STATE OF VERMONT Agency of Human Services (AHS)		
Housing Stability	REVISION HISTORY: N/A	Chapter/Number
	EFFECTIVE DATE: August 22, 2012	Attachments/Related Documents:
Authorizing Signature: Douglas A. Racine Douglas A. Racine, Secretary, Agency of Human Services	Date Signed: 8/22/12	

PURPOSE/POLICY STATEMENT:

To establish policies and practices that promote greater housing stability for all persons served by the departments and offices of the Vermont Agency of Human Services.

BACKGROUND:

Stable, safe, affordable housing is critical to all of the clients of the Agency of Human Services. No AHS program or service can achieve its goals for clients if those clients are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The highest priority for AHS housing efforts is to end homelessness in Vermont. All departments shall be attuned to the housing needs of clients and ensure that their programs support housing stability.

DEFINITIONS:

The terms *Homeless* and *At Risk of Homelessness* are defined in the appendix to this policy.

SCOPE:

This policy applies to all AHS departments, offices and contracted service providers.

STANDARDS and GUIDELINES:

To reduce the incidence and duration of homelessness, AHS will support effective local programming and services integrated with other state, federal and private resources to provide the following components along a Continuum of Care.

1. Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing

Because homelessness is inherently traumatic, AHS supports activities with a demonstrated ability to stabilize persons who are at risk and rapidly re-house persons who have lost their housing. Among other criteria, such programs will be evaluated on their ability to stabilize or re-house persons within 28 days, and document subsequent stability in that housing at three, six or twelve months.

2. Outreach

AHS supports targeted outreach to persons who are homeless where and when the activity demonstrates effectiveness at re-housing this population or provides emergency shelter or services to the vulnerable unsheltered homeless population, particularly during harsh weather.

3. Emergency Shelter

AHS seeks to preserve existing emergency shelter bed capacity without creating additional shelters, and will work with community partners to reduce reliance on publicly-funded motels as a substitute for housing. In areas where the need for emergency shelter consistently exceeds supply, AHS will work with its partners to target alternative service models such as transitional housing, seasonal warming shelters, or supportive housing programs suited to the local need.

4. Supportive Services: Case Management / Housing Case Management

Acknowledging that the terms "case management," "care coordination" and "service coordination" are neither universally accepted, nor consistently defined across programs or populations, they are used here to describe the diverse array of non-financial supportive services essential to an individual's or family's success in housing and other domains of life.

A. General Expectation that Case Management Address Housing Stability

All AHS programs, contractors or grantees providing case management, care coordination, or service coordination shall take into consideration the housing needs of any clients served. The program or service shall include an assessment of the family's housing during intake or assessment, and include housing needs in any care or case management plan.

B. Specific Expectations Related to Housing Case Management / Housing Support / Retention

"Housing case management," "housing support" and "housing retention" describe any of the more specialized service modalities in which attaining and maintaining housing are the primary goal or contracted purpose of the program or service. While the model, amount and duration of services provided will vary to fit the needs of the family or community, all such services funded by AHS shall, at a minimum:

- Establish (through consultation with the client, AHS and other engaged providers) who shall be the lead case manager or coordinator for the client, and establish communication criteria to ensure supports are integrated.
- Work with participants to develop a written housing plan and set personal goals.
- Employ best practices which help clients to identify their strengths and opportunities, as well as any underlying issues which may have led to homelessness or could undermine success if not addressed.
- Assist the family to acquire and maintain stable housing which is affordable to them.
- Develop effective working relationships and agreements with landlords to ensure clients have and maintain stable housing.
- Provide information and encouragement for the family or individual to avail themselves of other appropriate services or take appropriate action to address barriers.
- Identify the appropriate level of support for each client, without creating over-dependence.
- Provide follow-up housing case management to families at increased risk of becoming homeless after they have moved into permanent housing.
- Be evaluated based on an ability to secure and retain housing for the clients served.

If a client is renting, the housing case manager/housing support worker shall, with the client's written permission, initiate contact with the landlord so the landlord knows of additional people to contact if housing problems arise. This worker shall establish an agreement with the landlord about when and under what circumstances the landlord can and should contact the agency staff for assistance.

5. Transitional and Supportive Housing

While certain programs such as transitional housing for offenders under the supervision of the Department of Corrections may require specialized design features, transitional and supportive housing programs supported by AHS will – to the maximum extent possible – provide supported housing which is integrated into non-specialized residential buildings or settings. This could include leasing of rental units by service providers, or arrangements for supportive services to be provided in designated units.

6. Affordable Housing

AHS supports the efforts of partner agencies such as DEHCD, Housing Vermont, VHCB, and VHFA to create permanently affordable and mixed income housing, particularly housing which is affordable to persons at or below 30% of Area Median Income.

AHS will allocate a portion of funding traditionally supporting temporary shelter (hotel and motel stays) to rental subsidy assistance to place and sustain low-income Vermonters who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in housing with appropriate supports.

AHS departments administering programs providing rental subsidy assistance shall ensure that the subsidized unit passes a Housing Quality Standards (HQS) inspection prior to the tenant/participant moving in, and that units continue to pass annual HQS inspections for as long as the AHS subsidy is provided. AHS will work with partner agencies to coordinate inspections.

Access to Services, Uniformity, Coordination, Preservation, Planning, Measuring Results

Access to Services / Uniformity of Services and Definitions

To improve permanency outcomes and achieve greater parity and predictability across the state, the above housing-related services and assistance supported by AHS will – to the maximum extent possible - be available in the region of Vermont where the family or individual resides or became homeless, and be consistent across the State of Vermont.

AHS programs serving people who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness, shall employ the standard definitions contained in the appendix of this policy unless the program is required by a federal funding source to use alternate definitions.

Program Coordination / AHS Housing Task Force

AHS programs providing homelessness prevention; rapid re-housing; housing case management; intake, assessment and referral; emergency shelter; transitional housing; and supportive housing shall be coordinated to the fullest extent possible.

An AHS Housing Task Force, chaired by the AHS Director of Housing, is created to ensure all efforts to develop, support or fund housing, including transitional housing or supportive housing services, are integrated to increase effectiveness by preventing duplication, gaps, and competition between departments for housing resources and units. All plans or proposals for new housing or supportive housing services shall be submitted by the relevant AHS department to the AHS Director of Housing for review by the AHS Housing Task Force.

Preservation of Existing Projects and Programming / Evaluation of New Proposals

AHS prioritizes preservation of effective existing shelter and housing programs. Applicants requesting AHS funding to support services in a new shelter, transitional, or supportive housing projects shall demonstrate, at a minimum:

- That there is both a short-term and long-term local need for the project supported by data acceptable to the Agency of Human Services.
- That the program design is best-suited to provide the appropriate housing and/or supports to the local population identified.
- The suitability of the proposed location and building to meet resident needs and efficiently provide services.
- That the applicant has sufficient expertise and capacity to develop and manage the project and provide the needed supportive services.
- That the proposal is integrated with, or informed by, the local homeless continuum of care and fills an identified gap in services or capacity.
- That there is a viable back-up plan for reuse of the project in the event that the need or project funding changes.

Strategic Planning / Vermont Council on Homelessness
The Vermont Council on Homelessness is charged with the development, implementation, monitoring and revision of the State's Plan to End Homelessness. This will, to the greatest extent possible, align with the AHS strategic plan, and with Vermont's HUD Consolidated Plan.

Measurement of Homelessness / Point in Time Report
The AHS Secretary's Office will work with members of the Vermont Council on Homelessness and/or Homeless Continuum of Care to support preparation of a comprehensive Vermont Point in Time Homelessness Report to include data from all Vermont counties. The report will be updated and finalized each year by April 15th.

Measurement of Results / Annual Report
AHS Departments administering programs, grants and contracts providing emergency shelter, transitional housing, supportive housing, homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing services, or housing case management will adopt one or more of the appropriate Agency of Human Services Housing Stability Indicator(s) approved by the AHS Secretary's Office and will link grant or contract performance measures to these indicators.

AHS departments will submit an annual report to the AHS Director of Housing no later than October 15th. These reports will summarize the activity and performance of the department's housing, shelter, and homelessness prevention programs from the previous state fiscal year.

COMPLIANCE:

The overall responsibility for supporting housing stability among AHS clients rests primarily with AHS departments and offices. To ensure a consistent and comprehensive approach, the Secretary's Office shall monitor the implementation of this policy and provide individual departments with direction, support and consultation.

ENFORCEMENT:

The Office of the Secretary, in consultation with the AHS Housing Task Force, may initiate reviews, assessments or utilize other means to ensure that this policy is being implemented.

APPENDIX – Further Definitions:

*"**Homeless**"* in this policy is defined as a household meeting criteria in one of the following categories:

(1) An individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, meaning: (i) An individual or family with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground; (ii) An individual or family living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state, or local government programs for low-income individuals); or (iii) An individual who is exiting an institution where he or she resided for 90 days or less and who resided in an emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution;

(2) An individual or family who will imminently lose their primary nighttime residence, provided that: (i) The primary nighttime residence will be lost within 14 days of the date of application for homeless assistance; (ii) No subsequent residence has been identified; and (iii) The individual or family lacks the resources or support networks, e.g., family, friends, faith-based or other social networks, needed to obtain other permanent housing;

(3) Unaccompanied youth under 25 years of age, or families with children and youth, who do not otherwise qualify as homeless under this definition, but who: (i) Are defined as homeless under another federal program; (ii) Have not had a lease, ownership interest, or occupancy agreement in permanent housing at any time during the 60 days immediately preceding the date of application for homeless assistance; (iii) Have experienced persistent instability as measured by two moves or more during the 60-day period immediately preceding the date of applying for homeless assistance; and (iv) Can be expected to continue in such status for an extended period of time because of chronic disabilities, chronic physical health or mental health conditions, substance addiction, histories of domestic violence or childhood abuse (including neglect), the presence of a child or youth with a disability, or two or more barriers to employment, which include the lack of a high school degree or General Education Development (GED), illiteracy, low English proficiency, a history of incarceration or detention for criminal activity, and a history of unstable employment; or

(4) Any individual or family who: (i) Is fleeing, or is attempting to flee, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions that relate to violence against the individual or a family member, including a child, that has either taken place within the individual's or family's primary nighttime residence or has made the individual or family afraid to return to their primary nighttime residence; (ii) Has no other residence; and (iii) Lacks the resources or support networks, e.g., family, friends, faith-based or other social networks, to obtain other permanent housing.

*"**At Risk of Homelessness**"* in this policy is defined as:

An individual or family with an annual income below 30% of median family income for the county who lacks sufficient resources or support networks immediately available to prevent them from moving to an emergency shelter or another place defined in Category 1 of the "homeless" definition; AND who meets one of the following conditions:

- Has moved because of economic reasons 2 or more times during the preceding 60 days; OR
- Is living in the home of another because of economic hardship; OR
- Has been notified they will lose their housing within 21 days; OR
- Lives in a hotel or motel and the cost is not paid for by charitable organizations or by Federal, State, or local government programs for low-income individuals; OR
- Lives in an SRO or efficiency apartment unit in which there reside more than 2 persons; OR
- Is exiting a publicly funded institution or system of care.