

WRITTEN STANDARDS FOR PROVISION OF ESG AND COC ASSISTANCE

The West Central Minnesota Continuum of Care Homeless to Housed Task Force has developed written standards for the provision of Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) and HUD Continuum of Care (CoC) assistance which include policies and procedures for evaluating each household's eligibility to obtain ESG or CoC assistance. The standards serve as a guide for administering ESG and CoC assistance within the West Central MN region. While each program's regulation clearly define program use, the West Central CoC has further identified how program funds can best be utilized based on the needs of the homeless in our region. The West Central CoC will continue to refine its written standards as the region adapts and further develops our regional CARES (Coordinated Assessment, Referral and Enrolment System) network AND develops improved strategies for targeting resources.

The written standards were developed through a Continuum-wide System Mapping process. Information was gained from various service providers through surveys, HMIS reports, program type meetings (Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing, and Permanent Housing), and CoC meetings. The information gathered included;

- Current/Planned Inventory
- Target Population
- Service Descriptions
- Essential Program Elements
- Eligibility/Entrance Criteria
- Eviction/Ban Criteria
- Outcomes – both program and system

Note: inventory included programs, beds, population, subpopulation served, bed type and length of stay

The information was then presented to the Continuum to further refine and define each component. The standards are designed to assure a consistent, transparent, client centric, clearly defined and coordinated process.

INCOME ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

All assistance provided through ESG and CoC Programs must benefit households who have an annual income of below 30 percent of median household income for the area based on household size, and as updated annually by HUD (with the exception of those who are currently homeless by HUD definition, but must be within 30 percent at 1 year certification). The most recent table of income limits is available at: <http://www.huduser.org/datasets/il.html> .

Certain rules and requirements apply in determining income, as well as eligibility;

1. ESG regulations require that income of all qualifying household members may be included in the determination of income, as may be applicable. The applicant's income must not exceed 30% of the Housing Area Median Family Income (HAMFI).
2. The ESG or CoC program staff must verify that the applicant's income meets low income criteria within thirty (30) days prior to entering ESG or CoC funded programs (excluding Emergency Shelter).

3. Staff must consider anticipated income to determine affordability prior to placing in scattered site housing where participants must transition in place.
4. ESG and CoC recipients (excluding Emergency Shelter) must determine eligibility by examining, verifying, and/or updated, as necessary, source documents and documenting in the client file, preferably through HMIS. Examples of documentation include; Last 30 days of payment stubs, self-employment profit/loss statement, agency statements (Social Security Benefits, Disability Benefits, Unemployment Compensation, Retirement Funds, Pension, Workman's Compensation, Child Support) or other applicable proof of income.
5. If the individual has no income or is paid in cash and has no way of obtaining income verification from the source, then a Declaration of Income form may be used, but only as a last measure.

COORDINATION OF SERVICES

Good coordination of services is essential to a client centric model, most effective use of resources, effective Coordinated Assessment system, and improved outcomes. Agencies receiving ESG and CoC funds must work collaboratively with household members and other providers to plan and link to resources that will help house and stabilize their consumers. ESG and CoC funds may be used in the coordination of services. Component services include:

1. Utilizing CARES to access, screen, assess and link household applying for services to homeless prevention, emergency shelter, transitional housing, rapid-rehousing, and permanent supportive housing.;
2. Advocating on behalf of individuals/families in accessing all services they are eligible to receive.
3. Assuring no access to services through side-doors;
4. Working with households to create a housing stability or independent living plan;
5. Helping participant's access services by funding, if applicable, transportation assistance to attend service appointments;
6. Prioritizing enrollment in mainstream resources;
7. Updating eligibility and availability information into HMIS and/or CARES to assure appropriate, timely and accurate linkage to services;
8. Children must be connected with school liaison for prompt enrollment per CoC policy;
9. Monitoring and evaluating program participant progress;
10. Following-up on CARES Referrals and requests for information in a timely manner;
11. Updating household intake, exit and status changes in HMIS; and
12. Following up with household after exit to inquire on housing stability and need for further linkage to service (Excluding Emergency Shelter).

SERVICE PRIORITIZATION & TARGETING

The Continuum recognizes that the demand for services outweighs existing resources; that some households entering homelessness can be diverted from ever needing to enter shelter; and that some entering shelter can resolve their housing crisis independent of further homeless supports. Furthermore, the Continuum understands that linking individuals with the right level of housing and

services is not only essential to their success in the program, but is the most efficient use of regional resources. Service prioritization is there for essential to maximize existing resources, focusing on those that are least likely to succeed without intervention and supports.

The Continuum has adopted a policy prioritizing service for the following populations within the West Central service area. The specific policies are located on the CoC website and include documentation requirements. Prioritization includes:

1. Chronic Homeless: Chronic Homeless persons and families will be given priority in CARES including preference over open shelter beds and enrollment in permanent supportive housing.
2. Families with Children and Youth: Families with children and unaccompanied youth will be given priority in Rapid-Rehousing programs at a three to one rate over adult singles.
3. Persons coming from the streets or emergency shelter: Preference will be given to those meeting the HUD homeless definition category 1 over those in other categories or those in doubled-up situations or institutionalized.
4. Minnesota Long-Term Homeless: Persons meeting Minnesota's LTH definition will be given priority for Minnesota funded programs after Chronic Homeless persons.
5. US veterans ineligible for federal, state or county Veterans benefits: Preference in permanent supportive housing will be given to US veterans who do not qualify for other veteran's services due to discharge status. Preference applies when VI-SPDAT or SPDAT score and other priorities are equal.
6. High Service Needs: Persons with high service usage and needs, as determined by the VI-SPDAT or SPDAT score, will be prioritized for permanent supportive housing following chronic homeless and long-term homeless priorities.

The Continuum has adopted the following policy on service targeting:

1. Prevention: Funds may be used to provide relocation, stabilization, and short-term rental assistance for low barrier households.
2. Emergency Shelter: Funds may be used to provide emergency shelter, motel vouchers, onsite meals, personal hygiene, case management, advocacy and housing linkage for anyone seeking shelter and known to be without safe and secure overnight sleeping accommodations.
3. Motel Voucher: Funds may be used to provide a 1-5 nights motel stay and limited case management for anyone seeking shelter known to be without safe and secure overnight sleeping accommodations and cannot access or are not eligible for emergency shelter.
4. Domestic Violence Shelter: Funds may be used to provide temporary shelter and support services for persons escaping violent or abuse situations.
5. Transitional Housing: Funds may be used to provide TH to persons who meet the federal and/or state definition of homelessness, who have moderate barriers, who display an ability to increase their income enough at exit to financially maintain stable housing; and who show a willingness to develop a housing stability plan and goals and meet with program Case manager. Individuals who have failed out of Transitional Housing in our CoC in the past will be ineligible for THP and referred to PSH. Program guidelines include:

- Financial Literacy: Basic budgeting, credit repair, debt management, consumer protection issues.
- Rental Assistance:
 - Note: Adjusted gross income is utilized for HUD.
 - 30%
 - Every 3 months.
 - Agency assistance is not to exceed the FMR.
- Case Management: Service to include needs assessment, benefits/eligibility screening, information, referral, and advocacy as necessary
 - Expect weekly contact with Minimum of monthly contact
 - Require a minimum of monthly home visits.
 - CM must work with client to set goals and develop plan of action based on barriers assessment, personal goals with a minimum of plan to include increasing household income (employment income if applicable) and maintaining stable housing.
 - Evaluate goal and plan at least quarterly and monitor at least monthly.
 - Assure all school children are connected to the school liaison and enrolled in school within ___ days.
- Advocacy: Advocate on behalf consumer to access house and mainstream resources.
- Housing Education: teaching skill sets for interacting with landlords, basic concepts of leases, and expected behaviors of a tenant

6. Permanent Housing: Funds may be used to provide PH to persons who meet the federal and/or state definition of homeless, have high-moderate to high barriers, and who have a willingness to develop a housing stability plan and goals and meet with CM. Programs guidelines include:

- No time limits;
- Support Services offered based personal choice and barriers assessment;
 - Range of services from intensive to minimal and mandated to voluntary.
- Assistance with Rent subsidies;
 - Note: Adjusted gross income is utilized for HUD.
 - Cannot pay more than 30% of income towards rent and utilities.
 - To be evaluated a minimum annually.
 - Rent must be reasonable.
- Advocacy: Advocate on behalf consumer to access housing and mainstream resources.
- Housing Stability Plan: Consumer driven housing plan based on barriers assessment.
- Housing Education: Basic tenant education on teaching skills

Types and targeting of Permanent Housing includes:

- Rapid Re-housing – moderate barrier singles or families with income or income potential
- Permanent Supportive Housing – high barrier singles or families
- Long-Term Homeless Beds – long-term homeless singles or families
- Permanent Supportive Housing for Chronic Homeless – Chronic singles or families.

EDUCATION AND FAMILY STABILIZATION

1. Education: The CoC adopted a policy (see CoC website) requiring all projects to assure school age children are linked to the local school liaison to ensure rapid enrollment (within 3 days) and access to other McKinney-Vento services.
2. Family Stabilization: The West Central MN Continuum of Care has established a policy assuring that families experiencing homelessness should not be separated unless the health and well-being of children are at immediate risk. In addition, a broad definition of family should be used that allows for female headed, male-headed, two parent, same sex parent, LGBT parent, and extended families to be served together with their children.