

**HOPE VI:**  
*Where Do We Go  
from Here?*

## HOPE VI'd and On the Move

Jennifer Comey

*More households used vouchers to leave the original HOPE VI sites than moved into traditional public housing or moved without housing assistance.*

The HOPE VI program targets the nation's most distressed public housing developments. Two of the program's objectives are to improve residents' living environments and to provide housing that will avoid or decrease the concentration of very low income families (see text box on page 9). The program is up for reauthorization in Congress, and if reauthorized, the program will run for another decade. Based on recent analysis, at least 47,000 to 82,000 distressed public housing units remain across the country (Turner et al. 2007).<sup>1</sup> There is a need for a continued federal effort to address the problems that residents in traditional public housing often report living with: pervasive drug dealing, violent crime, and poor-quality housing. Thus, it is important to understand how successful the HOPE VI program has been in achieving its ambitious objectives.

The five public housing developments in the HOPE VI Panel Study were among the most distressed housing in the nation (see text box on page 9). The baseline survey in 2001 showed conditions in these developments were terrible: respondents reported substandard conditions such as peeling paint, mold, inadequate heat, and infestations of cockroaches and other vermin. The surrounding neighborhoods were equally troubled—extremely high poverty, predominantly minority neighborhoods with high rates of unemployment, welfare receipt, crime, and other social ills (Popkin, Harris, and Cunningham 2002).

Initially, program designers envisioned that most original residents would move

back to the revitalized HOPE VI sites. But the reality has been that relatively few have actually returned, for a variety of reasons both positive and negative. With the shift to mixed-income developments, there are simply fewer public housing units on site. Some sites have imposed relatively stringent screening criteria that have excluded some former residents. And, on the positive side, many former residents who have received vouchers are satisfied with their new housing and are not interested in returning. Finally, at a few more troubled sites, long histories of mismanagement and neglect mean that residents do not trust the housing authority's promises of better conditions and choose not to return (Buron et al. 2002; Popkin et al. 2004). The net result of these low return rates is that for most original residents, relocation is the major HOPE VI "intervention."

To determine whether HOPE VI has succeeded in meeting its goal of providing an improved living environment for residents, we need to look at where these relocated residents are living—what type of housing they are living in, the quality of their new housing, and the types of neighborhoods where they are located. In this brief, we examine these three broad questions. We find that for the most part, the story for former residents is positive—they are living in better housing in less-troubled neighborhoods. But a substantial minority continue to live in traditional public housing developments that are only marginally better than the distressed developments from which they moved.

## More Families Move with Housing Choice Vouchers

By 2005, 84 percent of the families in the HOPE VI Panel Study had relocated from the five HOPE VI sites. The remaining 16 percent of respondents still living in their original developments were from either Atlantic City's Shore Park or Chicago's Wells. While both housing authorities were gradually relocating families, each took different approaches. In Atlantic City, the public units were being torn down and redeveloped in stages so many of the residents would not have to relocate until a revitalized unit was available for them. In Chicago's Wells development, many of the residents who wanted to stay in public housing units or who had failed the screening criteria for vouchers or mixed-income housing relocated within the site because the housing authority had agreed to keep some units open until they built the replacement housing.

By 2005, 43 percent of households had received Housing Choice vouchers and 22 percent had moved into other traditional public housing developments (figure 1). Another 10 percent were renting in private-market units with no assistance, and 4 percent had become homeowners. Approximately 1 percent of the HOPE VI Panel Study respondents were either homeless or in prison in 2005.

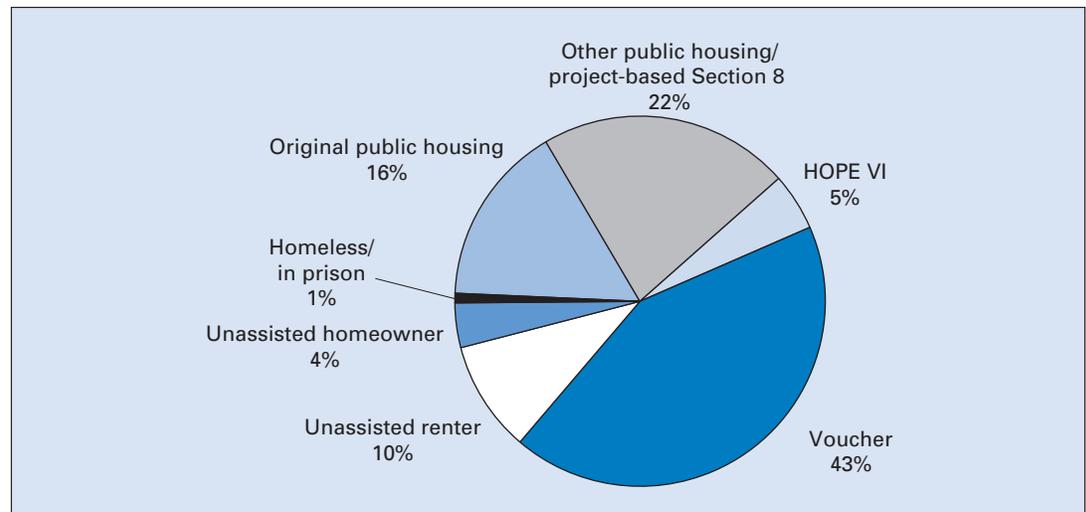
Redevelopment was under way in all the sites by 2005, although none were com-

pleted. Therefore, it is not surprising that only 5 percent of the Panel Study respondents had moved back into a newly remodeled HOPE VI unit by the 2005 follow-up. Atlantic City's Shore Park, where the housing authority was building a revitalized unit for every household that wanted one, had the greatest share of original families (14 percent) that had moved back into redeveloped HOPE VI units. Other research suggests that return rates to HOPE VI sites overall have varied considerably from less than 10 percent to 75 percent, with the largest numbers returning to sites that were rehabilitated rather than demolished and rebuilt—not the case in any of these five sites. Based on this evidence, it seems likely that the final figures for returning for the HOPE VI Panel Study sites will increase somewhat over time but will remain relatively low.<sup>2</sup>

The type of housing assistance families received varies by site, as it is a product of local rental markets and local administrative relocation plans. For instance, 64 percent of families from Richmond's Easter Hill moved using a voucher, compared with only 20 percent in Atlantic City's Shore Park development.

Families inexperienced with the private housing market often face challenges in finding units and negotiating with landlords (Comey, Briggs, and Weismann forthcoming; Smith 2002; Turner et al. 2000). In 2005, our in-depth interviews with HOPE VI Panel Study respondents revealed that

FIGURE 1. Relocation Outcomes for HOPE VI Panel Study Respondents, 2005



Source: 2005 HOPE VI Panel Study.

Note: Numbers do not total 100 percent because of rounding.

families' own assessments of their ability to "make it" in the private market were a factor in whether they chose to use a voucher, as well as their perception of the quality of the housing and neighborhoods. Some respondents spoke of the challenges they faced in using their vouchers, including competing with other relocatees for the pool of potential units. Respondents also reported feeling rushed by relocation staff to take any unit available, and in some instances, said that hasty housing authority inspections (a requirement of the program) resulted in their moving to poor-quality housing.

Beverly,<sup>3</sup> a single mother of two from Atlantic City's Shore Park, explained in 2005 that the reason she chose to remain in the development was that she could not afford to use a voucher and did not want to move to another less-desirable public housing development:

The ladies that live next to me, they asked me, "Why didn't you take Section 8 and move where they moved?" I didn't want to take Section 8 because I'm not working. And I didn't want to move to [another public housing development] because what's the use of leaving here? You're going to somewhere that's worse than, you know, where I'm at.

### Most Residents Move to New Neighborhoods

One concern about the HOPE VI program was that relocatees would cluster in the distressed communities near their original developments. However, our analysis of the locations of the HOPE VI Panel Study families who had moved by 2005 shows that most left their original neighborhoods. Nearly all relocatees (93 percent) reported living in their current neighborhoods for five years or less. Voucher holders moved a median distance of 3.4 miles from their original public housing developments, unassisted renters moved a median distance of 3 miles, and families that moved into other public housing moved a median distance of 2.3 miles. Homeowners moved a much shorter median distance of 0.9 miles, reflecting that most homeowners were former Shore Park residents buying within the redeveloped Atlantic City HOPE VI site.

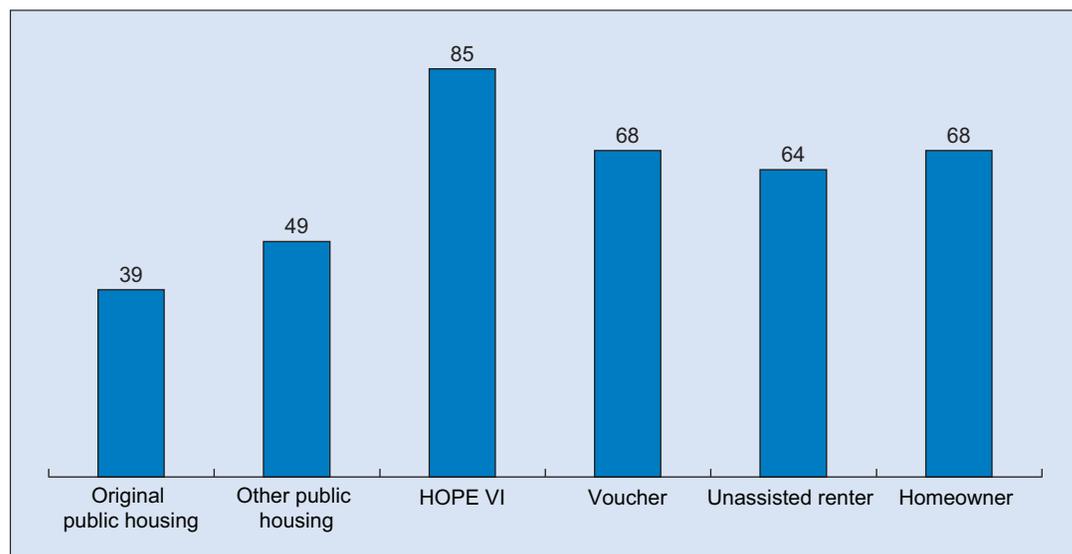
Though most HOPE VI relocatees moved away from their original developments, only 14 percent of the families moved outside their city limits. However, a greater proportion of families from Richmond's Easter Hill moved outside the city (36 percent) compared to families from Washington's East Capitol (4 percent) or Chicago's Wells (4 percent). This difference may reflect the extremely high housing costs in the San Francisco Bay Area that are driving families to seek housing further inland.

### Housing Quality Improved for Those in the Private Market

One goal of the HOPE VI program is to improve the living conditions of people living in the most severely distressed public housing. Substandard housing conditions adversely affect residents' daily lives by exposing them to hazards such as lead paint, mold, inadequate heat, and infestation of cockroaches and rats. At baseline, roughly one-third of respondents reported having three or more housing problems such as water leaks, peeling paint or plaster, or a unit that was uncomfortably cold due to a broken heater; our analysis showed that respondents' housing was substantially worse than that reported by other poor renters nationwide (Comey 2004).

In 2003, we found that HOPE VI Panel Study respondents who moved into the private market generally reported substantial improvements in their housing quality (Comey 2004). Our analysis of the 2005 follow-up survey shows that these improvements have continued (figure 2). We asked families to rate their current housing as "excellent, good, fair, or poor." In 2005, 68 percent of voucher holders and homeowners rated their housing as excellent or good, as did 64 percent of unassisted renters. Eighty-five percent of families living in the new HOPE VI units gave their units high ratings. In contrast, a much smaller share of households in public housing rated their housing as excellent or good. Only 39 percent of those in the original public housing (those that had not yet been relocated) gave their units high ratings in 2005. And only about half of those relocated into other public housing (49 percent) rated their housing as excellent or good.

FIGURE 2. HOPE VI Panel Study Respondents Reporting Excellent or Good Housing Quality by Housing Assistance, 2005 (percent)



Source: 2005 HOPE VI Panel Study.

At baseline in 2001 and at each of the follow-ups, we asked respondents about a series of specific housing problems such as broken heating units, insect and rodent infestation, broken toilets, and peeling paint. In 2003, those moving into the private market reported fewer housing problems than they had at baseline, and those trends continued at the second follow-up in 2005. For example, while slightly more than half of respondents who ultimately moved to the private market reported having two or more problems at baseline, just a quarter of voucher holders and unassisted renters reported two or more problems in 2005. Homeowners reported the greatest improvement, with just 15 percent reporting two or more problems in 2005. In contrast, those who remained in traditional public housing—either their original development or a different one—experienced virtually no improvement in housing quality over time; about 40 percent of those living in other public housing and about 60 percent of those in the original public housing units reported having two or more problems at baseline and at the 2005 follow-up.

### Families Leaving Public Housing Move to Less-Poor Neighborhoods

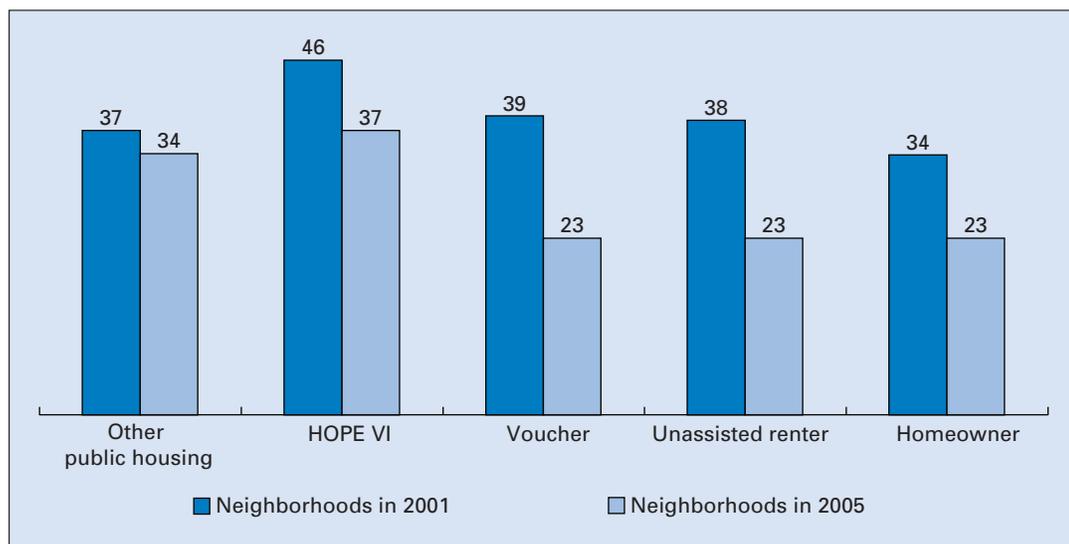
Studies of HOPE VI relocatees have generally found that original residents tend to

move to neighborhoods with lower poverty rates than their original distressed public housing communities (Buron et al. 2002; Kingsley, Johnson, and Pettit 2000). Similarly, our analysis shows that HOPE VI Panel Study families that moved—even those that moved into other public housing developments—moved into neighborhoods with less poverty compared to their baseline locations (figure 3). Voucher holders and unassisted renters moved to neighborhoods where the poverty rate was 16 and 15 percentage points lower on average, respectively, than their baseline neighborhood. Homeowners moved into neighborhoods that had a poverty rate 11 percentage points lower than their neighborhoods at baseline. Families relocating into other public housing developments also experienced a reduction in their poverty rate—approximately 3 percentage points from their neighborhood at baseline, a statistically significant improvement but not nearly as large as for those that moved into the private market.

Another indicator of improved neighborhood quality is that private-market relocatees were living in communities with lower unemployment rates. In 2005, voucher holders and unassisted renters were living in communities with unemployment rates that were about 5 percentage points lower than at baseline.

However, while relocatees are living in neighborhoods that are less poor, there has

FIGURE 3. Average Poverty Rates for HOPE VI Panel Study Respondents, by Housing Assistance, 2001 and 2005 (percent)



Source: 2005 HOPE VI Panel Study.

been less change in racial segregation. The vast majority of HOPE VI Panel Study families moved into neighborhoods that were predominantly minority. Those living in traditional public housing experienced no change and were living in communities that were 91 percent minority. As with unemployment rates, there was a slight (and statistically significant) change for private-market movers: the average percent minority neighborhood population for voucher holders and unassisted renters was 5 and 8 percentage points lower than at baseline. However, even with these decreases, residents continue to live in racially segregated communities.

Moving to different neighborhoods with lower poverty rates reflects real improvements in relocatees' living conditions. Families that moved into the private market—voucher holders and unassisted renters—reported dramatic improvements in quality of life and neighborhood safety over the study period. Relocatees reported a wide range of life improvements including allowing their children to play outside, seeing less fighting among neighborhood children, sleeping better, and feeling less worried about drug dealing and violent crime. Those who remained in traditional public housing and did not experience as significant a change in neighborhood conditions did not experience this “safety

benefit” (Buron, Levy, and Gallagher 2007; Popkin and Cove 2007).

### Voucher Holders and Unassisted Renters Move More Often

Families entering the private market have more opportunities to move, as their housing assistance is “portable,” compared to those living in public housing developments. Families in the private housing market can choose to move voluntarily; that is, they can move to find better-quality housing units, safer neighborhoods, or more convenient neighborhoods near transportation, jobs, or family. Conversely, families living in the private market may be forced to move involuntarily for not paying rent on time or because their landlords are selling the building. We analyzed the mobility rates of the Panel Study respondents and found that 58 percent of unassisted renters, 32 percent of voucher holders, and 17 percent of unassisted homeowners lived at (at least) two different locations between 2003 and 2005.<sup>4</sup> Looking just at those families that had more of an opportunity to move—those that had vouchers at both the 2003 and 2005 follow-ups—nearly half moved twice since baseline (97 out of 212 respondents). Nine percent of voucher holders reported that they moved three or more times, and 28 percent of unassisted renters reported moving as often.

Mobility rates for families that held vouchers both in 2003 and 2005 varied considerably by site. For instance, 66 percent of voucher holders from Chicago's Wells moved at least twice between 2003 and 2005, compared with only 28 percent of voucher holders from D.C.'s East Capitol. This difference may reflect the substantial differences in the two rental markets—Washington, D.C., has one of the tightest markets in the nation with vacancy rates around 5 percent, while Chicago's 11 percent vacancy rate (higher than the national average) reflects a market with more opportunities for low-income renters.<sup>5</sup>

### More Mobile Voucher Holders Live in Lower-Poverty Neighborhoods and in Better-Quality Housing

Because of the challenges that low-income families face in navigating the private market, we wanted to determine whether higher rates of mobility resulted in voucher holders ending up in better- or worse-quality neighborhoods. We analyzed the subpopulation of families that had vouchers during 2003 and 2005,<sup>6</sup> dividing them into one group that lived in two different locations between 2003 and 2005 and one that lived in the same location at 2003 and 2005.<sup>7</sup>

We found that voucher holders who lived at two different locations between 2003 and 2005 moved to lower-poverty neighborhoods by 2005, a reduction of 6 percentage points on average compared to those voucher holders who stayed in the same location. This difference suggests that more mobile voucher-holder families in

our HOPE VI Panel Study were moving into more desirable locations over time as they became more familiar with negotiating the private market.<sup>8</sup>

The findings for housing quality were similar. We asked families whether their current housing was “better, worse, or the same” as their housing at the baseline location. Almost three-fourths (70 percent) of all voucher holders responded that their 2005 housing unit was in better condition than their baseline unit (table 1). However, 72 percent of more mobile voucher holders reported better housing, compared to 64 percent of voucher holders who stayed in the same location over time.

### Little Evidence of Voucher Holders Becoming Unassisted

Early in the program, policy analysts and housing advocates were concerned that families relocated from HOPE VI sites using vouchers would lose their assistance and become homeless or precariously housed (i.e., doubled up). However, our analysis shows that only a small proportion (1.7 percent) of Panel Study respondents have experienced homelessness since baseline and another 5 percent reported being doubled up, although there is some variation by site.<sup>9</sup> These figures are comparable to those for other similar populations (McInnis, Buron, and Popkin 2007).

Looking at the subsample of families who moved from their original developments by 2003, only 14 households (or 3 percent of the subsample) that had a voucher in 2003 reported being unassisted in 2005.<sup>10</sup> And there was only one instance

*Voucher holders who moved more than once after leaving the HOPE VI site lived in lower-poverty neighborhoods than those who moved only once.*

TABLE 1. HOPE VI Panel Study Respondents' Comparison of Housing Conditions between 2005 and 2001 by Housing Assistance (percent)

Housing assistance in 2005	Housing Quality		
	Current house better than at baseline	Current house worse than at baseline	Current house the same as at baseline
Original public housing	31	23	46
Other public housing	40	25	36
Vouchers	70	8	22
Voucher, same location 2003 and 2005	64	13	23
Voucher, different locations 2003 and 2005	72	6	21
Homeowners	78	8	14

Sources: 2001 and 2005 HOPE VI Panel Studies.

of a voucher holder in 2003 later becoming homeless. More families lost their assistance after 2003 for negative reasons than positive ones: six families reported that they were evicted by the landlord or broke voucher program rules. Only one reported losing their assistance because their household income was too high, and another became a homeowner.<sup>11</sup>

There were also clear differences by site: 8 out of the 14 respondents who had a voucher in 2003 and then became unassisted by 2005 were originally from Durham's Few Gardens.<sup>12</sup> The Durham Housing Authority experienced serious management problems during the study period that affected the implementation of its HOPE VI program. Relocation happened very quickly—all of the families were relocated and the site demolished by 2003. In addition, the HOPE VI program in Few Gardens was plagued by mismanagement and legal trouble; the housing authority's director was indicted for embezzling HOPE VI funds. While the total number of families that lost their assistance was small, the fact that most were from Durham's Few Gardens suggests that implementation and oversight had a major impact on their experiences.

## Policy Implications

For most residents of the original HOPE VI sites, relocation is the major program. Our findings show that for the majority of residents who have moved to the private market, moving has meant improvements in neighborhood poverty rates, neighborhood unemployment rates, and housing quality. In fact, more mobile voucher holders experience even greater improvements over time than those who moved once with a voucher and stayed in the same place.

Our findings have several important implications for policy.

**Encourage residents who are able to choose housing vouchers.** Our evidence suggests that private-market movers—both voucher holders and unassisted renters—have experienced significant improvements in their housing and neighborhood quality. These findings suggest that as many residents as possible should be encouraged to choose vouchers rather than move to another traditional public housing development. Given that respondents in the private market have high mobility

rates, these movers should be provided with ongoing support to help them learn to negotiate the private market.

**Provide second-mover counseling to voucher holders.** After voucher holders and unassisted renters have successfully completed a year in the private market, they should be offered counseling modeled on Chicago's Housing Opportunity Program (Cunningham and Sawyer 2005). Chicago's program encourages voucher holders to make a second move to a lower-poverty community that offers greater opportunity for them and their children. This type of counseling could increase the proportion of relocatees who move to truly better-quality neighborhoods over time.

**Address housing conditions in the original units, even though they will be demolished.** The slow pace of redevelopment in two sites raises concerns for those residents remaining. Families still living in the Shore Park and Wells developments continue to live in substandard housing conditions. These conditions should be addressed even though these units will ultimately be demolished.

**Improve conditions in traditional public housing.** Even with the positive news about private-market movers, we cannot overlook the 38 percent of Panel Study respondents who remain in traditional public housing, either their original public housing development or other public housing. These families are in the same high-poverty neighborhoods or have moved to neighborhoods that are only marginally better, and their housing conditions have not improved as their private-market counterparts have. Housing authorities need to effectively address the problems in their traditional public housing stock to ensure that those who select this option for replacement housing do not end up in conditions that are as bad as the distressed developments where they started.

## Notes

1. The following factors were included to identify "distressed" public housing: HUD management rankings, vacancy rates, and rates of welfare receipt among residents.
2. For other studies that have examined rates of return, see Holin, Buron, and Baker (2002); Buron et al. (2002); and National Housing Law Project (2002).
3. All respondents' names are pseudonyms.

4. For our survey, we tracked the addresses of our families at 2003 and 2005. However, families could have moved to additional locations at other times.
5. Statistics are from tables B25014 and B25004 of the 2004 American Community Survey ([http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?\\_lang=en](http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en)). The vacancy rate for Washington, D.C., is the city average, while the vacancy rate for Chicago, Illinois, is the Cook County average.
6. The number of HOPE VI Panel Study respondents who had a voucher in 2003 and 2005 was 212.
7. Of the 212 respondents who had a voucher at 2003 and 2005, 97 lived at two different locations during this time and 115 stayed at the same location.
8. The average poverty rate for voucher holders who stayed in the same location between 2003 and 2005 was 26.5 percent compared to the average poverty rate of voucher holders that moved twice by 2005, 20.7 percent. Using OLS regression, we analyzed the factors that predicted lower neighborhood poverty rates for the most recent 2005 locations, controlling for other household characteristics at the  $p < .05$  level. Voucher holders who moved twice were estimated to have a predicted 2005 neighborhood poverty rate of 6 percentage points less than voucher holders who stayed in the same location. Other statistically significant independent variables included using a voucher in general or being an unassisted renter in 2005, and having an income of more than \$10,000. Using a voucher or being an unassisted renter had a predicted effect of reducing neighborhood poverty rates by 29 and 28 percentage points, respectively, compared to those continuing to live in the original public housing developments. Having an income of more than \$10,000 had the predicted effect of lowering the neighborhood poverty rate by 3 percentage points lower than baseline.
9. See McInnis, Buron, and Popkin (2007) for more details on the variations by site.
10. A total of 517 respondents moved from their original public housing by 2003.
11. Of the remaining seven families that had vouchers and then rented unsubsidized, five answered "other" to the question of why they lost their assistance, and two did not answer the question at all.
12. The remaining four respondents were from Richmond's Easter Hill, and two respondents were from Washington, D.C.'s, East Capitol.

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## About the Author



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## HOPE VI Program

Created by Congress in 1992, the HOPE VI program was designed to address not only the bricks-and-mortar problems in severely distressed public housing developments, but also the social and economic needs of the residents and the health of surrounding neighborhoods. This extremely ambitious strategy targets developments identified as the worst public housing in the nation, with problems deemed too ingrained to yield to standard housing rehabilitation efforts. The HOPE VI program is now up for reauthorization; if reauthorized, it will run for another 10 years.

The program's major objectives are

- to improve the living environment for residents of severely distressed public housing by demolishing, rehabilitating, reconfiguring, or replacing obsolete projects in part or whole;
- to revitalize the sites of public housing projects and help improve the surrounding neighborhood;
- to provide housing in ways that avoid or decrease the concentration of very low income families; and
- to build sustainable communities.

Under the \$6.3 billion HOPE VI program, HUD has awarded 609 grants in 193 cities. As of June 2006, HOPE VI revitalization grants have supported the demolition of 78,100 severely distressed units, with another 10,400 units slated for redevelopment. Housing authorities that receive HOPE VI grants must also develop supportive services to help both original and new residents attain self-sufficiency. HOPE VI funds will support the construction of 103,600 replacement units, but just 57,100 will be deeply subsidized public housing units. The rest will receive shallower subsidies or serve market-rate tenants or homebuyers.

## HOPE VI Panel Study

The HOPE VI Panel Study tracks the living conditions and well-being of residents from five public housing developments where revitalization activities began in mid- to late 2001. At baseline in summer 2001, we surveyed a sample of 887 heads of households and conducted in-depth, qualitative interviews with 39 adult-child dyads. We conducted the second wave of surveys in 2003 (24 months after baseline) and the third and final wave in 2005 (48 months after baseline). In 2003, we surveyed 736 heads of household and interviewed 29 adults and 27 children; in 2005, we surveyed 715 heads of households and administered 69 interviews. We also interviewed local HOPE VI staff on relocation and redevelopment progress, analyzed administrative data, and identified data on similar populations for comparative purposes. The response rate for each round of surveys was 85 percent. We were able to locate, if not interview, nearly all sample members; the largest source of attrition was mortality.

The Panel Study sites are Shore Park/Shore Terrace (Atlantic City, NJ); Ida B. Wells Homes/Wells Extension/Madden Park Homes (Chicago, IL); Few Gardens (Durham, NC); Easter Hill (Richmond, CA); and East Capitol Dwellings (Washington, DC). These sites were selected as typical of those that had received HOPE VI grants in 1999 and 2000 but that had not yet begun revitalization activities.

The principal investigator for the HOPE VI Panel Study is Susan J. Popkin, Ph.D., director of the Urban Institute's A Roof Over Their Heads research initiative. Funding for this research was provided by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Fannie Mae Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Chicago Community Trust.

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