



Metro Area Continuum of Care for the Homeless

***Low Barrier and Housing First Standards***

**PURPOSE:** To set uniform standards for operating ESG & CoC funded projects using a Housing First approach. Housing First is an approach to homeless assistance that prioritizes rapid permanent housing placement and stabilization and does not have service participation requirements or preconditions.

**POLICY:** All Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) & Continuum of Care (CoC) funded projects will operate their projects using a Housing First approach and will incorporate the following project-level standards into their internal policies and procedures. CoC-funded projects will be monitored for adherence to this policy through annual MACCH site visits.

- ***Rapid placement into permanent housing.*** Placement into permanent housing is priority and a housing readiness model is not utilized. Upon entry into emergency shelter (ES) & transitional housing (TH) programs, households are assessed using the CoC's comprehensive, standardized common assessment and referred to the By-Name-List (BNL) or other permanent housing options. Permanent housing placement is not delayed while the household works through a service/goal plan. Permanent housing placement may be delayed for individuals fleeing domestic violence, but only until the household is no longer in immediate danger.
- ***Remove barriers to entry.*** Persons experiencing homelessness should not be screened out of or discouraged from participating in programs because of such factors as:
  - Lack of income or employment
  - Poor credit or financial history
  - Active or history of substance abuse or completion of treatment
  - Having a criminal record with the exception of legally mandated restrictions
  - History of domestic violence
  - Behaviors that are interpreted as indicating a lack of "housing readiness" (*people with disabilities are offered clear opportunities to request reasonable accommodations within applications and screening processes and during tenancy, and building and apartment units include special physical features that accommodate disabilities*)

- **Program termination only used as a last resort.** Project participants are not terminated from the project for reasons beyond the non-payment of rent or other lease-related violations. Participants cannot be terminated for reasons such as:
  - Failure to participate in supportive services
  - Failure to make progress on a service plan
  - Loss of income or failure to improve income
  - Fleeing domestic violence
  - Any other activity not covered in a lease agreement (with the exception of documented instances of harm, threat, or assault to an agency staff person [given that these activities may not always be expressly detailed within a lease agreement as reason for program termination])

Emergency Shelter programs: While emergency shelter programs do not provide program participants with a lease or an occupancy agreement, shelters are expected to adhere to the other listed requirements. Specifically, shelter should not be contingent upon sobriety, income, or participation in services. Moreover, program termination should only be used as a last resort (as an example: termination should only be limited to reasons of safety and/or threat).

Scattered-site programs: If a program participant is given an eviction notice by the landlord or property manager, program staff should work to negotiate the resolution of issues and/or the eviction timeline to allow for another housing option to be identified. The project should try to do everything possible to rehouse any program participants unless there is a legal barrier to doing so.

Site-based programs: In site-based programs, the lease or occupancy agreement may be between the project and the program participant. The lease should only contain items that are typical in leases for individuals within the local market. Under this model, the project may have to evict the program participant for lease-related violations, but this should be avoided when possible. If the program participant is facing eviction, the project should offer to work with the participant to find other alternative housing options.

- **Adopt client-centered service methods.** All projects should ensure housing and service options are tailored to meet the unique needs of each individual or family presenting for assistance. Program participants have access to the services that they reasonably believe will help them achieve their goals with an emphasis on engagement and problem-solving over therapeutic goals. Program participants should not be required to participate in services and should not be terminated from the program for failure to do so. Participation in services or compliance with service plans are not conditions of tenancy, but are reviewed with tenants and regularly offered as a resource to tenants. Services are informed by a harm-reduction philosophy that recognizes that drug and alcohol use and addiction are a part of some tenants' lives. Tenants are engaged in non-judgmental communication regarding drug and alcohol use and are offered education regarding how to avoid risky behaviors and engage in safer practices. Substance use in and of itself, without other lease violations, is not considered a reason for eviction. “