

Opportunities to Improve Outcomes for Families with Children through the Community Choice Demonstration

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

The Demonstration aims to identify the services or combination of services that are most influential and cost effective for helping HCV families with children move to areas of opportunity.

The Office of Policy Development and Research's (PD&R's) demonstration projects¹ and associated research, such as program evaluations, help build the evidence base for effective HUD policy. PD&R recently released the "Research Design, Data Collection, and Analysis Plan (RDDCAP): Evaluation of the Community Choice Demonstration," which outlines how the office will evaluate the impacts and effectiveness of the Community Choice Demonstration (Demonstration) with a randomized control trial that is expected to enroll more than 15,000 families with children in HUD's Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program.² HUD selected 8 sites that include 10 public housing agencies (PHAs) to participate in the Demonstration and provide mobility-related services to more than 9,000 families with children to expand residential choices and access to lower-poverty areas, designated as "opportunity areas." For the purposes of this Demonstration, researchers identified opportunity areas based on factors such as poverty rate, proportion of HUD-assisted rental units that include children, school test scores, and other opportunity indices. HUD is interested in families moving to areas of opportunity because research has shown that children who grow up in these areas experience improved life outcomes. Families participating in the HCV program, however, are unlikely to use vouchers to rent housing in areas of opportunity without deliberate supports and coaching to facilitate such moves. The Demonstration aims to identify the services or combination of services that are most influential and cost effective for helping HCV families with children move to areas of opportunity.

Researchers will evaluate the two main interventions of the Demonstration: Comprehensive Mobility-Related Services (CMRS) and Selected Mobility-Related Services (SMRS). CMRS aims to help participants overcome the financial barriers, knowledge and skill gaps, family hesitancy, and landlord hesitancy that often impede moves to low-poverty and high-opportunity areas. The suite of CMRS includes pre-move coaching for families; assistance in searching for housing in areas of opportunity; financial assistance for application fees, security deposits, and transportation costs for families; holding fees to cover unfinished leases, lease-up bonuses, and damage mitigation funds for landlords; and post-move check-ins and support. CMRS also includes post-move supports to help families that move to opportunity areas stay there or help them with second moves to another opportunity area. The SMRS intervention will take a subset of the services CMRS offers to determine whether a more limited and less costly intervention can effectively assist moves to areas of opportunity. The eight sites for the Demonstration are Cleveland, Ohio; Los Angeles, California; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Nashville, Tennessee; New Orleans, Louisiana; New York City, New York; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Rochester, New York.

The Demonstration will proceed in two phases. The first phase started in late 2022 and will assess the primary impacts of CMRS, including the percentage of families receiving services who move to areas of opportunity and their length of stay, and secondary outcomes such as the

percentage of families who use vouchers to find a new unit and move to any location. Researchers will also assess the relative effectiveness of different services and the household- and site-level characteristics associated with moves to areas of opportunity. The sites began with a 6- to 9-month pilot period and most are now in full implementation ending in September 2024. To rigorously test the effectiveness of the intervention, the researchers will use the gold standard in experimental research design — random assignment — with families randomly placed in either the CMRS group or a control group that offers the PHA's typical services.

The second phase will begin in October 2024 and is expected to end by April 2028. During this phase, researchers will randomly assign some families to a third option, SMRS, whereas others will continue to be assigned to the CMRS group or the control group. The specific bundle of services that SMRS will include will be based on early analysis of the most effective CMRS services from Phase 1. The researchers will have the option of testing up to three distinct combinations of services, testing each of them at two to four sites.

Quantitative data collection will be supplemented by qualitative interviews, as well as a process evaluation and a cost analysis. The evaluation results will be completed at four junctures:

- Phase 1 implementation and early findings, in 2024.
- Phase 1 process, impact, and cost evaluation, in 2026.
- Phase 2 Interim Impact Evaluation, in 2028.
- Phase 1 and 2 Comprehensive Impact Evaluation, in 2031.

The Community Choice Demonstration will initially enable HUD to assess the effectiveness of different services to facilitate HCV families' access to low-poverty, high-opportunity neighborhoods. At the same time, the Demonstration will deepen stakeholders' understanding of the relationship between moves to opportunity areas and health, education, and economic outcomes, building on the existing literature from HUD's Moves to Opportunity Demonstration³ and Opportunity Insights' Creating Moves to Opportunity,⁴ and other housing mobility randomized controlled trials. In the tradition of PD&R demonstration projects, the findings will shape evidence-based HUD policy to achieve better outcomes for HUD-assisted families with children.

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References

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