

# INTEGRATING RAPID RE-HOUSING & EMPLOYMENT



**Program & Policy  
Recommendations for  
Enhancing Rapid Re-Housing**

**MARCH 2017**

**HEARTLAND ALLIANCE**

NATIONAL INITIATIVES

# Report Information

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Heartland Alliance's National Initiatives on Poverty & Economic Opportunity is dedicated to ending chronic unemployment and poverty. We believe that every person deserves the opportunity to succeed in work and support themselves and their families. Through our field building, we provide support and guidance that fosters more effective and sustainable employment efforts. Our policy and advocacy work advances solutions to the systemic issues that drive chronic unemployment.

### Our national initiatives include:

The National Transitional Jobs Network (NTJN)  
The National Center on Employment & Homelessness (NCEH)  
Black Men & Youth Overcoming Barriers & Realizing Employment (B.MORE) Initiative

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# Executive Summary

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The scale of family homelessness demands attention. On a single night in January 2016, an estimated 194,716 people in families with children were experiencing homelessness in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Public schools reported that 1,263,323 students nationwide were experiencing homelessness during the 2014-2015 school year, a figure that includes students who were living doubled up,<sup>i</sup> in a motel, or in another temporary housing situation due to their family's loss of housing, economic hardship, or lack of alternative accommodations.<sup>2</sup>

Now is a critical time to make concerted efforts to ensure that clear pathways to quality employment and economic opportunity are a key component of programs and policies that aim to prevent and end family homelessness, including housing interventions such as rapid re-housing. Along with lack of affordable housing, insufficient earned income and unemployment are among the key causes of family homelessness,<sup>3</sup> and millions of families experience housing insecurity.<sup>4</sup> The majority of renting families who live below the poverty line spend at least half of their income on housing costs,<sup>5</sup> and one in three American households has no savings account.<sup>6</sup> These vulnerable households are one lost job or financial challenge away from losing housing.

Family homelessness and financial insecurity represent a significant cost to cities and communities in the form of lost tax revenue, unpaid public utility bills, and public benefit use.<sup>7</sup> Homeless services for families can also be intensive and costly. Moreover, experiencing homelessness as a child can lead to missed educational opportunities and have a detrimental impact on a child's physical, social-emotional, and cognitive development,<sup>8</sup> resulting in expensive and long-lasting negative consequences. Families who are financially healthy, on the other hand, can contribute to the local economy and are more likely to provide

## ***People Experiencing Homelessness Need and Want to Work***

***Time and again, research shows that people experiencing homelessness need and want to work. People experiencing homelessness consistently rank employment along with healthcare and housing as a primary need and often attribute their homelessness to unemployment and insufficient income. When parents of families experiencing homelessness are asked to name one thing that would most help get their family back on its feet, the most common answer is employment, and heads of households experiencing homelessness overwhelmingly opt into employment services when available. It is clear that pathways to employment and economic opportunity is what families need—and want—to end their homelessness.***

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the stable housing and support that children need to thrive.<sup>9</sup> It is critical that housing interventions seeking to help mitigate the risk—and cost—of family homelessness offer pathways to employment and economic opportunity for all heads of households.

In recent years, rapid re-housing has emerged as a key national strategy in the fight to end family homelessness. Rapid re-housing aims to move homeless families into permanent housing quickly through housing identification services, a short-term rental subsidy, and case management services that can include connections to jobs. Families assume full payment of their rent and maintain their leases following the end of the subsidy period. In alignment with the federal goal of ending family homelessness by 2020, rapid re-housing capacity has grown dramatically over the last decade.<sup>10</sup>

Rapid re-housing has shown great promise in helping people experiencing homelessness move out of shelter and into housing. However, large-scale evaluations show that rapid re-housing as currently implemented generally falls short on helping participants meet their stated employment needs and achieve longer-term housing security—both of which are key to truly ending family homelessness.<sup>11</sup> Analysis of available research and in-depth interviews with rapid re-housing providers across the country indicate that although rapid re-housing participants need and want to work, many face significant barriers to employment and have experienced long-term or chronic unemployment.<sup>12</sup> Rapid re-housing participants need greater access to appropriate employment services—including robust employment, training, and barrier-mitigating supportive services—in order to increase earned income, succeed in work, and stabilize in housing following the end of their rapid re-housing subsidy period.

Rapid re-housing plays an important role in helping families quickly exit shelter or other temporary accommodations and enter their own housing. However, if efforts to end family homelessness continue to rely on rapid re-housing, it is vital to enhance rapid re-housing program implementation and policy to ensure that all rapid re-housing participants have access to employment, training, and barrier-mitigating supportive services that can help them succeed in quality jobs.

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i. Students who are “doubled up” are those who are sharing housing with others due to a loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason. To be considered homeless, students sharing housing must also be determined to lack fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. For more information, see National Center for Homeless Education, 2016.

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Enhancing rapid re-housing with pathways to economic opportunity requires that a range of actors and public systems work together to share capacity, knowledge, and resources and to advance public policy solutions. These stakeholders include rapid re-housing practitioners and program administrators, Continuum of Care (CoC) leadership, local, state, and federal government officials, policymakers, advocates from the homeless services, workforce development, and other fields, philanthropy, and researchers, among others. Although solutions will look different across communities based on local need and capacity, cross-system coordination, collaboration, and leveraging of existing resources will be necessary to achieve the program and policy recommendations contained in this paper.

This paper spans program-level and policy solutions because both are necessary to enhance the rapid re-housing model with pathways to employment and economic opportunity for people experiencing homelessness and to realize the long-term goal of ending family homelessness. The first section of this paper provides an overview of existing research on rapid re-housing and employment and builds the case for why robust employment, training, and supportive services are key to the success of rapid re-housing participants. The second section draws from in-depth interviews with rapid re-housing providers coupled with existing research to offer program-level recommendations for enhancing

## ***Paper Methodology: Identifying Our Recommendations***

***There is limited experimental evidence regarding specific practices that are effective in delivering employment, training, and barrier-mitigating supportive services through rapid re-housing interventions. To address this gap, we supplement a literature review with structured, in-depth interviews and site visits with rapid re-housing providers across the country who offer their participants employment, training, and related supportive services both in-house and through referrals and partnerships. The program-level recommendations included in this paper were identified both by multiple practitioners as well as supported by the existing literature and are specific to people being served by rapid re-housing. In addition, interviews with practitioners illuminated systems-level issues and policy gaps that can make it difficult to ensure that all rapid re-housing programs have pathways to employment and economic opportunity. The systems and policy solutions put forward in this paper draw from the insights of rapid re-housing practitioners as well as our team's expertise in systems change and workforce development and homeless services policy. The recommendations in this paper can be used by rapid re-housing practitioners and program administrators, Continuum of Care leadership, local, state, and federal government officials, policymakers, advocates, philanthropy, and researchers, among others.***

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the design and delivery of employment, training, and related supportive services for people in households being served by rapid re-housing. The third section provides policy and systems-level recommendations to help ensure that the rapid re-housing model has the capacity, resources, and incentives to provide pathways to employment and economic opportunity for all rapid re-housing participants.

**Programmatic recommendations, discussed in depth in on pages 17 to 27, include:**

**Build Robust Partnerships to Offer a Continuum of Employment, Training, and Related Supportive Services that Can Meet a Wide Range of Needs:** It is likely that employment services are not an area of expertise for many rapid re-housing programs—and there is no need to re-invent the wheel or feel like these services have to be built from the ground up. Instead, rapid re-housing providers can and should prioritize and value employment, make it a stated goal for their participants, and work with CoC leadership to support the development of necessary partnerships to make sure appropriate employment services are delivered.

**Immediately Engage Rapid Re-Housing Participants in Employment, Training, and Related Supportive Services:** Finding a job takes time. Due to the time-limited nature of their housing subsidies, unemployed rapid re-housing participants are under considerable pressure to connect quickly with earned income in order to pay market-rate rent when their subsidy expires. For this reason, rapid re-housing providers should introduce participants to employment services as soon as they are enrolled, whether in-house or through partnerships with employment service providers.

**Formalize Case-Conferencing and Partnerships, or Consider Co-Location, Between Housing and Employment Specialists:** To maintain stable housing and retain employment, rapid re-housing participants' housing location and rental costs must be aligned with their job location and earned income. It is critical that housing and employment specialists serving people in rapid re-housing programs intentionally and consistently communicate and coordinate, whether they are working at the same program and location or through a referral relationship across programs, systems, or locations.

**Leverage Flexible Funds to Meet the Employment, Training, and Supportive Services Needs and Interests of Rapid Re-Housing Participants in an Individualized Way:** Rapid re-housing programs should

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seek and leverage flexible funding dollars to meet the diverse employment, training, and supportive services needs of rapid re-housing participants. Flexible funding has been a core component of integrated rapid re-housing and employment initiatives in multiple localities and has been recognized as a promising practice in those settings. Rapid re-housing providers are encouraged to make full use of flexible funds and to inform participants about their availability at the start of programming so that participants know these supports are available when employment-related needs arise.

**Prioritize Job Retention and Reemployment Services to Support the Longer-Term Employment Success of Rapid Re-Housing Participants:** Job retention support is especially critical for jobseekers who face barriers to employment. To help ensure that rapid re-housing participants can meet their lease obligations and stabilize in housing following the subsidy period, job retention in the competitive labor market should be a priority for any rapid re-housing program that is integrating employment into its service delivery.

**Support and Accommodate Job-Driven Training and Education for Rapid Re-housing Participants:** The most effective training programs at raising incomes for low-income workers require more time to complete than the rapid re-housing subsidy typically allows. In the near term, rapid re-housing providers can connect participants to short-term training opportunities that are job-driven, credential-bearing, and “stackable,” in which one credential serves as the foundation for subsequent credentials in the same field. In the longer-term, funders and providers of rapid re-housing services should design, fund, and implement rapid re-housing programs with housing subsidy periods of variable length to accommodate participants’ completion of job-driven sector training in high-growth occupations.

**Offer Financial Capability Services so that Rapid Re-Housing Participants Can Manage Earned Income and Start to Build Assets:** By the time rapid re-housing participants enter the homeless services system, it’s likely they have either been unable to build savings due to insufficient income or have exhausted or nearly exhausted their savings. By incorporating financial capability services<sup>ii</sup> into their service delivery or building partnerships to deliver these services, rapid re-housing programs can play an important role in helping participants build savings to protect against future episodes of homelessness and get on track to financial well-being.

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ii. Financial capability services aim to increase access to financial systems and products that meet the needs of low-income individuals while also supporting an individual’s ability to set short and long-term financial goals, reduce debt, and increase financial knowledge and independence.

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Policy and systems-level recommendations, discussed in depth in on pages 28 to 36, include:

**Using an Interagency Approach, Take a Federal Leadership Role in Ensuring that Employment, Training, and Barrier-Mitigating Supportive Services are Integrated with Rapid Re-Housing Programs:**

Federal leadership from across agencies including the Departments of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Labor (DOL), and Health and Human Services (HHS), can pave the way for rapid re-housing to be a springboard to employment and economic opportunity for the millions of families experiencing or at-risk of homelessness and housing instability. Federal leadership must take an interagency approach to meeting the employment needs and interests of families experiencing homelessness and ensuring that critical supportive services necessary for success in employment are fully funded and readily available.

**Advance Research and Learnings Related to Rapid Re-Housing and Employment Services, Supports, and Pathways to Economic Opportunity:**

The rapid re-housing field is ripe for research and evaluation, piloting, and philanthropic investment with regard to how rapid re-housing models and employment services, supports, and pathways to economic opportunity could be best constructed and implemented. Moreover, seeding and supporting cross-system collaboration that supports pathways to employment and economic opportunity for homeless families will be critical roles for public-private partnerships alongside the research community.

**Dedicate Federal Funds for Employment Services for Homeless**

**Jobseekers:** Federal agency leaders and Congress should work together to identify and appropriate dedicated federal resources to sufficiently meet the employment and training needs and interests of homeless jobseekers. Dedicated federal funding has the potential to strengthen rapid re-housing programs and other housing interventions and to greatly increase the likelihood that families have the resources and supports to achieve economic opportunity.

**Include Increases in Employment and Income as Outcomes of Successful Rapid Re-Housing Programs:**

Ending family homelessness will require a focus on the economic well-being and housing security of people who have exited the homeless services system, including those served by rapid re-housing. However, current system- and program-level performance measures do not effectively incentivize the homeless services system to ensure rapid re-housing participants are on track to longer-term financial and housing security. Doing so will require that stakeholders including HUD and other federal

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agencies, CoC leadership, researchers, and advocates include increases in employment and income as outcomes of successful rapid re-housing programs.

**Build the Capacity of and Develop a Shared Culture Among Rapid Re-Housing and Employment Providers and Systems:** Providers and public systems have a great deal to learn from and contribute to each other about expanding access to employment and economic opportunity for people experiencing homelessness. Philanthropy—alongside local public systems—can play a critical role in leveraging its convening power to bring workforce and homeless services groups together, fund training and peer learning efforts among systems, and support continuous improvement. Local, state, and federal systems can also encourage and give space for frontline staff to participate in this kind of cross-system learning.

**Address the Elephants in the Room: Lack of Affordable Housing and Low Job Quality:** Rapid re-housing is an emergency response to the devastating impacts of two interrelated structural issues facing this country: lack of affordable housing and low job quality for millions of workers. Interviews conducted for this paper consistently illuminated these issues for families in rapid re-housing and the resulting challenges homeless service providers face in trying to stabilize families through the provision of short-term rental assistance. Truly ending family homelessness requires addressing issues around the availability of affordable housing and job quality in the United States head-on. This means doubling-down on strategies to increase the stock of affordable housing, to ensure that rent subsidies allow for the lowest earners to afford quality housing, and to advance a good jobs agenda. The current housing affordability and labor market mismatch is untenable and requires a commitment by a myriad of stakeholders to new policy choices.

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# I. Why Employment Should Be Part of Rapid Re-Housing Programs

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This section provides an overview of existing research on rapid re-housing and employment and builds the case for why robust employment, training, and related supportive services are key to the success of rapid re-housing participants.

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**Far too many families and children are homeless and face housing insecurity for economic reasons.** On a single night in January 2016, an estimated 194,716 people in families with children were experiencing homelessness in the United States.<sup>13</sup> Public schools reported that 1,263,323 students nationwide were experiencing homelessness during the 2014-2015 school year, a figure that includes students who were living doubled up,<sup>iii</sup> in a motel, or in another temporary housing situation due to their family's loss of housing, economic hardship, or lack of alternative accommodations.<sup>14</sup> Although point-in-time counts indicate that the number of homeless people in families has declined by 17 percent between 2007 and 2016,<sup>15</sup> the data from public schools show a 59 percent increase in the number of homeless students nationwide from the 2007-2008 school year to the 2014-2015 school year.<sup>16</sup> The public school data suggest that in recent years, families with children may increasingly be living doubled up with other people, couch surfing, or staying in motels in order to keep a roof over their heads, which puts them at imminent risk of literal homelessness.

Unfortunately, these homelessness data are not surprising. Along with lack of affordable housing, insufficient earned income and unemployment are among the key causes of family homelessness.<sup>17</sup> Currently, 42 percent of workers make less than \$15 per hour<sup>18</sup> and 28 percent of workers earn poverty-level wages.<sup>19</sup> One in three American households has no savings account,<sup>20</sup> and 80 percent of the poorest households lack the savings to subsist at the poverty level for three months in the absence of income.<sup>21</sup> There is no place in the country where someone working full time at the federal minimum wage can afford a modest one bedroom apartment,<sup>22</sup> and the majority of renting families who live below the poverty line spend at least half of their income on housing costs.<sup>23</sup> As a result, millions of families experience housing insecurity<sup>24</sup> and teeter on the brink of homelessness, one financial challenge or a lost job away from living on the street or in shelter.

iii. Please see footnote i for a definition of "doubled up."

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**The rapid re-housing model faces a significant tension: although families served by rapid re-housing are expected to pay market rate rent following the end of a brief rental subsidy period, heads of households likely face multiple barriers to employment, which can make maintaining unsubsidized housing after the subsidy period ends difficult and sometimes impossible.**

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**Rapid re-housing is a key national strategy for preventing and ending family homelessness—yet rapid-re-housing, as currently implemented, does not consistently offer families facing significant barriers to employment pathways to economic and housing security.** In recent years, rapid re-housing has emerged as a key strategy for preventing and ending family homelessness. The rapid re-housing model, however, faces a significant tension: although families served by rapid re-housing are expected to pay market rate rent following the end of a brief rental subsidy period, heads of households likely face multiple barriers to employment and have experienced long-term or chronic unemployment, which can make maintaining unsubsidized housing after the subsidy period ends difficult and sometimes impossible.

In one study, for example, more than half of families had not worked for pay in the previous six months and 30 percent had not worked in the past two years.<sup>25</sup> In another demonstration, 65 percent of participants were not employed at entry into rapid re-housing.<sup>26</sup> These and other studies,<sup>27</sup> as well as interviews with rapid re-housing providers conducted for this paper, show that rapid re-housing participants face barriers to employment that may include:

- Lack of child care and transportation;
- Exposure to domestic violence;
- Having a criminal record;
- Substance use;
- Mental and physical health challenges, including both their own and their children's;
- Very limited education;
- Lack of English fluency; and
- Bad credit.

These data make clear that many rapid re-housing participants need intensive, evidence-based employment and supportive services to get, keep, and advance in work in order to afford and maintain stable housing following the end of their rapid re-housing subsidy period. However, evaluations of large-scale rapid re-housing demonstrations show that the model, as currently implemented, is an effective tool for moving participants out of shelter and into housing but falls short on helping participants achieve increased earned income through employment and longer-term housing security. Specifically, two major multi-site demonstrations, the *Rapid Re-Housing for Homeless Families Demonstration (RRHD)* and the *Family Options Study*,<sup>iv</sup> both found that rapid re-housing helped families exit shelters and move into their own permanent housing but did not positively impact longer-term housing security and had little or no effect on employment and earned income for participating families.<sup>28</sup>

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**RRHD participants experienced very high housing instability in the year following program exit, with 76 percent of families moving at least once. Families drew a clear connection between their housing stability and their employment status: when families were surveyed about their barriers to housing stability following program exit, 75 percent reported that lack of current employment posed a problem.**

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These large-scale demonstrations show that rapid re-housing implementation does not always adequately meet the needs of participating families for employment assistance. For example:

- Only one-third of *Family Options* participants assigned to rapid re-housing were referred to programs that offered any employment and training services.<sup>29</sup>
- *RRHD* programs provided assistance to help participants gain employment and obtain vocational training, yet only four percent of families gained employment income while in rapid re-housing and only an additional seven percent gained earned income in the year after *RRHD* exit.<sup>30</sup>
- Following program exit, 75 percent of *RRHD* participants reported that a lack of current employment posed a problem with regard to their housing stability.<sup>31</sup>

Although the heads of homeless households want to work, believe employment is essential to helping their families stabilize,<sup>32</sup> and overwhelmingly opt into employment services when available,<sup>33</sup> these findings suggest that rapid re-housing programs as currently designed, implemented, resourced, and incentivized may be connecting too few participants to employment services. These findings also suggest that available employment services and supports may not be intensive enough to ensure participants' longer term success in both housing and the workforce. Integrating rapid re-housing with robust employment, training, and supportive services may be one of the most promising approaches for helping rapid re-housing participants improve their economic situations and afford housing on their own following program exit—outcomes that participants themselves see as deeply intertwined.

## **What is Rapid Re-Housing?**

**Rapid re-housing aims to help homeless families and individuals quickly exit homelessness, stabilize in permanent housing in the community, and avoid subsequent returns to homelessness. The strategy has three core components: housing identification; rent and move-in assistance that includes a short-term rental subsidy; and case management aimed at helping participants obtain and move into permanent housing, stabilize in housing, and connect to community and mainstream supports, including paid employment. All case management activities should be voluntary and client-driven. At the end of rapid re-housing assistance, participants are generally expected to pay market-rate rent without assistance and maintain the requirements of their lease. While a program must offer these three core components in order to be considered rapid re-housing, specific program structure is left to the discretion of communities and varies from place to place.**

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***The new administration has the opportunity to take a leadership role in preventing and ending family homelessness through ensuring that rapid re-housing is a springboard to employment and economic opportunity.***

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***Integrating rapid re-housing with robust employment, training, and supportive services may be one of the most promising approaches for helping rapid re-housing participants improve their economic situations and afford housing on their own following program exit.***

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**Now is the time to make concerted efforts to enhance rapid re-housing program implementation and policy with clear pathways to employment and economic opportunity for families experiencing homelessness.** Through its funding priorities, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has signaled strongly that rapid re-housing will play a central role in federal efforts to end family homelessness by 2020.<sup>34</sup> While previous administrations have successfully doubled-down on efforts to address chronic and veteran homelessness, the new administration has the opportunity to take a leadership role in preventing and ending family homelessness through ensuring that rapid re-housing—and other housing interventions serving families—is a springboard to employment and economic opportunity. Doing so will also likely improve the efficacy of and reduce costs to the homeless services system overall by helping people stabilize in housing.

In the near term, enhancing rapid re-housing with pathways to employment and economic opportunity is important because rapid re-housing programs may be serving increasingly vulnerable families and individuals in coming years. In a trend that is likely to continue, rapid re-housing capacity has grown dramatically in the last decade and funding for other housing strategies has significantly declined, leading communities to direct more people entering the homeless services system into rapid re-housing.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, national advocates have recommended that rapid re-housing programs prioritize serving participants least likely to exit homelessness without assistance, including those without employment or income.<sup>36</sup> This is a shift from earlier program implementation that has, in some cases, included screening participants out based on minimum income thresholds or employment status. Together, these changes will very likely result in more people being served by rapid re-housing, including a different mix of individuals who may have little or no income, face significant barriers to employment, and whose long-term housing security will be threatened without intensive employment interventions.

Taking a longer view, enhancing rapid re-housing with pathways to employment and economic opportunity is especially critical given that family homelessness and financial insecurity represent a significant cost to cities and communities in the form of lost tax revenue, unpaid public utility bills, and increased public benefit use.<sup>37</sup> Family homelessness also has long-term and costly detrimental effects on children's well-being that can carry over into adulthood and contribute

iv. The *Family Options Study* is a rigorous evaluation that compares the impacts of interventions commonly used to help families experiencing homelessness, including the impact of referring families living in emergency shelter to rapid re-housing programs relative to letting these families pursue any available housing assistance on their own (“usual care”). The data cited in this paper refer to the impacts of giving families priority access to rapid re-housing compared with usual care. As the study states, this comparison “can be thought of as an experiment between two well-matched groups that differ only in the intervention to which they were assigned” (p. xviii). For more information about the *Family Options Study* and its methodology, please see Gubits et al., 2016.

to cyclical poverty; for example, one study of housing-insecure adults found that those who first experienced homelessness as children were significantly less likely to be employed in adulthood.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, families who are financially healthy can contribute to the local economy and are more likely to provide the stable housing and support that children need to thrive.<sup>39</sup> Rapid re-housing already has been shown to have the lowest average cost compared to other housing interventions for families experiencing homelessness<sup>40</sup>—and the model may be made even more cost-effective if enhanced with pathways to employment and economic opportunity that will offer families long-term financial and housing security and yield positive economic ripple effects in communities and across generations.

## ***Applying an Equity Lens: Unequal Access to Economic Opportunity is a Driving Force Behind Family Homelessness***

***Families experiencing homelessness are by and large made up of female heads of household, large percentages of whom are women of color. In 2014, demographic data on persons and families experiencing homelessness indicated that over two-thirds of families experiencing homelessness were headed by a female of color.***

***Insufficient earned income and unemployment are among the key causes of family homelessness. The relationship between earned income and housing instability requires considering a range of historic and current realities as it relates to women, race, and work that are rooted in historic and current institutional sexism and racism. These include: persistent wage disparities between the earnings of men and women; the lack of access to work-sponsored benefits, stable hours, and asset building opportunities across female-dominated professions; uneven workplace protections; and discrimination, among a few.***

***While not the primary focus of this paper, it is nevertheless critical to reflect on the relationship between housing stability and the current and previous ways that U.S. policies, institutions, and employer practices systematically have denied equal access to economic opportunity for all women—and particularly women of color.***

## II. Recommendations for Enhancing Rapid Re-Housing Design and Implementation with Employment, Training, and Supportive Services

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This section draws from in-depth interviews with rapid re-housing providers coupled with existing research to offer program-level recommendations for enhancing the design and delivery of employment, training, and related supportive services for people in households being served by rapid re-housing.

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The first priority of any rapid re-housing program is to ensure that people experiencing or at imminent risk of homelessness are moved quickly into safe, permanent housing. Although rapid re-housing participants' success in employment is a secondary consideration and workforce development service delivery is likely not a core competency of many rapid re-housing providers, providers can and should prioritize and value employment and make it a goal for their participants.

The following program-level recommendations—drawn from interviews with rapid re-housing providers in the field coupled with existing research—offer ideas and strategies for rapid re-housing providers to integrate their programs with pathways to economic opportunity and to deliver employment, training, and related supportive services to their participants. Rapid re-housing providers, however, are not expected to implement all of these recommendations on their own; instead, the success of these program-level enhancements will require partnerships with multiple actors across different systems who can offer their resources, time, and expertise.

Nevertheless, rapid re-housing providers and administrators are strongly encouraged to consider these recommendations as they seek to design, fund, implement, and fine-tune their programs. Continuums of Care (CoCs) also need to pay attention to these strategies as they consider the role of rapid re-housing in their region and how the CoC will ensure high-level systems performance, including by increasing employment and income among people experiencing homelessness. To this end, CoCs are encouraged to play a key role in advancing these recommendations, including by leading the development of necessary partnerships.

***These programmatic recommendations are tailored and specific to the rapid re-housing context. For additional information about best and promising practices for helping people experiencing homelessness succeed in employment, please see our [Working to End Homelessness Toolkit](#).***

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***“We assume everyone’s employable or has some type of skill set—but everyone also has different barriers.”***  
***—Friendship Place, Washington, DC***

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***Our WIOA Planning & Implementation Toolkit has ideas for helping to ensure that the WIOA system increases employment and economic opportunity for jobseekers facing barriers to employment, including homeless jobseekers.***

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## **Program Level Recommendations:**

### **#1: Build Robust Partnerships to Offer a Continuum of Employment, Training, and Related Supportive Services that Can Meet a Wide Range of Needs.**

It is likely that employment services are not an area of expertise for many rapid re-housing programs—and there is no need to re-invent the wheel or feel like these services have to be built from the ground up. Instead, rapid re-housing providers can and should prioritize and value employment, make it a stated goal for their participants, and work with CoC leadership to support partnership development to ensure the delivery of appropriate employment services. Establishing robust partnerships with a wide range of community-based providers, programs, and public systems can help ensure that rapid re-housing programs meet their participants’ diverse employment, training, and supportive services needs and interests. Establishing partnerships is especially important given the deprioritizing of funding for Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Supportive Services Only (SSO) projects, which provided dedicated services to people experiencing homelessness, including employment and training services. Finally, through exchanging resources and knowledge, establishing partnerships with mainstream service providers can also help build their capacity to serve people experiencing homelessness more effectively.

American Jobs Centers (AJCs)—administered through the public workforce system under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)—provide jobseekers with access to employment, education, training, and supportive services and are important partners for rapid re-housing programs. Although WIOA directs AJCs to prioritize services and supports to jobseekers who face barriers to employment, research and provider experience shows that in many communities, the AJC may not be equipped to meet the full range of employment, training, and supportive services needs of rapid re-housing participants who face more significant barriers to employment such as having a mental health condition, having a criminal record, or exposure to domestic violence or trauma.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, rapid re-housing participants who have low literacy and numeracy skills may not qualify for access to much-needed occupational skills training through the AJC.<sup>42</sup> While the AJC will be an appropriate resource for some rapid re-housing participants, it is not a one-size-fits all solution.

***“We find that most homeless jobseekers are not able to access and navigate the mainstream employment services. If a homeless person walks into a local American Job Center, it’s pretty clear they won’t get the services they need.”***

***—Neighborhood House, Seattle/King County***

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***Read our brief on TANF and the homeless services system to learn how state and local TANF programs can be leveraged to provide access to work opportunities and support services for families experiencing homelessness.***

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***Partnerships were essential to the Massachusetts Secure Jobs Initiative, a statewide program that combined rapid re-housing with employment pathways. This Secure Jobs brief offers insight into building and leveraging networks to improve service delivery on behalf of homeless jobseekers.***

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As a result, strong partnerships outside of the WIOA-funded public workforce system are critical to creating a continuum of employment, training, and supportive services for rapid re-housing participants. While appropriate partners will depend on local capacity, workforce development and supportive services partners for rapid re-housing programs to consider include:

- Community-based service providers who specialize in delivering intensive employment and training services to jobseekers facing barriers to employment, including strategies such as Transitional Jobs;
- Community colleges, adult basic education programs, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs, and accredited agencies offering credential-bearing job training;
- The Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) or welfare system, which can provide eligible individuals support for child care, transportation, and work appropriate clothing or tools, among other employment-related needs;
- The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment & Training Program, which can provide eligible individuals job search assistance, job retention services, and assistance with transportation, dependent care, and licensing fees, among other employment-related needs;
- Quality and affordable child care providers;
- Public sector partners or community-based service providers who can connect participants with access to affordable and adequate transportation options;
- Community-based legal services, mental health and health care providers, and providers specializing in financial capability services; and
- Other services as needed on an individual basis.

Establishing a network of diverse partners leverages existing local expertise, experience, and resources and helps ensure that rapid re-housing programs can offer a continuum of employment, training, and supportive services that meet the needs and interests of rapid re-housing participants.

***“We’re all about partnerships—it’s more effective and cost-effective. We don’t want to re-create existing services; we want to work with existing organizations so that they can work better with our clients.”***  
***—Community Teamwork Inc., Lowell, MA***

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***Rapid re-housing providers should consider implementing a Housing First approach to employment—as opposed to requiring the completion of lengthy work-readiness preparation prior to employment, programs can help individuals begin working as quickly as possible and provide skill development and other services concurrently with work.***

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## **#2: Immediately Engage Rapid Re-Housing Participants in Employment, Training, and Related Supportive Services.**

Finding a job takes time. As of January 2017, the average length of time a jobseeker was unemployed was 25 weeks, and 24 percent of active jobseekers were long-term unemployed, having searched for work for 27 weeks or more.<sup>43</sup> Rapid re-housing participants who are disconnected from the labor market are likely facing barriers to employment that may further lengthen the typical job search, such as criminal records, basic skills deficits, or spotty work histories.

Due to the time-limited nature of their housing subsidies, unemployed rapid re-housing participants are under considerable pressure to connect quickly with earned income in order to pay market-rate rent when their subsidy expires. For this reason, rapid re-housing providers should introduce participants to employment services as soon as they are enrolled, whether in-house or through partnerships with employment service providers. Rapid re-housing providers also report that participants' sense of urgency regarding the need for employment is strongest at the beginning of the subsidy period, and providers can leverage this urgency by introducing employment services upon enrollment in rapid re-housing. Rapid re-housing providers should consider implementing a Housing First approach to employment—as opposed to requiring the completion of lengthy work-readiness preparation, training, and barrier-mitigating services prior to employment, programs can help individuals begin working as quickly as possible and provide skill development and other services concurrently with work.

There are a number of ways rapid re-housing providers can help participants get started on employment as quickly as possible:

- Introduce employment as a goal on day one, and offer connections to job search assistance and other preparation as early as possible;
- Integrate employment goals into every case management conversation; and
- Use Motivational Interviewing techniques to address ambivalence and lack of confidence about pursuing work and help participants see the value and possibility of employment, recognize that they can pursue their ambitions, and commit themselves to actively seeking employment.

There are also specific employment program models and structures that emphasize and facilitate rapid attachment to paid employment. The two most extensively researched, evidence-based employment models for people facing employment barriers, transitional jobs and individualized placement and support (IPS, also known as supported employment), both stress rapid attachment to employment. Rapid re-housing providers should be aware of the ways in which employment

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***Rapid re-housing providers should introduce participants to employment services as soon as they are enrolled, whether in-house or through partnerships with employment service providers.***

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service providers can facilitate rapid attachment to earned income, including:

- Transitional jobs and other types of subsidized employment which use a wage subsidy to incentivize placement with employers;
- Social enterprise in which participants gain work experience and earned income through revenue-generating businesses operated by program providers;
- Job carving within community based organizations wherein positions are created and/or set aside for participants to perform roles within housing providers or other community-based organizations;
- Intensive job development focused on jobseeker preferences and effective matching, and implemented with small caseloads and highly individualized services (as is found in the IPS model); and
- Compensation for time spent in training and preparation, in order to stabilize participants with income while they develop skills and prepare for workplace success.

While participants in rapid re-housing face the urgent need to earn income as soon as possible, participants also very likely need occupational training and other skill development activities in order to earn enough to remain stably housed. For more on this idea, see program recommendation #6 on pages 25 to 26.

## ***Working Hand in Hand: A Program-Level Approach to Coordinating Employment and Housing Services***

***In January 2014, Community of Hope, a non-profit that aims to end homelessness, increase family-sustaining income, and improve health and well-being for families in Washington, D.C., undertook deliberate efforts to drive better employment outcomes among its housing participants, including those in rapid re-housing.***

***Community of Hope began this effort by adopting a strengths-based, client-directed, and person-centered service delivery model based on stages of change theory. In addition, Community of Hope increased alignment of its employment and housing services, placing a greater emphasis on coordination and information sharing among its housing and employment staff. These staff received training in best practices for helping housing participants increase their income and, in a simple but important move, pushed their desks together to facilitate communication. Housing and employment staff now introduce themselves to participants at program entry as “your team,” establishing that these services work hand in hand. Throughout service delivery, housing and employment staff meet jointly with participants, regularly share updates, and meet twice per month to brainstorm solutions for participants facing more significant barriers.***

***Since adopting this new service delivery approach, Community of Hope has seen a dramatic increase in the number of housing participants who have gained jobs while receiving employment services: while only five rapid re-housing participants gained jobs in 2013, 39 did so in 2016.***

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***“There needs to be alignment between where housing is located and where a job or training is or will be. The employment specialist and the housing specialist need to be in communication, and the rehousing plan and the employment services plan need to mirror each other.”***  
***—Father Bill’s & Mainspring, Quincy, MA***

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### **#3: Formalize Case-Conferencing and Partnerships, or Consider Co-Location, Between Housing and Employment Specialists.**

To maintain stable housing and retain employment, rapid re-housing participants’ housing location and rental costs must be aligned with their job location and earned income. As a result, it is critical that rapid re-housing programs that already have woven employment supports and referrals into their offerings are cognizant about their collaborative efforts. Indeed, housing and employment specialists serving people in rapid re-housing programs should intentionally and consistently communicate and coordinate, whether they are working at the same program and location or through a referral relationship across programs, systems, or locations. In practice, this could mean having housing and employment specialists introduce themselves to the rapid-rehousing participant at the same time to provide an overview of services, establish a group rapport, and demonstrate that housing and employment are closely intertwined. Housing and employment specialists can also:<sup>44</sup>

- Co-lead case management meetings with the participant;
- Work together to create a combined re-housing and employment service plan that has shared goals;
- Maintain ongoing communication to check in on a participant’s progress or trouble issues that may arise;
- Engage in regularly-scheduled joint case conferencing;
- Share data; and
- Teach each other the language and accountability measures of their respective systems.

Formalizing these processes, whether on the program level or across systems, can help ensure that communication and coordination among housing and employment specialists occurs. For example, on the program level, job descriptions or a philosophy of care statement can build close coordination into job roles and service delivery approaches. Across systems, memoranda of understanding can clarify expectations around coordination and communication. Finally, when housing and employment specialists are not based at the same program or location, co-locating these staff—even part-time—can facilitate real-time information sharing and cross-system learning as well as collaborative case management activities with rapid re-housing participants.

***“There needs to be a partnership between the housing provider and the employment coach. We also need to educate housing providers on employment language and learn the housing providers’ language as well. When we started, it was like two different worlds—we didn’t understand what people were saying or the expectations. Learning each other’s language really helped our relationship.”***  
***—Career Path Services (LEAP Program), Pierce County, WA***

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***“The more flexible funds are to fill gaps, the better.”***

***—Career Path Services (LEAP Program), Pierce County, WA***

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***“Flexible funding is a huge benefit. There are impediments that get in a client’s way that can become ‘deal breakers,’ like a parking ticket from 1990 or needing work boots. These things can suddenly seem to blossom into an insurmountable obstacle to employment. Having that flexibility to address these types of barriers is good.”***

***—Community Teamwork Inc., Lowell, MA***

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#### **#4: Leverage Flexible Funds to Meet the Employment, Training, and Supportive Services Needs and Interests of Rapid Re-Housing Participants in an Individualized Way.**

Rapid re-housing programs should seek and leverage flexible funding dollars in order to meet the diverse and individualized employment, training, and supportive services needs of rapid re-housing participants. Flexible funding has been a core component of integrated rapid re-housing and employment initiatives in multiple localities and has been recognized as a promising practice in those settings.<sup>45</sup> Available research and rapid re-housing providers in the field identify diverse ways flexible funds have been leveraged to support the employment-related needs of rapid re-housing participants, including by providing support for:

- Transportation such as bus cards, gas money, or even a car;
- Childcare;
- Interview clothes;
- Work uniforms and textbooks;
- Licensing exam fees;
- Outstanding parking tickets;
- Cell phone minutes so participants are available for job search-related phone calls; and
- Retention bonuses to further incentivize maintaining employment.

Additional creative uses of flexible funds have included developing a partnership with a ride sharing program in an area with limited public transit options and funding a matched savings program to encourage rapid re-housing participants to save and start building assets.<sup>46</sup>

Rapid re-housing providers are encouraged to make full use of available flexible funds as well as to inform participants about their availability and potential uses at the start of programming so that participants know these supports are available when employment-related needs arise.<sup>47</sup> Conversations between providers and participants about possible uses of flexible funds may also help spur creative ideas about how these funds can be used to mitigate barriers to employment that are difficult to address through traditional funding streams.

***“For an individual family, flex funds may total a small amount of dollars, yet they can make a huge amount of difference.”***

***—Building Changes, Seattle/King County***

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***“Getting a job isn’t necessarily the hard part—what’s hard is to keep and advance in that job. Job retention and career advancement services can help give people the opportunity to grow in their job and grow their income.”  
—YWCA of Seattle  
King County***

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***Our Working to End Homelessness Toolkit has additional information about job retention and reemployment support for homeless jobseekers. Explore the [toolkit](#), or read the [brief](#) about job retention.***

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## **#5: Prioritize Job Retention and Reemployment Services to Support the Longer-Term Employment Success of Rapid Re-Housing Participants.**

Job retention support is especially critical for jobseekers who face barriers to employment. To help ensure that rapid re-housing participants can meet their lease obligations and stabilize in housing following the subsidy period, job retention in the competitive labor market should be a priority for any rapid re-housing program that is integrating employment into its service delivery in-house or via referral partnerships.

Job retention support should be provided even after the rental subsidy has ended and should include regular, ongoing check-ins with rapid re-housing participants to ensure their needs are being met at the workplace and to help participants clarify employer expectations and work through any conflicts that might arise on the job. Research shows that retention services lasting at least six months, and involving three or more check-ins with the participant each month, are associated with positive outcomes such as working more months, working full time, and higher earnings.<sup>48</sup> Job retention support can also include providing financial and non-monetary incentives such as gift cards, wage supplements, and retention bonuses, which offer much-needed additional income, financial motivation to continue to succeed in employment, and may encourage rapid re-housing participants to remain engaged with program staff.<sup>49</sup>

Rapid re-housing programs can also anticipate that some participants will choose or be asked to leave their jobs, and should be prepared to offer reemployment services to help participants quickly re-engage in job search activities in order to avoid long periods of unemployment and the possibility of falling behind in rent. Reemployment services may include identifying the reasons for job loss from the program participant’s and employer’s perspectives, coaching participants on managing barriers that emerged on the job, and offering job search assistance.

***“We were able to provide up to 120 days of retention support—that was huge. Numerous people lost employment during that time, and retention services allowed us to bring them back in and stay connected.”  
—Career Path Services (LEAP Program), Pierce County, WA***

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**Funders and providers of rapid re-housing services should design, fund, and implement rapid re-housing programs with housing subsidy periods of variable or longer length to accommodate participants' completion of job-driven sector training in high-growth occupations.**

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## **#6: Support and Accommodate Job-Driven Training and Education for Rapid Re-Housing Participants.**

Rapid re-housing programs and participants face a dilemma with regard to employment and training: the time-limited nature of rapid re-housing requires a relatively fast transition into employment, but the jobs available to participants are all too often inadequate to pay for market-rate housing. Families in rapid re-housing have identified this as a “major concern,” expressing to researchers that it “created a double bind: they had to find a job quickly to become eligible for assistance, but the kinds of jobs that were available quickly would not sustain them after assistance expired.”<sup>50</sup> Meanwhile, the most effective training programs at raising incomes for low-income workers require more time to complete than the rapid re-housing subsidy typically allows. Currently, in some instances participating in job-driven training can actually *hurt* a family’s chances of receiving rapid re-housing assistance. For example, *Rapid Re-Housing for Homeless Families Demonstration (RRHD)* grantees were less likely to offer rapid re-housing services to parents enrolled in longer-term education and training programs due to concerns that their incomes would not rise quickly enough to maintain housing by the end of the subsidy period.<sup>51</sup>

The most promising and effective way to help low-income jobseekers access higher wages and benefits is through well-designed job-driven training. For example, one sector training targeting low-income jobseekers—which combines sector-focused occupational skills training with pre-employment career readiness services, sector-focused job development, and employment retention services—has been shown in rigorous evaluations to increase training completion, credential acquisition, sector employment, and overall earnings for long-term unemployed participants.<sup>52</sup> However, most sector training programs, even if targeted at low income jobseekers, have minimum basic skills requirements that many rapid re-housing participants will not meet. For this reason, rapid re-housing programs should establish

## **Coordinating Housing and Employment Services and Systems: Lessons Learned from a Decade of Experience**

*In July 2016, Building Changes, a Seattle-based non-profit working to prevent and end homelessness in Washington state, published “Coordinating Employment and Housing Services: A Strategy to Impact Family Homelessness.” This paper lifts up Building Changes’ lessons learned over their past decade of work to coordinate housing and employment services on behalf of families experiencing homelessness, including families in rapid re-housing. Many of Building Changes’ real-world lessons, acknowledged challenges, and constructive recommendations for ensuring that families experiencing homelessness have access to coordinated housing and employment services are consistent with the recommendations outlined in this paper.*

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***“Strong financial empowerment and capability services need to be baked in to rapid re-housing programs—that’s a key takeaway for us. Tracking expenses, managing debt, learning how to use tools successfully, and building credit and understanding how it affects your housing and employment are all critical. Building savings and decreasing debts are also really important goals for rapid re-housing participants. Participants will face setbacks and challenges, and to be able to plan for those through proactive financial empowerment is key.”  
—YWCA of Seattle  
King County***

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partnerships with adult basic education providers, particularly those that offer basic skills instruction that is contextualized to employment.

The need to accommodate training and skill development can be addressed in phases. In the near term, rapid re-housing providers can seek to connect participants to short-term training opportunities with that can be completed within the existing housing subsidy period. Short-term training opportunities can be delivered through partnerships with community colleges, the WIOA system, or local accredited agencies. Importantly, even short-term training should be job-driven, credential-bearing, and “stackable”—in which one credential serves as the foundation for subsequent credentials in the same field—in order to lead to real employment with opportunities for advancement. In the longer-term, funders and providers of rapid re-housing services should design, fund, and implement rapid re-housing programs with housing subsidy periods of variable or longer length to accommodate participants’ completion of job-driven sector training in high-growth occupations.

**#7: Offer Financial Capability Services so that Rapid Re-Housing Participants Can Manage Earned Income and Start to Build Assets.**

One in three American households has no savings account,<sup>53</sup> and 80 percent of the poorest households lack the savings to subsist at the poverty level for three months in the absence of income.<sup>54</sup> By the time rapid re-housing participants enter the homeless services system, it’s likely they have either been unable to build savings due to insufficient income or have exhausted or nearly exhausted their savings. By incorporating financial capability services<sup>v</sup> into their service delivery or building partnerships to deliver these services, rapid re-housing programs can play an important role in helping participants who are enrolled in employment and training services or who have become employed create a household budget and manage earned income, repair credit, start to build savings to protect against future episodes of homelessness, and get on track to financial well-being. Research suggests that many people experiencing or at risk of homelessness want to participate in financial capability services in order to improve their financial situations: in one study of families receiving rapid re-housing assistance, 90 percent of households opted into asset building services.<sup>55</sup>

Financial capability services that rapid re-housing programs may consider incorporating into their service delivery or referring out to include:<sup>56</sup>

- Financial education and coaching that addresses a range of issues such as managing a paycheck and budgeting, decreasing debt, and improving credit through financial literacy curricula and one-on-one support;

v. Please see footnote ii for a definition of financial capability services.

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**For more information on integrating financial capability and employment services for homeless jobseekers, read our [brief](#): “Work Matters: Employment as a Tool for Preventing Homelessness and Improving Health.”**

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- Facilitating participant use of the mainstream banking system and safe, affordable financial products for low-income consumers so that participants can access alternatives to expensive check cashing services and predatory lenders;
- Ensuring participants can claim applicable tax credits such as the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit by connecting them with free tax preparation services such as Volunteer Income Tax Assistance programs; and
- Connecting eligible participants to existing matched savings programs such as the [Individual Development Account Program](#) or implementing an in-house matched savings program—possibly through leveraging flexible funds, as discussed on page 23—that helps participants save toward their housing-related goals.

## **Financial Capability and Employment Services: A Combination That Works**

*Financial capability services are especially important in the context of employment and training programming for rapid re-housing participants and may bolster participants’ longer-term success in work. For example, negative credit report information can act as a barrier to employment, and, among individuals who are already working, the stress resulting from financial instability can result in difficulty focusing at work or missing work altogether. Research also shows that integrating financial capability and employment services can lead to improved credit, higher job placement rates, reduced debt, and an increased likelihood of year-round employment among individuals who face barriers to employment. Receiving combined financial capability and employment services is also associated with increases in income and number of hours worked per week among low-income workers.*

# III. Policy and Systems-Level Recommendations for Making Rapid Re-Housing a Springboard to Employment and Economic Opportunity

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This section draws from the insights of rapid re-housing practitioners to provide policy and systems-level recommendations to help ensure that the rapid re-housing model has the capacity, resources, and incentives to provide pathways to employment and economic opportunity for all rapid re-housing participants.

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Achieving many of the program-level enhancements to rapid re-housing design and implementation discussed in this paper requires policy and systems change aimed at strengthening rapid re-housing approaches and fostering a policy environment that is conducive to ensuring that all rapid re-housing programs are a springboard to employment and economic opportunity. The following policy and systems-level recommendations offer a range of actors ideas for making sure the rapid re-housing model has the capacity, resources, and incentives to provide all rapid re-housing participants with robust employment, training, and related supportive services necessary to succeed and advance in employment. These actors include Continuum of Care (CoC) leadership, local, state, and federal government officials, policymakers, advocates, philanthropy, and researchers, among others.

## **Policy and Systems-Level Recommendations:**

### **#1: Using an Interagency Approach, Take a Federal Leadership Role in Ensuring that Employment, Training, and Barrier-Mitigating Supportive Services are Integrated with Rapid Re-Housing Programs.**

Federal leadership can pave the way for housing strategies such as rapid re-housing to be a springboard to employment and economic opportunity for the millions of families experiencing or at-risk of homelessness and housing instability.

As discussed extensively throughout this paper, rapid re-housing programs cannot be effective in the long-term if they are not integrated with robust employment, training, and related supportive services. As this administration sets its priorities, it will be critical for leaders within multiple federal agencies—including the Departments of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Labor (DOL), and Health and Human Services (HHS), among others—to work in

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***Because no one federal agency has the resources, capacity, and expertise to address the economic opportunity needs of families experiencing or at-risk of homelessness on its own, an interagency approach to this work is necessary.***

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partnership with each other, Congress, and the field to develop, fund, and advance the “next generation” of rapid re-housing models that include these critical components.

Because no one federal agency has the resources, capacity, and expertise to address the economic opportunity needs of families experiencing or at-risk of homelessness on its own, an interagency approach to this work is necessary. This is especially true in regard to ensuring that critical supportive services necessary to succeed in employment—especially affordable child care and adequate transportation options—are fully funded and available to all families experiencing or at-risk of homelessness. Given that rapid re-housing participants face significant barriers to employment, many of these families will simply be set up for failure in the workforce without access to these supports. Coordinating across federal systems to develop the next generation of rapid re-housing strategies can go a long way toward ensuring that periods of family homelessness are rare, brief, and non-recurring.

## **#2: Advance Research and Learnings Related to Rapid Re-Housing and Employment Services, Supports, and Pathways to Economic Opportunity.**

The field has a lot to learn with regard to how rapid re-housing models and employment services, supports, and pathways to economic opportunity could be best constructed and implemented. Questions that could be valuable to explore include: 1) the optimal length of rapid re-housing subsidies based on enrollment in adult basic education or sector training programs relative to the cost of housing or 2) the impact and value blending rapid re-housing models with discrete types of employment services such as wage-paid real work opportunities. Moreover, because it is clear that rapid re-housing participants need skills training to increase their ability to access quality job opportunities, there is a need to study rapid re-housing models that offer flexible and extended rental subsidy periods that allow participants to complete

***In addition to federal leadership, Continuum of Care (CoC) leadership has an important role to play in leading the development and implementation of rapid re-housing models as well using existing resources and federal program discretion. For example, CoCs can leverage existing resources such as Community Development Block Grant funds, TANF block grants, WIOA formula funds and Governor’s Discretionary dollars, and SNAP Employment & Training resources, and others, to ensure that existing and new rapid re-housing programs have robust employment, training, and supportive services.***

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***The employment, training, and supportive services needs of rapid re-housing participants necessitate multiple system connections.***

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training. These questions, among others, are ripe for research and evaluation, piloting, and philanthropic investment.

It is equally important to note that rapid re-housing programs do not operate in a vacuum. Many programs and systems are needed for rapid re-housing strategies to be successful, and research and interviews conducted for this paper illuminate that the employment, training, and supportive services needs of rapid re-housing participants necessitate multiple system connections. Nevertheless, there are few examples where housing, workforce, income supports, child care, and other public systems have collaborated at the systems level for the benefit of homeless families and children. Looking ahead, public-private partnerships can play a critical role in seeding and supporting cross-system collaboration that supports pathways to employment and economic opportunity for homeless families—efforts that, in turn, can be evaluated by the research community.

### **#3: Dedicate Federal Funds for Employment Services for Homeless Jobseekers.**

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***Federal agency leaders and Congress should work together to identify and appropriate dedicated federal resources to sufficiently meet the employment and training needs and interests of homeless jobseekers.***

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Employment needs to be a core component of the rapid re-housing model. Despite significant need and ever-increasing accountability by the homeless services system and other systems to demonstrate employment outcomes and success, there are no dedicated resources at the federal level targeted to the employment needs of homeless jobseekers and negligible resources dedicated to jobseekers facing barriers to employment writ large. To this end, federal agency leaders and Congress should work together to identify and appropriate dedicated federal resources to sufficiently meet the employment and training needs and interests of homeless jobseekers, including adults and youth.

Presently, many of the rapid re-housing providers interviewed for this paper defer to the WIOA or TANF systems to manage their participants' complex workforce development needs, although neither of these funding streams and systems is consistently effective at doing so. Both the WIOA and TANF systems face resource and policy constraints and neither function consistently in every state and local community to serve the employment needs of people facing barriers to employment or the needs of homeless jobseekers in particular.

One of the statutory goals of WIOA legislation, which replaced the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) in 2014, is to ensure the public workforce system serves the employment needs of adults and youth jobseekers facing barriers to employment. However, the system historically has not been well-equipped or incentivized to do so. In program year 2014, WIA programs exited only 7,453 adults experiencing homelessness who received intensive or training services—only 2.2 percent of all program exiters who received those types of much-needed services.<sup>57</sup> Data show that on a single night in January 2014, 578,424 people were experiencing homelessness,<sup>58</sup>

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***Many rapid re-housing providers defer to the WIOA or TANF systems to manage their participants' complex workforce development needs, although neither of these systems is consistently effective at doing so.***

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***Historical precedent shows that providing dedicated federal funding targeted at people experiencing homelessness can rapidly expand service delivery for this population—that people experiencing homelessness will participate in services aimed at providing pathways to economic opportunity when these services are available.***

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suggesting that the WIA system did not reach hundreds of thousands of homeless individuals who could have benefited from services. Unfortunately, there are early indications that the WIOA system—due to a combination of federal and local factors such as dwindling funding and capacity constraints, local area knowledge gaps, and lack of robust federal incentives or enforceable priorities—is not making significant progress in serving or dedicating funds to support populations facing barriers to employment and homeless jobseekers in particular.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, federal formula funding under WIA and now WIOA for youth and adults has declined by 40 percent since 2001,<sup>60</sup> making it harder for many communities to justify serving the intensive and more costly employment needs of jobseekers facing greater barriers to employment with limited available funds while also operating as a universal public workforce system.

On the TANF side, states spend little of their TANF block grant resources to improve recipients' employability. In 2015, only 8.2 percent of total TANF spending went to workforce development and work supports for participants.<sup>61</sup> Few TANF resources are leveraged to connect participants with intensive employment interventions such as education and training or subsidized employment—states spent only 1.2 percent of their TANF funds on education and training and less than one percent on work subsidies in 2015. On the whole, TANF has a poor track record of promoting transitions to greater economic opportunity for low-income families. An examination of more than 27,000 single parents who were current or recent TANF recipients showed that only one in four experienced a measurable increase in earnings over a three-year follow up period.<sup>62</sup> Most jobs secured by individuals who leave TANF are low-wage, unstable, and offer few benefits or advancement opportunities—jobs that make it difficult to achieve housing security.

There is a historical precedent for providing dedicated federal funding targeted to individuals and families experiencing homelessness: the Federal Adult Education for the Homeless (AEH) Program. Launched in 1988 and administered through the Department of Education, the AEH Program operated in states as a competitive grant until its funding was rescinded from the 1995 federal budget.<sup>64</sup> The AEH Program offered basic skills remediation and literacy training to adults experiencing homelessness aimed at helping these individuals increase their employability, earn a GED or other type of adult diploma, or reach a personal or economic objective.<sup>65</sup> The Program demonstrates that providing dedicated federal funding targeted to people experiencing homelessness can rapidly expand service delivery capacity for this population and that people experiencing homelessness will participate in services aimed at providing pathways to economic opportunity when these services are available. During its eight years, the AEH Program served over 320,000 adults and families experiencing homelessness and was considered successful in preparing people experiencing homelessness for employment and training opportunities and cost-effective.<sup>66</sup> Because rescinding federal

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***State and local funds are simply not a viable substitute for federal funding dedicated to meeting the employment-related needs of people of experiencing homelessness.***

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funding to the Program quickly led to its elimination or vast reduction of services in states across the country,<sup>67</sup> the AEH Program shows that state and local funds are simply not a viable substitute for federal funding dedicated to meeting the employment-related needs of people of experiencing homelessness.

Finally, the lack of dedicated federal employment resources for homeless jobseekers places the burden on state and local units of government to make difficult decisions about how to prioritize already-scarce workforce resources. As the AEH Program demonstrates, dedicating federal funds to the employment needs of homeless jobseekers has the potential to ease this burden. This type of dedicated federal funding also has the potential to strengthen rapid re-housing programs and other housing interventions and to greatly increase the likelihood that families have the resources and supports to pave the way toward economic opportunity.

#### **#4: Include Increases in Employment and Income as Outcomes of Successful Rapid Re-Housing Programs.**

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***Incentivizing the homeless services system to work toward ensuring the economic well-being of rapid re-housing participants will require that stakeholders include increases in employment and income as outcomes of successful rapid re-housing programs.***

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Ending family homelessness will require a focus on the economic well-being and housing security of people who have exited the homeless services system, including those served by rapid re-housing. Under the HEARTH Act, HUD measures the performance of a community's homeless services system as a whole. Although HUD's system performance assessment takes into account increases in employment and income for people served by CoC-funded rapid re-housing programs, CoCs have a high level of discretion with regard to how they prioritize and hold their programs accountable for these outcomes. At the same time, neither employment nor longer-term housing security are key measures of rapid re-housing success according to local and program-level evaluations and current rapid re-housing performance benchmarks.<sup>68</sup> Rapid re-housing performance benchmarks state that the efficacy of a rapid re-housing program should be measured based on its ability to reduce the length of time that participants spend homeless, exit households to permanent housing, and reduce returns to homelessness within a year following program exit.<sup>69</sup> While these outcomes constitute important intermediary measures of success, they do not incentivize the homeless services system to ensure that rapid re-housing participants are on track to longer-term financial and housing security—outcomes that will, in turn, allow rapid re-housing funds to be used to serve a greater number of families and reduce costs to the system over time.

Incentivizing the homeless services system to work toward ensuring the economic well-being of rapid re-housing participants will require that stakeholders include increases in employment and income as outcomes of successful rapid re-housing programs. On the federal level, HUD, DOL, other federal agencies, and advocates can work together to produce guidance on how to spur employment and income growth for rapid re-housing participants in order to improve program

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***Advocates across several fields—including those focused on issues of workforce development, homelessness, income supports, families, and children—can call for the rapid re-housing model to be held accountable for participants’ employment, income, and housing security outcomes.***

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outcomes and help meet both HUD’s system performance measures and the WIOA system’s statutory goal of serving jobseekers facing barriers to employment, including homeless jobseekers. HUD, DOL, and HHS can also work together to provide technical assistance to communities to effectively implement this guidance. Over time, HUD may also want to explore how it prioritizes the employment-related system performance measures in future funding applications.

Locally, CoC leadership can help ensure that increases in employment and income are key measures of success for their CoC’s rapid re-housing programs by prioritizing the programs that meet these goals for continued or increased HUD funding. In addition, researchers can inform the field by continuing to gather rapid re-housing program implementation and outcomes data as it relates to participants’ employment, income, and longer-term housing security in order to identify service delivery successes and gaps, help develop data-driven program performance measures, and equip advocates and policymakers with research about the role employment can play in preventing and ending homelessness. Finally, advocates across several fields—including those focused on issues of workforce development, homelessness, income supports, families, and children—can call for the rapid re-housing model to be held accountable for participants’ employment, income, and housing security outcomes.

#### **#5: Build the Capacity of and Develop a Shared Culture Among Rapid Re-Housing and Employment Providers and Systems.**

Providers and public systems have a great deal to learn from and contribute to each other about expanding access to employment and economic opportunity for people experiencing homelessness. In communities across the country, providers and systems serving homeless jobseekers often do not collaborate, use different systems-specific language, and are unaware of how each other’s systems operate and the resources and expertise they have to offer. For rapid re-housing and employment service providers and systems to partner and deliver services effectively and efficiently, it will be critical to build their capacity and develop a shared culture among these providers and systems over time.

Rapid re-housing and employment pilots in [Massachusetts](#), [Connecticut](#), and [Washington state](#) have all leveraged philanthropic investments to foster stronger relationships among housing, employment, and other social service providers and to improve cross-system collaboration to advance economic opportunity for rapid re-housing participants. These pilots have shown success in moving the needle on employment outcomes for homeless jobseekers and improving provider and systems coordination. For example, average monthly income increased by 58 percent among participants who worked with an employment navigator in Washington state’s [King County Rapid Re-Housing for Families Pilot](#),<sup>70</sup> and two-thirds of participants enrolled in the first two phases of the Massachusetts

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***Read our [case study on Washington state’s King County Rapid Re-Housing for Families Pilot](#), which fostered cross-system collaboration through the use of employment navigators for families experiencing homelessness.***

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**Staff participation in learning, collaboration, and resource sharing opportunities across a range of agencies and systems enhances staff's work on behalf of homeless jobseekers and strengthens cross-system connections.**

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*Secure Jobs Initiative* entered new employment.<sup>71</sup> These pilots also demonstrate that staff participation in learning, collaboration, and resource sharing opportunities across a range of agencies and systems enhances staff's work on behalf of homeless jobseekers and strengthens cross-system connections and partnerships.<sup>72</sup>

In addition, evidence from Houston, Texas, suggests that strategically identifying and bringing together workforce and homeless system professionals to learn about each system's structure, language, and why employment is critical for homeless jobseekers can increase knowledge among both systems about each other's services and advance a shared understanding of why employment services are so important for this population. This suggests that other communities could benefit from similar training and peer learning opportunities.

Moving forward, philanthropy—alongside public systems on the local level—can continue to leverage its convening power to bring workforce and homeless services groups together, fund training and peer learning efforts among systems, and support continuous improvement. Equally important, local, state, and federal systems can play an important role in encouraging and giving space for front line staff to participate in this kind of cross-system learning.

## ***Spurring Cross-System Learning and Collaboration on Behalf of Homeless Jobseekers: Houston's Income Now Workshop Series***

*In Houston, recognizing that people experiencing homelessness are often served by both the housing and employment systems, advocates along with leaders from the city's Continuum of Care and Workforce Development Board developed and implemented a ten-part workshop series designed to equip front-end service providers and program managers from both systems with best practices and tools to increase employment and economic opportunity for homeless jobseekers. The series aimed to shift public system staff perceptions about the ability of people experiencing homelessness to succeed in employment. Outcomes data from the workshop series show a 10 percent increase among participants who agree that people experiencing homelessness can be successfully employed. There was also a 19 percent increase among participants who agreed they felt equipped with strategies to help homeless individuals work on employment goals.*

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***Rapid re-housing is an emergency response to the devastating impacts of lack of affordable housing and low job quality. As a result, homeless service providers face significant challenges in trying to stabilize families through the provision of short-term rental assistance.***

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## **#6: Address the Elephants in the Room: Lack of Affordable Housing and Low Job Quality.**

The reality is that rapid re-housing is an emergency response to the devastating impacts of two interrelated structural issues facing this country: 1) lack of affordable housing and 2) low job quality, including decades of wage stagnation for millions of workers. Interviews conducted for this paper consistently illuminated and reinforced these issues for families in rapid re-housing and the resulting challenges homeless service providers face in trying to stabilize families through the provision of short-term rental assistance.

The need for affordable housing far outstrips the supply. Currently, only one in four renters who are eligible for federal housing assistance receives it, leaving millions to seek housing they can afford on the private market.<sup>73</sup> In 2014, however, there were only 31 rental units that were affordable and available for every 100 extremely low-income renters nationwide.<sup>74</sup> The federal minimum wage has not increased since 2009—yet there’s no place in the country where someone working full time at this wage can afford a modest one bedroom apartment.<sup>75</sup> Despite a shrinking official unemployment rate, unemployment hovers around 9.4 percent according to a more comprehensive measure that includes people who want to work but have not looked for a job in the last month and people who work part-time due to lack of other opportunities.<sup>76</sup> Nearly 2 million jobseekers have been unemployed for six months or more,<sup>77</sup> and there are an estimated 1.85 million potential workers who are “missing” from the workforce because of weak job opportunities.<sup>78</sup> In addition, job growth in the wake of the Great Recession has been heavily concentrated in lower-wage industries<sup>79</sup> that often fail to provide workers with sufficient earnings to meet their household income needs. Nationally, there are seven jobseekers for every one job opening that pays the national single adult living wage of \$17.28 per hour, leaving 86 percent of jobseekers unable to secure work that allows a single adult to make ends meet, let alone support a family.<sup>80</sup>

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***Truly ending family homelessness requires addressing issues around the availability of affordable housing and job quality in the United States head-on.***

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It is no surprise, then, that rent burden is on the rise.<sup>81</sup> Today, the majority of renting families who live below the poverty line spend at least half of their income on housing costs and almost a quarter—representing over 1 million families—dedicate more than 70 percent of their income to pay rent and keep the lights on.<sup>82</sup> These families teeter on the brink of homelessness and are one financial challenge such as a car repair, illness, or missed paycheck away from losing housing. Indeed, as many as 44 percent of people experiencing homelessness already earn some income through work.<sup>83</sup>

Truly ending family homelessness requires addressing issues around the availability of affordable housing and job quality in the United States head-on. While a comprehensive housing and job quality agenda is beyond this paper’s scope, it is clear that a range of actors—including Congress, state and local governments, researchers,

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***It is time to double-down on strategies to increase the stock of affordable housing and ensure that all jobs are good jobs.***

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philanthropy, and advocates, among others—must double-down on strategies to increase the stock of affordable housing and ensure that rent subsidies allow for the lowest earners to afford quality housing. These diverse stakeholders must also work to ensure that all jobs are good jobs through worker protections, adequate wages, hours, and benefits, fair scheduling, clear pathways to advancement, and employer-focused education on the needs of low-income workers, among others. Tackling the affordable housing and job quality issues simultaneously may also mean thinking critically about piloting and expanding place-based economic development strategies that improve the quality and stock of affordable housing while creating job opportunities for individuals who face barriers to employment and improving communities.

The current housing affordability and labor market mismatch is untenable and the result of decades of policy choices. Reversing these effects—and ending family homelessness—requires a commitment by a myriad of stakeholders to new policy choices.

# Conclusion

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The scale of family homelessness demands attention is paid to both housing interventions and homelessness prevention efforts. Rapid re-housing has emerged as an important tool in the fight to end family homelessness and indications are that it will continue to be prioritized and implemented as a cost-effective housing intervention. Indeed, rapid re-housing has shown great promise in helping people experiencing homelessness move out of shelter and into housing. However, large-scale evaluations also show that rapid re-housing as currently implemented generally falls short on helping participants meet their stated employment needs and achieve longer-term housing security—both of which are necessary to truly end family homelessness.

If efforts to end family homelessness continue to rely on rapid re-housing, it is clear that the strategy must be enhanced. Rapid re-housing program implementation, systems, and policy must take deliberate steps to ensure that all rapid re-housing participants have access to employment, training, and barrier-mitigating supportive services that help them get, keep, and advance in quality jobs with family-sustaining wages. Enhancing rapid re-housing with pathways to economic opportunity requires that a range of actors and public systems identified throughout this paper work together to share capacity, knowledge, and resources and advance public policy solutions. Although solutions will look different across communities based on local need and capacity, cross-system coordination, collaboration, and leveraging of existing resources will be necessary to achieve the program and policy recommendations contained in this paper.

Now is a critical time to be developing and advancing the next generation of rapid re-housing interventions. Failure to do so will have lasting negative impacts on families and children and result in costly implications for multiple systems and communities over time. By acting now to ensure that the rapid re-housing model has the capacity, resources, and incentives to provide pathways to employment and economic opportunity, we can chart a course toward offering families long-term financial and housing security and ending family homelessness.

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