

Leaving Permanent Supportive Housing When Clients Are Ready: How Providers Can Help

Research into Action | Project #2

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) is the leading solution to homelessness for people who have been unhoused for a long time, have a documented disability, and would benefit from ongoing support. PSH offers rental subsidies and flexible services tailored to tenants' needs. Although PSH is permanent housing, a notable number of people choose to leave for other housing opportunities. They may do so on their own or through a provider-led "Moving On" initiative.

One [Research Into Action](#) team led by Emmy Tiderington, PhD, LMSW investigated the factors that are associated with successful exits from PSH. They used the information they learned to design the Life After Supportive Housing (LASH) tool, a questionnaire that helps determine and support readiness to move on. This research shows that people who leave PSH for a permanent housing option without paired support services commonly maintain stable housing—and these insights give PSH providers a roadmap for how to best identify and support people interested in Moving On.

Key Takeaways

9 out of 10 people who left PSH for a permanent housing option without paired support services did not return to homelessness.

The researchers examined healthcare, affordable housing, and homelessness data from New Jersey and Pennsylvania. They found that most people in PSH (about 60%) did not leave during the 5-year study period. Among those who did, more people (about 13%) exited to "successful" destinations (like renting or owning a home or moving into permanent housing with family) than to "unsuccessful" (about 8%) destinations (like returning to homelessness or entering a nursing home or hospital).

Longer PSH stays are associated with "successful" exits.

People who left PSH for a permanent housing option without paired support services tended to have resided in PSH longer when compared to those who left PSH for temporary or institutional settings. Several other factors – including the personal, program, and community characteristics outlined below – predicted where people exited.

Exit outcomes vary by age, race, gender, and history of substance use disorder.

Black and Hispanic people were more likely to exit to a successful destination. Other individual characteristics associated with successful exit included being younger, a female, and not having a substance use disorder diagnosis—whereas males, single adults, and people with a substance use disorder diagnosis were more likely to experience unsuccessful exits. At the same time, Black and Hispanic people were more likely to return to homelessness at some point in the two years after exiting.

Community and program factors—like the availability of affordable housing—play an important role in PSH exits.

Although individual characteristics are a component in who leaves PSH, other factors are at play. Community is an important one: programs in areas with less affordable rental housing tend to have more PSH tenants exit to unsuccessful destinations.

Program characteristics matter too: programs with less tenant turnover tend to see more tenants exit to successful destinations. This might be because case managers are better able to support stable long-term residents with familiar case histories in their Moving On process. Alternatively, these programs may not be meeting tenants' needs, causing them to exit before they are ready. Programs that did not receive funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) saw more tenants exit—and to unsuccessful destinations—perhaps because they were not resourced as well, were held to different standards, or did not receive technical assistance from HUD.

Providers can take steps to help PSH tenants looking to move on.

People who are considering leaving PSH should be supported throughout their decision-making and move out processes. Using findings from this study, the researchers developed an assessment tool (the Life After Supportive Housing, or LASH tool) that reflects factors associated with successful exits from PSH, and includes input from current and former PSH tenants.

This tool places tenants in the driver's seat, and is designed for use with their service providers at semi-regular intervals. It asks if moving on from PSH is a goal; if so, it prompts tenants to think of factors that could help them be successful—like if they've been paying their rent on time, if they are connected to community services and social supports, and how confident they are in their ability to remain housed once they move on. Providers can adopt this tool (or a similar research-based practice) to assess people's interest in Moving On, and help those who are interested to prepare to leave PSH.

“Centering tenants’ expertise in their own readiness process ensures that decisions about ‘moving on’ are grounded in collaboration, fairness, and respect for individual goals and circumstances.”

– Dr. Emmy Tiderington,

[Developing the Life After Supportive Housing \(LASH\) Readiness Self-Assessment Tool to Promote Successful Exits from Permanent Supportive Housing](#)

Related Findings

The study included other findings, including those related to the use of healthcare services and supportive housing model type (single-site or scattered). To learn more, please read the full reports:

- [Investigating Predictors of Successful Exits from Permanent Supportive Housing](#)
- [Developing the Life After Supportive Housing \(LASH\) Readiness Self-Assessment Tool to Promote Successful Exits from Permanent Supportive Housing](#)

Implications: Research Into Action

The Alliance identified ways this research could inform policy and practice:

- **Permanent Supportive Housing is backed by decades of evidence. This study adds to the proof, fueling efforts to maintain PSH as one of the nation's primary solutions to homelessness.** While in PSH, tenants are more likely to access regular healthcare and less likely to access crisis care. Even after leaving PSH, most people remain stably housed and do not return to homelessness. This is especially true of those who exited to a successful destination but also holds up for those who exited to unsuccessful destinations.
- **The need for more PSH funding is urgent. Expanded resources could increase the number of program slots, bolster provider capacity, and responsibly promote Moving On opportunities.** Over the past few decades, communities across the country have expanded the availability of PSH. Even still, there are significant unit shortages each year. In addition to creating more units, increased funding could ensure adequate staffing and reduce caseloads so that each client interested in Moving On receives sufficient attention to facilitate successful exits. Funding dedicated to Moving On initiatives could also help more PSH tenants who are interested in moving out to do so, thereby freeing up more slots for people who want and need PSH services.
- **Improving housing affordability is paramount to ending homelessness.** The fact that housing unaffordability [causes people to enter homelessness](#) is well documented. This research also shows the flip side: unaffordability also makes it difficult to exit homelessness. People residing in more affordable areas are more successful in leaving PSH. Policies addressing underlying housing market conditions are a necessary component in any strategy to end homelessness.
- **Applying a [targeted universalism approach](#)—which recognizes that different strategies can help everyone reach a universal goal—could further improve PSH outcomes.** The researchers found that one's identity shaped the likelihood of stability after PSH. Providers should take steps to understand how people with differing backgrounds fare in their programs and then develop group-specific strategies to improve outcomes for everybody.
- **PSH providers should adopt research-backed Moving On policies and procedures, and PSH staff should be adequately trained to support tenants' Moving On-related goals.** Most people who choose to leave PSH do not return to homelessness. PSH providers must take steps to understand the needs of their tenants and help set them up for success as the tenant defines it—including a voluntary transition out of PSH, if desired. This requires provider training and other supports. The research-backed LASH tool can help providers to define tenant-centered preparatory case management and transition support goals.
- **Continuums of Care (CoCs) can facilitate implementation of Moving On policies.** Local homelessness coordinating bodies, or CoCs, can help ensure that Moving On practices are standardized across providers. CoCs can compare programs and identify why some have better outcomes than others. CoCs can then support providers in improving their ability to meet clients' needs.
- **Researchers should continue to study this topic.** Tools like LASH should be pilot tested, validated, and periodically reevaluated to ensure it is helping as intended. Outcomes of Moving On initiatives should be monitored to ensure that all people, regardless of their identity, are able to thrive in and after PSH, should they choose to leave.