



Supportive Housing Standards

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Introduction

The Supportive Housing Alliance, formerly known as the Stewardship Council, is an interagency working group whose purpose is to directly impact the creation, preservation, and stabilization of supportive housing as a key component in Minnesota’s work to prevent and end homelessness. More information about the Supportive Housing Alliance and the connection between these standards and the Alliance’s overarching vision and purpose can be found [here](#).

The current iteration of the supportive housing standards was created with significant stakeholder engagement in the interest of universalizing expectations for service and operating models for site-based supportive housing in Minnesota. The Supportive Housing Alliance recommends that funders of site-based supportive housing adopt these standards for organizations and developments they fund that provide site-based supportive housing.

The Supportive Housing Alliance is aware that many of these standards are already common practice for supportive housing partners, but also know that adequate resources are not yet available to support full implementation of the standards across all supportive housing sites. We recognize that funding partners have a significant role in identifying necessary resources and supports to implement the standards and a responsibility to outline monitoring practices to review adherence to the supportive housing standards. This is work that the Supportive Housing Alliance commits to, in partnership with stakeholders of supportive housing, as well as a continuous improvement process to support evolution of the standards as we all learn more.

Guiding Principles

Principles that should govern the provision of supportive housing



Equity

- Address and promote accessibility and equity within housing and service delivery for disparately impacted communities in the project’s region.
- Areas to assess include physical accessibility, cultural responsiveness and sensitivity, safety, environment, and accommodations specific for people with behavioral health disorders, and/or intellectual/developmental disabilities, and communication modes/methods.
- Service providers use an antiracist approach and incorporate cultural considerations into all programming, including considerations for serving LGBTQIA2S+ tenants and tenants with disabilities.
- Best practice for all site-based supportive housing service providers is to review and consider adopting relevant portions of the [National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services \(CLAS\) in Health and Health Care](#).
- Evaluate equity through the lens of accessibility and cultural responsiveness.

Participant Choice

Participants are empowered to govern decisions for their lives. Participant choice in housing and services and self-determination are central to supportive housing model. Choice is built-in wherever possible, such as location and type of services, data collection and use, etc.

Integral to this is *informed choice*. Informed choice is when a participant, with or without reasonable accommodations, understands all the options available to them, including alternatives that they previously may not have known about or have experienced. It also includes understanding of the benefits and risks of their decisions. Providers are responsible for making sure participants are given information that might impact their decision making.

Recognizing that while choice is never limitless, for households experiencing homelessness, systems have often further restricted those choices. Resolving this is necessarily a collective responsibility in which the Supportive Housing Alliance recognizes their role. Nonetheless, quality supportive housing should continue to center self-determination of participants whenever possible and should be a central principle in planning with participants.

Accessibility

Accessibility means providing equitable access to everyone along the continuum of human ability and experience. Accessibility encompasses the broader meanings of compliance and refers to how organizations make space for the characteristics that each person brings.¹

Housing First principles are followed:

- Low barrier housing access with no readiness requirements for entry
- No requirements for keeping housing except those of the lease, which should mirror the lease of all tenants in the building.
- Service providers are required to make a broad spectrum of services available on an ongoing basis and to continually work to engage people in accessing services.
- Have lease violation mitigation policies and practices with the goal of keeping people housed.

There is a clear plan for accessibility from application through tenancy. Appropriate and reasonable accommodations and supports are provided during the application and screening processes. This includes accommodations as needed for equal access.

Communication during tenancy is accessible to all tenants.

¹ From the American Alliance of Museums

- Staff are available at regularly scheduled times including non-business hours if possible. Staff schedule is clearly communicated to tenants.
- All property management communications and documents related to property rules and policies will meet accessibility needs.
- Emergency contacts are provided when staff are not at the site.

Staffing Principles

- Partners (owner, service provider(s), property management and additional partners as appropriate) should enter into an [MOU](#) outlining roles and responsibilities.
- Policies should be applied consistently across partners and should include:
 - Plans for emergencies and natural disasters
 - Grievance policy and procedure
 - Crisis response, including behavioral health crises
 - Privacy rights
 - Lease infraction mitigation/housing retention
- Peers/people with lived experience are part of the supportive housing team and a conscious effort is made to support and promote peers/people with lived experience to leadership roles
- Background checks are completed for all staff with direct contact with tenants. Flexibility with background is built in wherever possible to accommodate inclusive hiring practices.
- Training plans are updated annually and include onboarding and continuous education in place for all staff who interact with tenants.

Entity Qualifications

Training and Staffing Expectations for Site Staff

Property Management, Service Provider and Front Desk staff align with core values of supportive housing and reflect the population being served.

Use Housing First, harm reduction, and person-centered approaches

Ensure that interactions with tenants are trauma-informed

Are provided with ongoing supervision and support

Property Management

Property management staff are trained in or receive training in the following content within the first year. Trainings should be made easily accessible to staff. When possible, these trainings should be made available to others who work with tenants onsite including caretakers and volunteers. Ongoing supervision and support should be provided.

- Conflict resolution
- Equity training, including antiracism and implicit bias
- Ethics and Boundaries
- First aid and CPR, including responding to overdoses
- Harm reduction
- Homelessness 101
- Housing First
- Mandated reporter and/or vulnerable adult training
- Mental health 101, mental health first- aid, de-escalation, and crisis response
- Self-care
- Trauma-informed approaches

Service Provider

Service provider staff are trained in or receive training in the following content within the first year. Training should be made easily accessible to staff. Site-based supportive housing service providers serving people with behavioral health needs should have a licensed mental health professional available to meet with staff for consultation and training. All staff should receive ongoing supervision and support.

- Children and family focused training for family supportive housing
- Co-occurring disorders: SPMI/Chemical Dependency/Chronic Physical Health Conditions/Disability
- Definitions of Homelessness
- Engaging People with High Needs or Barriers
- Equity training, including antiracism and implicit bias
- Ethics and Boundaries
- First aid and CPR, including responding to overdoses
- Harm Reduction
- Homelessness 101
- Housing First
- Mandated reporter and/or vulnerable adult training
- Mental health 101, de-escalation, and crisis response
- Minimizing Secondary Trauma
- Motivational Interviewing
- Person-Centered Practices
- Self-Care
- Tenant rights
- Trauma informed approaches

Front Desk

A fully staffed front desk is recommended for majority supportive housing sites and/or those serving people with higher barriers to housing stability.

Front Desk staff are integral to the supportive housing team as the first point of contact for tenants and guests, and therefore key in community building and integration. Front Desk staff greet tenants and work to create a welcoming, safe and secure environment that makes space for the characteristics that each person brings.

Front Desk staff are trained in or receive training in the following content within the first year. Training should be made easily accessible to staff. Ongoing supervision and support should be provided.

- Conflict resolution
- Equity training, including antiracism and implicit bias
- Ethics and Boundaries
- First aid and CPR, including responding to overdoses
- Harm reduction
- Homelessness 101
- Housing First
- Mandated reporter and/or vulnerable adult training
- Mental health 101, de-escalation, and crisis response
- Self-care
- Trauma-informed approaches

Standards at Application	<u>Responsible Entity:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Site-based Service Provider ▪ Property Management ▪ Front Desk, may be either SP or PM
<p>There is an established procedure for staff to communicate with tenants and referral sources during the application process in ways people can understand as well as track and retain documentation. The roles and responsibilities are clear and detailed in the MOU that exists between the owner, property manager, and service provider. Property management and service provider should communicate through a channel that tenant has consistent access to.</p>	<p>Service Provider Property Manager</p>
<p>Site’s tenant selection policies and procedures comply with Minnesota Housing’s Tenant Selection Plan Guidelines. This includes a timely and clearly written process that is communicated with applicants for the approval or denial of housing applications and appeals. Additional flexibility with screening criteria beyond the guidelines is encouraged.</p>	<p>Property Manager</p>
<p>The supportive housing intake process from eligibility screening through lease-signing is conducted through a trauma informed and culturally responsive approach and only includes the minimum number of questions needed to determine tenant eligibility, such as those required by funders. The process should ensure applicant understands their rent amount and rental assistance.</p>	<p>Service Provider Property Manager</p>
<p>The housing application process is separate from any service needs assessment and does not request detailed clinical information.</p>	<p>Property Manager</p>

<h2 style="text-align: center;">Standards During Tenancy/Operating</h2>	<p><u>Responsible Entity:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Site-based Service Provider ▪ Property Management ▪ Front Desk, may be either SP or PM
<p>Lease terms for supportive housing tenants are the same as non-supportive housing tenants—without limits on length of stay as long as lease terms are met. To the extent possible, tenants have flexibility to end their lease without penalty if they find another affordable housing option.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Property Manager</p>
<p>Sites have clear policies for addressing crises, including behavioral health crisis response.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Service Provider Property Manager Front Desk</p>
<p>After move-in tenants receive: orientation, tenants' rights handbook, copy of policies or site manual after going through the documents with site staff. Tenants sign off on policies/site manual after reviewing with staff. Policies are accessible at any time during tenancy.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Service Provider Property Manager Front Desk</p>
<p>All supportive housing tenants are offered services during the application process and immediately when they move-in and have person-centered, individualized service plans. Service plans are available and encouraged for all tenants, and when possible, choice of service provider is offered. If someone does not engage services at move-in, they continue to have the option of engaging in services at any point in their tenancy.</p> <p>Plans should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be tailored to tenants’ needs, preferences, and culture. Identify strengths and needs related to housing stability and steps to address potential issues. • Be flexible to adapt to type, location, intensity, and frequency of services based on tenants’ changing needs and preferences. • Include housing transition planning. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Service Provider</p>

<p><i>(continued)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve identification and coordination with existing supports. Primary service provider should ensure that the household is connected with additional supports as needed. • Identify and utilize other supports already in place (e.g. Housing Stabilization Services Person-Centered Plan, TCM, etc.) 	
<p>Tenants will have a choice in which services they receive and how to receive services. The options are clearly and continuously communicated to tenants.</p> <p>This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where to receive services • How to engage in services, including scheduled meetings, drop-in times/open office hours, and group activities • To the extent possible, who provides their services (agency and staff person) • Tenant has choice of services of which to engage 	<p>Service Provider</p>
<p>A core housing-related services set is offered to all supportive housing tenants including children. Additional support services, beyond the core set of housing-related services are available through the site-based service provider or through referrals. Services should be offered in consideration and response to culturally specific needs and preferences.</p> <p>Core housing related services offered include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education for whole household on roles, rights, and responsibilities as a tenant and those of the property manager/landlord; • Assistance with maintaining relationships with the property managers and neighbors; • Advocacy to prevent eviction when housing is at risk; • Prevention and early identification of actions and inactions that may jeopardize continued housing; • Assistance with maintaining services and supports, including applying for benefits to retain housing; • Supporting the building of supports and resources in the community 	<p>Service Provider</p>

<p>All supportive housing tenants have access to services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ People receive services through the site-based provider during any gaps in eligibility or otherwise accessing individual services. • Services are available if people lose eligibility for individual services for any reason. 	<p>Service Provider</p>
<p>Outcomes goals are set and tracked by the service provider to inform program improvements, with housing stability and equity as the primary outcome measures.</p>	<p>Service Provider Property Manager</p>
<p>There is a clear process for obtaining tenant feedback on housing and services and meaningfully responding or incorporating feedback into program improvements.</p>	<p>Service Provider Property Manager Front Desk</p>

<h2>Standards During Housing Transition</h2>	<p><u>Responsible Entity:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Site-based Service Provider ▪ Property Management ▪ Front Desk, may be either SP or PM
<p>Tenants who are transitioning out of supportive housing for any reason are supported to move on to other housing that better meets their needs and preferences.</p>	<p>Service Provider Property Manager</p>
<p>Legal eviction is the last possible resort, and all other housing transition options are exhausted prior to legal eviction, including mutual termination of lease.</p>	<p>Service Provider Property Manager</p>