

## Six Immediate Steps Counties Can Take to Ensure Housing Stability and Maximize Participation in Transitional Housing Program-Plus (THP-Plus) During COVID-19

The Transitional Housing Program-Plus (THP-Plus) program provides transitional housing and supportive services for former foster youth who exited foster care after age 18, a population that is particularly vulnerable during a crisis. Youth who are facing exit from THP-Plus programs during the current public health crisis are at increased risk of homelessness because of the scarcity of other housing resources and transitional planning supports. Any period of homelessness or housing instability will compromise their health and the health of others, and will frustrate public health efforts to control the spread of COVID-19.

It is imperative for counties to take the lead in ensuring that THP-Plus providers have the technical assistance and resources needed to maintain youth in housing while emergency orders are in place and for a reasonable period of time after those orders are lifted. Counties can take immediate action, utilizing a number of strategies, to extend THP-Plus housing and services, or access alternative housing resources, so that youth participants do not have to exit the program at risk of homelessness and without a safe place to shelter in place and practice social distancing.

The six strategies described below are intended to assist counties in their efforts to:

- Maintain youth in THP-Plus housing, avoiding exits whenever possible and creatively braiding funding streams to help youth stay put beyond their scheduled exit date.
- Quickly expand county housing options for transition age youth so that youth in THP-Plus can seamlessly transition to another supportive housing setting and so that THP-Plus-eligible youth have newly available housing options.
- Communicate a clear, county-wide strategy for ensuring stability in transitional housing to reduce uncertainty and anxiety among youth who, absent a county plan, would be scheduled to exit their programs without a safe transition plan.

### 1) Expand THP-Plus eligibility by extending the age and duration requirements for students.

In 19 of California's 47 counties with THP-Plus programs, eligible youth can participate in the program for a total of 24 months or until they turn 24 years old, whichever is earlier.<sup>1</sup> The remaining 28 counties have opted in to an extension, authorized by SB 1252 (2014), that allows students to participate in THP-Plus for a total of 36 months or until they turn 25 years old, whichever is earlier.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of the extension is to allow former foster youth to stay in THP-Plus while they complete their education (diploma, GED, college, or vocational certificate). Opting into the extension now can help students stay housed for an additional year, giving them time to develop a transition plan.

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<sup>1</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § 11403.2(a)(2).

<sup>2</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § 11403.2(a)(2)(B); All-County Information Notice (ACIN) I-40-15 (May 27, 2015), p. 2, available at [https://www.cdss.ca.gov/lettersnotices/EntRes/getinfo/acin/2015/I-40\\_15.pdf](https://www.cdss.ca.gov/lettersnotices/EntRes/getinfo/acin/2015/I-40_15.pdf). A list of counties that offer the extension can be found on the JBAY website: <https://www.jbaforyouth.org/thp-plus-extension/>.

Counties can opt into the THP-Plus extension to extend THP-Plus eligibility for all participants who are students. Counties can contact [TAYPolicy@dss.ca.gov](mailto:TAYPolicy@dss.ca.gov) for steps on how to exercise the option as quickly as possible. Once a county opts in to the age and time extension, they must apply the extension to all participants (not on a case-by-case basis).<sup>3</sup> Counties must also notify child welfare and probation departments, and notify THP-Plus providers in their county, after they have opted in to the extension.

## **2) Supplement THP-Plus funds with new money available through the Transitional Housing Program.**

Counties seeking additional funds to maintain THP-Plus participants in housing past the statutory age and duration requirements may utilize the new Transitional Housing Program (THP), administered by the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD).<sup>4</sup> THP is meant to serve young adults up to age 25, with priority to former foster or probation youth. Unlike THP-Plus, there is no maximum duration, and the maximum age is 25 for all counties. Counties can use THP funds to extend or expand their THP-Plus services, especially for youth currently residing in THP-Plus.

County child welfare agencies were required to accept their THP allocations by April 15, 2020, and over May and June HCD will be executing standard agreements and disbursing funding.<sup>5</sup> Note that some counties may have submitted an application without the required Board of Supervisors resolution and will be asked to obtain this resolution before HCD can execute a standard agreement and disburse funds. THP is an annual allocation, subject to budget appropriation.

## **3) Modify out-of-county eligibility policies and coordinate regionally to streamline referrals.**

Counties with THP-Plus programs may accept former foster or probation youth who currently live in the county, but who emancipated from a different county.<sup>6</sup> Youth experiencing homelessness during the current public health crisis may have exited care in a county with no available THP-Plus units, or they may have moved since exiting care.

Counties should take immediate steps to coordinate regionally, assess THP-Plus capacity across multiple counties, and develop expedited inter-county referral processes, in order to match former foster youth who are homeless or at risk of homelessness with available THP-Plus housing in other counties. This coordination also allows counties to share promising strategies they have already implemented to keep participants housed.

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<sup>3</sup> ACIN I-40-15, pp. 1-2.

<sup>4</sup> Detailed information about THP can be found on the HCD website: <https://www.hcd.ca.gov/grants-funding/active-funding/thp.shtml>.

<sup>5</sup> The list of counties that accepted their THP allocations and allocation amounts can be found on the JBAY website: <https://www.jbaforyouth.org/sb-80-implementation/>.

<sup>6</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code §§ 11400(s), 11403.2(a)(2); Manual of Policies and Procedures § 30-913.1. Each county's out-of-county policy can be found on the JBAY website: <https://www.jbaforyouth.org/out-of-county-youth-thp-plus/>.

**4) Utilize new state funding allocated to counties through the Homeless Housing, Assistance, and Prevention (HHAP) Program to establish additional supportive housing for former foster youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness.**

In the Fiscal Year 2019-20 state budget, the Homeless Housing, Assistance, and Prevention (HHAP) Program was established with a one-time investment of \$650 million to address homelessness.<sup>7</sup> Of this \$650 million, at least eight percent (\$52 million) is required to be dedicated to addressing homelessness among youth.<sup>8</sup>

In February, local homeless Continuums of Care, counties, and the state's 13 largest cities were allocated HHAP funds by the Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council (HCFC) within the California Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency.<sup>9</sup> The HCFC will be executing standard agreements and disbursing funding to local jurisdictions in the spring and summer of 2020.

Counties may consider utilizing their local HHAP funding to establish or expand Rapid Rehousing for youth, which is a very similar program model to THP-Plus and is one of the eligible uses of HHAP funds. The department or agency within each county receiving these funds varies across the state; it is most often the health and human services agency.<sup>10</sup>

**5) Collaborate with the local Public Housing Authority to provide subsidized housing and supportive services to the THP-Plus-eligible population using Family Unification Program Vouchers or Tenant Protection Vouchers.**

Former foster youth may be eligible for one of two population-specific subsidized housing vouchers made available by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

First, former foster youth age 18 and up to 24 are eligible for a Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) coupled with supportive services for up to 18 months through the Family Unification Program (FUP) awarded to Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) by HUD.<sup>11</sup> PHAs administer FUP vouchers in partnership with county child welfare agencies, who are responsible for referring youth and providing supportive services. In April 2020, HUD awarded 12 California PHAs 558 new FUP vouchers (\$10.36 million).<sup>12</sup>

Second, PHAs that administer traditional HCVs *not through FUP* may administer Tenant Protection Vouchers (TPVs) through HUD's Foster Youth to Independence initiative. These

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<sup>7</sup> Information about HHAP can be found on the BCSH website:

[https://www.bcsch.ca.gov/hcfc/hhap\\_program.html](https://www.bcsch.ca.gov/hcfc/hhap_program.html).

<sup>8</sup> More information about the 8% youth set-aside in HHAP can be found on the JBAY website:

<https://www.jbaforyouth.org/hhapp/>

<sup>9</sup> Allocation amounts for each Continuum of Care, city and county can be found on the BCSH website:

[https://www.bcsch.ca.gov/hcfc/documents/hhap\\_allocations.pdf](https://www.bcsch.ca.gov/hcfc/documents/hhap_allocations.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Contact information for each county's agency or department receiving HHAP funds can be found on the

JBAY website: <https://www.jbaforyouth.org/hhap-county-contacts/>

<sup>11</sup> Information about FUP Vouchers can be found on HUD's website:

[https://www.hud.gov/program\\_offices/public\\_indian\\_housing/programs/hcv/family](https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/hcv/family).

<sup>12</sup> The list of 12 PHAs awarded new FUP Vouchers can be found on HUD's website:

[https://www.hud.gov/press/press\\_releases\\_media\\_advisories/HUD\\_No\\_20\\_046](https://www.hud.gov/press/press_releases_media_advisories/HUD_No_20_046). The list of PHAs awarded FUP Vouchers in previous years can be found on HUD's website:

[https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/PIH/documents/Copyof\\_FUP\\_Awards\\_All%20Years\\_.pdf](https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/PIH/documents/Copyof_FUP_Awards_All%20Years_.pdf).

vouchers provide the same combination of housing and services to eligible former foster youth as FUP for up to 36 months.<sup>13</sup>

In counties with greater demand for THP-Plus than can be provided, FUP Vouchers or TPVs can be used to offset this need and offer a similar combination of housing and services as THP-Plus. Vouchers may also be used to secure housing for eligible youth who are scheduled to exit THP-Plus housing because they have reached the statutory maximum time limits.

**6) Alleviate THP-Plus participants' anxiety by clearly communicating county and program plans to preserve housing and services.**

Even when counties and programs do exercise flexibility and creativity to keep THP-Plus participants in housing past the age and duration of eligibility, THP-Plus participants often are not aware that their counties or programs have developed such a plan. Faced with the possibility of homelessness, these youth expend needless time, energy, and fear trying to develop an emergency transition plan for themselves. Some participants have put their own health at risk by leaving home to seek resources.

Counties should make available through all of the channels commonly accessed by youth—online webpages, social media, phone calls, text messages, and written notices—all of their plans and efforts to ensure that no youth will leave THP-Plus without a transition plan due to their age or eligibility status. This should be part of a county strategy to talk with all youth in their county regularly to communicate new resources and updates and to gather feedback about service needs and challenges. For example, counties could host a “virtual drop-in center” for youth to bring problems or questions since physical drop-in spaces are not accessible. The county strategy should also include targeted communications for youth who are approaching a scheduled exit or transition from their THP-Plus program.

***For more information about this resource, or to share additional strategies, please contact:***

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***For resources and technical assistance, please contact:***

California Department of Social Services TAY Policy Unit, [TAYPolicy@dss.ca.gov](mailto:TAYPolicy@dss.ca.gov)

California Department of Housing and Community Development, [THP@hcd.ca.gov](mailto:THP@hcd.ca.gov)

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<sup>13</sup> Information about TPVs for former foster youth can be found on HUD's website: [https://www.hud.gov/program\\_offices/public\\_indian\\_housing/programs/hcv/fyi\\_tpv](https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/hcv/fyi_tpv). For a list of PHAs eligible to apply for TPVs for former foster youth, visit: [https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/PIH/documents/PHAs\\_with\\_an\\_ACC\\_with\\_HUD\\_for\\_HCVs\\_that\\_do\\_not\\_administer\\_FUP\\_080919.pdf](https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/PIH/documents/PHAs_with_an_ACC_with_HUD_for_HCVs_that_do_not_administer_FUP_080919.pdf).