

The Role of Long-Term, Congregate Transitional Housing in Ending Homelessness

This document was developed through the collaboration of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Office of Violence Against Women at the Department of Justice, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the National Alliance to End Homelessness.

Achieving the Federal goal of ending homelessness includes the use of evidence-based models and approaches like permanent supportive housing, using Housing First, and rapid re-housing, to help people quickly reconnect to permanent housing. Some models of time-limited or transitional housing may also facilitate connecting people to permanent housing effectively and efficiently.¹ Even models of transitional housing that are designed as long-term, congregate programs may also contribute to this goal, but only for certain high need populations or in limited situations. This brief will only examine the role of the long-term, congregate transitional housing program model. Subsequent briefs will examine the role of other models of transitional housing, including the use of longer-term transitional housing programs that are not based in congregate living facilities.

Target Long-Term Congregate Housing Programs to People with Severe or Specific Needs

Many communities still operate congregate transitional housing programs – defined as facility-based programs that offer housing and services for up to two years to individuals and families experiencing homelessness. While many people who have traditionally been assisted in long-term congregate transitional housing may be served more efficiently in other program models, this model may be appropriate for some people, including:

- Certain individuals and heads of households struggling with a substance use disorder;
- Individuals in early recovery from a substance use disorder who may desire more intensive support to achieve their recovery goals;²
- Survivors of domestic violence or other forms of severe trauma who may require and prefer the security and onsite services provided in a congregate setting to other available housing options; and
- Unaccompanied and pregnant or parenting youth (age 16-24) who are unable to live independently (e.g. unemancipated minors) or who prefer a congregate setting with access to a broad array of wraparound services to other available housing options.

¹This may include transitional housing programs that primarily function as short-term, crisis or “interim” housing, and those that utilize a scattered-site housing approach, such as using transitional housing funds to provide temporary rent subsidies and transition-in-place housing models.

² Many individuals with substance use disorders can achieve sobriety through outpatient support and do not require residential support.

The majority of people experiencing homelessness do not require lengthy stays in transitional housing in order to successfully acquire and sustain permanent housing. People whose primary barrier to housing stability is economic in nature do not require transitional housing, nor do people with serious mental illnesses who may be better served in other program models, such as permanent supportive housing. Long-term stays in congregate transitional housing programs should therefore be reserved for those individuals with severe or specific needs who choose transitional housing over other services that would help them more quickly reconnect to permanent housing. Programs serving these populations should have as few barriers as possible to program entry (e.g. sobriety requirements) and to continuation in the program.

Use Congregate Transitional Housing Stock to Meet Emergency Housing Needs

Some households face severe barriers to identifying and securing permanent housing, which may lead to prolonged episodes of homelessness. While these households may not need the specialized services of a long-term transitional housing program they may need shelter or other kinds of emergency housing for a potentially longer stay. The facilities used in congregate transitional housing programs can provide that resource while those households receive housing location services to help them exit homelessness as quickly as possible.

Depending on the community, these populations may include:

- Individuals who are listed on a sex offender registry;
- People re-entering the community after a stay in jail or prison; and
- Large families.

In summary, long-term, congregate transitional housing can be an effective resource to end homelessness when it is targeted to people who face more severe challenges to finding housing and when it is offered with as few barriers to program entry as possible. Communities should also carefully assess the use of long-term congregate transitional housing in light of the needs of people experiencing homelessness within their community and available resources to assist them.