



# CONTINUUM OF CARE WRITTEN STANDARDS REVISED MAY 2019

## PREAMBLE

The Continuum of Care (CoC) is responsible for coordinating and implementing a system to meet the needs of the population and subpopulations experiencing homelessness within the geographic coverage area of MS Balance of State ([see link for coverage map](#)). Both the Emergency Solution Grant Rules and Regulations (ESG) and the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Continuum of Care Program Interim Rules state that the Continuum of Care (CoC), in consultation with recipients of Emergency Solutions Grants program funds within the geographic area, (1) establish and consistently follow written standards for providing Continuum of Care assistance, (2) establish performance targets appropriate for population and program type, and (3) monitor recipient and sub-recipient performance.

All programs that receive ESG or CoC funding are required to abide by these written standards. The CoC strongly encourages programs that do not receive either of these sources of funds to accept and utilize these written standards.

The written standards have been established to ensure that persons experiencing homelessness who enter programs throughout the CoC will be given similar information and support to access and maintain permanent housing.

The majority of these standards are based on the ESG and/or the HEARTH Interim Rules. There are some additional standards that have been established by the CoC that will assist programs in meeting and exceeding performance outcomes that will help the CoC reach the goal of ending homelessness.

The Continuum of Care Written Standards will:

- Assist with the coordination of service delivery across the geographic area and will be the foundation of the coordinated entry system
- Assist in assessing individuals and families consistently to determine program eligibility
- Assist in administering programs fairly and methodically
- Establish common performance measurements for all CoC components.
- Provide the basis for the monitoring of all CoC and ESG funded projects

These written standards have been developed in conjunction with ESG recipients, the CoC Collaborative Applicant and with service providers to allow for input on standards, performance measures and the process for full implementation of the standards throughout the CoC from the perspective of those organizations that are directly providing homeless housing and services, Emergency Shelter (ES), Transitional Housing (TH), Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH), Rapid Re-Housing (RRH) and Supportive Service Only (SSO).

The CoC's agenda was to do as follows:

- Review of the standards required by regulation
- Entry criteria based on the level of support services provided by each component
- Common or local performance measures in addition to HUD benchmarks already determined

The CoC, the Collaborative Applicant, the MS BoS ESG recipients and providers have approved the CoC Written Standards. The Written Standards will be reviewed and revised as needed at a minimum of once per year. Revisions that would affect the Coordinated Entry process would be made as soon as possible. Agreement to abide by the Written Standards will be a condition of being moved forward for CoC or ESG funding.

## **PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS FOR ALL PROGRAMS**

- Programs must coordinate with other targeted homeless services within the CoC
- Programs must coordinate with mainstream resources in the CoC including housing, social services, employment, education and youth programs for which participants may be eligible
- Programs must have written policies and procedures and must consistently apply them to all participants
- Programs that serve households with children:
  - ✓ A staff person must be designated as the educational liaison that will ensure that children are enrolled in school, connected to appropriate services in the community, including early childhood program such as Head Start, Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and the McKinney Vento education services.
  - ✓ The age and gender of a child under age 18 must not be used as a basis for denying any family's admission to a project that provides shelter for families with children
- Programs receiving ESG and CoC funding must participate in HMIS (Homeless Management Information System), however all homeless programs are strongly encouraged to participate in HMIS.
  - ✓ Programs must meet minimum HMIS data quality standards
  - ✓ Programs providing Domestic Violence or Legal Services may opt out of HMIS participation but must utilize a comparable database to collect HUD required data elements
- Programs must conduct an initial evaluation to determine eligibility and the amount and type of assistance needed to regain stability in permanent housing (in the future this will be the role of coordinated entry system)
- Program rules and regulations should be designed in the spirit of inclusion rather than as grounds for denial or termination. Programs should exercise judgment and examine all extenuating circumstances in determining when violations are serious enough to warrant termination so that a program participant's assistance is terminated only in the most severe cases.
- Programs must have a formal procedure for terminating assistance to a participant that recognizes the rights of the participant(s) involved.
  - ✓ Programs must use judgment and examine all extenuating circumstances in determining that a violation should result in termination
  - ✓ Every effort should be made to allow the participant to remain in the program; termination should only be exercised in the most severe cases.
  - ✓ Termination does not necessarily preclude assistance at a future date

- Programs must make known that use of the facilities and services are available to all on a nondiscriminatory basis
- Programs may not engage in inherently religious activities such as worship, religious instruction or proselytization as part of the programs or services funded under the CoC or ESG. These activities can be conducted but must be separate and voluntary for program participants.

## **RECORD KEEPING REQUIREMENTS FOR ALL PROGRAMS**

- Participant Recordkeeping Requirements include:
  - ✓ All records containing personally identifying information must be kept secure and confidential
    - Programs must have written confidentiality/privacy notice a copy of which should be made available to participants if requested
  - ✓ Documentation of homelessness (following HUDs guidelines)
  - ✓ A record of services and assistance provided to each participant
  - ✓ Documentation of any applicable requirements for providing services/assistance
  - ✓ Documentation of use of coordinated assessment system
  - ✓ Documentation of use of HMIS
  - ✓ Records must be retained for the appropriate amount of time as prescribed by HUD
- Financial Recordkeeping Requirements include:
  - ✓ Documentation for all costs charged to the grant
  - ✓ Documentation that funds were spent on allowable costs
  - ✓ Documentation of the receipt and use of program income
  - ✓ Documentation of compliance with expenditure limits and deadlines
  - ✓ Retain copies of all procurement contracts as applicable
  - ✓ Documentation of amount, source and use of resources for each match contribution

## **OCCUPANCY STANDARDS FOR ALL PROGRAMS**

- All housing units, including scattered site programs owned and managed by private landlords, must meet applicable state or local government health and safety codes and have current certificate of occupancy for the current use and meet or exceed the following minimum standards: (For more detail refer to ESG regulations 576.403 (b) Minimum Standards)
  - ✓ Buildings must be structurally sound to protect from the elements and not pose any threat to health and safety of the residents
  - ✓ Must be accessible in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Fair Housing Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act where applicable
  - ✓ Must provide an acceptable place to sleep and adequate space and security for themselves and their belongings
  - ✓ Each room must have a natural or mechanical means of ventilation
  - ✓ Must provide access to sanitary facilities that are in operating condition, private and clean
  - ✓ Water supply must be free of contamination
  - ✓ Heating/cooling equipment must be in working condition
  - ✓ Must have adequate natural or artificial illumination and adequate electrical resources to permit safe use of electrical appliances

- ✓ Food preparation areas must have suitable space and equipment to store, prepare and serve food in safe and sanitary manner
- ✓ Building must be maintained in a sanitary condition
- ✓ Must be at least one smoke detector in each occupied unit of the program; and where possible near sleeping areas. The fire alarm system must be designed for hearing-impaired participants. There must be a second means of exiting the building in case of fire or other emergency.

The Program, Record Keeping and Occupancy Standards as represented above apply to all programs regardless of the type of services/housing that they provide. Below are the minimum standards that apply to each specific component of the homeless system in addition to the above.

## **EMERGENCY SHELTERS**

### **Emergency Shelter Procedures**

Emergency shelter programs serve various sub-populations: households with children, individuals male or female, unaccompanied youth, and victims of domestic violence. The level of support services available to participants varies greatly from program to program. The length of stay is generally expected to be less than 30 days; extensions may be granted at some shelters if participants are following through with their case plans. Placements can also be made at area hotels/motels if there is no appropriate shelter available.

### **Eligibility Criteria:**

- Participants must meet the HUD definition of homelessness

Currently, each individual shelter/program has its own eligibility criteria. At entry, this may be based on the sub-population served, i.e.–age, gender, family composition, severity of behavioral health issues, etc. Once Coordinated Entry System is established all referrals to shelters and assessment for type and level of services will come through that system.

DV programs will be exempt from participating in the coordinated entry system due to issues of confidentiality and homeless youth (12-18 yrs. of age) could still access shelter through the Runaway & Homeless Youth Shelters.

### **Minimum Standards:**

- Minimum hours of operation 8PM – 7AM
- Staff supervision whether paid or volunteer must be provided during hours of operation of program
- Provide a minimum of one meal per day
- A minimal amount of personal information must be collected to establish a daily client roster to be kept in case of emergency and/or building needs to be evacuated
  - ✓ At intake each participant shall be informed of evacuation procedures.
  - ✓ Maps/diagrams of exits should be prominently placed throughout the facility

## Standard Outcomes

- Average length of stay is less than 35 days
- 50% of participants exit with a successful housing outcome<sup>1</sup> and/or  
30% of participants exit to permanent housing
- Less than 30% of participants exit to an unknown location
- 60% of participants exit with/linked to cash income
- 60% of participants exit with/linked to non-cash resources

## RAPID RE-HOUSING PROGRAMS (RRH)

Rapid Re-Housing Programs (RRH) provide housing relocation and stabilization services and short or medium term rental assistance as needed to help a homeless individual or family move as quickly as possible to permanent housing and achieve stability in that housing.

### Shared Eligibility Criteria:

- Participants must meet the HUD definition of homelessness
  - Individuals and families who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence:
    - An individual or family with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, etc.
    - An individual or family living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state, or local government programs for low income individuals);
    - An individual who is exiting an institution where he or she resided for 90 days or less and who resided in an emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution; or
    - An individual fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence if also literally homeless;
  - Eligible clients must also meet eligibility criteria as defined in the NOFA under which the program was funded.
- Participants must be in an emergency shelter or residing in a place not meant for human habitation
- Participants will generally have a minimum of 4-7 identified barriers to accessing/retaining permanent housing

### Minimum Standards:

- Maximum participation in a rapid rehousing program cannot exceed 24 months
- Services that must be provided include landlord outreach, assessment of housing barriers, financial assistance, and case management

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<sup>1</sup> Successful housing outcome for Emergency Shelter participants could be permanent housing or transitional housing for former homeless persons; living with family or friend as permanent tenure; owned or rental by client with or without subsidy; psychiatric facility; substance abuse or detox facility.

- Support services must be provided throughout the duration of stay in housing
- Assessment is done to determine if household can be stabilized with RRH funds
- No income limits for households
- The household being served directly into a community-based unit it will retain after the program ends
- Service Plans for program participants are individualized based on their needs and on helping households find and keep housing. This typically includes landlord outreach and help with the process of housing search
- Other types of supportive services may be provided as needed by links to mainstream programs or partner agencies
- Short-term financial assistance, up to 3 months, is provided to support housing. The amount of monthly assistance is flexible.
- Case management will be provided during three months of assistance
- Reassessment at 3 months to determine area median income (AMI) at 30% or higher

### **Short Term Rapid Rehousing Assistance**

#### **Eligible Costs for Short Term RRH:**

CoC funds can be used to pay housing owners, utility companies, and other third parties for the following costs:

- Rental application fees that are charged by the owner to all applicants.
- Security deposits that are equal to no more than two (2) months' rent.
- Last months' rent if it is necessary to obtain housing for a program participant. The last months' rent may be paid to the housing owner at the time the owner is paid the security deposit and the first months' rent.
- Prior rental arrears may be paid to a previous landlord if the arrears negatively impact the program participants' ability to get new housing. In order to pay this service, the old lease must be provided and the affidavit of arrears must be completed and signed by the prior landlord.
- Utility deposits as required by the utility company for all customers. The only eligible utility services are gas, electric, water and sewage.
- Utility payments in arrears may be paid up to three (3) months. Monthly utility payments will not be eligible with CoC funds.
- Moving costs may be paid for truck rental or hiring a moving company. Temporary storage fees for up to three (3) months are allowable provided the fees are accrued after the program participant begins receiving assistance and before he/she moves into permanent housing. Payment of temporary storage fees that are in arrears is not an eligible expense.
- Hotel or motel vouchers may be paid for a homeless family or individual when no

appropriate shelter is available. Hotel or motel stays should be limited to no more than one week.

- Rental assistance or arrears to pay for a lot on which a manufactured home is located.

**Under no circumstances should any funds be paid directly to the program participant.**

### Requirements for Short Term RRH Assistance

The requirement for short- and medium-term rental assistance is that a program participant and a housing owner have a written lease for the provision of rental assistance.

- Short-term rental assistance may be provided for up to three (3) months. Case manager must reassess the program participants' circumstances at least monthly. Case manager must provide reasonable timelines for program participant to submit information necessary to determine program eligibility.
- Payment of rental arrears consists of a one-time payment for up to three (3) months of rent in arrears (delinquent), including any late fees on arrears. Any subsequent payment of late fees will have to be with non-CoC funds.
- **It may be left to the discretion of the sub-recipient of CoC funds to determine the maximum amount of rent to be paid and the duration to be paid, as well as whether the program participant will share in the cost of payments. This will be determined based on the standards created by the sub-recipients and issued through the contract modifications.**
- Program participants who have applied for tenant-based rental assistance (section 8), are eligible for security deposits only. The CoC program will not pay rental arrears on the tenant's portion of the rental payment.
- Rental assistance cannot be provided for a unit that exceeds the Fair Market Rent established by HUD. Rent must be in compliance with HUD standard of rent reasonableness (comparable like units).
- Rental assistance payments may only be paid to the property owner with whom the sub-recipient has entered into a rental assistance agreement. The rental assistance agreement must be very specific and set forth the terms under which the assistance will be provided (i.e., when the assistance begins and ends). The agreement must also provide that during the term of the agreement, the owner must give the program participant a copy of any notice to vacate the housing unit. This shall also include any complaint used under state or local law to commence an eviction action against the program participant.
- Payment of late fees will have to be with non-CoC funds.
- Each program participant must have a legally binding typewritten lease agreement for the rental unit. The lease must be between the property owner or landlord and the program participant (tenant). The lease must be signed by the landlord and the tenant(s). The lease must clearly provide a full and complete address for the rental property. If the lease

agreement is between parent and child, siblings or other relatives, it is invalid, and not reimbursable. If an employee, spouse or other family members of the sub-recipient program has rental property, that employee is not eligible for rental reimbursement through the CoC program. If the property owner is renting a single family unit, the lease must also be typewritten and notarized. Handwritten lease agreements are not acceptable.

### **Mandatory Documentation for Short Term RRH Assistance**

Determination of eligibility of a program participant for CoC financial services must be conducted by the sub-recipient through an initial consultation with a case manager. The case manager should be able to determine the amount and types of assistance the individual or family needs to regain permanent housing stability. These evaluations must be conducted in accordance with a centralized or coordinated assessment system.

The sub-recipient must re-evaluate the program participant's eligibility and the types of assistance needed at least every three (3) months. At a minimum, each re-evaluation must establish that: (a) the program participant does not have an annual income that exceeds thirty percent (30%) of the median family income for the area, as determined by HUD; and (b) the program participant lacks sufficient resources and support networks necessary to retain housing without CoC assistance.

The sub-recipient may also require each program participant receiving homelessness prevention or rapid re-housing assistance to provide notification of changes in income or other circumstances (household composition) that affect the program participant's need for assistance under CoC.

The program participant is required to provide the circumstances that resulted in he/she becoming homeless. A program participant must be able to provide valid documentation for requesting the financial assistance in the form of:

1. **Application.** This document is to be completed by the case manager and signed by the program participant. The case manager must provide complete detail of how the program participant became homeless. All information provided in the application should be certified as true and correct to the best of the parties' knowledge. Any application that is not signed by both the case manager and the program participant is not a valid document. The CoC application is mandatory for all program participants.
2. **Income verification.** HUD defines income as "any money that goes to, or on behalf of, the head of household or spouse (even if temporarily absent) or to any other household member". Annual income includes the current gross income of all adult household members and unearned income attributable to a minor. The types of income to be counted include:
  - ✓ Earned Income
  - ✓ Self Employment/Business Income
  - ✓ Interest & Dividend Income
  - ✓ Pension/Retirement Income
  - ✓ Unemployment & Disability Income
  - ✓ TANF/Public Assistance
  - ✓ Alimony, Child Support and Foster Care Income



✓ Armed Forces Income

Annual income must be calculated through the use of HUDs income calculation worksheet. The case manager must obtain verification of all income reported by the program participant. If program participant has indicated previous employment but is not currently employed the case manager must provide documentation from previous employer or from unemployment compensation. This documentation is mandatory for all program participants and adult household members.

3. **Asset verification.** Assets are defined as cash or material items that can be converted to cash quickly. They include both real and/or personal property and investments that a household may possess, including assets that are owned by more than one person, but allow unrestricted access to the applicant. Assets include:

- ✓ Amounts in checking and saving bank accounts.
- ✓ Stocks, bonds, savings certificates, money market funds, and other investment accounts.
- ✓ The cash value of trusts that may be withdrawn by the household.
- ✓ IRA, Keogh and similar retirement savings accounts, even when early withdrawal will result in a penalty.
- ✓ Lump sum receipts of cash received and accessible by household, such as inheritances, capital gains, lottery winnings, insurance settlements, and other claims.

Household assets generally are not counted as income, with the exception of interest and dividend income. However, household assets should be taken into consideration when determining whether a household has other financial resources sufficient to obtain or maintain housing.

4. **Lease Agreement.** This document must clearly list **all of the parties to the lease; must provide terms and conditions; must have a beginning and ending date and must be signed by all involved parties (landlord and tenant).** If the lease has expired, it must have a clause addressing the continuance of the agreement on a month- to- month arrangement unless State law dictates that the lease automatically continues under a month-to-month or annual arrangement until the lease is renewed or is otherwise terminated. In the event the lease is extended on a month- to- month agreement, the landlord must still provide a written statement which clearly indicates this is month- to- month. The written lease agreement is mandatory for all program participants submitting an application for CoC assistance.
5. **Rental Assistance Agreement.** The rental assistance agreement must be very specific and set forth the terms under which the assistance will be provided (i.e., when the assistance begins and ends). This document is mandatory for all program participants.

Additional documentation required for the program participants' file are listed below:

6. **Rent Reasonableness checklist.** Rent reasonableness should be determined by considering the following: (1) the reasonableness in relation to rents being charged for comparable unassisted units, taking into account the location, size, type, quality, amenities, management, and maintenance of each unit; and (2) the rent should not be in excess of the rent currently being charged by the same owner for properties (if comparable to the unit in which the participant will be leasing) as well as those actual rents charged. Rent reasonableness must be determined for all units for which CoC rental assistance and/or security deposit assistance is being provided. **If the rent for the unit does not meet the rent reasonableness, then CoC funds cannot be used to assist the household in that unit. Furthermore, CoC funds cannot be used to pay the rent up to the rent reasonableness standard, while the tenant pays the remainder.** This document is mandatory for all program participants
  
7. **Habitability Standards.** These standards apply when a program participant is receiving financial assistance and moving into a new (different) unit. Inspections must be conducted upon initial occupancy. This document is mandatory for all program participants
  
8. **Lead-Based Paint checklist, if applicable.** This document is intended to guide grantees through the lead-based paint inspection process to ensure compliance with regulations found at 24 CFR 35, Parts A, B, M and R in order to prevent lead-poisoning in young children. CoC staff can use this checklist to document any exemptions that may apply, whether any potential hazards have been identified, and if safe work practices and clearance are required and used. This document should be kept in each program participants' file.
  
9. **Termination of Assistance, if applicable.** If a program participant violates program requirements, the sub-recipient may terminate the assistance in accordance with a formal process established by the sub-recipient that recognizes the rights of individuals affected. To terminate rental assistance or housing relocation and stabilization services to a program participant, the required formal process, at a minimum, must consist of:
  - Written notice to the program participant containing a clear statement of the reasons for termination;
  - 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 who made or approved the termination decision; and
  - Prompt written notice of the final decision to the program participant.

## Medium Term Rapid Rehousing Assistance

### Eligible Costs for Medium Term RRH:

CoC funds can be used to pay housing owners, utility companies, and other third parties for the following costs:

- Rental application fees that are charged by the owner to all applicants.

- Security deposits that are equal to no more than two (2) months' rent.
- Last months' rent if it is necessary to obtain housing for a program participant. The last months' rent may be paid to the housing owner at the time the owner is paid the security deposit and the first months' rent.
- Prior rental arrears may be paid to a previous landlord if the arrears negatively impact the program participants' ability to get new housing. In order to pay this service, the old lease must be provided and the affidavit of arrears must be completed and signed by the prior landlord.
- Utility deposits as required by the utility company for all customers. The only eligible utility services are gas, electric, water and sewage.
- Utility payments in arrears may be paid up to three (3) months. Monthly utility payments will not be eligible with CoC funds.
- Moving costs may be paid for truck rental or hiring a moving company. Temporary storage fees for up to three (3) months are allowable provided the fees are accrued after the program participant begins receiving assistance and before he/she moves into permanent housing. Payment of temporary storage fees that are in arrears is not an eligible expense.
- Hotel or motel vouchers may be paid for a homeless family or individual when no appropriate shelter is available. Hotel or motel stays should be limited to no more than one week.
- Rental assistance or arrears to pay for a lot on which a manufactured home is located.

**Under no circumstances should any funds be paid directly to the program participant.**

#### **Requirements for Medium Term RRH Assistance**

The requirement for medium-term rental assistance is that a program participant and a housing owner have a written lease for the provision of rental assistance.

- Medium-term rental assistance may be provided for between three (3) to 24 months. Case manager must reassess the program participants' circumstances at least monthly. Case manager must provide reasonable timelines for program participant to submit information necessary to determine program eligibility.
- Payment of rental arrears consists of a one-time payment for up to three (3) months of rent in arrears (delinquent), including any late fees on arrears. Any subsequent payment of late fees will have to be with non-CoC funds.
- **It may be left to the discretion of the sub-recipient of CoC funds to determine the maximum amount of rent to be paid and the duration to be paid, as well as whether the program participant will share in the cost of payments. This will be determined**

**based on the standards created by the sub-recipients and issued through the contract modifications.**

- Program participants who have applied for tenant-based rental assistance (section 8), are eligible for security deposits only. The CoC program will not pay rental arrears on the tenant's portion of the rental payment.
- Rental assistance cannot be provided for a unit that exceeds the Fair Market Rent established by HUD. Rent must be in compliance with HUD standard of rent reasonableness (comparable like units).
- Rental assistance payments may only be paid to the property owner with whom the sub-recipient has entered into a rental assistance agreement. The rental assistance agreement must be very specific and set forth the terms under which the assistance will be provided (i.e., when the assistance begins and ends). The agreement must also provide that during the term of the agreement, the owner must give the program participant a copy of any notice to vacate the housing unit. This shall also include any complaint used under state or local law to commence an eviction action against the program participant.
- Payment of late fees will have to be with non-CoC funds.
- Each program participant must have a legally binding typewritten lease agreement for the rental unit. The lease must be between the property owner or landlord and the program participant (tenant). The lease must be signed by the landlord and the tenant(s). The lease must clearly provide a full and complete address for the rental property. If the lease agreement is between parent and child, siblings or other relatives, it is invalid, and not reimbursable. If an employee, spouse or other family members of the sub-recipient program has rental property, that employee is not eligible for rental reimbursement through the CoC program. If the property owner is renting a single-family unit, the lease must also be typewritten and notarized. Handwritten lease agreements are not acceptable.

### **Mandatory Documentation for Medium Term RRH Assistance**

Determination of eligibility of a program participant for CoC financial services must be conducted by the sub-recipient through an initial consultation with a case manager. The case manager should be able to determine the amount and types of assistance the individual or family needs to regain permanent housing stability. These evaluations must be conducted in accordance with a centralized or coordinated assessment system.

The sub-recipient must re-evaluate the program participant's eligibility and the types of assistance needed at least every three (3) months. At a minimum, each re-evaluation must establish that: (a) the program participant does not have an annual income that exceeds thirty percent (30%) of the median family income for the area, as determined by HUD; and (b) the program participant lacks sufficient resources and support networks necessary to retain housing without CoC assistance.

The sub-recipient may also require each program participant receiving homelessness prevention or rapid re-housing assistance to provide notification of changes in income or other circumstances (household composition) that affect the program participant's need for assistance under CoC.

The program participant is required to provide the circumstances that resulted in he/she becoming homeless. A program participant must be able to provide valid documentation for requesting the financial assistance in the form of:

10. **Application.** This document is to be completed by the case manager and signed by the program participant. The case manager must provide complete detail of how the program participant became homeless. All information provided in the application should be certified as true and correct to the best of the parties' knowledge. Any application that is not signed by both the case manager and the program participant is not a valid document. The CoC application is mandatory for all program participants.

11. **Income verification.** HUD defines income as "any money that goes to, or on behalf of, the head of household or spouse (even if temporarily absent) or to any other household member". Annual income includes the current gross income of all adult household members and unearned income attributable to a minor. The types of income to be counted include:

- ✓ Earned Income
- ✓ Self-Employment/Business Income
- ✓ Interest & Dividend Income
- ✓ Pension/Retirement Income
- ✓ Unemployment & Disability Income
- ✓ TANF/Public Assistance
- ✓ Alimony, Child Support and Foster Care Income
- ✓ Armed Forces Income

Annual income must be calculated through the use of HUDs income calculation worksheet. The case manager must obtain verification of all income reported by the program participant. If program participant has indicated previous employment but is not currently employed the case manager must provide documentation from previous employer or from unemployment compensation. This documentation is mandatory for all program participants and adult household members.

12. **Asset verification.** Assets are defined as cash or material items that can be converted to cash quickly. They include both real and/or personal property and investments that a household may possess, including assets that are owned by more than one person, but allow unrestricted access to the applicant. Assets include:

- ✓ Amounts in checking and saving bank accounts.
- ✓ Stocks, bonds, savings certificates, money market funds, and other investment accounts.
- ✓ The cash value of trusts that may be withdrawn by the household.
- ✓ IRA, Keogh and similar retirement savings accounts, even when early withdrawal will result in a penalty.
- ✓ Lump sum receipts of cash received and accessible by household, such as inheritances, capital gains, lottery winnings, insurance settlements, and other claims.

Household assets generally are not counted as income, with the exception of interest and dividend income. However, household assets should be taken into consideration when determining whether a household has other financial resources sufficient to obtain or maintain housing.

13. **Lease Agreement.** This document must clearly list **all of the parties to the lease; must provide terms and conditions; must have a beginning and ending date and must be signed by all involved parties (landlord and tenant)**. If the lease has expired, it must have a clause addressing the continuance of the agreement on a month- to- month arrangement unless State law dictates that the lease automatically continues under a month-to-month or annual arrangement until the lease is renewed or is otherwise terminated. In the event the lease is extended on a month- to- month agreement, the landlord must still provide a written statement which clearly indicates this is month- to- month. The written lease agreement is mandatory for all program participants submitting an application for CoC assistance.
14. **Rental Assistance Agreement.** The rental assistance agreement must be very specific and set forth the terms under which the assistance will be provided (i.e., when the assistance begins and ends). This document is mandatory for all program participants.

Additional documentation required for the program participants' file are listed below:

15. **Rent Reasonableness checklist.** Rent reasonableness should be determined by considering the following: (1) the reasonableness in relation to rents being charged for comparable unassisted units, taking into account the location, size, type, quality, amenities, management, and maintenance of each unit; and (2) the rent should not be in excess of the rent currently being charged by the same owner for properties (if comparable to the unit in which the participant will be leasing) as well as those actual rents charged. Rent reasonableness must be determined for all units for which CoC rental assistance and/or security deposit assistance is being provided. **If the rent for the unit does not meet the rent reasonableness, then CoC funds cannot be used to assist the household in that unit. Furthermore, CoC funds cannot be used to pay the rent up to the rent reasonableness standard, while the tenant pays the remainder.** This document is mandatory for all program participants
16. **Habitability Standards.** These standards apply when a program participant is receiving financial assistance and moving into a new (different) unit. Inspections must be conducted upon initial occupancy. This document is mandatory for all program participants
17. **Lead-Based Paint checklist, if applicable.** This document is intended to guide grantees through the lead-based paint inspection process to ensure compliance with regulations found at 24 CFR 35, Parts A, B, M and R in order to prevent lead-poisoning in young children. CoC staff can use this checklist to document any

exemptions that may apply, whether any potential hazards have been identified, and if safe work practices and clearance are required and used. This document should be kept in each program participants' file.

18. **Termination of Assistance, if applicable.** If a program participant violates program requirements, the sub-recipient may terminate the assistance in accordance with a formal process established by the sub-recipient that recognizes the rights of individuals affected. To terminate rental assistance or housing relocation and stabilization services to a program participant, the required formal process, at a minimum, must consist of:
- Written notice to the program participant containing a clear statement of the reasons for termination;
  - 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 who made or approved the termination decision; and
  - Prompt written notice of the final decision to the program participant.

**Process Outcomes:**

- Average shelter Length of Stay (LOS) less than 45 days
- Average time from program entry to housing placement is 41 days
- Referral to RRH by shelter Case managers within 7 business days

**Performance Benchmarks**

**1. Reduce the Length of Time Program Participants Spend Homeless**

The first goal of RRH is to reduce the amount of time individuals and families spend homeless. The primary opportunity for a RRH program to impact how much time a household spends homeless is the speed with which it is able to identify and help households access appropriate housing options. Activities that contribute to good performance on this outcome are recruiting landlords to have access to units, finding units that are in the communities and neighborhoods that program participants want to live in, and negotiating with landlords to help program participants access housing.

**For a program to meet this performance benchmark, households served by the program should move into permanent housing in an average of 30 days or less.**

**2. Permanent Housing Success Rates**

The second goal of a RRH program is to exit households to permanent housing in the community with or without a subsidy. A RRH program can impact permanent housing success through the combination of an appropriate housing placement, financial assistance, and effective case management and services

(see “Housing Identification” on page 5, “Rent and Move-In Assistance” on page 8, and “Rapid Re-housing Case Management and Services” on page 10).

**For a program to meet this performance benchmark, at least 80 percent of households that exit a RRH program should exit to permanent housing.**

### 3. Returns to Homelessness

The third goal of a RRH program is to reduce the number of households returning to homelessness following soon after an exit from a RRH program. The primary opportunities for a RRH program to impact the success of a household in remaining housed is through the combination of securing appropriate housing and effective case management and services

**For a program to meet this performance benchmark, at least 85 percent of households that exit a RRH program to permanent housing should not become homeless again within a year**

## TRANSITIONAL HOUSING PROGRAMS

Transitional Housing (TH) facilitates the movement of homeless individuals and families to permanent housing within 24 months of entering TH.

### Shared Eligibility Criteria:

Currently, each individual shelter/program has its own eligibility criteria. At entry, this may be based on the sub-population served, i.e. – age, gender, family composition, severity of behavioral health issues, etc.

- Participants must meet the HUD definition of homelessness
- Participants will generally have a minimum of 6-9 identified barriers to accessing/retaining permanent housing

Once Coordinated Entry System is established all referrals to shelters and assessment for type and level of services will come through that system.

### Minimum Standards

- Maximum length of stay cannot exceed 24 months
- Assistance in transitioning to permanent housing must be provided
- Support services must be provided throughout the duration of stay in transitional housing
- Program participants in transitional housing must enter into a lease agreement for a term of at least one month. The lease must be automatically renewable upon expiration, except on prior notice by either party, up to a maximum term of 24 months

### Accessing Transitional Housing Programs (until Coordinated Entry System is in place)

- TH programs will screen potential participants using the common assessment form



### **Accessing Transitional Housing Programs (when Coordinated Entry System is in place)**

- All referrals for TH programs will come through the Coordinated Entry System
- Each TH program in the CoC will provide accurate and up-to-date information on eligibility criteria for the program; i.e. – gender specific, individuals/families

## **PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING AND SAFE HAVENS**

Under the HEARTH Interim Rule Permanent Housing (PH) is one of the eligible program components. Permanent housing is community-based housing, the purpose of which is to provide housing without a designated length of stay. Permanent Supportive Housing is one of the two types of Permanent Housing eligible for CoC Homeless Assistance Program funding.

### **Shared Eligibility Criteria:**

- Participants must meet the HUD definition of homelessness
- PSH can only provide assistance to individuals with disabilities and families in which at least one adult or child has a disability
- Participants will generally have a minimum of 9-12 identified barriers to accessing/retaining permanent housing

Once the CoC's Coordinated Entry System is established all referrals to shelters and assessment for type and level of services will come through that system.

### **Minimum Standards**

- There can be no predetermined length of stay for a PSH program
- Supportive services designed to meet the needs of the program participants must be made available to the program participants throughout the duration of stay in PSH
- Program participants in PSH must enter into a lease agreement for an initial term of at least one year. The lease must be automatically renewable upon expiration, except on prior notice by either party, up to a maximum term of 24 months
- Turnover beds in PSH projects will be prioritized for the chronically homeless
- PSH programs will utilize housing first approaches

### **Accessing PSH Programs (when Coordinated Entry System is in place)**

- All referrals for PSH programs will come through the Coordinated Entry System and/or SPOE?
- Each PSH program in the CoC will provide accurate and up-to-date information on eligibility criteria for the program; i.e. – gender specific, individuals/families.

Priority is given to chronically homeless individuals and families as defined by HUD.

Recipients that are providing permanent supportive housing for hard-to-house populations of homeless persons must exercise judgment and examine all circumstances in determining whether termination is appropriate. Under the Continuum of Care Interim Rule, it was determined that a participant's assistance should be terminated only in the most severe cases.

The Mississippi Balance of State CoC adopts HUD's Notice CPD-14-012, Notice on Prioritizing Persons Experiencing Chronic Homelessness and Other Vulnerable Homeless Persons in Permanent Supportive Housing, issued on July 28, 2014, in that those experiencing chronic

homelessness should be given priority for non-dedicated PSH beds as vacancies become available through turnover. PSH renewal projects serving specific disabled subpopulations (e.g., persons with mental illness or persons with substance abuse issues) must continue to serve those groups, as required in the current grant agreement. However, the chronically homeless within the specified subpopulation should be prioritized for entry as described below. The full notice, which includes related recordkeeping requirements can be found at: <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Notice-CPD-14-012-Prioritizing-Persons-Experiencing-Chronic-Homelessness-in-PSH-and-Recordkeeping-Requirements.pdf>. As noted in the Balance of State CoC Competition policy for 2017u, at least 85 percent of the CoC program-funded permanent supportive housing beds that become available through turnover must be prioritized for chronically homeless individuals and families.

The overarching goal of adopting this Notice is to ensure that the homeless individuals and families with the most severe service needs within a community are prioritized in PSH, which will also increase progress towards the Balance of State CoC's goal of ending chronic homelessness. This will also guide programs in ensuring that all CoC Program-funded PSH beds are used most effectively.

Recipients of CoC Program-funded PSH are required to follow the order of priority when selecting participants for housing in accordance with the Balance of State CoC's written standards while also considering the goals and any identified target populations served by the project, in a manner consistent with their current grant agreement.

Due diligence must be exercised when conducting outreach and assessment to ensure that persons are served in the order of priority as adopted by the Balance of State CoC. HUD and the Balance of State CoC recognize that some persons—particularly those living on the streets or in places not meant for human habitation—might require significant engagement and contacts prior to their entering housing. Recipients are not required to keep units vacant where there are persons who meet a higher priority within the CoC and who have not yet accepted the PSH opportunities offered to them. Street outreach and housing providers should continue to make attempts to engage those persons using a Housing First approach to place as few conditions on a person's housing as possible.

## **PRIORITIZATION of CHRONICALLY HOMELESS**

1. Order of Priority in CoC Program-funded Permanent Supportive Housing Beds Dedicated to Persons Experiencing Chronic Homelessness and Permanent Supportive Housing Prioritized for Occupancy by Persons Experiencing Chronic Homelessness

### **First Priority:**

**Chronically Homeless Individuals and Families with the Longest History of Homelessness and with the Most Severe Service Needs.**

A chronically homeless individual or head of household as defined in 24 CFR 578.3 for whom both following are true:

- a. The chronically homeless individual or head of household of a family has been homeless and living in a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven, or in an emergency shelter for at least 12 months either continuously or on at least

- four separate occasions in the last 3 years, where the cumulative total length of the four occasions equals at least 12 months; and
- b. The CoC or CoC Program recipient has identified the chronically homeless individual or head of household, who meets all of the criteria in paragraph (1) of the definition for chronically homeless, of the family as having severe service needs (see Section I.D.3. of this Notice for definition of severe service needs).

**Second Priority:**

**Chronically Homeless Individuals and Families with the Longest History of Homelessness**

- c. A chronically homeless individual or head of household, as defined in 24 CFR 578.3, for which both of the following are true:
  - i. The chronically homeless individual or head of household of a family has been homeless and living in a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven, or in an emergency shelter for at least 12 months either continuously or on at least four separate occasions in the last 3 years, where the cumulative total length of the four occasions equals at least 12 months; and,
  - ii. The CoC or CoC program recipient has not identified the chronically homeless individual or the head of household, who meets all of the criteria in paragraph (1) of the definition for chronically homeless, of the family as having severe service needs.

**Third Priority:**

**Chronically Homeless Individuals and Families with the Most Severe Service Needs.**

A chronically homeless individual or head of household as defined in 24 CFR 578.3 for whom both of the following are true:

- d. The chronically homeless individual or head of household of a family has been homeless and living or residing in a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven, or in an emergency shelter on at least four separate occasions in the last 3 years, where the total length of those separate occasions equals less than 12 months; and
- e. The CoC or CoC program recipient has identified the chronically homeless individual or the head of household, who meets all of the criteria in paragraph (1) of the definition for chronically homeless, of the family as having severe service needs.

**Fourth Priority:**

**All Other Chronically Homeless Individuals and Families.**

A chronically homeless individual or head of household as defined in 24 CFR 578.3 for whom both of the following are true:

- f. The chronically homeless individual or head of household of a family has been homeless and living in a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven, or in an emergency shelter for at least 12 months either continuously or on at least four separate occasions in the last 3 years, where the cumulative total length the four occasions is less than 12 months; and

- g. The CoC or CoC program recipient has not identified the chronically homeless individual or the head of household, who meets all of the criteria in paragraph (1) of the definition for chronically homeless, of the family as having severe service needs.

Where a CoC or a recipient of CoC Program-funded PSH beds that are dedicated or prioritized is not able to identify chronically homeless individuals and families as defined in 24 CFR 578.3 within the CoC, the order of priority in the section below (B. Order of Priority in Permanent Supportive Housing Beds Not Dedicated or Prioritized for Persons Experiencing Chronic Homelessness) may be followed.

## **B. Order of Priority in Permanent Supportive Housing Beds Not Dedicated or Prioritized for Persons Experiencing Chronic Homelessness**

### **First Priority:**

#### **Homeless Individuals and Families with a Disability with the Most Severe Service Needs.**

An individual or family that is eligible for CoC Program-funded PSH who has been living or residing in a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven, or in an emergency shelter for any period of time, including persons exiting an institution where they have resided for 90 days or less but were living or residing in a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven, or in an emergency shelter immediately prior to entering the institution and has been identified as having the most severe service needs.

### **Second Priority:**

#### **Homeless Individuals and Families with a Disability with a Long Period of Continuous or Episodic Homelessness.**

An individual or family that is eligible for CoC Program-funded PSH who has been living or residing in a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven, or in an emergency shelter continuously for at least 6 months or on at least three separate occasions in the last 3 years where the cumulative total is at least 6 months. This includes persons exiting an institution where they have resided for 90 days or less but were living or residing in a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven, or in an emergency shelter immediately prior to entering the institution and had been living or residing in one of those locations for at least 6 months or on at least three separate occasions in the last 3 years where the cumulative total is at least 6 months.

### **Third Priority:**

#### **Homeless Individuals and Families with a Disability Coming from Places Not Meant for Human Habitation, Safe Havens, or Emergency Shelters.**

An individual or family that is eligible for CoC Program-funded PSH who has been living in a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven, or an emergency shelter. This includes persons exiting an institution where they have resided for 90 days or less but were living or residing in a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven, or in an emergency shelter immediately prior to entering the institution.

#### **Fourth Priority:**

#### **Homeless Individuals and Families with a Disability Coming from Transitional Housing.**

An individual or family that is eligible for CoC Program-funded PSH who is coming from transitional housing, where prior to residing in the transitional housing lived on streets or in an emergency shelter, or safe haven. This priority also includes homeless individuals and homeless households with children with a qualifying disability who were fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking and are living in transitional housing—all are eligible for PSH even if they did not live on the streets, emergency shelters, or safe havens prior to entry in the transitional housing.

#### **PROCEDURE:**

Permanent Supportive Housing Programs will be required to utilize the Coordinated Entry Process as implemented.

### **SUPPORTIVE SERVICES PROJECTS**

Under the HEARTH Interim Rule Supportive Service Only (SSO) is one of the eligible program components. SSO projects are projects that provide services to persons experiencing homelessness that are not tied to specific housing units.

#### **Shared Eligibility Criteria:**

- Participants must meet the HUD definition of homelessness

#### **Minimum Standards**

- **Support services provided must focus on:**
  - Getting participants housed
  - Linking participants to mainstream benefits and resources
  - Maintaining benefits which the participant is eligible for
- **Street Outreach Programs**
  - Engagement (pro-active activities to find and engage persons experiencing homelessness)
  - Address/provide basic survival items (blankets, gloves, socks, personal care items, etc.)
  - Provide assistance with navigating system/link to services
  - Assist with obtaining housing
  - Outreach is a collaborative effort - Must participate in WNY Coalition for the Homeless Outreach Committee
  - Minimum Safety Measures
    - A minimum of two outreach workers must be available to go out
    - Must always have charged cell phone and answer immediately if called
    - Must sign in/out and include locations that will be visited with approximate times
    - Try to be aware of possible gang activity for personal safety reasons and to alert homeless contacted (particularly homeless youth) to them

- **Drop In Center: (Should not be used as an emergency shelter)**
  - Engagement activities
  - Address/provide basic survival items (blankets, gloves, socks, personal care items, etc.)
  - Provide assistance with navigating system/link to services
  - Assist with obtaining housing
  - Transportation
  - Provide a low demand environment
  - Provision of basic needs (laundry, shower, snacks, clothing, etc.)
  - Provide social supports (informal counseling by staff, peers, etc.)
  - Co-location of other service providers
  - Can be used as jail diversion for small offenses (sleeping in public place, trespassing, etc.)
  - Minimum Safety Measures
    - A minimum of two staff must be present while open
    - Must have a working phone available
    - Participants must sign in/out

#### **Access to SSO Programs**

- Accessing SSO Programs for legal services may be through Coordinated Entry, direct access at the legal services organization, or through referral from housing/providers.
- Participants may also access drop-in center or outreach services directly (help with wording)