
NSMHA Board of Directors Housing Opportunities Principles

Safe, affordable and decent housing is a necessary foundation upon which people who have severe and persistent mental illnesses can pursue recovery. It empowers people and gives them dignity and self-respect.

The North Sound Mental Health Administration (NSMHA) has always advocated that safe, affordable, decent, and adequate housing must be available to consumers. NSMHA recognizes that people who have psychiatric disabilities/mental disorders want to have the same kinds of housing choices that other citizens have available. They want housing that will allow them access to meaningful activities and relationships with non-disabled individuals as well as housing that will allow them to participate in activities beyond those provided by the mental health system.

To these ends NSMHA has adopted the following principles:

1. It is necessary to provide a variety of residential and housing support services which are designed to respond to various levels of consumer functioning. While some consumers may need to live in a residential treatment facility as a transition, NSMHA advocates that the mental health system help consumers find, secure and keep permanent housing and that the mental health system provides the supports to consumers in order to achieve this.
2. Housing should be provided as close to a consumer's community of choice as possible in order to maintain family, community and other natural supports.
3. The continuum of residential and housing support services must provide consumers with choices of where to live within the available resources.
4. The continuum of housing supports and services must maximize the number of housing opportunities in normal, non-facility-based settings. To that end, the mental health system should cultivate relationships with landlords, housing authorities and others who offer housing to the general public. To overcome landlords' reluctance to rent to consumers, the mental health system must offer support to landlords such as rent guarantees and emergency intervention services.
5. Residential and housing support services provided to consumers will be flexible, have variety, and increase or decrease based on each individual's needs.
6. When a consumer is hospitalized or enters into a crisis-respite stay, the consumer will be given assistance in retaining his/her housing. When a consumer is returning to the community after hospitalization, jail or other absence, it is critical that arrangements be made in advance to ensure that the consumer has a place to live and the consumer has adequate support during the transition.
7. Residential and housing support services will provide for language and cultural differences, physical deficits, sensory handicaps, as well as the mental health needs of consumers.
8. Whenever possible, the goal of residential and housing support services shall be to help consumers secure homes of their own with the opportunity to share or not share them with others. Consumers should be able to continue to live in their homes after services end.
9. It is critical that all recipients of residential and housing support services receive an appropriate level of support or care that will meet each individual's needs. Special efforts must be made to

- ensure that medically-fragile consumers have appropriate housing and have the special supports they need in order to live in that housing and maintain their health.
10. The best way to solve the problem of homelessness is to prevent it in the first place. It is critical that consumers have eviction-prevention services and rapid re-entry into permanent independent housing should eviction occur. The mental health system must be able to offer, refer to, or arrange such supports for all consumers.
 11. Providers who serve adult consumers are expected to assess consumers' daily living skills and provide training or support to ensure that consumers can maintain their residences, pay their bills, prepare or obtain meals and keep themselves safe at home.
 12. NSMHA supports the "Housing First" principles that 1) consumers should not be required to participate in or comply with treatment in order to obtain housing (even if they are actively abusing alcohol or other substances) and 2) consumers should be helped to access permanent housing as quickly as possible.
 13. It is difficult for consumers to find housing when they have criminal histories, histories of arson or histories of sexual offenses. But the public is safer if such consumers have permanent housing with appropriate supports and there is good coordination between mental health providers and corrections personnel. The mental health system must establish a relationship and work with various parts of the criminal justice system in order to create permanent housing opportunities and supports.
 14. Fair market rent for clean, safe and desirable housing is beyond the means of many consumers. The mental health system must advocate for the expansion of rent subsidies and vouchers as well as advocate that people who have mental illnesses are allowed a fair share of such resources.