

## Charlotte-Mecklenburg

### Rapid Re-Housing Performance Measures and Program Standards

#### Introduction

Rapid re-housing is designed to help individuals and families quickly exit homelessness, return to housing in the community, and not become homeless again. Rapid re-housing is defined as an intervention providing short-term or medium-term assistance (up to 24 months) to households. In this type of program, the lease for the unit must be between the landlord and the program participant.

This document explains how the Charlotte-Mecklenburg community measures performance of rapid re-housing programs. It also outlines standards for the three core components of rapid re-housing programs: housing identification, rent and move-in assistance, and case management and services. The standards described in this document are based on the standards produced by the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) which are based on what is currently considered promising practice by NAEH, the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), Abt Associates and other federal technical assistance providers, and nationally-recognized, high-performing rapid re-housing providers<sup>1</sup>.

#### Performance Measures

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg community has adopted six system performance measures for its homeless services system. Four of those measures are calculated for rapid re-housing programs. Those measures are calculated using data from the North Carolina homeless management information system (NC HMIS). Three of these measures align directly with the three primary goals of rapid re-housing which are to reduce the length of time program participants spend homeless, exit households to permanent housing, and limit returns to homelessness. At this time, our community has not set specific benchmarks for each measure for rapid re-housing programs, so these measures are discussed as community goals and how rapid re-housing programs can impact those overall community goals. This document will be updated in the future as specific benchmarks are set.

##### 1. Performance Measure: Length of time Homeless

The community's goal is to reduce the average length of time person remains homeless in emergency shelter or transitional housing. Rapid re-housing programs can help reduce the length of time homeless by quickly identifying housing opportunities and helping households access those housing opportunities.

##### 2. Performance Measure: Exits to Permanent Housing

The community's goal is to increase the percentage of people who exit the homeless services system to permanent housing. Permanent housing has several definitions in NC HMIS, such as private, unsubsidized housing or housing shared with friends for a more permanent tenure (instead of temporary tenure). Rapid re-housing programs can impact this measure through housing identification, housing placement, and case management services.

##### 3. Performance Measure: Returns to Homelessness

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<sup>1</sup> *Rapid Re-Housing Performance Benchmarks and Program Standards* (Issue brief). (2016, February 15). Retrieved April 19, 2017, from National Alliance to End Homelessness website: <http://www.endhomelessness.org/page/-/files/Performance%20Benchmarks%20and%20Program%20Standards.pdf>

The community's goal is to reduce the percentage of persons who return to homelessness and is measured as the extent to which persons who leave homelessness to permanent housing experience additional periods of homelessness. Rapid re-housing programs can help with this goal by placing individuals and families in appropriate housing and providing effective case management.

#### **4. Performance Measure: Employment and Income Growth**

While this measure is not one of the three primary goals of rapid re-housing programs, as defined by NAEH, our community has chosen to use this measure for all providers in the homeless services system.

The community's goal is to increase the percentage of adults, in Continuum of Care-funded projects, who gain or increase employment or non-employment cash income between entry of the homeless services system to exit. Rapid re-housing programs help to impact this measure through case management services that focus on helping households enroll for specific benefits and increase employment and earnings over time.

#### **Core Component Program Standards: Housing Identification & Rent and Move-in Assistance**

- H1. Programs explain purpose of intervention prior to admitting the individual or family into the program. Programs have guidelines that ensure fairness and avoid arbitrary decisions that vary from client to client or staff to staff.
- H2. Programs consider the needs of the household in terms of location, cost, number of bedrooms, handicap access, and other pertinent information when moving a household into housing. Programs will assess potential housing for compliance with program standards for habitability, lead-based paint, and rent reasonableness prior to the individual or family signing a lease and the program signing a rental assistance agreement with the landlord.
- H3. Programs may provide assistance with rental application fees (ESG, CoC and SSVF only), moving costs (ESG, SSVF, and CoC only), temporary storage fees (ESG and SSVF programs only), security deposits (up to 2 months for ESG, CoC, HOME, and SSVF), utility deposits, utility payments, rental arrears (up to 6 months for ESG), utility arrears (up to 6 months for ESG), credit repair (ESG and CoC only), and legal services (ESG and CoC only) related to obtaining permanent housing. Grantees should follow the specifics of the grant program under which their program is funded to understand specific restrictions for each program and the maximum number of months allowed for rental and utility assistance. In order to maximize every limited resource, expenses paid outside of rent shall be of last resort. Programs problem solve with participants in order to determine alternative resources.
- H4. **Lease:** The program participant will sign a lease directly with a landlord or property owner. Grantees may only make payments directly to the landlord or property owner. Initial lease agreements should be for one year, renewable for a minimum term of one month and terminable only for cause. HOME TBRA leases should not have prohibited lease provisions (24 CFR 92.253). Master leasing is permissible if subsidy source allows. The intention of master leasing is to stabilize household and transfer lease to household.
- H5. **Rental Assistance Agreement:** Grantees may make rental and utility assistance payments only to an owner with whom the household has entered into a rental assistance agreement. The rental

assistance agreement must set forth the terms under which rental assistance will be provided. The rental assistance agreement must provide that, during the term of the agreement, the landlord must give the grantee a copy of any notice to the program participant to vacate the housing unit or any complaint used under state or local law to commence a legal eviction against a program participant.

- H6. Programs shall take a progressive approach when determining the amount that households will contribute toward their monthly rent payment. Programs are to remain flexible, taking into account the unique and changing needs of the household. The household's payment are to reflect the regulations of the subsidy funding source. In cases in which households lack any source of income and the funding source is HOME TBRA program, programs can choose not to charge households rent during their participation in the program. This practice shall be on a case-by-case basis and not a standard of practice. All rent payments made by program must be paid directly to the landlord or property owner. Programs will review the amount of rental assistance paid for the participating household at least every 3 months, or what is stipulated by subsidy source, whatever is shorter. Programs are to have written policies and procedures for determining the amount of rent participants pay towards housing costs. This amount must be reasonable based on household income including \$0 for households with no income. These policies should also address when and how programs use financial assistance as a bridge to housing subsidy or a permanent supportive housing program. When the program determines the household would not imminently return to homelessness if financial assistance ended, financial assistance should end. Support services may continue when financial resources end.
- H7. When determining the amount and length of financial assistance, programs should base their decision on the needs of the household and its housing stability plan. In order to maintain fair and consistent expectations for all households, programs are to have well-defined policies and procedures for determining the amount and length of time for financial assistance to program participants as well as defined and objective standards for when case management and/or financial assistance should continue or end. Programs must review the amount of rental assistance provided every 3 months and continued need determined through consultation between the participant and the case manager. Programs shall review regulations for the funding source to determine minimum/maximum months rental assistance may be paid.
- H8. **Use with other subsidies:** Except for one-time payment of rental arrears on the program participant's portion of the rental payment, rental assistance cannot be provided to a program participant who receives other tenant-based rental assistance or who is living in a housing unit receiving project-based rental or operating assistance through public sources. Programs can pay for security and utility payments for program participants to move into these units when other funding sources cannot be identified. Utility payments must be paid directly to the utility company.

#### **Core Component Program Standards: Rapid Re-Housing Case Management and Services**

##### **Program Staff**

- 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. Program staff assist participants in identifying safe, decent and affordable housing as quickly as possible in order to end the participant's housing crisis. This service may be with the program's housing locator or case manager.
- C3. Case managers are trained on RRH case management strategies, housing first, harm reduction, and other related evidence-based practices as well as program policies and community resources. Training regarding home visit safety is also provided. Additionally, a program has a regular process for onboarding new case managers and their supervisors and in providing ongoing training opportunities.

### **Program Policies**

- C4. Home visits are to occur at least once per month at a time directed by program participant. Visits may take place outside regular business hours.
- C5. 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.
- C6. Rapid Rehousing case management services offered by a program are voluntary for the program participant. Case managers are to make every attempt in building rapport and engaging participant.
- C7. Program has clear safety procedures for home visits, considering both the safety of the rapid rehousing participant as well as the case manager when conducting home visits.
- C8. Program has clearly defined relationships with employment and income programs and connects program participants.
- C9. Program has clearly defined policies and objective standards for when case management should continue and end. Services may continue even after the subsidy ends. 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.

### **Program Activities**

#### *Obtain and Move into Permanent Housing*

- C10. Within three (3) business days of enrollment, program conducts a tenancy barriers assessment to identify and address any possible barriers. This assessment does not influence participant access to services.
- C11. Case manager connects 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 photo identification;
  - Prepare participants for successful tenancy by reviewing lease provisions; and support other move-in activities such as providing furniture.
  - Obtain mainstream resources, including, but not limited to income supplements/benefits (TANF, Food Stamps/SNAP, disability), non-cash supports (healthcare, food supports, etc.),

legal assistance, credit counseling, and subsidized childcare. When making these referrals, it is the case manager's responsibility to follow-up on receipt of assistance. However, a participant may choose not to follow up on or participate in any referred services or programs.

C12. Programs 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.

*Support Stabilization in Housing*

C13. Case manager works directly with the participant and landlord to resolve tenancy issues without threatening the participant's tenancy. Issues may be related to lease violations by either party. Program works quickly to identify a corrective course of action, and, without breaking a participant's confidentiality, keeps the landlord and participant informed about the program's action to mitigate the situation.

C14. Case managers work with participants to build their communication skills to create positive relationship with landlord. This relationship may assist in preventing evictions and encourage proactive communication.

C15. Case managers help participants avoid evictions before they happen, and maintain a positive relationship with the landlord. This can be done by moving a household into a different unit prior to eviction and possibly identifying a new tenant household for the landlord's unit. Eviction for unit does not equate to discharge from program, and program shall assist participant in identifying alternative permanent housing.

C16. Housing Stability plans are directed by program participant and are initiated upon referral to program and no later than move in day and reviewed at every 3 months. Goals focus on how participants 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.

C17. 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. Options include benefit enrollment and increasing employment and earnings over time.

C18. 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.

C19. 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.

*Close the Case*

- C20. When closing a case, case managers are responsible for ensuring that all appropriate referrals have been made and information on available community assistance has been shared with a participant. Resources include those related to income as well as mental health, healthcare, domestic violence services, or any other resource that assists in participant in maintaining housing.
- C21. When a referral to on-going supports is made while a case is open or in the process of closing, case managers provide a “warm handoff” and follow up, to assure that assistance is satisfactory.
- C22. 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. Programs shall make every attempt to not leave participants in imminent risk of homelessness. Programs have the ability to either directly intervene or provide referral to another prevention resource.

**Program Philosophy and Design**

Beyond ending homelessness for individual households, rapid re-housing (RRH) plays a key role in ending homelessness overall. To do so effectively and efficiently, a program must coordinate with the broader homeless system and have a commitment to a Housing First approach. It shall not screen out households based on barriers or discharge participants due to them.