

NYS Division of Housing and Community Renewal NYS Housing Trust Fund Corporation

Special Needs: Housing for Persons with Special Needs

Nursing Home Transition and Diversion Waiver Housing Subsidy Program

“There is finally hope. I have spent nine years living without hope thinking there was no way I could get out of an institution, or hope for other people to live on their own in a place of their choice. With this program I have been able to do that...”

Burton Aldrich, NHTD Housing Subsidy Program Participant

Nursing Home Transition and Diversion (NHTD) Waiver

The NHTD waiver is administered by the NYS Department of Health (DOH) and uses Medicaid funding to provide support and services to assist individuals with disabilities and seniors toward successful inclusion in the community. Waiver participants may transition from a nursing facility or other institution, or choose to participate in the waiver to prevent institutionalization.

The NHTD Medicaid waiver was developed based on the philosophy that individuals with disabilities and seniors have the same rights as others. This includes the right to be in control of their lives, encounter and manage risks and learn from their experiences. This is balanced with the waiver program's responsibility to assure the health and welfare of waiver participants.

Waiver services are provided based on the participant's unique strengths, needs, choices and goals. The individual is the primary decision-maker and works in cooperation with providers to develop a service plan. This process leads to personal empowerment, increased independence, greater community inclusion, self-reliance and meaningful productive activities.

Building a Program

Round table discussions were held with high performing Section 8 HCV Program LAs and those experienced in partnering with Independent Living Centers (ILCs) to explore the feasibility of administering a statewide Housing Subsidy Program. This effort reviewed the best practices of LAs successful in housing individuals transitioning from institutions, eliminating barriers to housing acquisition and ensuring a high level of engagement. Information gathered through these focus groups served as the foundation for creating the NHTD Waiver Housing Subsidy Program. A Program Guide was subsequently developed to educate and inform program participants.

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A training program was launched for Pilot LAs that were selected based on successful lease-up rates and DOH identified areas of need. These trainings included Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) outside of DHCR's regulatory purview to facilitate program participation in metropolitan Buffalo and Albany. Regional Resource Development Centers (RRDCs) under contract with DOH to determine NHTD Waiver eligibility, as well as Service Coordinators also attended the statewide trainings.

DHCR and DOH worked collaboratively in developing and delivering the training curriculum to ensure seamless program administration. The broad audience provided the added benefit of fostering relationships between local housing and service agencies.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between DHCR and DOH formally recognizing the collaborative effort to create the Nursing Home Transition and Diversion (NHTD) Waiver Housing Subsidy Program.

DHCR developed an electronic system for LAs to transmit necessary information, track program participation and facilitate prompt payments to landlords. The new system is designed to work in parallel with the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher System, to ensure consistency and minimal training requirements for LAs. This system allows for timely direct deposit payments to owners and authorized managing agents.

Developing a Partnership

Realizing that the key to living independently is finding safe, decent and affordable housing, DOH and DHCR partnered to create the Nursing Home Transition and Diversion (NHTD) Waiver Housing Subsidy Program. This State funded initiative provides rental assistance to NHTD Medicaid waiver participants in New York State. The Program offers an alternative to nursing home placement for people with disabilities ages eighteen (18) or over and seniors by assisting them with securing housing and at home services appropriate to their needs.

To apply individuals begin the eligibility process with a Regional Resource Development Center (RRDC) and Service Coordinator under contract with DOH. Together a service plan is developed and approval granted for participation in the NHTD Waiver.

An appropriate unit is then selected by the household and a Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program Local Administrator (LA) under contract with DHCR, performs a Housing Quality Standards (HQS) inspection and determines the amount of rent subsidy. The dollar amount of subsidy assistance varies depending on the income of the family or individual and the approved rent for the unit. Subsidy payments are sent directly to owners or authorized managing agents via direct deposit.

A household may remain with the program as long as they are waiver eligible, even if they change residence. However, the goal is to transition the household to Section 8 and use the NHTD Housing Subsidy to transition or divert other individuals from

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institutional settings. By engaging Section 8 LAs early in the NHTD Waiver Housing Subsidy process and requiring HQS standards, ensures that the unit will meet Section 8 program requirements and facilitate a smooth transition onto the Section 8 program.

Program Success

The NHTD Housing Subsidy has received appropriations totaling over \$7 million to date, which has allowed the program to be offered in every county within the State. The average rental subsidy payment is \$557 per month with total average tenant payment (rent plus average utility cost) amounting to \$345 per month. Two of four households served are transitioned from Nursing Homes with the others being diverted from institutional settings.

DHCR produced a video on the NHTD Housing Subsidy Program that included an interview with the first program participant, Mr. Burton Aldrich, to commemorate his experiences and share the program's value from a human perspective. Mr. Aldrich is a forty-six year old gentleman that suffered a spinal cord injury as a result of a diving accident ten years ago. Subsequently, he cycled from hospitals, rehabilitation centers and institutions for the majority of those years before finding an apartment. Struggling to make rent payments and on a fixed income, Mr. Aldrich was confronted with a notice of eviction for delinquency in rent payments and the prospect of re-entering a facility. The NHTD Housing Subsidy Program was able to assist Mr. Aldrich with a rent subsidy, allowing him to continue to live independently and afford other necessities in life.

This program has strengthened the partnership between housing and service delivery systems, as organizations have become more adept with developing plans that meet individual service and housing needs.