

These agencies contributed to and subscribe to the harm reduction housing guidelines.

AIDS Foundation
OF CHICAGO



Heartland Human Care Services, Inc.



Heartland Health Outreach, Inc.



**HARM
REDUCTION
HOUSING:
GUIDELINES
FOR
SUPPORTIVE
HOUSING
STAFF**

Harm reduction housing

is designed to maximize access to housing and provide the support necessary to minimize the loss of housing for people who use substances and engage in other high-risk behaviors. Typically, individuals who are appropriate for this type of housing have not been successful in mainstream housing or have cycled in and out of homelessness due to the consequences of high-risk behaviors.

Harm reduction housing offers a continuum of service models and strategies. For some, abstinence will be an immediate goal. For others, the focus will be on improving the quality of life while taking steps to reduce the harm caused by risky behaviors —steps that may or may not lead to abstinence. Models will vary based on location, the type of lease involved, the amount of support provided by the program, and the kind of people served by the program. Regardless of the model, the goal of harm reduction housing is always the same – to maximize access to and minimize loss of housing, while taking into account the rights of the individual along with the needs and well being of the community.

Harm reduction housing programs share the following features:

- Programs will not bar or eliminate substance users and those who engage in other high-risk behaviors from housing. Instead, they will work to reduce barriers to housing and find ways to encourage the participation of those who continue to engage in high-risk behaviors.
- Providers will develop a wide range of housing and service options that add value by bundling and increasing access to supports and services. Services are offered as support, but are not mandated: participation is not a requirement for housing.
- Providers will articulate, in writing, participant rights and responsibilities as well as the rights and responsibilities of the housing program and staff. Continued participation in the program is determined by adherence to these expectations and on participant functioning, not by whether participants engage in high-risk behaviors.
- Housing staff will explore with participants the benefits of changing, reducing, or eliminating high-risk behaviors. Toward that end, they will provide accurate and balanced information, neither minimizing nor exaggerating the dangers and potential consequences of substance use and other high-risk behaviors.
- Staff will continually and collaboratively define and redefine success with participants based on the participants' identified goals. Success is defined as maintaining housing, rather than behavior change.
- Housing staff will reach out to help participants to engage in housing and services, to build motivation, and to recognize that ambivalence is endemic to the process of change. Further, they will look for opportunities to explore ways participants can reduce harms experienced as a result of high-risk behaviors.
- Programs will develop policies and practices based on the goals of maintaining housing, ensuring safety, and maintaining access to housing and services.
- Housing staff will help participants learn how to be good neighbors and maintain tenancy. They will also develop relationships with property management and advocate on behalf of participants to avoid eviction and loss of housing.
- Providers will develop housing plans with participants that identify strategies and steps to take in the event participants are at risk for becoming homeless. They will also develop referral options and a permanent housing network that participants may access in the event current housing is no longer an option.
- Housing staff recognizes that decision-making power rests with the participants, and that the staff and the housing program are partners with the participants in the change process.