

Family Options Study

for Welfare Academy Session:

“Using Multi-Armed Randomized Trials to Identify Effective Policy Interventions: An Innovative Strategy that Works”

Anne Fletcher, U.S. Department of Housing and
Urban Development
NAWRS Workshop
Pittsburgh, August 2017



PD&R

Family Options Study

- Multi-armed randomized trial designed to generate evidence about which types of housing and services interventions work best for families experiencing homelessness both in the short term (20-months after RA) and the long term (36-months after RA)
- Impacts estimated across five domains: housing stability, family preservation, adult well-being, child well-being, and self-sufficiency
- Examined three types of interventions:
 - Permanent housing subsidy (SUB)
 - Community-based rapid re-housing (CBRR)
 - Project-based transitional housing (PBTH)
- Intervention costs



Study Context

Family Options Study

Funder	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Contractor	Abt Associates; P.I. Steve Bell (Abt Associates) and Beth Shinn (Vanderbilt University)
Period	2008 – 2016
Underlying Programs	HUD Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Programs, HUD Housing Choice Voucher Program
Locations	12 communities across the country



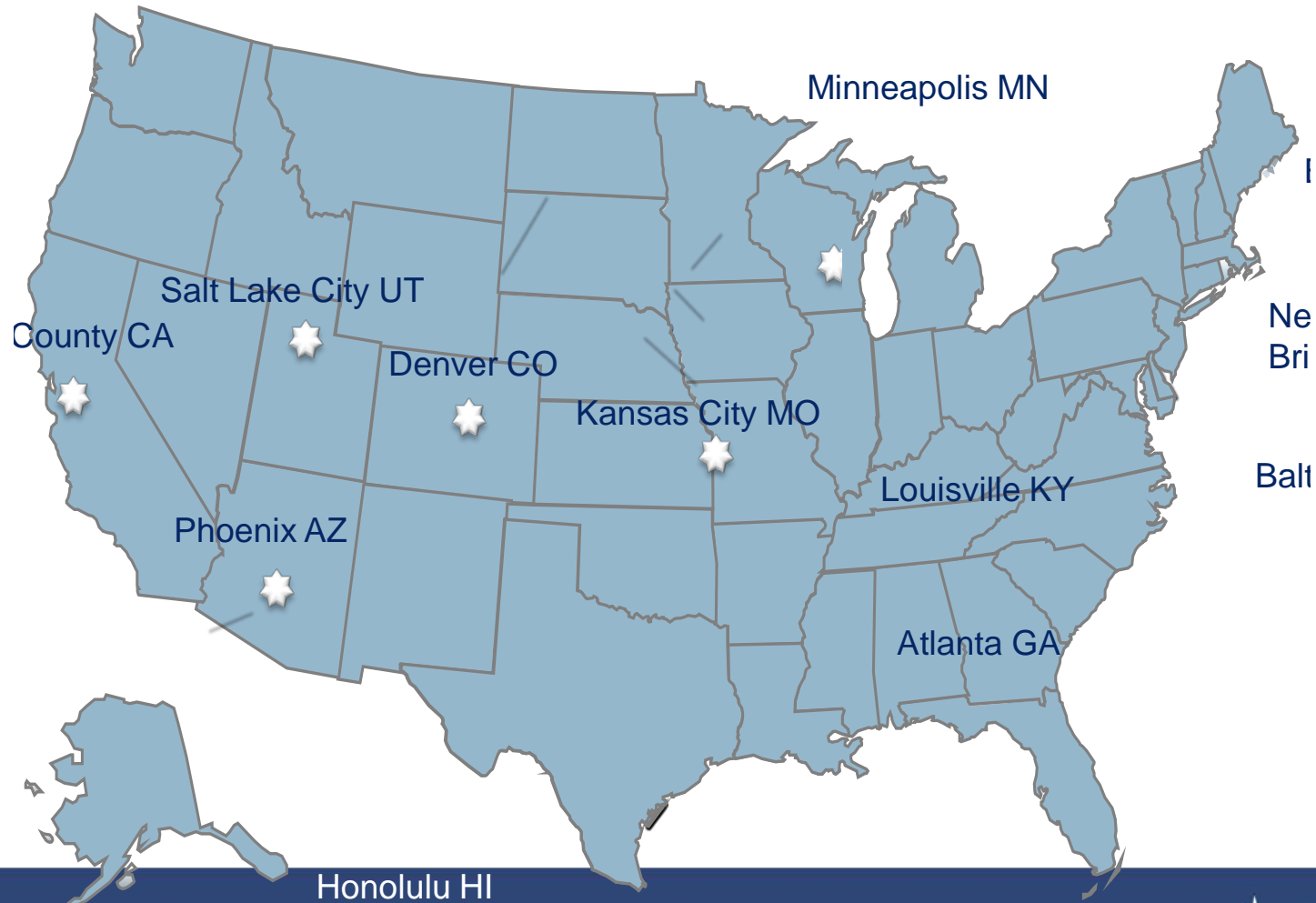
Impetus for the Study

- In mid-2000, the body of research on family homelessness was largely descriptive, both of the population and the various interventions
- Communities address family homelessness with a fairly limited set of programs that have been largely funded by HUD since the 1980's
- Programs to address homelessness vary along three primary domains: 1) length of stay/duration of assistance, 2) provision of supportive services, 3) housing arrangement and financing thereof
- Little evidence existed to guide a community's decision for "who needs what" to enable families to exit homelessness permanently and the costs of the various interventions



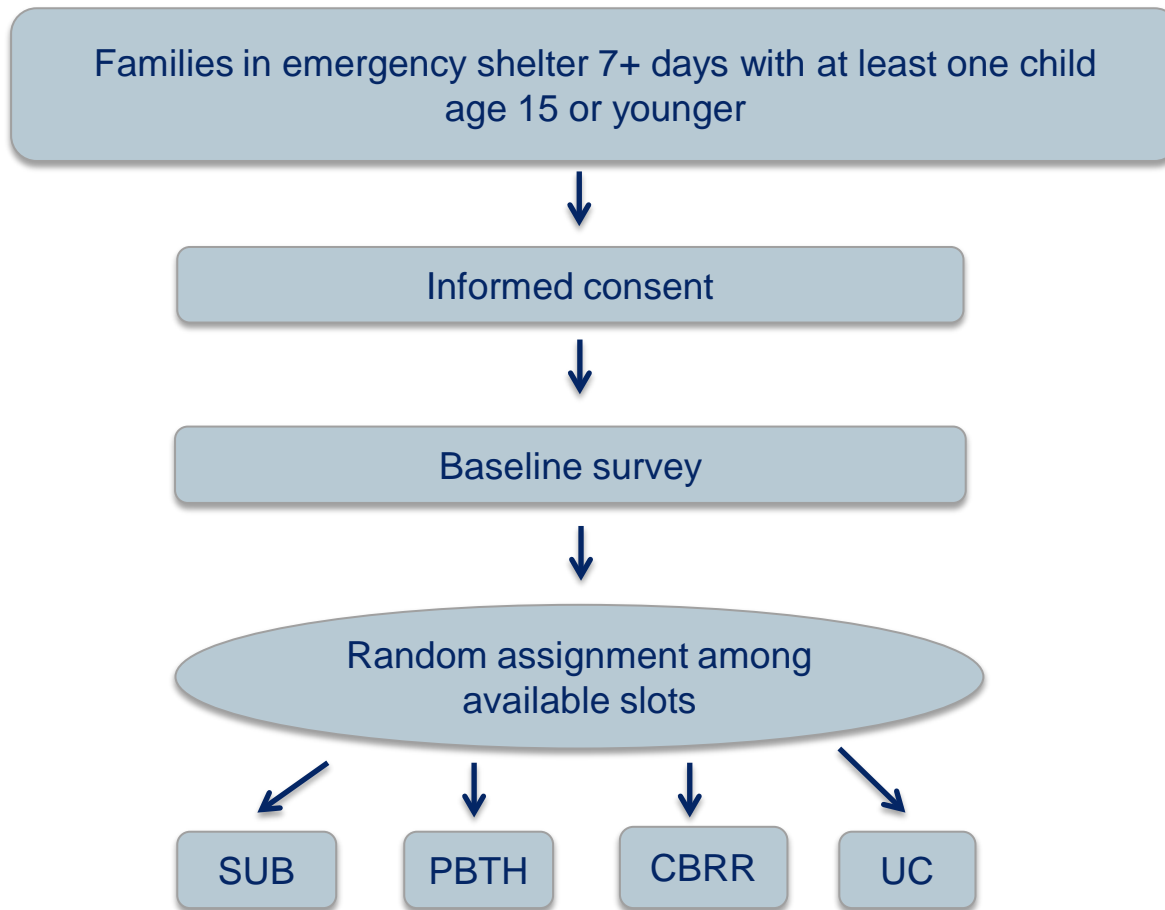
PD&R

Study Sites



PD&R

Study Design

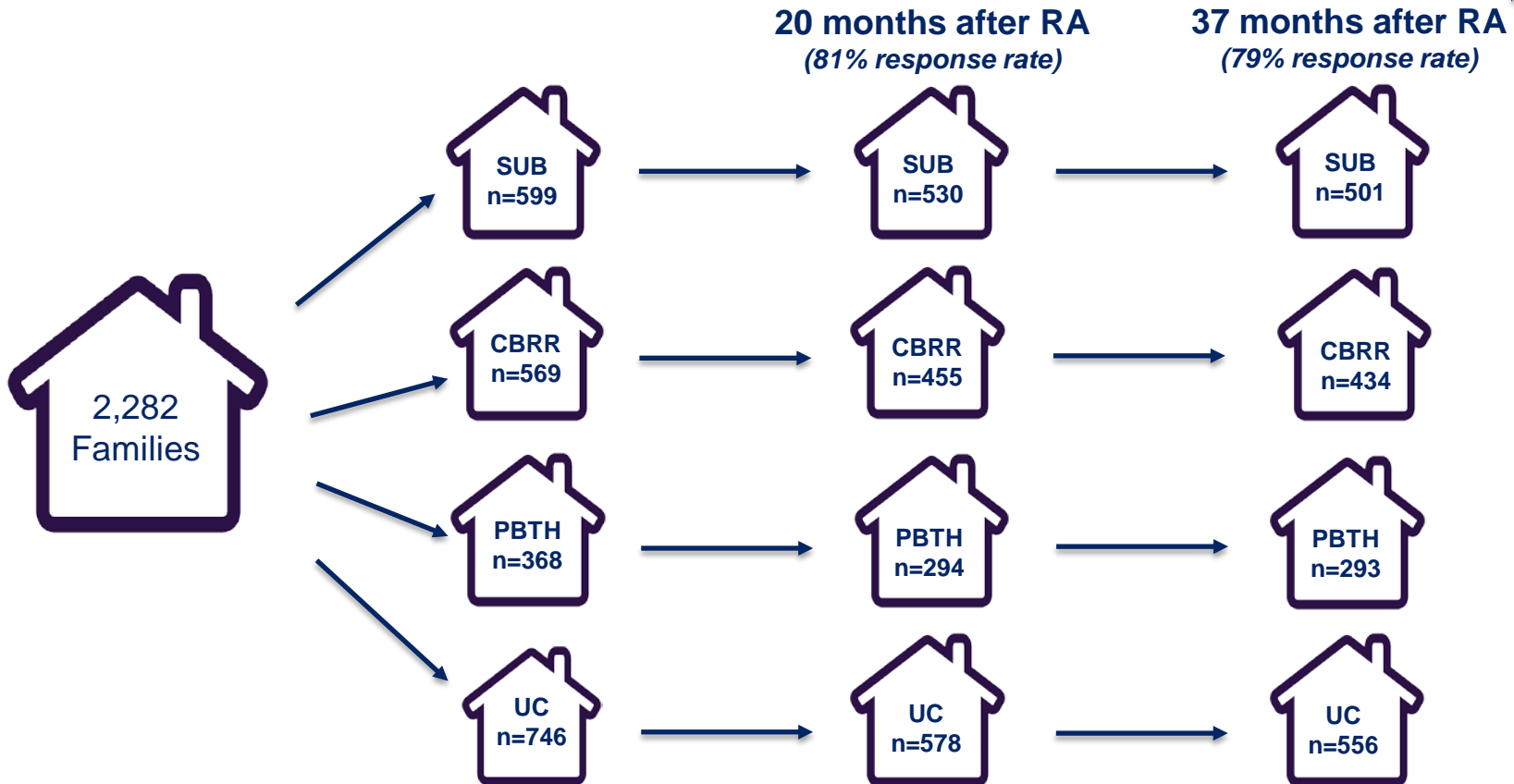


Study Design

Sept. 2010 - Jan. 2012

July 2012 – Oct. 2013

March 2014 – March 2015



PD&R

Policy Question Being Addressed

Policy question: Does priority access to a particular intervention yield differences in outcomes for homeless families over the short-term (approximately 20 months) and/or the long-term (approximately 37 months)?

- Impact estimates reveal the *average impact* of offering a family priority access to a specific intervention.
- The study design provides evidence about the kinds of assistance families use under these scenarios and the effects of that program use.
- Study families used a variety of housing and homelessness assistance under these scenarios which mirror the “real-world” conditions in which families are not required to use any one type of assistance.



PD&R

Findings- Outcomes for Families

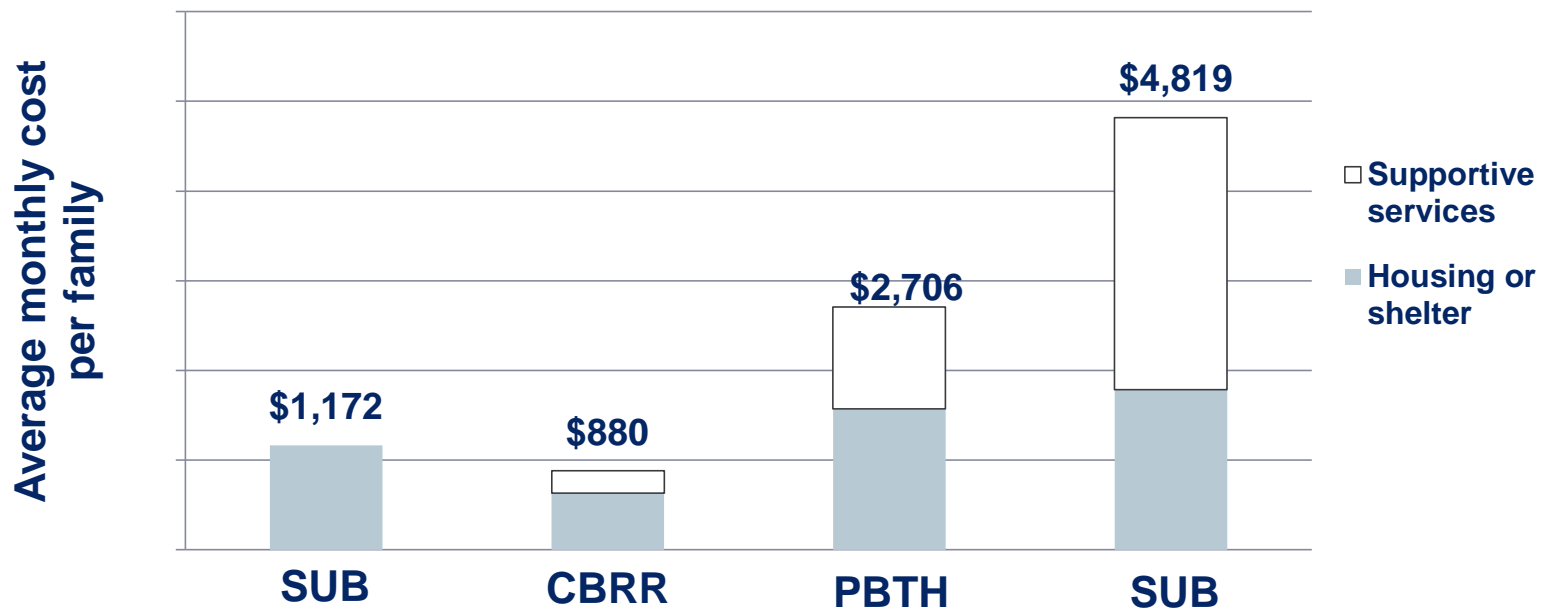
- Families offered **usual care** are still struggling significantly 37 months after random assignment
- Families offered the **SUB intervention** experienced significantly improved outcomes, including improved housing stability and a host of outcomes related to adult and child well-being and self-sufficiency measures
- Families offered the **CBRR intervention** look similar to usual care families
- Families offered **PBTH intervention** achieved generally equivalent housing outcomes as families assigned to CBRR, but experienced reduced stays in emergency shelter when compared to UC families



PD&R

Findings- Intervention Costs

SUB families achieved these benefits, on average, for roughly \$45,500 over the 37-month period—a cost which is only 9% higher than the costs which accrued to the families assigned to usual care, who utilized, on average, \$41,000 in housing and services over the 37-month period.



Implementation Challenges

- Identification and recruitment of study sites
- Implementing an RCT in the real world, not the theoretical world
- Maintaining a highly mobile sample over the long-term
- Carrying out a long-term study in the Federal environment



PD&R

Methodological Benefits

- Rigorous evidence to guide policymaking and program implementation
- Previously unavailable information on the relative effectiveness of various housing and services interventions
- Exhaustive cost data to pair with the impact estimates
- Construction and preservation of a series of datasets that can extend the learning from the study into the future



PD&R

Additional Information

- Study webpage and links to all study publications:
http://www.huduser.org/portal/family_options_study.html
- Data to be stored and made accessible to researchers at the Center for Administrative Records Research and Applications (CARRA) and the U.S. Census Bureau
- HUD Contact: anne.l.fletcher@hud.gov, 202-402-4347



PD&R