

FORENSIC HOUSING STUDY

for the

**Philadelphia Mental Health Care
Corporation on behalf of the
Department of Behavioral Health and
Intellectual disAbility Services**

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prepared by

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In March 2010, Philadelphia's Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services (DBHIDS) was awarded funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act/Byrne Justice Assistance Grant Program through the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency. The goals of this grant are to identify incarcerated individuals with serious mental illness and refer them to appropriate diversionary programs and needed mental health services.

Recognizing that affordable housing is a significant challenge to providing diversion alternatives for individuals who are justice involved, the grant also provided funding for a forensic housing study. The purpose of this study is to explore the housing needs of non-violent offenders whose contact with the criminal justice system is related to their symptoms of severe mental illness and/or co-occurring substance use disorders, and to develop strategies to provide a range of safe, affordable housing in order to support recovery. In February 2011, PMHCC on behalf of DBHIDS contracted with Diana T. Myers and Associates, Inc. (DMA) to conduct the forensic housing study.

The scope of services includes the following products:

- Evaluation of barriers to accessing housing
- Strategic Plan to Address Barriers, including identification of effective strategies and housing models for addressing housing needs in a way that will ensure individual stability in the community
- Housing Financing Resources
- Comments and feedback on existing DBHIDS Housing Inventory

Stakeholder input was sought through interviews and/or roundtable discussions facilitated by the consultants. Interviews were conducted with 59 key stakeholders, and two stakeholder meetings were held -- first, with legal staff involved in the Philadelphia's First Judicial District Mental Health Court, and second with DBHIDS case managers and other staff. As no primary data was generated for the purpose of this study, the qualitative data obtained from stakeholders was the primary source of information used to further define the target population and determine their most pressing housing barriers.

PROTOTYPES

The consultants developed prototypes in order to characterize the target population as described by stakeholders. The five prototypes include:

Prototype 1 – Individuals with justice involvement living in the community at risk of losing their housing. This includes those who are: actively symptomatic displaying behaviors that could jeopardize their housing stability; living with family members in an unstable environment; and living in substandard or overcrowded housing.

Prototype 2 – Individuals incarcerated with housing to return to at re-entry. Housing may include their own home, a home with family, or DBHIDS residential housing.

Prototype 3 – Individuals with justice involvement within the DBHIDS residential system (including forensic CRRs, non-forensic CRRs, acute care settings, and long-term structured residences) who are ready to move to permanent supportive housing, or other setting.

Prototype 4 – Homeless individuals with mental illness and a history of justice involvement, including those who meet the HUD homeless definition and those who do not. Individuals may be homeless at arrest and needing placement for diversion; currently in PPS and homeless prior to being arrested; and individuals who lost their housing while incarcerated.

Prototype 5 – Frequent users of mental health, criminal justice, homeless, health and other public services and facilities.

BARRIERS & STRATEGIES

Barriers and strategies are presented in the following four categories:

- 1- Supporting Individuals in Housing
- 2- Accessing Existing Housing
- 3- Expanding Housing Options and Opportunities
- 4- Preventing the Loss of Housing

Barriers

Individuals with serious mental illness and co-occurring substance use disorders as well as justice involvement face a number of barriers to securing and maintaining appropriate housing. Some barriers are a direct result of their criminal justice involvement while others are related to such additional factors as: health/mental health challenges, substance addiction, very low income, lack of employment skills, under educated, poor rental history and/or credit history. Individuals with housing are often living in unstable housing situations, in unsafe neighborhoods, with family members who no longer want them to live in the home, or they may lose housing during incarceration. Those who lack housing have difficulty obtaining treatment and housing in residential services settings due to the limited availability of beds in residential services settings. Additionally, they have restrictions about where they can live due to their criminal histories and/or may lack the income or eligibility requirements for community-based housing options, including subsidized housing.

Strategies

Affordable housing is critical for each of the prototypes identified at all points along the Sequential Intercept Model. To the converse, the lack of appropriate housing options is clearly a major roadblock to effective diversion and re-entry for these individuals. The consultant has provided recommended actions within four major strategy areas

designed to increase housing opportunities and stability of individuals with justice involvement. Strategies are provided to assist these individuals in obtaining and maintaining housing. They include:

- Strategies to increase the availability of existing supports and to modify supports in order to provide the recovery-oriented services to meet the needs of individuals with justice involvement.
- Strategies to increase access to existing housing, including resources available through DBHIDS, the homeless Continuum of Care, the Philadelphia Housing Authority, and through private landlords.
- Strategies to increase resources, including those for scattered site permanent housing, site-based permanent housing, and transitional beds in residential service settings.
- Strategies to develop specialized housing options for individuals with justice involvement, including a 60 day re-entry site, a pilot to increase transitional housing in Philadelphia neighborhoods, and a Housing First program for frequent users of the behavioral health, criminal justice, and homeless systems.
- Strategies to prevent the loss of housing, including a housing risk assessment tool, homeless prevention assistance through a Homeless Prevention and Rapid Rehousing initiative, rental assistance in order to prevent the loss of housing during incarceration, and strategies to assist families with reunification upon reentry.

It is important to note that this is an extraordinarily challenging time to be expanding resources. Considering the current fiscal environment and the major cuts expected from federal and state governments over the next few years, this will be a process that will require innovation, flexibility, and the development of new partnerships. Progress in this area will also require a high level of coordination and cooperation among the City's behavioral health, criminal justice and housing systems.