

Governor Christie Announces New Statewide Housing First Initiative to Assist New Jersey's Most Vulnerable

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500 State Rental Assistance Program Vouchers To Be Available For Chronically Homeless

Trenton, NJ – Continuing the Administration's strong record of reducing homelessness in New Jersey, Governor Christie today announced the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) will issue 500 State Rental Assistance Program (SRAP) vouchers through a new statewide Housing First program. The vouchers will be available to chronically homeless individuals and/or families who are high utilizers of public systems.

"The issue of homelessness has been a critical priority for my Administration and we have been working to coordinate the delivery of services more strategically to help people get back on their feet again," said Governor Christie. "Housing First is just one example of how we are doing new and innovative things in government to combat chronic homelessness and housing insecurity in our state."

Governor Christie noted:

- In 2015, homelessness was a staggering 41% lower than it was in 2007;
- From 2014 to 2015 alone, we reduced the number of homeless in New Jersey by nearly 14%;
- Rates of homelessness among families with children declined by 25% in the last year.

DCA anticipates \$5.4 million in annualized funding for the vouchers and \$250,000 in discretionary Community Services Block Grant funds for coordinated services. Under the statewide Housing First program, 400 rental vouchers will be allocated to chronically homeless households and 100 rental vouchers to homeless veterans.

"Providing housing with supportive services has a significant impact on their health and well-being, and the community they live in," said Charles A. Richman, Commissioner of New Jersey Department of Community Affairs. "This initiative builds upon the significant commitment DCA has made to address the housing needs of the most vulnerable populations in our state."

Housing First is an innovative, nationally recognized approach to ending homelessness. The program has been successful in keeping the costliest, most vulnerable, long-term and chronically homeless patients stably housed, dramatically reducing unnecessary hospitalizations, emergency room visits and incarcerations.

Last year, the DCA, along with the Department of Human Services, supported the Camden Housing First Initiative and dedicated 50 project-based Housing Choice Vouchers to high utilizers of emergency room services.

DCA also contributed project-based Housing Choice vouchers to the Department of Children and Families' (DCF) extremely successful Keeping Families Together program. This permanent supportive housing program helps child welfare-involved families find permanent supportive housing. Clinical and case management staff and evidence-based, trauma-informed services are also provided to support the unique needs of individual families. DCF established the program in Essex County in July 2014 and later expanded it to Monmouth and Passaic counties. Most recently, the program was added in Atlantic and Gloucester counties.

An RFP will be issued to identify local partnerships that will serve as incubators for best practices in housing and

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services for a variety of vulnerable populations. Tenant-based vouchers and service funding will be awarded to at least five organizations that have experience with assisting households in finding housing and providing ongoing supportive services, including but not limited to medical services, mental health, case management, substance abuse treatment and employment training.

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