

Recording: <https://youtu.be/3fPYTEWRZ5Y>

# Housing First 201: Practical Implications and Applications

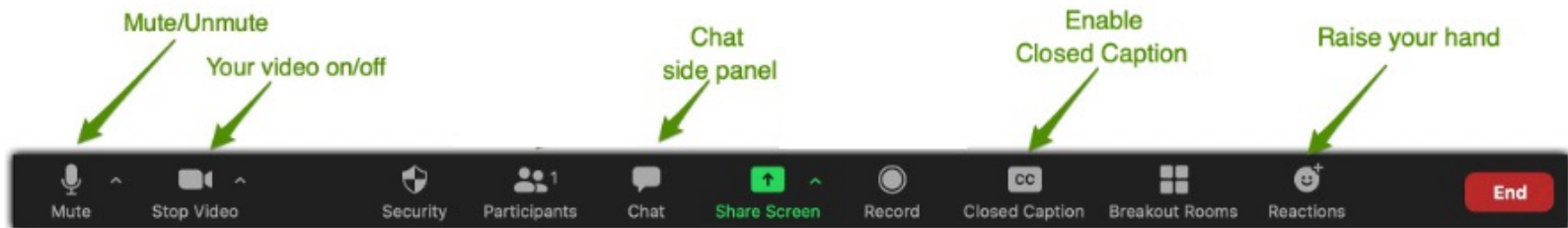
Contra Costa County Continuum of Care

May 8, 2023

# Zoom Reminders

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- **Closed captioning** is available.
- We are **recording** this training.
- **Questions?** Chat, unmute, or raise your virtual hand.
- **Tech issues?** Send a message to Alex.



# Today's Agenda

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Core Principles & Key Characteristics of Housing First Programs



Barriers to Program Enrollment



Common Housing First Challenges



Implementing Housing First (Challenges, Solutions & Individualized Approaches)



Looking Forward

# Introductions



Jamie Schechter, *CoC Director*  
Shelby Ferguson, *CoC Administrator*  
Mary Juarez-Fitzgerald, *CES Manager*  
Jaime Jenett, *Community Engagement Specialist*

[ContraCostaCoC@cchealth.org](mailto:ContraCostaCoC@cchealth.org)



Michele Byrnes  
*Directing Analyst*

Alex Michel  
*Senior Policy Analyst*

[ContraCosta@homebaseccc.org](mailto:ContraCosta@homebaseccc.org)

# Who's In the Room?

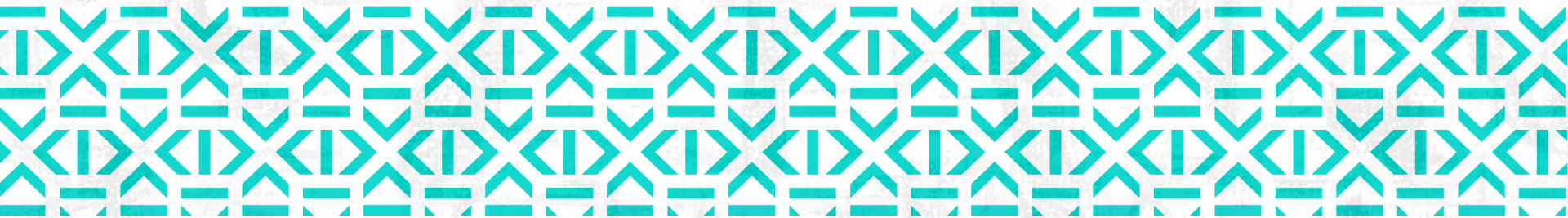
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Name/Pronouns//Agency



What is one uplifting thing that happened this week?

# Core Principles & Key Characteristics of Housing First Programs



# Why Housing First?

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- Evidence-based
- Funder/community priority
- Core Practice
- State law
- Helps people

# Housing First at the **System Level**

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- **All programs** lower barriers
- Most **vulnerable prioritized**
- **Housing-focused** services and engagement begin **immediately**
- **Client-focused and voluntary**
- **Evidence-based** practices
- Client **choice and voice**
- As you serve higher acuity people, you may need to increase supportive services.

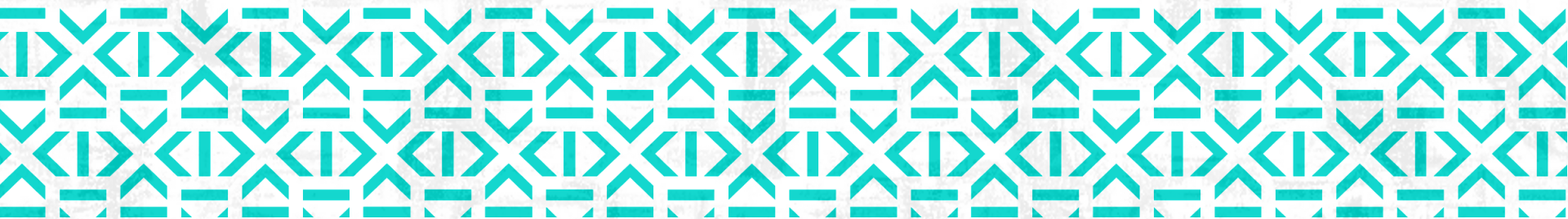


# Housing First at the Program Level

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- Participants are treated with **dignity and respect**
- Optimize **autonomy and independence**
- Participation is **voluntary and self-initiated**
- **Program entry not is contingent on:**
  - **Sobriety**
  - **Income**
  - **Clean criminal record**
  - **Clear eviction history**
- **Staff are trained on best practices**
- **Commitment to increasing supportive services**

# Barriers to Program Enrollment: Pre-Enrollment Documentation



# Pre-Enrollment Documentation

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## What is necessary prior to enrollment?

- Set by the funding stream; or
- Required by law

## What is NOT necessary prior to enrollment?

- Needed for rental application
- Needed for employment
- Used to identify housing barriers

# Pre-Enrollment Documentation (con't)

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## What is necessary prior to enrollment? (CoC Program)

- Documentation of homelessness (and disability for PSH)
- ONLY if PSH *and* operated by local government: verification of citizenship/immigration status

## What is NOT necessary prior to enrollment (CoC Program)

- Background check
- ID
- Income
- Credit check
- Drug test
- Anything else

# Pre-Enrollment Documentation (con't)

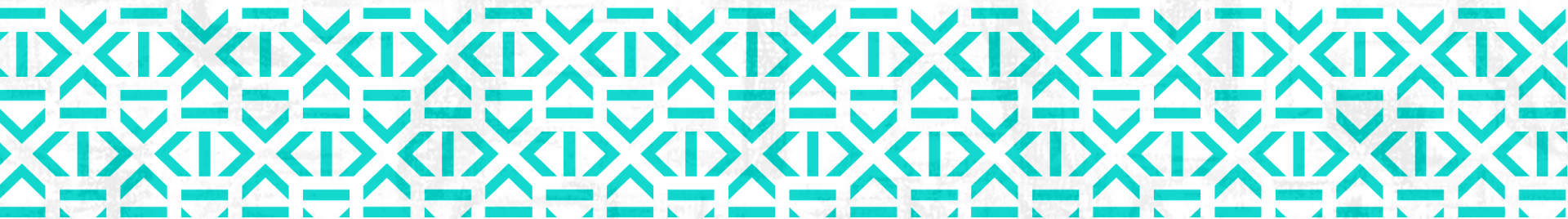
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Do you know which pre-enrollment requirements are **necessary**, and which are added by your organization?

Are there ways to lower pre-enrollment requirements for your program(s)? Where do those barriers come from?

What concerns do you have about changing pre-enrollment requirements?

# Common Housing First Challenges



# Common Challenges

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- Serving participants with behavioral health needs
- Serving participants with low or no income
- Serving participants on the 290 registry
- Serving participants who have histories of migration / undocumented status
- Landlord reluctance to renting to people who are exiting homelessness
- Shelters with strict behavior-based rules



# Serving Participants with Behavioral Health Needs

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- **Common Challenge:** Behavioral health needs that present challenges to maintaining housing and accessing services.
- **Core Component of Housing First:** Applicants are **not rejected** on the basis of **poor credit or financial history**, poor or lack of rental history, criminal convictions unrelated to tenancy, **or behaviors that indicate a lack of “housing readiness.”**

Citation: Section 8255(b) of the California Welfare & Institutions Code (emphasis added)



# Treatment Offered, Not Mandated

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- AA meetings required
- Mandatory cooperation with treatment plan requirements or face eviction

- Housing-focused case management provided
- Links to other services – health, substance use, benefits, employment, education, other resources - provided

# Serving Participants with Behavioral Health Needs: Housing First Approach

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- Make all service plans and other agreements flexible and based on the needs of the individual
- Understand that certain times (e.g., first 90 days, first 6 months) and certain clients require more intensive staff and community resources
- Ensure leases are uncoupled from service plans and participants have full tenancy rights and access to legal assistance
- Provide prevention support to avoid lease violations & evictions
- Build trust with clients to participate in the community
- You are not responsible for their recovery, but you can still offer support

# Serving Participants with Low or No Income

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- **Common Challenge:** Providers worry participants will not be able to become financially independent.
- **Housing First Approach:** Understand **individual's history** and connect them to the **appropriate services:**
  - Connect with local housing authority regarding vouchers
  - Assess based on prospective income
  - Increase connections to cash and non-cash benefits
  - Explore shared housing opportunities
  - Increase support for housing stability at the system level

# Serving Participants with Low or No Income: Key Questions

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- What are their sources of income or expenses?
- Are they employed? Do they receive benefits? Do they have spousal or child support responsibilities? If they've been involved with the CLS, do they owe court supervision fines or fees?
- Is the client receiving all eligible benefits? Does the client need benefits (such as VA, SSDI/SSI or Medicaid, etc.) re-evaluated?
- Is the client currently working, or able to work? Can the client return to a past area of work?
- What can the client afford to pay in rent with the program's assistance?
- What will the client's budget be after rental assistance is discontinued?

# Serving Participants on the 290 Registry

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- **Common Challenge:** Stigma, misunderstanding, limited housing options
- **Housing First Approach:**
  - Understand the limitations of the sex offense registry
  - Establish partnerships with criminal legal system partners
  - Use information on the registry
  - Know what is required – and not required
    - CoC and ESG-funded programs are not required to disqualify households based on criminal history
    - Fair Housing and Employment Act (FEHA) limits denial of assistance
    - PHAs are required to deny admission to people with lifetime registration requirements but are not permitted to create policies that deny admission if it is not a lifetime requirement

# Serving Migrants / Participants with Undocumented Status

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- **Common Challenge:** General poverty, language barriers, racialization & intersecting inequities, and history of trauma
- **Housing First Approach:** Acknowledge and uplift the fact that migrants and folx with undocumented status **add value to communities** and **bring with them many strengths.**
  - Offer culturally affirming supportive services that hold spaces where clients can continue to practice cultural traditions/customs
  - Hire multi-cultural and multi-lingual staff
  - Stay in the know about available resources
  - Report any ICE activity in your city

# Landlords' Fears About Renting to a Person Who Has Been Unhoused

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- 1. Common Challenge:** Landlord concern about renting to a tenant with past or current experience of homelessness.
- 2. Housing First Approach:** Support relationship and let landlord know their efforts are supporting the community
3. Understand and address anxieties by eliminating hassle and mitigating risk
  - Make someone available for landlord to contact in a crisis
  - If a landlord leases to one of your clients & it is working well, ask for more units
  - Check in regularly with landlord and participant
  - Seek feedback about what is working well and what your agency can do better
  - Work with tenants to help avoid problems that undermine the relationship

# Behavior-Based Rules in Shelters

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We reserve the right to randomly test participants at anytime. Failing a drug test or being under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol while on program grounds can result in immediate dismissal and lead to reporting to necessary authorities.

Clients engaging in behavior that is disruptive to other clients or staff will be requested to terminate that behavior or go to another area of facility.

Staff are trained in harm reduction, crisis resolution and to recognize signs of health crisis related to substances.



# Housing First in Shelters

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Ensure low-barrier, easily accessible assistance to all people

Help participants quickly identify and resolve barriers to obtaining and maintaining housing

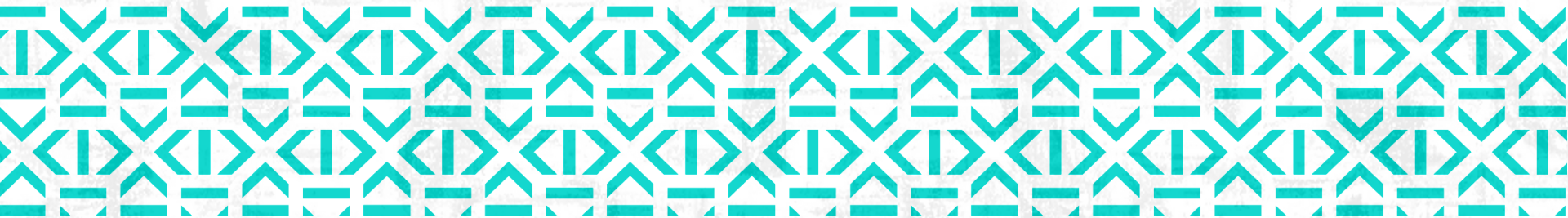
Seek to quickly resolve the housing crisis before focusing on other non-housing related services

Allow participants to choose the services and housing that meets their needs, within practical and funding limitations)

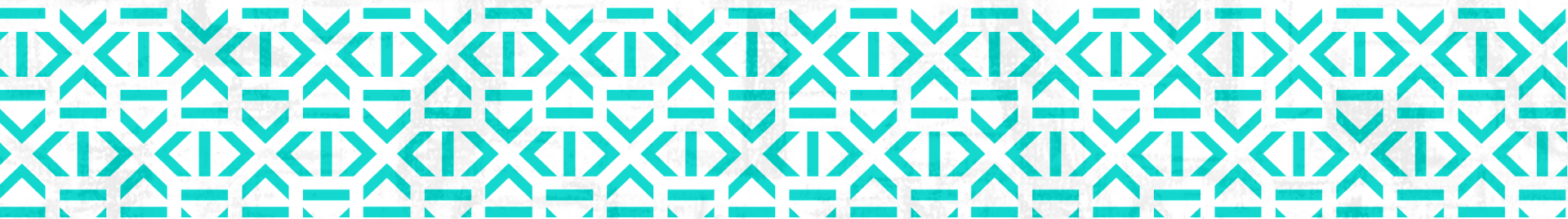
Connect participants to appropriate support and services available in the community that foster long-term housing stability

The type, duration, and amount of assistance is based on an individualized assessment and the availability of other resources to obtain and maintain stable housing

BREAK



# Implementing Housing First (Breakout Activity)



# Instructions for Breakout Rooms

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Discussion Leader

Homebase staff will facilitate



Reporter

Delivers the group's report in the time allowed

# Scenario #1

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**Challenge – Low or No Income:** Sophia and her two children are participants in your housing program. Sophia is an eager and willing participant, but you know that based on her children's needs and her own employment history, Sophia will never be able to afford rent in the area on her own.

- What are your immediate concerns or first steps?
- What clarifying questions/other information would you want to have or get to respond to this scenario?
- What local programs or resources can you offer to Sophia's family?
- How can you take a strengths-based approach to supporting Sophia in maintaining stable housing?
- Can you think of a time when your agency supported a client with little or no income to obtain and maintain housing? What worked?

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# Share Out & Questions

# Scenario #2

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**Challenge – Landlord Reluctance:** Sam is a single adult who is working with your housing program, which has received CoC funding to provide rental assistance and supportive services. One of your reliable property owners has recently retired, and you are having trouble finding landlords willing to rent to a person who has been unhoused.

- How do you build and maintain the relationship with the landlord?
- Does your program have specific strategies for engaging landlords? What has worked? What has been challenging?
- Has your program reached out to landlords with medium portfolios?
- Does your program have formal landlord incentives, such as leasing signing bonuses, risk mitigation funds, or dedicated crisis staff? What has worked?



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# Share Out & Questions



# Thank You!

Questions?

[ContraCosta@homebaseccc.org](mailto:ContraCosta@homebaseccc.org)