



Healthy Aging in Supportive Housing

Toolkit for service providers, developers & property managers



September 2016



Healthy Aging in Supportive Housing

Toolkit for service providers, developers & property managers

IV. Healthy Aging in Quality Supportive Housing: Services – Designing a Services Program

Vulnerable elders living in supportive housing have unique needs that can be met through a robust system of services designed and coordinated strategically to meet these needs. As supportive housing welcomes more elderly tenants and as providers support aging in place, services should be enhanced, tailored and in some cases re-designed to meet increasingly complex needs.

Programs and services provided to aging and vulnerable elders in supportive housing must be comprehensive, age-appropriate and made available onsite or close to community services such as specialized elderly outreach services, assistance with activities of daily living, 24-hour crisis assistance, physical health care, mental health care, substance use treatment, transportation services, representative payee services, care coordination with community providers, nutrition and meal services, and community building activities aimed at reducing isolation. The need for these specialized services may place additional financial burdens on supportive housing providers. Thus, some communities or providers may choose to prioritize access to resources like Home and Community Based Waivers services (HCBW) for supportive housing tenants.¹ Supportive housing providers may need their own support to rise to meet these opportunities.

Designing or Modifying the Services Program

Designing and/or modifying service programs to better meet the needs of older tenants requires understanding of tenant needs and how these can be met through quality services. It requires considerations for how services will be delivered and who will deliver them – the primary services provider, by a partner agency or through referral. Any new services incorporated into an organization’s services program will need to come with funding or partner resource options, organizational policies and procedures that will operationalize these services and a determination of the staffing that will be involved in delivering these services. To ensure a quality services program that delivers outcomes, the Dimensions of Quality framework can be used for services that target vulnerable elders:

Tenant Centered: services are voluntary, customized and comprehensive, reflecting tenant needs. Vulnerable elders with histories of homelessness have unique and complex health and support needs, including co-occurring disorders, behavioral health challenges and histories of substance use. Strategies and examples are below, providing guidance on how to meet these unique and changing needs.

¹ ASPE: [Overview of Home and Community Based Waiver Services and Medicaid](#)



Healthy Aging in Supportive Housing

Toolkit for service providers, developers & property managers

Services assessments

Services assessments should include multidimensional assessments that identify the needs of formerly homeless elders.² Quality assessments cover these unique tenant needs and accommodate various modes of delivery (multiple languages, options for hearing and/or vision impaired, etc.) that may require patience and repetition to ensure tenant comprehension. Case managers should administer assessments at intake and throughout a resident's tenancy to identify and monitor changing service needs. It is beneficial for intake assessments to assess food security, mobility and health needs, and include the signing of HIPAA release forms.

Accessible: Tenants are aware of the services available to them and services are available at convenient hours and locations, or arrangements are made to ensure tenants can access these services. Vulnerable elders have high accessibility needs when it comes to services, including needs for reliable transportation, in-home or physically accessible service locations, as well protocols in place for accessing emergency services at any time of day due to health emergencies, falls, etc. Quality service programs monitor tenant eligibility for existing and future benefits programs such as health insurance programs and community programs that become available to people upon reaching a certain age. Ensuring services accessibility for elders also means establishing procedures for facilitating tenant awareness and comprehension of available services. This can include providing support on service applications and using effective channels of information dissemination for each tenant.

24-hour crisis assistance: Supportive housing projects should make 24-hour crisis assistance accessible in case of emergencies or individual crises. This is often a joint effort. Property management usually has primary responsibility except in cases of psychiatric crisis when social service staff members will need to take the responsibility. It is important to develop clear emergency policies and procedures for dealing with safety and crisis, spelling out the chain of command in case of emergency, what information should be provided to emergency services, when to involve on-call staff, when to call 911, knowledge sharing regarding tenant profiles and mobility needs and procedures for disseminating protocols to tenants.

Coordinated: The primary services provider has established connections to mainstream and community-based resources. Resident services coordination is especially important for vulnerable elders who have varying services needs throughout their tenancy, and may need more specialized services than younger tenants. *See below regarding staffing for social services programs that serve vulnerable elders.*

² LeadingAge provides comprehensive resources and a toolkit for resident assessment for seniors: http://www.leadingage.org/A_Tool_to_Assess_Housing_Residents_Needs.aspx.



Healthy Aging in Supportive Housing

Toolkit for service providers, developers & property managers

Integrated: Staff supports tenants in developing and strengthening connections to their community. Quality integrated services also means integrating service delivery across systems to more effectively and efficiently serve tenants. Integrating healthcare and housing support services is especially effective for this population. *See below regarding healthcare coordination, collaborations and partnerships.*

Sustainable: The supportive housing project or program has funding that is sufficient to provide services to tenants on an ongoing basis. Funding is flexible enough to address changing tenant needs. Vulnerable elders have many changing service needs that tend to become increasingly complex over time. This higher demand for services means the need for funding or resources to cover these services in the long term. There are many service and insurance options for vulnerable seniors, but less so for those who are under age 65. It is important that service program staff monitor service, insurance and other benefits eligibility to ensure that tenants receive the care and services to which they are entitled.

Strategies for meeting the most pressing needs of vulnerable elders follow, along with common resources and examples for how these tenant-centered services can be delivered.

