

Research [in] Brief

For Families with Housing Vouchers, Landlords Hold the Key to “Opportunity Neighborhoods”



Primary issue

When children grow up in high-poverty neighborhoods, which more often than not are a legacy of residential segregation by race, they are less likely to thrive as adults. One way to improve children’s future success is by helping their families move to “opportunity neighborhoods”—areas with less poverty, more resources, and better schools—with housing vouchers that subsidize private-market rent. But most voucher holders do not reside in such areas, despite the benefits. One suspected reason is that landlords may screen out tenants who use vouchers.



Key findings

Research published by the Cleveland Fed found that landlords respond less often to applicants with vouchers than to those without. In fact, among applicants who say they will use a voucher, landlord responses are cut by half.

Some cities have tried raising voucher payment amounts in an effort to better enable voucher holders to move into opportunity neighborhoods. Even when the amounts are raised, though, many landlords still don’t respond to these prospective tenants. Higher payments are seemingly not enough to convince more landlords to accept tenants with vouchers in such neighborhoods.



The bottom line

Evidence from recent studies shows that while public policies can help families access different neighborhoods, getting landlords to accept voucher tenants is necessary for policies to succeed at moving families to opportunity neighborhoods.

A successful, large-scale policy of moving people to neighborhoods with more opportunity requires efforts to make program participation more attractive to landlords through means other than raising voucher payments alone. Lowering compliance costs, shortening inspection windows, and assisting new landlords with navigating the program are promising steps to get more landlords to say “yes” to vouchers more often.

