

Improving Housing Outcomes for People Involved with the Criminal Justice System

Understanding the Revolving Door of Homelessness and CJS Involvement

Involvement with the criminal justice system (CJS) creates unique barriers to safe and stable housing. Arrests, conviction, and incarceration can lead to housing and employment discrimination, exacerbated behavioral health issues, and limited access to public benefits, among other challenges that increase the risk of extended experiences of homelessness.

Extensive evidence demonstrates the inextricable connections between homelessness and CJS involvement. People who have been incarcerated, for example, are 10 times more likely to experience homelessness than the general population, and more likely to be homeless for longer periods of time. And people experiencing homelessness are more likely to be involved with the CJS – including as a result of citations or arrests for the activities of living outside.

Recognizing this “revolving door between homelessness and reincarceration,” HUD has committed to a comprehensive approach to addressing the housing needs of people involved with the CJS. With approximately one-in-three Americans having some type of criminal record and nearly 50,000 people entering shelters from incarceration each year, it is paramount that homeless systems and programs have the tools to effectively prevent and end homelessness for these individuals.

Addressing the housing needs of individuals involved with the CJS is not only an urgent crisis for our work to end homelessness, it is also key to advancing equity in our homeless systems of care. Due to longstanding systemic inequities, BIPOC people are more likely to be impacted by the criminal justice system than the general population – and are more likely than the general population to experience homelessness after release. LGBTQ+ people also experience incarceration and homelessness at much higher rates than those who are heterosexual or cisgender.

Prioritizing Individuals Impacted by the Criminal Justice System

There are several strategies and interventions that can break the cycle of CJS involvement and homelessness, and many reasons Continuums of Care (CoCs) should make it a priority to

improve housing outcomes for community members involved with the CJS. These reasons include:

1. People who are involved with the criminal justice system face some of the greatest barriers to safe and stable housing. **We cannot end homelessness in our communities unless we overcome these barriers.**
2. Criminal justice system stakeholders can be tremendous, often untapped partners for impact. There are many meaningful opportunities to coordinate resources and align systems to improve housing outcomes for people involved with the CJS.
3. Addressing the housing needs of people impacted by the criminal justice system advances racial equity, with both incarceration and homelessness disproportionately impacting BIPOC individuals.
4. It advances equity for LGBTQ+ people who also experience incarceration and homelessness at much higher rates than those who are heterosexual or cisgender.
5. Programs that have committed to a Housing First approach must take steps to lower barriers to access and participation for individuals impacted by the CJS, including those with criminal records.

Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness and Criminal Justice System Involvement

This toolkit is an actionable guide to support CoCs, direct service providers, and other homelessness system partners to lower barriers and increase housing access for people impacted by the CJS.

The resources, educational material, and tools provided here support community partners to:

- Build Effective Partnerships with Criminal Justice System Stakeholders (Section I)
- Strengthen Access to Housing and Services through Outreach, Identification, and Prioritization (Section II)
- Expand Low-Barrier Housing Opportunities and Supports to Advance Housing First (Section III)

The following chart outlines the tools, strategies, and action steps described in the toolkit.

Tool	Key Strategies and Action Steps
Section I: Building Effective Partnerships with Criminal Justice System Stakeholders	
A. Engaging Criminal Justice System Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage people with lived experience of both homelessness and the criminal justice system in the CoC

Tool	Key Strategies and Action Steps
in CoC Governance and Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify CJS partners and establish formal roles within the CoC, including as members of the CoC Board and relevant CoC committees • Engage CJS partners in strategic planning processes, identifying specific strategies for increasing housing access for people impacted by the criminal justice system
B. Effectively Onboarding Criminal Justice System Partners to the CoC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide CJS partners with foundational information about how homeless assistance systems and the CoC works to support their active participation • Encourage ongoing communication between CoC members and CJS partners to share hopes and expectations and adjust as needed to best leverage the partnership
C. Building and Maintaining Cross-System Partnerships with the Criminal Justice System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage the appropriate partners to establish a common agenda with shared goals • Identify mutually reinforcing activities with clear roles and responsibilities • Adopt shared metrics and systems for continuous communication
Section II: Expanding Access to Housing through Outreach, Identification, and Prioritization	
D. Enhancing Access to Resources for Individuals Involved in the CJS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with law enforcement including police and sheriff departments, to provide community alternatives to law enforcement response • Engage with the courts and criminal justice system case managers to support individuals experiencing homelessness who are involved with the criminal justice system • Support discharge planning and reentry for individuals who are at risk of homelessness after reentering the community • Coordinate with parole and probation to prevent and end homelessness for individuals with criminal records

Tool	Key Strategies and Action Steps
<p>E. Strategies for Prioritizing People with Criminal Records in Coordinated Entry Systems</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure coordinated entry policies and procedures explicitly prohibit individual programs from implementing eligibility requirements or other barriers not required by the terms of their funding, in accordance with the Housing First approach • Identify appropriate prioritization factors and assessment methods for people involved with the criminal justice system • Regularly evaluate assessment and prioritization processes to ensure they effectively prioritize people involved with the criminal justice system in accordance with their individualized vulnerability and need
<p>Section III: Advancing Housing First through Low-Barrier Housing and Supports</p>	
<p>F. Lowering Housing Barriers for People Involved with the CJS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement the Housing First approach to reduce barriers to safe and stable housing • Understand and address the unique needs of special populations, including survivors of domestic violence and people with limited English proficiency
<p>G. Working with Landlords to Overcome Housing Barriers for People with Criminal Records</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare for potential issues in advance, including common questions, requests, and anticipated issues that landlords may raise • Consider strategies to overcome hurdles and help understand and address landlord’s concerns • Leverage partnerships between the criminal justice system and CoC to more effectively support clients with criminal records, such as individuals in reentry
<p>H. Housing-Focused Case Management for People Involved with the CJS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply culturally competent strategies responsive to the challenges faced by individuals reentering the community from incarceration • Develop a housing-focused case plan that is responsive to the client’s individual strengths and challenges • Support the client to implement the plan and lower barriers to stable housing

Tool	Key Strategies and Action Steps
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the client is set up for success in long-term housing stability
I. Tailored Housing Opportunities for People Involved with the CJS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design programs responsive to the needs of individuals reentering the community from incarceration • Understand criminal justice system housing resources and their limitations to develop an integrated continuum of housing and services • Leverage resources to expand housing opportunities that overcome challenges resulting from eligibility barriers or stigma

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