



Bergen County Homeless Family Services:
Housing, Emergency Shelter, Advocacy Resources,
and Tools for Self-Sufficiency

40 PASSAIC STREET, HACKENSACK NJ 07601

Main Line: (201)-488-2525



Effective Date: February 1, 2021

Policies and Procedures for HEARTS Emergency Shelter Admission

Admission Mandate: Families who are seeking admission to emergency shelter at HEARTS must meet the HUD definition of homeless and have lived in Bergen County when this episode of homelessness occurred.

Admission Process: Families may apply for emergency shelter in person or on the phone with the Coordinated Assessment and Intake Specialist (CAIS) during HEARTS Office hours. An intake and assessment will be completed. The assessment will determine the immediate needs of the family and whether HEARTS is appropriate to meet those needs. Eligibility for emergency shelter will be determined within 2 days of completing the assessment and intake application.

Potential Exclusionary Criteria Include:

1. Family members who require behavioral health or substance use disorder services that are beyond those available in the community and that render the family member unable to remain safely and comfortably in the emergency shelter environment.
2. Family members who pose a serious risk of danger to self, others, or property.
3. Family members who need a level of medical or nursing care that cannot be rendered safely and effectively in the HEARTS facility.
4. The family has been discharged from HEARTS emergency shelter for violating rules or regulations or for failing to participate in housing planning.
5. Family member is required to register under Megan's Law.

Cases for Consideration and Approval upon Review and at the Discretion of the HEARTS Team:

1. Should a prospective family earn more than 50% of the Median Family Income by federal HUD guidelines, the HEARTS Team will determine the family's assessed immediate needs and determine whether the family qualifies for a referral to the HEARTS program. If the family is deemed to not qualify for HEARTS, then the HEARTS staff will still complete an assessment and make a determination for appropriate community-based referrals to include the Housing Prioritization List.

2. Should a prospective family be former Section 8 recipients because they lost their Section 8 status or alternatively, were unable to use their Section 8 prior to the voucher's expiration; then, the HEARTS Team will evaluate the circumstances as to why the family no longer has Section 8 and make a determination to their eligibility in HEARTS. If the family is deemed to not qualify for HEARTS, then the HEARTS staff will still complete an assessment and make a determination for appropriate community-based referrals to include the Housing Prioritization List.

Hours of Operation.

If HEARTS CAIS determines a family meets eligibility criteria, and they present prior to 2pm Monday through Friday they will be admitted to emergency shelter that day after completing the bed bug protocol.

Families presenting at HEARTS as street homeless after 2pm will not have sufficient time to complete the bed bug protocol prior to the end of the business day. They shall complete an abbreviated screening and be motel placed until the morning of the next business day under WFNJ Immediate Need or SSH/TANF -SSH Motel Placement funding. The abbreviated screening shall include a determination that the family appears to meet the HUD definition of homeless, the family's current homeless emergency occurred while they were residing in Bergen County, that the family meets the financial eligibility criteria for participation in HEARTS and no exclusionary criteria are present. These families shall complete the rest of the HEARTS admission process the next business day.

Families experiencing a homeless emergency after hours are directed to Bergen County Homeless Hotline (211) for Homeless Hotline placement and are also to present at the HEARTS Office at 8:45am the following business day for screening, assessment, and intake.

Families who present as street homeless after business hours shall be directed to contact the 211 who will screen and motel place until the next business day, if appropriate. BCBSS WFNJ EA staff shall review HMIS 211 referrals each morning at the start of business and forward all relevant forms and information for 211 placed families from HMIS to HEARTS staff by 9am. HEARTS staff shall outreach these families, conduct the coordinated assessment and other program screenings to determine the family's eligibility for participation in HEARTS that day.

Those families who do not meet admission criteria will be provided with alternate shelter options that may be available to them.

Incoming Referrals from other Shelter Programs

The HEARTS program was initiated to increase the availability of emergency shelter resources for Bergen County families experiencing a housing emergency. It is not intended to replace a family's access to existing shelter options. Families that have been determined eligible for and placed in existing Bergen County family shelter programs are not appropriate referrals to the HEARTS program. Families being

discharged from existing family shelter programs for violating the rules shall not be eligible for participation in HEARTS.

Family shelter programs designed to meet the specialized needs of certain families (substance use disorder shelter programs, reentry shelter, or domestic violence safe houses for example) must exhaust specialized shelter options and utilize existing referral procedures to other statewide programs for families who meet their admission criteria when they lack the bed space to shelter these families. Referrals from existing Bergen County shelter programs shall be considered on a case-by-case basis with HEARTS staff making the final determination of the family being admitted into the program. If accepted the referring shelter program shall agree to work cooperatively with HEARTS staff to provide for or arrange for, those specialized services the family would have received had there been bed capacity in their program.

Referrals from Community Case Management and Service Providers

Families at imminent risk of homelessness can be referred for assessment. Community Case Managers and Service Providers making referrals to HEARTS agree to engage in homelessness prevention activities prior to their family becoming street homeless.

Community providers are required to complete a written referral and additional information must be provided as needed. They agree to accept HEARTS release of information forms or upon referral to HEARTS provide their own signed releases to enable assessment to begin immediately.

The HEARTS program is designed to rapidly resolve a Bergen County family's housing emergency. For this to occur the participant family, HEARTS staff, and the family's community support network must work cooperatively and collaboratively in assessment, planning, and execution of the plan.

Community Case Management agencies and service providers agree to continue working with referred families during the assessment and eligibility determination process and if accepted into the program, while the family is a HEARTS participant.

If the family meets admission criteria, they will be provided emergency shelter, if it is available provided the referring agency agrees to continue to offer services to the family. If the referring agency fails to continue to provide services or fails to participate in the HEARTS Housing Permanency Plan this can be a reason for the family's discharge from the program.

Referrals from community providers may take up to 5 business days for review, prior to HEARTS initiating the intake process with the family.

Community Case Management agencies and service providers shall actively participate in the family's weekly Housing Permanency Plan (HPP) meetings. They shall keep HEARTS staff informed on any changes or new challenges the participant family is experiencing. Community Case Management and service providers also agree to work towards the housing plan as outlined in the HEARTS participant's HPP. Advocacy by case managers and service providers on behalf of HEARTS families is expected and encouraged. The HPP is developed collaboratively, however, HEARTS staff is responsible to make the

final determination as to what, if any, post shelter discharge assistance the family's permanent housing arrangement will include. (i.e., Referrals to ESG, RRH for families, or voucher)

Appeals Process:

If a family is denied admission to emergency shelter at HEARTS, they may request an appeal in writing at the office within 5 business days of the denial. They will be scheduled to meet with the HEARTS Social Work Supervisor within 5 business days to appeal the decision. The SWS will render a written decision within 2 business days.

If the issue is not resolved after the meeting with the SWS the family may request a review in writing from the BCBSS Assistant Administrative Supervisor of Social Work within 5 business days of the decision. The review will be on paper only. The BCBSS Assistant Administrative Supervisor shall render a decision within 2 business days of the receipt of the written request for a review.