



HOUSING PLUS FUND

The State of California, through its Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) is providing money to counties to provide services to the severely mentally ill. Significant funding is coming to the County from this source along with the mandate to transform the system of care for the severely mentally ill. The County Mental Health Department has developed a new system of care for every age group suffering from severe mental illness, including chronically homeless adults. These “Full Service Partnerships” for MHSA clients include a full array of services including rental subsidies if needed. The guiding principle of this care is “doing whatever it takes” to help people attain stability in their lives and stop the cycle of homelessness.

In 2003, the Office of Affordable Housing and the Mental Health Department requested and received approval from the Board of Supervisors to establish the Housing Plus Fund. This fund combined \$2 million from the Affordable Housing Fund with \$2 million from MHSA one-time funds. The \$4 million was made available to developers to subsidize the cost of a specific number of units to be affordable to the homeless mentally ill that would be served by Full Service Partnership contractors. Also, consumers would be housed in these units according to the Housing First approach.

Reserving a limited number of units for this population within a larger housing project is considered the best practice for establishing stable housing for this population. Formerly homeless people can live in studios and apartments in various locations throughout the County, and there is no stigma attached to any one apartment building. The Full Service Partnerships will provide rental subsidies, if needed, to the tenants as well as the appropriate supportive services to help them maintain a stable living situation. Services may include psychological and substance abuse counseling, job training and financial guidance, and workshops on tenant-property owner relations. On-going case management is also available as needed.

So far, \$2,150,000 has been allocated from Housing Plus Funds to four projects (Curtner Gardens, Paseo Senter I, Paseo Senter II, and Kings Crossing). In all, 42 units have been assisted and will be restricted for the homeless mentally ill for 55 years. In addition, developers receiving Housing Plus Funds must agree to work with the County’s Full Service Partnership Program to identify prospective tenants for these units. In this way, the units are affordable to the County’s Full Service Partnership clients, and the tenants

will be able to maintain their housing with the help of the rental subsidies and supportive services.

Agreements with developers state that a certain number of units must be made available to the target population, rather than specific units. If a tenant should no longer need the rental subsidy or supportive services, there would be no need to move. Rather, another apartment in the project would be designated for this use.

The Process of Applying for MHSA Housing

If consumers of the County's MHSA Programs are homeless and they express interest in participating in the MHSA Housing Program, their case managers will obtain the appropriate information and help them fill out application and consent forms. Case managers review the selection guidelines to determine eligibility. If eligibility is determined, case managers and consumers work together to secure the necessary documentation, including verification of disability and homelessness. All applications must be reviewed and certified as qualified for MHSA housing units by both the Housing Coordinator and the Full Service Partnership Coordinator in the Mental Health Department. Copies of the certifications are provided to the consumers, the case managers, and to property managers of County subsidized housing units.

Once a suitable housing unit is identified by the MHSA Housing Coordinator case managers work with their consumers on the process of renting and moving into MHSA assisted units. A rental subsidy agreement is executed between the consumer and the MHSA Program and lease documents are executed between the consumer and the landlord. Initial deposits and first month rent are paid directly to the property managers by the FSP Program. The FSP Program may also cover other move-in costs, for example furniture and housing supplies.

After consumers move into their units, case managers notify the MHD Housing Coordinator, and information about the consumers and the housing units are entered into the MHSA Supportive Housing database for monitoring and evaluation. FSP case managers continue to provide assistance to their clients and offer access to various programs to help them sustain their stable living environments. Supportive programs include psychological and substance abuse counseling, job training, financial counseling, and everyday living skills. Relationships between the Housing Program and the property owners are also maintained, so that if tenant issues arise at any time, property owners can contact the case managers or MHSA housing specialists.

This model of providing permanent supportive housing to the County's homeless mentally ill is possible because of the long-term underpinnings of the MHSA Housing Program. The housing units made possible by County funds are restricted for this population for 55 years, and the support services stem from on-going funding from the State's MHSA Program.