

**Guidance on Targeting Families
for the Partnerships to Demonstrate the Effectiveness
of Supportive Housing for Families in the Child Welfare System**

Supportive housing integrates a housing subsidy with wrap around services; it is an intensive and relatively expensive intervention that uses affordable, stable housing as a platform for services, for high need families. This demonstration aims to show the efficacy of using supportive housing to reduce child maltreatment and end housing instability among high need families involved with the child welfare system.

In the Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA), the Administration for Children, Youth, and Families (ACYF) stated that the program should serve “a subset of families who come to the attention of the child welfare system due to severe housing issues and high service needs.” These families are “a subset of families for whom the lack of adequate housing is a factor, in addition to other high service needs, in the imminent placement or placement of the child, or children, in out-of-home care.” The FOA further identifies expected outcomes as “...a reduction in child welfare system contacts, child maltreatment, child removals, and foster care placements, and an increase in housing stability and employment.”

Given the cost and limited availability of housing and intensive services, it is critical that projects within this demonstration target supportive housing to families for whom the program will have the biggest impact. To meet ACYF’s requirements demonstration sites must analyze local data to identify the risk factors to use to select families and set up clear eligibility criteria and referral processes that can be applied systematically. This will reduce opportunities for caseworkers to introduce subjectivity during the family selection process.

In order to guide sites in defining their target population, this document specifies our recommended eligibility criteria. Each site's eligibility criteria, whether or not following this guidance, should be supported by showing how their local data was used to identify the most appropriate families for the intervention.

Developing Targeting and Eligibility Criteria

In developing targeting criteria, demonstration sites should select families who meet all of the following eligibility guidelines:

1. Most likely to experience negative child welfare outcomes (e.g., out-of-home placement, long-term open cases, reentry to the child welfare system in the form of re-reports of abuse or neglect and repeat open cases).
2. Inadequately housed, i.e. who are homeless or unstably housed.
3. Multiple needs (i.e., mental or physical health problems, substance use, disabled children, etc.).

Operationalizing Key Terms

Figuring out how to target supportive housing to child welfare involved families requires operationalizing three key terms: (1) child welfare involvement; (2) inadequate housing; and (3) high need. Each term, operationalized in order below, further refines the subset of families under consideration for the supportive housing program. Here are some guidelines for how to define these terms:

Child Welfare Involvement

Child welfare involvement is the first criterion to be applied. We know from research that it is very difficult to predict out-of-home placement or reentry into the child welfare system.

Demonstration sites should consider selecting families currently involved in the child welfare system. Specifically, we recommend selecting families with an **open case with a substantiated report of child abuse or neglect and whose children are at high risk for out-of-home placement absent the provision of supportive housing**. Note that this is the definition that was used in

Keeping Families Together, the impetus for the current demonstration. Importantly, families without a current substantiated report of abuse or neglect are not currently at risk of having their children removed and should not be included.

For households where children are already in out-of-home care (families working on reunification), referrals to this demonstration should be systematically selected prior to assignment to a child welfare case manager's caseload. For the purposes of this demonstration, to ensure families meet the "highest need" threshold, the family becomes eligible immediately after removal, subject to the criteria below. Cases should not be selected from existing child welfare caseloads. This helps prevent caseworkers from making subjective judgments about who they want to serve.

Inadequate Housing

Most families involved in the child welfare system have limited incomes and often experience difficulties affording rent, leaving them in precarious housing situations. These families may need help paying their rent, but they do not require intensive models such as supportive housing. Therefore, demonstration sites must focus on factors to differentiate between families who are homeless for economic issues alone and those families who are homeless because they have multiple barriers to staying housed. Housing should also be a factor in the parents' ability to care for their children. Families selected should have one of the following housing situation:

- Sleeping on the street, in cars, or in other places not meant for habitation
- Living in Emergency shelter
- Living in transitional housing
- Exiting a residential treatment center without access to stable housing
- Unstably housed and imminently losing housing within five to seven days
 - Evicted in 5 to 7 days from time of referral
 - Discharged from hospital or institution
 - Living in housing condemned by housing officials
- Three or more moves in the past 12 months
- Fleeing domestic violence

High Need

The third criterion reduces the target population to high need families. Supportive housing combines housing subsidy with intensive services. It should go to families who have multiple needs that compromise their capacity to parent and remain housed. The characteristics that define eligibility should reflect the types of services the program offers and focus on those characteristics that require the most intensive (and expensive) services. Families should meet at least one of the following conditions:

- Primary caregiver has mental health problem
- Primary caregiver has alcohol and/or drug problem
- Child has mental health or behavioral problem
- Child has developmental, learning, or physical disability

In addition, other risk factors associated with higher levels of child welfare involvement (more likely to involve out-of-home care, longer time spent in care) should be considered in the eligibility criteria.

- Domestic violence (two or more incidents in the home in the past year)
- Primary caregiver has a chronic health condition
- Age of youngest child is under two
- Four or more children in the household
- Primary caregiver has criminal arrest history
- Household has previously received child protective services
- Primary caregiver has history of abuse or neglect as a child

We recommend eligible families have 3 or more characteristics from either set of bullets above, with at least one characteristic from the first set of bullets.