

# Addressing Housing Instability Through Systems Alignment and Coordination

*Highlights from a housing and human services policy discussion at the fall 2017 National Governors Association Center for Best Practices Policy Institute for Governors' Human Services Advisors<sup>1</sup>*

## Executive Summary

States and communities work continuously to better address the needs of people facing housing instability and crisis, especially those struggling through addiction and mental health disorders. These individuals and their families are among the most regular users of public systems, experiencing frequent and multiple contacts with courts, corrections systems, emergency shelters, hospitals, child welfare and other costly public services.<sup>2</sup> This constant rotation of systems involvement indicates the relative instability of and need for additional support for low-income children and families.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, frequent users of public systems create significant strain on public budgets.<sup>4</sup> Dozens of communities are turning to models that embrace systems alignment, coordination and partnerships, relying more on data-driven solutions to improve outcomes for some of the most impoverished and vulnerable people in the United States.<sup>5</sup> This issue brief presents a set of models states can consider when addressing housing instability through systems alignment and coordination.

## Returning Home: Successful Reentry and Reintegration

- *Aligning Corrections + Mental Health + Housing*
- *Using Prerelease Data for Postrelease Support*

The **Ohio** Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) implemented a reentry-supportive housing model called “Returning Home Ohio” (RHO) to provide intensive prerelease coordination and postrelease housing and services to people the state has identified as “at risk of homelessness upon release” and as having a substance use, mental health or serious behavioral health disorder.

A rigorous evaluation found that participants were 60 percent less likely to be reincarcerated and 40 percent less likely to be rearrested for any crime. They also received 290 percent more mental health and substance abuse service days than the comparison group. Furthermore, a cost study found that RHO participation resulted in lower criminal justice system costs.<sup>6</sup> Since the program’s inception in 2006, ODRC has invested more than \$5 million to provide rental subsidies, tenant assistance, support services, evaluation and project management.

## Frequent Users Systems Engagement: Ending the Crisis Systems Cycle

- *Aligning Corrections + Courts + Health Care + Housing*
- *Identifying Frequent Utilizers Through Cross-Agency Data Matching*

Frequent Users Systems Engagement (FUSE) is a model in which communities use extensive data to identify and engage high utilizers of public systems and place them in supportive housing to break the cycle of their repeated use of costly crisis services such as emergency departments, shelters and the criminal justice system.<sup>7</sup> Through partnerships among local corrections, hospitals, courts and housing agencies, 35 communities across the country are providing supportive housing to their top system utilizers—and lowering costs in the process.

The **Connecticut** Departments of Correction, Mental Health and Addiction Services, and Social Services launched a structured FUSE demonstration that targets

the top users of corrections and homelessness services. The first 120 people housed experienced a near-total decrease in shelter days and a 73 percent reduction in jail days after just one year. Based on this success, Connecticut has expanded the initiative from 30 to 190 supportive housing units.

## Keeping Families Together

- *Aligning Goals Across Child Welfare + Housing*
- *Matching Child Welfare Data + Housing Need*

Keeping Families Together (KFT) supportive housing is a model that offers families with children who are at risk of recurring involvement in the child welfare system a stable, safe home environment so that they can move forward as a family unit, which evidence shows is preferable to parent-child separation. Currently active in seven states, KFT provides access to affordable housing and essential support that helps every member of the family. This model is reuniting children with their parents, reducing unnecessary foster care placements and lowering costs.<sup>8</sup>

The **New Jersey** Department of Children and Families (DCF) used state funds to launch a KFT program in 2014. DCF used data to identify the most frequently encountered families that face homelessness and also experience multiple complex challenges to family progress and socioeconomic mobility. Through a partnership with the state housing agency and the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, DCF now provides supportive housing to families with children at risk of or in out-of-home placement and who are also deemed ready for reunification with parents for whom housing instability is the only barrier. The initiative has seen early success consistent with improved housing

stability for families and a reduction in child abuse and neglect reports. Based on promising early results, New Jersey has expanded the program to a target of 173 units by the end of 2017.

## Governors Play a Critical Role in Helping Low-Income Families Stay Housed

Housing security is a key component of families' economic stability. Addressing the housing needs of low-income families is an opportunity for governors to demonstrate compassion and leadership while partnering with federal, state, county, local and private sector partners to identify innovations in public service. Supportive housing is a proven intervention that pairs subsidized housing with coordinated support services, and opportunities exist for state leadership to create cross-jurisdictional relationships to provide unified fronts on certain issues.

In addition to Governor Chris Christie's work in the New Jersey KFT model, **California** Governor Jerry Brown in 2016 signed the No Place Like Home initiative into law, establishing a \$10 million Bringing Families Home state grant to house child welfare-involved families experiencing homelessness. The effort, led by the California Department of Social Services and county child welfare agencies, provides families with stable, safe housing to prevent out-of-home placement and facilitate children's reunification with birth parents.

Governors have an opportunity to use their executive leadership to work with their state's leaders to streamline safety net efforts and support cross-system collaboration to serve vulnerable populations.

“My administration has made eliminating homelessness for New Jersey citizens a key priority through a variety of programs, including Keeping Families Together, which provides families with the support services they need to get them back on track and stand on their own. Our homelessness efforts are an investment in the future, giving parents the opportunity and stability in their lives to reconnect with their children or to literally keep their families together.” - **New Jersey** Governor Chris Christie<sup>9</sup>

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices Policy Institute for Governors' Human Services Advisors is an annual convening of governors' human services policy advisors, secretaries and directors of human services agencies and state child welfare commissioners. The institute is designed to convene policy leaders and administrators from U.S. territories and states to highlight innovations and best practices in serving children and families and to provide opportunities for peer-to-peer consultation and learning. The 2017 fourth plenary meeting on housing and human services included the following state policy specialists: Erin Burns-Maine, director of state policy, Corporation for Supportive Housing; Sharon McDonald, director, families and youth, National Alliance to End Homelessness; Kelly Sinko, policy development coordinator, Office of Policy and Management, State of Connecticut; and Janel Winter, director of community resources, New Jersey Department of Community Affairs. For a summary of past institute convenings, including the 2017 meeting, please see <https://www.nga.org/cms/center/issues/eo/human-services>.

<sup>2</sup> MacDonald, R., Kaba, F., Rosner, Z., Vise, A., Weiss, D., Brittner, M., . . . Venters, H. (2015). The Rikers Island hot spotters: Defining the needs of the most frequently incarcerated. *American Journal of Public Health*, 105(11), 2262–2268. Retrieved from <http://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2015.302785>; Johnson Listwan, S., & LaCourse, A. (2017). MeckFUSE pilot project: Process & outcome evaluation findings. Retrieved from <https://www.mecknc.gov/CommunitySupportServices/HomelessServices/SiteAssets/Pages/MeckFUSE-Evaluation/Final%20MeckFUSE%20Outcome%20Evaluation%20Report%20Sept%202017%20%28002%29.pdf>; and Aidala, A. A., McAllister, W., Yomogida, M., & Shubert, V. (2013). Frequent Users Service Enhance "FUSE" initiative: New York City FUSE II evaluation report. Retrieved from [http://www.csh.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/FUSE-Eval-Report-Final\\_Linked.pdf](http://www.csh.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/FUSE-Eval-Report-Final_Linked.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Jonson-Reid, M., Emery, C. R., Drake, B., & Stahlschmidt, M. J. (2010). Understanding chronically reported families. *Child Maltreatment*, 15(4), 271–281. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3628675>.

<sup>4</sup> National Association of Counties & CSH. (2013). Supportive housing for justice-involved frequent users of county public systems: A guide for county officials. Retrieved from [http://www.naco.org/sites/default/files/documents/Supportive\\_Housing\\_2013.pdf](http://www.naco.org/sites/default/files/documents/Supportive_Housing_2013.pdf); and MacDonald et al., The Rikers Island hot spotters.

<sup>5</sup> Brooks, J., & Wills, M. (2015). Data-driven approaches to delivering better outcomes. Retrieved from <https://www.nga.org/files/live/sites/NGA/files/pdf/2015/1415CIDataandEvidence.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Fontaine, J., Gilchrist-Scott, D., Roman, J., Taxy, S., & Roman, C. (2012). Supportive housing for returning prisoners: Outcomes and impacts of the Returning Home-Ohio pilot project. Retrieved from [http://www.csh.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Report\\_Supportive-Housing-for-Returning-Prisoners\\_Aug12.pdf](http://www.csh.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Report_Supportive-Housing-for-Returning-Prisoners_Aug12.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Aidala et al., Frequent Users Service Enhancement "FUSE" initiative.

<sup>8</sup> Swann-Jackson, R., Tapper, D., & Fields, A. (2010). Keeping Families Together: An evaluation of the implementation and outcomes of a pilot supportive housing model for families involved in the child welfare system. Retrieved from [http://www.metisassociates.com/publications/downloads/Metis\\_11-10\\_KFTRreport.pdf](http://www.metisassociates.com/publications/downloads/Metis_11-10_KFTRreport.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> State of New Jersey, Office of the Governor. (2017). Governor Christie announces expansion of successful homelessness reduction program [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.publicnow.com/view/CC9BE56773F66D4992800C413D962FACED5BCCDF>.