

## Affordable Housing Trusts

Having a home is foundational to living a healthy, full life. But across the United States, affordable housing shortages persist, rates of homelessness continue to rise, and more people are at risk of eviction. Affordable Housing Trust policies are a community-driven way for cities to invest in building and maintaining affordable housing for everyone. They can also make our communities more inclusive by ensuring all people – no matter their income – have access to affordable housing.

### The Housing Challenge

- Homelessness is a prevalent and growing problem. 2024 saw the highest number of people experiencing homelessness on a single night ever recorded, totaling 771,480 people or 23 in 10,000 people.<sup>1</sup>
- In 2023, more than 50% of households that rent in the U.S. paid in excess of 30% of their income on gross rent.<sup>2</sup>
- A longitudinal study between 2000-2019 found that compared to the baseline rent burden of 30% of a person's income, a burden of 70% was associated with 12% higher mortality.<sup>3</sup>
- According to research by the National Low Income Housing Coalition, there is no state in the U.S. where a full time worker could afford a two-bedroom rental home making less than \$15/hour without being burdened more than 30%.<sup>4</sup>

### A Healthy Solution: Affordable Housing Trusts

Affordable Housing Trusts are distinct funds established by city, county, or state governments that receive ongoing, dedicated public revenue, which can be used in different ways to produce, preserve, and protect affordable housing.

- **Focus on creating affordable housing** – Affordable Housing Trusts are set up as reliable sources of funding within cities, helping city leaders leverage additional funding.<sup>5</sup>
- **Offer flexible uses for cities** – Affordable housing trusts can be used to create or maintain low-income housing, subsidize rental housing, and/or support non-profit housing developers. They can also provide low income homebuyers with down payment assistance, interest subsidies and gap financing.<sup>6</sup>

- **Promote long-term equity goals** – Trusts can set aside funds for extremely low-income households or require permanent affordability in housing funded by the trust. Additional focus areas can include gentrification and neighborhood economic diversity.<sup>7</sup>
- **Access multiple funding sources**– Affordable Housing Trusts can be funded in a multitude of ways, from dedicating a particular source of revenue to a trust on a regular, recurring basis, to direct appropriations and private donations, to development impact fees, in-lieu fees or other taxes and fees.<sup>5,8</sup>

### What is the Evidence that Affordable Housing Trusts Can Improve Health?

Across a range of cities and political contexts, Affordable Housing Trusts have a track record of producing and rehabilitating housing that is affordable for low-income tenants and homeowners, whose incomes generally fall below 80% of an area's median income.<sup>7</sup>

- In St. Louis, the local housing trust funded 1,583 rental units and 184 homes between 2003-2017.<sup>9</sup> Increased affordable housing can lead to lower rent burdens on residents, which can contribute to mortality.<sup>3</sup>
- Trusts can target health outcomes directly: Healthy Homes Des Moines addressed chronic health conditions through tailored, in-home interventions. Funds from the trust were used to provide in-home asthma education, carry out remediation of household asthma triggers, and provide cleaning supplies – all contributing to more asthma-free days per month for children.<sup>10</sup>

### How Can Affordable Housing Trusts Help Address Health Disparities?

Research consistently shows a close tie between health and housing generally, and that poor health outcomes associated with housing cost and stability are more likely to affect racial and ethnic minorities, and low-income and other vulnerable populations.<sup>11</sup> Local housing trusts offer a unique mechanism for promoting health equity because they are designed to serve low-income households as well as other vulnerable populations such as people experiencing homelessness, people who are elderly, and survivors of domestic violence.

- In Washington, DC, the local housing trust enabled residents to secure acquisition funds and preserve long-term affordability, helping low- and moderate-income residents of color remain in their communities despite rapid gentrification.<sup>12</sup>
- In 2020-2021, the Philadelphia Housing Trust Fund made 93% of its investments in majority low-and-moderate-income areas, assisting a total of 12,622 households city-wide.<sup>13</sup>

## What Are Some Future Issues to Consider?

Housing trust funds are only as effective as they are lucrative, so the total amount of money that is invested matters for success. Trust funds are at risk of disinvestment during economic downturn or change in governmental priorities.<sup>14</sup> While those that receive recurring revenue through a codified law are less vulnerable, there is still risk of repeal.

One issue not sufficiently addressed in the literature on housing trusts is whether and how they serve immigrant households, particularly undocumented immigrants. This issue should be considered to ensure no one is left out of the health-promoting potential of housing trusts.

## Resources for Cities

[County Health Rankings & Roadmap: Housing Trust Funds](#)  
[Community Change: Housing Trust Fund Project](#)  
[Local Housing Solutions: Housing Trust Funds](#)  
[Policy Link: Housing Trust Funds](#)

## References

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