

## Balance of State Continuum of Care Program Standards For Motel Vouchers

The Balance of State Continuum of Care developed the following Motel Voucher 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 shelter, 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

## **SECTION 2**

### **ADMINISTRATION**

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

**CRITERIA:**

1. The agency providing motel vouchers 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 motel vouchers and providing fiscal oversight.
4. There shall be a locked storage space for confidential documents relating to participants and personnel.
5. The agency providing motel vouchers 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 following standards apply to employees administering motel vouchers within EHH funded nonprofits. These agencies shall be adequately staffed by qualified personnel to ensure quality service delivery, effective program management, and the safety of program participants.

#### **CRITERIA:**

1. The agency shall have written job descriptions for each position type (paid and unpaid), which includes responsibilities and qualifications.
2. The agency shall have written policies for the selection of all shelter personnel in conformance with the Equal Employment Opportunities (EEO) guidelines.
3. All agency staff shall receive training in at least the following:
  - relevant agency operating procedures
  - confidentiality and boundaries
4. 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 motel facilities should ensure that basic health and safety standards can be met. It is the responsibility of the nonprofit agency to confirm the motel's adherence to the criteria stated below at the time of initial partnership.

#### **CRITERIA:**

1. The motel shall comply with applicable local fire, environmental, health, and safety standards and regulations.
2. The motel shall have the proper city and state licenses to operate. An annual agreement shall be signed between the motel and the agency indicating the correct licenses are in place.
3. All room occupancy limits shall be adhered to when placing a household with a motel voucher.

4. Motels shall provide sufficient wash basins and toilets which are in proper operating condition for personal hygiene.
5. Case management and/or the collection of private data shall be done in a manner to protect the participant's confidentiality.
6. The motel 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;
  - fire detection systems;
  - adequate fire exits;
  - adequate emergency signage;
  - adequate emergency lighting.
7. The motel 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. The agency shall receive an annual independent audit or financial review.
3. The agency shall have internal fiscal control procedures which are reviewed and approved by the Agency's Board of Directors.

## SECTION 6

### 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 ESG guidelines.

**CRITERIA:**

1. In addition to sleeping arrangements, the agency shall address the following basic needs:
  - a. The right to human dignity;
  - b. Reasonable security;
  - c. Referrals to other agencies.
  
2. The agency 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 agencies 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 agency is concerned about a client's wellbeing due to mental or behavioral health and/or believe the client is significantly impaired, the agency must seek appropriate services.
  - B. The agency shall actively work to limit barriers to program entry and will have written policies as to what would disqualify a person from receiving a motel voucher.
  - C. The agency shall make known the rules, guidelines, procedures and regulations of the motel voucher program in a way that a participant will understand them.
  - D. The agency shall make known the rights and responsibilities of participants that shall include a grievance procedure for addressing potential violations of their rights.
  - E. The agency shall have a policy regarding the reporting of child abuse and endangerment.
  - F. The agency shall document services provided to each participant in accordance with grant requirements and retain them according to agency policy.

- G. The agency shall involve participants in the decision-making processes of the agency. 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.
- H. The agency shall offer participants utilizing motel vouchers to use the agency's address for the purpose of voter registration and the receipt of public benefits, in accordance with local requirements.
- I. The agency shall maintain records of unusual or significant incidents.
- J. The agency shall comply with the Balance of State Policies and Procedures for Coordinated Entry.
- K. The agency 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.
- L. The agency shall not require participants to participate in religious services or other forms of religious expression.
- M. The agency 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 agency shall not ask for nor require documentation to prove gender.
- N. Except where limited by the motel facility, agencies 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, and should take measures to ensure that involuntary family separation does not occur. Furthermore, the agency shall not ask for nor require documentation to prove familial status.
- O. The agency 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.
- P. The agency 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.
- Q. The agency 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 motel voucher projects:

- a. Category 1 – Literally Homeless
- b. Category 2 – Imminent Risk of Homeless
- c. Category 3 – Other Federal Statutes
- d. Category 4 – Fleeing/Attempting to Flee DV

Documentation of eligibility shall be included in each participant file.

## SECTION 7

### **QUALITY IMPROVEMENT**

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

**CRITERIA:**

1. The agency 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 agency shall track indicators on a continual basis, and review for changes at least annually. These outcomes are based on HUD requirements.
3. The agency staff or board of directors will evaluate critical incidents in a timely manner and determine whether policies and procedures could be improved.