



Equal Access

COC ALL-STAFF TRAINING | NOVEMBER 17, 2022

WASHTENAW COUNTY OFFICE OF COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT

What is Equal Access?

- ▶ The Equal Access rule helps make sure that all eligible persons are able to access services and shelter to help resolve their housing crisis.

Federal Equal Access Requirements

HUD Equal Access to Housing Rule

- All services coordinated through the Continuum of Care must be available to all eligible persons, regardless of ***actual or perceived race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, familial status, disability, actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, and marital status.***

State Equal Access Requirements

State Protected Classes Against Discrimination Include...

- Religion
- Race
- Color
- National Origin
- Age
- Sex
- **Height and Weight**
- **Familial or Marital Status**

Local Equal Access Requirements

CoC Policy Dictates...

- All clients shall be informed of their right to access housing and services without discrimination, and of their right to initiate a grievance process if they believe they have been discriminated against.

Family Composition

The Equal Access Rule defines *Family* as, but not limited to, regardless of marital status, actual or perceived sexual orientation, or gender identity, the following:

1. A single person who may be elderly, near-elderly, displaced, disabled or any other single person
2. A group of persons residing together, and such group includes, but is not limited to:
 - a. A family with or without children (a child temporarily in foster care is considered a member of the family)
 - b. An Elderly Family
 - c. Near Elderly Family
 - d. A Disabled Family
 - e. A Displaced Family
 - f. The Remaining Member of a Tenant Family

Family Composition

ALL families must be served

- For example, non-romantic groups who present for services as a family.
 - Non-romantic groups may be two or more unrelated clients, regardless of gender identity, seeking services as a family.
- They **CANNOT** be denied service or recognition as a family according to **Equal Access**.

Equal Access Rules Apply to:

- All HUD- and MSHDA-funded programs, including Continuum of Care and ESG
- This includes:
 - Avalon
 - OCED
 - IHN
 - MAP
 - Ozone House
 - Safe House
 - Salvation Army/HAWC
 - SAWC
 - SOS Community Services

Why is Equal Access Important?

- Among homeless LGBTQ youth (up to age 24), the average age of first time homeless is **15 YEARS OLD**.
- In a recent study, nearly two thirds of homeless shelters **failed to enroll a person properly** once they identified as transgender.
- Nearly a quarter of homeless transgender residents **report being assaulted by other residents or staff** at homeless shelters.

How Many Clients are LGBTQ?

National data from agencies serving youth experiencing homelessness show:

- **Homeless Youth Overall:** 40% are LGBTQ
 - **Drop-in Centers:** 43%
 - **Street Outreach:** 30%
 - **Housing Programs:** 30%

How Many Clients are LGBTQ?

In Washtenaw County:

- Less than 1% of the county's homeless population identifies as transgender or non-conforming gender as compared to **12.5%** of youth experiencing homelessness in Washtenaw County.
- Ozone House reports that **25%** of youth seek assistance for LGBTQ-specific situations, but the total number of LGBTQ-identifying youth seeking other services is likely much higher.

Note: we do not collect data on sexual orientation.

How Does Equal Access Fit in with our CoC?

Client-Centered Approach

- Providers should focus on the needs of clients and to let their needs and abilities guide services provided.

How Does Equal Access Fit in with our CoC?

Client Choice

- Individuals must be placed in accordance with gender identity.

How Does Equal Access Fit in with our CoC?

Housing First

- Prioritizes providing permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness without requirements or added barriers.

Best Practices

Promote **DIGNITY, RESPECT,** and **VALUE** of every individual

- 1) **Respect Client Choice:** Individuals must be placed in accordance with gender identity
- 2) **Respect** the client's assessment of what feels safe within the program or outside referrals
- 3) **Accept** the name, gender, and pronouns given by a client
- 4) **Do not** ask a client their sex at birth
- 5) **Clients should not** be asked to "prove" their gender

Foster an **Inclusive** Shelter Community

- 1) **Resolve conflicts** quickly, and expel the harassing client when warranted
- 2) Provide a **confidential space** for clients to express concerns
- 3) **Ensure confidentiality** of the client even within you organization

Foster an **Inclusive** Shelter Community

- 4) An individual's gender transition **should not be shared** with other staff
- 5) Approach the client in a **private setting** to ensure confidentiality is not breached
- 6) **Report violations** of the Equal Access to Housing Rule to the CoC (maybe start with your supervisor, though)

Safe Spaces And Conflict Resolution

People will ask the following when walking into your space:

1. Is this a place where **I can be myself** or will **I have to hide** who I am?
2. Is this a place where I will **experience violence** from people around me— employees, volunteers, or other residents?
3. Will the people who work here **understand what I need**?
4. **Am I safe enough** here to stay off the streets tonight?

Safe Spaces and Conflict Resolution

- When there is a conflict between two individuals, don't target the more cooperative, harassed individual to make changes. **Focus on the aggressor.**
- Staff training should incorporate **multiple ways to address and resolve** impermissible conduct among residents.
- Conflict resolution **should not involve expulsion** of the victim of harassment.



Final Questions?