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## SNAPS Weekly Focus: What about Transitional Housing?

Over the last several years, better information has emerged about how different homeless service models really work, which has prompted a discussion about what we as a community might do to make sure that our housing and service programs reach as many people as possible with the best outcomes possible. We have started using words like **efficient** and **effective** to describe the promising practices such as Rapid Re-housing and Housing First. At times, the conversation can be uncomfortable. The decisions we need to make are hard. And of course having hard and uncomfortable discussions when we are experiencing budget cuts are all that much more difficult and uncomfortable. And at the center of many of these discussions at both the local and national levels has been the subject of transitional housing.

I get asked on a regular basis about HUD's position on transitional housing. Some people think that HUD simply wants to get rid of this type of housing altogether. To those folks I often say this – HUD does not advocate the wholesale removal of one type of homeless resource in a community (like emergency shelter or transitional housing) with the replacement of another (like rapid re-housing). That would be short-sighted, and does not take into account the specific needs of communities. What HUD really wants is for communities to be strategic, to have the tough conversations, and really use their data to be sure that whatever programs they have in place to serve families and individuals experiencing homelessness are part of a larger system approach, and have the best outcomes possible.

Transitional housing is an eligible component of the Continuum of Care (CoC) Program and can be a necessary part of a CoC's homeless assistance portfolio.

However, it is time for CoCs to look at transitional housing programs with a critical eye – look at recent research, review each program's eligibility criteria, analyze outcomes and occupancy rates, and make sure the services offered (and paid for) actually match the needs of people experiencing homelessness within the CoC. Many transitional housing programs may need to change their program design or serve a different population. For example, some may need to remove strict eligibility criteria that result in those families that really need intensive services being screened out (often resulting in low occupancy). In other cases, the best course of action is to reallocate the transitional housing program in favor of a more promising model.

For many years, using HUD funds for transitional housing was the only funding alternative for serving families and individuals that did not need permanent supportive housing. With rapid re-housing now eligible under both the CoC Program and the Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) program, there is an alternative and promising option for families with low-barriers that need shorter interventions. Rapid re-housing can be done with a lower cost per household – increasing the total number of households that can be served with the same amount of funding. If the majority of households served in your CoC's transitional housing are



families with lower barriers, you should consider reallocating those projects into new rapid re-housing projects for families.

Similarly, as CoCs move to a more direct Housing First approach, eligible households with disabilities that will need long-term assistance likely do not need an interim stay in transitional housing. For example, a CoC that has a high number of people in transitional housing **waiting** for placement into permanent supportive housing should consider reallocating those transitional housing units into new permanent supportive housing.

We know that there are families and individuals who need more assistance than rapid re-housing offers but who do not qualify for permanent supportive housing. Transitional housing should be reserved for those populations that most need that type of intervention – programs that serve domestic violence survivors and youth and those that provide substance abuse treatment come to mind first – rather than being used either as a holding pattern for those that really need permanent supportive housing or those that need less intensive interventions.

As we move forward, I hope that we can continue the conversation about what interventions can have the most positive impact. Change is hard, and there are a lot of details that need to be discussed when approaching the question of transitional housing at both the national and local levels. But with open discussion, the use of data, and the commitment to systems change rather than a program-oriented approach we can ensure that homeless services dollars are used to the biggest possible benefit for those whom we all serve.

Below are some interesting readings on transitional housing to spark local discussion:

- [\*The Family Options Study\*](#)
- [\*Rearranging the Deck Chairs or Reallocating the Lifeboats?: Homelessness Assistance and Its Alternatives\*](#)
- [\*Characteristics of Transitional Housing for Homeless Families\*](#)
- [\*Life After Transitional Housing Homeless Families\*](#)

Don't forget to check back to [SNAPS Weekly Focus page](#) over the coming weeks as we will continue to post related materials and TA products related to each weekly focus, as they become available.

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

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