

August 7, 2020

To: Members of the System Coordination Committee (SCC)

From: Coordinated Entry Working Group

Subject: Report and Recommendations from Coordinated Entry Working Group

### Background

In 2019, members of the HMIS Oversight Committee formed a smaller working group to develop recommendations for changes to Alameda County's Coordinated Entry (CE) structure within HMIS to meet HUD requirements scheduled to go into effect on April 1, 2020. Some initial recommendations from this subcommittee were reviewed and approved by the System Coordination Committee. Prior to implementation, HUD delayed the date for communities to comply with these new HMIS requirements until October 1, 2020.

The SCC and HMIS Committee members elected to use this additional time to bring together previously separate but related efforts relevant to future CE design and implementation. These previous threads and discussions had included CE evaluation focus groups and feedback sessions, a housing problem solving policy and training workgroup, and the system modeling effort. With financial support from EveryOne Home, Health Care Services Agency (HCSA), and Housing and Community Development (HCD), Katharine Gale and staff from BitFocus served as external experts and facilitators of a series of weekly Coordinated Entry planning sessions. The sessions included representatives from nonprofits, city and county government, and BitFocus<sup>1</sup>. Participants were invited based on their prior involvement in related working groups and their current and future leadership roles in CE.

Previous actions by the SCC that inform this work include:

- February – Review of the 2019 CE Evaluation and review and approval of the CE Assessment and Action Plan
- April - Review of the Housing Problem Solving policy and final approval
- April/May - Appointment of an ad-hoc group on CE triage which met twice and provided a report to the SCC in May
- May - Establishment of the current CE Working group to bring together members of HMIS Oversight, the Triage work group and CE funders and operators to finalize recommendations from the HMIS oversight group and develop additional recommendations for refinement and implementation to improve CE and meet HUD requirements
- July – Receipt of the first CE Working Group update and approval of the process for collecting eligible information to facilitate referral and matching within the HMIS system.

In order to meet the HUD HMIS CE implementation date of October 1, 2020, the workgroup is sending forward these recommendations to HMIS Oversight and the SCC.

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<sup>1</sup> Workgroup participants include representatives of the Cities of Berkeley and Oakland, HCSA and HCD; HRC supervisory staff from BACS, Abode and East Oakland Community Project, and staff from EveryOne Home and Bitfocus.

Workgroup members want to ensure BitFocus has adequate time to build out the recommended changes in HMIS and to develop associated training materials. Workgroup members strongly recommend training on CE changes take place by mid-September. The attached materials represent consensus-based recommendations from workgroup participants.

### **Recommendations**

The CE Working Group recommends that the SCC authorize HCSA and Bitfocus to proceed with refinement and changes to Coordinated Entry system that include the following key elements:

- Follow recommendations outlined in the Assessment and Action Plan adopted February 2020 to establish Housing Problem Solving as a key component of CE (per the HPS policies adopted May 2020);
- Create a phased assessment process that reduces time spent on assessments, especially in initial interactions, and provides immediate information regarding likelihood of receiving a resource to clients after assessment;
- Move to conducting matching and filling openings within HMIS; and
- Create changes in HMIS needed to support these refinements and comply with HUD requirements for Coordinated Entry by October 1.

This multi-part recommendation includes:

1. Approve an updated workflow for Coordinated Entry (additional non-substantive changes may be made to the proposed work flow after SCC approval for improving training content and messaging.) See Attachment 1.
2. Approve the establishment of Housing Problem Solving as a program in HMIS located under the Coordinated Entry agency and establish a list of Housing Problem Solving Services for inclusion in HMIS. See Attachment 2.
3. Approve the establishment of a Crisis Housing queue for prioritizing and matching to participating shelter beds, to most transitional housing, and potentially to other future designated crisis resources, with a threshold score to be established for placement on the queue of approximately twice the number of households anticipated to be served within a year in participating program openings. Current data estimates indicate this queue would contain ~5,000 households.
4. Approve the development of a Permanent Housing queue to be used for matching to enriched permanent supportive housing, permanent supportive housing, deeply affordable housing targeted to homeless households, shallow subsidy programs for homeless households, and some rapid rehousing programs with a threshold score to be established for placement on the queue of approximately twice the number of households anticipated to be served within a year in participating program openings. Current data estimates indicate this queue would contain approximately ~1,000 persons/households.
5. Approve suggested revisions to the current CE assessment tool, including dividing the current questions into those asked during a Crisis Assessment phase and those asked during a Housing Assessment phase to reduce the collection of unnecessary and unused data; approve the addition of certain non-scored questions for filtering and matching purposes, and approve changes in scoring and wording on certain scored questions based on evaluation feedback collected on the current CE assessment. See Attachment 3.

**Action:** Authorize HCSA, as the incoming CE Management Entity, and Bitfocus to implement:

- a. Changes 1-5 above;
- b. The previously approved change to collect information to begin matching to openings within HMIS;
- c. To establish the threshold scores in consultation with the CE work group;
- d. To develop recommendations for transitioning from the current By-Name List to the Crisis Housing and Permanent Housing queues by January 2021;
- e. To make modifications to the System Manual to reflect these policy changes.

**Next Steps:** The CE Work Group will continue to meet during the last three weeks of August. During this time the group will:

1. Consider feedback from HMIS Oversight and the SCC, modify if needed, and finalize the above refinements and changes.
2. Advise HCSA and Bitfocus on the development of training materials and approach for the new workflow and HMIS structure.
3. Discuss messaging needed for the new CE approach and workflow, including
  - a. How problem solvers/"assessors" message to participants and to case managers or advocates in other programs what it means for clients:
    - i. To be placed on one or both queues, or
    - ii. To not be placed on a queue and retain eligibility for Housing Problem Solving only
  - b. The messaging and approach for the transition from the existing BNL to the Crisis and Housing queues
4. Discuss ongoing reporting needs and how to evaluate the impact of these changes.

The Working Group will bring back a final report to the September SCC meeting with an update on final changes, and with recommendations for reporting and evaluation. However, to meet the HUD deadline the changes covered in this report must be approved and training scheduled before the next SCC meeting.

**Attachment 1:  
Proposed Refined Alameda County Coordinated Entry Work Flow**

<p><b>Step 1:</b> Triage (not in HMIS)</p>	<p>Establish if the person/household needs immediate crisis support, wants a referral to DV system, or an urgent health-related treatment service. Determine if the household is eligible for housing crisis response system services because they are literally or imminently homeless. (Some CE Access points may serve both imminently homeless and literally homeless; others may only serve literally homeless.)          * Literally homeless: in a place not meant for human habitation, in a shelter, in an institution for less than 90 days and entered from literal homelessness, fleeing domestic violence.          *At Imminent risk of homelessness: Residence will be lost within 14 days, no subsequent residence has been identified and household lacks resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing.</p>	
	<p><b>END</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● If referring elsewhere for services or crisis, or</li> <li>● If not eligible for services from housing crisis response system; make referrals to other systems and programs that may be able to assist</li> </ul>	<p><b>CONTINUE</b> if homeless (or at imminent risk in Access Points that serve both) and not immediately being referred elsewhere</p>
<p><b>Step 2:</b> Profile</p>	<p>Complete or update Release of Information and Client Profile in HMIS. May also include completion of Information Sharing Authorization (ISA) for housing-health data sharing through the Community Health Record (CHR).</p>	
<p><b>Step 3:</b> Housing Problem Solving</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Offer and conduct Housing Problem Solving (HPS) Conversation using HPS guide (not in HMIS);</li> <li>2. Complete Problem Solving Enrollment in HMIS under the HPS project in the CE Agency. Enrollment will include enrolling household members with person receiving services and the associated CE Zone.</li> <li>3. Enter any services and financial resources provided in HPS interaction.</li> <li>4. If HPS has identified a potential resolution, create Resolution Plan and document plan in HPS project notes or via upload of a written plan (countywide template in HMIS may get established at a later point).</li> <li>5. Determine if eligible for, needs, and wants CE Crisis Assessment for shelter and transitional housing. Offer to complete Crisis Assessment should come after providing context about the low availability of temporary housing resources (shelter, TH) and attempting problem solving with the household.</li> </ol> <p><b>Eligibility for Crisis Assessment:</b> Anyone who is unsheltered, currently in temporary shelter that does not participate in coordinated entry, in an institutional setting less than 90 days and homeless prior, or fleeing DV *</p> <p><i>* CE policy makers may later want to consider greater limits on who is offered the CE Crisis assessment, particularly single adults.</i></p>	
	<p><b>END</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● If successful Housing Problem Solving Resolution is reached; <b>EXIT FROM HPS PROGRAM</b>, or,</li> <li>● If an HPS Plan has been made and person has safe temporary place to stay or does not want or need to be considered for shelter; <b>PROVIDE HPS PLAN AND FOLLOW UP APPT OR NEXT STEPS</b> or,</li> <li>● If person is not eligible for Crisis Assessment. Make clear that HPS remains an option.</li> <li>● HPS services to be provided up to 90 days per episode. Households can re-enroll in services after this 90 day period if they remain homeless.</li> </ul>	<p><b>CONTINUE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● If no HPS resolution reached and person is eligible for Crisis Assessment, or</li> <li>● If there is an HPS plan in process but it does not include a safe place to stay tonight and person wants to be considered for shelter and is eligible for the crisis assessment.</li> </ul> <p>If person does not want to be considered for shelter or TH but is eligible for a Housing Assessment, proceed to Housing Assessment (Step 5)</p>

<p><b>Step 4: CE Crisis Assessment</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Enter Coordinated Entry Project enrollment in the Coordinated Entry (CE) Agency. All HMIS project enrollment data should cascade from HPS enrollment; update data if any changes since HPS enrollment.</li> <li>2. Conduct Crisis Assessment; many responses to questions from the Client Profile and from the CE Enrollment will pre-populate into the CE Crisis Assessment tab; update any pre-filled responses that have changed and complete additional scored and unscored questions.</li> <li>3. Review CE Crisis Assessment Score and give person information about expectation of whether likely to receive shelter/TH and in what timeframe; if unlikely reoffer HPS.</li> <li>4. Enter household on Crisis Housing queue if scores is above annually established threshold score set to include roughly 5,000 households on list; threshold score TBD.</li> <li>5. After discussing housing availability through the housing crisis response system, determine if eligible for, needs, and wants to do a Housing Assessment.</li> </ol> <p>Eligible for Housing Assessment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult head of household (HOH) or adult member of a household with a disability or with HIV/AIDS; or</li> <li>• Household that would like to be considered for Rapid Rehousing;</li> <li>• Any transition-aged youth (TAY), households with children under 18 years old, or households with a Veteran</li> </ul>	
	<p><b>END</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If not eligible for or not interested in Housing Assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• make clear that HPS remains an option</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>CONTINUE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If eligible for and interested in completing Housing Assessment</li> </ul> <p><b>Note</b> that the full Housing Assessment does not have to occur on the same day and could be done at a future time or by appointment.</p>
<p><b>Step 5: Housing Assessment</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Conduct Housing Assessment; questions from CE Crisis Assessment will cascade into HMIS Housing Assessment.</li> <li>2. Update Crisis Assessment questions before completing new questions.</li> <li>3. Review score and compare to threshold in place at time for adding to the Permanent Housing queue. Threshold starting point to include approximately 1,000 households to match to permanent housing resources and RRH. Threshold score will adjust annually based on inventory and utilization data.</li> <li>4. Give person information about whether they are being added to the Permanent Housing queue and the probability they will receive a housing match within a given time period.</li> <li>5. Enter person/household on Permanent Housing Queue if over a score threshold and they want to be added.</li> </ol>	
	<p><b>END</b></p> <p>If household does not score within threshold from Housing Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer other resources, try to connect to other services</li> <li>• Reiterate status – they continue to be HPS eligible; if on Crisis Housing queue remind of that</li> <li>• Continue HPS if person still engaged or offer a return for additional problem solving exploration</li> </ul>	<p><b>CONTINUE</b></p> <p>If score within Housing Threshold status,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify next steps: document readiness, review contact info, when likely to hear, how to stay in touch, etc.</li> <li>• Communicate if likely to be assigned a CE Navigator or assign Navigator (process TBD)</li> </ul> <p><b>END</b></p>
<p><b>Step 6: Assessment Update and Auto Removals</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessments will be considered valid for 90 days, though they can and should be updated if information changes within that time frame.</li> <li>• After 90 days, an assessment will need to be updated before referrals can be made. HMIS will be set to flag this.</li> <li>• Assessments that have not been updated and CE enrollments that show no activity in the last 180 days will be made inactive and households will be automatically removed from queue(s).</li> </ul>	

**Attachment 2:  
Housing Problem Solving Set Up and Service Types**

**1. Housing Problem Solving Set Up**

Recommendation is to set up Housing Problem Solving as a program under the Coordinated Entry Agency within HMIS. This will allow for people to potentially be assisted by more than one agency or Access Point without being double entered, leaves less likelihood of records remaining open after services, and allows all Problem Solvers to see if someone is already in process. Reporting will be possible by geography and by agency.

Additional Housing Problem Solving programs can be set up outside of Coordinated Entry if they are offered separate from the CE process.

The Housing Problem Solving enrollment will be the first enrollment in the CE process. Content of the HPS enrollment can pull into a CE enrollment if someone is going to complete a CE Crisis or Permanent Housing Assessment. This will allow Housing Problem Solving to come first and for HPS services to be offered to people and households who are at imminent risk of homelessness and not eligible for other CE services.

**2. Housing Problem Solving Service Lists**

Housing Problem Solving services will be categorized by the major areas of service anticipated to be offered, aligned with, but somewhat more detailed than, those recognized in the adopted HPS Policy. (Adopted by SCC May 2020.)

Categories will include:

1. HPS (timeframes: new, 31-60, 61-90, etc.)
2. Direct HPS Service (housing planning, counseling, mediation, etc.)
3. Referrals
4. Emergency/Essential
5. Housing
6. Identification
7. Income and Employment
8. Transportation

Pick list items under categories will correspond to the categories, with between 4 and 10 choices, and a list of definitions for categories and specific services will be developed as part of training materials.

**Attachment 3:  
Proposed Changes to Assessment Process, Phasing and Tool Content**

The phased approach divides the existing Assessment Tool into the Crisis Housing Assessment and Permanent Housing Assessment.

**A. Crisis Assessment** (approximately 17 questions<sup>2</sup> including several that are pre-populated from information in the client Profile screens and Coordinated Entry CE enrollment by this stage):

1. Pull as much information as possible forward from Profile and from CE Enrollment.
2. Add unscored questions to determine if participant household wants to be considered for shelter, transitional housing and/or safe parking.
3. Retain existing scored questions with no modifications for:
  - a. Age of household members
  - b. Whether someone is pregnant
  - c. Length of Homelessness
  - d. Household income
4. Retain and slightly modify questions or scoring for:
  - a. Current living situation – modify answer choices and scoring so that currently fleeing domestic violence is scored same as unsheltered and so that persons in shelter/emergency hotel or in an institution who must leave within 14 days and otherwise qualify as homeless can receive points (Note: must be in an institution less than 90 days and homeless prior to entering to qualify as homeless);
  - b. Household size - modify scoring so that medium-size households receive some points, no change to maximum;
  - c. Disabilities – modify scoring so that households with more than one person with disabilities can receive more total points than a single person household with multiple disabilities – reduce maximum score for this question to move points to new questions intended to get at severity of health conditions and needs;
  - d. Retain and modify language on question regarding life-threatening illness;
  - e. Add a question on the need for accommodations for disabilities (mobility, visual, hearing)

Total score for this portion of the assessment to remain the same as if the questions being used had not changed and equal a maximum score of 144 points

Results of the creation of the Crisis assessment and these changes to the tool are anticipated to place on the Crisis Queue households that are, relative to other homeless households, somewhat lower income, have more disabilities and/or greater severity, are larger households, have someone who is pregnant, have one or more person who is elderly or TAY, have younger children, and/or have spent more time homeless.

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<sup>2</sup> Number of final questions is approximate for both tools because mechanics to work out what will cascade forward are still being worked on. Also, not all questions are asked of all household types.

**B. Housing Assessment** (approximately 17 questions, in addition to those from the Crisis assessment, most additional questions cannot prepopulate):

1. The Housing Assessment will incorporate all the questions from the Crisis Assessment which will cascade forward and only need to be re-asked if there have been changes or significant time (more than 90 days) has elapsed.
2. Add to Housing Assessment unscored questions to determine if participant household wants to be considered for permanent housing options and/or rapid rehousing options
  - a. If interested in rapid rehousing, add two questions regarding whether the household had sufficient income to pay rent within past two years, and whether household is engaged in activity to increase income or afford rent. These questions not scored but used to filter Permanent Housing Queue.
3. Retain existing scored questions with some modifications in wording and none to scoring for:
  - a. Last time held a lease (add *or owned a home*)
  - b. Number of evictions or foreclosures in past five years
  - c. Convictions for offenses that pose significant housing barriers
  - d. Whether have done things in past 30 days that are unsafe (change to *90 days*)
  - e. Whether have previously run away from home or foster care
4. Modify and reduce points slightly for existing health related questions:
  - a. Replace question regarding number of health emergency contacts in last 30 days to a question regarding hospitalizations in the past 12 months
  - b. Add question regarding any overnight stays in a hospital or other facility to receive treatment or counseling for a problem with emotions, nerves, or mental health
  - c. Modify question regarding need for assistance with activities of daily living and reduce points associated with this question
5. Add additional unscored questions for matching purposes:
  - a. Where in County willing to live
  - b. Whether willing to accept shared housing, SRO, or studio opportunities
  - c. Whether only willing to live where pets are accepted
  - d. Past or current foster care (for eligibility).

Results of the creation of the separate Permanent Housing assessment and the above modifications will be to:

- Reduce the number of questions and particularly of sensitive questions being asked (criminal history, hospitalizations, safety) at the time of the Crisis assessment in a likely first encounter, and of people unlikely to be prioritized for housing
- Allow the list to be used for better rapid rehousing matching
- Capture the information needed to make matches to different programs and locations
- Particularly emphasize housing barriers in the housing assessment

Total maximum possible score for the complete assessment (Crisis plus Housing) equals 225 points.

Changes to the tool to create the Permanent Housing Assessment are anticipated to place on the Housing queue households that, relative to other homeless households, are similar to those who are high on the on the Crisis queue but also have higher housing barriers and/or have greater need of services to gain and remain housed.