



## Disability Policy Consortium

### Call To Action: Urgent Need to Address Homelessness Among People With Disabilities

#### Too many people with disabilities are homeless in Massachusetts

##### What's the problem?

- 28.6% of people with disabilities in Massachusetts live in poverty. <sup>1</sup>
- 24.5% of people with disabilities are SSI recipients with a maximum benefit of approximately \$11,440/year for an individual and \$18,273.24/year for a couple. <sup>2</sup>
- A family must have a combined income of approximately \$51,256 a year to afford a two-bedroom apartment at market rate rents. <sup>3</sup>
- Massachusetts needs 17,000 houses a year to meet demand. <sup>4</sup>
- The real estate industry is not building enough affordable and accessible housing to meet this need.
- Housing voucher programs have long waiting lists. People often have to wait 7-10 years to be housed. <sup>5</sup>

**“It’s obvious when you’re working with people how much of their life is destabilized if they don’t have housing. You can’t get PCA services, harder to find jobs, and hard to get adequate consistent medical care if you don’t have housing.” –Nassira Nicola, Director of Community Integration-BCIL**

There are approximately 1,590 chronically homeless individuals (people who have significant disabilities and have been homeless for a year or more) living in Massachusetts, <sup>6</sup> 600 of these live in Boston. <sup>7</sup>

##### Potential Solutions

- The Alternative Housing Voucher and the Massachusetts Rental Housing Voucher programs.
- Supported housing that follows the “housing first” model, providing housing without restrictions.
- Increased production of affordable accessible housing.

**What stands in the way?** Advocates have routinely found that there is a severe lack of:

- Affordable housing units, especially those that are wheelchair accessible (particularly in urban areas). <sup>8</sup>
- Voucher programs without time limits and that can be used statewide.
- Housing programs without sobriety requirements, meaning that people with mental health issues who are at higher risk for substance use disorders, can be harder to house.

In general, families with members who have disabilities are also especially difficult to house. <sup>8</sup>

#### Housing Voucher Programs in Massachusetts

Two of the major housing voucher programs in Massachusetts include: <sup>8 9</sup>

**Alternative Housing Voucher Program (AHVP):** Program distributes housing vouchers to low-income people with disabilities who are under 60 via local housing authorities. Voucher holders pay 25% of their income to their landlord. Advocates won a \$1.05 million increase to the program in the FY2016 budget to gain 120 new vouchers for a new total of 554. <sup>10</sup> However, more than 2,000 people remain on waiting lists. Vouchers are difficult to use in urban areas because of high rents, especially for accessible units. For more information go to: <http://bostoncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Alternative-Housing-Voucher-Fact-Sheet-FY17.pdf>

**Massachusetts Rental Housing Voucher Program (MRVP):** Initially, MRVP offered 20,000 vouchers, it now offers less than 5,000. Housing advocates such as Citizens' Housing and Planning Association have won a series of increases to the program, most recently winning a more than \$30 Million increase in FY2016, bringing it up to \$90,931,597. For more information go to: <http://www.mass.gov/hed/housing/rental-assistance/mrv.html>

## Supported Housing

Supported housing remains one of the most effective methods of helping homeless people with disabilities find and maintain housing; more enterprises like these are needed. Some of the major supported housing initiatives include:

**Home and Healthy for Good:** Has permanently housed 860 chronically homeless adults. (<http://www.mhsa.net/HHG>).

**Heading Home Inc.:** Provides permanent congregate housing to 75 individuals, scattered-site apartments, and two apartment buildings (<http://www.headinghomeinc.org/>).

**Other major programs include:** Pine Street Inn's Stapleton House ([http://www.pinestreetinn.org/solving\\_the\\_problem](http://www.pinestreetinn.org/solving_the_problem)) and McKinney Shelter Plus Care Program (<http://www.mass.gov/hed/housing/rental-assistance/mspc.html>).

**There is a vital need for more funding to increase accessible and affordable units so more people with disabilities can benefit.**

## Next Steps for Housing Advocates

**The Disability Policy Consortium (DPC) recommends to advocates:**

- Recognize that housing is a healthcare issue.
- Support a \$2.5 Million increases to AHVP to return it to its original 800 voucher allocation.
- Support S1323, which aligns state building code with the ADA, increasing the share of renovated apartments that are accessible.
- Support House Bill 1111 that provides financial incentives and removes administrative barriers to housing.<sup>4</sup>
- Work with DHCD and the Department of Mental Health to develop more supportive housing programs.

**Take action! Help end homelessness for people with disabilities in Massachusetts!**

**The DPC is a statewide cross-disability civil rights organization. Visit us online: [www.dpcma.org](http://www.dpcma.org)**

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<sup>1</sup> Cornell University (2015). 2013 Disability Status Report. Accessed November 9, 2015. <http://tinyurl.com/jpnzy96>.

<sup>2</sup> MassLegalServices (2015). 2015 SSI Payment Levels; 2015 SSI and SSDI Threshold Amounts Accessed 11/9/15. <http://tinyurl.com/j7nfvfn>.

<sup>3</sup> National Low Income Housing Coalition (2015). Out of Reach: 2015 Massachusetts. 11/ 9/15. <http://nlihc.org/oor/massachusetts#>.

<sup>4</sup> Citizen's Housing and Planning Association (2015). H1111, An Act Relative to Housing Production. Accessed 12/9/15. <http://tinyurl.com/z34eur5>.

<sup>5</sup> Nicola, N, & English, S. (2015) Personal interview. 12/3/15.

<sup>6</sup> Finn J., Durkin, M. (2015). Dealing with chronic homelessness. *CommonWealth*. Accessed 10/20/15. <http://tinyurl.com/j5t28nf>

<sup>7</sup> Bernstein, L (2015). Personal communication 10/2/2015.

<sup>8</sup> Killick, C (2015). Personal Interview. 12/18/15.

<sup>9</sup> MassLegalHelp (2015). What types of vouchers are there?. Accessed 10/15/15. <http://www.masslegalhelp.org/housing/types-vouchers>.

<sup>10</sup> Stout, A (2016). Personal Interview between Maggie Sheets and Allegra Stout. 1/20/16.