



## **Western Virginia Continuum of Care Anti-Discrimination Policy**

### **Overview**

The Western Virginia Continuum of Care is committed to ending homelessness across its entire geographic region which covers the counties of Clarke, Frederick, Page, Rockingham, Shenandoah, and Warren, the towns within those counties, and the cities of Harrisonburg and Winchester. To provide all individuals and families equal access to necessary housing and services, the CoC has adopted policies and procedures to ensure no one seeking services from the CoC is discriminated against. These policies and procedures provide guidance to staff and volunteers of all CoC agencies to prevent discrimination in agency policies and during any interactions with clients.

Continuum of Care (CoC) and Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) programs must operate in compliance with federal nondiscrimination and equal opportunity requirements, including the Fair Housing Act, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act. The requirements of the Equal Access in Accordance with an Individual's Gender Identity regulation, and the requirements of executive orders regarding equal employment opportunity and opportunities for minority and female owned businesses also apply. Please see 24 CFR 5.105 for a full list of applicable federal laws, regulations and Executive Orders. All agencies in the CoC including, but not limited to, the CoC Lead Agency (Harrisonburg Redevelopment & Housing Authority), agencies funded through CoC and ESG programs, and homeless service agencies funded by other federal and state programs, commit not to discriminate against anyone seeking homeless services based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status, disability, age, gender, LGBTQIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, allies) status, or marital status.

### **Equal Access Policy**

Providers of federal and/or state-funded housing and services in the Western Virginia CoC shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status, disability, age, gender, LGBTQIA status, or marital status. Providers shall make housing available to all otherwise eligible individuals regardless of actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status. The CoC and all participating agencies will provide housing and services in accordance with a client's gender identity, determine eligibility without regard to actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status, and will serve all persons regardless of actual or perceived barriers to services. The CoC's coordinated assessment system will provide equal access to all persons, especially those least likely to seek

or receive services, and that permits all agencies to comply with applicable civil rights and fair housing laws and requirements.

### **Equal Access Procedures**

The Western Virginia CoC will:

- Provide as-needed training to agencies and agency staff regarding the Equal Access Rule and related requirements.
- Use appropriate, inclusive language in communications, publications, trainings, personnel handbooks, and other policy documents that affirms the CoC's commitment to serving all eligible clients in adherence with the HUD Equal Access Rule.
- Ensure that communications and resources pertaining to housing and services are accessible to individuals with disabilities.
- Continue to develop partnerships with organizations that can provide expertise around the process of changing gender markers on identification and benefit applications or can ensure subject matter expertise among staff.
- Support all clients in understanding their privacy rights and the implication of releasing information.
- Monitor CoC and ESG-funded agencies annually to ensure compliance with applicable fair housing and civil rights laws and related requirements. Monitoring will be carried out by the Compliance and Evaluation Committee.

Agencies will:

- Include policies and procedures in employee handbooks and training that prohibit discrimination and provide guidance to staff to ensure equal access to all groups to the agency's services.
- Ensure all staff, volunteers, and contractors maintain the confidentiality of a client's legal name and sex at birth and understand the potential impact that disclosure can have on a client's progress to self-sufficiency.
- Ensure staff, volunteers, and contractors understand that a client may present their gender differently than the way they identify.
- When possible, ensure that construction or property rehabilitation includes and promotes privacy and safety in sleeping areas, bathrooms, and showers.
- Mediate and resolve conflicts between clients in a way that respects clients and treats them fairly and equally.
- Take immediate action to resolve inappropriate behavior, treatment, harassment, or equal access issues by any person (staff, volunteers, contractors, or clients). Follow the prescribed agency grievance policy as with any other grievance.

Agency staff will:

- Honor all requests, to the extent possible, for special accommodations for anyone who has a disability or who feels discriminated against or unsafe.

- Honor the request of an individual for accommodations based on their personal safety and privacy concerns, whenever feasible.
- Try to ensure client safety and prevent harassment. If at all possible, staff will remove perpetrators of harassment before asking victims to move.
- Assist clients without identification documents to understand the resources available to obtain identification. Make available intake materials that allow individuals to indicate both their legal name and the name they prefer to be called.
- Treat a client's gender identity and sex assigned at birth as confidential medical information that will not be disclosed without specific, time-limited client consent. Similarly, a client's legal name shall be treated as confidential information.
- Not consider a client or potential client ineligible because their appearance or behavior does not conform to gender stereotypes and will serve all individuals eligible for the program.
- Not ask questions or seek information concerning a person's anatomy or medical history beyond elements necessary for the purpose of providing services.
- Not require an individual's gender identity to match the gender listed on an ID or other documents.

### **Involuntary Family Separation Policy**

According to CoC Program interim rule 24 CFR 578.93(e), involuntary separation is prohibited in projects funded through CoC and ESG dollars. In accordance with the interim rule, the CoC will work with providers to ensure shelter placement efforts are coordinated to avoid involuntary family separation. CoC- and ESG-funded projects may not deny admission to any household on the basis of:

- The age or gender of a child under 18
- The gender of a parent or parents, or
- The marital status of a parent or parents

### **Faith Based Activities Policy**

In providing program assistance, CoC agencies and staff shall not discriminate against a program participant or prospective participant on the basis of religion or religious belief. In providing services supported in whole or part with federal financial assistance and in their outreach activities related to such services, programs shall not discriminate against current or prospective program beneficiaries on the basis of religion, a religious belief, a refusal to hold a religious belief, or a refusal to attend or participate in a religious practice. All activities must adhere to federal requirements, as established in 24 CFR § 5.109.