

## Behavioral Health Care Services (BHCS) Housing Services Office

### Housing Assistance Fund Policy

The BHCS Housing Assistance Fund, managed by the Housing Services Office (HSO) of Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services, was created to provide a flexible source of funds to help BHCS consumers and their families obtain and maintain long-term, stable housing of their choice. In order to maintain this funding source, recipients are encouraged to give back to the Housing Fund in order to assist others who may be in need.

#### 1) Who Qualifies for Assistance through the Housing Fund?

Applicants for assistance must meet ALL of the following criteria:

- a) Applicant must be an adult with *a serious mental illness* or child with a *serious emotional disorder* WITH an identified ongoing BHCS-funded specialty mental health service provider. Only County or BHCS-contracted mental health service providers with the capacity and expectation of ongoing consumer follow-up for at least one year are eligible to assist applicants to access these funds.
- b) The individual or household is currently without long-term, stable housing or is in an unstable housing situation that puts the household at-risk of homelessness.
- c) The assistance is expected to help stabilize the individual or household in housing of their choice over the long-term.
- d) The service provider and applicant make a commitment to work together to achieve long-term housing stability. This includes developing a housing plan and budget with the applicant and may also include periodic home visits, regular contact, and working relationships with the property manager to address housing-related concerns.
- e) The applicant agrees that the service provider will provide the Housing Services Office with information about the applicant's housing situation and stability through six and twelve month check-in calls after receiving assistance.

## 2) What are Eligible Expenses for the Housing Fund?

Eligible expenses include:

- Unpaid, late or back rent to prevent eviction/loss of housing;
- Security deposits and first month rent to assist with move-in;
- Short-term rental assistance or temporary housing assistance to prevent imminent homelessness or end homelessness;
- Longer-term rental assistance for clients enrolled in the BHCS or other subpayee program with pending Social Security funds.

## 3) What are the Assistance Limits?

No formal financial limit exists for this program and typical amounts are related to the monthly cost of housing. For individuals with housing subsidies like Section 8, the applicant is typically expected to cover their tenant portion of rent; this is a factor used in evaluating financial assistance limits.

## 4) How are Requests Approved?

If an applicant's situation is uncertain or unusual, or if the provider is unfamiliar with the Fund, it is recommended that the provider contact the Housing Services Office *prior* to preparing an application for assistance to determine whether or not the request is appropriate and eligible for consideration.

Eligible service providers must submit a *completed* application and signed assistance agreement for the use of these funds on behalf of a particular applicant. Applicants must review and sign the Housing Assistance Agreement.

Applications must include copies of rental or lease agreements and documentation of any additional expenses owed, such as back rent. If back rent is owed, the service provider and applicant should provide a detailed account of what happened in the past and what steps will be taken in the future to avoid housing instability. For applicants who are awarded Section 8 housing vouchers or subsidized housing, additional documentation and explanation of efforts to remedy the situation with the Housing Authority prior to approval may be required.

Within 2-4 working days of submitting a completed application, the provider will be notified if the application has been approved and under what, if any, conditions. Approvals will be based on the principles outlined above with extra value given to requests where short-term financial assistance is likely to have a positive long-term, measurable impact. Payment can only be made after receiving an approval and receipt of all required landlord/property manager related documents.

## 5) How are Housing Fund Payments Made?

Once a request has been approved, the service provider or landlord must provide the necessary documentation from the landlord for a payment to be made. This includes an original signed invoice, an original signed w-9 form from the property owner, and a vendor update form (faxed copies of the invoice and w-9 form are NOT accepted). Without these documents from the landlord, Property Management Company or housing provider, the BHCS Finance Department staff cannot issue payment.

Once all the Fund paperwork is received, checks are typically provided within five (5) business days. Checks may be mailed to the property owner or held at the Housing Service Office for pick up by the service provider. All funds are issued to eligible third parties, typically the landlord, property management agencies or hotel/motel operators. Funds are never paid directly to applicants.

#### 6) What is Giving Back?

The best way to ensure that the Housing Fund will be able to continue to serve persons in need is if those who receive assistance agree to give back to the Fund. Recipients are encouraged to give back if able.

Recipients who opt to *give back* commit to making a contribution to the Fund when they sign the Assistance Agreement. Recipients are asked to make contributions back to the fund six months and twelve months after receiving assistance. Requests for contributions are only made based on completed Assistance Agreements. Recipients are under NO OBLIGATION to pay back to the fund unless repayment was a condition of approval of the original request.

#### 7) What are the methods for Giving Back?

Applicants may make contributions through a check or money order made to: “BHCS Housing Assistance Fund” and sent to the Housing Services Coordinator by QIC Code, personal drop-off by service provider staff, or through the regular mail. Contributions can be made via payee service deductions if the applicant is utilizing BHCS payee services.

#### 8) Where Can I Obtain The Housing Fund Application And Assistance Agreement Forms?

Copies of the application and assistance agreement for this fund can be found on the Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services Website at:

<http://www.acbhcs.org/Housing>

Copies can also be obtained by contacting the Housing Services Office directly by phone or e-mail at the address below:

Housing Services Office, Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services

Attn: **Martin Pacheco**

1900 Embarcadero, Ste. 206, Oakland, CA 94606

QIC Code: 28008;

Tel: (510) 567-8016; Fax: 1 (877) 341-5867; HSO@acgov.org