

# Supportive Housing under the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA)

March 2014, Publication #CM35.01

## 1. What is permanent supportive housing?

Permanent supportive housing is affordable housing that offers voluntary services to support low-income individuals with disabilities who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. "Permanent" means that there is no limit on length of stay. You can live there as long as you follow the rules in the rental agreement.

## 2. Does the MHSA fund housing?

Yes. In 2006, the MHSA Housing Program received \$400 million to build or fix up permanent supportive housing for people with mental health disabilities. Although the program is a significant source of financial support for supportive housing, its resources are limited. The program's original goal was 10,000 units of permanent supportive housing. However, in April, 2013, the state Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) reported the goal as 2,500 units, with 1,095 of those units ready for occupancy. DHCS also reported that a total of \$117,496,607 in MHSA funds had been disbursed through March, 2013.

### 3. Who is eligible for MHSA supportive housing?

MHSA supportive housing is targeted for people who are low-income and who are homeless or at risk of being homeless. Eligibility also requires that you are an adult with a serious mental illness or a child or adolescent with a serious emotional disturbance, as defined under state law.

### 4. Who qualifies as being “homeless”?

A person who lives on the streets or lacks a fixed and regular night time residence is considered homeless. Being “homeless” includes living in a shelter, motel, or in other temporary living situations without tenant rights.

#### Who is “at risk of being homeless”?

At risk of being homeless includes but is not limited to the following:

- a. transition-age youth exiting the child welfare or juvenile justice systems;
- b. people discharged from crisis and transitional residential settings;
- c. people discharged from hospitals;
- d. people discharged from skilled nursing facilities that have a certified special treatment program for people with mental disorders;
- e. people discharged from mental health rehabilitation centers; and
- f. people discharged from city or county jails.

### 5. What type of housing may be available?

The MHSA Housing Program covers both rental housing and shared housing. You may qualify for an apartment or for a bedroom in a house.

## 6. What supportive services may be available?

All county applications for MHSA Housing Program funding must include a supportive services plan that provides for appropriate service options. This could include crisis intervention services, peer support, or public benefits counseling. Such assistance enables eligible persons to live more independently in the community. You can accept or reject services and not lose your housing.

## 7. How much does supportive housing cost the tenant?

Rents for supportive housing vary depending on the type of housing and how it is subsidized. Typically, rent will be no more than 30% of a tenant's available income. Contact the MHSA Housing Program or your county's mental health or behavioral health department for specific information regarding cost.

## 8. Who determines a person's eligibility for supportive housing?

Your county behavioral or mental health department can tell you if you are eligible.

## 9. How can I apply for supportive housing?

Contact your local behavioral or mental health department for information about how to apply for MHSA supportive housing in your area. See the following link for a directory of county mental health access lines:

<http://www.dmh.ca.gov/docs/CMHDA.pdf>

## 10. What if MHSA supportive housing is full?

The MHSA intends to "provide state and local funds to adequately meet the needs of all children and adults who can be identified and enrolled in programs under this measure." However, if supportive housing programs are full, counties can open waiting lists so that eligible persons may obtain assistance when available. Contact your local mental health or behavioral health department for information about waiting lists in your area.

## 11. Is there anything I can do if the county denies my request for supportive housing?

Yes. You can ask for a written explanation of how the county determines who gets MHSA supportive housing. You can also ask if the county has an MHSA Issue Resolution Process to address denials of access to MHSA supportive housing. If your county does not have an Issue Resolution Process, you can request that one be established. You can also bring the issue to the attention of your county mental health board or commission. In addition, you can contact an advocate or attorney for assistance.

## 12. Where can I find more information on MHSA Supportive Housing?

- You can get more information on MHSA supportive housing from your county mental health or behavioral health department.
- The California Department of Health Care Financing publishes a Tool Kit for MHSA supportive housing:  
<http://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/MH/Documents/MHSAToolkit-Final.pdf>.
- The California Housing Finance Agency also has information on MHSA supportive housing:  
<http://www.calhfa.ca.gov/multifamily/mhsa/process/MHSABackground.pdf>
- For information on some of the state's MHSA-funded programs, see:  
<http://www.calhfa.ca.gov/multifamily/mhsa/projects/index.htm>

We want to hear from you! After reading this fact sheet please take this short survey and give us your feedback.

English version: <http://fs12.formsite.com/disabilityrightsca/form54/index.html>

Spanish version: <http://fs12.formsite.com/disabilityrightsca/form55/index.html>

*Disability Rights California is funded by a variety of sources, for a complete list of funders, go to <http://www.disabilityrightsca.org/Documents/ListofGrantsAndContracts.html>.*

***The California Mental Health Services Authority (CaMHSA) is an organization of county governments working to improve mental health outcomes for individuals, families and communities. Prevention and Early Intervention programs implemented by CaMHSA are funded by counties through the voter-approved Mental Health Services Act (Prop 63). Prop. 63 provides the funding and framework needed to expand mental health services to previously underserved populations and all of California's diverse communities.***



WELLNESS • RECOVERY • RESILIENCE

