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## SNAPS Weekly Focus: Adopting a Housing First Approach

When we started this weekly focus series, we talked about making changes to business-as-usual approaches. Each week, we've focused in on strategies that communities should consider implementing in order to make their systems as effective and efficient as possible. This week, we're going to discuss an approach to housing that is proven to be both cost-effective and successful for the people we serve.

**Housing First** is an approach where homeless persons are provided immediate access to housing and then offered the supportive services that may be needed to foster long-term stability and prevent a return to homelessness. This approach removes unnecessary barriers and assumes that supportive services are more effective in addressing needs when the individual or family is housed – when the daily stress of being homeless is taken out of the equation. Key components of this model include a simple application process, a harm reduction approach, and no conditions of tenancy beyond those included in the lease. This approach is highlighted in [Opening Doors](#) as a core strategy for ending homelessness.

Research has demonstrated that this model is effective for persons that have long histories of homelessness, with the most complex service needs – such as persons with mental illness. Studies show that for even those considered the hardest to serve over 80 percent were in housing a year after entry under the Housing First model. As we stated in week two of this series, communities should be moving away from a “first come, first served” approach to housing, towards a proactive approach to outreach that identifies, engages, and connects homeless persons with the **highest level of need**—including individuals and families who are chronically homeless—with permanent supportive housing. Housing First is a paradigm shift away from a traditional **housing ready** approach.

Our data indicates that still too many programs are using a **housing ready** approach, which puts barriers to housing in front of the people that need our help the most. It isn't always easy, but it is the right thing to do. No one should have to show that they deserve a place to live.

While many communities are already implementing a Housing First approach with great success, others may not be sure where to begin. The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) recently developed [The Housing First Checklist: A Practical Tool for Assessing Housing First in Practice](#). This tool is “intended for use by policymakers, government officials, and practitioners alike to help make a basic assessment of whether and to what degree a particular housing program is employing a Housing First approach.” You are encouraged to utilize this tool as the first step in implementing a Housing First approach in your community.



Acting Assistant Secretary for Community Planning and Development, Mark Johnston recently recorded a [YouTube video](#) encouraging communities to adopt a Housing First approach. In the weeks to come, SNAPS will also be releasing additional guidance and materials related to implementing a Housing First approach. Keep checking back to [SNAPS Weekly Focus](#) page for these materials, as they become available. In the meantime, please find useful resources on the [USICH](#) and [National Alliance to End Homelessness \(NAEH\)](#) websites.

As always, we thank you for your commitment to ending homelessness.

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