

THE TWENTY-FIFTH ANNUAL ROSALYNN CARTER GEORGIA MENTAL HEALTH FORUM VIRTUAL EVENT

FRIDAY, MAY 21, 2021
(DAY 2)

11:00 a.m. - Noon Conversation: Georgia Innovations in Supportive Housing

The innovative approaches to supportive housing that are underway in Georgia will be discussed. Georgia Supportive Housing Association/Housing First Coalition and the DBHDD Supportive Housing Advisory Committee/Supported Housing Advisory Committee for Residential Experiences (SHARE) will respond to comments and questions that are raised during the session. These organizations seek to advance the creation and preservation of quality supportive housing in Georgia for persons with disabilities. They provide sufficient resources for this effort through education and advocacy.

Answers to questions from the chat:

Q. Will this forum have any relevance to people outside the United States?

This forum is focused on Georgia however Housing First principles are being applied in other countries where studies evidence that permanent supportive housing is effective in reducing homelessness and achieving housing stability.

Q. I expect the tsunami of evictions will require policing of parking lots where people live out of their cars. Also, is there a shortage of rental properties?

Studies indicate that homelessness was increasing in the United States, even prior to COVID-19, and the safety nets were under-resourced to meet the growing need. Providers have made heroic efforts during the pandemic to safely house and serve the need. It is feared that an end to the CDC moratorium on evictions will be devastating to many households. A silver lining is the targeted Emergency Rental Assistance funds that tenants can apply for and a number of eviction freezes enacted by state and local governments which may not be affected by vacation of the CDC's eviction moratorium, if the recent Federal Court ruling is not successfully appealed. Whether policing of parking lots that serve as base for people living in their cars will increase will be location specific. There is a shortage of affordable housing and, particularly, a gap between the number of rental units affordable to extremely low-income households (0-30 percent AMFI). The Georgia Department of Community Affairs recently hired a contractor to

assess the statewide affordable housing resources and supportive housing resources in Georgia and data is expected to be released in April of 2022.

Q. Are lessors allowed to reject ex-felons convicted of minor marijuana offenses?

Landlords have an obligation to honor Fair Housing laws. In 2016, the Department of Housing and Urban Development issued a guidance memo on the use of criminal background as a factor in leasing. It discussed the issue of disparate impact, wherein the landlord's policy is not discriminatory on its face, but it has an impact on a particular protected class. Landlords have responded differently to the guidance, and there is varying legal advice provided about rental policies. Much of the advice for criminal background policies includes that single or lesser offenses should not result in a denial, but multiple offenses or the underlying facts of an offense can. The guidance makes clear that a policy not to lease to any person with a record of arrest or incarceration is forbidden and an individualized review is required in order to determine the seriousness of the offense, the time lapsed, etc. and the relationship of the record to reasonable concerns the lessor may have.

Q. What is being advocated for as far as use of the American Rescue Funds to leapfrog, push the dial to improve availability of supportive housing in Georgia?

This is important advocacy. To join the Housing First Georgia Supportive Housing Coalition, please email gshassociation.com. The American Rescue Plan, passed by Congress last month, includes \$1.9 trillion in emergency pandemic aid, and includes Georgia's \$17.4 billion share to cover revenue losses, schools, unemployment benefits, rental assistance and infrastructure needs. To spread the aid equitably and put it to its best uses across Georgia's 159 counties and dozens of cities, we are working to define what to recommend and to advocate with the Governor and with larger communities receiving direct allocations for a portion of it to be applied to housing and supports that will provide long-term stability to vulnerable Georgians.

Q. What is the link between a capitalist society and social issues like affordable housing? Government has to play a major role.

We have a deep divide between the most and least wealthy in our country. We have rising home prices, an expensive rental market, and expensive development costs. The panelists' exhortations to prioritize housing and equity, as a community and as a nation, need to be voiced widely. This prioritization needs to be taken by our government and stakeholders, and this forum lends its collective voice!