Housing First!
Perspectives from the US

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Today:

- What is "housing first"?
- Etymology
- Core principles
- What it is not
- Qualifications
- Emergent federal policy in the US
What is “housing first”?  

A. A slogan  
B. A philosophy  
C. A program model  
D. A brand  
E. A policy  
F. All of the above
Etymology

1993 – “Beyond Shelter” publication (T, Tull)

1998 – Natl. Alliance to End Homelessness

Early-mid 2000s – Applied to Consumer Preference Supported Housing (CPSH) (Tsemberis, Pathways to Housing)

CPSH Program Model

Established by Pathways to Housing in 1992

Assumption: Housing is a right to be honored, not a privilege to be earned.

Consistent with Americans with Disabilities Act principles: Access and reasonable accommodations
CPSH Program Model

Core Principles:

- Consumer choice and empowerment
- Separation of services and housing
- Services are voluntary and flexible
- Community integration
- Harm reduction and recovery oriented

Are these principles distinct from PSH in general?
CPSH Program Model

Key Differences:

The Target Population: People who are long-term homeless, service “resistant” or “noncompliant,” or who are not effectively treated with existing therapies. People who can’t get into existing PSH or who get evicted from existing PSH.

Sobriety or treatment compliance is not required (although, philosophically, PSH is supposed to be similar in this regard).
Underlying theory and values:
• Transitional placements provide for stabilization and learning.
• Individual change is required through treatment.
• Consumers must ‘earn’ permanent housing.
Housing First Model

1. Homeless
2. Shelter placement
3. Transitional housing
4. Permanent housing
5. Ongoing, flexible supports

Tsemberis slide, 2010
Relevant Contrasts:

Not “housing readiness”
Not “clean and sober” housing

Less Relevant Contrasts:

Residential treatment
“Twelve Step” Recovery and abstinence
CPSH Program Model

Limits on Consumer Choice:

- Legal compliance
- Tenant rental contribution (30% of income)
- Mandatory weekly home visits
Evaluating Housing First

- Highly effective program for the ‘hard to house’
- 85% housing retention rates across many cities and programs
- Access problems eliminated, retention increased
- Reduction in acute care services and significant cost savings (pre=post)
- Improves quality of life
- SAMHSA’s “National Registry of Evidence-based Practices”

Tsemberis effectiveness (2004); HUD Pearson 6 cities (2007); VA Rosenheck 11 cities (2007); Larimer, cost (2009).
Some Qualifications

- Tsemberis study compared CPSH to “usual care” not to other PSH programs
- Not clear that there are differences from PSH more generally – lacking published fidelity measure.
- When does “first” clock start?
- Some transitional housing often needed or used (Pathways to Housing sometimes places people in safe havens or in temporary housing prior to apartment)
- Local political sensitivities sometimes requires some “readiness” or engagement before placement.
Pathways CPSH model was promoted by Bush administration USICH (Mangano); led to visibility and association with “housing first” slogan

Now “franchised” to four countries and many cities

But is it different than PSH more generally? What constitutes fidelity?
Other concerns

- Not for everyone?: Some PSH residents prefer clean and sober housing, and neighbors

- Not everyone consistently fails in treatment

- US context: Screening tool (“Vulnerability Index”)
  - Unknown psychometric properties
  - Case mix problems in practice and policy: Should policy promote “silting” (inverse of “creaming”)?
Housing First! as Policy

- HEARTH Act: promotes “housing first” principles: rapid rehousing, followed by community-based services ("homeless" aren’t different from housed)
- Shift away from shelter-based supportive services and transitional housing
- Applied to families and transitionally homeless adults
- A prevention-centered approach is emergent: Housing First! as official policy