

## **For Immediate Release**

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## **The Central Ohio Area Agency on Aging is Tackling Housing Insecurity for Older Adult Renters**

Columbus, OH— Across the United States, the number of older adults experiencing housing insecurity is steadily increasing. Rising housing costs put older adults with fixed or lower incomes at great risk of losing their homes. Targeted shallow subsidies could be one answer for older adult renters.

The Central Ohio Area Agency on Aging (COAAA) and The Ohio State University's College of Social Work's Age-Friendly Innovation Center (AFIC) launched the Shallow Subsidy Pilot Program (SSPP) in July 2024, to promote housing security for low-income older adult renters. The SSPP is one of the first programs in the United States to use a random control trial, the gold standard for program evaluation, to examine the impact of shallow rental subsidies on older adults.

The SSPP provided \$330 per month to landlords of older adults spending at least 50% of their income on rent enrolled in a COAAA case management program, living in Delaware, Fayette, Fairfield, Franklin, Licking, Madison, Pickaway, and Union Counties, and whose landlords agreed to the arrangement.

While all participants were spending more than 50% of their income on rent, nearly half reported spending over 75% of their income on rent. Thirty-eight percent of participants had experienced homelessness, half of whom had experienced homelessness after the age of 50. Principal Investigator, Dr. Katie Calhoun pointed out, "Central Ohio is facing a housing crisis and new evidence-based solutions are desperately needed. Pairing a randomized controlled trial with our community-engaged research approach allowed us to demonstrate the true impact of the shallow subsidy while honoring the lived experiences of older adults navigating housing insecurity."

Over the 12-month period, AFIC evaluated the program's impact on housing stability, financial well-being, and health of participants through surveys and in-depth interviews with participants.

Many participants described feeling more empowered and having greater choice about where and how they lived. For some, the "extras" now within reach meant the difference between buying soap and toilet paper, paying for needed medication, or getting a haircut. Connection, dignity, and the ability to say yes to coffee with a friend or to buy a gift for a grandchild all emerged as newfound freedoms. AFIC Director, Marisa Sheldon shared, "We all deserve to be able to meet our basic needs, and it was clear through our interviews that the subsidy made that possible for the participants."

One SSPP participant said, "The subsidy has made a huge difference. I feel like I can actually breathe without having to constantly worry about money." Another participant shared, "It's been going wonderful. I've had the opportunity to get to relax. I don't have to worry so much about being so financially broke at the end of the month because I've got a little extra money coming in. Mentally, it's been fantastic."

One of the most compelling stats: by the end of the pilot, the rate of emergency department visits in the shallow subsidy group plummeted—from 70% of participants in the six months before subsidy, to just 20% in the last six months of the year. This offers a window into the potential for significant cost saving to our medical systems.

According to the Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project, there were 107.4 million treat-and-release emergency department visits in 2021. With an average cost of \$750 per visit, the aggregate costs totaled \$80.3 billion. For children, the average cost was \$440 per visit, and for patients aged 65 and older, average costs rose to \$1,110 per visit.

"Housing security is top of mind for those we serve. Piloting innovative housing programs, even on a small scale, is essential, and this evaluation is crucial for COAAA as we design future housing assistance for Central Ohio older adults," said COAAA Executive Director Katie White.

On January 13, 2026, COAAA and the Age-Friendly Innovation Center will partner to host a discussion panel in COAAA's Education Center from 11:30 am to 1:00 pm to provide an overview of the Shallow Subsidy Pilot Program and report findings. Click [here](#) to register for the event.

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**More information on the SSPP**

The Shallow Subsidy Pilot Program Findings Report can be found [here](#). COAAA's podcast, "Pretend I know Nothing About," recently published an episode on the project and can be heard on Apple, Spotify, or streamed [here](#).

**About COAAA**

COAAA arranges and coordinates in-home services for older adults and individuals with disabilities, including homemaking, home-delivered meals, personal care, and transportation. COAAA provides advice, education, and support to family caregivers, and advocates for programs and policies that benefit older adults and individuals with disabilities.

**About AFIC**

The mission of the Age-Friendly Innovation Center, a research center of the Ohio State University, College of Social Work is to innovate with older adults through research, education, and engagement to make our communities age-friendly.