

HOPWA CHALLENGES IN RURAL AREAS

HOPWA grantees delivering housing and supportive services in balance of state areas often face obstacles such as very limited housing stock, large geographic service areas, and limited client transportation resources. Grantees in urban centers face similar circumstances when working to provide housing and services in more remote or rural locales within their HOPWA Eligible Metropolitan Statistical Area (EMSA). This fact sheet explains grantee service area requirements, gives an overview of rural housing program challenges, suggests methods to enhance rural housing operations, and lists informational resources, including a recorded webinar produced through HUD's HOPWA Modernization initiative.

This resource is prepared by technical assistance providers and intended to help grantees and project sponsors understand HOPWA program guidance. The contents of this document, except when based on statutory or regulatory authority or law, do not have the force and effect of law and are not meant to bind the public in any way. This document is intended only to provide clarity to the public regarding existing requirements under the law or agency policies.

HOPWA SERVICE AREA REQUIREMENTS

HOPWA program regulations specify the service areas of city and state grantees. HOPWA formula grants are made using a statutorily-mandated formula to allocate 90 percent of HOPWA funds to eligible cities on behalf of their metropolitan areas and to eligible states. The service area requirements include:

- **City grantees** receive formula allocations based on HIV case data, housing costs, and poverty data for all jurisdictions within the EMSA. The regulations at 24 CFR 574.120 require city grantees to address the needs of all eligible persons who live in the EMSA. City grantees must make housing and services available to persons living anywhere within their respective EMSAs and must reach eligible people in all counties covered. It is not considered sufficient to have all housing and services in one location — such as the most populated city — unless measures are in place to ensure that HOPWA services are also made available to those living in more remote areas of the EMSA.
- **State grantees** receive formula allocations based on HIV case data, housing costs, and poverty data in areas of the state *outside of any qualifying EMSA*. The state grantee must make HOPWA services available in these “balance of state” areas, although the regulations also allow states to carry out activities anywhere within the state, including within an EMSA (24 CFR 574.3). If a state decides to fund an area within an EMSA, this decision should be based on data showing a higher need in that area.

Grantees should make efforts to ensure availability of HOPWA program assistance throughout all jurisdictions or counties within their service area, using a variety of means, such as:

- Locating HOPWA housing and services in all covered areas
- Co-locating HOPWA staff in outlying agencies to assist with intake and assessment
- Establishing collaborative agreements with outlying agencies to facilitate referrals
- Developing area-wide outreach plans to ensure that all eligible persons know how to access assistance



CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

HOPWA programs providing housing in rural and remote communities frequently encounter challenges and barriers to success. While similar to issues addressed by urban-centered programs, these challenges are often much more difficult to overcome in a rural setting. Programs are encouraged to assess such barriers when engaging in HOPWA program or system planning.

- **Transportation** options in rural communities are often limited or non-existent, making it difficult for clients to access services
- **Coverage** of very large and remote areas causes challenges for program staff who must carry out home visits, maintain close connections to clients, and engage landlords
- **Lack of affordable rental housing stock** is a major obstacle for many rental assistance programs
- **Substandard housing** is common, and further complicates access to housing
- **Stigma and confidentiality** issues are often more prevalent in rural communities
- **Lack of accessible health and mental health services** may make treatment and adherence more difficult to maintain

ENHANCING RURAL HOUSING OPERATIONS

Best practices in housing programs serving rural areas show that, in order to be successful, programs must engage in careful planning and deliberate program design. Success often depends upon active marketing of the housing program, including outreach and engagement with potential landlords. Programs will benefit from ongoing attention to landlord relationships, monitoring of landlord-tenant interactions, and an emphasis on eviction prevention. Implementation of these activities should also trigger a review of other services that may be needed, along with updated procedures intended to protect client confidentiality.

- **Marketing your Program.** Marketing the program is one of the best strategies to develop a pool of landlords and management companies willing to rent to clients. Marketing activities may be directed at “mom and pop” landlords, property management companies, and other service providers in the area. A toolbox of marketing resources can include an agency or program brochure, one-page informational handouts, client success stories, and support letters from landlords who have participated.
- **Landlord Engagement.** Engagement activities start with proactive outreach — to landlord associations, individual landlords, knocking on doors. Focus on how you can be helpful and respond to their needs as business owners. Be clear about your role and realistic about the support you can provide to help clients become and remain good tenants.
- **Eviction Prevention.** Common reasons for eviction include unpaid or late rent, criminal activity, unauthorized guests, neighbor disturbance, poor housekeeping and other breaches of the tenant’s lease. Housing case managers should be in direct communication with landlords and should visit clients in their units on a regular schedule based on each client’s needs. Many behaviors can be handled before they become serious enough to cause eviction. It is the case manager’s role to help clients understand their rights, but also their responsibilities as tenants, and to advocate with landlords for fair treatment.
- **Transportation and Other Support Services.** Since lack of transportation often impacts client access to services, particularly in rural areas, programs should assess ways to increase transportation options. HOPWA Supportive Services can fund transportation in a variety of ways, including taxi/ride share vouchers, and under some circumstances, gas vouchers. Some Ryan White programs also provide these transportation services. Additionally, Supportive Services may be used to purchase vehicles and gas costs for client transportation, as well as mileage costs for case managers to visit and/or

Figure 1: Remember the four things that landlords want



transport clients. Other considerations for the use of HOPWA Supportive Services may include food banks or other nutritional services that are needed but not easily accessed in rural communities.

- **Confidentiality Reminder.** As programs engage in increased community outreach, rental program marketing, and landlord engagement, it may be necessary to update and expand confidentiality procedures in order to avoid unintended disclosure. Advance planning can help staff approach landlords and community members appropriately, and planning can be informed by the HOPWA Confidentiality User Guide, found at <https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/HOPWA-Confidentiality-User-Guide.pdf>

PROGRAM PLANNING

The following are suggested planning questions and issues that grantees and communities may use to assess their program design for service area coverage, rural housing operations, and rental program success.

1. Are we reaching people living with HIV/AIDS in all parts of our service area? If not, how can we improve?
2. Do we need to develop some new strategic partners to increase the impact or reach of our rural housing program?
3. Are we conducting the right level of outreach and marketing? To landlords, to property managers, to civic groups, and to other social service or health organizations in the area?
4. What written materials are needed to help with outreach?
5. Are we conducting outreach and marketing in a manner that protects client confidentiality?
6. Are we sharing resources appropriately? Within our organization and within our community of providers?
7. How can we build and sustain long-term relationships that will increase program success?

RESOURCES

These resources offer information and best practices for rural housing programs. Note that many of the resource materials are not HOPWA-specific and therefore may contain certain information on implementation of program elements that cannot be funded by HOPWA, such as rapid re-housing.

- National Alliance to End Homelessness: *Rapid Re-Housing Toolkit*
<https://endhomelessness.org/resource/rapid-re-housing-toolkit/>
- HUD's Landlord Engagement & Recruitment Additional Resources (May 2015)
<http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=Landlord-Resource.pdf>
- Florida Housing Coalition Landlord Collaboration Guidebook: Working with Landlords to Help Households Move Out of Homelessness
<http://www.flhousing.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Landlord-Collaboration-Guidebook-2016.pdf>
- Rural Health Initiative: Promising Transportation Models:
<https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/toolkits/transportation/2/program-models>
- Webinar: Rural Challenges — Operating HOPWA Housing Programs in Rural Communities:
<https://www.hudexchange.info/trainings/courses/hopwa-modernization-rural-challenges-operating-hopwa-housing-programs-in-rural-communities/>

For any questions on allowable HOPWA program activities, please contact the HOPWA AAQ Desk:
<https://www.hudexchange.info/program-support/my-question/>