

Create and expand housing supports for adults with behavioral health conditions

Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5187; Section 215(66); Chapter 475; Laws of 2023

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Acknowledgements

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Executive summary

ESSB 5187 (2023), Section 215(66)

\$5,623,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2024, \$5,623,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2025, and \$3,748,000 of the general fund—federal appropriation is provided solely to maintain and expand access to no barrier, and low-barrier programs using a Housing First model designed to assist and stabilize housing supports for adults with behavioral health conditions. Housing supports and services shall be made available with no requirement for treatment for their behavioral health condition and must be individualized to the needs of the individual. The Authority and Department of Commerce shall collaborate on this effort and must submit a status report to the Office of Financial Management and the appropriate committees of the legislature by December 31, 2023.

The purpose of this report is to provide information on the Housing First program implemented in Washington State, January 2023. Housing First is defined as “a homeless assistance approach that prioritizes providing permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness, thus ending their homelessness and serving as a platform from which they can pursue personal goals and improve their quality of life” (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2022). The Principles of Housing First include (quoted from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development):

- Homelessness is first and foremost a housing crisis and can be addressed through the provision of safe and affordable housing.
- All people experiencing homelessness can achieve housing stability in permanent housing.
- Everyone is “housing ready.”
- Many people experience improvements in quality of life, in the areas of health, mental health, substance use, and employment, as a result of achieving housing.
- People experiencing homelessness have the right to self-determination and should be treated with dignity and respect.
- The exact configuration of housing and services depends upon the needs and preferences of the population.

Highlights of this report include:

- Overview of the evidence-based practice of Housing First
- Housing First Grantees
- Staffing model and program development
- Year One program data (January 2023 - June 2023)
- Technical assistance and consulting services provided to organizations

Background

The state projected a two percent increase in people experiencing homelessness since the start of the pandemic. In the Identifying Homeless and Unstably Housed DSHS Clients in Multiple Service Systems report (Shah, 2012), Research and Data Analysis was able to leverage data from multiple systems to identify the characteristics of the unhoused population. The report indicates that unhoused individuals were more likely than the overall DSHS clientele to:

- Be African American and Native American
- Live in high density urban areas
- Have mental illness and substance abuse conditions
- Receive medical treatment for injuries
- Receive cash and/or food assistance

According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the Housing First model is a homeless assistance approach that prioritizes providing permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness. Housing First does not require people experiencing homelessness to address all their problems including behavioral health conditions or to graduate through a series of programs or services before they can access housing. (Housing First, 2022). The 2022 Point in Time Count conducted by the Department of Commerce has identified 12,909 individuals as unsheltered. This is an increase of 16 percent from 2020. Of the 12,909 unsheltered individuals, 7,435 people self-identified as having a mental health condition and 6,661 self-identified as having a substance use disorder.

The goal of the “Low Barrier and No Barrier Housing First Initiative” first funded through ESSB 5693 (2022), Section 215(96) was to align construction and/or acquisition of multiple units, housing subsidies, and individualized services for individuals who identify as chronically homeless and/or very low-income individuals and families experiencing behavioral health conditions. The initial cost proposal submitted for this project included \$2.5 million for the Department of Commerce budget to fund capital expansion of units dedicated to the Housing First Initiative and provide project-based vouchers or rental subsidies to give individuals multiple housing options.

The Housing First program is intended to:

1. Move people into housing directly from streets and shelters without preconditions of treatment acceptance or compliance.
2. Have the provider offer robust support services to the housing project. These services are predicated on assertive engagement, not coercion.
3. Not require participation in services as a condition for continued tenancy.
4. Embrace a harm reduction approach to addiction rather than mandating abstinence. At the same time, the provider must be prepared to support resident’s commitments to recovery.
5. Provide residents with leases and tenant protections under the law.
6. Be implemented as either a project-based or scattered site model.

The Department of Commerce did not receive dedicated capital or operating funds for the Housing First Initiative to construct and/or acquire units or housing vouchers/subsidies. In response, the Health Care Authority (HCA) and Department of Commerce worked closely to leverage existing housing capital projects to marry Housing First services with existing and future housing options.

In April 2023, Catholic Charities of Pasco opened Bishop Skylstad Commons (pictured below), a building with 60 single units of permanent supportive housing (PSH). This is the primary implementation site for the Housing First pilot grant in Pasco, a rural and farmworker community with a population that identifies at least 50 percent Hispanic or Latino.

Image 1: Bishop Skylstad Commons, the newly opened building by Catholic Charities of Pasco in April 2023



Family Support Center of South Sound, The Landing, (pictured below) will finish construction in early November 2023. The Landing is a permanent affordable housing with supportive services project with 62 units. These units include one, two, and three-bedrooms apartments, for families with children and survivors of domestic violence. The space includes a leasing office, supportive services offices, laundry facilities, a community room, and an outside play area. The Landing is a permanent affordable housing project that will include Housing First services.

Image 2: The Landing, Family Support center of South Sound.



Operationalizing the efforts

Two Housing First Service expansion information sessions were held in September 2022. The purpose of the information sessions were to orient agencies interested in adding or expanding Housing First and harm reduction models, provide an opportunity for questions, and review the expectations to receive funds under ESSB 5693 (2022). A total of 18 agencies in eight regions applied in October of 2022 and a total of ten agencies were selected in November 2022 across eight regions. In January 2023, HCA executed contracts for the startup of all ten agencies. Contract terms required each Housing First contractor to develop a project plan that included action steps towards implementing Housing First low barrier programming. The project plan included:

- The management structure, policies and procedures, evaluation components, a business plan, and a community outreach plan .
- A plan to obtain certification/licensing/credentialing.
- A fidelity plan to stay to the the evidence-based models of Housing First and harm reduction.

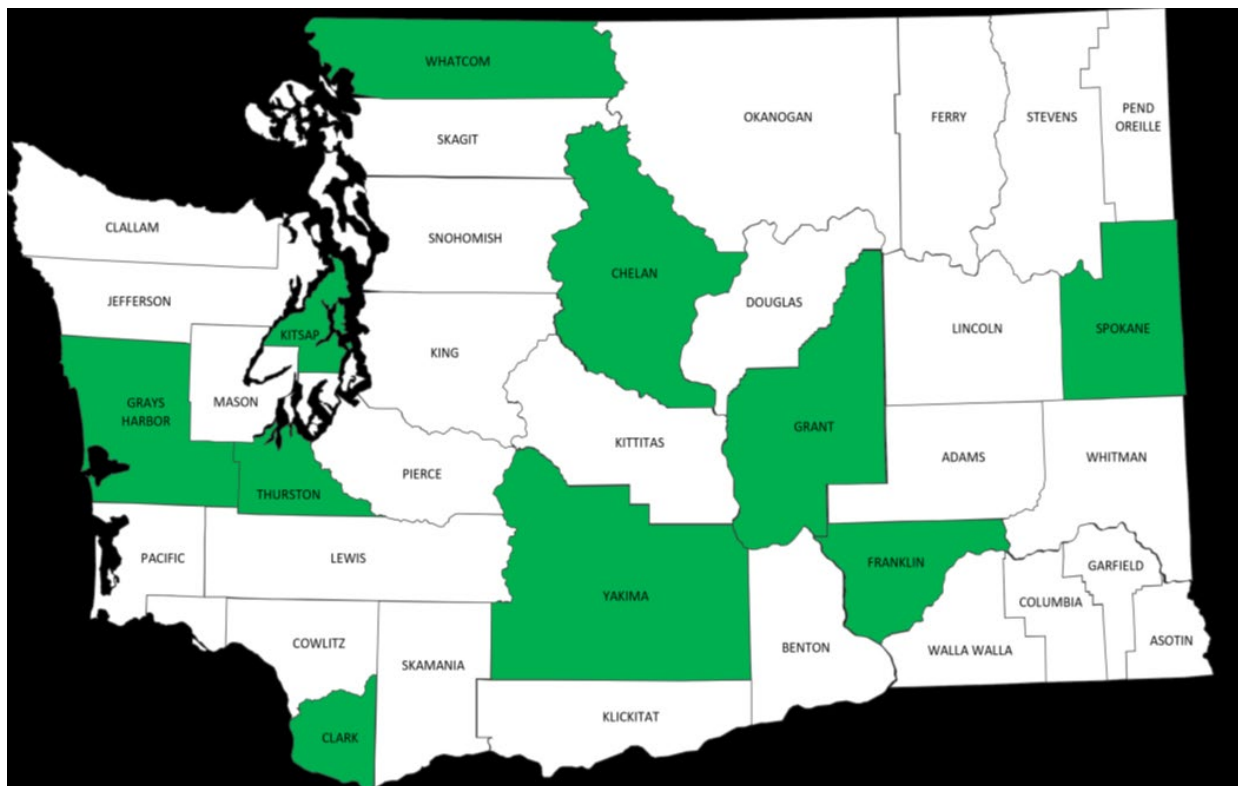
Progress towards implementation was reviewed monthly by the HCA Housing First program Manager. This included close monitoring of the hiring of new staff specifically for HCA Housing First services.

All Housing First programming includes voluntary wraparound support services and individualized care planning to support progress. All enrolled Housing First participants are offered both supportive housing services and/or peer support services as part of their care plan.

Locations of Housing First grantees by region

- **Great Rivers:** The Moore Wright Group (Aberdeen)
- **Salish:** Kitsap Homes of Compassion (Bremerton)
- **Thurston-Mason:** Family Support Center (Olympia)
- **Southwest:** SeaMar Community Health Center (Vancouver)
- **North Sound:** Opportunity Council (Bellingham)
- **North Central:** YWCA North Central Washington (Wenatchee)
- **Greater Columbia:** HopeSource (Ellensburg), Yakima Neighborhood Health Services (Yakima), Catholic Charities (Pasco)
- **Spokane:** Catholic Charities (Spokane)

Image 3: HCA Housing First grantee regional map



Funding

Total Budget Amount FY23 \$6,027,000

Total Budget Amount FY24 \$5,623,000

The amount awarded per Housing First contractor was up to \$646,899 for year one and \$596,399 for year two and three. Budget per agency is based on the following staffing model:

- **Full team:** Two Housing Specialists, two Certified Peer Counselors, one supervisor, one property manager.
- **Full team minus property manager:** Two Housing Specialists, two Certified Peer Counselors, one supervisor.
- **Half team:** One Housing Specialist, one Certified Peer Counselor, and one supervisor.
- **Other budget line items include:**
 - Startup costs for year one
 - Housing First contractor personnel, direct program expenses, administration and overhead
 - Client supportive services funds
 - Technical assistance to agencies
 - Program evaluation
 - One HCA Housing First Manager full-time equivalent (FTE)

Technical assistance and consulting

The consulting agency for this project is Advocates for Human Potential, Inc (AHP), a nationally recognized leader in health and human services. The lead on this project is Sherri Downing, AHP Senior Program Manager. AHP created, hosted, and presented three webinars for the Housing First staff throughout year one:

- **Webinar 1:** Homelessness, Housing First and Harm Reduction
 - April 6, 2023
- **Webinar 2:** Roles and Boundaries – expectations for your staff; professional boundaries
 - May 4, 2023
- **Webinar 3:** The Realities of the Work – overview of behavioral health disorders; vicarious trauma as a staff member
 - June 1, 2023

In June 2023, HCA hosted a Housing First Conference in Wenatchee, WA. This was an in-person event allowing all ten teams to come together for networking and team building. The topics for breakout sessions included:








- Housing First, not Housing Only: The stigma of homelessness and a harm reduction approach
- Building Connections: Outreach and Engagement
- Permanent Supportive Housing Principles
- Peer Organizations and Community
- I am housed, now what? Supported Employment
- Implicit Bias / DEI

Housing First aggregated data from January 1 to June 30, 2023

In year one, HCA contracted with Research Data Analysis (RDA) to collect, monitor, and evaluate demographic and service data. In year two, HCA contracted with the Department of Commerce to develop a designated entry point within the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) to better collect and evaluate outreach and service outcomes.

This report is intended to monitor the Housing First program. The report details clients served, demographics, and services and referrals provided during year 1 (January 1, 2023 – June 30, 2023).

Table 1: Housing First – Total Clients Served January 1, 2023 – June 30, 2023

SITE	NUMBER	
Opportunity Council	90	
The Moore Wright Group	80	
Kitsap Homes of Compassion	47	
Family Support Center South Sound	46	
Catholic Charities – Pasco	46	
SeaMar	45	
Yakima Neighborhood Health Services	32	
Catholic Charities – Spokane	24	
YWCA Neighborhood Health Services	*	
Hope Source	*	
Total	408	

Data note: Table 1 displays the total number of clients served by each site during the year one enrollment period.

Table 2: Housing First – Year 1 Client Demographics

	NUMBER	PERCENT
Total events/services	2,584	100%
Unduplicated individuals	408	100%
RACE/ETHNICITY		
American Indian, Alaska Native, or Indigenous	40	10%
Asian or Asian American	*	*
Black, African American, or African	29	7%
Hispanic or Latin(a/e/o)	29	7%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	11	3%
White or Caucasian	280	69%
Unknown	47	12%
AGE		
18-29	60	15%
30-54	221	54%
55+	124	30%
Unknown	3	1%

Data note: Table 2 displays the distribution of clients served by their race/ethnicity and age.

Note: Observations fewer than 11 are asterisked and suppressed per the HCA data suppression policy. Race/Ethnicity measures are not mutually exclusive; therefore, clients may be counted in more than race/ethnicity category.

Table 3: Housing First – Year 1 Services and Referrals

	NUMBER	PERCENT
Total events/services	2,584	100%
SERVICE TYPE		
Peer services	539	21%
Supportive housing services	905	35%
SUPPORT SERVICE PROVIDED		
Application fees	24	1%
Harm reduction supplies	35	1%
Home sustainability items (e.g., mattress, small appliances)	70	3%
Identification documents	52	2%
Other or additional request approved by HCA	791	31%
Past due utilities	20	1%
Survival gear	89	3%
Transportation	59	2%

Data note: Table 3 displays the total number of clients that received the specified services.

Table 4: Housing First – Year 1 Living Situation at Enrollment and Housing Obtained during Enrollment

	NUMBER	PERCENT
Total clients	408	100%
LIVING SITUATION		
Unstably housed	146	36%
Houseless	209	51%
Temporarily sheltered	53	13%
HOUSING OBTAINED		
Permanent housing	108	26%
Temporary/transitional housing/recovery Home ¹	51	13%
No housing obtained (the individual remained unhoused or was already housed upon program enrollment)	249	61%

Data note: Table 4 displays clients' living situations at the time of enrollment and the type of housing obtained during enrollment.

Created for the Health Care Authority by the DSHS Research and Data Analysis Division per WA State ESSB 5187 (2024), Section 215 (66). SEPTEMBER 2023 (Noel-Harrison, Speaker)

¹ This category includes a small number (e.g., <11) of other housing situations such as staying with a friend or family member.

Conclusion

Year one Housing First start-up included hiring and training agency staff the across the state. The majority of the ten HCA Housing First contractors were able to hire and start services within three months of their executed contract in January 2023. Agencies in rural areas experienced challenges with recruitment but within six months all sites were fully staffed and providing services. State Fiscal Year 24 continuation contracts were executed in July 2023.

In July 2023, Housing First contractors started collecting service and outcome data in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) administered by the Department of Commerce. Services and outcome reports are due to the HCA Housing First Program Manager monthly and reviewed with each agency quarterly. A few months into the data gathering using HMIS, the quality of the data provided improved and a greater variety in the services were offered to program participants.

Starting in August 2023, the HCA Housing First Program Manager began conducting onsite visits to evaluate fidelity to Housing First and harm reduction, documentation (eligibility, care planning and progress notes) best practices, and recommendations for technical assistance.

As the program moves forward into this second full year of operation, the focus will include:

- Enhanced technical assistance for providers and staff.
- Robust data collection.
- Careful onsite and virtual monitoring.

The Housing First program will continue to reach underserved and marginalized populations and assist individuals experiencing homelessness or at risk of losing their housing.