



Portsmouth Homeless Action Consortium (PHAC)

Coordinated Entry System (CES)

Policy & Procedure Guidelines

PHAC Adopted 7/2/2020

Homelessness for whatever reason has pervasive adverse effects on the individual and communities.¹

Ending homelessness in Portsmouth depends on a comprehensive, coordinated approach that recognizes that housing, in and of itself, is the keystone to any plan. In order to effectively combat and end homelessness, a plan must address all its various categories: chronic, family, domestic violence victims, youth, mentally ill persons, substance abusers, and those being discharged from institutions.¹

The collection of homeless service providers in the City partnering under the umbrella of the Portsmouth Homeless Action Consortium (PHAC) work together to help decrease homelessness and enhance the quality of life of persons at risk of or experiencing homelessness in Portsmouth by fostering their levels of self-sufficiency through housing assistance and a supportive network of community services.

Overview

The purpose of this document is to outline the Portsmouth (VA) Continuum of Care (CoC) Coordinated Entry System (CES) policies and procedures.

The Portsmouth Continuum of Care (CoC) is named the Portsmouth Homeless Action Consortium (PHAC) and Portsmouth Department of Social Services (PDSS) serves as the collaborative partner and primary point of contact for the Portsmouth CoC. PHAC and its provider agencies serve the geographical boundaries of the city of Portsmouth, VA.

PHAC is committed to having a process that aligns with the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) guidelines and provides a fair, standardized and transparent system that facilitates equal access to housing resources for individuals and families who are "literally homeless" as (as defined by HUD) or at risk of becoming homeless.

¹ "A Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness in Portsmouth, VA, The Planning Council 2008

All PHAC providers that receive HUD funding, which includes CoC Programs or Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) and/or Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (VDHCD) funds are required per HUD guidance to participate in the CES. Those projects may include transitional housing, permanent supportive housing (PSH), rapid rehousing (RRH) or homeless prevention services.

Coordinated Entry is defined by HUD’s CoC Program interim rule at 24 CFR 578.3 as, “ a centralized or coordinated process designed to coordinate program participant intake assessment and the provision of referrals. A centralized or coordinated assessment system covers a specific geographic area, is easily accessed by individuals and families seeking housing or services, is well advertised, and includes a comprehensive and standardized assessment tool. The coordinated entry system provides a consistent and standardized assessment of individuals that are literally homeless, as defined by HUD, or at risk of becoming homeless.

Individuals experiencing a housing crisis gain access to services by calling the Regional Housing Crisis Hotline (HCH). The HCH is the central access point of contact housing emergencies throughout the Greater Hampton Roads area, covering 13 jurisdictions. The HCH has a local (757) 966-2107 and toll-free number (866) 750-4431, which can be accessed throughout the region. The number has been shared with all the agencies within the CoC and is listed in the 2-1-1 Virginia data base. Staff at the HCH complete a basic intake and then refer clients based on self-reported needs. The caller’s information is entered into the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), a secure database that updates in real time. Due to the sensitive nature, domestic violence information is stored in a separate database managed by the domestic violence service providers. *Individuals experiencing domestic violence who call the HCH are given the Help & Emergency Response (H.E.R.) 757- 485-3384 for services.*

Guiding Principles

PHAC follows defined guidelines in prioritizing housing for the most vulnerable. To achieve this practice, PHAC also observes guiding principles that include a commitment to the following—

A “Housing First” Approach: this client-focused approach is focused on getting individuals into permanent housing first and then providing supportive services, as needed to help sustain and maintain their housing status. Supportive services could include employment, mental health, substance abuse treatment, coaching and counseling.

Fair Housing: as recipients of federal and state funding, PHAC providers comply with all applicable laws related to housing, including—

- A. Fair Housing Act, prohibiting housing discrimination based on race, color, gender (sex), national origin, disability or familial status.
- B. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, prohibiting discrimination based on race, color or national origin.
- C. Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, prohibiting discrimination based on disability
- D. Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act, prohibiting discrimination from private entities that own, lease and operate places of public accommodation from discriminating based on disability and covers shelters, social service providers.
- E. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.

Vulnerability Prioritization: ensuring that all decisions are made based on vulnerability in accordance with HUD Notice CPD-016-11. This also includes prioritizing Veterans and Chronic Homeless.

Low Barrier Access: meaning we will continually seek to reduce barriers to accessing sheltering and housing, which could include requirements of sobriety, income, employment and/or absence of criminal record.

Access

Accessing the CES is made by contacting the Regional Housing Crisis Hotline. Households may contact the **Regional Housing Crisis Hotline (HCH)** by calling **(757) 966-2107** or Toll Free at **(866) 750-4431** for an initial screening and referral to eligible services and other community resources including diversion, homeless prevention, shelter or outreach. A household can be one or more individuals.

Assessment

The CES assessment process is used to determine housing needs, vulnerability and the most appropriate resources.

The CoC has agreed to the use of one assessment tool city wide along with case conferencing discussions (PCAN) to identify the most vulnerable households. For single individuals, the Vulnerability Index-Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT) and for families, the F-VI-SPDAT , the Y-VI-SPDAT for youth who are 18-24 will be used. All VI-SPDAT assess vulnerability in 5 areas:

1. history of housing and homelessness
2. risks
3. socialization and daily functioning
4. wellness – including chronic health conditions, substance usage, mental illness, and trauma and
5. family unit (if applicable).

Once a referral is received, the agency or another designated point-of-contact (navigator, case manager, client specialist or advocate) will conduct a complete assessment to determine the most appropriate housing resource. Homeless households are prioritized based on their VI-SPDAT score. Referrals for housing resources are made through the Portsmouth Coordinated Assessment Network (PCAN).

During the SPDAT assessment, the tool is explained and consent is secured before the assessment can be conducted. Individuals are advised of their right to refuse consent to share information and that their refusal will not prevent them from receiving services.

Individuals are presented at Portsmouth Coordinated Assessment Network (PCAN), a provider forum where cases are discussed for prioritization and available housing resources.

Housing Programs: Eligibility and Prioritization

There are a variety of housing programs (projects) supported by PHAC provider agencies. Each housing program may have specific requirements and availability as well as funding levels. At any given time, these programs are available based on vacancies and funding.

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) - housing for individuals with disabilities or a family in which a child or adult has a disability. Financial assistance is provided as long as needed along with supportive services. Chronically homeless households are eligible and prioritized for PSH.

Rapid Rehousing (RRH) - moves households from homelessness into permanent housing by offering short term rent assistance. Household eligibility criteria will be based on VI-SPDAT score and length of homelessness. *The amount of rent each program participant must pay is determined by the household's budget and will be the least amount of financial assistance necessary based on household needs and housing barriers.*

Transitional Housing (TH) - is temporary housing for up to (12) twelve months that provides housing and supportive services. TH helps bridge households to independence and permanent housing. Homeless households with notable housing barriers (i.e. multiple evictions) are eligible and prioritized for TH.

Referrals

The CES makes referrals to all programs (projects) within the Portsmouth CoC. The referrals are routed through the PCAN committee for case conferencing and prioritization to identify the next eligible household when programs have openings. Eligibility and screening criteria for each provider's program are used to ensure that clients are being appropriately referred. Providers are required to submit their program criteria updates/ changes to the CES through Central Intake a repository for all information related to the Coordinated Entry System and to Portsmouth Department of Social Services (PDSS) as the collaborative agency. In addition Providers will also send the updates to the Housing Crisis Hotline to keep the information current for callers seeking assistance. The Portsmouth CoC strives to use available resources effectively and efficiently to serve the most vulnerable in the homeless community.

When a potential housing resource has been identified through PCAN, the case manager or another designated point-of-contact (navigator, client specialist or advocate) will notify the household. The receiving agency should contact the household and (navigator, client specialist or advocate) within seven (7) business days to schedule an appointment. After meeting with the household, the receiving agency has seven (7) business days to provide a disposition of the referral into HMIS. Non-PHAC agencies or non-HMIS participating agencies, case managers or client advocates desiring to present a household to PCAN *must* collaborate with Central Intake for presentation at PCAN.

Referrals may be declined if the household is unable to be reached or does not meet the program's eligibility criteria. The agency is asked to notify the household with disposition entered into HMIS within (7) seven business days, as well as notifying the referring agency and PCAN. The household is then returned to their previous prioritization order or until they are determined to be inactive.

PCAN referrals Off-week: Should a housing resource become available during the off- week of PCAN then the housing resource information would be emailed to Central Intake who would then identify the next eligible household based on prioritization. Central Intake would then send an email with HMIS number only to participating agencies asking for approval of referral. Update on response and status would be reported at next regular PCAN meeting.

After- Hours Access

Households in need of emergency shelter after regular business hours (7 p.m.) may leave a message with the Regional Housing Crisis Hotline and they will be contacted the next business day.

During the months of November through April, callers will get an automated option after-hours that will direct them to winter shelter services. The staff at the shelter will offer accommodation if space is available, and the household is population appropriate. The local police department transports individuals to the winter shelter services after-hours as well.

Client Rights

All households have a choice regarding what housing resource is best for them. If a household declines a referral they will be returned to their prioritization order until a future housing resource becomes available or they are deemed inactive. The CES strives to meet the needs of the households it serves.

Grievance

PHAC and its providers through the CES seek to help decrease homelessness and enhance the quality of life of individuals at risk of or experiencing homelessness in Portsmouth. We seek to operate with integrity and fairness.

Housing program grievances related to a specific provider should be directed to that provider for resolution within their defined organizational process. The agency must respond within 14 business days

after receipt of a complaint. If the issue is not resolved to the client's satisfaction, the client may consider contacting the provider's governing board.

CES grievances, those related to policies and/or procedures, should be directed to PHAC in care of Portsmouth Area Resources Coalition, Inc., (PARC), as the collaborative agency. PHAC must respond within 14 business days after receipt of a complaint.

CES grievances can be submitted electronically via email or by hard copy to:

Portsmouth Homeless Action Consortium
C/O Portsmouth Department of Social Services
1701 High Street, 4th Floor
Portsmouth, VA 23705
phac@portsmouthva.gov

Fair Housing Grievances related to discrimination can be directed as follows below.

Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation (DPOR)

www.dpor.virginia.gov
Regulatory Programs and Compliance Section
Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation
9960 Mayland Drive, Suite 400
Richmond, Virginia 23233-1463
Phone: (804) 367-8504
FAX: (866) 282-3932
Email: ComplaintAnalysis@dpor.virginia.gov

For additional information on Fair Housing laws, contact:
**Housing Discrimination Hotline or Virginia Fair Housing
Office 1-800-669-9777 1-888-551-3247**

Marketing

The Regional Housing Crisis Hotline (HCH) number is marketed through each of our provider agencies. Information on accessing housing information and resources via the HCH is also posted on the City of Portsmouth's official website. The number is also listed in the 2-1-1 Virginia data base.

An informational brochure is also available and each provider agency has an electronic copy to use as they deem appropriate.

Future plans include launching a PHAC Facebook page with CES content.

Training

PHAC and its provider agencies are committed to delivering quality and timely services.

Assessment training is provided for current and new staff, including volunteers annually and as needed by PDSS as the collaborative agency for PHAC. All provider HMIS users are also required to participate in training prior to being able to access the database.

System Evaluation

The CES system will be evaluated on an annual basis to help ensure efficient and effective operations.

The CoC will conduct an annual online survey (i.e. Survey Monkey) to secure feedback from community providers. That input will be analyzed and used to inform future process improvements.

Data Management

The CES utilizes the Hampton Roads Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) to track and manage data. HMIS Policies and Procedures ensure adequate privacy protections of all participant information per the HMIS Data and Technical Standards at 24 CFR 578.7(a)(8). All users of HMIS participate in mandatory training on the privacy rules associated with collection, management, and reporting of client data and sign agreements to adhere to these policies and practices. The same privacy protections and rules associated with the use of HMIS are applied in the handling and managing other client confidential and personal information.

Definitions

Assessment – A series of standardized questions administered uniformly within the CES to determine a household’s current housing situation, housing and service needs, risk of harm, acuity level, risk of future and continued homelessness, and other adverse outcomes

Homeless:

Chronic

Has been homeless for at least one year continuously or on at least four separate occasions in the last three years, where the cumulative total of the four occasions is at least one year (**Stays in institutions of 90 days or less will not constitute a break in homelessness, but such stays are included in the cumulative total**) in a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven, or an emergency shelter; **AND** Has a head of household (or a minor head of household if no adult is present in the household) with a diagnosable substance use disorder, serious mental illness, developmental disability, post-traumatic stress disorder, cognitive impairments resulting from a brain injury, or chronic physical illness or disability, including the co-occurrences of 2 or more of those conditions.

Literal (Rapid Rehousing Eligible)

A: Persons living on the street or sleeping in a place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation OR

B: Persons living in a shelter designed to provide temporary living arrangements (congregate/scattered site emergency shelters, transitional housing, hotel/motel paid for by a charitable organization or government program) OR

C: Persons exiting an institution where they resided for 90 days or less **AND** resided in a place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering institution **OR**

D: Persons fleeing domestic violence. ***Must meet one of the homeless status categories listed above.***

Imminent Risk (Prevention/Diversion Eligible)

A: Person will imminently lose primary nighttime residence within 14 days and meets **BOTH** of the following circumstances. No appropriate subsequent housing options have been identified **AND** household lacks the financial resources and support networks needed to obtain immediate housing or remain in its existing housing. **B:** Persons fleeing domestic violence *** Must also be imminently homeless***

****** (All information cited came directly from Virginia DHCD Homeless Certification as updated December 2015 and is in alignment with HUD)*

Household -- A person living alone or a group of related or unrelated people sharing a housing unit (living space).

VI-SPDAT (Vulnerability-Index Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool) – A survey administered both to individuals and families to determine risk and assist in prioritization decision-making when providing assistance to homeless and at-risk of homelessness persons.