



North Carolina Balance of State Continuum of Care

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2021 North Carolina Balance of State Continuum of Care Coordinated Entry System Evaluation

Overview:

On September 30, 2020, HUD issued [CPD Memo: Availability of Additional Waivers for CPD Grant Programs to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19 and Mitigate Economic Impacts Caused by COVID-19](#). This memo stated, “24 CFR 578.7(a)(8) is waived to the extent it is necessary to lift the requirement in Section 11.B.15 of the Notice Establishing Additional Requirements for a Continuum of Care Centralized or Coordinated Assessment System for 1-year beginning on the date of this memorandum.” In conjunction with the memo and the justification, the North Carolina Balance of State Continuum of Care (NC BoS CoC) did not complete an evaluation of the coordinated entry (CE) system in 2020.

The NC BoS CoC Coordinated Entry Council (CEC) began reviewing and updating the Permanent Housing and Shelter and/or Street Outreach surveys in January 2021. On February 15, 2021, the CEC passed a motion for the 2021 NC BoS CoC CE evaluation process and timeframe. It was determined the distribution and collection of surveys would be the responsibility of the Regional CE Lead. Each Regional CE Lead needed to return all completed surveys to North Carolina Coalition to End Homelessness (NCCEH) staff by May 7, 2021. NCCEH staff reviewed all surveys, compiled data, and reported outcomes to the CEC. The CEC will discuss system improvements and help facilitate changes in the CoC using the evaluation. NCCEH staff reviewed 43 Shelter and/or Street Outreach surveys, 26 Permanent Housing surveys, and 30 Provider surveys. Due to the continued effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, service providers stated the decrease of in-person services as the main reason for low participation.

Methods

The NC BoS CoC conducted the evaluation of its coordinated entry system in April 2021, with the following timeline for implementation:

- 1) Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH): PSH clients who have entered a PSH program in the last year will be offered the opportunity to complete the coordinated entry evaluation survey that asks about their experience of the coordinated entry system. The timeframe for PSH surveys was May 1, 2021, through April 30, 2021.
- 2) Shelters and/or Street Outreach: All people completing the VI-SPDAT will be offered the opportunity to complete the coordinated entry evaluation survey that asks about their experience of the coordinated entry system. Every client that receives a VI-SPDAT between April 17, 2021, and April 30, 2021, in the CoC must receive the survey.
- 3) Rapid Rehousing: All clients housed by a rapid rehousing program in the CoC must receive this survey within 30 days (before or after) they are housed.

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The evaluation consisted of three elements:

- 1) Surveys to participating provider agencies
- 2) Surveys to people who are enrolled in permanent housing programs (rapid re-housing and permanent supportive housing) and were housed in the last year.
- 3) Surveys to people currently experiencing homelessness. People in shelters and people experiencing unsheltered homelessness were surveyed.

Survey results were analyzed by the North Carolina Coalition to End Homelessness and the NC Balance of State CoC Coordinated Entry Council.

The provider agency survey asked questions about each aspect of the CE system:

- Prevention and Diversion
- Shelter
- Assessment (VI-SPDAT)
- Case conferencing
- Referrals to permanent housing

Participating service providers were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the part of the system in which they participate, meeting the goals of the CoC, and meeting their agency goals. The surveys to people in permanent housing and people currently experiencing homelessness asked about their experience of the CE system, whether the system met their needs, and their satisfaction with service providers.

Summary

This evaluation allows NC BoS CoC to evaluate and continue to improve its CE system. It provides a basic snapshot of how CE is working in the CoC but also poses additional questions the CoC could integrate into future evaluations. This evaluation shows that the CoC has implemented the basic aspects of coordinated entry throughout its geographic area:

- Access points attempt to help people find shelter and emergency services, including domestic violence shelter and services
- People experiencing homelessness are assessed for permanent housing using the same screening tool, the VI-SPDAT
- Permanent housing programs take most of their referrals from the CE system.

The CoC could make improvements to its CE system:

- The Prevention and Diversion Screening Tool does not seem to significantly aid in diverting households from entering the homelessness response system.
- Emergency shelters should continue to lower barriers and become more housing-focused.
- The VI-SPDAT does not score clients accurately and has been shown to have racial bias. The CoC will consider other tools and/or prioritization to improve the CE process.



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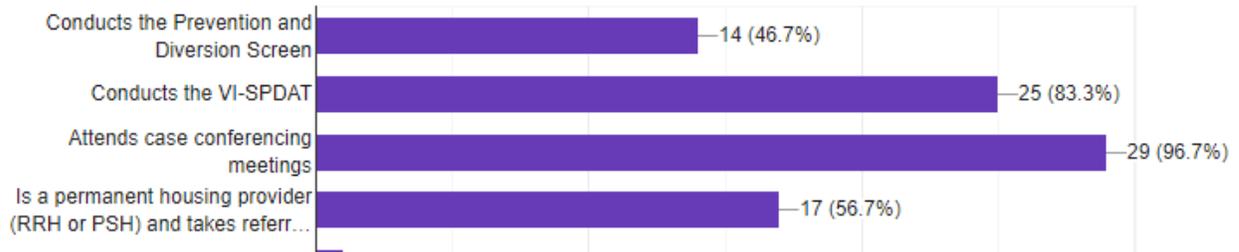
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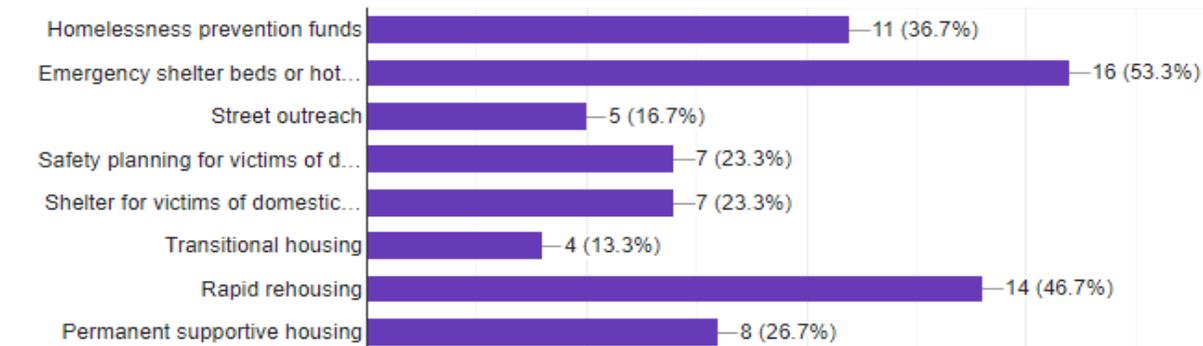
- People experiencing homelessness in the CoC are not offered permanent housing options quickly. The CoC should continue to try to reduce the length of time people experience homelessness and have discussions on how to increase affordable housing.

Provider surveys

Provider agencies completed 30 surveys. Survey respondents included agencies that participated in every part of the CE system. Provider surveys were completed in all 13 Regions of NC BoS CoC.



Most agencies that completed the survey conduct the VI-SPDAT and attend case conferencing meetings.



Prevention and Diversion

The first step in the NC BoS CoC's coordinated entry process is to conduct the Prevention and Diversion Screen. This screen is intended to accomplish three things:

- 1) Divert households from homelessness by identifying alternative solutions to their housing crisis;
- 2) Identify households that need immediate referral to a domestic violence service provider for safety planning; and
- 3) Refer households to emergency shelter if they cannot be diverted.

Approximately 52% of the respondents said the P&D screen generally does divert households from homelessness, and approximately 47% said it does not.



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Since most respondents to this section were emergency shelter agencies, these results may indicate that the front door of emergency shelter is not the right place to administer a diversion screen, as most households have already exhausted resources prior to presenting at an emergency shelter.

The CoC should consider taking a different approach to facilitating diversion and self-resolution. Some respondents also indicated they do not complete the P&D screen, as they do not receive homelessness prevention funding. More training and resources are likely necessary.

Respondents indicated many ideas for how to improve the prevention and diversion process. The ideas that were the most popular or may be most impactful included:

| How can the P&D process be improved? | Number of responses |
|---|---------------------|
| More emergency and DV shelters in the community | 7 |
| Accurate community resource list | 4 |
| Increase in homelessness prevention/diversion funding | 2 |
| Transportation | 2 |
| Less restrictions on eligibility and/or less documentation required | 2 |

The CoC should consider these ideas and others to improve the prevention and diversion process and to increase access to emergency shelter. Increasing transportation would be one way to increase access to shelter beds without needing to fund new shelter beds in every county. The CoC should also work with the DV service provider community to ensure every person fleeing domestic violence has a safe place to sleep.

VI-SPDAT

Everyone who experiences homelessness for more than 12-14 days in the NC BoS CoC should be assessed using the CoC-designated assessment called the VI-SPDAT. This tool helps prioritize people who are most vulnerable for permanent housing resources. To confidently prioritize households using the assessment, the VI-SPDAT should accurately reflect the needs of each household. 52% of respondents said the VI-SPDAT accurately reflects the needs of the people the organization serves while 48% said it is accurate about half the time.

Respondents identified the following strengths of the VI-SPDAT:

- Prioritizes households with the most significant barriers
- Gives an overview of client vulnerabilities
- Captures information about many social determinants of health
- Allows organizations to start conversation with clients about their needs

However, respondents generally agreed that the VI-SPDAT has problems with accurately reporting the needs of households. The two most cited weaknesses of the VI-SPDAT were:

- Underreports problems because clients may not be willing to divulge and/or do not feel comfortable in answering all the questions



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- Lacks diversity, equity, and inclusion

The NC BoS CoC Racial Equity Prioritization workgroup is working on identifying and/or creating an alternative screening tool(s) that more accurately reflects the needs of households and supports diversity, equity, and inclusion.

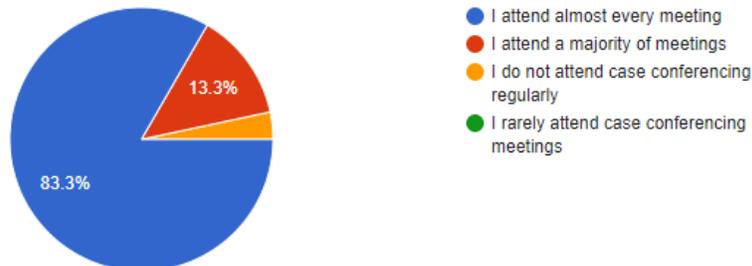
Case conferencing

Case conferencing plays an essential role in the NC BoS CoC's coordinated entry system. Case conferencing meetings should help communities make good decisions about how to serve people experiencing homelessness, providing an opportunity to discuss cases, gathering additional information from multiple service providers, and connecting households to resources needed to end their homelessness.

Case conferencing is only effective if it is well-attended. Almost all (97%) agencies said they attend case conferencing with only about 17% of agencies citing they do not attend regularly and/or the majority of meetings. All CoC regions have an option to virtually join case conferencing, which has allowed more participation than previously.

How frequently do you attend case conferencing meetings?

30 responses



Case conferencing is more effective if clients can be referred or connected to other resources besides CoC- and ESG-funded housing resources. 90% of respondents said their meeting does connect clients to other resources outside of the homeless service system.



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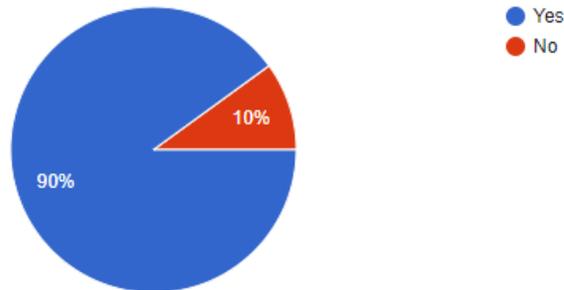
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Does the case conferencing meeting help connect clients to other resources besides CoC- and ESG-funded permanent housing?

30 responses

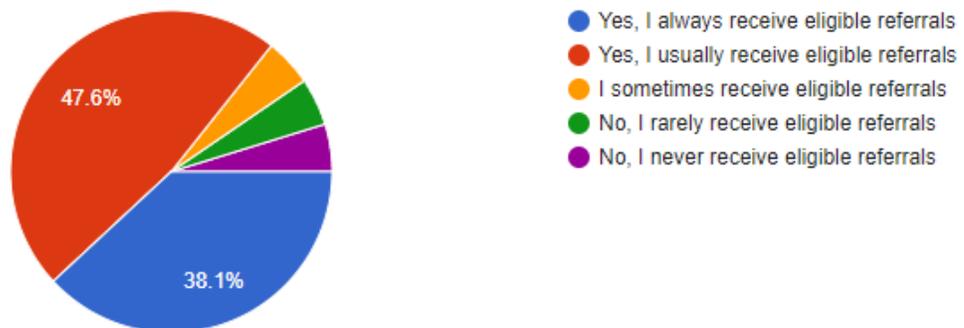


Referrals to permanent housing

Most referrals from the CE system to permanent housing programs should be eligible for those programs. A majority (86%) of permanent housing programs said they always and/or usually receive eligible referrals, with a minority (14%) stating they sometimes, rarely, or never receive eligible referrals from the CE system.

Do you receive eligible referrals from the coordinated entry system?

21 responses



Some households may be ineligible for a housing program to which they are referred. The NC BoS CoC CE designed the system this way: the system does not collect complete documentation on every household because it would slow the referral process. Instead, the CE system should conduct a basic assessment of eligibility and let the permanent housing provider determine eligibility as they collect supporting documentation. The NC BoS CoC should integrate discussions about eligibility into case conferencing to ensure most referrals are eligible.

CoC- and ESG-funded permanent housing programs should be taking all their new admissions directly from the CE by-name prioritization list. 85% of permanent housing programs take the majority of their



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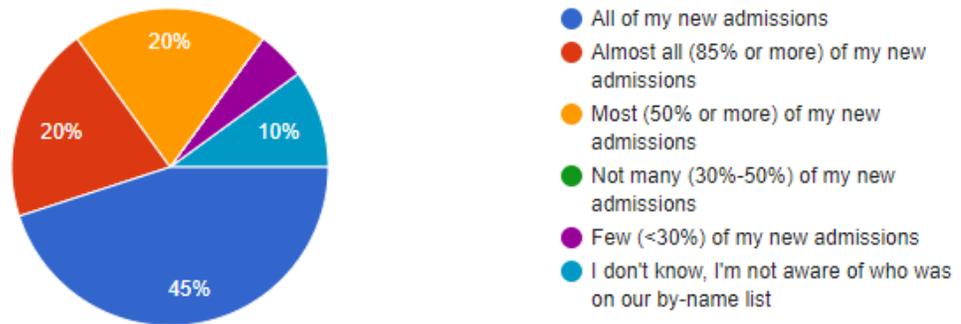
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referrals from CE. There are some permanent housing programs with other sources of funding, that are not required to take all referrals from CE, which could account for some referrals taken outside of CE. However, all CoC and ESG-funded permanent housing programs, should be able to identify households from the by-name list.

Approximately what share of your new admissions in the last year were on the regional by-name list and were referred by the coordinated entry system?

20 responses



Surveys of people living in permanent housing

People living in permanent housing have been through every aspect of the coordinated entry system. The NC BoS CoC asked participants to evaluate their experience moving through the CE system.

26 people completed surveys from Regions 2, 3, 4, 7, and 12. Providers offered surveys to all households housed in the last year and were completely optional and confidential.

The survey asked respondents to evaluate the services they received while they were experiencing homelessness. The following chart indicates the services that respondents felt were most helpful to them while they experienced homelessness. The overwhelming majority of people said being connected to permanent housing was the most helpful service they received. Emergency shelter and food were also important.

| What services were the most helpful to you? | Number of responses |
|---|---------------------|
| Find new housing or referred to housing program | 22 |
| Provided food | 13 |
| Referral to emergency shelter | 11 |
| Referral to domestic violence shelter | 6 |
| Medical needs or provided health care | 5 |



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Although our current CE system does not prioritize households for emergency shelter, connecting people experiencing homelessness to emergency services is one of the key functions of coordinated entry. 16 respondents had no problems while staying in shelter. Three said they could not enter shelter at which they presented, three said they were forced to leave a shelter, and four did not stay in shelter.

Six people also reported problems while in shelter. Three stated they felt discriminated against by shelter staff and three stated they had problems with other shelter residents.

Although relatively small numbers, everyone should have access to a safe shelter bed where they do not experience discrimination and are respected by shelter staff. Shelters should ensure they have a robust anti-discrimination policy and a grievance process for clients to express concerns. Shelters should only force people to leave in the most extenuating circumstances and reduce any screening barriers to entering the shelter.

Coordinated entry should connect clients to permanent housing options that fit their needs. 24 respondents stated they were offered housing options quickly. When asked what is going well in their current housing, responses are as follows:

- Love it (x2)
- Have a roof over their head
- Plenty of food
- Have a home
- Everything (x6)
- Comfortable
- Bills are paid
- Safe

Surveys of people currently experiencing homelessness

The NC BoS CoC collected surveys from people in emergency shelters and people living unsheltered. These surveys were confidential and completely optional. The access point offered the chance to complete a survey after the provider assessed the client using the VI-SPDAT.

Most surveys collected were from people in emergency shelters, with people in Regions 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 11, and 12 returning surveys.

When asked what type of assistance would be most helpful, 83% of people stated help getting into an emergency shelter, housing, and/or food as their top priority.

| What services were the most helpful to you? | Number of responses |
|--|---------------------|
| Help getting into an emergency and/or DV shelter | 20 |
| Help with food | 13 |
| Help with enrolling in a housing program | 11 |
| Help with healthcare | 9 |



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Timeliness

The NC BoS CoC asked questions in every survey about how quickly the CE system connects people to permanent housing and services. For many people, the CE system quickly connects them to permanent housing, but approximately one-third of households were not connected to permanent housing after 6 months.

A majority of people experiencing homelessness (83%) expect to find housing quickly, with 62% stating they expect to find housing in less than three months.

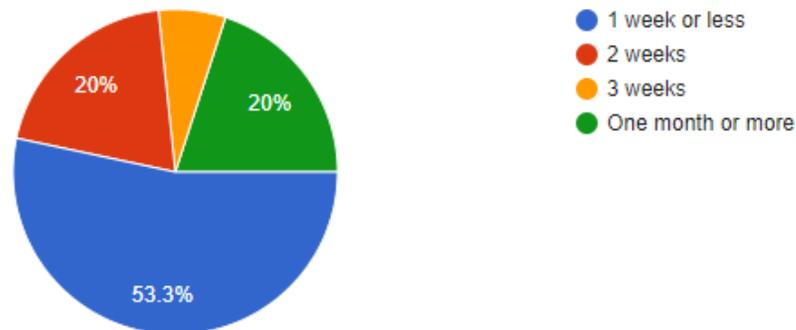
Unfortunately, people currently experiencing homelessness seem to have overly optimistic views of how long it will take to find permanent housing. Among people currently in permanent housing, most people (59%) waited at least 3 months for housing, and 29% waited 6 months or more. The CoC should train provider staff to communicate the process and timeframe of finding housing, in order for people currently experiencing homelessness to have a more accurate expectation.

Emergency shelter responses overwhelmingly stated the lack of affordable housing as why the CE system may not connect people to housing in a timely manner.

The CoC does not have enough resources to provide every person experiencing homelessness a referral to a CoC- or ESG-funded program. However, the resources the CoC does have should always receive timely referrals from CE. Although most permanent housing programs only wait 1 to 2 weeks for a referral from CE, 20% of providers keep slots open for a month or more.

How long do you usually keep slots open before the coordinated entry system refers you someone who is eligible to fill that unit?

15 responses



These answers indicate that the CE system works relatively quickly, but some improvements could be made to decrease the time between referral and permanent housing placement.

The CoC could improve the timelines of referrals in CE in a few ways:

- Attempt to secure additional CoC and ESG housing resources.
- Attempt to secure additional permanent housing resources, like preferences through Public Housing Authorities or Housing Choice Voucher programs.



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- Implement a progressive approach to housing in which most households are offered rapid rehousing assistance then moved to permanent supportive housing as necessary. This approach would prevent people with higher needs from waiting a long time for a PSH slot to open.
- Help shelters implement more housing-focused services to facilitate self-resolution.
- Identify and reduce barriers at case conferencing meetings to quickly fill open permanent housing slots.

Grievances

The NC BoS CoC's coordinated entry system provides a process to file grievances if a participant has felt mistreated or discriminated against in the CE process. Most of respondents were aware of this process, with 93% citing they did not feel discriminated against.

All survey respondents were offered the option to file a complaint; however, the three people who indicated they were discriminated against did not complete the information so the CoC could address their grievance.

Evaluation Improvements

The CoC learned a lot about its CE system in this evaluation and how to improve the evaluation itself. The CoC identified three areas of the evaluation process that need improvement: response rates, survey content, and response biases.

Response rates

The CoC should try to improve response rates to all the surveys, focusing on getting enough responses in every region survey so it can draw more granular conclusions. Due to the pandemic and limited staff capacity, the CoC expected lower participation rates in 2021. However, the CoC should consider adding CE evaluation participation to its annual CoC and/or ESG scoring process.

Survey content

The CoC should better align its provider survey questions with those on the client surveys so it can draw more general conclusions about the CE system.

The provider surveys should allow for a wider range of responses. Most questions on the survey were written for agencies that provide permanent housing, but many agencies participate in CE and only provide services. The survey should include questions that pertain more directly to agencies that do not provide permanent housing.

Response Bias

Client surveys seemed more positive than expected and very few grievances were filed (and no grievances were described on the survey). Although it is probably true that most clients who receive services in the CoC are happy with those services, clients may have also felt pressure to answer positively for fear of losing services. Surveys should have been confidential and anonymous, but the CoC should ensure all clients understand that their surveys will not be seen by their service provider and will not affect their housing or services in any way.