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Introduction

The United States leads the world in the number of people incarcerated in federal and state correctional facilities. There are currently 1.4 million people in America's prisons and more than 700,000 people in America's jails.¹ According to survey research on the correctional population, approximately 26 percent of people in jail reported that they were homeless in the year prior to their incarceration, and 19.5 percent of state prisoners reported being homeless.² The United States continues to have the highest incarceration rate in the world and, with an estimated 3 million people living without a home every year,³ continues to struggle with the policy challenges of chronic homelessness, the lack of affordable housing, and the exclusion of certain people from federal housing subsidies.

This research brief will summarize recent findings on what is known about access to quality or substandard housing as it relates to public safety and the use of incarceration. Along with conducting a brief literature review, the Justice Policy Institute (JPI) has compared data on state housing expenditures with crime rates and incarceration rates. While there is no single solution that will entirely reduce the probability that a person will be involved in criminal activity, and the literature is not conclusive on any one factor that would solve every community's various challenges, the research suggests that increased investments in housing can have a positive public safety benefit. JPI's findings include:

- **Some studies found that substandard housing—particularly where exposure to lead hazards is more likely to occur—is associated with higher rates of violent crime.** Two recent independent studies have shown that exposure to lead, associated with older, deteriorated, and lower-quality housing, can result in increased delinquency, violence, and crime.
- **For populations who are most at risk for criminal justice involvement, supportive or affordable housing has been shown to be a cost-effective public investment, lowering corrections and jail expenditures and freeing up funds for other public safety investments.** Additionally, providing affordable or supportive housing to people leaving correctional facilities is an effective means of reducing the chance of future incarceration.

¹ Sabol, William J., Todd D. Minton, and Paige M. Harrison. 2007. *Prison and jail inmates at midyear 2006*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

² James, Doris J., and Lauren E. Glaze. 2006. *Mental health problems of prison and jail inmates*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

³ Human Rights Watch. 2004. *No second chance*. New York: Human Rights Watch.

- **States that spent more on housing experienced lower incarceration rates than states that spent less.** Of the ten states that spent a larger proportion of their total expenditures on housing, all ten had incarceration rates lower than the national average. Of the ten states that spent a smaller proportion of their total expenditures on housing, five had incarceration rates above the national average and two had incarceration rates just below the national average.

What is meant by “supportive” and “affordable” housing?

Affordable housing, and its subset of *supportive housing*, refers to permanent housing that is affordable to persons making 80 percent of the median income in the area. Rents charged are typically less than 30 to 40 percent of the household income. Affordability is generally accomplished through federal, state, and local governmentally subsidized programs that provide assistance in capital and/or operating resources. Capital and operating assistance can occur in many forms, such as money invested in exchange for tax credits from federal and/or state income taxes, mortgage interest deductions, direct payments to supplement rent payments, and real property donations or property sale or lease at less than market value of land to be used for the construction of affordable housing.

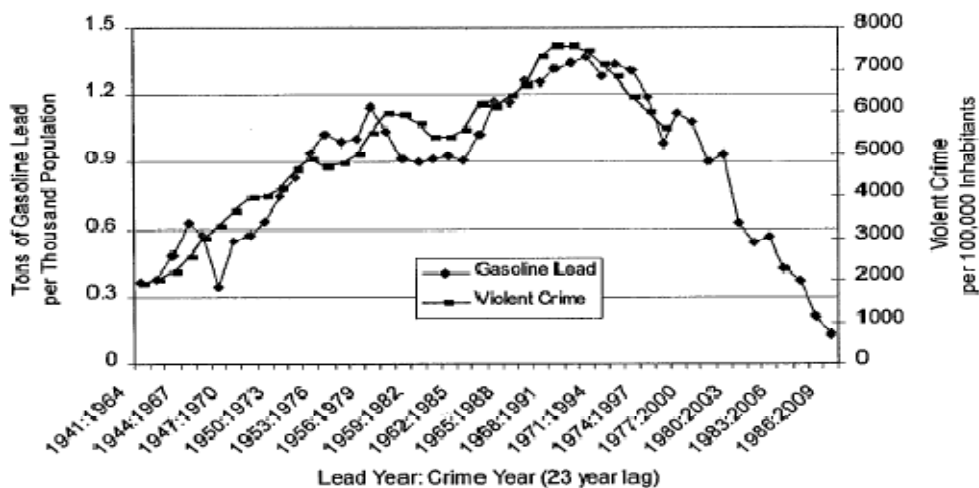
Supportive housing is housing that provides on-site services to individuals in need of support to improve or maintain their health, independent living skills, income, employment, socialization skills, quality of life, and, most important, maintain their housing. People who qualify for this type of housing may include the homeless, people with mental illness, the elderly, those with substance abuse problems, and those being released from incarceration. Best practices indicate that the housing and the support services work cooperatively but are independent of each other. Services are provided as an adjunct to housing, and the use of services is usually not a requirement of the housing. Supportive housing is typically limited to people with disabilities or special needs and who have incomes at or below 30 percent of the median income in the area.

1. Low-quality housing, and the risk factors associated with low-quality housing, may affect public safety.

Housing conditions have a significant impact on health, social circumstances, and life outcomes. Housing that is overcrowded, dilapidated, rodent- or insect-infested, or without appropriate utilities is of particular concern. Such low-quality housing has been associated with negative public safety outcomes. A 2007 article published by researchers at the University of Texas at Austin examined current empirical literature on the effects of housing quality. The authors found strong evidence of an association between low-quality housing and a number of social consequences, including decreased educational performance and negatively influenced health conditions, such as mental illness, resulting from factors such as frequent residential mobility, exposure to lead paint, and poor indoor air quality.⁴

Two recent independent studies have shown that exposure to lead, associated with older, deteriorated, and lower-quality housing,⁵ can result in increased delinquency, violence, and crime. A 2000 study funded by the Office of Lead Hazard Control of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development examined long-term trends in population exposure to lead in paint and gasoline in relation to trends in violent crime in the United States. The study found that long-term trends in exposure to gasoline lead were clearly consistent with violent crime rates, and they were strongly associated with murder rates.⁶ Furthermore, children who are exposed to higher levels of lead tend to display more aggressive and delinquent behavior than those who are not exposed.

Lead levels in gasoline have tracked violent crime trends.⁷



Source: Nevin, Rick. 2000. How lead exposure relates to temporal changes in IQ, violent crime, and unwed pregnancy. *Environmental Research* 83(1).

⁴ Mueller, Elizabeth J., and J. Rosie Tighe. 2007. Making the case for affordable housing: Connecting housing with health and education outcomes. *Journal of Planning Literature* 21(4).

⁵ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Undated. Lead Awareness Program. www.epa.gov/lead/, accessed August 22, 2007.

⁶ Nevin, Rick. 2000. How lead exposure relates to temporal changes in IQ, violent crime, and unwed pregnancy. *Environmental Research* 83(1).

⁷ Nevin, Rick. 2000. The graph is a visual representation of the research cited in the article, a comprehensive compilation of data from a wide variety of sources including the U.S. Department of Justice, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the U.S. Geological Survey.

A 2004 study published in the *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* examined the association between air-lead levels and crime rates across 2,772 U.S. counties. Even after adjusting for general levels of air pollution and several structural covariates of crime, results from the study suggest a direct effect of air-lead levels on property and violent crime rates.⁸

Low-income families are disproportionately concentrated in central cities, and lower-income households are more likely to have paint in poor condition, creating paint chip and lead dust hazards.⁹ In 2002 the National Institutes of Health found that 35 percent of low-income housing (housing occupied by families with an annual income of less than \$30,000) had lead-based paint hazards, compared with 19 percent of housing that is not considered low-income.¹⁰

⁸ Lynch, Michael L., and Paul B. Stretesky. 2004. The relationship between lead and crime. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 45(2).

⁹ Nevin, Rick. 2000.

¹⁰ Jacobs, D. D., R. P. Clickner, J. Y. Zhou, S. M. Viet, D. A. Marker, J. W. Rogers, D. C. Zeldin, P. Broene, and W. Friedman. 2002. The prevalence of lead-based paint hazards in U.S. housing. *Environmental Health Perspectives* 110(10): A599-A606.

2) Affordable and supportive housing can provide public safety benefits to communities.

“Opposition to affordable housing often rests on the assumption that affordable housing brings no net benefits to the community, and that it threatens property values in the neighborhood concerned.” *Elizabeth J. Mueller and J. Rosie Tighe, University of Texas, Austin*¹¹

Neighborhood residents sometimes raise concerns that a new supportive housing project might aggravate the community’s public safety challenge. In 1997 the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty polled 89 supportive housing programs and found that 41 percent had experienced “not in my backyard” opposition from prospective neighbors and local governments prior to beginning their operations.¹² Sixty-one percent of these opponents listed a potential increase in crime as their major concern with having supportive housing in their community. However, studies have shown not only that the addition of supportive housing to a community does not increase crime, but also that investments in supported housing have been associated with improved neighborhood quality and property values.¹³

Research published in the *Journal of Urban Affairs* in 2002 examined 14 Denver neighborhoods in which supportive housing facilities opened between 1992 and 1995 to determine the impact of supportive housing on neighborhood crime rates. The authors concluded that none of the categories of reported crime (total, violent, property, disorderly conduct, or criminal mischief offenses) experienced statistically significant increases near a supportive housing facility after it was developed and began operating.¹⁴

Supportive housing, when it is provided to people leaving prison, can help promote public safety and other positive social outcomes. People leaving prison are especially vulnerable to homelessness because they often are banned from federal housing, face challenges reconnecting with family and friends, and lack the funds to afford available housing. A California study reported that 50 percent of Los Angeles and San Francisco parolees were homeless in 1997.¹⁵ As the number of people re-entering communities from prison has grown steadily with the incarceration rate, so too has the number of people who are at risk of homelessness.

¹¹ Mueller, Elizabeth J., and J. Rosie Tighe. 2007.

¹² National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty. 1997. *Access delayed, access denied*. Washington, DC. Online at www.nlchp.org

¹³ Arthur Andersen LLP, University of Pennsylvania Center for Mental Health Policy and Services Research, K. E. Sherwood, and TWR Consulting. 2000. *The Connecticut Supportive Housing Demonstration program evaluation report*. New Haven: Corporation for Supportive Housing.

¹⁴ Galster, George, Kathryn Pettit, Anna Santiago, and Peter Tatian. 2002. The impact of supportive housing on neighborhood crime rates. *Journal of Urban Affairs* 24(3): 289-315.

¹⁵ California Department of Corrections. 1997. *Prevention parolee failure program: An evaluation*. Sacramento: California Department of Corrections.

A number of studies have found public safety benefits to providing housing to people leaving prison.

- A 1998 qualitative study conducted by the Vera Institute of Justice found that people leaving a correctional facility in New York City for parole who entered shelters for the homeless were seven times more likely to abscond during their first month after release than those who had some form of housing.¹⁶
- A study funded by the Fannie Mae Foundation revealed a 20 percent recidivism rate for people leaving Illinois correctional facilities for two specific long-term housing programs compared to a 50 percent recidivism rate for those who did not participate in the programs.¹⁷

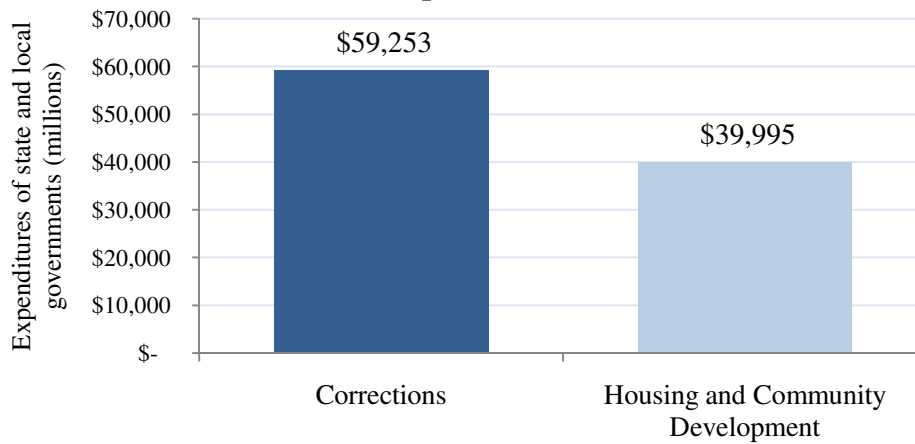
¹⁶ Nelson, Marta, Perry Deess, and Charlotte Allen. 1999. *The first month out: Post-incarceration experiences in New York City*. New York: Vera Institute of Justice.

¹⁷ Black, Kendall, and Richard Cho. 2004. *New beginnings: The need for supportive housing for previously incarcerated people*. New York: Corporation for Supportive Housing and Common Ground Community.

3) Supportive housing can reduce correctional spending.

Although research focused on several cities has shown that increased spending on supportive housing reduces correctional spending, jurisdictions continue to spend more on corrections than on housing. In 2005 state and local governments spent approximately one-third more on corrections than on housing and community development.¹⁸

State and local governments spent almost \$20 billion more on corrections than on housing and community development in 2005.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Governments Division. *State and Local Government Finances by Level of Government and by State: 2004-05*. www.census.gov/govs/www/estimate.html

A 2007 report by the National Alliance to End Homelessness reported on the cost-effectiveness of supportive housing compared to other services, including the criminal justice system.¹⁹ The analysis included several cities.

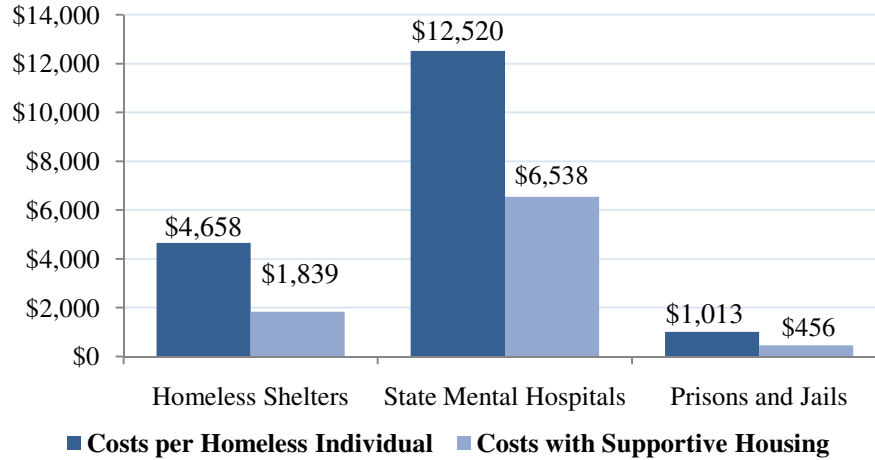
- Data from 4,679 New York City placement records of homeless individuals into supportive housing between 1989 and 1997 showed that the costs of supportive housing can reach up to \$17,277 per person per year.²⁰ By securing just one supportive housing unit, the city saved \$12,146 per year in public costs, including those costs associated with health and mental health care, shelter, prisons, jails, and other criminal justice agencies. Prior to placement in housing, homeless people with severe mental illness used an average of \$40,451 per person per year in social and criminal justice services. Placement in housing through this program was associated with marked reductions in shelter use, hospitalizations, length of stay per hospitalization, and time incarcerated.

¹⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, Governments Division. Undated. *State and local government finances by level of government and by state: 2004-05*. www.census.gov/govs/www/estimate.html, accessed July 26, 2007.

¹⁹ National Alliance to End Homelessness. 2007. *Supportive housing is cost-effective*. Online at www.endhomelessness.org

²⁰ Culhane, Dennis P., Stephen Metraux, and Trevor Hadley. 2002. The impact of supportive housing for homeless people with severe mental illness on the utilization of the public health, corrections, and emergency shelter systems: The New York-New York Initiative. *Housing Policy Debate* 13(1).

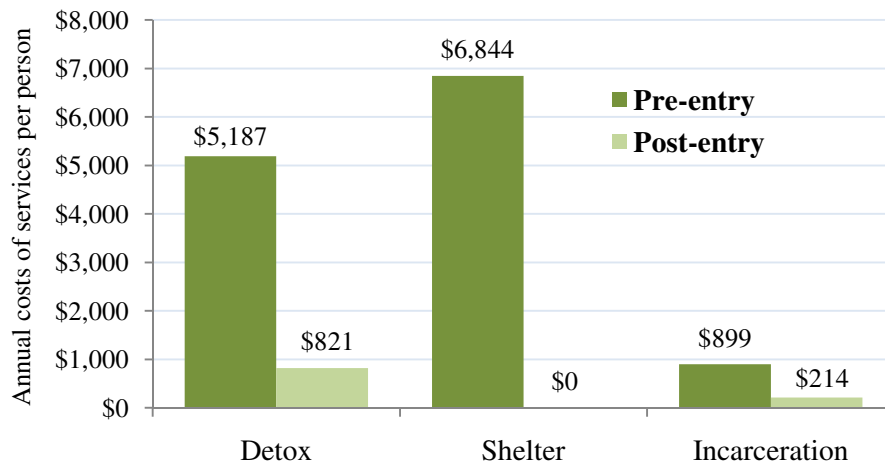
Supportive housing saved New York City \$9,358 per year in public costs associated with shelter use, mental health care and incarceration.



Source: Culhane, Dennis P., Stephen Metraux, and Trevor Hadley. 2002. The impact of supportive housing for homeless people with severe mental illness on the utilization of the public health, corrections, and emergency shelter systems: The New York-New York Initiative. *Housing Policy Debate* 13(1).

- A Denver program developed in 2003 to provide supportive housing for the chronically homeless realized substantial savings for the city. After placement of chronically homeless people in supportive housing, the number of people held at county jails decreased 60 percent, with a 76.2 percent reduction of nights spent in county jails. The associated costs of incarceration for the people served by this program declined from \$34,160 to \$8,120 a year, a reduction of \$26,040 or 76 percent.²¹

Supportive housing saves Denver thousands of dollars per person on public services annually.



Source: Perlman, Jennifer, and John Parvensky. 2006. *Denver Housing First Collaborative: Cost benefit analysis and program outcomes report*. Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, as cited in National Alliance to End Homelessness. 2007. *Supportive housing is cost-effective*. Online at www.naeh.org/content/article/detail/1200

²¹ Perlman, Jennifer, and John Parvensky. 2006. *Denver Housing First Collaborative: Cost benefit analysis and program outcomes report*. Colorado Coalition for the Homeless. Online at www.shnny.org/documents/FinalDHFCCostStudy.pdf

A 2004 study of nine U.S. cities found that supportive housing is the most cost-effective way to serve homeless individuals. In all nine cities—Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Columbus, Los Angeles, New York, Phoenix, San Francisco, and Seattle—estimates find the cost of supportive housing to be considerably less than the cost of prison and/or jail.²²

Prison costs almost three times as much as supportive housing in Los Angeles.



Source: The Lewin Group. 2004. *Costs of serving homeless individuals in nine cities. Chart Book Report*. New York: Corporation for Supportive Housing.

Supportive housing is crucial for many people with mental illness who often have difficulty maintaining a stable housing situation and are vulnerable to homelessness.²³ Homelessness increases the likelihood that people with mental illness will have contact with law enforcement. Researchers at the University of Pennsylvania found that providing supportive housing to people with severe mental illness decreased the number of days people with severe mental illness spent in prison or jail 74 and 40 percent, respectively.²⁴

²² The Lewin Group. 2004. *Costs of serving homeless individuals in nine cities. Chart book report*. New York: Corporation for Supportive Housing.

²³ National Coalition for the Homeless. 2006. *Factsheet: Mental health and homelessness*. Online at www.nationalhomeless.org/publications/facts/Mental_Illness.pdf.

²⁴ Culhane, Dennis P., Stephen Metraux, and Trevor Hadley. 2002.

4) Increased spending on housing and community development is associated with reduced crime and reduced incarceration rates.

JPI analyzed national and state-level spending on housing and community development and corrections expenditures and compared these expenditures to violent crime rates and prison incarceration rates from 2000 to 2005. We found that an increase in spending on housing is associated with a decrease in violent crime at the national level and a decrease in incarceration rates at the state level.

An increase in spending on housing and community development paired with a decrease in spending on corrections is associated with both lower violent crime rates and lower prison incarceration rates.²⁵

Violent crime rates decreased when funding was shifted to housing from corrections.

	2000	2005	Percent change (2000-2005)
Housing expenditure as a percent of total expenditure	1.5%	1.7%	+10.74%
Corrections expenditure as a percent of total expenditure	2.8%	2.5%	-10.62%
Violent crime rate*	506.50	469.20	-7.36%

*Rates are the number of reported violent offenses (murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault) per 100,000 people in the population.

On average, the ten states that allocate a larger portion of their budgets to housing and community development (calculated and labeled as housing expenditure as a percent of direct expenditures) have lower incarceration rates than the ten states that allocated a smaller percentage.²⁶ Of those states that spend a larger portion of their budgets on housing, none had an incarceration rate higher than the national average. However, half of those states that allocate the least to housing and community development had incarceration rates higher than the national average, and two of those states had incarceration rates just below the national average: Arkansas was 1.6 percent lower and Idaho was 6.5 percent lower than the national incarceration rate.

²⁵ Violent crime data: FBI Uniform Crime Report, *Crime in the United States, 2000-2005*. Expenditure data: U.S. Census Bureau, Governments Division. *State and Local Government Finances by Level of Government and by State: 2004-05*. www.census.gov/govs/www/estimate.html. Corrections data: Harrison, Paige M., and Allen J. Beck. 2006. *Prison and jail inmates at midyear 2005*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

²⁶ Expenditure data: U.S. Census Bureau, Governments Division. *State and Local Government Finances by Level of Government and by State: 2004-05*. www.census.gov/govs/www/estimate.html. Prison incarceration rate data: Harrison, Paige M., and Allen J. Beck. 2006. *Prison and jail inmates at midyear 2005*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

On average, states that spend a higher percentage of their budget on housing have lower incarceration rates than states that spend less.

Ten states that allocate a larger portion of their budget to housing

2005	Housing as a percent of direct expenditures	Incarceration rate (per 100,000)
United States	1.7%	488.3
Massachusetts	2.5%	138.5
New Hampshire	2.5%	196.0
Vermont	2.4%	238.8
California	2.4%	456.0
Maryland	2.3%	405.3
Alaska	2.3%	373.8
Rhode Island	2.2%	179.6
Connecticut	2.1%	376.5
Maine	2.1%	153.0
Washington	2.0%	263.0
Average	2.3%	278.0

Ten states that allocate a smaller portion of their budgets to housing

2005	Housing as a percent of direct expenditures	Incarceration rate (per 100,000)
United States	1.7%	488.3
Mississippi	1.1%	→684.8
Texas	1.1%	→701.3
South Carolina	1.1%	→539.3
Wisconsin	1.0%	395.7
Arizona	1.0%	→501.1
Arkansas	1.0%	480.2
Oklahoma	0.9%	→655.6
Iowa	0.7%	289.3
Idaho	0.5%	456.6
Wyoming	0.3%	398.2
Average	0.9%	510.2

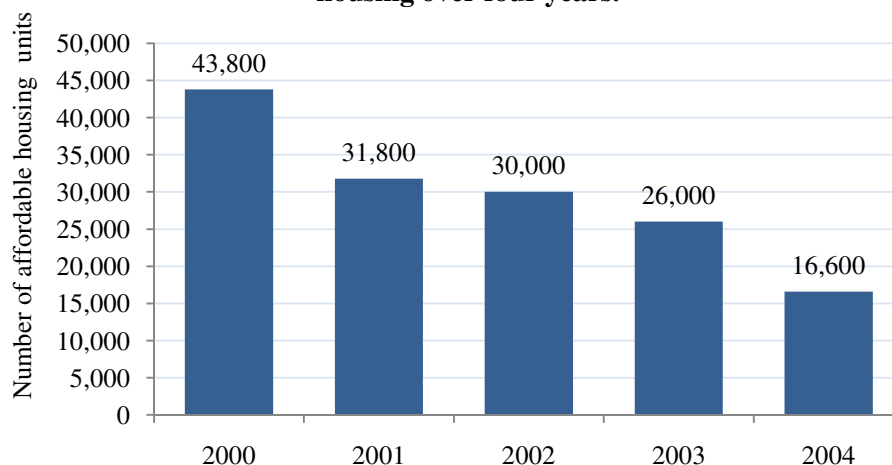
Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Governments Division. *State and Local Government Finances by Level of Government and by State: 2004-05*. Harrison, Paige M., and Allen J. Beck. 2006. *Prison and jail inmates at midyear 2005*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Recommendations

Positive investments in communities and community development through housing (such as supportive housing and affordable housing) can yield benefits in public safety, cost savings, and long-term community enrichment. Stable housing is the foundation for education, employment, and access to other social programs and services. Compared with people who face barriers in their housing situations, people in stable living environments are better able to make investments in themselves, their families, and their neighborhoods.

In 2002 nearly 2,000 people returned from prison to the District of Columbia.²⁷ During the same time period, the city experienced a dramatic loss of affordable housing.²⁸ Without affordable housing, people returning from prison are more likely to face challenges obtaining employment, staying in treatment programs, and getting other services that would help them reestablish themselves in the community. Though it may be possible for people returning from prison to move to surrounding suburbs, the value of maintaining ties to family and community within the city is crucial for people returning from prison to successfully reestablish themselves in society.

The District of Columbia lost 62 percent of its affordable housing over four years.



Source: Rodgers, Angie. 2005. *New census data show DC's affordable housing crisis is worsening*. Washington, DC: DC Fiscal Policy Institute. Online at www.dcfpi.org/9-13-05hous.pdf.

²⁷ Bureau of Justice Statistics. 2002. *Correctional populations in the United States*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics. Harrison, Paige M., and Jennifer C. Karberg. 2003. *Prison and jail inmates at midyear 2002*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics. Harrison, Paige M., and Jennifer C. Karberg. 2004. *Prison and jail inmates at midyear 2003*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics. Lattimore, Pamela K. 2004. *National portrait of serious and violent offender reentry initiative*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute. Cited and analyzed in Roman, Caterina Gouvis, Michael J. Kane, and Rukmini Giridharadas. 2006. *The housing landscape for returning prisoners in the District of Columbia*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

²⁸ According to the DC Fiscal Policy Institute, affordable housing in this context is housing that rents for \$500 or less per month or homes valued at \$150,000 or less, but not necessarily subsidized by the government. Rodgers, Angie. 2005. *New census data show DC's affordable housing crisis is worsening*. Washington, DC: DC Fiscal Policy Institute. Online at www.dcfpi.org/9-13-05hous.pdf.

Research limitations

Some studies produce data that associate crime with the presence of or proximity to subsidized housing such as supportive housing or affordable housing. Other researchers conclude that statistical association with crime results from factors specific to particular housing (such as an allocation policy that concentrates crime-likely individuals in already-crime-prone spaces), suggesting that implementation of carefully thought out policy on subsidized housing (regulating factors such as design and allocation) has the potential to lower or remove statistical correlations between governmentally subsidized housing and crime.²⁹

Although investments in housing and other social factors have been shown to promote public safety and healthy communities, there is no single solution that will reduce the chance that a person will be involved in criminal activity. The research is not conclusive on any one factor that would solve every community's public safety challenges, as different communities have differing needs and what works for one may not work for another. All of these social factors should be considered in the context of individual communities in order to establish policies that effectively ensure public safety.

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²⁹ For example, in 1999 researchers at the New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research explored the issue of crime and public housing in Sydney, Australia, concluding that statistics associating subsidized housing with crime reflected the allocation of crime-prone individuals to subsidized housing; these researchers suggested that adjusting allocation policy will influence the statistical relationship between subsidized housing and crime. Weatherburn, Don, Bronwyn Lind, and Simon Ku. 1999. Hotbeds of crime? Crime and public housing in urban Sydney. *Crime and Delinquency* 45(2).