



## INTRODUCTION TO AN EVOLVING HOMELESS SYSTEM

### BACKGROUND

Over the last 35 years, the federal, state, and community responses to homelessness has changed significantly. In the 1980's, emergency shelters were the only response to ensure people experiencing homelessness were safe; the shelter response was not intended to end homelessness, but to deal with a short-lived crisis. Communities created a process by which individuals and families experiencing homelessness would move through a "continuum of care." A continuum of care was designed to make people experiencing homelessness "ready" for housing stability. The homeless system would require individuals and families experiencing homelessness to access, in this order—

- Emergency housing or a shelter,
- A transitional housing project that required people to participate in services, follow rules, and avoid use of drugs or alcohol, and
- Permanent housing existing in the market.



At any point in this process, people experiencing barriers to housing stability, such as severe substance use disorders, serious mental illness, and distrust of public systems, would return to homelessness. Not only was this system devoid of a process to move people toward a permanent place to live, no safety net system existed to catch those who fell out of this system.

### SUPPORTIVE HOUSING & HOUSING FIRST

The federal government recognizes supportive housing and housing first as evidence-based practices. Over the last 25 years, research regarding supportive housing has demonstrated 75-93% of people who previously experienced chronic homeless are able to stay stably housed and avoid return to homelessness within a year, compared with transitional housing, which traditionally screens out people with the greatest barriers to housing stability, but still has high rates of return to homelessness.<sup>1</sup> Research shows supportive housing is cost-effective for people cycling through public systems while homeless. Evidence also shows significant benefits of eliminating barriers to accessing and retaining housing stability in housing without limits on length of stay, referred to as housing first.<sup>2</sup>

Supportive housing using the housing first model uses the following approaches:

- The apartment is intended for people with barriers to housing stability, such as people experiencing long-term or repeated episodes of homelessness, or homelessness with frequent institutionalization;
- The tenant pays no more than 30% household income towards rent;
- The tenant holds a lease and can remain in the apartment as long as the tenant continues to meet the terms

<sup>1</sup> D. Gubitts, M. Shinn, M. Wood, et. al. Family Options Study: 3-Year Impacts of Housing & Services Interventions for Homeless Families. Prepared for the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development. Oct. 2016.

<sup>2</sup> S. Tsemberis, & R. Eisenberg, R. Pathways to Housing: Supported Housing for Street-Dwelling Homeless Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities. 2000.

and conditions of the lease;

- Property managers, supportive services providers, and the tenants all work together to avoid eviction;
- Tenants have easy, facilitated access to a flexible and comprehensive array of supportive services designed to assist the tenants to achieve and sustain housing stability;
- Service providers proactively engage tenants in supportive services, but participation in such supportive services is not a condition of ongoing tenancy; and
- Service and property management strategies include effective, coordinated approaches for addressing issues resulting from substance use, relapse, and mental health crises, with a focus on fostering housing stability.

### ***RAPID RE-HOUSING***

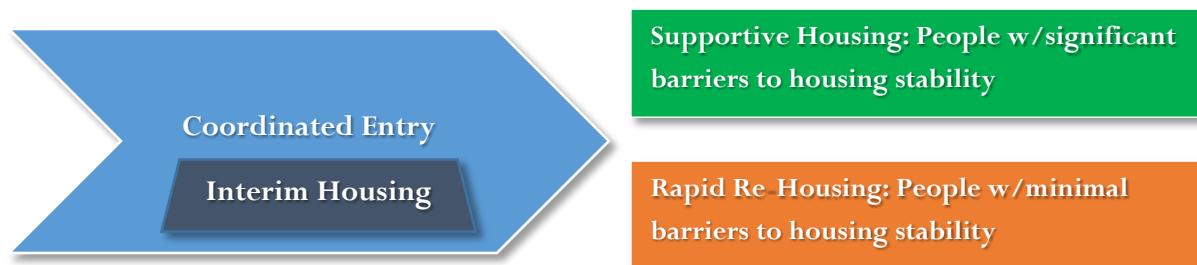
Over time, supportive housing projects often housed people who had never experienced homelessness or who experienced homelessness due only to economic hardship, and didn't need the intensive services supportive housing offers. In 2009, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act included funds for a rapid re-housing. This model helps households quickly exit homelessness and return to permanent housing. It provides housing search assistance, landlord recruitment, security deposits, back utility assistance, up to 24 months of rent, and case management services to help households increase their incomes to afford the apartment on their own. Studies show 85-90% of families stabilize with rapid re-housing, with families 4.7 times more likely to stay stably housed than families who do not receive rapid re-housing.<sup>3</sup> Rapid re-housing is appropriate for individuals and families who do not need supportive housing to exit homelessness, and is far less expensive than supportive housing.

### ***INTERIM OR BRIDGE HOUSING***

Because our communities do not have sufficient resources to provide housing and services to everyone experiencing homelessness, wait times still exist to access the appropriate housing intervention. So that people have a safe place to stay while awaiting referral to a housing unit, and so that services staff can remain connected to households, communities are developing a range of responses to house people on an interim basis. These approaches can include using an emergency shelter, motel vouchers, recuperative care beds (for those exiting hospitals), and other crisis housing beds. While residing in interim housing, housing navigators help people with housing applications, obtain documentation, and work to remove whatever barriers may exist to moving someone into permanent housing.

### ***NEW HOMELESS SYSTEM***

Communities are working toward developing new systems that assess the type of housing intervention the household requires, then move that household into a permanent place to live as quickly as possible.



<sup>3</sup>T. Byrne, D. Treglia, D. Culhane, J. Kuhn, & V. Kane. Predictors of Homelessness Among Families and Single Adults After Exit from Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Programs: Evidence from the Department of Veterans Affairs Supportive Services for Veterans Program. 2015.