



Monarch Housing Associates NJCounts 2017

Best Practices for Ending Homelessness

Across New Jersey, government and the homeless services system are implementing the best practices to end homelessness. The State of New Jersey needs increased federal funding to ensure that New Jersey continues to make progress in ending homelessness.

Housing First

Housing First is an evidence based best practice designed to end homelessness and support recovery by housing individuals as quickly as possible and then wrapping services around them as needed. This housing model has proven effective in housing a wide variety of homeless population subsets including chronically homeless households and families and the general homeless population. Within this model, housing is not contingent upon participation in services and services provided are designed to promote housing stability. The New Jersey Department of Community Affairs (DCA) has significantly invested in Housing First as a solution to chronic homelessness in New Jersey.

In Middlesex County, more than half of the 33 Housing First vouchers that NJ DCA awarded to Coming Home Middlesex, a non-profit organization, have already been leased up or will be issued to eligible chronically homeless persons.

Rapid Re-Housing

Rapid Re-Housing is a strategy that has proven successful in helping communities cost effectively reduce homelessness. Homeless households entering the emergency shelter and transitional housing system are immediately provided with services to connect them with permanent housing. Once housing has been located, households are provided with temporary rental assistance and short term, intensive case management to help them stabilize and maintain their housing.

New Jersey is in a unique position to utilize Emergency Assistance (EA) funds to provide intensive case management to households placed in permanent housing through Temporary Rental Assistance (TRA) and create a statewide opportunity to implement rapid re-housing.

In Mercer County, the Mercer County Board of Social Services is utilizing a single point of entry model to assess and prioritize rapid rehousing resources for families, with a commitment to intensive case management, wraparound services, and linkage to other community supports to ensure success. Community leaders embrace the rapid rehousing model and dedicate resources for housing assistance and client centered inter-agency collaboration.

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Centralized and/or Coordinated Assessment Systems

Centralized and/or Coordinated Assessment, also known as coordinated entry or coordinated intake, paves the way for more efficient homeless assistance systems by:

- Helping people move through the system faster (by reducing the amount of time people spend moving from program to program before finding the right match);
- Reducing new entries into homelessness (by consistently offering prevention and diversion resources upfront, reducing the number of people entering the system unnecessarily); and
- Improving data collection and quality and providing accurate information on what kind of assistance consumers need.

Coordinated assessment is ideally a system-wide process and can serve any and all populations. Systems may accomplish coordinated assessment through the use of a centralized phone hotline (e.g. a 2-1-1), a single physical point of assessment (through an emergency shelter or a dedicated assessment center, for example) or a decentralized coordinated system (with multiple assessment points all employing the same assessment and referral process).

In Middlesex County, the Coordinated Assessment System has helped Coming Home of Middlesex County and its partners identify and successfully apply for almost all available slots.

Prioritizing Homelessness by Public Housing Authorities

Setting public housing authority (PHA) priorities for homelessness directs rental assistance vouchers to households with the greatest housing need and saves money by keeping households out of the shelter system.

In a priority system, referrals for homeless households would come from pre-approved organizations. The referring organization accepts responsibility to verify homeless eligibility and keep referral information current. The referring organization can be required to follow up with and provide services to the household for one year. To be fair to those already on a waiting list, a cap of 20% for homeless households can be set.