

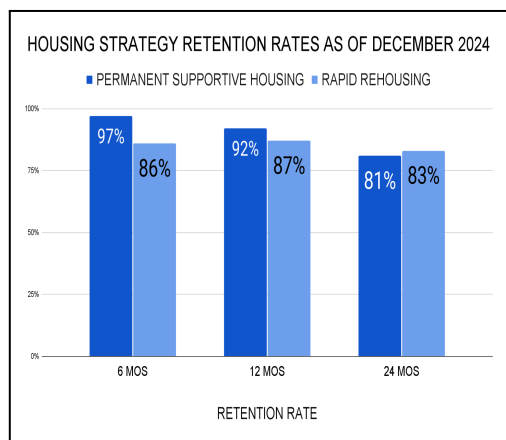
White Paper: An Evaluation of the Performance of Portland's Housing and Sheltering Strategies for Reducing Unsheltered Homelessness

May 2025

Prepared by: Dr. Sandra Comstock

I. How Sustainable are Permanent Supportive Housing, Rapid Rehousing and Eviction Prevention Programs Compared to Shelter-Only Strategies?

Whereas 80% of those receiving Rapid Rehousing (using affordable & market rate units) or Permanent Supportive housing remain housed 2 years after subsidies end, 84% of those entering shelter return to the streets or destination unknown within 77 days.¹



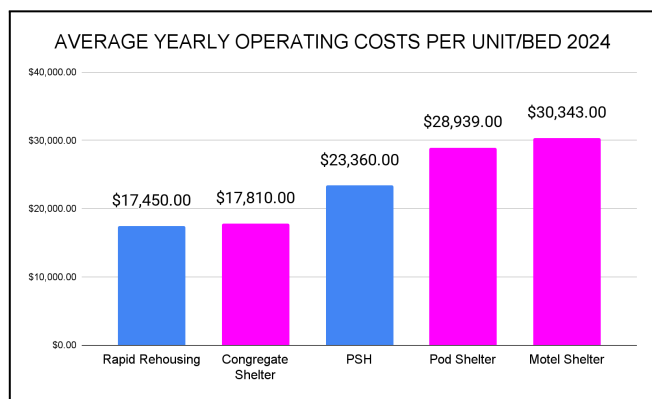
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HOW HAVE HOUSING & SHELTER PROGRAM TYPES PERFORMED FROM JULY TO DEC 2024?

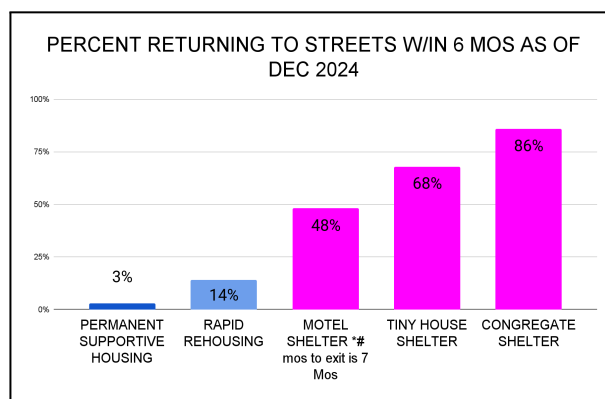
PROGRAM RANKING	Days in Program & Off Streets	% Returning to Streets or Unknown w/in 6 Mos	% Securing Housing	Average # Served a Month	SHS Spending Jan - Dec 2024
1. PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING	Varies	3%	100%	3,949	\$34,257,851
2. RAPID REHOUSING	36	14%	100%	2,046	\$37,401,208
EVICTON PREVENTION	N/A	N/A	N/A	4,759	
ALL SHELTER	77	84%	16%	3,159	\$44,896,340
3. MOTEL SHELTER	226	48%	41%	860	
4. TINY HOUSE SHELTER	161	68%	14%	617	
5. CONGREGATE SHELTER	54	86%	12%	1,681	

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Shelters cost more to operate per person than rapid rehousing, PSH, and eviction prevention with case management. Shelter users' 84% rate of return to the streets (versus PSH's rate of 3% and Rapid Rehousing's 14% rate) involves additional costs in sweeps, outreach, day centers, ER expenses, incarceration, and more.⁴



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¹ Rapid Rehousing can often be enough to allow people to return to paying rent because many (including many chronically unhoused residents) are unhoused because they've lost income and suffered evictions, making securing an apartment logistically complicated. When one loses housing, one must use all their time and stamina waiting in lines and moving across town to eat, bathe, wash clothing, and reacquire tents, tarps, bedding, medications, etc. confiscated during serial removals by City contractors via sweeps. Housing is the basic foundation people need to have the time and peace to make health appointments, reinstate medications, improve job retention/prospects, and nurture the social connections crucial to weathering setbacks and paying the rent.

² <https://multco.us/file/2025-04-16-soc-presentation-all-slides-for-website.pdf/download>. Note: *while costs span 8 mos, per mo calculations are based on 6 mos, given reimbursement time is 1-2 mos * some individuals began or stopped receiving support during the 6 mos examined

³ [How many people access housing programs in multnomah county; Total # of Beds/Pods; & Average Utilization Over Time by Individual Shelter](#); FY 2025 Quart 2 Report; FY2023 Quarter 4 Report

⁴ NAEH [Ending Chronic Homelessness Saves Taxpayers Money](#); OHCS [Permanent Supportive Housing](#) 2019 Jacob et al ["Permanent Supportive Housing With Housing First"](#) Nov 2021

⁵ Green, Et al ["Cost Comparison of Congregate, Motel, and Village-Type Shelters"](#) Journal of Social Distress & Homelessness 3-2025; [Joint Office of Homeless Services shares new rapid rehousing data in board briefing](#) (Dec 13 2024); [Amid record-setting homelessness response, Multnomah County, Portland deliver on pledge to add supportive housing](#), Offered by Communications Office Sep 13 2018. It's worth noting that this doesn't include set up costs for shelters which average \$61,058 **per unit** for Congregate Shelter, \$123,153 **per unit** for Pod Shelter, and \$96,866 **per unit** for motel shelter

⁶ [Average Utilization Over Time by Individual Shelter; Costs of RHH, PSH & Eviction Prevention Multnomah County FY 2025 Q1+2 Report, P. 26;](#)

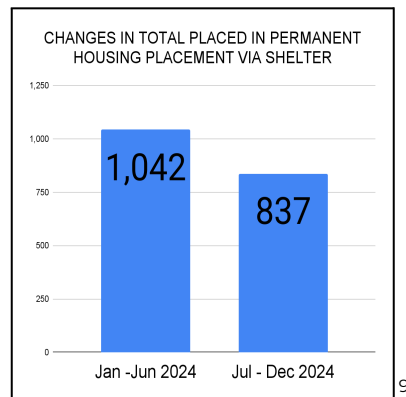
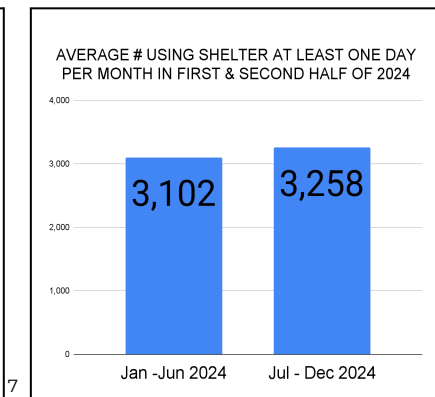
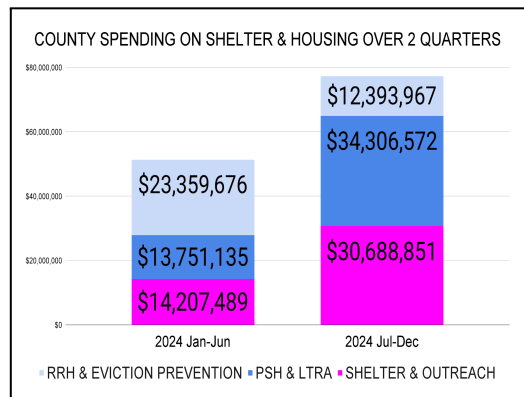
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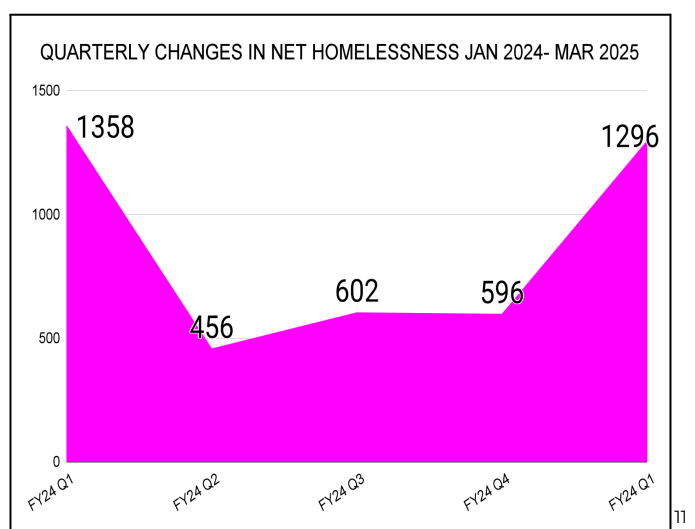
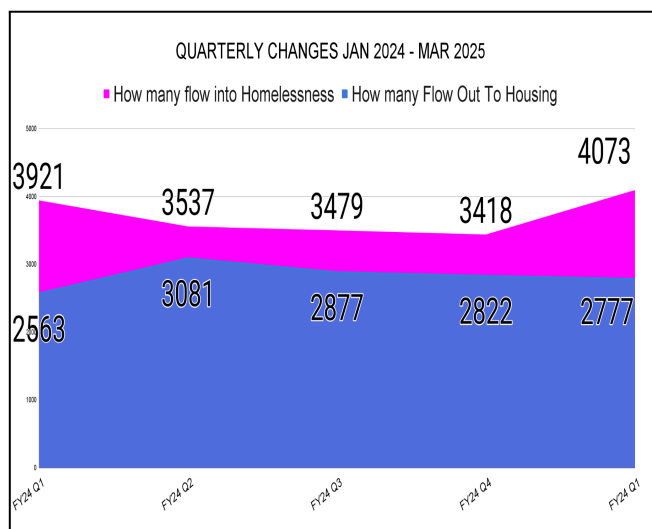
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III. What are the Outcomes of the Recent Shift Lowering Investments in Eviction Prevention, and Rapid Re- Housing in favor of Sheltering in the last 6 Months?

While that data for Multnomah County and Portland shows shelter has performed poorly, this is not so much an *inherent* shelter problem, as the outcome of our increasingly “shelter-only” investment strategy. Specifically, the City and County increased shelter spending by 116% between the first and second half of 2024, allowing shelters to host an average of 156 more at least one day each month. Meanwhile, public dollars for all housing programs increased by only 25.81%, resulting in 205 fewer placements in housing from shelter.



Moreover, a much smaller increase in spending on combined RRH & PSH housing placements and evictions after Quarter 2 of 2024 has yielded a trend toward increasing net homelessness, suggesting the growing mismatch between shelter versus housing spending is reigniting net growth in overall homelessness in 2025.



⁷ DATA SOURCE: <https://johs.us/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Q2-FY25-SHS-Report-Final-Version.pdf>

⁸ DATA SOURCE: [Where do people leave shelter to?](#)

⁹ DATA SOURCE: [How many people are staying in shelter?](#)

¹⁰ DATA SOURCE: [Inflow and Outflow From People Experiencing Homelessness](#)

¹¹ DATA SOURCE: [Inflow and Outflow From People Experiencing Homelessness](#)

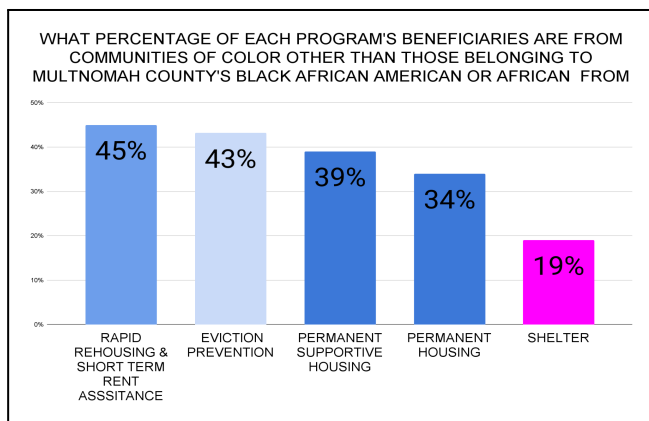
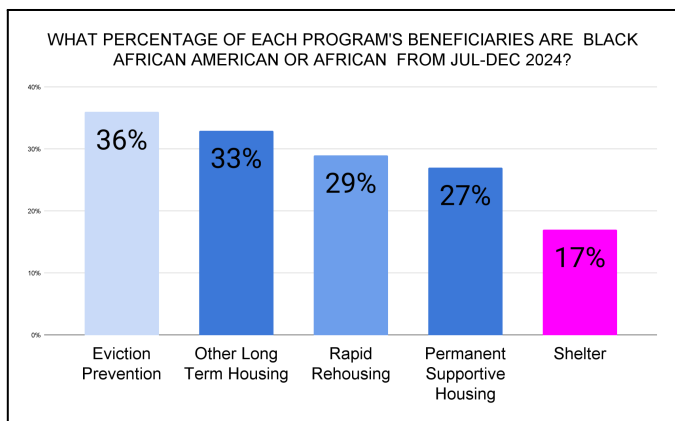
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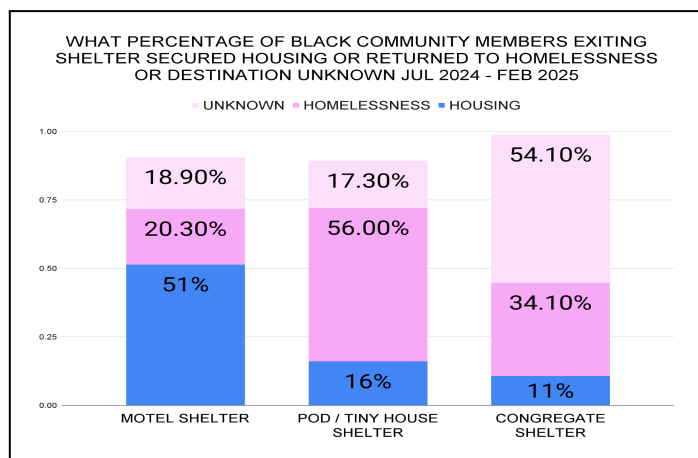
IV. How Equitably Do Eviction Prevention, Housing, and Different Shelter Programs Serve Communities of Color Experiencing Homelessness?

From July to December 2024 eviction prevention and housing programs performed far better than shelter in serving Portland's Black communities and other communities of color experiencing homelessness, with Shelter underperforming other programs by 10 to 26 percentage points.. The difference is even more stark when we compare the percentage of other communities of color served by different programs. From this it is clear that cutting spending on housing in favor of shelter, reinforces long standing racial service and housing disparities.

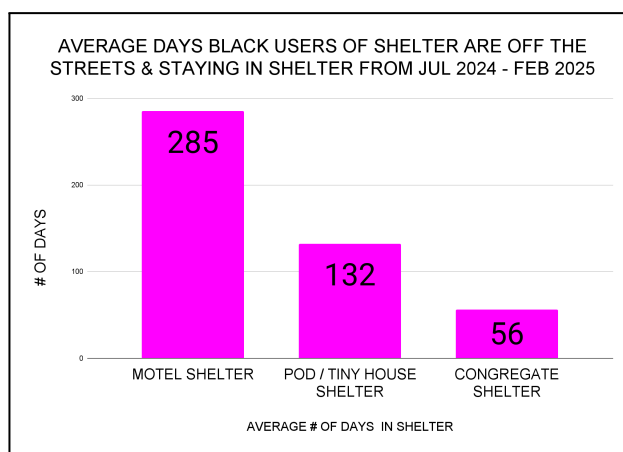


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Comparing how well congregate shelter programs serve Black communities in housing placements and average lengths of stay by shelter type suggests that opening more congregate shelter beds - especially overnight only - is likely to increase long standing disparities in service for Black County residents, who earn less than half of the average white household according to the last 2020 Census.¹³



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¹² Data Source: [What are the characteristics of population staying in shelters?](#) ; [What are the characteristics of population accessing housing programs?](#); [What are the characteristics of population receiving eviction prevention assistance?](#)

¹³ "Based on 2020 U.S. Census data for Portland, the average Black household brings in about \$3,000 in monthly income, while Latino households earn \$4,500, and Native American households earn nearly \$5,000. In comparison, white Portland households earn \$6,400 on average each month." Zelienski, Alex "[Most people of color can't afford to live in Portland, report finds](#)" OPB March 22 2023

¹⁴ DATA SOURCE: [% Participant Exit Destinations by Race/Ethnicity](#) p 21, 26, 31

¹⁵ DATA SOURCE: [Average Length of Stay in Days by Race/Ethnicity](#) p 21, 26, 31

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Conclusion

In sum, most formerly homeless Portlanders who have secured housing since 2021 via RRH, PSH, or LTH, remain housed 2 years after their subsidy ended. In contrast, our shelters have created an *on-off streets-to-shelter and back-to-the-streets cycle*, where an average of 84% return to the streets or destination unknown from shelter after 77 days.¹⁶ Yearly RRH costs 98% of maintaining a congregate shelter bed, 60% of pod shelter, and 58% of motel shelter, 60%; while PSH costs 81% operating 1 pod or 77% of 1 motel room. RRH can be ramped up right away using the hundreds of empty low income apartments,¹⁷ as well as the market rate units, at \$1300 a month or less.

The negative impact of overspending on shelter compared to housing investments is evident how reduced increases in housing vis-a-vis big increases in shelter investment has coincided with a big uptick in net homelessness (defined as the difference between those losing housing and people placed in housing) from July 2024 through March 2025.¹⁸

Improving housing to shelter investment parity would **free up shelter beds by allowing more shelter users to exit to housing, ending their homelessness**. Augmenting eviction prevention investments would **reduce demand for beds** by lowering the numbers losing housing and becoming homelessness, often for the first time.¹⁹ Rebalancing housing to shelter spending would stretch our tax dollars further, saving on per person costs, as well as on the time, effort and money on standing up the new overnight-only shelter proposed in the Mayor's budget.

Rebalancing our system toward parity in housing placement and stabilization opportunities versus shelter beds isn't just more efficient and effective; it is the most equitable. The data shows rent assistance is what communities of color seek and use most. They use shelter the least. Communities of color have long endured housing and service disparities. The Mayor's proposed "shelter-only" deepens the disparity. We have a duty of fairness to uphold, and an ethical imperative to redress the unfairness of current and past policy choices where we can.²⁰

Several CDC's say there are hundreds of newly built affordable apartments at the 60% AMI that currently lie vacant and many tenants in 60% AMI units who earn far less than 60% AMI who are currently arrears on rent payments. Additionally, according to [Apartments.com](#) there are 1,268 market rate units with rents under 1300 a month available on May 26 2024 in Multnomah, with many managers signed up to lower requirements through guarantees afforded via the County's [Housing Connector](#). We must seek ways to maximize tax dollars to reduce homelessness on our streets, lower the disparities in services and housing our communities of color currently experience, reduce evictions, and preserve affordable housing.

¹⁶ [Average Length of Stay in Days by Race/Ethnicity](#); [How many people access housing programs in multnomah county](#); [Housing Retention Rates at 6, 12, & 24 Months](#); [Total # of Beds/Pods](#); & [Average Utilization Over Time by Individual Shelter](#); [Adult Shelter Longitudinal Overview](#)

¹⁷ Unfortunately, many restricted income units created with Portland Housing Bond subsidies are priced at 60% of the overall area median income (between \$49,000 and \$70,000 depending on household size) in the Metro region. However, the median income of renters is markedly lower than that of Metro homeowners, making renters needing deeply affordable apartments unable to afford units priced at 60% AMI and below. For this reason many of the new buildings we built using bond supported subsidies are in danger of becoming insolvent due to low occupancy and rents in arrears.

¹⁸ The net number of Portlanders experiencing homelessness is derived from the difference between the numbers experiencing homelessness who successfully secured homes in the period minus the number newly forced from their apartments by high rents in the same timeframe. Data Source: [Inflow and outflow from the population experiencing homelessness](#)

¹⁹ "Of the 1,740 people who answered whether this was their first-time experiencing homelessness, 36.7% said yes" Zapata, Marisa " [2023 Point in Time Findings Report: Count of People Experiencing Homelessness in Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington Counties, Oregon](#)" p. 13 04/29/2024

²⁰ Based on 2020 U.S. Census data for Portland, the average Black household brings in about \$3,000 in monthly income, while Latino households earn \$4,500, and Native American households earn nearly \$5,000. In comparison, white Portland households earn \$6,400 on average each month. Zelenkiski, Alex " [Most people of color can't afford to live in Portland, report finds](#)" OPB March 22, 2023