




<b>Health Care Agency</b> <b>Behavioral Health Services</b> <b>Policies and Procedures</b>	Section Name:	Administration
	Sub Section:	Housing
	Section Number:	04.04.01
	Policy Status:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New <input type="checkbox"/> Revised

	SIGNATURE	DATE APPROVED
Deputy Director Behavioral Health Services		6/25/2026

**SUBJECT:** Behavioral Health Bridge Housing (BHBH) Rental Assistance

**PURPOSE:**

To establish procedures where Rental Assistance funds are available to Behavioral Health Bridge Housing (BHBH) participants who are exiting the BHBH to permanent or transitional housing and are in need of financial assistance in order to secure housing. Participants must meet BHBH eligibility.

**POLICY:**

It is the policy of the Orange County Health Care Agency (HCA), Behavioral Health Services (BHS) that specific procedures and eligibility criteria shall be followed when providing rental assistance funds to BHBH participants. BHBH funds shall not be used to supplant other funding sources available for the same purpose.

**SCOPE:**

This policy is applicable to Orange County HCA BHBH programs, rental assistance programs and participants.

**REFERENCES:**

[DHCS Behavioral Health Bridge Housing](#)

[BHS 07.01.01 Fraud and Abuse Policy and Procedure](#)

[HCA VIII-23.01 Fraud, Waste, and Abuse Prevention Policy and Procedure](#)

**DEFINITIONS:**

Behavioral Health Bridge Housing – Short and mid-term residential settings with a goal to connect individuals to long-term housing stability. Bridge housing may include, but is not limited to, emergency/interim housing, rental assistance and auxiliary funding in assisted living settings.

Supportive Services – Those services necessary to help program participants obtain and maintain housing, manage symptoms of serious behavioral health conditions, and support

recovery and wellness. Examples include peer support, employment assistance, transportation assistance, and group and individual activities that promote a sense of purpose and community participation.

**PROCEDURE:**

I. Rental Assistance Eligibility Criteria

A. Homeless Criteria - individuals experiencing homelessness is defined as meeting one or more of the following conditions:

1. Lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.
2. Having a primary residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground.
3. Living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter, designed to provide temporary living arrangements (including hotels and motels paid for by federal, state, or local government programs for low-income individuals or by charitable organizations, congregate shelters, and transitional housing).
4. Exiting an institution into homelessness (regardless of length of stay in the institution).
5. Will imminently lose housing in the next 30 days.
6. Fleeing domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and other dangerous, traumatic, or life-threatening conditions relating to such violence.

B. Serious Behavioral Health Condition Criteria - To be eligible for BHBH, an individual must meet one of the below criteria:

1. The individual has one or more of the following:
  - a) Significant impairment, where “impairment” is defined as distress, disability, or dysfunction in social, occupational, or other important activities, including education and family relationships.
  - b) A reasonable probability of significant deterioration in an important area of life functioning.
  - c) A need for Specialty Mental Health Services (SMHS), regardless of presence of impairment (for individuals under age 21).

AND

2. The individual's condition, as defined in a, b and/or c above, is due to either of the following:
  - a) A diagnosed mental and/or substance-related or addictive disorder, according to the criteria of the current editions of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) and the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD).
  - b) A suspected mental and/or substance related or addictive disorder that has not yet been diagnosed.

OR

3. The individual has at least one of the following:
  - a) At least one diagnosis from the current edition of the DSM for Substance-Related and Addictive Disorders, with the exception of Tobacco-Related Disorders and Non-Substance-Related Disorders.
  - b) At least one suspected diagnosis from the current edition of the DSM for the Substance-Related and Addictive Disorders, with the exception of Tobacco-Related Disorders and Non-Substance-Related Disorders. OR
- C. The individual is a Community Assistance, Recovery, and Empowerment (CARE) Program participant, regardless of whether they meet criteria in the paragraph (A) or (B), above.

II. Verification of Participants' Eligibility will be verified by the completion of the following:

- A. Third Party Homeless Verification form and;
- B. A disabling condition form that indicates that the participant has a serious mental illness and/or substance use disorder and;
- C. The participant does not have a consistent income source to cover their portion of the rent, or the participant is utilizing a housing voucher, or other subsidy or participant does not have a housing voucher, and the permanent or transitional housing that is sourced is the most appropriate placement, and all other funding sources have been maximized and;
- D. W-9 from the landlord and;
- E. Copy of signed lease.

III. Rental Assistance

- A. Rental Assistance may be short term, and midterm. Short term is 90 days or less and mid-term is 90 days, up to two years, with the possibility of a 1-year extension. Rental Assistance must align with the completion of the BHBH program on June 30, 2027.
- B. Rental Assistance may cover utility payments for units where utilities are not included in the rent. The following utilities may be covered by Rental Assistance:
  - 1) Electricity
  - 2) Water
  - 3) Gas
- C. Rental Assistance shall be based on the need of the BHBH participant. If a participant is receiving rental assistance, they shall be expected to apply for the appropriate funding available for their current circumstance, (e.g. SSI, SSDI, employment). BHBH service providers shall assist the BHBH participant in submitting applications for income. If the participant is ineligible for SSI/SSDI, BHBH provider shall work to identify other sustainable financial support.
- D. Any change in the participants income must be reported to the BHBH provider within 30 days.
- E. Assistance shall be adjusted accordingly with an updated Rental Assistance Agreement.

IV. Housing Unit Standards

- A. Housing units utilized by BHBH participants shall meet Emergency Solutions (ESG) habitability standards for permanent housing and Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Continuum of Care (COC) Housing Quality Standards (HQS) when possible.
- B. Permanent Supportive Housing and Rapid Rehousing units matched through the Coordinated Entry System (CES) and made available by local housing authorities do not require inspection by BHBH program, as the housing authority determines habitability by their housing quality standards (HQS).
- C. Housing that is sourced outside of the CES or local housing authorities shall require inspection by the BHBH program.

V. Calculation of Rental Assistance

- A. The Rental Assistance amount shall be determined by Rent Reasonableness.

- B. BHBH Providers shall only provide rental assistance for a unit if the rent is reasonable.
    - 1. HUD regulations define a reasonable rent as one that does not exceed the rent charged for comparable, unassisted units in the same market area.
    - 2. HUD also requires that owners not charge more for assisted units than for comparable units on the premises.
  - C. For each unit, the comparability analysis must use at least three comparable units in the private unassisted market.
    - 1. The analysis shall show how the reasonable rent was determined, including major differences between the contract units and comparable unassisted units.
    - 2. The comparability analysis may be performed by the BHBH Provider, HCA staff or by another qualified person or entity.
    - 3. Those who conduct these analyses or are involved in determining the housing assistance payment based on the analyses may not have any direct or indirect interest in the property.
- VI. BHBH Provider shall ensure the following regarding Owner Certification of Reasonable Rent
- A. By accepting each monthly housing assistance payment, the owner certifies that the rent to owner is not more than rent charged by the owner for other comparable unassisted units in the premises.
  - B. At any time, HCA may require the BHBH Provider to submit information on rents charged by the landlord/owner for other units in the premises or elsewhere.
  - C. Rental Assistance shall be calculated at 30 percent of the family's monthly adjusted income (adjustment factors include the number of people in the family, age of family members, medical expenses, and child-care expenses).
- VII. Payments Made on Behalf of the BHBH Participants
- A. Rental Assistance must be paid directly to the property manager or property owner on behalf of the participant by the BHBH Provider.
  - B. BHBH Providers must keep record of rental assistance paid and provide this information to the County as requested. This documentation should include the participants name, address of unit, amount of assistance, dates payments were made, transaction number and payment address.

- C. BHBH providers shall have a Rental Assistance Agreement document approved by the County that outlines the terms of the Rental assistance.
- D. BHBH Providers shall develop Policies and Procedures if a unit assisted is vacated before the expiration of the lease. The assistance for the unit may continue for a maximum of 30 days from the end of the month in which the unit was vacated, unless occupied by another eligible person. No additional assistance will be paid until the unit is occupied by another eligible person. Brief periods of stays in institutions, not to exceed 90 days for each occurrence, are not considered vacancies.

**VIII. Supportive Services**

- A. Supportive Services must be a component of the rental assistance program and must be made available to residents throughout the duration of their participation in the BHBH program.
- B. Supportive Services includes, but is not limited to: housing navigation, case management, participant assistant funding and landlord mitigation funds.
- C. Participation in Supportive Services is voluntary and available at no cost to the participant.
- D. Home visits shall be a component of these services so that the BHBH provider can assist with supporting the participant with any concerns regarding housing sustainability.
- E. The participant, and the BHBH Provider shall work on applying for all financial resources available with the intention of securing long term income to support the cost of their housing.

**IX. Fraud, Waste and Abuse Prevention**

- A. The County of Orange BHBH program is committed to ensuring that funds made available are spent in accordance with the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS), Behavioral Health Bridge Housing Program.
- B. To ensure that the rental assistance program is administered effectively and according to the highest ethical and legal standards, as referenced in the individual contracts/Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), the County and the BHBH Providers shall follow the HCA Fraud, Waste and Abuse Prevention policy as well as employ a variety of techniques to prevent errors and intentional program abuse. This includes BHBH Provider participation in Regular Reviews, and is not limited to the following:
  - 1. Cost Reports
  - 2. Invoices

3. Rental Agreements
  4. Rent Reasonableness determination
  5. Documentation review
- C. BHBH providers shall complete trainings required by the County that reinforce the intent to eliminate program abuse.