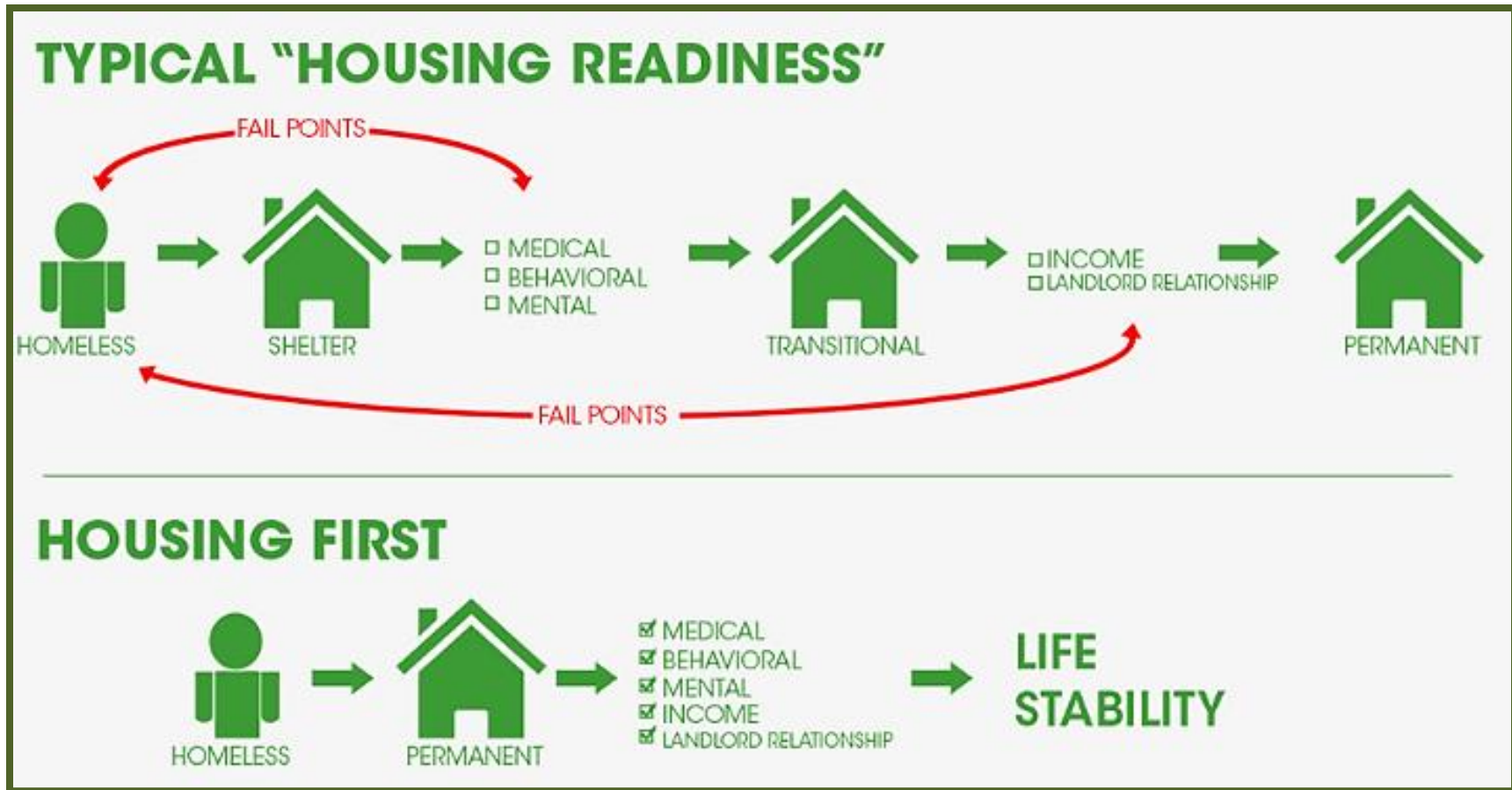


Homeless Network of Yakima County – Best Practices – Housing First



What is Housing First?

Housing First is a proven approach, applicable across all elements of systems for ending homelessness, in which people experiencing homelessness are connected to **permanent housing** swiftly and with few to no treatment preconditions, behavioral contingencies, or other barriers. It is based on overwhelming evidence that people experiencing homelessness can achieve stability in permanent housing if provided with the appropriate level of services. Study after study has shown that Housing First yields higher housing retention rates, drives significant reductions in the use of costly crisis services and institutions, and helps people achieve better health and social outcomes.

What are conditions of Housing First?

- ❑ Access to programs is not contingent on sobriety, minimum income requirements, lack of a criminal record, completion of treatment, participation in services, or other unnecessary conditions.
- ❑ Programs or projects do everything possible not to reject an individual or family on the basis of poor credit or financial history, poor or lack of rental history, minor criminal convictions, or behaviors that are interpreted as indicating a lack of “housing readiness.”
- ❑ People with disabilities are offered clear opportunities to request reasonable accommodations within applications and screening processes and during tenancy, and building and apartment units include special physical features that accommodate disabilities.
- ❑ Programs or projects that cannot serve someone work through the coordinated entry process to ensure that those individuals or families have access to housing and services elsewhere.
- ❑ Housing and service goals and plans are highly tenant-driven.
- ❑ Supportive services emphasize engagement and problem-solving over therapeutic goals.
- ❑ Participation in services or compliance with service plans are not conditions of tenancy, but are reviewed with tenants and regularly offered as a resource to tenants.
- ❑ Services are informed by a harm-reduction philosophy that recognizes that drug and alcohol use and addiction are a part of some tenants’ lives. Tenants are engaged in non-judgmental communication regarding drug and alcohol use and are offered education regarding how to avoid risky behaviors and engage in safer practices.
- ❑ Substance use in and of itself, without other lease violations, is not considered a reason for eviction.
- ❑ Tenants in supportive housing are given reasonable flexibility in paying their share of rent on time and offered special payment arrangements for rent arrears and/or assistance with financial management, including representative payee arrangements.
- ❑ Every effort is made to provide a tenant the opportunity to transfer from one housing situation, program, or project to another if a tenancy is in jeopardy. Whenever possible, eviction back into homelessness is avoided.

Important Clarifications

- Housing First is not a "program." It is a whole-system orientation and response.
- Housing First is a recognition that everyone can achieve stability in (real) housing. Some people simply need services to help them do so.
- Housing First is about health, recovery, and well-being. Housing itself is the foundation and platform for achieving these goals.
- Housing First is about changing mainstream systems.

What program models follow the Housing First Approach?

Two common program models follow the Housing First approach but differ in implementation:

1. **Permanent supportive housing (PSH)** is targeted to individuals and families with chronic illnesses, disabilities, mental health issues, or substance use disorders who have experienced long-term or repeated homelessness. It provides long-term rental assistance and supportive services.
2. **Rapid Re-housing** is employed for a wide variety of individuals and families. It provides short-term rental assistance and services. The goals are to help people obtain housing quickly, increase self-sufficiency, and remain housed. The Core Components of rapid re-housing—housing identification, rent and move-in assistance, and case management and services—operationalize Housing First principals.