



SUMMARY: RECOVERY HOUSING PROGRAM GUIDANCE

The California Interagency Council on Homelessness (Cal ICH) Recovery Housing Program Guidance supports system leaders and program administrators operating state-funded Recovery Housing Programs (RHPs) in aligning with California's Housing First requirements. It ensures that state-funded RHPs honor participant choice, reduce barriers, and provide voluntary, person-centered recovery services—while upholding housing stability.

Recovery Housing Programs can align with Housing First—and when using state funds, they must.

These key principles offer a roadmap for Recovery Housing Programs serving people experiencing homelessness as they navigate the path to recovery and stable housing:

- **Alignment with Housing First:** RHPs must meet the 11 core components of Housing First, including low-barrier access, voluntary services, tenant rights, and equitable screening and referral policies.
- **Person-Centered Care & Harm Reduction:** RHPs ensure participants are at the center of their service plans and are referred to the housing and services options that meet their needs. RHPs must accommodate the use of medication-assisted treatment (MAT) and incorporate evidence-based practices such as motivational interviewing and trauma-informed care.
- **Participant Choice:** Entry into RHPs must be voluntary (unless court-ordered). Programs must offer alternative housing options for individuals who decline or exit recovery housing.
- **No Eviction for Relapse:** Programs cannot remove participants solely for substance use. Instead, relapse support should be offered and transitions to other appropriate housing facilitated when necessary.

Are you a City, County, Continuum of Care or Federally Recognized Tribe in need of support implementing Housing First? Cal ICH here to help. Contact us at calich@bcsh.ca.gov.



Q. Who should recovery housing programs be designed to serve?

A. Recovery housing **should** be targeted to individuals who voluntarily choose a sober-living or recovery-focused environment as part of their personal recovery plan, **not as a condition of accessing housing or services.**

Recovery housing **should not** be used as a default placement or requirement for anyone experiencing homelessness. All placements must be based on participant choice and informed consent, with strong coordination through the local coordinated entry system to ensure people are connected to the housing type that best matches their needs and goals.

Q. Isn't Housing First the opposite of recovery housing? How can a program that expects sobriety comply with Housing First?

A. Not at all. Housing First does not prohibit recovery-focused or abstinence-based housing, it simply requires that participation in those programs be voluntary and non-punitive.

Under this guidance, recovery housing remains fully compatible with Housing First as long as individuals choose it freely and are not evicted back into homelessness for relapse. The goal is to expand—not limit—people's housing choices.

In practice, this means recovery housing can still promote sobriety and peer support, but within a framework that prioritizes housing stability, dignity, and recovery support, not punishment or exclusion.

Q. Recovery housing should be a safe space for those in recovery. How can someone who is making the space unsafe for other participants be removed *and* the program still align with Housing First?

A. ***Housing First does not eliminate program expectations or safety standards, it changes how they are applied.*** Participants cannot be removed solely for relapse or substance use, but they can be exited for lease violations, including serious or repeated violations that jeopardize health, safety, or the well-being of others.

However, even when removal is necessary, providers must make every effort to prevent a return to homelessness by:

- Offering warm handoffs or connections to alternative housing;
- Coordinating through local coordinated entry systems; and
- Documenting those efforts to show that exits to homelessness are extremely rare.

The intent is accountability with compassion — ensuring programs remain safe and recovery-oriented while honoring the state's commitment to housing stability and participant choice.

Q. Is there a limit on how much state homelessness funding can go into recovery housing?

A. No cap is set in this guidance. Local jurisdictions are encouraged to assess the full spectrum of housing and service solutions, including recovery housing, permanent supportive housing, interim housing, and rapid rehousing, to identify the most effective combination for achieving long-term stability and reducing returns to homelessness.