



Anti-Discrimination Policy, and Statement on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging

Overview

The Jackson County Continuum of Care (CoC) is committed to providing stable housing for those experiencing sheltered and unsheltered homelessness and offering preventative services to those at risk of losing access to housing. The CoC seeks to end sheltered and unsheltered homelessness in Jackson County through the collaborative efforts and resources of all sectors of our community, and has adopted these policies and procedures to ensure that all families and individuals 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 at-risk participants and participants experiencing sheltered and unsheltered homelessness. Through these policies and procedures, the CoC will comply with all applicable civil rights and fair housing laws and regulations, including HUD's Equal Access and Gender Identity Rules.

DEIB Statement

Mission

We welcome and invite people of all backgrounds and identities with dignity, integrity and compassion. We will foster education, connect with marginalized and underrepresented groups, and create equitable outreach and services for our evolving community. By living our organization's mission, we will implement, adapt, and maintain an equitable and inclusive community for all those seeking shelter and housing.

We define diversity as a coexistence of many different identities, lived experiences, and backgrounds in which individuals are represented and visible. People are unique with unique perspectives that shape, blend and influence how to advance our mission and solve problems more effectively and equitably.

We define equity as an approach that ensures everyone has access to the same opportunities. Equity recognizes that we don't all start from the same place due to our privileges and disadvantages. Equity acknowledges uneven starting places and seeks to correct the imbalance by giving all individuals what they need to grow, contribute and develop.

We define inclusion as a culture where individuals from all backgrounds, identities, and perspectives are actively invited into the conversation. Their voices and experiences are valued as integral parts of the collective narrative, ensuring that they are encouraged to actively contribute to the shaping, adaptation, and success of the community. Inclusion recognizes the worth and potential of every member because of their differences and not in spite of them.

We define belonging as a culture where the overarching system and process proactively evolve to create spaces that honor and celebrate the uniqueness of each individual. Rather than asking people to fit into a pre-existing mold, belonging emphasizes adapting the environment to ensure that everyone feels seen, heard, and affirmed in the conversation. To create a space for belonging is to ensure that the community's structure continually reflects and respects the multifaceted identities and voices it encompasses.

Equal Access Policy and Procedures:

All service providing members of CoC are prohibited from discriminating against anyone seeking housing services based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, age, gender identity or expression, LGBTQ status, veteran status, or marital status. This includes, but is not limited to, the CoC Lead Agency, agencies funded through the Continuum of Care programs, and service providers funded by other federal and state programs.

The CoC will operate a coordinated entry system that provides equal access to all persons, especially those least likely to seek or receive services. This system will allow 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, Section 504, Title 2, Title 6, and the Fair Housing Act.

The CoC will:

- Provide annual and as-needed training to service providers and others regarding the applicable civil rights and fair housing laws and regulations
- 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 participants, in accordance with the CoC's approach to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.
- Support all participating individuals and families in understanding their privacy rights and the implications of releasing information.
- Regularly monitor CoC-funded agencies and coordinated entry systems to ensure compliance with all applicable civil rights and fair housing laws and regulations.
- Offer annual training concerning diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging, and associated mandates to service providers and other relevant stakeholders.

All service providers will:

- Make sure that staff and volunteers respect and affirm all races, gender identities and expressions, national origins, religions, sex, disabilities, age, LGBTQ status, veteran status, or marital status.
- Ensure that all staff and volunteers maintain the appropriate confidentiality of a participant's private information, including disability, race, gender identity, and gender assigned at birth.
- Ensure understanding of the potential impact that confidential information disclosure can have on a participant'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 participants.
- 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.
- Train staff and volunteers to acknowledge, respect, and advocate for racial diversity and inclusion.
- Address and rectify any instances of racial, gender or other bias, mistreatment, or discrimination by staff, volunteers, or participants promptly.

Service provider staff will:

- Ensure participant safety and prevent bias and harassment.
- Not consider a participant or potential participant 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 medical history beyond what is necessary to determine program eligibility.
- Not require a person's gender identity to match the gender listed on legal documentation.
- Help participants identify resources available to obtain legal identification documents.
- Use the participants preferred gender and pronouns.
- Respect and validate participants' racial and ethnic identities in all interactions.

Racial Equity Policy

The CoC acknowledges the ongoing challenge of racial disparities in accessing housing and supportive services for those at risk or currently experiencing sheltered and unsheltered homelessness. In our commitment to eradicate sheltered and unsheltered homelessness in Jackson County through community-wide collaborations, the CoC has formulated policies and procedures ensuring equal access for all individuals without racial discrimination. These guidelines empower service providers to promote racial equity in their practices and interactions. In alignment with these principles, the CoC is dedicated to upholding all relevant civil rights and fair housing legislations.

All service providing members of CoC may not discriminate against individuals based on race, color, national origin, or ethnic background.

Involuntary Family Separation Policy

In accordance with HUD's CoC program regulations, involuntary family separation is prohibited in CoC-funded projects. CoC-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 of a parent or parents; or
- The marital status of a parent or parents.

Faith-Based Activities Policy

Service providers and their staff shall not discriminate against any client or prospective client on the basis of religion, religious beliefs, a refusal to hold a religious belief, or a refusal to attend or participate in religious activities.

Grievance and Anti-Retaliation Policy

Anyone participating in the CoC has the right to file a grievance if they have a complaint about the provision of housing and services. The CoC affirms that people who wish to file a grievance have the right to do so without retaliation from the party accused or any associated representative. Retaliation includes, but is not limited to: harassment, intimidation, violence, program dismissal, refusing to provide services, use of profane or derogatory language to or in reference to the complainant, or breach of contract.