

# Leveraging the Affordable Housing Sector to Respond to the Opioid Crisis



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# Setting the Stage: Addiction & Overdose Crisis

- Over the last 2 decades, >800,000 people have died of a drug overdose
- Before COVID-19, overdose deaths were contributing to an unprecedented decline in US life expectancy
- Opioids contribute to most overdose deaths, hence the term “opioid crisis”
- Overdose deaths among Black Americans have risen more rapidly in recent years, highlighting important concerns regarding equity & service access



# A critical moment for action

Strong synthetic opioids, like fentanyl, are now ubiquitous in the illicit drug market, dramatically heightening the lethality of use

**Figure 2. National Drug-Involved Overdose Deaths\*, Number Among All Ages, 1999-2019**

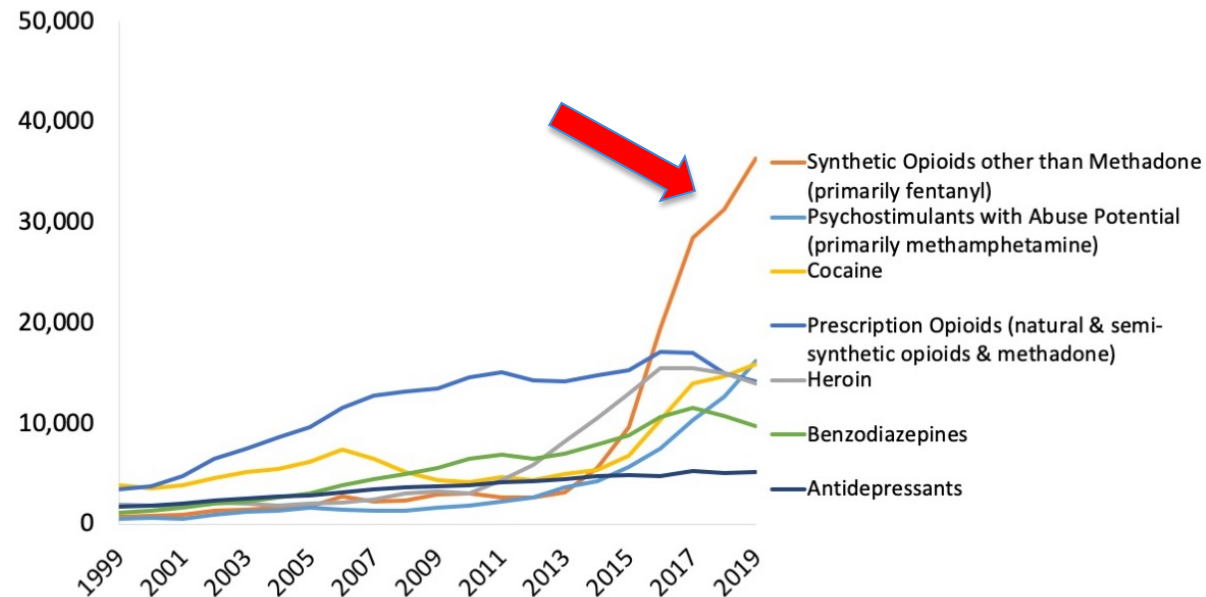


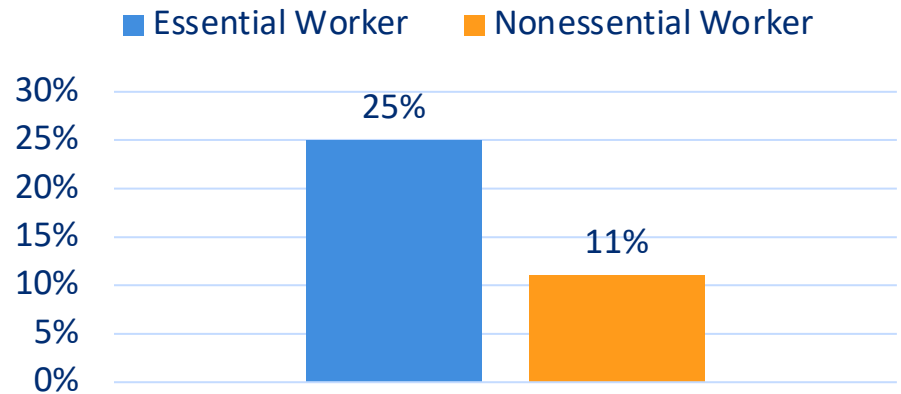
Image source: <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drug-topics/trends-statistics/overdose-death-rates>



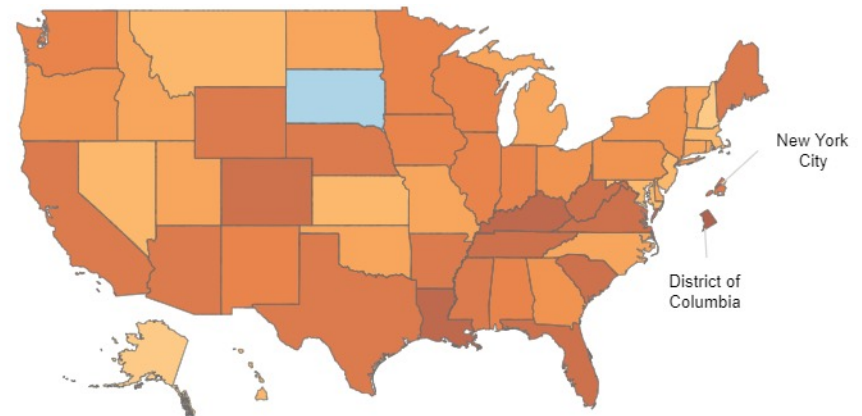
# A critical moment for action

During the pandemic...

- 12% of adults overall reported *increased* alcohol consumption or substance use
- Essential workers were more likely to report *starting or increasing substance use* (25%) than non-essential workers (11%)
- Drug overdoses increased in every state but one
- **Nationwide, drug overdoses rose by 29% in 2020**



Started or increased substance use to cope with stress or emotions related to COVID-19



Citations: <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/>  
<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>



# Intersection of Housing and Substance Use

High levels of substance use disorder among people experiencing homelessness

	Prevalence estimate range in studies of people w/ homelessness	Pooled prevalence estimate	Prevalence in general population
Alcohol use disorder	8-58%	38%	4-16%
Drug use disorder	5-54%	24%	2-6%
Dual diagnosis	58-65%	Not available	<1%

Source: Fazel et al. The health of homeless people in high-income countries: descriptive epidemiology, health consequences, and clinical and policy recommendations. Lancet, 2014.



# Intersection of Housing and Substance Use

- Direction of causal relationship between substance use disorder and housing instability complicated
- Housing instability can worsen substance use-related issues
  - Example: Eviction rates associated with significant increases in overdose mortality in urban areas.<sup>1</sup> (Bradford & Bradford, 2020).
- Housing interventions can improve substance-use related issues
  - Moving to Opportunity experiment suggest gender-specific effects on adolescent substance use.<sup>2</sup> (Schmidt et al, 2017)
  - Family Options Study found reduced problematic substance use among those receiving permanent housing subsidy versus usual services.<sup>3</sup> (Gubits et al, 2015)
  - Limited Housing First (HF) research – HF is model that does not require participation in treatment - suggests potential effects on substance use,<sup>4</sup> treatment retention,<sup>5</sup> use of emergency medical services,<sup>6</sup> tenure in housing<sup>7</sup>

1. Bradford and Bradford. The effects of evictions on accidental drug and alcohol mortality. Health Services Research, 2020.

2. Schmidt et al. Adolescence is a sensitive period for housing mobility to influence risky behaviors. J of Adolesc Health, 2017.

3. Gubits et al. Family Options Study. 2015 HUD Report.

4. Appel et al. Housing First for severely mentally ill homeless methadone patients. J Addict Dis, 2012.

5. Padgett et al. Substance use outcomes among homeless clients with serious mental illness. Comm Ment Health J, 2011.

6. Mackelprang et al. Housing First is associated with reduced use of emergency medical services. Prehosp Emerg Care, 2014.

7. Hall et al. Housing versus treatment first for supportive housing participants with substance use disorders. Substance Abuse, 2020.



# Intersection of Housing and Substance Use

- Substance use disorder dramatically heightens risk of involvement in the criminal-legal system
  - Estimated 50% of incarcerated people have substance use disorder<sup>1</sup>
- Substance use disorder → criminal-legal system involvement → housing discrimination based on criminal record
  - Heightens barriers to obtaining housing on private market, which may both increase need for housing assistance and pose challenge to qualifying for housing assistance
  - 14% reported felony conviction of at least one adult family member was barrier to housing in Family Options Study<sup>2</sup>

1. Mumola et al. Drug use and dependence, state and federal prisoners. BJS Report, 2006.
2. Gubits et al. Family Options Study. 2015 HUD Report.



# Methods

- We draw on primary data collected in partnership with the Council of Large Public Housing Authorities (CLPHA)
- CLPHA members include 68 PHAs that own and manage more than 40% of all public housing and one-quarter of Housing Choice vouchers in the United States
- We administered an online survey from September to November 2019 to all 68 CLPHA members, 43 (63%) of whom responded





# Housing Options and Support for People With SUD

## ➤ **PHAs report various partnerships and approaches designed to house people with SUD**

- Most PHAs reported using project-based vouchers for people with SUD (89.2%)
- Nearly two-thirds of respondents also reported having permanent supportive housing models (62.2%)
- A similar proportion of respondents reported having Housing First programs (67.6%)
- About half of PHAs reported partnerships with time-limited recovery housing providers (52.8%)



# Housing Options and Support for People With SUD

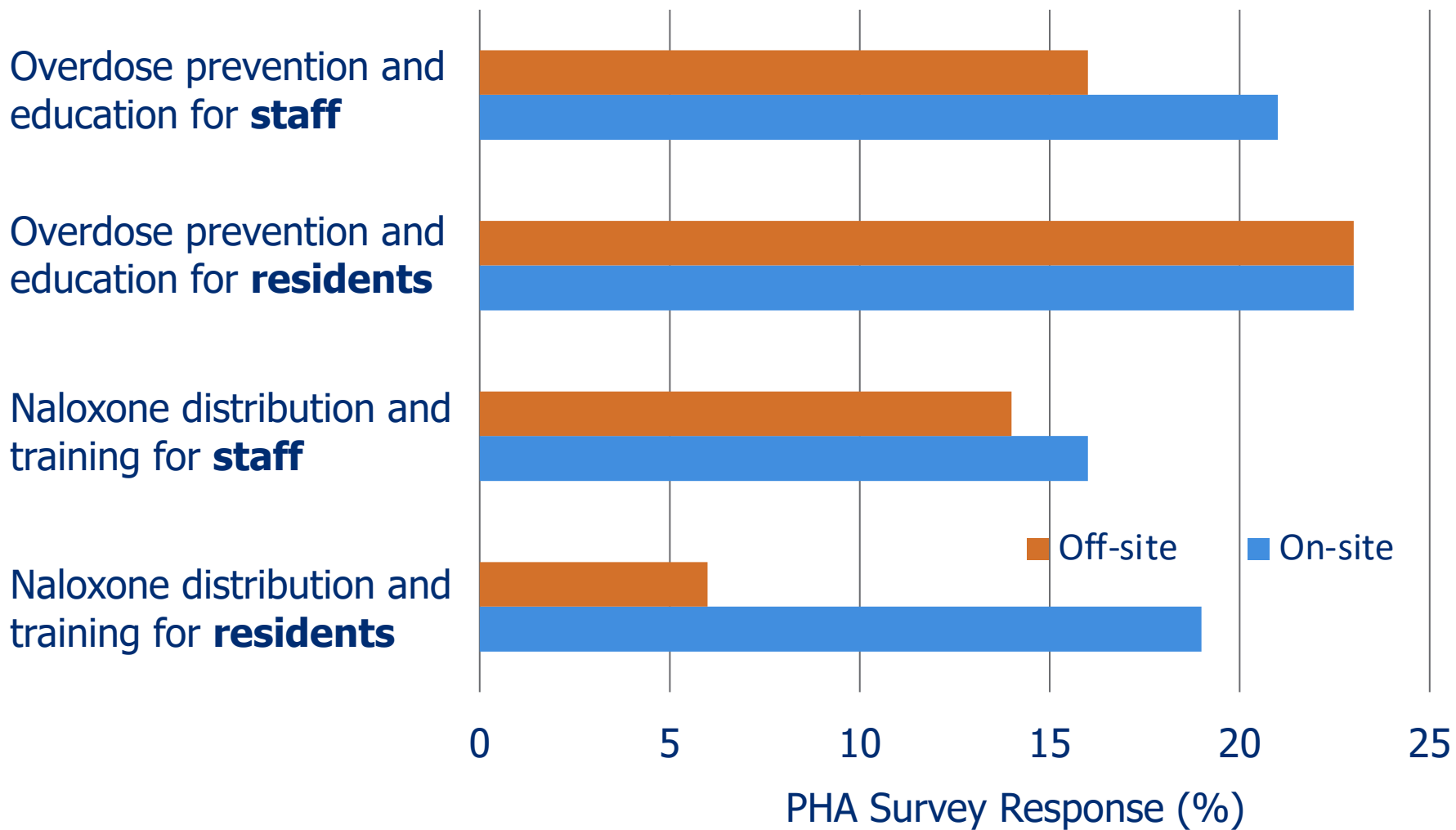
- **Despite these programs, respondents indicated that the need for new vouchers (70.6%) and for more permanent supportive or sponsor-based housing (88.2%) is critical to meeting the increased demand for housing people with SUD**
- **Beyond the provision of housing through these programs, PHAs reported having various on-site programs and partnerships designed to promote SUD recovery, including counseling and self-help groups**
  - A quarter of PHAs reported the presence of on-site counseling with a credentialed mental health or addiction professional (25.0%)
  - Some PHAs indicated on-site self-help groups, such as 12-step programs or Narcotics Anonymous (16.7%)

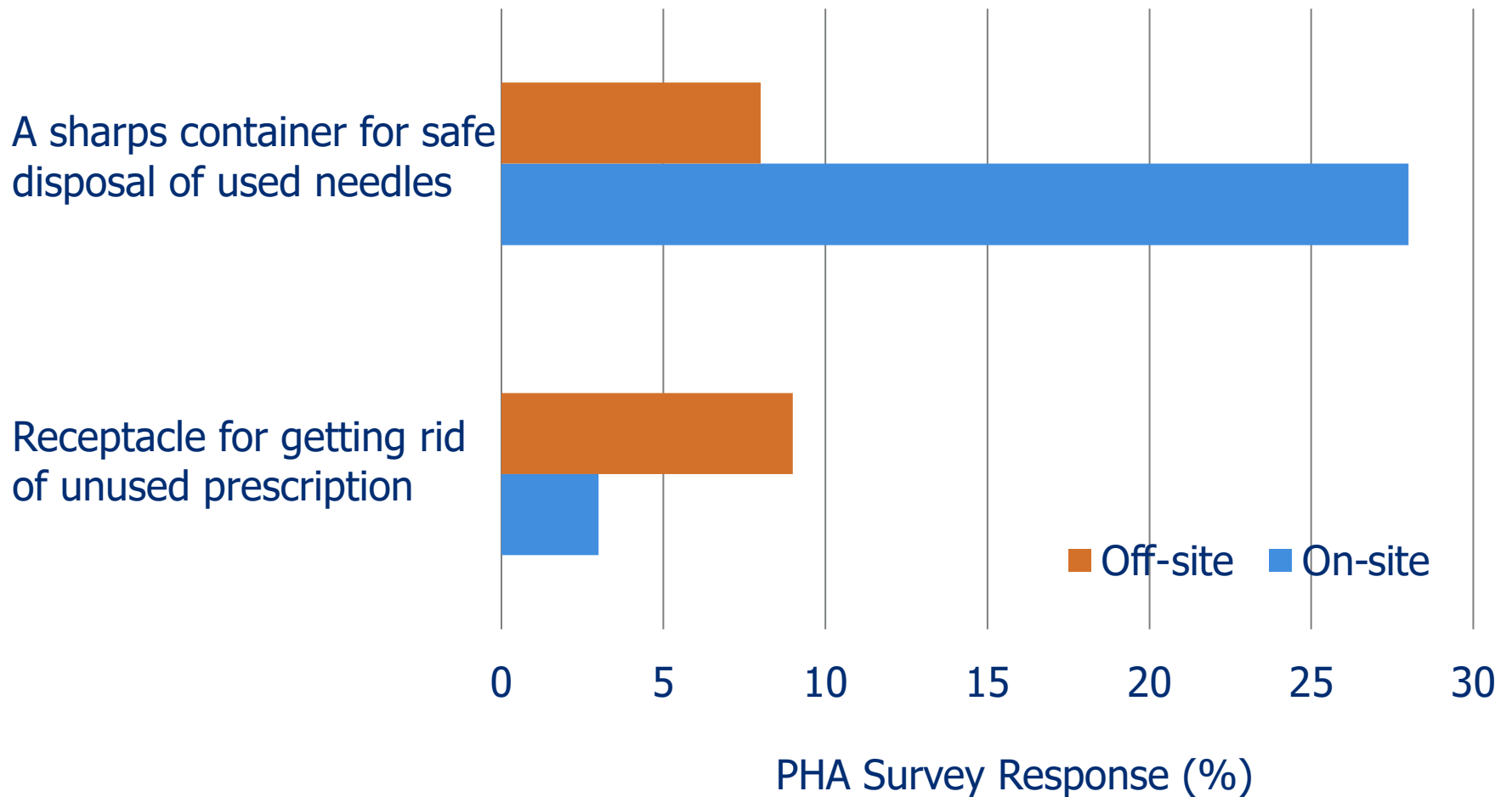


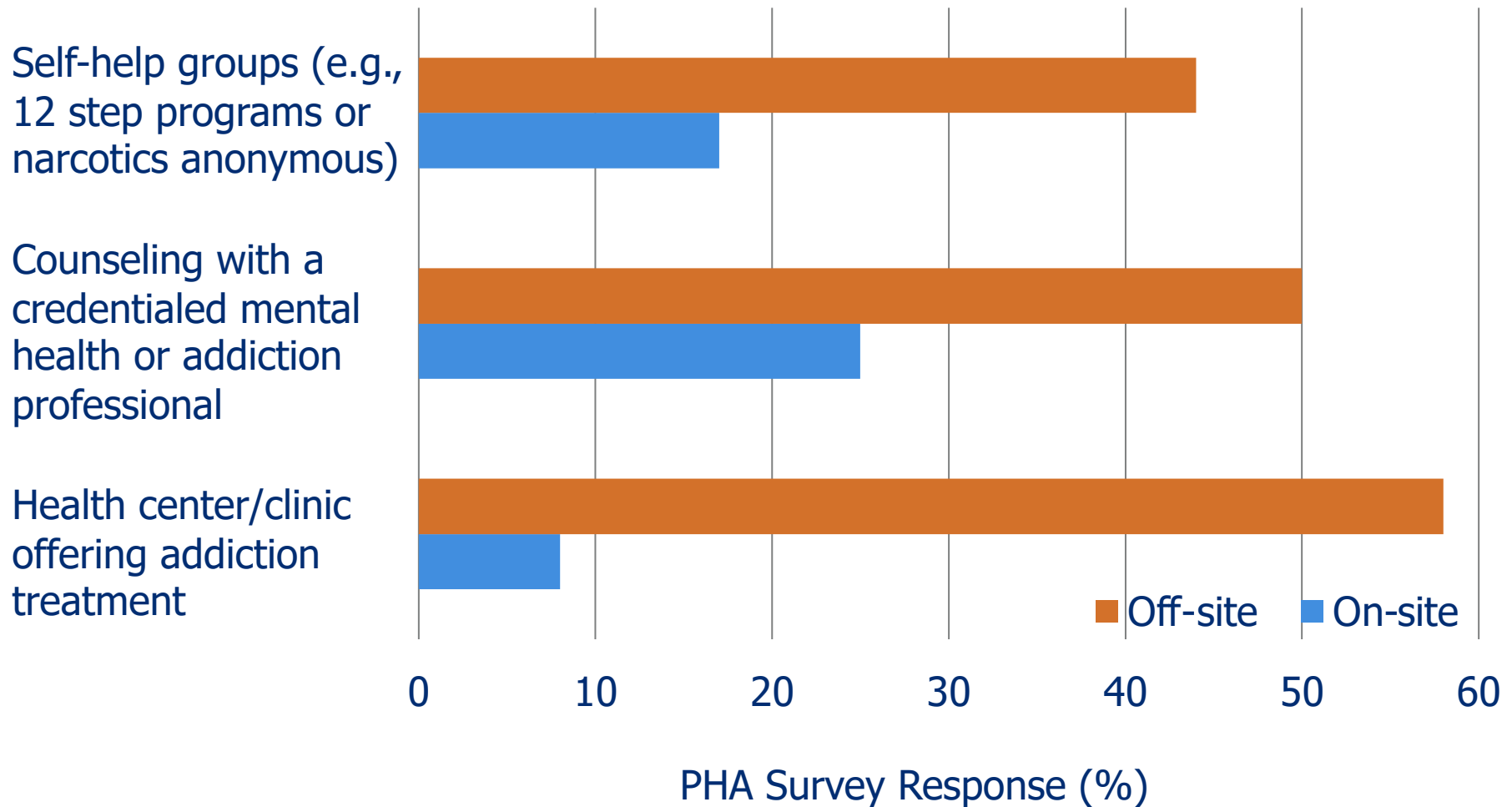
# Housing Options and Support for People With SUD

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# Criminal History and Look-Back Periods

- **Results confirm a wide variation in look-back periods, during which criminal activity related to substance use would bar applicants from receiving housing assistance**
  - 31.3% of PHAs reported lock-back periods of 5 years
  - The median look-back period was 5 years, ranging from 2-10 years
  - 6.3% of PHAs reported considering criminal history regardless of timeframe



# Criminal History and Look-Back Periods

- **Many PHAs also confirmed that applicants for housing assistance are evaluated using a broad framework**
  - 87.5% of PHAs indicate that engagement in treatment may be a mitigating factor that could enable applicants to receive housing assistance
  - 70.6% of PHAs reported that their agency would be able to approve a public housing applicant despite a previous drug-related conviction for possession
  - 87.5% of PHAs would consider whether the offender has successfully completed a drug treatment program in their evaluation

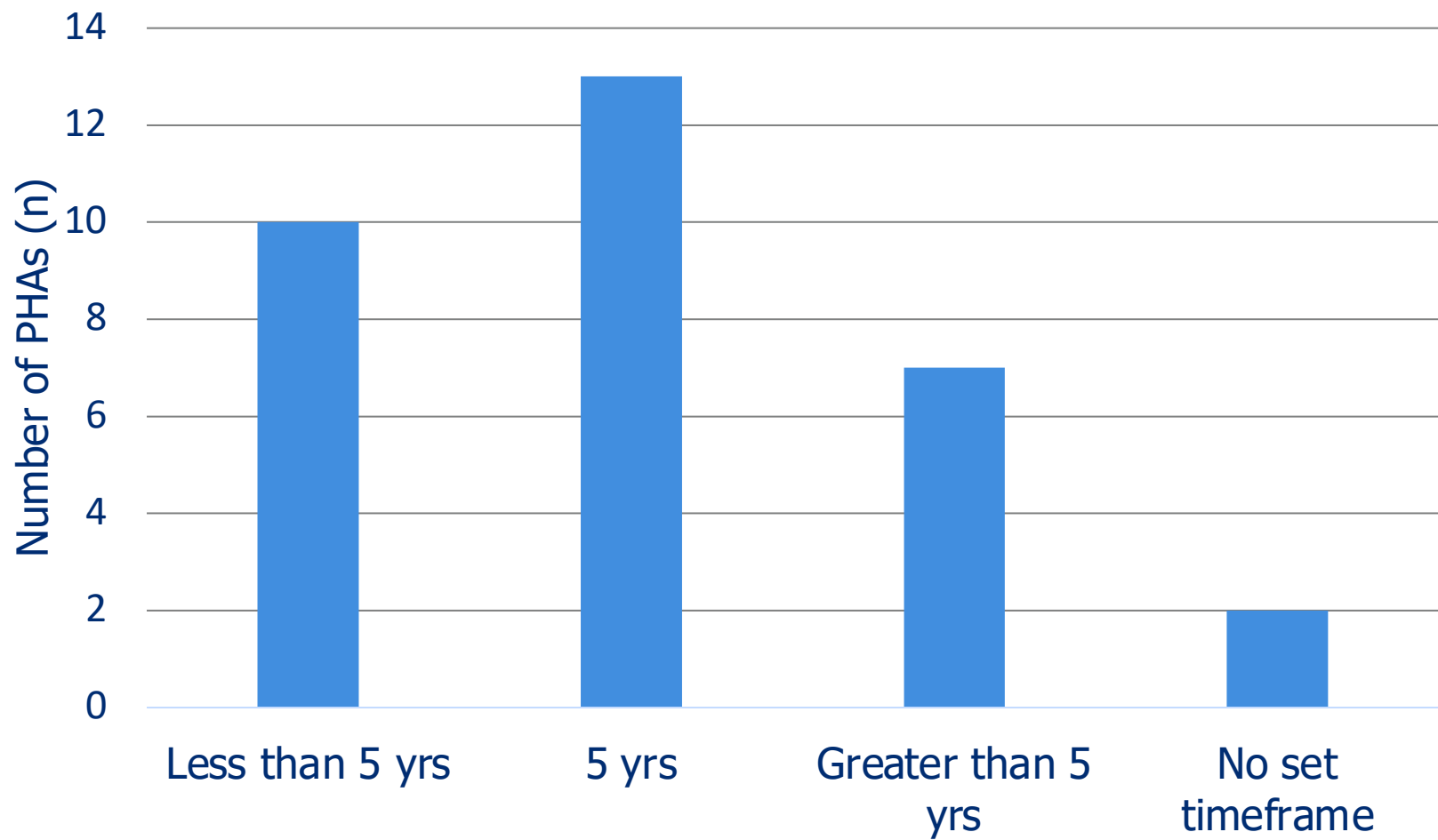




# Criminal History and Look-Back Periods

- **Reducing look-back periods could be an important strategy for reducing institutionalized SUD-related stigma**
  - 21.2% of PHAs reported that criminal activity related to drug possession is frequently a primary factor in public housing eviction
  - 38.2% of PHAs indicated that if a resident is at risk for eviction in part due to SUD, the agency has a process for referring residents to recovery services





# Summary

- **SUD remains an enormous challenge facing PHAs**
- **While PHAs report a variety of partnerships, there is a need for new vouchers and housing assistance**
- **Sharing of best practices may extend access to some approaches to harm reduction**
- **Criminal look back periods can be an important housing barrier; these vary widely across PHAs**

