



# Responding to the Employment and Training Needs of SNAP Participants Experiencing Homelessness and Housing Instability

POLICY BRIEF 9  
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## Introduction

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) can be a critical part of States' efforts to help SNAP participants secure the training and employment opportunities they need to reach economic self-sufficiency. The program's flexibility to provide targeted employment and training services as well as robust supports can make it an effective tool for responding to the needs of SNAP participants that face high barriers to employment, including individuals experiencing homelessness or housing instability.

## Employment and Training Barriers Faced by SNAP Participants Experiencing Homelessness or Housing Instability

A combination of high housing costs and limited availability of affordable housing options can contribute to increased risk of housing instability and homelessness among already severely rent-burdened households. In 2015, 8.3 million renters had worst-case housing needs. These renters had very low incomes (less than 50 percent of Area Median Income), didn't receive housing assistance, and had severe rent burdens, severely inadequate housing, or both.<sup>1</sup> According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) 2017 Point in Time count, there were more than 553,000 people experiencing homelessness on a single night across the country, including more than 114,000 children.<sup>2</sup>

SNAP participants can be among those households experiencing housing instability and homelessness. Indeed, according to the Family Options Study, which looked at 2,282 homeless families entering emergency shelters, 85 percent of these households were SNAP participants.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, many able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs), whose average income in 2015 was just \$2,000,<sup>4</sup> face a lack of affordable housing options and are at risk for homelessness.

For SNAP households, increasing income through employment is vital to accessing and maintaining housing that is affordable and avoiding homelessness. Yet many SNAP households lack the marketable skills, education, or work experience needed

to obtain work that pays enough to meet local housing costs. A recent survey of parents experiencing homelessness in New York City found that 70 percent were unemployed with some or no work history, while those who were working held low-wage jobs that left them living below the poverty line.<sup>5</sup> These families reported a lack of jobs in their local communities and a lack of childcare as significant obstacles to employment.<sup>6</sup> Substance abuse or health/mental health problems, such as those related to a history of trauma (including the trauma of homelessness itself) are also commonly found among this population. Finally, employers may have negative stereotypes about individuals experiencing homelessness (e.g., that they are unmotivated, unreliable, or will not fit in to the workplace) and may be reluctant to hire them.

SNAP households with unstable living situations will often try to increase their incomes by looking for employment or participating in a job training program. However, the uncertainty and stress of a housing crisis can create a vicious cycle: lack of stable housing makes obtaining and maintaining a job difficult, while lack of a steady, adequate paycheck contributes to housing instability. Connecting these households with SNAP E&T programs that work in partnership with public housing programs or homeless assistance programs can provide a much-needed opportunity to help them secure stable housing supported by good jobs.

## Aligning Employment and Training and Housing Strategies to Serve SNAP Participants Experiencing Homelessness and Housing Instability

SNAP participants experiencing homelessness and housing instability often need help to address both their housing and employment needs, frequently at the same time. SNAP E&T programs can better meet these needs by:

1. Tailoring SNAP E&T services to meet the specific employment and training needs of participants experiencing homelessness and housing instability;
2. Working with E&T providers who partner with key stakeholders, such as employers or landlords; and
3. Developing cross-systems partnerships with homeless assistance programs and public housing programs to better meet the housing and employment needs of participants.

## Supporting Effective Employment and Training Services/Models

SNAP E&T programs can provide services that address the specific employment and training needs of SNAP participants experiencing homelessness and housing instability by engaging training providers that have a proven track record of effectively serving this population. States can bring on these organizations as SNAP E&T third-party partners—organizations contracted by States to provide SNAP E&T services to SNAP participants with identified employment, training, and supportive service needs.<sup>7</sup>

Individuals experiencing homelessness and housing instability require a continuum of employment and training models and approaches to address a diverse range of needs and strengths. Compared to traditional workforce programs, these models typically include additional support such as intensive case management as well as navigation and coordination with key systems and services that strengthen housing stability and job retention by addressing barriers to employment (criminal records, physical or mental challenges, etc.). They may also offer a more individualized pace of program participation—allowing participants to take time off to attend appointments as they need to, for example—and a program environment focused on job retention. [Successful program models](#) are flexible and often adjust their program outcome expectations to



establish realistic goals for measuring performance in serving individuals experiencing homelessness and housing instability. Successful programs may also integrate trauma-informed approaches and focus on providing supports tailored to specific subpopulations experiencing homelessness or housing instability (e.g., families with children may require childcare and help finding flexible employment, or veterans may need coaching on matching their military skills to local labor market demand, etc.).<sup>8</sup> SNAP E&T providers may offer navigation/case management services that can not only support participants' success in employment and training programs, but can also link them to local affordable housing programs and homeless service providers if they are not already connected. Effective programs may also provide supportive services including financial assistance to address barriers that limit participants' ability to gain employment as well as access or maintain housing. Common barriers may include lack of valid identification, such as a birth certificate or a state identification card; lack of reliable transportation to get to a job interview or submit a rental application; and lack of clothing that is suitable to apply for work or meet with an apartment management company. Finally, effective programs may develop individualized employment plans that address potential concerns about transitioning off housing subsidies as well as selecting customized career pathways.

Employment and training models that help address the needs of homeless and unstably-housed SNAP participants include:

- **Social Enterprise.** Mission-driven business focused on hiring and assisting individuals who face barriers to work by offering training, supported work experience and employment. Social enterprises can offer low barrier access to structured and instructive employment and training opportunities in order to increase skills, build work experience and instill confidence. Goodwill Industries International and Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) are well-known examples of social enterprises.
- **Transitional Jobs/Work Experience.** Time-limited, subsidized jobs that combine paid work, job skills training, and supportive services to help individuals facing barriers to employment succeed in the workforce. Transitional jobs can be combined with job search services to transition participants into permanent employment.
- **Housing and Employment Navigator.** Approach that aligns key systems (workforce, housing and social services) to support homeless households to obtain employment and stable housing by utilizing a navigator to coordinate a client-centered team approach.
- **Individualized Placement and Support (IPS).** Supported employment approach designed to assist adults with behavioral health conditions or other complex barriers get and keep competitive employment. This model offers highly individualized services, rapid employment and outreach to employers to develop jobs that match the goals of participants. Supported employment staff also work closely with behavioral health and other service providers and offer ongoing employment support.

### Subsidized Employment and SNAP E&T

The subsidized wages paid to SNAP E&T participants as a part of a social enterprise or transitional jobs program cannot be paid with SNAP E&T funds. However, administrative costs and supportive services associated with serving SNAP participants in such programs may be allowable.

As States select SNAP E&T providers, including third-party partners, they should prioritize programs that offer the kinds of tailored supports and services designed to successfully and rapidly connect individuals experiencing homelessness or housing instability to the job market through quality education and training opportunities that maximize the ability of participants to secure and retain employment.

## **Partnering with Public Housing and Homeless Assistance Programs**

In addition to engaging providers that can effectively serve SNAP participants experiencing homelessness or housing instability, SNAP E&T programs can work in partnership with public housing programs and homeless assistance programs.

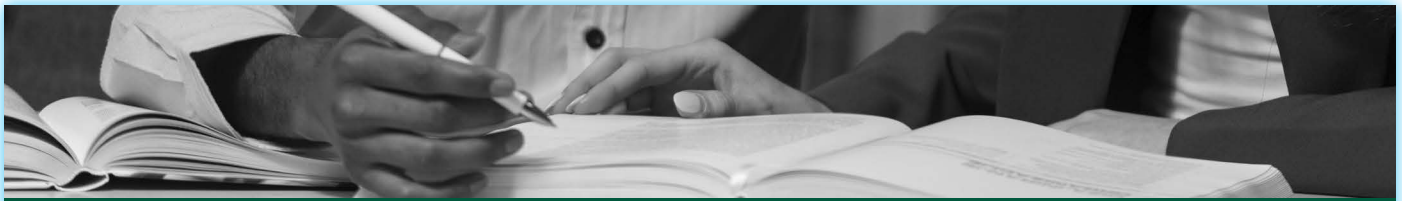
HUD-funded public housing programs are administered by Public Housing Authorities (PHAs), providing low-income households with access to permanently subsidized and affordable housing. This includes the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV, or Section 8) program. HUD also funds Continuum of Care (CoC) programs, the regional or local planning bodies that coordinate housing and services funding for individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

SNAP E&T presents an important opportunity to assist SNAP participants who may be accessing services through public housing programs or homeless assistance programs funded through HUD. State SNAP agencies can collaborate with the agencies and community-based providers administering these programs to combine the resources, services and expertise of each system in support of efforts to increase the economic opportunity of participants and their capacity to obtain and maintain housing.

SNAP E&T providers serving households living in public housing can collaborate with housing providers to help residents learn about the SNAP E&T services for which they are eligible, the benefits of participation, and to facilitate referrals and service coordination. SNAP E&T participants residing in public housing programs may have limited or no case management support, and SNAP E&T programs may need to work with PHAs to identify, recruit, and enroll eligible participants in SNAP E&T.

HUD strongly encourages partnership between SNAP E&T and homeless assistance programs, awarding points in its CoC program competition to those CoCs that can demonstrate they work with mainstream benefit programs to help participants. These partnerships can combine and efficiently integrate supports to address barriers to employment that individuals experiencing homelessness often face. This approach requires a coordinated process to clearly identify what the barriers are (e.g., lack of educational attainment, physical or mental health challenges, lack of transportation, etc.) and to ensure the correct usage of supportive service funds to avoid duplication of supportive services.

Homeless assistance services can include short-term or medium-term financial assistance to help people obtain housing or to avoid losing their housing. As the financial assistance comes to an end, participants need to have sufficient income to assume the full cost of housing on their own. SNAP E&T services can offer needed employment and training services and early engagement in these programs can provide participants with connections to economic opportunities that will help them to maintain housing stability.



## Massachusetts' SNAP Path to Work and the Secure Jobs Program

The [Secure Jobs program](#) in Massachusetts is an integrated housing and employment model which provides access to a coordinated network of supports for families experiencing housing instability or transitioning out of homelessness, helping them to regain financial stability as they secure employment. Launched in 2013 through a partnership between the Paul & Phyllis Fireman Foundation and the Massachusetts Interagency Council on Housing & Homelessness, Secure Jobs operates in seven regions of the State serving families experiencing housing instability and homelessness.

*Secure Jobs* is a partnership between local non-profits (providing rental assistance, housing services, child care, and transportation support) and American Job Centers and their workforce partners (providing employment and training services). The program offers integrated services that help participants achieve stability in housing and full-time work. The model brings employment services to households living in homeless shelters and motels and offers a case management approach that provides personalized long-term support to families as they work on stabilizing their lives.

Recently, several *Secure Jobs* providers have become SNAP E&T partners within Massachusetts SNAP E&T program, SNAP Path to Work, administered by the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA). SNAP Path to Work helps *Secure Jobs* increase support for eligible families who are SNAP recipients and participating in job readiness, skill training, job search, and retention services. SNAP E&T's flexible programming fits well with *Secure Jobs* integrated approach. The focus on short-term job training and employer driven services assists households in securing quality jobs that support stable housing.

According to DTA, *Secure Jobs* aligns with the DTA's interest in stabilizing the lives of families experiencing homelessness so that they can move towards lasting economic self-sufficiency.

The services offered focus on the unique circumstances of each family, creating a safe space to address the complex barriers that they face and taking into account that a successful approach will look different for each person and family. *Secure Jobs* long-term case management model provides strength-based, flexible and tailored supports to help participants set and achieve meaningful employment goals. And its efforts to collaborate with the State's Department of Housing and Community Development and other community partners helps participants access services more seamlessly through a centralized point of contact.

The *Secure Jobs* program is one example of how SNAP E&T programs can effectively contribute to meeting the complex needs of homeless and unstably-housed SNAP households. The model intentionally aligns housing and employment services and offers targeted vocational services focused on economic opportunity and the ability of participants to maintain stable housing.

## Appendix

### HUD Programs Serving Individuals Experiencing Homelessness and Housing Instability

SNAP participants who are experiencing homelessness and housing instability are often eligible for HUD-funded housing assistance and homeless services. HUD programs that address housing affordability, homelessness and housing instability include:

#### Housing Assistance

HUD funds affordable housing programs for low-income households operated primarily by public housing authorities (PHAs). This includes a variety of low-income public housing units and programs that are made affordable through a combination of subsidies, tax credits and public/private investments. HUD also funds the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program, or Section 8. This program allows eligible households to apply a voucher and subsidy to a unit in the private rental market.

#### Continuum of Care

In addition to funding development and maintenance of affordable housing, HUD's Continuum of Care programs is designed to promote communitywide commitment to the goal of ending homelessness; provide funding for efforts by nonprofit providers, and State and local governments to quickly rehouse, promote access to and effect utilization of mainstream programs, and optimize self-sufficiency among individuals and families experiencing homelessness. To find your local Continuum of Care, visit [www.hudexchange.com/programs/coc](http://www.hudexchange.com/programs/coc).

Low-income public housing and the HCV programs sometimes provide a service component to aid residents. This might include case management, life skills or access to employment and training assistance. Below are examples of PHA programs designed to assist with employment, training and economic advancement. These opportunities are available in many but not all regions and may have differing and limited scopes.<sup>9</sup>

**Family Self-Sufficiency Program (FSS)**: HUD-assisted families agree to participate in a 5-year program to increase their earned income, and reduce their need for income assistance and rent subsidies. Participating families complete an individual training and service plan (ITSP) which identifies goals, services and resources. The FSS program relies on local employment and training services and partners to assist families to carry out their ITSP. When a family increases its income, the PHA sets their rent at a higher rate. This additional rent paid by the family goes into an escrow account, which is established by the PHA. Once a family graduates from the FSS program, the family may access the escrow account. The funds can help the family in a variety of important ways.

**Resident Opportunity and Self Sufficiency Program (ROSS)**: ROSS is designed to assess the services needs of residents of conventional Public Housing or Tribal housing. A ROSS Program Service Coordinator helps coordinate available resources in the community to meet these needs. This program promotes developing local strategies to link with supportive services and resident empowerment activities. The goal of the ROSS program is to enable participating families to increase earned income, reduce or eliminate the need for income assistance, and make prog-

ress toward achieving economic independence and housing self-sufficiency.

**HUD Section 3:** Section 3 is a provision of the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968 that helps foster local economic development, neighborhood economic improvement, and individual self-sufficiency. The Section 3 program requires that entities that receive certain types of HUD funding, to the greatest extent feasible, provide job training, employment, and contracting opportunities for low- or very-low income residents in connection with projects and activities in their neighborhoods.

## Program Eligibility

Eligibility for public housing and the HCV system is based primarily on income. It may also include specialized programs that are available to low-income households based on age (seniors), disability, veteran status, previously homeless or other categories. Households that increase income through employment and go above HUD income limits may no longer be eligible for a housing subsidy. This transition may be a concern for SNAP E&T participants who have relied on housing assistance to ensure housing stability and prevent returns to homelessness. SNAP E&T providers should coordinate closely with PHA staff to carefully inform residents and offer benefit-planning assistance.

HUD sets rents for public housing and HCV based on the idea that rent will not exceed 30% of a household's anticipated gross annual income. For households with no or extremely low income, housing authorities may require a minimum rent of \$25 but no more than \$50 per month.

Key homeless housing strategies and resources include:

- **Housing First** is a proven approach to homeless assistance that provides immediate access to permanent housing with few to no pre-conditions, barriers or behavioral expectations. Housing First does not require 'housing ready' prerequisites such as sobriety, having earned income or agreeing to service participation prior to obtaining permanent housing. It is an approach that prioritizes permanent housing as the foundation upon which individuals can connect to the kinds of services and supports that promote housing stability and success including connections to employment and economic opportunity.
- **Homeless prevention** resolves imminent homelessness with housing-focused case management and temporary rent subsidies. Services are time-limited and prevent literal homelessness.
- **Diversions** resolves literal homelessness with short-term assistance combining housing-focused case management and emergency financial assistance, resulting in stable and secure housing.
- **Emergency shelter** provides temporary shelter for people experiencing homelessness. Emergency shelter programs vary and may offer shelter on a day-to-day basis or for up to 90 days for a household.
- **Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) Program** provides funding to "(1) engage homeless individuals and families living on the street; (2) improve the number and quality of emergency shelters for homeless individuals and families; (3) help operate these shelters; (4) provide essential services to shelter residents, (5) rapidly rehouse homeless individuals and families, and (6) prevent families/individuals from becoming homeless."<sup>10</sup>
- **Rapid rehousing** quickly moves homeless individuals into permanent housing by providing temporary rent subsidies and housing-focused case management, primarily in market-rate housing.

- **Transitional housing** provides subsidized housing for no longer than 24 months and is designed to move people experiencing homelessness into permanent housing.
- **Permanent supportive housing (PSH)** is subsidized, non-time-limited housing with support services for homeless households that include a member with a permanent disability.
- **Housing Programs for Veterans** may be available specifically for this group, in addition to all of the programs previously described. The HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) program pairs Housing Choice Voucher rental assistance for Veterans experiencing homelessness with case management and clinical services. The Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) is designed to rapidly re-house Veteran families experiencing homelessness and prevent homelessness for those at imminent risk due to a housing crisis. SSVF provides access to services including outreach, case management, and assistance in obtaining VA and other public benefits and time-limited financial assistance to cover rent, utilities, security deposits, and moving costs.





## ENDNOTES

- 1 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research. Worst Case Housing Needs: 2017 Report to Congress. August 2017. <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/Worst-Case-Housing-Needs.pdf>
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- 3 *Bust, Khadduri, and Gubits (2016).*
- 4 Bolen, E., D. Rosenbaum, S. Dean and B. Keith-Jennings, More than 500,000 Adults Will Lose SNAP Benefits in 2016 as Waivers Expire, Center on Budget & Policy Priorities, Washington, D.C. (March 2015). Retrieved from <https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/1-5-15fa.pdf>
- 5 Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness (ICPH)
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 SNAP to Skills, Securing Third-Party Partners for SNAP E&T Programs, July 2017, at [https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/snap/S2SBrief3\\_SecuringThirdPartyPartners.pdf](https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/snap/S2SBrief3_SecuringThirdPartyPartners.pdf)
- 8 Working to End Homelessness Toolkit, Heartland Alliance. <https://www.heartlandalliance.org/nationalinitiatives/field-building/weh-toolkit/>
- 9 A directory of Public Housing Authorities and the types of services they offer is available here: [https://www.hud.gov/program\\_offices/public\\_indian\\_housing/pha/contacts](https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/public_indian_housing/pha/contacts)
- 10 <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/EmergencySolutionsGrantsProgramFactSheet.pdf>



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