



STATE OF WASHINGTON

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES

MENTAL HEALTH DIVISION PO BOX 45320, OLYMPIA WA 98504-5320 (360) 902-8070

# Mental Health Housing Consortium

Bud Alkire gave a presentation on how housing authorities work as well as how to collaborate with them and have an influence. Some highlights from his presentation include:

- Housing Authorities are organized under state law, Chapter 35.82 of the RCW
- They are generally created by a city or county when they see a need present.
- These housing authorities form through the creation of the city or county creating and electing a governing board.
- Although the governing board for these housing authorities is appointed by a city or county, they are independent public agencies.
- Housing Authority board members are not elected, and therefore, have no taxing ability.
- Housing authorities appointed by a city are usually only allowed to own housing within that city. Those created by a county can generally only own housing in unincorporated areas of the county. There are exceptions to including larger cities contracting to provide housing in other areas as well as smaller cities permitting the county housing authority to operate in their jurisdiction.
- Housing authorities traditionally receive their funding from the federal government, primarily through HUD. Other federal funds come from the Department of Agriculture through a large rural housing program. Recently, however, housing authorities have been receiving more financial support from state and local governments. An example of this support is the 1/10 of one percent sales tax in support of chemical dependency and mental health services, including housing.
- A large percentage of those receiving assistance from the Housing Authorities fall into the above category. At the Everett Housing Authority, for example, 46% of their 3,300 households are used to assist at least one disabled person. Statistics for the breakdown are not available, but Mr. Alkire believes a majority of those being served under this category is related to mental health.
- Due to the federal funding, most housing authorities are under a highly controlled regulatory system. Three, soon to be four, of our state's housing authorities, however, have received a designation that allows their funding to be more flexible. The Housing authorities that have this special designation are Seattle, King County, Vancouver and most recently, Tacoma.

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Basic Programs (though there are substantial variations between Housing Authorities) include:

1. Housing units owned by the Housing Authorities and rented out at deeply subsidized rates, based on tenant income. This type of program requires a large amount of federal funding to sustain.
2. Housing authorities develop rental properties which they own and operate but do so without the deep HUD subsidies. In this program, the HAs act as the landlord. Properties are rented out below the private market rate. The properties may also have units that are restricted to special funding, including State Trust fund, Seattle's levy, or low income tax credits. In this program, properties are also being tied to their housing voucher program so units can be deeply subsidized without HUD's public housing grant.
3. The third program is the housing voucher program itself. This program is also known as the Section 8 program, and was previously referred to as the housing certificate program. This tends to be the most popular program with clients because the housing voucher is tied to them instead of to buildings. With this program, clients generally pay the same amount of rent that they would if they were renting a public housing unit but can choose to live basically anywhere (on approval of meeting safety standards, etc.); the housing authority will have a contract with the landlord agreeing to pay the remaining balance. After a year, the tenant can move to another unit, normally anywhere in the USA.
  - Across the state, landlords can refuse to participate in this program. An exception to this however, is in King County where they cannot refuse to participate in the program.
  - Housing Authorities have the ability to tie up to 20% of their vouchers to specific buildings, which creates subsidized buildings. Some HAs use non-public housing rental units that they own while others have done this by merging with other non-profit developers. This allows the HAs to serve extremely low income individuals while still being able to afford the bills for the buildings. In Everett, for example, tie their vouchers to property owned by community mental health agencies.
  - HAs can develop local preferences in admitting clients as long as they are not illegally discriminating. Interestingly, the only HAs that are not able to do this are those with the special designation – they can only grant priority to persons with a disability generally, not limiting it to a specific disability.
  - They have developed sophisticated financing and development skill and welcome discussion about partnering as they have the responsibility of making housing available to serve all of the members in the community.

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