

GRANTWATCH

Homelessness And Health Care: What Is Being Funded?

In June 2018 *Health Affairs* published a Culture of Health policy brief titled “Housing and Health: An Overview of the Literature.” Funded by the **Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**, the brief notes that “selected housing interventions for low-income people have been found to improve health outcomes and decrease health care costs.” The brief notes that “observational studies have shown that being without a stable home is detrimental to one’s health.”

According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD’s) *2018 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress*, released in December 2018, roughly 553,000 people were homeless in the US on a single night in 2018—a 0.3 percent increase since 2017. Since 2017 the number of homeless veterans fell 5.4 percent, and the number of homeless people in families with children declined 2.2 percent. However, the number of chronically homeless people grew 2.2 percent.

According to a December 2018 press release, HUD announced \$4,645,284 in additional funding (after awarding \$35 million in October 2018) for homeless veterans and their families through the HUD-Veterans Affairs (VA) Supportive Housing Program. It combines rental assistance vouchers from HUD with case management and clinical services provided by VA medical centers.

In San Francisco, California, voters supported Proposition C in the November 2018 election. The proposition, described by CNBC as “controversial,” will “tax the city’s biggest businesses to raise funds to combat homelessness.” Prop C is supposed to generate “up to \$300 million a year to combat the city’s homelessness crisis through initiatives like new beds in shelters and increased mental health services.”

Modern Healthcare reported on November 14, 2018, that Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar “said Medicaid may soon allow hospitals and health systems to directly pay for housing...or other solutions for the ‘whole person.’”

Foundations are also trying to prevent housing instability.

Grant Results

In July 2018 HUD and the **Council on Foundations (COF)** announced the winners of the Secretary’s Award for Public-Philanthropic Partnerships. HUD Secretary Ben Carson presented the awards. The **Michael Reese Health Trust** and **Polk Bros. Foundation** were among the winners because of their efforts to cultivate and support the Chicago and Cook County (Illinois) Housing for Health Strategic Plan (H2). Polk Bros. had been involved in trying to end homelessness, and Michael Reese had expertise in health care and “was forward-thinking about the social determinants of health,” according to a July 2018 COF blog post by Debbie Reznick of Polk Bros. The two funders figured they could be more effective if they collaborated across sectors. With their support, the Center for Housing and Health launched H2, a public-private partnership that is now also funded by the **Chicago Community Trust**. The center recruited a cross-sector leadership council including people from local, state, and federal governments; health systems; supportive housing providers; managed care organizations; foundations; and other nonprofits. Reznick reports that “H2 is making incredible and scalable strides in its goals to create” more housing for homeless people, “to share data across the housing and health systems, and provide cross-sector training and coordination.”

In 2013 **UniHealth Foundation**, in Los Angeles, California, awarded a grant for linking homeless people being discharged from hospitals to

recuperative care. The funding went to St. Joseph Hospital, in Orange County, to work with Illumination Foundation (IF), a nonprofit, to launch a pilot project called Chronic Care Plus (CCP). The goal was to “chart a path to housing, health, and stability for the most medically vulnerable homeless” people in the county, according to a UniHealth summary. The project combined medical care provided by that hospital “with post-hospital recuperative care and permanent supportive housing [PSH]” provided by IF. The project documented the total use of services by homeless clients, the cost of services, and clients’ health outcomes before and after project participation. Emergency department (ED) “visits declined from an average of 10 times per client per year” before entering CCP “to 1.58 times per client per year” during the two-year grant. In 2017 UniHealth funded a three-year expansion of CCP to three additional hospitals in the county, with the goal of creating “a coordinated and cohesive county-wide safety-net system for homeless patients.” Each participating ED will have a homeless care navigator to support patients accessing hospital- and community-based services.

Results from these previous grants led UniHealth to award a two-year, \$650,000 grant in 2018 to Providence Little Company of Mary Medical Center San Pedro, in partnership with IF, to develop a program to improve both the physical and mental health of homeless people “by linking them to socioeconomic support services,” UniHealth said.

The **Bob and Renee Parsons Foundation**, which primarily funds in Maricopa County, Arizona, has awarded a total of \$3 million to Circle the City, which provides health care services for the homeless in that county. The foundation has helped fund both a mobile medical clinic and the Parsons Family Health Center, an innovative clinic providing primary care, integrative behavioral health services, case management, and substance use intervention for homeless people. Parsons also helped fund a medical respite center in central Phoenix, which provides “a time and



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place for adults facing homelessness to heal from illnesses and injuries,” according to a 2017 press release. The fifty-bed center serves people too acutely ill or injured to receive traditional outpatient care. The foundation noted in the release that Circle the City’s services are also “beneficial to the public health-care system.” Patients cared for in the grantee’s facilities “have been shown to incur fewer costs related to future hospitalizations and emergency services.” A recent analysis found that a year after a group of 309 patients engaged with Circle the City, their annual cost of care decreased by more than \$4.7 million. Bob Parsons, founder of GoDaddy and YAM Worldwide Inc., and Renee Parsons, a business executive, launched their foundation in 2012. Many other foundations have supported Circle the City over the years.

Publications And Recent Grants

The **Conrad N. Hilton Foundation** has been funding solutions for chronic homelessness in Los Angeles County since 1990 and has awarded \$141 million. The foundation has primarily used the PSH model. “A wide body of research shows” that this approach “is the best, most cost-effective solution,” Hilton’s website says. And according to a HUD press release, providing permanent housing, coupled with supportive services, also saves taxpayer money “by interrupting a costly cycle of emergency room and hospital, detox, and even jail visits.” Hilton’s current strategy (for 2016–20) has three prongs. First, it aims to facilitate systems change. This includes urging stakeholders “to invest resources and improve efficiencies in both housing and service provision,” the foundation says. Second, it seeks to look “upstream” to find out how people become chronically homeless, “examine emerging consensus” on the prevention of homelessness, and support the creation of new supportive housing

units. Third, Hilton aims to “develop and disseminate knowledge,” which includes promoting continuous learning in other parts of the US about effective practices.

The Hilton Foundation awarded funding to RAND in 2014 to evaluate Los Angeles County’s Housing for Health PSH program. The resulting report, published in 2017, found “a reason for hope” in the county, a June 2018 RAND Blog post explained. The county “has quietly succeeded in moving some of its most chronically homeless and vulnerable residents into permanent housing, with health care and social services.” And it has done this “while saving taxpayers millions of dollars.”

“Studies have found that homeless people age prematurely” and have “high rates of geriatric health issues at younger ages compared with people who are not homeless,” says the **New York State Health Foundation’s** (NYSHealth’s) website. The funder awarded a 2017 grant to the University of Pennsylvania School of Policy and Practice for “data-driven research and analysis on the health care utilization, needs, and costs” for homeless people ages fifty-five and older. The funding supports New York State’s participation in this multistate project. The data gathered will be used to develop potential interventions that reduce homelessness and related health care costs for this population. Penn will disseminate its findings to New York State and City officials and to “key stakeholders in the health care and housing sectors.” The grantee expects to provide detailed financial projections that will let policy makers determine the “viability of proposed solutions.” Brian Byrd of NYSHealth said that a report is expected in early 2019.

In 2018 thirteen nonprofits and local government agencies received funding through the **Kresge Foundation’s** Advancing Health Equity through Housing Initiative. Because of housing’s “centrality” as a platform for people “to achieve well-being and economic stability,” the initiative targets “the demonstrated harmful physical and mental health impacts of housing instability,” according

to a December 2018 press release.

Kresge is also part of a collaborative, formed in February 2018, called Funders for Housing and Opportunity. It invests in housing stability across the US. Members include the **Annie E. Casey, Bill & Melinda Gates, Ford, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur, JPB, and Oak Foundations**, as well as the Hilton Foundation and the **Melville Charitable Trust**, which “is the largest foundation in the U.S. exclusively devoted to ending homelessness.”

Kresge, MacArthur, the **Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation**, Partners HealthCare, and Casey, along with the **Boston Foundation** (tBF) and individual donors, have co-funded Health Starts at Home, an initiative using cross-sector partnerships for interventions aimed at improving housing stability and children’s health outcomes. Also, Melville awarded \$150,000 toward an evaluation of this initiative hosted by tBF. Health Resources in Action and the Urban Institute are the lead evaluators.

Other foundations funding initiatives on homelessness include the **Bezos Day One Fund** (Jeff Bezos is founder of Amazon); **California Community Foundation** (funds in Los Angeles County); **Pierce Family Foundation** (funds in Chicago and Michigan); and **Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland** (funds in Cuyahoga County, Ohio).

Key Personnel Change

MITCH KREBS became the new director of the Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust’s Rural Healthcare Program in October 2018. Most recently he was principal at Herd Wisdom LLC, a public affairs and advocacy firm that he founded. His other past positions include press secretary to former Gov. Mike Rounds (R) of South Dakota. ■

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