



# Supporting Whole-Family Approaches to Housing Stability and Economic Mobility: The Role of Housing and Homelessness Providers

In *Home, Together*, the federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness, we focus on strategies to ensure that homelessness is a rare, brief, and one-time experience. In order to achieve that goal, national, state, and local partners must work across sectors to build a coordinated community response that addresses the strengths and needs of individuals and families.

This fact sheet, part of a series that focuses on recommendations from the [Policy Statement on Meeting the Needs of Families with Young Children Experiencing and At Risk of Homelessness](#), is designed to strengthen collaboration between early care and education (ECE) providers and housing and homelessness services providers. It provides strategies for supporting a **whole-family approach**—breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty by simultaneously and comprehensively meeting the needs of both children and parents who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

## What is the role of housing and homelessness service providers in supporting whole-family approaches?

Housing serves as a platform upon which families can build the stability they need to pursue goals related to health, education, and employment. Other community partners are critical for providing services and supports that reinforce stability and growth. Partners include:

- Education providers, including early childhood systems for children and adult education for parents
- Economic support providers, including housing, employment, and food and nutrition
- Health and wellbeing providers, including physical and behavioral health services for parents and children
- Social capital, including friends, extended relatives, and other natural supports and networks

## How can housing and homelessness service providers learn more about ECE initiatives in their community?

You can support your community's efforts to implement whole-family approaches by first learning more about the relevant issues and supports that exist for expectant parents and families with infants and young children.

- Research the risks associated with homelessness for pregnant mothers, infants, and young children, and the unique vulnerabilities of this population, as well as the role of evidence-based services and supports in meeting their needs.
- Establish or strengthen processes to refer families to relevant prenatal and early childhood supports and services. These may include home visits, Early Head Start, developmental screening, follow-up health care and educational evaluations, and parenting support. Some providers can prioritize young children for enrollment based on their housing status. For example, Head Start programs have certain flexible criteria for enrolling children experiencing homelessness, and Lead Agencies responsible for administering the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) program must have procedures to permit enrollment of

children experiencing homelessness prior to completion of all required documentation (including grace periods for compliance with immunization and other health and safety requirements).

- Learn more about strategies to support early childhood development within your programs through tools such as the [Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Family Shelters](#) and the [Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Family Supportive Housing](#).
- Connect with early childhood education providers and local systems of care, which are comprehensive networks of community-based services and supports organized to meet the needs of families who are involved with multiple child service agencies, such as child welfare, mental health, schools, juvenile justice, and health care.

### **How can housing and homelessness providers partner with ECE providers in their work to serve infants and young children?**

ECE providers can benefit from your expertise in housing stability, coordinated entry processes, and prioritization and assessment protocols. Your support can strengthen their understanding of how their programs can best meet the needs of families with children or expectant mothers experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.

- Share strategies on screening for housing needs and identifying families with young children experiencing homelessness.
- Offer training opportunities related to supporting pregnant women and families with young children.
- Provide training on available homelessness services and housing resources, program eligibility, and best practices and strategies to connect families with young children to these resources.
- Brief stakeholders, such as local hospitals, birthing centers, child care agencies, early intervention specialists, early childhood special educators, medical care providers, home visitors, and/or homeless education liaisons in schools on the purpose of the Continuum of Care, types of housing services providers, and coordinated entry processes.

### **How can housing and homelessness providers deepen partnerships with ECE providers and strengthen whole-family approaches?**

You've laid the groundwork, shared information, and outlined best practices for collaboration. Now you can institutionalize shared commitments and complementary, coordinated, and joint activities.

- Broaden and strengthen relationships with potential key ECE partners and providers.
- Work with mental health consultants to train and support shelter staff to address the developmental and behavioral needs of young children and to create linkages to behavioral health providers in the community.
- Establish recurring meetings between leaders and staff across programs or systems to explore innovative ways to facilitate referrals, coordinate services, and increase collaboration.
- Develop memoranda of understanding to help formalize partnerships and commitments to work together on identified action areas.
- Regularly assess how partnerships are functioning and the efficiency and efficacy of referrals. Make mid-course corrections, when appropriate, to improve the quality of collaborative efforts.