

Preventing Homelessness Among Youth and Families with Children

Researchers:

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Sector(s): Health, Labor Markets, Education, Finance

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Location: King County, Washington

Sample: 600 youth or families with children at imminent risk of experiencing homelessness

Initiative(s): State and Local Innovation Initiative

Target group: Youth Families and households

Outcome of interest: Housing stability

Intervention type: Housing and neighborhoods

AEA RCT registration number: AEARCTR-0002854

Partner organization(s): Lab for Economic Opportunities (LEO) - University of Notre Dame, King County Department of Community and Human Services

Over half a million people experience homelessness in America on any given night, and among those experiencing homelessness approximately one in three are families with children and one in ten are youth between the ages of 18 and 24. Many homelessness prevention programs provide case management and immediate financial assistance to individuals at imminent risk of experiencing homelessness, but there is a lack of evidence on whether both components are necessary for an effective program. Researchers are evaluating the impact of case management and immediate financial assistance compared to only financial assistance on housing and health outcomes for youth and families with children.

Policy issue

The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) estimates that half a million people were experiencing homelessness in the United States on any given night in January of 2017.¹ Families with children account for approximately one-third of those experiencing homelessness on any given night. Additionally, one out of five individuals experiencing homelessness were children and one out of ten were youth between the ages of 18 and 24. In particular, unaccompanied youth are more likely to live in unsheltered locations than individuals or families.²

Homelessness prevention programs seek to prevent incidences of homelessness among individuals and families with the highest risk of experiencing homelessness by providing services such as financial assistance and case management. Research on reducing homelessness has traditionally focused on policies that provide housing to individuals already experiencing homelessness. However, there is limited evidence on the effectiveness of homelessness prevention programs. Some existing research suggests that homelessness prevention programs consisting of both case management and financial assistance are effective in reducing incidences of homelessness among individuals and families. But additional research is needed to determine whether both components are necessary or whether simply offering financial assistance would yield the same effect.

Context of the evaluation

In 2015, King County, Washington declared the homelessness crisis a state of emergency. Over 12,000 individuals were experiencing homelessness in King County on a given night in January of 2018, and more than 30 percent were families with children or unaccompanied youth aged 18-24. King County has invested \$19 million in the Youth and Family Homelessness Prevention Initiative (YFHPI) to provide immediate financial assistance and personalized case management for families with children and unaccompanied youth under the age of 25.



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Details of the intervention

Researchers are conducting a randomized evaluation to test the impact of case management and immediate financial assistance on homelessness prevention.

Researchers are partnering with King County and YFHPI to run the study and are recruiting all participants through YFHPI. Potential clients must be residents of King County and aged 12-24 or have a dependent child aged 0-24. All potential clients who contact YFHPI for assistance meet with a case manager and take a homelessness risk assessment called the Standardized Risk of Homelessness Tool. Since previous experience suggests that YFHPI is not effective for clients with too low or too high of a risk score, all clients with a risk score within the “moderate risk” range are invited to participate in the study.

Upon confirmation of eligibility, case managers explain the purpose of the study to their clients and clients choose whether to participate in the evaluation. Those who agree to participate are randomly assigned to either receive immediate financial assistance with case management or without case management.

Case Management + Access to Flexible Funds

	Funds Group	Access to Flexible Funds Only Group
Assigned a Case Manager	Yes	Yes
Access to Flexible Funds	Case manager approves and pays the expenses	Case manager approves and pays the expenses
Case Management	Navigating interactions with landlords; identifying housing	None

To measure housing stability, the researchers will gather administrative data on the use of emergency housing services, such as shelters, and consumer reference data, which captures address histories that can be used to measure housing spells and moves from one location to another. Researchers will also collect administrative data on behavioral health, physical health, criminal justice, employment, benefit use, and child welfare outcomes.

Results and policy lessons

Project ongoing; results forthcoming.

1. Henry, Meghan, Rian Watt, Lily Rosenthal, and Azim Shivji. 2017. "The 2017 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress." Accessed September 16, 2019. <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2017-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>.
2. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. 2017. "HUD 2017 Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Programs Homeless Population and Subpopulations." Accessed September 16, 2019. https://files.hudexchange.info/reports/published/CoC_PopSub_NatITerrDC_2017.pdf.