

PART #1: Assessment of Need + Housing Strategy

First Step: Assess Need & Barriers

Everyone needs decent, stable housing in order to thrive. Work with your client to find a path to a housing goal that meets their needs. Depending on where your client's priorities are, this may mean more than one stop along the way. Discuss all housing options with them but help them realistically assess their immediate needs, as well as long-term goals.

You will need to understand their **need**, their **history**, and their **barriers** to housing. In addition to helping you understand need and barriers, this information will help you know what programs they may or may not be eligible for and if they might have any priority for housing.

A client may be reluctant to discuss these things in detail with you. However, honesty and disclosure will be important down the line. To access any kind of subsidized housing, you and your client will need to reveal and verify some of the information below to the housing authority or provider in control of the housing resource. Credit, criminal history and other checks can reveal a lot of information; it is best to be up front about the issues you will need to help your client confront. It won't work for either of you to be dishonest or hide required information.

In order to make this assessment, discuss these items with the client:

- ◆ **Current Situation:** What is their current living situation? How long have they been there? How long can they stay there? Is it safe? Are their housemates aware of their HIV status? Are they paying rent where they are living? Are they facing eviction? Are they homeless or have they been recently?
- ◆ **Housing History:** Have they ever been evicted in a Massachusetts court? Have they ever received any kind of subsidized assistance in the past? If so, were they kicked off the program? When? Who was providing the assistance? What kind of assistance was it (for example, state public housing, Section 8, Shelter Plus Care)? Do they have any documentation about this? Beyond lack of income, what has made it difficult for them to maintain stable housing in the past? Have they ever applied for subsidized housing in the past? If so, when and where? When did they last hear about their application?
- ◆ **Substance Use:** Are they currently using any illegal substances? Do they hope to reduce use or not? Are they currently clean or sober? If so, for how long? What is their drug of choice? Are they trying to stop using? Have they lived in recovery programs in the past? How did that go? What have been their successes and challenges about substance use in the past? Do they need help or support with recovery now?
- ◆ **Mental Health:** Do they feel safe? Do they have a mental health diagnosis? When were they diagnosed? Are they seeing a physician regarding their illness? Are they taking any prescribed medication? Self-medicating? Are they a DMH client? Has their mental health ever made it difficult for them to maintain a living situation? Did it ever lead to an eviction from a unit or termination from subsidized housing? Do they need any accommodation where they are living now, in order for it to work?

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- ◆ **Criminal History:** Have the client pull a Personal CORI report. Do they have any default or open cases? Distribution of illegal substances? Sex offence? Manufacturing of methamphetamines? Any criminal history connected to eviction/termination from subsidized housing? How old are cases?
- ◆ **Other:** What is their citizenship/immigration status? Does everyone in household have the same status? Are they a veteran? Are they a recent victim of domestic violence? Were they displaced because of domestic violence? Do they need any assistance with Activities of Daily Living? Do they have any special needs that will need to be accommodated where they live? Are they disabled? Do they need to be close to medical services, support or family? Basics: household income + sources, info about household members.

Brainstorm: Questions to ask for housing search

Review: List of Documents for Housing Search handout

Step Two: Develop a Housing Strategy

Your questions to the client will help you both decide:

- ◆ If they have short-term needs that should be addressed in temporary, transitional and/or supported housing;
- ◆ What preferences or priorities for state or federal housing they are eligible for;
- ◆ What resources they will not be eligible for; and
- ◆ What barriers your client will have to overcome in order to obtain stable housing.

Some current needs will outweigh your client's desire to have the most independent and long-term housing option possible. Help them to address and dispel their hesitations about transitional housing. Overcoming some barriers to permanent housing may require first taking temporary steps.

Once you have a plan and goals, start gathering required documents.

Follow-up on past applications to housing.

Track all contacts with and applications to programs and housing authorities.

Pay attention to deadlines and application requirements.

Follow all application instructions as closely as possible.

Save copies of all applications, one for you and one for the client.