

Community-Centered Housing: Aligning Social Practice and Supportive Housing

Policy Brief By Fountain House and Corporation for Supportive Housing

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The Issue

Supportive housing is the preeminent approach to addressing the housing needs of people living with serious mental illness and other disabilities. An evidence-based intervention that combines affordable housing assistance with voluntary services, supportive housing has been shown to increase housing stability and improve health.

People living with serious mental illness, as well as people with histories of homelessness, experience high rates of [social isolation](#) and [loneliness](#). Social isolation and loneliness not only impact psychological and emotional well-being but also put people at notably [greater risk for negative physical health outcomes](#) and premature death. Connection to others, a sense of purpose and means for personal growth are critical to attaining and sustaining mental illness recovery. Thus, while supportive housing is essential, it is not sufficient without accompanying social supports, especially those that address isolation, loneliness and other barriers to maintaining mental health.



Supportive Housing, Clubhouse Model & Social Practice

Supportive housing combines affordable housing with supportive services to help people who face the most complex challenges live with stability, autonomy and dignity. Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) works to advance the proven, cost-effective supportive housing model around the country.

Research Shows:

- [Decades of research](#) demonstrate that supportive housing is effective in improving housing stability, reducing the use of costly crisis care, and improving health, quality of life, and other outcomes.
- For people experiencing recurring cycles of incarceration and homelessness, most of whom are living with health and substance use issues, [supportive housing has proven particularly effective](#) at ending long periods of housing instability, significantly reducing contact with the justice system, reducing crisis care costs and supporting successful community reentry.

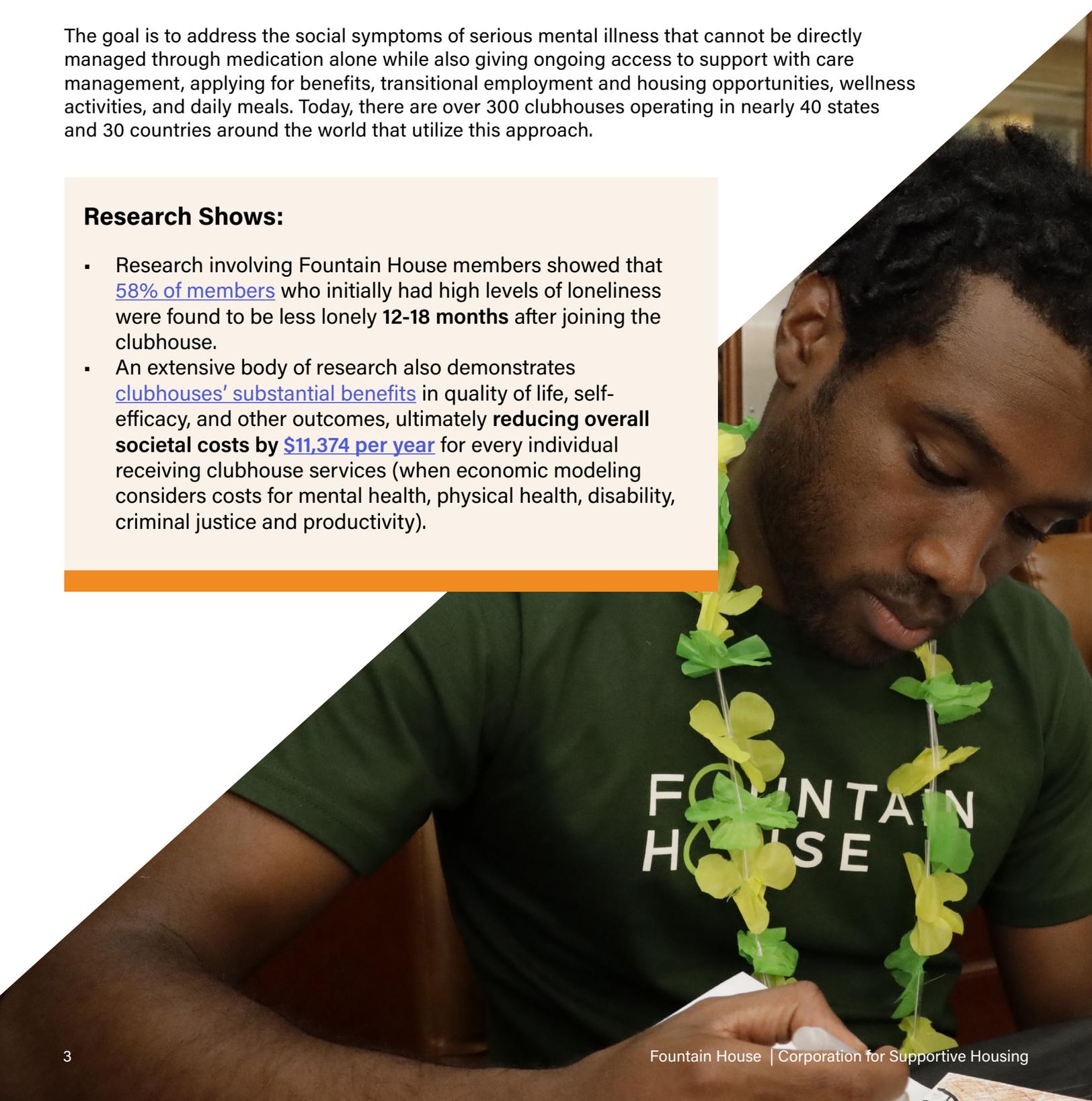
Supportive Housing, Clubhouse Model & Social Practice

The **clubhouse model**, pioneered by Fountain House in 1948, incorporates a nonclinical treatment approach called **social practice** that uses an intentional community to help people recover from mental illness. The community, which is made up of trained professionals known as social practitioners and individuals recovering from serious mental illness called members, is designed to provide what's known as psychosocial rehabilitation. With psychosocial rehabilitation, people living with serious mental illness learn emotional, cognitive and social skills and get holistic support in all aspects of their lives.

The goal is to address the social symptoms of serious mental illness that cannot be directly managed through medication alone while also giving ongoing access to support with care management, applying for benefits, transitional employment and housing opportunities, wellness activities, and daily meals. Today, there are over 300 clubhouses operating in nearly 40 states and 30 countries around the world that utilize this approach.

Research Shows:

- Research involving Fountain House members showed that [58% of members](#) who initially had high levels of loneliness were found to be less lonely **12-18 months** after joining the clubhouse.
- An extensive body of research also demonstrates [clubhouses' substantial benefits](#) in quality of life, self-efficacy, and other outcomes, ultimately **reducing overall societal costs by \$11,374 per year** for every individual receiving clubhouse services (when economic modeling considers costs for mental health, physical health, disability, criminal justice and productivity).



FOUNTAIN
HOUSE

Evidence of a Solution – Community-Centered Housing (CCH)

Given the compelling evidence base that exists for how social practice effectively supports people living with serious mental illness in clubhouses, **Fountain House** and **Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH)** are exploring how social practice can be integrated into supportive housing to maximize its potential to help people more holistically.

With support from the Dauten Family Foundation, **Fountain House** tested a hypothesis that embedding social practice into supportive housing – the **Community-Centered Housing (CCH)** approach – would reduce loneliness, improve other outcomes for supportive housing tenants and allow supportive housing programs to reach their full potential for individuals with serious mental illness.

In support of this hypothesis, Fountain House initiated a two-pronged exploration: (1) undertaking a landscape assessment of the field of supportive housing, particularly as it relates to serving people living with serious mental illness, and (2) a user-designed evaluation of social practice implementation within Fountain House’s redesigned Community Apartment Program (CAP) – a scattered-site supportive housing program at Fountain House made up of 20 apartments with four to five tenants per apartment. Residents are provided services to assist in their recovery including case management, mental health supports and activities to build daily living skills.



The Community-Centered Housing (CCH) approach would reduce loneliness, improve other outcomes for supportive housing tenants and allow supportive housing programs to reach their full potential for individuals with serious mental illness.



Evidence of a Solution – Community-Centered Housing (CCH)

The most noteworthy learning from the landscape assessment was the strength of support for developing CCH as an approach and eagerness to join Fountain House in developing it. Virtually uniform across semi-structured interviews with 45 expert stakeholders (that included providers of supportive housing, public officials, funders, consumers and others) was the critical need to address the issues of loneliness and isolation among people living with serious mental illness and a belief that CCH has the potential to address these issues.

These expert stakeholders pointed to bipartisan interest in addressing the issues of loneliness and isolation and the potential appetite for entertaining new approaches, particularly nonclinical ones. Throughout the assessment process, many expressed interest in joining Fountain House on this journey – as thought partners, pilot collaborators, or colleagues in training, technical assistance, and education.

The effort to test the hypothesis was bolstered by the early findings from the qualitative evaluation of the redesigned CAP. While the quantitative research component is ongoing and requires more time to produce clear results, the qualitative findings reveal significant positive responses from clubhouse staff and members. Many of the participants expressed an improved sense of connection between their lives inside the clubhouse community and their housing.

More specifically, the qualitative evaluation provided a much deeper understanding of why CCH has great potential. These findings point to two key areas: the need for stronger wraparound services and social support, and the unique power of community to reduce social isolation.



Some elements of social practice resemble traditional social work approaches, but are implemented more intentionally.

Ways to implement:

- Amplify resident voice and support active participation in decision-making within their housing communities
- Support residents in identifying their short- and long-term recovery goals, especially as it relates to their housing
- Connect residents to community resources that can support their personal goals



Social practice builds upon traditional social work by actively engaging individuals in intentional, vibrant and voluntary community life.

Facilitation tactics can include:

- Opportunities for residents and staff to work together on meaningful activities
- Access to transitional environments (i.e., spaces in society where mental health is not a priority of the environment) that will have rehabilitative value for residents
- Socialization and increased social networks through resident engagement, social gatherings in the community, and connecting residents from different apartments

Our Recommendations and Next Steps

Build on Supportive Housing Successes

Supportive housing has a long and successful history with integration of different services and partners. We will explore those promising practices and search for ways to scale and replicate. For example:

- Co-locating site-based supportive housing with health services provided by a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) or medical and social care provided by a Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) has been successful in providing these critical services for tenants, as well as others in the community.
- Embedding social practice into existing supportive housing settings (both in site-based and scattered-site projects) to create similar results around increasing well-being and quality of life.



Forge a Path Toward Community-Centered Housing

The work to date affirms the potential of CCH, including the strong support to build out the concept that emerged from stakeholder interviews. The previous work also helps to identify a next-generation set of questions to expand on what has been learned. Building on the findings from the Dauten Family Foundation-funded work, Fountain House and CSH see significant potential to move CCH forward by advancing three interrelated approaches:



1.

Build on the breadth of enthusiasm and interest by fully developing partnerships and deepen stakeholder awareness and engagement



2.

Refine the approach, including steps to address practical questions such as the most effective forms of housing to which CCH might be applied



3.

Test and demonstrate its application, including using the emerging evidence base to adapt and innovate

Our Recommendations and Next Steps Continued

Fountain House and CSH are pursuing the approach's design and implementation through continued internal programmatic refinement and external partnership development. These include:



Demonstration, Research and Evaluation

We are crafting a full picture of the impact of implementing social practice in the Fountain House CAP through continuation of the current demonstration and research project. Key elements include furthering social environment creation to maximize member engagement and success and capturing data over sufficient time to understand its adoption and further identify adaptations or innovations.



Pilot Development

In addition to CAP, Fountain House is undertaking a more expansive demonstration of its Bronx development project that combines 235 units of supportive housing and a 15,000-foot new clubhouse in a single building. More broadly, Fountain House has begun working with CSH regarding joint efforts to identify pilot sites, broaden stakeholder engagement and engage supportive housing experts in advancing CCH. Additionally, Fountain House has already engaged the broader Fountain House United (FHU) network in these discussions, and there is substantial interest in the next steps to further the integration of clubhouses and supportive housing in the 11 states FHU includes.



Policy and Program Development

The initial CCH work generated substantial insights that form the basis for several next-generation questions that Fountain House and CSH are working to pursue. The questions include: (1) the trade-offs between different types of housing (congregate vs. scattered site) for the implementation of CCH, (2) whether CCH could or should be a standalone support or layered on top of existing programs or services, and (3) how integration of current tenant selection systems outside the control of the housing provider can be navigated.



Education

Social practice — the foundation of CCH — is relatively unknown outside of clubhouse settings, highlighting the need for an education campaign that introduces the approach and demonstrates how its integration into supportive housing can improve outcomes for people living with serious mental illness. In addition, education efforts are needed to help social practitioners better understand supportive housing, and to help both supportive housing providers and clubhouses understand how to implement a CCH model.



Workforce Development and Training

Understanding and developing the role of the social practitioner and coordination strategies between social practitioners and supportive housing staff in a CCH model are critical to the approach's success.



Technical Assistance

The development of a technical assistance team as a key resource to accelerate the adoption of CCH in the clubhouse world and the supportive housing field.

Conclusion

Community-Centered Housing (CCH) offers a chance to reimagine what housing can achieve. By embracing this model, we can drive meaningful transformation in the housing sector and create environments that support people living with serious mental illness and promote lasting recovery and stability.

With further testing and evaluation, CCH has great potential to apply evidence-based practices to new environments in ways that achieve both aims. The collaboration between CSH and Fountain House is uniquely positioned to lead this exploration due to the deep technical expertise, broad networks, experience using pragmatic innovation to drive policy change, and shared vision that it brings to bear. CSH and Fountain House are interested in working with practitioners of supportive housing, people with lived experience, funders, policy makers and other key partners to learn what partnerships already exist and explore what more can be done to advance an integrated approach.



About Us



For over 75 years, Fountain House has been a beacon of hope and recovery for people living with serious mental illness. Through our direct service clubhouse programs in New York City and Los Angeles, as well as national policy, advocacy and research initiatives, we have transformed the lives of tens of thousands of people living with serious mental illness. Founded in 1948 in New York City, Fountain House originated the clubhouse model of community mental health that has been replicated more than 370 times in nearly 40 U.S. states and in 30 countries around the world. For more information, contact: jseidman@fountainhouse.org



CSH (Corporation for Supportive Housing) advances affordable and accessible housing aligned with services by advocating for effective policies and funding, investing in communities, and strengthening the supportive housing field. Since our founding in 1991, CSH has been the only national nonprofit intermediary focused solely on increasing the availability of supportive housing. Over the course of our work, we have created more than 512,500 units of affordable and supportive housing and invested more than \$2.2 billion in communities. Our workforce is central to accomplishing this work. We employ approximately 170 people across 30 states and U.S. Territories. As an intermediary, we do not directly develop or operate housing but center our approach on collaboration with a wide range of people, partners, and sectors. Learn more at www.csh.org.