

Ocean County Homeless Prevention and Assistance Coalition

Ocean County Homelessness Prevention and Assistance Coalition Coordinated Assessment Policies and Procedures

Purpose

The Ocean County Homelessness Prevention and Assistance Coalition (HPAC) Coordinated Assessment System was created to assist the homeless in Ocean County to access services, specifically related to permanent housing and to ensure that those households with the highest needs and longest lengths of homelessness were being prioritized for appropriate permanent housing opportunities in the community.

These policies and procedures outline how the coordinated assessment system is structured and how it should be implemented.

Background and Need

Within the current system in Ocean County when a household becomes homeless there are many doors through which they could enter the homeless service system. Households may receive different services and housing options depending on which agency they first seek assistance from. The current system also has housing options presented to clients based on availability instead of based on the overall need of the client and other clients in the community, making it more of a first come, first serve process for households seeking permanent housing.

A thorough assessment and housing prioritization process will allow the Ocean County HPAC to assist households with the resources they truly need. Moreover, the current system, which sometimes requires households to jump from one agency to another prevents the community from being able to assess the HPAC's effectiveness as well as the current gaps in services. By taking the time to evaluate each household's need throughout the community, rather than focusing solely on where there is space for them, the HPAC will have a much clearer picture of what other types of services and funding are needed by the community to serve the households that are seeking assistance.

The coordinated assessment system requires a shift in the way agencies are determining level of need and accepting referrals for their projects, however, the reality is that resources continue to be cut as the need continues to grow. It is therefore critical that the Ocean County HPAC is increasingly thoughtful and targeted about using available resources.

Overview of the Coordinated Assessment System

In Ocean County, the coordinated assessment process has been structured to ensure that all households experiencing homelessness, meaning those currently in an emergency shelter, in a transitional housing project, or unsheltered, are assessed using a standardized assessment tool to determine the level of need of each individual household.

From the scores associated with the assessment tool, the Coordinated Assessment Agency will create a Housing Prioritization List which will prioritize each household based on the information gathered in the assessment. All permanent housing and rapid rehousing projects funding through the CoC and ESG will then utilize this prioritization list to take the neediest and most appropriate household to fill their vacancy. This process will

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prevent households from having to apply to each permanent housing project and will allow permanent housing projects to more quickly fill vacancies with appropriate clients in the community.

Accessibility

The coordinated assessment tools, referrals, and access to homeless prevention information and homeless housing providers is available through one site located centrally in the region so that individuals and families have a location from which they can access housing and services. Physical sites provide standardized access to housing and services in conjunction with the specialized service delivery that is appropriate for high-priority subpopulations like veterans, youth, and individuals and families fleeing domestic violence. The coordinated assessment agency offers information and referral services to any individual or family seeking housing services and refers literally and imminently homeless households to housing providers upon availability of housing.

The coordinated assessment agency has the ability to engage individuals with varying problems such as a language barrier, or disability using available resources in the community. Mobile services will be provided through the utilization of a van to facilitate services for those residents living in remote areas of the county where transportation is limited. The coordinated assessment agency will establish a toll-free number clients in need may phone after hours in order to initiate services; all calls will be returned within a 24-hour period.

Assessment Tool

The Ocean County HPAC has created a Housing Prioritization Tool (HPT) that it will utilize to prioritize households in their coordinated assessment system. The Housing Prioritization tool collects information about various health and social needs of each household to evaluate their vulnerability and level of service need. The tool considers factors such as:

- The extent of a household's homelessness
- Health care concerns/emergency room visits
- Interactions with the police and law enforcement
- Mental health disabilities or issues
- History or active substance use/abuse
- History or current experiences of domestic violence
- Veteran Status
- Income Sources and work history

The Housing Prioritization Tool uses the responses to the questions related to the factors above to provide a score that identifies the vulnerability of the client. The higher the HPT score the household receives, the higher the level of intervention they will most likely need to maintain permanent housing and avoid additional episodes of homelessness.

Completing the Assessments

The coordinated assessment agency will complete the Housing Prioritization Tool on all referrals. The HPT will be completed upon referral as quickly as possible for all clients. Community agencies that agree to complete assessments and have participated in HPT assessment training may also administer the assessment on homeless individuals they encounter in the

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community. Agencies with access to HMIS should complete the assessment within the system and should submit a hard copy of the assessment form to the coordinated assessment agency. Any agency completing HPT assessments that does not participate in HMIS must complete a paper or electronic version of the HPT and submit a copy of the assessment to the Coordinated Assessment Agency for inclusion in HMIS.

While it is ideal that all clients who will be included in the Housing Prioritization List will already be connected with a sheltering program or street outreach team, the HPAC is aware that some clients may be most comfortable seeking services at agencies that are not a sheltering or outreach team. For this reason, any agency that engages a client that is currently unsheltered and should be included in the Housing Prioritization List, will refer that client to the coordinated assessment agency for the HPAC. The coordinated assessment agency will then complete the HPT for the client to ensure that if it is appropriate, they will be included on the Housing Prioritization List and will be prioritized for housing opportunities.

Housing Prioritization List

In order to effectively utilize the completed assessment and to create cross program coordination for accepting referrals, the Ocean County HPAC coordinated assessment agency, will maintain the Housing Prioritization List. This list will be used to identify which clients in the community are the most vulnerable and the most in need of housing opportunities based on the prioritization of the HPAC, outlined below. The prioritization list will be composed by the Coordinated Assessment Agency, on a weekly basis, by pulling the report directly from HMIS.

The prioritization list will be confidential, as there will be no identifying information included on the list. The categories that will be included are:

- Client ID
- Household Type
- Number of Household Members
- Head of Household's Current Age
- Head of Household's Gender
- Household's Chronic Homeless Status
- If the Head of Household is Disabled
- If Another Member of the Household is Disabled
- If the Household has a Veteran
- Housing Prioritization Score
- Current Homeless Location
- Length of the Time the Household has been in their Current Homeless Situation
- Agency to Contact for Referral
- Notes

The clients that will be included on the housing prioritization list will only be those that meet HUD's definition of literally homeless, which includes households currently housed in an emergency shelter or transitional housing project, or households that are currently in a place not meant for habitation. The HPAC will do an analysis of the Housing Prioritization List after implementation to determine if the list should be expanded to include household's that are at-risk or in doubled up situations.

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Prioritization

While the primary prioritization of the Ocean County Coordinated Assessment System will be based on the score the household receives from the Housing Prioritization Tool, the Ocean HPAC has added additional prioritization to the Housing Prioritization List.

CoC funded Permanent Supportive Housing Projects shall fill program vacancies according to the prioritize as defined in the HUD Notice CPD-16-11. Permanent Supportive Housing Programs shall serve those with the longest histories of homelessness and most severe need according to the CoC approved assessment tool.

CoC funded Permanent Housing Beds Dedicated or Prioritized for the Chronically Homeless

- First Priority – Chronically homeless individuals or families with the longest history of homelessness (continuous or episodic based on the cumulative time from each episode) and most severe need
- Second Priority – Chronically homeless individuals and families with the longest history of homelessness (continuous or episodic based on the cumulative time from each episode)
- Third Priority – Chronically homeless individuals and families with the most severe needs
- Fourth Priority – All other chronically homeless individuals and families

CoC funded Permanent Housing Beds NOT Dedicated or Prioritized for the Chronically Homeless

- First Priority – Homeless individuals and families with a disability and the longest periods of homelessness and most severe need
- Second Priority – Homeless individuals and families with a disability and the most severe need
- Third Priority – Homeless individuals and families with a disability coming from streets, safe havens or emergency shelters without the most severe service needs
- Fourth Priority – Homeless individuals and families with a disability coming from transitional housing

Once the Coordinated Assessment Agency composes the final Housing Prioritization List each week, the list will be sorted in the order identified above. This will ensure that populations that have the highest needs and options available will be prioritized when housing providers are seeking referrals.

Referrals

One of the goals of the Ocean County Coordinated Assessment and Housing Prioritization System was to streamline the way clients have to apply for permanent housing opportunities in the community. For this reason, instead of the current system, where clients have to apply for each permanent housing project and possibly wait on lists for each project, when an opening occurs or a new project comes on line, that specific project will utilize the Housing Prioritization List to fill its vacancies.

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Within 30 days of an anticipated date of vacancy of a unit, housing providers will notify and provide the eligibility criteria to the Coordinated Access Agency with maximum capacity and unit size required. Once the Housing Prioritization Tool is complete, referrals will be made available through a secure electronic method or HMIS, this eliminates the need for clients to complete applications for each separate program since permanent housing projects will only accept applications from clients that seem to be eligible for the project and only when a vacancy is available. A referral packet will be forwarded to the housing provider who will attempt client contact within 24 hours or the next business day and will be required to begin the interview process within ten (10) business days of receipt of the packet, complete a basic background check (48 hours) and will be responsible to identify the location and times of the intake interview which are convenient for the referred client. Housing providers will notify the Coordinated access agency of acceptance or denial of the referral within seven (7) business days using the attached acceptance/denial forms. After daily contacts are attempted for seven (7) consecutive business days, and no contact is made, that applicant will be bumped down one spot on the list and contact for the next applicant will be attempted. If no contact is made within 45 days, that applicant will be bumped to the back of the list.

All ESG and CoC funded permanent housing and rapid rehousing projects must take all referrals for open units in their projects from the Housing Prioritization List in this manner. Since this is such an important aspect of the prioritization list, all CoC and ESG projects will be monitored on their utilization of the prioritization list and project's that do not utilize the list will risk a loss of funding.

Through the work of the agencies in the CoC, Ocean County has made significant progress towards ending homelessness among its veteran and chronically homeless population. While this is true, there are many projects that have dedicated beds to the chronically homeless. If, upon seeking a referral from the Housing Prioritization List, the project does not find a client who meets the definition of chronically homeless, and therefore would not be eligible for the project, the agency can request a letter from the CoC Lead, stating that at the time of the vacancy, there were no chronically homeless individuals or families in the CoC and therefore the project is receiving approval to accept the next most vulnerable population based on the HUD Notice: CPD 16-11 titled ' Notice on Prioritizing Persons Experiencing Chronic Homelessness and Other Vulnerable Persons in Permanent Supportive Housing'.

While CoC and ESG funded projects are the only projects required to take all referrals from the Housing Prioritization List, all partners who serve the homeless population and are able to take clients from the prioritization list will be encouraged to participate.

Case Conferencing

While it is only permanent housing and rapid rehousing projects that will be taking their referrals from the Housing Prioritization List, the Ocean HPAC is aware of the unfortunate circumstance, that there is not enough permanent housing and rapid rehousing resources to serve all clients that become homeless throughout the County. For that reason, the Ocean HPAC will implement a case conferencing committee. Case conferencing will be utilized to identify options and plans for the clients that are not eligible for traditional resources in the CoC. It is not the intention of the Ocean HPAC to allow clients to remain on the Housing Prioritization List for long periods of time, as the case conferencing will be used to identify opportunities for the most vulnerable and hardest to serve clients.

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Case conferencing will occur as needed. The case conferences will involve all CoC funded agencies and all other homeless providers who have signed MOUs with the coordinated assessment agency to ensure confidentiality and will focus on the clients on the housing prioritization list that are not currently engaged by a provider for possible housing opportunities, in efforts to identify specific opportunities or services available to move clients toward permanent housing.

Client Confidentiality

It is the responsibility of all agencies to ensure clients are aware that information will be used to prioritize them for housing opportunities in the community. Each agency is currently advising clients of their rights in relation to the collection of HMIS data and this must be part of that disclosure.

If during case conferencing, names or any identifying information will be shared among the group, the agency must ensure that the client has signed a release of information allowing their information to be shared among the group of providers in attendance.

Outcomes

The Ocean CoC Lead, as managing entity of the Housing Prioritization List is responsible for the tracking and measuring of outcomes related to the Coordinated Assessment Process. The following items will be analyzed to ensure the system is working as intended:

Agency Participation

- The CoC Lead is responsible for tracking which projects are submitting information for the Housing Prioritization List, either through HMIS or separately through the electronic Housing Prioritization List submission to ensure that all projects that should be submitting information to have clients included, are
- The CoC Lead will also track which CoC and ESG funded projects are taking clients from the Housing Prioritization List, this will be done to ensure that all clients that should be taking referrals from the system are and that clients are not skipped based on non-eligibility issues

Length of Time Clients Remain on the Housing Prioritization List

- Ocean CoC has the goal of helping clients obtain permanent housing as quickly as possible and so will track the length of the time clients remain in projects and on the prioritization list before entering a permanent housing placement

Destinations of Clients Being Removed from the Prioritization List

- The overall goal of the Coordinated Assessment System is to assist households in finding permanent housing placements that are appropriate for them based on their housing needs, for that reason, the destinations of all clients that are included on the list will be tracked on a separate document to determine the effectiveness of not only the Coordinated Assessment System but the Ocean County HPAC and its community partners.