Continuum of Care History and Purpose

The Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act of 2009 (HEARTH Act) amended the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. Among other changes, the HEARTH Act consolidated the three separate McKinney-Vento homeless assistance programs (Supportive Housing Program, Shelter Plus Care program, and Section 8 Moderate Rehabilitation SRO program) into a single grant program known as the Continuum of Care (CoC) Program.

HUD published the Continuum of Care Program interim rule in the Federal Register on July 31, 2012. The rule was posted on HUD’s website and now governs the CoC Program. At its simplest, a Continuum of Care is established by representatives of relevant organizations within a geographic area to carry out the responsibilities set forth in the CoC Program interim rule.

The CoC Program is designed to assist individuals (including unaccompanied youth) and families experiencing homelessness and to provide the services needed to help such individuals move into transitional and permanent housing, with the goal of long-term stability. More broadly, the program is designed to promote community-wide planning and strategic use of resources to address homelessness; improve coordination and integration with mainstream resources and other programs targeted to people experiencing homelessness; improve data collection and performance measurement; and allow each community to tailor its program to the particular strengths and challenges within that community.

Each year, HUD awards CoC Program funding competitively to nonprofit organizations, States, units of local governments, and/or instrumentalities of State or local government collectively known as recipients. In turn, recipients may contract or sub-grant with other organizations or government entities, known as sub-recipients, to carry out the grant’s day-to-day program operations.

The composition of each CoC is expected to be tailored to its unique community circumstances, to the extent possible involving all of the players required to further local efforts to end homelessness. The purpose of requiring stakeholder representation from a wide range of organizations within the CoC’s geographic area is to ensure that all community stakeholders participate in developing and implementing a range of housing and services.

A CoC is expected to address homelessness through a coordinated community-based process of identifying needs and building a system of housing and services that addresses those needs. While the CoC's function is not new one, the CoC Program interim rule designates the CoC as the community planning body that addresses the needs of persons who are homeless or experiencing a housing crisis. Accordingly, the CoC must move beyond the evaluation and prioritization of specific projects to a system-wide evaluation of the community’s response to homelessness.

Sources: HUDExchange (www.hudexchange.info), and “Establishing and Operating a Continuum of Care”, 2012, HUD