

Supportive Housing for People with a Criminal History

A Profile of Characteristics and Outcomes for Residents with Prior Felonies

About the study

The Supportive Housing Outcomes Study followed outcomes for 576 randomly selected residents in 51 randomly selected supportive housing programs in Minnesota, beginning in January 2010. Over a two-year period, 549 residents were interviewed up to four times. In addition, administrative data related to participants' employment, benefit use, and homelessness were gathered through the fall of 2012.

Of the 549 residents in the study, 445 completed a survey that included information about whether they had a prior felony conviction (referred to throughout this report as having a criminal history). Residents in permanent supportive housing were slightly more likely to have a criminal history than those living in transitional housing (31% vs. 26% of residents).

According to the 2012 Minnesota Homeless Study, conducted triennially by Wilder Research, nearly half (47%) of homeless adults in Minnesota have spent time in a correctional facility, including juvenile detention centers, county jails or workhouses, or state or federal prisons. Of these, 18 percent have been incarcerated within the past two years (Wilder Research, 2013).

Finding safe and affordable housing can be extremely challenging for those experiencing homelessness, and the task is more difficult for those with a criminal history.

Evidence suggests that supportive housing can benefit homeless adults who have experienced incarceration. The Corporation for Supportive Housing states, "Cost studies in six different states and cities found that supportive housing results in tenants' decreased use of expensive homeless shelters, hospitals, emergency rooms, jails and prisons" (Corporation for Supportive Housing, n.d.). Additionally, a return on investment study conducted by Wilder estimated that "the chance of a conviction is reduced from 48 percent to 13.8 percent [in the first year] after entering supportive housing" (Chase, Da'ar, & Diaz, 2012).

Wilder conducted additional analyses of the 2013 Supportive Housing Outcomes Study to look at the outcomes for 127 residents with a prior felony conviction. This summary presents key findings from that analysis. Readers should note that all outcomes reported in this summary are statistically significant. Additional data tables can be found in the Appendix.

Transitional housing

Demographics and history

- Although the majority of those living in transitional housing are women (83%), **male residents** were more likely to have a felony conviction (36% versus 23%). Residents **age 25 through 54 (31%)** were also more likely than other age groups to have a felony; there were no significant differences between racial groups.
- **According to HMIS records, nearly all residents with a criminal history reported having some type of long-term disability.** Disabilities included drug or alcohol abuse (76%) and mental health problems (72%). In fact, residents with a reported disability were nearly five times as likely to have prior felony conviction.
- **Those with a criminal history were more likely than those with no history to be considered long-term homeless (LTH).** Over one-third of transitional housing residents with a criminal history were considered LTH, meaning they were homeless for at least a year or four times in the past three years. LTH residents were 1.7 times more likely than those who had been homeless for a shorter amount of time to have a felony conviction.

Program features

- **Transitional housing residents with a criminal history were more likely to be in programs that were restrictive in terms of drug use and testing.** The majority (87%) of residents with a criminal history were in a program that required consent to random drug testing (compared to 60% of those with no criminal history), and they were *less* likely to be in a program that allowed substance use (8%, compared to 20%).
- **Residents were less likely to be in a program that required a job search.** Less than half (48%) of residents with a criminal history were in programs that required a job or job search, compared to 69 percent of those with no criminal history.

Outcomes

Residents in transitional housing with a criminal history were significantly:

- **More likely to have recurrences of homelessness after exiting their program:** 57%, compared to 41% of those with no criminal history.
- **More likely to have a new conviction resulting in arrest after entering the program:** 22%, compared to eight percent of those with no criminal history.

Permanent supportive housing

Demographics and history

- **Men** living in permanent supportive housing were more likely than women to have a prior felony conviction (44% versus 18%). In addition, **residents 55 and older** (54%) were more likely than other groups to have a felony. There were no significant differences by race.
- **According to HMIS records, nearly all residents with a criminal history reported having some type of long-term disability:** Disabilities included mental health problems (71%) and drug or alcohol abuse (56%). Like those in transitional housing, residents with a reported disability were nearly five times as likely to have a felony.
- **Those with a criminal history were more likely to be considered long-term homeless (LTH):** The majority of those with a criminal history were considered long-term homeless (72%), compared to 64 percent of those with no criminal history.

Program features

- **Permanent supportive housing residents with a criminal history were more likely to be in a program with larger caseload sizes.** Roughly one-third (37%) of those with a criminal history were included in a caseload of 20 individuals or fewer, compared to nearly two-thirds (62%) of those with no criminal history.
- **Residents were less likely to be in a program that required daily activities.** Only 6 percent of residents with a criminal history were in a program that required daily structured activities, such as school, work, or volunteering; this is compared to 15 percent of those with no criminal history.

Outcomes

Residents in permanent supportive housing with a criminal history were significantly:

- **More likely to have benefits at follow-up:** 59 percent had some type of state-administered benefit (excluding food stamps), compared to 37 percent of those with no criminal history. Nineteen percent of those with a criminal history had group residential housing benefits at follow-up, compared to 8 percent of those with no criminal history.
- **Less likely to be employed at follow-up.** Fifteen percent of residents were employed in the third quarter of 2012, at the end of the study, compared to 20 percent of those with no criminal history.

Issues to consider

It is clear that supportive housing residents with a criminal history have higher hurdles to overcome than those with no criminal history. They reported poorer mental and physical health and have experienced longer periods of homelessness. Generally, those with a prior felony conviction were also more likely to have negative outcomes. In the case of transitional housing, they were significantly more likely to have recurrences of homelessness and new convictions resulting in arrest. For those in permanent supportive housing, residents with a criminal history were significantly less likely to be employed at follow-up; however, they were *more* likely to have received benefits.

To dig deeper into this data, researchers examined program features by outcomes. Most interesting to note in this additional analysis was that residents of programs that require drug testing are significantly less likely to be employed at follow-up. (Note: This was the case for those with no criminal history; the sample of those with a criminal history was too small to yield significant findings.)

Since those with a criminal history are 1) more likely to be in programs that require drug testing, but 2) less likely to be in programs that require a job search, it may be worth considering placing these individuals in lower demand programs, as the study results suggest drug testing may be connected to lower chances of finding employment, which is already a difficult task for this population.

It is difficult to answer the original question – which type of housing program is most beneficial for those with a criminal history – based solely on the data reported here; however there is some indication that certain program features, such as those related to employment and drug testing, should be taken into consideration for those with a criminal history.

For more information

The full report or summary from the study, including additional details on study methodology, can be accessed on the Wilder Research web site at www.wilder.org/studies/Supportive%20Housing%20Outcomes%20in%20Minnesota/1335

This is one of a series of short descriptive reports examining one particular group of participants or kind of program. Due to space restrictions, only a limited number of outcomes are presented. The main report on the study, posted on the Wilder Research website (wilderresearch.org), includes comprehensive chapters for each of the two main program models, transitional housing and permanent supportive housing, describing the kinds of program elements that are incorporated into each model, the characteristics of participants served, and the many different kinds of outcomes that were observed over the study's follow-up period.

References

Chase, R., Da'ar, O., & Diaz, J. (2012). Return on investment in supportive housing in Minnesota. Retrieved from Wilder Research website:

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Wilder Research. (2013). [Homelessness in Minnesota: Findings from the 2012 statewide homeless study](#). Saint Paul, MN: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation.

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451 Lexington Parkway North
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55104
651-280-2700
www.wilderresearch.org



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For more information

This summary presents highlights of the report *Supportive Housing Outcomes in Minnesota*. For more information about this report, contact Stephanie Nelson-Dusek at Wilder Research, 651-280-2675.

Author: Stephanie Nelson-Dusek.

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