

CASE STUDIES: Homelessness Prevention

AAA Expertise Can Support APS Clients' Housing Stability

California's Home Safe Program

US Aging highlights successful programs and partnerships to provide inspiration for AAAs and other community-based organizations to advance their work in homelessness prevention. Find more case studies at www.usaging.org/research.

Older adults and people with disabilities who meet the eligibility criteria for Adult Protective Services (APS) may need new housing to escape abuse, neglect and exploitation. Others may need support to stabilize their existing housing situations. California lawmakers established a pilot **Home Safe Program** in 2018 to close a gap in the availability of housing-related supports for this population. Starting in 2021, all 58 California counties now have Home Safe programs run by county APS agencies with funding through 2025. This case example describes characteristics of Home Safe programs, key features in Los Angeles County and opportunities for further Area Agency on Aging (AAA) involvement.

Prior to Home Safe, California APS agencies had few options other than referring clients who were facing homelessness to shelters or other housing-related supports in the community. Home Safe resources enable APS agencies and their partners to take a proactive approach to assisting these individuals with finding and/or keeping appropriate housing through services including:

- Housing-related intensive case management for six months;
- Housing-related financial assistance such as short-term rental assistance, application fees, first month's rent, housing deposits or landlord incentives;
- Deep cleaning to maintain safe housing;
- Eviction prevention;
- Landlord mediation; and
- Home modifications that facilitate mobility.¹

Counties have considerable flexibility with the program's local structure and mitigation strategies. Each locality can tailor the program to the specific needs of their communities and the resources available to meet them. This flexibility enables AAAs to become integral partners, an approach adopted by Los Angeles County.

Home Safe in Los Angeles County

The **Los Angeles County Aging and Disabilities Department** serves as county's Area Agency on Aging and houses its APS unit. APS created a sub-unit for Home Safe with team members who specialize in housing and homelessness. This team has ready access to AAA supportive services and an ability to coordinate with AAA team members for integrated service delivery. This structure enables the department to address housing and unmet health-related social needs immediately—while the investigation occurs—to prevent homelessness, recognizing that adult maltreatment is a major factor in housing instability and homelessness. When APS receives a referral, the county's internal system initiates both the APS investigation and involvement of the Home Safe team. The latter assesses housing stability and can begin supporting individuals with housing navigation and/or stabilization as well as putting in place supportive services that individuals want and need.

¹ <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/cdss-programs/housing-programs/home-safe-program>

Partnerships for Housing Stability

In Los Angeles County, one of the Home Safe program's critical partners is the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), a homeless continuum of care. LAHSA provides housing intervention and diversion with a focus on homelessness prevention, from financial assistance to help pay housing costs to landlord engagement and other interventions that may keep older adults and people with disabilities from becoming unhoused.

Data Collection and Outcomes

One equity practice that Los Angeles County uses is analyzing data to identify disparities and formulate responses. As a result of one analysis, APS now is doing additional community outreach and education about Home Safe with Black Americans and American Indians. Home Safe, APS and AAA intake also includes sexual orientation and gender identity data fields so they can monitor for possible inequities among those population groups.

Advice for AAAs

AAAs can apply some Home Safe practices to help older adults stay housed. Services that seem to create the greatest impact include:

- Assessing for housing instability;
- Implementing intensive case management for three to six months; and
- Partnering with legal assistance providers for specialized support since many housing issues have legal implications.

AAAs have **experience and expertise** in coordinating and providing services relevant to Home Safe or other homelessness prevention programs, including housing navigation or coordination services, homelessness prevention programs, established housing partnerships in the community, and/or owning or operating housing.

These capabilities can be enhanced by:

- Partnering with APS agencies for case management, home modification facilitation, decluttering or other Home Safe-like services;
- Integrating APS-AAA approaches when AAAs have existing housing capabilities that an APS agency could leverage, rather than recreate;
- Integrating data-sharing systems, coordination processes and workforce training; and
- Serving as administrators of housing financial assistance when AAAs are standalone nonprofit organizations and can quickly provide APS-authorized payments, such as for a security deposit to hold an apartment.

Retention Benefits to Staff Specialization

Department leaders report that their Home Safe-specialized social workers have greater job satisfaction and less burnout than other frontline staff. Although supporting individuals with complex, highly difficult situations, Home Safe team members are able to see the impact when these individuals attain their personal goals, in part through the Home Safe program supports.

Focus on Legal Aid in Sonoma County



Implementation of the Home Safe program is flexible. In Sonoma County, the Home Safe program partners with legal aid to support APS clients with housing instability. The program funds an attorney to help mitigate landlord-tenant issues, litigate eviction proceedings or sometimes petition for extra time to find accessible housing. Sonoma County's Home Safe team also includes a part-time housing navigator who works with individuals to locate affordable, accessible housing. Clients are referred to the AAA for supportive services.

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