

## Clubhouse Housing Supports

*“If you look at life and the way other people view you, where you live is always front and center. The first two questions on any application are your name and then your address. So, in essence, your address is a big part of your identity.”*  
(Ruas, Dee, “Having an Address: the Importance of Clubhouse Housing”)

*“The Clubhouse is committed to securing a range of choices of safe, decent, and affordable housing for all members.”* (Standard 28)

This statement is reminiscent of references in the Declaration of Independence to “life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness.” These are fundamental aspects of human existence that all people recognize and desire. Similarly, all people want a home, a place of their own, reflective of their identity, about which they have choice, privacy, and autonomy. Psychiatric hospitals are the opposite, and when their illness is acute people with mental illness sometimes do find themselves having to live with little privacy, choice, or autonomy. But when people leave hospitals, they want to go to a real home and not just a less restrictive version of the hospital.

The challenge for Clubhouses is that much of the housing that is affordable for people with mental illness is not safe, or if safe, not decent – in other words, not a home. How Clubhouses assist members to find housing that they can truly call “home” is different for different Clubhouse communities. Some Clubhouses operate their own housing program, while other Clubhouses assist members in utilizing available housing in the local community. There are, however, values, benchmarks, policies, practices, and goals that, according to this Standard, should apply to all approaches.

Fundamental to any approach, as in other aspects of Clubhouse life, are relationships. Many members can benefit from assistance in developing and maintaining satisfactory living conditions, but this assistance must flow from genuine side-by-side Clubhouse relationships. When these relationships exist, the person needing assistance sees the members and staff who are offering assistance not as intruders, but as allies in helping build a better life. When strong Clubhouse relationships are in place, the key is not enforcement of rules and regulations but mutual trust.

First, to optimally assist all members with finding and keeping good housing, the Clubhouse community must be a place where housing is an obvious and visible concern, just as are employment and education. Making housing a vital and ongoing topic might include:

- Encouraging the sharing of information by members about their housing through discussions and presentations at Clubhouse meetings and informal conversation.
- Incorporating housing into record keeping on member goals.
- Written Clubhouse surveys for members to complete, showing the nature of their housing as well as satisfaction and problems.
- Photographs and other visual displays of members’ housing at the Clubhouse.

- Encouraging Clubhouse visits to places where members live while maintaining privacy rights.
- Have housing as an item on WOD task lists so that it becomes a regularly discussed topic, much like reach out, employment, or other daily unit tasks.
- Maintain statistics on the types of housing that members have.

Secondly, Clubhouses must facilitate access to safe, decent, and affordable housing opportunities either through housing resources in the local community or by operating a housing program. This includes:

- Acquiring information about housing opportunities by visiting private landlords, real estate agents, and government housing officials and seeing the housing offered.
- Arranging visits and presentations by housing providers at the Clubhouse.
- Lobbying and advocating with government officials for subsidies and funding arrangements enabling members to obtain housing that offers privacy and independence along with the availability of Clubhouse supports.
- Researching availability of land and related information in order to assess building apartments.
- Through relationships with housing providers or the management of Clubhouse housing establishing conditions that maximize both the autonomy of members in their homes and also the availability of Clubhouse supports.
- Assess whether or not there are truly housing opportunities available through other community agencies that give members the level of autonomy and dignity that are articulated in our Standards. If there are not, it is incumbent upon the Clubhouse to establish its own housing program.

Thirdly, Clubhouses must provide supports that assist members in managing and utilizing their housing for personal fulfillment. This involves:

- Incorporating housing services into a Clubhouse unit so that members and staff work together to provide these services and members are involved in helping each other.
- Providing services relevant to housing such as completing housing applications, budgeting assistance, transportation to grocery stores, and help with moving.
- Providing assistance in the furnishing and upkeep of apartments, including advocating with landlords and housing providers for help with the maintenance of appliances.
- Familiarizing members with resources in the nearby community, such as stores, laundry facilities, and recreational facilities.
- Providing cooperative assistance within members' homes, as needed, on matters such as cleaning and food preparation.

The fact that an individual's personal identity is reflective of where a person lives indicates much about stigma. People who are homeless with no place to live can be passed

by as virtual non-persons. Adults with mental illness who are placed in group housing situations tend to be seen merely as one of a group, and the group is defined by the illness. By contrast, enabling Clubhouse members to have what everybody recognizes as a home can invite their individuality to shine.