



North Alabama Coalition for the Homeless, Inc.

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This Standards of Care Document was drafted to serve as a guide of reference for member agencies of the North Alabama Coalition for the Homeless, Inc (NACH). All NACH member agencies are encouraged to adopt these standards in an effort to improve the overall quality and uniformity of service delivery continuum wide.

This Standard of care document was approved by the NACH Board of Directors on April 14, 2011.

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Olly Orton, NACH Board President

NACH Board of Directors

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Standards of Care
Prepared by the NACH Standards of Care Committee

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NACH PROVIDER PROVISIONS

1. Member Agency Standing

All NACH member agencies, and organizations funded via the HUD Continuum of Care process, contracted to provide homeless services, are required to be certified according to their respective state agency *or* be a recognized 501(c)(3) organization.

2. Best Practices

All NACH member agencies are encouraged to develop and implement best practices as defined by HUD and other recognized entities. The intent of this is to improve the effectiveness of service delivery to homeless person and ultimately assist them in attaining self-sufficiency to the greatest amount possible.

3. Intake

Written intake eligibility criteria shall be clear, specific, nondiscriminatory and readily available to both clients and referring entities.

4. Client Assessment/ Plan of Action

All NACH member agencies that provide transitional or permanent housing shall conduct an assessment of a client's current social, health (to include mental health and substance abuse/use) employment, and education conditions in order to establish a plan of action for each client. Emergency shelter providers shall not be required to establish an individual plan of action for clients but shall make on-going efforts at linking clients to transitional and permanent housing providers.

This plan should describe the client's needs for supportive services, establish a service/referral plan and outline personal goals toward attaining residential, financial and personal stability and self-sufficiency. Clients must participate in both the development and implementation of the Plan of Action.

Unrealistic and inappropriate goals should be avoided to prevent discouragement and loss of interest by clients. The choices made by the client with the assistance of their case manager should be meaningful, realistic, and within the client's range of skills, abilities, and present circumstances. The Plan of Action should be adjusted on an ongoing basis to reflect changes in each client's standing.

The Plan of Action should be completed within three (3) business days after a client is admitted to transitional or permanent supportive housing.

5. Client Budgeting and Financial Literacy

All homeless persons served by NACH member agencies, who are employed or receiving financial benefits, should be encouraged to establish a savings plan. All NACH member agencies are encouraged to provide or refer for training and education to clients as it relates to monetary savings, financial accountability, and budgeting.

NACH member agencies that provide transitional or permanent supportive housing shall require clients, who are employed or receiving benefits, to contribute towards the cost of their housing and services and/or to a client savings account. These arrangements shall be clearly defined to the client and in compliance with established policies and procedures that should be compliant with federal limits on the percentage of income (not exceeding 30%) that can be paid for housing.

6. Cultural Sensitivity / Discrimination

All NACH member agencies should demonstrate sensitivity to client's primary language and cultural background to the greatest extent possible. NACH/ HUD funded agencies will work to the greatest extent possible to arrange for ongoing translation services as required for clients.

No NACH member agency shall discriminate on the basis of race, color, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion, or national origin in the provision of housing and services.

7. Community Reintegration

All NACH member agencies should facilitate and promote each client's sense of belonging within and to a community. As part of the recovery goals of homeless clients, all NACH member agencies should include a specific community re-integration components or referrals for such programs. This may include, but is not limited to: mentoring programs, recovery groups (such as AA, NA, etc.), voluntary attendance at community-based worship services, volunteer activities in the community, field trips, guest lectures, presentations by elected officials and other prominent and active members of the local community.

To the greatest extent possible, shelters and residential facilities should develop Neighborhood Advisory Boards where issues of neighborhood impact can be discussed in an open forum.

8. Cooperation / Continuum of Care

All NACH member agencies should work cooperatively and extend professional courtesy to other NACH and non-NACH homeless/ housing providers to facilitate service provision to homeless persons.

9. After Care

All NACH housing program providers are encouraged to develop and implement an aftercare plan. This may be done by the agency's own staff or in collaboration with other agencies/community partners. Each facility should attempt to track and provide follow-up supportive services to its program graduates for no less than ninety (90) days after discharge. In some cases, this may be impossible when a client leaves a facility without a proper discharge interview/plan.

When a Client moves from any facility to market-rate housing or is reunited with family or friends providing domicile in the community, agency case workers should make a concerted effort to maintain contact for at least ninety (90) days after discharge. Supportive services should continue during this time to help prevent a recurring episode of homelessness.

10. Confidentiality and Sharing of Information

All NACH member agencies are encouraged to share client data and demographics electronically using the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). All NACH member agencies shall comply with all applicable federal, state and local laws and regulations governing the confidentiality of health care information and domestic violence information. Member agencies are encouraged to protect a clients privacy to the greatest extent possible.

Empowerment of Homeless Persons

All NACH member agencies that provide transitional or permanent housing are encouraged to have in place an advisory council made up of current residents. Senior agency staff are also encouraged to meet with the council on a regular basis to solicit input and discuss rules and other aspects of agency operations. Every NACH agency which primarily serves homeless persons, should have homeless or formerly homeless person included in the composition of its local governing board.

11. Mainstream Resources

NACH member agencies that provide housing services are encouraged to assist clients in the obtainment of mainstream programs such as: Medicaid, SSI, All-Kids Insurance, Food Stamps, Workforce Investment Act, Veteran's Benefits, etc.

NACH FACILITIES OPERATIONS

1. Environment

All NACH member agencies that provide residential facilities must adhere to local zoning and fire code regulations governing maximum occupancy for all dwellings. They also shall comply with local and state ordinances, laws or regulations governing the prevention and/or control of communicable air-borne diseases within residential facilities.

Transitional and permanent supportive housing facilities shall:

- Be safe, clean, and sanitary.
- Residents shall be given the opportunity to have important papers, documents and valuables stored in a safe location.
- Beds, pillows, and bed coverings (e.g., sheets and blankets) shall be safe, clean and sanitary to the greatest extent possible (e.g., free of infestation).

2. Nutrition

Clients who are employed should be offered an opportunity for a cooked or bag lunch until first payroll.

All meals served by emergency, transitional and permanent supportive housing facilities should be nutritionally sound and balanced in compliance with USDA and other standards and/or regulations adopted and/or issued by the local public authority responsible for the regulation of meals at residential facilities as they pertain to both adults and children. Meal preparation facilities and staff must comply with local health department requirements.

NACH recognizes that nonresidential soup kitchens and other outreach programs may rely on donated food and, therefore, are encouraged to adopt the standards outlined in this section but are not required to do. {so unless so stated in a funding contract. All residential facilities must make a reasonable effort to meet medically appropriate dietary needs of clients. }

3. Licensing

All NACH member agencies shall comply with all local and state ordinances, zoning regulations (in accordance with Fair Housing rules), laws or regulations governing residential facilities and/or housing conditions and secure necessary licensing.

4. NACH Housing Facility Rules

All NACH agency housing facilities should establish and enforce house rules governing the use of alcohol, illegal use of controlled substance, fighting, violence, and/or inappropriate behavior for the purpose of protecting the health and safety of the clients and staff.

Facility rules should be posted in a conspicuous place and reviewed and signed by clients at intake. Homeless individuals and families served in continuum facilities shall be accorded dignity and respect at all times.

5. Grievance Procedures

A grievance procedure providing for fair notice and hearing shall be made known and available to clients who seek redress. Facility staff must sign acknowledgment of the same grievance policies and procedures.

NACH agencies should implement a system of Progressive Counseling to provide a variety of consequences for rule violations and failure-to-follow-plan short of and leading up to termination of stay.

6. Staff

NACH member agency facility administrators shall ensure that their staff have the appropriate qualifications, licensing, training, and supervision necessary and appropriate to their position.

TYPES OF HOUSING FACILITIES

1. Emergency Housing Facilities

To reduce the risk of harm to other clients and staff, as resources permit, emergency shelter facilities will make reasonable efforts to arrange for health screenings for communicable, air-borne diseases (i.e., tuberculosis).

2. Transitional Facilities

As distinguished from the emergency phase that focuses more on meeting basic human needs, the transitional facilities should focus on preparing Clients for self-sufficiency and moving towards permanent housing. Common service plans should include goals that address overcoming barriers to self-sufficiency and maintenance of permanent housing. The client is expected to assume an increasing degree of autonomy and personal responsibility (e.g., fewer rules and restrictions, greater financial contributions to self-support where able) during their stay in transitional housing.

Clients enrolled in Transitional Housing should attain a minimal level of progress towards self-sufficiency such as:

- Full-time employment or enrollment in formal job training if able mentally and physically
- Disability application if client is claiming to be disabled

3. Permanent Affordable and Supportive Housing Phase

Permanent Affordable and Supported Housing for homeless persons is the primary outcome for all NACH member agencies that provide housing services.

The purpose of permanent, affordable and supportive housing is twofold:

(1) to provide access to supportive housing for those homeless individuals and families with special needs (i.e., permanent disabilities) or
 (2) to assist those homeless individuals and families capable of maintaining independent living with minimal initial support to secure housing in the affordable housing market. Permanent, affordable and supported housing may be accessed by homeless individuals and families from any phase of the Continuum of Care, provided that the Client meets eligibility criteria of the facility. Eligibility should include a demonstrated ability of the Client to maintain self-sufficiency during the emergency and/or transitional phases of their placement.

Clients should be provided with housing appropriate to their needs (e.g., assisted living, single room occupancy, tenant based rental assistance,) with supportive services necessary to maintain residential and personal stability (e.g., after care case management, mental health treatment, medical care, recovery groups, domestic violence counseling, etc.).

Providers assisting clients in locating and securing affordable market rate housing should insure that housing meets comparable market rent guidelines and housing quality standards established by local, state and/or federal ordinance, law and regulation as applicable.

In the event that a client is at risk of losing permanent, affordable and supportive housing and is in need of a placement more appropriate for their needs, every effort shall be made to provide additional services within the NACH Continuum of Care to prevent a return to homelessness.

Landlord/Tenant based lease agreements, and local and state ordinances, laws or regulations governing tenancy thereof, shall govern breaches.