Goals of the study

- Examine the extent to which PHAs are making efforts to serve people experiencing homelessness by:
  - Using their preference systems to provide access to mainstream housing assistance for people experiencing homelessness
  - Removing barriers that may make it difficult for homeless people to use housing assistance programs

- Describe approaches PHAs and partner organizations are using to serve homeless households
PHA preference systems

- PHAs may prioritize households on waiting lists for the Public Housing and the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) programs.

- Before 1998, federal preferences gave priority to households with severe rent burdens, living in substandard housing (including homeless), and displaced.

- Following QHWRA (1998), PHAs set local preferences.

- Preference systems may be complex:
  - Layers of preferences with different rankings
  - Several household characteristics with equal weight
  - Different preferences for different PHA programs
Two-part data collection process

Web-based survey
- All PHAs (3,988)
- 80% response rate (3,210 PHAs)
- 86% of all HCV units and 82% of public housing units reflected in responses
- Questions were largely close-ended: yes/no or check from a list
- Questions focused on how preference systems work, where homeless households fit. Some questions about barriers and policies.

Telephone survey
- 125 purposively selected PHAs
- 75 PHAs with efforts and 50 without efforts
- 120 respondents
- Questions with open-ended responses
- Discussions focused on how PHAs and partners are making special efforts to serve people experiencing homelessness or why they are not.
Types of efforts to serve people experiencing homelessness

1. General preferences: Ordering the PHA’s waiting list to ensure that housing resources reach specified populations ahead of those who also may be eligible for housing assistance.

2. Limited preferences (“set-asides”): A defined number of units or vouchers for which homeless people may get top priority.

3. Modifies screening: Modified application of screening or changes to other policies or procedures to reduce barriers homeless people face in using PHA programs.

   - Overall, 24% of PHAs, controlling 53% of all assisted housing units, make at least one of the efforts.
Competition for general preferences for housing assistance

- 32% of all PHAs have some general preference for homeless household, but only 10% have a strong general preference

- Types of households to which PHAs often give the same preference as people experiencing homelessness
  - Current residents of the jurisdiction
  - Victims of domestic violence
  - Households with elderly heads or spouses
  - Households in substandard housing
  - Households displaced by public action or natural disaster
  - Veterans
  - Households with severe rent burden
Efforts to serve homeless people through set-asides and modifying screening

- 9% of PHAs have set-asides for homeless households. These PHAs have 36% of all assisted housing units.

- 11% of PHAs modify screening or other program rules. These PHAs have 24% of all assisted housing units.
PHAs making more than one type of effort

- **Strong General Preferences**: 29% of PHAs (8% of units)
- **Limited Preferences**: 19% of PHAs (38% of units)
- **Screening Modifications**: 30% of PHAs (21% of units)
PHA program characteristics that help explain efforts

- Larger PHAs are much more likely than smaller PHAs to have set-asides or to modify program rules.
- Smaller PHAs are just as likely to have strong general preferences that put homeless households at or close to the top of waiting lists.
- PHAs with HCV programs are more likely to make efforts than PHAs with just public housing.
- Many PHAs that project-base some vouchers (14% of PHAs administering HCV) have set-asides (31%) or modify screening (24%)
PHA location characteristics that help explain efforts

- PHAs in metro areas have 80% of program units and are much more likely to make efforts…but not through strong general preferences.

- PHAs serving areas with large numbers of homeless people (based on the CoC PIT counts) are much more likely to make efforts than PHAs in other areas.
PHA participation in the homeless services system that helps explain efforts

- Participation in the CoC makes PHAs more likely to have set-asides or modify screening.

- Administering programs targeted to homeless people—e.g., Shelter Plus Care or VASH—has a positive effect on efforts to serve homeless households with HCV or Public Housing.

- Administering special purpose vouchers such as NED, mainstream vouchers, and FUP also has a positive effect.
75% of PHAs do not.

In follow-up survey, PHAs identified various reasons:

- PHA’s mission is to operate housing for seniors
- PHA is geographically remote from the center of the CoC
- PHA does not want to make policy changes implied by participation in the CoC—for example, bump people on current closed wait lists to a lower status
# Identifying and addressing household barriers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Percentage of PHAs that agreed with barrier statement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homeless applicants with no fixed address often get removed from the waiting list</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless households do not have the needed eligibility documentation</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because of their barriers, homeless households need housing search and landlord negotiation assistance in the HCV program</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is higher turnover among homeless households, resulting in higher administrative and/or operating costs</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our PHA cannot afford to serve homeless households that are zero income or extremely low income (ELI)</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
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Household barriers by number of units in PHA

- 80% of households in 1-500 units have no fixed address leading to removal from waitlist.
- 70% of households in 501-5,000 units have a missing eligibility documentation.
- 60% of households in 5,001+ units have housing search and landlord assistance needs.
- 50% of households in 1-500 units have higher turnover leading to higher costs.
- 40% of households in 501-5,000 units cannot afford to serve ELI households.
- 30% of households in 5,001+ units have waitlist needs.
- 20% of households in 1-500 units are leading to documentation and landlord removal from assistance needs.
PHA relationships with homelessness service providers

- 30% of PHAs indicated that they have formal relationships (e.g., MOUs) with organizations that serve homeless people

- This is a larger percentage than the 24% of PHAs that make efforts to serve homeless people
PHA and partner approaches to serving homeless people

- PHAs and their partners provide assistance to homeless households at various stages in the process of gaining access to housing assistance
  - Outreach
  - Eligibility screening and verification of homelessness
  - Providing housing through different types of programs
  - Providing assistance locating housing in which to use vouchers
  - Promoting housing retention
Outreach

- Homeless people already served by partner agencies often are referred to the PHA.

- Partners help people experiencing homelessness prepare their PHA application and gather documentation needed to establish eligibility.

- Sometimes PHAs that have no slot available refer homeless households to partner agencies for temporary assistance.
Eligibility screening and homeless verification

- PHAs must determine eligibility, but they often rely on information gathered with the assistance of partner agencies.

- Among PHAs with a general homeless preference, 77% rely on an outside organization to verify homeless status; 83% PHAs with set-asides do so.
Placement into housing

- Choice between HCV and Public Housing often depends on relative availability
- PHAs stated in the telephone survey that partner organizations usually request vouchers rather than public housing units
- PHAs that use project-based vouchers to serve homeless households may target specific sub-populations among people experiencing homelessness
- MTW agencies have additional flexibility for sponsor basing and use of block grant funding
 Assistance locating housing in which to use vouchers

- PHAs may have a relationship with a partner organization to help homeless people find HCV qualifying units.

- Partners also may provide assistance with security deposits, utility deposits, first month’s rent, furniture, appliances.
Promoting housing retention

- Among PHAs with some type of special effort to serve homeless people, two-thirds have a partner organization providing services to formerly homeless tenants.

- Even among PHAs without special efforts, almost half have partners that provide services to formerly homeless tenants.

- Case management is the most common service provided.

- PHAs report that case management can help address tenancy issues and prevent eviction or termination of assistance.
Encouraging PHAs to make greater efforts to serve homeless people

- New guidance from HUD in Notice PIH 2013-15 (HA)
  - Information and strategies outlined in the Notice are confirmed by the findings of this study.
  - Study suggests need for further training PHA staff on definitions of homelessness, what types of preferences and policy changes are permitted.
Based on the study findings, HUD could consider:

- Encouraging large PHAs to create limited preferences for homeless households, make current set-asides larger
- Encouraging all PHAs to modify screening and other policies, consistent with the guidelines set forth in the Notice
- Encouraging smaller PHAs to create strong general preferences for households experiencing homelessness
  - Use a narrow definition of homelessness
- Redoubling efforts to encourage PHA participation in CoCs
- Requesting funding for additional special purpose vouchers