



January 27, 2016

## DC's Public Housing: An Important Resource at Risk

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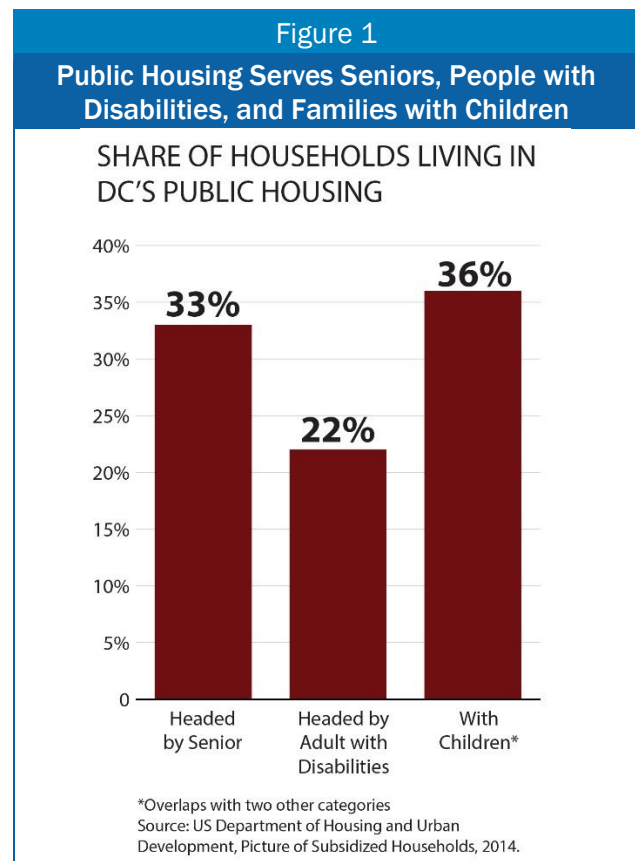
DC's public housing is a key source of stable affordable housing for 7,300 households, primarily seniors and people with disabilities living on modest fixed incomes and families with children near the poverty line, according to a new [report](#) by the DC Fiscal Policy Institute. Unfortunately, this resource is at risk due to chronic federal underfunding that has left most properties in need of rehabilitation or replacement.

Many public housing properties are slated for redevelopment, which will bring better quality housing but also put some families at risk of being displaced. The DC Housing Authority should take steps so that residents can continue to count on public housing for stable, affordable homes – a rarity in DC's [high-cost](#) housing market.

- Most households living in public housing are headed by a senior or person with disabilities. One-third have children (See **Figure 1**).
- About two thirds of households rely on Social Security or disability benefits for the main source of income. For twenty percent of households, wages are the main source of income, and 10 percent rely on TANF or other cash assistance.
- The average income of households living in public housing is just 15 percent of the area median, or \$16,000 for a family of four. That's \$7,000 below the poverty line.

Public housing provides housing stability that's nearly impossible to find on the private market and even other affordable housing programs. Rents for public housing tenants adjust to changes in income – such as a job loss – and tenants have a variety of unique rights.

Yet this important source of housing is at risk. Federal funding shortfalls have made it difficult to maintain public housing. Four of five public housing units in DC need significant repairs.



The DC Housing Authority plans to redevelop five properties, with 2,000 units, into mixed-income developments. Three of them – Barry Farm, Lincoln Heights, and Park Morton – will be redeveloped through DC’s New Communities Initiative and receive local funds from the District.

Redeveloping public housing, while needed, has risks for residents, who could be displaced from their community, lose affordable housing during construction, or be unable to return to the property once it reopens. The DC Housing Authority (DCHA) can take steps to protect residents, and the District should distribute New Communities funding only if those resident protections are in place.

- **Help families stay nearby during construction:** Rather than tearing down an entire property at once, properties can be redeveloped in phases. Where possible, nearby land should be used to build some units first.
- **Help relocated families find an affordable place during construction.** This should include help if families need to move from the first temporary home located by the housing authority.
- **Enable families to return when construction is complete:** All homes torn down should be replaced with an equivalent-sized one. And DCHA should not require residents to go through additional screening before moving back in.