

# Recovery Homes are a Cost-effective Intervention for Addiction, Alcoholism and Homelessness

## WHAT ARE RECOVERY HOMES?

“Recovery houses are safe, healthy, family-like substance-free living environments that support individuals in recovery from addiction. While recovery residences vary widely in structure, all are centered on peer support and a connection to services that promote long-term recovery. Recovery housing benefits individuals in recovery by reinforcing a substance-free lifestyle and providing direct connections to other peers in recovery, mutual support groups and recovery support services. Substance-free does not prohibit prescribed medications taken as directed by a licensed prescriber, such as pharmacotherapies specifically approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for treatment of opioid use disorder as well as other medications with FDA-approved indications for the treatment of co-occurring disorders.”



SAMHSA Recovery Housing: Best Practices and Suggested Guidelines,  
<https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/housing-best-practices-100819.pdf>

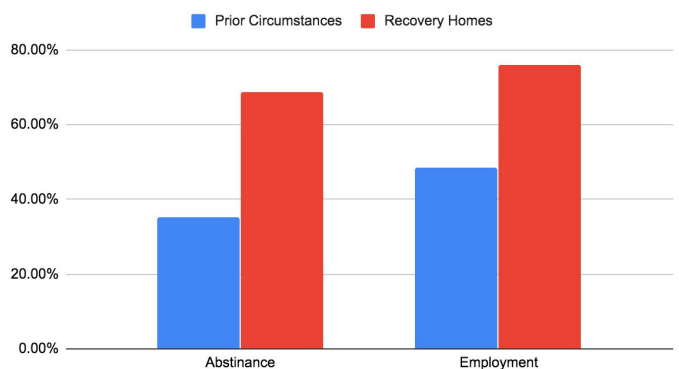
## RECOVERY HOMES ARE EFFECTIVE

Dozens of studies have detailed the effectiveness of recovery housing in peer-reviewed journals and by national experts. For example, the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism compared men and women leaving residential addiction treatment and returning to their prior living circumstances with those leaving residential treatment and moving into a recovery home.

Those who went to recovery homes showed significantly better outcomes at two year follow-up. Moreover, recovery home residents earned \$550 more per month than their counterparts.

[Communal housing settings enhance substance abuse recovery.](#) Jason LA, Olson BD, Ferrari JR, Lo Sasso AT. Am J Public Health. 2006 Oct; 96(10):1727-9.

Recovery Homes v. Prior Circumstances



## RECOVERY HOMES EARN SIGNIFICANT FINANCIAL SAVINGS

---

In addition to the evidence establishing positive recovery outcomes for recovery home residents, studies calculating the economic costs and benefits of establishing recovery homes have overwhelmingly found that the benefits far outweigh the costs. For example, researchers have documented cost savings to the community of up to \$29,000 per resident, when comparing residency in a recovery home with peer support, to returning to a community without peer support. Savings to the community factors in the cost of substance use, illegal activity, and incarceration that might occur.

*\$29,000 in  
savings over  
business as usual*

Center for Social Innovation. (2013). Recovery Housing in the State of Ohio: Findings and Recommendations from an Environmental Scan.

Lo Sasso, A. T., Byro, E., Jason, L. A., Ferrari, J. R., & Olson, B. (2012). Benefits and costs associated with mutual-help community-based recovery homes: The Oxford House model. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 35(1), 47-53.

## RECOVERY HOMES PLUS OUTPATIENT TREATMENT ARE AN EFFECTIVE & INEXPENSIVE ALTERNATIVE TO RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT

---

In many states - including Oregon, there is a waitlist to enter residential addiction treatment. Addicts and alcoholics can spend up to 6 months for a residential treatment bed. For many, the combination of recovery housing with evidenced-based outpatient treatment is becoming a successful and effective model of care. Moreover, the mutual support of peer residences is an essential component to recovery, modeling the societal and fellowship aspects of recovery, and is fully endorsed by SAMHSA as an integral component of recovery houses. Recovery homes affiliated with outpatient treatment together produce outcomes comparable to residential addiction treatment - at a fraction of the cost and with none of the wait.

Polcin D. L. (2009). A model for sober housing during outpatient treatment. *Journal of psychoactive drugs*, 41(2), 153-61

Smelson, D. A., Kline, A., Kuhn, J., Rodrigues, S., O'Connor, K., Fisher, W. Kane, V. (2013). A wraparound treatment engagement intervention for homeless veterans with co-occurring disorders. *Psychological Services*, 10(2), 161-167



## RECOVERY HOMES CAN BE PRIVATELY OWNED AND OPERATED

---

Existing large houses - urban, suburban, and rural - can be profitable for private property owners to rent or lease as recovery homes. There are limited Federal funds and national nonprofit organizations - such as Oxford House - which help private owners learn about managing a recovery home and get started, even help manage tenants at no cost. Evictions are almost unheard of in recovery homes, and specialized leases further protect private owners. Most states provide property tax exemptions for some types of recovery houses to encourage private business to expand in this area.

A national survey is now underway but there could be as many as 2500 privately-owned recovery homes already operating and which need no ongoing government support.

## RECOVERY HOMES VS. HOUSING FIRST

 <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Proven research-based outcomes</li><li>● Excellent outcomes with individuals with addiction</li><li>● Culture, LGBTQ and gender specific recovery housing</li><li>● Less expensive than Housing First</li><li>● Communal living</li><li>● Mutual support focused on alcohol &amp; drug free lifestyle</li><li>● Alcohol &amp; drug free living environment</li><li>● Peer support</li></ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Proven research-based outcomes</li><li>● Superior outcomes with co-occurring disorders</li><li>● More expensive than recovery homes</li><li>● Individual single-room living</li><li>● Focused on stable housing</li><li>● Harm reduction focused</li><li>● May include case management services, or may not, especially over time</li><li>● Not alcohol &amp; drug free</li></ul>
---	--

A 2017 study by America’s foremost Recovery homes researcher, Douglas Polcin, Ed.D of the Public Health Institute, reveals the benefits of recovery homes vs. Housing First.

**Recovery homes** are alcohol & drug-free living environments for persons with addiction, alcoholism, and some with mental illness, who wish to abstain from substances and embark upon a program of recovery. The housing stock used for recovery homes is typically ordinary housing that fits in with single-family neighborhoods, multi-family neighborhoods, and mixed-use residential-commercial areas.

**Housing First** evolved during the 1990’s as a reaction to the large numbers of persons who remained chronically homeless even if they received professional treatment for addiction, alcoholism, and mental illness. Housing First are typically single occupancy rooms or efficiency units in large new-built apartment buildings. Housing First intends to provide immediate access to free or at least subsidized housing to interrupt an individual’s homelessness and allow them to then start treatment for addiction, alcoholism, or mental illness. . Rather than promoting an abstinence-oriented recovery from

*There should be  
“parallel funding”  
between Housing  
First (SROs) and  
Recovery Homes.*

addiction and alcoholism, Housing First uses legal interventions - evictions - to amend resident relapses or other misbehavior.

The Housing First and recovery home approaches present different areas of strength and weakness that could potentially complement one another. While Housing First can accommodate a wide variety of individuals because it adapts to their needs and desires, it sacrifices the power of the social environment and the influence of peer support that can enhance the functioning of residents (e.g., Polcin, et al., 2010a, Polcin & Korcha, 2015).

The conclusions of the 2017 analysis of Housing First and recovery homes reports that Housing First and recovery homes should be developed to run robustly in parallel ways. Funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development should support a range of housing options for homeless persons with substance abuse problems, including recovery homes and Housing First.

[The Architecture of Recovery: Two Kinds of Housing Assistance for Chronic Homeless Persons with Substance Use Disorders](#). Friedner D. Wittman, Ph.D., M.Arch., Douglas L. Polcin, Ed.D., and Dave Sheridan, B.A. *Drugs Alcohol Today*. 2017; 17(3): 157–167.

---

## **HUD ENCOURAGES BOTH RECOVERY HOMES & HOUSING FIRST**

The [HUD Recovery Housing Policy Brief](#) states, "research has found that housing models that are operated with Housing First practices have demonstrated their effectiveness in achieving housing stability for people with serious mental illnesses, and for those who have experienced chronic homelessness including many with active substance abuse disorders. Because of that strong evidence, HUD is encouraging communities to continue to expand the supply of housing models, including permanent supportive housing, that embrace Housing First and that use harm reduction practices, and HUD continues to place a policy priority on such practices within its Continuum of Care Program Competition. Notwithstanding its emphasis on a Housing First approach, HUD also recognizes the importance of providing individual choice to support various paths towards recovery. Some people pursuing recovery from addiction express a preference for an abstinence-focused residential or housing program where they can live among and be supported by a community of peers who are also focused on pursuing recovery from addiction—environments that are provided by Recovery Housing programs. However, supporting individual choice must also mean that a community is ensuring that housing options are available for people at all stages of recovery."

---

## **CULTURE, GENDER & LGBTQ RECOVERY HOUSING**

Recovery homes are designated by Federal law as residences and not facilities so most retain the informal capacity to be culturally, gender and LGBTQ specific. Recovery homes can meet the needs of communities particularly impacted by alcoholism and addiction, and for whom clean and sober housing may be unavailable. Some recovery homes speak Spanish, some are intentionally inviting to African Americans, or the Latinx community, or understand military Veterans, or are inclusive of people who are LGBTQ, or recognize the need and safety of gender specific homes. Many recovery homes have a religious foundation attractive to people of faith. Most Housing First buildings are not culturally, gender or LGBTQ specific.