Unhoused African Americans and LGBTQIA+ Youth: Disproportionately Overrepresented Groups in the Unhoused Population

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ABSTRACT

Over 75,000 individuals in Los Angeles County are unhoused, representing a crucial issue that needs to be addressed. In addition to stemming from a complex array of historical and societal factors, the unhoused population is further burdened by racial and identity-based inequities, with African Americans and LGBTQIA+ youth representing two disproportionally overrepresented groups in the unhoused population. Thus, more work must be conducted to uncover the systemic injustices that perpetuate homelessness and advocate for more equitable solutions. This analysis explores the historical antecedents leading up to the current housing crisis before drawing from evidence-based studies to frame a set of policy choices and recommendations to address the disproportionate number of homeless African American and LGBTQIA+ youth populations in Los Angeles. I discuss current approaches to resolving the homelessness problem before introducing and advocating for Housing First, an evidence-based approach that seeks to empower unhoused individuals by prioritizing housing from the beginning. Critically, I address specific challenges faced by unhoused African Americans and LGBTQIA+ youth, providing a framework for implementation and recommendations to address such disparities in housing more adequately. As with necessities like food, clothing, and fundamental rights to speech and freedom, housing is a human right.

Los Angeles boasts one of the world's most dynamic and productive economies, yet it is simultaneously called the nation's

epicenter of homelessness. Where the sleek angles of sports cars are just as common as the mismatched tarps of homeless encampments, it is no wonder that Los Angeles is ranked seventh in income inequality out of the largest 150 metro regions (PolicyLink 2023). With over 45,000 homeless people in the City of Los Angeles and an additional 30,000 in the greater county, homelessness has become an increasingly critical issue in LA and beyond (LAHSA 2023). People experiencing homelessness–or alternate term, the unhoused–experience increased exposure to communicable diseases, violence, malnutrition, and harmful weather exposure, and they have, on average, a 12-year shorter life expectancy when compared to the general US population (NHCHC 2019). While 26.7% of the Los Angeles unhoused population are sheltered adults and youth, unsheltered youth make up 3.0% of the unhoused population, and unsheltered adults make up a staggering 70.3% of the unhoused population. Furthermore, characterization of significant portions within the unhoused population (LAHSA 2024) include: 29,823 chronically homeless; 2,991 veterans; and 2,406 transition-aged youth–who are particularly vulnerable due to their ineligibility for youth services.

According to USICH's (n.d.) report using data trends to dismantle myths believed about homelessness, 40-60% of unhoused individuals have jobs–despite the common conception that unhoused people are unemployed–but struggle to find housing because it is unaffordable. Economic reasons like job loss contribute significantly, and many shelters are limited to people who are sober, straight, and have no disability or criminal record. Additionally, while unhoused people are commonly perceived as dangerous and violent, they are more likely to be victims of violent crime. Finally, while a common stereotype is that most unhoused people have substance use and/or mental health disorders, the majority don't; instead, the large majority of people with substance abuse and mental health illnesses are *not* homeless.

Despite making up only 5-8% of the overall US youth population, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex, Asexual (or LGBTQIA+) youth make up 40% of the youth population experiencing homelessness (Robinson 2018). Additionally, homelessness is experienced disproportionately by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (or BIPOC), as more than

40% of the homeless population is composed of African Americans, though they comprise only 13% of the general population (NAEH 2023). In Los Angeles, African Americans make up 31.7% of the homeless population despite making up only 7.6% of the general LA county population (LAHSA 2023). LGBTQIA+ youth and African Americans face unique challenges due to their marginalized identities, and it is crucial to understand the underlying causes of their homelessness to uncover the systemic injustices that perpetuate homelessness and advocate for more equitable solutions.

Given these stark disparities, this paper examines homelessness among two of the most disproportionately affected groups: African Americans of all ages and LGBTQIA+ youth. While homelessness affects individuals across various demographics, these groups face unique systemic challenges that warrant specific attention. African Americans experience homelessness at significantly higher rates than their proportion of the general population, primarily due to historical and structural factors such as discriminatory housing policies and economic disparities. Similarly, LGBTQIA+ youth make up an outsized portion of unhoused young people, often as a result of identity-based discrimination and family rejection. Understanding these differences is essential to developing tailored policy solutions that address their specific vulnerabilities and break the cycle of homelessness.

HISTORICAL CORRELATIONS - THE ORIGIN OF PUBLIC HOUSING AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

It is important to acknowledge the historical antecedents of modern housing programs to understand the homeless issue. This necessitates a discussion of public housing, which the government initially constructed in the early 1900s to address the living conditions of America's poorest families during World War I (Goetz 2013). These projects provided affordable and decent housing for the neediest. Still, they soon followed a recognizable pattern of racialization, mismanagement, and subsequent demolition following the increasingly dominant neoliberal perspective. The post-World War I period, which began in the 1930s, saw improved economic conditions as liberal democratic

philosophy defined the character of American politics and government. Starting with President Roosevelt's New Deal programs from 1933 to 1938, Keynesian economics was born, which supported 'big government' solutions and redistributive programs (Goetz 2013; Marr 2015). The federal government favored demand-side policies to bring the country back into stability, encouraging infrastructure development and jobs by building housing, instituting food programs, and enhancing social security.

As economic conditions improved, the racial character of public housing changed from primarily white to Black. White public housing residents were presented with more opportunities in the private sector than their Black counterparts, resulting in an outflow of whites and an increase in Black occupancy (Goetz 2013). At the same time, funding for public housing decreased as the shift to the neoliberal ideology occurred. Public housing quickly became marginalized and stigmatized, further cementing its demise. The civil rights movement, beginning in the late 1950s-1960s, brought in new legislation like the Fair Housing Act, which President Johnson signed as part of the Civil Rights Act of 1968 (HUD n.d.a). However, a shift to more neoliberal views soon began. The neoliberal approach fosters financial deregulation and labor market flexibility at the expense of social welfare programs (Goetz 2013). This has contributed to rising levels of unstable employment, inequality, and poverty, now defining characteristics of major metropolitan areas in the United States. Importantly, housing for the nation's most disadvantaged became a major crisis as a shift to the private market was prioritized.

In the 1970s, the expansion of the public housing stock ended with the Nixon administration. With the passage of the 1974 Housing and Community Development Act, the Section 8 housing program began to take effect. Rather than provide families with hard units–as in public housing–the government began to compensate them with housing vouchers for use in the local private housing market (Marr 2015). However, these vouchers were not effective at addressing the housing need, as prospective buyers with vouchers were highly likely to encounter discrimination and various barriers to obtaining housing (TBF 2020). Displaced families from the demolition of public housing

were often limited to relocating to high-poverty and racially segregated neighborhoods (Marr 2015).

According to Roschelle (2019), the decline of public housing and the rise of neoliberal policy were in line with the discriminatory perspectives on social welfare at the time. In the 1980s and 1990s, Black and Latina mothers on social welfare were often vilified as 'lazy' and welfare-dependent. In 1996, President Clinton passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act to eliminate welfare dependency by enforcing a lifetime limit of 5 years on welfare receipt. Such policies further entrenched racism and discrimination in American social assistance, a characteristic that still affects housing programs today.

Marr (2015) notes the relationship between structural (causal) and cultural (adaptative) factors indicates the link between current housing programs and the history of public housing decline. Multiple social levels shape the process of exiting homelessness. Unhoused individuals attempt multifaceted efforts, but the housing constraints system and low-wage jobs currently characterize our economy and tie them to an endless cycle. The various structural factors that affect the unhoused population include the labor market, housing market, and welfare system. Instead of defining homelessness as embracing an identity or culture, ethnographic researchers should focus on how resources (economic, social, emotional, etc.) can be obtained. Thus, local and national governments should promote employment at a living wage, affordable housing, and adequate welfare support.

CURRENT APPROACHES TO RESOLVING THE HOMELESS PROBLEM

The dominant approach to managing homelessness in the United States is the *linear continuum of care*, emphasizing a step-by-step staircase model. The linear approach is structured so that low demand/low service provisions are available at the first level, and transitional housing and permanent housing are offered only after consistent demonstration of housing readiness or 'worthiness' (Padgett, Henwood, and Tsemberis 2016).

Traditional system approach

Level of independence

Permanent
housing

Transitional
housing

Shelter
placement

Homeless

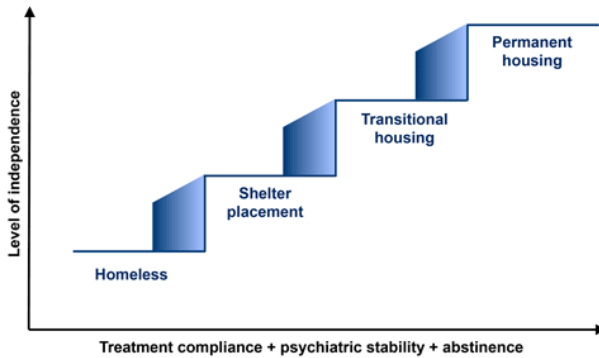Treatment compliance + psychiatric stability + abstinence

Figure 1: The treatment first approach is based on the linear continuum of care and step-by-step staircase model (Padgett et al. 2016).

This reinforces the conception that homeless people with serious mental illness and co-occurring substance abuse are the authors of their destinies. This approach reinforces a means-tested policy by having the individual demonstrate they deserve access to housing. Because of how this approach is structured, individuals do not always proceed through it orderly, and far too many 'fall off the staircase.' Despite its so-called moral attractiveness, the linear approach–otherwise known as treatment first–is often a "cruel and costly circle of futility" (Padgett et al. 2016). Navigating this social services system can be incredibly difficult, as participation in the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (or CalWORKs; a public assistance program for families in California) requires complex requirements. In addition to maintaining adherence to income limits and reporting changes in household composition and criminal justice status, parents are tasked with providing proof of immunization requirements and other legal documentation. For many homeless families, these documents can be easily lost or stolen, resulting in an inability to qualify for assistance. The number of program participation requirements can be so unreasonable that even caseworkers are confused by the system (Roschelle 2019). These are directly tied to a capitalist society's neoliberal approach to basic human needs. Many treatment-first social services are also faith-based, encouraging many families to feign religious enthusiasm. For

example, one transitional housing facility required residents to attend lectures on topics like "The Myth of Evolution" or "How Jesus Can Lead You out of Temptation and Homelessness." As one woman frustratingly put it, "'I'm not homeless because of temptation; I'm homeless because I'm poor. But I don't have a choice; I have to pretend to believe their bullshit'" (Roschelle 2019). These barriers illustrate how traditional approaches fail to address the root cause of homelessness, particularly for historically marginalized groups. Instead of treating housing as a privilege contingent on compliance with social service requirements, we must shift toward recognizing it as an unconditional right. A theoretical foundation for this shift can be found in philosopher John Rawls's theory of justice, which argues for fairness and equity in social structures.

THE ETHICAL CASE FOR HOUSING AS A RIGHT

Rawlsian theory offers a comprehensive framework for understanding justice and fairness in society. In the context of homelessness and the recognition of housing as a fundamental right, several key concepts within Rawlsian theory become particularly relevant and provide a deeper understanding of its implications. First, Rawls argues that individuals have diverse conceptions of what constitutes a good life, shaped by their values, beliefs, and interests. Acknowledging housing as a right means respecting individuals' agency and autonomy in pursuing their vision of a good life, which may involve stability, security, and a sense of belonging that housing can provide (Talisse 2001). Rawls also encourages using the *original position*, a hypothetical scenario in which individuals come together to establish principles of justice from behind a *veil of ignorance*. In this exercise, individuals lack knowledge–are *veiled in ignorance*–about their specific attributes, such as wealth, talents, or social status. Applied to homelessness, the *original position* calls for policies that prioritize housing as a right, as individuals in the *original position* would not know whether they might experience homelessness. Therefore, they would strive to create a just society where everyone can access secure housing, ensuring fairness and impartiality (Talisse 2001). This philosophy is justly apt, especially in consideration of disproportionately marginalized

groups in homelessness, like African Americans and LGBTQIA+ youth. Housing should be provided unconditionally as a prerequisite for stability and well-being rather than a reward earned.

HOUSING FIRST - EMPOWERING THE HOMELESS BY INCLUDING THEM IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS
It is a fundamental human right to have basic food, clothing, and healthcare needs met. While many of these are handled with direct services, like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (or SNAP; a modern version of the Food Stamp Program), the fundamental right to shelter needs to be more adequately addressed in the U.S. Consistent with the neoliberal model, many welfare programs in the U.S. are means-tested and restricted to needs-based assistance. This contrasts with the more rights-based assistance programs in Europe. Interestingly, it follows that definitions of homelessness in European countries are characteristic of more accommodating housing programs (Padgett et al. 2016).

The Housing First evolved as a consumer choice program philosophy stemming from the patient and human rights movement of 1970. It incorporates community-based, mobile support services based on the Assertive Community Treatment model and also has a basis in the harm-reduction model originating from the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Padgett et al. 2016). Currently, the general model of Housing First approach is based on the not-for-profit Pathways to Housing model which emphasizes permanent scatter-site housing. This initially came from consumer advocates who argued that people with psychiatric disabilities should have the same 'normalized' housing as those with other disabilities. The main goal is to prevent institutionalization that undermines social integration and independent living (Padgett et al. 2016). The organizational aim of the Housing First approach is to employ staff with lived experience in homelessness who have training in psychiatric rehabilitation, trauma-informed care, and harm reduction. Additionally, a strong focus is on reducing power differentials and blurred boundaries between staff and program participants (Padgett et al. 2016). The Housing First approach offers standard

housing, tenancy rights, privacy, freedom separate from program demands, off-site rather than on-site services, and affordable rent contracts. *By directly providing permanent housing*, consumers can focus on utilizing their services. They experience ontological security, which arises from stability in one's living environment. This leads to engagement, retention, and a closer experience of having a true 'home' (Padgett et al. 2016). These characteristics are all meant to provide residents with security and comfort that motivates them to keep their housing.
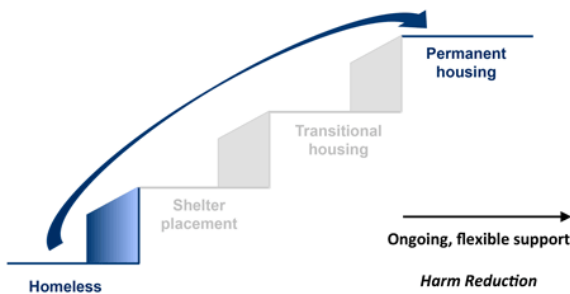
Housing First approach

Permanent housing

Transitional housing

Shelter placement

Homeless

Ongoing, flexible support

Harm Reduction

Figure 2: The Housing First approach places individuals directly into permanent housing, from "streets to homes" (Padgett et al. 2016).

Evidence-Based
The Housing First model is widely recognized as an effective and cost-efficient approach to addressing unhoused populations. The earliest evaluations of the Housing First model began in the early 2000s in New York City. A 2000 study demonstrated that after five years, 88% of Housing First participants remained housed, compared to 47% of participants in the control group (Padgett et al. 2016). Additionally, a 2004 study comparing retention rates of participants in the Housing First model and the Treatment First model demonstrated that Housing First participants spent almost no time experiencing homelessness after two years, which was considerably more successful than the Treatment First group, which, on average, spent about 25% of their time in homelessness (NAEH 2023). Another study from 2004 that utilized a random assignment experimental approach demonstrated that the Housing First model eliminated barriers to services and was more successful in reducing homelessness than programs that were

contingent on sobriety and treatment progress, resulting in 79% of Housing First participants stably housed by the end of six months, compared to 27% in the Treatment First group (NAEH 2023).

More recently, a 2021 study found an 88% decrease in homelessness and a 41% increase in housing stability with the Housing First model. In 2015, Housing First demonstrably increased outpatient service utilization and outreach to and engagement with clients inadequately served by the public mental health system. Recent studies also indicate that Housing First may reduce the usage of alcohol, stimulants, and opiates (NAEH 2023).

Evidence also suggests that the Housing First model is cost-effective. In 2007, Project 50 was launched in Skid Row to assess the efficacy of the Housing First approach (Krisiloff and Boyce n.d.). Over ten days, 471 unhoused individuals were counted, and 350 were surveyed. The top 50 most vulnerable were selected based on a vulnerability index, with an average number of years homeless of 9.58. 76% and 90% of the participants were identified with mental health and substance abuse issues, respectively. Then, an engagement team was employed to establish and maintain rapport with the individuals engaging in services. Integrated health, mental health, and substance abuse services were provided in offices on-site, within the participant's place of residence, or anywhere necessary, in accordance with the Housing First model. After four years, Project 50 boasted an 80% retention rate. Perhaps most impressively, the cost analysis revealed total cost offsets of $3.284 million (108% of the money spent by the program) returned to LA County, which corresponded with a surplus of $4,774 generated per occupied unit (Krisiloff and Boyce n.d.).

CHALLENGES FACED BY UNHOUSED AFRICAN AMERICANS AND LGBTQIA+ YOUTH

African Americans and LGBTQIA+ youth, as mentioned, represent two disproportionately represented groups experiencing homelessness despite making up a small portion of the overall population. From October 2021 to November 2022, the UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative (BHHI 2024) conducted the California Statewide Study of People Experiencing

Homelessness with significant focus on understanding the experience of Black unhoused individuals. In California, Black individuals make up 26% of the unhoused population despite making up only 7% of the state's overall population. Incarceration was reported by 43% of unhoused Black Californians, compared to 31% of whites and 37% of other races. Interestingly, 51% of unhoused Black Californians are age 50 and older, indicating an insufficient social safety net and lack of lifetime wealth to retire. Black Californians also experienced meager incomes before homelessness, as leaseholders' median monthly costs were $675, more than half of the median monthly household income. During homelessness, Black Californians reported inadequate access to mental health services, as only 35% of those who reported at least one mental health system in the prior month received either counseling or medication. Perhaps most strikingly, 51% of Black unhoused Californians reported that discrimination impeded their housing search, and 59% noted the length of waitlists for housing support, compared to 48% of white Californians and 49% of other races.

LGBTQIA+ youth face similar yet unique challenges, as individuals who deviate from the norm are usually pathologized and labeled. Homosexuality and gender non-conformity have had a long history of pathologization, with homosexuality being classified as a 'mental disorder' until 1973 (Abramovich 2016). As a result of this, various stereotypes, stigma, and homophobic and transphobic microaggressions still exist today. It should be no surprise that one of the most prevalent causes of homelessness among queer and trans youth is identity-based family conflict; as mentioned previously, a disproportionately large number of unhoused youths identify as LGBTQIA+ (Abramovich 2016). Youth experience homelessness for a variety of reasons, including escaping from abusive homes, emancipating from the foster care system, or being raised by unhoused parents (My Friends Place, n.d.). It has been estimated that each year, 100,000 children are victims of commercial sexual exploitation, with homeless and runaway youth being the most vulnerable population (My Friends Place, n.d.). Abramovich (2016) analyzes a study from 2016 in Toronto, Canada, which reported that LGBTQIA+ youth experience institutional erasure and invisibility in attempting to

receive housing support services. As the sheltered system is gendered, erasure begins as early as the first formal intake upon entrance to a shelter, where youth are asked questions that require them to identify as male or female. Additionally, LGBTQIA+ cultural competency training is not made mandatory for staff working in shelters, which may mean an inadequate ability to handle situations of homophobia or transphobia. A combination of these factors may lead LGBTQIA+ youth to avoid the shelter system. Youth lacking specialized health care services may resort to unmonitored street suppliers for transition-related treatment. This, of course, can result in severe health complications.

Given these structural barriers, traditional housing support systems often fail to meet the needs of African Americans and LGBTQIA+ youth experiencing homelessness. For African Americans, systemic discrimination in housing and employment limits access to stable housing, while LGBTQIA+ youth frequently face exclusion from family support and shelter systems due to identity-based bias. These realities underscore the need for an approach that removes preconditions for housing and prioritizes immediate stability. The Housing First model offers a particularly effective solution by providing secure housing without requiring individuals first to demonstrate sobriety, employment, or compliance with other restrictive conditions. By addressing housing as a fundamental right rather than a conditional benefit, Housing First is uniquely positioned to break cycles of homelessness and mitigate the barriers these disproportionately affected groups face.

Another two-year study in Toronto, Canada, published in 2016, demonstrated that the Housing First model can be effective for ethnic minority groups (Stergiopoulos et al. 2016). A randomized controlled trial was conducted for 237 adults from ethnic minority groups experiencing mental illness and homelessness. To address this specific population, anti-racism and anti-oppression practices were implemented alongside rent supplements and intensive case management. The main principles of the ethnic minority service approach included language use, education, alliance building, and social justice activism. Immediate access to permanent housing in preferred neighborhoods was provided following the Housing First model.

For African Americans, this scattered-site housing approach was likely effective because it prevented re-segregation into high-poverty areas, which historically mirrored failed public housing models. Additionally, staff were focused on countering racism, discrimination, and power inequities. After 24 months, Housing First participants remained stable for a more significant proportion than the control group (75% vs. 41%). This evidence suggests that the Housing First model should effectively address African American unhoused individuals.

While the Housing First approach has demonstrably sound evidence for adult unhoused individuals, research on unhoused youth is sparse and even more so for youth identifying as LGBTQIA+. Rather than emphasize a scattered-site housing model for LGBTQIA+ youth, they may benefit more from interconnectedness and community with similarly identifying peers. Fostering acceptance and community should be the main focus of housing programs seeking to address LGBTQIA+ youth, as these are themes that are most critically needed by individuals who have already experienced significant social exclusion. Legal guardianship is also a concern when serving homeless youth, as it challenges self-empowerment, autonomy, and choice.

BARRIERS AND POLICY SOLUTIONS FOR HOUSING FIRST

Challenges to Implementation

In 2016, the California Legislature passed Senate Bill 1380, which required all housing programs to adopt the Housing First model (CDH n.d.). Housing First has demonstrated remarkable success in reducing homelessness, yet the crisis persists. This raises an essential question: If Housing First works, why hasn't it solved homelessness? While the model is effective, its implementation has been hindered by structural, political, and economic barriers limiting its reach. These challenges include insufficient funding, landlord discrimination, and a lack of tailored approaches for different populations. Addressing these obstacles requires a multifaceted strategy that combines policy reform, tenant protections, and shifts in public perception.

Housing First programs often rely on federal assistance programs like the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program to

provide rental subsidies that make housing affordable for low-income individuals and families, . Section 8 subsidizes rent so tenants only pay 30% of their income, while the federal government covers the rest (HUD n.d.b). Approximately 60,000 families in Los Angeles use Section 8 vouchers, making it a critical tool for securing housing for people transitioning out of homelessness (LA Times 2025). However, even though Section 8 is widely implemented, it still faces serious limitations that impact Housing First's effectiveness. Despite Section 8 vouchers guaranteeing rent payments, many landlords refuse to accept tenants who use them due to stigma against low-income renters and misconceptions that they are riskier (AMA Consulting Group 2022). Some landlords impose additional screening criteria, such as requiring higher credit scores or rental history, which effectively excludes many voucher holders. Without stronger legal protection, Section 8 vouchers are often not the ticket out of homelessness that they were meant to be.

Since landlord participation in Section 8 housing is necessary, an amendment to California's Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA) in 2020 has made it illegal for landlords to reject tenants solely because they use a Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher to help them afford their rent (Fair Housing Foundation 2020). However, landlord discrimination against Section 8 tenants still occurs. Starting in 2023, the nonprofit Housing Rights Initiative (HRI) investigated with undercover investigators who posed as prospective tenants with Section 8 vouchers; over a year, hundreds of brokers and landlords were contacted. HRI found explicit discrimination against voucher holders 44% of the time in San Francisco, 53% in Oakland, 58% in San Jose, and 70% in Los Angeles (Inner City Law Center 2024). Many states still allow landlords to refuse Section 8 vouchers, significantly limiting housing options for low-income renters, including those in Housing First programs. As of January 2025, only 23 states have legislation prohibiting source-of-income discrimination (SOID), including protections for Section 8 voucher holders (PRRAC 2025). However, even in states with SOID laws, the extent of protection varies. Some states explicitly exclude housing vouchers from their SOID protections, while others have weak enforcement mechanisms, allowing discrimination to persist. Wisconsin's

SOID law does not cover housing vouchers, and Maine and Minnesota's SOID laws are weakened by court interpretation (PRRAC 2025). Recent developments have heightened concerns about the future of Section 8 housing programs. In early March 2025, the Los Angeles Housing Authority stopped processing new and ongoing applications for Section 8 vouchers, likely due to recent funding cuts at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) under the Trump administration. This suspension threatens access to stable housing for thousands of low-income residents and unhoused individuals who rely on federal assistance. As federal funding becomes increasingly uncertain, it is more critical than ever to advocate for stronger tenant protections, increased investment in affordable housing, and policies that ensure the long-term sustainability of housing assistance programs.

Policy Recommendations & Successes
To maximize the effectiveness of Housing First, systemic reforms must address barriers to implementation, including discrimination against voucher holders, insufficient affordable housing, and the need for specialized housing models for marginalized groups. Expanding access to housing and reducing structural inequities will require stronger legal protections, increased financial incentives, and shifts in public perception. State and local governments must increase funding for both scattered-site and community-based housing options. Expanding the affordable housing supply, mainly through mixed-income developments that prevent high-poverty concentrations, would enable Housing First to operate at the necessary scale for lasting impact. Legislative action is also needed at both federal and state levels to safeguard Section 8's role in Housing First programs. Strengthening penalties for non-compliant landlords, expanding financial incentives such as tax breaks or guaranteed rent payments, and enforcing anti-discrimination laws are critical. Additionally, many landlords remain unaware that Section 8 guarantees rent payments, making it a stable and reliable income source. Public education campaigns and direct outreach can address misconceptions while streamlining participation requirements to encourage greater landlord involvement. States with SOID

protections must also enhance enforcement mechanisms to hold landlords accountable. Governments should implement stronger oversight, offer incentives such as property insurance discounts, and ensure reimbursement for potential damages to reduce landlord hesitancy. By addressing these barriers, Housing First programs can better secure stable housing for participants, breaking cycles of chronic homelessness and ensuring that federally funded housing assistance is used as intended. California's Project Homekey exemplifies this approach by converting existing hotels and motels into permanent supportive housing, rapidly increasing housing availability, and bypassing private landlord discrimination. As of August 2024, Project Homekey had funded nearly 16,000 housing units, with 172,000 households projected to be served over the life of the project (CDH 2024).

Recognizing the racial disparities in homelessness, the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) Commission established the Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness in 2018 to examine the causes of Black overrepresentation in homelessness, identify opportunities to increase racial equity and craft more effective policy recommendations addressing Black unhoused individuals (LAHSA 2018). More recently, Governor Gavin Newsom (2024) signed two bills into law, AB 2835 and AB 3057, to create additional shelter and more housing units. By removing the sunset date on tenancy rules, AB 2835 will allow service providers to place unhoused individuals more easily into privately owned hotels and motels for more than 30 days. Additionally, AB 3057 will streamline the process for local governments to construct Junior Accessory Dwelling Units for more affordable housing options. While these efforts represent progress, more investment is needed to expand Housing First at a scale that meaningfully reduces homelessness.

Abramovich (2016) recommends that to better support LGBTQIA+ unhoused youth, the government should support the development of housing options that are tailored to LGBTQIA+ youth and encourage programs that foster an intersectional approach. In addition to providing staff with LGBTQIA+ cultural competency training, this approach should encompass

recreational needs, mentorship opportunities, health considerations, and cultural connections. Standards that are LGBTQIA compatible, such as gender-inclusive washrooms and shelter intake processes, should also be enforced. Perhaps most critically, government programs should invest in more research and programs that specifically address LGBTQIA+ unhoused youth. This is particularly important, as LGBTQIA+ individuals tend to be undercounted. Nationally, HUD launched an initiative in June 2023 as part of the Biden administration (USICH 2023) to prevent homelessness among LGBTQIA+ youth and aims to provide regular training for LGBTQIA+ youth care providers and release a toolkit for best practices on supporting LGBTQIA+ youth, among other goals.

Solving homelessness is not just about policy—it's also about changing the narrative. Public misconceptions—such as the belief that unhoused individuals are "unwilling to work" or "choose homelessness"—create political resistance to Housing First programs. In California, organizations like Yes in My Backyard (California YIMBY n.d.) have directed significant efforts towards advocating for pro-housing policies and fostering public support for housing initiatives. Since 2017, YIMBY has led the passage of 18 bills into law, including AB 68 that expands Accessory Dwelling Units and SB 330 for accelerating housing construction, limiting fees, and protecting tenants, which have collectively enabled the potential development of millions of new housing units. By engaging communities and policymakers, California YIMBY (n.d.) dispels myths about housing developments and emphasizes reducing homelessness' economic and social benefits. Expanding similar advocacy efforts could further reduce stigma and build political will for long-term investments in affordable and supportive housing.

CONCLUSION
Although this paper is not a primary research source, it draws on evidence-based studies to frame a set of policy choices and recommendations to address the disproportionate number of homeless African Americans and LGBTQIA+ youth in Los Angeles. While Housing First has proven to be a highly effective model, its full potential remains unrealized due to systemic

barriers, funding shortages, and policy limitations. Addressing these challenges requires more than program expansion—it demands legislative action, landlord accountability, and a fundamental shift in how society perceives homelessness. By adapting Housing First to meet diverse needs, increasing investment in permanent supportive housing, and combating housing discrimination, policymakers can ensure that safe, stable housing is accessible to all—particularly the most marginalized populations. Despite recent advancements in policy toward addressing Black and LGBQIA+ unhoused populations, continued research, funding, and programs are necessary to ensure a more equitable future. Only through sustained commitment and structural reform can Housing First evolve from a promising solution into a fully realized pathway out of homelessness.

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