



## Adopting Housing Problem-Solving Approaches with Prevention, Diversion, and Rapid Exit Strategies

*Home, Together*, the federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness in America, recognizes that to end homelessness, every community must have in place a systemic response that ensures that homelessness is a rare, brief, and one-time experience. Using a housing problem-solving approach can prevent homelessness and help people exit homelessness more quickly.

Adopting a housing problem-solving approach means helping households use their strengths, support networks, and community resources to find housing. It should be attempted with virtually everyone interacting with the homelessness services system, often more than once.

Housing problem-solving is not a new project type or component, and it typically does not operate as a standalone program. Instead, [housing problem-solving techniques](#) are used within existing programs across the entire homelessness services system.

Housing problem-solving approaches support the effective implementation of [homelessness prevention, diversion, and rapid exit strategies](#) – strategies that should be a part of every coordinated entry process and are offered as potential housing pathways for all populations.

Adopting a housing problem-solving approach across your system utilizes potentially untapped resources and may significantly improve communities' system performance measures. Housing problem-solving can reduce lengths of time homeless, numbers of households experiencing first-time homelessness, and the share of households returning to homelessness.

### **Housing Problem-Solving: The Practice**

Housing problem-solving starts with conversations intended to:

1. Identify the household's strengths and existing support networks;
2. Explore safe housing options outside the homelessness services system, even if temporary when a part of a diversion or rapid-exit intervention; and
3. Connect the household to community supports and services.

Effective housing problem-solving involves much more than simply asking a prescribed set of questions. It is carried out by skilled, trained, and flexible staff who engage in open-ended, exploratory conversations to understand a household's strengths and existing support networks. These staff members use empathy, active

listening, conflict resolution, and mediation skills, and draw on their understanding of and access to community-based resources.

Housing problem-solving explores options that the household may not have been able to identify or felt comfortable enough to explore on their own. After identifying options, staff members determine what other types of services or supports may be necessary to make the identified option a reality.

Sometimes the solutions are as simple as mediating a conflict with a family member or connecting a household to community resources like health, social services, and employment. At other times, the solution might include one-time financial assistance. Since financial assistance isn't always necessary, communities can implement housing problem-solving regardless of whether financial assistance is available. Of course, there may also be instances when ongoing follow up is necessary to provide continued support to families as they work through conflict or other challenges.

Below are examples of services and financial assistance, depending on the funding support that may be available, that can be provided as part of a housing problem-solving approach:

Services could include:

- Strengths-based case management
- Conflict resolution
- Housing search
- Landlord-tenant mediation
- Connection to mainstream resources
- Family mediation
- Tenant legal services
- Credit repair

Financial assistance might be used for:

- Rental application fees
- Security or utility deposits
- Utility or rental arrears
- Moving costs
- Bus, train, or airplane tickets to help facilitate return to family
- Food assistance
- Car repairs, bus passes, gas, vehicle repairs, and other expenses for job-related transportation
- Costs associated with obtaining identification documents
- Employment supplies, like uniforms, work boots, or cell phones
- Employment-related training certifications

## Conclusion

As communities implement multiple strategies to prevent and end homelessness, adopting a housing problem-solving approach across the system will better serve households experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Calling upon natural support systems, mainstream resources, and limited financial assistance, skilled staff can help a household avoid homelessness altogether or help them exit to housing rapidly and retain stable housing.