Los Angeles County is home to the largest jail system in the world, operated by the LA County Sheriff’s Department (LASD). The county is also the center of one of the most acute homelessness problems in the United States. According to the 2019 Point-in-Time Count (Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, 2019), there are nearly 59,000 people experiencing homelessness within LA County. On any given night, the LA County jail houses more than 16,000 inmates, and recent estimates suggest that nearly one-half of all inmates have at least one chronic disease, about two-thirds have a substance use disorder, and about one-fourth have serious mental illness (Gorman, 2018; Hamai, 2015). Because of the lack of affordable housing and social services in the community, LA County jail has seen an increase in the number of individuals with complex clinical needs.

Los Angeles County Office of Diversion and Reentry's Supportive Housing Program

A Study of Participants’ Housing Stability and New Felony Convictions

**KEY FINDINGS**

- From April 2016 through April 2019, 311 participants were enrolled.
- The majority were male and African American.
- Seventy-eight percent of the population suffered from at least one mental health disorder and nearly 40 percent had both a mental health and substance use disorder.
- Individuals without a behavioral health diagnosis (less than 3 percent) qualified because of a serious physical health issue or pregnancy.
- Housing stability rates were calculated for two groups: people who had received housing for at least six months or for at least 12 months. The six-month housing stability rate was 91 percent; the 12-month housing stability rate was 74 percent.
- Of a total of 96 individuals, 13 had been convicted of a new felony during the 12 months after being housed, for a 14-percent qualifying return rate. Three other individuals had pending felony charges.
A recent initiative designed to tackle these issues is the LA County Department of Health Services’ Office of Diversion and Reentry’s (ODR’s) supportive housing program, which provides housing coupled with case management. Evidence suggests that this type of program has helped individuals experiencing homelessness and suffering from co-occurring mental health and substance use conditions by increasing housing stability and reducing dependence on publicly funded crisis care (Larimer et al., 2009). However, less is known about the use of supportive housing to address the needs of individuals under criminal court supervision. A recent pilot in New York City suggested potential cost offsets, such as reduction in incarceration costs (Aidala et al., 2014). However, as outlined in a recent systematic review conducted by the National Academy of Sciences (2018), the effectiveness of permanent supportive housing remains inconclusive.

Therefore, it is important to understand whether supportive housing is achieving its goals. The LA County program’s goals are to improve housing stability and reduce criminal justice involvement among individuals enrolled into the program.

Methods
We used ODR data that represented participants enrolled in the supportive housing program between April 2016 and April 2019. The data set provided participant demographic information and clinical diagnosis as determined by ODR personnel. We summarized this information to help describe who is being served by the program.

ODR also gave us data from the housing provider (i.e., Brilliant Corners) that provided information about each participant’s housing status, such as move-in and move-out dates, reason for exit, and destination at exit. We used the destination classification definitions specified by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (2016) to classify individuals’ housing status as stable, neutral, or unstable. We calculated housing stability rates for two groups: people who had received housing for at least six months or for at least 12 months.

Finally, ODR submitted to us data maintained by the LASD on arrests among program participants. ODR reviewed these cases against criminal court records and classified them as to whether the arrest (1) led to a new felony case or (2) was a probation violation, dismissed by court, or rejected by the District Attorney’s Office. We examined rates of new felonies among participants that received supportive housing at least 12 months ago.

Findings
Program Participants
In Table 1, we present descriptive information about the full sample and of individuals who were featured in the outcome analyses. Of the 311 participants enrolled from April 2016 through April 2019, the average age was 39 years old (range between 20 and 69), and the majority were male and African-American. Approximately 7 percent of the population was classified as being in the top 5 percent of LA County social service utilizers, according to reports produced by the County Executive Office (Hamai, 2018), which maintains an aggregated data set of service use across several service sectors (e.g., health care, mental health care, substance use treatment, and law enforcement). The primary clinical diagnoses were substance use disorders, psychotic disorders, and bipolar disorders. Seventy-eight percent of the population suffered from at least one mental health
disorder and nearly 40 percent had both a mental health and substance use disorder. Individuals without a behavioral health diagnosis (less than 3 percent) qualified because of a serious physical health issue or pregnancy.

The study samples featured in our outcome analyses \( n = 187 \) and \( n = 96; \) i.e., those who were housed at least six and 12 months prior to the end of the study period) were similar to the total population in terms of demographic, service utilization and clinical diagnoses.

### Housing Stability

The six-month housing stability rate was 91 percent; the 12-month housing stability rate was 74 percent.
Six Months
Of the full group of 187 individuals, 169 people were in a permanent housing situation at six months. One individual had moved to a higher level of care and therefore was not considered in the calculation. The remaining 17 people were documented as living in temporary or unstable living conditions: jail or prison (n = 8), returning to interim housing or the street (n = 3), residing in a substance use disorder treatment program (n = 1), or in an "other/unknown" status at exit (n = 5).

Twelve Months
Of the full group of 96 individuals, 69 people were in a permanent housing situation at 12 months. Three were considered neutral and therefore not used in
the calculation (two had moved to a higher level of care and one was deceased). The remaining 24 were documented as living in temporary or unstable living situations: jail or prison (n = 14), returning to interim housing or the street (n = 3), residing in a substance use disorder treatment program (n = 1), or in an “other/unknown” status at exit (n = 6).

Felony Rates
Among those individuals who had been placed in housing at least 12 months before the end of the study period (i.e., April 2019), we examined whether participants had a new felony charge during the 12-month period after housing. Of a total of 96, 13 individuals had been convicted of a new felony during the 12 months after being housed, for a 14-percent qualifying return rate. Three other individuals had pending felony charges.

Conclusions
This report presents early interim findings about ODR’s supportive housing program. We found six-month and 12-month housing stability rates of 91 percent and 74 percent, respectively. Of the cohort that had been placed in housing more than a year ago, 14 percent had new felony convictions. Our next analysis will examine county service use and associated costs for this population prior to and after housing placement to better understand how the program might influence changes to service access and use of different publicly funded resources.

References


Hamai, Sachi A., Interim Chief Executive Officer, County of Los Angeles, “Pay for Success Initiative—Recommended Project and Next Steps,” memorandum to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, Los Angeles, Calif., July 28, 2015.


About This Report

This is the first of two reports planned to provide information about the individuals served by the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services’ Office of Diversion and Reentry’s supportive housing program and is part of an evaluation effort by the RAND Corporation in collaboration with the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services’ Office of Diversion and Reentry; the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department; and Brilliant Corners, a nonprofit supportive housing provider. This report should be of interest to corrections agencies, supportive housing providers, and policymakers in the criminal justice and supportive housing field. It was funded through a contract with Brilliant Corners.

RAND Justice Policy Program

RAND Social and Economic Well-Being is a division of the RAND Corporation that seeks to actively improve the health and social and economic well-being of populations and communities throughout the world. This research was conducted in the Justice Policy Program within RAND Social and Economic Well-Being. The program focuses on such topics as access to justice, policing, corrections, drug policy, and court system reform, as well as other policy concerns pertaining to public safety and criminal and civil justice. For more information, email justicepolicy@rand.org.

Questions or comments about this report should be sent to the project leader, Sarah B. Hunter, at Sarah_Hunter@rand.org.