



## **HIV/AIDS Housing Plan Released**

By [Windy City Media Group](#)

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Chicago, IL - A five-year Chicago area HIV/AIDS housing plan meant to address the ongoing affordable housing crisis and its impact on those living with the disease was recently released.

AIDS Foundation of Chicago ( AFC ) and the Chicago Department of Public Health ( CDPH ) released the five-year HIV/AIDS housing plan for 2008-2012, called "A Place to Call Home." It includes key issues, recommendations and strategies to address the ongoing unmet needs in HIV/AIDS housing. In 2007, the Chicago area was faced with a severe affordable housing crisis, which greatly impacted individuals with HIV/AIDS. Over the past 18 months, AFC, CDPH and other stakeholders collaborated to come up with a plan for action that was presented Jan. 30 at John Marshall Law School. Housing consumers, advocates and numerous HIV/AIDS agencies attended the presentation.

Chicago is not alone in the affordable housing crisis. Affordable housing is a nationwide issue that especially affects the HIV/AIDS community. National studies show that 40-60 percent of those living with the disease experience homelessness or housing instability at some point.

In addition, demand exceeds supply, despite the fact that HIV/AIDS housing units in the Chicago area have tripled and those receiving rental assistance have increased fivefold since 1995, when the first area HIV/AIDS housing plan was released. AFC estimates that roughly 15,000 individuals in the Chicago area need HIV/AIDS housing services. According to the five-year plan, the HIV/AIDS housing units currently available meet only 10 percent of that need.

Those collaborating on the five-year plan named it "A Place to Call Home" for a very specific reason: Research shows that housing equals health. It has become a motto for local advocates of HIV/AIDS housing, who know that research shows a connection between housing and harm reduction, access to medical care, improved health and much more.

However, getting housing for all those in need has been in struggle, with funds hard to come by.

"Sometimes what seems obvious—not everybody in power sees it that way," AFC's housing expert Arturo Bendixen said. "The research is showing such a strong correlation between health and housing."

The new plan calls for a minimum 10 percent increase in HIV/AIDS housing each year, which means 800 more units by 2012. Currently, there are over 1,300 units in the Chicago area, with over 20 HIV/AIDS agencies providing housing, rental subsidies and other supportive services.

The federal Housing Opportunities for Persons Living with AIDS ( HOPWA ) program pays for roughly two-thirds of the units. The remaining one-third is paid mostly by U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development dollars.

At the heart of the plan are 29 recommendations, with four strategic priorities: the affordable housing crisis, the inadequate continuum of AIDS housing, the need for supportive services and the need for collaboration.

In terms of research, since the formula used to in previous plans to determine need is no longer applicable, housing advocates hope to develop a new formula to in order to better assess the need. Bendixen called the 10 percent minimum increase in units that the plan calls for each year "conservative," but hopes a new formula will give a better idea of what is needed.

The plan also highlights areas of concern, such as the need for more long-term housing, youth housing and supportive services, such as harm reduction services and services for those who were recently incarcerated.

Thanks to medical innovations, individuals living with the disease are doing just that: living. But with people living much longer, dwindling federal dollars and a nationwide affordable housing crisis, problems arise. According to The National AIDS Housing Coalition, it is estimated that, nationwide, approximately 500,000 people living with HIV/AIDS will need housing assistance at

some point. Current federal HOPWA funding only serves 67,000 people a year.

"The epidemic continues to evolve," said CDPH's Chris Brown. "It is very different from 25 years ago."

"Thank God medical science allows people to live longer, but it's now our responsibility to make sure those lives are lived in peace," said AFC's Service Providers Council Housing Committee Co-Chair Michelle Gilbert.

AFC's Mark Ishaug expressed concern over where 800 units would come from, because "it's hard to get these dollars." However, Bendixen said he is "more hopeful than ever" that new money will be available to help address HIV/AIDS housing in the area. In fact, there are already new units that will soon be available. Bendixen added that agencies need to continue being aggressive and on top of things.

Individuals can find information about housing resources in the Chicago area at [www.direct2housing.org](http://www.direct2housing.org) . The new plan can be downloaded online at [www.aidschicago.org](http://www.aidschicago.org) .

*Written by Amy Wooten*