

Safe Havens:

A Proven Program for Saving Lives and Ending Homelessness

What are Safe Havens?

Safe Havens are supervised and supportive housing for people who are homeless and have multiple health and disability conditions. These individuals have not been successful in traditional shelters due to trauma and/or safety concerns. The program provides individuals with transitional housing, connects them to behavioral health and medical services, and serves as a bridge to permanent housing. It is a proven model that saves and transforms lives, reduces health care and other public health costs, and improves quality of life.

What Services Do Safe Haven Residents Receive?

- Help in securing benefits;
- Assistance completing housing applications and creating a housing plan;
- Self-help groups, medication management, and linkages to behavioral health care;
- Social supports and community re-entry skills; and
- Crisis intervention when needed.

Who are Served by Safe Havens?

The model is designed to serve hard-to-reach, hard-to-engage individuals who are chronically unhoused with severe and often co-occurring mental health and substance use conditions. These individuals are among the highest users of EDs, hospital beds, and emergency medical services, and have high rates of criminal justice involvement.

What is the Evidence for Safe Havens?

- Since 2016, the Safe Haven in Westfield has served 38 people. Twenty-two of these individuals now have independent housing; only one was discharged for non-compliance.
- Individuals enrolled in permanent supportive housing programs in Massachusetts have significantly lower total per-person per-year MassHealth costs compared to a similar group of chronically homeless individuals (BCBSMA Foundation, 2020).

Why Expand the Safe Haven Program?

The pandemic exacerbated the needs of many vulnerable populations because of the closure of shelter beds and an increased demand for mental health and addiction treatment services. Expanding access to Safe Havens programs is vital to serve these individuals and offer them a pathway to supportive housing and treatment. The Department of Mental Health (DMH) is committed to expanding these programs across the state, as they are predominantly located in the greater Boston area today. More funding is needed to achieve regional equity.

For additional information, contact Jennifer Honig, JD at the Massachusetts Association for Mental Health (MAMH): (339) 440-3573 or jenniferhonig@mamh.org

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