Coordinated Access in Connecticut

Providers of service to people experiencing homelessness are coordinating their efforts to end homelessness in communities across Connecticut by developing Coordinated Access Networks (CANs).

Through these CANs, service providers work together to streamline and standardize the process for individuals and families to access assistance. Coordinated Access is required by the Federal Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act, which governs most of the federal funding communities receive to address homelessness, and supported by the State of Connecticut Department of Housing.

The primary goal is to help communities focus on rapidly ending each person’s homelessness by connecting them with appropriate housing and resources as quickly as possible.

**What is Coordinated Access?**

Coordinated Access is a standardized method for accessing housing/homeless services from the point that a household experiences homelessness to the point that they are again stably housed. It requires standardized and written protocols, assessment tools, and agree upon priorities among the community who serves those experiencing homelessness.

The State Department of Housing (DOH), with partners from CT Coalition to End Homelessness, Partnership for Strong Communities, and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS), designed a system of eight Coordinated Access Networks (CANS), or Regions, based on the transient movement of people experiencing homelessness. Continuums of Care (CoC’s) and towns within these CANS worked to design very specific protocols and procedures for access to housing and shelter services that link up to the statewide CAN framework operated by 211 and funded by the state DOH.

This means that in order to access emergency shelters, households in need must call 211 to enter the CAN service system. Callers select 3 then 1 to be patched through to a housing specialist.

The Greater Hartford CAN, made up of more than 100 leaders from local organizations that work with the issue of homelessness, has been meeting weekly to operationalize this new system. This system began back in November, 2014. The system focuses on a single “front door” approach to access housing services. Currently, any individual or household facing a housing crisis will be directed to call 211 where they will speak with a housing specialist to access their needs. If they are not in need of immediate services, they will have an appointment scheduled with one of the case managers in the region to discuss their situation and determine the best options available to meet their needs. If a household or individual is in need of immediate shelter, 211 will communicate with Regional Shelters to locate an available shelter bed(s).

The main goals of this coordinated entry system are to ensure that all households and individuals receive equal treatment when experiencing a housing crisis, to guarantee client-focused services are delivered that align the most relevant services to each individual circumstance, and to facilitate the ability to capture meaningful data from the first moment a household experiences a housing crisis and extending until they are once again stably housed.

Housing programs are an expensive and valuable resource to the community. Coordinated Access is designed to screen and assess all those in need, to determine what type of housing assistance they might best be suited for. Instead of program by program waitlists on a first come first served basis, there is now one community-wide referral list making referrals to almost all of the housing programs intended to serve the homeless. Each different type of housing intervention will have its own prioritized referral list. Highest priority for the intensive intervention, permanent supportive housing, will go to those who are experiencing chronic homelessness with high service needs. Others, who may face fewer obstacles to stable housing and have shorter experiences with homelessness, may be prioritized for Rapid Re-housing or Transitional Housing programs.

**What are the Benefits of Coordinated Access?**

* It is a centralized and coordinated system that is transparent to the community
* It allows establishment of an unduplicated count of those who seek and need housing/homeless assistance services allowing to advocate for needed resources
* It allows for targeting existing and future resources in the most effective way
* It creates a culture change where all those involved are focused on the outcome of getting people rapidly into housing
* It is a flexible process. It can be adjusted when necessary.

