

What is a Housing Crisis Resolution System?

Homeless programs provide services and housing to some people who are experiencing homeless. A housing crisis resolution system responds to the needs of *all* people who are without housing in a given community. This change is fundamental – and every word is critical:

1. **Housing** – the entire system is about getting *every* person or household with nowhere to live into housing; it recognizes the lack of housing as a temporary condition, not a personal failing or an inherent characteristic as the word “homeless” implies.
2. **Crisis Resolution** – the system understands that being without housing is a crisis, and that regaining housing resolves that particular crisis, whatever other needs a household may still have.
3. **System** – the programs and resources function together as a system with a common set of goals and performance measures, and the entire system’s resources are deployed to meet its goals.

To be effective, the system must provide an appropriate response to *everyone* who needs it, especially those with the greatest needs. It must not screen out from assistance anyone experiencing literal homelessness – that is, living outside or on the streets or in shelter. This also means limited system resources must not be used to serve people more appropriately served elsewhere. In other words the system must target and prioritize.

The Focus Strategies [Housing Crisis Resolution System diagram](#) shows a model system in which people who are currently housed, even if temporarily, are diverted from homeless services and helped with other resources, and people without housing are quickly directed to the most appropriate housing-focused intervention.

Key features of a Crisis Resolution System include:

- A coordinated entry system (CES) for intake, assessment and referral that uses standardized tools and processes to assess housing needs and match people to the most appropriate and least intensive intervention possible; the CES has locations in places where people without housing gather, and access to programs is only through the CES.
- People who are not *literally* homeless are diverted from ever entering the homeless system; only those who are literally homeless enter shelter, interim housing, rapid re-housing or permanent supportive housing programs;¹ People who are doubled up with family or friends are diverted away from homeless services through connections to other programs that can help them stabilize.
- People who are literally homeless but meet specialty criteria for others systems of care with systems in place to serve and house them are also diverted. For example, in some communities the mental health system includes housing support and people who are already registered with the mental health system should be assisted by that agency.
- The vast majority of households who are literally homeless are assisted to find housing on their own or are rapidly re-housed using short-term housing assistance.

¹ Literal homelessness refers to people who are living outside, in cars, in emergency shelters, and otherwise living in places not meant for human habitation.

- When the system is first starting, people who enter from long periods of homelessness with the most severe housing barriers (including disabilities) are directed to permanent supportive housing; over time only those who have not been successful in rapid re-housing are eligible for permanent supportive housing.
- The community has enough beds available in interim housing and emergency shelters to temporarily shelter literally homeless people and provide safe places to stay while submitting applications and moving into permanent housing.
- The community spends little to no homeless-dedicated resources on longer-term program models that don't provide permanent housing such as transitional housing. Any such programs are very specifically targeted, and are held accountable for demonstrating that the extra time and resources are needed to achieve specific outcomes that would otherwise not be achieved.

In a Housing Crisis Resolution System, all of the parts of the system work together toward a common goal, even when they play different roles. Every actor in the system views each person who is literally homeless as someone with a housing need that can be addressed within 30 days. There are no “hopeless cases” or people who are not “housing ready.” When a person enters the system, we figure out where they can live and provide the rental assistance and other support they need to re-enter housing. The systems data is used to tell over time who remains housed and who does not. For those who repeatedly return to homelessness, long-term subsidies and services may be needed, and can be prioritized. If patterns emerge these are analyzed and adjustments are made.