

HCV Best Practices: Strategies to Align Vouchers with Community Needs

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All right, good afternoon or good morning to some of you. Welcome to the Strategies to Align the Use of Vouchers with Community Needs webinar.

Agenda

So, what we'll be going over today, in regards to using strategies to align the use of vouchers and community needs, the webinar will provide information to help PHAs understand how they can strategically use vouchers to address larger cross-cutting federal and local initiatives. This information will allow PHAs to think more creatively about the use of vouchers and the role they play in their communities. Our agenda today is broken down into three main sections from some amazing panelists from Burlington, Vermont; Columbus, Ohio; and Austin, Texas. And, we'll be discussing recidivism prevention, eviction prevention, homelessness, and vouchers. If you have questions regarding any of the information that's discussed today for the panelists, at the end of each individual section, we will do some Q and A with the panelists at that point. So, if you have questions for the panel as they're presenting, we will address those at the end of each section's presentation.

Webinar Facilitator – Mike Eddins

So, my name is Mike Eddins. I am a vice president with CVR Associates. I've been in housing for more than seventeen years. For those of you who have met me before, I say two decades, but it's really seventeen years. I've worked in two different housing authorities: one in Akron, Ohio, and one in DeKalb County, Georgia. I've spent most of my career working with the Housing Choice Voucher Program, through the various components of operations: policymaking, budgeting and the like. I have specialties in SEMAP utilization, as well as operations. Additionally, I work in a variety of different ways and capacities for CVR through relocation and asset repositioning. I do want to thank some colleagues who have been instrumental in bringing this project together. And those colleagues are Ron Ashford. Formerly from HUD, Ron has assisted me in putting together the panelists for today's webinar as well as providing information on what we should address in terms of our topics. I also received assistance from Ruthie White from NCHCW, and she has also been instrumental in helping put our panel together as well as



selecting the topics. Now, I also want to give a shout out to Jesse Sutton and Sara Byrd from CVR, as they have been instrumental in putting together our slide deck, worked on the technical assistance aspects of things, and have basically kept me in line and kept the project moving forward. So, I just want to make sure I recognize them as they've been instrumental in getting this project together.

Strategies to Align the Use of Vouchers with Community Needs

So, this is a topic in terms of what we're talking about today. It's something that I'm really kind of passionate about. I read a book several years ago that told me—one of the things that it discussed was—it would say that solving problems brings happiness. And so, I kind of took that to heart. So to that end, affordable housing is full of problems waiting for us to solve. So, I find great happiness in working in this industry and find a lot of fulfillment in the work. These types of initiatives that we're going to be discussing today and the creative solutions that will be introduced by our panelists are at the heart of solving problems in local communities, which is something that I think needs to continue to develop with housing authorities across the country. To solve these problems within local communities, PHAs need to determine what their local needs are and get involved in solving those problems. And in doing so, it'll bring benefits to the community, as well as administrative benefits to the housing authority. And it allows the housing authority to leverage the value of that voucher.

Determining Local Needs

In determining local needs, you can get involved as a PHA with your local community organizations who are interacting with a variety of residents within your local communities. The Continuum of Care is a great place to start where a lot of service providers, who can provide assistance to residents, can be found and developed. Relationships can be developed with those providers as well as other supportive housing providers within local communities, as well as different local governmental departments on homelessness service providers. Aligning your vouchers with the needs of the community can improve the quality of life for your residents by providing resident services that you otherwise would not be able to provide.

Benefits of Aligning Vouchers

There's not a lot of funding that goes into helping residents outside of the FSS Program when it comes to vouchers, and so utilizing the relationships within the community can help improve the quality of the lives of the residents that we're all serving. In terms of administrative processes, there's a lot of strategies that can be implemented to reduce administrative burdens that housing authorities face. An example that comes to mind is when it comes to preventing evictions. I think a bit in terms of if you have one family that gets evicted, you now need to lease up that one voucher. Depending on the success rate of your voucher program and your waiting list as well as the success rate of the families who are finding or locating units with their vouchers in the community, you could



find that for every household that is evicted, you're having to go through four names on your waiting list, and a lot of work and time and effort just to refill that voucher. So, preventing something like an eviction from happening by providing residents with resources is something that will have a positive impact on the administrative side of your voucher program. In terms of the leveraging of vouchers, I had a boss one time who used to talk about the return on an investment. For a while, I didn't really understand what he meant by that. But as we started to reach out into the community and work with different community programs, what we found is as we created specific preferences or different community needs, we would get additional services provided to our voucher holders that we otherwise didn't have access to. Through the use of community partners and the partnership with community partners, we would get assistance in the forms of security deposits or furniture donations or transportation or improved education or employment opportunities for residents, which increase the value of the voucher (which was pegged at like \$700 in half a month). So thinking of it in terms of if you provide a voucher to an applicant through a community partnership, you're able to access a plethora of other services that you otherwise wouldn't be able to access. And so, your \$700 a month—what that voucher is worth for that family becomes a lot more valuable. And so going back to what my boss said a long time ago, the return on investment is dependent on how committed you are to working with the community and putting together different partnerships that can help you provide more opportunities for the residents that we're serving.

Recidivism

And so, I will get off my soapbox, and we can talk about recidivism. And so, today we have two panelists for this topic.

Webinar Panelist – Liz Whitmore

I would like to first introduce Liz Whitmore, who is the director of rental assistance for the Burlington Housing Authority. She has more than seventeen years of experience in the field of housing and homelessness services. She's held a variety of positions with the PHA and spent eight years managing state and federal funds for the Vermont Department of Corrections' transitional housing programs.

Hi, everyone.

Hey, Liz.

Thanks for having me.

Webinar Panelist – Crystal Jones

All right. And our next panelist on this topic is Crystal Jones, the Director of Housing and Retention Services for the Burlington Housing Authority. Crystal has worked in the field of housing and supportive services for over seven years. She has worked in a variety of



community service organizations with vulnerable populations throughout the state of Vermont. Welcome, Crystal.

Awesome! Thanks, Mike. Hi, everyone. I'm so excited for this!

All right. So with that, I am going to throw the ball to you, Liz. And you should have it right now.

Recidivism Prevention

Thanks, Mike. I will read this quote that it looks like you've plugged in for us about recidivism prevention. "The President and I believe that everyone deserves a second chance and a stable home from which to rebuild their lives. No person should exit a prison or jail only to wind up on the streets." And that's from Secretary Marcia Fudge.

Burlington Housing Authority

So, I just want to give sort of a brief history and context because Vermont is very different. And if folks are trying to replicate something like this, I just want them to be aware of the differences between Vermont and a lot of other states. In many states, the corrections system is part of a public safety agency or umbrella. But in Vermont, the Department of Corrections, it's within the broader agency of human services. So, we're already coming from a place that's much more grounded in holistic human services before an approach that is really more thoughtful about returning folks to the community than then some other states. We're also a very small state. So, we have one state jail and prison system as opposed to county systems that a lot of other states may have. And we have a unified probation and parole and jail system. So probation; parole; jail; prisons, they all fit within the Department of Corrections and work fairly well together. We also have a supervision status called furlough, which is essentially an extension of incarceration but in the community, so folks are released from jail or prison, but they are supervised in a way that they could be returned fairly easily if they're not abiding by the terms of their supervision. And part of that is to have stable housing. So, the context for how BHA got connected with the Department of Corrections started back in around 2004 to 2005. The state was struggling with our correctional facilities being overburdened and full. And we were actually contracting with private prisons and other jails across the country for beds. So, we were paying and sending people out of state where they couldn't have regular contact with their families. They were moved around, and we just didn't feel like that was the best way to treat Vermonters. So, the legislature set aside at this time, about half a million dollars to create fifty beds or so across the state to serve folks who could be released from incarceration if they had stable housing to go to. And at the time, BHA was one of the very first grantees. We started with a pretty small program. One person who spent a lot of time out in the community, just talking to landlords and dispelling myths about folks that are returning to the community. And also talking about how DOC and BHA could be helpful if landlords were willing to agree to rent to folks who were exiting the correction system. And over the years, the state budget for transitional housing has grown to close to \$7 million, which is a mix of both



state dollars and Medicaid dollars. And the BHA's grant in the last couple of years has more than doubled so we have the capacity to serve many more folks than we did in the past. The target population is people who are exiting incarceration or those who are supervised in the community and in need of stable housing or support. And, we aim to work with the most moderate- to high-risk offenders as determined by the Department of Corrections. And, I think we're different than a lot of other programs because we not only are willing to but we almost target working with folks who have a history of convictions for sexual offenses, because we recognize that these folks that are housed are better for the community, and everyone is safer if people are successful. We also just want to acknowledge that the word "offender" doesn't always feel great, but it is the language that's used by the Vermont Department of Corrections. And so that's in some of our documents, and as we talk, you may hear us say that. I also wanted to explain some of the acronyms that you might hear Crystal talking about. There's a lot of jargon that goes with this work. The DOC would be the Department of Corrections. PO is a probation or parole officer. P&P is kind of a short for probation and parole, that is the office where those folks work. OMS is the Offender Management System. And that's what the Department of Corrections uses to manage folks who are supervised in the community and those in correctional facilities. And, they've also given limited access to transitional housing providers who are funded by DOC to do this work. So, Crystal and her team can log in and see a little bit of information about people who they may be working with. And ORHP is the Offender Re-Entry Housing Program. ORHS is the Offender Re-Entry Housing Specialists, the staff who do this work. PSH is permanent supportive housing, and an SRO is a single room occupancy. So I think with that, I will pass things over to Crystal who can give some more details about the specifics of the program.

Referral Process

Great, thanks for that, Liz. All right, I'll start with our referral process. So all of the referrals for our program come from the PO of the participant once it's been identified that they're going to be returning to Chittenden County or they're in Chittenden County and without stable housing. It goes from the PO then to the district manager of P&P, who, if approved, sends it over to us to look at. We use some basic information about the case, about the charges, some of the history of the participant, and then we schedule an interview, whether that's in the facility or out in the community, and we finalize an application.

Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible for the program, a participant must be returning to and/or are living in Chittenden County and have, again, been referred by the Probation and Parole District Manager. A person has to have at least one year left on their sentence so that we're not only housing with them but also working with them for Supportive Services moving forward. A participant needs to have some sort of an income plan. So, that can be employment, that could be social security, that can be TANF, just something that's going to help them survive—live—out here in the community. And then the fourth piece, which is really important, is meeting with the ORHS staff on a regular basis. So, the program itself is housing search and retention. So when a person starts working with our program,



most of our meetings are focused on what types of support are you going to need, what barriers are you going to need to overcome, and what type of housing is going to be most appropriate. A very first thing we do is put people on our waiting list for a BHA voucher; we do have a voucher preference for community members exiting institutions. So, it's important that we get folks on that list nice and early. We then look at the types of housing that we have available, and typically we work with three different types: our SROs where it's a private room and a shared living space. And, we partner with a couple of different housing providers in the community on those SROs. There's PSH, permanent supportive housing; we actually have one building; it's called Dettmann Place that's full of efficiency apartments, and there's case management onsite so people can drop in and make appointments; we are always available. And specifically in that program, the subsidy is attached to the unit. And then after a person has lived there for a year and feels like they're ready to move on, they can then get a voucher and moved out into a private unit, which is a third type. They're one-, two-, or three-bedroom units within either BHA's properties or out in the community. And again, that can be with a subsidy or with participant income if they do have employment at the time. And then once housed, the participant works with us up to one year. So really, the point isn't just 'here's a house, you know, go live, survive, figure out your barriers'. It's 'here's a home in a community that we hope that you can make your own and a place to work on life goals and address all of those barriers that brought you to prison in the first place'.

Key Partners

Thanks, Crystal. We just want to acknowledge that this work can't be done alone, right? We work closely with the Burlington Probation and Parole office, especially if folks are struggling. It's a great resource to have a probation officer to kind of put some pressure on folks to maybe re-engage in services; well, we can be a kinder voice to help support people to get connected to what they need. We have a connection with the community justice centers in Vermont, which I think are pretty unique. They offer re-entry support and restorative practices for folks who are returning to the community—something called COSA, which is a circle of support and accountability—that's really geared towards high-risk folks, generally with sex offenses or other pretty well-known or pretty egregious crimes. And that is a team of folks who are really just meant to be supportive, while also holding people accountable to their own goals and to community safety. The Howard Center is a designated mental health agency in Burlington, and we rely on them a lot for mental health and substance abuse support. We also have the local VOC Rehab office, which helps with employment search. And, there are a number of other organizations that we are able to connect to for employment assistance. And then also, the Continuum of Care providers. So, we do sometimes have folks who are temporarily without housing, so they may be in shelter while we still work with them to find permanent housing, or other, you know, services that are necessary throughout the community. There are mentorship programs. Vermont Works for Women is a great training program for women, and they do target those who have been incarcerated in the past. And then just local landlords too are huge partners. I think, in the beginning, we put a lot of work into building those relationships, and that while we still have to foster them, we have a number of landlords who are, you know, sometimes asking us for referrals because they



find that this program is great because they have the support from the Offender Re-Entry Housing Specialists, as well as Probation and Parole. And, I will send it back to Crystal.

Key Staff Tasks

Great, Liz. That was a great segue, actually, to this slide to talking about developing a pool of landlords. One thing that we do know about this population is that they're carrying with them a stigma, right? A stigma that all people with a criminal history are violent or destructive. They're addicts. They're not going to pay their rent. They're going to damage all the units and we find that that just isn't true. Of course, there are a couple here and there that, you know, it's hard to really keep that housing stable. And then we hope you know, to see them the next time around. But for the most part, we have pretty positive outcomes. So, we really focus on that relationship with the landlord. When they call, we answer the phone; when they email, we respond, you know, as quickly as we can; we want to keep that relationship alive and keep that strong. Because what we see, right, is if a person comes into the program—a landlord comes into our program—works with us; they have a good experience; they're going to give me a call, you know, two weeks from then saying, “Hey, you know what, I've got another unit that seems to be working out”. And then another key task is really staying in contact with the participant. One of the first things that we do when we're working with a person is talk about: what does it look like when you're doing well? And what does it look like when you're struggling? Right? So, what does it look like when you're doing well? What does success look like for you and to you? And how can I champion that? Like, we want to champion that. That's great stuff. And then also, what does it look like when you're struggling? What are warning signs, right? You know, if a person says, “Hey, one of my warning signs is I'm going to start isolating, and, you know, I'm not I'm not going to clean my house very much, right?” So, our next meeting, say we're there, and we're like, “Hey, you know, you missed a meeting. I'm noticing. There's a lot of laundry here. These are warning signs I've seen before, how can I help support you with that?”

Barriers

Barriers, right? So, we think a lot of the same barriers: medical, mental health, addiction, unhealthy relationships, generational poverty, trauma. Knowing that these barriers exist, we are here to help participants overcome them. We help folks get to mandatory meetings, whether that's with your PO, maybe it's a therapist appointment or medical appointments, even transportations an issue; we can help you figure that out. Paying rent and utilities on time; let's come up with a schedule for paying your rent and your utilities and talk about when you do get behind; help you access community funds, make a plan for paying rent going forward, abiding by the lease terms. One of the most common things that we see is people who are smoking inside of their unit. And a lot of times that's violating the lease. And so, okay, maybe you're not going to quit smoking, but how can we get you to smoke outside of the unit. Engaging in restorative support system: this one is really big, whether it's natural support, organic supports, or professional support, or just, you know, putting up boundaries, right, putting up boundaries for yourself to keep yourself safe and healthy. And then, communicating openly with stakeholders. So when



you're struggling, you can say you're struggling; that's okay. It doesn't have to be filled with shame. We're here to help. Or, again, when you're doing really well, let us know; we want to champion that. That's really good stuff. So overall, right? The goal is helping people find housing, help them stay successful in housing, and help them really thrive and grow and overcome those barriers, which not only helps them stay safe and healthy but it also does the same for the community. And that's, I believe, all we have for slides. Are there any questions?

So, there is a question in the chat. Okay. So, the first question is, how do you balance your work with the prison parole? And I'm assuming that's departments when it comes to criminal background checks?

Great. And are we talking criminal background checks when it comes to a Housing Choice Voucher or when it comes to a landlord of housing? And I guess, we could answer both of those. Liz, do you want to tackle the one with Housing Choice Voucher?

Sure. Yeah. So, I mean, I don't think we operate any differently for folks that are being referred to the Offender Re-Entry Program. Like I said, we have access to the DOC's offender management systems, so we can see the charges that they have and their history there. And then we just run the criminal background checks like we would for anyone else. I would say that we're more likely to, you know, overturn an appeal for someone who is connected with the Offender Re-Entry Housing Program, or we may go into it without, you know, knowing that there's a plan and supports in place; we might not deny someone who we normally would based on a criminal background. I hope that answers the question.

And then, from the perspective of a landlord: lots of landlords have screening that say if you have a criminal background or your credit score is below whatever, then they're not going to rent to you. And something that I actually just breezed right over in our presentation is our landlord risk pool. So, landlords who are hesitant and are like, "Oh gee, this is more of a risk than just taking anybody else." You say, "All right, here's what we can do. We can give you up to one month's rent of money on top of the security deposit just in case, right? Say there's old rent or damages when the person leaves. If they can provide us with information showing us how much is owed, we can pay that to them so that we can keep that relationship strong and so that they're not left holding the bag.

Okay, we had a couple more questions come into the chat. So, I'm going to throw these your way. Okay? How many staff members do you have that work with participants in the program? And how many participants do you have?

That's a great question. So, we have three staff members that work with participants. But also, we have a whole team of service and support at BHA for our properties. So, we've got the three members who can help people when they're in scattered sites. And then once a person is housed in our properties, they have access to stash programming. They have access to onsite services; we have community events; there's a lot of staff available. We're slotted to serve 61 people and there are technically three FTEs to do the work.



So, there's another question: Do you work with the families of prisoners to unite them in housing?

So in that instance, the person would likely not work with our program. So if a person has an option to come out, whether that's with family or maybe a partner of theirs, they typically don't come to our program. Our program is really reserved for people who just have no other options and would either remain homeless or remain incarcerated for lack of housing.

Another question is, you mentioned that you provide onsite case management services and said it's always available, are you saying that case management onsite services is 24/7?

That's a great question. So if we're not available, we also have a call center that people can call into and then can also be directed to our designated agency, which also has a 1-800 number to call for the person being in crisis. So, it'll typically be after hours, a call center, and then we would follow up the next day.

There's another question related to the landlord trust fund, is it to pay for damages, etc.?

Yes, yep. So, damages, back rents, back utilities if they never got switched over into the participant's name. It could be any of those things. Absolutely.

What is the funding source used for that? Yeah, Department of Corrections. So is the Department of Corrections funding all of the programming, all of the supportive services programming then?

All of the DOC supportive services programming.

All right, here's another question. Did you have to update your administrative plan for this program?

No, I don't believe so. Liz, do you have more?

No, because not everyone is receiving a Housing Choice Voucher. And the folks that do often are eligible for the mainstream preference that probably a lot of folks are familiar with that gives priority to folks who are exiting institutions or at risk of homelessness.

And I think the last question is, where do the funds come from that are given when the landlord is leery about renting to someone?

That's also the Department of Corrections. Yeah. It's an industry standard to have some sort of safety net for something to go wrong. They see that; they understand that. And also, they fund that risk pool of money, but they also fund tenant participation funds, which is essentially if we need to have a barbecue, if a person needs something that other funding can't purchase; like you can get funding for backgrounds in the community; you can get funding for back utilities in the community, And if you have a cat who you love and you can't afford to get a litter box, we'll get you a litter box.



All right, that is all the questions in the chat. I do have one question for you guys. So if a housing authority is interested in trying to develop this type of program, where would you recommend they turn to first to start having conversations about how to develop this type of program for their agency?

Call me and Liz. Honestly, we got this program going on and then, we actually have a handful of other programs that are similar—similarly designed—but focus on a different population. We've both been doing this for quite a while and gotten a few things off the ground. So yeah, hit us up if you have questions or just want a consult on what could be next for you.

It looks like we've gone through all the questions in the chat. So. I think you guys are done for now. If there's any other questions that anybody has in relation to the recidivism programs there in Burlington, feel free to put those in the Q&A and/or in the chat. And we may circle back to them if we have time later in the presentation.

Eviction Prevention

But if not, we'll go ahead and move on to our next topic, which is Eviction Prevention.

Webinar Panelist – Justin Davis

And so, on this panel, we have Justin Davis, the Vice President of the Housing Choice Voucher Program for the Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority. He has more than fifteen years of public housing industry services throughout central Ohio. He oversees the daily operations of more than 13,000 HCV Program recipients and works with 3,000+ property owners. He also is responsible for over \$108 million in annual HAPs to residents.

Hello, everyone. Nice to meet you.

Webinar Panelist – Lianna Barbu

All right and joining Justin on this presentation is Lianna Barbu. She is with the Community Shelter Board in Columbus, Ohio. She directs the internal operations of the Community Shelter Board and is responsible for overseeing the operation and management of all finance activities, grants, IT, and human resources as well as oversees the work of the Continuum of Care activities. Lianna, hello.

Hi, everyone!

So with that, Justin, I'll let you take it away.



Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority (CMHA)

Thank you again. I wanted to start off by letting you guys know what our departmental mission is and how we feel that aligns very, very well with what CMHA's mission is. As a department, we determine that empowering our clients to live in the housing they choose in the neighborhood they choose, with our partners providing them with the services they need. So very much in line with what CMHA is doing overall. CMHA's mission is CMHA helps people access affordable housing through collaborative partnerships to develop, renovate, and maintain housing; promote neighborhood revitalization; and assist residents in accessing needed social services.

Eliminating Barriers to Entry

We have worked tirelessly this year. I have sat in so many meetings to review and revise our administrative plan. We are currently at, I think, 36 chapters in our admin plan that we've went through to make sure that we have removed the misdemeanor review from our policies period. In the past, that would be something that could have prevented someone from even getting on the program or resulted in them being terminated from the program. They're also instituting a case-by-case review of any denials of assistance or terminations of subsidy by reviewing the relevant factors associated with their individual case. We truly are trying to keep as many people housed as we possibly can. We operate currently off of criminal codes. If a participant is in violation of a criminal code, CMHA will move to intent to terminate. With our revision, it is an intent to terminate with an ultimate case-by-case review again, so we won't be immediately terminating someone from the program just because they have violated one of the rules. We will work with them. And then lastly, we are in communication with our local probation offices to work with them to have a probationary period for our participants just as they do in the courts. Our view is if the courts are not putting you in jail, why should we be terminating your housing?

CMHA Values

CMHA has three core values. Community: we value stable households that build neighborhoods and improve the quality of life of the whole community. Commitment: we serve the community with commitment, integrity, and competence to meet the challenges of change with the spirit of revitalization in all areas of our work. And Collaboration: we leverage our resources with partners who share our vision and passion. Our team and communication connect all CMHA employees and include all of our customers and collaborators.

Community

Community: our community partners—CMHA currently works with almost 60 community partners here in the central Ohio area. We specialize in emergency rental assistance, health care, education, job placement and training programs, mental health, and



connections to other needed social services. In addition to our community partners, CMHA has been designated a RISE Center, and we have designated ours as the RISE EnVision Center. We are one of five EnVision centers in the state of Ohio.

CMHA Services

CMHA services: as I said, we are designated an EnVision center here, and our EnVision center has partnered with HCGC, which is Health Care Collaborative of Greater Columbus. Through them, they connect our participants to whatever resource they possibly could need in our community. It is a powerful network of referrals to literally anything our participants need to be successful. As I said, we connect our families with needed social services that they need.

Commitment

Commitment: CMHA is committed to assisting and providing our clients and finding affordable housing. CMHA is able to stay mission-driven, because we know our “Why”: the people we serve every day. They're our neighbors, our friends, and everyone is part of the CMHA family. To assist our families in the current housing market, CMHA is showing our commitment by offering landlord incentives. Security deposit assistance: for our zero-to-two-bedroom units, we are offering up to \$500 in security deposit assistance. And for three bedrooms or larger, up to \$750. I can tell you that as of this morning, we have paid of \$598,827 in security deposit assistance for 625 clients. Vacancy payments to owners. Very similar premise: for zero-to-two bedrooms, it's a flat \$500. For three bedrooms or larger it's \$750. We have paid out to our landlords in vacancy payments \$407,000 to 665 landlords. We're also paying for homebuyer education classes for our participants as well. Many participants who are on our program who want to utilize a voucher to purchase a home, we will pay for the homebuyer education classes for them and work with them to purchase a home. It is a tough market here, but we want to give everybody the opportunity to get in the home or apartment that they want to be in. So in addition to that, we have provided housing search assistance. We've contracted with a company named RH Brown and Co., who works with our participants once they're issued a voucher all the way through to the time they are housed. And then we also use Affordablehousing.com, which is formerly gosectioneight.com, to have a listing of rental units that are more than likely affordable and applicable to our program.

Collaboration

Collaboration: CMHA seeks to improve our client's circumstances, but we know that we are not the experts on things other than housing. So, we've had to partner with other organizations. To provide emergency rental assistance we've partnered with Impact, central Ohio's community action organization, to provide our clients with needed services. We partner with HCGC in 2020. The partnership has been highly successful, and it's resulted in CMHA and HCGC winning the Resident Services Award from Nan McKay for large organizations. To keep our families who violate the law housed, we will



be signing a Memorandum of Understanding with our county probation office to work collaboratively on a pilot program to not terminate housing subsidies when the courts offer probation versus jail time.

Small Area Fair Market Rents

Another thing that we are doing here because we have seen an increase in rents across the board since the pandemic started, we are working with HUD on implementing Small Areas Fair Market Rents for our jurisdiction. We have done analysis, and we show that by applying these Small Area FMRs to select zip codes in our jurisdiction, we will see increased payment standards, which will allow our families to get into new areas of opportunity, better school districts, better neighborhoods, and things like that that are closer to grocery stores and other services that they may need. The other half of our jurisdiction will continue to operate and fall under our traditional payment standards which are on the screen right now.

CMHA and CSB Partnership

So, we will now pass it off to Lianna to talk about the partnership between CMHA and CSB.

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)

Thank you, Mike. Community Shelter Board funds fifteen partners in Columbus and Franklin County to deliver an array of services including Coronavirus prevention, emergency shelter, street outreach, rapid rehousing, and permanent supportive housing. Our system of care served 14,000 people last year. Currently, Community Shelter Board oversees 2,000 units of permanent supportive housing in our community. We believe in housing first and approach quickly and successfully to connect individuals and families experiencing homelessness to permanent housing without preconditions and barriers to entry such as sobriety treatment or service participation requirements. We work with our partners to manage permanent supportive housing developments and provide a supportive services funding needed to stabilize previously homeless individuals in permanent supportive housing.

Permanent Supportive Housing (Continued)

We have a long-standing, strong partnership with Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority that started back in 2003. We were at the forefront of development of permanent supportive housing, what is considered today a nationwide best practice. At that time, developing permanent supportive housing for the homeless population was subsidized with project-based vouchers with a cutting-edge approach. Common at Grant (you can see a picture of it here) opened in 2003, and it's a hundred-unit development subsidized with project-based vouchers. 50% of the units in this building were dedicated to the homeless population. Since 2003 when the first of these projects opened,



Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority increased their support for over 900 units of permanent supportive housing that are subsidized. We continue to work with CMHA on each new permanent supportive housing development to support the rental subsidies. And, this allows us to focus on raising funds for capital development and supportive services components of a permanent supportive housing new build. The Housing Choice Vouchers offered the stability that these projects need, and it is a vital component in incentivizing developers and investors to build permanent supportive housing. In addition, CMHA administrative plan includes reduced barriers for the homeless population, like the criminal background. Without CMHA, we couldn't have built any of these projects. And CMHA continues to be at the table as a trusted partner in developing affordable housing in our community.

Continuum of Care Governance

So, how did we get where we are? The Community Shelter Board has oversight of the local Continuum of Care, and CMHA is an active member of both the Continuum of Care and the Continuum Care Board. And so, they're heavily involved in the decisions that the Continuum of Care makes. Most importantly, CMHA is involved in all decision-making regarding development of new permanent supportive housing. Another important member of the Continuum of Care and the Continuum of Care Board is the Alcohol, Drug, and Mental Health Board of Franklin County, and I will explain on the next slide why the participation of these two entities on the Continuum of Care is very important.

Unified Supportive Housing System

Unified Supportive Housing System, or USHS for short, is recommended the shelter board initiative that centralizes placement into permanent supportive housing of all eligible individuals and families across Columbus and Franklin County, Ohio. USHS was established in 2008 as a collaborative effort between Community Shelter Board; Alcohol, Drug, and Mental Health Board of Franklin County, or ADAMH; and the Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority. This partnership brings together the homelessness, mental health, and housing systems in a partnership set up to benefit the most vulnerable individuals in our community. Through this partnership, we manage the housing facilities for the 2,000+ units of permanent supportive housing that I mentioned at the beginning.

Goals

The goal of the Unified Supportive Housing System is to streamline and provide a standardized, coordinated system for applying for, approving, and placing households that have the greatest need and vulnerability and experience homelessness in permanent supportive housing. Individuals with the longest history of homelessness and the most severe service needs are given first priority to housing based on permanent supportive housing availability, ensuring to target those with the highest barriers of obtaining and maintaining permanent housing on their own.



Unified Supportive Housing

Within the Unified Supportive Housing System, we implemented a HUD notice of permanent supportive housing prioritization based on extensive homelessness and vulnerability. They have a comprehensive Homeless Management Information System, or HMIS, that tracks information on all homeless individuals that access homeless services in our community. On a monthly basis, they produce what we call a 'Hotlist' of individuals that experience homelessness for a given number of days in their current episode. The USHS Manager reaches out to providers that currently serve individuals on the Hotlist—providers that work with clients to fill out an application and gather associated documentation. Individuals with the longest history of homelessness and the most severe service needs or highest vulnerability are given first priority to help things based on permanent supportive housing availability. Again, ensuring supportive housing programs target those with the highest barriers to obtaining and maintaining permanent housing on their own. What's most important is that the USHS pool is not a first come first serve list. It's a pool. It's not truly a waitlist. The client's priority in the pool can change all the time based on who else is in the pool at a given time and the client's perspective vulnerability.

Unified Supportive Housing (Continued)

The USHS Manager assesses eligibility of the prioritized clients or the available PSH units. A background check is done on the client in the pool to assess eligibility for the different PSH projects we have. We also worked with CMHA to reduce the administrative burden. For example, CSB sends CMHA a list of potential candidates, and CMHA pre-qualified individuals for housing. We also work to identify the necessary documentation that individuals need for their housing appointment with the goal of reducing the need for more appointments. Once the household is referred to a PSH unit or a project, the household then works with their case manager and the housing projects to complete the necessary paperwork and get the CMHA voucher. The USHS Manager continues to communicate with the housing provider, emergency shelters, and outreach partners to expedite the housing process. Once the voucher has been issued, it is inspected and the client is housed with the move in. Supportive services from the housing providers start based on client choice. Supportive services are not required unless they are used as an eviction prevention tool. However, the CMHA subsidies provide a stability that clients need, and eviction in permanent supportive housing are extremely, extremely rare.

Right Person, Right Unit, Right Time, Right Cost

So in summary, our relationships are defined by placing the right person in the right unit at the right time, and of course, at the right costs. And this is going also back to Mike's point about the return on investment. This statement summarizes the investment that Mike was talking about in the beginning. Mike, back to you.

All right. Thank you, guys. So before we go into the next section, we can take some questions. It looks like we have a couple in the chat right now. So, the first question for



the CMHA team and the Community Service Board is: do applicants coming into this type of program receive a preference on the waiting list?

Yes, they do. Basically, they bypass our waiting list, and they get preference points that allow them to supersede all the other program applicants.

Another question that came in was: Under CMHA., where do the funds come from to pay for the different things? I think that's in relation to the security deposits, vacancy payments, housing search assistance.

So, we allocated a million and a half of our Cares Act dollars last year to these programs. The contracting services to housing search; that comes out of CMHA's interoffice call center. So those are just our funds that we pay for that. And then there's one other program, but this also comes out of CMHA dollars as well. Not Cares Act.

Okay. So have you guys seen a benefit in using a housing search firm to house residents?

So right now, I can tell you we have 1,400 vouchers on the street actively looking for places to live. RH Brown and Co. has a network of owners and landlords they are working with outside of Affordablehousing.com that want our clients. It's just getting them in there, having the right payment standard. I think that's one of the challenges here too. You have a lot of competition to get into some of these homes. Some places are getting 10–20 applications for that one. So, making sure our clients stand out a little bit was our goal and by offering basically anywhere from \$1000 to \$1,500 helps us stand out a little bit more than some of the participants in other programs in the community.

So, I assume the housing market there in Columbus is pretty hot right now like most of the rest of the country at this time?

So at one point this summer, we were the hottest in the country. Wow. So, it started to slow down, but nowhere near where you would think it would need to be for us to be able to house 1,400 vouchers. Right. We are always looking for landlords. Any of the innovative programs that we can try and do on our side, we want to do, because we want to get as many people housed as we can. We have a cap of 14,759 vouchers that we can have. When you get to that number, we want to house 14,000 families, but 1,400 vouchers on the street is the barrier to getting to 14,000.

So another question is in the chat says, How is RH Brown and Company paid? Is it on a per voucher place basis, or is it..

So it's a tiered structure, actually. So, we have participants who we are issuing vouchers to, who we know will not be able to find housing. Mrs. Brown—her team—they're going to work with them start to finish. They're going to try and get them in every single place that they have a chance to get into. When their voucher is up if they have been unsuccessful, we have a flat fee for her being unsuccessful and getting them into a unit. For everyone she gets in a unit, there is also another flat fee that is obviously higher that we pay her for that housing assistance search. And I can tell you, she's been successful. I believe she's



got 150 people so far leased up into units, which I think is great especially knowing that she really didn't start on this program with us until the beginning of the summer. We're very, very pleased with her progress on that. And I would look forward to her showing what else she can do in our community for the many different communities we have.

And then there's another question in the chat that is asking, how many employees make up your HCV department?

So, we currently operate with 63 Housing Choice Voucher employees. That does include our FSS and our home ownership team. We are down from where we normally operate around 75. We're hoping that as the year continues on, we're able to pick up that additional staff and get back rolling with full capacity.

This is Mike, I have one other question for you. Could you talk a little bit more about how you're going to be rolling out this probationary period for participants that are under termination?

So, we are taking it to our board in November. That's why I had to be very, very vague on here. Yeah, they reviewed it and reviewed it to make sure that we are not putting things out there sooner than our board can actually approve it. But our notion is that we are going to have just a communication with our probation office just letting us know if our participant is in good standing. And that's all we need. If they're in good standing, they stay housed and we don't have any issues. In the event that they are violated, Franklin County probation would inform us and then we will take appropriate next steps. We believe in bifurcation here. So not terminating subsidy for the entire household, but just removing one household member who is violent.

So, there was one other question in the chat that just came in: how many HCV vouchers does CMHA have?

Active, we are paying on 12,597. We have about 200 that are on hold as we process ownership changes. We wanted to make sure we weren't paying the old owner. And then, we have 1,400 actual vouchers, HCV vouchers, on the street in varying degrees of time. Obviously, we have the ability to extend vouchers, and we have some families who are in those extension periods as well.

Alright, I have one other question then. Could you tell us a little bit more about the RISE EnVision Center?

I absolutely can. I will not do as good a job as our vice president Sonja Nelson, who is over the RISE Center and our Resident Initiatives team. But if you want to know what 'passionate about our residents' looks like that is that program. That is that EnVision Center. If we have a client who is in need, they are doing everything possible to service them. One of the things that they are working on now is getting the actual nonprofit status associated with them, so they can actually earn 501 (c) designation. So, they can actually receive these donations; they can actually start a scholarship on things like that, because we see all of these opportunities to better our clients. And through the RISE center, that's our deal. And the more we put into our vehicle the better we'll all ultimately



be. We have done everything that we can do, at least that we've thought of, during the pandemic to assist our clients. We have done the food drives, the delivery of hand sanitizers. Anything that our clients needed during the pandemic, we made sure they had, and that was all done through Resident Initiatives in the RISE Center. Those clients that were facing eviction for non-payment of rent, again, we partnered with Impact. That was all done through Resident Initiatives and the RISE Center. They advocated on the tenants' behalf and our residents' behalf to get CMHA to put up additional funds to cover emergency rental assistance for our clients, separate from what was given by the government to Impact to do that same rental assistance. Our RISE Center is an advocate at the end of the day. And a lot of our clients don't realize they have this advocate. So, we are working actively to make sure they all know this service is there for them. We have flyers that we hand out regularly. We are in the community. We just had a major press event here at the housing authority, because we opened a client center that houses our Resident Initiatives team and our RISE Center. So, our clients can go there now versus having to take a phone call or trying to do something else.

So, you ran the Emergency Rental Assistance Program—residents could go to the RISE Center and fill out...Yes. Okay.

So, our residents would connect with the RISE center. There was a form that HCGC had created that sends the information over to Impact. So, it kept tracking. So, one of the things that we wanted to avoid, I believe—I had conversation today with HUD prior to getting on this call—the fraud associated with the Emergency Rental Assistance Program. It is a program that if the landlord and the tenant want to collude, they could absolutely do so. So far, on our end, the housing authority making sure that we were not paying the landlord subsidy, and they're getting an emergency rental assistance for that same amount of subsidy is very, very important. So working very, very collaboratively with them, we made sure that no one was paid twice.

And then we did have one other question that came in; it said I may have missed it but is the search assistance person someone from the community or a grant position or employed by the agency?

So, it's a contract position. We put out an RFP, the company RH Brown and Co. They have won this RFP; they have done all of our RAD relocations. Whenever we have done a disposition of a property, she (Mrs. Brown) has worked with—her team—has worked with those families to get them rehoused as well. She is a local to central Ohio organization. But she has worked across Ohio. We know she's done relocation services down in Cincinnati. She was also a former HUD employee. So, she has a strong understanding of URA Rule. And, she actually helped keep us on our toes a lot because she is so familiar with the rules and regulations associated with relocating and housing.

Homelessness and Vouchers

All right. Well, I think that is all the questions for the CMHA and Columbus, Ohio team and the Community Shelter Board. So, thank you, guys. We will move on now to Homelessness and Vouchers.



Webinar Panelist – Lisa Garcia

So, I would love to introduce our first webinar panelist. This is Lisa Garcia, Vice President of Assisted Housing for the Housing Authority of the City of Austin. Lisa provides strategic leadership and a mission to increase access to affordable housing. She manages the rental assistance programs that help over 5,800 households and 13,000 individuals. She's a member of the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials, so NAHRO, and works towards system level change, analyzing policies and recommending strategies that increase affordable housing and services for the homeless and low-income families. Welcome, Lisa.

Webinar Panelist – Kate Moore

And co-presenting with Lisa is Kate Moore. She is the Vice President of Strategic Planning and Partnerships for the Ending Community Homelessness Coalition, also known as ECHO there in Austin, Texas. She has more than two decades of professional affordable housing experience, working with nonprofits city, state, county, and state agencies. She's experienced in programs for people experiencing homelessness and people with disabilities. She's worked as consultant with a staff member of the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs and the City of Austin. She also worked in Portland, Oregon areas as a homeless case manager and working for a community land trust in the city of Portland's Housing Bureau. Welcome, Kate Moore. All right, so Lisa, I am going to pass the ball to you. Are you ready for it?

Yeah.

It is all yours.

Need a Place to Call Home

Thank you, Mike, for the introduction and for inviting me to participate in today's webinar. I have worked with the Housing Authority of the City of Austin for the past twenty-seven years. And during my tenure in partnerships with HUD and community partners, we've increased the number of vouchers available to serve the homeless from 35 to over 1,700 today. This represents amazing strides to provide housing and services to the homeless, but there's still more work to do. In Austin on any given night, there are over 3,160 homeless individuals, and we anticipate more people become homeless when the Eviction Moratorium ends. Additionally, the recent passing of Proposition B has heightened the need for affordable homes to house the homeless. In Austin, Texas, it is now a criminal offence to sit, lie down, or camp in public areas.

Community Need Demographics in 2020

Thank you for having me. This is Kate Moore. I'm going to begin by walking you through some demographics of the population of people experiencing homelessness in our



community. So, this slide illustrates the racial and ethnic demographics of our county, which is Travis County. And that's what the red dot is. There are some people experiencing homelessness with the blue dots. Race is the single leading factor of all social determinants that lead to homelessness in our country, and Austin is no exception. A black Austinite is six times more likely than a white Austinite to experience homelessness as you can see on this slide. Only 8% of people in Travis County are black compared to 35% of people experiencing homelessness. But homelessness is not an individual issue. It's a systemic and institutional issue. And the racial inequities in these demographics can be traced not only to racism and the community's past response to homelessness, but also to long standing racial barriers in housing, education, policing, criminal justice, employment, and health care.

Community Need Demographics in 2020 (Continued)

So, this next slide provides just some additional demographics. It shows that the majority of people experiencing homelessness in our community are male with a median age of 38.

Community Need Demographics in 2020 (Continued)

You can also see that our population experiencing homelessness is primarily single-person households with a large percentage of survivors of domestic violence. Also not on this chart but important, we also see seven out of ten people experiencing homelessness have a disability. Austin also has a large and growing population of chronic homelessness. Chronic is a HUD definition that in broad strokes means that someone has a disability and has been experiencing homelessness for a significant amount of time. It is here that we see the impact of the lack of resources to meet the demand that continues to lengthen the time that people stay in unsheltered homelessness in our community. For example, in 2020, large urban areas on average chronicity of 20%. While Austin continues to see larger percentages of people experiencing chronic homelessness. As you can see on this, it's just 41% of our population was chronic in 2020.

Community Need Demographics in 2020 (Continued)

So, this slide shows our gaps analysis. So, we know that permanent housing and homelessness—as many of the presenters are giving great examples—the data is clear also that permanent housing programs are the most effective interventions to ending someone's homelessness. Our homeless response system has two main permanent housing programs: permanent supportive housing, or PSH, and rapid rehousing. Nearly nine in ten people in our community who enter into a permanent housing program remain stably housed two years later. So, we know that they work. But as you can see from this graph, we need more of it. We're grateful for our partnership with HACA that has allowed us in our community to increase the amount of permanent housing programs.



CoC and HACA: Current Partnership

2016, HACA created Homelessness Preference issuing vouchers to over 300 homeless households referred through Coordinated Entry. Each month, 25% of vouchers issued from the waitlist are provided to those experiencing homelessness. The average is five batches each month. Homeless Preference vouchers create an opportunity for CoC to make vouchers available to those with the highest needs in our community, which can change over time. Kaye will now expand on how this prioritization works in Austin.

One of the great things about the Homeless Preference voucher is that it's dynamic to meet our ongoing needs. Currently, through our communities Coordinated Entry system, we have a prioritization system that prioritizes the creation of new permanent supportive housing programs first. This would require somebody in our community to have matching service dollars to leverage with the voucher. If that isn't available, we make the vouchers available to permanent supportive housing clients who choose to move on from permanent supportive housing services to a Housing Choice Voucher. And then third, if we have vouchers still, we make the vouchers available to rapid rehousing clients who need a permanent rental subsidy to stabilize. So, these last two examples are priorities often called move-up vouchers, and they're very valuable to us because they free up existing programming to be able to take on additional clients.

Partnership Benefits

One of the primary benefits of HACA partnering with the CoC is knowing that individuals and families referred have been identified by the CoC as having the highest need for housing. Secondly, all households served are pre-screened to make sure they meet HACA's eligibility requirements. Third, all households receive housing search in case measurement services provided by a community partner to help them locate a home and connect the services to increase their success. Additionally, the CoC continually reviews and improves their system with an eye towards ensuring that the most vulnerable receive housing, while also considering racial and gender identity equity.

CoC and HACA Current Initiatives

One of the primary challenges we face in Austin is a lack of affordable units. Recognizing the crucial need to create additional housing opportunities for support services. HACA is project-basing vouchers to serve the homeless. We currently have 200 project-based voucher units and five different partners at six locations. To meet the ongoing need, HACA plans to issue requests for proposals in the future to make additional project-based vouchers available. The leveraging of project-based vouchers to create additional funds for housing units stands the key strategy to expand the opportunities for the homeless.



Emergency Housing Vouchers

HACA is actively involved in conversation and activities as it relates to the homeless response system. This includes having decision makers such as myself or other HACA employees serving on ECHO's leadership council and various task groups. That strong partnership allowed HACA to quickly engage with our CoC and various community partners to develop and execute value for the recently awarded emergency housing vouchers. I'll turn it back to Kate to share how the emergency housing voucher program and our partnership created additional PSH opportunities. Kate? Thanks, Lisa. So, the emergency housing voucher program really was an exciting opportunity for our community. One of the things that we were able to do is create effective programming to help fill the gaps in permanent housing in our community. And this was a case of needing to have existing relationships not only between the Continuum of Care and the PHA, but as well as relationships with providers and the community, and these existing relationships really paid off. We started meeting regularly to strategize and get the work done. As soon as the notice was released to meet HUD's aggressive deadlines for the emergency housing vouchers. We found several partners who had service program funds that could be matched with the vouchers to meet the PSH or the permanent supportive housing level of services. We were able to create new permanent supportive housing program slots, which was huge in our community with such a high need for this additional programming. Our agency has also been doing outreach to non-traditional black- and brown-led agencies to find avenues for them to become providers in our homelessness response system. And with these emergency housing vouchers, we created a short-term rapid program with the emergency housing vouchers with the Austin Area Urban League because of those efforts and that relationship building done ahead of time, and now they are running their first permanent housing program in the homelessness response system, which is very exciting.

I also want to do a big shout out to HUD for putting a requirement and the guidance for the emergency housing vouchers that the PHA had to partner with the Continuum of Care and take referrals from Coordinated Entry. This was really helpful. This provided clear guidance to our community of how we were to partner on these vouchers, which allowed us to move past that assumption quickly and get to planning how these vouchers could work.

Community Partners

As already mentioned, partnerships are key. HACA continually works with partners to identify opportunities to apply for additional vouchers. These conversations are ongoing, so when new opportunities surface, we are ready to connect and apply for the vouchers. Just this week, our collaboration with ECHO and Lifeworks resulted in an award of 75 vouchers. Some of our other partners include local mental health providers, nonprofits that serve the homeless, and faith-based organizations.



Lessons Learned and Future Vision

In closing, the primary message I'd like to relay is the importance of building relationships with your community of care and other community partners that serve the homeless. I think everyone would agree strong friendships and relationships don't happen in one day, but continue to engage with others and build a diverse network of partners. Together and through a systematic approach, we can dramatically improve our response to house the homeless one partnership and one home at a time. I also wanted to take this opportunity to thank HUD for providing so many additional resources to house the homeless. Secondly, I want to thank HUD for providing additional admin fees and service dollars with the new emergency housing vouchers, which allows PHAs and community partners to better serve and house the homeless. Finally, I also want to thank HUD for listening to housing practitioners and approving administrative flexibilities and waivers for PHAs to adjust their screening criteria to serve the homeless as well as streamlining eligibility certification processes. Just finally again, I just want to thank the audience for participating today and for all the work you do to help provide housing and services to our homeless neighbors. And I'm going to turn it back over to Mike. Thank you.

Questions

With All right. So, there's a couple of questions that came in through the chat. And I will propose those to you guys. So, the first question is: what documents do you require from your CoC to show the client is eligible for the emergency housing voucher in the four different groups?

So, we have established a referral form that they provide, that they have to complete. And, they have to certify that the individual referred is eligible for the voucher.

And then, I had a question in regards to your rapid rehousing. It sounded like you allow for rapid rehousing participants to utilize a voucher at the completion of their rapid rehousing period. When that happens, do you require those residents to move or are they able to lease in place?

So hopefully—this is Kate, I'll take a stab at this, Lisa, if you have anything to add. We have staff at ECHO that work with the residents, and hopefully we can allow them to stay in place. You know, Austin's market is really hot as well and very competitive. And so, you know, sometimes a property owner may choose to refuse a voucher. And in that case, we would help support that client to find a new place to live.

Yeah, I just kind of personally thinking about it. That's kind of a unique approach to kind of the ending of a rapid rehousing period to immediately be able to utilize the voucher after that can help boost the utilization of your voucher program. So, I find that very interesting. So, thank you for sharing them. Okay, a couple more questions came in: Is there any source of income discrimination law there?



No. In Austin, Texas, we are not allowed in the state of Texas to have a source of income law. And that's one of the reasons that the owners could refuse the voucher if they chose to.

So, there's nothing precluding an owner from saying no to somebody with a voucher? Am I hearing that correctly? Correct.

Correct. Yep. There's no source of income protection.

So, I think that's the end of the questions that we have so far. We are going to go ahead and stay on for a couple more minutes in case any questions come in. I would like to thank everybody on the panel. You guys are awesome. We appreciate the presentations you have provided today. It's truly great to learn about how some of your PHAs are addressing your community issues. I think it's something that is desperately needed in a lot of communities and thank you so much for sharing that with everybody today. As a reminder, all questions asked today will be addressed in a frequently asked questions document and posted to HUD Exchange. In addition to that, there's also some items that HUD has available to PHAs that I think would be helpful to post as well, one of which is the Eviction Prevention Toolkit that HUD put out, I think, sometime mid last year. And, I believe there's information in regards to re-entry, as well as a lot of information in regards to working with homeless families and implementing that into your voucher program. So, we'll try and add some additional information in that regard and links to those documents for participants to be able to access. But with that, we'll go ahead and if any attendee doesn't have any more questions, you are free to leave. If you have additional questions, feel free to put them in the chat with the panel. We'll be here for five more minutes. So, thank you. You've been a great audience. Thanks all for joining the webinar. So, there was a question that came in a little bit ago. And Justin, this would be for you. Would you be available, or would you be willing to share the RFP that you guys put out for your housing search assistance?

Let me confirm, but I believe that should not be a problem since it was posted publicly.

And then, there's a question that came in asking, how VASH vouchers work as homeless? Anybody on the panel want to kind of take a stab at that? I'm thinking they're wondering if it's different than—if VASH is different than the vouchers you're talking about that you're using for your permanent supportive housing or through your regular Housing Choice Voucher Program?

I can take a stab at that, yes. The VASH vouchers are separate, because we have a separate allocation, and then, we receive direct referrals from the VA for homeless veterans that are eligible for those vouchers.

So, here's another question: can you share your landlord incentives that you use to increase unit availability?

Can I clarify the question: so CMHA, we put together a one-pager that we had put on our website, is that what you're looking for? Or, are you just looking again for me to go over what we do?



I think maybe she's saying both.

Yeah, I can definitely provide it. Honestly, it's easier to get it from our website. CMHAnet.com. I'm not sure how to provide it to the group through this medium. Okay. But here, let me do this. I'll put it in the chat.

While you're doing that, Justin, are you putting a link in the chat? Is that what you're doing?

Yes. Okay, cool. And once you get on the website, there's a tab that says Landlord Incentives. Simply click on it. It'll give you the flyer that we pushed out that has RH Brown and Co.'s contact information on there as well as the ins and outs of how we're doing this. I think the one caveat to Columbus's landlord incentives is that these incentives are only applicable if you are bringing a vacant unit onto our program. A leasing-in-place unit would not qualify for the security deposit or vacancy payments.

Very good distinction. Thank you for clarifying that, Justin.

So, we use SharePoint, and I was able to finally get the website to open. We have been issuing our EHVs. And we have been working with our CSB on this. And, we've created a shared SharePoint site. So, I can say, we've issued 61 vouchers so far, and I'm looking to see how many we actually had come back leased up. We're issuing so that's a positive.

Yeah.

There's another great question in the chat here. There's two of them. So the first one is, may I ask how the presenting PHAs determine what community needs are to be addressed? For example, do you survey the community? How do you go about determining what the community needs are?

I guess I would say for Columbus, we get a lot of phone calls from our participants, our stakeholders, letters, things like that, letting us know the issues in the community. In addition to that, many of our staff here are on local boards that have dealings that affect the community. So, we are hearing about things from many different angles. And as a result, we are able to be actionable on things that we may not have been able to be actionable on had we not been in the rooms to have the discussion.

I would reiterate that for us here in Burlington. And then, also our University Medical Center also does a needs assessment. They have a foundation that has some grant funding dollars and I want to say, biannually, and it is a survey that goes out to all of Chittenden County and then shows sort of key priority areas as identified by the community.

There's another question that came in for you, Justin. It said, asking again, what CMHA funds are used for landlord incentives? Is it HCV admin fees, reserves, unprotected net position, CoC funds, or other funds?



So, we use CARES Act dollars for the landlord incentives, the security deposit assistance, vacancy payment assistance, and homebuyer education. For RH Brown and Co. and Affordablehousing.com, those are paid out of CoC funds.

And then it looks like the last question we have for the panel is: did you use HUD waivers? And how do you plan to follow up with clients who were allowed to participate in the emergency housing vouchers?

Can you say the question one more time? I want to make sure I'm trying to answer it appropriately.

So, the question is: did you use HUD waivers? And how do you plan to follow up with clients who are allowed to participate in the emergency housing vouchers?

So yes, we absolutely have used the waivers. I instructed my team as we are receiving these referrals over from CSB to take advantage of waivers to the fullest extent. We want to change how quickly we are doing this. Because we need less documentation to actually issue a voucher, we should be able to take the self-certifications as soon as we get you and be able to turn around a voucher. My challenge to the team is to turn vouchers around to the emergency housing vouchers 48 to 72 hours after we received the referral. We have allocated our team members to it. It is just getting everybody on board with doing things the way we need them to. We've set up all of our systems to work. It's just now getting everybody on board.

Thanks

And I think that is the end of the questions. So, thank you to the panel and to the attendees. We appreciate everyone taking the time to join today. Again, all questions asked today will be addressed in the frequently asked questions document that will be posted to HUD Exchange along with the presentation and associated documents that we spoke about. So, I hope everyone has a great afternoon. Thanks for joining.

