

COORDINATED ENTRY:

Community Call for Transformative Change

JULY, 2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	04
BACKGROUND:UNREALIZED PAST RECOMMENDATIONS	05
WHAT IS COORDINATED ENTRY ?	07
HOW COORDINATED ENTRY WORKS	08
KEY FINDINGS	10
RECOMMENDATIONS	17
DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS	22

01

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Coordinated Entry System is intended to serve as the primary gateway for people experiencing homelessness to housing resources. In theory, the system prioritizes those with the greatest needs and connects them to appropriate housing opportunities.

This report explores significant concerns raised by community members, service providers, and people experiencing homelessness regarding the system's lack of transparency, fairness, accessibility, and effectiveness. Many households are unable to access housing assistance despite significant need, and the process can be confusing and difficult to navigate.

This white paper explains how Coordinated Entry currently works, barriers within the system, community findings, and outlines recommendations to transform the system. It builds on previous report findings from the Coalition on Homelessness and the city of San Francisco's report by Focus Strategies. The goal of this report is to provide recommendations fostered by stakeholders including service providers and homeless people, to move toward a more transparent, equitable, and human-centered system that better serves families, youth, and individuals experiencing homelessness in San Francisco.

02

BACKGROUND: UNREALIZED PAST RECOMMENDATIONS

In 2022, the Coalition on Homelessness in collaboration with community organizations released a report exploring the experiences of people navigating the Coordinated Entry System in San Francisco. The goal of the report was to better understand how the system works for those attempting to access housing and shelter. That same year the city contracted with the organization, “Homebase,” and released a report titled “*Coordinated Entry System Evaluation Qualitative Findings.*”

The city then formed a 21 member advisory body to create recommendations based on that analysis and released a set of fixes that same year. The recommendations from both reports largely lined up and the Local Homeless Coordinating Board adopted the recommendations.

The third phase of this process was implementation and the city formed an implementation committee. Some minor changes were made, but before all the changes could be realized, the implementation committee was disbanded in 2024.

For people experiencing homelessness in San Francisco, accessing housing services can be an extremely difficult and stressful process. Individuals and families often attempt to navigate the system while facing severe instability, uncertainty, and crisis. In order to access housing—and for families, shelter as well—people must go through the Coordinated Entry System (CES).

The Coordinated Entry System requires individuals to visit designated access points where they complete an assessment. Based on their responses, the system generates a score that determines how they are prioritized for housing. Those considered the most vulnerable are placed higher in the queue and may receive housing referrals when units or subsidies become available.

While Coordinated Entry is required under federal homelessness policy, local governments determine how the system is implemented. This means that cities like San Francisco have the authority to adjust policies, improve processes, and reform aspects of the system that are not working effectively.

The current Coordinated Entry system in San Francisco was originally designed with input from focus groups of unhoused individuals and interviews with service providers. However, many service providers interviewed for the report expressed concern that their feedback was not adequately incorporated into the final system design.

Some participants who did receive housing assistance reported that the support provided was not always sufficient for long-term stability. For example, individuals were not matched with the right housing such as being placed in short-term housing subsidy programs and then struggled to maintain housing after subsidies expired. Many could not earn enough income to cover rent independently.

Others described the housing process as highly demanding and difficult to manage while homeless. One participant explained that navigating Coordinated Entry felt like a full-time job, requiring constant communication with multiple providers responsible for different aspects of the housing process. For many, the system is confusing and lacks any clarity on the path to housing, and next steps.

04

WHAT IS COORDINATED ENTRY?

Coordinated Entry is the system used to connect people experiencing homelessness with housing programs and services. It is a centralized process that assesses people's need for housing. It prioritizes who needs housing the most, and matches them to available housing

Individuals can access the system through:

- Community Access Points
- Outreach teams from the Homeless Outreach Team (HOT)

Community Access Point Types:

- Adult Access Points
- For individuals over 18 without children.
- Family Access Points
- For families with minor children.
- Transitional Age Youth Access Points
- For young adults ages 18–24.

05

HOW COORDINATED ENTRY WORKS

STEP 1: ASSESSMENT

Individuals complete a housing assessment that asks questions about:

- Housing history
- Health conditions
- Safety concerns
- Support networks
- Barriers to housing

STEP 2: SCORING

Responses generate a vulnerability score. Higher scores are typically given to individuals who:

- Have experienced homelessness for longer periods
- Have disabilities or serious health conditions
- Have fewer support systems

STEP 3: HOUSING REFERRAL STATUS

- When housing becomes available, the highest scoring individuals may receive referrals. For example, if ten housing units become available, the ten highest scoring individuals may receive housing referral status.
- Those who do not receive referrals are directed toward Problem Solving, which may include short-term financial assistance or mediation services.

STEP 4: DOCUMENTATION

Individuals must gather documentation including:

- Housing history
- Health conditions
- Safety concerns
- Support networks
- Barriers to housing

STEP 5: HOUSING PLACEMENT

If matched to a housing opportunity, individuals may receive:

- Permanent supportive housing
- Rapid rehousing
- Subsidized housing programs



06

KEY FINDINGS

Service providers were interviewed during 2025/26 to collect on the ground experiences with the system

1. HOUSING ASSESSMENTS DO NOT ALWAYS MATCH CLIENT NEEDS

Service providers report that the current assessment process often results in clients being referred to programs that do not match their actual housing needs.

In many cases, individuals who clearly need Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)—such as those experiencing chronic homelessness without support networks—are scored into Problem Solving, which only provides short-term assistance.

Providers frequently must initiate Administrative Reviews to correct these mismatches.

One provider explained:

“Sometimes we get a client who has been homeless their entire life and has no support system. They clearly need permanent supportive housing, but they score as ‘problem solving only.’ That is definitely not the support they need. We have to request administrative reviews very often because of this.”

This indicates that the current scoring system may not accurately reflect long-term housing needs.

2. ELIGIBILITY THRESHOLDS ARE TOO HIGH

Providers identified the scoring thresholds for housing programs as one of the most significant barriers to housing access.

Providers identified the scoring thresholds for housing programs as one of the most significant barriers to housing access.

The city sets score ranges that determine eligibility for programs such as:

- Permanent Supportive Housing
- Rapid Rehousing
- Problem Solving

However, providers report that the thresholds are often so high that people must reach an extreme level of crisis before qualifying for meaningful housing assistance.

A provider noted:

“To qualify for permanent supportive housing, you have to score very high. The city could lower them if they wanted.”

Providers emphasized that lowering thresholds slightly could allow earlier intervention and prevent people from deteriorating further before receiving help.

3. RAPID REHOUSING EXPECTATIONS DO NOT MATCH CLIENT REALITIES

Rapid Rehousing programs require participants to begin contributing toward rent within a short time frame, often around three months after entering the program.

Providers report that this expectation can be unrealistic, particularly for Transitional Age Youth (TAY) who may have no income, limited employment history, and limited family support.

One provider shared: *“Rapid rehousing requires people to start contributing toward rent pretty early, about three months into the program. That doesn’t work for a lot of transitional age youth who have very low income or no income at all.”*

Providers mentioned that program design should better reflect the realities of youth and other vulnerable populations.



4. THE SYSTEM PRIORITIZES PROGRAM AVAILABILITY RATHER THAN ACTUAL NEED

Several providers expressed concern that program thresholds appear to be set based on housing availability rather than actual community need.

As one provider explained:

“It feels like the thresholds are based on availability instead of necessity. Instead of measuring what people actually need, the system adjusts the numbers depending on how many units are available.”

This dynamic can result in individuals with serious needs being excluded from housing programs simply because there are not enough units available.



5. LONG DELAYS AND ADMINISTRATIVE BARRIERS

Providers described cases where correcting an assessment or accessing the appropriate program can take months.

In one example, a provider described a client who was denied services at multiple service centers and incorrectly scored as “problem solving.”

The provider explained:

“We had a client denied services at several centers. He scored ‘problem solving’ but we believed he needed permanent supportive housing. We tried to get a transfer, and the entire process took nine months.”

During that time, the client remained in crisis and struggled to access shelter services.

6. ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS MAY MISS IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Providers noted that certain questions within the assessment tool carry more weight than others and may not accurately capture housing needs.

For example:

- Length of time homeless should be given greater weight in relation to someone's age.
- Some important questions have been removed for certain populations
- Housing history is sometimes limited to the past three years

One provider raised concerns about this limitation:

“Looking at only three years of housing history can manipulate the numbers. We should be looking at lifetime homelessness, especially for youth and adults who experienced homelessness before age 18.”



7. BARRIERS FOR SPECIFIC POPULATIONS

Providers identified several populations that face particular barriers in Coordinated Entry.

Undocumented Individuals

Undocumented clients may struggle to qualify for housing programs even when local subsidies are available.

Transgender and Undocumented Individuals

Trans undocumented clients face additional barriers in navigating housing systems and eligibility requirements.

People with Behavioral Health Needs Individuals with conditions such as:

- Schizophrenia
- Bipolar disorder
- Developmental disabilities

may struggle to maintain communication with providers due to unstable phone access or other barriers.

Survivors of Domestic Violence

DV survivors may hesitate to disclose sensitive information during assessments.

07

COMMUNITY RECOMMENDATIONS

ADDRESS THE LACK OF TRANSPARENCY

1) ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Clients should understand:

- How scoring works
- What qualifies someone for housing
- Why scores change
- Administrative review procedures
- Eligibility requirements
- Expected timelines
- Access points should provide clear system orientation for housing seekers.

2) INFORMED CLIENTS

Implement a MyChart or KP.org client interface that is optional for clients that allows people to log in themselves or with help of provider to check scores, housing status, needed appointments, store paperwork, see what paperwork is needed. System would have measures to protect privacy, such as dual authentication for documents.

- Upcoming appointments
- Missing documents
- Housing updates
- Secure document storage

IMPLEMENT FAIR ASSESSMENTS

1) NEEDS OVER VULNERABILITY

- Change from a system of solely prioritization based on vulnerability to include matching to housing needs. Craft assessment that matches people to appropriate housing without adding many questions.
- Housing referrals should include DPH options for people with higher acuities, or other options such as public housing, DAHLIA
- A Coordinated Entry system should include clearer pathways to mental health services
- Ensure individuals are matched with housing they are eligible for and that there are accountability measures to ensure equitable non-discriminatory scoring across all sites.

2) ADDRESS RACIAL AND CULTURAL DISPARITIES

Reforms should address disparities affecting:

- Latine households
- Black households
- Asian households

3) BUILD ON REFORMS HAPPENING NOW

Build on and support current work by DSHS/LHCB/DV (There is a separate process for violence impacted persons that should be protected)

Implement Home by the Bay Family and Transitional Aged Youth Addendum Recommendations that refer to Coordinated Entry



ENSURE EQUITABLE ACCESS

1) REDUCE PAPERWORK

Reduce Paperwork: Eliminate documentation requirements that are not legally required

2) FOLLOW OFFICIAL SF HOMELESSNESS DEFINITION

Include households with children in SRO's and living doubled-up. This would not apply to HUD COC housing that has different definition

3) REMOVE INCOME BARRIERS

Remove minimum income requirements that exclude extremely low-income households.

4) LIMIT LONG SHELTER STAYS

Anyone staying in shelter for two years or longer should automatically receive housing referral status.

5) NO WRONG DOOR

Any trusted community organization that meets standards should be able to conduct Coordinated Entry assessments.

- Increased trust
- Greater cultural competency
- Continuity of care
- Better access for marginalized communities

Access should be standardized but not centralized, allowing community providers to participate.

6) EMERGENCY ASSESSMENTS

Allow unhoused people to be reassessed if their situation changes instead of having to wait a full six months. For example, someone can become disabled from an accident and would need a new assessment.



IMPLEMENTING A HUMAN-CENTERED APPROACH

1) DIRECT PLACEMENT

CES must prioritize people over bureaucracy. Flexibility beyond automated scoring systems.

This includes allowing that one-third of units vacant past 30 days be moved to direct placement by providers. This would allow for “unicorn” clients – those with high needs but do not score high enough to qualify to be placed. (does not apply to HUD funding units)

2) WORKER SUPPORT:

- Customer service training
- Adequate support
- Time for rest and self-care

03

U.S. DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS

The U.S. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) designates an individual or family household as homeless if it lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. The definition also refers to a household who has a primary nighttime residence that is either a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations; an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings. HUD's Homelessness Definition final rule further establishes specific categories of homelessness.



1. Living in a place not meant for human habitation – Examples include streets, vehicles, abandoned buildings, or outdoor encampments
2. Living in temporary shelters includes emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, or temporary hotel placements funded by government or charitable programs.
3. Leaving an institution: Individuals leaving hospitals, jails, or treatment facilities who were homeless prior to entering those institutions.

S.F. DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS

CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO HOMELESS DEFINITIONS:

Note: Poverty is the major cause of homelessness. In order to reach a definition of homelessness, this root cause must be addressed. These definitions are not meant to supersede or replace definitions of homelessness and chronic homelessness that have been set forth by funding sources, contractual agreements, or existing data collection systems.

HOMELESSNESS

The term “homeless” includes individuals or families who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and who have a primary nighttime residence in one or more of the following categories:

SHELTERED HOMELESSNESS

Anyone staying in a mission or homeless or domestic violence shelter, i.e., a supervised public or private facility that provides temporary living accommodations.

Anyone displaced from housing due to a disaster situation.

STREET HOMELESSNESS

Anyone staying outdoors; for example, street, sidewalk, doorway, park, freeway underpass.

VEHICULAR HOMELESSNESS

Anyone staying in a car, van, bus, truck, RV, or similar vehicle

MAKE-SHIFT

Anyone staying in an enclosure or structure that is not authorized or fit for human habitation by building or housing codes, including abandoned buildings (“squats”) or sub-standard apartments and dwellings.

S.F. DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS

DOUBLED-UP

Anyone staying with friends and/or extended family members (excluding parents and children), because they are otherwise unable to obtain housing, or

Any family with children staying in a Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotel room – whether or not they have tenancy rights, or

Anyone staying in temporary housing for less than 6 months, and the accommodations provided the person are substandard or inadequate, for example, garage, small room, overly crowded space.

TRANSITIONAL

Anyone staying in a Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotel room without tenancy rights, or

Anyone formerly homeless (formerly in one of the above categories) who is now incarcerated, hospitalized, or living in a treatment program, halfway house, transitional housing or

Anyone formerly homeless (formerly in one of the above categories) who has obtained supportive housing or permanent housing for less than 30 days. While we recognize that the issues that brought people to homelessness may take a lifetime to overcome, we believe that at a minimum, 90 days of wrap-around aftercare services should be provided for individuals exiting homelessness into permanent housing.

Homeless definition adopted by Board of Supervisors 12-17-01, Approved by Mayor Willie L. Brown 12-28-01, File No. 012191, Gloria L. Young, Clerk of the Board

HOME BY THE BAY ADDENDUM



- Redesign Coordinated Entry to connect people to diverse housing options and services interventions based upon their needs and choices
- Redesign Coordinated Entry to aim to connect all people experiencing homelessness to available supports and drive progress toward racial equity and housing justice
- Increase successful connections to wraparound services offered outside the homelessness response system.
 - Expand opportunities available to households scoring lower on the Coordinated Entry assessment
 - Ensure there is follow up when households request services (like job support)
 - Include an option for families to connect with a Family Resource Center (FRC) for additional support
 - Include DPH options for people to request behavioral health services they are interested in
- Make it easier and faster for households to be placed into shelter and housing through both HSH and MOHCD –
 - Explore data sharing opportunities between systems to reduce duplicative intake questions, minimizing the need for families to retell their stories, which can be traumatizing. Link service sign-ups so that CalAIM / CalWorks/ SNAP / Childcare Subsidies / DAHLIA / etc – so duplicate information is not needed to confirm eligibility across city departments.
 - Ensure housing placements match need.
- Ensure public understanding of Coordinated Entry and the DAHLIA housing portal and ensure that homelessness services providers can support people to access housing through both systems. This should include a public communications strategy to:
 - Ensure households understand how scoring works, what qualifies someone for housing, why scores change, administrative review procedures, eligibility requirements, expected timelines and the process to access housing once matched.
- Develop additional strategies for providing a broader range of housing options for households living in doubled-up situations, SROs, or other overcrowded, unsafe, or unstable living arrangements, including housing outside of the homelessness response system.



**THANK
YOU**