

HOUSING FIRST SUPPORTS RECOVERY FROM SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS

Housing First is *the* most effective approach to ending homelessness for most individuals, including those with substance use disorders.

The Housing First model provides people experiencing homelessness who are in recovery from substance use disorders several options - including supportive housing and recovery housing - to address their health and housing needs. Ending homelessness requires communities to ensure that housing options are available for people at all stages of recovery.

With Housing First, each person is offered a tailored approach - including access to stable, affordable housing, linked with voluntary services as needed - to help them become and stay safely and stably housed. While this approach will be different for everyone, the goal is the same: to quickly end homelessness and provide individuals with the support they want and need.

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Supportive housing is a highly effective strategy for people in recovery from substance use disorders. Although affordable housing is part of the solution, some people may also need supportive services to maintain housing stability. For that reason, supportive housing combines affordable housing with intensive, voluntary, coordinated services.

Under a supportive housing framework, individuals in recovery from substance use disorders who prefer to live in an abstinence-focused environment are able to live independently in apartments or single-family homes in residential neighborhoods, with access to services. Individuals can also be accommodated under Housing First with shared housing with others who also want to live that lifestyle, and intensive programming and structured service approaches. Services are usually provided in the individual's rental unit or building, or at a place of their choosing in the community.

Research shows that supportive housing:

- **Effectively ends homelessness and reduces housing stability.** A large body of research shows that the vast majority of people who live in supportive housing are able to stay stably housed in the community.
- **Can reduce healthcare and other costs.** Studies show that supportive housing can reduce the use of health care systems, corrections, and other systems.
- **Can lead to better treatment outcomes.** Those in supportive housing reduce their use of substances over time. Available studies indicate that supportive housing works at least as well - if not better than - other treatments available in the community to help people experiencing homelessness reduce their substance use.

Everything becomes easier when one has a home, including recovering from substance use disorders. Learn more about supportive housing [here](#).

RECOVERY HOUSING?

The Housing First model can be used to support Recovery Housing, where people experiencing homelessness can access the affordable housing, services, and the peer-support community they may prefer as they recover from substance use issues. When administered in a manner consistent with the principles of Housing First as part of a comprehensive, community wide strategy, Recovery Housing can provide additional options for people who are experiencing homelessness and substance use disorders.

Effective Recovery Housing programs should:

- **Be voluntary.** Participation must be self-initiated (there may be exceptions for court-ordered participation) and residents must have expressed a preference for living in a housing setting targeted to people in recovery with an abstinence focus;
- **Be low-barrier.** There must be minimal barriers to entry into programs, so that long periods of sobriety, income requirements, clean criminal records, or clear eviction histories are not required for entry;
- **Provide high-quality services.** Services should align with participants' choice and prioritization of personal goals of sustained recovery and abstinence from substance use;
- **Help individuals, not punish them.** Relapse and other setbacks are common on the path to recovery. These challenges should not be treated as an automatic cause for eviction from housing or termination from a program, which can cause individuals to become homeless again.
- **Hold individuals accountable.** While relapse should not be an automatic cause for eviction, individuals should be held accountable if their behavior substantially disrupts or impacts the welfare of the recovery community. Because our focus is on ending homelessness, eviction should be a last resort; and
- **Provide alternative housing, as needed.** Participants who determine that they are no longer interested in living in a housing setting with an abstinence focus, or who are discharged from the program or evicted from the housing, must be offered assistance in accessing other housing and services options, including options operated with harm reduction principles.

Learn more about the role of Housing First and Recovery Housing [here](#).

For more information, contact NLIHC senior vice president of public policy and field organizing Sarah Saadian at ssaadian@nlihc.org.

