

STEP TA Webinar: Sustainable Independent Living

STEP (Supporting Transformation to Empower People) Technical Assistance (TA) Summary

June 17th, 2024

Session Description

This TA session focused on available resources and approaches for supporting individuals moving from congregate living settings to independent supports in sustaining those transitions. Specifically, Elba Caraballo, the DDS Director of Housing, presented on options for how providers can connect individuals receiving supports with financial assistance to cover new costs in independent settings. This included details on how the Rental Assistance Program (RAP) works for individuals in supportive housing, other rent support options, and information on other financial assistance programs for people living in the community. Deputy Commissioner Elisa Velardo shared comments emphasizing the importance of considering available options to create more independent living opportunities.

Presentation and Discussion



1. Rental Assistance Program (RAP) and Section 8 Vouchers

- Room and board are covered for individuals in Community Living Arrangements (CLAs). When someone transitions from a CLA to a more independent setting, rent is a significant additional monthly expense.
- RAP (state funded) and Section 8 vouchers (federally funded) can help fill this gap for individuals who meet income eligibility requirements.
 - Both programs have waiting lists.
 - Interested individuals should apply for both when waiting lists are open.
- If an individual's income increases, they often remain eligible but may be responsible for a greater share of the rent. Providers and case managers can work together to make sure individuals and their families understand this impact.



2. Supportive Housing

- Supportive housing is an approach to independent living. It includes supports similar to IHS delivered to people living in multiple units in a development.
- Individuals moving to supportive housing will receive DDS RAP funding without going through the waiting list because each supportive housing unit has an assigned RAP voucher.
- If the individual chooses to move to a different apartment not in the supportive housing development, they will receive a new RAP voucher.
- Elba is available to answer provider questions about establishing a supportive housing program or to support discussions between providers and developers to explore creating a supportive housing program.
- DDS has an open rolling [Notice of Opportunity](#) to help fund supportive housing programs.
- Providers can approach developers to consider setting units aside for supportive housing in existing or new housing developments.
 - Developers can receive tax credits.
 - Individuals receiving supports also tend to be long-term tenants and have support from providers and their broader support network.

- Providers supporting individuals to transition from CLA or CRS settings to supportive housing as part of an approved STEP plan are eligible to receive incentives.



3. Provider Role

- Providers can play a key role in supporting individuals to understand their options for more independent living situations.
- It is important to train staff who work directly with individuals to recognize when to start conversations about independent living.
 - For example, if someone complains about having to eat when everyone else eats or talks about wishing they could stay out longer, this person may be a good candidate for independent living.
 - Prepare staff for how to start these conversations and how to follow up to support someone and their family to understand their options.
- Providing information about independent living needs to also include realistic information about additional responsibilities including financial obligations.
- Open houses where individuals considering transition can visit supportive housing and talk to others who made the move are very helpful.
- Once someone has decided to move to independent living, providers can coordinate with case managers to support individuals to apply for RAP or Section 8 vouchers and complete necessary documentation to continue to receive assistance.



4. Other Assistance

- Individuals in independent residential settings are also responsible for additional costs.
- Contact utility companies for information on available utility assistance.
- Meals on wheels, food banks, and community-hosted meals are great resources to address food insecurity.

STEP TA Transition

This was the last scheduled STEP TA session. Regional Resource Administrators are available to answer provider questions about STEP. The [DDS Provider Gateway](#) includes several STEP resources for providers such as FAQs, session recordings, and guidance materials.

For questions related to supportive housing, providers may contact [Elba Caraballo](#).