



Anti-Discrimination Policies

Background

The Northeast Minnesota Continuum of Care (NE CoC) is a broad coalition of community partners that have been working, since 1997, to coordinate efforts to address homelessness in Northeast Minnesota and to meet the diverse needs of our local population. The NE CoC Region includes 6 counties in Northeast Minnesota - Aitkin, Carlton, Cook, Itasca, Koochiching & Lake counties - and the Bois Forte, Fond du Lac, Leech Lake & Grand Portage Indian Reservations.

The NE CoC has adopted these policies and procedures to ensure that all individuals and families experiencing homelessness have equal access, without discrimination, to all necessary housing and supportive services. These policies and procedures provide guidance to all service providers to prevent discrimination in their policies and in their interaction with individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Through these policies and procedures, the NE CoC will comply with all applicable civil rights and fair housing laws and regulations, including HUD's Equal Access and Gender Identity Rules.

Anti-Discrimination and Equal Access

Equal Access Policy

All service providers in the NE CoC region are prohibited from discriminating against anyone seeking homeless services based on race, ethnicity, color, national origin, language, ancestry, religion, sex, familial status, age, gender identity, LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning) status, marital status, domestic or sexual violence victim/survivor status, or sensory, mental, or physical disability. This includes, but is not limited to, the CoC Lead Agency, agencies funded through the Continuum of Care and Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) programs, and service providers funded by other federal and state programs.

The NE CoC operates a coordinated entry system that provides equal access to all persons, especially those least likely to seek or receive services, and that allows all participating agencies to comply with all applicable civil rights and fair housing laws and regulations, including HUD's Equal Access and Gender Identity Rules.

Equal Access Procedures:

The NE CoC will:

- Provide annual and as-needed training to service providers and others regarding the HUD Equal Access and Gender Identity Rules and related requirements.
- Use appropriate inclusive language in communications, publications, training events, personnel handbooks and other policy documents that affirms the CoC's commitment

to serving all eligible clients in adherence with the HUD Equal Access and Gender Identity Rules.

- Regularly monitor CoC-funded and ESG-funded agencies and regional coordinated entry systems to ensure compliance with HUD's Equal Access and Gender Identity Rules, and other applicable civil rights and fair housing laws and regulations.
- Develop partnerships with organizations that can provide resources, guidance, and accountability to ensure all persons have equal access to CoC programs.
- Provide transparent and easy-to-access information to individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness about their rights to equal access to Coordinated Entry and programs in the NE CoC and who to contact if they feel they are discriminated against.

Service providers will:

- Make sure that staff and volunteers understand that a client may present their gender differently than the way staff and volunteers identify their gender.
- Ensure that all staff and volunteers 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 toward self-sufficiency.
- When possible, ensure that new construction and rehabilitation includes and promotes privacy and safety in sleeping areas, bathrooms, and showers.
- Take prompt action to resolve inappropriate behavior, treatment, harassment, or any other equal access issues by staff, volunteers, or clients.
- Include policies and procedures in employee handbooks and training that prohibit discrimination and provide guidance to staff to ensure that all persons have equal access to the agency's services.
- Provide transparent and easy-to-access information to all clients and potential clients about their rights to equal access and who to contact if they feel they are discriminated against.

Service provider staff will:

- Use the gender and pronouns identified by clients and potential clients.
- Do their best to ensure client safety and prevent harassment.
- Not consider a client or potential client to be ineligible for services because their appearance or behavior does not conform to gender stereotypes.
- Not ask questions or seek information concerning a person's anatomy or medical history beyond that necessary to determine program eligibility.
- Not require a person's gender identity to match the gender listed on an ID or other documents.
- Help clients understand the resources available to help them obtain legal identification documents.
- Keep clients' transgender status confidential unless the client wants to share this information.
- Provide intake materials that allow individuals to indicate their legal name and the name they prefer to be called.
- Refer to all individuals as the name they prefer to be called in all communications.

- Treat clients' gender identity and sex at birth as confidential medical information that will not be disclosed without written time-limited consent. Similarly, client legal name shall be treated as confidential information.

Involuntary Family Separation Policy

In accordance with HUD's CoC and ESG program regulations, involuntary family separation is prohibited in CoC-funded and ESG-funded projects. CoC-funded and ESG-funded projects may not deny admission to any household on the basis of:

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

Faith-Based Activities Policy

CoC agencies and staff, volunteers, or contractors shall not, in providing assistance, discriminate against a client or potential client on the basis of religion or religious belief. IN providing services support in whole or part with federal financial assistance and in 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 religious activities.

Limited English Proficiency Policy

CoC agencies and staff, volunteers, or contractors shall provide services to all households regardless of their spoken or written language. To ensure individuals with Limited English Proficiency have access to all programs and services available, CoC and its service providers will:

- Provide services that are respectful and responsive to each individual's needs and preferences;
- Ask clients and potential clients about their cultural and linguistic needs at intake and throughout the service relationship;
- Make reasonable accommodations for households that are limited in their English proficiency;
- Provide access to language assistance and translation services for any client or potential client who identifies this as a need at no cost to them;
- Make reasonable accommodations for households that are limited in their English proficiency, and
- Utilize resources such as the Language Line and State Services for the Blind/Deaf to facilitate written and verbal communication.

Affirmative Marketing and Outreach

The NE CoC, its member agencies, its recipients of CoC and ESG funds, and its Coordinated Entry System partners shall affirmatively market access to Coordinated Entry (and as a result to the housing and services available through Coordinated Entry) to eligible persons

regardless of on race, ethnicity, color, national origin, language, ancestry, religion, sex, familial status, age, gender identity, LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning) status, marital status, domestic or sexual violence victim/survivor status, or sensory, mental, or physical disability. who are least likely to apply in the absence of special outreach, and maintain records of those marketing activities.

Grievance and Anti-Retaliation

Filing a Grievance:

All individuals will be informed of the CoC's Anti-Discrimination policy at assessment. At intake, orientation or employment, all clients, staff, volunteers, and contractors should be provided the program's Anti-Discrimination Policy and should be informed of the program's grievance process.

- For housing program related complaints, grievances will be directed to the appropriate housing provider for resolution.
- For complaints with Coordinated Entry in the NE CoC, grievances can be sent to the CoC Coordinator or any of the Coordinated Entry access points listed on the CoC Coordinated Entry page.
- For discrimination complaints, contact the
 - Department of Housing & Urban Development: 1.800.765.9372 OR visit https://www.hud.gov/i_want_to/file_a_fair_housing_discrimination_complaint for instructions on filing a complaint online or via mail.
 - Minnesota Department of Human Rights: 651-539-1100 or Toll Free at 1-800-657-3704

Anti-Retaliation:

The NE CoC strictly prohibits retaliation against individuals who file grievances or participate in the grievance process. Retaliation includes any adverse action taken against an individual because they have asserted their rights under this policy.

Appendix I

Resources

Notice on Equal Access Rights: <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Notice-on-Equal-Access-Rights.pdf>

Equal Access Rights for Persons Identifying as LGBTQ+:

https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/fair_housing_equal_opp/housing_discrimination_and_persons_identifying_lgbtq#_Know_Your_Rights_Equal_Access_Rule

HUD Equal Access Final Rule:

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2012/02/03/2012-2343/equal-access-to-housing-in-hud-programs-regardless-of-sexual-orientation-or-gender-identity>

Appendix II

Checklist for Agency Anti-Discrimination Policies

Agencies can use this checklist to develop Anti-Discrimination Policies that align with the NE CoC's Anti-Discrimination Policies.

YES	NO	Checklist Questions
		Does your agency have an Anti-Discrimination policy?
		Is there a stated plan to train new staff and clearly communicate this policy during the onboarding process? Is annual training provided for staff, volunteers, and contractors?
		Does the intake process include a copy of the agency's Anti-Discrimination policies to clients or people presenting for services.
		Does the Policy Refer to Department of Housing Urban and Development (HUD) Equal Access Rule, anti-discrimination and privacy laws, and all other federal, state, and local non-discrimination and privacy law?
		Is there a clear statement about non-discrimination because of race, ethnicity, color, national origin, language, ancestry, religion, sex, familial status, age, gender identity, LGBTQ+ status, marital status, domestic or sexual violence victim status, or sensory, mental, or physical disability?
		Is there an equal access policy?
		If there is an equal access policy: Does it include specific procedures for working with transgender and gender nonconforming persons?
		Is there a family separation policy?
		Is there a faith-based activities policy?
		Are procedures spelled out that demonstrate how the clients, agency, staff, volunteers, and contractors will carry out the agency's anti-discrimination policies?
		Are there grievance and anti-retaliation policies and procedures? If so, are they shared with each person presenting for services?