

State and Local Policy Levers to Address Homelessness & Advance Housing Equity

State and local governments can play a critical role in ending housing instability and homelessness. State and local policymakers should prioritize proven solutions that address the root causes and harmful conditions of homelessness and reject shortsighted and punitive responses that worsen these conditions for their residents and make it harder for them to gain permanent housing.

This resource aims to support advocates and policymakers seeking to advance housing access and stability for all community members. No one policy can be a “silver bullet,” but taken together, this non-exhaustive list of policies and strategies can play a critical role in preventing and addressing homelessness, promoting public and community health, and advancing racial equity. Most of the strategies highlighted would reform our current systems to help reduce homelessness, minimize harm, and advance equity, while some of the policies would begin to shift power to directly impacted people and pave the way for more transformative changes.

When weighing which of these policies to prioritize, consider:

- Does this policy address the racial inequities of our current housing systems and policies?
- How have or will we engage and center people with lived expertise in the development and implementation of this policy or strategy?
- Does my city/county/state already have programs, resources, or policies in place that this could build on or leverage for this policy? Are there places with existing programs or policies that we could look to as models? How can we secure additional resources if needed?
- Are there partners or coalitions already working on this or who could work with us as allies? What partners do we need to bring to the table? What is needed to build political will?
- Who might oppose this change, and how can we address their concerns without undermining progress – or build power to overcome their opposition?
- How impactful would this policy be and how will we measure this impact? Does this policy primarily mitigate current harm, or could it also advance long-term transformation of our housing system?



THE FRAMEWORK
FOR AN EQUITABLE
HOMELESSNESS
RESPONSE

The Framework for an Equitable Homelessness Response project is being collaboratively guided by the following partners:

- Center on Budget and Policy Priorities • National Alliance to End Homelessness • National Health Care for the Homeless Council • Housing Justice Collective • National Low Income Housing Coalition • Urban Institute • National Coalition for the Homeless • National Homelessness Law Center • Housing Narrative Lab • Barbara Poppe and associates • Matthew Doherty Consulting •

Strategy

Help people with the lowest incomes afford housing

Why this strategy is important

The gap between incomes and housing costs is the primary driver of homelessness. The gap is fueled by a long history of racist housing and economic policies and practices. Addressing that gap is key to both preventing and resolving homelessness, and advancing equity.

Key state & local policies

- Establish or expand state- or locally funded rental subsidies for the lowest-income and most marginalized households
- Increase benefits for people with disabilities, older adults, caregivers, and low-paid workers through expanding state supplements to programs like Supplemental Security Income, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Earned Income Tax Credit, and other cash or income support programs
- Increase the state or local minimum wage
- Rein in rent increases through rent stabilization
- Create or expand renter's tax credits to reduce rent burdens for low-income renters
- Improve pathways to jobs that pay a living wage

Examples & resources

- [State and Local Rental Programs Database | NLIHC](#)
 - [Rental Assistance as a Homelessness Strategy | CBPP](#)
 - [Federal Rental Assistance Fact Sheets | CBPP](#)
 - [TANF Housing Supplements | CBPP](#)
 - [Rent Stabilization Toolkit | NLIHC](#)
 - [Employment and Income | NAEH](#)
 - [State Child Tax Credit and EITC Expansion | CBPP](#)
 - [State Minimum Wage Tracker | EPI](#)
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Strategy

Protect tenants and expand targeted homelessness prevention

Why this strategy is important

Homelessness increases when more people are forced into homelessness than exit it. Stemming the inflow is a key part of the solution, and will help to address deep, persistent racial inequities in homelessness and evictions.

Key state & local policies

- Expand and improve access to emergency rental assistance programs that include funds available for back rent, unpaid utilities, or other emergency expenses
- Provide services and housing resources for people exiting institutions — like hospitals, foster care, or prisons/jails — to prevent inflow into homelessness
- Pass a state or local Tenants Bill of Rights (or pass individual policies within it, like just cause eviction protections, application and lease fairness, source of income protections, habitability protections)
- Provide guaranteed counsel and eviction diversion programs for people facing eviction lawsuits
- Establish laws that protect tenants' right to organize

Examples & resources

- [Emergency Rental Assistance Resource Hub | NLIHC](#)
 - [Tenant Protection Resources | NLIHC](#)
 - [Tenant Bill of Rights | NHLP](#)
 - [Housing and Justice System Connections | CSH](#)
 - [Right to Counsel | NCCRC](#)
 - [Tenant Union Federation](#)
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Strategy

Reduce barriers to accessing housing

Why this strategy is important

Unnecessary documentation and administrative processes can create barriers to housing for the lowest income, most marginalized households, including people experiencing homelessness. Additionally, the lack of supportive services and prevalence of policies and practices that discriminate against people based on their race, income, disability, and LGBTQ+ status contribute to deep racial and other inequities among people experiencing homelessness.

Key state & local policies

- Reduce participants' administrative burdens, such as with self-attestation of eligibility, direct-to-tenant assistance, categorical eligibility, and more
- Establish "Source of Income" protections
- Leverage Medicaid or other funding to expand services that help people access and retain housing through resources like supportive housing
- Expand eviction record sealing and expungement
- Advance Fair Chance Housing policies to limit the use of criminal convictions to discriminate against tenants
- Limit tenant screening procedures to minimize housing denials based on credit or housing background
- Limit or prohibit excessive and arbitrary fees required of prospective renters

Examples & resources

- [Source of Income Protections | PRRAC](#)
 - [Using Medicaid to Address Health Related Social Needs | CBPP](#)
 - [Medicaid and Housing Related Services Toolkit | CSH](#)
 - [Fair Chance Housing Toolkit | Root & Rebound](#)
 - [Eviction Record Sealing and Expungement Toolkit | NLIHC](#)
 - [Abuse and Bias in Tenant Screening Harm Renters | NCLC](#)
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Strategy

Increase the supply and preservation of deeply affordable and supportive housing

Why this strategy is important

There is a severe shortage of rental homes affordable and available to people with the lowest incomes, including supportive housing. While addressing supply alone is not enough to make housing affordable for everyone, increasing housing abundance in ways that prioritize housing for people with the lowest incomes can help narrow the gap.

Key state & local policies

- Establish, preserve, or expand investment in housing that is publicly or community-owned, permanently affordable, and accessible to people with the lowest incomes (e.g. community land trusts, public housing, social housing)
- Establish or expand state- or locally funded project-based/ operating subsidies
- Establish, improve targeting of, or expand a Housing Trust Fund to build or preserve homes affordable to people with the lowest incomes
- Reform zoning laws to incentivize the development of affordable housing, including deeply affordable and supportive housing
- Streamline regulations to make it easier and cheaper to build and preserve affordable and supportive housing
- Require that local jurisdictions plan for, preserve, and build housing for people at all income levels, including people with the lowest incomes and people with supportive services needs
- Establish funds to acquire and preserve affordable housing (both naturally occurring and Low-Income Housing Tax Credits) at risk of market rate conversion
- Create and support a tenant opportunity to purchase

Examples & resources

- [State and Local Housing Trust Funds | NLIHC](#)
 - [By-Right Development Tool | NMHC](#)
 - [Streamlined Permitting Process | Local Housing Solutions](#)
 - [Social Housing | Alliance for Housing Justice](#)
 - [Local Tools to Address Housing Affordability | NLC](#)
 - [Low Income Housing Tax Credits | NLIHC](#)
 - [State Tax Credits to Develop Affordable Housing | Novogradac](#)
 - [Preserving Long-Term Affordability in LIHTC Housing | Bipartisan Policy Center](#)
 - [Saving Affordable Housing | NHLP](#)
 - [Tenant Opportunity to Purchase | PolicyLink](#)
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Strategy

Create dignified, low-barrier shelter and interim housing options that connect people to services and permanent housing

Why this strategy is important

People experiencing homelessness want and need accessible, well-resourced, respectful interim housing options that meet their varying and at times changing needs. Shelter and interim housing should be focused on helping people secure permanent housing.

Key state & local policies

- Establish by-right zoning for interim housing projects
- Provide state funding for the conversion of hotel/motels or office buildings into interim and permanent supportive housing
- Establish guidelines to remove barriers to interim housing and ensure it is accessible
Provide robust services to residents of interim housing, including to connect them to permanent housing and health care
- Provide funding for operating costs and services for interim housing settings

Examples & resources

- [By-Right Principles | Institute for Local Government](#)
 - [State Example: CA's Low Barrier Navigation Center Guidelines](#)
 - [State Example: CA's Homekey Program](#)
 - [Reimagining Interim Housing | Framework for an Equitable Homelessness Response](#)
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Strategy

Address the immediate health, safety, and housing needs of people living outside

Why this strategy is important

While we work on scaling permanent solutions to homelessness, there are concrete ways that we can keep people safer and healthier while they are forced to live outside.

Key state & local policies

- Repeal policies that punish people for being homeless and create more barriers to permanent housing, like anti-camping laws
- Create protocols to ensure no person is displaced from an encampment without being connected to housing
- Pass laws to prohibit discrimination against people experiencing homelessness
- Provide sanitation and trash pickup services to improve health and safety conditions for people sleeping outside
- Establish or increase “street medicine” services to increase immediate access to medical and behavioral health care for people experiencing homelessness
- Create 911-dispatchable, 24/7 available non-police crisis intervention teams
- Establish or increase funding for outreach and case management services for people living unsheltered to help with housing navigation, access to care, and income support

Examples & resources

- [Learning From a Crisis | NLIHC](#)
 - [Unsheltered Homelessness Tools | USCF Benioff Center](#)
 - [Strengthening Homeless Outreach | Community Solutions](#)
 - [Community Toolkit for Addressing Unsheltered Homelessness | CSH](#)
 - [Street Medicine and Outreach | NHCHC](#)
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Strategy

Generate revenue to advance housing justice

Why this strategy is important

We can fund solutions to housing instability and homelessness by ensuring those who most benefit from wealth and property ownership pay their fair share. Revenue strategies can complement strategic use of federal funding, including HUD programs and Medicaid.

Key state & local policies

- Make property taxes more progressive
- Tax the sale of very high-value properties to fund affordable housing for people with the lowest incomes
- Raise new, progressive revenue sources and dedicate funding to addressing homelessness and affordable housing for the lowest-income households
- Issue bonds to fund affordable or supportive housing for people with the lowest incomes

Examples & resources

- [State Revenue Options Tool | CBPP](#)
 - [Taxing Very High-Value Home Sales Is an Equitable and Effective Strategy to Raise Revenue and Fund Affordable Housing | CBPP](#)
 - [State funding streams | Local Housing Solutions](#)
 - [State example: DC](#)
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