

# System Wide Diversion or *Assisted Rapid Resolution*



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The second installment of our Dynamic Prioritization series looks at system-wide diversion, or *assisted rapid resolution* (which is perhaps a more complete and descriptive name), as a proven client-focused strategy for reducing system inflow and freeing up limited resources for the most vulnerable persons. All communities should consider building system-wide assisted rapid resolution approaches and strategies into the CoC's coordinated entry approach for the following reasons:

- Assisted rapid resolution is a basic problem solving approach that can meet the housing stability needs of most persons seeking homeless assistance.
- All access points should build capacity to engage participants in an assisted rapid resolution conversation as an initial step in the coordinated entry engagement and assessment process.
- Assisted rapid resolution provides a human-centered, client-focused approach to problem solving that identifies and leverages the strengths inherent in every individual.
- Crisis response systems will function more efficiently when we reduce inflow into emergency shelter whenever possible.

## Introduction

Over the last half-decade, many communities have developed and implemented a uniform approach to identifying the people most in need in their communities and accelerating their access to housing and services, often through coordinated entry systems. This approach has worked well for many high-need, high-priority people who previously might not otherwise have had access to critical services—their needs are now being identified early, and they're being given priority for high-intensity housing solutions.

But what about those people whose scores on standardized assessments do not identify them as among the highest-acuity people in their communities? All too often, these individuals—whose needs may not be as severe as others around them, but who are nonetheless in need of assistance from homeless services providers—may never be prioritized for rapid re-housing (RRH), on the one hand, while being ineligible for permanent supportive housing (PSH), on the other. Put simply, they're stuck without a prioritized service strategy.

We've heard from many communities around the country who have been frustrated to find that coordinated entry, in their system, has meant that people who are experiencing a housing crisis without exceptionally high acuity scores are no longer receiving the same level services as they did in years past. In this post, we'll describe the **assisted rapid resolution approach** to solving this problem—what you might know as diversion—and talk about how it's provided, when it's provided, and the positive impacts it can have on persons experiencing a housing crisis and the systems of care designed to support them.

### What is assisted rapid resolution?

Assisted rapid resolution, simply put, takes the form of a problem solving conversation between an intake worker and a person seeking crisis services. The intake worker conducts a brief but intensive assessment to determine the circumstances contributing to the client's immediate housing crisis. The focus of the conversation is on clearly delineating the material conditions directly related to the client's choice to seek shelter at that moment, rather than long-standing poverty or behavioral health issues which might also be present. There's often no set assessment protocol, no standard set of services or resources offered, and long-term permanent housing placements are typically not the primary goal.

Isn't this just diversion? Not really, even though the core concept *is* derived from the practice of diversion, which many communities have deployed to prevent people experiencing a housing crisis from entering emergency shelter. Diversion, in that limited sense, was often used when a community lacked available shelter capacity, essentially as an answer to a resource constraint issue. More recently, however, diversion has also been understood as a client-focused approach appropriate for people seeking shelter who might be able to preserve their current housing or find safe, alternative housing with a little bit of assistance. This broader understanding of diversion led to assisted rapid resolution.

Unlike diversion, which is often implemented reactively in response to resource scarcity, assisted rapid resolution is a proactive way to help clients explore their own housing options earlier. It is:

- Client-centered—with a focus on the client's agency in resolving his or her own housing crisis;

- Flexible--all available housing options are creatively explored through a problem solving conversation; and
- Immediate--providers recognize a critical window of opportunity to act swiftly to resolve the housing crisis.

CoCs' effective use of the strategy will help to ensure that participants are able to quickly resolve their housing crisis on their own and, potentially, avoid shelter stays. In many instances emergency shelter enrollment is unavoidable and may actually be the safest or most appropriate interim solution on the client's trajectory back to stable, permanent housing—but it doesn't have to stop there. Remember, rapid resolution problem solving conversations can be just as effectively deployed during a client's shelter stay, especially if the client is unlikely to receive a referral to RRH or PSH within a short period of time.

### **What are emerging best practices in assisted rapid resolution?**

While the approach, timing and target population of assisted rapid resolution are all flexible, this strategy does require skilled staff who are well-trained and supported in the practice. If multiple staff and/or programs use the assisted rapid resolution approach, the community should standardize goals and objectives among all partners to ensure consistency. Uniform training of all staff will ensure that financial assistance resources, if used, are deployed consistently and clients receive the same quality problem solving assistance regardless of the location, timing, or staff person providing the help.

Effective staff will be attentive listeners and solution-oriented thinkers who ask open-ended questions to help clients identify housing options they hadn't considered or resolve housing problems that previously seemed intractable. Staff will be open and transparent about the pros and cons of each housing option. Staff will provide dispute resolution services so that landlord issues and relationship problems that are getting in the way of stable housing can be resolved. Most critically, though, staff will identify the strengths and resources present in each client and leverage those assets to support the client in exploring and securing appropriate housing options.

The typologies of homelessness are well documented. We now understand that most people experience homelessness transitionally, and stays in emergency

shelter usually represent a one-time crisis, for a short period of time. Analysis from some communities shows that the transitionally homeless population could represent as much as 75% of all persons who experience homelessness during the course of a year. ***Transitionally homeless persons are the exact population communities should target for assisted rapid resolution.*** Some communities have been able to reduce shelter admission by as much as 50% after instituting system-wide assisted rapid resolution strategies. Reducing shelter enrollments can profoundly impact system capacity, creating more flow and allowing limited resources to be directed to clients with the most intensive service and housing needs.