

# Ohio Operational Protocol

Version 1.1

Effective April 30, 2009

## B.9. Housing

### **a. Process for documenting type of residence to which participants are transitioning**

Transition Coordinators are responsible for helping HOME Choice participants to obtain qualified residences. They will document information regarding the qualified residence on the HOME Choice enrollment form and forward it to ODJFS.

Transition Coordinators also will report the type of housing supplement or benefit for which the demonstration participant qualifies. Transition Coordinators are responsible for verifying required licensure when HOME Choice participants move to a qualified residence that is a licensed facility. Transition Coordinators will conduct the verification through contact with the appropriate licensing entity.

Once the person is enrolled in the HOME Choice project, the participant's case manager is responsible to report any changes in the participant's qualified residence. The case manager will report this information to the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) for tracking using a "Change in Status Form". ODJFS will track the qualified residence of all HOME Choice participants.

### **b. Methods to assure sufficient supply of qualified residences**

#### **i. Existing or planned inventories and/or needs assessments of accessible and affordable housing**

Ohio has a limited supply of accessible rental units. Public and private housing complexes that receive federal money are generally required to have 5 percent of their rental units accessible to people with mobility impairments and 2 percent of rental units accessible to individuals with hearing or vision impairments. However, the availability of these units to people with disabilities has declined due to inconsistent enforcement of accessibility requirements and most publicly and privately subsidized housing complexes admitting only persons who are elderly.

There is not sufficient data to document the actual number of accessible housing units for people with disabilities in Ohio. However, assumptions can be made about unmet housing needs based on the number of people with mobility and sensory impairments. While programs such as the Low Income Housing Tax Credit program have worked to increase the number of accessible housing units, affordability continues to be a concern.

In addition, there is little information about the location of accessible units available among existing housing stock. Many developers of affordable housing do not include information about accessibility in their property lists. For this reason, in some

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communities, accessible units remain vacant reinforcing the misperception that there is no unmet need for affordable and accessible housing units.

According to the Social Security Administration, in 2004, 168,018 non-elderly adults residing in Ohio received monthly Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits of \$579 a month. In addition, there were 278,951 people (including spouses and children of individuals with disabilities) receiving monthly Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits of an average of \$862 a month.

Yet a study done in 2004 showed that in Ohio, an average of 87.8 percent of SSI benefits were needed to rent a one-bedroom unit and an average of 76.4 percent of SSI benefits were needed to rent a studio or efficiency unit. The disparity between income and housing costs clearly demonstrates the need for people with disabilities to live in some type of subsidized housing.

The Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program, the largest source of funding for affordable housing in Ohio, awards tax credits to approximately 90 projects a year. These projects target individuals or families who earn an average of 40 to 60 percent of the Area Median Gross Income and are thus unaffordable to most people with disabilities.

Seventy-three of Ohio's 88 counties offer rental assistance through the Housing Choice Voucher Program. Currently, there are 84,509 Section 8 Vouchers being used by low income tenants in Ohio and 64,413 people on a waiting list. Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) are required to collect data on the characteristics of the people who are on the Housing Choice Voucher Program waiting lists, including information on whether a person has a disability. However, not all PHAs collect and report the data. The 65 Ohio PHAs that do collect this information report more than 10,000 individuals with a disability, representing 19.7 percent of the total wait list population of 50,807.

Currently, there are 52,000 public housing units located in 50 of Ohio's 88 counties. However, 34,118 individuals remain on waiting lists, and many Public Housing Authorities (PHA) wait lists are so long that they are often closed. As with the Housing Choice Voucher Program, PHAs are required to collect statistics on the number of people on the public housing waiting list who have a disability. However, this information is not collected consistently across all PHAs. The 45 PHAs that collect specific information on people with disabilities report 32,858 people on their waiting lists, 5,410 or 16.5 percent of who have an identified disability.

"Mainstream Vouchers" are Housing Choice Vouchers set aside exclusively for people with disabilities. They are funded through the Section 811 tenant-based rental assistance program and receive five-year annual contribution contracts. Beginning in 1997, PHAs were eligible to apply for these vouchers and in 1999 non-profit organizations were also permitted to apply.

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Currently, 700 Mainstream Vouchers, awarded to seven PHAs and two non-profit organizations, are being used in Ohio. In addition, 29 PHAs in Ohio have been awarded 4,378 special purpose vouchers set-aside for people with disabilities. The one-year renewable contracts include vouchers for mainstream housing opportunities for persons with disabilities and rental assistance for non-elderly persons with disabilities related to certain types of Section 8 project-based developments.

Due to challenges with reporting mechanisms it is not clear if these vouchers are, in fact, being used by a person with a disability, and once the voucher is turned over, it is reassigned to a person with a disability.

## **ii. Methods to address identified shortages**

To begin to address issues around the lack of a comprehensive inventory of affordable and accessible units, ODJFS partnered first with the Ohio Department of Aging (ODA) and later with the Ohio Housing Finance Agency (OHFA), the Ohio Department of Development (ODOD) and the Developmental Disabilities Council (DDC) in the development of a web-based housing locator. Using Real Choice Systems Change grant monies, ODJFS was able to leverage additional funds for the project from these agencies.

This team of state organizations worked with an advisory group comprised of consumers, advocates, and other state agencies to develop a user-friendly web-site called the Ohio Rental Housing Locator ([www.OhioHousingLocator.org](http://www.OhioHousingLocator.org)). The site became operational in September 2007 and features an interactive database that provides searchable information on affordable, accessible rental housing throughout the state, as well as links to other housing options and resources.

The housing locator will permit landlords to advertise their properties without charge. In addition to providing statewide exposure for their units, landlords and property managers can use the service to help manage their inventories and waiting lists. As it is web-based, housing providers and users can access the information 24 hours a day, seven days a week, from their home, office or public computer. To date, there are 803 properties listed on the website with at least one property in each of Ohio's 88 counties. The site is still in its infancy and aggressive marketing efforts are underway to encourage more landlords to register their properties. Attachment 29 contains print screens from the Housing Locator.

## **iii. Plans to work with Housing Finance Agencies, Public Housing authorities and other housing programs**

ODJFS plans to work with housing finance agencies, public housing authorities, and other housing programs to promote available, affordable, and accessible housing. Strategies for doing so are outlined in the following paragraphs.

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## iv. Strategies to promote available, affordable and accessible housing

ODJFS established a Housing Workgroup as part of the process leading to the development of HOME Choice. The HOME Choice Housing Work Group consists of consumers, advocates, state agency staff, housing professionals and providers representing a cross section of the disability, aging and housing communities. The group sought workable solutions that would align with Ohio's goals for the MFP demonstration project. Activities included:

- Identifying barriers to housing faced by HOME Choice participants;
- Developing recommendations to increase the supply of affordable, accessible, integrated housing available to not only HOME Choice participants but to the aging and disability community as a whole; and
- Developing processes that support HOME Choice participants in their search for a qualified residence as they transition from an institution to the community.

The Housing Workgroup will continue throughout the demonstration working on the following strategies.

### Short-Term Strategies (targeted toward the goal of relocating 2,231 MFP participants)

**Recommendation 1:** Increase the access of HOME Choice participants to rental assistance and public housing.

- Work with local PHAs and their state organization, the Ohio Housing Authorities Conference.
  - Include a PHA representative in the HOME Choice Housing Workgroup.
  - Educate PHA boards and staff about HOME Choice.
  - Attend OHAC Executive Leadership meeting to educate PHA directors about HOME Choice and the key role the PHA plays in the success of the project.
  - Encourage PHAs to include preferences for HOME Choice participants on their waiting lists.

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- Support people with disabilities, disability advocacy groups and other efforts to advocate for affordable housing for HOME Choice participants.
  - Educate people with disabilities, disabilities advocacy groups and others about HOME Choice and the key role housing plays in the success of people with disabilities relocating from institutional settings to the community.
  - Provide information and resources to people with disabilities and disability advocacy groups regarding PHA planning processes, waiting list and public hearings.
  - Provide information and resources to people with disabilities and disability advocacy groups about private, federally assisted housing programs, as well as federal, state and local housing processes.

**Recommendation 2:** Provide information and support regarding local housing resources to Transition Coordination Providers.

- The ODJFS Housing Coordinator will train Transition Coordination Providers, consumers, advocacy groups, etc. on the use of the web-based housing locator.
- Provide one-on-one technical assistance regarding housing issues to providers of Transition Coordination.
- The ODJFS Housing Coordinator will be available to provide technical assistance to Transition Coordination Providers, which will include information on fair housing laws, local housing planning processes, home modification resources, and waiting list information.

**Recommendation 3:** Recruit property managers and landlords throughout the state to register and populate the Housing Locator website.

- Within the first 24 months of the HOME Choice Demonstration Project the ODJFS Housing Coordinator will attend at least 10 Housing Conferences to showcase the Housing Locator web site to federal/state funded housing projects.
- Owners of all Low-Income Housing Tax Credit properties funded in 2008 and in the future will be required by the Ohio Housing Finance Agency (OHFA) to list their properties on the Ohio Housing Locator as soon as they placed in service.
- Using grant funds from the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council, ODA will market the website.

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- Provide education and technical assistance in the use of Ohio's web-based housing locator and other web-based housing resources that may be available in specific geographic areas.

**Recommendation 4:** Educate elected officials at the local, state and federal level about the crucial role housing plays in the success of the HOME Choice project. Specifically:

- A legislative briefing for members of the Ohio General Assembly has already been held.
- The Ohio Senate and House Leadership have been asked to appoint a member from each party to participate in the HOME Choice Planning and Advisory Group. To date, two senators have been appointed, and members from the Ohio House of representatives are expected to be appointed soon.
- HOME Choice Housing Workgroup members will work to educate the legislative liaisons and communication offices within state departments whose target populations may be impacted by HOME Choice.
- HOME Choice Housing Workgroup members will encourage their agency's legislative liaisons to educate the Legislative Services Commission
- Support potential participants' and advocacy groups' efforts to educate policymakers at the federal level.
- Support HOME Choice Local Housing and Services Cooperatives, as described below, as a mechanism to communicate with local elected officials.

**Recommendation 5:** Examine ways of educating potential participants who are interested in shared living arrangements.

- Include a question about potential participants' interest in shared living arrangements: "Are you interested in learning about more shared living arrangements"?
- Develop resource materials to educate consumers about roommate information and issues. Topics may include advantages and disadvantages of having a roommate, how to choose a roommate, conflict resolution, and sharing household expenses.

**Recommendation 6:** Empower people with disabilities and the agencies and individuals that support them to work together to obtain full access and inclusion for people with disabilities in all aspects of life. To accomplish this goal, regional collaboratives, known as Local Housing and Services Cooperatives, will be established, strengthened and

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sustained to increase understanding of the desires and needs of people with disabilities and to improve how public resources are allocated.

A HOME Choice Local Housing and Services Cooperatives is defined as a broad-based group of persons, whose mission is driven by persons with disabilities, including providers of affordable housing, and service and transportation supports, working together to address the needs of people with disabilities in their community. Through partnership with the HOME Choice Housing Workgroup, these collaboratives will work to improve access to housing, transportation and supports that are integrated, accessible, and affordable.

The Local Housing and Services Cooperatives will develop, expand and strengthen disability advocacy efforts on a regional basis across the state by building on existing collaborative efforts and encouraging formation of new collaboratives in areas of Ohio where they do not exist. They will educate communities about the needs and desires of people with disabilities and seek to:

- Empower people with disabilities to impact the allocation of local resources for housing, services, and transportation.
- Improve the understanding of local housing, transportation and service resources to the needs of persons with disabilities;
- Increase the percentage of housing resources used by persons with disabilities in affordable, accessible and integrated settings in the community.
- Improve the availability of affordable and accessible transportation in local communities.
- Improve understanding at the state and local level of barriers to achieving integration for persons with disabilities in their communities and initiate activities to remove those barriers.
- Support local, state and federal legislation and policy initiatives that promote a zero step entrance, wide interior doors and a usable bathroom on the first floor of newly constructed homes.
- Serve as a vehicle for people with disabilities and advocates to participate in local and state housing, transportation, workforce and community planning.

**Recommendation 7:** The HOME Choice Housing Workgroup will encourage and assist in the development of Local Housing and Services Cooperatives for persons with disabilities. The committee will:

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- Contact existing cooperatives and partners across the state and identify lessons learned.
- Develop recommended guidelines for cooperatives on cross-disability membership, tools for advocacy, and state level partnerships.
- Provide information to Local Housing and Services Cooperatives to enhance their effectiveness in affecting local resource allocation, including:
  - HOME Choice commitments/activities anticipated within their catchments' areas, and potential for partnerships with those efforts.
  - Ways to impact housing plans to ensure that affordable, accessible and integrated housing is available to persons with disabilities.
  - Data available on persons with disabilities in the collaborative's catchment area to improve planning efforts on behalf of persons with disabilities.
  - Lessons learned from other cooperative efforts.
  - Identification of resources and potential partnerships in housing, services, transportation, employment, and other areas to address the needs of persons with disabilities.

## **Long-Term Strategies (targeted toward long-term systems change)**

**Recommendation 1:** Maintain a collaborative state level housing committee to address barriers to affordable, accessible housing for HOME Choice participants.

- The HOME Choice Housing Workgroup will continue to meet and monitor the effectiveness of short-term housing strategies, collect data needed for those strategies that are to be measured, and advocate for the long-term strategies.
- The HOME Choice Housing Workgroup will coordinate activities with Ohio's Inter-Agency Council on Homelessness and Affordable Housing, which consists of cabinet-level directors from each state agency that is involved with housing and workgroups comprised of state agency staff, commissions, service providers, and advocates. The Council operates under the authority of the director of the Ohio Department of Development.

**Recommendation 2:** Explore ways to underwrite the development costs of tax credit properties that would allow for the production of a sufficient number of affordable units for persons whose income is limited to Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

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- Educate persons with disabilities on ways to effect policy change within the Qualified Allocation Plan (QAP) process.
- Work with the Ohio Housing Finance Agency to identify creative funding streams that may assist in underwriting some development costs.
- Examine other states' best practices.

**Recommendation 3:** Advocate for extended housing options and explore changes to Medicaid financial eligibility requirements as part of Ohio's Unified Long-Term Care Budget.

- Explore the feasibility of the development of a tenant-based rental assistance program for HOME Choice participants during the FY10-11 budget development process.
- Examine the use of potential funding sources including the Unified Long-Term care Budget and Ohio Department of Development (ODOD) Home Funds for a tenant-based rental assistance program.
- Work with the OHFA and ODOD to develop rental assistance programs that target people transitioning from institutional settings.
- Allow persons entering a NF or ICF-MR who expect to return home within nine months to keep a larger portion of their income in order to maintain their home.
- Allow HOME Choice participants, prior to their relocation, to keep a portion of their income in order to save for housing expenses.