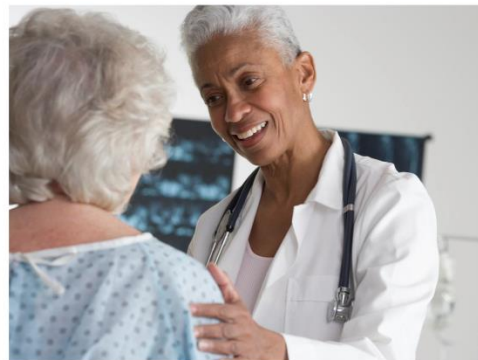# CSH

The Source for
Housing Solutions

# Healthy Aging in Supportive Housing

*Toolkit for service providers, developers & property managers*



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## III. Supportive Housing and Vulnerable Elders

Supportive housing is essential to address the complex needs of vulnerable elders and to help them avoid costly emergency room visits and institutionalization. Proactively engaging tenants in on-site and community-based services has proven effective in keeping tenants housed and helping them meet their goals. Delivering *quality* supportive housing that is tailored to the unique needs of vulnerable elders is an effective way meet these needs, allowing tenants the choice to age in their own homes for as long as possible.

### *Supportive Housing Basics*

Supportive housing is a combination of affordable housing and supportive services designed to help vulnerable individuals and families use stable housing as a platform for health, recovery and personal growth. It focuses on balancing four distinct components of the model — housing, supportive services, property and housing management and community.[1] Quality supportive housing projects are as diverse as the communities in which they are located but all supportive housing:

- **Targets vulnerable households**: whose head of household is experiencing homelessness, at-risk of homelessness, or is inappropriately staying in an institution. They may also be facing multiple barriers to employment and housing stability, including mental illness, substance use and/or other disabling or chronic health conditions.
- **Is affordable,** meaning the tenant household ideally pays no more than 30% of its household income toward rent.
- **Provides real leases**: tenant households sign a lease or sublease identical to a non-supportive housing tenant with no limits on length of tenancy, as long as lease terms and conditions are met.
- **Provides flexible, voluntary services**: proactively engages members of the tenant household with a flexible and comprehensive array of supportive services, without requiring participation in services as a condition of ongoing tenancy.
- **Effectively coordinates** among key partners to address issues resulting from substance use, mental health and other crises, with a focus on fostering housing stability.
- **Provides community connections**: supports tenants in connecting with community-based resources and activities while building strong social support networks.

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[1] CSH Quality Supportive Housing Toolkit: http://www.csh.org/toolkit/supportive-housing-quality-toolkit/gettingstarted/understanding-supportive-housing/#sthash.LSEzV41C.dpuf

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Quality supportive housing is centered on ensuring the following key outcomes:

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Tenants stay housed | Tenants improve physical health | Tenants improve mental health | Tenant increase income or employment | Tenants are satisfied with available services |

Tenants are satisfied with their housing

To realize these tenant outcomes, supportive housing must deliver on quality in each of its project components: project design and administration, property and housing management, supportive services and community. Quality is measured through the following dimensions. All project components must be:

- **Tenant-Centered**—Every aspect of housing focuses on meeting tenants' needs
- **Accessible**—Tenants of all backgrounds and abilities enter housing quickly and easily
- **Coordinated**—All supportive housing partners work to achieve shared goals
- **Integrated**—Housing provides tenants with choices and community connections
- **Sustainable**—Housing operates successfully for the long term

This framework for quality supportive housing delivery is meant to be applied broadly to any supportive housing model, regardless of the target population. However, this framework can be viewed with an aging lens to bring practical insights and strategies for effectively meeting the unique needs of vulnerable elders and allow them to age in place while maintaining their independence and choice for as long as possible.

## Aging in Place in Supportive Housing

It is possible for individuals to safely age in place[2] in quality supportive housing. The majority of Americans (78%) wish to remain in their homes as they grow older rather than moving to an institutional care setting.[3] Most vulnerable elders can remain in their homes if comprehensive services are provided that meet increasingly complex and demanding needs.

Quality supportive housing works to address homelessness among vulnerable elders, as it meets these unique needs and can prevent premature placement into costly nursing homes

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[2] Aging in place is defined as "the ability to live in one's own home and community safely, independently and comfortably, regardless of age, income or ability level." (Centers for Disease Control)
[3] AARP: Aging In Place Brief

or other institutions. Supportive housing that is accessible and coordinated anticipates the level of services needed and provides them conveniently to residents through collaboration, partnership and written agreements to keep tenants housed and living independently.

Not all supportive housing providers, however, are equipped to manage the complex needs of newly housed vulnerable elders or the changing ones experienced by tenants who are aging in place. According to a survey conducted by CSH with New York Capital District, over 60% of providers did not have any formal relationships with home health aid programs or visiting nurse services and 75% did not have any social or wellness activities targeted to their older clients.[4]  This gap illustrates the need for developing intentional strategies around new partnerships, collaborations or services to meet increasingly complex and variable health needs. Providers may not have prior experience with these types of changes to service delivery or may not have experience partnering with other agencies that provide these services. Providers have typically accommodated aging in place on a case-by-case basis, working with each tenant on connecting to more or different services or making unit modifications when the time arises. However, as more providers gain skill and experience serving vulnerable elders, key insights and lessons learned can be gleaned from their efforts. These insights can be used to employ a more strategic approach to meeting this population's unique needs, using quality supportive housing as a framework. Supportive housing providers should bring dimensions of quality, tailored to vulnerable elders, to each of the project components.

| Suportive Services | Community Connections | Property Management | Project Design |
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[4] CSH's Home to Stay: Quality Supportive Housing for Aging Tenants