

Survey: Resource Awareness and Utilization by Affordable Housing Residents

Why Stakeholder Engagement in Resident Services is Important for Housing Stabilization

By: Yelena Voznyuk | August 2019 | Northwest Housing Alternatives

Summary: Resident Services can do more to raise awareness of health and education resources available to residents of affordable housing. Lack of awareness of these resources may be due to access to information, misconceptions about cost and eligibility, and/or difficulty accessing resources due to a disability.



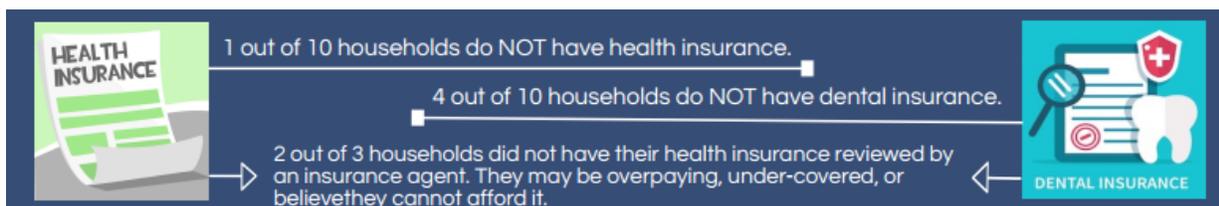
Northwest Housing Alternatives' Resident Services (RS) Program provides supportive services to residents of NHA's affordable housing by linking households with resources needed for housing stabilization, growth, and advancement. This includes linking households to available community resources, forming partnerships to increase access to new resources, working in tandem with property management to ensure lease compliance, and organizing events on site at properties for educational or socialization purposes. Resident Services shares information with residents in a myriad of ways, including quarterly newsletters, welcome packets for new residents, quarterly tenant meetings, and informational flyers.

The purpose of the 'Health & Education' survey was to conduct an evaluation of the RS program by measuring several key questions:

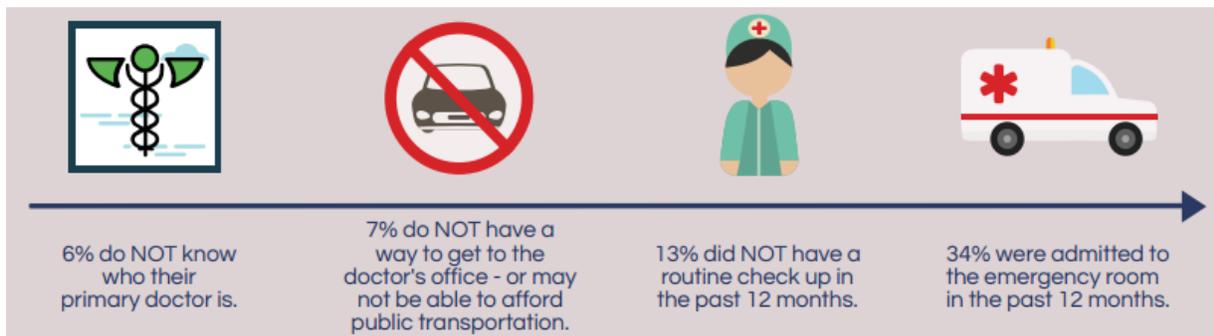
- Are Resident Services Coordinators effectively engaging with households?
- Are households aware of and utilizing the services and resources available to them?
- Does engagement with Resident Services positively impact housing stability?

12 Portland-area NHA properties were surveyed, with 202 surveys completed. Survey questions were based on health and education resources already available in the community.

Results showed that 61% of survey participants did not have an insurance agent review their health coverage options in the past 12 months, even though 1 in 10 survey participants reported a need for health, dental, or both coverages.



Many survey participants also reported having health care service barriers such as not having a primary doctor, lack of transportation to the doctor's office, and not having a regular checkup. Common reasons included: "having low-income, physical/emotional disabilities, and confusion of the [health market] process."



1 out of 5 survey participants did not fill their prescription medication due to financial difficulties. 1 out of 3 participants reported a need for financial assistance in replacing prescription glasses and/or acquiring medical equipment. Reasons for lack of utilization include “being unaware of available resources, believe they cannot afford it, or experience disability limitations in accessing services”.

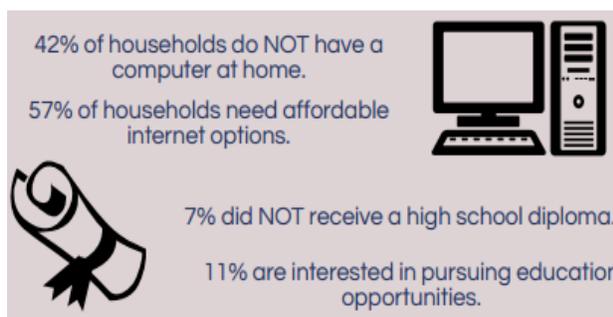
Findings also showed that some survey participants who faced a mental health crises were unsuccessful in receiving mental health support due to “mental/physical limitations, accessing program services, communication, and/or being [unaware of free services]”.

In the education portion of the survey, a high number of households reported they did not have a working computer, or internet, in the home. Barriers included low income as the primary reason, followed by mental and physical limitations.

The number of survey respondents with a member in the home needing a high school diploma was similar to the number of participants interested in pursuing education opportunities. Again, income and mental/physical limitations were the most common reasons that services and resources were not accessed, while some reported they were simply unaware of the availability.

How Resident Services Plans to Increase Engagement

Based on these evaluation results, the RS department created and implemented a **New Move-In Assessment** that is included in all tenant welcome packets distributed to new households. This assessment provides an opportunity for RS coordinators to engage with new households to understand their needs, tailor services accordingly, and increase overall awareness of the RS program.



As a result of the survey findings, Resident Services has applied for grants covering health care needs and is establishing a new partnership with Health+ to allow residents to schedule virtual consultations with doctors for non-emergency situations. RS is also adjusting their client assistance budget to increase funds for transportation needs. Furthermore, RS will be increasing partnership engagement at properties to increase awareness of services and resources available.

The *'Health & Education'* survey will be administered again in 2020 to all of NHA's properties. This will allow us to take similar action at all 33 NHA properties that receive Resident Services statewide, while providing an opportunity to compare results with the 12 Portland-area properties that participated in the survey in 2019 and assess for improvement.