

# **EASTERN PA CONTINUUM OF CARE POLICY REQUIRING THE USE OF A HOUSING FIRST APPROACH**

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Approved by the Continuum of Care Board, 12/19/16

As of the date of this Policy, all CoC Program-funded projects will be required to operate projects using a housing first approach, as described below. Adoption of housing first practices will be documented via program policies and procedures, and any other relevant documents that evidence the incorporation of the practices into the design and operation of the project.

## **Housing First: Definition**

*Housing First* is an approach to homeless assistance that prioritizes rapid placement and stabilization in permanent housing and does not have service participation requirements or preconditions such as sobriety or a minimum income threshold. Projects using a Housing First approach often have supportive services; however, participation in these services is based on the needs and desires of program participants.

## **Housing First: Implementation**

Following are specific steps to support the implementation of a Housing First approach:

a. *Use Data to quickly and stably house homeless persons.* Programs that use a Housing First approach should be moving individuals and families quickly into permanent housing.

b. *Engage landlords and property owners.* Identify and recruit landlords of units in the geographic area so that when an individual or family needs housing, potential units that those individuals or families may choose from have already been identified, speeding up the housing process.

- Landlord engagement can be undertaken by each homeless assistance provider or consolidated so that one or a few organizations engage landlords on behalf of many providers.

c. *Remove barriers to entry.* Persons experiencing homelessness should not be screened out of or discouraged from participating in programs because they have poor credit history, or lack income or employment. People with addictions to alcohol or substances should not be required to cease active use before accessing housing and services.

- For example, participants are not screened out based on any of the following:
  - ✓ Having too little or little income
  - ✓ Active or history of substance use
  - ✓ Having a criminal record with exceptions for state-mandated restrictions
  - ✓ History of domestic violence

d. *Adopt client-centered service methods.* All projects should ensure housing and service options are tailored to meet the unique needs of each individual or family presenting for services and that program participants have access to the services that they reasonably

believe will help them achieve their goals. However, program participants should not be required to participate in services.

- For example, participants are not terminated from the program for the following reasons:
  - ✓ Failure to participate in supportive services
  - ✓ Failure to make progress on a service plan
  - ✓ Loss of income or failure to improve income
  - ✓ Being a victim of domestic violence
  - ✓ Any other activity not covered in a lease agreement typically found in the project's geographic area.

*e. Provide a formal process for program termination that recognizes the rights of individuals receiving assistance under the due process of law. This process, at a minimum, must consist of:*

- Providing the program participant with a written copy of the program rules and the termination process before the participant begins to receive assistance;
- 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 (or a subordinate of that person) who made or approved the termination decision; and
- Prompt written notice of the final decision to the program participant.