



Housing First Standards Policies and Procedures

Revised September 18, 2017

BACKGROUND

The Alliance for Housing (Oakland County's Continuum of Care) established a centralized housing registry to provide equitable and consistent access to all potential program participants seeking permanent housing in our local community. A workgroup was established through the Alliance for Housing's Systems Coordination and Implementation Committee, under the Community Interagency Service Team to develop both a centralized intake process with prioritization standards, and to provide continued implementation and oversight of the disposition process.

In order to ensure that access to programs is consistent across the partnership, the group has established minimum standards to be implemented across the continuum of care for all programs, including Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH), Rapid Rehousing (RRH) and Transitional Housing (TH) that embrace Housing First.¹ The intent of this policy is to remove any barriers to accessing housing and services for all potential program participants identified to potentially receive housing assistance through the Alliance for Housing. These standards will also be adhered to during the approved program participant's continued participation in the programs.

As part of the coordinated entry system, potential program participants will receive a copy of this document, to provide information related to the Housing First principles utilized in the community to ensure that individuals are aware that their background and history will not exclude them from programs.

Housing First – Referral Screening

The elements below outline the necessary factors examined to be identified as a Housing First Program². Expectations for housing partners to address these areas are outlined for each factor throughout the referral, screening and approval process:

¹ Housing First, Section II.A.7. of the 2016 HUD NOFA

² Elements as outlined in The Housing First Checklist, United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, April 2013

- The Alliance for Housing operates a single centralized housing registry to ensure equal access to all potential program participants to apply for permanent supportive housing in the community. All potential program participants are screened for eligibility for this program. Referrals are accepted through the coordinated system and include referrals directly from shelters, street outreach, drop in centers, and other parts of the crisis response system. Potential program participants can also call one of the participating agencies and receive a screening for access directly. This registry also allows for examination of possible placement in transitional housing or rapid rehousing programs to meet immediate needs of the program participant when PSH is not readily available.
- Identification for potential program participants for permanent supportive housing is conducted in a collaborative forum during weekly meetings that follow a prioritization process which includes such factors as chronic homeless status, vulnerability and length of homelessness. Other programs in the continuum of care use these factors as part of the screening process for housing assistance, using thresholds to insure the most vulnerable are served first.
- All Alliance for Housing programs will comply with HUD guidance, ensuring equal access, benefits, accommodations, and services to individuals in accordance with their gender identity. There are no additional requirements for individuals to “prove” gender identity.
- Sobriety, use of substances, completion of treatment and participation in services are not preconditions for entry or continuation in permanent supportive housing or rapid rehousing programs. Potential program participants are screened and accepted into programs without this being a factor in consideration of approval of the applicant. For transitional housing there may be additional considerations based on program design related to licensing requirements, shared living situations, and safety concerns.
- Potential program participants are not rejected based on poor credit or financial history, rental history, or behaviors that indicate a lack of “housing readiness”.
- All Alliance for Housing programs have the discretion to ask questions about a potential program participant’s criminal history and run a background check (state and/or national level) as part of their intake process for housing and supportive services planning. A potential program participant failing to disclose

criminal history will not be a basis for denial of admission in a program. Criminal history will not exclude someone from accessing PSH or RRH. For transitional housing there may be additional considerations based on program design related to shared living situations and safety concerns.

In TH situations, where an applicant will be potentially living with other program participants as a roommate, criminal history may be a factor in placement into a unit. Consideration will be provided to explore single occupancy units in these situations when available.

- In situations where a potential program participant reports outstanding warrants, or warrants are identified through a background check, a review will be conducted on a case by case basis. This will include but is not limited to working with the potential program participant to identify a plan for restitution, and working with the probation officer and/or the court. The individual case will be brought back to the Prioritized Housing workgroup to evaluate in consideration of the timeline that the person may be placed in jail and if this would exceed the 90 day limit to retain their slot of permanent supportive housing. In situations where the group makes a determination that the warrants will prevent the program participant from retaining tenancy, the potential program participant will be placed on hold with the PSH partner as an identified potential program participant to continue in the intake process once the factors preventing enrollment are resolved. If the applicant resolves the situation and is unable to access a unit due to the program being full, the potential program participant will be prioritized on the centralized housing registry in order to receive the next available slot that he/she potentially qualifies for in the disposition process. Similar considerations will be utilized for placement in rapid rehousing or transitional housing in the community.
- Program staff will work with potential program participants to obtain necessary documentation to move forward in determining eligibility. Efforts will be made to expedite this process to housing as quickly as possible.

All Alliance for Housing programs will utilize a minimum standard 30 day timeline for the potential program participant to obtain all necessary documentation in a collaborative effort. Extensions will be reviewed by the circumstances of the situation, and in PSH and TH situations, brought back to the prioritized housing group for updates and review. Specific information is below to provide additional guidance:

- Identification

A photo ID that is current or expired may be utilized to verify identification. In situations where the applicant does not have either, program staff will work to link the potential program participant to available community resources that can assist with this process and utilize the Secretary of State ID Exception Unit process when applicable to the circumstances.

In situations where the photo ID notes residency in another county, homeless verification that the potential program participant is residing in Oakland County will be utilized to determine eligibility. Potential program participants will not be required to change their ID to update the county of residence.

- Social Security Number
Card or printout is preferable for verification purposes. However, another document such as a tax return, medical record, etc. will suffice to meet this requirement.
- Disability
Some programs, including all permanent supportive housing, require a verification of disability. For those engaged in mental health services a certification of services may be the most expedient way to meet this requirement. However, no program shall mandate current enrollment in services as terms of eligibility, and a verification from a physician or supportive service program will suffice. In situations where any verifiable disability is eligible, proof that the applicant receives SSDI is acceptable. In situations where the grant specifies a required type of disability, additional documentation will be needed.

Housing First – Program Participation

The elements below outline the necessary factors examined to be identified as a Housing First Program. Expectations for partners to address these areas are outlined for each factor throughout individual/household's participation in the program:

- Supportive services provided by the program focus on engagement and housing case management to increase self-sufficiency rather than therapeutic goals. Program staff utilize the VI-SPDAT or Full SPDAT³, depending on

³ VI SPDAT is the Vulnerability Index - Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool and is used as a means to triage program participants as well as identify vulnerabilities. SPDAT stands for Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool and is a full assessment and ongoing case management tool to assess need and risk factors for persons that present as homeless.

program requirements established by the funder, to cooperatively develop service plans that are driven by the program participant without predetermined goals. Participation in services or program compliance is not a condition of permanent supportive housing tenancy. Rapid rehousing programs may require case management as a condition for receiving rental assistance. Transitional housing may require program participants to have contact with a Case Manager as a part of the lease and program agreement.

In all situations where case management is provided or offered, the program staff will work with program participants to provide alternatives to meeting in the home when requested. Case managers will work with program participants to identify a mutually agreed upon place and time which may include a community based setting to continue to connect and provide resources.

- Use of alcohol or drugs will not be considered a reason for eviction without other lease violations. Program staff will work with the program participant to provide opportunities to link with treatment and supportive services but will not make that a mandate for continued tenancy. In situations where the program participant is under 21, program staff may discuss issues related to legalities with the individual.
- In situations where the property is owned by the program, or the program holds the lease, tenants in permanent supportive housing and transitional housing are given reasonable flexibility in paying their tenant share of the rent (after subsidy) on time and offered special payment arrangements (i.e. a payment plan) for rent arrears and/or assistance with financial management (including representative payee arrangements). When the lease is in the PSH program participant's name, and there are extenuating circumstances that prohibited the program participant from paying the tenant portion of rent, the program staff will work with the program participant on a case by case basis. Because rapid rehousing programs do not have a funding line to pay the program participant's portion of rent, program staff will also review on a case by case basis and make efforts to link the program participant with available resources in the community that may be able to assist when extenuating circumstances are presented.
- Case managers/services coordinators are trained in and actively employ evidence-based practices for client/tenant engagement such as motivational interviewing and client-centered support. All programs utilize a person centered approach.
- Services are provided with a focus on harm reduction philosophy that recognizes drug, alcohol use, and addiction can be a part of the tenant's life,

and tenants are engaged in nonjudgmental communication regarding substance use. Tenants are offered education regarding how to avoid risky behaviors and engage in safer practices.

- Program staff will work with program participants to identify housing locations that meet their specific needs. This may include working to identify properties that have physical features that can accommodate the disability, and reduce harm and promote health, for the tenant. Examples of these features would be elevators in a building, ADA wheelchair compliant showers, etc. when available within the community.
- Program staff will work with program participants to assist with housing applications when a literacy disability has been identified. Similarly program staff will provide resources/assistance when English is a second language, or accommodations need to be made for hearing/visual impairments

As part of the coordinated entry system, potential program participants will receive a copy of this document, to provide information related to the Housing First principles utilized in the community to ensure that individuals are aware that their background and history will not exclude them from programs.

I have received a copy of the Alliance for Housing's "Housing First Standards, Policies and Procedures" through _____ (agency). My signature or the signature of my guardian below indicates that I have received a copy and understand the information contained in this document.

Applicant's or Guardian's Signature

Date

Alliance Community Partner Representative

Date