What is Supportive Housing?

Supportive housing is decent, safe rental housing integrated in the community. It is housing that is affordable to individuals with low or no incomes. In most instances supportive housing is considered permanent meaning a person retains their housing even if their service needs change. In permanent supportive housing, the consumer has all the rights and obligations of tenancy. Evidence-based practices and national studies indicate that independent, decent, safe and affordable community-based housing linked to flexible client-driven community-based supports is desired by consumers as an essential ingredient to foster and support their own journeys towards recovery and resiliency. Please see the Supportive Housing Fact Sheet for further information.

Ideally, permanent supportive housing is affordable, meaning tenants pay no more than 30% of their income toward housing costs. Permanent supportive housing recognizes that for many consumers, access to quality, community-based supportive services can ensure a successful tenancy in the housing. As such, supportive housing is linked with voluntary and flexible supportive services to support tenancy and address other needs.

Evidence demonstrates that:

- Permanent supportive housing materially increases residents’ stability and autonomy and thus provides a higher quality of life.
- Effective supportive housing requires a close partnership, common goals, and true understanding between housing providers, service agencies and local communities.
- The community, through the Local Collaborative(s), is paramount in developing long term community support and engagement through advocacy, education and readiness.

New Mexico’s Long Term Supportive Housing Plan

In December 2007, the New Mexico Behavioral Health Collaborative completed a Long Term Supportive Housing Plan. That Plan sets forth supportive housing policy and strategic priorities for the State of New Mexico. The Plan provides information and makes recommendations for housing development, rental assistance, support services and statewide leadership. It contains statewide needs assessment data and information on various federal, state and local resources for supportive housing. The Plan also emphasizes the Collaborative’s desire to focus its initial efforts and investments on two vulnerable target populations – persons with a severe mental illness and young adults transitioning out of the foster care or juvenile justice systems -- but it also recognizes the housing needs of the broader community.
What is Housing First?

The term “Housing First” refers to supportive housing programs specifically designed to help homeless people get off the streets and into housing. It is a nationally proven approach to solving homelessness, reducing high cost medical expenditures, incarceration, residential treatment centers, public safety costs, costs for adults adjudicated as abused and/or neglected. It emphasizes direct placement into permanent housing and a service approach that does not necessarily require sobriety or treatment compliance. Therefore, consumer use of behavioral health services or programs is not a condition of ongoing occupancy. The Housing First model was developed in the U.S. in the early 1990s in response to the large growth in the homeless population in urban areas. The PBS Documentary ‘Home at Last’ provides a first hand look at the Housing First model developed by Pathways, an exemplary program in New York which has been adopted as an evidenced based practice by SAMSHA.

The Long Term Supportive Housing Plan articulates New Mexico’s Supportive Housing philosophy and the concept of Housing First fundamental beliefs: a) that housing should be separate from support services, i.e. participants are considered tenants, first, and, clients of support services, second; and; 2) consumer choice, i.e. consumers make their own choices about which rental unit they want to live in, and about when or if, they access support services.

Many successful and sustainable Housing First programs effectively weave a variety of funding supports for housing development, rental assistance and support services thereby decreasing dependence over time on State funds. Housing project development assistance with specific unit set asides for supportive housing are available via application to Section 811, Section 202, Section 232, Section 515 and 538 Rural Rental Housing Programs, HOME, Section 8 Moderate Rehabilitation SRO program, Low Income Tax Credit Finance, etc. Individual tenant based benefit programs include HOME Program, Shelter Plus Care, Supportive Housing Program, Section 8 housing choice vouchers, and Section 8 Mainstream Program. Individual recovery and assistance services could be supported through seeking client eligibility through Medicaid, SSI, HOPWA, and Supportive Housing Program.

Research shows that a one-size-fits-all approach to Housing First for persons with mental illness who are involved in the criminal justice system involved and/or who have substance abuse disorders will not work. What works in housing for most persons with mental illness may be different from what works for those who are justice involved — particularly those individuals released from jail and prison to the community and placed under correctional supervision.
New Mexico is currently funding two pilot programs, each focused on the two priority populations designated by the Behavioral Health Collaborative, adults with severe mental illness and youth making a transition from the juvenile justice system or aging out of foster care.

The **CYFD Housing Fist Youth Program** began in November, 2007. The purpose of this 20 voucher program, which is based in Albuquerque, is to provide housing for youth aging out of foster care or from the juvenile justice system. The program provides each consumer with an apartment of their own coupled with client and community centered services that assist the youth to make a successful reintegration into society. To learn more about the program, this [CYFD Youth Permanent Supportive Housing Video](#), is provided.

**Linkages** is a three site Housing First pilot program for adults with severe mental illness, in Santa Fe, Albuquerque and Silver City/Deming area which began in January 2008 and provides 10 rental vouchers in each of the three sites for a total of 30 vouchers statewide. The target population is homeless, very low income persons who have been diagnosed with severe mental illness and/or co-occurring substance abuse issues. Each site has a housing administrator that oversees the housing vouchers and one or more support services agencies that provide supportive services to the consumers.
Basic Community Resources Needed for Supportive Housing in Your Community

Below is a description of the basic resources a local community will want to assure are available to create supportive housing units in their community.

**Support Services Partners:** Non-profit support services agencies that are experienced in comprehensive client assessment; developing individualized service plans with consumers consistent with CCSS (Comprehensive Community Support Services). However all service providers are encouraged to participate. These support services partners are dedicated to systematic and regular outcome measuring, and, can be assessed favorably by the GOI (General Organizational Index).

**Rental Assistance:** The viability of supportive housing program will require resources for long term, deeply affordable rental assistance for its program participants [i.e. rents offered for supportive housing units should be at or below 30% of the participants income]. This is necessary whether the housing is: a) scattered site (in a variety of sites/locations) and rental subsidies are made available to multiple landlords or property managers, or, b) in the case of new housing project construction to help with guarantying mortgage payments; and/or, to provide ongoing funding support for the lessee to continue to provide deeply affordable housing assistance.

This may be accomplished via:
- PBRA (project based rental assistance) that provides a supply of vouchers for project based programs;
- Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers that must be applied for when the local housing authorities is taking applications;
- Tenant Based Rental Assistance– (TBRA) as temporary rental bridge vouchers. Often it is possible to develop a relationship with a Housing Authority to begin with a "bridge" program and to refer people to a Housing Authority for a Section 8 Housing Voucher for people to go on the Housing Authority’s waiting list or to get a preference. (Please contact the Collaborative’s Supportive Housing Coordinator for details).

As documented in the Plan, many communities in New Mexico simply don’t have available housing stock that is of high quality and affordable to the priority target populations. If there are no available affordable housing units in your area, it may be necessary to physically create or build affordable housing units. The Collaborative encourages the Local Partnership to invite both non profit and for profit developers to participate in its discussions. The intent being that potential development partners could create new and needed housing, or, include supportive housing units in developments being planned.