

Article 37: Human Development and Lack of Bridge Housing and Transitional Housing

While **bridge housing** provides a vital immediate reprieve from the streets for homeless individuals, its short-term nature can inadvertently prolong the instability that leads to shelter recidivism (Colburn et al., 2025; Dawkins, 2023; Reid et al., 2025). Therefore, longer-term **transitional housing** serves as a critical countermeasure, offering the extended duration and integrated social services necessary for deep-rooted recovery. Moreover, this housing model provides the structural support required to stabilize individuals with complex needs by filling the gap between crisis and permanence. Ultimately, transitional housing effectively transforms a temporary stopgap into a sustainable pathway towards lasting housing security, personal autonomy, and proper human development (Dashora & Kiaras, 2025; Mayer et al., 2024; Semborski et al., 2021).

Causes and Scope of Lack of Bridge Housing in the United States

The lack of bridge housing in the United States is primarily driven by the growing gap between stagnant wages and escalating market rents. Structural barriers, such as restrictive local zoning and high development costs, further constrain the available supply of these critical intermediate resources. This shortfall creates a massive systemic drawback, causing homelessness to increase significantly as individuals lose their pathway to long-term stability. Consequently, lack of access to housing spaces in this category forces many people to remain in precarious cycles of homelessness while waiting for specialized support to become available (Colburn et al., 2025; Dawkins, 2023; Reid et al., 2025).

To look into this issue further, a study examined causes and scale of the shortage of bridge housing in the United States by assessing whether current housing assistance systems have enough capacity to move people out of homelessness. Using national administrative and policy data from federal housing programs, the researchers analyzed how individuals exit shelters and what resources are available to support those transitions. The analysis relied primarily on data from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and national homelessness response systems that track shelter use and housing placements. These datasets compile information collected by local homelessness service providers and federal housing programs across the country. The findings showed that the housing assistance system lacks sufficient capacity to transition most households from shelters into stable housing. For instance, only about 12.4% of households staying in shelters receive rapid rehousing or similar housing assistance, leaving most without a pathway to permanent housing. This gap reflects a broader shortage of bridge housing options that could help individuals move from emergency shelters into longer-term housing. The study explains that the problem is closely linked to the limited supply of affordable housing and insufficient funding for housing assistance programs. Given the scarcity of these resources, many individuals remain in shelters longer or cycle back into homelessness. The research also highlights how policy priorities and funding constraints have limited the expansion of transitional housing capacity. The authors conclude that without a major expansion of affordable housing and housing assistance programs, the United States will continue to experience significant shortages in the bridge and transitional housing pathways needed to reduce homelessness (Colburn et al., 2025).

Another study addressed the structural factors driving the national housing supply gap—a broader constraint that also limits the availability of bridge pathways in the United States. Following that lead,

the researchers assessed trends affecting housing production and availability using national housing policy data, housing market statistics, and federal program information from agencies such as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The data were drawn from federal housing reports, policy evaluations, and nationwide datasets that track housing construction, affordability, and housing stock conditions. These datasets compile information collected through government housing programs and national housing monitoring systems. The findings indicated that the United States faces a substantial gap between the number of affordable housing units available and the number of households that need them. This shortage reduces the availability of bridge housing options that support movement from shelters into permanent housing, and structural constraints within the housing system contribute to this gap as well. Furthermore, limited housing construction, the loss of older affordable housing units, and rising development costs have reduced the overall supply of low-cost housing. Thus, regulatory barriers and financing limitations further slow the development of new affordable units. As a result, housing production has not kept pace with demand among lower-income households. The researchers concluded that expanding affordable housing supply through policy reforms, preservation strategies, and increased investment is necessary to address the shortage of bridge pathways out of homelessness (Reid et al., 2025).

Likewise, a study examined how housing supply gaps shape homelessness levels in the United States, given that such constraints limit the availability of bridge housing pathways. Using panel data on homelessness from U.S. communities between 2015 and 2019, the researchers analyzed how local housing markets influence homelessness rates. The study combined Point-in-Time counts collected by local Continuums of Care with housing and demographic data from national sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau and other housing market datasets. Thus, the analysis examined how housing supply conditions and land-use regulations relate to the size of local homeless populations. The findings showed that housing supply restrictions (including those in bridge housing) and limited housing construction are strongly associated with higher homelessness rates. Communities with more restrictive land-use regulations tended to experience greater homelessness levels. Moreover, these restrictions limit the development of new housing and reduce the availability of affordable units. When housing supply remains constrained, homelessness systems face greater pressure to move individuals from shelters into stable housing. This imbalance creates barriers between emergency shelters and longer-term housing placements. The study concluded that expanding housing supply and easing regulatory constraints are important steps for improving housing access and reducing homelessness in the United States (Dawkins, 2023).

Effectiveness and Impact of Transitional Housing

When properly funded, transitional housing serves as a vital catalyst for long-term stability by providing people with the immediate security needed to engage with support services. Such spaces create a systematic pathway that empowers individuals to move beyond the crisis of homelessness and focus on specialized goals like employment or recovery. Furthermore, this housing model significantly increases the likelihood of a successful and permanent transition into stable housing by offering a structured environment rather than a temporary stay. Ultimately, transitional housing helps reduce the strain on emergency systems while fostering lasting independence for vulnerable populations (Dashora & Kiaras, 2025; Mayer et al., 2024; Semborski et al., 2021).

On that note, a study reviewed housing interventions for young adults experiencing homelessness, including evidence suggesting that transitional housing can support stability and positive developmental outcomes. For this purpose, researchers conducted a literature review of peer-reviewed sources examining housing programs designed for emerging adults facing housing instability. Thus, they performed a systematic search across eight academic databases, including PsycINFO, PubMed, Web of Science, Google Scholar, CINAHL, Social Work Abstracts, Cochrane, and ClinicalTrials.gov. The search covered studies published between 1987 and 2018, initially identifying 7,344 records, of which 29 studies met the final inclusion criteria. The studies that were included examined several housing models, including transitional housing programs, independent living programs, supportive housing, and Housing First approaches. Across the reviewed sources, programs that provided stable housing environments were associated with improvements in housing stability, quality of life, education, employment, and social relationships. Moreover, transitional housing settings that included support services such as case management and life-skills training were particularly linked to positive developmental outcomes. Participants in these programs often gained greater independence and improved coping skills while preparing for long-term housing stability. The review also indicated that longer stays in supportive housing environments were associated with better outcomes when participants exited the programs. These findings suggest that structured housing programs can provide important support for young adults navigating the transition to independent living. Therefore, the authors concluded that housing models combining stable accommodations with supportive services (such as transitional housing) show promise for improving long-term outcomes for individuals experiencing homelessness (Semborski et al., 2021).

Another study examined whether long-term transitional housing programs improve outcomes for young people experiencing homelessness. Particularly, the study focused on a 20-unit transitional living program designed for homeless young adults aged 18–24, which operated under a Housing First and harm-reduction philosophy. Following that lead, researchers collected qualitative longitudinal data through in-depth semi-structured interviews with individuals participating in the program. Fifteen participants completed interviews at the beginning of the study, and seven were interviewed again about six months later to observe changes over time. The data were analyzed using a six-step thematic analysis approach to identify patterns in participants' experiences and outcomes. The findings show that stable transitional housing contributed to reduced substance use and improvements in education, employment goals, and overall well-being among the participants. They also reported stronger interpersonal relationships and greater emotional stability while engaging with the program. A key factor behind these improvements was the non-judgmental and supportive environment created by staff and program policies. Furthermore, participants emphasized that access to longer-term housing and supportive relationships helped them regain stability and plan for future independence. These results suggest that transitional housing can provide meaningful benefits beyond immediate shelter by supporting longer-term development and recovery. The study concluded that structured transitional housing programs with supportive services can play an important role in improving life outcomes for homeless youth. Additionally, the authors noted that continued support after leaving these programs is important to sustain these positive effects (Dashora & Kiaras, 2025).

Lastly, a study examined how transitional housing impacted the well-being and stability of people displaced from a large homeless encampment in Boston, Massachusetts. More specifically, researchers aimed to understand residents' perspectives after the encampment was cleared and many individuals were offered transitional housing as an alternative living arrangement. The study assessed qualitative

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interview data collected from thirty former encampment residents between July 2022 and February 2023. Moreover, participants were asked about their experiences with safety, health, and daily life following the encampment removal. Among those interviewed, fourteen individuals had been placed in transitional housing, while others returned to different forms of homelessness. The findings showed that individuals who obtained transitional housing reported improved safety, greater stability, and better access to food, water, and health services. Many participants also described improvements in physical and mental health, including better management of chronic conditions and reduced exposure to violence. Furthermore, transitional housing environments helped residents focus on long-term personal goals, such as addiction recovery, health care engagement, and obtaining permanent housing. In contrast, people who were not placed in transitional housing often experienced worsening safety concerns and mental health stress after displacement. These results suggest that transitional housing can provide a safer and more stable environment that supports recovery and personal development. The researchers concluded that when encampment removals occur, transitional housing can significantly improve health, stability, and progress towards long-term housing goals (Mayer et al., 2024).

References

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