

# Chapter 6: Cross-Sector collaborations for expanding equitable access to long-term housing stability

## 6.1. Introduction

Both the coronavirus pandemic and demands for racial justice have drawn attention to longstanding inequities in many areas of U.S. life, including significant racial and ethnic inequities in long-term housing stability. The goal of long-term housing stability is particularly challenging to achieve, given the high cost of housing in the U.S. Across the 25-year lifespan of the Fair Market Standard for housing assistance, a full quarter of U.S. rental markets did not offer a single unit priced low enough to receive rental assistance, regardless of a family's racial and ethnic background. Many factors contribute to unequal access to long-term housing stability. When people have difficulty maintaining stable housing, however, the rest of their lives can become increasingly unstable. Persistent housing challenges can be particularly damaging to children's physical and mental development (Challa et al., 2024; Kannan, 2025; Sriram, 2023).

Despite the many barriers to housing stability, a variety of nonprofit and philanthropic organizations work to expand and improve housing assistance, and they also work to increase the number of affordable units so that there is more room for families with the lowest incomes. Accurate estimates of unmet need help guide housing assistance allocations so that fewer people experience long-term housing instability. In a new analysis that examines both the benefits available through federal programs and housing costs in U.S. counties, we estimate how much funding would provide housing assistance to help eliminate unmet need while keeping families' affordable housing costs below 30 percent of their incomes. No jurisdiction's entire housing system can reserve all of its rental stock or all of its for-sale units for these lowest-income families; however, ideal housing markets would offer a mix of housing options that are affordable to residents with different income levels.

6.1.1. Overview of the Study

Introduction: Several factors determine the housing outcomes for people with extremely low incomes. This study examines strategies that could expand access to long-term housing for people with the least income. It considers how improving job and wage quality, paths to promotion, and organizational culture within U.S. firms would likely raise the earnings, economic stability, and housing security of workers with low incomes. It also examines remotely delivered financial coaching and the role of deregulation in serving these populations. Job quality, stability, and opportunities for career advancement are key factors in preventing homelessness. The lack of affordable housing is such an extreme crisis that its enormity can water down our understanding of its causes and the solutions needed to end it. In addition to a shortage of units, the mismatch between income levels and rent prices means that some people will never earn enough for shelter. This gulf is growing between income levels for low-income workers and their housing needs. Data shows that about 35 percent of renter households lived in units for which their incomes were insufficient to pay rent and utilities. This percentage of rental burden represents an approximately 10 percent increase throughout the previous 20 years. To close this gap, examine methods that exist to decrease low-income worker disenfranchisement by positively impacting job and wage quality, career promotion, and housing support.



Fig 6 . 1 : Cross-Sector Collaboration

## 6.2. Understanding Housing Stability

### Appendix A: Defining Long-Term Housing Instability

Shelter is the most basic human need, and affordable housing is required for other social goals such as access to employment, good schools, and adequate healthcare. Accounting for spending on housing, utilities, and related home and contents insurance, housing typically comprises the largest expenditure of households. Safe, sustainable, and affordable housing becomes more important in light of two global trends: urban sprawl and urbanization. The need for long-term housing stability pertains in high-income, middle-income, and low-income countries, albeit with some differences that are discussed further in our review. In high-income countries, not only do governments increasingly rely on the private sector and the third sector to provide affordable housing options, but housing is becoming cross-subsidized through the creation of mixed-income neighborhoods as the primary vehicle for achieving social and economic goals simultaneously.

Despite the importance of housing stability, the multidimensional concept of long-term housing stability recently has been undertheorized and under-researched, particularly where the lens is turned to examining the many social benefits and consequences of housing stability-focused policies. This state of affairs is difficult to reconcile with a general move in interdisciplinary social science research to understand neighborhoods and the impacts of place on individuals, families, and communities. The absence of a master definition of long-term housing stability illustrates the complexity of the problem. This complexity exists with two key measurement architectures used to quantify housing stability: different concepts of time—such as housing stability at one point in time or housing stability as a concept that spans different periods of historic time—and different concepts of housing stability, such as those measuring tenure change, place change, or a combination of both. Irrespective of the definition used, large national data sets suggest serious problems of housing stability (Suura, 2024; Annapareddy & Sudha Rani, 2024; Challa et al., 2024).

#### 6.2.1. Definition of Housing Stability

Housing stability ensures residents sleep in the same place each night. It goes beyond the specific location where a person lays their head down: it includes whether future moves are anticipated, how far someone has to travel from their dwelling place to a potential job or school, the quality and affordability of the residence, how long a person can anticipate living there, whether the individual or family chooses that living arrangement, whether the individual or family is included in decisions about mobility in the future, and the quality of the dwelling and if it is acceptable to the person who

remains there. Housing stability contextualizes the impact of events that happen in a person or family's life because it defines exactly where that life occurs. Residents are expected to thrive when housed in a residence, so ensuring an indoor place to sleep is only a minimal first step. This characteristic is an ideal one to use as a policy and practice guideline, but it has not been defined and validated as such. Circumstances that establish or disrupt housing stability differ by race, geographic location, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability status, and other characteristics. It can also change for the same resident multiple times during the same year based on their diverse personal experiences and needs and community or political affairs. Without defining housing stability and examining how societal and individual behaviors, institutional policies, and broader social systems impact housing stability, researchers and practitioners might focus on the wrong outcomes. They might even increase homelessness. A public health approach can help policymakers, service providers, and residents seek and implement housing stability-promoting strategies by providing a shared definition with clear implications.

### **6.2.2. Importance of Long-Term Housing**

Over the past forty years, a growing body of research has consistently demonstrated the importance of long-term stability in secure housing as a fundamental social determinant of health. While individual and community health outcomes can benefit from social services aimed at the parameters of shelter in the moment – soup, soap, and salvation – and many lives remain attached to the immediate work of responding to acutely shelterless conditions, upstream benefits become available when shelter services are complemented with stabilizing housing interventions such as eviction protections, housing-based models of behavioral health and addiction treatment, income supports adequate to help defray housing cost burdens, and supports for homeowners and tenants that help safeguard long-term tenure. From pregnancy to old age, the health benefits of long-term housing stability are profound.

There has been an encouraging global push toward Housing First over the past twenty years, but as many who work in the homeless shelter industrial complex know, securing appropriate housing isn't the end of the story. While distressing increases in the number of homeless people over the past forty years testify to a range of intertwined failures to provide such foundational support to those in need, significant ongoing unmet housing needs of those who are nominally housed are also a part of the larger systems challenge. Those who are 'doubled up,' couch surfing, at risk of losing their housing, or living in substandard conditions such as with mold or no heat will also struggle with ongoing negative mental and physical health outcomes and may dip in and out of homelessness, the carceral system, or other negative emotional and economic spirals.

### **6.3. Challenges to Housing Access**

Demand for housing is affected by a multitude of factors, including population growth, housing geography, market and rent value fluctuations over time, and government policies. Nevertheless, market changes endanger households due to increasing rents exceeding household income, demand increases from displaced neighbors, speculation, demolition and remodeling, massive regeneration of deprived urban areas, and inadequate tenant protection laws. Housing policies aim to prevent future housing challenges, emphasize government control and supervision measures to address neighborhood challenges, and increase rental assistance to help low-income families afford the current housing market. The sad reality is that these political response patterns are all based on the belief that housing challenges will persist.

All housing policies addressing the market and political challenges of affordable and tolerable housing in the future have yet to address the existing housing system's poor quality of housing today. Identifying specific areas of need and prioritizing the supply of additional resources is the essential step. Ongoing oversight can assess progress in reducing the gap between the current condition and the established need. Despite these unresolved disputes, overall strengthening of housing policy and resources without major investment downsizing decisions can be made immediately. Many of our nation's habitual housing-related problems stand in stark contrast to our radiant homes, contributing to personal and public health crises along with enormous psychological, social, and economic costs that are not considered a national priority. With the courage to intervene, innovative, collaborative strategies can enable society to embrace a national goal of decent, low-cost housing for every citizen.

#### **6.3.1. Economic Barriers**

Many people do not have stable housing or lose their housing when they experience a financial crisis. Uneasily rising rents and too-low unemployment benefits create economic barriers to housing stability. Five states index benefits to rising housing costs or include a housing stipend, so childless unemployed adults do not need to cover any rent for access to housing. Some people exiting homelessness have housing options, but affordable housing in high-opportunity neighborhoods that are also affordable in a crisis or with low wages is in short supply. Federal revenue for affordable housing and assistance programs has been too low to meet demand for housing at all income levels, so only a quarter of eligible low-income households receive any assistance. Mediating immediate economic barriers increases housing stability in the short run.

To decrease reliance on programs for people who need help recovering from financial losses, states and localities should establish the ability of people who face financial

barriers to use tax refunds and other tax credits to cover a larger share of their housing costs. The number of low-income adults who rent rather than own has increased significantly over the past decade, but the federal tax code only allows homeowners to exclude the value of employer education benefits from their taxable income. Making the exclusion available to homeowners and rental households would recognize that renters also benefit from education and expand access to an opportunity that fosters housing stability, upward mobility, and workforce development. Federal spending for housing assistance that enables low-income renters to pay no more than 30% of their income for rent is also low. The federal government offsets some of the cost of housing assistance with employer contributions, and adults have been able to contribute to any account in addition to the savings account.

### **6.3.2. Social and Cultural Factors**

The interventions and system orientation in this initiative are informed by the social and cultural conditions that often trap families and individuals with legacy histories of homelessness. During interviews and reflexive exercises with grantee team members and their partners, collaborators discussed understanding homelessness as symptomatic of the unequal distribution of power and resources inherent in a racially structured society. This understanding itself does not ensure that people working in homelessness systems are immediately able to respond in ways that more equitably spread power and resources. However, recognizing that current approaches to homelessness policy and system design have resulted in structural location and a cultural presumption of inevitable social failure heightens the urgency for a more conscious effort to shift whether and how individuals and households are treated, not just in housing, but in other sectors of their lives' interrelated temporal and spatial dimensions.

Another important feature of this applied cultural analysis is the inside knowledge of advocates, case managers, housing navigators, and other direct line staff that sociologists sometimes label cultural or emotional labor invested in empowering people sidelined by racialized power relations and unfair economic opportunities. This is important social knowledge that is pertinent to society's willingness to realize its ideals, and places such staff in a strategic societal position to contribute actively to the design and execution of community-inclusive systems and policy initiatives. Outside of their role as formal grantees, staff and advocate representatives associated with two organizations actively participate in project governance, serving on the systemic change working group or providing feedback on project evaluation activities. There is a critical participatory approach to system and policy design not generally associated with community development or community-external prerequisites for achieving long-term housing stability.

### **6.3.3. Policy and Regulatory Issues**

The emergence of flexible funds and the particular use of funds without broad compliance and reporting requirements has engendered a shift in operations to reorganize work with some people served to be of immediate benefit, as determined by the person. This flexibility is prized by communities, program managers, and the staff who work with people needing financial assistance. While direct cash assistance can engage and reframe services with people experiencing homelessness, leveraging this idea—that staff have the ability to creatively allocate funds without service process compliance for meeting the needs and wants of persons served—is not easily transposed into regulation without concerns about control over funds, service entitlements, and fidelity to practice.

The programs reviewed expressed that this perceived risk of lost or deterred regulation keeps many potential collaborations too tense to function. An exceptional form of partnership to emerge from the COVID crisis—of service regulations to meet the most practical person-serving needs as determined by those doing the serving—may provide a template in which a blurring of lines between shelter and housing can offer insights on transformation pathways, including the reimagining of rules we assume necessary to serve people experiencing homelessness.

### **6.4. The Role of Cross-Sector Collaborations**

Improving access to and the effectiveness of long-term housing stability services for all who need it will require greater cross-sector collaboration. Layers of interconnected challenges across housing and health are deeply intertwined with inequities that impact a range of social outcomes. Stakeholders from sectors beyond housing are beginning to recognize the role they and their spheres of influence play in these outcomes. Recognizing this, we must build bridges beyond established partnerships. These expanded links transcend the customary focus on joint income or the immediate crisis that led to families seeking help from a particular organization or sector.

This means that funders focused on healthcare and behavioral health services are examining ways to rely on the long-term stability of housing to maximize the effectiveness of the care that is provided. Insurance companies count the cost-effectiveness of supportive housing and engagement of community health workers. Local governments are pushing beyond housing development as the sole goal of expansion of the housing supply to integrate zoning and permitting policies with the broader impacts on equity and future product growth, while local organizations are openly using plans to price out the neediest residents in the local area as a basis for community organizing to change policy. These cross-sector collaborations, along with

coordination within housing and service-providing sectors, are making incremental changes that could and should add up to an equitable supply of housing for everyone in the country. They can serve as models for future and expanded work.

#### **6.4.1. Definition of Cross-Sector Collaboration**

Cross-sector collaboration can manifest in many forms, ranging widely in formality, purpose, structure, and process. In addition to highlighting important components of existing frameworks, it is also valuable to critically assess and refine the guiding definitions and principles of cross-sector collaboration. Some definitions of cross-sector collaboration could potentially be too broad, encompassing single-event interactions that are too shallow to effect meaningful change. At the same time, too narrow a definition could exclude interactions that actually have the potential to make a concrete difference to performance and outcomes. To refine the definition of cross-sector collaboration considered for this study, it can help to underscore the importance of ascribing shared goals and values and a common pathway toward mutual advantage. This includes shared power between formal members and other involved entities, including those with lived experience of homelessness, and a high degree of interdependence across sectors. These elements of equity, mutuality, and interdependence offer useful supplements to existing definitions and serve as a clarifying interpretation of the general concept of cross-sector collaboration.

Some existing definitions also emphasize the public and nonprofit sectors at the expense of the private sector. The impetus for creating these collaborations often comes from challenges related to housing, homelessness, community health, public safety, criminal justice, emergency department utilization, or pharmacy expenses. These issues necessitate close collaboration between those with comparative expertise in the housing and social determinants of health sectors. However, closing gaps between high-impact solutions and homeless service systems can also involve partnering with those in the for-profit corporate sector. These organizations concentrate a wealth of other resources that could be essential for developing and sustaining new solutions, but also introduce risks when profit motives conflict with defined goals, such as a housing-first approach.

#### **6.4.2. Historical Context and Evolution**

Before elaborating on the collaborative governance framework developed to analyze current cross-sector collaborations between housing and health leaders and their stakeholders, it is notable to understand the historical context and evolution of this intersection in the United States. Housing and health have long been intertwined, beginning in the earliest periods of American urbanization. Public health advocates have



long argued that the quality of housing not only affected an individual's or family's health, but also the health of entire neighborhoods, towns, and regions. As the epidemiological transition was experienced in the United States, the primary health concerns shifted from acute infectious diseases related to unsanitary conditions to enabling those suffering from chronic ailments, as well as those facing complex diagnoses, to recover expediently through the provision of safe, stable, and quality living conditions, necessitating access to clean air, water, and space and to protection from environmental hazards, including the uncertainty of homelessness and housing instability.

In the past few decades, the expansion of efforts to improve the health and well-being of individuals through support for stable, affordable housing has been intended to address spiking housing costs and the decreasing availability of affordable rental stock, which together have contributed to significant levels of income inequality and onward racial and ethnic segregation within communities. As those disparities have widened, housing's permanent role as a central location in each person's life course has come into full focus. Changes in homeownership status, residential transitions, and housing wealth comprise core life course decisions that create different gateways for health and social developments for all in American society. Public efforts to assist individuals and families with housing challenges are intended to act as safety-net services within an intentionally de-commodified housing policy sphere. Meanwhile, the expansion of housing as a human right is debated sometimes vigorously over how resources and existing policies should be redistributed and preserved. These debates are contributing to the national rise in supportive housing and housing-first interventions, which stemmed from over two decades of experimentation with innovative methodologies to work with the homeless, the dispossessed, and others housing unstable.

## **6.5. Key Stakeholders in Housing Stability**

Government action at all levels affects housing stability for individuals and families at various income levels and with different needs. While housing laws and regulations originate from public policy and have to be enforced by government staff, local government representatives and officials, at a variety of agencies, inspire change through Housing Stability Plans or other collaborative, multi-agency policy initiatives that require the expertise of both private sector and nonprofit entities. Crafting these new approaches requires stakeholder engagement by the housing and policy experts found in academia, philanthropy, business and labor sectors, government departments, nonprofit organizations of different types and income levels, and community residents who have or are currently experiencing housing instability and homelessness. The success of

Housing Stability Plans, laws, regulations, and programs requires some additional contributors: money, data, expertise, and buy-in.

Under the model, these stakeholders can be found participating in 12 different functions necessary to provide successful implementation of rental housing, which reach beyond real estate development to include community organizations, government agencies, and businesses that can address not only housing, but also service needs, including transportation, education, and financial systems. Collaboration between business and health care, education, and social service providers may not come as easily as it does between community organizations and government. All local partners involved in a supply-side response have finite capacity. An increase in funding for affordable or supportive housing does not, by itself, change the inadequate supply situation in a region. Capacity for construction, operations, and staffing needs to be developed concurrently and efficiently. Information on point-in-time counts conducted by communities has been used to link federal money for affordable housing with a genuine, rather than assumed or random, need.

#### **6.5.1. Government Agencies**

Conduct a registry of all single adults accessing municipal shelter services. Evaluate our services and support systems for single adults currently experiencing homelessness using both quantitative and qualitative evidence. Innovate and advocate for policies and practices that effectively and efficiently address both the emergency and underlying systemic causes of homelessness among single adults. Secure the funding required to sustain these activities by developing and advocating for a range of appropriate policies and supports, implementing a best-practice data system to document needs and outcomes, and promoting our progress to the general public, elected officials, and other stakeholders on an ongoing basis. Strengthen our own capacity by implementing the best models we can create to help single adults experiencing homelessness return to stability, and communicating clearly and consistently to all partners and stakeholders about the work we do and the impact we are having on individual lives and on the overall volume of homelessness in our community. In addition to the array of emergency and recovery services provided, the government also maintains a community services and support system that includes education, health care, public safety services, adult protective services, child protection, law enforcement, legal assistance, workforce development, housing, and many other city-wide and local sector responsibilities. Although the human services sector is the primary source of the most direct assistance to a single adult experiencing homelessness, supportive services and collaborations with other sectors are also important for achieving each person's stability. Similarly, even though other sectors are not usually the primary source of assistance, they can improve the reach and the

success of the human services sector's efforts to end housing instability by creating opportunities to collaborate and to share credit and resources for integrated work.

### **6.5.2. Non-Profit Organizations**

Non-profit organizations play a powerful role in society. They provide a massive range of important services that help people improve their lives and contribute benefits to more prosperous communities. There are non-profit organizations with global reach, and there are small, local organizations. Non-profits also support communities facing political upheaval and crisis, providing legal help for people seeking asylum. Non-profit organizations are important owners and players, contributing economically and solving social problems. Non-profit organizations play an outsized role in our economy and wider society, helping to level the playing field, calm the sharpest edges of inequality, and create a stronger, more dynamic economy for all residents.

Non-profit organizations help to address inequality by opening doors for those with the least opportunity to improve their circumstances by advocating for change, such as public policies to create a more just society; providing human services, regardless of recipients' ability to pay for them; directly investing in low-income communities; and promoting the redistribution of wealth, such as by funding soup kitchens or homeless shelters. Non-profit organizations create jobs, providing a significant portion of the nation's GDP, accounting for millions of jobs and significantly reducing the likelihood that non-profit workers will work in poverty compared to for-profit workers.

### **6.5.3. Private Sector Contributions**

Private sector contributions to long-term housing stability are varied and can take on a number of distinct forms. Being a primary source and representing a considerable capital asset, the contributions of for-profit real estate are quite varied. Partnerships with real estate assets have been growing increasingly common within cities that oversee their regulations. Nonmarket single-family housing initiatives have leveraged the regulatory power of city codes that combat displacement to ensure that speculative profits do not exclude a critical funding stream for providing permanent affordable housing. Some nonprofits purchase existing assets to ensure the creation of permanent affordable housing. Other city governments have repositioned their municipal bond authority to physically underwrite asset acquisitions through the creation of new investment pools. There are nonprofit corporations that are actively curtailing speculative pressures on deeply affordable real estate prices by purchasing a range of existing housing stock and subordinating the property's land value from the owners' portfolio.

Certain jurisdictions also hold stock that confers special property-related benefits and can reposition stock to take advantage of this rewrapped class. Enhanced ability to gain long-term property access, assume ownership, or opt for blank loans are possible tools in effectively addressing the housing needs of low-income and low-wealth populations. Governments can help to defray negative consequences of certain market behaviors by creating alternatives that substitute for the defunded infrastructure that otherwise subsidizes high prices. Although this type of subsidy does not liberate investment onto the investing depopulated list or sector from the traditional real estate sources, the broader base of capital support is created that benefits all asset owners who are willing to reposition to be able to realize greater community-building social impacts.

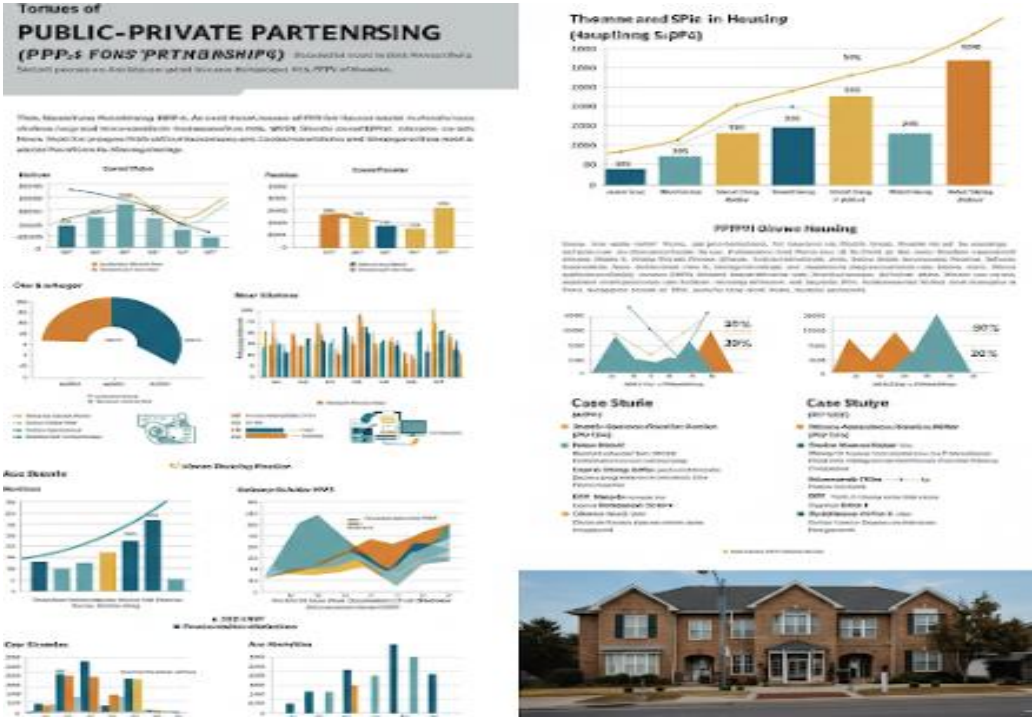


Fig 6 . 1 : Public-Private Partnerships in Housing as a Potential Contributor

6.5.4. Community-Based Organizations

Community-based organizations (CBOs) are trusted entities in their communities with unique assets and expertise that can support tenant stability and success. Small and midsize CBOs may be the missing link in partnerships that deliver that support and make affordable housing work well. Both CBOs and property owners care deeply about essential issues such as rental affordability, but they work from very different places in the market. A small number of large CBOs can and do work across all sectors, but in the

markets where the vast majority of rental housing is provided, long-standing relationships between CBOs and owners are the real solution to supporting neighborhoods and stabilizing these critical resources. Projects show that this key piece of the solution has room to grow, offering practical, market-oriented, cost-effective ideas for how state and local housing funders, lenders, and intermediaries can gently weave CBO and property owner networks together.

There is no one-size-fits-all strategy for bridging this divide, yet the USA calls for more community capacity and tenant investment. The impact of local CBO and owner partnerships is largely unknown, and the strategic national investment made through various organizations has plateaued. Given the scale of the national network of properties and the chronic underfunding of other support for low-income programs in the United States, the serious overhaul of federal public housing and rental assistance programs under discussion, and the role of private rental housing in near-term recovery, the time is ripe for re-engagement. Efforts to foster local partnerships seek to identify solutions and strategies that can deliver better rental choices and outcomes more organically as part of the market norms in low-income, high-minority, tax credit markets. If the United States is serious about delivering better housing choices for lower-income renters, it's time to address these gaps and lift up CBOs to play a bigger role as leaders in shaping these important collaborations.

## **6.6. Models of Successful Collaborations**

**Different Types of Relationships and Ways to Measure Success** While scholars have examined cross-sector collaboration designed to enhance education, employment, and health outcomes, the literature about these types of relationships that actually improve shelter provision and access to decent housing in the US is limited. "Collaboration" can be defined in many ways; relationships and expectations across programs may be varied. Some collaborations allow programs to call each other for help and may have few other joint expectations. Other collaborations operate from shared consents for staff to assess additional needs or shared intake processes. Others expect staff to implement or at least "fix" the services of the partner programs. Still others attempt more shared products, plans, and fund development.

**6.2. Cross-System Homeless Case Conferencing: Dissemination and Receptiveness** In one type of collaboration that has increasingly been utilized throughout the United States, community stakeholders from homeless systems of care are sharing case information to ensure that precious housing resources are used efficiently and effectively. Such Cross-System Homeless Case Conferencing has facilitated housing resource matches and follow-up services for those who are most likely to become successful long-term tenants.

### **6.6.1. Case Study: Public-Private Partnerships**

The scale and scope of commitment from the faith-based and nonprofit sectors to end homelessness are familiar. Arguably, the organizations on the ground are the vanguard of the movement to end homelessness, providing essential prevention and supportive services. These organizations tend to be small, under-resourced, and often work on the margins, reliant on the geographic reach, capital attraction, and political influence of their local government partners to resource local infrastructure development and targeted housing interventions. A review of the literature returns numerous examples of successful public-private partnerships to fix broken public systems or to develop individual projects, but we found little evidence of successful public, private, and philanthropic partnerships to develop the capacity to implement effective systems-wide interventions. In addition to strengthening nonprofit organizational capacity, this case may reveal lessons of public, philanthropic, and private sector involvement instrumental to creating or expanding equitable access to long-term housing solutions.

We will share findings from our mixed-methods study of a private, philanthropically funded multimillion-dollar partnership with a public, militarily strategic, and economically integrated system of homelessness prevention and emergency shelter services. At the time of this study, we had identified no other public-private partnerships to build the same type of specialized organization as the one in this case. While it is typically the faith-based and nonprofit sector that leverages charitable gifts and governmental budgets to build infrastructure and deliver housing opportunities, it is not uncommon for the economically integrated private sector in the United States to donate or leverage significant philanthropic support each year to support homelessness prevention and emergency shelter services.

### **6.6.2. Case Study: Community-Led Initiatives**

The collaborative is working to reimagine the way public services are delivered to achieve long-term housing stability and safety for the people most impacted by mass incarceration and criminalization. In aligning our work and sharing our lessons learned, we hope to lay a foundation for universality across sectors that will inspire other public service systems – including workforce development and public education – to join us in working differently so that we all can deliver on the promise of community-led and community-owned peace and vitality. The collaborative seeks to use one metric – long-term housing stability in safe and supportive communities – to track each unique individual’s success across public system services and social determinants of health. This means working to eliminate and tear down the silos that traditionally separate public service systems from one another.

Our collaborative approach draws from the experience of community services and other tenant-led eviction resistance organizations, and utilizes the vehicle of housing stability as a means of investing in community building and leadership development. The collaborative centers the unique expertise of individuals and their families most impacted by mass incarceration and criminalization to innovate and implement a new model of community safety aligned with community safety charters and collaborative leadership agendas. We know that siloed, transactional non-profit service delivery models actually reinforce the isolation and marginalization that sentencing and incarceration wreak among families and communities. By creating pathways for local community transformation that are grounded in public service systems and social determinants of health, voice, and choice, philanthropy and government can achieve a multiplier effect of long-lasting community vitality.

## **6.7. Strategies for Effective Collaboration**

Expanding equitable access to long-term housing stability requires partnerships to design, implement, and sustain effective programs. Partnerships for long-term housing stability can also align with other goals of homeless and supportive services systems, such as addressing mental health and substance use issues and ensuring access to care coordination, transportation, and other services that help manage illness, such as routine care. This document provides specific strategies to support states, localities, and communities in fostering and sustaining successful collaborations and presents examples of how states, localities, and communities are employing these strategies. Drawing on strategies and examples, each of the key components of successful cross-disciplinary collaborations is discussed in detail in the following sections.

A successful collaboration starts where governments collaborate with each other, and where public and private entities unite to form a powerful force for doing good in the world. All confident leaders have vision, purpose, and the ability to execute. The art of collaboration is accomplished through the act of creating strong relationships. In order to seize opportunities for strengthening collaborations, state housing agencies, local planning organizations, and Continuums of Care will be growing more diversified in composition and scope, and the barriers that historically hindered isolated institutional functioning are disappearing, making them better positioned to help state and local governments confront complex, cross-sector challenges.

### **6.7.1. Building Trust and Communication**

The importance of shared principles, building trust, and effective communication. Cross-sector collaborations engage individuals and organizations with distinct skill sets,

experiences, and priorities in service of solving complex problems. Establishing a shared set of principles and goals is key to building trust and helping establish the underlying commonalities that founders, directors, managers, and staff can build upon. Meeting people face-to-face and gaining confidence in their abilities, while clearly and succinctly stating one's own proposed contributions, are important early steps in fostering trust. Employing strong facilitation and process management is also crucial when convening such efforts. These initial actions help to connect individuals and create an environment that is conducive to idea sharing, that respects diverse perspectives, and that fosters trust and subsequent collaboration.

Trust and collaboration are further strengthened when there is evidence that the proposed solutions are strongly supported by multiple forms of evidence. Facilitators of cross-sector collaborations can help move toward mutual recognition of alliance benefits and reinforce the value of interdependence. Even more important is the integral role of individuals from different organizations interacting around capacity, mentoring, shared learning, and teamwork. Although participation should be voluntary, those expected to join a codified, ongoing partnership are most likely to be motivated by the benefits to their organizations when full trust develops. Rather than being the product of multiple reinforcing messages, trust nurtured in the early stages of collaboration is stronger when transparency, evidence, and common criteria are present.

### **6.7.2. Shared Goals and Vision**

Making meaningful progress toward housing stability for people experiencing homelessness through cross-sector collaboration is laudable and ambitious work. Yet, the persistence of systemic issues—such as lack of affordable housing and disparities in the availability of vital resources such as quality child care or accessible health care—can sometimes make it seem naïve, if not Pollyannaish, to engage in collaborative projects. However, without shared goals, derived from an honest acknowledgment of each sector's unique strengths and weaknesses, and without a shared, expansive vision for how collective efforts to fulfill these goals could end homelessness, communities are unlikely to achieve real and lasting progress. In these first three chapters, we introduce a model of cross-sector collaboration to seek longer-term housing solutions for people on the streets who present persistent, sometimes overwhelming challenges to emergency crisis response systems. At its root, the concept of shared goals requires humility and trust; it is not about reaching agreements that everything that everyone does is of equal value. Cross-sector collaboration requires humility from each player. At the same time, the concept of efficiency is also relevant, pointing to the importance of specialization, with the idea that strengths and limitations identified through an honest assessment of what different sectors can contribute are likely to inspire respect and trust within the



collaborative team. Ultimately, reaching shared goals and successfully implementing the vision of cross-sector collaboration takes inherently difficult work; it requires skillful facilitation, leadership, and an understanding and commitment to consistently modeling humility, respect, and reciprocity.

### **6.7.3. Resource Sharing and Pooling**

Resource sharing, whether through financial investment or pooled operational resources, was a frequent motif in the collaborations. For some organizations, financial investment was not available in abundance. Those organizations employed the strategy of focused versus blanket investments in neighborhood initiatives, which ensured that housing stability projects had the most leverage in the targeted service areas. In a similar way, collaboration partners pooled and leveraged operational resources to make the most of their investments. In any given neighborhood, you can't address everything. All you can do is focus on an initial set of data-driven strategies. That old aphorism about it taking a village? It's a cliché, but it's also true. A neighborhood strategy doesn't just require a multifaceted approach involving different stakeholders; it also needs unprecedented levels of cooperation from the different players across the board. Obviously, the fundamental shortage in all of this is funding. But for those organizations for which money was more plentiful, the creation of a set of achievable performance benchmarks was quite helpful. These benchmarks were coupled with a financial commitment to effective homelessness mitigation in the neighborhood. Collaborations that were somewhat poorer in material goods still emphasized that dedication to collective change was as important as economic investment. In cases of constrained resources in a specific locality, pooling and leveraging assets were key to seeing actual results emerge. These efforts, representing a collection of groups, could see better outcomes than any one actor could achieve singularly. The allocation of the operational resources, however meager, has been particularly telling in the performance results. The creation of an analysis plan

and the establishment of data performance measures facilitated member accountability.

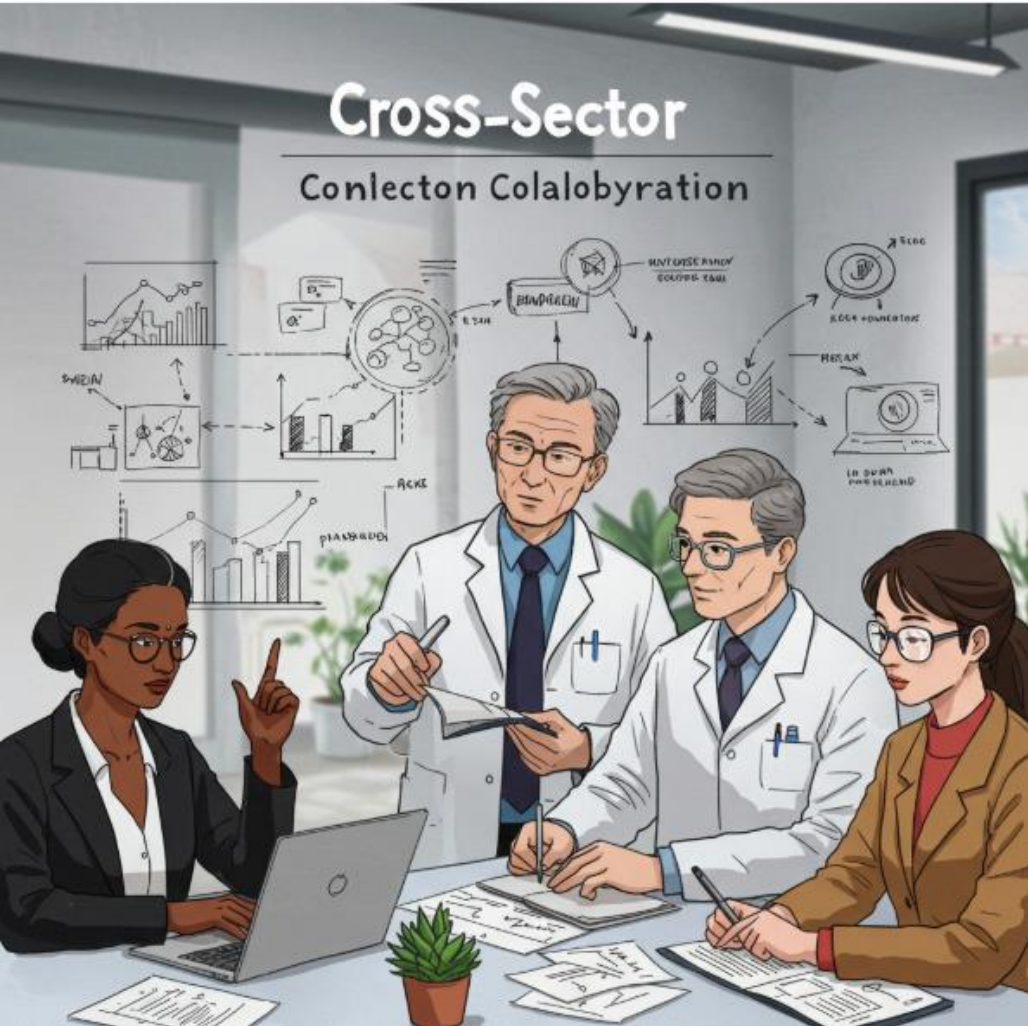


Fig 6 . 3 : Cross-Sector Collaboration

6.8. Conclusion

Given the breadth of housing issues and the persistent nature of housing insecurity and homelessness, there is no substitute for expanding high-quality, sustainable services and housing. In the United States, there is a housing supply crisis resulting from generations of disinvestment, segregation, and discriminatory housing policies. Cross-sector collaborations have the potential to streamline access to housing stability for populations who would likely be shuttled from one siloed system to another. We offer the cases in this chapter as examples of how intersectional collaboration with designed intentions to increase access to housing for individuals with intersecting needs can be designed and

implemented effectively. In efforts to advance equitable housing outcomes, collaborations need to shift beyond parallel problem-solving towards collective strategies and efforts to jointly create opportunities for housing access and stability. Relatedly, there is much that could be informed by the sector-specific or local challenges these cases and others have faced, and how they have worked to balance varying needs and agendas in effective ways. Notwithstanding these important challenges, the cases show how cross-sector collaborations can work to obscure the maze of entry points formerly needed to obtain access to services long enough to promote housing access and stability for at least some of the populations targeted by each sector. While challenges and tensions are likely to be inescapable, these collaborations provide useful examples of how government, non-profits, and businesses can work to bring about the policy coordination that is needed to access the many homes that continue to be out of reach for the nation's most vulnerable individuals.

### **6.8.1. Final Thoughts on Advancing Housing Stability**

This chapter has focused on how current and previous policies have created enormous barriers to economic security for many families, especially families with children and people with disabilities, and has offered solutions for advancing housing stability. Arguments for supporting long-term housing stability are increasingly informed by pay-now-for-savings-later paradigms. Helping families afford housing through the earned income tax credit would do a great deal to change the balance. A number of the other ideas for expanding income support discussed above would also improve housing stability, including increases in the value of the food stamp benefit. The housing production gap has a number of us thinking about how we can change the policy environment and structures to make meaningful progress. It would also be helpful to reform the way the Department of Housing and Urban Development funds homeless programs so that they are a more reliable source of long-term housing assistance for homeless households. The current policies to help people afford housing are both inefficient and inequitable. Filling the gap would also distribute more of the money for long-term housing assistance on a more permanent basis, allow states to establish their own programs, and ultimately help even more families afford a place of their own.

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