

Emergency Shelter and Interim Housing

Emergency Shelter and Interim Housing provide short-term places for people with nowhere else to live to stay temporarily, meet basic needs such as food, safety and hygiene, and be supported to seek and obtain housing. The differences between emergency shelter and interim housing are largely based on sources of funding, and in some cases on the configuration of the space. Shorter term sites that either expect or limit stays to 30 or 60 days and provide beds in congregate dormitories are typically called shelter. Programs that open for limited seasonal periods are also typically considered shelter. In some communities, however, shelters provide apartments and longer term stays.

Interim housing refers primarily to programs that have converted from transitional housing. As transitional housing, these programs typically included intensive support services programming aimed at helping clients address a wide range of issues (e.g. employment, substance use, health, life skills, etc.) and required service compliance for residents to remain. As interim housing, these same programs have been reconfigured to provide a level of support similar to emergency shelters, with a focus on meeting basic daily need (food, clothing) and assisting residents to find and secure housing. Lengths of stay in interim housing are usually no more than 120 days, while traditional transitional housing programs can be up to 24 months in length. Interim housing is not a program type recognized by HUD, which funds the majority of transitional housing programs and many emergency shelters. In some communities people who are not able to exit emergency shelter directly to permanent housing within a very short time will move from emergency shelter to interim housing.

In a right-sized system, the key components of shelter and interim housing include:

- Beds
- Meals (usually two or three)
- Storage for personal items
- Safety and security
- Housing search support, either through program staff or by linkages with rapid rehousing programs

In a right-sized system, shelter and interim housing serve the same function: they provide a temporary place for people to stay while they seek housing. Because this is intended for a very short time, these programs should not invest limited resources in services that are not specifically about preparing people for regaining housing. In communities with separate rapid rehousing programs, shelter and interim housing will provide basic needs and safety services only. In others, rapid rehousing resources and supports may be part of the shelter's service program. In these cases, the shelter or interim housing program will offer housing-oriented services and case management as well as financial assistance to secure housing (deposits, short-term rental assistance). Other types of services should not be offered in shelter but provided in the community. For example, health services should be provided by community clinics and other providers that serve the community, so that once the household exits shelter they can continue their relationship to a provider.