

# Housing as Home

## Allegheny County Office of Behavioral Health Permanent Supportive Housing Strategic Plan

November 2005

### Plan Aims to Create 220-240 New Housing Units

The Allegheny County Office of Behavioral Health (OBH) understands the barriers to affordable housing that consumers with mental illness or mental illness and co-occurring substance abuse face.

As part of its commitment to providing evidence based, recovery-oriented services for consumers, OBH decided to develop a housing plan. OBH hired the Technical Assistance Collaborative (TAC) to work on this. TAC is a national agency that helps counties (and other groups) plan mental health, substance abuse, and housing services.

TAC created a plan for Allegheny County to develop new housing opportunities for consumers. The plan will be funded using \$5 million in HealthChoices (Medical Assistance) reinvestment funds. It was developed based on information from Allegheny County stakeholders and projects and research from

around the country. This included:

- Interviews and focus groups with people who work in the human services field in Allegheny County
- Interviews and focus groups with consumer and family groups
- Surveys of consumers in Mayview State Hospital and OBH-funded residential programs
- Published information on best practices and successful programs
- Review of current programs and funding
- Input from the Housing Advisory Stakeholder Committee

This newsletter explains the strategies in Allegheny County's plan to make 220-240 units of permanent supportive housing available for consumers within two to three years.

### What Is Permanent Supportive Housing?

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) programs provide affordable housing *linked* to supportive services that are available, but not required. PSH is:

- Safe and secure.
- Affordable to consumers.
- Permanent, as long as the consumer pays the rent and follows the rules of their lease.

It is linked to support services that are:

- Optional. People are not required to participate in services to keep their housing, although they are encouraged to use services.
- Flexible. Individualized services are available when the consumer needs them and where the consumer lives.

A growing number of research studies have found that consumers



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## Housing Preference Survey Results: Most Consumers Want Their Own Apartment

In 2005, Allegheny County called on the Consumer Action and Response Team (CART) to conduct a survey. The goal was to find out more about consumers' housing preferences. This information was used in developing the OBH Housing Plan.

CART surveyed:

- 206 consumers living in CRRs or LTSRs
- 103 CRR and LTSR staff members
- 60 consumers at Mayview State Hospital

CRRs (Community Residential Rehabilitation) and LTSRs (Long Term Structured Residence) are facilities that combine housing with a structured program and on-site staff supervision.

### Housing Characteristics

Survey results showed that 38% of the consumers at Mayview State Hospital and 58% of the consumers living in CRRs and LTSRs would like to live in an apartment. Other types of housing (such as group homes) were less popular with consumers.

Similarly, staff members thought an apartment would be the best housing choice for almost half of the consumers in CRR and LTSR programs.

Regardless of the type of housing, many consumers felt it would be especially important to have a private bedroom and a private bathroom.

### Neighborhood Characteristics

Another part of the survey dealt with the types of neighborhoods consumers preferred. Consumers indicated a neighborhood should be safe and should offer access to public transportation, grocery stores and other shops.

Many consumers would prefer to live in neighborhoods in the eastern part of the City of Pittsburgh.

Among the most popular neighborhoods were Shadyside, Oakland, East Liberty and Squirrel Hill.

### Barriers

When asked about barriers to getting the housing of their choice, most consumers in Mayview State Hospital said that someone else makes the decision about their housing

Consumers living in CRRs and LTSRs felt that money was the biggest barrier. CRR and LTSR staff said that mental illness symptoms and a lack of daily living skills could also prevent consumers from living in the housing of their choice.

### Services and Supports

Consumers were also asked what type(s) of services and supports they might need to live in the housing of their choice. In terms of behavioral health services, consumers said that the following services would be important:

- Case management
- Counseling
- Psychiatrist appointments
- Vocational services
- Payee services
- Drop-In Centers

Consumers also felt that help in finding an apartment, finding furniture, learning how to manage money, and learning how to take more responsibility for their treatment would be important.



## OBH Plan Uses Several Strategies to Develop New Housing

The **Housing Development Fund Administrator** will focus on developing new housing using many different funding sources. The **Permanent Supportive Housing Provider** will manage referrals, waiting lists, and the Housing Support Team. It will also expand housing through funding to make rents affordable. The Office of Behavioral Health will oversee both projects. OBH will also make sure that providers in the mental health system coordinate services to support consumers in permanent supportive housing.

### Housing Development Fund Administrator

The Housing Development Fund Administrator will be in charge of managing the OBH Housing Development Fund. The Administrator will work with developers and builders to develop 60-80 new units of permanent, supportive housing for priority consumers.

Some of these units will be in smaller buildings and will only serve consumers. This could be a four-unit apartment building where all of the units are for consumers. Other units will be in larger rental projects that are available for a variety of individuals. This could be a 20-unit apartment building where five units are for consumers. All OBH units will have funding to make the rent affordable.

### Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) Provider

The PSH Provider will manage the following:

#### *Housing Support Team*

The Housing Support Team staff will:

- Help consumers move into and keep their permanent supportive housing
- Find landlords with available housing that fits consumer choices
- Help consumers access housing resources like Section 8 vouchers
- Help resolve landlord/tenant issues
- Provide housing education and support to other providers and systems

- Communicate and coordinate with treatment providers

#### *Project-Based Leasing Fund*

The PSH Provider will find landlords or housing developers who will lease 60 units to the PSH Provider for five years. The PSH Provider will lease these units to consumers. Consumers will pay about 30% of their income for rent, and units will follow Section 8 quality standards.

#### *Bridge Subsidy Program*

This Program provides rent assistance for about 100 consumers until they receive Section 8 vouchers. When consumers begin this program they will need to apply for Section 8, all units will need to pass a Section 8 inspection, and landlords will agree to accept Section 8 vouchers.

#### *Housing Contingency Fund*

The Housing Contingency Fund will help consumers who are moving into permanent supportive housing with one-time costs like security deposits, utility deposits, furniture and household item purchases.

#### *Housing Clearinghouse*

The Housing Clearinghouse staff will:

- Track the availability of all the OBH units;
- Manage the waiting list for OBH units; and
- Keep a library of housing information and housing resources in the County

#### Priority

**consumers** are people with serious mental illness or co-occurring mental illness and substance abuse disorders who are at Mayview State Hospital, community residential rehabilitation (CRR) programs, long term structured residence (LTSR) programs, or other OBH-funded residential programs.

## What Is Permanent Supportive Housing?

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who move to permanent supportive housing spend less time in hospitals, shelters and jail. People have a higher quality of life. Services also cost less.

While creating a PSH program for mental health consumers may be new in Allegheny County, PSH is not a new idea. All of the strategies included in Allegheny County's plan (see page 3) follow examples of other successful programs from around the country.

Creating 220-240 new units of housing will allow more consumers to live in their own apartments rather than in residential programs. In turn, more placements in residential programs will become available as people move to PSH units. So, the PSH program should create more "movement" in



the housing system and allow more and more consumers to live in the community with supports.

## When Will New Permanent Supportive Housing Units be Available?

OBH has already started the process of finding qualified organizations to work on this plan. By early 2006, both the Housing Development Fund Administrator and Permanent Supportive Housing Provider will be selected. They will then start hiring staff and implementing the strategies described on page 3. Some of the programs,

such as project based leasing, will provide housing opportunities for consumers quickly. Creating new units using the Housing Development Fund will take longer. The OBH Housing Plan calls for most of the 220-240 new housing units to be created and filled within three years.

**Allegheny HealthChoices, Inc. (AHCI) is a contract agency for the Allegheny County Department of Human Services' HealthChoices Program.**

AHCI is a private, not-for-profit organization. Our mission is to assure equitable access to quality, cost-effective behavioral health care that promotes positive clinical outcomes, recovery, and resiliency.

AHCI's services include information systems, monitoring and oversight, analysis, training and technical assistance. We also operate the Ombudsman service for the HealthChoices behavioral health program in Allegheny County.

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