

Passaic County Interagency Council on Homeless

Coordinated Assessment Sub-Committee Policies and Procedures

Purpose

The Passaic County Interagency Council on Homeless (PCICH) Coordinated Assessment sub-committee follows a Housing First approach to quickly and efficiently connect individuals and families experiencing homelessness to permanent housing without preconditions and barriers to entry, such as sobriety, treatment or service participation prerequisites. In other approaches, permanent housing was typically offered only after a person experiencing homelessness could demonstrate that they were “ready” for housing. By contrast, Housing First is premised on the following principles: Homelessness is first and foremost a housing crisis and can be addressed through the provision of safe and affordable housing; All people experiencing homelessness, regardless of their housing history and duration of homelessness, can achieve housing stability in permanent housing; Some may need very little support for a brief period of time, while others may need more intensive and long-term supports. <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/3892/housing-first-in-permanent-supportive-housing-brief/>

Under the authority of 24 CFR 578.7(a)(8), requirements stipulate that Continuums of Care (CoC) and recipients of CoC Program and Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) Program funding must meet related to the development and use of a centralized or coordinated assessment system. It also provides guidance on additional policies that CoC and ESG recipients should consider incorporating into written policies and procedures to achieve improved outcomes for people experiencing homelessness. These include:

1. Cover the entire geographic area claimed by the CoC;
2. Be Consumer-focused;
3. Be easily accessed by individuals and families seeking housing or services;
4. Include a comprehensive and standardized assessment tool;
5. Provide an initial, comprehensive assessment of individuals and families for housing and services;
6. Streamline and expedite referral process for households;
7. Link households to the most appropriate intervention;
8. Develop a policy to guide the operation of the centralized or coordinated assessment system to address the needs of individuals and families who are fleeing, or attempting to flee, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking, but who are seeking shelter or services from non-victim specific providers.

Overview of the Coordinated Assessment System

The CoC plans and manages the coordination of services to people experiencing homelessness through a collaboration of public and non-profit agencies, grantors, advocacy groups and formerly homeless individuals. The CoC has provided grant funding to NJ-211 to be the single point of entry for the coordinated assessment process. NJ-211 is the virtual Coordinated Assessment access point accessible to the community via telephone availability 24 hours a day 7 days a week. NJ211 strives to make materials and phone conversations accessible to persons with limited English proficiency through translation. NJ211 is a key partner in conducting point of entry referrals into shelters, permanent housing, and services. The CoC’s Coordinated Assessment system covers Passaic County through strategic outreach from Projects for Assistance in Transitioning from Homelessness (PATH) and Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) partners. Strategic outreach covers the CoC’s geography annually, proactively focusing on the hardest to serve individuals.

As part of the coordinated system, the CoC has created a Housing Prioritization Tool (HPT) to identify the most vulnerable households in the Coordinated Assessment system. Using the tool ensures that people with the greatest needs will be prioritized and referred to housing providers for available permanent supportive housing

Monthly CoC meetings and regular meetings of several issue-specific committees deal with topics such as the level of system integration, progress on action steps in the plan to prevent and end homelessness, joint funding proposals and researching best practices through visits to other communities. The meetings provide an important venue for consumers, providers and grantors to identify system-wide gaps and community-based solutions. In addition to the monthly meetings, all stakeholders routinely work together to identify needs, set priorities and strategy, eliminate duplication, evaluate, coordinate and improve services and the delivery system.

Coordinated Assessment Committee

The purpose of the Coordinated Assessment Committee is to lead the efforts for the Coordinated Assessment System within Passaic County and to ensure that these efforts are aligned with HUD requirements.

The committee is represented by a diverse body of members including formerly homeless individuals and service providers to people experiencing homelessness. As such, committee members may include, faith-based organizations, substance use service providers, mental health service providers, school system representatives, municipal and county government elected officials, homeless or formerly homeless individuals, legal services provider, funder, health care provider, and assessment front-line staff, outreach specialists, drop-in-center staff, emergency shelter staff, transitional housing staff, permanent supportive housing staff, rapid re-housing staff, Passaic County Board of Social Services staff, NJ211 staff, domestic violence service staff. These seats may be part of an arrangement where each group rotates having a seat on the committee each year.

The Co-Chairs are appointed by the Executive Committee and are responsible for:

- assembling a committee representative of agencies providing housing and sheltering services as well as supportive services to the homeless community;
- preparing meeting agendas and minutes to inform the committee and the PCICH executive committee on the processes and outcomes of the system;
- evaluating the system and seeking solutions to improve the efforts to reduce homelessness;
- serving as the point of contact for anyone seeking more information or having concerns about the coordinated assessment process;

Responsibilities of the Coordinated Assessment Committee:

- providing general oversight and management of coordinated assessment;
- investigating and resolving consumer and provider grievances or concerns about the process, other than declined referrals, which will be addressed using the process described in these policies;
- making decisions about special situations, unique to a consumer
- providing information and feedback to the PCICH Executive Board and the community at large about coordinated assessment;
- evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of the coordinated assessment process;
- reviewing performance data from the coordinated assessment process; and
- recommending changes or improvements to the system based on performance data to the PCICH Executive Board;
- ensuring that agencies are participating in coordinated assessment at the required level – using the system, adding and removing names, accepting referrals for vouchers, providing notification of voucher openings;
- ensuring that the coordinated assessment process is in compliance with the CoC and HMIS policies;
- gathering the Case Conferencing/Stakeholder Committee (described further in this document) for general case conferencing facilitated by the co-chairs

Committee Members include but are not limited to:

- Catholic Family and Community Services
- Community Hope
- CUMAC-ECHO
- Eva's Village
- Good Shepherd
- Hispanic Multipurpose Center
- Heart of Hannah
- McKinney Vento Liaisons
- New Destiny Family Success Center
- NJ 211
- New Jersey Community Development Corporation (NJCDC)
- Passaic County Women's Program
- Paterson Housing Authority
- Paterson Task Force
- Projects for Assistance in Transitioning from Homelessness (PATH)
- Passaic County Department of Human Services
- Passaic County Department of Social Services
- St. Joseph's Health
- St. Paul's Community Development Corporation
- St. Peter's Haven
- Straight and Narrow
- Women and Families Ascending Association (WAFAA)
- Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) of Paterson and Passaic

Assessment Tool

Passaic County CoC has developed a coordinated assessment system aligned with HUD requirements. A Housing Prioritization Tool (HPT) prioritizes households in the coordinated assessment system. The HPT 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

Access

The HPT uses the client's responses to the questions related to the factors listed above in the Assessment Tool Section 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 need to maintain permanent housing and avoid additional episodes of homelessness.

Through the NJ211 screening process, specialists will identify those callers who are appropriate for prevention and diversion, so that those people in need of emergency services and permanent housing will be appropriately prioritized.

All emergency shelter, transitional housing and street outreach teams will be responsible for referring clients to NJ211 for a housing needs assessment. If a client calls the shelter or engages with the outreach team, they will be referred to NJ211. If a client comes directly to a shelter for help, they will be provided with a phone to call NJ211.

The HPT will be a part of the assessment completed by NJ211 and will be completed in HMIS. Any projects that are legally excluded (such as Domestic Violence agencies) from using HMIS must complete a paper or electronic version of the HPT and provide that information to the Coordinated Entry Lead Agency as well as maintaining completed assessment forms for their individual clients. The information provided to the Lead Agency will then be added to the Housing Prioritization List.

To establish a safety net for hard to reach unsheltered clients, agencies who encounter a person who chooses not to seek the help of a shelter or outreach team, will refer that client to the local Projects for Assistance in Transitioning from Homelessness (PATH) agency. PATH will complete the HPT for the client, and they will be included on the Housing Prioritization List (HPL) as appropriately determined by the assessment.

Prevention & Diversion

Based on the prevention and diversion questions triage tool, NJ 211 staff will refer callers to appropriate agencies based on their presenting needs, including Board of Social Services, Catholic Charities and other county agencies that may provide assistance. If a consumer can be diverted (has a safe place to stay for the next 7-10 days) the staff will provide appropriate referrals.

If 211 is unable to divert consumers to a stable living situation outside of the homeless service system, they will complete an assessment and be referred to a shelter.

Housing Prioritization List

The Housing Prioritization List (HPL) will be maintained by the Coordinated Assessment Lead Agency. The HPL will be pulled directly from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). This list will be used to identify which clients in the CoC are the most vulnerable. All ESG and CoC funded permanent housing and rapid rehousing projects are required to utilize the list to fill their open units.

Prioritized clients included on the housing prioritization list will meet HUD's homelessness definition of Category 1 – Literally Homeless:

Individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, meaning: (i) Has a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not meant for human habitation; (ii) Is living in a publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state and local government programs); or (iii) Is exiting an institution where (s)he has resided for 90 days or less and who resided in an emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution. <https://www.hudexchange.info>

To provide information for case conferencing among providers, the prioritization list will be entered in a password protected document and made available to ONLY to agencies that have clients on the list or agencies that have housing, shelters and/or vouchers for housing.

The categories that will be included on the list are:

- Client ID
- Client Name
- Disability
- 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 HPL will be sorted by Housing Prioritization Score (highest to lowest) and will include the following factors:

- Individuals or families that are chronically homeless
- Individual or family's Prioritization Score
- Individuals or families that are or include a veteran
- Individuals or families that have a member who is disabled
- The length of time the individual or family has been in their current homeless situation

Confidentiality

Clients will complete a Release Form giving their permission to discuss their needs at the Case Conferencing and to be contacted by Housing Providers when they are next on the prioritization list.

Case Conferencing

To assist with the shortage of housing for people who are experiencing homelessness, case conferencing will be held a minimum of once per month. The case conferences will involve all homelessness service providers and interested parties in the community and will focus on the top clients on the housing prioritization list that are not currently engaged by a provider for possible housing opportunities.

Additionally, the Passaic County CoC recognizes that there are many people who are experiencing homelessness with a prioritization score that is at the lower end of the list. It is further understood that they also need services and referrals for permanent housing. For this reason, case conferencing will also be utilized to identify options and plans for the clients that are not yet eligible for traditional resources in the CoC.

Housing Referrals

The Coordinated Assessment Committee will follow these steps for Housing Referrals:

1. When a permanent housing provider has an opening, the Coordinated Assessment Committee Member representing the provider, must consult the Housing Prioritization List for the client with the highest prioritization that is eligible for the project.
2. If the person at the top of the list is not eligible due to the voucher's stipulations, then the provider moves down the list to the next eligible person. It is expected that providers may make several phone calls to the current program who is assisting the client, to determine eligibility.
3. The permanent housing agency will then reach out to the current program who is working with that

client to obtain a referral.

4. Once the permanent housing provider requests a referral from a client, the provider makes a note on the list to inform other members that this person has entered into the application phase and is already being vetted for a project.
5. At Case Conferencing meetings, the Housing Provider and Referring Agency will report on the status of the placement, including the reason for the client being denied, if applicable.

Programs that deny individuals from voucher placements must immediately communicate the reasoning for non-acceptance to the Coordinated Assessment Lead Agency. In addition to this communication, the non-accepting agency must communicate this denial at the case conferencing sessions, so that strategies to help the client can be deployed.

If upon seeking a referral from the Housing Prioritization List, the Housing Provider does not find a client who meets the definition of chronically homeless and other voucher requirements, the Housing Provider can request a letter from the Coordinated Assessment Lead Agency, which will state that at the time of the vacancy, there were no chronically homeless individuals or families who met the requirements of the voucher, 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'.

Outcomes

Analysis of the tracking measures in HMIS, such as bed availability for housing projects, and the length of time clients remain on the HPL as well as where clients are discharged to, assists the CoC and the Coordinated Assessment Sub-Committee in making improvements to the system and the process of referrals.

The Coordinated Assessment Committee is focused on achieving the following outcomes:

- Engage the active participation of CoC and ESG funded providers and non-CoC and ESG funded providers.
- Move the HPL into the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).
- Efficient and real-time use of the Housing Prioritization List by all providers.
- Reducing the time a person is listed on the HPL.
- Increasing successful exits to permanent housing of the overall homeless population throughout Passaic County .
- Maintain annual housing retention at or above 90%.