HOMELESSNESS IN THE UNITED STATES

A HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Homelessness and Post WW II America

Homelessness and Post WW II America

Federal government passed several laws to promote urban renewal

Cities nationwide could access federal funds for slum clearance

Homelessness and Post WW II America

Definition of Homelessness:

People who lived in cheap lodging houses in the congested part of any large city

- Alice Willard Solenberger, *One Thousand Homeless Men*, 1911

Homelessness and Post WW II America

Single Room Occupancy Hotels or SROs

Skid Rows, homeless districts in American cities

Skid Row, Chicago, 1950.
Chicago Tribune

Skid Row, Chicago, 1950.
Chicago Tribune

Starr Hotel, 1954
617 W. Madison, Chicago
Chicago History Museum

Post WW II: Skid Row as blighted area or community for extremely poor people

Homelessness and 1980s America

Shelter System

Housing vs Treatment

Lack of permanent affordable housing

Starr Hotel, 1954
617 W. Madison, Chicago
Chicago History Museum

1980s: Housing vs Community-based approach

PLANNING FOR HOMELESSNESS: LAND USE POLICY, HOUSING MARKETS, AND CITIES' HOMELESSNESS RESPONSES

Prof. Katherine Levine Einstein

Boston University

Institute for Research on Poverty Webinar

March 5, 2023

CITIES AND HOMELESSNESS

- Cities are the main site of the nation's growing homelessness crisis
- Key driver: rising cost of housing
- Cities can increase the housing supply and reduce housing costs through their control over **land use/zoning policies**
- This research evaluates whether local governments:
  - Are connecting their homelessness and land use policies
  - See homelessness as a housing problem

'A dire situation': Surging rents and housing shortage spark homelessness in Lawrence

Housing instability has long gripped Lawrence, where rent increases fueled by a lack of supply and a growing population have pushed hundreds to the brink of homelessness, or the streets.

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Planning for Homelessness: Land Use Policy, Housing Markets, and Cities' Homelessness Responses

Katherine Levine Einstein[1] and Charley E. Willison[2]

WHY MIGHT CITIES STRUGGLE TO MAKE THESE CONNECTIONS?

- Local governments are responsive to residents and businesses who are concerned about the negative externalities of unsheltered homelessness
- State and federal governments, which are very influential actors in homelessness policy, largely are not making this connection
- Supply skepticism

DATA

- Housing and homeless plans from the nation's 100 largest cities (data collected in summer 2022)

- Survey of mayors of cities over 75,000 in summer 2021 (n=116) and 2023 (n=114)

HOMELESS AND HOUSING PLANS PLANS

- Only 54% of the 100 largest cities have homeless plans!

- Virtually all cities (99%) had a housing plan available online
  - 76% of these plans mention homelessness at least once

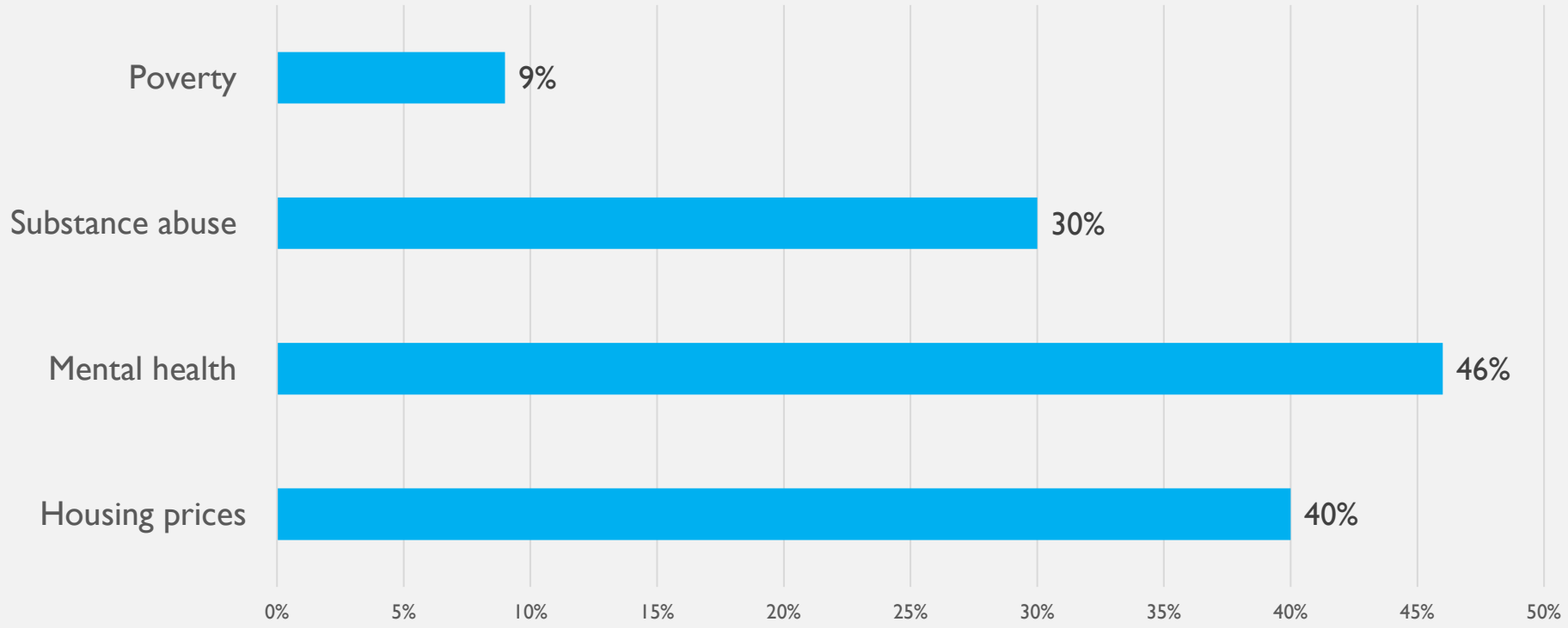
HOUSING SUPPLY IN HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING PLANS

- Only 30% of homelessness plans mention zoning/land use – the most important policy tools for increasing the housing supply

- Only 16% of housing plans connected land use and homelessness policy

SURVEY OF MAYORS

What do you think is the single biggest cause of homelessness in your city?

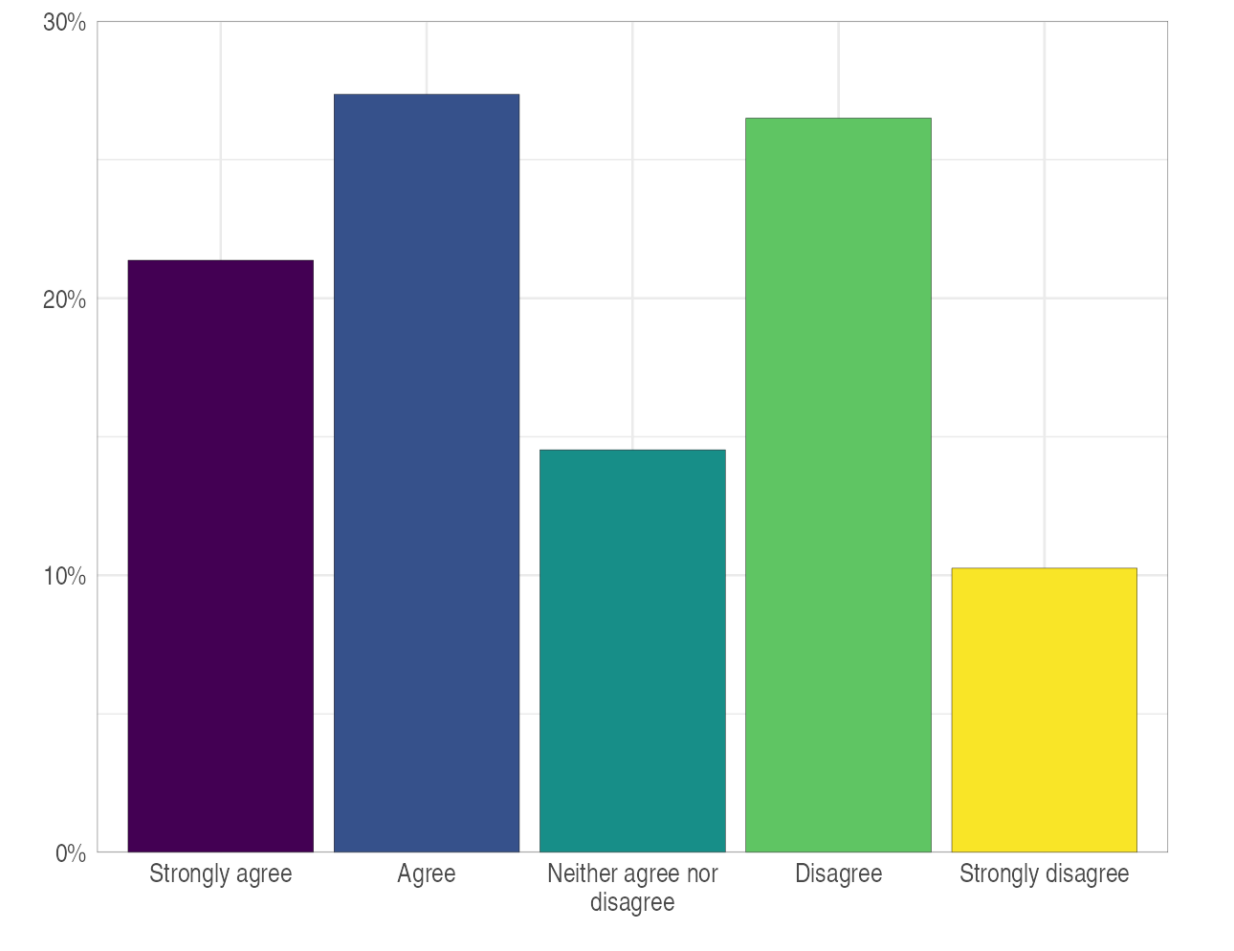


SURVEY OF MAYORS

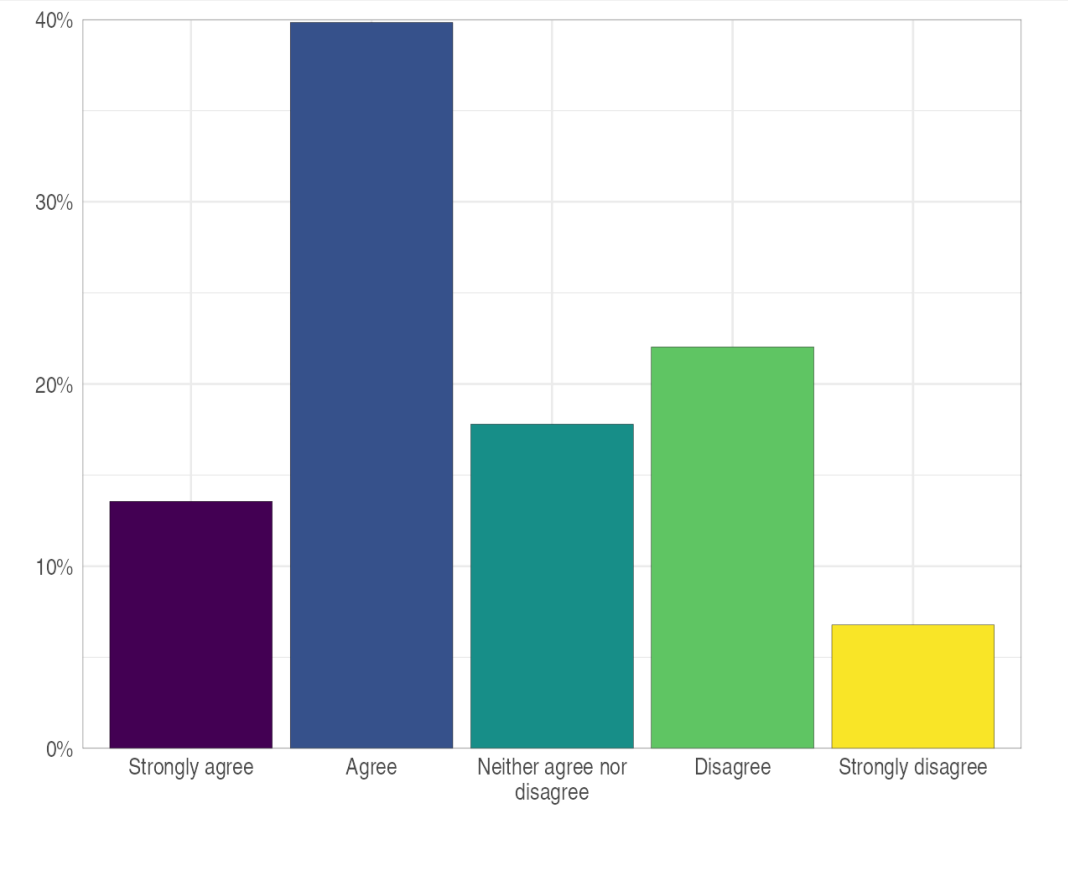
- "It's a mental illness and lack of desire to be within housing. To not want to be house. And drug and alcohol addiction. These are people who want to live on the street and they don't want to take advantage of the shelters that we have,"

- "I want to mention two [causes], because it's the co-occurring issues with addiction and mental health."

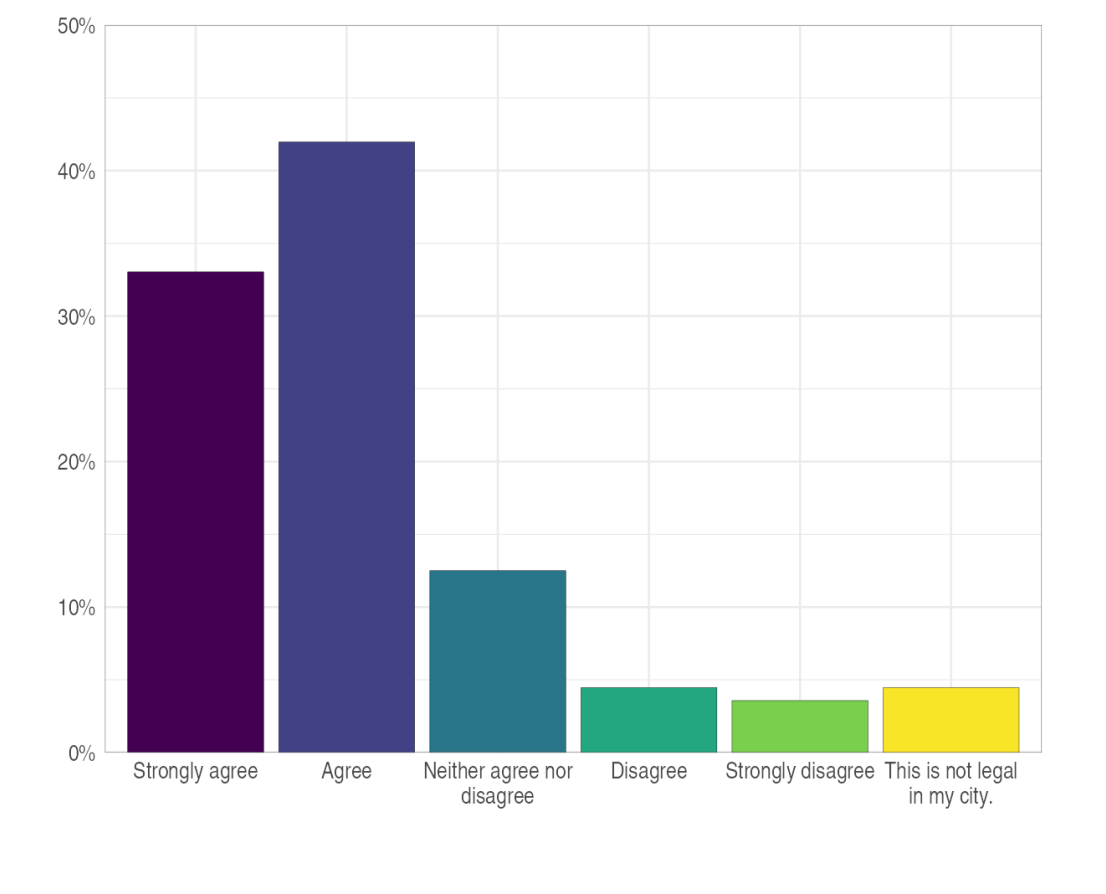
AGREE/DISAGREE. HOMELESSNESS IN MY CITY IS FIRST AND FOREMOST A HOUSING AFFORDABILITY PROBLEM.



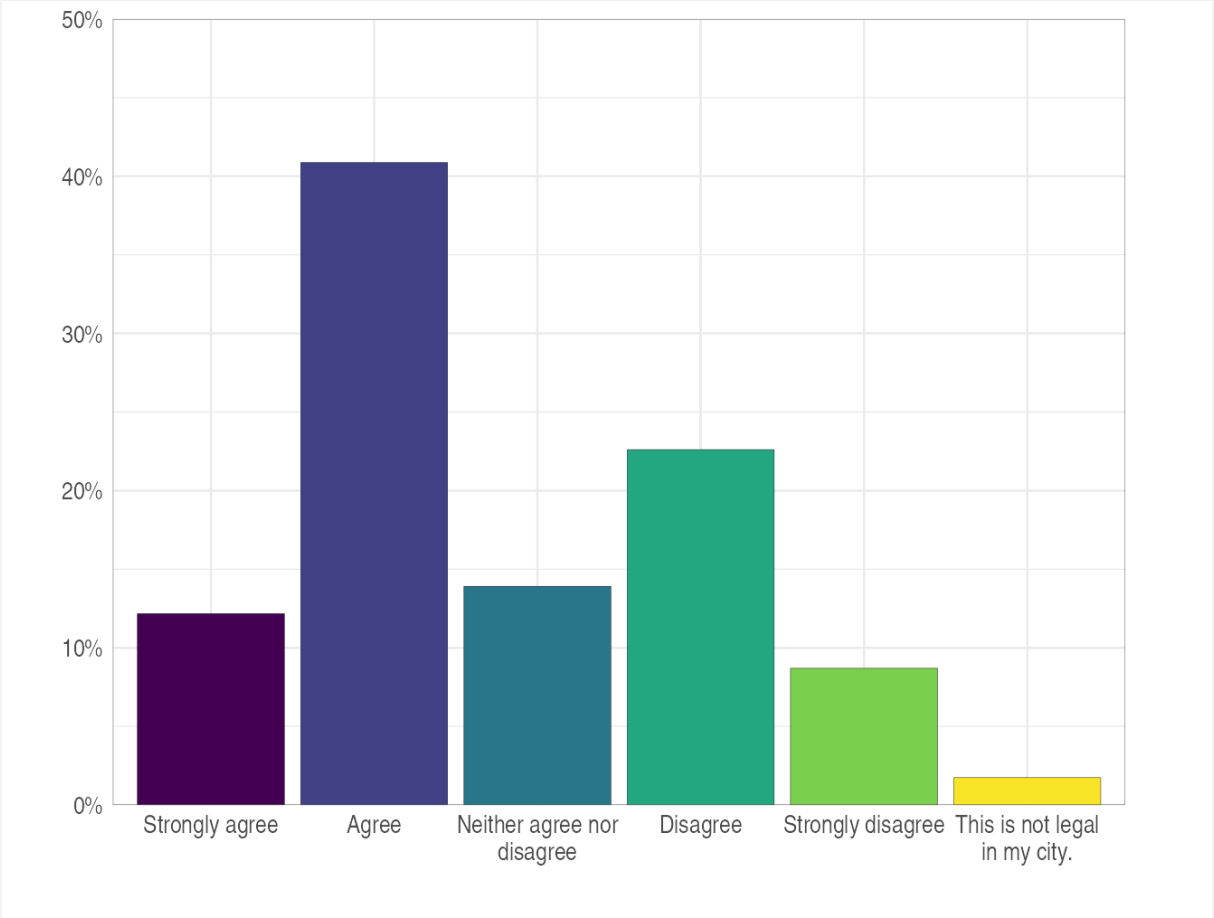
AGREE/DISAGREE. DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR IN PUBLIC SPACES, SUCH AS PARKS AND MASS TRANSPORTATION, HAS GOTTEN WORSE IN MY CITY OVER THE LAST 5 YEARS.



AGREE/DISAGREE. PART OF A CITY'S STRATEGY TO MAINTAIN PUBLIC ORDER SHOULD INCLUDE PERIODICALLY CLEARING HOMELESS ENCAMPMENTS.



AGREE/DISAGREE. PART OF A CITY'S STRATEGY TO MAINTAIN PUBLIC ORDER SHOULD INCLUDE USING CURFEWS AND RESTRICTING USE OF PUBLIC SPACES, SUCH AS PARKS, AFTER SUNDOWN



CONCLUSION

- **Cities and their leaders do not:**
  - See homelessness as a housing problem
  - Connect homelessness and housing supply in important policy documents

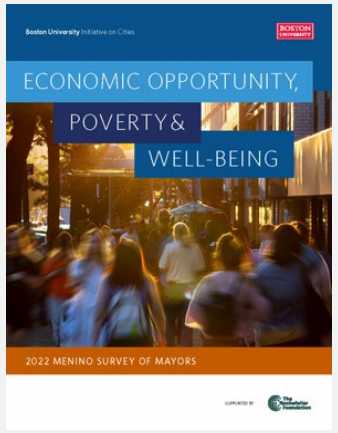
- **Instead…**
  - Support more reactive and punitive solutions to homelessness that exacerbate the problem
  - Federal government unlikely to be a helpful leader in this space in the coming years

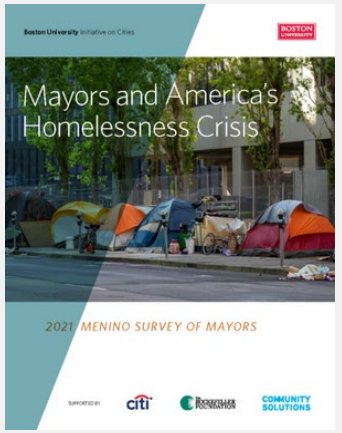
Menino Survey of Mayors

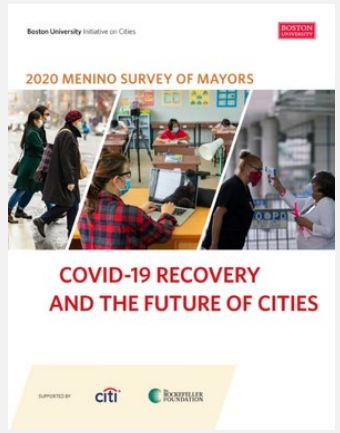
www.surveyofmayors.com

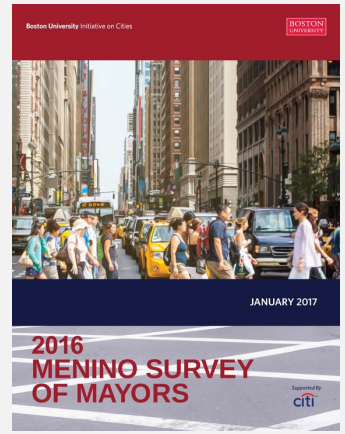
- Launched in 2014 and named for IOC Co-Founder and Mayor of Boston, Tom Menino

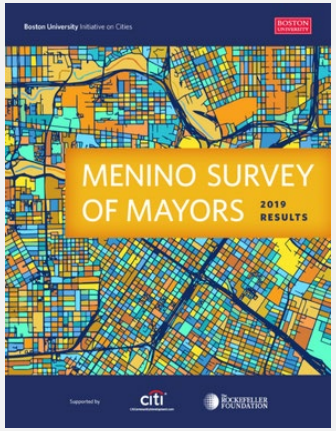
Partners and funders have included: Citi, The Rockefeller Foundation, US Conference of Mayors, National League of Cities, Trust for Public Land, and Community Solutions

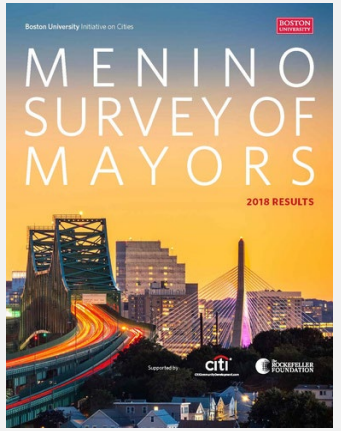


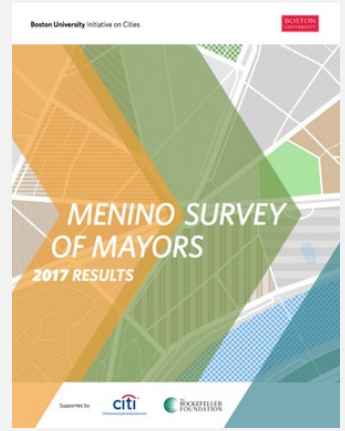








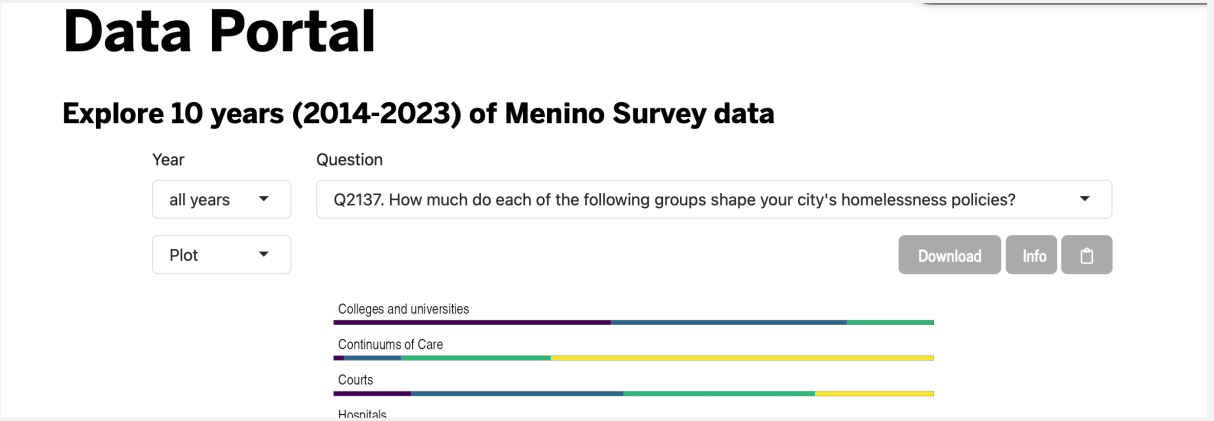




Research Team: Katherine Levine Einstein, David Glick, and Maxwell Palmer (BU Associate Professors of Political Science); Stacy Fox (BU Initiative on Cities)

PUBLICLY AVAILABLE DATA FROM 10 YEARS OF SURVEYING MAYORS

- https://www.surveyofmayors.com/data/
- Conducted 1,003 interviews with 546 mayors of cities over 75,000
- All interviews are conducted in person or over the phone



THANK YOU!

- kleinst@bu.edu

WILSON SHEEHAN
LAB FOR ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Evidence-Based Solutions to Homelessness: The Role of Housing Assistance and Prevention

David Phillips, Director of Research, Lab for Economic Opportunities at Notre Dame

UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

HALF A MILLION HOMELESS

Rising Rates and Systemic Challenges

Record Increase in Homelessness

Homelessness in the U.S. increased by 18% in 2024, reaching over 770,000 individuals, the highest since tracking began in 2007.

Surge in Family Homelessness

Family homelessness rose by 39%, highlighting economic and housing affordability challenges.

NO CONSENSUS ON RESPONSE

WHAT THE EVIDENCE SAYS:
AN OVERVIEW

BUILDING EVIDENCE

Permanent Supportive Housing

A 'Housing First' approach providing long-term housing and support services without preconditions.

Pathways to Housing: Pioneered the Housing First model, demonstrating significant reductions in homelessness.

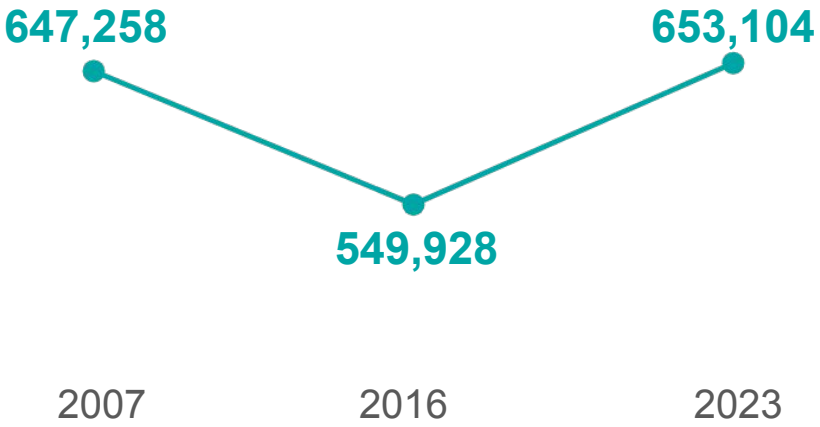
HUD-VASH: A successful program reducing veteran homelessness by providing vouchers and case management.

Family Options Study: Showed that long-term subsidies reduce family homelessness and improve economic stability.

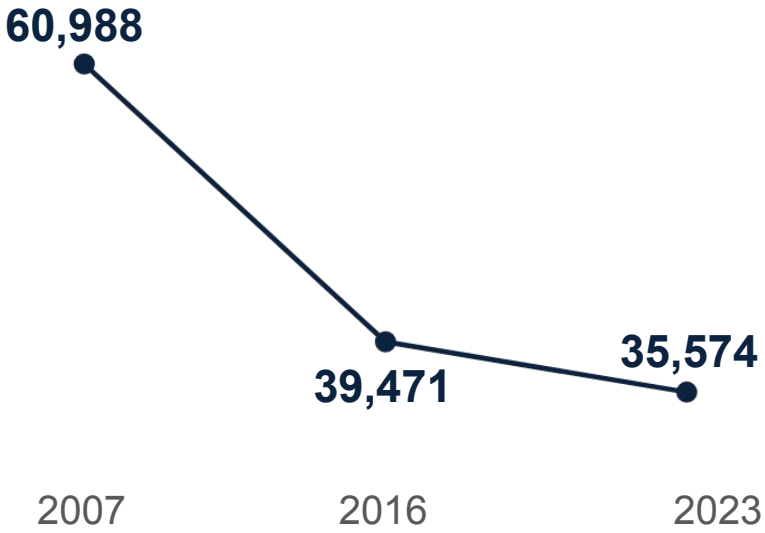
BUILDING EVIDENCE

Success of HUD-VASH

Homelessness Overall



Veteran Homelessness



BUILDING EVIDENCE

Rapid Re-Housing

A short-term intervention providing rental assistance and case management to quickly move people into housing.

Core Components: Includes rent subsidies, housing search assistance, and supportive services to ensure stability.

Family Options Study Findings: Showed mixed results—some families secured housing, but long-term impacts on stability were unclear.

Cost-Effectiveness: Less expensive than permanent housing, but effectiveness is not known.

Much more to learn: we need more evidence about these kinds of intermediate options

HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION: A CASE STUDY

DESTINATION: HOME

The Model

SYSTEM PARTNERS

SACRED HEART COMMUNITY SERVICE
CSA Community Services Agency
LifeMoves Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness
The Salvation Army
St. Joseph's Family Center
Sunnyvale Community Services
HEALTH • HOME • HEART West Valley Community Services
Amigos de Guadalupe Center for Justice & Empowerment "Connecting resources to people"
BAY AREA COMMUNITY HEALTH
HomeFirst. Services Where Homelessness Ends.
Housing Choices
ICAN
LATINAS CONTRA CANCER

Legal Support

Law Foundation OF SILICON VALLEY

Emergency Family Shelter Support

FAMILY SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Domestic Violence Advocacy Consortium

aad
Community Solutions
NEXT DOOR SOLANO
eliminating racism empowering women ywca Silicon Valley

ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE

- Immediate cash assistance that can be used towards rent, utilities and other basic expenses
- Legal support & eviction defense
- Case management services
- Assistance applying for benefits
- Help accessing services & resources provided by other partners

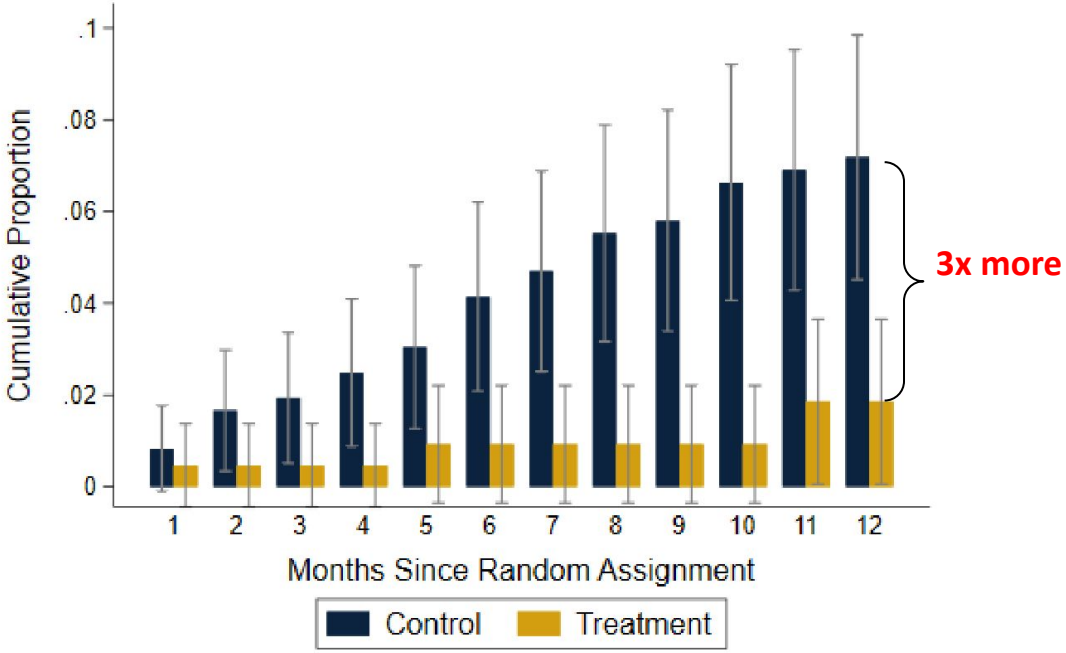
leo

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

Key Findings

- Decreased homelessness that **persists over time**
- Those not receiving assistance are **3 times more likely** to experience homelessness
- Every $1 spent on EFA resulted in **benefits of $2.47**

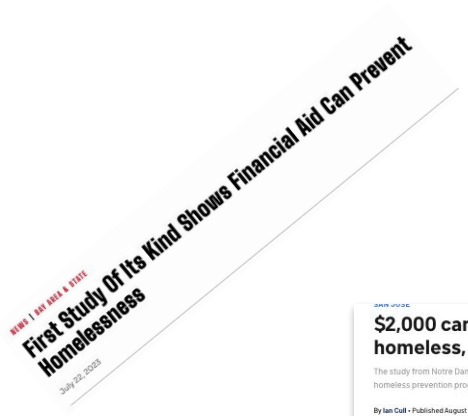
Housing Outcomes over Time:
Homeless Program* Use, Pre-March 2020



WHAT NOW

Ongoing Impact

1. Several briefings for partner stakeholders
2. Transition of program to County: Sustainability and Expansion
3. Federal Policy work
4. Toolkit
5. Popular Press/National Conversation



DESTINATION: HOME

RESOURCES

Download HPS Toolkit

Access Lit Review

Contact LEO's Project Development Team

Email Mara Trionfero Lucas at mtrionfe@nd.edu

or

Visit partnerwithleo.org