



Lessons from an Acute Housing Crisis Response:

Heritage House Apartments, St. Louis, MO

2024

Acknowledgements

The collaborative response to the displacement of Heritage House residents in January 2024 was made possible through the generous support, coordination, and leadership of a wide variety of advocates, service providers, organizations, and agencies. Each contributed valuable resources, expertise, and commitment in support of residents, and success depended on every organization and individual involved.

The evaluation team at the Community Innovation and Action Center (CIAC) at the University of Missouri-St. Louis (UMSL), Sara Mohamed and Hilary Sedovic, would like to thank the St. Louis City Senior Fund for the opportunity to engage in the essential work of assessing the facilitators and barriers of the Heritage House response so that our region (and others like it) might move toward preventative action as well as be better prepared to respond to similar crises in the future. We are grateful for the thoughtful and gracious spirit with which Stephanie Herbers and Jamie Opsal navigated this process with our team.

We would also like to thank the St. Louis Regional Response Team (RRT), namely Kaelin Richardson and Alaina Smith, for their support in planning and facilitating stakeholder feedback meetings, drafting this report, and being candid, capable collaborators.

Thank you as well to all the stakeholders who agreed to be interviewed by our evaluation team and shared their reflections and insights from supporting the Heritage House response. Interviewees continuously highlighted a wide range of partners' contributions and talents – because of this, there is an appendix dedicated to these quotes of appreciation. Every partner was described as playing an indispensable role, and this report cannot fully portray the depth and breadth of each partners' contributions, expertise, and dedication. The ways that you showed up for Heritage House residents and for one another clearly demonstrated your deep compassion, care, and commitment to our St. Louis community.

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Introduction

Late in the evening of Sunday, January 14, 2024, water pipes burst at Heritage House Apartments in Midtown St. Louis, MO, causing flooding that would soon require over 160 residents – many of whom were older adults with complex medical needs – to evacuate. The damage to the 18-story building at 2800 Olive Street happened in part as a result of extremely low temperatures and a failing heating system.

The St. Louis Fire Department and other St. Louis City emergency response teams responded. Teams coordinated the evacuation of residents by city order and brought them to an area hotel, after which emergency management was redirected to other pipe bursts in the city.

Severe water and mold damage destroyed belongings and many residents lost everything. The extent of damage rendered the building unlivable for at least a year; it became clear that, beyond temporary shelter, evacuees needed permanent housing. The region's existing network of service providers support people who are unhoused or otherwise impacted by housing insecurity every day, yet no one or two organizations could suddenly resettle over 160 people. And while a tornado or record flood would have triggered local, state, and federal disaster resources, the Heritage House evacuation fell outside of the traditional disaster relief infrastructure.

This combination of factors catalyzed a unique, cross-sector response. Over the following months, more than 30 nonprofit, governmental, business, philanthropic, community-based, and faith partners met the moment, supporting residents with housing, food, healthcare, case management, and a number of wrap-around services. Despite challenges with funding, staff capacity, housing shortages, and supplementary services, partners ultimately facilitated housing transitions at an unprecedented speed and scale; approximately 80% of residents secured permanent housing within three months.

Report Purpose

This report is intended to:

1. Provide an overview of events that capture response activities in the three months following the evacuation of Heritage House residents.
2. Outline the primary strengths and challenges of the response effort taken on by a wide range of community partners.
3. Identify recommendations from community partners for future prevention of and preparation for large housing emergencies.

City of St. Louis Senior Citizens' Services Fund (St. Louis City Senior Fund) contracted with the Community Innovation and Action Center housed at the University of Missouri - St. Louis (CIAC) to plan and implement a qualitative process evaluation as well as develop and deliver this report. CIAC collaborated with the St. Louis Regional Response Team (RRT) to carry out the deliverables.

Methods

Stakeholder Interviews

In June and July of 2024, the evaluation team conducted semi-structured interviews with individuals actively involved in the multi-month Heritage House response. CIAC, Senior Fund, and the Regional Response Team (RRT) identified individuals who were involved in the response. Organizations and individuals who participated in regular leadership or other coordination meetings during the response were designated as the "core response team". At least one individual from each of these organizations was asked to interview. Of the 24 people invited to interview, 19 completed interviews.

Interview questions focused on the timeline of events as the interviewees remembered them, what interviewees saw as the strengths and challenges of the response, and their recommendations for future response. Interviews ranged in length from 60-90 minutes, some in-person and some via Zoom. Interviewees consented to their interviews being recorded for the purposes of transcription and were informed that their responses would

remain anonymous with no quotes attributed to them. Transcripts were completed by Rev.com.

Two stakeholder feedback sessions were hosted in early August 2024. 11 people involved in the Heritage House response attended a session; all but one attendee also completed an interview. Participants reviewed initial interview themes and discussed recommendations. This process allowed the report team to confirm or adjust their initial findings and identify further topics that stakeholders felt were essential to the report.

An interview codebook was finalized after stakeholder feedback was integrated into previous revisions. The reliability and validity of the final codebook was then tested by two staff members: each coded the same two interview transcripts and compared results to confirm that they were understanding and applying code definitions similarly. Remaining interviews were coded using Dedoose qualitative research software. Themes and representative quotes were identified by analyzing the coded transcripts.

The final report was developed based on those findings.

Additional Response Data

Quantitative data for the Heritage House response was gathered from the shared data infrastructure developed using the cloud-based platform Airtable, which was used by response partners for collecting, analyzing, and referencing resident data.

Local news media were also referenced to support recollection and development of the timeline overview (see [Endnotes](#) for sources).

Limitations

The report team recognizes the limitations of this process. Namely, this report is written from the perspective of responding partners, and it lacks insights from residents' first-hand experience. Interviewees do not and cannot speak for the people directly impacted.

While the report team made a thorough, good-faith effort to cast a wide net, the report is also limited by the scope of the partners invited and interviewed. Some stakeholders

were unavailable or did not respond to invitations, and important perspectives were inevitably left out.

Finally, the report reflects the recollections of interviewees several months after the hectic, high-pressure series of events that comprised the evacuation and response. The report team completed due diligence by cross-referencing interviewee transcripts against each other, email records, limited outside research, and the expertise of at least seven reviewers. Still, memory is prone to error and this report does not purport to be the final arbiter of truth. Instead, it captures the point-in-time reflections of the people and organizations who managed the Heritage House response, preserving their experience and insights for further work.

Timeline of Events

Heritage House Pipes Burst

JANUARY

On the cold, early morning of Monday, January 15, the St. Louis Mayor's Office sends an email to the St. Louis Area Agency on Aging (SLAAA), alerting them to the pipe bursts at Heritage House and asking for support in responding to the crisis.

- **Mid-Morning:** SLAAA arranges to meet with the St. Louis City Emergency Management Agency (CEMA) and the American Red Cross at Heritage House to assess the situation. Heritage House's building manager expresses that issues should be resolved that day while SLAAA, CEMA, and Red Cross representatives state that preventative evacuation is needed.
- **Early Afternoon:** The Mayor's Office negotiates a discounted rate at a downtown hotel for residents who want a room, the cost of which is covered by Sansone Group, the property management company for Heritage House. CEMA contacts Metro Transit to arrange for buses that will warm residents and transport them to the hotel.
- **Late Afternoon:** Building management and community partners call residents and knock on their doors, encouraging them to evacuate. Some residents self-evacuated, but others stayed despite the conditions.
- **Early Evening:** The fire department and an inspector return to Heritage House and announce a city order to evacuate the entire building. First responders, the American Red Cross, CEMA, and other agencies transport residents to a downtown hotel.



Core Response Team Established

The Mayor's Office, St. Louis Area Agency on Aging, and Alderwoman Keys begin establishing a "core response team" with other partners to meet varied residents' needs. This includes coordinating meals, getting access to belongings, conducting daily wellness checks, securing funding support, and connecting residents to various resources.



Update On Return To Home

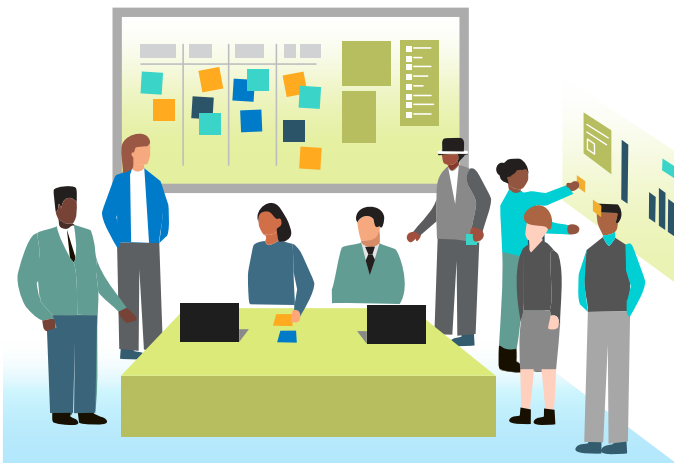
Residents receive notification that the building will not be habitable for at least a year and they need to find new homes. Heritage House Board of Directors indicates their hotel stays are covered through January 30.



Core Response Team Continues to Expand

The core response team expands from addressing residents' daily needs to preparing for more comprehensive case management that helps residents secure safe, quality, and affordable housing. The team also works on securing funding to support hotel stays past January 30.

- ▶ A data team from UMSL CIAC is engaged to develop a shared database to keep track of residents' current needs, housing requirements, wellness checks and case support, and other key information.
- ▶ Daily wellness checks, resident meetings, and prepared meals continue.



Core Response Team Continues Coordination and Working with Other Partners to Provide Support

FEBRUARY

Residents Relocate To New Hotel

Residents move to a hotel near the airport due to pre-scheduled bookings at the downtown hotel.



Housing & Resource Fair

LATE JANUARY

A two-day resource fair is held at the airport hotel. The event includes housing providers representing more than 30 buildings, as well as partners offering support with medications, internet services, mental health support, and case managers that can help with navigating housing options.



Residents Relocate To New Hotels

FEBRUARY

Close to 100 residents living at the hotel near the airport must relocate a second time due to pre-scheduled bookings. This third move requires that residents are split between three hotels; service delivery (e.g., meals, resident communications, other on-site support) expands to multiple locations instead of a single site.



Core Response Team Moves Toward Ending Crisis Response

FEBRUARY-MARCH

Over the next several weeks, partners make ongoing refinements to service delivery. Over 80% of Heritage House leaseholders are connected to and begin moving into permanent housing. Hotel stays, furniture purchases, “welcome home” kits, and other moving expenses are covered by various community partners to reduce the cost burden on residents, many of whom saw housing costs increase with the move.

As the number of residents needing services decreases, response partners began to disengage from the crisis, refocusing on their existing programs and services. Hotel stays supported by several funding sources end. Residents still in need of support remain engaged with designated partners.

Response Partners

The Heritage House response was made possible through the collaboration, support, and leadership of a wide variety of advocates, service providers, organizations, and agencies. Each organization listed – as well as many additional churches, community groups, sororities, and fraternities – contributed valuable resources, expertise, and commitment throughout the response, enabling more successful transitions for Heritage House residents amidst the challenge of sudden displacement.

Core Response Team

- Action St. Louis
- City of St. Louis
 - Office of the Mayor
 - St. Louis Area Agency on Aging, Department of Human Services (SLAAA)
 - St. Louis Development Corporation (SLDC)
- Community Innovation and Action Center (CIAC) at the University of Missouri - St. Louis (UMSL)
- Housing Options Provided for the Elderly (HOPE)
- Office of Congresswoman Cori Bush
- St. Louis City Senior Fund
- St. Louis City Ward 11 Alderwoman Laura Keys
- St. Louis City Ward 11 Legislative Aide Marlene Davis
- St. Louis Regional Response Team (RRT)
- Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis, Inc.

Contributing Organizations

- Angad Arts Hotel
- Archwell Health
- Arch City Defenders
- Deaconess Nurse Ministry
- Element St. Louis Midtown Hotel
- Five Star Center

- Association on Aging with Developmental Disabilities
- BEK Moving
- BJC Behavioral Health
- Cardinal Ritter Senior Services
- Cheshire Inn
- City of St. Louis
 - Community Development Administration
 - Building Division
 - Fire Department
- Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COAD)
 - Advent Community Services
 - AmeriCorps
 - American Red Cross
 - Catholic Charities
 - MO Baptist Disaster Relief
 - St. Patrick's Center
- Hilton St. Louis at the Airport and Ballpark
- Incarnate Word Foundation
- JFS of St. Louis
- LifeWise STL
- Lutheran Senior Services
- McCormack Baron Management
- Metro Transit Bi-State Development
- Monarch Immigrant Services
- Office of Housing and Urban Development
- Provident Behavioral Health
- Send Relief
- Southside Senior Citizens Center
- St. Andrew's Housing
- St. Andrew's Senior Solutions
- St. Louis Housing Authority
- Unique Home Care
- Westin Hotel

Reasons Partners Engaged in the Response

More than anything else, interviewees repeatedly referenced the strength and value of stakeholder collaboration. All interviewees were impressed with individuals' willingness to work together and provide any resources they could.

I think the difference [with this response] could also have been just the dedication of the people involved and the commitment,

from the person driving the Five Star bus to the staff at Southside Senior Center that were preparing meals, to the case managers, to City staff, up to the Mayor's office, and to funders like CDA and funders like Senior Fund that jumped in and immediately were willing to participate in daily conversations and to brainstorm around emergencies and how to best assist people. People were all in.

While admitting that their collaboration was not without its challenges, the primary feelings interviewees shared in reflection of the work they had done were pride and gratitude. Consistently, interviewees expressed hope that despite the many challenges they encountered, this report would highlight what they were able to accomplish by working together.

Partners came to the table for multiple reasons, including that they:

1. Did relevant work in their day-to-day jobs (e.g. working with older adults, or part of the City's emergency response team);
2. Saw an opportunity to help and wanted to support, so they offered services they thought might be useful;
3. Had the ability to dedicate their time to the response;
4. Were contacted by Heritage House residents (more often the case for government representatives); and/or
5. Commitment to mobilizing and organizing with and for community.

Roles

Interviewees identified a wide range of formal and informal roles and responsibilities that they and others took on to carry out the response, often noting that they worked to meet needs as they were identified. Some individuals took on multiple roles. On the next page, *Table 1 – Response Roles & Functions* summarizes essential response functions, though it by no means represents every key person and contribution.

Table 1 – Response Roles & Functions

Role	Overview
Emergency Response & Management	Emergency response and management partners were involved in the immediate response to the water pipe breaks, including assessing the condition of the building, determining when it was time for residents to evacuate, and carrying out the evacuation.
Coordination & Management of Extended Response	Several City departments and other organizations stepped up to identify needs, organize partners and resources, and manage logistics. This included daily check-in calls, emails, and meetings; resident communication; funding decisions; operations and contracts; and managing hotel relationships.
Resident Support (Emotional, Social, Advocacy/ Navigation)	On-site resident support was taken on by multiple partners. Resident support included door-to-door wellness checks; social support; meals; developing and maintaining trusting relationships; identifying and assisting residents with specific support needs; and more. Several key partners ensured they had an in-person presence on a daily basis and were important for relaying real-time information about resident needs to the rest of the planning and coordination team.
Case Management & Housing Navigation	Case managers and other resource navigators helped connect residents to the resources they needed. Housing specialists worked with residents to find and apply to housing that best fit their needs and arrange their moves. Case managers could access some funding —primarily for older adults— to assist with rental deposits, purchase furniture, and alleviate barriers

	(e.g., application fees and transportation) that would have prevented the transition to permanent housing.
Role	Overview
Funding & In-Kind Contributions	Organizations with access to funding to cover expenses upfront for later reimbursement and funders that could ultimately reimburse expenses for the response was essential. This also included organizations that had general operating support or other specific funding sources that allowed them to allocate dedicated staff time to the response, which was outside their typical activities and services for the year.
Ecosystem Connector	Ecosystem connectors were described as individuals who were knowledgeable about and well-connected to several organizations and groups and could use those connections to bring needed resources or individuals to the response. Interviewees described how different partners had different connections in the community and how these varied connections brought in needed resources that filled in gaps to the response including donation of food and personal care items, access to health and care services, volunteers for on-site activities, etc.
Data Support	Dedicated data staff created and maintained a customized shared database and dashboard. Information for individual residents was stored in the database and information from daily wellness checks, hotel status, housing assistance needs, case manager interactions, etc. were updated daily. The database evolved in real time as partners identified opportunities to improve quality and usability.

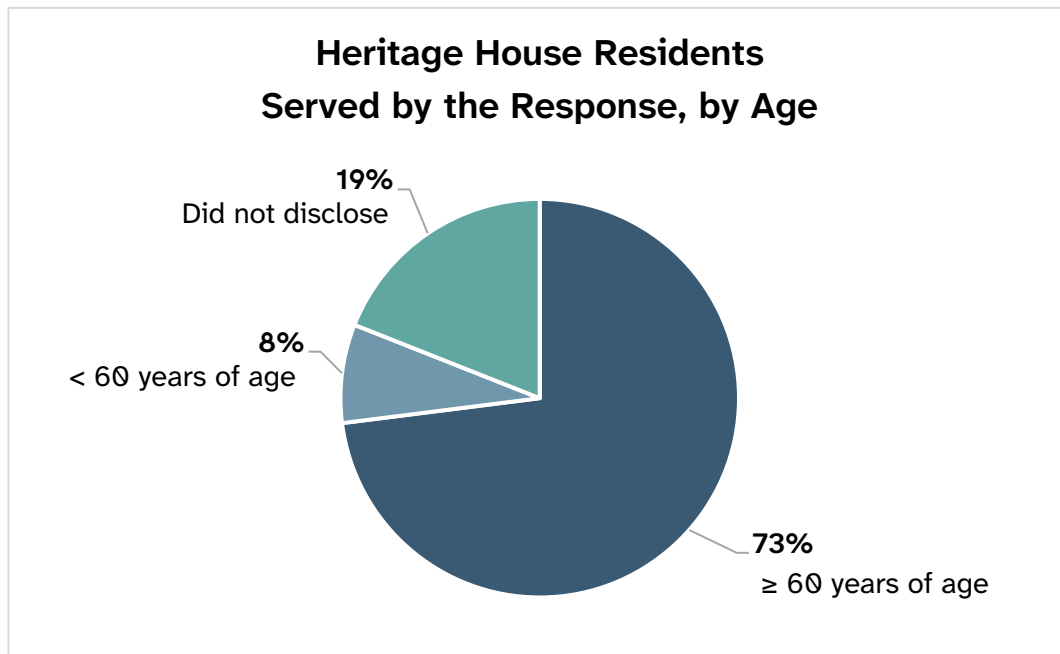
Role	Overview
Resource Gathering & Distribution	The function of resource gathering was described as obtaining and providing whatever resources residents might need on-site at the hotels. This could include food, mobility aids, personal care products like incontinence supplies, and more. This was described as a very important, on-the-ground role that connected directly with residents.
Event Planning & Implementation	Staff from partner organizations and volunteers held specific roles in carrying out the housing and resource fair including recruiting housing providers from over 30 buildings and other support services, planning an intake process, creating materials on housing options, promoting the event to residents, setting up the location, managing day-of activities, helping attendees navigate their housing options, and ensuring accurate data and follow-up.
Transportation & Moving Assistance	Transportation for residents was essential for various functions throughout the response and was provided by public and private transit providers (i.e., public buses, senior centers, cabs, and other on-demand transportation). Transportation support was particularly needed to assist residents in returning to their apartments to retrieve belongings. Later, moving companies helped transport belongings to new homes.

Heritage House Residents

Resident Demographics

Heritage House Apartments was originally built primarily as a retirement community for educators. Heritage House has since welcomed younger residents as well. *Figure 1* below shows the self-reported age of residents supported by the response, as captured by the data team: 73% were 60 or more years of age, 8% were less than 60 years of age, and 19% did not disclose their exact age.

Figure 1 – Heritage House Residents Served by the Response, by Age



8%

of residents reported that they were veterans or spouses of veterans.

30%

of residents required additional health support or case management for medication access, disability support, etc. during the response.

Of the residents served by the response effort, a wide range of household income was reported. Some residents were currently employed, some were looking for work, and many others were retired.

Monthly rents at Heritage House ranged from:

\$650 - \$1,400

Residents held leases at Heritage House for an average of:

8 years*

*(range: <1 year – 36 years)

Resident Needs

Experiences and needs of Heritage House residents were central to many of the reflections shared in partner interviews. Most interviewees noted that there was a wide, diverse range of needs across the resident population, the extent of which became clearer the longer residents were out of the usual environments that had supported their daily living.

Also, many residents had left belongings behind at Heritage House when they evacuated, not anticipating that they would be unable to return. The ability to retrieve essential belongings from Heritage House was limited due to restricted access to the building by the property management company—due to safety concerns and lack of electricity—and the unfortunate reality that many of their belongings had been damaged by water and mold. As the situation evolved, response partners progressively added services and further support for residents. Below are reflections from interviewees about the various experiences of residents to which partners strived to respond.

Mental and Emotional Health

Interviewees identified that there were significant emotional challenges for residents struggling with the abrupt transition from their homes and community at Heritage House

to hotels and their next home. Many interviewees described the trauma residents experienced seeing their home (of several decades, for some) flood, experiencing evacuation with their neighbors, not knowing where they would live week-to-week, and trying to navigate a complex housing landscape for the first time in years.

Many interviewees shared their own impressions as well as secondhand experience with the diverse sources of stress that residents faced during the response, including:

- Accepting that they wouldn't return to their homes.

At what point do you say to someone, "We've helped you, but now you're on your own?" or say to someone, "Okay, we've gotten you housing, you're a success," when they don't feel like a success, because really, I mean, I had people who were moving into housing who were happy about it, but who said, "Really, I just want to go back home." And that's the thing, if you've lived at a place for decades ...

- Living in unfamiliar environments.
- Losing belongings to water damage and mold; the stress of safely getting access to assess what could be recovered.
- Exacerbation of existing mental health challenges.

We had a lot of veterans who were dealing with PTSD, and they would get up and go out and walk along the highways. Police would bring them back and the hotel staff knew to call me. And I would sit there and get them in a place where they felt [...] safe enough to go to their room and go to sleep.

- Having to quickly identify, apply to, and move to new housing.

Mobility and Physical Health

One of the most frequent themes referenced by interviewees was the range of residents' physical needs, most of which became increasingly evident as the response wore on. Many interviewees reflected that residents may have developed mechanisms of support that allowed them to live independently while at Heritage House, but once removed

from that environment, their independence was compromised. As the response continued to unfold, it was essential that the core response team identify hotel accommodations and long-term housing options that met the mobility and physical health needs of residents.

Some of the most frequently cited physical needs and accommodations included:

- Access to mobility aids and other medical equipment.
- Accessible hotel rooms, including rooms for residents with hearing impairments and/or wheelchair users.
- Appropriate dietary support, especially for diabetic residents.
- Incontinence supplies.
- Meal delivery due to limited mobility.
- Health check-ups and personal care assistance.
- Medication delivery.

Multiple interviewees expressed feelings of relief and fulfillment for residents who did progress to more supportive permanent housing solutions, such as senior apartments with support services or assisted living residences. Several explicitly named that residents who had higher care needs were now in appropriate housing that would support those needs and that some residents had not previously been aware of the resources available to them as seniors.

Community of Neighbors

Many interviewees referenced the assets of the residents' physical and social community and how being displaced from their usual environment when moved to a hotel near the airport created significant challenges for some residents. Some interviewees also emphasized how residents took care of and connected with one another in these new environments, and that supporting opportunities for social connectedness and trust was beneficial for residents during this time of stress and transition.

One interviewee reflected on nightly community dinners:

It was a great community gathering point for people to check in on each other and make sure they're okay and have their support system and all of that ... Having a dedicated room that they could go to and know, "I will see other neighbors here." Or, "I haven't seen Mrs. Jones in a while. Can you check on her?"

Trust

Interviewees referenced a range of factors that they felt influenced residents' sense of trust or mistrust of partners involved in the response. Trust-building factors included partners serving as resident advocates, navigators, and conveners. Trust-disruptive factors included inconsistent communication from different stakeholders, varying narratives of who was responsible/to blame for the displacement and response, and delays in attaining some resources for residents.

The challenges are always having enough time, having enough people, and having the resources when you need them. So, if you've got to wait a day or three days or a week, people may feel as though you're not trying to help them, but it's just simply the challenge ... And I think that's why I came in helpful because a lot of people knew me. A lot of them grew to trust me. And so, if I shared something with them, they believed [and trusted] it and they calmed down.

Other Assistance Needs

Other resident needs that partners sought to address included:

- Provision of prepared meals, laundry, and other needs that residents would typically be able to meet independently or have access to in their apartments while they were staying at the hotel.
- Safely getting access to, sorting, and storing belongings.
 - Scheduling access to Heritage House to recover any remaining viable belongings.
 - Storage options for what residents were able to recover.

- Identifying housing options that met needs related to:

- Income requirements and affordability.
- Location.
- Proximity to grocery stores, pharmacies, and/or employment.
- Accessibility.
- Level of support available.
- Space requirements, particularly for families.

It's hard to balance the reality of this situation with what is currently available housing stock-wise, and what that person can afford and actually be approved for. Because we had people who were approved, and then owners came back or managers came back and said, "Oh, no, you don't make enough money to move in." And they said, "I was paying more at Heritage House," but some owners require two to three times the amount of income that the person makes, two to three times the amount of income as what they're paying on housing.

- Moving assistance.

- Financial assistance for rental deposits.
- Financial assistance with obtaining new furniture and other supplies.
- Transporting belongings that were salvaged to new home.

- Technological barriers.

- Some residents did not have a cell phone or experienced challenges with using one.
- Other residents were not prepared to navigate the internet independently to submit online applications and/or seek information on housing.

[Some of the residents couldn't] fill out an online form. Some of them don't have cell phones, so then if they're out of their home, there's not a way to contact them because they don't have a phone ... Technology is a barrier for sure, and then

communication is a barrier because again, some of them are like, "I don't want a cell phone. I won't have a cell phone."

- Transportation
 - Many residents did not have their own personal transportation; one resident lost their job because they previously were able to walk to their place of employment but were unable to get there after the move to the hotel near the airport.
 - Lack of access to on-demand transportation affected access to food, prescriptions and healthcare, laundry, and other daily needs.

Outcomes of the Immediate Response

As outlined in the timeline of events, most active response efforts were reduced and/or resources were exhausted by the end of March 2024. At that time, partners synthesized the following data from Airtable on residents served by the response:

Scale

160 residents from 152 households were engaged by the response team following their displacement from Heritage House on January 15, 2024.

119 residents who did not have alternative options were provided hotel rooms between January 30th and March 4th by the City of St. Louis, St. Louis City Senior Fund, and private funders.

3,500 total cumulative nights of hotel stays were provided to residents over the course of the response (an average of about 33 nights per resident).

Service Provision

92%

of residents were supported by housing case managers from Housing Options Provided for the Elderly (HOPE), St. Louis Development Corporation, and Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis, Inc. throughout this process.

526

total cumulative hours of service were provided by housing case managers from HOPE and SLDC to residents (an average of about 3.5 hours per person). Additional housing support was provided by other partners.

97

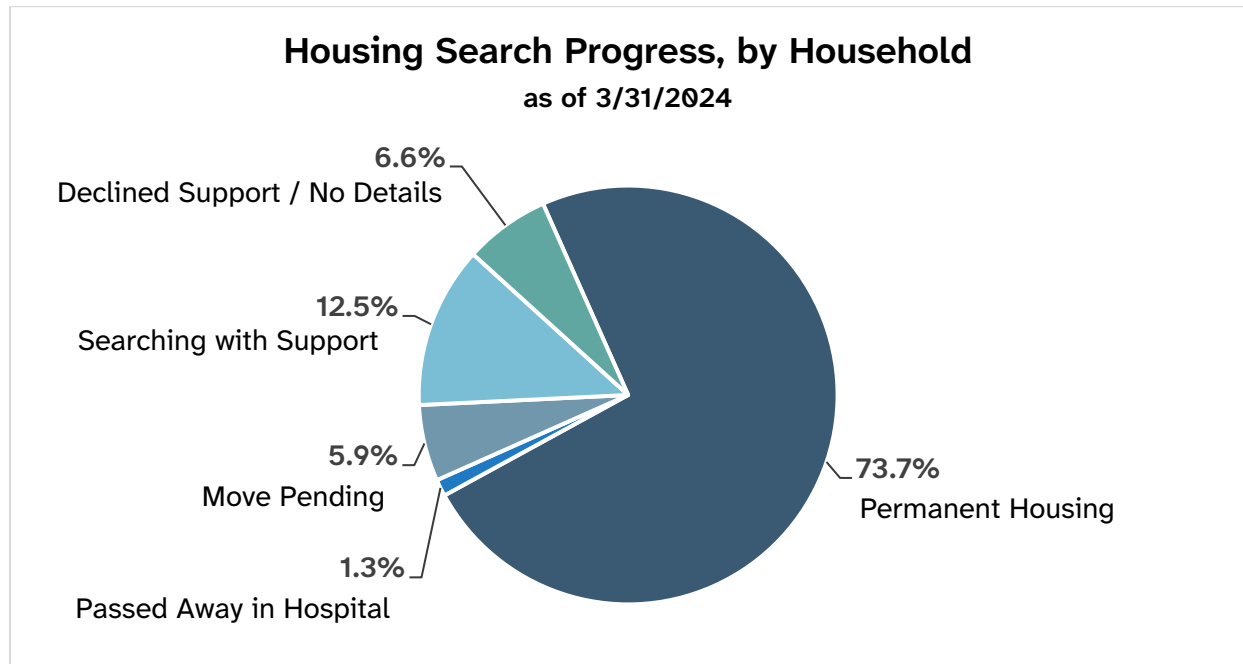
residents (about 61%) attended at least one day of the collaborative housing and resource fair organized by response partners on January 30th and 31st at the Hilton St. Louis Airport Hotel.

62

Individuals received financial assistance in the form of security deposit payment, first month's rent payment, move-in fees, and/or furniture replacement due to emergency housing vouchers not being available.

Housing Status

Figure 2 – Housing Search Progress, by Household (as of 3/31/2024)



Above, *Figure 2* captures data of Heritage House resident households' progress toward securing permanent housing at the end of March 2024, nearly three months into the response.

73.7% of households had moved to permanent housing, 6.6% of households reported a pending move to permanent housing, 12.5% of households were identified as searching for housing with the support of case managers, 6.6% of households had either declined housing support follow-ups and/or had been unresponsive to outreach efforts, and unfortunately two residents (1.3%) passed away while in the hospital.

Of note, about 7% of households found housing before support was needed and 2 residents (1%) declined support before case managers were available in the response and were known to be connected to other services -- therefore neither of these groups are included in this dataset.

Strengths of the Response

Overwhelmingly, interviewees remarked upon the strengths evident in the response; namely, the collaboration of response partners. Beyond collaboration, though, interviewees had many similar perspectives of what made the response successful including strengths around flexible funding, previous relationships and experience, commitment and abilities of partners, and the shared data infrastructure.

Funding Sources

Speed of Funding Availability

Interviewees shared that funding for the response came from a variety of sources with varying degrees of restrictions and timelines for approval. Due to the speed at which the response continually unfolded, it was significant when partners could commit funds as quickly as possible. Multiple interviewees highlighted how impactful it was for the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis, Inc. (Urban League) to take on costs up front, such as hotel rooms, to be reimbursed later. They also emphasized the value of the St. Louis City Senior Fund's involvement and ability to commit significant funding for older residents early on. Some interviewees referenced that pre-existing contractual partnerships with other stakeholders involved and/or support from their organization's leadership to commit to the response enabled them and others to contribute more readily. It was also noted that having demonstrable data of demographics and needs available enabled some funders to engage more readily.

Multiple interviewees also highlighted the significant impact of the speed of approval for American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) thanks to a partner at the City's Community Development Administration (CDA). It was mentioned that by happenstance the CDA director was in Washington D.C., meeting with somebody at the federal level, which enabled them to get approval more quickly for use of ARPA funds for the housing emergency as well as an exact maximum amount approved for use. The approval of this funding enabled partners to make clearer commitments to what resources could be provided to residents.

Flexible Funding

Funding sources that were unrestricted or more flexible made a significant impact for the response. Multiple interviewees emphasized the value of unrestricted or flexible funding that could be used to fill gaps not met by larger, restricted sources. For example: the approval of ARPA funding allocated for emergency housing response helped cover short-term hotel costs so that more flexible funding could be used to cover expenses like rental deposits and other resources for more permanent housing support.

Collaboration and Relationships

Previous Working Relationships

Throughout the response, interviewees reported the benefits of having previous working relationships with involved response partners. Existing contractual as well as informal relationships facilitated collaboration and communication and was a significant way by which partners were brought into the response. One interviewee discussed the work they often do with various partners related to housing, referencing frequent collaboration with Action St. Louis, alderpeople, the Mayor's Office, and HUD. Another referenced their relationship with the St. Louis Area Agency on Aging (SLAAA) and how they have formal collaborative work but also that they feel they have a positive working relationship with the staff members.

Several interviewees mentioned that having preexisting contracts with key response partners enabled them to activate more quickly in terms of funding, but also that they had preexisting relationships and were familiar with working together. Some interviewees highlighted the value of having existing connections with churches and other groups and organizations in the region that donated items, meals, and provided social and spiritual support.

Relationship with Hotels and Public Transit

Relationships with local hotels and Metro Transit were critical to the response's ability to serve residents. Hotels provided housing for individuals, a place to store food, a gathering space for residents, and space to implement the housing and resource fair.

Metro Transit was able to transport residents between hotels and was part of the initial crisis response when residents had to be evacuated.

I remember one church came in one day and they were rolling so much food in there, I was like, "Wait a minute ... What are we going to do with all this food?" One day we had 20 rotisserie chickens and they brought in like 30 pizzas and all kinds of fruits and vegetables and big pots of spaghetti, everything. So, I said, "Wait a minute. We don't have anywhere to put all this." But again, this is where people work together.

The hotel said, "Whenever you need to use our freezers and refrigerators, just let us know." And that was extremely helpful. Because sometimes so much [food] would come in one day, you couldn't really distribute it and you had to have somewhere to put it.

Previous Experience

Interviewees described how their previous experiences working in emergency responses to situations like the 2022 flooding or the pandemic affected how they engaged in the Heritage House crisis response. Many said they brought skills over from those previous experiences as well as the knowledge of which kinds of partners to call upon.

Commitment

One of the main strengths of the response that interviewees discussed was the collaborative nature of all individuals involved. Interviewees were impressed with the commitment of the stakeholders to the response and often described individuals' willingness to do what was needed and the passion with which it was done – even if it was outside of an organization or individual's normal responsibilities. One interviewee remarked that there did not appear to be much hesitation around defined "lanes" of typical responsibilities, which enabled everybody to respond more quickly.

We had funders that were willing to help box up [residents' belongings] and move them. We had department directors who

were knocking on doors to deliver communications to residents to make sure they knew about the next step in the process. We had local as well as national entities that wanted to have regular calls about assistance that could be provided ...

Interviewees expressed feeling supported by their collaborators and noted that there were varied strengths that complemented each other. They described a supportive culture where they all worked to fill gaps and look out for one another:

One person got sick with COVID and had to step back, and other people were able to step up and assist while that person was out [...] We helped each other and checked in and had this attitude of, “Okay, it's okay for you to step back and I will step forward and then I can step back and you'll step forward.”

Rapid Problem-Solving

Throughout the interviews, interviewees mentioned the behavior that evaluators came to describe as “springing into action” to mean that people were willing to jump in and help with any need that would arise. People were willing and able to respond quickly, and they inspired each other. One team member described thinking:

As an issue would arise, we would discuss what was needed; from calling certain people and partners to making a spreadsheet, listing resources to creating the exact communications update to residents, or creating logistics for the housing fair.

One interviewee shared an example when a resident needed a bank document to apply for an apartment, and a team member ran out to pick it up:

She didn't plan on running over to the bank [when she walked into the hotel that day], but she adjusted on the fly and did what she needed to do.

Shared Data

Centralized Data

Interviewees noted that initially, resident data was scattered and being shared across multiple files, so having a shared database helped streamline information sharing and reduced the potential for error and outdated information. Interviewees reported that it was helpful to ultimately have resident data stored in one place using Airtable, a cloud-based platform for managing and sharing data. This eliminated the need for superfluous data coordination across organizations and meant that partners were not wasting time locating the data they needed - it was available in a central location, no matter where they were working, and supported continuity of resident care.

With password-protected user access closely managed by the data staff from CIAC, data captured in Airtable provided information on residents including which hotel they were in, their room number, their apartment information at Heritage House, whether they were assigned to a case manager, their age, housing transition status, etc. so that relevant partners were enabled to engage residents in need of assistance as well as identify resources available to them through assessment of varying criteria.

We had collaborative information sharing where folks who were case managing, who were specializing in housing, who were doing wellness visits, everybody was sharing information in one data infrastructure so that we could create a comprehensive, wraparound approach to meet people's needs.

Flexible Data Infrastructure

Interviewees found the shared Airtable database to be beneficial in effectively responding to the needs of residents, particularly because of its flexible development. Many stated that because the needs of the response changed so quickly, they needed a data infrastructure that could quickly adapt to those changing needs. Interviewees also expressed appreciation for the staff member who built and evolved the data infrastructure, remarking that they built it responsively to the needs of interviewees and

were continuously making changes and updates to support partner processes and reduce burden on providers.

Challenges of the Response

Funding

Funding was an ever-present need, mentioned by interviewees as both a strength and challenge. External funding sources were identified as essential for carrying out the response and ensuring residents were in safe short- and long-term housing. Many interviewees noted that funding commitments were confirmed over time (i.e., there was not an existing community emergency fund) and that it was challenging to identify unrestricted funding sources that could address the gaps present in the response (e.g., funding for residents under age 60, funding for multi-week housing emergency response). Throughout the response, stakeholders managed barriers related to uncertain funding commitments and restricted funding, as well as communicating clear needs to prospective funders. Interviewees often referenced how the inability of building ownership to provide much financial support exacerbated funding challenges:

[Stakeholders affiliated with Heritage House] initially covered the cost at the first hotel, but then within a week they said they would not be able to continue that. And so suddenly there was this, "We're moving people out of the hotel, where are they going to go to?" Because generally in independent senior housing, the ownership has insurance which covers the cost of hotel stays, and they would be responsible for that type of situation for making sure that their residents were able to be transitioned.

But once we realized, "Okay, this is going to mean a hundred people that are going to be homeless overnight because of this unexpected situation," we then called on other agencies like Senior Fund and the [St. Louis Development Corporation] to see if they could step up to provide some funding to make it

possible for people to stay in hotels and get housing assistance to help them land in permanent housing.

Fundraising in Real-Time

Interviewees described feeling uncertain as to where funding would come from and the total amount that could be committed to determine how long resident support could be provided. Many interviewees referenced how the uncertainty of how much funding would be committed to the response led to a lesser sense of stability, consistency, and trust for residents, many of whom experienced multiple notices of hotel support extensions.

It was so unfair to the residents that we had to keep telling them, "Your hotel stay is extended one week, one more week, two more weeks." So, people were constantly left in this limbo, which is just not the way we want to be treating folks. We just didn't know where the dollars would come from in another week.

If I could go back, maybe we could have created a better system of how we did communications to residents. But I also think it was changing so often that we communicated the best we could when we had information to share. We couldn't over-commit, and we couldn't also effectively predict if or when more funding might become available.

Several interviewees expressed uncertainty or frustration as to why more funders did not contribute to the response, while others identified that the evolving context made it challenging to communicate clear needs to prospective funders in ways that could have enabled them to contribute within the timeframe needed. Interviewees reported that partners spoke with several foundations, prospective major donors, and funding agencies who were open to support, but did not have a precedent or process for rapid response nor unrestricted disbursements. Partners were asked to provide more detailed information than they were able to relay in real-time (e.g., line-item costs, resident demographics that met specific criteria, written summaries).

Restricted Funding

Interviewees also discussed how difficult it was to piece together funding from various sources. When a potential funding source was identified, it often came with restrictions due to existing federal and state statutes or other policies. It was primarily noted that there was a clear funding stream available for residents aged 60 and above, which was useful for residents who met that criterion but presented challenges for those who did not. There were also restrictions other than age that determined how funds could be spent (e.g., disability or veteran status), limiting the available resources that would support a more effective and comprehensive response. Some interviewees expressed frustration at funders' inability to be more flexible amid a crisis situation due to existing restrictions set in place prior to the housing emergency.

Collaboration With a Limited Roadmap

Organizational Barriers to Entry

Due to the unpredictable nature of the response and the variety of needs that were present, there were some interviewees that named that their or other organizations did not know where they could best fit into the response. Some also felt that it did not fit into their day-to-day activities so they weren't sure how they could help. Others reported that they were not told specifically how they could help, which they felt they needed to be able to support the response.

Role Uncertainty

There was a lot of reported uncertainty regarding role responsibility – many interviewees did not feel that they knew who was responsible for which aspects of the response at different points in time. Many interviewees felt that the building management company should've led and coordinated the response. Interviewees reported that when they did not see the building management company taking a leadership role, community partners came together to determine what would happen next. Interviewees reported that this lack of role clarity led to a lot of reactivity in the response (i.e. responding to needs as they came up) rather than a plan of who would be responsible for what, which interviewees expressed wanting in the future.

It took some real time to figure that out and clarify “who's on first”. And really nobody was on first, it was just this collaborative that came together and said, “We will divide and conquer and figure it out.”

Most interviewees raised questions around the role of government agencies in the response and whether various agencies had done too much or too little. Many felt that staff from Mayor Jones’ Office led the response and were appreciative of their work, but some interviewees weren’t entirely sure if such work should have been that office’s responsibility. Interviewees also expressed confusion about ways to activate City Emergency management resources and what CEMA’s role was in a situation that required several months of response and assistance.

Stretching Beyond Typical Responsibilities

Due to the fast-moving pace of the crisis as well as the ever-changing needs, many response partners were doing work that was outside of their usual responsibilities. Because no one (public nor private organizations) seemed to have dedicated staff or funding to respond to such situations, many partners took on responsibilities “on top of” their usual roles. Several interviewees also felt their day-to-day work at times was put on hold because so much of their effort was being put toward the response.

Initially, we saw this as a short-term response, and it morphed into an ongoing commitment. And that took over other responsibilities and day-to-day job tasks that people usually do, that I usually do. I feel like I'm still catching up from being diverted and committed to this response for months.

By mid-February, as the immediate crisis appeared to be resolved, many volunteers and organizations began to step back from the response, ultimately increasing the workload for the fewer who were able to remain in service of residents who still needed assistance.

Housing

Availability and Appropriateness of Housing Options

Many interviewees referenced the challenge of finding permanent housing solutions for residents for a variety of reasons including:

- Low availability of adequate housing stock.
- Lack of information on available housing units.
- Time of year (i.e., tenants are less likely to move during winter).
- Length of processes for approving residents.
- Vacant units that couldn't be "turned around" quickly enough.

Unique Needs of Resident Population

Some interviewees mentioned that some residents had health needs that required a higher level of care in their next living situation than what they may have had access to while living at Heritage House, and some residents did not have the income to support this higher level of care. There were also several references to balancing the dignity of resident self-determination in choosing housing with clear observations of safety risks when helping a resident decide what type of housing may be most appropriate.

Two different interviewees in direct service agencies shared:

I think many of us were surprised how many people should have been in assisted living [rather than living independently at Heritage House], and either they didn't realize they needed to be in assisted living or they did not want to go into assisted living, because they felt like they could live on their own if there was a better home healthcare system for them.

There is this criterion that I've always gone by for independent housing, which is: you have to be able to make a pathway to safety. And people in wheelchairs living on the fifth floor who needed additional supports were, I think,

continuing to live there because they had lived there for decades...and that was their home. But they could have been receiving more supports and perhaps should have been receiving more supports.

Managing Expectations

Interviewees identified that another significant challenge for transitioning residents into permanent housing was the mismatch of resident expectations with the current housing market. Primarily, interviewees reported residents' concerns regarding housing quality, location, and affordability. Some residents had continued to stay in hotels because they hadn't yet located a home that suited them, despite housing case management support.

Others struggled to meet the income requirements of potential units, even when the monthly rent was lower than what they'd been paying at Heritage House. Still others were challenged by current market rates that may have financially matched what they had been paying at Heritage House, but the quality of the units was lower or the location was not desirable to them in comparison to the resources they'd grown accustomed to having nearby.

There was a woman who kept on saying, "I don't want to take just anything. I know that I can go to a one-bedroom apartment in a dangerous neighborhood and get in, but I never want to move again. The last move I want to make is into the cemetery." And that's her right.

Access to Transportation and Temporary Housing

During the response, residents were moved to multiple hotel locations due to pre-existing room bookings made prior to the housing emergency response and the length of time residents needed to stay at hotels (i.e., there was no existing, central location that residents could stay for as long as they needed). Interviewees noticed how difficult this was for residents. They mentioned how many residents did not have personal transportation which made moving to a new location with personal belongings difficult. They also reflected on how chaotic multiple moves must have felt to residents.

If we hadn't had to move people between hotels, that would have been ideal, I think, for residents to feel less chaotic or have a less chaotic experience as they're trying to find more permanent housing; but I also know that hotel partners were really valuable and supportive during the process.

Difficulty Gathering Data

Initially, one major challenge that interviewees reported encountering was limited data on the residents including occupancy numbers, up-to-date leases, resident contact information, mobility needs, and emergency contacts. Some of this information was acquired from the property management group and residents over time, but not having this information available nor accurate from the beginning made it more challenging to implement effective emergency management, evacuation, and subsequent support.

Action St. Louis and other organizations went door-to-door at hotels to collect information on residents to know who was being affected by the crisis. Even with canvassing and database solutions in place, information was primarily self-reported by residents, leaving room for error in reporting and documentation. Data that was incomplete and slow to materialize posed a challenge for direct service providers:

We didn't have age verification. We had numbers for ages. We needed dates of birth because people tend to not always date their age correctly for various reasons [...] We also needed more accurate income information. Those are the two key pieces of information we need at HOPE to find housing for somebody. The reason being, very simply, we need to know where you can afford to live. We need to know where you qualify to live based on your income, and we need to know your age.

Recommendations

Stakeholders involved in the Heritage House response shared their recommendations. Their feedback is synthesized in fourteen recommendations that expound on the following questions:

- **Prevent:** What policy and practice changes could prevent or mitigate a similar crisis by addressing underlying causes over the long term?
- **Prepare:** What steps can the region take to plan and prepare for crises of this nature?
- **Respond:** What did we learn about effective, equitable service delivery that can carry over to future collaborative responses?

As the region's infrastructure ages and extreme weather events increase, collaborators expect to see more mass displacements that fall outside of the traditional disaster response infrastructure. This report compiles opportunities for action to strengthen the region's response to acute and ongoing housing crises.

Prevent

The Heritage House evacuation serves as an alarm bell calling the region to identify and address high-risk rental properties before they cause mass displacements. Action St. Louis detailed the dire rate of deferred maintenance and unsafe living conditions within the region's aging rental stock in a 2023 report, "The Rental Landscape in St. Louis." 73% of renters in the associated survey dealt with pests and rodents, and approximately 40% reported mold or leaks.¹ With this landscape in mind, response partners highlighted several measures to improve the quality, quantity, and affordability of the region's rental housing.

1. Targeted Building Inspections

While staffing and funding constraints can prevent cities from increasing inspections and strengthening code enforcement with a broad brush,

municipalities have found success by focusing oversight on the highest-risk, highest-impact properties.²

Tiered inspection schedules, for example, tie inspection frequency to code violations. Evanston, Illinois implemented a tiered system in 2024 following the emergency evacuation of a large apartment complex with unresolved violations. Residential rental properties with over eight code violations now require an inspection after one year, one to seven violations require an inspection after three years, and properties with no violations require an inspection every 5 years.³

Las Vegas is among the cities that specifically target aging properties; buildings built before 1981 that have more than three rental units are inspected annually. The city implemented this inspection schedule and a host of new enforcement mechanisms after a 2019 fire killed six people in a deteriorating apartment complex.⁴

Former Heritage House residents interviewed by media outlets alleged ongoing maintenance challenges and burst pipes dating back to December 2022.^{5,6} The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reported that the office of Representative Cori Bush received complaints about the property and conducted a site visit “that revealed mold, holes in the ceilings and poor management” in summer of 2023.⁶

St. Louis City currently requires inspections every three years or upon a change in occupancy, while many municipalities in the region – Ferguson and Granite City, for example – do no regular, proactive inspections.⁷ Public records from St. Louis City indicate that Heritage House was inspected in 2021 and issued three violations: a violation for insects or roaches and two “major” violations for unclean rooms and “excessive storage” impacting the safety of the building.

2. Data-Driven Code Enforcement

Stakeholders involved in the response often cited stronger code enforcement and higher fines as tools to help stabilize the regional rental landscape. As one partner said, “it’s cheaper to pay the fine than fix the problem.” Baltimore increased fines while focusing the impact on large complexes: in addition to

renewing their property license more often, repeat violators pay an additional fee of \$15 per unit, which then funds an Affordable Housing Trust Fund.⁸

Other cities have used data and research to strengthen code enforcement through implementation innovations. Randomized controlled trials involving over 20,000 properties in three cities have found that early communications to targeted property owners resulted in modest to major improvement in code compliance.⁹ As detailed in a 2019 article in the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*:

“In New Orleans, earlier notification through the introduction of a new courtesy letter [...] improved compliance by the first inspection by 14.7 percent; in Louisville, simplified citation and violation letters reduced compliance costs and increased compliance by the third inspection by 3.3 percent and payments by 12.0 percent; and in Chattanooga, preemptive postcards also aimed at reducing compliance costs sent to properties with previous violation(s) boosted compliance by 9.2 percent.”⁹

These cities identified win-win improvements that increased compliance *and* reduced costs. The St. Louis region can learn from their examples by exploring small-scale pilots and looking to evidence-based implementation as one means to offset the financial impact of costlier solutions.

3. Tenant Protections

By equipping residents to report problems without retaliation, additional tenant protections in the St. Louis region could help municipalities with early identification and resolution of substandard housing. This feedback loop is especially crucial in localities that rely on complaints rather than a proactive inspection schedule.

Broadly speaking, tenant protections establish minimum standards for rental conditions and ensure that tenants have rights and recourse when those conditions are not met. As the previously mentioned report by Action St. Louis describes, Missouri law lacks strong definitions of “habitable” standards and

landlord accountability. As a result, Kansas City has passed local ordinances that clarify and expand tenant rights.¹

The National Low Income Housing Coalition has tracked more than 300 new tenant protections enacted across the country since 2021:

“Providing a clear definition of habitability ensures that tenants are aware of the standards to which rental units are held, and outlining the responsibilities of landlords helps to guarantee that all parties, tenants and landlords alike, are aware of their responsibilities at every stage of a lease term, facilitating in turn clear communication and timely resolution of issues when they arise.”¹⁰

4. Targeted Outreach to Properties with High Populations of Older Adults

The Heritage House response was complicated by the high rate of medical and mobility needs amongst residents. Many already faced challenges with activities of daily living and required support not available through an independent rental property. Some residents did not know what options existed for supportive housing, nor which public benefits they could receive.

Stakeholders suggested proactive outreach to residents in private rental facilities with high concentrations of older adults, particularly those in subsidized housing. They recommended that local municipalities consider outreach strategies to increase awareness and utilization of services for people with disabilities and older adults with medical needs.

Prepare

The Heritage House experience raises multiple opportunities to proactively plan and prepare for future crises of a similar nature – those requiring a complex, collaborative, and multi-month recovery. The following opportunities rose to the top as opportunities to explore.

5. Integrating Emergency Management Across Agencies

The learnings from Heritage House call for local municipalities to consider new ways of integrating emergency response resources across agencies. Response partners suggested that St. Louis City and County incorporate emergency management staff and resources within divisions focused on health, housing, and older adults. Both local governments and regional coalitions could explore multi-agency cross training, drills, and shared staffing models for emergency management experts to temporarily embed in agencies and organizations tasked with responding to crises outside of traditional disaster response.

Had a tornado hit Heritage House, a clear set of resources, responders, and long-term recovery plans would have immediately taken effect. Because pipes burst without an emergency declaration, however, 160 people needed resettlement without traditional emergency management infrastructure. The region must pinpoint strategies to bridge this gap.

6. Pre-Negotiated MOUs and Contracts

Any opportunity to identify and negotiate partnerships before a crisis occurs saves precious time and builds a wider network of services. Several other recommendations in this report could be made possible through proactive conversations and pre-negotiated MOUs, contracts, or letters of commitment. As one interviewee explained:

I'm interested in exploring MOU structures that begin to pre-negotiate who may do what in a situation like this. For example, contracts with hotels with pre-negotiated rates, as well as MOUs with social service organizations. We would know: if we need case managers for this kind of population, then we ask these 10 organizations.

If they say yes, [then we would] already have an agreement drawn up that would have them delivering XYZ in exchange for an amount of funding that was ready to mobilize quickly. We

would have much less scrambling and negotiating to do in real time.

7. Emergency Plans for High-Risk Properties

The Heritage House experience raises the opportunity to make – or even require – an evacuation plan for apartment complexes that meet certain criteria. Municipalities and/or private disaster management organizations could prioritize buildings with serious code violations and those with a high concentration of residents with low-incomes or medical needs.

Interviewees suggested that local municipalities explore new partnerships between divisions responsible for buildings and emergency management, ensuring that data on building conditions feeds into emergency planning.

8. Rental Registries

Many cities employ a mandatory rental registry as the foundation of their building oversight system – Dallas, Cleveland, Minneapolis, Des Moines, and Philadelphia, to name a few.² Registries list the address, number of units, and owner contact information for all rental properties, making them a key channel for oversight and communication. Some registries also serve tenant protection functions by providing access to information on buildings' property management, evictions, and past inspections.¹¹

Practically speaking, registries can help residents seeking housing understand the rental landscape and assess their options. With a central rental registry, the Heritage House response could have identified potential properties with appropriate units more quickly and comprehensively. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, registries have been discussed as emergency management tools for municipalities to quickly identify renters displaced or impacted by natural and man-made disasters.¹¹

St. Louis City passed a rental registry bill in 2024, which will establish a mandatory registration process for residential rental units in the City. The

ordinance does not go fully in effect, however, until the Board of Aldermen passes an additional ordinance. Otherwise, the policy will go into effect in 2027.¹²

9. Philanthropic Pooled Fund

Response partners emphasized that crisis management hinges on the ability to quickly deploy flexible funding. Several stakeholders are interested in working with regional funders on a pooled crisis response fund.

Respond

Recommendations in the *Respond* section highlight lessons learned to improve on-the-ground service delivery. These insights offer specific items for collaboratives to consider closely while running a crisis response effort.

10. Centralized Data

Shared data was a crucial element of the Heritage House response, allowing for cross-agency case management and a continuous arc of services. A plan for developing and maintaining a system for centralized data will be invaluable to future responses.

The Heritage House experience highlighted the opportunity to deploy a shared data system with special attention paid to:

- Immediate implementation, ensuring data collection and standardization from day one.
- Accessibility to partners, recognizing that only a user-friendly system will be effective in crisis.
- Identifying existing databases that could be integrated and/or cross-referenced.

11. Early Needs Assessment

Paired with the immediate implementation of shared data, an early, comprehensive needs assessment would have improved service delivery.

Partners advised triaging medical needs before transporting or housing individuals. Had that system been in place, the Heritage House response could have immediately diverted people with urgent medical needs to the hospital, connected residents to appropriate services, and assessed unique supports needed.

This learning underscores the opportunity to integrate emergency management best practices, and specifically triage protocols, across agencies.

12. On-Site Mental Health Care

A comprehensive crisis response cannot overlook the impact of trauma. Interviewees emphasized how devastating the loss of their homes and the subsequent turmoil were to residents. One partner remembered sitting down with a frustrated resident:

She sat there and we talked, and I held her hand and she cried. And that's what she needed. Sometimes you just got to get it out. And she needed to talk about having lived in the Heritage House for 19 years, and she thought that this would be the last home that she would ever have.

Offering on-site counseling and mental health services on an ongoing basis would improve client services in future responses.

13. Case Management Ratios

Partners quickly recruited case managers from several agencies, yet capacity shortfalls and time constraints forced those who answered the call to manage overwhelming caseloads. Reflecting on the experience, the team recommended a maximum of 15 clients per case manager.

The crux of this recommendation is for future responses to name a target range for the number of clients a case manager can effectively serve, and therefore the minimum number of case managers required. Even if the targets prove unfeasible, the Heritage House experience suggests that pinpointing case

management goals at the onset will support strategic recruitment and assignment.

14. Sense of Community

Interviewees discussed the positive impact of community relationships, and the negative impact on those who felt disconnected.

In a scenario where people are housed together for an extended period, a strategy to bring community together and provide some sense of normalcy will have a significant impact on mental health and wellbeing. One response leader made it her mission to bring joy to dinnertime with music and dancing. Had the response had the capacity to provide additional community activities, residents would have benefited further.

Conclusion

While the Heritage House Apartments evacuation and closer was unfortunately not a unique event, the combined scenario of unexpected long-term displacement of residents, the complex needs of the resident population, and the rapid community crisis response is important to document and share.

Based upon the strengths and relationships demonstrated in this collaborative response, it feels clear that there are opportunities for stakeholders to continue working together to effectively address root causes and prepare for similar situations.

Key themes from the findings – funding sources, collaboration and relationships, housing and residents' needs, and shared data – and recommendations offer a starting point for partners to plan and implement interventions. As the work continues – both within and outside of crisis response – partners continue to convene to take action that seeks to interrupt these cycles of displacement in the future.

I'll just reiterate that a lot of really good people came together at the right moment. And I just hope that all of us who have been involved found value in this work and want to see how we can continue to do this work together, so that hopefully one day we can actually address these root causes, when we're not in this crisis response moment.

Appendix A: Appreciations

Interviewees continuously highlighted a wide range of partners' contributions and talents. Every partner was described as playing an indispensable role, and this report cannot fully portray the depth and breadth of each partners' contributions, expertise, and dedication. Below are a selection of quotes further expressing appreciation for those who participated in the response:

For a lot of these people and agencies, it's their job, but I saw real care happening. People who went that extra mile... It was just tremendous.

I know there was a faith-based volunteer group ... They came into town for 10 days to help us. Not only were they good cooks and provided meals, but they even had a system in place where they could take people's clothes and wash them and bring them back to them. Now you're talking about a needed service.

I think the coming together of everyone was amazing. I think the work from the Aging and Disability Network was incredible. The City, the Senior Fund folks, the SLAAA folks, just the comradery of all of us in the same room was amazing.

This could have been a terrible disaster where we had older adults who were homeless and had mobility issues on the street. That could have happened. If the Urban League, all the other services providers, and the [Core] Response Team had not provided food resources and support obtaining medication and all of those things, had [St. Andrew's] Senior Solutions not provided medical and personal care support, this would've been disastrous. The way that the City responded, the way that the community

responded, I have to say it was truly outstanding. And what we were able to do was nothing short of amazing in the time that we had.

Marlene Davis and Alderwoman Keys were people on the ground in the hotel just about 24/7. Their roles did not demand that they do that necessarily. But I think having people who evolved into being really trusted figures for residents and just having that coverage all the time on the ground at the hotel was important. I appreciated their roles, and in a future system and response, a role like that would be essential again.

I think maybe one thing that's not as easily captured is the element of people serving as advocates, whether it's a policy advocate or a funding advocate or referrals and getting whatever service is needed in there. I think having a pretty big core group of people that were advocating on a regular basis for the people who had lost their homes was a really huge strength and important component.

I really appreciated Anneliese [Stoevers] leadership in coordinating weekly meetings and keeping things going. It can be easy when there are so many partners in the room to keep it high level, but there was a real willingness amongst all the partners to dig into the details of tasks that needed doing.

One of the biggest keys I think was that Grace [Kyung] from the Mayor's Office took the lead project management role. Not everybody has the skill set to coordinate and lead the way she did.

From my vantage point, Action St. Louis was one of the first organizations to mobilize and just say, "We need to get these people cared for no matter what." They selflessly dedicated a lot of staff resources and expertise. They had a big team on the ground, checking on residents door-to-door, doing some of the work that nobody else might've been willing to do, which wasn't in their job descriptions, it wasn't in their 9:00 to 5:00. They just rose above and beyond.

I called the Urban League and told the CEO, "This is bigger than the City. The City can't handle this alone. We need help." He said, "Well, you just tell me what you believe we need to do and we're there."

I have to mention Southside Wellness. They did so much to make sure that seniors had balanced meals for their particular diets. They didn't bring out a bunch of fried foods that were processed. These were home-cooked meals: greens, cornbread, beans [...] They were such a blessing.

Let me please mention ArchWell [Health], Oak Street [Health]... Retired nurses from Homer G. Phillips, they came out and they did assessments, taking the blood pressure, checking blood sugar, making sure that residents' medications were lined up. I'm telling you, this was a tremendous experience, and I'm so grateful for all of them.

I will say that I think there was really good partnership with Emergency Management, Human Services, and the Red Cross, and even Metro with their staff and the bus drivers and the staff that they had that were in the lobby to help direct people out to the buses and make sure they got out there safely. They were

instrumental in really helping to escort people to the buses [during cold and icy conditions], which was nice.

The way Jamie [Opsal] at Senior Fund was able to coordinate the case managers was really crucial because she coordinated case managers from several different organizations. That could have been chaos and instead, it was quite organized.

I think there was really, really solid, consistent leadership. I think it was a strength that both the Congresswoman [Cori Bush] and the Mayor's office wanted to be as involved ... Congresswoman Bush, her office has been really proactive in trying to advocate for the needs of their people. I think that there was a lot of good teamwork.

The Regional Response Team, Urban League, and the Senior Fund were very flexible in meeting [residents'] needs and making exceptions and alterations to the original budget or plan so that we could meet those needs.

[UMSL] CIAC was also flexible in how they worked with organizations to get the information into the shared database without it being burdensome to the separate providers. And it was really great particularly when CIAC made a dashboard that everybody could see which, again, was just something that they created as the need evolved.

The St. Louis Area Agency on Aging was wonderful and the Senior Fund, phenomenal. Jamie [Opsal] and all them, just awesome. VOYCE, everybody just came

in and did what they could. Alderwoman Keys, Marlene [Davis], all of them were key partners.

Urban League was a critical partner, the Senior Fund and our DHS department that also has senior services. HOPE – Housing Options Provided for the Elderly – were great to work with. We had to stand up resources and partner with SLDC for folks who were under age 60. CIAC pitched in and was helpful from a data front. Grace [Kyung] from the Mayor’s Office was the operations point person and was invaluable.

I would say a huge strength was the willingness of organizations, both not-for-profit and government entities and research institutions and others, that were just willing to jump in and provide assistance. I think sometimes in situations, an emergency is approached from the vantage point of, “Well, we can only do this one thing and that’s all we’re going to do.” But in this situation, it truly was an all-hands-on-deck, everyone doing as much as they could to assist. And that was something that was different than other weather-related responses.

As is evident from this selection of quotes, there were many stakeholders involved in the response – all of whom expressed great appreciation and respect for their collaborators. *This selection is by no means an exhaustive representation of the gratitude conveyed by interviewees as well as those who were not involved in the interview process.* There were 12 organizations who were considered part of the “core” response team and 38+ who contributed a wide range of resources and time at various points of the response (list available for reference under “Contributing Organizations”). The success of this response is a result of every involved individual’s and organization’s contributions.

Endnotes

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