

North Central Florida Alliance for the Homeless & Hungry
Standards of Assistance



North Central Florida
Alliance
for the Homeless and Hungry

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Introduction

The North Central Florida Alliance for the Homeless & Hungry (the Alliance) has developed these program standards to provide specific guidelines for how programs can operate to have the best chance of ending homelessness. The primary goals of these standards include:

1. Promote policies that insure people are treated with dignity and respect
2. Promote consistency across all programs in the area
3. Provide a baseline for holding all programs in the Continuum of Care to a specific standard of care
4. Establish a baseline for program staff competence and training, specific to the target population served.
5. Assist with the coordination of service delivery across the geographic area and will be the foundation of the county-wide coordinated entry system.
6. Provide the basis for the monitoring of all CoC and ESG funded projects.

These standards reflect the goals of the Continuum to provide to all people:

1. A safe environment
2. Housing-focused case management
3. Rapid access to Permanent Housing
4. Placement of all family members together
5. Service delivery and shelter/housing regardless of barriers
6. Provision of housing and related services without regard to race, color, religion, disability, sex, age, national origin, ancestry, marital status, familial status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or genetic information
7. The right to dress in accordance with the gender with which they self-identify, and to receive services/support consistent with their self-identified gender

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 these funds to accept and utilize these standards.

These written standards will be reviewed and revised at least annually.

Housing First Model

All programs are required to use a Housing First approach to assistance. The housing first approach prioritizes rapid placement and stabilization in permanent housing without preconditions such as sobriety or income requirements. Programs may require a baseline level of participation in case management services.

Emergency shelter, transitional housing and supportive service only projects are using a housing first model if they operate with low barriers that balance the need to provide services with the safety and well-being of program participants, work to quickly move people into permanent housing, and do not require participation in supportive services.

Coordinated Entry System

To minimize barriers to housing access and ensure timely placement, all programs must participate in and receive referrals through the NCFA Coordinated Entry System.

Universal Assessment

All individuals will be assessed using a comprehensive, universal assessment tool called the Vulnerability Index Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT). This tool guarantees that individuals' levels of need and eligibility determinations are made in an informed and objective manner.

Homeless Management Information System

All programs must participate in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) per the ESG and CoC Interim Rule (24 CFR 576 and 578).

Non-Discrimination Policy

All programs:

1. Must determine client eligibility for housing regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status, and must not discriminate against clients who do not conform to gender or sex stereotypes (i.e., because of gender identity);
2. Must grant equal access to programs or facilities consistent with client gender identity, and provide client's family with equal access;
3. Must *not* ask clients to provide anatomical information or documentation (i.e. ID), physical, or medical evidence of gender identity; and
4. Must take non-discriminatory steps when necessary and appropriate to address privacy concerns raised by participants

Definitions

Chronically Homeless

A chronically homeless individual or head of household is someone for whom both of the following are true:

1. 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; Each period separating the occasions must include at least 7 nights of living in a situation other than a place not meant for human habitation, in an emergency shelter, or in a safe haven.
2. If the individual has been living in the facility for fewer than 90 days and had been living in a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven, or in an emergency shelter immediately before entering the institutional care facility.

Engagement

Engagement includes locating, identifying, and building “relationships with unsheltered homeless people and engage them for the purpose of providing immediate support, intervention, and connections with homeless assistance programs and/or mainstream social services and housing programs. These activities consist of making an initial assessment of needs and eligibility; providing crisis counseling; addressing urgent physical needs, such as providing meals, blankets, clothes, or toiletries; and actively connecting and providing information and referrals to programs targeted to homeless people and mainstream social services and housing programs, including emergency shelter, transitional housing, community-based services, permanent supportive housing, and rapid re-housing programs (24 CFR 576.101).

Permanent Supportive Housing

Permanent Supportive Housing provides permanent housing and supportive services to individuals and families with a disability, prioritizing those who are chronically homeless. The program is designed to reintegrate this highly vulnerable population into the community by addressing their basic needs for housing and providing ongoing support. There are two key components of the program: permanent housing and supportive services.

Using a housing first approach, program participants are provided with rapid access to permanent housing with minimal preconditions. Good credit or rental history are not required to receive housing. Tenants can remain in their homes if the basic requirements of tenancy are met—paying the rent (as applicable), not interfering with other tenants’ use of their homes, not causing property damage, etc. This ensures participants have a private and secure place to make their home, just like other members of the community, and provides them with a stable foundation from which they can pursue their goals.

Prevention

Homelessness Prevention programs provide supportive services to prevent people from becoming homeless. Funding may also be used to help such persons regain stability in their current housing or other permanent housing.

Rapid Rehousing

Rapid Rehousing is an effective intervention for many different types of households experiencing homelessness, including those with no income, with disabilities, and with poor rental history. The majority of households experiencing homelessness are good candidates for rapid re-housing. The only exceptions are households that can exit homelessness with little or no assistance, those who experience chronic homelessness and who need permanent supportive housing, and households who are seeking a therapeutic residential environment, including those recovering from addiction.

Rapid Rehousing assistance may include:

- Rental assistance;
- Case management;
- Supportive services;
- Utility assistance; and
- Security deposits.

Street Outreach

Street Outreach (SO) provides “essential services necessary to reach out to unsheltered homeless people; connect them with emergency shelter, housing, or critical services; and provide urgent, non-facility-based care to unsheltered homeless people who are unwilling or unable to access emergency shelter, housing, or an appropriate health facility (24 CFR 576.101).”

Transitional Housing

Transitional housing means housing, where all program participants have signed a lease or occupancy agreement, the purpose of which is to facilitate the movement of homeless individuals and families into permanent housing within 24 months or such longer period as HUD determines necessary. The program participant must have a lease or occupancy agreement for a term of at least one month that ends in 24 months and cannot be extended (CFR 578.3).

Universal Standards

Administration

1. The program shall be operated by a non-profit organization, recognized under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.
2. The program shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, disability, sex, age, national origin, ancestry, marital status, familial status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or genetic information. If there are additional local ordinances governing discrimination, the program shall comply accordingly. Furthermore, programs serving families with children shall not discriminate on the basis of the sex or age of the children or the size of the family. Families must be served regardless of how they define their family (e.g., two men with children, two women with children, a grandparent with grandchildren). Provision shall be made in such cases to maintain the family as an intact unit. If the program is unable to maintain the family as an intact unit due to its physical design, and there is no other appropriate placement, the program must attempt to connect the family with other resources.
3. The program shall provide opportunities for participant input on policies that directly affect them.
4. The agency's Board of Directors shall meet at least quarterly.
5. The agency shall develop and implement procedures to ensure the confidentiality of records.
6. The agency shall have a policy manual which, at a minimum, includes the program purpose, population served, description, non-discrimination policy, confidentiality statement, and rules and procedures.
7. Agencies that receive funding through the Alliance (including pass-thru funds from the Florida Dept. of Children & Families or HUD funding), local government, charitable organizations and/or foundations are required to participate in the Continuum of Care's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) or an equivalent system.
8. Agencies that receive funding through the Alliance are required to regularly participate in Continuum of Care general meetings and be a member of at least one committee.
9. The program shall have a written policy regarding the possession and use of controlled substances, as well as prescription and over-the-counter medication.
10. The program shall have a written policy regarding Universal Precautions to control the spread of infectious diseases.
11. The program shall have a written policy regarding the control of weapons.
12. The program shall provide for an evaluation of the effectiveness of the services offered, at least annually. This can include focus groups, outside monitoring groups, or program evaluators.

Personnel

1. The agency shall have an organizational chart of all paid staff working in the program. There shall be written position descriptions for each position type which includes job responsibilities and qualifications.
2. For the safety of the residents, programs shall have adequate, trained, on-site staff coverage during operating hours, unless individual secured units are provided.
3. Program staff should receive training in at least the following:
 - a. Emergency procedures;
 - b. Agency operating procedures
 - c. Conflict de-escalation
 - d. Basic first aid, CPR/AED
 - e. Mental Health First Aid
 - f. Funding-specific training requirements
4. All relevant direct service staff shall receive additional training in at least the following:
 - a. Non-violent crisis intervention techniques;
 - b. Referral procedures to relevant community resources
 - c. VI-SPDAT/SPDAT training
5. Providers must have written Policies and Procedures that include:
 - a. Drug-free workplace
 - b. Criminal record checks and child abuse clearances:
 - i. Single Adult Providers: All program staff must obtain Level 2 criminal record checks prior to hire and at five (5) year intervals thereafter.
 - ii. Family Providers: All program staff and volunteers in emergency housing programs serving children must obtain Level 2 criminal record checks prior to hire and at five (5) year intervals thereafter.

Fiscal Management

1. There shall be an accounting system which is maintained in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP). The accounting records must segregate grant revenue and expenses.
2. The program shall have a record of accountability for clients' funds or valuables if they are held by the agency on premises.
3. The agency shall receive an annual independent audit or audit review. This independent audit, including the governance letter, must be made available to the Continuum of Care upon request.
4. The agency must have adequate internal controls over public funds. These internal controls must be reviewed and approved by the Board.
5. All charges to grants must be reasonable, allowable, adequately documented and determined in accordance with GAAP. This includes costs claimed as cost sharing or matching.

6. Adequate documentation for salaries/wages charged to federal and state grants should be kept to meet funding requirements.
7. Operating Agency has the following insurance provisions, notices and certificates and upon request shall furnish certificates evidencing the existence of the following:
 - a. Worker's Compensation Certificate
 - b. General Liability

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation will be conducted by the Lead Agency to insure compliance with these written standards and local, state, and federal funding requirements.

Emergency Shelters

Physical Facility

1. The shelter building shall be structurally sound to protect residents from the elements and not pose any threat to the health and safety of the residents.
2. The shelter shall be accessible in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.
3. There is a written plan for reasonable accommodation of persons with disabilities.
4. The shelter shall make every effort to accommodate clients based on the gender in which they identify as it relates to use of facilities.
5. The shelter shall take into account client's safety when placing and assigning them to a bed or a room.
6. The shelter shall be maintained in a sanitary condition.
7. The shelter shall have reasonable access to transportation.
8. The shelter will accommodate family members together without separating them.
9. The shelter shall provide a bed, cot, crib, or equivalent equipment for sleeping such that individuals are not sleeping on the floor *for regular (non-overflow) sleeping accommodations*. Shelters providing Cold Night or other emergency protocol accommodations may allow individuals to sleep on the floor.
10. The shelter shall provide private space to meet with clients.
11. The shelter shall have laundry facilities available to clients or a system available for like services.
12. The shelter shall have available at all times first aid equipment and supplies in case of emergency.
13. All staff on duty shall have access to a telephone. Emergency telephone numbers shall be posted conspicuously near the telephone.
14. The shelter shall provide a locked place for the storage of personal belongings, including medications
15. Except where the shelter is intended for day use only, the shelter shall provide program participants in the shelter with an acceptable place to sleep and adequate space and security for themselves and their belongings.
16. Shelters must meet adhere to all licensing and grant requirements for the physical safety of the building and its occupants.

Fire Safety

1. Shelters must have a posted evacuation plan in all residential buildings.
2. Shelters must conduct fire drills at least quarterly.
3. Shelters must meet all local building and fire codes regarding smoke detectors, sprinkler systems, emergency exits, and emergency lighting.

Food Service

1. Shelters providing food service shall make adequate provisions for the sanitary storage and preparation of foods.
2. Shelters providing food for infants, young children and pregnant mothers shall make provisions to meet their nutritional needs.
3. Shelters shall provide, or arrange food services to clients or make known the available services nearby.
4. Shelters preparing food and serving food shall comply with all local licensing requirements.

Operations

1. The shelter shall have written policies for intake of clients and criteria for admitting people to the shelter. The shelter's intake policy should be available for the client's review.
 - a. Shelters may not require residents to be a citizen of the United States, nor can they require any documented immigration status
 - b. Shelters may request, but not require, identification for an individual to receive services. For individuals who cannot provide a photo identification, staff should work with them to obtain this and other documents required for housing immediately.
2. Shelters must participate with coordinated entry, triage, and diversion.
3. Shelter shall maintain an attendance list which includes, at least, the name and HMIS number.
4. The shelter shall post and read, or otherwise make known, the rules & regulations of the shelter and information on and access to the grievance process.
5. Each shelter's grievance policy must address the following:
 - a. Process for initiating a grievance,
 - b. Timeframes for grieving and making the final decision,
 - c. Designation for who makes the initial decision and who makes the final unappealable decision,
 - d. Appeals process,
6. The shelter shall follow mandatory reporting guidelines as required by law.
7. Shelters may not require residents to complete chores in order to stay in the shelter. They may, however, require residents to keep their bed and common areas clean. Accommodations must be provided for those with a disability commensurate with their ability to perform work.
8. Shelter shall provide access to a public or private telephone for use by shelter clients to make and receive calls.
9. Shelter shall encourage the involvement of clients in the decision-making processes of the shelter. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways, including having resident advisory councils to give input into the operations of the shelter, or having homeless or

formerly homeless people on the board, or having homeless or formerly homeless people trained and hired as staff, or input from clients through suggestion boxes or exit surveys, etc.

10. Shelter shall allow current clients to use the shelter as a legal residence for the purpose of voter registration and the receipt of public benefits.
11. The shelter shall maintain an incident log to record daily unusual or significant incidents.
12. The shelter shall have written policies for searches.
13. The shelter shall not require clients to participate in religious services or other forms of religious expression.
14. The shelter has a written policy regarding client possession of weapons that ensures the safety of clients, staff and volunteers. The policy should address the concealed carry law. Clients are informed of the policy.

Rights & Responsibilities

1. Emergency shelter staff must review Rights & Responsibilities and Grievance Procedures during the initial intake and orientation. These Rights & Responsibilities should be posted and/or readily available.

Services

1. The shelter shall provide case management and referral services that are designed to get clients into permanent housing.
2. The shelter shall maintain records to document services provided to each client, including keeping progress notes on specific services provided.
3. Shelters may not require residents to participate in supportive services, including budgeting or financial literacy classes; AA, NA, or substance abuse counseling; mental health evaluation and treatment; religious services; employment assistance; or case management. Shelters may require individuals to participate in a housing plan.

Permanent Supportive Housing

Leasing and Rental Assistance

1. Program participants are provided housing without a designated length of stay that permits them to live as independently as possible.
 - a. All participants must have a signed agreement outlining the terms of their housing. Two individuals in a shared housing situation must have their own lease and their own bedroom unless the two individuals are presented together as a household.
2. The program participant must be the tenant on a lease for a term of at least one year that is renewable and is terminable only for failure to uphold the lease requirements.

3. Rental assistance cannot be provided to a program participant who is already receiving a housing subsidy, or living in a housing unit receiving rental assistance or operating assistance through other Federal, State, or local sources.

Eligibility

1. Permanent supportive housing can only provide assistance to participants who have been determined to meet the criteria based on referral through Coordinated Entry.

Supportive Services

1. Supportive services designed to meet the needs of program participants must be made available to the program participants.
2. Supportive services to enable program participants to live as independently as possible must be provided throughout the duration of their residence.
3. Supportive services must be voluntary, but can and should be used to persistently engage tenants to ensure housing stability.

Housing Quality Standards

1. Two individuals in a shared housing situation must have their own lease and their own bedroom unless the two individuals are presented together as a household.

Program Income & Occupancy Charges

1. Program income generated from rent and occupancy charges must be collected from program participants and added to funds committed to the project and used for eligible program activities.
2. If occupancy charges are imposed, they may not exceed the level dictated by the funding source.
3. A program participant's initial income must be examined at least annually to determine the amount of the contribution toward rent payable by the program participant and adjustments to a program participant's contribution toward the rental payment must be made as changes in income are identified
4. Each program participant must agree to supply the information or documentation necessary to verify the program participant's income.
5. If there is a change in family composition (e.g., birth of a child) or a decrease in the resident's income during the year, the resident may request an interim reexamination, and the occupancy charge will be adjusted accordingly.

Termination of Assistance

1. 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 in the most severe cases.
2. Assistance may be terminated to a program participant who violates program

requirements or conditions of occupancy by providing a formal process that recognizes the due process of law.

3. Agencies cannot prevent individuals from receiving PSH services based on a previous service history with the same agency.

Rapid Rehousing

Leasing and Rental Assistance

1. The program participant must be the tenant on a lease for a term of at least one year that is renewable and is terminable only for cause.
2. Program participants may receive short-term (up to 3 months) and/or medium-term (for 3 to 24 months) tenant-based rental assistance.
3. Standards for determining the share of rent and utilities costs that each program participant must pay, if any, will be based on the guidelines of the funding agency.
 - a. The rent charged for a unit must be reasonable in relation to rents currently being charged for comparable units in the private unassisted market and must not be in excess of rents currently being charged by the owner for comparable unassisted units.
4. Program participants may receive up to 24 months of rental assistance. However, it is expected that program participants will only receive the level of assistance necessary to be stably housed for the long-term.
5. Rental assistance cannot be provided to a program participant who is already receiving rental assistance, or living in a housing unit receiving rental assistance or operating assistance through other federal, State, or local sources.
6. Programs may pay up to double the usual security deposit if required to facilitate a rapid housing placement.

Supportive Services

1. Program participants must meet with a case manager not less than once per month to assist the program participant in ensuring long-term housing stability.
2. Program participants may receive supportive services after rental assistance stops.
3. Program participants must be re-evaluated at least annually to determine program eligibility and participant need.

Bridge & Clinical Housing

Leasing and Rental Assistance

1. Bridge & Clinical Housing providers must adhere to all funding requirements.

Street Outreach

1. Street outreach must:
 - a. Engage all unsheltered homeless persons.
 - b. Link to emergency health services.
 - c. Link to emergency mental health services.
 - d. Refer to access to transportation.
2. Street outreach contacts must be entered into HMIS so they can be considered when reviewing active/inactive status in the Coordinated Entry Systems.

Prevention

Eligibility

1. Households must receive at least an initial consultation and eligibility assessment with a case manager or other authorized representative who can determine eligibility and the appropriate type of assistance needed.
2. Participants must provide documentation of an imminent housing crisis.
3. Providers should allocate limited prevention assistance based on the Prevention VI-SPDAT.
4. Programs must attempt to determine that:
 - a. No appropriate subsequent housing options have been identified;
 - b. The household lacks the financial resources to obtain immediate housing or remain in its existing housing; and
 - c. The household lacks support networks needed to obtain immediate housing or remain in its existing housing.

Income

1. The household's total income must be below 50 percent of Area Median Income (AMI) unless otherwise set by funding source.

Supportive Services

1. Resources must include a plan to address the immediate crisis.
2. Resources must resolve the immediate crisis.
3. Maximum assistance amount must be based on the funding source's requirements.