

# Helping Unhoused Older Adults Through HUD Homeless Assistance Programs

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## Justice in Aging

Justice in Aging is a national organization that uses the power of law to fight senior poverty by securing access to affordable health care, economic security, housing, and the courts for older adults with limited resources. Since 1972, we've focused our efforts primarily on populations that have traditionally lacked legal protection such as women, people of color, LGBT individuals, and people with limited English proficiency.

## Key Lessons

1. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funds homelessness interventions, such as permanent supportive housing (PSH), that are a critical resource for older adults at risk of or experiencing homelessness.
2. Legal assistance providers and aging services advocates should seek out more information about their local Continuum of Care (CoC) and how to refer older adults to coordinated entry, which is generally the only way to access many HUD-funded homeless assistance projects, including many HUD-funded PSH projects.
3. By joining and partnering with CoCs, legal assistance providers and aging services advocates can improve their community's homeless response system for older adults.

## Continuums of Care Coordinate Communities' Homeless Response Systems

HUD's Continuum of Care (CoC) program funds coordinated, community-wide homelessness response systems across the country.

- CoCs exist in every state and are local, regional, or statewide groups that work to reduce homelessness in their communities and coordinate homeless assistance projects that provide housing and supportive services.<sup>1</sup>

## HUD Funds Various Homeless Assistance Interventions, Including Permanent Supportive Housing

The main homeless assistance interventions funded by HUD include:

- **Emergency Shelter:** Emergency shelters provide temporary housing for people experiencing homelessness.<sup>2</sup>
- **Transitional Housing:** Transitional housing provides temporary housing with supportive services for up to two years and is meant to help people transition from emergency shelters into permanent housing.<sup>3</sup>
- **Rapid Re-housing (RRH):** RRH provides short- or medium-term tenant-based rental assistance and services, including case management, to help people secure permanent housing as soon as possible.<sup>4</sup>

1 See generally U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "[Continuum of Care 101](#)" (June 2009).

2 HUD Exchange, [Emergency Shelter](#).

3 HUD Exchange, [Transitional Housing \(TH\)](#).

4 HUD Exchange, [Rapid Re-Housing \(RRH\)](#).

- **Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH):** PSH provides indefinite rental assistance with voluntary supportive services for people experiencing homelessness who also have disabilities. PSH programs are often designed to address the complex needs of people who are at risk of or experiencing chronic homelessness and need more support to achieve housing stability. These supports, which aim to promote housing retention and independent living, may include services such as case management and behavioral health treatment.<sup>5</sup>

## Housing First Principles Help Remove Barriers to Housing

HUD prioritizes funding homeless assistance projects, including those providing RRH and PSH, that adopt a Housing First model. “Housing First” is a proven model of addressing homelessness that expedites access to permanent housing with voluntary, person-centered wraparound services.

- PSH and other programs with a Housing First approach have low-barrier admissions policies and generally do not screen people out because of issues such as poor credit history, lack of income, past evictions, or criminal records (with limited exceptions).<sup>6</sup>

## Refer Clients Who Need Homeless Assistance to Coordinated Entry

Legal assistance providers and aging services advocates working with older adults at risk of or experiencing homelessness may [contact their local CoC](#) to refer clients to the CoC’s coordinated entry process.

- Each CoC operates a coordinated entry system that assesses an individual’s need and preferences for housing and supports.
- After going through coordinated entry, individuals are placed on a CoC’s priority list that prioritizes people with the highest needs for referral to appropriate homeless assistance projects.
- Unlike many other safety net programs, HUD homeless assistance is not an entitlement, so not all who are eligible will receive referrals.
- Individuals should periodically keep in touch with coordinated entry staff to update their contact information, report significant changes, and ensure they remain on a priority list.

## Coordinated Entry Is the “Front Door” to HUD’s Homeless Resources

Coordinated entry is important because it is generally the only way to access many HUD-funded homeless assistance projects, including many HUD-funded PSH projects.<sup>7</sup>

- Older adults staying in shelters may still need to be connected to coordinated entry. They may be staying in shelters or other temporary housing projects that do not receive HUD funding and do not participate in the coordinated entry system. People living in shelters offering temporary living arrangements may be eligible for referral to HUD-funded RRH and PSH via coordinated entry.
- Sometimes coordinated entry also refers people to Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) for certain vouchers or other housing assistance designated for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

5 HUD Exchange, [Permanent Supportive Housing \(PSH\)](#); HUD, [Notice CPD-16-11](#), Notice on Prioritizing Persons Experiencing Chronic Homelessness and other Vulnerable Homeless Persons in Permanent Supportive Housing (July 2016).

6 HUD Office of Policy Development and Research, [“Housing First Works”](#) (2023); HUD Exchange, [Fair Housing and Equal Access – Criminal History](#).

7 HUD requires CoC- and ESG-funded homeless assistance projects to accept referrals from the coordinated entry process only. (Exceptions exist, however, for providers serving people fleeing domestic violence, trafficking, and other similar situations.) HUD, [“Coordinated Entry Core Elements”](#) (June 2017).

- In general, however, coordinated entry does not place people on waiting lists for HUD’s subsidized housing programs like Housing Choice (“Section 8”) Vouchers, Section 202, or public housing – individuals should [apply for these programs](#) separately.

## Aging Advocates Should Participate in Continuums of Care

Legal assistance providers and aging services advocates should become involved with [their local CoC](#). CoC membership and meetings are usually open to any member of the public with an interest in homelessness issues. Some ways that legal assistance providers and aging services advocates may be able to contribute include:

- Informing a CoC’s strategic planning by highlighting and providing education about the housing and service needs of older adults.
- Shaping a CoC’s coordinated entry process to ensure that older adults have equitable access to the homeless service system. For example, advocates may be able to offer input on the assessment tool and criteria their CoCs use to prioritize households to ensure they capture older adults’ needs.
- Becoming part of a CoC’s referral network: advocates can refer older adults to coordinated entry while also helping CoCs connect people to resources in the aging and disability network.
- Providing housing and/or services as part of supportive housing projects designed for older adults.

## Conclusion

Aging advocates serving older adults in need of HUD’s homeless resources, such as PSH, should refer individuals to a CoC’s coordinated entry system. While not all older adults who go through coordinated entry will find housing through this process, it may increase some older adults’ potential housing options. Legal assistance providers and aging services advocates can also become involved with their local CoC to have a “seat at the table” and ensure their community’s homeless response system meets the needs of older adults.

## Additional Resources

- Justice in Aging Issue Brief, [HUD Homeless Assistance Programs: A Basic Primer for Aging Advocates](#)
- NCLER: [Trauma-Informed Practices: Serving Older Adults Facing Housing Instability](#)
- National Academy for State Health Policy, [Health and Housing: Introduction to Cross-Sector Collaboration](#)
- Administration for Community Living, [Housing and Services Resource Center](#)
- U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, [Older Adults and Homelessness: How Continuums of Care and Area Agencies on Aging Can Collaborate](#)

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**Case consultation assistance is available for attorneys and professionals seeking more information to help older adults. Contact NCLER at [ConsultNCLER@acl.hhs.gov](mailto:ConsultNCLER@acl.hhs.gov).**

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