

Low-demand Supportive Housing Programs

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.

Classification of programs as low-demand is based on in-depth interviews with program managers (see full report for details), which showed that all transitional programs in the study placed one or more of the designated expectations on participants. Only permanent supportive housing (PSH) offered a mix of both low-demand and higher demand program models. For this reason, results presented here are based on a comparison of the 185 PSH residents living in the 17 programs that have none of the designated expectations, and 103 PSH residents living in the 11 programs with at least one such expectation.

Who Uses Them and With What Results

Supportive housing service models have evolved significantly over time, and Wilder's longitudinal study of supportive housing includes both programs that have clear expectations for resident behavior and activity (high-demand models), as well as programs that place only modest demands on residents (low-demand models) as a condition for ongoing tenancy. This fact sheet compares the two models and examines the outcomes associated with each.

During the 1980s and early 90s, most models considered Transitional Housing (TH) were time-limited and contained multiple expectations for participants to "work" the program and meet certain participation and behavioral expectations. As participants approached the end of their service period in the program, many assumed greater responsibility for their own behavior and gradually prepared for entry into some form of longer term housing, either with or without subsidies. Under this model, all TH participants were expected to have a goal of greater self-sufficiency, most often through some type of stable employment or other form of reliable income stream.

Typical program expectations included the following:

- Participation in daily program activities designed to encourage self-sufficiency or improve well-being
- Requirements to search for employment
- Limits on the number or frequency of visitors
- Drug testing or sobriety

As programs evolved during the 1990s, Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) programs often adopted one of the central tenets of the Housing First service model: specifically, that it may be best to place those who have experienced long-term homelessness in housing that provides both safety and stability, and does not place a great many demands on participants. This model suggests that those who have faced significant challenges to maintaining stable housing because of physical health, mental health, or substance use can most immediately benefit from housing that simply allows them to feel safe and whole, where they can begin to heal from the many stressors and traumas in their lives without being subjected to additional program demands or expectations.

Since there are virtually no low-demand **transitional housing programs**, this report describes the characteristics of only those who are served in low-demand **permanent supportive housing** programs. The report examines differences between the residents of these programs and those enrolled in higher-demand permanent supportive housing programs, and reviews the outcomes associated with each. The discussion focuses on how this information can be used to support the coordinated entry process currently being implemented across Minnesota.¹

Participants in low-demand vs. higher demand programs

Findings

Of the 288 study participants in PSH programs with data about their program rules, 185 PSH residents lived in low-demand programs; that is, there were no expectations for these participants to be involved in daily structured activities, they were not required to be employed or search for employment, there were no restrictions on visitor frequency, and there were no requirements for drug testing. 103 PSH residents lived in higher demand programs with at least one or more of these expectations.

When the characteristics of those served in both types of permanent supportive housing are compared, a wide range of differences can be observed, as shown below. Note that all reported percentage differences in the figure below are statistically significant (using a Chi-square test) with less than 5 chances in 100 that the reported difference could have occurred by chance.

¹ Minnesota Housing defines coordinated entry as “a centralized or coordinated process designed to coordinate program participant intake, assessment, and provision of referrals.”

Study results show that...

- Men are more likely than women to be served in low-demand programs.
- Older participants are more likely than younger participants to be served in low-demand programs.
- Women without children are more likely than women with children to be served in low-demand programs.
- Compared to adults who are housed as part of a family, single adults are more likely to be served in low-demand programs.
- Persons with long-standing disabilities (including those with mental health and drug related disabilities) are more likely than those without long-standing disabilities to be in low-demand programs.
- Those who have experienced long-term homelessness are more likely than the recently homeless to be in low-demand programs.
- Adults with no prior record of employment are more likely than adults with a history of employment to be in low-demand programs.

Characteristic	Percent in low-demand PSH programs	Percent in PSH programs with one or more behavioral expectations
Male	74%	26%
Female	55%	45%
Age 55+	79%	21%
Age 25-54	68%	32%
Under age 25	32%	68%
Women without children	70%	30%
Women accompanied by children	43%	57%
All single adults	73%	27%
All adults housed as part of a family with children	46%	54%
Persons with longstanding disabilities	67%	33%
Persons without longstanding disabilities	38%	62%
Experienced long-term homelessness	70%	30%
Experienced recent or episodic homelessness	58%	42%
No record of employment in quarter preceding program entry	66%	34%

The analysis indicates that in comparison to programs with one or more behavioral expectations, low-demand permanent supportive housing programs in Minnesota are more likely to serve older single adults without children, especially those with long-standing disabilities (including those related to mental health or drug abuse). In addition, low-demand programs are more likely to serve those who have longer episodes of homelessness and no record of employment history in the quarter preceding program entry. These results appear to be consistent with the intended purpose of low-demand programs.

Relationship of client and program characteristics to outcomes

Additional analyses show that there are a wide range of differences related to participant outcomes depending on specific participant characteristics and program characteristics.

In general, low-demand programs appear best suited to help certain populations gain long-term stability through access to Group Residential Housing (GRH) and other mainstream benefits. GRH benefits were more likely to be attained in low-demand programs by:

- White participants (23% of white participants in low-demand programs, vs. 4% of whites in programs with one or more behavioral expectations)
- Single adults (20% vs. 2%)
- Persons with a mental health disability (11% vs. 4%)
- Persons with a drug or alcohol related disability (28% vs. 8%)
- Persons with a felony conviction (25% vs. 8%)

Mainstream benefits (other than food assistance) were more likely to be attained in low-demand programs by:

- Single adults (52% vs. 36%)
- Persons with a felony conviction (67% vs. 42%)

For a variety of other kinds of outcomes, many personal characteristics were more often found to be associated with success in higher-demand programs but not in low-demand programs. However, there are often other considerations that must be factored into decisions about program placement including the type and level of disability, prior employment training and job experience, and the strength of existing social support networks. For this

reason, it is important to consider the particular aspects of a given placement in addition to the general predictive factors described below.

Predictors of program exit

In general, exits were more likely to occur during the study period among those served in programs with one or more behavioral expectations. In particular, residents with the following characteristics were more likely to exit such programs:

- Women (70% exited from programs with behavioral expectations vs. 58% who exited from low-demand programs)
- Older adults age 55 or older (71% vs. 54%)
- Single females without children (83% vs. 55%)
- Persons with no documented long-term disabilities (83% vs. 64%)
- Persons with multiple episodes of homelessness (76% vs. 52%)
- Persons with a history of domestic violence (80% vs. 70%)
- Persons employed in the quarter prior to program entrance (32% vs 16%)

Predictors of employment at the conclusion of the study

In general, positive employment outcomes occurred more often among those served in programs with one or more behavioral expectations. Residents with the following characteristics were more likely to be employed at the conclusion of the study if they were served in such programs:

- Women (32% were employed among those served in programs with behavioral expectations vs. 21% who were employed among those served in low-demand programs)
- Men (16% vs. 8%)
- White participants (24% vs. 11%)
- Persons with long-standing disabilities (20% vs. 10%)
- Persons with a mental health disability (22% vs. 13%)
- Persons with a drug or alcohol related disability (31% vs 10%)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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 full report includes comprehensive chapters for each of the two main program models, transitional housing and permanent supportive housing, and describes 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. The full report is available on the Wilder Research [website](http://www.wilderresearch.org) (www.wilderresearch.org).

Predictors of a reoccurrence of homelessness

Among those who exited permanent supportive housing, residents with the following characteristics were more likely to have a reoccurrence of homelessness at some time during the study period if they were served in low-demand programs:

- Older adults age 55 or older (28% of those in low-demand programs had a reoccurrence of homelessness vs. 0% of older adults served in programs with behavioral expectations)
- Young adults age 24 or younger (58% vs. 24%)
- Persons with long-standing disabilities (33% vs. 19%)
- Persons who were survivors of domestic violence (50% vs. 24%)

White participants served in low-demand programs were much more likely to have a reoccurrence of homelessness than people of other races served in low-demand programs (43% of whites vs. 18% of American Indians, and 17% of African Americans)

Conclusions

These analyses show that a wide range of residents served in permanent supportive housing programs that include one or more behavioral expectations are:

- More likely to exit their program during the study's three years of follow-up
- More likely to be employed at the end of the study
- More likely to avoid a reoccurrence of homelessness

These results are no doubt driven by the fact that the decision process for enrolling participants in one type of program or another is, at least in part, guided by the understanding that those with more longstanding and significant barriers are a better fit for low-demand programs.

It is useful to note that those with felony records, who are among the hardest to serve in market-rate housing, are being effectively connected with Group Residential Housing. The receipt of mainstream benefits is more variable but tends to occur more among residents in low-demand programs.

With regard to coordinated assessment, these results suggest that for those who are good candidates for permanent supportive housing options and who express a willingness to work toward employment goals and/or consider developing a plan to move on to less service-focused housing options, there may be real value in seeking placement options in programs with behavioral expectations that are aligned with these goals. At the very least, for those who initially enter low-demand programs, there will likely be value in some type of periodic reassessment to determine if other goals may become viable targets once a period of housing stability is achieved.

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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 Greg Owen at Wilder Research, 651-280-2714.
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