

Understanding Rapid Re-housing

Supplemental Analysis of Data from the Family Options Study

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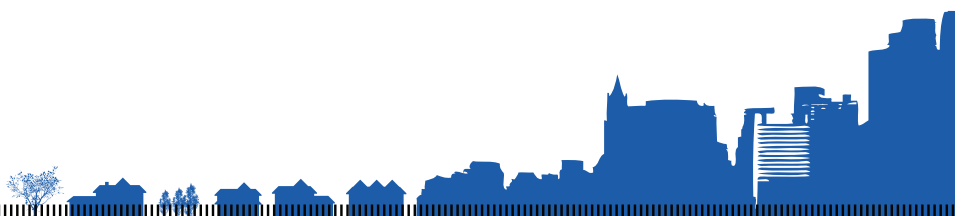


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1. Introduction and Background

Rapid re-housing programs provide temporary assistance to individuals and families who experience homelessness so they may quickly move into permanent housing and stabilize there (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2014). Since 2009, the number of communities in the United States using rapid re-housing (RRH) programs to address homelessness has grown from just a few to several hundred. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is sponsoring the *Understanding Rapid Re-housing Study* to address important questions about RRH assistance. To carry out the study, Abt Associates is synthesizing the current body of research available on RRH, conducting new analysis of existing data, and collecting new data to analyze current RRH program designs and households' experiences using RRH assistance.

This paper is the deliverable for Task 6 of the *Understanding Rapid Re-housing Study*. The paper presents new analysis about short-term rent subsidies and associated services provided by rapid re-housing programs using data collected for the Family Options Study. The paper explores differences in the use of RRH in the 12 communities participating in the study, provides additional information on returns to shelter following the use of RRH that permits comparisons to benchmarks created by the National Alliance to End Homelessness, and describes the housing quality and rents paid for families who used RRH.

Short-term rent subsidies provided by rapid re-housing programs were one of three types of programs to which families who started in emergency shelter were randomly assigned for priority access by the Family Options Study. The study compared short-term rent subsidies, long-term rent subsidies, and project-based transitional housing with one another and with the usual care available to homeless families who stayed in emergency shelter.

Families were not required to use the program to which they were given priority access, nor were they prohibited from using one of the other types of programs. Some families assigned to RRH did not use that program, and some families assigned to one of the other treatment arms or to usual care did use RRH at some time during the study's three-year follow-up period. Some of the analysis in this paper focuses on the use of RRH by families with priority access to that program, and other analysis focuses on all families in the study who used RRH.

The analysis conducted for this paper does not use the experimental design of the Family Options Study. We explore what happened to families who used rapid re-housing after the study's random assignment. Therefore, any observed relationship between program use and outcomes cannot be attributed to the intervention alone but may be associated with differences between families who used RRH and families who did not.

The paper is organized as follows. The remainder of this section provides some background on RRH, describes the data collected by the Family Options Study and how it is used in this paper, and concludes with a description of the particular RRH programs that participated in the Family Options Study. Section 2 describes the take-up and duration of use of RRH by families who were given priority access to that program, including variations across study communities. Section 3 describes the patterns of use of RRH by all families in the study, including whether RRH was used as a bridge to a long-term rent subsidy. Section 4 describes returns to homelessness by study families who used RRH and compares rates of return to those found by other studies. Section 5 describes the living situations of families following their use of RRH, including where families who returned to homelessness were just before that happened. Section 6 explores whether families given priority access to RRH received help in locating housing and moving in, including whether that help appears to have made a difference. Section 7 describes the housing quality and rents paid by current and former RRH recipients. The conclusion makes some observations about the key findings from this analysis.

1.1 Origins and objectives of rapid re-housing

In the late 1980's, PATH Beyond Shelter, a local agency in Los Angeles, California, piloted the idea of providing short-term rental subsidies to move families rapidly from shelters to conventional housing. Columbus/Franklin County, Ohio, and Hennepin County, Minnesota developed system-wide approaches to rapid re-housing for homeless families in the 1990s, based on the premise that extended shelter stays simply prolong homelessness in ways that are costly to both

families and communities. As more communities experimented with this approach to providing assistance to homeless individuals and families, the components of rapid re-housing programs have become more clearly defined.

In 2007, the U.S. Congress appropriated funds for the Rapid Re-housing for Homeless Families Demonstration (RRHD) (Spellman et al., 2014). Beginning in 2009, 23 Continuums of Care (CoCs) received three-year RRHD grants to develop and operate rapid re-housing programs. At the same time the first RRHD programs opened in fall 2009, rapid re-housing was adopted nationwide following the creation of the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP) by the American Recovery and Revitalization Act (ARRA) (P.L. 111-5, February 2009). HPRP provided \$1.5 billion to communities nationwide to be spent within a three-year period on either homelessness prevention or rapid re-housing. HPRP marked the first major investment by HUD in the rapid re-housing model of providing homeless assistance. Short-term rent subsidies continue to be offered as one component of rapid re-housing programs funded by HUD's CoC Program and Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) program, the U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program, and other sources.

The primary goal of rapid re-housing is to provide temporary assistance that quickly moves individuals and families who experience homelessness into permanent housing¹ while providing appropriate time-limited supports to help them stabilize there (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2014). Guidance released by HUD and the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) in 2012 specifies three core components for RRH programs: (1) housing identification, (2) rent and move-in assistance, and (3) rapid re-housing case management and services.

1.2 Data and Methodology

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) launched the Family Options Study (FOS) in 2008 to learn about which housing and services interventions work best for families with children experiencing homelessness. The study randomly assigned 2,282 families in 12 communities.

Reports published in July 2015 (Gubits et al., 2015) and October 2016 (Gubits et al., 2016) provide evidence about the effects, relative to usual care, of giving families in emergency shelters priority access to long-term rent subsidies, short-term rent subsidies (with case management focused on housing and self-sufficiency), or project-based transitional housing. Usual care means leaving families to find their way out of shelter without priority access to a program that would provide them with a place to live.

The four groups to which families were randomly assigned by the study are:

1. ***SUB***, in which families had priority access to a long-term rent subsidy, typically a Housing Choice Voucher (HCV).
2. ***CBRR***, in which families had priority access to a short-term rent subsidy lasting up to 18 months and case management focused on housing and self-sufficiency, provided by a rapid re-housing program.
3. ***PBTH***, in which families had priority access to a temporary, service-intensive stay, lasting up to 24 months, in a project-based transitional housing facility.
4. ***UC***, in which families had access to usual care homeless and housing assistance but did not have priority access to any particular program.

Of families enrolled in the Family Options Study, 569 were randomly assigned to receive priority access to short-term rent subsidies and case management focused on housing and self-sufficiency provided by rapid re-housing programs. Some of the remaining 1,713 study families who were not given access to rapid re-housing but instead randomly assigned to another group also used rapid re-housing over the course of the study's observation period.

The study team followed the families for three years and measured outcomes in five domains of family well-being:

1 Permanent housing refers to housing situations that are permanent in the sense that if a household is able to pay for the housing, either with or without housing assistance, the household can stay indefinitely.

(1) housing stability, (2) family preservation, (3) adult well-being, (4) child well-being, and (5) self-sufficiency. The longitudinal dataset compiled for the study contains a wide range of information about adults and children and covers an important three-year period in these families' lives. These data support further investigations about how families used RRH short-term rent subsidies in the 12 communities studied. The data set includes:

- A baseline survey conducted during a stay in emergency shelter right before random assignment;
- Follow-up surveys 20 and 37 months after random assignment, providing information about the family head and up to two focal children;
- Tracking surveys that collected detailed information about family composition and program use approximately 6, 12, and 27 months after random assignment;
- Administrative data about each family's use of homeless and housing assistance from HMIS and HUD administrative data on Housing Choice Vouchers, public housing, and project-based rental assistance; and
- Program information about program models, site characteristics, and the cost components of emergency shelter, rapid re-housing, and transitional housing programs.

Based on these data, the Family Options Study team created an augmented data set that tracked program use and family living situation on a monthly basis. The Program Usage data were assembled from data collected from surveys of the family head and supplemented with administrative data sources.² The study team combined survey data with HMIS administrative records, HUD administrative records, and study enrollment verification records to create the Program Usage/Living Situation Data file. The living situation data consist of monthly indicator variables for each of the following living situations:

- Living in own place;
- Living in partner's place;
- Doubled up with a relative or friend and paying part of rent;
- Doubled up with a relative or friend and not paying part of rent;
- Living in hotel or motel paid for by self;
- Living in a place not meant for human habitation (e.g., car, abandoned building, anywhere outside);
- Staying in emergency shelter or transitional housing program;
- Staying in domestic violence shelter;
- Staying in other programs or institutions (indicating separation from other family members): care facility, residential drug or alcohol treatment program, jail; or
- Missing: no information on family's living situation or program use is available for the month.

The Program Usage/Living Situation data file covers each month from random assignment to the 37-month follow-up survey; in this paper, we define the "follow-up period" as the period of time between random assignment and the 37-month follow-up survey.³

The analysis reported in this paper uses the Program Usage Data to supplement the Family Options Study Report with additional, descriptive analysis to describe the use of RRH by study families, including: variations across study communities; whether RRH was used as a bridge to a long-term rent subsidy; the extent to which families who used RRH returned to homelessness; and the living situations of families following their use of RRH. The paper also uses

2 In addition to the analysis in this paper, the Program Usage Data have been used in other supplementary analyses of Family Options Study Data, including Gubits et al. (2017a) and Solari and Khadduri (2017).

3 The follow-up survey did not occur at exactly 37 months for all families, so the length of the follow-up period varies (ranging between 32 and 49 months, with an average of 37 months). For families who did not respond to the 37-month follow-up survey, the follow-up period is set to 37 months.

data from the 20-month survey to describe the extent to which families given priority access to RRH received help in locating housing and moving in and to describe the housing quality and rents paid by current and former RRH recipients.

4.1 The Rapid Re-housing Programs in the Family Options Study

The rapid re-housing intervention was part of the Family Options Study in all 12 study communities: Alameda County, Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Connecticut, Denver, Honolulu, Kansas City,

Louisville, Minneapolis, Phoenix, and Salt Lake City. Altogether 33 rapid re-housing programs agreed to participate in the study and provided information on eligibility requirements. The study referred families to 27 of these programs over the course of the study. The research team believes that the study included most of the rapid re-housing programs operating at the time.⁴ Some communities had only one RRH program, while in other communities RRH was implemented by more than one organization in separate programs. In all sites except one, the RRH programs were funded by the HPRP program and followed the rules of that federal program.⁵ In Boston, the program was funded by the state of Massachusetts.

HPRP rapid re-housing funding could be used to provide rental assistance (up to 18 months), security deposits, utility deposits and payments, help with moving costs, and hotel and motel vouchers. HPRP also could fund case management for participating families. Rental assistance could only be used for a housing unit that passed a habitability inspection. The inspection requirements were slightly less stringent than the Housing Quality Standards required for the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program (Gubits et al., 2015). The HPRP programs established the amount of rental assistance paid to households. The assistance offered to families in Boston was very similar to HPRP although the rent subsidies could be provided for longer than the 18 months allowed in HPRP.

Nearly all of the RRH programs in the Family Options Study were operated by community-based nonprofit organizations (the exceptions being Louisville, Kentucky and Phoenix, Arizona where city government agencies operated the RRH program). These community-based nonprofit organizations typically operated multiple homeless assistance and social service programs in addition to RRH. For example, several providers also operated emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, and permanent supportive housing programs. Some providers also offered social services such as employment services, food pantries, and financial literacy training. In three cases, RRH providers were part of well-known national networks; Salvation Army, St. Vincent de Paul, and Catholic Charities.

Within the overall constraints of HPRP rules, the design of RRH programs varied across communities, as shown in Exhibit 1.

4 All RRH programs in each community were included in the HMIS administrative data used to create the Program Usage/Living Situation database. Unless the program failed to report data to the HMIS, it is included in use of RRH by families assigned to SUB, PBTH, or UC.

5 In Minneapolis and Salt Lake City, rapid re-housing providers supplemented HPRP funds with state funds and other ARRA funding (Gubits et al., 2015).

Exhibit 1: Eligibility requirements and type of housing assistance for RRH programs in the Family Options Study

Site	Eligibility requirements	Type of Assistance		Subsidy calculation(s)
		Rental assistance	Payment of arrears or start-up costs	
Alameda County	Minimum income or employment Willingness to use RRH assistance in designated locations	6–12 months	Yes (including some utilities and moving costs)	Formula: subsidy is percent of rent
Atlanta	Minimum income or employment Sobriety No criminal history Required to pay program fee or rent	4–6 months	Yes	Combination: full subsidy for 3 months then formula based on tenant contribution of 30% income Fixed monthly subsidy (not formula)
Baltimore	Minimum income or employment Education or work experience No previous debt to housing authority or ability to repay debt immediately	6–12 months	Yes	Set by case managers on a case by case basis (not formula)
Boston	Willingness to use RRH assistance in designated locations Proof of citizenship or legal residency	18+ months	Yes	Fixed monthly subsidy (not formula)
Connecticut	Minimum income or employment Proof of citizenship or legal residency	4–6 months 6–12 months	Yes (security deposit)	Fixed monthly subsidy (not formula) Combination: For some families assistance is calculated by formula based on tenant contribution of 30% of income. But in some cases subsidy was adjusted if income was very low or utilities were high.
Denver	No requirements beyond HPRP eligibility rules	6–18 months	No	Combination: For some families assistance is calculated by formula based on tenant contribution of 30% of income. But in some cases subsidy is adjusted if income is very low or utilities are high.

Site	Eligibility requirements	Type of Assistance		Subsidy calculation(s)
		Rental assistance	Payment of arrears or start-up costs	
Honolulu	Minimum income or employment Tuberculosis test	4–6 months	Yes	Fixed monthly subsidy (not formula)
Kansas City	Onset of homelessness in past 12 months Absence of debts/able to secure utilities Willingness to pay program fee or rent	Up to 12 months	Yes (rent and security deposit only)	Fixed monthly subsidy (not formula)
Louisville	Onset of homelessness in last 12 months Recent drop in income	6 months	Yes (utilities only)	Fixed subsidy (lump sum payment based on household size)
Minneapolis	No requirements beyond HPRP eligibility rules	3-6 months	Yes	Fixed monthly subsidy (not formula)
Phoenix	Minimum income or employment Education or work experience Sobriety	6-12 months	Yes	Fixed monthly subsidy (not formula); full rent is subsidized
Salt Lake City	No criminal history	6-12 months	Yes	Fixed monthly subsidy (not formula)

Source: Interviews with program staff by Family Options Study site visitors. Eligibility requirements were self-reported by study participating programs.

Note: Most communities had consistent rules and approaches across programs, but some did not, as indicated in the varying durations of rental assistance provided by RRH program and the varied subsidy calculations for monthly rental assistance.

Rapid re-housing programs funded by HPRP applied statutory eligibility criteria. Families had to be homeless, have incomes at or below 50 percent of the area median income, and could not have financial resources and support networks to obtain and remain in housing. None of these requirements were impediments for the families in the study. Many of the RRH programs used additional eligibility requirements, however, which were related primarily to families' ability to lease units in the private market or the likelihood that they would be able to sustain the rent on their own once the RRH rent subsidies ended.

The most frequent requirement used in RRH programs related to minimum income or employment, intended to identify families who program staff expected would be able to assume rent on their own after RRH assistance ended. Half of the communities had RRH programs that required families to meet a minimum income threshold, demonstrate a consistent source of income or employment, or express a willingness to work. Not all programs in a community imposed these minimum income or employment requirements, but this condition was in place for nearly half (49 percent) of the 33 RRH programs included in the analysis.

Some RRH programs required families to meet other conditions to be considered for RRH assistance, but these other conditions were less frequent and scattered across programs and sites, with no dominant criteria.

Understanding Rapid Re-housing:

The approach to RRH also varied across communities in the way in which the rental assistance was structured and in the length of time over which families could receive the assistance. The expected duration of assistance was six months or less in Honolulu, Louisville, and Minneapolis and for some programs in Atlanta and Connecticut. Boston had the longest expected duration, 18 months or more, longer than permitted by HPRP program rules. Most communities provided a fixed monthly amount, rather than using an income-based formula. However, in many programs the fixed amount could vary from family to family depending on what the case worker viewed as the family's need. For example, in Alameda County, the subsidy was calculated as a percentage of the rent, and in Phoenix the subsidy covered the full rent. For some families in Atlanta, the subsidy covered the full rent for the first three months.

The HPRP rules required programs to recertify a family's needs for assistance every three months. Many programs used these or more frequent meetings with families to review the family's progress towards being able to cover its housing costs. This caseworker assessment was not explicitly characterized as "progressive engagement," as it later came to be articulated as a program approach that provides "just enough" assistance to end a family's homelessness. The Family Options Study did not collect detailed information from programs on the way in which they interacted with families but only on the frequency of case management meetings and the types of services to which families were referred by their case management. Therefore, it is not possible to categorize study communities by the extent to which they used a progressive engagement approach.⁶

RRH programs have continued to evolve. After the period during which the Family Options Study assigned families to receive priority access to rapid re-housing, HUD and the USICH released guidance on the core components of rapid re-housing programs. The guidance defines rapid re-housing as "an intervention designed to help individuals and families to quickly exit homelessness and return to permanent housing" and specifies the three core components that should be part of a rapid re-housing program: 1) housing identification; 2) rent and move-in assistance; and 3) rapid re-housing case management and services. The guidance also emphasizes that rapid re-housing assistance is to be provided without preconditions such as employment, income, and absence of criminal record (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2014). HUD currently limits RRH housing assistance to 24 months, while SSVF provides a maximum of 12 months of assistance within a two-year period (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2011; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016). SSVF also requires that in order to use rental assistance through the program, units must meet rent reasonableness and habitability requirements (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016).

6 The web survey of RRH programs that will be conducted for this Understanding Rapid Re-housing Study includes questions on progressive engagement, as well as on other evolving features of RRH programs.

2. How did families offered priority access to RRH use the assistance?

This section describes the take-up and duration of the use of RRH for families that were given priority access to RRH by the Family Options Study and compares those patterns of use across the 12 study sites.⁷ The section also describes how quickly families used the short-term rent subsidies provided by RRH and whether they used another program first.

2.1 To what extent did families offered priority access to RRH use the assistance in each of the study communities?

Of the 569 families randomly assigned to receive priority access to rapid re-housing, 336 families (59 percent) took up RRH by the end of the study period. Most families who took up RRH did so within the first 12 months after random assignment (323 families took up RRH within 12 months of random assignment). In several communities, all of the families who were going to start receiving RRH assistance had already done so as of 12 months.

Take-up varied substantially by study community, ranging from fewer than a third of families in Boston and Honolulu to about 9 of 10 families with a priority offer of RRH assistance in Louisville and Salt Lake City (Exhibit 2). Take up is a combination of program eligibility screening, family choices about whether to accept the priority offer of RRH assistance, and whether a family that tried to use the assistance was able to find a housing unit and use RRH assistance in that unit.

Exhibit 2: Take-up of RRH by families with priority access by study community

Site	# families with priority access to RRH	RRH take-up rate after 12 months	RRH take-up rate through end of follow-up
Total, all sites	569	323 (57%)	336 (59%)
Alameda	56	31 (55%)	33 (59%)
Atlanta	73	55 (75%)	57 (78%)
Baltimore	20	9 (45%)	9 (45%)
Boston	53	16 (30%)	19 (36%)
Connecticut	73	43 (59%)	44 (60%)
Denver	8	3 (38%)	3 (38%)
Honolulu	44	8 (18%)	11 (25%)
Kansas City	30	12 (40%)	12 (40%)

⁷ The analysis in this section uses monthly program use data, derived from records from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and survey data. Take-up rates discussed throughout this report will differ slightly from those presented in the Family Options Study Three-Year Impacts report (Gubits et al., 2016). The three-year impact report examined experimental impacts of the relative effects of priority access in pairwise comparisons of families in two assignment groups. The impact analysis sample was restricted to survey respondents because most outcomes were measured from survey data. In contrast, the analysis reported in this section includes all families randomly assigned to receive priority access to RRH (whether the family responded to the follow-up survey or not).

Site	# families with priority access to RRH	RRH take-up rate after 12 months	RRH take-up rate through end of follow-up
Louisville	18	16 (89%)	16 (89%)
Minneapolis	52	34 (65%)	34 (65%)
Phoenix	62	26 (42%)	26 (42%)
Salt Lake City	80	70 (88%)	72 (90%)

Source: Family Options Study Program Use Data. 2010 American Community Service 1-Year Estimates, US Census Bureau

Notes: Follow-up period ranges from 32 to 49 months, averaging 37 months

Sample includes all families who received priority access to RRH, whether or not they responded to surveys.

Eligibility Screening

All families were pre-screened before random assignment to determine whether they appeared to meet requirements for the RRH programs available at the time of random assignment. The study recorded families’ responses to eligibility screening questions and indicators of whether families were screened out from consideration for random assignment to RRH based on responses to specific questions. These data indicate that minimum income or employment requirements were the most frequent reason families were screened out from assignment to RRH.⁸ Of families screened out of RRH, more than half (53 percent) did not meet the programs’ requirements to demonstrate a stable source of income, employment, or willingness to work. Other screening criteria were required much less frequently and accounted for a smaller proportion of RRH screen-outs (Gubits et al., 2013b).

The take-up rates shown in Exhibit 2 are the rates of use of RRH assistance by families who were not screened out as a result of their responses to the eligibility questions asked by the study. Some of these families were screened out later, when they went to programs to apply for assistance. After assignment to priority access to RRH, the families were referred to specific RRH programs and the program conducted a formal eligibility determination process. Early analysis of post-random assignment screening found that approximately 10 percent of families offered priority access to RRH programs were found ineligible by the programs despite having passed the pre-random assignment screening. Most often this was because of insufficient income or employment (Gubits et al., 2013b). In some instances, families’ responses to pre-random assignment screening questions indicated likely eligibility for RRH programs, but in the program’s formal eligibility determination process the family was determined ineligible. For example, program staff typically would verify income and employment status. In some cases the program’s verification processes may have shown that families did not meet program requirements despite the families’ responses to the screening questions asked before random assignment.

As expected, some of the communities with the highest take-up rates —Louisville, Minneapolis, and Salt Lake City— did not require minimum income or employment to receive assistance (Exhibit 3). However, the pattern between eligibility requirements and RRH take up is not consistent. For example, in Atlanta, RRH programs imposed employment and several other eligibility requirements beyond those required by HPRP and the take-up rate, 75 percent as of 12 months following the families’ random assignment, was one of the highest in the study. Programs in Denver did not use any additional eligibility requirements, but that site had one of the lowest take-up rates, 38 percent.

⁸ The impact estimates in Gubits et al. (2015) and Gubits et al. (2016) compare only families assigned to RRH to other families who were eligible to be assigned to RRH but were randomly assigned to another group.

(However, the rate for Denver applies to only eight families.) These inconsistent patterns indicate that eligibility requirements are not the only factor driving take-up rates. Other factors may include family expectations about the assistance and housing market conditions.

Exhibit 3: Take-up of RRH, eligibility requirements, and duration of assistance by study community

Site	RRH take-up rate after 12 months (%)	Eligibility requirements	Expected duration of assistance
Total, all sites	57	N/A	N/A
Louisville	89	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Onset of homelessness in last 12 months • Recent drop in income 	6 months
Salt Lake City	88	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criminal history 	6-12 months
Atlanta	75	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum income or employment • Sobriety • Criminal history • Required to pay program fee or rent 	6-12 months 4-6 months*
Minneapolis	65	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No requirements beyond HPRP eligibility rules 	3-6 months
Connecticut	59	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum income or employment • Proof of citizenship or legal residency 	4-6 months 6-12 months*
Alameda	55	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum income or employment • Willingness to use RRH assistance in designated locations 	6-12 months
Baltimore	45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum income or employment • Education or work experience • No previous debt to housing authority or ability to repay debt immediately 	6-12 months
Phoenix	42	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum income or employment • Education or work experience • Sobriety 	6-12 months
Kansas City	40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Onset of homelessness in past 12 months • Absence of debts/able to secure utilities • Willingness to pay program fee or rent 	Up to 12 months
Denver	38	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No requirements beyond HPRP eligibility rules 	6-18 months

Site	RRH take-up rate after 12 months (%)	Eligibility requirements	Expected duration of assistance
Boston	30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proof of citizenship or legal residency • Willingness to use RRH assistance in designated locations 	18+ months
Honolulu	18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum income or employment • Tuberculosis test 	4-6 months**

Source: Family Options Study random assignment records.

*When more than one duration is given, durations are for different RRH programs in the community.

**Originally 3 months, later extended to 4-6 months.

Family Expectations

Interviews with a small number of families given priority access to RRH indicate that some families may have not applied to the RRH program because they believed they would be found ineligible, whether or not that would have been the case. Other families said that the short duration of the assistance—or uncertainty about the length of the assistance—made them reluctant to take up the assistance (Fisher et al. 2014). As Exhibit 3 shows, some of the communities with the lowest take-up rates—for example, Honolulu—also had short expected durations of assistance. On the other hand, some of the highest take-up rates were in programs with expected durations of assistance of six months or less. Programs in those communities may have been appealing for reasons other than the duration of assistance. Minneapolis and Louisville made RRH a central element of their strategies for addressing family homelessness and may have succeeded in communicating its advantages to potential users of the assistance.

In Honolulu, the expected duration of RRH assistance changed during the course of the study. The City of Honolulu originally designed the program as a one-month subsidy, but later extended assistance to three months. According to program staff, families referred through the study often declined this option because they thought that three months would not be enough time—given the rents in Honolulu—for them to take over a market-rate apartment on their own. Ultimately, the program leadership decided to offer a six-month rent subsidy to all the families that had initially declined the RRH option offered through the study, as well as all new families referred to the RRH program. Program staff reported that, even when offered six months of assistance, many families declined the assistance.

In Baltimore, another site with a fairly low take-up (9 of 20 families referred to RRH used the assistance), funding for rapid re-housing was unavailable for several months during program enrollment, after some families had been referred (slots were reported as available at the time of random assignment, but were not available when referred families sought the assistance, because of interruptions in funding). When funding resumed, some families who had been referred did not take up the offered assistance.

In addition to the design of the RRH programs, the availability of other homelessness assistance programs may have driven family decisions on whether to accept the offer of rapid re-housing. For example, Boston is a “right to shelter” community, where all homeless families are assured of some form of emergency shelter for an indefinite period of time. Families in this community may have elected to turn down offers of rapid re-housing while waiting to access other forms of housing assistance.

Housing Market Conditions

One might expect lower take up in sites with lower rental vacancy rates (tighter rental markets) or in sites with higher rents. Presumably in such markets families might find it more difficult to locate housing in which to use the short-term rent subsidy, and higher rents might make it more difficult for families to assume the full rent on their own when assistance ends.

Exhibit 4: Take-up of RRH by families and housing market conditions

Site	RRH take-up rate through end of follow-up (%)	2010 rental vacancy rate (%)	Median monthly gross rent (\$, 2010)
Total, all sites	59%	N/A	N/A
Salt Lake City	90%	7.5%	\$832
Louisville	89%	9.2%	\$670
Atlanta	78%	16.4%	\$892
Minneapolis	65%	6.1%	\$861
Connecticut	60%	12.3%	\$1,047
Alameda	59%	5.6%	\$1,198
Baltimore	45%	7.5%	\$874
Phoenix	42%	11.7%	\$884
Kansas City	40%	13.8%	\$738
Denver	38%	5.5%	\$811
Boston	36%	5.4%	\$1,233
Honolulu	25%	6.1%	\$1,171

Sources: Family Options Study Program Use Data. 2010 American Community Service 1-Year Estimates, US Census Bureau

Notes: Follow-up period ranges from 32 to 49 months, average of 37 months

Sample includes all families who received priority access to RRH, regardless of whether they responded to surveys.

To some extent we see RRH take up patterns that appear to reflect housing market conditions in 2010 near the time of enrollment. In the two sites with lowest RRH take up (Honolulu and Boston), rental vacancy rates were among the lowest of the sites, and median rents were among the highest.

Similarly, we see relatively high take up of RRH in Louisville (89 percent) that coincides with high- vacancy, lower-cost rental market conditions. Take-up was also high in Atlanta and Salt Lake City, which had high vacancy but relatively higher costs. However, there are some exceptions to this pattern. Kansas City and Phoenix had relatively low RRH take up (40 percent and 42 percent, respectively) but relatively lower cost and higher vacancy rental housing.

2.2 How quickly did families offered priority access to RRH use the assistance?

Once families were randomly assigned to the short-term subsidy group, they had to complete the program’s eligibility screening process and enroll in the RRH program. Once the family was accepted into the program, they had to meet with program staff to determine the amount of subsidy they would receive, search for a housing unit, and secure a unit that met the program’s habitability standards.

Families offered priority access to RRH who used the assistance typically began to receive short-term rental assistance within several months of random assignment. Across all sites, the length of time between random assignment and the start of RRH averaged three months, with median of two months (Exhibit 5).^{9,10}

The analysis finds statistically significant variation across communities in the time it took families to start using RRH assistance. Families in several communities started using RRH rental assistance in less than two months (Denver, Kansas City and Louisville), while it took the median families in other sites three or more months to begin using the short-term rent subsidies (Boston, Baltimore, and Honolulu).

Exhibit 5: Length of time to start of RRH rental assistance for families with priority access by community

Site	# families using RRH	Average # months from random assignment to start of RRH	Median # months from random assignment to start of RRH
Total, all sites	336	3.0	2.0
Alameda	33	3.4	1.0
Atlanta	57	2.6	2.0
Baltimore	9	4.6	4.0
Boston	19	7.0	3.0
Connecticut	44	2.4	2.0
Denver	3	0.7	1.0
Honolulu	11	10.0	5.0
Kansas City	12	1.2	1.0
Louisville	16	1.5	1.0
Minneapolis	34	2.1	2.0

9 Family Options Study families assigned to receive priority access to a Housing Choice Voucher spent somewhat longer leasing up with a voucher, 114 days after random assignment on average (Solari and Khadduri 2017). The HPRP regulations required that the unit meet a rent reasonableness test as well habitability standards, a less stringent housing quality inspection than the HCV program. However, RRH staff still have to make decisions on how much subsidy to provide.

10 In many sites, the average time to start of RRH is higher than the median, because it is affected by a few families with long periods of time between random assignment and start of RRH.

Site	# families using RRH	Average # months from random assignment to start of RRH	Median # months from random assignment to start of RRH
Phoenix	26	2.3	2.0
Salt Lake City	72	2.5	2.0

Sources: Family Options Study Program Use Data

Notes: Follow-up period ranges from 32 to 49 months, averaging 37 months

Sample is comprised of all families who received priority access to RRH, regardless of whether they responded to surveys.

Many of the same factors that influenced the families’ decision to use RRH may have also affected the average length of time it took them to access RRH. In Honolulu, a longer subsidy was offered to families who initially declined a shorter subsidy, so families may have waited until receiving the longer offer before accepting. In Boston, a “right to shelter” community, families could stay in emergency shelter for an indefinite period before taking the rapid re-housing subsidy. This pattern is consistent with findings by Solari and Khadduri (2017) regarding timing of take up of long-term subsidy assistance in Boston, influenced by the right to shelter policy in that community.

Most families who used the RRH rent subsidy to which they were given priority access did so directly following their stay in emergency shelter, although there was some variation by community. Exhibit 6 shows the two main pathways to using RRH for families offered priority access and who went on to use the short-term subsidies.¹¹ Across all of the study communities, most families with priority access who used RRH did so immediately after the shelter stay (93 percent). Seven percent used another type of assistance (usually transitional housing) before taking up the RRH subsidy. Atlanta and Honolulu had the highest proportion of families use another type of assistance before RRH (16 percent and 18 percent, respectively).

Exhibit 6: Sequence of program use for families with priority access to RRH who used RRH, by community

Site	N	ES-RRH	ES-other assistance-RRH
Overall	336	314 (93%)	22 (7%)
Alameda	33	31 (94%)	2 (6%)
Atlanta	57	48 (84%)	9 (16%)
Baltimore	9	9 (100%)	0 (0%)
Boston	19	18 (95%)	1 (5%)
Connecticut	44	43 (98%)	1 (2%)
Denver	3	3 (100%)	0 (0%)

11 There were six families in the “Emergency Shelter to RRH” pathway with a period of no program use between emergency shelter and RRH. Three of these families did not start RRH until 20 months or more after entering shelter.

Site	N	ES-RRH	ES-other assistance-RRH
Honolulu	11	9 (82%)	2 (18%)
Kansas City	12	12 (100%)	0 (0%)
Louisville	16	15 (94%)	1 (6%)
Minneapolis	34	34 (100%)	0 (0%)
Phoenix	26	26 (100%)	0 (0%)
Salt Lake City	72	66 (92%)	6 (8%)

Source: Family Options Study Program Use Data

Notes: Follow-up period ranges from 32 to 49 months, average of 37 months. Sample restricted to families who received priority access to RRH, regardless of whether they responded to surveys.

There were six families in the ES-RRH pathway with a period of no program use between emergency shelter and RRH. Three of these families did not start RRH until 20 months or more after entering shelter.

2.3 How long did families use the short-term rental assistance to which they were given priority access?

Across all communities, families offered priority access who received short-term rental assistance used the subsidy for an average of somewhat more than seven months (Exhibit 7). The median duration of the assistance was slightly shorter than the average (6.5 vs. 7.4 months). This duration is broadly consistent with other information about RRH. For example, a report on HPRP found that, according to grantee performance reports, a majority (64 percent) of RRH participants stayed in the program for six months or less (HUD, 2016).

Exhibit 7: Duration of short-term rental assistance by site

Site	# families using RRH	Average # months used RRH	Maximum expected duration of assistance	2010 rental vacancy rate (%)	Median monthly gross rent (\$ 2010)
Total, all sites	336	7.4	N/A	N/A	N/A
Alameda	33	10.5	12 months	5.6%	\$1,198
Atlanta	57	5.5	6-12 months	16.4%	\$892
Baltimore	9	6.7	6-12 months	7.5%	\$874
Boston	19	14.9	18+ months	5.4%	\$1,233
Connecticut	44	7.5	6-12 months	12.3%	\$1,047
Denver	3	10.5	18 months	5.5%	\$811
Honolulu	11	5.4	6 months ^b	6.1%	\$1,171

Site	# families using RRH	Average # months used RRH	Maximum expected duration of assistance	2010 rental vacancy rate (%)	Median monthly gross rent (\$ 2010)
Kansas City	12	7.5	12 months	13.8%	\$738
Louisville	16	5.9	6 months	9.2%	\$670
Minneapolis	34	6.7	6 months	6.1%	\$861
Phoenix	26	5.6	12 months	11.7%	\$884
Salt Lake City	72	7.0	6 months ^c	7.5%	\$832

Source: Family Options Study Program Use Data

Notes: Follow-up period ranges from 32 to 49 months, averaging of 37 months

Sample is all families who received priority access to RRH, regardless of whether they responded to surveys. Program staff reported the typical maximum length of assistance during the program data collection for the study. Ranges reflect variation in program design within the community and the requirements of HPRP funding at the time of study implementation. Most programs did not have an absolute limit on the number of months of assistance offered through the program.

- b Initially, RRH assistance was limited to 3 months, but during the study period program staff modified the design to allow 6 months of assistance.
- c In Salt Lake City, the anticipated duration of assistance changed from less than 6 months to more than 6 months during the study period.

As with take up of RRH by families offered priority access to a RRH program, the duration of the rent subsidies for families that used the RRH subsidy varied by community. Generally, there were no firm limits on months of assistance in the RRH programs, beyond what was allowed by HPRP regulations (up to 18 months). Families received the subsidy for less than six months on average in Atlanta, Honolulu, Louisville, and Phoenix. In Alameda, Boston and Denver, families received the subsidy for more than 10 months. The duration of the rent subsidies reflects both the design of the program in each community and housing market conditions. Generally, the durations of assistance are consistent with what program staff reported was the maximum expected duration in that community. In Minneapolis and Salt Lake City, families used the assistance for somewhat longer than the expected six months reported by the RRH programs in those locations. Kansas City and Phoenix had maximum expected length of assistance of 12 months, but families ultimately used the assistance an average of seven months or less. In addition, subsidies generally lasted for a longer period of time in higher-cost rental markets. That was the case for Alameda County and Boston. Program rules appear to have been more important than market conditions in Denver and Honolulu. Denver had among the lowest median gross rents across the 12 communities, but Denver permitted families to use RRH for a maximum of 18 months, and the 8 families who used RRH did so for an average of 10.5 months. Honolulu has a low vacancy rate and high rents, but program rules permitted families to use the assistance for a maximum of six months.

3. How did all study families who used RRH use the assistance?

Some families who did not receive priority access to rapid re-housing but instead were randomly assigned to receive other interventions (long-term rent subsidies, project-based transitional housing, or usual care) nonetheless used RRH. In this section we examine use of RRH for all families in the study, regardless of assignment group. The section begins with a discussion of take up of RRH for families who found their way to this type of assistance on their own. The analysis then looks at whether RRH is typically one-time assistance or if families return for a second “dose” of the rent subsidy. The section concludes with discussion about the extent to which RRH assistance was used in conjunction with long-term subsidies in the communities in the study.

3.1 To what extent did families who did not receive priority access to RRH use RRH rental assistance?

An interesting topic to consider is how often families without priority access through the FOS used RRH assistance. Given RRH’s growing prevalence as a tool to assist homeless families, even families not assigned to the intervention may have had access to an RRH program.

Exhibit 8 shows the total number of families in each assignment group in each community and the proportion of families in each assignment group that used RRH at some time during the three-year follow-up period. As described in Section 1 of this paper, UC means usual care, SUB means a long-term rent subsidy, and PBTH means project-based transitional housing. Overall, across all assignment groups and all sites, 27 percent of families in the study used RRH. As expected, use of RRH was highest in the RRH group (59 percent). It also is not surprising that use in the UC group (21 percent of all families assigned to UC) was higher than for families assigned to the SUB (12 percent) or PBTH (14 percent) groups, since those families had priority access to another form of housing assistance.

For families without priority access to RRH, the size of the community’s RRH program appears to have been the dominant factor influencing whether a family used RRH. In some sites fairly high percentages of the SUB and PBTH groups used RRH. The most extensive use of RRH by families without priority access to that program was in Salt Lake City, where use in the SUB and UC groups exceeded 70 percent. Use of RRH by groups without priority access was also common in Minneapolis. Both Salt Lake City and Minneapolis have large RRH programs that are considered important components of the community’s emergency response to homelessness.

Exhibit 8: Use of RRH by assignment group and community

Site	UC		SUB		PBTH	
	# in group	Took up RRH	# in group	Took up RRH	# in group	Took up RRH
Total, all sites	746	154 (21%)	599	70 (12%)	368	50 (14%)
Alameda	77	14 (18%)	76	0 (0%)	49	10 (20%)
Atlanta	75	14 (19%)	0	-	41	7 (17%)
Baltimore	21	0 (0%)	0	-	17	0 (0%)
Boston	64	12 (19%)	64	1 (2%)	0	-
Connecticut	76	8 (11%)	47	2 (4%)	18	2 (11%)

Site	UC		SUB		PBTH	
	# in group	Took up RRH	# in group	Took up RRH	# in group	Took up RRH
Denver	65	6 (9%)	76	2 (3%)	23	3 (13%)
Honolulu	65	9 (14%)	43	2 (5%)	66	7 (11%)
Kansas City	50	2 (4%)	53	1 (2%)	42	0 (0%)
Louisville	35	1 (3%)	32	0 (0%)	24	2 (8%)
Minneapolis	63	21 (33%)	62	12 (19%)	4	1 (25%)
Phoenix	81	14 (17%)	71	2 (3%)	65	14 (22%)
Salt Lake City	74	53 (72%)	75	48 (64%)	19	4 (21%)

Source: Family Options Study Program Use Data

Notes: Follow-up period ranges from 32 to 49 months, averaging 37 months

Sample includes families in all assignment groups, regardless of whether they responded to surveys. Atlanta and Baltimore did not have the SUB intervention.

3.2 Did families return for a second “dose” of RRH?

The rules of the HPRP program that provided the funding for most of the RRH in the Family Options Study did not prohibit multiple spells of assistance. More recently, some communities have been implementing a “progressive engagement” approach to assistance. In this approach, a family is given only as much assistance as is thought needed to achieve housing stability, but assistance can be extended or repeated if still needed. In addition, case managers keep in contact with the family after a period of rent subsidy ends and may conclude that the family needs additional support. HPRP rules required periodic recertifications of need for assistance, and most RRH programs participating in the Family Options Study did this every three months. Most families in the study who accessed a RRH program did so during one period of time (one episode), suggesting that caseworkers were not continuing to work with the families after the end of subsidy. Altogether, across all assignment groups, the vast majority (92 percent) of the 610 families who used RRH had a single occasion of program participation (Exhibit 9).

Exhibit 9: Number of episodes of RRH, for all families who used RRH

Number of episodes	Number of families	Percent of families (%)
1	561	92.0
2	47	7.7
3	2	0.3

Source: Family Options Study Program Use Data

Notes: Follow-up period ranges from 32 to 49 months, averaging 37 months

Sample includes all families who used RRH, regardless of assignment group (N=610)

3.3 Did families use RRH as a “bridge” to a long-term rent subsidy?

A central finding from the Family Options Study is that, compared to usual care and to offers of short-term rent subsidies or transitional housing, priority access to a long-term rent subsidy led to by far the best outcomes for reducing family homelessness three years after random assignment. Priority access to long-term subsidies also produced beneficial effects in several other areas of family well-being (two examples are reduced psychological distress and intimate partner violence) and reduced food insecurity (Gubits et al., 2016).

Given the large, positive effects of offering families in shelter access to long-term rent subsidies, policymakers and local homeless assistance providers are interested in pursuing strategies to make this assistance available to families who experience homelessness. However, the homeless assistance system does not currently provide immediate access to such subsidies for most families in shelter, and waiting lists for housing choice vouchers, public housing, and other forms of long-term subsidies are very long. Local homeless assistance systems might reasonably seek opportunities to use other forms of assistance such as short-term subsidies offered in RRH as a bridge or conduit to long-term subsidies.

The Family Options Study found that families not given priority access to a long-term rent subsidy often were able to gain access to such subsidies, either the type offered to the SUB group, usually a housing voucher, or another form of rental assistance without a time limit such as public housing or project-based Section 8. In the usual care group, 36 percent of families used some form of long-term subsidy during the follow-up period, and 30 percent were using this type of assistance at the time of the 37-month follow-up survey. One-third of families assigned to the PBTH group used a long-term subsidy.

Families assigned to the rapid re-housing group showed similar patterns, with 35 percent ever using some form of long-term rent subsidy during the follow-up period. The impact analysis did not find that priority access to RRH programs led to greater use of long-term rent subsidies compared with usual care, but families with priority access to RRH began using the long-term rent subsidies later in the follow-up period than their counterparts in the UC group. At the time of the 37-month follow-up survey, 30 percent of families who had priority access to RRH were using some form of long-term subsidy (Gubits et al., 2016). Thus, across the full study sample, priority access to short-term subsidies did not act as a conduit to long-term subsidies to a greater extent than did usual care. Some communities may have encouraged families using RRH to apply for long-term subsidies and helped them use the subsidies when they became available. However, staff of emergency shelters may have been encouraging all families to get on waiting lists for long-term subsidy programs, including families in the UC group.¹² Or families may have been on waiting lists for long-term subsidies before entering shelter.

Exhibit 10 shows the proportion of families in all assignment groups in each of the study communities who used RRH and who also went on to use a long-term subsidy. In six communities more than 30 percent of families who used RRH also used a long-term subsidy. More than half of RRH users in Boston also used a long-term subsidy, as did 42 percent of RRH users in Salt Lake City. This reflects the high overall use of RRH in Salt Lake City by families not given priority access to RRH by the study. It is also consistent with findings by Solari and Khadduri (2017) that families assigned priority access to long-term subsidies were more likely to have used RRH before the long-term subsidy in Salt Lake City and Minneapolis than in other communities. In Boston, the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program that is the source of many of the long-term rent subsidies gives families experiencing homelessness a waiting list preference, and the overall use of long-term subsidies by all families, regardless of assignment group, was high in Boston (Solari and Khadduri 2017).

12 This would not have violated the study protocols, which required only that UC families not be given immediate access to a long-term housing subsidy or one of the other study interventions.

Exhibit 10: Use of long-term subsidy after RRH

Site	# using RRH	Used long-term subsidy after RRH
Total, all sites	610	181 (30%)
Alameda	57	8 (14%)
Atlanta	78	10 (13%)
Baltimore	9	2 (22%)
Boston	32	17 (53%)
Connecticut	56	15 (27%)
Denver	14	5 (36%)
Honolulu	29	2 (7%)
Kansas City	15	6 (40%)
Louisville	19	6 (32%)
Minneapolis	68	22 (32%)
Phoenix	56	14 (25%)
Salt Lake City	177	74 (42%)

Source: Family Options Study Program Use Data

Note: Follow-up period ranges from 32 to 49 months, average of 37 months

Sample includes all families that used RRH, regardless of assignment group (N=610)

4. To what extent did families who used RRH return to homelessness?

The overarching objective of RRH is to swiftly move households who experience homelessness into permanent housing and to stabilize them there. In its Rapid Re-housing Performance Benchmarks and Program Standards, the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) established three measurable goals for RRH programs:

1. Reduce the length of time participants are homeless;
2. Exit households to permanent housing; and
3. Limit returns to homelessness within a year of program exit (NAEH, 2016).

This section uses the Program Use/Living Situation data collected by the Family Options Study to examine the third goal, returns to homelessness after RRH exit. This analysis permits comparisons of the returns to homelessness observed in the Family Options Study with the NAEH benchmarks and with other studies of RRH.

This analysis includes all families who used RRH, regardless of whether they received priority access to RRH. We consider a family to have experienced a “return to homelessness” in each interval after the family stopped receiving RRH rental assistance (the “exit”) if the family spent part of any month during the interval in an emergency shelter, a transitional housing program, or a place not meant for human habitation.¹³ This analysis section considers only the first exit from RRH for the approximately eight percent of families using RRH who returned for a second “dose” of RRH (see Exhibit 9 in Section 3). Both this definition of homelessness and the observation period after exit from RRH conform to the measures used in the NAEH benchmarks and much of the previous research on RRH program outcomes (Gubits et al., 2017b).

4.1 What was the pattern of returns to homelessness after families exited RRH?

Across all 2,282 families in the study, 610 received short-term rent subsidies from a rapid re-housing program at some point during the follow-up period, and 585 exited RRH before the end of follow-up. More than a quarter (28 percent) had returned to homelessness at some point within a year of exiting rapid re-housing, and more than one-third (36 percent) returned to homelessness by the end of the follow-up period 37 months later (Exhibit 11). The median length of a family’s second episode of homelessness was two months.

Exhibit 11: Percent of families who returned to homelessness after leaving RRH

Number of families observed for full return window	# of families who used RRH	Families who returned to homelessness
6 months after first RRH exit	567	106 (19%)
12 months after first RRH exit	555	155 (28%)
18 months after first RRH exit	536	168 (31%)
After first RRH exit, through the end of data collection	585	209 (36%)

¹³ By contrast, the Family Options Study Three Year Impact Report (Gubits et al., 2016) analyzed the impacts of the interventions on several measures of housing instability. The Family Options Study impact analysis measured housing stability in the six-month period before the date of the follow-up survey, regardless of whether the family had used or exited rapid re-housing assistance. In addition, in the Family Options Study impact analysis, staying in transitional housing during the follow-up period was considered taking up one of the study interventions rather than a return to homelessness.

Source: Family Options Study Program Use/Family Living Situation Data

Notes: Follow-up period ranges from 32 to 49 months, averaging of 37 months. Sample includes all families who used RRH, regardless of assignment group.

In the first three rows, the sample is restricted to families for whom we observe particular lengths of post-RRH program use/living situation (6 months, 12 months, or 18 months, respectively), during which we can measure returns to homelessness. We observe at least 6 months of post-RRH program use/living situation data for 567 families; 12 months for 555 families; and 18 months for 536 families.

In the final row, the sample includes all families who exit from RRH, regardless of the number of months of post-RRH exit data available. From this group, 209 families returned to homelessness. The length of follow-up for this row averaged 28 months, ranging from 1 month (for those who exited RRH just before the end of follow-up) to 47 months (for those who exited RRH at the beginning of follow-up).

The rate of return to homelessness after exiting RRH varies by community (Exhibit 12). For instance, in Boston, only about seven percent of all families who exit RRH had returned to homelessness during the study period. This low rate of return may reflect the wide availability of long-term subsidies in Boston because of a preference given to homeless families by the Housing Choice Voucher program. In contrast, more than 40 percent of families who exited RRH in Denver, Louisville, Minneapolis, and Salt Lake City had returned to homelessness at some point during the 37-month follow-up period. These patterns do not appear to be driven by rent levels or vacancy rates, as the four sites with the highest rates of return to homelessness have moderate rents and vacancy rates. There may, however, be a relationship to program design, as Louisville, Minneapolis, and Salt Lake City had an expected duration of assistance of 6 months or less.

Exhibit 12: Percent of families who return to homelessness after leaving RRH, by site

Site	Number of families who used RRH and exited during the study period	Percentage of families who returned to homelessness during the study period	Maximum expected length of assistance	2010 rental vacancy rate (%)	Median monthly gross rent (2010)
Louisville	17	53%	6 months	9.2%	\$670
Denver	12	50%	18 months	5.5%	\$811
Salt Lake City	173	50%	6 months ^c	7.5%	\$832
Minneapolis	68	41%	6 months	6.1%	\$861
Honolulu	25	32%	6 months ^b	6.1%	\$1,171
Atlanta	76	31%	6-12 months	16.4%	\$892
Phoenix	55	31%	12 months	11.7%	\$884
Connecticut	53	30%	6-12 months	12.3%	\$1,047
Kansas City	15	27%	12 months	13.8%	\$738
Alameda County	54	17%	12 months	5.6%	\$1,198

Site	Number of families who used RRH and exited during the study period	Percentage of families who returned to homelessness during the study period	Maximum expected length of assistance	2010 rental vacancy rate (%)	Median monthly gross rent (2010)
Baltimore	9	11%	6-12 months	7.5%	\$874
Boston	28	7%	18+ months	5.4%	\$1,233

Source: Family Options Study Program Use/Family Living Situation Data

Notes: Follow-up period ranges from 32 to 49 months, averaging of 37 months.

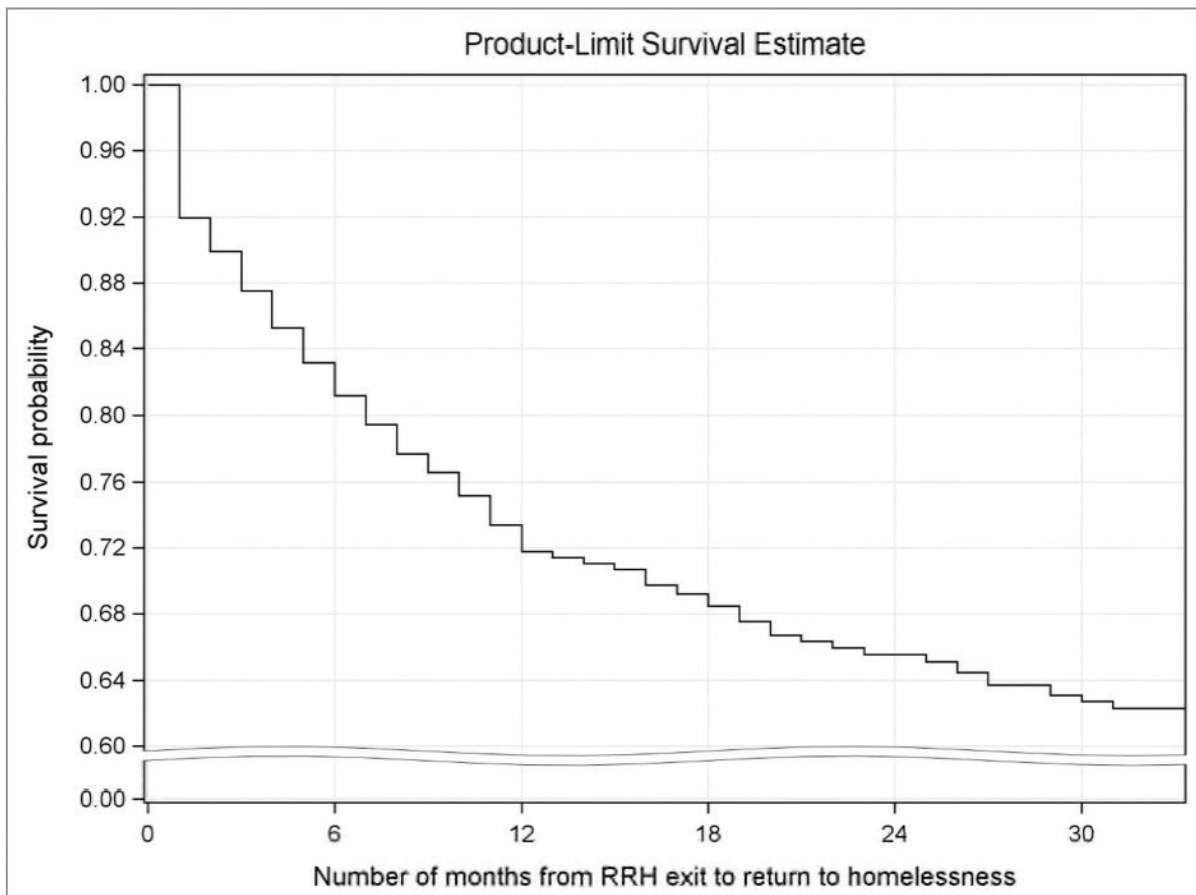
Sample includes all families who exit from RRH during the follow-up period, regardless of assignment group. Program staff reported the typical maximum length of assistance during the program data collection for the study. Ranges reflect variation in program design within the community.

- b Initially, RRH assistance was limited to 3 months, but during the study period program staff modified the design to allow 6 months of assistance.
- c In Salt Lake City, the anticipated duration of assistance changed from less than 6 months to more than 6 months during the study period.

We conducted a survival analysis to examine how quickly families returned to homelessness after leaving RRH. The survival curve (Exhibit 13) shows the proportion of all RRH leavers (N=585) who had not returned to homelessness, at each month after leaving RRH. This provides a visual picture of how many families have avoided returning to homelessness over time.

As of the first month after leaving RRH, 92 percent of families had not returned to homelessness, indicating that 8 percent of families did become homeless by the first month after leaving RRH. The curve remains fairly steep during the first few months after leaving RRH, showing that initial returns to homelessness were more common during this period. After about 12 months, the curve becomes flatter, as fewer families were becoming homeless.

Exhibit 13: Survival curve—percent of families who had not returned to homelessness at each month after leaving RRH



Source: Family Options Study Program Use/Family Living Situation Data

Notes: Sample includes all families who used RRH and who exited during the follow-up period, regardless of assignment group. (N=585).

Overall, about a third of families returned to homelessness at some point after leaving RRH. The risk of returning was greatest in the first year after leaving RRH. Once families avoid returning to homelessness in the first year after leaving RRH, the probability of them returning to homelessness at a later date declines.

The proportion of families in the Family Options Study who returned to homelessness after exiting rapid re-housing programs is higher than the rate found in other studies and does not meet the NAEH performance benchmark. The NAEH Rapid Re-housing Performance Benchmarks and Program Standards call for no more than 15 percent of program exiters to return to homelessness in the year after exit from rapid rehousing (NAEH, 2016). As part of this Understanding Rapid Re-housing Study, the Abt study team conducted a review of RRH studies and performance reports that measure returns to homelessness (Gubits et al., 2017b). This review found that the rate of return to homeless varies (as does the definition of “return to homelessness”), but most of these analyses found that RRH programs meet the under-15-percent benchmark. For example, an evaluation of the Rapid Re-housing for Homeless Families Demonstration (RRHD) found that about 10 percent of RRH recipients experienced homelessness in the 12 months after exit from RRH (Finkel et al., 2016).

We do not have a single, clear answer to why the Family Options Study rate of returns to homelessness is higher than that found by other studies. The study used survey data to supplement HMIS and may have identified some returns to homelessness in survey data that are not apparent in studies based solely on HMIS data. For example, families who

entered shelter in another jurisdiction not covered by the original HMIS and who reported the shelter stay in one of the follow-up surveys, would be included here but not in other studies. At the start of the FOS, all families were residing in the 12 study sites. At the time of the 20-month follow-up survey, 91 percent of families continued to reside in the same state, and at 37 months, 88 percent of families remained in the same state. Some families did relocate to other states. Twenty months later, at least one study family was residing in each of 42 different states and Puerto Rico (McInnis and Rodriguez, 2016).

Another possible explanation relates to the quality of HMIS data. The sites included in the Family Options Study had high levels of HMIS coverage, and the study design required careful attention to the family identifiers collected at baseline so that the sample could be tracked over time. Therefore, the Family Options Study may have been able to identify more families in the HMIS than is the case for other studies (Gubits et al., 2013a).

Yet another possibility is that the FOS study sample differs from the population in other studies. The Family Options Study imposed several conditions on the study sample, including requiring that families must have stayed in shelter for at least seven days and must have had a child present with them in the shelter. Some of the other studies may include households without children, and some may include households that are less likely to return to homelessness than a family not able to resolve a housing crisis within a week.

While the overall rate of return to homelessness is higher among FOS families, the pattern of returns to homelessness over time is consistent with the results of other studies. Data from HMIS show that, among families participating in RRHD who returned to shelter in the 12 months following exit from RRH, nearly half of the returns occurred in the first month after exiting RRH (Spellman et al., 2014). Among FOS families, between a quarter and a third of families who returned to shelter in the 12 months following exit from RRH did so in the first month after exit. A possible explanation for this pattern of returns to homelessness may be that families were unable to afford the unit they rented while subsidized by RRH in the absence of assistance.

4.2 Do family characteristics help explain which families return to homelessness after exiting RRH?

This section compares the families who returned to homelessness in the 12 months after leaving RRH with families who did not become homeless during that period. The comparison focuses on family baseline characteristics measured at the time of the shelter stay during which the families were recruited into the study. These findings are non-experimental. That is, the results of this descriptive analysis do not provide causal evidence about which family characteristics lead to a return to homelessness. They do, however suggest factors that might have some influence on subsequent homelessness.

For the most part, families who became homeless after exiting RRH were similar to families who exited RRH and did not become homeless. Previous experience of homelessness before the shelter stay, participation in public income support and benefit programs at the time of the shelter stay, having a family member with a disability, psycho-social challenges, and barriers to housing were not statistically different between the groups (Exhibit 14).

However, there were a few differences between families who became homeless again and families who did not. Families who became homeless after exiting RRH rental assistance had a slightly greater average number of children than families who did not become homeless (2.3 vs 2.0), which might reflect greater difficulty finding housing that is affordable without a subsidy. Work experience also appears to be related to subsequent homelessness, with families who became homeless again less likely to have been working at the time of study enrollment. However, longer-term work histories appear similar across the two groups. White, non-Hispanic families were somewhat more likely, and African American families somewhat less likely, to have a subsequent episode of homelessness.

In addition, families in which the head had been doubled up at any point as an adult were somewhat less likely to return to homelessness after existing RRH. Further, among all families in the study, those who were doubled up at some point as an adult were more likely to be doubled up at the 20-month follow-up survey compared with families who had never been doubled up. This suggests that doubling-up may provide a degree of protection for families against

future homelessness. To investigate this further, we looked at the rate of doubling up during the 12 months after the family exited RRH. We found that there was not a significant difference in the rate of doubling up between families that returned to homelessness in the 12 months after exiting RRH and those that did not return to homelessness. Thus, we cannot draw any strong conclusions as to whether doubling up provides protection against future experiences of homelessness.

Exhibit 14: Baseline characteristics of families who did and did not become homeless again after using RRH

Family characteristic	Families who did not become homeless in the 12 months after leaving RRH	Families who did become homeless in the 12 months after leaving RRH	Statistical significance
Sample	400	155	
Number of adults and children			
Adult respondent is female	91%	91%	
Average age of adult respondent (years)	30.9	31.6	
Average number of children	2.0	2.3	**
Race/ethnicity			
Hispanic, any race	19%	21%	
White non-Hispanic	22%	34%	**
Black non-Hispanic	47%	34%	**
Other non-Hispanic	12%	11%	
Homeless history			
Previous episode of homelessness prior to entering shelter	63%	63%	
Months homeless prior to shelter (mean)	1.8	1.9	
Total years homelessness in life (mean)	1.2	1.4	
Doubled up history			
Ever doubled up as adult because couldn't pay rent	87%	81%	*
Years doubled up last five years (mean)	1.5	1.3	
Childhood instability			
Homeless as child	16%	17%	
Foster care, group home, or institution as child	31%	27%	

Family characteristic	Families who did not become homeless in the 12 months after leaving RRH	Families who did become homeless in the 12 months after leaving RRH	Statistical significance
Employment history of adult respondents			
No work past week	77%	88%	**
No work past 6 months	50%	49%	
No work past 1 year	39%	39%	
No work past 2 years	28%	26%	
Job characteristics for adults who are working			
Earnings at main job (mean)	13,882	13,828	
Hours per week at main job (mean)	28.6	26.7	
Employment of adults in family			
One adult working for pay	26%	17%	*
Two adults working for pay	4%	1%	*
Total family income over the past year			
Mean	10,604	8,888	
Public program participation			
SNAP (food stamps) receipt	89%	92%	
TANF receipt	38%	30%	
Medicaid receipt	65%	68%	
Disability status			
Disability and/or disabled family member	41%	39%	
Adult respondent has disability that limits/prevents work	7%	10%	
Exposure to violence and mental health			
Domestic violence by spouse or partner as an adult	52%	57%	
PTSD symptoms	25.5	28.4	
Psychological distress	19%	23%	

Family characteristic	Families who did not become homeless in the 12 months after leaving RRH	Families who did become homeless in the 12 months after leaving RRH	Statistical significance
Previous housing history: perceived barriers to housing			
History of eviction	41%	39%	
Never a leaseholder	35%	38%	
Other barriers to housing			
Felony conviction of at least one adult family member	16%	19%	
Felony conviction of adult respondent	12%	17%	
Felony conviction of non-head family member	6%	6%	
Drug abuse	17%	15%	
Alcohol abuse	12%	14%	

Source: Family Options Study Data

Notes: Sample is the 555 families who used RRH, regardless of assignment group, and for whom we have 12 months of post-RRH program use/living situation data.

***/**/* denotes a significant difference in means at the .001/.01/.05 level, respectively

5. What are the living situations of families after exiting RRH?

This section examines in depth the living situation of RRH families at various points after exiting RRH. In addition to whether the family was homeless at 6, 12, and 18 months after the family stopped receiving the RRH rent subsidy, the analysis shows whether the family was in its own housing (with or without a rent subsidy) and whether the family was doubled up. The analysis includes all families who used the RRH short-term rental subsidy and exited during the study period, regardless of whether they received priority access. As in Section 4, the analysis considers only the first exit from RRH for the 8 percent of families who had a new episode in an RRH program.

In addition to recording returns to homelessness, the program use/living situation data provides detail on the type of living situations for families each month. At 6 months after exiting RRH, eight percent of families were experiencing homelessness (Exhibit 15). Nearly all of these homeless families were in emergency shelter (6 percent) or transitional housing (2 percent), with only 0.2 percent unsheltered. The proportion of families who were homeless rose to about 10 percent at 12 months after exit from RRH and then fell back to 8.5 percent at 18 months after exit. These point-in-time rates are lower than those shown in Section 4 (Exhibit 11), which show that almost 28 percent of families became homeless at some point in the 12 months after leaving RRH. As the median length of time homeless for those returning to homelessness was two months, many of those families were no longer homeless as of the 12th month.

In addition to the families who experienced homelessness, another 11 percent of families were doubled up with another family as of six months after exiting RRH, and the percentage of families with that experience grew slightly by the 18th month after exit from RRH.

Exhibit 15: Living situation of families after exit from RRH

Living situation	Months after exit from RRH		
	6	12	18
<i>N</i>	567	555	536
Homeless	8%	10%	9%
Unsheltered	0%	0%	0%
Emergency shelter	6%	6%	5%
Transitional housing	2%	4%	4%
Own housing	63%	60%	61%
Rapid re-housing	3%	1%	1%
Long-term subsidy ^a	13%	16%	19%
Own housing, no subsidy	47%	43%	40%
Missing	15%	11%	11%
Doubled-up	11%	14%	13%
Hotel paid for by self	1%	1%	1%
Other ^b	3%	5%	5%

Source: Family Options Study Program Use/Living Situation Data. Program use is based on a combination of participant survey data and administrative records from HMIS and HUD; other living situations are based on the participant survey. More detail is provided in section 1.2.

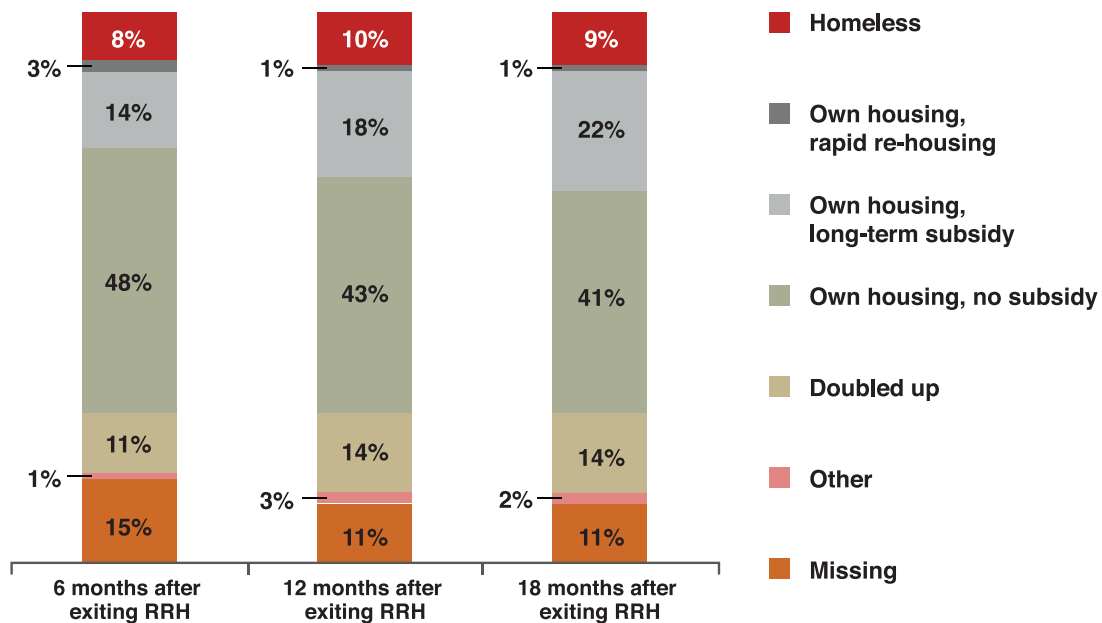
Notes: Sample includes all families who used RRH, regardless of assignment group. Components do not sum to 100 due to rounding.

In each column, the sample is restricted to families for whom we observe particular lengths of enough post-RRH living

situation (6 months, 12 months, or 18 months, respectively), during which we can measure living situation. We observe at least 6 months of post-RRH living situation data for 567 families; 12 months for 555 families; and 18 months for 536 families.

- a “Long-term subsidy” includes long-term housing subsidy, project-based vouchers, public housing, and permanent supportive housing
- b “Other” includes drug/alcohol treatment care facilities, jail, unspecified governmental housing, or domestic violence shelters not categorized as an “emergency shelter.”

Exhibit 16: Living situation of families after exit from RRH



Source: Family Options Study Program Use/Living Situation Data. Program use is based on a combination of participant survey data and administrative records from HMIS and HUD; other living situations are based on the participant survey. More detail is provided in Section 1.2.

Notes: Sample includes all families who used RRH, regardless of assignment group. Components do not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Sample is restricted to 536 families for whom we observe 18 months of post-RRH living situation.

“Long-term subsidy” includes long-term housing subsidy, project-based vouchers, public housing, and permanent supportive housing

“Other” includes drug/alcohol treatment care facilities, jail, unspecified governmental housing, or domestic violence shelters not categorized as an “emergency shelter.”

The share of families receiving a long-term subsidy increased, while the share of families living in their own housing without a subsidy declined. At six months after exiting RRH, 14 percent of families were receiving a long-term subsidy. This share rose to 18 percent after 12 months and to nearly 22 percent after 18 months. At six months after exiting RRH, 48 percent of families were living on their own without a subsidy; dropping to 43 percent of families at 12 months and 41 percent of families at 18 months.

For the 209 families who used RRH, exited from RRH, and returned to homelessness, Exhibit 17 shows their housing situation just before returning to homelessness at some point after exit from RRH. In the month just before returning to homelessness, nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of families were in their own housing, and another 11 percent were

doubled up. Only 24 percent were receiving RRH, which suggests that many families who returned to homelessness did not go directly from RRH to homelessness; instead, most continued living on their own for some period. This is consistent with other studies, which found that few households that exit a rapid re-housing program become homeless immediately upon exit. The 24 percent (51 families) who returned to homelessness directly from RRH assistance comprised nine percent of the 585 families who used RRH.

Exhibit 17: Living situation of families who used RRH and subsequently returned to homelessness

Living situation	One month prior to return to Homelessness
<i>N</i>	209
Homeless	
Own housing	63%
Rapid re-housing	24%
Long-term subsidy ^a	2%
Own housing, no subsidy	36%
Missing	24%
Doubled-up	11%
Hotel paid for by self	0%
Other ^b	0%

Source: Family Options Study Program Use/Living Situation Data. Program use is based on a combination of participant survey data and administrative records from HMIS and HUD; other living situations are based on the participant survey. More detail is provided in Section 1.2.

Notes: Sample includes all FOS families who used RRH and returned to homelessness, regardless of assignment group. Components do not sum to 100 due to rounding.

- a “Long-term subsidy” includes long-term housing subsidy, project-based vouchers, public housing, and permanent supportive housing*
- b “Other” includes drug/alcohol treatment care facilities, jail, unspecified governmental housing, or domestic violence shelters not categorized as an “emergency shelter.”*

6. Did families given priority access to RRH receive help in locating housing and moving in?

Rapid re-housing includes case management to help families leave emergency shelters and become stabilized in private rental housing. This section examines the extent to which families assigned to receive priority access to RRH reported that they received assistance in locating housing and moving in. The section also assesses whether families that reported receiving such help were more likely to use the RRH rent subsidy.

In the 20-month follow-up survey, families who received priority access to short-term rent subsidies were asked whether they received the following types of assistance at some point during the 20 months after random assignment:

- assistance obtaining a rental subsidy,
- assistance locating housing or negotiation with landlord, or
- assistance with moving (expenses, furnishings, etc.) or help settling in.¹⁴

Of the 569 families randomly assigned to receive priority access to RRH, 455 responded to the 20-month survey. Of these 455 families, 204 used only RRH, while 81 did not use any program other than emergency shelter. We examine responses to these questions only for the 204 families that just used RRH, excluding families who used other types of housing subsidy programs, as they may have received such services from those other programs. However, we cannot determine whether the assistance with locating and moving into housing was provided by the RRH case manager, by staff of the emergency shelter,¹⁵ or staff of another benefit or service program in which the family might have been participating.

The families who took up RRH were more likely to report receiving each of these types of assistance than those who received priority access to RRH but only used emergency shelter (Exhibit 18):

- 66 percent of RRH users reported receiving assistance obtaining a rental subsidy, compared to only 14 percent of those who only used emergency shelter
- 39 percent of RRH users reported receiving assistance with housing search, compared to only 17 percent of those who used only emergency shelter
- 36 percent of RRH users received moving assistance, compared to 10 percent of those who used only emergency shelter

14 The 20-month follow-up survey only asked about receipt of services to families with priority access to short-term rental subsidies (RRH) or project-based transitional housing (PBTH). The question was not asked of families in the UC and SUB groups. The survey question was: “The following questions are about services you have received since [month and year of random assignment]. We are interested in services you may have received from an agency or through a program you participated in. Please do not include any services or assistance you received from friends or family. 1) Assistance obtaining a rental subsidy; 2) Assistance locating housing, negotiation with landlord; 3) Assistance with moving (expenses, furnishings, etc.).

15 In some cases, emergency shelter staff also serve as “in-reach” staff for RRH programs. Even when this is not the case, emergency shelter staff may provide housing search assistance.

Exhibit 18: Receipt of help in locating housing and moving in between random assignment to priority access to RRH and 20 months later

Assistance received	Used ES plus RRH ^a	Used only ES ^b
<i>N</i>	204	81
Assistance obtaining a rental subsidy	66%	14%
Assistance with housing search	39%	17%
Assistance with moving	36%	10%

Source: Family Options Study Data

Notes: Sample restricted to families with priority access to short-term rental subsidy that responded to the 20-month survey and did not use long-term subsidies or transitional housing.

- a Used ES and RRH between random assignment and the 20-month survey, and used neither a long-term housing subsidy nor transitional housing during that period.
- b Used neither long-term housing subsidy, transitional housing, nor RRH between random assignment and the 20-month survey.

These results are puzzling. The study team expected that all participants who received RRH assistance would report having received assistance obtaining a rental subsidy, but only 66 percent of families reported receiving such services. Similarly, only 39 percent of families reported having received housing search assistance. It could be that programs did not offer this assistance, but we think this is unlikely. The study team conducted site visits to discuss program operations with RRH providers, and those interviews indicate that programs did offer these services. The low reported receipt of assistance obtaining a rental subsidy and searching for housing may reflect survey recall (for most families, the 20-month survey was administered many months after they started using RRH assistance) or interpretation of the survey questions on the part of the study participants. There may have been a mismatch between the assistance caseworkers provided as “housing search assistance” and the services that families actually found helpful and remembered at the time of the survey.

The reported receipt of housing search assistance varied by community (Exhibit 19). In Baltimore, Denver and Louisville, fewer than 20 percent of families who used RRH reported receiving housing search assistance. In contrast, more than half of families in Boston, Kansas City and Honolulu reported that they received search assistance. The high rate in Boston may reflect the fact that some families in Boston had long stays in emergency shelter before they began to receive RRH assistance (see Section 2, Exhibit 5). This longer stay in emergency shelter may have offered more time for emergency shelter staff to provide housing search assistance, and it was that assistance families recalled when answering the survey question.

Exhibit 19: Receipt of housing search assistance between random assignment and 20 months later, by community

Site	Number of families who used RRH and no other housing subsidy program	Number/percentage of families that received housing search assistance
Alameda County	23	11 (48%)
Atlanta	31	11 (36%)
Baltimore	6	1 (17%)
Boston	11	9 (82%)
Connecticut	26	6 (23%)
Denver	2	0 (0%)
Honolulu	6	4 (67%)
Kansas City	7	4 (57%)
Louisville	11	2 (18%)
Minneapolis	28	13 (46%)
Phoenix	15	6 (40%)
Salt Lake City	34	11 (32%)

Source: Family Options Study Data

Note: Sample restricted to families with priority access to RRH who responded to the 20-month survey and did not use long-term subsidies or transitional housing.

These results are based on self-reported information by survey respondents who may or may not have been able to remember whether they received these types of assistance. However, they provide limited evidence that assistance in finding housing, negotiating with landlords, paying moving expenses, and getting settled is associated with the use of the RRH rent subsidy.

7. What is the housing quality and what are the rents paid by current and former RRH recipients?

RRH short-term rental assistance relies on private-market rental housing to house individuals and families. Any rental assistance paid for with HPRP funds was required to meet rent reasonableness standards, and units had to meet habitability standards. The habitability standards were less stringent than similar requirements for the Housing Choice Voucher program. In addition, these RRH programs were being implemented rapidly following the allocation of HPRP funds under ARRA.

What did families in the Family Options Study who used short-term rent subsidies report about the quality of the housing and the amount of rent they paid? This section presents descriptive information on the rents and conditions of the housing of current and former RRH users 20 months after their initial stay in shelter.

The results of the comparison of families assigned to receive priority access to RRH compared to those assigned to usual care reported in Gubits et al. (2016) found that, compared to usual care, priority access to RRH had no effect on housing quality reported at the time of the three-year follow-up survey. In this new analysis, we compare families who actually used RRH assistance with those who used only emergency shelter.

This analysis focuses on families who used RRH or only used emergency shelter and were living in their own housing at the time of the 20-month follow-up survey, regardless of their assignment group. We exclude families who also used a long-term rent subsidy at any time during the 20-month follow-up period.¹⁶ We then divide the remaining sample into three groups: families who, as of the 20-month follow-up survey had used only emergency shelter; families who received RRH before, but not at, the 20-month follow-up; and families who received RRH in the month of follow-up. An important caveat is that the number of families in this third group is small – just 30 families – which is unsurprising, since the rent subsidy provided was intended to be short term, and most families had completed RRH by the time of the survey.

The comparisons between groups are non-experimental, so any observed differences in characteristics among the groups do not necessarily reflect a causal effect of RRH on housing quality.

The analysis is based on responses to the 20-month follow-up survey, which asked families detailed questions about housing quality and rents. The 30 families receiving RRH at that time reported generally good housing quality (Exhibit 20). Only 20 percent reported that their housing quality was fair or poor. When asked about eight specific types of problems with the quality of their housing, families reported that their housing exhibited fewer than one of these problems, on average. Thirteen percent reported mildew, mold or water damage; seven percent reported floor problems; and seven percent were in housing with holes or large cracks where outdoor air or water could come in.

Families using RRH at the time of the 20-month survey paid about \$280 in monthly rent. This is significantly lower than the amounts paid by families not receiving RRH at follow-up, reflecting that the rent subsidy reduced the monthly rent that the family paid. It is also much lower than median rents at each of the study sites. In 2010, median monthly gross rent ranged from \$670 in Louisville to \$1,233 in Boston.

Housing conditions were somewhat worse for the 309 families who never received RRH. For this group, 39 percent reported that their housing quality was fair or poor. Families reported that their housing exhibited on average 1.2 out of 8 potential problems. Twenty-three percent were in housing with mildew, mold or water damage; 19 percent in housing with floor problems; and 18 percent in housing with holes or large cracks. Families paid about \$563 in average monthly rent, which is about twice the amount paid by families receiving RRH at follow-up.

Finally, housing conditions were even a bit worse for the 213 families who had received RRH for some period of time

16 Families with a long-term subsidy could have had housing of higher quality available to them because owners were more willing to rent to a family with a long-term rather than a short-term subsidy. In some cases, the long-term subsidy may have provided a larger subsidy each month. In addition, the Housing Quality Standards applied by the Housing Choice Voucher program are somewhat more stringent than the standard that was required by HPRP.

but were not receiving it as of follow-up. Among these families, 41 percent reported that their housing quality was fair or poor. Families reported that their housing exhibited 1.5 out of 8 potential problems, on average. Thirty-three percent reported mildew, mold, or water damage; 27 percent had floor problems; and 22 percent had holes or large cracks where outdoor air or water could come in. Families paid approximately \$624 in average monthly rent, which was higher than the average rents paid by families who used only emergency shelter.

Exhibit 20: Features of housing at 20-month follow-up, by program usage

Housing feature	Program use		
	ES only	RRH before, but not at, follow-up	RRH at follow-up
<i>N</i>	309	213	30
Not including kitchens, bathrooms and hallways, how many rooms are there in your house/ apartment/living space available for the use of your family? (median)	3	3	3
Does your current housing have any of the following problems?			
a. Mildew, mold, or water damage on any wall, floor, or ceiling?	71 (23%) ^b	70 (33%) ^{a, c}	4 (13%) ^b
b. Any floor problems such as boards, tiles, carpeting or linoleum that are missing, curled, or loose?	59 (19%) ^b	79 (27%) ^{a, c}	2 (7%) ^b
c. Any holes or large cracks where outdoor air or rain can come in?	56 (18%)	47 (22%)	2 (7%)
d. Bad odors such as sewer, natural gas, etc. in your home?	28 (9%)	32 (15%)	2 (7%)
e. In the last three months has any bathroom floor been covered by water because of a plumbing problem?	46 (15%)	34 (16%)	1 (3%)
f. In the last three months has your toilet not worked for 6 hours or more?	44 (11%)	19 (9%)	1 (3%)
g. In the last three months has your electricity not worked for 2 hours or more?	28 (9%)	21 (10%)	0 (0%)
h. In cold weather, do you ever need to use your oven to heat your home?	40 (13%)	36 (17%)	5 (17%)
Count of housing problems (mean)	1.2 ^{b, c}	1.5 ^{a, c}	0.6 ^{a, b}
In the month just past, what did you and the people in your family pay [as rent/for the mortgage/ and any condo fee]? We are interested only in knowing the amount of the [rent/mortgage/condo fee] payment that you and your family paid (average).	\$563 ^{b, c}	\$624 ^c	\$281 ^{a, b}

Housing feature	Program use		
	ES only	RRH before, but not at, follow-up	RRH at follow-up
In the month just past, what was the total amount you and the people in your family paid for utilities that were not included as part of the rent or condominium fee?(average, among those paying utilities)	\$178 ^c	\$177 ^c	128 ^a
What is the total amount of all utility payments, for a typical month—that is not a month with unusually high or low heat or air conditioning bills? (average, among those with utility payments)	\$163	\$147	\$131
Reported housing quality is poor/fair	39% ^c	41% ^c	20% ^{a, b}

Source: Family Options Study Data

Notes: Sample is comprised of families surveyed at 20 months, regardless of assignment group, who were in their own place at follow-up and did not use a long-term housing subsidy between baseline and follow-up (including the follow-up month). Independent samples *t*-test was used to evaluate group differences in count and continuous outcomes. Fisher’s Exact Test was used to evaluate group differences in binary outcomes.

a Statistically significant difference from “ES only” group ($\alpha = .05$).

b Statistically significant difference from “RRH before, but not at, follow-up” group ($\alpha = .05$).

c Statistically significant difference from “RRH at follow-up” group ($\alpha = .05$).

There are several interpretations that can be drawn from this analysis. First, it appears that short-term rental assistance is working as intended while families received the subsidy – families with RRH at follow-up were paying less rent, yet living in higher-quality housing, than families without short-term rental assistance. However, the results also suggest that RRH is not a springboard into higher quality housing. As of 20 months after random assignment, families who received short-term rental assistance at some point but subsequently stopped receiving RRH were in no better housing than families who never received RRH at all.

8. Conclusion

This new analysis of data from the Family Options Study provides a detailed description of use of short-term rental assistance, the characteristics of families who used RRH, and the living situation of families after exiting RRH. We find that take-up and duration of short-term rental assistance varied widely among families with priority access to RRH across the 12 study communities, likely reflecting both local rental markets and design features of the RRH program in each community. The analysis also suggests that assistance provided by RRH case managers both in finding a housing unit and moving into the unit may have helped some families use the RRH rent subsidy.

Use of RRH by families without priority access to that type of assistance also varied widely by community. Use of long-term subsidies after RRH is more common in some communities than others, suggesting that RRH may be used as a bridge to long-term rent subsidies in some communities. For example, there is some evidence that RRH is used as a bridge in Salt Lake City and Minneapolis.

However, across all study sites, families assigned to usually care were almost equally as likely to access a long-term subsidy, so we cannot conclude that overall RRH serves as a bridge to long-term subsidies.

A little more than one-quarter of families who used RRH returned to homelessness at some point during the 12 months after the family stopped using RRH rental assistance. This rate is higher than rates found by other studies of RRH and is higher than the benchmark for returns to homelessness set by NAEH. The difference could reflect more comprehensive data in the Family Options Study or could be associated with the characteristics of the study sample. Consistent with previous studies, the risk of returning to homelessness was highest immediately after leaving RRH and decreases over time. Overall, family characteristics measured at baseline do not help explain which families using RRH return to homelessness. The only family characteristics found to be associated with returns to homelessness are number of children, work experience before becoming homeless, and a history of doubling up before becoming homeless. Most families who returned to homelessness had been living in their own housing immediately before becoming homeless.

After 20 months following the initial shelter stay, ongoing RRH recipients were living in higher- quality housing than previous RRH recipients or families who didn't receive any housing assistance. Families who received RRH at some point, but subsequently stopped receiving RRH were in housing similar in quality to that of families who never received RRH at all.

The wide variation in RRH take-up and duration across sites makes clear that short-term rental assistance, as measured by the Family Options Study, is not a single, uniform program; rather, it varies significantly across providers. This finding points to the need for research that explores further how the design and implementation of RRH programs affect take up and duration of assistance.

Another component of this Understanding Rapid Re-housing Study will create a catalog and taxonomy of RRH programs as implemented as of 2018 and will include interviews of staff in a small number of RRH programs. Those components will include exploration of how RRH programs have implemented the "progressive engagement" model in which a family is given only as much assistance as is thought needed to achieve housing stability. Case managers decide whether to extend the assistance and also keep in contact with the family after their RRH rent subsidy ends. The family is then permitted to come back to the program for additional support as needed.

Practitioners and service providers may be interested in the finding that the rate of return to homelessness is highest in the months immediately following exit from short-term rental assistance. Support services to help families stabilize during these critical months may help reduce returns to homelessness following the end of rapid re-housing rental assistance.

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