

Expanding services via Housing First and Harm Reduction models

Background

The Housing First model's priority is providing permanent housing to those experiencing homelessness or housing instability. Housing First does not mandate participation in services or treatment to obtain housing or other services. It operates under a rights-based, client-centered philosophy that underscores recovery orientation and social and community integration.

Research indicates that when people have access to reliable housing, they are able to better focus on work pursuits and personal goals, thereby improving overall life quality.

The Housing First program in tandem with the Harm Reduction model seeks to expand no-barrier and low-barrier services across Washington state with these outcomes as goals. Harm Reduction is defined as “a set of practical strategies and ideas aimed at reducing negative consequences associated with drug use” (<http://www.harmreduction.org>).

Eligibility

Adults in Washington state who meet the following criteria are eligible for Housing First services:

- Individuals with diagnosed behavioral health conditions
- Individuals experiencing unstable housing conditions or homelessness
- Individuals whose household income is under 50% Area Median Income (AMI) in the county they reside

Oversight and authority

In accordance with ESSB 5693 (2023), Section 215 (96), the Washington State Legislature provided funding in the State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2023 operating budget to create and expand access to no-barrier and low-barrier programs using a Housing First model designed to assist and stabilize housing supports for adults with behavioral health conditions.

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Funding

Housing First contracts were awarded to ten providers in eight regions throughout Washington state beginning in SFY2023. These are all non-profit agencies doing community work.

SFY2023

- \$6,027,000 of the general fund: state appropriation
- \$3,748,000 of the general fund: federal appropriation

Program outcomes

The total number of individuals enrolled in January to June 2023 (SFY2023) is 420.

Of the 420 enrolled:

- 146 individuals received housing stabilization services
- 159 of 262 housing-insecure individuals obtained permanent or transitional housing options

Key partners

This program and its correlating models have significant key partners including national subject matter experts and Housing First staff from throughout Washington state. The Washington Health Care Authority (HCA) has contracted consultants such as Advocates for Human Potential who are partners as well, in addition to agency representatives who also support this endeavor.

For more information

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