

Expanding services via Housing First and Harm Reduction models

Background

The Housing First model's priority is providing permanent housing to those experiencing homelessness or housing instability. Housing First does not mandate participation in services or treatment to obtain housing or other services. It operates under a rights-based, client-centered philosophy that underscores recovery orientation and social and community integration.

Research indicates that when people have access to reliable housing, they are able to better focus on work pursuits and personal goals, thereby improving overall life quality.

The Housing First program in tandem with the Harm Reduction model seeks to expand no-barrier and low-barrier services across Washington state with these outcomes as goals. Harm Reduction is defined as “a set of practical strategies and ideas aimed at reducing negative consequences associated with drug use” (<http://www.harmreduction.org>).

Eligibility

Adults in Washington state who meet the following criteria are eligible for Housing First services:

- Adults 18 years or older
- Individuals with behavioral health conditions
- Individuals experiencing unstable housing conditions or homelessness
- Individuals whose household income is under 50% Area Median Income (AMI) in the county they reside

Oversight and authority

In accordance with ESSB5950 (2024), Section 215 (66), the Washington State Legislature appropriated funding to create and expand access to no-barrier

and low-barrier programs using a Housing First model designed to assist and stabilize housing supports for adults with behavioral health conditions.

Budget FY25

- \$5,623,000 general fund state
- \$3,748,000 general fund federal

Program outcomes

As of June 30, 2024, there were a total number of 1,246 enrolled.

Of the individuals enrolled:

- 722 individuals received a barrier removal financial service
- 267 individuals received a housing subsidy financial service
- 1,047 individuals received case management
- 259 individuals received mental health peer support services
- 248 individuals received substance use disorder peer support services
- 36 individuals received a referral to permanent housing

Key partners

Housing First contracts are awarded to ten non-profits in eight regions throughout Washington state.

This program's key partners include national subject matter experts and Housing First staff from throughout Washington state. The Washington Health Care Authority (HCA) has contracted consultants such as Advocates for Human Potential in addition to agency representatives who also support this endeavor.

For more information

Contact: HCADBHRInformation@hca.wa.gov

Contact: Cathi Geisler
Housing First program manager