

Austin/Travis County Homelessness Response System Coordinated Assessment Policy

As per the Austin/Travis County Homelessness Response System Coordinated Entry Written Standards, “provisions in the CoC Program Interim Rule at 24 CFR 578.7(a)(8) require that Continuums of Care (CoC) and recipients of HUD CoC Program and HUD Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) Program funding establish a [Coordinated Entry System]” which “include(s) a comprehensive and standardized assessment tool.”

The Austin Prioritization Assessment Tool (APAT) is the standardized assessment tool utilized by the Austin/Travis County Coordinated Entry System (CES) to prioritize households for housing referrals. The APAT was developed by the TX-503 CoC governance system, which reports to the Leadership Council, the local CoC Board. The APAT went into effect as the official prioritization tool for the Austin/Travis County CES on October 1, 2021, following an approval vote by the Leadership Council in August 2021. The decision to approve the APAT was based on a thorough review of pilot data collected by the CES throughout 2020 and 2021.

The TX-503 CoC Coordinated Entry Written Standards guide the CoC’s compliance with the Interim Rule. This policy, rather, details the role of the Coordinated Assessment in the local Coordinated Entry System, and the process by which the entities responsible for developing and maintaining the Coordinated Assessment will do so.

Continuous Improvement of the APAT

The responsible entity for the ongoing development and continuous improvement of the local Coordinated Assessment is the Austin/Travis County Homelessness Response System Equity Committee, or a subordinate workgroup designated by the committee. The Equity Committee provides updates to the Leadership Council regarding innovations and refinements to the questions asked in the prioritization tool.

Any changes made to the APAT will be formalized by vote in the Equity Committee. These updates will be implemented by assessors in the community on an annual basis. Votes to approve changes to the APAT can happen at any point throughout the year at any frequency, and the changes will be implemented in the following implementation period, which will be no more than 12 months from the date of any given approval vote on a change to the tool.

The date for annual update implementation is November 1st of each year. Any changes that have been made and not yet implemented by the first of November of any year will be implemented and effective officially as of that date.

ECHO will follow all steps in the process below in preparation for each implementation date:

1. Send out updates to the Coordinated Entry assessor community with a summary of changes to APAT, a reminder of the required (quarterly/biannual, etc) training, and updated training materials to reflect new changes, as needed.
2. Update assessor training materials as needed to reflect new change(s)
3. Conduct trainings with all assessors regarding new change(s) to the APAT
4. Update Coordinated Assessment language in HMIS to reflect new change(s)
5. Update all HMIS reports that rely on APAT data to reflect new change(s)
6. If new change(s) will affect total scoring, communicate this with community partners

Role of the Austin/Travis County Coordinated Assessment

The APAT is a prioritization tool that plays a vital role in the selection of clients for referrals to program openings they are eligible for, as they become available. APAT score only comes into effect when there are multiple otherwise eligible applicants for the same slot in the same program. In cases in which two clients' APAT scores are identical, the Coordinated Entry Written Standards for the Austin/Travis County Homelessness Response System provide criteria for prioritization by intervention type which guides the order in which applicants will be referred.

It IS the role of the APAT to...

- Prioritize clients who are least likely to otherwise self-resolve their homelessness without formal housing intervention

It is NOT the role of the APAT to...

- Determine who is and is not eligible for a program
- Indicate the type of housing intervention an applicant would benefit most from
- Triage by risk of mortality
- Identify acute medical or safety crises
- Automatically prioritize all individuals of any specific sub-group or subpopulation above all individuals NOT in that population
- Create more permanent housing resources
- Leave any permanent housing resource unused

Some of the factors above are assessed during the assessment and referral process separately from the APAT questions and scoring. These factors may be considered during the referral creation step. For example, program eligibility (such as Veteran Status) is confirmed separately from APAT score, as is the identification of potential intervention need. These factors often overlap with APAT scoring factors, but the APAT cannot make an otherwise ineligible client eligible, nor the reverse.