



**Mendocino County
Homeless Services Continuum of Care
Emergency Shelter Program Standards**

EMERGENCY SHELTER PROGRAM STANDARDS

RATIONALE: Emergency shelters are safety net facilities for people experiencing housing crisis. They provide an entry point into stabilization services leading as quickly as possible to permanent housing. Because participants are in crisis, entry requirements and documentation are minimal and clients will not be denied, regardless of ability to pay. Programs involve congregate living; therefore basic community rules ensure a safe and healthy environment in which participants can progress in resolving their housing crisis.

Program Standards serve as a common policy framework for Mendocino County's Emergency Shelters. Ultimately the intent is to bring the policy to the Continuum of Care Governing Board for adoption system-wide. While the Emergency Shelter Program standards are not policies and procedures, they may be used as an outline for local agency policies and procedures, and adopted policies should be incorporated into local manuals.

TARGET GROUPS: This document establishes minimum standards for shelters serving single adults, families with children, unaccompanied youth, and other specialized populations. *Individual shelters may establish standards for more specialized practice.*

1. Evaluating eligibility for assistance

a. Homeless per federal definitions.

- i. All shelters participating in HMIS must serve only clients who meet federal definitions of homelessness (and in limited cases, those "at-risk" of homelessness). Shelters operating with federally-originated funds may only serve people meeting federal homeless definitions 1, 2, or 4. Homeless status is verified at intake for all incoming shelter residents. Refer to attached Homeless Definitions chart, page 9.
- ii. Documentation: Please see the chart on page 10 for acceptable forms of documentation. Shelters should make every effort to meet federal standards of documentation. The preference is for 3rd party documentation. 2nd party documentation (observation by a homeless services provider) is acceptable if 3rd party documentation is not available. At a minimum, client self-certification will be accepted.
- iii. Lack of 3rd party documentation must not prevent an individual or family from being immediately admitted to emergency shelter. Records contained in an HMIS or comparable database used by victim service providers or legal service providers are acceptable evidence of 3rd party documentation and intake worker observations.



Mendocino County Homeless Services Continuum of Care Emergency Shelter Program Standards

- b. Income Levels: *There is no fee for using emergency shelter services.* Income may not be used as eligibility criteria for entry into emergency shelter services. However, all shelter participants will be required to certify their income level.
 - c. Required intake documents:
 - i. Personal identification: at least one photo ID is preferred, see attached list for options, page 11. If the participant is unable to produce personal identification, the shelter may make a local decision about the necessity of pursuing ID.
 - ii. Documentation of Homelessness or At Risk status per federal guidelines (page 10).
 - iii. Income self-declaration
 - iv. HMIS intake forms, including written informed consent
 - v. Signed acknowledgment of receiving program rules or requirements.
 - d. Eligibility screening: All persons seeking shelter will be screened first for their housing status to identify whether they meet federal homelessness definitions (1, 2 or 4—see page 9).
 - e. Comprehensive Assessment:
 - i. Comprehensive Assessments will be conducted by the Coordinated Entry provider within one week of initial screening if at all possible. It is anticipated that the Coordinated Entry provider's waitlist, case management, and education about services will minimize the phenomenon of participants leaving the shelter before a full assessment can be conducted.
 - ii. Shelters will provide a basic intake, with HMIS enrollment, within 72 hours of accepting a participant into services.
 - iii. A case management interview, resulting in a written action plan, is preferred within 7 days. All shelters will work toward this standard, with the understanding this is impacted by capacity: current capacity often limits case management initiation.
 - f. Changes to MCHSCoC Emergency Shelter Written Standards will be determined by the MCHSCoC Governing Board by majority vote.
2. Coordination with other providers
- a. Shelter guests will be referred to Coordinated Entry.
 - b. Grievance procedure: A sample grievance form is attached at page 12, for providers to put on their own letterhead and customize for specific agency practice. If a common pattern of grievance emerges, the MCHSCoC assigned Committee will take up possible changes of policy.
 - c. Street Outreach
 - i. Outreach workers will refer unsheltered persons into Coordinated Entry as quickly as possible, conducting the VI-SPDAT screening as possible and assisting them to access Coordinated Entry.



Mendocino County Homeless Services Continuum of Care Emergency Shelter Program Standards

- d. Prevention & One-time Financial Assistance providers
 - i. Households seeking assistance must first be screened for homeless vs. at risk housing status. If homeless, prescreen for Limited Assistance with VI-SPDAT screening tool and refer through Coordinated Entry to a one-time financial assistance program. If At Risk, refer directly to Prevention/Diversion assistance as resources are available.
 - ii. Emergency Shelter providers will collaborate with agencies providing one-time assistance, to help exiting participants to access one-time assistance or deposit assistance (e.g., RRH, CalWORKS, SSVF).
 - e. Rapid Re-Housing providers
 - i. Households meeting federal homeless definitions will be screened for Rapid Re-Housing at Coordinated Entry, and if appropriate referred through Coordinated Entry to a Rapid Re-Housing program. Options will be explored for accommodations other than entering the shelter, until an appropriate housing placement can be made
 - ii. Emergency Shelter providers will collaborate with Rapid Re-Housing providers, by providing short-term admittance to shelter while the household locates new housing.
3. Determining and prioritizing accepted clients vs. other forms of assistance
- a. Each adult referred will be screened utilizing the VI-SPDAT and assessed using the HMIS Intake Forms.
 - b. Coordinated Entry will provide appropriate referrals with a feedback loop and the possibility of case conferences triggered by inappropriate referrals. With this understanding, Mendocino County emergency shelter providers will operate from the viewpoint of screening people *in* rather than out. In doing so they commit to being good stewards of the funds, acting in the best interest of the clients in residence, and with transparency regarding the limits of the program.
 - c. Prohibition against involuntary family separation: per federal requirements, the age and gender of a child under age 18 cannot be used as a basis for denying any family's admission to emergency shelter. All shelters funded with federally-originated dollars must adhere to this rule.
 - i. Individual Shelter Policies Each Shelter within the MCHSCoC must develop a standard of admission and behavior for the health and safety of shelter guests. These policies will be public documents and will be administered consistent with Fair Housing, Americans with Disabilities Act, and MCHSCoC wide (these) standards.
 - ii. Legal concerns:
 - (a) 290 Sex Offenders: Shelters serving children must check adult names with the State sex offender registry before allowing Entry. Single-gender adult shelters may accept 290 sex offenders. Offenders will be asked to make legally required disclosures and will be advised of youth programs in the vicinity so they can live up to their responsibilities. A stay may be discontinued if staff members learn the offender is lingering in proximity to a youth facility.



Mendocino County Homeless Services Continuum of Care Emergency Shelter Program Standards

4. Emergency Shelter Program Elements

- a. Stabilization and basic orientation to program: Shelters should ensure personal contact is made to acclimate new participants to the facility and help them establish a sense of safety. A one-to-one meeting should take place within the first week to build rapport and offer support in resolving housing crises.
- b. Resolving housing crisis is shelter's primary focus. Emergency shelter programs should direct their services to resolving the individual's housing crisis. Working towards a Housing First model, case management should create a dialog focused on addressing barriers to housing. Individual activities should be compiled in an Individual Action Plan or equivalent, with weekly review with the case manager.
- c. Mendocino County shelters seek to provide a trauma-informed system of care. All shelters should work to bring evidence based practices and programs. Trauma-informed services should include case management; onsite integrated health resources; evidence based programs; living skills programs focused on communication skills, grief/loss, and well-being.
- d. Each participant's needs are individual, and as such Emergency Shelters within the MCHSCoC seek to make the following services available to all shelter participants:
 - i. Health Assessment, establishment of primary care home and health coverage, and access to behavioral health treatment as needed.
 - ii. Financial education, Money Management and Savings Programs, including tenancy education and credit clean-up.
 - iii. Work readiness, including resume development, computer skills, and mock interviews, GED. This may include community service, mentoring & other opportunities to foster self-esteem and confidence.
 - iv. SOAR benefits assistance (see <http://soarworks.prainc.com/course/ssissdi-outreach-access-and-recovery-soar-online-training> for free on-line training).
 - v. Legal services: record expungement, addressing pending charges, and legal services for those fleeing domestic violence.
- e. Community Rules: Emergency shelters must have a code of conduct that supports the dignity of participants, and creates a safe and supportive environment to help participants resolve their housing and other crises.
 - i. Residents and staff are to be treated with dignity, respect & kindness:
 - (a) No discrimination or harassment of residents, volunteers or staff; no inappropriate language.
 - (b) Respect for personal space: no non-residents in resident rooms; residents may not take anything that does not belong to them.
 - (c) Attention to sound levels including TV and music; use private radios or other electronic devices only with earphones.
 - (d) Respect for the physical site: no damage to the property.



Mendocino County Homeless Services Continuum of Care Emergency Shelter Program Standards

- ii. Our goal is to support a safe environment onsite:
 - (a) Fire Prevention: No flammable chemicals, fireworks, candles, incense, or cooking in resident's rooms. No tampering with fire or smoke alarms. Smoking is allowed only in designated outside areas.
 - (b) Preventing physical harm: Participants cannot bring in any objects that could be used to harm self or others, e.g., no weapons (real or toy), and no verbal or physical threats.
 - (c) No illegal activity, including illegal drug use or possession onsite, including marijuana, medical or otherwise.
 - (d) A Healthy and Sanitary Environment: No food in client rooms/dorms; residents must have access to personal hygiene resources. Shelters may require participation in chores or volunteer services to maintain a healthy environment, with provisions for disabilities and illness (e.g., modified assignments or being excused).
 - (e) Shelter guests will be expected to behave in a way that does not negatively impact other shelter guests, or disturb their peaceful enjoyment of the shelter.
 - iii. Policies to support the health and safety of children under 18:
 - (a) Children onsite must be supervised by their parents or legal guardians at all times (with the exception of unaccompanied youth, where they are present by permission of the legal guardian).
 - (b) MCHSCoC Emergency Shelters will assess the educational needs of shelter guests. If Children are identified, coordination with the McKinney Vento/Hearth Mendocino County Office of Education liaison.
 - iv. Guest community meetings may be conducted to ensure good communication, empowered problem-solving, health and well-being; individual shelters may make these mandatory.
 - v. The MCHSCoC encourages shelters to make accommodations to support program participants who are working swing shift and graveyard shifts, giving them day time access to the shelter site.
5. Consequences of actions counter to participants' safe and quiet enjoyment of shelter facilities.
- a. Mendocino County shelter providers will adhere to the principle of consistent application of consequences. The size of the facility, and special needs of the population served, may influence the way consequences are delivered; therefore all shelter providers will consistently apply consequences when they occur within their programs.
 - b. All program participants must be notified of the house rules and expectations, and shelter-specific consequences will be reviewed with participant by shelter staff. (Prior to accepting a placement), and as they come into the shelter. House rules, shelter-specific consequences, and grievance procedures will be posted in common areas of shelters.
 - c. Violation of peaceful enjoyment of the premises includes rude language, refusal to



Mendocino County Homeless Services Continuum of Care Emergency Shelter Program Standards

participate in community care of the facility, or not attending to basic hygiene (as it affects others). These are treated with verbal warnings and support for behavioral change. If they are repeated, it is possible to write up warnings and for participants to be asked to leave for periods of 1 to 30 days.

- d. Violations of Safety: Verbal violence can lead to temporary expulsion; physical violence can lead to permanent expulsion, especially if the police must be involved or if there is physical harm to staff or other participants. Each shelter will have clear written procedures for expulsions, subject to exceptions under behavior contract provisions below.
 - e. Support for behavioral change: In implementing consequences, shelter staff will assess the participant's openness to change, and whenever possible design behavior contracts to address those behaviors that have led to concerns, while making every effort to avoid an expulsion.
 - f. If an expulsion is required to ensure safety, every effort will be made to connect the participant with more appropriate resources, and to identify a way to ensure the participant's safe transport to alternate services (e.g., detox). Whenever possible, shelter staff will elevate the case to a higher level of care.
6. Winter (Seasonal) Shelter and Extreme Cold/Wet Weather Policies:
- a. Seasonal Efforts:
 - i. Local Homeless Resource Centers will have up-to-date information available on the location(s) and how to access extreme weather shelter services.
 - ii. Seasonal shelter: Shelter expansions are designed to address the public health risk of cold or wet winter weather to unsheltered people. Because this health risk is increased with consumption of drugs or alcohol, seasonal shelters should be behavior-based, with no sobriety or drug-testing requirements. Shelters should review safety and legal requirements to be in shelter with participants on Entry (e.g., weapons and drugs cannot be brought inside the shelter).
 - (a) Volunteers staffing seasonal shelters should receive training on protocols for behavior problems, e.g., when to call staff, and when to call 911.
 - (b) Any behavior problems occurring within seasonal shelters should be referred first to designated staff; and to police if there is a threat to the safety of self or others.
7. *Service animals will allowed consistent with Fair Housing Laws and the Americans with Disabilities Act.*
8. How long a particular program participant will be provided with emergency shelter
- a. These written standards do not limit length of stay for emergency or temporary shelter activities provided in Mendocino County.
 - b. Emergency and temporary shelters are encouraged to quickly connect residents to housing navigation services and permanent housing resources.



Mendocino County Homeless Services Continuum of Care Emergency Shelter Program Standards

- c. Re-Admission after exiting: With the exception of expulsions, participants can re-enroll after a designated period of timeout— as of June 2016, this is individual to each shelter. There is no maximum number of times a participant may re-enter a shelter, with the exception of permanent expulsion due to violent behavior.
9. Occupancy Standards: Minimum space, bedding, meals, and personal item storage to be provided per person:
- a. Normal occupancy is set by a combination of use permits and construction or operational funding contracts.
 - b. Standards for Temporary Shelters
 - i. Each shelter will provide clean bedding upon Entry: sheets, blankets, pillows, mattress covers, and mattress. These should be in a clean and sanitary condition and should be inspected, and if necessary treated, for presence or evidence of arthropod/insect activity.
 - ii. Shelters must adhere to local building and fire codes. At a minimum, 2 means of egress should be available.
 - iii. Shelters must have a minimum of 30 square feet per person in single-tier beds, or 20 square feet per person in 2-tier beds. At least 50 cubic feet of air space must be provided per person, and when arranged head-to-toe, beds should have 3 feet of separation one from the next.
 - iv. Every shelter must have at least 1 hand-washing sink and at least one shower per 15 people, with soap, warm water, and disposable towels.
 - v. Every shelter must have 1 toilet for every 20 people (or 1 for every 10-20 females and 1 combined toilet/urinal for every 25-59 males).
 - c. Shelters may provide personal items, such as towels, minimum toiletries, and hygiene articles.
 - d. Storage may not always be available; the MCHSCoC recommends that each shelter provide a minimum of 10 cubic feet of personal storage per person.
10. Records retention:
- a. It is the common practice of Mendocino County homeless service providers to retain paper records for 7 years. The MCHSCoC's preference is that all data be entered into HMIS. HMIS meets all HIPAA, privacy and security requirements, more completely than most paper systems. Private user information can be drawn from the meta-data. Participating providers may scan documents and upload them to HMIS. Under HUD's data standards, the HMIS vendor will be responsible for regular secure storage of data retained beyond the required periods. To the extent possible, providers will move toward such electronic records, with the understanding some agencies will be required to retain paper records for monitoring by their funders.



Mendocino County
Homeless Services Continuum of Care
Emergency Shelter Program Standards

b.



Homeless Definition

CRITERIA FOR DEFINING HOMELESS	Category 1	Literally Homeless	<p>(1) Individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, meaning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Has a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not meant for human habitation; (ii) Is living in a publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state and local government programs); <u>or</u> (iii) Is exiting an institution where (s)he has resided for 90 days or less <u>and</u> who resided in an emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution
	Category 2	Imminent Risk of Homelessness	<p>(2) Individual or family who will imminently lose their primary nighttime residence, provided that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Residence will be lost within 14 days of the date of application for homeless assistance; (ii) No subsequent residence has been identified; <u>and</u> (iii) The individual or family lacks the resources or support networks needed to obtain other permanent housing
	Category 3	Homeless under other Federal statutes	<p>(3) Unaccompanied youth under 25 years of age, or families with children and youth, who do not otherwise qualify as homeless under this definition, but who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Are defined as homeless under the other listed federal statutes; (ii) Have not had a lease, ownership interest, or occupancy agreement in permanent housing during the 60 days prior to the homeless assistance application; (iii) Have experienced persistent instability as measured by two moves or more during in the preceding 60 days; <u>and</u> (iv) Can be expected to continue in such status for an extended period of time due to special needs or barriers
	Category 4	Fleeing/ Attempting to Flee DV	<p>(4) Any individual or family who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Is fleeing, or is attempting to flee, domestic violence; (ii) Has no other residence; <u>and</u> (iii) Lacks the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing



Mendocino County
Homeless Services Continuum of Care
Emergency Shelter Program Standards



Homeless Definition

RECORDKEEPING REQUIREMENTS	Category 1	Literally Homeless	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written observation by the outreach worker; <u>or</u> • Written referral by another housing or service provider; <u>or</u> • Certification by the individual or head of household seeking assistance stating that (s)he was living on the streets or in shelter; • For individuals exiting an institution—one of the forms of evidence above <u>and</u>: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ discharge paperwork <u>or</u> written/oral referral, <u>or</u> ○ written record of intake worker’s due diligence to obtain above evidence <u>and</u> certification by individual that they exited institution
	Category 2	Imminent Risk of Homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A court order resulting from an eviction action notifying the individual or family that they must leave; <u>or</u> • For individual and families leaving a hotel or motel—evidence that they lack the financial resources to stay; <u>or</u> • A documented and verified oral statement; <u>and</u> • Certification that no subsequent residence has been identified; <u>and</u> • Self-certification or other written documentation that the individual lack the financial resources and support necessary to obtain permanent housing
	Category 3	Homeless under other Federal statutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certification by the nonprofit or state or local government that the individual or head of household seeking assistance met the criteria of homelessness under another federal statute; <u>and</u> • Certification of no PH in last 60 days; <u>and</u> • Certification by the individual or head of household, and any available supporting documentation, that (s)he has moved two or more times in the past 60 days; <u>and</u> • Documentation of special needs <u>or</u> 2 or more barriers
	Category 4	Fleeing/ Attempting to Flee DV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For victim service providers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ An oral statement by the individual or head of household seeking assistance which states: they are fleeing; they have no subsequent residence; and they lack resources. Statement must be documented by a self-certification or a certification by the intake worker. • For non-victim service providers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Oral statement by the individual or head of household seeking assistance that they are fleeing. This statement is documented by a self-certification or by the caseworker. Where the safety of the individual or family is not jeopardized, the oral statement must be verified; <u>and</u> ○ Certification by the individual or head of household that no subsequent residence has been identified; <u>and</u> ○ Self-certification, or other written documentation, that the individual or family lacks the financial resources and support networks to obtain other permanent housing.



**Mendocino County
Homeless Services Continuum of Care
Emergency Shelter Program Standards**

ACCEPTABLE FORMS OF IDENTIFICATION FOR EMERGENCY SHELTER PROGRAMS

- Valid driver's license or identification card issued by DMV
- Valid driver's license or identification card from the state or country of origin
- Birth Certificate
- United States Passport
- Foreign passport
- Verification of citizenship, alienage, or immigration status
 - o Permanent Resident Card or Alien Registration Receipt Card
 - o Employment Authorization Document (Card) that contains a photograph
 - o Green Card
 - o Work Visa
- Certificate of Naturalization or Citizenship
- American Indian Card
- Voter's registration card
- US military card
- Military dependent's ID card
- Social Security Card or Tax ID number
- State Benefits Card



**Mendocino County
Homeless Services Continuum of Care
Emergency Shelter Program Standards**

Sample Client Grievance Procedure

DEFINITIONS:

Complaint – When a client or community member doesn’t like particular procedures, the outcome of a process, style differences between staff, time frame of staff responses, or behavioral styles that may feel abrupt or too direct when compared to other staff styles. A complaint may be handled in an informal conversation with staff person or supervisor, if necessary.

Grievance – When a client or community member states that they have been harmed by staff behavior and that behavior significantly deviates from appropriate, professional behavior or when a client’s complaint is not resolvable with the staff person’s supervisor. Filing a grievance is a formal procedure that will include management involvement and possible oversight from the relevant agency’s Executive Director.

POLICY:

It is important to have a mechanism for clients to address grievances or complaints promptly. Clients need to feel that their concerns are well heard, that they are treated respectfully, and that the agency makes every effort to formally investigate complaints in a fair and thorough manner. Clients need to know that we are engaged in continuous improvement of our services.

PROCEDURE:

1. In the instance of every complaint or grievance we learn of, the client must be encouraged to first try to work out the issue with the staff person involved or the staff person in charge of the client program.
2. If the grievance cannot be resolved by informal discussion between the client and the staff member, the client may submit the grievance in writing to the staff member’s supervisor. If the grievance cannot be resolved by the staff member’s supervisor, the client may request the grievance be submitted to the Executive Office.
3. The Executive Office will review all the information presented by the client, the staff member, and the supervisor and may collect additional information to resolve the grievance. The decision of the Executive Office is final.
4. The client may request a written response to the grievance. The final decision with regard to the grievance shall be made a part of the client’s files.

Client Name

Client Signature

Witness Name

Witness Signature

Date



**Mendocino County
Homeless Services Continuum of Care
Emergency Shelter Program Standards**

**Addendum A
Infectious Disease Mitigation**

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Temporary Guidelines: During the Shelter-in-Place Public Health Order needed to mitigate increased COVID-19 transmission in our community, emergency and temporary shelters operated in Mendocino County must follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP) Interim Guidance for Homeless Service Providers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).

- a. These guidelines are available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/homeless-shelters/plan-prepare-respond.html>.
- b. This guidance is regularly updated and shelter operators are responsible for continually updating their operation practices to align with guideline updates.