

Continuum of Care

What is a Continuum of Care?

The Continuum of Care is a **community-based, long-range plan** that addresses the needs of homeless persons in order to help them reach maximum self-sufficiency. The Continuum of Care is developed through collaboration with a broad cross section of the community and based on a thorough assessment of homeless needs and resources. The Continuum of Care is recommended by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as a comprehensive and strategic approach to addressing homelessness.

HUD Definition of the Continuum of Care:

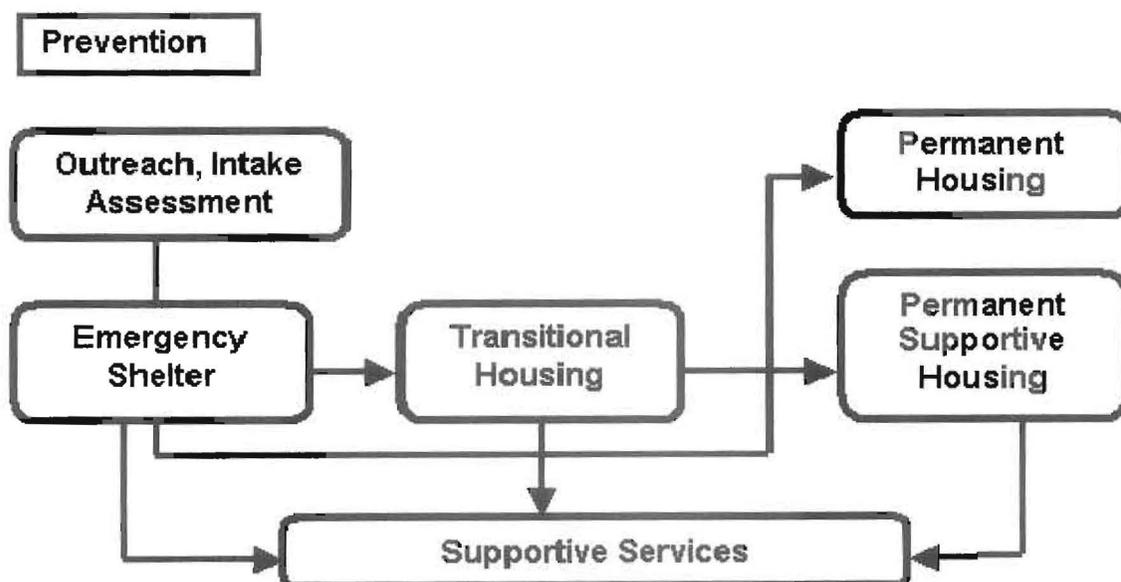
"The Continuum of Care is a community plan to organize and deliver housing and services to meet the specific needs of people who are homeless as they move to stable housing and maximum self-sufficiency. It includes action steps to end homelessness and prevent a return to homelessness."

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Trainer Guide on Continuum of Care Planning and Implementation

Fundamental Components of a Continuum of Care System

The Continuum of Care system is a coordinated set of services. The fundamental components of this system are described below. Not all homeless persons will need services from each component in the Continuum of Care. A full range of services should be available, however, in order to meet the needs of different subpopulations of homeless persons.

The fundamental components of the Continuum of Care system do not work in isolation from one another. Rather, the Continuum of Care system is a dynamic system in which services are linked through referrals and networking. This linkage helps homeless persons access services more easily and progress toward permanent housing and self-sufficiency. Homeless persons do not necessarily move through the system in a linear fashion.



Homeless Prevention

Assistance to help people maintain their housing and prevent homelessness.

Outreach, Intake and Assessment

To identify an individual's or family's needs and link them to appropriate housing and/or services.

Emergency Shelter

Short term, safe and decent shelter provided as an alternative to the streets.

Transitional Housing

Housing with supportive services to help people develop the skills they need to live in permanent housing.

Supportive Services

Supportive services should be available throughout the Continuum of Care in order to address the specific needs of each individual. Supportive services may be provided in conjunction with housing, or through referral. Services should be available to address both the immediate and long term needs of homeless persons, such as education, employment assistance, health care, substance abuse treatment and mental health care, child care, transportation and other services.

Permanent Housing

Affordable housing in which residents pay no more than 30% of their income for housing costs.

Permanent Supportive Housing

Housing with supportive services designed to allow persons with disabilities to live in the community as independently as possible.

Continuum of Care Grant (HUD "SuperNOFA" for Homeless Services)

The Continuum of Care Grant is a highly competitive federal grant that provides funding for homeless services and housing. This grant is sometimes referred to as the "Homeless SuperNOFA" or "SuperNOFA". Last year, Virginia was eligible for nearly \$14 million in funding under this grant.

A wide variety of services and housing are eligible for funding under the Continuum of Care.

Supportive Housing Program:

Provides funding for new construction, acquisition and rehabilitation, operating costs and supportive services for the following activities:

- **Transitional Housing**
Housing with supportive services provided for a maximum of 24 months to help homeless persons make the transition from homelessness to independent living.
- **Permanent Housing for Persons with Disabilities**
Permanent housing with supportive services provided to allow homeless persons with disabilities to live in the community as independently as possible.
- **Supportive Services Only (SSO)**
Services provided by an entity that does not also provide housing.
- **Safe Haven**
Specialized shelter for chronically mentally ill persons.

Shelter Plus Care:

Provides rental assistance to homeless persons with disabilities. The value of rental assistance must be matched by an equivalent amount of services.

Section 8 Moderate Rehab Single Room Occupancy (SRO):

Provides funding for rental assistance and rehabilitation of low cost housing for single individuals.

Essential Elements of the Continuum of Care Planning Process

In order to apply for Continuum of Care funds, communities must develop a Continuum of Care plan. This plan is Exhibit One of the Continuum of Care grant application which outlines the local process, goals and priorities for addressing the needs of homeless persons. All decisions regarding funding under the Continuum of Care grant are based on the quality of the Continuum of Care Plan described in Exhibit One. The essential elements of the Continuum of Care planning process are described below.

Comprehensive

The Continuum of Care plan is comprehensive in that it requires communities to think long-range in addressing the needs of homeless persons. Homelessness is a complex issue that cannot be resolved overnight. In order to better serve homeless persons and develop a more effective, coordinated Continuum of Care system, communities must think beyond immediate needs to longer range solutions.

The Continuum of Care plan is also comprehensive in that it addresses the needs of all homeless persons. There are many subpopulations of homeless persons, such as persons with mental illness, HIV/AIDS, victims of domestic violence and homeless veterans. Each of these subpopulations has different characteristics and different needs. A Continuum of Care system should be designed to meet the unique needs of these subpopulations while also developing capacity to serve homeless persons with multiple needs.

The Continuum of Care plan is comprehensive in that it looks to all resources in the community and not just HUD funding to address homeless needs. The Continuum of Care plan is a plan to help homeless persons achieve maximum self-sufficiency. Implementing this plan will require considerable resources, both human and financial. The plan must therefore identify resources from throughout the community that can be used to address priority needs.

Collaborative

Because homelessness is such a complex issue, touching so many aspects of the community, the Continuum of Care plan requires participation and collaboration among many sectors in the community. These entities include agencies that work directly with homeless persons, organizations that are affected by or interested in homelessness, as well as government, business, and community representatives. Ideally, Continuum of Care planning should include representatives from groups that do not work extensively with homeless persons in order to educate them about the needs of homeless persons and involve them in finding solutions.

Community-Based

Every community is unique and must develop its own Continuum of Care plan based on the needs of homeless persons living there. As part of the Continuum of Care plan, HUD requires that communities conduct an extensive analysis of homeless needs and services. This analysis is intended to collect local data on the needs of homeless services so that planning can address local conditions.

Consensus Driven

As a long range, strategic plan, the Continuum of Care plan requires that communities develop goals, objectives and priorities. In deciding these priorities, communities are expected to use a consensus decision making process in which all participants come to agreement about the most critical needs. Consensus decision making is important in order to maintain a unified effort in carrying out the difficult task of implementing the plan. Developing a Continuum of Care a plan is not easy and requires several months of work. To help communities improve their planning process, the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development is providing resources, training and technical assistance on the development of Continua of Care statewide.