

Berks Coordinated Entry System Policies and Procedures

Berks Coalition to End Homelessness

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Berks Coordinated Entry System

In 2009, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act was amended by the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act. Among other actions, the HEARTH Act consolidated several of HUD’s separate homeless assistance programs into a single grant program, the Continuum of Care Program, and codified into law the CoC planning process. The Berks Coalition to End Homelessness (BCEH) is the collaborative applicant for the CoC Program Competition, the HMIS lead, and the Coordinated Entry lead agency for PA-506 Reading/Berks County Continuum of Care (CoC).

The CoC Program interim rule (24 CFR 578) requires that CoCs establish and operate a “**centralized or coordinated assessment system**” hereafter referred to as a coordinated entry system. The rule defines coordinated entry as

a centralized or coordinated process designed to coordinate program participant intake assessment and provision of referrals. [Such a] system covers the [CoC’s] geographic area, is easily accessed by individuals and families seeking housing or services, is well advertised, and includes a comprehensive and standardized assessment tool. (24 CFR part 578.3)

Both the CoC Program interim rule and the Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) program interim rule (76 FR part 75953) require that projects operated by recipients and subrecipients of CoC or ESG grant funds must participate in the established coordinated entry process.

The Berks Coordinated Entry System (BCES) described in this manual is designed to meet the requirements of the HEARTH Act. The Berks/Reading CoC has designed the BCES described in this manual to coordinate and strengthen access to housing for families and individuals who are experiencing homelessness throughout Berks County. The BCES institutes consistent and uniform assessment and referral processes to determine and secure the most appropriate response to each individual or family’s immediate and long-term housing needs.

Participation Requirements

All projects receiving funding from the Continuum of Care (CoC) Program or Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) Program are required to participate in BCES. Participation requirements include:

- CoC projects must adopt written standards for client eligibility and enrollment determination
- CoC projects must communicate project vacancies (bed and/or unit) to the Coordinated Entry Manager at BCEH
- Persons experiencing a housing crisis must access CoC-funded services and housing using CoC defined access points



- Berks CoC projects must enroll only those clients referred through the BCES according to the CoC's designated referral strategy
- Berks CoC projects must participate in the BCEH monthly case conferencing meetings and any planning or administrative activities as needed
- Berks CoC projects must abide by all policies and procedures set forth in this manual

Participating organizations must ensure admission to projects is not contingent on pre-requisites such as abstinence of substances, minimum income requirements, health or mental health history, medication adherence, age, criminal justice history, financial history, completion of treatment, participation in services, “housing readiness”, history or occurrence of victimization, survivor of sexual assault or an affiliated person of such a survivor, or other unnecessary conditions unless required by law or funding source.

Coordinated Entry System Design Principles

The BCES is designed with the following principles:

1. Prioritize the most vulnerable as the primary factor among many considerations – Limited resources should be directed first to persons and families who are most vulnerable.
2. Eliminate barriers to housing access – Identify system practices and individual project eligibility criteria which may contribute to excluding clients from services and work to eliminate those barriers.
3. Transparency – Make thoughtful decisions and communicate directives openly and clearly.
4. Exercise continuous quality improvement efforts – Continually strive for effectiveness and efficiency and agree to make changes when those objectives are not achieved.
5. Promote collaborative and inclusive planning and decision making practices.
6. Diversity – Respect cultural, regional, programmatic, linguistic, and philosophical differences.
7. Data driven – use data to analyze local housing needs and create a diversity of housing options.

Person-Centered Approach

In addition to the above design principles, the BCES emphasizes a client-centered approach. These include the following 6 principles.

1. **Person-centered assessments.** The CoC created an assessment that is based on participants' strengths, goals, risks, and protective factors.



2. **Accessible tools and processes.** BCES ensures all tools and processes are easily understood by participants being assessed and referred; in addition, all BCES materials are available in formats for persons with disabilities. BCES tools and materials are available in English and Spanish as the CoC has a large Hispanic/Latinx population.
3. **Sensitivity to lived experiences.** The BCES is sensitive to participants' lived experiences in every aspect of coordinated entry, including the development of assessment tools and delivery protocols that are trauma informed, minimize risk and harm, and address potential psychological impacts.
4. **Participant choice.** The BCES prioritizes participants' choices in coordinated entry process decisions such as location and type of housing, level and type of services, and other program characteristics. All assessment processes provide options and recommendations that guide and inform participant choice, as opposed to rigid decisions about what individuals or families need.
5. **Clear referral expectations.** The BCES includes referral protocols that ensure that participants will be able to easily understand which program they are being referred to, what the program expects of them, what they can expect of the program, and evidence of the program's rate of success.
6. **Commitment to referral success.** The BCES is committed to successfully completing the referral process once a referral decision has been made through coordinated entry, including supporting the safe transition of participants from their current living situation to housing, and supporting participants in identifying and accessing an alternate suitable project in the rare instance of an eligible participant being rejected by a participating project.

Housing First and Low Barrier Policy

The BCES does not screen people out of the coordinated entry process due to actual or perceived barriers related to housing or services, including, but not limited to: too little or no income, current or past substance use/abuse, domestic violence history, resistance to receiving services, the type or extent of disability-related services or supports that are needed, history of evictions or poor credit, lease violations or history of not being a leaseholder, or criminal record—with exceptions for state or local restrictions that prevent projects from serving people with certain convictions.

All CoC-funded programs must follow a Housing First approach in which people experiencing homelessness are connected to permanent housing swiftly and with few to no treatment preconditions, behavioral contingencies, or other barriers. The Housing First approach is based on overwhelming evidence that people experiencing homelessness can achieve stability in permanent housing if provided with the appropriate level of services.



Fair and Equal Access

All recipients and subrecipients of CoC Program and ESG Program funding must comply with the nondiscrimination and equal opportunity provisions of Federal civil rights laws as specified at 24 C.F.R. 5.105(a), including, but not limited to the following:

- Fair Housing Act prohibits discriminatory housing practices based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, or familial status;
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance;
- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin under any program activity receiving Federal financial assistance;
- Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits public entities, which includes state and local governments, and special purpose districts, from discriminating against individuals with disabilities in all their services, programs, and activities, which include housing, and housing related services such as housing search and referral assistance.
- Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits private entities that own, lease, and operate places of public accommodation, which include shelters, social service establishments, and other public accommodations providing housing, from discriminating on the basis of disability; and
- HUD's Equal Access Rule at 24 CFR 5.105(a)(2) prohibits discriminatory eligibility determinations in HUD-assisted or HUD-insured housing programs based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status, including any projects funded by the CoC Program and ESG Program. The CoC Program interim rule also contains a fair housing provision at 24 CFR 578.93. For ESG, see 24 CFR 576.407(a) and (b).

The BCES is available to all eligible persons regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, familial status, disability, actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status. All eligible populations in Berks County, including people experiencing chronic homelessness, veterans, families with children, youth, and survivors of domestic violence, have fair and equal access to the coordinated entry process.

The BCES referral process is informed by Federal, State, and local Fair Housing laws and regulations and ensures participants are not “steered” toward any particular housing facility or neighborhood because of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, or the presence of children. Data collected from the assessment process is not used to discriminate or prioritize households for housing and services on a protected basis, such as race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, familial status, disability, actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity or marital status.

All participating organizations will ensure that individuals are placed, served, and accommodated in accordance with their gender identity. This includes programs that have shared sleeping and/or



bathing facilities. Programs must take reasonable nondiscriminatory steps to address privacy and safety concerns and must ensure that their policies do not isolate or segregate individuals based on gender identity.

The CoC Written Standards require all CoC and ESG service providers to have written non-discrimination policies in place. All coordinated entry access points must be accessible for persons with disabilities. Upon request, all agencies must provide appropriate and reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities and/or Limited English Proficiency so they can participate equally in the coordinated entry process, including qualified language interpreters, and other ways of making information and communications with those with Limited English Proficiency. For more information on the CoC's Anti-Discrimination Policy, please see Appendix B.

Emergency Services

Anyone will be able to access emergency services, such as an emergency shelter, domestic violence shelter, and emergency service hotlines independent of the CoC's coordinated entry process. These services are staffed to assist anyone seeking services day or night. Contact will be made with any client referred by 2-1-1 for coordinated entry assessment within one business day. Interventions such as emergency shelter will not be prioritized based on severity of need or vulnerability but are rather used as a crisis response. If emergency services are funded through the ESG Program, the project must follow the written standards required under 576.400(e)(3)(iv)

If a client accesses emergency services during hours when the coordinated entry's intake and assessment processes are not operating (e.g. no staff member is available that is trained in BCES processes), an assessment should be conducted within the following two business days.

Safety Planning

The CoC must provide necessary safety and security protections for persons fleeing or attempting to flee family violence, stalking, dating violence, or other domestic violence situations. Safe Berks is the local service provider for anyone who is a victim/survivor of domestic violence. If an individual being assessed identifies that they are experiencing domestic violence, stalking, dating violence, or family violence, the assessor is trained to provide information about Safe Berks and explain the various services and options available. The assessor should offer to call Safe Berks or other emergency resources with the client or on the client's behalf. All participating agencies are aware of available services and will ensure that a confidential and safe referral is made for the client seeking services. If the client does not choose the services offered by SafeBerks, they will have safe and confidential access to the coordinated entry process through any access point.

Accessing Coordinated Entry System

The Berks County CoC ensures that any person who is homeless and seeking assistance has



access to the Berks Coordinated Entry System (BCES). There are currently 13 points of access for the BCES, which are located throughout the CoC geographic area and provide the same assessment approach for all persons. The 13 access points are:

- Berks Counseling Center
- Boyertown Multi-Service Center
- Catholic Charities
- Easy Does It
- Family Promise
- Hope Rescue Mission
- Human Relations Commission
- Mary's Shelter
- Opportunity House
- SafeBerks
- Salvation Army
- SAM
- YMCA of Reading

In addition to these physical locations, anyone can call 2-1-1 at any time for a referral to the BCES and the CoC's Street Outreach team act as an access point.

Full Coverage

The full geography of the CoC is covered by BCES services including access to crisis response services, assessment of clients, and referral options. The coordinated entry access points are located within the city of Reading and throughout Berks County. A person experiencing homelessness will also be able to access 2-1-1, which will send all referrals for assessment to BCEH.

Outreach

Street outreach efforts funded with ESG or CoC funds must be linked to the BCES. The BCES has ensured that all outreach workers are trained to give the BCES assessment and to have adequate access to both paper and electronic methods of administering the survey with the same standardized processes offered at site-based access points. In addition, staff responsible for street outreach attend monthly case conference meetings to provide input and further information on participants.

Standardized Access and Assessment

All defined access point providers are trained to administer the assessment tool as part of the coordinated entry process. The assessment process is standardized across the CoC, with uniform decision-making across all assessment locations and staff. BCES operates using a client-centered approach, allowing clients to freely refuse to answer assessment questions and/or refuse referrals.



Assessment Tool

As of January 2023, the BCES uses the Berks County Assessment Tool (BCAT) for assessment and scoring (the VI-SPDAT was used previously). The BCAT can be used to score individuals, families, and youth including those who are experiencing chronic homelessness. This tool was developed through a collaborative effort of many organizations, community members, stakeholders, and people with lived experience in an effort to create a racially equitable, effective, and succinct assessment.

Individuals and families who do not meet HUD's definition for literal homelessness or imminent risk of homelessness do not receive an assessment and will be referred to more appropriate services.

The BCAT is available on paper and in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Assessments can be done directly in HMIS or completed on paper and input into HMIS. All assessments must be recorded in HMIS within 3 business days from when the information was first collected. Providers who do not have access to HMIS can send the paper assessment to the Coordinated Entry manager within 3 business days from when the information was first collected to be input to HMIS.

Prioritization

The Berks County Assessment Tool (BCAT) will be the only tool used to assess eligibility and prioritization for individuals and families. The BCAT scores will be used to sort participants into the category of the most appropriate housing intervention. The order of client priority on the prioritization list will under no circumstances be based on disability type or diagnosis.

The CoC must define a minimum BCAT score or score range associated with referrals to available housing programs. The ranges are:

- Individuals and families will be referred to ***Permanent Supportive Housing*** if they receive a score of 11+ on the BCAT
- Individuals and families will be referred to ***Rapid Re-Housing or Transitional Housing*** if they receive a score of 6 - 10 on the BCAT
- Individuals and families with a score of 5 or less will qualify for diversion. These cases will be encouraged to self-resolve, find family or friends to assist, or be provided with other options.

The BCES Manager checks for new coordinated entry clients every business day; new clients can be entered directly into HMIS or the BCAT is sent to the BCES Manager. New clients are added to the overall master list of all BCES clients. Prior to the monthly case conferencing meetings, the BCES Manager adds anyone with a score 10+ to that month's prioritization list. Clients that are sleeping in an unsheltered situation will be considered as first priority, followed



by those staying in emergency shelters (including a domestic violence shelter), and those in an unknown housing situation will be considered third.

Referral Process

The BCES Manager keeps current information on all program eligibility criteria and available openings. This information is vital in ensuring households are referred to organizations that are able to accommodate their needs; this also ensures referrals meet program requirements and households are more likely to be accepted.

A referral can only come from the BCES Manager and consists of an email to the organization's contact person with a letter on BCEH letterhead. This letter confirms the client's homelessness status, confirms this is a coordinated entry referral, provides their score, and provides the client's contact information.

Throughout the month, the BCES Manager will make referrals to organizations with program openings according to the prioritization list. During the monthly case conferencing meeting, the BCES manager will go through the prioritization list with the participating organizations. Any household that has not received a referral yet will have one made during the meeting. The BCES manager will also follow up on any household that is still on the list and has not entered a program, and the receiving organization will provide an update on the current status.

Following the monthly meeting and/or a referral, the receiving organization must attempt the first contact with the client **within 5 business days** of receiving the referral; however, two to three business days is preferable.

Any referral provisionally reviewed by participating agencies and a preliminary enrollment determination made must be communicated back to the BCES manager within **3 business days** of the decision being made.

Referral Rejection Policy

Both Berks CoC providers and program participants may deny or reject referrals from the BCES, although service denials should be infrequent and must be documented through the "BCEH Coordinated Entry Follow Up Form" (Appendix C). All participating projects and clients must provide the reason for service denial and provide additional details upon request.

At a minimum, project's referral rejection/denial reasons must include at least one of the following reasons:

- Client/household refused further participation (or moved out of the CoC area)
- Client/household does not meet required criteria for program eligibility
- Client/household unresponsive to multiple communication attempts



- Client resolved housing crisis without assistance
- Client/household safety concerns. The client's health or well-being or the safety of current program participants would be negatively impacted due to staffing, location, or other problematic issues.
- Client/household needs cannot be addressed by the program. The program does not offer the services and/or housing supports necessary to successfully serve the household.
- Program at bed/unit/service capacity at time of referral
- Property management denial (include specific reason cited by property manager)
- Conflict of interest

In the event of a service denial or participant rejection the following steps must be followed:

1. All referral requests that result in a denial must be reviewed by the BCES manager.
2. The HMIS record must be updated to reflect the reason for the denial.
3. Further communication must include a detailed written justification of the referral denial provided within **3 business days**. The written justification of service denial must also be shared with the client.
4. A provider who denies multiple referrals for reasons against Housing First will have this considered during the CoC Program Competition scoring process. The provider may be required to attend remediation meetings with the Coordinated Entry Manager and CoC staff.

Participant Autonomy

Should an individual reject a housing or service option, they will maintain their prioritization for the next available housing or service option. The housing or service option that was rejected shall be provided to the next individual or family according to the prioritizations in the CoC Written Standards.

BCES clients are freely allowed to decide what information they provide during the assessment process, to refuse to answer assessment questions, and to refuse housing and service options without retribution or limiting their access to other forms of assistance.

Appeal Process

The purpose of the grievance and appeals process is to ensure that if a client has a problem or concern with the BCES, they have a means to report the concern. Completing the grievance process will not negatively affect a client's status within BCES. The process should be completed if the grievance relates to one of the following:



- Access to Coordinated Entry System (i.e. no assessment provided or follow up from CE staff)
- Assessment (i.e. scoring)
- Prioritization (i.e. disagreement with housing designation)
- Housing referral (i.e. lack of follow through from housing provider)
- Other (please be specific)

Note: if a grievance is about an agency or the shelter system, the client should go through that agency's grievance/appeal process first; if the desired action is not completed, then follow the below grievance process. In addition, BCES cannot guarantee placement into permanent housing, as demand for housing is far greater than the supply.

Grievance Process:

1. To file a grievance, clients must email the details of the situation to the BCEH Executive Director at jack@bceh.org and copy the Coordinated Entry Manager at tracey@bceh.org. If email is not available, a letter can be written to BCEH. Please explain the complaint, grievance or issue, and include the names of those involved and dates. The complaint should be as specific as possible.
2. Clients can expect a confirmation that the grievance was received within 5 business days.
3. BCEH staff will review the grievance, verify the grievance process is the appropriate place for the complaint, complete an investigation and clearly document their findings.
4. BCEH will respond to the complaint with recommended solutions within 10 business days of receiving the complaint.
5. BCEH will track all complaints in an effort to determine system-wide patterns or problems that can be addressed. All identifying information regarding individual clients will be kept confidential and not shared without consent.

Stakeholder Inclusion

BCEH will support the implementation, expansion, and ongoing operation and evaluation of the Berks Coordinated Entry System by regularly convening stakeholder input and feedback opportunities. The BCES receives feedback from various avenues. The CoC has a Lived Experience Advisory Panel consisting of members with current or recent past experience of homelessness; this panel will periodically discuss the BCES and provide feedback on improvement. In addition, the BCES manager frequently seeks feedback from participating organizations on their experience with BCES.

One of the common issues with the BCES was the previous assessment being used. Organizations and participants had several issues with the VI-SPDAT, which prompted the BCES to create a new assessment effective 2023. The BCES Manager created a committee of



representatives from the participating organizations, people with lived experience, and people of various backgrounds to create a new assessment. The committee will assess the new assessment periodically to ensure it is functioning properly.

Coordinated Entry System Training

The CoC must provide training protocols and at least one annual training opportunity, which may be in-person or a live online session to participating staff at organizations that serve as access points or otherwise conduct assessments.

BCEH will present trainings according to need and requests at the monthly case conferencing meetings. These trainings will be designed to ensure all participating BCES partners are knowledgeable in BCES participation and performance expectations, are following guidelines and protocols for BCES operations, and strive to achieve national best practices for the most effective coordinated entry system.

Other training and capacity building opportunities could include but not be limited to the following:

- Trauma-informed care throughout the CES system
- Co-occurring issues of substance use disorders, mental illness, physical disability, chronic health conditions, and sexual assault and family violence.
- Domestic and sexual violence 101, exploring dynamics of violence and how violence impacts a person’s executive decision making and functioning
- Maintaining high quality data collection and reporting practices
- Strategies for maintaining client confidentiality and privacy while coordinating care among multiple CoC partners
- Linkage of BCES practices to achieving HUD’s CoC system performance measures
- Best practices for working with members of the LGBT+ community,

Training on topics related to culturally appropriate engagement, assessment practices and programming is designed and conducted by members of the community representing the specific culture or subpopulation impacted.

Data Sharing and Data Collection

The CoC and BCES shall comply with all privacy and data sharing policies set forth in the “Berks County Continuum of Care HMIS System-Wide Policies and Procedures”.

The BCES will use the HMIS to manage data related to coordinated entry operations. This will ensure adequate privacy protections for all participant information. When beginning an



assessment, the client will be informed that their information will remain confidential and will be asked for consent to proceed. The same Release of Information is utilized by all providers to input all BCAT and demographic data within HMIS. This document is part of the HMIS process and is required prior to entry of any client information into the system. Individuals who do not sign the release of information or give verbal consent may still complete the assessment on paper, and their information will not be entered into HMIS; they will still be added to the prioritization list, and the assessment results will be shared only with the agency that is accepting the referral.

Some participating BCES providers will need to opt out of data sharing practices to comply with the explicitly expressed requests of clients who wish not to share their information or in cases where providers are prohibited from participating in HMIS or sharing client information (e.g. victim service providers serving households fleeing domestic violence). In these instances coordinated entry protocols will need to accommodate management of prioritization lists using masked or encoded identifiers of applicable households.

Privacy Protections

The BCES must abide by all privacy protections as defined by the “Berks County Continuum of Care HMIS System-Wide Policies and Procedures”. Individuals are free to decide what information they provide during the assessment process and agencies are prohibited from denying assessment or services to individuals who refuse to provide specific information unless that information is necessary to establish program eligibility according to the program regulation. Individuals shall be allowed to refuse to answer assessment questions and refuse housing and service options without retribution or limitations on the access to assistance. Participating agencies are also prohibited from denying services to participants if the participant refuses to allow their data to be shared unless Federal statute requires collection, use, storage, and reporting of a participant’s personally identifiable information as a condition of program participation.

Marketing the BCES

The BCES covers 100% of the geographic area by utilizing 2-1-1 and CoC providers as access points available at all times. The 2-1-1 hotline is heavily advertised in English and Spanish in bus terminals, health centers, schools, etc. throughout the CoC. Referrals come from a variety of sources representing the entire CoC geographic area, including rural areas. There are 14 BCES access points, including 4 rural access points and the street outreach that acts as a mobile access point.

BCES targets outreach to those who are least likely to apply for assistance. BCAT assessments can occur anywhere and assessors are instructed to use translation services as needed, including sign language interpretation. The BCES continually looks for new access points to ensure equal access. The CoC works with the LGBT Center, NAACP, rural libraries, rural organizations, and the local social service center for Hispanic households; these strategic partnerships ensure all



people in different populations and subpopulations are reached.

All access points are physically accessible for people with disabilities, and the majority of these organizations are accessible via public transportation. The street outreach team will also meet people where they are, including places not meant for human habitation. 2-1-1 can be accessed for assessment online and by phone from anywhere in the county. Assessors are trained to provide the following accommodations as needed: braille, audio, large type, assistive listening devices, and sign language interpreters.

Incorporating Mainstream Services

CoC and BCES staff regularly reach out and maintain relationships with mainstream housing and service providers including: Public Housing Agencies; affordable housing operators; VA Medical Centers; public child welfare agencies; providers of mental, physical or behavioral health services; schools; early childhood care and education providers; out of school time providers; hospitals; correctional facilities; and workforce investment programs. These providers are available to accept referrals for services for BCES households, and they are aware of the process to make referrals to the BCES if their client is not already involved.

Homeless Prevention Services

Households are able to access homelessness prevention services funded with ESG Program funds through the coordinated entry process. The BCES Manager provides information and referrals to anyone looking for homeless prevention assistance. All other BCES access points are aware of these ESG, SSVF, and EFSP funded homeless prevention sources, and make referrals to those sources when necessary. 2-1-1 receives inquiries from anyone in the county at risk of homelessness and refers these households to urgent services when and where they are needed.



Appendix A: Definitions

HUD's Four Categories of Homelessness

Within the homeless definition there are four categories of homelessness:

1. Literally Homeless
2. Imminent Risk of Homelessness
3. Homeless Under Other Federal Statutes
4. Fleeing/Attempting to Flee Domestic Violence

Category 1: Literally Homeless

Individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, meaning:

- Has a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not meant for human habitation; or
- Is living in a publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state and local government programs); or
- Is exiting an institution where (s)he has resided for 90 days or less and who resided in an emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution.

An individual or family only needs to meet one of the three subcategories to qualify as Homeless Category 1: Literally Homeless.

Category 2: Imminent Risk of Homelessness

An individual or family who will imminently lose their primary nighttime residence, provided that:

- Residence will be lost within 14 days of the date of application for homeless assistance;
- No subsequent residence has been identified; and
- The individual or family lacks the resources or support networks needed to obtain other permanent housing.

Includes individuals and families who are within 14 days of losing their housing, including housing they own, rent, are sharing with others, or are living in without paying rent.

Category 3: Homeless Under Other Federal Statutes

Unaccompanied youth under 25 years of age, or families with Category 3 children and youth, who do not otherwise qualify as homeless under this definition, but who:

- Are defined as homeless under the other listed federal statutes;



- Have not had a lease, ownership interest in permanent housing during the 60 days prior to the homeless assistance application;
- Have experienced persistent instability as measured by two moves or more during in the preceding 60 days; and
- Can be expected to continue in such status for an extended period of time due to special needs or barriers

HUD has not authorized any CoC to serve the homeless under Category 3. HUD determines and approves the use of CoC Program funds to serve this population based on each CoC's Consolidated Application. See 24 CFR 578.89. Individuals and families that qualify as homeless under Category 3 may be served by the ESG program if they meet required eligibility criteria for certain ESG components.

Category 4: Fleeing/Attempting to Flee Domestic Violence

Any individual or family who:

- Is fleeing, or is attempting to flee, domestic violence;
- Has no other residence; and
- Lacks the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing

“Domestic Violence” includes dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, and other dangerous or life-threatening conditions that relate to violence against the individual or family member that either takes place in, or him or her afraid to return to, their primary nighttime residence (including human trafficking).

HUD Definition of “At Risk of Homelessness”

Category 1: Individuals and Families

An individual or family who:

- Has an annual income below 30% of median family income for the area; AND
- Does not have sufficient resources or support networks immediately available to prevent them from moving to an emergency shelter or another place defined in Category 1 of the “homeless” definition; AND
- Meets one of the following conditions:
 - Has moved because of economic reasons 2 or more times during the 60 days immediately preceding the application for assistance; OR
 - Is living in the home of another because of economic hardship; OR
 - Has been notified that their right to occupy their current housing or living situation will be terminated within 21 days after the date of application for assistance; OR
 - Lives in a hotel or motel and the cost is not paid for by charitable organizations or by Federal, State, or local government programs for low-income individuals; OR



(E) Lives in an SRO or efficiency apartment unit in which there reside more than 2 persons or lives in a larger housing unit in which there reside more than one and a half persons per room; OR (F) Is exiting a publicly funded institution or system of care; OR (G) Otherwise lives in housing that has characteristics associated with instability and an increased risk of homelessness, as identified in the recipient's approved Con Plan

Category 2: Unaccompanied Children and Youth

A child or youth who does not qualify as homeless under the homeless definition, but qualifies as homeless under another Federal statute

Category 3: Families with Children and Youth

An unaccompanied youth who does not qualify as homeless under the homeless definition, but qualifies as homeless under section 725(2) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, and the parent(s) or guardian(s) or that child or youth if living with them.

Definition of “Chronic Homelessness”

- The definition of chronically homeless is a homeless individual with a disability as defined in section 401(9) of the McKinney-Vento Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11360(9)), who:
 - Lives in a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven, or in an emergency shelter, and
 - Has been homeless and living as described for at least 12 months* or on at least 4 separate occasions in the last 3 years, as long as the combined occasions equal at least 12 months and each break in homelessness separating the occasions included at least 7 consecutive nights of not living as described.
- An individual who has been residing in an institutional care facility for less, including jail, substance abuse or mental health treatment facility, hospital, or other similar facility, for fewer than 90 days and met all of the criteria of this definition before entering that facility**; or
- A family with an adult head of household (or, if there is no adult in the family, a minor head of household) who meets all of the criteria of this definition, including a family whose composition has fluctuated while the head of household has been homeless.

*A “break” in homelessness is considered to be 7 or more nights.

**An individual residing in an institutional care facility does not constitute a break in homelessness.

Definition of a Disability



has an adult head of household (or a minor head of household if no adult is present in the household) with a diagnosable substance use disorder, serious mental illness, developmental disability (as defined in section 15002 of this title), post traumatic stress disorder, cognitive impairments resulting from a brain injury, or chronic physical illness or disability, including the co-occurrence of 2 or more of those conditions.



Appendix B: Berks County PA-506 Continuum of Care Anti-Discrimination Policy

Overview

To provide all individuals and families equal access to necessary housing and services, the Continuum of Care (CoC) has adopted policies and procedures to ensure no one seeking services from the CoC is discriminated against. Each CoC provider must have a policy prohibiting discrimination against persons based on race, ethnicity, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender expression, gender identity, religion, national origin, ancestry, disability, marital status, age, source of income, familial status, or domestic or sexual violence victim status, ensuring that all participants are afforded equal opportunities, as stipulated in Federal Law and regulations. All other non-CoC funded providers are strongly encouraged to have one as well.

CoC and Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) programs must operate in compliance with federal nondiscrimination and equal opportunity requirements, including the Fair Housing Act, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act. The requirements of the Equal Access in Accordance with an Individual's Gender Identity regulation, and the requirements of executive orders regarding equal employment opportunity and opportunities for minority and female owned businesses also apply. Please see 24 CFR 5.105 for a full list of applicable federal laws, regulations and Executive Orders. All agencies in the CoC including, but not limited to, the CoC Lead Agency (Berks Coalition to End Homelessness), agencies funded through CoC and ESG programs, and homeless service agencies funded by other federal and state programs, commit not to discriminate against any individual or family seeking homeless services based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status, disability, age, gender, LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual) status, or marital status.

Equal Access Policy

Providers of federal and/or state-funded housing and services in the CoC shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status, disability, age, gender, LGBTQIA+ status, or marital status. Homeless services providers will make housing available to all eligible individuals regardless of actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status. The CoC and all participating agencies will provide housing and services in accordance with a client's gender identity, determine eligibility without regard to actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status, and will serve all persons. The CoC's Coordinated Entry system will provide equal access to all persons, especially those least likely to seek or receive services.

Equal Access Procedures

Berks CoC will:

- Provide as-needed training to agencies and agency staff regarding the Equal Access Rule and related requirements.
- Use appropriate, inclusive language in communications, publications, trainings, personnel handbooks, and other policy documents that affirms the CoC's commitment to serving all



eligible clients in adherence with the HUD Equal Access Rule.

- Ensure that communications and resources pertaining to housing and services are accessible to individuals with disabilities.
- Continue to develop partnerships with organizations that can provide expertise around the process of changing gender markers on identification and benefit applications or can ensure subject matter expertise among staff.
- Support all clients in understanding their privacy rights and the implication of releasing information.
- Monitor CoC and ESG-funded agencies annually to ensure compliance with applicable fair housing and civil rights laws and related requirements.

Organizations will:

- Include policies and procedures in employee handbooks and training that prohibit discrimination and provide guidance to staff to ensure equal access to all groups to the organization's services.
- Make available intake materials that allow individuals to indicate both their legal name and the name they prefer to be called.
- Ensure all staff, volunteers, and contractors maintain the confidentiality of a client's legal name and sex assigned at birth and understand the potential impact that disclosure can have on a client's progress to self-sufficiency.
- Ensure staff, volunteers, and contractors understand that a client may present their gender differently than the way they identify.
- When possible, ensure that construction or property rehabilitation includes and promotes privacy and safety in sleeping areas, bathrooms, and showers.
- Mediate and resolve conflicts between clients in a way that respects clients and treats them fairly and equally.
- Take immediate action to resolve inappropriate behavior, treatment, harassment, or equal access issues by any person (staff, volunteers, contractors, or clients). Follow the prescribed organization grievance policy as with any other grievance.

Organization staff will:

- Honor all requests, to the extent possible, for special accommodations for anyone who has a disability or who feels discriminated against or unsafe.
- Honor the request of an individual for accommodations based on their personal safety and privacy concerns, whenever feasible.
- Try to ensure client safety and prevent harassment. If at all possible, staff will remove perpetrators of harassment before asking victims to move.
- Assist clients without identification documents to understand the resources available to obtain identification.
- Treat a client's gender identity and sex assigned at birth as confidential medical information that will not be disclosed without specific, time-limited client consent. Similarly, a client's legal name shall be treated as confidential information.
- Not consider a client or potential client ineligible because their appearance or behavior does not conform to gender stereotypes and will serve all individuals eligible for the program.



- Not ask questions or seek information concerning a person’s anatomy or medical history beyond elements necessary for the purpose of providing services.
- Not require an individual’s gender identity to match the gender listed on an ID or other documents.

Involuntary Family Separation Policy

According to CoC Program interim rule 24 CFR 578.93(e), involuntary separation is prohibited in projects funded through CoC and ESG dollars. In accordance with the interim rule, the CoC will work with providers to ensure shelter placement efforts are coordinated to avoid involuntary family separation. CoC- and ESG-funded projects may not deny admission to any household on the basis of:

- The age or gender of a child under 18
- The gender of a parent or parents, or
- The marital status of a parent or parents

Faith Based Activities Policy

In providing program assistance, CoC agencies and staff shall not discriminate against a program participant or prospective participant on the basis of religion or religious belief. In providing services supported in whole or part with federal financial assistance and in their outreach activities related to such services, programs shall not discriminate against current or prospective program beneficiaries on the basis of religion, a religious belief, a refusal to hold a religious belief, or a refusal to attend or participate in a religious practice. All activities must adhere to federal requirements, as established in 24 CFR § 5.109.

Reporting

Berks Coalition to End Homelessness (BCEH) has implemented a retaliation-free violation reporting policy to ensure adherence to policy regulations. Conduct prohibited by this policy and found to be unacceptable is subject to report, investigation, and response.

BCEH requires the prompt reporting of all incidents of discrimination and non-compliance with this policy. A formal complaint procedure for the reporting of violations of the Anti-Discrimination Policy has been instituted. It is established that all program participants must be advised at program intake of their legal rights, including an explanation of this policy and instructions for reporting violations.

Initially, reporters should contact administrators of the specific program demonstrating non-compliance with concerns, except in cases where retaliation is feared. If the concern is not resolved after administrators are involved, reporters may contact BCEH at 610-372-7222 or by faxing 610-372-7223 or mailing the completed report form to the office.

Monitoring and Enforcement

Berks Coalition to End Homelessness will ensure that all CoC-funded agencies are familiar with this policy and are adhering to the guidelines. All funded projects are to keep timely written



documentation regarding specifics of placement/treatment/incidents and exceptions involving individuals and families served. In addition, BCEH will ensure all homeless service providers in the community, including ESG-funded organizations, are familiar with the policy. BCEH will provide technical assistance as needed regarding this policy.

Organizations will be found in violation of this Anti-Discrimination Policy for actions including, but not limited to:

- Denial of services based on membership in a protected class.
- Publishing, circulating, issuing, displaying, posting, or mailing any written statement or utterance of any verbal statement disparaging any member of any protected class, that may result in exclusion from services or denial of fair treatment.
- Institution of rules limiting freedom of attire, especially affecting religious observance or gender identity, except in cases where decency, health, and safety are concerned.
- Real or implied creation of any quota system intent on limiting the number of protected class members to be served by an organization.
- Allowing an offensive and hostile living environment, promulgated by staff, other participants, or both, to discourage, demean, or otherwise disenfranchise participants as members of a protected class.
- Segregating any participant to a specific location based on protected class status.
- Refusal to make requested reasonable accommodations and modifications for members of a protected class; or refusal or withholding of any accommodation, advantage, or privilege based on protected class status.

Confirmed acts of discrimination, harassment and misconduct will be dealt with appropriately. Responsive actions will include training, counseling, and progressive correction measures. The purpose of these responses in cases of confirmed violation is to promote adherence to this policy.

Effective date: May 20, 2023

Jack Williams
Executive Director
Berks Coalition to End Homelessness

Elise McCauley
Assistant Director
Berks Coalition to End Homelessness

References:

- Fair Housing Act (42 USC 3601-19): <https://legcounsel.house.gov/Comps/civil68.pdf>
- HUD Equal Access Final Rule: <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/1991/equal-access-to-housing-final-rule/>
- HUD's Portal for Online Fair Housing Complaints: https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/fair_housing_equal_opp/online-complaint

Materials from HUD 11/16/16 Equal Access and Gender Identity Rules Training:

<https://www.hudexchange.info/course-content/equal-access-and-gender-identity-rules-training/Implementing-HUDs-Equal-Access-and-Gender-Identity-Rules-Slides-2016-11-17.pdf>



Appendix C: BCEH Coordinated Entry Follow Up Form

BCEH Coordinated Entry Follow Up Form

This form should be completed by clients whenever they are denying a referral that has been made by a Coordinated Entry System agency. All staff who are unable to accept a client for any reason should also complete this form. Forms should be returned to the coordinated entry manager at BCEH.

Date _____

Referral Date: _____

Agency Name: _____ Program Name: _____

Staff Contact: _____ Email: _____ Phone: _____

Client Name: _____ Client Service Point ID Number: _____

Reason for denial (Please check a box and explain in detail below)

- Client/household refused further participation (or moved out of the CoC area)
- Client/household does not meet required criteria for program eligibility
- Client/household unresponsive to multiple communication attempts
- Client resolved crisis without assistance
- Client/household safety concerns. The client's health or well-being or the safety of current program participants would be negatively impacted due to staffing, location, or other problematic issues.
- Client/household needs cannot be addressed by the program. The program does not offer the services and/or housing supports necessary to successfully serve the household.
- Program at bed/unit/service capacity at time of referral
- Property management denial (include specific reason cited by property manager)
- Conflict of interest

Please describe why you are unable to accept this referral:

Is this due to policy or procedure created by a funder, board, staff, property management, landlord or other entity?

Please Explain:



If you were unable to contact client regarding this referral, please indicated the dates of attempted communication, to whom, and in what form (phone, email, etc)



Appendix D: Berks Coordinated Assessment Tool

