



2017 PAHRC REPORT:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Housing Drives Community Sustainability

Housing is the starting point for building sustainable communities that are poised to provide for residents now and into the future. Researchers estimate the cost of unsustainable and non-inclusive community development to be in the billions of dollars, with many communities currently positioned to provide a lower quality of life to future residents. The 2017 PAHRC Report explores the ways in which housing can shape resiliency and boost sustainability for individuals and the communities in which they live. It highlights how housing made affordable through publicly supported housing programs, in particular, plays a key part in ensuring that communities can attract and retain residents and provide them with opportunities to thrive and reach their full potential.

Protecting the Most Vulnerable and Providing Paths to Resilience

Publicly supported housing provides 7.1 million households with a stable, adequate, and affordable home; households that include 5.6 million children, 2.5 million seniors, 2.7 million disabled individuals. It is also a critical resource for working families, helping 1.87 million low-income families earning the majority of their income through wages make ends meet and build their financial security. Over 75% of able-bodied working-age households living in publicly supported housing have at least one member working. Publicly supported housing also allows household members to care for family members that may be very young, aging, or disabled. Caregivers for children under six, seniors over 82, or a disabled individual represent just under half of all able-bodied working-age adults receiving rental assistance.

Affordable housing promotes stability. Low-income families experience more instability, with nearly twice as many households at or just above the poverty line reporting a move in 2016 compared to their higher income counterparts (15.3% to 6.8%). Yet only thirty-six percent of households receiving rental assistance reported a move between 2013 and 2015 compared to 51% of their unassisted low-income peers. Affordable rents also allow families to set aside money to save for emergencies or invest in their future, which enhances their financial security. Providing all cost-burdened low-income renter households in the US with rental

assistance would be a significant step in reducing poverty and promoting economic mobility, giving households an addition \$3,848 dollars per year to save or spend on improving health, furthering education, or expanding employment options by defraying childcare and transportation costs.

Living in publicly supported housing also provides a healthier and more supportive environment than unassisted rental units affordable to low-income families. For example, publicly supported units are subject to inspections and regulations that insist on meeting national health standards. Rent-assisted households also report significantly higher rates of neighborhood meeting attendance, solving neighborhood problems, speaking with local officials, and talking with neighbors than their unassisted peers.

Promoting Sustainable Communities

Economic Sustainability

Affordable housing investments leverage dollars most effectively to promote economic mobility for low-income families, save money for communities, and stimulate economic growth. Improving energy efficiency in affordable housing units, preserving housing units rather than rebuilding lost units, and providing affordable housing options in all communities provides a return on investment that saves families and communities money. Housing investments can also create a multiplier effect for local economics by making it easier for employers to attract talent, create jobs, and boost local spending. For example, investing in repairing current public housing units in disrepair could generate \$80 billion of direct and indirect spending, nationally, and boost employment.

Social Sustainability

A large part of the affordable housing stock is in danger of losing its affordability at a time when only 53 renters in 100 at all income levels can afford their current home. Thus current housing options made affordable through publicly supported housing programs represent important opportunities improve sustainability. Many of these units and vouchers allow families to live in better quality neighborhoods with improved access to opportunities like jobs, education, and transportation.



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However challenges include adding expanding affordable housing and affordable options in higher quality neighborhoods, improving opportunities in under-invested neighborhoods, reducing economic and racial segregation, and increasing access to neighborhoods through transportation. The legacy of racial segregation and discrimination also persists in many communities, inhibiting the catalyzing effect of affordable housing to improve economic mobility and economic growth. Rent-assisted minorities are disproportionately located in higher poverty areas. These patterns of segregation have a major toll on community sustainability and household resiliency and depress economic growth. Developing opportunities close to affordable housing options and opening up access to the community for low-income members are important steps toward improving sustainability, bolstering the economy, and enhancing democracy.

Environmental Sustainability

Sustainable communities are also healthy communities. Improving environmental conditions reduces spending on healthcare, improves public health, and promotes increased productivity. Many housing providers participating in publicly supported housing programs have made significant investments into improving energy efficiency, building healthy communities, and incorporating environmental design into development. However, challenges remain in improving the health of community members in relation to their environment.

Tools for Sustainability

Understanding barriers to sustainability in communities using data is an important step to removing barriers and making improvements. Experts recommend community stakeholders conduct a local assessment to understand local strengths and challenges and to plan for the future. Partnerships in planning and service delivery are also necessary to coordinate the complex systems that impact communities and plan for future improvements. Finally, involving residents in the process of making their city work better for them and their children will better ensure that all needs are met and that residents will support and perpetuate sustainability efforts.

Our communities are only as sustainable as our vision for the future. Affordable housing and promoting the full potential of our most vulnerable residents should be at the center of our strategies to create sustainable communities.