



Creating Equal Access to Homeless System Housing Resources for DV Survivors

History

For more than five years, the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV) and the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness (CCEH) have worked in collaboration, together with state and federal funders, to safely and confidentially provide survivors of domestic violence access to housing resources in Connecticut, and to collectively advance the work of housing and domestic violence policy and practice in our state. This partnership stems from years of work between the two systems to improve communication, cooperation, policy, and practice with an aim to increase housing opportunities and access to supportive services for both of our constituencies.

In 2014, CCADV and CCEH developed a set of shared principles which outlines the core elements of their relationship. The document speaks to important factors such as standards, access, choice, and accountability and serves as a critical blueprint for our ongoing work. A key shared goal: ensuring equitable cross-system access for individuals to get the services and supports they need. This includes providing equitable access to domestic violence services for homeless clients who need them, and equitable access to homelessness response system housing resources for domestic violence survivors in need of support. These shared principles and goals inform CCADV and CCEH's participation as members of the Reaching Home Steering Committee, which provides oversight for "Opening Doors-Connecticut," the statewide plan to end homelessness, and their work with the two Connecticut Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Continuums of Care (CoC). CCADV and CCEH continue to build coordination and communication through:

- Ongoing training and cross-training for housing and domestic violence providers
- Ongoing technical assistance for housing and domestic violence providers
- Quarterly status meetings between leadership of CCADV and CCEH
- A requirement in CCADV member organization standards that Connecticut's 18 domestic violence providers actively participate in the statewide coordinated homelessness response system

Creating a means to systematize equitable access to homeless housing resources for domestic violence survivors presented a specific challenge. Consistent with best practices and HUD guidance, Connecticut's homelessness response system is increasingly data-driven, using the federally mandated Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) database as a tool to help increase the efficiency and effectiveness of programs and allocation of resources in the homelessness response system. New data tools include by-name housing registries maintained in HMIS which are used to allocate homeless housing resources, including rapid re-housing and permanent supportive housing, to households according to documented need. Domestic violence providers are not able to enter data into these by-

name housing registries, given that the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) prohibits local victim service programs from entering personally identifying information about victims into HMIS in order to protect survivor's confidentiality.

To address this challenge, in December of 2016, CCADV and CCEH developed together, with support from state funding partners and in consultation with federal funders, a protocol that allows domestic violence survivors to be added anonymously to the housing registries maintained in HMIS. In developing this protocol, CCADV and CCEH sought technical assistance and guidance from The Confidentiality Institute, National Resource Center on Domestic Violence and The National Network to End Domestic Violence as well as HUD and the Family Violence Services and Prevention Program (FVPSA). Though this process has many moving parts to protect a domestic violence survivor's identity while at the same time ensuring that the domestic violence survivor has access to the type of housing and in the community of choice, it has been successful in connecting domestic violence survivors to homeless housing resources. From the launch of this system, domestic violence providers have referred to the homeless system for housing resources 73 households, including 31 single adults and 42 families. To date, 29 households, including 8 single adults and 21 families, have been housed or matched to a housing resource (and in the process of securing housing).

The success of this partnership is greatly rooted in continued communication and collaboration between the two systems. The housing protocol, alone, would not be successful separate from this greater context.

The Approach

Connecticut state agencies that fund work to end homelessness, federal funding partners (Connecticut's HUD, CoCs), and CCEH worked together to develop Coordinated Access Networks (CAN's) as the mechanism to bring together providers in communities across the state for the purpose of implementing HUD's requirements regarding coordinating access to homeless response resources and advancing the goal of ending homelessness. Before 2016, some domestic violence providers were already engaged with their local CAN, while others were not. In 2016, CCADV, in collaboration with the domestic violence providers – added a provision to service provision standards which requires consistent participation in their local CAN. This move to have domestic violence advocates actively engaged in their CANs offered a statewide coordinated strategy between the two systems for the first time. Domestic violence advocates were also trained on administering the Vulnerability Index-Service Prioritization and Assistance Decision Tool (VI-SPDAT) – the housing needs assessment used universally across the Connecticut homelessness response system. Housing advocates were also trained on the unique needs of domestic violence survivors and the complexities of this public health issue.

The protocol requires that a domestic violence survivor complete the VI-SPDAT with the domestic violence advocate. The domestic violence advocate will also work with domestic violence survivor to determine whether they should be marked on the appropriate CAN housing registry as a "high risk priority." Domestic violence providers may obtain risk detail and interpret lethality using one or multiple factors, including risk assessment, arrest history, the presence of a restraining order and safety plan. If a domestic violence survivor is marked as a high risk priority, that domestic violence survivor moves to the top of the list for the appropriate housing resource, and will be the next served when that resource is

available. Drawing from this information, the domestic violence advocate fills out a de-identified HMIS referral form which includes the following data entry fields:

Data Entry Field	Description of Field
Referral Date	Date the client's unidentified information was sent to CCADV
CAN which client seeks placement	Please enter the CAN name in which the client is seeking housing. This may not necessarily be the CAN in your catchment area.
VI-SPDAT Score	The score the client receives from the VI-SPDAT that was conducted by CCADV provider in house.
Household Type	The number of bedrooms the client will need given their family size.
Chronically Homeless	Is the client chronically homeless by HUD's definition? Please visit CCEH or HUD's website for the complete definition.
High Risk	Is the client identified as high risk due to their LAP screen, danger assessment, SRI of through safety planning?
Point of Contact at CCADV	Please allow the person processing your client to CCEH to fill this section out along with their email and phone number.
Unique Client ID#	This number will be assigned by the CCADV point of contact and sent back to you on the PDF fillable form.

Once this referral form is complete, it is emailed by the domestic violence advocate to an established point of contact at CCADV. The point of contact then codes the domestic violence survivor depending on which domestic violence provider the domestic violence survivor is being referred from. The referral form is then emailed to the point of contact at CCEH who then enters the information into HMIS and provides the CAN with the HMIS code.

The point of contact at CCADV also sends the coded HMIS referral form back to the domestic violence provider for their records, so the domestic violence provider can advocate appropriately for the domestic violence survivor at the CAN meetings in their region. For organizational purposes, a live excel document (which does not include client identifying information) is kept between the two points of contact to ensure a referral is not missed. Below is an example of the live excel document. It is the responsibility of the point of contact to fill in all fields except the CCEH acceptance Date, which is filled in by the point of contact at CCEH once the referral is entered into HMIS.

Client Unique ID#	CCEH Submission Date	CCEH Acceptance Date	Coordinated Access Network	Notes
CCADV1	12/21/2016	12/21/16	New London	Score: 7 Household type:2 High Risk
CCADV2	01/03/2017	1/5/17	Torrington, Winstead	Score: 10 Household Type:2 or 3 High Risk
CCADV3	01/03/2017	1/5/17	Waterbury	

Once, this process is complete, domestic violence advocates take the lead of advocating for domestic violence survivors at the CAN meetings. Point of contacts at both organizations have no additional involvement in this process. It is also important to recognize that advocates are guided by these important tips and reminders:

- The system is put in place to allow domestic violence survivors to be considered in the HMIS system in a confidential manner.
- Domestic violence survivors are entered into housing registries and offered housing resources consistent with the prioritization of housing resources adopted by the Connecticut coordinated homelessness response system. Domestic violence survivors are treated equitably with homeless clients in need of housing resource, and are not guaranteed faster housing placement unless they are marked as “high risk priority.”
- Domestic violence providers are still responsible for representing the needs of domestic violence survivors at CAN and housing meetings.
- Domestic violence providers must keep track of a survivor’s Unique ID# for easy identification when housing does become available. CCADV does not know what domestic violence survivor is assigned to the Unique ID# and will only call the domestic violence providers upon the CAN’s acceptance of a client for housing. The domestic violence advocate will then work with the CAN going forward.
- Domestic violence survivors do not call CCADV or CCEH directly to check on their status within the CAN. This puts domestic violence survivor at risk of their identity being discovered and neither CCADV nor CCEH has access to this information.