



Homelessness and Domestic Violence

When leaving means losing a home: mapping the pathway from abuse to housing loss and back

For many survivors, the choice is between staying with an abuser and having nowhere to sleep. Housing systems and domestic violence systems still operate largely apart, so the same person is counted, screened, and served twice — or not at all. This study follows the actual pathway between abuse and housing loss in real communities to identify where a single earlier intervention would have changed the outcome.

PARTNER WITH US

Purple Cactus is seeking foundation, corporate, and individual partners to fund this study. Contact grants@purplecactus.org to request the full prospectus and budget.

THE PROBLEM

22–57%

of women experiencing homelessness report domestic violence as the immediate cause (range across studies)

ACF/OFVPS fact sheet (2016), compiling studies from 2003–2004

80%+

of mothers with children experiencing homelessness had previously experienced domestic violence

Aratani 2009, National Center for Children in Poverty

58%

of the 13,018 requests domestic violence programs could not meet on one day in 2025 were for shelter or housing

NNEDV, 20th Annual Domestic Violence Counts (2026)

What is largely missing from the published literature is a community-level picture of the sequence: how long after a first police contact housing loss occurs, which survivors are re-victimized after entering the homeless system, and which housing interventions reduce repeat violence.

WHAT WE WANT TO LEARN

- What proportion of survivors who come to law enforcement attention lose stable housing within 12 months, and what are the strongest early warning signs?
- How often do survivors experiencing homelessness return to the abuser for shelter, and what services would have prevented that return?
- Which housing responses — emergency shelter, rapid rehousing, flexible funding, vouchers — are associated with the lowest rates of repeat violence and repeat homelessness?

APPROACH

- **Community cohort.** Enroll survivors at the point of a domestic violence incident across three to five partner jurisdictions and follow housing status over 18 months, under IRB oversight and with informed consent.
- **System linkage.** Match participant records, with consent, across law enforcement, homeless services (HMIS), and domestic violence programs to build a single timeline per household.
- **Survivor voice.** In-depth interviews with survivors who lost housing and with those who kept it, to understand the decisions and turning points behind the numbers.

WHAT THE STUDY WILL PRODUCE

- An early-warning profile that domestic violence and housing programs can use to prioritize housing support before loss occurs
- Comparative evidence on which housing interventions reduce both repeat homelessness and repeat violence
- Practice guidance and a joint screening protocol for domestic violence programs and Continuums of Care

WHY PURPLE CACTUS

Purple Cactus exists to unite the criminal and social justice systems by directing philanthropic resources toward evidence-based programs that keep survivors safe, hold abusers accountable, and build stronger communities. Every dollar given will be traceable to a real outcome: each campaign will publish its goal and funds raised, granted, and available, and every grantee will report outcomes through our portal.

FUNDING REQUEST \$1.2M – \$1.8M · 24 months

Bottom-up estimate: research staff and fringe, 3–5 site partnerships, 300–500 enrolled households, participant incentives, IRB, HMIS data agreements, secure record linkage, survivor interviews, dissemination, and 15% indirect. Upper range adds a fifth site, larger cohort, and an extended follow-up wave.

Need help now? National DV Hotline, 24/7: call 800.799.7233, text START to 88788, or chat at thehotline.org.