

Brief Case Management Guide to Housing First Policies for HUD-Funded Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) Units

Porchlight permanent supportive housing (PSH) programs are committed to utilizing best practices of Housing First. Supportive services offered to program participants have the primary goal of identifying and addressing previous and potential barriers to maintaining permanent housing. The Housing First model dictates that participants enter housing without regard for their perceived “housing readiness”, and that support services are offered continually throughout their tenancy. This means that applicants need not have income, demonstrate sobriety, or have a stated desire to engage in case management.

PSH program participants are referred to Porchlight from the CoC Coordinated Entry priority list. All clients require documentation of chronic homeless status and disability. Once eligibility has been determined, program entry is low-barrier. Porchlight does not screen out participants for rental history, income, or criminal history. PSH case managers may be involved in gathering eligibility documentation if necessary, but will also have an opportunity to meet program participants during the application process, and are encouraged to begin engagement prior to program entry.

After participants have entered the PSH program, case managers continue to actively engage with them and develop rapport. Program participants may decide whether and how often they participate in supportive services, but case managers must continue to actively engage with them. Participants will not face termination from the program for deciding not to participate in services, or for failing to make progress toward their goals. However, clients must understand based on the way services are continually offered that if at any point they would like to begin engaging or engage more, they are welcome and encouraged to do so. It must be clear that case managers are advocates whose primary goal is to keep participants housed.

Harm reduction is an integral component of Housing First. Harm reduction focuses on reducing negative consequences related to substance use and other risky behaviors, rather than attempting to eliminate the use or behavior altogether. Even obvious and active substance use will not impede acceptance into a PSH program. Likewise, continued use or relapse alone will not result in termination from the program. The case manager’s objective is to help the participant identify any current or potential consequences, including lease violations, and work with the client to mitigate those consequences. The case manager continually advocates for their clients, including acting as liaison between the program participant and the landlord (Porchlight or in the community) to prevent termination or eviction. This includes ensuring a participant is not terminated for being a victim of domestic violence.

Eviction prevention may also extend to money management. PSH units differ from most apartments in that rent is calculated based on 30% of the participant’s income. Some participants may receive disability or other federal or state benefits that are considered fixed income. Others may have more variable income and rent calculations that would change accordingly. The case manager should ensure that clients whose incomes fluctuate have their rent adjusted and therefore do not fall behind. If a client does fall behind on rent, the case manager may work with the participant to develop a budget and payment plan to avoid termination for non-payment. Case managers are encouraged to work with program participants to obtain or increase their income in an effort to improve their housing stability, but participants will not be terminated if they lose or do not increase their income.

Case managers should seek out additional resources regarding the Housing First model and continue to utilize and share best practices.