CSH

INTRODUCTION TO COORDINATED ENTRY SYSTEMS (CES)

BACKGROUND

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) *requires* local communities receiving federal homeless assistance funds to establish Coordinated Entry Systems (CES) to identify, assess and prioritize homeless individuals and families for housing and services based on vulnerability and severity of need by January 2018. CES is designed to—

- Ensure that people experiencing homelessness receive the right housing intervention, and
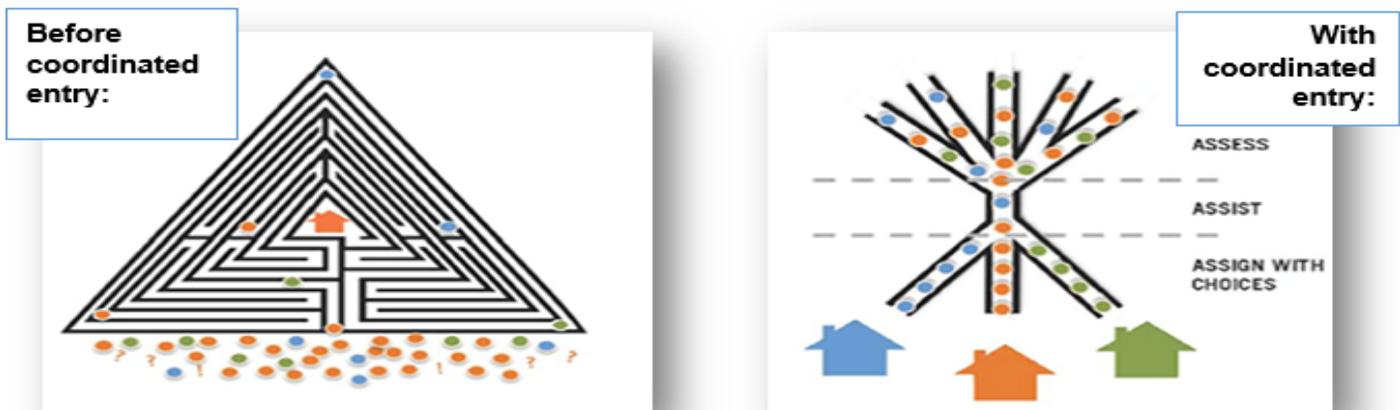- Prioritize people who need supportive housing the most to be able to access it as quickly as possible.

The CES process enables communities to target limited housing and services to those with the greatest vulnerabilities. Without CES, people experiencing homelessness often face long wait times to receive assistance or are screened out altogether. Some of the most vulnerable people experiencing homelessness do not have the functional ability to check in routinely on wait lists, and to apply at multiple housing sites, necessary under a "first come, first served" process of accessing housing and services, and so are the least likely to be able to access housing without a CES process in place.

Recognizing the value and success of well-developed CES in targeting housing and services for those most in need, the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) has drafted guidelines encouraging counties to adopt CES to identify homeless, chronically homeless, and at-risk of chronically homeless individuals and families for supportive housing under the No Place Like Home (NPLH) program. HCD proposes to provide incentives to communities that commit to using CES to refer eligible individuals and families into funded projects, essentially prioritizing those with the highest need and barriers to housing retention for NPLH units.

THE BASICS

Coordinated entry is a community-wide approach that moves a homeless response system from a collection of independent housing and service providers who employ their own referral policies and wait lists, to a comprehensive approach intended to coordinate all housing and service resources. In CES, providers work collectively to match people experiencing homelessness to an appropriate housing placement based on vulnerability and need.

CES simplifies the process by which homeless persons access housing and helps to ensure the right housing intervention is paired with the most appropriate participant. It is a data-driven process that allows communities to **provide access** to housing resources, to **assess** each individual or family who enters the homeless response system for their vulnerabilities and needs, to **assign** housing interventions based on client need, and to create a framework of **accountability.**

ACCESS

Under coordinated entry, people experiencing homelessness find the homeless system easy to access and are able to call 211, to contact a public agency, or to walk into a shelter, and gain access to the system. This centralized intake process is key to ensuring people are able to gain access to all housing and services interventions through a "no wrong door" approach. Housing interventions available through CES typically include interim or bridge housing, rapid rehousing, transitional housing, and permanent supportive housing.

ASSESS

The cornerstone to the CES process is a standardized assessment tool and process. Based on an assessment, the individual or family is matched to the housing intervention appropriate for that individual or family to exit homelessness. The assessment also allows staff administering it to determine whether the individual or family should be prioritized for supportive housing based on vulnerability and severity of needs. A common assessment tool is the Vulnerability Index-Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool, better known as the VI-SPDAT. This tool is intended to provide a score based on the individual's likelihood to die prematurely on the streets. The VI-SPDAT accounts for the following factors: length of time homeless and risk of continued homelessness, mental health and/or substance use disorders, medical conditions, age, use of crisis or emergency services, and vulnerability to victimization.

ASSIGN

The results of the assessment provide the CES with data to match the individual or family with the most appropriate housing intervention, based on client needs and housing resources. Typically, a person who has a significant history of homelessness and high services needs would be matched with supportive housing, whereas someone who is homeless for a short period may be matched with rapid rehousing. In essence, CES creates a centralized refferal system to match the individual or family to the right housing program and unit.

ACCOUNTABILITY

CES helps local communities establish a shared vision, achieve common goals, and collect system-wide data which allows for on-going planning. CES is intended to engage all stakeholders at least annually to evaluate and update the coordinated entry process. This community process is intended to guide homeless assistance planning and system change efforts in the community.

HUD[1] urges that the following qualities are includes in an effective CES:

- *Prioritization*. People with the greatest needs receive priority for any type of housing and homeless assistance available in the area.
- *Low Barrier*. The CES does not screen people out for assistance based on lack of employment or income, drug or alcohol use, or a criminal record. In addition, housing and homelessness programs lower their screening barriers in partnership with the coordinated entry process.
- *Housing First Orientation*. People are housed quickly without preconditions or service participation requirements.
- *Person-Centered*. Individuals and families receive choice in where they want to live, and in the services they engage in.
- *Fair and Equal Access*. All people in the geographic area can easily access the coordinated entry process, whether in person or by phone, the process for accessing help is well known, and the process serves people who speak languages commonly spoken in the community.
- *Inclusive*. CES includes all subpopulations, including people experiencing chronic homelessness, veterans, families, youth, and survivors of domestic violence.
- *Outreach*. CES is linked to street outreach efforts so that people sleeping on the streets are prioritized for assistance in the same manner as any other person assessed through the coordinated entry process. This quality is particularly important in California, where most homeless people are living unsheltered.

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[1] https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Coordinated-Entry-Policy-Brief.pdf