

RAPID RE-HOUSING

What is Rapid Re-Housing?

Rapid re-housing is an intervention, informed by a Housing First approach that is a critical part of a community's effective homeless crisis response system. Rapid re-housing rapidly connects families and individuals experiencing homelessness to permanent housing through a tailored package of assistance that may include the use of time-limited financial assistance and targeted supportive services. Rapid re-housing programs help families and individuals living on the streets or in emergency shelters solve the practical and immediate challenges to obtaining permanent housing while reducing the amount of time they experience homelessness, avoiding a near-term return to homelessness, and linking to community resources that enable them to achieve housing stability in the long-term. Rapid re-housing is an important component of a community's response to homelessness. A fundamental goal of rapid re-housing is to reduce the amount of time a person is homeless.

Rapid re-housing models were implemented across the country through the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP), included as part of the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) of 2009. Through this national implementation experience, rapid re-housing programs were found to be a highly successful and cost-effective way to end homelessness for a wide range of households experiencing homelessness. The intervention model is premised on the following ideas:

- Although they may have many additional challenges and service needs, the majority of families and individuals experiencing homelessness become homeless due to a financial crisis or other crisis that leads to the loss of housing. Addressing homelessness for these households primarily entails addressing their housing barriers to help them return to permanent housing.
- Most families experiencing homelessness are not significantly different in characteristics from other poor families. Most have had recent experience living in permanent housing, and can return and remain housed without long-term supportive services. This intervention focuses on identifying and building upon the strengths of families to maintain their own housing.
- Prolonged exposure to homelessness has a significant negative effect on adults and children—the longer a household experiences homelessness, the poorer the outcomes will likely be in a variety of areas. Therefore, the length of time a household experiences homelessness should be minimized by helping them return to permanent housing as quickly as possible upon becoming homeless. Households should be assisted to exit homelessness and obtain permanent housing as soon as possible rather than remain homeless while awaiting a vacancy in another program.

Although access to affordable housing is an effective way to ensure long-term housing stability among households experiencing homelessness, affordable housing resources currently fall far short of the need. Short-term assistance - including financial assistance, housing search assistance, and targeted services - has shown tremendous promise in resolving the immediate crisis of homelessness for many families and preventing their future returns to homelessness.

- Resources are limited and should be used most efficiently to ensure that assistance can be provided to the greatest number of people experiencing homelessness. An operating principle is that households should receive “just enough” assistance to successfully exit homelessness and avoid returning to the streets, other places not meant for human habitation, and emergency

shelters. Longer-term and more costly programs like permanent supportive housing should be reserved for those individuals and families who need this level of assistance to exit homelessness and remain housed.

Target Populations

Rapid re-housing is an effective intervention for many different types of households experiencing homelessness, including those with no income, with disabilities, and with poor rental history. The majority of households experiencing homelessness are good candidates for rapid re-housing. The only exceptions are households that can exit homelessness with little or no assistance, those who experience chronic homelessness and who need permanent supportive housing, and households who are seeking a therapeutic residential environment, including those recovering from addiction.

Rapid Re-Housing's Effectiveness

Research suggests that rapid re-housing is more cost-effective than transitional housing. The long-term impacts of rapid re-housing are still being studied, but initial research indicates that people assisted by rapid re-housing experience higher rates of permanent housing placement and similar or lower rates of return to homelessness after the assistance ends compared to those assisted by transitional housing or who only receive emergency shelter. In and of itself, rapid re-housing is not designed to comprehensively address all of a recipient's service needs or their poverty. Instead, rapid re-housing solves the immediate crisis of homelessness, while connecting families or individuals with appropriate community resources to address other service needs.

Core Program Components and Practice Considerations

Rapid re-housing interventions assist households experiencing homelessness by helping them move directly into permanent housing in the community using whichever combination of financial assistance and housing-focused services are needed and desired by the household. Rapid re-housing has core programmatic components and practice considerations which are described below. While a rapid re-housing program must have all three core components available, it is not required that a single entity provide all three services nor that a household utilize them all.

Core Program Components

A Tailored Package of Assistance – To help households obtain permanent housing as quickly as possible, rapid re-housing can draw from a variety of types of assistance and tailor this to households based on their specific strengths and barriers. Some households may only need limited financial assistance to cover rent and move-in costs, some may only need housing search assistance, while others may need a combination of assistance or assistance for a longer duration. These different types financial and non-financial assistance should be thought of as tools in a rapid re-housing program's "toolkit" that can be flexibly deployed to achieve individual client goals:

- ***Housing Identification***: The primary focus of services in rapid re-housing is to provide help with finding housing and to troubleshoot barriers that prevent access to that housing. Housing identification services encompass helping households find appropriate rental housing in the community, contacting and recruiting landlords to provide housing opportunities for individuals and families experiencing homelessness, addressing potential

barriers to landlord participation such as concern about short-term nature of rental assistance and tenant qualifications, assisting households to complete applications and prepare for interviews with landlords, helping households to determine if a housing option meets their needs and preferences, and help with moving. It could also include identifying co-housing with a friend or family member if that is the most appropriate option for permanent housing.

- **Rent and Move-In Assistance**—The primary barrier to permanent housing for many families experiencing homelessness is their limited finances. To address this barrier, rapid re-housing programs offer financial assistance to cover move-in costs, deposits, and the rental and/or utility assistance (typically for six months or less) necessary to allow individuals and families to move immediately out of homelessness and stabilize in permanent housing. In some instances, households may need and qualify for longer term rental assistance, such as through a Housing Choice Voucher (i.e., “Section 8”), to permanently escape homelessness and achieve housing stability. In this case the time-limited financial assistance may serve as a bridge until the voucher is secured.
- **Rapid Re-Housing Case Management and Services** - At a minimum, a rapid re-housing program must include case management, but it may also include other services, such as tenancy supports. Case management and services may be provided to households to help overcome and troubleshoot barriers to (re)acquiring and maintaining permanent housing. Case management services in rapid re-housing programs can help individuals and families select among various permanent housing options based on their unique needs, preferences, and financial resources, address issues that may impede access to housing (such as credit history, arrears, and legal issues), negotiate manageable and appropriate lease agreements with landlords, and make appropriate and time-limited services and supports available to families and individuals—and to the landlords who are partnering with the rapid re-housing program. Case management services can also monitor participants’ housing stability after securing housing and during program participation, ideally through home visits and communication with the landlord, and be available to resolve housing-related crises should they occur.

Case management will also, as appropriate, assist households with connecting to resources that help them improve their safety and well-being and achieve their long-term goals. This includes providing or ensuring that households have access to resources related to income and health care benefits, employment and community-based services (if needed/appropriate) so that they can sustain rent payments independently when rental assistance ends. **Case management services should be client-directed, respectful of individuals’ right to self-determination, and voluntary.** Unless basic, program-related case management is required by statute or regulation, participation in non-financial services should not be required to obtain or maintain rapid re-housing assistance. Since rapid re-housing is a short-term, crisis response program, case managers typically do not attempt to directly address all of the service needs they may identify. When households are willing and able, case managers help them connect to community-based services that already exist. Rapid re-housing providers should have knowledge of where to find and how to access these community-based services. Moreover, rather than simply providing referrals to community-based services *on behalf of* a household, rapid re-housing providers can enlist

household members to participate in this process, to help households gain the knowledge and skills necessary to find and access community-based services in the future on their own.

Practice Considerations

- **Primary focus on helping households obtain permanent housing as quickly as possible** – Consistent with a Housing First approach, rapid re-housing programs focus on the goal of helping households obtain permanent housing as quickly as possible and without first requiring household members to meet behavioral prerequisites like sobriety and treatment adherence. From the moment households experiencing homelessness are encountered, rapid re-housing programs engage them around where and how to obtain permanent housing and flexibly provide “just enough” financial assistance to help the household become stable. Possible permanent housing may be in private market apartments, affordable or subsidized housing, or living with friends or family members.
- **Accessible to households experiencing homelessness** – Rapid re-housing must be highly accessible to households experiencing homelessness. Programs should have a means of quickly reaching households that become homeless in a wide variety of settings where they are likely to seek help, including emergency shelters, food pantries, and social services programs. Communities that have coordinated entry and assessment systems and information lines (e.g., 2-1-1) in place should integrate rapid re-housing screening and triage into these systems to identify households in need of rapid re-housing assistance and engage them in the re-housing process as soon as possible.
- **Assistance is guided by assessment of housing barriers, strengths, and preferences** – All assistance provided in rapid re-housing should be guided by a housing plan, which is developed based on an assessment of *housing* barriers and in partnership with households. Upon first contact, an initial assessment is conducted to identify households housing needs and preferences, strengths, and barriers to housing, and to identify possible alternatives and resources. This assessment should be primarily focused on assessing housing needs rather than service needs, and can be used to determine if rapid re-housing alone is the most appropriate intervention or if longer-term assistance is needed and desired. For instance, if households are found to have extraordinary financial challenges and/or longer-term, housing-related needs for assistance, the program should connect them to longer-term rental assistance or permanent supportive housing. The initial assessment also provides the basis for the initial level of financial assistance and/or supportive services to be provided by the rapid re-housing intervention. Regular reassessments, provided through follow-up, should be built into the housing plan to determine if the level of assistance should be increased, decreased or discontinued once households enter permanent housing.
- **Flexibility and adaptability of assistance** – Periodically reassessing the preferences, needs, and abilities of households assisted by rapid re-housing is critical, as this allows for the determination of whether the levels of both financial assistance and services need to be either increased or decreased. One method of implementing a rapid re-housing program is using a ‘progressive engagement’ approach, wherein households experiencing homelessness are given a basic level of financial and services supports. Ongoing monitoring and periodic reassessment determines if and when the basic level of assistance should be changed or increased. This allows rapid re-housing programs to be flexible and adapt to changing circumstances.

Important Questions to Consider when Implementing Rapid Re-Housing

Communities implementing new rapid-re-housing programs as part of their homelessness system should consider the following questions:

- ***What resources can we draw on to fund rapid re-housing interventions?*** A number of Federal, state, local, and philanthropic sources can be used to support and finance rapid re-housing programs. The costs of rapid re-housing include the direct financial assistance as well costs related to housing search and case management services, including personnel. Among the Federal funding sources that can finance rapid re-housing include HUD's [Continuum of Care](#) and [Emergency Solutions Grants \(ESG\) Programs](#), HHS's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families ([TANF](#)), [Title IV E Foster Care](#) and Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), and [the VA's Supportive Services for Veteran Families \(SSVF\) program](#).
- ***What is the focus of the services/case management component and how might it be different than in other programs?*** The focus of services in rapid re-housing is primarily oriented toward helping families resolve their **immediate crises**, find and secure housing, and connect to services if/when appropriate. Case managers should monitor and provide ancillary services in the short run to promote obtaining and maintaining housing. This may be a contrast to many programs in which the focus is providing comprehensive support to each household and remaining engaged for a longer period of time. This crisis-related, lighter-touch (typically six months or less) approach allows financial and staff resources to be directed to as many individuals/households experiencing a housing crisis as possible. At the same time, depending upon funder flexibility, programs should be designed to allow households to return for more assistance if they need it at a later time.
- ***How will we ensure that there is a clear and efficient process for ensuring access to rapid-re-housing for those households who need it?*** Providers can identify and map the steps in the "program flow" in their community, beginning at the point at which households are identified as experiencing homelessness until they have secured permanent housing. The basic steps in this process include direct outreach (or coordination with other outreach providers), screening for rapid re-housing assistance, program intake, housing barrier assessment, provision of assistance, housing search and placement, links to other supports, reassessment and adjustment, and case closure. If the local program flow is not efficient based on the analysis, they should consider changes that would improve efficiency. It is important to also identify how the rapid re-housing program can refer and link to other types of housing assistance like rental assistance programs and permanent supportive housing for households who need and desire such assistance.
- ***How can providers measure the efficiency of a rapid re-housing program?*** The primary measure of the efficiency of a rapid re-housing program is the amount of time it takes to re-house households. Efficient programs typically re-house households in a couple weeks and in most cases in less than 30 days. If it is taking longer, it is possible that the program's policies and procedures need to be streamlined. For example, if it takes several weeks to begin showing apartments to eligible households because of the documentation requirements of the program, the provider should identify ways to reduce or streamline those documentation requirements.

- **How can providers ensure adequate access to housing and community-based services for rapid re-housing participants?** Rapid re-housing providers can increase the pool of possible housing and supportive service options for their clients by proactively building relationships, particularly with landlords and community-based housing and service providers. Rapid re-housing providers can and should educate landlords about the types of financial assistance they offer, as well as the role that their services can play in mitigating the risk to landlords of providing housing to households with no or poor housing and credit histories. By being responsive to landlord concerns, rapid re-housing can create a positive experience and perception among them about providing housing to formerly homeless households. Such partnerships help ensure that landlords do not screen out rental applications from persons with extremely low or no income, poverty-related housing and credit histories, etc. Landlords become dedicated, long-term partners when programs provide support to landlords by intervening to resolve concerns about lease, late payments, conflict with tenants, when they provide rental assistance payments promptly, and when they help landlords quickly fill vacant units.

Similarly, rapid re-housing providers can conduct outreach and education to providers of other services households generally need and want (such as subsidized daycare, employment, etc.) by attending community events, leaving brochures at service settings, and meeting with leadership of services organizations. In some instances, memoranda of agreement can be executed between rapid re-housing programs and other services, to outline mutual expectations and responsibilities around how referrals can be provided from rapid re-housing programs to community-based services and vice versa.

Useful Resources on Rapid Re-Housing

U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness

[Solutions Database](#) – This database contains short profiles of important practices and programs, including tips for replicating and information about results, as well as links to help you find more information or resources you can use.

National Alliance to End Homelessness

- ✓ [Rapid Re-Housing – Creating Programs that Work](#) – A guide to assist communities in rapid re-housing implementation.
- ✓ [Rapid Re-Housing Training](#) – Five short modules developed by the Center for Capacity Building that break down the basic elements of the intervention.
- ✓ [Rapid Re-Housing: A History and Core Components](#) – A brief paper describing background, research, and three core components of rapid re-housing.

VA

- ✓ [SSVF Program: Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Best Practice Standards](#) – Practice standards developed by Abt Associates and the Technical Assistance Collaboration under contract with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) that reflect a growing consensus about what works in homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing programs.
- ✓ [SSVF Rapid Re-Housing Webinar](#) – This power point provides an overview of SSVF, as well as components of high-performing rapid re-housing programs.

Research

The following research articles and related publications provide supporting evidence for why communities should increase the availability of Rapid Re-housing assistance and the efficacy of the Rapid Re-housing model.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (2012). [Research on Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing.](#)

This document provides an annotated list of select research on homelessness prevention and Rapid Re-housing. It includes research from the State of Michigan; Hennepin County, MN; and New York, NY.

Culhane, D. P. & Mettraux, S. (2008). [Rearranging the Deck Chairs or Reallocating the Lifeboats? Homelessness Assistance and Its Alternatives.](#) *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 74(1): 111-121.

This article uses research on homelessness to devise alternative forms of emergency assistance that could reduce the prevalence and/or duration of episodes of homelessness and much of the need for emergency shelter.

National Alliance to End Homelessness. [Rapid Re-Housing Successes.](#)

This interactive mapping tool highlights areas in which communities were able to successfully place families in permanent housing at encouraging levels. The map describes the number of families affected, the average cost of assistance, and the positive results stemming from that assistance.

Rodriguez, J. (2013). [Homelessness Recurrence in Georgia: Descriptive Statistics, Risk Factors, and Contextualized Outcome Measurement.](#)

This report analyzes risk factors for a later recurrence of homelessness among persons served over a year by programs reporting data into Georgia's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). The study found that of 21 variables the top risk factors of returning to homelessness were an absence of Rapid Re-housing enrollment and having a history of homelessness in HMIS.