

Housing and Reentry in the District: An Overview

People returning from incarceration need stable housing to successfully reenter our community. Research shows that housing is a stabilizing force, giving people a consistent base from which they can access employment, services for mental health or substance use disorders, and other support services. RAN member organizations report high numbers of people returning from jail and prison who are homeless, many of whom were homeless at the time of their arrest.

University Legal Services, which provides reentry services to people with psychiatric disabilities, reports that 90% of their clients are homeless.

How the District's housing process disadvantages returning citizens:

- DC does not have a systematic process or dedicated resources for providing supportive housing to returning citizens.
- In practice, DC uses the Department of Housing and Urban Development's definition of chronic homelessness¹ and apply it to vouchers that are 100% locally funded, thereby excluding individuals who have been in "an institutional care facility, including a jail, substance abuse or mental health treatment facility, hospital, or other similar facility" for 90 days or more. **This is not required and needs to be changed.**
- People can easily spend more than 90 days incarcerated without having been charged with a new crime. Under DC's Coordinated Entry process, these individuals lose any time they have accrued toward being considered chronically homeless.
- The longer people remain incarcerated, the more likely they are to experience trauma and the less likely they are to resolve their homelessness. Currently, the Coordinated Entry system forces people with the highest needs, those returning from institutions such as psychiatric facilities and jails, to become homeless again in order to be eligible for assistance.

Thrive DC, a homeless service provider, reports that 70% of their African American clients in their reentry programs are homeless.

¹ 24 CFR 578.3, Definitions, accessed from https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/CoCProgramInterimRule_FormattedVersion.pdf

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To support our returning citizen neighbors, DC must:

- Apply the definition of “chronic homelessness” from the DC Homeless Services Reform Act,² which recognizes that a person who is exiting an institution and had been chronically homeless when they entered the institution is *still* considered chronically homeless upon release;
- Expand the definition of “shelter” in the DC Homeless Services Reform Act to include halfway houses, which function much like a temporary shelter to returning citizens who are homeless in anticipation of their release;
- Provide returning citizens access to the Coordinated Entry system – i.e., be assessed for permanent supporting housing vouchers – before they are released from the jail, halfway houses, and the Federal Bureau of Prisons in order to more quickly address the urgent need for stable housing.

15% of males and 10% of females cited incarceration as the reason for their first homeless experience in D.C.’s 2019 Point-in-Time Plus survey.

RAN Client Experiences Show the Importance of Housing:

- **Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop** member JP applied for Section 8 housing *ten years ago* and still has not received a result to this day. Additionally, DY was homeless and receiving mental health support from a behavioral health provider in Northeast DC. They did not follow up on helping him locate housing. He applied for housing through numerous mental health providers, successfully completing piles of paperwork. None of his efforts yielded a positive result. While homeless, a provider looked at him and commented while denying services, “You do not look homeless.”
- **University Legal Services (ULS)** was able to help Alan, who at age 40, had most of his adult life consist of battling with schizophrenia and cycling in and out of jail and prison. Two years ago, US Medical Center for Federal Prisoners developed a release plan for Alan that reconnected him with Pathways, ensuring access to a voucher, and working on the application process with ACT team. Through the help of safe housing and supportive services, Alan was able to establish a solid foundation that will allow for immense growth. He moved into his own apartment a year ago, was able to attend to his mental health needs resulting in stability for two years, and reconnected with his sister and father as an active member of the family.
- Mr. NM was released from prison, he disclosed to **Voices for a Second Chance (VSC)** that he was homeless, an unemployed skilled laborer, HIV+, and suffering from a substance abuse disorder. His case manager scheduled a medical appointment, completed the combined Medicaid application, contacted a medically supported housing agency. For Mr. NM, this meant that food, shelter, and transportation were provided for at least 30 days. Currently, Mr. NM maintains gainfully employment and independent housing.

² § 4-751.01. Definitions, accessed from <https://code.dccouncil.us/dc/council/code/sections/4-751.01.html>

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