

A decorative border of colorful house icons surrounds the central text. The icons are arranged in a grid and include colors such as red, grey, blue, purple, green, and dark blue. The text is centered within this border.

Texas Balance of State
Continuum of Care

Housing First Standards & Definitions

Document History

Date	Action
April 29, 2024	Housing First Standards & Definitions document created

Texas Balance of State Continuum of Care Housing First Standards & Definitions¹

Introduction and Purpose

Housing First is an approach to quickly and successfully connect individuals and families experiencing homelessness to permanent housing without preconditions and barriers to entry, such as sobriety, treatment, or service participation requirements. Supportive services are also offered to promote housing stability and prevent returns to homelessness rather than assessing predetermined treatment goals prior to permanent housing entry.

The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Texas Balance of State Continuum of Care (TX BoS CoC) prioritize the Housing First approach as the guiding method for addressing and ending homelessness and expect CoC Program-funded projects with the responsibility to integrate Housing First principles and standards within their policies and procedures. Texas Homeless Network (THN), as the Collaborative Applicant for the TX BoS CoC, is tasked to carry out the required activities of [24 CFR 578.7](#), including evaluating the outcomes of projects under the CoC Program and establishing performance targets. As the Lead Agency of the TX BoS CoC, the CoC has designated the evaluation of Housing First in CoC Program-funded projects as a performance priority. Each year, THN will conduct an assessment of the implementation of Housing First in CoC-funded projects that is intended to gather information that will assist THN in establishing performance benchmarks and technical assistance needs.

This document provides a framework of the Housing First philosophy for the TX BoS CoC. This document outlines Housing First standards and definitions for agencies to implement within their policies and procedures.

Additional Resources on Housing First:

- [HUD Exchange – Housing First in Permanent Supportive Housing Brief](#)
- [United States Interagency Council on Homelessness – Housing First Checklist](#)
- [HUD Exchange – Housing First Assessment Tool](#)

Housing First Categories

The Housing First Standards and Definitions are organized in the following categories:

1. Housing First in Project Access
2. Housing First in Project Input
3. Housing First in Project Lease Arrangements
4. Housing First in Services
5. Housing First in Housing Provision

¹ Standards & Definitions were borrowed from a [monitoring tool](#) used by Ocean County Homelessness Prevention and Assistance Coalition

Housing First in Project Access

Standard	Definition
Projects are Low-Barrier	Admission to projects is not contingent on pre-requisites such as abstinence of substances, minimum income requirements, health or mental health history, medication adherence, age, criminal justice history, financial history, completion of treatment, participation in services, “housing readiness”, history or occurrence of victimization, survivor of sexual assault or an affiliated person of such a survivor or other unnecessary condition unless required by law or funding source.
Access Regardless of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, or Marital Status	Equal access is provided in accordance with the 2012 and 2016 Equal Access Rules , meaning that any project funded by HUD must ensure equal access for a person regardless of one’s sexual orientation or marital status, and in accordance with one’s gender identity. Adult-only households, regardless of marital status, should have equal access to projects (if these project types are not available within a CoC, the CoC should conduct an assessment to determine if these project types are needed and work with providers to accommodate the need).
Admission Process is Expedited with Speed and Efficiency	Projects have expedited admission process, to the greatest extent possible, including helping participants obtain documentation required by funding sources, as well as process to admit participants regardless of the status of their eligibility documentation whenever applicable.
The Provider/Project Accepts and Makes Referrals Directly Through Coordinated Entry	Projects actively participate in the CoC-designated Coordinated Entry processes as part of streamlined community-wide system access and triage. Referrals from Coordinated Entry are rarely rejected, and only if there is a history of violence, the participant does not want to be in the project, there are legally valid grounds (such as restrictions regarding sex offenders), or some other exceptional circumstance that is well documented.

Housing First in Project Input

Standard	Definition
Projects Create Regular, Formal Opportunities for Participants to Offer Input	Input is welcomed regarding the project's policies, processes, procedures, and practices. Opportunities include involvement in: quality assurance and evaluation processes, a participant leadership/advisory board, processes to formally communicate with landlords, the design of and participation in surveys and focus groups, planning social gatherings, and integrating peer specialists and peer-facilitated support groups to complement professional services.

Housing First in Project Lease Arrangements

Standard	Definition
Leases are the Same for Participants as for Other Tenants	Leases do not have any provisions that would not be found in leases held by any other tenant in the property or building and are renewed per the participants' and owner's choice. People experiencing homelessness who receive help moving into permanent housing should have leases that confer the full rights, responsibilities, and legal protections under Federal, state, and local housing laws. For transitional housing, there may be limitations on length of stay, but a lease/occupancy agreement should look like a lease that a person would have in the normal rental market.
Measures are Used to Prevent Eviction	Property or building management, with services support, incorporates a culture of eviction avoidance, reinforced through practices and policies that prevent lease violations and evictions among participants, and evict participants only when they are a threat to self or others. Clear eviction appeal processes and due process is provided for all participants. Lease bifurcation is allowed so that a tenant or lawful occupant who is a victim of a criminal act of physical violence committed against them by another tenant or lawful occupant is not evicted, removed, or penalized if the other is evicted.
Rent Payment Policies Respond to Tenants' Needs	While tenants are accountable to the rental agreement, adjustments may be needed on a case-by-case basis. As necessary, participants are given special payment arrangements for rental arrears and/or assistance with financial management, including representative payee arrangements.

Housing First in Services

Standard	Definition
Person-Centered Planning is a Guiding Principle of the Service Planning Process	Person-centered planning is a guiding principle of the service planning process.
Participant Engagement is a Core Component of Service Delivery	Staff provide effective services by 1) developing relationships with participants that provide immediate needs and safety, 2) developing trust and common ground, 3) making warm hand-offs to other mainstream service providers, and 4) clearly explaining staff roles. Engagement is regular, and relationships are developed over time.
Services are Culturally Appropriate with Translation Services Available as Needed	Project staff are sensitive to and support the cultural aspects of diverse households. Wherever possible, staff demographics reflect the participant population they service in order to provide appropriate, culturally-specific services (see CLAS Standards). Transition services are provided when needed to ensure full comprehension of the project. Projects that serve families with children should have family-friendly rules that allow for different schedules based on work and school hours and have services that allow parents to participate in activities without having to constantly supervise their children themselves (i.e., can use the bathroom or take a shower without their children being in the bathroom with them).
Staff are Trained in Clinical and Non-Clinical Strategies (Including Harm Reduction , Motivational Interviewing , Trauma-Informed Approaches , and Strengths-Based Approaches)	Services support a participant's ability to obtain and retain housing regardless of changes in behavior. Services are informed by a harm-reduction philosophy , such as recognizing that substance use and addiction are a part of some participants' lives. Participants are engaged in non-judgmental communication regarding their behavior and are offered education regarding how to avoid risky behaviors and engage in safer practices.

Housing First in Housing Provision

Standard	Definition
Housing is Not Dependent on Participation in Services	Participation in permanent housing settings is not contingent on participating in supportive services or demonstration of progress made on a service plan. Services must be offered by staff, but are voluntary for participants.
Substance Use is Not a Reason for Termination	Participants are only terminated from the project for violations of the lease or occupancy agreements, as applicable. Occupancy agreements or an addendum to the lease do not include conditions around substance use or participation in services. If the project is a recovery housing model focused on people who are in early recovery from drugs or alcohol (as outlined in HUD's Recovery housing brief), different standards related to use and subsequent offer of treatment may apply.
The Rules and Regulations of the Project are Centered on Participants' Rights	Project staff have realistic expectations and policies. Rules and regulations are designed to support safe and stable communities and should never interfere with life in the community. Participants have access to the project at all hours (except for nightly in and out shelter) and accommodation is made for pets.