



RAPID REHOUSING SERVICE STANDARDS

OVERVIEW

Rapid re-housing is an intervention designed to help individuals and families to quickly exit homelessness, return to housing in the community, and not become homeless again in the near term.

The three core components of a rapid re-housing program are: housing identification, move-in and rent assistance, and rapid re-housing case management and services. ¹

Programs proposing to provide rapid re-housing services within the Continuum of Care are expected to align their policies and procedures with the standards outlined within this document.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- Programs offering rapid re-housing programs shall utilize the coordinated assessment system for all program referrals.
- In the coordinated assessment/central intake process, all households will be assessed and prioritized using a standard tool. Households who are literally homeless (HUD definition category 1) and have a high level of acuity will receive priority for referral to rapid re-housing.
 - No participants will be denied a referral based on no or too low of income, or poor credit history.

Core Component Program Standards

While a household that is rapidly rehoused is not required to utilize all three core components, a rapid re-housing program must offer program participants all three core components: housing identification, move-in and rent assistance, and rapid re-housing case management and services. The core components can be provided by a single agency or in partnership with other agencies and still meet these program standards.

1. Housing Identification

Housing Identification is the first core component of rapid re-housing, the goal of which is to find housing for program participants quickly. Activities under this core component include recruiting landlords with

¹ This document has been adapted from the National Alliance to End Homelessness' document *Rapid Rehousing Performance Benchmarks and Program Standards* which was based on what are currently considered promising practices by the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), federal technical assistance providers, and nationally recognized, high-performing rapid re-housing providers. Continuums of Care are required to develop standards locally for providers that include who receives rapid re-housing and how much rent a participant is required to pay.

units in the communities and neighborhoods where program participants want to live and negotiating with landlords to help program participants access housing.

Principles

- Within the limits of the participant’s anticipated income, a rapid re-housing program should have the ability to help households access units that are desirable and sustainable—those that are in neighborhoods where they want to live in, that have access to transportation, are close to employment, and that are safe.
- Housing identification efforts should be designed and implemented to actively recruit and retain landlords and housing managers willing to rent to program participants who may otherwise fail to pass typical tenant screening criteria.
- Critical to the formation of landlord-program relationship is the recognition of the landlord as a vital partner. The RRH provider must be responsive to landlords to preserve and develop those partnerships for the purposes future housing placements.

Housing Identification Program Standards

H1. Program has a mechanism by which landlords are identified, recruited and encouraged to rent to homeless households served by the program. Staff have the knowledge, skills, and agency resources to: understand landlords’ perspectives, understand landlord and tenant rights and responsibilities, and negotiate landlord supports.

H2. Staff are trained on housing identification, housing inspection, landlord tenant rights and responsibilities, and other core competencies as well as the wider array of housing assistance available within a community. Program has routine ways to onboard new staff and to keep staff regularly updated on new strategies, policies, and housing assistance options in the community.

H3. Program has written policies and procedures for landlord recruitment activities, including screening out potential landlord partners who have a history of poor compliance with their legal responsibilities and fair housing practices.

H4. Program offers a standard, basic level of support to all landlords who lease to program participants. This support is clearly communicated to landlords. Program can negotiate additional supports, as needed, on a case-by-case basis. At a minimum, this policy specifies that program staff:

H4a. Seek to resolve conflicts around lease requirements, complaints by other tenants, and timely rent payments; and

H4b. Whenever possible, negotiate move-out terms and assist the person/household to quickly locate and move into another unit without an eviction (see Rapid Re-Housing Case Management Program Standard C15.).

H5. Program has a written policy requiring staff to explain to participants basic landlord-tenant rights and responsibilities and the requirements of their specific lease.

2. Rent and Move-In Assistance

Rent and Move-In Assistance is the second core component of rapid re-housing, the goal of which is to provide short-term help to households so they can pay for housing. Activities under this core component include paying for security deposits, move-in expenses, rent, and utilities.

Principles

- Rent and move-in assistance should be flexible and tailored to the varying and changing needs of a household while providing the assistance necessary for households to move immediately out of homelessness and to stabilize in permanent housing.
- A rapid re-housing program should make efforts to maximize the number of households it is able to serve by providing households with the financial assistance in a progressive manner, providing only the assistance necessary to stabilize in permanent housing.

Rent and Move-In Assistance Program Standards

R1. Program staff are trained on regulatory requirements of all rapid re-housing funding streams and on the ethical use and application of a program's financial assistance policies, including, but not limited to initial and ongoing eligibility criteria, program requirements, and assistance maximums. Program has a routine way to onboard new staff and to keep staff regularly updated on changing regulations and/or program policies.

R2. Programs utilize the principles of progressive engagement in determining rental assistance needs. Guidelines are flexible enough to respond to the varied and changing needs of program participants, including participants with zero income.

R3. Programs may require participants to pay part of their income towards rent. This should be clearly defined in the program's policies and procedures and explained to the participant at the time of program intake or orientation.

R4. Program issues checks quickly and on time and has the capacity to track payments to landlords and other vendors.

R5. The transition off financial assistance is coordinated with case management efforts to assist program participants to assume and sustain their housing costs (see Rapid Re-Housing Case Management and Services Program Standards C18.-C20., C24.).

3. Rapid Re-Housing Case Management and Services

Rapid re-housing case management and services is the third core component of rapid re-housing. The goals of rapid re-housing case management is to help participants obtain and move into permanent housing, support participants to stabilize in housing, and connect them to community and mainstream services and supports if needed.

Principles

- Rapid re-housing case management should be client-driven. Case managers should actively engage participants in voluntary case management and service participation by creating an environment in which the participant is driving the case planning and goal-setting based on what they want from the program and services, rather than on what the case manager decides they need to do to be successful.

- Rapid re-housing case management should be flexible in intensity—offering only essential assistance until or unless the participant demonstrates the need for or requests additional help. The intensity and duration of case management is based on the needs of individual households and may lessen or increase over time.
- Rapid re-housing case management uses a strengths-based approach to empower clients. Case managers identify the inherent strengths of a person or family instead of diagnoses or deficits, then build on those strengths to empower the household to succeed.
- Rapid re-housing program case management reflects the short-term nature of the rapid rehousing assistance. It focuses on housing retention and helping a household build a support network outside of the program. It connects the participant with community resources and service options, such as legal services, health care, vocational assistance, transportation, child care, and other forms of assistance, that continue beyond participation in the rapid re-housing program.

Rapid Re-Housing Case Management and Services Program Standards

C1. Case manager’s job descriptions direct case managers to focus on housing and to use strengths based practices focused on participant engagement and meeting the unique needs of each household.

C2. Case managers are trained on rapid re-housing case management strategies and related evidence-based practices as well as program policies and community resources. Additionally, a program has a regular process for onboarding new staff and regularly updating the training of current staff.

C3. Except where dictated by the funder, program participants direct when, where, and how often case management meetings occur.

C4. Case managers respect a program participant’s home as their own, scheduling appointments ahead of time, only entering when invited in, and respecting the program participant's personal property and wishes while in their home.

C5. Services offered by a program have voluntary participation. Programs should seek participant input in determining the type and design of services that are offered in the program to ensure the program is meeting participant need and not providing unnecessary services.

C6. Program has clearly defined relationships with employment and income programs that it can connect program participants to when appropriate.

C7. Program has clearly defined policies and objective standards for when case management should continue and end. These guidelines are flexible enough to respond to the varied and changing needs of program participants. In instances where cases are continued outside of these defined policies and objective standards, there is a review and approval process.

C8. Assessments completed prior to housing are strengths based, limited, and focus on those things necessary to support health and safety and resolve the housing crisis as quickly as possible.

C9. Program has resources and/or be able to connect participants to community resources that help participants: resolve or navigate tenant problems (like rental and utility arrears or multiple evictions) that landlords may screen for on rental applications; obtain necessary documentation such as identification;

prepare participants for successful tenancy by reviewing lease provisions; and support other move-in activities such as providing furniture.

C10. Program offers basic tenancy skills learning opportunities which can include instruction or guidance on basic landlord-tenant rights and responsibilities, requirements and prohibitions of a lease, and meeting minimum expectations for care of the housing unit, such as not causing damage.

C11. Program staff work directly with the participant and landlord to resolve tenancy issues without threatening the participant's tenancy. Program works quickly to mediate the situation, encouraging a strong and healthy landlord and tenant relationship that can continue following the participant's exit from the program.

C12. When necessary, case managers help participants avoid evictions before they happen, and maintain a positive relationship with the landlord.

C13. Housing plans focus on how program participants can maintain a lease and address barriers to housing retention, including maximizing their ability to pay rent; improving understanding of landlord/tenant rights and responsibilities; and addressing other issues that have, in the past, resulted in housing crisis or housing loss. Plans account for participant preferences/choices, and include only goals created with and agreed to by the participant.

C14. Case managers make referrals to appropriate community and mainstream resources, including, but not limited to income supplements/benefits (TANF, Food Stamps/SNAP, etc.), non-cash supports (healthcare, food supports, etc.), legal assistance, credit counseling, and subsidized childcare. A participant may choose not to follow up on or participate in any referred services or programs.

C15. As rapid re-housing assistance is short-term, case managers pay particular attention to participants' incomes moving forward. Though income is not a requirement at the beginning of a program, case managers help participants review their budgets, including income and spending, to make decisions about reducing expenses and increasing income.

C16. Case managers work with participants to identify pathways for increasing earned income, including participating in mainstream and community employment support programs as well as using a program's own employer connections.

C17. If necessary, participants are assisted in identifying existing familial and personal connections that can help them maintain housing by providing supports such as child care, transportation, etc. Participants may choose not to engage in this process.

C18. When closing a case, case managers provide information to participants about how they can access assistance from the program again if needed and what kind of follow-up assistance may be available. In instances when a participant is at imminent risk of returning to homelessness, program has the capacity to either directly intervene or provide referral to another prevention resource.

Program Philosophy and Design

Beyond ending homelessness for individual households, rapid re-housing plays a key role in ending homelessness overall. To do so effectively and efficiently, a program must coordinate with the broader

homeless system, not screen out large portions of the homeless population, and have a commitment to a Housing First approach.

Principles

- In order to identify, engage, and assist as many households experiencing homelessness as possible, a program should coordinate and fully participate with the broader homeless assistance system.
- Rapid re-housing is an intervention designed for and flexible enough to serve anyone not able to exit homelessness on their own. Rapid re-housing programs should not attempt to screen out households based on a score on an assessment tool or criteria that are assumed, but not shown, to predict successful outcomes, such as a minimum income threshold, employment, absence of a criminal history, evidence of “motivation,” etc.
- Rapid re-housing participants should have all the rights and responsibilities of typical tenants and should sign a standard lease agreement.

Program Philosophy and Design Standards

P1. Program staff are trained on the principles of Housing First and oriented to the basic program philosophy of rapid re-housing. Program has routine way of onboarding new staff that includes training on Housing First and rapid re-housing principles.

P2. Program uses the standards included in this document (or other similar standards) as the basis for training and supervising staff.

P3. Program has well-defined and written screening processes that use consistent and transparent decision criteria. Criteria do not include screening possible participants out for income or lack thereof.

P4. Eligibility criteria for the program do not include a period of sobriety, a commitment to participation in treatment, or any other criteria designed to “predict” long-term housing stability other than willingness to engage the program and work on a self-directed housing plan.

P5. Disabilities are only assessed insofar as they may be a direct factor causing past housing instability or loss and when related to the participant’s ability to obtain a disability-specific benefit, service, or accessible unit.

P6. Leases for program participants are legally binding, written leases. Leases with additional requirements, such as drug testing or program participation, are not allowed.

P7. Program participates in the local community’s Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) meaning they collect all required data standards and take steps to ensure quality data entry.

P8. Program participates in and accepts referrals from the local coordinated entry system and participates in efforts to improve the efficiency and quality of referrals when necessary.

P9. Program has an ongoing performance improvement process that includes evaluation of participant outcomes and participant feedback. The performance benchmarks and standards in this document provide a framework for performance evaluation and performance improvement efforts.



RAPID RE-HOUSING PERFORMANCE BENCHMARKS

This document provides details on performance benchmarks that would qualify a program as effective. These benchmarks are accompanied by qualitative program standards for each of the rapid re-housing core components that are likely to help a program meet the performance benchmarks.

Performance Benchmarks

Ultimately the effectiveness of a rapid re-housing program is determined based on a program's ability to accomplish the model's three primary goals:

- Reduce the length of time program participants spend homeless,
- Exit households to permanent housing, and
- Limit returns to homelessness within a year of program exit.

Benchmarks for performance on the above outcomes are detailed below. When examining a program's ability to meet the benchmarks, it is important to remember that rapid re-housing is a Housing First intervention, meaning, among other things, that programs should not be screening out households based on criteria that are assumed to predict successful outcomes, such as income, employment, criminal history, mental health history, medical history, or evidence of "motivation." The benchmarks detailed below are based on performance data of programs that do not screen households out on the basis of the above barriers. Programs assisting individuals and families with high housing barriers are able to achieve these outcomes. It should also be noted that one of the program standards is that a program does not screen out households on the basis of the above barriers, so a program that met the performance benchmark, would still not meet the accompanying program standards if it was screening out households for those reasons. It may be necessary for rapid re-housing programs to have some prevention capacity to serve high barrier households after placement. It is a possibility that some households that are rapid re-housed will need periodic support to avoid a return to homelessness.

While programs should strive for these benchmarks, funders can use performance on these benchmarks as an opportunity to assess relative effectiveness between programs and to undertake performance improvement efforts, including assessing barriers to better performance and performance improvement planning. The performance benchmarks also provide a baseline from which funders can establish performance improvement goals and performance-based contracting standards.

All of the below performance outcomes can be measured using data in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). As such, individual programs must be entering high quality data into HMIS. A rapid re-housing provider who is also a domestic violence provider would not participate in a community's

HMIS. Thus, in order to be able to calculate the performance benchmarks, that provider would be required to use an alternative, equivalent method that collects all of the necessary data points.

Programs that have not been operating for a year will not have sufficient data to meet all of the performance benchmarks, but these programs can meet the program standards, which are intended to design programs that do achieve the benchmarks and are detailed later in this document. Additionally, in the first several months of operations, providers may need time to bring operations to scale and reach full capacity.

Performance Benchmark #1: Reduce the length of time program participants spend homeless

The first goal of rapid re-housing is to reduce the amount of time individuals and families spend homeless. The primary opportunity for a rapid re-housing program to impact how much time a household spends homeless is the speed with which it is able to identify and help households access appropriate housing options.

For a program to meet this performance benchmark, households served by the program should move into permanent housing in an average of 30 days or less.

This measure is the average length of time between the date when an individual or family is identified as having entered a rapid re-housing program (HMIS rapid re-housing program entry date) to when they move into permanent housing (HMIS residential move-in date). This measure is only calculated for those households that move into a permanent housing destination and does not include those who have not yet moved in or move into a non-permanent housing destination.

$$\text{Average} = \frac{\text{Sum of number of days from program entry to move in date for all households}}{\text{Total number of households}}$$

Permanent housing may include private, unsubsidized housing; subsidized housing; permanent supportive housing; or housing shared with friends or family in a sustainable living situation (one that should not be categorized as “temporary”). Permanent housing does not include shelter, a transitional housing program, jail or prison, or a treatment facility.

Performance Benchmark #2: Permanent housing success rates

The second goal of a rapid re-housing program is to exit households to permanent housing in the community with or without a subsidy. A rapid re-housing program can impact permanent housing success through the combination of an appropriate housing placement, financial assistance, and effective case management and services (see Housing Identification, Rent and Move-In Assistance, and Rapid Re-Housing Case Management Program Standards)

For a program to meet this performance benchmark, at least 80 percent of households that exit a rapid re-housing program should exit to permanent housing.

This measure is calculated by taking the number of households who were in permanent housing when they exited the rapid re-housing program (HMIS rapid re-housing program exit date and destination at exit) and dividing by all of the households who exited the rapid re-housing program regardless of

destination over the same period of time. This figure should be calculated for households exiting the rapid re-housing program over the preceding 12 month period. A program working on performance improvement, may wish measure this for shorter intervals.

$$\text{Percent} = \left(\frac{\text{Total number of households exited to PH during a time period}}{\text{Total number of households that exited program during same time period}} \right) 100$$

Permanent housing may include private, unsubsidized housing; subsidized housing; permanent supportive housing; or housing shared with friends or family in a sustainable living situation (one that should not be categorized as “temporary”). Permanent housing does not include shelter, a transitional housing program, jail or prison, or a treatment.

Performance Benchmark #3: Returns to Homelessness

The third goal of a rapid re-housing program is to reduce the number of households returning to homelessness following soon after an exit from a rapid re-housing program. The primary opportunities for a rapid re-housing program to impact the success of a household in remaining housed is through the combination of securing appropriate housing and effective case management and services (see Housing Identification and Rapid Re-Housing Case Management Program Standards).

For a program to meet this performance benchmark, at least 85 percent of households that exit a rapid re-housing program to permanent housing should not become homeless again within a year.

This is typically measured by examining HMIS data from homeless programs across the entire community to determine whether people who successfully exit from the rapid re-housing program to permanent housing returned to homelessness, meaning an unsheltered location, emergency shelter, transitional housing, or a Safe Haven, within 12 months of exiting.

$$\text{Percent} = \left(\frac{\text{Total number of households who did NOT return to homelessness during time period}}{\text{Total number of households exited to permanent housing during the same time period}} \right) 100$$

Programs operating for less than a year will not be able to meet this benchmark. Additionally, to calculate this measure, programs must have access to homeless system data for all other programs in the community (open data system) or the ability to access an HMIS report from their community’s HMIS lead agency.

This measure of returns to homelessness tracks the percentage of households who do not experience a subsequent episode of homelessness. If a household receives some type of emergency or permanent housing assistance, but does not experience another episode of homelessness, then they should be considered a household that did not return to homelessness for the purpose of this performance benchmark. And, if a household moves from one permanent housing situation to another permanent housing situation or doubled up situation without another episode of homelessness in-between moves, it is also considered a household that did not return to homelessness for the purpose of this measure.

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