

# TRANSITIONAL HOUSING SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE ON PROBATION IN PIMA COUNTY, ARIZONA

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This report was created with support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation as part of the Safety and Justice Challenge, which seeks to reduce over-incarceration by changing the way America thinks about and uses jails. Core to the Challenge is a competition designed to support efforts to improve local criminal justice systems across the country that are working to safely reduce over-reliance on jails, with a particular focus on addressing disproportionate impact on low-income individuals and communities of color.

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The authors would like to thank Pima County's Adult Probation Department for their engagement in interviews and policy review for this study. We would also like to thank the Arizona Administrative Office of the Courts for providing our team with the administrative data needed to conduct quantitative data analysis. Lastly, we are grateful to our Urban Institute colleague Evelyn F. McCoy; to the Adult Probation Department's Chief Probation Officer David Sanders, Cara Singer, and Matt Anderson; and to the Arizona Administrative Office of the Courts' Shanda Breed and Matias Nevarez for their thoughtful feedback on earlier versions of this report.

# Transitional Housing Support for People on Probation in Pima County, Arizona

Housing instability has been found to be closely related to people's risk of jail incarceration (Brown et al. 2022; Cho 2004; Metraux, Roman, and Cho 2007), and as such, several jurisdictions across the country have invested in stable housing options for people involved in the criminal legal system. One such jurisdiction, Pima County, Arizona, has invested in short- and long-term housing support for people involved in the criminal legal system, including people on probation. In this vein, the county has also expanded its transitional housing support program as a bridge to long-term stable housing.

The Urban Institute, funded by the CUNY Institute for State and Local Governance via the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation as part of the Safety and Justice Challenge Research Consortium, partnered with the Pima County Adult Probation Department (APD) to study transitional housing support for people on probation and its relationship to probation terminations resulting in jail incarceration. In this study, we used a mixed-methods approach involving analysis of three data sources: (1) administrative data on people serving probation who received APD funding for transitional housing support between 2020 and 2022; (2) interviews with 30 key stakeholders, including APD officers, representatives of committees leading Pima County's probation-reform and jail-population-reduction efforts, and people on probation; and (3) a review of probation case files for 28 unique cases in which people on probation received transitional housing support. In this brief, we describe key takeaways from our broader study, which, in addition to transitional housing, examined probation pathways to jail and jail incarceration trends for people on probation in Pima County (see Khalid and coauthors [2023] for a full report on the study, including a detailed methodology and results; see Shukla, Khalid, and Jackson [2022] for a short brief on jail population trends in Pima County).

## An Overview of Transitional Housing Support for People on Probation

Housing instability, especially chronic homelessness, has been found to have strong links to jail incarceration. Not only are people with histories of criminal legal system involvement at higher risk of facing homelessness, but homelessness can be a major cause of further system involvement. Eligibility

requirements to receive housing support, discriminatory screening practices, high housing costs, and a scarcity of housing vouchers are common for justice-involved people, and conversely, behaviors associated with homelessness that are often criminalized, like sleeping, sitting, and asking for money in public spaces, can increase people's risk of justice involvement (Brown et al. 2022; Cho 2004; Metraux, Roman, and Cho 2007). This is particularly true for people serving probation, whose probation conditions require them to report and maintain a valid address, a violation of which can result in jail incarceration.

To address such housing-related challenges, several agencies across the country have ramped up efforts to prioritize stable housing options for justice-involved people. In 2019, Pima County piloted one such program, the Pima County Housing First program, which implemented a permanent supportive housing model that combines long-term housing subsidies with intensive case management tailored to justice-involved people experiencing homelessness (McBain et al. 2021). Much like other subsidized housing programs, the demand for Pima County Housing First is high and the application process and wait times can be lengthy. To cater to people's immediate, short-term housing needs, Pima County also strengthened its transitional housing program. Transitional housing has been in place in the county for several years, but support for it was boosted in 2019, partly through funds made available to the county through the Safety and Justice Challenge. The overarching goals of transitional housing are to provide people a bridge to longer-term, more stable housing and to reduce their risk of legal system involvement, especially jail incarceration directly or indirectly related to homelessness. In the short term, this support can give people time to explore affordable permanent housing options, secure employment to support their housing needs, and better abide by probation conditions, especially those pertaining to having a valid address on file.

In Pima County, transitional housing support for people on probation involves referrals from APD officers to local halfway houses and shelters and short-term funding from the APD for their stays. Funding is determined on an as-needed basis and is typically provided for one to four weeks, averaging at about two weeks. After the approved funding ends, people may decide to stay longer, in which case they are responsible for their rent; otherwise, they work with their probation officers to identify alternate short-term stay options until they find long-term solutions.

The APD contracts with various facilities to provide this support. As of March 2023, 12 housing providers with about 20 facilities were participating in the program, although there were few housing options for people convicted of sex offenses and women. The APD has increasingly prioritized working with providers who have on-site managers and supportive services over basic shelters that only provide beds.

## Who Receives Transitional Housing Support?

The eligibility criteria for accessing transitional housing while on probation in Pima County are broad. Any person on probation experiencing housing instability can request referrals and funding from the APD, although priority (especially for funding) may be given to people at higher risk of violating probation and people with more immediate housing needs, which is consistent with research on housing for people with criminal legal involvement (Metraux, Roman, and Cho 2007).

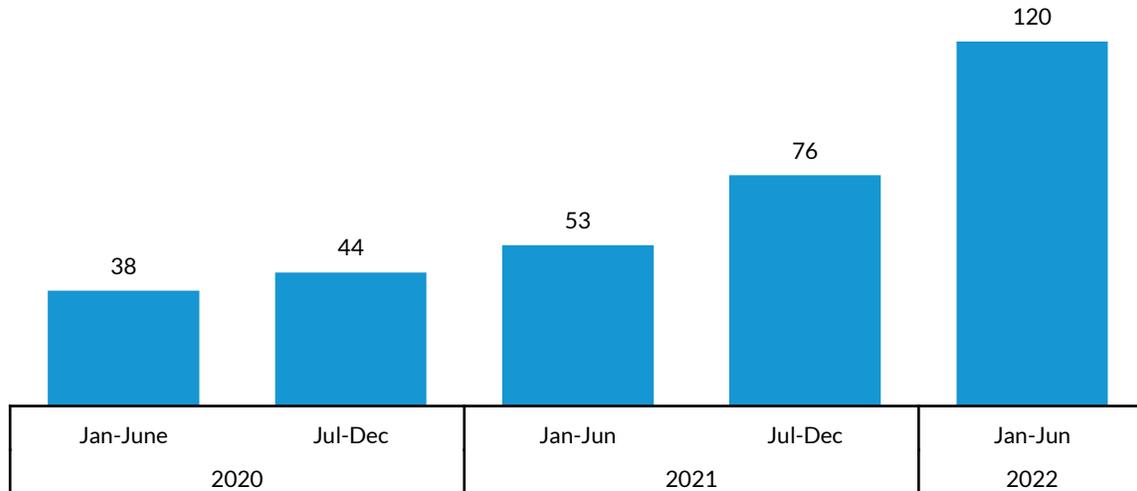
From our interviews, we learned that in Pima County, transitional housing support (and especially APD funding for transitional housing) is prioritized for the following people on probation:

- people determined to be at **higher risk** of committing formal violations or serving jail time because of housing issues;<sup>1</sup> these include people on the Intensive Probation Supervision caseload, which involves a higher level of supervision and more conditions than the Standard Probation Supervision caseload
- people **about to be released from jail or prison** who do not have postrelease housing arrangements
- people **about to be released from substance use treatment facilities** who do not have postrelease housing arrangements
- people charged with **domestic violence offenses** who are required to move out of the complainants' residences
- people charged with **sex offenses**, who generally face housing challenges because they are not permitted to live in certain neighborhoods, including those near schools, child care facilities, and parks

Our analysis of administrative data on people on probation who received APD funding for transitional housing between January 2020 and June 2022 confirmed these eligibility criteria. During that period, 331 people received funding<sup>2</sup> and the number of recipients increased significantly (figure 1). Bivariate analyses suggest that between January 2020 and June 2022, 26 percent of the people who received transitional housing support were on the Intensive Probation Supervision caseload, a significantly larger share than that of the overall probation population between (7 percent). They also had higher criminogenic risk scores, higher odds of having at least one felony charge as part of their original sentence, and a higher likelihood of having a “probation tail” (a sentence that entails incarceration and probation terms).

FIGURE 1

The Number of People Who Received Financial Support from the Pima County Adult Probation Department for Transitional Housing Increased Significantly from January 2020 to June 2022



Source: The Urban Institute's analysis of the Pima County Adult Probation Department's administrative data on people who received funding for transitional housing.

## The Relationship between Transitional Housing Support and Probation Terminations to Jail

We conducted multivariate analyses to study the relationship between transitional housing support and probation terminations that resulted in jail incarceration.<sup>3</sup> For these analyses, we focused on a sample of people ( $n=207$ , the treatment group) who received APD funding for transitional housing support and were actively on probation between January 2020 and December 2021 and compared them with people serving probation during the same period who did not receive APD funding for transitional housing ( $n=11,827$ , the control group), following outcomes through June 2022.

Results showed that although people who received APD funding for transitional housing had their probation terminated to jail at a higher rate than people who did not receive such funding (9 percent versus 6 percent), they did not have significantly higher odds of being terminated to jail through revocations to jail or coterminous terminations.<sup>4</sup> However, people who received APD funding for transitional housing support were significantly more likely to be charged with a felony or undesignated felony, were more likely to be classified in a higher risk category based on criminogenic risk scores, generally had more petitions to revoke filed against them during their probationary terms, were more

likely to be on the Intensive Probation Supervision caseload, and were more likely to have a probation tail status, all factors that are associated with increased odds of jail incarceration (Khalid et al. 2023). Once we controlled for these factors, this group did not have significantly higher odds of being terminated to jail through revocations to jail or coterminous terminations. This means that the likelihood of being incarcerated in jail after a formal violation was not different for people who received APD funding for transitional housing support and people who did not.

Though these analyses describe individual-level relationships between transitional housing and jail-based outcomes, they do not capture the true impact of transitional housing support on termination type for three reasons. First and foremost, the data we analyzed did not include people on probation who may have used transitional housing options, independently or through referrals from the APD, but did not receive APD funding. The data also did not include information on people's housing statuses after funding ended. Second, identifying an appropriate comparison sample was challenging absent information on housing needs among the overall probation population. Third, several factors that we did not have data on can influence people's experiences on probation and their likelihood of violating probation conditions. These include the amount and duration of funding for transitional housing support and in-house services and staff engagement at halfway houses and shelters; they also include people's employment status, wages, mental health needs and substance use issues, perceptions of halfway houses and shelters in general and of the services provided there specifically, perceived stability, and interactions with probation officers regarding issues such as housing needs. The APD does not measure these factors, and they are therefore missing from our administrative data analysis. Moreover, other challenges owed to the transitional housing program's being in the early stages of implementation. These included having a small number of people served at the time of analysis, which can lead to more variance in findings, and having short follow-up periods to observe outcomes, which made determining aggregate-level causal relationships difficult. Despite these limitations, this analysis sheds light on important relationships, provides a preliminary look at the early effects of transitional housing support, and shows that further in-depth analyses using detailed metrics on transitional housing are warranted.

## Benefits and Challenges of Pima County's Transitional Housing Support

To better understand Pima County's transitional housing support and to contextualize findings on that support's relationship with probation terminations, we spoke with key stakeholders about the benefits

and challenges of transitional housing and which elements can be improved to improve people's experiences with that support. Though we did not find the program to have significant effects on people's odds of being incarcerated in jail, stakeholders perceive the program to be immensely helpful for people's well-being, especially when "success" is looked at more holistically than only in terms of recidivism.

## What Worked?

Key findings on benefits of Pima County's transitional housing support program include the following:

- **Pima County's transitional housing support provides immediate support and short-term stability**, and it is designed to instill accountability and reduce people's likelihood of absconding because of housing-related challenges.
- **Having housing, even temporarily, gives people time to work on other immediate needs**, like finding jobs and generally complying with probation conditions. For people recently released from jail or prison, stability within the first few weeks is crucial for successful reentry. This program, especially the financial support element, aims to support people during this period.
- **The program provides people short-term support while they wait for more permanent housing support**, especially related to applying for housing vouchers and other subsidized housing options.

## What Can Be Improved?

Key findings on improvements Pima County can make to its transitional housing support include the following:

- The demand for transitional housing is high among people on probation in Pima County, but **housing options are insufficient**. With only 20 contracted facilities, priority is given to people determined to be at higher risk of violating probation and to need housing more urgently. This means that people can face long waits before receiving referrals and housing assignments.
- **Funding is also limited**. Though the APD has several funding streams, including via the Safety and Justice Challenge, to support people with rent, it is unable to fulfill all requests for funding. Absent funding options, people need to pay their rent themselves, which can be challenging for people facing unemployment or who otherwise have limited resources.

- **Housing options for people with sex offenses and women are further limited**, resulting in long wait times for housing assignments, especially those that can be funded by the APD.
- **Transitional housing can be less of a stabilizing force for people with mental health and/or substance use needs**, who generally need specialized care in addition to stable housing.
- Similarly, **the efficacy of transitional housing support for people on probation can be limited without other forms of support**, such as help with employment, transportation costs, food, and medical needs. Though the APD is proactively working to contract halfway houses and shelters that provide case-management support, the level of support and services they provide varies.

## Conclusion

Short-term transitional housing support is one part of Pima County's two-pronged approach to supporting the housing needs of people on probation (along with permanent, long-term housing) as a means of preventing future criminal legal system involvement, especially jail incarceration. Findings from this study suggest that transitional housing can be a helpful part of a multifaceted approach to providing stability but that it may be insufficient in and of itself. Though we did not find receiving transitional housing support to be associated with increased odds of probation compliance in this study, our interviews with key stakeholders and review of probation case files provide some evidence of the substantial benefits of the county's program, especially pertaining to the beneficiaries' well-being. The program can provide people crucial short-term relief from housing instability, giving them time to focus on abiding by probation conditions and identifying permanent housing options. Additionally, when making funding decisions, the APD prioritized people who were generally more at risk of violating probation to provide support to people who might need it more. Our findings also highlight various challenges with the current program, most importantly challenges pertaining to limited housing and funding options and to a lack of ancillary services. Contracting with more housing providers, identifying additional funding streams, and providing other types of case management support can all help Pima County improve the program's efficacy for increasing people's compliance with probation conditions as well as for people's experiences with transitional housing and overall well-being.

# Notes

- 1 Criminogenic risk, or a person's criminogenic needs and risk of reoffending, is assessed through Arizona's statewide, standardized risk-needs assessment tool, the Offender Screening Tool (OST). The OST assesses people on nine domains focused on the presence of lifestyle issues known to be associated with offending behavior (e.g., criminal history, substance use, mental health needs, social connections, etc.). OST scores are based on information collected through a person's case file, face-to-face interviews, and the professional judgement of staff. For more information, see "Offender Screening Tool (OST)," Arizona Judicial Branch, accessed June 21, 2023, [https://www.azcourts.gov/apspd/evidence-based-practice/risk-needs-assessment/offender-screening-tool-ost#:~:text=The%20offender%20screening%20tool%20\(OST,of%20the%20Courts%20\(AOC\).](https://www.azcourts.gov/apspd/evidence-based-practice/risk-needs-assessment/offender-screening-tool-ost#:~:text=The%20offender%20screening%20tool%20(OST,of%20the%20Courts%20(AOC).)
- 2 This number only includes people who received financial assistance from the APD for transitional housing. Data on people who received referrals from the APD to halfway houses or shelters but no financial assistance from the department are not systematically maintained by the APD and were therefore not available to the project team for analysis. The county began tracking funding for transitional housing in early 2020.
- 3 Probation in Pima County can end in an unsuccessful termination to jail through two types of dispositions following a formal petition to revoke: revocation to jail and coterminous disposition. If revoked to jail, the person spends the rest of their sentence incarcerated. Coterminous sentences, which are used frequently in Pima County, can be a combination of community-based supervision and jail incarceration, with the probation period expiring after the jail term ends (De La Rosa and Peterson 2020). The type of disposition and the length of the jail stay depends on the plea agreement, the seriousness of the violation (whether a technical violation, a new crime violation, or a combination of both), and the seriousness of the original offense.
- 4 People can be held in jail for two other reasons as well: if they are at risk of absconding before their probation violation disposition, and because of formal nonrevocation sanctions (e.g., short-term stays for failed drug tests). These types of sanctions are used less frequently in Pima County, however, and data on them are not available in administrative records on people on probation. Though we also analyzed administrative jail records in this study, the data do not clearly distinguish reasons for jail incarceration, making it difficult to separate nonrevocation sanctions from unsuccessful terminations. Results from the jail data analysis are not included in this report and can be found in Khalid and coauthors (2023).

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