

Using Tenant-based Housing Vouchers to Help End Homelessness in Los Angeles

For more than 10 years, Los Angeles has been engaged in a community-wide effort to end homelessness, focusing on people with high-needs and chronic patterns of homelessness through a partnership among local government agencies, homeless service and healthcare providers, community organizations, and philanthropy.

Data Sources

Conducted for the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation by a team of researchers at Abt Associates, this study uses a data set that, as of 2021, had only recently become available. The data include issuances of vouchers as well as lease-ups, making possible estimates of success rates for households issued vouchers. Another data quality improvement made it possible to compare success rates for people experiencing homelessness and other households. In addition to drawing on that rich data set made available by HUD's Office of Policy Development and Research, the study team conducted extensive interviews with staff of PHAs, organizations in the region's homeless services and health systems, and people with lived experience of using a voucher to leave homelessness. For the full report, including the methodology, [see www.hiltonfoundation.org/learning/using-tenant-based-housing-vouchers-to-help-end-homelessness-in-los-angeles-2016-2020](http://www.hiltonfoundation.org/learning/using-tenant-based-housing-vouchers-to-help-end-homelessness-in-los-angeles-2016-2020).

Tenant-based rental subsidies are a major component of the strategy for expanding access to permanent housing that includes supportive services. Most of the community's tenant-based rental subsidies are provided through the federal government's Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program. Nineteen public housing authorities (PHAs) across Los Angeles County administer HCVs. The Los Angeles PHAs have committed substantial numbers of their vouchers to people experiencing homelessness. PHAs work together with homeless service providers, the County's Department of Health Services and the Department of Mental Health, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to match people experiencing homelessness to vouchers and assist them in becoming eligible for HCV and searching for housing.

Across Los Angeles County, PHAs issued more than 12,500 vouchers to people experiencing homelessness between 2016 and 2020. The largest numbers of voucher issuances to households experiencing homelessness were from the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles, the Los Angeles County Development Authority, and the Housing Authority of the City of Long Beach. Those are the largest PHAs in the region, but they also are devoting the largest shares of their HCV programs to the effort to end homelessness.

Findings

- Of the vouchers that went to people experiencing homelessness, the highest number went to **single individuals**, consistent with the high share of people experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles who do so as individuals rather than as members of families.
- **More than half** of all issuances were to people **identifying as Black**, consistent with the community's 2020 homeless Point-in-Time Count, that showed a disproportionate share of people experiencing homelessness in the Los Angeles region are Black. **About a quarter went to households identifying as Latino**, a smaller share than the share of people experiencing homelessness who identify as Hispanic or Latino.
- Once issued a voucher that permitted them to search for housing, **nearly seven of every 10 households experiencing homelessness** (65 percent) succeeded in leasing a housing unit with voucher assistance. This was a somewhat higher success rate than for households not experiencing homelessness (61 percent) and can be attributed to two factors—**the high motivation to make the effort to use a voucher for people without a current place to live and the help they received from case managers**. During the 2016-2020 period, Los Angeles County funded and implemented incentives for landlords that agree to rent to people experiencing homelessness, and that also appears to have helped drive these high success rates.
- The per household cost for PHAs to serve people experiencing homelessness is **only slightly higher** than the cost of serving other households. The additional cost of serving a formerly homeless household is \$29 per month, or about 3 percent.
- Success in using a voucher was similar among people experiencing homelessness, regardless of household size and disability and for all racial and ethnic groups. Black households experiencing homelessness had a success rate of 66 percent. **Black and Hispanic households experiencing homelessness had greater success using vouchers than Black and Hispanic households who were not homeless at the time the vouchers were issued**. That was not the case for White households. **Case managers and landlord incentives appear especially important for helping Black and Hispanic households overcome barriers to leasing up**.
- Use of vouchers by people experiencing homelessness is heavily concentrated in certain parts of the Los Angeles region. This is true of other voucher users as well, but **households who use a voucher to leave homelessness** are more likely to be concentrated in the same locations and more likely to rent units in census tracts with a **high proportion of people living in poverty**. This could reflect their high imperative to use a voucher (and willingness to compromise on location), racial discrimination (reflecting the high percentage of voucher users who are Black), or the greater likelihood that they stayed close to the locations where they were staying during their episode of homelessness.

