

SHELTER DIVERSION PROGRAM GUIDELINES

Program Description

Shelter Diversion is a strategy that prevents homelessness at the front door of the homelessness response system by helping people identify immediate alternative housing arrangements and, if necessary, connecting them with services and financial assistance to help them remain in or return to permanent housing. Every effort should be made to divert program participants to other housing solutions at their first contact with the homelessness response system. This program's intent is to limit the trauma of homelessness on the individual or family and keep limited shelter beds available for those most in need. Shelter diversion does not act as a barrier to shelter.

The Department of Human Services, Division of Family and Community Services (FCS) is committed to the development and expansion of Shelter Diversion for families and individuals experiencing homelessness in alignment with Home Illinois, Illinois' Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness.

Eligible Grantees

- A. All applicants must be nonprofit organizations, subject to 26 U.S.C. 501(c) (3) of the federal tax code.
- B. Applicant organizations must be designated by the local Continuum of Care (CoC) as a qualified provider of permanent supportive housing and be recommended by their partner CoC for funding through this program in accordance with that CoC's policies.
- C. Applicant organizations must be in good standing with the Illinois Secretary of State and have been so for the last four fiscal years.
- D. Applicant organizations that are current IDHS grantees must be in good standing with the IDHS Office of Contract Administration and have been so for the last four fiscal years.

Program Participant Eligibility Requirements

- 1. Eligible program participants are individuals and families who are seeking emergency shelter by accessing Coordinated Entry for a Continuum of Care or the 'front door' of the homeless response system; AND
- 2. Meet the criteria under the HUD definition of "at risk of homelessness" (24 CFR § 576.2); OR
- 3. Meet the criteria under Categories 2, 3, or 4 of the HUD definition of homelessness (76 FR 75994)

Eligible Service Costs

Supportive Services – All eligible supportive services provided must help program participants identify immediate alternative housing arrangements and, if necessary, connect them with services and financial assistance to help them remain in or return to permanent housing obtain and maintain housing. Funds may be used to pay the salary and benefits of grantee staff who directly deliver eligible supportive services. It can also cover eligible services contracted with and

performed by another agency. Additionally, any overhead costs directly related to providing supportive services are eligible. Eligible supportive services are:

- Moving costs – reasonable one-time costs are eligible and include truck rental and hiring a moving company
- Case management – costs of assessing, arranging, coordinating, and monitoring the delivery of individualized services to meet the needs of the program participant(s) are eligible costs. Component services and activities consist of:
 - Conflict resolution/mediation;
 - Connections to family or natural supports;
 - Counseling;
 - Developing, securing, and coordinating services – especially with local Homeless Prevention, Rapid Re-housing, LIHEAP, and other local rent and/or utility assistance programs;
 - Using the centralized or coordinated assessment system as required;
 - Obtaining federal, State, and local benefits;
 - Monitoring and evaluating program participant progress;
 - Providing information and referrals to other providers;
 - Providing ongoing risk assessment and safety planning with victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking; and
 - Developing an individualized housing and service plan, including planning a path to permanent housing stability.
- Housing search and placement services – costs of assisting eligible program participants to locate, obtain, and retain suitable housing are eligible:
 - Component services or activities are tenant counseling; assisting individuals and families to understand leases; physically inspecting units to ensure compliance with housing quality standards; securing utilities; and making moving arrangements.
 - Other eligible costs are:
 - Mediation with property owners and landlords on behalf of eligible program participants;
 - Credit counseling, accessing a free personal credit report, and resolving personal credit issues; and
 - The payment of rental application fees.
- Legal services – eligible costs are the fees charged by licensed attorneys and by person(s) under the supervision of licensed attorneys, for advice and representation in matters that interfere with the individual or family's ability to obtain and retain housing.
 - Eligible subject matters are child support; guardianship; paternity; emancipation; legal separation; orders of protection and other civil remedies for victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking; appeal of veterans and public benefit claim denials; landlord tenant disputes; and the resolution of outstanding criminal warrants.
 - Component services or activities may include receiving and preparing cases for trial, provision of legal advice, representation at hearings, and counseling.

- o Fees based on the actual service performed (i.e., fee for service) are also eligible, but only if the cost would be less than the cost of hourly fees. Filing fees and other necessary court costs are also eligible. If the grantee is a legal services provider and performs the services itself, the eligible costs are the grantee's employees' salaries and other costs necessary to perform the services.
 - o Legal services for immigration and citizenship matters and issues related to mortgages and homeownership are ineligible. Retainer fee arrangements and contingency fee arrangements are ineligible.
- Mental health services – eligible costs are the direct outpatient treatment of mental health conditions that are provided by licensed professionals. Component services are crisis interventions; counseling; individual, family, or group therapy sessions; the prescription of psychotropic medications or explanations about the use and management of medications; and combinations of therapeutic approaches to address multiple problems.
- Outpatient health services – eligible costs are the direct outpatient treatment of medical conditions when provided by licensed medical professionals including:
 - o Providing an analysis or assessment of an individual's health problems and the development of a treatment plan;
 - o Assisting individuals to understand their health needs;
 - o Providing directly or assisting individuals to obtain and utilize appropriate medical treatment;
 - o Preventive medical care and health maintenance services, including in-home health services and emergency medical services;
 - o Provision of appropriate medication;
 - o Providing follow-up services; and
 - o Preventive and non-cosmetic dental care.
- Substance use treatment services – costs of program participant intake and assessment, outpatient treatment, group and individual counseling, and drug testing are eligible. Inpatient detoxification and other inpatient drug or alcohol treatment are ineligible.
- Transportation – Eligible costs are:
 - o The costs of program participant's travel on public transportation or in a vehicle provided by the grantee to and from services eligible under this section.
 - o Mileage allowance for service workers to visit program participants;;
 - o The cost of gas, insurance, taxes, and maintenance for a vehicle in which staff transports program participants and/or staff serving program participants;
 - o The costs of grantee staff to accompany or assist program participants to utilize public transportation; and
 - o If public transportation options are not sufficient within the area, the grantee may make a one-time payment on behalf of a program participant needing car repairs or maintenance required to operate a personal vehicle, subject to the following:
 - Payments for car repairs or maintenance on behalf of the program participant may not exceed 10 percent of the Blue Book value of the vehicle (Blue Book refers to the guidebook that compiles and quotes prices for new and used automobiles and other vehicles of all makes, models, and types);

- Payments for car repairs or maintenance must be paid by the grantee directly to the third party that repairs or maintains the car; and
- The grantee may require program participants to share in the cost of car repairs or maintenance as a condition of receiving assistance with car repairs or maintenance.
- Direct provision of services – if the supportive service described in this section is being directly delivered by the grantee, eligible costs for those services also include:
 - The costs of labor or supplies, and materials incurred by the grantee in directly providing supportive services to program participants; and
 - The salary and benefit packages of the grantee staff who directly deliver the services.

Relocation Assistance – Separate from transportation assistance, relocation assistance is financial assistance that will help an individual or family travel longer distance when there is a safe and appropriate host within the individual or family's support system which will agree to host them for at least 30 days. They can be diverted through assistance with travel and logistics that include:

- Greyhound bus tickets;
- Amtrak train tickets;
- Airline tickets (when bus or train travel is not practical);
- Gas cards; and
- Necessary provisions for travel (care packages, gift cards for grocery/convenience stores or restaurants, etc.)

HMIS – costs directly related to contributing and maintaining data in HMIS or a comparable database (for victim service providers) are eligible. Utilizing HMIS is strongly encouraged for the reporting burden of this program (not required by IDHS) and for systems-level evaluations by CoCs, but must be utilized if the CoC has a policy in place that requires shelter diversion providers to record program and client level data into HMIS. Eligible HMIS costs include:

- Obtaining technical support
- Paying for travel to, and attending, CoC-required or CoC-approved trainings
- Paying for HMIS licenses and/or participation fees charged by the HMIS Lead

Cost Sharing or Match Requirements

There are no cost sharing or match requirements for this program.

Program Standards

Diversion is an intervention designed to immediately address the needs of someone who is at imminent risk of losing their housing or someone who has just lost their housing and become homeless. Diversion is a client-driven approach; its goal is to help the person or household find safe alternative housing immediately, rather than entering shelter or experiencing unsheltered homelessness. It is intended to ensure that the homelessness experience is as brief as possible, to prevent unsheltered homelessness, and to avert stays in shelter. Diversion should not be a

mechanism for denying access to available shelter, but rather one for finding a better alternative than shelter or the street.

The core components of a Diversion program are a Rapid Resolution problem-solving approach to conversations with individuals experiencing a housing crisis paired with access to flexible funding that supports creative solutions to keep people housed or create new housing options.

How Does Diversion Work?

Diversion is an intensive service intervention. Through an interactive problem-solving conversation with the program participant, staff seek to:

- understand what caused a person's housing crisis;
- explore what immediate solutions to the crisis may be possible by identifying natural and community resources and supports; and
- help them pursue a solution(s).

These conversations should be person-centered, strengths-based, trauma informed, culturally appropriate, housing-focused and solutions-focused.

The idea is to immediately get the program participant into a safe housing alternative. Some of these options may include:

- a negotiated stay at or return to their previous housing;
- short-term, non-shelter accommodation;
- apartments or homes, (including shared housing);
- returns to family.

Staff should have training in skills like mediation, negotiation, conflict resolution, active listening, and strengths-based approaches. They should have access to flexible financial resources for things like rent arrears, transportation, utilities, and deposits. Staff also should have the ability to connect the program participant with community-based services, as needed.

Creativity is one of the keys to successful diversion, as there is not a single strategy that makes diversion effective. Staff who engage in diversion conversations with households are creative in their solutions, and explore every option to divert households from shelter. This can range from helping someone locate a family member or friend that can help, to acting as a mediator in the current housing situation, to developing a resolution that can allow the household to stay where they are.

Rapid Resolution Problem-Solving Approach:

The Rapid Resolution approach takes the form of a problem-solving conversation between an intake worker and a person seeking crisis services. The intake worker conducts a brief but intensive assessment to determine the circumstances contributing to the program participant's immediate housing crisis. The focus of the conversation is on clearly delineating the material conditions directly related to the program participant's choice to seek shelter at that moment, rather than

long-standing poverty or behavioral health issues which might also be present. It is a proactive way to help program participants explore their own housing options earlier. It is:

- Client-centered—with a focus on the program participant's agency in resolving his or her own housing crisis;
- Flexible—all available housing options are creatively explored through a problem-solving conversation; and
- Immediate—providers recognize a critical window of opportunity to act swiftly to resolve the housing crisis.

Rapid Resolution is a practice that allows providers to help the person find their strengths and resources to resolve their homelessness. This practice is centered in support and trust that, with some help, people might be able to identify resources to help them resolve their housing crisis. In many cases, just having staff engage in a conversation to get to know the household allows for a successful resolution without any financial assistance. It can include the following services:

- Conflict mediation (with a landlord, family or friends);
- Connections to financial, utility, and/or rental assistance;
- Short-term case management focused on housing stabilization;
- Connection to mainstream services and benefits;
- Housing location and advocacy.

This strategy does require skilled staff who are well-trained and supported in the practice. Effective staff will be attentive listeners and solution-oriented thinkers who ask open-ended questions to help program participants identify housing options they hadn't considered or resolve housing problems that previously seemed intractable. Staff will be open and transparent about the pros and cons of each housing option. Staff will provide conflict resolution services so that landlord issues and relationship problems that are getting in the way of stable housing can be resolved. Most critically, though, staff will identify the strengths and resources present in each program participant and leverage those assets to support the program participant in exploring and securing appropriate housing options.

Performance Measures

- Number of persons assessed for diversion (by household type)
- Number of persons enrolled in diversion services (by household type)
- Number of persons safely diverted from shelter admission (by household type)
- Number of persons initially diverted from shelter admission that subsequently return for diversion within 6 months (by household type)
- Number of households assessed for diversion (by household type)
- Number of households enrolled in diversion services (by household type)
- Number of households safely diverted from shelter admission (by household type)

- Number of households initially diverted from shelter admission that subsequently return for diversion within 6 months (by household type)
- Living situation (prior to program entry, by household type)
- Exit destination (by household type)

Performance Standards

100% of households entering program will meet HUD's definition of "at-risk of homelessness" or Categories 2, 3, or 4 of HUD's definition of "homelessness"

30% of households enrolled in diversion services will be safely diverted from shelter admission

30% of households diverted from shelter admission will exit to a permanent destination (by household type)

50% or less of households initially diverted from shelter admission subsequently return for diversion within 6 months (by household type).

Reporting

- This program was designed for compatibility with HUD's Annual Performance Report (APR) data reporting standards that are required by HUD to be exported from HMIS (or a comparable database for victim service providers). Grantees are strongly encouraged to utilize HMIS for the reporting burden of this program (not required by IDHS) and for systems-level evaluations by CoCs, but must be utilized if the CoC has a policy in place that requires shelter diversion providers to record program and client level data into HMIS. When required, grantees are responsible for ensuring the completion and maintenance of all data fields required by their local Continuum of Care's HMIS and Coordinated Entry policies, procedures, processes, and/or standards. IDHS may require submission of exported APR reports or their equivalent to verify compliance, performance measures, and demographic information for those served through this program.
- Periodic Financial Reports will be required on a monthly basis and must be submitted no later than 20 days after the end of the reporting month.
- Periodic Performance Reports will be required on a quarterly basis and must be submitted no later than 20 days after the quarter ends.
- Other Unique Programmatic Reporting Requirements: Additional annual performance data may be collected as directed by the Department and in a format prescribed by the Department.