

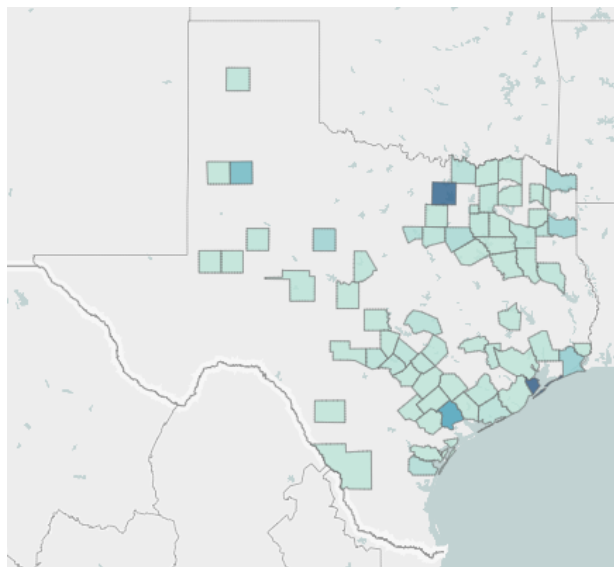
EHV's Spread a Net Wide Enough for the Texas Balance of State Continuum of Care

By: Billy Streu

The Emergency Housing Voucher (EHV) program, a beacon of hope for those facing housing insecurity out of the COVID-19 pandemic, emerged as a result of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA). The program allocated funds for approximately 70,000 EHV's nationwide, aiming to tackle homelessness and housing instability. The Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA) and Texas Homeless Network (THN) partnered to administer 380 EHV's across regions within the Texas Balance of State Continuum of Care (TX BoS CoC).

EHV Program Overview

To be eligible for an EHV, individuals and families must fit into one of four categories: literally homeless, at-risk of homelessness, recently homeless with a risk of instability, or fleeing domestic violence. THN is the entity responsible for determining eligibility based on one of the 4 categories above. Referral partners and self-referred individuals and families completed an online form within specific time frames. EHV Staff then assessed all households to determine eligibility and the most vulnerable in each category and then prioritized those households based on pre-defined criteria. Additional emphasis was placed on ensuring that one in every three vouchers was allotted to survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault.*



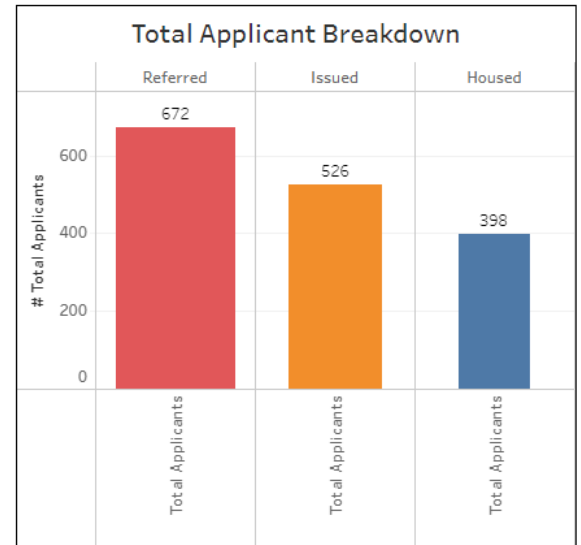
After applications were submitted and accepted, eligible applicants were referred to TDHCA to continue the voucher issuance process. Once applicants received an issued voucher, they had 120 days to identify housing and secure a lease. In this part of the process, THN partnered with referring programs and self-referred individuals by providing housing search assistance, financial assistance to address various housing barriers, and essential household items to promote housing stability.

*THN partnered with the Texas Council on Family Violence (TCFV) and Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) throughout the program. Both of these organizations provided expertise and feedback on best practices for survivor and veteran households, as well as offering support to overcome barriers encountered by these sub-populations. TCFV also assisted in identifying referral sources across the TX BoS CoC.

Referral Statistics and Housing Outcomes

THN received referrals from [69 counties in the TX BoS CoC](#), leading to a total of 672 applicants referred to TDHCA. Of these, 526 received issued vouchers. By the end of the program, 398 total households, comprising 928 individuals, were successfully housed. [Learn more about the demographic breakdown of these program participants here.](#)

Notably, survivors constituted more than 60% of the EHV population, surpassing THN's initial goal of 1 in every 3 vouchers to be allotted to a survivor. Adversely, an equity study highlighted disparities, particularly among unaccompanied youth and nonbinary/transgender individuals, emphasizing the need for more targeted strategies in future programs. [View the equity study report here for more details regarding findings from this research.](#)



Demographic	Count	Rate
Black/Af Amer	216	41%
White	270	51%
Hispanic	112	21%
Female	426	81%
Male	96	18%
Survivor	332	63%

Common Housing Barriers

The EHV team encountered various barriers throughout the process, including utility/rental debt, insufficient credit scores, prior eviction records, and lack of transportation. It is critical to note that survivors in the program faced specific housing barriers due to financial, technological, and other forms of abuse, such as coerced debt, vital records destroyed by an abuser, and the need to flee before voucher issuance or housing identification. Additionally, the lack of source of income protection laws in Texas leads to difficulties in engaging landlords and ensuring voucher acceptance. These numerous barriers reveal the multifaceted nature of housing insecurity.

Recommendations for the Future

To enhance program efficacy in the future, the following three recommendations are proposed:

1. Streamlining processes and fostering collaborations between Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) and service providers can reduce wait times and ensure smoother transitions.
2. Collaborating with numerous statewide/local advocacy organizations to promote broader participation across sub-populations, including youth and LGBTQIA+ communities, and strengthen equitable distribution of resources and assistance.
3. Promoting tenant readiness statewide through increased funding statewide for landlord incentives, deposits, arrears, renter's insurance, essential household items, and other costs that present barriers to housing.

Casting a Texas-Sized Housing Net

The EHV program housed almost 1,000 individuals across the Texas Balance of State Continuum of Care! This strategy showed us that it is possible to target homelessness and housing insecurity across a wildly vast geography and make a significant impact, particularly for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. By empowering individuals and families through access to housing vouchers, we can spread a wide housing net to alleviate housing instability and foster the well-being of Texans. May we continue to learn from this valuable program and improve Texas' efforts to make homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring.