



Center for Effective Public Policy

The Impacts of Housing Instability Among People Recently Released from Incarceration

The Reentry Coalition of New Jersey asked the Center for Effective Public Policy to review the research related to incarceration and homelessness. This report provides a summary of the prevailing issues and highlights best practices in addressing the impacts of housing instability among people recently released from incarceration.

Men and women who have been incarcerated are nearly 10 times more likely than people who have not resided in prison or jail to struggle with housing-related issues (Couloute, 2018)

Introduction

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 443,740 people were released from state and federal prisons in 2021 (Carson, 2022). Many of those face significant needs when returning to their communities (Sawyer, 2022). People who have been incarcerated are more likely to experience financial stress, damages to social ties and family relationships, difficulties with obtaining gainful or meaningful employment, and a decline in physical and mental health (Metraux et al., 2020; Remster, 2021). Each of these negative impacts elevates the risk of homelessness or housing instability: men and women who have been incarcerated are nearly 10 times more likely than people who have not resided in prison or jail to struggle with housing-related issues (Couloute, 2018).

The focus of this paper is to explore the relationship between incarceration and experiences of homelessness. First, we underscore conditions that contribute to experiencing homelessness and

housing instability. Second, we identify and review intervention models that have demonstrated positive outcomes with people facing housing instability and the impact of these models with populations who are justice-impacted. Finally, we focus on the state of New Jersey and some of the promising efforts that have been introduced to alleviate housing instability for people who have been incarcerated.

Part I: Homelessness: A National Crisis

It is estimated that, on a single night in 2022, 582,462 people were experiencing homelessness in the United States (de Sousa et al., 2022). Of this population, 60% were in sheltered locations (e.g., emergency shelters, transitional housing programs) and 40% were in unsheltered locations (e.g., streets, abandoned buildings, cars). Approximately 27% of all people experiencing homelessness had experienced chronic homelessness, which means they had been without stable housing for more than one year. It is noteworthy that during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020 and 2022), there was a 15.5% increase in the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness.

Conditions That Contribute to Being Unhoused

With some exceptions, people generally do not choose to be without housing (Couloute, 2018). The absence of housing often occurs when all other options are exhausted and/or when people face circumstances that make maintaining housing difficult or impossible. Gaetz et al. (2013) have identified three sets of factors as the major causes of housing instability:

- structural factors, such as the lack of available and affordable housing, income and job opportunities, and access to resources, and discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, and/or sexuality;
- failure of systems to support vulnerable populations, such as youth in care reaching adult status, immigrants and refugees, and people discharged from facilities, including jails and prisons; and personal factors, for example, traumatic events, such as domestic violence and child abuse; dissolution of families; losses due to fire or natural disaster; loss of employment;

and personal health crises, including physical impairment, dependence on substances, and mental illness.

Interestingly, a number of marginalized and vulnerable groups are disproportionately overrepresented not only among criminal justice populations but among people who are more likely to struggle with housing security. For example, in 2015, 9.1% of Black men ages 20–34 were incarcerated compared to 1.6% of their white counterparts (Pettit & Sykes, n.d.). While 13.6% of the U.S. population is Black,¹ in 2022, 37.3% of people experiencing homelessness were Black (de Sousa et al., 2022). Other groups that are overrepresented include people with long-term health conditions, such as mental health issues, substance use disorders, physical disabilities, and other medical conditions (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2021); survivors of domestic violence (Nelson-Dusek & Gerrard, 2017); young adults and youth who have trauma histories, were previously involved with the child welfare system, identify as LGBTQ+, have special needs or disabilities, or are pregnant or parenting (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2021); and veterans (Metraux et al., 2020).

Incarcerated Populations Are Increasingly Vulnerable

The identification of subgroups, or typologies, of homeless populations has been an important research priority to guide the development and implementation of homelessness services and policies. Single adults are generally described as experiencing three temporally based types of homelessness: chronic (shelters become like long-term housing), episodic (people move in and out of homelessness), and transitional (people spend a short time in a shelter before accessing more stable housing). The emerging research also suggests that people who experience homelessness are not a homogenous group. Therefore, the usefulness of these typologies can be enhanced when we understand the needs of specific populations (McAllister et al., 2011), such as people involved with the justice system.

¹ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/RHI225221>

The intersection between incarceration and homelessness has been clearly established. Of the estimated 615,000 people leaving prison in 2019, more than 50,000 entered shelters immediately upon release (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2022). People who were formerly incarcerated are almost 10 times more likely to be homeless than the general public (Couloute, 2018), and those with multiple incarcerations are twice as likely to experience homelessness than those with one incarceration. Data reported in 2008 suggests that, among those formerly incarcerated, women, particularly Black women, have a higher likelihood of experiencing homelessness compared to men, including Black men, although men have a higher likelihood of being unsheltered (Couloute, 2018).

Remster (2019, 2021) conducted one of the first long-term studies of post-incarceration homelessness among a sample of males. Results of this study revealed that over an eight-year span, approximately one-tenth of men released from prison spent time in a shelter. A number of personal factors elevated risk for homelessness among this population, and these factors varied over time. For example, men who were Black, unmarried, and older were more likely to experience homelessness upon release. Remster (2021) also found that men with serious mental health and substance use issues who were formerly incarcerated were more likely to experience homelessness after release. When housing stability was not available, this group became entrenched in emergency service usage and were more likely to be revoked while under community supervision for noncriminal and criminal activities.

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means to screen applicants for their properties (Forkey et al., 2019). People who have been convicted of sex offenses and are on the sex offenders list or those convicted of producing methamphetamine in federally assisted housing face additional challenges (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development [HUD], n.d.). Ultimately, housing authorities hold the right to deny housing to applicants with a history of substance use and/or involvement in criminal activity that may interfere with the living conditions of other residents.

A critical finding by Remster (2021) is that people who are paroled are less likely to experience chronic homelessness than people who serve their full sentence. The potential support offered by parole serves a protective function, particularly for those with complex needs.

People returning from prison or jail are often limited or forced to return to areas with high crime and poverty rates, lower-paying employment options, and proximity to past criminal connections (Metraux et al., 2007). This not only elevates the risk of recidivism but prevents people who were previously incarcerated from the benefits of housing stability where they can more readily establish positive social networks, gain employment, and avoid rearrest. A critical finding by Remster (2021) is that people who are paroled are less likely to experience chronic homelessness than people who serve their full sentence. The potential support offered by parole serves a protective function, particularly for those with complex needs. Unfortunately, most agencies will not consider a person to be eligible for parole unless they can demonstrate access to stable accommodation.

Criminalizing Homelessness

According to the National Homeless Law Center (NHLC, 2021) nearly every state has laws or policies that criminalize actions associated with homelessness. This trend increased dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is anticipated that it will continue to rise. The most common restrictions include prohibitions against standing in road ways, panhandling in public places, and vagrancy. Many states have also enacted laws to prevent camping and restrictions on sitting, lying down, and eating in certain areas (NHLC, 2021; Sarma & Brand, 2018).

Restrictions, penalties, and laws that criminalize homelessness do little to solve homelessness and often exacerbate problems by creating additional barriers to housing and employment. As NHLC states, “Punishing an unhoused person for sleeping outdoors does not obviate their need to sleep nor does it create a safe place for them to sleep indoors” (NHLC, 2021, p. 16).

According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH, 2021), the expense of enforcing criminal statutes is high and ultimately diverts resources that could be used to solve homelessness. Further, people who are unsheltered have a much higher than average rate of interaction with the police, which elevates the risk for fines, penalties, and court appearances as well as the likelihood of becoming a victim of police violence (NAEH, 2021; Sarma & Brand, 2018). For people who are justice-impacted, these actions perpetuate the cycle of incarceration and housing instability. Adding to a previous criminal record increases the likelihood of being rejected as a housing candidate in the future. Additionally, temporary removal from the community disrupts involvement with the labor market (Herbert et al., 2015).

Part II: Evidence-Based Intervention Frameworks

There are many factors that contribute to experiences of homelessness among people after their incarceration and various promising programs and interventions to prevent homelessness and promote housing stability for this population. Metraux et al. (2020) conducted an extensive review of the literature to explore the impact of different strategies and models. A summary of their findings is presented below.

Discharge Planning

Discharge or release planning is currently considered a core element of effective correctional practice (La Vigne et al., 2008), though the quality and usefulness of these services vary dramatically across settings (Metraux et al., 2020). A primary focus at discharge is to ensure that each person has access to stable housing immediately upon release. Many agencies begin

discharge planning three to six months prior to release. However, housing shortages, the lack of housing options, and other challenges suggest that this need should be addressed earlier in the carceral process. There is no direct evidence demonstrating the impact of discharge planning on housing stability however, Metraux et al., (2020) described several promising practices that can help to ensure an individual has a safe place to live upon release. First, an assessment should be conducted to determine risk of homelessness and housing needs prior to re-entry. Second, when possible, efforts to engage or reengage family and other supports should be explored. Finally, correctional agencies are encouraged to support “in-reach” programs where community organizations are permitted to enter carceral facilities and share information on housing and other services

Reentry Programs

A number of reentry programs have been introduced to impact housing stability and homelessness. Metraux et al. (2020) described the impact of three broad types of programs:

Generally, CCFs facilitate the gradual transition into the community and offer both supervision and treatment. They also serve as a buffer against homelessness for people transitioning to the community, offering immediate access to housing and supportive services. The available research on CCFs suggests that these programs show promise in reducing recidivism outcomes when implemented with fidelity (Wong et al., 2019)

community correction facilities (CCFs), reentry programs that include some form of housing or rental assistance, and supportive housing initiatives. These are briefly described below with the addition of a fourth type: family reentry.

I: Community Correctional Facilities

CCFs include halfway houses and other community-based residential facilities that can be part of the person’s incarceration or a condition of release. Generally, CCFs facilitate the gradual transition into the community and offer both supervision and treatment. They also serve as a buffer against homelessness for people transitioning to the community, offering immediate access to housing and

supportive services. The available research on CCFs suggests that these programs show promise in reducing recidivism outcomes when implemented with fidelity (Wong et al., 2019).

Unfortunately, there are no studies that focus on outcomes beyond recidivism. Future research is necessary to determine the impact of CCFs on long-term housing stability and other important outcomes such as employment, drug use, and so on (Wong et al., 2019).

II: Reentry Programs Providing Housing and Rental Assistance

Metraux et al. (2020) describe several housing supports provided to people transitioning to the community that do not include placement in a CCF. These programs provide case management, employment supports, referrals to community housing agencies, and rental assistance. Several programs have been identified that show promise in impacting housing stability. For example, in a demonstration project conducted in Washington State, a housing voucher program paid private housing rent expenses for up to three months after a person's release on good behavior. Other programs that have exhibited promising outcomes among this population include:

- Washington State's Reentry Housing Pilot Program (Lutze et al., 2014),
- Fortune Society in New York City (McDonald et al., 2008),
- Burlington Housing Authority's transitional housing (Ramirez, 2016),
- King County Housing Authority's Passage Point, which offers supportive housing for reentering parents (Ramirez, 2016), and
- Alaska Housing Finance Corporation's tenant-based rental assistance (Gutierrez, 2016).

The noteworthy components of these programs revolve around a multifaceted approach to addressing needs and the continuity of care across service providers that begins before the person is released. As with the available research on CCFs, the promise of reentry programs to reduce homelessness and increase housing stability has not been fully explored. However, the prevailing evidence suggests that people are at greatest risk for homelessness and recidivism when they do not have access to housing upon release.

III: Supportive Housing

The Housing First (HF) model is an established supportive framework for treatment and service delivery directed toward those experiencing homelessness (Evans et al., 2021). It has been adopted as best practice by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and is widely implemented.

Previously, receipt of housing assistance was contingent upon people satisfying preconditions, such as sobriety. Housing First—prioritizes immediate housing based on the belief that housing stability is a necessity to resolve additional circumstances, such as substance misuse and mental health disorders. The Housing First model encompasses permanent housing strategies and rapid re-housing programs (i.e., immediate but temporary rental assistance and subsidies to people facing short-term housing crises). It often includes case management and wraparound services like Assertive Community Treatment (ACT), and voluntary treatment, to support stability of the person’s overall well-being and housing status (Evans et al., 2021). The five principles of Housing First are displayed in Table 1 (Gaetz et al., 2013).

Table 1: Housing First Principles

Immediate Access to Housing	Consumer Choice and Self-Determination	Recovery Orientation	Individualized and Client-Driven Supports	Social and Community Integration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing not conditional on sobriety or completed treatment • Voluntary participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Client choice for housing type and location • Client choice for service usage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports maintenance of social, educational, occupational, and extracurricular activities • Harm reduction approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clients have access to a range of services • Supports are dependent on individual need 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separation of housing and supports • Clients are not stigmatized or isolated • Participation in meaningful activities

A coordinated entry system (CES) is used in conjunction with Housing First. A CES is a centralized data management system that contains the information of those experiencing homelessness. It is designed to help coordinate assessment and referral processes for people who are unhoused and to prioritize services for those with the highest risk and needs (Balagot et al., 2019; HUD, n.d.; Srebnik et al., 2017). With information about those who are unhoused available in a common database, multiple service providers can access pertinent information.

There are four steps involved in securing housing services via a coordinated entry system (HUD, n.d.):

1. **Assessment:** A validated and standardized assessment tool is used to determine a person's housing circumstances, risk of experiencing homelessness, risk of harm and/or adverse outcomes, and individual service needs.
2. **Scoring:** The assessment is scored to derive a standardized measure of risk and objective vulnerabilities to inform prioritization. Prioritization is also informed by case management input to account for additional population-based risk and vulnerabilities.
3. **Prioritization:** People entered in a CES are ranked in order of priority. Those with higher levels of need are prioritized for housing assistance.
4. **Determining eligibility:** Eligibility is determined by identifying whether people meet the requirements for participation in the housing service to which they are referred.

In general, the CES is described as an effective means to allocate appropriate housing resources to the most vulnerable populations in a timely manner, according to individual level of risk and need (Balagot et al., 2019). It is noteworthy, however, that stakeholders have raised concerns

about the limited evidence available regarding the validity and reliability of the most frequently used CES assessment tools (Wilkey et al, 2019). Research conducted by Wilkey et al. (2019) revealed that one of the most common assessment tools—Vulnerability Index – Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT)—yields lower prioritization scores for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) populations than for their white counterparts. As such, BIPOC populations are prioritized for permanent housing at a lower rate. The authors propose specific policy and practice recommendations to ensure that the CES process is used fairly and equitably.

There is considerable empirical evidence in support of Housing First programs for people who are justice-impacted. Regardless of the method of measurement (e.g., decreased number of jail stays, jail bookings, and arrests), results consistently support the use of Housing First programs (Woodhall-Melnik & Dunn, 2016). These results have been attributed to the use of wraparound services (ACT) that address the spectrum of social, mental, and behavioral health needs faced by this population (Forkey et al., 2019). Of the various Housing First programs, supportive housing provided the strongest evidence base for successfully housing people who were formerly incarcerated (Metraux et al., 2020) and yielded fewer reconvictions among participants than other housing programs (Cunningham et al., 2021; Somers et al., 2013).

A number of specific programs have been evaluated and display positive outcomes for people who are justice-impacted and experiencing homelessness. These programs are described briefly below.

- The Denver Supportive Housing Social Impact Bond Initiative (Denver SIB) was a supportive housing program under the Housing First model (Cunningham et al., 2021). The program was designed to support people with long-term homelessness and frequent interactions with the criminal justice system. Eligibility requirements included eight or more arrests within three years and the lack of a permanent address for at least three

arrests. Intensive wraparound services were offered and focused on the provision of subsidized housing, behavioral health services, links to community resources, a modified assertive community treatment (ACT) team, and transportation assistance and referrals.

Participation in this supportive housing program resulted in a 40% reduction in shelter visits. Moreover, an average of 81.3% of people retained their housing after two years. Researchers reported a 34% reduction in police contacts, 40% reduction in arrests, 30% reduction in unique jail stays, and a 27% reduction in total jail days. Additionally, a 65% reduction in the use of detoxification services was reported among program participants (Cunningham et al., 2021).

- The Frequent Users Services Enhancement (FUSE) is a supportive housing program designed for people with frequent jail and shelter usage (Aidala et al., 2014). The program has three core elements: data-driven problem solving, policy and systems reform, and targeted housing and services. Recruitment involves in-reach into a range of settings such as jails, shelters, and hospitals. Eligibility requirements are four jail and four shelter stays within five years prior to admission to the program.

According to a 2013 study, after 12 months in the program, 91% of FUSE participants retained permanent housing compared to 28% retention among a nonparticipant control group. After 24 months, 86% of participants remained in supportive housing compared to 42% of the control group. FUSE participants spent 146.7 fewer days in shelters than the comparison group. Notably, participants spent an average of 19.2 fewer days incarcerated (40% reduction) and had fewer jail admissions than the comparison group (Aidala et al., 2014).

The research on supportive housing is extremely promising; however, it is clear that these services should be reserved for people with chronic patterns of homelessness and extensive

medical, mental, and behavioral health needs. An approach that has been frequently used in conjunction with supportive housing is assertive community treatment (ACT; Gaetz et al., 2013). ACT is designed for people with complex needs, such as mental health and substance use disorders, and is delivered through a multidisciplinary team that provides ongoing, acute care. Compared to standard case management, ACT has had great successes in supporting the reduction of homelessness among people with psychiatric and substance abuse needs and has a strong evidence base (Coldwell & Bender, 2007).

Forensic assertive community treatment (FACT) extends upon the ACT model and is specifically tailored to people with serious mental illness (SMI) who are involved in the criminal justice system. Recipients of FACT often experience chronic homelessness or are at risk of experiencing housing instability or homelessness (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2019). The main components of the ACT framework and the components distinguishing FACT from ACT are outlined in Table 2 (Gaetz et al., 2013; SAMHSA, 2019).

Table 2: Assertive Community Treatment Principles

<p>Core Components</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wraparound services provided by multidisciplinary team of professionals • Available 24/7 to provide support • Regular meetings with client and team members • Team is mobile • 10:1 client-to-staff ratio • Program components informed by client choice • Peer support and recovery orientation • Services are unlimited and individualized based on needs
<p>Members of ACT Team</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clinical/medical staff (psychiatrist, doctor, nurse, substance use specialist) • Peer support workers • Generalist case managers who broker access to housing and complementary supports
<p>Additional Elements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing support/tenancy expertise (landlord support, support securing housing, help moving in and maintaining housing unit, rent subsidy/income support specialist)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic skills training (cooking, cleaning, numeracy re: paying rent) • Education/employment specialist (dedicated to broader goals of social integration and self-sufficiency)
<p>Elements Added in FACT</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service provision addresses criminogenic risks and needs through evidence-based recidivism reduction treatments • Treatment team includes criminal justice partner and peer specialist with lived experience • Serves clients with SMI and prior arrests and incarcerations • Ability to leverage sanctions and incentives imposed by criminal justice agencies providing supervision

IV: Family Reentry Programs

Metraux et al. (2020) describe how, for people exiting incarceration who do not require intensive intervention, their careful transition to their families can help ensure a safe and effective reentry and be a cost-effective way to avert homelessness and elevate the emotional and financial stability of families (diZerega & Villalobos Agudelo, 2011; Herbert et al., 2015). However, people who hope to live with family members who reside in public housing or who are supported by tenant-based vouchers are confronted with a barrier: in many states and cities, program rules do not allow people who were formerly incarcerated to reside in public housing or with those supported by vouchers.

The New York City Housing Authority relaxed this rule and established the Family Reentry Pilot Program (FRRP), which allows people with criminal records to move back in with their families in public housing. In this way, FRRP supports people who were incarcerated—particularly those facing exclusion criteria—in accessing public housing (Bae et al., 2016). Following a successful two-year period with no justice system involvement, a person may be added to the lease of their family member. Eligibility requirements for the pilot program are release from prison, jail, or juvenile correctional facility within three years of their application. Participants are provided individualized case management services in conjunction with community-based supportive services (Bae et al., 2016).

At the time of the evaluation, program requirements were completed by 20 participants (N = 108), while the remainder were at varying stages of their participation in the program (Smith et al., 2017). Of those who completed the program, 6 were added to the lease, 10 were in the process of being added to the lease, and 4 decided against joining the lease. Notably, “less than a handful” of participants received a new criminal charge while in the program” (Smith et al., 2017, p. 30). Qualitative analyses with participants and service providers reported provision of stable housing as the program’s key strength, thus acting as a catalyst for successful reintegration by addressing and reducing the risk of justice system involvement (Smith et al., 2017).

Policy Change Efforts Across the Country

In addition to model programs and intervention strategies that impact outcomes, a number of policy changes have become the focus of housing authorities across the United States. Table 3 focuses on housing authorities’ policy change efforts to facilitate increased access to public housing for people released from incarceration (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2022).

Table 3

Housing Authority	Policy Change
Allegheny County, PA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revised look-back periods* from 10 and 5 years to 5 and 3 years Removed certain convictions from exclusion criteria list (e.g., marijuana possession, felony theft offenses)
Burlington, NC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individualized review for housing, eliminating automatic denial of applicants** Scaled back the look-back period for certain crimes from 5 years to 3 years Use a grid to determine if further screening is needed and have in place a process for applicants to show evidence of rehabilitation if they are denied
Delaware	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Created Family Reentry Program to reduce recidivism and increase the number of landlords who accept housing vouchers from people with conviction histories
Illinois	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Background checks review 6 months back from application date
Oklahoma City, OK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced the look-back period from 5 years to 3 years

Housing Authority	Policy Change
Tacoma, WA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admission policy looks only at felony convictions for violent, drug-related, or threatening offenses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ If present, an individualized review is required • Reduced the look-back period from 5 years to 1 year • Housing applicants are no longer automatically denied a housing voucher for criminal history**

Notes: * A look-back period is the time frame for which criminal records are considered for admission to housing.

** This excludes HUD-mandated exclusions (i.e., those required to register on the sex offender registry for life and those convicted of producing methamphetamine in federally assisted housing).

There are also a number of innovative efforts emerging across the U.S. to promote the decriminalization of homelessness. Examples of state and citywide initiatives are presented in Table 4.

Connecticut	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service providers work together with prosecutors to secure guarantees that they will not prosecute people who are chronically homeless or who are unsheltered for minor offenses • Public education campaigns encourage citizens to call 211 versus 911 for nonemergency situations
Portland, OR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police have hired a community liaison to serve as the primary contact between providers, social service agencies, and police to develop a response to the homelessness crisis
New York City, NY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Corporation for Supportive Housing’s FUSE initiative identifies frequent users of public systems, including hospitals, jails or prisons, and shelters, and provides them with supportive housing, significantly reducing returns to all systems.
Oakland, CA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • . Police officers receive training in working with people who are homeless and struggle with mental health issues and co-occurring disorders. An emphasis is placed on offering support and resources rather than fining and arresting.

Part 3: Homelessness and Incarcerated Populations in New Jersey

As indicated previously, the experience of homelessness for people who have been incarcerated has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this section, we will focus on homelessness in New Jersey and highlight several innovative practices that have been implemented to address homelessness in this state.

Homelessness in New Jersey

Monarch Housing Associates coordinates the point-in-time count of people who are unhoused in the state of New Jersey. They reported that, on a single night in 2022, New Jersey accounted for approximately 1.5% of the total homeless population in the United States. Of the 8,754 people experiencing homelessness in New Jersey, 88% were in sheltered locations and 11% were in unsheltered locations. Approximately 15.5% of the sheltered group were experiencing chronic homelessness, which means they had been without stable housing for more than one year, while 55.4% of the unsheltered were rated as chronic. Of all people experiencing homelessness in New Jersey, 57% were male and 41% were female. The racial/ethnic breakdown was 48.2% Black; 25.2% white; 18.9% Hispanic/Latino, and 1% multiracial (Monarch Housing Associates, 2022). The disproportionate number of Black people experiencing homelessness is consistent with the findings reported nationally (Couloute, 2021, Prison Policy Initiative, n.d.).

According to the Annual Homeless Assessment Report, significant increases in homelessness were strongly related to not only COVID-19 economic stressors but also dramatic increases in housing rental costs (de Sousa et al., 2022). Monarch Housing Associates (2022) reported that the most prevalent reasons people were homeless in New Jersey included being asked to leave a shared residence (22.4%), loss or reduction of job income (10.9%), and eviction or risk of eviction (9.4%). Notably, being released from prison/jail was the sixth most prevalent reason (~6.5%) for experiencing homelessness. Moreover, 48% of people experiencing homelessness in New Jersey reported having a disability, 60.4% reported mental health issues, and 45.3% reported a substance use disorder.

In 2021, in New Jersey, 4,815 people were released from prison (Carson, 2022) and 118,749 were released from jail (Sawyer, 2022). Approximately 5.5% of New Jersey's population experiencing homelessness reported jail, prison, or a juvenile detention facility as their residence prior to experiencing homelessness (Monarch Housing Associates, 2022).

Promising Policies, Programs, and Practices

New Jersey has initiated several policy changes to facilitate increased access to public housing and to provide essential supports for people who h incarcerated. For example, in December 2022, New Jersey advanced Bill A1239, which is designed to support people who are incarcerated in securing housing upon release (New Jersey Legislature, 2022). If passed, the state will be required to set standards for ensuring physical safety and for providing emergency and long-term housing, multifaceted counselling and support services, individualized care management, and assistance in obtaining permanent housing for residents returning to the community from incarceration (New Jersey Legislature, 2022).

New Jersey also aims to reduce barriers for people who were incarcerated through the Ban the Box law (Opportunity to Compete Act), which has been effective since 2015 (Mora, 2018). This law mandates that employers cannot inquire about criminal records (including expunged records) on employment applications and cannot make any oral or written inquiries about criminal records during the initial employment process (i.e., initial encounter regarding prospective employment). Notably, once the first interview is complete, inquiries are permitted (Mora, 2018).

Finally, there are a number of well-established and promising programs available to people who are justice-impacted:

- Volunteers of America Delaware Valley (VOADV) provides a variety of community-based reentry services for people following incarceration. In addition to residential housing programs, VOADV offers a Safe Return program—a multidisciplinary approach to

navigating successful community reintegration (VOADV, n.d.). Safe Return supports people returning to society following incarceration. Participants in this program are assessed via a standardized assessment tool and this information is used to inform and target appropriate service delivery. Supportive services are offered through a variety of community-based providers. Services include, but are not limited to, the following (VOADV, 2020):

- housing assistance,
- employment services (e.g., job readiness, employment training, job placement),
- legal assistance and advocacy,
- navigation and linkage to treatment services (e.g., mental health and substance use treatment),
- comprehensive case management services, and
- assistance obtaining identification.

The Safe Return program also works in collaboration with county justice facilities and Department of Corrections facilities throughout New Jersey to prepare people for release into the community. Discharge planning begins up to six months prior to a person maxing out of their incarceration sentence.

- Hudson County has a voucher program for permanent supportive housing for people experiencing chronic homelessness with frequent use of crisis systems, including correctional facilities, hospitals, and shelters. Analysis of the pilot program revealed a 47% reduction in costs for the aforementioned services within one year of permanent supportive housing delivery (Forkey et al., 2019).

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- Gateway Community Action Partnership is a nonprofit organization that has created a “tiny home” village specifically for people recently released from incarceration (Pandy, 2022). The goal is to provide housing to aid reintegration into the community. Entry to the program is coordinated with parole. The six-pod village provides people with a bed, desk, storage space, mini fridge, and heating and cooling appliances. As it is designed for temporary residence, people have their tiny home for 180 days (Pandy, 2022).

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Conclusion

The goals of this paper were to highlight the relationship between incarceration and homelessness and, moreover, to identify best practices for facilitating housing stability among people who are justice-impacted. This population is particularly affected by discriminatory screening processes for community-based housing programs based on criminal records. Additionally, poor familial and social ties, physical and mental health conditions, unemployment, and the criminalization of homelessness are all barriers preventing people recently released from incarceration from obtaining housing stability and successfully reintegrating into the community.

Several supportive housing programs have demonstrated successful outcomes (e.g., reductions in recidivism rates, increases in housing retention) among people who are justice-impacted. The Housing First model and coordinated entry systems are widely implemented as best practices for serving the complex needs of populations experiencing chronic homelessness. To optimize the use of available resources, a number of researchers have suggested that intensive resources, such as those required for Housing First and for approaches like ACT, be targeted for people identified as experiencing chronic homelessness (Metraux et al, 2020; Remster, 2021). This requires that

correctional agencies carefully assess housing needs and stability at discharge. It also suggests that people returning to the community from incarceration who require temporary or less intensive housing support have access to other options.

A number of programs other than supportive housing were reviewed in this paper, including family reentry programs, temporary housing, and targeted case and discharge planning. To optimize the use of these programs, it is essential that, prior to release, correctional facilities and community-based providers work collaboratively with people who are incarcerated to identify housing. In addition, people who are incarcerated should have access to a variety of programs and services that will assist them as they transition to the community. These include an array of personal, vocational, and educational programs.

It is essential that states continue to develop innovative policies and practices that provide people with housing and support following incarceration and that offer housing authorities incentives to allow people with a criminal record to access housing. There is also an immediate need to explore and understand the disparities among BIPOC people who experience homelessness and to ensure that eligibility and access to available services are equitable across racialized groups. Finally, the need to expand criminal justice research outcomes beyond a focus on recidivism and reoffending is essential. Researchers are encouraged to explore the impact of criminal justice interventions on measures of homelessness and housing security, family stability, and employment.

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