

What is Housing First?

Housing First is an approach that prioritizes providing permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness, thus ending their homelessness and serving as a platform from which they can pursue personal goals and improve their quality of life. This approach is guided by the belief that people need basic necessities like food and a place to live before attending to anything less critical, such as getting a job, budgeting properly, or attending to substance use issues. Additionally, Housing First is based on the belief that client choice is valuable in housing selection and supportive service participation; exercising that choice is likely to make a client more successful in remaining housed and improving their life. Housing First programs remove barriers faced by households trying to attain permanent housing, and do not require prerequisites to access housing support beyond what is required in a tenant's lease.

How is Housing First different from other approaches?

Housing First does not require people experiencing homelessness to address their problems before they can access housing, including behavioral health problems, or graduating through a series of services programs. Housing First does not mandate participation in services either before obtaining housing or in order to retain housing. Supportive services are offered to assist with housing stability and individual well-being, but participation is not required. Services have been found to be more effective when a person chooses to engage. Other approaches do make such requirements in order for a person to obtain and retain housing. Many Housing First models also use a harm reduction approach to help reduce barriers to obtaining or maintaining permanent housing.

Who can be helped by Housing First?

A Housing First approach can benefit both homeless families and individuals with any degree of service needs. The flexible and responsive nature of a Housing First approach allows it to be tailored to help anyone. As such, a Housing First approach can be applied to help end homelessness for a household who became homeless due to a temporary personal or financial crisis and has limited service needs, only needing help accessing and securing permanent housing. At the same time, Housing First has been found to be particularly effective approach to end homelessness for highly vulnerable populations, such as chronically homeless individuals. Housing First also promotes racial equity, in that it removes judgement from the providers as to who is “deserving” of permanent housing - which can be riddled with bias against people of color.

Does Housing First work?

There is a [large evidence base](#) demonstrating that Housing First is an effective solution to homelessness. Consumers in a Housing First model access housing faster and are more likely to remain stably housed, and systems see many benefits when using the Housing First model. Providing access to housing generally results in cost savings for communities because housed people are less likely to use emergency services, including hospitals, jails, and emergency shelter, than those who are homeless. One study found an average cost savings on emergency services of \$31,545 per person housed in the course of two years. Another study showed that a Housing First approach can cost up to \$23,000 less per consumer per year than a shelter program. Housing First is not only cost efficient, but it also reduces the trauma households face due to homelessness.