

Ending homelessness requires an intentional and coordinated response system that provides people who are unhoused with safe, secure, and sustainable housing to meet their needs. It begins with equitable and effective coordinated entry systems that support people experiencing homelessness with services such as housing navigation that can guide individuals and families on the path to obtaining and maintaining housing. [Housing navigation](#) and housing education seek to identify opportunities and address barriers to housing for individuals and families exiting street, shelter, transitional, and other forms of homelessness. This includes consideration of education and support services related to credit counseling and repair provided by member organizations of the [National Foundation for Credit Counseling](#).

Housing navigation is essential in assisting clients with identifying housing options, resources, and services that prepare them to successfully engage landlords and meet requirements to obtain housing. Across the country, community organizations like [The Navigation Center](#) seek to provide “hope and direction” to individuals, families, and veterans at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

What and Who Are Housing Navigators?

Housing navigators play an integral role in addressing the needs of individuals and families experiencing homelessness. The [housing navigator](#) is the link between clients and services; they work directly with clients and alongside case managers, social workers, and other service providers to address clients’ needs on entry to homeless services systems, while engaging the system, and after obtaining housing. Housing navigators are responsible for developing relationships with and between clients and community partners and ultimately with housing professionals and landlords. Their responsibilities involve assisting clients with identifying and eliminating potential housing barriers related to criminal records, credit reports, and prior housing judgments due to eviction. This is particularly helpful for individuals and families seeking housing with vouchers. Housing navigators can serve as the first line of defense for clients encountering housing discrimination based on race, ethnicity, and other protected classes.

Essential Considerations for Housing Navigators

- Provide individuals and families holding housing vouchers with credit counseling and related services options.
- Identify ways to empower those seeking housing to advocate for themselves regarding financial barriers, challenges, or opportunities to enhance credit.
- Identify local legal aid societies such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) as a partner/resource to support people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness to obtain legal assistance with housing matters. This can include homelessness prevention and anti-discriminatory efforts such as:
 - Supporting the right to counsel or the right to representation in eviction cases.
 - Providing guidance in possible housing discrimination when sources of income, particularly vouchers, are not accepted by landlords.
 - Resolving landlord and tenant disputes to maintain housing.
 - Encouraging state and federal legislators to increase budgets for homelessness prevention.
 - Addressing alleged discrimination based on housing status, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, physical or mental ability, and source of income.
- Support the engagement of housing and homeless advocacy groups, people with lived experience of homelessness, and civil rights and human rights agencies by promoting and participating in awareness or educational sessions and social media campaigns. Strategies that connect housing navigation with targeted outreach to landlord associations can bring focus to the benefits of landlords working with households supported by housing navigators and other support systems.

Duties and Responsibilities of Housing Navigators

- Guide and support individuals and families through the housing search process.
- Identify strategies and resources to mitigate issues with credit reports, utility arrears, criminal records, and/or unfavorable landlord references.
- Participate in the housing needs assessment process to identify individuals' and families' housing preferences.
- Assist clients with application to landlords and Public Housing Authorities (PHA) for permanent housing and in preparing/obtaining any needed documentation. This can include ensuring individuals and families—particularly people who identify as Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) with [limited English proficiency](#)—have access to plain language options and resources in their preferred language.
- Negotiate with PHA officials for timely inspections and landlord corrective action requests.
- Assist individuals and families with expanded housing searches when necessary to ensure timely permanent housing.
- Facilitate a wide variety of support services such as health, behavioral health, substance abuse treatment, benefits, employment, financial, and transportation, among other needs.
- Assist individuals and families in the development and assessment of their needs and a plan to meet their needs.
- Develop coordinated and cooperative working relationships, through active outreach, with a wide range of service providers and related stakeholders such as landlords, service providers, property management companies, and employers.

(Adapted from the VA National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans [Housing Navigator Toolkit Job Description](#))

Engaging Landlords, PHAs, Housing Professionals, and Community Stakeholders

Developing and maintaining positive, accountable, and supportive relationships with property managers, landlords, and other housing professionals is essential for assisting clients seeking housing with rental assistance such as the [Housing Choice Voucher Program](#). This requires housing navigators to:

- Identify and maintain a database of landlords and housing professionals that accept housing vouchers; rental assistance; and people with past struggles with credit, tenancy, and/or criminal records.
- Coordinate with case managers, social workers, housing specialists, landlords, and other community stakeholders in the work of assisting people with navigating systems when seeking housing to find the best outcomes for them. Housing navigators working in conjunction with service providers and other community stakeholders are encouraged to support the development of a housing navigator role/position to work directly with clients as they seek to obtain and maintain housing. This provides an opportunity for [recruiting, hiring, and onboarding](#) people with the lived experience of homelessness and expertise in navigating homeless provider systems and housing placement services.
- Work with the community to develop a funding source to mitigate risks and identify an agency as a co-signer or reference who can potentially provide an incentive for landlords to rent to individuals and families struggling with credit, tenancy, and/or criminal records.

Conclusion

Providing housing navigation allows for an intentional and coordinated response to ending the experience of homelessness for individuals and families. Housing navigators working collaboratively with case managers, landlords, and housing professionals are positioned to meet the needs and support the productivity and success of unhoused individuals and families as members of the community. Such efforts help to ensure that the experience of homelessness is brief and exiting homelessness is sustained.