



Bringing Our Neighbors Home Updates and Improvements to the TPCH Coordinated Entry System January 13, 2021

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, TPCH has made swift and necessary changes to our Coordinated Entry system and program approaches in an attempt to expedite housing access and mitigate the risk of illness among people experiencing and at risk of experiencing homelessness in Pima County communities.

Over the past eight months, we have developed expedited housing strategies, conducted health screening and prioritized hundreds of persons at higher risk of severe medical complication associated with COVID-19 for shelter and supportive housing, adopted new priority policies allowing the most vulnerable people access to all available housing services, and implemented phone-based housing assessment and problem-solving through our Coordinated Entry network.

We have learned from each of these activities taking into account what is working and what needs a refined approach. And today, we are excited to announce several permanent changes to our community's Coordinated Entry approach based on the lessons learned through these activities.

Review a summary of changes and TPCH's revised Coordinated Entry Policies & Procedures, Written Standards, and COVID-19 Expedited Housing Strategy & Interim Coordinated Entry Policies at <https://tpch.net/about/tpch-governing-documents/>.

Bringing Our Most Vulnerable Neighbors Home: Updates to Supportive Housing Prioritization

Since the implementation of TPCH's Expedited Housing Strategy and Interim Coordinated Entry Policy in April 2020, we have prioritized households at risk of severe medical complication for COVID-19 illness for all housing services funded through the CARES Act and Continuum of Care Program. We have continued to prioritize households meeting TPCH's prior priority factors (unsheltered, severity of service needs, length of time homeless) for all other housing services.

Today's Coordinated Entry policy updates merge these two approaches so that persons at the highest risk of fatality while homeless (including persons experiencing chronic homelessness and individuals and families fleeing domestic abuse) are prioritized with persons with high severity of service needs and/or higher risk of severe medical complications associated with COVID-19 illness. This updated approach will streamline the prioritization and matching process and make housing support more quickly available to our most vulnerable neighbors.

Specific Changes

Effective immediately, supportive housing matching will be conducted by the HMIS Lead Agency using the updated prioritization process and factors outlined by in the January 11, 2021 revisions to the TPCH Written Standards and TPCH Coordinated Entry Policies and Procedures. Community matching teams may continue to meet to provide care coordination but will not longer be authorized to direct matches to supportive housing except as authorized for youth projects below. Transitional Housing and Rapid Rehousing projects will continue to serve higher-acuity households and TPCH will be hosting a free training series facilitated by the National Alliance to End Homelessness for all transitional and rapid rehousing providers this spring focused on best practices and strategies to do so successfully.

Effective February 1, 2021, the COVID-19 Shelter Screening/Triage tool will be de-activated and replaced with the TPCH COVID-19 Assessment. The COVID-19 assessment two-part series of questions to assess medical risk associated with COVID-19 infection and pandemic-related causes of homelessness (i.e. job loss). The COVID-19 Assessment will be used to prioritize placement in COVID-19 shelter programs and referrals to supportive housing services.

Preventing Homelessness Before It Occurs – Updates to Homelessness Prevention and Coordinated Entry

Homelessness Prevention services funded through HUD's Emergency Solutions Grant Program are required to use Coordinated Entry for the management and prioritization of service requests and referrals. Additionally, numerous community-based homelessness prevention programs opt to accept referrals through the Coordinated Entry system. With significant infusions of new homelessness prevention resources funded through the CARES Act and other resources, TPCH has made significant changes to the Coordinated Entry process as it relates to homelessness prevention. These changes are intended to streamline assessment and access to these services in real time and before an eviction has been finalized.

To accomplish this, TPCH will replace the lengthy assessment tool currently used to assess and prioritize households for homelessness prevention assistance (Prevention VI-SPDAT) with a simplified assessment tool designed locally to prioritize households for whom lower-intensity rent/utility assistance is unlikely to resolve housing instability (TPCH Homelessness Prevention Prioritization Assessment).

Additionally, TPCH has adopted an Integrated Access Point/Service System model which will allow projects authorized by the Continuum of Care Board to operate integrated assessment and immediate service delivery for households prioritized for homelessness prevention assistance in locations where immediate services are needed (i.e. hospitals, courts).

Specific Changes

Effective immediately, households assessed for homelessness prevention assistance will remain active and eligible for referral to homelessness prevention projects for 30 days without further contact needed. If a household is not prioritized for homelessness prevention assistance within 30 days and is still in need of assistance, a new assessment will need to be completed. This is consistent with the current interim policy so there will be no change experienced by households being assessed, assessors, or projects requesting homelessness prevention referrals through Coordinated Entry.

Effective immediately, projects administering on-site services at hospitals, courts, or other locations where immediate assistance is needed to prevent homelessness may email tpch@tucsonaz.gov for directions to submit a request approval as an Integrated Access Point/Service System. Requests received prior to January 20, 2021 will be reviewed during the January 26, 2021 CoC Board Meeting.

Effective February 1, 2021, TPCH will discontinue use of the Prevention VI-SPDAT screening tool which is currently used to assess and prioritize households for homelessness prevention assistance

Effective February 1, 2021, TPCH will begin using the TPCH Homelessness Prevention Prioritization Assessment to assess and prioritize households for homelessness prevention assistance.

Effective February 1, 2021, households will be prioritized for homelessness prevention services according to the updated prioritization factors and process outlined in the January 11, 2021 revision to the Coordinated Entry Policies and Procedures.

Providing a Safe Place for Youth – Updates to Coordinated Entry for Youth Projects

As part of community planning for the TPCH Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project initiative, TPCH developed a unique prioritization process led by a community matching team and using youth-specific prioritization factors aimed at more effectively connecting unaccompanied and pregnant/parenting youth under the age of 24 to housing and supportive service programs.

Specific Changes

Effective immediately, referrals to projects designated for youth ages 18-24 will be prioritized according to the updated prioritization factors and process for youth projects outlined in the January 11, 2021 revision to the Coordinated Entry Policies and Procedures.

The updated prioritization factors and process were developed as part of community planning for the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project and have been implemented since October 2020. No specific changes in current practice result from this policy update.

Making Assessment Easier – Conducting Coordinated Entry Assessment by Phone

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, TPCH authorized Coordinated Entry Access Points to conduct Coordinated Entry housing assessment by phone. Since the implementation of this practice in late Spring 2020, TPCH has found that this practice offers a valuable alternative approach to assessment for households that are unable to visit Access Points, especially during the pandemic. Based on the success of this interim initiative, TPCH has updated its policies and procedures to permanently allow phone-based assessment and to permit verbal releases of information for entry into the HMIS and data-sharing.

Once public health risk is reduced, Access Points will resume providing in-person assessment; however, households in need of assistance will also be able to continue to conduct assessment by phone when it is preferable to the household.

Specific Changes

Under interim policy approval, Coordinated Entry Access Points have conducted phone-based assessment since Spring 2020. The January 11, 2021 policy update permits this practice to continue beyond the pandemic. No specific changes in current practice result from this policy update.

Restoring Power and Honoring the Voice of Those We Serve – Grievance Policy & Procedure

Under current TPCH policy, people seeking housing assessment and problem-solving through Coordinated Entry have no formal pathway to grieve their treatment during participation in the Coordinated Entry system to TPCH directly. Likewise, there is no process by which an organization can formally grieve violations of approved TPCH policy as they relate to Coordinated Entry to the CoC Board. In an effort to restore power and honor the voices of those we serve and those who work most closely with people experiencing homelessness, TPCH has implemented a formal grievance policy and procedure covering the Coordinated Entry system.

Specific Changes

Effective immediately, persons served by the Coordinated Entry system may submit a grievance to TPCH using the grievance form posted at www.tpch.net/coordinatedentry. Likewise, agencies participating in the Coordinated Entry system may submit a grievance to TPCH in the event that Coordinated Entry Policies and Procedures are not being followed in the community and/or by the lead agencies charged with implementation of TPCH Coordinated Entry policies using the same form.

Effective February 1, 2021, all agencies conducting Coordinated Entry assessment shall make all persons being assessed and/or otherwise served through Coordinated Entry aware of the grievance policy, process, and form as part of the assessment process.