

Supportive housing report details growth, funding gaps

The Supportive Housing Network of New York is pushing for money to rectify differences in funding between two state programs

[Molly Burke](#) April 4, 2024



The Supportive Housing Network of New York released a report looking at more than 62,000 units of supportive housing units across the state. The organization believes that the housing system can answer growing homelessness issues, but needs more equity across projects. Supportive housing, including Cara House, which broke ground in April 2022 in Schenectady, provide permanent housing to residents who pay 30 percent of their income. (Paul Buckowski/Times Union)

Paul Buckowski/Albany Times Union

ALBANY — The Supportive Housing Network of New York is pushing for more housing options as homelessness soared last year in a state where 62,000 units are home to at-risk populations.

The network, which represents more than 200 nonprofits developing and operating supportive housing, believes that the existing units — which are permanent housing options — could be a solution for New York as homelessness increases.

A report they issued this week said the state saw a 39 percent increase in homelessness in 2023. Lawmakers at the Capitol have focused on affordability and housing issues as budget negotiations continue with a looming deadline.

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Pascale Leone, the network's executive director, said that supportive housing represents a solution to homelessness that has been tested since the first units opened in New York City in 1980 as part of a nationwide effort.

"It's absolutely remarkable to see that we have 62,000 units and just how transformative supportive housing is not just for individuals, but actually for generations," Leone said. "We have a rich history to build upon that's really inspiring."

A resident at Kathlyn Gardens, supportive housing provided by the YWCA of Rochester and Monroe County, cited the unit she grew up in with her mother and brother as the reason for her future success, the report said.

"Because of where we live, both my brother and I were able to go to a highly rated school. I have a good job and my brother is attending college next September," the resident said in the report. "This place has given our mom the ability to raise us safely."

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Supportive housing provides rental assistance and social services to individuals and families who face a risk of homelessness. Supportive housing

often targets veterans, domestic violence survivors, people dealing with substance abuse problems, older adults, AIDS patients and former inmates. Residents signed leases to stay in the units for as long as they financially need to, paying 30 percent of their income toward rent, while the rest of the housing cost and social service costs are covered through government and private funding.

The organization's report found that nearly 40,500 supportive housing units are in New York City, while 21,800 are elsewhere in the state. More than half of the units are congregate housing, which are all in one setting with social services on site, while the rest are scattered housing that organizations rent on the free market while providing mobile social services.

The report highlighted major differences — particularly when it comes to funding from different state programs — across supportive housing in New York.

"It's a very diverse stock of different types of housing serving different populations with very different funding levels," said Rebecca Zangen, the network's chief policy officer.

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Leone and Zangen said the state of supportive housing in New York has grown more complex for all involved parties to navigate as different organizations, government entities and populations participate in projects.

"As we built upon what was working, we've actually embedded more inequity into the system," Leone said. "As the state grew to address some of the unique needs of individuals, we complicated a system and created more

eligibility criteria that have slightly different nuance."

Leone said that "new and shiny" supportive housing projects failed to look at existing units and "have parity amongst the different programs."

In 1987, the state's Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance created a program that would later be renamed the New York State Supportive Housing Program, with nearly 19,000 units funded through the program, including nearly 88 percent of which are congregate housing.

The program provides organizations running supportive housing \$2,964 annually per unit for single adults and young adults, and \$3,900 annually per unit for families. The funding is to defray costs of social services — which are based on a case management model and include help with accessing mental health and addiction treatment, public benefits, education and job training. It does not include money for rental assistance not covered by the residents.

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In 2016, the new Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative started with a goal of creating 20,000 additional units by 2030. The program annually requests proposals from nonprofits to develop and operate congregate supportive housing, awarding conditional funds before permanently financing a project after all capital funds have been secured, the report said.

Funding discrepancies have left some supportive housing options struggling to cover expenses and compensate staff, Leone said. The executive director said that at one site of supportive housing, a single case worker was covering the social services for more than 40 residents.

"These are the folks who showed up when no one else could, or would, during a pandemic, and it's important that we pay people what they're worth in their value," Leone said. "That has to be something that is seen in the budget. Workforce is an issue across the board."

Leone was appreciative of seeing a \$32 million increase proposed for the state supportive housing program in the Senate's budget proposal, though the potential for inclusion in the final budget is unknown. The increase would bring that program's funding up to the level of Empire State initiative program. In November, [the organization sent a letter to Gov. Kathy Hochul](#) pushing for inclusion of the funding in the budget.

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For Leone, new construction and development of units, [including a project for veterans underway in Menands](#), is incredibly important to expanding the reach of supportive housing, but not at the expense of maintaining older units.

More than 12,000 units of supportive housing opened more than 15 years ago and have not been updated. Leone said that older units that have not been rehabilitated can present significant problems for aging residents, as well as general upkeep concerns.

"It's important that we don't neglect our first pioneering and innovative programs for the sake of new and better, because these older programs are still ongoing," Leone said.

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