

Leveraging TANF Funds and Strategic Partnerships to

Improve Housing Stability and Economic Outcomes for Low-Income Families

- 1) **Where can I access the Use of TANF Funds to Serve Homeless Families and Families at Risk of Experiencing Homelessness report?**

Office of Family Assistance: The report in question can be found on the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Office of Family Assistance (OFA) Web site here: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/resource/tanf-acf-im-2013-01>.

- 2) **Is there a limit to the amount of TANF and Maintenance of Effort (MOE) funding that a client may receive?**

Office of Family Assistance: This is an area where state TANF agencies have the discretion of determining eligibility, benefit levels, time periods, etc. Please contact your state TANF program for more information.

Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA): In Massachusetts, we do not track all TANF- or MOE-funded benefits in their totality by client. However, for TANF- and MOE-funded programs, there may be a limit. For example, there is a maximum monthly cash assistance benefit for which a family may be eligible, as there is for child care allowances and housing subsidies.

- 3) **How receptive have TANF agencies been to collaborating with Continuum of Care organizations (CoCs) or Homeless Service Agencies since the release of this guidance on use of TANF? Is this determination made at a state level, or locally with each TANF office individually?**

Mercer County, New Jersey – Housing First Initiative: I expect that this webinar will open many doors at both local and State levels.

- 4) **Does a state need to adopt this option to use TANF funds, or is it available to all local departments now?**

Office of Family Assistance: States need to decide on whether or not to establish such policies.

- 5) **Can TANF funds be used as match for U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) homeless assistance programs?**

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U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Special Needs Assistance

Programs: While it is permissible for Federal TANF funds to be used for HUD's homeless assistance grants programs, it is not permissible for state funds to be used as match to count towards a jurisdiction's MOE requirement. For the full Q&A on using TANF as match, please see <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/resource/q-a-use-of-funds?page=3>.

6) How can service providers identify point persons to work with at the local TANF agencies?

Office of Family Assistance: Service providers who are interested in establishing a relationship with their TANF agency colleagues but are unaware of who to contact should reach out to the appropriate OFA Regional Office Program Manager for assistance.

7) HUD "grades" local CoCs on how well they partner with mainstream benefit providers (TANF administrators) and loses points in their HUD application if they do not have a strong partnership with such. Are there any penalties that administrators of TANF face if they in fact do not partner with homeless service providers?

Office of Family Assistance: No.

8) Is it not the case that it takes much longer than the rental assistance period to stabilize the families to a level where they can pay rent on their own?

Mercer County, New Jersey – Housing First Initiative: Our evidence is that it takes about five months on average from the time a family is placed in its own home, with the lease under its name. The whole program is predicated on helping the family to maximize its strengths.

Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development: We recognize that not everyone will be able to pay full rent at the end of their time in these programs. However, we see it as being better than the family sitting in shelter. In many cases, the short-term subsidy programs can help a family rehabilitate their housing history, which helps eliminate one barrier to housing in the future.

9) Are federally recognized Tribes eligible for CoC grants?

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Programs: No. Eligible applicants under the Continuum of Care (CoC) program are private nonprofit organizations, states, local governments, instrumentalities of state and local governments, and public housing agencies are eligible to apply if they have been selected by the Continuum of Care for the geographic area in which they operate.

The Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) program is a formula program where funds are allocated to metropolitan cities, urban counties, territories, and states. Metropolitan cities, urban counties and territories may provide ESG funds to projects operated by units of general purpose local government or private nonprofit organizations. State recipients must provide all of their ESG funds (except for up to 7.5 percent for administrative costs) to units of general purpose local government or private nonprofit organization sub-recipients.

- 10) **This is a question for Mercer County. Is a family connected with a case worker prior to entering a shelter? Does that cause homeless stays to shorten?**

Mercer County, New Jersey – Housing First Initiative: They are connected with a case worker after 7-10 days, because many homeless episodes resolve themselves during that period of time.

- 11) **How, in rapid rehousing are agencies able to get around the regulations regarding poor credit, unpaid utilities, broken leases, owing public housing money? Also, does the State Plan need to be modified if they presently do not use Technical Assistance (TA) funds for housing per say?**

Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development: In many cases, landlords are willing to work with families who have less than perfect housing histories when they know that they stabilization case worker will be available to provide assistance. Also, in many cases, the agencies working with the families have existing relationships with landlords that they are able to leverage to provide landlords with the assurances that they won't be abandoned if they have problems with their tenant.

- 12) **Are learning disabilities allowed to be an exemption from work requirements at the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance?**

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Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance: Not on the basis of the learning disability. Most people with learning disabilities are not exempt from the work requirement, unless they have a concurrent disability under DTA disability standards. However, people who are screened positive for a learning disability are offered a free learning disability assessment. During the assessment period, the individual is granted “good cause” from meeting their work requirement, but this time still counts against their 24-months of time-limited benefits. Information from this assessment is used in referring the individual to appropriate education or training services.

- 13) **In Michigan participants are exempt from work participation if they are homeless. Are you using TANF for prevention? Participants would not be exempt from work participation if they have received an eviction notice or in the process of eviction.**

Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance: In Massachusetts, homeless families are not exempt from the work requirement. However, if they perform the appropriate number of hours of housing search (a mandatory component of their stay in state-funded family shelter), the individual is granted “good cause” from meeting their work requirement. However, this time still counts against their 24-months of time-limited benefits. In addition, they may have good cause for not participating in work activities due to lack of transportation or child care.

- 14) **In New Jersey, are you following a Housing First model for your Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) projects? If so, was this a shift from standard practice and how was it received by homeless service providers?**

Mercer County, New Jersey – Housing First Initiative: Yes, we follow a Housing First model. Rapid Rehousing is not PSH, however, but temporary supportive housing. We have found that providers learn to offer the services that government seeks to buy. It is also important to train providers to the model that is desired.

- 15) **What does it mean that Massachusetts is a "right to shelter state"?**

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Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development: Massachusetts has a statute that requires that the Commonwealth provide shelter to families if they meet eligibility requirements.

16) Is the HomeBase program a state program or federal?

Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development: It is a state-funded program.

17) How do you determine an eviction is through no fault?

Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development: We consider the following to be no-fault evictions: Foreclosures where tenant has been leasing, condemnation of housing where family is living, non-payment of rent due to medical issues, loss of income due to medical condition, eviction caused by loss of income.

18) How have you managed to place families with high barriers into housing rapidly? We find that landlords often screen them out because of barriers even with incentives like double security deposits, ongoing case management, etc.

Mercer County, New Jersey – Housing First Initiative: As was said during the webinar, the landlord trusts the agency that stands behind the tenant, even if the landlord isn't yet ready to fully trust the tenant.

19) What did the transitional housing program for families do when the CoC funding was cut? Did it become emergency shelter or PSH?

Mercer County, New Jersey – Housing First Initiative: Much of our transitional housing stock has been rented, so as the demand for it has gone down, units have not needed to be leased again. In the cases, where the units are owned, they will be repurposed, but not for emergency shelter.

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- 20) Can the participants from Massachusetts and/or New Jersey share their strategies to identify affordable housing in their communities to move their families to? I understand the strategy to work with landlords, but we are locally in a very tight rental market. Ideas?

Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development: The housing providers that administer the various rehousing programs have developed relationships with landlords and property management companies over the years and are able to tap into any affordable units that may become available. However, it is still difficult in some places as there is not an always adequate stock of units that meet the needs of these families (appropriate bedroom sizes, de-leaded, etc.).

Mercer County, New Jersey – Housing First Initiative: Agencies will usually find the housing stock is larger than they expected. Having the case manager work with the client during the housing search process helps identify housing prospects.

- 21) Are Tribal TANF programs allowed to similarly leverage TANF funding?

Office of Family Assistance: Tribes also have the flexibility to use their funds to stabilize housing for families eligible for Tribal TANF.

- 22) This question is for A Safe Haven. How much does your child care cost per month?

A Safe Haven: A client may choose their provider from a state child care provider. There is no cost to the participant once TANF benefits have been established.

- 23) Do these programs include any supportive services in addition to case managers?

Mercer County, New Jersey – Housing First Initiative: Typically, Rapid Rehousing Case Managers will broker other mainstream services for their clients; the model presumes that not all services need to

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come through the homeless system. Every team of case managers has at least one person highly focused on employment.

24) Can we take the assistance that housing providers are giving to TANF families and use it as MOE?

Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance: I believe you will want a final ruling from ACF based on your state's circumstances, but Massachusetts uses its state-funded housing assistance towards our MOE. Massachusetts includes in these services shelter, housing search, case management, and short and long-term housing subsidies.

25) How did transitional housing facilities in Mercer County deal with being closed and their funds moved to rapid re-housing? Did project based transitional housing programs close? How was that done if they received HUD COC funding?

Mercer County, New Jersey – Housing First Initiative: We issued a plan in 2009 that represented a community consensus around Housing First and Rapid Rehousing. Even though not all transitional housing providers were completely convinced, they signed on. No decision was made on transitional housing for three years after that, and even then, another year's notice was given, so transitional housing providers have had considerable lead time to adjust to the new normal. Plans are currently being made for the last families in transitional housing to move into permanent housing through other means.

26) Will TANF have any cuts with the sequester budget cuts across the board?

Office of Family Assistance: No. State TANF block grants are exempt.

27) The two types of permanent housing in the CoC program are PSH and Rapid Re-Housing. Since PSH requires persons be disabled but Rapid Re-Housing does not, is it a better fit for Rapid Re-Housing to partner with TANF than for PSH programs to partner with TANF?

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Mercer County, New Jersey – Housing First Initiative: Yes

28) We do similar things but have many students that are challenged with homelessness. Can you talk more about housing?

A Safe Haven: We currently provide overnight shelter for youth. Many students who are participating in Alternative Schools have taken advantage of this Y.E.S. (Youth Empowerment Services) program. They can elect to stay and participate in all services after they are 18. At our 2750 W. Roosevelt location we have 400 beds; we provide food, shelter, and case management and workforce services for all persons - moving them into permanent housing.

29) Do you have agencies that outsource services (such as legal, mental health, etc.) that transitional housing covers, but Rapid Re-Housing doesn't?

Mercer County, New Jersey – Housing First Initiative: Think of Rapid Re-Housing as creating linkages to those services in the community.

30) How do you work with clients who have outstanding bills (electric, propane, etc.) and leases that have gone bad?

Mercer County, New Jersey – Housing First Initiative: Our Board of Social Services has funds for back rent, utility etc. We also have state funds that go to a local community agency.

31) Can application fees be paid too?

Office of Family Assistance: The question is unclear, although for TANF the answer is “yes,” but this is a state choice.

32) Is Rapid Re-Housing only for lease or rental and also for mortgage?

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Mercer County, New Jersey – Housing First Initiative: People who enter Rapid Re-Housing are not generally ready for home ownership, as they are unemployed.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs: Rapid Re-Housing is an eligible activity under both the Emergency Solutions Grants program and the Continuum of Care Program. Under the ESG program, the only eligible costs for this activity are housing relocation and stabilization services and short- and/or medium-term rental assistance. Under the CoC Program, the eligible costs are short- and/or medium-term rental assistance, supportive services, Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), and project administration. Mortgage assistance is not an allowable cost under either program.

33) Do you use a "no wrong door" approach? Do all homeless or at-risk families need to go through the department's homeless coordinator? What happens if they go directly to the emergency shelter for assistance?

Mercer County, New Jersey – Housing First Initiative: Clients can enter the system through other "doors", but the centralized intake, screening and approval are through the Board.

A Safe Haven: We are an emergency shelter and interim housing provider. Our mission is employment and permanent housing for every participant.

34) Is anyone using these approaches with single homeless adults, unaccompanied by children?

Mercer County, New Jersey – Housing First Initiative: In Mercer County, we have launched a Rapid Rehousing program for singles. We have some recent history with it for a population of frequent users of the County Jail – six stays in three years. Of 50 served and rehoused, 34 have so far been placed in jobs.

35) For those housing programs that provide preference to clients who are "employment ready," who makes that determination? Can you tell us more about the screening process involved?

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Mercer County, New Jersey – Housing First Initiative: We will share our Screening tool with the organizers, so that it can be downloaded. See “Mercer Alliance to End Homelessness Screening Tool.”

- 36) Do any of the programs lease apartments under an agency's name vs. the client due to issues such as background, credit, etc.?

Mercer County, New Jersey – Housing First Initiative: The essence of the program is to put the lease in the tenant's name. At that point, they are no longer homeless, even if they are still receiving government assistance. This is a crucial motivating factor, we believe; the tenant identifies the apartment as their own and worth preserving.

- 37) What about the children of a parent who is "at fault" for an eviction?

Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development: Families who have an at-fault eviction can be referred to community shelter beds or to RAFT (prevention assistance) if the tenancy can be saved or help to re-house the family elsewhere.

- 38) How did you determine that who you were targeting was most likely to become homeless? Did you use local or national data?

Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development: We use data from the National Alliance and from NYC prevention research.



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
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Webinar Q&A Session

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