# Needs of Supportive Housing Programs In Ohio

**Need Assessment**

June 2021

COHHIO

Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio

# ABOUT COHHIO

COHHIO is a coalition of organizations and individuals committed to ending homelessness and to promoting decent, safe, fair, affordable housing for all, with a focus on assisting low-income and special needs populations.

As a statewide coalition, we promote a range of housing assistance services, including homeless prevention programs, emergency shelters and permanent affordable housing with supportive services.
In addition to public policy advocacy, research and public education, COHHIO provides training and technical assistance to local provider agencies and nonprofit service organizations. Other COHHIO initiatives include:

- Facilitating local efforts to combat youth homelessness.
- Protecting and promoting tenants' rights.
- Helping individuals who are homeless and disabled obtain SSI/SSDI benefits to become stably housed.
- Coordinating homeless services agencies' efforts to secure funding and comply with federal mandates in Ohio's 80 rural counties.
- Strengthening underrepresented communities through voter participation.

# ABOUT THE ASSESSMENT

COHHIO, with the support of the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, launched a survey with the goal to identify key areas of need in supportive housing.

Per the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, supportive housing is a highly effective strategy that combines affordable housing with intensive coordinated services to help people struggling with chronic physical and mental health issues maintain stable housing and receive appropriate health care (Dohler, Bailey, Rice, Katch 2016,p.1).

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

COHHIO, with the support of the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, wanted to hear from supportive housing providers in the community to assess need.

The survey used was divided into 3 categories:

- The impact of the pandemic
- Utilization of an equity lens within service delivery
- Key needs for supportive housing operators

**The impact of the pandemic**

Based off the survey, 70% of supportive housing operators reported witnessing an increase of tenants not paying rent during the pandemic. COHHIO encourages supportive housing operators to work with local CAA's to get ERA, reestablish tenant income to reassess rent, and/or work with clients on a payment arrangement.

**Equity lens within service delivery**

A little over 25% of respondents stated they disaggregate data to look at services offered and evictions by race/ethnicity. Of the 25%, 75% said they use this information to modify service delivery. Using disaggregated qualitative and quantitative data to analyze service delivery and evictions is a great way to identify gaps in services and begin working on strategies to improve equitable service delivery.

**Key needs for supportive housing providers:**

- A common theme pertaining to needs for supportive housing was more diverse, safe, and affordable housing in communities.
- Another theme was the need for flexible funding that can be used for risk mitigation, tenant needs, activities, rent/utility assistance and more.
- The last common theme was additional funding for case management and services. Providers highlighted the need for more wrap around services to meet the unique needs of tenants and to work to increase self-sufficiency.

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# Introduction

Supportive housing is a key tool to ensure homelessness is a rare, brief, and non-recurring event. Decades of research has presented evidence demonstrating that affordable housing in combination with intensive coordinated services enables individuals struggling with chronic physical and mental health issues to remain stably housed.[1] Ensuring that supportive housing operators having resources is critical to meeting the needs of individuals with high acuity and long histories of homelessness. This aligns with Ohio's statewide efforts to end homelessness.

As part of its ongoing advocacy and technical assistance work, the Coalition on Housing and Homelessness in Ohio (COHHIO) has engaged supportive housing providers in discussion to understand the challenges to improving services in supportive housing programs. Common themes from these conversations include the limited supply of available and affordable housing stock, lack of community service options, and the difficulty of gaining both tenant and landlord buy-in, as well as other barriers.

To develop a strategy that more effectively addresses these issues, COHHIO, with the support of the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, launched a survey of supportive housing providers with the goal of assessing key needs. The results of this survey are summarized in this report and help to inform the recommendations therein for targeted resources and trainings to support the development and ongoing operation of supportive housing programs statewide.

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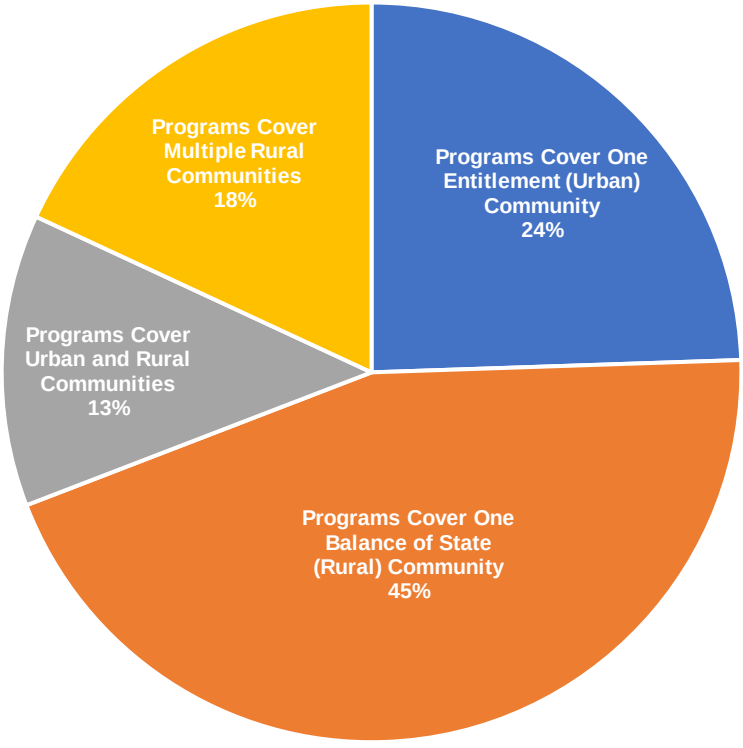
# Survey Methodology

COHHIO sent the *Needs of Supportive Housing Programs In Ohio* survey to contacts within its member network via email on May 20, 2021. COHHIO staff retrieved the list of contacts from its listserv, which includes multiple contacts working at varying levels within supportive housing organizations across the state including the Ohio Balance of State Continuum of Care, the regional homelessness system for Ohio's 80 rural and suburban counties, and the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH). The survey was ultimately completed by 95 respondents representing 73 unique organizations.

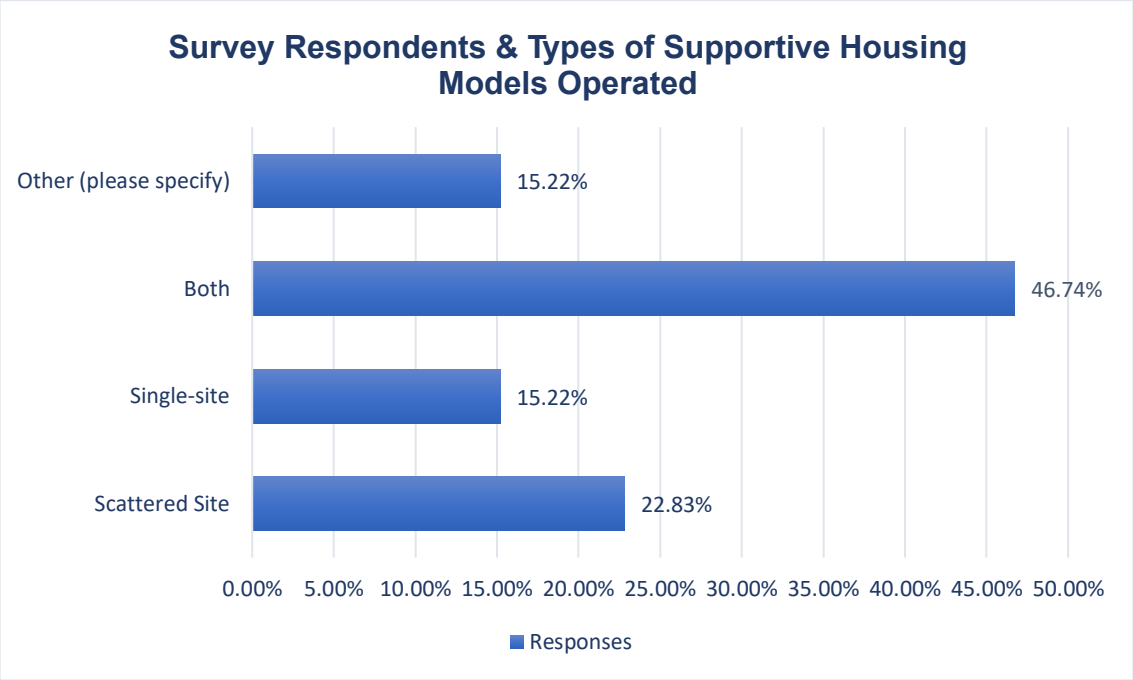
The Survey Monkey platform was used to distribute the survey and collect responses. The initial request provided a deadline of June 4, 2021 for completion of the survey. Reminder emails were also sent to contacts 3 times. Responses came from contacts representing a variety of geographic categories, with the majority of respondents representing organizations that work in one rural community within the Ohio Balance of State. The graph below demonstrates the geographic representation respondents.

**Survey Respondents & Geographic Coverage of Supportive Housing Programs**



The responses from the 95 contacts are used in this report to inform the discussion of baseline needs, the impacts of the COVID-19 global pandemic and its effect on the operation of supportive housing programs, and the extent to which the crisis of COVID-19 has further exacerbated the challenges faced by persons most disproportionately impacted by homelessness. Respondents reported working in a myriad of roles within the supportive housing field including program directors, service coordinators, case managers, property managers, grant managers, financial and accounting professionals, and others.

Per the responses, 47.0% reported operating both scattered and single site programs, 23.0% of survey respondents indicated they operate scattered site only supportive housing programs, 15.0% reported operating single site only programs, with the remaining 15.0% working in organizations that engage with and support the supportive housing delivery system.



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# Summary of Key Findings

COHHIO's May 2021 survey revealed that:

1. **The COVID-19 global pandemic has drastically affected the operation of homeless programs statewide** and supportive housing environments in particular. The majority of respondents indicated they have observed an increase in the number of tenants not paying rent since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. **Supportive housing providers generally report utilization of planning, assessment, prioritization, and evaluation processes to tailor services and resources to culturally and ethnically diverse subpopulations** as a key practice to ensure tenants' unique needs are adequately met.

3. **Supportive housing providers are continually challenged by the practice of engaging and recruiting affordable and private-market landlords** to ensure tenants can access and retain permanent housing.

4. Even as supportive housing providers have adjusted their policies and practices based on evolving needs and circumstances within their local communities, **the availability of resources and the need for trainings on best practices and interventions are needed to respond to the joint COVID-19 and homelessness crisis** in order to target the communities and people with the greatest need.

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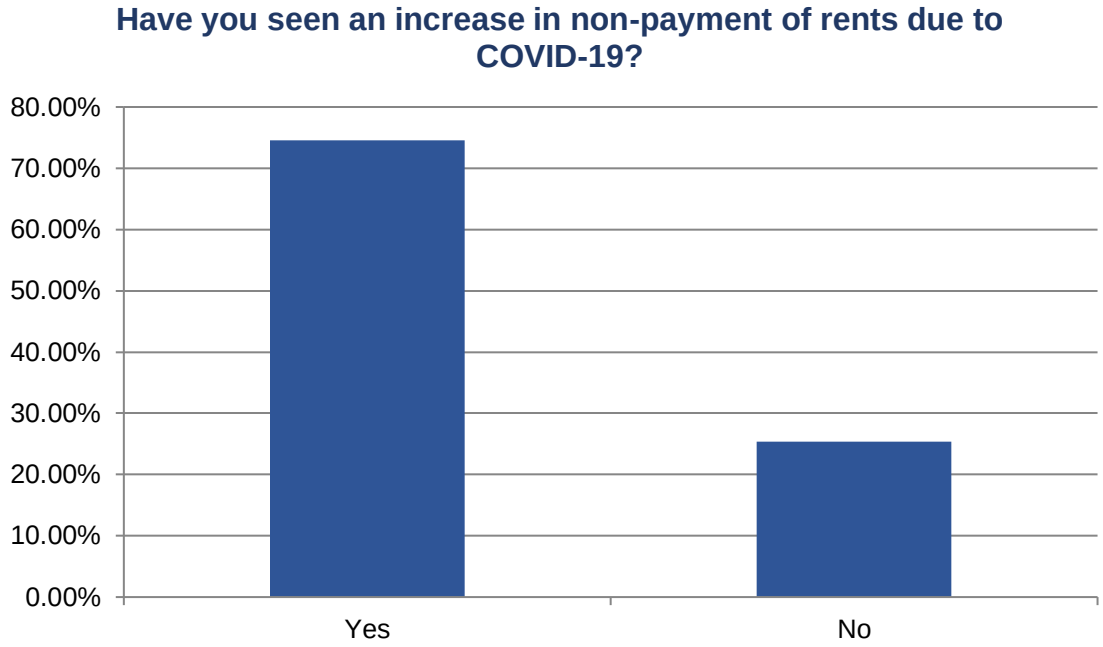
# Supportive Housing Programs and Services through the COVID-19 Pandemic

COHHIO's sample of supportive housing providers highlights the impacts of COVID-19 on supportive housing. Respondents indicated the pandemic has drastically affected supportive housing, specifically impacting rent and staff.



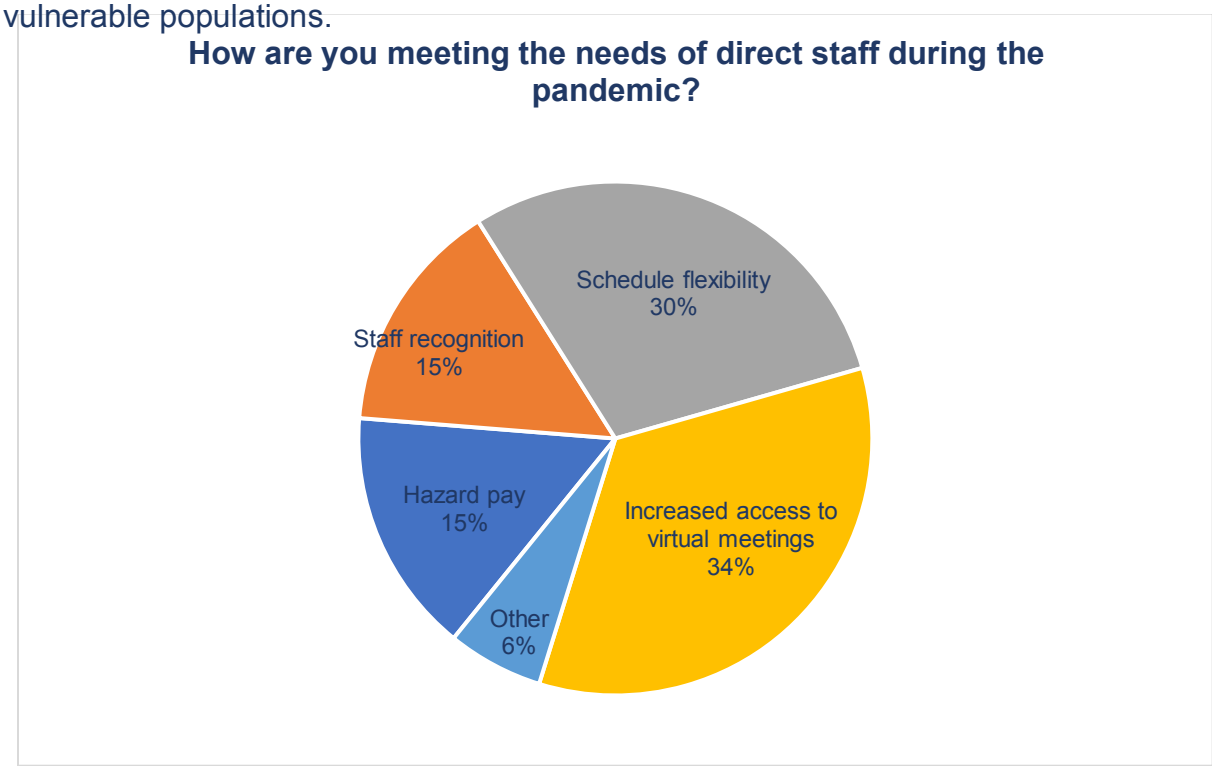

As shown in the above table, 70.0% of respondents indicated they have observed an increase in the number of tenants not paying rent since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

To mitigate the impact of tenants not paying rent and potentially losing housing, COHHIO has encouraged supportive housing operators to take the following actions:

- Recalibrate any changes to income for tenants to ensure the rent is reflective of their current income.
- Assist tenants with identifying and applying for Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA). Congress has approved a total of nearly $47 billion in ERA, including $1.5 billion allocated to the State of Ohio, to pay up to 12 months of arrears and up to three months prospective rent for people experiencing housing instability. The statute allows housing providers to initiate ERA applications with cooperation from their tenants. COHHIO strongly encourages providers to work with their local **Community Action Agencies** or other community agencies administering ERA to help residents pay off arrears. This assistance can be accessed by landlords as well.

- Lastly, COHHIO encourages providers to create payment plans, if all else fails, to keep individuals housed.

The pandemic has further shed light on the vulnerability of people who are experiancing or have experienced homelessness, including individuals in supportive housing environments who experience both chronic homelessness and possible high acuity. In addition to creating financial distress, the COVID-19 pandemic has also increased the stress, vulnerability, and safety concerns of programmatic staff who are working to meet the needs of tenants in supportive housing. COHHIO asked how providers accommodated their staff's needs as they continued providing services for vulnerable populations.




**Other includes increased training opportunities, Personal Protective Equipement, allowing for work for home flexibility, technology support, and more*

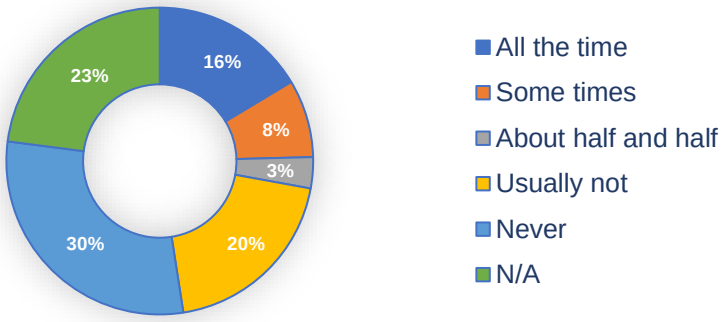
Respondents indicated that supportive housing providers are finding creative ways to compensate direct service staff during the pandemic. The strategies most utilized include providing increased access to technology to access virtual meetings, and increased schedule flexibility. Respondents also noted that the pandemic has made the homeless system face a lot of realities - among the most important were the needs of direct service staff. COHHIO encourages providers to continue utilizing and finding creative ways to compensate these vital professionals by ensuring their compensation reflects their importance to the success of supportive housing delivery system.

# Equitable Practice

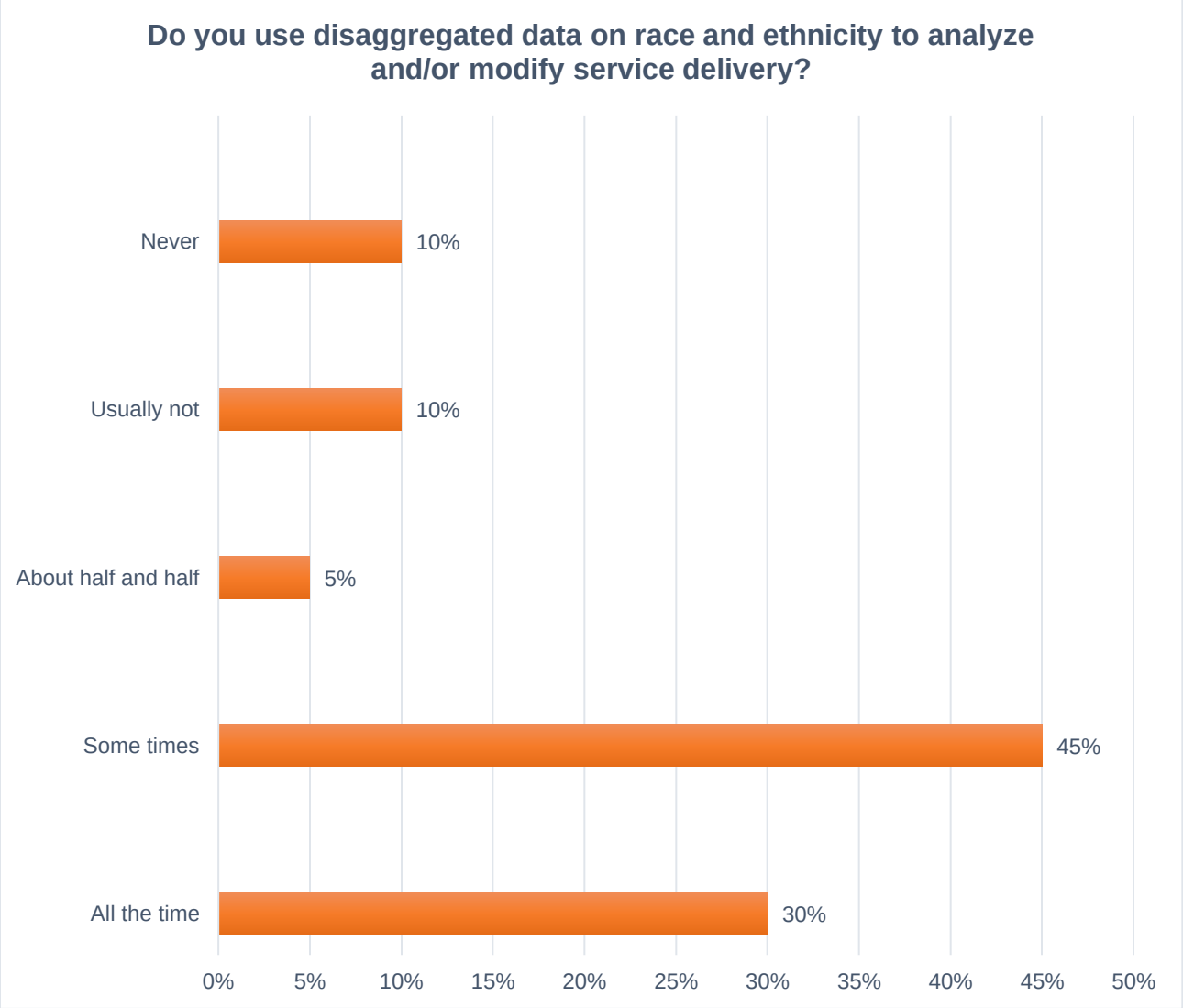
In recognition of the fact that individuals experiencing homelessness and residing in supportive housing environments are disproportionally people of color, specifically Black/African Americans, COHHIO's survey asked respondents a series of questions to assess how providers plan for and/or measure equity in service delivery. These questions sought to identify what considerations are given to racial equity issues and what are areas for improvement. Responses to these questions were received from 63 unique respondents.

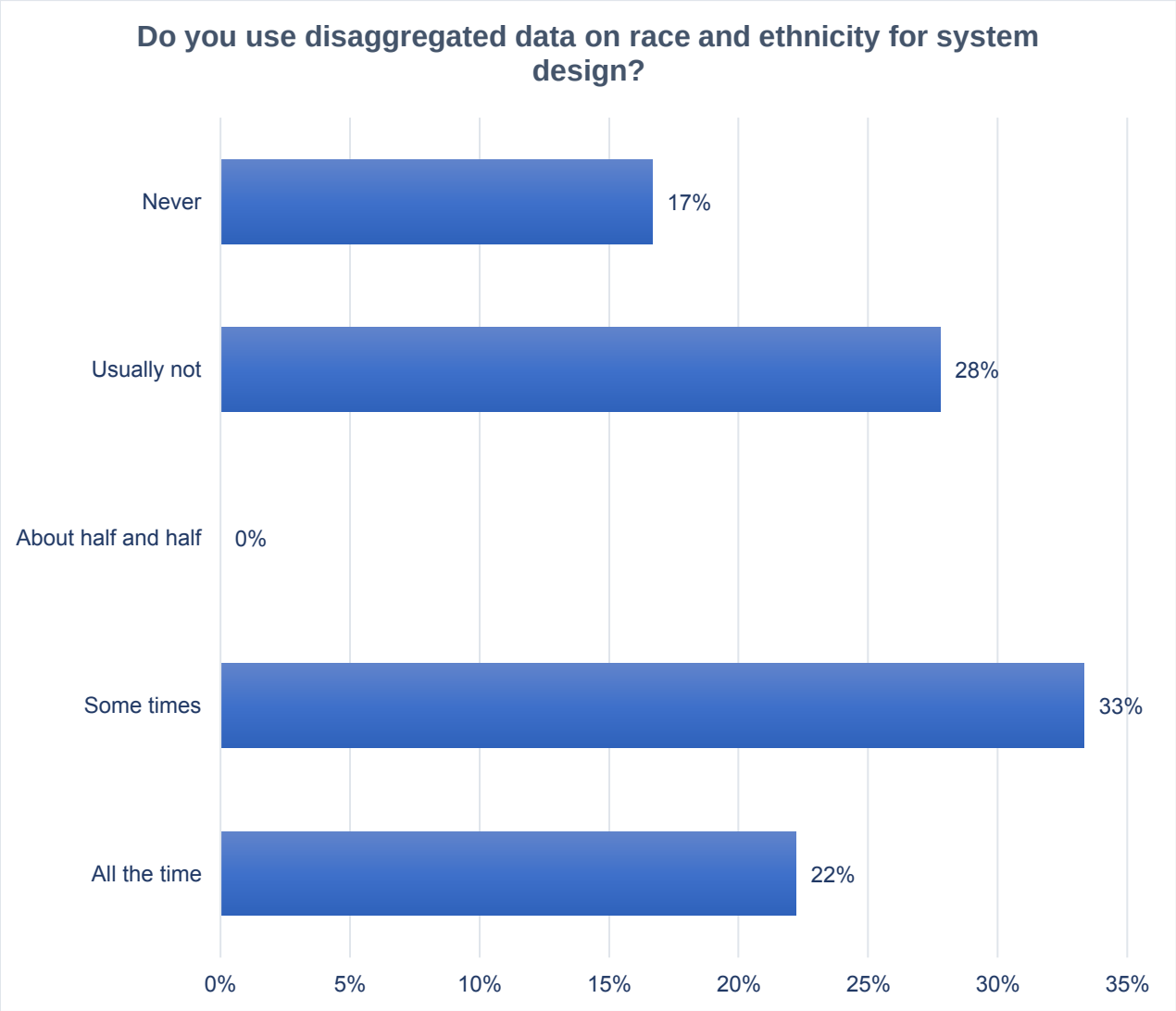
The best way to assess potential inequities is by disaggregating data to identify areas where inequities occur. "Data disaggregation" means splitting large, general categories into more specific groups, such as race, gender, age, etc. [2] This ensures that services and disruptions occur equitably and helps identify potential gaps in service delivery.

**Do you disaggregate data by race/ethnicity in regards to evictions/services?**




20 respondents responded to the question about data disaggregation indicating that they do at some point disaggregate data by race and ethnicity. As a follow up to this question, the survey lead respondents through a series of additional questions to understand how this data is utilized. 75% of this sample indicated they are utilizing disaggregated data to inform service delivery and identify areas that need to be modified "sometimes or all of the time". Using data is also key to centering racial equity in system design[3], including creating new types of housing and support service programs, as well as setting optimal inventory and service levels. However, the proportion of the sample responding they "sometimes or always" use disaggregated data on race and ethnicity for system design was 55.0% while the proportion indicating "usually not" was 28.0%.


Do you use disaggregated data on race and ethnicity to analyze and/or modify service delivery?
Never
10%
Usually not
10%
About half and half
5%
Some times
45%
All the time
30%
0%
5%
10%
15%
20%
25%
30%
35%
40%
45%
50%


Do you use disaggregated data on race and ethnicity for system design?
Never
17%
Usually not
28%
About half and half
0%
Some times
33%
All the time
22%
0%
5%
10%
15%
20%
25%
30%
35%

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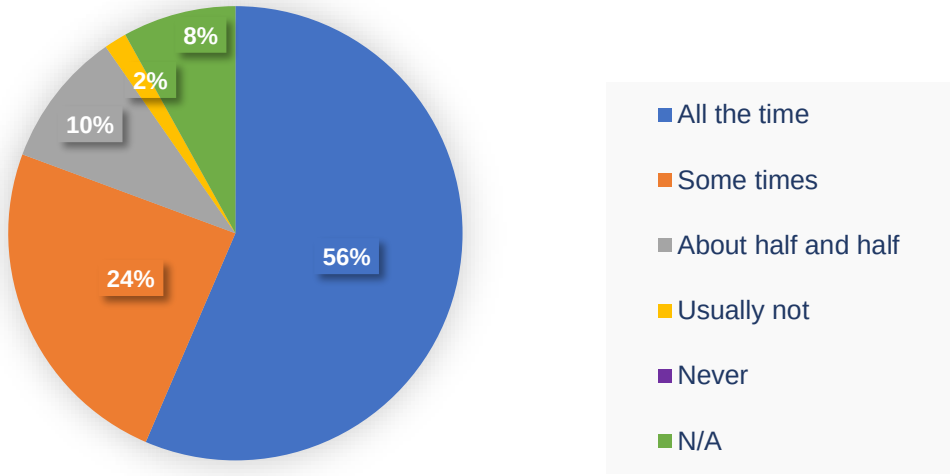
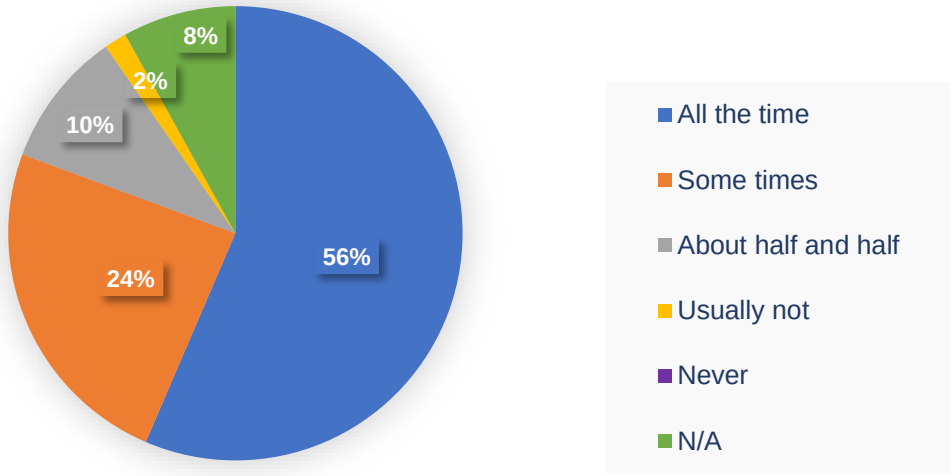
**Do you feel that your organization allows tenants to drive their services to meet their unique needs?**




56.0% of respondents indicated they allow tenants to shape services according to their needs as the experts of their own life circumstances. This is revealing in that consumer self-determination in housing and services is a key principle of Housing First and a crucial part of establishing an equitable service delivery model.

As a general standard of practice, COHHIO suggests that supportive housing operators establish Tenant Boards that allow for power sharing and for tenants in the housing setting to have a voice in regards to rules, policies, activities and procedures, as well as a forum to address concerns. Only one in four (24.0%) respondents indicated Tenant Boards are utilized to develop policies and procedures and to address tenant concerns. Tenant boards are one way of sharing power, other ways include: including tenants as members on boards of directors, training tenants on advocacy and tenant rights, establishing tenant-led “unions” and more.

**Do you feel that your organization allows tenants to drive their services to meet their unique needs?**

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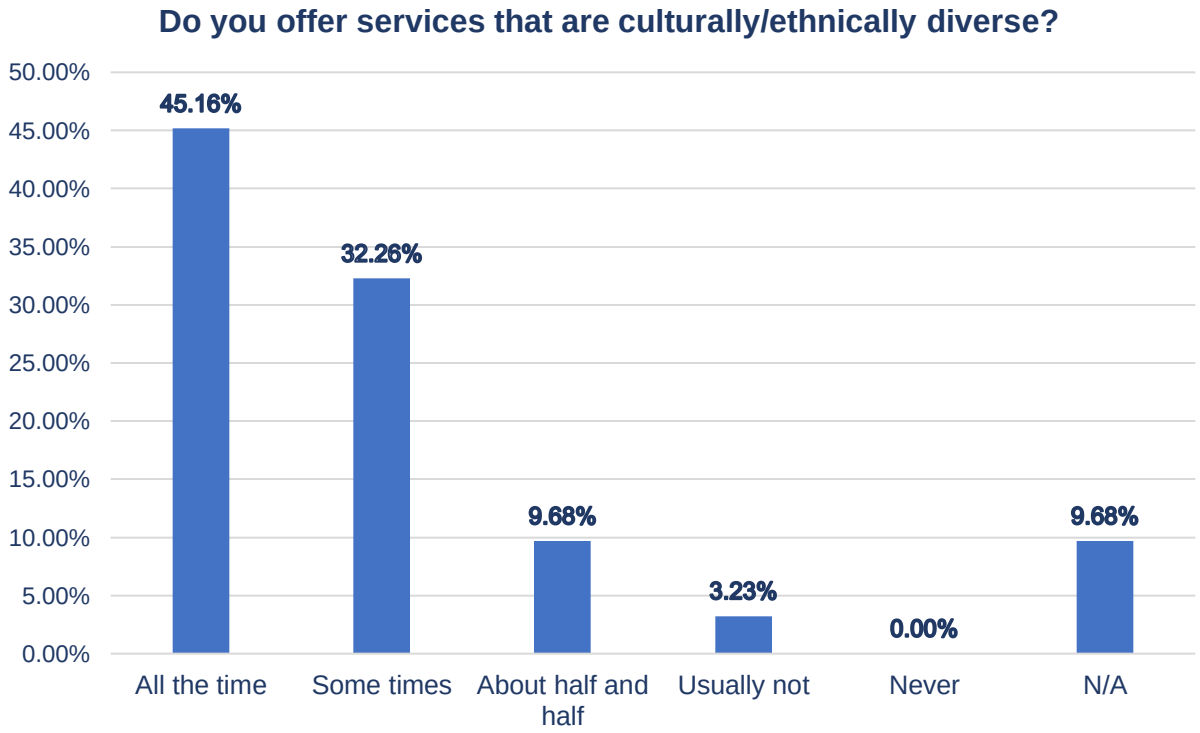



COHHIO asked an open-ended question around other ways that organizations work to ensure equity. Responses included the following:

- Utilizing satisfaction surveys and focus groups to give residents the opportunity to provide feedback and shape future policy and programming changes/updates.
- Ensuring programmatic and employee policies and procedures apply an equitable lens in program and service delivery and employment opportunities/hiring practices.
- Services and access are provided based upon Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) status standards defined by the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) for equity, diversity and inclusion are maintained.

In conclusion, COHHIO recommends that both quantitative and qualitative data is collected and analyzed to understand racial and ethnic disparities within homelessness and supportive housing programs.

For more information on creating a nurturing and equitable service delivery model, see the below links to additional resources.

1. Nurturing An Equitable Supportive Services Environment Informational Brief
2. Nurturing an Equitable Supportive Services Environment Infographic

- *"When we identify tenants, who show an increase in stability (are able to maintain rent on time, who have had their disabling condition improve, who no longer access supportive services regularly, etc.) we begin to discuss the possibility of other housing subsidizes and opportunities. We also begin to transition them to more outside supports who can continue to work with them after they move. Our housing stability planning process that is reviewed by and driven by the client also serves as a motivation strategy for encouraging tenants to move on when they are ready."*

As a general practice, COHHIO encourages supportive housing providers who have not adopted *Moving-On Strategies* to use the resources provided by HUD to assist in this work.

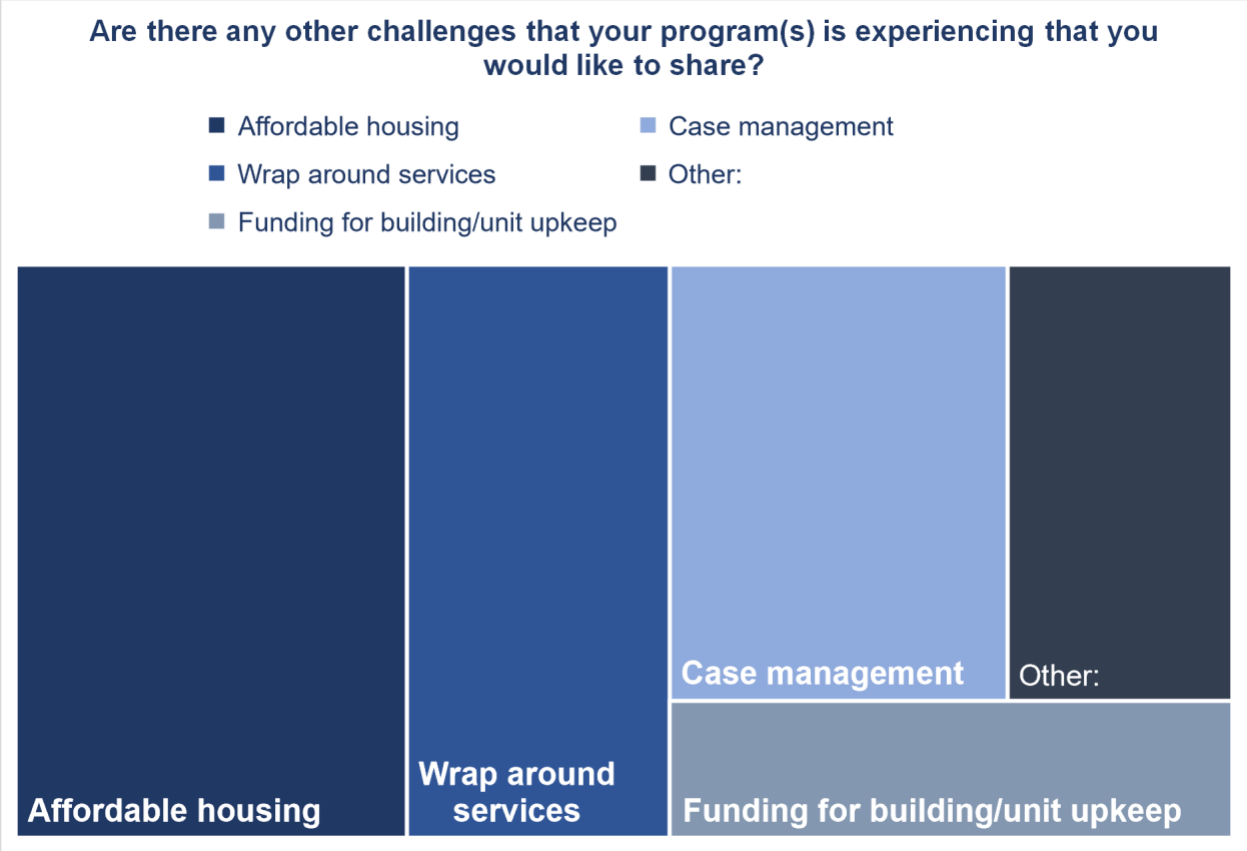
The next question was an open-ended question regarding meeting the needs of tenants.

**What additional resources do you think would assist you with meeting the needs of tenants in your program?**

Of responses received, many operators and providers mentioned the need for increased trainings around tenant self-sufficiency, access to education, employment, and income-increasing resources. The breakdown from the responses are below:

- 16% of respondents identified a need for **increased community resources**, including transportation, daycare, and more.
- 13% requested **more funding for supportive services** through case management and resources to increase tenant engagement.
- 10% focused on **increased flexibility on FMR allowance**, highlighting the helpfulness of waivers and the need for new landlords to meet FMR requirements.
- 10% highlighted the need for **more resources** to help with rent and utilities including water bills.
- 10% mentioned **increased risk mitigation resources** that help remediate housing issues and keep positive relationships with landlords.
- 10% identified the need for more **safe, decent and affordable housing** in the community.
- 10% requested increased access to **Mental Health and AOD services**.
- The remaining providers highlighted a need for **furniture and technology** for tenants.

Additional challenges to supportive housing programs were as follows:




Mentioned by providers was the need for more affordable housing, specifically the need for more supportive housing. Providers discussed the need for **affordable housing** that meets Housing Quality Standards and Fair Marker Rent requirements. Some providers highlighted that the lack of affordable housing leads to longer stays in homelessness.

Other identified needs were **case management** and **wrap around services**. Respondents indicated that recruiting and retaining case managers has been a challenge due to funding constraints, which has led to a lower capacity to provide services. Some communities also mentioned the need for a SSI SSDI Outreach Access and Recovery (SOAR) case manager to help tenants apply for social security. Wrap around services that meet the unique needs of the tenant in their housing program was also mentioned, including services to assist with mental health, substance use, criminal history, income and poor rental history including evictions.

Providers also highlighted the need for **funding for building and maintaining units**. This funding could be used for damages to scattered site and single site properties. Also requested was flexible funding that could be used for tenant car repair or helping a unit qualify under HQS.

Some responses did not match a specific category and therefore were grouped under the **other** category. Topics in this grouping included issues such as blended management, as it relates to defining roles with property management and service delivery; and the need for outreach to eligible participants due to a lack of homeless programing in their community; issues pertaining to COVID-19; and challenges to generating participation with a resident council.

The final question asked providers to think outside of the box in regards to meeting the service needs of tenants in their program.

- The majority of the respondents highlighted the need for **more diverse housing** options in their community, underscoring the need for more affordable housing stock in diverse areas.

- Respondents also emphasized the need for more **consistent flexible funding** to meet unique needs of tenants. Funds could be used for risk mitigation, additional activities, cleaning services, furniture, transportation, employment and more.

- The ensuing largest need was **additional staff** to increase services, security, and the ability to bring in more peer specialists.

# Closing

Ultimately, COHHIO recognizes that providers exhibited resilience and perseverance while adapting to the unique needs and challenges caused by the pandemic. Moving forward, COHHIO encourages the following for:

Providers:

- Work with clients to ensure they're able to pay rent due to hardships caused by the pandemic
- Ensure staff receive a livable wage and benefits that reflects the importance of their work
- Ensure equity permeates throughout all agency programs
- Adapt a "moving-on" strategy
- Secure additional funding options for supportive services
- Implement best practices in landlord engagement
- Reach out to CSH, COHHIO, NAEH and others for training needs
- Work to create and preserve affordable housing through investment and advocacy

Funders:

- Look at ways resources can be targeted to meet the needs outlined above
- Provide resources that allow for more Training and TA to meet the needs of providers
- Allow for more funding flexibility
- Promote the utilization of an equitable lens
- Invest in the preservation and building of affordable housing

In closing, COHHIO would like to thank the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services for their continued support, especially with this assessment. The providers from around the state who participated in this survey, and all other partners who assisted with the creation of this assessment.

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# Abbreviations

**AOD**- Alcohol or Other Drugs
**CSH**- The Corporation for Supportive Housing
**DOL**- Department of Labor
**ERA**- Emergency Rental Assistance
**FMR**- Fair Market Rent
**HCRP**- Homeless Crisis Response Programs
**HHS**- Department of Health and Human Services
**HQS**- Housing Quality Standard
**HUD**- The Department of Housing and Urban Development
**MH**- Mental Health
**MOU**- Memorandum of Understanding
**NAEH**- The National Alliance to End Homelessness
**OVW**- The Office on Violence Against Women
**PSH**- Permanent Supportive Housing
**USICH**- The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness
**SOAR**- SSI/SSDI Outreach Access and Recovery
**VA**- Veterans Administration

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# Citations


- [1]Ehren Dohler Recent Work: Veterans' Homelessness Cut in Half Since 2010 Major Study: Housing Vouchers Provide Haven for Homeless Families Webinar: How Supportive Housing , et al. "Supportive Housing Helps Vulnerable People Live and Thrive in the Community." Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 31 May 2016, www.cbpp.org/research/housing/supportive-housing-helps-vulnerable-people-live-and-thrive-in-the-community.

- [2]MartinRogers, Nicole. "Race Data Disaggregation: What Does It Mean? Why Does It Matter?" Minnesota Compass, www.mncompass.org/data-insights/articles/race-data-disaggregation-what-does-it-mean-why-does-it-matter.

- [3]Staff of the Oakland-Berkeley-Alameda County, California Continuum of Care. "Centering Racial Equity in Homeless System Design." National Alliance to End Homelessness, 23 Feb. 2021, endhomelessness.org/centering-racial-equity-in-homeless-system-design/

- [4]Suchar, Norm Suchar, et al. "SNAPS In Focus: Moving On Strategies to Support Stable Transitions from Permanent Supportive Housing." HUD Exchange, www.hudexchange.info/news/snaps-in-focus-moving-on-strategies-to-support-stable-transitions-from-permanent-supportive-housing/.