

What is shared housing?

Shared housing is an affordable housing model in which a person experiencing homelessness lives with two or more people in one permanent housing unit, sharing the rent and utilities. Each person living in the unit is listed on the lease. It often involves working closely with people experiencing homelessness to help match them with potential housemates, negotiating with landlords, and consistently engaging with all parties to ensure that the arrangement is appropriate.

For people to live in a shared housing arrangement successfully, everyone — from providers, to landlords, to the people being housed, to case managers — must believe that shared housing can work and have active investment in its success.

Why shared housing is necessary.

Shared housing is a critical solution that addresses the lack of affordable housing. A crisis most affecting those who are extremely low income and people experiencing homelessness. The shared housing model increases affordable housing options and allows for multiple people experiencing homelessness to access housing at once — which both benefits people experiencing homelessness (can access housing more quickly) and the homelessness system itself (more people, housed more quickly creates less strain on the system due to increased outflow). Shared housing also benefits landlords in fortifying their ability to receive rent from their tenants and reduce vacancy rates. In a time where people need to be housed more quickly than ever, shared housing is a flexible, efficient approach.

What are the benefits of shared housing?

Shared housing reduces the rent burden for everyone within the arrangement. It's a flexible and efficient approach. Along with alleviating someone's financial burden it also provides many benefits such as strengthening social support networks and accessing resources, such as food, childcare, and other essential resources, that may previously have been unavailable.

By sharing housing and housing multiple people in units at once, the homelessness/housing system is able to accelerate its work, move more people into housing, and increase system flow. The point of shared housing is to reduce the rental burden and provide housing stability; the model seeks to get people housed quickly and efficiently.

For landlords, shared housing also guarantees that a unit will be filled, and people will pay the rent this is especially important in tight rental markets and a nationwide lack of affordable housing, shared housing makes housing more accessible.

Who can live in shared housing?

Shared housing can work for different types of people with varying needs (such as single adults, families, individuals, seniors, and transition-aged youth). Sharing housing can also work for the benefit of affinity groups like people who are in recovery or people who are LGBTQ, among others. To support successful shared housing arrangements, providers typically work closely with all people in a shared housing arrangement to ensure complementary matches for prospective tenants and landlords, and to provide a supportive environment for all tenants.

Shared housing has worked especially well for people with low income, fixed income, or no income at all. In many cases, shared housing works best when the strengths of each person or household complement the other's needs.

Example 1: a senior with a low-fixed income could live in shared housing with a low-income family. If the senior does not have any income, they can provide childcare or other agreed upon services in lieu of rent. This can alleviate the burden of childcare costs on the family and provide affordable, permanent housing to the senior.

Example 2: A young adult with no income could live in shared housing with a low, fixed-income senior and offer in-home living support for the senior in exchange for renting a room in their home. In this scenario, if the homeless young adult is working with a homeless system program (coordinated access, shelter, rapid re-housing program, etc), diversion, rapid exit, rapid re-housing, or other funds can be utilized to assist the young adult with paying for training to provide in-home assistance/care to the senior.

With any shared housing living arrangement, the residents of the unit must be in agreement about what it means to be a roommate, be listed as a tenant on the lease, and engage in shared housing at their own free will.

Where can shared housing be used?

Shared housing can be applied across a variety of locales: city, suburban, small town, rural. Shared housing can — and will — look different based on locales, but is an approach that can be applied no matter where someone is trying to get into housing.

What are components to successfully using a shared housing model?

A successful shared housing arrangement involves good communication — including roommate/housemate agreements, budgeting parameters, conflict resolution strategies, support from landlords, and additional support from service providers as needed. Effective shared housing uses roommate matching considerations to ensure that all tenants can live in an environment that best suits their own strengths and needs. Some of those components may include noise level in the unit, substance use, and visitors to the unit. It is also important that shared housing is seen as an option, but not the only option; to be successful, shared housing must be a choice that all tenants choose willingly.

How can systems fund shared housing?

Shared housing can be financially supported by multiple funding sources, including public and private dollars, as well as tenant income. Housing Choice Vouchers (like Section 8), rapid re-housing, Housing Opportunities for Persons Living With [AIDS \(HOPWA\)](#), and other government funded rental subsidy programs can fund multiple types of shared housing living situations.

Public funding arrangements can include funding a program participant in a unit with a non-program participant; an entire unit with participants on a shared lease through the program; or the program participants individually all live in one unit and have separate leases.

Private dollars from philanthropists, endowments, foundations, and other charitable entities can also fund shared housing living arrangements in these same ways.

Additionally, programs can support tenants in arranging shared housing living situations where the program participants fund their portions of the rent using their personal income. In situations where a household has low or fixed income, their income can fund a portion of the rent in a unit with another low or fixed income household.

