

Greater Richmond Continuum of Care FAQ: Shelter Referral and Intake Process

How does shelter referral work in the Richmond region?

Referrals to emergency shelter are coordinated regionally based on the availability of shelter beds and staffing. Our community works together to prioritize these limited resources to serve those with the longest histories of homelessness and the greatest needs. If someone is within 3 days of losing their housing, they should call the Homeless Connection Line at 804-972-0813. Additional resources can be found at www.hclrva.org.

Why do we do it this way?

Homeless services agencies in our region work together to make the best use of emergency shelter and other homeless assistance resources because we do not have enough resources to serve everyone experiencing a housing crisis. We must prioritize how those limited resources are used and our region makes those decisions based on a community-led review process.

Who sets this process?

This process is set, evaluated, and updated (as needed) by the Greater Richmond Continuum of Care (GRCoC), our region's coordinated and collaborative network of homeless service providers. The GRCoC's System Policy and Process Committee works with Homeward staff and input from others to develop recommendations that ensure our shared processes serve the most people. Those recommendations must then be approved by the GRCoC Board of Directors. This entire process starts by listening to people experiencing homelessness to understand their needs. Throughout the year, hundreds of staff and volunteers from community partners across the region participate in weekly planning and service coordination sessions. Information based on this extensive input is aligned to ensure recommendations meet federal regulations for providing homeless assistance that is fair, transparent, and free from discrimination.

Why don't we provide walk-in access to shelter?

The Greater Richmond Continuum of Care would love to provide walk-up access to emergency shelter if we had the funding levels to facilitate this service, including more funding across multiple programs and sufficient funding to support immediate access to emergency shelter and resources to help people get on the pathway to a permanent home. Simply referring more people to shelters that are not adequately resourced to help people exit to stable housing will not help us accomplish our shared goals.

What happens when you call the Homeless Connection Line (HCL)? Why do we use the HCL?

The HCL is a multi-agency GRCoC program that ensures greater accessibility across our region. The GRCoC created a phone-based starting point to get connected to homeless assistance programs 8 years ago in order to reduce the barriers of people seeking assistance. When someone calls the HCL, they are connected to a Diversion Specialist or instructed to leave a voicemail, which is returned within one business day (usually, the same day). Callers can talk with a trained and compassionate Diversion Specialist seven days a week. A phone-based resource, coupled with proactive coordinated street outreach team members in the field, allows our neighbors who need assistance the most to make the best use of their time to find out about community resources, get assistance in problem-solving their housing situation, and learn more about shelter and housing opportunities. Additionally, this phone-based system also allows us to fairly and transparently triage the needs of people seeking assistance and make connections to other systems of care better suited to meet the needs of callers.