Meeting the Challenges of Housing Older Homeless Adults

National Alliance to End Homelessness National Conference 2014

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July 31, 2014
The Curve Gets Older

Age distribution for male homeless shelter residents (1990-2010)

In 2010, 11 percent of the male homeless population was age 49-51.

Source: Analysis of U.S. Census data by Dennis P. Culhane | Credit: NPR
Problems That Make Finding Housing Difficult

- Financial Problems
- Job Loss
- Physical Health Issues
- Mental Health Issues
- Estrangement
- Other Life Crises
1,736 surveys were distributed to older adults in targeted shelters, transitional housing programs, outreach, and service locations.

993 surveys were completed by respondents in 42 locations.
Problems Encountered in Finding Housing

Of the 939 respondents who answered question about barriers:

- 468 (50%) identified lack of income
- 369 (39%) indicated that they were already on waiting lists
- 206 (22%) cited criminal records
- 178 (19%) cited no or bad credit
501 (52%) of the 962 respondents who answered the question about prior mental health care reported having received such care at some point.
447 (47%) of the 956 respondents who answered the question about substance abuse services reported having received such care at some point. (96 of these respondents indicated **current use of illegal drugs**; another 24 currently using illegal drugs cited no prior treatment.)
Physical Health Issues

- Older homeless adults have been shown to have the range and severity of health issues similar to people in the general population who are 15 years older.


- A recent study on geriatric syndromes in homeless adults aged 50-69 in Boston found higher comorbidity rates than among other older adults, including hypertension, asthma or COPD, and depression. Many experience cognitive declines and report binge-drinking.

2013 Economic Security Index


$23,592 -- Elder Index for an Elder Renter

$11,490 -- 2013 Federal Poverty Level

$13,392  $17,612  $16,924  $20,134


Source: Wider Opportunities for Women, National Fact Sheet, January 2013

The Economic Security Gap

Median income falls below the Elder Index in every state.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Elder Index, Single Renter</th>
<th>Median Elder Income</th>
<th>Economic Security Gap</th>
<th>Median Income as % of E.I.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>$27,924</td>
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<td>$9,890</td>
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<td>$20,936</td>
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<td>CT</td>
<td>$28,464</td>
<td>$20,190</td>
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Challenges to housing homeless older adults

- Don’t know how to access resources
- Find the systems are difficult to maneuver
- Not good at asking for help
- Wait until the last minute to seek assistance
- More “prickly issues” to deal with
- Don’t trust people and have faced rejection
- Some have “given up” on finding housing
- You need to go to them
- Not enough affordable housing
Older Adult Epiphany – I Want Housing

- Health issues begin to impact lifestyle
- Ready to retire bad ways
- Thinking about end of life issues
- Rather die with a roof over head

Artist & former Outreach client (now housed) Brian Joyce lived outside for 30 years.
Hearth Strategy

Hearth, Inc.

Outreach Program
1,600 elders placed; 3,500 served (capacity to help 350 elders/year)

Housing & Services
7 sites, 188 units

Advocacy
Furthers dialogue (local and national) to discuss and promote effective solutions to end elder homelessness
Hearth At Olmsted Green

- New construction, 59 one-bedroom units
- Completed in Spring 2012
- Tax credit project with max. 4 month rent up
- All homeless with elderly, disabled preference for 62+
- Project marketed for months in the Greater Boston area
- Project based waitlist opened to apply in Dec. 2010
- First draw of waitlist Jan. 2012 had 16 self-certified clients not screening for other properties who were 62+
- Waitlist had hundreds of 18 - 62 yr. olds on it
The demand for Hearth housing is high and availability is limited. The Hearth Outreach Program enables Hearth to assist homeless elders in locating alternative affordable housing opportunities and the social services critical to their long term housing success.
Hearth Outreach Team

- Director is a licensed mental health professional
- Five housing search case managers
- One prevention case manager
- One or two MSW students – good for stabilization
- Part-time data analyst
What does it take to house an older adult?

- **Time**
  - Ages 62+ take eight months
  - Ages 50 to 60 take one to one and a half years
- **Trust**
- **Apply to PHA waitlists**
- **Gather/organize documents and mail**
- **Complete housing applications**
- **Advocate at screenings**
- **Prepare appeals**
- **Engage for the long haul**
Stabilization Challenges

- Afraid to move in
- Will have something to lose if something goes wrong
- Budgeting
- Relationships with other people are necessary
Success! 2013 Was Another Banner Year for Hearth

- 157 formerly homeless older adults were housed successfully
- Our Outreach Program alone placed 109 homeless older adults in permanent housing
- 38 at risk clients either preserved their tenancy or relocated

Thank you Kathleen and staff you helped when I had nowhere else to go.
Recommendations from the National Leadership Initiative

December 2011

Promote affordable supportive housing

- Section 8 program reform and expansion
- Provide assistance navigating systems and obtaining benefits
- Create safe, accessible housing that allows residents to “age in place”
- Plan for medical and cognitive decline – support for activities of daily living (ADLs)
- Housing preference for 50 – 62 yr. olds
Increase access to services that promote health and housing stability among older adults and elders and that can be provided in a permanent housing setting

Make existing funding streams more flexible and so more efficient
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