

Chronic Homelessness Definition & Documentation

March 8, 2023

Information taken from a HUD webinar on Chronic Homelessness

Agenda

1. Why is this important?
2. Definition of chronic homelessness
3. Documenting disability
4. Documenting homelessness
5. Self-certification and due diligence
6. Putting this info into action



Why Should I Care About Chronic Homelessness?

- Documentation of Chronic Homelessness is required for Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) programs.
- P. 27 of the Written Standards:
 - “Further, people who have complete chronic documentation in place with the Coordinated Entry System Manager are prioritized for openings in PSH programs.”



Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)

- Permanent housing that:
 - has no time limits
 - is paired with supportive services
 - serves households with a disabling condition
- Agencies serving single adults
 - Housing Initiatives, Tellurian, Porchlight, Heartland
- Agencies serving households with children
 - The Road Home, Heartland



Chronic Homeless Definition

(1) A “homeless individual with a **disability**,” as defined in the Act, who: Lives in a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven*, or in an emergency shelter; **and**

- Has been **homeless** (as described above) continuously for at least 12 months **or** on at least 4 separate occasions in the last 3 years where the combined occasions must total at least 12 months. Occasions are separated by a break of at least seven nights.

(2) An individual who has been residing in an institutional care facility for fewer than 90 days and met all of the criteria in paragraph (1) of this definition, before entering that facility; or

(3) A family with an adult head of household (or if there is no adult in the family, a minor head of household) who meets all of the criteria in paragraphs (1) or (2) of this definition, including a family whose composition has fluctuated while the head of household has been homeless.

Safe Haven vs. Porchlight's Safe Haven

Safe Haven

- project type defined by HUD that provides a shelter to people experiencing homelessness who have a severe mental illness, oftentimes coming from a place not meant for human habitation and have been unable or unwilling to participate in housing or supportive services

-HUD will not fund new safe haven projects

Porchlight Safe Haven

-formerly was a HUD safe haven

-now operates independent of HUD rules, serves people experiencing homelessness with severe mental illness, provides day-time shelter and 14 SRO (single room occupancy) units of permanent housing

What qualifies as a disability?

Diagnosable

- physical, mental or emotional impairment, including an impairment caused by alcohol or drug abuse, post traumatic stress disorder, or brain injury
- development disability
- the disease of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome or any condition arising from the etiologic agency for acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS)

Impact

- expected to be long-continuing or of indefinite duration
- substantially impedes the individual's ability to live independently
- could be improved by the provision of more suitable housing conditions



Documenting a Disability

- Must be third-party, and includes:
 - Written verification from a professional licensed by the State to diagnose and treat the disability and certification that the disability is expected to be of long-continued and indefinite duration and substantially impedes the individual's ability to live independently.
 - Written verification from SSA.
 - The receipt of a disability check.
 - Intake staff-recorded observation of a disability that is confirmed and accompanied by evidence above within 45 days of being housed.

Documenting Length of Homelessness

- Order of priority:
 1. Third-party.
 2. Self-certification from the person seeking assistance.

Remember!!

- A single encounter in a month is sufficient to consider the household homeless for an entire month unless there is evidence of a break.

What is a break in homelessness?

- At least 7 nights not residing in an emergency shelter, safe haven, or place not meant for human habitation.
 - Examples: Staying with family/friends, doubled-up, couch surfing, staying in a hotel that is paid for by the individual.
- Stays in institutions of greater than 90 days.
 - Note: Stays in institutions of less than 90 days do not constitute as a break and count toward total time homeless.

Documenting Length of Homelessness: Acceptable Forms of Third-Party Documentation

- An individual record of a stay in an emergency shelter, a safe haven, or from a street outreach contact from **HMIS** or comparable database (used by victim service providers).
- A **written observation by an outreach worker or intake worker** of encounters with the individual or head of household that includes a description of the conditions where the individual or head of household was living or is currently living.
- A **written observation by a community member** that has observed where the individual or head of household was living or is currently living.
- A **written referral by another housing or service provider.**

Documenting Length of Homelessness: HMIS

- First stop on documentation journey
- Always, always, always check HMIS first
- Obtain as much documentation as possible from HMIS



Documenting Length of Homelessness: Written Observation by Outreach or Intake Worker

- Must have physically observed where the individual or head of household is currently residing.
- If the encounter was at a soup kitchen or day resource center, you must state why you believe, to the best of your knowledge and based on your professional judgement, that the person is/was residing in a place not meant for human habitation, emergency shelter, or safe haven. Must specify each month in which you encountered the person and the nature of the conversation that led you to believe they were experiencing literal homelessness.
- Cannot provide third-party documentation for months that you did not encounter the person.
- Written observation should be on letterhead, should be signed by the staff member and contain their title.

Documenting Length of Homelessness: Community Member Verification of Homelessness

- May accept third-party documentation from someone in the community (shopkeeper, building owner, neighborhood resident) that has physically observed where the person has been residing.
- Prefer the community member provide written observation that indicates which months they have seen the person.
- Can take oral documentation from the community member, but the intake worker must write it down.
- Intake worker must use professional judgement as to the reliability of the source.

Documenting Length of Homelessness: What if I Can't Get Third-Party Documentation?

- Provide a written record of your due diligence to obtain Third-Party Documentation.
- Provide a written record of intake worker's documentation of the living situation.

AND

- Provide the individual's self-certification of the living situation.

Documenting Length of Homelessness: Institutional Stays

- Discharge paperwork or a written or oral referral from a social worker, case manager, or other appropriate official stating the beginning and end dates of the time residing in the institutional care facility.
- When the above is not attainable, a written record of intake worker's due diligence to obtain verification **AND** the individual's self-certification that they are exiting an institutional care facility where they resided for less than 90 days.

Documenting Length of Homelessness: Self-Certification

- An individual's time in a place not meant for human habitation, an emergency shelter, or a safe haven.
- Third-party documentation is preferred; however:
 - For all clients, up to 3 months can be documented through self-certification.
 - In limited circumstances, up to the full 12 months can be obtained through self-certification.
- Must provide:
 - Thorough documentation of attempts to obtain third-party documentation and why third-party documentation was not obtained.
 - Written certification from individual or head of household of the living situation of the undocumented time period.