

# How PHAs Can Assist People Experiencing Homelessness

## INTRODUCTION

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The Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) and public housing programs offer key opportunities for people experiencing homelessness to achieve long-term housing stability. These programs administered by public housing agencies (PHAs) are the largest sources of federal housing assistance for households with extremely low incomes. Traditionally, PHAs have operated separately from the HUD-funded homeless assistance programs administered by local Continuum of Care (CoCs), and people experiencing homelessness have often found it challenging to use PHA programs. Increasingly, however, PHAs have become central players in community efforts to reduce homelessness. In 2013, HUD issued [Notice 2013-15, Guidance on Housing Individuals and Families Experiencing Homelessness through the Public Housing and Housing Choice Voucher programs](#). This notice details some strategies and approaches that PHAs can implement to provide increased housing opportunities to households experiencing homelessness through the HCV and public housing programs.

To provide further guidance on how PHAs can help people experiencing homelessness, including how to strengthen their collaborations with the local CoC, HUD developed the guidebook [How PHAs Can Assist People Experiencing Homelessness](#).

The guidebook is intended for multiple stakeholders including:

- PHA leadership, who have responsibility for deciding how to prioritize and allocate the HCV and public housing program resources;
- PHA intake workers and other direct service staff, who are responsible for helping people experiencing homelessness apply to the HCV and public housing programs and take the steps needed to move into housing units; and
- CoC leadership, who can advocate for people experiencing homelessness and look for additional opportunities to expand their access to affordable housing.
- Partner organizations within the CoC-led homeless services system, whose staff can learn about best practices in working with PHAs.

This guidebook is evidence-based, drawing from conversations with PHA leadership and intake staff in seven PHAs and their local CoC counterparts to understand best practices. The guidebook offers promising practices and detailed examples of how PHAs can use their HCV and public housing programs to help people experiencing homelessness. PHAs are a key component in the continuum of housing and service supports available to households experiencing homelessness, providing long-term subsidies to help people to leave homelessness and reduce the crisis of homelessness in a community.

To enhance accessibility and ease of use, the document is organized into five subject guides:

- [Focusing on Homelessness: Collaboration between PHAs and CoCs](#)
- [Establishing Waiting List Preferences and Programs Specifically for People Experiencing Homelessness](#)
- [Using Coordinated Entry to Identify People Experiencing Homelessness for Housing Assistance](#)
- [Helping People Experiencing Homelessness Navigate the PHA Application Process](#)
- [Assisting People Experiencing Homelessness Through the Lease-Up Process](#)

Each guide contains **best practices** that PHAs may consider adopting or adapting for their own use. Best practices are highlighted in textboxes with this icon 

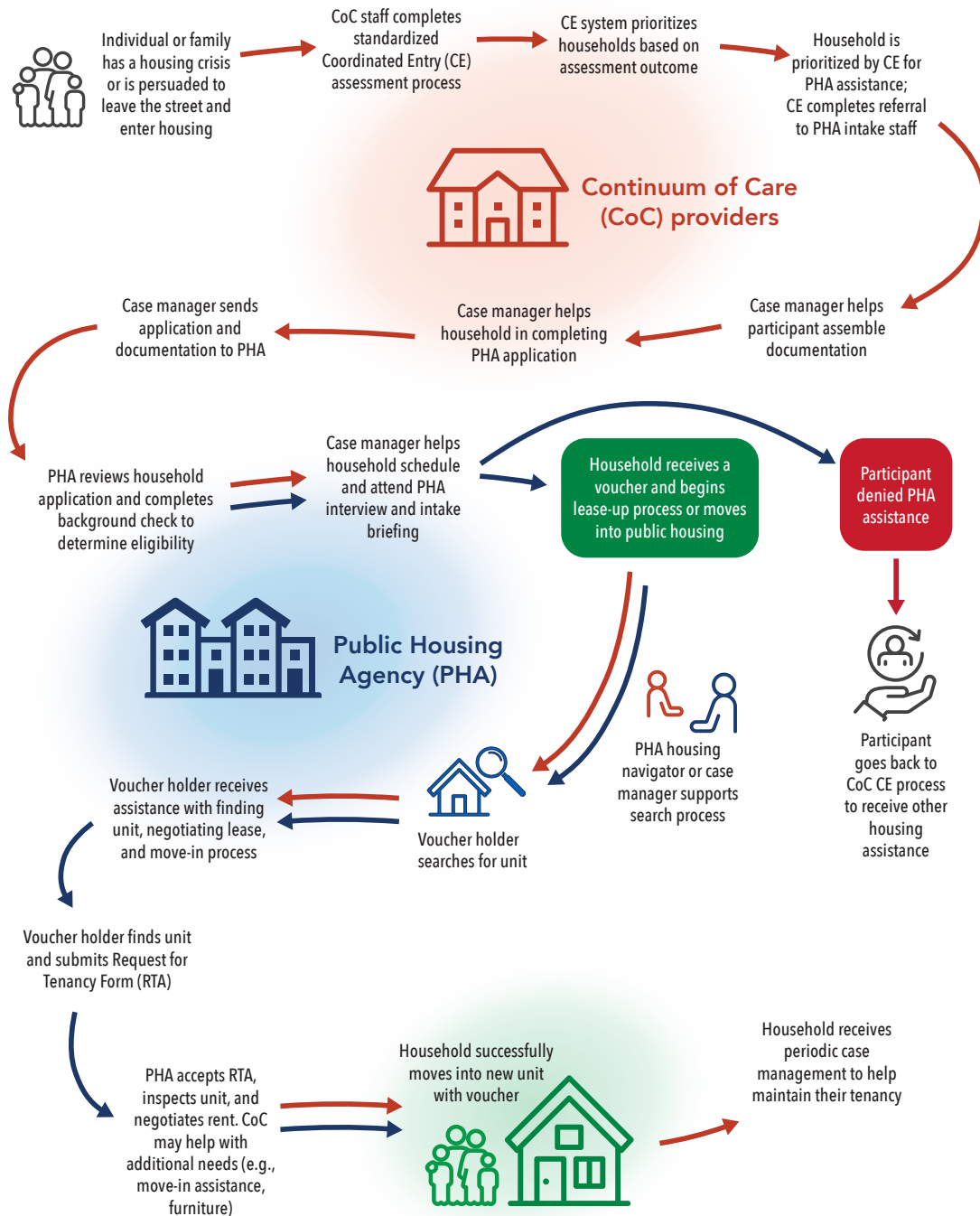
The guides also include **examples** that detail how other PHAs approach serving people experiencing homelessness. PHAs examples are outlined in a blue text box for easy reference.



# Helping People Experiencing Homelessness Access the HCV and Public Housing Programs

The process map illustrates how PHAs can work with CoCs to help households experiencing homelessness access their HCV and public housing programs and obtain long-term housing assistance that will help them remain stably housed. Sections of this graphic are highlighted in the individual subject guides.

## The Path from Homelessness to PHA Assistance



## Glossary of Key Terms

Throughout the guides, there are numerous program names and terms specific to PHAs and CoCs. This glossary provides definitions for these key concepts.

- **Coordinated Entry (CE) System:** A centralized system for assessing the needs and program eligibility of people experiencing homelessness and determining priorities for linking them to the housing programs for formerly homeless people that are available in the community.
- **Continuum of Care (CoC):** A regional or local planning body required by the HUD to organize and deliver housing and services to meet the specific needs of people who are homeless as they move to stable housing. CoC refers to the system for coordinating programs that address and prevent homelessness within a geographic region.
- **Homeless Management Information System (HMIS):** A local information technology system that collects client-level data and data on the provision of housing and supportive services to individuals and families currently or at-risk of experiencing homelessness. Each CoC operates a HMIS that complies with HUD's data collection, management, and reporting standards.
- **Housing Choice Voucher (HCV):** Sometimes referred to as Section 8 based on the regulations the program comes from, the HCV program is HUD's largest rental assistance program for low-income households. PHAs pay a share of the rent linked to the household's income for a unit the household locates in the private rental market. The unit must meet minimum health and safety standards, and the landlord must agree to a rent within program guidelines.
- **Moving On Program:** A collaborative program between a CoC and PHA that identifies people living in permanent supportive housing who no longer need the intensive services offered to PSH residents but who need ongoing rental assistance to maintain their housing. Households in this program are transitioned from PSH into mainstream subsidized housing such as the Housing Choice Voucher program, public housing, or HUD multifamily assisted housing developments.
- **Moving to Work (MTW):** Moving to Work is a demonstration program under which some PHAs are given the authority to waive standard program rules for the HCV and public housing programs and to merge the HUD funding streams that support these programs.
- **Permanent supportive housing (PSH):** An intervention that pairs housing assistance with voluntary supportive behavioral health and other supportive services to help people with disabilities who have had chronic patterns of homelessness. The services are designed to help people maintain housing stability and are tailored to the changing needs of the residents.
- **Public Housing program:** One of HUD's rental assistance programs, the public housing program provides affordable rental housing to low-income households, including people with disabilities, the elderly, and families. Public housing units, which can vary in size and type of unit, are owned and operated by local public housing agencies. Residents of public housing pay approximately 30 percent of their income for rent.