



# Housing First 201: Practical Implications and Applications

Contra Costa County Continuum of Care

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# Homebase Team

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# Today's Agenda

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Core Principles & Key Characteristics of Housing First Programs



Barriers to Program Enrollment



Common Housing First Challenges



Implementing Housing First

Challenges & Solutions  
Individualized Approaches



Looking Forward

# Core Principles & Key Characteristics of Housing First Programs

# Why Housing First?

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- Evidence-based
- Funder/community priority
- Core Practice
- State law
- Helps people

# Housing First at the **System Level**

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- **All programs** lower barriers
- Most **vulnerable prioritized**
- **Housing-focused** services and engagement begin **immediately**
- **Client-focused and voluntary**
- **Evidence-based** practices
- Client **choice and voice**
- As you serve higher acuity people, you may need to increase supportive services.

# Housing First at the **Program Level**

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- Participants are treated with **dignity and respect**
- Optimize **autonomy and independence**
- Participation is **voluntary and self-initiated**
- **Program entry not is contingent on:**
  - **Sobriety**
  - **Income**
  - **Clean criminal record**
  - **Clear eviction history**
- **Staff are trained on best practices**
- Commitment to **increasing supportive services**

# Barriers to Program Enrollment: Pre-Enrollment Documentation

# Pre-Enrollment Documentation

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## What is necessary prior to enrollment?

- Set by the funding stream; or
- Required by law

## What is NOT necessary prior to enrollment?

- Needed for rental application
- Needed for employment
- Used to identify housing barriers

# Pre-Enrollment Documentation

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## What is necessary prior to enrollment? (CoC Program)

- Documentation of homelessness (and disability for PSH)
- ONLY if PSH *and* operated by local government: verification of citizenship/immigration status

## What is NOT necessary prior to enrollment (CoC Program)

- Background check
- ID
- Income
- Credit check
- Drug test
- Anything else

# Pre-Enrollment Documentation

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Do you know which pre-enrollment requirements are **necessary**, and which are added by your organization?

Are there ways to lower pre-enrollment requirements for your program(s)? Where do those barriers come from?

What concerns do you have about changing pre-enrollment requirements?

# Common Housing First Challenges

# Common Challenges

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- Serving clients with SMI, behavioral health challenges and substance use
- Serving clients with low or no income
- Serving clients on the 290 registry
- Landlord reluctance
- Shelters

# Serving Clients with SMI and Behavioral Health Challenges

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- Common Challenge: Engage in behaviors that cause them to lose housing and access to programs.
- Reframing the Challenge: Make all service plans and other agreements **flexible** and based on the **needs of the individual**:
  - Certain times and certain clients require more
  - Ensure leases are uncoupled from service plans
  - Tenants have full rights via leases and access to legal assistance
  - Prevention support
  - Build trust with clients
  - You are not responsible for their recovery

# Serving Clients with Low or No Income

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- Common Challenge: Providers worry they will not be able to become financially independent.
- Reframing the Challenge: Understand **individual's history** and connect them to the **appropriate services**:
  - Connect with local housing authority regarding vouchers
  - Assess based on prospective income
  - Increase connections to cash and non-cash benefits
  - Shared housing
  - Increase support for housing stability at the system level

# Serving Clients on the 290 Registry

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- Common Challenge: Historically challenging population to house.
- Reframing the Challenge: Lower barriers by:
  - Work with clean slate programs and criminal legal system partners
    - ID people at risk of homelessness
    - Clean slate work
  - Identify which providers can house people on the 290 registry and under what conditions
  - Establish collaborative team for each client
  - Know participant's specific restrictions and conditions
  - Help clients reframe their stories

# Landlords' Fears About Housing First

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- Common Challenge: Concerned that high-needs tenants may undermine ability to be a good tenant.
- Reframing the Challenge: Support relationship and let landlord know their efforts are supporting the community.
  - Understand and address anxieties by eliminating hassle and mitigating risk
  - Make someone available (other than 9-1-1) for landlord to contact in a crisis
  - Ask for more units
  - Check in regularly with landlord and participant
  - Seek feedback
  - Work with tenants

# Shelters

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- Common Challenge: Some individuals won't participate in housing search, case management, or other voluntary services
- Reframing the Challenge: Work with the participant to find their strengths and meet their unique needs.
  - You own the engagement, they own their lives
  - Work as a team – participants have both professional AND personal support networks; find creative connections to help them engage
  - Support the client in identifying clear, actionable steps that do not overwhelm
  - Set them up for success in housing - warm handoff to build trust, clear path to stability after housing

BREAK

# Implementing Housing First (Breakout Activity)

# Instructions for breakout rooms

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Discussion Leader

Assures that each person who wants to speak is heard in the time available



Recorder

Writes output using the speakers' words



Reporter

Delivers the group's report in the time allowed



Time Keeper

Keeps the group aware of time, monitors report-outs

# Scenario #1

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**Challenge – Low or No Income:** Sophia and her two children are participants in your housing program. Sophia is an eager and willing participant, but you know that based on her children's needs and her own employment history, Sophia will never be able to afford rent in the area on her own. What do you do?

# Scenario #2

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**Challenge – Behavioral Health Challenges:** You run a permanent supportive housing program. One month ago you received a referral for Alex, who has a history of substance use. Since arriving, Alex has refused to meet with their case manager or cooperate with the process. Based on behavior and appearance, it also appears that Alex has relapsed and is using alcohol and methamphetamine on a regular basis. This weekend there was a small kitchen fire in Alex's unit and when staff arrived to assist them, Alex appeared to be under the influence of methamphetamine. What do you do? What if there are other roommates?

# Debrief Questions

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- What local programs or resources did you identify that can help?
- What resources does your program or agency have that helps reframe challenges?
- What successful housing outcomes have you seen in your program and how have you done that?

# Questions?

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