

# Portable housing benefits in the US: Evidence & lessons for Canada

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# HCVP: Introduction & how it works

- Program of federal U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
- Started 1970s, expanded 2000s
- Largest housing subsidy program in the US
  - Section 8 vouchers / HCVP: 2.1 M households
  - Section 8 project-based: 1.2 M households
  - Public housing: 1.1 M households
- Since 2004, deep cuts to all US housing subsidies, loss of public housing units

# HCVP: Introduction & how it works

- Delivered by local Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) via waiting lists
- Federal regulations:
  - Eligibility: income below 50% area median
  - Fair Market Rent set by HUD for each metro area
  - Housing Quality Standards inspection
  - Household pays 30% of adjusted income on rent – PHA pays difference to the landlord

# Research and evidence on HCVP

## **Moving to Opportunity (MTO)**

- 4600 families with children living in public housing
- Assigned to 1 of 3 conditions
  - No intervention
  - Housing voucher that must be used in low-poverty area
  - Housing voucher that can be used anywhere
- Outcomes after 10-15 years
  - Improvements in housing & neighbourhood quality, safety
  - Some better health and mental health outcomes for adults & girls
  - DID NOT show expected associations with employment and education
  - Negative behavioural and mental health effects for boys

# Research and evidence on HCVP

## HOPE VI and Chicago Plan for Transformation

- HOPE VI
  - Redevelopment of “severely distressed” public housing
  - PHAs received federal funds for redevelopment, vouchers, and support services
  - HOPE VI Panel Study 2001 - 887 households, 5 cities
  - Chicago – further in-depth research on HOPE VI process
- Findings
  - Many households encountered barriers to moving
  - Improved housing quality and neighbourhood safety
  - Increased hardship, food insecurity, housing instability
  - After 10 years - tenants who remained in renovated public housing and received case management were healthier and felt safer

# Research and evidence on HCVP

## **Impacts of relocation on social support networks**

- Relocation disrupts social networks
- Informal supports critical for material support, childcare, employment contacts, health
- After 3 years, half of CHA tenants still returning to former neighbourhoods at least weekly

## **Rapid Re-Housing for Homeless Families, Family Options Study**

- Vouchers effective to help families leave shelter & stabilize
- But unstable housing after temporary vouchers end
- Deep, permanent housing subsidies significantly improved housing stability, adult and child well-being, food security

# Research and evidence on HCVP

## **Benefits and limitations of the program**

- Measurable improvements in housing stability & conditions, economic stability, food security, well-being – for tenants who were already in private market housing

BUT

- Low program coverage
- Low program uptake
- Low neighbourhood mobility
- Barriers in relocating out of public housing
- Challenges in private market for public housing tenants

# Lessons for the Canadian context

## 1. Clear regulation, local implementation

- Importance of federal / provincial regulation
  - Fair Market Rent (FMR) – prevent rent inflation
  - Housing Quality Standards
  - Rent geared to income
- Local implementation requires resources
  - Relocation counselling
  - Housing search assistance
  - Timely housing quality inspections & enforcement
  - Ongoing advocacy, support, stabilization



# Lessons for the Canadian context

## 2. The myth of housing choice

- Vouchers alone can not “level the playing field” for low-income tenants
- Other barriers for tenants in private market
  - Discrimination
  - Cost
  - Poor credit history, lack of references
  - Insecurity of tenure
  - Poor conditions, lack of enforcement
  - “Section 8 submarkets” – reinforcing spatial polarization?
  - Structural and historical roots of housing exclusion

# Lessons for the Canadian context

## 3. Moving public housing tenants into the private market?

- US HCVP research: mostly relocating public housing tenants – with mixed results
  - Improvements in satisfaction with housing and neighbourhood, sense of safety
  - Small or no improvements in economic mobility
  - Worsened financial hardship, food insecurity
  - Loss of social support networks, place-based services
  - Ongoing housing instability
  - Health impacts & trauma for young men and older adults
  - Risk of disqualification and cancellation

# Lessons for the Canadian context

## 4. Comparing the costs

- Portable housing benefits vs. improving physical conditions and providing wrap-around supports in social housing?
  - Cost estimates for voucher programs must consider all resources required for administration, inspections, ongoing supports
  - Chicago Case Management Demonstration – improved conditions & services, without loss of social networks