



## Housing First—Community Wide Definition

Housing First is an approach that centers on providing individuals experiencing homelessness with appropriate housing quickly, regardless of potential housing barriers, then providing support services as needed. What differentiates a Housing First approach from other strategies is that there is an immediate and primary focus on helping individuals and families access long-term, sustainable housing as quickly as possible. This approach has the benefit of not only being consistent with what most people experiencing homelessness want and prefer, but also being associated with consistently high outcomes across a variety of communities.<sup>1,2</sup>

### Core Elements:

- Acceptance of applicants regardless of their sobriety, any past or current use of substances, any completion of rehabilitation or treatment, or participation in any other supportive services.
- Applicants are seldom rejected solely on the basis of poor credit or financial history, poor absent rental history, criminal convictions, or any other behaviors are generally held to indicate a lack of “housing readiness.”
- Discretionary funds are available to support basic needs for both clients without income and clients who experience financial crises. Tenants are given reasonable flexibility in paying their tenant share of rent. Typical case manager to client ratio 1:10 to 1:15.
- Supportive services emphasize engagement and problem-solving over therapeutic goals. Services plans are highly tenant-driven without standardized or predetermined goals, and client choice is key. Participation in services or program compliance (unrelated to lease terms) is not a condition of tenancy.
- Use of alcohol or drugs in and of itself (without other lease violations) is not considered a reason for eviction.
- Tenant selection process includes the prioritization of eligible tenants based on criteria such as duration/chronicity of homelessness, vulnerability, or high utilization of crisis services.
- Case managers/service coordinators are trained in and actively employ evidence-based practices for client/tenant engagement, such as motivational interviewing and client-centered counseling.
- Services are informed by a harm reduction philosophy that recognizes that drug and alcohol use and addiction may be a part of tenants’ lives; tenants are engaged in non-judgmental communication, and tenants are offered education regarding how to avoid risky behaviors and engage in safer practices.
- Building and apartment unit may include special physical features that accommodate disabilities, reduce harm, and promote health among tenants.
- Community has a coordinated assessment system for matching people experiencing homelessness to the most appropriate housing and services; individuals experiencing chronic homelessness and high need families are matched to appropriate permanent supportive housing/Housing First opportunities.<sup>3</sup>
- Every effort is made to offer a transfer to a tenant from one housing situation to an alternative option, if a tenancy is in jeopardy. Programs avoid eviction back into homelessness whenever possible.

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.endhomelessness.org/library/entry/what-is-housing-first;>

<sup>2</sup> <http://pathwaystohousing.org/research-library/>

<sup>3</sup> [http://usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset\\_library/Housing\\_First\\_Checklist\\_FINAL.pdf](http://usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Housing_First_Checklist_FINAL.pdf)