

CoC Program Special NOFO Digest: Housing First

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On June 22, 2022, the [Continuum of Care \(CoC\) Program Supplemental Funding Opportunity to Address Unsheltered and Rural Homelessness \(Special Notification of Funding Opportunity\) NOFO](#)) was announced. This is a first-of-its-kind opportunity to address unsheltered homelessness and homeless encampments including funds set aside to address homelessness in rural communities.

Applications for the [Unsheltered and Rural Homelessness NOFO](#) must be submitted no later than **October 20, 2022, at 8:00 PM EDT**.

To support communities in developing their plans to address rural and unsheltered homelessness; existing Technical Assistance (TA) and other resources through a series of listserv messages.

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

With this foundation, Housing First program clients demonstrably achieve better health and social outcomes. [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.

CoCs can play an important role in keeping projects faithful to a Housing First approach, by implementing the following steps:

1. 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.
2. CoCs should [regularly evaluate](#) projects for Housing First fidelity across multiple dimensions, including access, participant input, leases, services, and housing itself.
3. CoCs should monitor and analyze evaluation data to determine which projects may need additional support in implementing Housing First.

Resources

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

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

For additional resources, visit the [CoC Program Unsheltered and Rural Homelessness NOFO page](#) on the HUD Exchange.

Questions?

For questions about the Special NOFO, please email SpecialCoCNOFO@hud.gov

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