



**AUTISM IN CITIES**

# Enhancing Housing Assistance for Philadelphians with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

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## What is the Philadelphia Autism Project?

The [Philadelphia Autism Project](#) supports autistic individuals, their families, and the broader Philadelphia community through education, connections, and innovation. Its initiatives include training and eLearning opportunities, a centralized resource hub and events calendar, an annual conference, and innovative projects including small grants for community-initiated programs, the launch of an autism peer support program, and supporting an autism family navigator pilot program. In addition to its partnership with Philadelphia City Council, DBHIDS and CBH, the project works in tandem with the statewide [Autism Services, Education, Resources, and Training \(ASERT\) Collaborative Eastern Region](#).



## What is the Policy Impact Project?

The [Policy Impact Project](#) is a venture of the [Policy and Analytics Center](#), under the direction of Dr. Lindsay Shea at the [A.J. Drexel Autism Institute at Drexel University](#). This project was created in response to the need for changes in policy - today – to address the needs of autistic people and their families in the U.S. In some cases, the need for policy changes is specific to autism, but often, changes to policy that impact broader populations are necessary to improve outcomes for autistic people and their families.

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# Enhancing Housing Assistance for Philadelphians with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

There are few published facts about how people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in Philadelphia use public housing assistance. This is an important topic because people with IDD, such as people with autism spectrum disorder (autism) or intellectual disability (ID), are often at a financial disadvantage, according to [foundational research](#) on this topic.

In Philadelphia, like the rest of the United States, people with IDD can lack the financial resources needed to rent or own a place to live. They face challenges related to poverty, disability, historical and structural inequities, limited funding, a shortage of available housing units, complicated application processes for housing and benefits, restrictive eligibility criteria, and long waitlists.

**Together, these issues can negatively affect health by limiting access to quality care.** People who are dealing with multiple challenges may shift their focus toward meeting their basic needs instead of thinking about their health or the health of their family members. People with disabilities may also have difficulty finding appropriate and accessible care close to where they live.

## Key Findings

- In 2014, a total of 1,642 Philadelphians with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) received housing assistance from the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) program. In 2016, this number declined by 15% to 1,395.
- Most Philadelphians with IDD who lived in HUD-assisted households were children, predominantly Black or African American boys aged 6–12.
- Over three-fourths of HUD-assisted households with a person with IDD had extremely low incomes (below 30% of the local area median income, as defined by HUD for that year, according to the number of household members).
- A little less than half of Philadelphians with IDD who lived in HUD-assisted households used the Housing Choice Voucher program for rent assistance, and another third lived in public housing.

## Report Overview

This report examined how Philadelphia households that included people with IDD used HUD assistance during 2014–2016. We defined IDD as individuals with autism spectrum disorder (autism), intellectual disability (ID), or both. We provided counts and characteristics of people with autism and/or intellectual disability who were enrolled in Medicaid and using HUD assistance. We used this information to determine recommendations for better meeting housing assistance needs within this group.

# The intersection of housing, health, and disability

*Adults with IDD may be more likely to face challenges related to housing.*

It is important to understand the living situations of Philadelphians with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) like autism, because housing instability leaves them vulnerable to financial stress, homelessness, isolation, and poor health.



## What does *housing instability* mean?

**Housing instability** refers to housing that is uncertain from day to day. **Will I have enough money to pay my rent? Will I get evicted?** Frequent moves, homelessness, and inadequate conditions are often related to unaffordable housing costs – defined as housing that costs **more than 30% of income**.

Adults with IDD may be more likely to experience **housing instability**, eviction, and homelessness due to their higher rates of unemployment than the general population. People with IDD tend to experience financial insecurity and may need assistance for rent or home ownership. They may also need services to support them to live in their communities.

## Housing instability can affect health.

There are **many reasons** why people living in unstable housing in the U.S. have suboptimal health **outcomes**.

- Access to **affordable, stable, and safe housing is essential for physical and mental health**.
- **Risk of eviction** is associated with higher levels of stress, **anxiety, depression, elevated blood pressure and heart disease, and even suicide**.
- Risk of negative impacts on health is more likely when people lose a connection to regular care from health providers who know them.

- People facing **housing instability** often **delay health and mental healthcare** (including necessary prescriptions) due to cost.
- In turn, people living in **unstable housing** are more reliant on emergency departments rather than consistent primary care, for issues like **diabetes**, especially among **families**.

**People with IDD often have high rates of physical and mental health needs.** Individuals with IDD of all ages frequently use health care and disability services. Any delays or disruptions to care are likely to lead to significant complications.

But little is known about how the health and mental health needs of people with IDD are further impacted by housing instability.



## Which public programs address the housing-related needs of people with IDD?

Programs and policies that serve people with disabilities are usually not connected to each other. For example, financial supports for housing exist separately from supports for community living.

The U.S. Department of **Housing and Urban Development (HUD)** is the leading source of financial assistance for housing in the U.S. People with IDD are one group of people who live in HUD-assisted housing. For example, nearly [90,000 autistic individuals](#) in the U.S. received HUD assistance in 2016 - about one-quarter of whom had co-occurring ID. For context, this means that over [10% of all Medicaid-enrolled autistic individuals](#) were living in a household that received

HUD assistance. These autistic individuals were predominately Black and Hispanic children.

While many people who experience housing instability also have higher rates of health challenges, HUD is a system that is separate from health insurance, including Medicaid. Medicaid is a type of public health insurance that also provides funding for services and supports that assist people with IDD to live in their community. These services include things like life skills training (such as cleaning, shopping, cooking, personal care), personal assistants (for help with nursing and activities of daily living), and transportation. But Medicaid does not typically cover the actual costs of housing, like assistance with rent or mortgage. A few cities are experimenting with using Medicaid to provide temporary assistance with housing needs, but this is a relatively new idea.

## HUD housing programs

HUD provides three main types of housing assistance to assist low-income families, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities:

- **Housing choice vouchers** pay a portion of rent for tenants with very to extremely low incomes. These vouchers are administered by the local Public Housing Agency (PHA).
- **Multifamily housing** is privately owned or non-profit buildings with five or more rental units. Some units may receive subsidies (like Section 811) to make them affordable for low-income or disabled tenants.
- **Public housing** is housing owned and managed by a local public housing authority (PHA) for eligible low-income families, elderly, and people with disabilities, with rent typically based on income.

# Housing and disability in Philadelphia

[Philadelphia is a diverse community](#), as seen in the city's racial and ethnic makeup. The population is nearly 40% Black or African American, 33% White, 15% Hispanic and almost 8% Asian. Philadelphia is also one of the poorest large cities. In 2023, roughly 20% of Philadelphia residents were living below the federal poverty level – especially among people from historically marginalized races, ethnicities, and genders. [Nearly 40% of Philadelphia's children \(under age 18\) live below the federal poverty level](#), which is \$19,337 in annual income for an adult living with two children. The poverty rate has improved over the last decade but [remains high](#). Over half of Philadelphia's [1.58 million](#) residents were eligible for Medicaid in 2022.

While the poverty rate has dropped, the city still has more than 300,000 people living below the poverty level. More residents experienced homelessness in 2024 than ever before, [with a 10% increase from the previous year](#). Housing affordability also continues to be a struggle for some residents. In addition to the 10% increase in the number of Philadelphians experiencing homelessness, nearly half of renters were burdened by unaffordable housing, meaning they spent 30% or more of their income on housing.



## What does *housing affordability* mean?

Housing is affordable when the cost of housing does not interfere with a person's ability to pay for other necessities like food, health care, and transportation. Unaffordable housing is defined as housing that costs [more than 30% of income](#).

[These imbalances](#) stem from decades of racial discrimination seen in **redlining\*** practices, workplace and hiring prejudice, segregation, inadequate school funding, underfunded public transit, and over-policing. This history shaped the conditions for structural biases that exist in Philadelphia and other cities across the nation today including economic disinvestment in our major urban centers and ongoing mortgage discrimination for people trying to obtain a loan to buy a home.

## What is redlining?

**Redlining** is a discriminatory practice where lenders denied loans based on race and location. Redlining has had a lasting and detrimental impact on the city of Philadelphia, particularly on Black communities. This practice, which was widespread during the mid-20th century, has contributed to ongoing racial segregation, limited access to resources, and persistent health and economic disparities.

## Philadelphia is home to many people with disabilities.

A sizable disabled population calls Philadelphia home. [In 2023, approximately 18% of](#) Philadelphians reported having a physical or intellectual disability, compared to the national rate of nearly 14%, according to information collected by the U.S. Census Bureau. In fact, Philadelphia has the third highest rate of disabilities compared to other large U.S. cities. In general, people with disabilities are more likely to feel the effects of the city's economic conditions and to experience injustices.

There is more information available about autistic people in Philadelphia than people with an intellectual disability (ID). In 2014, the Pennsylvania Autism Census reported that there were [4,167](#) individuals on the autism spectrum receiving services in Philadelphia – double the number of autistic Philadelphians in 2005. These counts did not include those who are [undiagnosed, misdiagnosed,](#) or not receiving services. This suggests that 4,167 autistic Philadelphians is an undercount. Regardless, autistic people are the fastest growing group of people with an IDD, and the question of what types of housing assistance this group needs, versus what they receive, is under-researched.

## What housing-related services are available for Philadelphians with IDD?

People with IDD use the same public housing system for assistance as others in the city of Philadelphia. In Philadelphia, the **Division of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)**

also supports accessible housing for individuals with disabilities through [housing repair and maintenance programs](#). The DHCD is also known as the **Philadelphia Housing Authority or PHA**.

[It is likely that a significant number of individuals with IDD are using HUD assistance](#) in the city, but little is known on this topic. Understanding how many Philadelphians with IDD receive HUD assistance is critical for identifying risk factors and priorities for services, especially given their increased risk for poor health outcomes.

Knowing how many people with IDD the Philadelphia Housing Authority (PHA) is serving is vital for planning. Philadelphia is currently advancing [two major citywide initiatives](#) to promote mixed-income communities and expand housing opportunities. To understand whether these approaches could effectively support people with IDD, we first need a baseline picture of how they are using HUD assistance and what their housing-related needs are. This need is even more urgent as [PHA plans to shrink staff in 2026](#) to reduce operating expenses while it undertakes a full remake of its [affordable housing portfolio](#).

## The public housing landscape in Philadelphia

Philadelphia is often dubbed the [“poorest big city”](#) in the country, and the housing crisis is a chronic problem for those in need in the city of Philadelphia. HUD assistance is generally available to individuals and families with very low or extremely low incomes. Eligibility is determined by annual income, family size, and U.S. citizenship or eligible non-citizen status. A few programs have specific criteria for elderly individuals, people with disabilities, or those experiencing homelessness.



In theory, these services should always be available for those who need them. However, Philadelphians often face long or closed **waitlists**, like HUD applicants in other cities. The situation is currently at a **standstill**. The waitlists for subsidized public housing and housing choice vouchers have been **closed** for many years; although, waitlists for senior and special programs remain open. The housing choice voucher waitlist reopens on occasion for updates. It last reopened in 2023 but will not temporarily **reopen** again until 2027.

Waiting times for public housing **can take up to 10 years**. PHA currently has approximately **40,000 people on the public housing waitlist** due to low unit turnover. The backlog in public housing availability is a result of high demand and limited funding.

**The lack of affordable, accessible, and integrated housing** prevents some disabled people from being able to stay in their communities. In the worst cases, this can lead to displacement, isolation, or institutionalization for the disabled family member.

Even when there is affordable housing available, for a person with a disability there is no actual guarantee that the home is physically accessible to them. This makes finding adequate housing even more difficult for people with IDD who also have physical disabilities. According to **HUD, less than 1% of housing units** nationwide are accessible to wheelchair users and “less than five percent [are] accessible for individuals with moderate mobility difficulties.”

**This report presents new data about Philadelphians with IDD who are enrolled in Medicaid and also receive HUD supports. We focus on people with ID and/or Autism.**

# Questions and answers about Philadelphians with IDD who receive HUD assistance

## How many Philadelphians with IDD use HUD assistance?

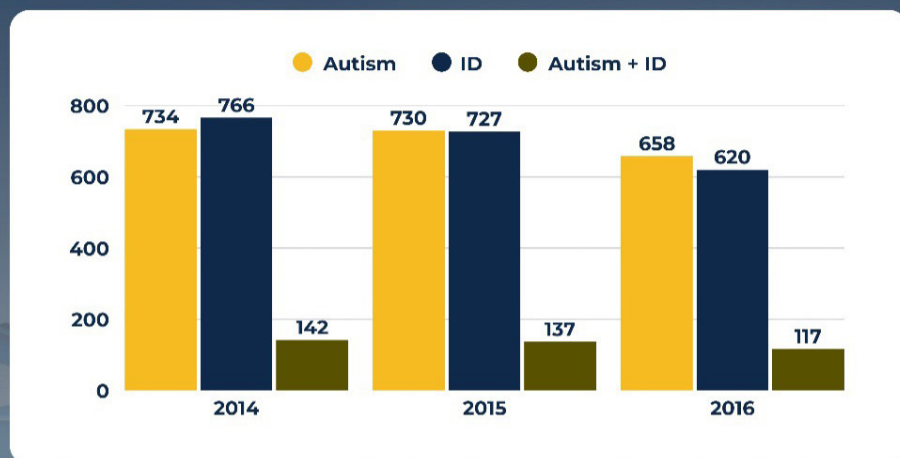
Using our most recent linked data from Medicaid and HUD, **on average about 1500 Philadelphians** with autism spectrum disorder (autism), intellectual disability (ID), or both received HUD assistance between 2014 and 2016.

The number of Philadelphians with IDD receiving housing assistance through HUD fell slightly across these years, decreasing by 247 people - from 1,642 in 2014 to 1,395 in 2016. This decline corresponded with a **small overall decline** in Philadelphians who received HUD assistance **between 2014 and 2016**.

HUD assistance among individuals who only had autism was slightly higher than those who only had ID. Individuals with both autism and ID made up a significantly smaller portion of people receiving HUD assistance across these years.



**The number of Philadelphians with Autism, ID, or both who received HUD assistance decreased from 1,642 (2014) to 1,395 (2016).**



## Who are the Philadelphians with IDD who received HUD assistance?

Of the 1,395 total individuals with IDD living in HUD-assisted households in 2016, most were males, and the majority were Black or African American. Less than 10% were white and few were Asian.

Children comprised over half (56%) of Philadelphians with an IDD who lived in households that received HUD assistance in 2016. This means that many people with IDD who lived in a HUD-assisted household in Philadelphia were young Black or African American boys.

## Where does our housing data come from?

Our data about housing comes from HUD. HUD data tells us about everyone who uses HUD assistance. But, in regard to disability, HUD data only tells us if a person with a disability lives in the home IF the family reported that.

Our data about people with disabilities comes from Medicaid claims from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). Medicaid data helps us find records for people with autism and/or ID who live in Philadelphia County.

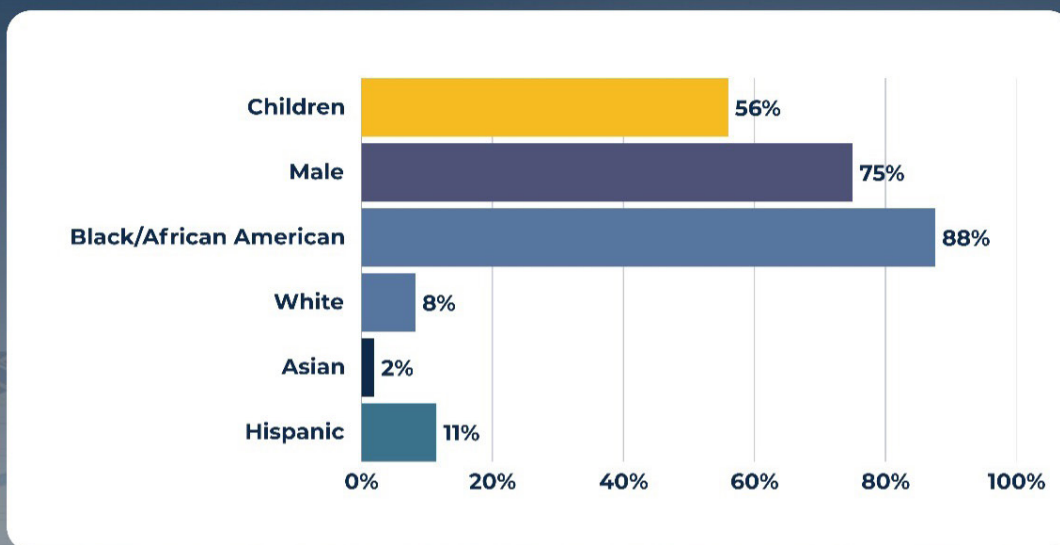
When we combine Medicaid claims data with HUD data, we can see more specific information. This allows us to see whether people with autism and/or intellectual disability live in a household that uses HUD benefits.

We cannot see information about actual people in this data. There are no names or addresses. But we can look at deidentified data about people who live in Philadelphia County.

We used the most recent linked data that was available at the time of this writing.

You can read more about our methods in the [Appendix](#) section.

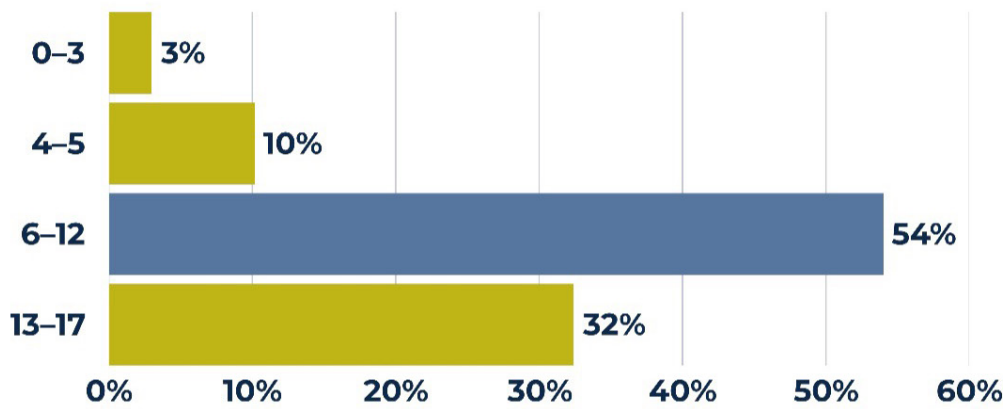
## Philadelphians with IDD who lived in HUD-assisted households in 2016 were often children.



Children with IDD in Philadelphia HUD-assisted households tended to be early school age. Over half were between the ages of 6 and 12. “Early school age” refers to the period when children begin formal schooling and continue their elementary education.

[Early experiences affect the development of the brain](#), which provides the foundation for all future learning, behavior and health. Understanding living experiences early in a child’s development is crucial because of the long-lasting physical, social, and emotional impacts that may happen when children are exposed to housing instability.

## Children with IDD in HUD-assisted households in Philadelphia in 2016 were often early school age.



### Philadelphians with IDD living in HUD-assisted households had high levels of social needs.

In 2016, there were over 1,300 HUD-assisted households in Philadelphia that had family members with an IDD. Over three-fourths of these households had incomes in the extremely low category (below 30% of the local area median income, as defined by HUD, adjusted for the number of household members), compared to [81%](#) of all Philadelphia HUD-assisted households.

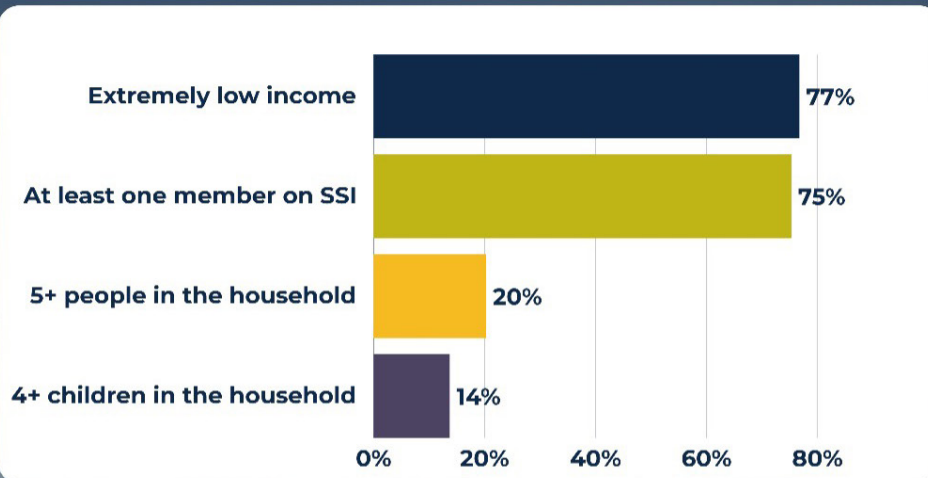
While we do not know the exact income cutoffs that HUD used to define extremely low income for Philadelphia households in 2016 (by number of household members), we know that 30% of the median household income was \$12,450 for Philadelphia County in 2016. We also know that nearly 50% of HUD-assisted households in Philadelphia in 2016 had less than \$10,000 in household income.

Many of these households had members who received other types of public assistance in addition to HUD. Specifically, 75% of HUD-assisted households of people with IDD had a member who received Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and 7% received Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (not shown).

### Who were the heads of HUD-assisted households that had a person with IDD?

We looked at heads of HUD-assisted households in Philadelphia where at least one person had autism and/or ID in 2016. The heads of households tended to be between the ages of 35 and 44 years. This age range is similar to the citywide median age of householders in Philadelphia, which was 35 years of age [according to the 2020 Census](#).

## In 2016, over 1,300 HUD-assisted households in Philadelphia included a member with an IDD and had complex socioeconomic challenges.

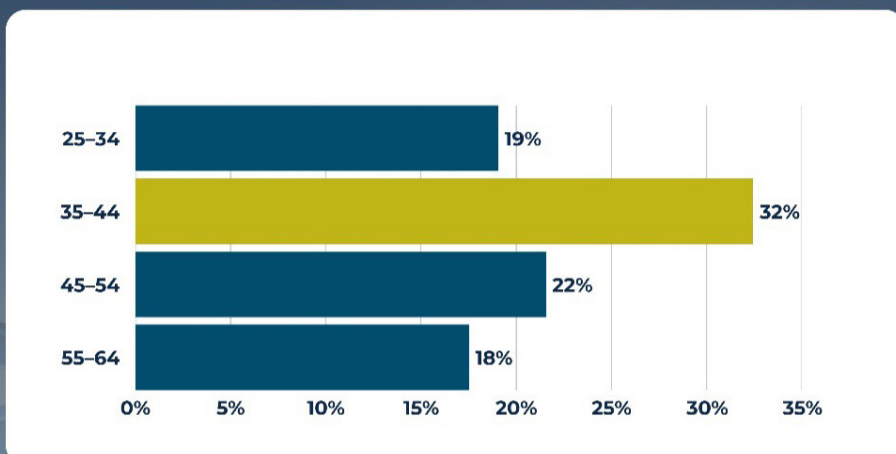


Additionally, heads of HUD-assisted households with a person with IDD in Philadelphia were typically Black, non-Hispanic females.

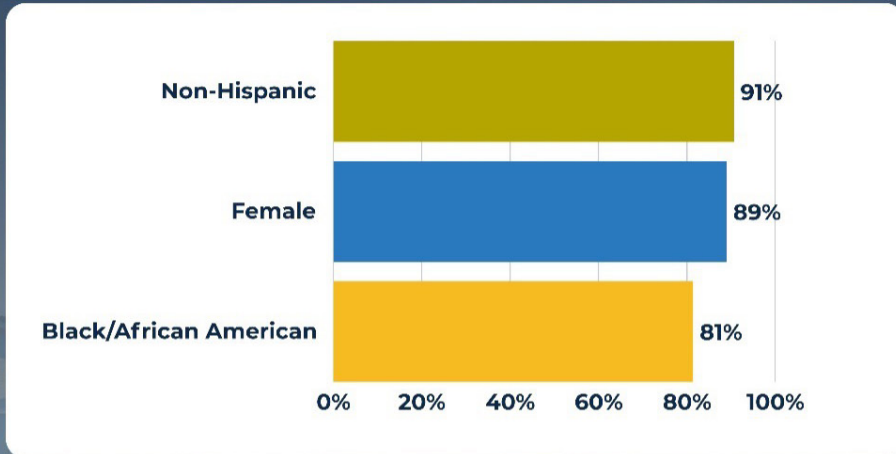
### Who is the *head of household*?

HUD does not have a standard definition of what *head of household* refers to. Researchers typically assume it means the person who is named in a lease. It could also mean the person with the highest income in the household.

## More heads of Philadelphia households with a person with autism and/or ID were between **35 and 44** years old.



## Most HUD-assisted households (with people with IDD) had a female as the head who was a non-Hispanic, Black/African American.

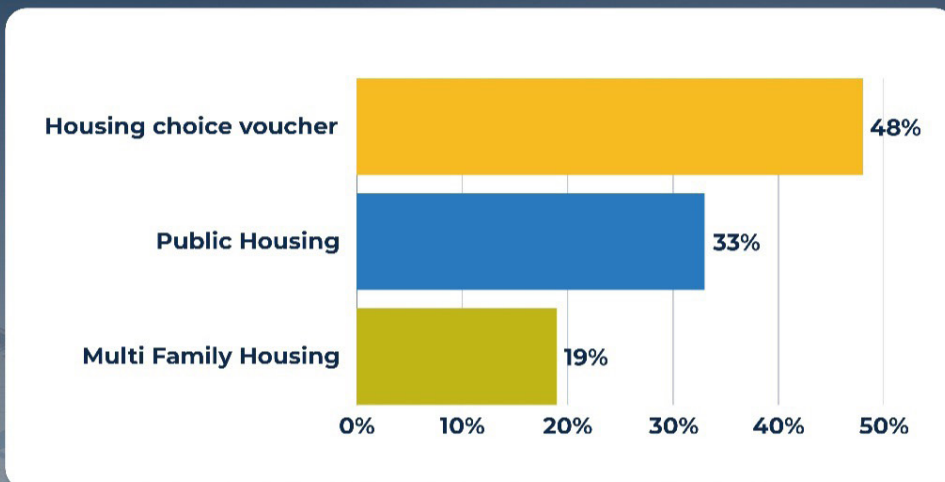


HUD's **Housing Choice Voucher** program is the most widely utilized federal rental assistance program in the United States, providing aid to over [2.2 million households](#).

Nearly half (48%) of the Philadelphia households with a person with IDD, or 632 households, used the **Housing Choice Voucher** program in 2016. In contrast, nearly 60% of HUD-assisted households with an autistic person nationwide participated in the Housing Choice Voucher program in the same year, according to research conducted in our center.

About one-third of HUD-assisted Philadelphia households with a person with IDD lived in **public housing** in 2016. This was more than the HUD-assisted households nationwide who used public housing (21%).

## Households with people with IDD were more often enrolled in the Housing Choice Voucher Program.





## Evidence of housing-related needs in autism support center data

### *Housing-related requests to an autism support center in Philadelphia*

The ASERT (Autism Services, Education, Resources & Training) Collaborative operates a statewide Resource Center in Pennsylvania that helps autistic people, their families, and professionals find information, training, and services. ASERT receives about 1,000 inquiries per year from Pennsylvanians seeking guidance on a range of topics, including accessing autism screening assessments, diagnoses, and services, and navigating Medicaid waiver programs. People also reach out about community needs, including access to safe, affordable, and reliable housing, and how to address those needs.

We analyzed 57 contacts the Resource Center received about housing needs in Philadelphia County between 2019 and 2025 to better understand the variety of housing supports Philadelphians needed. Given the ongoing housing crisis in Philadelphia—including rising rents, limited affordable options, and long waitlists for assistance—we also sought to understand how the autism community may be uniquely impacted and what kinds of supports might be needed.

## The importance of listening to the housing needs of autistic people

[Self-advocacy](#) is essential for autistic people seeking support because it empowers them to effectively communicate their needs, rights, and personal boundaries. This skill set fosters autonomy and social inclusion by enabling people to participate confidently in educational, healthcare, and social settings.

When autistic people self-advocate for their housing needs, it is critical to listen to determine the types of supports that are needed. This is especially true regarding housing-related needs, as [little research is available](#) concerning housing needs of autistic people.

These contacts only represented about 3% of total contacts across the state and date range, but they illustrate how important stable, affordable, and suitable housing is for independence and quality of life for this community. This is especially true since people might not think to call an autism support center about housing needs.

## Who made the contacts about housing-related needs?

Nearly 40% of people who contacted ASERT about housing-related needs were parents and caregivers, followed by support staff and social service professionals (19%), autistic people advocating for their own needs (11%), and other family members (11%). In many cases, parents, family members, and staff contacted ASERT on behalf of a child or client about housing issues and how to address those needs. When an autistic person contacted ASERT, they were typically doing so on their own behalf.

There was a smaller but notable group of homeowners and landlords (18%) who wanted information and resources that would help them develop or retrofit their property to be used as supportive housing. [Supportive housing](#) is affordable, permanent housing that comes with a range of voluntary services. It helps people with specific needs to live stable and independent lives in their community.

## What were the housing-related needs?

Many people who contacted ASERT expressed an urgent need for housing and affiliated resources, often due to difficulties finding a place to live, living in unstable or temporary arrangements, or residing in unsafe or unfit environments. Several also noted that complex health needs impacted their housing situation. Some reported experiencing homelessness. Others sought help with housing-related cost issues, like lack of stable income or rent relief.

## What is rent relief?

Rent relief programs provide financial assistance to eligible renters facing eviction or housing instability. Philadelphia has several rent-relief programs, including the now closed [Emergency Rental Assistance Program \(ERAP\)](#), the [Targeted Financial Assistance \(TFA\) program](#), the [Shallow Rent Program](#), and the [Housing Choice Voucher Program](#) through Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

The most frequently reported issues were related to general housing needs including needing a home, home assistance, or a safe and comfortable place to stay (72%). This included requests for emergency, temporary, or supportive housing to address an array of needs. For example, some described needing immediate relocation due to unsafe or stressful living situations.

One person asked for recommendations for a neighborhood that would be safe and accommodating for themselves and their autistic child with unique sensory needs. Other people needed professional assistance, such as an autistic person facing eviction.

Others reported living with family members in challenging conditions, needing a home with accessibility modifications for a child with medical or developmental needs, or experiencing homelessness with multiple children.

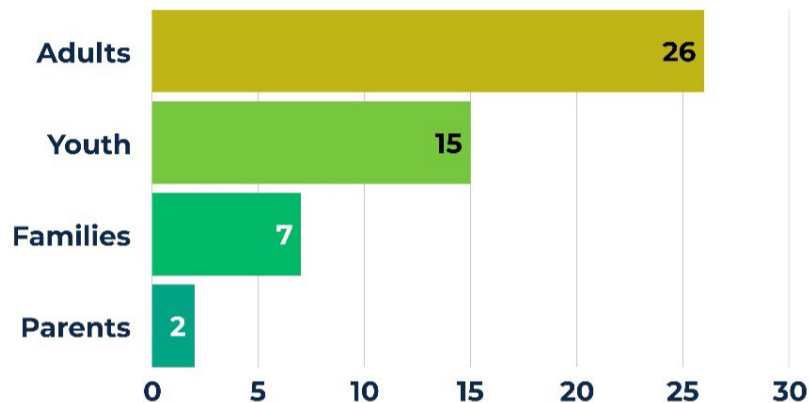
Some sought guidance on accessing housing through family navigators and school supports. Three people also needed legal or other resources to navigate unfit living environments or problematic neighbors.

Others sought financial assistance, help with utilities, or programs like 811 Project Rental Assistance, Pennsylvania Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP), or local grants to help cover rent and make home modifications.

## Most contacts about housing-related needs concerned adults.

Contacts made to ASERT about housing were more often made by people with an autistic adult in the home or by an autistic adult themselves. Fifty-two percent of autistic people living alone or with families that needed housing support were adults, including two autistic seniors. Children and teens accounted for 26% of contacts. Eighteen percent of calls involved families with multiple autistic or disabled members, including two autistic parents who needed housing supports for their family.

### Adults were the largest group of autistic individuals in need of housing-related resources.



*Note: The low number of seniors using the call center could be due to several factors, such as limited access, lack of awareness about the service, communication challenges, or already receiving support through other programs.*

Among the 26 contacts about autistic adults and seniors, 18 needed housing assistance like relocation support from unsafe environments or help finding stable housing. Other contacts regarding autistic adults were about employment or financial support to help pay for moving costs or rental assistance. In four cases, there were barriers to navigating existing services. For example, one person reported difficulty getting updates about a waitlist spot.

Among 15 contacts about children, 11 were about unsafe or unfit living conditions, a frequently reported issue for this group.

### What types of resources did ASERT provide?

While ASERT cannot recommend specific providers due to funding restrictions, the team's role is to connect individuals with available

information, help them navigate established systems, and identify unmet needs that may inform future resource development.

In response to housing-related contacts, Philadelphia Autism Project provided extensive resources, including housing guides that contained information on vouchers, Section 811 supportive housing, Centers for Independent Living, grant opportunities, as well as guidance on Medicaid waivers and adult services.

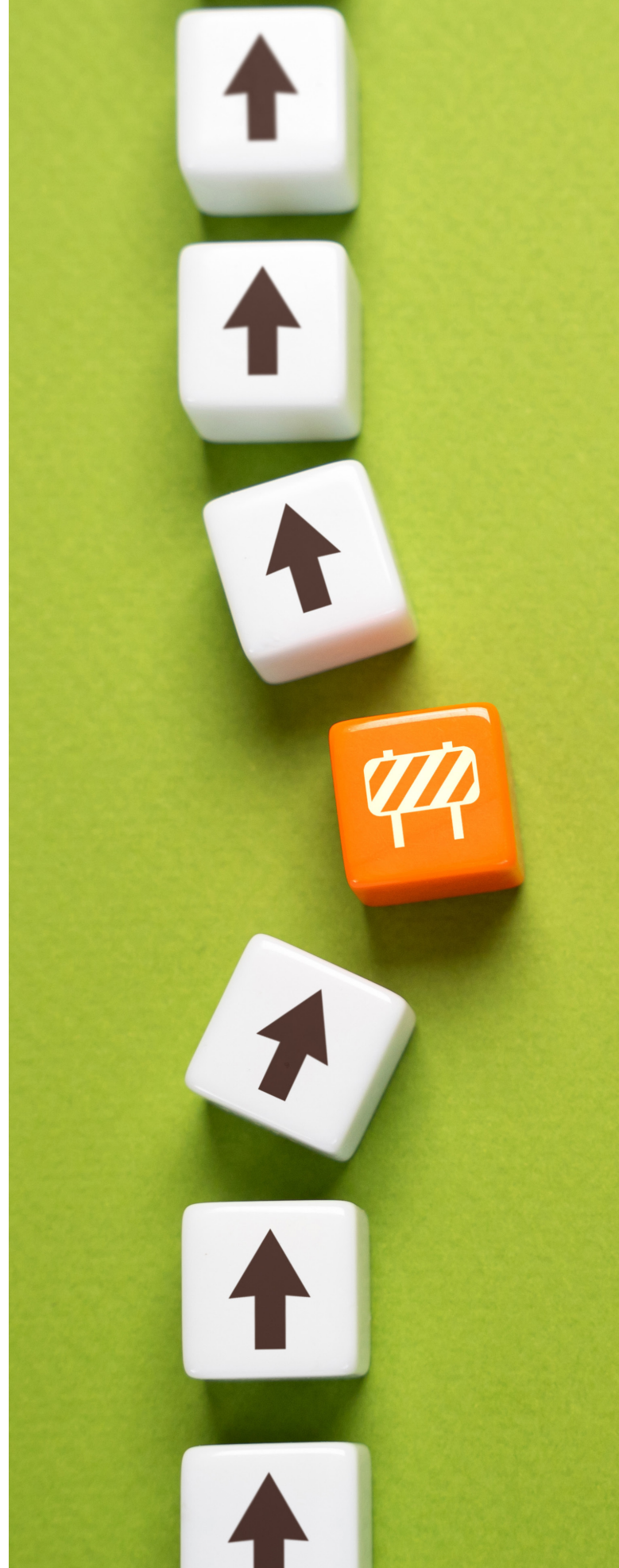
ASERT staff also offered general resources such as [ASERT's support group map](#), the Philadelphia Autism Project resource list, the CAR Autism Roadmap, and links to the PA Family Network, COMPASS provider finder, and Autism Speaks Adult Services.

However, no follow-up data was available to determine whether people ultimately obtained the housing assistance they needed.

# Key Challenges and Recommendations

*Our findings highlight the key challenges for Philadelphians with IDD who need housing assistance.*

- **Declines in the rates of HUD assistance** for households of people with IDD. The number of HUD-assisted households in Philadelphia [continued a steady decline](#) over the last decade. Analysis of updated data could determine whether this decline has also occurred for people with IDD. However, there is reason to be concerned that HUD assistance has become less available, while the number of households affected by IDs like autism has increased.
- **High rates of extreme poverty** and public benefit reliance. It is extraordinarily difficult for households impacted by extreme poverty, disability, and other needs to improve their housing situation. These circumstances represent the exact type of complex needs that public assistance is designed to address.
- **Underrepresentation of households with people with IDD in the housing voucher program** is worthy of exploration. Housing vouchers are the most common form of housing assistance nationally. Compared to both national and local statistics, households of people with IDD in Philadelphia were less likely to use housing vouchers to assist with rent costs in the community and were more likely to live in public housing. Analysis of updated data could determine whether this trend continued. Community conversations could explore the reasons underlying over-reliance on public housing among households with people with IDD.





## Practice Recommendations

Our analysis focused on understanding the specific housing needs of the IDD community and the scope of those needs. Contacts to the ASERT autism support center demonstrated a growing need for local housing resources that are tailored to inclusive, accessible, and affordable housing in Philadelphia.

Individuals and families with IDD often face issues that go far beyond a person's specific disability. They often need resources related to employment, health, mental health, and housing, but they may not ask for these resources when contacting a disability-focused resource center.

### 1. Proactively ask about housing-related needs.

Local disability support organizations like ASERT, the Philly Autism Project, and similar organizations could proactively ask contacts about housing-related needs, even if callers don't mention them directly. This would help the community better understand the level of housing-related needs.

**2. Collaborate to build resources.** Disability organizations could collaborate with housing assistance organizations to identify existing resources to direct referrals. They could also pinpoint gaps in needed resources to educate the community on the housing needs of people with IDD.

**3. Develop Specialized Housing Navigation Services.** Families of people with IDD, and adults with IDD, often face complex systems.

- Fund housing navigators who specialize in IDD.
- Provide one-on-one support through the housing search and leasing process.
- Offer legal aid for families facing eviction or discrimination.

**4. Track Outcomes.** To better understand community needs, identify obstacles, and track success of referrals:

- Use short-term follow-up contacts to determine whether people were able to access the resources they needed.
- Use long-term follow-up to determine whether people were ultimately successful in meeting their housing needs.

### 5. Learn more about the role of HUD assistance in improving the lives of Philadelphians with IDD.

- Explore how individuals with IDD are supported before, during, and after housing changes.
- Analyze whether receiving HUD assistance has an effect on quality of life for people with IDD in Philadelphia.
- Collect stories of Philadelphians with IDD and their family members to better understand their decisions and experiences with HUD and HUD assistance.

### 6. Integrate Housing with Social Services.

Given the high rates of deep poverty and public benefit use:

- Co-locate housing assistance with SSI/TANF enrollment and case management.
- Use a "no wrong door" approach to connect families to wraparound supports.
- Train housing staff in trauma-informed care and disability services.



## Policy Recommendations

Improving housing assistance for Philadelphians with IDD requires targeted, data-informed, and equity-driven strategies. By addressing systemic barriers and tailoring supports to the unique needs of this population, Philadelphia can lead the way in inclusive housing policy for residents with IDD.

### 1. Advocate for Housing Policy Change



**Fact:** Housing policy has not kept up with the growing housing needs of the IDD community in Philadelphia.

#### Recommendations:

- Conduct a community-engaged study to determine why the number of Philadelphians with IDD who are receiving HUD assistance is low. Use the findings to direct which recommendations should be prioritized.
- Align funding with housing programs designed to meet the specific needs of people with IDD.
- Include people with IDD and their families in housing policy planning.
- Ensure housing strategies support disability rights. For example, waiving a “no pet” policy to allow assistance animals.
- Policies like universal or guaranteed basic income may help people have more stable housing by giving them a steady source of income. Examples include the Guaranteed Income [pilot programs](#) implemented in Philadelphia, and the ongoing Guaranteed Basic Income [pilot program](#) in Chicago.
- To reduce Philadelphia’s housing assistance waitlist, the city should pursue a multi-pronged approach focused on increasing supply, securing more funding, and reforming administrative processes.

### 2. Better Understand Disparate Use of Housing Choice Vouchers



**FACT:** Philadelphia was lower than the national average for voucher use among households with disabled individuals.\*

Voucher use in households with a person with IDD was lower than other Philadelphia households using HUD assistance.

#### Recommendations:

- Conduct community studies to determine whether voucher use is lower for the IDD population by choice. Determine whether more people with a family member with IDD prefer to live in public housing, as opposed to using a voucher for housing rental, or whether the problem is voucher availability.
- IF community studies indicate that families would prefer to use a voucher over living in public housing, then:
- Increase outreach and application support for families who may be eligible for this voucher.
  - Increase the number of vouchers specifically allocated to people with IDD.
  - Reduce administrative burden by simplifying the application process for families with complex needs.

\*This statement refers to data on autistic individuals.

### 3. Increase Public Housing Accessibility



**FACT:** Philadelphia households with people with IDD were more likely to live in public housing than other HUD-assisted households in Philadelphia, as opposed to receiving vouchers to pay rent in community housing.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Ensure public housing units are accessible and inclusive for people with IDD by fixing barriers (such as making sure entrances are wheelchair accessible), improving accessibility features (such as a grab bar in the bathroom), and training staff to provide appropriate support.
- Retrofit existing units with sensory-friendly and mobility features.
- Train public housing staff on IDD awareness and accommodations

### 4. Target Support for Black and African American Families



**FACT:** The majority of HUD-assisted individuals with IDD in Philadelphia were Black/ African American.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Create opportunities to listen to the needs of people with IDD from black and brown communities in Philadelphia to understand their needs and how HUD assistance can be leveraged to better serve them.
- Work with community leaders and stakeholders to create service priorities and solutions based on what homeowners and renters say they need.
- Partner with community-based organizations that serve Black families.
- Identify and address the systems that make it hard for people to get or keep housing.
- Consider the past and ongoing impacts of [redlining](#) and [ableism](#).

### 5. Support Female Heads of Household



**FACT:** Most heads of IDD households were Black or African American, non-Hispanic women ages 35–44.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Offer social supports tailored to caregivers of people with disabilities and people with disabilities who are the heads of households.
- Create peer support networks to build mutual support and reduce isolation and stress.
- Co-create leadership and advocacy development opportunities that honor caregivers' needs.

### 6. Prioritize Early Childhood Housing Stability



**FACT:** Over half of HUD-assisted individuals with IDD were children aged 6–12 years.

#### **Recommendations:**

Housing programs should:

- Promote housing stability during critical developmental years through proven policies such as [eviction prevention programs](#), and rental assistance initiatives.
- Partner with early childhood providers to offer developmental screenings, therapies, and parenting resources onsite or nearby.

### 7. Improve Data Sharing and Integration



**FACT:** Linked Medicaid-HUD data enabled this analysis.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Expand availability of linked data at the state and local levels.
- Develop ongoing data-sharing agreements between housing and health agencies.
- Use linked data to identify unmet needs and track outcomes.
- Collect data that can be disaggregated by race, age, and disability type to better understand the needs of specific groups of people.

# Housing Resources

## General Resources

- [Autism Housing Network](#): Provides resources so that local communities can build or find the homes they need to meet the housing and support crisis in their community context.
- [CAR Autism Roadmap](#): Provides a database of housing/group home options.
- [Liberty Resources](#): A Center for Independent Living, that provides skills training in addition to other services (such as housing counseling).
- [PA Health Law Project](#): Helps with getting or keeping Medicaid, including waiver funding for in-home support and services.
- [Philadelphia Housing Authority \(PHA\) – Accessible Housing](#): PHA's Reasonable Accommodation Request Form and contact information for the Accessibility Coordinator.
- [Philadelphia Housing Resource Guide](#): Housing and community development resources and programs in Philadelphia.
- [Philadelphia Autism Project Resource List \(A-List\)](#): A database of autism (evaluations, adult resources, etc.) and non-autism (family support, accessing services, grants, etc.) related resources in Philadelphia.

## Technical Assistance

- [Equal Housing Center of PA \(for housing professionals\)](#): Assists victims of housing discrimination, helps individuals with disabilities who need to request reasonable accommodations or reasonable modifications in order to be able to use and enjoy their housing on an equal opportunity basis, and provides education, training programs, and technical assistance for housing professionals, nonprofit and social service organizations, housing authorities, local governments, and others to promote compliance with fair housing laws and to prevent discrimination.
- [Housing Alliance of PA](#): A statewide coalition working to provide leadership and a common voice for policies, practices, and resources to



ensure that all Pennsylvanians, especially those with low incomes, have access to safe, decent and affordable homes.

- [Housing and Disability Technical Assistance Program](#): Provides information about accessible housing, fair housing laws and regulations, available financial and technical support, successful housing projects, and other important topics related to housing for people with disabilities in Philadelphia.
- [PA Regional Housing Coordinator \(RHC\) Information and Referral Form](#): \*Regional Housing Coordinators provide technical assistance to Social Service Providers, Landlords and Property Managers. They do not directly serve clients. Request a training, learn about accessible housing and home modification resources, ask fair housing questions, find affordable housing resources, learn about the 811 PRA program or get advice through landlord/tenant disputes.

## Advocacy

- [Fair Housing Rights Center of Southeastern PA \(FHRC\)](#): FHRC educates the public, professionals, and jurisdictions on fair housing/fair lending laws; provides investigative and enforcement services to individuals who have experienced housing discrimination in rental, sales, lending, appraisals, and other housing-related transactions.
- [Philadelphia Coalition for Affordable Communities](#): A group of community, disability, faith, labor, and urban agriculture organizations pushing for housing equity.
- [Self-Determination Housing of Pennsylvania \(SDHP\)](#): Advocates for accessible, affordable, and integrated housing opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

# Appendix 1. Methods

## *Where did we get these data?*

Our team has special, approved access to HUD records of housing assistance in the U.S. for 2008-2023. We also have an agreement with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) which allows access to an approved set of Medicaid data which includes claims for autistic Medicaid enrollees through 2020. This report focuses on linked Medicaid and HUD data for 2016. When we link the HUD records with Medicaid records (with special approval), we can determine which households in the U.S. received HUD assistance and had a household member on the autism spectrum. We can only see records for autistic people who received Medicaid benefits. People who use Medicaid benefits are more likely to have financial needs, so this is a group who are more likely to also need housing assistance.

- We analyzed Medicaid claims for people with claims related to autism or ID.
- We included people within the autism group or the ID group if they had two outpatient claims or one inpatient claim within 2016 in which autism or ID were also coded.
- We compared people who had autism only, ID only, and autism+ID.
- We looked at people who were enrolled in Medicaid for 10 or more months and received HUD assistance. Some individuals may appear in multiple years.

For additional data by year pertaining to HUD assistance in Philadelphia, HUD offers a portal that can be searched by year, by Public Housing Authority, and by county. Link: <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/picture/yearlydata.html>

