Western PA CoC Written Standards Training 2025

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What are the Written Standards?

- Provide guidance for CoC and ESG programs related to service delivery

- Ensure that all programs are operating in a consistent, coordinated way that is compliant with HUD and CoC standards

- Required by HUD

Structure of Written Standards

- Standards for all project types
  - Includes recordkeeping and case management standards
- Standards by project type – specific standards that must be followed if you are operating PSH, RRH, etc.
- Appendices
- Optional Forms and Templates – separate document. Not required, but available as a resource

Standards for Emergency Shelter (ES)

Goals

- Exit households to permanent housing as quickly as possible

- Upon admission, all households should be entered into CE to expedite permanent housing.

- **CoC recommends that all ES programs, regardless of funding source, follow the CoC Written Standards.**

Access

- May accept participant referrals from CE, other agencies, or from the participants themselves

- Provide the Access, Diversion, Assessment, Prioritization, and Referral phases of CE, as described in the CE Policies and Procedures

- During the Access and Diversion phase of CE, Shelter staff should explore all options prior to enrolling a household in ES, including problem-solving conversations, identifying community supports, and offering lighter touch solutions.

Access

- Provide the Prevention phase of CE only to the extent necessary to determine that a participant is not experiencing literal homelessness and refer them to an appropriate service provider.

- If funded to provide the Prevention and Rapid Exit phases of CE, use a progressive engagement approach that incorporates Housing Problem Solving (HPS) Prevention techniques to serve households with case management, supportive services, and financial assistance, including one-time payments and short-term housing assistance, to identify the lightest-touch method to successfully eliminate each participant's barriers to remaining in safe, stable permanent housing.

Access

- Victims of Domestic Violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking: To the extent possible, these households will be referred to the local domestic violence agency for safe shelter.

- When not feasible, shelter providers will work with their local domestic violence agency to develop protocols to meet their safety needs.

Eligibility

- Category 1: Literally Homeless

- Category 2: Imminent Risk of Homelessness

- Category 4: Fleeing/Attempting to Flee Domestic Violence

Eligibility

- To the maximum extent possible, shelters should avoid discharging guests, except when the guest poses a danger to themselves or other shelter residents.

- Discharging guests should be a last resort when there are no other viable options available.

Eligibility

ES *may* deny entry or future stays only for the reasons listed below.

- Violence towards other guests or staff

- Excessive damage to property

- Theft from the shelter or other guests

- Need for medical services beyond those the shelter is equipped to provide*

- Any known abuser of a current resident (even if no PFA)

- Sex offender registered on Megan's Law list, depending on location and other clients served

Prioritization

Each shelter will be responsible for establishing their own prioritization standards.

Documentation (ES Specific)

- Documentation of Homelessness/At Imminent Risk of Homelessness*

- ES programs should work with participants to obtain their necessary documents.

- *See Documentation for All Project Types for additional requirements*

there's a template for that!

Duration and Amounts

- No maximum length of stay in ES

- Goal is for households to remain in shelter for the shortest time possible to stabilize housing

- Shelters should provide flexibility related to length of stay based on individual needs.

- ES programs should not charge fees.

- Shelters should maintain a housing-focused approach when working with participants.

ES-Specific Standards

- Engage participants from day one to assess housing barriers, develop housing plans, and link households to the right types of assistance

- Discharge, to the greatest extent possible, to a permanent housing resource

ES-Specific Standards

- Operating in compliance with The Final Rule for Equal Access in HUD Projects

- ES that serve families with children are prohibited from denying assistance to or separating members of a family with children based on gender or age.

- Fair Housing and ADA compliance re: service/support animals

ES-Specific Standards

- Non-discrimination policy

- To the extent possible, ES should have 24/7 hours of operation.

- There must be access to staff during hours of project operation.

- Provide access to food preparation and food storage space

- Establish secure space for storage of personal possessions

ES-Specific Standards

- ES should operate with a low-barrier approach.

  - People do not have to line up for a bed each night or leave early in the morning.

  - Not requiring drug and alcohol testing, criminal background checks, income, identification documents to get in (assist participants once they are in shelter to obtain these ID documents)

  - Accepting all family configurations, if shelter provides services to families

  - Accepting couples, if shelter provides services to singles

  - Shelters should offer and encourage participation in services, but should not mandate services as a requisite for remaining in the shelter.

ES-Specific Standards

- Provide secure storage of medications, especially in shelters with children

- Smoking is prohibited in buildings that provide shelter to children.

- Weapons may not be brought into ES.

- Shelter guests may not bring or use illegal substances or alcohol on the premises.

ES-Specific Case Management

- Exit planning should start upon project entry with regular discussions about moving towards permanent housing.

- Shelter staff should conduct an initial service assessment within 7 days of intake, prioritizing emergency service needs and providing the Access, Diversion, Assessment, Prioritization, and Referral phases of CE, as described in the CE Policies and Procedure

- Weekly re-assessments

Performance Measures

- Households should move into permanent housing within **an average of 35 days.**

- **At least 44%** of households who exit ES exit to permanent housing.

- **No more than 6%** of households that exit to permanent housing after being homeless should become homeless again within 12 months.

Next Steps

- All CoC- and ESG- funded programs sign off by April 30, 2025 that their program(s) have reviewed the WS, understand them, will implement them, have watched the training recordings, and will ensure that all new hires review the standards and recorded CoC trainings within 60 days of hire: https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/8216721/Western-PA-CoC-Written-Standards-Acknowledgment-Form-2025

- If there are standards that programs are not implementing, make a plan to implement those standards by June 30, 2025.

- Feedback on the standards is welcome year-round: https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/7127925/Western-PA-CoC-Written-Standards-Annual-Feedback