

DC Flex: A Flexible Subsidy for Uncertain Times A Rent Support Experiment

#DCSaves #DCAhorrayProspera Forum

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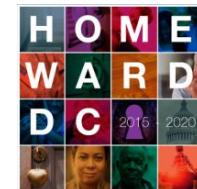
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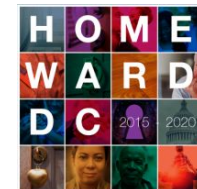
Homelessness Context in DC

- DC's strategy to address homelessness- Homeward DC
 - DC is a Right to Shelter jurisdiction
 - We have scaled Rapid Re-Housing for families, but...
 - Getting connected (or re-connected) to employment and housing isn't always enough to stabilize households; income levels among RRH participants remain very low
- Reforming our homeless services (crisis response) system and investing in affordable housing are interrelated by different goals
 - Rapid Re-Housing is not a replacement for investments in affordable housing
 - DC Flex is another tool in our affordable housing toolbox



DC Flex Program Overview

- New rental subsidy
 - Launched in 2018 by DC Department of Human Services
 - Pilot funds are recurring for 4 years
 - Goal: Prevent homelessness and increase housing stability
- Eligible households
 - Reside in DC;
 - Are at risk of homelessness at the time of application
 - Have applied for at least one emergency or temporary DC administered government-funded housing or rental assistance program
 - Are at or below 30% of Area Median Income (AMI)
 - Are headed by a person age 21 years or older who:
 - Has physical custody of one or more minor children;
 - Is currently employed or has recent history of employment
 - Is the leaseholder for a rental unit in the District.
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DC Flex Program Benefits

- Households receive a \$7,200 annual benefit (average of \$600/month)
- Funds can be used flexibly throughout the year, but have a monthly cap equivalent to participants' total rent payment.
- Up to \$500 of unused funds can be spent on other items related to housing stability. Rest can be rolled into following year.
- Benefit will last for 4 years as long as the participant remains eligible.
- Two Financial Coaching Sessions required (no case management or other supportive services)



What outcomes do we expect DC Flex to improve?

We use already collected data to measure:

Homelessness

- Are families returning to shelter?

Housing Stability:

- Eviction proceedings
- Applications for the The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)

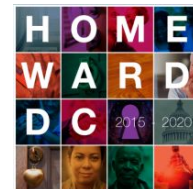
Financial Health

- **Employment**
- **Income**
- **Reduced reliance on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**



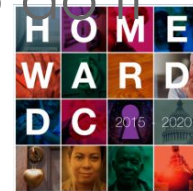
The Psychology of DC Flex

- How will people use the money?
 - All at once?
 - Equally each month?
 - None until an emergency?
- How will people weigh a 4-year benefit when faced with short-term housing challenges?



What have we learned so far?

- 125 enrolled households
- Initial surveys revealed that most enrollees work full-time, like the financial coaching provided, have a plan to pay rent after DC Flex funds have exhausted & are 'Very Satisfied' with program
- Online access to account balance does not increase frequency of checking on it
- Re-framing minds around different focus of program (shallow vs. deep housing subsidy; crisis response to homelessness vs. long term affordable housing)
- 'Big Brother' mentality is pervasive
- There are many ways to increase housing stability... and enrolled households are using program to do it





THE **LAB** @ DC

Thank you!

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For more information about the Flexible Rent Subsidy, visit (<https://osf.io/r47hb/>)

