



CSH Co-LAB **SUMMARY REPORT**

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SUMMARY REPORT

Introduction

CSH (Corporation for Supportive Housing) advances affordable 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. For more information, visit www.csh.org.

Supportive housing is a combination of affordable housing and supportive services designed to help individuals and families use stable housing as a platform for health, recovery and personal growth, to thrive in their communities.

The Los Angeles Tenant Centered Collaboratory (Co-LAB) is an extension of CSH's capacity-building efforts in the Western United States to improve the operations and fidelity to the core principles of quality supportive housing. The goal of the Co-LAB, supported by the Hilton Foundation, is to improve the quality of tenant-centered supportive housing to focus our training and technical assistance (TA) on tenant outcomes, and to do so with the guidance of tenant leadership.

Background

In May 2021, the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) launched The Los Angeles Tenant-Centered Co-LAB (Co-LAB) Training series. The training was designed as a collaborative, peer-to-peer learning environment for teams comprised of people with lived experience, housing developers/owners, services providers, and property manager partners that are within 1-3 years of leasing up their Los Angeles County supportive housing developments. Additionally, the purpose of the Co-LAB was to foster the co-creation of community environments centered on tenant choice, safety, and wellness. The Co-LAB also focused on navigating operational challenges common in the first year while ensuring tenant retention, promoting tenant leadership, and sustaining staff for long-term success.

Following the participation of the Co-LAB, participants were offered follow-up Technical Assistance (TA) for up to 18 months (TA provided at 6 months, 12 months, and 18 months). Technical assistance that was offered included: best practices on the coordination between supportive services and property management for quick lease-ups during the COVID-19 pandemic, assistance with understanding the developments pro-forma, budgeting for the lease-up process, and developing trauma-informed training for property managers

Focus Groups

In 2023-2024, the Co-LAB hosted eight (8) Focus Groups that included representation from Los Angeles supportive housing developers, service providers, tenants, individuals with lived expertise of homelessness and working in homeless services, a Black Affinity Group, and property managers. The purpose of the Focus Groups was to 1) understand the perspectives and learning needs of each group, 2) to inform the Co-LAB curriculum development and 3) to guide how to support pressing training and technical assistance needs.

Below is a summary of each focus group type. The summary includes information about the focus group format, participants, and considerations for expanding access to quality supportive housing in Los Angeles County. (Please note this is not an exhaustive list of information shared and learned.)

Supportive Housing Providers

The supportive housing providers' focus group consisted of staff members from organizations providing services and support to households exiting homelessness or residents of supportive housing. The following are findings from the groups.

- Participants expressed consumers and staff must navigate through a lot of “red tape” to achieve the housing outcomes they are looking for, i.e., prioritization listings, document readiness, SPDAT utilization, utility assistance/eviction prevention resources, etc.
- Participants identified a need for the project team (developer, property manager, and service provider) to establish clear roles and responsibilities at the pre-development phase-to include roles in the move in process, and roles to support tenants once living in their homes.
- Participants identified the need to establish a trauma-informed curriculum for Los Angeles County service providers, stating the need to utilize mandatory trainings to prepare staff to deliver quality services (i.e., agency described feeling like they have to “piece” together trainings for their staff). Participants highlighted consistency and accountability amongst service providers and property management is key to preventing tenant evictions.

People with Lived Experience working in Homeless Services

The people with lived experience working in homeless services' focus group consisted of staff members from organizations providing services and support to households exiting homelessness. The focus group included staff members with lived experience of housing instability, homelessness, and system engagement. The following are findings from the groups.

- Participants identified the need to include reasonably comfortable furnishing in the development/operating budget.
- Participants identified the need to provide tenants with opportunities to gain economic stability through education/GED, work force development, becoming an advocate or consultant, etc.
- Participants identified the need to provide tenants with resources and access to tenant eviction resources, landlord-tenant laws, tenant rights, legal aid, tenant councils, advocacy groups, and payee programs.
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Tenants

Tenant focus groups consisted of various virtual and in person opportunities with tenants and past residents of Los Angeles County-based supportive housing developments. The following are findings from the groups.

- Participants identified the need for continuous education on evidence-based practices and other interventions like Housing First, culturally and linguistically appropriate services and supports, assertive community engagement, and life skills training for staff working with residents.
- Participants shared authentic relationships, engagement, and communication help create a home-like environment, “putting the business to the side sometimes”.
- Participants shared experiences of unfairness and unconscious bias including:
 - Fear of retaliation: case managers threatened to “write people up;” as a result, tenants felt their housing was in jeopardy.
 - Tenants shared stories of being stereotyped and experiencing unfair treatment from some case managers.
 - Lack of power-sharing, parity, and fairness in unit selection between tenants of different backgrounds.
- Participants identified a lack of security and safety in their own homes, referencing a high frequency of illegal activities, trespassing, and/or substance use after business hours that was perpetuated by non-residents and residents.

The tenant focus groups proposed the following solutions:

- Participants highlighted the need for providers to hire and retain case managers with lived experience of homelessness (navigating the homeless, housing, mental health, and court systems).
- Participants identified training and personal accountability as a pathway to resolving unfair treatment in PSH.

Supportive Housing Developers

The developer focus group consisted of developers in Los Angeles County with a history of successfully bringing affordable and supportive housing units into the market.

- Participants shared the importance of tenants and developers having access to housing vouchers. Participants reported vouchers not only assist organizations with seeking funding for financing developments but also drive tenant retention in income-based housing.
- Participants shared the need to have available information about the differences and focuses on each services funding department. (i.e., DMH, DHS, etc.).
- Participants shared the need to have access to references of successful trauma-informed design approaches.
- Participants identified early and ongoing community engagement as an opportunity to combat NIMBY-ism and assure neighbors they are striving to be a good neighbor and asset to the neighborhood. For example, assisting communities in understanding how they will benefit from affordable and shared housing developments like opening onsite clinics and services to community members.

Property Managers

The property manager focus group consisted of property managers operating in supportive housing sites in Los Angeles County. The following themes were extracted from the insights gathered during the virtual sessions and the online survey.

- Participants shared challenges in effectively assisting tenants while managing behavioral challenges and conflicts arising from lease violations, alongside financial constraints limiting support from the tenant service team.
- Participants emphasized addressing conflict resolution through prioritizing professionalism, active listening, and collaboration between property management and service providers, supported by grievance policies for promptly addressing tenant complaints.
- Participants discussed challenges in managing tenant turnover involving delays due to documentation issues, repairs, and subsidy miscommunication, requiring coordination with referral agencies for specific population vacancies.
- Participants discussed the challenges faced in day-to-day responsibilities, including interagency collaboration, balancing individual well-being with property management tasks, compliance with regulatory requirements, and tenant engagement.
- Participants highlighted staffing challenges, communication with service providers, balancing property management tasks with PSH needs, recruitment of experienced staff, and training and skill development.

Feedback from LA-based Consultants

CSH collaborated with consultants with lived expertise to help facilitate in-person and virtual focus groups to gain a deeper understanding of the training needs and gaps of supportive housing providers in Los Angeles County. Consultants supported each Co-LAB focus group by co-developing content and questions, facilitating discussions, debriefing focus group qualitative data, and reviewing documents relevant to capacity-building efforts. Below are key findings from CSH's debrief meetings with our consultants.

1. Incorporating the voices of literally and/or formerly homeless individuals/households in the development process, most specifically in pre-development phases for design features, etc.
2. Incorporating the voices of property managers in the development process.
3. Creating staff retention programs because tenants "feel" the impact of support staff turnover within organizations. This can improve the continuity of care, trust, and feeling of support for tenants.
4. Investing in professional development for Peer Specialists and programs can help with staffing changes and diversifying the workforce.

Reflections for Cohort Two

Our process for shaping the trajectory of Cohort Two training initiatives has been deeply informed by invaluable insights derived from Co-LAB's Focus Groups.

By centering tenant well-being as a framework in the development of Cohort Two, we continue to expand our understanding of the challenges and opportunities in Los Angeles County's supportive housing landscape. Through this process, three pivotal themes have emerged to guide Cohort Two's training sessions: Fair & Trauma-Informed Practices, Effective Collaboration & Communication, and Tenant Support & Thriving.

The overarching focus on Fair & Trauma-Informed Practices underscores the commitment to creating environments essential for tenant wellness and community resilience. The theme of Effective Collaboration & Communication offers the potential for streamlined cross-agency operations and tangible benefits such as enhanced efficiency and project success. Meanwhile, Tenant Thriving & Support aims to promote vibrant communities through the exploration of practices that support and promote various backgrounds of tenants and tenant agency.

As we look ahead to Cohort Two, these training themes offer a promising roadmap for transformative change, fostering stronger, more welcoming communities where tenants can truly flourish.

Conclusion

Each focus group was intended to provide a space for CSH to learn, guide, and build a timely and relevant curriculum for the second Co-LAB cohort utilizing the qualitative data synthesized from the Co-LAB's focus groups.

Thank You

The Co-LAB team is grateful for the significant contributions from CSH staff, supportive housing tenants, service providers, People with Lived Experience, and supportive housing developers. Your voices and robust conversations have laid the foundation for updating our Co-LAB training curriculum. The Co-LAB has truly been a collaborative community process, and we will carry that approach forward into its implementation.

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

CSH would like to express our deepest appreciation to everyone who contributed to the development, facilitation, and/or participation in the Co-LAB Focus Groups. Without your voice, our work cannot contribute to building the field of supportive housing. Your contributions allow our organization to maintain the freshness and relevancy of our work in highlighting the importance of quality supportive housing. Please note this is not an exhaustive list of participants.

Co-LAB Consultants

- Theodore Patton
- Linda Arnold
- Alicia Rhoden

Individuals

- Gannette Johnson
- Simone Neal
- Tia Dickinson
- Emily Martiniuk, CSH, Speak- Up Advocate, 2016
- Shawn Pleasants
- Shalonda Battee, CSH Speak-Up Advocate
- Kia Dupclay, Free 2 Dream Big
- Jayden Alexander, Housing Works
- Wallace Richardson
- Sonya C., Downtown Women's Center Los Angeles
- Celina Alvarez, Housing Works
- Mildred "Millie" Brown, CSH Speak-Up Advocate
- Lisa B., CSH TKE Advisory Council
- Eric Gray, Project 180
- Yenni Rivera, Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority

Organizations

- Housing Works
- Gramercy Place Apartments
- Hollywood Community Housing Corporation



ABOUT CSH

CSH advances affordable housing aligned with services by advocating for effective policies and funding, investing in communities, and strengthening the supportive housing field. **Learn more at csh.org**