

Section 8 Mobility

Neighborhood Health &

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Section 8 Mobility and Neighborhood Health

Emerging Issues and Policy
Challenges

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background and purpose



In the fall of 1999, the Urban Institute, with support from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and The MacArthur Foundation, held a symposium on the issues of Section 8 mobility and neighborhood health. The purpose of the symposium was to assess what is known about the potential impacts of the Section 8 assisted housing program on neighborhoods and to identify implications for both policy development and future research. This report draws on the existing research literature and the symposium discussion to summarize the current state of knowledge and debate on the issues of Section 8 mobility and neighborhood health.

The Section 8 Program

Over the past decade, the Section 8 tenant-based assistance program has grown in both size and importance as a component of federal housing policy for poor renters. Unlike the public housing program, which subsidizes the construction and operation of housing developments for the poor, the Section 8 tenant-based program supplements what very low income families and individuals can afford to pay for housing in the private market. Thus, tenant-based assistance enables recipients to choose moderately priced housing of the type and in the location that best meets their needs. The Section 8 program is administered by local and state housing agencies under contract to the federal government. Participants generally contribute 30 percent of their monthly income toward housing costs, with the Section 8 program making up the difference up to a locally defined payment standard. Today, about 1.4 million households nationwide participate in the Section 8 program (Schussheim 1998).

In general, the Section 8 program works well. The most recent national estimates indicate that the vast majority of families and individuals who receive certificates or vouchers are successful in finding a house or apartment that qualifies for assistance. Minority households, families with children, elderly people, and the disabled all appear to be successful in taking advantage of Section 8 assistance to obtain decent and affordable housing on the private market.¹ Recipients live in better-quality housing and pay more affordable rent burdens than similar, unassisted households. Moreover, tenant-based assistance recipients are far less likely than public housing residents to be concentrated in high-poverty neighborhoods. National analysis of neighborhood characteristics for participants in different federal housing programs has found that Section 8 certificates and vouchers reduce the probability that families live in the most economically and socially distressed areas. Specifically, only 14.8 percent of certificate and voucher recipients live in high-poverty neighborhoods (more than 30 percent poor), compared with 53.6 percent of public housing residents (Newman and Schnare 1997). Thus, Section 8 tenant-based assistance effectively addresses some of the most serious shortcomings of traditional, project-based housing programs.

Because of the effectiveness of the Section 8 program, tenant-based housing assistance is growing in importance relative to more traditional project-based programs. In recent years, Congress has funded virtually no net additions to the stock of federally subsidized developments, relying instead on Section 8 certificates and vouchers for any increments to

1. A 1994 study of both certificates and vouchers found that over 80 percent of recipients nationally were successful in finding a house or apartment to qualify for assistance (Kennedy and Finkel 1994). HUD has recently launched a new study to update this performance information.

the total pool of low-income housing assistance.² Moreover, the demolition of severely distressed public housing projects and the expiration of subsidy contracts with private developers are shifting substantial numbers of poor families from project-based to tenant-based assistance. Thus, the effectiveness of federal efforts to help low-income families and individuals meet their housing needs increasingly hinges on Section 8 policies and program implementation.

Despite the overall success of tenant-based housing assistance, there are reasons to believe that the Section 8 program could be strengthened. It may not be achieving its full potential for promoting housing mobility and choice, especially for minority families with children, and there is some reason for concern that the positive findings from research conducted early in the 1990s may not always apply under today's market conditions. Increasingly, local housing authorities and low-income advocacy organizations report that Section 8 recipients are having problems finding housing. The National Low Income Housing Coalition (1999) recently reviewed evidence on current trends in Section 8 success rates and concluded that the generally high success rates researchers found in the early part of the decade stand in contrast to conspicuous amounts of housing scarcity and frustration with the voucher system. And data indicate that black Section 8 recipients as well as recipients who live in central cities are more likely to live in high-poverty and segregated neighborhoods than are white and suburban recipients (Turner 1998).

In addition, concerns are being raised in some communities about the implications of Section 8 for the neighborhoods in which recipients live. Some people believe that clusters of Section 8 households can destabilize neighborhoods, bringing drugs, crime, and antisocial behavior and precipitating a cycle of neighborhood disinvestment and decline. In cities where severely distressed public housing developments are being demolished, the population of families relying upon Section 8 may become increasingly poor and disadvantaged, potentially intensifying pressures on program administrators, landlords, and receiving communities (Popkin and Cunningham 1999).

The question of how Section 8 may be affecting neighborhoods depends to some degree on the extent to which program participants are geographically concentrated or clustered. Although national data have shown that Section 8 recipients are far less concentrated geographically than public housing residents, there is evidence of significant clustering in some places. For example, in suburban Cook County (Chicago), the majority of Section 8 recipients are located in the southern suburbs, with substantially fewer found in the southwestern or northern suburbs

2. Although federal funds support housing development through the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit and the HOME Program, programs that provide long-term rent subsidies to guarantee affordability for very low income households have largely been discontinued.

“The changes in my neighborhood were subtle at first. More people wore scuffs and tank tops at the supermarket, and the lines were longer owing to the complexities of determining what is a permissible food-stamp purchase. . . . The landscape, once impeccably maintained, began taking on a littered look. . . . Imagine stepping on a used condom as you retrieve cash to take your children to see “Buddy.” Local commerce changed. A beauty-supply store closed, replaced by a boutique quaintly named Cigarettes Cheaper! A pawn shop nearby does a brisk business, as does the Checks Cashed store. . . . It was when I noticed the gang graffiti spray-painted on the decorative boulders outside the bank that I paused. . . . Federally subsidized tenants had come to our quiet, well-kept suburban neighborhood.”

(from a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed; Jennings 1997)

(Fischer 1999). And when Fairfax County (Virginia), a suburb of Washington, D.C., commissioned a study of Section 8 clustering, researchers found that overall levels of spatial concentration were low by comparison with the central city, but that a disproportionate share of the county's certificates and vouchers were being used along the Route 1 corridor, a major thoroughfare inside the Capital Beltway (Lipton 1998).

Reliable indicators of the actual extent of geographic clustering among Section 8 recipients have not yet been developed. Most national analysis has focused on the share of households living in high-poverty or high-minority census tracts (Newman and Schnare 1997; Turner and Wilson 1998). These are clearly useful indicators of Section 8's location-al patterns, but significant clusters of recipients in nonpoor, racially mixed, or suburban neighborhoods could go undetected. New analysis being conducted by HUD defines clusters as neighborhoods where Section 8 participants are represented at two or more times their expected rate, given a neighborhood's share of the affordable rental housing stock. In the 50 biggest metropolitan areas nationwide, such clusters may exist in about 20 percent of neighborhoods where any affordable housing is found and account for a substantial share of all Section 8 recipients (perhaps as high as 45 percent).³ Researchers in the field of crime prevention have developed other methods for defining spatial clustering or hot spots (Sherman, Gratin, and Berger 1989; Sherman and Rogan 1995), and this type of geographic analysis may be applicable to assessing the extent of clustering among Section 8 recipients as well.

Concerns about whether Section 8 recipients may be undermining the stability and health of neighborhoods are linked in complicated ways to recent efforts to use the program to further the goal of poverty deconcentration. Since the early 1990s, the Department of Housing and Urban Development has explicitly encouraged local housing agencies to promote mobility and deconcentration among Section 8 recipients, based on evidence that the concentration of poor families in high-poverty and high-minority neighborhoods is bad for the families and the communities in which they live. In addition, many of the nation's most distressed public housing developments are being demolished, with some of their residents receiving Section 8 certificates to move to better neighborhoods. These dispersal policies have heightened public awareness that households may be using their Section 8 assistance to move from poor and minority neighborhoods to more affluent and/or predominantly white neighborhoods, as well as to fragile working-class communities, sometimes leading to fears about the potential impacts on these receiving communities. In other words, efforts to combat clustering may heighten community concerns about Section 8, possibly making deconcentration efforts more sensitive and challenging.

3. These estimates are based on preliminary data tabulations conducted in 1999 by HUD's Office of Policy Development and Research.

In October 1999, the Urban Institute, with support from HUD and The MacArthur Foundation, hosted a symposium of researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to discuss the issues of Section 8 mobility and neighborhood health (see the appendix for a roster of participants). Because considerable research and at least two previous conferences (Polikoff 1995; Turner and Williams 1998) have focused on whether and how to promote mobility among Section 8 recipients, these questions were not the main topics of the 1999 conference. Instead, this gathering focused primarily on the issue of whether and how Section 8 might be adversely affecting neighborhood well-being. The purpose was to explore what we know and what we need to know, and to highlight implications for both policy and research.

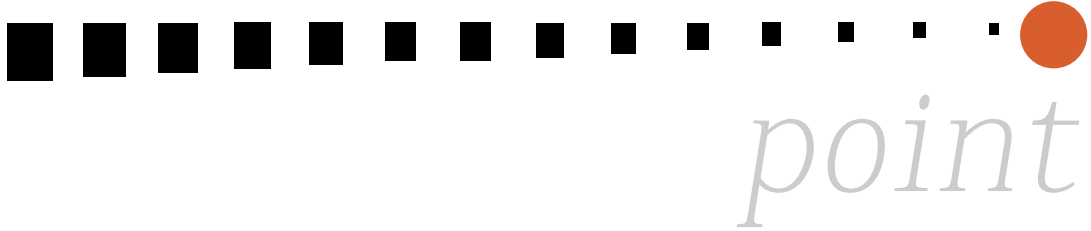
This report presents the current state of knowledge and debate on the issue of Section 8 mobility and neighborhood health, based on both the existing research literature and discussion at the 1999 symposium. It groups challenges that confront today's Section 8 program into three broad categories: 1) concerns about the impact of Section 8 on neighborhoods; 2) possible causes of geographic clustering among Section 8 recipients; and 3) special issues posed by the relocation of public housing residents. For each of these categories, we present competing claims about how and why Section 8 might be affecting the well-being of neighborhoods, summarize any research evidence that is available to assess these claims, and discuss a range of possible policy responses, from minor programmatic adjustments to more radical reform of the Section 8 program. Each section also offers an agenda of priority research needed to further inform the policy debate on the issues of Section 8 mobility and neighborhood health. The report concludes with a summary of both programmatic options and research priorities.

There is no concrete evidence to indicate that the Section 8 program is undermining the health of large numbers of urban neighborhoods. Although significant levels of geographic clustering do appear to occur, neighborhood opposition to the program has been limited to a relatively small number of loudly publicized instances. Nevertheless, the potential for adverse neighborhood impacts should not be ignored. The flare-ups of neighborhood opposition that have occurred may be symptoms of serious problems of program implementation and have the potential to undermine support for the Section 8 program as a whole. As the program grows in both size and visibility, policymakers and program administrators should actively seek to strengthen the program so that it expands opportunities for recipients to make real choices about where to live, improves both neighborhood and housing outcomes, and avoids excessive clustering in vulnerable neighborhoods.

impacts of section 8 on receiving neighborhoods



As the Section 8 program has grown in size and as HUD has promoted greater mobility and deconcentration of recipients, opposition to the program has arisen in several communities across the country. Some residents and community leaders have claimed that the influx of Section 8 families is undermining the health and stability of their neighborhoods, although there is no systematic evidence of cause and effect. Two different sets of concerns can be identified about the possible impacts of Section 8 on destination neighborhoods. The first focuses on communities' fears about Section 8 recipients and their behavior, while the second focuses on the behavior of property owners who accept Section 8 tenants.



"Section 8 recipients bring crime, drugs,
and gangs to previously safe and
healthy neighborhoods."



"Fears about Section 8
recipients reflect racial and class
prejudices and have no real basis in fact."

challenge 1a

Problem Behavior by Section 8 Recipients

In Boston, St. Louis, Baltimore, Chicago, and Philadelphia, opposition to Section 8 has flared up in neighborhoods where residents claimed that recipients were responsible for rising rates of crime and disorder. In many cases, further investigation revealed that the disruptive families were not Section 8 recipients. For example, Boston's Mayor Flynn convened a Committee on Subsidized Housing Issues to address concerns that disruptive behavior by Section 8 residents was contributing to the decline of stable neighborhoods. The committee issued its final report in 1993, concluding that most of the behavior problems attributed to the program turned out to involve unsubsidized families, not Section 8 recipients. The same has been true in several other cities, where investigations into community complaints have concluded that few if any of the problem families were, in fact, Section 8 recipients. Nevertheless, concerns about antisocial and disruptive behavior by Section 8 recipients persist in some communities.

There are good reasons to question whether some claims about the disruptive behavior of Section 8 recipients actually reflect racial prejudice or fears about racial change in the neighborhood. Many of the instances of neighborhood opposition to Section 8 appear to have occurred in areas experiencing some racial or ethnic transition. According to the head of Philadelphia's Human Relations Commission, "When people say, 'I have a complaint about a Section 8 tenant,' I can't recall a situation where it has not been a person of color" (Nicholas and Panaritis 1999). However, race is not always the driving concern; for example, in the southern suburbs of Chicago and in suburban Baltimore, middle-income African Americans (or their elected officials) expressed strong opposition to the influx of Section 8 recipients (Galster et al. 1999).

Although no reliable evidence is available to estimate the extent of disruptive behavior by Section 8 households, neighborhood complaints cannot simply be ignored. Some cities have explicitly targeted their Section 8 resources to families with a high probability of problem behaviors. Both Philadelphia and Boston, for example, gave first priority to families who were homeless. When program rules and procedures were reviewed in these cities, it turned out that local housing agencies had not taken action to enforce existing rules of behavior for either tenants or landlords and were not meeting with community groups to hear their concerns (Nicholas 1998). Thus, even though many complaints about bad behavior among Section 8 recipients have proved groundless, there are also cases in which community complaints appear to have been legitimate.

“ From Northeast to South Philadelphia, residents have complained of drug use, noisy behavior and other problems with Section 8 tenants. . . . Neighborhood leaders have complained that some Section 8 tenants play music too loud, scatter trash across lawns, or entertain guests all night. ”

(from a *Philadelphia Inquirer* news article; Nicholas 1999)

“ A few years ago, long-time residents say, the [St. Louis] neighborhood was virtually free of crime. But that changed quickly. From September 1992 to September 1993, police counted 54 crimes, including a murder, 13 drug offences and scores of thefts, burglaries and assaults. ”

(from a *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* news article; Todd 1994)

Scholars do not agree about whether and how neighborhoods are affected by newcomers who do not adhere to conventional norms of behavior. Galster and Zobel (1998) argue that poverty deconcentration might indeed have a negative effect on destination neighborhoods. They present a theoretical analysis under three alternative assumptions about whether poor people engage in more disruptive behavior when they are concentrated in high-poverty neighborhoods. This analysis suggests that dispersing the poor will only yield a net reduction in socially disruptive behavior *if* an individual's likelihood of engaging in problem behaviors rises as the poverty rate of his neighborhood increases *and* if problem behaviors increase faster at high neighborhood poverty rates than at low neighborhood poverty rates.⁴ Otherwise, Galster and Zobel suggest, deconcentration may create as much or more disruption in receiving neighborhoods as it eliminates in sending neighborhoods. Moreover, when Galster and Zobel review the existing literature on the relationship between neighborhood characteristics and individual behavior, they conclude that the evidence is thin and contradictory.

Other researchers, however, have argued that a strong neighborhood environment can discourage or sanction disruptive behavior by individual residents.⁵ The literature on community crime prevention suggests that in a socially organized neighborhood, residents exercise informal social controls over one another, reinforcing social norms of acceptable behavior and reducing crime and disorder (Greenberg, Rohe, and Williams 1982; Rosenbaum 1988; Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997). Furthermore, in a recent empirical analysis of subsidized housing developments in New York City, Saegert and Winkel (1998) conclude that residential communities with higher social capital enjoy better outcomes in terms of crime and physical condition.

Property values provide an important indicator of changes in a neighborhood's stability and well-being, and many of the claims about the crime and disruptive behavior associated with Section 8 also raise the specter of declining property values. Very little empirical research has explored the effect of Section 8 on neighborhood property values. Galster et al. (1999) analyzed patterns of home sale prices in Baltimore County neighborhoods surrounding Section 8 units. They found that a small number of Section 8 units had a positive impact on nearby property values, but that larger concentrations of subsidized units had an adverse effect. The authors suggest that high concentrations of subsidized units may stigmatize a small geographic area as a subsidized housing neighborhood, resulting in lower

4. In the authors' words, "The relationship between neighborhood poverty rate and individual propensity to engage in problem behaviors is characterized by a positive threshold or by an increasing marginal impact."

5. See Ellen and Turner (1997) for a comprehensive review of the empirical evidence on how neighborhood environment may affect individual behavior and outcomes.

property values. Lee, Culhane, and Wachter (1999) analyzed the impacts of subsidized units on nearby property values in the city of Philadelphia and found that while public housing developments had a significant negative impact on surrounding property values, scattered-site public housing and Section 8 certificates and vouchers had only slight negative impacts. The generalizability of these studies is limited, since they provide evidence on only two metropolitan areas, but they do represent a valuable starting point for further analysis.

The empirical analysis of property value impacts also raises the possibility that the neighborhoods where Section 8 households locate already have below-average property values and appreciation rates. Specifically, Galster et al. (1999) find that subsidized units tend to be located in subareas (within census tracts) that have lower-than-average property values and appreciation rates. As a consequence, Section 8 units may be perceived as linked to declining property values, even though they are not the cause. This finding raises important questions about the factors that shape and constrain Section 8 location choices and that may lead to geographic clustering of assisted households. These issues are discussed further in section 2.

Despite loud claims and heated local debates, there is little definitive evidence about the extent to which Section 8 recipients engage in disruptive behavior or how neighborhoods may be affected. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to ignore these issues entirely, and local housing authorities can consider a wide range of possible actions to address or preempt community concerns about disruptive behavior by Section 8 recipients. Options include establishing more rigorous screening criteria, educating landlords about their responsibilities, responding systematically to community complaints, and tracking where recipients live to try to avoid the clustering that might exacerbate perceptions of problem behavior. Furthermore, as more very low income families (and former public housing residents) enter the Section 8 program, some may need supportive services to be successful, and housing authorities might consider forming partnerships with social service agencies to provide counseling and training for participants about their obligations as tenants. However, some complaints about disruptive behavior simply reflect stereotypes and prejudice. To counter these negative stereotypes, housing authorities could be more proactive about educating landlords and the community at large about the Section 8 program, possibly forming partnerships with other community organizations to build support for the program and for low-income tenants in general.

Housing authorities may be able to **screen out potential problem tenants**. While housing authorities must base eligibility primarily on income, they are authorized to establish additional criteria based on family behavior or suitability for tenancy. This type of screening may

Program and Policy Implications

eliminate some applicants and identify others who need counseling or support in order to be successful Section 8 participants. Symposium participants also discussed the merits of imposing additional requirements for participation (such as work requirements) as possible directions for HUD policy. In developing any new screening or eligibility policies, it will be important to balance concerns about identifying problem tenants with equally valid concerns about applicants' privacy and the risk of denying assistance to vulnerable families who need affordable housing. Currently, little is known about criteria that are good predictors of a family's future behavior, the effectiveness of screening, or the potential adverse consequences of overly strict screening.

Since housing authorities' ability to screen participants is limited, they may also want to **educate landlords** about their obligations to screen potential tenants and address problem behavior. Landlords should recognize that their responsibilities to screen and monitor tenants are the same for Section 8 tenants as they are for regular, private-market tenants. But while landlords have responsibility for addressing problem behavior and for evicting tenants if necessary, symposium participants agreed that the Section 8 program does not always provide them with assistance and support. In other words, housing authorities could help participating landlords by **responding to landlord complaints** and helping them **remove problem tenants** if necessary. One symposium participant commented that while housing authorities may not have legal obligations to take any action beyond terminating Section 8 assistance, the housing agency has some responsibility for that tenant's presence in a community and therefore should help to ensure that they are evicted.

In addition to screening and landlord education, housing authorities may want to **provide more extensive supportive services to participants**. Two symposium participants indicated that their agencies have developed programs that provide such services as needs assessment, case management, and workshops on topics like tenant obligations and budgeting. One has partnered with nonprofit social service agencies to provide counseling and help participants secure employment. The other has received permission from HUD to convert some of its vouchers into funds for a targeted program of services. Some analysts and practitioners believe that the need for supportive services will grow in the future due to recent changes in federal policy that may increase the proportion of very low income, vulnerable families participating in Section 8.⁶

6. The Quality Housing and Work Requirements Act (QHWRA) requires that 75 percent of a housing authority's Section 8 recipients must have incomes below 30 percent of the area median income. Some practitioners believe that this requirement will lead to significant changes in the characteristics of program participants; others argue that most housing authorities already meet this target.

Housing authorities can also address the issue of problem participants by **monitoring and responding to community complaints**. This means tracking complaints and promptly addressing any real problems with disruptive tenants or bad landlords. Many local housing authorities lack any systematic mechanism for keeping track of complaints about their Section 8 program or for following up to determine whether and where real problems may need to be addressed. In contrast, the Housing Authority for the City of Los Angeles has developed an ombudsman program to track and respond to complaints from tenants, landlords, and community residents. The Alameda County Housing Authority has formed partnerships with local police in order to quickly determine when Section 8 participants are involved in criminal activity. Housing authorities can publicize their willingness to address complaints through landlord newsletters, ads in community newspapers, and other types of outreach. However, symposium participants agreed that it is also essential to protect participants' rights to privacy and choice. Individuals making complaints about Section 8 should not be told whether or not a particular household participates in the program, and housing authorities should not bar families from choosing particular neighborhoods.

While agreeing that disruptive behavior by Section 8 tenants sometimes occurs, many symposium participants questioned how often these concerns reflect stereotypes and prejudice rather than real problems. Several participants suggested that some complaints may simply involve behaviors that differ from community norms but are not illegal. These might include dress, type or volume of music, use of outdoor spaces, or boisterous behavior by youth. Consequently, some symposium participants argued that in addition to providing Section 8 tenants with additional training, housing authorities could **reach out to community organizations** to try to resolve these types of disputes and provide support for both tenants and neighborhoods. Faith-based organizations may be particularly useful partners, especially if they are willing to provide mentoring for new, low-income families in their communities. Such proactive efforts may prove particularly valuable in racially changing neighborhoods, where concerns about the behavior of Section 8 participants seem most likely to arise.⁷ Further, housing authorities might try to **dispel stereotypes about Section 8 participants** through high-quality public relations and education efforts. Specific activities might include sponsoring a media campaign, holding community workshops, or partnering with other types of organizations to advocate for open housing.

7. Note that some symposium participants raised concerns about alerting community organizations in advance that Section 8 families may be moving into their neighborhood. In some circumstances, such proactive efforts might violate the privacy of individual families or even fuel neighborhood concerns about the Section 8 program and its effects.

Future Research Priorities

Further research is clearly needed to help policymakers and practitioners better understand the extent to which disruptive behavior by Section 8 recipients is a problem and whether and how communities can regulate the behavior of residents. Specifically, basic research is needed to address the following key questions:

- What is the incidence (and severity) of problem behaviors among Section 8 recipients (compared with other low-income renters and with the general population)?
- Does screening reduce the incidence of problem behaviors, and if so, what indicators effectively predict problem behaviors?
- Do counseling and supportive services reduce the incidence of problem behaviors?
- Does the entry of Section 8 families into a neighborhood affect quality of life or property values, and if so, under what conditions?
- To what extent, and in what types of neighborhoods, are Section 8 recipients clustered?
- Do public perceptions of clustering and bad behavior among Section 8 recipients match reality?

Systematic investigation of these research questions could help federal policymakers and local program administrators decide whether and how to invest in efforts aimed at addressing problem behaviors among Section 8 recipients and their potential effects on receiving neighborhoods.

In addition, HUD could strengthen administration of the Section 8 program by providing local housing authorities with a series of best practice reports to disseminate information about effective strategies for dealing with problem tenants and building positive relationships with communities. Possible topics for tenant-related issues include counseling and supportive service models; partnerships with social service and local welfare agencies; curricula for educating tenants about the Section 8 program and their responsibilities; examples of partnerships with police; and strategies for tracking and responding to landlord and community complaints. A series of reports on improving the image of the Section 8 program and Section 8 tenants might include strategies for creating partnerships with community organizations and faith-based organizations and examples of successful public relations and/or educational campaigns.

Finally, local housing authorities need tools and examples of how they can collect and analyze local data to understand and address poten-

tial behavior problems and neighborhood consequences. For example, housing authorities could take advantage of tools for monitoring and mapping complaints about disruptive behavior so they can easily follow up on situations that involve Section 8 participants; tools for obtaining and analyzing data from local police departments so they can track serious problems that may require termination of Section 8 assistance; and tools for conducting assessments that will allow them to identify participants who may require counseling and support.



point

"Landlords in neighborhoods where demand is weak exploit the Section 8 program and take advantage of lax program administration, accelerating disinvestment, and decline."



counterpoint

"Section 8 subsidies bring needed rental income to landlords in marginal neighborhoods and may actually help stabilize or revitalize the rental stock."

challenge 1b

Landlord Incentives in the Section 8 Program

In several of the communities where neighborhood opposition to Section 8 has flared up, investigation has called attention to the role of unscrupulous property owners. Landlords can affect program outcomes in a number of ways. First, they clearly play an important role in determining whether problem behavior by individual Section 8 recipients becomes a serious problem for the neighborhoods in which the recipients live. In Boston, the Section 8 problem came to be seen as a problem of absentee landlords, and in Philadelphia, the housing agency's response to complaints about Section 8 problems included banning landlords who were not maintaining their properties. Landlords who fail to screen prospective tenants, enforce the lease terms, fix any damage to their properties, or evict destructive residents may allow individual Section 8 tenants to undermine neighborhood well-being. In effect, the beneficial effects of living in a healthy neighborhood will not be realized by poor families unless the behavioral standards and norms of these neighborhoods are enforced, and landlords are key players in this process. Thus, responsible landlords are critical to the long-term success of the Section 8 program.

In addition, some evidence suggests that landlords may sometimes exploit the Section 8 program to maximize their rental income at the expense of neighborhood well-being. When HUD officials followed up on community complaints from Baltimore that Section 8 recipients were destabilizing the health of the Patterson Park neighborhood, they found that because the housing authority was including more affluent neighborhoods nearby in its determination of reasonable market rents, property owners in Patterson Park could earn *higher* rents from the Section 8 program than unsubsidized renters were willing to pay for the same units. Therefore, landlords sought out program participants as tenants and did not sanction or evict them, even for lease violations. In fact, Pollock and Rutkowski (1998) argue that real estate investors have strong incentives to misuse the Section 8 program in neighborhoods where demand is weak, possibly even acquiring property in these neighborhoods for this purpose.

But under different circumstances it may be possible for Section 8 to help stabilize a neighborhood's housing stock and potentially increase its property values. As discussed earlier, Galster et al. (1999) find that small numbers of Section 8 tenants are associated with increases in values, and suggest that this may reflect the fact that landlords who rent to Section 8 recipients are required to make improvements to their properties in

“A well-intended program has turned into an unchecked landlord welfare program.”

(from a news report in the *Washington Post*; Lipton 1998)

order to meet Housing Quality Standards. Research on supply-side effects of the Experimental Housing Allowance Program (EHAP) in which the concept of tenant-based housing assistance was first tested found no perceptible effect on rents or property values in either a tight housing market . . . or a loose market. However, approximately half of households surveyed from neighborhoods with relatively high levels of program activity reported that they thought the program had caused property values to rise, improved property upkeep, and increased the amount of residential repair (Lowry 1983).

Schwartz (1998) documents how New York City has used Section 8 in conjunction with other subsidy programs to develop and rehabilitate affordable housing in distressed neighborhoods. More specifically, the city used Section 8 assistance to enable formerly homeless families and other poor households to occupy housing rehabilitated with funds from other programs. In other words, the city managed to use them as de facto operating subsidies for some of the projects it helped finance. Schwartz argues that, used in this way, Section 8 and Fair Market Rents yield important benefits: The presence of Section 8 tenants increases a development's rent roll, enabling owners to better maintain the property, provide additional services, build up reserves, and tolerate higher operating costs for vacancy and arrearage losses.⁸

“ Renting to
Section 8 [is] so
profitable many speculators
are no longer interested in
ordinary working class
renters.”
(from a 1995 *Baltimore Sun*
news report)

As discussed earlier, research on the relationship between Section 8 and neighborhood property values raises the possibility that a disproportionate share of recipients may be located in areas where values are low and appreciation is weak. Again, Galster et al. (1999) caution that the apparent causal link between Section 8 and lower property values may actually reflect the fact that Section 8 recipients are overrepresented in lower-value areas. This possibility raises the concern (discussed further in section 2) that rental property owners in higher-value neighborhoods may not have much incentive to participate in the program, since market demand for their units may be stronger. It is in lower-value neighborhoods that the guaranteed rent stream offered by Section 8 has the greatest appeal to property owners and the greatest potential for both positive and negative effects, depending upon the extent of clustering and the willingness of landlords to enforce lease terms and behavioral norms.

In this context, the issue of race arises yet again. The research literature on residential segregation and discrimination provides good reasons to suspect that market demand tends to be weakest in the locations where minority Section 8 recipients are most likely to find housing. First, existing evidence indicates that it is minority Section 8 recipients, particularly African Americans, who are most likely to be geographically clustered and

8. Schwartz does not address the question of whether the large numbers of formerly homeless families may have disrupted or destabilized the neighborhoods in which these properties were located.

to locate in higher-poverty and higher-minority neighborhoods (Turner and Wilson 1998). Moreover, research on the persistence of racial segregation in urban housing markets indicates that the neighborhoods in which blacks live both in the central city and in the suburbs have lower socioeconomic status than those in which comparable whites live (Logan, Alba, and Leung 1996). Middle-class minority neighborhoods are also closer (geographically) to poorer neighborhoods and neighborhoods with higher crime rates and include more residents with precarious economic and social circumstances than middle-class white neighborhoods. And because many whites are reluctant to move into neighborhoods that they perceive as black or racially changing (Farley, Fielding, and Kryson 1997), areas that are most open to minorities may also have the weakest property values and be most susceptible to decline.

These stubborn patterns suggest that apparently stable, nonpoor neighborhoods that are racially mixed or predominantly black are particularly vulnerable to being destabilized by an influx of poor households or by incomers who are disruptive of behavioral norms (Pattillo 1998; Pollock and Rutkowski 1998). In other words, racially mixed and predominantly black neighborhoods are in many ways the most likely communities to be open and welcoming to minority Section 8 recipients, creating the potential for geographic clustering. At the same time, these neighborhoods are already at risk of low or declining property values, which potentially provide incentives for property owners to take advantage of the Section 8 program, further destabilizing the community.

Overall, existing research about landlord incentives and neighborhood effects in the Section 8 program is inconclusive. Nevertheless, local housing agencies can take steps to discourage Section 8 landlords from receiving above-market rents, tolerating disruptive behavior by their tenants, concentrating recipients in neighborhoods where demand is weak, and potentially undermining neighborhood well-being. Some symposium participants suggested that such reforms might run counter to efforts to broaden Section 8's attractiveness to landlords and open up the program to a wider diversity of housing providers and communities (discussed further in section 2). But others argued that reforms of this kind would push housing authorities to reach out to successful property owners in desirable neighborhoods. Nevertheless, getting tough with a landlord who is abusing the program may hurt current recipients, at least in the short term, particularly if the landlord leases to a large number of program participants. Therefore, symposium participants argued for a combination of landlord education, sanctions, and *positive* incentives to address concerns about the role of property owners in the Section 8 program.

The first steps housing authorities can take are to **monitor the location of Section 8 recipients** and **respond promptly to complaints** about both families and landlords. HUD's management information systems

“What I’m talking about is the amateur landlords who made bad investments in the late ‘80s and are looking for Section 8 to bail them out.”

(from a *Boston Globe* news report; Canellos 1993)

Program and Policy Implications

provide housing authorities with the technical capacity to map where Section 8 recipients live in order to anticipate and address any excessive clustering that may occur.⁹ It is important to note that housing authorities cannot deny a Section 8 recipient's right to move into a neighborhood of his or her choice, regardless of the extent of clustering. However, housing authorities can encourage recipients to consider other neighborhoods by identifying available units and providing information about the relative strengths and weaknesses of various neighborhoods. In addition to tracking recipient locations, housing authorities may wish to track complaints. As indicated earlier, some housing authorities do so now logging complaints about problem tenants, properties, and landlords; investigating these complaints promptly; and addressing problem behavior if it actually involves the Section 8 program.¹⁰ A system of this kind not only makes citizens feel that the housing authority is responsive and accountable, it can also help identify problem neighborhoods or property owners.

Local housing authorities can also **strengthen rent reasonableness procedures** in order to ensure that property owners are not earning above-market rents from the Section 8 program. One symposium participant described this as the hardest job that Section 8 administrators have to carry out and one of the least well defined. If rents are set too low, fewer landlords will participate in the program and geographic clustering may be intensified. But if rents are set too high especially in neighborhoods where market demand is weak or declining unscrupulous property owners may see an opportunity to make money off the Section 8 program at the expense of both recipients and the surrounding community. HUD clearly needs to provide more guidance to local agencies about how rent reasonableness should be administered and how potentially vulnerable neighborhoods can be identified.

In addition to more systematic monitoring, some housing authorities have developed strategies for **providing high-quality information and training for participating landlords** in order to inform them of their rights and responsibilities under the Section 8 program and to help them do an effective job of preventing or addressing problem behavior by tenants. Possible topics include guidelines for fair and effective screening of potential tenants, strategies for responding to problem behavior or community complaints about a tenant, and procedures for eviction of Section

9. The Multifamily Tenant Characteristics System (MTCS) provides demographic and program information for all Section 8 recipients, including their addresses. The HUD 2020 software can provide the capacity for housing authorities to map these addresses in relation to neighborhood characteristics. For more information on both of these systems, see HUD's Web page.

10. The goal of responsiveness to community complaints must be balanced against the need to protect recipient privacy and the confidentiality of program information. Individuals making complaints should not be informed whether a particular household or landlord participates in the Section 8 program.

8 participants. Some housing authorities have involved local property owners in the development of outreach and training programs, providing an active role for responsible landlords in making the program successful.

When the evidence indicates that a landlord is abusing the Section 8 program failing to enforce lease terms or maintain units to housing quality standards the local housing authority can **impose sanctions**. The most obvious sanctions available include abating or withholding payment to the landlord until a problem is resolved, terminating their Housing Assistance Payments contract, and disqualifying them from further participation in the program.¹¹ In the short term these sanctions may actually make conditions worse for residents and possibly for the surrounding community. Therefore, housing authorities need some carrots to deploy along with the sticks. For example, a housing authority might offer hands-on technical assistance to landlords who have difficulty with Section 8 tenants or partner with a neighborhood reinvestment or community development agency to provide small grants or low-interest loans for repairs needed to meet housing quality standards.

This leads to the issue of **partnerships among Section 8 and other local programs**. Many housing authorities can probably improve their performance considerably with existing resources, but effectively addressing the problems of property decline and disinvestment in vulnerable neighborhoods may require the active involvement of other local agencies as well. Section 8 is likely to be only one small piece of a complex puzzle that includes community policing, housing code enforcement, supportive services to troubled families, and targeted subsidies for property improvements. In these cases, housing authorities should be active participants in communitywide efforts to stabilize troubled neighborhoods and reverse the process of decline. The new housing authority planning requirements being implemented under the Quality Housing and Work Requirements Act of 1999 (QHWRA) are intended to promote more effective communication and collaboration at the local level. Local housing authorities may be able to capitalize on these requirements to build partnerships with other public and nonprofit agencies active in their communities.

Further research is needed to help local housing authorities anticipate and address potential problems with participating landlords, to better understand whether and how Section 8 affects neighborhood property values, and to identify circumstances in which property owners are most likely to take advantage of the Section 8 program. Some of these research priorities overlap with suggestions introduced in the previous section, relat-

Future Research Priorities

11. Some symposium participants indicated that the language of the contract between a housing authority and a landlord needs to be strengthened to prevent or discourage lawsuits when the housing authority decides to terminate the contract.

ing to recipient behavior. Specifically, basic research is needed to address the following key questions:

- Does the entry of Section 8 families into a neighborhood affect quality of life or property values, and if so, under what conditions?
- What types of neighborhoods are most likely to be adversely affected by the entry of Section 8 families?
- To what extent, and in what types of neighborhoods, are Section 8 recipients clustered?
- What incentives and/or sanctions would encourage Section 8 landlords to maintain their properties and enforce lease terms?

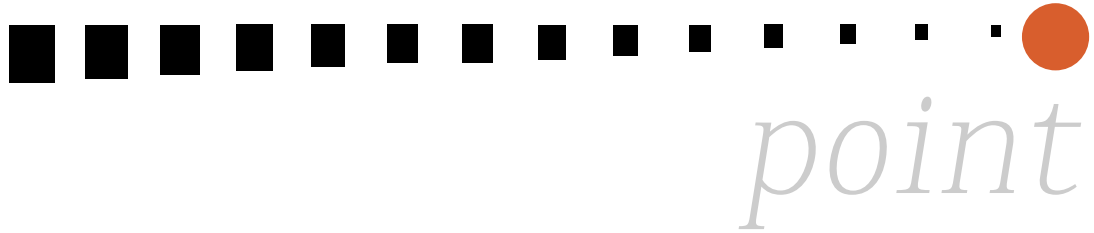
Systematic investigation of these questions could help federal policymakers and local program administrators decide whether and how to invest in efforts aimed at addressing problems with landlords and their potential effects on the neighborhoods where Section 8 recipients live.

In addition, HUD could assist local program administrators by producing a series of best practice reports to disseminate information about effective strategies for preventing or addressing problems with landlords. Again, there is considerable overlap here with best practices in the area of recipient behavior. These reports might include rent reasonableness procedures; programs and curricula for landlord education and training sessions; strategies for imposing effective sanctions on problem landlords; and examples of successful partnerships with local police, code enforcement officials, housing rehabilitation programs, or other targeted neighborhood revitalization initiatives. Finally, local housing agencies need tools and examples for identifying vulnerable neighborhoods and anticipating potential clustering. Specifically, they need data and methods that will enable them to map Section 8 locations, identify clusters of Section 8 recipients, and assess market conditions in neighborhoods where these clusters are located. In addition, housing authorities need tools for monitoring and mapping neighborhood complaints so that they can easily follow up on complaints that actually involve Section 8 recipients and quickly determine whether complaints are clustered in particular neighborhoods.

causes of geographic clustering among section 8 recipients



As long as subsidized households are widely scattered, they are unlikely to have any major or lasting impact on their surrounding communities, regardless of individual behavior. But if some neighborhoods are effectively closed to Section 8 or if families cluster in significant numbers for other reasons, then greater potential exists for either real or perceived impacts on the receiving neighborhoods. There are reasons to suspect that overconcentration of Section 8 households may cause problems, including opposition from receiving communities, even if there is no disruptive behavior by individual recipients. In other words, clustering does not inevitably result in disruptive behavior, but it can produce neighborhood opposition anyway. This section discusses two sets of arguments about why Section 8 recipients may be geographically clustered. The first focuses on the availability of affordable rental housing in different types of neighborhoods the supply side of the equation while the second focuses on the location decisions of participating families the demand side.



"The limited availability of affordable rental housing forces Section 8 recipients to cluster geographically."



"Although plenty of housing is available, landlords exclude Section 8 recipients from properties in suburban and low-poverty neighborhoods."

challenge 2a

Supply-Side Constraints on Location Choice

To some extent, location patterns among Section 8 recipients may simply mirror the geographic distribution of affordable rental housing. Historically, many affluent suburbs have used zoning and land-use regulations to limit the development of rental housing, especially more affordable rental housing, in order to maintain their property tax base and social homogeneity (Advisory Commission on Regulatory Barriers to Affordable Housing 1991; Malpezzi 1994). Few states require local jurisdictions to build or accommodate their fair share of affordable rental housing (Burchell et al. 1994). As a consequence, the stock of rental housing units tends to be somewhat concentrated in central cities, older suburbs, and less-affluent neighborhoods (Orfield 1997). Thus, Section 8 recipients may be effectively excluded from some desirable areas by the absence of moderate-cost rental housing in these communities.

In addition to concerns about the overall distribution of rental housing units, some local practitioners and low-income housing advocates argue that Fair Market Rent levels are too low to permit families access to many desirable neighborhoods. The subsidies that Section 8 provides to participating families are calculated as the difference between 30 percent of household income (the family's contribution) and a unit's market rent up to the local payment standard. Payment standards are governed by Fair Market Rent levels, which are set by HUD based on data for local housing market areas to reflect prevailing rents for physically adequate units. Fair Market Rents vary by unit size and are adjusted each year to reflect changes in market conditions. In 1994, HUD changed the formula for calculating Fair Market Rents, setting them at the 40th percentile of units in the market rather than the 45th percentile. Although HUD has presented data showing that this reduction did not substantially cut the number or geographic deconcentration of eligible rental units, some local practitioners have argued that the change in Fair Market Rents has seriously constrained their ability to deconcentrate Section 8 families.

Current law and regulations give local housing agencies new discretion to set their Section 8 payment standards anywhere between 90 and 110 percent of the federally determined Fair Market Rents.¹² These payment standards may vary by neighborhood if necessary to promote geographic deconcentration. In addition, local housing authorities can apply for HUD approval to set payment standards even higher potentially up to 120 per-

12. HUD analysis indicates that payment standards at 10 percent of current Fair Market Rents would be higher than Fair Market Rents set at the 45th percentile.

“ The law was intended to get them out all over the county, but a lot of areas don't want to be bothered with this kind of housing. ”

(from a *Chicago Tribune* news article; Callahan 1995)

cent of the Fair Market Rent levels. This system of local discretion over payment standards may help address practitioner concerns about the adequacy of Fair Market Rent levels and provide the flexibility to expand access to desirable neighborhoods. However, the system is new and some local housing authorities may not yet understand it fully.¹³ In addition, recent reforms to the Section 8 program require housing authorities to target 75 percent of their Section 8 assistance to households with incomes below 30 percent of the area median and prohibit recipients from contributing more than 40 percent of their income for rent. Some local housing agencies believe that this combination of restrictions will significantly reduce their ability to achieve geographic deconcentration, because Fair Market Rents are low relative to market rents in desirable neighborhoods and the lowest-income households may need to contribute more than 40 percent of their income in order to make up the difference. No evidence is available about the extent of this problem or how it might be addressed by adjusting payment standards.

“ You’re on the waiting list, your number comes up, you get your certificate, you go out and find a landlord who will rent to Section 8 holders. Unfortunately, not all of them will.”

(from a *Chicago Sun-Times* news article; Ihejirika 1993)

Even when Fair Market Rents are adequate, not all of the units available at (or near) local payment standards are necessarily made available to Section 8 recipients. HUD is currently conducting research to assess the extent to which Section 8 recipients live in poorer neighborhoods relative to the overall stock of affordable housing. Turner and Wilson (1998) found that in four of the six metropolitan areas they analyzed, Section 8 recipients were significantly less widely dispersed geographically than the below Fair Market Rent stock. One explanation for this pattern may lie in the administrative hurdles families face if they use their Section 8 assistance to move from one jurisdiction to another. Although the Section 8 program permits recipients to use their assistance anywhere in the United States, administrative barriers make this portability feature burdensome not only for families but for sending and receiving housing authorities as well (Feins et al. 1997).

In addition, many researchers as well as practitioners are convinced that there may be a Section 8 submarket that excludes some of the rental housing that should be available below the Fair Market Rent. In their national study of the Section 8 program, Kennedy and Finkel (1994) concluded that most successful recipients either rented in place convincing their current landlord to accept Section 8 payments or found a landlord who already had other Section 8 tenants. In other words, few found units owned by landlords who were not already participating in the program. The same pattern is apparent from focus group discussions with both successful and unsuccessful Section 8 participants in Chicago (Popkin and Cunningham 1999). Moreover, many of the landlords who accepted these families reported that they made only some of their units available to Section 8 families; other units they owned were not available

13. Some program administrators and low-income housing advocates worry about increasing payment standards, since higher subsidy costs per household reduce the number of households that can be served from a fixed budget. However, HUD's new regulations address this problem by renewing Section 8 subsidies at their actual per-unit cost.

for program participants. This type of strategy has been echoed in more recent interviews with landlords in the Washington, D.C., and Chicago areas, with several landlords indicating that some but not all of their properties are open to Section 8 tenants (Cunningham, Sylvester, and Turner 1999; Lenz and Coles 1999).

Landlords who own rental property in desirable neighborhoods may not see strong incentives to participate in the Section 8 program. In many metropolitan areas today, rental housing demand is very strong; vacancy rates are low, prevailing rent levels are rising, and landlords do not have any difficulty finding market-rate tenants for units in good neighborhoods (HUD 1999). Under these circumstances, landlords clearly do not *need* Section 8 to lease units they own in desirable neighborhoods. In fact, some landlords avoid participating in the Section 8 program altogether because they do not want to become entangled in red tape and bureaucratic hassles, and when market demand is strong, these landlords have no reason to change their minds. Section 8 programs that are not efficiently administered have particular difficulty attracting landlords with properties in desirable neighborhoods. A housing agency with a reputation for delays or unreliability in conducting inspections, approving leases, or making payments is likely to have serious problems convincing landlords to accept Section 8 tenants.¹⁴ Only landlords who cannot otherwise find paying tenants for their properties are inclined to tolerate these inefficiencies.

Minority Section 8 recipients may face additional barriers gaining access to housing in predominantly white neighborhoods, even if units are available below Fair Market Rents. To some extent, locational outcomes may reflect either the preferences or the fears of minority participants (discussed in section 2B). Nevertheless, we know that housing market discrimination persists at very high levels in rental housing markets nationwide (Turner, Struyk, and Yinger 1991; Yinger 1998). Although increasing numbers of minority households have gained access to suburban neighborhoods in the past two decades, researchers continue to find evidence that minorities face significant barriers to entry into white suburban neighborhoods. Even after controlling for socioeconomic status, minorities are significantly less likely than whites to move to predominantly white neighborhoods and more likely to move to minority or racially mixed neighborhoods (Stearns and Logan 1986; South and Crowder 1998).

When Section 8 recipients discuss their own perceptions of discrimination, they cite few cases of overt discrimination on the basis of race, but many indicate that there are neighborhoods in which they would not even look for housing because they expect either discrimination or harassment. Many families with children, particularly teenagers, do appear to have experienced explicit discrimination. Section 8 recipients report that teenage

“ I have never had a good experience with Section 8 as administered by the Chicago Housing Authority. . . . From the arrogant receptionists at the main office, to the intransigent bureaucrats, to the inability of landlords to speak to anyone in charge of anything, to annual inspections, to minuscule rent increases that don't come close to covering increases in trash collection, taxes and heating costs, dealing with Section 8 is simply not worth the aggravation to landlords who keep buildings in fine condition and have no problem attracting tenants from the free marketplace. ”

(from a letter to the editor in the *Chicago Tribune*; Langowski 1997)

14. HUD has recently introduced the Section 8 Management Assessment Program (SEMAP) to rate and monitor the performance of housing authorities in these and other areas of program administration.

boys are perceived as undesirable because they are assumed to be gang-bangers, while teenage girls are perceived as undesirable because they attract teenage boys (Popkin and Cunningham 1999; Popkin et al. 2000). Some researchers and fair-housing advocates argue that discrimination against Section 8 is becoming the new and socially acceptable way to discriminate on the basis of race or ethnicity (Beck 1996).¹⁵

Program and Policy Implications

The existing research evidence does not definitively resolve the debate about whether the stock of housing affordable for Section 8 recipients is sufficient to meet their needs without excessive clustering. Nevertheless, there are many steps that local housing authorities can take to expand the number and diversity of landlords participating in the Section 8 program. Some housing authorities might even decide to participate in the development of affordable housing throughout the area if the stock and location of affordable rental units are not sufficient. An essential prerequisite for success in these efforts, however, is high-quality program administration. If Section 8 is poorly administered if property owners encounter excessive delays, uncertainties, or red tape efforts to expand landlord participation will almost certainly fail.

As discussed earlier, the first step housing authorities can take is to **monitor the location of Section 8 recipients** in order to determine whether clustering is occurring and to identify target areas for outreach to landlords. Not only do housing authorities need to know where recipients are living, many may need more complete and accurate information about where moderate-cost rental housing is located in the region. HUD is currently developing indicators that local housing authorities can use to highlight locations where Section 8 recipients are either over- or underrepresented relative to the stock of affordable rental housing and to target areas where the affordable rental stock appears to be underutilized by program participants.

In addition, local agencies may need to **strengthen program administration** to ensure that bureaucratic delays and red tape do not deter property owners from participating in Section 8. Key issues include delays in conducting initial inspections and approving leases, and delays or unreliability in making monthly subsidy payments. Landlords can also be deterred from program participation if they perceive that program staff are unresponsive to their questions and problems. Some housing authorities have improved not only the performance of their programs but also perceptions among landlords by actively involving local property owners in decisions about program administration, training new landlords, and resolving disputes between participating landlords and program staff. However, several symposium participants argued that even when the Section 8 program is

15. Some states and localities prohibit discrimination on the basis of a person's source of income; such laws may (in some cases) be able to sanction property owners who refuse to participate in the Section 8 program.

effectively administered, some delays and costs to the landlord are inevitable. They recommend that housing authorities be granted the discretion (and resources) to **offer landlord incentives**. One possibility is to provide holding payments, which would compensate landlords for the time units are vacant while inspections and lease approvals are being conducted.

Housing authorities may also need to conduct **ongoing outreach to new landlords**, targeting those who own property in desirable communities in order to expand the number and diversity of owners who participate in the Section 8 program. Many local Section 8 programs appear to conduct outreach intermittently or not at all because they feel they already have enough participating landlords to accommodate all their program participants. This attitude may contribute to geographic clustering and a Section 8 submarket. In order to maximize recipient choices and avoid clustering, housing authorities may need to continuously renew and expand the pool of landlords who accept Section 8 tenants. Effective outreach efforts often attempt to dispel any prevailing myths about the program, assuring landlords that they retain the discretion to screen and evict tenants, that accepting one Section 8 family does not require them to accept every applicant, and that most Section 8 recipients make good tenants. If the housing authority (or a local partner) provides counseling and support services to participating families or offers postplacement dispute resolution, these services can be important selling points in marketing Section 8 to doubtful landlords. Again, involving participating landlords is likely to improve the effectiveness of such an education and outreach campaign.

Under current law, housing authorities have new discretion to **adjust payment standards** in order to enable participating families to gain access to more desirable neighborhoods, possibly even varying payment standards by location in order to promote deconcentration. Even with this flexibility, however, some argue that Fair Market Rents are too low and that HUD should **raise Fair Market Rents nationally**, possibly returning them to the 45th percentile of prevailing rents. Several symposium participants also argued that the new statutory constraint prohibiting recipients from paying more than 40 percent of their income for rent should be lifted so that Section 8 can **allow participants to contribute a larger share of their income toward rent**. Others strongly disagreed, however, arguing that the limitation on tenant rent contributions protects low-income households from paying excessive rent burdens.

Although evidence about the incidence of discrimination against Section 8 recipients is limited, many local administrators routinely **inform participants of their rights under the Fair Housing Act** and help those who believe they have been victims of discrimination to file complaints. In particular, participants may be victims of discrimination on the basis of their family status or the presence or age of their children, as well as on the basis of their race or ethnicity. Working in partnership with local fair housing organizations, housing authorities may be able to heighten awareness of

federal antidiscrimination protections among both participants and landlords. In addition, if **state or local laws prohibit discrimination based on source of income**, the local housing agency may want to consider initiating complaints against landlords who refuse to accept Section 8 tenants on this basis.

For some housing authorities, expanding locational options for Section 8 recipients may mean helping some move to nearby jurisdictions. In order to **reduce barriers to portability**, the various housing authorities within a metropolitan housing market can work in partnership to simplify application procedures, provide clear and accurate information about portability options, and reduce the delays and roadblocks that families face when they try to transfer from one jurisdiction to another. At the same time, HUD needs to continue its efforts to minimize the costs and burdens that portability creates for local administrators. Some symposium participants argued, however, that the problems of portability cannot be entirely solved as long as the Section 8 program is administered by local housing agencies; they advocated a transition to **state or regional administration of the Section 8 program**.

In some housing markets the supply (or geographic distribution) of moderate-cost rental housing may not be sufficient to meet the needs of Section 8 recipients. Under these circumstances, local housing authorities may decide to work in partnership with other government agencies and private developers to use the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit, HOME funds, or other subsidies to **expand the stock of moderate-cost rental housing**. As discussed earlier, HUD's new consolidated planning requirements may create opportunities for housing authorities to think strategically about local housing market needs and their interaction with other programs and initiatives, bring these issues to the attention of local housing and community development agencies, and form new working relationships. If necessary, Section 8 authorizes local housing agencies to allocate up to 15 percent of their vouchers to particular housing developments.

Future Research Priorities

Additional research is clearly needed to help both local program administrators and federal policymakers accurately assess the availability and geographic distribution of affordable rental units and to expand options for Section 8 recipients if necessary. Specifically, basic research is needed to address the following key questions:

- Is sufficient rental housing available below Fair Market Rents to meet the needs of Section 8 recipients, and are such units available in low-poverty and nonminority neighborhoods?
- How are housing authorities setting their payment standards? Are they varying payment standards by location? If so, are

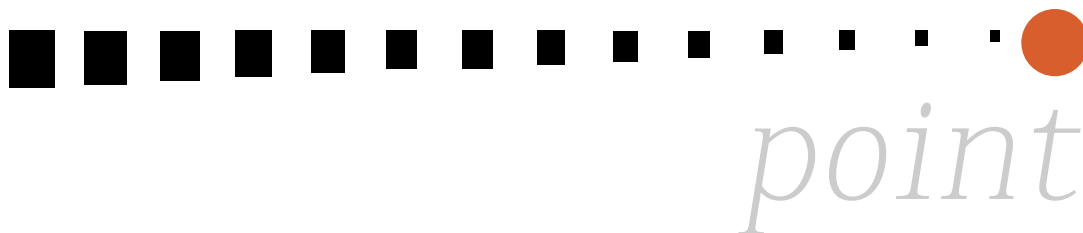
outcomes for participating households improving?

- What indicators effectively signal tight markets or rising rents?
- Are Section 8 recipients gaining access to the full range of housing units available below Fair Market Rents?
- Do landlords discriminate against Section 8 recipients or use non-participation in Section 8 to avoid renting to minorities or families with children?
- How widespread are problems with basic program administration? Is HUD's new Section 8 Management Assessment Program improving the quality of program administration?
- What are the key barriers to participation in Section 8 from a landlord's perspective?
- What incentives would increase landlord participation in the program?

Systematic investigation of these questions could help federal policymakers and local program administrators decide whether and how to invest in efforts aimed at opening up more housing units (in more neighborhoods) for Section 8 participation.

In addition, HUD could help local practitioners by producing a series of best practice reports to disseminate information about strategies that appear to be effective in expanding the number and diversity of housing options open to Section 8 participants. Topics could include setting payment standards, conducting effective landlord outreach, facilitating portability, implementing administrative reforms to achieve faster turnaround on housing quality inspections and lease approvals, and forming effective partnerships for both fair housing enforcement and affordable housing production.

Finally, local housing agencies need tools and examples for inventorying the stock of affordable housing regionwide, assessing its availability to Section 8 recipients, and comparing locational patterns among Section 8 recipients with the geographic distribution of units potentially available to them. More specifically, local housing agencies need help developing data and methods for determining the availability of below Fair Market Rent housing units in neighborhoods of different types regionwide, mapping Section 8 locations, identifying Section 8 clusters, and relating these clusters to the distribution of affordable housing. In addition, local decisionmakers could make good use of information from area property owners regarding attitudes toward the Section 8 program and the quality of its local administration.



"Section 8 recipients want to live in familiar neighborhoods close to family, friends, churches, and other social supports and are distrustful of efforts to relocate them to other communities."



"Most housing authorities fail to provide effective information about locational choices or meaningful assistance with portability."

challenge 2b

Demand-Side Constraints on Location Choice

In conjunction with concerns about the supply of suitable and affordable rental housing in desirable neighborhoods, local practitioners often point out that few Section 8 recipients move very far from their pre-program neighborhoods. In other words, geographic clustering may simply reflect the original locations of these families. Since the Section 8 program explicitly leaves the final decision about location up to the participating families, their needs and preferences play a critical part in explaining patterns of geographic clustering. Their decisions may mean that some families do not want to move elsewhere, but it may also mean that local program administrators have failed to effectively communicate that affordable housing is available in other locations and that these locations offer benefits that families want and need.¹⁶ In fact, some critics of local housing authorities have argued that Section 8 staff intentionally limit information on mobility opportunities in order to keep program participants (and the associated administrative fees) within their own jurisdictions.

Two studies of Section 8 recipients in the Washington, D.C., metro area document relatively low levels of mobility. The first study, conducted in 1995 by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, examined the extent to which Section 8 recipients use their assistance to move to other jurisdictions. The majority of recipients did not switch jurisdictions, despite the opportunities that portability offers, and most of those who did move went to neighboring jurisdictions (Pope 1995). A more recent study compares the preprogram and destination addresses for a one-year cohort of new Section 8 recipients in the District of Columbia and its suburbs. This study finds that the majority of recipients stayed within five miles of their original place of residence, with about one in four leasing in place and more than one-third moving less than two-and-a-half miles (Cunningham, Sylvester, and Turner 1999).

Focus groups and interviews with Section 8 recipients and public housing relocatees in several cities across the country confirm that many families want to remain close to their current locations. Their reasons include proximity to friends and family, access to services, and availability of public transportation. For example, one mother explained, I prefer to stay in the city. For one, if my child gets sick and me, I don't have a car. Where I

I would say
Richmond
Highway was more convenient. You have grocery shopping, the doctor, the movies right there. The buses run every 15 minutes.

(from a *Washington Post* news article; Robberson 1996)

16. Considerable research and debate has focused on the question of whether moving to a lower-poverty or less predominantly black neighborhood benefits poor families. See, for example, Rosenbaum (1995), Briggs (1998), Ellen and Turner (1997), and Popkin, Buron, and Levy (1999). Therefore, the evidence on this issue is not explicitly addressed here, nor was it a topic for discussion at the October 26 symposium.

live, I could walk to the County [hospital] (Popkin and Cunningham 1999). In some cases, low-income families may resist or oppose efforts at deconcentration because of their fears about unfamiliar neighborhoods. For example, public housing residents in Chicago repeatedly expressed profound fears about suburban living, frequently referring to floods and tornadoes (Popkin and Cunningham 1999). Many simply want to remain close to their family and social networks. For example, Hmong families in Minneapolis adamantly oppose deconcentration efforts and would like to remain in public housing in what they term their village (Popkin et al. 2000). Families also voice very practical concerns about the availability of transportation, services, and supports in outlying areas.

“ I’ve been staying in the city all my life, 24 whole years. And I ain’t fixing to just up and leave and go to no suburbs where I don’t know nobody. ”

(a Chicago Section 8 participant; Popkin and Cunningham 1999)

In some cities, minority communities are particularly suspicious of the motives behind efforts at poverty deconcentration. Recent focus groups with public housing relocatees in Chicago included residents who believed that the current policy of public housing demolition, mixed-income redevelopment, and poverty deconcentration is a conspiracy on the part of white people to reclaim the central city, pushing blacks out to the now undesirable suburbs. One respondent, for example, asserted that they gonna put all of us out there. . . . After it get a certain time of night, they gonna blockade out the city limit. . . . Everybody that s out, they re gonna be there, you can t come to the city limits until the daytime. In the nighttime, you re not going to be able to come this way. Another respondent agreed: Yes, they want it back. . . . They want it back, it s closer to the jobs (Popkin and Cunningham 1999). Given the history of neglect, broken promises, and failed initiatives in many big-city public housing programs, these residents’ suspicions about deconcentration efforts are understandable.

However, evidence from assisted housing mobility efforts suggests that many Section 8 families including minority residents of inner-city neighborhoods see real benefits in moving to low-poverty neighborhoods; effective information and counseling can often help residents overcome their fears. Again drawing from recent interviews, Section 8 participants express real yearning for a better neighborhood: I was looking for areas where on my days off, I can go . . . jogging. You know how you look and you see white people walking their dogs and kids. I was looking for that . . . [a place where my kids] can sit and play. . . . I don t want them [to] find crack cocaine pipes and beer bottles and stuff (Popkin and Cunningham 1999). Experience from the Gautreaux demonstration, the Moving to Opportunity demonstration, and public housing desegregation settlements suggests that some families who initially expressed considerable hesitancy about moving very far ended up being very satisfied with their new communities (HUD 1999; HUD 1996; Rosenbaum et al. 1991; Popkin et al. 2000).

Often, the standard Section 8 briefings fail to provide families with a real understanding of the opportunities open to them. These briefings are

frequently long, poorly organized, and dominated by an emphasis on rules, restrictions, and penalties. They are not encouraging or user friendly, and many families leave them without fully comprehending the program and its procedures, let alone the opportunities Section 8 potentially provides (Popkin and Cunningham 1999; Cunningham, Sylvester, and Turner 1999). Few Section 8 programs offer assistance to participants in learning about housing opportunities in unfamiliar neighborhoods or in broadening their housing search to encompass affordable communities throughout the metropolitan area.

A growing body of evidence indicates that assisted housing mobility programs can significantly improve locational outcomes for tenant-based assistance recipients, resulting in greater mobility to low-poverty and low-minority neighborhoods for families that might otherwise find it difficult to move out of distressed, inner-city neighborhoods (Goering, Tebbins, and Siewert 1995; HUD 1996; Turner and Williams 1998; and HUD 1999). Placement rates vary substantially across programs, reflecting differences in market conditions, client needs, and depth of services, and, as yet, rigorous data on the relative costs and performance of these programs have not been assembled or analyzed.¹⁷ In particular, because many mobility counseling programs implemented to date include geographic restrictions on the types of neighborhoods in which participants can use their Section 8 assistance, little is known about how counseling alone affects locational outcomes.

Clearly, more information is needed about the neighborhood preferences of Section 8 recipients and about the impacts of various counseling and search assistance strategies. Although some families may ultimately decide not to move to low-poverty or suburban neighborhoods, local housing agencies can take a variety of steps to better inform Section 8 families about the range of locational options open to them and help them take advantage of mobility and portability opportunities. Symposium participants identified and discussed a range of programmatic changes that can be made to improve access to information on housing options available to Section 8 recipients.

First, housing agencies may need to **improve Section 8 briefings and informational materials** so that families better understand their options. Some housing agencies are currently working with communications consultants to develop a briefing packet that presents information in an easy-to-read, attractive, and interactive format. And several mobility programs have produced videos that help families understand the mobili-

Program and Policy Implications

17. See Turner and Williams (1998) for preliminary data on costs and performance assembled from a wide variety of assisted housing mobility programs. Also see Goering et al. (1995) for evidence on the performance of mobility programs.

ty opportunities that Section 8 offers. Symposium participants suggested that HUD should consider consolidating or decreasing the number of topics that must be discussed in a Section 8 orientation, and that information about moving to better neighborhoods should be a more consistent theme throughout the briefing and program materials. Mobility counseling programs have found it effective to involve past participants who have already moved to a desirable neighborhood in their orientation or briefing sessions. Some hire successful participants as counselors, include a scheduled visit to the home of a recent mover as part of their tour of target neighborhoods, or incorporate group rap sessions in which clients who are in the process of searching for housing meet with past participants to exchange information and gain inspiration.

Second, housing authorities can **assemble and maintain information about amenities, services, and transportation** in communities throughout the metropolitan area. Mobility counseling practitioners stress the importance of providing concrete information about possible destination neighborhoods, with which many inner-city minority families are unfamiliar. Some housing agencies have met this need by creating resource rooms that Section 8 families can visit to get information about city and suburban neighborhoods and social services. Additionally, housing agencies may need to address families' fears and suspicions about deconcentration directly and honestly. This can be done by keeping the program emphasis on choice and opportunity so that families do not feel that relocation is being forced on them.

There are also possible programmatic changes that could help encourage mobility among Section 8 recipients. As discussed earlier, **simplifying portability practices** could make it easier for families to move between jurisdictions. Clearly, portability can be an administrative challenge for both sending and receiving housing agencies. But regional agreements on portability guidelines and procedures can reduce administrative burdens so that Section 8 recipients are not discouraged from exercising their portability options.

Some families may need more **hands-on assistance with housing search** in order to fully understand and take advantage of the options open to them in the regional housing market. Mobility practitioners have identified three basic components of an effective counseling program: 1) initial briefings and assessments; 2) direct assistance with housing search; and 3) postmove follow-up services. Although local programs vary considerably, most practitioners agree that an effective mobility program must go beyond the move itself, addressing at least some of the other barriers to successful mobility and self-sufficiency that families face. And many practitioners argue that some follow-up contact and assistance must be provided for at least a few months after participating families move to a new neighborhood (Turner and Williams 1998).

Some programs also **provide transportation for participating families during the housing search process**. They see transportation as a critical component of the services they offer. Obviously, a van operated by the mobility program makes it easier for clients to get to where the units are. In addition, trips to unfamiliar neighborhoods can help overcome clients' fear about moving and expose them to neighborhoods they would not otherwise have considered. Some practitioners argue that clients will not look at units outside the central city unless transportation is provided because these are unfamiliar areas and the travel time involved in visiting units and meeting landlords is too lengthy on public transportation (Turner and Williams 1998).¹⁸

It is clear that mobility may not be appropriate for every new Section 8 participant, but housing authorities may wish to explore the possibility of **second move counseling** for families whose confidence about moving to a better neighborhood increases gradually. Recently, a few programs have begun contacting existing recipients a month or two before their lease expiration to inquire if the family will be renewing their lease and offering help in making another move if that is the family's choice. These services can help families that have had problems with their first unit or landlord make a successful move to another low-poverty or low-minority area rather than move back to their original neighborhood. In addition, second move counseling can help families move to progressively better neighborhoods over time, especially if their first move did not improve their neighborhood conditions (Turner and Williams 1998).

Although housing agencies can significantly enhance the information and search assistance they provide on their own, some will need resources from HUD to implement these changes. Thus, **funding to support mobility counseling and regional collaboration** may be needed to significantly affect patterns of geographic clustering. In addition to funding, HUD could encourage housing authorities to provide more assistance to families by giving **more emphasis to locational outcomes in the Section 8 Management Assessment Program** (SEMAP). Currently, housing authorities can receive a deconcentration bonus in their performance score based on the percentage of Section 8 families with children living in low-poverty areas. HUD might consider increasing the weight of this factor in a housing authority's total score or offering points for other outcomes, such as establishing portability guidelines or achieving high enrollment in mobility programs.

18. Some have also suggested that families that move to suburban areas should receive assistance in buying and maintaining cars so that they do not have to rely on public transportation.

Future Research Priorities

Additional research is needed to help design and deliver information and assistance that can help Section 8 recipients broaden their housing search and find units in neighborhoods that best meet their needs. Specifically, basic research is needed to address the following key questions:

- How do Section 8 recipients search for housing? What neighborhood characteristics do they value?
- What barriers or constraints do Section 8 recipients confront when they search for housing?
- Does information about mobility opportunities and/or housing search assistance affect locational outcomes?
- What are the costs per successful move for different mobility counseling models, and how do these costs vary with local market conditions?
- What share of families who make mobility moves returns to high-poverty neighborhoods after a short time?
- How effective is second move counseling at improving neighborhood outcomes for Section 8 households?

Systematic investigation of these questions could help federal policymakers and local program administrators decide whether and how to invest in efforts to promote greater mobility among Section 8 recipients.

In addition, HUD could assist local housing authorities by providing best practice reports to disseminate information about strategies that encourage geographic dispersal among recipients. Possible topics include designing effective orientation sessions and briefing materials, promoting the benefits of residential mobility, reducing portability barriers, and providing cost-effective housing search assistance. Finally, local housing agencies need tools and examples for understanding how Section 8 recipients currently search for housing, including their preferences and priorities and the barriers they encounter when they search beyond their immediate communities. In particular, local housing authorities should have the capacity to routinely monitor participants' success rates and assess differences in success rates for different groups of households and for households searching in different parts of the metropolitan area.

relocation of residents from public housing demolition



In many cities across the country, deteriorated and distressed public housing developments are being demolished, and most are being replaced with lower-density, mixed-income developments. As a consequence, large numbers of families many of whom are long-time public housing residents are receiving Section 8 certificates and entering the private housing market at the same time. Some of these families expect to return to public housing once redevelopment is complete; others are seeking permanent housing. In some markets, the number of public housing relocatees is quite large relative to the local Section 8 program as a whole. Chicago is the most extreme case, with the housing authority planning to demolish and replace at least 11,000 units over the next decade and receiving at least 7,500 extra Section 8 vouchers earmarked for the relocatees. Early indications from Chicago suggest that most former public housing residents may be clustering in poor neighborhoods not far from their original developments (Fischer 1999). As a consequence of what is happening in Chicago and other cities, some critics have characterized HUD's efforts to redevelop public housing and relocate residents as converting vertical ghettos into horizontal ones. This section discusses the special challenges raised by the relocation of large numbers of public housing residents.



point

"Long-time public housing residents face special challenges that make it particularly difficult for them to cope effectively in the private housing market."



counterpoint

"The number of suitable housing units available for rent is not large enough to accommodate the volume and pace of public housing demolition."

challenge 3

Special Issues for Public Housing Relocation

In several cities around the country, the relocation of families from notoriously distressed public housing developments has heightened suspicions and fears about the Section 8 program. In Baltimore, for example, residents of inner-ring suburban neighborhoods vigorously opposed the Moving to Opportunity demonstration program in part because they saw it as a harbinger of efforts to relocate residents from several large and severely distressed public housing projects. In Chicago, the large-scale closing and demolition of public housing has sparked serious concerns about the well-being of both the relocatees and the neighborhoods to which they are moving. Many people, aware of the crime, physical decay, and social disorganization that plagues distressed public housing, expect the relocatees to bring these problems with them to their new neighborhoods.

A significant share of long-time residents of distressed public housing may have serious personal problems that make it difficult for them to succeed in the private rental market.¹⁹ Many of these developments are mired in poverty, with very high rates of welfare dependency and chronic unemployment. In some, gangs and drug dealers have come to dominate the social world, making it difficult if not impossible for residents to avoid becoming enmeshed in the underground economy, and many households include one or more members with a criminal record. Moreover, because of the gangs and the ubiquitous drug trade, life in these developments is extremely dangerous, potentially causing lasting trauma for both adults and children (Popkin et al. forthcoming).

Early evidence from focus groups with public housing relocatees suggests that these families face enormous challenges when they search for housing. Many have real difficulty understanding the Section 8 program, the options open to them, or the program rules they must follow. Because these families generally rely on public transportation, the process of searching for housing is time-consuming and costly. Large families with children seem to have a particularly difficult time because of the limited availability of three- and four-bedroom units in the private rental market (Popkin and Cunningham 1999; Popkin et al. forthcoming).

19. Note that public housing residents who are displaced by demolition or redevelopment must (by law) be relocated; therefore, placement rates for these families are very high. But these initial placements do not necessarily enable families to move to healthy or opportunity-rich neighborhoods, and they do not ensure that families will be able to remain in their private-sector units.

“ This is a monumental missed opportunity to de-stigmatize public housing residents by integrating them into regular neighborhoods where they can function as everyday citizens, thus breaking up the pockets of poverty that breed crime, violence and hopelessness. ”

(from a *Chicago Sun-Times* news article; Rumbler 1998)



The crisis in
affordable rental

housing is getting worse. It's possible that thousands of apartments could be lost to the affordable market in the next few years, their occupants sent packing to compete with other needy people for fewer and fewer affordable units. . . . But there's already a shortage of affordable rental housing, as well as a shortage of landlords who'll accept Section 8 certificates.



(from a *Chicago Sun-Times* news article; Rumbler 1999)

Even among landlords who regularly accept Section 8 recipients, many appear to see public housing residents as undesirable tenants. Families report that landlords reject them because they have children, because they have teenagers, and because they currently live in public housing (Popkin and Cunningham 1999). Interviews with landlords reveal the same pattern; given what they know about the problems of public housing developments, many landlords simply perceive former residents of these developments as too big a risk (Lenz and Coles 1999).

In some housing markets, local observers argue that the rental market may not be able to accommodate the number of apartment seekers generated by public housing demolitions. Recent national analyses indicate that the stock of low- and moderate-cost rental housing is shrinking, possibly tightening the market for units that rent at or below Fair Market Rents (HUD 1999; Daskal 1998). In Chicago, serious concerns have been raised about the number, physical adequacy, and geographic concentration of housing units affordable for families who receive Section 8, particularly in light of the magnitude of planned demolitions. A rental market analysis conducted in Chicago indicates that sufficient units may not be available outside of poor and minority neighborhoods (Great Cities Institute 1999). As discussed earlier, too little is known about the number and location of rental units available to Section 8 recipients.

Even if the total number of rental units is sufficient to accommodate the new demand created by public housing revitalization efforts, the pace of relocation may be too rapid to permit families to find housing in desirable neighborhoods. In some cases, the number of families moving at the same time may exceed the capacity of existing mobility counseling services; some families may simply need more lead time to make decisions about the type and location that best meets their needs. Many families especially those seeking housing in unfamiliar neighborhoods or neighborhoods where Section 8 is not already clustered find that it takes a long time to find a unit (Popkin and Cunningham 1999). Assisted housing mobility programs across the country routinely extend the search period for families seeking housing in low-poverty neighborhoods (Turner and Williams 1998).

Program and Policy Implications

The relocation of public housing residents raises many of the same issues discussed in earlier sections of this report. In addition, local housing authorities may need to provide extra assistance and support to former public housing residents. This assistance will probably have to be more extensive than simply locating an acceptable unit and should be initiated as soon as a housing authority begins planning redevelopment activities. In order to help former residents make a successful transition to the private market, housing authorities may need to provide mobility counseling, case management, and long-term follow-up support. Further, housing authorities may need to proactively address community concerns, reaching out to community organizations and faith-based groups to build support for these families.

First, housing authorities should provide residents with **adequate, understandable information about their housing choices**. Presenting basic information at a group meeting or through a brief letter is often not sufficient. Many residents will be too distressed about having to move to absorb the information, and, because of literacy problems, many may not understand information provided in these forms. Confusion and fear about the impending demolition and relocation may cause residents to make hasty decisions without considering other options that might provide better opportunities for themselves and their families. Information about the relocation and housing choices should be provided in a clear, easy-to-understand format. Ensuring that residents understand their options may require one-on-one counseling sessions as well as group meetings.

Many symposium participants argued for **better relocation planning**, suggesting that it is critical for housing authorities to begin providing relocation assistance, including needs assessment and counseling, *before* relocation efforts get under way. One participant suggested that housing authorities begin the counseling process as soon as they receive their HOPE VI grants (or as soon as they receive HUD approval of demolition plans). Whether or not this is feasible, beginning the counseling process early allows families to make more informed choices about relocation. Some families that initially opt to remain in public housing might make a different choice if they are provided sufficient information about opportunities in other types of communities.

In the context of public housing relocation, **counseling and case management** may need to go beyond basic housing relocation services or even mobility counseling. This will be the first private landlord for many long-time public housing residents, as well as their first time paying for utilities. As discussed earlier, an unknown proportion of the residents of severely distressed public housing face serious challenges, including problems such as substance abuse, domestic violence, depression, and trauma caused by living in dangerous, violent communities. Some will need substantial help and support in order to address these problems and become stable in a new setting. Without such assistance, the relocation may become yet another stressor that has the potential to cause serious harm to these vulnerable families. Delivering this kind of intensive support may require housing authorities to either provide more case management and supportive services themselves or to partner with public and nonprofit agencies that can deliver quality services to residents.

Finally, local housing authorities should consider including **follow-up services and support** as part of their relocation counseling. Some relocatees, particularly those with serious personal problems, may experience difficulties in adjusting to the private market. Follow-up counseling can help connect movers to services in their new communities, resolve any conflicts with landlords or neighbors that may occur, and

help families begin taking steps toward long-term self-sufficiency. One option that housing authorities can consider is partnering with other supportive institutions, including faith-based organizations that can provide mentoring to families in their communities.

Future Research Priorities

Further research can help us better understand how public housing relocatees are faring in the Section 8 program and what additional assistance may be needed to meet their special needs. Research is also needed to assess the impact of counseling efforts and to ensure that affected metropolitan areas have sufficient housing to absorb the number of relocatees anticipated. Specifically, basic research is needed to address the following key questions:

- What is the incidence (and severity) of problem behaviors among public housing relocatees (compared with other Section 8 recipients)?
- To what extent and in what types of neighborhoods are public housing relocatees clustered? Does this differ from patterns for other Section 8 recipients?
- Do public perceptions of clustering and bad behavior among relocatees match reality?
- What special barriers or constraints do public housing relocatees confront when they search for housing?
- How effective are search assistance and other supportive services for public housing relocatees? What models appear cost effective?
- Are sufficient numbers of affordable rental units available to accommodate the scale and pace of public housing relocation?
- What are the key concerns about public housing relocatees from a landlord's perspective, and what incentives would increase landlord participation in the program?

Systematic investigation of these questions could help federal policymakers and local program administrators decide whether and how to invest in efforts to protect and support public housing relocatees so that their long-term housing and neighborhood outcomes improve.

In addition, HUD can help local housing authorities by developing best practice reports on issues such as informing relocatees about their choices and providing relocation assistance, including how to design effective assessment and case management, counseling, and follow-up support. Reports might also provide examples of successful efforts to

form partnerships with public and nonprofit social service agencies and faith-based organizations to supplement housing authority services. Finally, local housing authorities need examples of assessment tools they can use to determine the counseling and support needs of relocatees prior to beginning relocation.

summary of policy and research recommendations



In recent years, alarms have been sounded about possible problems with the Section 8 housing assistance program that may result in excessive clustering of poor families and potentially undermine the well-being of neighborhoods in which assisted households live. Although anecdotes abound, there is little systematic evidence that the Section 8 program is damaging the health of large numbers of urban neighborhoods. Nevertheless, the potential for geographic clustering and adverse neighborhood impacts should not be ignored. The Section 8 program now constitutes the federal government's primary mechanism for meeting the housing needs of low-income households. In order to ensure that it continues to operate effectively, both HUD and local housing authorities need to address the issues and challenges outlined here, strengthening the Section 8 program so that it maximizes opportunities for recipients to make real choices about where to live, enhances both neighborhood and housing outcomes, and avoids excessive clustering in distressed or fragile neighborhoods.

A wide variety of actions could be taken to advance these fundamental policy goals. Exhibit 1 lists the full range of possible actions or programmatic reforms that were discussed at the October symposium and indicates which of our five policy challenges each addresses. This list includes a number of steps local housing agencies can take under existing rules, as well as actions HUD could take to reinforce best practices in Section 8 administration and to introduce new rules and procedures. It is important to note that as HUD works to strengthen the Section 8 program and its administration, issuing new regulations or posting best practices on the HUD Web site simply will not go far enough to inform and educate local housing authorities about how to administer the program effectively. Instead, HUD needs to work proactively with local housing authorities to improve their practices and strengthen program operations.

Participants in the 1999 symposium also discussed more far-reaching changes to the administration of Section 8 that could enhance location choices and help avoid adverse neighborhood effects. Local housing authorities often lack the capacity, resources, or authority to address such challenges as neighborhood decline, housing code enforcement, racial and ethnic discrimination, support services for vulnerable families, or the availability of affordable housing regionwide. In some instances, housing authorities may be able to partner with other public or non-profit organizations to advance shared goals. And some experts anticipate that the quality of Section 8 administration may improve over the near term as a result of recent policy changes, including the Section 8 Management Assessment Program and consolidated local planning requirements. Nevertheless, many of the complex challenges confronting Section 8 in urban areas might be more effectively addressed if administration of the program was reassigned to an agency with a larger mission and more resources. For example, if a state or regional agency assumed responsibility for the program, it might be better able to recruit landlords from suburban as well as central-city neighborhoods, encourage families to search beyond their immediate neighborhoods, and expand the supply of affordable housing in nontraditional neighborhoods. No consensus emerged among symposium participants about whether responsibility for Section 8 should be reassigned or about what the right assignment might be. But discussion repeatedly returned to the fact that local agencies, many of which are preoccupied with the management of public housing developments, may not be well equipped to effectively address the full range of challenges posed by the Section 8 program today.

Policymakers and program administrators clearly need more information about the issues of Section 8 mobility and neighborhood health. Exhibit 2 summarizes the basic research questions raised in this report, indicating which of the five policy challenges each would help address. Without a knowledge base of this kind, federal policymakers and local

Exhibit 1: Possible Program and Policy Actions

| Suggested Actions or Reforms | To Address the Challenges of: | | | | |
|---|-------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| | Recipient Behavior (1a) | Landlord Behavior (1b) | Supply Constraints (2a) | Demand Constraints (2b) | Public Housing Relocation (3) |
| Strengthen program administration | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Monitor the location of recipients | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Monitor and respond to landlord and community complaints | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Screen out problem tenants | ✓ | | | | ✓ |
| Improve briefings and written materials | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Strengthen rent reasonableness | | ✓ | | | |
| Terminate and evict problem tenants | ✓ | | | | |
| Sanction problem landlords | | ✓ | | | |
| Set adequate payment standards and/or increase Fair Market Rent | | | ✓ | | |
| Allow participants to pay higher rent burdens | | | ✓ | | |
| Conduct ongoing landlord outreach | | | ✓ | | |
| Provide landlord training and education | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Provide information about neighborhoods | | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Provide housing search assistance | | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Provide transportation for housing search | | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Provide second move counseling | | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Provide postmove counseling | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Provide supportive services to families | ✓ | | | | ✓ |
| Offer landlords incentives to participate | | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Provide assistance to landlords with property repairs | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Address myths and stereotypes | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Partner with community groups and faith-based organizations | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Coordinate with local housing and community development agencies | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Partner with fair housing groups | | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Partner with other housing authorities to simplify portability | | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Partner with regional organizations to expand affordable housing supply | | | ✓ | | |
| Administer Section 8 at the state or regional level | | | ✓ | ✓ | |

administrators cannot be sure whether and how to change their program operations or invest in new activities and services. In addition to basic research, housing authorities and their partners need information about best practices for addressing a wide range of challenges, such as participant screening, landlord outreach, rent reasonableness determinations, mobility counseling, and supportive services. Finally, local housing authorities need tools and techniques they can apply to determine where Section 8 families are locating, whether they are clustering, and what neighborhoods may be adversely effected. Data are already available in HUD's management information systems to address these questions jurisdiction by jurisdiction, but many local housing authorities do not know how to take advantage of these data to strengthen program operations and improve outcomes for both participating families and the larger community.

Exhibit 2: Priority Research Questions

| Suggested Topics for Research | To Address the Challenges of: | | | | |
|---|-------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| | Recipient Behavior (1a) | Landlord Behavior (1b) | Supply Constraints (2a) | Demand Constraints (2b) | Public Housing Relocation (3) |
| Incidence and severity of problem behaviors among recipients | ✓ | | | | ✓ |
| Indicators that predict problem behavior | ✓ | | | | ✓ |
| Costs and effectiveness of tenant screening | ✓ | | | | ✓ |
| Effectiveness of counseling and support services to reduce problem behaviors | ✓ | | | | ✓ |
| Impact of recipients on neighborhood quality of life and property values | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Extent of clustering among recipients | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Mismatch between real and perceived clustering and neighborhood effects | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Characteristics of neighborhoods most vulnerable to disruption and decline | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Effectiveness of sanctions or incentives for responsible landlord participation | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Availability of rental units below payment standards | | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Geographic distribution of rental units below payment standards | | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Early indicators of tight markets and rising rent levels | | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Extent of recipient access to the available rental units | | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Extent of discrimination against Section 8 recipients | | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Impacts of SEMAP on program administration and outcomes | | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Variations in local payment standards and impacts on program outcomes | | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Barriers to landlord participation | | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Recipient's housing search strategies and neighborhood goals | | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Barriers to recipients' housing search and location choice | | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Effectiveness of mobility counseling (including subsequent moves) | | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Effectiveness of second move counseling | | | | ✓ | ✓ |

appendix

roster of symposium
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October 26, 1999

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