
Improving Federal Housing Programs Could Help More Children Grow Up in Safer, Higher-Opportunity Neighborhoods

Where a child grows up can be a critical influence on his or her lifelong health and success, and improvements to federal rental assistance programs could have a big impact on children's life outcomes, a report released today by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) finds.

Only 15 percent of the nearly 4 million children in families receiving federal housing assistance live in high-opportunity neighborhoods with access to good schools, safe streets, and high employment rates, according to the report. A larger share (18 percent) live in neighborhoods of extreme poverty.

Children exposed to neighborhood violence and extreme poverty often suffer cognitive, health, and academic deficiencies, the research shows, while low-income children who move to safer neighborhoods with better schools have experienced significant improvements in their lives, including gains in academic performance.

"Growing up in high-poverty neighborhoods undermines children's intellectual development and school performance and makes it more likely that they will suffer from mental and physical health problems," stated Douglas Rice, Senior Policy Analyst at CBPP and co-author of the report. "Federal rental assistance should do more to help children and their families move to better neighborhoods and improve children's lives."

The new report analyzes research from several studies, including the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Moving to Opportunity demonstration, and lays out key actions that could help federal rental assistance programs better serve low-income families. They include:

- Creating stronger incentives for local and state housing agencies to help families move to better neighborhoods.
- Modifying policies that discourage families from living in higher-opportunity communities.
- Minimizing barriers to families' ability to choose to live in high-opportunity communities through the Housing Choice Voucher program.
- Better assisting families in using vouchers to live in high-opportunity areas.

As Barbara Sard, Vice President for Housing Policy at CBPP, explained, "Federal officials can make key policy changes to strengthen our major federal rental assistance programs to improve the lives of children and their families without spending more or waiting for Congress to act. Rental assistance can do more than provide a stable place to live, as vital as that is. It can enable families to have access to better and

healthier neighborhoods that can have lifelong benefits for children, their families, and communities as a whole.”

The report, *Creating Opportunity for Children: How Housing Location Can Make a Difference*, is available at <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=4211>.

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