



## PHA GUIDE TO REFERRALS

### **Description:**

Homeless service providers can help PHAs implement housing assistance programs that use special purpose vouchers, supportive housing programs, or a homeless preference by identifying eligible individuals and families, [assisting with application preparation](#), and documenting applicants' eligibility and qualifications for prioritizations, such as a prioritization for persons experiencing chronic homelessness. PHAs may limit a homeless preference to applicants referred by partnering organizations.

### **Implementation Tips:**

#### **Identifying and Referring Eligible Applicants**

Partnerships between service providers and PHAs can help strengthen preferences and housing assistance programs for people experiencing homelessness in several ways. First, for PHAs that have recently implemented or are considering implementing a homeless preference, special purpose vouchers, or targeted homeless assistance programs, homeless service providers can help identify households on the existing waiting list that qualify for assistance. Without these partnerships, PHAs may not know which households on their wait list are experiencing homelessness and meet other criteria for assistance.

Partnering agencies should help advertise changes to PHA wait list status or preferences (e.g., opening a wait list, creating a homeless preference), and the availability of special purpose vouchers or targeted supportive housing units in shelters, feeding centers, and other programs that serve people experiencing homelessness. Partnering agencies can also help those already on the wait list update their information and can help those not on the wait list apply for assistance. Additionally, referral agencies can create data sharing agreements with PHAs to identify existing wait list households that meet the homeless preference. This may be accomplished by matching the wait list data with data from Homeless Management Information Systems.

## **Documenting program or preference eligibility**

Partnerships can also help PHAs verify that the individual or family qualifies under a homeless preference, meets the criteria for a special purpose voucher or targeted supportive housing program, and/or qualifies for prioritizations, such as a prioritization for persons experiencing chronic homelessness. When a PHA establishes a partnership for referrals from a homeless service organization, they may allow the partnering organization to verify the individual's or family's program or preference eligibility before the individual or family is referred to the PHA. This can serve the dual purpose of relieving the burden on people experiencing homelessness to provide documentation while also filtering out applicants with other means that may be claiming homeless status to decrease their wait time for rental assistance.

## **Limiting preferences to referral agencies**

Finally, PHAs can limit their preferences, special purpose vouchers, or targeted supportive housing units to people referred by partner organizations. This can be particularly useful for supportive housing partnerships to ensure that the people receiving assistance need the level of services provided by the program. PHAs may create a general or limited preference specifically for people who are referred by a partnering homeless service organization or consortia of organizations. For example, a PHA could partner with an organization that serves families in shelter to establish a preference or limited preference for families documented to have the longest-term stays in shelters that are unlikely to exit homelessness without a permanent subsidy. However, when implementing such limited preferences to partner organizations, the PHA must be sure to not limit the source of referrals to an agency, organization, or consortia that denies its services to members of any Federally protected class under fair housing laws, i.e., race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability, or familial status.

## **Where Can You Do This?**

Partnerships for referrals should be established with any PHA. There is a clear need for these partnerships even for PHAs that do not yet have a homeless preference or administer special purpose vouchers or other programs targeted to people experiencing homelessness. Establishing partnerships and referral agreements with PHAs that do not yet have preferences or targeted programs can help document the need for PHAs to serve people experiencing homelessness and will support such PHAs to more quickly and effectively implement new preferences or targeted programs.

## **For whom**

All populations, with a specific focus on chronically homeless people, vulnerable people, and other people with disabilities experiencing homelessness who may need supportive services attached to their rental assistance.

## Examples

San Antonio: The San Antonio Housing Authority (SAHA) has a formal partnership with the Center for Healthcare Service (CHCS) to administer a Shelter Plus Care program to serve people with a disability who are experiencing homelessness. The Memorandum of Agreement to formalize the partnership states:

SAHA agrees to allocate when available rental subsidies in the way of tenant- based vouchers to eligible individual/families (“Participants”) as referred by the CHCS up to an annual amount of 100 vouchers. As consideration for the allocation of the rental subsidies as hereinbefore described, the CHCS will provide eligibility assessment services as well as intensive case management and treatment services to the Participants referred for rental subsidies.<sup>1</sup>

Boston: The Boston Housing Authority has set-aside 500 Housing Choice Vouchers for homeless families. Families can only be eligible to receive a voucher through a referral from a Boston shelter. The shelters are responsible for identifying and referring families that have had the longest shelter stays and meet the Boston residency requirement. The Boston Housing Authority provides regular training to shelter staff on the referral process and presumes that any family referred through the shelter partnership is eligible for assistance pending the criminal history background check.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on this partnership see the profile on the Corporation for Supportive Housing’s PHA Toolkit: <http://www.csh.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/CSH-PHA-Profile-SanAntonio-FINAL.pdf>