

Balance of State Continuum of Care Program Standards For Emergency Homeless Shelters

The Balance of State Continuum of Care developed the following Emergency Homeless Shelters standards to ensure:

- Program accountability to individuals and families experiencing homelessness
- Program compliance with HUD and State of Wisconsin rules
- Program uniformity
- Adequate program staff competence and training, specific to the target population being served

SECTION 1

DEFINITIONS:

Developmental Disability – means, as defined in section 102 of the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 (42 U.S.C. 15002): (1) A severe, chronic disability of an individual that— (i) Is attributable to a mental or physical impairment or combination of mental and physical impairments; (ii) Is manifested before the individual attains age 22; (iii) Is likely to continue indefinitely; (iv) Results in substantial functional limitations in three or more of the following areas of major life activity: (A) Self-care; (B) Receptive and expressive language; (C) Learning; (D) Mobility; (E) Self direction; (F) Capacity for independent living; (G) Economic self-sufficiency. (v) Reflects the individual’s need for a combination and sequence of special, interdisciplinary, or generic services, individualized supports, or other forms of assistance that are of lifelong or extended duration and are individually planned and coordinated. (2) An individual from birth to age 9, inclusive, who has a substantial developmental delay or specific congenital or acquired condition, may be considered to have a developmental disability without meeting three or more of the criteria described in paragraphs (1)(i) through (v) of the definition of “developmental disability” in this section if the individual, without services and supports, has a high probability of meeting these criteria later in life. 24 CFR 578.3.

Disabling Condition – (1) a condition that: (i) is expected to be long-continuing or of indefinite duration; (ii) substantially impedes the individual's ability to live independently; (iii) could be improved by the provision of more suitable housing conditions; and (iv) is a physical, mental, or emotional impairment, including an impairment caused by alcohol or drug abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder, or brain injury; or (2) a development disability, as defined above; or (3) the disease of Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) or any conditions arising from the etiologic agent for Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome, including infection with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). 24 CFR 583.5.

Family – Family includes, but is not limited to, regardless of marital status, actual or perceived sexual orientation, or gender identity, any group of persons presenting for assistance together with or without children and irrespective of age, relationship, or whether or not a member of the household has a disability. A child who is temporarily away from the home because of placement in foster care is considered a member of the family. 24 CFR 5.403.

Homeless – For the purposes of Rapid Re-Housing, homeless means: An individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, meaning: (1) 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, airport, or camping ground; (2) 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); or (3) 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. 24 CFR 576.2

Emergency Shelter- any facility with overnight sleeping accommodations, the primary purpose of which is to provide temporary shelter for the homeless in general or for specific populations of the homeless. 24 CFR 91.5.

Housing First - an approach to quickly and successfully connect individuals and families experiencing homelessness to permanent housing without preconditions and barriers to entry, such as sobriety, treatment or service participation requirements. Supportive services are offered to maximize housing stability and prevent returns to homelessness as opposed to addressing predetermined treatment goals prior to permanent housing entry.

Housing First is premised on the following principles:

- Homelessness is first and foremost a housing crisis and can be addressed through the provision of safe and affordable housing.
- All people experiencing homelessness, regardless of their housing history and duration of homelessness, can achieve housing stability in permanent housing. Some may need very little support for a brief period of time, while others may need more intensive and long-term supports.
- Everyone is “housing ready.” Sobriety, compliance in treatment, or even criminal histories are not necessary to succeed in housing. Rather, homelessness programs and housing providers must be “consumer ready.”
- Many people experience improvements in quality of life, in the areas of health, mental health, substance use, and employment, as a result of achieving housing. ● People experiencing homelessness have the right to self-determination and should be treated with dignity and respect.
- The exact configuration of housing and services depends upon the needs and preferences of the population.

Housing First core features include:

- Few to no programmatic prerequisites to permanent housing entry
- Low barrier admission policies
- Rapid and streamlined entry into housing
- Supportive services are voluntary, but can and should be used to persistently engage tenants to ensure housing stability
- Tenants have full rights, responsibilities, and legal protections
- Practices and policies to prevent lease violations and evictions
- Applicable in a variety of housing models

<https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Housing-First-Permanent->

SECTION 2

ADMINISTRATION

STANDARD: Each program should operate under the auspices of a Board of Directors; each program must honor the confidentiality and rights of each participant.

CRITERIA:

1. The shelter shall be operated under the umbrella of a non-profit organization, recognized as such with the Internal Revenue Code.
2. The grantee's Board of Directors shall consist of voluntary (unpaid) members, with the exception of the agency's CEO or Director.
3. The grantee's Board of Directors shall meet at least quarterly. The board is responsible for setting the overall policy for the shelter and providing fiscal oversight.
4. There shall be a locked storage space for confidential documents relating to participants and personnel.
5. The shelter shall develop and implement procedures to ensure the confidentiality of records.
6. The program shall have a policy manual which includes the shelter's non-discrimination policy, grievance and termination policy, and confidentiality statement.

SECTION 3

PERSONNEL

STANDARD: The program shall be adequately staffed by qualified personnel to ensure quality service delivery, effective program management, and the safety of program participants.

CRITERIA:

1. The shelter shall have written job descriptions for each position type (paid and unpaid), which includes responsibilities and qualifications.
2. The shelter shall have written policies for the selection of all shelter personnel in conformance with the Equal Employment Opportunities (EEO) guidelines.
3. The shelter shall have adequate, trained, on-site coverage during all hours the shelter is open to participants, unless individual secure units are provided.
4. All shelter staff shall receive training in at least the following:
 - emergency procedures and evacuation policy

- relevant agency operating procedures
 - confidentiality and boundaries
5. All relevant direct service paid staff shall receive additional training in at least the following:
- non-violent crisis intervention techniques
 - referral procedures to relevant community resources
 - cultural sensitivity

These trainings can be developed by each individual agency but should be offered for all new staff as part of the onboarding process. It is recommended that agencies develop a plan to offer these as ongoing trainings annually. Agencies will be responsible for tracking these trainings with each direct service staff.

SECTION 4

FACILITY

STANDARD: All shelter facilities should ensure that basic health and safety standards can be met.

CRITERIA:

1. The shelter shall comply with applicable local fire, environmental, health, and safety standards and regulations.
2. The shelter shall meet HUD's minimum standards for sanitation and habitability requirements as established by *24 CFR 576.403*.
3. The shelter shall provide suitable sleeping arrangements for each shelter participant as applicable to shelter type. The shelter provides clean bedding for participants entering shelter.
4. The shelter shall provide sufficient wash basins and toilets which are in proper operating condition for personal hygiene. Clean towels, soap and toilet tissue shall be available to each participant.
5. Case management and/or the collection of private data shall be done in a manner to protect the participant's confidentiality.
6. The shelter shall have a fire safety plan which is compliant with the local municipality's fire code. At minimum, the following must be included:
 - posted evacuation plan;
 - regular fire drills conducted;
 - fire detection systems;
 - adequate fire exits;
 - adequate emergency signage;
 - adequate emergency lighting.

7. The shelter shall have adequate provisions for the following:
- pest control;
 - garbage removal;
 - proper heating and ventilation systems;
 - exits, entrances, steps and walkways must be kept clear of obstructions.

SECTION 5

FISCAL MANAGEMENT

STANDARD: The program shall have sound accounting/fiscal practices with proper checks and balances.

CRITERIA:

1. There shall be an accounting system which is maintained in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP).
2. If participants turn over their valuables or money to the shelter, the shelter shall have a record of accountability for those items.
3. The shelter shall receive an annual independent audit or financial review.
4. The shelter shall have internal fiscal control procedures which are reviewed and approved by the Agency's Board of Directors.

SECTION 6

FOOD

STANDARD: Every effort should be made to ensure adequate access to food supplies for all participants with the proper sanitation and preparation of food on-site.

CRITERIA:

1. Shelters providing food shall make adequate provisions for the sanitary storage and preparation of foods.
2. Shelters providing food will make a reasonable effort to accommodate the dietary, cultural and religious needs of their participants.
3. Shelters shall provide or arrange food services to participants or make known the available services nearby.

SECTION 7

HEALTH

STANDARD: Each program should have clearly defined processes for addressing first aid, medication, and disease.

CRITERIA:

1. The shelter shall always have available first aid equipment and supplies in case of a medical emergency.
2. All staff on duty shall have access to a telephone. Emergency telephone numbers shall be posted conspicuously near the telephone.
3. The shelter must have a policy regarding the possession and use of controlled substances as well as prescription medication.
4. The shelter shall have procedures to limit the exposure of infectious diseases.

SECTION 8

OPERATIONS

STANDARD: The program shall make every effort to provide safe and stable emergency shelter accommodations while assisting participants in locating safe, affordable housing that meets participants' needs in accordance with client intake practices and within EHH guidelines.

CRITERIA:

1. In addition to sleeping arrangements, the shelter shall address the following basic needs:
 - a. The right to individual dignity;
 - b. A clean environment;
 - c. Reasonable security;
 - d. Referrals to other agencies.
2. The shelter shall have written procedures for:
 - a. Admission and intake
 - b. Diversion
 - c. Referrals
 - d. Discharge
 - e. Included in these standards shall be safeguards to meet the safety and shelter needs of special populations (i.e. victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking; and individuals and families who have the highest barriers to housing and are likely to be homeless the longest.)
3. All shelters must maintain immediate and low-barrier access. Programs cannot deny service based on the active symptoms of a potential disability, including mental health

and behavioral health. Absolute sobriety cannot determine eligibility for shelter; therefore, no alcohol or drug screens can be required for eligibility.

A. If the shelter is concerned about a client's wellbeing due to mental or behavioral health and/or believe the client is significantly impaired, the shelter must seek appropriate services.

4. The shelter shall actively work to limit barriers to program entry and will have written policies as to what would disqualify a person from entering shelter.
5. The shelter shall make known the rules, guidelines, procedures and regulations of the shelter in a way that a participant will understand them.
6. The shelter shall make known the rights and responsibilities of shelter participants that shall include a grievance procedure for addressing potential violations of their rights.
7. The shelter shall have a policy regarding the reporting of child abuse and endangerment.
8. The shelter may require adult participants to perform reasonable duties related to safety, cleanliness, and health of shelter suitable to their abilities. Documentation may be requested to support accommodations.
9. The shelter shall provide access to a public or private telephone for use by shelter participants to make and receive calls.
10. The shelter shall document services provided to each participant in accordance with grant requirements and retain them according to agency policy.
11. The shelter shall provide a safe, secure environment and have procedures to regulate access.
12. The shelter shall have a policy regarding the control of weapons.
13. The shelter shall involve participants in the decision-making processes of the shelter. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways: participant advisory councils, having homeless or formerly homeless people on the board or on the staff, etc.
14. The shelter shall offer participants residing at the shelter to use the shelter address for the purpose of voter registration and the receipt of public benefits, in accordance with local requirements.
15. The shelter shall maintain records of unusual or significant incidents.
16. The shelter shall have procedures for consensual and nonconsensual searches.
17. The shelter shall comply with the Balance of State Policies and Procedures for Coordinated Entry.

18. The Shelter shall participate in the use of an HMIS database or a HUD approved HMIS comparable database for domestic violence shelters, comply with data collection standards, monitor the quality and completeness of data entered into HMIS, and participate in ongoing mandated trainings offered by the HMIS administrators.
19. The shelter shall not require participants to participate in religious services or other forms of religious expression. Programs will honor participants preferred religious beliefs or absence thereof.
20. The shelter shall comply with HUD's Equal Access Final Rule and will not discriminate on the basis of gender identity or expression, race, religion, or national origin. Furthermore, the shelter shall not ask for nor require documentation to prove gender.
21. Shelters serving families with children shall also not discriminate on the basis of the sex or age of the children or the size of the family, except where limited by the facility. The Shelter shall take measures to ensure that involuntary family separation does not occur. Furthermore, the shelter shall not ask for nor require documentation to prove familial status.
22. The shelter shall have written termination procedures. Procedures must include method for informing participant that the assistance is coming to an end, reasons assistance is coming to an end, must recognize individual rights, must include a written grievance procedure.
23. The shelter shall have a written policy to ensure the provision of emergency services for individuals whom it does not have the immediate capacity to serve. The policy shall include a process by which persons are ensured access to emergency services during hours when the coordinated entry system is unavailable (i.e. offices are closed), and how persons will be given access when the system is available.
24. The shelter shall create policies and procedures to ensure participants are eligible for emergency shelter services. Individuals and families defined as homeless under the following categories are eligible for assistance in emergency shelter projects:
 - a. Category 1 – Literally Homeless
 - b. Category 2 – Imminent Risk of Homeless
 - c. Category 3 – Homeless Under Other Federal Statutes
 - d. Category 4 – Fleeing/Attempting to Flee DV

Documentation of eligibility shall be included in each participant file.

25. The shelter shall have written policy and procedures for assessing, prioritizing, and reassessing individuals' and families' needs for essential services related to emergency shelter. Essential Services can include, but are not limited to: child care assistance, education services (GED, skill-building, literacy, health/substance abuse education), employment assistance, health services, legal services, life skills training, mental health services, substance abuse treatment, and transportation

SECTION 9

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

STANDARD: Each program must have a defined process for program review and evaluation.

CRITERIA:

1. The shelter shall periodically review processes and procedures, as well as participant and staff feedback, to assess possible modifications for improvement. This process will occur at least annually.
2. The shelter shall track indicators on a continual basis, and review for changes at least annually. These outcomes are based on HUD requirements.
3. The shelter staff or board of directors will evaluate critical incidents in a timely manner and determine whether policies and procedures could be improved.