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The Cost of Eviction and Unpaid Bills of Financially Insecure Families for City Budgets

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The financial health of cities depends on financially secure residents. When families have little to no savings and experience a disruption in their income or expenses, bills may be missed and consequences such as eviction may result. In Seattle, the government cost of family financial insecurity from eviction and unpaid property taxes and utility bills is estimated to range from $20 million to $46 million of a total annual budget of $1 billion. An estimated 140,000 families do not have at least $2,000 in savings and are thus financially insecure.

Another way to measure the financial health of Seattle residents is through credit scores, which estimate the perceived risk of delinquency on a debt or line of credit. Overall, 21 percent of Seattle residents have a subprime credit score, signifying high risk and limited access to credit. This is below the national average of 30 percent.

What can be done? Helping Seattle families boost savings and pay loans and bills on time will improve their financial health and that of the city.

Among families in Seattle,

46% are financially insecure, with less than $2,000 in savings, compared with 52% nationally.

$20–46 million

The minimum cost to Seattle government of family financial insecurity from eviction and unpaid property taxes and utility bills

140,000

of the 310,000 families in Seattle are financially insecure

21%

of Seattle residents have subprime credit scores

How Household Financial Insecurity Affects Cities and Steps Cities Can Take

Eviction is a growing cause of homelessness, and **each homeless person costs some cities tens of thousands of dollars** a year.

Missed housing payments can lead to missed property taxes. On average, local governments generate **30 percent of their revenue from property taxes.**

Over **$13 billion in public utilities sales taxes** were collected in the United States last year to fund infrastructure, transportation, and other city services.

After an income disruption, financially insecure households are 14 times more likely to **be evicted.**

After an income disruption, financially insecure homeowner households are 3 times more likely to **miss a housing payment.**

After an income disruption, financially insecure households are 3 times more likely to **miss a utility payment.**

Half of all households do not have $2,000 in nonretirement savings, making them financially insecure and at higher risk for evictions and missed payments.

This comes at a cost to cities.

Steps cities can take:

Offer financial coaching, counseling, and innovative uses of technology to help build residents' financial well-being, including savings strategies.

Integrate financial interventions—such as those that help residents repay rent and utility debt—into other programs to meet people where they are.

Make saving easy through incentivized programs that provide matching funds to help residents build an emergency savings cushion and move up the economic ladder.

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