

Diversion

Diversion strategies and practices assist people to resolve their housing crisis by accessing alternatives to **entering** emergency shelter or unsheltered homelessness. It is a client-driven approach, the intent is to promote positive alternatives to entering shelter or unsheltered homelessness, not to erect barriers to crisis housing programs.

Effective implementation of diversion requires practitioners to:

- Understand what precipitated individuals' or families' request for homelessness assistance.
- Explore with individuals and families immediate, short- or long-term housing options, including within their own family or social network, that may offer them safe alternatives to entering shelter or unsheltered homelessness.
- Pursue the safe, alternative housing options identified by individuals and families through providing help to:
 - Connect or reconnect them with extended family, friends, and community-based supports;
 - Resolve disputes (e.g. with family, friends or landlords);
 - Access financial assistance (e.g. for rent, rent arrears, utilities, security deposits or transportation) or in-kind support (e.g. child care, grocery cards); and/or
 - Link to community-based and mainstream services (e.g. housing search assistance, legal services, employment services, and counseling).

Effective systems implementation of diversion requires:

- Staff trained in problem-solving and diversion strategies who are easily accessible to people experiencing a housing crisis, particularly at shelter-entry points, call centers, and coordinated entry access points.
- Collaborative partnerships with agencies serving at-risk populations that enable staff to provide a warm hand-off to mainstream and community-based service providers who can respond to the needs of diverted individuals and families.
- Building capacity to provide flexible financial assistance to facilitate individuals' and families' ability to connect (or reconnect) to housing and avoid sheltered or unsheltered homelessness.
- Ability to quickly connect individuals and families to available safe temporary accommodations (such as emergency shelter) when an alternative safe housing placement cannot be identified or is not immediately attainable.
- Connecting individuals and families who could not be diverted to housing-focused services (e.g. rapid exit services provided by outreach or shelter staff) so work begun during the diversion intervention to help them identify and access alternative housing will continue.
- Regular use of data to refine interventions and evaluate the impact of diversion assistance, including outcomes of diverted individuals and families and the impact of diversion on system performance.

Rapid Exit

Rapid Exit strategies and practices are designed to help people experiencing homelessness resolve their housing crisis quickly by supporting their own efforts to reconnect with family or friends or gain new independent housing to escape homelessness.

Effective implementation of rapid exit strategies requires practitioners to:

- Explore with individuals and families experiencing sheltered or unsheltered homelessness their own plan to exit homelessness.
- Help individuals and families identify additional immediate, short- and long-term housing options, including within their own family or social network, that can provide safe alternatives to remaining homeless through engaging them in a problem-solving conversation.
- Support individuals' and families' pursuit of immediate short- and long-term housing that would allow them to quickly and safely exit homelessness through providing services to help them:
 - Connect or reconnect with extended family, friends, roommates, or landlords and mediate disputes as needed;
 - Identify available rental housing, including roommate and other shared housing options;
 - Access financial assistance (e.g. for rent, rent arrears, utilities, security deposits or transportation) or in-kind support (e.g. child care, grocery cards); and/or
 - Link them to community-based and mainstream services (e.g. housing search assistance, legal services, employment services, counseling).

Effective system implementation of rapid exit strategies requires:

- A broad consensus that safely re-housing individuals and families experiencing homelessness is a primary duty of the homeless service system and staff serving in homeless service programs.
- Outreach and shelter staff trained and deployed in delivering housing-focused services, including housing search, landlord mediation, and addressing barriers to housing.
- Housing-focused help available to all people experiencing homelessness. Outreach workers, shelter staff, and other homeless services staff assist individuals and families not yet assigned to a housing intervention (e.g. rapid re-housing, targeted affordable housing, or permanent supportive housing) with help to reconnect to housing.
- Seamless transitions between staff providing diversion assistance and those providing rapid exit services so that work begun during diversion interventions continue to be built upon to help people rapidly reconnect to housing.
- Collaborative partnerships exist between homeless service systems and community-based and mainstream agencies serving at-risk populations that enable outreach and shelter staff to link individuals and families with services they require (e.g. income and employment support, legal assistance and advocacy, and child care).
- Building capacity to provide flexible financial assistance to help people quickly reconnect to housing.
- Regular use of data to refine housing focused interventions and evaluate their impact on assisted individuals and families as well as the impact on system performance.