



## **Policy Position on Supportive Housing | Supportive Housing Association of NJ (SHA)**

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**We call upon the Murphy Administration, state legislators, members of Congress, fellow advocates, SHA members, families and consumers to work together to address these issues and create solutions so that we can advance a strong and robust supportive housing industry.**

Supportive Housing is a philosophy and model that advocates the development of safe, permanent, affordable homes with supportive services in communities for people who live with special needs. It is an approach that regards housing as a human right, with the opportunity to integrate into one's community and live as one chooses, with support.\* A strong supportive housing system supports a strong state economy and provides opportunities for people to assimilate into society, living with dignity and becoming as self-sufficient as possible. SHA supports a varied approach to community housing that promotes tenant independence, flexibility and choice and fosters community integration.

New Jersey's supportive housing landscape is challenged due to increased housing costs, reduced funds for services and subsidies, and the inflexibility of existing systems to meet shifting needs. Expensive, short-term services such as emergency rooms and shelters are overutilized, options for individuals leaving state institutions are limited, and the aging population continues to grow. However, long-term investments can address these issues and make New Jersey a leader in the provision of effective solutions for complex social issues.

**A healthy, successful supportive housing industry is built upon three pillars:**

- 1. Capital funding for construction or renovation;**
- 2. Sufficient service-operating dollars; and**
- 3. Access to Flexible Supportive Services.**

A system built upon these pillars maximizes the ability for individuals with special needs to obtain and/or remain in their homes successfully, with the greatest control and choice over their lives. Public and private players should partner to meet current and future demand for capital, operations and services.

Many components of New Jersey's system are strong and well-functioning, with providers working closely with government partners including the New Jersey Department of Health, Department of Human Services, Department of Community Affairs, and the NJ Housing & Mortgage Finance Agency (HMFA). SHA is dedicated to shoring up existing partnerships and to working with public leaders to maintain the current infrastructure and to develop new housing and services for those most in need. By working with state and local partners can resolve issues and create new opportunities through the administrative process, legislative action and, if needed, court challenges.

## Priority Recommendations

### Expand the Supply of Affordable Housing in New Jersey.

Stakeholders should plan strategically to ensure a pipeline of ongoing and future housing production, affordability for consumers, and availability of services. Embrace family models, partnerships, new funding strategies, mixed use and mixed tenancies, adaptations of existing housing complexes, and additional solutions. Encourage flexibility in rules and regulations that will increase the amount of housing stock and access to existing housing through rental or ownership. There is no one model for supportive housing.

- **Increase capital funding for construction and renovation.**

- Replenish the now-depleted Special Needs Housing Trust Fund by moving dollars from hospital closures, Money Follows the Person (MFP) Rebalancing Fund contributed from dedicated sources, HMFA reserves, State Affordable Housing Trust Fund, and additional sources.
- Utilize and adapt existing housing, including senior housing, foreclosures, boarding homes and other uses that are underutilized or in poor condition but can be adapted and improved.
- Urge rule change under the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC)/Qualified Allocation Plan (QAP) that provides equal weight under point incentives for all eligible special needs populations, including individuals and families who are homeless and those leaving institutions.
- Provide equal opportunity in the QAP for urban and suburban projects.
- Work closely with affordable housing advocates and municipalities to urge expenditure of local housing trust funds and adherence to the Mount Laurel Doctrine through development of affordable homes in towns and cities across the state.
- Support legislative and regulatory initiatives to ensure that the Mount Laurel Doctrine is implemented in a way that removes barriers to supportive housing as part of a broad strategy for creating homes for lower-income people.
- Work with banks and other lenders, as well as philanthropic sources, to create grants and low-interest loans, including bridge loans, to expand housing.
- Foster partnerships with public housing authorities and other affordable housing systems.
- Encourage government to streamline the housing development and service delivery process wherever possible.
- Ensure that housing is developed in the most efficient and cost-effective manner to maximize the number of units of housing and the number of people served.
- Investigate state transfer of liens on group homes (and other measures) to providers to enable them to build assets and create more housing.
- Revise rules that do not promote supportive housing, such as sprinklers and other fire/safety requirements not consistent with regular community living.
- Promote family member partnerships as an important public/private partnership including incentives for families who donate or purchase homes as a way of expanding the amount of housing for their children and other people with disabilities.
- Increase the amount of barrier-free housing statewide to accommodate an aging population and the many people with disabilities who live with mobility impairments.

## **2. Sufficient operating dollars for innovative, efficient services that reflect choice and maximize independence**

Become a forward-thinking industry that considers new ideas and responds to current needs and trends. Seek cost-effectiveness in building, renovating, operations and service delivery. Strive to downsize or eliminate overused services and costly housing that violate supportive housing goals.

- Resolve the critical issue of lack of housing vouchers. Prioritize increases in rental vouchers. These include Federal rental vouchers (project and tenant based), State Rental Assistance or SRAPs and other state special needs vouchers.
- Prioritize state-only funding, as in the New York Medicaid Redesign Program, to create housing and rebalance the system through savings at the high-cost end of the continuum.
- End chronic homelessness through housing first/rapid re-housing models that include Medicaid rate for pre-enrollment outreach, vouchers and dedicating transitional and shelter funds for permanent housing and services.
- Spearhead efforts to integrate medical and behavioral health services through expansion of health homes and other models.
- Ensure that existing housing is maintained at affordable rates and that providers have adequate dollars for maintenance of infrastructure.
- Encourage government to streamline the housing development and service delivery process wherever possible.

## **3. Flexible Services and Responsiveness to Stakeholders**

Maintain critical communication through data management and information exchange to ensure that the system meets the housing and services expectations from all stakeholders (residents, family members and providers) and continues to advance and improve in supporting the development of successful community experiences. Pay particular attention to the needs of providers and families who require technical assistance, guidance and adequate funding to serve populations living in vulnerable circumstances. Create a system that serves many populations, reduces barriers and increases systemic flexibility.

- Promote the least-restrictive settings for Olmstead populations and all people with special needs. \*\*
- Preserve Medicare/Medicaid for current and future seniors and people with disabilities.
- Provide adequate technical assistance, support and flexibility for agencies serving Olmstead populations and others living with challenging situations.
- Permit easier transitions between supportive services so that providers can more quickly and effectively serve clients, and consumers can select and receive services in a timely fashion.
- Allow providers to ease into Medicaid and fee-for-service systems of care.
- Ensure adequate state Medicaid rates and state supplemental service rates for supportive services. (\*Note: Medicaid does not reimburse for housing costs). Rates should ensure staff retention and system integrity.

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\* Adapted from Supportive Housing Network of New York, <http://shnny.org/research-reports/research> and Corporation for Supportive Housing, [www.csh.org](http://www.csh.org).

\*\* Olmstead v. L.C. 527 U.S. 581 (1999) is the federal law that requires the deinstitutionalization of individuals with special needs to a less-restrictive community setting when determined by treatment professionals.