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Parent, Family and Community Engagement

# Prioritizing Families Experiencing Homelessness for Enrollment: Performance Standards and Related Strategies

October 1, 2019



## Navigating Adobe

- General Chat
- Interactive Functions
- Web Links Pod
- Recording for ECLKC



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## Welcome and Introductions



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## Speakers



Brandi Black Thacker,  
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Jennifer Olson,  
NCPFCE



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Office of Head Start



Dr. Deborah Bergeron,  
Office of Head Start

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## Supporting Families Experiencing Homelessness in Head Start and Early Head Start Three-Part Web Series

- Prioritizing Families Experiencing Homelessness for Enrollment: Performance Standards and Related Strategies, **Oct. 1, 2019**
- Conversations with Families about Living Experiences and Housing Goals: Creating Opportunities for Professional Development in your Program, **Nov. 14, 2019**
- Establishing and Sustaining Community Partnerships for Outreach and Continuity, **Dec. 5, 2019**

**Webinar Time: 3:00-4:30 p.m. ET**

**Join the Chat After the Webinar! 4:30-4:45 p.m. ET**



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## Learning Objectives

- Review Head Start Program Performance Standards that support your program's capacity to serve families experiencing homelessness
- Discuss strategies and best practices to enhance access and participation in programs for children and families experiencing homelessness
- Engage in reflective discussion associated with balancing eligibility requirements, reporting expectations and building lasting and supportive relationships with families



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## Why It's Important to Talk About Homelessness

- Historic numbers of children are experiencing homelessness
- Infants are the most vulnerable
- Homelessness can contribute to:
  - Developmental, health, emotional, behavioral, and learning challenges
  - Barriers to participation in early education programs



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## Pregnancy and Parenthood Are Common Among Youth Experiencing Homelessness

- Young parents have 3 times the risk of experiencing homelessness compared to non-parenting peers.
- 43% of 18-25 year-old young women experiencing homelessness report having at least one child, compared to 22% of young women who had not experienced homelessness.



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# Language Matters

- Homelessness does not define the person or child
- People first language acknowledges the individual before the situation (families experiencing homelessness)
- Homelessness is a situation the family is experiencing, not a status
- Our language should honor each



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# #HomeAtHeadStart

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Dr. Deborah Bergeron,  
Office of Head Start

## New Information Memorandum! Head Start and Early Head Start Eligibility for Children in Kinship Care

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## Seven Strategies for Enhancing Access and Participation



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## Need for Increasing Access and Participation

- Early childhood and school-age child care programs lessen impact of homelessness
- Programs provide opportunities for families to build on strengths, identify immediate needs, and plan for the future.



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## Need for Increasing Access and Participation

- Children and families experiencing homelessness encounter barriers to access and participation
- Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) specify regulatory requirements for removing barriers to access and participation



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## What Are the Seven Strategies for Enhancing Access and Participation?

1. Prioritization
2. Reserving Slots
3. Eligibility
4. Verification
5. Grace Periods
6. Continuity of Enrollment and Effective Transition
7. Training for Staff

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## Strategy 1. Prioritization

Head Start and Early Head Start programs can prioritize children experiencing homelessness for enrollment in different ways depending on their community needs data and program resources.

**1302.14(a)(1)**



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## Strategy 1. Reflection Poll

Do your ERSEA policies recognize families experiencing homelessness as a priority population?



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## Strategy 1. Prioritization



### Best Practices

- Incorporate data about family homelessness in the community assessment process so protocols for prioritization are informed by community needs
- Assign sufficient criteria or points to create a priority rating for children experiencing homelessness, especially when there is a waitlist for services
- Partner with providers of services to families experiencing homelessness
- Prepare for conversations with families

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## Strategy 2. Reserving Slots

Reserving slots can help protect vacancies so enrollment is possible on a more continual basis for children who are experiencing homelessness. Families experiencing homelessness may seek services during the program year outside of typical recruitment and enrollment periods.

**1301.15(c)**



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## Strategy 2. Question for Reflection

What are some ways that your program has been able to use this regulation in support of families experiencing homelessness?



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## Strategy 2. Reserving Slots



### Best Practices

- Establish local program policies allowing Head Start and Early Head Start programs to reserve up to three percent of their funded enrollment for children experiencing homelessness
- Create relationships with shelters and other homeless service providers to streamline the referral and enrollment process
- Coordinate referrals in order to enroll children in vacant slots within the allotted 30-day timeframe

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## Strategy 3. Eligibility

Children experiencing homelessness are eligible for Head Start and Early Head Start enrollment. No other criteria are necessary to establish eligibility.

**1302.12(c)(1)(iii)**



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## Strategy 3. Reflection Poll

How comfortable is your program in using the McKinney-Vento Act definition for ERSEA practice?



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## Strategy 3. Eligibility



### Best Practices

- Create protocol to ensure families experiencing homelessness are not required to submit income in addition to verification of homeless status
- Provide flexible enrollment practices (i.e. home visits at shelters until family is more settled in new housing)

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## Strategy 4. Verification

Head Start programs can adopt documentation and verification policies that allow flexibility for families experiencing homelessness. Informal or emergency housing arrangements may make it difficult for families to provide verification of temporary housing. Families may also be fearful or uncomfortable verifying housing arrangements that are unstable.

**1302.12(i)(3)(i-iii)**



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## Strategy 4. Questions for Reflection

What strategies have you incorporated into the documentation of your ERSEA process that ensure families are treated with dignity and respect?



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## Strategy 4. Verification: Families Seeking Services



### Best Practices

- It's about the person and not the paperwork
- Be open and compassionate as you partner with the family to determine next steps (e.g. referrals to resources for food, transportation, housing)
- Enhance protocol to verify living situation
- Connect with homeless services provider, school personnel, or other service agency to assist in determining a family's living situation

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## Strategy 4. Verification: Currently Enrolled Families



### Best Practices

- Families may not realize their new living circumstances make them eligible for additional resources, but if you have an established relationship, it is more likely the family will connect with you for support
- Create a follow-up protocol to allow for recognizing changes that may signify a new living situation for currently enrolled families

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## Strategy 5. Grace Period

Head Start and Early Head Start programs can provide a grace period of up to 90 days or the length of time specified by state licensing standards. Families experiencing homelessness often do not have immunization and other health records required for enrollment due to frequent moves and emergency circumstances.

**1302.15(e) and 1302.16(c)(1)**



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## Strategy 5. Reflection Poll

Are children allowed to attend while health records are being obtained?



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## Strategy 5. Grace Period



### Best Practices

- Let children attend while immunization and other health records are being obtained
- Assist families with obtaining required documentation within the grace period
- Establish interagency agreements for sharing documentation between all providers of resources for families

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## Strategy 6. Ensure Continuity of Enrollment and Effective Transition

Stability is important for children's development and learning. The HSPPS include requirements to allow children to remain in the program they currently attend in order to prevent disruption and promote continuity of care. If it is in the best interest of the child to transition to another program, effort should be made to ensure smooth transition and seamless participation into a comparable early care and education setting.

**1302.15(b)(3) and 1302.72(a)**



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## Strategy 6. Questions for Reflection

- What strategies do you use to maintain enrollment and attendance with families experiencing homelessness?
- How do you facilitate transition when families experiencing homelessness move to another early care and education setting?



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## Strategy 6. Ensure Continuity of Enrollment and Effective Transition



### Best Practices

- Identify children who may become homeless while already enrolled by creating an “early alert system” to monitor children’s attendance, health, development, and learning
- Facilitate a smooth transition to another program when a family must relocate out of the service area (e.g., transferring records, cross-program communication with families)
- Develop MOUs with programs in service areas where your families may be moving

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## Strategy 6. Ensure Continuity of Enrollment and Effective Transition



### Best Practices

- Accept child health files (and possibly screenings) from another grantee or be open to providing them, when the family transitions in/out of your program
- Consider the option of helping families sign up for electronic medical/dental records so their records could be transferred with them as they attend a new health facility
- Provide support to assist families who have relocated due to homelessness and who are having difficulty getting to the program (e.g., transportation assistance through partnerships with public schools or community agencies, bus or gas vouchers, or facilitating car pools)

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## Strategy 7. Training for Staff

Head Start and Early Head Start programs could provide training about program policies. Given the unique enrollment criteria and processes for families experiencing homelessness, staff must understand how to apply the McKinney-Vento Assistance Act definitions and the policies in daily practice.

**1302.12(m)(1)(ii)**

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/family-support-well-being/article/supporting-children-families-experiencing-homelessness>



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## Strategy 7. Questions for Reflection

What professional development and/or staff wellness opportunities do staff need to do this work?



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## Strategy 7. Training for Staff



### Best Practices

- Offer training that de-stigmatizes and increases understanding of homelessness and its impact on children and families
- Collaborate with community partners to maximize training resources and strengthen working relationships among direct service staff
- Embed content about serving children and families experiencing homelessness into existing education, T/TA, professional development activities, reflective supervision, and staff wellness opportunities

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## Review: Seven Strategies for Enhancing Access and Participation

1. Prioritization
2. Reserving Slots
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4. Verification
5. Grace Periods
6. Continuity of Enrollment and Effective Transition
7. Training for Staff

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## Supporting Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness: An Interactive Learning Series



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## Communities

- ✓ ERSEA Managers-Coordinators
- ✓ PFCE Deepening Practice Communities
- Already a MyPeers member? Find the **ERSEA Managers-Coordinators** or **PFCE Deepening Practice** communities in MyPeers under “All Communities,” and select the blue “Join” button.
- Not a member of MyPeers? Sign up!
  - ✓ Visit the MyPeers page on the Early Childhood Learning Knowledge Center (ECLKC).
  - ✓ Scroll to the bottom and select “Create an Account.”
  - ✓ Fill out the form and within a few days you will receive an email from MangoApps with your login information.

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Have More Questions?

Stay and chat with us!

The speakers will stay on the line an additional 15 minutes to continue the dialogue.



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# Evaluation Link and Wrap-up



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