

What is Housing First?

Housing First is an approach that centers on providing homeless people with housing quickly and then providing services as needed. What differentiates a Housing First approach from other strategies is that there is an immediate and primary focus on helping individuals and families quickly access and sustain permanent housing. This approach has the benefit of being consistent with what most people experiencing homelessness want and seek help to achieve. Housing First programs share critical elements:

- There is a focus on helping individuals and families access and sustain rental housing *as quickly as possible and the housing is not time-limited*;
- A variety of services are delivered primarily following a housing placement to promote housing stability and individual well-being;
- Such services are time-limited or long-term depending upon individual need; and
- Housing is not contingent on compliance with services – instead, participants must comply with a standard lease agreement and are provided with the services and supports that are necessary to help them do so successfully.

A Housing First approach rests on the belief that helping people access and sustain permanent, affordable housing should be the central goal of our work with people experiencing homelessness. By providing housing assistance, case management and supportive services responsive to individual or family needs (time-limited or long-term) after an individual or family is housed, communities can significantly reduce the time people experience homelessness and prevent further episodes of homelessness. A central tenet of the Housing First approach is that social services to enhance individual and family well-being can be more effective when people are in their own home. While there are a wide variety of program models, Housing First programs all typically include:

- Assessment-based targeting of Housing First services
- Assistance locating rental housing, relationship development with private market landlords, and lease negotiation
- Housing assistance – ranging from security deposit and one month's rent to provision of a long-term housing subsidy
- A housing placement that is not time-limited
- Case management to coordinate services (time-limited or long-term) that follow a housing placement.

Housing First is an approach used for both homeless families and individuals and for people who are chronically homeless. Program models vary depending on the client population, availability of affordable rental housing and/or housing subsidies and services that can be provided. Housing First programs often reflect the needs and preferences of each community, further contributing to the diversity of models.

(Source: National Alliance to End Homelessness, Solutions Brief, November 27, 2006)