

Health Begins with Homes

Stable, affordable housing is essential to ensuring a healthy and thriving community. As we recover from the pandemic, Cumberland and Perry counties need a housing policy that focuses on health and equity.

As individuals and organizations concerned with the health of our community, we are committed to advancing policies that:

Support Housing First Approach

Housing First is an effective model for addressing the housing needs of individuals and families while providing these people with options to pursue their personal goals and improve their quality of life. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, “Housing First does not mandate participation in services either before obtaining housing or in order to retain housing. Supportive services are offered to assist with housing stability and individual well-being, but participation is not required.”¹ Further, a systemic review of 26 studies showed that Housing First programs decrease homelessness, improved housing stability, enhanced the clients’ quality of life, and reduced hospitalizations and visits to emergency departments.² All housing providers should utilize a Housing First approach to meet their clients where they are at, and to build on their clients’ strengths for longer and sustainable impact.

Increase the availability of affordable housing

Pennsylvania needs at least an additional 220,000 affordable homes and rental units.³ To expand housing options, we should employ innovative zoning strategies that facilitate the use of current housing and promote the construction of new units, while increasing public investment and incentivizing private development. We must focus on both developing and expanding programs to maintain affordable housing and ensure everyone has a safe place to live.

Expand rental assistance and eviction protection

The inability to pay rent or mortgage affected one-in-six American adults (16%) during the pandemic.⁴ Though some financial assistance was available, too many families who faced job loss or reduced income did not receive enough to cover housing expenses and faced eviction in the middle of a public health emergency. Our priority must be to prevent evictions, aid property owners, and increase rental assistance.

Put more resources into addressing homelessness and prioritize the most vulnerable

In 2022, 12,691 Pennsylvanians were unhoused.⁵ It is crucial to allocate more funding to temporary shelters, especially for vulnerable populations like families with children, veterans, seniors, people of color, individuals with disabilities, the formerly incarcerated, and victims of intimate partner violence.

Address all forms of housing discrimination

Housing discrimination is an ongoing problem. Existing laws fail to adequately protect individuals based on disability, race, national origin, family status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or history of incarceration. We need laws that protect against housing discrimination in all forms and include effective enforcement provisions.

Pass statewide zoning standards

Exclusionary zoning and land-use rules that deter the construction of affordable housing exacerbate Pennsylvania's housing shortage. We support the Pennsylvania Housing Choices Coalition's call for legislative reforms. This involves legalizing duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes in big cities, allowing mixed-use buildings and apartments in commercial areas, permitting accessory dwellings, and enabling the building and sale of starter homes on smaller plots.

¹ National Alliance to End Homelessness. Housing First Fact Sheet. <https://endhomelessness.org/resource/housing-first/>. Accessed December 8, 2023.

² Peng Y, Hahn RA, Finnie RKC, Cobb J, Williams SP, Fielding JE, Johnson RL, Montgomery AE, Schwartz AF, Muntaner C, Garrison VH, Jean-Francois B, Truman BI, Fullilove MT; Community Preventive Services Task Force. Permanent Supportive Housing With Housing First to Reduce Homelessness and Promote Health Among Homeless Populations With Disability: A Community Guide Systematic Review. *J Public Health Manag Pract*. 2020 Sep/Oct;26(5):404-411. doi: 10.1097/PHH.0000000000001219. PMID: 32732712; PMCID: PMC8513528.

³ National Low Income Housing Coalition. The Gap: The Affordable Housing Gap Analysis 2021. <https://nlihc.org/gap/state/pa>. Accessed February 16, 2024.

⁴ Pew Research Center. 10 Facts about U.S. renters during the pandemic. <https://pewrsr.ch/3FIXNCW>. Accessed February 16, 2024.

⁵ National Alliance to End Homelessness. SOH: State and CoC Dashboards. <https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/homelessness-statistics/state-of-homelessness-dashboards/?State=Pennsylvania>. Accessed October 5, 2023.