

East Bay Innovations, a nonprofit organization located in Alameda County, California, east of San Francisco, arranges and provides personalized supports that enable people with disabilities to live in their own homes, work in jobs of their choice, and fully participate in their communities. Since its founding, EBI has collaborated with diverse partners to create affordable, accessible housing in Alameda County and, more recently, assisted 150 people with disabilities to move from institutions and unstable or inadequate housing to permanent homes in the community. Among these, 120 received continuing long-term supportive services that help ensure their housing remains stable. EBI estimated that 85 percent of those who transitioned from institutions to the community also required deep housing subsidies and many needed accessible housing.

Research Methods and Outcomes

Interviews with 25 key informants,¹ including EBI leadership and senior staff members, clients, Public Housing Agency (PHA) officials, nonprofit affordable and supportive housing developers, county healthcare and mental health officials, and housing advocates, revealed organizational attributes that underpin EBI's success and that could serve as models for advocates. A literature review and key informant interviews also helped identify significant barriers and facilitators to creating affordable, accessible housing in the San Francisco Bay Area and California.

EBI Organizational Attributes

- **Vision and commitment:** The organization's work is anchored in a fundamental commitment to disability rights, independent living, and community integration principles.
- **Mastery of housing programs and policies:** Senior EBI staff have mastered complex housing programs and policies and built lasting relationships, anchored in trust, with every significant housing stakeholder in Alameda County.

¹ Brandeis University, Committee for Protection of Human Subjects. IRB Protocol #20048R-E Caldwell: *Understanding Barriers and Facilitators to Increasing Affordable Housing for People with Disabilities*

- **Community building through creative collaborations:** Collaborating with EBI, county healthcare leaders advocated successfully for a Medicaid-funded Flexible Funding Pool, which helped with landlord recruitment and client moving expenses.
- **Expertise working with people with complex disabilities, familiarity with the practical details of architectural accessibility:** EBI staff have honed their skills over several decades, working with people with significant functional limitations and other disabilities, many of whom require fully accessible housing.
- **Frequent, successful use of reasonable accommodation provisions:** Since its founding, EBI staff have sought legally available reasonable accommodations that remove policy barriers preventing people with disabilities from renting affordable housing.

Creation of Affordable, Accessible Housing: Barriers and Facilitators

- **Barriers:** As a society, we lack a shared vision that housing is a human right, according to many of the key informants we interviewed. In their opinion, people who need affordable housing most, including people with disabilities, face a social perception of unworthiness that acts as a disincentive to the construction of affordable housing projects. Other significant barriers in California include losing historic funding from property taxes and redevelopment funds, the cost and complexity of building such housing, and restrictive land-use rules. Even when locales build affordable housing, rents are often too high for people with disabilities living on SSI payments. Renters can use federal housing vouchers to reduce rents, but the need for vouchers outstrips their availability. While federal laws require a small percentage of units to be physically accessible when housing is built with federal funding, the need for accessibility far exceeds availability, and housing managers sometimes rent accessible units to people who do not require accessibility.
- **Facilitators:** Foremost among the federal policies that respond to the lack of affordable housing are programs that provide rental subsidies for various low-income groups. HUD Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers and HUD 811 Mainstream programs are examples of housing subsidies that help people with significant and long-term disabilities live independently in the community. Important innovations also include federal Medicaid programs, such as California's Whole Person Care pilot (2015 – 2020), which permitted Medicaid funding to be used to help people transition from institutions, or from being homeless, to the community, cover unexpected housing costs, and provide financial incentives to landlords and property managers to accept disabled tenants. Federal disability rights laws play a unique role by requiring reasonable accommodations that can waive or modify policies when they exclude people with disabilities from renting affordable housing. Other important facilitators include the federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program, which encourages private investment in housing construction and rehabilitation that lower-income households can afford.

Conclusion

Only robust federal and state responses will resolve most long-standing structural barriers. However, service and advocacy organizations, such as EBI, can have an impact locally. They can work with PHAs and urge them to set aside Housing Choice Vouchers for people transitioning from institutions. Advocates can encourage locales to adopt inclusionary zoning rules and strengthen existing rules by requiring that developers take housing vouchers so the units are affordable. Locales should be urged to require that commercial multifamily housing developers accept rental vouchers as a condition of approving housing developments. Medicaid managed care health plans that serve people with disabilities should include funding for the costs of transitioning people with disabilities from institutions to homes in the community when negotiating Medicaid reimbursement rates with their states.

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Abbreviations

ACHSA	Alameda County Healthcare Services Agency
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
CC	Care Connect (AC Care Connect)
CCT	California Community Transitions
CMS	Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
DHCS	Department of Health Care Services
EBI	East Bay Innovations
FFP	Flexible Funding Pool
FMR	Fair Market Rate
HACA	Housing Authority of Alameda County
HCBA	Home- and Community-Based Alternative Waiver
HCD	California Department of Housing and Community Development
HOPWA	Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS
HUD	US Department of Housing and Urban Development
IHSS	In-Home Supportive Services
LIHTC	Low-Income Housing Tax Credit
MFP	Money Follows the Person
MHSA	Mental Health Services Act
NIMBY	Not in My Back Yard
PHA	Public Housing Agency
RCEB	Regional Center of the East Bay
RFP	Request for Proposal
RHNA	Regional Housing Needs Allocation
SMI	Serious Mental Illness
SSI	Supplemental Security Income
UD	Universal Design
WPC	Whole Person Care

Other Terms

HUD 811 Housing Choice Vouchers (Mainstream Vouchers)
HUD Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers