



Coordinated Entry Committee

9830 Patuxent Woods Drive • Columbia, MD 21046

Minutes of the October 13, 2020 Meeting

Webex

Attendance:

Department of Community Resources and Services Staff: Cara Baumgartner, Rose Burton, Jennifer Corcoran, Elizabeth Van Oeveren

Attendees: Jen Broderick, Cami Carr, Jennifer Dunson, Melissa FitzGibbon, Kevin Lee, Daniela McDonald, John Pomory, Linda Zumbrun

Linda Zumbrun opened the meeting at 10:36 am.

Report on Prioritization Workgroup

Staff reviewed the general function of the Prioritization Workgroup, which is to ensure the accuracy of the By-Name List, use the By-Name List to identify households for referral to permanent housing projects, and case conference households having difficulty obtaining housing or those who have significant needs for whom there is not a quick housing placement available. The Workgroup is comprised of agency program managers and supervisors so that those present are advocating not for their specific clients but looking across the full population for the most vulnerable households. When the Workgroup began, and for a long time thereafter, its time was consumed with identifying referrals for the then-current round of Housing Choice Voucher Program set-asides. This left little time to develop procedures other than implementing the prioritization standard.

When the COVID prioritization standard went into effect and was used for this year's round of set-aside vouchers, some members of the Workgroup expressed concern that the use of sheltered status was causing vulnerable people who had come indoors to be missed. However, when openings in PSH occurred and the chronic eligibility criteria applied, people appeared satisfied that the appropriate people were referred. And, when the Committee delegated the discussion of potentially amending the COVID prioritization standard to the Workgroup, the discussion focused on the consistent application of the COVID standard across those in shelter, RRH, and unsheltered locations and did not expand to whether the standard itself should be amended.

However, at the last meeting of the Workgroup, in which referrals for openings at Leola Dorsey were discussed, concerns were again expressed about implementation of the COVID prioritization standard. Because the Board was about to go into governance training with the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) and would be finalizing the structure and role of the committees, staff decided that rather than only moving forward with the current referral process, another meeting should be held to review the role of the Workgroup and to allow its members to discuss the COVID prioritization standard.

Staff recommended to the Committee that the COVID standard be left in place as-is given (1) the expectation that there will be another wave of COVID cases, and (2) the likely coming discussion of NAEH's recommendation that our non-COVID prioritization standard move away from being based on subpopulations and to length of homeless episode. Additionally, constantly changing the standard effectively negates having a standard, and the process uses time that needs to be invested in other topics, such as developing a policy for bridging households from RRH to PSH. However, staff requested direction from the Committee about whether the Prioritization Workgroup should be empowered to recommend another amendment to the Committee.

Members of the Committee felt that the switch from the usual to the COVID prioritization standard was appropriate. They also expressed a desire to have a prioritization standard that does not change frequently, but does not change frequently because it truly works for the community. A policy for a RRH-PSH bridge and for the needs of households fleeing violence were noted to be important topics to be included. The possibility of tracking outcomes for households meeting the chronic definition housed through RRH but not bridged to PSH was discussed. An attendee shared the view that the COVID prioritization standard is appropriate for shelter but is not effective for housing, stating there are people in shelter who are more vulnerable than those in unsheltered locations. This led to a discussion of how to define vulnerability, which was identified as scoring on the VI-SPDAT.

Staff raised the need to have a clear prioritization standard that is adhered to over time rather than adjusted on a person by person basis. An objective process is a tenet of Coordinated Entry. Additionally, it is important to distinguish between whether the COVID prioritization standard needs to be changed vs. whether there are not enough resources in the community.

As the discussion turned to a method for determining whether a particular prioritization standard was the right one, there was clarification that seeing the intended outcome(s) over times is what would measure success. In the case of the standard prioritization, it was designed to address chronic homelessness and we have now reached a point at which of all the households known to the providers in the system, there are eight who meet the chronic definition. Thus, that standard has accomplished what it was intended to do.

The Committee then considered whether there has been a significant change in circumstances relative to COVID in Howard County. There has been a partial opening of entities such as stores and restaurants where those who are unsheltered could access hand washing facilities, but they still need to practice social distancing. Staff shared the belief that we are still in the midst of COVID, that those in shelter can socially distance and so are less likely to contract COVID, and that it is too early to change direction with the prioritization standard. A Committee member noted that we are also in the process of implementing

Move-On and will revisit the policy for a RRH-PSH bridge soon, and the members generally agreed that there was not a strong reason for needing to change the COVID prioritization standard and we should proceed as previously decided.

System Evaluation

Staff suggested that information be gathered on the kinds of client feedback already being gathered by system agencies before the Committee considers any additional steps. This will be discussed at the November meeting, as the October meeting will cover issues coming out of the Board Governance training.

The meeting concluded at 11:35 am.