

 <p style="text-align: center;">County of Sacramento Department of Health Services Division of Behavioral Health Services Policy and Procedure</p>	Policy Issuer (Unit/Program)	Mental Health Services
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Title: Behavioral Health Bridge Housing	Functional Area: Programs	
<p>Approved By: <i>Signed version available upon request.</i></p> <p>Monica Rocha-Wyatt, LMFT Program Manager</p> <p>Sheri Green, LMFT Division Manager</p>		

Background/Context:

Assembly Bill 179 was signed into law in September 2022 to establish the Behavioral Health Bridge Housing (BHBH) Program, which provides statewide funding to operate interim housing settings for people experiencing homelessness who have a Serious Mental Illness (SMI) and/or Substance Use Disorder (SUD). BHBH Programs provide housing navigation to assist people who have serious behavioral health conditions that prevent them from accessing help, and provide interim bridge housing with supportive services with the goal of exiting into permanent and long- term housing.

Definitions:

- A. Bridge Housing** – Short and mid-term residential shelter programs with supportive services to help stabilize individuals and support engagement in treatment services with a goal to connect individuals to permanent and long-term housing stability. This may include, but not limited to: emergency/interim housing, rental assistance, and auxiliary funding in assisted living settings (commonly referred to as “board and care patches”).
- B. Homeless** – For the purposes of BHBH Program, the definition of homeless is based on the [CalAim Enhanced Care Management program Policy Guide](#), February 2024, page 10, An individual or family experiencing homelessness is defined as any of the following:

1. An individual or family that lacks adequate nighttime residence.
2. An individual or family with a primary residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used for habitation.
1. An individual or family living in a shelter.
2. An individual exiting an institution (including incarceration) into homelessness.
3. An individual or family who will imminently lose housing in the next 30 days.
4. Unaccompanied youth and homeless families and children and youth defined as homeless under other federal statutes.
5. Individuals fleeing intimate partner violence.

Notes on this definition:

This definition is based on the HUD definition of "homeless," with the following modifications:

1. If exiting an institution, individuals are considered homeless if they were experiencing homelessness immediately prior to entering that institutional stay, regardless of the length of the institutionalization.
2. The time frame for an individual or family that will imminently lose housing has been extended from 14 days (HUD definition) to 30 days

C. Leasing: A written lease or rental agreement for a rental unit is recommended between households who receive rental assistance through the Contractor and the owner/property manager. A typical lease will specify length of term and participant responsibilities. The Contractor should support the participant with resources regarding participant's rights so they can be better informed and negotiate their leases if applicable. In master leasing situations funded by the Contractor, the property manager may also be the Contractor. These leases may vary in length and standards depending on whether the housing support is short (up to 3 months) or mid-term (3-9 months). If the participant(s) is not on the primary lease but is instead subleasing from the contractor.

D. Participant Assistance Funds: Flexible dollars that can be used to remove barriers that helps participants meet their immediate needs (e.g., assistance getting IDs and other vital documents, transportation, food, and hygiene products, etc.). Funds may also be used to support individuals in completing housing applications, or for costs associated with credit reports, security deposits, and basic furniture package approved by the County.

E. Rental Assistance: Funds to pay all or a portion of the rent for a unit in which a person will reside. Assistance may be short (up to 3 months) and/or

medium (3-9 months). The Contractor pays the difference between the contracted rent of a unit and the participants' contribution toward rent. When the rental assistance covers the remaining rent after a housing certificate or voucher is utilized the service is referred to as a "subsidy." When the rental assistance covers the remaining rent in a market rate unit, the service is referred to as a "rent gap" (see [Prevention Assistance & Re-Housing Services Policy and Procedure](#), page 4).

Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is intended to: outline guidelines; address Rental Assistance, Participant Assistance Funds, Landlord Outreach and Mitigation, and Auxiliary Funding in Assisted Living; identify target population and eligibility criteria for the BHBH program.

Details:

A. Program Philosophy and Design

Bridge housing has been developed based on the population's needs and [Housing First](#) principles. It will include voluntary support services for individuals experiencing both homelessness and serious behavioral health conditions.

The contents of this policy and procedure (P & P) are relevant to the resolution of or prevention of homelessness. They are also for housing related activities intended to address housing support services and related interventions for participants who are: using interim or bridge housing, moving into a dwelling, or renting rooms, or entire dwellings including apartments, studios, single family homes, condos, board and care homes, and room and board homes.

B. Program Target Population, Prioritization, Eligibility and Screening

1. Target Population: The BHBH program is designed to target the historically underserved or over-represented individuals experiencing homelessness (per the most recent published [point in time count and other local studies and data](#)). This includes individuals with serious behavioral health conditions, including SMI and/or SUD, who are experiencing homelessness, with special focus on the following, but not limited to:
 - a. [Community Assistance, Recovery, and Empowerment](#) (CARE) program participants
 - b. Participants escaping domestic violence or human trafficking
 - c. Commercially Sexually Exploited Children and Youth (CSEC)

- d. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, and more (LGBTQ+)
- e. Foster youth
- f. Transition Age Youth (TAY)
- g. Other special populations

2. General Prioritization Factors

- a. HEART will prioritize the participants and families with the highest needs whose symptoms of their behavioral health condition directly impact homelessness or homelessness exacerbates their behavioral health symptoms.
- b. Contractors will use housing subsidies and support services based on clinical need after participant contributions per county policy and other natural supports or community resources (e.g. Full Services Partnerships, other mental health providers, etc.) have been exhausted or are unavailable to ensure Contractor is payer of last resort.
- c. Contractors may also use risk factors found in the [Prevention Assistance & Re-Housing Services Policy & Procedure](#) to further prioritize participants as needed.
- d. Contractors will not impose additional eligibility requirements to identify if a participant is "housing ready" such as sobriety (except sober living environments), employability, "meds compliant" or income.

3. Eligibility and Screening

- a. Unless there are safety issues, such as fleeing domestic violence, the BHBH contractor encounters during non-business hours that necessitates an urgent response, every participant will be screened by the Homeless Engagement and Response Team (HEART) to establish eligibility. An urgent response is only necessitated should there be immediate risk for psychiatric hospitalization or incarceration that can be prevented by access to immediate shelter or at immediate risk for domestic violence or exploitation. All HEART screenings will include an assessment for program eligibility and a triage tool to prioritize new BHBH enrollments based on the following:
 - i. Vulnerability factors that include but are not limited to, chronic health issues requiring regular monitoring, physical disabilities, recent victim of crime or abuse, etc.

- ii. High risk factors that include but are not limited to escaping domestic violence, immediate risk of victimization, need for electric powered medical device (e.g. wound vacuum), suicidal/homicidal ideation, recent use of crisis services, discharging from hospital or inpatient treatment, etc.
- iii. Available options, including behavioral health services and the participant's natural supports that can assist with funding or temporary housing until more permanent housing can be secured.
- iv. Strategies have been utilized and attempted in the past – including those that worked and those that did not work.

C. Additional Housing Resources

BHS requires that participants are supported with applying for housing resources, tailored to their functioning level, that may be available to the participant in the community. Housing resources are available that adjust rent to the household's particular income and ability to pay, including most programs administered by Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency and/or through the coordinated access system administered through Sacramento Steps Forward.

D. Eligible Use of Funds and Requirements

Bridge housing will:

1. Be established and provided based on the population's needs and Housing First principles.
 - a. Abstinence from alcohol or other substances may not be a requirement for the BHBH program or grounds for program removal, unless in a sober living environment.
 - b. Services are informed by harm-reduction strategies that recognizes SUD as a part of participants' lives, where participants are engaged in nonjudgmental communication regarding substance use.
 - c. Participants are offered education regarding how to avoid risky behaviors and engage in safer practices and connected to evidence-based treatment if requested.
 - d. When indicated, funding may be used to support recovery residences and sober living environments for individuals with significant SUD needs.

2. Meet the [National Standards for the Physical Inspection of Real Estate \(NSPIRE\)](#) habitability standards and, when possible and as applicable, [CoC Housing Quality Standards \(HQS\)](#).
3. Support access to treatment.
4. Prioritize and ensure that eligible CARE program participants receive BHBH program services as clinically indicated.
5. Provide Housing navigation and other supports to assist BHBH program participants in accessing sustainable, affordable, and permanent housing resources.
6. Allow for choice, enable people to stay in their home communities to the extent possible, and provide for community integration in accordance with all applicable federal and state regulations.
7. Not use BHBH funds to pay for existing services or housing supports that are currently reimbursed, or eligible for reimbursement through Medi-Cal, Mental Health Services Act/Proposition 1, Wraparound flex funds, or other federal or local funds with prior county approval.
8. Conduct financial review auditing and fraud prevention to ensure appropriate uses of funds in accordance with county policy.

E. Amount of Rental Assistance or Participant Assistance Funds

In all instances, financial assistance should be as minimal as feasible to resolve the housing crisis. Expenditures may not exceed the amount stipulated in Exhibit C of the contract for the duration of each participant housing plan, without written approval from the County. Contractors will use housing subsidies and support services based on need after other natural supports or resources have been exhausted or are unavailable to ensure Contractor is payer of last resort.

1. The amount of assistance will be dependent on the presenting needs and goals as identified in the participant housing plan.
 - a. Participants may receive a maximum monthly rental assistance based on their household size, household composition, income, and local Fair Market Rent (FMR). Rental assistance is higher for participants with no or very low income and is smaller for participants that have some income.
 - b. BHS requires that Contractors use the standardized BHS [Maximum Rental Assistance Calculator](#) (MRAC) tool to determine a maximum rental and/or housing assistance amount for each household. A fixed maximum amount helps participants manage their expectations when

searching for a reasonable housing unit. The MRAC also helps ensure that participants are receiving equitable housing rental assistance to prevent bias. A Rent Reasonableness Checklist and Certification (Attachment A) can also be used in unusual circumstances that are not covered by the Rental Assistance Calculator such as calculating rent for a home with more than 6 bedrooms for very large families or housing cooperatives. Completed Rental Assistance Calculators should be saved as support documentation for the amounts itemized in the participant housing plan in the participant's Smart Care record.

- c. The household's initial rental assistance calculation, plus any adjustments made because of the income re-certification and rental assistance re-calculation will be documented in Smart Care and the changes reflected in the participant housing plan.
- d. The MRAC provides rental assistance monthly maximum amounts, but titrating rental assistance amounts down to phase-in independence and self-sustainability in required in the participant housing plan.
- e. Monthly maximums provided by the calculator are not intended to be inflexible requirements of payable amounts. They are designed to provide unbiased and equitably based guidance that sets expectations and allows for self-sustainability based on participant income.
- f. The MRAC will be updated regularly to adjust fair market rents set by HUD and median family incomes. Contractors are required to utilize the most updated version of the calculator to ensure fairness and continuity for participants across programs.

- 2. One-time outreach supplies are limited to a maximum of \$50 per participant per quarter.

F. Documentation

Contractors will comply with any documentation outlined in this policy as well as any Quality Management policies and training regarding the use of bridge housing services. Contractors will enter into and maintain all participants currently experiencing homelessness who receive BHBH supports in HMIS and will refer participants to the Coordinated Access System (CAS). Contractors will comply with the Sacramento County Continuum of Care's data standards. For more information, contractors can contact Sacramento Steps Forward or visit their website for HMIS forms and documents at <https://sacramentostepsforward.org/resources/helpful-materials/>

G. Payments

Payments will be made directly to property owners or property managers. Payments may not be made directly to participants. Clear documentation of all payments must be provided as routine audits are conducted for fraud and waste prevention.

H. Landlord Outreach and Mitigation

As part of housing navigation, BHBH program funds may also be used for a Landlord Outreach and Mitigation Fund to support engagement of property owners or property managers, which may include offering supports and incentives to property owners or property managers on behalf of property owners. This could include a mitigation or emergency fund for reimbursing owners/managers if a BHBH program participant damages a unit or to cover other unforeseen costs related to housing through the BHBH program.

I. Exit from Housing Support Services

Exit from housing support services occurs when the participant and or family has secured permanent housing, reached an ability to self-sustain paying rent and utilities, has resolved the crisis for which they sought services, and/or has reached the maximum duration limit per the BHBH Grant term.

J. Auxiliary Funding in Assisted Living Settings (commonly referred to as board and care patches).

When indicated, BHBH funding may be used to support the successful placement of individuals who have care needs. The length of the funding is based on the maximum duration limit per the BHBH Grant term. Assisted living settings are licensed by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) and include Adult Residential Facilities (ARFs) and Residential Care Facilities for the Elderly (RCFEs), among others.

K. Occupancy

Occupancy of units should be determined based on multiple variables such as maintaining health and safety, voucher limitations, local ordinances, lease terms, CPS mandates, etc. The Contractor however shall not impose rules regarding the household's actual sleeping arrangements but can restrict the rental size based on funding and sustainability.

L. Rent Reasonableness

In situations where the MRAC cannot be utilized, BHS requires that rental units remain reasonably priced, comparable to other units in the community. Rent

reasonableness includes gross rent, utilities, location, quality, size, type, age, amenities, maintenance, and housing scarcity.

Related Policies and Attachments:

- [QM 10-30 Progress Notes \(Mental Health\)](#)
- [QM 01-07 Determination for Medical Necessity and Target Population](#)
- Attachment A: Rent Reasonableness Checklist and Certification
- Attachment B: MRAC

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