

## **PENNSYLVANIA: Housing and HIV Go Hand in Hand**

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Philadelphia is beginning a needs assessment to better chart the intersection of HIV and housing issues for 2012-17. More than 140,000 HIV-affected US households struggle with unstable housing, according to the National AIDS Housing Coalition. Housing is a key factor to HIV treatment and long-term HIV risk reduction, it says.

"If you have a weakened immune system, shelters, which are often dangerous, can become just deadly," said Max Ray, an ACT UP activist involved with housing issues. Many shelters confiscate medicines, so residents may have to disclose their HIV infection to access their medications. Such barriers can interfere with adherence, Ray added.

Philadelphia administers the federal housing programs Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS and Shelter Plus Care. The city provides no funding for HIV/AIDS housing, said Michelle Sonsino Lewis, a spokesperson for the city's Office of Housing and Community Development (OHCD), which administers HOPWA locally.

HOPWA, which provides subsidies for people with the disease who pay more than 50 percent of their monthly income on rent, has 229 city residents on its waiting list. While the homeless are prioritized and can wait an average of one to three months for subsidies, other patients can wait up to two years, said Sonsino Lewis.

The housing needs assessment will evaluate regional barriers, unmet needs and strategies to fill gaps, and it will involve at least one public forum before it is submitted to the city by July 31. It will update, review, and evaluate HOPWA efficacy and overall housing programs, policies, and other factors affecting HOPWA needs. OHCD's deadline for assessment proposals is Dec. 22.

Chicago has a successful public-private HIV/AIDS housing program, Ray noted. A centralized AIDS housing office, partial rent subsidies, housing linked to medical care, and options for active drug users also would benefit Philadelphia, he said.

[See the topic on aegis.org](http://aegis.org)