



Expanding Permanent Supportive Housing for People with Disabilities

Developing federal policy and strategies to take permanent supportive housing to scale nationally

SUMMARY

Between 2010 and 2012, [Technical Assistance Collaborative](#) (TAC) worked to align key federal housing and service policies, programs, and funding to encourage states to expand permanent supportive housing for low-income people with disabilities who are homeless or institutionalized, or at risk of either. TAC, a nonprofit, consulting firm, has provided its expertise to government and nonprofit organizations seeking to increase the amount of public supportive housing, as described on its [website](#).

Key Results

The following project results are from a report to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) and an interview. The collaborative:

- Served as a resource and strategic adviser as federal agencies aligned and expanded permanent supportive housing initiatives
- Created and distributed educational resources to support the development of a permanent supportive housing system at state and local levels, anchored by federal policies and programs

Funding

RWJF awarded the Technical Assistance Collaborative a grant of \$156,464, which ran from October 2010 through June 2012.

CONTEXT

Supportive housing combines safe, affordable housing with tailored, coordinated health, mental health, substance abuse, and vocational services for residents, along with advocacy for public benefits. It is a proven strategy for stabilizing vulnerable people with disabilities and reducing their health care costs.

The Technical Assistance Collaborative, based in Boston, works at federal, state, and local levels to address the housing and service needs of very low-income people with disabilities. A \$1.3 million RWJF grant in 1992¹ supported the collaborative to provide technical assistance and direction for the replication of the Foundation's programs on mental illness.

Several emerging federal initiatives provided an opportunity to expand permanent supportive housing for people with disabilities. They include:

- The 2010 Affordable Care Act, which emphasizes integrating health services, expanding Medicaid, and reforming long-term care
- The 2010 Melville Supportive Housing Investment Act, which authorized new resources for states to create permanent supportive housing for low-income people with disabilities. The Supportive Housing for Persons with Disabilities, a program known as Section 811 of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), provides the resources.

The new model emphasizes providing rental assistance to enable disabled individuals to live in existing affordable housing units, rather than building new housing projects targeted to such individuals.

- A more aggressive attempt by the Justice Department to enforce the mandate in the Americans with Disabilities Act to integrate disabled individuals into the community. The Supreme Court upheld that mandate in 1999, through the Olmstead decision, which encouraged a move away from institutional care toward the least-restrictive environment possible for such individuals.

“All of that is pushing toward an expanded view of permanent supportive housing as a solution to the costs of long-term care and homelessness” among people with disabilities, said Stephen L. Day, MSW, co-founder of the collaborative and project director.

RWJF's Interest in This Area

RWJF has a longstanding interest in supportive housing, based on its belief that to be in the health business it also needs to be in the housing business. With the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Ford Foundation, RWJF launched the Corporation for Supportive Housing in 1991, and has since provided \$33 million in funding.

Between 2002 and 2012, the corporation helped develop more than 152,000 units of supportive housing for people who are chronically homeless, many of whom also have mental health challenges. (See [Program Results](#).)

¹ Grant ID# 20138.

Between 2006 and 2011, RWJF funded the Technical Assistance Collaborative to build the capacity of social service organizations in Louisiana working with individuals who needed permanent supportive housing after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and to advance public policies that supported that work.

The initiative, directed by Day, placed 3,250 individuals and families with physical, mental health, substance use, and developmental disabilities in nearly 2,200 units of public housing. The units were “scatter site,” that is, not in housing developments designed primarily with a disabled population in mind. Residents received services through Medicaid and other public funding. (See [Program Results](#).)

This project served as a model for the project reported on here.

THE PROJECT

The Technical Assistance Collaborative worked to align key federal housing and service policies, programs, and funding to encourage states to expand permanent supportive housing for people with disabilities.

Most efforts to create such housing have relied on specialized funding, but this project aimed to tap existing federal programs that fund housing and services. The project also focused on providing housing for people with various disabilities, rather than for people with one mental or physical challenge.

Project staff worked with senior officials from HUD; the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), including both its Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services; the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration; and the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness.

“RWJF funded us to keep talking to all of these folks, to convene them, to get them working together and make sure that permanent supportive housing was viewed as a solution,” said Day.

Other Funding

The Melville Charitable Trust provided approximately \$300,000 for this initiative. The Technical Assistance Collaborative also received \$190,000 as a subcontractor for New Editions Consulting, using funding from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

RESULTS

In a report to RWJF and an interview for this report, project staff cited these results. The collaborative:

- **Served as a resource and strategic adviser as federal agencies aligned and expanded permanent supportive housing initiatives. The following are examples of the collaborative’s activities:**

- HUD, HHS, and the Justice Department are collaborating on a joint policy framework to guide permanent supportive housing. The HHS Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation manages joint meetings among senior agency officials. “We have reinforced the need for all of them to be at the table,” says Day.
- In May 2012, HUD requested state applications for \$85 million in funding to provide permanent supportive housing under Section 811. Thirty-five states and the District of Columbia applied. Qualifying requirements included formal agreements between state Medicaid and housing agencies, links with local housing agencies, and an outreach and referral strategy. HUD expects to fund between nine and 16 states. As of December 2012, HUD had not announced the awardees.

“Permanent supportive housing has always occurred at the local or provider level, with almost no state involvement,” noted Project Director Day. He called the new requirement that state agencies must work together “a revolutionary activity.”

He expects the HUD program to produce some 2,800 new units of housing, rather than the 550 units that the same funding would have yielded under a less-coordinated approach.

- HUD has authorized housing officials in Georgia to use HUD-funded housing and rental vouchers to integrate disabled individuals into the community.
“Getting HUD and Justice Department lawyers to hammer out what that actually means required a tremendous amount of work,” Day noted. “This is the kind of thing that happens behind the scenes, it doesn’t get a lot of publicity, but it is the grist that makes the wheels turn so something can happen at the local level.”
- The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, the primary funder of home- and community-based services for disabled individuals, is creating a definition of community integration that matches that of HUD, HHS, and the Justice Department and complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- HHS has commissioned a large-scale evaluation of cross-disability and cross-agency strategies for encouraging permanent supportive housing.

- **Created and distributed educational resources to support the development of a permanent supportive housing system at state and local levels, anchored by federal policies and programs.** These resources include:
 - A paper for use by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration for training its staff to collaborate with federal, state, and local agencies, and providers, on permanent supportive housing. The collaborative conducted a webinar on this information with the staff.
 - *Connecting with Medicaid: Strategies and Options for Providers of Services to People Who Are Homeless*, an issue brief on how organizations serving homeless individuals, many of whom have disabilities, can become Medicaid providers, subcontract with Medicaid providers, and enroll clients in Medicaid.²
 - *Medicaid Eligibility: Enrollment Pathway Considerations for Vulnerable Populations*, an issue brief for service providers on how the Affordable Care Act affects eligibility for Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program.³
 - The Resource Center on Supportive Housing, a [website](#) that highlights HUD’s Section 811 program and provides other information and resources for states and other stakeholders.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. **Be nimble in capitalizing on new opportunities at the federal level.** “You have to be able to react very quickly to changes in the funding and policy environment,” said Day. “No one could have predicted that Melville or the Affordable Care Act would pass when they did.” The collaborative leveraged those opportunities to support cross-agency initiatives on permanent supportive housing.
2. **Promoting supportive housing requires expertise in numerous policies, including the Americans with Disabilities Act, low-income housing tax credits, and Medicaid financing for community-based services.**

“You have to know how state and local levels work so you can bring real solutions to state and federal policy-makers,” Day emphasized. “You have to know what each is struggling with.”
3. **To advance federal policy, develop an honest and transparent relationship with agency officials.** “Federal officials see advocates all the time—people who have one or another idea to sell,” Day said. “It is very rare that federal agencies get informed and objective information. Federal officials have really come to trust our input, they trust our knowledge. They know we will be honest with them and not push a product.

² *Connecting with Medicaid: Strategies and Options for Providers of Services to People who are Homeless*. Boston: Technical Assistance Collaborative, June 2011. Available [online](#).

³ *Medicaid Eligibility: Enrollment Pathway Considerations for Vulnerable Populations*. Boston: Technical Assistance Collaborative, May 2012. Available [online](#).

They know we are not trying to get funding for ourselves, we are trying to move policy ahead.”

AFTERWARD

Under contracts with HUD, the Centers for Medicaid & Medicare Services, and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the collaborative is:

- Providing technical assistance to state and local entities on implementing permanent supportive housing
- Developing issue briefs on how states can leverage funds for services provided through supportive housing under the Affordable Care Act
- Evaluating efforts to house homeless populations

The collaborative also has contracts with many states to help create permanent supportive housing programs. A request for continued funding to work across federal agencies is pending at the Melville Charitable Trust.

Prepared by: Karyn Feiden

Reviewed by: Sandra Hackman and Molly McKaughan

Program Officer: Nancy Barrant

Program Area: Vulnerable Populations

Grant ID#: 68140

Project Director: Stephen L. Day (617) 266-5657; sday@tacinc.org

BIBLIOGRAPHY

(Current as of date of the report; as provided by the grantee organization; not verified by RWJF; items not available from RWJF.)

Reports

Medicaid Eligibility: Enrollment Pathway Considerations for Vulnerable Populations. Issue Brief. Boston: Technical Assistance Collaborative, May 2012. Available [online](#).

Connecting with Medicaid: Strategies and Options for Providers of Services to People Who Are Homeless. Issue Brief. Boston: Technical Assistance Collaborative, June 2011. Available [online](#).

Communications or Promotions

<http://811resourcecenter.tacinc.org>. Provides information on HUD's Section 811 projects and the Supreme Court's Olmstead decision on community integration under the Americans for Disability Act.

www.tacinc.org. The collaborative's main website provides more resources on permanent affordable housing.