

Overview of Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)

Lack of adequate, affordable housing and the stress associated with the risk of homelessness profoundly impacts an individual's access to employment opportunities, health services, and other basic needs such as healthy food, transportation, and education. Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) refers to interventions that combine (1) affordable housing assistance and (2) support services to address the needs of individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness.¹ More than half a million people in the United States are estimated to have experienced homelessness in 2022.²

Today, many PSH programs (including Washington's AHAA Initiative and the Foundational Community Supports Program) are modeled around the evidence-based practices of the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) "Housing First" approach.

Understanding the Housing First Approach

The nonprofit Pathways to Housing developed the "Housing First" approach to meet the housing and treatment needs of those experiencing chronic homelessness. In the 1980s and 1990s, the typical approach to housing support and interventions made housing support dependent upon accepting and maintaining sobriety and mental health treatment.

The Housing First approach flipped the model, prioritizing stable housing, with the consumer driving decisions about housing options and support services.³ The model is predicated on the principle that adequate housing is a human right and individual consumer choice must direct all support and interventions. Since its inception in the 1990s, numerous studies and evaluations have demonstrated the effectiveness of Housing First's pragmatic and principled approach to improved health outcomes and maintaining health and sobriety goals. In 2014, SAMHSA published an evidenced-based toolkit for implementing the Housing First approach based on seven core principles.

1. **Choice of Housing:** Individuals have the right to direct their housing selection.
2. **Separation of Housing and Services:** Access to housing is wholly independent of accepting other supportive services, including (but not limited to) health interventions.
3. **Decent, Safe, and Affordable:** This means that all units meet US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) quality standards, and tenants do not pay more than 30% of their income on rent and essential utilities.
4. **Integration in the Community:** Available housing options should be integrated into residential areas.
5. **Full Rights of Tenancy:** Individuals receiving housing support shall have a lease that complies with local landlord/tenant laws and regulations.
6. **Access to Housing:** Housing is never denied based on evaluating whether an individual is "ready" for housing. Housing and is never dependent upon other treatment or health goals but is a priority of its own.
7. **Flexible, Voluntary Services:** PSH services are tailored to the client's individual needs; this includes identifying client preferences and priorities at entry and throughout the program.

The bottom line of the Housing First approach is that establishing and maintaining adequate, affordable housing is an end goal in and of itself. A Housing First approach which prioritizes individual choice in housing, the services offered, and personal social and health goals, translates to improved housing retention *and* health outcomes, including adherence to health goals set by the individual.

FOR EXAMPLE

in 2020, the Seattle City Council estimated that approximately 90-95% of individuals placed in PSH remained housed a year later.

Housing *Plus* Services

In addition to the Housing First principles that prioritize individual choice, autonomy, and empowerment, PSH programs recognize that establishing and maintaining adequate housing often requires more support and services than referral to an affordable housing unit. As provided through Apple Health's Foundational Community Support (FCS) program, PSH services include housing case management and tenancy support services,⁴ which incorporates:

- Conducting housing assessments (including client preferences and priorities)
- Identifying housing resources, including conducting outreach to landlords to identify available housing
- Assistance with housing applications and support in obtaining a lease
- Provide support to individuals obtaining a lease
- Referral to and assisting in the application of housing subsidies and community supports
- Support and advocacy in landlord/tenant disputes
- Education, training, and coaching

In addition to individual case management and tenancy support services through the FCS, Washington has adopted a three-pronged model (or three-legged stool) to PSH services through Apple Health. This recognizes that addressing the housing needs of individuals and the community requires:

- **Individualized Support Services** (as delivered through FCS Services),
- **Direct Assistance in Housing Costs** through Rental Assistance and other subsidies (as delivered through Apple Health and Homes Rental Assistance), and
- **Infrastructure Development** through incentives to landlords and partnerships with housing units and community-based organizations to expand the availability of affordable housing, as delivered through the Apple Health and Homes Initiative.⁵

ENDNOTES

- ¹ National Alliance to End Homelessness, “Permanent Supportive Housing,” April 26, 2023. Available at <https://endhomelessness.org/ending-homelessness/solutions/permanent-supportive-housing/#:~:text=Permanent%20supportive%20housing%20is%20an,needs%20of%20chronically%20homeless%20people>.
- ² U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, The 2022 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress, December 2022. Available at <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2022-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>.
- ³ Sam Tsemberis, Leyla Gulcur, Maria Nakae, “Housing First, Consumer Choice, and Harm Reduction for Homeless Individuals with a Dual Diagnosis.” American Journal of Public Health, 94, no. 4 (April 1, 2004): 651-56. Available at <https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.94.4.651>.
- ⁴ Amerigroup, Foundational Community Supports, Orientation Presentation, 2022. Available at https://provider.amerigroup.com/docs/gpp/WAWA_CAID_ProvOrienPres.pdf?v=202205261318.
- ⁵ Washington State Health Care Authority, “Introducing the Apple Health and Homes (AHAH) Program.” February 8, 2023. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6LcF7OqoR1U>.