



# Supportive Housing Policy Platform for Pennsylvania

May 31, 2023

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## Executive Summary

Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH), in partnership with Regional Housing Legal Services (RHLS), conducted numerous listening sessions to engage partners during a year-long planning grant to develop a supportive housing policy platform for Pennsylvania. This platform seeks to raise awareness of key policy issues that prevent communities throughout Pennsylvania from creating the supportive housing needed for marginalized members of their communities. Through several listening sessions, CSH and RHLS identified more than a dozen recommendations for policy changes in Pennsylvania and kept track of the most commonly occurring recommendations. A Core Review Coalition was consulted to further identify the policy changes that would have the highest impact on the creation and sustainability of supportive housing in PA, highlighted below. The hope for this platform is to guide statewide policymakers, housing developers, service providers, and housing advocates in the collective goal to end homelessness and create communities that thrive in the commonwealth.

## Policy Recommendations

The four policy changes consistently highlighted by project participants and prioritized by the Core Review Coalition as having the highest impact on the creation and sustainability of supportive housing in PA are highlighted below.

<b>Enhance</b>	<p><b>Enhance Support Services Funding</b></p> <p>The current state of supportive services funding is inadequate to meet the needs in communities across PA. There is a need for increased and stable services funds as well as a need to align those resources with affordable housing capital and operating funds.</p>
<b>Address</b>	<p><b>Address Affordable Housing Needs</b></p> <p>There is no supportive housing without affordable housing. Supportive housing champions must align policy recommendations with existing efforts to enhance affordable housing stock across the commonwealth.</p>
<b>Challenge</b>	<p><b>Challenge Resistance to Affordable and Supportive Housing</b></p> <p>Supportive housing cannot thrive in the same environment community resistance can. Stakeholders must challenge resistance while enhancing relationships with existing landlords.</p>
<b>Lead</b>	<p><b>Establish a Statewide Interagency Council and Plan to Address Homelessness</b></p> <p>Pennsylvania needs a statewide plan to address homelessness that is created and led by an interagency council accountable to the Governor's office.</p>



The four policy recommendations this PA supportive housing platform uplifts will be further detailed below. These recommendations are (1) enhance support services funding, (2) address affordable housing needs, (3) challenge resistance to affordable and supportive housing, and (4) establish a statewide plan to address homelessness.

## 1. Enhance Support Services Funding

Supportive housing is targeted to individuals engaged with, and impacted by, different crisis system(s), including but not limited to, those with homelessness history, behavioral health diagnoses, complex medical care needs, substance use disorders, incarceration history, survivors of domestic violence, older adults, transition age youth, etc. Currently, service providers are relying on resources specific to target populations to provide supportive housing services. For example, some communities are able to build supportive housing services for individuals diagnosed with severe mental illness (SMI), but project participants reported a lack of funding available for individuals without official diagnoses still in need of substantial support. As such, these funds have been described as inadequate, stagnant, limited, or even, absent by participants in this platform process. If the supportive housing need in PA is to be met, the state will need to create and enhance supportive service revenues to allow for the implementation of flexible, person-centered services unique to communities across the commonwealth. Pennsylvania must:

- Dedicate supportive services funds that can be braided with the creation of new affordable housing units and can sustain quality support services;
- Amend the state Medicaid plan through the adoption of a Medicaid Waiver or State Plan Amendment that will augment existing Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) to include enhanced tenancy supports as well as training and capacity building supports for providers to carry this activity out;
- Ensure service revenues include, but are not limited to, eligibility criteria like chronic homelessness, which limits flexibility and effectiveness in addressing needs at a local level;
- Prioritize comprehensive and holistic care in coverage to allow activities most relevant to an individual and their community (e.g., funds that facilitate service providers' ability to meet the transportation needs of their tenants).

## 2. Address Affordable Housing Needs

Supportive housing typically serves individuals and families with incomes between 0-30% of the Area Median Income (AMI). Participants in this process consistently stated a need for more affordable housing throughout the commonwealth, even for those with housing subsidies and vouchers. This affordable housing deficiency has created a backlog of people waiting years to be housed. It has also kept some families and individuals in supportive housing programs even after their need for services diminishes, creating a bottleneck in a system meant to be a vehicle for those people to move on and thrive. Pennsylvania must:

- Enhance operating funding (i.e., rental subsidies) so supportive housing developers and/or providers are able to keep pace with increasing rents;
- Scale resources like the PA Housing Affordability and Rehabilitation Enhancement Fund (PHARE);



- Acknowledge the impacts of systemic racism on housing, and specifically in the implementation of affordable housing responses, and target resources and tools to address these disparities;
- Address factors that limit access to housing such as the utilization of criminal background checks, credit checks, and income discrimination as a means to deny potential tenants;
- Leverage federal, state, and municipal funds to address affordable housing needs specific to communities.

### **3. Challenge Resistance to Affordable and Supportive Housing**

Participants named resistance to new affordable and supportive housing as a significant barrier in meeting supportive housing needs. This manifests as neighborhood resistance commonly referred to as NIMBYism, or “Not in My Back Yard,” and reluctance from landlords to work with supportive housing tenants. In order to build and sustain more supportive and affordable housing, Pennsylvania must:

- Facilitate and support efforts to strengthen and adopt inclusionary zoning provisions in municipalities throughout PA, and at a municipal level in big cities;
- Create educational material to aid allies in community engagement and advocacy efforts;
- Promote creative responses to community resistance such as YIMBY (“Yes in My Back Yard”);
- Organize coalition building to execute local community engagement and to build relationships with local champions;
- Develop material and resources, including financial incentives, risk mitigation funds, bonus programs, etc., to help supportive housing providers engage and strengthen relationships with landlords.

### **4. Establish a Statewide Interagency Council and Plan to Address Homelessness**

Project participants consistently expressed a desire for more leadership and coordination from state agencies to provide guidance and support to local efforts addressing homelessness. Participants also voiced frustration and confusion related to resources administered by various agencies that do not appear to be coordinating or leveraging opportunities to create more supportive housing. As a recommendation, PA must:

- Establish an interagency council on housing/homelessness to provide leadership by coordinating resources, providing guidance, and enabling localities to advance solutions;
- This council must create and effectuate a statewide plan to end homelessness in PA;
- Identify resources for direct TA and capacity building for Continuums of Care (CoC’s) that will help identify and strategically address gaps.