

SNAPS Special NOFO: Housing First

On June 22nd, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) released the Continuum of Care Supplemental to Address Unsheltered and Rural Homelessness (Special NOFO). This is a first-of-its-kind opportunity to address unsheltered homelessness and homeless encampments including funds set aside specifically to address homelessness in rural communities.

To support communities in developing their plans to address rural and unsheltered homelessness, HUD is highlighting existing Technical Assistance (TA) and other resources through a series of listserv messages. Today's message focuses on implementing the Housing First approach to homelessness.

Housing First

Housing First is an approach that prioritizes providing safe, decent, and affordable permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness. It does not have service participation requirements or preconditions to housing. The Housing First approach 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 can achieve stability in permanent housing;
- Everyone is “housing ready;”
- Permanent housing provides a stable place to live and serves as a platform to pursue goals like health, food security, employment, and better quality of life;
- People experiencing homelessness have the right to self-determination and should be treated with dignity and respect; and
- The exact configuration of housing and services depends upon the needs and preferences of the person.

Accordingly, Housing First emphasizes client choice in accessing supportive services like mental health or substance use counseling. Programs should make services and service referrals (e.g., for substance use and mental health counseling, job training, etc.) available to clients. Staff should also proactively engage with clients to ensure that they are aware of available services. This allows programs to offer tailored services that can be intense or not, depending on the needs and wants of the individual client.

Housing First is a proven approach to reducing homelessness—in fact, it [outperforms](#) other approaches. As the [United States Interagency Council on Homelessness](#) (USICH) writes, “Study after study has shown that Housing First yields higher housing retention rates, drives significant reductions in the use of costly crisis services and institutions, and helps people achieve better health and social outcomes.”

Most importantly, when implemented with fidelity to the model, evidence demonstrates that Housing First keeps people housed. Supportive housing programs using a Housing First approach have high rates of housing retention, and Housing First rapid re-housing programs have similarly high rates of placement

into permanent housing.¹ With this foundation, Housing First program clients demonstrably achieve better health and social outcomes.²

CoCs can—and should—play an important role in keeping projects faithful to a Housing First approach. First, CoCs should train projects on what the Housing First approach is, why it is important, and [how it can be implemented](#) at the project level. Second, they should [regularly evaluate](#) projects for Housing First fidelity across multiple dimensions, including access, participant input, leases, services, and housing itself. Third, they should monitor and analyze evaluation data to determine which projects may need additional support in implementing Housing First.

The resources below provide further guidance for integrating Housing First in CoC planning and the Special NOFO application.

Resource List

- [Housing First Implementation Resources \(HUD\)](#)
- [Housing First Checklist: Assessing Projects and Systems for a Housing First Orientation \(USICH\)](#)
- [Housing First Assessment Tool \(HUD\)](#)
- [Implementing Housing First in Permanent Supportive Housing \(USICH\)](#)
- [Permanent Supportive Housing Evidence-Based Practices \(SAMHSA\)](#)
- [Resource Roundup: Understanding and Implementing Housing First \(USICH\)](#)

The Special NOFO is open through October 20, 2022. Please submit questions to SpecialCoCNOFO@hud.gov.

¹ Per [USICH](#), housing retention for supportive housing programs using a Housing First approach is generally between 75 – 85% for single adults and 80 – 90% for families. Housing First rapid re-housing programs have also demonstrated high success rates, including 80% placement into permanent housing for the VA's Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program and 90% placement for the Rapid Re-housing for Homeless Families Demonstration.

² [USICH](#) reports that Housing First significantly reduces visits to hospital emergency rooms; most research finds that it also reduces hospitalizations and inpatient care costs. Likewise, Housing First clients generally experienced fewer arrests and days of incarceration.