

A Place to Call Home

On November 18, 2005, over 100 participants representing AIDS Housing Consumers, AIDS Housing Service Providers, the Chicago Department of Public Health, the AFC Program Team, and other stakeholders met at John Marshall Law School for the 2005 Chicago Area AIDS Housing Summit. The goals of the summit were to review the progress of AFC's 2001 Five Year Chicago Area HIV/AIDS Housing Plan and to begin discussing and identifying critical issues in AIDS Housing for the next 5 years. The summit results were to provide the foundation for a strategic planning process for the next Five Year AIDS Housing Plan. The day was divided into morning and afternoon sessions. The morning and afternoon were further split into 4-6 short presentations followed by small group feedback sessions.

MORNING SESSION

The morning presentations focused on the 4 critical issues identified in the 2001 plan and their relevancy today. Eight small groups then identified the critical issues that are most relevant today. They also identified new potential critical issues affecting AIDS Housing.

CRITICAL ISSUE #1

Seven of 8 small groups identified critical issue #1 as a relevant issue today. Critical issue #1 states that there is an HIV/AIDS affordable housing crisis distinct from and connected to a general affordable housing crisis.

Small group participants voiced concern over the displacement of people living with HIV/AIDS. Participants asked where clients are being displaced to and whether or not there are HIV/AIDS services in these areas for the displaced. Further discussion from service providers and consumers revealed concern over people living with HIV/AIDS who are living doubled and tripled up. People living with HIV/AIDS often suffer from compromised immune systems and subsequently require a safer standard of living than doubling and tripling allots. Some small group participants voiced concern for the younger homeless population living with HIV/AIDS. There is a fear that this population is not accessing HIV/AIDS case management services and therefore not eligible for housing.

Small group participants also voiced concern over meeting the housing needs of substance using people living with HIV/AIDS. More despondent voices from the small groups claimed the HIV/AIDS Housing Community has made little to no advancement in stemming the affordable housing crisis. These voices emphatically stated that in many ways we are still at ground zero. The current fair market rent was identified as the primary obstacle to housing people living with HIV/AIDS by many small group participants. Finally, numerous small group participants discussed the need for supportive services with a special focus on life skills training in order to ensure successful mainstream placements for people living with HIV/AIDS. In review, many of these issues were identified in the 2001 plan. But, the summit participants highlighted displacement, inadequate living conditions, and current fair market rent as areas of significant importance for the next housing plan.

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CRITICAL ISSUE #2:

Three of the 8 small groups identified critical issue #2 as a relevant issue today. Critical issue #2 states that the HIV/AIDS housing continuum is limited in depth and breadth and cannot adequately serve the emerging needs people living with HIV/AIDS.

Small group participants identified the lack of coordination within the continuum as a continuing problem. Emergency shelters, transitional and supportive housing providers, and scattered site programs lack the needed coordination to serve people living with HIV/AIDS. Increased coordination is needed to address the varied housing needs of those living with HIV/AIDS. Participants also discussed the use of funds for different types of housing and the success or lack of success of different types of housing. Some voiced strong support of supportive housing while others stressed increased funding for emergency and transitional housing. Small groups also debated the use of long-term vouchers and its impact on the rental assistance program. In review, many of these issues were identified in the 2001 plan. But, the summit participants highlighted a continuum of housing types (emergency shelters, transitional, and supportive housing), need for their coordination, and the use of long-term vouchers as areas of particular interest for the next housing plan.

CRITICAL ISSUE #3:

Seven of 8 groups identified critical issue #3 as a relevant issue today. Critical issue #3 states that support services vary in availability both by region and by program and are inadequate to support people living with HIV/AIDS with multiple and specialized needs.

The majority of small group participants identified a need to include life skills training for consumers. There was some debate about the timing when the life skills training should take place. Some participants felt that a housing first approach recommends life skills training occur after housing the client while others felt that life skills training was essential before housing the client. They argued that without life skills training, successful placement was difficult and compromised. Many clients have never held a lease and lack the skills to be successful on their own. Participants identified a general lack of support services to meet the special needs of people living with HIV/AIDS and a lack of referral sources for their basic needs including food and utilities.

Small group participants questioned where the money to pay for supportive services will come from in the current political climate. Participants discussed the role consumers play in policy and advocacy. Some participants felt that consumers' increased involvement in policy and advocacy will encourage potential funding sources and policy makers. Others argued that we have not been creative in using the resources we have available to us now. Harm reduction was identified as both a gateway to increased housing opportunities for people living with HIV/AIDS and an obstacle. Small group participants shared stories of success in using harm reduction models. Clients are able to stay housed and avoid punitive measures for alcohol or drug use found in sobriety-based housing programs. Participants also shared frustration over the ambiguity of harm reduction and the lack of universal guidelines for its implementation. Without a universal definition or language,

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coordination is strained and the continuum is further limited. In review, some of these issues were identified in the 2001 plan. Summit participants highlighted life skills training, lack of funding, and a clear and consistent harm reduction approach as areas of particular interest for the next housing plan.

CRITICAL ISSUE #4:

Seven of 8 groups identified critical issue #4 as a relevant issue today. Critical issue #4 states that there is a lack of joint intra and inter housing and services planning.

Small group participants identified a need for interagency collaborations in the face of the growing severity and complexity of socioeconomic issues facing people living with HIV/AIDS. They discussed the implementation of centralized database tracking systems to assist service providers in the data collection process and service provision. Some concerns were expressed over duplication of data and the inherent time commitment in data collection, but in the end the majority of participants supported increased data collection and collaboration. In the face of limited resources, small group participants, particularly consumers, called for increased collaboration with government officials, policy makers, and other people in power at the local, state, and federal level. Consumers also called for collaboration with non-governmental funding sources for increased housing and service opportunities for people living with HIV/AIDS. They stated that future collaboration with limited resources may compromise the potential for the AIDS Housing Continuum.

Small group participants including consumers, service providers, and other stakeholders, all acknowledged the need to identify and respond to the multiple issues of clients, improve communication skills, and increase accountability to the community. Consumers called for better coordination throughout the AIDS Housing Continuum. Service providers called for increased and improved communication between case managers and housing advocates. Other stakeholders identified accountability to the community as the keystone to collaboration and the foundation of future AIDS Housing enterprises. In review, many of these issues were identified in the 2001 plan. Summit participants highlighted the use of centralized database tracking systems for increased intra and interagency collaboration as an area of particular interest for the next housing plan.

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CRITICAL ISSUES FOR 2006

Small group participants were asked to identify one new item affecting AIDS Housing in the Chicago metropolitan area that needs addressing in 2006 and to briefly describe their reasoning. The following is an initial list of some individual participant responses:

- Increased advocacy at the state and federal levels
- Provide safer housing options for people living with HIV/AIDS
- Out-pricing and over-pricing of housing
- Housing opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals
- Lack of incentives for developers to include set-asides in new developments
- Lack of housing resources in suburbs and collar counties
- Increasing population of young women with families being diagnosed with HIV
- Stigma of HIV in communities of color
- Lack of family social support for people living with HIV/AIDS
- Lack of education and misinformation in rural areas surrounding Chicago metropolitan areas
- Disparities between average individual and family income and fair market rent
- Penalties for employment while receiving SSI or SSDI
- The rising cost of utilities
- Shrinking resources for AIDS Housing and services

A more unified voice arose among several groups concerning the best use of AIDS Housing dollars. Some participants questioned the benefits of transitional housing and suggested that permanent housing is the only solution for people living with HIV/AIDS. They argued that there is a lack of necessary support for people living with HIV/AIDS in transitional housing. Other participants countered this idea by suggesting that some people living with HIV/AIDS are not equipped to live in permanent housing and lack the life skills necessary to bypass transitional housing. They argue that a best use of AIDS Housing dollars model would include a transitional housing stage where residents learn necessary life skills for successful permanent placement. Other topics in a similar thread included the issue of integrating AIDS Housing, the use of long-term vouchers over rental assistance and vice versa, and advocating for property ownership in replacement of rental options. The above list and the discussion of best use of AIDS Housing dollars is not an exhaustive listing of the topics discussed but it serves as an outline of the participants' comments.

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AFTERNOON SESSION

The afternoon presentations focused on environmental issues in the HIV/AIDS community including HIV/AIDS epidemic trends, housing affordability and availability, AIDS Housing research highlights, funding and resource availability, 10-year plans to end homelessness, legal issues and AIDS Housing, and a demonstration of AFC's On-Line Housing Directory. Following the presentations, participants joined a small group discussion of their choosing on environmental factors affecting AIDS Housing. Summaries of the small group discussions follow.

SUPPORTIVE SERVICES RESOURCES FOR AIDS HOUSING

Participants in the supportive services small group identified multiple areas of importance for the next 5-year Chicago Area Aids Housing Plan. Participants discussed the influx of new illegal drugs, concerns over connecting substance users to services regardless of their desire for a sober lifestyle, and the importance of service providers keeping abreast of what is happening on the street level. Participants discussed the difficulties former incarcerated individuals encounter in accessing services. People with a history of incarceration are often denied services despite having reformed lifestyles. Participants identified a need to change policies that limit expungements to arrests only, not convictions, and advocate for linkages to resources and services that will work with and accept formerly incarcerated.

Participants also addressed issues of consumers with mental illness, the effects of deinstitutionalization, and how some service providers are still seeing the effects of deinstitutionalization in their clients. Some service providers also noted that the behaviors blocking mentally ill consumers from accessing resources are the same behaviors that often lead to eviction.

Participants expressed concern over funding cuts for services when there is clearly a need for more intensive services. Some participants argued that once a month case management is not enough for clients and stated that AIDS Services Agencies need more staff. Participants stressed a need for a solid and stable housing continuum. Some participants were uneasy with the status of emergency and transitional housing in the Chicago land area. They expressed concern for clients who may not be ready for independent living. Participants also called for a broader scope of services and increased collaboration of services. Finally some participants gave examples of services to keep people with special needs, like mentally ill substance abusers (MISA), housed and ensuring that there are adequate alternative housing and service options for consumers as the two key areas in supportive services for the next 5-year plan.

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RESPONDING TO 2006 + CRITICAL ISSUES

Participants in the responding to 2006 and beyond critical issues small group identified multiple areas of importance for the next 5-year Chicago Area Aids Housing Plan. Participants discussed funding as an area of concern. Some participants commented on how a lack of funding will have a direct impact on AIDS Housing. Others discussed how funding will have an impact on AIDS Services. One participant commented that it would be nice to know whether or not funds exist prior to making referrals. Participants discussed affordable housing, particularly the lack of funding for and availability of affordable housing. Service providers expressed concern over the lack of housing choices for clients, especially when a client has been evicted or is currently facing eviction. Participants also discussed collaboration and the need for housing providers to work with other service providers. Some participants maintained that collaboration today is limited. One participant commented that information about housing and housing opportunities for people living with HIV/AIDS are difficult to access due to the lack of coordination and collaboration.

When asked to identify the two most important issues for AIDS Housing in 2006 and beyond, the participants identified affordable housing and funding. Participants stated that unless clients have affordable housing, they cannot address the many issues that impact their lives. They argued that if a client has a place to stay they will have an easier time accessing employment opportunities, they will have the opportunity for stable personal and professional relationships, and they will have the opportunity for increased self-esteem and pride in maintaining their own home. As for funding, participants stated that current incomes are not meeting current housing costs. Some participants argued that in light of decreased funding it will become imperative to define a cutting off point for clients who are unable to maintain independent living while others countered that argument by highlighting an increased need for life skills training for clients with no experience holding a lease. One participant suggested that intensive case management services and life skills training be integrated. Employment opportunities were identified as means to combat decreased funding for AIDS Housing.

OTHER TOPICS

Other topics for the afternoon small group discussions included best use of existing resources, searching for new resources for AIDS Housing, translating AIDS Housing research into policy initiatives, continued systems integration work needed by AIDS Housing, improving emergency housing services for people living with HIV/AIDS, legal issues and AIDS housing, and corrections issues and AIDS Housing. There was a wide variety of opinions shared by these groups. Information on these small group discussions will be included in the 5-year planning process.