

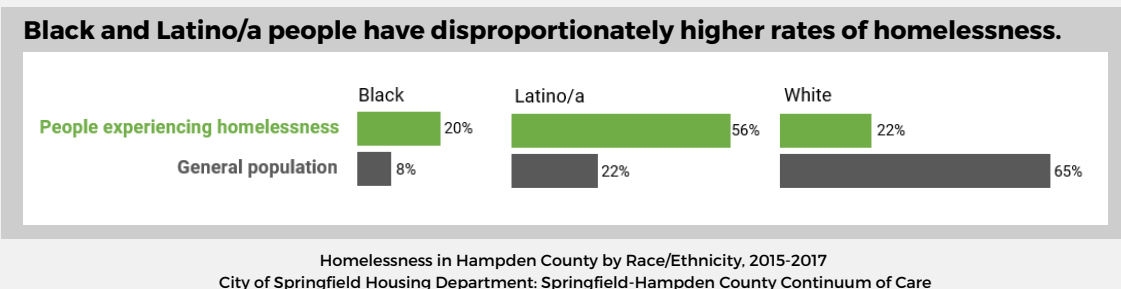
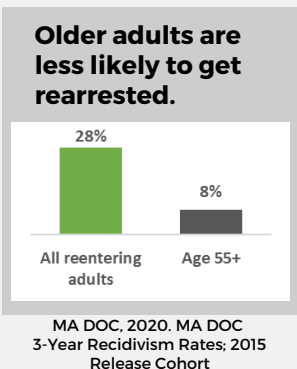
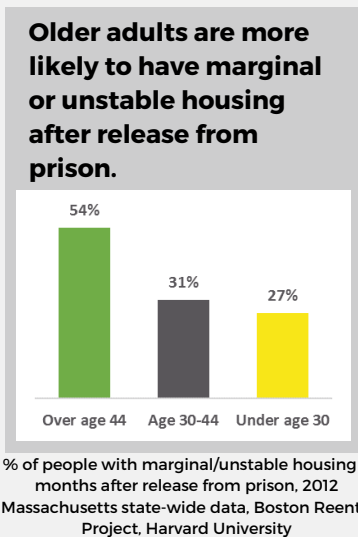
Healthy Aging with a Criminal Record in Hampden County, MA: A health impact assessment about the use of CORIs in housing decisions

CURRENT CONDITIONS

We estimate that there are about **6,300 people in Hampden County in a given year with a criminal record**. Many people face **barriers** to accessing affordable housing due to their CORI & sometimes for crimes that happened 10-40 years ago. Access to **housing is essential to health**.

- Consideration of criminal history has systematically been inserted into housing decisions.
- Policies of mass incarceration have led to many more people with records, who are **disproportionately Black and Latino/a**.
- People who have been incarcerated are estimated to be **11x more likely to experience homelessness** than people who have not been incarcerated.
- People age 50+ with a record are at **high risk for homelessness & housing instability** but at **low risk for committing crime/getting rearrested**.
- We didn't find any evidence** to show that people with criminal backgrounds are more likely than other residents of public housing to commit crimes.
- There isn't enough affordable housing** in Hampden County to meet demand.
- Not being able to access affordable housing can **affect mental and physical health**. It increases the risk for certain conditions if homeless.
- LHAs take seriously their **mission to provide housing for people with low incomes**, as well as their responsibility to ensure a **peaceful & safe environment** for all residents.

“Honestly, my involvement with the legal system has destroyed [my chances for] any type of housing I've tried to obtain.”
—HIA Survey Participant



WE EXPLORED THE IMPACT OF 6 POTENTIAL POLICY CHANGES

- 1 Establish formal partnerships between housing & service providers**
 - People with supportive housing succeed at **staying housed**, commit **less crime**, and stay **healthier**.
 - Partnerships are valued by housing providers, service providers & residents.
- 2 Use only federal exclusion criteria* in housing admissions decisions**
 - Limiting tenant selection criteria may lead to **fewer denials**.
 - LHAs have broad discretion over whom they admit & deny.
- 3 Allow applicants to submit evidence of mitigating circumstances before denial**
 - Consideration of mitigating circumstances may lead to **fewer denials**.
 - LHAs should consider age (50+) a mitigating factor.
 - There are barriers to application process, including requesting hearing to appeal & present mitigating circumstances.
- 4 Create explicit criteria for denial that is available publicly**
 - Screening criteria can be challenging to access.
 - With more explicit criteria, applicants will have more knowledge going into the process, which might result in **more applications & appeals**.
- 5 Share data about denials**
 - Systematic tracking of denials is very limited. We were unable to obtain local data on denial rates.
 - Data is an **incentive to behavior** & increases **transparency**.
- 6 Permit family members to house people with a CORI except federal exclusion criteria***
 - Allowing family members to house relatives with a CORI would arguably **address one of the largest needs for people returning from prison and jail**.
 - Backgrounds checks are required by LHAs. Use federal criteria & mitigating circumstances to make fair decisions.

“It’s a 3-way partnership - the tenant, service provider, and housing provider. It’s not ‘us against them’. Strong interventions and programs working collaboratively with the housing authority.”
—Gándara Mental Health Center

*The federally mandated exclusions refer to 2 types of convictions that result in automatic denial: manufacturing methamphetamine on premises of federally-assisted property AND lifetime registration requirement under state sex offender registration program

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

“It has totally affected me. Because of my CORI, I have been denied repeatedly... And I haven’t been incarcerated or in trouble for 11 years.”
—HIA Survey Participant

Fund:

- More partnerships between housing & service providers
- A pilot program (like Graduated Reintegration Program) to set aside housing for people exiting prison/jail

Change LHA practices:

- Consider age (50+) an automatic “mitigation” if no crimes in last 2 years
- Designate staff person/navigator to help applicants
- Expand training on reviewing/understanding CORIs & federal criteria
- Put absolute disqualifying crimes and info about appeals on the front page of the application

Criminal legal system:

- Expand funding criteria to allow for community-based reentry programs
- Improve reentry services to ensure people reentering have true housing plans

