



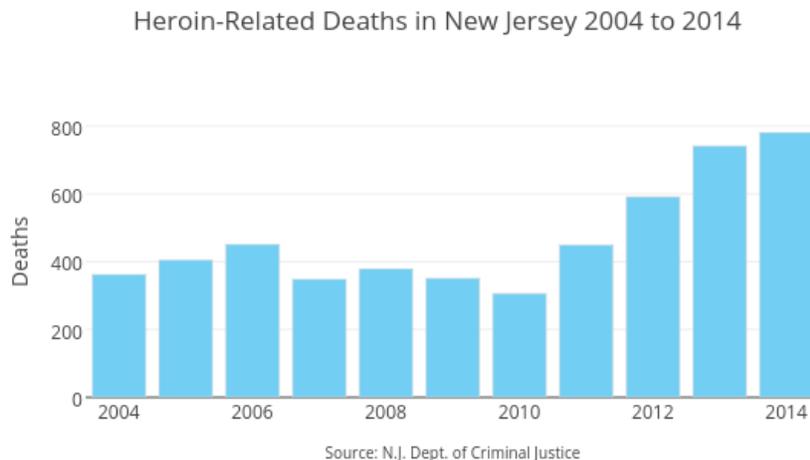
SUPPORTIVE HOUSING'S VITAL ROLE IN ADDRESSING THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC IN NEW JERSEY



CSH Policy Brief | March 2017

Scope of Opioid 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 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.²



New Jersey has experienced a sharp increase in the rates of illicit opiate use and associated adverse consequences, such as overdose, over the last decade. In 2015 there were 32,529 substance abuse treatment admissions for heroin and other opiates in New Jersey, almost half of the total admissions and more than for alcohol and marijuana combined.³ Drug overdose deaths in New Jersey in 2015 totaled 1,587, an increase of almost 30% since

2012.⁴ New Jersey has been particularly hard-hit by overdoses related to fentanyl (a strong synthetic opioid that is used either alone or in combination with heroin), which totaled 417 in 2015, more than 8 times the number in 2013.⁵ Communities statewide have been reeling from the casualties, who far outnumbered deaths from homicides and car accidents combined in 2015.^{6,7} The Office of National Drug Control Policy 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 drugs] 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

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 “New Jersey Drug and Alcohol Abuse Treatment: Substance Abuse Overview 2015 Statewide.” *Department of Human Services: Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Office of Planning, Research, Evaluation and Prevention*. Trenton, New Jersey. June 2016.

⁴ New Jersey Office of the State Medical Examiner (OSME). *Drug Related Deaths for 2015*. 2/6/2016. <http://www.nj.gov/oag/library/NJ-OSME-2015-Drug%20Deaths-Chart-by-County.pdf>

⁵ Stirling, Stephen. December 7, 2016. “Overdose Deaths Skyrocket in N.J. as Opioid Epidemic Proves Unassailable.” *Nj.com*. http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2016/12/overdose_deaths_skyrocket_in_nj_as_opioid_epidemic_continues_its_boom.html

⁶ Ivers, Dan. January 1, 2016. “Despite Progress in Cities, N.J. Homicides Jump 4 Percent in 2015.” *NJ.com*

⁷ NJSP Fatal Accident Statistics for 2015. <http://www.njsp.org/info/fatalacc/2015-stats.shtml>

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.

“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.

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 have co-occurring substance use.

In 2016, an estimated 8,895 individuals were homeless on a given night in New Jersey; over 21% of these individuals fell into the category of having chronic substance abuse.¹¹ More than 3,500 of the substance use treatment admissions in New Jersey in 2015 were for homeless individuals.¹²

An Important Part of the Solution

Stable, affordable housing is a crucial component of recovery for individuals with substance use disorders. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, SAMHSA, asserts that as communities consider how to effectively serve individuals with mental illnesses and substance use disorders who are homeless, “...the importance of making a variety of safe, affordable housing options available cannot be overstated. Without housing, services and supports cannot be effective”.¹³ 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

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). 2016 CoC Homeless Populations and Subpopulations Report – New Jersey. October 12, 2016.

¹² Limei Zhu. “New Jersey Drug and Alcohol Abuse Treatment: Substance Abuse Overview 2015 Statewide.” *Department of Human Services: Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Office of Planning, Research, Evaluation and Prevention*. Trenton, New Jersey. June 2016.

¹³ SAMHSA. *Ending Chronic Homelessness for Persons with Serious Mental Illnesses and Co-Occurring Substance Use Disorders: Blueprint for Change*. 2004.

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.

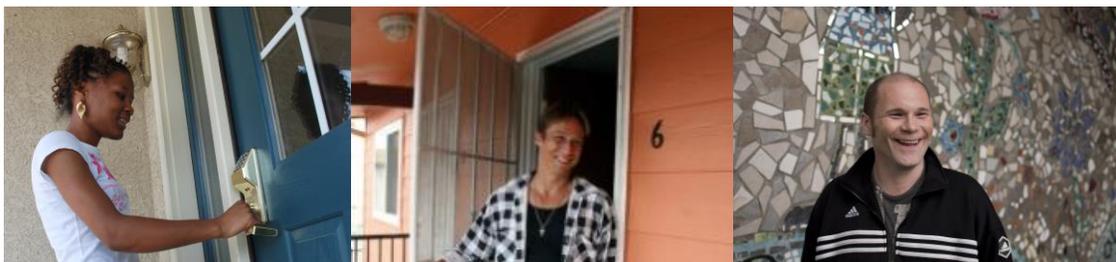
emerged as a more effective way to end homelessness for people with serious mental illness and chronic substance use issues.¹⁷

A Call to Action

In his 2017 State of the State address, Governor Chris Christie called the opioid crisis “...perhaps the single most important issue to every New Jersey family we will have the chance to address while I am governor”. Governor Christie and lawmakers in New Jersey have recognized the severity of the opioid crisis facing the State, and have taken admirable steps toward preventing addiction and overdoses and lowering barriers to treatment. There is more work to be done, however, particularly around the inclusion of affordable and supportive housing in coordinated, multi-agency efforts to address the problem. Individuals using substances who are homeless or are more likely to enter treatment and reduce or discontinue substance use when they have access to a safe and stable home and supportive services.

New Jersey has recognized the efficacy of supportive housing and the Housing First approach for improving outcomes and reducing costs for chronically homeless individuals who are high utilizers of public systems, and invested in the approach by awarding 500 State Rental Assistance Program vouchers and accompanying services funding.¹⁸ By expanding the Housing First program include homeless individuals struggling with substance use issues (who may not be chronically homeless), the State would be providing a safe, supportive platform from which individuals can begin to stabilize and address their substance use issues.

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 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. In his State of the State address, Governor Christie said that our fellow citizens facing the disease of addiction to not deserve to be living on the street. Housing First is a proven way to ensure that homeless individuals suffering from substance use issues can quickly access housing and the services they need to battle addiction and work towards recovery. The Christie Administration and the New Jersey legislature must ensure that adequate supportive housing resources are committed to meet the tremendous need.



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 Press Release, New Jersey Department of Community Affairs (DCA), July 21, 2016 - *Christie Administration Awards State Rental Assistance Program Vouchers and Service Funding through the Statewide Housing First Initiative*.