

New report indicates alternative shelters lead to better outcomes for people experiencing homelessness

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A new [report](#) from Portland State University's Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative (HRAC) indicates that alternative shelters provide better outcomes for people experiencing homelessness than traditional shelters.

The research, conducted by HRAC on behalf of Multnomah County's Joint Office of Homeless Services (JOHS), analyzed the cost, participant experiences, and client outcomes in [village](#)-style and motel shelters as compared to more traditional congregate shelters.

"This research shows that motel and village shelters, which provide private living spaces that support the autonomy, dignity, and safety of clients, lead to better experiences and more [positive outcomes](#) than congregate shelters," said Jacen Greene, HRAC assistant director.

Village and motel shelter models have grown in recent years as an alternative to traditional shelters. In Portland, several villages have been constructed by [community members](#) and local agencies to better support the houseless population.

This report shows that the village model is not only more desirable to people experiencing homelessness, but can be less expensive in some circumstances to build than congregate shelters. The [success rate](#) for moving an individual into housing is also higher than at traditional shelters.

"Alternative shelters provide participants with levels of privacy, autonomy, and safety that are not always present in congregate shelters," according to the report. "These factors helped participants feel like they could pause, breathe, and work toward their goals."

As compared to other shelter models, villages have the lowest capital costs per unit when the land is free (as has been the case for villages in Portland), but are more expensive than motel or congregate shelters if land costs and pod replacements are factored in. Motel shelters are often faster to set up and are more flexible in terms of conversion to housing, but can be difficult to set up due to supply.

In evaluating cost, HRAC found that moving a person into housing and providing supportive services—like rental assistance or vouchers—is comparable to the cost of providing a congregate shelter bed, and costs less than alternative shelters.

"We found that placing somebody into housing, paying their rent, and providing supportive services is usually a less costly alternative than any type of temporary shelter, and is the only approach that actually ends homelessness," Greene said.

These findings provide guidance to determine which type of shelter is most appropriate based on the circumstances of the population being served. An effective shelter strategy should:

- Utilize shelter types with individual, private rooms
- Size shelters to a smaller total number of units
- Center equity in services and programming
- Include identity-supportive shelters and/or programming
- Locate shelters close to essential services and amenities
- Consider long-term shelter costs and site usage/conversion potential in planning
- Incorporate input and feedback from people with lived experience of homelessness

"Ultimately, any shelter strategy should be viewed as a temporary stopgap until enough housing can be provided to address current and

forecasted needs," according to the report.

"Someone in a [shelter](#) is still experiencing homelessness, and the only true solution to homelessness is to ensure that people who are housed are able to remain there, and people who are unhoused are placed in housing as soon as possible."

More information: Alternative Shelter Evaluation Report.
pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/hrac_pub/43/

Provided by Portland State University

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