Rapid Re-Housing Performance Benchmarks and Program Standards

Introduction

Rapid re-housing is an intervention designed to help individuals and families to quickly exit homelessness, return to housing in the community, and not become homeless again in the near term. The core components of a rapid re-housing program are housing identification, move-in and rent assistance, and rapid re-housing case management and services. These core components represent the minimum that a program must be providing to households to be considered a rapid re-housing program, but do not provide guidance for what constitutes an *effective* rapid re-housing program.

This document provides details on performance benchmarks that would qualify a program as effective. These benchmarks are accompanied by qualitative program standards for each of the rapid re-housing core components that are likely to help a program meet the performance benchmarks. Lastly, this document include a section on program philosophy and design standards that provide more guidance on the broader role a rapid re-housing program should play in ending homelessness.

The standards included in this document are based on what is currently considered promising practice by the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), Abt Associates and other federal technical assistance providers, and nationally recognized, high-performing rapid re-housing providers.[1] As rapid re-housing practice continues to evolve, these program standards will be updated. This living document is intended to be a tool to help current and potential rapid re-housing providers, funders, and other stakeholders design and identify rapid re-housing programs that are or are likely to be the most successful in ending homelessness for individuals and families through the use of the three core components of rapid re-housing.

How to Use this Document

Funder, State Leaders, and Coalitions can use the performance benchmarks and program standards to increase the effective implementation of rapid re-housing. These standards can be used in the development of Requests For Proposals (RFPs) for a variety of funding streams and to set performance and outcome goals for programs, evaluate applications for new rapid re-housing programs and determine which organizations are best suited to provide rapid re-housing, and review current program performance.

Providers can use these standards to improve their own rapid re-housing practice and to evaluate possible rapid re-housing partner agencies. These benchmarks and standards provide clear goals for programs implementing the model and interested in improving practice.

[1] CARF and COA have also developed rapid re-housing standards. The standards included in this document do not conflict with the standards published by CARF or COA.

Continuums of Care (CoCs) can use these standards during the process of developing written standards for how they plan to administer assistance through coordinated assessment. CoCs must develop standards for providing assistance including prioritizing who receives rapid re-housing and how much rent participants in a rapid re-housing program must pay. While recommendations for such standards as required by HUD are not included in this document, these standards can help inform their development and ensure that rapid re-housing programs in CoCs are applied effectively and efficiently.

Performance Benchmarks

Ultimately the effectiveness of a rapid re-housing program is determined based on a program's ability to accomplish the model's three primary goals:

- Reduce the length of time program participants spend homeless,
- Exit households to permanent housing, and
- Limit returns to homelessness within a year of program exit.

Benchmarks for performance on the above outcomes are detailed below. When examining a program's ability to meet the benchmarks, it is important to remember that rapid re-housing is a Housing First intervention, meaning, among other things, that programs should not be screening out households based on criteria that are *assumed* to predict successful outcomes, such as income, employment, criminal history, mental health history, medical history, or evidence of "motivation." The benchmarks detailed below are based on performance data of programs that *do not* screen households out on the basis of the above barriers. Programs assisting individuals and families with high housing barriers are able to achieve these outcomes. It should also be noted that one of the program standards included below is that a program does not screen out households on the basis of the above barriers, so a program that met the performance benchmark, would still not meet the accompanying program standards if it was screening out households for those reasons. It may be necessary for rapid re-housing programs to have some prevention capacity to serve high barrier households after placement. It is a possibility that some households that are rapid re-housed will need periodic support to avoid a return to homelessness.

When using these performance benchmarks for program evaluation and purposes of comparison between programs, a community may not have any programs that meet these benchmarks despite meeting the program standards, particularly in extremely expensive or low-vacancy housing markets or if programs are primarily serving households with zero income and/or higher housing barriers. While programs should continue to strive for these benchmarks, funders can use performance on these benchmarks as an opportunity to assess relative effectiveness between programs and to undertake performance improvement efforts, including assessing barriers to better performance and performance improvement planning. The performance benchmarks also provide a baseline from which funders can establish performance improvement goals and performance-based contracting standards.

All of the below performance outcomes can be measured using data in a community's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). As such, to accurately measure whether a benchmark has been met, CoCs need to have high participation rates of targeted homeless assistance programs and individual programs must be entering high quality data in a community's HMIS. A rapid re-housing

provider who is also a domestic violence provider would not participate in a community's HMIS. Thus, in order to be able to calculate the performance benchmarks, that provider would be required to use an alternative, equivalent method that collects all of the necessary data points.

Programs that have not been operating for a year will not have sufficient data to meet all of the performance benchmarks, but these programs can meet the accompanying program standards, which are intended to design programs that do achieve the benchmarks and are detailed later in this document. Additionally, in the first several months of operations, providers may need time to bring operations to scale and reach full capacity.

Performance Benchmark #1: Reduce the length of time program participants spend homeless

The first goal of rapid re-housing is to reduce the amount of time individuals and families spend homeless. The primary opportunity for a rapid re-housing program to impact how much time a household spends homeless is the speed with which it is able to identify and help households access appropriate housing options. Activities that contribute to good performance on this outcome are recruiting landlords to have access to units, finding units that are in the communities and neighborhoods that program participants want to live in, and negotiating with landlords to help program participants access housing (see Housing Identification Program Standards).

For a program to meet this performance benchmark, households served by the program should move into permanent housing in an average of 30 days or less.

This measure is the average length of time between the date when an individual or family is identified as having entered a rapid re-housing program (HMIS rapid re-housing program entry date) to when they move into permanent housing (HMIS residential move-in date). This measure is only calculated for those households that move into a permanent housing destination and does not include those who have not yet moved in or move into a non-permanent housing destination.

$$Average = \frac{Sum\ of\ number\ of\ days\ from\ program\ entry\ to\ move\ in\ date\ for\ all\ households}{Total\ number\ of\ households}$$

Permanent housing may include private, unsubsidized housing; subsidized housing; permanent supportive housing; or housing shared with friends or family in a sustainable living situation (one **that should** not be categorized as "temporary"). Permanent housing does not include shelter, a transitional housing program, jail or prison, or a treatment facility.

Reminder: A community may not have any programs that meet this benchmark, particularly in extremely expensive or low-vacancy housing markets. Funders and programs may want to set alternate performance goals for the purposes of comparison between programs or performance improvement while programs work to achieve these benchmarks.

Performance Benchmark #2: Permanent housing success rates

The second goal of a rapid re-housing program is to exit households to permanent housing in the community with or without a subsidy. A rapid re-housing program can impact permanent housing success through the combination of an appropriate housing placement, financial assistance, and

effective case management and services (see Housing Identification, Rent and Move-In Assistance, and Rapid Re-Housing Case Management Program Standards)

For a program to meet this performance benchmark, at least 80 percent of households that exit a rapid re-housing program should exit to permanent housing.

This measure is calculated by taking the number of households who were in permanent housing when they exited the rapid re-housing program (HMIS rapid re-housing program exit date and destination at exit) and dividing by all of the households who exited the rapid re-housing program regardless of destination over the same period of time. This figure should be calculated for households exiting the rapid re-housing program over the preceding 12 month period. A program working on performance improvement, may wish measure this for shorter intervals.

$$Percent = \left(\frac{Total\ number\ of\ households\ exited\ to\ permanent\ housing\ during\ a\ time\ period}{Total\ number\ of\ households\ that\ exited\ program\ during\ same\ time\ period}\right)100$$

Permanent housing may include private, unsubsidized housing; subsidized housing; permanent supportive housing; or housing shared with friends or family in a sustainable living situation (one that should not be categorized as "temporary"). Permanent housing does not include shelter, a transitional housing program, jail or prison, or a treatment.

Reminder: A community may not have any programs that meet this benchmark, particularly if programs are primarily serving households with zero income and/or higher housing barriers. Funders and programs may want to set alternate performance goals for the purposes of comparison between programs or performance improvement while programs work to achieve these benchmarks.

Performance Benchmark #3: Returns to Homelessness

The third goal of a rapid re-housing program is to reduce the number of households returning to homelessness following soon after an exit from a rapid re-housing program. The primary opportunities for a rapid re-housing program to impact the success of a household in remaining housed is through the combination of securing appropriate housing and effective case management and services (see Housing Identification and Rapid Re-Housing Case Management Program Standards).

For a program to meet this performance benchmark, at least 85 percent of households that exit a rapid re-housing program to permanent housing should not become homeless again within a year.

This is typically measured by examining HMIS data from homeless programs across the entire community to determine whether people who successfully exit from the rapid re-housing program to permanent housing returned to homelessness, meaning an unsheltered location, emergency shelter, transitional housing, or a Safe Haven, within 12 months of exiting.

$$Percent = \left(\frac{Total\ number\ of\ households\ who\ did\ NOT\ return\ to\ homelessness\ during\ time\ period}{Total\ number\ of\ households\ exited\ to\ permanent\ housing\ during\ the\ same\ time\ period}\right)100$$

Programs operating for less than a year will not be able to meet this benchmark. Additionally, to calculate this measure, programs must have access to homeless system data for all other programs in the community (open data system) or the ability to access an HMIS report from their community's HMIS

lead agency. For a program in a community without open or adequate HMIS coverage (at least 80 percent of programs entering data), and for a rapid re-housing provider who is also a domestic violence provider, this measure can be calculated using an alternative, equivalent method to document the program's ability to meet the standards such as follow up with a representative sample of households that exit to permanent housing.

This measure of returns to homelessness tracks the percentage of households who do not experience a subsequent episode of homelessness. If a household receives some type of emergency or permanent housing assistance, but does not experience another episode of homeless, then they should be considered a household that did not return to homelessness for the purpose of this performance benchmark. And, if a household moves from one permanent housing situation to another permanent housing situation or doubled up situation without another episode of homelessness in-between moves, it is also considered a household that did not return to homelessness for the purpose of this measure.

Reminder: A community may not have any programs that meet this benchmark, particularly if programs are primarily serving households with zero income and/or higher housing barriers. Funders and programs may want to set alternate performance goals for the purposes of comparison between programs or performance improvement while programs work to achieve these benchmarks.

Core Component Program Standards

The core components for rapid re-housing were developed in collaboration with, and endorsed by, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). While a household that is rapidly re-housed is not required to utilize all three core components, in order to meet the program standards in this document, a rapid re-housing program must *offer* program participants all three core components: housing identification, move-in and rent assistance, and rapid re-housing case management and services. The core components can be provided by a single agency or in partnership with other agencies and still meet these program standards.

Program standards are detailed below for each of the three core components. These standards are accompanied by principles and a rationale on which the standards are based as well as examples of how a program may meet those standards.

Housing Identification

Housing Identification is the first core component of rapid re-housing, the goal of which is to find housing for program participants quickly. Activities under this core component include recruiting landlords with units in the communities and neighborhoods where program participants want to live and negotiating with landlords to help program participants access housing.

Principles

- Within the limits of the participant's income, a rapid re-housing program should have the ability to help households access units that are desirable and sustainable—those that are in neighborhoods where they want to live in, that have access to transportation, are close to employment, and that are safe.
- Housing identification efforts should be designed and implemented to actively recruit and retain landlords and housing managers willing to rent to program participants who may otherwise fail to pass typical tenant screening criteria.
- Critical to the formation of landlord-program relationship is the recognition of the landlord as a vital partner. The RRH provider must be responsive to landlords to preserve and develop those partnerships for the purposes future housing placements.

Rationale

One of the primary activities under housing identification is the recruitment of landlords as landlord recruitment and support is essential to program participants having rapid access to permanent housing from the moment they enter the program. The more partnerships with landlords the program has developed, the more opportunities program participants have to rapidly obtain permanent housing. As landlords experience the benefits of a partnership with rapid re-housing programs, they may give preference to program participants or even be willing to occasionally consider some reduction in rent or an occasional late payment.

Without landlord screening concessions, many program participants would be denied many housing opportunities due to their income, housing, credit and/or criminal histories. Landlords are often willing to waive some or all screening requirements because the program staff will communicate with the landlord and tenant and will resolve tenancy problems as soon as possible if and when they arise. Some programs also promise limited vacancy periods between tenants, or double security deposits to persuade landlords to rent to tenants who appear to be higher risk.

At the same time, the program must also be knowledgeable about landlord responsibilities to protect households served by the program. Programs should not knowingly place households with negligent landlords and should help households understand tenant and landlord rights and responsibilities.

Beyond landlord recruitment, programs must also match households to appropriate housing—housing for which they will be able to pay the rent after financial assistance ends; that is decent; and, that is safe, including meeting the particular safety needs of survivors of domestic violence. Effective programs accomplish this by providing a variety of housing options in a variety of neighborhoods and by serving as a resource to households during the housing search, location, and application processes.

Housing Identification Program Standards (H1. – H9.)

Program Staffing

H1. Program designates staff whose responsibility is to identify and recruit landlords and encourage them to rent to homeless households served by the program. Staff have the knowledge, skills, and agency resources to: understand landlords' perspectives, understand landlord and tenant rights and responsibilities, and negotiate landlord supports. A program may have dedicated staff for whom this is the primary responsibility. If a program does not have a dedicated staff person(s) who performs this function, case manager job descriptions must include responsibilities including landlord recruitment and negotiation and at least some of the program's case managers must be trained in this specialized skill set to perform the recruitment function effectively.

H2. Staff are trained on housing identification, landlord tenant rights and responsibilities, and other core competencies as well as the wider array of housing assistance available within a community. Program has routine ways to onboard new staff and to keep staff regularly updated on new strategies, policies, and housing assistance options in the community.

Program Policies

H3. Program has written policies and procedures for landlord recruitment activities, including screening out potential landlord partners who have a history of poor compliance with their legal responsibilities and fair housing practices.

H4. Program offers a standard, basic level of support to all landlords who lease to program participants. This support is detailed in a written policy distributed to landlords. Program can negotiate additional supports, as needed, on a case-by-case basis. At a minimum, this policy specifies that program staff:

> H4a. Respond quickly (within one business day) to landlord calls about serious tenancy problems;

H4b. Seek to resolving conflicts around lease requirements, complaints by other tenants, and timely rent payments; and

H4c. Whenever possible, negotiate move-out terms and assist the person/household to quickly locate and move into another unit without an eviction (see Rapid Re-Housing Case Management Program Standard C15.).

H5. Program has a detailed policy for the type of assistance provided to help households find and secure housing. Staff explain and distribute this policy to households at entry to the program. Some households may decline assistance in finding housing, but the program checks on their progress and offers advice and/or direct assistance if they encounter obstacles they cannot resolve independently.

H5. Program has a written policy requiring staff to explain to participants basic landlord-tenant rights and responsibilities and the requirements of their specific lease.

Program Activities

H6. Program continually engages in the recruitment and retention of landlord partners and has methods of tracking landlord partners and unit vacancies, unit locations, characteristics, and costs.

H7. Program provides participants with multiple housing choices within practical constraints. The onus is on the program to provide these housing choices, but this does not preclude program participants from conducting their own search and choosing housing they identify independently.

H8. Program assists participants in making an informed housing choice with the goal that the participant will be able to maintain after program exit, even when the household will experience high housing cost burden. While, participants ultimately chose their housing unit, a program uses housing and budgeting plans that help a participant understand the likelihood of being able to pay rent and meet the requirements of the lease by the end of assistance. For extremely low income households, there should be reasonable projections and expectations and due diligence on the program's part to help participants secure income (through employment, public benefits, and/or on-going rental assistance) at program exit (see Rapid Re-Housing Case Management Program Standards C18.-C20.).

H9. When closing a case, program provides information to landlords about how they can contact the program again if needed and what kind of follow-up assistance may be available.

Examples of Meeting Program Standards: Housing Identification

Programs that meet the above standards include those that:

- Employ "Housing Location" staff who have experience working with and negotiating leases with local landlords.
- Recruit landlords through word of mouth; cold outreach to posted ads; driving around prospective neighborhoods looking for FOR RENT signs; soliciting references from partners; Craigslist and other websites, other media; and/or through presentations at local service clubs, religious organizations, and landlord associations, and collaborative approaches with local elected officials and government agencies.
- Provide contact information to landlords to reach appropriate staff, respond to landlord calls within one business day, mediate disputes between program participants and landlords, pay for damage caused to units, and assure rental payments are made on time.
- Contact local tenant rights organizations to identify landlords who fail to comply with licensing/building requirements and/or fail to correct violations; review housing court records; and/or survey program participants about their satisfaction with landlords to identify patterns in landlord behavior that would suggest they should not be program partners.
- Be familiar with the screening information landlords collect to identify prospective tenants. This information can help match program participants with landlords and units.

Rent and Move-In Assistance

Rent and Move-In Assistance is the second core component of rapid re-housing, the goal of which is to provide short-term help to households so they can pay for housing. Activities under this core component include paying for security deposits, move-in expenses, rent, and utilities.

Principles

- Rent and move-in assistance should be flexible and tailored to the varying and changing needs of a household while providing the assistance necessary for households to move immediately out of homelessness and to stabilize in permanent housing.
- A rapid re-housing program should make efforts to maximize the number of households it is able to serve by providing households with the financial assistance in a progressive manner, providing only the assistance necessary to stabilize in permanent housing.

Rationale

The intent of the rent and move-in assistance component of rapid re-housing is to enable the quick resolution of the immediate housing crisis. The majority of RRH participants will be able to maintain housing with short-term rent assistance. Programs should start out by assuming households, even those with zero income or other barriers, will succeed with a minimal subsidy and support rather than a long subsidy, and extend these if/when necessary. Households with higher housing barriers or no income may need assistance for different depths or durations, but such households should still be assisted in immediately attaining permanent housing and the large majority will still successfully exit to permanent housing.

Programs should be attentive to the ability of a household to maintain housing once subsidy ends, but should not be entirely constrained by attempts to reach a rent burden of only 30 percent of a participant's income—a standard that is not achieved by the majority of low-income and poor households. Instead, they should recognize that once housed, the RRH households will be much better positioned to increase their incomes and address their other needs.

Additionally, by not over-serving households, programs can maximize the impact of available resources to serve the largest number of people possible. The flexible nature of the rapid re-housing program model enables agencies to be responsive to the varied and changing needs of program participants and the community as a whole.

Rent and Move-In Assistance Program Standards (R1. – R9.)

Program Staff

R1. Program staff are trained on regulatory requirements of all rapid re-housing funding streams and on the ethical use and application of a program's financial assistance policies, including, but not limited to initial and ongoing eligibility criteria, program requirements, and assistance maximums. Program has a routine way to onboard new staff and to keep staff regularly updated on changing regulations and/or program policies.

Program Policies

R2. Program has clearly defined policies and procedures for determining the amount of financial assistance provided to a participant, as well as defined and objective standards for when case management and financial assistance should continue and end. Guidelines are flexible enough to respond to the varied and changing needs of program participants, including participants with zero income.

R3. If participants are expected to pay an amount toward their housing, program has written policy and procedures for determining that amount, and it must be an amount that is reasonable for their income (this could be up to 50-60 percent of income), including $0 for those with no current income.

R4. A progressive approach is used to determine the duration and amount of rent assistance. Financial assistance is not a standard "package" and is flexible enough to adjust to households' unique needs and resources, especially as participants' financial circumstances or housing costs change. Policies detailing this progressive approach include clear and fair decision guidelines and processes for reassessment for the continuation and amount of financial assistance. Policies and procedures also detail when and how rapid re-housing assistance is used as a bridge to a permanent subsidy or permanent supportive housing placement.

Program Activities

R5. Program provides when needed—either directly or through formal agreement with another organization or agency—financial assistance for housing costs, which may include rental deposits, first month's rent, last month's rent, temporary rental assistance, and/or utility assistance.

R6. Program issues checks quickly and on time and has the capacity to track payments to landlords and other vendors.

R7. Program has the capacity to pay reasonable back rent and utility arrears that directly prevent a participant from being able to sign a lease.

R8. Program helps participants meet basic needs at move-in, such as securing basic furnishings for an apartment, including mattresses and basic kitchen items such as a pot for cooking and utensils.

R9. The transition off financial assistance is coordinated with case management efforts to assist program participants to assume and sustain their housing costs (see Rapid Re-Housing Case Management and Services Program Standards C18.-C20., C24.).

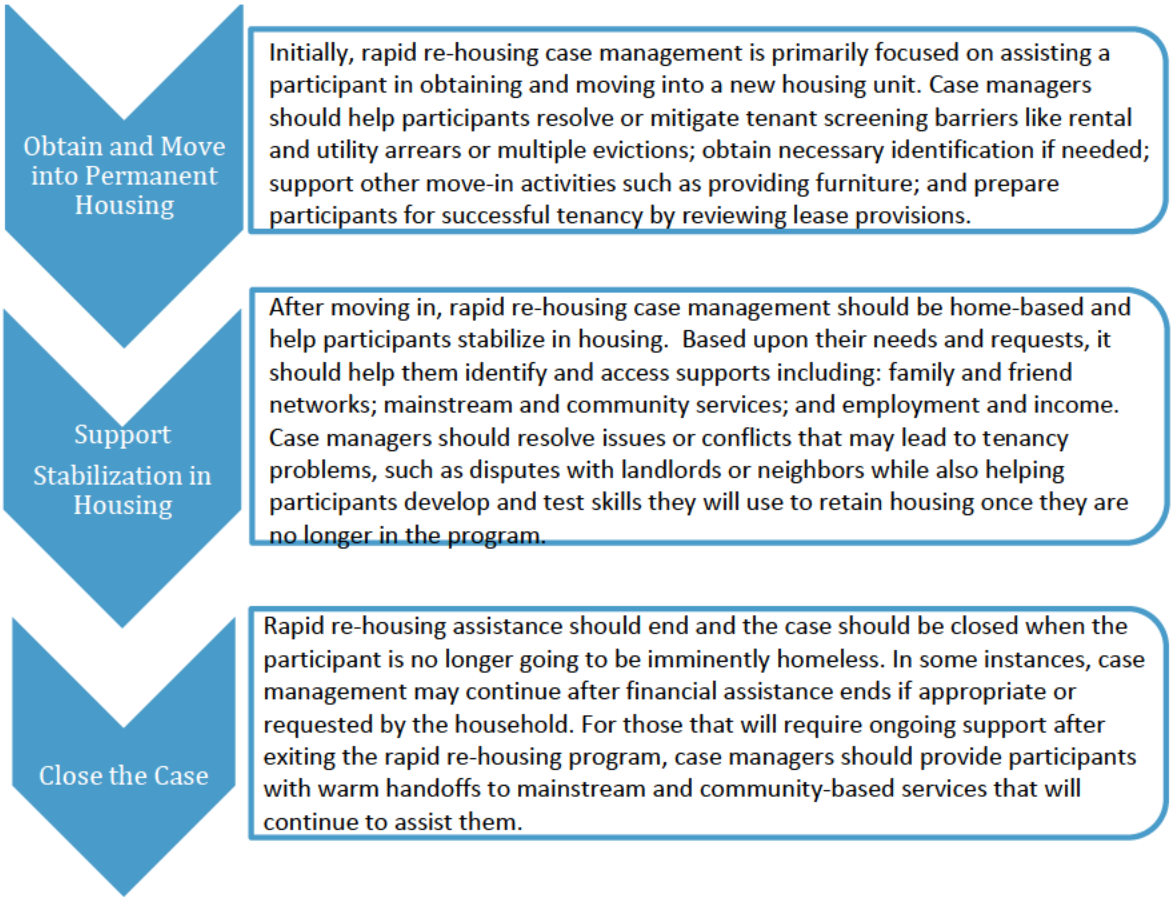
Examples of Meeting Program Standards: Rent and Move-In Assistance

Programs that meet the above standards include those that:

- Utilize income-based, shallow and/or deep subsidy structures that expect clients with income to contribute toward their rent and other costs, and that move as quickly as appropriate to reduce or end subsidies.
- Have a policy they provide to program participants that says assistance is determined based on individualized housing plans/case plans/participant goals and needs, and also makes clear any limits to financial assistance required by their funder(s) or established by the program.
- Have established processes for approval, review, and modification of types/levels of financial assistance.
- Have policies that inform clients that the program is intended to be of short duration, and practices that encourage clients to think of themselves as capable of sustaining their housing and that reduce reliance on the program.
- Have policies that reduce or end subsidies whenever appropriate, leaving open the possibility that a household may return for more assistance, rather than continuing support.

Rapid Re-housing Case Management and Services

Rapid re-housing case management and services is the third core component of rapid re-housing. The goals of rapid re-housing case management is to help participants obtain and move into permanent housing, support participants to stabilize in housing, and connect them to community and mainstream services and supports if needed.



Principles

- Rapid re-housing case management should be client-driven. Case managers should actively engage participants in voluntary case management and service participation by creating an environment in which the participant is driving the case planning and goal-setting based on what they want from the program and services, rather than on what the case manager decides they need to do to be successful.
- Rapid re-housing case management should be flexible in intensity—offering only essential assistance until or unless the participant demonstrates the need for or requests additional help. The intensity and duration of case management is based on the needs of individual households and may lessen or increase over time.

- Rapid re-housing case management uses a strengths-based approach to empower clients. Case managers identify the inherent strengths of a person or family instead of diagnoses or deficits, then build on those strengths to empower the household to succeed.
- Rapid re-housing program case management reflects the short-term nature of the rapid re-housing assistance. It focuses on housing retention and helping a household build a support network outside of the program. It connects the participant with community resources and service options, such as legal services, health care, vocational assistance, transportation, child care, and other forms of assistance, that continue beyond participation in the rapid re-housing program.

Rationale

Rapid re-housing is a short-term crisis intervention. As such, the intent of rapid re-housing case management is not to build a long-term services relationship, but instead to assist a household in accessing and stabilizing in a housing unit. Because of that, case management focuses on navigating barriers to tenancy and helping participants to build a support system. It does the latter by identifying and connecting them with community supports, including services and mainstream resources as well as family and friend networks so they have support to work through issues that may have contributed to their original housing instability. Programs should not initially assume all participants need multiple services, but wait until a need is demonstrated and/or expressed by the participant. Staff should be able to increase supports as needed to help program participants. In instances when a households' situation is more complex and they want longer-term supports to retain their housing, a program must be able to connect households to community and mainstream services to enable longer-term assistance.

Rapid Re-Housing Case Management and Services Program Standards (C1. – C24.)

Program Staff

C1. Case manager's job descriptions direct case managers to focus on housing and to use strengths-based practices focused on participant engagement and meeting the unique needs of each household.

C2. In programs that have specialized staff that conduct housing location (see Housing Identification Program Standard H1.), case managers work closely with housing locator staff to match the client to an appropriate unit as quickly as possible.

C3. Case managers are trained on rapid re-housing case management strategies and related evidence-based practices as well as program policies and community resources. Additionally, a program has a regular process for onboarding new staff and regularly updating the training of current staff.

Program Policies

C4. Except where dictated by the funder, program participants direct when, where, and how often case management meetings occur. Meetings occur in a participant's home and/or in a location of the participant's choosing whenever possible.

C5. Case managers respect a program participant's home as their own, scheduling appointments ahead of time, only entering when invited in, and respecting the program participant's personal property and wishes while in their home.

C6. When case management and service compliance is not mandated by federal or state regulation, services offered by a program have voluntary participation.

C7. Program has clear safety procedures for home visits that staff are trained on and that are posted clearly visible in office space and shared with program participants at intake, and shared with participants and staff whenever changes are made.

C8. Program has clearly defined relationships with employment and income programs that it can connect program participants to when appropriate.

C9. Program has clearly defined policies and objective standards for when case management should continue and end. These guidelines are flexible enough to respond to the varied and changing needs of program participants. In instances where cases are continued outside of these defined policies and objective standards, there is a review and approval process.

Program Activities

Program activities for rapid re-housing case management are grouped into categories that will contribute to the specific goals of rapid re-housing case management. The program activities listed here are not exclusively provided in a linear progression and can be administered in whatever order and intensity is most appropriate for a participant.

Obtain and Move into Permanent Housing

C10. At enrollment or within 72 hours of enrollment, program conducts a tenancy barriers assessment—not for the purpose of screening out a participant, but to quickly address any such barriers, help direct and navigate the housing search and contribute to landlord negotiation efforts. Any other assessments completed prior to housing are limited and focus on those things necessary to support health and safety and resolve the housing crisis as quickly as possible.

C11. Program has resources and/or be able to connect participants to community resources that help participants: resolve or navigate tenant problems (like rental and utility arrears or multiple evictions) that landlords may screen for on rental applications; obtain necessary documentation such as identification; prepare participants for successful tenancy by reviewing lease provisions; and support other move-in activities such as providing furniture.

C12. Programs offers basic tenancy skills learning opportunities which can include instruction or guidance on basic landlord-tenant rights and responsibilities, requirements and prohibitions of a lease, and meeting minimum expectations for care of the housing unit, such as not causing damage (See Housing Identification Program Standard H5).

Support Stabilization in Housing

C13. Program staff work directly with the participant and landlord to resolve tenancy issues without threatening the participant's tenancy. The issue might be failure to pay rent, not properly maintaining

the unit, or disturbing the quiet enjoyment of others. It also may include a landlord not meeting his/her obligations. Program works quickly to identify a corrective course of action, and, without breaking a participant's confidentiality, keep the landlord and participant informed about the program's action to mitigate the situation.

C14. When appropriate, case managers work with participants to build their communication skills to better respond to or negotiate with a landlord. This might relate to repairs; an extension on a rent payment; or complaints against the tenant concerning noise, odors, trash, or the behavior of children or guests, for example.

C15. When necessary, case managers help participants avoid evictions before they happen, and maintain a positive relationship with the landlord. This can be done by moving a household into a different unit prior to eviction and possibly identifying a new tenant household for the landlord's unit (See Housing Identification Program Standard H4).

C16. Housing plans, sometimes known as case plans or goal plans, focus on how program participants can maintain a lease and address barriers to housing retention, including maximizing their ability to pay rent; improving understanding of landlord/tenant rights and responsibilities; and addressing other issues that have, in the past, resulted in housing crisis or housing loss. Plans account for participant preferences/choices, and include only goals created with and agreed to by the participant.

C17. Program, at a minimum, maintains a list of community resources (and their eligibility requirements) to which participants can be referred. Preferably, program has relationships with these agencies. The list is regularly updated, and includes other low-income housing assistance programs.

C18. Case managers make referrals to appropriate community and mainstream resources, including, but not limited to income supplements/benefits (TANF, Food Stamps/SNAP, etc.), non-cash supports (healthcare, food supports, etc.), legal assistance, credit counseling, and subsidized childcare. When making these referrals, it is the case manager's responsibility to follow-up on receipt of assistance. However a participant may choose not to follow up on or participate in any referred services or programs.

C19. As rapid re-housing assistance is short-term, case managers pay particular attention to participants' incomes moving forward. Though income is not a requirement at the beginning of a program, case managers help participants review their budgets, including income and spending, to make decisions about reducing expenses and increasing income. Options include benefit enrollment and increasing employment and earnings over time.

C20. Case managers work with participants to identify pathways for increasing earned income, including participating in mainstream and community employment support programs as well as using a program's own employer connections.

C21. If necessary, participants are assisted in identifying existing familial and personal connections that can help them maintain housing by providing supports such as child care, transportation, etc. Participants may choose not to engage in this process.

Close the Case

C22. When closing a case, case managers are responsible for ensuring that all appropriate referrals have been made and information on available community assistance has been shared with a participant.

C23. When a referral to on-going supports is made while a case is open or in the process of closing, case managers provide a "warm handoff" and follow up, to assure that assistance is satisfactory.

C24. When closing a case, case managers provide information to participants about how they can access assistance from the program again if needed and what kind of follow-up assistance may be available. In instances when a participant is at imminent risk of returning to homelessness, program has the capacity to either directly intervene or provide referral to another prevention resource.

Examples of Meeting Program Standards: Rapid Re-Housing Case Management and Services

Programs that meet the above standards include those that:

- Have job descriptions for case managers that include requirements that they focus activities on obtaining housing and housing stabilization and conduct case management in participants' homes and other locations outside the office and that they have the ability to get to and from those meetings.
- Have case/housing plan templates that limit the number of goals and action steps to be included in a single plan, and focus attention on housing and income related goals.
- Have a case review process to help staff problem-solve around case/housing plans.
- Make use of a "Support Network Map" that helps participants identify people already in their lives who can help with specific things, such as transportation or child care.
- Offer budgeting assistance when desired by participants.
- Train staff to coach participants in conflict avoidance or de-escalation, adequate care of the housing unit, lease compliance, etc.
- Collect, maintain, and update records of available mainstream and community resources for program participants. This includes community resources that can reduce burdens on income including employment opportunities, food banks, clothing consignment stores, low-income utility programs, and others.

Program Philosophy and Design

Beyond ending homelessness for individual households, rapid re-housing plays a key role in ending homelessness overall. To do so effectively and efficiently, a program must coordinate with the broader homeless system, not screen out large portions of the homeless population, and have a commitment to a Housing First approach.

Principles

- In order to identify, engage, and assist as many households experiencing homelessness as possible, a program should coordinate and fully participate with the broader homeless assistance system.
- Rapid re-housing is an intervention designed for and flexible enough to serve anyone not able to exit homelessness on their own.[2] Rapid re-housing programs should not attempt to screen out households based on a score on an assessment tool or criteria that are assumed, but not shown, to predict successful outcomes, such as a minimum income threshold, employment, absence of a criminal history, evidence of "motivation," etc.
- Rapid re-housing participants should have all the rights and responsibilities of typical tenants and should sign a standard lease agreement.

Rationale

Rapid re-housing is a Housing First intervention meaning that the primary focus is moving households into housing quickly without preconditions. As such, programs should maximize the number of households they can serve by coordinating with the local homeless assistance system's coordinated entry and outreach efforts and by not screening out households. Additionally, the primary focus of assessments and assistance should be on resolving the current housing crisis. This means a focus on the circumstances of the crisis, the household's barriers to obtaining and maintaining housing, and the reasons they are unable to solve their housing crisis without the program's help.

National data shows that rapid re-housing allows a very high percentage of homeless households with the highest barriers to secure permanent housing and not re-enter homelessness. Studies have not found any factors that reliably predict RRH program participants' success or failure in maintaining permanent housing after the subsidy has ended. Therefore, assessing for *assumed* client success in maintaining permanent housing should not be a part of pre-intake screening or admission to a RRH program.

Despite its widespread effectiveness not all individuals or families will be successful in a shorter-term intervention like RRH. With that in mind, programs should have strong connections to mainstream housing programs and other service providers that can support households for whom the RRH intervention is not enough. Everything possible should be done to ensure that those served by rapid re-housing do not become homeless again.

[2] Some households experiencing chronic homelessness would be more appropriately served in permanent supportive housing.

Program Philosophy and Design Standards (P1. – P11.)

Program Staff

P1. Program staff are trained on the principles of Housing First and oriented to the basic program philosophy of rapid re-housing. Program has routine way of onboarding new staff that includes training on Housing First and rapid re-housing principles.

P2. Program uses the standards included in this document (or other similar standards) as the basis for training and supervising staff.

Program Policies

P3. Program has well-defined and written screening processes that use consistent and transparent decision criteria. Criteria do not include screening possible participants out for income or lack thereof.

P4. Eligibility criteria for the program do not include a period of sobriety, a commitment to participation in treatment, or any other criteria designed to "predict" long-term housing stability other than willingness to engage the program and work on a self-directed housing plan (see Rapid Re-Housing Case Management Program Standards C16.).

P5. If coordinated entry does not prioritize referrals, program has clearly-defined and written criteria and procedures that enable it to prioritize applicants, particularly where the volume of requests for assistance from eligible households exceeds program resources. Prioritized households are those least likely to exit homelessness without assistance—not the households considered most likely to succeed in rapid re-housing, regardless of any scores on assessment tools or lack of income.

P6. Disabilities are only assessed insofar as they may be a direct factor causing past housing instability or loss and when related to the participant's ability to obtain a disability-specific benefit, service, or accessible unit.

P7. Leases for program participants are legally binding, written leases. Leases with additional requirements, such as drug testing or program participation, are not allowed.

Program Activities

P8. Program participates in the local community's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) meaning they collect all required data standards and take steps to ensure quality data entry.

P9. Program participates in and accepts referrals from the local coordinated entry system and participates in efforts to improve the efficiency and quality of referrals when necessary. If there is no local Continuum of Care (CoC) organizing body (example: a statewide or Balance of State CoC) or coordinated entry system, a program has clearly defined outreach activities to engage possible program participants.

P10. The rapid re-housing program must maintain and distribute information on alternative, available resources that may intervene effectively and rapidly if the program's services are unavailable or less effective.

P11. Program has an ongoing performance improvement process that includes evaluation of participant outcomes and participant feedback. The performance benchmarks and standards in this document provide a framework for performance evaluation and performance improvement efforts.

Examples of Meeting Program Standards: Program Philosophy and Design

Programs that meeting the above standards include those that:

- Have eligibility criteria that prioritize rather than exclude people who have no employment or income, or who are disabled.
- Participate in a planning or performance improvement process for local coordinated entry system to ensure sufficient and proper referrals.
- Ensure that participants are not presented with and do not sign leases that have restrictions that a typical tenant would not receive.