



# Enhancing Family Stability: A Guide for Assessing Housing Status and Coordinating with Local Homelessness Programs for TANF Agencies

Administration for Children and Families  
Office of Family Assistance

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Many families eligible for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program benefits and services may be experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness or housing instability. Data from a recent HUD study indicates that 41 percent of families in emergency shelter were receiving TANF cash assistance.<sup>1</sup> The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance (ACF/OFA) encourages state and local TANF programs to help ensure individuals and families experiencing or at risk of homelessness are quickly identified and connected to the housing and supports they need to stabilize by connecting those individuals to their local homeless services system.

OFA has developed this guide in an effort to help state TANF agencies recognize the important role they have in identifying and serving families experiencing homelessness and families at risk of homelessness. It is meant to be a resource to help states better assess for homelessness and housing instability during intake and formulate cohesive strategies with state and local homelessness providers and systems, such as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)-funded Continuums of Care (CoC) (see text box). Many TANF jurisdictions already collect information regarding housing status during client intake, which can help facilitate a more streamlined referral process to CoC resources and services, such as child care, domestic violence prevention, financial literacy, and food pantry services. For those that do not, the appendices to this document offer several options for developing a standardized set of questions regarding housing status and risk of homelessness to integrate into the TANF client intake process. TANF agencies can simply include a few housing status questions and a phone or email-based process to connect a family experiencing some kind of housing instability with a CoC or create a more comprehensive model of co-location with integration of intake and assessment. We include sample housing assessment questions, which TANF agencies may wish to incorporate as they assess the housing status and related needs of applicants and help to make connections to local CoCs, whether or not a family is eligible for TANF cash assistance. Also included is the District of Columbia's current "TANF Comprehensive Assessment and Housing Instability" tool, designed by their Department of Human Services during its TANF program redesign (intended to serve as an example of how

### **Continuums of Care (CoC)**

A CoC is a network of people and organizations interested in preventing and ending homelessness (e.g., non-profit organizations, governments, and public organizations at state, county, and city levels and social service providers) over a locally defined geographic area. This network of organizations develops and implements a strategy to prevent and end homelessness over that geographic area, participates in local homeless assistance program planning and coordination, and applies for HUD homeless assistance grants for their work. Each CoC is responsible for coordinating the local response to homelessness in its respective geographic area. CoCs can provide up-to-date information on local crisis response and housing options for persons who are experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness, and can refer families to appropriate housing and services based on the local system of prioritization. A current list of primary points of contact for each CoC can be found on the HUD Exchange website, located here: <https://www.hudexchange.info/grantees/>

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<sup>1</sup> *Are Homeless Families Connected to the Social Safety Net?* April 2016. <https://aspe.hhs.gov/pdf-report/are-homeless-families-connected-social-safety-net>. This rate was higher than for all families in deep poverty in the same counties (22 percent). While the numbers indicate that homeless families may be better connected to the social safety net than those in deep poverty, we note that less than half of families experiencing homelessness are connected to TANF, despite their low incomes.

one jurisdiction has integrated housing questions into its TANF intake process), as well as a list of additional resources.

### **TANF's Role in CoCs**

OFA believes that state and local TANF agencies can develop valuable partnerships with local homeless providers and systems like CoCs, and support the “coordinated entry” process as a strategy to combat homelessness among TANF and other low-income families. CoCs provide a prime opportunity for this coordination by administering a local homeless services response system through a range of network providers, and implementing coordinated entry as a condition of HUD funding.

In its most basic form, coordinated entry is housing-focused and designed to quickly connect families experiencing a housing crisis with housing and housing-related resources as efficiently and effectively as possible. It standardizes the assessment process across local providers, and coordinates the referral for resources (such as prevention services, transitional housing, rapid re-housing, permanent supportive housing, emergency shelter, and case management) in a way that incorporates participant choice, and allows communities to prioritize scarce resources towards the most vulnerable community members. By coordinating with CoCs, TANF agencies can help to ensure that their TANF participants have access to crucial crisis response and housing resources. Further, TANF agencies can also work with CoCs to develop a streamlined process to connect eligible families being served in the CoC's homeless assistance system to the TANF agency for assistance.

To improve service delivery to families at-risk of or experiencing homelessness, and create processes that look at the whole family, identifying barriers that can impact the success of an individual with employment and educational goals, TANF agencies can work with the CoC's local homeless services and housing systems to:

- Undertake a comprehensive resource mapping process;
- Coordinate the referral, application, intake, and eligibility determination processes;
- Co-locate services, and develop single application forms for multiple programs;
- Share data on families experiencing or at risk of homelessness; and
- Promote unified case planning

As detailed in ACF's 2013 [Information Memorandum on the Use of TANF Funds to Serve Homeless Families and Families at Risk of Experiencing Homelessness \(TANF-ACF-IM-2013-01\)](#), TANF agencies can also unify their work with CoCs to address family homelessness and housing instability by implementing a range of benefits, services, and interventions with allowable uses of TANF funds that connect families to housing and supportive and employment services.

### **Assessment of Housing Status during TANF Intake**

Assessment tools are an integral part of CoC coordinated entry processes. Although there is

no one recommended tool and language and formatting varies across localities, we recommend that TANF agencies create tools that present TANF applicants with questions related to their housing status and risk of homelessness, especially if they have young children. This can help to quickly identify a family's relative need and potential eligibility for targeted services offered by the local homelessness service system, including – but not limited to – emergency shelter, rapid re-housing, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing, homelessness prevention, and housing stabilization assistance. Such questions can also facilitate referral to other public and privately-funded assistance.

### **Other Partnerships to Consider When Developing Housing Status Assessments**

#### **Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) Programs**

In FY 2015 there were just over 200,000 young parents between ages 16 and 24 receiving TANF. These young parents, who are still transitioning to adulthood themselves, are particularly vulnerable to homelessness due to challenges in pursuing their education and likely limited work experience. We encourage TANF agencies to explore partnerships with local RHY programs, which are funded through ACF, in addition to local HUD-funded homelessness programs. For RHY, the Transitional Living Program, which includes the Maternity Group Homes Program for pregnant and parenting youth, provides longer-term residential services to homeless youth between the ages of 16 and 22. Youth are provided with stable, safe living accommodations and services that help them develop the skills necessary to move to independence. In maternity group homes, young people learn parenting skills, child development, family budgeting, health and nutrition, and other skills to promote their long-term economic independence and ensure the well-being of their children. In many communities, this collaboration can occur through the larger coordinated entry process, though in some communities TANF agencies may coordinate directly with RHY programs.

For more detailed information on coordination with Youth Homelessness Programs, please look for upcoming guidance at:

<https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/toolkit/responsibilities-and-duties/>.

#### **Domestic Violence Programs**

Domestic violence is a major cause of homelessness, particularly for families with children. In a 2012 survey of 25 cities, 28% of Mayors cited domestic violence as a leading cause of homelessness among families with children (See [U.S. Conference of Mayors Hunger and Homelessness Survey, 2012](#)). Families experiencing domestic violence often have limited access to safe and stable housing or trauma-informed services. According to Section 402(a)(7) of the Social Security Act, TANF jurisdictions have the option to establish and enforce standards and procedures to screen and identify recipients with a history of domestic violence, while maintaining confidentiality, refer them to counseling and supportive services, and issue good cause domestic violence waivers of program requirements as necessary. Discussions about the housing needs of TANF clients may provide opportunities to support such families experiencing trauma and violence who are homeless or at risk of homelessness due to domestic violence, and we encourage TANF agencies to include domestic violence-specific assessment questions during intake and connect families to domestic violence services and programs. We note that caution

should be taken to inquire about domestic violence issues in such a way that does not place victims in any additional risk of harm as a result of their disclosure. TANF agencies are encouraged to collaborate and partner with state domestic violence coalitions and local domestic violence programs to ensure that assessment and case management practices are sensitive to the safety of their clients. The privacy and safety concerns of victims of domestic violence and their families may pose challenges in accessing mainstream housing programs and it is therefore critical that they are connected to the right point of contact in the homeless assistance system.

For more detailed information on coordination with Domestic Violence Programs, please find an updated version of the *Coordinated Entry and Victim Service Providers FAQs* at: <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/toolkit/responsibilities-and-duties/>.

For more information on coordination with State Domestic Violence Coalitions, please find an up-to-date contact list for all domestic and sexual violence coalitions across the United States and its Territories: <http://www.vawnet.org/links/state-coalitions.php>



*For number 2 and 3, if yes and no other safe place to stay or access to a safe place to stay for a limited time, then connect to coordinated entry.*

*If the applicant indicates otherwise, but that the family is still unstable and would like further consideration, connect to coordinated entry.*

*You can also connect participants to other mainstream housing and related resources.*

### **Homelessness Screening Clinical Reminder Tool**

Alternatively, states might consider using questions from a [Homelessness Screening Clinical Reminder tool](#) developed by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for use with veterans accessing health care services. The primary questions in this tool include the following:

- In the past two months, have you been living in stable housing that you own, rent, or stay in as part of a household? (“No” response indicates Veteran is positive for homelessness).
- Are you worried or concerned that in the next two months you may NOT have stable housing that you own, rent, or stay in as part of a household? (“Yes” response indicates Veteran is positive for risk of homelessness).

### **The Online Work Readiness Assessment Tool**

[The Online Work Readiness Assessment \(OWRA\)](#) tool was developed by HHS for state, tribal, and county TANF programs and other stakeholders to assess and improve the work readiness of low-income and working individuals. Jurisdictions may choose to use this tool during their TANF intake process, and have an option to further modify the tool to include any additional housing stability screening questions (inclusive of questions such as the above).

### **The District of Columbia Department of Human Services – TANF Comprehensive Assessment (TCA), Housing Domain**

Beginning on the following page, we include the District of Columbia’s current Housing Domain of the “TANF Comprehensive Assessment” (TCA) tool, designed by the Department of Human Services during the District of Columbia’s TANF program redesign. The TCA was modified from the OWRA, and as a logic-based assessment tool, provides specific referral recommendations based on the scoring methodology built into the tool. It is important to note that the tool’s logic includes skip-patterns. In certain instances, not all questions included in the tool are asked to every customer. Based on a customer’s unique responses to the questions, the tool will automatically skip to only the relevant remaining questions to garner the correct score. The TCA Housing Domain guides staff referrals to additional services based on the assessment. Responses to two questions regarding potential length of stay at current housing situation and potential length of stay at an alternative option are used to determine a housing stability score which, when combined with the answers to other questions, helps to identify the services needed by the family and within what timeframe. This tool is intended to serve as an example of how one jurisdiction has integrated housing questions into its TANF intake process.

APPENDIX A: Sample Housing Status Assessment Tools for TANF Programs

For more information on how to use the tool, please contact Tamitha Christian, Deputy Administrator, Economic Security Administration, Department of Human Services, Government of the District of Columbia: Phone: (202) 698-1714, Email: [Tamitha.christian3@dc.gov](mailto:Tamitha.christian3@dc.gov)

  DEPARTMENT OF  HUMAN SERVICES	Homelessness questions		
	TANF REDESIGN	VERSION 1.0	LAST EDITED ON: 01/24/2013

**Q1a: Where did you stay last night?** [Please select the one response that best describes where you stayed last night]

- a. Emergency shelter, including hotel or motel voucher paid for by a social service or charitable organization
- b. Transitional housing for homeless persons
- c. Permanent supportive housing for formerly homeless persons
- d. Psychiatric hospital or other psychiatric facility
- e. Substance abuse treatment facility or other detox facility
- f. Hospital (non-psychiatric)
- g. Jail, prison or juvenile detention facility
- h. Half-way or three-quarter-way home for persons with criminal offenses
- i. Room, apartment or house that you rent
- j. Apartment or house that you own
- k. In a friend's or family member's room, apartment or house
- l. Hotel or motel paid for without emergency shelter voucher
- m. Foster care home or foster care group home
- n. Group home or other supervised residential care facility
- o. Place not meant for human habitation (street, car, park, etc.)
- p. Place or a situation that is dangerous to the health or safety of any household member
- q. Other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_

**Q1b: Where were you staying prior to the place you stayed at last night?**

*[Insert text box]*

**Q2: How long have you stayed in the place you stayed last night?** [Please select the one response that best describes how long you have stayed there]

- a. One week or less
- b. More than one week, but less than one month

	Homelessness questions		
	TANF REDESIGN	VERSION 1.0	LAST EDITED ON: 01/24/2013
		Questions and Scoring	

- c. One to three months
- d. More than three months, but less than one year
- e. One year or longer

**Q3: Is this housing subsidized?** That is, are you paying lower rent because the Federal, state, or local government is paying for part of your rent? (This assistance could be Public Housing, a Section 8 Voucher, a Section 8 project or privately owned subsidized housing, or some other type of assistance).

- a. Yes
- b. No

**Q4: Are you able to stay in this housing for more than 90 days?**

- a. Yes
- b. No

**Q5: Why do you need or want to leave?** [Please check all of the reasons why you need to leave the place you stayed last night]

- a. Received an eviction notice
- b. Non-payment of rent or past due rent
- c. Unable to pay future rent because lost housing subsidy, job, or other income source
- d. Non-payment of utilities or utility shut-off
- e. Overcrowding
- f. Non-contribution to household costs
- g. Housekeeping concerns (failure to maintain cleanliness of the unit)
- h. Housing is or will be condemned
- i. Friend or family member being evicted or threatened with eviction
- j. Threat of abuse by partner, family member, or other
- k. Being discharged or service is being terminated

  DEPARTMENT OF  HUMAN SERVICES	Homelessness questions		
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- l. Personal conflict with others
- m. Other health or safety concerns
- n. Other lease violation(s) (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_
- o. Other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_

**Q6: When do you need to leave?** [Please choose the one response that best matches your situation]

- a. Today
- b. 2-3 days
- c. Within next 7 days
- d. Within next 2 weeks
- e. Within next 30 days
- f. Within next 60 days
- g. Within next 90 days
- h. More than 90 days

**Q7a: If you paid the rent or utilities you owe or contributed to rent or utilities, would you be able to stay in your current housing?**

- a. Yes
- b. No

**Q7b: Do you have enough money or can you borrow money to do this?**

- a. Yes
- b. No

**Q8a: Is there other safe housing where you and your family can stay when you need to leave?**

- a. Yes
- b. No

  DEPARTMENT OF  HUMAN SERVICES	Homelessness questions		
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**Q8b: How many nights can you stay in that place?** [Please choose the one response that best matches your situation]

- a. Only one night
- b. 2-3 days
- c. 3-7 days
- d. 7-30 days
- e. 30-60 days
- f. 60-90 days
- g. More than 90 days

**Q9: Do you need assistance finding some place to stay?**

- a. Yes
- b. No

**Q10: Do you need assistance to be able to stay in your current housing?**

- a. Yes
- b. No

**Q11: What type of assistance do you need?** [Please choose all of the responses that best describe your need(s)]

- a. Financial help for first month's rent, utilities, or other one-time costs
- b. Ongoing rent subsidy to afford housing
- c. Rental housing information
- d. Help finding housing that meets my/my family's needs
- e. Housing repairs
- f. Legal assistance
- g. Landlord mediation

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- h. Budgeting assistance
- i. Other (describe): \_\_\_\_\_

**Q12a: Right now, are you receiving help related to your housing needs from any other agency?**

- a. Yes
- b. No

**Q12b: Please describe the help or services you are receiving:**

*[Insert text box]*

**Q12c: What is the name of the person and agency/organization or program they work for that is helping you now?**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Agency/program: \_\_\_\_\_

**Q12d: May we contact this person (or agency/program, if staff name unknown) if needed to assist you with this crisis? For example, we might contact them to see if they have resources to assist you with finding or keeping your housing.**

- c. Yes
  - d. No
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  DEPARTMENT OF  HUMAN SERVICES	<b>Homelessness questions</b>		
	<b>TANF REDESIGN</b>	<b>VERSION 1.0</b>	<b>LAST EDITED ON: 01/24/2013</b>

<b>Q6 (When do you need to leave?) scoring matrix</b>	
Q6 response	Score
Today	0
2-3 days	3
Within next 7 days	7
Within next 2 weeks	14
Within next 30 days	30
Within next 60 days	60
Within next 90 days	90
More than 90 days	100

<b>Q8a (Is there other safe housing where you [and your family] can stay tonight (if you have to leave immediately) or when you leave the place you are currently staying?)</b>	
Q8a response	Score
Yes	= Q8b score
No	0

**Housing Stability Score = Q6 score + Q8a Score**

<b>Q8b (How many nights can you stay in that place?) scoring matrix</b>	
Q8b response	Score
One night	1
2-3 days	3
3-7 days	5
7-30 days	18
30-60 days	45
60-90 days	75
More than 90 days	100

  DEPARTMENT OF  HUMAN SERVICES	Homelessness questions		
	TANF REDESIGN	VERSION 1.0	LAST EDITED ON: 01/24/2013

Questions and Scoring

Housing Status	Conditions	Description
Literally Homeless	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Current housing is a place not meant for human habitation (street, car, park, etc.) <u>OR</u> a place or situation that is dangerous to the health or safety of any household member <u>OR</u> Housing Stability Score = 0</li> </ul>	Housing Stability Score = 0 refers to those customers who do not have a place to stay at beyond tonight
Literally Homeless Shelter/Transitional Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Current housing is an emergency shelter, including hotel or motel voucher paid for by a social service or charitable organization <u>OR</u> a transitional housing for homeless persons</li> </ul>	
Imminent Risk of Literal Homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing Stability score is between 1 and 7</li> </ul>	Refers to individuals who are currently housed, are at risk of losing their existing housing and have not identified a suitable subsequent housing option that would guarantee dwelling in aggregate in excess of 7 days.
Precariously Housed – Temporary Facility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Current housing is a permanent supportive housing for formerly homeless persons <u>OR</u> a psychiatric hospital or other psychiatric facility <u>OR</u> a substance abuse treatment facility or other detox facility <u>OR</u> a hospital (non-psychiatric) <u>OR</u> jail, prison or juvenile detention facility <u>OR</u> a half-way or three-quarter-way home for persons with criminal offenses <u>OR</u> Customer specified “Other, Don’t Know or Refused” to Q1 AND Customer claims that he or she is able to stay in current housing for the foreseeable future</li> </ul>	Refers to individuals who are currently staying in housing that are by definition of temporary and yet claim to be able to stay in these facilities for the foreseeable future
Precariously Housed – 30 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing Stability score is between 8 and 30</li> </ul>	Refers to individuals who are currently housed and are at risk of losing their existing housing. The combination of the customer’s current housing and subsequent options provide housing for a maximum of 30 days.
Precariously Housed – 90 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing Stability score is between 31 and 90</li> </ul>	Refers to individuals who are currently housed and are at risk of losing their existing housing. The combination of the customer’s current housing and subsequent options provide housing for a maximum of 90 days.
Stably Housed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Current housing is a room, apartment or house that customer rents <u>OR</u> an apartment or house that customer owns <u>OR</u> customer is living in a friend’s or a family member’s room, apartment or house <u>OR</u> a group home or other unsupervised residential care facility AND Customer claims that he or she is able to stay in current housing for the foreseeable future</li> <li>Housing Stability score exceeds 90</li> </ul>	Includes individuals who are not at risk of losing their current housing. It also includes those that may lose their current housing BUT The combination of the customer’s current housing and subsequent options provide housing in excess of 90 days.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### Continuum of Care (CoC) Contacts and Local Homeless Assistance Information

- Up-to-date information on HUD’s Coordinated Entry requirements:  
<https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/toolkit/responsibilities-and-duties/>
- Information about local and regional CoCs, including contact information for individual CoCs (note that this page also includes information for other HUD grantees; specify “CoC Program” in the dropdown search box):  
<https://www.hudexchange.info/grantees/>
- Additional information on state and local homeless assistance and related programs:  
<http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/topics/homelessness/localassist> ;  
<https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Coordinated-Entry-Policy-Brief.pdf>

### U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) Resources

- *Housing Status Assessment Guide for State TANF and Medicaid Programs* (housing assessment tool):  
<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/09/HomelessnessDataHHS/HousingStatusGuide/report.pdf>
- *Homelessness Data in Health and Human Services Mainstream Programs* (main report):  
<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/09/HomelessnessData/report.pdf>
- *TANF-ACF-IM-2013-01 (Use of TANF Funds to Serve Homeless Families and Families at Risk of Experiencing Homelessness)*:  
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/resource/tanf-acf-im-2013-01>
- *TANF-ACF-IM-2014-03 (Domestic Violence Awareness Month: Opportunities and TANF Resources For Prevention and Action)*:  
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/resource/tanf-acf-im-2014-03>
- *Information about local Runaway and Homeless Youth grantees and local Family Violence Prevention and Services grantees, including contact information*:  
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/grants/fysb-grantees>
- *Information on the National Domestic Violence Hotline - 1800-799-SAFE (7233)*  
<http://www.thehotline.org/>
- *National Resource Center on Domestic Violence’s Housing and Domestic Violence Special Collections Resource*  
[http://www.vawnet.org/summary.php?doc\\_id=2555&find\\_type=web\\_desc\\_SC](http://www.vawnet.org/summary.php?doc_id=2555&find_type=web_desc_SC)

### U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) Resources

- *Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness*:  
[http://usich.gov/opening\\_doors/](http://usich.gov/opening_doors/)
- *Family Connection: Building Systems to End Family Homelessness*:  
[http://usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset\\_library/Final\\_V3\\_Family\\_Connections.pdf](http://usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Final_V3_Family_Connections.pdf)

### Other Resources

- *Using a Universal Screener to Identify Veterans Experiencing Housing Instability*:  
[http://www.endveteranhomelessness.org/sites/default/files/research/Universal%20Screen%20to%20Identify%20Veterans%20Experiencing%20Housing%20Instability\\_2014\\_03.04.pdf](http://www.endveteranhomelessness.org/sites/default/files/research/Universal%20Screen%20to%20Identify%20Veterans%20Experiencing%20Housing%20Instability_2014_03.04.pdf)

- National Alliance to End Homelessness' *Coordinated Assessment Toolkit: Assessment and Referrals*: <http://www.endhomelessness.org/library/entry/Coordinated-Assessment-Toolkit-assessment-and-referrals>