



July 25, 2016

SNAPS In Focus: Addressing the Needs of Persons Fleeing Domestic Violence

Last November, I penned a message through our *SNAPS In Focus* series, entitled [Ensuring Access for Survivors of Domestic Violence](#). That message highlighted HUD's increased emphasis on ensuring that Continuums of Care (CoCs) are addressing the needs of persons fleeing domestic violence, and pointed to specific places in the FY 2015 CoC NOFA that incentivized increased participation and coordination in the CoC by victim service providers. This emphasis is a direct result of HUD's recognition of the intersection between domestic violence and homelessness and the importance of maintaining CoC-funded projects available for this population, particularly in those places where there are no other projects serving people fleeing domestic violence within a reasonable distance.

The intended outcome for the message and the increased emphasis in the competition – along with new FAQs and technical assistance resources – was to provide communities with a path towards a balanced approach to safely serving both those persons actively fleeing domestic violence situations and survivors of domestic violence in targeted programs as well as in programs throughout the homeless services system.

However, as the results of the 2015 CoC Program Competition were announced, we and our federal partners became concerned at the number of existing projects for this population that lost funding, and we have heard directly from communities and providers about concerns as well. At the same time, we were also encouraged by the number of new permanent housing projects for this population that gained funding across the country.

So today, I want to be clear with communities. High-quality projects that serve people fleeing domestic violence are a critical component of a comprehensive homeless services system **regardless of component type**. Transitional housing, rapid re-housing, and permanent supportive housing for survivors each can and should have a place in a community's system as long as these programs meet a need in the community, can show positive safety and housing related outcomes, and provide choice to the people who want these types of programs.

I would urge CoCs to thoughtfully and fully engage with local victim service providers to ensure this balanced approach. In particular, as your CoC is making local decisions, I hope that the following important issues are being considered specifically for projects serving survivors of domestic violence:

- **Geographic Coverage:** Is the project the only one serving this population available in the geographic area? This is especially important in rural areas where many domestic violence projects cover large catchment areas. If the project lost funding, is there another way to serve this population in the area?
- **Outcomes:** Projects serving people fleeing domestic have unique program designs, which are focused first on the safety of the household. Once safety is established, housing stability can be fully addressed. The process by which these programs are judged at the local level should consider these unique factors, and account for the fact that survivors often need longer timeframes to gain stability and move to permanent housing.
- **Program Design:** Is the program well-designed to meet the safety needs of survivors and their families? Does the program use trauma-informed practices? Has the program adopted a Housing First orientation and is it



low barrier in its approach? In other words, does the project have entry and intake processes that do not screen applicants out due to factors such as employment, income, drug or alcohol use, criminal history, or other factors?

- **Data:** Although victim service providers are prohibited from entering data in HMIS, they are required to maintain comparable databases of their own design which should be providing the CoC with aggregate information on the outcomes of their project. Projects serving survivors of domestic violence where the recipient is not a victim services provider are required to enter data in their Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). CoCs should use this data to determine safety and housing stability outcomes for projects.
- **Reallocation:** After reviewing data and the unique outcomes related to serving survivors of domestic violence, CoCs may decide that there are lower-performing programs that the CoC would like to reallocate. In implementing such reallocations, CoCs should ensure they are reallocating to programs that will be dedicated to survivors of domestic violence, have experience providing quality domestic violence services, **and** that the reallocation will result in at least as many units for this population.
- **New Resources:** In addition to ensuring that projects dedicated to survivors are reallocated to the same population, CoCs should consider new resources that will provide permanent solutions for survivors. Without permanent housing options to exit to from shelter or transitional housing, some survivors may feel that going back to an abuser is their only way out of homelessness. HUD encourages communities to strike a balance that includes both safe short-term and longer-term options to help stop the cycle of homelessness for households experiencing domestic violence.

I hope this information is helpful to CoCs and victim service providers across the country as communities are making local decisions related to the [FY 2016 CoC Program Competition](#). For our part, HUD is continuing to work with our Federal Partners and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) to identify effective ways to serve survivors of domestic violence and to strengthen community capacity. The USICH Interagency Sub-Group on Domestic Violence is prioritizing both short- and longer-term actions to support this important work. This includes developing a quick-guide for communities to help inform decision-making as they assess and review domestic violence transitional housing project applications that USICH will release later this week.

As the HUD-HHS-DOJ funded [Domestic Violence and Housing Technical Assistance Consortium](#) gets underway, many CoCs will hear from the members of the Consortium over the next few months as they begin a needs assessment. They will be speaking directly with CoCs, homeless service providers, and domestic violence providers to find out what your needs are for better serving this population based on their specific housing and service needs. HUD will also be convening a listening session at the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) Annual Conference next week to hear from CoCs and homeless providers specifically on their issues and questions on using CoC funds to serve survivors of domestic violence in their communities.

As always, thank you for your work towards ending homelessness.

Ann Marie Oliva
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Special Needs