

CHOICE: A Holistic Statewide Housing Intervention for Individuals with SMI Experiencing Housing Insecurities

Mississippi Home Corporation

Special Needs Housing: Housing for Persons with Special Needs

HFA Staff Contact

Jenny Layton

jenny.layton@mshc.com

HFA: Mississippi Home Corp

Title: CHOICE: A Holistic Statewide Housing Intervention for Individuals with SMI Experiencing Housing Insecurities

Category: Special Needs Housing: Housing for Persons with Special Needs

Background

The *Olmstead v. LC* civil rights case of 1999 led to the United States Supreme Court's decision that "disabled individuals have a qualified right to receive state-funded support and services in the community rather than institutions". Transitioning to community settings leads to a heightened look at a time-old problem: *lack of affordable community housing and access to community care for those with disabling conditions*. Housing insecurities and limited income are key factors that impact individuals living with severe mental illness (SMI). The combination of mental illness and homelessness has gotten national attention through *Olmstead*. Severe mental illness, affordable housing, and community support intersect which challenges states to find ways to respond to *The Olmstead* lawsuit. In response to the *Olmstead* case, the Mississippi Department of Mental Health partnered with Mississippi Home Corp (MHC) to provide statewide community housing options through the CHOICE program and wraparound services through Community Mental Health Centers (CMHC).

Housing Need

The shift in care from institutional settings to community-based settings led to an investigative look at gaps in the Department of Mental comprehensive services in Mississippi's community support networks. Looking at national data, the need for affordable housing as part of holistic community response is undeniable. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), individuals with SMI are at a greater risk for experiencing housing insecurities due to lower-income, multiple health issues, and limited access to affordable housing. In addition to the impact SMI has on housing access, NAMI statistics indicate that 25% of individuals experiencing homelessness are also living with SMI (NAMI)⁽¹⁾. In Mississippi, about 95% of individuals served by a Mental Health facility in Mississippi met the Federal definition for SMI compared to the nationally 71% SMI rate.

Additionally, in 2019, the state of Mississippi identified 1,184 individuals as homeless (NAEH, 2019)⁽²⁾. In that same year, 876 individuals who accessed mental health facilities in Mississippi came from a homeless shelter (SAMHSA, 2019)⁽³⁾. This number does not include unsheltered individuals or individuals currently in institutional settings seeking a community alternative. MHC saw the need for affordable housing to be involved in the response to the *Olmstead* lawsuit (*Department of Justice v. the State of Mississippi*) which required a shift to community-based treatment for individuals with SMI.

Problem Statement

Individuals with SMI are at a greater risk of experiencing income and housing insecurities, impacting their ability to access community mental health programs.

Innovative Response to *Olmstead*

The relationship between SMI, housing instability, and community care systems is a constant concern related to the state's *Olmstead* response. Mississippi Home Corporation (MHC), through collaboration with the Mississippi Department of Mental Health, provided a holistic statewide model in response to the housing crisis among individuals with SMI and the *Olmstead* case. Mississippi legislators increased Mississippi Community Mental Health service capacity and provided financial support to MHC to develop an innovative sustainable housing solution for individuals with SMI. In response to this challenge, MHC implemented the CHOICE program in 2016.

(1) [Securing Stable Housing | NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)

(2) [MS fact sheet 2019 PIT Data \(endhomelessness.org\)](#)

(3) [AllSingleYearReports_Part1 \(samhsa.gov\)](#)

(4) <http://www.dmh.ms.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/FY20-Fast-Facts-Final-Draft.10.6.pdf>

HFA: Mississippi Home Corp

Title: CHOICE: A Holistic Statewide Housing Intervention for Individuals with SMI Experiencing Housing Insecurities

Category: Special Needs Housing: Housing for Persons with Special Needs

Before developing the CHOICE program, there was little to no information about comprehensive statewide programs that include homeless systems, mental health systems, and housing networks working holistically.

CHOICE

Due to the relationship of SMI, homelessness, and limitations to sustainable housing, MHC partnered with the local Continuum of Cares and the Department of Mental Health to develop and implement the CHOICE program. The CHOICE program:

1. Provides 12 + Permanent Supportive Housing Vouchers to identify special groups experiencing housing instability living with an SMI.
 - a. The housing voucher provided subsidized rent (based on income) to qualified individuals in an identified community in Mississippi.
 - b. CHOICE focuses on applicants' preferences and can be used with private landlords.
2. Connects applicants with Community Mental Health Centers (CMHC) in their area.
 - a. To ensure access to community care, CHOICE housing case managers work with applicants to connect them to local community CMHC and obtain appropriate community and home care.
3. Promotes housing sustainability.
 - a. After receiving 12 months of subsidized housing assistance, housing case management, and CMHC services, CHOICE applicants are positioned to transition to a Housing Authority subsidy voucher.

Coordination of Services

From identifying service gaps and funding to program implementation, partnerships and coordination were critical to the CHOICE program's success. MHC structured CHOICE to rely on partnerships with Continuum of Cares, Housing Authorities, subsidized housing, and the Department of Mental Health, each system focusing on their strengths and coordinating to provide a cohesive system for individuals with SMI through CHOICE. MHC's partnerships through the CHOICE program continue to evolve.

Program Impact and Measurable Benefits

The CHOICE program is a statewide housing effort that serves 82 counties in the state of Mississippi. In 2020, CHOICE served 258 (869 from 2016-2020) individuals with SMI who lack permanent housing. Of those served, 58% were from institutional hospitals, and 42% came from homeless situations. 12% of those served were discharged to a community subsidized unit, and 37% were discharged to sustainable, affordable housing without a subsidy (Chart 1 & 2).

Individuals in the CHOICE program had a decreased experience of institutionalizations. According to the data, only 7.8% of CHOICE participants had an event that required institutionalization treatment. The average length of institutionalization for individuals with SMI in Mississippi is 93.5 days. The average length of institutional settings for individuals in the CHOICE program is 37.6 days (Chart 3 a). Individuals receiving CHOICE are more likely to retain subsidized affordable housing and receive community mental health services.

Benefits that Outweigh Cost

- (1) [Securing Stable Housing | NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)
- (2) [MS fact sheet 2019 PIT Data \(endhomelessness.org\)](#)
- (3) [AllSingleYearReports_Part1 \(samhsa.gov\)](#)
- (4) <http://www.dmh.ms.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/FY20-Fast-Facts-Final-Draft.10.6.pdf>

HFA: Mississippi Home Corp

Title: CHOICE: A Holistic Statewide Housing Intervention for Individuals with SMI Experiencing Housing Insecurities

Category: Special Needs Housing: Housing for Persons with Special Needs

Housing intervention programs like CHOICE obviate the revolving door of institutionalization and homelessness. In 2020 the average cost to stay in one of Mississippi's designated state psychiatric hospitals was \$450.71 per day; whereas, the average cost per day to receive housing support with case management from the CHOICE program was \$21.80. According to statistics, the average length of stay in a psychiatric hospital in Mississippi is 93.54 days; additionally, according to statistics, someone with SMI and lack of community support and stable housing will remain in psychiatric hospitals longer than their counterparts. That adds up to an annual cost to the state of \$42,159.41/individual annually (using the 93.54-day average). This cost amount is considering only 93.5 average annual treatment days. The cost will go up if adjusted for the increase in length of stay and frequency of commitments due to housing insecurities (DMH, 2020) ⁽⁴⁾. On average, CHOICE supportive housing costs \$7,955.29/individual annually, including a monthly rental cost of \$579 (Chart 3b). At program graduation, the annual cost of individuals who received CHOICE intervention decreases as they transition to subsidized affordable housing, receiving community support from their local CMHC.

Effective strategies:

1. *Preventing:* Partnering with local Continuum of Cares to engage individuals while in institutional settings before they are released to unstable housing situations and engaging individuals who are homeless and frequent psychiatric hospitals.
2. *Preparing:* Working with local landlords by advocating for CHOICE participants to obtain or sustain housing and providing a housing subsidy to reduce CHOICE participants' rental burden.
3. *Delivering:* Partner with Community Mental Health centers to provide home-based services, case management, and employment intervention appropriate to the participant's needs.
 - a. Partnering with tax credits landlords, local Housing Authorities, and low-income housing programs to prioritize vouchers to individuals impacted by the Olmstead lawsuit.
 - b.

Successful Outcomes

Testimonies

1. *A.S. entered the CHOICE program on 10/2019. She experienced housing instability and severe mental illness. By the time she exited the program, she was stable on her medications, working a full-time job, and was moving into a new house that she would be able to afford on her own. In the discharge interview, she told her CHOICE case manager that she appreciated the program helping her stay connected with her mental health provider and taking her medication each day. She said she felt better than she had felt her entire life and was looking forward to the next chapter.*
2. *C.F. entered the CHOICE program on 2/2020. He was living in a shed behind an acquaintance's house with no running water or electricity. During the program, he stayed connected with his mental health provider and received a Section 8 voucher. He has applied for disability and is in the appeals process with an optimistic outlook.*

Sustainability and Replication

The CHOICE program paved the way for developing systems that can work together to increase long-term housing stability. Thanks to the floor plan laid out by the CHOICE program, this model is currently being developed for Mississippi's Youth program and Reentry program. The Youth and Reentry programs expect to pilot in 2021-2022.

(1) [Securing Stable Housing | NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)

(2) [MS fact sheet 2019 PIT Data \(endhomelessness.org\)](#)

(3) [AllSingleYearReports_Part1 \(samhsa.gov\)](#)

(4) <http://www.dmh.ms.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/FY20-Fast-Facts-Final-Draft.10.6.pdf>

HFA: Mississippi Home Corp

Title: CHOICE: A Holistic Statewide Housing Intervention for Individuals with SMI Experiencing Housing Insecurities

Category: Special Needs Housing: Housing for Persons with Special Needs

Supporting Visual Graphs

Chart 1.

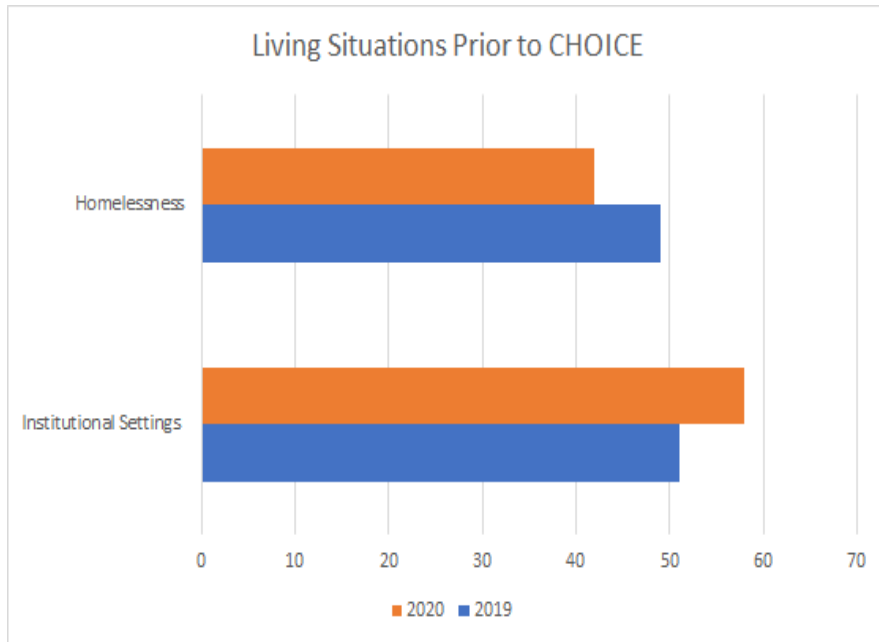
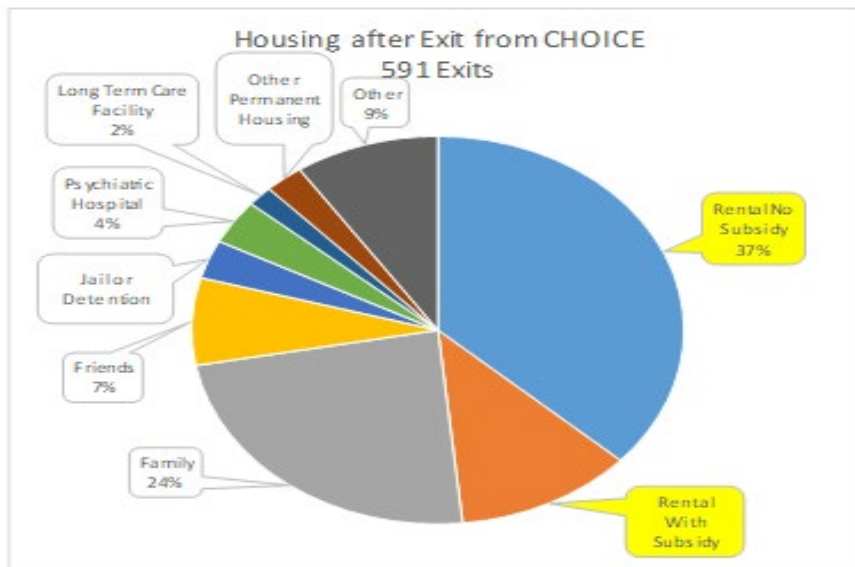


Chart 2.



- (1) [Securing Stable Housing | NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)
- (2) [MS fact sheet 2019 PIT Data \(endhomelessness.org\)](#)
- (3) [AllSingleYearReports_Part1 \(samhsa.gov\)](#)
- (4) <http://www.dmh.ms.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/FY20-Fast-Facts-Final-Draft.10.6.pdf>

HFA: Mississippi Home Corp

Title: CHOICE: A Holistic Statewide Housing Intervention for Individuals with SMI Experiencing Housing Insecurities

Category: Special Needs Housing: Housing for Persons with Special Needs

Supporting Visual Graphs

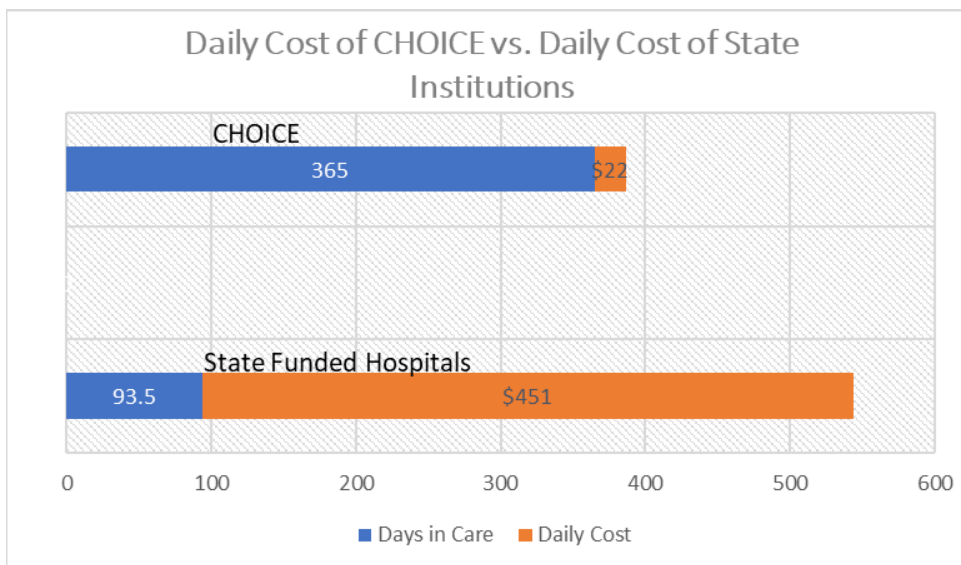
Chart 3a.

Utilization of Institutional Care		
State Funded Hospitals		CHOICE
Avg. # Days in Hospital	General population 93.5	CHOICE participants 37.6
Total Cost	\$42,159	\$16,965

Chart 3b.

Rent Amount Paid by CHOICE
Average per Month

Payment Type	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Average
With Tenant Contribution						
Rent	\$632	\$541	\$531	\$555	\$579	\$552
Tenant Portion	\$109	\$188	\$160	\$166	\$145	\$162
CHOICE Portion	\$523	\$353	\$371	\$388	\$434	\$389
No Tenant Contribution						
CHOICE Portion	\$577	\$544	\$534	\$529	\$558	\$539
All Tenants						
CHOICE Portion	\$562	\$469	\$462	\$468	\$500	\$474



- (1) [Securing Stable Housing | NAM: National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)
- (2) [MS fact sheet 2019 PIT Data \(endhomelessness.org\)](#)
- (3) [AllSingleYearReports_Part1 \(samhsa.gov\)](#)
- (4) <http://www.dmh.ms.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/FY20-Fast-Facts-Final-Draft.10.6.pdf>