term.”

Gray, P.; Fraser, P. *Housing and Heroin Use: the role of floating support*. *Drugs: Education, Prevention, and Policy*, 12:4, pp. 269-278.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) National Center for Health Statistics. Table 40. Specific Drugs Involved in Drug Poisoning Deaths, 2008-2013 http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/heroin_deaths.pdf

² Seelye, Katharine Q. *In Heroin Crisis*. “White Families Seek Gentler War on Drugs”. *The New York Times*. October 30, 2015

³ Seelye, Katharine Q. *In Heroin Crisis*. “White Families Seek Gentler War on Drugs”. *The New York Times*. October 30, 2015

⁴ New York State Joint Senate Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction Final Report and Recommendations. 2014.

⁵ Office of National Drug Control Policy. New York/New Jersey High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas Threat Assessment, 2015.

⁶ Tracy, Thomas. “Heroin is Making a Comeback in New York City, With Fatal Overdoses Outnumbering Homicides”. *The New York Daily News*. April 4, 2015.

⁷ Michel, Lou. “10 Heroin Overdoses in 24 Hours Points to Epidemic in Buffalo”. *The Buffalo News*. July 17, 2015.

⁸ Office of National Drug Control Policy. New York/New Jersey High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas Threat Assessment 2015.

⁹ CSH and National Council for Behavioral Health, *Substance Use and Housing National Leadership Forum Framing Paper*, October 6, 2014

¹⁰ Haracopos, A. et. al. (2003). *On the rocks: A follow-up study of crack users in London*. Criminal Policy Research Unit, South Bank University.

There are currently over 88 thousand people experiencing homelessness in New York State with 58 thousand people in New York City shelters each night.^{11,12} Between 2007 and 2015, New York State experienced a 41% increase in homelessness, the largest increase in the country.¹³

An Important Part of the Solution

Stable, affordable housing is a crucial component of recovery for individuals with substance use disorders. Supportive housing combines affordable housing with services that help people who face the most complex challenges to live with stability, autonomy and dignity. Supportive housing has been proven as an effective solution to ending homelessness for active substance users; barrier-free housing provides a necessary platform to access a variety of services, participate in long-term recovery and give individuals the opportunity to engage in important community roles.¹⁴ There has been demonstrated success in housing stability providing people using heroin the opportunity to address their substance use disorder.¹⁵

A study published in 2014 by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) found that supportive housing was successful in reducing the use of, and costs associated with crisis care services including shelters, detox centers, jail and medical care (hospitalizations and emergency room visits). The findings suggest that individuals actively using substances can be housed successfully and stably without imposing treatment requirements on them.¹⁶

One important element of supportive housing for people with substance use disorders is the Housing First approach. This philosophy views housing as the platform for stability and recovery, and aims to house people as quickly as possible, and then provide services as needed. Developed as an alternative to the “services first” approach, which often disqualifies or dissuades people with substance use disorders from accessing housing units, Housing First emerged as a more effective way to end homelessness for people with serious mental illness and chronic substance use issues.¹⁷ The Housing First model of supportive housing is recognized by SAMHSA and the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) as a best-practice for reducing chronic homelessness and encourages communities with HUD funding to adopt a Housing First approach system-wide.¹⁸

CASA’s study of supportive housing for people with substance use disorders demonstrated:

- reductions in substance use among residents;
- declines in use of public services including shelter, criminal justice, emergency room visits and hospitalizations, and
- public sector savings.

¹¹ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The 2015 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress. November 2015.

¹² NYC Department of Homeless Services Daily Census. December 3, 2015.

¹³ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The 2015 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress. November 2015.

¹⁴ CSH and the National Council for Behavioral Health. Substance Use and Housing National Leadership Forum Convening Report. October 6-7, 2014.

¹⁵ Gray, Paul; Fraser, Penny. *Housing and heroin use: The role of floating support*. Drugs: Education, Prevention, and Policy. Vol. 12, Iss. 4, 2005.

¹⁶ Neighbors, Charles; Hall, Gerod; et.al. *Evaluation of NY/NY III Housing for Active Substance Users*. The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse. 2014.

¹⁷ Padgett, Deborah K. et.al. *Housing First Services for People Who Are Homeless With Co-Occurring Serious Mental Illness and Substance Abuse*. New York University School of Social Work. 2006.

¹⁸ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Notice of Funding Availability for the 2015 Continuum of Care Program Competition.

A Call to Action

The CASA study specifically evaluated supportive housing for persons with substance use disorders created under the successful NY/NY III supportive housing production initiative. By practically every measure, each NY/NY program (I, II and III) has been successful. However, NY/NY III ends this year, and without a new, robust statewide supportive housing agreement, New York State will not have the supportive housing necessary to meet the needs of those people with substance use disorders who are experiencing homelessness.

A recent needs assessment estimated 36,164 homeless households (30,311 individuals and 5,853 families) were in need of supportive housing in 2013 in New York State. The study estimates that nearly 32,000 supportive housing units must be created in the near future just to meet this identified need. If all of these new units are created, well over 50% of them will house people with serious substance use disorders who will require intensive community-based services to increase their chances of recovery.¹⁹

After the release of this study, New York City Mayor Bill De Blasio committed \$2.6 Billion towards 15,000 units of new supportive housing in the five boroughs over the next 15 years.²⁰ Governor Andrew Cuomo announced in January 2015 a plan to create 5,000 units of supportive housing, with 3,900 earmarked for New York City and 1,100 to be spread across the rest of the state. However, given the growing opioid epidemic and homelessness crisis, advocates have recommended a much larger State commitment to the creation of supportive housing. All told, the State and City together should take action and dedicate resources to meet a goal of over 30,000 new supportive housing units.

Statewide, elected officials have recognized supportive housing as an effective solution for the problems impacting their communities. In fact, 133 Assembly members and 26 Senators have signed bi-partisan letters to Governor Cuomo asking him to fund supportive housing.^{21, 22} In a recent interview, NY State Senator Catharine Young, Chair of the Senate Housing, Construction and Community Development Committee stated “Supportive housing really works. Actually 85% of people who are homeless with addiction problems who get into supportive housing programs are successful.”²³ In the same interview, NY State Senator George Amedore said, “Look at what’s contributing to homelessness – mental illness, addictions, substance abuse. We have a huge problem in the State of New York with the heroin epidemic, and it’s causing a great deal of families to be torn apart...and it’s raising up the homelessness rates around the state. It’s a quality of life issue we have to address...supportive housing, we have found, to be successful with those individuals who have struggled with addictions”.²⁴ In a press release issued last July, NY General Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie summed it up best when he said, “Supportive housing has proved to be an effective solution.”²⁵

Supportive housing is the answer for the most vulnerable among us -- those who need an affordable place to live and the stability that comes with a home to better cope with mental health, addiction and chronic health challenges. Without supportive housing, these individuals and families will continue to cycle endlessly between homelessness and expensive public services delivery systems including, inpatient hospital beds, psychiatric centers, detox services, jails and prisons, at an enormous public and human cost.

¹⁹ CSH, “Real Supportive Housing Need in New York State: a statewide supportive housing needs assessment based on data collected and evaluated by CSH” October 2015. http://www.csh.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Final_Real-SH-Need-in-NYS.pdf

²⁰ Stewart, Nikita. “De Blasio Unveils Plan to Create 15,000 Units of Housing”. The New York Times. November 18, 2015.

²¹ NY Assembly Speaker Carl B. Heastie News Release, “Assembly Leads Fight For Increased Supportive Housing”. July 10, 2015

²² Senator Martin J. Golden, [letter to the Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo](#). November 12, 2015.

²³ Time Warner Cable News, Capital Tonight. “Senators Push for Supportive Housing”. November 23, 2015

²⁴ Time Warner Cable News, Capital Tonight. “Senators Push for Supportive Housing”. November 23, 2015

²⁵ NY Assembly Speaker Carl B. Heastie News Release, “Assembly Leads Fight For Increased Supportive Housing”. July 10, 2015