

Message Guide:  
**Making the Case for  
Supportive Housing**



CSH, a national nonprofit that helps communities plan, finance, build, and manage supportive housing, engaged the Housing Narrative Lab in 2025 to conduct public opinion narrative research and test messaging. The goal was to assess public understanding of supportive housing and identify which messages resonate with a broad audience. CSH and Housing Narrative Lab also partnered to develop effective messages that increase support for and investment in this long-lasting solution.

## KEY RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ Respondents overwhelmingly support stable housing combined with services to solve homelessness with 9 out of 10 supporting it and 6 out of 10 strongly supporting it.
- ▶ The top three reasons respondents **SUPPORT** affordable housing with services: 1) It combines affordable housing with tailored support, 2) it gets people off the streets and out of encampments and 3) it provides stability for individuals and families.
- ▶ The top reason respondents **OPPOSE** affordable housing and support services: They worry people will take advantage of the program.

## TOP TESTED MESSAGES

**Shifting Resources** moved people to support more investment in housing with supportive services for people experiencing homelessness. This message resonates most with people who identify as Republican, have a conservative ideology, are majority white, live in suburbs, are people 55 and older and homeowners.

**Everybody wants to solve homelessness but how we do it matters. Housing along with supportive services like job training and substance use and mental health treatments help people get off the streets and rebuild their lives. It's common sense — everyone needs a home and some people with disabilities, health issues, or young people leaving foster care need more help. It's time to shift our resources toward compassionate and effective approaches like providing stable, affordable housing with support services like job training, mental health care and substance use treatment, to improve life for everyone in our communities.**


**Personal Story** was effective with our base, persuadables and segments of the opposition, including people who are white, 55 and older, Republicans voters, with conservative ideology and homeowners.

**For years, I was trapped in a cycle I couldn't break. I lost my home because I couldn't afford both medical bills and rent. I bounced between shelters and the streets. It took courage and hard work to get my life back on track, but I also really needed some support. I'm glad I found supportive housing. Now I have my own housing, a place to cook a meal, help paying my rent, and access to the services I need. I'm working part-time, building savings, and rebuilding my life. Supportive housing gave me a second chance.**

# AUDIENCES

Lake Research Partners, who conducted the research, uses the labels Base, Persuadable and Opposition to describe audience segments. The Housing Narrative Lab uses Likeminded for the base and Least Moveable for the opposition.

Our findings highlight that a one-size-fits-all approach to messaging is ineffective. **A nuanced strategy is essential**, with tailored narratives for the three primary audiences.

AUDIENCE	WHO THEY ARE AND WHAT THEY BELIEVE	WAYS TO TALK TO THEM BASED ON WHAT THEY CARE ABOUT
<b>Insiders</b> (tiny % of population) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Your co-workers, community leaders, young college-educated, people in progressive pockets. They are organizers, advocates, service providers or work in the housing sector.</li><li>▶ Believe housing is a human right.</li><li>▶ Reject opposition messages and ideas about ways to address homelessness.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Respond best to bold messages rooted in equity and justice.</li><li>▶ Already deeply informed and already taking action.</li></ul>
<b>Base/ Likeminded</b> (35% of the population) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ The people you want to mobilize to push for investment in housing and needed services. They believe housing is a basic human need.</li><li>▶ More likely to be Black, renters, majority Democratic with a liberal ideology. They have a high rate of direct or indirect experience with housing instability or homelessness.</li><li>▶ Messages should focus on the values of <b>dignity, shared responsibility and systemic change</b>.</li><li>▶ <b>Responds best to <i>Personal Story</i>, then <i>Shifting Resources</i> messages.</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Use value statements such as, “No matter our race, gender or income, we all want to get and keep a roof over our heads.” “Having a safe, stable place to call home is foundational to our children’s and grandchildren’s well-being and benefits all of our futures.”</li><li>▶ Offer statements they can share with others: “Supportive housing is evidence-based — it keeps people housed, reduces expensive emergency services and makes communities safer.”</li><li>▶ Use language that frames action as systemic change: “This is how we break the cycle of homelessness.” “Instead of jailing or fining people, we should invest in proven housing solutions.”</li></ul>
<b>Persuadables</b> (36% of the population) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Key to expanding public support beyond the already committed base.</li><li>▶ More racially diverse than the opposition but less than the base.</li><li>▶ Politically diverse, including Independents (28%), Democrats (34%) and a significant Republican contingent (36%). <b>This means that a successful message cannot rely on partisan language or appeals.</b></li><li>▶ Concerned about homelessness but skeptical of government action and worry more about high taxes and people taking advantage of government programs.</li><li>▶ <b>Motivated by results, not ideology and responds best to <i>Shifting Resources</i> and <i>Personal Story</i> messages.</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Respond to concrete, visible benefits tied to safety and community benefits. “Stable housing plus services gets people off the streets and makes neighborhoods safer” or “Supportive housing means fewer tents, safer streets and stronger communities.”</li><li>▶ Frame supportive housing as “smart spending,” not as more spending. Consider phrases like, “This is about spending smarter, not more — shifting money from expensive ER visits and jail stays to proven housing solutions.”</li></ul>
<b>Least Moveable</b> (29% of the population) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ This group is least aligned with solutions that provide supportive housing and services. Messaging aims to reduce their opposition. They are least likely to be persuaded because they believe housing is a private responsibility or support programs that force homeless people into jails, or treatment.</li><li>▶ Concerned about fraud, waste and abuse in supportive housing programs.</li><li>▶ Lean male, are more likely to be over 65, are majority white, Republican, with a conservative ideology, higher income and homeowners.</li><li>▶ <b>This group responds best to the <i>Personal Story</i>, then the <i>Shifting Resources</i> messages.</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Use language that shows our solutions are pragmatic and efficient and that appeals to their sense of fiscal responsibility: “Shift resources to what works.”</li><li>▶ Talking about how supportive housing “gets people off the streets and out of encampments.” This addresses top concerns about safety and order.</li><li>▶ Tell personal stories that show how housing and services got people on a path to self-sufficiency, which appeals to this group’s value of personal effort and responsibility.</li></ul>

# WORDS TO EMBRACE AND REPLACE

✓ Say this	✗ Instead of this	Why
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Supportive housing as long as needed</li> <li>✓ Stable, affordable housing</li> <li>✓ Stable housing combined with support services</li> <li>✓ Supportive housing for people with complex or different needs, like disabilities, leaving foster care or having mental health issues</li> <li>✓ Stable housing with services that support recovery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Permanent supportive housing</li> <li>✗ Non-time limited housing</li> <li>✗ Stable housing with support services for a limited time</li> <li>✗ Housing First</li> </ul>	<p>The word “permanent” can evoke indefinite, irreversible commitment that makes some voters, particularly those in the persuadable middle, wary. The phrase “as long as needed” is more flexible and compassionate, and implies a needs-based relationship rather than an open-ended entitlement. It also suggests effectiveness. For advocates, this is a valuable refinement for messaging that can help build trust and reduce resistance because it frames the support in a way that feels both responsible and humane.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Support services like job training, counseling, mental health and drug use treatment, and help finding and securing a home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Support services generally</li> <li>✗ Housing with wraparound services</li> </ul>	<p>People come to the conversation with the belief that people experiencing housing instability and homelessness need help finding work and medical services. Messages that reflect this are well received.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Affordable or stable housing with support services <b>tailored to individual needs</b> and helps people stay housed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Stable housing with support services as people need it</li> </ul>	<p>People support the idea of tailored services to meet individual needs.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Providing <b>affordable</b> housing with support services gives people the help they need to overcome homelessness or address their complex needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Providing <b>long-term</b> housing with support services gives people the help they need to overcome homelessness or address their complex needs</li> </ul>	<p>Providing long-term housing with support services gives people the help they need to overcome homelessness or address their complex needs</p>