

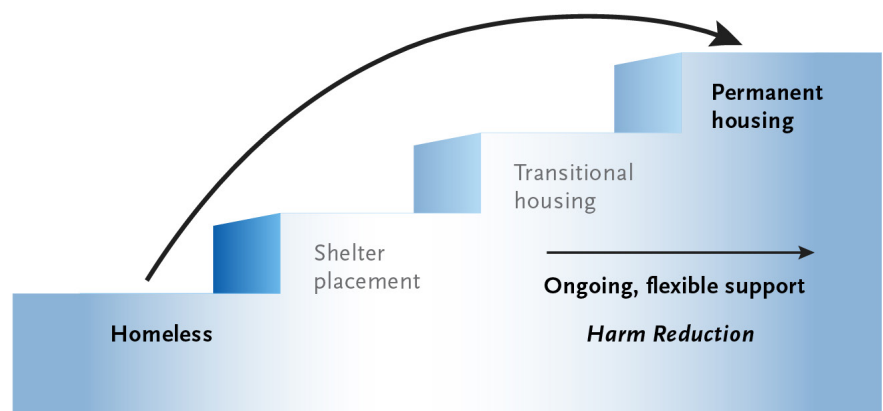
# HOUSING FIRST AND HARM REDUCTION

According to the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, the Housing First approach is centered on the beliefs that everyone can achieve stability in permanent housing directly from homelessness, and that stable housing is the foundation for achieving other health and social goals. HOPWA grantees and project sponsors are strongly encouraged to incorporate Housing First into all their HUD-funded activities, at both the project and community levels. Grantees and project sponsors are strongly encouraged to incorporate Housing First practices across all their HUD-funded activities, including the housing and services funded by HOPWA.

*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.*

## HOUSING FIRST APPROACH

Figure 1: [City of San Rafael, 2017](#)



## CORE PRINCIPLES OF HOUSING FIRST

- Everyone is “Housing Ready”: Access to programs is not contingent on sobriety, minimum income requirements, lack of a criminal record, completion of treatment, participation in services, or other unnecessary conditions.
- Programs or projects do everything possible not to reject an individual or family on the basis of poor credit or financial history, poor or lack of rental history, minor criminal convictions, or behaviors that are interpreted as indicating a lack of “housing readiness.”
- Housing and service goals and plans are highly tenant-driven.
- Supportive services emphasize engagement and problem-solving over therapeutic goals.
- Participation in services and compliance with service plans are choices, not conditions of tenancy. Service options are reviewed with tenants and regularly offered as a resource.
- Services are informed by a harm reduction philosophy that recognizes drug/alcohol use and addiction as parts of some tenants’ lives.
- Substance use itself, without other lease violations, is not considered a reason for eviction.

A Housing First approach can be used in HOPWA’s tenant-based and facility-based housing activities. With Housing First, tenants should have a choice of safe, affordable, decent housing options in which there is a separation of housing and services. Participants have tenant rights and access to robust, flexible, and voluntary services.



## HARM REDUCTION APPROACH TO DELIVERING SERVICES IN HOUSING

### CORE PRINCIPLES OF HARM REDUCTION

According to the Harm Reduction Coalition, harm reduction is focused on reducing the negative consequences associated with drug use. It incorporates a spectrum of practical strategies from safer use, to managed use, to abstinence, allowing providers to meet drug users where they are, addressing the condition of use along with use itself.

- There are no punitive sanctions for what someone chooses to put/not put in their body.
- When we create punitive sanctions, people will lie.
- Incremental change is normal.
- Quality of life and well-being measure success.
- Tenant engagement: A commitment to ensuring tenants are actively engaged in influencing housing services and shaping their communities.
- Client-focused services: a non-authoritative approach that allows clients to take a lead in discussions so that they will discover their own solutions.
- Motivational interviewing is used in order to help people resolve ambivalent feelings and insecurities to find the internal motivation they need to change their behavior.

### PRACTITIONERS USING A HARM REDUCTION APPROACH UNDERSTAND THE STAGES OF CHANGE

*(Continuing and Professional Education — Virginia Tech, 2010)*

- *Precontemplation* — unaware that behavior is problematic
- *Contemplation* — intention to start healthy behavior in the foreseeable future
- *Preparation* — ready to take action by a specific date
- *Action* — have changed behavior and intend to keep moving forward
- *Maintenance* — have sustained new behavior for six months and intend to keep moving forward
- *Relapse* — return to the old behavior with desire to return to action
- *Termination* — have no desire to return to unhealthy behavior

### HARM REDUCTION AND HOUSING FIRST

Harm reduction is an important part of the Housing First model as it is based on principles of self-determination and individual choice. Examples of integrating harm reduction and Housing First approaches into HOPWA Programs:

#### RESOURCES

- Housing First Checklist:  
[https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset\\_library/Housing\\_First\\_Checklist\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Housing_First_Checklist_FINAL.pdf)
- Housing First Permanent Supportive Housing Brief:  
<https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Housing-First-Permanent-Supportive-Housing-Brief.pdf>
- Stages of Change:  
<http://www.cpe.vt.edu/gttc/presentations/8eStagesofChange.pdf>
- The Harm Reduction Coalition:  
<http://harmreduction.org>
- United States Interagency Council on Homelessness:  
<http://www.usich.gov>

- Accept clients into TBRA and permanent housing programs with an assessment that offers, but does not mandate, supportive services to help them maintain housing.
- Include clients in site selection process.
- Develop individualized housing service plan with clients.
- Align supportive services with clients' identified goals.
- Schedule case management meetings first thing in the morning, late in the month before monthly check arrives.
- Budget for alcohol/recreation.
- Encourage going to AA/NA meetings while a person is still using substances.
- Have rental assistance provided via checks directly to the property owner or to a representative payee.
- Facilitate landlord-tenant negotiations.
- Focus on behaviors rather than on substance use.
- Align residential agreements with standard leases.

These practices should be tailored to the culture and needs of your community, and incorporated into your HOPWA program design.