



OPPORTUNITY  
STARTS AT HOME

# WITHIN REACH:

*AMBITIOUS FEDERAL SOLUTIONS  
TO MEET THE HOUSING NEEDS OF  
PEOPLE WITH LOW INCOMES*

Long-Term National Policy Agenda

[NLIHC.ORG/SITES/DEFAULT/FILES/OSAH\\_POLICY-AGENDA.PDF](https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/OSAH_POLICY-AGENDA.PDF)

# BRINGING TOGETHER NEW PARTNERS TO TACKLE THE NATION'S AFFORDABLE RENTAL HOUSING CRISIS

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated economic shocks, millions of extremely low-income renters were living in unstable and unaffordable housing, on the brink of eviction and homelessness. The housing crisis disproportionately impacts people of color, who, due to decades of ongoing structural racism<sup>1</sup>, are more likely to experience rental cost burdens, homelessness, and living in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty, which, in turn, dramatically hinders educational attainment, health, food security, and economic upward mobility. Rental housing affordability has worsened dramatically over the past 15 years, and more families than ever are struggling to pay the rent and make ends meet. The pandemic has dramatically exacerbated housing instability in every corner of the country, with an estimated 30–40 million renters at risk of eviction. For those at the bottom of the income scale, the problem is most acute: more than 10 million households with extremely low incomes are either homeless or pay unaffordable rental costs that force them to make impossible choices between paying the rent and paying for heat, food, medications, transportation, and other necessities.

In the short-term, the campaign will continue working to ensure that the necessary federal resources and protections are in place to meet the urgent needs of people who are currently experiencing homelessness and the millions of people who are now on the brink due to COVID-related economic shocks. This includes Congress immediately enacting a robust COVID relief bill that includes billions in emergency rental assistance, a

national eviction moratorium, and increased homeless assistance funding through the duration of the pandemic. But the reality is that people with the lowest incomes needed housing assistance prior to the coronavirus outbreak and their needs will persist through, during and long after. The current pandemic makes clear that housing and health are inextricably linked, and it should serve as a clarion call for Congress to invest now in solutions that promote housing stability over the long run.

Failures of both the private market and public policy — at the federal, state, and local levels — have contributed to today's historic housing crisis. And many people and institutions, both private and public, must take part in addressing it. Among these institutions, the federal government has an indispensable role to play. This document outlines a set of federal policies that we believe are necessary, over the long run, to solve the affordable housing crisis facing the poorest individuals and families.

We all have a stake in solving this problem. When families repeatedly fall behind on the rent and are forced to move, their children are less likely to succeed in school, and high classroom turnover disrupts learning for other children as well. Children in families that move often are also much less likely to grow up in areas with quality schools and other opportunities they need to escape poverty and climb the economic ladder. People with chronic health conditions find it more difficult to access care when they cannot afford a stable home, and the stress of paying high rents can worsen their health. Affordable housing (and housing broadly) has a long history rooted in racial

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1 Please see the campaign's Racial Equity Fact Sheet, which explains the history of how decades of intentionally racist public policies created yawning racial disparities that persist today. <https://www.opportunityhome.org/resources/racial-equity-housing/>



injustice that must be remedied if we want to grow the economy, care for our seniors and people with disabilities, create safe communities and neighborhoods, improve food security, meet veterans' needs, end homelessness, and more. A decent, affordable home helps people succeed and thrive.

We are the Steering Committee of *Opportunity Starts at Home*, a dynamic, long-term, multi-sector campaign to ensure that the nation's historically marginalized households and those with the lowest incomes live in safe, accessible, affordable homes in neighborhoods that are free from discrimination and where everyone has equitable opportunities to thrive. To

accomplish this vision, we have a built a movement with stakeholders from many sectors to generate widespread support for federal housing policies that expand resources and correct long-standing structural and racial inequities. Affordable housing campaigns are not new, of course, but what is unprecedented and transformative about *Opportunity Starts at Home* is the scope and diversity of the partners that are joining forces. The campaign is advised by a Steering Committee including leading national organizations representing a wide range of interests that are working shoulder-to-shoulder to solve the affordable housing crisis.



# LONG-TERM GOAL & POLICY STRATEGIES

The housing affordability crisis demands a major, long-overdue federal response. Federal action is necessary not only to expand resources, but also to set overarching policy priorities and incentivize and support coordinated efforts at the state and local levels. While state and localities also have important roles to play, they cannot solve this problem on their own.

**This campaign seeks to expand federal housing resources and correct long-standing structural and racial inequities to ensure that people with the lowest incomes can afford a good home, which adds to their quality of life through better health, greater educational attainment, and stronger earnings.** To achieve this ambitious long-term goal, three key policy strategies are essential:

1. **Expand rental assistance** for every income eligible household;
2. **Expand the stock** of housing affordable to households with the lowest incomes; and
3. **Stabilize households** by providing emergency assistance to avert housing instability and homelessness.

## Bridge the Gap Between Rents and Income

Rental assistance is a critical tool for helping people with the lowest incomes afford decent, stable homes, and avoid homelessness. In the nation, a renter household needs an annual income of \$49,830 to afford a modest two-bedroom rental unit,<sup>2</sup> which is far above the wages of many working families or the fixed incomes of many seniors and people

with physical or mental health conditions that limit their ability to work. People of color disproportionately make up the population of renters with extremely low incomes. In fact, 20% of Black households, 17% of American Indian or Alaska Native households, 15% of Hispanic households, and 10% of Asian households are extremely low-income renters compared to only 6% of white non-Hispanic households are extremely low-income renters.<sup>3</sup> Even in properties that have been built with the help of robust construction subsidies, such as the Low Income Housing Tax Credit, the rents (or operating costs) are typically unaffordable for individuals and families with extremely low incomes.<sup>4</sup>

A substantial expansion of rental assistance for people with the lowest incomes is thus a key element of any successful strategy to solve the affordable housing crisis. The most well-known type of rental subsidy is the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program. Vouchers help people with the lowest incomes afford housing in the private market by paying landlords the difference between what a household can afford to pay for rent and the rent itself, up to a reasonable amount. Housing vouchers are also flexible – for instance, families may use them to rent homes that best meet their needs, including homes in areas with quality schools and greater access to jobs. Housing vouchers may also be tied to a specific housing development in a way that facilitates the development's financing and makes it easier for owners to provide health and other services to people in need. But due to historically chronic under-funding and disinvestment, only 1 in 4 households eligible for a federal housing voucher will

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2 "Out of Reach." National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2020, [https://reports.nlihc.org/sites/default/files/oor/OOR\\_2020.pdf](https://reports.nlihc.org/sites/default/files/oor/OOR_2020.pdf).

3 "The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes." National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2020. [https://reports.nlihc.org/sites/default/files/gap/Gap-Report\\_2020.pdf](https://reports.nlihc.org/sites/default/files/gap/Gap-Report_2020.pdf)

4 "The Cost of Affordable Housing: Does it Pencil Out?" Urban Institute and National Housing Conference, July 2016, <http://apps.urban.org/features/cost-of-affordable-housing>; "Mapping America's Rental Housing Crisis." Urban Institute, 27 April 2017, <https://apps.urban.org/features/rental-housing-crisis-map/>



get the help they need.

Congress should enact a substantial expansion of HCVs to ensure that every household that qualifies for a voucher receives a voucher. HCVs, as currently structured, are a proven, evidence-based model for ensuring housing stability, reducing childhood poverty, and eliminating homelessness. But, at the same time that we recommend taking the HCV program to full scale, programmatic improvements to the existing model would further improve effectiveness and help correct long-standing racial disparities. Most notably, due to barriers rooted in race based discrimination as well as other structural deficits, few voucher holders live in low-poverty neighborhoods even though there are available units to them, and most families of color using vouchers live in what the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines as “minority concentrated” neighborhoods, even though most voucher-affordable units are located elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> Some voucher holders want to stay in their current neighborhoods to be close to family, child care, or current job,

but others would like to use the voucher to move elsewhere. For those interested in moving, significant barriers stand in the way. For example, in many parts of the country, landlords routinely refuse to accept voucher holders, particularly in affluent white neighborhoods, and are often permitted by the law to do so.<sup>6</sup>

The HCV program can be improved to ensure that households are empowered to use their voucher in a neighborhood of their choosing. Specifically, the campaign recommends the creation of an additional 500,000 vouchers specifically designed for low-income families with young children to inform them about options they have to live in neighborhoods of opportunity with high-performing schools, strong job prospects, and other resources.<sup>7</sup> Research shows that these neighborhoods, which have historically benefited from ample public and private investment, can dramatically improve the life trajectories of young children. Therefore, it makes sense to prioritize these new vouchers for low-income pregnant people and families with children under age 6 who either have a recent history of homelessness or housing instability, or live in an area of concentrated poverty (or are at risk of being displaced from an opportunity area).<sup>8</sup> These new “mobility vouchers,” which has already received bipartisan support in Congress, should be paired with counseling and support services that have a proven track record of supporting parents and helping families move out of neighborhoods of concentrated poverty. Such a program would also enable housing agencies to identify and engage new landlords willing to participate in the HCV program. Moreover, these 500,000 mobility vouchers could be considered a starting point toward the

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5 Mazzara, A and Knudsen, B. (2019). “Where Families With Children Use Housing Vouchers.” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/housing/where-families-with-children-use-housing-vouchers>

6 “A Pilot Study of Landlord Acceptance of HCVs.” US Department of Housing and Urban Development, September 2018, <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/Landlord-Acceptance-of-Housing-Choice-Vouchers.pdf>

7 Sard, Barbara et al. (2018). “Helping Young Children Move Out of Poverty by Creating a New Type of Housing Voucher.” [https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/rental\\_vouchers\\_paper.pdf](https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/rental_vouchers_paper.pdf)

8 Chetty, Raj et al. (2015). “The Effects of Exposure to Better Neighborhoods on Children.” [http://www.equality-of-opportunity.org/assets/documents/mto\\_paper.pdf](http://www.equality-of-opportunity.org/assets/documents/mto_paper.pdf)



ultimate goal of having a universal program where everyone who qualifies for a voucher receives a voucher.

**Of course, moving to a new neighborhood is not a solution for all families, nor is it feasible at population scale. A sound national housing policy empowers families to access neighborhoods of their choice, and, at the same time, seeks to ensure that all neighborhoods are neighborhoods of opportunity.** Policymakers must correct historical exploitation and disenfranchisement by ensuring that comprehensive revitalization plans are in place for all high-poverty neighborhoods that have endured decades of intentional disinvestment that has hindered upward life trajectories for generations of people.



Comprehensive revitalization plans must focus on those most deeply impacted and protect against forced displacement (gentrification) so that existing residents can experience greater resources and improved schools, public safety, infrastructure, job opportunities, and more. All neighborhoods should be neighborhoods of opportunity.

While vouchers are the most common form of rental assistance, other promising policy innovations exist that could be used to similar effect. One idea is to create a

new federal renter's tax credit which would reduce rents in housing developments designated by states to levels the lowest income families can afford.<sup>9</sup> A federal renter's tax credit would enable families to stay stably housed and keep more of their income for other essentials like food, medicine, education, and transportation.

## Expand the Affordable Housing Stock

In markets where vacancies in existing buildings are scarce, "supply-side" approaches are also essential to produce more affordable homes. These investments should be targeted at where the supply shortage is most severe – at the lowest end of the income spectrum. Renters with extremely low-incomes account for most of the shortage of affordable and available rental homes in the nation, and renters with extremely low-incomes are the only income group facing an absolute shortage of affordable homes. By contrast, there is a cumulative surplus of affordable homes for households with higher incomes. To expand the affordable housing stock, the campaign will primarily advocate for a significant expansion of the national Housing Trust Fund (HTF), which is the first new housing resource in a generation and is exclusively targeted to help build, preserve, and rehabilitate housing for people with the lowest incomes. The national HTF is a block grant to states and operates at no cost to the federal government because it is funded through fees on Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. Each state distributes HTF resources based on its annual Allocation Plan, which identifies the state's priority housing needs. In 2020, \$322,564,268 in HTF dollars were allocated to states, but far more resources are necessary to meet the need.

As the HTF expands, newly built affordable units must be located in ways that foster

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9 Fischer, Will et al. (2017). "Renters' Credit Would Help Low-Wage Workers, Seniors, and People with Disabilities Afford Housing." Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/housing/renters-credit-would-help-low-wage-workers-seniors-and-people-with-disabilities>

racially and socially just and inclusive communities. The HTF statute requires states to select a state agency (such as a housing finance agency or a housing department) to receive and administer HTF resources. Each state must prepare an annual Allocation Plan showing how it will distribute HTF resources and select potential recipients. Historically, other federal housing production programs have too often located units in high-poverty communities of color, further exacerbating racial and economic segregation. This pattern cannot continue with new production programs like the HTF. Each state's HTF Allocation Plan must prioritize its statutory obligation to "affirmatively further fair housing" (AFFH) and make certain that the lowest income people have fair and affordable housing options in racially and economically integrated neighborhoods.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, the campaign will work to ensure that other existing tools that produce affordable housing are equitably assisting the lowest income renters. To that end, the campaign will advocate for new incentives, requirements, and/or resources for a significant share of Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) units to be 1) affordable to those with the lowest incomes and 2) strategically sited to foster economically and racially inclusive communities. LIHTC, created in 1986, is the largest source of new affordable housing in the nation and has provided much needed assistance to millions. However, LIHTC often serves households making an average of 60% of Area Median Income (AMI) and has historically struggled to meet the needs of extremely low income households who make 30% of AMI and below. LIHTC also falls short of meeting its potential to provide affordable units located in low-poverty, diverse neighborhoods.<sup>11</sup>

Additionally, the campaign will advocate to preserve the existing affordable housing stock, including the roughly one million public housing units that are currently home to 2.6 million residents. More than half of all households living in public housing are headed by a disabled and/or elderly resident, and nearly half have at least one child residing in the home. Nearly three quarters of households are considered very low- or extremely low-income, making less than 50% of the area median income, and the average annual tenant income is about \$13,400. Congress has disinvested in public housing for decades, resulting in a backlog of capital repair needs of as much as \$70 billion. Thousands of public housing units are lost each year to disrepair. Communities can quickly deploy these funds to make critical infrastructure repairs, such as fixing leaky roofs, replacing outdated heating systems, and remediating mold to improve the health and living conditions for millions of residents.

Increasing the overall supply of units affordable for the lowest income renters not only helps those most in need, but it also alleviates rent pressure for those with higher incomes. Millions of low-income renters currently occupy units that they cannot afford, but those units could be affordable to those with higher incomes. A greater supply of rental housing would allow these low-income renters to move from unaffordable units to affordable units, thereby freeing up their original units for higher income renters who could better afford them.

## **Preventing Housing Instability with Emergency Assistance**

While some households need longer-term supports to keep stably housed, others could be stabilized through a

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10 "The National Housing Trust Fund: Promoting Fair Housing in State Allocation Plans." Poverty & Race Research Action Council, May 2016, [https://www.prrac.org/pdf/Promoting\\_Fair\\_Housing\\_in\\_HTF\\_State\\_Allocation\\_Plans.pdf](https://www.prrac.org/pdf/Promoting_Fair_Housing_in_HTF_State_Allocation_Plans.pdf)

11 Fischer, Will (2018). "LIHTC Could Do More to Expand Opportunity for Poor Families." <https://www.cbpp.org/research/housing/low-income-housing-tax-credit-could-do-more-to-expand-opportunity-for-poor-families>

relatively small amount of flexible, one-time financial assistance. Long before the pandemic, most renters in poverty spent at least half of their incomes on housing, leaving virtually no margin for unexpected expenses, such as car repairs, unreimbursed medical bills, natural disasters, or temporary income losses. These events can quickly send households down the spiral of housing instability, eviction, and homelessness. The need for emergency housing aid far exceeded its availability, and federal, state, and local funds that were available for crisis assistance and services were mostly used for other priorities. Every day, people become homeless who not long ago had a stable home, but their lives were disrupted by an economic crisis that a small amount of money could have fixed. Emergency assistance must be targeted to the most severely impacted; Black renters experience the highest rates of eviction filings and judgements, and nearly one in four black renters live in a county in which the black eviction rate was more than double the white eviction rate.<sup>12</sup>

Based on pre-pandemic research, tenants facing eviction often owed relatively small amounts of rent – in many cases, around one month of rent or less. In fact, across 22 states where there was available data, the median money judgment issued by a court for an eviction was \$1,253 between 2014 and 2016. Money judgments include unpaid rent plus court fees, late fees, and other costs incurred during the legal proceedings, which means that tenants faced eviction for originally failing to pay an even lesser amount. In these states, a third of money judgments were for less than the local median rent. In North Carolina, 32% of money judgments were for less than \$600. In Virginia, 22% were for less than \$600.<sup>13</sup>

As the campaign works to assist people who are already homeless or at risk due to housing instability, we must also act to minimize the number of people who fall into these perilous situations. A review of existing federal, state, and local programs that offer some form of emergency assistance and/or legal services show an uneven patchwork of support for households with low incomes. The nation needs a permanent, standing Emergency Assistance Fund (EAF) that provides short-term crisis assistance to those at imminent risk of housing instability, eviction, and homelessness. Such a program is needed in “normal” times and, as the pandemic has laid bare, in extraordinary times too.

At least three-fourths of the dollars should be used to provide flexible financial assistance to help low-income households overcome a short-term crisis that directly impacts their housing stability, and up to one-fourth of funds could be used to provide wrap-around services, such as case management, rehousing services, services to connect households to other public supports, and referrals to other services for behavioral, emotional, and mental health issues. Research is clear that providing short-term crisis assistance to keep individuals and families stably housed is much cheaper to the taxpayer than incurring the myriad of long-term costs associated with housing instability, eviction, and homelessness.<sup>14</sup> Emergency assistance programs have a strong track record of success in states and localities across the country and are among the most cost-effective policy tools available to the federal government to stabilize people in times of crisis. This concept has already received bipartisan support in Congress.

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12 Eviction Lab. <https://evictionlab.org/demographics-of-eviction/>

13 Badger, Emily. “Many Renters Who Face Eviction Owe Less than \$600,” New York Times, December 12, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/12/upshot/eviction-prevention-solutions-government.html>

14 Campaign Fact Sheet, Opportunity Starts at Home, <https://www.opportunityhome.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Emergency-Assistance-Fund-Fact-Sheet-FINAL.pdf>



# COMPLEMENTARY STATE AND LOCAL ACTION

These proposals reflect a bold vision of a vigorous federal response to the housing affordability crisis. At the same time, we acknowledge that states and localities must also expand resources, as well as implement more effective policies, if the campaign is to achieve its goal. For example, a significant expansion of HCVs at the federal level would be most effective when complemented with state and local efforts to eliminate source of income discrimination. In many states and municipalities, landlords are permitted under the law to openly discriminate against voucher holders which makes it difficult for voucher holders to find housing, especially in low-poverty neighborhoods. Also, as mentioned earlier, states must ensure that

HTF Allocation Plans promote racially and economically inclusive communities. States and localities should also enact new rules to protect renters, such as good-cause eviction and right to counsel laws, to reduce the instability that so many marginalized families experience. Moreover, states and localities should work together to reduce barriers to housing development, such as restrictive zoning policies which constrain supply, increase costs, and exacerbate residential segregation. To the maximum extent possible, the federal government should incentivize and support these complementary efforts at the state and local levels.



# MULTI-SECTOR IMPACTS

These policy solutions will improve outcomes beyond housing alone. Housing influences outcomes across many sectors and the research shows it. Students do better. Patients are healthier. People can more readily escape poverty and homelessness. The economy is stronger. And our nation is more just and equal, when all people across the country have access to safe, stable, affordable homes.

We know that housing is linked to many other sectors:



## Education

Stable, affordable homes are linked with better educational outcomes (e.g., improved test scores; fewer behavioral problems; increased graduation). Research shows that children in low income households that live in affordable housing score better on cognitive development tests than those in households with unaffordable rents, partly because parents with affordable housing can invest more in activities and materials that support their children's development. One study showed that scattered-site public housing drove stronger student academic gains and significantly reduced achievement gaps. When students suffer from health conditions related to dilapidated housing, they take those problems into the classroom which distracts them from learning. When students experience housing instability and homelessness, they move from school to school, which means a disruptive churn of different teachers and curriculum.

Moreover, because government policies have enabled white households to accumulate more wealth through homeownership, whites disproportionately live in wealthier communities with high numbers of other homeowners – and because schools are largely funded through local property taxes, these communities usually have better funded schools.



## Health

When adults and children live in stable, affordable homes, they have better physical and mental health outcomes, are at lower risk of hospitalization, and are less likely to experience other economic hardships like food insecurity. Research has shown that stable housing reduces overall healthcare expenditures by 12% for Medicaid recipients, increases the use of primary care services by 20%, and decreases emergency room visits by 18%. Young children in families who live in unstable housing are 20% more likely to be hospitalized, and those who are forced to move frequently are at increased risk of poor child health, developmental delays, and being underweight for their age. Moreover, housing instability and homelessness have been linked to increased risks of depression and mental illness for both adults and children over their lifetimes. Not only does the housing crisis cause and perpetuate individual health disparities, it also balloons healthcare costs. One study from Children's HealthWatch found that unstable housing among families with children will cost the nation \$111 billion in avoidable health-related expenditures over the next ten years.



## Food Security

Stable, affordable homes enable low-income families to devote more of their limited resources to other necessities, which is why stably housed families experience greater food security. Low-income families that live in affordable housing experience greater food security and their children are 52% less likely to be seriously underweight compared to those who are cost-burdened by rent.



## Upward Mobility

When low-income families with children used experimental housing vouchers to access affordable homes located in high-opportunity neighborhoods with low poverty, quality schools, and low crime, the children were 32% more likely to attend college and had 31% higher annual incomes as adults. In fact, younger disadvantaged children who moved to affordable housing located in lower-poverty neighborhoods earned an average of \$302,000 more over their lifetime compared to their peers in higher poverty neighborhoods. Additionally, a recent report from the Children's Defense Fund and Urban Institute found that, when it comes to child poverty reduction, expanding federal housing vouchers would have the single largest impact among nine other non-housing policies examined.



## Racial Equity

To this day, race predicts one's likelihood of experiencing rental cost-burdens, homelessness, and living in lower opportunity neighborhoods of concentrated poverty that have endured decades of intentional disinvestment. Lower wages, along with historical discrimination that prevented people of color from owning homes and building wealth, means that people of color are more likely to rent and are also more likely to struggle affording that rent. Not surprisingly, people of color are therefore dramatically overrepresented among those experiencing homelessness – in fact, African Americans represent 13% of the general population but are 40% of people experiencing homelessness

and more than 50% of homeless families with children. Additionally, due to a legacy of government-sponsored housing segregation (e.g., redlining), African American and Hispanic families are significantly more likely to live in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty compared to white families, which significantly hinders opportunity and upward mobility. According to research from the Institute for Child, Youth and Family Policy at Brandeis University, most white children live in high-opportunity neighborhoods while most Black and Hispanic children live in low-opportunity neighborhoods. Studies show that affordable housing located in inclusive, high-opportunity neighborhoods can reduce residential segregation and concentrations of poverty, which, in turn, can enhance income, economic growth, safety, property values, and educational attainment for people of color.



## Homelessness Prevention

People experience homelessness because they cannot afford a place to live. Research demonstrates that communities in which residents spend over 32% of their income on rent experience a rapid rise in homelessness; in many areas of the country, even small rent increases can place thousands of people at heightened risk of homelessness. When people do experience homelessness, they are at higher risk of premature mortality driven by extreme weather, injuries, and treatable medical conditions. Reducing homelessness not only improves individual life trajectories, but also reduces costs to all taxpayers by avoiding expensive ER visits, criminal justice encounters, shelter stays, and more.



## Economic Growth

Research shows that the shortage of affordable housing in major metropolitan areas costs the U.S. economy about \$2 trillion a year in lower wages and productivity. Without affordable housing, families have constrained opportunities to increase earnings, causing slower GDP growth. According to the National Association of Home Builders, building 100

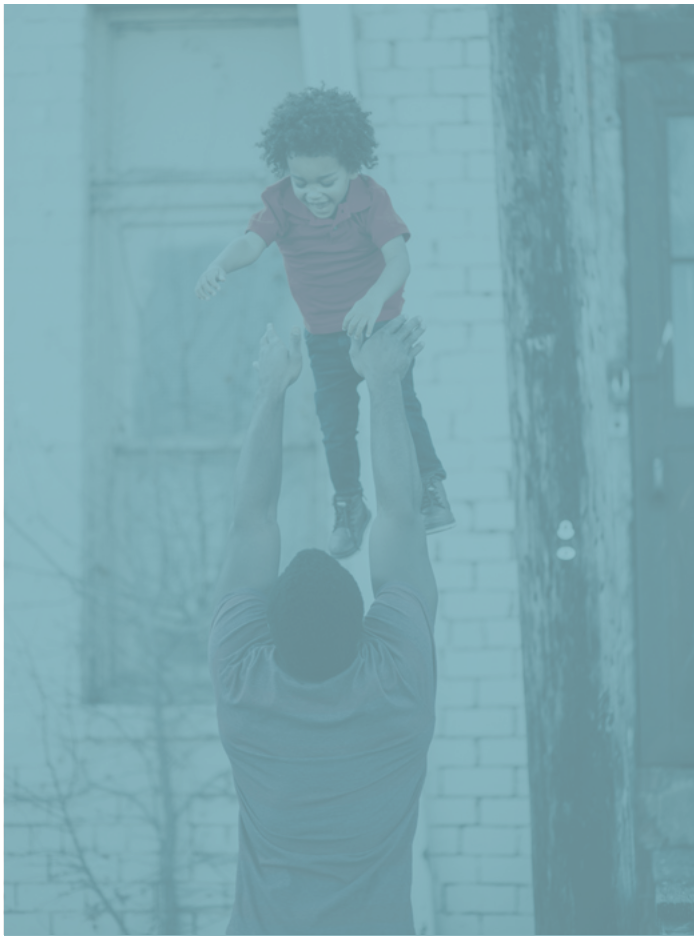


affordable rental homes generates \$11.7 million in local income, \$2.2 million in taxes and other revenue for local governments, and 161 local jobs in the first year alone.



## Climate

When housing near jobs and transit is unaffordable, low-income and working-class people, who often do not have the option to work remotely, are forced to live far away from where they work. This results in long commuting distances, which dramatically increase car-related greenhouse gas emissions. In California, where the housing affordability problem is particularly acute, roughly 40% of greenhouse gas emissions are from transportation alone. Additionally, investing in energy efficient multifamily affordable housing units means lower energy bills for cash-strapped low income families, more stable rental payments, and reduced overall air pollution.



## Criminal Justice

When people are not stably housed, they are more likely to have encounters with the criminal legal system. Moreover, individuals transitioning out of the criminal legal system face many barriers to housing and are especially susceptible to homelessness. In fact, a study found that people were most likely to experience homelessness within the first 30 days after release from prison or jail. They need stable housing so that they can reconnect with society and rebuild their lives. Formerly incarcerated individuals who find stable affordable housing are less likely to go back to jail and prison than those who do not.



## Domestic Violence

Victims of domestic violence struggle to find long-term, affordable housing after escaping abusive relationships. As affordable housing options become scarcer, victims stay longer in emergency domestic violence shelters or they are turned away due to capacity limitations. According to one survey, 83% of domestic violence survivors entering shelters identified “finding housing I can afford” as a need. This was second only to “safety for myself.”



## LGBTQ Equity

As a result of discrimination, LGBTQ people are more likely to experience homelessness and housing instability than non-LGBTQ people. Studies show that LGBTQ youth and young adults are 120% more likely than their heterosexual and cisgender peers to experience homelessness, which can significantly impede their economic mobility, educational achievement, and physical and mental health. In fact, 40% of all homeless youth identify as LGBTQ.

Please see the campaign’s website at [www.opportunityhome.org/related-sectors](http://www.opportunityhome.org/related-sectors) to learn more and explore the research presented in this section.



## Veterans

After serving our country bravely, veterans need access to decent, stable, affordable housing so they can thrive in the very neighborhoods they swore to defend. In 2012, about 1.79 million low-income veterans were cost-burdened (paying more than 30% of their income on housing), and 762,000 were severely costburdened (paying more than 50%).

In 2014, rental assistance helped 343,000 veterans afford housing. Rental assistance for veterans has proven highly effective in dramatically reducing homelessness, but there remains significant unmet need.



## Gender Equity

Fair access to safe, accessible, and affordable housing is vital to the wellbeing of women and girls. Women, and particularly women of color, are overrepresented in the low-paid workforce, and therefore disproportionately struggle with high rents, eviction, and homelessness. In January 2020, 228,199 women, girls, transgender people, and gender non-conforming people experienced homelessness. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, studies found that Black and Latina women renters face higher eviction rates than men and, throughout the pandemic, Black, Latina, and Asian women were more likely to be behind on rent.



# SOLVING THE CRISIS REQUIRES ROBUST INVESTMENTS

Solving the housing affordability crisis requires investments that will bring proven solutions to scale. The necessary investments will be substantial, yet are within our means.

The costs of reaching our goal depend heavily on the particular design and mix of policy strategies that policymakers choose. To get a sense of the magnitude of cost, here are some examples of ambitious proposals put forth recently by a bipartisan set of sponsors:

- The Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) has recommended that federal rental assistance be made available to all eligible households with incomes at or below 30 percent of Area Median Income who apply for such assistance. At the time of its report, BPC estimated the annual cost of providing this increased coverage would be approximately \$22.5 billion.<sup>15</sup>
- The Children's Defense Fund has proposed to provide housing vouchers to all families with children with incomes below 150 percent of the poverty line, and for whom market rents are unaffordable. This proposal, which the Urban Institute estimated would cost \$22.3 billion annually, would dramatically reduce family homelessness and lift an estimated 2.1 million children out of poverty, thereby reducing child poverty by 22 percent.<sup>16</sup>

- The Turner Center for Housing Innovation modeled three variations of new renter's tax credits that would significantly reduce housing costs for low-income households. These proposals would serve between 13.3 – 15.1 million households and cost between \$41 - \$76 billion annually depending on the program design.<sup>17</sup>
- The Bipartisan Policy Center has proposed a new emergency assistance program that would invest \$3 billion annually to help an estimated 2.4 million households experiencing temporary financial crises to avert the loss of housing.<sup>18</sup>

Our nation could comfortably afford more robust and equitable housing policy solutions, if we chose to make them a priority. Consider, for example, that:

- The 2017 tax cut law, which disproportionately benefited the nation's corporations and highest-income households, is projected to cost \$1.9 trillion over the coming decade.
- According to economist Gabriel Zucman, U.S. companies have been avoiding around \$70 billion each year in taxes by shifting profits to offshore tax havens.<sup>19</sup>
- The *annual* cost of the mortgage-interest deduction, which disproportionately benefits wealthier homeowners and does little to increase homeownership rates, is roughly \$77 billion.

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19 Zucman, Gabriel. *The Hidden Wealth of Nations*. University of Chicago Press, 2015.



- Research from Children’s HealthWatch found that unstable housing among families with children will cost the U.S. \$111 billion in avoidable health and education expenditures over the next ten years.<sup>20</sup>

We have the resources to invest in solutions — what is missing is the political will to

fund these solutions at the scale necessary. Investments in affordable homes will generate multiplying returns in the form of higher educational attainment, increased economic mobility and productivity, reduced healthcare expenditures, increased investments to local economies, new jobs, and more.

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20 “Stable Homes Make Healthy Families.” Children’s HealthWatch. <http://childrenshealthwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/CHW-Stable-Homes-2-pager-web.pdf>.



# THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW

Being able to afford a decent home is a prerequisite for opportunity. The promises that our leaders make every election cycle — better health, better economic opportunity, better education — can be fulfilled only if our nation's families have safe, decent, affordable homes in which to live. The nation's housing sector is broken, at least for those people at the bottom of the income scale — and the consequences affect all of us.





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## FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about the campaign and ways you can get involved,  
visit [www.opportunityhome.org](http://www.opportunityhome.org).

You can also contact Mike Koprowski, National Campaign Director,  
at [mkoprowski@nlihc.org](mailto:mkoprowski@nlihc.org) or Chantelle Wilkinson, National Campaign  
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