

Greater Richmond Continuum of Care Standards for Diversion 2024

Introduction

The Greater Richmond Continuum of Care (GRCoC) has developed the following standards for partner agencies providing Diversion services. These standards were created in collaboration with Homeward and the GRCoC Diversion Work Group, Coordinated Entry Committee, and Board. These standards were originally developed in June 2017 and revised in May 2024. They were reviewed by the GRCoC System Policy and Process (SPP) Committee and approved by the GRCoC Board. SPP reviews Program Standards every two years to ensure they are current with community needs and priorities. These standards will serve as the guiding principles for all Diversion programs, regardless of funding source.

Description

Diversion is a strategy that empowers households facing imminent homelessness to identify safe and appropriate housing options, thereby assisting them to avoid emergency shelter. Essential elements for diversion include trained staff that treat the screening process as an opportunity to explore a household's current housing crisis and be creative about housing options. Diversion supports exploring housing options; helps mediate conflicts with landlords, family, or friends connected to housing; and assists in identifying resources and natural supports to retain or access housing. Assistance is offered without preconditions (such as employment, income, absence of criminal record, or sobriety). Diversion is not a barrier to other resources (such as emergency shelter), but a first step in assistance that may make other interventions unnecessary.

Access Points

Diversion is provided within the GRCoC at every Access Point. The Homeless Connection Line (HCL) is the primary Access Point for the GRCoC, serving the City of Richmond, the Town of Ashland, and the counties of Charles City, Chesterfield, Goochland, Hanover, Henrico, New Kent, and Powhatan. The HCL provides phone-based, diversion-focused access for individuals and families experiencing or within three days of experiencing homelessness. The HCL is a multi-agency collaborative program of the GRCoC staffed by Homeward, HomeAgain, Senior Connections, Housing Families First, and Area Congregations Together in Service.

Eligibility Criteria

In order to access Diversion services and/or assistance, households must meet or be within three days of meeting specific definitions of homelessness as defined by HUD under C.F.R. § 576.2 (2012). Eligible households include any individual or family that lacks (or is within three days of lacking) a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, this residence meaning:

1. An individual or family with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground;
2. An individual or family living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state, or local programs for low-income individuals); or
3. An individual who is exiting an institution where he or she resided for 90 days or less and who resided in an emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution.

Eligible households may also include any individual or family who:

1. Is fleeing, or is attempting to flee, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions that relate to violence against the individual or a family member, including a child, that has either taken place within the individual's or family's primary nighttime residence or has made the individual or family afraid to return to their primary nighttime residence;
2. Has no other residence; and
3. Lacks the resources or support networks, e.g. family, friends, faith-based or other social networks, to obtain other permanent housing.

Determination of Eligibility

For all services/assistance, an initial evaluation to determine eligibility of households will be conducted by Diversion staff. The evaluation will be as concise as possible and center on confirming that the household is three days or less from losing housing and falling into homelessness, as described above. Determining eligibility should only focus on time until losing housing and quickly lead into the "diversion conversation" if households meet the criterion.

Types of Diversion Assistance

The primary services provided by Diversion providers are listed below. Because Diversion is tailored to the needs and situation of each household, the type and intensity assistance provided to a household may include any combination of Diversion components. Diversion is, by nature, a creative process of empowering the client/household through natural supports and community resources and, as such, the list below is not exhaustive. Specific financial assistance provided by Diversion providers must be in compliance with grant funding requirements, and used as a last resort.

- **Housing Resource Exploration:**
 - Reason(s) for losing housing, avoiding losing housing, if possible, tenant rights and eviction process
 - Personal financial supports, finding creative methods to keep/obtain housing
 - Exploring family and friend supports to retain housing (financial help) or obtain safe, stable housing with family or friends (including "doubled up" situations)
 - Making connections with, coordinating, and piecing together other community assistance programs to stabilize, retain, or obtain housing
 - Using creative combinations of resources and assistance to retain or obtain housing
- **Mediation:**
 - Talking with landlords to help households stay in housing, including conflict mediation and/or access to financial assistance or other community programs to pay rent or utility arrears, etc.
 - Conflict resolution and mediation with family members/friends who a household was previously staying with or might be able to access housing with, including connections to other community resources (e.g. food pantry)
- **Financial Assistance**
 - Financial assistance should always be paid to a third party (landlord/leasing agency, utility company, repair service) or provided in a non-cash payment (gas gift card, bus ticket)
 - Financial assistance should be provided at the minimum level necessary for retention of or access to safe, habitable, overnight housing
 - Financial assistance should be verified and reality-tested to ensure

- that it will lead to a household retaining/accessing safe, stable housing
- Financial assistance may include (but is not limited to) paying rent or utility arrears; single-instance transportation to employment, housing, or other community assistance program(s); food and gas gift cards; and other, similar, indirect payments

Amount, Duration, and Repetition of Diversion Services

The amount and duration of Diversion services/assistance must be provided in compliance with grant funding requirements. Diversion providers should refer to regulations or parameters associated with awarded grants for specific guidance on eligible Diversion financial assistance. The GRCoC expects that households will receive the minimum amount of services/assistance necessary to retain/obtain safe, stable housing. Providers may choose to self-impose a maximum limitation on that amount and/or type of financial (such as Flexible Funding) or in-kind assistance that they will provide to a client in a single instance or over a period of time. However, no limitation shall be imposed for the number of times that a household may access and receive diversion services (such as mediation and housing option planning), so long as the household meets the aforementioned eligibility criterion.

Non-Discrimination

Providers must have a policy prohibiting discrimination against households based on actual or perceived race, ethnicity, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, religion, national origin, ancestry, disability, marital status, age, source of income, familial status, or domestic or sexual violence victim status, and ensuring that all participants are afforded equal opportunities.

Confidentiality

All Diversion providers will establish, abide by, and keep updated a written policy to ensure client confidentiality, which will include development and maintenance of signed or verbal household confidentiality agreements.

Complaints and Appeals

All providers must have a board-approved grievance policy and provide specific procedures to be followed for any disputed decision affecting assistance. Any individual receiving assistance must receive written notification of the grievance policy.

Termination

Providers must have a documented termination policy. A grievance with termination should be reviewed or heard by an individual other than the person (or subordinate of that person) who made or approved the termination decision. Should the household disagree with the decision made by the initial reviewer, a second level must be available for an appeal at the CoC level. This two-level process, at a minimum, must consist of: (1) Written notice to the project participant containing a clear statement of the reasons for termination; (2) Prompt written notice of the final decision; and (3) Written policy for continuing assistance to surviving family members, in the event of a death of a head of household, that establishes a reasonable grace period of continued assistance to surviving family.

Data System

Diversion providers must adhere to the Data Quality Plan approved by the GRCoC Board. Providers must use the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) or a comparable data system if the agency is prohibited from using HMIS. All diversion eligible households must be consistently entered into database adhering to Coordination Entry System Policies and Procedures related to diversion.

Outcomes

Diversion providers collect data in HMIS when diversion efforts have been exhausted for those who are by HUD's definition literally homeless or three days or less within losing housing.