

**Connecticut Supportive Housing Assessment/Acuity Index
Guidance and Manual**

January 2018



ASSESSMENT/ACUITY INDEX (AAI) OVERVIEW

The Connecticut Supportive Housing Assessment/Acuity Index (AAI) is a tool used to collect information that will assist tenants and service providers in planning actions to strengthen housing stability, promote independence and improve the tenant's quality of life. It notes a tenant's strengths and skills and the supports which can help a tenant plan for his or her vision of the future. The primary purpose of the AAI is to provide an opportunity for a case manager to get to know the tenant and to examine the experiences, strengths and hopes of the tenant. This is done to assist the tenant in developing service plan goals that are meaningful to the tenant and that reflect his or her hopes and aspirations.

The AAI is one document with two parts, where both parts are used in conjunction to form a comprehensive portrait of a tenant. The first part, referred to as the Assessment, uses a narrative conversation to assemble a tenant's historical information and experiences that are useful to consider when developing service plan goals. It also notes current information which is needed to identify the appropriate supportive services.

The second part, referred to as the Acuity Index, provides a systematic way to assess a person's level of independence and support needs in a variety of areas related to housing stability, income and benefits, health, and access to supportive services/resources. The purpose of the acuity index is to help guide the tenant and service staff in the development of service plan goals.

Scores in the Acuity Index can also be used to help identify tenants who are skill-ready to consider other housing options with community-based supports outside of the supportive housing program. Scores can also be used by supervisors to determine direct care staff's case load size, supervision needs, and evaluate the distribution of work and other employee/agency needs.

AAI Process

Plan for appropriate time to conduct outreach, gather information and complete the AAI. In some instances the case manager may not be able to get exact dates and details. In these situations, the case manager should move on and complete the assessment without these details. ***No portion of the AAI should be left blank.***

It is a requirement that the initial AAI is completed within 30 days of the tenant being housed. After the initial AAI, reassessments are completed at six month intervals. All reassessments are aligned with the anniversary date of the initial AAI. To help ensure that the AAI is completed on time, especially for tenants who may be difficult to engage, the AAI process can be started up to one month before the due date.

Both the initial and all subsequent AAIs are signed and dated by the staff member who is directly working with the tenant and the supportive housing program supervisor. Although the Connecticut Supportive Housing Quality Standards do not require a tenant to sign the assessment, an individual agency can choose to have a tenant sign if the agency feels it is helpful.

The AAI can be completed in multiple stages. The case manager will gather and examine all supporting documents that are available and accessible. If additional information is needed, the case manager should request this information from other providers after obtaining written consent from the tenant.

Supporting information is especially important to have for the initial assessment. It can include assessments and discharge information from other agencies or any other information from past or current

providers. Completing subsequent AAIs should include a review of progress notes from the previous six months so updated information can be added.

After a case manager has incorporated information from other sources and progress notes, he or she will then meet with the tenant to fill in any information gaps and check with the tenant for accuracy. These meetings should involve a series of conversations and can be done over time according to the preferences of the tenant.

Sometimes a tenant may decline to participate in these conversations. If a tenant declines, the case manager should rely on information from progress notes and supporting documents and should complete the AAI as thoroughly as possible. Tenant's nonparticipation should be noted and the service plan should include a detailed outreach and engagement plan.

Example: A case manager has gathered information from other sources, has looked at progress notes and has met with the tenant once. The case manager had another meeting with the tenant scheduled, but the tenant now cannot make it. The assessment and acuity index must be completed by tomorrow.

Resolution: The case manager should move forward and complete the assessment noting any information that is still outstanding or missing. For the acuity index, the case manager should choose levels based upon the information that is available. Additional information from the tenant can be considered when developing service plan goals and can be noted in progress notes for incorporation in the next assessment and acuity index.

Finalizing the AAI

The AAI is finalized once a case manager feels there is enough information in both portions to help a tenant develop meaningful service plan goals within the timeframe established by quality standards. If information requested in the AAI is missing, the case manager should use their best judgement and document using an appropriate designation such as:

- N/A
- "Tenant does not recall"
- "Tenant declined to provide information"
- Or the noting of unsuccessful attempts to retrieve information from an outside agency

The Acuity Index guides service planning through identifying the most pressing needs that a tenant has and is divided into the following three sections: 1) Housing, Income and Benefits; 2) Health, Supportive Services and Resources; and 3) Parenting and Child Services and categorizes tenant self-sufficiency and independence on a four point scale. The scale ranges from a 0, representing low self-sufficiency and independence, to a 3, representing the highest level. There should be consistency within the agency as to how each element is scored.

Only elements that are rated a 0 or a 1 require a service plan goal. These goals can be either active – something that a tenant is working on currently, or deferred – a goal that is identified as important but for which the tenant has made the decision to work on at a later time or not at all. If a goal for a section rated 0 or 1 is deferred, a note should be included on the service plan, the Acuity Index, or in the progress note. The note should include a specific reason why a goal is being deferred and describe how the case manager will continue to engage the tenant.

In addition to addressing and categorizing areas rated a 0 or 1, some tenants may choose to focus on an area that is rated higher. If this is the case, the case manager should assist the tenant in developing goals in these areas as well.

When choosing a score (0, 1, 2, or 3), use information from any and all resources, including tenant self-report. This will open up conversations in regards to why staff has given a particular score. Staff should carefully read *all* options before choosing a score. Make sure not to get caught up trying to figure out exact percentages to determine a rating unless that information is readily accessible. If a particular percentage is not known staff will make a best estimate as follows:

- 0 = none of the time
- 1 = less than half of the time
- 2 = most of the time
- 3 = all or almost all of the time

Example: A case manager is missing the dates that a person was hospitalized, but he or she knows it occurred sometime in 2014. Despite attempts to get additional information from the hospital and from the tenant, the precise dates are not known.

Resolution: The case manager should note that the tenant was hospitalized in 2014 and should use this information to assist in assessing needs and to develop service plan goals.

Note about the Acuity Index portion:

It's important to recognize that Acuity Index scores will fluctuate. A high score in one area may be lower on the next Acuity Index. This may simply reflect a change in the needs or experiences of the tenant. Filling out the "New" and 'Last' columns will show changes in a tenant's needs over time and may present the opportunity to engage in exploratory conversations. There is a space at the end of each section where comments can be added. Staff are encouraged to use this space to explain anything out of the ordinary and any circumstances that may have affected scoring, especially if the scoring has changed from the previous six months.

ASSESSMENT SECTIONS

Tenant Information

DDaP Periodic Assessment (includes International Classification of Diseases-10)

DDaP Supportive Housing Assessment

These sections includes information that providers are required to report to DMHAS every six months through DDaP.

HMIS Domestic Violence History

The history of domestic violence question is taken directly from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and needs to be reported for all tenants entering supportive housing. If a program reports data through HMIS, other required data elements are collected through the standard application for supportive housing.

Members in household other than tenant (if applicable)

The listing of all persons in the household is necessary for service planning purposes. Supportive housing providers should look at the entire household when assessing service needs. This includes noting the name and address of schools and/or day care for children and noting any special service needs of family members. If there are no other people in the household other than the tenant, write or type “not applicable” (N/A) on the first line.

Emergency Contact Information

Listing a tenant’s nearest relative or friend not living with the tenant provides the case manager with a contact to reach out to if there is an emergency. It also provides a point of contact if a case manager is unable to reach a tenant. Tenant may not have an emergency contact, write or type “not applicable” (N/A).

Current Medications

The current medications that a tenant is taking must be noted and updated during each assessment. Case managers may choose to update these between assessments as needed or update them on the chart face sheet. Medications are noted in order to give case managers background information to help tenants understand their medications and any possible side effects or interactions.

In some cases a tenant may not wish to share information regarding medications with case managers. If a tenant declines, the case manager should continue to attempt engagement around providing medication information.

Housing History and Information

History of housing/homelessness in the 5 years prior to program admission:

In this section, case managers should note the tenant’s history of housing and homelessness. Specifically, case managers should focus on the factors that contributed the tenant’s past episodes of homelessness.

This history is useful in assisting newly housed tenants in focusing on housing stability. Some questions and information that may be useful include asking a tenant what factors, influences or experiences he or she believes contributed to his or her becoming homeless. With this information, case managers can work with the tenant to identify goals and actions that will strengthen the tenant’s ability to maintain housing.

Some specific questions to think about include:

- How many episodes of homelessness did the tenant experience in the past five years?
- How long was the tenant homeless?
- When the tenant was homeless, did he or she stay in a shelter or on the streets?
- In the past five years, was the tenant a resident of an institution? Was he or she incarcerated?
- When the tenant was not homeless, did he or she have an apartment?
- If a tenant had his or her own apartment, was there a subsidy for the unit?
- Did the tenant ever stay with family or friends?
- Was the tenant ever evicted? If so for what reason?

Current landlord, and rental payment history:

This section of the assessment identifies the name and contact phone of the tenant's current landlord. It also identifies the length of time currently housed, the number of late rent payments for the past 12 months and the length of time the tenant has successfully maintained a lease.

The length of time a lease was maintained should include all leases with all landlords. For example, if a tenant in a scattered site program successfully moved to another unit after a year of holding a lease and he or she has successfully held a lease in the new apartment for 4 months, the length of time should be 16 months.

Sometimes a tenant may have a pattern of breaking leases with landlords. The case manager should look at the circumstances of ending these leases to determine if this pattern reflects circumstances or behaviors that may impact housing stability. The case manager should note his or her evaluation in the assessment.

Issues with landlord and/or neighbors:

In this section, the case manager should note any problems, complaints or damage that have occurred during the past 12 months. It should be noted if the tenant was evicted at any time in the past 12 months or if the tenant's landlord threatened eviction during this time period.

If this is the first assessment, the case manager can either note any information that he or she might have regarding the tenant's housing history or can indicate N/A. If the assessment is the first six month follow-up, the case manager should complete the information looking back over the prior six months.

Circumstances that impact ability to maintain housing:

The case manager should note any circumstances or problems that a tenant is facing that might make the tenant more vulnerable to losing his or her housing.

- Some specific questions to think about include: Has the tenant recently stopped taking medications prescribed for a mental health disability?
- Has he or she stopped participating in any services that have been supportive in the past?
- Was there a recent job loss, a decrease in hours worked or another income loss/decrease?
- Has the tenant experienced significant health problems recently?
- Did a change in a relationship with a significant person who was supportive occur?
- If a tenant uses substances, has substance use increased?
- Has a tenant's financial obligations increased?
- Has the tenant been arrested?
- Are people who are not supportive of the tenant involved in his/her daily living?

Daily Living Skills Challenges

This section includes a checklist of daily living skills challenges that a tenant may be facing.

Employment and Education

In this section, the case manager notes the employment status of the tenant including the employer and number of hours worked per week. Participation in an education program should be also be described in this section.

This portion of the assessment also asks about the tenant's employment and education goals. Sometimes an individual has clear and concrete goals about employment and/or education. In this case, the goals can be recorded and the case manager can talk with the tenant about placing these goals in the service plan.

An individual may not have concrete or clear goals related to employment and/or education. In this situation, the case manager should take some time to ask the tenant what he or she might want to do regarding setting goals in these areas. This can also include volunteering.

Some of the questions a case manager might ask someone who is not working or involved in an educational program include:

- What type of work have you done in the past?
- Are you interested in returning to that line of work?
- If you were working, what type of job do you think you would like to have?
- What type of job(s) would you not want?
- What are some of your talents that would help you get a job or would be useful in a job?
- If you want to return to school, where would you like to go and what might you want to study?

People often have concerns about working and how working might impact the benefits they are receiving or how a disability might impact their ability to work. A tenant might also be concerned about how past involvement with the criminal justice system might be a barrier to getting a job. In all these scenarios, the case manager should offer to connect the tenant with an agency or individual who would be able to talk to him/her about these concerns.

Tenants who are working might be very happy with their job and/or employer. Others might want to explore other employment options. Some questions a case manager might ask those who are working include:

- Are you interested in looking at other types of jobs?
- Would you like another type of job or work in another field?
- Is there another job where you are working that you would like to have?
- What is your dream job?

Medical and Health

The medical and health section provides the case manager with information concerning the tenant's use of health care systems, current medical insurance and health problems he or she might be experiencing.

In the provider section, there are spaces to indicate a tenant's primary care provider, dental provider and any specialists the tenant may be working with. In some instances a tenant may see a specialist for both

primary and specialty care. If this is the case, the specialist should also be identified as the primary care provider. The last appointment and next appointment must also be noted.

Current health challenges, medical problems and known allergies are also included in the section. Case managers should also provide a summary of any hospitalizations related to physical health that occurred in the past. They should also include a summary of any current medical treatments a tenant is undergoing.

In some cases a tenant may decline to share information with a case manager regarding their medical status. Documentation should reflect this. If the tenant does not wish to share, the case manager should encourage the tenant to continue to work with his or her health care provider and continue to attempt engagement around health related issues.

Behavioral Health, Substance Use and Trauma

If the tenant participates in behavioral health services, this section includes contact information for clinicians, case managers and/or other behavioral health and/or substance use providers. Like the medical and health section, the behavioral health contact information section includes places to indicate the last and next appointment.

The case manager will record past and current mental health and substance use diagnoses in this section. In addition, there are sections to indicate behavioral health and substance use treatment history.

The trauma section includes an introduction to which the case manager can refer when speaking with tenants. It was developed to assist staff in framing conversations and is not meant to be read verbatim. This will let tenants know that they can talk about life experiences that may be very disturbing. At the same time, it reinforces that the choice to talk about traumatic experiences rests solely with the tenant and that the level and nature of the information a tenant chooses to provide or discuss is up to the tenant. If the tenant states they do not wish to talk about past trauma, respect that response and write or type N/A or Tenant does not wish to discuss at this time.

Case managers should look for information regarding a tenant's history to see if there is any indication of experiences that might lead to trauma. Some areas to look for or some examples that case managers might want to talk to a tenant about include:

- Witnessing or experiencing something that put one's life or the life of another in danger or where the tenant or someone else was seriously hurt
- Witnessing or experiencing a bad accident, a fire, flood or other disaster
- Experiencing a life threatening illness
- Been in a war zone or experienced war
- Been attacked physically or with a weapon
- Verbal or emotional abuse
- Been forced to have sex and/or been touched inappropriately in a sexual manner
- Been discriminated against or harmed because of gender, culture, religion, skin color or sexual orientation
- Any other experience that was extraordinarily stressful or upsetting

It is very important that case managers emphasize that a tenant can always come and talk about traumatic experiences any time the tenant wants to. In addition, the case manager should also offer to help the tenant access resources and services in the community that may be helpful.

Financial Resources and Obligations

In this section, the case manager notes the income sources and outstanding debts for the tenant and all persons living in the tenant's household. There is also a section to list the name and contact information for the tenant's Conservator of Person and/or Finance and Representative Payee. Needs identified in this area may necessitate work around budgeting, if the tenant chooses to address.

Legal Involvement

This section includes contact information for attorneys, legal services providers, and supervision officers for tenants who are involved in the legal and/or child welfare system. The section also provides a place to note a tenant's history of legal involvement. This would include convictions, history of incarceration, current status of pending charges and current involvement with the child welfare system.

Services

The services section provides a space to note the services or activities that the tenant would like to participate in and access. This can include services provided by behavioral health agencies, employment supports, parenting supports and any other resource in the community that the tenant would find helpful.

Since there are a wide variety of services and resources a person can access, the case manager should review the services and resources available in the community with the tenant. Then, based on the tenant's interest, the case manager should emphasize the benefits that each service or resource could offer.

Natural Supports

Current supportive persons, family and/or anyone the tenant considers family, and or groups are noted in this section. The case manager should also note the ways that the tenant is involved in his or her community. This can include involvement with support groups, religious activities, community centers and activity groups that are not provided in the behavioral healthcare system.

Interests and Hobbies

This section provides a space for case managers to note a tenant's interests and activities. Case managers and tenants should explore how these interests can help with community connections and can support a tenant in achieving his or her goals. The case manager will help develop goals for folks with scores of 2's and 3's on the Acuity Index by looking at the wants vs. needs when the tenant is stable and working towards independence.

Strengths and Barriers to Accessing Resources and/or Services

Positive and negative factors that influence a tenant's ability to access services and resources are noted in this section. This can include personal factors such as a tenant's motivation and community factors such as transportation and the availability of services and/or resources.

Additional Information and Summary Notes

In this section, the case manager can note additional information that is useful in assessing a tenant's needs and planning for services. Summary notes provide a space for summing up needs and findings from the assessment. Completion of these two sections is optional according to the preferences of the case manager and his or her supervisor. If the option not to complete these sections is chosen, the person completing the assessment should note this by entering N/A in the space provided.

ACUITY INDEX SECTIONS

Housing

Rent Payment: The case manager looks at how often the tenant or a tenant's rep payee or conservator has paid rent on time in the past 12 months. For newly housed people coming from homelessness, 0 level should be chosen since the tenant has not paid rent in the past six months. Any scores requiring explanation should be entered in the comments section.

Utility Bill Payment: The number of times a tenant has paid his or her major utility bills such as electricity and heat on time during the past year is assessed. If utilities are included in the tenant's rent, level 3 should be chosen if rent is being paid on time.

Rent Arrears: In this section, the index examines any rent arrears that a tenant might have together with his or her willingness to participate in a payment plan. If there are no rent arrears, level 3 should be chosen.

Utility Arrears: Similar to rent arrears, this section looks at total utility arrears together with payment plan status. If there are no utility arrears, level 3 should be chosen.

Safe Living Environment: Safe Living Environment looks at how often unsafe or disruptive activities in the tenant's apartment have occurred. The case manager should indicate the number of times the police have been called or the landlord notified that unsafe conditions or situations are present.

Lease (include all leases if tenant moved): This section examines the total length of time a tenant has continuously held a lease. This should include leases with all landlords if the tenant has made a positive move to another apartment. A case manager should also use his or her judgment when considering how to rate a tenant who continually breaks his or her lease with landlords, even if landlords agree. In these instances, a case manager should look at the circumstances to see if this pattern reflects circumstances or behaviors that may impact housing stability and consistently apply to all tenants served by the agency.

Income and Benefits

Stable/Consistent Source of Cash Income: This section evaluates the tenant's level of cash income including the length of time he or she has been receiving it. It includes income from employment and self-employment.

Benefits: The receipt of benefits for which a person is eligible is the focus of this section. If a tenant does not qualify for benefits or is receiving everything that he or she is entitled to, the case manager should choose level 3. Benefits here refer to SSI, SSDI, TANF and SAGA.

Employment: The employment section measures the length of time employed and, for those not employed, the level of motivation to become employed. Level 3 should be selected for those who cannot work due to disability provided that disability benefits are received.

Debt: This section looks at the level of outstanding debt a tenant has as well his or her ability to meet debt payment obligations.

Health

Mental Health Care Use: For tenants who have an identified mental health care need, this section looks at how often he or she accesses services. The type of service will vary according to the specific needs of the tenant. For individuals who have no identified need for services or those who are very well connected to services, the case manager should choose level 3 and provide an explanation in the comments box.

Primary/Specialty Health Care Use: This section evaluates how a tenant uses primary health care resources and the level to which he or she follows standard guidelines for treatment of chronic conditions (if applicable) and preventive health care.

Medication Adherence: For tenants who are taking medications, this section examines whether a tenant takes his or her medication as prescribed. This section relies on tenant self-reporting and includes all medications a tenant should be taking including those prescribed for chronic health conditions.

Harm Reduction (such as substance use, gambling, risky sexual behaviors, etc.): Harmful behaviors and the tenant's adoption of behaviors that will lessen risk are assessed in this section. For tenants that engage in behaviors that put them at risk of harm, the case manager is asked to indicate to what level the tenant is taking steps to reduce the risks and harm associated with specific behaviors.

Supportive Services and Resources

Connection to Community Supports: This section evaluates the level of community supports a tenant has outside of the supportive housing program. It also looks at the motivation of the tenant in accessing additional supports.

Crisis Intervention: In this section the number of crises a tenant has experienced in the past 12 months and his or her willingness to work with the case manager and/or other providers in addressing the crisis is examined. The agency should identify what types of occurrences constitute a crisis and apply this definition across all tenants.

Life Skills: The life skills section evaluates how independently a tenant can conduct standard activities of daily living.

Legal: This section examines any outstanding legal issues or obligations that a tenant might have and includes an evaluation of the level of compliance with any criminal justice supervision requirements.

Mobility & Transportation: In the title of this sub-section, 'mobility' refers to a tenant's opportunity and access to transportation options. It does not refer to physical mobility (i.e. whether the tenant is ambulatory). Evaluation includes whether there are resources for public transportation, private transportation, transportation via the service provider, and if the tenant owns or has access to a vehicle.

Parenting and Child Services

Childcare: This section looks at the level of childcare needs and the accessibility of childcare, subsidized or unsubsidized, for children in the household.

Children's Education: The education section examines if children who are school-aged and required to be enrolled, are enrolled in school and the level of attendance and participation.

Parenting: This section assesses the adequacy of parenting skills.

Child Welfare Involvement: For families who are involved with the child welfare system, this section examines the level of involvement with child welfare services including the level of participation in services.

Children with Special Needs: The special needs section examines the level of connection to and participation in support services for children in the household who have been identified as having special medical, educational or other unique service needs.

Note about the Parenting and Child Services section:

The family section of the Acuity Index is intended for use with family providers and for tenants in other programs who have children living with them. This section of the acuity index can also be used if a tenant often provides care for a child in his or her home, but this is not mandatory. For individuals that do not have children, please score this section as 3's as this score indicates "no need."