



2Gen Economic Mobility Demonstration

Racial discrimination and social, political, and economic dynamics have led to spatial inequality in metropolitan areas across the United States, including Chicago and its suburbs. Many families, particularly families of color living in historically disinvested neighborhoods in the Chicago region, face high barriers to the prerequisites for economic mobility, including access to safe and affordable housing, meaningful employment, quality education, adequate health care, and, ultimately, wealth accumulation. Important efforts in disinvested neighborhoods across Chicago and Cook County currently seek to increase opportunities and tackle some of the consequences of these historic disinvestment patterns.

Federal housing vouchers (offering subsidized rents in privately-owned housing) have enabled some low-income families to surmount the affordable housing barrier. However, many families who use housing vouchers continue to face serious constraints from the continuing effects of systemic racism and inequities, and the impacts of discrimination. The question of whether economic mobility for families using housing vouchers could be improved by supports designed to overcome some of these constraints has not been answered.

Specifically, would providing services to families after they have secured affordable housing through the use of federal housing vouchers result in increases in employment and income, quality education, asset and credit building, and/or health and well-being? The 2Gen Economic Mobility Demonstration (named for its focus on both generations – children and adults – within participating families) will provide information to help answer that question. It will also seek to provide such information respecting a subset of families who have used their vouchers to move to “opportunity” neighborhoods (low-poverty census tracts that have historically high rates of, or are otherwise deemed likely to foster, economic mobility).

2Gen’s goal is that – by demonstrating that services will help low-income families who are primarily families of color foster economic mobility by taking foundational steps toward financial security, homeownership, and wealth building – this program will catalyze national policy reforms that will extend similar opportunities to tens of thousands of low-income families nationwide.

In order to do this, the 2Gen Demonstration will evaluate the experiences of 1000 participating families, 800 with vouchers from the Chicago Housing Authority and 200 with vouchers from the Housing Authority of Cook County. Families across Cook County with at least one child under the age of 18 are eligible for the project, and participation is voluntary.

Of the participating families, 500 will receive 2Gen services, the other 500 will not. Children's Home & Aid, an Illinois social service agency, will provide the services – comprehensive family coaching, employment services, and referrals for other needed services – for at least one year. A coach, supported by a team of generalists and specialists, will engage personally with each family to:

- assess the family's unique educational, employment, emotional, and social needs and strengths, including health and well-being, education challenges and skills deficits, and financial and employment-related issues;
- engage in collaborative problem-solving with participants;
- work with participants to determine short-term and long-term goals and manageable action steps to achieve the goals; and
- where appropriate, help families build networks and communal ties to access educational, employment, and social service systems available in their communities.

Researchers will follow families' experiences over a two-year period. They will collect administrative and survey data to compare the outcomes of families who receive services and those who do not in several areas: housing (e.g., duration in opportunity neighborhoods, number of moves); employment (e.g., annual and quarterly earnings, average quarterly employment); income (e.g., household income, TANF and SNAP participation), education (e.g., enrollment, attendance); financial and material well-being (e.g., assets and debts, credit access); and physical and mental health (e.g., health issues, feelings of safety and social support).

Partners in 2Gen include the Chicago Housing Authority; the Housing Authority of Cook County; Children's Home & Aid; MDRC, a New York-based research organization, the principal investigator, responsible for research and evaluation; the Center for Urban Research and Learning at Loyola University Chicago, a local research consultant to MDRC; and BPI, the overall program manager.

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