



May 5, 2016

CoC Competition Focus: Creating a Systemic Response to Homelessness

Leading up to the publication of the FY 2016 Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA), we will publish *CoC Competition Focus* messages that explain HUD's policy priorities for the FY 2016 Continuum of Care (CoC) Program Competition and link to key resources to help CoCs and project applicants implement these priorities. These messages will be different than our [SNAPS In Focus](#) messages as they will be primarily focused on highlighting existing resources to help CoCs and providers effectively implement the priorities instead of explaining the policy priorities in detail.

In these *CoC Competition Focus* messages, we will cover the following policy priorities (as identified in the [FY 2016 CoC Registration Notice](#)):

- Creating a systemic response to homelessness (today's message)
- Strategically allocating resources
- Ending chronic homelessness
- Ending family homelessness
- Ending youth homelessness
- Ending veteran homelessness
- Using a Housing First approach

This first message is about creating a systemic response to homelessness. This priority is intended to encourage communities to develop the systemic supports to ensure that homelessness assistance is well coordinated; well managed; accessible to the populations seeking assistance; transparent to providers, community members, and households seeking assistance; and that it achieves positive outcomes.

Coordinated Entry

A Coordinated Entry system is necessary for developing a systemic response to homelessness in your community. As we noted in a previous [message](#) and in guidance, coordinated entry is a powerful tool that is designed to ensure that people experiencing homelessness are prioritized for and matched with the right intervention as quickly as possible. It aims to standardize the access, assessment, and referral process across all providers in the CoC. What does this look like in a particular community? Each CoC's coordinated entry system will be unique, as it must be designed to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness in your CoC. However, even with all of these differing needs and capabilities, HUD has identified some [core characteristics of an effective coordinated entry process](#), and asks that CoCs review these carefully, and consider implementing them in your own process.

Planning

Another vital step to developing a systemic response to ending homelessness is to plan as an *entire* community, not just with homeless service providers. Planning with as many different types of stakeholders as possible will bring more resources and knowledge to the table and ensure that your entire system meets the needs of all persons



experiencing homelessness. For example, involving youth and youth providers in your CoC's planning process can help ensure that you are effectively identifying youth experiencing homelessness, that the coordinated entry process is appropriately assessing their needs, and that there are resources available within the CoC that are desired by the youth. There are a variety of resources available to CoCs looking to engage other, non-traditional stakeholders, including [PHAs](#), [landlords](#), and [philanthropic organizations](#) that we encourage you to review and use within your CoC if you haven't started doing so already.

Making Assistance Appealing and Accessible

Resources also have to be welcoming, appealing, and accessible to people experiencing homelessness if your CoC is to end homelessness. Each person experiencing homelessness should have access to inclusive and nondiscriminatory shelter and housing, [including those who are transgender and gender non-conforming](#). We firmly believe that people should not be screened out of programs because of unnecessary barriers and eligibility requirements (e.g., minimum income requirements or sobriety). Additionally, people should not be terminated from programs because they violated rules that were not appropriate in the first place.

For these reasons, we encourage providers to use a [Housing First](#) approach whenever possible. This means that housing is operated without preconditions or participation requirements, and the actions that can cause someone to be terminated are limited to those that are necessary to protect the health and safety of other residents and staff. We understand that providing low barrier, client-centered, culturally competent assistance is challenging. However, we strongly believe that it better meets the needs of individuals and families experiencing homelessness and will ultimately result in a more effective system.

Collecting and Analyzing Data

A systemic response to addressing homelessness requires that your CoC understands how your system is functioning as a whole – where the system is strong, and where improvements need to be made. We require CoCs to analyze data and report system performance measures. **HUD will begin collecting the system performance measures data for the first time this summer in HUD's Homelessness Data Exchange (HDX)**. HUD has published [resources](#) to help providers prepare to report on these measures. These required system performance measures look at a range of factors that impact the CoC's ability to address homelessness, including:

- the length of time people are experiencing homelessness
- the number of people returning to homelessness
- the number of people becoming homeless for the first time
- the overall number of people experiencing homelessness

Reviewing this data will help your CoC understand the existing resources available and how those resources are contributing to the overall goal of your system.

Your CoC should use this information to improve how your system addresses the needs of persons experiencing homelessness. A true understanding can only be gained if comprehensive, high quality data is collected. Therefore, your CoC should strive to ensure that the homeless inventory in the community is covered in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), and that the data meets the highest standards for quality. Additionally, HUD encourages CoCs to develop their own measures that can provide unique information that is meaningful to your individual system. Collecting local performance measures is an important way to maximize resources to end homelessness in your community, and it can also bring other partners to the table, which makes your system stronger.



Thank you for your commitment and work to end homelessness.

Norm Suchar & Brett Gagnon
Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs

Additional Resources Related to Developing a Systemic Response to Ending Homelessness:

- [Effective Crisis Response](#)
- [Family Options Study](#)
- [Equal Access to Housing Final Rule](#)
- [CPD Notice: Appropriate Placement for Transgender Persons in Single-Sex Emergency Shelters and Other Facilities](#)
- [Coordinated Entry and HMIS FAQs](#)
- [Coordinated Entry and Victim Service Provider FAQs](#)