



## 1.4 Standard Terms: Disaster Planning and Homelessness Services

To integrate a homeless response into your disaster plan, it helps to understand the vocabularies used by disaster planners and service providers. These are common [Disaster Planning](#) and [Homeless Service Delivery](#) terms.

### DISASTER PLANNING TERMS

#### *Emergency/disaster situation, disaster, incident, event*

These terms are used interchangeably throughout this Toolkit. FEMA provides very similar definitions for the terms **disaster**, **emergency**, and **incident**. These are occurrences or events—natural or human-caused—that require a response to protect life and/or property. An incident reaches the level of disaster when it results in severe property damage, deaths, and/or multiple injuries; it is “large-scale” when the response requires resources beyond the capacity of the local jurisdiction.

Examples of emergencies, disasters, or incidents include: terrorist attacks, terrorist threats, civil unrest, wildland and urban fires, floods, hazardous materials spills, nuclear accidents, aircraft accidents, earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, tropical storms, tsunamis, war-related disasters, public health and medical emergencies, or other occurrences requiring an emergency response.

#### *Disaster plans, emergency response plans, preparedness plan, hazard mitigation plans, emergency operations plans*

These terms are frequently used interchangeably to refer to plans that outline the response to any large-scale crisis event, whether natural or man-made. FEMA defines two types of plans:

- **Emergency Operations Plan (EOP).** FEMA defines this plan as “an ongoing plan for responding to a wide variety of potential hazards. An EOP describes how people and property will be protected, details who is responsible for carrying out specific actions; identifies the personnel, equipment, facilities, supplies, and other resources available; and outlines how all actions will be coordinated.” This plan is focused on the *immediate operational response* of the jurisdiction when the disaster hits.<sup>1</sup>
- **Multi-hazard Mitigation Plan.** This plan addresses “the effort to reduce loss of life and property by lessening the impact of disasters.... State, tribal, and local governments engage in hazard mitigation planning to identify risks and vulnerabilities associated with natural disasters, and develop long-term strategies for protecting people and property from future hazard events. Mitigation plans are key to breaking the cycle of disaster damage, reconstruction, and repeated damage.” A multi-hazard mitigation plan is focused on the *long-term planning effort* to respond to a disaster—including prevention efforts prior to the disaster, immediate disaster response, and recovery efforts post-disaster.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.training.fema.gov/programs/emischool/el361toolkit/glossary.htm#E>



In this guide, **emergency response plan** is used interchangeably with an EOP. **Disaster plan** is used as an umbrella term to be inclusive of any type of document that addresses what steps the jurisdiction will take in the event of any type of large emergency situation.

### *Evacuation, shelter-in-place*

In the event of a disaster, residents have two choices: stay in their homes or other current location (**shelter-in-place**) or leave their homes to seek safer shelter elsewhere (**evacuation**). FEMA defines an evacuation as “the organized, phased, and supervised withdrawal, dispersal, or removal of civilians from dangerous or potentially dangerous areas, and their reception and care in safe areas.” It further recognizes that there are three kinds of evacuation: a **spontaneous evacuation** (residents leave the threatened area without any official word of a threat or instructions to do so); a **voluntary evacuation** (residents are warned of a potential threat or risk to property or life and are encouraged to leave); and a **mandatory evacuation** (residents are told they must leave because of the severity of the threat).<sup>2</sup>

### *FEMA*

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (**FEMA**) is an agency of the [U.S. Department of Homeland Security](#), initially created in 1978. The agency's primary purpose is to coordinate the response to a disaster that has occurred in the United States and that overwhelms the resources of local and state authorities. See [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)

### *Preparedness, response, recovery*

These terms generally refer to the phases and/or different types of responses to a disaster. When used together in this Toolkit, these phases are meant to represent the full range of potential responses. FEMA describes these terms as follows:

- **Preparedness.** Actions that involve a combination of planning, resources, training, exercising, and organizing to build, sustain, and improve operational capabilities. Preparedness is the process of identifying the personnel, training, and equipment needed for a wide range of potential incidents and developing jurisdiction-specific plans for delivering capabilities when needed for an incident.
- **Response.** Immediate actions to save and sustain lives, protect property and the environment, and meet basic human needs. Response also includes the execution of plans and actions to support short-term recovery.
- **Recovery.** The development, coordination, and execution of service and site restoration plans; the reconstitution of government operations and services; individual, private sector, nongovernmental, and public assistance programs to provide housing and to promote restoration; long-term care and treatment of affected persons; additional measures for social, political, environmental, and economic restoration.

## HOMELESS SERVICE DELIVERY TERMS

Very precise definitions apply when operating a program funded under HUD’s Continuum of Care (CoC) or Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) homeless programs. This glossary provides simplified ‘plain English’

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.fema.gov/hazard-mitigation-planning>

<sup>3</sup> <https://emilms.fema.gov/IS700aNEW/glossary.htm#E>



definitions for use by disaster planners and service providers. For technical definitions of terms related to these programs, please see [the CoC Program Interim Rule at 24 CFR part 578](#), and the [ESG Interim Rule at 24 CFR part 576](#).

The **Consolidated Plan** (Con Plan) is a three- to five-year housing and community development plan required of local governments and states receiving certain types of HUD formula grant funding. It is designed to help jurisdictions assess their affordable housing and community development needs and market conditions, and to make data-driven, place-based investment decisions. It is carried out through Annual Action Plans, which provide a concise summary of the actions, activities, and the specific federal and non-federal resources that will be used each year to address the priority needs and specific goals identified by the Con Plan. In the event of a disaster, plans for using certain federal recovery funds must be explained in the Con Plan.

Note, the Con Plan provides information on the nature and extent of homelessness, a description of each category of each homeless persons specified by HUD (chronically homeless, chronic substance use disorders, persons with HIV/AIDS, severely mentally ill, veterans, victims of domestic violence and unaccompanied youth). The plan also provides the number of persons experiencing homelessness on a given night, the number of persons who experience homelessness each year, those at-risk of homelessness, as well as a list of homeless service providers. It also indicates the total number of units and number of emergency shelter beds, transitional housing beds, and permanent supportive housing beds. This document identifies neighborhoods with concentrations of low- and very low-income persons, who may be vulnerable in the event of a disaster.

A **Continuum of Care (CoC)** is a regional or local planning body that coordinates housing and services funding for families and individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. HUD administers the majority of its funds for homelessness through the CoC Program, which: promotes community-wide commitment to the goal of ending homelessness; funds efforts to quickly re-house homeless individuals and families in order to minimize trauma and dislocation; promotes access to and effective utilization of mainstream programs; and optimizes self-sufficiency among individuals and families experiencing homelessness. Note that “a CoC” refers to the regional or local planning body described here, while “the CoC Program” refers to the specific HUD program to address homelessness.

A **Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)** is a local information technology system used to collect client-level data and data on the provision of housing and services to homeless individuals and families and persons at risk of homelessness. Each CoC is responsible for selecting an HMIS software solution that complies with HUD's data collection, management, and reporting standards.

### *Homeless persons/population, persons experiencing homelessness, vulnerable populations*

HUD's formal definitions of “[homeless](#)” and “[at risk of homelessness](#)” can be found in useful summaries on the HUD Exchange, or in the [CoC Program Interim Rule at 24 CFR part 578](#), and the [ESG Interim Rule at 24 CFR part 576](#). This Toolkit uses the following terms:



- **Persons experiencing homelessness** refers to people who are living in places that are not designed for human habitation, are living in emergency shelter or transitional housing, are without a safe residence because they are fleeing domestic violence, or are likely to lose their housing imminently. This guide uses this term interchangeably with **homeless persons**.
- **Vulnerable populations** refers to people who are not currently homeless, but are extremely vulnerable to becoming homeless – particularly after a disaster-- due to their economic, health, or social circumstances. This might include some senior citizens, people with disabilities, non-English speakers, people with substance use issues, very and extremely low-income people, undocumented workers, and others in precarious economic circumstances.

### *Homeless provider network, homeless service providers*

Throughout this Toolkit, the individuals and agencies that provide support (shelter, food, medical care, etc.) to persons experiencing homelessness and other vulnerable populations are referred to as **homeless service providers**. This group will vary by jurisdiction, but it should include a wide range of organizations such as: operators of emergency shelter, transitional housing, or permanent housing for homeless individuals and families; agencies that provide street outreach and food programs; faith-based groups that provide support to extremely low-income persons; mental health service providers; medical service providers (public health clinics); and public housing authorities. Collectively, this group of providers is referred to as the **homeless provider network** in this Toolkit.

### *Emergency shelter, transitional housing, permanent housing*

HUD provides funding to assist persons experiencing homelessness under the CoC Program (see details in the CoC Interim Rule at 24 CFR part 578) and the ESG Program (see details in the ESG Interim Rule at 24 CFR part 576). The primary forms of shelter and housing assistance – which may or may not be provided in a given community – include:

- **Emergency Shelter (ES)** includes any facility whose primary purpose is to provide temporary shelter for persons who are experiencing homelessness in general, or for specific populations of persons experiencing homelessness.
- **Transitional Housing (TH)** includes housing that has as its purpose facilitating the movement of homeless individuals and families to permanent housing within a reasonable amount of time (up to 24 months).
- **Permanent Housing (PH)** means community-based housing without a designated length of stay and includes both permanent supportive housing and rapid re-housing. To be considered permanent housing, the program participant must be the tenant on a lease for a term of at least one year, which is renewable for terms that are a minimum of one month long and is terminable only for cause.
- **Permanent Supportive Housing** is long-term, permanent housing that provides supportive services to help homeless persons with disabilities live independently.
- **Rapid Re-housing** assistance includes relocation and stabilization services and short- and/or medium-term rental assistance as necessary to help a homeless individual or family move as quickly as possible into permanent housing and achieve stability in that housing.



### *Supportive Services*

Supportive services assist homeless individuals and families in the transition from the streets or shelters into permanent housing and assist persons with maintaining housing. The term “supportive services” includes a range of services such as case management, health and mental health care, and transportation. They can be facility-based or provided as street outreach (e.g., mobile vans for health care).

#### *Street outreach*

Street outreach programs proactively reach out to unsheltered homeless persons on the street and in places not meant for human habitation to connect them with emergency shelter, housing, or critical services. In cases where unsheltered homeless people are not willing or able to access emergency shelter, housing, or an appropriate health facility, the goal is to provide urgent, non-facility-based care.

#### *Coordinated Entry*

Coordinated entry means a centralized or coordinated process designed to coordinate program participant intake assessment and provision of referrals. Each CoC designs their coordinated entry system to meet the needs of the community. Access points can vary from a single point of entry to multiple points, from physically going to a shelter to calling a referral number. The agencies charged with administering the coordinated entry system can range from homeless service providers to government social service agencies.