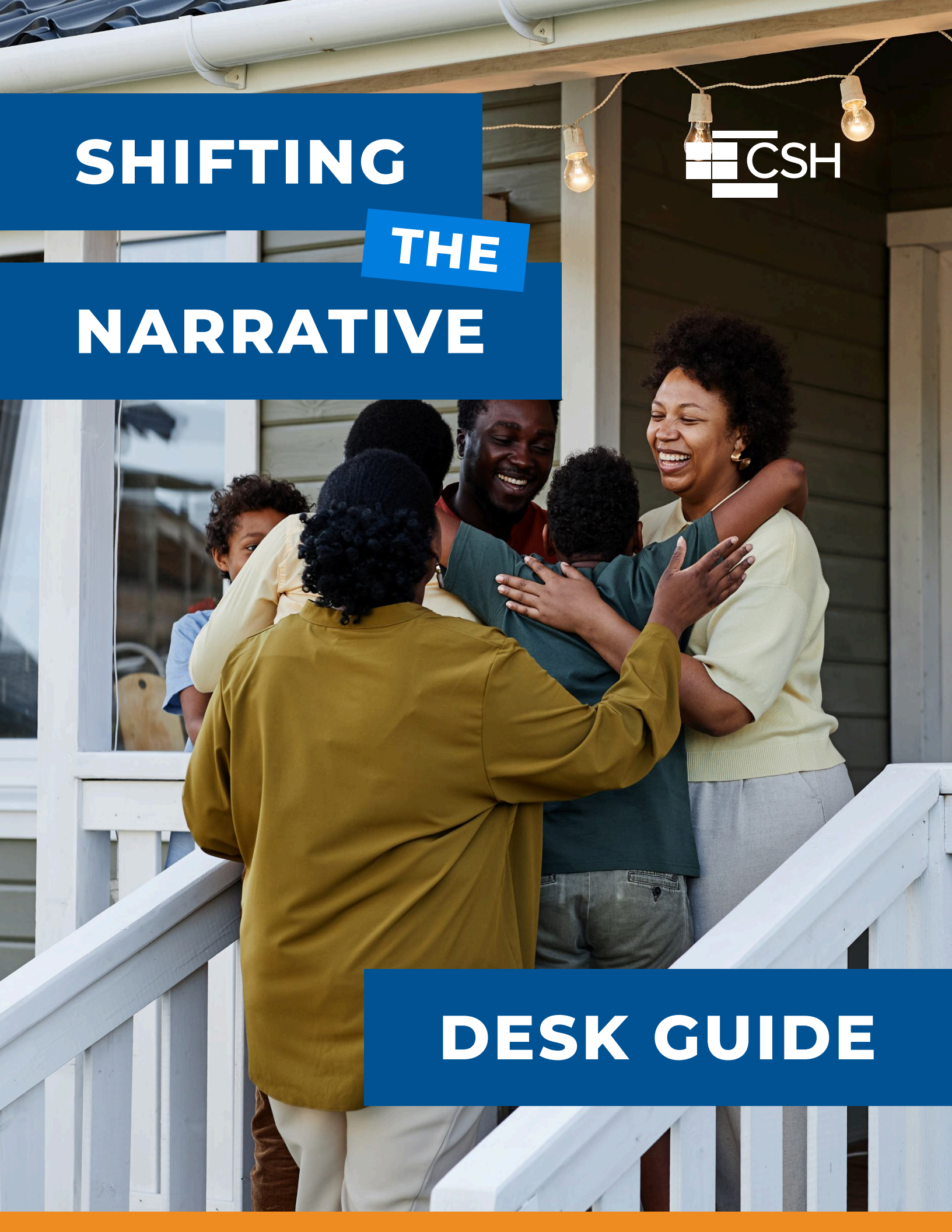


A photograph of a family of five embracing on a porch. A woman in a yellow sweater is on the right, smiling and hugging a man in a green shirt. The man is hugging a child in a green shirt. Another child in a yellow shirt is on the left, and a woman in a mustard-colored shirt is in the foreground, hugging the group. String lights hang above them. The background shows a house with white railings.

SHIFTING



THE

NARRATIVE

DESK GUIDE



WE ALL NEED A SAFE PLACE TO CALL HOME

Supportive housing pairs affordable homes with services that help people with complex health and economic needs—veterans, young people aging out of foster care, older adults, and people with physical and mental disabilities or substance use disorder—stay stable and housed.

CSH works with communities to strengthen and improve supportive housing systems, advancing this evidence-based solution to help people stay off the streets, rebuild their lives, and reduce homelessness for the long term. By shifting resources to cost-effective supportive housing solutions, we create safe and healthy communities where everyone can thrive.





BUILDING BLOCKS FOR IMPACTFUL STORIES

Start with inclusive shared values

Leading with values grounds complex issues within a framework the audience already cares about and understands.

"No matter what's in our wallets or what challenges we face, we all need a stable place to live."

Name the problem, but don't stay there

You can call out the choices or policies of elected officials here. But be sure to do this after starting with values.

"But today, thousands are experiencing homelessness because rent is high, jobs don't pay enough, and there aren't enough treatment programs for those who need them."

Use trusted messengers

Use messengers who reflect the culture, geography, or demographics of the target audience. Share message tips, but empower them to speak authentically and from lived experience.

Research shows that who carries your message is just as important as the content of the message.

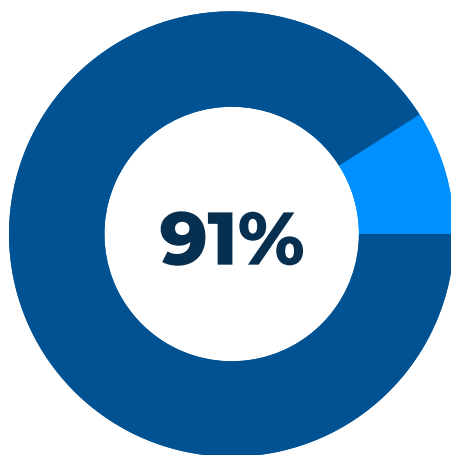
Identify solutions and provide clear call to action

We face cynicism—not about the concept of supportive housing, but about whether programs are well-managed and reaching the people who truly need it.

"It's time to shift our resources toward compassionate and effective approaches, such as stable housing with support services like job training, mental healthcare, and substance use treatment."

Most Americans *get it.*

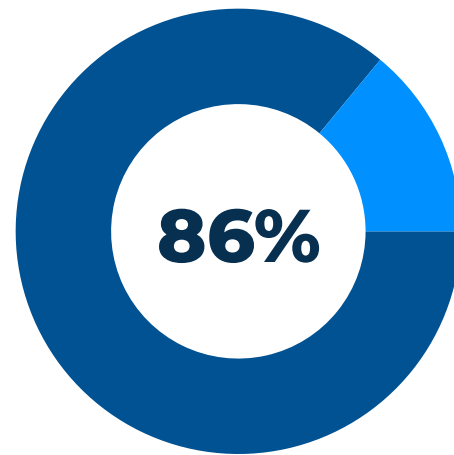
Stable housing combined with support services is an evidence-based and effective approach for people experiencing homelessness.



SUPPORT

Most Americans *want to fund it.*

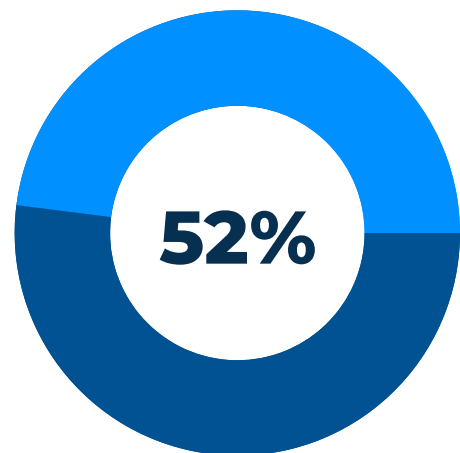
Funding that provides housing with services for people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness.



SUPPORT

It's top of the list for a *majority of adults.*

52% of adults think it is more important to prioritize funding for supportive housing compared to other areas like education, healthcare, and infrastructure.



SUPPORT

We need a new narrative.

While "permanent supportive housing" and "Housing First" might be terms the housing field and practitioners know and understand, using these phrases turns up the heat on cynicism and triggers waste, fraud, and abuse concerns with segments of the public.



PHRASES TO STOP USING	WHAT WORKS BETTER
Permanent supportive housing	Supportive housing as long as needed
Housing first	Supportive housing for people with complex or different needs like disabilities, leaving foster care, or having mental health issues
Non-time limited housing	Stable, affordable housing
Housing with wraparound services	Stable housing with services that support recovery
Long-term housing with support services	Affordable or stable housing with support services tailored to individual needs

Talk about individual needs

MESSAGING THAT WORKS

Affordable or stable housing with support services tailored to individual needs helps people stay housed.

WHY IT WORKS

People respond well to “tailored to individual needs”.



Name who we help

MESSAGING THAT WORKS

Supportive housing for people with different needs, like disabilities, aging adults, leaving foster care, or having mental health issues.

WHY IT WORKS

Respondents feel positive toward a variety of reasons why supportive housing is needed for specified groups of people with complex needs.



Avoid abstract terms and jargon

MESSAGING THAT WORKS

Stable housing with services connects people to the help they need to rebuild their lives, stay out of camps, and off the streets.

WHY IT WORKS

Abstract terms don’t show people what is really happening (arrests, jails, fines), while concrete, visible outcomes tied to safety resonate with audiences.



Be specific about services

MESSAGING THAT WORKS

Support services like job training, counseling, mental health and drug use treatment, and help finding and securing a home.

WHY IT WORKS

Naming services specifically unpacks what supportive housing is in a way people understand.



Long-term sounds too long

MESSAGING THAT WORKS

Supportive housing as long as needed.

WHY IT WORKS

Some support is lost when using “long-term” because it triggers waste, fraud, and abuse concerns.



Services matter

MESSAGING THAT WORKS

Support services that individuals choose for themselves, such as job training, substance and mental health treatment, yield better outcomes.

WHY IT WORKS

Research shows that even the most skeptical audiences still support services that individual needs.



The audience matters, too

Effective messages meet people where they are. Before creating content, take a moment to consider your target audience and what motivates them.

In our research, we segment audiences into four categories:

1. Likeminded/Base
2. Persuadables
3. Least Movable
4. Messengers/Experts



LIKEMINDED LILY

“Human dignity matters.”

Likeminded Lily is a young, urban renter who understands housing instability not as an abstract issue but as part of her lived reality. She’s socially aware, values person-centered approaches, and gravitates toward solutions that reflect her community’s needs and her own experiences.

- Under 30
- City-based in the West
- No children at home
- More likely Black, a renter, and politically liberal
- Direct experience with housing instability or homelessness



WHO THEY ARE



Want to invest in housing and needed services



Believe housing is a basic human need



Ready to turn support into action

HOW TO REACH THEM



The goal is to move this audience into action—sharing messages, mobilizing friends and family, signing a petition, etc.



Focus on the values of dignity, shared responsibility, and systematic change



Offer messages they can share with others who might not be part of the choir yet



EXAMPLE

“Supportive housing is evidence-based—it keeps people housed, reduces costly emergency services, and makes communities safer.”

PERSUADABLE PAUL

“Cost-effective solutions, please.”

Persuadable Paul is a lower-income American whose daily realities shape his outlook more than politics. He moves between renting and homeownership and often feels disconnected from political institutions. Voting doesn’t feel especially impactful to him, so he rarely sees himself as part of the civic process.

- **Balanced housing mix: homeowners (51%) and renters (42%)**
- **Lower income**
- **Politically diverse: Independents (28%), Democrats (34%), Republicans (36%)**
- **Least likely to identify as a likely 2026 voter**



WHO THEY ARE



Concerned about the problem of homelessness but deeply distrustful of the institutions and programs designed to fix it



Skeptical of government action and worry more about high taxes



Motivated by results, not ideology



Use people-centered stories to provide tangible evidence that a pragmatic, cost-effective solution is both compassionate and effective.



Lean into community benefits: “stable housing plus services gets people off the streets and makes neighborhoods safer.”



Use concrete, visible benefits/outcomes tied to safety: “gets people off the streets” or “out of encampments” and “provides stability.”



Frame supportive housing as “smart spending” not more spending.



Underscore how supportive housing is cost-effective: “This is about spending smarter, not more—shifting money from costly ER visits and jail stays to proven housing solutions.”

NOT MOVABLE MIKE

“Nobody deserves a handout.”

Not Movable Mike is an older, higher-income American who feels firmly rooted in his views and his community. He’s a long-time homeowner with a strong sense of stability and consistency in his life. Politically, he leans conservative and sees himself as an active participant in civic life, with a clear intention to vote in 2026.

- Lean male, often over 65
- Majority white, Republican, conservative ideology
- Higher income and homeowners
- More likely to identify as a likely 2026 voter



WHO THEY ARE



Most likely to believe housing is a private responsibility that everyone must handle themselves



Strongly support increasing government funding for programs that force homeless people off the streets and into jails and mental health and substance use treatment institutions



Concerned about people taking advantage of supportive housing and worry that limited resources might go to people who don’t need it

HOW TO REACH THEM



Least likely to change their minds, so our goal is to reduce their opposition and avoid triggering backlash mobilization.



Uplift pragmatic and efficient solutions that appeal to a sense of fiscal responsibility: “Shift resources to what works.”



Avoid “permanent housing.” This triggers concern about “government handouts.” Use “stable housing” or “supportive housing.”



Frame supportive housing as a tool that “gets people off the streets and out of encampments.” This helps overcome safety and disorder concerns.



Use personal stories that show how supportive housing helps individuals get on a path to self-sufficiency.

PRACTITIONER PATTY

“Housing is healthcare.”

Practitioner Patty works where housing and healthcare meet. She’s steeped in long-standing models like Housing First and brings deep systems knowledge. She values evidence, coordination, and practical solutions that improve stability and dignity.

- Typically 35–55
- Lives in urban/suburban areas with strong services
- Often has children or caregiving duties
- Works in housing, healthcare, or behavioral health
- Experienced with system barriers and service gaps



WHO THEY ARE



Deeply committed to improving health, housing stability, and quality of life for people with complex needs



Values evidence-based practices, cross-sector partnerships, and coordinated systems of care



Looking for practical tools, proven strategies, and real-world implementation guidance



Sees supportive housing as a critical component of improving both individual and community outcomes

HOW TO REACH THEM



Lead with research, outcomes, and proven best practices that demonstrate measurable impact.



Highlight integrated approaches that strengthen partnerships between housing, healthcare, and community organizations.



Provide actionable resources, implementation guidance, and examples practitioners can apply in their own work.



Acknowledge operational challenges while emphasizing scalable, sustainable solutions that improve coordination.



Reinforce that supportive housing advances both person-centered care and system-wide efficiency by improving health outcomes, reducing avoidable crisis interventions, and creating long-term stability.

How we win

We need to flood the zone with proactive, frequent, uplifting messages that highlight the cost-effectiveness of supportive housing and the positive outcomes it delivers.



“Supportive housing gets people off the streets and out of encampments.”



“Supportive housing saves taxpayer dollars by reducing emergency costs and gets people the services they need.”



“Supportive housing means fewer tents, safer streets, and stronger communities.”



“Providing stable and affordable housing combined with services like substance use treatment or job training for as long as it’s needed helps people rebuild their lives.”



“Everyone wants to feel safe walking down the street, but that doesn’t mean arresting those who don’t have a safe place to sleep at night.”



“People are more likely to recover when they can choose care that works for them.”



“A safe and stable place to call home is the foundation for health and well-being.”



“When we all have access to the care, safety, and stability we need, our communities are stronger and healthier for everyone. ”



“Affordable housing with services prevents repeated government intervention rather than expanding it.”





Yield
GIVING

This document was prepared by CSH in collaboration with Tarah Walsh Communications and Kelly Creative Advertising. We gratefully acknowledge the unrestricted support of MacKenzie Scott's Yield Giving for making this work possible.

