

The Role of Emergency Shelter in Diversion

To effectively respond to homelessness, communities should be able to help residents maintain or regain housing *without having to enter emergency shelter*. **Diversion** is a strategy that helps people experiencing a housing crisis quickly identify and access safe alternatives to emergency shelter.

Diversion includes services such as: creative problem solving conversations; connecting with community resources and family supports; housing search and placement; and flexible financial assistance to help people resolve their immediate housing crisis.

Homeless response systems and shelters should engage in diversion strategies because it reduces new entries into homelessness, cuts down on shelter wait lists, reduces demand for limited shelter beds, and targets more intensive homelessness interventions to those with higher needs.

When is Diversion Most Effective?

- Diversion strategies should be implemented at the access points to the homeless system.
- Shelters should use diversion strategies when a person is seeking shelter, **but before** intake.
- Diversion should be attempted with everyone seeking shelter to determine whether it is viable, desirable, safe, and appropriate to find alternatives to shelter.
- Individuals and families that do not have a safe alternative to shelter should not be diverted away from shelter. Instead, shelters should use housing-focused, rapid exit services work to continue to try to re-house people after they have entered shelter.

What Are the Fundamentals of Effective Diversion Practice?

- **Community Wide Buy-In.** Community and shelter staff buy-in is critical to the successful implementation of diversion strategies across the system.
- **Problem Solving Conversation.** Diversion begins with a problem solving, strengths-based conversation — not with a pre-application for eligibility or an assessment tool with a list of questions. It focuses on action steps that a person and shelter staff can take to avoid shelter/homelessness system.
- **Creating Connections.** Shelters can't do it all and a household's natural supports and community partners are critical to effective implementation.
- **Continuous Practice.** Problem-solving conversation may need to happen more than once, diversion strategies are not a one-time service. Follow-up is critical.