



Healthy Aging in Supportive Housing

Toolkit for service providers, developers & property managers



September 2016



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VI. Healthy Aging in Quality Supportive Housing: Services – Staffing and Services

Service Program Staffing

As in any supportive housing project, appropriate staffing needs should be considered for projects that target and serve vulnerable elders and those with needs for higher levels of support. Whether your service program is a new one that targets vulnerable elders or one that is being modified to accommodate those aging in place, it is advisable to have staff who understand the needs of aging tenants and have had experience with geriatric populations. If current staff do not have this expertise, supportive housing providers should partner with organization that do, or provide trainings on service those who have geriatric conditions and those who are frail and have mobility impairments in addition to other complex conditions. Staff should also be trained to support residents during their end of life, helping tenants understand their options, connect with family and help manage logistics. It is a best practice for caseloads to be small for this population (no larger than 40:1 generally and 14:1 for those with complex conditions¹) to allow for more intensive services and support.

Staff members are consistent sources of meaningful support: Vulnerable elders often require more intensive support than younger residents in supportive housing and many do not have the family supports like elders in the general population who live in senior housing. Therefore, service provider staff often fill the roles that family members often fill for supporting those who are aging – assisting with benefits access, managing legal paperwork, advocating for services, providing meaningful social and celebratory experiences and managing the logistical, psychological and emotional aspects of transition periods throughout an elder’s tenancy.

Essential Staff Roles: Housing projects that target vulnerable elders or those who are accommodating aging in place will likely find that new staff roles are needed to better meeting the needs. Training existing staff in new expertise areas is essential, but completely new types of service roles will likely be needed. These roles can be newly hired staff or service partners who come on site.

It may be beneficial to have an integrated service provider and property management team who are both trained to identify geriatric health issues, cognitive difficulties and the need for new supports like activities of daily living. For scattered site developments, this could

¹ [Home to Stay: Quality Supportive Housing for Aging Tenants](#)



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be a very closely coordinated team that can identify these issues together.²

- On-site nurse practitioner to assist with acute medical needs, psychosocial services, preventative services and links to primary care (once per week is recommended).
- Behavioral health provider
- Behavior health case manager
- Rehabilitation specialist (as needed)
- Resident service coordinators (see below)

Service Partnerships: Very few supportive housing providers can provide every service that vulnerable elders may need throughout their lives, so collaborations and partnerships are necessary. These can take the form of service coordination through referrals with “warm handoffs,” having partners come on site to provide services, or integrating services with partners to serve vulnerable elders in a new service site such as an onsite clinic. Service partnerships differ by type, but all partnerships should commit to serving vulnerable elders, have similar partnership goals, fill one another’s service gaps and follow through on commitments.

Resources:

- [Leading Age’s Toolkit for Building Health and Housing Partnerships for Older Adults](#)
- [Guidance: Developing Health and Housing Partnerships](#) in Supportive Housing
- [HUD’s Resident Services Coordinator Program](#)
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² Center for Urban Community Services. (2003). *Developing the “Support” in Supportive Housing*, prepared by Tony Hannigan and Suzanne Wagner. http://www.csh.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Tool_DevelopingSupport_Guide.pdf