



### Housing First Standards Assessment Tool

**Overview:** This tool aims to assess and document how closely a housing and service provider adheres to the recommended best practice standards of the Housing First model, in the context of the broader work to implement a Housing First orientation at the system-level. This tool specifically evaluates project-level fidelity to Housing First, which directly impacts a system’s fidelity to Housing First. In addition to the universal best practice standards identified in this tool, Continuums should also take into account their local community context and local written standards pertaining to Housing First when assessing projects. A Continuum of Care can use this tool to prompt

**Provider Info tab:** The Provider Information tab should be completed *prior* to beginning the assessment. Specifically, the **Project Name, Project Type, Target Sub-Population served, and Date of Assessment** fields need to be completed in order to populate the assessment standards and report summary with questions that are

**Standards:** The standards have been arranged into the following categories: *Access, Evaluation, Services, Housing, Leases, and Project-Specific*. The “Tab” chart at the bottom of this page describes each of the categories in more detail. Some of the categories are not applicable for all project types, and those standards do not need to be

| Project Type                 | Applicable Standards   |
|------------------------------|--|
| Coordinated Entry            | Access & Evaluation; Project-specific                            |
| Street Outreach              | Access & Evaluation; Project-specific                            |
| Emergency Shelter            | Access & Evaluation; Service & Housing; Project-specific         |
| Transitional Housing         | Access & Evaluation; Service & Housing; Leases; Project-specific |
| Rapid Rehousing              | Access & Evaluation; Service & Housing; Leases; Project-specific |
| Permanent Supportive Housing | Access & Evaluation; Service & Housing; Leases; Project-specific |

**Safeguarding:** Please keep in mind safeguarding concerns when assessing projects. In particular, we advise Continuums of Care to work with projects with victims of domestic violence to make sure that adequate safety and confidentiality policies and practices are in place before beginning assessments.

**Scoring:** For each standard, there are three scoring criteria: “Say It”, “Document It”, and “Do It” (as explained further below). To show that a project is in full compliance with each standard, the assessor should mark “Always” for each scoring criteria. Use the drop down in the three columns to the right to select “Always” or “Somewhat” or

- “*Say It*” means that project and agency staff can describe verbally what they do concerning each standard. The assessor should be able to identify that the organizational culture supports the standard by how staff talks about what is done.
- “*Document It*” means that there is written documentation that supports the project’s compliance with each standard. Written documentation could include Policies and Procedures, Personnel Handbooks, Professional Development Plans, Project Rules, etc.
- “*Do It*” means that the assessor was able to find evidence that supports the project’s compliance with each standard. Evidence could include information contained in client or other administrative files, client acknowledgement that something is being done, staff can point to documentation that supports

**Assessor Notes:** A cell below each individual standard allows the assessor to add optional notes about the information collected for that particular standard. The notes can include where information was found, what questions were asked, who answered the questions, what additional information is needed to be able to mark that standard as

| Tab                             | Description   | Purpose  |
|---------------------------------|---|--|
| Instructions                    | Tool overview and aim   | Offers instruction to users on the assessment tool   |
| Provider Info                   | Input provider, project and general assessment information  | Determines project-specific standards for consideration                                      |
| Standards - Access & Evaluation | Input compliance with standards concerning participant access to the project and input, project evaluation and performance management | Assesses whether access and evaluation are compliant with Housing First principles           |
| Standards - Leases              | Input compliance with standards concerning the lease and occupancy agreements, where applicable                                       | Assesses whether leases and occupancy agreements are compliant with Housing First principles |
| Standards - Services & Housing  | Input compliance with standards concerning the service and housing models and structure, where applicable                             | Assesses whether services and housing are compliant with Housing First principles            |
| Standards – Project-Specific    | Prompts assessment standards based on project type and targeted sub-populations served by the project, where applicable               | Assesses whether specific project standards are compliant with Housing First principles      |
| Report Summary                  | Displays assessment scores and conclusions, and highlights non-compliant standards  | Printable summary of the assessment  |



**Provider Information**

Please complete the information below on the organization being assessed.

| Provider Information         |                        |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Provider's Legal Name</b> | <b>[Test Provider]</b> |
| Acronym (If Applicable)      | _____                  |
| Year Incorporated            | _____                  |
| EIN                          | _____                  |
| Street Address               | _____                  |
| Zip Code                     | _____                  |

| Project Information   |   |
|---|---|
| Project Name  | _____   |
| Project Budget  | _____   |
| Grant Number  | _____   |
| Name of Project Director  | _____   |
| Project Director Email Address  | _____   |
| Project Director Phone Number   | _____   |
| <b>Which best describes the project *</b>   | <b>Joint Transitional Housing &amp; Rapid Rehousing</b> |
| <i>If project is a Safe Haven, please choose project type that it most operates like, e.g. shelter, transitional housing, or permanent housing</i>      |   |
| <b>Are your services targeted to any of the following populations specifically? Please select one if so, as this impacts your assessment questions.</b> | <b>People in Recovery</b>                               |

\*Please note that when you select a project type, particular standards may not be relevant.

| Management Information                  |       |
|---|-------|
| Name of CEO                             | _____ |
| CEO Email Address                       | _____ |
| CEO Phone Number                        | _____ |
| Name of Staff Member Guiding Assessment | _____ |
| Staff Email Address                     | _____ |
| Staff Phone Number                      | _____ |

| Assessment Information                 |                    |
|--|--------------------|
| Name of Assessor                       | _____              |
| Organizational Affiliation of Assessor | _____              |
| Assessor Email Address                 | _____              |
| Assessor Phone Number                  | _____              |
| <b>Date of Assessment</b>              | <b>Nov 02 2016</b> |



## Housing First Standards

For each standard, please use the drop down boxes in the three columns to the right to select "Not at all" or "Sometimes" or "Always". Marking "Always" signifies full compliance for the standard.

| No.      | Standard  | Access Definition / Evidence   | Say It               | Document it          | Do it                |
|----------|---|--|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Access 1 | Projects are low-barrier  | <p>Admission to projects is not contingent on pre-requisites such as abstinence of substances, minimum income requirements, health or mental health history, medication adherence, age, criminal justice history, financial history, completion of treatment, participation in services, "housing readiness," history or occurrence of victimization, survivor of sexual assault or an affiliated person of such a survivor or other unnecessary conditions unless required by law or funding source.</p> <p><i>Optional notes here</i></p>  | Please select answer | Please select answer | Please select answer |
| Access 2 | Projects do not deny assistance for unnecessary reasons                     | <p>Procedures and oversight demonstrate that staff do everything possible to avoid denying assistance or rejecting an individual or family for the reasons listed in Access Standard #1.</p> <p><i>Optional notes here</i></p>   | Please select answer | Please select answer | Please select answer |
| Access 3 | Access regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status | <p>Equal access is provided in accordance with the 2012 and 2016 Equal Access Rules, meaning that any project funded by HUD must ensure equal access for persons regardless of one's sexual orientation or marital status, and in accordance with one's gender identity. Adult only households, regardless of marital status, should have equal access to projects (if these project types are not available within a CoC, the CoC should conduct an assessment to determine if these project types are needed and work with providers to accommodate the need). Please see Equal Access Rules here: <a href="https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/1991/equal-access-to-housing-final-rule/">https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/1991/equal-access-to-housing-final-rule/</a></p> <p><i>Optional notes here</i></p> | Please select answer | Please select answer | Please select answer |
| Access 4 | Admission process is expedited with speed and efficiency                    | <p>Projects have expedited admission processes, to the greatest extent possible, including helping participants obtain documentation required by funding sources, as well as processes to admit participants regardless of the status of their eligibility documentation whenever applicable.</p> <p><i>Optional notes here</i></p>  | Please select answer | Please select answer | Please select answer |

| Access 5            | Intake processes are person-centered and flexible                                   | Intake and assessment procedures are focused on the individual's or family's strengths, needs, and preferences. Projects do not require specific appointment times, but have flexible intake schedules that ensure access to all households. Assessments are focused on identifying household strengths, resources, as well as identifying barriers to housing that can inform the basis of a housing plan as soon as a person is enrolled in the project.<br><br><i>Optional notes here</i>  | Please select answer | Please select answer | Please select answer |
|---------------------|---|---|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Access 6            | The provider/project accepts and makes referrals directly through Coordinated Entry | Projects actively participate in the CoC-designated Coordinated Entry processes as part of streamlined community-wide system access and triage. If these processes are not yet implemented, projects follow communities' existing referral processes. Referrals from Coordinated Entry are rarely rejected, and only if there is a history of violence, the participant does not want to be in the project, there are legally valid grounds (such as restrictions regarding sex offenders) or some other exceptional circumstance that is well documented.<br><br><i>Optional notes here</i>        | Please select answer | Please select answer | Please select answer |
| Access 7            | Exits to homelessness are avoided   | Projects that can no longer serve particular households utilize the coordinated entry process, or the communities' existing referral processes if coordinated entry processes are not yet implemented, to ensure that those individuals and families have access to other housing and services as desired, and do not become disconnected from services and housing. Households encounter these exits under certain circumstances, such as if they demonstrate violent or harassing behaviors, which are described within agencies' regulation-adherent policies.<br><br><i>Optional notes here</i> | Please select answer | Please select answer | Please select answer |
| Name                |   | Participant Input Definition / Evidence   | Say It               | Document it          | Do it                |
| Participant Input 1 | Participant education is ongoing  | Project participants receive ongoing education on Housing First principles as well as other service models employed in the project. In the beginning of and throughout tenancy, participants are informed about their full rights and responsibilities as lease holders, including the potential causes for eviction.<br><br><i>Optional notes here</i>   | Please select answer | Please select answer | Please select answer |
| Participant Input 2 | Projects create regular, formal opportunities for participants to offer input       | Input is welcomed regarding the project's policies, processes, procedures, and practices. Opportunities include involvement in: quality assurance and evaluation processes, a participant leadership/advisory board, processes to formally communicate with landlords, the design of and participation in surveys and focus groups, planning social gatherings, integrating peer specialists and peer-facilitated support groups to compliment professional services.<br><br><i>Optional notes here</i>   | Please select answer | Please select answer | Please select answer |



## Housing First Standards

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|          | Standard  | Lease and Occupancy Definition / Evidence   | Say It               | Document It          | Do It                |
|----------|---|---|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Leases 1 | Housing is considered permanent (not applicable for Transitional Housing)     | Housing is not time-limited (though rent assistance may be) and leases are automatically renewable upon expiration, except with prior notice by either party.<br><br><i>Optional notes here</i>   | Please select answer | Please select answer | Please select answer |
| Leases 2 | Participant choice is fundamental   | A participant has, at minimum, choices in deciding the location and type of housing based on preferences from a range of housing types and among multiple units, as available and as practical. In project-based settings, participants should be offered choice of units within a particular building, or within the portfolio of single site properties. In projects that use shared housing, i.e. housing with unrelated roommates, participants should be offered choice of roommates, as available and as practical. Additionally, as applicable, participants are able to choose their roommates when sharing a room or unit.<br><br><i>Optional notes here</i> | Please select answer | Please select answer | Please select answer |
| Leases 3 | Leases are the same for participants as for other tenants                     | Leases do not have any provisions that would not be found in leases held by any other tenant in the property or building and is renewable per the participants’ and owner’s choice. People experiencing homelessness who receive help moving into permanent housing should have leases that confer the full rights, responsibilities, and legal protections under Federal, state, and local housing laws. For transitional housing, there may be limitations on length of stay, but a lease/occupancy agreement should look like a lease that a person would have in the normal rental market.<br><br><i>Optional notes here</i>                                      | Please select answer | Please select answer | Please select answer |
| Leases 4 | Participants receive education about their lease or occupancy agreement terms | Participants are also given access to legal assistance and encouraged to exercise their full legal rights and responsibilities. Landlords and providers abide by their legally-defined roles and responsibilities.<br><br><i>Optional notes here</i>  | Please select answer | Please select answer | Please select answer |

|          |   |  |                      |                      |                      |
|----------|---|--|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Leases 5 | Measures are used to prevent eviction                           | <p>Property or building management, with services support, incorporates a culture of eviction avoidance, reinforced through practices and policies that prevent lease violations and evictions among participants, and evict participants only when they are a threat to self or others. Clear eviction appeal processes and due process is provided for all participants. Lease bifurcation is allowed so that a tenant or lawful occupant who is a victim of a criminal act of physical violence committed against them by another tenant or lawful occupant is not evicted, removed or penalized if the other is evicted.</p> <p><i>Optional notes here</i></p> | Please select answer | Please select answer | Please select answer |
| Leases 6 | Providing stable housing is a priority                          | <p>Providers engage in a continued effort to hold housing for participants, even if they leave their housing for short periods due to treatment, illness, or any other temporary stay outside of the unit.</p> <p><i>Optional notes here</i></p>   | Please select answer | Please select answer | Please select answer |
| Leases 7 | Rent payment policies respond to tenants' needs (as applicable) | <p>While tenants are accountable to the rental agreement, adjustments may be needed on a case by case basis. As necessary, participants are given special payment arrangements for rent arrears and/or assistance with financial management, including representative payee arrangements.</p> <p><i>Optional notes here</i></p>  | Please select answer | Please select answer | Please select answer |



## Housing First Standards

For each standard, please use the drop down boxes in the three columns to the right to select "Not at all" or "Sometimes" or "Always". Marking "Always" signifies full compliance for the standard.

|            | Standard  | Services Definition / Evidence  | Say it               | Document it          | Do it                |
|------------|---|---|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Services 1 | Projects promote participant choice in services                                 | <p>Participants are able to choose from an array of services. Services offered are housing focused and include the following areas of support: employment and income, childhood and education, community connection, and stabilization to maintain housing. These should be provided by linking to community-based services.</p> <p><i>Optional notes here</i></p>  | Please select answer | Please select answer | Please select answer |
| Services 2 | Person Centered Planning is a guiding principle of the service planning process | <p>Person-centered Planning is a guiding principle of the service planning process</p> <p><i>Optional notes here</i></p>  | Please select answer | Please select answer | Please select answer |
| Services 3 | Service support is as permanent as the housing                                  | <p>Service connections are permanently available and accessible for participants in Permanent Supportive Housing. Rapid Re-Housing projects should, at a minimum, be prepared to offer services for up to 6 months after the rental assistance ends. In emergency shelter and transitional housing, services are available as long as the participant resides in the unit or bed – and up to 6 months following exit from transitional housing.</p> <p><i>Optional notes here</i></p> | Please select answer | Please select answer | Please select answer |
| Services 4 | Services are continued despite change in housing status or placement            | <p>Wherever possible, participants continue to be offered services even if they lose their housing unit or bed (for congregate projects), or if they are placed in a short-term inpatient treatment. Ideally, the service relationship should continue, despite a service hiatus during some institutional stays.</p> <p><i>Optional notes here</i></p>   | Please select answer | Please select answer | Please select answer |



*Optional notes here*

Housing 3

The rules and regulations of the project are centered on participants' rights

Project staff have realistic expectations and policies. Rules and regulations are designed to support safe and stable communities and should never interfere with a life in the community. Participants have access to the project at all hours (except for nightly in and out shelter) and accommodation is made for pets.

Please select answer

Please select answer

Please select answer

*Optional notes here*

Housing 4

Participants have the option to transfer to another project

Transfers should be accommodated for tenants who reasonably believe that they are threatened with imminent harm from further violence if the tenant remains in the same unit. Whenever possible, transfers occur before a participant experiences homelessness.

Please select answer

Please select answer

Please select answer

*Optional notes here*



## Housing First Standards

For each standard, please use the drop down boxes in the three columns to the right to select “Not at all” or “Sometimes” or “Always”. Marking “Always” signifies full compliance for the standard.

|           | Standard   | Project -Specific Standards   | Say It               | Document it          | Do it                |
|-----------|--|---|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Project 1 | Quick access to RRH assistance   | A Rapid Re-housing project ensures quick linkage to rapid re-housing assistance, based on participant choice.<br><br><i>Optional notes here</i>   | Please select answer | Please select answer | Please select answer |
| Project 2 | RRH services support people in maintaining their housing                           | Participants and staff understand that a primary goal of rapid re-housing is to end homelessness and move participants to permanent housing as quickly as possible, regardless of perceived barriers.<br><br><i>Optional notes here</i>   | Please select answer | Please select answer | Please select answer |
| Project 3 | Providers continuously assess a participant’s need for assistance                  | On an ongoing basis, providers assess a participant’s needs for continued assistance and provide tailored assistance based on those assessments.<br><br><i>Optional notes here</i>  | Please select answer | Please select answer | Please select answer |
| Project 4 | Transitional housing is focused on safe and quick transitions to permanent housing | Participants and staff understand that the primary goals of transitional housing are to provide temporary accommodations that are safe, respectful, and responsive to individual needs, address the services needs of participants, and re-house participants in permanent housing as quickly as possible, regardless of other personal issues or concerns, and as desired by the participant. Participation in transitional housing services does not inhibit participants from moving to permanent housing when they choose to. Assessment and planning for permanent housing placement begins as soon as the individual or family expresses a desire to transition to permanent housing.<br><br><i>Optional notes here</i> | Please select answer | Please select answer | Please select answer |

|              |   |  |                      |                      |                      |
|--------------|---|--|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Project 5    | TH projects provide appropriate services                                    | <p>TH projects provide appropriate services to meet the participants health and safety needs (e.g., persons in early recovery; domestic violence survivors; those who need special accommodations) when there are no permanent housing solutions available (with or without supportive services) or when the participant chooses transitional housing. Services are not required in order to participate in housing.</p> <p><i>Optional notes here</i></p> | Please select answer | Please select answer | Please select answer |
|              |   | <p>No additional standards</p> <p><i>Optional notes here</i></p>   |                      |                      |                      |
|              |   | <p>No additional standards</p> <p><i>Optional notes here</i></p>   |                      |                      |                      |
|              |   | <p>No additional standards</p> <p><i>Optional notes here</i></p>   |                      |                      |                      |
|              | <b>Standard</b>   | <b>Population Specific Standards</b>   | <b>Say It</b>        | <b>Document It</b>   | <b>Do It</b>         |
| Population 1 | Recovery housing is offered as one choice among other housing opportunities | <p>Connection to recovery housing reflects individual choice for this path toward recovery. Abstinence-only spaces are incorporated into a Housing First model wherever possible, thus providing this type of recovery option to those who choose it. Recovery supports are offered, particularly connections to community-based treatment options.</p>  | Please select answer | Please select answer | Please select answer |

*Optional notes here*

Population 2

Services include relapse support

Housing and services include relapse support that does not automatically evict or discharge a participant from the project for temporary relapse. Relapse support might include referrals to outpatient treatment or direct provision of outpatient services or the ability to hold a unit for a certain period of time (30-90 days) while the participant undergoes residential treatment.

Please select  
answer

Please select  
answer

Please select  
answer

*Optional notes here*

Population 3

Services support sustained  
recovery

Recovery housing projects provide services that align with participants' choice and prioritization of recovery, including but not limited to abstinence from substances (if that is a personal goal), long-term permanent housing stability, and stable income through employment or benefits. Support is offered through connections to community-based treatment options.

Please select  
answer

Please select  
answer

Please select  
answer

*Optional notes here*

Population 4

Population

No additional standards

*Optional notes here*



# Housing First Standards: Assessment Summary

[Test Provider]  
2-Nov-16

Some standards have not been evaluated. Please return and complete all standards before finalizing report.

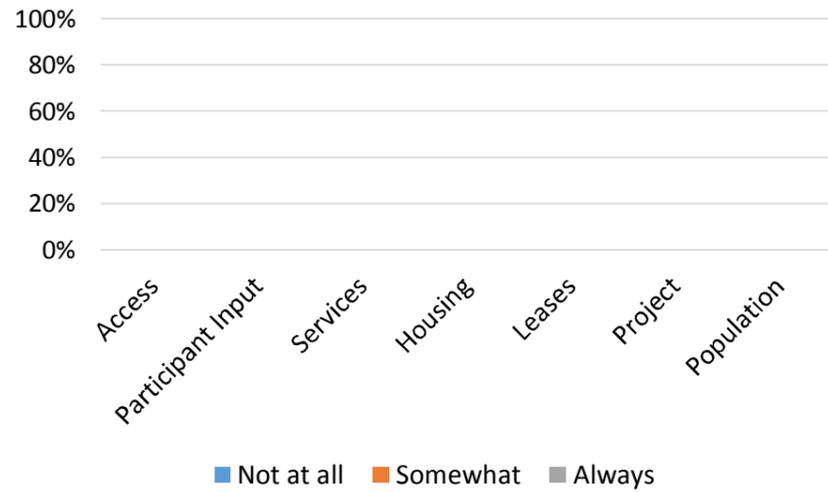
Your score: **0**

Max potential score: 216

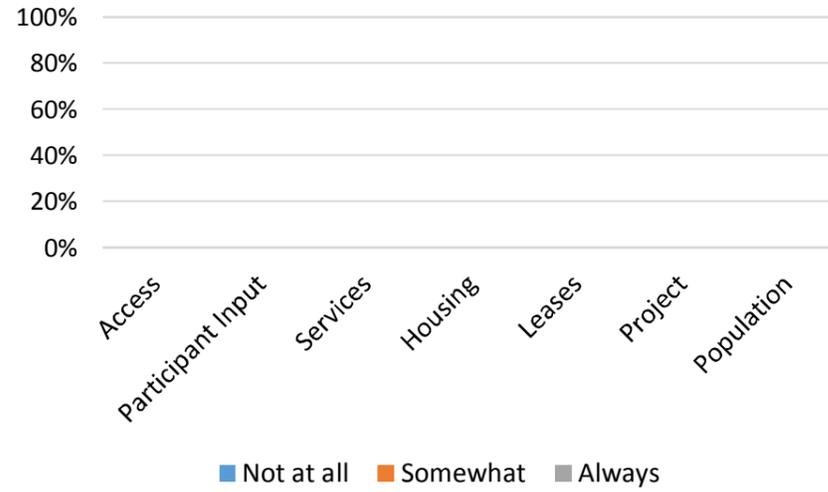
Score is calculated by awarding 1 point for standards answered 'sometimes' and 2 points for standards answered 'always'. Categories that are not applicable for your project are not included in the maximum potential score.



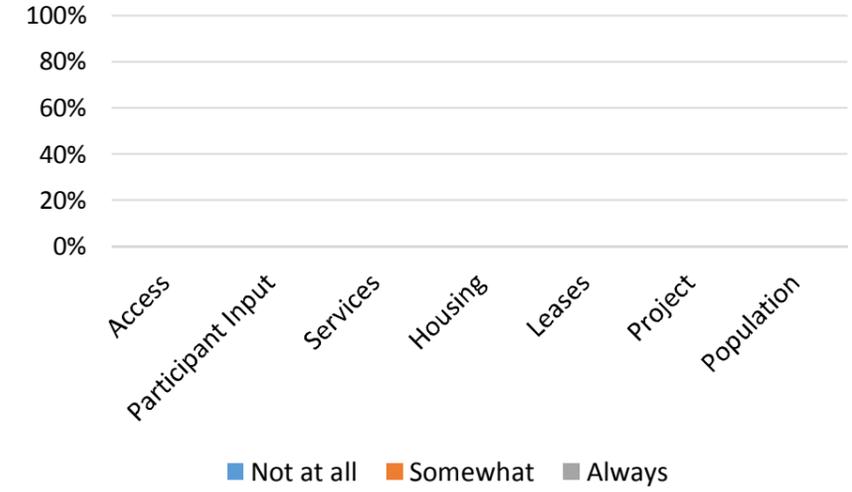
### Percentage of Standards "Said"



### Percentage of Standards "Documented"



### Percentage of Standards "Done"



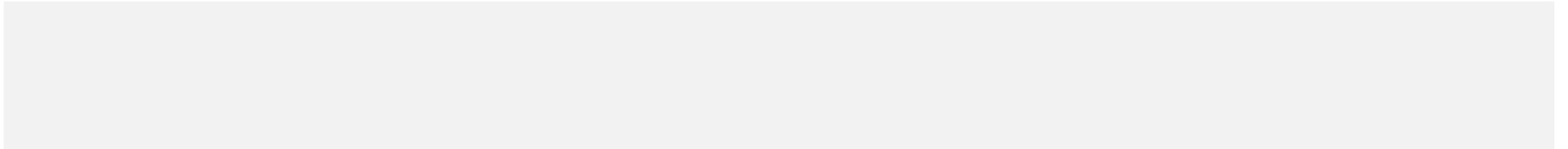
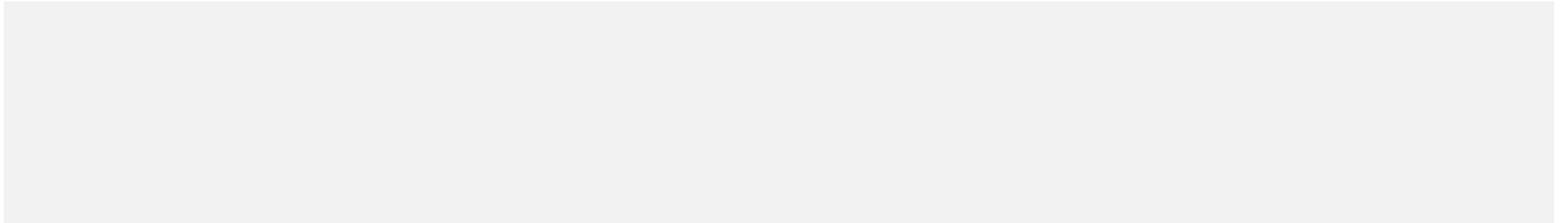
**Non-Compliant Standards ("Not at all" to Whether Standard is Said)**

*Category*

*No.*

*Name*

*Standard*





## Homelessness Prevention, Diversion, and Rapid Exit

*Home, Together*, the federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness in America, recognizes that to end homelessness, every community must have in place a systemic response that ensures that homelessness is a rare, brief, and a one-time experience.

In their efforts to develop effective systems, communities are increasingly focused on implementing stronger homelessness prevention and diversion efforts. And they are exploring ways to create more rapid exits out of homelessness through a housing problem-solving approach that doesn't depend upon dedicated permanent housing resources or subsidies. But there is often a lack of clarity about what these terms mean, how these strategies differ from one another, and the most important considerations for implementing these strategies.

This document, which was developed collaboratively by the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Department of Veterans Affairs, is intended to support more effective implementation of prevention, diversion, and rapid exit services. We recognize that federal resources may be limited for traditional homelessness prevention services, but that diversion and rapid exit are more targeted efforts that offer the potential to significantly reduce inflows and demand for limited housing resources available through the crisis response system. Diversion and rapid exit options should be offered to all those who contact coordinated entry systems.

### Distinctions in Terms: Agreeing on a Common Language

We believe greater clarity about terminology will be helpful for several reasons. A common language is necessary for effective communication among community partners and stakeholders, as well as across communities. Agreed upon terminology also helps move us forward as we discuss the scale and sources of funding needed for the various activities and stages of the process. Finally, a common language helps foster consistency and effectiveness in our work, and a shared approach to measuring that effectiveness.

We recognize that drawing clear lines between these terms can seem somewhat artificial because there are specific situations that may strain the distinctions. After all, each of these interventions is for individuals and families who are facing housing crises and need help to solve that crisis quickly. And the strategies highlighted here are not standalone programs; it is not in the best interests of the person at risk or experiencing homelessness to be shuffled from one "program" to the next in short order. Instead, these strategies should be considered different elements of a unified, seamless approach to help the household avoid homelessness or exit as quickly as possible—even when they may not be prioritized for higher levels of financial assistance and support services.

In practice, there is much overlap between these approaches. All may include a combination of financial assistance, mediation with landlords, legal services, employment services, and other supports. Strong identification efforts through the implementation of housing stability assessments are important tools to effectively identify the most at-risk households, connect them to the resources that will best respond to their housing crisis, and avert homelessness.

Of course, the same household may move through more than one of the strategies as we have described them below. For example, consistent with the progressive engagement approach, if initial diversion attempts are unsuccessful, the most appropriate place to stay may very well be in the emergency shelter; continuing housing-focused services will then be aimed at helping the household exit rapidly from the shelter; however, if additional barriers and vulnerabilities are identified through continuing engagement, rapid re-housing may ultimately be the appropriate intervention for that household. With this approach, there should be no point at which attempts at quick resolution of the housing crisis cease, regardless of where the person is staying or how much financial assistance might be available to them.

With those considerations in mind, below we define the terms homelessness prevention, diversion, and rapid exit, including indicating when such services are provided, and offer some considerations for effective implementation.

## Homelessness Prevention

**Homelessness prevention strategies represent a wide array of efforts to prevent housing crises from occurring and to prevent people who face such crises from experiencing homelessness. Prevention strategies are described in *Home, Together* as falling into the following categories:**

- 1. Activities that reduce the prevalence of risk of housing crises within communities;**
- 2. Activities that reduce the risk of homelessness while households are engaged with or are transitioning from systems; and**
- 3. Activities that target assistance to prevent housing crises that do occur from escalating further and resulting in homelessness.**

### Important Considerations and Practices

Homelessness prevention activities across the three categories described above are not the responsibility of the homelessness services system alone. Rather, homelessness prevention requires a multi-sector approach and an active focus on reducing the prevalence of housing crises.

In the first category of prevention, we recognize that housing crises can be reduced systemically when multiple sectors focus on big picture goals: (1) ensuring an adequate supply of affordable housing; (2) addressing systemic racial inequities; (3) improving education and meaningful and gainful employment; and (4) ensuring access to affordable child care, legal assistance, and physical and behavioral health care. While these multisector strategies may be less often framed as homelessness prevention, they can have the greatest impact on preventing homelessness.

In the second category, homelessness can be prevented through enhanced cross-system collaboration, including systems such as health care, child welfare, and corrections. Such collaboration includes increased awareness and attentiveness to housing stability, as well as effective transition and/or discharge planning. In this category,

systems must ensure that individuals are linked effectively to mainstream resources, including employment and health care, to reduce the risk of homelessness upon discharge or following the end of service provision.

Finally, in the third category of prevention, assistance helps prevent housing crises that do occur from escalating further and resulting in homelessness. In most communities, this assistance is provided through mainstream systems and/or through the homelessness services system. Prevention services in this category often include a combination of financial assistance, mediation with landlords, legal services, and other supports. When multiple systems provide prevention assistance, it is critical that they be coordinated and utilizing common assessment tools to identify and assist those at the greatest risk of homelessness.

## **Diversion**

**Diversion strategies and practices assist people to resolve their immediate housing crisis by accessing alternatives to entering emergency shelter or the experience of unsheltered living. This typically occurs at the point people request emergency services, such as entry into emergency shelter, or could take place in a day center or through outreach before a person spends a night unsheltered.**

### **Important Considerations and Practices**

Diversion occurs at a “front door” of the homelessness service system (e.g., coordinated entry access point, services center, emergency shelter) but before the person spends a night at a shelter, in a motel with a voucher, in a place not meant for human habitation, or unsheltered. In diversion, there is a focused conversation aimed at helping the person identify an immediate housing arrangement that is a safe alternative to shelter or sleeping unsheltered. This housing arrangement may be temporary, allowing time to identify a permanent housing option while avoiding the immediate trauma of homelessness, or it may allow those involved to explore the possibility of extending a temporary arrangement into a permanent one.

Approaching diversion from a client-centered service perspective is critical. Diversion is not a process of turning people away or declining to provide needed services. Rather, diversion offers a valuable service that helps people avoid the experience of being in shelter or unsheltered. Integrating diversion practices into the system helps ensure that scarce resources are better utilized. More importantly, good diversion processes focus on serving the household in crisis by helping them find positive alternatives to entering the shelter system or staying outdoors.

As with prevention, diversion assistance may be limited to services alone, such as conflict resolution or help connecting with family or friends. Alternatively, diversion may combine services with financial assistance, which may take a variety of forms, such as a bus pass to stay with a family member, assistance with past-due rent, or a grocery gift card for the friend with whom the person has been staying. Effective diversion involves keen active listening skills, understanding and access to community-based resources, and flexibility.

### **Rapid Resolution**

The VA’s Supportive Services for Veteran Families program may provide rapid resolution assistance for Veterans. This approach emphasizes the use of services, problem-solving conversations, and financial assistance to help households be diverted from homelessness or rapidly exit homelessness. Rapid resolution, then, encompasses both diversion and rapid exit as we have defined those terms here.

## Rapid Exit

**Rapid exit strategies are appropriate after a household has entered emergency shelter or stayed in an unsheltered setting, and serves to help them move as quickly as possible back into housing with the support of services and a minimal level of financial assistance.**

### Important Considerations and Practices

Rapid exit interventions are provided to a household as soon as possible after the household enters a shelter, a transitional housing program, or an unsheltered setting. A focus on rapid exit approaches is built upon the recognition that many people who experience homelessness can effectively resolve their own homelessness independently or with very limited help. By utilizing strengths-based, housing-focused case management, rapid exits can be facilitated for households that would not likely be prioritized for a housing intervention such as rapid re-housing or supportive housing, both of which involve deeper and longer-term rent assistance.

Rapid exit approaches often take the form of housing-focused services intended to help the person identify ways to exit homelessness quickly and, when possible, without utilizing homelessness-dedicated resources. Even when the exit does not occur quickly, attempts at resolving a person's housing crisis with housing-focused services should continue. And, because rapid exit depends primarily on case management skills, it is critical to invest in training that equips staff to provide effective light touch services and implement progressive engagement with all those in shelters and other temporary programs and through outreach. Depending on the community and funding streams, limited short-term financial assistance may also be used, when necessary, to facilitate returns to housing.

## Conclusion

By integrating effective homelessness prevention, diversion, and rapid exit approaches into systems, our focus is on providing assistance earlier in a household's housing crisis. It is the goal of these approaches to lessen trauma, identify and create new pathways to housing, reduce isolation, preserve scarce housing resources, and empower households to be partners in their housing plans. Implementing these strategies can best be achieved with clarity regarding terminology, timing, and the nature of the activities and services provided. This in turn reduces the prevalence of homelessness, the length of episodes of homelessness, and trauma, all of which better serve people facing housing crises.

Because these interventions better serve households in crisis, they also improve system effectiveness by reducing inflow and expediting outflow. With system-wide prevention, diversion, and rapid exit approaches, communities will see improvements in their system performance measures – shorter lengths of time people experience homelessness, reduced numbers of households experiencing homelessness for the first time, and fewer households returning to the system.



## National Alliance to End Homelessness

July 22-24, 2019

*Fred Gigliotti M.S.W.,  
Director of Emergency and  
Temporary Housing, Office  
of Homeless Services,  
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# Lower Barriers Does Not Mean Lower Expectations: Engaging People in New Ways in Emergency Shelter

- **The Philadelphia Office of Homeless Services is the government agency tasked to make homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring in Philadelphia**
- **30 year round shelters for individuals and families experiencing homelessness with a total capacity of nearly 2,800 beds**
- **Homeless Intake Access Points which sees more than 20,000 people a year, diverting nearly half from shelter entry**
- **Financial Assistance (Prevention) to more than 1,000 households in to prevent homelessness**
- **Expanded capacity in winter months**



# Conversion to Low Barrier

- **Housing First approach identified as the model which was HUD driven**
- **Culture change starting from OHS driving the new direction**
- **Housing First/Housing Focused Trainings offered to shelter providers**
- **Revised Emergency Shelter Standards moving from punitive to empowering**
- **Emphasis on philosophical shift that we no longer should police behavior**
- **OHS Shelter Director visited every shelter to communicate changes to both staff and participants**



# Creating a set of Expectations

- **Honest exploratory conversations upon first meeting with Case Manager**
- **Continued attempts to divert or prevent further homelessness once sheltered including one-time rental assistance if the participant identifies a place to live**
- **Rapport building: Empower people using techniques from motivational interviewing**
- **Create a tangible sense of urgency particularly for participants with low vulnerability**
- **Participants Rights and Expectations: Develop a Housing Plan/Housing Agreement**
- **Low Vulnerability Pilot: 20% of shelter participants score in low vulnerability range**



# Transition with Purpose to Low Barrier Services

- Evaluate and eliminate shelter rules that do not have a health and safety concern
  - This eliminates “power and control” tension between staff and participants
  - If you cannot explain the “why” of a rule with a straight face, it probably should not be a rule
  - Ask participants their experience with housing before entering shelter, including past scenarios
  - Tailor the housing plan to the reason for homelessness. Eviction history vs family discord creates a different housing plan. Keep conversations real, no judgement on what happened that led to the experience of homelessness
- 



# Emergency Housing Standards: The Guiding Document

- **Guiding Principles: Housing First, Housing Focused, Prioritization based on vulnerability, Person Centered, Strength Based**
- **Shelter Rules and Policies must not be punitive, restrictive, or designed to control behavior**
- **Participants Rights are emphasized**
- **Included is the right to be informed of the consequences of threats to health and safety**
- **The right to appeal a shelter's decision of Health and Safety Exit to OHS**



# Shelter is a Process not a Destination

- **Be consistent, fully transparent and honest**
- **Set reasonable expectations from the start**
- **Subsidized Housing is not guaranteed nor an expectation**
- **Be creative (shared housing, affordable housing in other communities)**
- **Encourage savings by messaging that saving money while in shelter is investing in themselves**
- **Re-focus on the “business” of personal finance and housing, instead of the “behavior” of participants**
- **Remember that most participants can be successful with a light touch of service, save the resources for the most vulnerable in your communities**



# Spring Point in Time Data

- **Street Count Spring 2019: 828**
- **Street Count Spring 2018: 895**
- **Singles in shelter Spring 2019: 1301**
- **Singles in Shelter Spring 2018: 1113**
- **Family Members in Shelter Spring 2019: 1262**
- **Family Members in Shelter Spring 2018: 1379**
- **OHS increased resources for singles to assist in reducing the number of people on the street, which was largely driven by the City's Opioid Crisis**

# For more information:

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# THE FIVE KEYS TO EFFECTIVE EMERGENCY SHELTER



## HOUSING FIRST APPROACH

Align shelter eligibility criteria, policies, and practices with a Housing First approach so that anyone experiencing homelessness can access shelter without prerequisites, make services voluntary, and assist people to access permanent housing options as quickly as possible.



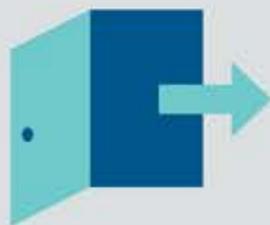
## SAFE & APPROPRIATE DIVERSION

Provide diversion services to find safe and appropriate housing alternatives to entering shelter through problem-solving conversations, identifying community supports, and offering lighter touch solutions.



## IMMEDIATE & LOW-BARRIER ACCESS

Ensure immediate and easy access to shelter by lowering barriers to entry and staying open 24/7. Eliminate sobriety and income requirements and other policies that make it difficult to enter shelter, stay in shelter, or access housing and income opportunities.



## HOUSING-FOCUSED, RAPID EXIT SERVICES

Focus services in shelter on assisting people to access permanent housing options as quickly as possible.



## DATA TO MEASURE PERFORMANCE

Measure data on percentage of exits to housing, average length of stay in shelter, and returns to homelessness to evaluate the effectiveness of shelter and improve outcomes.