

Supportive Housing Coalition of Pennsylvania Supportive Services Cost Analysis

October 2025

About CSH

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. 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.

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INTRODUCTION

Cost Analysis Findings

- Supportive services funds are inadequate to meet the needs of communities across the commonwealth
- Caseloads are too high
- Provider wages have not kept pace with other industries like retail, food services, etc.
- Supportive services providers are struggling to maintain budgets and sustain programs due to lack of funds
- Supportive service providers are unable to fill vacant positions - contributing to higher caseloads, less community support, and more turnover

Communities across Pennsylvania are in desperate need of resources to fund supportive services in supportive housing programs. Supportive housing is an evidence-based and highly effective strategy that combines affordable housing with supportive services to enable individuals and families who face complex barriers to housing with opportunities to thrive in their communities. This includes, but is not limited to, those with histories of homelessness, behavioral health diagnoses, complex medical care needs, substance use disorders, incarceration history, survivors of domestic violence, older adults, transition age youth, and others.

Supportive services include activities such as:

- Working with a tenant to create an individualized service plan and assisting the tenant in meeting those goals that will enable them to move on from services and supportive housing.
- Helping to coordinate mental health/substance abuse treatment appointments and/or physical health care appointments.
- Facilitating access to educational services and employment services.
- Supporting tenants' recovery from substance abuse.
- Helping to manage crises.
- Support in the development of life skills such as budgeting, cleaning, and cooking.
- Providing education about medications and supporting medication management.
- Assisting tenants to connect with and develop support in the community, including reuniting with family members.
- Support both landlord/property manager and tenant with tenancy issues related to adhering to lease agreements, tenancy rights, etc.

In CSH's engagement with more than 50 counties across Pennsylvania, a repeated theme has been that supportive services funding to meet the needs of these individuals is inadequate, stagnant, limited, or even absent.

If the supportive housing needs in Pennsylvania are to be met, it is imperative for the State to create and enhance supportive service revenue streams that allow for the implementation of flexible, person-centered services unique to communities across the Commonwealth.

The following is an overview of the current state of supportive services funding, how it impacts service providers, and what this means for those in need of these critical services in communities across Pennsylvania.

METHOD

CSH utilized the [supportive services budgeting tool](#) to acquire figures and data from providers across the Commonwealth. Additionally, CSH conducted focus groups and polls to gather data from members of the PA Supportive Housing Coalition. CSH aggregated the data and feedback from all participants under the condition that no organizations’ financial information would be made public. The following findings highlight the costs and funding gaps that exist in Pennsylvania.

FINDINGS

Average costs to provide services in supportive housing programs

Supportive Housing costs can vary across different projects, however, supportive housing costs a fraction of relying on crisis systems like jails, prisons, or hospitals to address the needs of people with intersecting challenges.



The cost of providing supportive services can be determined by several factors at different supportive housing programs. The size, location, target population, and level of services can all impact the cost of providing services to individuals and families in supportive housing programs. While some programs provide supportive housing to over 100 people with a relatively low level of service needs and service delivery other programs may serve a smaller number of tenants with higher service needs.

The U.S. average cost of providing housing and services can range between \$10,000-\$18,000 per tenant per year. The median cost in PA skews closer to the smaller end of this range at \$13,000 per tenant annually. CSH found that the median program size was 30 tenants in PA. It should be noted that programs of this size tend to skew to higher than recommended caseload sizes and would not be able to implement a high-fidelity housing first model. A program of this size would have a services budget of approximately \$390,000 annually.

The chart below represents potential annual budgets based on varying service models and sizes to show the scale that supportive service providers in PA experience.

Program size	Acuity/Services Level	Annual budget
5 households	High Acuity/Intensive Services	\$90,000
15 households	Moderate Acuity/Services	\$210,000
30 households	Moderate Acuity/Services	\$420,000
80 households	Low acuity/Light touch services coordination	\$800,000

CASELOAD RATIOS

Recommended caseload sizes in supportive housing are impacted by the level of need that residents have. While some programs may require a lighter touch service coordination to support tenants, some programs may require intensive services that include elements like clinical care and lower caseloads. According to guidance released by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, the recommended caseload size for supportive housing can range from 10 to 50 tenants per case manager depending on the service needs of the tenant.

Housing-based Case Management recommended caseloads³

Target Population	SH Scattered Site Caseload	SH Single Site Caseload	Existing Program Stably Housed Tenants
Individuals	10-20	10-20	20-50
Families	10-12	10-12	12-40
Transition-age Youth (18-24 yrs. Old)	10-15	10-15	15-30

Very few supportive service providers can meet these recommended caseloads. Some PA-based providers reported that they have caseload ratios between 20-30 residents with some reporting that these ratios are often intensified to upwards of 50 individuals due to turnover and the need to stretch limited funds to cover the expenses of operating. High caseloads have been attributed to poorer outcomes for tenants, lower morale, higher rates of burnout and turnover of staff, and decreased quality of services.⁴⁵

This means that communities across Pennsylvania are struggling to provide supportive services for individuals with higher needs, relying on interactions with expensive and disruptive institutions and crisis response systems. It should be noted that organizations that provided the highest level of care (Fidelity Assertive Community Treatment or ACT) were not included in this analysis.

SUPPORTIVE SERVICES STAFF WAGES

Pennsylvania is currently experiencing a crisis in staffing and sustaining supportive service providers. The individuals who provide services in supportive housing are often dedicated and mission driven providers who dedicate their lives to the service of those most marginalized in their communities.⁶ They bring a variety of skills, compassion, and expertise to their roles and are vital members of their communities. These individuals often enter the supportive services field acknowledging that their work may not be compensated at the equal to or higher levels than other professions. However, the wages in this industry have not kept pace with these other opportunities. The average salary of supportive services workers in Pennsylvania is approximately \$42,750.00.

For context, the average salary noted above \$42,750, is approximately \$11,000 more than the annual federal poverty level for a family of 4. This salary is about 45% of the statewide Area Median Income⁷ (AMI) in Pennsylvania. Individuals with this salary would qualify as a low-income household in every county in Pennsylvania as it falls approximately \$16,000 below the 80% AMI threshold⁸. In effect, this means that those who are helping to build stable communities cannot afford to live in them. To have a strong supportive service workforce in Pennsylvania, salaries need to be adjusted to be competitive and ensure that staff who are providing necessary services to those in supportive housing remain stably housed can be stably housed themselves.

Supportive housing provider organizations recognize that they ask their employees to do more for less than other industries. Increasing compensation is a high priority for every provider organization CSH spoke to. Organizations utilize a variety of mechanisms to increase benefits, provide training opportunities, and increase flexibility for staff when they can't increase base salaries. For example, some provider organizations provide signing or retention bonuses. They can offer this when they have salary savings because of the high turnover of staff and long vacancy times for open positions. Other providers are offering training and professional development opportunities to increase skills, knowledge, and capacity of staff. Others are providing opportunities for flex time and work from home options. These kinds of creative human resource strategies can only afford provider organizations to be but so competitive for employees.

For these wages, providers are asked to respond to behavioral health crises, traverse communities to visit dispersed residents, work outside of traditional business hours, absorb the impacts of secondary trauma, and learn to engage multiple systems like healthcare, substance use, the justice system, etc. To compare this with the opportunities that staff are passing up to engage in this work, CSH catalogued starting salaries at entry level positions of several recognizable retail, food services, and other businesses in several communities that represented different costs of living indices⁹ to gauge the competitive marketplace that supportive service providers looking to

hire qualified candidates are competing in. With current funding levels, many supportive housing case managers make up to \$3.00/hr. less than retail positions, school bus drivers, delivery drivers, house cleaners, correctional officers, and bank tellers.

Other Factors Impacting Budgets

The primary driver of supportive service budgets tends to be personnel and wages. However, there are other factors that were raised during this cost analysis that should be considered as they contribute to the cost of providing supportive services in Pennsylvania.

Administrative costs for most providers are capped at 10% of their budgets. However, all but one of the providers that we spoke to reported that the actual costs are closer to 15% or more of their budget.

For decades, programs have seen increases in costs for things like supplies, transportation, technology, and other elements of providing supportive housing. Over this time federal, state, and local funding sources have not kept pace with the increased costs. CSH estimates that programs will need to plan for an annual increase in costs of about 7.5%. This is not possible under current conditions for most providers, forcing them to make difficult decisions about staffing, services, and program sustainability.

As the acuity and service needs have increased due to the lack of behavioral health and substance use resources in communities, so have the challenges that supportive service providers face. Working with more individuals who have these needs often increases costs related to landlord mitigation, the need for training and credentialing, and other population specific expenses often borne by supportive service providers.

CONCLUSION

Pennsylvania is experiencing a crisis related to supportive services like those provided in supportive housing programs. Lack of adequate investments in supportive services has been a significant issue at the Federal, State, and Local level for several years. Programs are currently leveraging public and private funds, including what services are currently covered by Medicaid to address budgetary needs. Most programs operate at a loss that is offset by factors like vacant positions, caseloads well above recommendations, and creative use and leveraging resources.



After decades of doing more with less and doing as much as they can with what they do have, supportive housing providers across Pennsylvania need increased funding to sustain their projects.

Continuing to fund supportive services at current levels in Pennsylvania is unsustainable. Unless there is a change in the resources allocated to supportive service providers, these critical community service providers will be forced to make decisions about cutting staff, will lose experienced staff, or will have to make the extremely difficult decision to shut down leaving gaps in their communities that may take years to fill.

This trend has already begun as providers were particularly stressed to the point of closure across Pennsylvania during the COVID-19 pandemic.

While the cost of supportive services may seem like a large figure, supportive housing has proven to be a cheaper option than incarceration, hospitalization, and the utilization of other punitive and crisis systems.¹⁰¹¹¹² In this report, we have outlined many gaps in the available funding sources for supportive housing providers. By maintaining the status quo for supportive service providers, it continues to jeopardize existing supportive service programs and hinders the creation of the 38,000 units of supportive housing needed across the Commonwealth. The Pennsylvania Supportive Housing Coalition is developing recommendations for increasing the funding available to supportive service providers in Pennsylvania.

For more information about the Pennsylvania Supportive Housing Coalition and ways to get involved, please visit the [Pennsylvania Supportive Housing Coalition webpage](#).