



# Leveraging the American Rescue Plan's Housing Resources to Help Families

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JULY 2021





This brief was made possible in collaboration with Casey Family Programs, whose mission is to provide, improve – and ultimately prevent the need for – foster care.

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For too long, we have heavily relied on institutional settings such as homeless shelters, jails and prisons, nursing homes, and foster care to house individuals and families in crisis.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, state mandates such as 'shelter-in-place and 'quarantine at home' spotlighted on the devastating consequences for people without a place to call home and affirmed the value of stable housing as an essential component for public health, safety, and stability.

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), signed into law by President Biden in March, provides \$1.9 trillion to states, counties, and local jurisdictions for COVID-19 relief, including \$31.6 billion allocated for housing assistance and services and an additional \$9.1 billion set aside expressly for various services.

In addition, ARPA gives jurisdictions the flexibility to spend \$360 billion on benefits such as supplemental housing and service resources. This significant influx of resources can be used to invest in system responses that prioritize prevention-oriented strategies, leverage housing as a central resource for public health, and provide access to support services in communities where people live.

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## What is Supportive Housing?

Safe, stable, affordable housing is essential to the health and well-being of families from all walks of life. Children and youth who have a reliable place to call home are more likely to flourish in their development and be healthy later in life. In recent years, new resources to provide family-centered services and prevent unnecessary entries into foster care along with increased attention on child and family well-being, human services agencies are gaining a better understanding of the role housing plays in ensuring a family's stability, well-being, and mental and physical health.

Good health and childhood development are at risk for families who experience housing instability for any reason. The housing needs of families can vary, however. For many, short-term rental assistance or a long-term [housing voucher to help cover rent](#) may be enough to assist them in achieving housing stability. Families with more intensive service needs, however, may benefit from supportive housing.

Supportive housing is a model that combines quality affordable housing with trauma-informed services to support family stability and well-being. Supportive housing uses a "Housing-First" approach, prioritizing access to permanent housing quickly for families experiencing homelessness or housing instability.

This often means that families can stay together while receiving child welfare prevention services and may continue engaging in services via supportive housing for as long as they choose. In addition, for families with children in out-of-home placements, supportive housing can help families reunify more quickly and provide them ongoing support services over time that help maintain well-being and even thrive.

The components of [supportive housing](#) include:

- A focus on households whose heads of households are experiencing homelessness, are at risk of homelessness or are inappropriately staying in an institutional setting. They may be facing multiple barriers to employment and housing stability, including mental illness, substance use, and/or other disabling or chronic health condition,
- Affordability, meaning the tenant household pays no more than 30% of its income toward rent,
- Tenant households provided with a lease or sublease identical to non-supportive housing, with no limits on the length of tenancy, as long as lease terms and conditions are met,
- Proactively engages members of the tenant household with a flexible and comprehensive array of supportive services, without requiring participation in services as a condition of the ongoing tenancy,
- Effectively coordinates with key service partners to address issues resulting from substance use, mental health, and other crises, with a focus on fostering housing stability,

- Supports tenants in connecting with community-based resources and activities, interacting with diverse individuals, including those without disabilities, and building strong social support networks, and
- Elevates the voices of those with lived expertise, looking to them to lead efforts to develop programmatic solutions and inform funding decisions.





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## Supportive Housing Needs Assessment for Child Welfare Involved Families and Youth

The 2020 Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) Report indicates housing instability was a precipitating factor for a child's removal for at least 10% of foster care cases during the fiscal year 2019<sup>ii</sup>. The results are consistent with previous AFCARS reports. While lack of housing should not necessitate child welfare involvement, housing instability alongside additional challenges such as substance use or mental health needs can affect the overall placement decision.

As jurisdictions also do not uniformly track and report on housing indicators, the numbers reported in AFCARS are also likely undercounted. With this in mind, CSH estimates that some 43,667 families with children placed in foster care would benefit from supportive housing<sup>iii</sup>. The estimation considers two factors: repeat episodes of child welfare involvement and unstable housing as circumstances associated with the children's removal<sup>iv</sup>.

Housing insecurity and repeat involvement with the child welfare system point to potential ongoing or episodic behavioral or mental health challenges that supportive housing can help address. Moreover, preventive services provided in combination with affordable housing have also proven influential in recovery from addiction, educational success, and strong parent-child relationships. The process also requires minimal pre-conditions (e.g., sobriety, treatment compliance, program participation, etc.), thus serving as a platform from which families can effectively address the issues that initially brought them to the attention of child welfare in the first place. Even if families no longer need services, their affordable housing remains in place, supporting long-term housing security.

Additionally, approximately one-third of youth who have experienced homelessness also have a history in foster care<sup>v</sup>. This group of youth is often more likely to have an unstable connection to family, be more vulnerable to exploitation, earn an income below the poverty line, and have a history of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, neglect, and abandonment. Many avoid accessing supportive services, including those that promote stable housing and emotional and physical well-being, due to negative past experiences with public systems. Without a foundation of family and skills to transition to adulthood successfully, these youth are at heightened risk for adverse life outcomes as adults.

CSH estimates that 5,133 of these youth would benefit from supportive housing when factoring in incidences of post-traumatic stress disorder, trauma, and mental health needs. In addition, like the support that families receive, youth can also access ongoing support and skill-building services through the supportive housing model.

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## Shifting to Prevention with Supportive Housing

Supportive housing can provide a life-changing solution for youth and families who experience housing instability alongside additional challenges such as substance use or mental health needs. Children and youth who have a reliable place to call home spend fewer days in foster care, experience a reduction in subsequent abuse and neglect cases, reduce their risk of subsequent homelessness, and increase their school attendance<sup>vi</sup>.

Moreover, leaders in the child welfare sector do not need to be the experts in the supportive housing model or have available funding to ensure access to available supportive housing units and resources for the families that come to their attention. Instead, supportive housing uses a multi-sector strategy that changes how public agencies and providers work with families facing multiple challenges. This strategy identifies inadequately housed families with complex service needs and most at risk of ongoing support needs. Critical aspects of a successful, supportive housing model include [cross-system collaboration](#), [data sharing](#), and [aligning resources to prioritize families and youth](#).

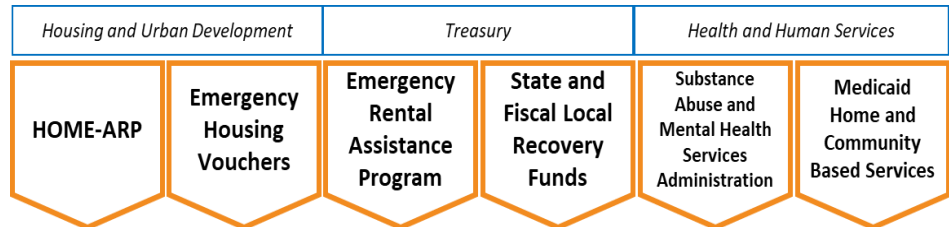
Further, supportive housing can serve as a platform for delivering preventive services and other evidence-based practices and interventions in state Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) prevention plans. FFPSA has provided a way for states to focus on prevention and planning, including helping to address housing instability in families through partnerships.

The available resources from ARPA outlined below can support both short-term actions to rapidly assist child-welfare-involved families with their housing needs and kick-start the development of a supportive housing cross-system collaboration that support data integration and realigning resources.

# Key ARPA Provisions for Housing and Services

The chart below provides an overview of available ARPA funds that can be used for housing and support services.

## Available ARPA funds that can be used for housing and services



	HOME-ARP	Emergency Housing Vouchers	Emergency Rental Assistance Program	State and Fiscal Local Recovery Funds	Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration	Medicaid Home and Community Based Services
Develop New Units	✓			✓		
Housing Navigation Services	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Supportive Services	✓			✓	✓	✓
Behavioral Health Services				✓	✓	✓
Housing Support Services					✓	✓
Acquire, Develop, Convert, Rehab Units to Supportive Housing	✓			✓		
Tenant-Based Rental Assistance	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Security Deposit Assistance		✓	✓	✓		
Utility Assistance		✓	✓	✓		
Flexible Housing Pool	✓			✓		
Operating Reserves	✓					
Data and Evaluation	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Tenants' Rights	✓			✓		

It's important to note that many of the resources listed above have applications outside of their uses for supportive housing, including helping families on the cusp of eviction or at risk of homelessness who may only need financial support. It is up to the receiving jurisdictions to determine the local needs and how to apply funds and resources. With that in mind, there are several ways to ensure the resources target those who will benefit from them the most.



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# Short-term Opportunities to Prioritize Child Welfare Involved Families with ARPA Funding

## 1. Emergency Rental Assistance Program

The [Emergency Rental Assistance Program](#) (ERA) includes \$21.55 billion for individuals and families who cannot pay rent or utilities and may face eviction<sup>[vii]</sup>. ARPA requires that jurisdictions target households with the greatest need, but it is up to the local jurisdiction to determine need criteria. By working with the local administering body, child welfare agencies can prioritize families who benefit from this financial resource. While some jurisdictions are working to [prioritize resources based on income levels, household makeup, geographic areas hardest hit by COVID-19, and more](#), ERA is best positioned to help families who do not need supportive housing but require financial support to remain stably housed. These funds, issued from the U.S. Department of Treasury, are administered to [states, territories, and tribes](#) through various state and local agencies.

## 2. Emergency Housing Vouchers

Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHVs) includes \$5 billion issued from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) targeted towards individuals and families experiencing homelessness, at risk of homelessness, recently homeless, have a risk of housing instability, or are fleeing or attempting to flee domestic/dating violence or human trafficking. Families receiving EHVs can also receive support in housing search assistance, move-in deposits and fees, moving expenses, essential household items, and renter's insurance. Providers can search the HUD website to identify the local administering Public Housing Agency (PHA) for determining if EHVs are available locally.<sup>vii</sup>. Jurisdictions cannot reissue EHVs after September 2023 if a family is issued an EHV before then, but they can continue to use it as long as they need it.

PHAs are responsible for issuing EHVs to families. Families are referred to PHAs through the local Continuum of Care (CoC). If the CoC does not have sufficient families to direct, the PHA can receive referrals from outside sources. To accept referrals from external sources, the PHA must enter into a partnership with the referring entity. The referring entity needs to certify if the referred families are homeless, at risk of homelessness, or fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence. The PHA in partnership with the COC and other referring partners, may also set a family preference for EHVs<sup>viii</sup>.

EHVs are tenant-based vouchers, meaning that families are issued a voucher directly and use it to rent any unit from a private landlord that accepts vouchers. EHVs can be used alone as financial support to help families obtain housing or remain stably housed. If the PHA is already working with partners that provide community-based services, EHVs may also be used for supportive housing.

As there is a limited number of EHVs, families may also access Housing Choice Vouchers (HCVs). While all the other resources identified in this section are one-time, time-limited resources issued through ARPA, HCV is the standard voucher program that is available on a continuous basis. HCVs can be leveraged alongside EHV to maximize all available vouchers. HCVs can be either tenant-based or project-based, meaning that the voucher is attached to a specific unit rather than issued directly to a family. Having several project-based vouchers in one building allows supportive housing providers to

have on-site services, which improves overall access to services for tenants in the building.

Some [jurisdictions](#) are also exploring [Moving On](#) programs, giving families in project-based HCV units who no longer need supportive service an EHV. This flexibility allows them to maintain their low-cost rent in a new apartment while opening a unit for a family in need of assistance. This type of model is best used in communities that do not already have the necessary partnerships and services infrastructure to provide supportive housing services with a tenant-based EHV or situations where a family would prefer on-site services directly in their building.

PHAs with Housing Choice Vouchers also can create local preferences that reflect the community's needs. For example, based on regional preferences, some families and youth may move to the top of a waiting list as units become available. In addition, PHAs may have allocations of vouchers to serve specific populations such as families or youth with child welfare involvement or those households with veterans or members with disabling conditions. Child welfare agencies should contact the local PHA to explore memorandum of understanding (MOU) opportunities to act as a referring partner for EVs and discuss options to include preferences for EHV and HCVs for child-welfare-involved families.

### 3. State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds

State and Fiscal Local Recovery Funds (SLFR) provides \$350 billion in funding for states, counties, metropolitan cities, territories, and tribal governments<sup>ix</sup>. While SLFR is, in part, intended to replace lost revenue in jurisdictions, there is significant flexibility with how the funds can be used. Some jurisdictions are using SLFR for capital to create a pipeline for more affordable housing units. Others are increasing access to rental assistance. Some are considering flexible housing pools that would seed additional services for families in supportive housing. SLFR is issued from the U.S. Department of Treasury, with legislative or executive leadership responsible for deciding how to allocate the funds locally. Coordinating with the housing sector to connect with government leadership will be vital to advocating to apply these funds toward housing and services activities and prioritizing them to address the needs of families.

### 4. HOME-ARP

The [HOME-ARP](#), issued through HUD, provides \$5 billion to states and local jurisdictions. Like the EHV program, HOME-ARP targets individuals and families who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, fleeing or attempting to flee domestic/dating violence or human trafficking, or when additional supportive services or assistance would prevent homelessness or help those at risk of housing instability. As noted in the chart above, HOME-ARP can be used in assisting with finding an apartment, paying rent, or support services. [Participating jurisdictions and each jurisdiction's allocation](#) can be found on the HUD website<sup>[xi]</sup>. Many jurisdictions are still actively deciding how to use these funds and waiting for HUD guidance to determine the application of these funds towards supportive housing.

### 5. Health and Human Services Funds

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services issued additional ARPA resources that focus on health and behavioral health. States are eligible for a [10 percent increase to the federal reimbursement of Medicaid](#) dollars. States must use funds to implement new or expand existing home and community-

based services in order to qualify. This includes a wide range of activities, including housing support services and activities such as developing cross-sector partnerships and integrating data across systems. This increase is available until March 2022.

Other mental health and substance use disorder block grants from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) totaling \$3.7 billion are available through September 2025. Mental health block grants will be [issued to states and territories](#) to provide comprehensive community mental health services and address gaps in existing services. The substance abuse prevention and treatment block grants will be [given to states, territories, and tribes](#) to implement and evaluate programs to prevent and treat substance use disorders and investments in existing programs. As families in supportive housing with episodic involvement in child welfare may benefit from ongoing access to mental health and substance use services to maintain their stability, these resources provide additional funding for services.

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# Long-term Strategies for Cross-Sector Collaboration

While this brief is intended to support activation around ARPA funds, it is important to note opportunities for long-term cross-sector collaboration.

## 1. Interagency Collaboration

The [key partners](#) needed to create supportive housing for high-need families include child welfare, housing entities, non-profit social service providers, and additional systems and community partners that provide linkages to health, behavioral health, schools, public assistance, early care and education, legal services, and domestic violence, among others. Coordinating with housing partners to streamline rental assistance and subsidies, case management, supportive housing services, and evidence-based child welfare services available to families can help keep families together or reunify them more quickly.

## 2. Share Data

The use of administrative data is critical to understanding the full scope of housing issues and the needs of the families across systems that provide services and supports. Funding to create integrated data systems is available across multiple ARPA funding streams. Linking data from the Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) and Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) will help identify families who would benefit from housing and services support. When such systems can talk with each other and share information, they can more effectively address families' needs and assist them in meeting their reunification, preservation, housing stability, and wellness goals.

Myths and challenges to sharing data and information are plentiful. Often agencies will default to not sharing any data or information due to privacy and confidentiality laws. In many cases, creating a data-sharing agreement between partners can help to set up parameters and protocols that protect participant privacy under applicable laws.

## 3. Housing Screening for Child Welfare Agencies

Matching child welfare and homelessness response system data may not identify all families experiencing housing instability or homelessness. For example, a recent match in Los Angeles between the child welfare and homeless systems found that two-thirds of homeless families were involved with child welfare; however, the match only included people identifying as families, leaving out single adults in a shelter who may have already had children removed<sup>x</sup>.

Some families also do not have access to formal homelessness response system resources, may be turned away due to a lack of shelter availability or may not meet a specified definition of homelessness. Child welfare systems may find housing instability is underreported due to data system limitations, agency policy or practice, case worker training, or case worker input. There are approaches to improve information on families' housing status throughout the child welfare process that includes:

- Embedding housing screening questions within child welfare intake or assessment tools;
- Using common housing screening questions across partner agencies/public systems; and

- Screening for housing instability at key points throughout the process, not just at initial intake as family circumstances may change

The best approach to developing housing screening questions and tools is working with people with lived experience to provide input and lead the design of the process.

#### 4. Address and Center Equity

Black, Indigenous, and Latinx families are disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic along with historical inequities and discriminatory policies and practices in both the housing and child welfare sectors. For example, Black families are 5.85 times more likely to be homeless and 2.57 times more likely to be involved in the child welfare system when compared to families of other races. Indigenous families are 3.54 times more likely to be involved in the child welfare system and 2.4 times more likely to be homeless. Latinx families are 2.43 times more likely to be homeless and 1.04 times more likely to be involved in the child welfare system<sup>xi</sup>. LGBTQ+ youth are 120% more likely to experience homelessness, with 89% of this group disproportionately Black<sup>xii</sup>.

To shift this paradigm, collaboration must focus on implicit biases in budgetary, programmatic, and policy decisions. As an initial step, persons with lived experience must be at the table to co-design the services and supports that will address their needs to ensure the successful development and implementation of housing programs. Housing and child welfare systems should utilize data disaggregated by race alongside qualitative data from families with lived experience to understand better and address racial disparities and develop concrete actions to advance racial equity in the development and delivery of housing services.

#### 5. Integrate Housing into Family First Title IV-E Prevention Plans

Addressing housing instability with evidence-based services is a critical cornerstone to strengthening families through primary prevention strategies and Family First Title IV-E Prevention plans. Supporting families by ensuring they have stable housing is critical to keep families safely together and prevent unnecessary involvement with child welfare systems. Jurisdictions should also assess their data to see how housing instability considerations affect the placement of children into foster care and explore how they might integrate into housing considerations into the “candidacy for foster care” definitions. Many evidence-based programs and services approved by the [Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse](#) have evidence of helping families remain together safely in their communities when paired with specific housing support and ongoing community support services<sup>xiii</sup>.

Interagency collaboration can have lasting effects on the families served, child welfare practice, and the broader community. Creating solutions to stabilize families requires staff from different agencies working together on a case-by-case basis on the front lines and at the agency leadership, administrative, and executive levels. Collaborations between housing and child welfare are critical for securing housing and support services for the families that need them most and the necessary resource commitments to adopt practices into standard agency practice.

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## About CSH



CSH, the Corporation for Supportive Housing, is the national leader in supportive housing, focusing it on person-centered growth, recovery, and success that contributes to the health and wellbeing of the entire community.

Our greatest asset is our team. From our Board of Directors to staff, we work every day to build healthier people and communities. Through our consulting, training, policy, and lending, we advance innovation and help create quality supportive housing. Our hub offices drive initiatives in 48 states and more than 300 communities, where CSH investments create thousands of homes and generate billions of dollars in economic activity.

**csb.org**

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<sup>i</sup> There are primarily two types of vouchers available to families – Housing Choice Vouchers/HCV (often referred to as Section 8) and FUP vouchers which is a program within the HCV program. More information can be found at: [https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/FUP\\_FACT\\_SHEET.PDF](https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/FUP_FACT_SHEET.PDF)

<sup>ii</sup> The Children’s Bureau, 2020 AFCARS Report <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/afcarsreport27.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> CSH Supportive Housing Needs Assessment: <https://www.csh.org/supportive-housing-101/data/>

<sup>iv</sup> More information can be found: [https://d155kunxf1aozz.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/DATAREFERENCES\\_web.pdf](https://d155kunxf1aozz.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/DATAREFERENCES_web.pdf)

<sup>v</sup> Chapin Hall (2019). Voices of Youth- Missed Opportunities: Pathways from Foster Care to Youth Homelessness in America.

<sup>vi</sup> Metis Associates (2010), Keeping Families Together: An evaluation of implementation and outcomes of a pilot of supportive housing models for families involved in the child welfare system.

<sup>vii</sup> More information on HUD’s Emergency Housing Vouchers can be found at: <https://www.hud.gov/ehv>

<sup>viii</sup> Emergency Housing Voucher Operating Regulations can be found here: <https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/PIH/documents/PIH2021-15.pdf>

<sup>ix</sup> More information on the State and Fiscal Local Recovery funds and allocations per jurisdiction can be found at: <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/coronavirus/assistance-for-state-local-and-tribal-governments/state-and-local-fiscal-recovery-funds>

<sup>x</sup> Foust, R., Nghiem, H.T., Prindle, J., Hoonhout, J., McCroskey, J., Putnam-Hornstein, E. (2019): Child protection involvement among homeless families, *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15548732.2019.1651437>

<sup>xi</sup> CSH Racial Disparities and Disproportionality Index: <https://www.csh.org/supportive-housing-101/data/>

<sup>xii</sup> Supporting Partnerships for Anti-Racist Communities: Phase One Study Finding, (2018). The Center for Social Innovation.

<sup>xiii</sup> Examples of EBPs already approved by the Clearinghouse and being used for child welfare involved families in supportive housing include –Parent-Child Interaction Therapy, Trauma Focused-Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Multisystemic Therapy, Parents as Teachers, Motivational Interviewing, and Healthy Families America.