



PHA GUIDE TO PARTNERING WITH HEALTH CENTERS

Background

Community Health Centers and Health Care for the Homeless (HCH) Programs receive federal grants from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), which is part of the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). These health centers and HCH programs also receive Medicaid reimbursement as Federally Qualified Health Centers. They provide comprehensive primary care services to low-income people in underserved communities, and many health centers often also provide some behavioral health and dental services.

HRSA also administers the Public Housing Primary Care (PHPC) program, which is operated by Community Health Centers in 25 states and Puerto Rico. PHPC programs deliver comprehensive, case-managed, family-based primary care and preventive health care services, including behavioral health. Options for programs include operating a clinic on-site in a public housing development or in an area adjacent to the housing development that offers access to services for residents of several public housing and HUD-assisted housing sites.

Some Community Health Centers, HCH programs and PHPC programs provide health services that are linked to housing assistance administered by PHAs, in programs that are designed to serve people experiencing homelessness and residents of permanent supportive housing.

Many of the residents of public and assisted housing receive health care services from Community Health Centers and PHPC programs. In some communities PHAs have provided space for on-site clinics in public housing developments. Building upon these connections, some PHAs have partnered with health centers to implement programs that are designed to help prevent and end homelessness, and to provide ongoing health care and support services to support housing stability for people with disabilities who have experienced homelessness.

Health Centers and HCH programs also partner with PHAs to assist people who are experiencing homelessness in applying for housing assistance, gathering the documentation needed to complete the application process, finding apartments and negotiating rental agreements with landlords who will accept housing vouchers, and delivering ongoing case management services.

Implementation tips

PHAs, Health Centers and HCH programs often serve the same low-income communities and people, but they speak different languages, have different business practices and organizational cultures, and operate with different funding requirements and program rules. In order to build successful and sustainable partnerships, it is critical for the partners to take time to develop a shared vision and goals, and to learn to appreciate each organization's perspective and funding constraints or incentives. It is also important to provide opportunities for staff members to participate in cross-training in order to understand the procedures each agency uses and better coordinate efforts to help people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness get and keep housing and access the health care services they need.

Where Can PHAs Do This?

All PHAs can establish partnerships with health centers or HCH programs to serve people experiencing homelessness. Both Home Forward and the Oakland Housing Authority are Moving to Work PHAs, and some aspects of the programs they have implemented (described above) may depend upon the flexibility that is available to these types of PHAs.

Collaborating with a health center to develop a clinic for tenants of public and assisted housing, including PSH tenants, is most likely to be a promising strategy when these tenants live in a neighborhood that offers limited access to other primary care services, and an existing or potential clinic site is located nearby in an easily accessible location.

Examples

- In Portland, Oregon, **Home Forward (formerly the Housing Authority of Portland)** developed [Bud Clark Commons](#), an award-winning development that includes a transitional shelter, day center, and 130 units of permanent supportive housing (PSH). In the selection of tenants for the PSH, Home Forward prioritizes individuals using a [vulnerability assessment tool](#). Home Forward partners with four community health clinics that administer the vulnerability assessment to their clients and screen prospective residents for placement in housing, using a [housing first](#) approach.

Examples

- Working in collaboration with the **Oakland Housing Authority**, Lifelong Medical Care received a PHPC grant to establish a clinic in downtown Oakland CA. The clinic serves residents of nearby public housing developments and HUD-assisted PSH programs. The grant allowed Lifelong Medical Care to significantly expand its capacity to deliver primary care and behavioral health services to PSH tenants, by establishing a full-time clinic in a neighborhood where several residential hotels have been rehabilitated and converted to PSH with ongoing rental assistance provided by programs administered by the Oakland Housing Authority.
- Lifelong Medical Care and the **Oakland Housing Authority** are also participating in the [Oakland PATH Rehousing Initiative \(OPRI\)](#). OPRI is a collaboration of housing and service providers working together to help people move from encampments and homeless shelters into permanent housing using Shelter Plus Care and Housing Choice Vouchers administered by the housing authority, with ongoing supportive services provided by Lifelong and other partner agencies. OPRI also prevents homelessness by serving people who are at risk of homelessness when they exit foster care or the criminal justice system without other housing options.