

Miami-Dade Homeless Continuum of Care Housing First Permanent Supportive Housing Standards of Care and Policies

I. PURPOSE OF CoC HOUSING FIRST PROGRAMS

Housing First is a model of permanent supportive housing (PSH) assistance that is offered without preconditions (such as sobriety, mental health stability, non-violent criminal history or a minimum income threshold) or service participation requirements though services are readily available, and rapid placement and stabilization in permanent housing are primary goals (Housing First PSH).

Housing First PSH within the Miami-Dade County Continuum of Care is targeted to Chronically Homeless individuals and families. Such programs are operated by local community-based agencies and/or housing providers and supported by multiple funding sources. Access to the Miami-Dade County's CoC Housing First PSH Programs and participating housing projects is coordinated through the Miami-Dade County Homeless Trust's Coordinated Outreach and Assessment Process as described below. The Standards of Care for the provision of Housing First PSH Programs funded by and/or through the Miami-Dade County Homeless Trust (Homeless Trust) are set forth below.

II. DEFINITIONS

A. Chronically Homeless

U.S. HUD definition of chronic homelessness is an individual or family with a documented disability condition who has been continuously homeless for a year or more (or at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years).

Chronically homeless persons are among the most vulnerable people in the homeless population. They tend to have high rates of behavioral health problems, including severe mental illness and substance abuse disorders, conditions that may be exacerbated by physical illness, injury or trauma. Consequently, they are frequent users of emergency services, crisis response, and public safety systems.

B. Harm Reduction Model

This is a homeless housing model. The Harm Reduction philosophy prioritizes housing stability among persons who have experienced homelessness and who may be facing disabilities. Although recovery from mental health and substance abuse disorders is always the goal, harm reduction acknowledges that persons may be at different places along the continuum of behavior change. Services are informed by a harm reduction philosophy that recognizes that drug and alcohol use and addiction are a part of tenants' lives, where tenants are engaged in non-judgmental communication regarding drug and

alcohol use, and where tenants are offered education regarding how to avoid risky behaviors and engage in safer practices.

Harm reduction focuses on meeting tenants where they are at and assisting them to set and achieve goals for themselves. In this process a trusting relationship is established with the provider. This relationship has been proven to be a key to many individual change processes. Services focus on helping tenants stay housed by assisting with the management of problems that interfere with their ability to meet the obligations of tenancy, such as paying rent. Tenants are also encouraged to explore obstacles toward their goals in an open and non-judgmental atmosphere where they can contemplate costs and benefits of receiving services addressing their special needs, so that staff does not alienate tenants or cause them to begin a dishonest game of hiding their drug use, psychiatric symptoms, etc. Like any other tenant, tenants receiving services using this philosophy must still pay rent and comply with the terms of their lease

C. Housing First Model

Housing First is a philosophy that homelessness can be most efficiently ended by providing someone with access to safe, decent and affordable housing. Although an individual experiencing homelessness may benefit from supportive services such as mental health or substance abuse counseling, participation in these services is not a prerequisite to access housing or a condition of maintaining it. In fact, the stability provided by a housing unit facilitates the ability of a tenant to participate in these services. Research has shown that even when participation in services is not required as a condition of tenancy in supportive housing, tenants still participate at high rates.

The Housing First philosophy focuses on simplifying the process of accessing housing through streamlining the application process and removing unnecessary documentation or site visits. It also ensures that supportive housing tenants are not subject to conditions of tenancy that exceed the normal conditions under which any leaseholder would be subject, including participation in treatment or other services. Research has demonstrated that this approach is effective in promoting housing stability, particularly among people who have been homeless for long periods of time and have serious psychiatric disabilities, substance use disorders and/or other disabilities.

D. Trauma-Informed Service Provision

Trauma-Informed service provision takes into account knowledge about trauma — its impact, interpersonal dynamic, and paths to recovery — and incorporates this knowledge into all aspects of service delivery.

Trauma Informed Service provision:

- Integrates an understanding of trauma, substance abuse and mental illness throughout the program.
- Reviews service policies and procedures to ensure prevention of retraumatization.
- Involves consumers in designing/evaluating services.
- Sees trauma as a defining and organizing experience that can shape survivors' sense of self and others.
- Creates a collaborative relationship between providers and consumers, and

- First Priority–Chronically Homeless Individuals and Families with the Longest History of Homelessness and with the Most Severe Service Needs.
- Second Priority–Chronically Homeless Individuals and Families with the Longest History of Homelessness.
- Third Priority–Disabled Homeless Individuals and Families with the Most Severe Service Needs.
- Fourth Priority–All Other Disabled Homeless Individuals and Families.

Veteran Homeless Families and Individuals

During COAP, homeless veterans and families who report a veteran member or individuals who identify as a veteran will be referred to the Veterans Administration (VA) for housing and services assistance. Such families and individuals will be initially assessed by the VA using the VI-SPDAT.

VI-SPDAT assessment and referral information generated by the VA will be captured in the Homeless Trust's HMIS. If the VA determines such homeless individual or household to be ineligible for VA assistance, they will be referred back to COAP for CoC assistance.

C. Screen In/Not Screen-Out Policies

Under the Housing First philosophy, a policy of screen in, not screen-out policy is adopted. Thus, persons cannot be screened out of units set-aside for the CH on the basis of pre-conditions of sobriety, mental health stability, non-violent criminal history or a minimum income threshold.

D. HMIS Participation and Confidentiality

All providers of Housing First PSH must participate in the Miami-Dade County Homeless Trust Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) under an HMIS Participation Agreement and subject to the HMIS Standards, Policies and Procedures.

Further, all providers shall comply with the Homeless Trust's Confidentiality Policies and Procedures.

IV. APPLICATION AND DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS

A. Application Form

1. Applicants for Housing First PSH assistance must complete the **Standard CoC Housing First PSH Application** issued by the Homeless Trust, as may be amended from time to time (**Attachment B**). Required documents are incorporated into the Standard CoC Housing First PSH Application package.

In the case of tenant-based rental assistance (TBRA), assigned housing specialists or case managers will assist households in locating rental properties that are within the household's current or projected budget. Households will be placed within **45** days of referral.

a. Tenant-Choice

Selection of a housing unit is based on applicant or prospective participant's choice.

b. 45-Day Limit to Housing Search and Move-In

The prospective participant must select and move into an HQS-approved unit within 45 days of the date of the Housing First PSH Program's written approval of assistance unless extensions are granted by the PSH provider for good cause. Failure to do so, without approved extensions, will result in the withdrawal of the opportunity for TBRA and referral back to the CoC Housing Coordinator for alternative referral.

The number of units viewed and rejected by the prospective participant will not adversely impact such participant's prospective assistance or current assistance in the event of a request to move to another unit at the end of a lease term.

3. Limit on Rejection of Project or Sponsored-Based Housing Assistance

Following referral to a project or sponsor-based unit, an applicant must accept or reject the unit within 5 days. If the applicant rejects the unit, the applicant will be referred back to the CoC Housing Coordinator for referral.

If the applicant accepts the unit, the applicant must take occupancy within 45 days of acceptance, unless extensions are granted by the PSH provider for good cause. Failure to take occupancy within 45 days without approved extensions will result in the unit being offered to another applicant.

An individual or household listed for PSH placement may reject no more than three units in a program's given property. Upon the third rejection, the individual or household will no longer be offered a unit in such property should one become vacant.

B. Tenant-Based Rental Assistance Agreement

Any unit that receives rental assistance payments must have a rental assistance agreement between the CoC Housing First PSH program paying the rent assistance and the property owner (or management company authorized to enter into the agreement and take payments on behalf of the owner). Such agreement shall incorporate language requiring the property owner, or the property manager, to request the assistance of the participant's case manager or housing specialist to address behavior which may lead to possible eviction in advance of taking any action toward evicting the participant. All CoC-funded providers of Housing First PSH in the

In order for participants, as tenants, to maintain housing and avoid future homelessness as a result of eviction, three behaviors are necessary:

- Pay their portion of the rent on time every month;
 - Maintain their home in a safe and sanitary condition and in the condition in which it was initially rented to them, except normal wear and tear;
 - Avoid behavior (their own or that of a household member or guest) that would disturb their neighbors' peaceful enjoyment of their own home (i.e. yelling, loud music or noise, violence, drug use, other illegal activity, damage to, or theft of, others' property, blocking or cluttering common areas or right-of-ways); and
 - All other conditions of the lease agreement.
2. A participant must be assisted through one of the evidence-based strength-based client-centered case management methodologies such as MI techniques to develop a Housing Assistance Plan (HSP) no later than **21** days of the Housing First PSH referral, in making an assessment of issues and barriers to their own housing stability and assist the participant in developing their plan to identify their own goals to enhance their own housing stability directly related to the three behaviors listed above.
- a. If the participant desires supportive services as listed below, the case manager or housing specialist shall promptly assist the participant in accessing such services: medical health treatment, mental health treatment, counseling, supervision, and other services essential for achieving independent living;
 - b. The case manager or housing specialist will also work with the participant to secure government and private benefits and financial assistance including, but not limited to Medicaid; SNAP; WIC; unemployment; SSDI/SSI, Food Stamps) for which the participant is entitled.
3. Case management engagement (including location(s) and frequency of case management meetings, including home visits) shall be established specific to the needs of the client and governed by the strength-based, client-centered case management methodologies employed by the provider consistent with these Standards.

C. Staff Competency

CoC Housing First PSH staff must have the qualifications, licensing, proper training and supervision necessary and appropriate to the job function(s) with which the staff members are entrusted.

D. Support Services Agreements

payment arrangements (e.g. a payment plan) for rent arrears and/or assistance with financial management (including representative payee arrangements) whenever possible.

- e. Every effort must be made to offer a transfer to a tenant from one housing situation to another, if a tenancy is in jeopardy. Whenever possible, eviction back into homelessness must be avoided.
3. Written notice to the program participant containing a clear statement of the reasons for termination;
 4. A review of the decision, in which the program participant is given the opportunity to present written or oral objections before a person other than the person (or a subordinate of that person) who made or approved the termination decision; and
 5. Prompt written notice of the final decision to the program participant.
- C. Termination under this section does not bar further assistance at a later date to the same family or individual.